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AESTHETIC CONTRASTS OF CONTEMPORARY URBAN ARCHITECTURE: RARE HIGH ACHIEVEMENTS AND PREVAILING WANDERING

Abstract

The period between the two World Wars was a golden age of the rise of Belgrade and other cities in Serbia. After the Second World War, there was a period of stagnation in urban areas, but there were also high achievements in the field of urban reconstruction. With the social changes that took place in the last two decades of the 20th century, with the advent of transition, the attitude towards the urban renewal of cities in Serbia, especially Belgrade, also changed. These changes brought higher quantity, and lower and lower aesthetic quality of new construction in cities. This possible view of a small part of quality, but also inappropriate architectural - urban practice in the field of urban reconstruction of Belgrade, is accompanied by a picture of the social context in its basic features.

Keywords: Urban renewal, Discontinuity, Architectural achievements, Urbanization process.

ЕСТЕТСКИ КОНТРАСТИ САВРЕМЕНЕ ГРАДСКЕ АРХИТЕКТУРЕ: РЕТКА ВИСОКА ДОСТИГНУЋА И ПРЕОВЛАДАВАЈУЋА ЛУТАЊА

Сажетак

Период између два Светска рата био је златно доба успона Београда и других градова у Србији. После 2. Светског рата у урбаним срединама долази до периода стагнације, али и високих достигнућа у области урбане реконструкције. Са друштвеним променама које су се догодиле у последње две деценије 20. века доласком транзиције, променио се и однос према урбаној обнови градова у Србији, посебно Београда. Ове промене донеле су већи квантитет, а све нижи естетски квалитет новоградње у градовима. Сагледавање малог дела квалитетне, али и неодговарајуће архитектонско – урбанистичке праксе у области урбане реконструкције Београда, праћено је сликом друштвеног контекста у основним обележјима.

Кључне ријечи: Урбана обнова, дисконтинуитет, архитектонски дometri, урбанизација.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reasons for interest and selection of this topic should be sought in further elucidation of the circumstances for the consequences of discontinuity of urban development in Serbia on the example of Belgrade, as well as the desired response of the scientific and professional public, through establishing a dialogue on focused issues and possible comparisons in the near or distant environment.

The process of urban development in Serbia experienced serious discontinuities at the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century. Interruptions in development were relatively short but radical during the World Wars. In peacetime, after World War II, urbanization flowed past the old city cores, on new avenues in a socialist-realist manner, encroaching on traditional settlement matrices with less intensity of change. Spatial interventions in the formed tissues of cities were only sporadic, either in devastated areas on the edges of the centers, or within relatively preserved environments, with limited intensity.

In the decades after World War II, the rare new architecture that appeared in the old core of Belgrade followed the dictates of the proclaimed ideology. Later, in the 60s of the last century, there was a liberalization in design, foreign influences penetrated, and production was increasing. In the years to come, in the eighth decade of the 20th century (70s), Belgrade became richer for a series of extraordinary architectural works, especially within the framework of urban reconstruction.

Since 1980, the architectural milieu of Belgrade and other cities has first been gripped by global wandering in search of a new direction in architectural design. In that period, the more or less preserved decency and logic in the development of urban aesthetics were captured by the influences of the quasi-postmodern direction in architecture on the one hand, and the negative influences of transition in social relations in the 90s, on the other. With the transition to the new millennium, in the years that followed after 2000, the new architecture and quality professional skills and resourcefulness of its authors (mainly the Belgrade School of Architecture), successfully coped with the modern practice of development and renewal of cities.

2. TIME OF MOTIVATION AND RATIONALITY

A pictorial description of the architecture of Belgrade in the years after World War II was given by B. Stojanović: "Another beginning in the chain of beginnings within the violent discontinuity of material - cultural development of this city in its long history." [1] It can be stated purity, honesty and integrity in the expressions of architecture of this time. A certain dose of asceticism in the materialization and content of buildings was a reflection of the post-war material poverty of society. Nevertheless, the authors relied on the aesthetics of the pre-war years and created rational modernist structures, with skillful studiousness in finding measure and proportion.



