
ARCHITECTURE OF THE THIRD WAY

SRDJAN JOVANOVIĆ WEISS

Temple University

Architecture of the Third Way explores contemporary roles and meanings of architecture and urban design vis-a-vis the geo-political alliance between the developing countries called the Non Aligned Movement (NAM).

This paper summarizes political history of the *Non Aligned Movement* in relation to forces that led it to build infrastructure, architecture and urbanism as a way of progress. The “third way” of doing this is to be seen historically as not dependent neither from the hegemony of the West, nor the influence of the former Soviet Republic, the two *star* enemies of the former Cold War.

First of all, what is the “third way”, socially, politically and then spatially in architectural and urban practice?

THE THIRD WAY

The *third way* of globalization and development refers to the union of the developing countries that discovered that they did not need superpowers in order to advance their own status. Furthermore, philosopher Slavoj Žižek defines the *third way* as a sort of a global autonomous movement, where it is clear that the poorer countries have courage to self-organize in order to go beyond the colonization they were under.

The *Non Aligned Movement* (NAM) was found in 1961 in Belgrade, capital of former Yugoslavia. It was arranged in order to collectivize the third world countries that were not part of either the West capitalist or the East communist block. NAM was found to make an economical, if not pragmatic, bridge among the nations that were not involved in the Cold War between the USA and the USSR.

Yugoslavia was one of the few main founders of NAM, together with Egypt, India, Ghana, Ethiopia and Indonesia. At the beginning four main protagonists of this movement were Josip Broz Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Sukarno and Haile Selassie. The six leaders started to cover the globe creating a sort of the prototypical “political equator”. Initially NAM connected Europe (Yugoslavia), Africa (Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia), Middle East (India) and Far East (Indonesia). Later on, several leftist leaders from Latin America joined NAM movement such as Cuba.

However the forging of this global alliance did not go as smooth as it was intended. The initial six countries gradually were reduced to the three founding countries of NAM: Egypt, India and Yugoslavia. The leaders of those countries at the time shook hands at the first conference of NAM in Belgrade in 1961. The key developing countries, one from Europe, one from Africa and one from Asia and the Middle East sealed the international contract of economical collaboration independent of both USA and USSR.

This gave birth to the three major new globalization powers of NAM. The first was India with Nehru's initial ideology of the non-alignment that he presented at the Bandung conference held in 1954 in Indonesia. The second was Nasser's promise to offer the access to both the muslim world of Africa in the North as well as access to entire Africa. The third one was Tito's pragmatic eye on offering highly educated engineers, traders as well as architects to craft this new international conglomerate as a viable sign of global progress.

The NAM movement has changed largely since 1961, but also it grew rapidly. Until 1989 and the Fall of Berlin Wall NAM had about 2/3rd of the planetary countries as its members and observers. 1989 marked the end of the Cold War, as well as the beginning of Balkan Wars, piecing apart Yugoslavia, one of the founding countries of NAM.

For Yugoslavia, as one of the founding members of NAM, the dramatic changes in international politics meant complete re-organization of territorial politics. Tito died in 1981, first Kosovo Albanian protest arose in 1982, multiple ethnic nationalist forces start the geo-political process known as “balkanization” and it took 7 years for it to develop and solidify politically before the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989. The wars in the Balkans started in 1990 and last until 1995. Then the crisis of Kosovo all the way until 1999, and finally NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in the Spring of 1999.

For NAM, Yugoslavia was out of their membership already in early 1990s. This was due to Slobodan Milosevic's nationalist politics, that led to wars later. However the idea of NAM remained, especially in the construction sector that had contracts with the countries such as Libya, Iraq, Iran, Zimbabwe and others.

During the 1990s post-modernism exploded on the scene impacting nearly all architectural aspects inside the crumbling state of

Yugoslavia. The crumbling state of Yugoslavia is one of NAM's founding members.

As Yugoslavia fell into the spiraling effects of war and crisis, the international priorities changed abruptly. Those priorities went from being international to become national. The *Balkanization* that occurred during the fall of Yugoslavia marked the era that every emerging state was suddenly on their own.

Even with the development of the local brand "Turbo Architecture," the international engineering contracts that *Energoprojekt* held maintained modern and straightforward solutions. The separation between domestic postmodern architecture and modern engineering abroad led to a nearly schizophrenic situation within the Socialist idea of globalization. On one hand would become the main architectural tool for Milošević's nationalist agenda, and on the other hand the company projected its international image as a successful global engineering corporation to the Middle and Far East as well as Africa, and increasingly in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

NAM provided the broader network is the one that the former socialist economic interest developed as an expertise in construction and infrastructure first.

This political network was not meant to be ideological, meaning to be positioned against neither capitalism nor communism, but to be operative as a collagen for the poor nations that found themselves as the collateral damage of the Cold War and superpower geo-politics.

THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE

In 2006 Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas visited *Energoprojekt*, the former Yugoslav engineering giant, in Belgrade, Serbia. He interviewed *Energoprojekt's* chief engineer and manager who worked from the 1970s to the 1990s in Lagos, Nigeria, and in other countries of the Non-Aligned Movement. The content of this interview has not been made public and at this time there are no plans for its publication. The presentation will use this interview by Koolhaas to chart the history of and its architectural implications during the transition from state-supported modern architecture of late socialism to today's crisis of emerging capitalist democracy.

The advent of the socialist corporate architecture giant *Energoprojekt* is thanks to its engineering rather than its architectural knowledge. The engagement of *Energoprojekt* in Nigeria was not because of any esthetics agendas, but because of agendas of the efficiency of construction in the developing world.

These construction technologies proved more influential than architectural calls for esthetics. The main example is the construction of the Lagos International Fair in Nigeria.

Architecture and engineering as well as military trade played major roles in this geo-political development of the third way. Thus

architecture can be investigated as playing a large role in the NAM political developments.

By the mid-1980s the architecture department of the major Belgrade-based state corporation *Energoprojekt* was expanded to receive talented young designers to help meet the immediate need for design services commissioned from the various NAM governments. This urgent jump in demand made *Energoprojekt* the most important commercial entity within any Socialist system. Thanks to NAM, *Energoprojekt* received massive infrastructural and military projects in the Middle East and Africa which included architectural commissions. These were mostly state projects in such places as Libya and Iraq, but also included semi-commercial commissions for hotels in Zimbabwe, and Fairs and Stadiums in Nigeria.

Much of this international infrastructure is generated through political agreements and alliances that are not always politically logical and aligned. The main example is the political commission, through NAM, to have Yugoslav engineers design the master plan of Lagos International Fair in Nigeria.

When we look at the master plan of the International Fair in Lagos we see the color coded organization of the fair. This organization is based on circular arrangement of roads, infrastructure and placement of signature buildings within this system of zoning.

If we venture into the technology of the complex of the Lagos International Fair, we are confronted with a production of a single triangular module. This module, designed to be the part the ceiling structure has been extracted to the entire complex. It is the fabrication of a single triangular cast concrete segment that makes all of these spaces possible.

The singular module affected the shape of the local football stadium at the Lagos International Fair. This use of a single construction module upset the geometry of the football stadium and its own standards.

Why is this at the same time creative and seemingly off from any kind of standard practice of construction? In Koolhaas's interview, the engineer responsible for the project explains that the creativity had to meet broad pragmatism of construction in a Third World country.

Internally, that call for pragmatism caused the optimization of designer teams that could follow it, within a state company like *Energoprojekt*. The others, who were left out, could have not been fired from their jobs.

Thus we have scheme of design labor which is unparalleled by the mainstream Western standards. That is that anyone who did not perform was left intact, with a hope that he or she may be useful in the future, or in other locations that needed spatial expertise.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

The research on the contemporary aspects of the Non Aligned Movement vis-a-vis architecture provides an insight in how third world nations self organize, and self regulate in terms of spatial planning and architecture, when they feel that they are under the trends of the developed countries.

The main challenge in this research is to distill global design potentials that can come out of the organization such as NAM.

One can also say, that NAM is one of the pioneering global organizations that do not have a center, in a way reflecting what information age has brought along much later.

What is critical is that the spatial practices in relation and surrounding NAM organization can be explored as creative spatial practices that do not have fixed locality.

The future of NAM is not as that crucial for this presentation as the fact that spatial practices coming out of it may gathered skills, knowledge and expertise for building social space that is beyond any agenda of either former West or former East.

WHITE NOISE

"Yugoslavs are the real friends of the Arabs...Yugoslavia is a real socialist country and not something else."

"I liked the freedom enjoyed in Yugoslavia and the way in which its peoples respect each other and draw together, although they are of several different nationalities. I also noted with pleasure that the Moslems are free and respected and may practice their religion as they wish. I saw many mosques being built in Yugoslavia. Its millions of Moslems form a very strong element of friendship between Yugoslavia and the Moslem countries, including the Libyan Arab Republic." - Muammar al-Qaddafi, 1974

On September 3, 1989, Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi stepped off an airplane at Belgrade's Sur in Airport. Dressed in white, the colonel-turned-president nodded to onlookers as ground engineers set about emptying the contents of his plane. His entourage of all-female bodyguards—Amazonian both in scale and beauty—stealthily dispersed, as they tend to, and surveyed the grounds. The following day, the Libyan and dozens of other heads of state were to assemble at the ninth summit meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, the international organization of over 100 "developing" states, spanning from Cuba to China, that had made a vaguely yet romantically defined "Independence!"—be it from the shackles of imperialism or the influence of any and all superpowers—their war cry and *raison d'être*.

