

## **Toward a Local Tradition: Modern Architecture in Macedonia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the local building tradition in Macedonia. The domain of the research occurs to be the 19th Century houses build in different cities within the state. The research shows that these houses build by the anonymous master have enormous functional, spatial and dwelling qualities. However, after the W.W.II, young architects began to practice Modernism in Macedonia. At the very begin they were dealing with the so-called the white phase of Modern architecture. But, as the time passes by, around the late '60 and the begin of the '70, the same architects in their works began to involve and modify local (traditional) elements from houses that were build a Century earlier, now mostly destroyed to make a place for modern homes. The study reveals ideas, details and works mostly by the local architects that would 'transform' the 'old' house to a modern way of making architecture.

**KEYWORDS:** tradition, houses, Modernism, Macedonia.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

New nations in the Balkan were faced with the question of modernity and tradition in architecture, mostly after the Second World War. The new concepts of nation/state brought with them questions of what national identity and culture was in these new born states, such was Macedonia. Architects in this region experimenting with the national identity issue had to take into account the temporal aspect of modernity that left their local culture 'behind' and the geographical aspect of civilization that the West had set itself as a model of.

If we decide to discuss about the modernity in architecture in Macedonia, we might be pleased to begin with Dušan Grabrijan, one of the most talented architectural theorist at that time and his study trip to Macedonia back in 1949. During the three months long trip, Grabrian will research, collect and study the architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Macedonia- mostly houses build by the anonymous master. In his book 'Makedonska kuća [The Macedonian House], published a few years later, 1955, Grabrijan explains in details the treasure he discovered in Macedonia.

He presents the house typology he had studied- the low house type and the high type of houses, pointing out the differences between these two house types. Grabrijan explains the capability of the master to build houses heaving in consideration the different climax in the territory of Macedonia. One can see the two different types of the houses, according to the climax: the open one, and the closed one.

The structure is another interesting point discussed by Grabrijan. He points out that houses own a very light structure in the first and second floor, made all of wood, which rests freely above the heavy structure made by stones in the ground level. Such a structure, according to Grabrijan, makes possible the concept of ‘flexibility’ of the plan and the façade, concepts treated in details by Le Corbusier in the ‘20. Inside the houses in Macedonia he discovers the echoes of early modernism such is the promenade, the spatial architecture, the minimal house, elements of standardization, or mass production, the modernism of the white phase.

According to Grabrijan ‘it is e treasure that has to be study, and use in order to create a new-modern architecture in Macedonia’.

## 2 THE CONCEPT OF INTERNATIONALISM IN ARCHITECTURE

It has to be mentioned that modernism in Macedonia began with a scratch few years before the Second World War. Works done by Jan Dubovi – 1936 (Figure 1b), Branislav Portiç – 1936 (Figure 1a), Kiril Zhernovski – 1937 (Figure 1c), Gligorije Tashkoviç – 1940, Mihail Dvornikov (1934-40) among others, show that modernism in architecture was brought from the West, interpreted by local architects, presenting the Zeitgeist of the 20th century architecture in Macedonia. This was called an architecture of Erich Mendelsohn, P.P. Oud, etc. (Tokarev, 2006) pointing out the ‘west ness’ that was brought in Macedonia.

