

ICOA1441: SOCIALIST MODERNISM MAP

Subtheme 03: Protecting and Interpreting Cultural Heritage in the Age of Digital Empowerment

Session 2: Use of Digital Technology for Dissemination and Interpretation

Location: Silver Oak 2, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 14, 2017, 10:25 – 10:40

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Dumitru Rusu is an architect based in Bucharest, Romania. He studied at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Polytechnic Institute in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. Later, he relocated to Romania and graduated from the Ion Mincu Institute of Architecture in Bucharest in 2003. In 2014 he completed a postgraduate degree in Conservation of Built Heritage at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. Since 2014, he has been a Member of ICOMOS Romania and ICOMOS-ISC20C Associate Member.

Abstract: Socialist architecture and more precisely the modernist tendencies of the 1955-1991 period, as a concept, are becoming more and more popular in specialists circles. In our case, “Socialist Modernism” is a research platform created by the B.A.C.U. Association. It focuses on modernist trends from Central and Eastern Europe that are insufficiently explored in the broader context of global architecture. Modernism in architecture first arose in Western European capitalist societies, following a series of essential principles such as "form follows function", the use of mass produced materials, the adoption of industrial aesthetics, simplicity and form clarity, the elimination of unnecessary details, etc. In post-war Eastern European socialist countries, on the other hand, modernist trends first influenced the professional sphere, and through that influence they were able to penetrate borders and the limits imposed by the Socialist ideology. In Central and Eastern Europe there are a number of important architectural monuments, mostly from 1955-1991, representative of the post WWII identity of each country and expressing the aspirations of socialist architects. Examples include: the "Romanita" Collective Housing Building- Chisinau, the Buzludzha Memorial - Bulgaria, the Emilia Pavilion – Warsaw, etc.

The objective of the project is an interactive map that would display the most valuable examples of Socialist Modernist architecture from 1955 to 1991, such as buildings, neighbourhoods, parks, recreation areas etc. An example of the map may be found on our site: <http://socialistmodernism.com/>

The interactive map is a community-driven tool focused on increasing our database, as well as promoting awareness in order to preserve these buildings. Anyone who is passionate about this historical period is able to join our cause by supporting it on Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest, by posting with the #socialistmodernism hashtag. All important socialist modernist landmarks will be included on this platform, so they can be easily accessed by anyone interested in such vestiges.

Key words: digital resources, conservation, dissemination, accessibility

Context

The architecture of the Socialist period and more precisely the modernist tendencies between 1955 and 1991, as a concept are becoming more and more popular in specialist circles. In our case, “Socialist Modernism” is a research platform created by the B.A.C.U. Association, focusing on those modernist trends from Central and Eastern Europe which have been insufficiently explored in the broader context of global architecture.



Fig.1- An illustrative image for the situation of the built environment in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Socialist modernism is an approach to architecture that was typical to the former socialist countries between 1955 and 1991 and was insufficiently covered by architecture history writings. The modernist trend was officially adopted as a result of historical events. 1955 was the official moment when “useless stylistical elements” in architecture were abandoned, by decision of the Central Committee of the U.S.S.R. Communist Party. The decision followed Nikita Khrushchev’s appeal, made one year earlier at the Unional Conference of Builders, Architects and Workers in Construction Materials Industry, Construction Machines Industry, Planning and Research. From there on, Stalinist (or realist-socialist, as it is also known) architecture was replaced throughout the socialist bloc.

This new stage must also be seen from the perspective of the much needed post-WWII reconstruction of cities. Countries in the former socialist bloc suffered massive destruction of their built patrimony and city reconstruction was conducted in a precarious economic context, which required special economic, social

and logistical strategies in order to be able to cover the necessary urban infrastructure, housing, industrial buildings and public buildings.

To renew the urban tissue, a set of economic policies were adopted, expressed in architecture by design blueprints and by a completely different stylistic orientation. The new building design directions made it compulsory to get rid of "useless stylistical elements", but also to purge shapes, to adorn the facades by "a truthful highlighting of wall parts and of large panel elements".

The socialist ideological rule of creating identical blueprints was adapted locally, though projects that followed the canonized political guidelines while introducing certain elements to individualize buildings and to underline their modernist character. By officially renouncing "useless stylistical elements", as required by post-1955 urban policies, architects in the Eastern bloc found an opportunity to take architecture beyond the ideologically imposed limits. Key principles of modernism were adopted in architecture during this period: "form follows function", the use of mass-production materials, industrial aesthetics, simplicity and clarity of shapes, rejection of unnecessary detail etc. In this way, post-Stalinist architecture became a way to recover modernism, hence our option to define this trend in architecture as "socialist modernism". Socialist modernism is a desire to go back to pre-WWII modernism, with architecture attempting to fulfil simultaneously cultural requirements as well as utilitarian and economic ones - the latter having priority.

