University of Banja Luka I Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy
ISSN 2712-0570 I UDC 72

2024
Special Issue

Architecture, Landscape and Territory in Yugoslav Modernism

AGG+ Journal for Architecture, Civil Engineering, Geodesy and Related Scientific Fields
АГГ+ часопис за архитектуру, грађевинарство, геодезију и сродне научне области

vi-xi **Introduction essay**

Vladimir Kulić
Iowa State University, College of Design, USA, vladakulic@gmail.com

PLANNING NETWORKS: ERNEST WEISSMANN AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF URBANISM IN YUGOSLAVIA

Vladimir Kulić
Iowa State University, College of Design, USA, vladakulic@gmail.com

PLANNING NETWORKS: ERNEST WEISSMANN AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF URBANISM IN YUGOSLAVIA

The title of this text is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, it points to a common object of planning: networks of various kinds, whether infrastructural, transportation, communication, or others, which feature prominently in the practice of professional planners. However, an alternative reading would suggest that planning itself is a networked activity, connecting practitioners and knowledge into formal and informal networks. As architectural historian Mark Wigley has argued, in the late 1950s, these two aspects underwent a simultaneous surge, exemplified by the activities of the Greek architect Constantinos Doxiadis and the British planner Jaqueline Tyrwhitt. Their journal *Ekistics* and the annual meetings they ran at the Greek island of Delos, known as the Delos Symposion, studied cities as networked systems and, at the same time, actively connected planners from around the world [1]. Seeing planning as a networked activity can surely be expanded beyond Doxiadis and Tyrwhitt's endeavours. For example, one of the most influential organisations in the history of modernist urbanism, CIAM (*Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*), was a social network *par excellence,* which connected individual practitioners across national borders and allowed for broad circulation of knowledge between them [2], [3]. However, like in most social networks, its members were not all equally linked, and some emerged as especially powerful connectors (or "hubs" in the parlance of network science). Sociograms can be useful in making these social links visible, but individuals who function as network hubs are often identifiable even without graphic aids because of their constant presence in the key events of a particular field.

One such individual was the Yugoslav architect Ernest Weissmann [4].[2] An active member of CIAM, Le Corbusier's one-time collaborator, a successful architect in prewar Yugoslavia, a member of the international committee for the design of the United Nations Headquarters in New York, a high official of the UN, a scholar at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, and a member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) in Zagreb, among other roles, Weissman was even at first glance an exceptionally well-connected person. However, just like the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) stipulates [5], the true extent of his networking capacities can only emerge if we meticulously trace his interactions on the smallest scale. Indeed, at close inspection, his prodigious network-building capacities become clearer. Weissmann used his vast roster of contacts to disseminate urban planning knowledge across the world, motivated by his life-long left-wing commitment to building a more egalitarian global society.[3] He was also the central character in the exceptional internationalisation of planning in Yugoslavia after World War II, which allowed for a tremendous influx of urban planning expertise, as well as for its further transmission around the world. Weissmann operated on a global scale, which renders the task of tracing his network-building efforts

[2] For Weissmann's early career, see [4].
[3] Scholars have recently started discussing CIAM as a network; see [6].

daunting, but even without an exhaustive study, a few episodes can illustrate their outsize impact on postwar planning both internationally and in Yugoslavia.

1. EPISODE 1

In January 1954, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, at the time in between stints at the University of Toronto and Harvard, assumed the position of UN Technical Assistance Advisor to the Indian Government in New Delhi, where she consulted on an exhibition about low-cost housing [7]. While there, she also served as Director of the UN Seminar on Housing and Community Planning, the first in a series of events that the UN would organize in the recently decolonized countries. It was at the seminar that she first met Constantinos Doxiadis, who had just started his planning company Doxiadis Associates (DA) with the ambition to acquire projects for planned development in the Global South. The rest was history: the ensuing partnership between Tyrwhitt and Doxiadis was one of the most influential forces in postwar urbanism, whose significance is difficult to overstate. It promulgated what Doxiadis called *ekistics,* a purported "science of human settlements aimed at the planned emergence of a single planetary city on Earth". From the time they met in 1954 until Doxiadis's death in 1975, the pair closely collaborated on the publication of the journal *Ekistics,* which Tyrwhitt edited and which functioned, in Wigley's words, as a "networking instrument" that aggregated and republished cutting-edge knowledge for further dissemination [1:92-93].

