



# Influences of Social Context to Architecture of Yugoslavia 1945-1990

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## Abstract

*Architecture of some building, but definitely of some particular area and particular time is never result of accidentally composed circumstances. It is always limited by reality and defined by social and economical conditions. In our travels and visiting of some places we always read and try to understand their history, tradition, way of life and culture through remains of architecture. Cities and their parts planned and developed accordingly modernist principles and authentic modernist architecture from the period of existence of Socialist Yugoslavia are specific, but very honest storytellers which can help us to realize what kind of society was intention to be established. Our duty is to learn to hear, read, see and recognize the value of these tangible stories as specific testimonies about period and civilization that disappeared, but which legacy in many aspects still exist. Those are stories about progressive and avant-garde architecture and urbanism that was in accordance and on the level of some of the best examples of modernism based on universal values tried to be establish in the first half of 20th century as revolutionary change in the history of architecture so far from just stylish determinations. Revolutionary architectural appearance was recognized by the society that believed they launched socialist revolution. Modernist architecture was more or less intentionally recognized as visual and formal manifestation of proclaimed ideas of modernization, urbanization, industrial, cultural, social and economic progress of entire society. Article research relations between social, political and economical conditions from one side and development of extraordinary architectural achievements based on human needs, public interest and artistic excellences as result of similar intentions and movements in this authentic kind of society.*

**Keywords:** Yugoslavia, modernist architecture and urbanism, social context

## 1. Introduction

It is needed adequate valorization and promotion of evident, recently globally recognized cultural and civilizational achievements, whose realization we have witnessed, and then, unfortunately, due to the systematically developed culture of forgetting, revisions of history and distorted interpretations, suppressed from collective memory. By researching architecture, literature, music, film, theater, painting, design, but also all other aspects of social progress, their development and ultimate reach, it is clearly visible that the citizens of socialist Yugoslavia had a rare opportunity in the turbulent history of these region, to be part of culturally developed world societies. It was result of their own creative and work engagement to reach and experience high achievements comparable to then recent accomplishments in the most progressive parts of the world. Modernism in architecture was routed in wide spectra of ideological background that in many aspects was complementary with proclaimed intentions of Yugoslav socialist society. Result was authentic architecture which reflected intentions to modernization, industrialization, cultural and educational emancipation and openness of the entire society.

## 2. Social Environment

In the period after World War II, and especially after the breakup of the relatively close relations with the USSR, Yugoslavia became a society based on several important premises. They were based on an external policy of non-alignment, internal orientation towards the model of socialist self-management and destatization, federalism, strong industrialization, urbanization and modernization of the entire society. Perhaps it could be concluded that modernization and industrialization, changing of agricultural country into a medium-developed industrial state, was the most important and most lasting consequences which were felt and enjoyed by everyone [1]. Yugoslavia is strongly oriented towards finding its own path of social development. The revolution destroyed the capitalist order, and system of socialist self-management undermined and mostly dismantled the state-socialist system. The communist movement in Yugoslavia took the position between the two dominant systems of the modern world and state was resisting the constant pressures of the ideology and practice of both opposing models from surrounding [2]. Although the Yugoslav leadership clearly differentiates itself from capitalist characteristics, some of the key features of capitalism, such as the market economy, remain accepted even in important documents of the SKJ (Savez Komunističke Jugoslavije – Union of Communists of Yugoslavia was only political party in Yugoslavian social system), such as the Platform for 10th Congress of the SKJ:

"The answer to the question about the relationship between the market and socialism is, therefore, positive. The market in socialism must exist and it does. Its denial is a defense of bureaucratism and technocratism [3]."

However, in reality market had some extent control in order to maintain social relations in production [2]. Through the decisive influence they had, the Yugoslav communists shaped consciousness and attitudes in society for the entire time of the state's existence, and in certain periods often, at least declaratively, in a progressive and emancipatory way: "Socialism cannot subordinate man's personal happiness to some kind of "higher goals", because the highest goal of socialism is man's personal happiness [4]." In the same way, the SKJ Program from 1958 advocates freedom of creativity in science and art, opposing their use for daily political purposes, and at the same time considering that these freedoms cannot be used to spread reactionary ideas [2].

