

THE STALIN ERA 1929–1953 EXTENSIVE INDUSTRIALISATION, CONSERVATIVE TRENDS, AND NEW TOWNS

The start of the Soviet Union's first five-year plan marked its beginning of the second phase in urban development, with the transition to industrialisation. Prefabricated housing construction methods were developed and many new cities around new industrial sites and centres were constructed. In the beginning of the 1930s Stalin's administration issued a decree against 'utopianism', replacing it with the ideology of 'Socialist Realism'.¹ The independent architectural societies in which so many of the experimental ideas of the 1920s had arisen were consolidated into the Union of Soviet Architects and brought under the direct control of the state. During this period, the idea of communal living was embodied in the morphology of the socialist city, or *sotsgorod*, with a utilitarian layout. A 'standard planning unit' for this new city was developed, and the first attempts were made to typify housing series.²

The Stalinist policy of rapid industrialisation combined with forced collectivisation of the countryside, which began in 1929, drove millions of peasants from their farmlands to new industrial sites, transforming small towns into large cities. Between 1926 and 1955, the urban population of the Soviet Union grew from 26.3 million to 86.3 million (or from 18 to nearly 50 per cent of the total population), creating an urgent need for investment in housing and infrastructure.³

The intentional underinvestment in housing and other urban services was a cornerstone of Stalin's industrial policy, as policy decisions reduced living space from 5.7 square metres per person in 1926 to 4.55 square metres in 1940.⁴ Housing conditions in cities deteriorated precipitously. Many of the newcomers lived in barracks or shacks or in communal flats with one or more families to a room.⁵ The waves of people flooding into towns and cities to work in new industries during the first three five-year plans (1929 to 1941) greatly overburdened the existing, inadequate housing facilities. Housing production was sacrificed in favour of significant investments in heavy industry. Construction of large industrial and mining plants throughout the country continued, in particular to develop industrial centres in the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East, along with the forced resettlement of workers to serve them.

In 1950 the per capita living space in urban areas was 4.9 square metres. That year the state built only 38.4 per cent of the housing that had been planned, consisting chiefly of low-rise units of flats constructed with conventional construction methods, such as bricklaying and concrete cast in place at the building site. By the end of Stalin's rule, 70 per cent of the housing stock consisted of one- and two-storey buildings. Moreover, half of this stock consisted of poorly equipped temporary housing types.⁶

REFERENCES

¹ Dushkina, N. 'The World Heritage Potential of 20th Century Urban Heritage in the Former Soviet Union', *ICOMOS–Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees*, vol. 69, 2019, pp. 176–185, p. 178. ² Ibid. ³ Sigrist, P. 'Stalin Urbanism', *Polis Blog* (2010). <<https://www.thepolisblog.org/2010/01/urbanism-under-stalin.html>> accessed 10 December 2023. ⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Morton, H.W., 'Housing in the Soviet Union', *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1984, pp. 69–80, here p. 71. ⁶ Morton, 'Housing in the Soviet Union', p. 72.

1 The first and second quarters of Magnitogorsk, 1933
SOURCE: Archive of the Magnitogorsk Local History Museum.

