Balancing Identities
Works by Architect Branko Petrović
in Addis Ababa (1962-1969)
Original Scientific Paper
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UDK 72.036 B. Petrović (63) "19"

Balansiranje identiteta
Radovi arhitekta Branka Petrovica
u Addis Abebi (1962.-1969.)
Izvorni znanstveni članak
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Fig. 1 B. Petrović, Wabe Shebelle Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1968: photo collage of the building’s diverse architectural and urban sequences

MOJCA SMODE CVITANOVIĆ, MELITA ČAVLOVIĆ, ANDREJ UCHYTIL

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Architecture
HR – 10000 Zagreb, Kaciceva 26
msmode@arhitekt.hr
mcavlovic@arhitekt.hr
auchytil@arhitekt.hr

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Balancing Identities

Balansiranje identiteta
Radovi arhitekta Branka Petrovića u Addis Abebi (1962.-1969.)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Modern Architecture
Non-Aligned Movement
Petrović, Branko
Technical Cooperation

The paper deals with the facets of work by the Croatian architect and urban planner Branko Petrović in Addis Ababa, where he served as the chief architect in the Ethiopian Ministry of Public Works and Communications from 1962 to 1969. Translation of the expertise stemming from the domicile practice and adaptation to a specific construction momentum in the city are thereby being considered. The modalities of technical cooperation are simultaneously examined as a form of international knowledge exchange in the field of architecture.

Addis Ababa, Etiopija
Moderne arhitektura
Pokret nesvrstanih
Petrović, Branko
Tehnička suradnja

**INTRODUCTION**

**Uvod**

Croatian architects’ activity in the geopolitical context of the Third World occurred in different modalities, where the processes of technical cooperation performed one of the key tasks. Technical cooperation as a form of international communication emerged globally after World War II, when the new social order prioritised material and social recovery and efforts to improve the quality of life stepped up. Aimed at supporting economic and social development of a particular area, in its elementary form, technical cooperation included knowledge sharing through the procedures of providing expert assistance or personnel training. Technical cooperation covered a wide range of professions related to specific requirements set in line with various development criteria, and architecture and urban planning, which this paper is focusing on, played a prominent role among different disciplines covered by its programmes. Seen as “soft diplomacy”, socialist Yugoslavia’s technical cooperation with developing countries largely fostered political ties forged within the Non-Aligned Movement, and was carried out mostly through two parallel processes — by educating citizens of the said countries in Yugoslavia and by sending its experts to provide “technical assistance” to the developing world.

In the fields of architecture and urban planning, technical cooperation procedures allowed acquiring higher education on the one hand, and on the other a status of experts with international qualifications, often repeatedly hired for different types of work abroad. This can be corroborated by one of the first significant professional transfers from Yugoslavia carried out through the technical cooperation programme of the United Nations in 1953, that of architect and urban planner Vladimir Antolić. As an UN expert, Antolić stayed in Southeast Asia – Myanmar (then Burma), Malaysia and Indonesia – providing assistance on various facets of the planning practice, until 1965. Furthermore, architect Miro Marasović realised a significant part of his work in Ghana, as Yugoslavia’s technical assistance expert from 1963 to 1965. Later on, as an expert within the UN technical cooperation programs, he ran the physical development projects for South and Upper Adriatic Region in Yugoslavia (1967-1973), and a medical tourism development project in Hungary (1973-1977). In line with that, architect Berislav Kalogjera’s professional path was also closely linked to technical cooperation frameworks. As Yugoslavia’s technical assistance expert he stayed in Ghana with Marasović from 1963 to 1965, after which he took part in the above mentioned UN granted project for the South Adriatic, ran the Regional Activities Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme in Split and worked as a UN housing advisor on Cyprus. Among the companies whose experts were contracted to work in developing countries frequently and according to various procedures, the Croatian Urban Planning Institute was one of the most prominent. The most significant international assignment of the Institute was the Urban Development Plan of

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1 A comprehensive overview of the international activity of Croatian architects discussed here was made in the dissertation *Croatian Architects’ Modalities of Work in the Countries of Africa and Southwest Asia 1950-1991* authored by Mojca Smode Cvitanović, under the mentorship by Professor Andrej Uchytil, PhD, based on research as part of doctoral studies at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Architecture.

