The book Ideological Equals, published in 2017, engages questions of gender in the socialist architectural environment of Soviet-aligned Eastern Europe. The book’s topic and contents were initiated at the 2014 conference European Architectural History Network during a session hosted by the editors, both architects and scholars. Mary Pepchinski (University of Dresden) and Mariann Simon (Budapest University of Technology and Economics) highlight that their approach to the theme turns towards an equality perspective than the more common difference framework. In their Introduction, they suggest that in European Soviet-aligned Eastern Europe, the study of gendered architectural practices was propaganda and therefore the study of gender relations was propagandized in response to the need for engineers and architects.

In Part I: “Case Studies”, the essays examine the issue on a bureaucratic and an institutional level. It provides an insight into the architecture and engineering schools, professional organizations, private companies and design offices. First chapter discusses the German Democratic Republic’s gender related professional policies after the Second World War in terms of socialist propaganda. Second chapter is a review of the women architecture students’ motivations to study with Jože Plečnik, who is known to not to follow modernist path in Slovenia. The next two chapters allow a perspective considering the women professionals’ self-organizations respectively in Hungary and Slovakia. The conception of successful women as anti-careerists and anti-leaders is criticized through the idea of “glass ceiling” in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter focuses on a still ongoing issue of spousal professional collaborations following the Polish architects like Maria Pietchotka, Hanna Adamczewka-Weichert, Malgorzata Händezewicz-Waclawek. The next chapter opens a discussion with analysing the female contribution to the Romanian Architectura magazine. And final chapter of the first part discusses four women architects’ built work in rural Estonia in the period of 1960-80. This part allows a wider perspective to understand the post war conditions and necessities in the practices of architecture and construction therefore suggests a fairer knowledge on the topic. The chapters don’t categorically include the Soviet policies which were applied to women representing different minorities of the society. It is difficult to say that the book takes a distinct position considering the economic and social privileges.

To conclude, Ideological Equals stands as an important source in two ways. Firstly, the book proposes a fresh perspective on the study of gendered architectural practices. And secondly, it brings together important historical studies about the local situations in socialist Europe. Therefore, the study facilitates non-biased opinions and fairer approaches in both areas.

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