



## The Construction of a Socialist City by East German Engineers in the Late 1950s: Post-war Reconstruction of Hamhung

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In the late 1950s, hundreds of East German engineers moved to the North Korean city of Hamhung to help with urban reconstruction after the Korean War; they were known as the ‘German Work Team Hamhung’. However, research on cross-border propagation of city planning for mass demonstrations appears to be non-existent. Therefore, this study investigates the square and street network designed for mass demonstrations in Hamhung and evaluates it from a socialist city planning history perspective. The research findings revealed the following: The reconstruction plan of Hamhung as a socialist city in the latter half of the 1950s had characteristics similar to the socialist cities of the Soviet Union (early 1930s) and East Germany (early 1950s). German architects contributed transnationally to the construction of socialist cities. In particular, in the case of Hamhung, the presence of Konrad Püschel was substantive. As mentioned above, although the East German engineers followed the concept and methodology in the aforementioned socialist states, they adapted them to the local circumstances that were ascertained by detailed preliminary survey work. Their activities represent the unconsidered aspect of the global/worldwide spread of the concept and methodology of socialist city planning.

**Keywords:** Post-war Reconstruction, East German Engineers, 1950s, Socialist City Planning, Hamhung

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Post-war Reconstruction of Hamhung

In the latter half of the 1950s, hundreds of East German engineers moved to the North Korean city of Hamhung to help with urban reconstruction of war damage from the Korean War. Owing to the cooperative relationship between socialist nations, they moved to an unfamiliar world at the request of the East German government. They were known as the ‘German Work Team Hamhung’ (Deutsche Arbeitsgruppe Hamhung) and were under the control of the organization Baustab Korea (Berlin) within the Ministry of Trade (Ministerium für Außenhandel und Innerdeutschen Handel).

Konrad Püschel (1907–1997) led the city planning department for the German Work Team, beginning in 1955. After studying at the Bauhaus, he moved to the USSR together with Hannes Meyer as a member of the Bauhaus Brigade in 1931. He was involved in the new socialist city construction of the Soviet city of Orsk. He began working for the Academy of Architecture and Fine Arts at Weimar in East Germany in 1948 and was later engaged in the post-war reconstruction of Hamhung.

Hamhung, the second largest city in North Korea, located on the northern coast of the Korean Peninsula, has long been the central city in this region. During the late 1920s, with the completion of hydroelectric plants in the northern mountains, industries developed rapidly in the coastal city of Hungnam, on the outskirts of Hamhung. Later, nearly 80%–90% of Hamhung was destroyed during the three continuous years of the Korean War, between June 1950 and July 1953. In August 1953, after the armistice, the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea plenum took up the issue of post-war reconstruction, and a three-stage reconstruction plan was unveiled for actions from 1953 to 1961.

#### 1.2 Previous Research and Study Objective

Regarding the influence of East Germany on North Korea, Frank (1996) described the outline of the central square in post-war reconstruction city plans and highlighted the influence of the Stalinallee in Berlin (now the Karl-Marx-Allee) on Püschel’s plan<sup>1</sup>. Shin (2017), who served as an interpreter for German Work Team Hamhung at the time, noted that the urban development principle of the East Germany as strictly applied to Hamhung<sup>2</sup>.



About the influence of the USSR on East Germany, the book ‘Ostkreuz’ (1999) explains East German post-war city planning ideas and their relation to Soviet city planning.<sup>3</sup> Wakeman (2014) examined residential complex projects in the post-war reconstruction of East Germany since the 1950s and pointed to their transnational background.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Kim and Jung (2017) evaluated the micro-district theory regarding the post-war reconstruction of North Korean cities in the context of socialist nations.<sup>5</sup>

However, research on cross-border propagation of city planning for mass demonstrations, such as from East Germany to North Korea, appears to be non-existent. Therefore, this study investigates the square and street network designed for mass demonstrations in Hamhung and evaluates it from a socialist city planning history perspective. For this study, we used materials left by Püschel at the Dessau Bauhaus Foundation and semi-annual reports of the German Work Team Hamhung from the German Federal Archives.

