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FIG. 1 HOTEL VISOKO, VISOKO

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# SPACES OF SYNTHESIS: UNIVERSAL VALUES AND REGIONAL IDENTITY IN ZLATKO UGLJEN'S ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITECTURE OF RESPECT  
CRITICAL REGIONALISM  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPACE  
UGLJEN, ZLATKO  
UNIVERSALITY

Zlatko Ugljen's architecture represents a profound engagement with the interplay between regional identity and universal architectural values. Through an analysis of his most significant works, this paper examines how Ugljen synthesizes traditional construction principles with modernist architectural expression, ensuring the continuity of spatial and cultural meaning. Particular attention is given to the concept of the *architecture of respect*, analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of critical regionalism and the phenomenology of space. Furthermore, the paper investigates the impact of socio-political contexts – ranging from socialist Yugoslavia to the post-conflict re-

construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina – on Ugljen's architectural practice. Employing a methodological framework that integrates a comparative analysis, case studies, and a phenomenological approach, the paper explores the materiality, spatial organization, and symbolic dimensions of his architectural solutions. The findings suggest that Ugljen's work serves as a paradigm for contemporary architectural practice, demonstrating how regional identity can be reaffirmed while simultaneously establishing universal spatial values capable of addressing the challenges posed by globalization and cultural fragmentation.

## INTRODUCTION

Zlatko Ugljen is a Bosnian Herzegovinian architect, born in Mostar in 1929. His works embody a synthesis of regional traditions and universal architectural principles, integrating the spirit of place (*genius loci*) with modernist design. Rather than existing in isolation, his architecture engages in an ongoing dialogue with tradition, space, and temporal context. Ugljen's phenomenological approach facilitates the reinterpretation of traditional building techniques within a contemporary framework, resulting in architecture that both preserves historical continuity and addresses the challenges of modernity.

His work can be analyzed through the lens of critical regionalism (Frampton, 1983), which advocates for an architecture that is deeply rooted in local traditions while remaining contemporary in both expression and technology. Additionally, it aligns with the phenomenology of space (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), a theoretical framework that explores how architecture shapes spatial experience and fosters an emotional connection between users and their environment. These two theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding Ugljen's architecture as neither a strict adherence to modernism nor a mere replication of tradition, but rather a synthesis of the local and the global.

This raises the question: How does Zlatko Ugljen's architecture achieve universal values through a dialogue with regional identity?

Ugljen's architectural expression can be contextualized within the work of architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, whose spatial design concepts have profoundly influenced contemporary architecture. Wright's philosophy of organic architecture (Perović, 2009), which emphasizes harmony between architecture and the natural environment, is evident in Ugljen's projects, where buildings do not dominate their surroundings but instead integrate into the landscape. Conversely, Le Corbusier's modernist principles and his emphasis on abstract forms are reflected in Ugljen's minimalist approach to volume, light, and materiality. Ugljen masterfully synthesizes these two approaches, reinterpreting traditional architectural elements through modernist forms and materials in order to create works that transcend local boundaries and embody universal values. His architecture is not only functional but also symbolic and transcendent, making it particularly significant in contemporary discourse on the architecture of respect.

Ugljen has created and continues to create across two key socio-political periods: the era of socialist Yugoslavia (SFRY, 1945-1991) and the post-Yugoslav context following the dissolution of the SFRY. During the socialist period, architecture was predominantly shaped by modernist principles, supported by a strong institutional framework that fostered the development of public, residential, and infrastructure projects. Within this context, Ugljen's work reflected a commitment to functionality, rationality, and collective values, while his approach remained focused on the harmonious integration of modernist architectural language with local cultural traditions.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, economic, political, and cultural circumstances underwent significant transformations. The transition from socialism to capitalism had a profound impact on architectural production – whereas architecture was previously planned within the framework of state investments, the post-Yugoslav period saw market-driven principles and privatization take precedence. In this shifting landscape, Ugljen's work testifies to the continuity of his philosophy of the architecture of respect. While some of his earlier projects were neglected or even destroyed, his later works sought to reaffirm universal spatial values within increasingly complex political conditions. Across both periods, his architecture remains deeply connected to the spirit of place (*genius loci*). Regardless of socio-political changes, his projects consistently adhere to the principles of contextuality, respect for space, and an inclusive architectural expression.



## ZLATKO UGLJEN'S ARCHITECTURAL WORK: TRADITION, MODERNITY, AND CONTINUITY

A historical analysis of the architectural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals a clear symbiosis of tradition and modernity in the works of Zlatko Ugljen. His architecture can be understood as part of an ongoing exploration of regional identity, whereby architectural expression is not conceived as an isolated act but rather as an extension of cultural and spatial heritage. This approach aligns with the theory of critical regionalism (Frampton, 1983), which advocates for the re-interpretation of local architectural elements through contemporary methods, thereby producing architecture that is both contextually rooted and universally resonant.

