



Art in the architecture of the National and University Library of Kosovo as the most attractive object in Europe

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Abstract

This paper deals with the architecture of the national and university library of Kosovo. internal and external image. artistic pages, domes, facade, outer space, contact with this space. The rest of the paper focuses on the exhibition of dictators like Kim Jung, whose photo was exhibited next to the Albanian renaissance. Their photographs were exhibited in the space of this Library. These materials from Korea elicited strong reactions from critics, who mainly saw the exhibition as promotion of a dictatorial system and its leaders. It was noted that this exhibition was held next to the portraits of Albanian National Renaissance figures, who were long-standing residents of the Library hall. On the second floor there were photographs, brochures and other stuff that presented North Korean life. Above all, there were two large photos of two former North Korean dictators: Kim Jong Sung and Kim Jong IL. Ah, and let's not forget Ismail Kadare's quote: "The relations of a great writer with a dictator are complex and difficult to explain, because they are both tyrants, but in this confrontation, the dictator is a false tyrant..."

Keywords: *Architecture, art, space, design, dome, Kosovo.*

Introduction

The National Library of Kosovo (Albanian: Biblioteka Kombëtare e Kosovës) is the highest library institution in Kosovo established by the Assembly and is located in Pristina. The mission of the library is to collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual heritage of Kosovo. It holds exhibitions and holds an archive of national newspapers. The library also provides a number of other services. It is known for its unique history, and the style of the building designed by Yugoslav architect Andrija Mutnjaković [hr], followed by controversies about the outside appearance of it. The history of libraries in Kosovo dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries. Collections of the Christian and Muslim religious communities are considered as the oldest archives libraries in Kosovo. Kosovo's institutional library was officially founded in December 1944 in the city of

Prizren. In 1982 the library was moved to the current building which was built in Pristina, the current capital of Kosovo. Over the years the National Library's name has changed depending on the political position of Kosovo. In 1989, Kosovo's status as an autonomous region of Serbia was revoked, tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanians working in the public sector lost their jobs, and Albanian students were prohibited from taking courses in the Albanian language. For public and private libraries in Kosovo, this was a time when many library collections were burned and destroyed.

The library was subsequently used to house a large number of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia who had fled their countries due to the Yugoslav Wars. After NATO's occupation of Kosovo in June 1999, it was revealed that the Yugoslav Army had used the library as a command-and-control centre. The

materials inside had been stolen, reading room furniture smashed, and the card catalogue had been dumped in the basement. The library workers were kept out for a week while Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping troops checked the building for any hidden explosives.

According to national and international organizations, about 100,000 Albanian-language books have been sent to the paper mill in Lipjan for pulping. Among those books were collections of national heritage, which explained the nation's origins and history.

The most significant part of the current library is its building. There are contradictory opinions about its style, which have resulted in different versions regarding the building. The current building of the National Library of Kosovo was inaugurated on 25 November 1982. It was designed by the Croatian architect Andrija Mutnjaković. Its space consists of 16,500 square meters. It is made

with zenith windows, with a total 99 domes of different sizes and is entirely covered in a metal fishing net, which have their own particular architectural symbolism.

It houses two reading rooms with 300 and 100 seats respectively, a reading room for periodicals, rooms for special collections, cataloguing and research, a 150-seat amphitheatre and a 75-seat meeting hall. It has the capacity to accommodate about two million volumes. The materials are located on two levels below ground and are closed to the public. The lobby of the library is used for various cultural events. The floor of the hall is a unique work of diverse mosaic marble stone. The largest dome of the library is the main ornament of the hall's high ceiling, thus providing ample natural lighting.



