

Itinerary: XX Century Architecture

19 The Kombinat Area



The Kombinat Area is a peripheral neighborhood in the southwestern part of Tirana, about 6 kilometers away from the city centre. It gets its name from the Kombinati i Tekstileve (The Textiles Plant) built with the support of the Soviet Union in the early 1950s. With the construction of Stalin Textiles Plant, glass factory, brick factory and railway station, Kombinat became a typical socialist workers' neighborhood. A series of buildings that are reminders of the Soviet Union and communist lifestyle can still be found there.

The old, newly painted monumental entrance to the plant, the main square where a statue of Stalin used to stand, as well as the former plant administration building where the local government offices are now located continue to remain as strong and strange references of that period.



LEGEND

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1 The Palace of Culture



The center of Tirana was designed as a monumental space. The Palace of Culture was built on the site of the Old Bazaar of Tirana, and the first brick was laid by the former Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev on June 3rd, 1959. After the permanent departure of Soviet specialists from Albania two years later, the work on the Palace of Culture was completed with the utmost commitment of the most prominent domestic architects and engineers. The structure of the building was visibly influenced by the Palazzo dei Congressi in Rome and the Finland Station in St. Petersburg. Construction work was completed in 1963.

2 The Palace of Cubes



This building is situated in Dibra Street and was designed by architect Max Velo, in 1972. It represents in itself the aspiration of Albanian architecture to keep pace with that of the other, especially the Western countries. In one of the apartments in this building, there was a study with a fireplace in it. This was the only apartment in a shared residential building in Albania with such a feature, which went against the socialist type of home unit style. The building was seen as exhibiting Modernist tendencies and concepts and Maks Velo, its architect was put under surveillance and later arrested and imprisoned. For decades Dritëro Agolli e Ismail Kadare, the two literary giants, as well as prominent composer Feim Ibrahim, lived and produced in it works that crossed the borders of Albania. In 2015, the building was declared a Cultural Monument of the Second Category.

3 The Queen Geraldine Maternity Hospital



The Queen Geraldine Maternity Hospital was designed by the Italian architect Tito Chioni between 1939 and 1940 as "Casa Materna e Infanzia", Tirana's Maternity Hospital. Above the main entrance there is a three-part relief by the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Gronchi. The building has not changed its function. In 2004, following a proposal of a group of intellectuals consisting of His Excellency Rrok Mirdita, writer Ismail Kadare, Prof. Dr. Mentor Petrela and Prof. Dr. Maksim Cikuli, the hospital was named the Queen Geraldine Maternity Hospital.

4 The Ministry of Education and Sports



The seat of the Ministry of Education and Sports was built during the 1930s as the Headquarters of the Italian Military Barracks. During the years of the communist regime, the building underwent changes and a second floor was added in 1962, according to a design by the architect Skënder Luarasi. The original design includes L-shaped floor plans for both floors. The main entrance is located west on the side road perpendicular to the main road Durrës Street.

5 The Asllan Rusi Sports Palace



The construction of the Sports Palace (Arena) was completed in 1963 according to a project designed and executed by local architects. At the time, it was called Partizani Sports Palace and it was the main arena for basketball, volleyball, wrestling, gymnastics, weightlifting, and other sports. With its 4000 seats capacity, these premises provided at the time a modern enclosed venue where national and international events of hand ball games and other disciplines were played.

The venue was named Asllan Rusi in 1996, when the late prominent Dinamo volleyballer was declared the "Volleyballer of the Century", and the "Merited Master of Sport".

6 The House of Officers



This building was completed in 1938, on the 10-year anniversary of the Albanian Monarchy and it was built to be used as a House of Officers (a recreational and cultural centre). The building was designed by architect Dhimitër Dhespoti, who chose to use a historic style that the city lacked. During the communist regime, it was a Military Cultural Center until 1970, when it became the seat of Albania's League of Writers and Artists and later of the Ministry of Culture. The building stands out for its Neo-Renaissance style.