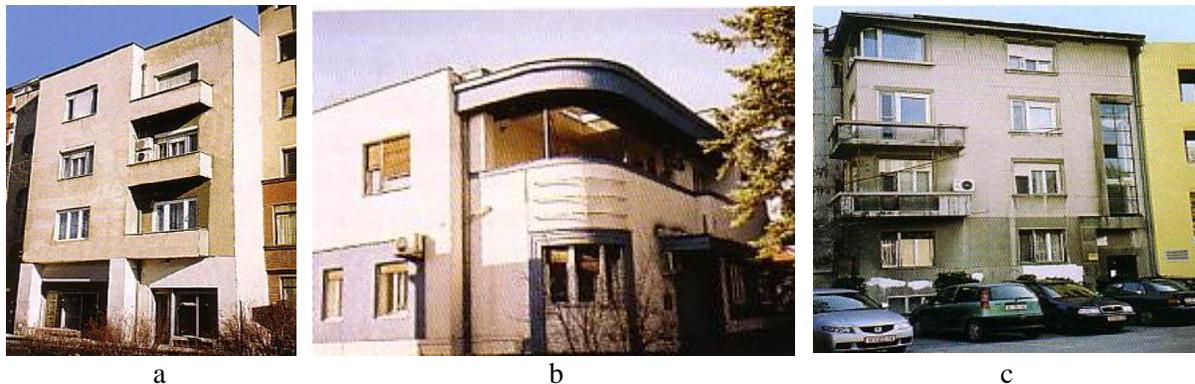


Figure 1: Early modernism in Macedonia

Grabrijans research in 1949 was important not only for bringing in full light the architectural treasure he has been studied. Moreover, he was asked to internationalize the architecture he discovered in Macedonia. Here we find Grabrijan to claim that houses in Macedonia present “modern architectural principles.” Grabrijan sees the Macedonian house as a source of “modern” architectural thinking. Their “Human scale”, “plasticity of spaces”, “flexibility”, the concept of the ‘minimal house’, the architectural promenade, the “unobstructed views”, and “geometry” were the modern principles he discovered in the Macedonian house (Grabrijan, 1955). He believed it was very hard to dismiss the links between the modern and Macedonian house. As an energetic protagonist of progressive architecture, Grabrijan unveiled in the Macedonian architectural heritage a source of creative inspiration for contemporary architecture. The Internationalization of the Macedonian house Grabrijan has achieved comparing the houses he discovered, studied and analyzed in Macedonia with the work of the most recognized Century architect- Le Corbusier. “After all the parallels presented,” Grabrijan insists, “no one can deny the influence of the Macedonian house on Le Corbusier’s language of architecture.” (Grabrijan, 1955).

Grabrijan’s point was to explain that the Modern architecture created by Le Corbusier and others in Europe indeed it has her roots in the Macedonian houses. His capability as a theorist was very useful achieving the international recognition of the local architecture from Macedonia. That is why architects in

Macedonia, after the Second World War, in their work use the international character in architecture, build in cubic-style, white color and flat roofs. Straight lines, geometry and social housing are one of the most used elements in creating the new- modern architecture in Macedonia. Examples, like Dragan Tomovski's (Housing Block, Shkup, 1947), Ludjek Kubesh's, (Housing apartments, Shkup, 1952), Risto Sheqerinski's ( Housing Block, Shkup 1952; Figure 2f), Sotir Tomoski's, (Medical Centre, Shkup, 1959), Gligorije Savoviç's (Cultural Centre, Koçani, 1960), Edo Mihevc's (Hotel Palas, Ohri, 1955; Figure 2e), Slavko Brezovski's, (Workers house, Shkup, 1962; Figure 2c), Aleksandar Serafimovski's (5 Housing Towers - Shkup, 1959; Figure 2a), Jovan Rankoviç's (Students dormitory, Shkup, 1960; Figure 2d), Branko Petriç (Administrative skyscraper, Shkup, 1962; Figure 2b) are some of the buildings that proudly present the 'white phase' of the modern architecture achieved in Macedonia, even though 20 years late. What Grabrijan had seen as an analogy between the houses in Macedonia and Le Corbusier, it occurs to have been understood by architects, which decided to create their architecture based on (now) internationalized elements of the houses discovered by Grabrijan in 1949. Architects of the post war period till the year of 1963 have created their modern/new architecture based on the concept 'become modern' through the 'return to sources'.



Figure 2. The international character in Macedonian architecture 1945 -1963

### 3 TOWARD A LOCAL IDIOM

The earthquake of 1963 somehow marks the end of the 'internationalism echoes' of creating architecture in Macedonia. After the earthquake, the city was projected to undergo radical transformations. After the earthquake, an international competition for drafting the new master plan for the city was organized, and already approved in 1964. To reconstruct the centre of the city itself, 8 teams of architects were invited to submit their proposals, four foreign teams: Luigi Piccinato (Rome), Maurice Rotival (New York), Kenzo Tange (Tokio), and Jo van den Broek&Jaap Bakema (Rotterdam) and four

Yugoslav teams: Radovan Mishević and Fedor Wrenzler (Zagreb), Edward Ravnikar (Ljubljana), Aleksandar Gjorgjević (Belgrade) and Slavko Brezovski (Shkup). The jury recommended the Kenzo Tange's proposal for the new city as the best one, mostly because of the high quality of its overall design composition and detailed ensemble layouts.

Two dimensions of creating architecture appeared during the reconstruction phase of Shkupi.

