

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

Introduction

This article describes the influence of ideas from the German architectural avant-garde, represented by the Bauhaus, on the development of industrialization and urbanization in the emerging Soviet state. It takes into account various historical assessments related to the development of the modern movement in the conditions of interwar Europe. For many decades, the question of the Bauhaus's potential influence has been subject to some simplified assessments. This was largely due to the ideological "freezing" of the Soviet state. A new look at the cooperation between modernist movements, including the Bauhaus, with the Soviets is now possible given the end of the Cold War. It was only at the turn of the century that archival materials related to social, economic, and political processes in the USSR have become accessible. This turn of events allowed scholars to explore what totalitarian Soviet societies knew about the West, while western societies gained knowledge about the scale of Soviet totalitarianism, thereby giving scholars on all sides an opportunity to reinterpret long-unquestioned facts and to propose new historiographic approaches. While this transformation enabled research into the influence of the modernist movements on Soviet architecture and urban planning in all aspects, the article focuses specifically on activities of Bauhaus representatives in the Soviet Union, including the implementation of the idea of a "socialist city." The quotations in the article were translated into English from Russian and German sources that were at the disposal of Soviet readers in the period under review and in the form in which they were presented. Materials from Philipp Tolziner's personal archive were also used.

Analysis of Bauhaus Ideas that Influenced the Development of Soviet Architecture in the 1920s and 1930s

As a phenomenon of cultural life, the Bauhaus played a crucial role in shaping the image of architecture and art of the twentieth century. Its innovation

was manifested, above all, in following the most modern, sometimes revolutionary artistic trends of the time. Today, the term “Bauhaus idea” is broadly understood not only as its creative legacy but also as a specific method and a special strategy for implementing the principles of design. Eberhard Roters aptly called Bauhaus “the embodiment of the intuition of the creative spirit” (verkörperte Intuition eines schöpferischen Geistes).¹ Walter Gropius, who first formulated the Bauhaus idea in his famous 1919 Manifesto, for many years clarified his “main idea of the Bauhaus.”² In 1961, Gropius claimed that the main feature of the Bauhaus is “dynamics,” which is understood as “an organic idea [...] that changes depending on changing living conditions, that is, not tied to time, to a place or a nation.”³ Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, in his 1953 speech at Gropius’s birthday celebration, noted that the

1 Roters 1965: 186.

2 Cf. Gropius 1952: 275.

3 Quote in Clemens 1961: 10.

Bauhaus was not an institution with a clear program—it was an idea, and Gropius formulated this idea with great precision. He said, “Art and technology—the new unity”. [...] The fact that it was an idea, I think, is the cause of this enormous influence the Bauhaus had on any progressive school around the globe. [...] Only an idea spreads so far.⁴

4 Quote in Giedion 1954: 17–18.

In addition, the Bauhaus idea included the integration of architecture with other art forms toward a “Gesamtkunstwerk.” The Bauhaus also wanted avant-garde architecture to become more social and therefore available beyond the confines of an artistic circle. Overall, during the fourteen years of its existence, the Bauhaus School produced a revolution in the field of architecture, design, and urban planning. The complex history of the Bauhaus reflected, to some extent, the instability and breadth of the spectrum of ideas of the new architecture at an early stage of its formation.

Throughout the evolution of the Bauhaus in Germany, parallel developments occurred in the USSR. In Moscow, the VHUTEMAS—Higher Art and Technical Studios—were created in 1920 on the basis of merging the Stroganov School of Industrial Art and the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. In 1927, they were reorganized into the Higher Art and Technical Institute (VHUTEIN), and in 1930, the Higher Architecture and Building Institute (VASI, now MARCHI), in which Hannes Meyer later taught, emerged as the successor institution. The creation of these educational institutions, which had no equal in the world, was a contemporary response to the changing social order and its impact on the cultural environment. They formed a new ideology of creativity, a new visual language. VHUTEMAS and Bauhaus made an immeasurable contribution to the development of the creative process in terms of industrial mass production technologies. As it is known, there was close cooperation between the Bauhaus and the Moscow VHUTEMAS and VASI schools. While this is a topic for a separate extensive publication, it should be noted that avant-garde tendencies and rethinking of the foundations of artistic creativity, which took place in VHUTEMAS and Bauhaus, were equally characteristic of the culture and technical production of Russia (and, since 1922, the

USSR). They are also characterized by the expression of ideological principles and value categories through objects of material culture.

The equality of applied and fine arts was already a theme in the 1919 Bauhaus Manifesto. The name of the Bauhaus school—“Construction House” reflects Gropius’s appeal: “Let’s build together the building of the future, which will be all in one: architecture, sculpture, and painting.” This thought was reflected in the famous drawing by Lionel Feininger, placed on the title page of the Manifesto: the cathedral, above which three stars shine, symbolizing the unity of architecture, sculpture and painting. It was also reflected in Gropius’s notes on the occasion of the merging of the Saxon-Weimar Higher School of Fine Arts (creative ideas) with the School of Applied Arts (practice), which allowed the “re-joining [of] all applied disciplines with the new architecture as an integral part.” He added, “The ultimate, though distant goal of the Bauhaus is a single artistic work—a building in which the boundaries between monumental and decorative art disappear.” Gropius explained further that “the dominant idea of the Bauhaus was the idea of creating a new unity, the idea of synthesis.”⁵ These goals defined the boundaries and method of teaching construction, with one of the most important tasks of the training being to address the need for industrial production of architecture.

5 Roters 1965: 186.

Negatively assessing the decorativeness of historicist architecture, Gropius noticed that the Bauhaus aims to teach a student how to design a building so that its “meaning and function would flow directly from its essence.” Because “the correct construction can only appear as a response to the aspirations of all people,” which can be achieved in housing construction on the basis of “introducing greater typization and variability of residential buildings [...] [and] creating different machines for housing.”⁶ That is why the “Bauhaus started cooperation with the industry by building a special experimental house, tried to implement and develop a theoretically formulated concept of housing construction, and test new technical possibilities.” Gropius stressed that “[t]he combination of this type of construction with the industry and the economy as well as accurate and practical use of production processes and materials determine the nature of the entire construction and modern appearance of the modern city.”⁷ Gropius’s writings clearly demonstrate the striving for a “New Unity of Art and Technology.” The architect, builder, artist, and craftsman were called to create a new environment in which the machine becomes a tool for creating art, and art is available to the masses. The Bauhaus, as many other European movements, addressed the need for social housing after the First World War, using new technical possibilities. In the article “The Importance of Industrial Architectural Forms for Style Development” Gropius noted that the starting point for new forms were works of industry and technology. As a result, the diversified urban environment becomes possible thanks to the use of prefabricated multi-story buildings, the creation of a regular transportation network, and new public areas.

