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Local and global – The modernist architecture of Makarska Riviera

Abstract

Profound socio-economic and cultural changes in Western industrial societies created the conditions for the emergence of mass tourism as one of the key forms of social mobility in the twentieth century. Rather than developing evenly, this phenomenon selectively produced spatially concentrated tourist landscapes, within which it acted as a powerful agent of transformation of social relations and local economies, while architecture and urban planning constituted the most visible media and material traces of these changes. These global dynamics are particularly clearly reflected in the case of the Makarska Riviera, which, until the Second World War, was characterised by a peripheral position, an economy largely based on agriculture and limited transport connectivity. Precisely because of this prior condition of underdevelopment, the post-war turn towards tourism triggered an abrupt and far-reaching transformation. With the recognition of tourism as a strategic development sector, sustained state-led investments in infrastructure, industry and the built environment rapidly reconfigured social and spatial structures, drawing trained architects into the formulation of new urban and architectural models. Within a relatively short period, the Makarska Riviera was transformed into a key site of modernist architectural production and an internationally recognised tourist destination. Focusing on the period from the late 1940s to the early 1980s, this study examines the cultural and architectural dynamics of the region, highlighting through stylistic analysis of selected examples its role as an internationally relevant testing ground for modernist architecture.

Keywords: Makarska Riviera, touristification, modernism, architecture, urbanism

1. Introduction

Although mass tourism emerged as a dominant form of leisure and mobility only in the second half of the twentieth century, it was shaped by a gradual and historically conditioned process that extended well beyond the immediate post-war period. This longer trajectory was driven by a convergence of technological, social and political changes already underway in the interwar years, most notably advances in transport infrastructure and the legal recognition of workers' rights such as paid annual leave, shorter working hours and minimum wages. Together, these developments created the structural conditions for the democratisation of travel, which had previously been limited to privileged social groups. Across Europe, leisure increasingly came to be understood as a socially productive and politically relevant sphere, integrated into broader projects of modernisation, public health and social regulation. Although the Second World War temporarily interrupted leisure travel, the interwar period established the conceptual, infrastructural and institutional foundations upon which mass tourism expanded rapidly after 1945. In the post-war decades, tourism developed on both sides of the Iron Curtain, albeit within distinct political and economic contexts and with uneven spatial effects. In Western Europe, mass tourism became concentrated in selected Mediterranean and Alpine regions, while in socialist Europe comparable processes unfolded along both the Black Sea

and the Adriatic coasts under state-led planning frameworks. Within this socialist context, Yugoslavia assumed a particularly prominent role, integrating tourism into its post-war modernisation strategies as a key economic sector and a major driver of spatial and architectural transformation along the Adriatic coast (Zinganel and Beyer 2013: 37–43).

Characterised by a highly indented coastline, a dense archipelago of islands, a predominantly karstic landscape and a Mediterranean climate marked by long, dry summers and mild winters, the Adriatic coast offered a combination of natural and climatic conditions particularly favourable to tourism development. Within this coastal system, the Makarska Riviera stood out for its distinctive geographical configuration: a narrow coastal strip defined by the dramatic rise of the Biokovo mountain range directly from the shoreline, with settlements, greenery and long stretches of pebble beaches compressed between steep slopes and the sea. This exceptional spatial relationship between mountain and coast endowed the Makarska Riviera with a pronounced visual and environmental identity, positioning it as one of the most valuable and recognisable segments of the Adriatic coastline within Yugoslav tourism planning.

From a barren land to a tourist gem – the title of a 1998 newspaper article from Makarsko primorje (Puharić 1998: 18) aptly encapsulates the profound transformation brought about by sustained tourism-led investment and planning in the Makarska Riviera during the second half of the twentieth century. Before the onset of tourism, Makarska Riviera reflected the broader historical and cultural patterns of Dalmatia. Life revolved around agriculture, which remained the dominant economic activity well into the 20th century. Traditional hamlets composed of stone houses were scattered along the foothills of Biokovo, their inhabitants relying on the limited agrarian possibilities of the rugged terrain. The economy was supplemented by modest trade and occasional industry, but tourism was still in its infancy. Although its origins in this region can be traced to the period preceding the First World War, it had not yet become a defining feature of the area.

Significant changes began to take shape in the late 1940s, although these early post-war interventions were not yet characterised by mass tourism or large-scale construction. Rather, this phase was defined by reconstruction efforts that increasingly converged with emerging state-level incentives for tourism development, aligning immediate needs of recovery with longer-term socialist planning objectives. The turning point occurred in the 1960s, when the interplay of local, national, and international processes ushered in an era of mass tourism, profoundly transforming the economy and the spatial-architectural landscape of the Makarska Riviera. By the 1970s, this development accelerated with capitalist momentum, leading to extensive spatial expansion.

By the 1970s, this tourism-driven development had reached full momentum, resulting in extensive spatial expansion and a markedly heterogeneous built environment. The analysis presented in this study therefore concludes with the late 1970s, not because the transformation of the Makarska Riviera came to an end, but because this moment marks a fundamental shift in development patterns. From this point onwards, construction increasingly moved away from predominantly public and state-coordinated initiatives towards privately driven development, accompanied by broader cultural, political and economic changes that would eventually culminate in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. With this shift, the architectural discourse associated with post-war modernism gradually lost its central role, giving way to different priorities and design approaches in the 1980s, even as ongoing processes of touristification continued to reshape the coastal landscape.

