

## **Identity of Architecture: The Case of the National Library of Kosovo**

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*This article is part of a research on concepts that belong to theoretical speculation in the discipline of architecture. The main intention is to shed light on the relationship of these theoretical concepts with the construction of architectural form and the episteme of architecture itself. One such concept is the identity of architecture. In this context, this research aims to clarify the interplay between identity – as a theoretical concept that is directly related to the form – and the architectural discipline. The first hypothesis is that architectural forms do not have a particular identity detached from their formal essence, but have an identity expressed by morphology. Second, different architectures, being forms of representations, express an external identity depended on the historical, political, social or cultural conditions. This article defines three main plans through which the identity of an architectural work is manifested: formal, stylistic/linguistic, and technological. The followed methodological approach is based on a theoretical analysis of the concept of identity, its contextualization within the discipline of architecture, and the interpretation of the results of such analysis through the case study of the National Library of Kosovo, built in Prishtina during 1971-1982. The study of the National Library is conceived as an example where the results obtained at a theoretical level and which aim to further clarify the discourse on the presented concepts, are expected to be verified.*

### **Introduction**

Architecture is a field of representation of society and its material existence, which depends on the context, users and historical conditions. As such it is commonly related to the concept of *identity*, be it national, religious, cultural, or other. In this context, the fundamental premise of the research is that an architectural work expresses a certain external identity, while at the same time has its own identity. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are: 1) to decipher the identity of architecture by unfolding the plans in which it appears; 2) to understand how an architectural work is used to represent the identity of the state and society. The first objective is addressed through the introduction of three plans which define the identity of architecture using its own features. These are the formal plan, the stylistic/linguistic plan and the technological plan. Here, we are to deal with aspects of a building such as typology, geometry, proportions, aesthetics, and the technology and materials used for its construction. The second objective is related to wider political, economic, cultural, and social conditions and events, which are

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represented through architecture and determine how the individual is identified with a work of architecture.

The presented research is part of the studies within the field of architectural theory, focusing on the period of modernism. The methodological design is based on a mix of research methods, including literature review, textual analysis, case-study research, and morphological-typological and aesthetical analysis of a building. In this way it is developed a theoretical discussion related to the meaning of *identity* and its emergence on the architectural discipline, through the discussion and interpretation of concepts presented by authors such as Manfredo Tafuri,<sup>1</sup> Franco Purini,<sup>2</sup> Carlos Martí Arís<sup>3</sup> or Raimundo Panikkar.<sup>4</sup> The results of this discussion which constructs the theoretical framework, are interpreted and tested through the case study, the National Library of Kosovo, built in the capital city of Prishtina during 1971-1982 (at the time when Kosovo was an Autonomous Socialist Province of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).

On one hand, the study of this specific building is precisely developed in the context of form, style/language and technology, in order to decipher its own *architectural identity*. On the other hand – by analyzing the ideological, political, economic, cultural and social context in Prishtina, Kosovo, and former Yugoslavia – the building will be used to understand how architecture is utilized as a *symbol of identity* (i.e., having the function of an identifying representation, being so inherent to the individual's experience and memory). By introducing and defining the aspects through which the identity in the architectural practice is studied, this research contributes to the emergence of new tools for interpreting architectural works, and the relating of the theoretical dimension of the discipline of architecture, to a concrete and practical level.

### Identity in Architecture

When discussing about *identity* in the discipline of architecture, it has to be emphasized that the term has two meanings, referring both to the internal features of a building and to the external conditions that the building identifies, i.e., *identities* that it represents. Referring to Raimundo Panikkar – although the author's analysis extends to the religious dimension – one can understand that the difference between these two meanings lies on the fact that the first has an objective and material character, while the second is based on interpretation and is a subjective process within which different relations occur.<sup>5</sup> Based on this, identity appears as an internal quality of the object, independent of the observing subject. This does not imply that the object is detached from the context (e.g., site

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1. M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1976).

2. F. Purini, *Të Kompozosh Arkitekturën* (Tirana: Polis Press, 2019).

3. C. Martí Arís, *Las Variaciones de la identidad: ensayo sobre el tipo en arquitectura* (Barcelona: Serbal, 1993).

4. R. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books, 2004).

5. Ibid, 154.

condition, social relations, etc.), but rather it has a particular relation with the context, which occurs at an individual level and experience, regardless the qualities of the object.

In order to extend the above distinction from a theological plan to the discipline of architecture, it can be considered that the internal identity of architecture is expressed through its material aspects. First, it is listed the geometry of an architectural work and the report or relation between specific parts inside the whole building, which are used to give form to the building. Secondly, it can be listed how this geometry is manifested in the stylistic and linguistic plan. And the third is listed the technology through which the building is constructed. Differently put, within the identity of architecture are included all the aspects that affect the materiality of the building, and are expressed through the physical and tangible dimension.

Through all the features listed above, an architectural work is then used to identify something other than itself. For instance, the emerging American nation in the eighteenth century, gave concrete form to its representative democracy through the use of neoclassical architecture and Baroque forms of city planning, utilized in L'Enfant plan for Washington, D.C.<sup>6</sup> A specific morphology and a specific architectural language were adapted to address the politico-ideological programme of the United States' government, which would constitute the identity of the American nation.

