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Recommended Citation

Elezi, Kujtim and Saliu, Nuran, "Modern architecture in the city of Tetova, 1945-1990" (2023). *UBT International Conference*. 19.

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Modern architecture in the city of Tetova, 1945-1990

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the Modern architecture in the city of Tetova, for the period time between 1945-1990. The first part of the paper aims to clarify the end of the Ottoman and later NEO architecture that was rapidly produced in the town some time between the 1914-1940. Here, one can follow the the transition from Ottoman architecture to what was known as European, but also the smooth way of ending the NEO architecture and the very begin of Modern understanding of making new architecture. The new begin in the city architecture was also followed by the new political system, that was badly looking to find himself presented, among other fields, also in architecture.

The second part of the paper investigates the problems that cost the modern way of thinking and building in Tetova. Not always, especially not in towns in Macedonia and Balkans, the Modern movement in architecture followed the rules of the book, meaning starting from the scratch. Politically influenced, most of the time Modern architecture began after the old architecture was destroyed in large scales. Cities lost their identity, in order to make place free for the new movement- the modern architecture. Only decades later, historians would conclude that this step at that particular time was completely wrong.

The third part of the examination on the field brings clear light on achievements during the modern era of making architecture in Tetova. Here we are able to see the power of modernism in the city itself, the new way of thinking and living in town, and the look of buildings that changed in a very short period time the shape of the city, more that the city life of its inhabitants.

Keywords: *modernism, history of modern architecture, Macedonia, Tetova.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tetova experienced European modernism in her skin only after the World War 2. The political enthusiasm that dominated the country was slowly followed by the embedding of the new architecture, which as such had an exceptionally large weight in the former Yugoslavia. The slogan "a new state is worthy of a new architecture" should be spread everywhere, and Tetova in this case could not be an exception.

Modernism in the 50s found the city of Tetova with two different architectural layers, both in time and appearance. On the one hand, under the influence of the Ottoman culture, Tetova after the World War 2 was a city with relatively well-formed 'organic' nucleus, with narrow cobblestone streets, with a bazar and monumental buildings located in the city center, such as the rare Painted Mosque, the hammam, guesthouse, and the very famous Bektashi complex 'Arabati Baba Tekke' (Figure 1a, 1b, 1c). Houses located on snakelike city streets form the most dramatic part of the city plan, with small layouts, sometimes regular and sometimes broken, depending on the location they were built, usually with no more than a ground floor and a first floor. The houses were built of stone, clay and wood, covered in clay tiles with a simple look, with all features of Ottoman architecture such as the constructive 'bondruk' system, window opening, the bay window element, proportions, the humanity and the way function is organized (Figure 1d). City functions, such as the public, economic, and residential functions were well balanced and the city had a smooth flow of development over centuries. This shows that Tetova during the Ottoman Empire was highly developed city, creating a well-known urban center, after Shkupi and Manastiri. Simply put, Tetova presented the image of a typical oriental city.



a. Painted Mosque



b. Bey's Bath – the hammam



c. Arabati Baba Tekke



d. Houses from ottoman era



Figure 1. Buildings from ottoman era (source: authors)

