


Kunst am Bau as the visual heritage of prefabricated modernist housing estates in Germany: the example of Berlin

Katarzyna Szmygin^{1,*} 

¹ *Department of History and Theory of Architecture; West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Żołnierska 50, 71-210 Szczecin; Poland; kszmyginwirski@zut.edu.pl*

* *Corresponding Author*

Received: 24.07.2025; Revised: 30.03.2026; Accepted: 14.04.2026; Available online: 26.06.2026

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Abstract:

This article explores the concept of Art and Architecture as a significant yet still under-recognised component of the visual heritage of prefabricated housing complexes in Germany, with particular emphasis on Berlin. The aim of the study is to analyse the role of art integrated with modernist architecture – both historically and in the context of contemporary challenges related to its preservation, documentation, and reinterpretation. The article explores the origins of the idea of integrating art and architecture, stemming from the modernist concepts of the Gesamtkunstwerk and the activities of circles such as the Bauhaus and the CIAM. It then traces the development of Art and Architecture policies in the contrasting realities of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Particular attention is paid to the functions of art in prefabricated housing complexes – from its ideological and educational role in the GDR to its aesthetic, integrative, and participatory functions in the FRG. The analysis is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining architectural history, urban studies, and heritage conservation theory. It is based on a comparative method and case studies of selected Berlin projects. It is demonstrated that the works of Kunst am Bau not only aestheticise the space of prefabricated housing estates but also serve as a vehicle for social memory, local identity, and the ideology of the era. The section on contemporary issues discusses the problems associated with the degradation and disappearance of neighbourhood art because of modernisation processes, emphasising the importance of systematic inventorying and integrated preservation strategies. The article also highlights the growing role of public participation and reinterpretation of heritage in revitalisation processes. The article's conclusions emphasise the need to treat Kunst am Bau as a dynamic visual heritage, requiring new research and design tools. Neighbourhood art should be viewed not as a relic of the past, but as an active resource shaping contemporary and future urban identities.

Keywords:

Kunst am Bau, housing estates, heritage, modernism, prefabricated, Berlin

1. Introduction

Contemporary reflection on the architectural heritage of the 20th century increasingly transcends the traditional framework of material preservation and encompasses those components of urban spaces that served ideological, social, and aesthetic functions – while simultaneously lacking a clear recognition of their historic value. One such element is Kunst am Bau – an institutionalised form of integrating art with architecture and urban planning, developed in German-speaking countries from the mid-20th century and particularly extensively used in the context of post-war prefabricated housing.

The idea of Kunst am Bau, rooted in modernist postulates of a harmonious blend of arts, was a response to the need to humanise large-scale urban planning and standardised residential architecture. These projects – from sculptures and mosaics to murals and installations – were not treated as decorative additions but as an integral part of housing estate designs, conveying educational, integrative, and ideological messages. Art in the spaces of prefabricated housing estates was intended not only to aestheticise the concrete surroundings but also to reflect the social, identity, and political values of the era.

Despite the often-ephemeral nature of their material, the works of Kunst am Bau now possess significant cultural heritage value – both as records of modernist urban utopias and as testaments to the daily lives of residents of apartment blocks. Their presence in communal spaces shaped the experience of

living, organised spatial orientation, and built local identity. In an era of progressive modernisation of prefabricated housing estates and their thermal transformations, many of these projects are degrading or disappearing without documentation, creating an urgent need for their recognition, analysis, and protection.

The aim of this article is to examine the role that Kunst am Bau has played, and can continue to play, in the structures of prefabricated housing complexes – not only as visual heritage but also as a component of the urban and social value of these spaces. The analysis will explore both the historical and ideological aspects of this phenomenon and the contemporary challenges related to its protection, documentation, and reinterpretation in the context of sustainable urban development. The article employs an interdisciplinary research approach, combining perspectives from architectural history, urban studies, heritage conservation theory, and selected issues in urban sociology. The analysis focuses primarily on examples from Berlin – a city of particular significance for the development and transformation of the Kunst am Bau phenomenon in both political systems – supplemented by selected representative projects from other centres in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. The analysis adopts a comparative approach, examining the development of the Kunst am Bau phenomenon in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic from the 1950s to the 1990s. It utilises an analysis of legal and programmatic documents,

