

## **Workshop**

### ***“Reconsidering Construction History – Configurations and Challenges of the Construction Industry in the High Modern Era (1880–1970)”***

Venue: Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum & Hoesch Museum, Dortmund

Date: Fri./Sat. November 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> 2024

### ***Preliminary remarks***

*The aim of the workshop is to make a programmatic contribution to the Construction History. We encourage contributors to give short inputs of approximately 15 minutes only, dominated by rather methodological reflections. The workshop discussions will provide the basis for the development of the contributions, which will then result in an intended publication (for example, a special issue of „Aedificare“).*

### **Concept**

The promise of progress in the high modern era (1880–1970) also extended to the building industry. It fundamentally included exploring new building materials (such as (reinforced) concrete and steel) as well as serial production, mechanization processes on construction sites and the scientification of the building industry. The Fordist logic of production, emerging in the 1920s, had a strong influence on the field of architectural knowledge and is clearly reflected in Ernst Neufert's "Bauentwurfslehre" (Theory of Building Design) published in 1936. Here, architectural design is defined as an almost “technocratic” act – i.e. determined by technology, bureaucracy, and functionality.

Standardization, patenting, typification, and seriality are the characteristics of construction in the high modern era. At the same time and in connection with this, a wide range of diverse problems arose. For the development of ever new, supposedly improved building materials, new collaborations had to be entered into that had not previously been tried and tested. These included collaborations between the construction and the chemical industry, for example.

(New) hybrid networks of actors had to be established, whose communication was not free of conflict due to different, industry-specific general principles (“Leitbilder”).

Serially produced houses demanded new, different practices of maintenance and repair, which seemed solvable by means of construction logics of the high modern era. An example are the concrete replacement parts in the German Democratic Republic's prefab buildings (“Plattenbauten”). However, such practices only postponed problems. Through departmental research (“Ressortforschung”), the state also exerted greater influence on the construction

industry and its activities, intervening in a technical-regulatory way and by doing so, ultimately regulating the market. The success or failure of construction innovations was decided against the backdrop of this sketchy structure of the construction industry in the high modern era. This development should also be taken into account when addressing questions about the valuation and valorisation of buildings dating from this period.

Using examples of prefabricated houses and selected building structures, we will explore four subject areas:

- A) **"Rationalities" in the construction industry of the high modern era:** On the one hand, this topic refers to the instruments that prompted the processes outlined above, specifically the patents and the standards. On the other hand, it refers to the processes themselves, in particular the typification and seriality. While the former are questioned regarding their procedural significance, the latter will be based on the contexts of meaning underlying the thematic discourses. Their significance for building in the high modern era has been little focused on. Taking a closer look at them can also lead to outlining specific innovation processes in the building industry.

Participants/speakers:

Tiago Matthes (ETH Zurich): "Patents and standardisation"

Sarah M. Schlachetzki (ETH Zurich): "'help saving time and money!' – Rapidbalken. On the history of a licensed building product"

- B) **"Economies" of construction in the high modern era:** With this topic, we are addressing a complex field of the building industry. The focus is on the knowledge networks that have emerged, for example, for the development of composite building materials. We look at the after-effects of these building materials in the construction industry (and university teaching), the marketing strategies of construction companies and the establishment of new production sites or necessary adjustments to existing ones.

Participants/speakers:

Tobias Nolteklocke (Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf): "Institutionalised material testing"

Igor Bloch (Ghent University): "Unpacking Colonial Narratives: A Critical Reading of Prefabricated Housing Advertising in Post-War Belgian Congo"

- C) **"Materialities" of high-modern construction:** The promise of progress in the construction industry of the high modern era was based above all on ever new, more efficient and/or more cost-effective building materials. In some cases, construction companies had to look for uses for these materials in others they developed customised materials for specific applications in construction. It is therefore not only interesting to analyse their historical emergence and the associated promises, but also the aspect of how new building materials were established on the market or how they have diffused from their intended uses into other areas. The focus is also on the state testing authorities and their role in and for the development and implementation of new building materials.

Participants/speakers:

Stephanie Van de Voorde (VUB Brussel)/Laurence Heindryckx (VUB Brussel) (?):  
"Between resistance and resilience. 'Le traditional évolué' and the dialectics of construction in Belgium in the 1950s"

Silke Haps (DBM/montan.dok, Bochum): "'Stahl mit Pfiff und Farbe (Platal)' and the West German steel company Hoesch's approaches to prefabrication in the 1960s"

- D) **"Valuation" and valorisation of high-modern buildings:** In the heritage conservation discourse buildings of the high modern era are playing an increasingly important role. They pose a challenge to the traditional values of heritage conservation and require new justifications and the formulation of new values – not least due to their mass and seriality as well as the significance of their construction. The cultural valorisation of this building stock goes beyond this and can be based on established discourse strategies from the fields of public history, museums, and industrial heritage.

Participants/speakers:

Lena Zirkel (DBM/montan.dok, Bochum): "Public History and Public Awareness"

Isolde Parussel (Hoesch Museum Dortmund): "How to musealise a modern building?"

Andreas Putz (TU Munich): "Monument values of ultra-modern buildings"

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