On the other side, although extremely short in duration, the period between the two world wars had left its traces in the architecture of the city. Tetova for a short time (1914-1940) recognized the tendencies for "Europeanization", that were identified after the weakening of the Empire in the first half of the 20th century, which also implied the abolition of such a specific, well-balanced and harmonious culture as that of the Ottoman Empire. The process of 'Europeanization' has emerged and the city skin began to change. Buildings are two or three stories high built with new materials, such as bricks, steel and rarely with reinforced concrete. Their plans start to express new forms as a demand for copied styles, influenced from Thessaloniki and Belgrade. The facades of the buildings are decorated with the styles of the time, while decorations are integral part of the facades of the buildings. Buildings do not have that sense of humanism we were familiar with in the earlier period, and now they not only begin to reflect the new and 'European', but they have an increased dose of monumentalism through which the newly created bourgeois class seeks to be at the center of the collective attention, among other things through architecture. Therefore, requirements for a rich, decorated and stunning architecture with European style was the only requirement during their construction. The creation of the new in the architecture in one part of new buildings in Tetova gave the desired result for only a short period of time. The *Europeanization* had already begun with giant steps and the path was already paved. Certain buildings that constituted the morphology of Tetova can be taken as examples, such as the 'Old Post Office' (Figure 2a), an administrative building, the first city Hospital, but also the present City Archive building, the Gymnasium, the Music school, and a larger number of other buildings located in this commercial street of interest as well as in other parts of the city. In general, in these buildings, when taking into consideration their function and building materials, facades, style elements, ornaments and monumentalism, the style requirements of the time are well articulated and these constructions have succeeded in presenting what is known the *Zeitgeist* in the architecture of the city, though with a slight appearance delay. The separation with the Oriental, in the architectural aspect, is very noticeable, which means that the level of stylistic elements shift has been high. The transformation here is radical, complex – not pure, not clear. It is a mixture of both of them. A kind of local eclecticism—not pure. Being much more than the former, these buildings start to ruin the uniformity of the Oriental in the architecture of the city of Tetova, because over

time these buildings will replace the older ones (pure Oriental expression), and the stylistic mixture will be of poor artistic (aesthetic) level (Figure 2a-2c).



Figure 2. The process of Europeanization (source: authors)

2. NEW IDEOLOGY, NEW (INTERNATIONAL) ARCHITECTURE

Judging by the events on the ground, World War II (1940-1945) interrupted all investments in architecture, so there were no new (architectural) developments in Tetova. However, after war there is a temptation for more presence of modernism in the city. The political change, the socialist system the country was floating on, the tendency of creating unity (brotherhood), the elimination of nationalism and the creation of the new socialist man were some of the elements that were in line with the ideals of the early modern style, and this is the reason why modernism will be supported by the country.

However, it should be noted that modernism in the city started in the roughest possible way. The new urban plan (the first after the Second World War was the one of 1960), which was expected to mark a new beginning (also in the architectural sense) for the city, turned into the most hated gene, because in the name of creation of “the new” in the city, the destruction of the old began, which, layered over time, had managed to embody the people with the architecture of the city, and had even created a collective memory.



Figure 3. Urban plan's (source: Armir Ferati)

The newly planned (modern) city boulevard purposely destroys almost the entire old city bazaar, which was partially damaged several years earlier with the newly ‘European’ buildings. A large part of the shops and houses with Oriental character were destroyed, as well as many other architectural

monuments, such as mosques, old water pumps, old streets, etc. Such a plan would be specified as tendentious, a plan to destroy the old in the name of creating the new, an approach more about a “revenge” against the existing urban customs and forms of the Ottoman city. As a result of implementing a new urban plan, Tetova lost its symbolic urban and historic core: the old Bazar, mosque, bridges, part of the old houses. In principle, the concept of building the new modernist city, the process of De-Ottomanization was a sort of ‘secret agenda’, implemented in the name of Tetova’s “general reconstruction”. The planned destruction of existing structures to make space for modernist 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. According to such an intervention, the city suffered total destruction, the face of the city became unrecognizable to its citizens, it’s main functions were severely damaged. Trumpeted modernism thus destroyed both the old architecture and the collective memory. Thus, instead of a reason to admire, the modernism proclaimed in this way caused irritation towards the new in the city.

The new urban plan, that of 1960’s brought a new conceptual upturn of the previous expansion of the city layout. 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 center, cultural and historical zones, housing, science and industrial zone, and a green and free zone. 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 Tetova into a new growing administrative and industrial city.



Figure 4. New modern city center with new buildings in Tetova (old Bazar is gone) (source: B. Svetozareviq.)

