

Proclamation of the Principles of Urban Planning by the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic (September 15, 1950)

Abstract

In the planned Socialist economy of the GDR, urban planning was entirely in the hands of the state. The GDR had suffered less wartime destruction than the Federal Republic, and it also met with a smaller influx of postwar refugees. As a result, the housing shortage there was less severe than in the West. In its basic program on urban planning from September 1950, the GDR government painted an idealized picture of a thoroughly planned city with representational buildings and spaces in the center and a ring of residential areas of mostly multi-storied buildings connected to a practical transportation network.

Source

1/ The city as a settlement form did not arise haphazardly. The city is the most productive and culturally rich settlement form for the communal life of human beings, something that has been shown by the experience of centuries.

In its structure and architectural shape, the city is an expression of the political life and national consciousness of the people.

2/ The goal of urban planning is to harmoniously satisfy the human entitlement to work, housing, culture, and recreation.

The principles and methods of urban planning are based on natural givens, on the social and economic foundations of the state, on the highest achievements in science, technology, and art, on the demands of profitability, and on the use of progressive elements in the cultural legacy of our nation.

3/ Cities “as such” do not arise and do not exist. To a large extent, cities are built by industry for industry. The growth of a city, the size of its population, and its geographical expanse are determined by city-forming factors, that is to say: by industry, administrative organs, and cultural sites, to the extent that they have more than local significance.

In the capital, the importance of industry as a city-forming factor takes a backseat to the importance of administrative organs and cultural sites.

Determining and affirming the city-forming factors is exclusively a government matter.

[...]

6/ The center forms the dominant core of the city.

The center of the city is the political center of the life of its population. In the city center lie the most important political, administrative, and cultural sites. The squares in the city center are the sites of political demonstrations, marches, and holiday festivities.

The center of the city is built up with the most important and most monumental buildings; it dominates the architectural composition of the city plan, and it determines the city’s architectural silhouette.

7/ When a city is situated on a river, the river and the roads along its banks should form one of the chief arteries of the city and its architectural axis.

8/ Traffic must serve the city and its residents. It must not tear the city apart and must not be an impediment to the population.

Through-traffic must be removed from the center and the central district and must be directed outside of its boundaries or into a circular ring around the city.

Installations for freight transportation on railroads and waterways should likewise be removed from the central district of the city.

[...]

9/ The face of the city, its individual cultural shape, is determined by squares, main streets, and the dominant buildings in the city center (in the largest cities by skyscrapers). Squares are the structural foundation for the planning of the city and its overall architectural composition.

10/ The residential areas consist of residential districts whose cores are the district centers. They should include all of the cultural, provisioning, and social institutions needed by the population in a given district.

The second link in the structure of the residential areas is the residential complex formed by a group of housing blocks united by gardens, schools, kindergartens, day-care centers, and provisioning installations that serve multiple housing blocks. Urban traffic must not be allowed within these residential complexes, but neither the residential complexes nor the residential districts should become closed-off, isolated structures. In their structure and planning, they are dependent on the structure and demands of the city as a whole.

Here, housing blocks, as the third link, basically have the same significance as complexes in planning and design.

[...]

12/ Transforming the city into a garden is impossible. Of course, adequate greenery must be provided. But this principle must not be violated: life in the city is more urban, life on the edge or outside of the city is more rural.

13/ Multi-story construction is much more efficient than single- or two-storey construction. It is also in keeping with the character of large cities.

14/ Urban planning is the foundation of architectural design. The central question in the urban planning and architectural design of a city is the creation of a unique, individual face for the city. The architecture must be democratic in content and national in form. To that end, architecture draws on the experience of the people as embodied in the progressive traditions of the past.

15/ No abstract scheme exists for city planning or architectural design. What is decisive is to bring together the most essential factors and demands of life.

16/ Designs must be prepared for the planning and building of certain city sections and for squares and main streets with adjoining housing blocks. These designs must be suitable for implementation, and they should be drafted at the same time that work proceeds on the city plan and in accordance with it.

Source: Ministerialblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, no. 25, September 15, 1950, p. 153; reprinted in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*. Bd. 8: 1949–1961: *Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004, no. 8/40.

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