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**The Socialist Sarajevo: between heritage and modernity**

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Abstract.

In the early 1960s Sarajevo experienced an exponential growth and an economic and demographic boom that exceeded the availability of housing. To remedy this growth peripheral areas were occupied by newly built districts which among other things reflected the gigantism of the socialist period, and proposed a system made up of blocks and super-blocks scattered in open territories. The architectural panorama was enriched by a series of new architectural editions, expressly inspired by the principles of functionalism and rationalism of the Bauhaus. All this has been created on the foundations made by a group of architects who returned in Bosnia Herzegovina after they had been trained in the most important European schools of architecture. Work of the new generations of Yugoslav architects marked a shift at the architectural scene in the 1960s. The paper intends to retrace some of the main stages of “modernization” of Sarajevo and highlight the singularity of architectural production that is, internationally, still unknown.

Keywords

Sarajevo — Modernity — Heritage

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**Introduction**

Sarajevo is a *city in the middle* - both geographically and culturally a condition that made it, for centuries, a city of crossroad and a meeting point of cultures, ideologies, and religions. The multiple essence of this city is the result of a continuum of invasions, destructions, wars, and reconstructions. The history of the city began with the Ottoman domination, when Sarajevo was transformed into the most “Eastern” city in Europe, following Istanbul’s example. The Ottoman domination was followed by the rule of Austro-Hungarian Empire, which aimed at adapting the city to European standards. After the ferocity of the two world conflicts the city was destroyed and impoverished and facing the problem of reconstruction.

In the mid-20th century, during the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SRBiH), the city was characterized with increasingly favorable social, economic, and subsequently architectural conditions. Significantly heightened pace of investment construction, progressively complex spatial demands, and a favorable climate of general social enthusiasm, generated projects of brave dispositional ideas and new formative approaches. The rise of urban and industrial society caused considerable increase in migrations to the capital which demanded large-scale urban development, as well as mass production of built environment, particularly of residential unit stock. To remedy this growth the General Urban Plan 1965–1986 was designed by the Institute for Planning and Development of Sarajevo. The document designated its longitudinal extension, in east-west direction, and initiated its rapid expansion from a narrow valley of river Miljacka to the wide area of Sarajevsko polje.



**Fig. 1**

R.Kadić, The residential ensemble of Džidžikovac built following the orography, Sarajevo 1953. Photograph by Stefania Gruosso, 2018.

The contemporary layout of the city is characterised by series of different layers that are not overlapping but are perfectly aligned with one another. Each individual layer has its own historical-morphological identity and witnesses a piece of the city's history in which the socialist Sarajevo is easily spatially identifiable for its urban extension, the change of city scale, and the vertical development of its architectures.

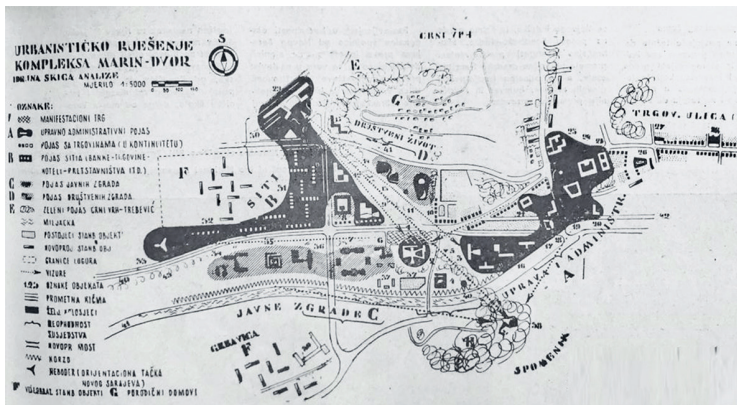
### **Socialist Sarajevo and Modernization of the City- The role of Neidhardt and impact of Le Corbusier on the city.**

The empowerment of urban proletariat and growth of industrial society was the impetus the government used for building strong socialist state. These occurrences were seen as both ideological and pragmatic tools, which in combination with the established self-management system impacted all aspects of living. The role of architecture in constructing the Yugoslav nation, control of socio-cultural life, and communication of the Yugo-Slavic socialism doctrine was tremendously important. The unique political identity, based on continuous balancing between East and West, resulted in the equally distinct, the “in-between” architecture (Mrduljaš & Kulić, 2012), that combined the communist egalitarianist ideology with the Western aesthetics and technology.

