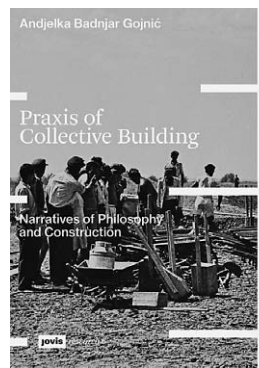


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PRAXIS OF COLLECTIVE BUILDING – NARRATIVES OF PHILOSOPHY AND CONSTRUCTION

PRAKSA KOLEKTIVNOG GRAĐENJA – NARATIVI FILOZOFIJE I GRAĐENJA

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Publisher: Jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin, 2023
Series: volume 6 in Jovis research,
dissertation at the RWTH Aachen

200 pages, 117 illustrations (colour and b/w)
[22/16.5 cm, paperback]
5 chapters, endnotes, bibliography

Design: Felix Holler, Leipzig
Stoffers Graphik-Design
Lithography: Stefan Rolle, Leipzig
Stoffers Graphik-Design

ISBN 978-3-86859-772-1 (Softcover)
ISBN 978-3-86859-788-2 (PDF)



The book *Praxis of Collective Building: Narratives of Philosophy and Construction* marks the first application of Yugoslav praxis philosophy to the study of architectural and construction practices. It opens a new perspective connecting philosophical discourse with practical building processes and sheds light on the socio-political dimensions of post-war reconstruction and housing shortages.

New Belgrade, the main case study of the book, remains the best example of a fully functioning socialist utopia and of the interplay between city-making, state-building, and *praxis* philosophy, illustrating the relationship between theory and practice. Anđelka Badnjar Gojnić explores how the building process in New Belgrade provides a deeper understanding of social theories. Using philosophy to analyse architecture within a broader political and social context, the author offers insight into the collective nature and efforts of postwar construction.

Architectural studies still lag in active exchange with social theories, raising the question of how construction can serve as a medium for deepening our understanding of these theories within architecture. Building processes can contribute to this understanding by offering a canvas for interpreting social theories. This book, therefore, provides a platform for critically revisiting Marxist theorists – such as Gajo Petrović, Rudi Supek, Henry Lefebvre, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Ernst Bloch – as well as Jürgen Habermas, in relation to architecture. By doing so, it examines how this interdisciplinary approach functions as a methodological tool. The author Badnjar Gojnić transcends their theories into architecture, employing methods of simplification, analytics, interpretation, articulation of archival material, and finding analogies for the concepts of social *eidos*, fragmentary knowledge, institution, and cultural memory.

The book contends that construction is not merely a technical process but also a philosophical and collective act through which social formations are shaped. *Praxis* serves as the central concept linking all the chapters, each of which explores a specific philosophical interpretation of praxis relevant to our re-

flections on construction. As a methodological approach, praxis bridges theory and practical engagement, prompting the question of whether narratives can illustrate the validity of applying theoretical ideas to architectural practice. The author's micro-historical approach seeks to reconcile theoretical inquiry with *praxis* philosophy by closely examining construction microhistories. Theoretical issues of collective production are examined through various narratives, including voluntary youth labor in the construction of New Belgrade from a Marxian praxis perspective, participatory prefabrication as a response to housing shortages in Yugoslavia, and the transfer and adaptation of the Yugoslav IMS prefabrication system to Cuba via the micro-brigade movement.

The book is structured around three narratives: *praxis and action*, *praxis and imagination*, and *praxis and Lebenswelt*. The case studies follow two parallel trajectories: one tracing the development of praxis philosophy in Yugoslavia and internationally during the second half of the twentieth century – particularly through the *Praxis* journal – and the other examining construction episodes beginning in Yugoslavia and eventually extending to the Global South.

The opening chapter outlines the connection between the Marxian view of praxis as socially engaged labour and the initiative of collective construction, which is closely tied to youth voluntary work movements. These narratives provide a conceptual framework for understanding how, in the early post-war period, extensive construction endeavours mobilized youth, thereby integrating social and political ideologies into the tangible process of building.

The second chapter, framed by Castoriadis's and Bloch's concepts of imagination, explores how material production in the country was intertwined with social imagination. Institutions such as the Institute for Materials Testing (IMS) – a place for cooperation in building and a self-governed enterprise – used New Belgrade as a testing field for innovative construction practices. The evolution of these practices led to the rise of prefabrication, which addressed housing shortages while in-

troducing new forms of participatory architecture. Prefabrication was seen as a solution to the housing crisis, fostering a collective effort to formalize and advance construction methods. The chapter focuses on how an open system was produced and tested as a part of a collective effort.

In both chapters, Badnjar Gojnić argues that housing, as a part of social modernisation, was crafted in Yugoslavia through the imaginative engagement of material production. This was possible due to the historical setup: an active philosophical scene, the post-war need for reconstruction, and the shift towards a self-governed economy.

Finally, the chapter on *praxis and Lebenswelt* delves into the transfer of knowledge to Cuba, emphasising how construction sites actively engaged with and transformed the lived experience (*Lebenswelt* as coined by Habermas) of their participants. The system imported from Yugoslavia made it possible to create this *praxis* in the everyday life of the brigade due to the cultural exchange that took place. This exchange established a link between the material *praxis* that emerged in Yugoslavia to build housing and the new reality in Cuba. The prefabricated construction model served as a foundational framework for the emergence of urban agriculture, a distinctive Cuban phenomenon that gained prominence during the 1990s.

The methodological approach of this book offers valuable insights at the intersection of philosophy, social theory, and architecture, framing construction as both a material and conceptual practice. By bridging abstract theory with the concrete realities of building, it demonstrates how architecture can serve as a medium for interpreting and enacting social thought. When such research would incorporate digital tools like Obsidian or NVivo, it would further reinforce this bridge – enabling the mapping of relationships between actors, ideologies, and events in ways that expand the book's praxis-based methodology. These tools not only support theoretical inquiry but also deepen its practical application, offering a model for future interdisciplinary research.