"The second half of the 20th century changed the world, not only because of specific relations between countries, but also because of

rapidly modernizing growth. The economy progressed at an average rate of five percent per year from 1948 until almost the breakup of Yugoslavia. Investment rates were also huge in times of political slowdown or repression. From the mid-70s until Tito's death in 1979, Croatia had a larger share of investments than Japan. Employment was high, although the question is whether there was a need for such companies and jobs. Modern technologies have ensured the growth of television programs, the film industry, new theaters are being created, pictures are taken and directed differently than in many similar countries [1]."

In such a context of progressive thinking, opportunities are created for the development of architecture that inherits the best of the time in which it was created. Just as the basic principles and directions of development were formed in terms of social and cultural movements, in similar way, in the field of architecture the dominant postulates that characterized the architecture of socialist Yugoslavia emerged and matured over time.

### 3. Yugoslav Modernism in Architecture as a Social and State Determinant

From its beginnings, modernism was more or less justifiably associated with left-wing ideas and as such was a magnet for young architects with similar attitudes. CIAM's "La Sarraz declaration" from 1928 clearly defines the involvement of architecture in political events and insists on the connection of architecture and construction methods with economic and social circumstances. The declaration insists on the rationalization and standardization of design and construction, as well as the work process during construction. Instead of a huge disproportion in the standard of living based on social differences, it was insisted on compliance of housing with the real needs of clients and users, in order to provide quality housing for as many people as possible [5]. Frampton recognizes three developmental phases of CIAM's existence: the first - from 1928 - 1933 under the dominant influence of German socialist-oriented architects, the second - almost dogmatic phase from 1933 - 1947 under the direct and very dominant influence of Le Corbusier, and the phase from 1947 to the end of the organization's existence when liberal idealism prevailed and promoted architecture through emotional and material needs [6]. During the entire period of the formation of modernism, a strong ideological foundation was always noticeable, and even it was not same during the period of almost 40 years of the movement's existence, successfully defined the basic principles of modernism. Precisely because of this, we cannot reduce modernism to aesthetic and formal stylistic characteristics, nor is it correct to interpret it as just another style during the historical development of architecture. Modern architecture brought a completely new, complex and multidisciplinary approach, based on philosophy, art, economy, technology and science. Involvement in social movements, humanism, left-wing and liberal attitudes were the reason for the complete rejection of the acceptance of modernism by totalitarian fascist and communist regimes. After Yugoslavia's severance of political and ideological connections with the Eastern bloc of countries in Europe and the aspiration to establish a clear social and cultural distinction from their prevailing social-realism, the ideas of architectural modernity, promoted by the already formed local modernist architects, find a favorable social climate and soil for rooting and intensive development. The modernism of Yugoslav architecture was understood as a synonym for social modernization and it was a way of cultural production that had the importance of ideological representation [7].

After the Congress of Writers in Ljubljana in 1952 and Krleža's speech which was promoting modernity and freedom of expression, Yugoslav art experienced a turning point, and was freed from the ideological restraints of the Communist Party, while the modernist expression became the main determinant and dominant art trend in the state [8]. Even the art and architecture of Yugoslavia do not have a strictly defined, homogenous state style with a clearly defined course and development, the influence of state structures existed and followed a general commitment to modernization and the creation of a humanistically conceived socialist society.