The new boulevard and the new city center would gather the first modern buildings in the city. The construction of new collective residential buildings were located both around the center as well as along the boulevard. The city hotel was built near the center, as well as the residential tower, a trading center and the courthouse. The axis of the new boulevard was gradually completed with public-administrative and collective residential buildings. Urban collective residential buildings were built slightly further from the center, but in the urban context they represented the innovation of the time. Schools and industrial facilities were built on the suburb of the city to enable economic development and social welfare of the citizens. The city was also distinguished for its green areas, park and playgrounds, and the distance between the buildings. The new urban plan also created a new individual residential area, the first urban neighborhood after the war, thus expressing new urban concepts that were experimentally implemented for the first time in Tetova, but which differed from the old form of the creation of residential neighborhoods from the Ottoman period.



a. New city center



b. New post office



c. City hotel



d. Shopping mall



e. Shopping mall



f. Residential building

Figure 5. Early new modern buildings in the city center of Tetova (1960's) (source: www.gavro.com.mk)

Now, the new trend of modernism transformed Tetova into a growing administrative and industrial centre. The high concentration of modernist buildings is mainly a result of the strong influence imported from the architectural thought of Le Corbusier. Although never officially proclaimed by the end of the '60s, Modernism with its white volumes and strict geometry became de facto the style of the first strong trend of socialist modernisation, articulated in the elegant administrative buildings, institutional and apartment buildings. It can be concluded that each of these architectural realizations in Tetova gained at least several meanings: purified aesthetics of modernism, abstract expression, functional plan solution, rationalism, purity of form, 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 Tetova.

The abstraction became the most obvious and the most logical strategy for representing the universality, still sufficiently to leave space for individual interpretations, a symbol of the post-war purification, as it carried the complex task to help 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 the preferred manner of building in the country.

3. THE "BRUT" INFLUENCE FROM THE CAPITAL

It is well known that after the earthquake of the 1963, Shkupi became an experimental model of the UN. Based on Kenzo Tange's master plan (1965), Shkupi will experience a new cycle of urban transformation and an opportunity to think over the new structures and city tissue in accordance with the latest architectural paradigms. The new established collection of valuable and sometimes outstanding architectural buildings, mostly concentrated in the heart of the city centre, but also dispersed within its tissue, will further define and strengthen the modern identity of Shkupi. The sculptural, textured *beton brut* surfaces and the strict geometric forms introduce the post-earthquake architectural language, making Shkupi the "Brutalist capital of the world". All changes in creating modernism in Shkupi are also

reflected in Tetova modernism. But now, the power and originality of the artistic expression of style is reduced, poorer, and the aesthetic aspect of buildings cannot be compared to that of Shkupi. But the good thing is that everything built years ago in Shkupi finds room to replicate with the modernism in Tetova with a reduced dose of quality of most features of late Modernism.

Internationalism in architecture, it seems, will be fruitful in Tetove even during the 70s, as a continuation of the presentation of functionalism, rationalism and standardization. Buildings of this period are not that ‘deformed’ examples of modern architecture. Architects still tend to be good professionals, although compared to the center, the suburbs may not always gain the architectural quality of their works. The objects pose an example in which the ‘continuity’ of the old rules is followed (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Internationalism in architecture. (source: K. Elezi)

After a high presentation of raw-concrete buildings in Skopje, in which the quality of both the structure and the aesthetic presentation was at a high level, brutalism will be recognized as a turning point in the creation of architecture in Tetove. The ‘brutal’ switch in the architecture of Tetova becomes apparent in the next presentations that clearly show the desire for dominance and monumentality of the heavy, the static, rudely expressed even through the surface materials of the building. In the new coming architecture we meet buildings inspired by Le Corbusier with *beton brut*, on the surfaces of which we can see the ‘sincerity’ that is expressed in the structure and the material, one of the definitions of Brutalist architecture. The following are such examples in Tetova. (Figure 7).

