

## REGIONALISM IN GDR-MODERNISM OF THE 1960s AND 1970s

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### **Abstract**

*The widespread narrative that all GDR-Metropolises were overwritten by a soul- and faceless socialist variant of post-war modernism must be questioned at least regarding some cities. Although whole streets were torn down in the 1960s and 1970s and history was only partially appreciated, there can be found a series of modernist buildings respecting local traditions.*

*Thus, regionalisms express themselves in traditional building materials – in the early 1960s most prominently in the Northeastern City of Rostock, whose brick-faced postwar buildings in the centre were recently categorized as 'Nordmoderne' ('northern modernism').*

*In the late 1960s and early 1970s, meanwhile, attempts have been made in Potsdam to adapt new modern structures to existing baroque and classicist buildings by materials, facade colours or vertical subdivisions of facades – in order to merge new and old buildings into a 'harmonic' unity.*

*Regarding the development of modernism in East Germany, the regionalisms mentioned above seem to have different roots. As the Haus der Schifffahrt in Rostock's Lange Straße could be explained as late successor of the 1950s Stalinist doctrine of the 'National Tradition', buildings such as the Institut für Lehrerbildung or Staudenhof in Potsdam seem to be efforts to avoid increasing monotony of east-modern architecture.*

**Keywords:** GDR, Socialism, Rostock, Potsdam

Although whole streets were torn down in many East German cities in the 1960s and 1970s and history was only partially appreciated, there can be found a series of modernist buildings respecting local traditions.

In this essay I would like to try to explain the genesis of these regionalisms in GDR post-war modernism of the 1960s and 1970s in Rostock and Potsdam. Concerning the development of modernism in East Germany, they seem to have different roots – in comparison to the democratic west, as well as looking to the various phases of the GDR's architecture itself. The essay should not only present selected structures in both cities, but also wants to analyze their cultural and historical context. At least, the GDR's Politics of memory (Geschichtspolitik)

in Rostock as a former Hanseatic city and Potsdam as a former Prussian residence is of importance and must be considered.

In the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) urban planning and architecture – unlike in the western-democratic Federal Republic of Germany – were unthinkable without the influence of state and party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands / SED). This applied both to the handling of the built heritage and to the design or function of the new buildings.

Analogous to the ever-shifting relationship between demolition and the preservation of the 'old city' the development of a 'socialist' architecture took place in the constant field of tension between tradition and modernism. In simple terms there are four phases, starting with the orientation of many architects to modernism of the Weimar Republic in the immediate postwar period, the subsequent phase of historicizing and traditionalist architecture of the 'National Tradition' until about 1955, followed by a renewed turn to (international) modernism with a simultaneous industrialization of the construction process. The latter continued until the end of the GDR and culminated in large satellite towns. From the end of the 1970s onwards, historicizing tendencies – which can be regarded as a kind of East German expression of postmodernism – again can be identified in the city centers. With regard to urban planning lots of historic streets were overbuilt and especially residential buildings were demolished up to the 1970s. Modern as well as traditionalist new buildings were often overdimensioned. From the end of the 1970s on greater consideration was given to the historical ground plan of the cities, which nevertheless did not exclude demolitions. Of course there have been overlaps or interactions between all these phases.<sup>1</sup>

The first phase of a historicizing architecture, in which local and regional building traditions were taken up at the same time, began in the early 1950s with the doctrine of the 'National Tradition' influenced by the Soviet Union. Past epochs and architectural styles were now been interpreted '*as progressive in the sense of Marxism's teleological notion of history*' (Lippert, 2017, p. 21). From German architectural history the choice fell first and foremost on classicism, which allegedly represented the democratic bourgeoisie. The selected 'progressive

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview (urban planning and architecture in the GDR) see for example Hoscislawski, 1991 or Palutzki, 2000, for case studies see also Butter & Hofer, 2017, and for 'postmodern' tendencies Angermann, 2018.