The building serving as the seat of the Holy See of Vatican in Albania was built in 1931 and was initially the home of Mr. Abedin Libohova. During the totalitarian regime, it was the headquarters of the Embassy of Communist Cuba, and in the 1990s, when this embassy closed its doors and after its restoration, the building became the seat of the Holy See of Vatican. The building is a remarkable architectural achievement with a distinct Neo-Renaissance style and being close to the center it has the treatment that resists time.

7 The Embassy of Vatican



8 The Bank of Albania



The Bank of Albania building is situated in the capital city centre, on the western side of Scanderbeg Square. It was designed by Prof. Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo (1890-1966), one of the most prominent Italian architects of the time. The works for the construction of the National Bank of Albania, the name used at the time, began in February 1937 and it was carried out by the Staccioli & Fortuzi company and overseen by engineer Cipriani. The inauguration ceremony took place on October 30, 1938. The architectural style of the bank belongs to Rationalism, a movement that flourished in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. The entire round hall is decorated with a gigantic mosaic, a work of art of large dimensions created by the Italian artist Giulio Rossi in 1939. 77 years later, on October 30, 2015, a symbolically chosen date, the renovated Bank of Albania building was inaugurated, and the Museum of Bank of Albania was opened for the first time.

9 The Ministries Square: The Centre of Tirana – Monumental Ensemble

During the 1930s, the Centre of Tirana underwent the most important transformation of its history, with the construction of the new governmental buildings and the outlining of Scanderbeg Square. Between 1929 – 1931, the Centre of Tirana became a construction site designed by the Italian architects Armando Brasini and Florestano de Fausto. The ministerial complex and the City Hall were built according to the project designed by the Florentine architect Florestano de Fausto. The centre of this museum area was also enriched with genuine national values, such as the symbols of Scanderbeg and Alexander the Great. The buildings of the ministries and other institutions situated at the center of the capital city and along its main street axis were declared a Cultural Monument Ensemble in 2000.

10 The Shallvare Buildings

The Shallvare Buildings are a manifestation of imposed Soviet architecture. They were built on the field bearing the same name during 1951- 1953. The project was designed by the architect Gani Strazimiri and was influenced by the Soviet totalitarian style. The Shallvare buildings were the first collective residential buildings of the Russian-Soviet type. Elements of traditional architecture were used in their outer architecture in observance of the "national form and socialist content" dogma. They were initially covered with wooden roofs that have now been changed into concrete flat roofs.

11 Former Dajti Hotel

For a long time, Dajti Hotel was considered the best hotel in Albania. It is situated in the center of the city, along the main boulevard of Tirana and it was named after the Dajti Mountain. This hotel was designed in 1939 – 1940 by the Italian architect Gherardo Bosio. A ballroom adjacent to the entrance hall was located on the ground floor. The top floors are much simpler regarding the style and structure than the opulent, marble-lined ground floor, which can be explained by the drop in funds during the war years. At the time, Dajti Hotel had everything necessary to be an avant-garde hotel and it was considered to be one of the biggest and most modern hotels in the Balkans. After World War II the building was briefly used as the seat of the communist government of the time. For a long time, this hotel was the only hotel where all foreigners who came to Tirana were accommodated. Even after the fall of the communist regime the hotel remained a state property. In 2002, it stopped functioning as a hotel and in 2007 Dajti Hotel received the status of a Cultural Monument protected by the state as a historic building.

12 The Prime Minister's Office

The Prime Minister's Office Building was designed by the Italian architect Gherardo Bosio in 1939. This building served initially as the Luogotenenza (military envoy of the Kingdom of Italy) office building.

After 1945, from the first post-war government to date it has served as the seat of the Council of Ministers and State Protocol. In 1974, a bas-relief made by a group of sculptors (Muntaz Dhrami, Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, Hektor Dule) and depicting motives of Albanian life was placed asymmetrically on the front part of the building. Whereas in the 1980s functional annexes were added to the building, changing its initial appearance at the sides and back.

13 The Palace of Congresses

The Palace of Congresses was designed and built in the 1980s as a symbol of the communist ideology and as an expression of the power of the totalitarian regime. The construction work began in 1982 and ended four years later in 1986. The structure of the building was inspired by the typical building in Gjirokastra, Berat, and the fort/house (kulla) of the North of Albania.