Developed within the framework of doctoral research on the early phases of modernisation and touristification on the Makarska Riviera, this study employs a multi-layered methodological approach. It combines a critical review of relevant scholarly literature with archival research and the analysis of historical planning documents and regulations. These sources are complemented by stylistic and typological analyses of selected realised and unrealised architectural and urban projects from the period under study. Through this approach, the study positions the Makarska Riviera as an internationally relevant modernist architectural testing ground whose formative role was largely defined between the late 1940s and the end of the 1970s.

2. Post-War Beginnings

In shaping the potential directions of development of Croatia's Adriatic region after the Second World War, tourism came to occupy a prominent position and was increasingly regarded as a secure source of foreign currency. However, unlike in many other global tourist destinations, the rise of mass tourism in former Yugoslavia remained relatively slow until the 1960s and lagged behind developments in established international tourist centres (Mrduljaš 2018: 180). The Makarska Riviera was no exception in this respect. At the time, its economy was primarily oriented towards agriculture, but it began to shift under new economic policies implemented by federal and republican authorities, which channelled significant investment into sectors such as industry, transport and tourism (Vojak 2012: 199).

Although the Second World War had a devastating impact on the area, it also served as a catalyst for spatial modernisation. Bombing and military operations caused widespread destruction of buildings and infrastructure, laying the groundwork for post-war reconstruction and contemporary development. In the years following the war, efforts were directed towards the gradual restoration of existing tourist facilities, including hotels such as Osejava, Miramare (later renamed Beograd), and Moskva (later renamed Park), as well as tourist establishments in Brela and Podgora (Franić 2006: 26). However, reconstruction was not limited to individual buildings, but extended to the comprehensive planning and organisation of the town as a whole. In this context, Makarska was among the first cities in Croatia to be selected for planned post-war reconstruction, alongside significantly larger urban centres such as Zagreb, Karlovac, Sisak, Dubrovnik and Duga Resa, reflecting the early recognition of its strategic tourism potential (Lasić 2012: 236).

As part of this initiative, architect Vlado Antolić was commissioned to draft the General Urban Plan (Regulation Plan) for Makarska, marking the town's first attempt at comprehensive urban planning (Milas 1983: 355). Completed in 1948, the plan envisioned Makarska as a small coastal settlement with pronounced potential for tourism development. Antolić sought to preserve the town's coastal character while introducing a more rational spatial organisation, with particular emphasis on pedestrian-friendly public spaces along the waterfront. While retaining the existing road, the plan proposed its partial reconstruction and redirection around the town in order to improve traffic efficiency. A key feature of Antolić's proposal was the introduction of functional zoning. The area between the rerouted road and the sea was subdivided into clearly defined zones, including a western sector designated primarily for tourism, with hotels and related facilities. The central area, encompassing the St Peter Peninsula and the historic core, was largely intended for restoration rather than extensive new construction. Above this zone, Antolić envisaged a smaller residential area together with a cable car station connecting the town to Mount Biokovo. To the east of the centre, the

plan allocated space for a sports stadium, a residential neighbourhood, a hospital and a forest park (Antolić 1949: 63–66). Although the broader vision of the plan was only partially realised, with most proposals remaining unbuilt, its conceptual significance should not be underestimated. Antolić's approach combined principles of modern functional urbanism with careful consideration of local cultural and natural conditions. In doing so, the plan articulated an early model of coastal spatial organisation based on functional differentiation, a planning logic that would become a defining feature of large-scale tourism development and coastal planning along the Yugoslav Adriatic in the 1960s and 1970s. Within this context, the Makarska plan can be understood as an important early indicator of the planning paradigms that later shaped the modernisation of the Adriatic coast.

Simultaneously, in the small town of Tučepi near Makarska, an ambitious project emerged, which Žarko Domljan described as a "solitary case of coastal usurpation" (Domljan, 1969: 32), underscoring its pioneering role in post-war tourist architecture along the eastern Adriatic coast. The hotel was notable not only for its early construction date but also for its stylistic execution, which stood out in a period when few significant architectural works were produced. Designed by Branko Bon, a renowned figure of Yugoslav modernism, the construction of Hotel Jadran commenced in 1948 (Deranja Crnokić and Jelavić Livaković, 2015: 25). The hotel was built in a pristine natural setting, bordered by pine forests and a pebbled beach. Its monumental facade immediately draws attention with a series of horizontal balconies interrupted by a vertical, lattice-like element. This "tower" serves to illuminate the large, irregular, almost sculptural oval staircase inside, an element that evokes the organic architecture popular in Europe and America at the time. The hotel was designed to exude luxury: the rooms were spacious and uncluttered, and entertainment and service areas were grand. The surrounding gardens, landscaped terraces, and communal spaces extended its architectural vision outdoors, further blending the structure with its natural surroundings. Numerous postcards and photographs preserved in the collection of the Municipality Museum Makarska capture the opulence and prosperity of the hotel during its operational heyday, showcasing evening galas and luxurious gatherings on its terraces. This legacy, combined with the building's original design, highlights its role as a symbol of early tourism development, long before the advent of mass tourism.[1]

