Im Blick der Anderen. In the View of Others: Berlin
The international Discourse on European Postwar Modernism

Conference, 6th/7th November 2026, Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Abstracts

Country Report: Denmark
Éadaoin Weisz Quinn

On the one side—and on the other: Danish architectural discourse across the East-West divide.

Between 1945 and 1980, Danish architecture and urban planning were deeply influenced by post-war reconstruction projects, the development of the welfare state, and international models. While Denmark was situated in the Western Bloc and its international outlook during the Cold War was primarily oriented towards the West, the political breadth within academic and professional circles allowed for surprising discussions that extended beyond the Iron Curtain. These were primarily informed by study trips and cultural exchange, which provided opportunities for Danish architects and planners to engage with developments beyond the Western Bloc. This paper takes as a starting point the initial reception in Denmark of the Karl-Marx-Allee and the Interbau and how these perspectives changed over the period studied. Through an analysis of contemporary professional journals, newspapers and publications, it highlights key moments when Danish architectural and planning discourse shifted its gaze beyond the Iron Curtain, exploring how these encounters informed debates within the architectural community.

Country Report: France
Paul Sigel

City of tomorrow? French perspectives on post-war reconstruction in Berlin

As one of the three Western occupying powers, France exerted considerable influence on reconstruction planning and architectural discourse in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin. Developments in planning and building in post-war Germany attracted close attention and commentary in France and were also influenced by French project initiatives, while the varied plans for rebuilding war-damaged French cities helped inform debate in Germany. In particular, specialist journals with a broad international readership provided a wealth of illustrative material that attracted attention in both the West and the East, while study tours had a similar impact. Meanwhile, the French media also reported repeatedly and extensively on building activity in Germany. In particular, coverage focused on the planning and implementation of the Interbau exhibition, as well as on numerous individual buildings and technical aspects, while parallels were also drawn with rebuilding activities in the eastern part of Berlin. Perceptions of Karl-Marx-Allee and of construction in Eastern Europe as a whole remained rather detached at first, but by the late 1960s there was broader and more nuanced reporting on planning and construction in the East.

Country Report: Hungary
Melinda Harlov-Csortán

From ‘All that glitters ain’t gold’ to ‘Berlin, how you’ve changed!’

Extensive construction took place across Hungary in response to the destruction of the Second World War and the changes brought about by the country’s incorporation into the Soviet sphere of influence. From the 1960s onwards, efforts were made – with varying degrees of success – to expand the welfare system, and Hungary also displayed a distinctive political and cultural openness within the Eastern Bloc; Western architectural journals became available and popular again, for example. Against this political and ideological backdrop, Hungarian-language print media engaged in a lively discussion of Interbau and the two construction phases of Karl-Marx-Allee (KMA I and KMA II). Some authors took a largely critical view of the Hansaviertel project and its architects, arguing that although it offered a variety of approaches to housing, it could not serve as a universal model for the housing of the future. In other cases, these Berlin developments served as a point of comparison and also a source of inspiration for Hungarian construction and urban planning projects in the second half of the

1960s and the late 1970s. These accounts praised Karl-Marx-Allee for its modernity, facilities and the speed of its development.

Country Report: Italy
Sandra Wagner-Conzelmann

Between total rejection and 'thunderous applause': Italy's reception of the reconstruction projects in divided Berlin

In post-war Italy, the reconstruction projects in divided Berlin met with mixed reactions. In the early 1950s, references to the socialist architecture of Karl-Marx-Allee I (KMA I) were predominantly negative, and at the time of the Interbau exhibition it was rejected as an inadequate approach to rebuilding cities, as was the exhibition itself. From the early 1960s onwards, perceptions of KMA I changed: a decisive factor was a study trip to the GDR in 1961 by a group of young Italian architects. In 1964, Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino and Guido Canella discussed KMA I in the leading architectural journal *Casabella Continuità* as a positive example of a departure from what was seen as dogmatic modernism. This open-minded approach was possible for various reasons. The young generation of Italian architects in the post-war period was seeking a new understanding of modernism that went beyond Italian Rationalism and other modernist approaches of the Fascist era. Furthermore, since they were closely aligned with the Italian Communist Party (PCI), they were less wary of socialist architecture than their colleagues in other Western European countries.

Country Report: Poland
Aleksandra Podlejska

Shifting perspectives: the reception of post-war Berlin projects in the Polish architectural press

This presentation examines the reception of two post-war architectural projects in Berlin – Karl-Marx-Allee and Interbau – in the leading Polish architectural journal *Architektura*. Drawing on articles, travel accounts and impressions, as well as texts translated from the foreign press, it explores how projects on both sides of the divided German capital were received and evaluated, and how they featured in Polish architectural discourse during the Cold War.
Particular attention is paid to the relationship between the projects' ideological and historical context and assessments of their functional, structural and aesthetic solutions. The presentation also explores how the Berlin projects informed the Polish debate on reconstruction and post-war urban planning. Initially regarded as a model of socialist planning and compared with Warsaw's MDM, Karl-Marx-Allee eventually also attracted criticism. The reception of Interbau was ambivalent, combining critical assessment with recognition of some of its technical achievements.
The presentation examines the varied and changing perspectives through which the Berlin projects were viewed, as well as the role of *Architektura* in the transnational circulation of modernist ideas, their selective adoption and critical reinterpretation in Polish architectural and urban planning debate.

