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Introduction: sports stadia and modern urbanism

NIKOLAUS KATZER
Helmut-Schmidt-University, Universität der Bundeswehr, Hamburg, Holstenhofweg, 22403 Hamburg, Germany

Despite the fact that sporting spaces reflect key shifts in thinking about town planning, sports architecture is still an underexplored area in the historiography of urban design. The architects, engineers and designers attempting to regenerate and rejuvenate cities after World War II were aware of the popular interest in competitive sports. Stadia and landscape design were intended to help erase the negative urban images of nationalism and totalitarianism. By starting a dialogue with the past, town planners questioned the grandeur and monumentalism prevalent in architecture since the late nineteenth century. They sought to rediscover and redefine the modern.

One of the key moments in the post-war concepts of Olympic urbanism was therefore a new understanding of modernity in landscape and urban design. Under the conditions of the Cold War, however, architecture had a special political and ideological impact.[1] On the one hand, parks and stadia were seen as icons of newborn societies, signifying a break with the recent past and undesirable national traditions. The sports architecture often dominated the urban landscape, changing the look of the city. On the other hand, they were supposed to symbolize the superiority of the culture which created them. Thus, urban and landscape design had a social impact within the boundaries of the state in which they appeared but also functioned as spaces of international communication. It is crucial to reveal the complex backgrounds of how the stadia and sports complexes were written into the topographies of major cities.[2] Furthermore, we should examine within a global context the architectural means by which planners sought to represent effective images of a modern 'democratic' or 'socialist' state.[3]

[1] A.J. Wharton, *Building the Cold War. Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago, 2001).
[2] J. Bale, 'Introduction', in J. Bale and O. Moen (eds.), *The Stadium and the City* (Keele, 1995), 11–20.
[3] Cf. D. Crowley and S.E. Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford, 2002), 4–5; R. Stokes, 'In search of the socialist artefact: technology and ideology in East Germany, 1945–1962', *German History*, 15 (1997), 221–39.

Every society produces its own space and uses it in its own way. The Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre criticized Soviet urban planners, arguing that they failed to produce a 'socialist space', just reproducing the modernist model of urban design: 'Change life! Change Society! These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from the Soviet constructivists of 1920–30, and from their failure, is that new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa.'[4] When exploring the changes in urban landscapes after World War II, we should therefore pay attention to national and regional differences. Nevertheless, fashions and ideas were being communicated all over the world faster than ever before. Thinking of landscapes as mirrors of the *Zeitgeist* compels historians of architecture and urban design to clarify the extent to which regional adaptations were based on international trends or local customs.[5]

Alexandra Köhring's article deals with a turning point in Soviet architecture, i.e. the replacement of the monumental style of the Stalin era by the so-called 'socialist democratic' style of the 1950s. Köhring analyses the interrelationship between aesthetic considerations, programmatic claims, political ambitions and ideological framework using the example of the building of the Luzhniki sports complex in Moscow. Her story of how the paradigm of urban transformation was fundamentally changed under the conditions of late Stalinism, the death of the dictator in 1953 and the Khrushchev 'thaw', covers the development of the prototype of a young 'sporting city' combining elements of natural landscape, garden architecture and standardized ('industrialized') buildings (stadium, training grounds, facilities).

The article by Kay Schiller and Chris Young also examines a change in post-war architectural concepts, but a decade later in the 1960s and in connection with the forthcoming 'mega-event' of the Munich Games in 1972. The concept of a landscape in motion was suitable for the spectacle of the Munich Games, as well as for everyday life after the Olympics, and can be regarded as a reflection of a broader 'discourse on democracy'. But what seems to be a concept of an open and transparent, informal and well-organized public park could also be a means of camouflaging the architects' past-political and ideological conflicts.

