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**Neglect of Modernism.
Montenegrin coastal architecture**

Abstract

The recent demolition of one wing of the Hotel *Korali* in Sutomore, Bar, one of the awarded examples of coastal socialist architecture in Montenegro, designed by architect Milan Popović, has caused strong public disapproval and at the same time indifference of various state institutions in charge of protection and management of the built heritage. Considering that the process of establishing protection over architectural buildings in Montenegro takes an extended period of time due to various stakeholders, a significant legacy of socialist architecture has not yet been adequately acknowledged, while only recently, it seems that the world is becoming aware of its importance. Therefore, a lack of strategy in the planning documents in the last decades has led to various forms of reconstructions, extensions and upgrades in order to adapt those structures to capitalist needs and ideas, while neglecting the value and original identity of these buildings.

Keywords

Socialist Architecture — Coastal tourism — Milan Popović

Introduction

In the case of most socialist regimes, as was the former Yugoslavia, utopian projects are evident, born as objects of contemplation between political ideology, focused on a common sense of unification of national identity and social change. Yugoslav modernism was a gesture of rebellion against the Western Modern Movement and socialist Realism. Situated between the capitalist West and the Communist East, Yugoslav architects responded to contradictory demands and influences. The architectural design approach of the former Yugoslavia in socialist period, was characterized by ambitious constructions and in many cities, including the Montenegrin coast, highly reflected in the most important Montenegrin architects, such as Milan Popović¹.

At the time, the pure Montenegrin coast offered fantastic spatial opportunities for architectural expression, resulting in structures that whether defied the nature, or were in harmony with it. From international-style architecture to brutalist “social condenser” – radical diversity and idealism of the nation have been demonstrated in Montenegro.

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, following the fall of the political ideology, the architectural ambition was interrupted and was no longer reflected in the identity and mentality of the citizens. The utopian dream has now been abandoned and turned into a nightmare.

Ideology of development of society and socialist architecture in Montenegro

When speculating the principles of strengthening national identity and love for the country, one must take into account that, «...the socialist state

went on to pursue a relatively independent brand of socialism based on workers' self-management, becoming the torchbearer of a „Third Way” in the bifurcated world of the Cold War.» (Stierli, M. and Kulić, V., (2018), p. 7). The introduction of the “paid vacation” concept enabled the working class to get acquainted with the culture, nature and other riches that Yugoslavia had to offer.