A significant impact on Ugljen's work came from architect Juraj Neidhardt (Fig. 2), a pivotal figure in the architectural history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who communicated Le Corbusier's modernist principles and tailored them to fit the local context. Ugljen was his student and collaborator, and his early works reflect the synergy of modernist reduction of form and traditional constructive solutions, as confirmed by his statement: "In architecture, continuity is not only desirable – it is necessary. Architecture does not start from nothing, but from the understanding and reinterpretation of what exists." (Ugljen, archive)

## CONTINUITY AND REGIONAL IDENTITY IN ARCHITECTURE

One of the key concepts evident in Ugljen's work is the development and reinterpretation of the "Bosnian style"<sup>1</sup>, first introduced into the architectural discourse of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Josip Pospisil. This concept, later expanded through the work of Juraj Neidhardt, integrates traditional elements of the Bosnian house, as well as oriental and Mediterranean architectural typologies, with contemporary technological advancements. Neidhardt's contribution to this discourse is particularly evident in his book *Arhitektura Bosne i put u suvremenno* (*The Architecture of Bosnia and*

*the Path to the Modern Age*; Neidhardt and Gabrijan, 1957), where he establishes the foundations of critical regionalism within the framework of Yugoslav modernism.

Ugljen's work continues this line of research, but with a more pronounced transcendence of material space, which brings him closer to a phenomenological approach to architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). His projects, such as the *White Mosque* in Visoko and the *Hotel Ruža* in Mostar, are not only interpretations of local architectural traditions, but also spatial manifestations of universal principles of architectural creation.

Ugljen's architecture does not imitate the past, but redefines it through contemporary architectural languages, maintaining the key values of space – harmony with the environment, material authenticity and the sensory experience of the user. This methodology can be compared to the work of Alvar Aalto, whose projects combine local materials with modernist formal principles, creating architecture that not only responds to functional needs, but also communicates with human perception of space.

Ugljen's works are often described as sculptural forms that blend harmoniously into the landscape, not dominating the space but becoming an integral part of it. This approach can be analyzed through the lens of Wright's organic architecture, where architecture emerges from the natural environment, as well as through Le Corbusier's modernist rationalism, which emphasizes purified geometric forms and technologically innovative solutions.

As Sadudin Musabegovic<sup>2</sup> observes, Ugljen's architecture represents a synthesis of modernist and postmodernist tendencies:

*'He has one foot in modernism, as he does not renounce the structure, but entrusts it to civil engineering, and the other in postmodernism, as he reintroduces the decorative, regional, and national alongside the past – elements that, if not entirely excluded, were at least largely neglected in modernism.'*

This duality in Ugljen's architecture is particularly evident in his sacred architecture, where he employs pure materiality and minimalism while embedding profound symbolic meaning.

Ugljen's work can be understood through the concept of the architecture of respect, which signifies a harmonious relationship between space, user, and architectural expression. This principle extends beyond its regional context and aligns with global tendencies in critical regionalism and phenomenological architecture. His architecture transcends lo-

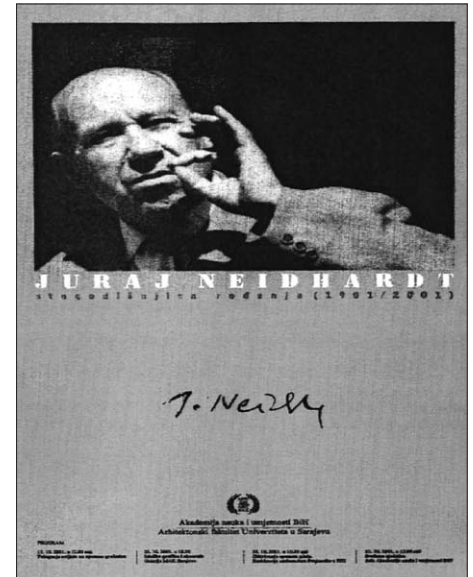


FIG. 2 POSTER AS PART OF THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF ARCHITECT, PROFESSOR, AND ACADEMICIAN JURAJ NEIDHARDT, SARAJEVO, OCTOBER 2001

<sup>1</sup> A wave initiated by intensive construction and the emergence of critical architectural thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries spurred a movement among architects and engineers to establish a Bosnian architectural style. One of its founders was architect Josip Pospisil in 1910. (Kržović, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Sadudin Musabegovic was one of the most significant art theorists and modern thinkers in Bosnia and Herzegovina after World War II. He also engaged in film directing, producing the short film *Soba* for Sarajevo's Sutjeska Film in 1972. He served as chief editor of the journal *Opredjeljenja*, the magazine *Odjek*, and as responsible editor of *Dijalog*. (ALU Sarajevo)

cal cultural specificities by communicating universal spatial values – light, proportion, materiality, and rhythm. Works such as *Šerefudin's White Mosque* in Visoko and the *Church of Our Lady of the Angels* in Zabilje exemplify how architecture can translate spiritual and cultural narratives into spatial forms, and rather than conforming to conventional religious typologies, embody the essential universality of sacred space.

