

THE BANK OF ALBANIA BUILDING: MEMORY AND MODERNIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the adaptive re-use and restoration project of the Bank of Albania building in Tirana, an Italian architecture heritage. Analysis of the intervention has more to do with the notion of dynamic change in the concept of preserving the memory of architectural heritage. It analyzes how this change is managed specifically by architects who redesign this building that today is part of the Albanian architectural heritage. The paper provides some answers to the questions: Was the intervention necessary? Can we accept the interventions as a positive influence? How the architects have managed it? What is done to ensure the preservation of esthetics and cultural heritage values?

In the end, is concluded that after having followed the way of respecting and preserving the inherent values of the building the project results were successful. The intervention that realizes the best use of the historic buildings sometimes is the only way to care properly and preserve the architectural heritage.

Keywords: adaptive re-use, restoration, architectural heritage, preservation, Italian architecture

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in the world that is constantly changing. These changes affect every aspect of our lives. Affect the environment and the city where we live as well as perceptions and attitudes towards our culture. Changes have also formed our approaches and practices of preserving the historical monuments, urban heritage, and our cultural landscape.

Today's concept of the preservation of cultural heritages is the result of a process related to the development of modern society, its values and demands. The understanding of cultural heritage is based on our scientific approaches and documented assessment of human achievement of the time. It requires the use of "critical judgment" in order to identify the object with its specific characteristics, defining and illustrating outstanding values or importance that distinguish it and justify his defense. This broad understanding of today's society has led us to the inclusion and acceptance of the approaches that were previously rejected, as long as this approach will contribute to the preservation of culture. Today the term preservation of cultural heritage is a result of this evolution and repair, maintenance, storage, adaption, re-use,

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and reconstruction are all considered known approaches. The theoretical concepts and many case studies of adaptive re-use are described in the literature of the last second part of XXth century (Cantacuzino, 1989; Conti, 1992; Fischer, 1994; Fallini, 1990; Herbers, 1990; Roberts, 1989; Canepari, 1997) and in XXIth century (Douglas, 2006; Nepravishta, 2013, etc.).

Buildings have always been modified to a certain extent, and the re-use of them has been initially developed as a thread of the conservation movement. Although the adaptation of buildings is not a new process, their conversion to other uses on a regular, larger scale is a more recent phenomenon (Douglas, 2006). Changing the paradigm of cultural heritage preservation occurred at 70². The new paradigm was driven by a growing concern for the environment, as well as higher costs for fuel and materials, making it a reliable alternative to storage, in general.

Analysis of adaptation project of the Bank of Albania building has to do more with the notion of dynamic change, in the concept of cultural heritage conservation and how this change is managed specifically by the architects.

2. THE PROJECTS OF MORPURGO FOR THE NATIONAL BANK OF ALBANIA

The Italian fascist government of Benito Mussolini's had supported King Zog I since early in his presidency (1925-28), that support had led to increased Italian influence in Albanian affairs (Wikipedia, 2017). The convention for the constitution of the National Bank of Albania was signed on 15 March of 1925 and was constituted in Roma on 2 September of this year. In the new urban scenario, the buildings of National Bank of Albania are imposed as emblem of economic development of the country (Giusti, 2006). The first Albanian Director (Kulla, 2017) of the bank was Abedin Nepravishta² (1925-27) who being the mayor of Tirana in years 1933-39, has influenced in its realization.

Ahmet Zogu has devoted a "particular attention" to the capital city. In Tirana, in half of the thirties, architecture has a style more moderate and modern than the architecture developed in Italy (Qyqja and Tirana, 2012). In this regards, the project for the National Bank of Albania in Tirana has a long story. The first project ideas started in 1925-26 by architect Fiorini (Giacomelli and Vokshi, 2012), which was not completed and remained only in the archives³. The new project for the "Branch of the National Bank of Albania in Tirana" was presented on September 1930 by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo⁴. From the first project of architect Fiorini, Morpurgo retakes only the proportions of the central body cube. It will follow the principle of design from initial project to the final one, were noted the existence of the convex shape in both cases. The architect of the project Morpurgo, places at the base of his work an interesting investigation tending to the stylization of monumentality celebratory, mediating through an expression of functionalism (Giacomelli and Vokshi, 2012). Add to this is another observation,

² He studied at the Higher School of Administration (MYLKIE) in Istanbul in the years 1908-1912.

³ In the Fiorini file of the Central Archive of State in Roma there are preserved twelf drawings of two projects for the National Bank of Albania (Giacomelli and Vokshi, 2012).

