



EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY NETWORK

PALAIS DES ACADEMIES

# EAHN

SECOND INTERNATIONAL MEETING

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM 31 MAY - 3 JUNE 2012

## THE WELFARE STATE PROJECT

### ARCHITECTURAL POSITIONS, ROLES AND AGENCIES

SESSION PROPOSAL

The session builds on the one held at the first EAHN conference 2010, and aims to address the multifarious relations between architecture and the vast subject of the Western European welfare state, which by now is generally considered a historical phenomenon.

While the welfare state involved a wide array of social policies and programmes, including health care, unemployment benefits and old age pensions, at its heart were initiatives – from new towns to hospitals and from schools to housing – that required new architectural solutions. This placed the architect on the front line of the welfare state project. Initially, architects received wide-scale praise for their innovative work but, when political consensus over the welfare state came under strain or collapsed – as notably during the crisis of the 1970s – architects and the work they produced came under sustained attack. Today, as we look back to the historical phenomenon of the welfare state, we can start to re-assess both how architects positioned themselves within the politics of building production and, crucially, the nature and characteristics of the work that they produced.

To understand the production of the period roughly demarcated by the years 1945-1985, we would like to investigate the positions, roles and agencies that architects have articulated vis-à-vis the welfare state. The Western European welfare state adopted large parts of the aesthetic agendas of the pre-war avant-gardes, and acted as a generous patron to modern architects and artists alike. Yet, at the same time, the welfare state system was under consistent attack, sometimes literally through terrorism or the street riots of 1968, sometimes more playfully in the case of so-called happenings and Dutch Provo. Main criticism as also vented by architects, concerned so-called “repressive tolerance” pointing to totalitarian aspects of the welfare state systems and their bureaucracies in particular.

We would like to bring together presentations that re-investigate the specific positions of architects as envisaged and allowed for by the welfare state project and vice versa. We want to address questions such as: What positions were given to architects in the post-WWII period and what critical roles did avant-garde architects claim for themselves? What was the real span of their agency? How did architects deal with the tension between the oppressive aspects of the welfare state project on the one hand and its emancipatory ambitions on the other? And most important of all, what productive moments, roles and projects emerged from this?

#### SESSION CHAIRS:

Tom Avermaete [E: [t.l.p.avermaete@tudelft.nl](mailto:t.l.p.avermaete@tudelft.nl)]

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The complete Call for Papers and Discussion Positions can be downloaded at the meeting website: [www.eahn2012.org](http://www.eahn2012.org) — or at EAHN website: [www.eahn.org](http://www.eahn.org).

#### CONFERENCE CHAIR

Hilde Heynen

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#### IMPORTANT DATES

September 30, 2011:  
submission of abstract to session chairs

October 31, 2011:  
notification of acceptance

March 15, 2012:  
submission of full papers

May 31- June 3, 2012:  
2nd EAHN international conference in  
Brussels