

## The Future of Mediterranean Architecture

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### ABSTRACT

*It would be enough if dwelling and building achieve to enter in the sphere of what is worth questioning and belong to this world among things that it's worth thinking.*

Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*

Haven't we the obligation to preserve and pass on the cultural memory which is conveying intangible sense and values that are so indispensable to every living society? Is not there any alternative for conserving our architectural heritage expressing shared universal values? On such point of view, the earthen architecture should not be essential to this protection and passing on of our inherited cultural, bio and techno-diversity? So, it should be upon the indisociable triptych “conservation-sustainable development-modernity” that could raise a “vision” for a recreated future of the earthen architecture useful for the coming out of more viable societies generating new specific as diverse equilibriums between “men”, their environment and their culture. We have to take better knowledge and more understanding of this “building intelligence” and go on updating, enriching our cultural legacy by a more appropriate use of our potentials. But, in the same time, we have to be careful to not be frozen in an “illusion of the permanency”. Based on such observations, the conservation, the development and the enriching of the earthen architecture heritage, are a decisive contribution for tomorrow. In the Albanian case, this is a possibility of opening a new path to a “post-development” period, which could not be based only in money profits, it is the moment to turn our interest to our inherited architectonic values, as Albania and as part of the Mediterranean Architecture; to update inherited building traditions, rich in material and in psychological characteristics. It should be clear that these architectures are built not with bricks or stones, but with relations of affect, passion and reciprocity.

**KEYWORDS:** Mediterranean, tradition, architecture, Albania

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Many changes have occurred during the past three decades in the Mediterranean metropolis and their globalization had strong effects not only in their spatial structure but also in their social function and their institutional planning practices. Such spatial regimes have transformed the Mediterranean metropolis and invite you to do a further resume of the general perception on these cities. Globalization comes along with the emergency challenge of what was perceived as the typical Mediterranean urban form – a combination of historical urban forms, cultural and anthropological; urban regimen, and urban lifestyle

and values. This process has been severe most of the times, including here a fast general transformation of the urban morphology and of the urban life in different scale, from the neighbourhood to the alleys to the family. It is of important interest to mention that this process is followed also by the invention/creation of new urban and architectural form that has deeply changed these metropolises. With the globalization, the borders between the Mediterranean cities and their peripheries, as well as the internal borders within the cities, have been reviewed; a phenomenon that invites to a reflection of the Mediterranean possible value as a spatial model to understand modern global interactions. Otherwise, metropolis in the age of globalization constitutes a border to the Mediterranean urban geography. But the process of reintroducing the Mediterranean in the global urban scene must not create new undefined categories, among which the Mediterranean metropolis is the most delicate. The reintroducing should be built on the bases of local micro-geographies and on the reflection of the articulation of the local and global dimension in different contexts. In Albania, the urban expansion of the '90 shook the tradition; the urban distribution, informal urbanization, invasion of residential buildings of bad construction quality, and the introduction of automobile in the historical areas.

## 2 TOWARD A MODERN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHITECTURE

The art of architecture takes its first meaning from the fact that it is closely related to people; that is why it involves ethical values. Secondly, people in a society are part of the past and of the future and meanwhile, their activities are related to time. Thirdly, society exists in a climatic space which affects its cultural relation with the environment. The individual constitutes the world; he is the inside part of a society that belongs to a certain region, in the other hand, he is part of the world as space, and the world as space is part of humanity in the past and in the future. Art should flourish so that the individual within the group makes sense to this purpose. In our knowledge, we should cultivate our sense of valuation of good and intent to pursue its expression.

*“Then we must speak to our poets and compel them to impress upon their poems only the image of the good, or not to make poetry in our city. And we must speak to the other craftsmen and forbid them to leave the impress of that which is evil in character, unrestrained, mean and ugly, on their likenesses of living creatures, or their houses, or on anyway else which they make. He, that cannot obey, must not be allowed to ply his trade in our city... No, we must seek out those craftsmen who have the happy gift of tracing out the nature of the fair and graceful, that our young men may dwell as in a health-giving region where all that surrounds them is beneficent”. Plato, the Republic III*

The issue here is that which is the service of beauty in the human happiness? This question is answered when beauty is discussed in architecture as a real expression of good. The more beauty we see, the more we can stimulate the potential to perceive her.

