

# REVIEW

## Moderna arhitektura u hrvatskoj 1930–IH Modern Architecture in Croatia 1930's

by Darja Radović Mahečić

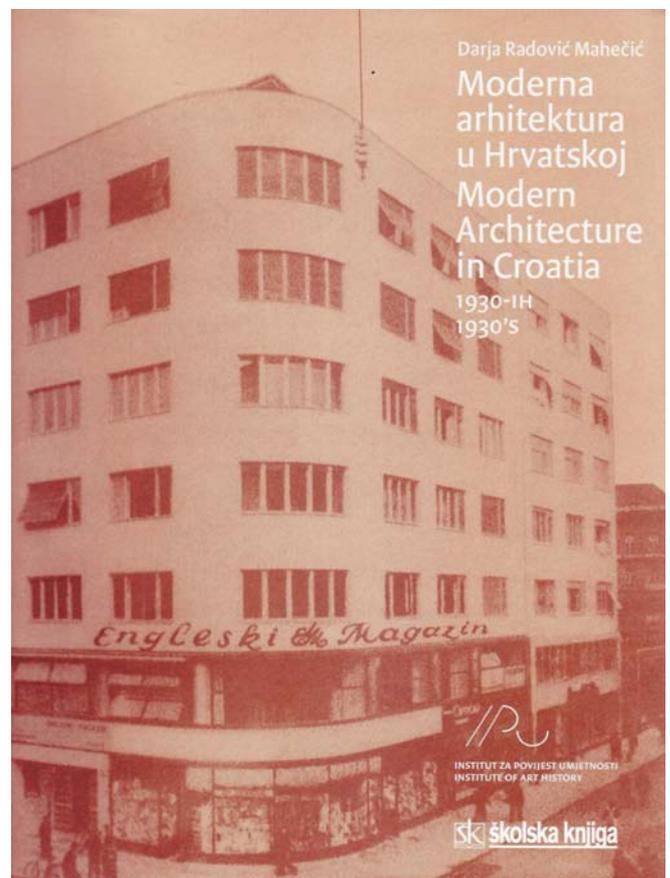
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In May 2007 *Institut za povijest umjetnosti* (The Institute of Art History) in Zagreb released an academic publication about the topography of modern architecture from the period between the two World Wars on the territory of Croatia. The book was produced by the *Školska knjiga* publishing house, supported by the *International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement* (DoCoMoMo), founded in 1988 in Eindhoven. DoCoMoMo works on revitalizing and promoting 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist art.

This book presents the results of a five – year project under the direction of Darja Radović Mahečić from the Institute for Art History in Zagreb. In the course of the project a national register of Croatian modern architecture from the period between 1926 and 1940 was set up. The task was to investigate this period of Croatian architecture, when a national identity was being created and many buildings and concepts were being developed under the influence of political changes, comparable to events in the traditional European architectural centres. The one hundred selected buildings represent a broad spectrum of types: public spaces, offices, residential and multifunctional buildings, rental villas and family houses, schools, hospitals, hotels, churches and chapels, exhibition pavilions and workers' districts. Some show close links with local tradition (e.g., the Institute for Biology and Oceanography in Split, by Fabjan Kaliterna, 1930–1931) mainly on the Croatian coastline. After Zagreb, the other cultural centres were Split, also Rijeka and Zadar, which were under Italian rule. Modern architecture also reached the islands of Krk, Hvar, Koločep and Lopud, and also the architecturally preserved town of Dubrovnik (see City Café and cinema at the Great Arsenal, by Mladen Kauzlarić and Stjepan Gomboš, 1931 – 1933).