traditions' that now were to be 'creatively developed' could also include the Gothic, the Renaissance or sometimes even the Baroque (e.g. Lippert, 2017 or Klusemann, 2017). The '16 Grundsätze des Städtebaus' ('Sixteen Principles of Urban Design') from 1950 – that were obligatory now – defined the spatial framework with broad 'main streets' ('Magistralen'), wide 'central squares' and a hierarchization of buildings right down to the center, where big residential buildings and high-rise buildings had to be constructed. Major historical buildings should be integrated in the new ensembles, but nonetheless many old (mostly residential) buildings were demolished. Although the 'compact city' was retained, streets were widened.<sup>2</sup>

The 'fight' against modernism, discredited as 'Western' and 'American', was one of the central motives for the development of this representative and eclectic architecture with its overemphasis on the facades, that served not least as 'socialist festive rooms' ('Sozialistische Festräume')<sup>3</sup> (Wagner, 2018). Nevertheless, after the 'turning point in construction' ('Wende im Bauwesen'<sup>4</sup>) around 1954/1955 and the increasing industrialization of the building industry, of all things modernism found its way into the architecture of the GDR.

Not least because of the mass-built prefabricated apartment blocks ('Plattenbauten') in a period from the late 1950s to the turn of 1989/90 – also near or in the city centers – many West-Germans condemn – up to this day – GDR-modernism as an especially soul- and faceless socialist variant of post-war architecture, which took no account of history or tradition at all. Thus Regionalisms, as they are found in West German post-war modernism<sup>5</sup>, are not expected in the East. However, even in the 'second German state', turning to

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Sixteen Principles of Urban Design' – that were passed by the Council of Ministers of the GDR after the so-called 'Journey to Moscow' of senior officials and architects in the summer of 1950 – were the guiding principles for urban development in the GDR from 1950 up to the early 1960s. The model for the 'beautiful German city' was urban planning of the Stalinist Soviet Union. For an overview see Durth et alii, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> 'Socialist festive rooms' can be understood as a stage for marches and events.

<sup>4</sup> After Stalin's death his successor, CPSU party leader Nikita Khrushchev, spoke out in favour of turning away from the facade architecture, which was now considered too expensive, at the Moscow 'All-Union Conference of Building Workers'. The evaluation of the new soviet building policy including the slow conversion of construction processes to industrialization, took place in the GDR after the first construction conference in 1955. See Die große Wende im Bauwesen. In Deutsche Architektur 5/1956, Magazine 1 (pp. 1-3). Industrialization meant that now mainly standard building types with prefabricated parts produced in factories were built. Individually planned buildings were also increasingly, albeit not exclusively, constructed from prefabricated elements. For more information about the slow endings of the 'National Tradition' see Salomon, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the town hall of Aschaffenburg (1956-1958, Diez Brandt) with a facade of mottled sandstone widely used in the city's building tradition.

functional solutions did not mean abandoning a regional touch. But how can this rather unknown and so far only partially explored phenomenon be explained?

An early expression of regionalist modernism in the GDR can be found in the north-east city of Rostock near the Baltic Sea. It immediately follows the phase of the 'National Tradition'. In the port city the war-ruined and – besides St. Mary's Church – demolished Lange Straße was rebuilt according to the model of the Berlin 'Stalinallee' as 'Magistrale' from 1953 on. The buildings are mostly brick-faced and pick up 'National Traditions' with gables, wind holes or blind arcades. In this case 'National Traditions' include the Northern German Brick Gothic, that characterized churches (such as St. Mary's e.g.) and the architecture of town halls in the Hanseatic cities in the Baltic Sea area in the Middle Ages. The latter were – next to others mainly classicist models (e.g. Klusemann, 2017) – defined as a role model by the President of the 'German Building Academy' ('Deutsche Bauakademie' / DBA), Kurt Liebknecht<sup>6</sup>.

