



Urban patterns in Dubrovka, Moscow (4); Shabolovka, Moscow (5); Gostyazhpromural, Yekaterinburg (6); Vichuga (7); Novokuznetsk (8); Avtozavodskiy, Tolyatti (9)

## EXHIBITION

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## Urban Development in the Soviet Union

Urban development in the Soviet Union needs to be seen against the backdrop of the political, economic, and technical conditions of the time, which framed the construction of cities and of housing, as well as architectural design. The basis for urban development in the USSR was the abolishment or severe restriction of private property. Within the very first six months of its existence, the Soviet government ordered the 'nationalisation' of industry, banks, foreign trade, and land. This changed the legal form of ownership, with private property being replaced by state property.<sup>3</sup> Another important precondition for urban planning was the economic system of the state-controlled planned economy, articulated in five-year plans aiming primarily to increase the military power of the state. Guided by politically motivated objectives, the state directed, steered, and controlled all economic processes in accordance with these long-term plans. The planned economy likewise controlled decisions pertaining to the planning and execution of all construction projects.

Urban planning and design in the Soviet Union – like art and architecture, as well – were used as ideological instruments. Integrated within a system of state control, urban design played a political role that was to be demonstrated on social, structural, and visual levels.<sup>4</sup> The guiding principles for urban development emerged under specific preconditions, such as technical feasibility; yet almost equally importantly, they were subservient to political goals. The realisation of a socialist city model was affected by the conditions that preceded the communist period. Despite initial intentions to eradicate 'chaotic' capitalist urban planning legacies, the spatial structure of older cities was only incrementally transformed, whereas the newly founded cities were taken to represent the 'purest version of the planned socialist city'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, it was in the new 'socialist cities' that egalitarian urbanism in the form of large-scale buildings of flats was most pronounced.<sup>6</sup> Socialist urbanisation therefore did not have the effect of a sweeping homogenisation on the whole urban system, but rather left a significant imprint while still allowing for regional variations in reference to architectural and built heritage.<sup>7</sup>

Urban development under Soviet power can be categorised in three phases: the transformational phase at the very beginning of the new state, as political and economic institutions were established (1917–1928); the Stalinist period, marked by extensive industrialisation and the construction of new cities around factories and mining sites (1929–1953); and the realisation of mass housing under Khrushchev (1953–1964) and Brezhnev (1964–1982), followed by the era of Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev ending in the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The phases are tied to pivotal moments in residential construction associated with the USSR's five-year plans and the subsequent adoption of standards in housing construction. Frequently, housing projects were underfunded or faced other implementation challenges, with the consequence that they were completed during a later historical period. Furthermore, plans for various republics often differed significantly in their details, depending on the pace of planning. As a result, some projects were constructed later than the period in which they were planned, while spatially aligning with the principles of the period in which they were conceived. In such cases, we categorise the project within a specific period by relying on spatial characteristics and the typology of residential buildings.

### REFERENCES

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SOURCES  
 4–9 Lara Klein, based on Google Maps.