conservation guidelines, and relevant literature, as well as a spatial and formal analysis of selected artistic projects integrated with prefabricated housing estates. Particular attention is paid to the relationships between artistic form, urban structure, and ideological context, as well as contemporary conservation strategies and participatory models used in revitalisation processes. Combining historical analysis with a spatial and conservation perspective allows us to consider neighbourhood art not only as an aesthetic phenomenon but also as a multidimensional component of the modernist landscape, requiring integrated research and design tools.

The scope of the analysis is selective, focusing on selected Kunst am Bau projects from the 1950s to the 1990s associated with the development of prefabricated housing in Germany. Attention is paid to examples from Berlin, which, due to its specific political and urban planning, constitutes a key area for observing this phenomenon in both political systems. The analysis is supplemented by selected projects from other centres in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, representative of broader urban planning and artistic processes. The geographical context of the study area, including Germany's political divisions and the locations of the Berlin examples discussed in the text, is presented in Fig. 1.

2. Theories of art and architecture integration and the definition of visual heritage

The relationship between art and architecture underwent a profound transformation in the 20th century, catalysed by the demands of the modernist avant-garde, which aimed to dissolve the boundaries between artistic disciplines and integrate them within a new spatial culture. In particular, the Bauhaus movement developed the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk [2] – a total work in which architecture, applied art, and the visual arts were to co-create a coherent social and aesthetic whole. Walter Gropius and Hannes Meyer viewed architecture as a platform for designing living

environments in which art serves not contemplation but everyday social activity. Meanwhile, within the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), founded in 1928, architecture was defined as a tool for reforming social life, with art playing an educational and communal role. Le Corbusier, in his work *Vers une architecture* [3], advocated supplementing rational form with expressive visual accents – in the form of murals, colour schemes, and sculpture integrated with architecture – as exemplified by the *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille. Max Bill also worked in this spirit, combining Bauhaus principles with the idea of „aesthetic democracy”. In his view, art in public spaces should not be exclusively for the privileged class, but rather a part of the everyday experience of everyone – especially residents of mass housing estates [4]. These assumptions found institutional realisation in the form of the Kunst am Bau policy – formally implemented in the Federal Republic of Germany as early as the 1950s and intensified in the German Democratic Republic after 1970 by mandating that a portion of the public investment budget be allocated to artistic activities.

In the context of large-panel architecture – especially the housing complexes of the 1960s–1980s – art realised within the Kunst am Bau framework played a mediating role. It softened the austerity of prefabricated buildings, organised common spaces, and reinforced the symbolic identity of neighbourhoods. Mosaics, murals, bas-reliefs, and concrete sculptures located at entrances, on facades, and in courtyards created complex visual codes that often acquired identity-defining significance for residents. For these reasons, it is justified to distinguish the concept of visual heritage as a separate category of conservation protection. This heritage is not based on material durability or canonical artistic value, but on the relational and semantic properties of visual elements that contribute to the everyday experience of space [5]. Works of art integrated with architecture served as readers of space – they allowed for orientation within the monotonous layout, gave names to places, and became points of reference.



Fig. 1. Left: political map of Germany showing the division into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the analysed period. Right: close-up map of Berlin with the East–West division and the locations of the examples discussed in the text, where: 1 – Abstract metal sculpture by Hans Uhlmann at Hansaplatz, Hansaviertel (FRG; see Fig. 5); 2 – Bronze sculpture *Reclining* by Alfredo Ceschiatti at Hansaviertel (FRG; see Fig. 4); 3 – Monumental mosaic frieze by Walter Womacka at Haus des Lehrers (GDR; see Fig. 3); 4 – Mosaic *Frieden* (Peace) on Marzahn Promenade (GDR; see Fig. 2). Source: own elaboration based on maps from the DW portal [1].