6 Gropius 1923: 10.

7 Ibid.

Gropius’s Bauhaus building in Dessau became the place where the program of a new, rationalist architecture was taught. The building aroused great

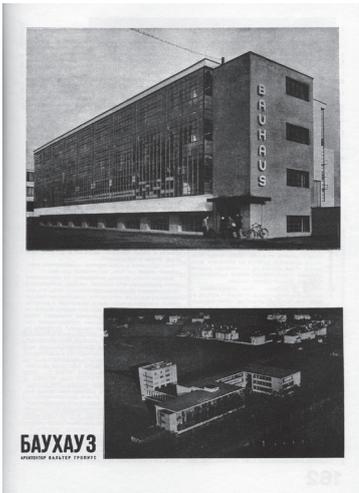
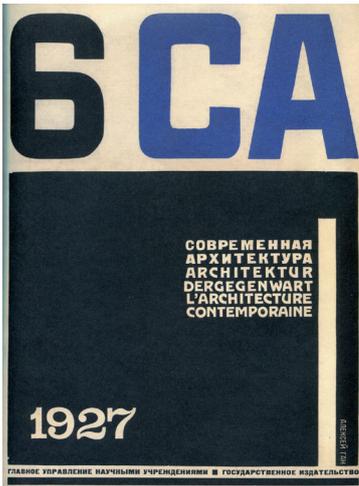


Fig. 1 Journal *Contemporary Architecture*, no. 6 (1927): cover (top) and page 161 (bottom) with photos of the Bauhaus building in Dessau.

8 Cf. Gropius 1967.



Fig. 2 Journal *Contemporary Architecture*, no. 6 (1927), page 170: Steel House in Dessau, 1926, by Georg Mueche and Richard Paulick.

interest in the USSR. The Journal *Contemporary Architecture* (1927, no. 6) presented photographs of the new building and outlined the Bauhaus curriculum, allowing VHUTEMAS students and practicing constructivist architects to study and imitate it (fig. 1). While the building could be understood as an example of “industrial production of architecture,” Gropius made clear that his ideas went beyond pure functionalism or rationalism. He commented: “[T]he idea of rationalism, which many consider the main feature of the new architecture, has only a cleansing role. Another aspect—the satisfaction of the needs of the human spirit—is as important as the material one.”⁸ Gropius’s most extensive exploration of industrial production in housing at that time was the settlement of Dessau-Törten single-family houses. Gropius’s architecture office, between 1926 and 1928, built 314 townhouses with an area of 57 to 74 square meters. At the same time, an experimental steel house with an area of 90 square meters was built by the two Bauhaus students Georg Mueche and Richard Paulick, with the aim of creating a new type of apartment building that could be quickly and cheaply mass produced. And although this idea did not find further implementation, it aroused great interest in the USSR. In Alex Pasternak’s article “Steel Houses in Germany,” which was published in the journal *Contemporary Architecture* in 1927, this structure was named one of the best German objects (fig. 2).

Gropius was very interested in including students in his architecture office, and he did so, for example, in the Törten estate. In a letter to Hannes Meyer dated December 8, 1926, he wrote that he hoped to expand such cooperation between students and practicing architects.⁹ Meyer was similarly interested in construction as “teamwork.” As he wrote in his article “Bauhaus und Gesellschaft,” in contrast to the individualism that was characteristic of the architect-artist’s “bourgeois” creativity, he envisioned his students working in teams in which the contribution of each was anonymous and focused on the result. After becoming the Bauhaus director in 1928, Meyer presented his program in the article “Bauen,” published in the Bauhaus journal, no. 4. He wrote:

How is the urban project created? [...] On the principles of effectiveness, we organize these building elements into a constructive unity. [...] The new prefabricated residential building is an industrial product, and therefore the work of a team of specialists: economists, statisticians, hygienists, climatologists, business administrators, standard specialists, heating technicians. [...] the architect? [...] the architect is an artist and becomes a specialist of organization.” And he continued: “The new housing estate in its final form is the ultimate goal on the path to universal prosperity [...]. The modern character of such an estate is not determined by flat roofs and vertical and horizontal facade divisions—but depends directly on the living conditions created in it.”¹⁰

Meyer put into practice his principles of collective work in the second stage of the Dessau-Törten project in 1928–29, which he developed with several

student “brigades.” For single-story model homes, students Ernst Goehl and Hubert Hoffman proposed new constructive solutions using steel and wood. A second group developed the general plan in the area adjacent to Gropius’s projects. A mix of single-family row houses and apartment buildings was proposed in the urban planning to reflect a social mix of “bourgeois” and workers’ elements (fig. 3). A third group of twelve students designed balcony-access houses with ninety apartments. Leading designers were Hans Volger, Philipp Tolziner, Béla Scheffler, and Walter Kaminski (fig. 4).¹¹

In comparison, in the USSR, architectural designs were carried out mainly by brigades. Therefore, it was not by accident that later in the USSR, Meyer would create the “Rot Front Brigade” with his students and describe his collective work method in the article “How I Work,” published in *USSR Architecture* in 1933. In it, he again stressed the importance of collective creativity: “I don’t work alone.” He further noted the importance of the pre-project surveys that he had introduced into the Bauhaus students’ training program. For the third item of his program, he stressed standardized drawings.¹²

Investigations into efficient housing continued under Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), who became the Bauhaus director in 1930. His 1927 apartment building at the Weissenhof in Stuttgart was published in the journal *Contemporary Architecture* in 1928 and was carefully studied in the USSR. But it was mainly in Ludwig Hilberseimer’s courses that students designed housing estates, primarily as linear buildings (*Zeilenbau*) (figs. 5, 6).

