

Introduction to *Architecture in Development*

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The introduction to
*Architecture in
Development: Systems
and the Emergence of the
Global South.*

PROJECT

Architecture in
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Cover of *Architecture in Development: Systems and the Emergence of the Global South* (Routledge 2022).

The chapters in [this volume](#) look at how architects, planners, and other related experts responded to the contexts and discourses of “development” after World War II. The discourses of development augured both an institutional shift and a cultural turn in the processes of modernization and capital formation around the world. They entailed an intensification and expansion of knowledge and expertise that accompanied the formation and transformation of new nation-states, transformed governmental mandates, and expanded franchises, along with the accompanying shifts in cultural and economic imaginaries. These chapters explore histories of architecture and urban planning that both participated in and were driven by these shifts. In large part, the discourses of development were not new. On the one hand, they referred back to ideas about transitions to modern forms of society from agrarian and “primitive” societies that had been prevalent since the eighteenth century, ideas that were given a statutory (and violent) mandate in the Soviet Union’s New Economic Policy in the interwar years. On another level, they linked back to archaic arguments of pastoral power, often rehearsing classical arguments about the relationships of state, society, and sovereignty as well as the uses and place of knowledge in managing these relations. The Foucauldian themes of governmentality and biopolitics—knowledge forms revolving around the nature of wealth, population, territory, health, hygiene, consumption, and the disciplining of behavior—were central to these new deployments of expertise, often seeking to replace politics in the classic sense. Considerable areas of overlap lay between colonial and postcolonial regimes in this regard, not least the critical significance that colonizer and (ex-)colonized accorded to the realm of “culture,” seen both as a wellspring but also as an obstruction in these discourses of freedom and emancipation. Consequently, development theory would not manifest itself in tracts of economic and political theory alone. It would manifest itself in song poetry, cinema, theater, literature and art, indeed in every sphere of expression where economic predicaments might be seen to impinge on cultural imaginaries.

Architecture and urban planning would appear in development discourse as a crucial terrain operating somewhere between culture and economics. Architects styled themselves both as aesthetic world-builders, styling the flurry of institution-building that took place in developing countries at this time in an array of modernist forms, and as mundane contractors, making claims on fiscal outlays and immersing themselves in bureaucratic and

procurement processes. For a brief period of time, architects and planners found themselves at the deliberative table wherever projects were being conceptualized, tasked to undertake buildings dedicated to political, biopolitical, or cultural functions, working alongside economists, doctors, researchers, politicians, and industrialists to design the very manner in which people ate, learned, worked, and produced. Development was, to cite Arturo Escobar, an “immense design project” itself,¹ one that today requires radical disassembly and rethinking beyond innocuous terms like “global modernism” and “colonial modernities” that risk erasing the sinews of conflict encountered in these globalizing and modernizing projects. This book seeks both to investigate and assemble ongoing scholarship on *architecture in development*, attending equally to the conflicting politics of knowledge and hierarchies of resource mobilization embedded in the resulting architectural forms.

If economic growth, defined by technological advances and industrialization, was seen as essential to support the newfound freedoms of the developing world, culture provided an alternative tent under which the philosopher-princes of development theory could gather the collective and individual drivers of motivation. What went by the name of development “theory,” therefore, was not some unitary concept but as an unwieldy smorgasbord of themes, initiatives, and interventions. As such, these ideas would assume many avatars across the world, infusing the political language of wildly opposed, inconsistent, and unrelated views of savant and gangster alike, affording ideological shelter *both* for hegemonic regimes of different kinds and opposition to them. Utilized as a shared *lingua franca* by despots, Oxbridge and LSE-trained heresiarchs, social justice movements, militaries, bureaucrats, and guerrillas, and by non-Marxists and Marxists alike, the rhetoric of development would also provide cover for umpteen private and public idiosyncrasies and hobbyhorses, enabling different cliques to establish little and large fiefdoms in bureaucracies, governments, and universities alike. Its keywords would be used to legitimate a vast variety of professions and pursuits, from the lowest tier of political bosses and fixers to large knowledge-institutional and fiscal networks composed of scientists, technicians, bureaucrats, and consultants, not to rule out expanding global cohorts of expertise-peddling hacks and charlatans.

