

Motylinska, Monika; Verlaan, Tim

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## Introduction: Architects as Global Entrepreneurs in the Long 20th Century

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## Introduction: Architects as Global Entrepreneurs in the Long 20th Century

**Monika Motylińska**, Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS), Erkner, Germany, [monika.motylińska@leibniz-irs.de](mailto:monika.motylińska@leibniz-irs.de)  
**Tim Verlaan**, Amsterdam Centre for Urban History (ACUH), Amsterdam, The Netherlands, [t.verlaan@uva.nl](mailto:t.verlaan@uva.nl)

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Throughout the 20th century, architects have become global entrepreneurs in expanding their portfolios and businesses. The far-reaching consequences of this historical development are at the core of this Special Collection. Our basic assumption is that since a substantial part of the modern built environment has been produced at the hands of private business, it is only logical to investigate it as such. During the period under research in this collection, architects and the commercial firms they were associated with played instrumental roles in the design, financing, construction and development of a wide range of building typologies, from sprawling suburbia to inner-city redevelopment schemes and social infrastructures.

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**Keywords:** global circulations; financialization; architectural business

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## Introduction

When starchitect Patrick Schumacher proposed to eliminate the very concept of social housing and privatize all public spaces in 2016, he was met with public outcry and protests outside his office. While used to intense criticism, the principal architect at Zaha Hadid Architects admitted that he was surprised to see colleagues and the broader public battering him for embracing market mechanisms and applauding the retreat of the state from the fields of architecture and urban planning. According to Schumacher, who built his fame on designing corporate architecture and masterplans on a global scale, neoliberalism had become the guiding principle in the design and production of the built environment (Wainwright 2016). Clearly, there was a discrepancy between what others expected from Schumacher and his own understanding of the role of the architect. The overwhelmingly negative response to his proposals was grounded in the expectation that architects should be working in the public interest better served by government rather than the market. As this Special Collection will demonstrate, debates over entrepreneurship as displayed by Schumacher, and, by extension, the question of how architects should relate to the marketplace, are nothing new. Throughout the 20th century, the post-war period in particular, architects have become global entrepreneurs in expanding their portfolios and businesses. The far-reaching consequences of this historical development are at the core of this Special Collection.

Our basic assumption is that since a substantial part of the modern built environment has been produced at the hands of private business, it is only logical to investigate it as such. During the period under research in this collection, architects and the commercial firms they were associated with played instrumental roles in the design, financing, construction and development of a wide range of building typologies, from sprawling suburbia to inner-city redevelopment schemes and social infrastructures. Due to the accelerating post-war demand for housing and office space, increasingly complex building processes and growing international competition, this *modus operandi* became more established, especially for western architects. Thus, we should be careful not to overemphasize the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, a decade that is generally portrayed as the moment when policies such as privatization, the setting up of public-private partnerships and the financialization of real estate were first implemented (Kefford 2021). Perhaps not surprisingly, architects have always been dependent on market forces and frequently boasted commercial ties with property developers and building companies. This intrinsic relationship between the field of architecture and private capital was not confined to the Western world. Economic logics, thinking and motivations also dominated the work of Western firms operating in the 'Global South'.

With this Special Collection we aim to embed the entrepreneurial architect more firmly into the narrative of 20th-century architectural history, specifically focusing on the post-war period. This was a decisive moment for the proliferation of globally active architectural offices due to dramatic geopolitical changes, decolonization above all, which led to an increasing number of clients from the Global South. Most importantly, newly independent states on the African continent hired Western firms to bolster their national infrastructures. However, already during the first half of the 20th century architecture and planning were closely tied to the emergence of transnationally operating construction companies as well, mostly of European or American origin (Lindner 1994). In addition, architects not only relied on imperial powers to acquire overseas commissions, but also actively sought clients during trade fairs, which acted as international marketplaces for commissions and the transfer of ideas (Motylinska 2020).