The identification with an architectural work is also an individual or collective interpretation of a certain building, neighborhood, or city, based on experience. But, the building, neighborhood, or the city, exist with their formal and aesthetic identity, regardless of the interpretation or identifications that a particular individual or social group has or not with them. This is confirmed by Manfredo Tafuri, who referring to Georg Simmel, writes on the *blasé* attitude of the *Baudelairian flâneur*, to show that one can experience the architectural and urban form independently of the form itself<sup>7</sup>. In this line, according to Franco Purini, there is a kind of *distracted perception*, which characterizes personal experiences of the city space.<sup>8</sup> In this case, architecture is not an element that one can search for it in the city – as a work of art, a concert or a book may be – but it appears randomly to the observer.<sup>9</sup> These references show that the individual's approach to architecture can be passive, and that the internal independent identity of the building exists even without being recognized by him/her; just as a building with its identity can exist on the other side of the world, but one does not identify it or is not being identified with it.

To understand the identity of architecture, which is then related to the presentation of particular external identities, it is important to define each of the plans introduced at the beginning. The first plan, which has to do with the formal identity, is closely related to the geometry of a building and the elements that constitute it. This identity is expressed in formal and typological terms and

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6. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, 1976.

7. Ibid, 78-86.

8. Purini, *Të Kompozosh Arkitekturën*, 2019, 53.

9. Ibid, 54.

includes, starting from the first archetypes, all the formal types that the individual has created in the long process of construction. Taking into consideration the definition that Martí Arís makes regarding the three universal categories of architecture<sup>10</sup> – constructed on Karl Popper's epistemological principles of the *Objective Knowledge* and the division of "three worlds" – it can be defined what is meant with *formal identity*. Arís has already distinguished the three universal categories of architecture in building elements or parts, formal relationships between these elements or parts, and architectural types.<sup>11</sup>

Based on what is stated above, the formal identity unfolds in these three overlapping *layers*. First, it relates to the elements of a building and its shapes. These elements can have different geometries that determine their identity. For instance, a vertical element (the column) can be circular or square in base. This layer implies the geometric relation of the filled parts of the building such as columns and walls, but can also be applied to the geometry and the shape of empty parts, of openings such as doors and windows. The second layer refers to the relationship and proportions that these elements create with each other. This is expressed by what Vitruvius describes as *eurythmia* and *symethria*, re-interpreted as the concept of *concinnitas* by Alberti. This layer deals with the proportions of a single element and the proportions formed between the various elements that constitute a building. The third layer of the formal identity of a building is formed by the typology and geometry, dependent on the way in which the elements are placed and the formal type that they create.

Elements of a certain building can have different geometries and shapes, and this expresses the layer of the formal plan. The same elements may have a different geometric ratio, defining – based on these relationships – different morphology, expressing in this way the second layer of the formal plan. The same elements can be distributed and placed according to a linear, circular, or mixed typology, thus, constituting the third layer of the formal plan.

The second plan for the definition of the identity of architecture is the stylistic/linguistic one. From the geometric/formal point of view, there are many examples of the same typology that is expressed in different languages or architectural styles. The cases are numerous, but we can mention architectural works belonging to the same formal typology, for example, the Villa Capra by Palladio, La Rotonde by Ledoux, Altes Museum by Schinkel, the Stockholm Library by Asplund, the Capitol of Chandigarh by Le Corbusier, the Gallery of Stuttgart by James Stirling or even Mario Botta's Rovereto Museum. All these cases, although they have the same formal structure, are distinguished for their stylistic or linguistic expression.

To clarify further, if Saint Peter's Basilica is compared to the Taj Mahal in terms of typology, according to the Vitruvian *iconographic* level, there are similarities expressed in the type of *enclosure* with an inscribed circle. The similarities are not only on the functional side, as both buildings are places that celebrate memory, but above all at the level of formal typology. The only difference between these two artistic masterpieces lies in the language that is used.

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10. Martí Arís, *Las Variaciones de la identidad: ensayo sobre el tipo en arquitectura*, 1993, 33.

11. Ibid.

Saint Peter with a language that celebrates the memory of the Christian apostle and religious histories through metaphors that have in the center the image of man, and the Taj Mahal which due to religious influences maintains an idiosyncratic attitude towards real images by being decorated with geometric motifs.

The last plan that determines the identity of a building is related to the technology and materials used for its construction, which can be from the most ancient to the most modern, from the most natural to the most artificial, and which can vary depending on the context. The choice of technology and materials is always in the function of the stylistic/linguistic plan, while both of these aspects interact to construct the formal identity which appears almost independent of them.

Finally, we can add that in the formal plan, architecture has a universal, almost cosmic dimension. There are no major differences between the forms of architecture constructed in different places. Even if we find any difference, it would still be minimal and not significant. The most obvious distinction exists between the stylistic/linguistic plan and the technological aspect. In this context, on iconographic level, the National Library of Kosovo, whose analysis will be developed based on the three defined plans, can also be considered as an *enclosure* with an inscribed circle, similar to all the monuments mentioned above. The differences with other architectural works are represented through the architectural languages and stylistic references.

### Setting the Context: The National Library of Kosovo

The National Library of Kosovo, built in the capital city of Prishtina – between 1971 and 1982, was designed by the Croatian architect Andrija Mutnjaković. Its construction is part of the city's general urban transformation which starts after the end of the Second World War (1945) and continues until the late 1980s, a period during which Kosovo was an Autonomous Socialist Province within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For the city of Prishtina – which until the end of the Second World War was an underdeveloped urban center with distinguished oriental morphological and stylistic features – the period after 1945 has been determinant for important political, economic, social, and cultural events, in both local and federative level, which were initially manifested in urban planning and architecture.<sup>12</sup> In this context, it is necessary to explain the social conditions in Prishtina and former Yugoslavia in relation to architectural achievements, to understand the identity of the National Library, particularly in stylistic/linguistic and technological aspects, and to decipher what the architecture of the building identifies and on what terms the citizens of Prishtina are identified with it.