In the southwestern section of what was then *Obala Maršala Tita*, now *Obala kralja Tomislava*, adjacent to the Baroque Tonoli palace (today housing the Makarska City Museum), the architectural studio "Rašica," led by Božidar Rašica, envisioned in 1958 an urban architectural complex comprising an open-air stage, a park, a square, and a cinema-theatre building. The project aimed to establish a dialogue with the historical architectural heritage, integrating it organically with new structures designed according to contemporary principles (*Čovjek i prostor*, 1959: 6). Beside the existing Baroque Tonoli palace, Rašica proposed the interpolation of a modern cinema-theatre building characterised by clear, unembellished lines and a pronounced horizontal volume. The lower part of the structure was to be clad in stone, establishing a visual connection with the region's traditional building materials, while the upper sections, featuring expansive glass surfaces, reflected modernist ideals of lightness and transparency. Special attention was devoted to creating public spaces. The square in front of and behind the building was to be connected by a passage running underneath the new structure, which would be elevated on pillars. On Glavica, a natural elevation dominating the area behind Tonoli palace, Rašica envisioned an open-air amphitheatre. At the base

[1] Recognised for its exceptional historical and architectural significance, Hotel Jadran was declared a cultural heritage site by state authorities (See: https://registar.kulturnadobra.hr/#/details/Z-5958). After decades of neglect and disrepair, the hotel has since been restored and returned to operation.

of this hill, along the pathway leading to the beach, he planned a park adorned with a series of sculptures by various artists. Facing the waterfront, he proposed a square featuring additional sculptures and wall paintings, all of which would collectively evoke the essence of a monument while simultaneously serving as a showcase of plastic arts. This integrative approach was characteristic of Rašica's work and reflected his affiliation with the avant-garde movement EXAT 51, which championed the integration of fine arts into contemporary architecture and design—what became known as total design. Rašica himself emphasised that the monument was intended to be "an expression of the achievements in the field of our plastic arts" (*Čovjek i prostor, 1959*: 6). Unfortunately, the project was never realised, possibly due to a legal dispute that arose later.[2] Subsequent developments realised on the same site, including the *Merces* commercial complex and the *Revolution Monument* (*Spomenik revoluciji*), adopted certain elements of Rašica's spatial concept, yet failed to sustain its comprehensive vision of the urban architectural environment as an integrated whole.

In 1958, Rašica also designed a project for three residential buildings on *Obala kralja Tomislava*, which was only partially completed. The plan included a corner building connecting to an existing structure parallel to the waterfront, along with two smaller buildings oriented perpendicular to the shoreline. The completed building features a café on the ground floor (originally named Central), with residential apartments occupying the upper two floors. The structure harmoniously integrates into the historic urban core; its vertical segmentation, with minimal projections, evokes the appearance of narrow vertical units typical of traditional coastal architecture. This effect is further enhanced by the stone-clad north and east walls of the ground floor, the sloped roof covered with traditional terracotta tiles, and the simple openings on the smooth, originally light-yellow facade of the upper floors.[3] The south facade at ground level was articulated with large glass panels framed by a concrete pergola of clean, simple rectangular lines. Rašica left a passage at ground level between the western side of the building and a neighbouring structure, linking the waterfront with the inner urban block. Vera Marsić (2009: 81) notes that the building, due to its stark simplicity, was met with significant criticism, and Rašica's perceived misstep resulted in the other two buildings from the original plan never being constructed. However, as early as 1961, Neven Šegvić (Vjesnik, 12 February 1961, as cited in Marsić, 2009: 175) recognised that Rašica approached the project as an architect attuned to the Dalmatian climate and the city's scale, embedding his architecture into the

[2] The unrealised status of Rašica's project may be linked to a copyright dispute with urban planner Olga Pavlinović. In 1981, Pavlinović successfully claimed that Rašica had utilised her urban planning analysis, originally developed for the 1957 general regulatory plan for Makarska, without her consent. The court determined that Rašica had made only minor adjustments to Pavlinović's concept and presented the revised plan as his own. As the author of this study, I have not encountered Pavlinović's original draft, making it difficult to ascertain the precise extent of Rašica's reliance on her work. Nevertheless, given Rašica's background, it seems plausible that the total-design approach, central to the conceptual framework of the Makarska project, was primarily Rašica's own vision. Regardless of the contested authorship, the plan represents a bold and innovative solution, and its non-realisation remains a notable loss for the urban and cultural fabric of Makarska.

[3] The building's eastern façade was recently painted by academic painter Teja Jurušić. While her work is artistically compelling, it diminishes the original simplicity of the eastern elevation (see the mural at Teja Jurušić's website: https://teajurisic.com/portfolio/on-the-coast/). Additionally, the removal of the concrete pergola on the southern façade and the installation of a black metal canopy have disrupted the clarity of that side.

surroundings with subtlety. Šegvić emphasised that Rašica demonstrated an ability to design not based on formulaic schemes but in response to the spatial logic of the site.

