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Kujtim Elezi

University of Tetova, kujtim.elezi@ubt-uni.net

Arbër Sadiki

University for Business and Technology, arber.sadiki@ubt-uni.net

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Architectural Reflection in Ferizaj: From Eclecticism to the New Wave of Modernism

Kujtim Elezi¹, Arber Sadiki²

¹ Ass. Prof. Dr. Sc.; State University of Tetova, Faculty of Applied Sciences,
Tetova, Republic of North Macedonia

² PhD Candidate, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract. Ferizaj has undergone a remarkable, not to say radical, transformation in the last century, both politically and economically, as well as culturally and in the urban aspect, particularly in its architecture. Architectural transformations of the city itself are the traces followed in this research to document and discuss architectural ‘transitions’ that have occurred in various circumstances by leaving traces on the architectural expression of the city. The purpose of this research is to emphasize and present two key moments of the transitions in Ferizaj through architectural evidence: On the one hand, the transition from architectural orientalism to what is known as ‘Europeanization’, and on the second hand, the transition from neoism to the creation of modernism through which Ferizaj gained a new image of socialist city. We must not forget to mention the political influences that have directed not only the economic development of the city, but also the architectural coloring which directly came from politics. The uniqueness of these two major transformations in the city architecture resulted in an extremely short period of time, i.e. no more than seven decades (the period of 1920-1990).

Keywords: History of architecture, architectural styles, Ferizaj, Modernism.

Introduction

The construction of Shkupi-Thessaloniki railway (1873), then its expansion to the direction of Ferizaj up to Mitrovica, represents the first major event of Ferizaj shifting from a small town with oriental character to a town with ‘European’ image, the size of which not only captures the dimension of surface expansion, but also of architectural representations over time. The railway to Ferizaj opened the door of communication with Europe. Trade with Thessaloniki, Mitrovica and Belgrade not only made the city to gradually recognize another world, but it also brought trade in a similar form to the city itself. The second important event is the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1908-1910) which made the city experience a level of freedom and convinced it that new political changes would come. These two events sparked the hope of big changes, a better future, which also had an impact on architecture. The latter probably did it best in presenting all conditional transitions in the city, both economic and political. Both of these are evident with all their parameters on the facades of the buildings built in two or three decades of the above-mentioned period. Despite the archetypal signs that were left in the period between the two World Wars, we cannot say that they present a turning point that should be marked after the fall of the Oriental empire and the return of Western-oriented social order. This is because the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, also known as the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, treated Kosova more as a colony than as an integral part of it. It is sufficient to say that two-thirds of this kingdom’s gendarmerie was stationed in Albanian-majority territory, making clear its approach towards this population. This huge investment, only to maintain order and security in a rebellious

territory whose major population disagreed with its involvement in a social order that was dominated by Slavic population, made public investment almost inexistent. (Fig. 1&2)



Fig. 1&2 Man and railway, Ferizaj, around 1900. Source: internet.

The third important factor in creating the image of the city of Ferizaj is the new political order established after World War II, which in architectural implementation was seeking to find expression, and on the other hand, transformations in Ferizaj were enormous, compared to the period between the two World Wars. Depending on the influence of a certain factor, we can see that the skin of the city expands and takes a new look. (Hyseni, 2014)

The escape from the Orient

Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, nobody would expect that a place on the outskirts of Kosova could have formed a complete organic core of an oriental city. The suburbs at the end of the Empire's rule were almost forgotten for investments. The city was left feeling proud only with the dominance of the oriental spirit in its buildings, whether they were small houses with only a ground floor and a first floor, built only with the available materials of the time: stone, soil and wood, with narrow switchback roads that constituted the tissue of the city, up to public buildings, such as the bazaar, mosques, dosshouses, and some old water pumps. Ferizaj at the beginning of the 20th century was considered a kasaba (town) with oriental architecture, but with reduced artistic values due to the above-mentioned factors. (Fig. 3-8)

