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Cold War Transfer: architecture and planning from socialist countries in the 'Third World'

Introduction: the 'Second World's' architecture and planning in the 'Third World'

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This themed issue of *The Journal of Architecture* focuses on what appears to be a major blind-spot of current architectural historiography of the post-war period: the transfer of architecture and planning from socialist countries to Africa, the Middle East and Asia during the Cold War. The papers gathered in this volume convey this theme by discussing the dissemination of Soviet, East-German and Polish urban models to Tanzania, Afghanistan and Iraq; Bulgarian and Romanian building activities in Africa; the paths of the architect Charles Polónyi crossing the 'peripheries': whether in his native Hungary or in Africa; and exhibitions in and about Africa prepared by the two Germanies divided by the Berlin Wall.

These essays develop current debates about the post-war transfer of architecture and urbanism not only by presenting hitherto unpublished archival research, but also by expanding the *problématique* of these debates.[1] First, the stress on the confrontation between the East and the West—which, as several authors have shown, polarised the dissemination of the architecture and planning concepts of the post-war period[2]—is complemented in this volume by an attention to multiple, pragmatic forms of collaboration between various actors on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Second, many papers shift the focus of the narrative from individual experts, such as Constantinos Doxiadis or Michel Ecochard,[3] to aggregate actors and the roles of individual architects within such organisations as construction firms, planning offices, governmental institutions and international development aid agencies. This reflects not only the conditions of architectural labour under state socialism but also, more generally, the high level of collective work and distributed authorship within the complex institutional frameworks under which export projects were delivered, whatever the political affiliations.

Third, the papers discuss not only the 'export of modernism' and its adaptations to the conditions of the 'Third World', they also show how the modernist idiom had been increasingly challenged: an 'export beyond modernism' as it were. With the term 'postmodernism' appearing on the margin of several papers in this volume, multiple lines are drawn which connect postmodern architecture in Central and Eastern Europe in the last three decades with the experience of architects from

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these countries working in the Middle East, Africa and Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. Fourth, the essays discuss the roles of architecture in a Cold War context by complementing the attention paid to the self-presentation of the two systems—with East and West Berlin and international exhibitions as favourite examples[4]—with the focus on architecture's performance in alternative scenarios of modernisation, the distribution of welfare, the definition of national identity, and production knowledge about processes of urbanisation. Finally, rather than celebrating the end of the Cold War in its own discourse—that is to say as the victory of the 'free world' over its dark 'other'—many papers in this volume introduce a more nuanced assessment of socialist-inspired modernisation processes and signal how the expert culture emerging in the second half of the twentieth century continues to influence current processes of urbanisation in the 'Global South' and their material, representational and institutional conditions.

Competition and collaboration

The paradox underlying the case studies presented in this volume is that while the concept of the 'Third World' was introduced in the early 1950s in order to designate countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which presumably were not part of the East-West competition, these countries very soon became important actors in the 'Global Cold War'.[5] Military, economic and technological modernisation were essential means in this confrontation, with the 'First World', the United States and Western Europe, and the 'Second World', the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, allocating significant resources in modernisation programmes offered to their allies—or opponents of their opponents—complemented since the early 1960s by programmes launched by countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and China.[6] Political and economic influence were important objectives, but so was the possibility of incorporating post-colonial countries into the ideological discourses of the Soviet Union and the United States: either the Marxist narrative of history inevitably leading to communism; or the alternative story of stages of economic development leading to self-sustained growth, suggested by US economists such as Walt Rostow.[7] In both versions of the development aid narrative, buildings would at the same time represent, mediate and convey modernisation efforts and provide a visible proof of geopolitical alliances, beyond offering an outlet for the respective building industries' products and lucrative contracts for architectural and planning experts. All this included tasks on every scale from public buildings, housing neighbourhoods and industrial facilities, to large-scale infrastructures, master plans of existing cities and new towns as well as overarching development programmes embracing entire countries.