But, astonishingly enough, also the *Haus der Schifffahrt* (an office building for the 'Deutsche Seereederei', 1959-1962, Joachim Näther), a reinforced concrete skeleton construction, and a residential high-rise building in masonry construction (Alfred Radner, 1959-1960) that had been built *after* the end of the 'National Tradition' – and completed the unfinished torso of the Lange Straße west and east in terms of urban planning – are mainly brick-clad. Similarly, another high-rise residential building, a Laubenganghaus (1966-1967, Dieter Jastram / Hans Fleischhauer), which is located approximately in the middle of the street, also fits seamlessly into the ensemble of the early 1950s with a brick-clad facade [Figure 1. & Figure 2.].

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<sup>6</sup> The German Building Academy, founded in 1951, was the most important institution in the GDR building industry, 'which had the last word in all questions of construction technology, architecture and urban development' (Lippert, 2018, p. 11.) The Academy, which was based on the Moscow All-Union Academy of Architecture, and its individual research institutes (including theory and history of architecture) were under the authority of the Ministry of Construction. From 1951 to 1961 its president was Kurt Liebknecht. In this function, but also as a member of the Central Committee of the SED, he had a ground-breaking influence on the development of architecture in the GDR. His architectural handwriting was versatile. His teacher Hans Poelzig, with whom he had earned his diploma in Berlin at the end of the 1920s, and *Neues Bauen* had initial influences. He was also influenced by the constructivism of the Soviet Union. In 1937 he became a Soviet citizen but however he returned to Berlin in 1948. In the 1930s he was significantly influenced by the neoclassical architecture of Stalin, which was to determine his work in the GDR in the 1950s. See Düwel, 1995.



**Figure 1.** Rostock, western end of the Lange Straße (view to the northeast), with the brick-clad Haus der Schifffahrt (1959-1962, Joachim Näther) on the left, followed by buildings of the early 1950s with adaptations of Northern German Brick Gothic (Joachim Näther et. alii), the brick-clad Laubenganghaus (1966-1967, Dieter Jastram / Hans Fleischhauer), and, on the right, the travel agency building (1964-1967, Dieter Jastram / Hans Fleischhauer) covered with reddish ceramic tiles. Source: Postcard, VEB Bild und Heimat Reichenbach, 1973, Picture: R. Schlegel / Picture provided by Ansichtskarten-Lexikon.de. The author has researched to the best of his knowledge and belief to locate the holder of rights. If that should not have succeeded completely, the author asks for notification

Even the motif of struts for vertical structuring of facades – reminiscent of the Gothic – was adapted (especially at the residential high-rise building in the east of the Lange Straße) [Figure 2.].

Their typology as modernist residential or office buildings can be seen through its openings ('Erschließung') or, in the latter example, in the '*readability of the residential function*' (Architectural guide Rostock, 1978, quoted after Hartung, 2005, p. 194). In detail, however, it was still possible to refer to traditional sources and to '*local 'traditions''*, as the German architectural historian Ulrich Hartung exposed in opposition to the '*negligent statement*' that the GDR had entered architectural modernism with building '*the same 'boxes' everywhere*' (Hartung, 2005, p. 195).



**Figure 2.** Rostock, eastern end of Lange Straße (view to the east, 2011), modern partially brick-clad residential high-rise building (Alfred Radner, 1959-1960) and earlier built Block E in 'National Tradition' with adaptations of Northern German Brick Gothic on the left (Carl-Heinz Pastor). © Picture: Christian Klusemann

In fact, an independent 'socialist' modernism has been discussed for the period after 1955 (Kossel, 2013). At the same time Bauakademie President Kurt Liebnecht did not want to get rid of the doctrine of 'National Tradition' immediately. Thus, the modern new buildings erected in the city centers in the second half of the 1950s could and should recline to the already existing buildings (Hohn, 1992).

This was also pointed out regarding the *Haus der Schifffahrt* in the architecture journal 'German Architecture' ('Deutsche Architektur'), published by the 'German Building Academy': 'All closed surfaces were made of brick, as this material emerges as an important design element in the construction of the Lange Straße and there are direct connections between the new building and the existing substance' (Deutsche Architektur, 1964, p. 37).

