

Housing estates of the nineteen-fifties - Modernization or demolition?

Methods for decision-making about demolition, modernization or construction in nineteen-fifties Housing estates

Every larger city in Germany still has buildings from the nineteen fifties that have usually been erected as housing estates. Many of these buildings are currently modernised, even more are waiting in line for modernization, so there are decisions necessary. To which extent can these buildings be updated or is it preferable to demolish them and build new houses?

Another question that is raised again and again is whether the planned measures make good economic sense. Long-standing decision-making processes are started, decisions are made and then revised. These decision-making processes are not always well organised and often long-winded. Especially when objectives are changed, for example when a building that was intended for modernization is later demolished and vice versa, the decision-making process is prolonged and can jeopardize the whole project.

This study shall help to expedite decision-making processes and to develop auxiliary means for rational decision-making.

Between 1949 and 1959 approx. 5.4 Mio flats were erected in Western Germany, many of which have been at least partly publicly funded. In many cases these publicly subsidised flats were built according to a typecast design. Especially in Schleswig-Holstein ninety percent of flats and housing estates from the fifties were erected on the basis of typecast buildings and typecast designs. Therefore this study also deals with the influence the typecasting has on current decisions and future modernizations.

All constructional measures that are taken on these buildings and estates can be divided into **four different courses of action**:

1. **Full modernization** (complete restructuring and refurbishment of the buildings interior and exterior)
2. **Partial modernization** (restructuring of certain areas of the building)
3. **Preservation**
 - 3.1. **Active preservation** (restoration)
 - 3.2. **Passive preservation** (preservation on a low level)
4. **Demolition** (substitution, new building, restructuring / higher density in urban development)

Building development companies name as **key reasons** for the decision to demolish:

- A restoration or refurbishment of the existing buildings would cost as much as building new ones but would not produce the constructional standard of a new house
- By demolishing and rebuilding a housing estate developers achieve a higher density

Interestingly enough, those who decided to demolish the buildings concerned named

economical and technical reasons as well as social, cultural and architectural-aesthetic reasons for their decision.

The most important discovery concerning housing estates from the nineteen-fifties was that these were buildings of an historical fabric. This realization required a specific course of action. The flats and housing estates in question often showed a high standard of architecture and urban development. The layout of the flats, on the other hand, was seldom up to date.

On the outset of every decision-making process about the demolition or modernization of these housing estates one should try to establish and present its constructional merits. Then one has to consider whether it is possible to preserve these qualities or whether it would be more economical to demolish the old stock and put up new buildings on the site in order to achieve a higher quality.