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American Perceptions of German City Planning at the Turn of the Century

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Abstract

The German city in the late 1800's was a victim of many of the malaises that had struck earlier in the century in Britain and the United States. Rapid industrialization, improved transportation networks, and massive urbanization contributed to the creation of overcrowded, slum-like, disease-ridden cities throughout the nation. The long-admired medieval centers were increasingly prone to epidemics and destruction by fire. In a cultural-political sense, they were perceived by the ruling authorities as being corrupt, anti-volklich and centers of the much feared socialist movement. For the greater part of the century, the city had been neglected by both the national and local governments. This lack of attention caused Nikolaus Pevsner to write that the German city was "the most urgent and comprehensive problem of the nineteenth century". Pevsner's view is valid until the last quarter of the century. At that time, increased attention was focused upon virtually all cities in the nation; indeed, by 1910, the American reformer Frederick C. Howe stated before the Second National Conference on City Planning that the Germans had built the "most wonderful cities in modern times". Howe was but one of many American planners who praised the German endeavors.

Comments

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