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Experts, export, and the entanglements of global planning

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Editorial

Experts, Export, and the Entanglements of Global Planning¹

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Abstract

After the conferences in Bretton Woods (1944) and San Francisco (1945), and especially with the implementation of widespread technical assistance policies of the Point Four Program (1949), teams of experts composed primarily of architects, but also economists, sociologists and anthropologists, began to gravitate around supranational organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. A key centre of focus of their interest was that new independent world that emerged from colonial rule and stepped onto the global stage for the first time in search of legitimacy and technical emancipation. The modernisation of third countries, a flagship of international policy in the early 1960s, opened the door to a holistic and intrinsically global approach. Building on this foundation, this monographic issue of *Planning Perspectives* aims to investigate the role supranational organisations played in the design discourse and the rise of 'global experts' especially but not exclusively in the aftermath of WWII. Researchers draw on case studies such as development plans and housing schemes, but also events related to dissemination or training programmes – in order to critically frame the profile of the 'global expert', the role of supranational institutions and the legacy of their actions in the contemporary world.

Keywords:

technical assistance; global experts; UN Development decades; international organisations; modernisation

Introduction

Over the past two decades, scholars have initiated a process aimed at challenging consolidated interpretations of modernisation in the so-called Third World countries, underscoring the complexity of the intertwining of knowledge and actors that make up the framework. This has contributed to the deconstruction of certain myths and the questioning of epicentres, including that of Western supremacy in development.² Łukasz Stanek's research showed how, despite the Cold War, the international circulation of Eastern European architects, designers and construction companies had never stopped and that 'global socialism' had left an important mark on cities such as Accra, Baghdad, Lagos and

¹ The topics of the editorial and the special issue were discussed at the seminar series entitled *Experts, Exports, and the Entanglements of Global Planning*, held online between September and December 2021 as part of the GUDesign Network project. While the editors fully shared the contents of the editorial, and in particular the introduction and conclusions, the chapter "Surveying, mapping, communicating the unknown" is attributed to Ines Tolic and "The greatest design project" to Filippo De Dominicis. The editors take this opportunity to thank all the authors and Heleni Porfyriou for having strongly supported the project from the beginning.

² Lu, *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity*.

even Abu Dhabi.³ At the same time, researchers from the territories of the former Yugoslavia unveiled a ‘non-aligned’ storyline related to architectural and urban planning production, revealing the political (as well as economic) implications of transnational collaboration. These strands of research have challenged the prominence of the United States in post-World War II historiography in terms of both technical assistance and business relations with developing countries.⁴ Simply stated, thanks to the opening of new routes in the established geographies of history, a more articulate understanding of the complex relationship between modernity and development is gradually gaining ground, resulting in the acquisition of a long ignored dimension of modern architecture and planning.⁵ Much, however, remains to be done.

Considered by some ‘an immense design project itself’, nowadays development seems to have become a crucial area of research for understanding the system of power and knowledge created between technologically more advanced countries and those that are considered developing.⁶ As the noted Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy (1900-1989) pointed out during one of his missions to Africa on behalf of Constantinos A. Doxiadis’s studio, this immense design project materialised in the interweaving of a large number of professional profiles, very different in terms of provenance, objectives and skills, all temporarily engaged in consultancy work outside their own country:

As I travelled, I found in every town that the hotels were full and the offices buzzing with every kind of expert. There were economists, agriculturalists, educationists, engineers, sociologists, experts in cows, trees, grass, ships, sand and insects, there were journalists and people writing books, people from UNESCO, FAO, WHO, from USA and the USSR, from every organization, university and nation under the sun. All these planners are working in isolation, ignorant of what others are doing, even suspicious each other, engaged ad hoc ..., each packing at this own part of the problem and wasting all efforts.⁷

Reasoning precisely on the entanglements of planning during the Development decades, this monographic issue of *Planning Perspectives* addresses the topic of development by questioning the role of organisations, foundations, and agencies that, through their ‘experts’, have operated in a pervasive and widespread manner in what more recently begun to be called the Global South.⁸ This way we can seek to contribute to ongoing efforts and at the same time fill what seems to us to be a bibliographical gap. In fact, it seems to us that scholars have mainly focused on certain more prominent figures, such as Constantinos Doxiadis or Michel Écochard, or on their more ambitious projects such as Islamabad or Casablanca. Without detracting from the importance of these works, we believe that the myth of development and the ideal of international cooperation can best be understood by analysing the work of transnational organisations in a historical perspective.

³ Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*.

⁴ See for example Sekulić, “Energoprojekt in Nigeria,” 200-229, and Smode Cvitanović, “Tracing the Non-Aligned Architecture: Environments of Technical Cooperation and the Work of Croatian Architects in Kumasi, Ghana (1961-1970),” 34-67.

⁵ Muzaffar, *The Periphery Within. Modern Architecture and the Making of the Third World*; Prakash, Casciato, Coslett, *Rethinking Global Modernism: Architectural Historiography and the Postcolonial*, 2022.

⁶ Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative, *Architecture in Development: Systems and the Emergence of the Global South*, 2022.

