

Susan Mazur-Stommen. *Engines of Ideology: Urban Renewal in Rostock, Germany 1990-2000.* nster: LIT Verlag, 2005. xi + 226 pp. EUR 29.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8258-6892-5.



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Published on H-German (June, 2006)

Rostock: Post-Socialist Urban Renewal in Profile

According to the jacket blurb, Mazur-Stommen's study "explores the relationship between ideology and specific architectural forms, the role of revitalization programs with external funding in this process, and possible conclusions regarding the future of other small cities in the Baltic region." This intended focus of Mazur-Stommen's book, based on her dissertation, is a valuable contribution to a very small literature on twentieth-century urban renewal in Germany in the context of reunification and post-socialism. In particular, her focus on the eastern city of Rostock helps widen the English language discussion of urban issues beyond Berlin. The ethnographic approach promises to provide a rich account of Rostock as a "particular place and time, rather than a collection of impressions elicited from a set of its inhabitants" (p. vii). In other words, it is the form and meaning of Rostock's built environment the author wishes to explain. In this way, the book is an addition to a growing literature on the social significance of architecture.

Mazur-Stommen's main argument is that "local ideologies and vernacular architecture" (that is, diverse and

"authentic") are being replaced by repetition and a German urban uniformity in the context of reunification and Europeanization, which results from what Mazur-Stommen calls "corporatization." This term is defined as "the wholesale construction of landscapes and environments where the long-term, collective efforts of a culture are replaced by rapid, streamlined decisions made by a few people" (p. 2). Furthermore, these few people, as experts or "specialists," often come from outside of Rostock. Mazur-Stommen argues that their status as outsiders means they have their own agendas, which do not always overlap with the community's best interests. Community participation, often a stated goal of federal or EU programs, is given lip service, but does not materialize in practice.

At the same time, Mazur-Stommen finds evidence of an underdeveloped civil society that lacks experience and organization to resist or counter well-funded and powerful corporatism. Mazur-Stommen's experience with the EU Interreg IIc program "Integrated Urban Planning and Management" outlines this dynamic in Rostock (see her chapter entitled "Altstadt-The Historic City").

Frustration—that both of residents and the author—comes across in quotes from interviews and in excerpts from field notes based on participant-observation in urban renewal programs. The book is at its strongest when it gives insight into these issues and the ways in which they intersect with a municipal planning system grappling with the legacy of socialism and the demands of capitalism.

Influenced by the work of Brian Ladd on Berlin, a second related hypothesis in Mazur-Stommen's study is that historic preservation as part of urban revitalization and the development of tourism in Rostock leads to the promotion of historical buildings and periods with a high level of cultural acceptance, and the lowest potential for conflict.[1] Mazur-Stommen expected a focus on the Hanseatic past (pp. 31-32). Here the focus is trained most directly on the relationship between ideology and architecture alluded to in the title of the book. While such a focus does not constitute a new argument, the details of such a process in Rostock would have added to our knowledge of how competing social visions and power differences affect urban form. Although Mazur-Stommen claims that "a subtle favoring of traditional forms does run throughout the decisions made about handling restorations and reconstructions," the book does not systematically explain just how history and architecture are intertwined in urban renewal efforts (p. 60). On the other hand, we do receive a better description of the processes of gentrification with their positive and negative effects (pp. 154-170).

In general, empirical findings specific to Rostock that are promising in their significance remain underdeveloped in relation to the larger issues the book purports to discuss. These analytical problems are compounded by an unclear, confusing structure and organization, which tends to disconnect related ideas and arguments. Why, for example, if the "researcher who wants to deal with the complexity of cities must first deal with the tangle of literatures that attempt to explain the origin, function, form, history, meaning and experience of cities," does the chapter that could help contextualize and position the author's work come at the end, right before the conclusion (p. 182)? Chapter divisions often seem to separate rather than gather related material. Perhaps this organization accounts for the significant amount of repetition that runs through the text. (The repetition could also be the result of inadequate editing, of which there is also evidence.)

Mazur-Stommen's book will be appreciated for providing an anthropological approach to the built environment and exploring the relationships between ideology, architectural form and the differing social experiences of those forms. Additionally, the book is a good introduction to the many issues relating to inter-regional and post-socialist urban development in reunified Germany as seen through the case study of Rostock.

Note

[1]. Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

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Citation: Shannon McMullen. Review of Mazur-Stommen, Susan, *Engines of Ideology: Urban Renewal in Rostock, Germany 1990-2000*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2006.

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