2 Forms and dynamics of technical cooperation of Yugoslavia with developing countries were described in more detail in the aforementioned doctoral dissertation (ref. 1).

3 Domljan, 1983; Galić, 1991: 86-91; Smokvina, Smode Cvitanovic, 2018

4 Celmić, 2004

5 Kečkemet, 2005; Matošić, 1999

6 Galić [ed.], 1991: 92-97. The importance of Ernest Weismann’s work in the context of pre-war modernism was synthetized by Tamara Bjažić Klarin [Bjažić Klarin, 2015]. The research carried out by Muhammad Ijlal Muzaffar partly addresses Weismann’s work in the mentioned UN framework [Muzaffar, 2007].

7 SR-AJ-208 – Branko Petrović’s personal file. The facts referring to received and provided technical assistance linked to Petrović’s biography, given the institutional basis of technical cooperation, are evidently mutually linked.

8 On the work of the AR-59 bureau: Pavlović, Vasić, 1971
Conakry, made in 1963 under the guidance of economist Franjo Gasparovic and architect Radovan Miščević, as a result of the technical cooperation ties forged between Guinea and Yugoslavia. Within the broader discourse of technical cooperation on a global scale, a prominent role was played by the architect Ernest Weissmann as head of the UN Housing and Town Planning Section and Assistant Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs in charge of the UN Housing Building and Planning Programme from 1951 to 1966, under whose charge numerous missions by that organisation involving well-known international experts were carried out. Architect and urban planner Branko Petrović, whose work is in focus of this paper, on the one hand, owing to the UN technical assistance received in 1952, won a scholarship for specialisation in urban planning theory and practice. From 1954 to 1958 he was director of Croatia’s Urban Planning Institute, while from 1958 until his departure to Ethiopia in 1962, he ran, together with Branko Vasiljević, their joint bureau for urban planning and architecture AR-59.1 The apparent intensity of professional activity and a wide range of interests resulted in a rich and diverse body of work, including in the methodologically innovative domain of regional planning, as well as numerous urban and architectural designs of different purposes and scales. Furthermore, Petrović was well acquainted with the architectural production in the country and abroad, active in publishing professional articles, participating in conferences and working in professional organisations where he took on high-ranking functions. After his return from Ethiopia, he worked as an advisor for urban planning and the protection of human environment in the Croatian Secretariat for Urban Planning, Construction, Housing and Public Utilities.11 His merit in the field of theory and critique in Croatia is unquestionable, especially in the domain of planning where Petrović is considered one of the “founders of contemporary urban planning theory and practice”.12

As a technical assistance expert in Ethiopia, Petrović engaged in an analogous array of activities. His work as chief architect in Ethiopia’s Ministry of Public Works and Communications coincided with the period of building conjuncture which largely defined the shapes of Addis Ababa’s urbanism that we see today. At the same time, the issue of African in the architectural cultures of the liberated continent gained significance13, particularly in the city which was supposed to become its political centre. Despite the fact that his predominant focus was on urban and, more broadly, regional planning, in Ethiopia he got an opportunity to design projects of the prime socio-political importance which surpassed works in his own country. Three Petrović’s works in Addis Ababa, the unrealized projects of the New Imperial Palace and the Organisation of African Unity headquarters and the realisation of Wabe Shebelle hotel, demonstrate the use of a clearly diverse formal vocabulary shaping architecture of national, international and local significance. His approach, which relied heavily upon the preceding experience as practicing architect in the second half of the 20th century, was adjusted when encountered with traditional building idiom found in Ethiopian architecture. On top of his contribution to rethinking the urbanism of Addis Ababa in the framework of urbanity-related aspects of his projects, Petrović showed a sensibility towards identity-related phenomena in the architecture of Africa which have remained
Following a period of Italian occupation (1936-1941) – unlike other African countries where the colonial rule remained for more than a decade later – Ethiopia came out of the World War II as a sovereign state within the victorious alliance. Modernising tendencies of the country run by Haile Selassie created the dynamics of a heterogeneous market much earlier than in comparable situations in other parts of Africa, balancing between economic and political benefits coming both from the West and the East. Very early on, years before the formal establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslavia became one of the closest allies of Ethiopia.