Figure1: The National Library of Kosovo



Figure 2: Domes of the national and university library of Kosovo

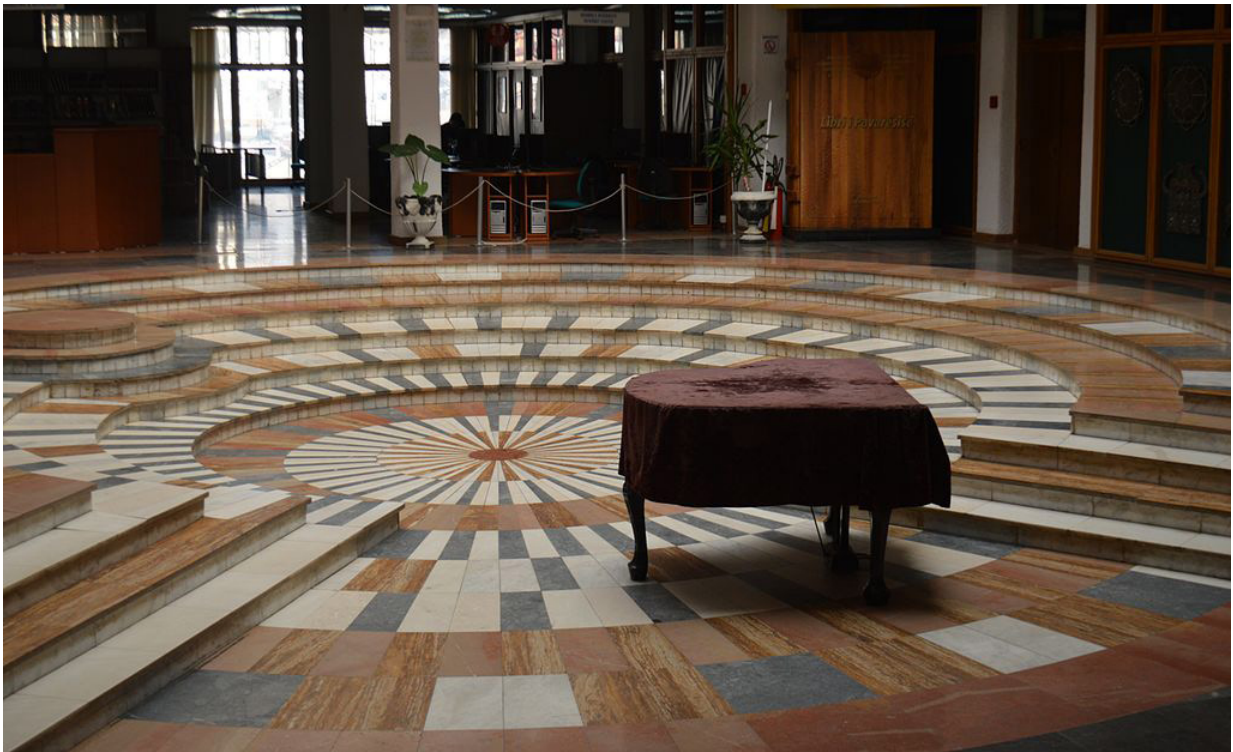


Figure 3: The main hall with the marble floor.



Figure 4: One of the amphitheatres inside the Library.



Figure 5: One of the reading rooms inside the Library.

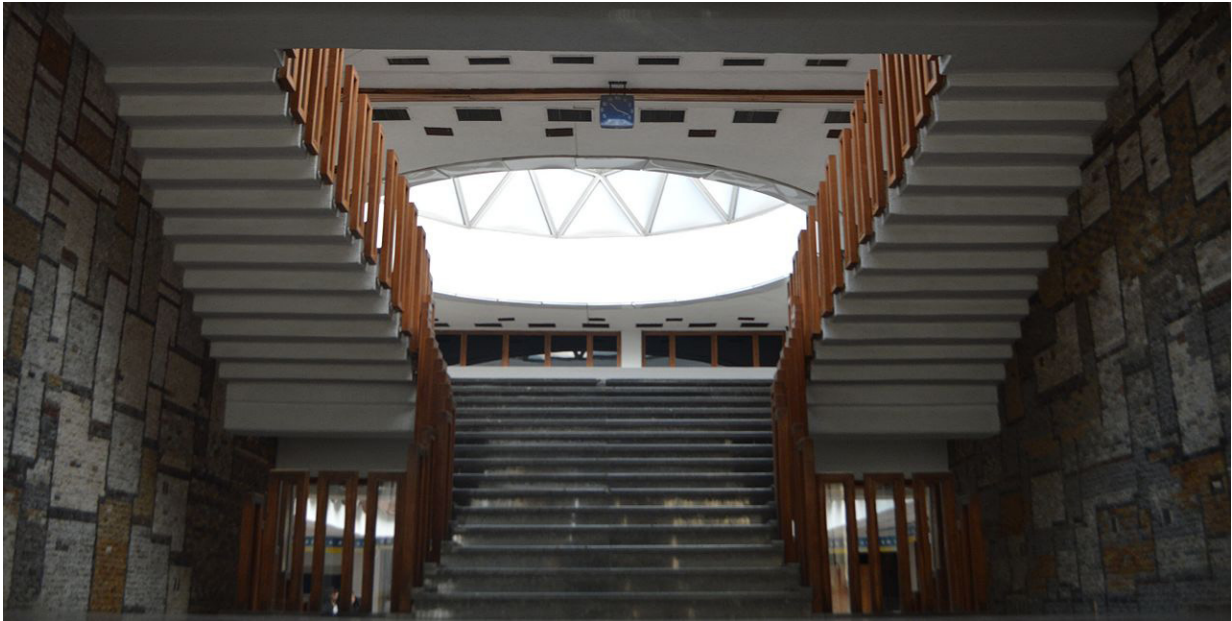


Figure 6: The view to the third floor.

