

Exporting Socialism. Making Business? Intercultural Transfer, Circulation and Appropriation of Architecture in the Cold War Period

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The dynamic interconnections between the so called ‘Second’ and ‘Third World’ during the Cold War period have received intensive scholarly attention in recent years.¹ The analysis of diplomatic relations between socialist countries and those of the Global South has been considerably broadened by studies about economic, cultural and scientific exchange. Architecture and construction play a prominent role in the field.² At the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space in Erkner a research group explores GDR architectural projects in the Global South.³ From June 21 to 22, 2018 the group invited international colleagues to discuss architectural exchange between socialist and ‘Third World’-countries. The main issues to be discussed, as CHRISTOPH BERNHARDT (Erkner) pointed out in his opening remarks, were the circulation of knowledge, patterns of appropriation – thus problematizing concepts of linear transfer –, the identification of actors of such appropriation, the reimport of ideas and the critical evaluation of the Cold War as a dominant framework of socialist architectural export.

The report will present the individual papers following these main points of discussion, therefore slightly departing from the original conference order.

The appropriation of socialist architecture and urban planning was prominently discussed in the keynote lecture by CHRISTINA SCHWENKEL (Riverside). She presented her ethnographic study about a mass housing project in the city of Vinh (Vietnam). It was launched by GDR architects on Vietnamese invitation in the 1970s. Schwenkel stressed that the housing blocks in Vinh were adapted and appropriated to local needs on several levels: GDR planners’ ideas of single family homes were transformed by Vietnamese ar-

chitects to suit more communal forms of living, e.g. shared kitchens. Today, female tenants do their cooking together, but outside in the courtyard. Courtyards were not only transformed into kitchens but also into gardens and accommodating chickens. Instead of the planned basements, today the ground floors house small shops, dentists or bird markets. The intended borders of clearly separated functional spaces are thus continuously blurred.

Appropriation in the form of improvisation was discussed by JONAS VAN DER STRAETEN and MARIYA PETROVA (Darmstadt). They presented a case study of the recently launched ERC-project „A Global History of Technology, 1850-2000“. It showed how Soviet master plans for the Central Asian city of Samarkand failed twice, in the 1930s and 1980s. However, inhabitants took house construction into their own hands and developed large neighborhoods which were mostly unauthorized. Improvisation, private initiative and individual skill proved of much greater importance for the urban development of Samarkand than great technological innovation or plans.

That architectural export works when it suits local structures became clear in the talk by ANDREAS BUTTER (Erkner). He showed how GDR architects successfully introduced prefabricated concrete shell roofs to China in the 1950s. The elements proved to be a synthesis of prefabrication and dynamic form and matched Chinese architectural aesthetics but also local economic needs.

TAO CHEN (Shanghai) presented a broader picture of the transfer of know-how from East Germany to China between 1952 and 1964. He argued that contacts between GDR specialists and the Chinese were framed largely in neo-colonial terms. The Germans felt highly supe-

¹E.g. David C. Engerman, *The Second World’s Third World*, in: *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 2011, S. 183-211; <http://socialismgoesglobal.exeter.ac.uk/>.

²Cf. the special issue *Cold War Transfer: Architecture and Planning from Socialist Countries in the ‘Third World’* ed. by Łukasz Stanek, in: *The Journal of Architecture* 17, 2012.

³<https://leibniz-irs.de/forschung/projekte/projekt/architekturprojekte-der-ddr-im-ausland-bauten-akteure-und-kulturelle-transferprozesse/>. (29.07.2018)

rior to their Chinese counterparts and made China pay high prices for their expertise. In an Indian case, however, GDR specialists acted more respectfully towards local interests, at least compared to their West German counterparts. MAX TRECKER (Berlin) used the highly competitive GDR and FRG projects of building steel works in Bhilai and Rourkela to highlight differences in East and West German economic aid design. But his case study also showed that Socialist aid seems to have varied greatly in its design and outlook. While the GDR policy to deliver easy-to-use equipment for the steel plant in Bhilai suited Indian ideas of industrialization by import substitution, the technically more advanced Krupp plant in Rourkela did not meet Indian expectations because the plant remained dependent on Krupp infrastructure and engineering skill.