Balancing between opposing ideas was in the very core of social development of Ethiopia which was striving towards modernisation and was, at the same time, marked by monarchism. Such circumstances were, among other things, reflected in the construction development of Addis Ababa, a city characterized at the same time by its affirmation as a diplomatic centre of the continent – the seat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (1958) and of the Organisation of African Unity (1963). In the second half of the 1950s and in the 1960s, the construction activity in Addis Ababa, the population of which at that moment amounted to slightly less than half a million, reached a volume unprecedented in the city history. The position of Addis Ababa as a social, political and economic centre of Ethiopia and as a continental political centre has incited a process of its dynamic transformation, which included construction of a large number of administrative, residential, educational, health, industrial and other buildings. The perspective of urban transformation was at the same time closely linked to the issue of representation of restructured and newly-established institutions.

Yugoslavia saw a strong interest to engage in the dynamic context of this developing country. As early as in the second half of the 1950s there was a considerable Yugoslav community in Addis Ababa consisting of experts in the service of the Ethiopian government and professionals from various export companies. In parallel with the international competition, Yugoslav professionals on the Ethiopian market often competed among themselves. Petrović’s appointment to the prominent position of chief architect of the Ethiopian Ministry of Public Works and Communications in 1962 occurred when the scene of a relative political stability and a well-
The established Yugoslav export production had already been set. Only three years before, architect Ugrenović had stayed in Ethiopia, exploring options for marketing design services for the Belgrade-based company Invest-Import. According to his report, professionals in that country were scarce, and modernisation efforts were only beginning to emerge. The total number of architects, mostly foreigners, in the whole of Ethiopia, was not more than 30, while the total number of engineers from all fields and all nationalities in Addis Ababa amounted to 59 in 1957. However, at the moment of Petrović’s arrival, the situation had already radically changed. Additionally, in the period between Ugrenović’s and Petrović’s stays in that country, Yugoslav design and contracting companies had already earned a stable position. In the 1960s, the number of Yugoslav experts in Ethiopia reached its peak.

The situation in the field of construction works was well described in the text written by Slobodan Sinđelić in 1969 and published in Belgrade’s journal “Architecture – Urbanism (Arhitektura – Urbanizam)” in which states: “The work of our experts in the field of architecture and civil engineering in Ethiopia is carried out in three basic forms used in parallel: through our contracting and design organisations, through the work of experts contracted as part of technical assistance and through bureaus that were awarded contracts in international competitions. We can safely state that work using these forms has reached a very high level of coordination and that a large part of success stories that we have witnessed can be attributed precisely to a close and tight cooperation among all our experts. The fact that in the last ten years the positions of the chief architect and the head of the Construction Department in the Ministry of Public Works were held by Yugoslavs clearly demonstrates that hiring Yugoslav experts via technical assistance produced good results and met expectations.” Although portrayed as a praise of international achievements of the Yugoslav civil engineering sector, the situation on the Ethiopian civil engineering market was not in the least easy, and technical assistance experts positioned in the state administration bodies were balancing between the interests of business diplomacy they were bound to follow, imperial aspirations and their own professional affinities.

The choice of Petrović as an adequate person for the demanding position was by the Yugoslav side undoubtedly justified by his versatile and successful professional biography. The transfer that required decision-making at the diplomatic levels of the two countries had to involve no less than a highly respected and qualified expert of a wide-ranging profile which, in Petrović’s case, included an extensive multi-faceted work experience in planning and design as well as management positions and social engagement. The position of chief architect of the Ministry of Public Works allowed Petrović not only to have an insight, to control and to guide the dynamics of international building activities, but also an opportunity to participate actively as a de-

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19 Ugrenović, 1959: 10-12 [HA2U-HMA-OAF/DCO/66]
20 Sinđelić, 1969: 43
21 The criterion for the selection of Branko Petrović as chief architect of the Ministry of Public Works and Communications of Ethiopia can be compared to the criterion for the selection of Miro Marasovic as head of the Architects Office of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi in Ghana [Smode Cvitanovic, 2020].
Addis Ababa is a relatively young city. Established in 1886 at an average altitude of c. 2,500 meters above sea level, the city whose name means “a new flower”, in its inception consisted of groups of traditional neighbourhoods scattered around the imperial residential formation situated at the location known as Ghebi. The city’s development in the aftermath of the World War II was to a large extent defined during the Italian occupation. In the following years the Ethiopian government, for the purpose of developing an urban plan of Addis Ababa, hired the British architect and urban planner Patrick Abercrombie, author of the Greater London Plan where he applied the “green belt” concept as means to restrict undesired urban sprawl on the African soil. In the decades to come other British and French companies were invited for the same purpose. However, the urban form of the city in the 1950s and the 1960s was to a large extent defined by its particular architectural landmarks.

