

Thomas Adam

Social Housing Reform and Intercultural Transfer in the transatlantic world before World War I

The cultural and social infrastructure of nineteenth-century cities within the transatlantic world did not emerge in isolation but was a result of intensive contacts and transfers across geographic, linguistic and later “imagined” national borders. While the transfer of social welfare policies across the Atlantic has already received much attention in the works of Daniel Rodgers and Axel Schäfer who have reminded us that social policy was created nowhere in the North Atlantic world in national isolation,¹ the transfer of private initiatives and civil society structures from Europe to North America throughout the nineteenth century is still largely a terra incognita. Too many historians still accept a neo-Tocquevillian interpretation, in which American civil society differed fundamentally from European societies, which relied on state action rather than civil society.

Tocqueville's famous dictum that wherever “at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England,” while in the United States one can certain “to find an association”² became the underlying interpretation for research into philanthropy and the Third Sector in Europe and the United States. However, Alexis de Tocqueville must have been virtually blind with regards to the development of associations in his own home country and in the European context in general. Further, as Kathleen McCarthy recently pointed out, European associations provided inspiration and models for many American associations such as bible societies.³ The tendency to form associations for the purpose of dealing with a specific local need or problem was certainly not uniquely American but rather part of a transatlantic philanthropic culture that relied on mutual observation and exchanges. London's social housing companies, for instance, inspired similar enterprises in continental European and North American cities. German Museum associations and libraries impressed American visitors so much that they returned home with the zeal of creating similar institution in their home towns. These institutions in turn became the subject of observation by German travelers, who at the end of the nineteenth century searched for inspiration for urban and social reform in American cities.

This paper will analyze the complexity of transfers in the realm of social housing reform between London, Berlin, Leipzig, Boston and New York. Since the 1840s, German social reformers such as Victor Aimé Huber, Johann Georg Varrentrapp, and Gustav de Liagre either visited London to learn about its various social housing enterprises or followed the

¹ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1998); Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform 1875-1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2000).

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, New York, Toronto, London, Sydney, Auckland: Bantam 2000), p. 630-31.

³ Kathleen McCarthy, „Weibliche Philanthropie und Öffentlichkeit als transatlantisches Phänomen, 1790-1860“, in: Thomas Adam, Simone Lässig, Gabriele Lingelbach (eds.), *Stifter, Spender und Mäzene: USA und Deutschland im historischen Vergleich* (published with Steiner Press 2008).

widespread publication and propagation of its social housing concepts in newspapers and travel reports. From the 1840s to World War I, an intensive transfer of social housing models occurred between London and various German and American cities. From the 1840s to the 1880s, London's social housing models informed the creation of similar enterprises in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig as well as in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. At the end of the nineteenth century, American reformers cast their net wider and considered social housing enterprises in German cities such as Leipzig as models that could be emulated back home.

Since the concept of intercultural transfer might not be familiar to the broader historical community, it seems necessary to introduce it before our discussion of transatlantic transfers within the realm of social housing can begin.

1. Intercultural Transfer and Agents of Transfer

The approach of intercultural transfer, developed in the 1980s by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner for the investigation of cross-cultural contacts between Germany and France, provides a new theoretical framework for the investigation of transatlantic exchanges and cultural borrowing.⁴ Intercultural transfer refers, in the words of Matthias Middell, to the movement of material objects, people and ideas between two separate and clearly defined cultures and societies.⁵ It, simply put, presumes “three things: (1) that something is being transferred, (2) that there is a point of departure for that transfer, and (3) that there is a point of arrival.”⁶ For Bernd Kortländer intercultural transfer happens as a three-step process of selection, transport and integration.⁷

Intercultural transfer always occurs below and beyond the level of the nation state and connects regions and places in distant areas. This concept assumes an openness of societies that allows for outside contacts and the import/export of ideas. In the process of intercultural transfer, societies acquire ideas that undergo modification and in the end contribute to the diversification of the societies involved. Espagne and Werner reminded historians that intercultural transfer always includes the adaptation and assimilation of

⁴ For the concept of intercultural transfer see: Matthias Middell (Hg.), *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich* (Comparativ 20 (2000)); Gabriele Lingelbach, „Erträge und Grenzen zweier Ansätze. Kulturtransfer und Vergleich am Beispiel der französischen und amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft während des 19. Jahrhunderts“, in: Christoph Conrad und Sebastian Conrad (Hg.), *Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), pp. 333-359; Johannes Paulmann, „Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts“, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* vol. 267 (1998), pp. 649-685. There are only few American scholars who have adopted the concept of intercultural transfer. See for instance: Kirsten Belgum, “Reading Alexander von Humboldt: Cosmopolitan Naturalist with an American Spirit”, in: Lynne Tatlock und Matt Erlin (eds.), *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Reception, Adaptation, Transformation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 107-127.

⁵ Matthias Middell, „Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik – Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis“, in: Middell, *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich*, p. 18.

⁶ Belgum, „Reading Alexander von Humboldt“, p. 107.

⁷ Bernd Kortländer, „Begrenzung – Entgrenzung. Kultur- und Wissenschaftstransfer in Europa“, in: Lothar Jordan und Bernd Kortländer (eds.), *Nationale Grenzen und internationaler Austausch. Studien zum Kultur- und Wissenschaftstransfer in Europa* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), pp. 1-11.

foreign ideas, which in the process of transfer are integrated into the receiving society and thereby contribute to the stabilization of regional and local identities.⁸

In contrast to traditional ways of writing history transfer history does not serve to legitimize national cultures or groups.⁹ History written along the lines of intercultural transfer undermines national stories of exceptionalism and uniqueness.¹⁰ The goal of transfer history, for Espagne, is to uncover the interconnectedness of various cultures and societies. To be clear, transfer history is concerned with the excavation of foreign influences and the appropriation of such influences within a given culture but not with the study of political or diplomatic contacts between different nations.¹¹

Although the study of intercultural transfer breaks with old notions of the dominance and distinctiveness of nation states, it still assumes the existence of distinct and different communities, between which the transfer occurs.¹² That might be problematic since communities in the making, which have been the departure and arrival point of intercultural transfers, have never been as stable as the proponents of transfer history and for that matter of comparative history have suggested. Furthermore, the occurrence of intercultural transfer reflects cultures, which are not static but in a constant flux of change, thus, making it challenging to identify home-grown concepts and outside influences. Since intercultural transfer works often both ways, and thus changes the structure and character of both the departure and arrival point, the distinctiveness of both societies is called into question. Ideas traveling between two societies and their successful integration in the receiving society should alert us to the fact that both cultures possess a degree of openness and compatibility that might outweigh their perceived distinct character. In other words, if nineteenth-century German cities provided concepts for the organization of American metropolis, does the successful integration of such concepts tell us something about the compatibility of urban society on both sides of the Atlantic? Or would it be better to speak of one transatlantic culture that spanned the Atlantic and included middle- and upper-class urban societies on both sides. When Felix Warburg, a wealthy Hamburg banker, went in 1895 on his journey to New York City where he was to join his future wife, it took him twelve days to cross the Atlantic. And although Warburg was new to New York City, this American metropolis did not feel

⁸ Michel Espagne/Michael Werner, „Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer als Forschungsgegenstand. Eine Problemskizze“, in: Michel Espagne/Michael Werner (eds.), *Transferts Les Relations Interculturelles dans L'Espace Franco-Allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe Siècle)* (Paris : Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), p. 14.

⁹ Michel Espagne, „Kulturtransfer und Fachgeschichte der Geisteswissenschaften“, in: Middell, *Kulturtransfer und Vergleich*, p. 58.

