

The making of the “city as a whole”. Postmodern discourse on urbanity in the GDR

Abstract

While postmodern architecture in the GDR was heatedly discussed especially during the 1980s, the notion of a postmodern urbanism seems to have gone unnoticed in those debates. The term „urbanity“ for instance, that played a major role in postmodern discourse in western countries, was hardly ever used. However, there was a notable shift in planning paradigms from the early 1970s onwards that was interconnected with inner-city development. Taking these developments as a starting point, the paper examines the debate on urbanity in the GDR in light of the debate on postmodernism and relates it to existing conceptualizations, particularly Nan Ellin's work on postmodern urbanism. It focuses on the evolution of the so called “Guiding principles for the socialist development of urban design and architecture in the GDR”. This is particularly suitable as a case study, since drafts and associated meeting minutes of this development process have been preserved in archives and provide insight into the intentions of the protagonists involved.

On this basis, the two theses of this paper will be discussed: 1. Given the content, the discourse on urbanity in the GDR since the early 1970s has been strikingly similar to the western one, but expressed in different words and ways which intentionally avoid similarities in language. 2. The discussion of a change in urban design started earlier than that of architectural design and postmodern architecture, possibly even catalysing it.

Keywords

Postmodernism, Urban Design, Urbanity, GDR