In socialist Yugoslavia, modernist architecture and urbanism were critical in the construction of socialism, being means for differentiating new typologies from the capitalist form of urbanization, aiming at the *de-Ottomanization* of the urban

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12. A. Sadiki, "Reflections of Sociopolitical Developments in the Architecture of Prishtina During 1945-1990", in *Prishtina New European Capital: Images of a City to be Discovered* (eds.) L. Rossi, B. Aliaj et al. (Tirana: POLIS Press, 2019), 18.

space.<sup>13</sup> The socialist Yugoslav city was the field where political power intended to express the social progress by destroying the former – capitalist/bourgeoisie system, spatially represented by Ottoman buildings and public spaces.<sup>14</sup> The dominant ideology of the period was that of “Brotherhood and Unity”, a ‘homogeneous Yugoslavism’ built on the idea of social unification, and political and economic centralization. It aimed to transcend all forms of ethnic, religious, or regional identity to develop a “Yugoslav identity”.<sup>15</sup>

Starting from the late 1960s, development in architecture and urbanism occurred simultaneously with wider social, political, economic, cultural, and constitutional changes, which somehow allowed the fostering of a sense of identification of each entity within Yugoslavia, leading to the idea of ‘national identity’, which then would contribute to the general image of the former federate. After 1966, the ideology of “homogenous Yugoslavism” started to vanish, opening way for greater national development, including twenty years of general development for Kosovo.<sup>16</sup> In this context, between the late 1960s and late 1980s, Prishtina experienced the most significant urban and architectural transformations.

This period is characterized by a considerable number of construction-reconstruction activities, defined by a modernist architectural discourse and an ideological background based on the concept of *identity*. The dominant typology of the period was landmark architecture. Architectural works were constructed almost spatially autonomous from each other, but have a strong character of space formation,<sup>17</sup> in unbuilt and undeveloped urban areas, by creating new centralities in the city and forming separate urban fragments.

Examples of this phenomenon are the National Library of Kosovo, the Palace of Youth and Sports, Rilindja Publishing House, the former Ljubljanska Bank, and other public buildings considered important for the statehood of Kosovo. From this group, the National Library of Kosovo (Figure 1) is probably the most distinguished case. Constructed at the very center of the University of Prishtina Complex, the National Library is defined by Kosovo Albanian architect and professor Teuta Jashari Kajtazi in her doctoral thesis, as *the first, leading, and strongest interpretation of the period*.<sup>18</sup> Analyzing her interpretation of the building, one can understand that the Library is one of the few landmarks in Prishtina which maintained its form and function until today, as it has managed to

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13. F. Jerliu, and V. Navakzi, “The Socialist Modernization of Prishtina: Interrogating Types of Urban and Architectural Contributions to the City,” *Mesto a Dejiny* 7 (2018): 66-74.

14. I. Gjinolli, “From Ottoman to Modern – Transformation of Prishtina 1945-1990,” in *Prishtina New European Capital. Images of a City to be Discovered* (eds.) L. Rossi, B. Aliaj, et al. (Tirana: Polis Press, 2019), 50-63.

15. T. Kajtazi, *Behind the National Identity: Politics and Social Activity Through Architecture – Liberal Socialism in Kosovo* (Wien: TU Wien, 2016).

16. Ibid.

17. D. Papa, “Envisioning the Future of Prishtina: An Image Shaped by the Spatial Experience,” in *Prishtina New European Capital. Images of a City to be Discovered* (eds.) L. Rossi, B. Aliaj, et al. (Tirana: Polis Press, 2019), 34-41.

18. Kajtazi, *Behind the National Identity: Politics and Social Activity Through Architecture – Liberal Socialism in Kosovo*, 2016, 92.

retain its original character and resist all the changes Kosovo underwent since the 1970.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 1.** *Left: The National Library of Kosovo, Areal View; Right: The National Library of Kosovo, View from the Entrance*

Source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/national-library-in-prishtina>.

### Identity of Architecture in the Case of the National Library of Kosovo

A proper analysis of the architecture of the National Library of Kosovo is related to what the building represents in terms of the ideological and urban-architectural context in Prishtina (and Former Yugoslavia) and to the division of architectural identity in the formal, stylistic/linguistic, and technological plan. Critical to understand and distinguish in this case, are two contexts. The first is the identity of the architecture of the Library, and the second is the identification with the architecture of the Library.

