



Delft University of Technology

Resonating Optimism

Gradski Trgovski Ventar (GTC), Designed by Zivko Popovski

van den Heuvel, D.

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Strada Brutalissima

Citation (APA)

van den Heuvel, D. (2025). Resonating Optimism: Gradski Trgovski Ventar (GTC), Designed by Zivko Popovski. In B. Bajkovski (Ed.), *Strada Brutalissima: North Macedonia Pavilion, 19th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia 2025* (pp. 204-205). National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**Green Open Access added to [TU Delft Institutional Repository](#)
as part of the Taverne amendment.**

More information about this copyright law amendment
can be found at <https://www.openaccess.nl>.

Otherwise as indicated in the copyright section:
the publisher is the copyright holder of this work and the
author uses the Dutch legislation to make this work public.



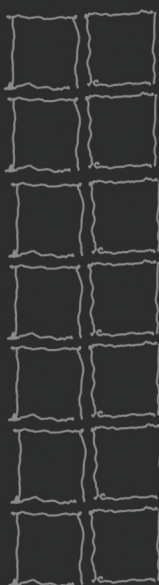
La Biennale di Venezia

**19. Mostra
Internazionale
di Architettura**

Partecipazioni Nazionali

STRADA BRUTALISSIMA

North Macedonia Pavilion
19th International Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia 2025



REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Strada Brutalissima
19th International Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia 2025

Commissioner:

Maja Nedelkoska Brzanova
National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia

Curator:

Blagoja Bajkovski
Faculty of Architecture – Skopje
University “SS. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje

Authors:

Blagoja Bajkovski
Ana Rafailovska
Marija Antikj Nikolova
Nevenka Mancheva Adjievaska
Tea Damjanovska
Mihajlo Stojanovski

Co-Commissioner:

Frosina Zafirovska

Assistant Commissioners:

Olivija Stoilkova
Maja Chankulovska Mihajlovska

Lead Research and Curator Advisor:

Meri Batakoja

Invited contributors:

Ottavio Amaro, Minas Bakalchev, Elisa C. Cattaneo,
Lorenzo Degli Esposti, Vladimir Deskov,
Manfredo di Robilant, Klaske Havik, Mitko Hadji Pulja,
Aneta Hristova-Popovska, Ana Ivanovska Deskova,
Vlatko P. Korobar, Vladimir Kulić, Lucia La Giusa,
Marija Mano Velevska, Jorge Mejía Hernández,
Maroje Mrduljaš, Giuseppe Resta, Luís Santiago Baptista,
Luka Skansi, Ines Tolic, Marina Tornatora,
Dirk van den Heuvel, Slobodan Veleviski

Project Management:

Elena Andonova

Collaborators:

Students from Faculty of Architecture – Skopje,
“SS. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje:
Tamara Djerkov, Mila Gavrilovska, Bojana Isijanin,
Kalina Ljubeckij, Dimitar Milev, Frosina Stankovska,
Bojana Vukovojac, Filip Zafirovski
+ Eric Ferreira Crevels

Supported by:

Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the
Republic of North Macedonia



Republic of North Macedonia

Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Organization:

National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia



In collaboration with:

Faculty of Architecture – Skopje,
“SS. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje



Sponsor:

Chamber of Certified Architects and
Certified Engineers of the Republic of North Macedonia