In Berlin's 'Stalinallee' the second building phase – that had started in 1959 – was also adapted to the earlier buildings of the first phase. Here, however, the connections are more pronounced in terms of urban planning due to the buildings' height and their parallel arrangement to the street (Hartung, 2005),

although tiles made of Meissen porcelain should at least convey to the older buildings (Salomon, 2016). In Rostock, the architectural connection through material is more evident. Recently the buildings discussed here were categorized as 'Nordmoderne' ('northern modernism') (Writschan, 2016). It is not surprising that the reference to regional building traditions on the facades of modern high-rise buildings is still valued among the population of Rostock today.<sup>7</sup>

Tradition and modernism were by no means mutually exclusive in the architecture of the GDR until the early 1960s, as can also be seen at the Berlin State Council Building (Staatsratsgebäude). Not only was Portal IV<sup>8</sup> of the City Palace (Stadtschloss), which was blown up in 1950, included in the facade as spolia. Also the building's high sandstone socle and a broad cornice evoke a 'classical' impression (Salomon, 2016).

With some caution it is therefore possible to speak of a 'modernized' version of the architecture of 'National Tradition' after 1955.

From the end of the 1950s modernism prevailed especially outside the city centers in structures built with industrialized pieces (Escherich, 2018) and the 'Sixteen Principles of Urban Design' as guiding principles for the redesign of the city centers were successively reformulated during the period 1959-1965 (Topfstedt, 1988). But, according to the First Secretary of the SED, Walter Ulbricht – who personally took part in debates on architecture during his whole time in office<sup>9</sup> – the city centers still should be designed architecturally more sophisticated (Salomon, 2016). After 1960, however, such grandiose plans for the centers only slowly prevailed. Instead prefabricated housing increased in the inner cities. Frequently, the concepts developed 'in the early days of industrial building' for the residential areas in the outskirts were not a solution for 'the tasks to be performed in the city centres'. (Topfstedt, 1988 S. 51).

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<sup>7</sup> Conversation between the author and Peter Writschan (monument protection authority of the Hanseatic city of Rostock), 10/20/2016 in Rostock.

<sup>8</sup> Although the Berlin City Palace was blown up in 1950 as a symbol of Prussian absolutism, a copy of Portal IV was included in the construction of the State Council Building for historical-political reasons, since the co-founder of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) Karl Liebknecht had declared the Socialist Republic there on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>9</sup> In office from 1950-1971, until 1953 Secretary General. His successor was Erich Honecker from 1971-1989.

In the face of growing concern that industrialization and modernization might lead to 'monotony' (Topfstedt, 1988), the party leadership again suggested to consider local specifics in the design of new buildings, whereas in town planning a 'socialist' character should be preserved (Escherich, 2018). It was in the middle of the 1960s when the redevelopment plans for the city centers got real chances for realization. At project meetings Walter Ulbricht now personally demanded to observe the '*typical architectural pictures*' of the cities in the GDR (quoted after Escherich, 2018, p. 96).

In the former Hanseatic city of Rostock, in which traditions such as peaceful and international trade with the countries bordering the Baltic Sea could be integrated into the GDRs Politics of memory (Seegers, 2003), the preservation of regional characteristics for new buildings was officially emphasized by the city and the district management of the SED in 1964 (Wolfes, 2009). Thus, even the prefabricated and meanwhile demolished *Interhotel Warnow* and the accompanying L-shaped travel agency and dormitory (which still exists in parts) on the south-western side of the Lange Strasse (1964-1967, Dieter Jastram / Hans Fleischhauer / Wolfgang Hartmann) referred to the traditional brick construction method with reddish ceramic tiles (Hartung, 2005) [Figure 1.]. The same applies to almost all buildings in the large housing estates in Rostock (Writschan, 2018).

