

Friday, 15 June
15.15-18.00

Track: Peripheries
Room: *National Library, Auditorium 3107*

MODERNITY AND RURALITY: MAPPING THE STATE OF RESEARCH

Session chairs: Axel Fisher, Université libre de Bruxelles / TU Berlin
Aleksa Korolija, Politecnico di Milano

Rurality appears as an emerging frame of reference in European discourses around the built environment, upsetting the longstanding lack of interest for rural areas of both the design disciplines and their histories. While some modernist architecture has sought, throughout its development, to find inspiration in vernacular and rural architecture (as a presumed source of authenticity and rationality), it was in the cities that this movement identified its preferred field of operations. Similarly, in the development of modernist urban planning and design, the importation of the countryside's environmental and social qualities to the urban sphere was meant to reform and cure the ill-perceived large industrial cities.

This session deals with an overlooked topic in architectural history—modernist design and planning in and for the countryside—addressing the relation between experiments in designing the physical environment and rurality at large. Examining the works of prominent or lesser-known modernist heroes, as much as those of obscure engineers active in the European periphery, it unveils unnoticed episodes in architectural history, spanning across key moments the modern era, disciplinary approaches, and scales. In doing so, this session offers an outline of different modernist attitudes towards rurality. Among the transversal issues raised across the session, one finds:

- alternately progressive and reactionary ontologies of the rural and nature: from more romantic, individualistic, and subjective attempts to reconcile humans and nature, to the invocation of the rural's alleged moralizing influence on individuals or collectivities; from escapist to merely functional uses of the countryside;
- uneven architectural boldness, oscillating between the imitation of the allegedly authentic vernacular, efforts to root emerging modernist styles in tradition, and the introduction of radically new architectural languages in the countryside, whether or not in connection with quests for national identity or even with totalitarian rhetorics;
- an inclination towards the dissolution of architectural design in favour of growing concerns for village design, regional planning, landscape, and even social planning and engineering;
- the autonomy or adherence of design stances to the underlying agrarian systems.

The extremely diversified range of the discussed case studies, while suggesting an expansion of architectural history's boundaries, sparks a potentially promising debate around the most appropriate conceptual frameworks and methodologies to approach the entanglements of modernism and rurality.

PAPERS:

To Subordinate, Unite, or Confront Architecture with Nature Knut Knutsen's Regionalist Strategies and Their Impact

Espen Johnsen, University of Oslo

This paper discusses architect Knut Knutsen's regionalist strategies around 1950, specifically regarding the relationship between architecture, the human factor, and nature, and how this was expressed in the modernization of the Norwegian countryside through his own projects and their impact on younger architects. In Norway, architects in the post-war years were not involved in the planning of villages or 'total' rural landscapes.

However, they designed buildings for the welfare state in or near rural settlements, as well as single-family houses and cabins located in nature.

In the late 1930s, Knutsen turned towards an architecture adapted to the site, to nature, and to the use of natural materials. After years of intense work (1946–1951), including his project for the *District Council Houses* in Vågå (1947) and his own *Summer House* (1949), Knutsen published his radical views on architecture's ecological, social, cultural, historical, and artistic responsibility. He attacked the contemporary modernist practice (by Mies and his followers) of producing self-sufficient, visible architecture. According to Knutsen, modern architecture should be subordinate to nature and slip almost invisibly into the landscape.

Knutsen's architectural thinking falls into the transition to the 'Second Modernism' (as described by Pallasmaa) by being more oriented towards the situational, the unique, the historical, the inclusive, and the pragmatic. From the late 1950s onwards, he became more interested in creating a 'synthetic landscape', a dialogue between *ecocentrism* and *anthropocentrism*, that combined impulses from nature as well as from modern and anonymous architecture. Studies of nature should inspire formal variations, and the house could also create an enhanced expression of the landscape. His layout for the *Council Houses* in Askim (1958) and for a *Humanist City* (1967–1968) will be included in this discussion.

Finally, the paper will discuss Knutsen's impact and how Are Vesterlid and Sverre Fehn used different architectural strategies in their thoughtful dialogue with nature, either by means of subordination, unification, or subtle contrast.

'Architecture, in the sense of pre-war times, is dying': Ernst May's Housing Schemes in Weimar's Rural East

Sarah M. Schlachetzki, University of Bern

In the interwar period, Berlin-based Martin Wagner was elaborating the idea of his 'city-countryside-city'. Socialist intellectuals such as Alexander Schwab aimed at a future balance between city and rurality by combining industrialism and re-agrarianization 'in a new, higher form'. Creating settlements for the hinterlands always mirrored social policy, economics, and, for the case of Weimar's East, plans for national consolidation. Only for the political left, however, architectural modernism was symbolic of a one-way street to a better future.

