

Introduction.

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Abstract. This short introduction reflects upon the significance of the conference to the research topic and scholarly community. After briefly providing an overview of the collaborative framework within which the event took place, it provides a few figures on the participation to the call for papers and the conference itself, as well as a few explanatory words concerning the different themed sessions and sections of the proceedings. Doing so allows the authors to highlight the relevance of the event to both research on the topic and to the concerned disciplines, but also the under-represented topics and disciplines, as a constructive contribution to the future research agenda.

1 The general framework of the conference

The international MODSCAPES conference & Baltic Landscape Forum 2018 dedicated to *Modernism, Modernisation and the Rural Landscape*, held in Tartu, second largest city of Estonia, from June 11th to 13th, 2018.

It was organized in collaboration with CIVILSCAPE, an associated partner in MODSCAPES and a member of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018's Stakeholder Committee: the event was therefore part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018².

The Conference venues were the *Assembly Hall - Peahoone Main Building at the Eesti Maaülikool* (Estonian University of Life Sciences), and the freshly completed *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* (Estonian National Museum³), a remarkable example of contemporary architecture and landscape architecture.

The event served as the mid-term event and as a major milestone in MODSCAPES, a collaborative European research project, funded under the HERA⁴ –

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² <https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/> [available on 8 January 2019].

³ <https://www.erm.ee/en> [available on 8 January 2019].

⁴ <http://heranet.info/about-us/> [available on 8 January 2019].

Humanities in the European Research Area's 3rd Joint Research programme dedicated to "Uses of the Past" (2016-2019).

As such, its general objectives were:

- attracting other scholars, practitioners, decision-makers and citizens concerned with modern rural landscapes;
- gaining insight in case-studies and approaches not examined within the project,
- disseminating the intermediary outcomes of the project,
- consolidating MODSCAPES' international network.

2 What is MODSCAPES?

MODSCAPES explores rural landscapes produced by large-scale agricultural development and colonisation schemes planned in the 20th century throughout Europe and beyond. It investigates 11 case studies across Europe and beyond.

... BUT WHO EVER HEARD ABOUT 'MODERNIST' RURAL LANDSCAPES?

At first sight, there is a contradiction between 'modernist' and 'rural'. Yet, throughout the 20th century, many European States imagined, adopted and implemented large scale development and agricultural schemes to modernise the countryside: parliamentary as well as fascist regimes, socialist republics or colonial powers. Today, there are thousands of modernist farms, hamlets, villages and towns in Europe and beyond, where several million inhabitants live or have lived.

Modernist rural development schemes were pivotal to Nation- and State-building policies, and to the modernization of the countryside. They provided a testing ground for the ideas of scientists, architects, engineers, planners, landscape architects and artists, who converged around a shared challenge. Their implementation produced modernist rural landscapes (MRL).

MODSCAPES aims to explore, document, and raise awareness around this largely underestimated shared cultural heritage, which has seldom been the topic of international and interdisciplinary research.

MODSCAPES looks at modernist rural landscapes as the physical embodiment of policies, borrowing methods to design-oriented disciplines, tested against three humanities-driven concepts:

The introduction of modernism – as the cultural and artistic expression of core modern values – in the countryside blurred conventional understanding of modernity. In *modernist* rural landscapes, "high modernism" – the visual order imposed by planners to make modern societies "legible" – had a crucial role.

Modern nation-states mediated the contradictions brought by the modernisation of large-scale societies using "imagination" and "creativity" to build new communities and identities. Focusing on *reinvention* is about identifying the different "styles" of such "national imaginings", and about how change was "creatively" managed or steered.

A unifying paradigm for a trans-disciplinary approach to the topic's tangible (the built environment) and intangible legacies (the related cultural and socio-political contexts), *landscape* is used to bridge arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, and to integrate research, policy, and practice effectively. Being the world "as perceived by people", landscape is a means of approaching history with an action-oriented objective.