#### Formal Plan

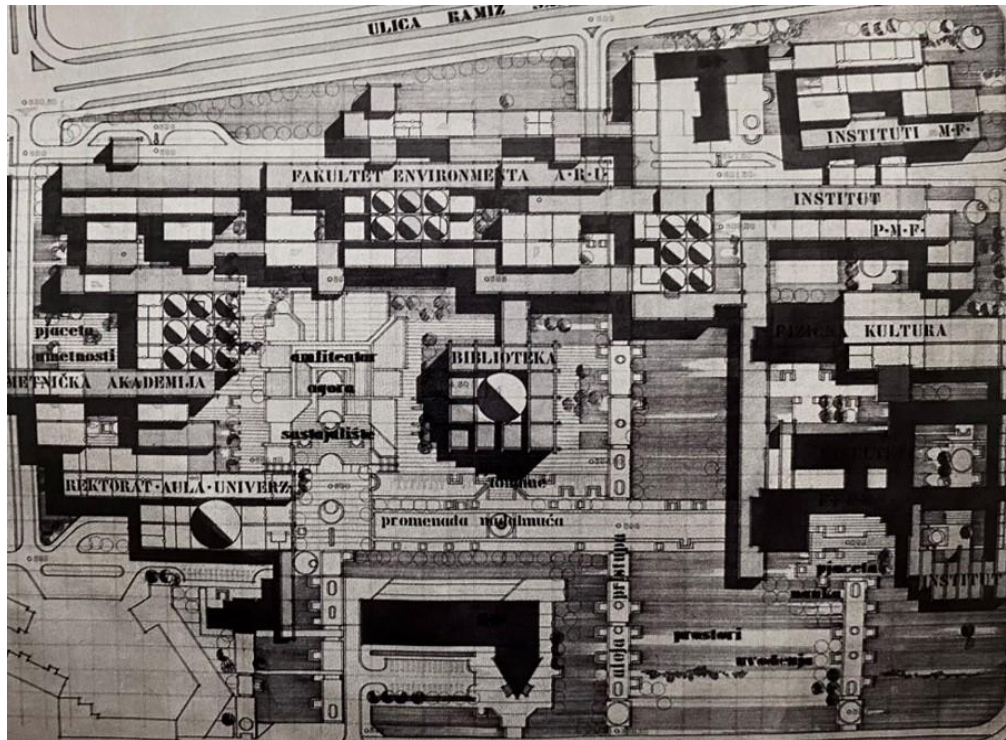
The initial formal parameters of the National Library were determined with the master plan for the University of Prishtina Center, which was drafted in 1971 by the Urbanism and Design Institute in Prishtina (Figure 2). The project was led by Kosovo Albanian architect Bashkim Fehmiu, in consultation with the architect from Belgrade, Bogdan Bogdanović, both being regular CIAM delegates. Although the master plan is categorized as an urban project, it contains the fundamental principles to shape the space from the architectural point of view,<sup>20</sup> in the sense of form and function. The general framework of the design is considered to be the construction module with a cubical structure covered with a dome. These principles are followed in the project for the National Library, designed by the Croatian architect Andrija Mutnjaković. Practically, what Mutnjaković was doing with the combination of cubes and domes in architectural work, Fehmiu did in urbanism with spaces and domes. The architect of the Library worked on a similar proposal for the competition for the Sarajevo library in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

19. Ibid.

20. Sadiki, *Arkitektura e Ndërtesave Publike në Prishtinë* (Prishtina: Blendi, 2020), 122.



characterized by cubes and domes, yet different in size, shape, functional organization, and spatial layout.<sup>21</sup> The project was not selected to be constructed but raised a discussion among professionals. Fehmiu saw the project and believed that it would fit his plan for the University Centre, to which Mutnjaković referred as “a city, a small city in the center of Prishtina”.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 2.** *The University of Prishtina Center, Ground Plan*

Source: Sadiki, 2020.

The formal layout of the Library, which is based on a proportional system combining the grid with concentric circles, is entirely inserted within a quadrant whose diagonals equal the diameter of the circle (Figure 3). In terms of geometry and form, the building is an example of the typology represented by an inscribed circle, similar to Saint Peter’s Basilica or the Taj Mahal. The seven-story building with 12000 square meters of usable space is characterized by two compositional elements: the cube and the dome (Figures 4 and 5). These two elements create the form of the building, representing layers of Islamic and Byzantine architecture, to be found in Kosovo and the region.<sup>23</sup> The combination of cube and dome in the architecture of the National Library, as two dominant and multiplied morphological elements, also recalls the typology of famous works of modern architecture, such

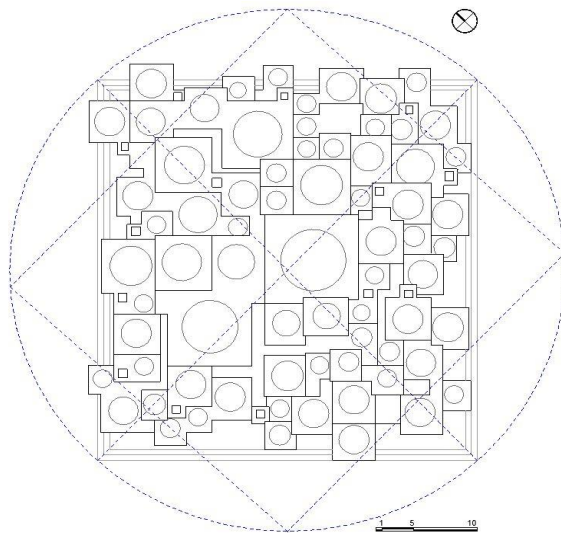
21. Kosovo Architecture Foundation, and Getty Foundation, *Conservation and Management Plan. The National Library of Kosovo “Pjetër Bogdani”* (Prishtina: National Library Press, 2017), 30.

22. Ibid, 31.

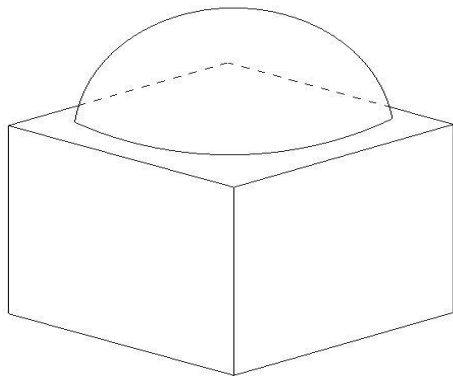
23. I. Ivas, “Interview with Andrija Mutnjaković,” in *Kosovo Modern: An Architectural Primer* (eds.) I. Gjinolli, and L. Kabashi (Prishtina: National Gallery of Kosovo, 2015), 136-147.



