

Uncharted architectural theory of critical regionalism in the work of Aleksandar Deroko between the world wars

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Introduction

There is the paradox: how to be modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization.¹

Repeatedly quoted, analysed, and sometimes challenged, Paul Ricoeur's words encapsulate the essence of critical regionalism. Critical regionalism is most commonly associated with Kenneth Frampton, whose efforts resulted in the wide popularisation of the concept during the 1980s.² However, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, the creators of the term, placed the appearance of the intellectual tradition of critical regionalism significantly earlier in the first half of the 1930s.³ Tzonis and Lefaivre later recognized Lewis Mumford as the most important of Frampton's predecessors.⁴ Exploring the previously uncharted architectural theory of critical regionalism in the work of Aleksandar Deroko between the world wars, this paper pushes the timeline of critical regionalism even further back – to the 1920s. It will show that, flourishing in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia through the ideas about architecture formulated by Deroko, the borders of interwar critical regionalism extended further than is generally assumed by architectural historians.

The paper comprises four parts. Drawing from the definition of critical regionalism presented by Tzonis and Lefaivre in their analysis of Mumford's work, the first part focuses on Deroko's interwar writing about architecture. Concisely introducing the intellectual environment that contributed to the development of Deroko's architectural ideas, it considers the role that the borderline position of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, perceived as a cultural threshold between the West and the East, played in the shaping of Deroko's critical regionalist attitudes. In addition to

¹ Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures' (1961), in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965, 271-284.

² Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, 16–30.

³ Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, 'The Grid and the Pathway: An Introduction to the Work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis, with Prolegomena to a History of the Culture of Modern Greek Architecture', in *Architecture in Greece*, 15 (1981): 164–178.

⁴ Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World*, Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2003, 33.

the five points offered by Lefavre and Tzonis, Deroko's text helped identify another essential premise of critical regionalism. Critical regionalism conditions design functionality, maintaining that architecture should be developed as a response to the unique conditions of the physical and socio-cultural context. The other three sections move the discussion into the domain of interwar architectural practice. The Hall of Residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty (1937), The Church of Saint Sava (1926) and Deroko's holiday house (1939), his three most famous interwar projects, serve as case studies for the implementation of the main points of critical regionalism in his designs.

Critical Regionalism envisaged: Aleksandar Deroko between the East, the West and the Local

The appeal of a regionalist approach to the design process, resulting in architecture sensitive towards the local context, gained traction amongst architectural theorists since the 1980s. Anthony Alofsin wrote about constructive regionalism in 1980, before Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefavre developed their concept of critical regionalism.⁵ Alofsin's interpretation of regionalism was meant to be constructive "not only in the sense of tectonic expression of construction, but in the sense of creating a positive dialogue between culture, buildings and the environment."⁶ Alofsin pinpointed essential traits of a "true" constructive regionalism, which constituted the framework for the regionalist position later defined as critical. According to Alofsin, constructive regionalism is, above all, tailored for the unique local conditions and way of life. Responding to local colours, materials, and customs, it is integrated with its setting, in either rural or urban landscapes. Constructive regionalism learns from the past, yet builds for the present, employing the latest technologies: "it embraces traditions and transforms them; fosters craft and pushes the limits of technology."⁷ Finally, according to Alofsin, constructive regionalism builds upon the process of the individual search for the universal.

Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefavre coined the term critical regionalism in 1981.⁸ Exploring the concept in the texts by Lewis Mumford, Tzonis and Lefavre described his position as profoundly original, being the first to infuse regionalism with a notion of relativity.⁹ Regionalism had previously been perceived in absolute opposition to the universal. In contrast, as Tzonis and Lefavre assert, Mumford's regionalism was developed as an engagement with the global, universalizing world – not as an attitude of resistance. His radical rethinking of traditional definitions transformed regionalism into a constant process of negotiation between the local

⁵ Anthony Alofsin, 'Constructive Regionalism' (1980, Revised 2005), in *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition* ed. Vincent B. Canizaro, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007, 369-373.

⁶ Alofsin, 'Constructive Regionalism', 368.

⁷ Alofsin, 'Constructive Regionalism', 371.

⁸ Tzonis and Lefavre, 'The Grid and the Pathway', 164-178.

⁹ Lefavre and Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism*, 33.

and the global. Analysing Mumford's ideas, Lefaivre and Tzonis identified five points of critical regionalism:

- Preservation of actual historical buildings and towns and rejection of absolute historicism – mimicking of historical architecture;
- The ecological or sustainable aspect of Mumford's approach to 'Return to Nature';
- Use of the most advanced technology of the day;
- Radically novel definition of a (increasingly multicultural) community;
- The balance between individual and universal.

Architectural ideas developed by Deroko between the two World Wars found accord with the majority of categories proposed by both Alofsin and Lefaivre and Tzonis. Interestingly, Deroko – much like the American historian Mumford – developed his positions in an intellectual milieu influenced by, yet at the same time, distant from the major European cultural centres, where Modernism flourished between the world wars. This distance – most obviously physical in the case of the US and predominantly cultural in terms of Yugoslavia – doubtless contributed to a slower acceptance of radical changes in architecture. Researchers of twentieth-century architectural history widely dismiss the hesitant attitudes displayed towards revolutionary innovations in these – and many other – environments as a sign of conservatism and backwardness. Closer reading of these 'conservative' texts about architecture however, show well-argued positions cautious towards the Modernist insensitiveness to the unique requirements of different contexts. Aware of the differences between various climates, topographies, societies, cultures, etc., many interwar architects questioned the rigid uniformity of Modernist solutions. They were also unconvinced by arguments for complete rejection of the past. 'Since civilization is based largely upon the capacity of human beings to remember',¹⁰ how were they to forget millennia of architectural experience?

Like many others, Aleksandar Deroko was well aware of the fact that architecture had to keep pace with the changing world. However, brought up in a specific intellectual environment, influenced by the culture of the West, yet at the same time relatively autonomous, he was in a position to maintain a critical distance from the radical inventions of Modernism and develop his own voice – one that, as it will be shown, did not lose its currency with the passing of time. Deroko was born and raised in Belgrade, the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia, and later Yugoslavia. Existing from 1918 until 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was a state on the Balkan Peninsula, (a geographic region) in South-Eastern Europe. As varied as the definitions of its northern border, the Balkans remains a fluid discourse, a dynamic milieu developed at the threshold between the cultural spheres of the West and the East.¹¹ Commonly considered as a 'non-European part of Europe' the complexity of

¹⁰ Vincentt Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1969, 257.