⁴ Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo. Architect, born May 31, 1890 in Rome. Academic of St. Luka, a professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Roma. He has carried out his activity in the field of architecture and urbanism, successfully taking part in many national competitions. Of his most recent works, in which we see applied a stylistic traditionalism which have brought a useful contribution to taste the results of the controversy of the "rationalism", are to be remembered: the block of buildings bordering the park Barberini in angle between Via XX Settembre and Via Four fountains; a group of buildings in Via Antonelli in Rome; the headquarters of the National Bank of Albania in Tirana (Enciclopedia Italiana, 2012).

the evident desire, with its production to reconnect in continuity with the classical tradition, the great works of the past, updating and making them appropriate to own time. The final project was designed in years 1934-36. The site chosen for construction has a strategic position at the intersection of urban and extra-urban roads. “Rational monumentalism” that characterizes the building of the Bank brought then an innovative image in the urban context. Its main corpus is built in the shape of an arch, bound by its position in the main square of the city. The building has a volume in the shape of L with the angle denied and connected by a curved portico, upon which insist on access and the general atrium. Its main entrance was realized by a magnificent portal that includes the entire height of the front and back of solid columns gives a very dignified appearance of the building. In the external portico a singular wall cladding brick, shaped from interwoven strips like a basket, proposes symbolic and allegorical themes of the Albanian tradition (Locci, 2009). In the Figures, 1, 2, 3 are presented the final drawings for the new bank.

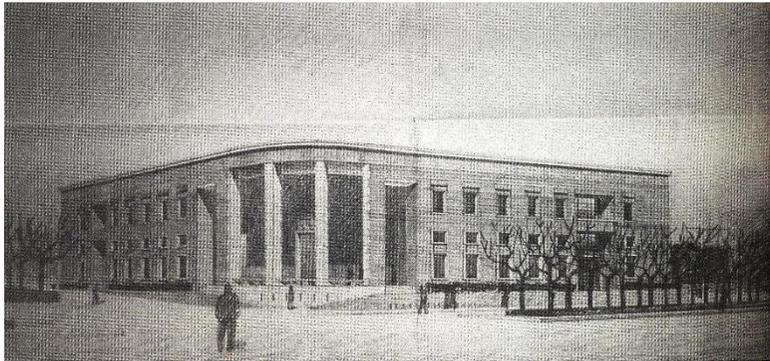


Figure 1. Perspective view of the bank, final proposal idea. Morpurgo’s drawing of 1936. Source: AQTN⁵.

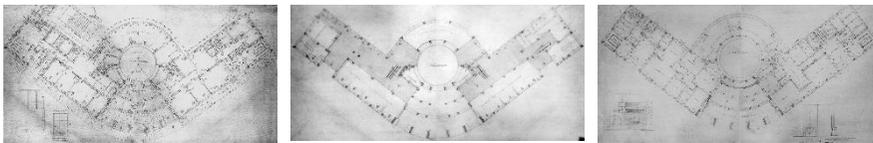


Figure 2. Plans for National Bank of Albania in Tirana. Morpurgo’s drawing of 1936. Source: AQTN.



Figure 3. The elevation and section for National Bank of Albania in Tirana. Morpurgo’s drawing of 1936. Source: AQTN.

Morpurgo's project was implemented in 1938 (Fig. 4), and the building remained untouched until 2010 when begins the work of its restoration and adaptation.

⁵ Central Technical Archive of Construction.



Figure 4. Photo of the National Bank of Albania after construction, 1940. Source: AQTN.

The third project of Morpurgo for the expansion of the bank was drawn up five years later in 1939-40 (Fig. 5). This project haven't been executed. Without major architectural changes and in full harmony with the existing, the headquarters of the bank was enlarged adding a regularly plan and transforming the area behind in a building with a cloister closed on all sides (Vokshi, 2014).

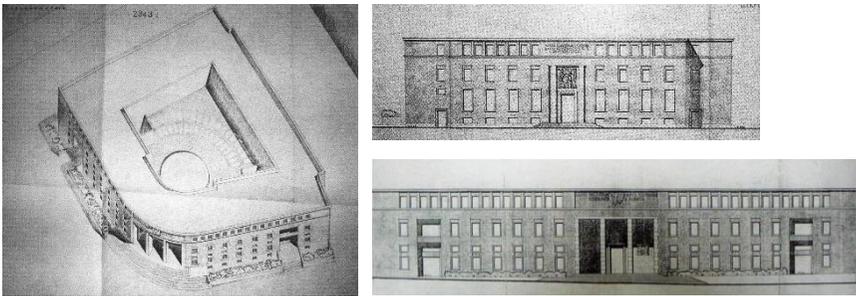


Figure 5. The addition design of National Bank of Albania. Morpurgo's drawing of 1936. Source: AQTN.

