

Saturday, 16 June
9.00-11.45

Track: Peripheries
Room: *National Library, Miller Salon*

OPEN SESSION: SOCIALIST BLOCK

Session chair: Mart Kalm, Estonian Academy of Arts

PAPERS:

Leisure and Recreation under Socialism: New Urban Parks in Beijing in the Early 1950s

Liu Yishi, Tsinghua University

Leisure and recreation occupy a conspicuous place in socialist state building. The green space system that includes public parks, street gardens, and small playgrounds within residential blocks was established in Beijing in the 1950s, with direct influence from Soviet experience. During the formative years of Chinese socialism, parks alongside other kinds of green space were built in the capital city, both as a container of all sorts of recreational and cultural activities and as a mechanism to mobilize the masses and cultivate socialist patriotism.

This paper depicts the conceptual evolution of park design in the West and the emergence and development of urban parks of culture and rest in the Soviet Union. It contends that the design philosophy of Soviet parks fits in the development of park design in a broader context, despite its close relation to political demands. The Soviet theory of park design was modified when introduced into China in the early 1950s, on which basis three large urban parks were built: Taoranting Park, Zizhuyuan Park, and Longtan Park. This paper examines the background of the making of new parks in Beijing in the early Maoist period, with an emphasis on the most successful example of Taoranting, which was converted from a deserted and depressed wetland into a centre for recreational and cultural events showcasing the accomplishments of Chinese socialism. In combination with revolutionary romanticism, it offers a prototypal narrative of transforming the rotten old into a radiant height of socialism.

The paper also compares the three new parks in Beijing to the typical Soviet park of culture and rest in terms of size of land, structure, types of facilities, and tradition and philosophies of garden design of each country, etc. It argues that the new Chinese parks demonstrated distinct variation from the Soviet model due to specific economic and cultural considerations that were part of the Chinese way of modernization and urbanization. .

National in Content, International in Form: Soviet Modernism and National Constructs in the Soviet Socialist Republics of Belarus and Lithuania

Oxana Gourinovitch, TU Berlin

The efforts to centralize the construction sector of the Soviet Union marked Soviet building policies from the very beginning. It was, though, not until the late 1950s that they brought accountable, holistic results. The reforms set off by Khrushchev succeeded in reorganizing the architectural institutions, scattered between multitudinous commissariats, soviets, and city councils, into a centralized system of design institutes. The reforms united planning and construction industries under the administration of one specific Ministry of Architecture and Construction, specified a general building code (SNiP), and extended and unified the architectural informational influx via a centrally controlled publishing system. Such centralizing measures made the large-scale industrialization and standardization feasible—'new advanced methods of construction and of production of building materials' in specialized factories allowed the construction to 'be increasingly transformed into the assembly of building components', — which Khrushchev highlighted in a memorable speech in December 1956.

Within the same reformatory framework, though, a decree from 1954 granted unprecedented planning sovereignty to the national republics, delegating the planning decisions to local administrations. The first generation of national specialists, graduating from the newly opened local architectural departments of the national educational institutions, followed soon after. Already before 1960, many national republics saw the last non-locally designed buildings completed: the projects by architects from Moscow and Leningrad vanished from their capital cities as Socialist Realism did. Internationally-inclined Soviet modernism was to become far more accommodating for the national constructs than its 'national in form' predecessor.

The paper studies this ambiguous transition, focusing on the cases of two national republics representing the extremities of the multifarious Soviet spectrum: the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic with strong nationalist tendencies, articulated through all social strata, and the Belorussian SSR, distinguished by an eclipse of the nationalist sentiment.