⁷ Fathy, “Africa – Case studies of cities visited – Some conclusions,” 6.

⁸ Dados, “Connell, The Global South,” 12-13.

To begin this reasoning, we need to start at least from the 19th century, i.e. when the processes of political, social and economic internationalisation had begun to become more and more pervasive, not failing to invest the debate on home and city as well. The need to coordinate these efforts resulted in the establishment of governmental and non-governmental organisations that, through their work, made a decisive contribution to the design disciplines, effectively broadening both their range of interest and action. The British Garden City Association, commonly considered the first to deal specifically with housing and planning, was founded in 1899, and in 1913 evolved into the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning. The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) was founded in 1913 in the Netherlands, while the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) was founded in Switzerland in 1928. After World War II, the need to establish bodies capable of tackling housing problems in a coordinated, international manner grew stronger. Thus, in 1948 the International Union of Architects (UIA) was established, and shortly afterwards in February 1949 the United Nations Technical Working Group on Housing and Town and Country Planning, 'a subsidiary of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, which serves as one of the links between the United Nations and its specialised agencies'. The main objective was the construction of an 'effective and integrated work programme in the field of housing and town and country planning that would reflect the interests and activities of the specialised agencies, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations and units of the United Nations Secretariat'.⁹

In the meantime, these organisations, specifically dedicated to settlement and urban issues, had been joined by others with broader objectives, such as the Red Cross founded in 1863, the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913, or the Ford Foundation in 1936. Over the years, a dense network of collaborations also developed between these associations. For example, 'between the two world wars the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as well as non-governmental organisations such as the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning carried out a number of valuable studies on...housing policies, housing standards and slum clearance'.¹⁰ In 1951, CIAM concluded a cooperation agreement with the UIA while IFHTP had, and still has, consultant status with both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)¹¹.

While formally neutral, the organisations were far from immune to the demands of politics. This characteristic, which had always been present, emerged more strongly after the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference in Bretton Woods (1-22 July 1944) and the San Francisco Conference (25 April - 26 June 1945). The instrumental relationship linking design and politics became even stronger in 1949, when US President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) announced the famous Point Four Program. As is well known, Truman's speech outlined a programme of technical assistance to underdeveloped countries that, where practical, was to be operated through the United Nations and its specialised agencies. The aim was to ease political turmoil through the use of technical aid. Shortly afterwards, indeed, the United Nations established the Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance and the Technical Assistance Board, which inaugurated a long season of international missions. The growing interest in development was exemplified by a growing number of networking events, the foundation of planning schools and/or the establishment of offices dedicated to specific issues. In

⁹ "UN convenes Working Group on Housing and Planning," 51.

¹⁰ "International Organizations and Housing," 47.

¹¹ Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on urbanism, 1928-1960*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2000, 168 and 313-314. See also "The International Labour Organization and Housing," 48-51.

1950 the first technical mission of the United Nations in South-East Asia began and in 1953 the first regional office for technical assistance was established in India after the initiative of Ernst Weissmann and under the responsibility of Jaqueline Tyrwhitt.¹² At the same time, the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning organised the South East Asia Regional Conference with the goal of systematising what had been done so far in the field of assistance. The event was attended by well-known and lesser-known names from the contemporary development program system: Ernest Weissmann, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Jacob L. Crane, and Constantinos A. Doxiadis, along with Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, Charles Abrams, Arie Sharon and others, all engaged in community development and planning in Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Israel, Jordan, Ghana, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.¹³ At the conclusion of the seminar, the UN officer Ernest Weissmann (1903-1985) stressed the urgency of new solutions, extensive and robust, that could grasp the spirit of what has been developed so far by individual communities. Over the years, initiatives about building and housing were recontextualised within the broader theme of planning to finally embrace the regional dimension at the Tokyo UN Seminar on Regional Planning in 1958. As the operational dimension grew, the geographical scope of reference also changed. Against the growing and consolidating East-West contraposition, the exclusive interest in the settlement condition of South-East Asia left room for broader development strategies. The economic implications of these are not to be forgotten either: as Nancy Kwak has demonstrated, houses, house ownership and national housing policies are to be understood both as a tool of foreign policy and a vehicle for international investment. The modernisation of Third World countries, a flagship of international policy between 1950s and 1970s, opened the door to a holistic and intrinsically global approach that became the core of Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme established after the Vancouver UN Conference held in 1976. In order to critically frame the profile of the 'global expert', the role of supranational institutions and above all the legacy of their actions in the contemporary world, it is necessary to draw on case studies that range from development plans and housing schemes, dissemination events and training programmes that were designed to suite a world still mostly unknown.

Surveying, mapping, communicating the unknown

'The magnitude and gravity of housing problems in various parts of the world, and the advisability of providing for exchange of views and constant liaison between the technical experts of the various nations' was recognised by the UN General Assembly as early as 14 December 1946.¹⁴ On the same occasion it was decided to entrust the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the task of 'studying the question of providing effective ways and means for furnishing, in co-operation with the specialised agencies, expert advice in the economic, social and cultural field to Member nations who desire this assistance'.¹⁵ In the years to come, through the coordinated action of specialised agencies, and through the field activities of their 'experts', the United Nations took the lead in the areas of

¹² Shoshkes, *Jaqueline Tyrwhitt: A Transnational Life in Urban Planning and Design*, 155-162.