Certainly, in the city centre the new modernist buildings – just like the buildings of the 'National Tradition' – did not pay much attention to the historical scale of the city. The only connection to history and tradition was the used material. Preserved buildings such as St. Mary's Church or the remains of the Market Place (more or less) seemed to be marginalized.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the handling of the urban and architectural heritage in the GDR was marked by ambivalences and contradictions. Everything that could be useful for '*the development of the socialist way of life*' (Hoscislowski, 1991, p. 223) had a chance to survive. Everything that did not fit into the picture had to make way for the new. At the same time the importance of the remains classified as worth

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<sup>10</sup> Despite these examples there are some buildings that are better adapted to the historical cityscape through gables, their roof shapes and their orientation to the historical town plan, such as the Hauptpost (1953-1956, Heinz Pätzold and architecture collective) or the *Haus Sonne* (1967, Fritz Hering and Dieter Jastram). Like the historic gabled houses on Neumarkt – that survived the war or were rebuilt – these buildings are plastered.



preserving was not always fully appreciated. And, of course, Socialism could best be represented by new buildings.<sup>11</sup>

However, from the mid-1960s onwards the focus in the field of tension between demolition and new construction in the city centres shifted partially towards preservation. According to the 'Principles of Planning and Designing Towns' of 1965, selected historical buildings still had to shape the city centers, at least parts of them (Escherich, 2018).

The constant back and forth of modern and traditional ideas also became apparent in urban planning: Although 'spaciousness' and 'generosity' had still been propagated around 1960 and historical road networks were or were to be built over (Topfstedt, 1988), the 'Principles' again proposed more compact urban spaces (Escherich, 2018).

For Potsdam, the latter only had a partial effect because the planning of the centre with wide and open spaces, which had already been envisaged around 1960, continued to shape the constantly modified planning. During the construction of the 'Zentrum Süd', that had begun in 1960 and was isolated from overall planning (Topfstedt, 1988), a large part of the war-destroyed eastern old town with its narrow streets had been demolished and was completely overbuilt with scale-busting new buildings, that – at least at first sight – did not follow Potsdam's building traditions. However, Edda Campen assumes that the balconies of the new buildings, which close off the southern centre towards the water and open onto the river Havel, were deliberately intended to create a connection to Potsdam's topography (Campen, 2011).

Moreover, in the former residential town, buildings with special significance for the monarchy were extraordinarily threatened after the 'victory of socialism', for they were seen as symbols of the Prussian Kings, that were discredited as 'militaristic' in the GDR (Topfstedt, 1988). The city palace, reconstructed in 2014, was demolished in 1959/1960, the Garrison Church (1730-1735, Philipp Gerlach), which is currently also being rebuilt, fell in 1968.<sup>12</sup> After all, some

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview about demolition and preservation of historical buildings in the GDR see Topfstedt, 1988, Palutzki, 2000 or Hoscislawski, 1991. For monument preservation in the GDR see for example Landesdenkmalamt Berlin, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The church' inglorious history on the 'Day of Potsdam', when President of the Reich Paul von Hindenburg and the newly elected Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler symbolically shook hands in the

architectural achievements commissioned by the Prussian rulers could be reinterpreted as the work of *'important builders, artists and craftsmen'* (Uhlemann, 1986, p. 5), as the architectural peculiarities of the city were appreciated (Dähmlow et alii, 2006). Thus, selected monuments were to be preserved in the redesign of Potsdam's city centre.

The number of buildings to be preserved changed during the 1960s but an attempt at a mixture of old and new – that, as in Rostock, led to complete new spacial relationships – can still be seen. The Old Town Hall (Altes Rathaus, 1753-1755, Johann Boumann / Christian Ludwig Hildebrandt) the Nikolai Church (1830-1850, Karl Friedrich Schinkel / Ludwig Persius / Friedrich August Stüler) and even the Marstall (rebuilt 1746, Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff), once part of the City Palace ensemble, were permanently integrated into the new *'socialist'* centre.

During a visit to Potsdam in the summer of 1967 Ulbricht, who now advocated modernism but at the same time monumentality in the city centres (Salomon, 2016), admonished the planned redesign. The new buildings seemed too monotonous to him. No *'concrete coffins'*, but a *'new architecture'* should be created, for the city should *'have a certain character after all'* (Ulbricht quoted after Grünzig, 2017, p. 341-342).

