

# ACME

Architecture of  
Coal in Modern  
Europe

ERC ADVANCED GRANT (2024-2030)

**DARK MATTER:**  
REVISITING THE ARCHITECTURE  
OF COAL IN POST-WAR EUROPE

CALL FOR PAPERS

**5 + 6TH NOVEMBER 2026**

# DARK MATTER: REVISITING THE ARCHITECTURE OF COAL IN POST-WAR EUROPE

In the decades following the Second World War, coal developed from an extracted energy source to a multi-dimensional modernist project. Across Europe, as nations rebuilt after the conflict, coal mining became the epicentre of technological optimism, democratic politics, urban regeneration, and mass communication as its architecture and spaces were redefined as symbols and sites of progress, welfare state ambition, and conduits for the reorganisation of everyday life.

It is now undeniable that coal has been and is environmentally adverse. As both a literal and symbolic driver of the climate crisis it embodies the contradictions of industrial modernity. Coal catalysed a super-wicked problem - vast in scale, entangled in governance, and resistant to solutions. But the coal industry offers a crucial historical lens on long-term planning, public investment, technological storytelling and the aesthetic strategies of extractive ambition. For example, new forms of housing, settlement, welfare amenities and health infrastructure, as well as information and social networks, grew alongside the modernised extractive industry, producing distinctive new architectural typologies, urban cultures and landscapes.

This conference invites papers that revisit coal, for better and worse, as a formative force in twentieth-century architectural, institutional and media practices. We are interested in how coal mediated relations between geology, governance, labour, technology, and spatial representation. What can post-war coalscapes teach us about infrastructure as ideology? What spatial tools were used to care for, manage, or mythologise extraction and energy and the workers who exercised them? What lessons - spatial, cultural and social - can be learned from the extraction of coal in twentieth century Europe?

We welcome interdisciplinary contributions that explore the following thematic territories:

- Architecture of coal modernisation
- Visual culture, media, and propaganda
- Modernisation and infrastructure
- Institutional care for labour: baths, hospitals, schools, clubs, libraries, social networks
- Housing and settlement
- Transitions and afterlives of extractive landscapes

Although labour and extraction of coal are often hidden in plain sight, by examining how coal mediates its layered identities - as an energy source, social structure, and epistemic regime - the conference aims to open new perspectives on how extractive modernity shaped ways of thinking that outlived the pits and remain instrumental to how we continue to consider the environment today.

This will be an in-person conference held at the Irish Architectural Archive [45 Merrion Square E, Dublin], on the 5th + 6th November 2026. See application details on next page.

Any queries should be sent to:  
[jack.kavanagh@ucd.ie](mailto:jack.kavanagh@ucd.ie)

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## Keynote speaker

**Lukasz Galusek** is Director of the Silesian Museum in Katowice. An architect, curator, historian, and author of over 150 publications, from 2018 to 2025 he served as Deputy Director for Programme Policy at the International Cultural Centre (ICC) in Kraków, where he curated and co-curated exhibitions and public programmes on the region's art and built heritage – including: 'The Architecture of Independence in Central Europe' (2018) and 'Socmodernism: Architecture in Central Europe during the Cold War' (2024–25). He also serves on high-level advisory and expert bodies, including the Presidential College for Foreign Affairs and the programme council of the Polish-Czech Forum, alongside heritage collaborations across the Visegrad Group and wider European networks.

## Guest Expert Panellists

**Tom Avermaete** has been Full Professor and Chair for the History and Theory of Urban Design at ETH Zurich since 2018. His research focuses on the architecture of the city and the changing roles, approaches and tools of architects and urban designers from a cross-cultural perspective.

**Stefan Berger** is the Director of the Institute for Social Movements, Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany; Chairperson of the committee of the Library of the Ruhr Foundation; and Professor of Social History at the Ruhr University. He specialises in nationalism and national identity studies, historiography and historical theory, comparative labour studies, and the history of industrial heritage.

**Carola Hein** is Professor of History of Architecture and Urban Planning at Delft University of Technology, Professor at Leiden and Erasmus University, and director of the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus PortCityFutures Centre. She holds the UNESCO Chair of Water, Ports and Historic Cities.

**Imre Szeman** is Director of the Institute for Environment, Conservation, and Sustainability and Professor of Human Geography at the University of Toronto, Scarborough. He teaches and conducts research in energy humanities, environmental studies, and social and political philosophy. He is co-founder of the Petrocultures Research Group and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

(others to be confirmed)

## About ACME

The Architectures of Coal in Modern Europe (ACME) is an Advanced Grant awarded by the European Research Council (ERC). ACME seeks to evoke, explore and substantiate a coalmining épistémè – the coalscape – a pervasive, interdependent network of ecologies, beliefs and practices that enfolded geologies, energies, bodies and space to exert a significant influence on the social and spatial foundation of modern, twentieth-century Europe, including its welfare state projects and the origins of the European Union. ACME proposes that understanding this coalscape represents a pivotal means with which to reconsider the critical intimacies between our extractive energy sources, cultural and social lives and built environment that have contributed to the Anthropocene.

ACME is led by Gary A. Boyd who is Full Professor of Architecture at University College Dublin. He was a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship recipient (2018-2022), Project Leader on a Getty Foundation Keeping it Modern grant (2019-2022), and won the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion in 2023.

## Conference Team

Professor Gary A. Boyd, Dr Tabassum Ahmed, Dr Emma Campbell, Dr Rebecca Jane McConnell, Anna Cooke, Niall Patrick Walsh, Dr Jack Kavanagh

## Timeline

Call published: Feb 2026  
Application deadline: 31st March 2026  
Notification of acceptance: 30th April 2026  
Conference dates: 5+6th November 2026

Selected contributors will be invited to publish their conference paper through an edited volume in 2027

## Application

This will include 300 word abstract and 150 word biography

Apply below or scan the QR code  
<https://forms.office.com/e/pA835e4JBk>



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