

Session at SAH (Montreal, 12–16 Apr 23)

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76th Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians

[1] The Unresolved Tensions of Mass Housing

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"The Unresolved Tensions of Mass Housing", session in the 76th Annual International Conference of The Society of Architectural Historians in Montréal, Canada.

Session chairs: Aniel Guxholli and Valentina Davila, McGill University

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Affordable mass housing projects of the twentieth century emerged in response to the severe shortages of the interwar years. For the first time, the state took on the role of patron of residential architecture. Housing became one of the primary objects of modernist architectural research, which approached it as a technical and economic problem. After the earliest transfers from a few western European centers to the Soviet Union and the Mediterranean beginning in the late 1920s, by the mid-twentieth century standardized modernist housing projects appeared worldwide, despite significant geographical, cultural, and political differences. In Latin America, where extreme poverty forced intense outmigration from the rural Andes into the cities, the state attempted to solve the problem of housing the poor while fostering the illusion that all sectors of society share in its wealth.

Critics of modernist mass housing projects have argued that many of the difficulties lay in the incongruence between theoretical models and reality, standards and actual ways of life, and the supposedly typical nuclear family as opposed to diverse living patterns. Yet another set of problems emerged in the translation of standard housing models from the Urals to the Caribbean, without proper adaptation to climate and local building practices, and under various political regimes. In many cases, architects failed to address the social and cultural aspirations of the intended inhabitants, exacerbating segregation and reinforcing endemic problems. In other cases, inadequate design standards for disenfranchised dwellers stemmed from the practices of totalitarian or corrupt regimes. This session invites contributions that examine these dynamics in mass housing worldwide, in various historical contexts up to the recent years, with a focus on how the process and outcome relate to programs of social reform, restructuring or coercion.

Reference:

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