¹⁰ Daniel T. Rodgers, „Exceptionalism“, in: Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (eds.), *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 21-40.

¹¹ Espagne, „Kulturtransfer und Fachgeschichte“, pp. 58-59; Belgium, „Reading Alexander von Humboldt“, p. 108; Stefan Berger and Peter Lambert, „Intellectual Transfers and Mental Blockades: Anglo-German Dialogues in Historiography“, in: Stefan Berger, Peter Lambert and Peter Schumann (eds.), *Historikerdialoge: Geschichte, Mythos und Gedächtnis im deutsch-britischen kulturellen Austausch 1750-2000* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 12.

¹² Florian Steger and Kay Peter Jankrift, „Einleitung“, in: Florian Steger and Kay Peter Jankrift (eds.), *Gesundheit – Krankheit: Kulturtransfer medizinischen Wissens von der Spätantike bis in die Frühe Neuzeit* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), pp. 3-4.

alien to him. As Sven Beckert pointed out, New York and Hamburg's elites shared common values (they read similar books, followed similar social conventions, shared similar ideas about social organization and responsibility, and they enjoyed a similar urban culture including museums, operas etc.). Although thousands of miles away from home and separated from Hamburg by the large ocean, Warburg felt right at home.¹³

Transfer history depends on individual agency. Thus, this concept offers a unique opportunity to combine an investigation of social structures with the study of individual agency. Agents of intercultural transfer were not ambassadors or political functionaries of nation states but acted upon their own and often in concert with larger local social and cultural organizations such as social clubs and peer groups. They did not, however, belong to transnational religious, political or cultural organizations. As private nineteenth-century citizens, they were concerned with the improvement of their home town. To become an agent of intercultural transfer was not a choice or a profession but it could become a well-respected career. It happened by chance and was always related to travel and social privilege. It was the wealthy citizen traveling for education and enjoyment who encountered models for the creation of an urban infrastructure. Travel was essential but did not always result in transfer and in learning about the different ways of creating an urban infrastructure. Agents of intercultural transfer were very selective in their observations of other cultures. Their "selective eyes"¹⁴ were predetermined by their social and cultural experience and by the contacts they were able to employ for the selection of objects for observation and study.

However, it seems to be questionable that travel did not have any impact on the agents of intercultural transfer themselves. It is certainly true that they perceived of Europe according to expectations and stereotypes formed long before their departure. These psychological structures, in turn, influenced how they perceived of the world encountered. George Ticknor, for instance, insisted on calling the Royal Saxon Library in his diaries a "Public Library"¹⁵ and praised it for its unrestricted access to the public without ever investigating who exactly was allowed to enter that library and who not. When he returned to Boston from his second trip to Germany in 1835/36, he wanted to recreate what he thought he had seen and experienced in Dresden. And while his perception of Dresden's society was certainly predetermined by social and cultural stereotypes, it was nevertheless not American stereotypes that influenced his perception of Germany but the stereotypes of Dresden's nobility and royal court.¹⁶

¹³ Sven Beckert, „Die Kultur des Kapitals: bürgerliche Kultur in New York und Hamburg im 19. Jahrhundert“, in: *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, vol. 4, edited by Warburg Haus (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), pp. 143-175.

¹⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁵ George Ticknor, *Journals* Vol. II (September 1816 to October 1816), Sept. 22-23 (Dresden Public Library).

¹⁶ Thomas Adam, "Germany Seen through American Eyes: George and Anna Eliot Ticknor's German Travel Logs", in: Hartmut Keil (ed.), *Transatlantic Cultural Contexts: Essays in Honor of Eberhard Brüning* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2005), pp. 151-163.

Nineteenth-century intercultural transfer differed fundamentally from earlier colonial occurrences of encounters (as for instance mission) in that the agents of intercultural transfer belonged in most cases to the receiving culture. Although agents of intercultural transfer might have been filled with a missionary zeal, they were certainly not missionaries in the traditional meaning of the term. They did not represent a superior culture and were not guided by the negation of the receiving society. And although they admired the giving society, which they perceived as superior to their own, they were still concerned with the transformation of the object of transfer to make it fit into the receiving culture. However, intercultural transfer depended on perceived or real differences between two different cultures. Feelings of inferiority and superiority played an important role as motivating factors for intercultural transfer. For wealthy New Yorkers, it was exactly the feeling of cultural inferiority to such poor and politically backward places as Spain and Saxony, which, nevertheless, possessed museums that every American traveler wanted to visit before he left the European continent, which spurred the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.¹⁷ Without a feeling of inferiority and without a clear acknowledgment of the superiority of the other culture, intercultural transfer would not have occurred.

In the process of transfer, agents of transfer became the authors of the object of transfer since they selected certain concepts and, further, transformed them into projects compatible with the receiving culture. This was necessary since agents of intercultural transfer returned with their object of transfer to the society they had left and were confronted with a virtually unchanged society and the challenge to integrate an alien object into this culture in order to transform society according to their visions. Thus, agents of intercultural transfer engaged in the observation, the transfer and the replication of a model they created in the process of transfer.¹⁸ This role allowed “non-productive” members of society “to justify their privilege” and to “minimize their guilt feelings” towards a society that had made the neo-Puritan work ethic the norm.¹⁹ They could take up positions of teachers and experts and “act out their desires for authority and importance.”²⁰

Knowledge about concepts and the direct experience during travel, however, were never sufficient preconditions for a successful transfer. Sometimes it took decades before certain models were replicated in the receiving culture. In the case of Ticknor’s free lending library, it took 32 years from the inception of the idea to the opening of the Boston Public Library. The desire for the establishment of such institutions by the receiving society was as important as the availability of models that could be implemented and the necessary funding. Although the desire for a public library was prevalent and although Ticknor lobbied friends and city government for some time to

¹⁷ Smithsonian Archives of American Art: *George Comfort Deposit Reel 4276 T 6814* (Microfilm): A Metropolitan Art Museum in the City of New York: Proceedings of a meeting held at the Theatre of the Union League Club, Tuesday Evening, November 23, 1869 (New York Printed for the Committee, 1869), p. 9

¹⁸ Espagne/Werner, „Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer“, p. 21.

¹⁹ William Stowe, *European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 10

²⁰ Stowe, *European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, p. 12.

create a free lending library, it took the pledge of Joshua Bates to finally realize Ticknor's dream.²¹

It would be wrong to assume that intercultural transfers occurred only in one direction. After Ticknor had established the Boston Public Library and George Fisk Comfort the Metropolitan Museum of Art, these institutions became the object of observation by Canadian (Byron E. Walker) and German (Constantin Nörrenberg and Adolf Bernhard Meyer) travelers who advocated the transfer of these perceived models (in the case of Nörrenberg free lending libraries and in the case of Meyer the museum association) to their home towns. It was not unusual that one particular model traveled several times across the Atlantic and across continents. It should be clear that transformations and modifications sometimes changed these models to a degree that they were barely recognizable by members of the giving society as having originated from within their own culture. The circle of intercultural transfer was, thus, complete. The replica had become the model that was replicated in the country of origin and sold as something amazingly new and superior.

Agents of intercultural transfer such as Victor Aimé Huber and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch proved essential for the intercultural transfer between London and German cities from the 1840s to the 1860s and between London and American cities from the 1870s to the 1890s. The following two sections will discuss the intricacies of intercultural transfer in the field of social housing. Social housing will be discussed in the context of private initiatives of individual reformers and in the formation of associations and limited dividend companies in German and American cities before World War I.