Although a formal urban plan for Makarska had been in place for over a decade, post-war development along the coast increasingly unfolded in an uncoordinated and improvised manner. In a 1959 interview published in Čovjek i prostor (1959: 6), Božidar Rašica openly criticised the absence of even the most rudimentary regional planning framework capable of regulating land use and construction. He warned that the *ad hoc* construction by both state and private sectors in recent years was leading to chaotic development, potentially causing severe long-term consequences. Although mass tourism in the region only began to take off in the 1960s, tourism levels in the 1950s had already exceeded expectations, resulting in the spontaneous construction of tourist facilities. This rapid development occurred without adequate technical, organisational, administrative, legal, economic, or spatial planning provisions. As tourism expanded, these deficiencies led to evident spatial disorganisation and a lack of coordination with related sectors (Kranjčević, 2015: 401). Responding to these concerns, Dragan Boltar (1962: 15) argued that the entire coastal and island region of the Adriatic required a comprehensive regional development plan. This plan, he suggested, should include zoning and micro-analyses tailored to the specific characteristics of individual areas. Recognising the challenges involved in producing such an ambitious plan, including the extensive expertise, funding and time required, the Institute of Urbanism at the Zagreb Faculty of Architecture and the Bureau for Tourism and Hospitality Construction were tasked with preparing limited studies for specific zones. Two such plans were completed, one for Šibenik and the other for the Makarska Riviera (Boltar, 1962: 15). *The Regional Plan for Tourism Development of the coastal zone from Brela to Podgora*, prepared between 1958 and 1961 under the leadership of renowned architects Josip Seissle and Dragan Boltar, was a groundbreaking initiative. This plan not only outlined essential guidelines for the spatial organisation of tourism but also provided detailed analyses of key factors such as forest coverage, beach characteristics, infrastructural prerequisites, agricultural land use, leisure facilities, trade networks and hospitality services (Dragan Boltar, Architecture, 1962: 18). Its significance lies in its pioneering role as the first regional spatial plan in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia specifically designed to address tourism development. Moreover, it established a methodological foundation for future regional tourism plans across Croatia (Kranjčević, 2015: 401). However, the practical implementation of this plan, like its predecessors (and most of its successors), proved inconsistent. While the plan advocated avoiding overcrowding on beaches and imposed strict limits on tourism density, these measures, though ambitious and rooted in an idealistic vision of sustainable development, ultimately proved unable to withstand the pressures of the rapid growth in mass tourism that emerged in the 1960s.

3. The Renaissance of Modernism on Makarska Riviera

After Tito's dramatic split with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia adopted a system known as self-management socialism. This political and economic departure from the Soviet model included trade and cooperation with capitalist countries, among other strategies, and emphasised the development of tourism along the Adriatic coast as a significant source of foreign currency, which bolstered the federal budget (Mustapić and Karajić, 2012: 308). Reliance on foreign exchange became particularly pronounced during the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s, with loans from the United States being utilised to complete the construction of the Adriatic Highway (State Road D8), a pivotal infrastructure

project that connected the northern and southern parts of the Adriatic coast. This project facilitated the arrival of international visitors and marked the onset of mass tourism (Poljanec-Borić and Šikić, 2012: 171). Surveying work on the Makarska Riviera began as early as 1959, with the majority of this section being completed by 1964 (Podgorelec and Klempić, 2012: 112).

In the meantime, a local natural event further stimulated the development of the Riviera towards mass tourism. On 7th and 11th January 1962, the Makarska Riviera was struck by powerful earthquakes. The material damage was immense – the seismic activity, followed by landslides from Biokovo that descended upon settlements and roads, caused significant damage to numerous architectural structures, especially in the southeastern parts of the Makarska Riviera (Herak and Herak, 2012: 272). However, once the situation had calmed, the outcome diverged from expectations of both development stagnation and the restoration of existing settlements. A visit by a high-ranking government delegation, led by Tito, followed by a construction commission and subsequent committees, resulted in the decision not to rebuild some of the Biokovo foothill villages and hamlets. Instead, new settlements were to be established along the coastline, with a clear focus on tourism (Hrstić, 2012: 285). Those who accepted this solution, which, given the unfavourable alternative, was nevertheless the majority, were granted very advantageous 'earthquake loans' for construction on coastal plots (Mustapić and Karajić, 2012: 313). Although deagrarianisation and touristification had already begun on the Makarska Riviera, the developmental push following the earthquake, driven by the planned reorientation of the population towards tourism, acted as a decisive catalyst for rapid social and spatial transformation. This momentum was furthered by the Yugoslav Economic Reform of 1965, which marked a broader shift towards market-driven principles of supply and demand (Poljanec-Borić and Šikić L., 2012: 172). With its new transport infrastructure and a clear development trajectory, the Makarska Riviera was well-positioned to benefit from these international changes, which facilitated the decentralisation of investments in tourism and construction.

The rapid pace of change is evident when we recall the aforementioned *Regional Plan for Tourism Development of the Coastal Zone from Brela to Podgora* (1958-1961), which was created as a microanalysis, since the state lacked the resources to develop a comprehensive plan for the entire Adriatic. By 1968, the *Regional spatial plan for the southern Adriatic* was completed. In contrast to the earlier plan, which limited both the number of tourists and construction, this new plan, due to the exceptionally favourable spatial conditions, proposed accelerated tourism development for the Makarska Riviera. The plan envisioned a total capacity of 70,000 beds for tourist purposes, and the rapid expansion of tourism is underscored by the fact that this planned maximum accommodation capacity was already realised by 1983 (Kranjčević, 2012: 221).

Amidst these transformative developments, Brela, a small town at the westernmost edge of the Makarska Riviera, appeared to benefit from a unique convergence of favourable circumstances. From the outset, construction in Brela avoided haphazard development, adhering instead to the Urban Development Study for Brela, crafted between 1960 and 1962 by Matija Salaj, Julije De Luca, and Ante Rožić. This study established a strategy prioritising low-density development and a careful integration of modestly scaled architecture within the natural environment (De Luca, 1969: 32). This urban planning approach yielded a series of tourist facilities designed by the same trio of architects, with interiors predominantly styled by Bernardo Bernardi and contributions from other artists such as Jagoda Buić, Aleksandar Srnec, and Vasko Lipovac. Notable examples include the Tourist Centre (Ante Rožić, 1969; interior by Bernardo Bernardi) and the Hotel and Villa Berulia (Ante Rožić, 1970; interior by Bernardo Bernardi). However, the crowning achievement in Brela is undoubtedly the