Country Report: Soviet Union
Thomas Flierl

Interbau 1957 as a reference point for Soviet reform policy

Shifts in Soviet architectural policy after the Second World War were felt throughout the Eastern Bloc. In architecture, the 'Thaw' under Khrushchev following Stalin's death in 1953 began with the Moscow Construction Conference of 1954 – even before the political reckoning at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Soviet specialist journals radically changed their design and expanded their coverage of architecture and urban planning around the world. Dedicated abstracting journals made summaries of selected Western specialist articles available, and for a time readers could even subscribe directly to Russian translations of Western specialist journals.
The flagship Soviet project, the new Moscow microdistrict of Novye Cheremushki (1956–1958), drew on Soviet concepts from the early 1930s and ideas associated with 'new towns' and 'satellite towns'. It prompted particular interest in the development of Interbau 1957, irrespective of the political debate over Berlin's status under Allied authority. Articles appeared and a deputy construction minister of the RSFSR even wrote an entire booklet on housing at Interbau. The 1958 UIA Congress in Moscow also encouraged this openness.

Country Report: Sweden
Nils Exner

‘An architectural Cold War’: Sweden’s contrasting responses to East and West Berlin

Interbau 1957 was a major media event in ‘neutral’ Sweden. Daily newspapers, radio and architectural journals reported on it for months, while travel agencies advertised Berlin as a city where visitors could experience the Cold War through architecture. Architects and planners wrote for a wide readership: rather than being confined to specialist circles, housing and urban planning had been matters of broad public debate in Sweden ever since the 1930s. Reports combined admiration with critical distance: they praised the exhibition’s boldness and international standing, as well as the green spaces in central Berlin, but the prevailing view was that many of the urban planning principles on display were already outdated. Much of what Berlin presented had been discussed in Sweden years earlier, and some ideas had already been set aside. Karl-Marx-Allee received far less attention: it was discussed mainly as East Germany’s answer to Interbau, with the two projects compared as expressions of rival political systems. Rather than being examined in detail, its first construction phase was viewed as authoritarian and outdated, while its second was received favourably and seen as part of a shared post-war modernism that transcended the bloc divide.

Country Report: United Kingdom
Laura Bowie

Rebuilding Cities, Reimagining Nations: Britain Looks to Postwar Berlin

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Britain faced the challenge of rebuilding not only its devastated cities, but also its national identity. From the Festival of Britain (date) to the New Towns programme (date), architecture and planning became central to articulating a new social vision amid the emergence of the welfare state and Britain's changing international position. Berlin's reconstruction offered British architects and planners a point of comparison through which to examine their own ambitions for postwar urban life. Responses to the Interbau reflected debates about housing, openness, community and individuality, while assessments of Stalinallee exposed the influence of Cold War politics and Britain's evolving relationship with the socialist world. This paper argues that British interpretations of Berlin's competing architectural visions were shaped as much by domestic aspirations and anxieties as by the political divisions of the Cold War.

Country Report: USA
Laura Bowie

Building Freedom: American Architecture and Cultural Diplomacy in Cold War Berlin

Emerging from the Second World War with unprecedented economic strength and international influence, the United States increasingly mobilised architecture and culture to project its vision of modernity, prosperity and freedom abroad. In West Berlin, an extensive programme of cultural diplomacy sought to make American political ideals visible through buildings, exhibitions and institutions. Yet architectural responses to Berlin's reconstruction were not determined by these political ambitions alone. Through debates surrounding the Kongresshalle, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's criticism of the Hansaviertel and American assessments of East German building policy, this paper examines how architectural discourse both reinforced and complicated the ideological polarisations of the Cold War. It argues that Berlin was not simply a showcase for American modernity, but a site where the relationship between architectural form, political ideology and cultural influence was actively negotiated.

Country Report: Yugoslavia
Jelica Jovanović

Old news from Berlin: Yugoslav media and the two Berlin reconstructions, 1949–1957

Yugoslav media coverage of two post-war reconstruction sites in Berlin – Karl-Marx-Allee (KMA I–II) in East Berlin and Interbau 1957 in West Berlin – reveals how a non-aligned socialist country presented rebuilding efforts in East and West Germany to its audiences. The research draws on specialist Yugoslav journals: few in number, these were concentrated in Zagreb and Belgrade, and they were largely focused on engineering, with only occasional reports on projects abroad. Coverage of Karl-Marx-Allee and Interbau was rather limited and has been pieced together from daily press reports, magazines, newsreels and surviving photographic archives.

Two circumstances help explain this limited coverage. Firstly, the construction of Karl-Marx-Allee coincided with Yugoslavia's isolation following its split with the Cominform in 1948, and there was no direct contact between Yugoslavia and East Germany until 1957. Secondly, Interbau 1957 opened in the year Yugoslavia recognised East Germany, prompting West Germany to sever diplomatic relations under the Hallstein Doctrine.

This paper argues that Yugoslav media did not treat the KMA and Interbau as models worth emulating. Instead, they either ignored them or presented them as "old news", overtaken by the momentum of Yugoslavia's own modernisation – the Belgrade Fair, advances in prefabrication technology, regional planning projects and architectural exports.