The building momentum that started in Addis Ababa in the 1950s, reached its peak in the 1960s. Several buildings were erected in that period which attempted to address the issue of representation of the newly constituted state and international institutions, emphasizing at the same time both the local history and tradition and a future based on the values of anti-colonialism, freedom and independence. At the urban scale, they formed a network of the city’s identity landmarks. The building of the National and Commercial Bank of Ethiopia by the French architect Henri Chomette, the building of the Addis Ababa City Hall and the seat of UN Economic Commission for Africa, the so-called Africa Hall, by the Italian architect Arturo Mezzedimi and the building of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Israeli-Ethiopian duo Zalman Enav and Michael Tedros, stand out as some of the most prominent buildings with these characterist. Another important building is the General Post Office, the Ministry of PTT and the Imperial Board of Telecommunications by architects Zdravko Kovacevic and Ivan Straus, built after winning the first prize at the international competition in 1964, where Petrovic was a jury member. This building, which deviates from the aforementioned conceptions with its abstract vocabulary, has been recently valued as one of the key examples of modern architecture in Addis Ababa, owing to the qualities on both the architectural and urban scale.

During his work in the Ministry Petrovic created numerous designs and materialized buildings addressing different programmatic and spatial situations across the country. In Addis Ababa he designed the Ministry of Agriculture, offered solutions for central squares, including the project that won the first prize in the competition for a monument on the Meskel square, a place of large public gatherings. The extension of the Jubilee Palace, at the time the imperial and currently the presidential residence, is considered as one of his most significant realisations, as is the case with the building of the Wabe Shebelle hotel, standing even today as a landmark in Addis Ababa city centre. The vision of Addis Ababa as a national and pan-African centre is most evidently manifested in two non-implemented designs intended for important functions – the project of the New Imperial Palace and the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity, situated, according to all criteria, at the most important locations of that city. Moreover, he put together a solo exhibition of drawings of the Ethiopian traditional architecture, he taught at the Department of Architecture of the Technical Faculty of the Haile Sellassie University and was a member of the Urban Planning Commission of the Ministry of the Interior. He received a Menelik medal by the emperor Haile Sellassie in 1969 for his achievements.
The analysis of three Petrović’s projects—the unbuilt ones of the New Imperial Palace and the Organisation of African Unity headquarters, and the built one of the Wabe Shebelle hotel—will demonstrate his nuanced approach depending on the specificities of the building programme and the urban setting. In this way representation narratives, ranging from the initially neutral, fundamentally abstract vocabulary of international modernism and the language that clearly evokes the elements of the local traditions, will come to the fore.

- The very location of the New Imperial Palace (project, 1963), set upfront on Ghebi, a hill with a historical significance as a cradle of urban development of Addis Ababa, undoubtedly confirmed its role to showcase imperial power. Additionally, this spatial intervention implied a deep transformation of a historically valued ambience of a hill whose woody slopes accommodated existing built structures, including several significant churches. Occupying the highest position on Ghebi, the floor plan for the new palace incorporated the older throne hall, leaving its construction and outlines practically intact, while the solution for its immediate surroundings respected all the historical buildings in that location.

The monumental character of the complex is additionally emphasized by a wide profile of the Menelik II Avenue, which, situated on a slope and directed towards Ghebi provides an axial approach to the entire setting. The Menelik II Avenue is flanked by buildings with significant political functions—the Jubilee Palace, known today as the National Palace,
the Africa Hall and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Implemented in the 1960s, the concept of defining this axis as a political centre dates back to the period of the Italian occupation and stems from the urban plan made in the second half of the 1930s by Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle. The same plan included a central imperial complex on Ghebi as well, positioned axially in relation to the avenue. Haile Selassie persevered with his aspirations to build his own representative palace on Ghebi over a longer period. In 1948 an international competition was launched for this purpose\(^{34}\), and according to one of Petrović’s reports, his palace followed after as many as 127 designs had been made in the course of 15 years for that same purpose.\(^{35}\) The belief that Petrović’s project, unlike other proposals, might be implemented was apparently justified which is corroborated by the fact that the Centroprojekt’s office was entrusted with making its construction drawings. However, the project was abandoned after all and the existing architectural complex on Ghebi was kept in its natural surroundings.

