

## **Abstract**

A common theme in the history of development is how the Eastern Bloc and the West competed for influence and power in the postcolonial world through all kinds of modernization projects, including factories, machinery, and infrastructure, and how the leaders of newly independent nation-states manoeuvred through this competition for their own benefit. What remains under-researched, though, is urbanism as a specific dimension of this development competition.

A case in point is the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) strategy of building relations with governments and urban development professionals from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, using the United Nations Programme UN-HABITAT as a platform. This case offers a unique new angle that goes beyond individual projects, people, and places, taking a broader and long-term institutional perspective on the global ambitions of a socialist state in the field of urbanism.

I argue that urbanism comes with specific features (e.g., economic characteristics and the fact that urbanism embodies ways of organizing society) which made it different from other development undertakings and turned urbanism into an important tool for socialist governments in the global development competition.