Bauhaus Graduates in the USSR: Historical Context

For the Weimar Republic, the time between 1924 and 1929 was a period of German prosperity after the end of the First World War. The period of stabilization was conducive to economic growth, and at the same time, Germany became practically a leader with respect to new intellectual and artistic trends in Europe. It was therefore the peak period of development of the culture and art of the Weimar Republic, which also includes the modern movement of Bauhaus architecture.¹³ Much of the avant-garde artistic movement was, by definition, strongly leftist, not to say, communist, as it was based on a Marxist assessment of the new post-war reality.

Post-revolutionary Soviet Russia in the early 1920s came to terms with the impossibility of fulfilling the postulate of exporting the communist revolution to Germany and, hence, to Europe as a whole. An expression of this situation was the arrest of the Soviet army and the “march of the communist revolution” by the Poles in 1920 in the Warsaw battle—the so-called “miracle on the Vistula.” Russia adopted the concept of the development of “communism in one country” only. Realizing the backwardness of Soviet civilization in Russia, Joseph Stalin (along with the communist party) decided to implement, as part of the subsequently announced 5-year economic plans, the establishment of heavy-industry centers. This was directly connected with the construction of urban centers grouping large-scale industrial workers. The

9 Winkler 1989: 75–76.

10 Meyer 1928: 12–13.

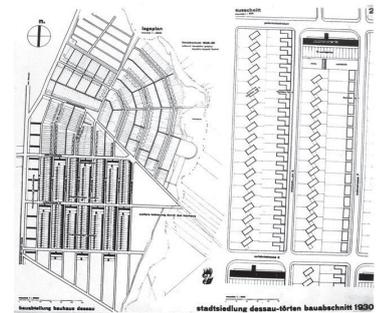


Fig. 3 Dessau-Törten 1929/1930. Hannes Meyer’s settlement expansion included student teams of the Bauhaus building department.

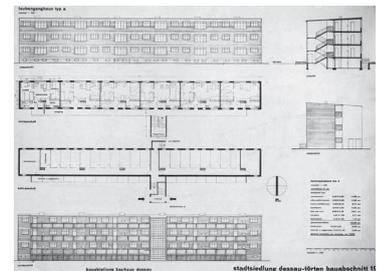


Fig. 4 Dessau-Törten 1929/1930: Drawings of balcony-access house.

11 Winkler 1989: 89.

12 Meyer 1933: 27–38.



Fig. 5 Design by Eduard Ludwig 1932.



Fig. 6 Design by Joost Schmidt 1932.

13 Cf. Cohen 2019.

14 Cf. Snyder/Brandon 2014.

15 Cf. Applebaum 2004.

16 Cf. Applebaum 2004; Potulski 2005; Oseka 2005.

key to the modernization process was the necessity of transforming the social structure of Soviet Russia as soon as possible: shifting the “unnecessary” peasant masses from the countryside and transforming them into workers’ masses in the newly emerging centers of great industry. The incredible scale of “hyper-industrialization” forged by Stalin starting in the 1930s claimed millions of victims.¹⁴ This period is associated with unprecedented terror against the peasant population—as part of the forced “collectivization” (Soviet euphemism for the Holodomor, or “Great Famine” in Kazakhstan and Ukraine). A similar situation concerned the millions of Gulag prisoners whose work was a free resource—the so-called “unnecessary people” from the point of view of communism.¹⁵ In the manner described above, using these “resources,” large investments in the totalitarian Soviet state were made, for example, in the DniproHES power plant and dam in Soviet Ukraine, metallurgical centers, and the city in Magnitogorsk, which was to symbolize the control of rich ore areas, including iron ore, non-ferrous metals, and similar raw materials, located in areas outside the Ural. Such investments were carried out under terribly difficult conditions, with no social facilities, accommodations, or sanitary infrastructure. In addition, work on building construction took place in extreme climatic conditions, on the so-called raw root. Human losses were counted in tens of thousands.¹⁶

In the initial period of introducing the processes of industrialization in the Soviet state, Stalin tolerated the use of foreign specialists. Without them, he probably would not have been able to implement such ambitious plans. Western specialists, who usually represented either the circles of leftist professionals or businessmen, fulfilled the role of the so-called *poputchikov* (“naive, incidental ally”). However, at the beginning of the 1930s, Stalin presented the necessity of establishing his own Soviet intelligentsia, acquired from the ranks of the working-peasant class, in order to become independent from any Western circles. Thus, the status of foreign specialists became less and less comfortable, and in the late 1930s, it boiled down to a known Leninist maxim concerning a certain category of people referred to as so-called “useful idiots”—the group of enthusiasts of the communist system, who were used by the communist party for different political aims. In this context, the history of the Bauhaus group of teachers, graduates, and students who moved to the Soviet Union is worth describing.

Activities of the Bauhaus Group in the Soviet Union

As it has been noted, the USSR closely followed the work of the Bauhaus representatives. In the press, it was proposed that the Soviet Union make use of the school in the field of urban planning (new planning and improvement of urban settlements) and housing construction (design of residential apartment buildings, typification of residential cells, norms for living spaces, “minimum housing,” landscaping). Of great interest was also the experience in using modern building materials and construction, the standardization of design and construction, and the organization, methodology, and mechanization of work.

In February 1927, the decision of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, “On Attracting Specialists from Abroad,” was adopted. The document stated that “as a rule” only highly qualified specialists from abroad could be invited. In 1928–1929, foreign specialists worked on 12.5% of the total number of projects in the USSR. The Soviet Union attracted Western European architects with the possibility of implementing a new proletariat utopia through large-scale construction. In total, about thirty architects arrived in the USSR to work in the fields of urban planning and housing.