¹³ IFHTP, *South East Asia Regional Conference* (New Delhi, February 1-5, 1954) and UN, *Regional Seminar on Housing & Community Improvement* (New Delhi, January 21 - February 17, 1954).

¹⁴ Housing and Town Planning [1946] UNGA 93; A/RES/53 (I) (14 December 1946).

¹⁵ Provision of Expert Advice by the United Nations to Member States [1946] UNGA 94; A/RES/52 (I) (14 December 1946).

housing and planning. Housing and planning also appeared on the title page of the *United Nations Bulletin*, published from November 1948 with the aim of ‘providing information useful to policy making officials and administrators on the one hand and to technicians on the other’.¹⁶

The UN's activities on these two fronts, brought together years later under the more nebulous ‘human settlements’,¹⁷ were varied and ranged from the study of minimum housing standards and problems relating to building materials and methods of construction, to the drafting of trans-national urban or infrastructure projects.¹⁸ However specific or ambitious these programmes might have been, the issue of housing was unquestionably the focus of all of them:

[T]he word *home* is used to signify the physical environment of family life - the house and household equipment, the neighborhood (urban and rural), the town, and the community facilities. It follows that housing and town planning and country planning are measures for improving the homes of the people. We are therefore dealing with a broad field of human activity in which the world-wide critical shortage of housing constitutes the present focus of interest¹⁹.

Given both the quantity and variety of works, not to mention their impact, it is necessary to consider the UN as an active player in both the transformation processes of the built environment and a new, supranational and multidisciplinary way of understanding it. In fact, under the aegis of the body, each of its agencies helped to develop a specific aspect:

[f]or example, the International Labour Organization is concerned with certain specific social and economic problems related to housing, such as the relation between rent and family income, methods for increasing productivity in construction, working conditions in the building trade, etc.; the World Health Organization has an interest in housing standards and sanitation, while the Food and Agriculture Organization is concerned with living conditions and housing of the agricultural population, as well as with the uses of timber for building purposes.²⁰

Specific problems were addressed through ‘missions’ led by so-called ‘international development experts’. These were highly specialised personnel that the organisation relied on to provide support to so-called Third World countries during what was called the ‘Age of Development’.²¹ A non-exhaustive list of experts around the United Nations was drawn up for Habitat, a conference entirely dedicated to Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development. A copy of this document is now in the archive of Constantinos A. Doxiadis, one of the most important UN ‘experts’ at the time.²² This list is organised by geographical area and includes many well-known and lesser-known names from the contemporary design scene. Among these, for Asia one could cite the Harvard educated Singapore-based architect William ‘Willy’ Lim (1932) or the renowned Japanese economist Shigeto

¹⁶ “Forward,” 1.

¹⁷ D’Auria, De Meulder, Shannon, *Human Settlements: Formulations and (re)Calibrations*, 8-27.

¹⁸ “International Organizations and Housing,” 47-53.

¹⁹ Crane, “Governments and the Homes of People,” 6.

²⁰ “Review of United Nations activities in the field of housing and town and country planning,” 68.

²¹ Hodge, “British Colonial Expertise, Post Colonial Careerism and the Early History of International Development,” 46.

²² Bromley, “Towards Global Human Settlements: Constantinos Doxiadis as Entrepreneur, Coalition-Builder and Visionary,” 316-340.

Tsuru (1912-2006); for Africa the director of the Building Research Institute in Kumasi and future vice president of Ghana, Joseph W.S. de Graft-Johnson (1933-1999); for Europe, the French ecologist and secretary general of the Haut Comité de l'Environnement Serge Antoine (1927-2006) and the director of the Development Planning Unit at the University College of London Otto Königsberger (1908-1999); for Latin America, the sociologist and future president of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1931) and the Cuban architect Selma Diaz, director of the Cuban Instituto de Planificación Física for Latin America; finally, for North America, the president and founder of The Urban Institute in Washington William Gorham (1930-2021) and the architect Peter Oberlander (1922-2008) who, after receiving his doctorate in Urban and Regional Planning from Harvard University, founded the Centre for Human Settlements at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.²³ The depth of these professionals, who are associated with brilliant political careers or important professional achievements, leave no doubt as to the quality of the network built by the United Nations to promote higher standards of living, social progress and economic development.²⁴

The number of projects undertaken during the Development decades, the diversity of experiences and the multitude of experts involved do not make it easy to think in abstract terms. However, it is possible to sketch a number of common elements: in particular, a professional profile and a set of tasks, with minor variations, reflecting the *modus operandi* of the institutions for which these 'experts' were called to advise.

