

THE STATE SOCIALIST WORKING GROUP OF THE 1950S AND 1960S AND ITS INTERDISCIPLINARY ASPECTS

This paper explores the trajectories of architectural and urban planning historiography within the state socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on the role of academic exchanges in shaping interdisciplinary methodologies. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet model influenced architectural practices and monument preservation across the USSR, the GDR, and other state socialist countries in Europe, embedding ideologically ‘correct’ rhetoric and Marxist materialist visions into historical narratives. A pivotal shift occurred in late 1954, when changes in Soviet architectural policy led to intensified criticism of architects and scholars, prompting widespread professional debates. In response, the international working group ‘History of Town Planning and Construction in Historical Cities’ (also known as the ‘Working Group’) was founded in 1955, facilitating discussions that sought to bridge the growing divide between architectural theory and practice. Through an analysis of contributions presented at the Erfurt, Warsaw, and Budapest conferences, this study examines how state socialist academics engaged with themes of urban development, preservation, and historical interpretation. Their debates not only revisited the role of aesthetics and Marxist materialism in architectural history but also created enduring and inherently interdisciplinary historiographical frameworks. By tracing the Working Group’s intellectual legacy, this study highlights its impact on both state socialist discourse and approaches to the history of architecture and urban planning.

Following the Second World War, the adoption of the Soviet model led to the establishment of Communist regimes and state socialist systems across the so-called ‘Eastern Bloc’, fundamentally transforming architectural practices and academic research. In this context, a distinct emphasis on institutional monument preservation emerged in the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), the GDR (German Democratic Republic/East Germany), and other state socialist countries¹. A major turning point came in late 1954 when a shift in Soviet architectural policy triggered widespread criticism of its architects and academics, subsequently affecting professional circles across Central and Eastern Europe. In response to these changes, the international working group ‘History of Town Planning and Construction in Historical Cities’ (later referred to simply as the ‘Working Group’) was formed in 1955, at a time when the field of history of architecture and urban planning was challenged by a growing disconnect between theory and practice².

This paper examines the contributions of state socialist scholars presented at the Erfurt, Warsaw, and Budapest conferences of the Working Group, arguing that the interdisciplinary debates at these venues – driven by politicized views of aesthetics and Marxist materialist interpretations of architectural and urban planning history³ – contributed to more nuanced narratives that integrated the inherently interdisciplinary nature of state socialist discourse. These contributions

remain crucial for tracing the group’s methodological propositions, understanding emerging professional discourse, and interpreting individual scholars’ perspectives on the past. This study further explores how leading state socialist academics incorporated ideas from disciplines beyond art and architectural history into their presentations, discussions, and publications during this period and beyond. These perspectives offer a deeper understanding of the evolution and reinterpretation of narratives regarding urban planning and architecture developed by Soviet and other state socialist scholars and practitioners both before and after the collapse of Communism.

As recent research reminds us,

European urbanism historiography also applied the “blending out” of the conditions of dictatorial development to the representation of twentieth-century urbanism to a great extent. This anachronism must be eliminated. [...] The internationalization of professional debates during the last decades brings researchers closer to the countries and histories that seemed so distant to their predecessors. Today we can conduct research on dictatorships in a different, more solid and free manner. The influence of the Cold War as a dichotomous, symmetrical paradigm of global interpretation is declining. [...] Historical studies provide promising impulses to better study and interpret urbanism⁴.

These reflections highlight the need to move beyond outdated perspectives and reexamine the historiography of twentieth-century urban planning in all its complexities. This includes consid-

ering the impact of state socialist regimes, as well as previously overlooked debates, public speeches, publications, and other relevant primary and secondary sources. The diminishing primacy of Cold War-era interpretations, often lacking nuance, makes such a reassessment more pertinent than ever.

Soviet influence on post-war architecture in Central and Eastern Europe between ideology and politics

With the directive “On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations”, issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)⁵ on 23 April 1932, Soviet cultural policy sought to consolidate all creative forces in the country. This coincided with the dissolution of existing literary and artistic groups and the formation of unified creative unions. The same year, the competition for the Palace of the Soviets, a convention hall and administrative center that was to rise on the site of the demolished Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, further reinforced these ideological changes, profoundly impacting architectural and urbanistic methods and discourse. The emergence of Socialist Realism in the arts accompanied the restructuring and reorientation of all architectural and urban planning practices, aligning them with new state policies and objectives, including a renewed emphasis on cultural heritage. Given the early interwar dominance of Modernist paradigms, most Soviet and

DĚJINY STAVBY MĚST A VÝSTAVBA

V HISTORICKÝCH MĚSTECH

KATALOG EXKURSE



ČESKOSLOVENSKO 1957.

page 141

Fig. 1 A special catalogue of historical plans of cities in Czechoslovakia prepared for the 1957 conference in Dobříš (© Haute École du paysage, d'ingénierie et d'architecture de Genève).

¹ F. KLEMPSTEIN, *Denkmalpflege zwischen System und Gesellschaft: Vielfalt denkmalpflegerischer Prozesse in der DDR (1952-1975)*, Bielefeld 2021, p. 15.

² *Städtebau: Geschichte und Gegenwart. Materialien der Konferenz Erfurt 1956 [der Arbeitsgruppe "Geschichte des Städtebaues und Aufbau in historischen Städten"]*, I, Berlin 1959, pp. 74-79.

³ Within the framework of Marxist-Leninist theory, 'materialism' refers to both 'dialectical materialism' and 'historical materialism'. The concept is often attributed to Karl Marx (1818-1883), whose theoretical writings laid its foundation and was later further developed under Leninism. Together with Friedrich Engels (1820-1885), Marx articulated a materialist conception of history ('historical materialism'), which posits that the material world constitutes an objective reality, where material conditions – specifically socio-economic formations and modes of production – shape society and social life. This perspective stands in contrast to 'Hegelian idealism', which sees ideas, culture, or human consciousness as the primary drivers of historical change. 'Historical materialism' was seen as a key analytical tool for studying the history of society in the Soviet Union and other state socialist countries of Europe. See K. MARX, *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin 1859, pp. III-VIII; J.V. STALIN, *Über dialektischen und historischen Materialismus*, Berlin 1955; R.O. GROPP, *Zu Fragen der Geschichte der Philosophie und des dialektischen Materialismus*, Berlin 1958; and *Диалектический и исторический материализм (Для системы партийной учебы)*, под редакцией С.М. Ковалева, Москва 1967.

⁴ Introduction, in *Urbanism and Dictatorship: A European Perspective*, edited by H. Bodenschatz, P. Sassi, M. Welch Guerra, Basel 2015, pp. 7-14: 7-8.

⁵ Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ). Ф. 17. Оп. 3. Д. 881. Л. 22.

⁶ Д.С. Хмельницкий, *Архитектура Сталина. Психология и стиль*, Москва 2006, pp. 92-93.

⁷ J. CONNELLY, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*, Chapel Hill 2000, pp. 19-70.

⁸ A. ÅMAN, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History*, New York 1992, p. 60.

⁹ M. DJILAS, *Conversations with Stalin*, Harmondsworth 1967, p. 90.