In the USSR, Hannes Meyer was very famous. Interest was aroused not only by his projects, but also by his left-wing views, for which he had been dismissed from his post as Bauhaus director. Meyer himself proposed working in the USSR, “where our designs and our experience [...] could bring the greatest benefit.”¹⁷ While still in Berlin, in October 1930, Meyer gave an interview with the *Pravda* newspaper, wherein he stated:

As a result of many years of work in capitalist society, I became convinced that working under capitalism is unthinkable for us. With our Marxist revolutionary worldview, we, revolutionary architects, inevitably enter into unsolvable contradictions with the world that is built on animal individualism, on the exploitation of man by man [...]. I leave for the USSR to work where a real proletarian culture is created, where socialism is built.¹⁸ (fig.7)

On February 8, 1931, Hannes Meyer and seven students moved to Moscow. In the “Giprovtuz” Institute of the People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Meyer’s students created the “Rot Front Bauhaus Brigade,” which included Tibor Weiner, René Mensch, Klaus Meumann, Konrad Püschel, Philipp Tolziner, Antonin Urban, and Béla Scheffler (figs. 8, 9). In this composition, the group worked for nine months, focusing on the design of higher technical schools, kindergartens, boarding schools, and residential buildings. In 1931, Meyer, Weiner, and Scheffler joined the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Architects, then the Association of Architects—Meyer in 1932, Weiner in 1933, Scheffler in 1935. The members of the brigade lived in a shared flat at Arbat Square (fig. 9). In 1934, Meyer became a full member of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR. Architects from Meyer’s (and May’s) groups worked in distant cities during construction on a permanent basis or during temporary business trips.

The achievements of the Bauhaus—in this case the 1928–1930 Bauhaus under Meyer’s leadership—were presented in the 1931 exhibition “Bauhaus Dessau. Lead period of Hannes Meyer. 1928–1930” at the Museum of New Western Art in Moscow. In the catalog (fig. 10) and in his article “Bauhaus: To the Exhibition in Moscow” in the magazine *Soviet Architecture*, the chairman of the VOPRA (All-Union Association of Proletarian Architects), Arkady Mordvinov (fig. 11), noted the usefulness of the Bauhaus and Meyer’s creative method for Soviet architecture. In the article, he compared Gropius and Meyer,

17 El Lissitzky 1945.

18 Gartman 1930.

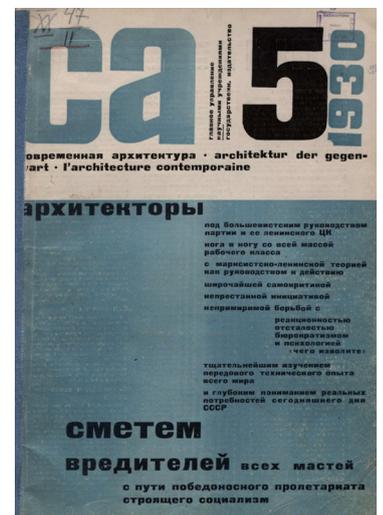


Fig. 7 Cover of *Contemporary Architecture* with Meyer’s interview.



Fig. 8 Bauhaus architects: Tibor Weiner, Margarete Mengel, Philipp Tolziner, and Antonin Urban (from left to right) in Moscow, May 1, 1932.

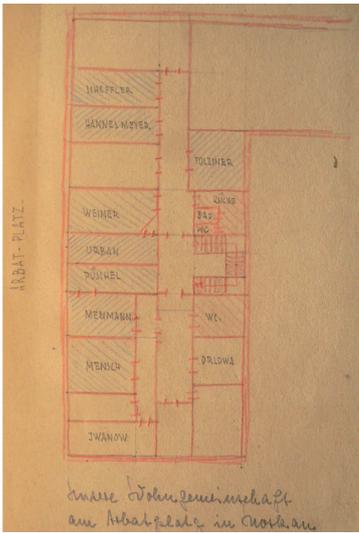


Fig. 9 The layout of the rooms of Rot Front Brigade members at Arbatskaya Square 1.

19 Mordvinov 1931.



Fig. 10 Poster of the Bauhaus exhibition in Moscow.



Fig. 11 Meyer with Arkady Mordvinov at the exhibition in Moscow, 1931.

20 Ikonnikov 1971: 329.

noting the role the Moscow Bauhaus brigade played in creating the “new architecture” in the USSR. Mordvinov also stressed the importance of Meyer’s teaching at VASI and emphasized his contribution to the use of the scientific method of architectural design, the training of students to rationalize design and construction, standardization and typification, as well as collectivity.¹⁹

The team led by Hannes Meyer took part in the most important Soviet competitions. For example, Philipp Tolziner, Antonin Urban, and Tibor Weiner, with Meyer as a consultant, participated in the 1931 competition for the design of the Soviet Palace (fig. 12). In 1932, Meyer left the group and began to deal with urban affairs. He also taught at the Higher Institute of Architecture and Construction (VASI). Together with Peer Bücking and Israel Geimanson, Meyer took part in the 1931–1932 competition “Development of Great Moscow.” The leading architects of the USSR all joined the competition. In this project, Meyer embodied the idea of a “functional city.” He proposed to create the main center in the historic old town and surround it with “county towns” or “satellite cities” (150,000 to 300,000 inhabitants) with their own centers. Eight satellite cities were proposed in the historical part of Moscow, and the remaining eleven satellite cities were disbanded as linear housing estates. Fast trains were offered as transport. Meyer proposed the maintenance of a concentric-radial system in Moscow. A proposal was made to expand the city to the east and southeast. This would make it possible to link the planned industrial areas with residential areas (figs. 13, 14).

Weiner, Tolziner, and Püschel were transferred to the design office “Gorstroyprojekt.” Some members of the Ernst May group were already working there, among them Hans Schmidt, Mart Stam, Werner Hebebrand, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, and Ernst Zieman. Under the leadership of the chief architect, Hans Schmidt, the Bauhaus graduates took part in the design of the socialist city of Orsk for 100,000 inhabitants. Schmidt, in 1933, described the main characteristics of the socialist city as follows:

The socialist city is being built [...] according to plan—by a socialist society. A socialist city is not a tool to exile nature, it is a creature of nature. It will be a green city according to Engels’s requirements. In the socialist city, the working class will build its own squares and houses, it will own them. The best possible living conditions for employees will be implemented here. [...] [T]he fact that a city can be built by a class with means of production, a class that has conquered its culture, this fact means the disappearance of the contradictions that led the nineteenth-century urban plans to a dead end. It means the release of architectural possibilities that are reflected in the architecture of the cities of the past.²⁰