As an example, one could cite the Egyptian government's request for a consultant in 'village planning and rural housing' submitted to the Technical Assistance Administration of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in April 1955. The request called for various activities to be carried out with a 'team of experts appointed by the United Nations and its specialised agencies'. The work, to be started 'as soon as possible', would preferably be entrusted to an expert with an engineering background and experience 'in low-cost housing in particular with regard to the development of low-cost shelters in rural areas...'. The task, to be carried out over one year, comprised a data collection phase, a project design phase and finally a training phase.²⁵ Despite the appellation by which their role and action was recognised, however, the experts knew very little about the local realities in which they were called upon to intervene. In this phase of first contact with the territory to be planned, the experts acted as true explorers, making their way through the customs, cultures and practices adopted in geographical areas about which there was very little knowledge at the time. By the admission of Leonard Rist (1905-1982), a World Bank official based in New York since its inception, even in the mid-1950s experts were the vanguard of a learning process with respect to places and populations about which practically nothing was known, and for which the model of a physical picture obliterated by wartime events, as in the case of the old continent reconstructed at the aftermath of the conflict²⁶. For this reason, the survey was the first and, in some ways, the most important of the actions taken. The most emblematic case that could be referred to is probably the survey carried out at the end of the Second World War by the Economic Commission for Europe to quantify the housing needs of the European peoples. Once systematised, the data collected flowed into the report *Housing Needs*

²³ "List of experts."

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

²⁵ United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, "Request from the Government of Egypt, 21 April 1955."

²⁶ Rist, "Interview transcript," 60.

and Programmes compiled under the supervision of – and not by chance – Constantinos A. Doxiadis.²⁷ The information acquired and the reports prepared by the experts served as a basis for setting up the project work, but also for drafting more popular texts. In fact, the report on the housing situation in Europe was used as a basis by Ernest Weissmann, at the time Director of the Industry and Materials Division of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, for the article “Grave Deficit of Dwelling in Postwar Europe”, published in the UN *Bulletin* and intended for the organisation's associates.²⁸

The surveys might have been less structured, but this made them no less rich in useful information. Some of these included photographs and sketches, in some cases even video material. An interesting case from this point of view is Skopje, where several international experts converged after the earthquake of 26 July 1963. Among them was Maurice Rotival who arrived on 19 September 1963, and who had been given the task of helping the government of Yugoslavia to prepare a request for intervention to be submitted to the UN Special Fund.²⁹ During the six weeks he stayed in Skopje, assigned the task of investigating the situation in the earthquake-affected city, Rotival took numerous notes and drew what he saw, leaving a trace in his notebooks of the catastrophic situation in the capital. In February 1965 other designers arrived in Skopje, including Luigi Piccinato. His photographs dwell on the ‘old’ part of the city, where some signs of the Ottoman past were still visible. What seemed to Piccinato to be a historical urban landscape, and as such was emphasised in the plan for the reconstruction of the city, seemed to others a sign of backwardness. Because of this misunderstanding, due to an irreconcilable differences between the position of the local population and the ideas of the international planner, Piccinato's proposal was immediately discarded.³⁰ To conclude the argument, it could be said that the documentation produced more or less formally by the experts during the survey phase often took a back seat to the actual project. Yet photographs, sketches and notes should not be understood as products of little interest, but as an integral part of the design process. Cases such as Rotival or Piccinato demonstrate the importance of this material which, without yet being a project, in fact already contained the main traits.

The information acquisition phase was followed by the actual planning phase. Entrusted with the development of ‘housing, public buildings, roads, sanitary provisions, etc.’, the experts were called upon to consider the quality of life as a whole, paying particular attention to ‘health, educational and other social aspects’.³¹ The study of space – and through it the organisation of people's social life – represented a particularly tough challenge for the experts. While they had to be designed for non-Western uses, customs and climates, reproducibility had to be ensured by employing a labour force and a class of technicians trained from scratch. Above all, one must consider the limited time spent by the experts in the host country, which, as in the case of the Egyptian project, was often limited to a few months, sometimes a year, and only rarely for longer periods. From this point of view, the training of the local population, the choice of materials to be used according to the construction techniques considered most appropriate were not choices of secondary importance. The system of ‘aided

²⁷ UN Economic Commission for Europe, *Housing Needs and Programmes*.

²⁸ Weissmann, ‘Grave Deficit of Dwellings in Postwar Europe,’ 15.

²⁹ Rotival, “The Report to Technical Assistance.” On Rotival, see Hein, “Maurice Rotival: Franch Planning on a World-Scale (parts I and II),” 325-344.

³⁰ Piccinato with Studio Scimemi, *Preliminary plan for the central area of the city of Skopje*, 1965.

