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The Reconceptualization of Modernist Structures in Post-Socialist Rural Regions: Case-studies from Brandenburg, Germany

Abstract

Through case-study and survey analysis in Brandenburg, Germany, this paper investigates the shifting conditions of modernist planning and architecture in rural regions of the former German Democratic Republic. The guiding political principles of the GDR gave equal priority to the development and settlement of rural areas as it did to urban and town planning, resulting in intense centralized efforts to construct new, modern rural centers. After 1952, and following the Soviet model, agricultural land and production processes were collectivized into agricultural production collectives—Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften (LPGs), reconfiguring the customary spatial arrangements of rural life. Rather than the traditional regional settlements which often paired single-family homes, gardens, farm buildings, and fields on one plot, agricultural production and processing were scaled up and consolidated into immense industrial structures. Workers were housed in multi-family apartment buildings, and rural centers were outfitted with cultural, educational, and recreational facilities formerly only found in towns.

Following German Reunification and the dissolution of the LPGs, the area has undergone major social, structural, and spatial changes. Regional agricultural production has been consolidated under fewer, larger corporations; rural centers are shrinking and are facing new challenges such as long-term unemployment and aging populations. Based on policy and site-analysis as well as interviews with local actors, this paper considers the fate and reuse of the LPG structures within this new structural transformation, analyzing the legal and economic frameworks dictating their re-use as well as the actors and strategies shaping these new spaces. The paper first considers representative examples of reuse from the categories of housing, production centers, and cultural buildings.

Full paper will be published in a separate publication series of DOCOMOMO Germany after the conference.