2. From Limited Dividend Companies to Housing Cooperatives and Emancipation

Since England had a head start in industrialization, it faced its social repercussions much earlier than Germany and the United States. In response to the emerging housing problem for the lower classes, London took a lead in developing various concepts for the provision of working-class housing within modern cities.²² Housing trusts (Pure Philanthropy) and limited dividend housing companies (Philanthropy and Five Percent) proved to be the most successful strategies that attracted social reformers from various cities in continental Europe and North America. The following discussion will focus on the Philanthropy and Five Percent movement. The first limited dividend housing company, the *Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes*, was founded in 1841 and soon followed by similar enterprises.²³

²¹ Thomas Adam, "Cultural Baggage: The Building of the Urban Community in a Transatlantic World", in: Thomas Adam and Ruth Gross (eds.), *Traveling between Worlds: German-American Encounters* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006), pp. 87-93.

²² Thomas Adam, "Transatlantic Trading: The Transfer of Philanthropic Models between European and North American Cities during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries", in: *Journal of Urban History* 28 (2002), pp. 328-351.

²³ Morris, "Philanthropy in the Voluntary Housing Field in London", pp. 24-38; John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: An Account of housing in urban areas between 1840 and 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 15ff.

Limited dividend housing company	Year of founding
Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes	1841
Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes	1844
Central London Dwellings Improvement Company	1861
Improved Industrial Dwellings Company	1863
Artizans and Labourers General Dwellings Company	1867
East End Dwellings Company	1884
Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company	1885

Common to all these companies was the desire to combine making a (limited) profit with providing healthy and affordable housing for working-class families. While making profit with the construction of urban tenement buildings was neither a novelty nor philanthropic, the idea to provide affordable and hygienic tenements which satisfied basic standards for human housing was both new and philanthropic. Further, the suggestion to limit the return on the invested capital to five percent clearly suggests motives beyond profit maximization. London landlords had been accustomed to providing housing to working-class families that German observers such as Huber likened to the housing of animals in barns. These horrible housing conditions were seen as breeding grounds of deadly diseases by English and German housing reformers alike. The fact that London's landlords, ignoring the social and cultural repercussions of such conditions, achieved an eight to fifteen percent return on such housing projects, enraged social reformers such as Southwood Smith and Victor Aime Huber.²⁴

During his many visits to London, Huber witnessed the emergence of these housing companies and came into contact with its chief founders. In early 1847 he was introduced to Lord Ashley, the later Lord Shaftesbury, who had founded the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* in 1844. Huber full of new ideas with regards to cooperation and shared responsibility approached Ashley with a text he had just written and in which Huber argued that renters should be included in the financing schemes and administration of social housing associations. Although Ashley fundamentally disagreed with the young and idealistic Huber on that point, he still arranged for Huber to visit the new tenement buildings of his housing association.²⁵ And although the nineteenth-century biographer of Huber consistently denies any English influence on his ideas and concepts, it seems to be clear that his English experience had an impact on Huber's thinking and

²⁴ Victor Aime Huber, "Die Wohnungsnot", in: *V. A. Hubers Ausgewählte Schriften über Socialreform und Genossenschaftswesen*. In freier Bearbeitung herausgegeben von Dr. K. Munding (Berlin: Verlag der Aktien-Gesellschaft Pionier, 1894), p. 594; Morris, "Philanthropy in the Voluntary Housing Field in London", p. 25.

²⁵ Rudolf Elvers, *Victor Aimé Huber: Sein Leben und Wirken Zweiter Theil* (Bremen: Verlag von C. Ed. Müller, 1874), p. 210-211; V. A. Huber, „Die Wohnungsreform“, in: *V. A. Hubers Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 1051-1053; Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy*, pp. 16-17.

the development of his concept of “innere Colonisation” (internal colonization).²⁶ It would, however, be wrong to assume that Huber adopted English ideas in their original form. As it always happens, ideas traveling between different places change and mutate in the process of transfer. In the case of Huber two different concepts merged and provided a new approach for the solution of the housing question in cities such as Berlin. Huber, who saw the necessity for reform, advocated the combination of two different modes of social action: (1) philanthropic help by well-off bourgeois and noblemen combined with the (2) self-help of the working people. For Huber the improvement of the social conditions of the working classes had to begin with the improvement of their living conditions. However, the provision of healthy and affordable housing was just the beginning of the reform Huber envisioned. It had to be followed by a moral and intellectual transformation of the workers and their emancipation by the formation of associations (cooperatives).

In 1846, Huber published his famous article “Über innere Colonisation.” In this article Huber attacked earlier attempts at social reform and cooperation (namely Robert Owen) and advocated reform within the existing capitalist system in order to avoid class conflict. Based upon deep religious beliefs, Huber believed in the solidarity between men of all social classes and the possibility of cooperation between the nobility, the factory owners and the workers. However, the central point of his reform was to enable workers to gain a position of self determination and self reliance. Since he did not see a possibility for workers to achieve such a position on their own, Huber believed that the concept of self-help (association) was flawed. Therefore, Huber propagated the combination of social assistance with the concept of self-help. In order to raise the living conditions of working-class families, he further suggested the creation of factory villages outside big cities, which he identified with material and moral decay. These factory villages were to be built in close proximity to the work place of the laborers and connected to industrial areas as well as the city by trains and busses. They were to provide healthy and affordable housing and gardens for each family. Since workers could not finance the construction of these complexes, Huber believed that factory owners, the nobility, and if needed the government should provide the necessary funding for these settlements. From the beginning, Huber envisioned these settlements as profitable enterprises, which were to accrue a fair return of five percent on the invested sums. Renters were to be encouraged to form consumer associations in order to lower the costs for necessary foodstuff and heating materials. Associations were considered a central part in Huber’s reform concept that ultimately was to lead to moral and social improvement of the working classes.²⁷

²⁶ Elvers, *Huber: Sein Leben und Wirken Zweiter Theil*, p. 302. Huber made the unsustainable argument, perhaps for nationalist purposes, that the German cooperative movement developed without English influences. See: V. A. Huber, *Die genossenschaftliche Selbsthilfe der arbeitenden Klassen* (Elberfeld: Verlag von N. L. Fridrichs, 1865), p. 44. For Huber’s interest in English cooperatives and his propagation of these ideas see in addition: V. A. Huber, *Ueber die cooperativen Arbeiterassociationen in England: Ein Vortrag, veranstaltet von dem Central-Verein für das Wohl der arbeitenden Klassen, gehalten am 23. Februar 1852* (Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Hertz, 1852); V. A. Huber, *Sociale Fragen: V. Die Rochdaler Pioniers: Ein Bild aus dem Genossenschaftswesen* (Nordhausen: Ferd. Förstemanns Verlag, 1867).

²⁷ Victor Aimé Huber, *Über innere Colonisation*. Aus d. Janus, Heft. VII. VIII., besonders abgedruckt zum Besten des Berliner Handwerkervereins (Berlin: Justus Albert Wohlgemuth, 1846), pp. 34-36 and 41ff.; Elvers, *Huber: Sein Leben und Wirken Zweiter Theil*, pp. 193-197.

Huber's article found an enthusiastic audience in Berlin where a couple of reform-minded citizens deliberated the founding of a social housing company for some time.²⁸ Carl Wilhelm Hoffmann, the royal architect (Landbaumeister) in Berlin, published in February 1847 a call for the founding of a *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft*.²⁹ This association, Hoffmann argued, was to follow the model of the *Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes* in London. Hoffmann was convinced that Berlin needed a social housing company that would provide healthy and affordable housing for working-class families in order to stop the increasing speculation on the housing market that led to dreadful housing conditions and unreasonable profits. He convinced 52 like-minded individuals to create such a social housing association in form of a limited dividend company in November 1847.³⁰ The founders of this housing association read with great interest Huber's article on "inner colonization" and adopted some of its ideas and in fact invited Huber to take a position in the administration of this housing association. Huber's pamphlet introduced the concept of renters associations and, thus, provided for the merging of the Philanthropy and Five Percent model with the idea of self-administration and the idea that the renters should acquire their homes over time.