The study is organised as follows: Regarding research methodology, Section 2 discusses changes in the organizational structure of German Work Team Hamhung, and clarifies the position of urban planning department in the organization and achievements of Püschel, who has intermittently been a leader. In Section 3, we evince that the square and street network for mass demonstration was the greatest feature of the newly built socialist cities in the 1930s Soviet Union and early 1950s East Germany, and Püschel had a special career in each country concerning urban planning. In Section 4, we highlight the post-war reconstruction plan of Hamhung in the late 1950s.

## 2. Organization of ‘German Work Team Hamhung’

### 2.1 History of Organization

German Work Team Hamhung, under the control of Baustab Korea (Berlin), submitted a report every six months to the Director of Baustab Korea. Among them, documents on organizational planning of staff members were also included (Figure 1). These materials have not been examined in previous studies and are highly useful. Specifically, the organizational structure was confirmed every six months from the second half of 1956 to the second half of 1960. From 1961 to 1962, one type of organization chart was also confirmed; however, since this organization chart was not available for every year, it was excluded from this study. These materials revealed constant changes in the organizational structure and number of experts. These changes are considered to reflect the situation at each stage of the reconstruction project.

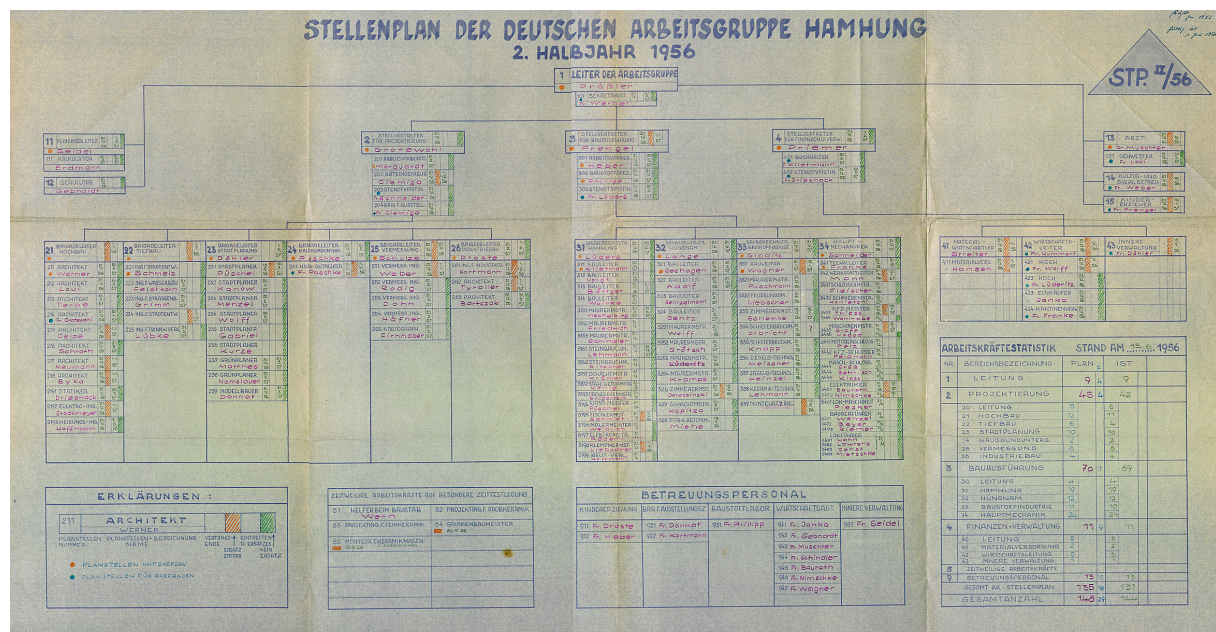


Figure 1: Organizational plan of the German Work Team Hamhung (1956)