Style and controversy

According to the architect of the National Library of Kosovo the building is meant to represent a style blending Byzantine and Islamic architectural forms. In other sources there are statements from the actual architect that "this project which is linked to the tradition of pre-Romanesque architecture of the Balkans, was being considered among other project for the Sarajevo National Library building".

By others this building is seen as a reaction to the impersonality of International Style and an attempt to combine modern means with regional traditions and rural architecture, but also as a Modern-Metabolist style. Despite the official statements of the architect about the style of the National Library of Kosovo there are many other controversies when it comes to the appearance of

the building and its meaning. One of the most famous versions is the one that connects the domes of the building with the national Albanian hat "plisi". This was the reason why Serbian politicians reacted very strongly about the appearance of the building.

Another version is that this project was meant to reconcile the relations between Serbians and Albanians. Its domes are a combination of existing Turkish baths in Prizren and Patriarchate of Peć.



Figure 7: Inside view of one of the domes



Figure 8: A rosette by Simon Shiroka of an old man wearing the Albanian hat "Plisi"



Figure 8: Circular rosettes by Simon Shiroka.



Figure 9: One of the domes inside the Library.

Digital library

Digitization for the National Library of Kosovo is a project of great importance. During this process, the National Library of Kosovo aims to put online the national heritage and other materials dealing with Kosovo to promote them and to make it easier for natives and individuals from other countries to have access to it. In 2008, with a view to developing a portal resembling the American Memory, Memory (Albanian: Kujtesa), the Documentary Centre of Kosovo was established.

Due to the very large number of documents that must be digitized, a process that takes a lot of time, the Library has established a sequence of criteria for documents that must be digitized before others and one of the basic criteria is the cultural and historical value of that material. Based on those criteria, these are the documents that have priority in digitization : most requested material which is in poor physical condition,

historical books and manuscripts, microfilms and other very required materials.

In general, materials that are most commonly digitized are rare books (49%), photographs (44%), manuscripts (39%), monographs (35%), music (30%), newspapers (9%), maps (1%).

Besides digitizing its own material the National Library of Kosovo provides access to some of the most popular electronic resources in the world and that made possible through the Electronic Library Consortium of Kosovo. For services for electronic resources in different libraries of the world the National Library of Kosovo was supported by Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, and by companies like EBSCO and GALE with financial support from the U.S. Embassy in Pristina. While Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo supported the Oxford Music Online and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo supported OXFORD Scholarship Online and Oxford Journal.



Figure 10: An analog catalog found in the National Library of Kosovo

Dictators in the National Library

North Korea exhibition at the National Gallery elicited strong reactions. When the K2.0 team visited “Guardians of Paradise, the hearts and minds of North Korea” exhibition at Pjetër Bogdani National Library in Prishtina, coincidentally we heard a conversation between three or four friends. Initially, the friends tried to enter one of the offices on the second floor of the library, but the door was closed. They stopped to wait, and perhaps to kill time, they started to discuss the exhibition.

The most vocal one of the group took charge of the conversation. He started to discuss the dictator Kim Jong Un, and then asked: “What are these Chinese guys doing here?” referring to North Koreans. While the others laughed, in what was one of the few interruptions of the babbler, one of his friends said: “Bro, it says North Korea here.”

“Whatever, aren’t they the same?” answered the first guy, and continued to comment on the close ties that Albania and China had 40 years ago, highlighting the name Enver Hoxha, following every sentence with the

question: “But for what?” – as in, what did he achieve? He no longer listened to his friend’s question, now his attention was attracted by a North Korean military uniform for babies – he was enthused by it.

We are not at all convinced that the group of friends didn’t know the difference between the two nations. Perhaps they noticed that we are journalists – maybe from our equipment – and were purposely being sarcastic in front of us, or perhaps they were cynical towards the exhibition. Or maybe they didn’t want to distinguish Chinese people from North Korean people, even though they knew the difference.

Those young men weren’t the only people that had something to say about the cinematic company Traavik. Info’s photography exhibition, that was exhibited from October 31 to November 11 at the Hall of the National Library. The exhibition – courtesy of Morten Traavik and Jørund F. Pedersen – displayed moments from North Korean daily life, a country that was visited more than 20 times by the authors.



Figure 11: Portraits of dictators among renaissance writers

In one of these visits, when director Morten Traavik organized a concert with the Slovenian band Laibach in 2015 – the first performance of a Western band in this country – a satirical official reception ceremony was organized for him and the band by the Head of the Committee for Cultural Relations, Mr. Ryu.

During the ceremony, Mr. Ryu described the industrial rock band as terrible, offensive and Neo-Nazi, since their clothes are similar to those of Nazis. From its founding in Yugoslavia in 1980, Slovenian band Laibach made a name for itself with parodies of totalitarianism, nationalism and militarism, as well as by using controversial images in their artworks.

For Mr. Ryu, it was unacceptable that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) – an antifascist country that fought against imperial Japan, former allies of European Nazis and Fascists – invited this band to perform at its capital in the 70th anniversary of its liberation.