PATRYK BABIRACKI (Arlington) discussed architectural appropriations of the „Upper Silesian Tower“ at the Posen International Trade Fair. He showed that in the early years of Socialist Poland the once Prussian pavilion was still regarded as a symbol of individual work and achievement resonating the long 19th century Posen tradition of „organic work“. However, already in 1948 the Prussian pavilion was transformed into the Soviet one, thus representing new foreign rule. The construction of the „iglica“ (needle) in the 1950s then meant the final aesthetic appropriation to the new cold war order.

JELICA JOVANOVIĆ (Vienna) traced the activities of Yugoslav construction companies abroad and described the great difficulties in finding adequate archival material about such endeavors. However, she could find projects of Yugoslav companies and construction research institutes, among others, in Czechoslovakia, Angola and Egypt. Yugoslavia's international relations can thus not be reduced to its political activities in the Non-Aligned-Movement but also imply technical and economic relations on various levels.

Several talks challenged Cold War dichotomies as an analytical framework for Second-Third-World relations.

TOBIAS WOLFFHARDT (Munich) discussed the role of the UN department of housing,

building and planning. He argued that the department made urban planning a problem of the development discourse in the 1960s. The 'urban international' now also included the Global South. Under the department's head Ernest Weissmann this global network integrated both Cold War systems.

ŁUKASZ STANEK (Manchester) showed how on the one hand Socialist architectural projects in Ghana were perceived by the British as coerced and thus uncreative labor. However, architects from Socialist Poland working for the Ghanaian construction corporation under Nkrumah conceived of themselves not as conveyers of socialism but as representatives of a globally understood modern architecture.

That partners in the Global South were highly pragmatic when dealing with the two sides of the supposedly Iron Curtain became clear in ANNE-KRISTIN HARTMETZ' (Leipzig) talk. She showed how Nkruma's Ghana first cooperated with the USA and the World Bank but began to opt for more Eastern European help starting in the early 1960s. This, however, was not for ideological reasons but because the Socialist partners promised „aid without strings attached“. However, to coordinate and successfully implement Socialist architectural export to Ghana – Hartmetz presented the failed try to transport a sugar factory from Czechoslovakia – proved to be a great challenge.

HANS-GEORG LIPPERT's (Dresden) presentation also hinted at the limits of Cold War dichotomies as analytical categories. Comparing West and East German architectural journals he found that GDR architects started to show quite a positive attitude towards projects in Western Germany since the 1960s. Their counterparts in the FRG proved highly interested in GDR urban planning and commented intensely on GDR architecture in the 1940s and again since the late 1960s. While some ironic statements about prefabrication can be found in West German journals severe criticism or polemics are absent from architectural journals on both sides.

That ideology played a minor role for architects became clear also in MONIKA MOTYLIŃSKA's (Erkner) talk. She traced the export of cement plants from the GDR to Syria

and found that their design was very suitable for an easy transfer to different localities. However, socialist ideology hardly travelled alongside the plants. What was more, the GDR cement plants were no Socialist invention but relied on the know-how of a Dessau cement manufacturer who had designed and exported cement plants since the 19th century. The GDR also exported planetaria to the Global South which had a much more symbolic value than the economically relevant cement plants. The planetaria were the topic of TANJA SCHEFFLER's talk who problematized the question of authorship in GDR architectural history. The famous Tripoli planetarium for instance was not designed, as usually assumed, by Ulrich Muether but by Gertrud Schille working for Carl Zeiss, Jena. She was widely recognized for her architectural skill in numerous 'Third World'-countries.

