

## PLACEMAKING: ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF MIHAILO TIMOTIJEVIĆ

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**Abstract.** *Using elements derived from what marks a place as singular is key to contemporary placemaking, understood as a primary objective of the theory of critical regionalism. The need to create humane, remarkably local architecture and to minimize the effects of universal and international clichés, in order to avoid the danger of making architecture locally unfounded and to invest it with meaning and a sense of place, certainly poses a challenge for every modern architect. This paper deals with the issue of contextuality and approach to the character and urban matrix of a place, as characterizing the buildings in the Western Serbian city of Užice designed by architect Mihajlo Timotijević. A critical approach is adopted in analyzing Timotijević's architectural plans and buildings constructed in Užice, in the attempt to show that the architect takes a genuine interest in the local topography and that which is called placemaking. The main goal of this research is to underline the fact that Timotijević's ability to perceive and read the messages sent by a place, materialize its distinctiveness and easily incorporate a "sense of place" in architectural spaces has given the city of Užice a new image, by integrating the spirit of the regional with that of the contemporary. The research results are particularly pertinent to contemporary architectural theory and practice, both in Serbia and the region, as a comprehensive, multifaceted example of a good practice of critical regionalism.*

**Key words:** *critical regionalism, placemaking, Mihailo Timotijević, Užice.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In theoretical considerations, the term *critical regionalism*, taken as a concept, indicates the idea of placemaking. In accordance with this theory, a place, in present circumstances, is defined in a way that visibly and purposely reflects the identity of a local environment and community, while embracing the values of global and universal achievements and modern technology. In other words, the concept of critical regionalism is to be understood as a concept of placemaking, with places constituted as local forms of *manifestations of world culture*.

In this paper, a critical approach is adopted in analyzing the buildings in Užice designed by Mihailo Timotijević, with the aim of showing that they manifest the concept of critical regionalism, whereby the architect succeeded in integrating the spirit of the regional with that of the contemporary, thus drawing the attention of both the professional community and general public to the phenomena and value of the local architectural heritage. The architect's treatment of the character and cultural matrix of the locality, more precisely, his ability to materialize the distinctiveness, customs, and cultural and social traditions of this part of Serbia reveals the kind of critical deliberation and reading of messages sent by the place that permitted him to respond effectively to a number of challenges in a rather peculiar local setting such as the city of Užice. Beside the problem of contextuality, this research also addresses that of creative reinterpretation of architectural heritage in the context of latter-day approach to materials and technologies. Therefore, the principal objectives of this paper are to give a scientific description, systematization and explication of Mihailo Timotijević's legacy in the city of Užice, as observed in the framework of the theory of critical regionalism, and by doing so make a contribution to the scientific study of architecture in Serbia at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The paper has two parts. In the first part, the etymology and meaning of the term "critical regionalism" are expounded, and the factors that led to its emergence identified. There is a special focus on the concept of critical regionalism as understood by the renowned US-based architectural critic Kenneth Frampton, as well as on the elements characteristic of the practice of critical regionalism.

The second part is conceptualized as a qualitative research into Timotijević's architectural work in Užice and his approach to design, in line with the theoretical postulates of critical regionalism. This part of research takes into consideration primary sources, above all the plans published in the Timotijević's monograph *Architect and Place [Arhitekt i mesto]*<sup>1</sup>, those obtained directly from the architect, and texts and papers previously published on the buildings under consideration herein, as well as an analysis of secondary sources. The conclusion provides a summary of the analysis and defines Timotijević's stance as an architect and the poetics of his designs.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM

The concept of critical regionalism in architecture was framed by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in the early 1980s. In their essay "The grid and the pathway. An introduction

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<sup>1</sup> The monograph *Architect and Place* presents the author's designs in the Užice area and his treatment of and relationship with a place, i.e. a particular city with its distinct spatial and cultural identity, to which the architect dedicates his art and ability to the fullest of their potential.

to the work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis,” they present critical regionalism as the third and most recent type of regionalism in Greece, as continuing the legacy of the picturesque “national regionalism” and the neoclassical version of “historical regionalism” (Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, 1981:177). According to Tzonis and Lefaivre, the concept of “regionalism” has its roots in ancient Greece. It was in the context of politics of rivalry between poleis and the protection of their colonies that the ancient Greeks used architectural elements to mark the identity of a group which would occupy a certain area. The terms *Doric*, *Ionic* and *Corinthian* were not only abstract decorative concepts. They were coined in a certain historical context in the process of “fission and fusion” of the region and its identity, and their usage is often determined by complex political meanings (Lefaivre, 2012:10).

