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# Reflection of sociopolitical developments in the architecture of Prishtina during 1945-1990

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## Abstract

*Reflection of social and political circumstances in architecture is something that has trailed Prishtina in all its periods of development. This study aims to highlight this impact in the architectural development of the city of Prishtina in the period 1945-1990. This timeframe has been determined based on important social events which were directly manifested in Prishtina's general urban development. Lower borderline relates to the end of Second World War, out of which Prishtina emerged an underdeveloped center with distinguished oriental features. Upper borderline (1990), coincides with revocation of autonomy of Kosova (28 March 1989) by the Republic of Serbia and commencement of a dark period for Kosova society.*

*Within this timespan, Kosova society has been subject to significant political and social changes, constitutional amendments among the most important. First, amendments of 1963, and later those of 1974 changed positively the position of the then Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosova, within former Yugoslav Federation.*

*Immediate influence of both amendments is easily readable, especially in the architecture of public buildings of the time, which clearly dominate also in the contemporary architectural identity of Prishtina, despite the striking damage of emblematic buildings of this period.*

## Introduction

It is of no coincidence that the Italian architect, theoretician and professor, Bruno Zevi among four components which mostly influenced the emergence of modernization, along with natural evolution of taste, scientific and technical development in construction, new theories on aesthetic perspectives, he also ranks essential social changes (Zevi, 2012:3).

French sociologist, Henri Lefebvre considers that urban space emerges as a result of social relations and as such it is a material and symbolic manifestation of a society (Grbin, 2013: 475-491). Urban space is a

complete projection of the society in space (Vujović i Petrović, 2005: 16). Lefebvre notes that space as a product is not an independent material reality which comes and exists "by itself", but it is produced and it is constantly interrelated with time. Therefore, according to him there is "social space" and "social time". Based on this, time and space are not purely material factors but they are social products and as such they can only be understood as undivided elements of social experience.

This makes space not only dependent on historical events, but fundamentally historic, which in turn binds us into an analysis which

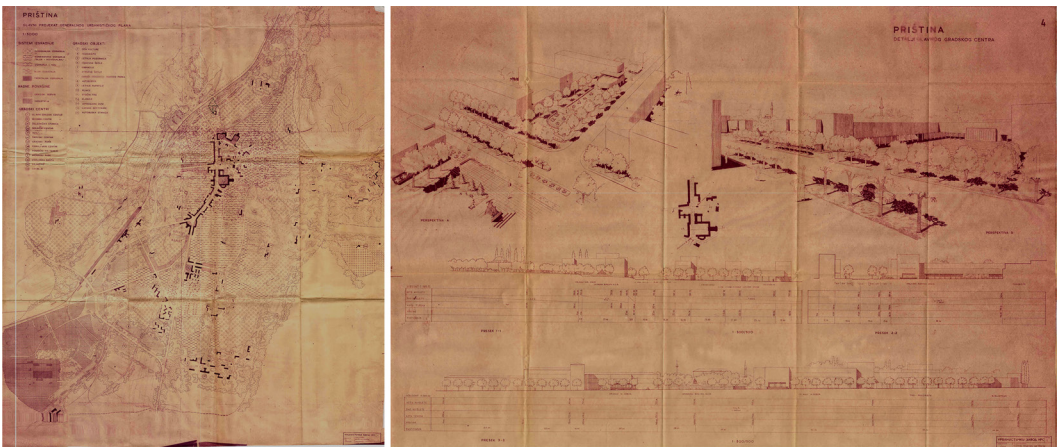


Fig1 / Prishtina GUP . Zoning (left). Detail of the city centre, (right). 1953, arch. Dragutin Partonić  
Source / Prishtina Municipal Archive, Stock: SO-KK, Box: 1(1-21) 2(1-14), No. 587)

captures historical conceptions and decision-taking power in every specific situation (Goonewardena, 2008: 29)<sup>1</sup>. Circumstances which Prishtina had been through by the end of the nineteenth century and first half of twentieth were unfavorable for the city to excel with its architectonic performance.