The modernization of society is the most visible in the strong urbanization that was implemented by the massive construction of cities, and especially by intensive housing construction. The system of socialist Yugoslavia had established strong and thoroughly developed financing mechanisms for the construction of an impressive number of new housing units, over time mostly very solidly designed and built [9]. The achievement of impressive results was preceded by the establishment and parallel development of networks of administrative bodies, organizations, institutes, and research centers that worked intensively on various aspects and issues related to housing [9]. Damjanović Conley and Jovanović especially emphasize the role of a particularly important state institution; The JNA – Yugoslav National Army, as the best organized investor, issued "Instructions for the construction of residential buildings for the needs of the JNA" in 1955, which intend to establish equal quality and comfort of housing for military personnel in all parts of Yugoslavia [9]. These standards were later changed and adapted to the growth of living standards, and it is especially important that they served as an exemplary document for standardization in the design of all Yugoslav housing units. Beside residential architecture, the construction of avant-garde modern public buildings, financed by particular social and state structures was particularly interesting. On the lists of some of the most successful examples of modernism are the buildings of the Homes of the Army, the Communist Party buildings, state institutions, residences used by the president. That could be accepted as indication of the systematic commitment of the top of the state and highest state structures to promote modernity and the permanent modernization of the entire society through architectural expressions. The establishment of modernism as an official artistic and especially architectural expression in Yugoslavia was sending a strong message and corresponded with the idea about progressive society. According to Kulić, it wasn't result of personal preferences or tastes of individuals from the political elite, not even Josip Broz Tito himself [7]. Kulić also insists on the perceptible connection between architecture and ideology on several levels since the debate on the establishment of the so-called an official architectural style that will correspond to the idea of the development of a new society, to an attempt to connect traditional architectural heritage and modern architecture. It is interesting that in a short period of time, modernism is widely accepted among architects and in society, to the extent that modernism and socialism become colloquially synonymous. According to Kulić this is confirmation of a very complex phenomenology in which the ideological matrix overlaps and establishes connections with architecture and thanks to favorable circumstances of the international dominance of modernism and the exceptional creative power of domestic architects that ultimately resulted in a completely unique artistic experiment at the level of society and the state [10]. In order to understand the link between modernism and Yugoslav socialist society, it is important to emphasize that in architecture the connection between artistic freedom and the real limitations of the place, but also of the social context, is extremely pronounced. An architect, like any other artist, works relatively freely, but almost always within the framework and spirit of the time in which he/she shapes his/her work. If it is recognized as piece of art, through it we will always understand the era in which it was created [11]. Such positions imply the importance of elucidating the relationship between architecture and its social environment, which exceeds the framework of architectural theory or the development of architecture, especially when a certain era of human history is subject of ideological interpretations and imposed prejudices.

"It seems that re-reading of everything that was written and thought about the architecture of modernism by its contemporaries, that include it in the currents of their own ideological horizons, and a careful interpretation of the form of its presence in public space, can help to open a new view of the entire Yugoslav past. The outlines of the architecture of modernism in Yugoslavia in that landscape will be clearer and less obscured by the double resistance that still hinders its perception — the resistance of the discipline of the history of architecture, with its obsession to stylistic, formal and theoretical genealogies and typologies; and, on the other hand, reluctance to rationally interpret the Yugoslav experience [12]."

### **3. Social, Humane and Aesthetic Aspects of Architecture**

On a global level, modernism has brought a much wider understanding of the social influence of architecture. As a particularly important element of contemporary architecture is its comprehensive vision about construction as a reality that fits aesthetically into a certain environment and on a social level becomes a part of the community and the city by making for the new era characteristic unbreakable connection between architecture and urbanism [13]. Socialist societies, not only Yugoslavian ones, declaratively strongly advocated the thesis of humanity and the satisfaction of Marxist-defined human needs. The Marxist theory of dialectical materialism implies that every creation is a direct consequence of productive forces, so architecture is a rational and productive activity whose primary goal should be the satisfaction of basic human needs [14]. Architecture is perceived as an activity that builds for man and the social community. Human personality is respected through architecture by creating a material framework that provides conditions for life, work, recreation, and requires the study of architectural compositions, exploring functionality and comfort based on the principles of human scale [15].

The humanist ideal of a freed man and a free society was promoted in the ideological system of socialist Yugoslavia, which found its confirmation in the departure from rigid functionalism and formalism in architecture through the thesis of anti-dogmatism in architectural creation, but also in the lack of dogma in the entire social value system [16].

