

Serbia

City as a regional context for architecture

From 18 February until 2 April 2015

- Concept:** Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević
- Exhibition venue:** Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday: 9 am to 6 pm, free admission
- Press tour:** Tuesday, 17 February 2015, 11.00 am
- Speakers:** Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević
- Official Opening:** Tuesday, 17 February 2015, 6.30 pm (by invitation only)
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The latest exhibition in Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's Architektur im Ringturm series takes visitors to Serbia in Southeastern Europe.

Geographically speaking, the country is split in two by the Sava-Danube line. The landscapes of northern Serbia are mainly lowlands, while the south stands out for its diverse, mountainous scenery dotted with plateaus, basins and rivers. With the country extending mainly from North to South, its moderate continental climate gives way to numerous microclimates, which are also reflected in approaches to construction. Starting with the emergence of the pioneers of modern architecture in the 1920s and 1930s, the show goes on to spotlight buildings constructed between 1945 and 1980, when modernism became firmly established as the architectural style that "represented the interests of the state". The building techniques adopted under socialism in Yugoslavia are presented using a number of architectural examples and personal portraits, while a selection of contemporary constructions provide a link to the present day.

City as a regional context for architecture

The academic study of architecture in Serbia was a by-product of the country's industrialisation, which began in the late 19th century. This also sparked a process of urbanisation and the growth of cities, especially in central Serbia's industrial belt, which were strongly influenced by a significant number of Austrian and German companies. Until this time, high culture in general and architecture in particular had been the preserve of monasteries. The lack of traditional urban centres meant that the country did not even have a capital from the Middle Ages until the 18th century. Instead, temporary capitals were set up wherever the king chose to take up residence for a period of time.

Industrialisation paves the way for urban development

The cities in northern Serbia originated from large villages. By contrast, urban centres south of the Sava-Danube line grew out of a cultural inheritance from the Ottoman Empire – the *čaršija* or market found in the heart of a settlement. The growth of major cities was mainly fostered by the Second Industrial Revolution – the onset of mechanisation prompted an exodus from rural areas, and over nine million people left their villages between 1945 and 1965. This internal migration transformed towns and villages into cultural hybrids, resulting in cities where the lifestyle had a distinctly rural flavour.

Leading lights of modernism

Besides Nikola Dobrović, the outstanding personalities on the Serbian architectural scene in the early modernist era were Dragiša Brašovan (1887–1965), Branislav Kojić (1899–1987) and Milan Zloković (1898–1965). They shaped the architectural development of the capital from the 1930s onwards, and as university lecturers and intellectuals their designs left an indelible mark on the entire country for generations through to the 1960s. Zloković was one of the founding fathers of the Group of Architects of the Modern Movement, which played a decisive role in establishing modernist architecture in the newly-founded state in the 1920s and 1930s. Zloković's origins, education and fluency in several languages set him apart, and the buildings he designed in Belgrade are among the exceptional pieces of architecture that survive to this day, serving as reference points and testaments to that period.

The architectural signature of prominent Serbs

One of the standard-bearers of modernist architectural language in Novi Sad was Djordje Tabaković (1897–1971). In addition to a number of small, private constructions, he designed several structures that shape the fabric of the city (including the multi-storey Dr Rudolf Klein building and the Dr Jovanović residential property – both built in 1932 – as well as the Tanurdžicev building with its distinctive rounded corners, finished in 1934; all of these properties are located in central Novi Sad).

The most important figures among subsequent generations of architects included Ivo Antić (Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 1965), Aleksej Brkić (Hempro office and commercial building, 1953, and Social Insurance Fund offices, 1957; both in Belgrade), Milorad Matura (army printworks, Belgrade, 1948-1950) and Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010). Bogdanović, who spent almost 20 years in exile in Vienna, left an individualistic yet profound mark on Serbia's architectural culture with his monuments and sketches, his design for the Belgrade's Jewish cemetery and his groundbreaking village school of architecture in Mali Popovic. Born in 1921 in Čačak, Mihajlo Mitrović, the elder statesman of the Serbian architectural milieu, continues to publish his work to this day (his designs include residential constructions in Niš; a residential property in central Belgrade, 1964; and the Genex Center, 1970-1980).