Immediately after the World War Two, in 1946, Prishtina became an administrative center of the former Autonomous Province of Kosova and Metohija, within Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup>.

In different time periods, there are different statistics on the number of population of Prishtina. These statistics begin with various defterler<sup>3</sup> of Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century, guides and reports of diplomats, to ecclesiastical statistics. Nevertheless, from the first official registration of 1948 conducted by former Yugoslav Federation, up to the last one of the same administration in 1981, the population of Prishtina from 19.631 increases to 108.083

inhabitants.

### Manifestation of social development in the city's architectural identity.

Urban development of the pre-World War Two Prishtina reflects a spontaneous evolution of a town, a characteristic of oriental cities<sup>4</sup>.

In certain circumstances, immediately after WWII, an immediate need for structuring and planning of city development rose up. The new social order deemed this, among other things, a good opportunity to introduce its values to a population which being the only non-Slavic entity within a Slavic federation, was generally sceptic about the benefits that this order could bring. Therefore, in 1953, "General Urban Plan" the first spatial document of post WWII was drafted by Belgradian architect and Professor Dragutin Partonić<sup>5</sup>.

The most important element of this plan was the proposal of southwest – northeast axis, a type of boulevard style street with avenues on the sides along which principal administrative

<sup>1</sup> / From 1879- 1893 Prishtina was capital of Kosova Vilayet. After 1912 it became the centre of the then Province of Kosova, until the new administrative division of Yugoslav Kingdom, where it remained only a District Centre within Vardar Banovinje. During the War World Two it was under Mussolini's regime when within the Albanian state under the fascist occupation, included majority of territories inhabited by Albanians, including most of the territory of today's Kosova. Upon capitulation of fascist Italy, control over the city was taken by Nazi Germany.

<sup>2</sup> / See: Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Article 2. Approved on 31 January 1946 in Belgrade

<sup>3</sup> / A type of register in Ottoman Empire

<sup>4</sup> / The basic unit was the neighbourhood, or so-called mahalla, consisting of low residential houses, mostly one or two-storied, which were interconnected by narrow alleys without any planned urban structure and order. The only common public space was the space in front of religious buildings: mosques that were generally accompanied by a fountain in front, churches, and the traditional covered bazaar, the bezistan, positioned in the central part of the residential quarters.

<sup>5</sup> / The plan, for the first time, defined the main functional units, such as: individual housing, combined housing, multi-dwelling housing, administrative area, hospital centre, etc. It was dimensioned for a population of up to 50,000 within an urban area of 223 hectares.



Fig2 / Lluqaqi's Mosque (left). Stakaj's catholic church (right). Source / Kosova Archives



Fig3 / Boulevard "Marshal Tito", 1963. Source / Kosova Archives

and cultural buildings, such as: Culture House, People's Theatre, Palace of Press, Palace of People's Army of Yugoslavia, Palace of Technics, and also the first communal residential blocks, were foreseen.

As to how focused on the central part of the town the plan was, is indicated also by the fact that this axis is processed in the level of Regulatory Plan where dimensions, volumes and urban landscapes are defined, despite the fact that according to legislation of the time General Urban Plans did not include such level of processing. Therefore, one can notice the hurriedness to establish as fast as possible the legal

infrastructure to initiate construction of first administrative buildings, which manifested the values of the "new social order".

By concentrating this development in the heart of current Prishtina, only for the execution of few buildings set out by this plan, objects of architectural importance from pre WWII period, such as Lluqaqi's Mosque nearby the present-day National Theatre, the church of Stakaj opposite to current Grand Hotel, and the only Hebraic synagogue which was at the town's bezistan, near the current Parliament building, had to be demolished (Fig.2). Soon this axis began to establish the