¹⁰ The concept of the 'ensemble city' emerged in the 1930s as an idealized urban planning model that aimed for a cohesive, artistic vision of the city as a work of art. However, this idea remained theoretical and was never fully translated into practice. It was soon supplanted by ideological directives and simplified methods that prioritized the design of selected urban areas, typically principal streets and city squares. See Ю. Л. Косенкова, *Советский город 1940-х - первой половины 1950-х годов: автореферат диссертации доктора архитектурных наук*, Москва 2000, https://www.niit.ru/pub/pub_cat/kosenkova_yu_l_sovetskiy_gorod_.html (last accessed 12 September 2024).

¹¹ Ю. Л. Косенкова, *Советский город 1940-х - первой половины 1950-х годов. От творческих поисков к практике строительства*, Москва 2008.

¹² Universitätsarchiv, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Konferenzen. Enthält v. a.: Unionskonferenz in Moskau Dezember 1954. Baukonferenz in Berlin vom 03.-05.04.1955. / Sign.: I/01/247. 1954-1955.

foreign architects and artists did not expect such a dramatic shift⁶. Soviet hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe extended into historical research, architectural practice, and urban planning. The 'Sovietization' of education and universities in those countries began shortly after the war and continued until the mid-1950s. As John Connelly has discussed, while the adoption of the Soviet model was widespread, it was not uniform, with nuanced variations among different academic elites. The process involved local communists and scholars who assumed roles as state functionaries⁷.

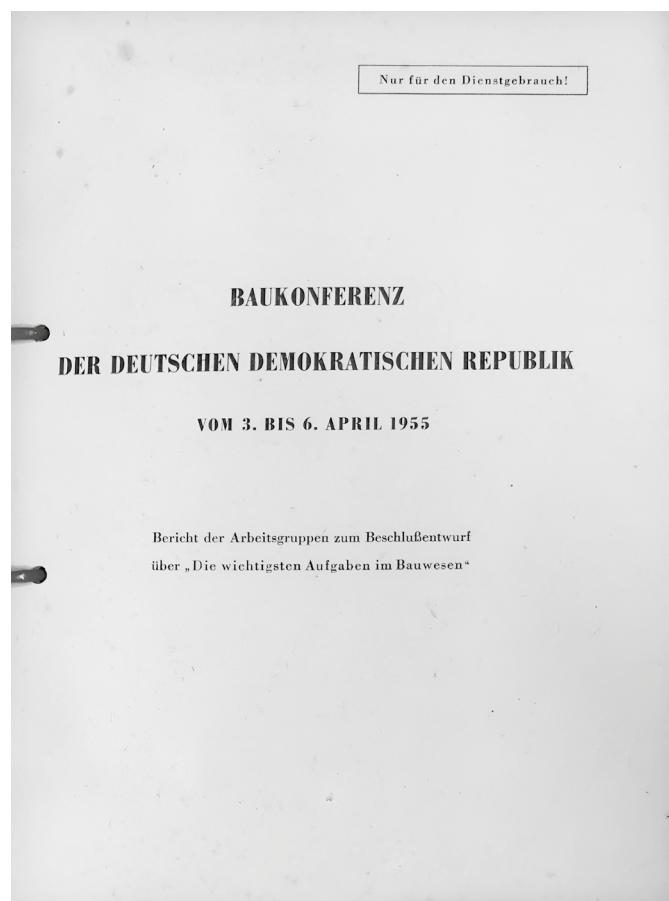
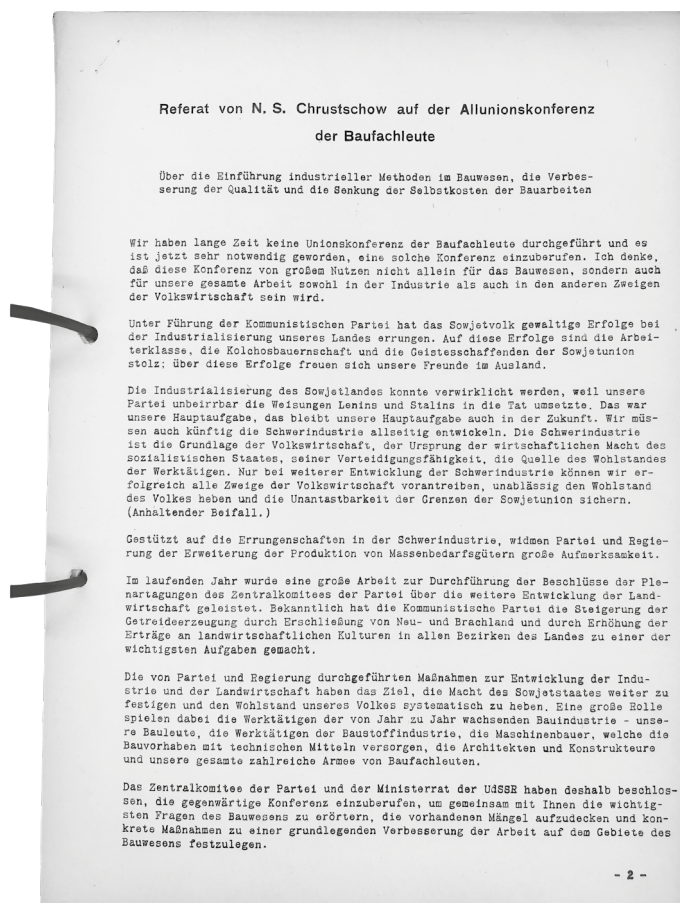
The Soviet model of academic research increasingly diverged from European standards of scientific rigor as it became progressively subordinated to communist ideology and shifting political orientations. In the late 1940s, architects and academics in state socialist countries across Europe came into direct contact with Soviet specialists: as Communist authorities came to power, they initiated close cooperation with the CPSU in Moscow. As Andres Åman has observed, "knowledge of 'the example from the Soviet Union' had to be disseminated quickly and put into practice. The result was a highly unusual campaign in the history of architecture. No country had ever changed direction so quickly, still less six countries at once"⁸. From the late 1940s through the early 1950s, political directives increasingly unified architectural and urban planning practices across the state socialist countries in Europe, reinforcing their growing connections with Moscow. Stalin's remarks to the Yugoslav communist politician and writer Milovan Djilas (1911-1995) encapsulated this process: "Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has power to do so. It cannot be otherwise"⁹. In line with the Soviet ideological framework, these transformations extended deep into the 'people's democracies' in Europe. Shaped by both systemic and individual factors, these

changes shared many similarities across the affiliated countries, particularly in the intensification of district-level architectural preservation practices. At the same time, Soviet and state socialist European architects often regarded urban planning as a subdivision of the arts. The unrealized idea of the 'city-ensemble'¹⁰ remained more of an aspiration than a tangible project, reflecting a broader trend of emphasizing the artistic component within the discipline of urban planning¹¹.

The death of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) brought Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) to power in 1953, ushering a radical shift in Soviet architectural policy. During a closed session at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's cult of personality, marking a sharp ideological break from his predecessor. Even earlier, in December 1954, he delivered a critical speech at the National Conference of Builders, Architects, and Construction Industry Workers, condemning various types of architectural "excesses" (fig. 2). This speech eventually led to Decree 1871, "On the Liquidation of Architectural Excesses", which resulted in harsh criticism of Soviet architects and academics and significantly altered architectural policies. An analogous conference in Berlin (3-6 April 1955) led to a resolution by the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, further aligning East German architectural policy with Soviet directives (fig. 3)¹². Subsequent publications in East German newspapers clearly signaled this reorientation (fig. 4). By 1955-1956, official policies emphasized rapid industrialization in architectural construction and building practices more generally.