3. The origins and development of Kunst am Bau in Germany

The idea of Kunst am Bau has been one of the key phenomena shaping the identity of public spaces in Germany

since the early 20th century, finding particularly strong roots in the urban planning and architectural practices of the modernist era. Its origins date back to the Weimar Republic, when socio-political transformations led to the need to create a new,

egalitarian urban aesthetic, reflecting a democratising society and its growing participation in shaping everyday spaces. In 1928, the first formal discussions on the integration of art with public buildings were initiated in Berlin, and these postulates were further developed in the Bauhaus programs, where artists such as Oskar Schlemmer and László Moholy-Nagy promoted the concept of a total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), encompassing architecture, urban planning, and the visual arts in a unified, functionalist spatial structure [6].

During the Third Reich, despite intensified state patronage of monumental art, the concept of integrating art with architecture was dominated by propaganda aesthetics and monumentalism, subordinated to National Socialist ideology [7]. At that time, *Kunst am Bau* assumed a purely representative character, detached from the social functions of urban spaces. After World War II, however, this phenomenon was redefined in both the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), adopting different ideological, formal, and legislative frameworks.

The idea of *Kunst am Bau* was institutionally established as early as the 1950s, when the obligation to allocate a portion of public investment budgets to works of art was systematically introduced [8]. In the Federal Republic of Germany, *Kunst am Bau* became a tool for the democratisation of public space, supporting the ideas of aesthetic pluralism and formal experimentation. Particularly in the context of prefabricated concrete and modernist housing estates, artistic interventions were intended to counteract the monotonous effects of serial prefabrication and introduce elements of visual identification and individualisation of space. Art was treated here as a countermeasure to the dehumanisation of modernist architecture, and its presence in the estates had a real impact on shaping residents' relationships with their surroundings. At the same time, in the GDR, *Kunst am Bau* took on a completely different political and ideological dimension. Here, the integration of art with public housing was directly embedded in the central planning system, which stipulated mandatory funding for art from investment budgets, although in practice the percentage allocated to this purpose often hovered around 1% of total construction costs [9]. However, unlike the pluralistic tendencies in West Germany, art in the GDR was strictly controlled by the state apparatus and subordinated to socialist ideology. The projects were intended primarily to fulfil an educational and propaganda function – to promote the ideals of work, collectivism, technological progress and workers' internationalism.

Formally, East German art favoured monumental mosaics, reliefs, and sculptures crafted in durable materials such as ceramics, architectural concrete, and metal, and their aesthetics often evoked a heroic narrative and an optimistic vision of socialist society. Artistic interventions were integrally linked to architecture and urban planning – particularly in the context of prefabricated housing estates, which were perceived as spaces for ideological education and the development of a new humanity. In practice, this meant close collaboration between architects, urban planners, and visual artists. However, unlike in Western models, the creative process was subject to censorship and formal content-approval procedures by political institutions such as the GDR Artists' Association (*Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR*). Although some projects are now considered valuable works of public art, many fell victim to vandalism or were deliberately removed in the 1990s due to the progressive de-ideologization of the urban landscape following German reunification [10].

From a comparative perspective, the differences between the *Kunst am Bau* in the GDR and the FRG were not only a matter of different legal frameworks and financing systems but primarily stemmed from the different roles assigned to art in the social structure. In the FRG, the dominant tendency was to treat art as a critical and participatory medium – a space for aesthetic pluralism, individual narratives, and local identities, while in the GDR, art was an element of systemic education, a carrier of official ideology, and a part of central planning [11].

It is also worth noting the material and technical aspects of the *Kunst am Bau* in prefabricated housing estates. In the FRG, art often took the form of ephemeral interventions, site-specific installations, or small-scale architecture of varying scale and materials, which facilitated the adaptation of the space during subsequent modernisation processes [12]. In the GDR, on the other hand, permanent elements inherent to the architectural structure – mosaics on facades, ceramic reliefs, monumental sculptures – dominated, and their removal after 1990 often led to permanent material degradation of the buildings [13].