¹¹ More about political geography of the Balkans: Alexander Vezekov, 'Entangled Geographies of the Balkans: The Boundaries of the Region and the Limits of the Discipline', in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans - Volume Four: Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)*

the topic of the Balkans has attracted a numerous scholars. Building on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism – who explained it as a powerful intellectual paradigm developed by Western Europeans to deal with the 'otherness' of Eastern culture, customs, and beliefs – Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert Hayden describe the Balkans as a variation of the Orientalist theme that distinguishes the region as a part of Europe which used to be under Ottoman rule.¹² Maria Todorova, a well-established expert on the topic of the Balkans, insists that Balkanism is a completely different discourse to Orientalism.¹³ Todorova claims that, though a part of Europe in terms of geography, the Balkans was culturally constructed as 'the other' and always paired in opposition to the 'West' and 'Europe'.¹⁴

Introducing the idea of 'Nesting Orientalisms', Milica Bakic-Hayden shows that a pattern of the West-East dichotomy influenced the self-image of the peoples from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.¹⁵ Replacing monarchy with communism, SFR Yugoslavia was formed after the 1939–45 war. However, there was no significant change in the population and, thus, it might be assumed that Bakic-Hayden's observation is applicable to the period between the world wars. According to Bakic-Hayden, the self-identity of the former Yugoslavs was built upon the idea of 'otherness'. Namely, the South Slavs who resided in areas that were formerly part of the Habsburg Monarchy distinguished themselves from those formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Within the latter area, Eastern Orthodox peoples perceived themselves as more European than those who assumed the identity of European Muslims. It should be noted that for Serbian historical self-reflection the concept of East was ambiguous. When associated with the Islamic Ottoman Empire, it was considered backward and alien. In contrast, researchers of the middle ages, the 'golden' period of Serbian history prior to the Ottoman conquest, have imbued the concept of East with a positive meaning. They identified it with the influences of the Orthodox East, i.e. Byzantium. From the nineteenth century onwards, it was widely considered that the historical Serbian 'self' had developed between two spheres of cultural influences – Western and Byzantine.¹⁶

The '(Byzantine) East – West – Us' conceptual triad was clearly reflected in the architectural production of the period. It resulted in a dichotomy that marked Serbian architecture since the latter half of the nineteenth century. The discussion did not lose traction even after Serbia became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in

Representations, ed. Roumen Dontchev Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov, BRILL, 2017, 115–256.

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003; Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert Hayden, 'Orientalist variations on the theme 'Balkan': Symbolic geography in recent Yugoslav cultural politics', *Slavic Review* 51(1): 1-15.

¹³ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 4-20.

¹⁴ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 4-20.

¹⁵ Milica Bakic-Hayden, 'Nestling Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review* 54(4), Winter, 1995: 917-931.

¹⁶ For example: Stojan Novaković, *Heraldčki Običaji u Srba: u primeni i književnosti*, Belgrade, 1884; quoted in: Milan Popadić, 'The Preservation and Presentation of Medieval Heritage in Serbia in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Imagining the Past. Proceedings of the 3rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, Belgrade, 2016, 216.

1918, and remained lively up until the 1939–45 war. Speaking in broadest terms, two major sources of architectural influence coexisted during this period. On one hand, architects followed the ideas disseminated by the cultural centres of Central and Western Europe – from Rundbogenstil and Beaux-Arts, to the twentieth-century ideas of the Modern Movement.¹⁷ On the other, inspired by the monumental sacred architecture of the medieval period (Byzantine East), and vernacular construction ('Us'), some architects looked inwardly. Building upon the concept of a specific 'self', different from the 'other' embodied in the foreign influences of the West, they attempted to develop a specific style of architecture, suitable to the local context and needs.¹⁸



Figure 1. Deroko's article 'The East, the West and Us' (*Umetnički pregled 13*: Belgrade, 1938, 396-398). Source: Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije.

As will be shown later in the text, Deroko's understanding of the history of art and architecture conveys his contemplations on the Yugoslav borderline cultural position, perceived as a bridge between West and East.¹⁹ The very title of one of the early texts by Deroko – "The East, the West, and Us" – reveals that he was intimately aware of this tension (fig. 1). Yet, a strong sense of 'self' permeated Deroko's attitudes. He maintained that though both of the opposing poles influenced Balkan architecture and art throughout history, simultaneously, it

¹⁷ More about 'traditionalist' (as opposed to the Modernist) Western architectural influences in Serbia: Aleksandar Kadijević, *Estetika Arhitekture Akademizma. XIX-XX Vek*, Belgrade: GK, 2005, 291-453.

¹⁸ Aleksandar Kadijević, *Jedan vek traženja nacionalnog stila u srpskoj arhitekturi. Sredina XIX - sredina XX veka*, Belgrade: GK, 2006, 321-330.

¹⁹ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Istok, zapad i mi (The East, the West and 'Us')', *Umetnički pregled 13*: Belgrade, 1938, 396-398; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Pre tolikih stoleća (Many Centuries Ago)', *Vreme*: 6-8 January, 1926.

resulted in original and authentic inventions. Deroko's life path also resonated with the 'East – West – Us' triad. His understanding of architecture developed through his immediate experience of the cultural spheres of both the West and the Balkans. Deroko studied mechanical engineering at the University of Belgrade's Technical Faculty.²⁰ These early interests in construction technologies remained obvious in the entire course of his career, and were to become an important feature of his regionalist position. As a researcher of architectural heritage, Deroko explored buildings' structural qualities, construction processes, materials, etc. He was fascinated with vernacular crafts, curiously inspecting and carefully documenting the various technical inventions of the anonymous vernacular creators. The outbreak of the 1914–18 war saw Deroko fighting at Thessaloniki as a pilot of the Allied Forces. Sent to recover in Italy and Austria, he enrolled at the Royal Engineering School in Rome, continuing the education he had started in Belgrade. However, the year he spent in Rome marked a turning point in his career. During this time, Deroko discovered the history of art and architecture, and, upon returning to his home city, started architectural studies at the University of Belgrade.

Deroko's interest in the history of Serbian and Balkans architecture became obvious well before his graduation in 1926. During the undergraduate studies, he published articles about medieval architecture and protection of architectural heritage. Much like Mumford, who noted that his 'training had perhaps prepared me better than that of most of my contemporaries; for, as a practitioner of civic and regional surveying, I had explored with a notebook and camera the cities and villages of the Eastern seaboard; and had learned to use buildings as documents',²¹ Deroko was able to experience historic structures first-hand through his numerous field trips to the most remote parts of the Balkan Peninsula. Vojislav Korać notes that Deroko's reports were accompanied by his thoughts on the essence of architectural creativity.²² Exploring medieval sacred architecture, Deroko discovered 'Us' - the vernacular architecture of the Balkan Peninsula. He was instantly attracted to its functionality and adept construction – especially in timber; the longevity of lessons passed on from one generation to another; the boldness and beauty of details. Deroko diligently recorded these research trips, returning with detailed notes, carefully executed drawings, technical analyses, sketches of landscape, etc. Broadly approaching vernacular construction technology, he was not solely interested in the houses themselves; he was attracted to everything related to the construction – service buildings, tools, and various everyday objects.²³ Deroko strove to understand the complex circumstances essential for functional design and influencing forms of architecture.

²⁰ Zoran M. Jovanović, *Aleksandar Deroko*, Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1991, 10.

²¹ Lewis Mumford, *Sticks & Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization*, first edition 1924, second revised edition New York: Dover Publications 1954, Preface viii.

²² Vojislav Korać, 'Aleksandar Deroko – skica za portet', *Glasnik DKS*, 15, Beograd 1991, 241-242.

²³ These interests never left Deroko. See, for example: Aleksandar Deroko, 'Narod: tehničar i pronalazač (The Folk: a Craftsman and an Inventor)', *Tehničke novine* 11: 9, 1 Maj 1958, 256.

Finally, Deroko was personally acquainted with the avant-garde tendencies in art and architecture in Paris. He was sent there in 1926 to study with Professor Gabriel Millet²⁴, an esteemed researcher of Byzantine art and architecture, at École de Hautes Études. His friend Rastko Petrović, a Serbian diplomat and avant-garde poet, introduced him to Parisian high society. Among others, Deroko met Guillaume Apollinaire, James Joyce, Saint-John Perse, and was close to the Parisian Dadaist circle. Picasso presented him with one of his paintings, and he was also introduced to Le Corbusier. Connections with such intellectuals from (the countries of) the West doubtless influenced Deroko. Commenting that “today, we do not have any particular architectural style,”²⁵ he agreed with the Modernist criticism of contemporary architectural production. Similarly, Deroko dismissed the conservative emphasis on architectural beauty: “in order for a house to be beautiful, it sometimes becomes almost unusable or, at least, uncomfortable.”²⁶ Rejecting futile aesthetics, Deroko described ornament as useless. However, though familiar with the latest ideas in art and architecture – and agreeing with some of them – he was not pulled into the radical vortex of Modernism. Maintaining an impartial attitude he was able to observe Modernist ideas from a critical distance. During the 1920s Deroko started to formulate his own ideas about architecture. Brought up within an ‘other’ European cultural context, his strong sense of ‘self’ was manifested in two ways. First, he rejected the (foreign) influence of Modernism, criticizing its uniformity and utter disregard of local context. Furthermore, he insisted that architecture should be developed in response to a functional imperative, suitable to the unique demands of a specific place, and expressing an authentic aesthetic sentiment of a people living in certain geographical conditions.

