

Word of Welcome from ICOMOS Poland. Heritage of Socialist Realism – Potentials for World Heritage?

In 1989, socialism ended in our part of Europe. Socialism was a system that had introduced characteristic forms of politics, culture, economy, etc. One of the fields where socialism created its own forms of action was urbanism and architecture.

More than 20 years have passed since the fall of socialism. This time is long enough to allow summarizing the heritage of this era – an evaluation of this heritage has become possible. On the other hand, the buildings erected during the socialist era are being torn down and replaced by new ones. For this reason, socialism can now be seen as a completed/bygone? historic period and preservation of its heritage can begin.

Since the discussion on the preservation of socialist heritage has only just begun, there are many questions to be answered. We have tried to find answers during our conferences and present these problems in a series of working sessions, papers and publications:

- City and Identity. Modernism and Anti-Modernism. The architectural legacy of Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern Europe, Berlin 2009;
- Architecture of the Second Half of the 20th Century – Studies and Protection/Das Erbe des Nachkriegszeit erhalten und erschließen – Denkmale der Moderne und Gegenmoderne/Zabytki Drugiej Polowy XX Wieku – Waloryzacja, Ochrona, Konserwacja. Warszawa/Berlin 2010;
- Socialist-Realist Urban Planning as the Object of Heritage Protection, Krakow-Warsaw 2011; Socialist Realism and National Tradition. Recording, evaluating and listing of key monuments and memorials in Warsaw and Berlin, Berlin 2011 (Landesdenkmalamt Berlin [ed.]: Von Moskau lernen? Architektur und Städtebau des Sozialistischen Realismus/Uczyc sie od Moskwy? Architektura i Urbanistyka Socrealizmu/Learning from Moscow? Architecture and Urban Design of Socialist Realism, Berlin 2012);
- The Architectural Legacy of Socialist Realism in Warsaw and Berlin: Marszalkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa – Karl-Marx-Allee, exhibition Berlin and Warsaw 2011 (catalogue: MDM–KMA. The Architectural Legacy of Socialist Realism in Warsaw and Berlin: Marszalkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa – Karl-Marx-Allee, Dom Spotkan z Historia (DSH) Warsaw 2011);
- Between Rejection and Appropriation. The Architectural Heritage of Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern Europe, Leipzig 2012;

However, there are many issues still to be solved. It seems that a good form of discussion about socialist heritage is the preparation of a concept for a serial, international nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List. In connection with this nomination, we can mention three groups of problems.

1. Firstly, we need to specify the object of the nomination. We need to decide which period should be represented (Socialist Realism, 1947–1956 or socialist architecture, 1945–1989). What should be the object of assessment – which typological group of heritage (architecture, town planning, monuments, greenery, industrial buildings, military architecture)? Which countries (Russia and the former Soviet Union, former socialist countries in Europe, outside Europe) should present their heritage in this nomination?
2. Secondly, we need to decide how to organize the process of site nominations. Who should be responsible for the nominations (should each country decide about its nomination or an international commission)? How many objects should be proposed by each country? How should we organize the process of comparing the sites in different countries (comparative studies)?
3. Thirdly, how should we organize the work of the international group which will prepare the nominations? Who will be the leader and set up the cooperation? What schedule should be embraced? Where and when will the upcoming meetings be held and what will be their objective?

The discussion about socialist heritage and the possibility of preparing nominations for the UNESCO list have been open for a few years. It has been possible thanks to the engagement of several institutions. On the German part, the leading role has been played by the German National Committee of ICOMOS and the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin under the guidance of Prof. Joerg Haspel. On the Polish side, it is the Polish National Committee of ICOMOS supported by the authorities of Warsaw and Krakow. Recently, these actions have received support from the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ICOMOS ISC20C). All these institutions deserve our gratitude and partners from other countries should be invited to cooperate.

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