The formation and the objectives of the Working Group

After the Stalinist era, political reorientations in architectural practice, the prevailing uncertainties within Soviet and other state socialist archi-



tectural and academic circles, and the challenges of urban renewal, reconstruction, and monument preservation – along with the necessity of interpreting both the distant and recent past – led to the formation of the ‘History of the Town Planning and Construction in Historical Cities’ working group. In late 1955, this initiative was proposed to the Deutsche Bauakademie (German Building Academy) in the GDR by the academies from Poland and Czechoslovakia with the support of two distinguished professors: Waclaw Ostrowski (1907-1990) from Poland and Emanuel Hruška (1906-1989) from Czechoslovakia. In the spring of 1956, the German Building Academy in East Berlin, the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, and the Czech and Slovak Academies of Sciences in Prague and Bratislava respectively, launched this international effort. Ostrowski’s and Hruška’s involvement in this initiative was shaped by their postwar experiences: the former participated in the reconstruction of Warsaw and co-founded the Warsaw Institute of Town Planning and Architecture in 1949¹³, while the latter participated in the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1947, where he was a referent for questions of regional planning at the

General Secretariat of the Economic Council and an external head of the Spatial Planning Department at the State Planning Office in Prague. A year later, in 1948, Hruška also founded and led the Institute of Urban Planning of the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering in Bratislava¹⁴.

As political landscapes rapidly shifted, the relationship between architecture, urban planning, monument preservation, and politics became increasingly critical within the emerging and ongoing academic discourse of the mid-1950s. One of the primary tasks of the Working Group was to establish a solid theoretical foundation for approaching the reconstruction of war-damaged urban areas¹⁵. The group brought together both collective professional debates and individual contributions from art and architectural historians, architects, and experts in cultural heritage and monument preservation from across the ‘Eastern Bloc’. The formation of the Working Group was preceded by earlier international efforts to protect cultural heritage, notably the Roerich Pact (Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments, also known as the Washington Pact) of 1935, as well as the development of the Hague

Fig. 2 The German translation of N. Khrushchev’s speech presented at the National Conference of Builders, Architects, and Construction Industry Workers in December 1954 (© Universitätsarchiv, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).

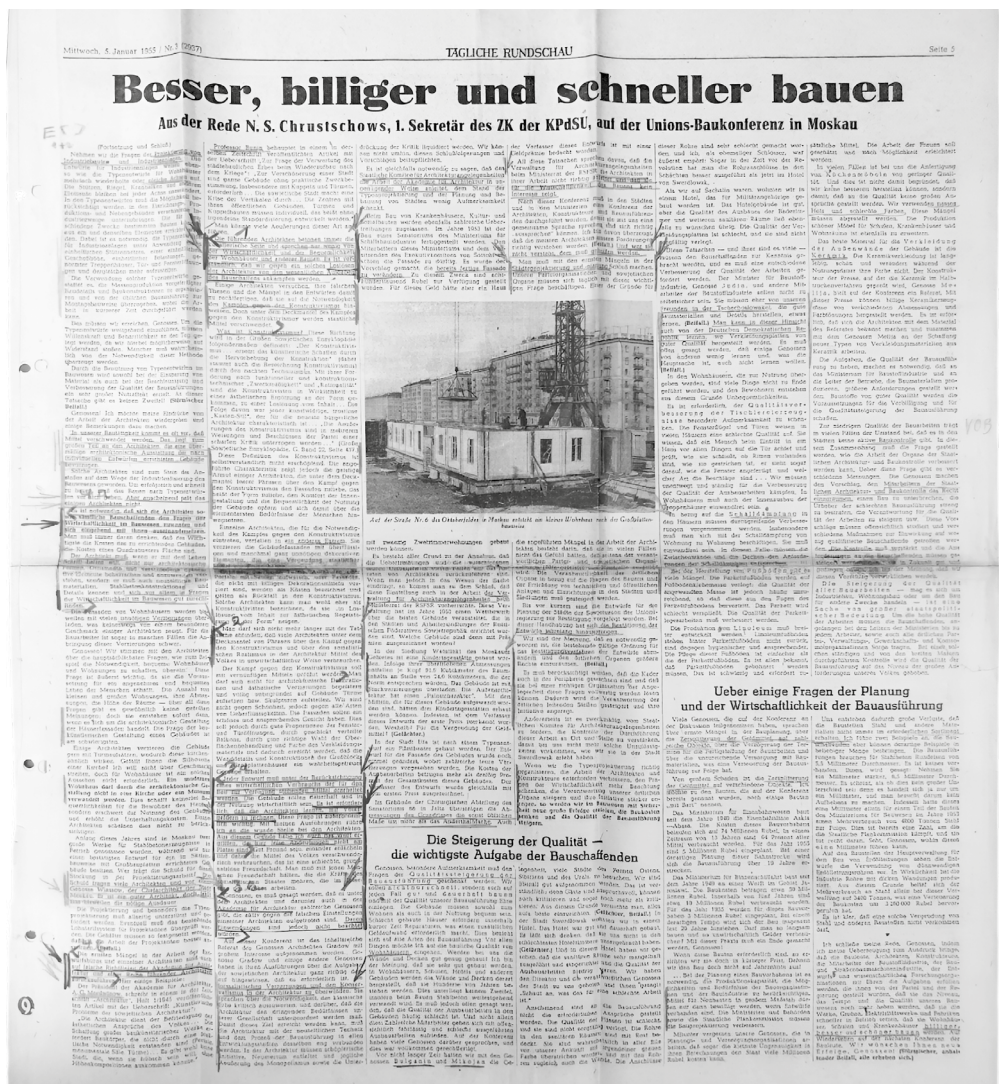
Fig. 3 Report on the draft resolution concerning “the most important tasks in the building sector”, East German Building Conference, Berlin, 3-6 April 1955 (© Universitätsarchiv, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).

¹³ Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, Dr. inż. arch. Ostrowski Waclaw, ur. 21 VIII 1907 r. Instytut Urbanistyki i Architektury w Warszawie. Profesor nadzwyczajny. 2/3170/26.5/6891, 1949, 1954-1955, Życiorys, Warszawa, Luty, 1954, p. 2, and Zaświadczenie by J. Grzybowski from 4 July 1949.

¹⁴ J. DOSTALÍK, Z. ULČÁK, *Biologický universalismus Emanuela Hruška*, “Architektúra & Urbanizmus”, 47, 1986, 1-2, pp. 52-71: 55.

¹⁵ *Städtebau...* cit., I, pp. 74-79.

Fig. 4 A newspaper article titled with Khrushchev's slogan "Besser, billiger und schneller bauen" ["Build better, cheaper, and faster", A.N.] (from "Tägliche Rundschau", 5 January 1955, p. 5; © Universitätsarchiv, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).



Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, signed in May 1954. The Hague Convention aimed to address the shortcomings of previous international initiatives and was built upon the principles of the Roerich Pact¹⁶, ensuring the continued relevance of these efforts on an international scale in the years that followed.