First, the architecture to be built will show a very rapid transformation in her character, compared with the earlier one, that of the 'cubic-style' before the disaster of 1963. Buildings now show their temptation in presenting 'the escape' of the 5 point of Le Corbusier, there is no white color on the building and brutalism appears in the facades of the main building. It seems that the call for changes made by the third generation, especially Aldo van Eyck, after the Second World War was attacking also the modernism in Macedonia. Buildings by Edward Ravnikar, (1965), V. Ladinska, ZH. Gelevski and S. Gjurić, (1965), Georgi Konstantinovski, (1971; Figure 3a), Janko Konstantinov, (1969-71; Figure 3b, 3c and 3e), Krsto Todorovski (1977; Figure 3d), are just few of the late modernism buildings, that present the change of the movement that had effected the architecture of Le Corbusier after the War.

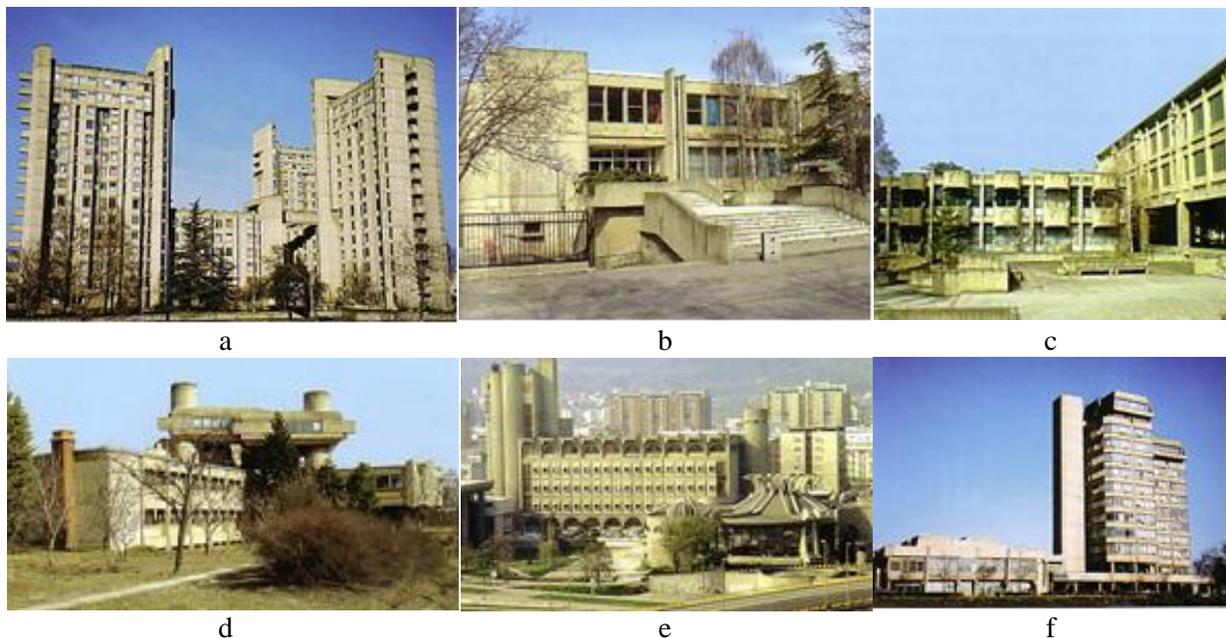


Figure 3: Brutalism in Macedonian architecture 1963-1980

On the other hand, architects that have followed the rules of creating the late modernism in Macedonia will not be the only one in charge. New architects, mostly domestic, like Boris Ćipan, Petar Muļiĥovski, Sotir Tomoski, Slavko Brezovski, Janko Konstantinov, Marko Mushić and others will return back to the tradition, and from there will look to inspire themselves in order to create their modernism in Macedonia. Now we see that architects are concerned with how in their architectural works to address the concept of critical regionalism. Ćipan, is first to be, to points out that the awareness of a regional architecture as an idiom having a distinct identity and being associated with an identifiable group, and having this association used for further manipulating the group's identity. (Ćipan, 1977) Their later work mark the second temptation of the group of architects, to demonstrate that going back to sources one can make architecture, even with more recognizable values. Following works that were presented by the same architects, led by Ćipan, it is not difficult to describe the desire of authors to follow the last temptation of Le Corbusier's changes in order modernism to be kept alive in Macedonia. At the same time, same

actors will find their place in the architecture that was able (allowed) to mark the Zeitgeist of the time, and also to keep the 'secrets' of the source from where architects were inspired.