Still, during the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods no specific word was used to describe the concept. An explicit reference to “regional” design in antiquity can be found in Vitruvius’ treatise *De Architectura*, a Roman text that introduces the concept of “regional” architecture, and also considers its political implications (Lefaivre, 2012:3). According to Vitruvius, this concept aimed at researching human habitats in the frame of their geographical environment, both physical and climatic.

The concept of “critical regionalism” as formulated by Tzonis and Lefaivre differs in its essence from most of the “regionalisms” from the past, which were applied “regionally” only as a protective or binding concept, as a political or marketing construct which promoted nationalistic movements, often in combination with chauvinism, folklore and commodification. As a matter of fact, the term “critical regionalism” was coined to draw attention to a new concept in architecture, adopted by a certain number of architects in Europe, who were trying to find an alternative to Postmodernism, the dominant movement of the period.

It is known that Postmodernism in Europe and the USA resulted from the general disillusionment with and loss of faith in the legacy of Modernism. The emergence of Postmodernism meant a revival of the concept of architecture as an art, with its value increasingly tied to its communicative power as a cultural object. In order to deconstruct and disarm the functionalistic and purist concept of modern architecture, Postmodernism promoted eclecticism as a way to counter the dysfunctional, contextual, decorative and scenographic aspects of contemporary art, relating to or replicating the classical and regional in a way that was often inherently incongruous. Such a pluralistic approach was readily accepted, and at the time of the financial recovery back in the 1960s it became a new corporative style in architecture. In the 1970s, in response to the modernist emphasis on universalism, Postmodernism rediscovered history, which became a significant characteristic of its development. As soon as the next decade, this new duality of Postmodernism is increasingly highlighted: “How to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization” (Ricoeur, 1965:277). However, in the late 1980s, Postmodernism significantly changed from a movement criticizing aesthetic and social parameters, to one confirming the *status quo*. Charles Jencks believes that, just as Modernism suffered from the overproduction and vulgarization of its language, Postmodernism started turning into a weak eclecticism of “anything goes,” that is, into “ornamentalism,” as it was nicknamed by American authors, thanks to its propensity for promoting “multiple-voice discourses” (Jencks, 2007:148).

In such a climate of never-ending conflict between the global and local, critical regionalism appeared as a new concept that hoped to reconcile these two phenomena in a

unique way. Tzonis and Lefaivre, realizing the disintegration of global Modernism, criticized by Postmodernism as reducing architecture to a mere “communicative or instrumental sign,” proposed the introduction of foreign paradigms to the domestic *genius loci*. In this way they tried to provide a framework for overcoming the negative aspects of globalization, without rejecting what was valuable about its legacy. In order for this approach to differ from the merely sentimental and dated principle of return to the authentic and local, Tzonis and Lefaivre combined the concept of regionalism with the Kant’s idea of the “critical.” It implies that architects, in facing issues and exploring possibilities, should think critically – in Kant’s sense. They should overcome prejudices and conflicts between the local and global, and intervene in accordance with the specificities of the actual situation, that in a specific region. While open to and embracing everything the “globalized” world has to offer today, including the possibility of constant interaction and exchange, architects should still appreciate the uniqueness of a “region,” the quality of social connections, and the physical and cultural resources of a certain locality. In its contemporary sense, especially that which is also “critical,” “critical regionalism” is seen as one of the most significant alternative approaches to design, one which enhances the creative power of globalization and at the same time minimizes its destructiveness. It is an approach which takes account of the context, thus avoiding the making of architecture that has no base in a certain space, in order to give it a sense of place.

The idea of critical regionalism as a new concept inspired a series of debates and new criticism. The US-based architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton is credited with popularizing the concept of critical regionalism. Frampton first introduced his understanding of critical regionalism in his 1983 essay “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” which he then revised in 1987 in an essay titled “Ten Points on an Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic.”

In his first essay, Frampton claims that the “fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place” (Frampton, 1983:21). Frampton called this concept “architecture of resistance,” in the sense that it represents a reaction against universal standards, cultural commodification and technology worship. Seeking to encourage the process of integration of tradition with modernity, Frampton developed a theoretical framework with a set of characteristics that describe *critical regionalism*, which he explained as the following points: 1. Culture and Civilization, 2. The Rise and Fall of the Avant-Garde, 3. Critical Regionalism and the “World Culture,” 4. Resistance of the Place-Form, 5. Culture versus Nature: Topography, Context, Climate, Light and the Tectonic Form, and 6. Visual versus Tactile (Frampton, 1983:17-29). Each of these points deals with specific issues related to the concept of “placemaking” in contemporary circumstances. While Frampton attaches a great significance to each of them, it is not his intention to enforce upon anyone the recipe for design in the spirit of the regional, but to offer wider conceptual guidelines for introducing a good practice of critical regionalism, and as strong as possible incorporation of the “sense of place.” In his essay, Frampton endorses the idea that architects should search for regional variations instead of continuing to design conforming to global uniformity.

Frampton laid the foundations for his critical theory on tendencies and trends in contemporary architecture in his “Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” which he then revisited and developed further in his essay titled “Ten Points on an Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic.” The second essay provides the same elementary guidelines as the previous one, but it can be interpreted as a detailed conceptual proposal

for critical regionalism and considered as forming a comprehensive, sound basis for a critical analysis of concrete buildings (Frampton, 2007:375-385).

Even though Frampton gave a detailed explanation of the concept of critical regionalism in his essays, his seminal work that allows a full understanding of the concept is *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, especially the fifth chapter, "Critical Regionalism: Contemporary Architecture and Cultural Identity." In this chapter Frampton points out the significance of both the local peculiarities of an area or region and of modern technologies, whose use in contemporary architecture is unavoidable. Here, Frampton refers to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and his essay "Universal Civilizations and National Cultures" (Ricoeur, 1965:277) as the foundation for his arguments. According to Ricoeur, the phenomenon of universalization leads to a kind of subtle destruction, of not only traditional cultures, but also of what Ricoeur calls the "creative nucleus of great civilizations and great culture." This philosopher also points out that "as if mankind, by approaching *en masse* a basic consumer culture, were also stopped *en masse* at a subcultural level", which often leads to the weakening – if not to a complete severance – of ties with the cultural past (Frampton, 2004:314).

For both Ricoeur and Frampton, the main goal of architecture is to keep its social values and to ensure the built environment preserves the meanings of the past, but in accordance with the imperatives of the future. Therefore, not even regional culture should be taken as something given and relatively unchangeable, but as something that needs to be cultivated thoughtfully and advisedly. Referring to Ricoeur, Frampton emphasizes the importance of regional or national cultures being constituted as local forms of "manifestations of world culture." In full awareness of the dangers coming from contemporary technology, Frampton does not support the revival of either great historical styles or rather modest vernacular building. On the contrary, he supports the stance shared by Tzonis and Lefaivre, that critical regionalism must not be considered as synonymous with vernacular architecture. The climate, culture and spirit of a region, as well as its traditional crafts and alike, must not be reduced to local patterns. Neither ancient nor contemporary cultures are products of one heritage, but hybrids of several cultures interacting and impacting on one another in a region in the past. Therefore, critical regionalism may be said to be lying somewhere between the eras of Neo-Historicism and Neo-Avant-Gardism: "Neo-Historicism was said to have a newfound faith in complete and strong links with the past; Neo-Avant-Gardism, while recognizing, does not subscribe to it, and moves only with an inventive eye to the future" (Jadhav, 2002:47). In this sense, critical regionalism depends on the architect maintaining a high level of self-awareness and sensibility, and having and developing the ability to find inspiration primarily in things such as the quality of local light, or in the tectonic drawn from a locally specific structural modality.

Based on the works quoted previously, which explain thoroughly the essential attitudes and principles of the concept of critical regionalism, several key criteria may be derived, whose application would allow the practice of critical regionalism in architecture, as especially pertinent to the case study that is researched in the following chapter of this paper:

- Critical regionalism should give *placemaking* precedence over *spacemaking*; a *place*, which is in fact a group of *spaces*, reflects the identity of a local environment and community;

- Critical regionalism is regional to the point that it highlights the specificities of the context being intervened in, from its topography to light and the call to create architecture in response to that particular context (which also favors local materials);
- Critical regionalism is architectonic rather than scenographic;
- Critical regionalism obligatorily considers light as a primary factor that reveals the structure and tectonic properties of a building; beside light, tactility and the visual effect are of special importance. Thus, special attention is paid to the atmospheric and ambient sense of warmth, cold, air humidity and flow, to creating a variety of colors, smells and sounds by using different materials, and to different impressions that are made by means of floor coverings, which help the body experience the unconscious change of position, movement, etc.;
- Even though it opposes the sentimental use of local forms, critical regionalism does at times allow for a reinterpretation of local elements, in an attempt to combine, as naturally as possible, the assets and resources of contemporary culture with local tradition.

Accordingly, critical regionalism, first and foremost, forms a basis for a mindful mediation between such opposite terms or concepts as the global and local, center and periphery, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, technique and technology. In other words, the concept of critical regionalism aims at a more humane architecture in the light of universally perceived abstractions and international clichés. Reinterpreting old traditions through the use of tectonic forms and local architectural vocabulary, as well as ensuring of social relevance can result in buildings characterized by contemporary architectural expression.

### 3. ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF MIHAILO TIMOTIJEVIĆ

#### **3.1. Mihailo Timotijević's Užice architecture – observing and reading spatial messages from macro space planning to micro space planning**

Užice began taking on the appearance of a modern city in the 1960s. The aftermath of the Second World War was a time of reconstruction and building of new streets, squares and modern high-rises. Today, the city is the economic, social and cultural hub of West Serbia. In the post-war period, Tito's Užice<sup>2</sup> symbolized the renewal brought by the socialist Yugoslavia. Leading Yugoslav architects participated in its regeneration, with Stanko Mandić, who designed a number of Užice's landmark buildings, including the well-known Partizan Square, one of the most prominent among them. In that period, Užice had all the features of a socialist city: it grew thanks to the country's industrial development and opening of state and society-owned macro-enterprise, state-owned construction land, and a focus on the development of social infrastructure. Post-socialist transition largely retarded Užice's architectural development, both due to the lack of vacant land in the city, given its peculiar hilly topography, and the lack of new funding. Today, the city is composed of single-family houses, mainly located on the outskirts, and high-density high-rises found in the historical

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<sup>2</sup>In the fall of 1941, Užice was the headquarters of Partizan forces, so its name was changed to *Titovo Užice* (Tito's Užice) at the end of the People's Liberation War, more precisely, in 1946, in honor of Josip Broz Tito. The city was renamed Užice again in 1992.

core, as new visual elements of the cityscape.<sup>3</sup> The first comprehensive urban plan of Užice, developed between 1960 and 1970, ordered the demolition of a large number of the then existing building stock, to provide space for the expanding city core. The historic part of the city remained the public, cultural, business and administrative center, but it was reconstructed to allow high-density residential developments (Kuzovic, 2016:548).

Mihailo Timotijević first designed buildings in Užice in the 1990s. Having earned the trust of the local authorities, Timotijević was hired to manage an urban project seeking to redesign Megdan, a neighborhood located in the city center; today, Megdan is home to by far the greatest number of mixed-use (office and residential) buildings designed by Timotijević in Užice. The urban renewal of Megdan, which is located next to the river, lasted several years, with Timotijević continuously involved. It is not very common in either Serbia or the region for architects to continuously participate in decades-long urban renewal of an area, and also to stay involved both in the creative aspects of the project and take part in decision-making at different levels of the process, all the way through the construction stage.

The Megdan neighborhood (a Turkish word meaning fight or contest), as its name suggests, was part of the demarcation line between the Serbian and Turkish parts of the city. It was mostly home to small, mixed-use buildings, and although it extended along the river Đetinja, the urban development of the city disregarded it as a natural regulating element. In the 1960s, as Užice's urban development accelerated, this part of the city was mostly ignored and remained mostly unchanged. Consistent with the ideology of the era, the focus was put on the main street, which typically housed all the important buildings, such as the town hall, city hotel, theater, and the main square. However, in the early 1990s, it was decided to reconstruct Megdan, with architect Mihailo Timotijević hired to do the urban design.<sup>4</sup> The urban design specified the construction requirements for concrete micro-locations and gave contours of the buildings-to-be. According to the architect, the design was innovative and courageous in its proposal to line the river bank with convexly shaped blocks, and thus reinforce the existing urban matrix, while diminishing the dominance of the skyscrapers built after the Second World War, resulting in their blending in the outlines of the future riverfront city center (Timotijević, 2004:41).

Between 1993 and 2004, Timotijević participated in the construction of several residential and office buildings in Megdan, and also co-developed a number of urban designs. Analysis of the buildings constituting the Megdan complex reveals that the concept underlying the development that replaced part of the old town quarters sought to take into account and reaffirm the inherited outline, including the course of the river Đetinja, naturally regulating the area (Figs. 1, 2).

This resulted in buildings whose most prominent façades form the edge of the of the city center, simultaneously making the city along the left river bank distinct and giving it a "face". The sophistication and heightened sensitivity to the terrain peculiarities and the concept of place building of the result is in line with the architect's critical approach to regional principles of construction as a way of expression.

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<sup>3</sup> A number of conflicts characterized Užice's development, mostly due to the natural limitations caused by the altitude, great height differences between different parts of the city, and the small area of the alluvial plain along the river Đetinja available for construction.

<sup>4</sup> Timotijević collaborated on this project with architect Miroslav Petrović-Balubdžić. The team accepted the commission, on condition the design specified by the then applicable urban plan was abandoned, as it proposed the construction of skyscrapers in Megdan of the type erected around Partizan Square.



**Figs. 1, 2** Megdan after reconstruction

The characteristics of Timotijević's designs which more obviously relate to the concept of critical regionalism are, on the one hand, his permanent concern for what he calls location building, i.e., place building, and on the other, his conviction that restraint and moderation are beautiful, which is why he gives priority to tectonic and visual formation. The play of light and shadow has an important role in the overall concept. Also, Timotijević has an extraordinary capability to enrich his shapes with craftsman's touches. In order to inspect all these elements more closely, i.e. to exemplify how the principles of critical regionalism are employed in Timotijević's work, several mixed-use buildings in the Megdan neighborhood are analyzed below.

The office and residential buildings constructed first (1993-1994<sup>5</sup>) are of great importance, as they line the city square, a small plaza and a strip mall. Beside the ground-floor colonnades in these buildings, the colonnades, eaves and canopies of the small stepped plaza are the elements that shape the public space, subtly connecting the new block with the existing structures and Partizan Square (Figs.3, 4).



**Figs. 3, 4** Megdan, mixed-use buildings, with small stepped plaza

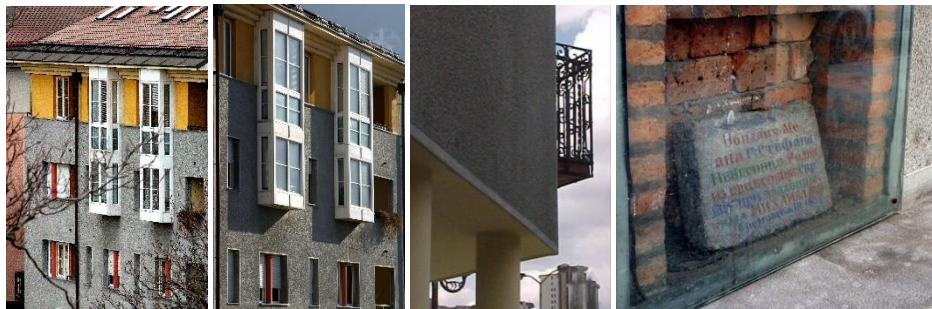
Unlike the ground-area dynamics, the regularity of openings on the upper floors ensures the occupants have privacy. With the offices set back, prominent cornices and long roofs, the volumes of the buildings seem less conspicuous and simpler, thus blending in with the adjacent 19<sup>th</sup>-century edifices, their roofs jointly giving the area an urban appearance (Timotijević, 2004:101). The simplicity and serenity of the residential floors is disrupted only by prominent bay windows, which the architect uses to ensure

<sup>5</sup> Timotijević and Petrović-Balubdžić won the Grand Prize of the International Salon of Urbanism for this project in 1994.



view of the green outskirts of the city. According to the architect, thanks to Užice's topography, regardless of the building density in the city, it is almost always possible to find a way to provide views of the green slopes of the surrounding hills from the buildings. Therefore, designs can always allow for such little "green outlets" (Figs.5, 6.).

Seeking to combine elements of contemporary culture with the local tradition in as natural a way as possible, the architect permanently built in one of the new buildings a cornerstone containing an inscription from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century building that stood there previously, and a wrought-iron fence of an adjacent building that had also been demolished (Fig. 7, 8.). As the architect himself puts it, elements that were once part of the houses and buildings demolished to make room for the Megdan complex were purposely built in the new buildings as reminders of – or memorial "references" to – their predecessors. Details such as these, which are both historical and cultural, result in the new interpolations being grounded in the local building heritage and mentally embodying and preserving the spirit of the place (Timotijević, 1995:393).



**Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8** Architectural details showing the new blending with the old

The mixed-use facilities in Omladinska Street, which overlook the river, are particularly interesting thanks to their convex frontages extending along the riverfront, also parallel with the convex bank revetment just below the street. The proximity of the bank revetment and the almost exact convex shape of the building give the street surface and the sloping stone bank the appearance of a solid base that the new buildings stand on (Timotijević, 2004:42). This combination of elements creates the effect of a natural, symbiotic relationship between the natural and man-made environments (Figs. 9, 10, 11).



**Figs. 9, 10, 11** Mixed-use buildings in Omladinska Street

The buildings occupy the block corners and extend along the future pedestrian precinct and the riverfront, with a lot of potential for the ground floors to be used for movement. Therefore, it was only logical for the architect to insert colonnades and design the ground floors as an office area, which is no longer simply a sidewalk along the length of the walls, but public space extending into the buildings. This solution also emphasizes the division of these simple, straightforward frontages into three parts. The glazed bottom level, which runs parallel to the riverfront, is set back and features a massive central block of proportionate dimensions, which reinforces the rhythm of the simply arranged windows above. The jettied upper floors additionally enrich the visual dynamics of the façade. The regular arrangement of the openings on the protruding frontages is an expression of discipline and simplicity, while the particular window design is varied on the different floors with elements differently installed at the glass level. That is how the simplicity of the design, which characterizes the whole complex, but is also visible as the buildings are approached – and especially as one focuses on the residential floors, is represented with specific recognizable elements. The windows are visibly drawn in, with the effect of making the wall mass more conspicuous and the shadows more strongly accentuating the structure of the façade openings. Simultaneously, in functional terms, the wall edges around the openings protect against excessive sunlight (Timotijević, 2004: 46). The fifth facade consists of sloping roof planes, which is in harmony with the character of the place, with the building prominently occupying the block corner. Equally, the roof design reveals the wish to combine a contemporary solution with traditional building. The roof edges are clad in copper, which adds a touch of craftsmanship, whereas the projecting eaves make the overall appearance modern.

Even though the individual Megdan buildings were erected over a relatively long time span, the architect strictly stuck to and insisted on the cube shape for all of these office and residential buildings, with the effect of their forming a continuous series of blocks. The latest addition to the development, the building constructed in 2009, reveals the same solution that choosing to continue using the forms found on the spot. Simple window openings are still the most prominent elements on the main frontage, although their arrangement is now slightly more “playful” compared to those built previously (Figs. 12, 13, 14).



**Figs. 12, 13, 14** Mixed-use facility built in 2009

This is probably due to the fact the building is an infill located in a narrow street, which does not allow a full frontal view of it. Of course, like with many other buildings by this architect, the use of bay windows ensures the right to a view. Since contemporary designs seek to meet the requirements of functional and functionalist architecture first,

relinquishing space between buildings, once a major constitutive urban element of cities, with growing numbers of infills in today's building practice, bay windows are the only way to provide wider views to occupants. Critically observed, their use as motifs on the building facade, compounded by the dimensions and proportion of the openings, makes an impression of the vertical regularity and stability marking the more recent architecture of Užice.

The foregoing analysis allows us to conclude that the buildings under consideration were created primarily through observation and reading of the messages of the area in which they were built, and that the architect was essentially concerned with the problem of contextuality and creative interpretation of local specificities. Thus, with the concept of a critical approach to the existing urban matrix at the site and the critical principles of addressing the issue of identity of Užice's future riverfront, it is clear that contextuality lies at the heart of Timotijević's architectural "production." This indeed is the only right starting point to create good architecture. The architect himself holds a similar view:

The process of integrating new architecture can take a lot less time, to the extent that balance has been found between the expression of one's own identity and visible structural agreement with the adjacent buildings. To influence those processes adequately, an architect has to develop a sense and sensitivity for each individual location. Because its potentials, memory, symbolic content and energy are motivating for constructors and dwelling at that particular place (Timotijević, 1995:394).

### 3.2. Tectonic versus the scenographic in Mihailo Timotijević's designs

In one of his six points of "resistance architecture," Frampton states that, in spite of the critical importance of topography and light, *the primary principle of architectural autonomy lies more in the tectonic than in the scenographic* (Frampton, 1983:27). Frampton also believes that the tectonic should not be perceived only from a technical perspective, because it is certainly more than simply an expression of a frame. Citing the American architecture historian Stanford Anderson, Frampton says the tectonic is not only related to the activity of making the basic physical structure, but also to activities that help raise it to a higher level, i.e. to an artform. Frampton places emphasis on "structural poetic" rather than on "re-presentation of facade" (Frampton, 1983:28). By keeping the volumes simple, arranging the openings harmoniously, choosing a polychrome palette in response to the monochrome spectrum of the adjacent facades and paying close attention to details, Timotijević reaches the high-water mark of "structural poetics" in his designs of office and residential buildings in Megdan in Užice (Figs. 15, 16).

Quite certainly, the way local light has been put to use is telling of the structure and tectonic qualities of these buildings. The simple, elegant colonnades found along most of the length of the edge of the block at the ground level engage in play with daylight, creating ever-changing patterns of shadow and light. When it comes to the approach to design that exploits daylight and shadow as architectural *materials*, it can be said that Timotijević's simple geometric formulas are supported in a subtle way by these passing and transforming *materials*. *Light and shadow that transform*, beside the unavoidable contrast that makes architectural phenomena more dynamic, also leaves an impression of presence of the spiritual, in both the structure and materialization (Fig. 17).



**Figs. 15, 16** Pure and plain-looking facades of mixed-use buildings (1993-1994)



**Fig. 17** Light and shadow as architectural materials

In terms of Timotijević's approach to architectural detail, it is worthwhile highlighting his capability to amalgamate the artistic with the critical potential of the region, and then also assimilate and reinterpret external influences. His simple and strict geometric building envelopes, manifestations of perfectly streamlined architectural design, are complemented with façade elements in a special way. The attention the architect pays to architectural detail, along with the shape and depth of his openings, can be seen as the next characteristic of his approach. Lintels, frames, portals, balustrades, cornices and stepped elements create the perfect balance in his designs between the strictness of contemporary aesthetics and the inner human need for detail. In Timotijević's architecture the clear and strict arrangement of openings is enriched with simple details executed in colors and materials which enhance the aesthetic quality of the overall architectural expression. It is not by chance that nearly pure colors are used here. The architect chose to do so because of the strong sunlight the buildings, with their position and orientation, are exposed to for a good part of the day, with the effect of color being sucked out of the material, i.e., made "subdued."<sup>6</sup> In other words, when in direct sunlight, color partly loses intensity, while keeping its chromatic value. The differential treatment of details on the windows observed vertically and the shadows created by the jetties enrich the overall appearance of the building. This makes architectural details significant elements of identity building.

Based on the above interpretation, the architectural language and details of Timotijević's designs are perceived as extremely precise, visually simple, yet upgraded with finishing touches evocative of tradition and craftsmanship, and the robust bodies of his building as tectonically simple. There is no difference between the structure of his buildings, with their ascetically simplified facades, and their spatial definition. There are no scenographic solutions, spectacle or designed effects. In the architect's words, "The need for unpretentious and restrained form is simply the imperative of city and civil culture, expressed as tolerance for the surroundings and horizontally and vertically oriented material, as intimations of abundance, not as ostentation" (Timotijević, 1995:394).

<sup>6</sup> From a lecture held by Mihailo Timotijević in a doctoral seminar at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, in November 2006.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research, which focuses on a selection of buildings in the city of Užice designed by architect Mihailo Timotijević, qualifies his work as having characteristics typical of the practice of critical regionalism, as formulated theoretically by Kenneth Frampton, and recognizes a critical distinction between his treatment of the building tradition and the far more frequent sentimental vernacularism. The architect's approach to that which is particularly regional, the tangible and intangible resources of the city of Užice, and the local light and materials are clearly indicative of his dedication to the concept of placemaking, as central to the theory of critical regionalism. This research is of special importance for contemporary architectural theory and practice, both in Serbia and the region, at the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it critically presents a good, comprehensive example of urban transformation that seeks to connect the assets and values of contemporary culture with that which is distinctly local.

The urban transformation of the Megdan neighborhood may be considered an exceptionally successful project owing primarily to the architect's critical approach to Užice's skyline silhouette. He displays a heightened sensitivity in the design process – he is receptive to the signals that are distinctly contextual, local, and boldly makes them part of the design process. The volumes of the mid-rises in the foreground, erected along the river, were carefully made to match the height of both the buildings on the bank across and those in the background. The cityscape thus created leaves an impression of a stepped group of buildings, whose height increases gradually from the southern side, all the way to the residential high-rises in downtown Užice. By producing this effect, Timotijević also made a new downtown outline, accentuating the significantly symbiotic association of the natural and man-made environments, while ensuring the wider city center remains residential.

Each individual segment of Timotijević's Užice designs indicates a sense of measure, refinement and consideration for both the surroundings and his own work, compounded with uncompromising contemporaneity. The place identity and distinctive local characteristics such as light, topography and climate are fully appreciated, and also enhanced and transformed. Timotijević's reliance on the context is his point of departure in his architectural reflections, and also constitutes the single most important aspect of his design process. Only this kind of architectural logic is capable of avoiding the trap of global uniformity which, obsessed with design and aesthetically pleasing images, easily succumbs to the dominance of the world's great monolithic cultures, unification of the architectural image of the world, and the dictates of the limited number of stylistic and functional design parameters, oblivious to and disinterested in the quotidian and social aspects of architecture.

Lastly, it may be concluded that Mihailo Timotijević's Užice designs, more precisely, his manner of expression of the identity of an environment – from topography and atmosphere to light and architectural details – is a clear demonstration of his adherence to the concept of placemaking and is illustrative of a good practice of critical regionalism.

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All photographs by Mihailo Timotijević.

## **STVARANJE MJESTA: ELEMENTI KRITIČKOG REGIONALIZMA U ARHITEKTURI MIHAILA TIMOTIJEVIĆA**

*Stvaranje mjesta u savremenim okolnostima, elementima izvedenim iz specifičnosti određenog lokaliteta, jedan je od primarnih ciljeva definisanih u okviru teorije kritičkog regionalizma. Problem postizanja humanije i lokalno specifične arhitekture te ublažavanja uticaja univerzalnih i internacionalnih klišeja, sigurno je izazov svakom arhitekti danas, kako bi se izbjegla neutemeljenost arhitekture u određenom prostoru i kako bi joj se mogao pripisati smisao i osjećaj za mjesto. Ovaj rad se bavi problemom kontekstualnosti, odnosom prema karakteru mjesta i njegovoj urbanoj matrici u kontekstu stvaralaštva arhitekta Mihajla Timotijevića u gradu Užicu. Kritičkim pristupom u analizi realizovanih objekata i projektne dokumentacije, se nastojalo ukazati na činjenicu da je u arhitekturi Mihaila Timotijevića u Užicu iskazan poseban interes prema lokalnoj topografiji i onome što se naziva građenje mjesta. Osnovni cilj ovog istraživanja je bio da se ukaže da je Timotijevićovo posmatranje i čitanje poruka prostora, način izražavanja senzibiliteta, te snažne integracije „osjećaja za mjesto“ u arhitektonskim prostorima, dovelo do stvaranja novog lica grada Užica, u kojem je objedinjen duh regionalnog i savremenog. Rezultat istraživanja je od posebnog značaja za savremenu arhitektoonsku teoriju i praksu, kako u Srbiji tako i u okruženju, jer predstavlja sveobuhvatan primjer dobre prakse kritičkog regionalizma.*

Ključne reči: *kritički regionalizam, mjesto, Mihailo Timotijević, Užice.*