Inspired by London's limited dividend housing companies (here the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* and the *Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes*), the *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft* was founded as a stock company with its shares bought by wealthy and reform-minded citizens who purchased shares (100 Thaler a piece) to the total amount of about 200,000 Thaler.³¹ The investors were promised a steady return of four percent. Huber compared this return with the return offered by several railway companies and argued that in contrast to risky private stock companies the housing association would offer a guaranteed protection of the invested sums even in case of default since the land and the buildings would not lose their value. And although the founders envisioned that the tenants would eventually become the owners of their tenements, Hoffmann, because of the high prices for the land, convinced the board of the company to build apartment buildings with up to 19 units in one house. In contrast to London's limited dividend companies, the Berlin enterprise included renters associations. These associations founded at Huber's request, were supposed to establish reading rooms and kindergartens.

²⁸ Michael Kanther and Dietmar Petzina claim that Huber's text in fact sparked the founding of the first German limited dividend company, the *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft*, seems to be exaggerated. See: Michael A. Kanther and Dietmar Petzina, *Victor Aimé Huber (1800-1869): Sozialreformer und Wegbereiter der sozialen Wohnungswirtschaft* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000), p. 75. Edmund Krokisius in his book about the founding of this company does not even mention Huber. See: Edmund Krokisius, *Die unter dem Protektorat Seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs Wilhelm II. stehenden Berliner gemeinnützige Bau-Gesellschaft und Alexandra-Stiftung 1847 bis 1901* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1901), p. 10. Carl Wilhelm Hoffmann mentions Huber's influence in his treatment of the founding of this company. See: C. W. Hoffmann, *Die Wohnungen der Arbeiter und Armen I. Heft: Die Berliner Gemeinnützige Bau-Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Verlag von E. H. Schroeder, 1852), p. 20.

²⁹ C. W. Hoffmann, *Die Aufgabe einer Berliner gemeinnützigen Baugesellschaft* (Berlin: Hayn, 1847).

³⁰ Hoffmann, *Die Wohnungen der Arbeiter und Armen*, pp. 19-24; Krokisius, *Berliner gemeinnützige Bau-Gesellschaft*, pp. 12-13.

³¹ The bylaws of this company can be found in: Hoffmann, *Die Wohnungen der Arbeiter und Armen*, pp. 37-57. For the starting of this company see also: Dr. Gaebler, *Idee und Bedeutung der Berliner gemeinnützigen Baugesellschaft* (Berlin: Commissions-Verlag von Carl Heymann, 1848).

They organized renters meetings to discuss problems and the future of the enterprise on a regular basis. Representatives of the board of trustees participated in these meetings and encouraged the participation of the renters in the administration of the housing association.

It is an irony of intercultural transfer that the modifications and mutations that occurred in this particular case proved to be unsuccessful. Huber's insistence on renters associations as well as the original plan of selling the tenements to its renters had to be abandoned in the 1850s. The cooperative element of this enterprise lost momentum with the resignation of Huber from the board of trustees.³² With these changes, the Berlin housing company became a "pure" limited dividend company that barely showed any differences to its London predecessors. This company is, nevertheless, the earliest attempt within German-speaking Central Europe to tackle the housing problem of working-class families.³³ Although it failed to produce a large number of apartment buildings in and around Berlin, and therefore had only a very limited effect on Berlin's housing market, it set an example that was followed later in cities such as Frankfurt am Main.³⁴ Furthermore, it paved the way for the integration of philanthropy and self-help in the German Bau- und Sparvereine (building and savings cooperatives).

In May 1860, five civic-minded members of Frankfurt's upper class published a call for the formation of a *gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft*.³⁵ Among these individuals was Georg Varrentrapp, who like Huber traveled extensively across Western Europe in search of ideas for improving various aspects of social life. In contrast to Huber, Varrentrapp was interested in a broad range of reform projects: prison reform, hygiene movement, and housing reform.³⁶ Varrentrapp was most likely the primary instigator of the Frankfurt limited dividend housing company and possibly the major author of the *Aufforderung zur Gründung einer gemeinnützigen Baugesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main*. In this call for support, the authors argued that a limited dividend company would be part of the long tradition of Frankfurt citizens to establish philanthropic institutions and thus join the

³² Elvers, *Huber: Sein Leben und Wirken Zweiter Theil*, pp. 272-277; Huber, „Die Wohnungsreform“, pp. 1062-1065; Kanther and Petzina, *Victor Aimé Huber*, pp. 75-79; Walter Vossberg, *Die deutsche Baugenossenschafts-Bewegung* (Halle a. S. 1905), pp. 8-9.

³³ A. Grävell, *Die Baugenossenschafts-Frage: Ein Bericht über die Ausbreitung der gemeinnützigen Bauhätigkeit durch Baugenossenschaften, Aktienbaugesellschaften, Bauvereine etc. in Deutschland während der letzten 12 Jahre* (Berlin: Im Selbstverlage des Centralverbandes städtischer Haus- und Grundbesitzer-Vereine Deutschlands, 1901), p. 111.

³⁴ For the development of this company until the turn of the century see: Krokisius, *Berliner gemeinnützige Bau-Gesellschaft*.

³⁵ Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, „Aufforderung zur Gründung einer gemeinnützigen Baugesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main“ [1860].

³⁶ Dr. E. Marcus, „Dr. Georg Varrentrapp“, in: *Jahresbericht über die Verwaltung des Medizinalwesens der Stadt Frankfurt a. M. 1886*, pp. 264ff.; Alexander Spiess, „Georg Varrentrapp gestorben den 15. März 1886“, in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 18 (1886), pp. XIff.; Georg Varrentrapp, *Ueber Pönitentiarssysteme, insbesondere über die vorgeschlagene Einführung des pensylvanischen Systems* (Frankfurt am Main: Franz Varrentrapp, 1841); Georg Varrentrapp, *De l'emprisonnement individuel sous le rapport sanitaire et des attaques dirigées contre lui par M. M. Charles Lucas et Leon Faucher* (Paris: Guillaumain, 1844); Georg Varrentrapp, *Ueber Entwässerung der Städte, über Werth und Unwerth der Wasserclosette, über deren angebliche Folgen: Verlust werthvollen Düngers, Verunreinigung der Flüsse, Benachtheiligung der Gesundheit* (Berlin: Hirschwald, 1868).

existing insane asylum, kindergarten, and the institute for the blind and deaf. However, in this case, the participants were not expected to donate their money but instead to purchase shares which were to yield a four percent return. The main goal of the company was to limit speculation with housing property and thus the provision of healthy and affordable housing for lower-class families. Attached to the call for support were the bylaws and a text authored by Varrentrapp in which he surveyed the attempts at social housing in various European countries (England, France, Belgium) and cities (Amsterdam, Groningen, Copenhagen, Basel, Bremen, Berlin). England and London were first in his presentation and Varrentrapp repeatedly pointed to the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes* as a model for the Frankfurt social housing company.³⁷ Varrentrapp succeeded in convincing a large number of Frankfurt's well-to-do citizens to purchase its 4000 shares of each 425 marks. According to the annual reports of 1868 to 1905 this housing association was very successful in keeping its promise to pay a four percent dividend each year and still accumulate sufficient capital to maintain and expand the building complexes. By 1909, the housing enterprise owned 524 apartments.³⁸

The *gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main* outlasted its predecessor in Berlin. In contrast to the *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft*, the *gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main* followed its English models from the beginning much closer and excluded the cooperative elements Huber had attempted to introduce in Berlin. It was, however, this combination of philanthropic support and self-help that would determine the production of social housing in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. Although during the 1870s and 1880s a number of such limited dividend companies were founded all over Germany, the legal framework and the economic conditions did not favor such enterprises and their widespread support. Instead, a new model of social housing – a hybrid between limited dividend company (Philanthropy and Five Percent) and cooperative (Self-Help) – emerged as the dominant player in Germany's social housing sector.