Tradition and Modernity: the hall of residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade

Coming back to the first point of critical regionalism – as proposed by Lefaivre and Tzonis – Deroko was a dedicated advocate of the preservation of actual historical buildings and towns. He was a passionate architectural historian actively involved in the conservation and preservation of architectural heritage:

Thank God the times of Viollet-le-Duc are long gone. For he, though once admired, is resented today, for having retouched old French monuments too much. If you visit prominent world museums, you will see that the old and damaged sculptures from Antiquity are mended only as much as necessary to create an impression about the whole, but what is new and what is old is clearly marked everywhere

²⁴ Dubravka Preradović, ed, *Gabrijel Mije i istraživanja stare srpske arhitekture*, katalog izložbe, Galerija nauke i tehnike 41, SANU, 2019; Djordje Mandrapa, ‘Odnos i kontekstualizacija istraživačkog i projektantskog rada Aleksandra Deroka’, *Phlogiston* 26, 2018, 97-136.

²⁵ Aleksandar Deroko, ‘Naš nacionalni stil u arhitekturi (Our National Style in Architecture)’, *Vreme*: 6 January, 1941.

²⁶ Aleksandar Deroko, ‘Estetika kuće u polju (Aesthetics of the Country House)’, *Umetnički pregled* 1, Belgrade, 1938, 142-143.

... New and old are always easily distinguished, from afar, otherwise, it might start to look like a restoration, and restoration in art is a criminal offense... The same applies to architecture. Contemporary principle is: for conservation – decidedly against restoration.²⁷

From the very beginning of his career, Deroko surveyed numerous medieval monasteries and towns (more than 300).²⁸ As noted earlier in the text, he based his judgements and scholarship on first-hand observation and personal surveying of historical buildings. Deroko always stressed the importance of the immediate experience with 'old architecture on site' as the only proper way to gain 'better knowledge of the whole matter', revising 'the data through personal knowledge and remarks', and helping 'against fraudulent reconstruction'.²⁹ Deeply committed to protection of heritage, Deroko was amongst the first authors of systematizations of Serbian architectural history, starting from his first text on medieval architecture in Serbia from 1922³⁰ (fig. 2). He also wrote one of the first textbooks on monumental and vernacular architecture in Serbia³¹ (fig. 3).

²⁷ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Restauracija manastira Sedmovratne Žiče privodi se kraju (Restoration of the Sedmovratna Žiča Monastery is Coming to an End)', *Vreme*: 19 August 1932, 3

²⁸ Jovanović, *Aleksandar Deroko*, 41-49; Popadić, 'The Preservation and Presentation of Medieval Heritage', 213-214.

²⁹ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Tri manastira srednjevekovnog Rasa (Three Monasteries of Medieval Ras)', *Misao* X: Belgrade, 1922, 1673-1686; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Povodom jednog S.O.S. apela još od pre dvadeset godina (On the occasion of one S.O.S. appeal from twenty years ago)', *Misao* XII: Belgrade, 1923, 838-842; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Izdanja narodnog muzeja u Beogradu', *Srpski književni glasnik* XXXII: Belgrade, 1931, 67-69; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Restauracija manastira Sedmovratne Žiče privodi se kraju (Restoration of the Sedmovratna Žiča Monastery is Coming to an End)', *Vreme*: August 19, 1932; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Na putu za kolenku drevne države Nemanjića (On the Way to the Cradle of the Ancient State of Nemanjići)', *Vreme*: July 20, 1933; Aleksandar Deroko, *Mangupluci oko Kalimegdana*, Belgrade: Dereta 2014, first edition 1987, 93-94, 103-104.

³⁰ Deroko, 'Tri manastira srednjevekovnog Rasa (Three Monasteries of Medieval Ras)', *Misao* X: Belgrade, 1922, 1673-1686. Throughout his career Deroko constantly published numerous articles in the daily newspapers *Vreme*, *Politika*, *Pokret*, *Telegram*, as well as journals *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva*, *Srpski književni glasnik*, *Starinar*, *Misao*, *Godišnjak Tehničkog fakulteta*, *Nova smena*, *Umetnički pregled*, *XX vek*.

³¹ Aleksandar Deroko, *Narodno neimarstvo I and II (Vernacular Architecture I and II)*, Institut za narodnu umetnost Beogradskog Univerziteta, 1939, 1940. His first two books and the only pre-war publications are actually collections of drawings in two volumes. Both publications comprise one sheet of text and 19 sheets of "drawings" with Deroko's hand-written notes on sepia paper, with pagination in red, which elevated them from mere books to exquisite items of art. Traditional architectural skills and details, types of chimneys, porches, windows, locks, and interiors, are depicted through the unique artistic means of Deroko's drawings. Later, numerous books include Deroko's best-known publication on Serbian monumental architecture entitled *Monumentalna i dekorativna arhitektura u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji (Monumental and Decorative Architecture in Medieval Serbia)*, Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1953; second edition 1962; *Narodna arhitektura – knjiga I, Spomenici arhitekture IX – XVIII veka u Jugoslaviji (National Architecture - Book I, Architectural Monuments*



Figure 2. Deroko's article 'Three Monasteries of Medieval Ras' (*Misao* X: Belgrade, 1922, 1673-1686). Source: Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije.

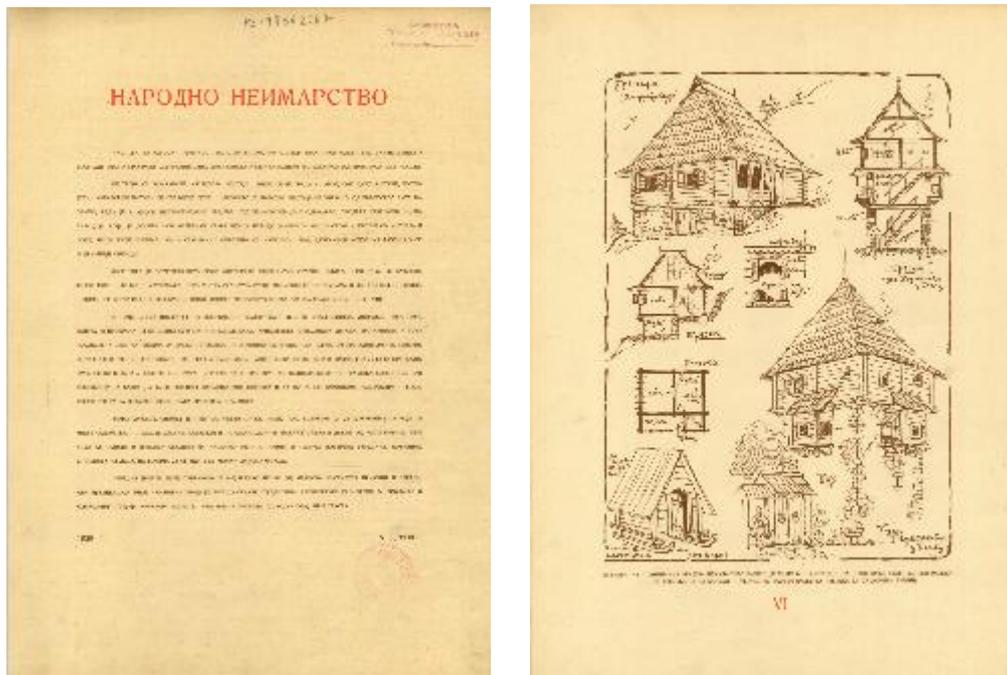


Figure 3. Deroko's drawings of vernacular architecture (Deroko, *Vernacular Architecture I*, Institut za narodnu umetnost Beogradskog Univerziteta, 1939).

of IX – XVIII century in Yugoslavia), Beograd: Građevinska knjiga, 1964; luxury edition in French, *Avec Les Maîtres d' Autrefois (Monastères médiévaux en Serbie, Macédoine, Monténégro)*, Beograd: Turistička štampa, 1967.