The globalization of the architectural practice leads us to adopt a transnational approach. According to Pierre-Yves Saunier, one of the field's foremost scholars, transnational history leads historians to follow flows, watch ties and reconstruct formations and relations between, across and through nations. Through historicizing contacts between communities and individuals, an empirical answer can be given to what is, and when was, globalization (Saunier 2013). We believe the financial flows, commercial ties and international contacts between architects, developers and builders deserve a transnational focus as well. Speaking to a different audience but with similar arguments, Rosemary Wakeman has called historians 'to train their scholarly lenses on the partnerships between the state and municipal entities as planners and transnational enterprises as builders and how these alliances were carried out on a global scale' (2014: 160). This Special Collection assents to these calls for broadening our research scope and aims to include architectural practice and property development in the Global South as well. The multifaceted involvements both within the Global South and between the Global South and the Global North have radically affected architectural production, with architects who work for international corporations and architectural offices becoming true global players.

By adopting a global scale in examining architects' entrepreneurial activities, we also hope to broaden our perspective on the agencies, rationales and mechanisms by which the diffusion of ideas on architecture and property development occur. Architects and their partners in the property sector and building industry travelled the world to propose their revolutionary ideas and learn about new developments elsewhere, leading us to believe that the global circulation of architectural and planning knowledge was often driven by economic expansion instead of intellectual hunger per

se. Still, we do not suggest reading architectural history as business history; rather, circulations of capital and labour are an intrinsic part of architectural activities and deserve at least equal attention as circulations of ideas and know-how. To underpin our hypotheses with empirical evidence, we have solicited contributions that focus on the work and worldviews of both architects with commercial ties and those who have turned developers themselves, as well as articles that examine the emergence of global architectural offices and the entrepreneurial discourse associated with this development. Within this playing field, architects acted as lynchpins between local government and property developers or were merely used by the latter to bolster the reputation of a new development, which has become standard practice in an economic sector where form increasingly follows finance (Wainwright 2019).

### **State of the Art**

The last few years have seen a flurry of scholarly publications in which the transition from widespread government intervention in the fields of architecture and planning to the primacy of the market is investigated from an explicit political-economic perspective. Neoliberalism — until a decade ago merely a slur — is now a buzzword that features prominently in many book titles and is taken seriously as the subject of academic study, as exemplified by a string of recent architectural and urban histories that have done an excellent job in examining the changing role of architecture in a more market-driven work environment (Cupers, Mattson and Gabrielsson 2020; Fontenot 2021; Phillips-Fein 2017; Spencer 2016). In addition to this growing interest in the relationship between neoliberalism and the production of built environments, architectural historians have also begun to examine the multiple roles of the architect under capitalist conditions — most extensively for the American context by Sara Stevens (2016). In the seminal volume *The Architect as Worker* (2015), the simplistic polarization depicted from the architect's vantage point — 'architects design, constructors build; we do art, they do work' (p. 62) — is successfully countered by Peggy Deamer and others, who contextualize the agency of architects from a labour perspective — a line of thought that is continued in Deamer's monograph *Architecture and Labor* (2020). Contrary to this Special Collection, these authors pursue a rather traditional genealogy of globalization processes in architecture, rooting them in the activities of CIAM and then focusing primarily on the 'shock of the global' from the 1970s onwards (see esp. Wilson et al. 2015). In her earlier work, Deamer also proposes the consideration of a much longer temporal trajectory of links between architecture and capitalism by focusing on anglophone discourses and well-investigated phenomena such as the Bauhaus (2014).

While the work of Deamer is an essential contribution to the field, it leaves aside the more mundane architectural typologies of the two last centuries. This lacuna has recently been partially addressed by Łukasz Stanek's monograph *Architecture in Global Socialism* (2020), which is a culmination of decades of meticulous research on the activities of architects from the Eastern Bloc in West Africa and the Middle East. Stanek's contribution makes us reconsider architectural activities beyond capitalist market dynamics and the notions of financial value, amongst others, by investigating multilateral barter trade deals within the socialist supranational economic organization CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). Hence, Stanek broadens the understanding of economic processes in the field of architecture by principles of mutuality and solidarity, according to which buildings can be seen as the materialization of common world views rather than speculative objects. Although not part of the analysis in this Special Collection, considering socialist contexts allows us to rethink the role of architects and is crucial for expanding our perception of architectural labour.