Unlike, for instance, the Italian plan, which suggested situating the Imperial Palace vis-a-vis the suggestive Menelik Avenue, Petrović did not place his building absolutely symmetrically to its access street. An elegant shallow volume of an almost square plan with a large patio, positioned along the top of a hill, slightly shifted in relation to the prominent urban axis, positions its entrances for diverse purposes on all four sides. With a total surface area of 25 000 square metres, the organisation of the palace implied several separate functional tracts within a relatively compact volume. Functional units included spaces for private accommodation of the members of the imperial family, guests and servants, spaces for protocol and ceremonial purposes with a special focus on the throne hall whose verticality opposes the predominant horizontality of the building, office space of the imperial court and facilities for service provision.

The effectiveness of the building in addressing climate-related requirements, which was generally lacking in the architecture of Addis Ababa in the 1960s\(^{36}\), was well taken into account in Petrović’s concept and incorporated through a series of design-related decisions: by indention of the facade canvas from the construction of the building perimeter, by applying various types of sheltered space as parts of its organisational disposition and through a horticultural treatment of a large part of its external surface area, primarily the ground-floor patio and the first floor terrace.

It could be claimed that his approach to monumentality applied in this concept was related to the theoretical discussions but also to a series of competition projects for buildings of socio-political significance in post-war Yugoslavia.\(^{37}\) Although it was urbanistically predefined by a distinct axial situation, Petrović’s composition manages to avoid absolute symmetry of, for instance, the Mezzedimi’s Town Hall in an almost identical situation towards the Churchill Avenue, and even to Africa Hall, having a strong axial disposition. Initially abstract, the horizontal body hovering over

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\(^{34}\) The author of one of the rewarded designs in this competition was the Croatian-Russian-German architect Đorđe Kiverov who, owing to this competition result, stayed in Ethiopia from 1949 to 1952 (PA-AR – Đorđe Kiverov’s biographical, graphical and photo documentation).

\(^{35}\) SR-AJ-208 – Branko Petrović’s personal file

\(^{36}\) Ḥabtemariam, 1987: 211. The approach that does not prioritize the aspects of “tropicality” is to a certain extent justified by the fact that the city is situated at an altitude of more than 2000 m above sea level.

\(^{37}\) The same can be detected in the design for Guinea’s Government Centre in Conakry, authored by architect Radovan Miščević in 1963, another complex with an important political function designed by Croatian architects in Africa.
the city uses references to local traditions through the treatment of its vertical accents, primarily the throne hall, along with shaping visible and tall construction pillars at the front elevation. In the discourse of formal references, models for this building can undoubtedly be detected in the aforementioned layer of city’s architecture emerging at that same time.

- The Organisation of the African Unity headquarters building (project, 1965) moved to the top of the agenda after the establishment of that institution and after declaring Addis Ababa its administrative centre in 1963. Following the project of a New Imperial Palace on Ghebi, the seat of the Organisation of African Unity on the Meskel Square, as foreseen by Petrović, occupied again one of the most prominent city locations. Just as the previously described project was supposed to redefine its surrounding spacious park, given the disposition and a site plan for the administrative building, a new definition of the largest city square was also foreseen. All the more, compared to the location of the New Imperial Palace on top of a hill, this building was planned to be at its foot, on the opposite side of the Menelik II Avenue, composing volumes of its architectural complex against the visual line of the same road. Although hypothetically, the duality of the imperial content on the hilltop and the public content below the hill can be seen as an analogy with the Acropolis and the Agora of an emerging society. The confrontation of the religious centre on Ghebi and the secular centre on Meskel already present in the city plan, was therefore supposed to be underlined by these two projects.