RESONATING OPTIMISM GRADSKI TRGOVSKI CENTAR (GTC), Designed by Živko Popovski

Dirk van den Heuvel

In 1965, now sixty years ago, the architect of the Gradski Trgovski Centar in Skopje, Živko Popovski, travelled to Rotterdam to work at the famed office of Van den Broek and Bakema for about half a year. I spoke with a former employee, Frans Hooykaas, who worked as a direct assistant to Jaap Bakema including numerous competitions and public presentations. He is now 86 years old: do you remember him? Yes! He was full of energy and enthusiasm. I see his photo on the internet now, and recognize his grey mustache, at the time a well-groomed black line in a very lively face. He moved around as if his limbs, legs and arms were all connected by elastics. But sorry, not so much more. Did he work on the Skopje project? On the design that the Van den Broek and Bakema office submitted to the UN competition after the city was hit by an earthquake? Not sure... But it seems likely since he came from Skopje? Also handy in terms of language. If so, he must have worked with the group of Stokla in the office, who did most of the competitions. We were doing so many competitions in those years, big city schemes: Tel Aviv and Ashdod in Israel, the Pampus plan for Amsterdam, Frankfurt am Main in Germany, the university buildings in Bochum, Plovdiv in Bulgaria, Zurich... The special aspect of Skopje was to work with existing buildings, the remaining constructions after the disaster of the earthquake had to be spared and included.

Imagine: Popovski 31 years young when he came to Rotterdam, Hooykaas was just 26 that year. The Dutch port city was still in tatters due to the bombing at the start of the Second World War, the empty lots everywhere around, particularly so in the city centre. The sound of pile drivers and construction machines hard at work for the reconstruction of Rotterdam formed a stimulating background chorus to everyday city life. The city was working to achieve a better future, for everyone. Despite the destruction and hardship, the atmosphere must have been one of unlimited optimism. The first wave of new building projects could already be experienced and admired, such as the Lijnbaan shopping centre and the impressive line of Lijnbaan housing slabs. Also, the new bright modernist department stores which dominated the inner city and were designed by outstanding architects like Marcel Breuer, Kraaijvanger and Van den Broek and Bakema themselves, must have given an air of progress and hope for better times ahead.

Popovski went back to Skopje in the same year, just as Rotterdam a destroyed city, and also full of hope things would get better. Unfortunately for Van den Broek and Bakema, they lost the Skopje competition to Kenzo Tange. Popovski though, would win the competition for the Gradski Trgovski Centar in 1967, and would realize the project in the following years. I visited it myself in 2023. It's hard not to like the project. Despite the obvious need for a makeover, it still holds a sophisticated elegance and generosity: in its material expression, the spatial layout, the stacking of its wide galleries and terraces, the way the public spaces and shops have been organised between the riverside and the public garden, and how the 1950s tower blocks by Aleksander Serafimovski have been integrated in a most natural way.

So many lessons to be learned! First and foremost: between the two destroyed cities, and the way the architects faced the challenges, the optimism of 1965 that still resonates.

Acknowledgement

The participation of North Macedonia in the 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2025, with the project *Strada Brutalissima*, was made possible through the generous support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of North Macedonia. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Mr. Zoran Ljutkov, Minister of Culture and Tourism, for recognizing the significance of our national participation in this prestigious event and its role in promoting our country's cultural identity. My sincere appreciation goes to the National Gallery of North Macedonia and the commissioner, Maja Nedelkoska-Brzanova, for her collaboration, personal support, and invaluable advice. I would also like to extend my thanks to Olivija Stoilkova for her dedication to management, communication, and logistics. Furthermore, I am grateful to Ana Frangovska, for her continuous engagement and valuable guidance. I extend my gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture – Skopje, “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje, Aneta Hristova-Popovska, for recognizing the importance of this project and providing unwavering support from its very inception. A heartfelt expression of appreciation goes to the authors of the project for their dedication and invaluable contributions: Ana Rafailovska, Marija Antikj Nikolova, Nevenka Mancheva Adjievska, Tea Damjanovska, and Mihajlo Stojanovski. I am also thankful to Elena Andonova for her efforts in project management. I am particularly grateful to the students from the Faculty of Architecture – Skopje for their patience, dedication, and commitment to producing the models: Tamara Djerkov, Mila Gavrilovska, Bojana Isijanin, Kalina Ljubeckij, Dimitar Milev, Frosina Stankovska, Bojana Vukovojac, and Filip Zafirovski. Their hard work and precision were instrumental in bringing this project to life, and I deeply value their contribution to this complex and ambitious endeavor. A special acknowledgement goes to Meri Batakoja, whose unwavering commitment—even during the most challenging times—played a crucial role in leading the research process. Her contributions added invaluable perspectives and depth to the project, ensuring its intellectual and conceptual rigor. I deeply appreciate the intellectual work, dedication, and perseverance of all the authors who contributed to developing a critical reading of this project: Ottavio Amaro, Minas Bakalchev, Elisa C. Cattaneo, Lorenzo Degli Esposti, Vladimir Deskov, Manfredo di Robilant, Klaske Havik, Mitko Hadji Pulja, Aneta Hristova-Popovska, Ana Ivanovska Deskova, Vlatko P. Korobar, Vladimir Kulić, Lucia La Giusa, Marija Mano Velevska, Jorge Mejía Hernández, Maroje Mrduljaš, Giuseppe Resta, Luís Santiago Baptista, Luka Skansi, Ines Tolic, Marina Tornatora, Dirk van den Heuvel and Slobodan Velevski. Their insights, critical reflections, and scholarly dedication have enriched the theoretical and historical dimensions of the project. I am especially grateful to Slobodan Velevski, Marija Mano Velevska, and Vlatko P. Korobar for encouraging me to embark on this experience, and for their continuous support throughout the process. Their trust and guidance have been a source of strength and motivation. I also express my appreciation to Denis Popovski and Mile Patlikov from the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University for their help in developing the structural aspects of the project.