³¹ United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, “Request from the Government of Egypt, 21 April 1955.”

self help', articulated most fully by Jacob L. Crane at the Housing and Home Finance Agency in Washington, DC, encouraged towards an empowerment of the local population who were left with the task of finishing the work begun.³² Beneath this rhetoric, which viewed development as a neutral language, however, lay a claim to hegemony of which few seemed to be aware.³³ In fact, in many cases the techniques adopted were completely foreign to the local production context, inspired by criteria of efficiency and optimisation of processes proper to a federated world under the aegis of modernisation: 'not charity, but an actual business', according to the then Special Fund president Paul G. Hoffman (1891-1974).³⁴ On the other hand, it is also true that many of the experts looked with interest at the methods and solutions already developed by the local populations, warning them of the risk associated with the forced importation of the means of production and the alienation that could result. As Jaqueline Tyrwhitt pointed out in the 1954 exhibition *The Modern Village*: 'There would not be no objection to villagers using even the modern machineries and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others'.³⁵ Beyond the contradictions, the magnitude of the problem and the brevity of the missions dictated an active role for the population, and soon the issue of training came to the fore.³⁶ At the conclusion of the task force through South East Asia, which began with the UN Mission of Tropical Housing and ended with the first United Nations Regional Seminar on Housing and Community Improvement in New Delhi, and faced with the growing magnitude of the rural problem, Ernst Weissmann emphasised the importance of an imaginative approach to be sought, in the first instance, through widespread educational processes:

Eventually planning schools should be established in each country or State in Southeast Asia. The needs for students interested in planning throughout the region are somewhat similar, and this fact should be taken into account in developing the curricula for those schools which are first established, as these will have to serve as "regional" schools for the time being.³⁷

In some cases, experts endeavoured to pass on their own way of doing things, in others the need arose to build more structured pathways, capable of guaranteeing continuous training of personnel capable of setting up, developing and managing a territorial development project. The definition of these tools and their proliferation after World War II could also be attributed to the growing complexities associated with design, its productive background and the progressive expansion of the designer's profession, which was forced to measure itself against scales ranging from 'units as small as a bed' to entities 'as large as the entire surface of the planet'.³⁸ In highly critical contexts, the acquisition of data and its subsequent systematisation became a matter of primary importance. At the same time, the need emerged to organise the dissemination of the information gathered through reliable, useful channels. It is in fact no coincidence that at the first meeting of the United Nations Technical Working Group on Housing and Town and Country Planning the decision was taken to establish 'a centralised

³² Harris, "The silence of the experts: 'Aided self-help housing,' 1939-1954," 165-189.

³³ Kwak, *A World of Homeowners*.

³⁴ Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 32-33.

³⁵ Tyrwhitt, "The village center," 5.

³⁶ Pacheco, "The Impact of Post-War Transnational Consultants in Housing and Planning Development Narratives: The Case of Otto Koenigsberger," 321-335.

³⁷ "Training for town and country planning," 110.

³⁸ Tyrwhitt, "Planning Tools and Grids," 448 and 451.

reference centre...developed for the exchange of information regarding proposed inquiries as well as of questionnaires, circular letters and reference material, with the card index system”,³⁹ while the better organised offices began to carry out simulations and scenarios through the use of the first computers.⁴⁰

Therefore, in a largely yet-undiscovered world the construction of a network of knowledge and channels for the communication of information gathered or results acquired was an issue of particular relevance.⁴¹ With the aim of ‘facilitating exchange of experience in housing and town and country planning’, in November 1948 the United Nations published the first issue of the *Bulletin*, which featured contributions by planners such as Walter Gropius (1883-1969) or J. J. P. Oud (1890-1963), institutional representatives such as Ernest Weissmann or Jacob L. Crane, as well as research findings on local materials, national policies and global aspirations. The insistence on communication aimed at fostering the construction of shared knowledge on housing, building and planning represents a fundamental aspect to understand the *modus operandi* of the United Nations: one need only consider the number of journals and manuals, conferences and workshops, exhibitions and displays organised by the body to understand the extent of the effort to promote a global, shared knowledge, a ‘standard’ – to quote one of the most controversial but most often-used words in those days. The idea that a shared knowledge of housing could be defined stemmed from the typical belief of the period that ‘particular local problems are in effect world-wide’.⁴² With the benefit of hindsight, we know that this was not actually the case and that the ideals of cooperation, aid and assistance also concealed forced impositions, which paved the way for forcing, misunderstandings and problems that have yet to be solved today.

In this regard, one could cite the First Conference on the History of Urban and Regional Planning, held in September 1977 at Bedford College, University of London. On that occasion, Anthony D. King presented a paper entitled “Exporting ‘Planning’: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience.” The paper was born out of ‘despair’ at the fact that most of the speeches focused on Europe and North America, almost completely glossing over the ‘modern planning experience in other areas of the world occupied by two-thirds of its population’.⁴³ According to the British architectural historian and sociologist, the importance of the design experiences in these areas lay in the impact that interventions by ‘Western’ designers had, he claimed, been

impossible to dissociate a more limited notion of “planning” from, at one level, a range of related topics such as architectural style, health, house form, legislation, building science, and technology and these, at another level, from the total cultural economic, political, and social system of which they are a part. The introduction of “modern” “planned” environments based on “Western” (and capitalist) notions of civilisation...has obviously modified far more than just the physical environment.⁴⁴

³⁹ “UN convenes Working Group on Housing and Planning,” 51.

⁴⁰ “New DACC computer arrives: biggest electronic computer complex in Greece,” 14.

⁴¹ Wigley, “Network Fever,” 82-122.

⁴² “International Congress at Zurich,” 54.