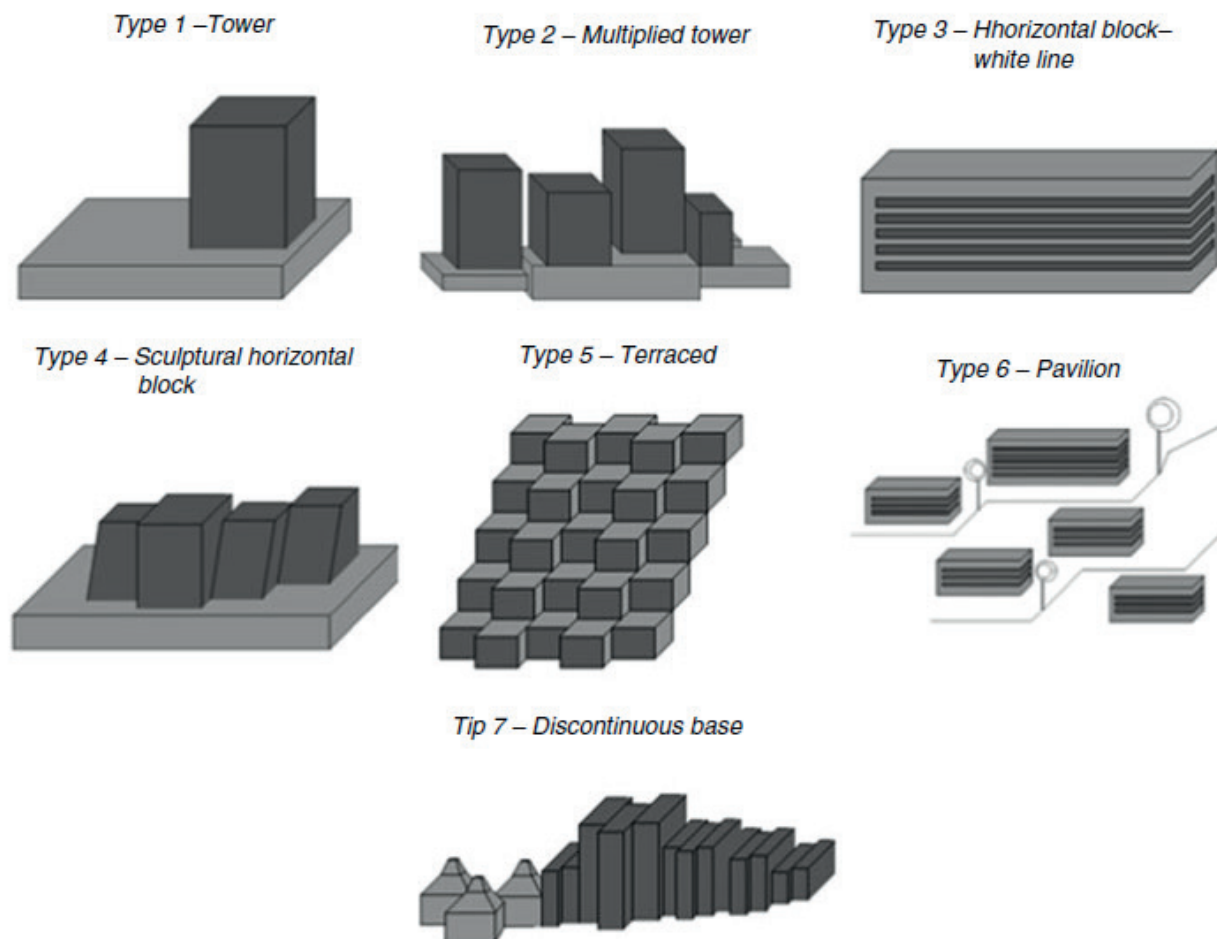
The symbolic role of tourism, as a generator of social development, was of great importance in Tito's Yugoslavia: large, impressively designed modernist hotel complexes were the leading means of showing the success of the “Third Way” politics and radical internationalism, and thus the architectural expression reflected modernity, freedom and innovation, while respecting local tradition, «...as the design of commercial hotels shifted from elegant modernist tower-and-slab typologies of the early 1960s to the increasingly complex group forms and megastructures in the following decade.» (Kulić, V., (2018), p. 37). Whether for socio-political or commercial purposes, the main objective at the time was to inspire the masses to travel.

Spatial planning of the coastal zone of Yugoslavia was directed in 1969, with the adoption of the regional spatial plan *Južni Jadran*² in a way that, among other things, tourism and infrastructure connections within the country were emphasized, while also establishing a better and more accessible connection with the Mediterranean countries and Europe. On the territory of Montenegro, it included all coastal municipalities, but also three continental cities: Titograd (today Podgorica), Cetinje and Danilovgrad. Of the thirteen tourist areas planned by the *Južni Jadran*, four were planned in Montenegro: Boka Kotorska with its center in Herceg Novi, Budva coast with the center in Budva, Ulcinj coast and Skadar Lake with the center in Ulcinj as well as central hinterland formed around Cetinje. This strategic plan has led to the mass movement of the population towards the cities, especially considering that Montenegro was the least urbanized area of Yugoslavia before World War II, so tourism fully generated the development and architecture of the Montenegrin southern region.

Many architects in Montenegro began to develop their own formal strategies increasingly distinct and recognizable in architectural composition, creating a unique style with elements of brutalism. The 1960s and 1970s are referred to as the golden age of Montenegrin architecture with great enactment of public competitions and with the consequent construction of expressive buildings. More than thirty hotels and touristic resorts were built in this period in Montenegrin Coast, carrying a special architectural expression - inspired by modern principles, with a particular regional character. The diversity of landscapes conditioned by the morphology of the southern region was particularly inspiring in terms of the architectural approach of the authors.

Extraordinary environments have been created blurring the boundaries between landscape, architecture and sculpture, so different typologies of objects are recognized.