At this stage, it became difficult to differentiate the work of Bauhaus and other German architects. In the construction of socialist cities in Sverdlovsk, Orsk, Perm, Solikamsk, Magnitogorsk, and others, German architects left the most noticeable mark. The greatest contribution to the planning of Magnitogorsk

was made by the Ernst May group (Mart Stam, Hans Schmidt, Walter Schulz, Walter Schwagenscheidt, Wilhelm Schütte, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky and others, a total of 23 people, including those who had left the group Rot Front). Under the leadership of Schmidt, one of these groups, which included Weiner, Püschel, Tolziner (they continued their work until 1936), and Charlotte Beese, developed in 1932–1933 a detailed project for the new district in Orsk, Lokomotivstroy, while the master plan is attributed to the Dutch architect Mart Stam (fig. 15). Scheffler, Tolziner, and Püschel had participated in the development and construction of the balcony-access housing in Dessau-Törten, and when comparing those with the ones in Orsk, the similarities are evident (fig. 16). The following principles based on the experience of construction in Germany were used: maximum efficiency, standardization, rationality, manufacturability of construction, and the maximum possible speed of design and construction. Many years later, assessing the role of the Bauhaus experience in working on the project, Tolziner wrote “The training I took—then the newest method of solving the problems of modern architecture—retained its positive quality and in very different conditions—in the distant socialist Urals.”²¹

The Soviet ideology of industrial development provided the urban model of the workers’ settlement not as a “housing estate,” but as a “place of employment.” Its purpose and character were completely subordinated to the tasks of the functioning of an industrial enterprise as an element of the national production system. The construction of “satellite housing estates,” “suburban workers’ housing estates,” or “garden-workers’ housing estates” outside existing cities, near built industrial plants, was perceived by the Soviet doctrine of urban planning as a strategic direction of urban planning. In Orsk, for the convenience of employees, it was considered necessary to bring the housing units closer to the workplace. Taking into consideration the sanitary and hygienic standards of the time, the industrial zone was separated from the living area by a park zone. Natural conditions and recreation were also taken into consideration, as districts were separated by streets with terraces, gently descending towards the Ural river. Wide boulevards and social centers divided the new city into four parts, with recreational areas and a sports center designed on the coastal embankment.

In the years 1935 to 1937, the “Quarter No. 8” was implemented in a fragmented way, consisting of three-story residential buildings with apartments of “elevated comfort.” As in Magnitogorsk and Novokuznetsk, only three-room sections were used in three-story buildings. Stam had used his design experience from the Hellerhof development in Frankfurt am Main in his Soviet housing design, as the comparison with the Magnitogorsk floor plan shows (fig. 17).

On January 26, 1935, Schmidt wrote to Victor Vesnin (chief architect of the People’s Commissariat of Industry): “Foreign architects [...] brought not only extensive experience at some stage of Soviet urban planning, but also [...] a methodology that would allow us to overcome all problems of urban planning.”²² Also Püschel recalled his work in Orsk:

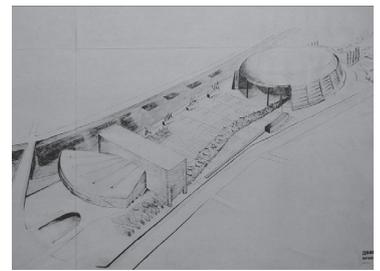


Fig. 12 Competition project for the Soviet Palace, 1931. Perspective of the complex from the north with the open “Great Hall.”

21 From Tolziner’s personal archives.



Fig. 13 Hannes Meyer: Plan for the expansion and reconstruction of Great Moscow, 1932, page 2: Residential areas.



Fig. 14 Hannes Meyer: Plan for expansion and reconstruction of the “Great Moscow,” 1932, page 3: Reconstruction of the center.

22 Meerovich/Khmel'nitsky: 132.

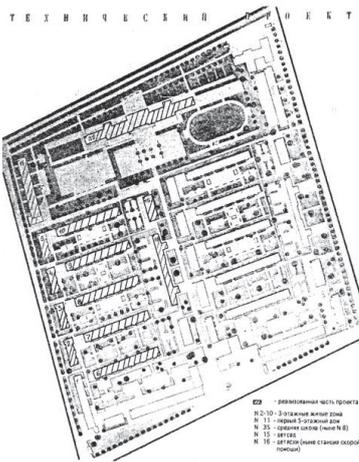


Fig. 15 Sixteenth General Plan of Orsk 1934-35.



Fig. 16 Comparison of a balcony-access house in Dessau-Törten (top) and a residential building in the "socialist city" of Orsk (bottom).

23 Puchel 1980: 158.

24 Cf. Winkler 1989: 152.

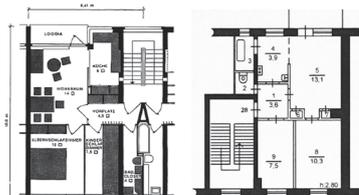


Fig. 17 Comparison of Mart Stam's 2.5-room unit in Hellerhof, Frankfurt am Main (left) and a typical IN-B flat in Magnitogorsk, Orsk in 1931 (right).

The construction was carried out in a difficult climatic condition, local environment, and natural landscape, with almost no motorized transportation, excavators, construction cranes, machinery, and a shortage of specialists. About 1,000 employees were employed to build a socialist city, but among them there were only twelve trained masons and a few more construction specialists. There were not enough experienced technicians: the brigadiers were interns or very young graduates of construction schools. In such conditions, a detailed study of each project was required.²³

All this was difficult to understand for German architects whose architectural principles and methods were largely determined by modern technologies and materials. And thus, the method of building a typical mass apartment by means of rationalization, standardization, and new technologies failed.

In the years 1932 to 1933, Hannes Meyer worked as the chief architect of the "Design Office of Socialist Cities in Heavy Industry" (Standartgorprojekt).²⁴ Here, he carried out the projects of the satellite city of Perm-Zakamsk for forty- to fifty-thousand inhabitants, the socialist city of Nizne-Kurynsk (fig. 18), and the "Socialist city of Gorky" in Perm (fig. 19). A detailed description of the project Nizne Kurynsk by Meyer was presented in the article "Zakamsky socialist city" in the newspaper *Zvezda Gazeta* from December 11, 1932. In these projects, he continued to develop the idea of a "linear city" (a term invented by Arturo Soria y Mata and also used by Hilberseimer), previously proposed in the General Plan of Moscow. In these projects, housing estates and cultural zones were located on both sides along communication arteries.