While Ugljen's architecture is widely recognized for its sensitivity to context, some of his projects exhibit a distinct architectural autonomy, where spatial expression is guided more by internal conceptual logic than by direct adaptation to the surrounding environment. A notable example is the *Kalin Hotel* in Bugojno, which, unlike his sacred and public buildings, prioritizes formal independence over contextual integration.

Ugljen maintained meticulous control over every phase of his projects, with his distinct authorial signature evident not only in spatial composition but also in materialization, detailing, and the way users engage with his architecture. His approach resonates with Wright's philosophy of integrating architecture with daily life, particularly in how his designs emphasize carefully orchestrated proportions, rhythm, materiality, and light to enhance human experience. However, whereas Wright's organic architecture seeks harmony with the natural landscape, Ugljen's work often negotiates between contextual sensitivity and formal autonomy, allowing his architecture to assert its presence while remaining attuned to spatial and cultural narratives. This human-centered design philosophy aligns with the phenomenology of space (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), where architecture is understood not as a static object but as an experiential and sensory phenomenon. Through this lens, Ugljen's architecture fosters a deeper emotional and perceptual engagement, reinforcing the notion that built space is not merely inhabited but actively lived and felt.

Ugljen's engagement with tradition is so intrinsic to his work that all his projects are defined by an ongoing dialogue between the past and the present. His architecture is not a nostalgic reconstruction of history but rather a reinterpretation of architectural elements through contemporary materials, forms, and construction methods. Such approach aligns with the principles of critical regionalism (Frampton, 1983), where local architectural identity is not viewed as static but as an evolving construct within a contemporary context.

Across his projects – whether sacred, public, or private – Ugljen consistently achieves a harmonious relationship between space, user, and the natural environment. This sensibility closely parallels the philosophies of Alvar Aalto and Frank Lloyd Wright, both of whom sought to bridge humanistic values and modernist principles through architectural practice.

Ugljen's architecture is frequently described as poetic, not only for its artistic expression but also for its ability to shape atmospheric experiences both inside and outside its spaces, resonating with a phenomenological approach to architecture, where materiality, light, sound, and spatial relationships shape an experiential understanding of space that extends beyond its purely functional dimension. This concept is particularly relevant in contemporary research on affective architecture, which explores how space communicates not only visually but also through sensory perception and the emotional responses it elicits from users (Pallasmaa, 2005).

Although such metaphors are rarely employed as analytical tools in academic discourse, the concept of spatial atmosphere and affective experience (Zumthor, 2006) offers a theoretical foundation for understanding this relationship. Ugljen's spaces, through lighting effects, material textures, and interaction with nature, cultivate spatial experiences that extend beyond rational perception, fostering a profound emotional connection between the user and the architecture.

## RESPECT FOR CONTEXT AND ARCHITECTURAL UNIVERSALITY

Towards the late 1970s, some of the most significant projects in Zlatko Ugljen's oeuvre were realized, with *Hotel Visoko* in Visoko (1974), *Hotel Ruza* in Mostar (1974), and *Hotel Bregava* in Stolac (1975) standing out as key works that illustrate the continuity and evolution of his architectural expression. These hotels are not only exemplars of modernist design but also landmark achievements of Yugoslav architecture, demonstrating a synthesis of functional requirements, spatial sensitivity, and local identity.

<sup>3</sup> The author recognizes bioclimatic design principles, creating a comfortable and authentic space through form and structure, natural ventilation, water integration in the form of channels, and the planting of local vegetation.

<sup>4</sup> Several prominent individuals have called for a halt to the ongoing permanent erasure: "Speaking about the 'restoration' of *Hotel Ruza*, he noted that it was 'first vandalized and then, again in an act of vandalism, rebuilt without restraint or scruple – but as something