The link of Ferizaj with Shkupi, Thessaloniki and Belgrade thanks to the constructed railroad made it reveal a completely different world from the one it had developed so far, thus gaining other types of buildings, unlike the usual buildings in the city and beyond – up to Prishtina as the largest center. This means that orientalism in architecture was the only story transmitted in the construction of time, a situation that would change soon. The city's architecture fell under the strong ambitions evidenced during the early 20th century for a radical transformation and 'Europeanisation'. Merchant movements, therefore, demanded imitation of buildings from the above-mentioned cities, with the sole purpose of presenting the power of a created micro-bourgeoisie layer which was seeking to cut off at all costs all links with the oriental past and to identify as close as possible to the West. The 'Europeanization' of Ferizaj began spontaneously, without implementing any detailed urban plan which in this period of transformation would also control the architectural emancipation of the city. The first buildings through which the 'Europeanism' could be traced back to Ferizaj were those built around the railway - mainly buildings with public character, such as post offices, schools, banks, hospitals, etc. Later, the same approach to transferring new borrowed ideas from Thessaloniki and Belgrade were also identified in merchants' houses, probably the only way to present the economic power of the new

layer in the city. Theoretically, here we talk about borrowings, imports, imitations and reinterpretations of isms from frequented cities, an architectural ‘disease’ that was also present in Shkupi, Tetovo and Prishtina, as centers that were undertaking the same borrowings as Ferizaj, though to a greater extent, even artistically prosperous.



Fig. 3,4,5,6,7&8 Oriental buildings in Ferizaj, 1900-1970. Source: internet.

The role of the architect began to be evident because the city was frequented by foreign architects, mainly Polish, German, Austrian, Hungarian, fleeing the Crimean War of 1856, and some Serbian architects, since Ferizaj after World War I was politically an integral part of what was known as the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (1919-1940). Different approaches to the production of the architectural style were observed under their influence, depending on the architect’s education or origin. These outcomes were not always seen positive from the society educated for some centuries with Oriental aesthetics. This was not the case only with Kosova’s society. Furthermore, Belgrade, the capital of the kingdom of that time, had experienced the same thing in the early 20th century, where most architects operating in the city were educated in Vienna and their developed projects on early modern principles were often rejected from Belgrade’s unprepared society to embrace modernism and consequently ‘they often felt as foreigners at their home, and after finishing their work they generally returned to Austria-Hungary. (Manević, 1986).

The first buildings possessed the following characteristics: the plan tends to have as regular form as possible, the symmetry is tentatively the key element in the formation of the plan and volume (although not always), the plan regarding the size is not extraordinary, the function of the living space, even the mixture of multiple functions in an object, is accomplished in a traditional way and without any attempted changes. The volume usually follows the form and the size of the plan, which means that there are no innovations even in this element. Building materials and constructions are mainly traditional ones, with which the local craftsmen maneuver easily. Buildings’ covers were constructed in a traditional way, in terms of the form as well as the

application of materials. In later cases, there was a usage of concrete and steel, and glass was also imported as a building material. (Fig. 9-11)

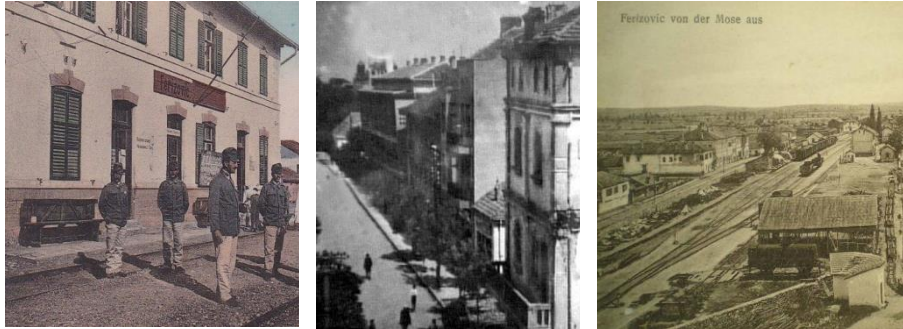


Fig. 9,10&11 First 'European' buildings in Ferizaj, 1890-1915. Source: internet.

