

Gottfried Feder, *The New City* (1939)

Abstract

Forging a new “racial state” required more than simply re-imagining the forms and concepts that comprised performance or visual art. The Nazis’ plans to rebuild a “racially pure” German society also called for the literal rebuilding of the physical environment in which that society lived. Architecture thus played a vital role in this reimagining. In this excerpt, Gottfried Feder (1883–1941), an engineer who held a professorship for settlement, regional planning, and urban development at the TH Berlin when this text was published, writes about the principles of city planning, emphasizing the link between city planning and ideology. According to Feder, city planners needed to be mindful of the “total organism” of a city. Each element of a city had to support the growth of this organism: from the number and shape of the various buildings to their positioning and proximity to one another, etc. It was not enough to merely plan building designs and city layouts; cities had to be designed according to the principles of National Socialism in order to foster a sense of a living, breathing national body through the very structure of cities themselves.

Source

The goal of this book is the new city

The cities of the future will be different in character. Like individual buildings, they will have to be designed out of the spirit of the new times. These new cities of a new *Weltanschauung* will be the most visible and most enduring expression of a new communal will. They will and must grow organically out of the social structure of the population. Their plans, their buildings, their streets and squares will have to serve the new life will, the rhythm of work, and the new community. The city of the future will serve the life and work of the population in a way very different from what the chaotically grown agglomerations of houses of our modern large cities are able to do.

A new design principle for urban and settlement planning had to be first recognized and scientifically studied before one could arrive at the foundations of a new art of city building and urban planning. The present study seeks to fill an astonishing gap in our literature. To be sure, there are thousands of books, publications, journals, and articles about individual structures, monographs and anthologies about categories of buildings, about churches, palaces, monasteries, castles, commercial buildings, residential buildings, country houses, workers’ houses, as well as about individual settlements and assemblages. But nowhere do we find works that present, from a comprehensive perspective, the total organism of a city or settlement. Nowhere has the effort been made to develop the spaces, houses and buildings, their location and interrelationship, their number and size out of the living needs of the totality.

Every city builder, every regional and settlement planner, indeed, in a way every architect who is charged with larger tasks or engages with them, confronts the four questions which – as far as I can tell – have nowhere in our literature been answered in a sufficiently fundamental and comprehensive way, yet the success of a correct city plan depends entirely on the answers.

These are the questions:

1. *What* belongs into a city or large settlement in terms of public buildings, economic and commercial enterprises, public utilities, apartment buildings, single-family homes, garages, petrol stations and so on?

2. *How many* establishments and structures of the type listed under 1. are necessary to meet the demand of the population for public services, shops, and places of work?

3. *Where* do these establishments belong so that routes from the home to the workplace and the shopping trips of the housewife do not get too long?

4. *How large* must the individual establishments described under 1. be, what plot size is required, how large is the area of the floors, how large is the space of all administrative rooms, workplaces, and workshops, including stairs and corridors, how large are the public spaces, that is, streets, squares, parks, and green strips relative to the building spaces and the courtyards and garden plots?

It is only from the clear answer to these four questions that the future city builder and urban planner can form a well-balanced city landscape in keeping with all the needs of human life. The present study in no way wishes to create a recipe or a rigid scheme, it in no way intends to construct a so-called ideal city and do violence to the urban planning artist and planning architect of the future city and constrain his creative force. All the study findings are presented such that while *everyone charged with planning a new large settlement or a city* shall find *all the tools* for the “future”, “proper” settlement, he shall nevertheless be able, *in a freely creative way*, to *shape the city plan into an artistic entity* out of the given elements, depending on what is locally present and the given purpose of the specific city.

The cities of the future

must be, in plan and structure, in their harmonious integration into the landscape and the environment, in their relationship to the district, the *Gau*, and the Reich, a living expression of the new *Zeitgeist* and the life will and willingness to work of the new Greater Germany created by Adolf Hitler. The individual buildings, their number and location in the city plan, are developed out of the living structure of the life and work of the population. [...]

Liberalism and decay are almost synonymous. What seemed to our parents and to the champions of Germany liberty in the 1848s as the greatest blessing has had a deleterious effect politically, economically, as well as personally. The older among us were initially somewhat dumbfounded by the sharp denunciation of liberalism by National Socialism, because they associated with the liberal era memories of freedoms won by struggle as well as the gigantic rise of the technological age. And the immense economic upswing of the old German Reich, the fantastic rise of America and the of the other industrialized states seemed to have arisen on the ground of the liberal-capitalist economy.

[...]

Source: Gottfried Feder, *Die neue Stadt. Versuch der Begründung einer neuen Stadtplanungskunst aus der sozialen Struktur der Bevölkerung*. Berlin, 1939, p. 1 f., 11f; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (in collaboration with Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*, vol. 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, pp. 849–50.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Gottfried Feder, The New City (1939), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5144>> [July 06, 2025].