At the first Erfurt conference in 1956, East German art historian Gerhard Strauss (1908-1984) outlined the Working Group's agenda, which focused on the methodology and challenges of urban planning history and on contemporary projects in historical city centers¹⁷. The conference opened with welcoming remarks from Kurt Liebknecht (1905-1994), president of the German Building Academy, who explained the origins of the Working Group in his country. He highlighted the ongoing development of existing cities and the shared challenges of rebuilding war-damaged ones, emphasizing both commonalities and regional differences. The importance

of historical studies was presented as a foundational knowledge base for urban planning, offering guidance for contemporary practices without merely replicating old forms. Reflections on the distant and recent past and practices were perceived as a valuable contribution to general history, essential for correcting "mistakes, unscientific attitudes, and nationalist misrepresentations". Liebknecht also expressed hope that this platform would establish a permanent collective, an entity previously lacking at the level of European socialist states¹⁸. The formation of the Working Group thus reflected a broader academic effort to define an up-to-date methodology through which to approach the history of urban planning, in line with the need to integrate contemporary projects into historical city centers (figs. 5-6).

The agenda of the Working Group remained largely consistent over time. International discussions among experts involved concerns regarding how to maintain integrity, determine

what should be preserved, and develop restoration and protection methods. The speeches and studies by Soviet and state socialist European art and architectural historians had to navigate a complex balance between professional autonomy, political influences, and ideological conformity. Unfortunately, surviving documents offer limited insight into how academics integrated collective discourse while also expressing personal or subjective viewpoints within the constraints of Soviet and local state socialist regimes. This raises the question: how did these tensions between the collective and the individual play out? These developments must be understood within the shifting ideological landscape of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' – a period of relative relaxation from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s – that introduced new dynamics, including partial deviations from previous ideological norms. Such deviations added layers of complexity to professional presentations, debates, and written accounts. At the same time, ideological demands of the state socialist regimes placed significant pressure on architectural policies, particularly in terms of addressing acute housing shortages and reconstructions of historical urban centers. These challenges demonstrate that state directives, intertwined with collective academic contributions, profoundly influenced the intellectual and cultural production of the era.

State socialist discourse and methodological contributions of the Polish delegation

Monument preservation efforts in the GDR were closely tied to state construction initiatives and ideological frameworks. In the 1950s, a distinction emerged between 'construction' (*Aufbau*) and 'reconstruction' (*Wiederaufbau*)¹⁹. A nuanced differentiation between these concepts is evident within the discourse of the Working Group. From the Erfurt conference in 1956 to the Budapest meeting in 1962, international

conference programs underscore the tensions between developing a historical narrative, preserving architectural monuments, and adapting historical sites to the needs of modern cities. The 1956 Erfurt conference and other international events organized by the Working Group were instrumental in shaping methodological discussions on the history of architecture and urban planning. Marking a broader shift in how academic institutions engaged with past and emerging architectural and urbanistic discourse, the final report from the Erfurt conference highlighted some of the key methodological questions (fig. 7). These issues were critically reevaluated and further developed by the Working Group.

The Erfurt conference program, structured into thematic sections with two or three presentations followed by discussion, provided a forum for reassessing established paradigms in architectural and urban planning. One of the first thematic sections, at which Polish and Hungarian experts presented their considerations, focused on methodologies for studying the history of urban development. Their contributions extended beyond documenting the current state of the field; rather, they reflected deeper methodological challenges. The published, multilingual conference proceedings provide important insights into the perspectives of the different participants, including Waław Ostrowski (1907-1990), Tadeusz Przemysław Szafer (1920-2017), Wojciech Trzebiński (1916-1993), Frigyes Pogány (1908-1976), Pál Granasztói (1908-1985), and Hanns Hopp (1890-1971). One of the most distinguished participants in this section was Andrey Vladimirovich Bunin (1905-1977), who represented, in an official capacity, the Institute of Architecture of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education and made significant contributions to the discussion.

The Polish contributions by Ostrowski, Trzebiński, and Szafer focused on their ap-

¹⁶ Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention, UNESCO, www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention (last accessed 12 September 2024).

¹⁷ *Städtebau*... cit., I, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 2.

¹⁹ KLEMSTEIN, *Denkmalpflege zwischen System und Gesellschaft*... cit., p. 15.

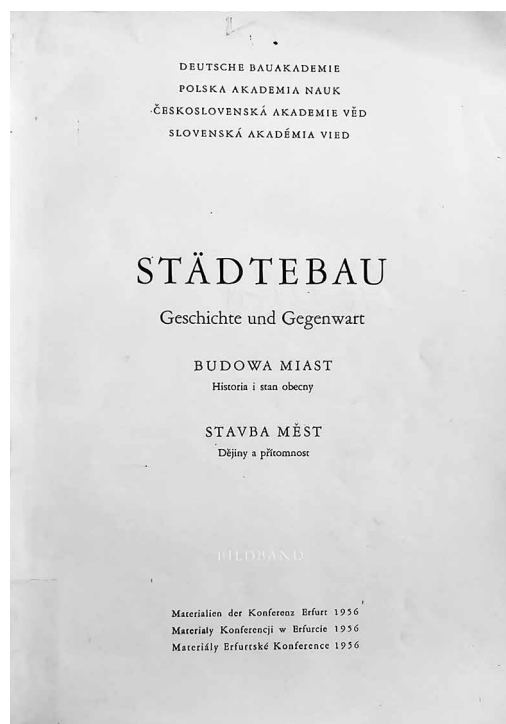
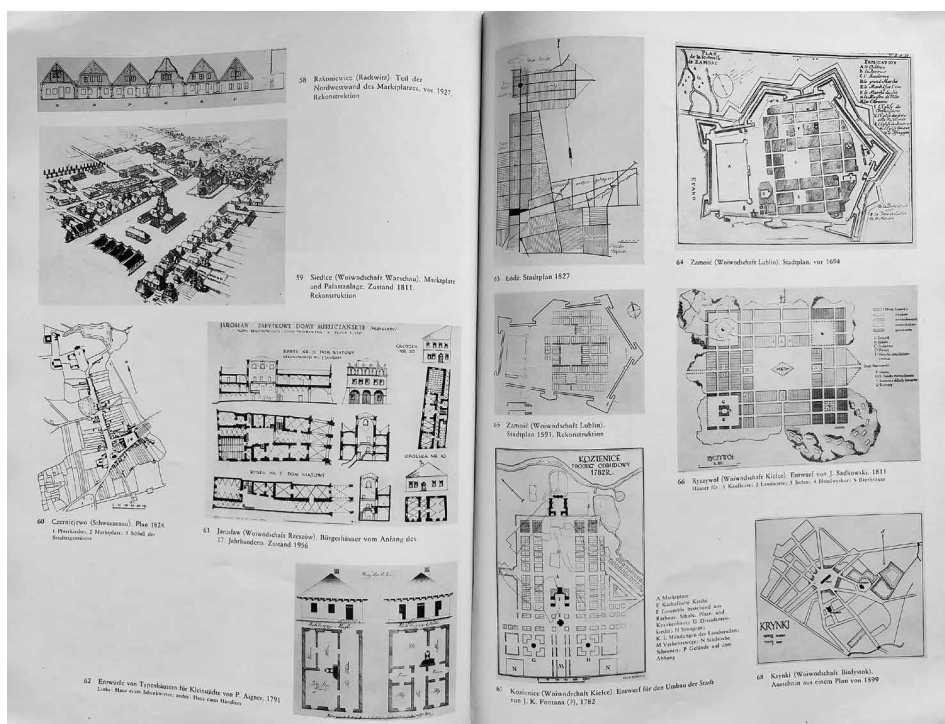


Fig. 5 Cover of the image tome of *Städtebau... cit.*, with materials from the 1956 Erfurt conference (© Bauhaus University Library, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).