Objects have been identified as ones that stand out with their volume in relation to the landscape in regular cubic masses – both in a strict form (tower) and in a discontinuous one, forming masses reminiscent of a city silhouette (multiplied tower); then buildings of smaller floors with a characteristic horizontal white line, i.e. prominent horizontal structural elements (horizontal block/white line); modified sculptural block in relation to all planes of the object (sculptural horizontal

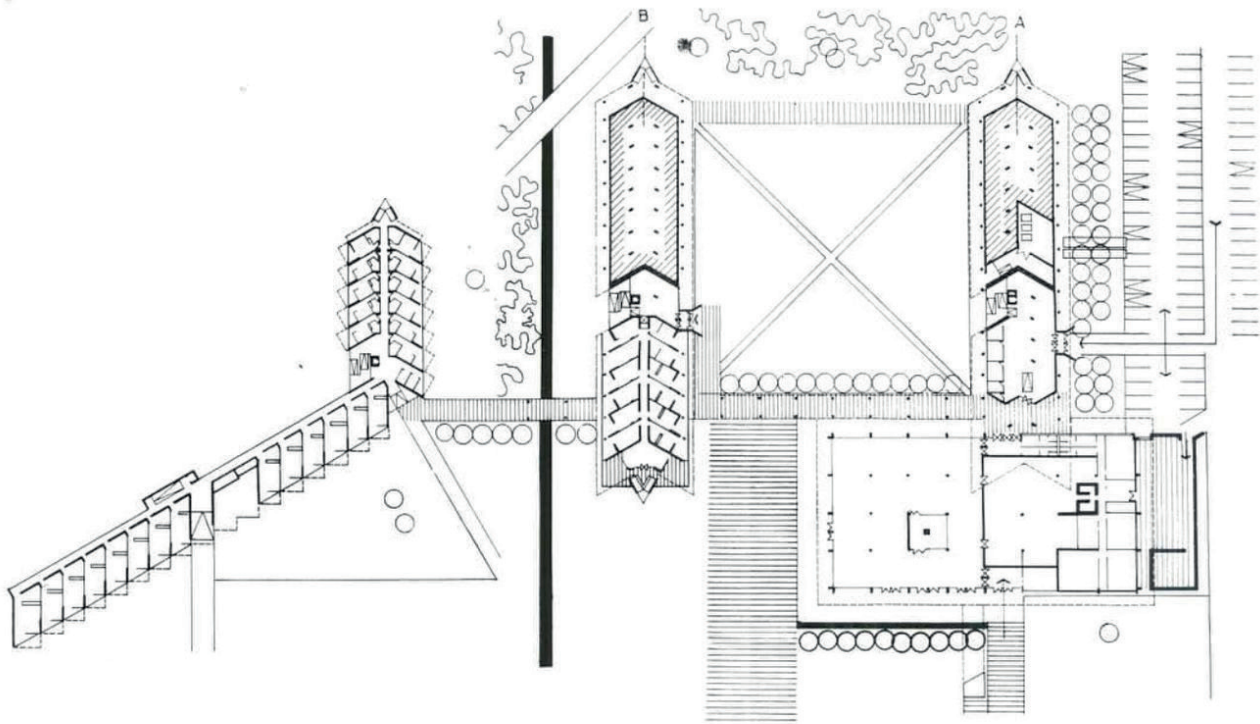
**Fig. 1**

Types of hotels according to the architectural conception of the objects (elaboration: T. Marović).

block); compact structure that adapts to the terrain and becomes an integral part of the landscape (terrace type); free structures in the space that form a tourist settlement (pavilion type); and buildings that are irregular in shape at the base, of various volumes and materialization of the façades (discontinuous base). [Fig.1] (Marović, T., 2021, p. 238-239)

Architecture of the coastal region through the oeuvre of architect Milan Popović. Case study: hotel *Korali*

A specific architectural approach to the design of hotel facilities on the Montenegrin coast is particularly noticeable when analyzing the design oeuvre of Montenegrin architect Milan Popović, an outmost modernist and the main representative of constructive functionalism in Montenegro. His work is characterized by innovative ideas, but also by the simplicity of strict function of the objects he designed. At the same time, his specific expression was dominant throughout the territory of Montenegro and recognizable through all the typologies of the buildings: hotels, universities, residential buildings, hospitals, schools, student dormitories, etc.). Milan Popović is the only Yugoslav architect to be a five-time laureate of the Republic award of the newspaper *Borba* for architecture³. Out of a total of seven hotels he designed on the Montenegrin coast, three were awarded with the above-mentioned award: hotel *Oliva* in Petrovac (1965), co-author Vladislav Plamenac; hotel *Korali* in Sutomore (1968), and hotel *Kastel Lastva* in Petrovac (1973). Other two awards he received were for two exceptional examples of brutalist architecture in Montenegro: Clinical Hospital Center in Podgorica (1974), co-author Božidar Milić and Technical faculties building of the University of Montenegro, in Podgorica

**Fig. 2**

Hotel Korali - Floor plan (source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/hotel-korali>).

