POWER AND ARCHITECTURE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
CAPITALS AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE. By Michael Minkenberg (Ed.)
New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014.

What are the defining the characteristics of democratic architecture? This was one
of the vexing questions that emerged after the reunification of Berlin and came
to preoccupy architects and planners engaged in rebuilding the city. The passion-
ate debates on architecture's political symbolism inspired Michael Minkenberg, a
political scientist, to pursue the larger theme of power and architecture. The result
is a collection of scholarly essays that examines this relationship through the lens
of the modern Western capital city. This book is one of 13 volumes in the "Space
and Place" series by Berghahn, an interdisciplinary series that addresses the cultural
and historical processes involved in the construction and contestation of space and
place. Capital cities, as contributor Lawrence Vale argues, occupy a unique place
at the intersection between architecture and power, given their political agendas in
both housing governmental institutions and representing nationhood. The capital
cities discussed in this collection did not evolve over time, but were either estab-
lished and designed *de novo* or were the product of large scale reconstruction during
a period of regime change, thus throwing their spatial politics into relief.

   In his excellent introduction, Minkenberg lays out a theoretical framework for
the nine essays that follow. He claims that the public architecture of the capital city
and the planning of its official civic spaces offer insight into the politicization of
architecture on three levels: as a symbol of national identity; as an expression of the
political regime, and as a result of political development and processes. Minkenberg
challenges the view that architecture simply reflects the ideology of the political
regime. Instead, he argues that architecture and urban design actively constitute
political reality. How architecture effectively contributes to political legitimacy and
through which mechanisms it shapes collective national identity are the central
questions of this collection. The essays, authored by political scientists and archi-
tectural or urban historians, approach these issues through a set of case studies that
challenge the conventional narratives associated with the histories of these cities and
suggest new scholarly methods. There are two essays on Berlin: Klaus von Beyme's
comparison of the postwar capitals of Bonn and Berlin, and Christoph Asendorf's
broad historical overview of Berlin's development as a capital city from 1701 until
reunification. Other essays focus on less studied capitals such as Ankara, Warsaw,
Vienna, Fascist Rome and Brussels as the supra-national capital of the EU.

   Taken together, these individual urban studies attest to the elasticity of style as a
political signifier, and challenge attempts to align a specific architectural language--of
monumentality or geometric axial planning, for example--with a particular political
ideology. Minkenberg's essay examines how democracy is "articulated, represented
and symbolized in capital cities." He documents four planned democratic capitals--
Washington, DC, Ottawa, Canberra and Brasilia—and analyzes their urban plans,
the architectural language of their government buildings and public spaces, their
site selection strategies and their uses of architectural symbolism, noting that, para-
doxically, they draw on neoclassical city planning strategies, such as axial planning,

geometric composition and monumentality. Rather than represent democratic ideals through a new formal language, these ideals are realized in practice through the provision of the physical space necessary to exercise democratic politics. This insight suggests that even more important than the symbolic program of architecture and urbanism are the actual social and political practices that they enable and promote.

The unique agency of architecture, operating both at the symbolic level and through everyday practice, is elaborated in Eve Blau's incisive essay on the making of Red Vienna in the 1920s and 30s. Blau discusses the urban politics of domestic space, analyzing the Socialist municipal government's transformation of Vienna via the construction of 400 new city council houses, known as *Gemeindebauten*. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's dialectical approach to urban space as a set of both social and spatial practices, she deftly analyzes the interplay of typological innovations of the new workers' housing with Socialist ideology, arguing that through their spatial configuration, iconography and everyday uses, the "Social democrats who built Red Vienna constructed an *idea* rather than a set of monuments." (p. 203).

The theme of the elasticity of style and its relationship to ideology is given added complexity through a side-by-side reading of two fascinating accounts of the political uses of architectural modernism -- Terry Kirk's "Image, Itinerary and Identity in the 'Third' Rome" which focuses on Fascist Rome, and Alev Çinar's "State Building as an Urban Experience: the making of Ankara" on the secular transformation of Ankara of the 1920s and 1930s. Kirk discusses the debates on modernism associated with the 1934 competition for the Palazzo del Littorio and its relationship to Mussolini's transformation of Rome, while Çinar analyzes the adoption of modernism as the national style giving legitimacy to the modern secular state.

Only one essay directly confronts the effects of globalization on the contemporary city. Carola Hein's essay on Brussels, the supranational EU capital, introduces a different conception of the capital city as a product of global forces and new supranational identities. Hein asks why the EU has not succeeded in creating an architectural face in Brussels that might establish a new "capital imaginary," arguing that a clearer architectural strategy could promote the emergence of a stronger European identity.

Hein's new urban imaginary highlights one of the implicit questions raised by the framework of this volume: is power in the contemporary city best understood in relation to national political regimes? As the historians Gyan Prakash and Kevin Kruse have noted, "today it is difficult to sustain the paradigmatic of modern cities as unified formations, securely located within their national borders with clearly legible politics and society."

This collection of provocative urban histories makes an important contribution to the interdisciplinary discourse on power and architecture defined by national political regimes. These studies reveal how architecture exercises social control not just through its material reality, but also, and perhaps more subtly, as a discursive framework that shapes cultural narratives and social identities.

REFERENCES

Gyan Prakash and Kevin Kruse (Eds.), Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics and Everyday Life (Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 4)

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