

# TOGETHER!

## On a new sense of community

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### **1 Saxony-Anhalt: Land of urban modernity**

Saxony-Anhalt has a complex legacy of post-war modernism. Especially in cities, that had been destroyed by war, the city centers were rebuilt on the basis of the 1950 Reconstruction Act with its 16 principles of urban development, while the Soviet Union and Stalin's vision served as strong examples. There are significant differences to Western European cities, that were reconstructed.

1. Urban development and construction of housing were part of a centrally planned economy.
2. The state had the right to use and develop the land. Land was declared public property and disappropriated without compensation. This was a prerequisite to radically change property boundaries in order to build on top of large areas with an entirely new urban structure.
3. The prices for land and rents were frozen.
4. The principles of the first reconstruction phase had a lasting effect. Representative buildings of the state, the governing party, and mass organizations built in the style of 'Socialist Classicism' dominated the new city centers, as did large parade grounds for demonstrations, and oversized green spaces. Examples of this in Saxony-Anhalt are Magdeburg, Dessau, Halberstadt, Merseburg and Zerbst.

The basic housing principle: In close proximity to the developing industries, large and small housing estates were built in order to create living space for the required workers, and to retain them. They were considered the working-class centers. The first of these settlements can be found in Sangerhausen- West (for workers in the copper shale mining industry), in Calbe (Saale) with the 'New Residential Town', and others, for example, in Wolfen-Nord, Merseburg and Lutherstadt Eisleben. A special case is Halle-Neustadt, the 'Socialist Model City', planned on the drawing board and built from 1964 onwards at a liberating distance from the old city of Halle on the eastern bank of the Saale.

This was a turning point in terms of qualitative and quantitative urban development. The parameters: An entire residential city for approximately 100,000 workers, working in the chemical plants near Leuna and Buna. The acute housing shortage in the GDR in 1973 prompted the launch of the housing construction program in order to solve the socio-political problem of the acute housing shortage by 1990. To this end, the construction of complex housing projects was pushed forward. Most cities now received 'their' new housing project in the style of the WBS 70 construction method. This also included medium-sized and small towns that had not previously 'benefited' from new construction. The new apartments were modernly equipped and sought after, while the old towns gradually fell into disrepair due to a lack of material and capacity, driven by political calculation. Other large housing projects were built instead: In Magdeburg, among others, Neu-Reform, Neustädter See and Neu Olvenstedt; in Halle (Saale), Silberhöhe. Since then, urban modernism has been omnipresent in Saxony-Anhalt.

## 2 The renewal of the urban modern settlements in Saxony-Anhalt

Due to the NEB initiative announced in 2020, SALEG has once again intensively examined the possibilities of further developing the urban heritage of post-war modernism in Saxony-Anhalt. Our guideline regarding the future viability of the settlements is based on the NEB criteria: **BEAUTIFUL. SUSTAINABLE. TOGETHER.** Translated into urban planning practice, this means: The buildings of post-war modernism should be **sustainable** in the context of climatic challenges, **aesthetically sophisticated** and **community-oriented**, in order to serve as a welcoming and future-oriented home to their residents. In many places renovation projects and other projects in urban development worth seeing, have already been launched. It is worth taking a look at the following good examples.

In **Halle (Saale)**, the **Silberhöhe** residential complex has been reduced in scale. Using the **Waldstadt Silberhöhe** concept, its high density was adapted to more moderate dimensions, and parts of the space were successfully renovated. A current example: The **Kreuzerhof** of the HWG. In **Lutherstadt Wittenberg** the **Wittenberg-West** district and in **Lerchenberg** to the north of the city, an upgrade was achieved with attractive public facilities and other amenities following. (Hundertwasser School, tenant meeting place, district management). In the **Stendal Stadtsee** district and in **Wolfen-Nord**, large-scale demolition was carried out in order to adapt the housing supply to the existing demand, with the aim of concentrating on historic core areas and new urban impulses. In **Aschersleben** and its **District Of The Cosmonauts**, a self-sufficient energy supply network, based on solar power, has been set up, and new community facilities have been provided.

In summary: A whole series of successful transformations have already been initiated in many cities, which are energetically sustainable, well integrated into their urban context and attractive to old and new residents.