In the latter half of 1956, the organization comprised a total of 148 members (135 experts).<sup>6</sup> The leadership department (9 experts, same as below) included three sub-departments: planning (45), building and construction department (70), and administration and finance (11). In addition, a caretaker department (13) comprising the



experts' spouses was established. Despite a gradual decrease in the number of members, the organizational structure itself did not change until 1957.<sup>7</sup> From 1958, the departments were abolished and reorganised into six teams: namely (1) the measurement and building site survey teams of the planning department were integrated with the urban planning team and renamed as the urban planning and measurement team.<sup>8</sup> (2) As the scale of the building construction department was reduced, the department was downgraded to a team, and the construction machinery team became independent.

During the second half of 1958, the city planning and measurement team and underground construction team were integrated and reorganised into four teams.<sup>9</sup> However, the integration was dissolved in the first half of 1959. In 1959, the industrial building team and the building construction team were reorganised into five teams.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 presents the changes in the planned number of experts every six months, which has not been clarified in previous studies. As for the 1955 year without the material, Püschel described that nearly 175 experts participated in 1955.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the most experts were dispatched in 1955 at the beginning of the post-war reconstruction project; in 1958, their number was reduced to 40 experts, whereas in 1960, the number reached 60 experts.

Table 1: The planned number of experts within German Work Team Hamhung

Year	First half of the year	Second half of the year
1956	-	135
1957	100	87
1958	43	35
1959	44	53
1960	65	67

## 2.2 Change in Urban Planning Team

Table 2 presents the stipulated number of city planners (Stadtplaner) within German Work Team Hamhung. In the second half of 1956 and first half of 1957, the urban planning team comprised one team with ten experts. Under one team leader, there were a total of ten experts, including six city planners, two green planners, and one model maker. However, in the second half of 1957, it decreased to one city planner under one team leader.

The main framework of the post-war city planning of Hamhung was completed in 1955. According to the autobiography of Püschel, the first leader of the city planning team, the city planning team had only three experts in March 1956. Thus, during this period, there were only two experts, Püschel and Peter Doehler, in urban planning. The city planning department was headed by three prominent leaders at different time periods: Püschel (from April 1955 to December 1955 and from September 1957 to December 1958), Peter Doehler (from December 1955 to February 1957), and Erich Ressel (February 1957 to September 1957).<sup>12</sup>

Based on these analyses, it can be inferred that the city planning team was in the following situation: First, in 1955, the framework of the reconstruction city plan was established under the leadership of Püschel. Second, the number of city planning experts dramatically increased under the leadership of Doehler in 1956, who intensively stuffed the plans with details. Finally, in the second half of 1957, the city planning was almost completed; therefore, it can be considered that there were only one or two experts in charge of city planning. In other words, the basic plan of 1955, under the leader of Püschel, was relatively important.

Table 2: The stipulated number of city planner within German Work Team Hamhung

Year	First half of the year	Second half of the year
1956	-	6
1957	6	1
1958	1	1
1959	2	2
1960	1	1



### 3. Konrad Püschel's Career and Socialist City Planning in the USSR (Early 1930s) and East Germany (Early 1950s)

Püschel planned the socialist city of Hamhung with a square and a street network for mass demonstration in the latter half of the 1950s. This feature was most emphasised in the construction of socialist cities in Moscow in the early 1930s and East Germany in the early 1950s, such as Berlin and Leipzig. In reality, German architects designed and constructed socialist cities in the 1930s in the USSR, which became the model for East Germany's post-war reconstruction in the early 1950s. Püschel also experienced the construction of socialist cities in these two countries in his career. This section explains the networks of streets and central squares designed specifically to accommodate mass demonstrations in the USSR in the 1930s and in East Germany in the 1950s.