Figure 1. Architecture of Belgrade in the 6th decade of the 20th century (from left to right): 1-Business building, 1956, arch. A. Brkić, 2-Business building, 1958, arch. S. Mihailović, 3-Residential building, 1957, arch. D. Nastić, 4-Resid.-public building, 1958, arch. R. Bogojevic, 5-Residential building, 1959, arch. Z. Petrović [1]

This period is characterized by the absence of wandering and aesthetic failures. The reason should be sought in the required and implied rationality, the limited possibility of creating unnecessary decorations and elements, and relying on previous quality periods of city construction. The period of the dictates of socialist realist construction left crucial traces of modernism in Belgrade, where, in addition to architecture, deprived of emphasized aesthetic values, embodied in workers' settlements and objects of social standard, a kind of pearl of authorial creative architecture was created. (Figure 1)

In this period, investments are treated through the interest of rapid consolidation of social needs, and the endeavors themselves are perceived as a matter of expertise and the privilege of the creative act,

whether it is basic or secondary needs. Awareness of the planned urban renewal of the old city center is still not maturing. Except in negligible traces, there is no incompetence, amateurism, illegal construction and kitsch at this time.

3. TIME OF URBAN RENEWAL AND SUPERIOR ARCHITECTURE

In the seventh and eighth decades of the 20th century, Belgrade continued to develop intensively in a positive direction, bearing in mind all aspects of good architecture, both function and form, and less often but important for the city, growing awareness of the need for urban renewal or urban reconstructions. Thanks to a solid planning basis, based on respect for a wide range of city functions and awareness of the need for multipurpose use of space, interventions of a more delicate nature are being realized, which had not been practiced in Belgrade's architectural practice until then.

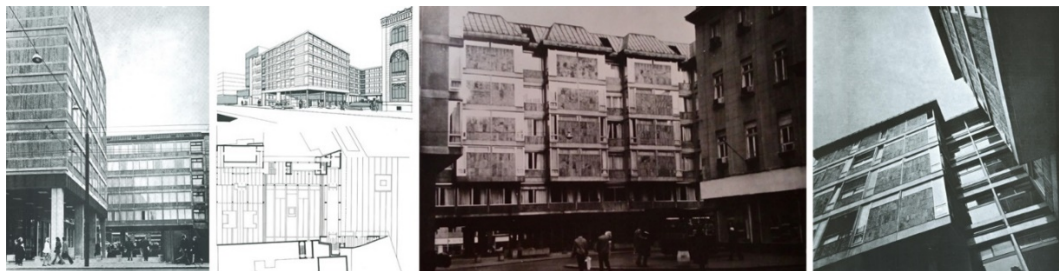


Figure 2. *Successful urban reconstruction, center of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, 1974, Author: arch. S. Ličina [2]*

Several successful urban interventions in the old city center, which, in addition to the main theme, also developed the needs of users of open city contents, nurturing multifunctionality as a need for modern treatment of public space, showed that Belgrade can follow the development of modern centers. (Figure 2) At the same time, the realization of "individual" investments continued, with dedicated, targeted users. Quality in the opening of modern urban architectural themes was the simultaneous education and habituation of the population to higher standards of urban life and the newly set aesthetic and design boundaries below which the city should not be planned in the future. At this time, awareness of the need to create secondary city centers is being established. The architecture of this period also hinted at the first attempts to transpose vernacular sources to modern construction.