Modernist rural landscapes are approached by MODSCAPES through 5 question-driven work packages:

- Documenting ADCP/ADCS: *What was debated and planned?*
- Physical Legacies: *What was realized and what remains?*
- Sociocultural Impacts: *What were the broader impacts?*
- Memories & Perceptions: *How do people see these landscapes today?*
- Changes & Challenges: *What should be done?*

Find out more by visiting our online tools: our website (<https://modscapes.eu>), our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Modscapes/>), and our Youtube channel (<https://youtube.com/channel/UCFM7qpjjaqEGilzHecFs-BA>).



Fig. 1. Unknown photographer, *Kindergarten in the “Paradise” kolkhoze*. Architect: Anastasja Varus, 1980s. (Source: Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum, EAM Fk 7801, <http://opendata.muis.ee/object/2638026>).

3 Rate of participation and disciplinary challenges

The conference was preceded by an international call for papers.

Some 80 proposals were received from 65 different contributors based in 14 different countries (among which 3 non-European countries), and largely dominated by the disciplines of architecture, urbanism, land use and regional planning, while landscape studies were the other cluster of disciplines represented. Out of these proposals, 48 were presented at the conference by 56 different authors and contributors. In total, 80 participants attended the conference, with Estonians making up for more than 30%, and a major presence of participants from, respectively, Italy, Portugal, and Germany.

Such figures denote a discrete success for a non-recurrent academic conference.

As a term of comparison, the conference was paired by a themed session on a similar subject, hosted by yet another conference taking place in Tallinn the same week (the 5th international conference of the EAHN – European Architectural History Network [1]), and chaired by two MODSCAPES researchers. The call for paper for this session also yielded a clear interest. Some 27 paper proposals were submitted (apparently one of the most successful sessions, according to the organizers) by from 15 different countries. While this session had a different scope, its structure and outcome help shedding a light on the MODSCAPES conference. In fact, the 4 shortlisted papers made up for a very diverse, yet consistent panorama, gradually drifting away from the conventional approach to architectural history, and to rurality within it, and opening up to fresh perspectives. First, the relationship between modernist architecture and rurality is a questionable one. As one commentator suggested (Mark Crinson), in the works presented in this session, and one could extend this remark to the MODSCAPES conference, there is little of the “concrete experience of the rural” which is implied in the word *rurality*. Rather, the rural seems to stand to modernist architecture as either a passive background, an external condition, or – in the most interesting cases – as “a projection”, a figment of imagination, to paraphrase Crinson’s own words [2: 7]. Second, the rural may well be seen as a modifier to architectural history’s methods and agenda:

a) It is a fertile condition for regionalist architectural approaches, where the stylistic reference to the vernacular can be read as a more or less convincing attempt to bridge the ineluctably expanding gap between architects’ expert knowledge and vanishing local building traditions;

b) It is the locus of village planning, a minor and overlooked sub-discipline of town and country planning, dominated by ideas concerning the ideal/utopian city, community-making through the provision of rigorously programmed collective facilities, and the integration of agricultural and environmental concerns;

c) it inevitably touches upon political and ideological agendas of nation-building, in terms of social engineering, frontier settlement, population and ethnic control;

d) and finally, participates to the organization of land ownership, land tenure, and most often to the dissolution of the commons and of pre-modern property laws.

This to say that, at least in the architecture and planning-related fields, the scholarly community was awaiting for an opening of the research agenda to the topic of rurality, especially in its modernist declination.

This obviously raises a need for cross-examination: why did the conference raise less attention to representatives of other concerned disciplines, especially in the area of rural studies or rural geography? One may speculate on the fact that the organizers

did not reach out to scholars in these fields, or that the framing of the conference did not show attractive to such established fields. Perhaps, could the decline of rural geography in the last few decades be another potential explanation. For sure, the enthusiasm of the participants towards the assumed freshness of the topic, symptomatically also betrayed the generally low awareness of the contribution of rural studies and geography among scholars in the architecture and planning disciplines. The conference raises the challenge of bridging clusters of disciplines who certainly have significant contributions to bring to the topic of modernism and rurality. To this end, the role of landscape studies may show critical.