While offering less advanced technology and fewer available resources, socialist countries were able to promote their model of modernisation—state-centered, justice-oriented and promising fast growth[8]—among many post-colonial countries. In various periods of their tumultuous histories from the 1960s to the 1980s, governments in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Syria, Tanzania, Vietnam and Yemen (and many others) sought development aid in the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, wary of the

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United States as an ally of former colonial powers and assigning to the 'Third World' an unfavourable position within the world market. In the context of the shifting political conditions of post-colonial countries, the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, the bipolarity of the Cold War was complicated and increasingly complemented by multipolar co-operation in the South. Some regimes, such as Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah (1957–66), became skillful players in this complex network of dependence, often accepting credits and expertise in construction projects from opposing sides in order to gain an upper hand in the 'negotiated imposition' of foreign planning solutions.[9] These multipolar co-operations became more and more widespread in the course of the 1970s, with economic motives playing an increasingly important role for socialist countries. However, this economy was a hybrid one, since architects and firms from the 'Second World' building in the 'Third' were operating on the intersection between socialist and capitalist systems whereby buildings would result from the global commodity economy, planned economies in their respective countries and the networks of the 'socialist global gift economy'.[10]

Networks and aggregates

The focus on networks is the common denominator of all papers in this volume which discuss how state institutions from socialist Europe established, stabilised, maintained, reproduced and expanded networks within which people, projects, money and ideas circulated.[11] They included, in particular, networks set up by state planning institutions—such as Bulgaria's Technoexportstroy and Bulgarproject, Romania's Romconsult and Romproiect, the institutes of urban planning (Gorstroiproekt) of the Soviet Union and Miastoprojekt branches in various Polish cities—as well as mediators, such as Poland's Polservice, which became an important player in the global market for intellectual labour. This institutional infrastructure, combined with gaps in the archives, often makes it impossible to determine the authorship of specific projects—with, for example, the same drawing of a housing project in Saida (Algeria) in the mid-1980s used to support competing authorship claims in the Romanian journal *Arhitectura* and in the archive of the Polish Institute of Architects (SARP)[12]—and, more generally, challenges the concept of individual authorship for the projects in question.

The networks of architecture and planning transfer brought about by these organisations were based on geopolitical alliances—with, for example, the Yugoslav engineering, architecture and planning office Energoprojekt being most active in the Non-Aligned counties.[13] Yet they were superimposed on and interfered with—and sometimes replaced—previous colonial networks,[14] as well as those established by Western firms, foundations and governments.[15] An important role was also played by international institutions such as the United Nations, and the projects developed under the auspices of its agencies (such as the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning, headed by the Croatian architect Ernest Weissmann, and later the UN Human Habitat Programme)[16] became platforms for exchanges between architects across the Cold War divide, as shown in the planning of

Skopje in Macedonia and in Dodoma, Tanzania's new capital.[17] These networks relayed designs for specific locations or contracts for the supervision of construction sites, but also typical plans for industrial plants and housing neighbourhoods, prefabricated systems such as the Soviet's KPD, teaching curricula throughout the Middle East and Africa and research methodologies like the ones proposed for Iraq by Miastoprojekt-Kraków or for Libya by Wadeco (Warsaw Development Consortium).[18]

Export beyond modernism

The emergence of these new products of architectural labour suggests that knowledge production took an increasingly important role in post-war architectural culture and many of the essays gathered in this issue explore the production and transfer of architectural and urban knowledge beyond the colonial dialectics between the metropolis and its 'architectural laboratories'.[19] While some of the projects abroad offered a feed-back loop for the development of architectural practices at home, the first objective of research was the adaptation of modernist architecture and functionalist urbanism to conditions differing from the geographical, social and cultural contexts in which they had been introduced and to which they had answered. Accordingly, foreign experts were dealing with a range of challenges specific to post-colonial countries: questions of the appropriate pace of modernisation, patterns of consumption, the balance between foreign and local expertise and resources, and professional education.[20]