Hotel Maestral with its annexes Mirna and Marina, designed in 1965 by Ante Rožić, Matija Salaj, and Julije De Luca, with interiors furnished by Bernardo Bernardi (De Luca, 1969: 34). The Hotel Maestral stands as a canonical example of modernist architecture, not only on a local scale but also internationally. The primary guiding principle in its design was to preserve the inherent qualities of the landscape as much as possible and to establish a harmonious dialogue between architecture and its surroundings. The positioning, shape, and height of the building were meticulously determined to respect views of both the mountains and the sea, as well as to ensure an aesthetic experience of the structure from the sea and approaching routes (De Luca, 1969: 32). The building's horizontally oriented form exhibits refined proportions and exquisite detailing. It comprises a low-rise and a high-rise section, seamlessly connected by a spiral staircase that elegantly dominates the space. With a limited number of rooms, the hotel features a luxuriously appointed tavern with a terrace, a bar, and a lounge. The interior design reflects a carefully executed synthesis of the visual and plastic arts. Alongside modern materials, traditional Mediterranean stone was used extensively in both the exterior and interior, ensuring a harmonious integration of past and present.[4]

In addition to the hotels built for public tourist purposes, during this period, the Adriatic coast, sea, and lush vegetation were also used for therapeutic purposes. For this purpose, a children's sanatorium was built in Krvavica to treat and rehabilitate children with pulmonary diseases. The building, with a fascinating space-age-like architecture, was designed by Rikard Marasović in 1960 and completed in 1964. Maroje Mrduljaš (2018: 177) aptly highlights the perfectly aligned form with function, describing the building as "a device for treating with sun and air that circulate through it." Indeed, the spatial decisions in the project stemmed from the need to use fresh air and outdoor space. The main building consists of two levels: a ground-level multifunctional space in the shape of an "L" and a circular ring on the second level, supported by powerful pilasters. The circular form allows each room to have its own terrace, which is simultaneously sheltered from direct sunlight by pergolas. A shared terrace on the upper floor serves as a protected play area for children, while the square beneath the building is open to the sea, functioning as a space for social integration. Once again, the author, perhaps influenced by interactions with architects working in Brela at the time or the general trend of critical regionalism replacing the austerity of modernism, combines modern materials with traditional ones, covering certain walls with stone. One of the more intriguing modernist elements, when considering the overall concept, is the ramp that dominates the ground floor and winds up to the upper terrace and sleeping areas, creating a unique connection between the layers. Few modernist works so boldly combine a radically free expression with nearly sculptural forms, while also being so practically adapted to the function and intended user group.[5]

[4] The local population still remembers the luxury and harmony of the hotel's interior, where gentlemen and ladies would arrive in suits and evening dresses to the bar. For some time, the hotel, due to its internationally recognised significance, was under preventive protection by the *Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia*. However, after this protection expired, the hotel did not receive permanent protection and was renovated in 2022. Although the renovation fortunately preserved the overall structure and basic modernist concept, the complete *total design* of the interior was irreversibly lost.

[5] Although it was a popular location during the Yugoslav era, during the conflicts of the 1990s, the building was repurposed to accommodate displaced refugees. Over time, the complex gradually ceased to be used, eventually being completely abandoned. From the 2000s onwards, much of the valuable furnishings and equipment were removed from the structure. However, the building was ultimately protected by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, and today it holds the status of a cultural heritage site. Unfortunately, it remains in a state of abandonment and rapid deterioration.

Another dynamic arched structure that aligns with international trends in softening the reductivism of modernism is the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Podgora. Built in 1964, the church was designed by Ante Rožić. Situated on an elevated plot, once surrounded by greenery, the sacred space was shaped using modern materials in a highly freeform arched design. The concrete shell curves over the unique nave, rising like hands in prayer above the sanctuary, allowing light to filter through a narrow opening in the northeast and through a glass wall on the southwest. The church's unconventional design was locally interpreted as a metaphor for the tent from the refugee camp at El Shatt, which reinforced the sense of "sacredness" in the space—a quality often absent in modern church architecture. Although modernism was in full swing on the Makarska Riviera at the time, the church's radical, non-traditional design represented a bold departure. It stands as perhaps the most daring of Rožić's independent projects, marking a significant moment in Croatian and Yugoslav architecture during the communist era, when sacred architecture was generally suppressed. Rožić confirmed his knowledge of the modern architectural lexicon with this church, creating a form that clearly draws visual references from the architecture of the great Le Corbusier, and perhaps most notably from his Philips Pavilion.[6]

In line with the economic growth that began in the 1960s and the increasing number of residents and tourists, the rapid expansion of tourism necessitated the development of infrastructure to support the modern way of life and the growing needs of the local community. The construction of facilities such as banks, post offices, health centres, schools, and other public institutions established new social and functional standards. The FINA building in Makarska, constructed in 1962, stands as one of the most notable examples of modernist architecture in the city. As Irena Lagator Pejović (2019: 1809) aptly notes, it shares aesthetic and design parallels with the National Bank building in Cetinje, also designed by Vulović. This distinctive style, which acts as Vulović's architectural hallmark, appears consistently across his works without succumbing to monotonous repetition. The facades of this rectangular building are distinguished by a clear and dynamic separation between the upper and lower levels. The upper section, projecting boldly above the lower, features vertical concrete elements that divide large window openings. These culminate in small overhangs, rhythmically forming a zigzag-shaped roofline. By contrast, the lower level employs a simpler design but gains visual interest through its juxtaposition of window openings and solid wall panels, which are clad in stone featuring a modern rhomboid texture. On the eastern facade, two broad concrete beams extend across both levels and are adorned with traditionally arranged stone veneer. The combination of traditional and modern elements reflects a harmonious balance between modern architectural expression and local tradition, highlighting a subtle synthesis of past and present in this project. Vulović's building is notable not only as an individual work but also for its role in the spatial and urban context of the square (*Trg 4. svibnja*) located southeast of the building, which was shaped during the 1960s and 1970s. Along with other modernist public buildings surrounding the square, including the post office