Fig. 2. Group photograph of (most of) the conference participants in front of the ERM – Estonian National Museum, 13 June 2018. (Photo: MODSCAPES-EMÜ, Rajen Bastola)

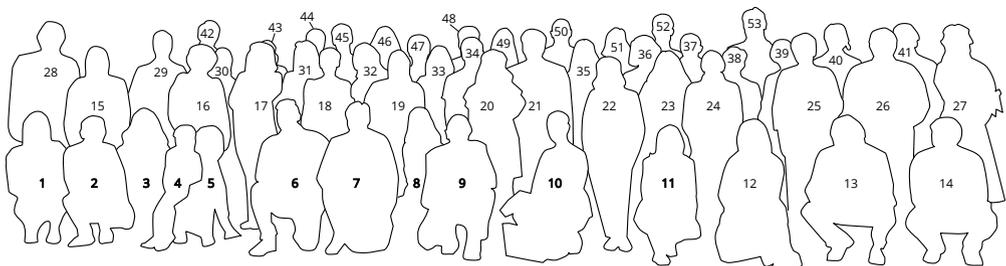


Fig. 3. Persons appearing on the above group photograph:

1. Alaleh Rahimi • 2. Ibuki Hara • 3. Marie Petra • 4. Vera Kuhlmann • 5. Jekaterina Balicka • 6. Axel Fisher • 7. Friedrich Kuhlmann • 8. Kaja Veddel • 9. Simon Bell • 10. Mia Åkerfelt • 11. Joana Couto • 12. Marta Prista • 13. Paolo Marcolin • 14. Martti Veldi • 15. Ann-Leena Miller • 16. Francesca Veronica Bonfante • 17. Emanuela Margione • 18. Vittoria Capresi • 19. Annelly Jürimets • 20. Constance Ringon • 21. Gerhard Ermischer • 22. Özge Sezer • 23. Maria Helena Maia • 24. Alexandra Cardoso • 25. Catherine Maumi • 26. Joaquim Flores • 27. Liudmila Slivinskaya • 28. Dirk Gotzmann • 29. Luca Bergamaschi • 30. Victoria Jolley • 31. Luca Csepely-Knorr • 32. Oksana Zhukova • 33. Alexandra Trevisan • 34. César Machado Moreira • 35. Afroditi Maragkou • 36. Julia Ess • 37. Miguel Moreira Pinto • 38. Maria Josefa Gonzalez Cubero • 39. Raili Nugin • 40. Anu Printsman • 41. Emily Bereskin • 42. Edoardo L. G. Bernasconi • 43. Laura Coucill • 44. Kristof Fatsar • 45. Michele Tenzon • 46. Victor Brunfaut • 47. Luca Monica • 48. Tinghsen Li • 49. Līva Garkāje • 50. Tzafirir Fainholtz • 51. Isabel Matias • 52. Christoph Muth • 53. Hannes Palang.

4 Rationale of the proceedings' structure

While participants warmly appreciated the conference's general focus, but also the overall consistence of the presented contributions, it is never an easy task to cluster such contributions into consistent sessions. Such sessions became the sections of these proceedings, confident that we found a fruitful balance and approach.



Fig. 4. Unknown photographer, *Discussion of the land improvement plan for the Konguta kolkhoz, 1957* (Source: *Eesti Põllumajandusmuuseum, Eesti Maaelumuuseumid SA – Estonian Agricultural Museum, Estonian Rural Museums, EPM FP 143:31, <http://opendata.muis.ee/object/1359210>*).

The first section, *Invented Ruralities, Designed Communities*, is intended as a visually rich and appealing icebreaker, especially for those non-acquainted with the topic.