Several other researchers contributed to a reconciliation of the architectural and economic domains too. In *Economy of Architecture* (2015), Juliet Odgers, Mhairi McVicar and Stephen Kite explore different notions of economy, although the actual aspects of profit-making, market strategies and dealing with a scarcity of means are not their main focus — as if these might have been all too obvious for historical investigation. In this regard, the collection *Industries of Architecture* (2016) provides interesting links between architectural design and the means of production of the built environment. Its editors, Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amhoff and Nick Beech, have opened up a promising field of multi-layered investigations of architectural materialities at the intersection of architectural and construction history, thus also reconnecting architecture to the general category of labour. Indirectly, such a focus enables us to also reconsider the role of architects, interrogating their day-to-day activities on the construction site as part of a wider network of actors who 'build'. This recent widening in the definition of builders resonates well with Andrew Saint's accurate but perhaps premature observation of the 'transformation of "architectural history", with its emphasis on aesthetics, design and authorship, into "building history", which has broader social and economic preoccupations' (Saint 1983: ix). In his monograph, Saint alludes to the role of the architect as a 'businessman', while examining architectural practice in the 19th-century United States, and as an 'entrepreneur', with reference to prominent architectural personalities in post-war Great Britain. Saint demonstrates how preconceptions about architecture as an 'artistic' craft were often at odds with the reality of the construction business in which the question of success — often reduced to monetary wins — played a crucial role.

Outside the field of architectural history, more attention has been paid to global property dynamics, in particular by geographers, urban sociologists and a limited number of urban historians (e.g., Fainstein 1994; Rogers 2016; Halbert and Attuyer 2016; Rogers and Koh 2017). It is from these disciplines that we lay our theoretical framework, in particular by extending the ideas of key thinkers in urban and transnational studies to the domain of architectural history. Already in 1989, in a seminal article on the rise of entrepreneurial modes of urban governance during the last quarter of the 20th century, David Harvey lamented the focus in literature on government ‘when the real power to reorganise urban life so often lies ... within a broader coalition of forces’ (1989: 6).

Architectural firms and property developers were often central to such growth-oriented coalitions. We can only begin to understand how buildings are financed and constructed by investigating how commercial architects interacted with their financial backers and governments, who have always depended on the accumulation and movement of capital to sustain economic growth (Savitch and Kantor 2002). This became even more pronounced during the post-war period, when urbanization supplanted industrialization as the driving force of capitalism; as Andy Merrifield has observed in relation to the work of Henri Lefebvre, ‘The capitalist epoch reigns because it now orchestrates and manufactures a very special commodity, an abundant source of surplus value as well as massive means of production, a launch pad as well as a rocket in a stratospheric global market: urban space itself’ (2006: 81). Following this observation, it is no coincidence that our contributions all focus on (sub)urban locations, as this is where land was scarcest and consequentially the biggest profits were made.

## Contributions

Although the historiography of this Special Collection’s research focus has become increasingly heterogeneous over time, most publications still demonstrate a preference towards particular buildings, well-known oeuvres, commissioned designs, biographical case studies and the transfer of ideas and planning concepts, conveniently leaving aside the question of how architecture is actually financed. Consequently, architects are often still portrayed as independent masterminds, more akin to artists in ateliers than entrepreneurs in the real world. The contributions in this Special Collection offer a different perspective.