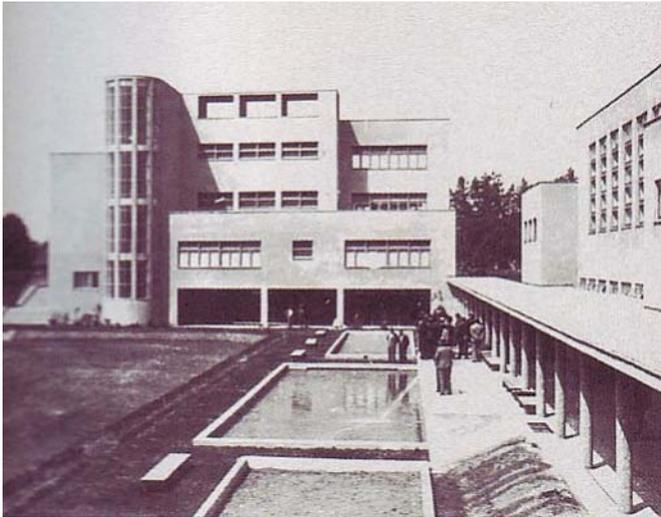
The structure of the book is clear and well-arranged. After the introduction there are chapters on *Croatian Modern Architecture in the 1930s* and *The Internationalization of Croatian Architectural Avant-Garde*, followed by a *Register of Modern Architecture in Croatia*, a bibliography, a typological index, and an index of localities and names. The core material is a catalogue of one hundred selected and in chronologically ordered examples of modern architecture in Croatia. Each building is presented here with its main specifications (name, architect



Book jacket

or architects, time of creation and address), black-and-white, illustrations (original and current photos, in some cases reproductions of plans and sketches) and an index of sources. The preconditions for inclusion in the catalogue were that the source documentation had been well researched, the buildings were of highly architectural value, and above all, that their present condition and appearance reveals the original architectural and urban concept.

The third condition must have been complicated by the fact that many examples have been damaged e.g., by removal of the flat roof, a typical formal feature. Nevertheless, these



Ivan Zemljak:  
Trešnjevka Municipal Primary School, Zagreb, 1930–1931

buildings are on the list, because they are important for the development of modern architecture in Croatia.

In the chapter *Croatian Modern Architecture in the 1930s* (p. 16–32) the author talks about historical context of Croatia and about the development of the Croatian school architectural system. This opening chapter goes on to show international and local architectural and urban design competitions, the problem of artists' associations and their programmes, and contemporary evaluations of the new modern architecture. The question of urban planning is then analysed. The towns encountered new problems, e.g., the rising of population in the towns, and the design of large municipal structures, rather than small flats. Next the book introduced some revolutionary events in the field of architectural education: the foundation of two architectural schools. The author describes the foundation of the Royal Technical College in Zagreb in 1919. The establishment of this school had been under preparation by the Croatian Society of Civic Engineers and Architects since 1898. Its first rector was Edo Šen (Schön) and the first graduate was Alfred Albini. The second school to be founded was the Department of Architecture, in 1926, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, under the direction of Drago Ibler. At that time the rector was Ivan Meštrović, who



Fabjan Kaliterna:  
Institute for Biology and Oceanography, Split, 1930–1931

later became a world-famous sculptor. Sixty students graduate from this school before it closed in 1942. In 1920 the Croatian Society of Civic Engineers and Architects accepted new rules for architectural competitions, including a commitment to arrange competitions for every General Master Plan (see international competitions for the General Master Plans of Zagreb and Split, 1931–1936) and for every public building. This contributed to the diffusion of modern architecture to distant regions. The existence of two architectural schools competing with each other was good for the development of Croatian modern architecture. One of the artists' associations, *Zemlja*, is introduced here. It was founded by the painter Krsto Hegedušić in 1929, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. The architect Drago Ibler headed the association and was also the author of its manifesto. The group wanted to promote art that reflected the modern vital needs of Croatian society. They put this into practice through public lectures, exhibitions and cooperation with similar intellectual groups. Before it was banned in 1935, the group held seven exhibitions with permanent and guest members. Almost all architects had at-



Marijan Haberle:  
Church of Blessed Marko Križevčanin, Zagreb, 1940

tended Ibler's course at the Academy.