Any timeline of development history that we may provide here must consequently only be a provisional one. Decolonization was not some singular, uniform, or even controlled process, given the myriad juridical and

governmental norms as well as economic rationales with which various colonial regimes came to control large tracts of territory around the world. At the turn of the twentieth century, many Latin American and Asian countries, including China, were nominally independent even if their sovereign powers were strongly controlled by semicolonial domains of influence, many of which slid handily into neocolonial forms of dominance after the Second World War. Likewise, the premise of sovereignty in the newly independent countries of the mid-twentieth century were significantly complicated by the onset of the Cold War almost immediately after the war, leading to brutal counterinsurgency wars in Malaya, Kenya, Vietnam, and Algeria. If World War II ended centuries of warfare over national boundaries in Europe, the European exit from the colonies would, by contrast, instigate—and actively propagate—new waves of warfare among territories tentatively kept at peace by imperial *détente* in the metropole. The five years after the Second World War would see the largest population migrations ever in history, and state-formation in the Third World would be accompanied by equally unprecedented mass slaughter and genocide on unimaginable scales, establishing patterns that have yet to cease. The tropes of development would thereby come to be wholly entangled within and complicated by these histories, creating alibis for betterment and oppression often in the same breath, and creating as many new types of perpetrators and saviors as beneficiaries and victims. Like other discourses of freedom, the emancipatory rhetoric of development proves to be handy for the financialization and militarization of societies alike.

The term development remains just as powerful today. It is invoked as an alibi to legitimize a complete lockdown of movement and communication in Kashmir, extrajudicial murders in Indonesia, and state-aided razing of rainforests in the Amazon. The ambivalence within its postulates allows it to infect opposing agendas in electoral contests—to wit, United States President Donald Trump’s pronouncement, “We’re a developing nation, too”—but also new movements for social, economic, and environmental justice. At various levels, the discourses of development have conditioned everything from speech acts to, say, the diameter of a water pipe or the composition of cement or fertilizers. The oscillation between ambivalence and high specificity impact, in turn, countervailing practices of control and freedom, conditioning the manner in which these words are understood, defined, and voiced. What development (like similar such words as *modernity*) *means* or could mean, for

the purposes of this book, would be a futile question; it receives as many definitions as the innumerable kinds of actors who see benefit in deploying some idiom of development in their own interest.

This book sets out to examine the arrays of power, resources, technologies, networking, and knowledge that cluster around this necessarily ambiguous realm, and the manner in which architects and planners negotiated these thickets in their multiple capacities, as epistemic authorities, as technicians, as negotiators, and as commentators and prognosticators on the future of government, settlements, space, domesticity, education, health, and every other field where arguments for development were invoked.

The Bretton Woods System in the Developing World

Toward the end of the Second World War, the dominant consensus that emerged within economic and political circles was that the world economy requires managing. The conference of economists from Allied countries that took place in the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, of July 1–22, 1944, represented an opening gambit for laying out a new, cohesive, and globally encompassing monetary system for the postwar world. The principal core of the Bretton Woods system was its effort to abolish the plural but also clannish order of the old European empires in order to establish a coordinated monetary system for a world composed of a far larger number of sovereign nation-states. Uncertainty in global markets, the argument went, deepened when states and politics acted in contradictory directions or when states' traditional fiscal-monetary fecklessness in market intervention went contrary to economic logic. These at least were the primary reasons adduced by economists in the 1940s for the Great Depression, as well as for the many such prior depressions of the previous century. The singular instrument that the Bretton Woods system focused on to battle the uncertainty of the capitalist system as ordained by the prewar imperial regimes was the money form. In creating the new system, money, along with its haphazard and ad hoc determinations of “price,” was detached from its association with the “natural” world, that is, the metallic standard, and reposed instead in a new, self-fulfilling *social* construct, a single exchange system pegged to the clout of the American dollar.