In his book *Nova arhitektura Bosne i Hercegovine – 1945-1975*, one of the most renowned Bosnian architects, Ivan Štraus, identifies four developmental periods of Bosnian architecture modernization (Štraus, 1977).

The complex process was initiated immediately after the WWI, and was mostly focused on immense construction marked by the influence of limited number of architects, and modest economic and investment possibilities. These were the turbulent years, the years of ideological split with Stalin's Russia, and strict social-realism, and the turning point towards economic reforms, decentralisation, and liberalisation. Prominent individuals, crea-





**Fig. 2**  
J. Neidhardt, Master plan for Marijnj Dvor, 1960.



**Fig. 3**  
J. Neidhardt, The vertical skyscraper of the Institution of Bosnia Herzegovina, the square and the horizontal Parliament building, Sarajevo 1974-1982. Photograph by Stefania Gruosso, 2016.

tors of the pre-WWII Sarajevo Moderna, such as Dušan Grabrijan, Muhamed and Reuf Kadić, Helen Baltasar, Juraj Neidhardt, Jahiel Finči, and others, affirmed Bosnian architecture within Yugoslav framework and set the path for continuation of modern architectural aspirations. The search for new architectural interpretation was mostly reflected through positive reminiscence of early Moderna, best seen in the exemplary residential ensemble in Džidžikovac (Fig.1) built by Kadić brothers in 1948, as well as the suggestion made for the modern urban reform of the city.

In the years to come, architecture of Sarajevo was strongly influenced by the schools of architecture from Zagreb and Belgrade, but also the work of Le Corbusier's student and one of the most significant builders of Sarajevo, Juraj Neidhardt<sup>1</sup>. He argued for the revitalization of the “man tailored city” idea, and the establishment of the “Bosnian pole in architecture”, grounded on the aspiration to transcend inherited architectural values into new, modern interpretation. (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957) In his 1960s suggestion for the creation of the new city centre in the area Marijin Dvor, he proposed a “spatial pause” that would revive the Ottoman philosophy of Sarajevo – the garden city and be a modernist counterpart of Bascarsija<sup>2</sup> (Fig.2). Recommended urban solution was dominated by a form of green pedestrian strip, which would lead to the main traffic road and beyond, in the direction of mountain Trebević. Tired of “skyscraper-mania”, Neidhardt suggested a business area with accentuated horizontal architectural tendency and parterre, which is more in tune with traditional *doksat* architecture (Neidhardt in Oslobođenje). Yet he connected the best of both worlds with his contradictory composition of vertically accentuated BiH Institutions building, juxtaposed with horizontal Parliament building and the entrance square (Fig.3).

The “Neidhardt approach” to architecture was based on harmonious symbiosis of traditional principles, the «neighborhood cult» and the «right to a view», with contemporary style of clear forms and minimalist expression. In his work he managed to creatively reinterpret this idea through numerous iconic buildings, such as Faculty of Philosophy and Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, residential buildings in Alipasina street 11-17, or his Summer Stage in Ilidza. This created a solid ground for the modernization of the city that continued in the 1960s and 1970s, when architecture was increasingly falling under the influence of regional but also first graduates of Sarajevo School of Architecture.

At the time, architectural demands were more complex in size and content, with new formal expression and spatial dispositions, influenced by contemporary technology and innovation, rise of consumer society and strengthening of Yugoslav nation. The general characteristic was a ten-

dency to create architecture of technical perfection as an aesthetic ideal, (buildings of Energoinvest, Unioninvest, Yugobank, etc) while during the 1970s, design was mostly influenced by international brutality, particularly evident in the building for Radio and TV Home, *Skenderija* the sports and recreation centre, the fallen icon of Sarajevo department store *Sarajka*, as well as number of health, hospitality, and administration edifices to the city (Straus, 1987). Perhaps as never before, architecture was unburdened by local folklore elements, recognizable by fine artistic and technical literacy, establishing an authentic legacy which was the original Yugoslav interpretation of European architectural tendencies. Unmatched in its expression, perfect balance between two worlds.

### **Residential architecture: Ciglane and Alipasino Polje**

The process of modernization in design of residential architecture was grounded on the socialist idea of equivalence embedded within Yugoslav culture. It was ‘the principle of class rather than identity’ that was given the priority, believing that a just social order would resolve any nationalist issues relating to the different ethnic groups. Residential architecture used its minimalist aesthetic as a strategy to participate in the organisation of individual and collective human life (Zejnilić & Husukić, 2018).

