

Volkswagen Plant (1939)

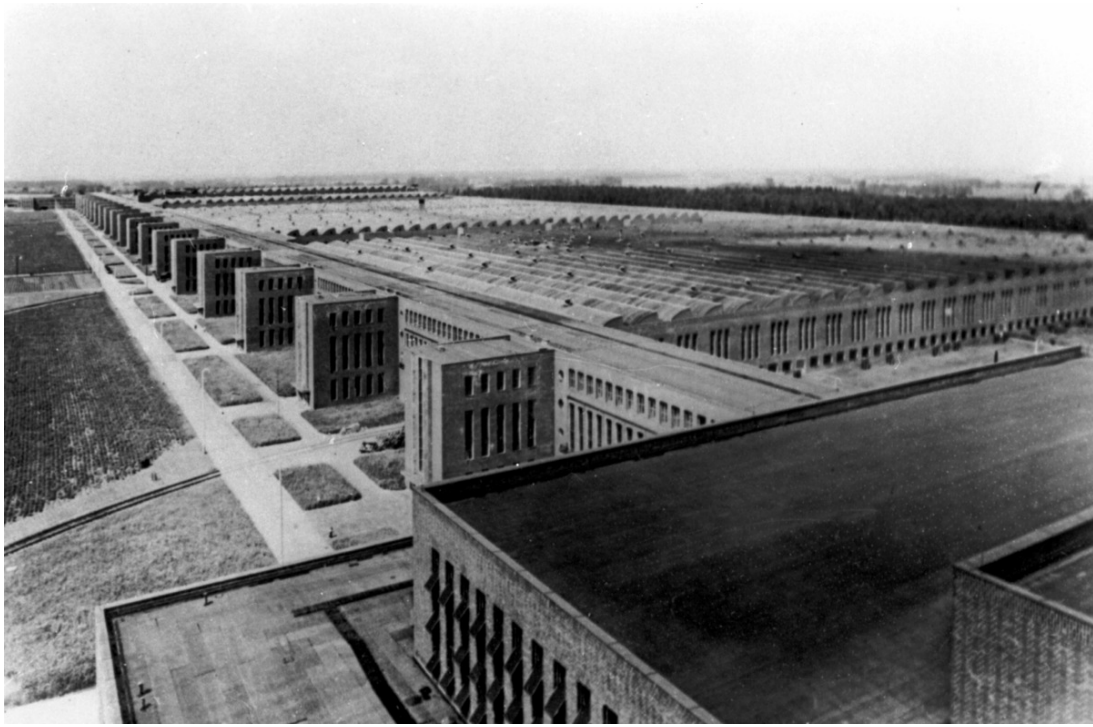
Abstract

Science and architecture, according to party ideologues, ought to serve the interests of the state, and represent a fusion of German ingenuity and “spirit.” Meanwhile, the regime needed to appease the public’s expectation of improved living standards promoted by official propaganda. A perfect example of this view was the construction of the Volkswagen factory in 1938, which became known as the “German River Rouge” (the Ford plant in Dearborn, Michigan, USA). Built in what is now Wolfsburg, the plant was originally intended to form the heart of a planned community called “The City of the People’s Car,” a site that would exemplify the values and aesthetics of the Volksgemeinschaft. The plant was intended to produce the “People’s Car:” an affordable, small family vehicle that every German household had been promised would be made available to them, cars which would never be produced for the domestic market during the Third Reich.

The plant’s design reflects the desired aesthetics of National Socialist approaches to architecture, most notable in the plant’s sheer immensity and over-sized fortress-like towers, suggesting the regime’s own ambitions, as well as its ornament-free, modern facades. The entire site was characterised by its planned nature: from the influence of the American model of technical rationality in production design, to the organized structure of the city’s living spaces, which emphasized belonging within a “natural” racial community. The plant was operational during the war, but produced military vehicles rather than Volkswagens for German citizens. The factory is still used today and parts of it are now a protected landmark.

Source





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