The import of architectural elements should also be noted, for example: columns, chapter, crowns, decorative elements, motifs applied for decorations, the beam as an element, window frames, etc., all of which mainly originate from Thessaloniki. In different combinations, most of these elements are multiplied during their use as decorative elements in the facade. In Ferizaj, the objects that in their functional and decorative structure contain different elements of borrowed styles to complete the building process begin to be created from these complex influences, which ultimately complicate the 'reading' process of the created architecture because it cannot simply be defined as a style from where the applied elements have originated. The origins of borrowings are numerous. The diversity of these combined elements, present in the early 20th century, shows a real possibility that different styles have had to influence the creation of architecture in the city. With the presence of these new elements, the process of changing the tradition was expected to give the first results; an architecture which could not easily be read because of the above-mentioned problems, but that definitely was parting from what was known as the architecture with "Oriental" or "European" style. (Grčev, 2003)

In general, these objects, where both their function and building materials, facades, style elements, ornaments, monumentalism and style requirements of the time are to some extent well-articulated, and these constructions have achieved to represent what is also known as *Zeitgeist* in the architecture of the city, though with a slight time delay. The separation from the Oriental, in the architectural aspect, is very noticeable, which means that the level of transition of stylistic elements has been high. (Fig. 12-18)



Fig. 12,13,14,15,16,17&18 'European' buildings in Ferizaj, 1900-1935.
Credits: Kujtim Elezi.

While the new buildings in use appeared to be richer with *'European'* elements with a radical separation from the oriental ones, in Ferizaj there was a second category of buildings, mainly of residential nature where we can encounter a mixture of traditional-oriental and new-European elements. Here we talk about buildings of the more economically poorer layer than those that financed the above-mentioned buildings. These buildings often replaced the old ones. Thus, the skin of the city began to get enriched with more buildings, in which the *'Europeanisation'*, however low, was present. A disadvantage of these buildings is that they contain architectural dualism. While the appearance of the building is linked with the presentation of the *'European'*, the essence of the building expresses an *Oriental* mentality. Hence, in objects with such a planimetry, facade design, volume handling, oriental elements transfer and traditional roofs, we also find European 'dressing', as in the decorations around the windows, highlighting pillar decorations with a capital, presence of a metal fence balcony, or emphasis of the symmetry through any element borrowed from 'European' styles. We can see a mixture of traditional and *'European'* elements in this category of buildings, although the oriental influence is more linked to the essence of construction, while the *European* influence on construction is present only with decorative approach. Transformation here is complex - not pure, not clear. It is a mixture of both. A kind of local eclecticism-not pure. Being more in number than the former, these buildings began to disrupt the uniformity of the Oriental in the architecture of the city of Ferizaj, because over time these buildings replaced the pure old ones with (oriental) architectural expression, and the stylistic mixture had a poor artistic (aesthetic) level.

Influences are increasingly pronounced in the external appearance of the buildings, in the facades, rather than in the essence—the function. There was a broader choice of decorative elements on the facades in the early 20th century, a choice that shows the return to applying European experiences. As a result, the same transition of elements of style in architecture became available and the same was applied in buildings with residential character, as well as with different functions. The fading process of traditional architecture, which reached its peak during the 19th century, was successful under the influence of permanent European trends, while accepting eclectic methods of compiling elements of the baroque as well as of the renaissance, especially with regards to the volume and facades of the buildings. We can find elements, such as

decorations, pilasters, asymmetry, parts of curves, or in short, a combination of elements of baroque and renaissance, all of which are found under the term city “*Europeanization*”, i.e., creating the ‘new’ as an imperative of the time.

Modernism between being ‘ideological’ and ‘international’

In the case of Ferizaj as a case study, we can say that the architectural ‘Europeanization’ until the eve of the World War II did not reach the peak of artistic expression of the style(s), even when it was compared to nearby centers such as Prishtina, Shkupi, Prizren, etc., where the power of style(s) was more present in the buildings of the same period. Works were scarce, while the artistic level expressed in them was scarcer. However, what should be highlighted in this new approach of creating the architecture is the fact that it made a clear distinction between the ‘Oriental’ and ‘European’ of the city’s architecture, at least in the visual aspect.

