

BELGRADE INTERNATIONAL: Tracing the Channels of Architectural Exchange and Promotion

Original scientific paper

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Abstract: During the Cold War capital cities on both sides of the Iron Curtain were important transmitters and mediators of architectural and planning practice. Perceived as an expression of official politics, built environment and its transformations were strongly supported by public authorities and used on two different levels – as a unique display of ‘state-approved’ aesthetic and/or a stage for events and meetings which facilitated professional exchange between institutions, societies and scholars.

Belgrade, the capital of ex-Yugoslavia and Serbia, represents an interesting example influenced by a specific geo-strategic position of the country during the Cold War. Stimulated by self-management socialism and backed by a proclaimed cosmopolitan atmosphere, the Yugoslav architectural and planning practice was opened to both Western and Eastern influences which shaped an anticipated urban identity and reflected the ambitions of President Tito.

Considering all these elements, the article will present and analyze official and unofficial flows of professional dissemination focusing on the period between 1960s and 1970s, which was an intensive phase for the Yugoslav professionals.

Key Words: Cold War, Yugoslavia, architecture, planning, international exchange, influences

* The author is currently a member of the research project ‘Cities and Transnational Interaction. The Cultural Contacts between West and East European Urban Centres during and beyond the Cold War’, located at the University of Tampere and funded by the Academy of Finland.

Introduction – Architecture vs. Cold War

THE NUMEROUS CHANGES GENERATED BY the turbulent 20th century had a significant impact on cities, their structure, architecture and society. The period between the mid-1940s and the end of the 1990s introduced a number of different and often opposed architectural concepts which directly or indirectly affected the appearance of cities all over the world. According to Frampton (2002), modern architecture after the Enlightenment has followed two directions – the utopianism of the avant-garde and anti-rational/anti-utilitarian attitude. The professionals after the Second World War have also accepted the similar division inspired by the increased industrial production.

The architectural journals, international competitions, architectural and planning congresses organised by international societies (IFHP/International Federation for Housing and Planning, UIA/International Union of Architects) certainly enabled the intensive diffusion of ideas on the European and global level. At the same time, exhibitions – such as EXPO – played an important role in global professional/architectural exchange, simultaneously providing an opportunity for a presentation of critical regionalism, various local practices and – ideological differences.

The first significant architectural divergence between the East and the West occurred in 1948, when the administration of Berlin was divided. The new socialist vision of urban space was created in consultation with Moscow and transmitted throughout the Eastern bloc. However, during the period of Khrushchev, these differences became less visible and the International style (or its regional/local emanations) was embraced by two opposing ideologies. Furthermore, from the late 1950s architects and urban planners from Eastern Europe intensified their presence in international associations – as members of executive bodies and national delegations, but also as participants and organisers of numerous professional events.

For example, The International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP), which was also active between two wars, discussed a number of planning themes interesting for both sides.

Simultaneously, The International Union of Architects/Union Internationale des Architectes (founded in 1948) successfully attracted members from both Eastern and Western bloc stimulating their equal participation and promotion – through the Executive Committee, congresses, assemblies and meetings. The rhythm of well-balanced ‘east’ and ‘west’ conferences lasted until the end of the Cold War¹, when it lost its ‘diplomatic’ purpose and was directed by new, global challenges of architectural profession.

1 ‘East’ host cities – Moscow (1958), Havana (1963), Prague (1967), Varna (1972), Warsaw (1981) and ‘non-aligned’ – Cairo (1985).

Belgrade – bridging the gap

During the initial post-war period of communist dictatorship in Yugoslavia (until 1948) Socialist Realism did not leave significant traces in Serbian architecture. Tito's conflict with Stalin initiated a new phase of self-management socialism, which was mostly financed by the West. After two decades (in the mid 1960s) the process of reforms transformed the socialist regime into an economy comprising both socialist and capitalist elements. Consequently, living standard in Yugoslavia was much higher than other East European countries and its cultural connections with the West were much stronger and intensive. The Yugoslav professionals were able to travel freely and they actively participated in western architectural forums and congresses.² Belgrade, as the capital of Yugoslavia, also became an important centre of the Non-aligned movement, underlining its cosmopolitan spirit and international orientation.