Explaining the first point of Mumford's critical regionalism further, Lefaivre and Tzonis stress another important feature of his approach to history. They point out that though Mumford studied history passionately, he strongly opposed mimicking – or copying – of historical architecture in subsequent periods. Or, to use Mumford's words, first published in 1941:

The forms that people used in other civilizations or in other periods of our own country's history were intimately part of the whole structure of their life. There is no method of mechanically reproducing these forms or bringing them back to life ... Our task is not to imitate the past, but to understand it so that we may face the opportunity of our own day and deal with them in an equally creative spirit.³²

Deroko's article from 1927 conveyed almost the same attitude. Insisting that various epochs produce distinct and unique architectural forms, he searched for authentic expression of his own period:

The arts are a direct result of specific circumstances. They cannot be forcefully shaped. Styles are not created [deliberately]. Our period will, naturally, produce spontaneously a contemporary style of art. Environments differ culturally and socio-economically too much, and especially so in relation to sentiment and spirit.³³

Deroko employed the term 'spirit' occasionally, presumably believing in a spiritual continuum between different historical periods, essential for vigour and inventiveness in architecture. He called on architects to appreciate the past, underlining that 'cultural heritage is to be kept up with' and should serve as an inspiration, a creative refreshment and encouragement with its naivety and deep sensibility, but never as a direct source for imitation. On a different occasion, Deroko noted that:

Today, it is being built less and less in the manner it has been built for hundreds of years. This cannot be helped, nor should there be any artificial or vigorous interventions because a specific time lives under specific circumstances and its building style is a spontaneous expression of those conditions and that time. Different time, willingly or not, creates under different circumstances its own, at least slightly, different style ... There have been attempts to make up and officially impose a style that would represent the epoch in question. The results did not last long.³⁴

³² Lewis Mumford, *The South in Architecture, The Dancy Lectures*, Alabama College, 1941, 14, 17-18.

³³ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Izložba naših vizantiskih umetničkih dela (The Exhibition of our Byzantine art works)', *Politika*: 12 April, 1927.

³⁴ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Naš nacionalni stil u arhitekturi (Our National Style in Architecture)', *Vreme*: 6 January, 1941.

Asserting that it is not possible to stop progress, Deroko stressed that 'least of all should schools and workshops be created, or "our style" resurrected.' According to Deroko, an attempt to recreate historic architecture would necessarily result in its degradation, a mere caricature of its past glory. Writing in 1932, Deroko was firmly set in his belief that: 'those who wish to resurrect our old and glorious architecture and transplant it into contemporary practice, in the name of "the creation of a pure national art", are mistaken.'³⁵

Designs for the Hall of Residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, which he created in collaboration with a young Russian emigre architect, Petar Dimitrijevič Anagnosti, in 1936, eloquently communicate what Deroko considered the 'correct' way to produce an architecture expressive of the period, yet rooted in tradition.³⁶ By the mid-1930s, due to the growing numbers of theology students, the old hall of residence became unfit, and the Faculty decided to erect a new, modern building featuring the latest technologies.³⁷ In terms of planning, designs convey efforts to develop a modern, functional solution – a practical response to the daily requirements of student life. The formal qualities of the structure reveal contemplations of modern architectural achievements, merged with inventions inspired by Serbian medieval architecture. In terms of the 'East-West-Us' triad, the architecture of the Hall of Residence was developed as a dialogue between the 'West' and 'Us', resulting in a large scale residential structure – formally unique, and a harmonic reconciliation of Modernism and distinct local features.

The architects designed an imposing structure, with a tall corner tower rising above symmetrically placed lateral wings. Perforated with two entry arches and reminiscent of a monastery bell tower, the tower contrasts with the simply treated ornament-free facades.³⁸ (Fig. 4) Ksenija Ćirić aligns the forms of the Hall of Residence with the period Art Deco tendencies to merge tradition and modernity through attempts to create traditionally 'beautiful' architecture tailored after modern needs and ways of living. Art Deco was indeed a popular stylistic choice for interwar Serbian architecture, and Ćirić notes that Deroko would probably have

³⁵ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Stara naša umetnost i savremeno stvaranje (Our Old Art and Modern Creation)', *Vreme*: 1 May, 1932.

³⁶ Fleeing before the October Revolution (1917), Petar Anagnosti eventually settled in Belgrade, where he enrolled in the studies of architecture at the Faculty of Architecture. During his studies, he was noted as a highly talented draughtsman. Later in his career, he exhibited a strong affinity towards Modernism. Based on Anagnosti's own words published in his memoirs, scholars agree that, for the Hall of Residence, Deroko hired the young Russian emigre architect for plans, statistic calculations, details and general supervision: Ksenija Ćirić, 'Internat studenata Pravoslavnog bogoslovskeg fakulteta u Beogradu (The Hall of Residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade)', *Nasleđe*: 15, 2014, 77-83; Marina Đurđević, 'Prilog proučavanju života i dela arhitekta Petra Dimitrijeviča Anagnostija (A Contribution to the Study of Life and Work of Architect Petar Dimitrijevič Anagnosti)', *GGB*: 47-48, 2000-2001, 239-251.

³⁷ Author unknown, 'Novi internat za studente Teološkog fakulteta (The Hall of Residence for the Students of Theological Faculty)', *Politika*: 16 Novembar, 1939, 13.

³⁸ Ćirić, 'Internat studenata', 79; Ćirić notes that the tower resembles the Wholly Trinity Church at Sopoćani Monastery.

