

The Role of Exhibitions in Housing Discourses (Paris/Milan, 13-20 May 16)

ENSA Paris-Malaquais and Politecnico di Milano, May 13–20, 2016
Deadline: Feb 20, 2016

Stephanie Dadour

On the role of 20th century exhibitions in shaping housing discourses

ENSA Paris-Malaquais (May 13, 2016) and Politecnico di Milano (May 20, 2016)

Organisation and coordination : Gaia Caramellino (DASTU, Politecnico di Milano), Stéphanie Dadour (Laboratoire ACS - UMR AUSser n°3329)

Scientific committee: Anne Debarre, Alessandro De Magistris, Freddie Floré, Catherine Maumi, Jean-Louis Violeau

A number of quite unexplored exhibitions devoted to housing, made possible by the joint efforts of cultural institutions, public authorities, governmental agencies, museums, housing experts, architects, planners, universities and civic associations, provide an interesting lens through which to explore the main “seasons” that marked the history of housing discourses in different contexts. The French Salon des Arts ménagers or the Italian Fiera Campionaria, for example reveals the evolution of housing representations in the collective imagery. It also uncovers the transformation of housing as an art of living (art d’habiter) into a consumption product, analogous to the rise of the single-family house hence, its neglect from the architectural profession.

At another level, Hitchcock and Johnson’s 1932 International Style Exhibition that marked the beginning of MoMA’s involvement in defining American modernism, separated housing from architecture, hence placing for a while the subject in the margins of American architectural discourse. The several exhibits held by the MoMA during the New Deal selected European exempla in order to legitimize the then recently inaugurated public housing programs. Those had a central role in codifying a national discourse on modern housing, shaping new residential models, typologies, ways of living as well as domestic cultures. These exhibitions also made use of international experiences and the modernist discourse in an instrumental way, in the interest of promoting the new programs and policies.

Despite their recurrence and importance (due to the active involvement of different actors), these events have received very little attention from canonical history of architecture. Through these exhibitions, a number of relevant issues of varying scale regarding public programs and policies, architectural and urban discourses (from the domestic space to that of the neighbourhood, to urban conceptions), the shaping and transmission of specialized knowledge and expertise, the experimentation with and defining of housing typologies, new technologies and methods of con-

struction, or even furniture design, could be addressed. Moreover, from the interwar years to the Cold-War, housing exhibits often assumed a crucial role, on the one side in codifying and disseminating residential cultures and ways of living (shaping social models), on the other, as occasions of cultural and political exchanges.

This colloquium aims at analysing the role and impact of exhibitions in the development of residential architecture. It seeks to examine the role of such federal, local, popular or specialized events in both codifying the national housing discourse and shaping residential models. Several questions will be addressed: What was on display in those exhibitions and what were their rhetorical and structural narratives? Or, what was the relationship between the exhibiting institution and the government in charge of housing? Did the discourse on housing undergo any transformation within a given institution? Or, how was the exhibition received within and without the architectural field?

The two-day conference will take place at ENSA Paris-Malaquais and at Politecnico di Milano following two thematics. The interest is directed towards exhibitions, which certainly share similar challenges and objectives with other modes of mediation, but has its own specificities.

In Paris the concern will be towards housing exhibitions as laboratory for the architectural field, focusing on their impact in defining architectural strategies and debates. Whereas in Milano, the focus will be on the mechanisms of the rhetoric and its impact on architecture, urban policies and cultural debate, that is to say the socio-political dimension underlying the housing exhibition. The intervention proposals will be selected on the basis of these thematics.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Contribution proposals will be submitted on February 20th, 2016 at the latest. It will be a summary of 500 words maximum, positioning the thematic scope to which it refers (in French or English for theme 1 and in Italian or English for theme 2). Abstracts must be original and must not have been published or presented at any other meeting. The acceptance of the contribution will be confirmed on March 1st, 2016 at the latest. It will be asked to the selected participants to send a summary of 2000 words, before May 1st, 2016.

It will be sent to: gaia.caramellino@gmail.com and stephaniedadour@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: The Role of Exhibitions in Housing Discourses (Paris/Milan, 13-20 May 16). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 24, 2016 (accessed Jan 26, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/12058>>.