Our respect and relation to the past is traduced to the humanity itself. The same respect that we wish to ourselves in the future, the same should we accord to the past generations. This phenomenon of respect inspires our loyalty to the historical buildings. We could say that time is “the beauty” itself. This loyalty should inspire the present time with a bigger sense of responsibility to fuse contemporary with artistic values of all time. The visual expression of time values gives individuality to the buildings, or a group of buildings that compose a village or a town. The achievements of people in the past are established within the walls and the roads, and there are not two towns alike. These building will always be a beautiful because they are achieved in the simplest ways. When architects leave or are insensitive to the study and the analysis of past architectural form and composition, they have less possibility to respect architecture as a register of the human achievement. If we do not keep alive the relation with the history of art and architecture, there is the risk of breaking with the ongoing process of improving the tradition

and this would bring a generation that would leave behind an unworthy legacy. Looking back in time should serve as a ramification of human knowledge and of the serious thought so that we can bring together the forces and the power necessary to move forward objectively.

The relation between people is closely related to the environment they live. It is senseless to exterminate ourselves from the surrounding environment, because such an itinerary testifies of an unhealthy life. We can control nature only by understanding it. This understanding will show by itself in the geographic environment sense instead of studying history and geography separately, so we could profit more from the critical access toward architecture. The values of time and space are closely related to the art of architecture. The lust of man for material power is dangerous because it could never satisfy him completely. The same attraction of artists toward nature has made them create masterpieces; the same attraction should guide us in the present and toward the future. It is obvious that the environment is different from region to region and climate is a determining factor in the topography and the physical aspect of the environment. If we wish to achieve a cultural expression of art, we should see its substantial bases. This means that we should accept the local geographic model and try to understand it physically. Buildings are symbols of man, of his life in a certain environment; art should commit itself to the representation of this real and true relation. The truth of the expression of man for his environment should always be criteria to a well developed architecture. Vernacular would be the term to express this symbolic relation. This defined relation does not mean quiescence of expression in time. This would rather mean a diversified possibility concentrated in a substantial matter that enables a touchable and deliberate beginning for the local architectural character. If the architect is not synchronized with his environment, he is not in position to create the right expression. During the understanding of the environment, the architect is less influenced by foreign forms, but when he is localized in a certain locality he is in a favourable position to control and to transform the influences not related to his purpose. This should be the most meaningful behaviour in the study of architecture. This is the also the biggest problem of architecture nowadays. The same problem troubles the Mediterranean countries too. The study of the geographic material should be translated to an art of valuation of the panorama in the same way that historical facts could be translated into artistic investigation. The material values of the panorama, surface, colour and textures are more meaningful if related to specific esthetical model. This knowledge oriented toward the material of a traditional building would supply the architect with a bigger trust in the expertise of its use as an answer of compositional values. The artisanal local mastery has gained a sensitive feeling in the use of material in time. Watching nature cultivates us with a certain structural composition in design because organic and beauty are masterly combined in their best form in nature. Architecture serves environment, climate and other nature factors, never the contrary, that environment serves the purpose of the building. The close watch to forms in nature testifies for a balance that helps the artistic vision of proportion in design. Architecture is a very good way of the expression and transmission of highly human values.

The Mediterranean always has been cradle of knowledge, culture and civilization. It has enriched the world with ideas and practices. Every development in the Mediterranean area cannot be separated from its climate. Catching the quality of the Mediterranean in architecture, minimizes intensity of the war between modern and the lived past; the future development of architecture can pursue unconditioned from the conflict between past and present. We should keep present that if the spirit is missing, the materials will have lack of vision, of colours and textures necessary for the divine inspiration.

Because architecture cannot be apart from the life and the thoughts of its people, and because there are so many complicated regions, the purpose of historic study of architecture in the Mediterranean is immense. There is urgent need of assimilation of historical facts, but also of promotion of a vision, for a critical, constructive and creative behaviour positioned in a human context.

In the past, the buildings were created by certain needs and in a certain environment however they were built in the same climatic and geographic conditions as today, so that the importance and the understanding of the local styles should be the main source for the today's architectural achievements, and that the past should be always of big practical interest for the artistic ongoing. The main element of the Mediterranean architecture is the similarity in a big scale. Influences from the central sources have

always been active, but this is not necessarily the explanation for its generalized character. Climate is the factor that made the problem in the Mediterranean similar in all the regions, however different regions has come to different solutions. This accentuate uniformity in the entirety of the Mediterranean architecture has given sense to the expression “the light of the south”.

### 3 THE ALBANIAN CASE

*” The architect has no other way than to be based on some forms to create his works, simply because it is impossible to invent them from nothing... If the architect denies tradition, if he ignores his art, unfortunately he will take the forms for his creations from the buildings surrounding him, and from those he sees in photographs and drawings. This means that in an inevitable way he will be inspired from tradition: but a hybrid one, second hand one. Otherwise, the history of architecture will offer him several well selected forms... The more we learn about history of architecture, the less plagiarism of old building would be seen. We study the work of the best past architects, not to copy or to apply exactly the same forms, but to know the “technical resource” and “expression methods”, to see how to solve some of the architecture problems, most of which are permanent. Lets profit from our predecessors moving freely within tradition...”: Leopoldo Torres Balbas*