Initially, the architecture of living was restricted by modest standards and poor construction quality. During the 1950s and 1960s housing development gained momentum and was characterized by appearance of new residential typology - unified blocks. In composition, they were or either fully stripped off any intervention and burdened with the «overall sensitivity» – or characterized by an exaggerated number of small scales details and interventions, evident in the first large residential area, Grbavica I. Though improved in disposition of living units, conventional architecture that was missing initially planned accompanied spatial content, was believed to be lacking in creativity, spirit, and authenticity.

Despite the uniformity in visual expression, much was done in the following years in reproduction of residential units, which were becoming more complex in content, more contemporary in spatial layout and much larger in size. Some of the most significant representatives of the time are residential settlements, Otoka, Čengić Vila, and Grbavica II. By 1971 the population of Sarajevo tripled in size, from 111.087 in 1948 to 359.448 inhabitants, only to grow to a count of 448.519 inhabitants in the following decade (Grad Sarajevo). Needed swift expansion in residential unit stock was a great burden on the city, that responded with planned residential construction mostly in the valley area of Sarajevsko polje (Sarajevo valley).

The jump in demographics and change in social structure of the population, was also followed with the first wave of illegal settlement construction on the slopes of Sarajevo, that lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s. Though hillside residential area – mahala is rooted in local tradition and is a genuine brand of Sarajevo that still determines the urban ambience, the frenzied, wild hillside development was world-apart from the stepped garden image of the XVI century Ottoman town.

Local architects experimented with new building models and typologies, while maintaining connections with local traditional. Architecture of dwelling in mature Yugo-design production, offered new living style for Sarajevans by proposing, for the first time, the tower block residential typology. Its finest interpretation is displayed in housing conglomerate Alipašino Polje, planed by Milan Medić, Jug Milić and Namik Muftić (1977-1980). At the



**Fig. 4**

N. Mufti and R. Dellale, Ciglane, Sarajevo 1976-1979. Photograph by Stefania Gruosso, 2018.

same time, bold solutions grounded on traditional model of living were offered in the mega construction of Djuro Djaković housing complex, known as *Ciglane*, designed by Namik Muftić and Radovan Dellale (1976-1979). Ciglane (Fig.4) – the homage of the Ottoman city, is a terraced type collective living settlement occupying area of 16 hectares, planned for 6000 residents in 1451 living units (Dobrovic, 1973). Located in the western part of Kosevo Valley in the site of former brick factory, this specific architectural solution reiterated the concepts of traditional mahala housing around Bascarsija. On a larger scale, Ciglane was one of the planned segments of spatial interventions done along the axis of Djuro Djakovc street (today Alipasina), that culminated with sports centre Skenderija at one end, and planned Zetra complex on the other.

The basic idea was grounded on continuity of urban structure, and playfulness of urban morphology in both horizontal and vertical direction. The picturesque spatial cluster, distinguished by the freedom of volume, harmonious materialisation, variety in views and interplay of urban ambience, manages to achieve necessary urban and residential intimacy regardless of the complex, layered matrix of streets, squares, parks and passages. This is evident in the offered urban content diversity: the main pedestrian promenade and the “gallery” street - above the garages (ground level), the middle street – “quiet residential street” (1st level), quiet street residential oasis and vista (2nd level) (Juric & Islambegovic, 2019).

Recently actualized but back then quite a revolutionary participatory approach in design, was utilized in the design of residential units, where the users were able to take part in the design and evolution of this megastructure through intervention on open terraces. Additionally, they were envisioned as supplementary areas, on account of which the units could expand if needed, as flexibility and adaptability was another major pivotal point of the design.

Opposite to Ciglane, residential complex Alipasino polje (Fig.5-6), is located on mild slopes of wide Sarajevsko polje (Sarajevo valley), between two main transportation arteries of the city. It was designed to house the rising middle classes or the working population of 30 000 inhabitants. (Investprojekt, 1985) Interestingly, it was the first settlement in Sarajevo larger than 15 hectares, covering massive area of 65 hectares and providing 8200 housing units (architect Milan Medic for Municipality Novi grad,



**Fig. 5**

The residential complex Alipasino polje. © Aida Redzepagic, 2020.

**Fig. 6**

View of Alipasino polje from Igman mountain. © Emina Zejnilović, 2023.