(1977), co-author Pavle Popović.

In the case of hotel *Korali* in Sutomore (1968), the characteristic modernist form is achieved, but at the same time, the concept radiates authenticity and artistic approach. The hotel is designed as a pavilion and consists of three units, each of them containing 200 beds, showing the magnificent architectural skills in achieving a perfect functionality of the hotel wings. Although the two pavilions are placed perpendicular to the shore, all rooms and terraces are rotated towards sea by a 45 degree angle, assuring the sea view [Fig.2]. Describing the pavilion type of buildings, Maroje Mrduljaš states that

the pavilion-like agglomerations strive for a more intense interaction between architecture and nature. These urban planning schemes include terraces, promenades, public infrastructure and landscaping, in order to take full advantage of the local vegetation. (Mrduljaš, M., (2013), p.192)

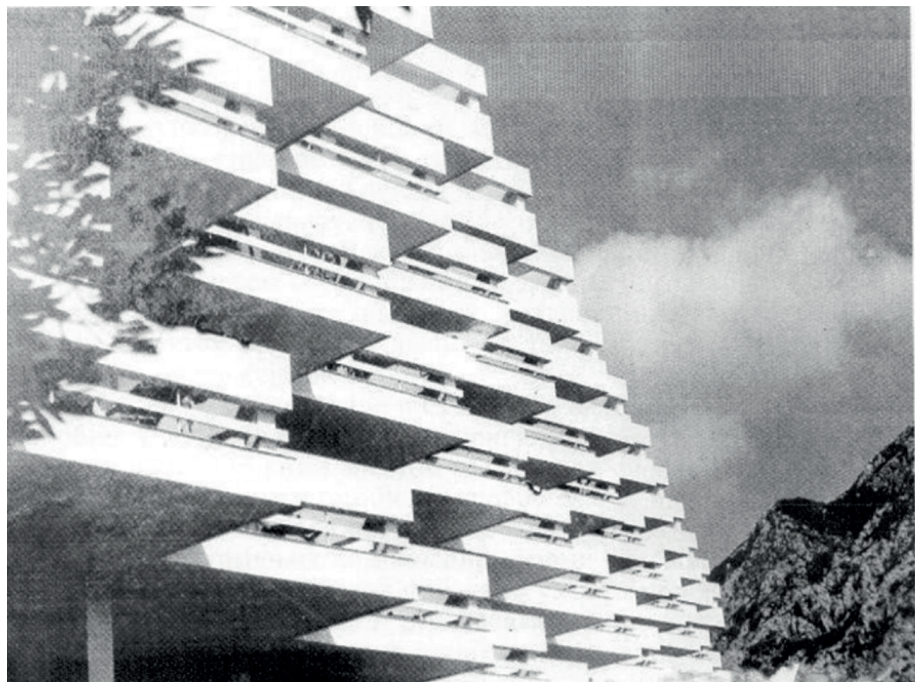
Observing the architectural form of the hotel *Korali*, the pavilion concept can be perceived in a way that it leans on the landscape of the hinterland, but at the same time it dominates the space by the form of broken masses, while creating an extension of the coastal and promenade zone, introducing visitors to a new landscape of the coastal environment. It is a characteristic example of a modernist architecture, because of its simple form created by the very elements of construction.

The function of the hotel can be read and discerned directly from the façade, with an undoubtedly visible difference between rhythm and fragment [Fig.3]. The continuous straight line and white façade are clearly expressed, as a characteristic segment and materialization of the hotel typology of this period on the Montenegrin coast. The building exudes a strong attitude towards accomplishing the idea of new movements in architecture, but also in politics, society, and development in general.