Traavik's documentary film, which covered the Laibach concert in Pyongyang, was screened after the exhibition in Prishtina. In conversation with Traavik after the screening, he was as controversial as usual, although he presented himself as hurt by the reactions he elicited here with his work.

Next to the entrance of the National Library they placed a quote by Kim Jong IL, former supreme leader of North Korea: "National literature that is stripped of the spirit of national independence, is nothing but a body without a soul."

As you enter the interior of the library, on the side you see a quote by the writer Milan Kundera, commenting on the beginnings of totalitarianism and the creation of a totalitarian society: "Just as the dream of paradise turns to reality here and there, people start to place obstacles in this path, and as such the leaders of paradise must build a small gulag by Eden. With time, this gulag is continuously enlarged and perfected, while the neighboring paradise becomes smaller and poorer."

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relations of a great writer with a dictator are complex and difficult to explain, because they are both tyrants, but in this confrontation, the dictator is a false tyrant..."

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University professor Blerim Latifi commented on the exhibition on Facebook. "A friend of mine told me, but I didn't believe him! I went to see it for myself and it was true," he said. "It is a reality. On November 5, 2019, in Kosovo, in the institution that was established to contribute to culture and freedom, one of the dirtiest dictators that the world has known is being promoted." In fact, he believes that many of those who responded – who he describes as people "with close ties to current or past structures of power in Kosovo" – did not even come to see the exhibition, and that their reactions were exploited by the media, which didn't bother to show the other side of the story.

He believes that the exhibition was misunderstood due to misinformation, and blames the media for this. "The media have uncritically broadcast them [the reaction] in their purest form and to me this is quite problematic," he says. For him, this kind of reporting is dangerous, because the media should be "one of the few areas of diversity, where diversity is possible – especially online media."

Although in the beginning he thought that the reactions came as a result of the exhibition being misconstrued as a promotion of the North Korean regime, Traavik later changed his mind. He continues to blame the media for inciting these reactions. Traavik says that he is surprised because it is the first time that he wasn't contacted by the media, even though he was ready to discuss each piece of criticism directed towards him.

As for his work – which he calls an experiment – Traavik believes that it should not elicit a debate about whether North Korea is "good or bad," rather it should incite people to consider whether or not they have self-censorship tendencies. He connects this to the lack of response from arts critics; Traavik says that he spoke to

some of his friends who agreed with his work, but were silent. He calls this “the silence of good people.”

“Self-censorship can have two forms: You can stop yourself from saying something because you don’t want trouble, or, in a way, it is by now so deeply ingrained in your system, that you don’t even think about saying something,” says Traavik. “In fact, even in a country like North Korea – although naturally they are much more controlled – you don’t need two million policemen to supervise people, because they are censoring one another.”

However, professor Latifi doesn’t agree with this. In a second Facebook post, he said that exhibiting photos of North Korean dictators cannot be relativized by saying that this is freedom of expression or a work of art. “In the normal democratic world, content that is contaminated, be it physically or ideologically, is exhibited with critical explanations.”

“The summary of Milošević’s speeches cannot be published without critical explanations on the consequences that these speeches had,” Latifi went on. “If this is not done, than the exhibition of dangerous content is just marketing for the content. Just like the banner with Kim Jong IL’s sayings on the external walls of the National Library.”

Before bringing it to Prishtina, the authors took the exhibition to Gjirokastër, the birthplace of Albania’s former dictator Enver Hoxha.

According to Traavik, the fact that the exhibition was initially organized in Gjirokastër and received positively – even though Albania suffered so much at the hands of the communist regime – shows that it did not promote the North Korean regime.

“You know about Albanian communism, and I would have been less surprised in a way if I would have received this type of reactions in a place like Gjirokastra, because after all Albania was the country which resembled North Korea the most in comparison with other European countries. But this didn’t happen. On the contrary [they liked it there],” he says.

Traavik insists that people who have lived in a system similar to North Korea did not see it as promotional artwork, and says that he expected the same in Kosovo.

(Taken from: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/dictators-agitated/>)

Conclusion

as a conclusion, we came to the results that urban spaces like the library offer opportunities for different exhibitions without making racial, cultural and artistic differences. Her image, which is the most unique in Europe, gathers artists and ordinary people from all over the world every year. It houses two reading rooms with 300 and 100 seats respectively, a reading room for periodicals, rooms for special collections, cataloguing and research, a 150-seat amphitheatre and a 75-seat meeting hall. It has the capacity to accommodate about two million volumes. The materials are located on two levels below ground and are closed to the public. The lobby of the library is used for various cultural events. The floor of the hall is a unique work of diverse mosaic marble stone. The largest dome of the library is the main ornament of the hall’s high ceiling, thus providing ample natural lighting.

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