Fig. 6 Images related to buildings and cities in Poland (from *Städtebau... cit.*, figs. 58-68; © Bauhaus University Library, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).



proaches to the history of urban development in Poland. Their joint presentation, titled *Research Methods for the History of City Planning/Building*, was structured in two parts: the first, prepared by Ostrowski and Trzebiński, and the second, written by Szafer. Both segments emphasized methodological questions and the use of sources. They recognized the complex, uninterrupted processes of urban evolution and considered the history of urban planning as an interdisciplinary field drawing from multiple disciplines²⁰. By framing urban development within a scientific framework, they challenged the prevailing views on the role of aesthetics in architectural history. In the USSR, GDR, and within certain professional circles in the European state socialist countries, urban planning – like architecture – was still largely regarded as a type of artistic practice. The discussions at the Erfurt conference signaled a partial paradigm shift in the study of architectural and urban history in the Soviet and other state socialist contexts. Despite the Polish delegates' criticism of the longstanding view that architecture and urban planning were primarily aesthetic endeavors – a perspective inherited from the late 19th and early 20th centuries – this approach was increasingly seen as insufficient and in need of a reevaluation²¹. Building on the contributions of his Polish colleagues, Hungarian scholar Frigyes Pogány reminded the audience that historical monuments

had traditionally been analyzed and appreciated mainly for their aesthetic qualities. The categories used by art and architectural historians centered on historical and aesthetic values, which remained fundamental to professional discourse. They continued to hold a prominent place in Soviet and other state socialist criticism of architecture and urban planning, reflecting broader intellectual and methodological tensions within the field²².

The analysis of the Polish delegation's contribution and the ensuing discussion makes it clear that earlier Soviet and European state socialist approaches to urban planning history were increasingly seen as inadequate, in particular the one adopted by the Austrian architect, city planner, and urban theorist Camillo Sitte (1843-1903). The history of urban planning was instead framed as needing to be concerned with “the social content that brought cities into being”²³. Sitte's interpretation of urban planning as an art form (the ‘art of cityscapes’) was deemed unsatisfactory and criticized as a “superficial ‘Formalist’ view”²⁴. The critique against Sitte was directed not only at Western traditions but also at the earlier Soviet and state socialist professional practices and interpretations that regarded architecture and urban planning as predominantly aesthetic in nature. The term ‘Formalist’, often used pejoratively, had gained traction in Soviet and European state socialist professional cir-

²⁰ Ivi, p. 60.

²¹ Ivi, pp. 60-67.

²² Ivi, pp. 74-78.

²³ Ivi, p. 62.

²⁴ Ibidem.

cles, particularly after two waves of Stalinist campaigns against Formalism in the early 1930s and late 1940s. Although never clearly defined, this negative view was reinforced by the mechanisms of the Soviet Union's highly centralized administrative command system. Even if only briefly mentioned, critiques of Formalism at Erfurt revealed traces of Stalinist-era discourse embedded within the ideologically sanctioned rhetoric about both contemporary and historical arts and architecture in the USSR and state socialist Europe. While broader political shifts had begun to reshape professional perspectives, the Polish rhetoric at Erfurt still reflected elements of these earlier paradigms. Despite an increasing number of experts distancing themselves from such rigid frameworks after the mid-1950s, the persistence of ideological legacies underscored the continued influence of politics on architectural and urbanistic discourse within the state socialist countries in Europe.

A close examination of the Polish contributions reveals the following key principles these scholars deemed essential for writing the history of urban development and planning²⁵:

- trace the impacts of social-economic transformations, productive forces, and technologies on urban forms;
- emphasize the necessity for a comprehensive approach to historical analysis that acknowledges the continuously evolving and complex nature of urban development;
- analyze both planned and spontaneous urban interventions chronologically, geographically, and factually, while integrating technical and humanistic perspectives;
- investigate the interplay of shapes, silhouettes, and layouts, considering the aesthetic, social, political, and philosophical contexts, rather than reducing urban forms to mere design ideas;
- recognize the role of surviving physical structures as a part of a material understanding of the past; and

- incorporate cartographic and visual materials as essential tools for historical analysis.

State socialist debates highlighted efforts to promote a broader, more socio-politically informed understanding of urban planning history, reflecting the complex intersections between multiple disciplines evident in their rhetoric. The surviving documentation of the Working Group reveals challenges in aligning planning history with socio-economic processes, stressing the need to incorporate social, economic, and technological transformations as key drivers of urban form. The shift in their debates was part of a larger paradigm change in which architecture and city planning were increasingly viewed through the lens of historical materialism and political utility rather than through artistic merit alone. The discussions not only reassessed but also critically debated the state socialist approaches to doing history, which had previously privileged Marxist materialist interpretations alongside aesthetic considerations.

The Polish and Hungarian presentations by Ostrowski and Pogány in Erfurt were followed by a discussion in which their East German colleague, Georg Münter (1900-1965), offered a critical response, targeting in particular Ostrowski's emphasis on aesthetics. Münter argued that urban development needed to be understood within its broader context, shaped by "certain fundamental social relations, which were not directly related to art, architecture and urban planning but 'translated' on the highest level"²⁶. Building on this discussion, Andrey Bunin outlined five key principles for studying the history of urban development and planning:

1. Productive forces form the foundation for the emergence and development of urban forms and must be considered in historical analysis;
2. Cities should be understood as socio-economic entities that exist within a continuous process of development;
3. Construction technology, including building

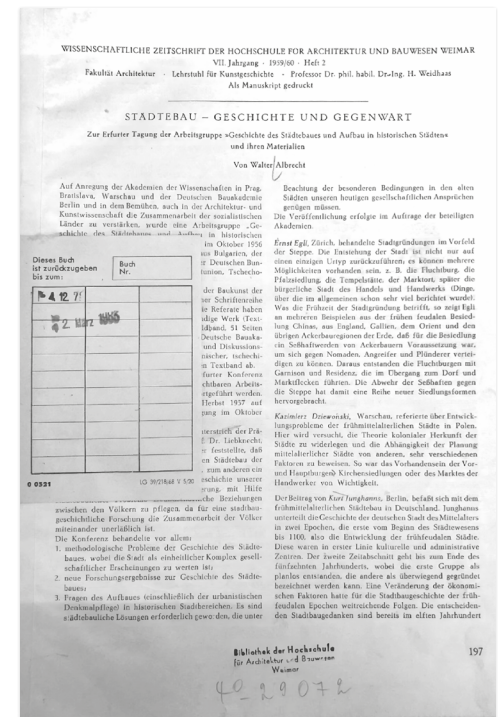


Fig. 7 First page of W. Albrecht's report on the Erfurt conference (from "Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar", 7, 1959-1960, 2, p. 197; © Bauhaus University Library, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).

²⁵ Ivi, pp. 88-90.

²⁶ Ivi, 87.

materials and structural systems, significantly influences the historical evolution of cities;

4. The analysis of urban form should incorporate aesthetic considerations alongside other factors; and

5. The history of urban development should not be examined in isolation or restricted to the context of a single country.

Bunin's five principles were not merely a reaction to the views of Ostrowski and Trzebiński but were also influenced by earlier professional discourse and research in Moscow and Leningrad. They represented the culmination of long-standing intellectual and methodological deliberations, reflecting Bunin's previous experiences and scholarly contributions. Although he articulated these principles explicitly for the first time during the Erfurt discussion, elements of them had already been present in his earlier studies and also continued to shape his later work²⁷.