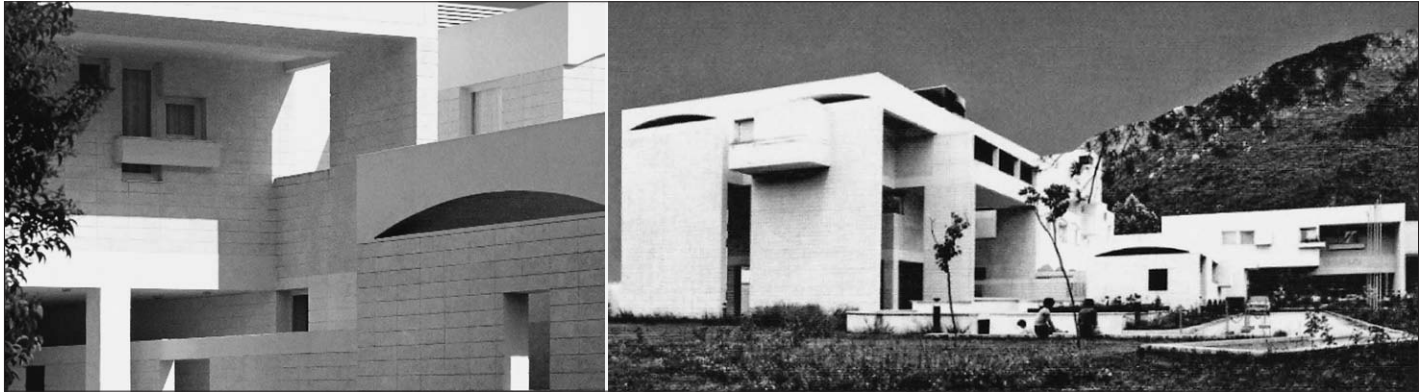


FIG. 3 HOTEL RUŽA, MOSTAR

Over the course of 50 years, the key aspects of Ugljen's architectural approach become apparent.

His projects are shaped by three fundamental principles:

1. A universal approach to functional design – Architecture is guided by rational spatial principles while maintaining a deep sensitivity to user experience.
2. Respect for natural and cultural context – Ugljen's projects do not replicate the past but reinterpret regional elements through a contemporary architectural language.
3. Plasticity of space and light – Ugljen employs light and shadow as integral design tools, shaping dynamic visual narratives within the spatial composition.

#### HOTEL RUŽA: DIALOGUE WITH CONTEXT AND DESTRUCTION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

*Hotel Ruža* in Mostar (Fig. 3) is situated within a complex urban fabric, embodying a synergy of modern and postmodern architecture. The project integrates traditional design elements with rational spatial organization, where the dimensions of openings, the rhythm of the façade, and materiality harmonize with the historical character of Mostar.

*Hotel Ruža* was one of the most significant examples of critical regionalism in Yugoslav architecture, where architectural form is not imposed on the space but shaped in accordance with the microclimate and contextual

specificities. Ugljen creates a space that protects the individual, offering shelter, much like Wright's long, white-painted eaves on his villas. The influence is also evident in the horizontal playfulness of the masses at ground level.

The interplay of light and shadow, a defining element in all Ugljen's works and a key design tool for generating endlessly shifting images of plasticity, is particularly pronounced in this project. Ugljen expresses elements of tradition using arches, as well as the careful dimensioning and positioning of openings. The interior of the hotel, conceived as a space of interpenetration, integrates water, greenery, and spatial organization to create an authentic Herzegovinian ambiance. Although energy efficiency was not a dominant concern at the time, Ugljen's approach to volumetric composition and the natural protection of façades demonstrates a deep sensitivity to the microclimate<sup>3</sup>, orientation, and solar exposure.

The destruction of *Hotel Ruža* during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>4</sup> (1992-1995) can be viewed within the broader context of the systematic devastation of cultural heritage in conflict zones (Riedlmayer, 2002). As UNESCO emphasizes, the deliberate destruction of architectural heritage in wartime represents not only a material loss but also a symbolic one, where architecture becomes a target of ideological and cultural conflict.

In recent years, a new building has been constructed on the same site, with architectural and urban planning solutions that significantly diverge from the original principles of contextual integration. This shift reflects a broader change in architectural paradigms in the post-socialist period, where the principles of planned and culturally conscious design have been supplanted by market-driven investments and neoliberal urbanization (Jansen, 2005).

entirely different, degrading and humiliating the artistic and cultural dignity of architecture itself for profit... under the logic of an unfettered economy." (Essayist and professor Dr. Sadudin Musabegović)

"Ugljen's misfortune is that the architectural masterpieces he built have, within his lifetime, met the fate of Heraclitean pebbles, played with by the cruel child of time." ; "When the storm and frost come – roses are the first to perish." (Poet Mile Stojic, 2010)





FIG. 4 HOTEL BREGAVA, STOLAC

#### HOTEL BREGAVA: THE INTEGRATION OF ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

The town of Stolac, located in eastern Herzegovina, is one of the most significant sites of cultural stratification in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where elements of ancient, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian architectural heritage coexist. Ugljen's *Hotel Bregava* (1975; Fig. 4) demonstrates a high level of architectural sensitivity to its surroundings, with the roof forms, façade proportions, and the dimensioning of openings carefully aligned with the traditional typology of the Herzegovinian house.

Its integration with the landscape can be linked to Frank Lloyd Wright's organicism, where architectural form adapts to the natural terrain rather than subordinating it. The use of stone, wooden details, and traditional motifs in a modern interpretation highlights the strength of Ugljen's architectural language.

He describes the *architecture of respect* as culturally attuned, emphasizing that architecture should grow into its environment rather than merely be placed within it. Inspired by the beauty of the Herzegovinian landscape – characterized by the serene architecture of residential complexes, stone roofs emerging behind courtyard walls, the olive-green hues of the landscape, and the clear waters of the Bregava River adorned with the red tones of roses and pomegranate fruit – Ugljen created a composition of sloping roofs with pronounced elements such as chimneys, overlapping roof planes, and extended eaves that protect the space.

