

Transformation of Sotsgorod. Planning ideas and reality

Round Table, online, 14th of December 2022. Moderation: Dr. Anastasia Malko, KIT.

Invited Guests:

Dr. Ing. Dmitri Chmelnizki, architect, historian, publicist, Berlin

Dr. Eugenia Konyshova, historian of architecture, Chelyabinsk

Topics and Questions:

The discussion focused on the changes over the past five years to the areas of Sotsgorod planned in the 1930s. Aim was to reflect upon the values of these areas and the transformation processes.

Discussion and Results:

Values and Identities

The specific character of Sotsgorod could be distinguished by the urban integrity of the residential complex, including all necessary functions integrated in the district and located in the pedestrian accessibility. As an independent, enclosed residential formation under an industrial enterprise it had a stable size intended to provide a comfortable way for balanced living. Another characteristic of the Soviet residential development in the Stalin era was the rigidly differentiated hierarchically, where the socialist city is a reflection of the distribution of different types of housing for a certain stratum from barracks for workers to comfortable apartment or communal housing for the privileged management.

Transformation

Since the 1990s until now, infill construction of multi-story buildings has been carried out on the territory of the socialist city, including on the site of demolished historical objects. Massive multi-story panel buildings changed the silhouette of the socialist city by “squeezing it” between new development. The expansion of highways and new development of open green spaces was significantly decreasing. Thus, the urban integrity of the socialist city, its main value, was damaged. Some buildings entirely or partially lost their original appearance. However, the most significant objects have retained their historical appearance to the present day, both residential buildings and social and cultural facilities.

Another transformation process is an outflow of the population living in these districts, which leads to the erosion of the collective identity formed when the districts were built to the residence of people working at the same enterprise. As a conclusion of all processes, the urban integrity incorporated in the project is blurring.

Legislation and Planning Rules

Several examples to explain the specific values of the socialist city could be noticed by the application as an object of cultural heritage with status foreseen in the Federal law, such as a “historical area of special significance” (“*dostoprimechatelnoe mesto*”) that had been proceeding for example for the Chelyabinsk Sotsgorod but till nowadays by the application was given a negative conclusion. Specific urban values are still hidden in civic society and are only appreciated by a few experts.

Civil Engagement and Activities

The popularization process for socialist cities could be seen in different projects, for example, “The Constructivist Project” organized by Natalia Melnikova, where the goal is to study objects of the urban environment of this historical period, the preservation and promotion of the unique heritage but those processes still need to be activated for the society.