One observation: Many of the early settlements, which often were built using a simple row construction method, can easily and specifically be improved to suit the changing demands in housing, the living environment and the energy supply! They used to and still do receive acceptance by the existing residents. Settlements in central locations (including those from before the Second World War) also seem to be transformed easily; they attract younger house-seekers when upgraded in terms of energy and construction, but people of all generations do live there happily. However, settlements, the construction of which is historically linked to a social vision, have proven to be a particular challenge for the dynamics of the present. And this is especially true for those that stand out due to their size, complexity and peripheral location. As time goes by, it becomes clear, that these settlements get into troubled waters, even into an identity crisis, when the vision they were built upon is lost. In practical terms: What happens to a socialist model city when the idealizations associated with the social order can no longer be maintained? The socialist city of Halle-Neustadt, for example, was laid out to not only fulfill residential functions, but to promote social change and the establishment of a socialist way of life, a life to which the development of a certain type of mindset was central, using the language and impact of architecture. The lack of stability in these communities became apparent immediately after the political turning point of 1989. But if a sense of community, in the broadest sense - here it is meant in a non-ideological sense - is a necessary condition for the acceptance of these built structures, then that can only mean one thing: It is the task of today's generations to redevelop this sense of community from within! A new sense of community is needed not only in terms of urban development and energy renewal, but also in view of socio-demographic change. NEB: TOGETHER.

### **3 TOGETHER in the large modern housing estates in East Germany**

To begin with, we take a glimpse at the special ownership situation in the large housing estates. The most important market players in the estates of modern housing used to be, and still are municipal housing companies and large cooperatives. In the 1990s, the latter sold parts of their properties to private buyers (mostly long-term tenants) - primarily in order to be able to take advantage of the federal government's old debt relief, (15 percent privatization was a prerequisite) and to be able to carry out modernization measures on their own properties. This means, that the individual privatization of apartments, as in Poland or Hungary, is more of an exception in Saxony-Anhalt. The housing industry players - the municipal housing companies and the housing cooperatives - are also highly committed to social cohesion in the large modern housing estates. Often this goes beyond their actual task of renting out housing. The concept of urban return comes into play, which refers to an added value for the city in terms of urban social life. This is the focus of the current CITY RENOVATION AWARD Saxony-Anhalt, an architecture design competition, called 'Designing cities - building

community', for which the country received 19 applications in total. They included transformation projects such as the 'Climate Garden' by GWW in Wernigerode. The award ceremony will take place on November the 14<sup>th</sup> 2024. Nevertheless, large housing estates are stigmatized throughout public perception and discussion. This is also the case in Halle-Neustadt. Ten years ago, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Neustadt, this problematic area received a lot of attention from the public: '50 years of Halle-Neustadt in dispute. Idea and experiment'. Where are we today? The settlements from modernism demonstrate social challenges, the most central one being: Social cohesion. This applies in this context to a special extent and in a special way. Because on the one hand, we now live in a society in which every person is valuable and in demand of their own initiative, while being expected to be self-responsible and participatory in the shaping of his or her community. On the other hand, there is a lack of enthusiasm needed for self-activation and self-efficiency, and this applies especially to large housing estates. This reflects the socio-economic problems in the country. That is why supporting these processes must be on top of any political, society-wide agenda that promotes community and initiates district development from below. The spatially expansive, generous design of socialist urban development however poses a problem. It is a built structure hostile to appropriation from below. One could say that the settlement structure resists appropriation. In addition, the current residents of the large housing estates do not represent a homogeneous group. The residents are representative of a diversified society. The ideas of home and community therefore vary. Complex and creative solutions are required that allow enough space and freedom for self-determination and self-efficiency. This is the only way to ensure that residents are actively involved. Saxony-Anhalt had the best experience in initiating participatory processes during the eight years of the International Building Exhibition 'IBA / Urban Redevelopment 2010'. 19 cities came to appreciate the valuable citizen-based approach for urban development processes. Since then an exchange of ideas has been maintained in the state's city network, which takes place twice a year. If our common goal is - and remains - that the settlements that were born from a completely different vision, develop into lively, adaptable and resilient neighborhoods, then this is precisely what is needed to activate local appropriation processes. They receive particular attention in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. There is a good chance that all three of the NEB's goals will be realized in the urban modernist settlements. Let's argue about the ways to get there! #NeueBauhäusler