

# The idea of decentralization and regional planning, in the 20th Century

## International symposium

School of Architecture, Grenoble (ENSAG), November 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### Call for papers

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from URSS to the United-States, Germany, Italy and Japan, architects, planners, economists, and politicians have repeatedly proposed decentralization as a way to restructure societies and their spaces—notably in response to political, economic, environmental, social, or cultural crisis. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century some proponents of those ideas (such as Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye and the members of the RPAA) regarded decentralization as the means to oppose the devastating effects of *metropolization*, that, since the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, has exploited natural resources, ruined local economies and cultures and standardized ways of life. The advocates of decentralization (Frank Lloyd Wright, Bruno Taut, Ernst May, Hannes Meyer, Nikolai Milioutine, Okhitovich, Giorgio Rigotti, Gaston Bardet, etc.) then fought the established spatial organization and aimed to establish new urban forms that would promote a new and fairer society. Many of its promoters considered decentralization not solely a reorganization of the diverse activities on the ground; they also saw decentralization as a means to establish a new economic and social order, intended to be more egalitarian also thanks to the diffusion of modern techniques – such as electricity, telephone, motorisation or radio.

The societal changes, after the Second World War, encouraged new approaches for national planning in rural regions or metropolitan areas with the purpose to imagine their future development (cf. Konstantinos A. Doxiadis, Clarence Stein, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Albert Mayer, Tracy B. Augur, E. A. Gutkind, Buckminster Fuller, Nishiyama Uzo, or Ishikawa Hideaki, etc.). Spatial plans from around the world promoted both decentralization at the national scale and within the urban region. Some technological advances were also at the origin of new projects. Thus, the risk that nuclear power represented for the populations prompted the politicians to decentralize the places of power, of research, and of strategic production, and to imagine a lesser density of the residential areas. Computer sciences, associated with statistical tools, were also mobilized in order to conceive another distribution of the population on the ground, to imagine a new way to settle, more respectful of the balances of the Earth. One of the recurring questions, which is still today a major issue, beginning of the 21<sup>th</sup> Century, is the one of the earth, or soil – understood as a reservoir of natural resources and as a site of agricultural production –, its deteriorated quality, its use and management.

The foundations of the decentralization ideas can be found in the studies made by geographers (such as Walter Christaller) but also in the theories developed by economists (as Thorstein Veblen, Sabsovich, Albion W. Small, Gottfried Feder, August Lösch, Walter Isard, Barbara Ward, among others). The concept of decentralization fed itself with the research and discoveries made in many scientific fields, and relies on technical progress in terms of mobility, communication, and power generation.

Our purpose is to revisit the concept and projects elaborated during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (mainly until the 1970s). We will attempt, with the different papers, to understand the ideals that founded them, the references mobilized, the tools – conceptual as well as practical – they experimented, the influences they could have – or not – on the making of the urbanized world and on a new image of it; we will also explore the transfers from a scientific field to another, from a cultural space to another.

We will focus more specifically:

- On the theoreticians of decentralization (should they be geographers, economists, architects, urban planners, landscape architects, etc.), on their ideals; on the national or international networks fostering the exchanges of ideas as well as on the context in which those ideas are taking place.
- On the projects designed and on their focus: economical, societal, political, environmental, etc.
- On the conceptual tools mobilized in order to imagine new forms and way of life, as well as new economical pattern.
- On the technological advances related to those projects: new means of mobility, of communication, new energies, but also new tools of representation, of modelling, etc.); on the new collaborations between scientific fields.

**The symposium organized at the School of Architecture in Grenoble will be the first of a series of three. The next symposiums will be organized, in 2018, at TU Delft (June) and at the Politecnico di Milano (fall 2018).**

Specific orientations are imagined for each one of the symposiums:

- The one organized at the ENSA Grenoble will focus more particularly on the ideals of decentralization and the ecological and economic issues of the projects and theories.
- The symposium organized at TU Delft will centre more on the questions regarding energy and mobility issues.
- The third one, at the Politecnico di Milano, looking at the diverse scales of the project (from the territorial one to the city-region) will investigate the impacts of decentralization on the definition of tools, approaches (codes, programs, visions) in the architecture and planning cultures.

The abstracts (300 words maximum), plus 5 key words, written in English or in French, should be sent **before July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017**, with a short bio (1 page), to this address: [decentralisation2017.18@gmail.com](mailto:decentralisation2017.18@gmail.com)

## Organisation

### Catherine Maumi

Professeur HDR en histoire et cultures architecturales

Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture de Grenoble

Directrice scientifique du laboratoire *Métiers de l'Histoire de l'Architecture, édifices-villes-territoires*, Univ. Grenoble Alpes

## Scientific Committee

Patrizia Bonifazio, Politecnico di Milano

Gaïa Caramellino, Politecnico di Milano

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Nicole de Togni, Politecnico di Milano

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Olivier Labussière, PACTE, Université Grenoble Alpes

Catherine Maumi, ENSA de Grenoble, Univ. Grenoble Alpes

Rosemary Wakeman, Fordham University, New York

