DISSEREATION

BEHIND THE NATIONAL IDENTITY; Political and Social Activity through Architecture – Liberal Socialism in Kosovo

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BEHIND THE NATIONAL IDENTITY
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"Take nothing for granted as beautiful or ugly, but take every building to pieces, and challenge every feature. Learn to distinguish the curious from the beautiful. Get the habit of analysis - analysis will in time enable synthesis to become your habit of mind. 'Think simple' as my old master used to say - meaning to reduce the whole of its parts into the simplest terms, getting back to first principles."\(^1\)

- Frank Lloyd Wright

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INTRODUCTION

Abstract, synopsis of chapters to follow

The 1970s and the early 1980s in Kosovo are an insufficiently explored but important period. They represent a more liberal approach toward the development of the region. This in turn was expressed in all spheres of life, including architecture, which functioned as an integral part of a society and its progress. On the other hand, this progress was “supported” by the intention to somehow overpower the existing architectural environment and the overall identity of the region. Progress and development can and should always be welcomed. In far as the above period is concerned, this was indeed the main intention. However, by the time this progress reached a concrete stage in which a number of buildings considered important were erected, the intention also became evident to have previous and “original” spatial manifestations replaced. Therefore, this study has the particular
purpose to review the architecture of those years and that specific period in Kosovo, including the historical interpretation and specific case studies of architectural works that were the result of those intentions.

All professionals bear a responsibility to contribute knowledge in their area of expertise. Accordingly, the following is a contribution to a better understanding of Kosovo’s architecture and design history, with emphasis on one of the most important and dynamic periods of the 20th century, namely the years which in the region were considered more liberal pertaining to various spheres of life. In the case of Kosovo, the term “liberal” could be understood differently, depending from the side it is looked at, social or the design one. Anyhow, from the design perspective this intention could very well be considered a positive factor. From the architectural viewpoint, design intends to follow technological advance and the “trends” of the time. Consequently, the erection of such buildings, surrounded by symbols related to different types of identity and leading towards regional modernism, is an important aspect to focus on.

In any event, the goal is to raise and retain interest about these developments among readers (students of architecture or other stakeholders). Considering this as an important aspect is adding to the context of this study. To add further to the overall picture, contributions of other authors are being presented and elaborated on. At times, these may be completely contradictory, but this fact is making the study all the more interesting. After all, the ultimate goal of this study is to provide a platform for dialogue and debate, thus awakening the interest on the buildings which are the subject of this study, and also on the period in which they were constructed, not only among professional architects, but also among general readers.

Before developing the study in detail, it is regarded as essential to provide some background on the above time line and on the developments associated with it. After all, it is the lack of studies on this particular subject which led to the author's decision to address the issue more thoroughly by
focusing on certain buildings. These buildings are considered particularly worthy of study, especially because their symbolism can be interpreted in various ways and because they represent a connection between national identity and the phenomenon referred to as “Yugoslav brotherhood and unity.”

Chapter 1 deals specifically with the almost fifteen-year period referred to above by explaining how and to what extend it was regarded as ‘interesting’ and dealt with prior to this study. The purpose of our lengthy research was to find as much documentation, and other information as possible about the time from about 1970 to the early 1980s. We examined architectural structures that were built during this time and which are considered as ‘icons’ and ‘models’ of that particular period in Kosovo. We compare those architectural developments with other developments during this period, including the government’s objective to use architecture to somehow negatively influence the identity of the region. This chapter is entitled the ‘State of the Art’. It includes a review of publications, guides and other documentation covering the period, the main objects of interest, and case studies. After reviewing all available records and other documentation, we prepared for further analysis.

Chapter 2 provides a general description of architectural progress, styles and trends in 20th century Europe, with particular emphasis on the period examined in this study, comparing them with developments in Kosovo. Our main interest is the period itself and the architectural ‘icons’ associated with it. They serve as examples identifying the region with all the symbolism behind their design and construction. Issues of identity and regionalism in architecture are therefore included in this chapter as separately analyzed components. The historical overview and interpretation, issues of identity and regionalism are essential factors. By integrating them, they serve as important components of analysis and of the entire composition.

This applies to works of architecture designed and constructed during the said fifteen-year period. They were chosen primarily because they were built for Kosovo's society with funds allocated to the development of Kosovo when the region was still part of the former Yugoslavia. The most
vital and important buildings considered necessary to show progress in the region were the National and University Library, which very strongly represented its period, the Rilindja Publishing and Office Tower, and the Youth and Sports Centre. We selected these as the main case studies for our analysis. We obtained first-hand information and additional resources for the Library from the architect himself. For the other structures, we obtained a number of information from the Municipal Archives in Prishtina.

Chapter 3 shows which direction was taken by after-the-fact interpretations of the period, specifically after the 1980s and after this study's main period of concern. Here, our intention is on the one hand to finalize the analysis and on the other hand to introduce additional thoughts on the period's architectural progress. This will benefit future research.

Chapter 4 provides conclusions and points out what further research is necessary to open up other new interesting paths to follow; thus leading to additional knowledge and conclusions. However, primarily this chapter explains the intention of the present study and the way in which its conclusions will prepare the way for the future. From this study not only the students of architecture will benefit, but also the general public.

In addition to many published sources consulted in our research and referred to here, this chapter also presents archival material from the Prishtina Municipal Archives. This archival material was specifically made available for this study and has never been published before.

The study concludes with a presentation of transparencies regarding the publication and documentary material. The sources of all photographic material are identified.
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