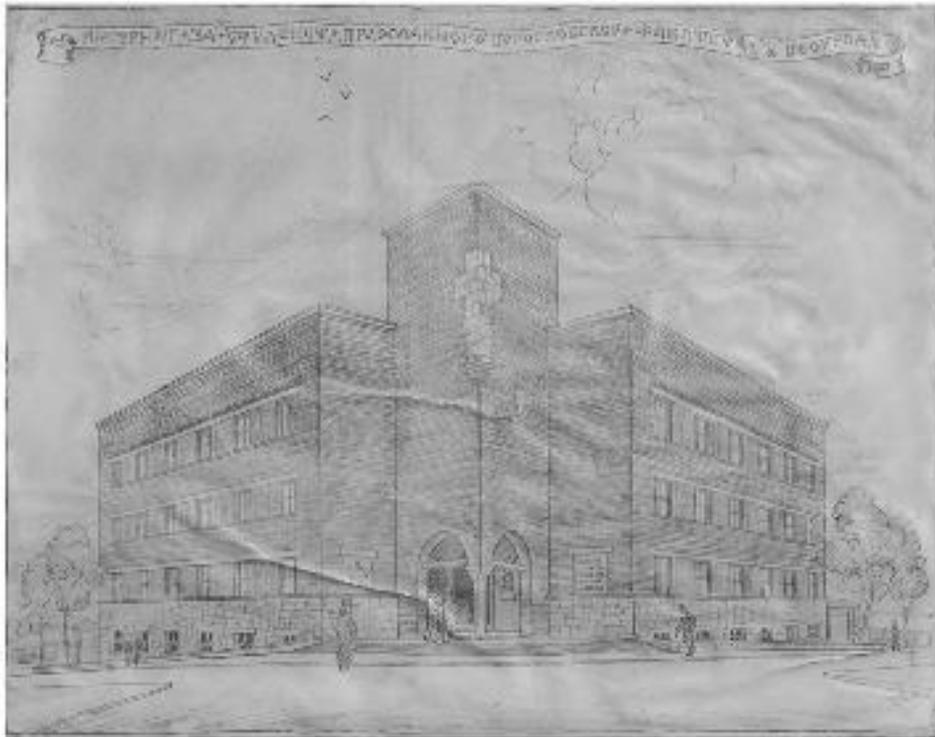


Figure 4. Hall of Residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, Deroko's drawing (Source: Ćirić, 'Internat studenata Pravoslavnog bogoslovskog fakulteta u Beogradu', 79).

been exposed to its influences during his visit to Paris in 1926 – only a year after the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (1925). Acknowledging inspiration from heritage architecture, and such medieval edifices as the Žiča, Sopoćani, or Dečani monasteries, Ćirić described the structure as a unique example of Art Deco in Serbian architecture, one that showcases the authenticity and the quality of Deroko's artistic imagination.³⁹ On the other hand, Irena Kuletin maintains that – as stressed by the press during the building's construction – 'the student dormitory was noted as an outstanding example of modernity and modernist architecture.'⁴⁰ The public perception of the 'outstanding modernity' of the project should also be considered within a broader context of the Serbian Orthodox Church's growing influence at that time. The Orthodox Faculty of Theology joined the University of Belgrade in 1920, and the Church aspired to affirm the Faculty as a modern educational institution. Designing the new hall of residence, Deroko conveyed his client's desire to consolidate the studies of theology as a modern and actual discipline. The scale, programme and functions of the new student dormitory required a union of modernizing and traditional architecture, one that would eloquently convey the ideas of modernity and historic continuity of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Deroko responded by reaching out to foreign interwar achievements and applying modernist formulas to traditional local

³⁹ Ćirić, 'Internat studenata', 82.

⁴⁰ 'Novi internat za studente Teološkog fakulteta', 13, in: Irena Kuletin Ćulafić, 'Architectural Work of Aleksandar Deroko – Beauty of Emotional Creativity', *SAJ*, 11: 1, 2019, 1-42, 28.

architectural forms. The linear contours of simple rectangular masses, flat roof and strong horizontal modeling of the facades were embedded in the lasting symbols of historical architecture.

In Deroko's designs, tradition is perceived as more than a specific historical period offering a repertoire of architectural forms to choose from – his creative efforts resonate with a liberal, humanistic approach to the concept of tradition. For Deroko, architectural tradition is the embodiment of 'Us' – a local building culture developed in relation to foreign inputs and influences. It marked a continuous transfer of knowledge, skills and customs, maintaining the cultural continuity and artistic expression of a nation. In his design for the student hall of residence, Deroko's choice of an ancient building material for the cladding – brick – draws directly from the local historical precedents while implying a cultural relatedness with the civilization of the West. On one hand, as Kuletin notes, 'Deroko's choice of brick for the façade alludes to the ancient forms of Mesopotamian building and a man's connection with soil, clay, crafts and nature. The brick had become an irreplaceable part of the tradition of building construction through centuries and millennia, from Sumer to the Romans.'⁴¹ On the other, a direct, physical connection with the Serbian soil from which the brick is made implies a historic relatedness between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbs. This connection stretched through the centuries of Serbian history and was embodied in the greatly admired examples of medieval architecture – constructed and embellished with brick. Like the old masons from medieval times, Deroko employed the combination of brick and stone as a means of spiritual – and artistic – expression of the otherwise ornamentless architecture of the Hall of Residence for the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade. Inspired by tradition, Deroko genuinely did not copy from history. Instead, he designed an edifice which responds to the present while acknowledging the past – a 'West-Us' metaphor that draws from the local yet locates Serbia in the context of Western culture.

Reconciling the poles of Critical Regionalism: particular/local and universal/foreign in the Church of Saint Sava

Discussion of the 'West-Us' relationship in the designs for the Hall of Residence brushed upon the issues of particularity and universality in architecture, introducing the fifth point of critical regionalism as explained by Lefaivre and Tzonis. According to the two scholars, a specific balance between the particular and the universal marks the regionalist theoretical position of Lewis Mumford. Mumford claimed that every regional culture necessarily possessed a universal side to it, 'it is steadily open to influences that come from other parts of the world, and from other cultures, separated from the local region in space or time or both together.'⁴² Writing on the other side of the Atlantic, Deroko expressed an almost

⁴¹ Kuletin Čulafić, 'Architectural Work of Aleksandar Deroko', 29.

⁴² Mumford, *The South in Architecture*, 30-31; Lewis Mumford, *Whither Honolulu? A Memorandum Report on Park and City Planning. Prepared by Lewis Mumford for City and County*

identical opinion. Balance between the particular and universal and an understanding of the 'East-West-Us' concept also informed Deroko's discussion of the tension between the local and the foreign, present in architecture throughout history.

Caught between East and West, Deroko's regionalist position developed in a constant process of negotiation between the local and the global – similarly to Mumford, who wrote in an environment culturally linked yet physically distant from the major European centres. Deroko maintained that every regional culture necessarily possessed a universal dimension. Discussing the historic architecture of Yugoslavia, he asserted that there were two sources of influence: "that which we brought ourselves, and that which we later received and adopted."⁴³ Deroko explained that the local attitude to the imported forms is more important than their original aesthetic potentials, and crucial for their translation into the new environment. The foreign architectural shapes are adapted to the local context, they are 'combined' and 'deformed', until, finally, novel and original forms are created. In other words, the particular internalises the universal. Clearly influenced by the idea of the 'East-West-Us' triad, Deroko maintained that the originality and individual values of Serbian heritage architecture emerged when it stopped perceiving eastern and western constructive system and decorative logic, and freely handling these elements, distinguished its own particular conception.⁴⁴ Deroko was always aware of the complexity behind negotiations between local and foreign elements of creative achievements in historical Serbian architecture. He always stressed the relevance of imported architectural inventions which, adjusted to the local taste, stimulated an abundance of authentic developments.⁴⁵ In other words, architecture, for Deroko, is always a local response to, and elaboration of, foreign creative incentives. Similarly, he proposed that the architecture of his own period should keep pace with modern inventions, but develop its own authentic voice, tailored for the unique local needs and conditions.

The interplay of the opposing poles – particular and universal; local and foreign – permeated Deroko's designs for the traditionally inspired architecture of the Church of Saint Sava (1926), perhaps the most ambitious project in the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The results of the competition for the construction of the Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade incited a heated debate in 1932. Openly challenging Modernist ideas, Deroko played a lead role in a scenario similar to the one which, playing out in New York in 1948, saw Mumford defending his arguments publicly. The debate "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" which arose from Mumford's criticism of Modernism presented in his article "The

of *Honolulu park* Board, Honolulu: The Author, 1938; Lefavre and Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism*, 39.