The influence of the *Begovina*<sup>5</sup> residential complex is particularly evident. Situated upstream along the Bregava River, *Begovina* composition uniquely complements Ugljen's

architecture, as its elements are both adopted and reinterpreted within his design.<sup>6</sup>

Like *Hotel Ruža*, *Hotel Bregava* was also demolished. The destruction of this building represents yet another example of the loss of architectural memory during the transitional period. As Bernik (2002) points out, the process of post-socialist urbanization often neglects principles of spatial integration, leading to architectural interventions that lose their connection to local identity.

#### HOTEL IN VISOKO: ARCHITECTURE AS SCULPTURE

The town of Visoko gained its first hotel in 1974. Although Ugljen began designing *Serefudin's White Mosque* in 1969, he considered the hotel to be his first true work, as it was completed before the mosque.<sup>7</sup> The Hotel in Visoko (1974; Fig. 1), though now neglected and left to decay, remains one of the city's key symbols, occupying a dominant urban position along the Bosna River. Its expressionist architectural elements reflect the medieval character of Visoko, where the building's vertical relationships connect with the historic walls and the morphology of the urban landscape. As Bernik (2002) notes: "Ugljen, as a creative seeker, did not start

<sup>5</sup> A residential complex of approximately 2,000 square meters was built during the Ottoman occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the leadership of Ali Pasha Rizvanbegović on the left bank of the Bregava River.

<sup>6</sup> Krzović describes *Hotel Bregava* as an outstanding example of regionalism, successfully merging modern architecture with Herzegovinian tradition. Ugljen emphasized authenticity by using local materials and integrating ambient characteristics, making *Hotel Bregava* a model of architecture that reflects regional identity rather than adhering to universal modernist styles. (Krzović, 1984)





FIG. 5 PROJECT – CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PHASE, BIJELA TABIJA, SARAJEVO

from zero; rather, he built upon the existing architectural expressiveness recognized by the profession before him.” This project, together with *Šerefudin’s White Mosque*, serves as an architectural manifestation of Ugljen’s vision of a building as a spatial sculpture.

Ugljen’s architecture is not a static reconstruction of the past but a synthesis of contemporary methodologies and traditional principles of spatial design. His projects, including *Hotel Ruza*, *Hotel Bregava*, and *Hotel Visoko*, represent the highest achievements of Yugoslav architecture in the 1970s, where the key element is a profound respect for both the environment and the human experience.

### RECENT SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS IN ZLATKO UGLJEN’S OEUVRE

In the early 2000s, Zlatko Ugljen designed two significant projects for the city of Sarajevo, reaffirming his consistency in spatial sensitivity and critical interpretation of context. Situated on the southern slopes of Sarajevo’s hills, both projects reflect Ugljen’s vision of architecture as a dialogue between past and present, where contextual integration and sensitivity to place play a crucial role.

The *Bijela Tabija* project (2007; Fig. 5), which has never been realized due to unresolved property and legal issues, represents Ugljen’s architectural vision for the reinterpretation of a historic site. This location holds exceptional

urban and symbolic significance, as it is situated on the Vratnik Plateau, one of Sarajevo’s historical foundations. Ugljen describes this space with the following words: “The plateau emerges as one of the origins of the city of Sarajevo, which makes it unique and undoubtedly gives it an epic character.” (Ugljen, archive)

In his concept, Ugljen rejects literal reconstruction (*facsimile*) in favor of a layered reading of the past through architectural interpretation. His goal was not to replicate history but to create a space that evokes the spirit of place (*genius loci*; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). This methodology is reflected in his approach to:

- Combine different spatial layers – from the Roman to the Ottoman period, creating a historical narrative through architectural form.
- Integrate social and educational functions – through an open-air *lapidarium*, envisioned as a space for collective memory and the interpretation of cultural heritage.
- Design the Sarajevo Museum of Architecture – conceived as an exhibition space for architectural models of Sarajevo’s most significant buildings, from the Emperor’s Mosque to modernist architecture.

This approach can be analyzed through the theory of architectural semiotics<sup>8</sup> (Eco, 1986), where space is not merely a material entity but a carrier of cultural meanings and historical layers. In this context, Ugljen’s architecture functions as an active interpreter of history rather than a passive reproducer of past forms.

On the lower plateau in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Kovači, Ugljen designed the *Administrative Building of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Fig. 6), a project that stands as one of his most significant contemporary contributions to sacred and civic architecture.

Completed in 2007, this project is characterized by three key aspects:

<sup>7</sup> The local community, meaning most residents, initially resisted the “new” interpretation of an Islamic religious structure due to their different understanding of architectural form. However, Ugljen’s departure from conventional construction and the universality of his message were eventually accepted, and the building was completed after ten years.

<sup>8</sup> Eco explains that buildings function not only as physical structures but also as signs that convey meaning within a cultural context. He explores the concept of “functionality as communication,” where architecture not only serves practical purposes but also conveys specific ideas, values, and ideologies through form, materials, and context.