By any measure, the “hero” at Bretton Woods was the ailing John Maynard Keynes, whose *General Theory of*

Employment, Interest and Money, published in 1936, expounded on the key role that the money-form, as a crucial determinant of market expectations, could play under certain constraints in stimulating investment within an ever-looming landscape of risk. The state's strategic injection of money as an inflationary instrument within a finite range of underemployment, Keynes had argued, could have the effect of modulating wage prices and commodity prices as a way of stimulating demand, such that markets would not be subject to the *simultaneous* demand and supply crises as experienced during the Great Depression. This gambit aimed to "save capitalism from the capitalists" by curbing the worst tendencies of the market to swing in boom and bust cycles.

The institutions founded in the wake of the Bretton Woods systems had global repercussions in the norms that it stipulated for monetary convertibility between national markets. It is hard to underscore the extent to which this was based on an extraordinary international compact between its participating nations. At one fell swoop, the output of a small fruit orchard in the Himalayas, the supply of diamonds in Rhodesia, the wages of a policeman in Singapore, the cost of a highway on the outskirts of Paris, and countless such unrelated economic "transactions" across the globe became linked to each other through the mediation of the American dollar, which became the default global currency for settlements across the world's diverse market systems.

Yet this presumptive multilateralism still remained, as many noted at the time, an Anglo-American compact. The Soviet Union and its satellites stayed out of Bretton Woods, based on their very different reading of the money form and its relationship to the state. The Bretton Woods conference had also included, in the words of the Mount Washington hotel staff that served as the venue, a "gathering of Colombians, Poles, Liberians, Chinese, Ethiopians, Russians, Filipinos, Icelanders and other spectacular peoples" comprising a substantial portion of the 730 delegates present, late-colonial proxies and peripheral witnesses to a change in the armature of Empire.² Pushed to the fringe of these deliberations, representing by far the demographic majority of the planet but invited only on the say-so of their colonial masters of the time, they were little solicited for their views on the creation of a global arrangement that they correctly understood, and voiced concerns about, as radically poised to overwhelm their future.

This marginalization did not reflect their political marginalization alone: their sidelining also reflected a structural lacuna in the Keynesian economic universe and hence in the design of the Bretton Woods agreements. The *General Theory* goes to great lengths to stipulate the specific relations of wages (demand), levels of employment and output under which its arguments for monetary infusion by the state and the cost of money (inflation) hold true. Another way of putting this is to say that Keynesian tools only worked at near full-employment levels, a premise that assumes a fully industrialized society. To deploy this strategy in conditions other than full employment was, to use Keynes' famous phrase, like "pushing on a string," infusing money and technology into worlds that had little aptitude to (productively) employ it.

Evidently this begged the question of the "developing" world, defined as they were by minimal penetration by modern, mechanized industry. "Pump-priming" demand through inflation was pointedly out of place for a nonindustrial workforce with the low productivity outputs associated with non-mechanized economies, a condition that development economists promptly took to describing as "surplus," "underemployed," or "unemployed" labor. Nonetheless, the monetary norms laid down at Bretton Woods reflected the Keynesian calculus, thus subjecting the entire developing world to an institutional armature that deemed them, de facto, if not irrelevant, certainly "defective" in terms of the theory driving this arrangement. This institutional arrangement thus implicitly recreated a hierarchy where industrial (formerly colonial) powers would retain primacy over countries enmeshed in primary production and resource extraction. If the developing world was, by definition, that in which Keynesian monetary theory did not hold, then "development economics" and "development planning" would appear in the postwar period as fields driven precisely by the desire to bridge the epistemological gap between Keynesian assumptions and the large tracts of the planet where these assumptions did not hold.