Püschel was concerned with city planning in the USSR in the early 1930s. From 1930 onward, the city of Moscow held annual design competitions for festivals in urban spaces, especially mass ceremonies and demonstrations to commemorate the Russian Revolution. Competitions for the development and reconstruction of greater Moscow (1931-32) are popular examples. For the competition, Ernst May and Hannes Meyer proposed the same idea for a mass demonstration space: First, ring road A would be widened to incorporate a green zone in which massed demonstrators would march through for revolution or May Day celebrations. Second, significant architecture would be placed at the heart of the city to accommodate mass demonstrations. In particular, Meyer proposed widening Red Square and incorporated skyscrapers in his plan.<sup>13</sup>

The basic reconstruction plan for Hamhung was determined in 1955. To explain the origin of Hamhung's plan, we will note some typical features of East German post-war reconstruction in the early 1950s, including concern for urban space, the setting of demonstration routes, and demonstration squares with symbolic high-rise buildings. The post-war reconstruction in 1950s East Germany was conducted simultaneously with its reconstruction as socialist cities. The following seven cities were important socialist cities in East Germany at that time: Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt) – newly constructed as East Germany's first socialist city, Hoyerswerda – a new town built as the second socialist city, East Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Rostock, and Magdeburg – that respected existing urban structure and functioned as socialist cities, were included. The first two new cities were constructed near the Poland border. The plans of the socialist cities in East Germany were modelled on Soviet socialist cities and featured residential complexes, demonstration routes, and demonstration squares with high-rise buildings. These features were well organized with each other. They were furnished in newly constructed cities. In existing large East German cities, these socialist features were incorporated based on analyses of the city's structure. For example, in East Berlin, the newly designed wide street Stalinallee was part of the demonstration route. Through that route, mass demonstrators were expected to gather in the square at the former royal palace site in the centre of Berlin. The establishment of a high-rise building was planned beside the square. There were similar plans in other large East German cities such as Dresden, Leipzig, and Magdeburg.

Thus, a common social situation existed in order to build new socialist cities in the Soviet Union in the first half of the 1930s, in East Germany in the first half of the 1950s, and in North Korea in the latter half of the 1950s.

These features were also observed in the post-war reconstruction of Hamhung in North Korea as executed by East German architects in the late 1950s. The next Section discusses Hamhung's plan, explaining that it shared fundamental concepts with East German city layouts.

### 4. Square and Street Network for Mass Demonstrations in Hamhung

The city planning department arranged the central square at the city centre and connected it with a street network, through which mass demonstrators could gather easily at the central square. In addition, the central square was surrounded by high-rise public buildings as symbols of urban space.

#### 4. 1. Street Network for Mass Demonstrations

In 1937, the Empire of Japan drew up a city plan for Hamhung, including new main roads and a railway station. In the early stages, the East German architects created a city plan based on the Japanese grid-based city planning (Püschel, 1959).<sup>14</sup> However, they finally rejected this plan and produced a reconstruction plan, characterised by three gently curved radial streets, a demonstration street, and a central square at their intersection (Figure 2). The grid-based city plan was primarily rejected because of Püschel's in-depth understanding of the city form in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> He used a method to thoroughly investigate the planning area before city planning. It is believed that the survey results revealed gently curving radial streets that organically connected with the existing urban structure. His city planning methodology at Hamhung was completed in the following three stages: (1) Investigation of the structural characteristics of the planning area, (2) new ordering of planned space based on structural value, and (3) completion of the entire plan of post-war reconstruction of Hamhung. This methodology



was written in a report summarizing Püschel's work at Hamhung in January 1959, when he completed the city planning.

Wilhelm Pieck street and Kim Il-sung street followed the city's historical main streets. Market street and transport street, two of the three radial streets, were also based on historical roads. However, the central axis street, one of the three radial streets, was newly designed to be the new axis of the socialist city. Five-storey apartments with pitched roofs were arranged on both sides.

All these streets are connected to the Central Square (in particular Demonstration square) located at the centre of the city. Püschel described Central Square as follows.

'It (the Central Square) will be a gathering place, which calls the residents of Hamhung to rallies and demonstrations, which unites them to joyful play and dance, giving them rest and joy'.<sup>16</sup>

For a political event that involved the entire city, people gathered at the Central Square through these streets. Thus, a street network for mass demonstrations was formed around the central square.