Figure 3. *Significant - reference architectural works of Belgrade: Urban Institute (Author: arch. B. Jovin, 1970) (left) and Residential Block (Author: arch. M. Jovanović, 1978) (right) [3]*

The most important architectural works of modern Belgrade were created in the time of "modern" at the beginning of the last century and in the period of the 7th and 8th decades of same 20th century, whether they were small or large themes. (Figure 3) Many of these works can be interpreted as the zenith of modernism, international style, with the predominant use of natural classical materials in construction, in natural concrete (but also facade bricks). Many mistakenly call this architecture "brutalism", and the curators of the exhibition of architecture of the former Yugoslavia at MoMA in New York in 2018, conceived the name of the event using the ambiguity of the word "concrete" in English, combining it with the word "utopia", which is not only inappropriately, but by allusion to futility, it degrades the value and significance of the achieved high artistic level of the presented architecture. [4]

The term and achievements of "Belgrade residential architecture", as well as crucial works of public character were created at this time. As the strength of social realism weakened and the liberalization of society strengthened, the appearance of insolent inappropriate interventions (upgrades, upgrades,

remodeling, conversion) manifested itself, but also clumsy investments, which indicated the coming transitional time and the collapse of aesthetics and logic of city development in the next period.

4. TIME OF TRANSITION AND CHANGE OF VALUE SCALES

The last two decades of the 20th century in the urban development of Belgrade were marked by all the difficulties of changing the social system (transition), as well as the collapse of the federal state in the circumstances of civil war in the immediate vicinity, to be finalized by NATO aggression against Serbia and Belgrade, as its capital. Apart from human sacrifices, many masterpieces of architecture and symbols of the city, created in the same century, also suffered as intentional or collateral targets.

The mentioned circumstances, as well as global trends, have caused a radical disruption of the measure of all values and quality relations on the line: investor - city administration - designer - builder - user. All of the aforementioned inappropriate interventions in space continued and intensified. Apart from the fact that unaesthetic phenomena and habits in spatial action were multiplied, they were also aggressive in their expression, so over time, in many elements, they became the rule of behavior.

The ineffective fight against such phenomena started late, with documents and new decrees and regulations of urban regulation. These new rules did not set the regulation on firm postulates, relying on everything that has proven to be good in the urban development of the city over time, but were prescribed consequently, with the intention of preventing an increased number of inappropriate behaviors in space. Thus, investors, who are by definition greedy in business and blind to aesthetics and art, have accelerated finding new ways of designing without building permits and regulations, in order to achieve as large a building area as possible, or a substantial profit. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. *Fragmentation of form, absence of regulation, excessive exposure, no proportion. New architecture of small value*

To a large extent, there has been a construction of "ready-made architecture", which does not have its ambient foundation and relation to tradition, which can be seen everywhere, which lacks in finding good measures and proportions, and causes a feeling of excessive tendency to expose in inappropriate environments. Such a combination of circumstances significantly violated the ambient values of the traditional parts of Belgrade. Instead of urban reconstruction taking place in larger strokes, the new image of the city is formed as a consequence of small parcelling, cacophony in styles and a pronounced disorder in regulation.

This period also brought the greatest wanderings in search of architectural expression, and the greatest among them is wandering in the fog of the postmodern. Trying to follow that unfortunate, fashionable style of the 80s of the last century, which was essentially never accepted, some architects realized in Belgrade objects that represent illogical volumes of provincial spirit with a bunch of irrationally placed eclectic elements, without foundation in the environment and ambience of a European city.

However, this period also gave rise to essentially high-quality architectural achievements, which, although carrying the difficulties of the time in which they were created, guided by the experience and talent of the author, reached to be quality representatives of one time and a button with modernity. It can be stated that in the 1990s, Belgrade followed the currents of world architecture in individual ups, and this tendency continued in the new millennium. (Figure 5)

