

The Influence of Bauhaus Ideas on the Development of Soviet Cities in the Years 1930–1980

Abstract

The article reflects on the role of Bauhaus ideas in shaping the concept of urban development and housing in Soviet conditions in the years from 1930 to 1980. It discusses the personal contribution of architects from the Bauhaus group who participated directly in the implementation of concepts and projects in the Soviet Union. Particularly, the article discusses the concept of a socialist city, “Sotsgorod,” as well as the development and shaping of mass housing estates of industrial construction for the “New Man” (Hannes Meyer) in the USSR. It shows that, in spite of the existing principles of “socialist realism” (during the Stalin era 1930–1953), with their reliance upon classical and national forms, Bauhaus’s rationalist ideas were used in the USSR until the fall of the country in 1991. The introduction of Bauhaus concepts in the USSR began in 1930, when a group of Bauhaus graduates came to the Soviet Union under the leadership of former Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer. Within seven years, they created designs and built projects, such as the development of the capital of the country, “Great Moscow,” a socialist city in the Urals, and the capital of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Birobidzhan. In these projects, the architects tried to implement the urban-planning principles of the Bauhaus. Also in the late 1950s, a main task of the state remained to be “fast construction of affordable housing” (Meyer). The construction of a Soviet series of residential buildings contained the Bauhaus thesis about “designing beautiful and comfortable (functional) facilities for a wide range of people” (Walter Gropius). In Soviet reality, this kind of rationalism became a means of saving manpower and material resources, which led to negative functional and aesthetic results. Nevertheless, the urban concepts of the 1970s and 1980s were based on principles of machine production in combination with aesthetic principles defined as “rigor, simplicity, and convenience.” These ideas remained valid until the collapse of the Soviet Union. For this article, the authors used source materials that were translated for the first time into English.

Keywords

Bauhaus, Brigade Rot Front, Soviet Urban Planning