⁴³ King, “Exporting “Planning:” Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience,” 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 13

King's reflections seem even more important when used to reflect on the impact exerted by international organisations in the countries of what we now call the Global South, and which, in order to be effectively evaluated, should take into account not only what has been produced, but also how this has been mapped, systematised, represented and narrated.

The greatest design project

With the entry of international organisations and the subsequent appearance of global experts, the design field expanded both in geographical and epistemological terms. With the reconstruction of Europe well under way, already in the early 1950s problems related to housing, building and planning were considered by industrialised countries as a world responsibility and treated as such with the agency of transnational organisations such as the United Nations and its branches.⁴⁵ But the global reach of planning went far beyond housing problems. UN advisors were especially concerned with issues related to overpopulation in the Southeast Asia, and in fact as early as 1950 the first technical mission of the United Nations began in India. Overpopulation, paired with yet unexplored land, made third countries considered as a reservoir of resources to be discovered and exploited to secure peace and wealth and remove any source of political or social instability. In this sense, resettlement operations as those carried out by UN advisors in the early years can be also interpreted in the light of the auspices that Aldous Huxley had expressed in a speech at the Unesco assembly in 1948.⁴⁶ The English writer, in fact, was among the earliest to promote the systematic unlocking of unexploited pieces of land against problems like population pressure and increasing density. What Huxley posed was a question of physical and at the same time social survival: it was indeed necessary to open up new territories not only to remedy possible food shortages, but also and above all to breathe new life into processes of 'community self-reliance', which great density seemed to limit. The expert in applied sciences or social sciences was the key figure in this scenario, the one who could unlock or materialise political will through design or the use of appropriate technical solutions. In Bromley's words, the expert acted as a true coalition builder.⁴⁷

But faced with such a broadening of perspectives – a view that embraced the planetary scale for the first time – appropriateness was not place-based. On the contrary, the expert was required to cast a portable knowledge that could be applied in the largest number of areas throughout the world. A knowledge that was meant to function successfully in a variety of ecological, political and social settings. In the field of planning, Huxley's wish was translated into the widespread adoption of low-density settlement models, all more or less traceable to the actions and thoughts of the Scottish planner Patrick Geddes, not by chance the only author cited in the report of the 1950 UN mission on low-cost housing in Southeast Asia,⁴⁸ a true milestone in this story: from the model village experimented at the first 1954 UN Seminar in Delhi to the schemes of nuclei spread on a regional scale, down to the great infrastructural plans imagined to balance settlement imbalances on a continental scale. Even when the focus shifted to ancient city centres and their restoration in the mid-1970s, the objectives were the same, albeit on a smaller scale. These interventions were very different from each other, yet

⁴⁵Gardner-Medwin, "United Nations and the Resettlement in the Far East," 283.

⁴⁶Huxley, "The Double Crisis."

⁴⁷Bromley, "Towards Global Human Settlements: Constantinos Doxiadis as Entrepreneur, Coalition-BUILDER and Visionary," 316-340.

⁴⁸*Low Cost Housing in South and South-east Asia*, 209-211.

equally replicable in Africa as in South-East Asia or Latin America, minus a few parameters, climatic or economic variables that, when properly recorded, allowed the solution to be adapted to the area under intervention. In this sense, as Constantinos Doxiadis stated, it is true that there were no standard solutions, even in areas considered geographically or politically uniform. Only in Europe, the Greek planner noted, were there exceptional fluctuations from 'average' values, and not only between countries, but also between regions, and between neighbourhoods in the same city. Moreover, the standard required constant updating, which was deemed impossible unless one imagined a completely pacified and stabilised planet under the auspices of biology and technology, as Huxley himself – one of Doxiadis' most quoted authors – had predicted in his *Brave New World*.⁴⁹ But it is precisely this condition – a condition set in 1954, which would form the basis of the subsequent reasoning behind *The City of the Future*, the research project conducted by Doxiadis and financed by the Ford Foundation – that reveals the essence of the project that the global expert was championing, and whose limits transcended the traditional boundaries of architecture and planning. In fact, his aim was not so much to design an average that would apply indifferently to any area of the globe, but to construct the conditions for every area of the globe to reach a minimum technical standard in line with the production systems of one of the two blocs. In other words, so that those circularity mechanisms typical of progress could make their way to every corner of the planet.

Never as in this case, therefore, did the design field prove to be instrumental in achieving a broader objective, which went far beyond the circumstances each project was called upon to operate in. The level of instrumentality of design is well epitomised by the terminology used to designate the field of action of these global experts. No longer tropical architecture, a place-based practice of colonial inheritance identified on a climatic basis, but development aid, technical assistance, aided self-help, global-scale activities in which the architecture and planning expert provided targeted advice. In fact, the expert's operability remained subordinate to a technical advancement that the project only had to prepare, or at least make possible, within the framework of broader cooperation processes. For this reason, it is reasonable to think of the expert not only as a catalyst of political will, but also as the one who was able to channel it towards the ultimate recipients of the project, a large section of the local population to whom a fundamental role was generally reserved, particularly in aided self-help projects. The direct involvement of the locals, which the expert had the task of stimulating through the training and education of the so-called 'inperfs', was in fact an essential step both for the introduction of new techniques and the physical realisation of the project, and for an underlying objective, less immediate in practical terms but just as crucial: the supposed emancipation of local communities through the experimentation and experience of technical progress. This is a prerequisite for exerting control not only over physical space, but also and above all over the relationships between individuals. Many experts were more than aware of such a mission, to the point of offering themselves as advisors for community planning and development operations. In fact, more than technical upgrades of inhabited spaces, many of the interventions promoted by the transnational institutions advised by the experts were first and foremost initial steps in social modelling that looked at new relations of production and dependence, and to which it was necessary to give new form. It is no coincidence that in the aftermath of the 1950 mission on low-cost housing in Southeast Asia on behalf of the United Nations, Robert Gardner-Medwin (1907-1995) concluded that aided self-help could only be practised in the presence of extensive processes of physical and productive decentralisation involving housing,