Ernest Weissmann was also present at the seminar in New Delhi in his capacity as the head of the UN's Housing, Town and Country Planning Section (HTCP). But more importantly, it was he who nominated Tyrwhitt for the job in India, thus facilitating her encounter with Doxiadis. Weissmann had been linked to both future partners through his various positions at UN, albeit separately. Doxiadis was the leader of the Greek delegation at the UN founding conference in 1945, whereas at the same time, Weissmann worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and it is likely that their contact dated back to that time. In 1953 Doxiadis was just embarking on a career as a global development expert by establishing Doxiadis Associates, a planning company with the ambition to enter the emerging development market, for which his prior association with the UN must have been useful.[4] By that time, Tyrwhitt was already one of the key members of postwar CIAM, but it appears that was not the way she had met Weissmann.[5] Rather, their connection dated back to 1952, when Weissmann appointed Tyrwhitt to the UN-funded project *Habitation pour le plus grand nombre* [7:151]. The initiative eventually fell through, but the following occasion was successful, leading to Tyrwhitt's appointment in New Delhi and to her encounter with her lifelong professional partner. Weissmann's mediation in that encounter illustrates his centrality to the "small world network" of postwar urban planning and the outsize role he played in it.

2. EPISODE 2

Ernest Weissman was vacationing on the island of Mali Lošinj in the Adriatic on July 26, 1963, when a devastating earthquake struck the Macedonian city of Skopje. The disaster attracted global attention, followed by an outpouring of aid from every corner of the world.

---

4 For an overview of Doxiadis's international career before Delos, see [8].

5 See [7:125]. Weissmann was at the time no longer directly active CIAM, even though he hoped to involve it in UN-sponsored programs. He was apparently disappointed by CIAM's repeated rejection of his progressive ideas; see [6:11]. See also [9].

Weissmann was at the time Assistant Director of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), while at the same time running the newly formed Housing, Building, and Planning Council (HBPC). It was in that capacity that the UN Secretary-General U Thant quickly dispatched him to Skopje to survey the situation.[6] The instructions laid out in the resulting report served as the basis for the entire reconstruction [9:33]. Weissmann also oversaw the entire process as Chairman of the International Board of Consultants, and his role would be later described as "the principal architect and ideologue of aid obtained from the United Nations."[7]

The story of the reconstruction of Skopje has been told many times over, but the UN's role in it can be summed up as managing the international influx of various kinds of expertise, from seismic research and construction technology to urban and regional planning. Dozens of specialists from around the world were brought to the city, including Doxiadis, whose company DA was hired to devise the city's new master plan, and the Japanese architect Kenzō Tange, who won the competition for the city centre. By this time, DA already had many projects in the Global South under their belt, sponsored by the UN, the Ford Foundation, and various governments, putting into practice the developmentalist agenda of the industrialised West. However, the Yugoslav government, then at the height of its non-aligned orientation, had its own networking ideas: in order to establish geopolitical balance in the planning team, it required that Doxiadis collaborates with the Polish company Polservice and the chief architect of Warsaw, Adolf Ciborowski. Skopje thus became a literal meeting ground for specialists from around the world or, as architectural historian Ines Tolić has argued, a "city as a network" of international solidarity [10:21-62].[8] Of course, Weissmann was not the only mastermind responsible for that project, but the outcome very much matched his own ambition to transform Skopje into a "world city" that could function as an "epicentre of knowledge that, in spite of the Cold War, would promote peace, understanding and collaboration [12]."

The effects of such a vision greatly exceeded its original site. The success of the internationalised planning of Skopje served as a blueprint for further involvement of the UN in Yugoslavia, most notably the so-called Adriatic Projects, three interlinked regional plans for the Adriatic coast, coordinated by the UN under the management of Adolf Ciborowski [13]. This, in turn, created a mindset among Yugoslav planners that favoured internationalism, leading to further exchanges. By the 1970s, it was common for Yugoslav planners not only to consult with foreign colleagues (typically in the West), but also to seek education abroad. Despite having officially retired from the UN by that time, Weismann travelled on various assignments around the world more than ever, but also continued to be involved in his home country by providing contacts and advice.

3. EPISODE 3

Just a couple of months after the Skopje earthquake, the young Slovenian architect Vladimir Braco Mušič found himself in New York as one of the first Yugoslav architects on a Ford Foundation grant for graduate studies in the US.[9] He was supposed to attend an urban

6 For a detailed account of Weissmann's role in the reconstruction of Skopje, see [9:32-43].

7 See [10] cited in [9:33].

8 Scholars have more recently studied the reconstruction of Skopje through the lens of the Actor-Network-Theory; see [11].