[6] Interestingly, due to an alleged lack of funds, the church was never fully completed according to the architect's original plans, which marks the beginning of its ongoing issues with inadequate condition and the procedures for its preservation and restoration. In the personal archive of the Rožić family, the author of this text discovered numerous documents that testify to decades of appeals by Ante Rožić for the completion and restoration of the deteriorating parts of the church. Despite its significant artistic value, even in its unfinished state, the church has never been officially valorised and protected by the relevant authorities, and its future remains uncertain.

designed by architect Ante Rožić in 1977, Vulović's building contributes to a cohesive urban ensemble.[7]

While the realised examples discussed above already demonstrate a high degree of architectural innovation, unrealised projects often articulate the modernist ambition of the period with even greater clarity. In this sense, unrealised projects can be particularly instructive, as their radical formal and spatial propositions were often too advanced to be executed at the time of their conception. A striking example is the conceptual design for Hotel Agava, proposed by Juraj Neidhardt in Makarska in 1969. Preserved solely through a photograph of the architectural model held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (object no. 144.2021), the project envisaged an extraordinary structure resembling a wind turbine laid horizontally across the landscape. Although never built, the design powerfully encapsulates the experimental spirit and forward-looking architectural imagination that characterised this phase of tourism-driven modernisation along the Makarska Riviera.

Another significant example of urban planning from 1971 is the design of Trg fra Andrije Kačića Miošića in Makarska, created by the local architect Olga Pavlinović. Pavlinović's solution is regarded by Željka Čorak (1996: 46) as an iconic work of modern Croatian urbanism. The challenge of this design was considerable, primarily due to the site's steep slope — an unusual feature for public squares. In addition to addressing the elevation differences along the north-south axis, Pavlinović also had to account for the urban fabric, with streets leading east and west. These pre-existing spatial conditions heavily influenced the design of Kačić Square. The architect organised the space into three interconnected levels, connected by central stairways and gentle ramps on the sides. By skilfully combining movement directions, breaking symmetry, and using varying types of stone, she created a dynamic spatial composition while respecting the existing topography and historical elements.[8]

In the simultaneous development of the city and society during the 1960s and 1970s, the local industrial sector emerged as a significant, albeit smaller, contributor to the economic diversification of the region. Throughout this period, several production facilities were established, with the *Amfora* soft drink factory standing out for its successful output and employment. In terms of architectural quality, the *Bread, Pastry, and Sweets Factory* designed by Milan Šoštarić in 1971 is particularly noteworthy, exemplifying the successful modernist approach to industrial architecture of the era (MUO, Zagreb, Inventory Number MUO-023926). The factory stands out as an example of a creative approach to industrial building design, a type of architecture where form is often subordinated to functionality. In this case, Šoštarić used complex, asymmetrically arranged volumes that energize the building's vistas. Through careful, almost sculptural exterior shaping, he successfully combined

[7] The original appearance of the building has unfortunately been altered by an extension to the northern part, where two additional floors were added to the residential section of the building, now in private ownership. Fortunately, the western, southern, and eastern façades have remained unchanged. A positive development is that the city of Makarska has recognised the value of this architectural and urban ensemble, and although the valuable modernist buildings of the Post Office and FINA are not protected at the national level, the city of Makarska has protected them through its own regulations within the current spatial plan *(Glasnik Grada Makarske, No. 27/23, ID of the PPUG, Art. 109, effective from 28.12.2023).*

[8] Although the architectural community acknowledges the significance of Pavlinović's design for Trg fra Andrije Kačića Miošića, the square has not been fully embraced by the public as a bold architectural solution. Many locals nostalgically recall its previous form, which was predominantly horticultural, and continue to criticize the current design for its lack of greenery, as well as the quantity and type of stone used in the paving. The use of cobblestones is often deemed impractical for pedestrian use, with the variable and slippery surfaces considered less user-friendly (data derived from interviews with local residents).

functionality with aesthetics, creating a space that is not only intended for production but also visually enriches its surroundings.[9]

A significant example of educational architecture in Makarska, and within the national context of modernist design, is the school constructed as part of the new "Istok" residential area. The urban plan for the district was developed by Dinko Milas, with the school building designed by Juraj Matijević, Vesna Matijević, and Dinko Milas in 1978, and completed in 1981. Guided by the idea of integrating the school as a social, cultural, and educational hub, the architecture respects the spatial and societal context, featuring classrooms with terrace access and a central atrium functioning as a communal "square." The strategic placement bridges the needs of the modern neighbourhood and older urban structures, while its spatial organisation departs from standard educational typologies to create a dynamic social-educational space (Premerl, 1981: 20).