The current state of socialist modernist heritage

Central and Eastern Europe boasts a number of important architectural monuments that are representative for the post WWII identity of each country and express the aspirations of socialist era architects, starting in 1955 and ending with the fall of Communism in 1991. Examples include: *"Romanita"* Collective Housing Tower- Chisinau, the Buzludzha Memorial- Bulgaria, the public Telephone and Postal Services building- Cluj-Napoca, Emilia Pavilion- Warsaw, Hotel Budapest- Budapest, Scheiben-Hochhäuser- Halle-Neustadt, House of Statistics- Berlin, etc.

Most of these buildings are found today in an advanced state of decay. Through this initiative we would like to encourage stylistic and architectural discipline and we therefore invite the local authorities and the civil society to get involved, so that the architectural value of these buildings is acknowledged, and along with it the still surviving social and cultural tissue, and that it is taken into account in the context of urban planning.



*Fig.2- Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party, (Buzludzha Monument), Shipka Pass, Bulgaria, built in 1981,
Architect Guéorguy Stoilov*

In today's economic and political situation, there is a great risk that these buildings would disappear – some of them being already illegally demolished or brutally renovated, without taking into account their architectural value.

Our objective is to revitalize elements of the urban fabric, so typical for the socialist period: boulevards, public buildings, living units, monuments etc., not only from a symbolic perspective, but also in their social and cultural context.

On the other hand, we were able to notice that the interest for this type of architecture has increased. One way to measure it was the success of "Socialist Modernism", the platform initiated by BACU and including a website, Facebook pages, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest.

So far we have counted about 200.000 users. The growing online trend and the vivid interest of platform members encourage us to extend our initiative with the database and interactive map.

Proposed solutions

The socialistmodernism.com map and database are part of a wider program we launched in 2013. Its long term objectives are to protect and promote valuable architecture built in the former socialist bloc between 1955 and 1991. Its short term objectives are to document, archive and distribute information on socialist modernist heritage from Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other regions like Cuba, Vietnam, etc.

To that end, we have initiated a crowd-sourced that will be accessible online on an interactive map. The “Socialist Modernism” interactive map reveals the most valuable examples of modernist architecture created in the socialist period, from buildings to neighbourhoods, parks, recreation areas etc.

An experimental version of the map (version 2) is already available on our site: <http://socialistmodernism.com/>



Fig.3- Socialist Modernism map - version 2.

We would like to turn this map into an interactive, community-driven tool to help us grow our database and increase the awareness needed to preserve these buildings. We have also created a mobile app that allows anyone to contribute to our map.

Users will be able to:

- locate sites on our map and find directions to them;
- add new sites they discovered;
- upload their own pictures and videos made on site;

The information already introduced in the database, on a trial basis, is available to experts and members of the public who have an interest in modernist-socialist heritage. They are also invited to contribute with information, images and videos to the database. All information originating outside the Association will be checked and confirmed by database administrators.

It must be said that we are still fundraising for the map. That is why some of the options, such as video download or users' forum with individual accounts, are not yet accessible. They will become active one by one, as the fundraising campaign proceeds.

Furthermore, we are building a community driven section to better coordinate the efforts made at local level and help organize our members.

Anyone who is passionate about this historical period will be able to join our cause on Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest by posting with the hashtag #socialistmodernism.

All the important socialist modernist landmarks will be included in this platform, allowing them to be accessed by anyone interested.

Socialist Modernism – is an initiative developed by BACU - *Birou pentru Artă și Cercetare Urbană* (Bureau for Art and Urban Research). Our approach follows the Socialist Modernist heritage built in the former Eastern bloc between 1955-1991. We are dealing with the protection, monitoring, research and preservation of the current state of the built heritage such as buildings, monuments, parks, squares, entire districts and green areas, etc.

The first phase of our project includes the analysis, research and study of a series of buildings of the socialist heritage. The second phase of the project deals with the education of local authorities and inhabitants of the protected areas, through a legislative program concerning the architectural stylistics of socialist architecture.

The Socialist Modernism platform invites architects, urban planners, historians and art historians or conservationists, artists, activists and anyone interested in this issue to contribute and to broaden the platform. Send us any information regarding neighbourhoods, buildings, monuments, parks and cultural landscapes or any relevant architectural elements– please don't forget to specify their location and address. All the information will be published on our website under the name of the author.

Conclusions

The Bureau for Urban Art and Research (B.A.C.U.) is an organization focused on urban and cultural conservation and rehabilitation activities. Its main directions are to protect, preserve and rehabilitate built heritage and art from the socialist period, as well as to monitor how architectural heritage in Central and Eastern Europe is maintained, protected and preserved. Apart from preserving the historical value of buildings, the Association is also interested in improving the overall urban landscape. B.A.C.U. is also striving to make it possible for certain architectural ensembles, buildings and other valuable objects to be classified as heritage and legally protected, both locally and internationally. In 2016, the Association initiated the classification process for four socialist modernist buildings in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.

