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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interpretation of architectural identity through landmark architecture: The case of Prishtina, Kosovo from the 1970s to the 1980s

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Abstract

The period in Kosovo from the 1970s to the early 1980s is important yet insufficiently explored. The period is characterized by a liberal approach toward the development of the region. Such development of Kosovo was evident in all spheres of life, including architecture, which functions as an integral part of a society and its progress. This progress was “supported” with an intention to overpower the existing architectural environment and the overall identity of the region in some way. However, when this progress was realized wherein numerous buildings considered important were materialized, an intention to have the earlier and “original” spatial structures to be replaced became evident. In the case of Kosovo, the term “liberal” can be understood negatively and positively. From the architectural viewpoint, designs tend to follow technological advances and “trends” of the time. Consequently, the materialization of such buildings, which are surrounded by symbolisms related to different types of identity and leading toward regional modernism, is an important part to emphasize.

The current study aims to consider important thoughts about architectural identity and its categories in general but specific to the context of Kosovo. The history of the region has a critical story of influences toward its formation. Although several philosophies were accepted by the mass, others produced the antidote of the actual input. This study considers the

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importance of finding the best possible interpretation of Kosovo's architectural identity, such that Kosovo can be well known in the future as it was in the past.

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1. Introduction

The issue of identity can be approached in numerous ways. It is an important element to identify in architecture. Architecture serves as a certificate and from the identity perspective, represents the thoughts of its own people, thereby creating distinctive architecture in various periods and locations (Torabi and Brahman, 2013, p. 106). In the current study, the identity issue relates to the region of the former Yugoslavia, which is an example of a country with multiple ethnic or national identities and inhabited by diverse ethnic and religious groups all attempting to find representation in all spheres of life. In several urban areas of Yugoslavia these identities tend to weaken. The relationships between these tendencies and architecture need to be investigated. In this context, the modern industrial economy may be considered a reason to place regions that differ from one another under one patronage; however, this idea cannot be generalized. Most of the recent developments in the former Yugoslavia and the former USSR exhibit explanations for the formation of modern nation states and the control of political power (Colquhoun, 2007, p. 153).

Generally, all of the structures in Prishtina or Kosovo to be discussed in this paper were selected mainly due to the fact that the same structures were built out of a necessity for the society and with the allocation of funds for the development of Kosovo when it was part of the former Yugoslavia. The most important buildings that considered the necessity for the progress of the region were the National and University Library, the Rilindja Printing House, and the Youth and Sports Center. These structures were selected as the main case studies for this particular analysis.

2. Analysis

The sense of belonging in a community and the relationship with architecture should always be considered, especially when architects are the ones who change certain areas depending on the location of their design (Adam, 2012). The fact that architecture represents the identity of a community is well supported by the idea that architecture depends on the geography, traditions, behaviors, visions, and history of a community and region (Torabi and Brahman, 2013, p. 107).

The first experience people have with a building, even before entering it, is its architectural identity. This identity, if interpreted correctly, can inspire confidence or even comfort. The characteristic of a façade—when separated from the function or constructive side of the building—is a major element that emphasizes the idea of symbolism in architecture. A building can symbolize a region (in the general sense), cultural identity, an ethnic group or identity, and even the identity of the architect. The most important message the architecture should convey is to make human

beings experience their existence with profound meaning and purpose, thereby helping them strongly remember who they are (Pallasma, 2007, p. 130).

Regardless of the identity a building is meant to represent, the architecture should be subject to a set of rules. These rules should guide the work of an architect regardless of the identity intended. This condition applies even in the case of national identity, where the implications are broad. Rules, and perhaps the architect's personal rules, must be set. As any other form of art, architecture can also be autonomous in the sense of personal artistic expression and culture bound in the sense that tradition and the cultural context serve as the basis for individual creativity. However, it should not remodel the reality of everyday specifics but orient views toward another dimension, such as memories and the reality of images or even dreams (Pallasma, 2007, p. 139).

A building's identity needs to be determined in the development phase and after its completion. This idea leads to a discussion on the various possibilities of interpreting identity. Regardless of the type of building and its architectural intention, it must adapt to changing conditions if it is to have a lasting effect in space and time. Numerous buildings are forced to undergo reshaping, reconfiguration, or renovation. Such processes will particularly change their original identity, as was the case with one of the structures in Prishtina, that is, Rilindja Publishing Office Tower (Fig. 1 and 2). In modern society, having buildings with steady and committed public meaning, as in the case in earlier stages, seems no longer



Fig. 1 Rilindja Printing House Tower. Original design (Photo: Petrit Rrahmani).

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