The examples discussed above represent only a selection of the high-quality architectural production realised on the Makarska Riviera during the post-war decades, yet they are sufficient to illustrate the intensity, ambition and overall quality of the modernist architectural milieu that emerged in the region within a relatively short period. This concentration of architecturally significant works attests to a moment of exceptional creative productivity, closely tied to the broader processes of modernisation and tourism-driven development. The 1980s did not bring a decline in construction activity; on the contrary, building continued at a rapid pace, interrupted only briefly by the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995). In the decades that followed, however, development increasingly led to the extensive occupation of space and the erosion of the previously coherent architectural language. The first signs of this shift were already visible in the late 1970s, with accelerating spatial expansion driven by the construction of coastal apartment buildings and holiday homes (Poljanec-Borić and Šikić 2012: 174). A growing reduction in the number of public architectural competitions, which had traditionally provided a framework for critical evaluation and creative experimentation, contributed to a gradual decline in architectural quality on the Makarska Riviera. At the same time, the rise of private investment intensified market-driven dynamics, allowing investors to exert increasing control over architectural outcomes. As a result, architects were progressively constrained by financial imperatives, often at the expense of the experimental and avant-garde ambitions that had characterised the earlier phase of modernist architectural production.

Despite the gradual erosion of architectural coherence described above, the Makarska Riviera, much like other parts of the Adriatic coast, retained a comparatively high degree of spatial and stylistic control over tourism development well into the late twentieth century. This relative restraint distinguishes the Yugoslav Adriatic from a number of other mass tourism destinations and calls for a more nuanced explanation of the conditions under which touristification unfolded. As Jasenka Kranjčević has noted, international experts have retrospectively assessed the spatial planning of tourism in socialist Yugoslavia and Croatia positively, emphasising that the relationship between tourism and space was not conceived solely in economic terms, but also took into account broader spatial, cultural and environmental values (Kranjčević 2021: 1202).

[9] The building no longer serves its original function and has been repurposed as a storage space for Kingtrade for several years. Despite its architectural significance, it has not been formally recognised by state authorities. However, it has been acknowledged by local municipal services, and its size and design are safeguarded by the spatial planning regulations (*Glasnik Grada Makarske,* No. 27/23, ID of the PPUG, Art. 109, effective from 28.12.2023).

A complementary perspective is offered by more recent studies that situate Croatian coastal development within a wider international context. While comparison with less successful examples is not in itself a sufficient measure of quality, Michael Zinganel has pointed out that, in contrast to other Mediterranean destinations such as Spain, Montenegro or Bulgaria, the Croatian coast experienced a comparatively more controlled expansion of tourism infrastructure, preserving key aspects of its spatial structure and cultural identity (Zinganel 2013: 170). This relative success can be attributed to the fact that tourism development in Yugoslavia was framed as a broader cultural and political strategic objective, rather than a purely market-driven process. As such, it did not unfold entirely spontaneously, but was accompanied by parallel efforts to establish mechanisms of regulation and control. Further insight into the architectural consequences of this framework is provided by Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann and Michael Zinganel, who note that Yugoslav architects working along the Croatian coast were often compelled to develop highly individual design solutions in response to demanding topographies and steep coastal terrain (Beyer, Hagemann and Zinganel 2013: 28–29). This condition fostered a notable diversity of architectural forms and spatial concepts, particularly when compared to other socialist tourism contexts. In contrast, the large-scale resort developments along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast frequently relied on the repeated application of efficient standardised typologies, resulting in a more homogeneous architectural landscape. On the Adriatic, by comparison, site-specific constraints and professional autonomy encouraged architectural experimentation and variation, contributing to the distinctive character of the region's modernist tourism architecture.

A crucial factor in this context was the predominantly public character of development projects and the strong involvement of architectural and planning professionals in their conception. Extensive professional debates accompanied tourism-related construction, particularly in coastal areas characterised by complex historical stratification and highly sensitive natural settings. It is therefore not surprising that critical discourse surrounding late modernist interventions on the Adriatic increasingly converged around a specific evaluative criterion: the extent to which new architecture contributed authentically to local urbanity. Large-scale construction and radical landscape transformation were frequently met with scepticism or outright criticism, while individual architectural and urban projects were assessed primarily according to their degree of integration into the regional landscape and their sensitivity towards historical and cultural context.

Early criticism targeted not only the scale of transformation but also the aesthetic and stylistic qualities of new interventions. Milan Prelog argued that many of the misunderstandings surrounding contemporary architecture stemmed from the fact that it was insufficiently "regionally determined" (Prelog 1971: 75). Similarly, Duško Kečkemet emphasised that architecture could and should be contemporary, but only insofar as it constituted a continuation of regional tradition, one that evoked rather than imitated historical forms (Kečkemet 1975: 14). Critics consistently condemned the disregard for natural topography, the neglect of cultural and historical context, and the superficial or distorted interpretation of tradition. Yet even the most severe commentators acknowledged the existence of a number of hotel buildings whose spatial and architectural qualities exceeded the prevailing standards of architectural production (Pasinović 2001 [1971]: 103). These projects were praised precisely for their balanced negotiation between tradition and modernity.

It is these qualities that define the projects analysed in this study. Beyond their introduction of new architectural forms and modernist design principles, their success lies in the careful integration of architecture into the steep terrain of the Makarska Riviera, its distinctive green landscape framed by

sea and mountain, and its long-standing tradition of stone construction. Only once these conditions began to erode, with the gradual shift towards privatised development and the diminishing role of public competitions and professional oversight, did the architectural coherence of the region begin to falter. It is for this reason that the present study identifies this moment as marking the end of the modernist renaissance on the Makarska Riviera.