⁴⁹ Doxiadis, "Types and Densities of Housing Accommodation," 4-8.

agriculture and industrialisation; i.e. combining technical assistance with community-based reforms based on new territorial patterns.

Years later, taking stock of the planning experiences of UN agencies, Ernest Weissmann gave further emphasis to these aspects by including them in a six-point UN planning and developmental doctrine.⁵⁰ Of these, the two most operative supported technical research and the free market for materials and products, while promoting new cities and self-sufficient neighbourhoods as prerequisites for balanced development. In this perspective, local character studies also seemed to have a doubly instrumental reason: on the one hand, to highlight a gap to be bridged; on the other to understand the adaptability of those same characters to the elements of innovation intended to be introduced, and to record the type of intervention where appropriate. The consolidation of the research, training and planning experience and the changing political-economic conditions were followed by a gradual evolution of project strategies. In fact, the progressive deterioration of the rural world, which had been taking place since the late 1950s, led to a progressive broadening of the field of study, which extended to the city and regional planning, even on a transnational scale. In parallel, the action of transnational agencies became more and more structured and diversified, with comprehensive programmes able to ‘attack simultaneously – as much as possible – the main issues of human settlements’.⁵¹ Study missions began to be accompanied by country-based assistance projects lasting five or ten years, almost always preceded by seminars and pilot schemes. Fuelled by an increasingly intense cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences and shaped by an increasingly organised bureaucracy, the work of the experts and that of the agencies that made use of them became an instrument with an explicitly political character. With the 1976 Habitat Conference in Vancouver, the issue of human settlements received its final institutionalisation. However, compared to the first experiences in Southeast Asia in the first half of the 1950s, the conceptual framework of the design field remained unchanged. As early as the first mission in 1950, and with the first UN Regional Seminar on Housing and Community Improvement, the contours of the project action were already clearly defined. It was no coincidence that it was on this occasion that Constantinos Doxiadis, according to Tyrwhitt “the best men we have”, first publicly expounded – and addressing a transnational audience – his worldwide planning perspective: the ekistic science.

A world of experts: global planning and transnational institutions

The role played by transnational institutions and their experts during the UN Development decades appears to be a historically homogeneous and clearly defined field of investigation from a chronological point of view. On closer inspection, however, in order to fully understand the significance of cooperation, assistance and aid actions, it would be necessary to take a longer-term approach and start by unveiling some background and preconditions. Looking back to the 19th century, it is easy to recognise certain traits, words and methods in the ideals of certain philanthropic organisations that would become typical of the actions undertaken during the so-called Age of Development. Tracing the history of the civilian relief operations promoted by the American Red Cross (ARC) in Italy and China, through painstaking research Theodossis Issaias's essay entitled "Imperial Spectacle and

⁵⁰ Weissmann, “Human Settlements – Struggle for Identity,” 230.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 231.

Emergency Shelters" reveals the American government's exploitations to advance its geopolitical objectives. Furthermore, using the presentation of the two operations at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) as a case study, Issaias emphasises another peculiarity that characterises all cases of international cooperation, assistance or aid, namely the need to narrate, promote and package them with the dual objective of communicating the results achieved, and above all the way in which these are to be interpreted.

The need for a historical approach and systematic analysis of sources also emerged from the essay entitled "Foreign aid for rural development" by Michele Tenzon and Axel Fisher. Here, by examining less known but just as ambitious schemes targeting the rural realm, through the case studies of the Lalla Mimouna community development project (1957-1965), the *Projet Sebou* (1963-1980), and the *Programme d'Habitat Rural* developed within the PAM 68-72 campaign (1967-1972), the authors offer a chronological cross-section over the entanglements between international organisations' underlying development policies and the disciplinary expertises of village planning and design throughout the development decades in the Gharb coastal plain. In this regard, it is important to remember that while the bibliography has prioritised case studies relating to cities and urban environments, the attention of international organisations was also focused with equal intensity on rural contexts, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when the countryside still constituted a real alternative to the high density of overpopulated slums.