2021). Urban composition is arranged through a series of 19-storey high buildings, positioned on the outskirts of the site, which regress to 5 – storey buildings as they move to the central section of the area. The created “gated” appearance towards the exterior, is intelligently softened with the adjustment of built scale, subtle levelling alterations of large public areas, which with its horizontality balances out the exaggerated verticality along the edges. Abundance of common spaces were provided allowing the locals to nurture the cult of neighborhood and maintain the sense of community. At the same time, the exterior view to the 19-floor tower blocks, corresponded with global architectural trends of the time and reflected the state’s vision of a successful, progressive society. This created an overture to the final phase of Sarajevo’s «unfinished modernization» - massive city expansion for the preparations of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games.

### **Public buildings. From instrument of the regime to icons of the contemporary city**

In addition to the residential growth, the architectural panorama of the city was also enriched through a series of new projects, that were the expression of the role of architecture in constructing the control of socio-cultural life. At the same time, architecture confirmed the interest of the regime to culturally develop the city, through different aspects and approaches, intending to make Sarajevo a modern cultural center. Significant spaces for culture were under construction as instrument through which Tito communicated the modernity of Yugoslavia to the world.

Examples include the Skenderija Culture and Sport Centre, a structure whose composition is a clear reference to the work of Le Corbusier, the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, whose domes resonate back to the Ottoman architecture and the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sports and Culture Center Skenderija (CSC Skenderija) (Fig.7) was built in 1969 along the Milicka river in a site close to the new city centre designed by Neidhardt in the area Marijin Dvor. It was built as a response to the city’s need to provide itself with a place that could offer sports and cultural activities, with an intention to improve the living quality. The complex designed by Živorad Janković with the collaboration of Halid Muhasilović presents itself as an ambitious work, unique in its intentions, content, dimensions, remarkable for the new way of interpreting and organizing space. The spacious composition that reflects the influence of the late (ie brutalist) Le Corbusier style (Neidhardt T, 2014) follows a complex functional program which sees the coexistence of sport, culture and commerce; a concept of hybrid architecture very close to the contemporary one. (Gruosso, di Lallo, Pignatti 2022). A huge podium dominates the composition from



**Fig. 7**

The Dvorana Mirza Delibašić, Sarajevo 1969.. Photograph by Stefania Gruosso, 2018.

street level and is mostly used for commercial activities, and hospitality activities. The two main building segments, Dvorana Mirza Delibašić and Dom Mladih act as a backdrop to the large central public space.

The Dvorana Mirza Delibašić, also called the «concrete rose» is a multi-purpose arena used both for sports events and competitions, characterized by large inclined pillars in reinforced concrete placed on the short sides, which seem to lift the building from the ground.

The Dom Mladih, which means House of Youth, is a multifunctional center made up of a concrete box, marked by horizontal windows that run along the entire facade, into which a cylindrical volume is inserted, hosting a dance hall, an amphitheater, a nightclub and a Youth Center. The uniqueness and the value of the CSC Skenderija are confirmed by the fact that the architects received the *Yugoslav National Borba Prize*, proclaiming it the best architectural project in Yugoslavia. The work was revisited and expanded for the 1984 Winter Olympics, which was the protagonist of new urban transformations for Sarajevo.

Not far from the Skenderija Culture and Sport Centre, the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics is located, one of the two faculties for the University of Sarajevo provided by the master plan of Juraj Neidhardt for Marindvor. The project is a clear expression of Neidhardt's theory based on the idea that an architecture adequate to the nation's modern conditions must be built on vernacular foundations.

The structure, that was built in the 1960s, according to the design of Neidhardt himself is composed by two blocks. The first block consists of a series of volumes organized around a central space. The lower part of the first block is finished with an evident rusticated stone base that is a clear reminiscence of the old city. The second block is a one-storey building covered by a roof topped by semi-spherical volumes clad in copper, an intentional reference to the domes of the traditional Ottoman city. The class-





**Fig. 8**

B. Magaš, E. Šmidihen e R. Horvat, the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina Sarajevo 1958. Photograph by Stefania Gruosso, 2016.

rooms inside these vaulted spaces feature a particularly effective layout and lighting that filters in from the sides. (Pignatti 2019)