Only after the German government introduced the principle of limited liability for all economic enterprises³⁹ and after the *Hannover Spar und Bauverein* (1885) had set an example of how to combine Philanthropy and Five Percent with Self-Help successfully, did the social housing movement gain strength. Before 1885, most housing cooperatives were based on the idea of transferring the homes into the private property of its members. The most important such cooperative was the *Flensburger Arbeiterbauverein* that was founded in 1878. These cooperatives, which were influenced by the model of the *Kopenhagen Arbeiterverein*, were, however, not a suitable instrument for tackling the

³⁷ Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, „Aufforderung zur Gründung einer gemeinnützigen Baugesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main“ [1860], pp. 4-6, 20-30; *Die Gemeinnützige Bautätigkeit in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag des Vereins für Förderung des Arbeiterwohnungswesens und verwandte Bestrebungen, 1915), pp. 22- 25; Henriette Kramer, „Die Anfänge des sozialen Wohnungsbaus in Frankfurt am Main 1860-1914“, in: *Archiv für Frankfurts Geschichte und Kunst* 1978, pp. 135-138.

³⁸ Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Magistratsakten MA T 2054.

³⁹ *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 11: „Gesetz, betreffend die Erwerbs- und Wirtschaftsgenossenschaften vom 1. Mai 1889.“ See for Huber's observations of the English situation in the 1850s. V. A. Huber, *Reisebriefe aus England im Sommer 1854* (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1855), pp. 462-464.

housing problem of the lower classes.⁴⁰ Therefore, reform-minded citizens of the city of Hanover together with workers who experienced the lack of affordable housing founded the *Spar- und Bauverein Hannover* in 1885. The founders of this new association turned their attention back to English models and attempted to integrate, as Huber had championed, the concepts of cooperative association with philanthropic assistance. However, in contrast to Huber and Hoffmann's *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft* the Hanover enterprise was founded on three innovative tenants: (1) it did not produce housing units which could be bought by its members over time, instead the buildings were to remain in the possession of the cooperative indefinitely; (2) it combined self-help (each renter had to be a member of the cooperative and was expected to purchase at least one share of 300 marks) with financial assistance from wealthy citizens (who were allowed to purchase multiple shares) by merging the housing cooperative with a credit union; (3) it adopted the legal provision of limited liability and thus limited the liability of shareholders to the amount of their shares (300 marks).⁴¹

The establishment of a credit union in conjunction with the housing cooperative provided for an economic solution in which individual wealthy citizens were encouraged to invest their money into social housing associations. The contributions of well-off citizens were very significant for the economic well-being of such associations as the example of the Hanover housing cooperative proves. In 1900 its members had purchased shares for 583,510.23 marks while wealthy citizens had deposited 659,922.68 marks with the credit union of this association.⁴² As A. Grävell in his history of the German cooperative movement points out, many cooperatives founded on the model of the Hanover housing cooperative allowed in their regulations for individuals to purchase multiple shares of 100 to 300 marks each. Such rules enabled individuals who were not renters with the cooperative to acquire shares of up to 40,000 marks at a guaranteed return of four percent. This provided housing cooperatives with sufficient funding for the production of affordable and healthy working-class housing.⁴³ It set an example for all German cities and soon sparked imitation in Berlin, Göttingen, Leipzig, and Dresden.⁴⁴ The number of housing cooperatives increased, according to Rudolf Albrecht, from 28 with about 2000 members in 1888 to 764 with more than 140,000 members in 1908. Those cooperatives owned property (land and buildings) valued at more than 200 million marks by 1908.⁴⁵

Until the early 1920s, the German housing cooperatives were dominated by wealthy bourgeois who run these associations and limited the influence of its members to an

⁴⁰ Rudolf Albrecht, *Die Aufgabe, Organisation und Tätigkeit der Beamten-Baugenossenschaften im Rahmen der deutschen Baugenossenschafts-Bewegung* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1911), pp. 38-39.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Ruprecht, „Gesunde Wohnungen“, in: *Göttinger Arbeiterbibliothek* vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 81-96; F. Bork, „Der Spar- und Bauverein, E.G.m.beschr. Haftpflicht in Hannover“, in: *Die Spar- und Bau-Vereine in Hannover, Göttingen und Berlin. Eine Anleitung zur praktischen Betätigung auf dem Gebiete der Wohnungsfrage* (Schriften der Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen Nr. 3) (Berlin: Carl Heymann Verlag, 1893), pp. 1-93.

⁴² Grävell, *Die Baugenossenschafts-Frage*, table II b No. 83.

⁴³ Grävell, *Die Baugenossenschafts-Frage*, p. 117. See also table II b in this book.

⁴⁴ *Die Spar- und Bau-Vereine in Hannover, Göttingen und Berlin*; Thomas Adam, *125 Jahre Wohnreform in Sachsen: Zur Geschichte der sächsischen Baugenossenschaften (1873-1998)* (Leipzig: Anonym, 1999).

⁴⁵ Albrecht, *Die Aufgabe, Organisation und Tätigkeit der Beamten-Baugenossenschaften*, p. 41.

absolute minimum. Only after World War I with the general democratization of German society did these associations become institutions of self-help in which workers/tenants took over the administration of those associations and increasingly assumed financial responsibility for both the shares and the savings deposited with the credit unions. Such emancipating goals were not part of the Philanthropy and Five Percent inspired housing reform in England and in the United States.

3. From Five Percent to Seven Percent Philanthropy and Social Control

About 30 years after Huber had visited London and more than twenty years after the *Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft* was established as the result of a successful transfer of a social housing model from London to Berlin, American social reformers became interested in European social housing experiments. In contrast to Huber who championed the ideas of Philanthropy and Five Percent at a time when this concept was still new and untested, American observers in the 1870s had the advantage to study an already established system of philanthropic housing companies in London.