Their technical expertise and deep understanding of structural integrity were essential in shaping the feasibility and execution of the architectural vision. Acknowledgement is also due to Kristinka Chulak, President of the Chamber of Certified Architects and Certified Engineers of the Republic of North Macedonia, for recognizing the significance of *Strada Brutalissima* and supporting its presentation in Venice. Lastly, my special appreciation goes to everyone who has been involved in and supported this project throughout its journey. Your contributions, in every form, have been invaluable. This project is a testament to the collective effort of many dedicated individuals whose passion, knowledge, and determination have made it possible to bring *Strada Brutalissima* to the global stage. I am profoundly grateful for this shared journey and for the opportunity to present the architectural and cultural heritage of North Macedonia to an international audience.

Blagoja Bajkovski

Curator of the North Macedonia pavilion at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2025

Publisher:
National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia

For the publisher:
Maja Nedelkoska Brzanova

Edited by:
Blagoja Bajkovski

Graphic design
Blagoja Bajkovski

Proofreading:
Dimitar Samardjiev

Photos:
Blagoja Bajkovski, Mila Gavrilovska

Printed by:
Geteo Print - Skopje, 500 copies

Published:
Skopje 2025

Copyright:
National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced
in any form or manner without prior permission in writing.

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски",
Скопје

72.036(497.7)(041)
72.079(497.7)(06.064)

STRADA brutalissima : North Macedonia Pavilion : 19th International
Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia 2025 / curator Blagoja
Bajkovski ; lead research and curator advisor Meri Batakoja ; project
management Elena Andonova ; foreword (Commissioner's note) Maja
Nedelkoska Brzanova ; photos Blagoja Bajkovski, Mila Gavrilovska. -
Skopje : National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2025. -
267 стр. : фотографии ; 23 см

Други автори: Blagoja Bajkovski, Ana Rafailovska,
Marija Antikj Nikolova, Nevenka Mancheva Adjievska,
Tea Damjanovska, Mihajlo Stojanovski

ISBN 978-608-257-122-5

1. Bajkovski, Blagoja [автор на изложбата] [куратор на изложба]
[фотограф] 2. Batakoja, Meri [консултант] [куратор на изложба] 3.
Rafailovska, Ana [автор на изложбата] 4. Antikj Nikolova, Marija [автор
на изложбата] 5. Mancheva Adjievska, Nevenka [автор на изложбата] 6.
Damjanovska, Tea [автор на изложбата] 7. Stojanovski, Mihajlo [автор на
изложбата]
а) Венецијанско биенале -- Македонски павиљон -- 2025 -- Изложби б)
Брутализам -- Архитектура -- Македонија -- Брошури

COBISS.MK-ID 65679621