The discussions, critiques, and contributions surrounding the writing of urban history and its methodology revealed a lack of unified perspectives and methods, with no significant methodological shift yet evident. However, traces of earlier approaches remained evident in the discourse. The Polish shift in perspective was not isolated from parallel debates in Moscow. In 1954, the main Soviet architectural journal, *Архитектура СССР* (*Architecture of the USSR*), had launched a politicized critique targeting scholars such as Andrey Bunin and his colleagues for their aesthetics-centered approaches. A year after the Erfurt conference, in 1957, Ostrowski's review of Bunin's 1953 publication *История градостроительного искусства* (*The History of the Art of Urban Planning*) further underscored the inadequacy of aesthetics-driven analyses in the 1950s²⁸.

The Erfurt debates revealed the complex interplay of professional, political, architectural, and technical factors that shaped approaches to ur-

ban structures under state socialism. The Working Group's discourse represented the culmination of efforts to establish a methodological foundation for the history of urban planning while engaging architects, art historians, and monument conservation specialists in discussions on preservation, restoration, and urban integrity. These debates highlighted the fluid, interdisciplinary nature of the scholars' approach. The Erfurt conference and other international meetings marked a transition from viewing the history of urban planning through a predominantly aesthetic lens to adopting a more complex, multifaceted framework. The critique of aesthetics-centered methodologies deepened, prompting a reassessment of the role of aesthetics in historical narratives – an issue that had long been debated by previous generations of scholars.

The methodological concepts discussed in Erfurt impacted the trajectory of urban planning historiography. Presentations and debates, particularly around Bunin's principles, sought to establish a cohesive methodological framework for studying and writing the history of urban planning. These discussions, alongside contributions from previous conferences, provide a platform for evaluating the relationship between individual and collective strategies. However, this process was fraught with contradictions, as both theoretical and practical developments were shaped by state directives, legislative constraints, and the need to reconcile personal inquiries with broader ideological imperatives.

From Erfurt to Budapest, and the contribution of Károly Ferenczy

Following high-level political criticism of architectural practices, the Working Group came to play a key role in reestablishing methodological foundations for urban planning history and reassessing interpretations of the recent past. The professional debates reminded research-

²⁷ А.В. Шуба, *Пять принципов А.В. Бунина на конференции 1956 года в Эрфурте*, in *Наука, образование и экспериментальное проектирование: тезисы докладов международной научно-практической конференции, 6-10 апреля 2020 г.*, I, Москва 2020, pp. 118-119.

²⁸ W. OSTROWSKI, *Istoria gradostroitel'nowo iskusstwa, tom I: Rabowladieczeskij Stroj, Feudalizm - Kapitalizm, Moskva, 1953 [recenzja]*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki: Teoria i Historia", II, 1957, 3-4, pp. 309-314. The original title of the review includes Ostrowski's misspelling and mistransliteration of the Russian original in Cyrillic (the correct transliteration of "История градостроительного искусства" is "Istoriya gradostroitel'nogo iskusstva").

ers of the inherent frictions between academic discourse, practical applications, and policy, as scholars and practitioners continuously adapted to shifting professional contexts. In 1956 and 1957, the international meetings in Erfurt and Dobříš (near Prague) facilitated an exchange of ideas and perspectives, fostering shared criticism and generating new debates (figs. 1, 8). After these first and second conferences, state socialist scholars continued to grapple with how to address the recent post-war past and the shifting political landscapes. These challenges were addressed at the Warsaw conference in 1959, where experts sought to interpret both the contemporary 'Western capitalist' developments and their own recent history. The Warsaw conference's main theme focused on twentieth-century urban planning, with particular attention to its progress and transformation in the post-war decades²⁹. The discussion within the Working Group reflected ongoing efforts to refine and formalize a collective state socialist methodology for interpreting the history of urban planning. Meanwhile, in the GDR, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 became a stark reminder of the ideological incompatibilities between Soviet-aligned state socialism and capitalist democracies. The division extended beyond East-West German relations, influencing academic discourse and restricting intellectual exchanges ahead of the Working Group's next meeting. In 1962, the Budapest conference became a critical platform for official debates, addressing the challenges of preserving historical city centers while evaluating architectural history as well. These discussions triggered the development of collective state socialist approaches to writing the history of architecture and urban planning, as well as guiding monument preservation practices. Károly Ferenczy's paper presented at Budapest, in which the Hungarian scholar advocated for a reevaluation of the field of architectural histo-

ry, stood out for its theoretical reflection. His argument, aligned with the perspective of his Polish colleagues at Erfurt, challenged the 'bourgeois' approach to architectural history, which prioritized stylistic uniformity and aesthetics. Ferenczy called for a new theoretical framework that would integrate historical material into a modern socialist perspective, arguing that the existing approach was outdated and ill-suited to contemporary developments³⁰. His critique linked the shortcomings of earlier state socialist interpretations of history to their bourgeois origins and tendencies and advocated for the need to connect architectural history with the ideology of the working class. This perspective reflected broader intellectual trends in which the label of 'Formalism' was not an inherent feature or flaw, but rather a cliché imposed through ideological critique. 'Formalist' traits were deliberately identified in certain works or approaches to reinforce accusations of superficiality and ideological deficiency. Ferenczy's text thus illustrates a broader effort within Soviet and state socialist professional circles to distance themselves from what they regarded as bourgeois art historical traditions.

Ferenczy structured his paper as both a critique of prevailing theory of architectural history and a proposal for its transformation. He argued that a scientific approach was needed to bridge the gap between historical research and professional practice. In his view, architectural history at the time remained disconnected from architectural practice, largely due to methodological shortcomings within the field. The discipline had not yet evolved into a true history of technology, even as the boundaries between the history of construction and the history of architecture were beginning to blur. Simultaneously, the modern architectural field was becoming increasingly internationalized, marked by a growing emphasis on engineering, technical expertise, and

²⁹ L. GERŐ, *Einleitung*, "Építés- És Közlekedéstudományi Közlemények", VIII, 1964, 1-2, pp. 15-16.

³⁰ F. KÁROLY, *Az Építészettörténet-Elmélet Korszerűségéről*, "Építés- És Közlekedéstudományi Közlemények", VIII, 1964, 1-2, pp. 374-375.

integration with the natural and social sciences. Ferenczy also highlighted the role of universities in cultivating the field of architectural history, both as an academic discipline and as a necessity for monument preservation³¹. By linking architectural history to contemporary discourse and professional practices, his contribution at Budapest sought to reshape the discipline into a productive force that could better serve the state socialist professional circles³².

The interdisciplinary nature of the Working Group's contributions

The methodological discussions within the Working Group indicate that the state socialist attitude toward the history of urban planning was not concerned solely with a historical evolution of forms. A closer examination of the professional exchanges at the Erfurt and other international conferences reveals the interdisciplinary nature of the approaches developed by scholars like Ostrowski, Szafer, and Trzebiński. Alongside Münter and Bunin, these scholars helped shape a state socialist framework for interpreting history – one that distanced itself from an explicitly aesthetic analysis.

Conference contributions and debates underscored the integration of architectural and art historical methods with political ideology and Marxist theory. Though not always directly cited, Marxist theory was crucial for the understanding of history, emphasizing socio-economic transformations, the role of productive forces, and the impact of technology on urban development. This Marxist-infused perspective linked the writing of architectural and urban planning history to broader questions of social organization and economic and political critiques of capitalist systems. At the same time, the focus on technology was interpreted as stemming from a techno-positive worldview and observations of technological advancements rather than as a purely Marxist-Leninist ideological construct.