Like their counterparts from the West, architects from socialist Europe were contributing to the rethinking of modernist premises according to the local climate of the 'humid and dry zones', building technologies and social structures,[21] while planners were adapting planning concepts, such as that of the 'neighbourhood unit' or 'mikrorayon', to Baghdad, Beijing, Delhi, Hanoi, Kabul and Zaria.[22] They were supported in this effort by a broad framework of educational and research institutions in socialist Europe, which drew upon a range of disciplines from anthropology, ethnography and oriental philologies to sociology, economics and environmental engineering, but also upon institutions emerging from the 1960s onwards with specific focus on architecture and planning in the 'developing countries', such as the research area in tropical construction (*Wissenschaftsbereich Tropenbau*) at the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering in Weimar (East Germany),[23] the College for Urban Planning in Developing Countries in Szczecin (Poland) and the specialised programmes at the Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow.[24]

But the papers in this volume also identify conditions in which modernism, as defined by the architectural avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s and developed within the post-war CIAM, was transformed into a very different type of discourse and practice, with questions of national identity, memory and history defining the agenda.[25] These were familiar topics for architects and planners from Central Europe, who could refer to the state-led post-war reconstruction and the rapid modernisation processes after the Second World War, but also to the preceding experience of architecture participating in nation-building processes after the First

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World War which ended the period of 'colonisation' of the region by the Hapsburg and Romanov empires.[26] At the same time, in the course of the 1970s and 1980s, architects from socialist countries working in Africa and the Middle East would be increasingly exposed to the postmodern critique of modernist architecture and functionalist urbanism in the name of traditional urban space, human scale and familiar patterns of perception. These discussions would become known to those working on export contracts from journals and books, but also from discussions with clients and collaborations with Western colleagues: or simply by visiting new buildings in Baghdad, Abu Dhabi or Kuwait. For many architects arriving from real existing socialism, this postmodern critique fed into their own disenchantment with 'real existing modernism' seen as one more facet of the increasingly evident political and economic crisis in their home countries.

Differentiated modernities

What the papers point out is the differentiation between the countries eastwards of the Iron Curtain, which, rather than forming a unified 'Soviet Bloc', greatly varied in their geopolitical agenda, political and economic interests, but also historical experiences and cultural traditions. In particular, what the comparative perspective offered by this volume suggests is a tentative tendency towards specialisation of architectural competence as exported from various socialist countries. This tendency was developed as an extension of the specific experiences of post-war production of space in the respective countries rather than an overarching economic coordination, such as the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), with Bulgarian firms specialising in tourist infrastructure, East Germans excelling in prefabricated housing and in some high-end facilities, such as the Zeiss planetaria with shell structures designed by the engineer Ulrich Müther for Tripoli and Kuwait[27] and specific branches of industrial facilities, Romanians competing in terms of the cost efficiency of prefabricated construction and Poles exporting expertise in urban design and building conservation. Yet when working in newly independent states in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, the professionals from the region relied also on older traditions of their specific architectural cultures. This approach included the association of modernism with Czech and Polish nationalism in regions such as inter-war Moravia (Czechoslovakia) and Upper Silesia (Poland), where historicist architecture used to be identified with the German presence; the appropriation of vernacular architecture as a resource for modernisation in Hungary; the pragmatic combination of foreign influences by Bulgarian architects; and the experience of urbanisation in Central Asian Republics, and in particular cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Baku, Dushanbe, Alma-Ata, from which Soviet experts claimed competence in dealing with Southern climatic conditions as well as historical and cultural aspects.[28]

From the 'Third World' to the 'Global South'

As is the case with other recent publications on the Cold War, the present research would not have been possible without the opening of private and state archives since the 1990s. The comparative

perspective of the designs, military maps and satellite photographs in archives on both sides of the former Iron Curtain offered complementary information and was sometimes the only way to determine the extent of the realisation of particular projects developed by architects from socialist countries who often lost track of their designs abroad. This includes cross-referencing sources not only from the countries directly involved, but also those linked in a system of international knowledge transfer, and, for example, the diagrams published by Iraqi officials in the East German journal *Architektur der DDR* allowed corroboration of the influence of the Polish 'General Housing Programme for Iraq' on the practices of Iraqi planners.[29]