Given their position in urban tissues, many tourist facilities had an enor-

Fig. 3

Hotel Korali – Façade segment
(source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/hotel-korali>).

**Fig. 4**

Hotel Korali – Roof terrace (source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/hotel-korali>).



mous impact on society, thus becoming not only places for vacation, but creating an entertaining environment for a socialist man, who could finally afford various forms of consumerist lifestyle. In that sense, open roof terraces of an enormous area were designed for hotels *Korali* and *Oliva*, which was a gathering place for the most important social events, serving not only the hotel users, but also the local population [Fig.4].

The disappearance of an architecture

In terms of architectural expression and the complexity of the circumstances within which it was created and shaped, socialist Montenegrin architecture should be treasured as a valuable heritage of the 20th century. However, after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, «the commons – from urban public spaces to the various civic, educational, and cultural facilities – have been subject to shady privatization schemes, reduced to mere real

estate» (Stierli, M. and Kulić, V., (2018), p. 8), which led to disappearance or reconstruction of these structures without appreciation for the heritage. Therefore, we only witness the outlines of what can be called the characteristic socialist architecture of the coastal area today.

The above-mentioned awarded project for hotel *Korali*, is an example of a current state of total abandonment of socialist Montenegrin architecture due to the negligence of the institutions, especially in terms of protection of heritage and author's rights. Following the recent event of "reconstruction" of the hotel *Korali*, leading to a total demolition of one wing, it is evident that the current society doesn't recognize its value enough to invest more in order to preserve a unique modernist and awarded architecture piece, which represented a symbol of an ideology and society. In this case, it was more important to respond to requirements of today's tourism concepts, than to celebrate architecture. Furthermore, this is a reflection of a much broader image of the socio-cultural fracture, thus provoking controversies, scandals and different opinions.

At the same time, the economic and political crisis in which the countries of the former Yugoslavia find themselves, leads to the impotence to face the past that continues to haunt the present. One can argue that the general attitude and indifference of the society towards the socialist architecture and heritage, could be the consequence and attempt to deviate from past ideologies. However, regardless the limbo in which this architecture seems to exist, perhaps its bareness and vulnerability might be the stage for some new actors to act, but with honest sensitivity towards its uniqueness.

Notes

¹ Milan Popović (1934-1985) was a Montenegrin Architect, graduated in Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade in 1958. He was a leading architect in Republic Institute for Urban planning and Design of Montenegro (from 1961), who created a number of significant buildings in Montenegro.

² Regional Spatial Plan for South Adriatic, later known as "*Jadran P*", covered the entire coastal zone of Yugoslavia and was a result of cooperation between the Government of SFR Yugoslavia and the United Nations Development Program. Numerous experts from Europe and the region participated in the development of the plan.

³ The Workers' Council of the newspaper *Borba* introduced the award on February 19, 1965. Federal and republic awards of this newspaper, have been awarded for the best architectural works in Yugoslavia continuously for 26 years. Architecture promoted through one, at that time, significant daily newspaper, represented the best way to establish a good communication between architecture and society (Alihodžić, R., (2015).

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Viktorija Nikolić (Belgrade, 1991) architect, she completed her Master of Science degree in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano discussing a thesis focusing on socialist architecture in former Yugoslavia and urban renewal of the House of Revolution in Niksic, followed by professor Ilaria Valente. She is currently working in the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial planning and Urbanism in Montenegro, as a head of department for Development and promotion of architecture, carrying out international architectural competitions for public buildings, developing various state strategies and rulebooks for architectural design and coordinating Montenegro's participation at la Biennale di Venezia 2023. She is currently working on State guidelines for the development of Architecture in Montenegro.

Tamara Marović (Bar, 1992), Msc Architect, (University of Montenegro - Faculty of Architecture; University Donja Gorica – Faculty of Polytechnics), was a Visiting critic at the Syracuse University from New York - School of Architecture, and a co-leader of summer school for Architecture students: “Between Myth and Utopia - Perspective Atlas of the Former Yugoslavia” (2019). She has worked as an associate architect with various firms, and has taken part in national competitions and research projects, and is currently working as an advisor in the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial planning and Urbanism in Montenegro, in the department for Development and promotion of architecture. She has been a coordinator and part of the creative team of the Montenegro's participation at la Biennale di Venezia 2023.