⁴³ Aleksandar Deroko, 'O estetskom kriterijumu u starom našem neimarstvu (On the aesthetic criterion in our old architecture)', *XX vek* (1938): 13-17, 13.

⁴⁴ Deroko, 'Istok, zapad i mi', 396-8.

⁴⁵ Deroko, 'O estetskom kriterijumu', *XX vek*: Belgrade, 1938, 13-17.

Sky Line: Status Quo" is well-known and need not be further commented upon on this occasion.⁴⁶

Following the public announcement of the decision to erect the structure after the winning designs by Bogdan Nestorović and Aleksandar Deroko, the question of the appropriate style for the Saint Sava Church shook the Yugoslav architectural scene to its foundations. The public debate was carried along the lines of the 'East-West-US' triad. Looking toward the West and the most recent period innovations, Modernists were relentless in their criticism of the awarded designs. They asserted that a new competition should be organised – one that would not set forth any stylistic requirements – and that designs employing novel architectural forms, expressive of modern times, must be selected.⁴⁷ Others acknowledged the need for traditional architectural features, yet they were uncertain of the appropriate paradigm. Architects such as Krstić Brothers and Rajko Tatić placed the discussion in the context of the 'East – Us' dilemma, contemplating the possibilities of drawing inspiration from the Byzantine precedents or those from the Serbian medieval repertoire.⁴⁸ Some, such as Ivan Meštrović, the renowned sculptor, architect and writer born in Croatia, called for a Yugoslav national style, and others asserted that an international competition should be organised, expressing opinions that a 'Serbian architecture' had yet to be developed.⁴⁹

Deroko's position, as one of the Church's designers, aligned him with critical regionalism.⁵⁰ Though he advocated the imperative for functionality and keeping up with the latest inventions in architecture, Deroko asserted that Modernism is inconsistent with the long history of sacred Christian architecture, and thus unsuitable for this project.⁵¹ Responding to the 1932 criticism, Deroko asserted that the Modernist approach, with its demands for reductionist forms made of steel, concrete and glass, could not be even considered in relation to design of a

⁴⁶ Gail Fenske, 'Lewis Mumford, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and the Bay Region Style', *The Education of the Architect: Historiography, Urbanism, and the Growth of Architectural Knowledge*, ed. Martha Pollak, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997, 37-85; Lefaivre and Tzonis, *Architecture of Regionalism in the Age of Globalization*, 113-123; Jose Parra-Martinez and John Crosse, 'Lewis Mumford, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and the Rise of 'Bay' Regionalism', in *Regionalism, Nationalism & Modern Architecture Conference Proceedings*, ed. A. Trevisan and A. Cardoso, Porto: CEAA, Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo Escola Superior Artística do Porto Portugal, October, 2018, 296-316.

⁴⁷ Dragiša Brašovan, 'Kako treba da izgleda budući monumentalni hram Svetoga Save? (How should the future monumental temple of Saint Sava look like?)', *Vreme*: 22 January, 1932.

⁴⁸ Krstić Brothers, *Vreme*: 22 January, 1932; Rajko Tatić, *Vreme*: 27 January, 1932.

⁴⁹ Ivan Meštrović, *Vreme*: 27 January, 1932; Milutin Borisavljević, *Vreme*: 2 February, 1932.

⁵⁰ More about this debate in: Renata Jadresin Milic and Milica Madanovic, 'Romantic Visions vs. Rejection of Ideal Reconstrucion', *Regionalism, Nationalism & Modern Architecture Conference Proceedings*, CEAA | Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo Escola Superior Artística do Porto Portugal: 25-27 October, 2018, 128-143.

⁵¹ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Prvi monumentalni hram Beograda (The First Monumental Temple of Belgrade)', *Srpski književni glasnik XXXVII*: September, 1932, 630-631; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Hram Svetoga Save (The Saint Sava Church)', *Vreme*: 6 January, 1933; Aleksandar Deroko, 'Naše Starine (Our Antiques)', Interview with Miloš Crnjanski, *Vreme*: 15 April, 1933.

monumental Orthodox church.⁵² As shown earlier in the text, Deroko maintained that a work of art inevitably expressed the epoch and society which produced it. However, he also stressed that a monumental structure – such as a church – is meant to be built for “eternity”, and hence its design must rise above the ephemeral taste of current fashion. As a result, according to Deroko, great works of art live far beyond their own time, and remain modern at all times.⁵³ In doing so – expressing a specific society of a certain period yet, at the same time, capturing a higher ideal which speaks to the coming generations – architecture possesses the capacity to reconcile the particular with the universal.

The designs for the Church of Saint Sava were clearly created in response to the conditions put forward by the 1926 competition asking for an edifice in the tradition of the medieval Serbian Orthodox architecture. Architects Nestorović and Deroko designed a centrally planned edifice. Shaped like a Greek cross, the structure is covered with a large central dome, supported by four pendentives and flanked on each side by a system of four smaller domes and lower semi-domes. However, the final solution went further than simply reflecting forms from Serbian medieval architecture. An elaboration on the centuries of architectural knowledge, adapted to the needs of the modern Serbian Church and the broader community, the designs for the Church of Sait Sava assembled the ‘West’, the ‘East’ and ‘Us’. Deroko noted that the two guiding principles followed in the designs were functionality of planning and monumentality of space and form.⁵⁴ The former was developed in response to the Western aspirations towards practicality, while the latter drew from Serbian-Byzantine medieval architecture. Looking back at the start of construction, Deroko later commented on the challenges of designing a functional space for 10.000 people, which was achieved with reference to Ernst Neufert’s handbook titled *Architects’ Data*.⁵⁵ Deroko also commented the thirty-meter diameter of the dome, discussing the obvious relations with the dome of St. Sophia in Constantinople.⁵⁶ Although, according to Deroko, the size of a building is not necessarily associated with monumentality, it was an important feature of the St. Sava’s Church project.⁵⁷ Deroko perceived monumentality as an aesthetic criterion dependent on two essential conditions: first - an imposing exterior appearance, achieved by bold modelling of simple and unbroken masses; and second – an uninterrupted interior space, formed by a harmonious, spacious, and well-lit void.⁵⁸

⁵² Deroko, 1932, 1933; Deroko continued to write about this, later in: Aleksandar Deroko, *A Ondak je letijo jeroplan nad Beogradom*, Belgrade: Dereta, 1983, 2013.

⁵³ Aleksandar Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 162.

⁵⁴ Deroko, ‘Hram Svetoga Save’.

⁵⁵ Ernst Neufert, *Architects’ Data*, first published in 1936; Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 156.

⁵⁶ Deroko, ‘O estetskom kriterijumu u starom našem neimarstvu’, 13, 16; Deroko, ‘Hram Svetoga Save’; Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 156.

⁵⁷ Deroko, ‘O estetskom kriterijumu u starom našem neimarstvu’, 16; later in Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 148-156.

⁵⁸ Deroko, ‘Prvi monumentalni hram Beograda’; Deroko, ‘Hram Svetoga Save’; Deroko, ‘O estetskom kriterijumu u starom našem neimarstvu’; later in: Deroko, *Narodna arhitektura I, Spomenici arhitekture IX – XVIII veka u Jugoslaviji*, 32.