The modern civilizations have brought to an alienation of architecture from the natural environment. A trend reflected in the modern architecture. The separation between the scientific thought and the artistic contents is the today’s problem. There is a globalization tendency in the architecture nowadays. We see everywhere modern buildings raised day by day and that do not show anything about the environment. These buildings can be built anywhere and have the exact same effect. There is no such thing as an effort to link-up the modern architecture with the surrounding environment or to adapt to the specific local climate. This is testimony of a big indifference toward the local character. The attraction to the latest achievements of technology and to “modern architecture” is a result of a confused thought of the bad coordination between technical progress and artistic concept. The education should be very careful not to underestimate the traditional Mediterranean architecture, where Albania stands, and pass through a transitory moment as it is today. Architecture has the ability to reflect people, culture and the development of a society. It is the best testimony of the relation of people with their local culture. The future of architecture in the Mediterranean countries must be a result of a good education based on the understanding of the region. The objective approach toward art and traditional culture is also mentioned from Plato when he speaks of music and athletics in the sense of the cultivation of body and spirit through the surrounding environment.

*”Let us describe the education of our men. What then is the education to be? Perhaps we could hardly find a better than that which the experience of the past has already discovered, which consists, I believe, in gymnastic, for the body, and music for the mind.” Plato, The Republic*

Education should help against the modern tendency which burns the facts without testing their importance toward the familiar environment first. There are a lot of books that speaks of the latest achievements in architecture and technology offering us examples hard to apply in the Mediterranean countries. It is of greatest importance to relate today’s architecture with the regional climate character. I think it is of big importance also the need to approach with the fine arts and the cultural power. This

approach would make possible the artistic encouragement in schools, institutions, and expositions to create the powerful bases for a local architecture with cultural values.

*“ It’s the case to affirm that the Albanian are one of the Balkan people embedded, so they are closely related to a terrestrial space as building space and wider in the pastures, or the landmarks of the rural communities.”* Emin Riza, *The Albanian city and the city house in XV-XIX century*

Many things are changed today, and many more to change in the future. The problem remains where should be oriented the future and which is our position in this itinerary? As today’s architects, would we know how to stimulate this process in the right way and which one is that? Should we be evaluated for what we are or would we be slaves of the assimilating processes in the name of globalization, neighbour’s pressure, religious doctrines, etc. Would this pressure make us forget or even to treat the legacy built as a spiritual or material value, conserved as a environmental, natural or human value that are succeeded with such sacrifice till today, as a relic? It is obvious that we should find ourselves the way how to read, to understand, to analyze and to be inspired from this national legacy, which has without any doubts the vitality and individuality to differ, to be evaluated and to contribute in the completeness property of the Mediterranean picture. The Mediterranean, this water space between three continents, cradle of thousands of years of culture, the golden belt of earth that has always something to hide, waiting to be discovered. The Mediterranean today needs to be respected, to be estimated and protected so that it could conserve its balance, its unity and its diversity. Part of this Mediterranean is Albania. Albanian are active actors of what is known the Mediterranean climate, Mediterranean nature, Mediterranean culture, Mediterranean identity, Mediterranean soul and Mediterranean architecture. Within the Mediterranean picture the Albanian architecture is shown as a moral architecture that answers entirely to the country or city lifestyle. In the country, the architecture of the Albanian house is distinguished as a live and healthy architecture, out of the cultivated methods and styles. It is distinguished as an architecture which with its individuality has brought a distinct beauty, clean and anonymous that has resisted to time. The most valuable buildings of the traditional architecture are found in the hilly and mountainous areas.