Recapitulation of the positive cultural and historical heritage, a critical analysis of national and international creativity, and the establishment of a methodology as a prerequisite for future work were necessary in accordance to the humane character of socialist culture in architecture [17]. The need to move away from the idea of socialist realism from the early 1950s opens up space for the activity of groups of abstract artists that placed art in a social context and by their engaged approach worked wider and deeper than purely aesthetic premises. The activity of one of the most significant such groups - EXAT 51 brings together sculptors, painters and in large number, some of the most successful architects who worked in the decades that followed. Their program of action can be seen through the new structure of the relationship between plastic arts "according to which urbanism defines the framework, architecture determines and realizes the basic prerequisites, and painting and sculpture complete the humanization of the human living environment - with the equal participation of science and industry [18]." This comprehensive understanding of the role of art, especially architecture, is on the edge of idealism, but it was not only a feature of the society of that time, but also the idea of modernism on a global level, whose supporters never agreed to be just followers of one of the many stylistic trends in art. From today's perspective of transitional, but also of much more advanced Western societies, sounds incredible that the state provides homes financed by social enterprises for their workers or by social solidarity funds and in this aspiration builds tens of thousands of flats per year. Although the demand for apartments has never been fully satisfied, the idea and the level of its realization remain impressive and in the sphere of imagination for many of today's states and societies.

Residential architecture and urban planning of new settlements were field for development of humanism and its principles as starting premises for architectural design. Initially, it was significantly limited by financial possibilities, but during the decades of Yugoslavia's existence, thanks to scientific, theoretical and practical work, the social reputation of architects and the better economic conditions, the residential architecture of Yugoslavia managed affirmation of human centric approach in numerous successful realizations. The original realizations from the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, which aspired to a minimum housing unit, were declared absurd from the socialism point of view [19]. At the same time, architects are intensively engaged in wide researches and elimination of the pathological consequences of collective housing, such as overcrowding and lack of privacy [9]. Later, in the constant search for compromise solutions between the proclaimed ideals of a socialist society and limited financial possibilities, architects insist on standardization and the establishment of minimum criteria in order to work according to their beliefs and professional attitude. Along with mass construction, architects are engaged in theoretical and scientifically based researches aimed at promoting humane centric design, which has to balance with all necessary technical, formal and utilitarian requirements. The scientific approach to design was also the basis for urban planning solutions founded on predefined coefficients and relationships between built and green and parking areas, as well as accompanying educational, cultural, commercial, traffic and other services harmonized with the number of new housing units and their inhabitants. According to Šmid, the results of socialist urbanization are not equally successful in all parts of Yugoslavia, and there is a noticeable difference between cities that inherit the Ottoman city structure and those with the Austro-Hungarian urban matrix and their compatibility with modernist urban interventions [20]. In the places with no challenges about fitting into the existing city structure, these new settlements of socialist Yugoslavia consistently follow the CIAM and the Athens Charter by following the prescribed distances between buildings for the minimum amount of sunlight hours for each housing unit, with belts of greenery between the newly created buildings and a clear differentiation of pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The treatment of public areas and promotion of public interest over private ones is distinguished as a specific kind of humanistic approach which made possible understanding of urban space as a primary resource for the life of the community, but not as a commodity whose sale makes a profit. Such an interpretation results in the establishment of built-up coefficients that leave enough space for numerous supporting functions, public areas and greenery. Transitional societies created in the post-Yugoslav period subordinate all available urban spaces to the interests of private investors and, with the abundant support of local authorities, commercialize every square meter at their disposal with idea to extract as much profit as possible, with little or no regard for the interests of the community.

The social and humane aspects of Yugoslav architecture are significantly represented, first of all in residential architecture and the creation of settlements, but also in industrial architecture, which was perceived and valued in very specific way [21]. The proclaimed humanistic nature of socialism, which tends to be aimed at all layers of society, is also manifested through architecture in the newly established typology of buildings such as culture centers, cinemas, theaters, amateur clubs, kindergartens, health centers, sports and recreation centers, city supply centers, etc. [17]. It was believed that their construction and their activities could encourage the social inclusion of a wide range of people, lifelong education, cultural elevation, enlightenment, health and sports culture and as a result, the progress of the entire society. Even the architecture of buildings that, from the point of view of the capitalist world, are synonymous

with commercial and profit-oriented functions at that time follows humanistic approach in design. The facilities of the supply centers and department stores of that time are not billboards for advertisements, but have a clear artistic and architectural integrity, while Yugoslav tourist architecture clearly affirms the idea of integration of architecture, the immediate environment and man. The human centric orientation in industrial, business, residential and architecture in general is proudly presented as the ultimate ideal because “in Yugoslavia, new factories, public buildings housing estates and large modern buildings with their light and airy spaces witnessing to the great concern of our community for the living and working conditions of our man [22].”