That international fairs could provide a forum for either fierce cold war competition or architectural exchange across the 'Iron Curtain' and that both are closely interconnected became clear in the presentations by JASNA GALJER (Zagreb) and OLGA KAZAKOVA (Moscow). GALJER showed that the 1957 newly opened ground of the International Trade Fair of Zagreb reflected a modernist architectural discourse which reached across the 'Iron Curtain'. The Yugoslav and international pavilions spoke one architectural language and dialogue proved more important than competition. This was in contrast, GALJER argued, to the Expo in Brussels in 1958. Nevertheless, also the Brussels event proved a forum for exchange. OLGA KAZAKOVA stated that Soviet architects were greatly inspired by what they saw in Belgium and brought new ideas back home where learning from the West had become possible again after Stalin's death. The planning of the Expo 1967 in Moscow however, turned out to be framed mostly by cold war competition. The fairground was to represent socialism's achievements and the fantastic projects for its design mostly alluded to the Soviet space program. With the successes of this program (and after the Cuban crisis) the entire project was discarded as too expensive and now unnecessary.

The diverse case studies presented clearly

showed that the term 'export' can never imply a one-to-one transfer of an architectural artifact or architectural knowledge to a new locality. Local specificity always played a role. What is more, socialist ideology hardly travelled along socialist architecture. Architects either had no ideological intentions or such intentions were quickly absorbed by local appropriations of the projects. These findings resonate a broad consensus in history and cultural studies where the dynamic mutuality of transnational and global interconnections has been repeatedly emphasized.⁴ The study of architectural exchange could benefit from further investigation in such mutuality, granting more analytical room to actors and knowledge from the Global South and tracing circulations back to the Global North. The economic dimension of 'Second'-/'Third'-World-interconnections in architecture and construction – hinted at in the conference title – would also deserve more scrutiny. The history of economic globalization could then include 'Second' and 'Third World'-actors. Architectural exchange thus proves a promising field of future global history writing.

Conference Overview:

Heiderose Kilper (Erkner): Opening Welcome

Christoph Bernhardt (Erkner): Introduction

Panel 1: Exploring Postwar Exchange on Urbanization and Architecture

Tobias Wolffhardt (Munich): Trade Solutions for the Global South? Urbanization, the UN and International Policies of Development

Jonas van der Straeten/Mariya Petrova (Darmstadt): In the Shadows of Socialist Architecture. Transregional Perspectives on Private House Building in Samarkand, 1950-1970

Panel 2: Cold War Politics of Construction

Max Trecker (Berlin): Forging the Indian Steel Industry. The Economic Side of the Cold War in the Global South

Jelica Jovanović (Vienna): Internat(iona)lizing Architecture. Yugoslav Actors on the Global

⁴ Cf. e.g. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science. Circulation and the Construction of Scientific Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900*, Basingstoke 2007.

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Panel 3: Hotspots of Architectural Exchange I – China

Andreas Butter (Erkner): A Success Story? Industrial Architecture of the GDR in Asia – Part I

Tao Chen (Shanghai): Exporting the German Know-how. East German Specialists in China (1952-1964)

Keynote Lecture

Christina Schwenkel (Riverside): The After-life of Aid. On the Repurposing of GDR Architecture in Vietnam

Panel 4: Hotspots of Architectural Exchange II – Ghana

Łukasz Stanek (Manchester): Made in Ghana. Architecture and Socialist Modernization

Anne-Kristin Hartmetz (Leipzig): Between Factory and Fiction. Planning and Implementation of Industrial Development Projects in Ghana in Cooperation with CMEA Countries, 1960-1972

Panel 5: The GDR and Socialist Architectural Transfer

Hans-Georg Lippert (Dresden): Cold War in the Media? Architectural Journals in West and East Germany

Monika Motylińska (Erkner): A Success Story? Industrial Architecture of the GDR in Asia – Part II: On the export of GDR cement plants

Tanja Scheffler (Dresden): The Carl-Zeiss-Planetarium in Tripoli

Panel 6: Trade Fairs as Hubs for Architecture and Planning

Patryk Babiracki (Arlington): The Upper Silesian Tower at the International Trade Fair in Poznań. Architectural Appropriations and the Cold War

Jasna Galjer (University of Zagreb): The Architecture of International Zagreb Fair between East and West

Olga Kazakova (Moscow): 1967 Moscow World Expo. A Territory of Friendship or a

Battlefield?

Final Discussion

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