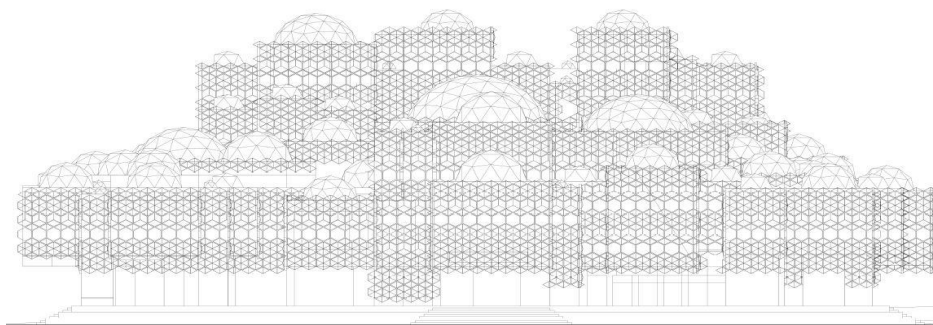
as the Amsterdam Orphanage designed by the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck in 1960 (Figure 6).



**Figure 3.** *The National Library of Kosovo, Formal Layout*  
Source: © Dasara Pula.



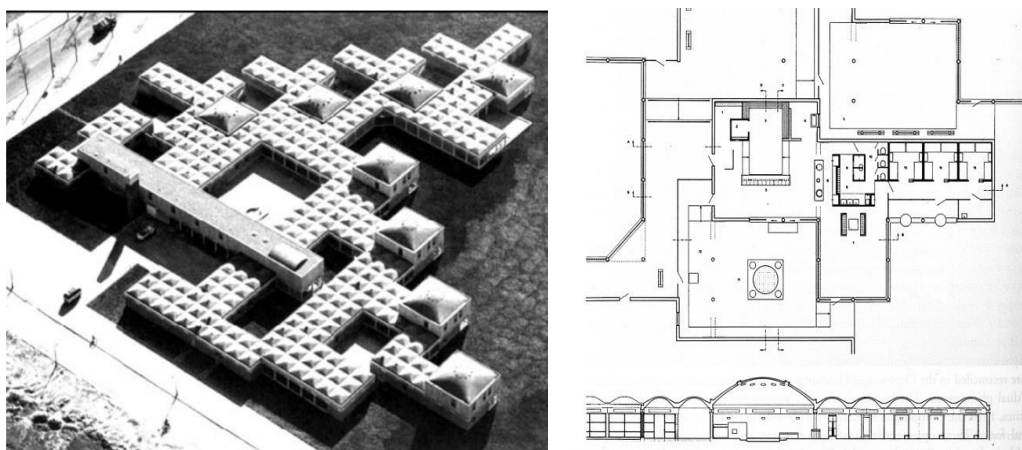
**Figure 4.** *The Combination of Cube and Dome*  
Source: © Dasara Pula.



**Figure 5.** *The National Library of Kosovo, Western Façade*  
Source: © Dasara Pula.

In his interpretation of the architecture of the Library, its architect Andrija Mutnjaković introduces the term *structural*. This term is particularly referred to as the strategy of planning the repetitions and mutations of the elementary spatial module.<sup>24</sup> The entire unique complex contains several cubicles, each topped with small white domes which are 99 in total, while a larger dome covers the center.<sup>25</sup> The dome construction answered the demands of the reader, in this way space is rounded and the lighting is close to the reader.<sup>26</sup>

The spatial type is selected between the type of libraries perceived as spacious halls, such as in Belgrade and Zagreb, and the type of simultaneously common and spatially separate volumes, as is the case with the library in Berlin. In this case, Mutnjaković gave advantage to the second spatial type.<sup>27</sup> The spatial arrangement of the library is done according to the scheme of treating the central area as an atrium with the function of a basic communicational area. Reading areas and other units are situated on different floors. They are distributed according to their importance, functional unity, and the number of visitors.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 6.** *The Amsterdam Orphanage by Aldo van Eyck*

Source: [https://www.archdaily.com/151566/ad-classics-amsterdam-orphanage-aldo-vaneyck?ad\\_medium=gallery](https://www.archdaily.com/151566/ad-classics-amsterdam-orphanage-aldo-vaneyck?ad_medium=gallery).

### Stylistic-Linguistic Plan

In principle, a cube covered with a dome is a morphological-typological feature present in different stylistic periods and architectural languages. Yet, there is a third compositional element in the architecture of the National Library, which is a detail that makes it a modernist work in terms of style. This element is the metallic grid made of hexagonal shapes, which has the function of a curtain

24. A. Mutnjaković, "Architectonics Summary," in *Narodna i Univerzitetska Biblioteka Kosova* (Prishtina: Rilindja, 1984), 134.