Traditionally, the history of urban planning was rooted in European traditions of art and architectural history. By contrast, the state socialist approach increasingly moved toward more complex interpretations that incorporated interdisciplinary perspectives. During the Erfurt discussions, scholars acknowledged that understanding urban planning history required the integration of multiple disciplines, including political theory and sociology. Technical fields such as civil engineering, along with the expertise of architects, civil engineers, art historians, and monument conservators, were also seen as essential. Moreover, a growing awareness emerged within professional debates regarding the necessity for anthropological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives to study human values. This is evident in references to non-material remains – such as human consciousness, naming conventions, and customs – which were recognized for their role in shaping urban development. Anthropology and cultural studies, through the interpretation of non-urban contexts, visual depictions, and written texts, provided alternative insights into the architectural and urban past. However, sociology, particularly as it developed in the West, was largely dismissed in state socialist contexts during the 1950s. Regarded as a “bourgeois science”³³, it was deemed unnecessary for Soviet and state socialist academics, architects, and urban planners. Consequently, twentieth-century sociological approaches are not explicitly evident in the professional debates of the Working Group.

Within the framework of the planned economy (which was based on state ownership, collective farming, and industrial productions managed by a centralized administrative command system), academic circles often broadened their scope to incorporate political, economic, and social contexts into their research. Scholars emphasized that the history of urban planning needed to extend beyond traditional aesthetic con-

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ivi*, p. 378.

³³ L.E. KHORUTS, *A Critique of the Theoretical Foundations of Bourgeois “Sociology of Knowledge”*, “Soviet Studies in Philosophy”, 3, 1964, 3, pp. 9-19.

siderations to address social, economic, and geographical factors. The Working Group expanded their focus to include cartographic and visual analysis while also addressing the technical and social dimensions of urban planning. Environmental and geographical factors, such as terrain and land use, were recognized as crucial in shaping urban forms. The Polish contributions at Erfurt further underscored the importance of integrating archaeological insights, particularly for understanding the urban forms of early epochs. These developments highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the Working Group's discourse and the dynamic interplay of ideas among its scholars.

Bridging national and international frameworks: heritage preservation laws and the Venice Charter

Despite the political divisions that characterized the era of the so-called 'Iron Curtain', the conferences of the Working Group benefited from a rich international exchange, with collaboration in heritage preservation persisting across ideological boundaries. These conferences facilitated discussions that intersected legislative concerns with preservation efforts, contributing to a growing awareness of legal developments at both local and international levels. Situating the Working Group's activities within a broader historical context highlights its alignment with international efforts in heritage preservation and conservation.

The heritage protection laws in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, USSR, and Poland are key to understanding this alignment. Although institutions worked to safeguard cultural monuments through preservation and reconstruction – often supported by specific acts and resolutions – there was no harmonized legal framework for the protection of cultural assets at the national level. The absence of a unified approach to cultural heritage protection led to reliance on cadastral

regulations and ad hoc decrees. National laws remained inconsistent and continued to evolve throughout the 1950s. In Czechoslovakia, this prompted the establishment of dedicated heritage protection agencies, culminating in the regulation of 1958. Meanwhile, in the USSR, regulatory inconsistencies were often in contradiction with various existing provisions. By the mid-1950s, the GDR's 1952 ordinance on preservation and protection of historical monuments was deemed inadequate as well, prompting the introduction of a revised version in September 1961. Poland followed suit with a similar formalization of its legal framework, whereby the absence of a singular, comprehensive law was overcome through the enactment of a dedicated law for the protection of cultural assets (Dz. U. 1962 Nr 10 poz. 48) in 1962³⁴.

A few years later, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) sought to establish overarching guidelines for heritage conservation, culminating in the 1964 Venice Charter. This document aimed to codify a non-ideological, universally applicable approach to heritage preservation. National and international documentation reinforced the interdisciplinary dialogue on how academics and architects addressed historical monuments beyond their own national borders.

The Venice Charter itself emerged as a product of international collaboration, bringing together experts from diverse national and ideological backgrounds. The involvement of Polish and Italian scholars, Jan Zachwatowicz (1900-1983) and Roberto Pane (1897-1987), in both the Working Group's conferences and the development of the Charter underscores the awareness of state socialist discourses and policies within broader international frameworks for cultural heritage protection, conservation, and restoration. Their participation also reflected the cross-national character of academic collaboration. Zachwatowicz had been involved since

³⁴ E. KOCOWSKA-SIEKIERKA, *Kwalifikacja zabytków i ich ochrona w Czechosłowacji w latach 1945-1958*, "Prawo", CCCXVI, 2014, 2, pp. 229-251: 230; В.В. Стравинская, *Советское законодательство по охране историко-культурного наследия*, dissertation presented at the НОУ ВПО "Нижегородская правовая академия", 2008, <https://www.dissercat.com/content/sovetskoe-zakonodatelstvo-po-okhrane-istoriko-kulturnogo-naslediya-0/> read (last accessed 23 April 2024); KLEMSTEIN, *Denkmalpflege zwischen System und Gesellschaft...* cit.; Dz.U. 1962 Nr 10, poz. 48, USTAWA, z dnia 15 lutego 1962 r., o ochronie dóbr kultury, Kancelaria Sejmu, s.1/18, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19620100048/U/D19620048Lj.pdf> (last accessed 27 September 2024).

the first conference in Erfurt, and both he and Pane took part in the third conference in Warsaw in 1959. Their contributions helped bridge state socialist and Western perspectives, reinforcing the importance of establishing a universal framework for historical monuments preservation – one capable of being applied and adapted across differing political and cultural contexts³⁵. Indeed, the crafting of the Venice Charter required a synthesis of many different perspectives from across the ideological spectrum.

Impacts and legacies of the Working Group's conferences

The conferences of the Working Group were partially documented in local journals and conference proceedings published by the various academic institutes. Despite their significance, the full impact of these gatherings remains insufficiently explored. However, traces of their influence can be identified in subsequent scholarly works and in the continued exchange of ideas, as documented in personal correspondences and other primary sources.

Intellectual dialogue continued after the conferences, as evidenced by the correspondence between Swiss scholar Ernst Egli (1893-1974) and Czechoslovak scholar Emanuel Hruška (1906-1989). In 1956, Hruška shared his paper *O Metodě a Cílech Raionového Plánování* (*Regarding the Method and Goals of District Unit Planning*) with Egli, which presented his ideas on regional development in Czechoslovakia³⁶. The paper he delivered at the Erfurt conference in 1956, *Die typische kleine Stadt in der Slowakei* (*The typical small town in Slovakia*), was later preserved in the professional archives of GDR scholars Hermann Räder (1915-1984) and Hermann Weidhaas (1903-1978)³⁷. Notably, Egli's interpretations of the history and theory of urban planning were not confined exclusively to Switzerland; his volumes on urban history were also available in the GDR and the USSR. Following

the 1957 conference, he sent a copy of his work to East German architect and architectural historian Kurt Junghanns, who informed Egli that he used it for his work on an art dictionary. In a letter dated 22 December 1959, Junghanns expressed regret that Egli's third volume had not been available to him before the completion of his publication³⁸.