Meyer continued the Bauhaus approaches of systematic urban analyses of topography, climate, and wind direction. He divided the city into districts with residential buildings of the same type. It was a repeatable scheme of linear buildings with courtyards closed on three sides. Inside, there were preschools, shopping centers, and sports areas. Here, Meyer tried to realize the Bauhaus idea of the "architectural and spatial organization of social relations and life processes." As the main architect of the Urban Planning Institute, GIPROGOR, Meyer also developed the plan of the capital of the future Jewish autonomous region Birobidzhan (1933-1934). It was one of the last designs of a Bauhaus representative in the USSR. Analyzing the factors, which had an impact on the shape, growth, and development of Birobidzhan, Meyer drew attention to the favorable geographical location and climate of the city and planned all works based on geological, hydrogeological, and soil research data (fig. 20). In the development plan of Birobidzhan, the administrative center of the new town was designed at the foot of the mountain—Bolshaya Sopka, at the intersection of two designed main motorways connecting the center of the old town, station, pier, and the industrial zone of the left bank. The project envisioned the construction of housing in two-story wooden and clay blocks (60%) and three- to five-story brick houses (40%). Public buildings were predominantly brick, ranging between one and four stories.

In 1934, Meyer published several articles in the journal *Soviet Architecture*. In the article “Architect in Class Struggle,” published in the first issue of the journal, he gave an interview to the Czech newspaper *Left Front*, in which he responded negatively to modern Western architecture. At the same time, Meyer was greatly interested in the experience of housing construction in the USSR. In the article “New Residential Buildings in Moscow,” he outlined his theoretical views on housing construction in the USSR and noted that the construction of residential buildings is beginning to occupy the same important place as industrial buildings, whereas in the years of the first 5-year plan, it occupied a more modest place. He welcomed the fact that “By the decision of the Council of People’s Commissars of 1934,” a transition was planned in cities and workers’ settlements to the construction of houses on several floors with two- to four-room apartments. In order to enable all family members to fulfill their needs, Meyer believed that apartments should have a “flexible layout” and “technical comfort.” He also considered “contacts with the outside world” important and therefore added balconies, terraces, and verandas. According to Meyer, new apartment buildings should both provide collective living and create a unity of urban planning. This was achieved by creating “rhythmic rows” of both residential premises on the façades and architectural volumes of residential buildings in urban space.²⁵

Meyer left the Soviet Union in 1936. Despite the fact that he did not agree with the changes in Soviet architecture associated with the appeal to the historical heritage and the proclamation of the “method of socialist realism” as the main method of Soviet architecture, the architect assessed the years of his work in the USSR positively. In a letter to Karola Bloch-Piotrkowska, he noted about his four-year practice in the Soviet Union that he feels “younger, stronger and full of creative power.”²⁶

From 1931 on, the People’s Commissariat of Industry (NKTP) began to terminate the collaboration with foreigners. In the resolution “On the Work of Transforming Being” (May 29, 1930), many ideas of the socialist city were called utopian, and thus the changes in the political and creative situation forced many foreign specialists to leave the USSR. The Bauhaus graduates who remained in the USSR were met with a tough fate, as most of them were repressed and imprisoned. After the expiration of the first contract, René Mensch left the group and returned to his homeland, Switzerland. Schmidt and Weiner left in 1937. Three, who inadvertently accepted Soviet citizenship, remained and were repressed. The Czech, Antonin Urban, married a Russian colleague, and was then arrested in 1937 and shot. Béla Scheffler was expelled from the party in 1942, accused of being a “German spy,” and shot at the Moscow Kommunarka NKVD training grounds. Leo Wassermann and Hannes Meyer’s secretary, Margaret Mengel, were also shot. Her son Hannes, who was renamed Ivan Ivanovich, grew up in orphanages as the “son of the enemy of the people.” He worked all his life in coal mines near Chelyabinsk. It was not until the 1990s that he learned about the fate of his mother and returned to Germany.

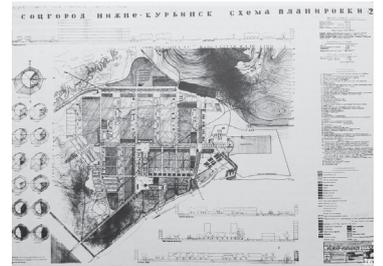


Fig. 18 Hannes Meyer: Plan of the new city of Nizne-Kurynsk, 1932.



Fig. 19 Hannes Meyer: Plan of the Socialist City of Gorky, 1932.

25 Meyer 1934: 59.



Fig. 20 Hannes Meyer. A general plan for the city of Birobidzhan.

26 Winkler 1989: 178.

In Leningrad, Peer Bücking was arrested and shot in January 1938. The same fate befell Hungarian Pal Forgo in 1941. Martin Knaute died on February 9, 1942, in one of the GULAG camps in the Komi ASSR, in the village of Vozhael. All traces of Klaus Meumann were lost in Magnitogorsk. Tolziner was also arrested in 1937 and deported to Perm. He was the only one who managed to survive to liberation, rehabilitation, and eventual return to Moscow. After being held in Soviet camps for prisoners of war, Püschel returned to Germany.

Soviet Urban Planning in the Years 1930–1950

In Soviet historiography, it was assumed that the period from 1935 to the end of the 1950s was the time of “building socialism in one country” (see above). In the theory of urban planning, the situation turned out to be paradoxical. The theoretical search for a solution to the problem of the socialist settlement system and the city of the future was largely based on the practical experience of the early 1930s. Due to their practical implementation, the methods set by foreign architects, including Soviet Bauhaus representatives, were preserved until the end of the 1930s. However, in the late 1930s, Soviet architecture was reoriented and the concept of the Soviet city was formulated as a “unified artistic group.” The principle of “socialist realism” emerged, and in architecture, the party turned to the use of classical forms, becoming, according to Dmitrij Chmielnicki, a leading creative method of “all Soviet forms of culture, including architecture.” Socialist realism “did not argue with existing and popular artistic theories in a professional environment.”²⁷ The ideas of monumentalism and the “heroic past” were embodied in postwar architecture in the forms of the “Stalin Empire.” Almost nothing is known about the activities of foreign specialists in the Soviet Union during this period. Tolziner, who survived the Stalinist camps, played an active role in the postwar years not only in the reconstruction of the cities of Solikamsk and Borovsk, but also in creating monumental restaurants in the Urals and in restoring many monuments of Russian architecture.

