

## Layers of Modernism

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# EDITORIAL

Uta Pottgiesser & Wido Quist

Editors-in-Chief

## LAYERS OF MODERNISM

The idea for this special issue was born during the Imperfect Modernism conference in a discussion with the guest editors Liutauras Nekrošius and Kateryna Didenko. Held in Vilnius in May 2024 and organized by the guest editors of this special issue, the conference brought together scholars, architects, and experts in heritage preservation from Canada, Cyprus, Eritrea, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Kosovo, Lebanon, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Ukraine. A wide range of issues was discussed, highlighting the uniqueness of regional adaptations in conservation, restoration, and adaptive reuse of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement shaped by each country's political, economic, and socio-cultural factors, while also revealing shared patterns.

Turning to the discussion on the concept of Modernism, it is worth noting that different manifestations and perceptions of modernist heritage have evolved throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries across diverse contexts and value systems. Scholarly debates, conservation practices, international initiatives, and local experience have shaped the concept as layered and flexible, now encompassing not only doctrinal modernist works and interpretations but a broader spectrum of modernities.

The earliest doctrinal interpretations linked modernist heritage primarily to the work of pioneering figures of the Modern Movement—often originated in North-western Europe and North America and considered to be Eurocentric. The classic works of Nikolaus Pevsner<sup>1</sup>, the foundational texts of Hubert-Jan Henket and Wessel de Jonge, and DOCOMOMO's activities since the late 1980s established the disciplinary canon, presenting Modernism as a coherent doctrine embodied in the works of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and the Bauhaus. However, this canon soon began to expand, incorporating Art-deco, tropical and colonial, and Soviet and socialist architecture, thus opening the way to a broader inventory.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the Modern Asian Architecture Network (2001) highlighted Asia's rich local interpretations of Modernism, while Western-centric approaches continued to shape the global canon by focusing on leading figures and schools, and international perspectives emphasized Modernism as a universal 20<sup>th</sup>-century architectural language. The issue of 'Other Modernisms' was not only the theme of the 2006 Docomomo International Conference but was further discussed in the Docomomo Journal 36.<sup>3</sup> The integrative framework of UNESCO's Identification



01 The 2006 Docomomo International Conference and Student Workshop in Istanbul (workshop) and Ankara (conference) was entitled and devoted to "Other Modernisms". © Photo: Wido Quist, 2006.

and Documentation of Modern Heritage program (2003) encompassed an even broader range—from Art Nouveau to Postmodernism—highlighting the diversity of modernist trajectories.<sup>4</sup>

In the last decades, new horizons have emerged in understanding Modernism. The memory-based heritage perspective views modernist architecture as a carrier of collective memory, tied to everyday practices and community attachments, as reflected in the mASEANa Project (2015-2020).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, an eco-cultural and sustainable heritage perspective is emerging, highlighting the potential of modernist buildings for sustainable development, adaptive reuse, and energy and resource efficiency, as demonstrated for example in Ecomomo<sup>6</sup>, a publication by Docomomo Netherlands as from 2010 a follow up to the 2008 Rotterdam Docomomo International Conference or Docomomo Journal 44 from 2011<sup>7</sup>. Both approaches are still further developing but already complement traditional views of modernist heritage mainly driven by historical and biographic approaches, broadening the horizons of its interpretation and preservation.

Within the growing community of today's 85 national and regional Docomomo Working Parties, this approach gains increasing importance and relevance, and poses the challenge of recategorizing and diversifying the views to modernist buildings, sites and neighborhoods. It is our privilege that the guest editors Liutauras Nekrošius and Kateryna Didenko took up this challenge and identified manifold examples that might be perceived as 'imperfect' from a traditional modernist perspective and will help us to understand and further define the future scope and limits of Modern Movement.

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- 2 TOSTÓES, A. (2017). How to love modern [post]-colonial architecture: Rethinking memory in Angola and Mozambique cities. *Architectural Theory Review*, 21(2), pp. 1-22.
- 3 TOURNIKIOTIS, P. (2007). Modernism and the issue of otherness. In *Other Modernisms: A Selection from the DOCOMOMO Registers*. *Docomomo Journal*, 36, pp. 5-79. <https://doi.org/10.52200/docomomo.36>.
- 4 UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2003). Identification and documentation of modern heritage (World Heritage Papers 5). UNESCO.
- 5 HAYASHI, K., Muramatsu, S., Yamana, Y., & Widodo, J. (Eds.). (2024). *mASE-ANa: Appreciating modern ASEAN architecture* (Paperback). Docomomo Japan. ISBN 978-4-904700-80-8
- 6 FOOLE, F., Eikhoudt, B., Bierman, J. (Eds.) (2010). *Ecomomo – Hoe duurzaam is Modern Erfgoed*, Docomomo Netherlands, ISBN 9789052693972. [https://www.docomomo.nl/upload/files/publicatie\\_ecomomo1\\_1.pdf](https://www.docomomo.nl/upload/files/publicatie_ecomomo1_1.pdf)
- 7 TOSTÓES, A., Blasi, I. & Prudon, T. (Eds.) (2011). *Modern and Sustainable*. *Docomomo Journal*, 44. <https://doi.org/10.52200/44.I.Z10ME4PV>.