FIG. 6 ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING OF THE RIYASAT OF THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, SARAJEVO



– Connection to historical context – Situated near *Bijela Tabija*<sup>9</sup>, *Žuta Tabija*<sup>10</sup>, and *Jajce Kasarna*<sup>11</sup>, which belong to the medieval, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian architectural heritage, the location enabled Ugljen to interpret architectural history through a contemporary design language.

– Symbolic and functional structure – The building's base is designed as a strong stone-clad wall, whose textured surface creates a dynamic interplay of light and shadow, evoking traditional Bosnian construction techniques. This aligns with Zumthor's theory of atmospheric architecture (Zumthor, 2006), where materiality and light shape the sensory perception of space.

– Typology of the domed space – Seven interwoven domes create the impression of a celestial vault, while light filtering through perforated star- and crescent-shaped openings symbolizes the spiritual dimension of Islamic architecture. This spatial concept resonates with the phenomenological approach to sacred architecture, whereby space becomes a site of introspection and transcendental experience.

As Ugljen states: "With its position, historical and topological characteristics, the Kovaci plateau, along with the specific function of the proposed building, provides the necessary sublimation that will define the character of the structure. Encouraged by such constants, we create an architectural scene that must pulsate with a distinct identity." (Ugljen, archive, 2007).

This approach reaffirms Ugljen's ability to interpret traditional elements through a contemporary architectural language, thereby

linking local identity with universal spatial values (Frampton, 1983).

Although the *Bijela Tabija* and the *Administrative Building of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community* projects differ in function and contextual specificity, both embody Ugljen's fundamental architectural message:

– Architecture as a dialogue with context – Ugljen does not imitate the past but reinterprets spatial principles through a contemporary design language.

– Materiality and light as key elements of architectural expression – Stone, light, and shadow shape the sensory perception of space. This concept relates to the transformation of the urban identity of this part of the city, deeply rooted in traditional elements<sup>12</sup>, as reflected in form, character, and material use.

<sup>9</sup> The White Fortress (*Bijela tabija*) is located along the Dariva-Mošćanica road, on the eastern elevation of the Sarajevo valley. Built on the site of a medieval fortress around 1550, its upper section, composed of large stone blocks, was added during the Austro-Hungarian period. The fortress played a crucial defensive role during the attacks by Austrian Prince Eugene of Savoy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Austro-Hungarian military campaign of 1878.

<sup>10</sup> The Yellow Fortress (*Žuta tabija*), situated on the Jekovac cliff – hence also known as *Jekovačka tabija* – was one of the fortifications forming the defensive walls around the historic town of Vratnik.

<sup>11</sup> The Jajce Barracks (*Jajce kasarna*), located in the historical district of Vratnik, occupy a dominant position overlooking Sarajevo and are visible from nearly every point in the city. This military complex was constructed in phases, from the Austro-Hungarian period until 1948.

<sup>12</sup> "With its position, historical and topological characteristics, the Kovaci plateau, along with the specific function of the proposed structure, provides the nec-



FIG. 7 INTERIOR, ŠEREFUDIN WHITE MOSQUE, VISOKO



FIG. 8 INTERIOR, CHURCH IN ZABILJE, VITEZ

– Contextual sensitivity as a universal value  
 – Both projects reaffirm the continuity of Ugljen's methodology, where space serves as a medium for articulating cultural and identity narratives.

### UNIVERSAL MESSAGES OF SPACE

Universality in architecture involves the creation of spaces that transcend specific local boundaries, connecting people through shared spatial and sensory experiences. Historically, great architectural achievements such as the Parthenon in Athens, Gothic cathedrals, or Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp share certain universal characteristics – the ability to simultaneously articulate aesthetics, functionality, and spirituality, creating spaces that communi-

cate with people regardless of their cultural or religious identity.

In this context, Zlatko Ugljen conveys a universal message of space through the distinct design of sacred and public places. His works, including *Šerefudin's White Mosque* in Visoko (1970s; Fig. 7), *Our Lady of the Angels Church* in Zabilje (2009; Fig. 8), the conceptual design for the *Roman Catholic Church* in Mostar (1972), and *Kalvarija Chapel* in Vitez (2015), represent an architectural reinterpretation of sacred space. These projects are not merely responses to local needs but exemplify how architecture can serve as a bridge between different cultures and eras, articulating universal values through a distinct architectural expression.

The concept of the universality of sacred space can be analyzed through the phenomenological theory of architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), which posits that sacred spaces are not merely buildings but places of heightened spatial awareness and spiritual introspection.

As Sergio Massironi notes (Thema, 2023), the universality of an architectural message does not stem solely from spatial form but also from architecture's ability to communicate universal values within a specific socio-political context. In this sense, Ugljen's architecture can be interpreted both as a critique and as an alternative to the prevailing narratives of architectural and social separatism.

