



# INTERPRETING 20TH CENTURY EUROPEAN URBANISM: DIFFERING LAYERS OF UNDERSTANDING

## INTERPRETOVAŤ URBANIZMUS 20. STOROČIA V EURÓPE: ROZLIČNÉ VRSTVY PONÍMANIA

Agnès Dudych



### INTERPRETING 20TH CENTURY EUROPEAN URBANISM – SECOND URBANHIST CONFERENCE

Conference, 21 – 23. 10. 2019,  
urbanHIST, Stockholm

The European consortium urbanHIST – focusing on the history of European Urbanism in the 20th century – organised its second conference in Stockholm in October 2019. The conference brought together over one hundred participants, mostly architects, historians, urbanists, geographers and sociologists, to discuss the main theme: “Interpreting 20th-Century European Urbanism”. The conference agenda included roundtables and panels as well as keynote lectures in which invited scholars with various interests presented their research focuses and recent results.

From plans to realisation, the transformation of urban development is shaped by a number of influences. As described by Henrieta Moravčíková (professor of Architectural History and head of the department of architecture at the Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences) in her current research on the planning history of Bratislava, both continuity and discontinuity in city planning characterise the creation of the modern city and generate different layers of understanding. The question Moravčíková posed for the case of the Slovak capital could be considered as an Ariadne’s

thread of the whole conference: what was the impact of 20<sup>th</sup> century urban planning on urban structures?

One of the layers helping in the understanding of urban structures is composed of the trends, ideas and concepts that travelled around the world and shaped the plans. As Stefen V. Ward (professor of planning history at Oxford Brooks University) explained in his lecture, there was and still is an international circulation of planning knowledge. His ongoing research show that this circulation was fostered by planners’ international journeys as well as the “export” of local expertise by countries and cities. This assumption was aptly illustrated by the exhibition *Flying Panels* hosted by ArkDes, the Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design, which the participants of the conference were invited to visit. Through this exhibition, curators Pedro Ignacio Alonso and Hugo Palmarola tell the story of concrete panels and how they changed housing in over seventy countries. Panels are one of these innovations exported to promote local *knowhow* and significantly shaped urban structures.

A second layer of understanding is related to the political or economic context. One of these aspects was explored in the lectures given by Sasha Tsenkova (professor of International Development and Planning at the University of Calgary) and Luděk Sýkora (professor of Social Geography and Regional Development at Charles University in Prague) which focused on the socialist and post-socialist transformation of cities. Sýkora analysed the impact of social changes in the context of post-socialist cities, exploring the different patterns of gentrification, segregation or suburbanisation, and the specificity of housing policy in this context. For Tsenkova, who presented her research on housing development and city making in post-socialist context, the development of cities is driven by the concept of *Exit, voice, and loyalty* described by economist Albert Hirschman. In the first case, people who cannot gain access to housing decide to exit the legal framework and built their own informal housing. In the second case, voice, groups lobby for their needs and organise themselves to achieve their goals. In the third case, loyalty, people remain inside the system and wait passively for conditions to improve. These two presentations helped to outline the political, social and economic role in the construction of the urban environment.

As an echo to the keynote lectures, the different panels concentrated on specific components assisting in the interpretation of 20th-century European Urbanism: housing development, dissemination and mobility of town planning ideas, writing town planning history, the impact of industrialisation on CEE cities, the post-socialist transition, urban regeneration, environment and urban landscape, or discourses of consumption in modern architecture, and many others topics. Thanks to the diversity of the presenters' backgrounds, case studies and concerns, the conference offered a broad and comprehensive picture of today's research interests. In addition, the conference clearly displayed a shared interest in exploring examples from both the western and eastern parts of Europe, underlining the importance of the urbanHIST goal: to build a pan-European history of urban planning.

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