The exposure to ambivalent influences created in Yugoslav culture a specific concept of Socialist Aestheticism which could be identified in architecture as well, even until the end of Titoism (the mid-1980s). This concept, especially in architecture, served to create an image of a tolerant, modern and progressive society – with intensive and extensive housing development, new settlements (especially New Belgrade) and public buildings which represented the power of political elite and the State. However, the Serbian architectural scene also had its parallel streams which produced some of the greatest works. It consisted of architects of pre-war reputation (Nikola Dobrović, Milorad Pantović) and those who made their first important works during the 1950s (Alekselj Brkić, Bogdan Bogdanović, Mihajlo Mitrović, Ivan Antić), but all of them accepted various international trends. In some cases, the 'contemporary European currents' were also requested by the political elite, as an expression of progress and openness of the State. The 1960s and 1970s brought the elements of Brutalism and critical regionalism, while some important buildings – like the Museum of Contemporary Art (1965 – Ivan Antić, Ivanka Raspopović), were internationally recognized.

The most intensive period of international exchange for Yugoslav architects started during the 1960s. The pace and content of various professional activities could be best followed through articles in domestic journals, such as *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* (Architecture/Urbanism – published from 1960 to 1987) and *Urbanizam Beograda* (Urbanism of Belgrade – 1969 to 1981). The first one was an important transmitter of new architectural and planning ideas, as well as a source of up-to-date professional news. The second one – as a publication of the Town

² It is important to mention that the 10th Congress of CIAM was held in Dubrovnik, while some of the most prominent Yugoslav architects (Nikola Dobrović, Dragiša Brešovan) were honorary members of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Planning Institute of Belgrade, represents a unique document about activities of an institution which has had a leading role in the urban development of Belgrade.

Knowledge exchange – congresses

The numerous flows of architectural exchange and diffusion, which connected professionals from Yugoslavia and other countries, are documented in 98 issues of *Arhitektura/Urbanizam*. For example, during 1960, the journal had its representatives at the 6th UIA Assembly, the 12th Triennale in Milano and its International Congress of School Building. The 6th UIA congress (London, 1961) was attended by 200 participants from Yugoslavia and during the same year Belgrade and Zagreb hosted an international event organized by UIA (7th Assembly of the Housing Committee).

In 1962, the list of attended events included the 26th IFHP Congress in Paris, the UIA assemblies in Madrid and Sao Paolo and the 2nd International Seminar of Industrial Architecture in Rio de Janeiro. Moscow was a new congress spot, followed by Havana, where the 7th UIA Congress was organized. The Yugoslav delegation consisted of five architects and was represented in the published material and on the exhibition 'The Architecture of Developing Countries' (Divac 1963).

The journal informed about the first conference of architects from Balkan countries organized in Sofia (Bulgaria) in May 1966. During the same year Belgrade was a host of the second UIA colloquium about the industrialisation of construction. The organizer of this international event was the Institute of Architecture and Urbanism of Serbia and it was attended by 45 delegates from 15 European countries.³

During 1970 the journal presented news from the 30th IFHP International congress (Barcelona, 1970) summarizing all the important topics and exhibition projects which were discussed during the event. EXPO 70 and its architecture and spatial concept were emphasised in an article by Ranko Radović (1970). In 1973 *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* announced the first UIA International Seminar on Permanent Education of Architects, planned for October 1974 and jointly organized by UIA and the Society of Yugoslav Associations of Architects in Belgrade.

It is noticeable that during the 1960s international news and events occupied more space and caused more attention of the editorial board because international cooperation needed some additional stimulation and advertisement. In contrast, the 1970s brought an increased number of free flows, projects and opportunities traced by already established channels and more personalized contacts among professionals.

156 | ³ *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* 43 (1967, 43).