Throughout his career, architect Ernst May tackled the problem of modernism and the rural in more than one way. While his large-scale projects for the Soviet Union in the 1930s were mostly unrealized, and his Frankfurt period earned him the greatest international renown, it was his position in Silesia between 1919 and 1925 that had challenged the young architect and his team to develop immediate, cheap, yet sustainable housing schemes for Breslau's countryside. It was also his achievement there (the creation of more than 3,000 dwellings) that won him his job in Frankfurt.

Given historiography's focus on the metropolis, it does not come as a surprise that May's Silesian work has either been ignored altogether or considered an 'unmodern' predecessor to the full-fledged modernism of his *Neues Frankfurt*. My paper will focus on May's and his team's Silesian housing schemes in the underdeveloped countryside, with respect to the colonization efforts vis-à-vis the border shifts of the time and with respect to the greater economic policies behind them, setting them in perspective with his later work, including his activity in East Africa. I argue that the formalist rifts between his work in Silesia, the USSR, Africa, and West Germany elucidate larger historiographic pitfalls in the conceptualization of 'modernism' and provide an apt example for a debate on the interconnection of architecture and the rustic.

Agrarian Penal Colonies and the Project of Modern Rurality in Italy

Sabrina Puddu, University of Hertfordshire / Leeds Beckett University

Between the 1860s and 1930s, seven penal colonies were founded in the rural territory of Sardinia. Following the transition from Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia to the unified Kingdom of Italy, they were instrumental to the latter's goals of enforcing penal reform, and modernising remote rural areas. Penal colonies were, in fact, planned to facilitate the birth and acceptance of a new, modern rural order imposed by the State. They impacted on the local farmers and shepherds' secular habits, substituting the feudal *Dominium Divisum* and land use right of *Ademprivium* with an enforcement of absolute ownership that was codified by the institution of the *Cadaster*. Besides, they added another dimension to the European discourse on penal regimes that was then focused on the architectural model solution of the prison. In this respect, Robin Evans has shown how the establishment of a penal colony in Mettray in 1839, at the time when the prison was being perfected as a building type, evidenced uncertainty about the latter's efficacy in reforming human behaviour, and asserted the need for new para-carceral institutions. Renouncing the strict confinement and central supervision of urban walled prisons, and promoted by social scientists, these institutions asserted the reformatory power of a work routine on inmates, and argued for a rural context as the ideal setting for such purpose. Established some twenty years after Mettray, the Sardinian colonies followed this same penal philosophy, although their spatial structure was not a linear descendent of the French precedent. In line with other examples - like Merksplas in Belgium - they expanded their reformatory scope towards the domestication of large-scale territories. Their scope

was also extended in time, planned as they were to develop over two stages: after the initial colonisation and land reclaim, civilians were meant to take over the colonies and their territory and turn them into modern agrarian settlements. The colonies of Castiadas and Cuguttu-Tramariglio are particularly explicative of this staged process. The first, built in 1875 on wetland affected by malaria, was implemented as a civilian settlement under Fascism and through the agrarian reforms of the post war democratic state. Cuguttu (1864) was followed by a more elaborate architectural project - the settlement of Porto Conte-Tramariglio (1938), an instance of Italian architectural rationalism of the 1930s

- to kick-start the fascist agrarian ambitions of a territorial system of farms and urban settlements. My paper will provide an analysis of the two colonies framing them within similar experiences in Europe, and will elaborate on the role that large-scale spatial reasoning played at some crucial moments of political transition in Italy.

'Only Human Tirelessness Built on Science can Conquer the Desert': Planned Agricultural Communities in Early Nineteenth Century Hungary

Kristof Fatsar, Writtle University College

A dominant economical and political theme in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Hungary was the colonization of its southern and largely infertile regions. This was in large part due to the earlier Ottoman occupation of the central parts of the country, a historic circumstance which had still not been overcome by centrally organized systematic colonization, mostly by German-speaking settlers, as late as a hundred years later. Another factor in the slow development of the southern regions was the unfavourable soil conditions, namely the drifting sand.

One of those who seriously thought about remedying this situation was the almost entirely forgotten Coblenz-born engineer and landscape designer, Rudolph Witsch. He had been experimenting with dune control in Hungary when creating a public park in the city of Pest in 1799, and was later employed by the military that governed the southern strip of the country after its reconquest. He wrote a treatise on the subject that was not only concerned about turning the region to profitable agriculture, but also proposing the layout of an ideal village as the core of the newly acquired agricultural lands. His proposal was not in the genre of Ledoux's utopian industrial (at Chaux) or agricultural (at

Maupertuis) settlements of grandeur. Rather, it followed Rudolf Eickemeyer's (1787) very utilitarian approach to planning villages.

His ideas to colonize the infertile southern ends of the country with land melioration methods and planned villages was eventually undertaken, although it is yet unclear whether his publications played a role in this process at all. This paper investigates the international context of Witsch's theoretical work and reflects on the contemporary success of many Hungarian landowners to turn barren lands to fruitful agricultural estates around their country houses and naturalistic gardens, some of which were designed by Witsch himself.