World War II (1940-45) interrupted all investments in architecture, and there was no progress in developing it in Ferizaj. However, after World War II, the tendency of creating the new was more evident than it was two decades ago, even in architecture. The political turn after World War II, the new socialist system that regulated all areas of life in the country (including architecture), the tendency for prosperity under the new motto of brotherhood, the fierce fight of eliminating nationalism (necessarily, as well as in architecture) and above all, the belief to create the new socialist man, were some of the elements that were in line with the ideals of the politics of the time, which we can see them as the basis of the creation of the new in new socialist cities. Now, it seems that modernization in architecture, and that in the town of Ferizaj, was delayed for almost three decades, and it was the new architectural spirit, which on the one side it was clearly in service of the country, where the latter were even financing work in the field, and on the other hand, if political involvement in architecture was left aside, the modern would present the nearest style to that time with the large layer of economically poor people, consisting of a large number in Ferizaj. (Fig. 19)



Fig.19 Modern buildings in Ferizaj, 1960-1990. Source: “Modernizmi në Ferizaj, 1960-1990”, 2017.

The first post-war urban plan of 1960 for Ferizaj was the most serious attempt until then in accelerating and controlling its development and expansion. The new urban plan brought a new conceptual upturn of the previous expansion of the city plan. The paradigm of this plan was the idea of a ‘new start’ which can be found in various aspects of the plan. The plan presented a new

attempt for urban reconfiguration of the city, suggested division of the city into functional zones, also by composing different functional categories, such as administrative and trading centre, cultural and historical zones, housing, science and industrial zone, and a zone of green and free areas. With the new urban plan, it was easier to gain control of the territorial and demographic growth of the city itself. In general, the urban plan was transforming Ferizaj into a new growing administrative and industrial city of the modern [socialist] era. Over time, modernism was the architectural spirit that began to seek recognition, and to replace earlier eclecticism. The way of designing the plan, the shape and volume treatment, the tendency of a total purity from the ornament, the straight and clear lines on the facade, the flat roof, and the tendency for regularity and ideal proportions, leave us under the impression that a great turnaround had taken place in Ferizaj in applying what can be called the *Spirit of the time*, although in this case, both during the 'Europeanization' and now in the modernization period, events were presented with a delay of several decades. We say so because while in Europe, the modern was presented with the masterpiece of that period, Ronchamp Chapel by Le Corbusier (1954), while modernism in Ferizaj began to be presented as an access to architecture. It seems that architectural flows from Europe to Ferizaj had always appeared with a time delay, although this does not mean that buildings of each subsequent period had lower artistic level due to the time delay. (Heynen, 1999) Following the theoretical concepts of modernism, the new urban plan was almost ideal. However, the situation took a dramatic turn in practice. The new modern boulevard of the city destroyed (almost intentionally) an old part of the city that was partially damaged several years before the World War II. A lot of houses with oriental character were destroyed, as well as many other architectural monuments, such as mosques, old water pumps, old streets, bridges, etc. Such a plan was referred to as tendentious, a planning to destroy the old in the name of creating the new. As a result of implementing a new urban plan, Ferizaj lost its symbolic urban and historic core: the old Bazaar, mosque, bridges, part of the old houses. The planned destruction of existing structures to make space for modern buildings was not based on genuine urban plans for the prosperity of the city. Moreover, it was sort of a political vision aiming at the termination of the so-called 'backwardness' of the city, and which in fact was conducted through targeting the most symbolic parts of the pre-modern city. (Kulić, Mrduljaš, 2012)

Basically, we must admit that the new boulevard and the new city center accumulated the first modern buildings of the city. The implementation of the new urban plan was achieved through construction of collective residential buildings located around the center and along the boulevard axis. Near the city center, there was the city hotel, the Municipality building, a shopping center and the courthouse. The axis of the new boulevard was gradually completed with public-administrative buildings, banks, post offices and collective housing buildings. The new urban plan also created a new individual residential area, and this was the first urbanized neighborhood after the war, thus expressing new urban concepts that were experimentally implemented for the first time in Ferizaj, but which were different from the old forms of creating residential neighborhoods from the Ottoman period. Urban blocks of collective housing were located slightly further from the center, but in the urban context they represented innovations of the time. Schools and industrial facilities were built on the outskirts of the city to enable economic development and social welfare of the people. The city was also distinguished for its free green areas, park, sport center and playgrounds. (Fig. 20-22)