International recognition – exhibitions

Among numerous events related to architecture and art, several exhibitions were particularly underlined and presented in the journal *Arhitektura/Urbanizam*. The first one, as an important signpost for the next decade of Yugoslav architecture, was the exhibition of Swedish architecture which visited Belgrade (29 September – 8 October 1959), Zagreb (20 October – 30 October 1959) and Ljubljana (10 November – 22 November 1959) – (Kovačević 1960). Additionally, in December 1960 the Commission for International Cultural Relations organised the Exhibition of Romanian architecture, which displayed architectural heritage, typical traditional houses and, in contrast, new tendencies in planning and architecture.

At the same time, the Exhibition of Contemporary Yugoslav Architecture, organized by the Society of Yugoslav Associations of Architecture in 1959 and 1960, visited several European cities – Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Warsaw, London, Glasgow and Liverpool. More than 150 projects presented the buildings from the post-war period, but some of the masterpieces from the 1932–1945 were also included. The importance of international cooperation and cultural contacts among states, professionals and non-professionals was especially emphasised in the case of Denmark and England, while colleagues from Poland considered this event as a new chance for professional exchange (“Izložba savremene arhitekture Jugoslavije u inostranstvu” 1960). Obviously, in this case architecture was a promoter of the state and its ideology, as well as a unique medium of communication among politicians, architects and planners. Maybe the best description of Yugoslav society (via architectural reflection) was given by observers who noticed the ‘International’ features of architectural production, without local/traditional elements.

The Contemporary Danish architecture was presented in Belgrade in 1962 and although it mainly displayed buildings from the 1950s it offered an insight into Danish practice and was well accepted by professionals. During the same year, in December, the British Council and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) organised an exhibition of contemporary British architecture which included about 50 examples of modern buildings designed in functionalist manner.

In 1964 the Exhibition of the Contemporary Soviet Architecture was organized in Belgrade, offering valuable information related to the building construction in USSR and presenting recent projects of various building types (Vuković 1964).

The Gallery of Belgrade Cultural Centre hosted in 1967 a new international exhibition – ‘Polish Architects in International Competitions’. It was organized by the Commission for International Cultural Relations and the Yugoslav Association of Architects in order to show a sophisticated approach of Polish colleagues and to present numerous successful and awarded architectural and urban proj-

ects.⁴ During the same year, Belgrade hosted the exhibition of the city of Vienna, which was a part of the manifestation 'A week of Vienna', organized in Zagreb, too. Considering the similarities of two cities – especially related to their position on the river banks of Danube – this event was highly evaluated as the first step in an inter-city cooperation.

One of the most interesting initiatives was related to the Museum of Contemporary Art, which organized a series of exhibitions related to the Finnish art and architecture. The exhibition of the Finnish design was held in 1975, the exhibition of Finnish architecture 'Tradition and Identity' in 1980 and the representative exhibition of Alvar Alto in 1987.

Professional openness – competitions

The journal *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* also announced numerous international competitions. For example, the first one was a competition for university buildings in Dublin (1963), followed by the competition for a post office in Adis Abeba (1963) in which a Yugoslav team of architects (Zdravko Kovačević and Ivan Štraus) won the first price.

The issue 30 (1964) informed architects about the competition for a design of National theatre in Budapest, inviting only architects from socialist European countries. During the same year the international competition for a project of urban reconstruction of the central area of Skopje (destroyed in earthquake in 1963) was launched, with the support of a special fund of UN, the government of SFRY, General Agency for Reconstruction and Building of Skopje, UIA and the Yugoslav Association of Urban Planners. The program and general conditions were approved by UIA in Paris, the competition started in January 1965 and there were eight invited architects/participants – Kenzo Tange (Japan), J. H. van den Broek (The Netherlands), Luigi Piccinato (Italy), Maurice Rotival (USA), Aleksandar Djordjević (Town Planning Institute, Belgrade, Yugoslavia), Radovan Mišćević and Fedor Wenzler (Town Planning Institute of Croatia, Zagreb, Yugoslavia), Edvard Ravnikar (Institute for Building, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia) and Slavko Brezovski ('Makedonijaprojekt', Skopje, Yugoslavia). The jury consisted of 10 members – representatives of UN, local government and international and Yugoslav professional associations, and the author of the best project was Kenzo Tange.