Invisible Theory of Praxis? Centralized Architectural Theory in the GDR

Kathrin Siebert, ETH Zürich

Between 1965 and 1967, on behalf of the German Academy of Architecture (Deutsche Bauakademie) of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), an authors' group under the guidance of the Swiss architect Hans Schmidt (1893–1972) developed a comprehensive initial proposal for a marxist architectural theory. The 261 pages that made up the *Contributions to Architectural Theory Research (Beiträge zur architekturtheoretischen Forschung)* were completed in 1967. Within ten thematic essays, six architects developed fundamental and current questions of architectural theory, such as concept, subject, and method, the relationship between architecture and society, as well as principles and conditions for creativity. The basic principle was a concept of architecture that covered all different scales of space, from the single apartment to urban development. In their opinion, architectural theory research should be based on knowledge and methods of cultural theory, sociology, psychology, cybernetics, and semiotics. However, the compendium circulated only in an edition of 200 copies. In my contribution, I will examine the production of architectural theory under centralized conditions. I'd like to show that in the GDR, there was not only concentration on economy but also on architectural theory for a particular moment in time. What kind of circumstances made this happen? Who was involved in the process? And what about the results? What exactly was the critical potential of the mentioned text? Why was the publication of this fundamental research officially prohibited, although principles of architectural theory had been so urgently demanded? What were the factors that made it unacceptable?

Travelling Influences from East to West and Back: The Case of Finland and Soviet Estonia

Laura Berger, Aalto University
Sampo Ruoppila, University of Turku

Our paper focuses on the knowledge transfer between Finland and Soviet Estonia during the 1960s and 1970s. As populations, Finns and Estonians have long historical and cultural contacts, aided by the similarity of the languages. After the inward turning period during Stalin's rule, the Khrushchev thaw marks the re-establishment of contacts during the 1960s. The architectural historian Mart Kalm has argued that within the entire Eastern Bloc, the direct and significant Scandinavian influence on Estonia during the Soviet years was unique. In this context, it was most of all Finland where it came to be possible to travel and sustain contacts. Thus, we argue that the special relationship between Finland and Soviet Estonia offers a most intriguing point of contacts to explore in detail.

We identify three consequential modes of exchange, in each of which images play a seminal role: (1) travels including official excursions but often also accompanied or followed by exchange between private persons, (2) the spread of publications, and (3)

exhibitions, where projects were displayed if not even canonized as known examples to the wider architectural community. Accordingly, the relevant materials come from travel accounts, epoch periodicals, and exhibition catalogues. The specific example is two Finnish housing estates which came to dominate the Estonian narrative: These are the first post-war, truly modernist residential areas of Tapiola (1954–late 1960s) and Pihlajamäki (1959–1965), which were the first Finnish examples where prefabricated elements were used to a large extent. Among masses of housing being constructed during these decades, it is images of Tapiola and Pihlajamäki which continued to be disseminated as the ideal examples long after their completion.

Nordic-Baltic Architecture Triennials as the Meeting Grounds of Late Socialist and Late Capitalist Postmodernisms

Ingrid Ruudi, Estonian Academy of Arts

What kind of a dialogue could take place between the ideals and ideologies of late socialist and late capitalist architects and theoreticians in the era of transition that shook Eastern Europe from the last years of the 1980s to the first years of the 1990s? What kinds of shifts of meanings and (mis)translations happened in communicating the beliefs and values of practitioners of the both sides? What were the political connotations of different architectures, and what was at stake for both sides in the attempt to establish an institutional platform for facilitating such a dialogue?

These issues are well illustrated by the case of the audacious undertaking of organizing the Nordic-Baltic Architecture Triennial (NBAT) in 1990 in Tallinn as a platform for high-level international cooperation and the exchange of ideas, decades before the biennial boom spread from the art world to architecture. The event featured representations of Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic, Faroese, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian architecture. With a two-day conference, a major exhibition, and a student workshop, the event was a success featuring international stars like Aldo van Eyck, Peter Wilson, Sverre Fehn, Henning Larsen, Juhani Pallasmaa, and others, in addition to the most celebrated architects from the Baltics. The theme—*Metropolism and Provincialism*—was ambitiously global and in tune with postmodern regionalism yet not without a touch of self-irony and a critical stance. The equally representative follow-up in 1993, titled *Architecture and Individuality*, demonstrated more complicated communication issues, with Western European architects like Günther Behnisch, Willem Jan Neutelings, Snøhetta, and others discarding the formal issues of postmodernism as individualistic expression and Baltic architects somewhat losing their ground due to the harsh reality of the first years of cowboy capitalism. In addition to analysing the shifting focus between late/post/socialist and late capitalist contexts, it is possible to observe changes happening within those three years as well.

The paper is based on archival material, contemporary reviews in Estonian and international media, and interviews with the organizers and the participants from Nordic and Baltic countries.