The *'Potsdam City Centre Development Committee'* (*'Aufbaukomitee Stadtzentrum Potsdam'*), founded in 1969 and chaired by the first secretary of the SED district management, finally advocated *'varied, interesting solutions'* on the Old Market Square (Alter Markt) – the city centre up to the destruction of the war – *'which adapt to the character of the historic valuable buildings and at the same time give the city a new, unmistakable character through generous ensemble formation and careful design of the individual buildings'* (Committee quoted after Emmerich-Focke, 1999, p. 183-184). Therefore attempts were made to adapt new modern structures to historic baroque and classicist buildings

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course of the constitution of the newly elected Reichstag, played not the only but an important role in its demolition.

Hitler had consciously placed himself in the tradition of the Prussian King Frederick II and Chancellors Otto von Bismarck and Paul von Hindenburg. This supposed continuity from Prussia to National Socialism had a negative effect on the image of Prussia in the GDR from the very beginning, until it slowly turned positive in the 1970s when the GDR increasingly saw itself as its own state due to recognition by the UN.

by materials, facade colours or vertical subdivisions of facades.<sup>13</sup> This does not apply to all new city centre buildings especially not to the *Interhotel Potsdam* (1969, Sepp Weber). A local reference was far from as easy to implement as in Rostock, where visible results could be achieved by brick alone. However, approaches of a local reference can be seen in the two connected buildings of the *Institut für Lehrerbildung* and the *Wissenschaftliche Allgemeinbibliothek* between Friedrich-Ebert-Straße and Alter Markt and, to a lesser extent, in the so-called *Staudenhof*. However, the scale of these new buildings was changed in favour of large forms.

The *Institut für Lehrerbildung* (IfL), an institute for educating teachers, was built between 1971 and 1977 (Sepp Weber / Wolfgang Merz / Dieter Lietz / Herbert Gödicke) based on the plans of the 1960s. In addition to Sepp Weber, who was also involved here, the architects of the neighbouring apartment block Am Alten Markt 10 (built 1971-1972 and colloquially called *Staudenhof* after the adjoining green area) Hartwig Ebert, Peter Mylo and Fritz Neuendorf were also responsible for the *Wissenschaftliche Allgemeinbibliothek*, a library building connected to the IfL, which was also built in reinforced concrete skeleton construction from 1970-1974 (Metropolar, 2011).

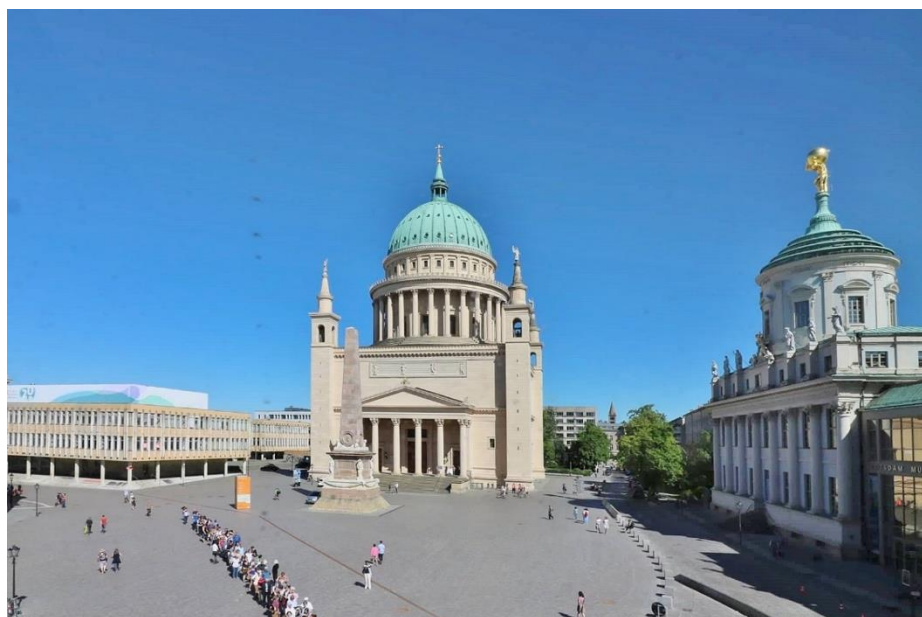
The IfL, which was demolished in the summer of 2018, consisted of a rectangular bar between Friedrich-Ebert-Straße and Alter Markt and three segments, each enclosing an inner courtyard. All segments were three-storeys high, with the ground floor zones marked by colonnades. The upper floors were vertically divided by reinforced concrete pilasters. Until its renovation in the 2010s the facade structure of the library was, in principle, similar to that of the IfL-complex but it was and still is a five-storey building.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, the individual modules (with a completely different choice of materials) recall Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's *Home Federal Savings and Loan* building in Des Moines/Iowa (1959-1962) in cubature and in the elevation of the facade with colonnades in the ground floor and vertical lines in the two floors above.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview of the author with the landscape architect Hiltrud Berndt from Potsdam, who was involved in the redesign of the centre with the design of the green space 'Staudenhof', on 10/12/2017 in Potsdam.

