Call for papers
Modelling Social Housing
The Relational Aesthetics of European Social Housing Estates

20-21 April 2023

An International Interdisciplinary Conference Hosted by
the National Museum of Denmark and Aarhus School of Architecture

Keynote speakers
Professor Albena Yaneva, University of Manchester
Professor Helena Mattsson, KTH School of Architecture

With this conference, we aim to fundamentally recast our understanding of the relationship between architecture and social life in order to suggest new designs and innovative solution models for building socially and environmentally sustainable urban environments. We do so by investigating the dynamic and co-constitutive relationship between social life and the built environment in social housing estates in European cities spanning past, present, and future perspectives.

The speculative claim that we want to explore is that social housing estates already contain the resources for their own sustainability. We suggest that geometrical and measurable designs encompass a multitude of flexible and diverse social uses and material practices that are relatively unexplored by architects and planners but which serve to tackle a variety of challenges. As such the daily routines that connect residents and architecture give rise to new and sophisticated social-cum-material models developed from within the housing estates. We suggest that by experimentally exploring the intricate relationship between social life and the built environments, we may develop a dynamic and immediately applicable archive of what we define as 'social urban models', that is, operative templates for sustainable urban development based on existing social and architectural resources in present and past social housing estates.

During the last Century, social housing has been crucial for imagining, making and experiencing European welfare societies. During this period, numerous models and prototypes for social housing have been developed to offer new frames for imagining the relationship between everyday life and the spatialization of welfare societies. It might be argued that a key characteristic of social housing is that it has always been susceptible to the tinkering with and manipulation of political and societal ideals, prone to re-conceptualizations, reframings, and social and physical alterations. With this conference, we speculate that we still need to capture the productive 'model-making capacities' embedded in these processes.

A number of socio-political and environmental challenges have reconfigured the relationship between the welfare state, the built environment, and social life in many European cities. Given the weakening of central administrative resources combined with pronounced ideological shifts in a number of European nation-states, we have seen an increased tendency towards the decentralization of welfare provisions and a push for local communities to assume a more active role regarding the social and environmental sustainability of the cities.

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Based on the local (modular) regularizations that emerge from the repeated engagements between differently positioned urbanites and the built environments of social housing estates, might we develop more sophisticated and genuinely engaged social urban models for participatory urban development? What can be learned, for instance, from residents' daily social and spatial negotiations of belonging, community, privacy, sound-hazards, access to common spaces, or dealings with public waste management? And might it be possible to identify sites and locations that are especially prone to acts of communitarian care and involvement?

The conference seeks to address the changing relations between architecture and social life by focusing on four interrelated themes

1. Formal/in-formal
Formal and informal (re)presentations serve different purposes. The tone, the choice of words, ways or visualizations, and the multiple ways that they are put together vary greatly depending on the degree of formality. Formal (re)presentations of the world may be activated through professional or academic activities, such as research projects and architectural contests, yet they often also claim to represent the modulations of the different kinds of informalities that they investigate. How might we productively challenge and critically engage with the translational processes that connect formal and informal (re)presentations? How are different kinds of (in)formal communities inscribed in the material fabric of social housing estates? And what motivates residents to engage or withdraw from participation in communities that straddle the divide between the formal and the informal?

2. Concrete/abstract
How are abstract ideas and ideals such as 'residents-democracy', 'the mixed city', 'community', or 'welfare' enacted in different social practices and imprinted in the built environment of social housing estates? And to what extent do they assert themselves differently depending on positionality and relational capacities, e.g. state authorities, architects, residents, housing associations, and urban planners? What are the scalar moves by which abstract ideals are negotiated and eventually end up having concrete and material effects? And how do concrete socio-material processes, say, the decay of buildings, the reduction of resources to local administrative authorities, etc., impinge on the detached - abstract -imaginations of social housing estates which are formulated and enacted elsewhere (urban management, political decision-making, etc.)?

3. Scale and complexity
The size, meticulousness, and endurance of a model define not only its appearance but also its significance in architectural, social, and historical processes of urban development. Hence, what role does scale and complexity play in defining, designing, and analyzing the urban environments of social housing estates in European cities? Does the phenomenon in question– be it social, architectural, economic, aesthetic, etc. – undergo transformation depending on the scalar moves, and, if so, how? What does it take for an object or phenomenon to remain stable across different scales? And how do differences in how a phenomenon is represented relate to the work of scales? Indeed, how might we understand the interplay between temporality, materiality, and analytical objects in relation to size and scale?

4. Models and prototypes

If architecture is to serve productive societal change it must have the potential to be (1) a model for the future as e.g., an iconic or inspiring driving force or material pre-figuration of ideal societies yet to develop and (2) a model of the present and past ideals e.g., the material translation of societal or political values, showing the eternally (of its time) correct standards of life and society. But how does architecture serve as both models 'for' and models 'of'? What makes us keep some models while discarding others and how do these choices affect the histories and myths that models over time come to embody? Also, what allows for the stability of a model, and when does it stop being a model? Considering the modelling of architecture, we may also have to consider what or who models what? Might it be possible to develop architectural models based on insights from residents' modelling work, as it were, for how to manage their present and future lives? How can we archive and repurpose our knowledge about models? And is architecture inherently prototypical, manipulated and in constant flux?

Overall, this conference welcomes diverse contributions that explore the intersections,exchanges, and interconnectedness between social life and the built environment in social housing estates in European cities.

We warmly invite scholars, and practitioners at all career stages, disciplines, genders, and ethnicities as well as methodological and theoretical approaches to submit abstracts that explore the above-described themes.

Logistics

The conference will be held at the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen from 20-21 April 2023. It is hosted by the research project ´Flexible Communities´ and thereby organized as a cooperative effort between the Centre for Social Urban Modelling (SUMO) at the National Museum of Denmark and
Aarhus School of Architecture.

Participation fee is 500DK and covers the conference dinner on April 20 and lunch as well as coffee at all days. It will be possible for scholars without funding to apply for a limited number of bursaries to cover the conference fee.

Paper proposals and submission details

Paper proposals must include a title, an abstract (max 300 words) and a short bio of the presenter including institutional affiliation, if applicable, as well as the contact details.

The abstract should indicate how it relates to at least one of the four themes mentioned above.

Proposals must be submitted via mail to **Marie-Louise.Ryborg.Kjeldsen@natmus.dk**

Deadline for submission of paper proposals: January 15, 2023.

Notification of acceptance: February 1, 2023.

Registration will be via a conference website which will be available in mid-January