

Eleventh International DOCOMOMO Conference
Mexico City, August 19–27, 2010

Living in the Urban Modernity

The rapid growth of urban areas from cities to metropolis in the twentieth century created a favorable environment for establishing a discourse on modern architecture. The advancement of technology and the introduction of new materials, which brought about new forms of expression, were not the only triggers for transformation. Concerns for wellbeing, such as hygiene, education, health, leisure and the right to work were also fundamental in shaping buildings and cities, leading to innovative architectural proposals within the framework of a diverse urban structure.

Mexico City offers a clear example of life in a metropolis. During the past century its limits expanded in such a way it became one of the largest urban conglomerations in the world and served as a fertile field for the development of modern architectural typologies.

For the 2010 **DOCOMOMO** Conference, **DOCOMOMO** Mexico proposes to analyze the different elements that transformed the city and its architecture. The conference program will include the following themes.

1 Modern Living

By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, overcrowded industrial towns which were the end product of migration from rural to urban areas brought housing to the forefront of the modern architectural agenda. The need to provide dignified and hygienic solutions to the emerging proletariat as well as to a cultured bourgeoisie resulted in the formulation of an architecture deprived of ornament, detached in many ways from past tradition, and inspired by technological development.

Simplicity and pure geometry became the distinctive features of the house; standardization and mass production its tools. Debates on the definition of a minimum living unit were held and exhibitions showed the public numerous possibilities and advantages based on designs which accommodated modern ways of life. New approaches to housing were developed after the end of World War II as a part of urban renewal or suburban expansion programs, as echoed in the “Good Life Modernism” slogan introduced at the MoMA, which became an important factor in modernizing and suburbanizing the American city.

The aim of this theme was to discuss the relevance of housing in the configuration of modern society. Self-contained houses and multi-family units, working class developments and bourgeois houses were all part of the same enterprise. Case-study analysis and archival documentation, conservation proposals, philosophical conceptions, and the political implications of housing, including formal and functional responses to specific programs were some of the topics considered.

2 Civic and Social Infrastructure

With the expansion of cities, technological advancement, and the transformation of the way of life, infrastructure requirements became essential to meet the demands of society. Planning and the implementation of social infrastructure became banners for wider national development policies and the resulting buildings and complexes acquired a strong urban presence. Governments expanded their network of public institutions from legislative palaces, embassies and town-halls to entire districts where political power was concentrated. The private sector also generated new architectural typologies. Health, educational, cultural and recreational facilities proliferated in the modern city and became pivots for further growth. Numerous competitions and specific commissions were drawn to solve new architectural programs, transforming isolated initiatives into large multi-functional complexes. The relevance of civic and social infrastructures as products of modernity can only be appraised through careful analysis of the distinct circumstances in which they were completed, including their socio-political and economical framework, the ideology present in their designs, and the urban significance of their architectural contributions, both for large scale urban compounds and smaller particular buildings.

3 The Modern City

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed intense theoretical debates regarding the future of the built environment. 'Ideal' cities foresaw the predominance of technological progress as a guiding principle for new design vocabulary. Cities also needed to accommodate a growing number of inhabitants and create proper conditions for their wellbeing. Analysis of urban densities, functional distribution and housing were also topics of the interwar period; from partial interventions in existing areas to the completion of town projects, the modern city began to take shape.

The aftermath of WWII raised questions concerning the validity of previous solutions for urban growth, which were deemed impersonal and standardized. New alternatives for the reconstruction of devastated zones became increasingly inspired on the principles of the modern movement.

This section aimed to reevaluate the achievements and failures of urban modernities around the globe from various disciplinary perspectives, including architecture and planning, urban studies, conservation, and social studies.

4 Technology for a Modern Habitat

Based on the technological advances of the nineteenth century, the modern movement broke away from traditional concepts of space and planning, and introduced new building techniques and materials to achieve architecture's new role in social reform. Technology was not only the means to achieve practical solutions but an intrinsic component of the modern ideology. With the global translation of the modern movement, local conditions of climate, topography, and material resources resulted in specific local responses. These local manifestations of modernism were many and diverse.

The very essence of the modern movement deeply challenges the possibilities of its restoration: not only was the intended lifespan of modern buildings often abridged by the technical limitations of new materials and construction methods, but modernity's call for progress made the durability of buildings a relative concept altogether. Therefore, conservation approaches must deal with the physical deterioration of modern buildings while assessing the extent to which replacement materials may adopt or retain the symbolic qualities originally associated to these buildings.

Characteristics of the modern movement, such as technical innovation and functionalism, have created some unique conservation challenges, both philosophical and technical, which have been central to **DOCOMOMO** discussion for many years now.

5 The University City

Throughout the twentieth century, the development of facilities for higher education became both an important factor in the political agenda of many governments and a cause for urban development. From specific interventions in traditional campuses to entire university cities, architects experimented with the latest thinking on planning, technological advancement, materials and forms. New ideals for planning and architecture welcomed the integration of major artworks: sculpture, mosaics, murals and landscaping, which provided each campus with its own distinct identity. University buildings became statements of progress, cultural growth and social interaction, and later, they were also the silent witnesses of the social transformation of the 1960s. The campus of the National University of Mexico (UNAM) was the venue for the Eleventh **DOCOMOMO** International Conference and as such the significance of modern universities around the world was explored as a new and distinct urban model, developing an artistic and architectural language which represents the social and political ideals of the time and the role of education in social reform.

This section discussed topics related to the modern university campus and its political, social, planning and architectural development.

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