During 1965 the journal invited authors to participate in two competitions – for the design of central area of Varna (Bulgaria), which was open to all members of UIA national sections, and an international competition for the housing unit

⁴ According to the article, the Polish architects participated in 29 international competitions between 1959 and 1965, winning more than 40 awards and special mentions (Radojević 1967).

of the European community for coal and steel in Luxemburg. In 1966, *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* also announced a competition organized by the city of Bratislava (Czechoslovakia) which was supported by UIA and accessible to all members of UIA and IFHP. The jury consisted of seven members – 3 from ČSSR and guests from USSR, Yugoslavia, UK and France.

During 1970 the journal underlined two interesting events – an international competition organized by the city of Vienna⁵ and an international competition for the Belgrade Opera House. The second one (Belgrade Opera House) attracted attention of 26 countries, 140 projects were received and the results were presented during 1971. The jury consisted of members from Yugoslavia (3), UK (1), France (1), Denmark (1), Italy (1) and Poland (1) and the best entry was the project of Danish architects Hans Dall and Torben Lindhardtsten.

In 1973 the Yugoslav professionals were notified about a new international success of Yugoslav architects – the first price for the project of a new National Opera in Sofia (Bulgaria) which was awarded to the team from Sarajevo (Ivan Štraus and Halid Muhasilović). The Belgrade team (Milan Lojanica and Petar Cagić) won the first price at the International seminar and competition ‘Goclaw 72’, while the similar event entitled ‘Confrontations – Warsaw 75’ was announced inviting teams from both the East and the West. During the 1973 UIA also planned a competition for students of architecture in the occasion of the 12th UIA World Congress in Madrid, scheduled for May 1975. Teams from the faculties of architecture in Belgrade (3), Zagreb (2) and Sarajevo (2) were included in this event⁶.

Networking via urban planning

During the 1960s and 1970s, Belgrade was also an interesting place for international experts related to the field of urban planning and design. Due to its significant position, Town Planning Institute of Belgrade represented a specific multi-modal node of professional flows and ideological preferences, embedded in numerous plans which have shaped the capital of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

According to the data presented in the journal *Urbanizam Beograda* (published by the Institute from 1968 to 1981), knowledge was transmitted and moderated mainly through professional visits to European cities and their institutions, numerous international conferences and exhibitions. The list of visited countries (from Austria, Germany, Italy, Sweden, The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, UK to USSR, Hungary etc.) demonstrates mostly focus on western experiences, as well as an apparent networking with western colleagues. The visits to the

5 The aim of this competition was the south area of the outer city ring and its expansions.

6 *Arhitektura/Urbanizam* 70/72 (1973, 135).

Institute included practicing architects and planners, academicians and politicians from USA, Sweden, Austria, Italy, France, Finland, Norway, Japan, India, Canada, USSR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Philippines, Australia, Cuba and Libya. They were interested in a number of topics such as new Belgrade settlements, urban and regional economy, activities and zones of the master plan, urban development, transformations and architecture, planning procedures, organization and structure of planning institutions, as well as a comprehensive overview of the planning situation in Belgrade.

Conclusion

Although exposed and subordinated to the rules and limitations of the Cold War, the international architectural and planning practice established its own channels of communication and exchange. The period during the 1960s and 1970s was especially interesting for the Yugoslav architectural/planning scene, which used its unique and privileged position between two ideological blocks. Supported by sufficient financial and intellectual resources, the Yugoslav architects and planners enabled a significant ideological promotion and reflection of the system (especially in the capital – Belgrade), but they were mainly oriented towards western models, allowing the influx of eastern experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that the professional institutions and urban space(s) represented an important professional magnet for colleagues from both ideological and professional poles.

Belgrade and its ideological/architectural offspring New Belgrade had an important mission, too. The uniqueness of the built environment, development and radical historical transformations were considered as a symbol of national progress and identity, but also as a signpost for the future to come. Unfortunately, the beginning of the 1990s closed a window of opportunity for Yugoslavia, setting a stage for new challenges and ideological shifts which generated numerous problems and blurred a purity of the inherited modernist expression.

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paper reported; 14. 4. 2013.
paper reviewed; 23. 6. 2013.
paper accepted; 27. 7. 2013.