<sup>14</sup> Today, however, the facade is characterised by two high storeys above the still existing pillar colonnades, so that the five-storey structure is no longer visible.



**Figure 3.** Potsdam, Alter Markt, view to the northwest (2016) with the Institut für Lehrerbildung on the left (1971-1977, Sepp Weber / Wolfgang Merz / Dieter Lietz / Herbert Gödicke), the Nikolai Church (1830-1850, Karl Friedrich Schinkel / Ludwig Persius / Friedrich August Stüler) and the Old Town Hall (1753-1755, Johann Boumann / *Christian Ludwig Hildebrandt*) © Picture: Rüdiger Seyffer

By using reinforced concrete pilasters (anything but unusual for post-war modernism), however, it was possible to establish a connection to Potsdam's building traditions at the same time. Many baroque or baroque-classical buildings in Potsdam's city centre, including Alter Markt, are characterized by vertical structuring elements such as columns or pilasters. In the colonnades, which can be found in Potsdam's architectural history at the Alte Wache (1795-1797, Andreas Ludwig Krüger) and on the Barberini-Palace, built between 1771 and 1772 by Carl von Gontard (demolished in 1948 and reconstructed 2015), there can also be seen a reference to the portico of the Nikolai Church.

Instead of corrugated sheet metal, copper should originally be used for the roof cladding of the IfL. By this a further reference to the church should be established<sup>15</sup> [Figure 3.]. Seen from Schwertfegerstraß, the moment of rising evoked by the vertical structuring elements – starting with the narrow pillars on

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<sup>15</sup> Interview of the author with the landscape architect Hiltrud Berndt from Potsdam, who was involved in the redesign of the centre with the design of the green space 'Staudenhof', on 10/12/2017 in Potsdam.

the ground floor via the pilaster strips – was continued to the columns of the dome tambour of the Nikolai Church [Figure 4.].



**Figure 4.** Potsdam, Institut für Lehrerbildung (1971-1977, Sepp Weber / Wolfgang Merz / Dieter Lietz / Herbert Gödicke) and tambour of the Nikolai Church (1830-1850, Karl Friedrich Schinkel / Ludwig Persius / Friedrich August Stüler) seen from Schwertfegerstraße to the east (2016) © Picture: Rüdiger Seyffer

As Hiltrud Berndt, landscape architect involved in the redesign of the city centre, recalls, *'transferring Potsdam motifs into modernism'* was repeatedly emphasised to the architects of Potsdam planning.<sup>16</sup> In order to accomplish this task the chief architect came up with the pilaster strips and the recesses in the facade (Falbe, 2017). However, according to Hartwig Ebert, who was involved in the construction, this was the *'utmost thing ... that the former GDR was able to do'* (quoted after Falbe, 2017, p. 105).

Sandstone pilaster strips, such as those found on the annex of the Bundesrechnungshof (1970, Wolfgang Merz) in Dortustraße, or the copper roof, which was not realized in the end, would certainly have made the intended reference to Potsdam's historical buildings appear more tangible.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview of the author with the landscape architect Hiltrud Berndt from Potsdam, who was involved in the redesign of the centre with the design of the green space 'Staudenhof', on 10/12/2017 in Potsdam.