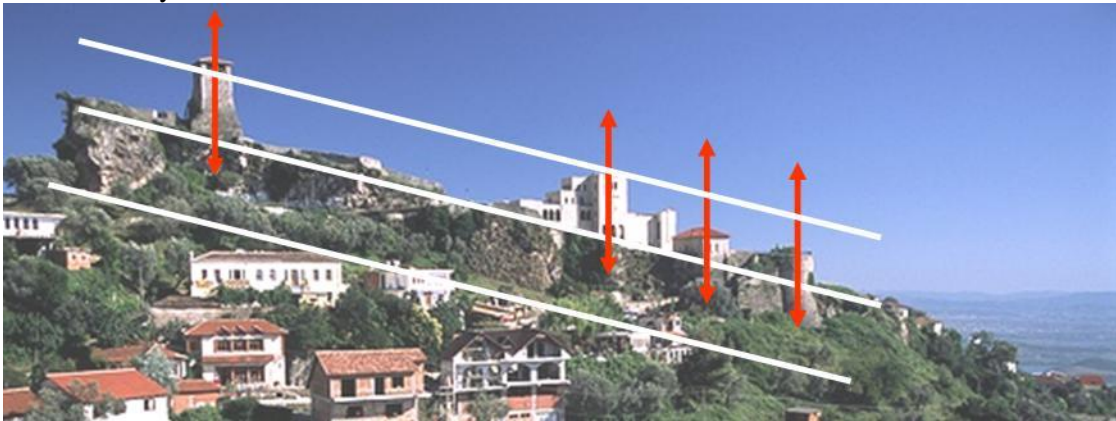


Figure1. settlements in hilly areas, Kruja, Albania, by Joli Mitrojorgji

These areas were not influenced from the Islamic styles. They build their house typologies as an answer to their way of live and their common laws. The rediscovering of the country traditional architecture values must be considered as a necessary step to know that part of architecture and culture which is pure, uninfluenced and not poisoned from the cultivated styles. This grouping of the traditional house summarizes the centennial legacy, which with its rational and functional values, proves of the bases principles on which were founded the European and Mediterranean architecture of the twentieth century. That is why the values of the traditional architecture of the Albanian country convert her in an ethnographic and cultural case of study necessary to be studied by all young architects. Albanian

traditional architecture and that of other European countries is not a compositional template. Overall, it reflects of a diversified compositional solution, a breathtaking spontaneity in the creation and construction of the architectural form. This characteristic of the architectures of the tradition, distinct in all Mediterranean region, seems to be more intensified in Albania, goes to the limits, speaking here of a psychology where the privacy of anonymity dictates the individuality and unrepeatability of its outside looking. As in the Mediterranean architecture, the plastic values of Albanian architectural forms of the tradition are a result to the geography of the terrain, orientation and the building material. They are also a result of the spiritual and psychological demands of the Albanian lifestyle, different in each locality. Staying within this unifying value of the Mediterranean traditional architectures, we could say that in the Albanian layer is discovered an extremity of forms that create an expressive plasticity and testify of the fertile compositional imagination of the anonymous builders.

*“The typology of the Albanian traditional house is shown as a summary of solutions and typology units in relatively small spaces.”* Emin Riza, The Albanian city and the city house in XV-XIX century.

Albanian traditional architecture reflects a great typological variety within a very small territory than in the other Mediterranean cases. Within the Mediterranean framework, the Albanian traditional housing architecture exposes with all her being the live relation, the symbiosis of man with the environment, a well build example is the museum of Bajram Curri as result of the traditional architecture analysis. This is more obvious in the country traditional architecture, an architecture cultivated in long time periods. The regional traditional architecture has not evaluated with the proper solemnity till today. We should be aware that this architecture has not only its special typological originality but above all radiates the form-substance unity, the lifetime architectural product with a great aspiration and great social psychology.



Figure 2. Museum of Bajram Curri, Albania, project and realized building, arch. Maksim Mitrojorgji

*“Traditional buildings that grow as an answer to today’s needs, harmonized with the environment from people who better than anything else knew how to adapt themselves to the feeling of native land... these were better inspiring study than the academic research for beauty all over Europe”.* F. L. Wright

The security of the environment is a characteristic of our architecture, interpreting her instinctively, it created masterpieces that not only did not interfere in the background, but they seem to derive from it; they melt instead of contrasting it.



Figure 3. examples of settlements respecting the nature, environment, climate, arch. Joli Mitrojorgji and Maksim Mitrojorgji

We distinguish several general achievements: first of all, local houses emphasize an awareness and understanding of nature, reflecting mostly what is hidden within it; secondly, the buildings enhance values to the panorama, reflecting it with living elements; thirdly, in a symbolic way, the building show of a high consciousness and knowing of the nature, applying these knowledge in architectural forms. Traditional architecture is full of examples where the architectonic form of the building structures and of the functional elements, as simple as they may seem, is determinative of the landscape they satisfy every functional demand and every human wish and esthetical of the users and viewers. In this way, traditional architecture is expressed as the art of creation of the environment with all emotional, functional and esthetical values and is seen as a representative of an era, style, typology, population and environment. The architecture of the traditional Albanian house is distinguished as the art of the creation of the form that unites people with his actions in time.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

So many cases to study...? How many experiences can be processed through the specified architectural analysis brought today in the theoretical level today with the purpose to serve this time and this level of social development of society. This reflection is understood as an invitation to dedicate little time to this activity, because the gap is very large and the incalculable need to educate the new generation with the national cultural values. The new generation among the embracing of new technologies must find new ways of inspiration front of the cultural internationalization. The new generation should build the urban and architectonic experience in accordance with the national psychology, a product of the modern era but with an Albanian spirit overall; in the approach of the urban and rural panorama, in the urban morphology of the settlements, in the public spaces syntax, in the architectonic building forms, in texture and colour. This is the only way to give character, individuality and distinctness to creativity and makes of architecture a part of the Albanian art being so part of the world culture.

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