The project of the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity, which, given its po-
litical significance and functional complexity can be compared to that of the New Imperial Palace, applies the typological pattern which is in certain elements comparable to the previous one. Horizontally placed, thin, pillar-supported body of a rectangular plan accommodates gardens in its interior. Its vertical accents appear as roof structures over the spaces of conference halls as well as the office tower. The ground floor of the building was envisaged as completely transparent and enriched by a series of public functions, thus complementing the content of a spacious square. While the elements of the climate performance, the approach to monumentality through a dynamic composition of interrelating volumes, and the effect of rich landscaping, can all be seen as equivalent to the previous project, his architectural design is to a much larger extent free from elements of traditional architecture.

In the end, both buildings can be discussed in the context of the capacity of the initially abstract modernism to represent the state and political power. Furthermore, their character can, globally speaking, be compared to the projects that address analogous architectural issues emerging at that same time across the world, starting from paradigmatic examples from the previous decade – Brasilia and Chandigarh – which in this case as well, undoubtedly served as models. When it comes to the Croatian practice, the same can be related to the issues of monumentality. When describing the characteristics of monumental expression in architecture, in a paradigmatic text addressing the intellectual origins of architecture in the early socialist Yugoslavia, the Croatian architect and theorist Neven Šegvić stresses the importance of the social purpose of the object and its functionality, physical location of the object in a given setting, type and radius of domination, choice of form and its reduction, addition or opposition of the object against the setting, specification of the design details, durability of the object and the quality of materials used. “It is a harmonious merging of these characteristics in a particular case, their dialectic unification, their artistic organisation and distribution that define architectural monumentality.”

In terms of space and content, the hotel is composed of several different elements. A two-storey glazed cube defines the situation of the corner of the main and the side street, providing the main entrance to the building and accommodating spacious bar and restaurant halls. It is complemented by a block, situated along the main road, whose indented, shaded ground floor is perforated by city shopwindows and overtopped by three floors.

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40 Šegvić, 1950: 34
41 Šegvić, 1950: 37
42 Building description based on a study visit.
43 Wontamo, 1969
44 Construction supervision was entrusted to Centroprojekt’s architect Hrvoje Justić. [Sinđelić, 1969; Conversations with Hrvoje Justić, 2012, 2013]
of apartment accommodation, while away from the roads, in the rear, lies a vertical structure with ten characteristic floors of hotel rooms and a panoramic rooftop bar. When defining accommodation units, the requirements concerning solar exposure and to heavy precipitation have been addressed by a buffer belt of loggias in the zones of their fenestration. Roughly following the external lines of the corner plot, the elements of the building define its interior garden with a terrace. This “extraordinary example of a well-studied, rational design” materializes its qualities mostly by implementing its own urban setup, and in that way Petrović confirmed his habitus in the urban domain. Unlike certain other hotel buildings in Addis Ababa, including some that were built at the same time, conceived as isolated and separated from its surrounding area, the layout of this hotel arose precisely from the affirmation of urban flows and from the coinciding efforts to enrich their content. In that way a primarily functionalist architecture characteristic of a large portion of the building production of the time was upgraded by Petrović in the context of urban integration, which was reportedly lacking in the city architecture.

Apart from their common consideration of urban and ambient values, when shaping the elevation of this hotel, a system very similar to that introduced by Kovacevic and Straus into Addis Ababa’s architecture was used. Free from a constructive function, elevations coated in an uninterrupted surface of a facade canvas, as exemplified by the General Post Office building, create firm, abstract volumes. When it comes to the Wabe Shebelle hotel, the use of a system of suspended facade can be linked to an expected, representative public function of its angular volume.

Building new and reconstructing the existing hotels was a common practice in Addis Ababa in the 1960s. An increase in the temporary accommodation facilities in the capital of a country that had only recently been relatively isolated coincided with shaping of its cosmopolitan character, and apart from the economic and diplomatic fields where a lively international dynamics was emerging, tourist activity intensified in parallel as well. At the moment of its completion, and before hotels of leading global chains were built, Wabe Shebelle had been characterized as a building “dominating an entire part of Addis Ababa and representing the largest and the best equipped hotel in Ethiopia”.

Out of the three described Petrović’s projects in Addis Ababa, two have a unique purpose and are tightly bound to references to the concrete moment and location. The New Imperial Palace and the Organisation of African Unity headquarters can primarily be linked to the discourse of Ethiopia’s building heritage at that time, and of the international architecture of global institutions. On the other hand, the Wabe Shebelle Hotel, given its purpose and functionalist concept, has a generic, universal character. Possibly due to its cosmopolitan content as well, the relevance of which was at the moment of construction even more pronounced, its generic contours can easily be imagined in the street layout of any city.