The difficulties one encounters when analysing the work of international organisations are certainly not few, and due to their very nature require an inherently transnational, cross-disciplinary, multi-archival and, very often, even multilingual approach. An example of this approach can be found in Vladimir Kulić's essay, which, by intersecting material from the archives of the Ford Foundation on the one hand and those of the former Yugoslavia on the other, helps to untangle some of the complex plots behind the word 'cooperation'. Just like 'assistance' or 'aid', the cooperation developed during Development decades had the Cold War in the background and presented a more contentious dimension that laid beneath the apparent ideological neutrality of the knowledge transfer. The case of the American-Yugoslav Project dealt with by Kulić contributes to the understanding of the role played by the Ford Foundation – a real actor in US foreign policy – in the creation of a network of experts in urban planning to be understood as a strategy for projecting American soft power abroad, and reaching far beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia.

The words of experts and international organisations and communication strategies assumed a strategic role in defining a professional field typical of the post-World War II period centred on the triangulation of housing, building and planning. Against the backdrop of a much larger and more complex world, where North and South, East and West meet and sometimes clash, the meaning of these terms seems to become uncertain. The search for new definitions was carried out among others by Constantinos A. Doxiadis, who, as Ines Tolić shows, used a magazine – *Eksitics* – to chronicle the UN agenda in so-called developing countries. The very same Doxiadis who had made the interweaving of North and South, East and West a banner of supposed neutrality, is presented in Vasiliki Petridou's essay not as an expert but as an interpreter and executor of expertise gained overseas. The story of the design of the University of Patras at the initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tells of an experience bordering on a short circuit, where the long arm of technical aid reaches right into the heart of the old continent. And in which one of the most influential global experts, already an advisor for the design of the Punjab University complex, is involved as project architect for a solution whose guidelines had been elaborated elsewhere.

A similar role reversal is in the background of the Italian case presented by Anna-Paola Pola. Already a recipient of international aid in the aftermath of the Second World War, in the following 20 years Italy had developed specific expertise in the areas of reconstruction and heritage conservation. This enabled it to present itself at the UN Habitat 76 conference with a proposal for sustainable urban development centred on the recovery and conservation of ancient centres in opposition to the growing phenomena of sprawl and land consumption. Pola's essay examines the consulting provided by Italian architects and urban planners in Latin America on behalf of UNESCO and UNDP, analysing the dawn of a shared knowledge both through the study of design aspects – and their codification – and through the restitution of events related to the training of specialised local personnel. It is also through the systematic study of pioneering experiences that we understand how the action of experts is intrinsically linked to design education, the subject of debate on several occasions. These included the Zurich congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning held in June 1948:

who should be the planner and what kind of background should he have? Because of the great differences in the background of the delegates themselves, no unanimous conclusion was possible. [It was agreed] however, that the planner must have the ability to work out for a community a plan that will provide for all its physical, economic and social requirements.⁵²

Only with this kind of approach does it seem possible to align the local and the global point of view, the short-term and the long-term objectives, as well as the work carried out on a minute scale with that of a more general nature. It is interesting to note that, just some 20 years ago, there was a certain ‘indifference’ towards the South and the ‘important architects and urbanists’ who had worked there, such as, for example, ‘Tai Kheng Soon, Minette de Silva, Lina Bo Bardi, Affonso Reidly, Mike Pearce, Otto Koenigsberger, Oluwole Olumuyiwa’. Even the work of Lewis Mumford in Hawaii was long ignored by historians.⁵³ One could therefore speak of a kind of discovery of the South and what happened there during the Development decades, when an ever-growing pool of planners, architects and social scientists began to probe the settlement issues of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa on behalf of the United Nations and other supranational organizations. The aforementioned inaugural mission to Southeast Asia in 1950 was followed by other initiatives, all distinctive experiences in the formation of the UN doctrine that Ernest Weissmann, one of the architects of UN planning policies, would talk about two decades later. Monica Pacheco's essay examines the particular case of the 1954 United Nations Housing Mission to the Gold Coast, on the one hand focusing on the evolution of the profile of the expert after the first reconnaissance missions, and on the other hand on issues related to the education and training of local inerts through the establishment of building and planning schools. The story analysed by Mónica Pacheco focuses on some of the key figures – Abrams, Crane, Gardner-Medwin, Königsberger – against the backdrop of the post-colonial transition of one of the most politically complex areas of West Africa, Kwame Nkrumah's future Ghana. A final issue worth reflecting on concerns the legacy of the UN Development decades today. In fact, while the research from the perspective of international organisations and their experts may make it

⁵² “International Congress at Zurich”, 54.

⁵³ Lefavre, “Lewis Mumford Tropicalist,” 274-277. See also Tzonis, Lefavre and Stagno, *Tropical Architecture. Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization*; Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience*.

appear that ‘those who are receiving aid did so helplessly and passively’,⁵⁴ there is no question that the plans and projects realised or – more frequently – only sketched out during the Development decades today are the repositories of hidden voices and untold dynamics capable of revealing the often harsh negotiation between global ambitions and local needs. In fact, modernisation and development were not a monolithic phenomenon, but rather, as is made clear by the papers presented in this issue of *Planing Perspectives*, malleable entities that was adapted, manipulated, implemented and sometimes even contested by both experts and local communities in search of a way to live with them.

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⁵⁴ Avermaete, “Coda,” 476.

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