The “Socialist Modernism” research program launched by B.A.C.U. in 2013 is part of a wider effort to raise awareness for the valuable architecture built in socialist countries in the second half of the 20th century. The “Socialist Modernism Map” is a continuation of our research, with a specific approach to modernist influences in the second half of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other regions. Understanding how socialist modernism evolved in these countries, by following the

artistic aspects of architecture, requires a good knowledge of the various historical conditions of the period, the ones that determined a certain historical evolution. The buildings and urban ensembles of the time were the result of centralized planning, which required work in large teams. Socialist modernist architecture evolved differently from one country to another, depending on their particular social and political context, so that it is possible to identify local character.

An important part in safeguarding socialist heritage is played by the “Socialist Modernism” initiative. Its actions are directed at rehabilitating and conservation of buildings in Central and Eastern Europe. The project is taking into account the uncertain legal situation of most of these modernist buildings/complexes, but despite the fact that it hinders our efforts, this challenge does not discourage us because most of these objectives are in an alarming state.



Fig.4- Bus Terminal, Nurek, Tajikistan, built in the late 70s

Our initiatives seek to introduce some discipline in the stylistical chaos that emerged in the recent decades. This process requires the involvement of both local authorities and the civil society, who need to become aware of the architectural value of the buildings and of the still existing social and cultural urban tissue, as well as of the importance of urban planning. We are currently working on revitalization proposals for several socialist modernist objectives built in cities/municipalities of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The proposals suggest the demolition of parasitic structures; prohibiting the closing of balconies and any type of DIY abusive rehabilitation; removing excessive advertising from the facades

and, finally, making these neighbourhoods, buildings, leisure facilities, parks etc. part of the historical heritage.

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Figures and Tables

Fig.1- An illustrative image for the situation of the built environment in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Fig.2. Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party, (Buzludzha Monument), Shipka Pass, Bulgaria, built in 1981, Architect Guéorguy Stoilov

Fig.3- Socialist Modernism map - version 2.

Fig.4- Bus Terminal, Nurek, Tajikistan, built in the late 70s

ICOA1441: CARTE DU MODERNISME SOCIALISTE

Sous-thème 03: Protéger et interpréter le patrimoine culturel à l'ère de l'autonomisation numérique

Session 2: Utilisation de la technologie numérique pour la diffusion et l'interprétation

Lieu: Silver Oak 2, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 14 Décembre, 2017, 10:25 – 10:40

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Dumitru Rusu est un architecte basé à Bucarest, en Roumanie. Il a étudié à la Faculté d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme de l'Institut Polytechnique de Chisinau, en République de Moldavie. Plus tard, il a déménagé en Roumanie et a été diplômé de l'Institut d'Architecture Ion Mincu à Bucarest en 2003. En 2014, il a obtenu un diplôme de troisième cycle en conservation du patrimoine bâti à la Faculté d'Histoire et de Philosophie de l'Université Babes-Bolyai à Cluj. Depuis 2014, il est membre d'ICOMOS Roumanie et membre associé d'ICOMOS-ISC20C.

Résumé: L'architecture socialiste et plus précisément les tendances modernistes de la période 1955-1991, en tant que concept, deviennent de plus en plus populaires dans les cercles de spécialistes. Dans notre cas, "Socialist Modernism" est une plateforme de recherche créée par l'association B.A.C.U. Il se concentre sur les tendances modernistes d'Europe centrale et orientale qui sont insuffisamment explorées dans le contexte plus large de l'architecture mondiale. Le modernisme en architecture est apparu dans les sociétés capitalistes d'Europe occidentale, suivant une série de principes essentiels tels que «la forme suit la fonction», l'utilisation de matériaux de masse, l'adoption de l'esthétique industrielle, la simplicité et la clarté des formes, etc. D'autre part, dans les pays socialistes d'Europe de l'Est d'après-guerre, les tendances modernistes ont d'abord influencé la sphère professionnelle, ce qui leur a permis de pénétrer les frontières et les limites imposées par l'idéologie socialiste. En Europe centrale et orientale, il existe un certain nombre de monuments architecturaux importants, principalement de 1955 à 1991, représentatifs de l'identité post-Seconde Guerre mondiale de chaque pays et exprimant les aspirations des architectes socialistes. Parmi les exemples, on peut citer: le bâtiment collectif «Romanita» - Chisinau, le mémorial de Buzludzha - Bulgarie, le pavillon Emilia - Varsovie, etc.

L'objectif du projet est une carte interactive qui présentera les exemples les plus importants d'architecture moderniste socialiste de 1955 à 1991, tels que les bâtiments, les quartiers, les parcs, les zones de loisirs, etc. Un exemple de la carte peut être trouvé sur notre site: [http : //socialistmodernism.com/](http://socialistmodernism.com/)

La carte interactive est un outil communautaire axé sur l'augmentation de notre base de données, ainsi que la sensibilisation afin de préserver ces bâtiments. Toute personne passionnée par cette période historique est en mesure de rejoindre notre cause en la soutenant sur Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest, en postant avec le hashtag #socialistmodernism. Tous les sites importants socialistes modernistes seront inclus sur cette plate-forme, de sorte qu'ils peuvent être facilement accessibles par toute personne intéressée par de tels vestiges.

Mots-clés: ressources numériques, conservation, diffusion, accessibilité