The effect of the money form on exchanges in every other social sphere has long been the object of study, from some of the earliest theological texts to a slew of modern scholarship in almost every discipline, and the conceivers of the Bretton Woods arrangement understood well that their impact would go far beyond monetary-fiscal decisions alone. In addition to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the two institutions designated to shore up global financial markets, the Bretton Woods Organizations also comprised,

under the umbrella of the United Nations and outside it, multi-lateral arrangements and charters dedicated to health, education, culture, labor rights, the environment, housing, quality standards, scientific research and cooperation, statistics, to name some of the prominent areas. Biopolitics and technique took precedence in realms where previously *laissez faire* approaches and conventional politics had reigned before, under the premise that “disinterested” agreements could be reached sooner and easier amongst experts arguing about methodology than in the internecine, squabbling play of interests that comprised most societies and dispensations of power. Many of the authors in this volume interrogate the work done by these Bretton Woods Organizations to show how the combination of biopolitics and technique have been central to organizing the post-Bretton Woods built environments.

A corollary to the Bretton Woods international arrangements of a single exchange system pegged to the dollar was the primacy accorded to *sovereign* nation-states as the principal agency tasked with guiding this new international compact. With Washington holding the fiscal reins, it nonetheless devolved on nation-states to negotiate the fraught predicaments of socialization produced by this monetary system. In its own way, the emphasis placed by the Bretton Woods system on the centrality and importance of the state cannot be discounted here, tantamount to something like apostasy within the economic liberal privileging of the autonomy of markets that it was otherwise designed to propagate. The hobgoblin that haunted the proceedings of the Mount Washington Hotel conference and analyses of the worldwide depression that preceded it was the Soviet *Gosplan*. In the 1920s, the forced modernization undertaken by the Soviet New Economic Policy had entailed the active alteration, from on high, of the terms of trade between agriculture and industry, a process involving the state’s intervention in determining prices all along the chain of commodities. While Keynes was none too taken with the ultimate viability of the Soviet system, the reasons behind the central role accorded to the state in the *General Theory* was as much political as economic, in that its theories were intended to defend political liberalism against the growing attractions of communism given the widespread despair of the Great Depression. Still, the *General Theory* restricted the state’s role solely to monetary manipulation while defending a circumscribed chaos or “animal spirits” in capitalist markets as essential to their vitality. Although there was a world of difference between the so-called “developing” economies and the Keynesian model, the

traditions of conceptualizing the city. By attending to how architecture, as a form of expertise and know-how as well as the producer of technical and aesthetic objects, attempted to manage difference by mediating between competing epistemologies, different scales of intervention, temporal as well as spatial, and various sectors of governance, the chapters that follow consider architecture as a field that fleshes out in concrete form the aporias and crises of development discourse.

1 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 32. [↑](#)

2 Jamie Martin, "Were We Bullied?" *London Review of Books* 35, no. 22 (November 21, 2013). [↑](#)

3 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005). [↑](#)

4 For the concept "theater of development" see Ayala Levin, *Architecture and Development: Israeli Construction in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Settler-Colonial Imagination, 1958–1973* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 15–18. [↑](#)

5 Mahbub ul Haq, *The Strategy of Economic Planning: A Case Study of Planning* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1. [↑](#)

6 Eric Helleiner, "Bretton Woods and the Endorsement of Capital Controls," in *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 25–50. [↑](#)

7 Paul Rosenstein-Rodan first presented this argument in a short paper titled "Problems of Industrialization of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe," *Economic Journal* 53 (1943): 202–211. Also see Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, "Notes on the Theory of the 'Big-Push,'" in *Economic Development for Latin America*, ed. Howard S. Ellis and Henry C. Wallich (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 57–81. [↑](#)

8 Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); also see Edward B. Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). [↑](#)

9 P. P. Streeten, "International Cooperation," in *Handbook of Development Economics*, ed. Hollis Chenery and T. N. Srinivasan, vol. 2 (New York: Elsevier, 1989), 1,154. [↑](#)

10 Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Birth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957). [↑](#)

11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966, 1994). [↑](#)

12 See Keith Michael Baker, "The Language of Science," in *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 85–128. [↑](#)

13 Paul Krugman, *Development, Geography, and Economic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 71. [↑](#)

14 David Webster, "Development Advisors in a Time of Cold War and Decolonization: The United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, 1950–59," *Journal of Global History* (July 2011): 260. [↑](#)