#### 4. Openness, Export of Architecture and Exposure to Outside Influences

With clear idea to be positioned out of blocks division in the World, Yugoslavia under leadership of president Tito was one of the founders and key players of movement of Non-alignment countries that took impressive role in the world of political and economy relations after it was founded in 1961 with more than 2/3 of United Nations members countries. Thanks to clear ideas of international peaceful coexistence and political struggle against colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, racism and all kinds of hegemony, the movement attract the most of countries of Asia, Africa and South America. As one of the crucial and the most important players of movement, Yugoslavia built incredible reputation in the world relations inside and out of the circle of Non-aligned countries. This position enabled establishment of strong economic relations, especially for construction companies from Yugoslavia that realized hundreds of projects all around the World, particularly in Africa, Middle East and even South America, USSR, etc. Beside huge infrastructural, industrial, energy plants, dams and other civil engineering projects, it was great opportunity to export ideas of Yugoslav modernist architecture and its architects. Congress centers, hotels, airports, hospitals, state office buildings, residential complexes, university buildings were designed and built by Yugoslav companies and very often materialized by products of Yugoslav construction industry. At the same time it was great opportunity of earning priceless cooperation, professional and personal experience for engineers, architects and thousands of workers from Yugoslavia, but domestic locals too.

Kulić believes that the Yugoslav discourse in culture and architecture maintained close relations with then current movements in the profession and colleagues from the West and from the East, as well as that original achievement were created under specific social and cultural conditions in the country [7].

In contrast to the Soviet Union, where the international style of modernism was considered as a symptom of the degeneration of the West [23], in Yugoslavia, after breaking ties with the USSR, and under the strong influence of domestic architects, internationalism became a legitimate, mostly dominant direction of contemporary architecture.

Yugoslavia's distinctiveness within the socialist world, belonging to the modern Western civilization and distancing itself from Soviet influence was strongly emphasized precisely through art and modern creativity, and as such was promoted at numerous international exhibitions around the world [24]. At the same time, concerts and exhibitions of the world's great modern artists were organized in Yugoslavia. Their presence in the age without the Internet had a decisive significance in shaping the entire art scene and its expression. Socialist Yugoslavia was really a part of the Western world in the cultural sense, whose cultural model it not only accepted, but which was continuously upgraded with numerous achievements [25].

#### 5. Conclusion

Throughout its history, architecture was never developed outside of the social context and historical circumstances. Architecture was external manifestation and an undeniable witness of the time in which it was created. Therefore, the attempt of Yugoslavia to create "socialism with a human face" in a country that, due to its geographical, but above all socio-political position, tended to be somewhere between block divided East and West of Europe, represents a turning point which conditioned the creation of a distinctive architectural expression. In present times is necessary to recognize domestic modernity in architecture as a unique value, regardless of personal preferences towards the ideological framework and the undoubted support of the then system in the development of such architecture. The preconditions for the existence of such a connection and for the realization of the civilization achievements of Yugoslav society, and among other areas, clearly in the field of architecture and urbanism, lay in a far greater openness to the world, especially the West, but especially in comparison to all the countries of the so-called the Eastern bloc. An important factor was a significant number of architects that were educated in the western and middle Europe and that were influenced by modernist ideas. As the result of this and many other researches we can identify as the most significant the unquestionable and phenomenological support of the Yugoslav state system structure which recognized modernist architecture as perfect reflection of the society they wanted to create. All circumstances and serious work resulted in an authentic modernist expression that completely prevailed in all parts of the country.

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