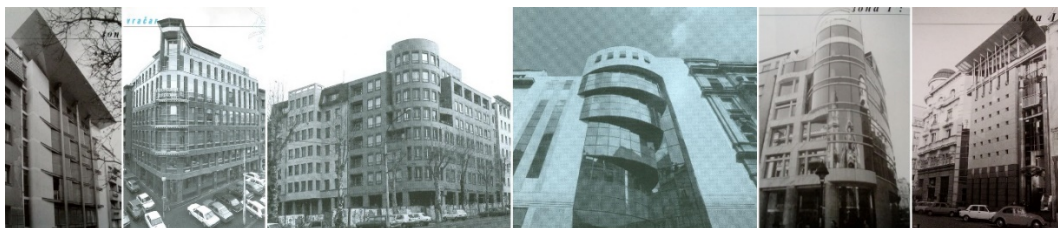


Figure 5. *New rappers at the end of the millennium - quality architectural achievements of the 90's in Belgrade (from left to right): 1-Residential building, 2000, arch. B. Mitrović, 2-Business building, 2001, arch. S. Rogan, 3- Residential block, 1999-2000, arch. M. and Đ. Bobić, M. Lojanica, M. and D. Marušić, S. Ličina, 4- usiness building, 1995, arch. S.Krunić, S. Rajović, 5-Business building, 1994, arch. M. Mirković, 6-Business building, 1997, arch. V. Milunović, B. Mitrović, D. Tešić [3]*

5. TIME OF CONSOLIDATION, SEARCH FOR CONTINUITY AND NEW WANDERINGS

After 2000 until today, the tendencies in the urban development of Belgrade that took place towards the end of the last century, have continued. In the first years of the new millennium, the city repaired the consequences of NATO's destructive aggression in a short time. In the visible ruins, as a testimony to that unfortunate event of several months, only a masterpiece of modern architecture, the Old Army Headquarters of the architect Nikola Dobrović, remains. The city has once again kept pace with modernity.

The appearance of exceptional, authorial achievements continued to the same extent as before, generally viewed as a small share in the total production. There is a calming of differences in styles, or the crystallization of a new approach in quality projects and construction, which could be subsumed under the term new modern or "neo-modern". This is especially noticeable in controlled and professionally - creatively led endeavors on larger interventions and moves, while in the wider city center it is a matter of individual extraordinary creations. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. *Architecture in context (residential buildings in the old ambiances of the city) - respect for the immediate environment by finding a measure in volume relations (Architects: G. Vojvodić, P. Cagić)*

What the city lacks are serious urban reconstructions, especially in the wider center, where small parcelling and interest in capital limit creativity and result in a chaotic overall picture of new structures. Rehabilitation, adaptation and reconstruction of existing contents is becoming more frequent, with the obligatory conversion of space, but also remodeling of facades. (Figure 7–left) This can be considered a positive trend in urban renewal of the city. The arrangement and redefinition of city squares, parks and ambiances is also important, including the installation of a significant number of new and the renovation of existing memorials and fountains.

Another bad tendency can be noticed: the appearance of a series (as from the catalog of standard projects) of new residential buildings built in an eclectic manner with many decorations and appearance from the beginning of the last century, with white facades in artificial stone and many wrought iron elements. These buildings do not belong to the milieu of Belgrade, favor kitsch, and caricature ridicule a city with an enviable tradition, rich history and a solid level of achieved urbanity. (Figure 7–right) The following is also written about the described phenomenon: "Everything that modernists taught with a lot of wisdom - thrift, modesty, honesty, simplicity and "beauty of convenience", and especially the distant coldness, which is often a feature of good art - was abolished by fanfare and false fireworks." [5]



Figure 7. Renovation of facades on the existing three office buildings (Authors: Remorker Architects, 2018-2019) (left) and „Starletarchitecture“ (eclectic manner and bad tendency) (right)

Positive and negative tendencies in the development and urban renewal of Belgrade will reappear. The speed and intensity of their arrival is surprising, creating the impression that entire parts and ambient values of the city disappear overnight and are replaced by new aesthetics. The paradox that arises and warns is the fact that a century ago (then in new directions in architecture and art) Belgrade followed in step with time and the world, building in the style of "modern", and today, in a time of changing values, found in a situation to represent a polygon for the construction of buildings with greatly outdated functional and aesthetic features.

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