Meanwhile, after the Warsaw conference in 1959, the German translations of Bunin's work on the development of urban planning in the USSR (*Die Hauptetappen der Entwicklung des Städtebaus in der UdSSR*) and of Schwidkowski's study of Soviet urbanism between 1941 and 1959 (*Die wichtigsten schöpferischen Probleme der Planung von Städten in der sowjetischen Stadtbaukunst der jüngsten Zeit [1941-1959]*) were presented at the German Building Academy in Berlin³⁹. At the same time in Warsaw, Ostrowski read Egli's *Geschichte des Städtebaus*, describing it as "a beautiful book" that "differs significantly from other histories of urban planning"⁴⁰. Moreover, Ostrowski's interests in his colleagues' research extended beyond the conferences. After the Erfurt meeting, he published academic reviews of Bunin's work on the history of urban planning and of Münster's study of ideal cities in the Polish journal "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki: teoria i historia"⁴¹.

Examining Ostrowski's and his colleagues' interpretations of contemporary practices raises the question of how the critical discussions from 1956 and 1959 were reflected – or omitted – in their later writings. For instance, the principles guiding the history of urban planning outlined by Bunin in 1956 appeared in the first and second volumes of his *История градостроительного искусства* (1953 and 1971 respectively)⁴², which were published before and after his visit to the GDR in 1956. This professional dialogue and scholarly exchanges are evident in the later works of scholars

³⁵ International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter), 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, ICOMOS, Venice 1964, <https://icahm.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/1964-Venice-Charter.pdf> (last accessed 3 September 2024).

³⁶ Hochschularchiv ETH, Zürich, Hs 786:88. Letter with an article from Emanuel Hruška to Ernst Egli.

³⁷ Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Archiv der Moderne (MdA), Weimar, N/55/61.5, "Bericht von Prof. E. Hruska von Juli 1956: Die typische kleine Stadt in der Slowakei, ihr historischer Kern, Erweiterung und Umland".

³⁸ Hochschularchiv ETH, Zürich, Hs 786:88 and 81. Letters between Kurt Junghanns and Ernst Egli, and the article by Emanuel Hruška that includes a letter from him to Egli (dated 5 May 1957).

³⁹ Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung (IRS), Erkner, Wissenschaftliche Sammlungen, A1 (director ISA), ITG/1/06 and 07/R3/A.

⁴⁰ Hochschularchiv ETH, Zürich, Hs 786:117a. Letter from Waclaw Ostrowski to Ernst Egli (dated 22 December 1959).

⁴¹ OSTROWSKI, *Istoria gradostroitel'noy iskusstva...* cit.; Id., Münther, Georg: *Idealstädte: Ihre Geschichte vom 15.-17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1957 [recenzja], "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki: Teoria i Historia", III, 1958, 3-4, pp. 373-377.

⁴² A. SHUBA, *Between 'Art' and 'Culture' of Urban Planning: The Soviet Narrative of Urban Planning History* by A.V. Bunin, in *Totalitarian Architecture and Urban Planning: History and Legacy*, edited by C. Lamberti, J. Zdunek-Wielgolaska, "Esempi di Architettura. International Journal of Architecture and Engineering", 2022, pp. 68-83.

such as Tatyana Fedorovna Savarenskaya (1923-2003), Edmund Goldzamt (1921-1990), Oleg Alexandrovich Schwidkowski (1925-1990), as well as those of Andrey Bunin, Emanuel Hruška, and Ernst Egli⁴³. Many of these scholars actively participated in the efforts of the Working Group or maintained correspondence with their colleagues. Their publications reflect a richly interwoven intellectual landscape, marked by intricate cross-national exchanges and shared professional interests (fig. 8). The evolving discourse, shaped by these interactions, continued to influence later scholarly debates and approaches to writing the histories of architecture and urban planning.

Conclusion

The surviving materials, though fragmentary, document the creation of the Working Group, the evolution of its discourse, and its approaches to studying the history of urban planning and developing architectural projects in historical urban centers. Its conferences acted as catalysts for professional encounters, reflecting the progression of ongoing debates and the emergence of new perspectives. By facilitating the exchange of ideas and creation of new professional networks, these gatherings contributed to a deeper understanding of urban planning history within the state socialist circles in Europe.

As discussed above, the Polish delegation's contribution at the Erfurt conference signaled a critical shift away from a primarily aesthetic focus toward other facets of urban development. The interdisciplinary character of state socialist academic discourse emerged clearly in the debates of the Working Group and the research of individual scholars such as Wacław Ostrowski, Tadeusz Szafer, Wojciech Trzebiński, Emanuel Hruška, and Andrey Bunin. Their work was shaped by both political and professional contexts, as well as by later publications by their respective national academics. The Working

Group's contributions reflected the politically and intellectually acceptable views – as well as tensions – present in state socialist professional and academic contexts.

The Erfurt conference and other events emphasized the need to expand historical analysis beyond aesthetics, advocating for an approach that connected architectural and urban history with other disciplines. This helped shape the evolving multidisciplinary orientation of state socialist attitudes toward the history of architecture and urban planning. The emergence of a distinct collective discourse was not only a strategic response to political realities but also an intellectual imperative.

The scholars discussed in this paper linked urban development and professional practices to broader socio-economic and political processes. Their emphasis on technical transformations aligned their work with both contemporary practical concerns and evolving theoretical discourse. Although legal aspects and heritage protection were not explicitly addressed, the historical contextualization of architecture and planning implicitly acknowledged their embeddedness in legal frameworks.

Reflecting on the Working Group's activities has allowed us to trace the evolution of ideas around the history of architecture and urban planning under state socialism. Nonetheless, further research is needed to determine the full extent of its influence on state socialist and Soviet narratives, preservation practices, and theories of urbanism. Continued scholarly engagement with the Working Group's intellectual legacy demonstrates its lasting impact. Indeed, the methodological and interpretative approaches developed by the Working Group in the 1950s and 1960s have extended well beyond the conferences, shaping subsequent academic and professional discourses.

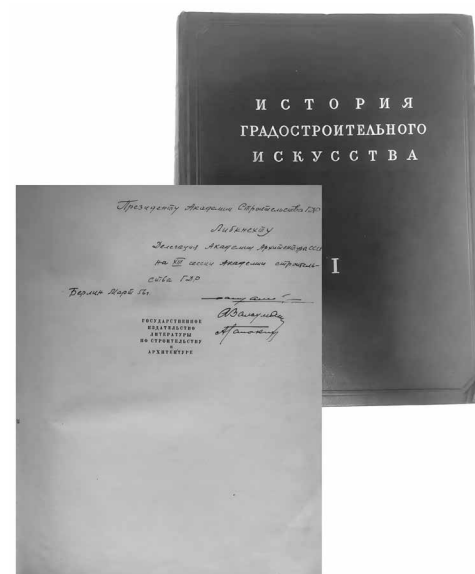


Fig. 8 A.V. BUNIN, *История градостроительного искусства*, Москва 1953, Cover of the first volume and title page with a dedication to K. Liebknicht from the Soviet delegation in Berlin, March 1956 (© Bauhaus University Library, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar).

⁴³ *Ibidem*. Also see E. EGLI, *Geschichte des Städtebaus*, I-III, Erlenbach-Zürich-Stuttgart 1959-1967; E. HRUŠKA, *Stavba miest: Jej história, prítomnosť a budúcnosť*, Bratislava 1970; W. OSTROWSKI, *Contemporary Town Planning*, I-II, Den Haag 1970-1973.