Outstanding examples of Serbian architecture

Thanks to the political strategy of long-time head of state Josip Broz Tito, numerous stunning, high-quality and internationally renowned Serbian constructions built between 1945 and 1980 still exist today. Almost all of the country's iconic residential and administrative buildings and cultural facilities date back to that period. And all are based on the principles of classic modernism, which was the architectural language dictated by the powers that be, although developers were given a free hand in the design. The decision of those in power to declare modernist architecture as "representing the interests of the state" is the most significant contrast between Yugoslavia's and Serbia's architectural culture and that of other Eastern bloc countries.



Aeronautical Museum in Belgrade by Ivan Štraus
© Adolph Stiller

Many architects from other parts of Yugoslavia developed properties in Serbia, as almost all large-scale projects were put out for tender by means of national, open architectural competitions.

The now vacant Yugoslavian parliament (Mihailo Janković, Antun Ulrich, Vladimir Potočnjak, Zlatko Najman and Dragica Perak, 1947-1961), the Aeronautical Museum (Ivan Štraus, 1969-1989), the Museum of the National Revolution in Novi Sad (Ivan Vitić, 1959-1963) and Apartment Block 28 in Novi Beograd (Ilija Anautović, 1971) are examples of commissions awarded to architects from outside Serbia. Tenders such as these were designed to stimulate the transfer of knowledge within Serbia and the creation of a sense of identity for Yugoslavia as a whole. The practice gave rise to a consistently high awareness of quality, which was nurtured and disseminated through regular theoretical articles in *Arhitektura i urbanizam*, a magazine published in Belgrade.

Metamorphosis – a district in transition

Novi Beograd, a brand new district featuring numerous unique pieces of architecture, deserves special attention. Originally planned in the late 1930s, construction work began in the 1950s. Based on principles proposed by Nikola Dobrović, Miloš Sombarski and several members of the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, the district was built on a plain on the left bank of the River Sava, which had still been swampland as late as the 18th century. Construction work – of varying quality – continues to this day, in line with the ongoing changes and adaptations to planning ideals. Viewed in its entirety, Novi Beograd is seen as an example of a successfully planned, late modernist urban expansion, strongly influenced by the Athens Charter. The extensively greened residential areas stand out for their pleasant, wide open spaces.



Partisans Square, a historic setting, by Stanko Mandić
© Užice City Archive

A historic setting

A less well-known development and another example of outstanding master planning is Trg partizana (Partisans Square) in Užice. Architect Stanko Mandić, whose training included a spell in Rome, adopted a sensitive approach to the location's topography, creating an ensemble of buildings and squares that form a unified space. In terms of function, scale, orientation and sightlines, the site has lost none of its unique feel, even though the original composition has become slightly run down.

In 1999, the post office building was destroyed during NATO bombing raids and the statue of Tito – the most important point of reference on the square – was toppled.

Serbia's architectural schools

Serbia's first architectural school was set up in Belgrade in 1846. Today there are several institutions in the capital, another school in Niš and an architecture course is offered in Novi Sad. Reports and debates on architecture have a long tradition in Belgrade daily newspaper *Politika*: the paper has run a column for over 50 years, usually written by Mihajlo Mitrović, with Bojan Kovačević now starting to follow in his footsteps. First published in 1960 (and now with a new publisher), *Arhitektura i urbanizam* is a specialist monthly architecture magazine which was recently joined by *Arhitekt* and *Dans*, journals published by the architectural associations of Niš and Novi Sad respectively. Niš has staged an annual architecture day and the Triennial of Architecture since 2003. The new generation of Serbian architects is breaking out in different directions. The country's architectural schools and colleges have helped to create a lively scene that takes its cue from Serbia's durable modernist constructions. There is also a growing awareness of the need for high-quality preservation of these buildings.

Catalogue

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