Still in the transitional part towards the new city, along the main street (Zmaja od Bosne), the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina subtly rises (Fig.8). The museum design by a group of Zagreb architects, Boris Magaš, Edo Šmidihen, and Radovan Horvat in the 1958 is perhaps the most international and modernist project in Sarajevo with its dominant cube forms and clean lines. The works has been the first prize winner in a public competition for the design of the Museum of Revolution in Sarajevo. Museum changed its name several times. In 1949 the museum was named Museum of National Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1967 Museum of Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and finally, by the Law on Museum activity, adopted in June 1993, museum was renamed to Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The building consists of a giant concrete cuboid resting on an almost entirely glazed base which appears to float atop a white stone podium. The entrance is characterised by a large staircase made of stone. The uniqueness and the architectural values of the Museum is well synthesized by the words of the Prof. Stjepan Roš:

The building of the Museum of the Revolution manifests the pure architecture of Mies van der Rohe. It is constructed of “boxes,” transparent and full. The glass-lined breathable skeleton stretches on a white stone pedestal, on which rests a full stone box [...] Spaces are extroverted, clearly oriented towards the inner garden. Nine columns — slender trees — contradict their own actual function because it looks like they break through and do not support. Free placement of walls gives the impression of moving billboards and an “open free plan”.

### **The socialist Sarajevo towards the future**

Forty years since the ending of Tito’s era the capital of BiH is still characterized by a multi-layered urban structure, with clearly identifiable large-



scale urbanization of the architectural layer constructed during the socialist regime. It must be noted that the 1992-1995 war stopped natural development of the city, and created spatial, cultural, and social gap.

Subsequently, the new additions have a “detached” trajectory in continuous attempts to reaffirm the identity of Sarajevo as a more global city. But while contemporary, generic, decontextualized and eccentric architecture imposes itself as a new form of violence that results in urban restructuring in general, representatives of the socialist architecture, are still dominating the image of a city. Their scale, monumentality, and intelligence of urban footprint, particularly within the residential areas Alipašino polje and Ciglane, allows them to maintain their authentic visual and spatial character and quality, regardless of obtrusive interference of contemporary additions, that threaten to architecturally pollute them.

Marijn Dvor, the area proposed as the “new center” by the masterplan of Juraj Neidhardt, confirms its role as symbol of renewal and urban experimentation with continuous investments and efforts for creation of new and contemporary architecture, while on the other hand it continues the reevaluation of the architecture of the past. In this view the public buildings, symbols of the socialist city constitute not only a historical memory but become icons that attend to stimulate the urban development in many aspects and that for this reason must be preserved from the neglected.

Since 2007 the Sports and Culture Centre Skenderija hosted the Art Depot, a temporary location for the Ars Aevi Collection made by the contribution of the most significant artists of the world, who contributed with their works to the creation of the collection of the future Museum of Contemporary Art. It was a way to contrast the violence of the war of the 90s through the culture, together with the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that covers the history of the country from the Middle Ages to the present and stands as an icon of resilience. Regardless of the poor condition and malfunctioning, it is still one of the most significant city landmarks, that is strongly etched in the urban memory of Sarajevans.

Sarajevo, is therefore an exemplary case of the exceptional work of socialist Yugoslavia leading architects, evident through a unique range of forms and modes easily identifiable along the west-east city axis. The belated recognition of the value of the works of socialist Yugoslavia, was confirmed with the exhibition curated by Martino Stierli and Vladimir Kulić, entitled *Toward a Concrete Utopia. Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* which took place in New York at the Moma, Museum of Modern Art, in 2018, in which Sarajevo has been represented through Juraj Neidhardt’s works. The works cited, together with many others that have not been discussed in this paper, constitute nowadays pieces of an open-air museum that still emits the glimmering radiation of the socialist utopia, and stand as a testimony and as a reflection of a fragment of history that characterized the socialist society and system.

## Notes

\* This paper is outcome of the researches and reflections of the authors conducted within a series of academic activities. In detail: S. Gruosso and E. Zejnilović are the authors of the *Abstract*; S. Gruosso is the author of *Introduction, Public buildings. From instrument of the regime to icons of the contemporary city* and *The socialist Sarajevo towards the future*; E. Zejnilović is the author of *Socialist Sarajevo and*

*Modernization of the City- The role of Neidhardt and impact of Le Corbusier on the city and Residential architecture: Ciglane and Alipasino Polje.*

<sup>1</sup> Juraj Neidhardt (1901-1979) was a theoretician, teacher, urban planner and one of BiH's most prolific architects who, tried to merge modern trends in architecture with traditional ethical principles that the city of Sarajevo had been founded on.

<sup>2</sup> Sarajevo's old bazaar, built during the Ottoman Empire rule, the historical and cultural center of the city.

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