It is followed by a track of 4 sections dedicated to *Modernist Rural Planning*. These sessions are focused on theoretically engaging planning issues, which allow to embrace the scale of modernist rural landscapes. Some experiments emerge as relevant *Paradigms* – the Fascist reclamation of the Pontine marshes on one end, and the Socialist collectivisation of the countryside on the other end – as opposed to *Antecedents, Copycats and Mavericks*. The section dedicated to *Comparative Perspectives* does unfortunately not represent the wealth of contributions to the homonym session, which eventually did not make it into full papers, but reflects the emergence of cross-national approaches around the issue of planning, against other issues where contributions walk the more conventional monographic path. The section dedicated to *Cultural and Physical Legacies* generously explores different ways in which modernist rural planning experiments still matter, whether on the ground as tangible legacies, or in cultural terms.

A second track is dedicated to *Mapping Modernist Rural Landscapes*. This is to confirm the importance of the act of mapping as a representation and investigation tool to produce knowledge as much as for rendering visually the outcomes of landscape-related research, as explained in the section *Methodologies and Outcomes*. The section *Shifting Used and Patterns* verifies with precise land-use quantitative indicators the nature of modernist rural landscape schemes and changes. Finally, *Speculative Approaches* test experimental mapping methods to further record and investigate the rural landscape.

The section *Bottom-Up Perspectives on Modernist Ruralities* can be understood as a reversed approach to modernist rural landscape, one that values the behaviours, appropriation and agency of the subjects of modernist rural landscapes: the settlers.

Immediately related, is the *Modernist Ruralities Between Representations and Propaganda* section, which reports the top-down discourses and narratives of decision- and policy-makers, with a special focus on their artistic and visual values and qualities.

The section *Making and Preserving Modernist Rural Heritage* draws upon the almost all-too-obvious heritage dimension of modernist rural landscapes, yet highlighting how such heritage does not necessarily stand where one would expect it, and that is often also a dissonant heritage.

The final sections complete the volume discussing the cultural construction of the modernist concept of nature – *Taming Nature* –, as well as the strong impact of yet other devices of rural modernization which paired the making of modernist rural landscape – *Encounters Between Infrastructure and Rural Landscapes*.

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Short resume

Axel Fisher is part-time associated professor at the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta, Université libre de Bruxelles, and director of the journal [CLARA Architecture / Recherche](#). He is also an F.R.S.– FNRS postdoctoral researcher, and was awarded a WBI.World excellency postdoctoral scholarship for a secondment period at the Habitat-Unit in Berlin (2018).

Simon Bell PhD is Chair professor at the Estonian University of Life Sciences and Associate Director of the OPENspace Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh. He has been president of [ECLAS](#), the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools between 2012 and 2018.

Vittoria Capresi is senior researcher at the Habitat Unit at the TU of Berlin. Her PhD dissertation (TU Vienna, 2011) was published in 2010: *The built Utopia. The Italian Rural Centres founded in Colonial Libya 1934-1940*. Bologna, BUP. From 2011-2014 she was Associate Professor in History of Architecture and Urban Design at the German University in Cairo-GUC.

Maria Helena Maia is a full-time tenured assistant professor and deputy-director at ESAP – Escola Superior Artística do Porto. She also is an affiliated researcher and director of [Arnaldo Araújo Research Center](#) (FCT uRD 4041). She has been publishing on architectural theory and history area and received two prizes by published books and participated in several research projects, such as “Popular Architecture in Portugal. A Critical Look”.

Cristina Pallini is associate professor at the School of Architecture, Politecnico di Milano; City reconstruction in Eastern Mediterranean port cities (particularly Alexandria, Thessaloniki and Izmir) has been her main field of research since 1995. Her research has been supported by scholarships from the Italian Research Council, the Greek Scholarship Foundation, the Greek Ministry of Education, the Aga Khan Program at MIT, and the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation.

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