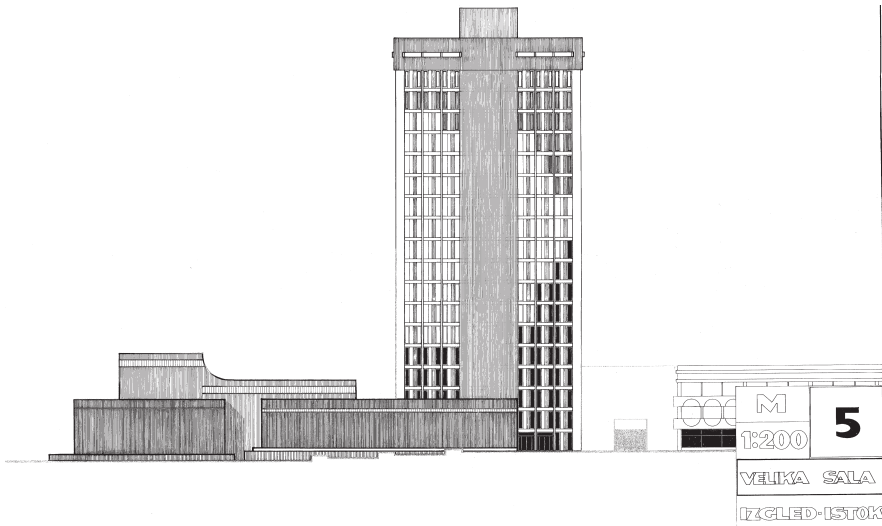


Fig4 / "Print House Rilindja". East view. Source / private archive of Prof. Georgi Kontantinovskit

urban silhouette foreseen by the plan. From the beginning of the '60s of the twentieth century, the axis became the principal boulevard of the town where main events, not only cultural but also daily human interaction were taking place, which had a considerable impact in the inception of formation of the modern civic structure in the sense of modernity in general.

Besides its direct impact in structuring the town, the plan laid down the immediate need to establish professional institutions which would deal with its processing into more detailed planning documents, but also its implementation<sup>6</sup>.

This initially resulted in establishing of the Department for Technical Services at the municipality of Prishtina, and a little later also of the Agency for Urban Planning and Design of Prishtina<sup>7</sup>.

The early stages of positive changes in the status of Kosova within former Yugoslav Federation began in the '60s, namely constitutional amendments of 1963, which regardless of the fact that were not substantial, yet resulted in positive changes such as openings of some faculties in Albanian language, and later, in 1970, foundation of University of Prishtina.

However, what changed substantially the position of Kosova within the Federation, were the constitutional amendments of 1974 when Prishtina received considerable political and executive rights within Yugoslav judicial system.

This was manifested with a multifaceted developmental boom; it was directly manifested in the constructions that were to come in the succeeding decade. Factors that influenced the most and buildings resulted as their outcome can be grouped as follows:

- As a result of political and administrative changes:
  - Building of former Executive Council of Autonomous Province of Kosova (today the building of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosova ) designed by Arch. Bogdan Nestorović (1948), reconstruction 1960 by Arch. Juraj Neidhardt.
  - The administration tower "Print House Rilindja", designed by Georgi Konstantinovski, (1972-78). (fig.4)
  - Institute of Albanology, Arch. Miodrag Pecić (1974).
  - Technical Faculty, Arch. Edvard Ravnikar (1976).

<sup>6</sup> / See the letter of architect Partonić, dated 09 April 1957, in relation to the first four-year plan implementation addressed to "People's Council of Prishtina municipality". (Prishtina Municipal Archive, Stock: 50-KK, Box: 1(1-21)2(1-14) No. 587)

<sup>7</sup> / Agency for Urban Planning and Design of Prishtina under the lead of Professor Bashkim Fehmiu, in the coming years developed into the principal institution of not only implementing and monitoring urban plans but also in planning in the level of the entire Kosova territory.

