The Enduring Presence of the Past

A recently published book on urban planning in Nazi Germany has received praise from readers and the press alike. Now it has been honoured with an award.

Text: Damien Leaf

Since its publication in spring 2025, *Urban Planning in Nazi Germany: Attack, Triumph, Terror in the European Context, 1933–1945*, which was also published in German, has become an unexpected bestseller for DOM. With 624 pages and a price tag of €128, it is safe to assume that buyers are making a conscious decision to purchase this book. The team of historians who worked on the project for many years reports that the numerous presentations have also met with considerable interest. The launch in May 2025 coincided with the 80th anniversary of Europe's liberation from National Socialism. The first presentation took place in the Pallasstrasse high-rise bunker in Berlin – a massive Second World War air-raid shelter built 1943–45. Its brutalist presence in the urban landscape made it a fitting venue for discussions about Nazi-era construction. Since then, there have been almost 20 additional events in many German cities as well as in Lisbon. 'They were very different, but without exception, the audience was always highly interested and eager to discuss, whether it was experts such as members of the Chamber of Architects or young students in Dortmund,' says Victoria Grau, part of the editorial team. In Nuremberg, once the city of the 'Reich Party rallies' where the Nazi regime staged massive propaganda events and built monumental rally grounds that still dominate parts of the cityscape, there was keen interest among citizens – not least because the city continues to grapple with the architectural legacy of the Nazi era.

The reception in the press, both general and academic, has been very positive. The architecture website *BauNetz* praised the book as 'an excellent, multi-layered and richly illustrated monograph that can certainly be understood as a standard work', while the left-wing daily *taz* commended the authors for presenting 'a well-founded account of a piece of dark architectural history, down to the planning detail'. The reviewer of the Italian newspaper *Il manifesto* emphasised the book's value in revealing the authentic nature of Nazi urbanism – highlighting systematic racist exclusion, forced labour, and camps rather than propaganda monuments. Most importantly, he calls it the result of a successful 'challenge' to internationalise the debate beyond national restrictions.

The pan-European perspective is a central element and, at this level of depth, a unique approach to the topic. *Urban Planning in Nazi Germany* concludes an ambitious research series over the course of 25 years examining urban planning under various European dictatorships – previously covering the Soviet Union under Stalin, Italy under Mussolini, Portugal under Salazar, and Spain under Franco.

This makes the authors and publisher all the more delighted that the book has now been awarded an international prize: the Architects' Company 2025 Book Award in the History category, one of architecture's most prestigious literary honours, celebrating outstanding contributions to scholarship and discourse. To further promote international dialogue, events are planned for 2026 in Vienna, Paris, and Barcelona, among other cities.



The editors Max Welch Guerra, Harald Bodenschatz, and Victoria Grau present their book at the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt in November 2025.