CONCLUSION

ZAKLJUČAK

Petrović’s activity in Addis Ababa coincided with exceptionally fertile circumstances of a building boom. In a dynamic situation the discussions on urban development and urbanity, type of construction, typological inventory, representation and local identity created a strong local discourse of heterogeneous participants, where Petrović’s work can also be positioned. The heterogeneity of approaches applied in the three described projects, apart from their different programme-related aspects, in a city characterized by a very hybrid modernity receives its broader meaning. While all three projects

45 Sinđelić, 1969: 44
46 Wontamo, 1969
47 Wontamo, 1969
48 Sinđelić, 1969: 44
49 *** 1969
find their initial conceptual standpoints in the urban domain, their formal layer could be understood as a reflection of various identities present within the strata of the very same culture.

The expert with a broad professional experience fitted in easily into a demanding context of a developing country requesting him to provide solutions to an equally broad range of tasks. Given his professional path, Petrović's Ethiopian period can be seen as one in a series of different phases that have precisely their content-related divergence in common. Moreover, given that each of the three described Petrović's projects had unique terms of reference, seeking a direct link to his work in his own country would be irrelevant. It is only in elements of his approach, concerning instances of representation and monumentality, composition laws and urban qualities incorporated in his architectural solutions, where ideas characteristic of the Croatian architectural practices could be recognised. The divergence of a direct relation to the Croatian practice is additionally justified by Petrović's 7-years long stay in Ethiopia. Despite his presence in the local Yugoslav community and despite being in touch with the developments in Croatia at the time, the architect's professional focus was for quite some time under a direct influence of a practice found abroad, so positioning Petrović's works closer to precisely the Ethiopian discourse can be additionally justified.

In 1969, just before leaving Ethiopia, in his interview for The Ethiopian Herald Petrović stressed the fact that at the time of his arrival some 80% of the buildings in Addis Ababa had not been built. During his stay and professional activity in Addis Ababa, it was given a new shape and acquired a character of an urbanised city, in a country which, even according to today's standards, has one of the largest percentage of rural population in the world. He elaborated on his own fascination with the Ethiopian traditional architecture by claiming that young Ethiopian architects, in order to have a reliable base for their projects, should extract original elements of their own valuable building heritage. Buildings erected on such foundations, using local raw materials for construction, would be simple, economical, functional, and above all “Ethiopian”.49 Contrary to omnipresent trends of a rapid urbanisation and construction according to the European standards which disregarded traditional building forms, this was a valuable attempt to find ways not only to recreate links with their own African tradition and restore certain aspects of identity, but also to respond to a need, which is topical still today, to disintegrate class divides of a stratified society.

[Translated by Tanja Žakula]

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INTERVIEW

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Biographies

MOJCA SMODE CVITANOVIC, Ph.D., post-doctoral candidate, collaborator on the project “Atlas of 20th Century Croatian Architecture”. Her research interests are focused on the processes of international transfer and dissemination.

MELITA ČAVLOVIĆ, Ph.D., post-doctoral candidate, collaborator on the project ”Atlas of 20th Century Croatian Architecture”. Her research interests are focused on the changes in architectural profession.

ANDREJ UCHTIL, Ph.D., Full Prof., head of the project “Atlas of 20th Century Croatian Architecture”. He received the “New Segvic” Award in 2008, the State Science Award (in collaboration with Z. Barisić Marenic and E. Kahrovic) in 2019 and the First Award of the “Zagreb Salon” in 2009 (in collaboration with R. Waldgoni).

Dr.sc. MOJCA SMODE CVITANOVIC, poslijedoktorandica, suradnica projekta „Atlas hrvatske arhitekture 20. stoljeća“. U svom istraživačkom radu bavi se procesima transfera struke i međunarodne diseminacije znanja.

Dr.sc. MELITA ČAVLOVIĆ, poslijedoktorandica, suradnica projekta „Atlas hrvatske arhitekture 20. stoljeća“. U istraživačkom radu zanimaju se promjene arhitektonske profesije.

PROSTOR

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