4. Conclusion

The architectural development of the Makarska Riviera during the second half of the twentieth century forms part of a broader transformation shaped by complex socio-cultural processes, most notably the emergence of tourism as a dominant driver of change. The origins of this transformation can be traced to the mid-1940s, when post-war reconstruction and spatial development strategies began to assign tourism an increasingly prominent role. A profound societal, and consequently spatial, shift occurred in the 1960s, driven by a convergence of local and national factors, including post-earthquake reconstruction, the construction of the Adriatic Highway, and Yugoslavia's strategic orientation towards generating foreign currency through international tourism. Within the span of four decades, the Makarska Riviera was transformed from a peripheral, underdeveloped and traffic-isolated coastal area into an internationally recognised tourist destination.

This process was inseparable from broader socio-political change and found its most tangible expression in architectural and urban development. Numerous spatial planning documents produced for the Makarska coastline in the post-war period testify to continuous efforts to respond to growing demands and capacities, which often resulted in the revision of long-term visions in favour of medium-term planning adjustments. Despite the frequency of these revisions and the pressures generated by expanding construction activity, such planning instruments nevertheless played an important regulatory role. In comparison with many other tourist destinations, they contributed to a more controlled spatial development of the Makarska coastline and helped mitigate the most extreme forms of uncontrolled expansion.

Within this dynamic framework, a generation of highly skilled and widely recognised architects, including Vlado Antolić, Božidar Rašica, Ante Rožić, Matija Salaja, Julija de Luca, Bernardo Bernardi, Rikard Marasović, Juraj Neidhardt, Petar Vulović, Milan Šoštarić, Olga Pavlinović, Dinko Milas and others, played a decisive role. Their work established a progressive architectural milieu whose most accomplished examples met international standards while remaining deeply rooted in the specific natural, cultural and topographical conditions of the Adriatic context.

The projects analysed in this study reveal a consistent effort to balance functional requirements with a sensitive response to the region's natural and cultural identity. While experimenting with modernist forms, materials and spatial concepts, many architects sought to respect the morphology of the terrain and the surrounding landscape, frequently incorporating elements of local tradition through the use of indigenous materials. This synthesis of functionality, formal freedom and responsiveness to place represents the highest level of architectural achievement on the Makarska Riviera during this period. The decades between the late 1940s and the early 1980s thus stand out as an exceptional phase in which regional modernism attained international relevance, before gradually yielding to the pressures of privatisation and market-driven development that would redefine the architectural landscape in subsequent decades.

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Sažetak

Makarska rivijera nakon Drugog svjetskog rata ulazi u proces duboke društvene i prostorne transformacije, potaknute širim modernizacijskim politikama socijalističke Jugoslavije i strateškim usmjerenjem prema razvoju turizma kao jednog od ključnih generatora gospodarskog rasta i deviznih prihoda. Do kraja 1940-ih riječ je o perifernoj, prometno slabo povezanoj i pretežno agrarnoj mikroregiji, no već u prvim poratnim desetljećima započinju sustavna ulaganja u prometnu infrastrukturu, industriju i planski razvoj obalnog prostora. Ti procesi kulminiraju tijekom 1960-ih godina, kada započinje puna afirmacija masovnog turizma i dolazi do ubrzane urbanizacije Rivijere.

Za razliku od brojnih drugih međunarodnih turističkih destinacija, razvoj Makarske rivijere odvijao se u okviru snažno reguliranog sustava prostornog planiranja i javnih investicija, uz izrazito aktivno sudjelovanje arhitektonske i urbanističke struke. Državni razvojni programi, regionalni prostorni planovi i sustav javnih natječaja omogućili su realizaciju velikog broja arhitektonski i urbanistički visoko vrijednih projekata, osobito u području turističke, javne i društvene infrastrukture. Upravo takav institucionalni okvir stvorio je preduvjete za nastanak iznimno kvalitetne modernističke arhitektonske produkcije, koja se po svojoj razini i raznolikosti može uspoređivati s najuspješnijim primjerima međunarodnog turističkog razvoja 20. stoljeća.

Rad se fokusira na razdoblje od kasnih 1940-ih do kraja 1970-ih godina, koje se u kontekstu Makarske rivijere može označiti kao svojevrsna „renesansa modernizma“. Analizom odabranih realiziranih i nerealiziranih arhitektonskih i urbanističkih projekata ukazuje se na ključne kvalitete tog razdoblja: funkcionalno promišljanje prostora, eksperimentiranje s modernističkim formama, osjetljiv odnos prema krajobrazu te integraciju lokalnih materijala i graditeljskih tradicija u suvremeni arhitektonski izraz.

Završetak analize u kasnim 1970-ima ne označava kraj transformacije prostora, već prekretnicu u razvojnim tendencijama. U tom razdoblju dolazi do postupnog slabljenja javnog i planskog karaktera izgradnje, smanjenja broja javnih arhitektonskih natječaja te jačanja privatnih i tržišno vođenih investicija. Time se mijenja uloga struke u oblikovanju prostora, a modernistički arhitektonski diskurs gubi svoju središnju poziciju. Ova studija stoga Makarsku rivijeru interpretira kao međunarodno relevantan primjer planski vođene turističke modernizacije te kao iznimno vrijedan modernistički arhitektonski poligon čije su ključne vrijednosti formirane u razdoblju između kasnih 1940-ih i kraja 1970-ih godina.

Ključne riječi: *Makarska rivijera, turistifikacija, modernizam, arhitektura, urbanizam*