After German reunification, the importance of *Kunst am Bau* was reassessed. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the principles of mandatory funding for art were maintained and expanded, and new regulations – such as the "*Kunst am Bau Leitfaden*" from 2012 [14] – emphasise the importance of participation, diversity, and experimentation in shaping public space. However, in the former East German territories, the problem of preserving and reinterpreting ideologically charged works of art arose, which remains a significant challenge for German conservation practice.

Recent research indicates that a growing number of cities – such as Berlin, Leipzig, and Rostock – are choosing to preserve selected GDR-era *Kunst am Bau* projects not as carriers of ideology, but as historical testimonies, subject to critical reinterpretation in the spirit of contemporary conservation doctrines [15]. In this approach, art integrated with prefabricated architecture becomes a valuable component of the legacy of post-war urbanism, which requires preservation not only for its artistic value but also as a document of the social, technological, and ideological processes of the 20th century.

It should be emphasised that Polish conservation discourse has only recently addressed the protection of works of *Kunst am Bau*, particularly in the context of modernist housing estates constructed using prefabricated technology. Transferring German experience – both in terms of legislative frameworks and participatory methodologies – could provide a significant impetus for the development of integrated preservation of neighbourhood art in Poland, which seems particularly relevant given the ongoing loss of artistic elements from prefabricated housing complexes [16].

4. The role of art in prefabricated housing complexes as exemplified by Berlin

In German post-war large-panel architectural complexes, art fulfilled several functions simultaneously. One of the most important roles was educational, particularly strongly emphasised in the GDR, where artistic objects – in the form of mosaics, bas-reliefs, and murals – not only decorated the space but also conveyed messages related to history, technological progress, workers' internationalism, and the role of the collective in building a socialist society. [17,18] These messages were inextricably linked to the state's ideological program, and the process of their creation was subject to strict political control. (Fig. 2)

Examples of such projects include large-scale mosaics and murals commemorating the builders of socialism, international workers' congresses, and scientists and technological pioneers. A representative example of the systemic integration of art and architecture in the GDR is the mosaic frieze by Walter Womacki, created between 1962 and 1964 for the Haus des Lehrers in Berlin [19] (Fig. 3). Created using ceramics, it creates a continuous visual narrative woven throughout the building. The composition combined themes of technological progress, collective work, and scientific development, aligning with the state's educational and ideological agenda. The work's location in a key urban node reinforced its educational function and made it a significant landmark in the city's structure. After 1990, despite the loss of its original ideological context, the mosaic was preserved and protected as part of the architectural ensemble, illustrating the transition from a propaganda tool to a historical testimony.

In Halle-Neustadt, a model housing estate built from the 1960s onward, numerous Kunst am Bau projects took the form of ceramic mosaics and concrete reliefs integrated into the facades of residential and public buildings. Examples include compositions adorning stairwell entrances, made of prefabricated ceramic elements, whose function was to strengthen residents' spatial identification and convey ideological messages. After German reunification, many of these projects fell into disrepair or were removed during building renovations, but some are currently being inventoried and protected [20].

The ideological function of neighbourhood art in the GDR was directly integrated into the urban planning system – artistic interventions were treated not as optional additions but as a mandatory component of the urban design, without which the development of the estate could not be formally approved. In this

context, art was understood as a tool of state communication, not subject to individual interpretation, and its message was intended to strengthen the sense of belonging to the socialist community and promote models of civic attitudes.

A different approach was observed in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the function of art in prefabricated housing estates evolved towards an aesthetic and integrative role, and from the 1970s also towards participatory ones. Especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, after the introduction of the Richtlinie Kunst am Bau des Bundes and local state regulations, art became a tool for the individualisation of neighbourhood spaces and the strengthening of local community identity. Instead of a direct ideological narrative, abstract, organic, and site-specific works dominated, often created through open competitions involving local artists and residents. Numerous projects implemented public consultation in the selection of themes and artistic forms, which was a crucial element in the democratisation of shared spaces and in a greater sense of shared responsibility for the aesthetics of the surroundings.