9 Mušič recounts the entire anecdote in [14]. For Ford Foundation's presence in Yugoslavia, see [15].

design program at one of the less highly-ranked American universities. Having attended CIAM 9 in Aix-en-Provence as a student, however, Mušič had his eyes on Harvard, whose Graduate School of Design (GSD) was at the time filled with CIAM luminaries. While in New York, he stopped at the UN Headquarters to visit Weissmann, a family friend, and he took the opportunity to share his desire to attend GSD. As luck would have it, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt—by then a Harvard professor—was in the building, and Weissmann called her on the spot. She remembered Mušič from Aix, and he was promptly admitted to Harvard, the heart of the American scholarly establishment. Apart from Tyrwhitt, Mušič would also study under other prominent CIAM members, such as Sigfried Giedion, Josep Lluis Sert, and Eduard Sekler, and he also encountered other influential intellectuals, such as the MIT professor Kevin Lynch. Cambridge was at the time also home to the Harvard-MIT Joint Centre for Urban Studies, a Ford foundation-sponsored think-tank that exemplified the paradigm shift in urban planning from a design-based approach to an open-ended, research- and policy-based process that accounted for user feedback [16].

Weissmann was thus once again the matchmaker for an encounter with far-reaching consequences. Had Mušič not gone to GSD, it is difficult to imagine that he would have had the intellectual breadth, confidence, and contacts to successfully co-direct the American-Yugoslav Project in Urban and Regional Studies (AYP), one of the most significant international ventures in Yugoslav planning that came on the heels of Skopje's reconstruction.[10] Hosted at the Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia in Ljubljana between 1966 and 1975, the project was a brainchild of Mušič and the US geographer Jack Fisher under the sponsorship of the US Department of State, Yugoslav government, and, until 1970, the Ford Foundation. It facilitated the import of the latest quantitative techniques in regional planning from the US, contributing precisely to the kind of shift pioneered at the Harvard-MIT Joint Centre, from physical planning to a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach. As a direct result, planning institutions in major Yugoslav cities like Belgrade and Novi Sad started using cybernetic quantitative methods, and leading universities developed graduate programs in regional planning. In addition, AYP functioned as a veritable networking instrument that facilitated contacts among planners from the United States, Yugoslavia, and other European countries like Czechoslovakia, Italy, West Germany, Romania, and Sweden.[11] Unsurprisingly, Weissmann remained connected to AYP; he served on the project's US Advisory Committee alongside other networking wizards of the American academic establishment, such as the planner and the University of Pennsylvania president Martin Meyerson. He thus continued to contribute to the project for which he laid the groundwork through his savvy networking.

4. AN INTELLECTUAL ENTREPRENEUR

Among planning historians, there is a tacit understanding—bordering on a myth—of Weissmann's significance for the postwar period. His name repeatedly appears in the accounts of the most important events and the biographies of widely known characters, but his own role remains reduced to that of a supporting actor who somehow always escapes the spotlight.[12] One of the reasons for such obscuring is the fact that Weissmann replaced

[10] For AYP, see [16] as well as [17] and [18].

[11] For AYP as a networking instrument, see [15].

[12] Among other sources, see [7], [19], and [20]. Only recently has Weissmann received more focused attention; in addition to Bjažić Klarin's groundbreaking book [4], which covers his early years. See also [6] and [12].

the highly successful architectural career of his prewar years with the less visible role of a UN bureaucrat after World War II. Instead of continuing to design cutting-edge buildings, he moved behind the scenes, which allowed him to promote far more effectively his vision of architecture as a means of achieving a more just society, the defining motivation of his entire career.[13] By replacing the drawing board with organising, managing, promoting, assessing, and connecting, he took advantage of the powerful platform of the UN to scale up his playing field to the entire globe. Weissmann thus emerged as what is today more or less casually termed an "intellectual entrepreneur:" someone who networks among individuals, disciplines, and institutions to pool various kinds of resources for the production and dissemination of knowledge. The term may evoke a distinctly neoliberal mindset that fetishises entrepreneurship for business purposes and requires everyone to adopt an entrepreneurial persona, but in Weissmann's case, the goal of the enterprise was still lodged in his prewar left-wing agenda to improve the quality of life for the greatest number. (It remains to be established, though, to what degree that goal was achieved considering its inevitable incorporation into the developmentalist agenda established in the capitalist West.) Such commitment is perhaps most obvious from the fact that he remained loyal to his homeland, socialist Yugoslavia, where he continued to contribute to various projects long after retirement, and citizen of which he remained until his death, even though he lived in the United States most of his life.

The exact methods and effects of Weissmann's intellectual entrepreneurship across the world remain to be thoroughly explored. There is little doubt, however, that such an exploration will cast light on an exceptional figure in the history of postwar planning, one whose moment in the spotlight has been long overdue.