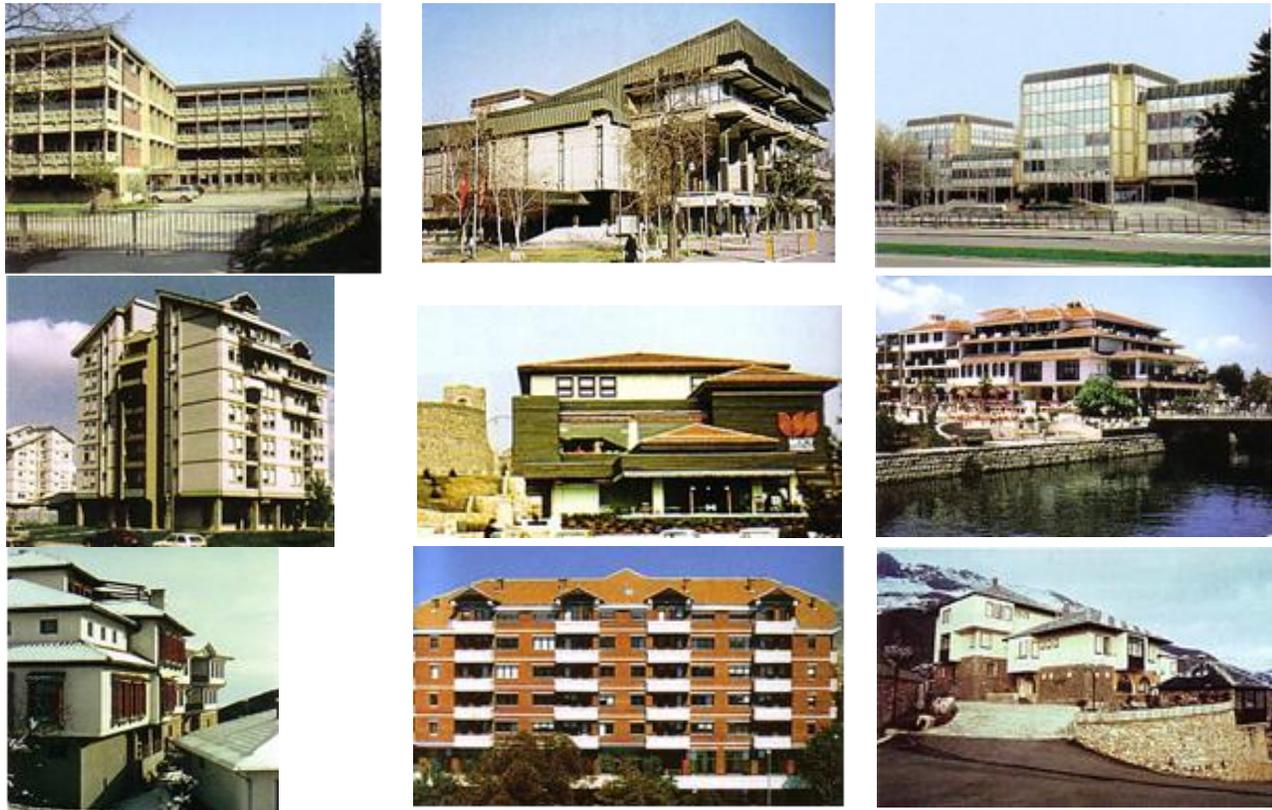


Figure 4. Modern Architecture in Macedonia, late 1980-1990

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The question to be answered here is did the domestic architects were able to create the National style in architecture, a style that will stand behind the identity of the nation which was new created after the War.

Although neither of the architects involved in the movement offers something that is a completely satisfying solution to the problems they permanently pose, that of National Identity in Architecture, their writings (Çipan, Muličkovski, etc.) and architecture demonstrates that there are at least as many possibilities as limitations in the development of local or regional architecture, and their strategies and theories are examples for the development of such in any locality. With time they must have understand that internationalism in architecture is not a productive choice, and functionalism and internationalism are no longer valid. In the late '70 and early '80 we faced a new 'ism': regionalism.

By analysing their work in Macedonia we see that their work is not just the synthesis of different (modern) architectures but also the negotiation of identities (local tradition) in the rapidly changing 20<sup>th</sup> century. From here, the 'state of crisis' is in a regional level. And if, the National style may have not achieved in Macedonia, as Tokarev will commit later on, that can be considered as a wider-regional problem. Let us remind that the 'state of crisis' at the same time was a problem to deal with even for more famous and older Nations, like in Turkey and Iran. Just as an example, Sedat Eldem (Turkey) and Rifat Chadirji (Iraq), they both field to achieve their National style with their works. (Bozdogan, 1987).

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