

# THEMATIC CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION

## **THE WAY TOWARDS REGIONAL MODERNITIES - JOINT WORKS OF DUŠAN GRABRIJAN AND JURAJ NEIDHARDT**

Nataša Koselj

The original idea to dedicate a special issue of the Docomomo Journal to the architects Dušan Grabrijan (1899–1952) and Juraj Neidhardt (1901–1979) came to my mind when Prof. Dr. Uta Pottgiesser became the new Chair of Docomomo International and when Docomomo Bosnia and Herzegovina joined Docomomo in 2021. The focus was two-fold; to help a new Docomomo chapter in the process of integration into the broader Docomomo community, and to present the research and creative work of two architects whose creativity connected Europe with the countries of former Yugoslavia already in the first part of the 20th century. Dušan Grabrijan was a Slovenian architect, and Juraj Neidhardt was a Croatian-Bosnian with German origins. Dušan Grabrijan was Plečnik's student in Ljubljana, and Juraj Neidhardt was a student of Peter Behrens in Vienna and a valued collaborator in Le Corbusier's Paris studio. Their Sarajevo lived experience, dedicated to the study of Bosnian and Macedonian traditional architecture and ways of life, combined with the Plečnik's school as well as with the school of Peter Behrens and Le Corbusier, resulted in a special attitude towards modernity – marked by concern for human scale, geography and history. Our first Zoom meeting coincided with the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, which became a priority for the next two issues of the Docomomo Journal. Similar to how our work started, the architect's Dušan Grabrijan's and Juraj Neidhardt's joint creative period also coincided with the inter-war and wartime. In those unstable times, they dedicated their research to studying the eternal values of the origins of modernity and were searching for the links between pioneering modernism and regional characteristics of 'architecture without architects'. Their seminal book *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity* (1957), with a preface by Le Corbusier, which was reprinted in 2023, became the most quoted book among the received papers for this special issue of the Docomomo Journal, so the title: *The Way Towards Regional Modernities* originates from this prominent book.

### Merjema Zatrić

The recent environmental turn in the humanities has foregrounded a set of questions in architecture history that reframed the relevance of “regional modernism”. The theory-writing, research and design in modern architecture have occasionally addressed the value of the local, but few have done it as thoroughly and daringly as the architects Dušan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt.

Their appreciation of the landscape, climate, culture and materiality of the geographic regions enriched modernist universalism with local values and placed architecture in the regional environment, marked by geographical-historical local specificities.

Just like the works of vernacular architecture emerged in the regions as results of collective authorship, Grabrijan’s and Neidhardt’s joint work was constituted as the fusion of their individual visions and curiosities. Grabrijan’s modernist respect for the otherness of non-Western cultural values met Neidhardt’s modernist desire to integrate his designs into a larger, organic whole. Their resulting original outlook on the architecture and the world was best represented in their book *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity*, which combined ethnography, modernist design, regional planning and environmentalism *avant la lettre* into a meticulous layout shaped in the image of the Bosnian region.

In the foreword to the book, Le Corbusier reconfirmed the need to comprehend local architecture in the “milieu” that “created it.” The book was, indeed, a map of Bosnian architecture in its milieu, including an attempt to make sense of its rapid post-Second World War transformations and the role of modern architecture in their midst.

As a crowning achievement of Grabrijan’s and Neidhardt’s joint research and theory-writing, Neidhardt’s design practice sought to insert itself into what he called a “single-stroke quality” of the historic agglomerations. The timeless substance and value of his built work are a physical testament to what was one of the most productive and unique collaborations and friendships in Yugoslav architecture.

The contributions in this Docomomo Journal unravel and (re)frame the richness of ideas presented in Dušan Grabrijan’s and Juraj Neidhardt’s written and built work, tracing these back to the influence of their teachers, regionalism, modernity, identity politics, heritage, context, disciplinary domains of architecture, and urbanism, to name a few of the most recurrent themes.

The richness and multiplicity of themes addressed in the different contributions made it very difficult to create the optimal order for this issue: every grouping of contributions would undervalue at least one of the aspects of the individual papers. Finally this Journal is structured in three main blocks where the first focusses on the joint origins and joint works of Dušan Grabrjan and Juraj Neidhardt. It includes contributions by Bogo Zupančič, Lejla Džumhur with Aida Idrizbegović-Zgonić and Dijana Alić. The second block of papers has the main focus on Plečnik and Dušan Grabrjan's work and contains contributions by Miloš Kosec, Mirjana Lozanovska with Viktorija Bogdanova and Aleksa Korolija. The third block of papers focusses on Juraj Neidhardt and is authored by Darja Radović-Mahečić, Aleksandar Bede with Dragana Konstantinović and Slobodan Jović and by Nevena Novaković. As guest-editors, we contributed with a paper on the origins of modernity and the synthesis of the arts with the region in the second and third block.

Troughout the papers, the influences and relevance of Juraj Neidhardt's and Dušan Grabrjan's evolving understanding of regional modernities is discussed. Including the multiple meanings, agencies, and controversies of the ways in which the Ottoman-era architectural heritage was understood and presented in two of the most important joint publications by Grabrjan and Neidhardt: "Sarajevo and its Satellites" and *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity*. The specificities of the importance of Jože Plečnik's influence in the region in connection with Dušan Grabrjan's research, his fieldwork, theory, and personal archive are discussed, as well as Juraj Neidhardt's architecture, design, and urban planning ideas, from contextuality to "radical" modernism. In the final part of this Docomomo Journal, several books by and on Dušan Grabrjan and Juraj Neidhardt are highlighted and the Heritage in Danger section presents the challenges of conserving the built legacy of Juraj Neidhardt.

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