Deroko contemplated the spatial qualities – the relationship between the fullness of the built forms and the surrounding voids – believing that this dynamic is that exquisite feature which makes architecture monumental. As evidenced in his architectural analysis of developments in Serbian medieval sacred architecture, he admired the oldest Serbian churches with ‘pure’ interior spaces and spacious exterior mases, made to be wide and proportionally low, ‘strong’ in their appearance, ‘easily readable’ and with ‘quiet’ surfaces treated simply, without unnecessary decoration.⁵⁹ He was critical of the later development when all of these elements started to be contracted, growing buildings tall and turning them into slender silhouettes with less functional interiors, subjugated to the effects of the exterior.⁶⁰

In the designs for the Church of Saint Sava, Deroko and Nestorović endeavoured to bring back to the sacred architecture of the period, the monumental features from the earlier medieval phases of Serbian architectural history. They developed a functional solution characterised by vast, continuous, lavishly lit interior spaces. Imposing voids were directly translated into strong exterior massing. The monumental effect of the building’s exterior is owed to the simple treatment of pure geometric forms, with minimal ornamentation applied to the facades. Developed in response to the ongoing interwar demands for functionality on one hand, and, on the other, interweaving experiences from the local historical design precedents with the universal features of monumental architecture, the Saint Sava Church project merged the particular with the universal, the local with the foreign.

Interestingly, despite the period of architectural criticism, the interwar solution for the Church of Saint Sava stood the test of time. Construction was interrupted by the 1939–45 war and the dominant ideological position of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for decades, but when it resumed in 1985–86, the designs by Nestorović and Deroko were only slightly modified.⁶¹ Subtly expressing an architectural union between the West, the East and Us, the building remains to this day one of the most imposing structures in Belgrade.

Sustainability, technologies, and functionality: Deroko’s holiday house

Inspired by vernacular architecture, Deroko’s holiday house (1937) is perhaps the most famous of his residential structures built between the world wars in Belgrade.⁶² Deroko’s own house was the project wherein the architect had the liberty

⁵⁹ Deroko, ‘O estetskom kriterijumu’, 15.

⁶⁰ Deroko, ‘O estetskom kriterijumu’, 13-17.

⁶¹ When the building of the church continued in 1985-86, most of its already accepted concept stayed the same; its architecture can be said to be from the years when the project was first approved and when the construction began. The decision to resume the construction of the church did not revive the debate of the 1930s, more in: Jadresin Milic and Madanovic, ‘Romantic Visions vs. Rejection of Ideal Reconstrucion’.

⁶² To list a few: Bogdan Bogdanović, ‘Aleksandar Deroko’, *Umetnici akademici 1968 – 1978*, Belgrade: SANU, 1978, 207-231, 212; Zoran Manević, *Leksikon neimara*, Beograd: GK, 2008, 92;

of expressing himself and 'Us' – in the way he came to understand it – to the fullest. (fig. 5) Writing about vernacular architecture, Deroko noted that its forms developed under the influence of the taste of the anonymous folk craftsmen-builder: 'that which the people themselves carried within their soul.'⁶³ Deroko continues to explain that:

[The people] brought [the taste] with them during the settling of the Balkans from its ancient homeland, behind the Carpathian Mountains... They knew how to build both beautifully and distinctively... [The ancient Slavs] knew, or at least, felt, the art and the beautiful, though 'beautiful' was not sought for the sake of itself, but resulted from the practical forms.⁶⁴

The idea of 'Us' resonated with a supranational pride in this text, related to the various groups of Slavic peoples which had historically settled across the Balkans. Deroko deemed that the people were the core carriers of the particular – or the local – in architecture, most clearly expressed in the forms of vernacular construction.

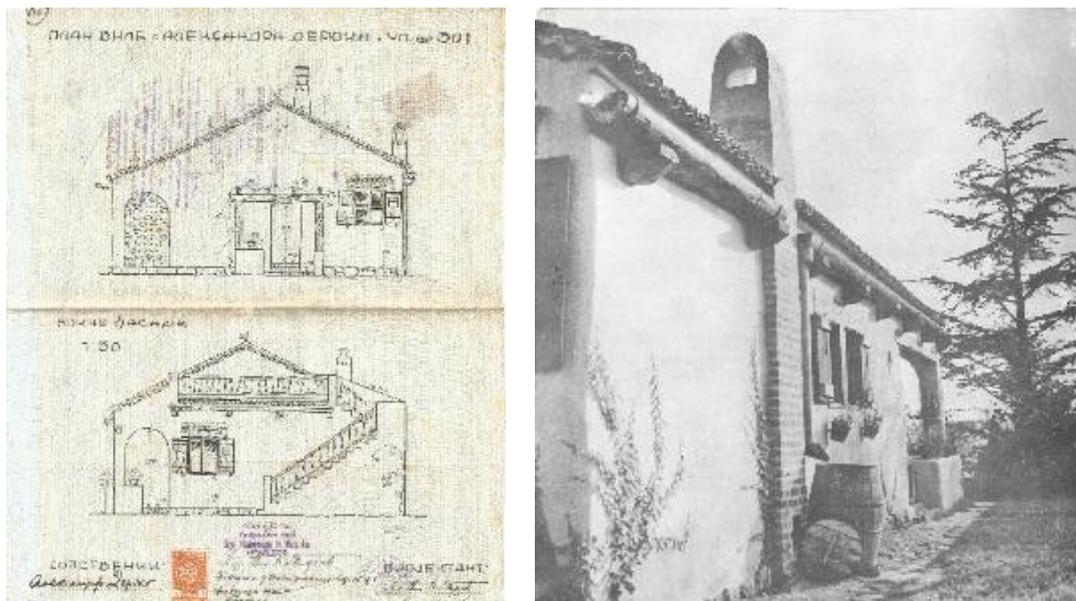


Figure 5. Deroko's Holiday House in Belgrade (1936). Left: Lateral Elevations (Source: IAB f. 2-7-1936); Right: Photograph of the Front Elevation (Source: Jovanović, *Aleksandar Deroko*, 91).

At the same time, for Deroko, forms of vernacular architecture were the product of practical response to various other conditions, terrain, climate, and available materials. All of these were considered in designs for his holiday house. The project can thus be described as a suitable example of two points of critical

Jovanović, *Aleksandar Deroko*, 89-90; Vladana Putnik, 'Folklorizam u arhitekturi Beograda (1918-1950)', *GGB*: 57, 2010, 175-210, 186.

⁶³ Aleksandar Deroko, 'Naša folklorna arhitektura (Our Vernacular Architecture)', *Umetnički pregled* 3: Belgrade, 1940, 72-79, 73.

⁶⁴ Deroko, 'Naša folklorna arhitektura', 73.

regionalism proposed by Tzonis and Lefaivre – the ecological or sustainable aspect of Mumford’s ideas about architecture, and relationships between critical regionalism and building technologies. Tzonis and Lefaivre condensed the former from Mumford’s *Report on Honolulu*, published in 1945. The latter stems from Mumford’s *Technics and Civilization*, where he advocated the use of the most advanced technology of the day – as long as it was functionally optimal and sustainable.⁶⁵ Similarly, maintaining that every historical period is unique, Deroko insisted that embracing the building technologies of the given period is the only plausible direction that architecture should take. In 1940 Deroko wrote:

... roads and railways brought traffic to once peaceful landscapes. They brought along new building materials, as well. Related to socio-economic, political changes resulted in a new way of living ... The old age was the age of the crafts ... The time of the crafts has come to an end. The age of the industry has begun.⁶⁶

Deroko noted that modern technology allowed for undertakings that, until recently, seemed impossible to achieve.⁶⁷ However, he was, at the same time, a passionate researcher of vernacular construction. He deeply appreciated the ingeniousness of the vernacular craft. Drawing from the vernacular, when justified by a building’s function, programme and other requirements, Deroko’s designs genuinely “fostered craft and pushed the limits of technology” – to use Alofsin’s words.⁶⁸ In fact, he hired craftsmen, and, to an extent, insisted on the use of the traditional tools, materials and methods for the construction of his holiday house.