The trend of modernism, which transformed Ferizaj into growing administrative and industrial center, distinguished itself with an additional, new architectural layer that strongly denied previous layers in existence. The high concentration of modern buildings is mainly a result of a strong influence of imported European concepts and the architectural thought of Le Corbusier. Although never officially proclaimed by the end of the '50s, modernism with its white volumes and strict geometry became de facto the style of the first strong trend of socialist modernisation, articulated in elegant administrative buildings, institutional and apartment buildings. It can be concluded that each of these architectural works in Ferizaj gained at least several meanings: purified aesthetics of modernism, abstract expression, functional plan solution, rationalism, form

purity, an appropriate new form and physical representation of the idea for a revolution and freedom. This architectural language can be read in all selected buildings that fulfilled the first urban plan of socialist Ferizaj. (Fig. 23-25)

The abstraction became the most obvious and the most logical strategy of representing universality, still enough by leaving space to individual interpretations, the symbol of the post-war purification, by carrying the complex task of helping in the 'war' fighting the idea of creating a 'national form' in times when the concept of brotherhood, unity and equity needed to be put on solid grounds. This acceptance of functionality, the international style and the rational way of construction in times of low economic development fully matched with the preferred way of building in the country. We deal with what in literature is known as the 'ideological' modernism in this part of the buildings, based on which the image of the prosperous socialist city was created, and Ferizaj itself possessed highly developing trend. On the other hand, the ideal and perfection in architecture were present in buildings of the time, although these two features are not qualified as extremely important in presenting them as achievements of the modern in the city.



Fig.20,21&22 Modern buildings in Ferizaj, 1960-1990. Credits: Kujtim Elezi

After the 1970s, Ferizaj experienced a new cycle of urban transformation and an opportunity to think over the new structures and the city tissue in accordance with the latest architectural paradigms. The newly established collection of valuable and sometimes outstanding architectural buildings, mostly concentrated in the heart of the city center, but also dispersed within its tissue, further defined and strengthened the modern identity of Ferizaj. The sculptural, textured *beton brut* surfaces and the strict geometric forms introduced the new architectural language of the 1970s. All changes for the creation of the modern in Prishtina and in other centers close to Ferizaj were also reflected in the creation of the modern. Only now, the power and originality of the artistic expression of style was reduced, poorer, and the aesthetic aspect of buildings could not be compared to that of, for example, buildings in Prishtina.



Fig.23,24&25 Modern buildings in Ferizaj, 1960-1990. Credits: Kujtim Elezi

The continuity in presenting International Style functionalism, rationalism and features in the late modernism in Ferizaj went on for some time. It seems that the progress on the ‘turn’ of the creation of modernism in Pristina needed some time to produce immediate results, so the ‘old’ in creating the new would rule for a while. Buildings of this period are not that ‘deformed’ examples of modern architecture. Architects still tend to be good professionals, although compared to the center, suburbs may not always gain architectural quality in their projects. The examples in which the ‘continuity’ with the old rules, a characteristic of early modernism at the turn of the century, are traced back to objects such as the *Police Station*, 1976; *Bankos Administration*, 1979 (by architects M. Višnjić and S. Odović). (Fig. 26, 27)

The power of the turn of architectural creativity in Ferizaj (the ‘brutal’ switch) became evident in the next presentations, which clearly show the desire for dominance and monumentality, of the heavy, of the static, rudely expressed through materials in the surfaces of the buildings. These are buildings inspired by Le Corbusier's work with ‘*beton brut*’ on the surfaces of which we can clearly see a ‘sincerity’ expressed in the structure and materials, one of the definitions of Brutalist architecture. The most significant example carried out in Ferizaj in this category is the ‘*Palace of Sports*’ in 1982 by architect Miroslav Čočanović. (Fig. 28)



Fig.26,27&28 Modern buildings in Ferizaj, 1960-1990. Credits: Kujtim Elezi

Architectural responses continue to speak different languages - from complex, but rigid spatial structures that, in attempt to ‘escape’ from functionalism, explore various typological matrices, mainly based upon the structural principles of fragmentation of the volume in individualised units. We go through powerful metabolists structures made in *beton brut*, the neo-expressive forms (examples: *Municipality Building*, 1963; *Post Office*, 1977, architect M. Višnjić;), all the way to the fragmented expressive forms and architecture as a topography - a herald of something that is yet to emerge and become actual in the world of architectural production (examples: *Hotel Lybeteni*, 1960, architects: D. Šugarčev, I. Šabić, M. Damjanović; *Shopping Mall*, 1970, architect A. Dimitrijević). (Fig. 29-32)



Fig.29,30,31&32 Modern buildings in Ferizaj, 1960-1990. Credits: Kujtim Elezi, internet.