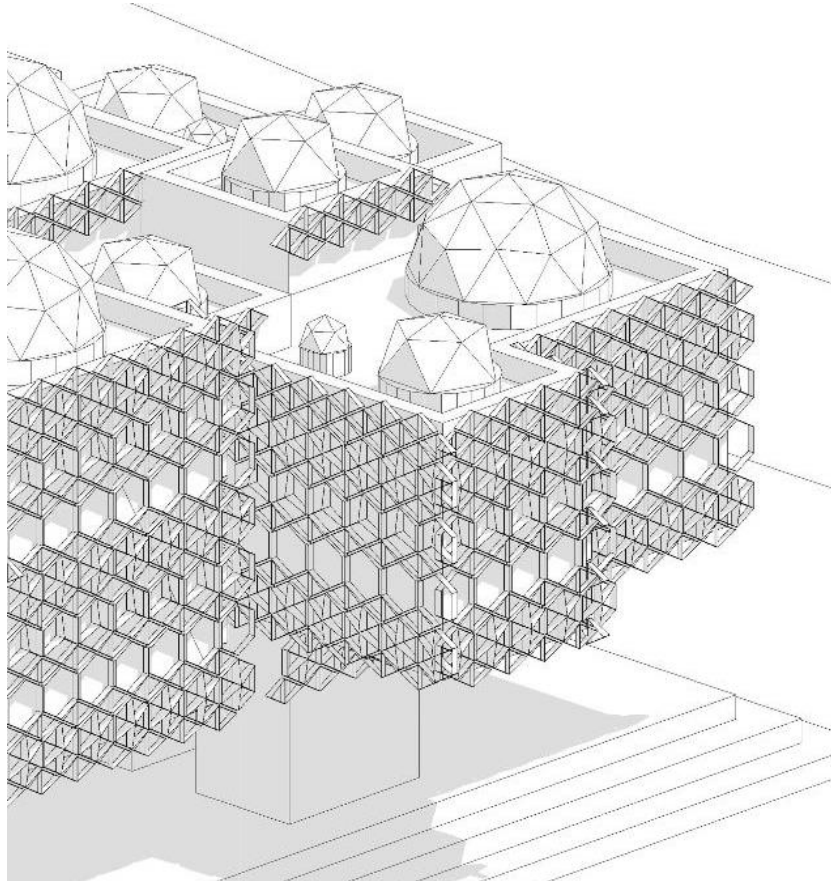
25. Kajtazi, *Behind the National Identity: Politics and Social Activity through Architecture – Liberal Socialism in Kosovo*, 2016, 92.

26. Ibid, 105.

27. Mutnjaković, "Architectonics Summary," 1984.

28. Ibid.

covering the façade, while hexagons are also repeated on the dome structure (Figure 7). To make a comparison with other modern architectural works, we can emphasize that the hexagonal grid was also a compositional element used by Frank Lloyd Wright as a stylistic feature in the planimetry of Hannah House.



**Figure 7.** *The National Library of Kosovo, Cube, Dome & Grid*

Source: © Dasara Pula.

The metallic grid on the façade has the intention to control the solar light, namely serving as the “internal illumination of space”.<sup>29</sup> The grid gives the impression that construction elements have been left on the site, therefore the exterior of the building has always conveyed a somehow unfinished look. This architectural style was developed in Western Europe a few years earlier and an example is the George Pompidou Centre in Paris.<sup>30</sup> If we exclude the grid from the façade, the building would be a good example of brutalist architecture (Figure 8).

29. Kajtazi, *Behind the National Identity: Politics and Social Activity through Architecture – Liberal Socialism in Kosovo*, 2016, 105.

30. Ibid, 93.



**Figure 8.** *The National Library of Kosovo, View of the Building without the Grid*

Source: © Kosovo Architecture Foundation.

The modern project of the Library originates in the period when the modern heritage in the region was critically reviewed. Mutnjaković expresses his criticism of high modernism and recognizes the international and local origins of the regional approach within the modern movement.<sup>31</sup> Through the project for the National Library in Prishtina, he finds a spatial archetype and tries to affirm the vitality of the regional architecture. The “new regional” style in modern architecture was adapted for the Library, as a solution to the problem of alienation, into which the “international style” of modern architecture has fallen.<sup>32</sup> The regional input from Kosovo was the region’s Byzantine and Ottoman influence. As Mutnjaković states:

“A common characteristic of these buildings is their identical treatment of space: a square area of the building covered by a dome. In their details of shape, plane treatment of walls, and the application of iconographic elements and their decorations, these buildings have marked architectural characteristics in common.”<sup>33</sup>

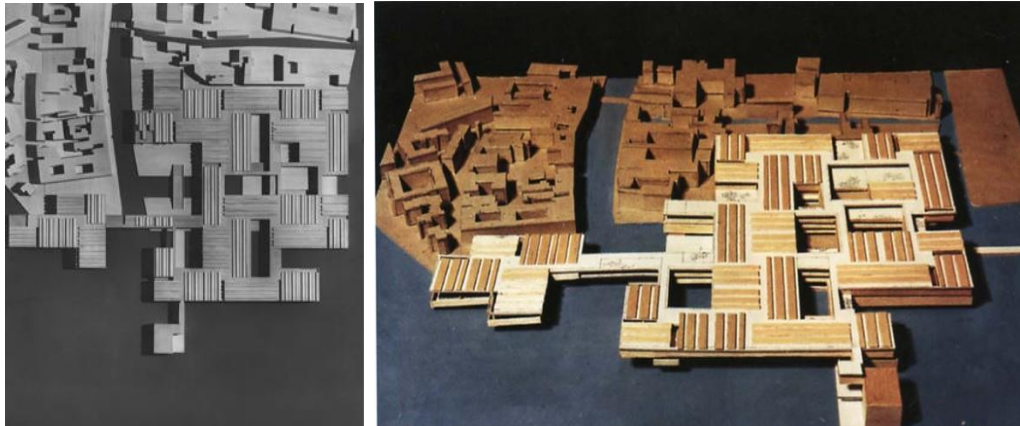
In terms of style, the National Library is an example of modern architecture. It is an expression of different architectural languages, which were developed within different stages of modernism, particularly brutalism and regionalism. In this

31. Mutnjaković, “Architectonics Summary,” 1984, 130.

32. Kosovo Architecture Foundation, and Getty Foundation, *Conservation and Management Plan. The National Library of Kosovo “Pjetër Bogdani”*, 2017, 23.