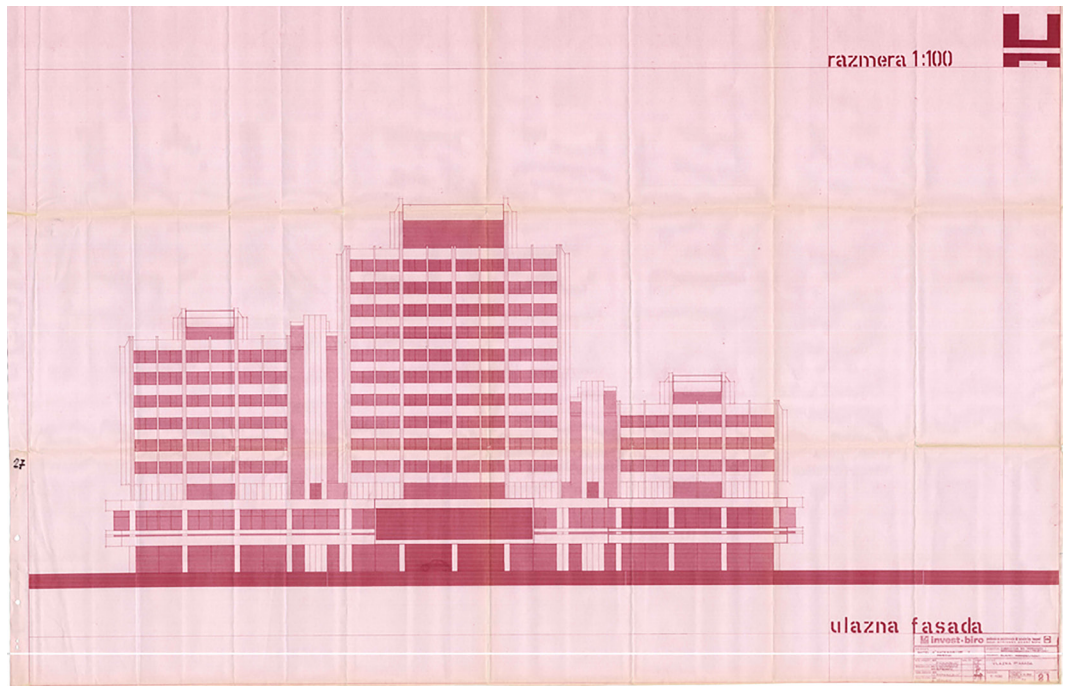


Fig5 / "Grand" Hotel. Front view.

Source / PMA, Stock, SO-KK, Grand H. Year 1973-1986, Box 1-4, No. 565).

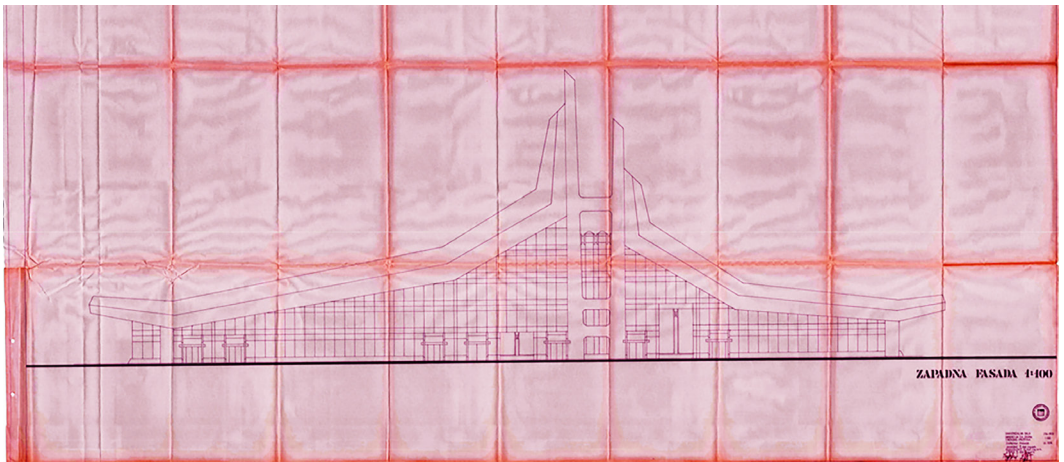


Fig6 / Universal Centre "Boro dhe Ramizi" Western facade.