However, the new buildings and the historical buildings should harmonize according to a colour concept developed in 1977 by the *Berlin School of Advertising and Design (Fachschule für Werbung und Gestaltung Berlin)* ('Farbgestaltung Stadtzentrum Potsdam', 1977, Landeshauptstadt Potsdam, Dokumentation Stadtentwicklung, p. 15. Compare Falbe, 2017).

Finally, an ochre-yellow colour tone was chosen that evoked associations with what is popularly referred to as *Potsdam Yellow* and which can be found at Sanssouci Palace and numerous historical town houses in the city (Klusemann et alii, 2016). References to the Nikolai Church and the Old Town Hall were also made by sandstone socles in the passages of the complex [Figure 3. and Figure 4.]. Even *Staudenhof*, which otherwise looks more like a debris, has some facade parts made of this material, which was deliberately also chosen here<sup>17</sup> [Figure 5.].



**Figure 5.** Potsdam, apartment block Am Alten Markt 10 (Staudenhof, 1971-1972, Hartwig Ebert / Peter Mylo / Fritz Neuendorf) with sandstone-elements at the side. In the background the sandstone-built Nikolai Church (1830-1850, Karl Friedrich Schinkel / Ludwig Persius / Friedrich August Stüler), view to the south (2016). © Picture: Rüdiger Seyffer

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<sup>17</sup> Interview of the author with the landscape architect Hiltrud Berndt from Potsdam, who was involved in the redesign of the centre with the design of the green space 'Staudenhof', on 10/12/2017 in Potsdam.

Despite these local references, which could unfold their full effect only to some extent (not least because of the GDR's economy of scarcity), the integration of the entire oversized complex into the once small-scale structure of Potsdam's city centre was one of the main reasons for the decision to demolish the *Institut für Lehrerbildung* (since 1991 Potsdam University of Applied Sciences). In 1990 the City Assembly had already decided to reconstruct the city centre. A small-scale development following the historical town layout in accordance with the pre-war state is going to be built on the site.

Nevertheless, an earlier and better knowledge of the regional echoes on the facades of the IfL – not visible to everyone – might have helped to protect the building, or at least parts of it, from demolition. Especially in the Potsdam public the architects' attempts to establish a local reference were not seen or underestimated for a long time.

Another Potsdam ensemble from GDR times with reminiscences of an existing building has meanwhile been strongly reshaped or in parts demolished. At the Brauhausberg, a hill south of the city centre, the Schwimmhalle (indoor aquatic centre, 1969-1971, type construction adapted by Karl-Heinz Birkholz) and the brick-clad terrace restaurant *Minsk* (1970-1977, also Karl-Heinz Birkholz) clearly referred to the war school on top of the Brauhausberg (1899-1902, Franz Schwechten), which in GDR times housed the headquarters of the SED district management. Even here the importance for architectural history has been unrecognized for a long time even by monument preservation.

The sometimes more, sometimes less successful attempt to link old and new – even though the old often suffered as a result in terms of urban development – is a characteristic that has played an important role in urban planning and architecture in the 41 years of the GDR in the most diverse nuances. This also seems to be true for the modernist phase, at least for some cities, whereas in other cities there are stronger breaks with the local building tradition. It would be important to investigate continuities across all phases of 'GDR architecture' even more closely than it has already been done – for example, to analyse a direct follow-up to the 'National Tradition' until the 1970s, as Ulrich Hartung already suggests. He assumes that through the 'arrangement' or 'design of building types', the foundations and 'evaluation standards', that began with the 'Sixteen

Principles of Urban Design', 'remained in force until the Honecker era' (Hartung, 2005, p. 182).

It would be desirable to further explore what has been preserved, to protect it from demolition and – independently of a political romanticisation of the GDR – to preserve it as a testimony of history. Emphasizing and recognizing local or regional peculiarities may help to mitigate the widespread and often prejudiced accusation of a 'non-local' GDR modernism and to explain, if not even promote, the identity-generating effect of post-war buildings.

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