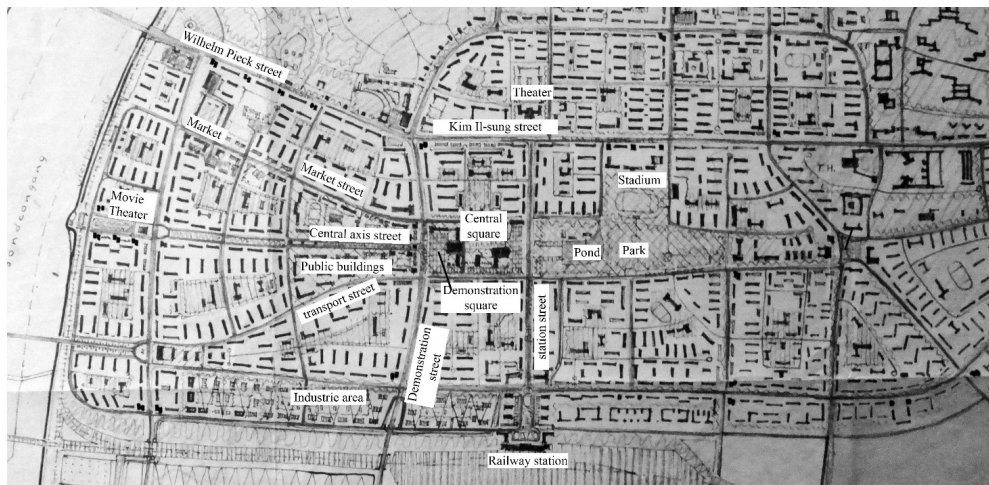


Figure 2: Central Area of Hamhung by the city planning department of the German Work Team, October 1959

#### 4. 2. The Central Square with High-rise Public Buildings

Püschel designed the central square as a symbol of urban space based on three considerations: first, the square's relationship with the street network; second, the construction of a twelve-storey high-rise public building (the 'central building') next to the central square (Figure 3); and third, the position of the podium relative to the demonstration street and central building.

Using this street network, mass demonstrators could gather easily at the central square. Püschel wrote as follows: 'Wide inner-city streets touch the central square. Parallel to the central building, a demonstration street leads from the sport stadium via an industrial area culture park to the podium'.<sup>17</sup>

The 'central building' contained many public facilities and organisations: the main provincial offices, party and mass organisations, city administration facilities, a main post office, city library, and provincial culture centre. Demonstrators would gather at the square in front of the central building.

The podium for the mass demonstration was arranged on the south of the square to light the speakers from behind (Figure 4). Moreover, as evident from the drawing, 'the main building gives the demonstration a dignified background from the viewpoint of podium'.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, the characteristics of Hamhung's city planning in the latter half of the 1950s were similar features seen in the reconstruction city planning in East Germany in the early 1950s. In the Stalinallee competition at East Berlin in 1951, high-rise apartments were also arranged parallel to the street. Gently curved radial streets were also seen in the design of Stalinstadt in 1951, which was built as the first socialist city in East Germany, now Eisenhüttenstadt. In East Berlin, high-rise public building projects set beside the central square were seen from 1950 onward. The building design changed from decorative in the early 1950s to non-decorative in the late 1950s, a reflection of criticism against Stalinism. Parallel to those in East Germany, the design of Hamhung's central building was also non-decorative.