Source / PMA. Stock SO-KK, DSPK Boro e Ramizi, year 1977, Box 1-4, No. 1303

- National and University Library, arch. Andrija Mutnjaković, (1971-82).
- As a result of economic development:
  - "Bozhuri" Hotel Eng. B.Pozanjakov, Arch. Dragan Kovačević (1974.-78.). (fig.5)
  - "Lubljana Bank" Arch. Zoran Zakić (1984.).
  - "Grand" Hotel, Arch. Bashkim Fehmiu, Arch. Dragan Kovačević (1974.-78.). (fig.5)
  - "Grmia" House of merchandise, Arch. Ljiljana Rasevski (1970-72).
  - "Kosova" Bank, Arch. Milan Tomić, Arch. Milan Pavlović and Arch. Svetla Putić, (1972.).
  - The administration of pharmaceutical factory "Farmed", Arch. Trajko

- Dimitrijević (1979.)
- New Post Office Building Arch. Halid Muhasilović, Arch. Izet Mulaosmanović (1983).
- The administration of "Elektrokosva", Arch. Zoran Zakić (1984).
- As a result of cultural development:
  - Universal Centre "Boro dhe Ramizi", Arch. Živorad Janković, Arch. Halid Muhasilović, Arch. Sretko Ešpek (1976). (fig.6)
  - Film Centre "Kosovafilm" Arch. Sali Spahiu (1981).
  - "TV Prishtina" Arch. Oton Gaspari. Adaptimi: Arch. Sali Spahiu, Arch. Hamdi Binakaj, (1965).

Delving into the development of Kosova society during 1945-1990, best manifested in its capital centre, one can see that almost all important political, social and economic events were fully expressed also in its urban and architectural development. Architectonic layers of the city, those present-day as well, clearly demonstrate it. Although social changes in Kosova were part of a tendency package for a general modernisation of the society within a socialist federation of post-World War Two, nonetheless due to specific Kosova circumstances, they often took idiosyncratic local directions.

The fact that the majority of the population was of Albanian ethnicity, of a different language and generally also of religion, historical past, culture, etc. as the only non-Slavic entity within the united federation of the Slavs of the south, made Kosova society resist even more, melting its identity with the others. In fact, the Yugoslav state in its core was not oriented in emphasizing cultural values of its peoples individually, which in essence corresponded with principles of modernity. This state intended a fusion of all its nations into "universal values" on which it claimed to have been founded and ought to be functioning. This made Kosova society in principal to be positioned against the changes of post-World War Two, habitually resisting them even though they could have often brought tangible changes in the practical sense of concrete life benefits.

Therefore, the plan of Professor Partonic, was initially eyed as plan aiming to destroy the vernacular past of the town. This partly proved to be true after the demolitions that took place in the heart of the existing town. However, in spite of all the shortcomings, one cannot deny the fact that the plan for the first time divided Prishtina into functional zones

and laid out the required development infrastructure. The first public spaces, in the aforementioned central boulevard section, were particularly an outcome of this plan. Social interactions, entirely new to Kosova society up then, were manifested in these spaces. Execution of this plan required establishment of local institutions to implement it, thus in addition to aforesaid benefits it can as well be claimed that it contributed also in setting up planning and management institutional capacities in the area of city development.

Constitutional amendments of 1963, and especially those of 1974, in addition to changing Kosova position within Yugoslav Federation, they changed the position of Prishtina itself within the former province. Due to its administrative status but also economic development, Prishtina experienced a demographic boom, where people from all parts of Kosova moved towards it. Most of the newcomers were from rural areas, and continued keeping strong attachments with their place of origin even years after, thus inducing the urbanisation of rural centres, in one hand, but also ruralising of the urban capital centre on the other. Consequently, this made Prishtina, even today, to exemplify yet another typical Balkan case of unfinished or possibly distorted modernisation.

In any case, urban or architectonic development of particular buildings of this period left an indelible mark in the development of the city. Even today, irrespective of their damage, many of significant buildings of the time, represent a dominant layer of city's' identity. Most of the main events, whether of everyday or institutional life, take place in the outer or inner spaces created during this period.

One can love, or hate, but one cannot remain indifferent to the buildings of this period. They are there, and it is there they should be, with their beauty

and ugliness, recounting themselves, time, history, the city...

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