

Enrico Prandi The Architecture of the Balkans: Far From Where?

Abstract

This editorial explores the perception of distance in the Balkan territories despite their geographical proximity.

The self-definition process of these recently divided regions is analyzed as an architectural enrichment rather than impoverishment. Architectural diversity is viewed as synonymous with choice and freedom, serving as a testament to overlapping cultures over time. The articles, aim to redirect scholars' attention to a context often overlooked. With this issue, the FAM magazine seeks to pose questions rather than provide certainties, emphasizing the importance of continued exploration and understanding of Balkan architecture.

Keywords

Balkan architecture — Identity — Former Yugoslavia

Stricken by misfortune, a Jewish man had decided to flee. He had disposed of his few belongings, bid farewell to relatives and friends, and had gone to the rabbi to receive the final blessing and a word of comfort.

“So, your decision is made?” asked the kind rabbi. And after a moment, “And tell me, are you going far?”

“Far from where?” replied the Jewish man.

(Jewish anecdote)

There are territories that, despite being geographically close, appear so distant as to belong to a completely different world. This is the case with the former Yugoslavia and its architectures, which are the focus of this issue curated by Marina Tornatora, Blagoja Bajkovski, and Ottavio Amaro. Morphological reasons, such as the presence of the Adriatic as an isolating element, are not sufficient justification for this perception. The reality is that we are victims of our own cultural heritage, which steers us north rather than south and west rather than east. However, in response to this distance, we could pose the metaphor used as the title of Claudio Magris's book, *Far from where?*

As well illustrated by the curators, the liminal condition of being on the border between the West and the East has triggered a process of self-definition, both decisive and interesting, that has characterized the architecture of these territories. It's important to remember that these territories have recently undergone division.

When we reflect on a topic, we place ourselves at the center and measure the conceptual distance from a condition that constitutes our benchmark. If in the past, Yugoslavia struggled to emancipate itself from architectural

imperialism, one that imposed standards in the name of a political ideology, the division into autonomous entities only encourages an architectural diversity to be understood as enrichment rather than impoverishment. Multiplicity has always been synonymous with choice and freedom. Construction (architecture) is always a testament to culture, and the resulting city is a palimpsest of cultures that succeed one another over time.

Although focused on a specific historical period of the 20th century, the articles presented here reflect an attempt to draw the attention of architecture scholars to a context that is both unrecognized and close.

In an article published in this magazine a decade ago, I reflected on the concept of European architectural identity and, in particular, on the existence of a set of characteristics (or the prevalence of common characteristics) that better define architecture. I realize that a decade in this century, which seems to proceed at an accelerated pace compared to previous ones, is a sufficiently long period for many reflections to appear outdated or even anachronistic. I wondered then if it would be possible, by analogy, to apply the question to the Balkan region. In other words, is there a Balkan architecture, and if so, what are its prevalent characteristics?

We believe that the role of a magazine like FAM is to continue asking questions rather than providing certainties, and the issue on Balkan Architecture aligns precisely with this direction.

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