

# PICTURESQUE MODERNITIES

## ARCHITECTURAL REGIONALISM AS A GLOBAL PROCESS (1890-1950)

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### “Non-Soviet” Modern: How CIAM 4 Shaped Socialist Architecture

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#### Abstract

While the effects of CIAM-inspired, regional planning during the postwar decades (1950-70) are well known, the role played by CIAM in producing an earlier regional approach around political consensus—socialist architecture and urban planning—has not been fully explored. This paper examines the CIAM 4 “Functional City” Congress, first set for Moscow in 1932, but relocated to the ship *Patris II* in 1933 after several postponements. This study challenges the received view of the congress as a failure because it did not realize “universal” modernism within the Soviet Union. Architectural briefs and meeting protocols reveal instead a discursive space that allowed architects in the USSR and Europe to contend with a key issue at that time: Socialism carried an expectation of difference; the built environment should operate differently under socialism than other systems of economic governance. Could modernism express such difference?

This paper investigates the strategies of architect-interlocutors Hans Schmidt, Nikolai Milyutin, Ernst May, and Margaret Wyss—CIAM affiliates who worked in the USSR—to contend with that expectation of difference. They used CIAM’s “functional” zone approach to plan distinct cultural and social services areas as unique qualities of socialist cities. They coined linguistic conjunctions such as “modern non-Soviet architecture” and the “socialist functional city” to describe their proposals. These maneuvers reveal that USSR-based CIAM architects struggled to join the center of a discourse rather than be European modernism’s designated periphery. Yet the moment such conjunctions appeared to support an international system of values among modernist architects, the forces of cultural and political difference began to pull them apart. When the conference was cancelled in 1933, a split had emerged. Skirting political polarities, CIAM leaders declared themselves “neutral” technicians, while their leftist contemporaries came into view as “politician-architects” for a socialist region.

Sigfried Giedion and Cornelis Van Eesteren, in Moscow to prepare for CIAM 4 “The Functional City, here photographed at a construction site, 1932 (ETH Zürich Archives, Sigfried Giedion Papers)



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