The chapter on *The Internationalization of Croatian Architectural Avant-Garde* (p. 33–53) tells about the contacts of Croatian architects with the association *Congr s Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and important architects from a number of European art centers (Vienna, Dresden, Frankfurt, Berlin, Budapest and Prague). The author draws attention to the reflections of Croatian modern architecture at international exhibitions and in technical papers published inside the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenes and elsewhere in Europe. The main journals are *Tehni ki list* (published in Zagreb), *Arhitektura* (founded in Ljubljana in 1931), *Gradevinski vjesnik* (founded in Zagreb in 1932), the German reviews *Bauwelt* and *Monatshfte für Baukunst*, the French review *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*. The book mentions prominent architects who studied outside Yugoslavia, e.g. Prague-students Nikola Dobrović, Marko Vidaković, Ivan Zemljak and Zvonimir Kavurić, Vienna student Juraj Neidhardt and Ernest Weissmann who worked with Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier helped him to become the first resident CIAM representative of Yugoslavia. Many other architects returned to

Yugoslavia from major European studios led by Le Corbusier, Josef Hoffmann, Adolf Loos, Peter Behrens or Hans Poelzig. Other architects took part in architectural competitions abroad, e. g., Juraj Neidhardt and Vladimír Potočnjak participated in the architectural competition for the workers' district in Zlín, Czech Republic in 1935, and Potočnjak was awarded one of the prizes.

The *Register of Modern Architecture in Croatia* (p. 58–467) includes some important Czech architects and their works on the territory of Croatia and also several of their Croatian colleagues who studied in Prague. We are introduced to the Villa Pfefferman (which now houses the embassy of the Czech Republic) in Zagreb. This project from 1928 – 1929 was led by Marko Vidaković, who studied in Vienna and Prague, where he graduated in 1918. He and his schoolfellows Ivan Zemljak and Vladimír Šterk they are considered to be the architects who designed the first modern buildings in Zagreb. Czech architect Josef Kodl designed the municipal schools in Split 1928–1930. The most important work alluding to Czech architecture is the Bataville satellite industrial town of the Baťa shoe factory in the neighborhood of Vukovar, by architects František Lydie – Gahura (general master plan), Vladimír Karfík and Antonín Vitek (architectural design of houses) 1931–1938. The project included 13 six – storey industrial blocks sized 80×20 m, according to the Baťa's Zlín Hall no. 24, with the skeleton of reinforced concrete with 6.15 m×6.15 m modules and large windows. The residential quarter built before 1936 was named after Jan Baťa. The quarter contained 122 apartment buildings, located in the park belt, with 421 dwelling units: 17 family houses for directors and engineers, 8 two – apartment houses for top managers and 97 four-apartment buildings for workers. The houses were cubic in form and were made of unplastered

facade bricks with details in concrete and flat roofs. The town housed 1818 people in 1936. In the midst of the public buildings there is a hostel for single workers with 200 beds, a primary school, a professional secondary school, a department store, a restaurant, a cinema, a stadium and sports airport. At the peak of its expansion in 1939, the factory employed 6290 workers of whom 4650 lived in the town. After 1945 the town was renamed to Borovo. The complex was damaged in Yugoslav army attacks in 1991. Restoration work has taken place since 1998, unfortunately without the value of the original structures.

The book *Moderna arhitektura u Hrvatskoj 1930 – ih informs* readers about the birth and development of Croatian modern architecture in the 1930s. Profiles of 100 buildings form the central material in this publication, the profiles are rich in iconic documentation and information about sources, and these make it valuable not only for researchers but also for practicing architects. The effort to promote the modern architecture of this period through one hundred selected houses is laudable. However, a book covering all the findings of Darja Mahečić's team and providing a compact insight into all structures included in the national register of Croatian modern architecture would be of even greater value.

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