In the early 1950s, the USSR changed the urban concept related to the development of industrial construction methods. Rationalism became an indispensable way of saving labor and material resources, and the construction of new residential areas was started in accordance with standard projects.²⁸ After he rose to power, Nikita Khrushchev made a fundamental architectural reform. In the 1930s, working in the Moscow municipal committee and party committee, he had shown interest in industrial methods of construction, which later led to a change from the Stalinist style to international modernism. On November 4, 1955, the decree “On Liquidation of Excesses in Design and Construction” was issued, which condemned costly ornamentation in architecture. Mass housing construction using industrial methods became widespread in the country, and details were minimized. A comparison between Meyer’s ADGB Trade Union School (1928–1930) and a typical Soviet school (1970) might show how former building principles returned (fig. 21): The repetitive simple architectural elements, along with the glazed surfaces,

27 Cf. Kosenkova 2011: 4.

28 Cf. Kosenkova 2011: 5.



Fig. 21 Comparison of the ADGB Trade Union School in Bernau 1928–1930 (top) and a typical school of the 1970s in Minsk, Belarus (bottom).

accurately reflected Meyer's architectural approach, which implies usability and sunlight. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that urbanism and architectural ideas from 1970 to 1980 were based on the Bauhaus principles of combining the theory and practice of "art and machine production" and the aesthetic principles of "rigor, simplicity, and convenience." These principles and ideas were implemented, it seems, until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The role of the Bauhaus in the formation of the rationalistic direction of Soviet architecture and today has acquired new importance. For its 100th anniversary, the 2019 exhibition "Bauhaus imaginista. School in motion. Architects-internationalists" has been organized in Moscow, dedicated to the complex relationships between the Bauhaus and the USSR, particularly visible in the work of former Bauhaus teachers and students in Moscow and other cities of the country.

Conclusions

The activities of the Bauhaus representatives in the Soviet Union were part of an agenda to create a "Soviet man," which meant to implement a "new man" within a communist utopia. In this manner, Soviet society would live in the city of the future, embodying the best sides of the new existence: good, order, paradise, communism,²⁹ which would result in a state of happiness provided by communism and the communist party. The realization of these perspectives was connected with the attempt to implement new ideas, including the creation of the concept of a "socialist city—Sotsgorod." The avant-garde project of rejecting the old capitalist city was reflected in the creation of new schemes in urban planning. The new Sotsgorod attempted to eliminate all class differentiations that were to be realized through the idea of "social progress." This goal was realized through access to multiplicable, identical housing units and similar-looking districts for the new proletariat class.

While the cultural and political conditions of Weimar, Germany, were quite different from the 1920s Soviet Union, Bauhaus ideas, particularly in the Meyer era, reflected Russian ideals, for example in the School's collaboration efforts. The attempt to transfer the Bauhaus's urban and architectural concepts was seen as an opportunity for Soviet authorities to develop industrial factories and build new socialist cities. It was also an opportunity for the Bauhaus group to expand and ennoble its architectural and urban achievements on an international scale. However, after leaving Germany to build the "Soviet paradise," they faced huge difficulties, which they tried to overcome by adapting their visions to the encountered realities. For most of the Bauhaus representatives, however, the civilizational and cultural clash with the Soviet reality had disastrous personal consequences.

The work of the Bauhaus representatives in the Soviet Union did not last long. Most of them worked between 1931–1934. After implementing the assigned projects, their role came to an end. Stalin's totalitarian politics eliminated their influence on the creation of settlements and any possibility of further professional activity in the USSR. The fate of the members of the Bauhaus group was overall depressing. Some left while it was possible, and only a few

29 Heitmann 2001: 38–39.

remained until 1938. Those who stayed and survived had to face the reality of Stalin's inhuman politics.

Today, most of the cities designed and built with the help of the Bauhaus group are in a very bad condition. While in the Soviet Union industrialization had the highest priority and was supported by extensive propaganda, nobody paid attention to ecology and human needs. As a result, the cities and their inhabitants have suffered from diseases, particularly HIV, child mortality, unemployment, and pollution. For example, Magnitogorsk is one of the most polluted places in the world, and Orsk is facing an HIV epidemic.

Authors

Nina Kazhar, Professor, Ph.D., Eng. of Architecture, is an associate professor at Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Czestochowa, Poland. Interested in the theory and history of architecture, she has published more than 150 articles in Belarus, Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, and Germany. She also has extensive teaching experience at various universities in Belarus, Russia, Poland, and Germany. She has published over ten educational and methodical manuals.
nkazhar@bud.pcz.pl

Nina Solkiewicz-Kos, Ph.D., is an architect and lecturer at the Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Czestochowa, Poland. She has authored and co-authored numerous publications, including a monograph, in the field of energy-efficient building. Prior to her academic career, she worked for ten years in the historic monuments preservation lab and in architectural studios, contributing to the realization of many building projects. She teaches urban and building engineering and is a member of the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) and the Chamber of Polish Architects (KIA). ninasolkiewiczkos@gmail.com

Mariusz Zadworny, Ph.D., is an architect and associate professor and the head of the Department of Architecture at Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Czestochowa, Poland. His research activities are in architecture and urban planning, with a main interest in the methodology of architectural design and the theory and practice of social housing. He authored monographs and articles concerning social housing and city renewal in Europe, and particularly in Poland. He is the author of *Koncepcja taniego mieszkania społecznego dla rodzin najuboższych wobec ich potrzeb współcześnie w Polsce* (The concept of cheap social housing for poor families with respect to their needs in contemporary Poland), Wrocław University of Technology Press, 2013. He has been a member of the Polish Society of Architects since 1988, and of the Silesian Chamber of Architects in Poland since 2002. mzadw5@hotmail.com

Literature

Applebaum, Anne (2004): Gulag. A History of the Soviet Camps, New York: Penguin.