The first to travel to London was the eminent Boston physician Henry Ingersoll Bowditch who went to the British metropolis in 1870 and stayed there for the summer to study its various social housing projects. When Bowditch arrived in London he was overwhelmed by the large number of social housing enterprises. Shaftesbury's *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes*, which had been among Huber's objects of observation, had become one among several thriving social housing companies. In addition, new innovative concepts such as Octavia Hill's house management system had been developed in the meantime. This multiplicity of social housing concepts and the large number of social housing companies forced Bowditch to make a selection and to compare the selected models with regards to a possible transfer from London to Boston. It is interesting to note that neither Bowditch nor any of the American social reformers who followed in his footsteps seemed to pay any serious interest to the model of cooperation as Huber had done. Only Canadian housing reformers developed some interest in the mixing of philanthropy and self-help after the turn of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

Bowditch focused his attention on three distinct models for social housing: (1) pure philanthropy (*Peabody Trust*); (2) Philanthropy and Five Percent (*Improved Industrial Dwelling Company*); (3) the *Jarrow Building Company*, which was organized along the lines of a cooperative that enabled its tenants to purchase their homes over time; (4) Octavia Hill's house management system.⁴⁷ While Bowditch dismissed the *Peabody Trust* as too philanthropic and paid little attention to the *Jarrow Building Company*, he focused his attention at the concept of Sydney Waterlow's *Improved Industrial Dwelling Company* and Octavia Hill's system of friendly rent collecting. Writing about Peabody's famous housing trust, Bowditch immediately recognized that it could not serve as

⁴⁶ Thomas Adam, "Philanthropic Landmarks: The Toronto Trail from a Comparative Perspective, 1870s to the 1930s", in: *Urban History Review* XXX, 2001, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁷ Henry I. Bowditch, "Letter from the Chairman of the State Board of Health, concerning Houses for the People, Convalescent Homes, and the Sewage Question", in: *Second Annual Report of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts January 1871* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1871), p. 182.

inspiration for social reform back in Boston. “The percentage for rents on the original outlays is so small that no capitalist would desire to employ his surplus funds without greater gain. We must look in other directions for plans and successful experiments in which philanthropy and capital joins hands.”⁴⁸ Bowditch shared with Huber the desire to combine improving the housing conditions of the deserving poor with philanthropy and a profitable investment for capitalists. Both, Bowditch and Huber, also shared the belief that workers/tenants needed material and moral improvement. While for Huber education and association were the tools to improve the moral and ethical character of working-class families, Bowditch found a more direct and with the everyday-life-experience of working-class families interfering method in Octavia Hill’s friendly visiting scheme. It was Hill’s fundamental conviction “that the poor needed example, tuition, inspiration and guidance in their everyday lives more than they needed charity.”⁴⁹ Bowditch found her concept of employing ladies of higher social standing to collect the rent directly from the renters on a weekly basis very appealing since he and his fellow Bostonian social reformers believed that the poor Irish immigrants needed strict guidance and moral improvement.⁵⁰ Such improvement seemed to be feasible if such ladies were endowed with the power to give advice with regards to the conditions of the apartment and to the general social life of the family.

When Bowditch returned to Boston, he convinced 163 wealthy Bostonians to form the *Boston Cooperative Building Company* (BCBC), which was capitalized at \$200,000 and limited to seven percent dividends. Initiated by Bowditch and headed by Martin Brimmer (1829-1906), this social housing enterprise combined the concept of Philanthropy and Five Percent with Hill’s house management system.⁵¹ In his *Letter from the Chairman of the State Board of Health* that was published as part of the *Second Annual Report of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts* and in various annual reports of the BCBC, Bowditch and his fellow housing reformer and shareholders of the BCBC continuously publicized Octavia Hill’s system of friendly rent collecting and applied central aspects of this system to the business practice of the BCBC.⁵²

⁴⁸ Bowditch, “Letter from the Chairman”, p. 198.

⁴⁹ Enid Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 214.

⁵⁰ *Third Annual Report of the Boston Co-Operative Building Company* (Boston, 1874), p. 13.

⁵¹ *The First Annual Report of the Boston Co-operative Building Co. with the Act of Incorporation and By-Laws* (Boston: W. L. Deland, 1872); E. R. L. Gould, *The Housing of the Working People (Eighth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), pp. 200-207; Culver, *Tenement House Reform in Boston*, pp. 145-164; Christine Cousineau, “Tenement Reform in Boston, 1870-1920: Philanthropy, Regulation, and Government Assisted Housing” (Working Paper presented at the Third National Conference on American Planning History Nov. 30-Dec. 2, 1989 in Cincinnati, Ohio), pp. 6-8; Joseph Lee, *Constructive and Preventive Philanthropy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), pp. 70-71. David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 252-263. Lawrence J. Vale mentions this company only briefly in his account of Boston public housing. Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass/London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 63-64.

⁵² Bowditch, “Letter from the Chairman”, pp. 212-217; *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Boston Co-Operative Building Company* (Boston: Press of L. Barta & Co., 1888), p. 18. For the transfer of Octavia Hill’s ideas to the United States see: Daphne Spain, “Octavia Hill’s Philosophy of Housing Reform: From British Roots to American Soil”, in: *Journal of Planning History* 5 (2006), pp. 106-125).

While the concept of limited dividend companies (in Berlin and Frankfurt with a four percent return and in Boston with a seven percent return promise) seemed to dominate housing reform on both sides of the Atlantic, German and American social reformers had very different visions with regards to the moral and intellectual improvement of the tenants. Although everyone agreed that moral and intellectual improvement was necessary, Huber and Bowditch envisioned different paths towards success. While Huber believed in the possibility for moral and ethical improvement of the renters and even participated in this project,⁵³ Bowditch and his fellow Bostonian reformers were from the beginning rather skeptical towards the renters of one of its most troubled project, the Lincoln Building, which served as an experiment in the application of Hill's management system. In its *Third Annual Report* the board of directors already cautioned by warning: "It is, however, ... felt that the experiments in London and Boston must necessarily differ very materially from one another..." because of "the difference between the characteristics of the English race, with which Miss Hill had chiefly to deal, and those of the Celtic family with which the committee was to come in contact."⁵⁴ Whereas German social reformers seem to have trusted in the possibility of moral improvement (although within their own ethnic setting), American social reformers displayed racial stereotypes and resorted to a much more rigid approach towards moral improvement than their German counterparts.

Further, the interest promised to investors in Boston was two percentage points higher than that of London's limited dividend companies and three percentage points higher than that of the limited dividend companies in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main.⁵⁵ Bowditch had argued that the margin of profit had to be higher in Boston since the overall profit margin in the United States was higher than in England during the 1870s.⁵⁶ However, the BCBC rarely reached its goal of paying a seven percent return to its investors. A seven percent return was paid only between 1871 and 1875, but between 1876 and 1889 "dividends were stopped or reduced to three percent and earnings were invested." In the 1890s dividends reached between five and six percent.⁵⁷ On paper London's Philanthropy and Five Percent had become Philanthropy and Seven Percent but in reality, the returns lagged behind that goal for years. It should be noted that this failure to produce the promised seven-percent return did not cause shareholders to sell their shares and to look for better investment possibilities. In fact, none of the limited dividend housing companies went bankrupt because the investor-philanthropists withdrew their support in response to the lower interest paid on their shares. The shareholders hold on to their shares and even left them to their children upon death. Although German and American social reformers had sincerely hoped to produce a working business model for the provision of social housing (a hybrid that integrated philanthropy with free market

⁵³ Elvers, *Victor Aimé Huber*, p. 276.

⁵⁴ *Third Annual Report of the Boston Co-Operative Building Company* (Boston, 1874), p. 13.

⁵⁵ *The First Annual Report of the Boston Co-operative Building Co. with the Act of Incorporation and By-Laws* (Boston: W. L. Deland, 1872), p. 10.

⁵⁶ This assessment is confirmed by Susannah Morris in her article "Market solutions for social problems", 537/538.