Based on the fact that all these colors of architectural styles belonging to the modern movement came decades after they had originally appeared in Western Europe, they did not follow the order of original appearance in Ferizaj. Hence, there are buildings with expressionist spirit before those based on the principles of rationalism and functionalism. This is another fact that these works

existed more due to the author's affinity for a particular architectural stream rather than being coherent, or even more original in relation to time.

The process of model absorption and reinterpretation found in local traditions was not taken as an element that would lead to the question of expressing architectural 'identity'. Tradition was deliberately cleaned from the mind of the local architects, mostly from the political agenda, but also through the filter of modernism. The attempt to return to the tradition and to create the modern based on well-studied elements by the tradition of earlier buildings almost never became a reality in creating what other countries often considered as the future goal - the one known as an architectural national identity. Regionalism emerging as the new element in the last phase of modern architecture is considered as an example, but in Kosovo, and particularly in Ferizaj, it was not present in any of the buildings. The usage of traditional motifs, such as the cultural, regional and the ethnic, was not a raw material for modern reinterpretation. Regionalism in the modern architecture of Kosovo can generally be traced to a small extent, or individual work, like those of Qemaj Beqiri.

Conclusions

After observing the rise of modernism in Ferizaj, the first thing that we can conclude is the fact that, as in many cities with oriental nuclei, there is some space for accusation for a brutal, unprofessional beginning, as a destroyer of the old and a kind of 'revenge' on the Oriental, a barbaric act on the old. As a result, Ferizaj lost a part of its past, a part of its architectural treasure layered extremely well over time. This loss has remained irreversible to this day.

On the other hand, we must admit that modernism in Ferizaj has above all succeeded in delivering the demands of the time on the political, economic and artistic aspect. Although a little bit late, and with a lower artistic and aesthetic level compared to Prishtina as the capital, modernism in Ferizaj managed to be a 'frozen' monument of social progress for more than half a century, clearly presented through architecture. Through its implementation as a style in architecture, Ferizaj managed to gain a new appearance, different when it is compared to earlier periods and objects with a new architectural identity. (Gjinolli, Kabashi, 2015)

It is evident that the modern in Ferizaj presents a conglomerate of borrowed, adapted and reinterpreted cases. We speak about the solid interpretation of a universal architectural language. In most cases, buildings have a pattern, with no artistic originality. There are few cases in which the dose of authenticity drives the artistic sensation of being an indisputable part of the creative process.

The representation of the time factor and its understanding in architecture is present, meaning that modernism begins with what is known as the 'idealization of the modern' through the basic principles of functionalism and rationalism, to continue with brutalism, international style, structuralism in architecture, neo-expressionism, until the return to the traditional (the local) in the search of creating nationalism in architecture.

Modernism as the approach to the creation of the city and its architecture has managed to give meaning to the critical process known as the relation time/architecture, with an expressed clarity, although only few original artistic examples are available. The spirit of modernism in architecture will certainly and strongly represent the relation time/architecture in the creation of modern living for the people. For the period it was created, it also sealed the meaning of time, as it was consequently its sole purpose.

After analyzing the whole process of modern architecture development in Ferizaj from World War II until 1990, where the social order that was being developed began to fall as well, we can easily conclude that this development, besides being considered as a manifestation of styles, was also a manifestation of general modernism that the Ferizaj society experienced after World War

II. In the beginning, the principles for the development of the city for the ‘new individual in a self-governing society’ were completely inconsistent with the traditional way of life, and consequently with the buildings and the people of Ferizaj, but the situation changed by transforming each other over time – people by changing architecture and architecture by changing people. As a result, this had an impact by transforming it and producing the first elements of urbanism in the city, although in the beginning it was seen with skepticism by the traditional Ferizaj society.

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