“Bauhaus, Dessau” (1927): Contemporary Architecture, no. 6: 160–161 and 163–165 (Russian).

Clemens, Roman (1961): Bauhaus. Eine Ausstellung von Idee und Arbeit, vom Geist und Leben am Bauhaus 1919–1928 und –1933. Exhibition catalog Darmstadt. Zurich.

Cohen, Daniel (2019): Prosperity słabości, Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga, Katowice (Polish version); original: Cohen, Daniel (2009): La prosperite du vice, Paris: Edition Albin Michel.

Gartman A.(1930): "Creativity under capitalism is unthinkable," Contemporary Architecture, no. 5.

Giedion, Sigfried (1954): Walter Gropius. Work and Teamwork. New York: Reinhold.

Gropius, Walter (1967): Die neue Architektur und das Bauhaus. Mainz: Mann.

Gropius, Walter (1952): "Das Bauhaus und die zukünftige Rolle von Architektur und Raumgestaltung," Die Neue Stadt, Frankfurt am Main, vol. 6, no. 7: 275.

Gropius, Walter (1923): Idee und Aufbau des staatlichen Bauhauses. Weimar/Munich: Bauhaus Verlag.

Heitmann, Claudia (2001): The Reception of the Bauhaus in the Federal Republic of Germany in the Period 1949 to 1968. Diss. Trier.

Ikonnikov A.V. (1971): Masters of Architecture about Architecture: Foreign Architecture. Late XIX - early XX century, M.: Art: 329–353 (Russian).

Jędrzejczak, Dobiesław (2001): "Theology of a Socialist City," in: idem. (ed.) Post-Socialist City – Organization of Urban Space and its Transformation (part11), 14th Conversatorium of the City Knowledge, Łódź: Łódź University Press: 277–282.

Khan-Magomedov S.O. (2001): The Architecture of the Soviet Avant-Garde. Moscow: Stroyizdat (Russian).

Kosenkova, Yulia (2011): "A long way to the city. To formulate the problem of studying Soviet urban planning of the 1950s – early 1980s," Internet Bulletin VolgGASU, ser.: Polythematic. vol. 3 (17): 1–15 (Russian).

El Lissitzky (1930), letter, dated August 23, 1930. In: Town Planning, ed. V. A. Shkvarikov, – M: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Architecture, 1945: 343. (Russian)

Meyer, Hannes (1934a): "Architect in Class Struggle," Soviet Architecture, no. 1: 59 (Russian).

Meyer, Hannes (1934b): "New Residential Buildings in Moscow," Soviet Architecture, no. 12: 168–173 (Russian).

Meyer, Hannes (1933): "How I Work," Soviet Architecture, no. 6: 27–38 (Russian).

Meyer, Hannes (1928): "Bauen," Bauhaus. Zeitschrift für Gestaltung, no. 2/3: 14–15.

Meerovich, M./ Khmelnskiy, D. (2005): "The role of foreign architects in the development of Soviet industrialization," Spatial Economics. Essays, no. 4: 131–149 (Russian).

Mordvinov, Arkady (1931): "Bauhaus. To the Exhibition in Moscow," Soviet Architecture, no. 1/2: 8–12 (Russian).

Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig (1928): "House at the Housing Fair in Stuttgart," Contemporary Architecture, no. 1: 30–31. (Russian).

Oseka, Andrzej (2006): Utopia w stepie, Wprost, no. 44, Agencja Wydawniczo-Reklamowa Wprost, Warszawa: 110–113.

Pasternak, A. (1927): "Steel Houses in Germany," Contemporary Architecture, no. 6: 170–178 (Russian).

Potulski, Jakub (2005): Rola i znaczenie tradycji w funkcjonowaniu współczesnych instytucji politycznych w Rosji, Europejskie Centrum Edukacyjne, Toruń: 144–145, 168–170.

Puchel K. (1980): "Hannes Mayer Group in the Soviet Union (1930–1937)," In: Interconnections between Russian and Soviet art and German artistic culture: 157–161 (Russian).

Raish G. (2016): "How an Architect from Germany Designed Birobidzhan," in: Building Materials, Equipment, Technologies of the XXI Century, no. 7: 50–53.

Roters, Eberhard (1965): Maler am Bauhaus. Berlin: Rembrandt.

Snyder, Timothy/Brandon, Ray (2014): Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953, Oxford University Press.

Shkvarikov V. A. (1945): Town planning – M: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Architecture (Russian).

Winkler, Klaus-Jürgen (1989): Der Architekt Hannes Meyer, Anschauungen und Werk, Berlin: VEB.

Figures

(photos by authors, unless stated otherwise below)

Figs. 1, 2, 7 Contemporary Architecture.

Figs. 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 20 Winkler 1989.

Figs. 5, 6 <https://www.junkers.de/junkers-und-das-bauhaus/das-bauhaus-plant-f%C3%BCr-junkers-eine-%E2%80%9Egro%C3%9Fsiedlung%E2%80%9C-dessau> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 8, 9 <http://old.kapitel-spb.ru/index.php/events/19-2011-03-28-12-03-59/49-zibenbrodt?start=3> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 12 <http://old.kapitel-spb.ru/index.php/events/19-2011-03-28-12-03-59/49-zibenbrodt?start=3> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 15, 16 <https://jonah-81.livejournal.com/6131.html> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 17 <https://qr.urfu.ru/ojs/index.php/qr/article/download/174/1873> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 18, 19 <http://old.kapitel-spb.ru/index.php/events/19-2011-03-28-12-03-59/49-zibenbrodt?start=3> (7.7.2019).

Figs. 21 <https://yandex.com/collections/card/59d39b7bc75bad00a6429b50/> (7.7.2019).

Recommended Citation

Nina Kazhar, Nina Sołkiewicz-Kos, and Mariusz Zadworny:
The Influence of Bauhaus Ideas on the Development of Soviet Cities in the Years 1930–1980.

In: Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок,
International Journal of Architectural Theory (ISSN 1434-0984),
vol. 24., no. 39, *Bauhaus Transfers*, 2019, pp. 61–78.