

REFLECTION REPORT

SHOPPING TYPOLOGIES (EX-)YUGOSLAVIA Their role and reciprocal relation by exemplary cases.

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Reflecting on the graduation period, I set out to investigate the role of shopping typologies and their reciprocal relation with (ex-) Yugoslav Croatia, studied by exemplary cases. From the results of this research, a final question arose pointing towards a (possibly new) interpretation of collectivity in a highly privatized environment, and the development of corresponding interventions. The research was interesting from the start, as the entire post-Yugoslav area is rarely discussed in the curriculum of Architecture in Delft, which focusses mostly on the East-West dichotomy, and forgets the Non-Aligned Movement, which still exists to this day.¹ When talking about communism and socialism, often people refer to Soviet Communism. Socialist Yugoslavia was in-between in multiple ways: geographically but also politically and economically. Often the region has been documented from a perceived position of superiority from both the East and the West (referring to the Cold-War era). It is much due to investigate and document the happenings of Socialist Yugoslavia.

Investigating the shopping typology in Socialist Yugoslavia have helped me, and hopefully anyone who reads my research, to a better understanding of my own ideas about shopping and consumerism, in between which many similarities are to be found. The shift from socialism to (radical) neo-liberalism have certainly affected the economy and politics in this region, however it seems the shopping typology has proven to show a certain agility, adaptability to change and survive.

With my mentors, it was quickly decided that an effective approach would be to circle around the topic, obtaining pieces of information that together could build up the body of research. From this decision, the initial research period started with a wide range of methodologies, directly following the constraints of being unacquainted with the country, history and language. In order to get to the core of the research

¹ On an unrelated note: although this is slightly optimistic or idealistic, the engagement of Yugoslavia with a large number of post-colonial countries through that movement might be able to provide insights in how to deal with our own colonialist past.

question, various methods were applied simultaneously; as to approach the topic from various angles. Because the shopping center generally is considered uninteresting to academia, the existing research on the topic was limited. The main discussed themes in existing discourse (within as well as outside of HR) are housing and education, but ideologically the shopping typologies functioned as another trajectory towards modernity. If one considers the shopping center as a typology of modernity, the research has a clear start: investigate the trajectory to modernity in Socialist Yugoslavia, which further narrows down to Croatia. From that scale, mass housing projects, but also sports (particularly for the final typology) were to be investigated.

As a helpful tool, the found economic, political and social developments were mapped out on a timeline, eventually leading to the conclusion that the three typologies each had their own distinct periods. To provide a larger understating of the projects and typologies, various magazines spanning the entire period were investigated to see understand the original ideas of the architects and the surrounding discourse. Simultaneously, photography as a tool to investigate its current state and use, but also the remnants of the original projects. The archival research and photography provided material for urban and architectural plan analysis, completing the toolbox of research.

Ultimately it can be concluded that language was the most crucial barrier, not only for understanding texts on the topics, but also for finding the texts in the first place. If I were to go further into the topic, mastery of the language is key as interviews, newspapers and other sources of information only available in Croatian would be necessary to reach further depths.

The (research)product of these methodologies entailed a selection of three projects, corresponding to three typologies, each bigger than the other and also playing a different role in their surroundings, namely: NaMa Trnsko, Robna Kuca RI and Koteks and Gripe sports- and shopping center. The role they had each differed: they had either an installing or introductory role, a pivotal point for the public/city/neighborhood around them; and/or: an enhancing or supporting role, enhancing existing movement/centrality within the center/public. Each typology engaging with the city in its own way.

The projects dealt with the creation of centrality, the continuation of the public and the composition of program. One of the reasons to investigate just this is can be found in the origins of the shopping center. In his publication *Shopping Towns USA*, Victor Gruen, one of the pioneers and perhaps originators of

the shopping center, declares a necessity of shopping centers to also house civic program.² This indicates the original goal of the shopping center.

Ideologically, they fulfilled this role by functioning as another trajectory towards modernity I'd argue, as the main discussed themes in existing discourse are housing and education. Architecturally, they played their role by adopting "traditional" or typical department store elements, such as the arcade and open plan, increasingly implementing regional elements. Thirdly, on the urban scale they operated by taking a) literal center position in neighborhood, b) enhancing circulation flows in the city, and/or c) offering a mixed program in a mostly mono-functional environment.

So, to the question of how did these typologies evolve, and did the shopping typology as trajectory to emancipation succeed? We go into a new question: have the fantastic visions of modernist architects and urbanists given society the physical structure to emancipation? Regarding the theme of the continuation of the public: it must be concluded that public character or role has (partially) evaporated. Regarding their creation of centrality: as urban entities the typologies (partially) have become isolated, specifically the Koteks shopping center, as part of the third typology. Regarding their program and with that its use: All of the typologies and corresponding projects have split up into smaller shops within the original building or have gone (partially) out of use. All of this has to do with the political and economic shifts after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Through comparison of the many projects, the final design brief slowly arose. Taking into consideration the thematic of collectivity and community, as well as a certain ideal of elimination of hierarchy, and abruptly ended by a (violent) shift to (neoliberal) capitalist economy, it is interesting to aim at a (possibly new) interpretation of collectivity in a highly privatized environment, and the development of corresponding interventions. This approach can be applied to virtually all post-communist countries, but would probably do best in the formerly Yugoslav countries, as their specific economic and political systems are distinct from other post-communist countries.

Looking plainly at the functioning and program of the various typologies, the design location of Koteks in Split, Croatia, it becomes apparent that it lacks a certain informal program, or it lacks the support for an informal program. The small commerce found in the other project within the typology or in the other typology is also absent here. Referring back to the original idea for shopping centers, as also housing civic program, it becomes clear what the strategy for Koteks needs to be.

2 Victor Gruen and Larry Smith, *Shopping Towns, USA* (New York: Reinhold; Chapman & Hall, 1960).

My design addresses the lack of that program and attempts to provide a structure in which informal engagements can take place. It is through engagement that active participation in the public can be reached. So instead of rethinking what a shop might be, I suggest to implement a market-hall within the existing complex, while extending the orientation towards the other side of the complex; responding to not only the issue of orientation within the city, but also offering an active role of the public. The final period of the graduation will focus on the precise materiality and placement of the design elements, looking for synthesis of the formal architecture and informal activity.

