

Architecture and Bureaucracy (Brussels, 30–31 Oct 19)

Brussels, Oct 30–31, 2019

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Architecture and Bureaucracy: Entangled Sites of Knowledge Production and Exchange
International conference

Often experienced by architects as a site of imposition and control, the bureaucracy associated with the production of the built environment can alternatively be seen as one of knowledge exchange. It is and has been a unique forum for the expression and discussion of ideas originating in disparate fields. Principles and concerns particular to architecture, interior design, urban design, engineering, construction sciences and technology, meet and meet topical issues in sociology and economy, law and politics, administration, management and government sciences and the ethics of public and private interests. These encounters, involving a wide variety of actors and cultures, significantly contribute to the production of architectural thought and to the materialisation of abstract concepts.

The unpublished record of bureaucracy, including planning applications, funding submission files, design, tender and building papers, central, regional and local government documents and company management papers, has been largely overlooked as a source for the study of architectural thought in the twentieth century. Yet it can illuminate valuable theory-practice relays and provide insight into the diverse intellectual traditions that converge in a culture of architecture more generously and inclusively considered. Reading such records as pieces of a powerful yet little understood form of media for architecture, as proposed by Ben Kafka for cultural history artefacts (*The Demon of Writing*, 2012), can bring out new dimensions in a wide-scope ontology of architectural production.

This conference intends to test such premises. We welcome papers that use the record of bureaucracy to illuminate the architectural and extra-architectural cultures of stakeholders in the design, regulation, assessment, approval, funding, specification and construction steps of building creation processes throughout the twentieth century. Proposals may focus on specific case studies of buildings, agents or administrations; discuss the nature, origins and specificities of discourses found in built-environmentrelated bureaucracy; and/or reflect on the methodological challenges in studying architecture and bureaucracy.

Preference will be given to papers that address one or several of the following subtopics:

1) Bureaucracy and transdisciplinary exchange Today as often in the past, bureaucracy can be seen as a co-work space for individuals with disparate education, training and professional cul-

tures: architects, interior architects and engineers sit side-by-side with sociologists, historians, legislators and jurists, managers and administrators, scientists and artists, as well as multifaceted, hard-to-categorise actors. We are interested in research that looks into how these different walks of life meet in bureaucracy, what their bearers bring, give out and take away in the process, and how transdisciplinary pollination occurs in bureaucratic milieus. A notable example would be the encounter of the engineering and architecture cultures in bureaucracy and the ways in which this enabled, potentiated or hindered the mutual understanding of these spheres as well as the development of negotiation, contagion, intersection and antagonism processes between them.

2) The office: site and subject of bureaucracy The office is a typical location for the performance of bureaucratic work. It is also a key architectural assignment of the twentieth century that rapidly developed in response to the increase of government administration and the growth of the service sector. The production of office spaces – from the choice of location to the interior design – was and is informed by a cocktail of management ambitions and official regulations. We are interested in papers that discuss the emergence of the modern office space as a co-produced environment influenced by a myriad of actors including the architect, the civil servant, the engineer, the contractor, the interior designer, the manager and the office worker, as well as a variety of knowledge fields, such as design, engineering and management sciences, sociology and occupational psychology. How did these actors and fields of expertise inform the spatial appearance of the modern office? Which bureaucratic vehicles played a central role?

3) Governments as agents of bureaucracy Governments at different levels constitute key actors in knowledge exchanges through bureaucracy; yet glimpses of the part played by official bureaucracies and their attending procedures and regulations in built environment history come most often in the guise of interference, obstruction or interdiction, to justify unbuilt designs, delayed works and unsatisfactory results. We welcome papers that attempt to look beyond discipline-bounded narratives of enlightened designers as victims of sclerotic bureaucracies and seek more nuanced accounts where other fundamental dimensions come into relief: after all, buildings are collective undertakings that embody the aspirations and concerns of communities as much as of individuals, having built-environment-related bureaucracy as a meeting ground. There, specific modes or discourse unravel, bound by bureaucracy's own codes of conduct, lexica, its forms and norms; there is rhetoric, posturing, even mischief in the record of bureaucratic exchanges – as well as the opportunity to convey beliefs, concerns and ambitions. Contributions that take interest in these edited but unpublished, often untapped expressions of architectural discourse in bureaucracy are also welcome.

Abstracts of max. 500 words accompanied by a one-page CV are to be submitted via e-mail to architectureandbureaucracy.arch@kuleuven.be by 30 April 2019.

Selected speakers will be notified by 31 May 2019.

The organisation of the conference is unable to support speakers with travel and accommodation expenses but will waive the registration fee for paper presentations.

More information will be posted on the website: www.architectureandbureaucracy.be

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