

Building the Non-Aligned World: Knowledge, Infrastructure, and Urban Development in the Global South

Abstract:

During the Cold War, the Non-Alignment Movement facilitated not only political solidarity but also extensive exchanges of technical expertise, educational programs, and infrastructural development between member states. This panel examines the crucial role of engineering knowledge transfer and migration of experts in shaping modernization projects across Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. From the export of hydroelectric, architectural, and medical expertise to the schooling of students from Global South in member states universities, and the impact of engineering companies on urban development, these transnational networks reshaped local environments while embedding Non-Alignment Ideals into material infrastructures. Bringing together scholars of Cold War history, urban studies, history of technology and science studies, and transnational development experts, this session explores how expertise and technical knowledge functioned as a form of soft power, shaping political alliances, economic strategies, and the built environment across the Global South.

The possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Education and Knowledge Transfer: the student exchange between NAM countries; scientific and engineering knowledge as a tool of diplomatic engagement
- Infrastructure and Development: Infrastructural Projects and their geopolitical significance; Non-Aligned approaches to industrialization and modernization; the politics of large-scale infrastructure projects in the Global South
- Engineering, Diplomacy, and Soft Power: technical expertise as an instrument of foreign policy; the role of engineers as state diplomats and knowledge brokers; case studies of engineering companies facilitating international cooperation; the intersection of ideology and technology in infrastructure projects
- Urban Planning and Architectural Legacies: postcolonial urban development of Global South; the architectural imprint of socialist modernisms in Non-Alignment countries; case studies of projects and their contemporary legacies

- Non-Aligned Technology and Sovereignty: engineering and industrial self-reliance in Non-Alignment economic strategies; technological transfer as a means of asserting postcolonial sovereignty; the political economy of technical assistance in the Global South.

Session organizer:

Tijana Rupčić

The Institute for the History of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

tijana.rupcic@ihnpan.pl