However, the end of the Cold War did not always put an end to its epistemic models and its 'intellectual division of labour',[30] which seem to be particularly persistent in the architectural historiography of the period. The imbalance between the ongoing institutionalisation of archives of post-war architecture in Western Europe and the challenges faced in the preservation of archival sources in Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa contributes not only to an extension of the orientalist gaze from the post-colonial South to the post-socialist East,[31] but also to the reinforcement of Cold War dichotomies, which bolsters the already existing blind spots in architectural historiography of the post-war period and distorts the view of international architecture culture from the 1960s onwards. This volume challenges this view in many ways, including opposition to the retroactive reduction of the current process of globalisation to its earlier stages and the historicisation of globalisation as 'Americanisation'.[32] Rather, the papers in this issue stress, with Samir Amin, the agency of the actors from the 'Third World' in the processes of globalisation[33] and bring to the fore the multiple, vibrant and in themselves heterogeneous processes of internationalisation of architecture and planning practices in post-colonial countries. By accounting for some of these processes, this volume contributes to the historiography of the globalisation of design practices during the Cold War which was not restricted to such notable examples as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Kenzo Tange, or Ove Arup.[34] More generally, this allows envisaging a more comprehensive genealogy of current urbanisation processes in the 'Global South', often conditioned by material structures, technologies and institutions originating from the Cold War and subscribes to the urgent task of accounting for the variety of centres of production of knowledge about urbanisation processes, which parallels the multiplicity of the patterns of these processes themselves.[35]

The papers are based on and extend the contributions to the Symposium on *Post-Colonial Planning, Global Technology Transfer, and the Cold War* (Rotterdam, 9th-10th November, 2010), organised by the Chair for Architecture Theory, ETH, Zurich and the Berlage Institute. This Symposium was part of a larger research, education and exhibition project *South of East-West*, initiated at the ETH, Zurich, and developed in collaboration with numerous other institutions.[36] The collaboration with Tom Avermaete, who was the co-editor of this volume, allowed the contextualisation of the papers on post-war architecture and planning transfer between Western Europe to North Africa.[37]

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9. *Cf.* M. Trentin, 'Modernization as State Building: The Two Germanies in Syria, 1963–1972', *Diplomatic History*, 33 (2009), pp. 487–505; on 'negotiated imposition', see S. Ward, 'Transnational planners', *op. cit.*; on Polish projects in West Africa, see Ł. Stanek, 'PRL™, Export Architecture and Urbanism from Socialist Poland', *Piktogram. Talking Pictures Magazine*, 15 (2011), pp. 1–54.
10. *Cf.*, O. Sosnina, N. Ssorin-Chaikov, 'Archaeology of power: anatomy of love', Introduction, 'Dary Vozhdiam/Gifts to Soviet leaders', Exhibition Catalogue (Moscow, Pinakotheke, 2006), p. 18.
11. This focus on official, state-sponsored networks explains why this volume is less concerned with émigré architects from Central and Eastern Europe working in Africa and Asia, such as Alexis Josic or Maciej Nowicki.
12. See illustration no. 5b in Vais' contribution to this volume, and dossier no. 1321, SARP Archive, Warsaw.

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36. The project *South of East-West*, initiated by Ł. Stanek, included two exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw: *PRL™ Export Architecture and Urbanism from Socialist Poland* (October 15th–November 15th, 2010) and *Postmodernism Is Almost All Right. Polish Architecture After Socialism and the Postcolonial Experience* (October 1st-30th, 2011); see also: Ł. Stanek, 'PRL™', *op. cit.* and the forthcoming publication *Postmodernism Is Almost All Right. Polish Architecture After Socialist Globalization* (Warsaw, Fundacja Beç-Zmiana, 2012). For the webpage of the programme, see: www.south-of-eastwest.net. *South of East-West* is a module of the research project *SCALES 1960–2010* headed by Á. Moravánszky (ETH, Zurich).
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