5. REFERENCES

[1] M. Wigley, "Network Fever," *Grey Room*, no. 4, pp. 83–122, 2001.

[2] T. Bjažić Klarin and N. Bojić, "CIAM Network Visualisation – Detecting Ideological Ruptures in the CIAM Discourse," in *Modern and Contemporary Artists' Networks. An Inquiry into Digital History of Art and Architecture*, Lj. Kolešnik and S. Horvatinčić, Eds., Zagreb: Institute of Art History, 2018, pp. 64-82.

[3] T. Bjažić Klarin, "CIAM Networking – International Congress of Modern Architecture and Croatian Architects in the 1950s," *Život umjetnosti* no. 99, pp. 40–57, 2016.

[4] T. Bjažić Klarin, *Ernest Weissmann: Socially Engaged Architecture, 1926-1939.* Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts/Croatian Museum of Architecture, 2015.

[5] B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

[6] T. Bjažić Klarin, "Ernest Weissmann's Architectural and Planning Practices: Continuity of Original Concerns of 'New Architecture' and Postwar Reconstruction," *Prostor,* no. 30, pp. 3-13, 2022.

[7] E. Shoshkes, *Jaqueline Tyrwhitt: A Transnational Life in Urban Planning and Design.* London and New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 154-155.

[8] P. Pyla, "Architects as Development Experts: Model Communities in Iraq and Syria," in *Landscapes of Development: The Impact of Modernization Discourses on the Physical Environment of the Eastern Mediterranean,* P. Pyla, Ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Design, 2013.

[13] For this argument, see [4:290-291].

[9] I. Tolić, *Dopo il terremoto: La politica della ricostruzione negli anni della guerra fredda a Skopje.* Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2011, p. 40.
[10] K. Jordanovski and K. Watts, *Skopje, catastrophe—renewal—experience.* Skopje: Matica, 2004, p. 67.
[11] I. Martek and M. Lozanovska, "Consciousness and Amnesia: The Reconstruction of Skopje Considered through 'Actor Network Theory,'" *Journal of Planning History,* vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 163-183, 2018.
[12] I. Tolić, "Ernest Weissmann's 'World City:' The Reconstruction of Skopje within the Cold War Context," *Southeastern Europe, no.* 41, pp. 173-75, 2017.
[13] V. Mattioni, *Jadranski projekti: Projekti južnog i gornjeg Jadrana 1967.-1972.* Zagreb: Urbanistički institut Hrvatske, 2003.
[14] V. B. Mušič, "Tribute," *Ekistics* 52, no. 314-315, p. 487, 1985.
[15] V. Kulić, "Ford's Network: the American-Yugoslav project and the circulation of urban planning expertise in the Cold War," *Planning Perspectives, vol.* 37, no. 5*,* pp. 1001-1027, 2022.
[16] E. Mumford, "From Master-Planning to Self-Build: The MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1959-1971," in *MIT, Architecture, and the 'Techno-Social' Moment,* Arindam Dutta, Ed., Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 2012, pp. 288-309.
[17] T. Nemann, "Overpromising Technocracy's Potential: The American-Yugoslav Project, Urban Planning, and Cold War Cultural Diplomacy," *Journal of Planning History,* vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 3–25, 2022.
[18] N. Grabar, "Razvoj prostornog planiranja: Suočavanje jugoslovenskog razvoja s konceptima američke akademije," in *Usponi i padovi,* A. Miljanić and B, Dimitrijević, Eds., Belgrade: Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju, 2021, pp. 45-61.
[19] E. Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960.* Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 2002.
[20] I. Muzaffar, "The Periphery Within: Modern Architecture and the Making of the Third World," doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHIES

Vladimir Kulić

Vladimir Kulić is Professor of architectural history and David Lingle Faculty Fellow at Iowa State University. In collaboration with Maroje Mrduljaš, he curated the traveling exhibition Unfinished Modernisations: Between Utopia and Pragmatism (2012-2014), and in collaboration with Martino Stierli, he curated the exhibition Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948-1980 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2018). His books include Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia (with Maroje Mrduljaš and Wolfgang Thaler, 2012), Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities (edited with Monica Penick and Timothy Parker, 2014), Bogdanović by Bogdanović: Yugoslav Memorials through the Eyes of Their Architect (2018), and the edited volume Second World Postmodernisms: Architecture and Society Under Late Socialism (2019). Kulić received numerous fellowships, grants, and awards, including those from the Society of Architectural Historians (2021), Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (2017), Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (2015), American Academy in Berlin (2015), American Council of Learned Societies (2013), Fondazione Bruno Zevi (2009), and the Graham Foundation (2007, 2014, 2018).