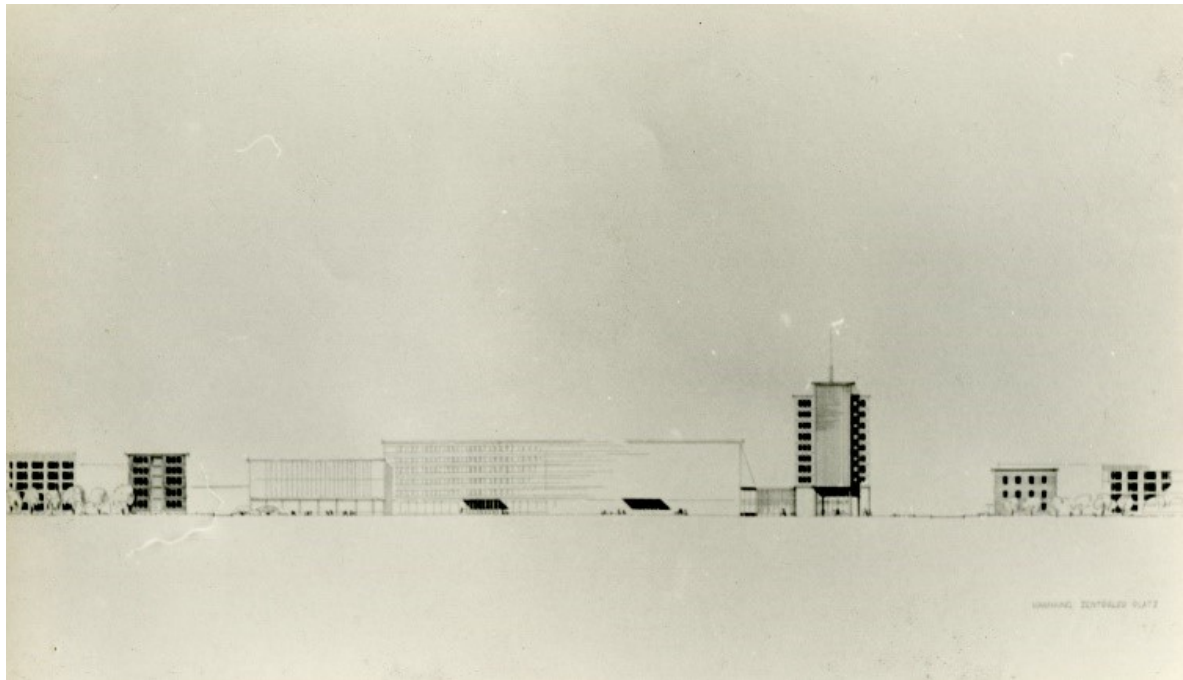


Figure 3: Central Building next to the Central Square

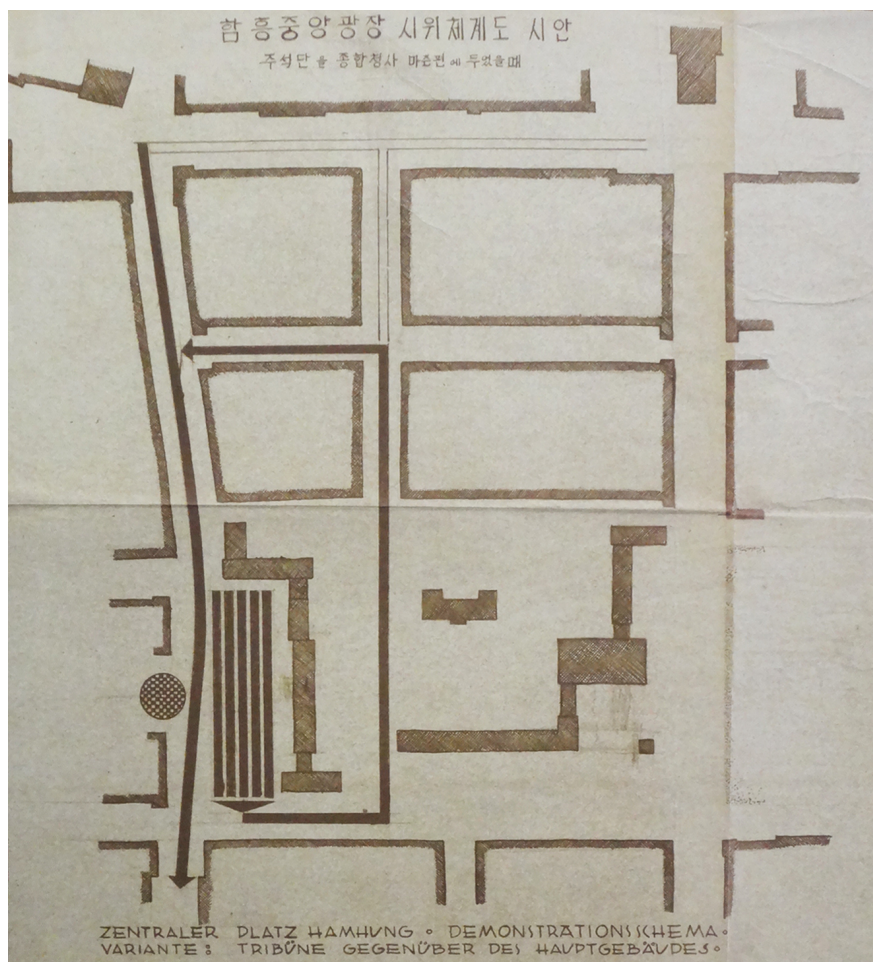


Figure 4: Demonstration route and podium



### 5. Conclusion

Thus, the reconstruction plan of Hamhung as a socialist city in the latter half of the 1950s had characteristics similar to the socialist cities of Soviet Union in the early 1930s and East Germany in the early 1950s.

As highlighted in Section 3, German architects influenced the reconstruction plan as a socialist city in Moscow in the early 1930s. Thus, German architects contributed transnationally to the construction of socialist cities. In particular, in the case of Hamhung, the presence of Püschel was substantive. In fact, Püschel engaged in the practice and study of socialist city planning in the 1930s USSR and 1950s East Germany, which were very advanced in terms of socialist city planning. In both the nations, streets networks and squares were very important features.

As previously mentioned, although the East German engineers followed the concept and methodology in the aforementioned socialist states, they adapted them to the local circumstances that were ascertained by detailed preliminary survey work. Their activities evince the unconsidered aspect of the global/worldwide spread of the concept and methodology of socialist city planning.

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### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes on contributor

Dr. Hideo Tomita (b. 1974) has been working as an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Kyushu Sangyo University in Japan. He graduated from the doctoral course of the Graduate School of Engineering at Hiroshima University, receiving his Doctor of Engineering degree in March 2002. From 2005 to 2006, he was a guest researcher at the Bauhaus University Weimar. In 2015, he was granted the Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering Best Paper Award 2014 from AIJ, AIK, and ASC. From 2016 to 2017, he was a guest researcher at the Technical Institute of Berlin.

### Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Sin, Dong Sam, *Die Planung des Wiederaufbaus der Städte Hamhung und Hungnam in Nordkorea durch die DAG-Städtebaubrigade der DDR von 1955 - 1962 - eine städtebaugeschichtliche Abhandlung aus der Sicht eines Zeitzeugen*, HafenCity Universität Hamhung, 2017.

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<sup>6</sup> Stellenplan der Deutschen Arbeitsgruppe Hamhung, 2. Halbjahr 1956. DL2, 4395 (Bd. 1), Bundesarchiv (Berlin Lichterfelde)

<sup>7</sup> Stellenplan der Deutschen Arbeitsgruppe Hamhung, 1. Halbjahr 1957, 2. Halbjahr 1957. DL2, 4395 (Bd. 1), Bundesarchiv (Berlin Lichterfelde)

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<sup>10</sup> Stellenplan der DAG 1. Halbjahr 1959, DL2, 5359 (bd. 1), Bundesarchiv (Berlin Lichterfelde)

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<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.



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<sup>16</sup> Püschel, K., Ausstellung Hamhung und Hungnam, 1958, Dessau Foundation collection, I18377F.

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<sup>18</sup> Zentraler Platz Hamhung · Demonstrationsschema Variante: Tribüne mit Hauptgebäude Verbunden, date unknown, Dessau Foundation collection.

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## Image sources

Figure 1: Bundesarchiv (Berlin Lichterfelde)

Figure 2: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation

Figure 3: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation

Figure 4: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation