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# SOCIALLY ENGAGED ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1950s AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

## The Example of Zagreb's Workers' University

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This paper investigates the links between architecture and its social purpose and focuses specifically on the building and institution known today as the Public Open University Zagreb (*Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb – POUZ*), which was previously called Moša Pijade Workers' (and People's) University (*Radničko (i narodno) sveučilište "Moša Pijade" – RANS*). The paper examines the innovative and experimental nature of the architectural concept of socially engaged architecture as part of the societal modernisation of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as changes to its function up to the present post-socialist condition. The authors discuss the complex relationship between employees, beneficiaries, programmes and the architectural design and the political, economic and social context. The aim is to explore sociocultural categories and how culture, work, education and the city interacted with one another during different time periods. By using theoretical and methodological insights gleaned from cultural anthropological approaches to space and architecture, the paper demonstrates how the identity, significance and values ascribed to the production of public space were shaped, medialized and modified through time.

**Keywords:** socially engaged architecture, workers' and people's universities, socialism, modernism, transformations

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Specific typologies of (public) spaces and architecture may develop within various socio-political systems and ideologies (e.g., Konstantinović 2014; Low 1996; Mako,

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on "The Socially Engaged Architecture and Its Memory", a talk delivered by Jasna Galjer and Sanja Lončar at the 9th InASEA Conference entitled "Emotions, Senses and Affects in the Context of Southeast Europe" held in Zadar, Croatia, 27–30 September 2018 (Galjer and Lončar 2018a). Both the paper and the talk are based on research carried out as part of the following research projects: "The Role of Zagreb's Workers' University in the Modernisation of Society from the 1960s up to the Present" (2017) and "Transformations of Social Roles Played by Architecture and Public Spaces from the Socialist Period" (2018). These research projects are headed by Jasna Galjer and funded by the University of Zagreb. For more information about the projects and approaches used, see Galjer, Lončar and Rubić 2017, 2018; Galjer and Lončar 2018a, 2018b. We would like to thank everyone who participated in this study; our interviewees; our translator, Vedrana Vojković Estatiev; Željko Krčadinac and Paolo Mofardin, whose photographs we have included; the Tadić family; and all of the institutions that made their archival material available to us: the Croatian State Archives, the Croatian Museum of Architecture, the Public Open University Zagreb, the Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, and the Institute of Art History.

Roter Blagojević and Vukotić Lazar 2014; Rabinow 2003), which function as “a strategy and/or technique of power and social control, but also as a way to obscure these relationships” (Law and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 351; cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 2000). As part of an attempt to construct a “new society”, socialism envisaged the construction of spaces intended specifically for social, economic, ideological, political, cultural and artistic educational purposes and attempted to exercise control over people’s leisure time (cf. Crowley and Reid 2002; Konstantinović 2014). Typical examples of these are workers’ homes and holiday resorts, labour union homes, kindergartens, parks and homes for Pioneers (aged 7–15) and others (Konstantinović 2014: 31). An important typological category was represented by multifunctional buildings for educational and cultural purposes such as workers’ (and people’s) universities, cultural homes, cultural centres, community (people’s) homes, people’s reading rooms, etc.,<sup>2</sup> which created a widespread network in all the constituent republics of the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia). Although they differed in terms of architectural typology, programming and design, as well as organisational and other aspects, these buildings and institutions played an important role in the lives of urban and rural settlements and communities during the socialist period. They were places where people gathered and where learning took place, and they were recognisable venues that contributed to the social and cultural dimension of daily life. Therefore, these institutions raise questions about the relationships between ideology and architecture, ideology and educational and cultural policies, and architecture and its cultural and educational purpose.

This paper investigates these links between architecture and its social purpose and focuses specifically on the building and institution known today as the Public Open University Zagreb (*Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb – POUZ*), which was previously called Moša Pijade Workers’ (and People’s) University (*Radničko (i narodno) sveučilište “Moša Pijade” – RANS* in Croatian).<sup>3</sup> This multifunctional building intend-

<sup>2</sup> This paper discusses a variety of multifunctional buildings used for educational and cultural purposes (whose Croatian equivalents are provided in italics following each term): workers’ (and people’s) universities (*radnička (i narodna) sveučilišta*), popular universities (*pučka sveučilišta*), cultural centres (*kulturni centri*), cultural homes (*domovi kulture*), and community (people’s) homes (*društveni (narodni) domovi*). Furthermore, other buildings which hold a comparable function are also mentioned: people’s reading rooms (*narodne čitaonice*), workers’ homes and holiday resorts (*radnički domovi i odmarališta*), labour union homes (*sindikalni domovi*), homes for cooperatives (*zadružni domovi*), kindergartens (*dječji vrtići*), parks and homes for Pioneers (aged 7–15) (*pionirski parkovi i domovi*), peasant homes – Croatian peasant homes, Croatian homes, Commercial Unity homes, Peasant Unity homes (*seljački domovi – hrvatski seljački domovi, domovi Gospodarske sloge, domovi Seljačke sloge*), educational homes (*prosvjetni domovi*), educational hearths (*prosvjetna ognjišta*), etc. The Croatian terms for these types of buildings and building complexes do not have single equivalents in English translation (cf., e.g., Dinulović, Konstantinović and Zeković 2014; Leček and Šute 2018; Rogić and Mutnjaković 1984). In this paper, we use the English term *home* to denote buildings called *dom* in Croatian because we believe that it best describes the role which was assigned to these buildings and institutions in the socialist period. They were not residential spaces but were meant to be places where people gathered and socialized, as well as places which strengthened the social integrity of the community and increased the trust people placed in the dominant ideology.

<sup>3</sup> Today’s Public Open University Zagreb is the successor of an institution originally established in 1907 due to the efforts of Albert Bazala and following the example of similar institutions in cities across Europe. The institution changed names several times, starting with the Popular University (1907), Central People’s University (1946), People’s University of the City of Zagreb (1954), Workers’ University (1954), Moša Pijade Workers’ University (1957),

ed for education and the dissemination of culture became a paradigmatic example of the socially engaged architecture of the 1960s.

The historical and contemporary roles of multifunctional buildings and institutions for education and the dissemination of culture, as well as how they were transformed starting from 1950s up until now, have not been sufficiently explored in either scholarly research into socialist architecture in general or as part of socialist architecture in the former Yugoslavia. Apart from individual papers (e.g. Pivac 1951), two broader studies should be noted. The first, *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj* (officially translated in the publication summary as *Culture Centers, Culture Halls and Community Centers in the Socialist Republic of Croatia*), written in 1984 by Ivan Rogić and Andrija Mutnjaković, addressed the relationship between cultural and community homes, their functions, typologies, standardisation and the like. The second study, *Arhitektura objekata domova kulture u Republici Srbiji* (*The Architecture of Cultural Homes in the Republic of Serbia*), had several contributing authors and was edited in 2014 by Radivoje Dinulović, Dragana Konstantinović and Miljana Zeković. This edited volume attempts to define the contemporary role of cultural homes and to assess their future potential by analysing their cultural and historical context and attendant values; programmatic, architectural and urbanistic aspects; and cultural policymaking and management of cultural spaces. Both studies demonstrate that the topic transcends the narrower field of architecture (i.e. architectural history) and includes research on political, social and cultural systems (cf. Mako, Roter Blagojević and Vukotić Lazar 2014). Furthermore, these studies indicate that individual case studies should be examined and point to the transformations in socialist architecture and institutions that resulted from both the changing educational and cultural policies in the socialist period and changes to the political and social environment in the 1990s. Transformations of the socialist built environment have often been a topic of research (cf., e.g., Light and Young 2010; Janev 2017; Rihtman-Auguštin 2000; Ristić 2014). Research indicates that there is a connection between politico-ideological changes and changes in the significance and values ascribed to spaces and architecture, which ultimately results in degradation, neglect or dismantling of structures and changes in name and/or function. In order to comprehend the social transformations that include architecture, it is necessary to follow the “complex, meaningful and creative lives of buildings” (Maudlin and Vellinga 2014: 1) and the changes these buildings undergo over time. It is also necessary for different stakeholders for whom a building holds some significance (those who commissioned it, critics, beneficiaries, visitors, scholars, architects, art-

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Moša Pijade Workers' and People's University (1980), Open University (1990), and Public Open University Zagreb (1997). Since it was established, the institution's remit has been adult education and overall cultural enlightenment. It also changed locations before the current building was inaugurated in 1961 at its present-day address, 68 Vukovar Street, Zagreb. The building was designed by architects Radovan Nikšić and co-author Ninoslav Kučan, and the furniture and fittings design were created by Bernardo Bernardi. In 1962 the building was the recipient of the City of Zagreb Award. It has been granted the status of a cultural good and is included in the Registry of Cultural Goods of the Republic of Croatia (<https://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=6212>, accessed 1. 7. 2019).

ists, journalists, residents, owners, and others) to create meanings and values and to negotiate these with one another (cf. Brand 1994; Maudlin and Vellinga 2014).

Available research about the Public Open University Zagreb (POUZ) / Moša Pi-jade Workers' (and People's) University (RANS) has so far focused on architectural history, interior design and conservation (Ceraj 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Ceraj, Haničar Buljan and Margaretić Urlić 2017; Jurlina 2018; Margaretić Urlić 2011; Margaretić Urlić and Šerman 2014; Paladino and Haničar Buljan 2011); on the role the building played within modern Croatian and Yugoslav architecture (Domljan 1969; Mrduljaš and Bjažić Klarin 2014; Bjažić Klarin 2016, 2018; Radović Mahečić 2004; Stierli and Kulić 2018); and on the institution's historical development as part of lifelong learning, adult education and education for workers (e.g., Horvat et al. 2003; Obad and Horvat 1997; Šoljan 1985). Social life and aspects of the building and the institution have been the subject of relatively few (popular) studies (Kovačević 2011; Krstić&Krstić 2011; Obad 2015; Roksandić and Keller 2011). Although the Workers' University in Zagreb was recognised by contemporary critics and architectural historians as a masterpiece of modernist design, it is usually analysed as an example of "total design" and one of the few built iconic signs of the idea of synthesis in post-war Croatian architecture (Galjer, Lončar and Rubić 2018). However, content and purpose as generators of this innovative design have still not been fully explored. This could, at least in part, be ascribed to its connection to the ideology of socialist society.

The focus of this paper is the innovative character of the architectural concept of socially engaged architecture and its changes within societal transformation from the early 1960s to the present. We have investigated the relationship between programmes, beneficiaries, employees, and the architectural environment. We also examined the political, economic and social context by analysing documents and other textual materials dealing with the history of the institution and on the architectural typologies of buildings with similar functions (cultural homes, cultural centres, community homes etc.) including scholarly literature, popular texts and recollections of former employees. Furthermore, we carried out extensive archival research,<sup>4</sup> conducted interviews with former and current employees of the institution, participated in round-table discussions about the building and organised walks around the interior of the building led by professionals, and analysed art projects related to the building (exhibitions). The analysis and discussion in this paper focus on three main questions: (1) What was the political and social context within which workers' universities were created as a form of socially engaged architecture in socialist Yugoslavia? (2) In what way was the architectural design of Zagreb's Workers' University innovative and what role did it play in creating a new socialist society? (3) How did changes to the political system and educational and cultural policies impact how the building and institution were transformed both physically and in terms of its significance?

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<sup>4</sup> Consulted archival records are listed in the list of references.

## Political and social context of the architectural typology

The establishment and activities of workers' universities should be viewed as part of an overarching architectural typology of multifunctional buildings for educational and cultural purposes that were being built as early as the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> They should also be viewed within the context of new political circumstances post-1945, which saw new forms of educational, propagandist and cultural activities. At that time, buildings and building complexes with comparable functions were also being constructed in other socialist countries. There were several workers' homes and clubs built in the Soviet Union post-1919 based on the *Maison du Peuple* model originally established in the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> This exceptionally popular typology was often comprised of hybrid and highly complex structures that included cinemas, theatres, libraries, sports halls, and spaces for various other activities. Their purpose was determined by the ideological programme and politicisation of post-revolutionary society (Chan-Magomedov 1983: 435). It is no coincidence that radical solutions,

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed analysis of the development of different types of multifunctional institutions for educational and cultural purposes and the relationships between these types is beyond the scope of this paper. Such institutions have existed in Croatia since the 19th century when reading rooms began to be established in urban and rural areas. The early 20th century saw the development of popular (called "people's") universities, in order to popularise science and learning. Their establishment was influenced by the British university extension and the Scandinavian adult education movements, and they followed the pattern of similar institutions in Vienna and Prague (Golubović 1985: 89). The Popular University in Zagreb was founded in 1907 and was among the first institutions of this kind (ibid.). By 1930 there were 50 popular universities in Yugoslavia (ibid.). People's universities were active during the Yugoslav National Liberation War and Revolution (1941–1945). Their work focused on mass education and activities such as public lectures, discussions of current events, literary evenings and other similar cultural events (ibid.: 91). Meanwhile, in the interwar period the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka* – HSS) began to build peasant homes in rural areas of the country. Some of the names these buildings were given included the Croatian Peasant Home (*Hrvatski seljački dom*), the Croatian Home (*Hrvatski dom*), Commercial Unity Home (*Dom Gospodarske sloge*), Peasant Unity Home (*Dom Seljačke sloge*, *Sloga*) and others (Leček and Šute 2018). They were multifunctional spaces, which meant that the well-known institution of the reading room was adapted to meet the political, economic, cultural and other needs of the visitors (ibid.: 160). A noteworthy figure when it came to designing multifunctional buildings meant to develop social life and offer cultural and educational activities (Croatian homes, educational homes, educational hearths, cultural homes) was Croatian architect Aleksandar Freudenreich (1892–1974). In 1943 he wrote a lengthy volume titled *Prosvjetna ognjišta: Priručnik za poticanje na građenje, osnivanje i izgradnju društvenih domova s dvoranama u Hrvatskoj* (*Educational Hearths: A Handbook to Encourage the Construction and Establishment of Community Homes with Halls in Croatia*) in which he described the programme-related and architectural features of such buildings meant to be built in smaller towns and villages (Freudenreich 1943; Limani 2009; Lončar 2014: 372–390). Following World War II, homes for cooperatives (*zadružni domovi*) started to be built in rural areas. They were intended as centres of "cultural, educational and cooperative life in villages" (cf. Živković 2009; Konstantinović 2014). In 1948 eleven types of homes for cooperatives were presented in the publication *Tipovi zadružnih domova* (*Types of Homes for Cooperatives*). Several hundred such buildings were built in Croatia in the first few years following World War II (Živković 2009: 294).

<sup>6</sup> *Maison du Peuple* (the People's Home) in Brussels, Belgium was a public building designed by Belgian architect Victor Horta in Art Nouveau style in 1896 and opened in 1899. The building was commissioned by the Belgian Workers' Party. It consisted of a café seating a thousand visitors, which shared the ground floor with various trading departments, while administrative departments, halls of various sizes for public meetings, trade union meetings, and social gatherings were located on the first floor, reached by an iron staircase. On the roof there was a large theatre and concert hall for more than 2,000 people. The architectural design reflects Horta's aim of expressing socialist ideas, which makes this significant not just as a masterpiece of Art Nouveau, but as an attempt to explicitly demonstrate the unity of ideology and architecture. This multifunctional programme became a paradigm for numerous people's homes in Belgium. One example is the *Vooruit*, built in Ghent in 1911–1914 by architect Ferdinand Dierkens as the cultural centre for Ghent's labour movement, which became a symbol of the socialist movement in the interwar period.



such as those of Konstantin Melnikov, were often heavily criticised for their experimental and individualised architectural expression (Wortmann 1990).

There were numerous institutions built in socialist Yugoslavia for educational and cultural purposes, which were meant to help further particular politico-ideological goals, i.e., to play an active role in creating a new socialist society. The new multi-functional workers' universities continued in part to add to the existing network of educational institutions (people's universities); however, attempts were made to find the "most suitable model" and to standardise these multifunctional institutions (cf. Pivac 1951; Rogić and Mutnjaković 1984). Discussions about establishing new institutions and expanding the network of people's universities had taken place as early as World War II, as part of what was locally referred to as the National Liberation Struggle. Guidelines for a "people's enlightenment" ("*narodno prosvjeđivanje*") policy were incorporated into the programme goals of the highest legislative and executive bodies – Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ)<sup>7</sup> in 1942 and State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH)<sup>8</sup> in 1943 – and these included the foundations of the programmes at future people's universities.<sup>9</sup>

The first workers' universities were established at the initiative of the Trade Union Association of Yugoslavia. This was based on the

need to enable the "new" working class of Yugoslavia to take an organised approach to facilitating self-management, which would initially be introduced in 1950, and to enable its efficient education in response to the new requirements imposed by the accelerated industrialisation and economic expansion of the country, as well as to create the necessary conditions for the development of cultural life and cultural production of the working class. (Odbor 1983: 3)

In these institutions, workers attended compulsory lectures, courses and seminars on worker self-management, as well as literacy and general primary education courses. The institutions also offered courses on general culture, provided space for cultural and/or artistic associations or groups, and organised cultural, artistic, theatrical and cinematic performances and other similar activities (ibid.).

Within a few years the model became very successful and widespread, and there was a network of these institutions in all former Yugoslav republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Statistics on the number of workers' and people's universities, educational and cultural activities, and the number of students and visitors illustrate how consistently and comprehen-

<sup>7</sup> *Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije* (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) (1942–1945).

<sup>8</sup> *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske* (State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia) (1943–1945).

<sup>9</sup> At the first AVNOJ session in Bihać in 1942, the Education Division drew up the People's University Statute (*Statut narodnog sveučilišta*), instructions on establishing literacy courses and other forms of educational improvement for the nation. At the second AVNOJ session in 1943 in the town of Jajce, the decision was made to establish people's universities on liberated territory (Odbor 1983: 3–4). The first people's university was set up in Bihać in 1942 and began to operate before the war had ended (Golubović 1985: 90).

sively the target political ideology and educational and cultural policies were being enforced. Workers' universities grew in number from 1953 to 1966, then declined until 1971 and finally levelled off up to the early 1980s (*ibid.*: 6) (Figure 1). The institutions saw several changes to the way they operated over the decades, depending on the circumstances in the different republics and provinces (*cf.* Dinulović, Konstantinović and Zeković 2014; Rogić and Mutnjaković 1984; Šoljan 1985).

Year	Total Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Croatia	Macedonia	Slovenia	Serbia			
							Total	Serbia Proper	Province of Kosovo	Province of Vojvodina
1953	P 840	65	35	182	83	63	412	293	49	70
	<u>W 15</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
	P+W 855	73	35	183	87	63	415	294	49	72
1954	P 677	76	38	164	51	28	320	226	27	67
	<u>W 32</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	P+W 709	88	39	166	61	28	327	231	28	68
1955	P 600	69	28	162	76	14	251	163	35	53
	<u>W 81</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>13</u>
	P+W 681	87	30	172	101	14	277	175	35	66
1959/60	P 442	50	22	125	33	16	196	117	19	60
	<u>W 212</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>25</u>
	P+W 654	85	29	151	50	75	264	153	26	85
1965/66	P 247	60	9	94	5	-	79	52	3	24
	<u>W 251</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>29</u>
	P+W 498	102	18	115	32	60	171	108	10	53
1970/71	P 213	58	6	83	4	-	62	46	1	16
	<u>W 222</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>27</u>
	P+W 435	96	12	100	30	48	149	99	7	43
1975/76	P 184	53	5	74	4	-	48	35	-	13
	<u>W 227</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>28</u>
	P+W 411	95	13	93	29	47	134	89	4	41
1978/79	P 134	53	2	73	3	-	53	40	-	13
	<u>W 230</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>36</u>
	P+W 414	94	9	91	28	47	145	89	5	51
1981/82	P 166	52	1	67	3	-	43	31	-	12
	<u>W 225</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>36</u>
	P+W 391	99	3	83	28	46	132	78	6	48

Figure 1. Number of people's and workers' universities in Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces in the years 1953, 1954, 1955, 1959/60, 1965/66, 1970/71, 1975/76, 1978/79, 1981/82 (Odbor 1983: 13; *cf.* Golubović 1985: 93).

P = number of people's universities, W = number of workers' universities, P+W = number of people's and workers' universities combined.



In Yugoslavia in 1953, there were 840 people's universities and 15 workers' universities, while in 1965/66 there were 247 people's universities and 251 workers' universities. In Croatia there were 182 people's universities and only one workers' university in 1953, whereas in 1965/66 there were 94 people's universities and 21 workers' universities (Odbor 1983: 13). In areas where workers' universities had not been established, their role was fulfilled by people's universities (ibid.: 3). The number of lectures, seminars, courses, performances, and exhibitions and the number of attendees were impressive. Figures show, for example, that in 1955/56 there were 681 people's and workers' universities in Yugoslavia, which hosted 17,335 public lectures with 2,123,000 attendees, while in 1960/61 there were 685 people's and workers' universities, which hosted 37,040 public lectures with 3,453,000 attendees, and 16,374 seminars and courses with 657,000 attendees. In 1975/76 there were 12,842 performances and exhibitions in Yugoslavia attended by 3,547,853 people (ibid.: 14) (Figure 2).

Year	Number of people's and workers' universities	Number of public lectures	Audience	Number of seminars and courses	Number of participants	Cultural events and exhibitions	
						Number	Attendance
1955	681	17,335	2,123,000				
1960/61	685	37,040	3,453,000	16,374	657,000		
1965/66	498	30,819	2,658,000	13,793	492,000		
1970/71	435	22,571	1,529,000	15,470	551,000		
1975/76	411	29,282	1,934,000	19,404	759,000	12,842	3,547,853
1978/79	414	7,611	573,026	17,914	705,721	6,612	3,109,951
1981/82	391	9,101	572,603	17,078	683,090	8,353	3,311,418

Figure 2. Educational activities at people's and workers' universities in Yugoslavia (There are no statistical records for the cultural activities at people's and workers' universities before 1975/76) (Odbor 1983: 14; cf. Golubović 1985: 94).

People's and workers' universities (as educational institutions for workers employed in factories) were hotspots of political and ideological activity. A broad institutional network and large-scale citizen involvement allowed the national government to disseminate ideas related to socialism and to realize the programme of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Odbor 1983: 4). At the same time, people's and workers' universities were places of cultural production and dissemination – “educational institutions and focal points of adult education and cultural life in their communities” (Golubović 1985: 92). This raises the question of the relationship between the architectural programming/function and design. How was architectural design (spatial relations, communication, design) meant to respond to the political, educational and cultural demands of the society of the time? Were workers' universities (and multifunctional buildings for educational and cultural purposes in general) brought

about in a unified, standardized form due to the socially engaged role they played? Or did they express a modern and innovative character of architecture and spatial design that was in opposition to the traditional orientation of cultural and artistic education?

The process of standardising the construction of cultural homes in socialist Yugoslavia began as early as 1947 with the first standard conceptual designs. However, inconsistent use of off-the-shelf solutions often led to work of insufficient quality. An early attempt at a systematic approach to this architectural typology in Croatian circumstances was *O domovima kulture* (*On Cultural Homes*) by Anđelko Pivac (1951). His starting point was a definition stating that programmes at cultural homes must be suited to their primary function, which was that of “a cultural and social centre, a place for the political and general betterment of the people” (Pivac 1951: 108). The author differentiates between a minimal programme intended for smaller communities and a more extensive and demanding programme incorporating a variety of facilities including larger halls for lectures, screenings and performances and rooms where groups convening around the theatre, music and various other topics could work independently (*ibid.*: 109). Pivac also lists the various spaces systematically according to their purpose. He believes that areas intended for work should be separate from those intended for exhibitions and public use. For this latter space he further differentiates between two groups of spaces: a hall with a foyer separate from the building service area and common rooms with a library and additional activity space (for chess, table tennis, pool, dancing, etc.) (*ibid.*: 110–111). He emphasizes the importance of communication as part of these functional zones, both within the building and with the space surrounding it. Among other things, he proposes that common areas open out towards a park or open space. Indicative of this is that in the conclusion Pivac stresses the special significance of the social role of architecture in this type of building and suggests that its architectural design deserves special attention. Our analysis of how space in this paradigmatic building – Zagreb’s Workers’ University – was conceived and organized confirms that the design included all these requirements, i.e., that the spatial concept emerged from the requirements defined in the early 1950s. This had not been observed in previous analyses and interpretations (cf. Margaretić Urlić 2011). It was this flexibility of spatial disposition that was best suited to changes in organisational structure and new facilities.

As part of socially engaged architectural production, cultural homes began to take on features of a specific typology. In the late 1950s, in accordance with the policy of cultural decentralisation and a shift away from the city centre, many multipurpose cultural homes began to be built in Zagreb. They were uniformly dispersed amongst the city’s municipalities (Dubrava, Sesvete, Peščenica, Novi Zagreb, Susedgrad, Trešnjevka and others), which reaffirmed the programme goals of generating culture and education, creating new forms of social interaction and incorporating local communities into cultural production. However, the degree of synthesis achieved in the paradigmatic example of RANS between spatial concept, function and social role was not achieved anywhere else.

## The Workers' University in Zagreb as a paradigm of innovative design

The Workers' University in Zagreb is a paradigmatic example of the socially engaged architecture of the 1950s. The decision to build an iconic building as a metaphor of societal modernisation and democratisation was made in 1955, and it defined the social and political relevance of education.<sup>10</sup> For such an important purpose, an appropriate location was required. Modern urban and architectural principles from the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (Blau and Rupnik 2007: 164) were contextualised as part of the new political and social system and realised in the construction of Moscow Boulevard, which had been named Belgrade Street in 1953, renamed Street of the Proletarian Brigades in 1957, and finally renamed Vukovar Street in the 1990s. These changes to the street's name reflect its symbolic value that is integrated into the major public buildings built on it: City Hall (1958), Workers' University (1961), Hall of Justice (1970), Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall (1973) and the Public Accounts Service (1981), which all represented the *genius loci* of power, culture and a planned economy (Ivanković 2006) (Figure 3). The construction of the two intersecting streets, University Avenue and Miramar Street, extended the axis of the Green Horseshoe string of parks in the area from the central railway station to the Sava River, which clearly marks not only the idea of connecting new and old Zagreb but also the continuity of the modern urban concept. The new urban axis was conceived as a representative string of higher education institutions designed and built over a period of just a few years (1956–1964), while the University of Zagreb was experiencing intensive growth. It comprises the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing (architect Božidar Tušek, 1959–1963), Moša Pijade Workers' University (architects Radovan Nikšić and co-author Ninoslav Kučan, furniture and fittings design by Bernardo Bernardi) (Ceraj 2015: 154), the Technical College (architects Marijan Haberle and Minka Jurković, 1960), the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (architect Božidar Tušek, 1955–1962) and the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture (architect Kazimir Ostrogović, 1964) (Ivanković 2006). These are superb examples of the modern understanding of a specific purpose, such as the organisation of the activity of higher education institutions, but also an expression of how society at the time saw institutions of learning and knowledge acquisition within the modernising processes of a transforming society.

It was thus no accident that the formal opening of the Workers' University building was an extravagant, widely publicized affair that was attended by the most prominent political leaders, and coincided with the First Conference of the Non-Aligned

<sup>10</sup> The decision to construct the building was made on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the country's liberation from German occupation, at the meeting of the People's Committee of the City of Zagreb held on 8 May 1955 ([s. n.] 1956).

Movement in 1961.<sup>11</sup> Comparisons of educational and cultural institutions in socialist Yugoslavia with the French model of *culture pour chacun* (“culture for everyone”) – established by André Malraux as the Minister of Cultural Affairs in de Gaulle’s government (1956–1969) – though intriguing, should be viewed with caution (Švec Španjol and Vujnović 2015: 6). Although they both stem from centralised politics, their goals as part of the democratisation of society are vastly different (Eyriès 2018: 51–74).



Figure 3. Radovan Nikšić and Ninoslav Kučan (co-author), Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1955–1961) and Vukovar Street, view from the west, 1960s (source: Institute of Art History, photo: Krešimir Tadić).

<sup>11</sup> The fact that the building had not been fully completed at the time lends the occasion even greater importance.



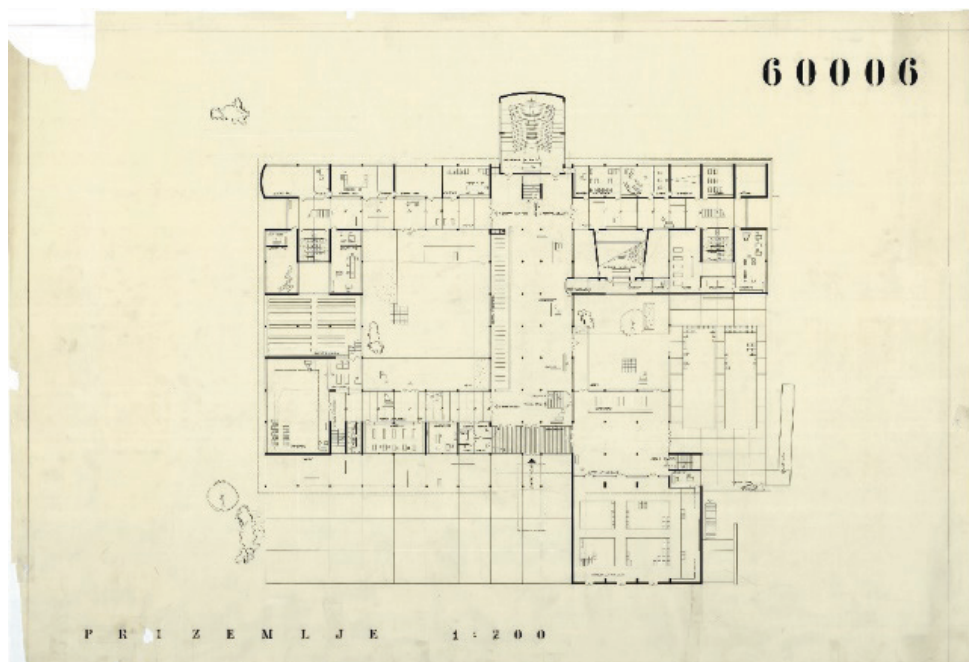


Figure 4. Radovan Nikšić and Ninoslav Kučan (co-author), Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), ground floor plan, competition entry (1955) (source: The Croatian Museum of Architecture — HAZU, Personal archive bequeathed by Radovan Nikšić, Inventory number: HMA/RN/3/18 (I-135/, kat. 018)).

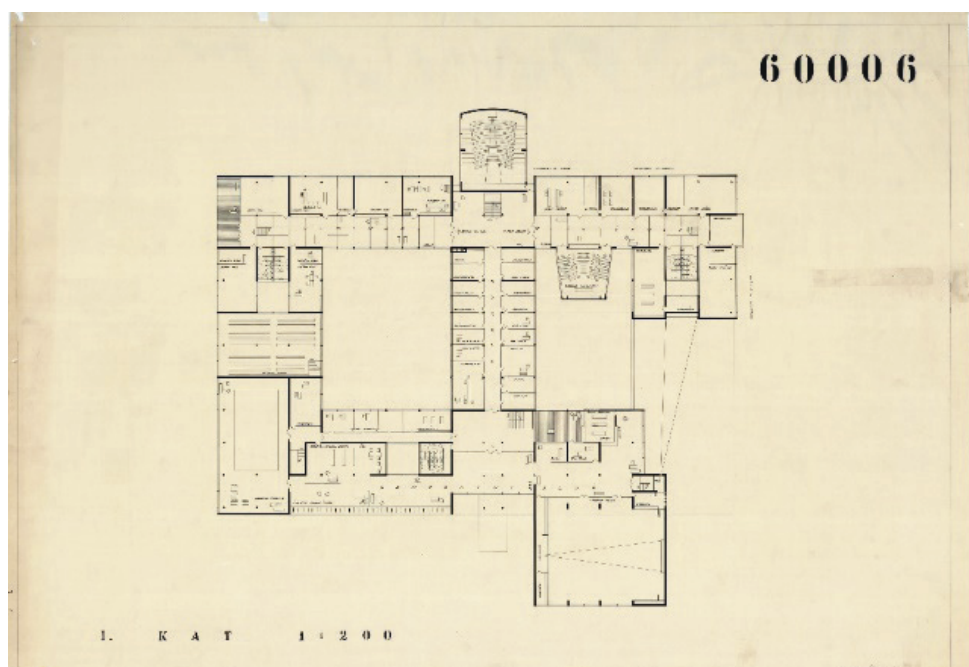


Figure 5. Radovan Nikšić and Ninoslav Kučan (co-author), Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), upper floor plan, competition entry (1955) (source: The Croatian Museum of Architecture — HAZU, Personal archive bequeathed by Radovan Nikšić, Inventory number: HMA/RN/3/18 (I-135/, kat. 018)).

Architects Radovan Nikšić and co-author Ninoslav Kučan, together with their associate Petar Kušan, devised a new kind of socially engaged architecture suitable for innovative educational methods aimed at adults and workers, and a multifunctional centre for various media of modern cultural production and consumption. The main idea was to create a fully active space that expressed the aim of city-building (the cultural ambition of developing a new city district with new type of buildings for public purposes) (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

The total surface of 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> was designed as a small city for around 5,000 daily visitors. Within the complex, spaces include inner streets and squares, open inner courtyards, halls and classrooms. Each space is given its own specific meaning by its position, use and fittings, but above all by its relationship to other spaces, to the whole and to the content of the site. The corridors, pathways and foyers play a key role as multifunctional spaces for communication. Special attention was paid to the “islands for rest” that were carefully distributed throughout the building (Figure 6). The purpose of shaping transparent spaces was to achieve an atmosphere and emotional quality whereby workers and visitors could feel “at home”. Nikšić defined the main idea of architectural design as a space–time concept, undoubtedly evoking Siegfried Giedion’s theory set forth in his influential book *Space, Time, Architecture*, first published in 1941 (Nikšić 1958). The spaces were vertically connected with several freely situated stairways, forming a “continuous” floating space.



Figure 6. Interior of Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), corridors with the “islands for rest” (source: Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, photo: Željko Krčadinac).

The architectural scene in socialist Yugoslavia was exceptionally vibrant and open. The United Nations Development Programme and study visits abroad allowed young architects to implement their experiences in their home environments and to initiate international networks. At an exhibition on residential architecture in socialist Yugoslavia 1945–1955, held in 1955 at the Fourth Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA) in The Hague, young architects interacted and initiated the forma-



tion of a “network”.<sup>12</sup> Improved communication was also apparent in the numerous articles on Dutch architecture and urbanism published in the *Čovjek i prostor* (*Man and Space*) journal. Architects who wrote for the Dutch architectural journal *Forum* played a key part in this development, as in 1956 *Forum*’s editor, Reinder Blijstra, came to Zagreb to deliver a lecture on contemporary Dutch architecture. His lecture focused in large part on urban renewal in Rotterdam and the construction of the *Lijnbaan* commercial area designed by Van der Broek and Bakema (Piffl 1956). Johannes van den Broek and Jacob Bakema’s studio in Rotterdam also hosted Radovan Nikšić (in 1956) and Milica Šterić (in 1957) from Belgrade, one of the most successful female architects in Yugoslavia in the postwar period. The visits were made possible by scholarships the two visiting architects received from the Dutch government.

During a 6-month stay in the Netherlands in 1956, Radovan Nikšić worked at the Van der Broek and Bakema studio and studied the Dutch construction industry and contemporary residential and school buildings. Furthermore, Jacob Bakema invited Nikšić to present this extraordinary work at the last meeting of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) in Otterlo in 1959, thereby recognising this architectural concept corresponded with the ideas of Team 10 and Bakema’s own theories.

Although this information regarding his time in the Netherlands are quite well known, the radical change to the competition project that differed from the final design has not yet been analysed in terms of structuralism in architecture. Similarly, it has escaped notice that Nikšić’s RANS project was designed in 1955 – the same year when Aldo van Eyck’s *Burgerweershuis* was designed in Amsterdam. Today Van Eyck’s project is viewed as a prototype of the structuralist approach to architectural design. It is based on the modular design principle and the dynamic composition of spatial units, as is the RANS project. The two architects also had a common approach to the use of skeleton framing and the role of the integrative element in designing the whole, as well as to the key role played by space intended for communication and designed to resemble “inner streets”, which resulted in new dimensions for social relations. Nikšić would go on to demonstrate a sustained interest in communications and construction in architecture. One result of this was his doctoral dissertation, *Komunikacije – konstruktivni i oblikovni element arhitekture* (*Communications – A Construction and Design Element of Architecture*), defended at Zagreb’s Faculty of Architecture in 1978. He used a number of examples from contemporary architecture to investigate the construction system of load-bearing cores as a formative element of the new structure of urban spaces. These examples included the conceptual designs by Arata Isozaki and Kisho Kurokawa, Jacob Bakema’s Dutch pavilion at the Osaka World Expo in 1970, Paul Rudolph’s Graphic Arts Centre (1967) and his own designs of standard residential buildings (Nikšić 1978: II–III).

Compatibility with Team 10 concepts and theories is evident in the idea of flexibility (a flexible ground plan in which units could change and enable redesigns in

<sup>12</sup> From the beginning of the 1950s, delegates represented Yugoslavia at the Congresses of the International Union of Architects (UIA) held in Rabat and Casablanca in 1951, and in Lisbon in 1953 as well as at the first regional meeting of urban planners of Eastern Mediterranean in Athens in 1954 (Bjažić Klarin 2016).

accordance with what the space would be used for). According to the principle of synthesis, Bernardo Bernardi designed all of the interior fittings, which created an organic whole of highly individualized spaces that could be easily modified. In addition to the educational units, the space included a large library with a reading room and a documentation centre (Figure 7), editorial offices for ambitious publishing activities with printing facilities and numerous additional activities. Special attention was paid to the design of the two multifunctional auditoriums, one with 600 seats (Figure 8) and the other with 220, planned for conferences, concerts, theatrical performances and film screenings. The cultural education programmes were particularly interesting and ranged from introductory to more advanced courses. The visual arts syllabi focused on understanding and experiencing art and included art history, modern and contemporary art, and architecture and design.



Figure 7. Interior of Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), Bernardo Bernardi, round table and A4 chairs in the ground floor reading room (source: Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, photo: Željko Krčadinac).



Figure 8. Interior of Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), Great Hall (source: Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, photo: Željko Krčadinac).

An optimal space was created through a study of teaching methods: a “seminar” unit for a group of 15–20 participants. Instead of rigid classrooms, the interiors were designed according to individualised and dynamic teaching methods and programmes and fitted with modular furniture and fittings that could be arranged in various combinations, which enabled direct and more democratic communication within a group (Figure 9). Thus teaching models and educational programming generated the building's spatial structure based on a spatial module of 7x7 metres.

The curriculum was tailored to meet a very broad range of adult educational needs. It was aimed at students at different levels and envisaged an elective approach.

The teaching methodology required students to actively participate as a means of developing independence at work. Three types of seminars were offered at the Workers' University in Zagreb: general educational and cultural topics, economics-based topics, and vocational education and training. Some groups were further divided according to topic or scholarly area; for instance, general education included general introductory seminars followed by seminars in the social sciences, natural sciences or the arts, during which students would acquire specialized, practical knowledge. A case in point is the Department of Social Sciences, which offered seminars on scientific socialism and the history of the workers' movement as well as one on church and religion that focused specifically on ideology. Another example is that of the Arts Department, which offered seminars on art, literature, music, and theatre. The focus was also on active class participation and the students' perceptions of the works they were studying. Classes were supplemented with topics-based clubs (e.g., contemporary literature, music, film or art) whose members held discussions and investigated the contemporary production of various media (Figure 10). It is clear from how the syllabi were structured and the teaching methods employed that there was a deliberate educational strategy in which culture played a key role as an integrative principle. Once they had completed the general educational courses programmes, the students could go on to attend the Post-Secondary School for Workers, whose primary purpose was to provide training for management positions. Various other types of activities were offered as well, such as fieldwork and event management.



Figure 9. Interior of Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), spatial module — a seminar room with desks that could be easily moved around to accommodate different teaching methods (source: Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, photo: Željko Krčadinac).



Figure 10. Interior of Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (1961), music education (source: Library of the Public Open University Zagreb, photo: Željko Krčadinac).

In 1957, the RANS Cultural Centre expanded its range when it began publishing an illustrated arts and culture journal called *15 dana* (*15 Days*).<sup>13</sup> It was initially published as a pocket edition – a mere eight pages in length – and it was intended to serve as a “fifteen-day information service” for the workers/employees of Zagreb. It was meant as a guide to the various programmes – theatre, concert, art, cinema etc. – organised by the Cultural Centre and targeted those who attended seminars offered by Moša Pijade Workers' University. This brief bulletin-like publication grew into a magazine and later a journal, which is indicative of highly dynamic developments in the field of popularising culture, which reached its peak in the 1960s. The publication included regular sections on the primary areas RANS was engaged in, including literature, painting, music, sculpture, caricature and photography, film and theatre, architecture and design, and the culture of domesticity (*kultura stanovanja*). They were produced by regular contributors to the journal, and contributions by Radovan Ivančević, Zlatko Kauzlarić, Andrija Mutnjaković, Milan Prelog, Radoslav Putar, Žarko Domljan and Eugen Franković were of particular note (Galjer 2016).<sup>14</sup>

In the 1960s in particular, numerous cultural programmes not only took place there but were also co-organised by the Workers' University; the Genre Film Festival (GEFF), “International Symposium Computers and Visual Research” (1969), “Industrial Design and Socio-Economic Movements in Yugoslavia” (1969) and others approve the highest standards of the activities. It is this area in particular in which the affirmation of radical, experimental and avant-garde forms of cultural production were evident. They had grown exceptionally popular thanks to the RANS pro-

<sup>13</sup> Starting with the ninth issue in 1958, the journal added a subheading to the title that has since changed several times.

<sup>14</sup> See Galjer 2016 for further detail on the popularisation of design in the *15 Days*.



gramme and were linked to developments in the contemporary art scene such as the New Tendencies exhibitions and the Music Biennale festivals, which all involved intermediality; bringing together art, technological innovation and the public and everyday sphere; and a pro-science approach (Kružić 2018: 19). This complex relationship was exemplified by the position taken by the Film Club, which organised screenings for club members and included censored films that were not permitted for country-wide distribution. The auditorium at RANS, the popular Moša Great Hall, couldn't hold everyone who wanted to attend screenings of "Repulsion" by Roman Polanski; "The Confession" by Costa Gavras; "Performance" by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg, starring Mick Jagger; or "The Tin Drum" by Völker Schlöndorf. Meanwhile, the GEF addressed timely and provocative topics such as that of the relationship between cybernetics and aesthetics, and the role of film in the affirmation of sexuality as an option for bringing about a new humanism.

## Transformations of the building and the institution from the 1960s to the present

Over the years the social role of workers' universities has changed dramatically. Transformations of these institutions took place within broader shifts in socialism's educational and cultural policies and within changes to the political system in the 1990s. These transformations could be seen in various material and non-material aspects of architecture and the institution, including changes to curricula, organisation, and funding mechanisms; how the space was used; how the original design was maintained and preserved; thoughts on how multifunctional architecture could be standardized for educational and cultural purposes; and changes to the values, meanings and ideas individuals and society as a whole ascribed to architecture and the institution.

Following a steep upward trajectory in the 1960s, the Yugoslav socio-political model experienced a crisis in the 1970s. This was reflected in attempts to introduce sweeping reforms for education and other areas. In 1976, an important symposium took place against the backdrop of seeking possible guidelines for transforming socially engaged architecture, during which Yugoslav architects convened to discuss the cultural homes.<sup>15</sup> The symposium, which was covered in the journal *Arhitektura* in 1976, hosted discussions on the role of cultural homes and the possibilities for transforming their functions as part of contemporary social needs. Amongst other contributions, those of Božidar Rašica and Andrija Mutnjaković are of particular note: the former used a comparative analysis of French architectural practices to highlight the need to embed the principles of sociological theory into architectural practice (Rašica 1976), while the latter looked at the social aspects of cultural homes and their

<sup>15</sup> The symposium was held in memory of the architect Drago Ibler on 21–23 May 1976 in the town of Kumrovec. The materials distributed at the symposium were published in their entirety in the journal *Arhitektura* 158–159 (1976) and supplemented by selected examples of cultural homes, cultural centres and memorial centres, including Moša Pijade Workers' University in Zagreb (Nikšić 1976).

role in spatial design (Mutnjaković 1976). One of the delegates at the symposium was Stipe Šušar, the Republic Secretary for Education and Culture (a role equivalent to those held by today's ministers for culture, science and education) and a key player in the reform of 1974, which was meant to become a platform for transforming the socio-political model of socialist (worker) self-management. He subscribed to the idea that development is generated by the decentralization, decommercialization and deschoolarization of education (Šušar 1982). However, the reform did not succeed in integrating education and culture into the real needs of a society practising self-management. In the example of RANS this transformation was obvious in the fragmentation and weakening links between individual organisational units.

The 1980s were marked by attempts to redefine the functions of buildings designed in the preceding period of modernisation. The transformation of workers' universities as multifunctional institutions continued with a focus on cultural activities. The focus also shifted from politics to vocational adult education, foreign language learning, senior citizen programmes and the like. Meanwhile, the idea of standardizing architectural types continued to play a role. *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj* (officially translated in the publication summary as *Culture Centers, Culture Halls and Community Centers in the Socialist Republic of Croatia*), a study by Ivan Rogić and Andrija Mutnjaković, combines the research and experience accumulated up to that point (Rogić and Mutnjaković 1984). Building on sociological and architectural premises, the authors used an interdisciplinary model to analyse the specific features of these institutions' social role and to develop a system based on functional spatial elements integrated into a structural entity. They grouped basic functional entities, including a hall with a foyer, a library and spaces for workshops, administration, socio-political organisations and hospitality facilities into six types. Depending on the size and complexity of the spatial disposition, these types ranged from a basic module ("a really small cultural centre") of 324 m<sup>2</sup> to a "very large centre" of 3,564 m<sup>2</sup> (ibid.: 97). The study included the basic project components (the layout and perspective view) and suggestions for designing the façade.

The Workers' (and People's) University underwent the most dramatic changes over the past three decades following changes to the political system that accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia and the resulting wars. These are evidenced by the new name of the institution, organisational and programming-related changes, and the condition of the building. This most recent period has seen symbols of the former political system removed from the building (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 2000). The name of the institution was changed to the Open University in 1990 and subsequently to the Public Open University Zagreb in 1997. The words "people's" and "workers'" are no longer used and neither is the name Moša Pijade, a prominent politician from the socialist period.<sup>16</sup> The informal name of the institution, which used to be *Moša*, be-

<sup>16</sup> The name of the institution was changed several times (see footnote no. 3). In 1957–1990 it was named after Moša Pijade (1890–1957), a prominent politician, painter and journalist who worked closely with Josip Broz Tito. He was also a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. He was in prison in 1925–1939 for printing a party paper called *Komunist*. He translated some key Marxist works including Marx's *Das Kapital* (with Rodoljub Čolaković) and Marx and Engel's *The Communist Manifesto*. During World War II, he joined the Partisans and was



came *Pučko* (Public) and *Otvoreno* (Open). Meanwhile, the Street of the Proletarian Brigades, where the institution is located, was renamed Vukovar Street.<sup>17</sup> The sculpture called the Moša Pijade Monument, which was the work of Antun Augustinčić, was removed in 1993.<sup>18</sup> The removal prompted a public reaction, and in 1994 graffiti appeared asking “*di je Moša* [Where’s Moša]”. This was recorded in oral, written and visual forms, as former employee Ružica Kovačević used this question as the title of an article opening an issue of *15 Days* focused on the institution (Kovačević 2011), and former employees Željko Obad and Predrag Mihok presented their interpretation of the event in a comic strip called “Art bonton” (Figure 11).<sup>19</sup>



Figure 11. Illustration by Predrag Mihok in Željko Obad's book *The Moša Pijade Ranch* (Obad 2015: 149).

a member of the Partisan Supreme Command. He was present at the first and second AVNOJ sessions. Once the war was over, he joined the top ranks of party and state officials and contributed to drawing up legislation for socialist Yugoslavia (<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=48186>; <http://krlezijana.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=1991>, accessed 1. 7. 2019).

<sup>17</sup> The street known today as Vukovar Street had several name changes during the 20th century. From the 1930s until 1947 it was called Varaždin Road, Moscow Boulevard in 1947–1953, Belgrade Street in 1953–1957 and Street of the Proletarian Brigades from 1957 until the 1990s. It was renamed Vukovar Street at the beginning of the 1990s (Ivanković 2006). For further details regarding changes to urban nomenclature in Zagreb see Rihtman-Augustin 2000; Stanić, Šakaja and Slavuj 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Antun Augustinčić (1900–1979), one of the most eminent Croatian sculptors of the 20th century, was close to Josip Broz Tito and was the state sculptor during the socialist period. In 1954 he created a sculpture dedicated to Moša Pijade. This sculpture stood in front of the Workers' (and People's) University building from 1961 until 1993 when it was moved to the park adjoining the Lavoslav Schwarz Foundation Retirement Home at 55 Bukovačka Road in Zagreb. The sculpture is a cultural good and is included in the Registry of Cultural Goods of the Republic of Croatia (<http://www1.zagreb.hr/zagreb/galerijakd.nsf/VO/AD51D192C0125FB6C1257F3E00490DE2?OpenDocument>, accessed 1. 7. 2019).

<sup>19</sup> The illustration depicts the façade of the Workers' University with the graffiti and a woman looking for the sculpture where it used to be, asking “Have you seen my Čiča Janko?”. This is a play on a folk song called “Have You Seen My Boy Janko” about the 15th-century heroic figure Janko Sibirjanin and alluding to Moša Pijade's nickname Čiča Janko.



Figure 12. Radovan Nikšić and Ninoslav Kučan (co-author), Moša Pijade Workers' (and People's) University in Zagreb (1955–1961), the condition of the building in 2010 (source: Institute of Art History, photo: Paolo Mofardin).

During the 1990s, the institution ceased being an educational institution for workers and focused instead on adult vocational education and lifelong learning. Consequently, the institution lost permanent funding and found itself on the open educational market, which has meant changes to the educational programmes in accordance with the demands of the labour market as well as a gradual reduction of high-quality art and cultural programmes. Several well-known experts who had established numerous educational and cultural programmes had already left the institution by the 1990s, and most of the courses started being taught by contract-based employees. Also, organisational changes occurred that have influenced the unity and cohesion of the institution. For example, some organisational units such as the Centre for Culture CEKAO became independent.

These changes impacted the way the space was used and brought about changes to the building's original purpose, which eventually led to neglect and deterioration of some parts (Figure 12). Space was let out to various external users (university faculties, independent television stations, nightclubs, cafés, etc.) who converted it and changed the primary architectural and spatial characteristics (for example, the Great Hall, its accompanying spaces, the library and the reading room and certain corridors), which went against the building's original values. The space's fluidity was neglected, as was the presence of natural light filtering in through transparent glass corridors, the elegance and purity of the design, the dichromatic colour scheme, original materials and fittings, designer fittings, lighting and other features (cf. Haničar Buljan 2017). Due to sporadic investments in building maintenance, the roof began to leak and problems with insulation developed. The building needs to be

modernized to resolve these problems, and in particular new electrical wiring, lifts, and the like are needed (cf. *ibid.*).<sup>20</sup>

The topic of how the architecture and the institution's significance and physical appearance have been transformed, particularly in the post-socialist period, is evident in interviews with (former) employees and beneficiaries of the Workers' University – in their (public) oral and written recollections of the institution. Changes to the institution and the curricula in the 1980s and 1990s were also described in *Ranč Moša Pijade* (*The Moša Pijade Ranch*), written by short story author Željko Obad and illustrated by Predrag Mihok (Obad 2015). These former employees of the Workers' University described their personal experiences and recollections of what it had been like to work at the institution. They reflected critically and with humour on numerous everyday situations among the employees themselves, between the employees and directors, and among the beneficiaries of the Workers' University, and outlined changes to national laws and legislation, i.e., different aspects of "conversion and privatisation" (*pretvorba i privatizacija*) that took place during the transition period.<sup>21</sup> A series of articles with telling titles such as "Violence Leads to Space", "Games of 'Kings' in 234", "Why Has Croatia Given Up on the University?", "Public Discussions and EU Projects", "Transform Me Gently", "A More Modern Moša Pijade Ranch", "Ewww (EU) Project Tasks" and the like were included in the book. They describe situations employees and the institution found themselves in as a result of calls to "restructure and modernize the workers' cooperative" of the 1980s (*ibid.*: 47), which included calls to reduce spending, restructure the institution and rationalize its activities. The book also included descriptions of the roles played by politics, legislation and corrupt individuals as ownership of the institution was transferred to new owners or, in other words, how a public good suffered devastation so private interests could profit (*ibid.*: 103–106).

These topics in particular dominated discussions with former employees regarding the current deterioration the building and the institution were experiencing. Comparisons between how things used to be and how they are now were frequent. Former employees and visitors had positive recollections of the Workers' University as the leading cultural centre of its time and a "cult spot" that attracted eminent artists and cultural personalities from both Croatia and abroad as well as a public genuinely interested in learning about art and culture. Their perception of the building at the time of the opening was also positive. They remembered that the building had been considered to be the most modernist at the time, and they often retold an anecdote from the opening in which President Tito, impressed by its appearance, commented that the building was "too expensive", but he "approved of it" by saying "our working class needs this". In contrast, they provided a series of examples to emphasize "the indifference towards the institution and the building during last 30 years", which re-

<sup>20</sup> See Ceraj, Haničar Buljan and Margaretić Urlić 2017; Jurlina 2018 for further details on the issues surrounding the preservation of the building.

<sup>21</sup> The illustrations are by Predrag Mihok, a former editor of the *15 Days* journal. Their hybrid visual language (a blend of caricature and comic strip) lends the book a specific humorous dimension.

ferred to the changes the Workers' University had undergone in terms of significance and its social role as well as differences in how the system and society now view knowledge and culture. They cited examples of inappropriate repurposing and the sense of resignation contemporary society has towards the institution's architectural value and the quality of the work it had done over the years. In their opinion, even talking about the quality and role of this institution in Croatian society invites accusations of "being nostalgic" and "being enamoured with the institution".

The post-socialist period has seen a gradual reaffirmation of socialist heritage in a number of European countries due to the growing interest of researchers, publishers, students, artists, gallery owners and tourists. The socialist built environment, memorial sculpture parks and residential architecture are being popularised in a range of media and forms of mass communication (exhibitions, photography, films, video clips and social media) and is (frequently) seen as part of unofficial, alternative, activist and other similar initiatives. This growing interest in socialist heritage in Croatia has in recent years begun to include the Workers' University, particularly in projects which remind the public of the historical context the institution was established in and in which it continued to operate. Several scholarly and popular studies and articles have been published,<sup>22</sup> and a number of public events (lectures, round-table discussions) and guided tours of the building have been organized. The history of the building and the activities of the Workers' University have been addressed in exhibitions, art projects and the media.<sup>23</sup> These events are still not a reflection of a general or dominant sentiment among the public towards socialist architecture and its significance for Croatian culture; they merely reflect the work of those who hold a professional interest in this area. However, they are definitely a step forward when it comes to re-evaluating the building and starting the renovations that have been promised.

<sup>22</sup> In 2011, for instance, a special edition of *15 Days* journal was published featuring six articles on the building's historical, architectural and artistic merits, as well as personal recollections and reflections on the building (Kovačević 2011; Paladino and Haničar Buljan 2011; Margaretić Urlić 2011; Ceraj 2011a; Krstić&Krišić 2011; Roksandić and Keller 2011). In the same year a doctoral dissertation on the opus of designer Bernardo Bernardi was written (Ceraj 2011b; published as a book: Ceraj 2015). Zagreb's Institute of Art History produced several conservation studies envisioning the renovation of some parts of the building (Haničar Buljan 2017; Ceraj, Haničar Buljan and Margaretić Urlić 2017). In addition, lists of original furnishings have been drawn up, a diploma thesis has been written on the topic of preserving modernist architecture (Jurlina 2018), and scientific research projects have been launched investigating RANS' social role (Galjer, Lončar and Rubić 2018; see footnote no. 1).

<sup>23</sup> An example is "Public Open University Zagreb – A Synthesis of Culture, Architecture and Design", a series of round-table discussions that was launched in 2017 and takes place yearly, each time in a different part of the building. It brings together experts and the building's current and former beneficiaries, facilitates discussion and reflection on the building's cultural, historical and architectural value and sends out an "appeal for the recognition and preservation" of modern architecture (Ceraj 2018; Popovčić 2017). Information on RANS and the opening of the building was included in the exhibition "The 1960s in Croatia – Myth and Reality" (based on an idea by Zvonko Maković) and held at the Zagreb's Museum of Arts and Crafts in 2018. The building and its interior design were described in the official exhibition catalogue (Ledić, Prlić and Vučić 2018) and in a special edition of the *Jutarnji list* daily called "The Decade When the Future Was Made" (Ogurlić 2018). The exhibition included a professional guided tour by architect Ivana Haničar Buljan. Furniture design and the building's architecture were the subject of a few television broadcasts (Haničar Buljan 2017) and the building itself was featured in "Concrete Sleepers", a popular television programme on socialist architecture by Maroje Mrduljaš. The Public Open University announced a public call for an art intervention called "Radničko" ("Workers'") to encourage artists to produce work related to the topic of cultural memory in connection to this building (Pejić 2019; usp. Krištofić 2019).

## Conclusion

This paper uses the example of Zagreb's Workers' University to describe the complex interaction between programmes, beneficiaries, employees, and the designed architectural environment, and the political, economic and social context. The requirements of the socio-political system in place following World War II – increased literacy, a general education in the area of culture, retraining people for new jobs, training the large working class to practise self-management, involving the working class in cultural events, planning leisure time and similar activities – called for an appropriate spatial setting, i.e., an architectural typology and a defined programme of activities. The architecture and institutions intended to provide education and disseminate culture were thus assigned a key role and became the central points for educating the wider public in order to fulfil the ideological (and political), social, economic and cultural goals of Yugoslavia at the time. They were meant to contribute to “building a new cultural identity”, which in turn was meant to strengthen the “newly created national and state identity” (Ristić 2014: 16). The creation of a dense network of workers' universities, cultural homes, community homes and similar institutions was seen as “the largest undertaking meant to pass on to others the ideas of those in political power with the help of architecture” in all of socialist Yugoslavia (Konstantinović 2014: 32).

There were many workers' universities, amongst which the Workers' University in Zagreb stood out for its innovative architectural and interior design; high quality educational programmes in the areas of adult education, art and culture; the number of activities it offered and the number of visitors it attracted. This led to its special status both in national and international circles. The Workers' University in Zagreb played the role of a national cultural and educational centre similar to those in other countries, for instance the *Maison du Peuple* in Brussels and the *Vooruit* in Ghent, Belgium; the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, Bulgaria; and the Belgrade Cultural Centre and the Sava Centre in Belgrade, Serbia (cf. Ristić 2014). It became a paradigm of the attitude socialist societies held towards education, knowledge and culture, and more specifically their attitude towards scientific institutions and knowledge acquisition within the modernizing processes meant to transform society. Finally, the Workers' University grew into a representative symbol of the socialist system and ideology, due to its central position along University Avenue, its name and the link it had with members of the working class and those who were prominent and politically engaged, and its formal opening ceremony (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 2000).

Despite its close connection to the socialist system and ideology, the Workers' University is a very good example of openness towards cultural transfer and innovative design using the architectonics of specific multifunctional purposes (in the area of education and culture). It reflects architectural and educational traditions and trends from different European countries – for example, structuralism in architecture (the Netherlands), open universities (Great Britain), *Volkschule* (Germany),



cultural centres (France), educational programmes for vocational education and lifelong learning (Finland, Sweden) and others (cf. Bazala 1907). Architect and critic Andrija Mutnjaković, who contributed to many RANS activities, emphasizes that the Workers' University was "a kind of resistance symbol to the socialist system" and that "this building brought about the global affirmation of Croatian culture". Architects Radovan Nikšić and co-author Ninoslav Kučan had succeeded in meeting the politico-ideological requirements set before them and created an iconic building as a metaphor of the modernisation and democratisation of society. Their creation established a new kind of socially engaged architecture suitable for innovative educational methods aimed at adults and workers and a multifunctional centre for various media of modern cultural production and consumption.

The Workers' University was already viewed in the socialist period as belonging to the anthology of twentieth-century Croatian architecture; however, it has undergone many transformations since then. Although the building has suffered significant deterioration, its flexible and convertible spatial structure still represents an experimental approach that played a key role not only in its initial phase during the 1960s but also in the period of great educational reforms in the early 1970s and during the radical transformation of the institution in the 1980s. Nevertheless, during the post-socialist transition the Workers' University had a negative connotation and was perceived as an unwanted relic of socialism. The transformations were thus evident in the organisational and programming-related changes, as well as what the space was used for, which resulted in a loss of identity and reduced recognisability due to deterioration.<sup>24</sup> The significance and values which had been ascribed to the building and the institution in the socialist period had an impact on the changes in its social role, status and popular perception in the post-socialist period. These changes point to a lack of (or a change in) the cultural policy planned and advocated in an earlier time (cf. Ristić 2014).

The paper takes as its starting point the key role played by socially engaged architecture in the modernisation and democratisation of socialist society. It provides a critical analysis of the Workers' University in Zagreb, with a focus on contextualising specific values ascribed to its design and meaning, starting from the 1950s up until the time when these values dissipated during the post-socialist transition period. Our use of an interdisciplinary methodology for this study, which has also been applied in previous studies (cf., e.g., Rogić and Mutnjaković 1984; Dinulović, Konstantinović and Zeković 2014), indicates that more complex approaches are needed when researching urban and architectural environmental complexes from the socialist period, including those of art history, cultural anthropology, cultural history, design history, sociology etc. More complex approaches will lead to a (more) holistic view of these spaces, which will help reduce the recent negative consequences of equating them with unwanted memories of the former political system.

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<sup>24</sup> Both the architectural and urban context and identity of what was previously the RANS building were shown to be completely ignored when a 26-floor office block called *Eurotower* was built at the intersection of Vukovar Street and Ivan Lučić Street (2006).



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## Društveno angažirana arhitektura 1950-ih godina i njezine transformacije. Primjer zagrebačkog Radničkog sveučilišta

U radu se istražuju poveznice između arhitekture i njezine društvene uloge na primjeru zgrade i ustanove Pučkog otvorenog učilišta Zagreb (POUZ), nekada Radničkog (i narodnog) sveučilišta "Moša Pijade" (RANS). Težište je na inovativnom i eksperimentalnom karakteru arhitektonskog koncepta društveno angažirane arhitekture u kontekstu modernizacije društva 1950-ih i 1960-ih godina, kao i na promjenama njezine funkcije u postsocijalističkom razdoblju. Autorice istražuju kompleksan odnos zaposlenika, korisnika, programa i arhitektonskog dizajna s jedne, te političkog, ekonomskog i društvenog konteksta s druge strane. Cilj je istražiti sociokulturne kategorije i odnose između kulture, rada, obrazovanja i grada u različitim razdobljima. Pritom se, korištenjem kulturnoantropoloških teorijskih i metodoloških pristupa prostoru i arhitekturi, razmatra kako su se identitet, važnost i vrijednosti koje su pripisivane javnom prostoru oblikovali, medijalizirali i mijenjali tijekom vremena.

**Ključne riječi:** društveno angažirana arhitektura, radnička i narodna sveučilišta, socijalizam, modernizam, transformacije