⁵⁷ Robert Treat Paine, "The Housing Conditions in Boston", in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. XX (July, 1902-December, 1902) (Philadelphia, 1902), p. 125.

mechanisms and profit), the shareholders seemed to have defeated this goal by behaving not like investors but like philanthropists who did not care about the return. Furthermore, the obvious difficulties to produce a seven-percent return might also explain the lack of imitation.⁵⁸

4. Casting a Wider Net: American Observers in Germany

After the early encounters of German and American social reformers and philanthropists with London's social housing companies and the initial transfers of these concepts which in the process of transfer had been modified and transformed, cross-cultural observation and transfer continued up until World War I. American social reformers such as Alfred Treadway White⁵⁹ and Elgin R. L. Gould⁶⁰ as well as their German counterparts, as for instance Wilhelm Ruprecht⁶¹ and Paul Felix Aschrott⁶², continued to travel to London in search for inspiration and concepts for providing better housing for lower-class families. In this process, London's various housing companies were praised as effective solutions and turned into models that should be emulated in various cities that faced the same challenges of industrialization and urbanization. The reports of these observers often read as if the authors wanted to sell a specific social housing concept to its reading audience. The argument often went beyond passionate interest on the side of the author and entered the realm of manipulation. Ruprecht and Aschrott, for instance, argued that London's limited dividend companies always reached their goal of guaranteeing a five percent return when in reality they rarely did.⁶³

At the end of the nineteenth century, the American focus also shifted from a narrow fixation on London to a focus on Europe. Since many social reformers had, inspired by one or the other London social housing company, created social housing projects in all major Western European cities, American observers such as Gould embarked on research trips to study the success of London-inspired social housing companies in various cities on the continent with a particular focus on German cities. In contrast to earlier observers, this second generation of housing reformers publicized their findings widely by producing detailed descriptions of all aspects of social housing companies with regards to their architecture, their economic set up, the hygienic standards, and the social characters of the tenants. The most extensive such survey of 443 pages plus 136 plans has been produced by Elgin Gould in 1895 with his book *The Housing of the Working People*. In

⁵⁸ Marcus T. Reynolds, *The Housing of the Poor in American Cities. The Prize Essay of the American Economic Association for 1892* (Baltimore: Press of Guggenheim, Weil & Co. 1893), p. 107.

⁵⁹ Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 89-93; Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, pp. 177-186.

⁶⁰ Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*.

⁶¹ Wilhelm Ruprecht, *Die Wohnungen der arbeitenden Klassen in London. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der neueren englischen Gesetzgebung und ihrer Erfolge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht's Verlag, 1884).

⁶² Paul Felix Aschrott, "Die Arbeiterwohnungsfrage in England", in: *Die Wohnungsnoth der ärmeren Klassen in deutschen Großstädten und Vorschläge zu deren Abhülfe. Gutachten und Berichte herausgegeben vom Verein für Socialpolitik* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1886), pp. 97-146.

⁶³ Morris, "Market Solutions for social problems", p. 538; Ruprecht, *Die Wohnungen der arbeitenden Klassen in London*, p. 105-106; Paul Felix Aschrott, "Die Arbeiterwohnungsfrage in England", p. 133.

1887 Gould went to Europe on an extensive study mission to compile available data on social housing companies in Great Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Denmark. Chapter IX (model block buildings) with 149 pages and chapter X (model small houses) with 79 pages are the most extensive and dominating parts of Gould's treatise. In chapter IX, Gould limited his description of American social housing companies to the two cities of New York and Boston. The two big companies he discussed, the *Improved Dwellings Company of New York* (White) and the *Boston Cooperative Building Company* (Bowditch), were both inspired by London models and took a lead in American housing reform. The main part of this chapter was dedicated to English and German social housing companies (both limited dividend companies and housing trusts). The case of housing companies in German cities such as Berlin, Leipzig and Hanover was of particular interest to Gould since these housing companies had been the result of intercultural transfer.

During his stay in Germany, Gould visited the *Berlin Mutual Building Company* (*Berliner gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft*), *Meyer's Model Tenement Buildings in Leipzig*, and the *Savings and Building Society in Hanover*.⁶⁴ All of these housing companies had been founded under the direct influence (first hand experience through travel, influence of travelers on wealthy individuals who had the financial means to realize social housing projects, and second hand information based on reading travel accounts and observing other "translations" of "foreign" housing models) of various social housing companies in London. Gould, who had already sufficient knowledge about London's social housing models, was nevertheless very interested in the study of these transfers and "translations" of London models. In his description of the *Berlin Mutual Building Company*, which was based upon the Philanthropy and Five Percent model, Gould harshly criticized the enterprise since it "was organized on a purely philanthropic basis."⁶⁵ It is not clear whether he misunderstood the workings of this limited dividend company (since he would later champion the concept of limited dividend companies) or if he thought the margin of profit was simply too small (only four percent). *Meyer's Model Tenement Buildings in Leipzig* was an impressive sight for Gould although he did not share Herrmann Julius Meyer's conviction that the only way for solving the housing problem was to create housing trusts. Following the model of the *Peabody Trust* in London, Meyer had donated nearly 19 million marks for the creation of an independent housing trust.⁶⁶ While these two enterprises did not present anything new to Gould, the *Savings and Building Society in Hanover* was certainly an unprecedented novelty to him. According to his description this "company is a cooperative society with limited liability. Shares have a value of 300 marks (\$71.40), and are payable in weekly installments of 30 pfennigs (7 cents). The rate of annual dividend paid upon share capital since the society was founded has been 4 per cent..."⁶⁷ Although Gould realized that this housing company included a savings bank, which was an integral part of the organization's concept of joining self-help with philanthropic assistance, he did not further analyze this new model

⁶⁴ I decided to use Gould's translations of the original German company names even if they are sometimes erroneous and differ from the translation I have used earlier in this text.

⁶⁵ Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, p. 289.

⁶⁶ Thomas Adam, „Stiften in deutschen Bürgerstädten vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Das Beispiel Leipzig“, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33 (2007), pp. 55-56, 62-64.

⁶⁷ Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, p. 308.

for the provision of social housing. It is in general puzzling that both Bowditch and Gould remained virtually blind towards the concept of the cooperative as a means of solving the housing problem. This attitude might be based in the elitist views of both individuals with regards to the social background of the families who lived in social housing projects. In the end it seems to be an irony that social reform in Germany relied on the concept of self-help while social reform in the United States focused on the concept of assistance provided by well-off citizens to lower-class families that could not help themselves.

Although the study of German social housing companies offered to Gould no new models – he choose to dismiss the saving and building society as a viable model – the study of these companies offered Gould some insight into the process of intercultural transfer. Gould was able to compare the modifications and the symbiosis that occurred in the process of transferring social housing companies from one economic, social and cultural space to another. In contrast to earlier housing reformers, Gould also had the advantage of being able to investigate the original models in London and to compare them to social housing companies that had been created in different settings all over Western Europe and even back home in New York and Boston. He could rely on an extensive body of statistical information with regards to the financing schemes, the rent levels, and the tenement population as well as the architectural concepts of social housing enterprises.

American and German social reformers were equally concerned with the type of tenant who should be the target of meaningful social reform and with the best way to create a closed environment for the nuclear family. In his description of the German social housing projects, Gould constantly pointed to the various ways to ensure that each family living in an apartment house would be isolated from the other tenants in order to create and protect a private sphere for this family. An “open apartment” structure would, in the eyes of nineteenth-century housing reformers on both sides of the Atlantic, lead to increased social intercourse between the tenants of one building, promiscuity and social decay. “We have learned by experience,” stated the *Third Annual Report of the Boston Co-operative Building Company*, “that such tenements as this which has common corridors, common water rooms, and, above all, common privies, are a disgrace to modern civilization, and public nuisances, inasmuch as they encroach upon the family relations, tend to make them impure, and thereby sap the very foundations of the State.”⁶⁸ The creation of a “closed apartment” with a separate hallway, an entrance door that could be locked, no communal facilities (bathroom etc.) and the limitations of the number of apartments which would share the same stairway was essential to the protection of the family and a stable society.⁶⁹ *Meyer’s Model Tenement Buildings in Leipzig* seemed, in the eyes of Gould, to set the right architectural example. Writing about this housing trust, Gould pointed out that each “of the tenements ... has a private hallway adjoining the main corridor and staircase. One door from a tenement opens directly to the corridor and

⁶⁸ *Third Annual Report of the Boston Co-operative Building Company* (Boston, 1874), pp. 14-15.