The design of *Šerefudin's White Mosque* in Visoko<sup>13</sup> from the early 1970s represents a radical departure from the stereotypical perception of sacred space. While traditional

*essary synthesis to emphasize the building's character. Inspired by such constants, we create an architectural setting that must pulsate with a personal identity. Reading the old in the spirit of creating the new is the focus of this approach. It is the foundation that guides us – a gift of heritage and a living reality that directs us to leave an architectural imprint of time, where the ever-present spirit of place is recognized.*" (Source: Project description, Ugljen's archive)

<sup>13</sup> The Aga Khan Foundation Award in 1983 included a notable remark from a jury member who referred to the mosque as the "White Flower": "Full of originality and innovation (though directly indebted to Le Corbusier's chapel in Ronchamp), imbued with the architect's thought and spirit, widely shared with the community, and deeply connected to both the future and the past." (Ugljen Ademovic, Ugljen, 2014)

Additionally, architectural critic Hugh Perman noted: "This project stands as the only relevant example of sacred architecture from former Yugoslavia."

The independent magazine *BH Dani* commented on the project's significance: "Foreigners once again



mosques structure their spatial organization along an axial alignment oriented toward the qibla, Ugljen creates a fluid, dynamic, and introspective space where light, materiality, and volumetry collectively shape the sacred atmosphere.

At the time of its construction, this project faced significant resistance, as it did not conform to the dominant modernist principles of standardization and rationality. However, with the passage of time, it can be seen as a precursor to contemporary approaches in sacred architecture, which increasingly emphasize space as an experience rather than a typological constraint.

When compared to *Our Lady of the Angels Church* in Zabilje (2009), the *Roman Catholic Church* in Mostar (1972), and *Kalvarija Chapel* in Vitez (2015), a clear continuity emerges in Ugljen's modernist expression – interwoven with regional heritage, conceptual exploration, and contemporary technology. These examples illustrate the universality of sacred space, independent of the religious affiliation of its users. Together, these projects establish architectural principles that emphasize the universality of spiritual experience – the encounter with the divine through space, light, and materiality.

Architectural form in Ugljen's projects does not conform to predefined typological patterns but is shaped by experiential and phenomenological qualities of sacred space. Materiality and light function as mediators between the physical and the spiritual, continuing the tradition of universal sacred architecture found in the works of Mies van der Rohe (*Barcelona Pavilion*), Alvar Aalto (*total design*), and Le Corbusier (*Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut* in Ronchamp).

Ugljen adopts these principles not as empty references but as reinterpretations shaped by the context, creating architecture that is not only locally grounded but also universally comprehensible.

Although his architecture transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, its universal message has not always been fully understood. Massironi (2023) highlights that the socio-political climate of the past thirty years has fostered an image of division rather than dialogue. Sacred architecture, in this context, could have served as a warning of what unfolded in the early 1990s – the fragmentation of social relationships and cultural identities. Sacred architecture should not be used as an instrument of separatism but as a space of universal values – harmony, respect, and continuity among different traditions, beliefs, and perceptions of the sacred.

## PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

Zlatko Ugljen's architecture demonstrates an exceptional ability to shape spaces that transcend their material dimension, guiding users toward an expanded, spiritual, and human-centered experience of space.<sup>14</sup> This aspect is particularly evident in the designs of the *Behram-Beg Madrasa Mosque* in Tuzla (Fig. 9) and *Kalvarija Chapel* (Fig. 10), where modernist rationality intertwines with a sense of the sacred and the transcendental.

According to Christian Norberg-Schulz<sup>15</sup> (1980), the phenomenology of space encompasses not only the material characteristics of architecture but also the ways in which space influences human perception, experience, and emotional engagement. In this context, Ugljen employs light not merely as a functional element but as a fundamental tool for shaping the metaphysical experience of space.

The spatial composition of the *Behram-Beg Madrasa Mosque* and *Kalvarija Chapel* is carefully designed with a deliberate interplay of light, shadow, and materiality, creating a sense of spirituality that transcends the physical dimensions of architecture.

As Krzovic (2005) highlights, Ugljen's technique of separating the dome from the wall through horizontal glass openings introduces the concept of transparency, allowing the interior space to open toward light. In the *Kalvarija Chapel* project, Ugljen masterfully utilizes open and closed surfaces on the façades and roof, creating a pyramidal roof structure with dynamic struts, beams, and glass elements.

The entrance to the space is not constrained by the conventional concept of a doorway – the interior remains open and freely accessible, redefining the architectural perception of entry and aligning it with a metaphysical understanding of transition from the physical to the spiritual realm. This principle can be compared to Le Corbusier's approach in *Notre*

*recognize what our own eyes remain blind to. The Serefudin White Mosque in Visoko, the masterpiece of Bosnian architect Zlatko Ugljen, won the Aga Khan Award upon completion. A quarter of a century later, Hungarian architects declared it one of the three best-designed sacred spaces built in modern style and spirit.*" (\*\* 2007)

In Germany, Rudolf Stegers' *Atlas of Modern Architecture, Sakralbau* recognized Ugljen among the world's most significant architects of sacred structures.