Our interest in a global scope and long temporalities as well as different methodological approaches is reflected in the arrangement of articles. Instead of focusing exclusively on the post-war period, we first turn our attention towards capitalist developments in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century. By exposing public debates and construction supply chains for monumental Beaux-Arts developments such as



Rio de Janeiro's Theatro Municipal, David Sadighian reveals how the architecture of 'whiteness' was a crucial instrument for uneven and highly racialized capitalist growth in the Global South. Sadighian investigates how the categories of the architect, engineer, entrepreneur and bureaucrat were blurred in a network of builders closely connected both to France (through the École des Beaux-Arts) and Germany (through the involvement of German companies as suppliers). By presenting a broad analysis of archival sources and contemporary public discourse, theoretically underpinned by the concept of racialized capitalism, Sadighian scrutinizes how one particular landmark project can be interpreted not only as part of municipal development programmes in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, but also as a materialization of entrepreneurial activity.

From Brazil we shift our focus to Bavaria, where the globally active architectural practice Lippsmeier + Partner (L+P) had its seat. Based on extensive archival research in Germany and Canada, fieldwork in Germany and Tanzania as well as oral history collections in both countries, Rachel Lee and Monika Motylińska shed light on the interdependencies between design research and practice. In their article, they investigate the workings of an architectural office as a collective, multinational and multilingual practice instead of highlighting the role of Georg Lippsmeier as the company's mastermind. L+P was successful in different regions in the Global South from the late 1950s until the 1990s and was associated with the Institut für Tropenbau (Institute for Building in the Tropics, IFT). As a hub of knowledge and a centre of expertise, this was a unique and powerful institute. IFT's research and publication activities were inseparably intertwined with L+P, which specialized in designing exhibition and trade fair buildings around the globe, as well as a wider range of typologies in the so-called tropics. Instead of simply reconstructing knowledge circulation, Lee and Motylińska investigate this binary combination of research and architectural practice as a — largely successful — business model for selling social infrastructure to the Global South.

There are many similarities between the protagonists in this article and the subsequent, more biographically oriented contribution by Janina Gosseye and Donald Watson. In their analysis of the work of Australian architect Edwin Codd, the binary opposition between social engagement and the pursuit of business interests is challenged. Like L+P, Codd was interested in affordable design solutions that were applicable in the Global South as well. Through oral history collection and archival analysis, the authors show how the IB74 building system offered a low-cost solution to the state's school-building deficit. Similarly, the US patent for a space frame junction was part of a larger, profit-oriented business strategy intertwined with interest in societal needs. In pursuit of commercial goals, Codd participated in many international trade fairs — which poses another analogy to L+P. This activity proved instrumental to the expansion of their network and acquiring funding for large-scale projects.



The acquisition of funding was central to the *modus operandi* of property developers as well — an underexamined but hugely influential profession in the field of post-war architecture and urban planning. Moving the focus away from architects and taking a speculative office development in Rotterdam as a case study, Tim Verlaan and Alistair Kefford investigate the growing rapprochement between the British and Dutch property markets during the 1960s and 1970s. The authors' focus on British developers and their alliances with local officials does not mean architects did not have any role to play: American starchitects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) were instrumental in the construction of the massive Europoint office building. As such, the development should be seen as a precursor to neoliberal urbanism and the globalization of property development. Thus, Verlaan and Kefford lay bare the vulnerability of local governments eager for prestige and foreign investment, which, as we have seen in a string of recent property scandals in cities worldwide, is still relevant today.

This Special Collection came together as a collaboration between the fields of architectural and urban history. Both disciplines use comparative approaches to explain historical continuities and change and to discover similarities and differences in how built environments are produced, used and represented through time and across space (Crysler et al. 2012; Ewen 2016). While our overview is far from comprehensive, we believe that a multidisciplinary perspective on the entrepreneurial strategies of architects is necessary to historicize interrelated dependencies and to uncover the motivations and strategies of actors involved in the construction process that are directly or indirectly linked to their commercial interests – and thus contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the entrepreneurial role architects played in the 20th century. By doing so, we complement a small but rapidly growing body of literature on the global history of commercial architecture and the actors involved.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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