3. THE NEED FOR ADAPTIVE RE-USE AND RESTORATION

The intervention for the adaptive re-use of the Bank of Albania became necessary as the need after the degradation existing building, the enlargement of activity and demand for new facilities in the function of this bank. The years have passed for the monumental building of the bank that was built with the most advanced technology of the time. The obligation to preserve this remarkable building after 73-year of its operation period was evident.

The initial morphological-functional form of the existing building was created by the need for usage that has made its existence possible. After three quarters of a century the ratio of consistency between spatial organization and requirements related to the original destination has changed over time as a result of the inconsistencies between the building form and changes of the bank operational model. The need for intervention was needed to respond to the difficulties of using it as a result of the physical and moral depreciation of the existing structure. They aim to reconstruct a new balance between spaces and activities and actual use and morphological-dimensional character of the existing building (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. View of the Bank of Albania before intervention. Source: ATSH.

The building inherited from Morpurgo carry in itself the flexibility of implementation of additions (enlargement) represented in the author's not executed project of 1939-40. Realization of additions to existing structures was the only way to increase the space needed, but they had to be realized while maintaining the integrity of the original structure, leaving it intact.

4. ADAPTIVE RE-USE AND MODERNISATION PROJECT

The winner project for the International Competition for the "Realisation of the construction and renovation project of the Bank of Albania Building", organized by the Bank of Albania in 2008, was designed by a group of Italian architects coordinated by Marco Petreschi⁶. The project was intended to link the past with contemporary functional and esthetic perspectives. The project preserves the historical values of the urban planning, architecture and landscape, geometric shape and materials, atmosphere and sensitivity of this building, as well as the heritage values of the monument.

The new project proposes a volume that closes the open L shape perimeter of the existing facility and cleaved into a diagonal way. That opening turns into a passage area that leads to the heart of the building, where the nodal point joins the old and the new. Even old building of Morpurgo is composed according to the diagonal axis that ends in a circular elegant volume. The master plan of the Center of Tirana of 2004, planned to preserve the old building in the volumetric proportions and its altimetry. The new facility has to follow the same geometric

⁶ Marco Petreschi is a "Roman architect", as pointedly suggested by Joseph Rykwert, Giorgio Muratore and Renato De Fusco (2007), in other words, a man who, independently of the stylistic fashions traversing Italy in the past few decades, has obsessively followed his own path: with irony in terms of current fashion and its power, physically in the tender relationship with materials and the techniques used to dominate those materials, in an empowering sense through design as a complete and aesthetic control of space, and never in an indifferent way towards history, but rather with care to have a proper distance from it.

shape proposed by Morpurgo in 1940 in order to have the same height and preserve its human scale.

New additions distanced itself from the existing building through the side cracks and opened the symmetric axis to create access to the inner courtyard. The new is connected with the old while maintaining the idea of Morpurgo for internal courtyard. A transparent glass connects the two parts and becomes protection and source of light for the space (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. The new adaptive re-use project of Bank of Albania building [15].

The aim of the project was to create fluidity of motion. The idea of entering into a lower level than that of the existing building was proposed. The old building was taken up in a semi-basement and simultaneously has its pedestal. The new facility has no external cover and by using the elevation of the terrain creates an entry in the zero level. It gives the possibility that at the same high with of the old object to create four floors above ground and four underground. The upper floors were used for administrative offices premises, the underground parking, and the main hydro deposit (Fig. 8, 9).



Figure 8. Plans of adaptive re-use project of Bank of Albania building. Source: Petreschi, 2010.



Figure 9. Sections and elevations of adaptive re-use project of Bank of Albania building. Source: Petreschi, 2010.

The composition of the new volume has nothing in common with architectural order of the classical columns. It recalls the idea of paving the façade in an uninterrupted series of vertical divisions by hanging common basis and the use of the same construction materials.

5. REALIZATION OF THE PROJECT AND THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUES

The realization of the project was important to the maintenance of harmony between the new addition and the old building while avoiding the creation of a copy of the original structure, which would damage the whole object. The sensitive and successful additions made by the authors, although in slight contrast, are in accordance with the proportions, materials, colors, composition and structure of the old building. They have their character and the modern physiognomy and are adapted to the original building without running it, but enabling a better connection of the new morphology with the context.

Referring to the fact that, the building is a representative of civic pride and cultural identity of the city of Tirana, the philological restoration of the original building and new additions creates a kind of pleasant surprise. It arises from the contrast between new elements of contemporary culture with those worth from the past. Important feature of the restoration project of the historic building of the Bank of Albania is to maintain the maximum values of the exterior and interior achieved by the masters who have built it.

Perhaps the most important and most interesting part of the re-use project has been working for a delicate balance between the old and the new (Fig. 10). The combination of them served as a dialog of opposites.



