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## THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF URBAN UTOPIAS

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the characteristics of planners is that they are presuming to know what is best for others. In fact, in countries with a strong planning traditions and even more intensively in specific periods of time, urban planners have tried to put this presumption into practice and have designed towns or neighborhoods that were supposed to be ideal environments for their inhabitants and firms for centuries to come. Typical examples of this attitude were the new towns and the new suburbs of large cities that were built in the sixties and seventies in the Northern European Countries and the characteristic post-war socialist neighborhoods in former communist countries.*

*These neighborhoods and towns were supposed to fulfill all the needs of the average inhabitant and of the average firm and were a deliberate and peculiar mix of space for housing, for working, for sports and relaxation and for socializing. The needs of people and of firms, however, change continuously and many of the urban utopias became obsolete, started to decline socially and economically, and many of them have become urban wasteland or, even worse, urban ghetto's, with dramatically high unemployment and poverty rates, criminality rates, and are often badly maintained. This important part of Europe's heritage thus risks deteriorating beyond rescue.*

*Notwithstanding the precarious conditions in which these neighborhoods and former new towns are finding themselves in today, their uniqueness offers a number of potentials for redevelopment.*

*First of all, they are highly recognizable. Not only might this image of the urban utopia, an essential ingredient of the brand of a specific area, contribute to social and economic development at large, it gives also plenty of scope for tourism development. Rereading the history of Europe through these urban utopias, reconstructing the presumed and effective needs of the inhabitants and the firms that were once eager to live and locate themselves in these utopias by simply looking at their structure and the services they once offered, by analyzing the differences and the similarities between the different European countries, offers the possibility to develop an interesting form of cross-national cultural tourism, a market segment that is supposed to grow explosively the coming decade. International tourism routes might knit all these different urban utopias together. These developments may contribute to stop the process of decline of the urban utopias and even trigger a process of revitalization and of conservation.*