In contrast to the ideologically structured programs of the GDR, projects in the Hansaviertel – such as Alfredo Ceschiatti's bronze sculpture *Reclining* (1958) and Hans Uhlmann's abstract metal composition (1957) – emphasised the autonomy of form and formal experimentation. Introduced as part of the postwar reconstruction and accompanying architectural exhibitions, they expressed the pluralistic cultural climate of West Berlin. Instead of clear-cut ideological narratives, they served as spatial dominants, organising the layout of courtyards and pedestrian areas. Their continued presence in urban space and inclusion in the discourse of heritage protection after 1990 reflect the institutional continuity of Kunst am Bau policy in the Federal Republic of Germany (Figs 4-5).



Fig. 2. The mosaic "Frieden" (Peace) on Marzahner Promenade depicts a mother and child in harmonious nature under the symbol of the peace dove, conveying that a happy life is only possible in peace. Source: own photo



Fig. 3. A monumental mosaic frieze by Walter Womacka (1962–1964) surrounding the modernist Haus des Lehrers in Berlin, where art served an educational role, conveying themes of history, technological progress, and collectivist values. Source: own photo



Fig. 4. Bronze sculpture "Reclining" by Alfredo Ceschiatti (1958), originally placed in front of Oscar Niemeyer's tower at Hansaviertel, referencing classical compositions. It was later relocated. Source: own photo



Fig. 5. Abstract metal sculpture by Hans Uhlmann (1957) at Hansaplatz, providing a central compositional focal point while referencing atomic themes and reflecting the characteristics of the new Hansaviertel neighborhood. Source: own photo

Regardless of ideological differences, the location of art elements in prefabricated housing complexes followed certain typical patterns. Artistic interventions were most often located at the intersection of public and semi-public spaces – on building facades, particularly on gable walls and in entrance areas, which, thanks to their prominence, served as visual dominants. Neighbourhood art was also located in courtyards, recreational areas, playgrounds, and the immediate vicinity of schools and kindergartens, strengthening their educational and integrative functions. Particularly in the GDR, mosaics and bas-reliefs were systematically placed at stairwell entrances, intended to foster residents' daily contact with art and strengthen their identification with their place of residence. In the Federal Republic of Germany, more diverse locations were preferred – from small outdoor sculptures in green courtyards to murals on side facades, which in the 1980s began to take the form of expressive, often ephemeral interventions with a strong social and symbolic meaning.

The techniques and materials used in neighbourhood art were equally diverse. In the GDR, durable ceramic mosaics, concrete bas-reliefs, terrazzo sculptures, and monumental metalwork compositions dominated, stemming both from technological limitations and the need to ensure material durability with minimal maintenance. The preference for weather-resistant techniques was a consequence of centrally controlled planning guidelines, which recommended the use of low-maintenance, vandal-resistant, and easily reconstructable materials. In the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly from the 1970s, mixed materials such as metal, wood, clinker brick, and plastics were increasingly used, allowing for a greater variety of forms and the introduction of moving elements and surprising

user interactions. Murals created using fresco or acrylic painting techniques also enjoyed increasing popularity, particularly in West Berlin, where street art began to enter dialogue with the spaces of prefabricated housing estates.

Material durability, which justified the use of ceramics and architectural concrete in the 1960s and 1970s, has become one of the main conservation concerns today. Thermal modernisation programs implemented in prefabricated housing estates, particularly in the former East Germany, often led to the partial or complete removal of works integrated into the facades. The lack of a prior systematic inventory led to irreversible losses, revealing the tension between energy efficiency requirements and the protection of visual heritage.

The presence of art in prefabricated housing complexes, both in the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, had multifaceted significance. On the one hand, it served as an aesthetic diversification of neighbourhood spaces, counteracting their repetitiveness and standardisation; on the other, it conveyed ideological, educational, and identity-building messages intended to support the development of local communities and strengthen emotional ties to the place of residence. Contemporary conservation and social research emphasise that elements of *Kunst am Bau* – particularly in the context of prefabricated housing estates – constitute a significant component of cultural heritage today, not only for their material value but also as carriers of social memory, testimonies of ideology, and expressions of historical urban planning and political strategies.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of Kunst am Bau in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic

Criterion	Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)	German Democratic Republic (GDR)
Legal basis and financing	Systematic introduction of the principle of allocating a specific percentage of the public investment budget (usually 1–2%) to art, federal and state regulations	Mandatory funding for art as part of centrally planned investments (approximately 1% of construction costs), embedded in the state planning system
Artist selection procedure	Open and invited competitions, participation of expert committees, and gradually increasing transparency	Procedures controlled by state institutions, strong ideological selection
Relationship to architecture	Often accompanying projects or introduced at the finishing stage, greater autonomy of the work	An integral element of the urban design, planned in parallel with the construction project
Dominant artistic forms	Abstraction, organic forms, formal experiments, site-specific installations (especially since the 1970s)	Monumental mosaics, reliefs, figurative sculptures, heroic and educational narratives
Social and ideological function	Aesthetic pluralism, individualisation of space, and gradually developing resident participation	Propaganda and educational function; promotion of socialist values (work, collectivism, technical progress)
Degree of state control	Limited to procedural and financial frameworks; relative artistic autonomy	High degree of control over content and form; project approval by political bodies

5. Protection and reinterpretation of the heritage of art

The heritage of residential art in prefabricated housing complexes, both in the Federal Republic of Germany and the former East Germany, is a particularly sensitive and problematic category within the protection of the post-war urban landscape. Elements of Kunst am Bau created in prefabricated spaces are not only bearers of specific aesthetic values but also evidence of urban planning, social, and political processes of the second half of the 20th century. However, their preservation faces several specific technical, legal, and social challenges that call into question whether they can be preserved in their authentic form.

One of the main problems in the protection of residential art is the durability of the materials used, particularly for projects from the 1960s and 1970s, when technologies enabling the mass production of decorative elements with minimal maintenance costs dominated in the GDR. In many cases, ceramic mosaics and architectural concrete were used, whose degradation – due to cyclical mechanical damage, grout corrosion, and environmental impacts – often proves irreversible today. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of systematic documentation of the original projects. In German prefabricated housing estates, particularly those in the former East Germany, only partial design studies of Kunst am Bau works have survived in state archives, and in many cases, documentation was limited to general urban visualisations without detailed artistic plans [21]. The lack of comprehensive inventories results in many projects gradually deteriorating or being completely destroyed before they are formally recognised as heritage requiring protection.

In German practice, systematic documentation and inventorying remain the primary tool for protecting the heritage of neighbourhood art. Research programs conducted by the Landesdenkmalamt in Berlin and federal institutions such as the Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung involve the creation of detailed registers of neighbourhood artworks, including digitisation and spatial location of objects, which enables their monitoring and planning of conservation measures. In recent years, strategies have also been implemented that include entries in the registers of monuments not of individual objects, but of entire urban complexes together with their artistic layer, as was the case, among others, with the section of Karl-Marx-Allee and selected fragments of Marzahn [22].

Models for the protection of neighbourhood art in Germany are evolving towards integrated restoration programs that are not limited solely to technical aspects but also encompass broad participatory processes. Particular emphasis is placed on actively involving residents in the identification, documentation, and selection of methods for protecting visual heritage. Municipal authorities, conservation institutions, and non-governmental organisations conduct joint workshops, public consultations, and create local catalogues of spatial values, enabling the preservation of not only the physical substance of works but also their social significance.

The protection and reinterpretation of neighbourhood art in prefabricated housing complexes, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines technical, conservation, and social competencies. German models demonstrate that effective protection is only possible within the framework of comprehensive heritage management programs that integrate documentation, technical measures, city policies, and resident engagement.

6. Significance for contemporary design practice

The legacy of neighbourhood art, particularly in the context of prefabricated housing complexes, is gaining new significance in the discourse of contemporary design and conservation practice. The processes of reinterpreting modernist urban structures and their visual features influence not only conservation methods but also the ways in which urban spaces are shaped in the 21st century. In the German context, the approach to neighbourhood art as a heritage element has led to a redefinition of design and conservation strategies, which accept, and even promote, a close relationship between new architectural interventions and the historic prefabricated fabric.

Contemporary design practice in Germany no longer perceives prefabricated housing estates as problem spaces requiring transformation through negation. On the contrary, existing elements of neighbourhood art are increasingly treated as resources with high identity potential that can be creatively utilised in revitalisation and urban planning projects. Art integrated with prefabricated architecture is no longer considered an aesthetic artefact of the past but is becoming a starting point for contemporary design concepts – both in terms of preservation and new implementations that align with the logic of a place

while simultaneously engaging in a critical dialogue with its heritage.

The adoption of design principles based on local cultural values is becoming increasingly common. In design practice, this requires implementing solutions that consider the symbolic layer of space, rather than limiting themselves to the technical modernisation of infrastructure.

The importance of neighbourhood art for contemporary design practice is also manifested in the evolving role of social participation. Revitalisation projects implemented in Germany, particularly those aligned with the guidelines of the New Leipzig Charter, indicate that elements of neighbourhood art are becoming catalysts for social processes of identification and resident activation. Within the framework of so-called co-urbanism, art is no longer perceived as a decorative element and is gaining political and cultural dimensions – it becomes a shared resource, the shaping and protection of which requires the shared responsibility of the users of the space.

Contemporary conservation of neighbourhood art in prefabricated housing complexes must be viewed not as an archival process, but as a dynamic management of the values of a place where the past, present, and future coexist. In practice, this means creating flexible conservation tools – such as local catalogues of visual values, aesthetic guidelines for new interventions, and public consultation procedures – that enable both the preservation of existing projects and the introduction of new artistic forms that fit within the logic of prefabricated structures.

A significant contribution of the legacy of neighbourhood art to the development of contemporary design practices is also the increased awareness of the tangible and intangible values associated with the techniques used in the 1960s and 1970s. Here, neighbourhood art also becomes a research tool – enabling the reconstruction of the history of prefabrication technology, the documentation of urban transformations, and the analysis of social relations embedded in the space. Many German conservation projects consider these aspects not only as part of conservation but also as inspiration for contemporary architectural and urban forms.

The importance of neighbourhood art for contemporary design practice cannot, therefore, be reduced to aesthetics. It is a multidimensional process – technical, social, political, and educational – that redefines the relationship between users, architects, and the legacy of prefabricated structures. From a post-war urban landscape perspective, this means shifting the emphasis from preserving the substance to managing the place's values, and from a design perspective, recognising neighbourhood art as an active resource that can shape future urban identities in a dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable manner.

7. Conclusions

An analysis of the origins, development, and contemporary conservation practices of neighbourhood art in the context of prefabricated housing complexes in Germany indicates that art integrated with modernist architecture constitutes a unique type of heritage that requires distinct research, conservation, and design methods. Elements of Kunst am Bau should not be treated as decorative additions to architecture, but as integral components of a cultural landscape in which artistic, social, ideological, and technological values coexist. The example of Berlin, as a city with a unique experience of political division and diverse models of urban development, particularly illustrates the complexity of the processes involved in the emergence,

functioning, and reinterpretation of neighbourhood art. A comparison of projects from the former East and West Germany reveals not only the different functions assigned to art in public spaces but also the different trajectories of its transformation since 1990.

The most serious threat to the preservation of this heritage remains its systemic undervaluation and the lack of comprehensive documentation. Technical modernisation processes, particularly the thermal modernisation of buildings, lead to the irreversible loss of many projects before they are recognised as cultural heritage. This requires implementing integrated conservation strategies that encompass both documentation and conservation efforts, as well as participatory mechanisms that engage local communities.

Contemporary design practice should treat neighbourhood art as a significant identity resource and an active component in shaping shared spaces. The Berlin experience demonstrates that effective conservation requires an approach based on heritage values management that considers both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. Local catalogues of visual values and consultation procedures play a key role in this process, enabling the design of new interventions in dialogue with the existing urban and artistic structure. Neighbourhood art in prefabricated housing complexes should therefore be understood as dynamic heritage, requiring not only protection but also conscious reinterpretation and integration into future design processes. Only such an approach will preserve its significance as a carrier of social memory and a shaping element of contemporary urban identities.

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