Under former President for Life Josip Broz Tito's tutelage, Yugoslavia had reached out to Qaddafi, eventually playing a prominent role in the development of the North African state. During the next twenty-eight years, several thousand Yugoslav citizens moved back

and forth between the countries, taking part in elaborate infrastructural projects in the desert, from building hospitals to paving roads. The large and complex naval academy in Tripoli, for example, was the work of Yugoslav architects employed by Energoprojekt, a company with multimillion dollar contracts throughout the country. The building was simple, modern, orthogonal, fashioned from prefabricated concrete, and, in true international corporate style, set in an office park. In return for the assistance, Tito received barrels of Libyan oil at bargain prices. It was, you could say, diplomacy by way of barter, and it managed to bring Tito's Yugoslavia into the world market. Positioned between East and West, a member neither of NATO nor of the Warsaw Pact, the country benefited economically from Tito's dealings with Libya: it was good news for the economy.

In Qaddafi, Tito (who along with Nehru, Sukarno, Nasser, and Nkrumah was one of the founding fathers of the Non-Aligned Movement) found a partner in shaping his vision of an exciting new geopolitical front and moment. The Libyan, after all, was especially good at positioning himself in relation to master-narratives, be they religious (Pan-Islam), geographic (Pan-African), ethnic (Pan-Arab), or winning-team (I heart Tony Blair) in nature. And so in the 1970s, Qaddafi found an unlikely ally as he fashioned his "Islamic socialism."

But when Qaddafi arrived in Yugoslavia in September 1989, the honeymoon had come to an end. Tito had been dead for nearly a decade. The Yugoslav economy was sputtering. A fractious nationalism was on the rise, and the first calls for self-determination were emanating from Kosovo. A certain Montenegrin named Slobodan Milosevic was the new despot in town and he would destroy Yugoslavia, not least by destroying the tolerant, multi-denominational framework of Tito's mid-century creation.

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

The airplane that brought Qaddafi to Belgrade was full of tribute. It carried one ton of Arabian sand brought from Libya, a massive white tent (*de rigueur* for the president, who only slept in his own tents), and a small number of camels and horses (Qaddafi was a devotee of camel milk). A selection of gifts for his hosts included traditional Bedouin folk craftwork and pieces of highly geometric, highly modernist Libyan art. Later those mementos were placed in shiny glass cases in one of Tito's many palaces used as receptacles for gift eclecticas.

Habituated as he was to getting his way, Qaddafi asked that he be able to ride atop one of his horses to the 1989 summit's opening ceremony. Instead—Milosevic's people said no—a compromise was struck. Arriving in a black stretch limousine, he would step onto custom-made Serbian-manufactured faux Persian carpets laid out just for him. His white tent was erected on the grounds of the obliquely named Libyan People's Bureau, just a few hundred yards from Tito's former home. Ordinary people who drove by every morning still recall the cordoned-off miniature zoo of camels and horses

that was set up beside the president's white tent. Camels were milked on the lawn every morning. At conference end, Qaddafi donated them to the Belgrade Zoo, where at least a couple of them remain to this day as tokens of the time.

TURBO BOOST

It is fittingly (and fleetingly) ironic that today, twenty years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and at a time when the Non-Aligned Movement has all but lost what cachet it once had, the two former allies—each one reborn in a new historical moment—are once again becoming fast friends. Qaddafi, after all, had famously shaken hands with the Western devil, his theatrical contrarianism all but shoved under the proverbial faux-Persian rug as he embraced reform, dismantled his weapons of mass destruction, and started playing golf with the likes of John Negroponte. In 2006, the US State Department announced that it would restore full diplomatic relations with Qaddafi, the onetime godfather of terrorism. Serbia, meanwhile, was now one straggling piece of what had once been a gloriously unified Yugoslav nation. The country was a shadow of its former self, trying to regain a foothold—economically, politically, culturally—in a new Europe.

And so, in January 2005, when a delegation of politicians from Serbia boarded a state-sponsored flight to Tripoli, it seemed that change was in the air. Within its ranks were politicians and businessmen, including Boris Tadic, the former president of Serbia himself. [(It should also be noted that within the entourage were one dozen female singers—traditional, neo-folk and what they call turbo-folk in style, temperament, dress.)

The long-dormant friendship had rekindled. *Energoprojekt* would prove to be one of the primary beneficiaries of this rekindling, winning the rights to construct Libya's new thousand-mile-long railway system. Contracts for thermoelectric systems, harbors, and arms were also signed. Even without the ideological umbrella of non-alignment to grease and propel exchange, it was back to business as usual. Business, after all, is the original source and the pragmatic idea of the Non Aligned Movement.