Deroko erected the house not only inspired by vernacular forms, but with the use of the vernacular construction process itself. However, he did not sacrifice the quality and solidity of the structure to vernacular methods. Insisting that new building technologies and materials should be embraced, Deroko employed structural concrete - the “monolith” so called by engineer Vasa Novčić – for the construction. Demonstrating an affinity towards sustainability, he physically incorporated the vernacular into his new home. Building materials and various objects, such as timber beams, roof tiles still with old attached houseleek, and wooden gutters, were sourced from demolished folk buildings. Also collected from households across the Balkans, old tools and discarded everyday objects were readapted – ladders were used instead of balustrades and barrels served for the collection of rainwater, etc.

Adding to the previously discussed points observed by Lefaivre, Tzonis, and Alofsin, this paper proposes insistence on the functionality of architecture as another important premise of critical regionalism. Demands for functionality were also at the heart of Deroko’s criticism, discussed earlier in this text, of attempts to

⁶⁵ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1934, 321-356; Lefaivre and Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism*, 36-37.

⁶⁶ Aleksandar Deroko, ‘Naša folklorna arhitektura (Our Vernacular Architecture)’, *Umetnički pregled* 3: Belgrade, 1940, 72-79, 78.

⁶⁷ Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 106.

⁶⁸ Alofsin, ‘Constructive Regionalism’, 371.

copy solutions from historical architecture in the subsequent periods practice. According to Deroko, historic architecture 'should be studied seriously, but as history, as scholarship' – not as a functional precedent for contemporary practice:

Isn't it absurd to adjust medieval architecture to modern needs? To build a railway station as a medieval building, or to make a post office as a tower. A female high school, therefore a school that needs light, modern rooms, as a convent for the ill, or a defence tower. To build, for example, modern hospitals according to the medieval recipe? To want forcibly what is not practical and pricier?⁶⁹

The imperative of functionality informed Deroko's understanding of the essence of architecture:

Spatial arrangement in a structure depends on practical living needs. This brings us to the essence of the matter. For, what is architecture? It is but a human shelter from nature, from animals and humans, so they can, protected, live and work better and in greater comfort. This was the beginning. Layout is determined by the way of living and work. ... Structure, or the way of building, depends, mostly, on building material. ... These two essential factors, planning and structure, influence development of a building's form. However, its shape is also influenced by a third component: the climate. ... The fourth factor that influences the shapes of a vernacular building is that which a people carries in its soul; the taste of the anonymous folk craftsmen who builds.⁷⁰

Clearly, Deroko believed that architecture, above all, needs to be functional.⁷¹ Planning should be practical, to produce a comfortable living and working environment. Furthermore, floorplans, structure, and architectural forms need to correlate to the local context – way of life, available materials, the terrain, and climatic conditions. However, for Deroko, functionality was not merely a question of convenience and comfort. He also stressed the necessity for a 'spiritual' functionality of architecture – it needs to be designed in such a manner as to satisfy human psychological needs.⁷² One of the most basic ways to accommodate this is to orient a structure towards a view, and, whenever possible, design a beautifully decorated garden. According to Deroko, this was especially significant for villas: 'it is a luxurious, not only practical building, but not luxurious in the sense of an overwhelming amount of abstract ornament, but only if attention is paid to luxury

⁶⁹ Deroko, 'Naše Starine', Intervju sa Miloš Crnjanski, *Vreme*: 15 April, 1933.

⁷⁰ Deroko, 'Naša folklorna arhitektura', *Umetnički pregled* 3: Beograd, 1940, 72-79.

⁷¹ Deroko, 'Estetika kuće u polju'; Deroko, 'O estetskom kriterijumu'; Deroko, 'Folklor u arhitekturi kod nas se više ne obnavlja'; Deroko, 'Naša folklorna arhitektura'; Deroko, *Mangupluci*, 157.

⁷² Deroko, 'Estetika kuće u polju', 143.

and the usefulness of “beautiful”.⁷³ In the design for his holiday house, Deroko used a spacious back porch to create a dialogue between the back rooms and the garden. The overall treatment of the exterior was strongly inspired by the vernacular construction. Opening to the surrounding spaces, the facades were decorated with various traditional building materials: crushed stone for plinth timber beams, and decorative bricks. Directly inspired by vernacular practice, Deroko placed the stairs outside the house, leaning on the façade. The stairs – both a functional feature and the main decorative motive of the lateral façade – led to a terrace at the attic level.

Deroko developed his critical regionalist method for small-scale residential designs learning from the vernacular. It was this building typology which allowed him to experiment with building technologies, test ideas about the practical and spiritual functionality of architecture, and explore the formal potentials of the local. According to him, vernacular architecture was a response to region-specific functional imperatives, shaped by distinct geographical features. He related the beauty of vernacular architecture to functionality; in his opinion, it stemmed primarily from clever planning, cost-effectiveness and unpretentiousness. Deroko maintained that these highly functional structures, devoid of excess architectural ornament, should serve as architectural textbooks, firmly objecting to the Modernist insensitivity to the local conditions.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that a seed of critical regionalism bloomed in the architecture and design philosophy of Aleksandar Deroko. Deroko’s regionalist position matured in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the two world wars, slightly earlier than the period in which Lewis Mumford developed his own ideas, made famous internationally by the efforts of Alexandre Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. Unlike Mumford, Deroko was a practising architect, so it is possible to trace his regionalist position through his architecture, not only through the writings he left behind. Deroko’s work can be considered as a part of a wider international network of critical approaches to Modernism, ranging from the United States to New Zealand in the first four decades of the twentieth-century.⁷⁴ Widespread, yet often overlooked by researchers of twentieth-century architectural history, these positions aspired to bridge the gap between past and present, and acknowledging universal qualities and global architectural achievements, cherished the uniqueness of the individual and the local. Similar arguments later re-appeared in the Post-Modernist criticism of the Modern Movement.

⁷³ Deroko, ‘Estetika kuće’, 143.

⁷⁴ Milica Mađanović, ‘Persisting Beaux-Arts Practices in Architectural Education: Architectural History and Theory Teaching at the Auckland School of Architecture, 1927-1969’, *Interstices: A Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 11: 2018, 9-25; Renata Jadresin Milic, ‘Contemporary Classical Architecture – Reconsidering tradition’, in: Tomasz Jelenski, Stanislaw Juchnowicz & Ewelina Wozniak-Szpakiewicz, eds, *Tradition and Heritage in the Contemporary Image of the City, Vol. 1. Fundamentals*, Kraków, Poland: CUT Press, 2015, 25-32.

Deroko's ideas about architecture developed at the crossroads of different cultural spheres, in an environment aware of the inherent tension this generated, and searching for its own voice. This paper proposes the specific borderline position of Deroko's home country as a relevant precondition for the emergence of his regionalist positions. As shown through the examples of three interwar projects – the Hall of Residence, the Church of Saint Sava and Deroko's holiday house in Belgrade – his architecture was not a copy of (local) historical precedents nor a direct importation of Modernist ideas. It valued modern technologies, when appropriate – seized the potentials of sustainable construction, and appreciated the importance of functional planning. Drawing from both poles, it reconciled tradition and modernity, local and global, offering lasting architectural solutions. In terms of the 'East-West-Us' conceptual triad, it can be concluded that Deroko learned from the West, was inspired by the East, and was enamoured of local historic architectural experiences. Herein lies the wider significance and currency of his regionalist design approach. Deroko's architecture can be described as a genuine contribution to Serbian, as well as international, architecture of the interwar period. His projects and the ideas which informed them tackle many issues present in contemporary architectural practice. They can be considered as relevant precedents to the present day – ones to be learned from, not to be copied.

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