

EN

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

OASE 117

Village Variations

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‘the village
follows us about
it’s just hiding
behind the façade of the city
...
the village
more than memory
is a psychoanalysis
of our modernity.’

Geert Bekaert, voice-over text for Jef Cornelis’s television documentary *Ge kent de weg en de taal*, BRTN, first broadcast 6 January 1976.

In the historiography of architecture and urban design, the village has been surprisingly underdiscussed. The same thing is happening in the contemporary architectural debate. Modernist historiography and current architecture criticism usually address avant-gardes, metropolitan urbanity, institutional urban building types and, more recently, the repurposing of industrial or commercial buildings and city districts. In this context, the village and the countryside implicitly function as the opposites of the modern city, although the modernisation of production, living and cultural experience has affected both city and countryside and therefore also the village.

Of late, ‘the village’ has been tentatively recapturing the attention of (usually regional) policymakers, residents and designers. This is partially due to the demand for spatial densification, climate challenges and declining biodiversity, but also to the pursuit of short chains for building, food and other activities. Unlike some 20 years ago, today the horizon of the architectural debate is no longer defined by the paradigm of the global network of competing cities.

Moreover, specifically in the Netherlands and Belgium, there are growing concerns for the ‘village identity’, for the preservation and even the ‘restoration’ of the appearance of villages and landscapes. This is manifesting partly as a reaction to ‘threatening’ expansion districts and the densification of villages with apartment buildings and other housing types. Recent publications include, for example, the essay ‘Niet meer maar beter. Dorps bouwen met Kwaliteit’ (‘Better, rather than More. Quality building in Villages’, Creative Industries Fund NL 2021-2022) in the Netherlands and ‘Toolbox Dorpse Architectuur’ (‘Toolbox Village Architecture’, AR-TUUR, 2021) in Flanders, where Flemish Government Architect Erik Wieërs expressed the ambition to approach the densification of villages as a qualitative issue under the heading of ‘villageness’. So things are increasingly in flux, but what is striking is that the way the conversation is conducted is often one-sided or quite superficial.

What are we talking about when we sing the praises of the village, want to ‘save it’ or emulate it? How universal is the village, how important are geographical variations between village types, and does the village enjoy renewed status and attention everywhere? Does the village still have meaning as a model in times of general urbanization, and in exactly what way?

OASE 117 seeks to contribute to the development of the debate and make room for the necessary historical perspective and theoretical and critical reflection. We are looking for contributions about the Low Countries as well as for articles that broaden the perspective geographically. We are interested in essays that, rather than oppose the village to modernity – ‘to become modern is to leave the village behind’ – examine the architecture and urban design of villages as complex

products of modernity and urbanization, or as the cultivated (counter)ideals of modern urbanism and architecture since the late nineteenth century.

We propose three guiding themes, namely:

1) The village as a cultural image

These articles address the dislike of and yearning for the village as a carrier of meaning, rootedness, authenticity. Is the romanticization of the village similar to the romanticization of peasant architecture and the vernacular? Is it a plea for a close-knit community, a place of comfort or of torment? What is the historical evolution of the cliché? What have cultural representations of villages meant to the Modern Movement, to the conservation movement, to the ecological movement, to post-war mass tourism? Does the village find new viability through what Bruno Latour calls 'the Earth orientation': an ecological project set to replace the modernization from local to global? To which cultural images and myths about the village do designers appeal in their projects, policymakers in their policy discourse, and critics in their architectural reviews? Which images and myths do they reject?

2) The village as an urban design model

Christian Schaub and Michael Schindhelm's 2008 film *Bird's Nest*, about the adventures of Herzog & de Meuron in China, includes a passage about a (failed) planning project for a district in the city of Jinhua. In it, the Basel architects present the village literally as an urbanization pattern. It turns out to be a model 'with small cubes'. The example raises questions about the urban design typomorphology of villages (linear villages, circular villages, greens villages, . . .), their plannability, their transportability, their replicability and even about whether they can be used as urban design models at all. What is left of the small-scale when it is applied on a large scale? Can village patterns exist separately from landscape and territory? And can we still talk about a village when we have skilfully densified it, expanded it, or transected it with infrastructure?

3) The architectural language of villages

Is there really such a thing as village architecture, or is the recent interest more about forms of collectivity in housing? Or, for example, about alternative care architecture? Are we talking about typology, form and appearance, or about materiality and construction? What interesting histories of ideal village architecture and of the curated villagescape can we write? What, for example, has been the (historical) interaction between (heritage) inventories of rural architecture and model books for good village architecture? Does the 'modern village' presented at the 1913 World Fair in Ghent give us any clues? What does the post-war or contemporary architecture of public facilities in villages tell us about 'village culture' and collective village living? Which theories, and which architecture criticism, should we reread today?

We invite authors to submit an abstract of up to 500 words, as a proposal for a 3,000-word article (up to max. 4,000 words). Abstracts must be submitted by 21 March 2023 via the following e-mail address: info@oasejournal.nl. Authors will be notified on 3 April whether their proposal is accepted and will then be asked to submit their full article around 1 July.



Still from
Christian Schaub and Michael Schindhelm's 2008 film *Bird's Nest*