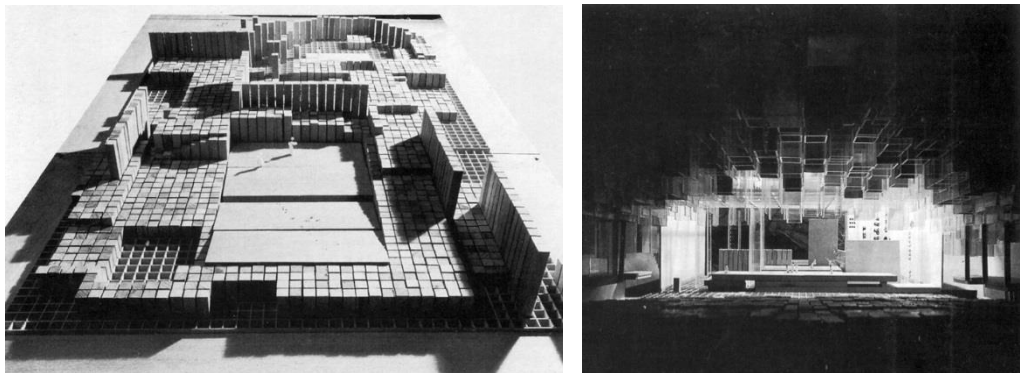
33. Mutnjaković, “Architectonics Summary,” 1984.

context (both in the stylistic and formal plan), following Carlos Martí Arís methodology, the building can also be compared by its plan with Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital and Maurizio Sacripanti's Lyrical Theatre in Cagliari (Figures 9 and 10).



**Figure 9.** *The Venice Hospital by Le Corbusier*

Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/789025/ad-classics-venice-hospital-proposal-le-corbusier>;  
<https://ucldigitalpress.co.uk/Book/Article/52/77/0/>.



**Figure 10.** *The Lyrical Theatre in Cagliari by Maurizio Sacripanti*

Source: <https://socks-studio.com/2012/06/10/lyrical-theatre-in-cagliari-maurizio-sacripanti-1965/>

### Technological Plan

In the construction of the National Library, for the architect it was very important to use elements belonging to the location, so he decided that the façade of the ground floor would be covered using local stones, the stones which were used in the masonry of the shrine of Sultan Murat, built-in Prishtina.<sup>34</sup> The whole ground floor is treated differently from the cubes, with large tile-like stones, two meters by fifty to sixty centimeters (Figure 11). The whole constructive structure of the Library is made of reinforced concrete, including the foundations, columns, beams, and slabs. The cubes, constructed in situ, are made of concrete, which is

34. Kosovo Architecture Foundation, and Getty Foundation, *Conservation and Management Plan. The National Library of Kosovo "Pjetër Bogdani"*, 2017, 36.



also the final layer of their façade, and have large openings covered with glass on all their sides. The domes, produced in Germany, are made of a light metallic construction, covered with white Plexiglas (Figure 12). In the interior, the ceilings are polyester ceilings from fiberglass, produced in Zagreb. Intending to design a technologically advanced building, the floors are mechanical, so all the installations are distributed in the building through the floor.



**Figure 11.** *The National Library of Kosovo, Stones on the Ground Floor*

Source: [www.socialistmodernism.com](http://www.socialistmodernism.com).



**Figure 12.** *The National Library of Kosovo, Picture of Domes*

Source: [www.socialistmodernism.com](http://www.socialistmodernism.com).

For the grid, the initial idea was to have a concrete grid covering the façade, but the building could be overloaded by this concrete element. For this reason, to use a lighter structure, Mutnjaković, and his colleagues, proposed that the grid should be produced from poured aluminum.<sup>35</sup> The whole grid is made of molds that were produced by pouring each model individually. There are around 70,000 pieces and 8 or 9 types of different profiles, “from the empty hexagon to the one divided into 3 pieces, or more pieces than the corner models, the positive corner

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35. Ibid, 43-44.

model, the negative one, and so forth. So, in a way that whole structure connected into one whole”.<sup>36</sup>

The whole structure of the building could be decomposed into these elements: reinforced concrete skeleton, concrete cubes, prefabricated Plexiglas domes, glass, and prefabricated metallic grid parts. In the context of Prishtina, which experienced its general development between the 1970s and 1980s, the construction of the Library signifies undoubtedly the new technologies and modes of building production, represented through the mentioned structural elements. Following this, in terms of building production and construction, the metallic grid covering the cubic concrete forms as a pure expression of brutalist architecture and the glass surface as screens through which the internal and external communications with each other, have a remarkable impact on the architectural identity of the National Library.

### A Symbol of Identity

The architectural project of the National Library of Kosovo represents the “Yugoslav Identity” constructed through a (re)building program in the name of modernization for the city of Prishtina and other Yugoslav cities at that time. Therefore, the National Library was part of the wider ideological background of Yugoslavia, pointing to the construction of an overall identity for the former federal republic, with the state being the authority that commissioned large-scale public buildings quite potent in conveying the image of a socially, economically and politically progressive state,<sup>37</sup> particularly between the 1960s and 1980s.

The architecture of this period, represented here by the National Library of Kosovo, is a combination of several modernist architectural styles/languages, which emerged in different contexts and places of the world, all with their peculiarities. They were generally accepted among the people and authorities in Yugoslavia and were spatially distributed in the whole region, identifying Yugoslavia as a country open to global events and developments of the time, which was not the case with other socialist countries in Southeastern or Eastern Europe, namely in the Soviet Union and Albania. Thus, the avant-garde architecture in Yugoslavia is also a direct representation of the avant-garde status of Yugoslav socialism.<sup>38</sup>

Besides contributing to the overall image of former Yugoslavia, the National Library is a landmark of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo (which was created in 1974), aimed at visually stating its political and economic power, as well as its equality with other states within the former Yugoslavia – pointing to the construction of Kosovo’s national identity and its status as an independent country. To understand this function of the Library’s architecture, it is important to go back

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36. Ibid.