Figure 10. Exterior and interior view after restoration and adaptive re-use. Source: Petreschi architects.

As Latham (2000) says, “re-use intermixed with new buildings creates the *serendipity* – a sort of pleasant surprise arising from contrasting new elements that emanate from our culture with those valued from the past”. Respect for the past that is so important has gone parallel with the recognition of what is wrong, and what should be preserved.

Saving the silhouette and the volume of the building is a positive element of the project. The new addition facades are treated carefully to preserve the mutual ratio between the old and the new without repetition of the old language or its imitation (Fig. 11).

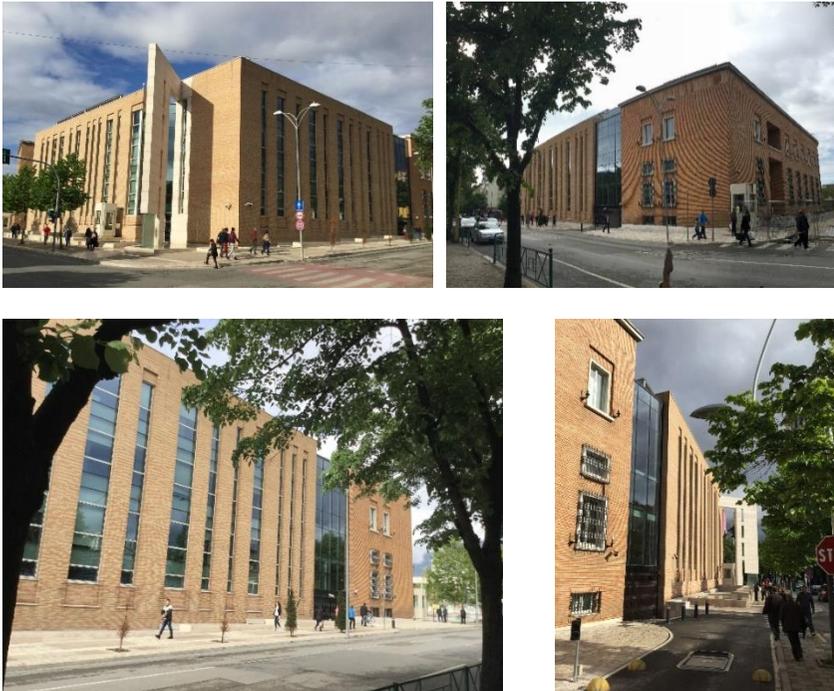


Figure 11. The view of the new additions to the Bank of Albania building. Source: Author.

Monumentality of the facades is highlighted with a modern language complied with ups and downs volumes emphasized by shadows cast. Materials used in the new facades like bricks, "Trani" stone, iron, wood, and glass, which are the same as those used in the existing Morpurgo building enable an organic link between them. Finishing details well adjusted, are turned to small architectural triumphs.

The simple and modern architectural language proposed is consistent with the function of the object and fully respects its monumentality, giving an added value to one of the most important buildings in the center of Tirana. According to Petreschi (2010) "construction, modernization and recovery of an original palimpsest, in continuity with its own history, is not a nostalgic appeal to the past but rather in its design, modeling and interpretation, that adapts to the needs of our times the form and function of the old structure, which derives from the sediments of a new and modern architectural expression. In this way, it can draw from the past to the sediments in the new continuity, without denying the original roots, to bring them properly in our time (Giacomelli and Vokshi, 2012).

The rehabilitated building came naturally in the urban context. This fusion is achieved by maintaining the value of the existing building, the ratio of the size and volume. It is in relation to the surrounding environment as the pace of spatial effects, interruptions, repetition and colors and finishes.

The adaptive re-use project of the Bank of Albania building has taken into account a number of factors that make possible the success of the intervention. In the project are combined energy conservation measures with the improvement of architectural qualities, increased comfort with measures to increase the building life span. Important was improvement of the usability parameters with the integration of two different phases of construction, safety, and welfare.

6. CONCLUSION

The adaptive re-use project of the Bank of Albania aimed to respond the aging phenomenon's, depreciation, and new usage requirements. The projects results were successful after having followed the way of respecting and preserving the inherent values of the building. It has brought long-term benefits to reduce environmental, social and economic costs for sustainable urban development of the center of Tirana.

Adaptation has also provided the opportunity for the architects to create a new design solution in respect of heritage values represented by existing buildings. The adaptive reuse of Bank of Albania has a minimal impact on the heritage significance of the building and its setting. All aspects of the historic building – structural, mechanical and technical – were restored and upgraded.

Adaptive reuse is self-defeating if it fails to protect the building's heritage values. By retaining the building's heritage significance and adding contemporary layers that provides value for the future the authors have implemented one of the most successful built heritage adaptive re-use projects.

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