⁶⁹ Thomas Adam, “Nineteenth-Century Housing Reform and Family Structure in a transatlantic perspective”, in: *From outer space: Architekturtheorie außerhalb der Disziplin Sonderheft der Zeitschrift Wolkenkuckucksheim. Internationale Zeitschrift für Theorie und Wissenschaft der Architektur* 10 No. 2 (September 2006) <http://www.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/Wolke/eng/Subjects/052/Adam/adam.htm>

stairway. Corridors are too small to allow promiscuous mingling. The private hallway of each tenement is considered another means of preserving the independence and isolation of the individual family.”⁷⁰

Philanthropists and housing reformers alike were also discussing the various ways of administrating social housing projects. Wherever Gould went in Great Britain and Germany, he often discovered that German reformers had, with few exceptions, adopted Hill’s house management system. However, some companies such as the *Berlin Mutual Building Company* and the *Savings and Building Society in Hanover* experimented with cooperative forms of management in which the renters were integrated into the administration of the buildings they inhabited. In the case of the *Berlin Mutual Building Company* “porters, janitors, and other assistants are usually selected from among the oldest tenants, who are generally functionaries. They receive no salary, nor are they granted reduced rentals. They gladly assume the duties of keeping order, lighting the halls, etc., for the honor of holding the position. A small gratuity, usually 30 marks (\$7.14), is given to them at Christmas.”⁷¹ Furthermore, reformers were also discussing the target of housing reform. Not every lower-class family was considered fit for inclusion in the social housing reform. On both sides of the Atlantic, reformers and philanthropists spoke of the upper strata of the working-class as the intended target of reform. However, it was often a problem to identify those worthy of social assistance. German social reformers decided to define the desired audience of social housing companies by establishing wage limits for those who would be allowed to live in social housing projects. In the case of the *Berlin Mutual Building Company*, individuals “having a yearly income under 500 marks (\$119) or over 3,000 marks (\$714) are ruled out as tenants.”⁷² In the case of *Meyer’s Model Tenement Buildings in Leipzig* the restrictions were even tighter: it admitted as renters only individuals with yearly incomes between 800 and 1800 marks.⁷³

While Berlin, Leipzig, and Hanover served not as sources of new and original models of social housing, American social reformers considered them as laboratories, in which foreign models of social housing were tested for their use within a different social and economic setting. Leipzig proved to Gould that it was possible and desirable to transfer social housing models between different urban spaces. While earlier American social reformers in Boston and New York displayed enormous skepticism that British standards of living in apartment buildings could be introduced into American cities with their large numbers of Irish immigrants, Gould was clearly convinced that such concepts were fully compatible with the American situation. Since the best example is always to translate theory into practice, Gould decided to prove that European-style housing companies could be replicated within American society. In 1896, Gould together with Robert Fulton

⁷⁰ Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, p. 293.

⁷¹ Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, p. 290.

⁷² Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, p. 290. For average workers income see: Thomas Adam, “How Proletarian Was Leipzig’s Social Democratic Milieu?”, in: James Retallack (ed.), *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 259-262; Thomas Adam, *Arbeitermilieu und Arbeiterbewegung in Leipzig 1871-1933* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 68-77.

⁷³ Heinrich Geffken and Chaim Tykocinski, *Stiftungsbuch der Stadt Leipzig*, Leipzig 1905, p. 686.

Cutting, the president of the *Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor*, convinced 410 wealthy New Yorkers to found the *City & Suburban Homes Company* (CSHC), which followed both British and German models. It was organized as a limited dividend company with about 410 shareholders. The apartment buildings provided self-contained apartments for its renters, which were accessible from staircases and closed towards other apartments. “Every apartment is a complete home in itself.”⁷⁴ To avoid long hallways and, thus, more contact between renters, larger complexes were subdivided into smaller houses with multiple entrances and staircases for a limited number of apartments. Probably inspired by Meyer’s concept of the “isolation of the renter family”, the buildings of the CSHC displayed an architectural design that limited social contacts between renters to a bare minimum. Female rent collectors were in charge of collecting the rent on a weekly basis. They used this opportunity to visit with the renters and to inspect the apartments often offering advice. In the self-description of the CSHC the intercourse of the rent collectors with the renters “often becomes cordial and helpful in a social way. . . . Advice is often asked regarding the arrangement of furniture, or choice of color in painting the rooms, care of children and on other domestic themes.”⁷⁵

5. Intercultural Transfer and Philanthropy

Studying intercultural transfer and philanthropy across the Atlantic in the nineteenth century poses a potential challenge to the role and importance of the nation state. It might be true that the nation state became an important actor during the nineteenth century. By setting legal limits to migration and trade, by regulating elementary and higher education and by encouraging industrial development, nation states had a decisive impact on shaping modern societies. However, as important as the nation state as an analytic category might be, it should not come into the way of investigating the contacts, intercultural transfers and interconnections that characterized the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century. The transfer of social housing concepts across the British Channel and across the Atlantic occurred not between nation states, but between cities and towns. The initiative for this transfer did not originate from state or local governments but from private citizens who were concerned with the common good. Agents of intercultural transfer were essential to the observation and the learning processes involved in the creation of philanthropic networks that connected cities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean irregardless of national belonging. In fact, New York’s housing reformers preferred to look to Europe instead to Boston for inspiration and guidance.

The actual transfer of models for urban organization happened in many ways: (1) Agents of intercultural transfer kept travel diaries and, according to outside sources, made a point of repeatedly discussing within their social circles their encounters with institutions they wished to have replicated in their home towns. (2) Agents of intercultural transfer published articles in newspapers and journals and some even wrote books. Such an approach provided for a wide distribution of ideas about urban institutions that could spark imitation back home by individuals who have not even traveled abroad. (3) Agents

⁷⁴ City & Suburban Homes Company, *Fourth Annual Report of the President* (New York, 1900), p. 5.

⁷⁵ City & Suburban Homes Company, *Third Annual Report of the President* (New York, 1899), no page number.

of intercultural transfer concerned with social problems (housing, slums, city planning) often already belonged to a voluntary group of citizens who were interested in ideas and models and were willing to implement these models without much time delay. In the case of Bowditch and Gould, both formed voluntary associations soon after their return to create social housing projects inspired by European models. That assured the realization of the ideas and concepts they had encountered. Although Gould still published the findings of his journey (1895), the time delay between observation (1887) – forming a model – implementation (1896) had been less than ten years. Since in some cases agents of intercultural transfer could rely on a group of volunteers and philanthropists, it was not always necessary to publicize their observations. It was possible to distribute the knowledge about models for urban organization by direct discussion and engagement.

In the process of intercultural transfer, agents of intercultural transfer created models for replication by universalizing and selecting characteristics of the observed institution. The model also often incorporated aspects of several institutions that were observed. Gould's model for social housing in New York City represented the combination of different even contrasting architectural and organizational models from London and Leipzig. The model created in intercultural transfer, thus, is the sum of ideas and impressions collected and selected by agents of intercultural transfer in the process of observation. Since intercultural transfer is closely connected to memory and processes of memorization, they are subjective in nature and do not lead to the creation of a simple duplicate in the receiving culture. The very nature of intercultural transfer poses a serious challenge to historians since transfers are not obvious and can only be explored by leaving the iron cage of the nation state behind. Fortunately, agents of intercultural transfer left notes and diaries that allow us to delve into the transnational and transatlantic dimension of nineteenth-century life.