37. Jerliu, and Navakzi, “The Socialist Modernization of Prishtina: Interrogating Types of Urban and Architectural Contributions to the City,” 2018, 66-74.

38. V. Kulić, “An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO ’58,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (2012): 161-184.



to earlier events, particularly to the demonstrations of 1968, organized by the Kosovo Students Union and followed by workers and all groups of Kosovo Albanian society without distinction. They demanded more rights, among which were equality and autonomy within former Yugoslavia, self-governance, and university in the Albanian language. The University of Prishtina was established in February 1970 and the architectural outcome of this event, was the master plan for the University Centre (1971), followed by the project of the National Library as its central building. The Library is one of the few buildings constructed as planned by Bashkim Fehmiu in the master plan for the University Centre. As such, it ended up being the architectural landmark through which one can identify one of the most important events in the modern history of the city of Prishtina, which opened way to other political and social developments, initially represented by the foundation of the University.

Since its construction, the National Library performed the function of the central library of Kosovo.<sup>39</sup> It served as a place of social interaction, a meeting point for different social groups, and continues to strongly remain this function today. However, it has to be mentioned that with the constitutional changes of 1989, after domestic political tensions which led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the suppression of the autonomy of the Socialist Province of Kosovo, the Library could not maintain its function and social significance. Between 1990 and 1999, Kosovo Albanian readers and workers were not allowed to enter the building, and due to a low number of readers using the facility (as Albanians were a majority in Kosovo), the Library saw its importance diminished.<sup>40</sup> During the late '90s and particularly during the Kosovo War (1998-1999), the building was partially used as a Military Base by the Serbian army, which informs us about its central character in a strategic, political, and spatial sense. After the Kosovo War, the building was immediately returned to its original function.

The idea of *identity* – be it regional or national – manifested through architecture as presented above, is not related to the identity of architecture itself. If we go back to the difference between identity and identification, we understand that what the Library represents in terms of politics, economy, culture, or society, is a manifold interpretation of multiple conditions which are identified through architecture. On one hand, for the people of Prishtina and former Yugoslavia, the architecture of the National Library could be interpreted as a symbol of identity for a period of social, economic, and cultural progress, within which they identify themselves as “united” and “equal” inhabitants of a developed country. On the other hand, the citizens of Prishtina, through the Library, identify their struggle as Kosovo Albanians for autonomy and progress within a federation with a predominantly Slavic population. The building identifies the progress (the 1970s-1980s), the stagnation (1989-1999), the Kosovo War (1998-1999), and the “regeneration” of the social life after it.

One of the most characteristic stylistic elements of the Library, the hexagonal metallic grid covering the whole structure, makes it appear as if it wants to defend

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39. Kosovo Architecture Foundation, and Getty Foundation, *Conservation and Management Plan. The National Library of Kosovo “Pjetër Bogdani,”* 2017, 17.

40. Ibid, 18.

itself against its surroundings, disconnecting the building from external circumstances. On one hand, this relates to the abstract part of Regionalism as a reminder that in several situations, the region's population had been placed in a defensive/defending position.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, being a modernist reference, while it is used to "control" the interplay of light and shadow, the metallic grid as a techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic element, "conceals" the building's politico-ideological character: a character that represents Prishtina (and Yugoslavia) as bounded to a modern and socialist tradition, as Tafuri (1967) would put it, a utopia through which the future was projected as a contradiction to the full capitalist development and the emergence of postmodernism as the cultural production of late capitalism.

### Conclusions

At the end of this article, it can be understood that what started as a preliminary assumption regarding the architectural identity, is disclosed through the case of the National Library of Kosovo, where three different plans that determine its architectural identity are distinguished. In this context, the first plan, the geometric/formal one, is represented by the combination of cube and dome: a classic combination that finds its origin in the case of Byzantine architecture expressed by the case of Saint Sophia. In this plan, the identity of the National Library of Kosovo is expressed through a typological constant that is part of the global architectural history and is manifested in many other famous architectural works. From this point of view, this case is an expression of an almost universal typology and does not constitute any innovation at the architectural level. The two types that can be found in the form of the building, as compared to other examples, are that of an *enclosure* with an inscribed circle and the modernist grid system containing the structural elements of the plan.

Novelty, in this case, is expressed in the stylistic/linguistic and technological plan. As it is clear from the above analysis, it seems almost difficult to define the language or style to which the architecture of the National Library belongs. Constructed at the time when postmodern architecture was developing in the western world, while aiming to represent the "critical regionalism" and at the same time using *béton brut* under a hexagonal metallic grid reminiscent of the famous modernist grid, the building appears as a combination of different linguistic expressions. It is precisely this plan that makes the National Library a unique case in the history of architecture, which more than the expression of local identity, it is a "mixture" of many international expressions, languages, or styles.

At this point, it can be confirmed that this case, which has an architectural identity expressed in the three plans analyzed and described above, – formal, stylistic/linguistic, and technological – is a case with an identity detached from the context. The building constitutes a world architectural heritage by being an expression of different plans of architectural identity that are independent of local

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41. Kosovo Architecture Foundation, and Getty Foundation, *Conservation and Management Plan. The National Library of Kosovo "Pjetër Bogdani,"* 2017, 94.

forms, expressions, and technologies. The National Library of Kosovo, as an architectural masterpiece with a specific architectural identity, contributes to placing Prishtina and Kosovo on the global map of modern architecture.

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