Christian Tagsold's article examines modernity as a concept in constant flux. He makes this evident by analysing the spatial model and architectural design of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Starting from the assumption that the Olympics were a symbol of modernity, Tagsold discusses the peculiarities of his case. Japan, as a 'reborn' nation was confronted by the lasting legacy of the 'ultra-nationalist disaster', the ruling conservatism and the burden of the Tenno monarchy. The sports spectacle served as a rite of passage into modernity. The Games bridged the

[4] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991), 59.
[5] E. Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore, 1987), 8–10.

psychological gap between Hiroshima and the Olympics of 1964, becoming a powerful reflection of the 'new' Japan and its fundamentally transformed capital.

All three articles are concerned with special cases of modernist sports architecture and landscape design at different stages of the Cold War. In their consideration of the political character of major urban projects, the authors show that spatial practices, rhetorical inscriptions and symbolic meanings played a fundamental role in reshaping post-war society, ideological frameworks and everyday life.

However, what at first glance seems to be similar or even the same – sports as a catalyst of modernizing processes – had a different impact on the various societies and acted in different ways and directions. Under the conditions of post-war reconstruction, Cold War policy and superpower relations, sport became a crucial field of cultural transfer and a dynamic force of (inter)nationalism; as part of the reciprocal exchange of modes and styles, it was a competition in architecture and counter-architecture, a building and design race. Thus, the question is whether the sports terminology served merely as a means of communication or as a key code to get through the outer layers into a deeper understanding. If modernity is actually a comparative framework,[6] was sports architecture a driving force of internationalism? A modern design could also be used as 'ideological hairdressing' or as the newspeak of modernity, a lingua franca of (inter)nationalism, a translation from inferiority into superiority, i.e. for the styling and shaping of societies in transition.

The three articles rest on the assumption that by virtue of their provisional character parks, landscapes and gardens belong to sports micro-history. This means that the authors are looking at very specific instances of design (or the lack thereof) at particular moments in time. They are seeking to find out the values and ideas which a particular architect, designer or engineer, a state, party or local official, or a pressure group, institution or individual sought to impress upon the landscape and the planned building ensemble. They describe and illustrate the individual layout of each sports park but give only limited information about its uses and interpretations. Consequently, we now know more about intentions and motivations than about changing perceptions and practices. What about 'euphoric' visitors, young sportsmen and sportswomen, what about emotions and atmosphere, what about the feeling of 'harmony' and 'beauty' in parks and stadia? The ways in which the consumers interacted inside the park and stadium, and whether they were indeed playing the game according to architects' and designers' ideas, also need further examination. The planned sports festivals and the Olympic Games

[6] Y. Kotsonis, 'Introduction: a modern paradox – subject and citizen in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russia', in D.L. Hoffmann, Y. Kotsonis (eds.), *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (London, 2000), 2.

could change into a carnival of the people, and subcultures could evolve in the spaces of official culture.

A subject of further comparative investigation might be the biographies of the fascinating architects, engineers and scientists Kenzo Tange (1913–2005), Aleksandr Vlasov (1900–62), Otl Aicher (1922–91) and Guenther Grzimek (1915–96). We should learn more about their professional ethos and their *Weltanschauung* in more detail. Did they act as individualists or as executors of a collective will? The careers of these architects seem to be good examples of the continuity of modernist ambitions to redefine technocratic dreams as well as of the ambiguous meanings of modernity and modern sports.

More comparative work on the history of sports architecture, urban planning and landscape design is needed. The three articles cover different yet intertwining periods from the 1920s to the 1960s. It could be useful to think in terms of the interdependence of successive or synchronic socio-cultural and political crises and an increased interest in new concepts of space and architectural solutions among different social forces. Playgrounds, the stadium or whole ensembles of sports arenas, facilities and landscapes served as places of social transformation dissolving the boundaries between the actors and the spectators, social classes and ethnic groups. However, the unification of them into a collective body was by no means the end of the story. As the articles show, modern sports architecture and concepts of space generate complex collective identities as well as individualistic modes of behaviour. Modern sports could function in a cohesive as well as in a disintegrating way.

The decision to obtain the status of a sports superpower or to host the Olympic Games obviously had a deep impact on the history of the Cold War as well as on the individual countries. By studying the history of sports architecture, landscape design and Olympic urbanism we gain new and original insights into the transformation of post-war societies.