<sup>14</sup> "This concerns the sanctity of space – if we may secularize this phrase from contemporary philosophy, which already holds different meanings for different individuals. It is about space, at the core of which is the





FIG. 9 MOSQUE OF THE BEHRAM-BEG MADRASA, TUZLA



FIG. 10 KALVARIJA CHAPEL, MOŠUNJ

*Dame du Haut* in Ronchamp<sup>16</sup>, where free-form shapes and unconventional lighting effects render the sacred space fluid and intuitive (Jencks, 1984).

As Massironi (2007) emphasizes, Ugljen's architecture employs spatial symbolism not only through formal elements but also through the capacity of space to engage the senses, making the metaphysical experience an integral part of architectural form.

As Ugljen himself states: "With light and the magic of shadow, space can be shaped by synthesizing the physical and the metaphysical, constructing transcendence from the emphasis on the numinous." (Ugljen Archive). This statement clearly demonstrates that his architectural approach is not merely technical or formal but is also philosophically grounded, with the interplay of light, materiality, and spatial organization being used to evoke a sense of transcendence.

Ugljen does not treat architecture solely as a material structure but as an experiential me-

dium, whereby space becomes a conduit for connecting users to deeper layers of perception and emotion. In this context, his sacred spaces not only reflect functional and formal innovation but also serve as places of introspection, universal experience, and spiritual connection.

## CONCLUSION

Zlatko Ugljen's architectural work represents a synthesis of the universal and the regional, achieved through a unique dialogue between spatial context, materiality, and the interaction of users, space, and the environment. His architecture is not a result of a mere replication of tradition but rather a reinterpretation of heritage through contemporary construction methods and innovative design approaches. In doing so, he not only honors cultural and natural heritage but also creates architecture that remains relevant over time.

Ugljen's architecture is rooted in a humanistic approach, where the user is at the center of design, with a deep respect for context and environmental integration, technological innovation, and engineering solutions, as well as a subtle interpretation of the spirit of place (*genius loci*). His projects carefully balance tradition and modern technological advancements, creating spaces that reflect both place and identity while enabling a continuous dialogue between past and present.

His architecture is not static but rather a process of interpreting and reshaping cultural memory through spatial forms. His ability to create spaces that are both universally recognizable and locally specific is a result of his

*human being, for whom it is essential to create an existential environment worthy of life.*" (Ugljen's archive)

<sup>15</sup> According to his ideas, the "sanctity of space" or *genius loci* arises from qualities such as light, ambiance, and the symbolic and cultural connections that space establishes with its surroundings. Norberg-Schulz argues that architecture is not merely a physical structure but a way of shaping space to foster a deeper connection with emotional and spiritual dimensions through the experience of light, texture, and symbolism. (Norberg-Schulz, 1980)

<sup>16</sup> Jencks, in his book on postmodern architecture, discusses the Ronchamp Chapel as an example of Le Corbusier's innovation in architectural form, light, and expressive freedom. (Jencks, 1984)

profound understanding of *genius loci* – a concept that permeates all his projects. Rather than replicating traditional motifs, he embeds them within contemporary architectural languages, ensuring that each project becomes a space of dialogue between past, present, and future.

In an era where globalization often erases local specificities, Ugljen's architecture stands as proof that a balance can be achieved between contemporary architectural principles and a profound respect for cultural heritage. His projects are not isolated from international architectural currents, yet they remain deeply rooted in the cultural and natural context of their surroundings. His work serves as a guide for future generations of architects striving for sustainable, contextually sensitive architecture – one that embraces innovation while maintaining its connection to place and identity. Architecture has the power to shape not only physical space but also collective consciousness and a sense of belonging to a community.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a time in which many of his works are disappearing, being forgotten, or neglected. In a socio-political context that often disregards the continuity of architectural heritage, Ugljen's contributions might have been more widely recognized under different circumstances. Nevertheless, his work remains a lasting reminder that architec-

ture is not merely a physical entity but a medium of communication, dialogue, and connection. As Mile Stojić poignantly wrote in *Ruža u oluji* (A Rose in the Storm): "A sorrow too great, for beauty was created for those for whom it was never destined."

Considering Ugljen's architecture through the lens of contemporary spatial theories, sacred architecture, and critical regionalism, it becomes evident that his work belongs to a broader architectural discourse that seeks a renewed balance between modernity and tradition. In this context, it is fitting to recall Frank Lloyd Wright's thoughts from his essay *Cardboard House* (1931), in which he emphasized: "A house is, we are inclined to believe, a noble companion to man and trees; therefore, it should possess a tranquility and texture that will quiet it as a whole and bring it into an elegant harmony with its natural surroundings. Every building intended for human needs should be elemental, a delicate feature of the terrain, complementing its natural environment and maintaining a close relationship with the ground."

Throughout his entire body of work, Ugljen remained committed to this very philosophy – that architecture should not be imposed but should permeate space, its spirit, and its history, creating environments where man, architecture, and nature exist in harmonious dialogue and balance.

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