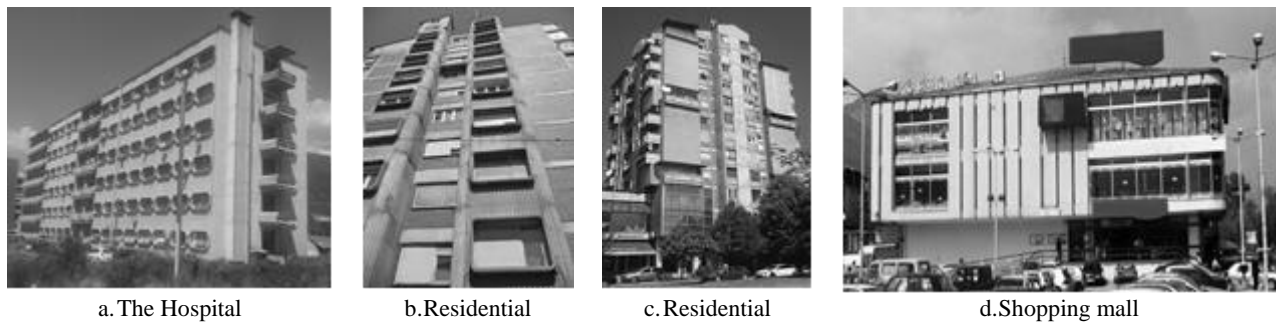


Figure 7. Brutalist buildings in 1970's (source: K. Elezi)

However, it must be pointed out that the attempt to go back to the tradition and create what will be known as architectural national identity will not be forgotten. This was known as the new agenda among the architects, dealing with regionalism in the modern architecture, a path cleared by Kenneth Frampton in the '70. The usage of tradition motifs, let us say cultural, regional and ethnic would become a raw material for Modern reinterpretation, especially in the works of Boris Cipan, Petar Mulickovski, Slavko Brezovski and others. The process of absorbing and reinterpretation of models found in the local tradition

lead to the question of expressing the architectural identity. What is common for these regionalisms is the fact that they are almost never reduced to a background effect; the tradition is always mindfully cleaned through the filter of modernism. At times, despite obvious European influences, the tradition can be interwoven in the reinterpretation of the typology (Figure 7d-7e). Architectural responses continue to speak different languages - from complex, but rigid spatial structures that attempt to 'escape' from the functionalism and explore various typological matrices, mainly based upon the structural principles of fragmentation of the volume in individualised units through the powerful metabolist structures made in *beton brut* (Figure 7a-7c).



Figure 8. Late modern buildings in Tetova (1970's and 1980's) (source: S. Perego (post office), K. Elezi (other buildings))

4. CONCLUSION

By observing the Modern architecture in Tetova, we can conclude that the way Modernism was implemented in Tetova, has left room to be accused for a brutal and unprofessional beginning, destroyer of the old, presenting a kind of a 'revenge' on the Oriental, a barbaric act on the old one. With this, Tetova loses part of its past, a part of its architectural treasure layered extremely good over time. This loss has remained irreversible to this day.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that Modernism in Tetova has, above all, succeeded in expressing the demands of the time, both on the political, economic and artistic aspect. Although slightly delayed and poorer on the artistic and aesthetic level compared to Shkupi as capital, Modernism in Tetova has been a 'frozen' monument of social progress for more than half a century, clearly presented through architecture. Through its implementation as a style in architecture, Tetova has acquired a new different appearance compared to earlier periods of time and to objects with a new architectural identity.

It is evident that Modernism in Tetova represents a conglomerate of borrowed, adapted and reinterpreted cases with a pronounced creativity. Here we talk about a solid interpretation of universal architectural language. In most cases, buildings are templated, lacking artistic originality. There are fewer cases in which the dose of authenticity drives the artistic sensation into being an indisputable part of the creative process (City Trading Center, the new Post Office, the House of Culture).

The representation of the time factor and its understanding in architecture is present, meaning that modernism begins with what is known the 'idealization of modernism' through the basic principles of functionalism and rationalism to continue to brutalism, international style, structuralism in architecture, neo-expressionism, until the return of the traditional (local) in the search of creating the nationalism in architecture. Modernization as an approach to the creation of the city and its architecture managed to give meaning to the critical process known as the relationship time/architecture, with expressed clarity, although there are only few original artistic examples. The spirit of modernism in architecture will certainly be able to strongly present the relationship time/architecture in creating modern living for the citizens. At the time when Modernism was created, it sealed the meaning of time, which was its sole goal.

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