The Palace of Congresses is 70 meters long and 18-23 meters tall. This building was designed in such a way as to easily allow for its conversion from a meeting hall into a concert hall. During the communist regime, the party in power held its congresses here. Nowadays the building is used for conferences, festivals, trade fairs, ceremonies, concerts, and other events.

14 The President's Office

The building was intended to be the seat of the Soviet Embassy in Albania. Its foundations were laid in 1959. But in 1961, when the Soviet Union terminated the diplomatic relations with Albania, the construction of the building had not been completed yet, so the Soviet Union Embassy was never placed there. The building is exceptionally conventional and decorated with exaggerated ornaments, typical of the Stalinist architecture.

The building's large volume is disrupted by the vertical rhythm of the massive columns placed at the front away from one another and the retracted window frames. It has oddly been built away from the road, which gives it a special character that emphasizes its importance. The building hosts the offices of the administration of the President of the Republic of Albania.

15 The Mother Teresa Square (University of Arts and the Polytechnic University)

Situated at the end of Dëshmorët e Kombit (The Martyrs of the Nation) Boulevard on the southern part of Tirana, this square was designed by the Italian architect Gherardo Bosio during 1939-194. Bosio designed the Empire Boulevard (now The Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard) which ended in Piazza Littorio in a Rationalist style. The buildings surrounding the square had various administrative functions that were intended to form a complete political and sportive buildings complex. Some of these buildings were Casa della Gioventù Littoria Albanese (G.L.A) – now University of Tirana's Rector's Offices and the Archaeological Museum. The GLA (casa delle organizzazioni giovanili = house of youth organizations) is a complex building. It is designed in a "U" shape, which offers the option of organizing events in both sides. Across from it is Casa del Opera del Dopolavoro Albanese (O.D.A) – now the University of Arts, and in the center, there was Casa del Fascio or Palazzo Littorio, now the Polytechnic University. The dominant colour is the white of marble slabs. This square is named Nënë Tereza (Mother Teresa) in honor of the Albanian Nobel Prize winner and Catholic nun.

The University of Arts

The building of this university was designed by the Italian architect Bosio between 1939 – 1941 and was completed in 1942. At the time, this building served as ODA (Casa del Opera del Dopolavoro Albanese) and it displays simple architectonic lines developed in a single plan of the main façade. It has a main entrance and a modular layout towards its parts. The architecture of this building, similar to those in its vicinity, belong to the Fascist Rationalist Style. Initially, it was the seat of Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro Albanese (a type of entertainment club organized by the Fascist Party).

Presently it hosts the University of Arts, a public institution of higher education in the field of arts. The University of Arts was founded in 1966 as the Higher Institute of Arts. In 1990, the Higher Institute of Arts was promoted to the level of a university, changing the name into the Academy of Arts.

The Polytechnic University building was designed by the Italian architect Gherardo Bosio during 1939-1940 and was completed in 1942 as Casa del Fascio (Fascist Home) or Palazzo Littorio. Its architecture is characterized by compact parallelepipeds joining one another, which gives the impression of a Roman castle and brings to mind the traditional Albanian fort combined with principles of Modernism. This building stands in harmony with the hills in the background. In 1957, the State University of Tirana was moved there as the union of five existing institutions of higher education, the most important of which being the Institute of Sciences, founded in 1947. Between 1985 and 1992 it was called the Enver Hoxha University of Tirana, after Enver Hoxha, the Communist dictator who died on April 11, 1985. It is now called the Polytechnic University of Tirana.

The Polytechnic University

16 The Palace of Brigades (The Presidential Palace)

The construction of the Presidential Palace, also known as the Palace of Brigades, was initiated by King Zog I, in 1936 and was designed by Italian architects Giulio Berte and later finished by Gherardo Bosio. In the meantime, King Zog I had left Albania since 1939 as a result of the Italian invasion of the country. If before Bosio the building had an Art Deco style, thanks to him it moved towards the Monumental Rationalism. The construction of the Palace was completed by Italians in 1941 and it was inaugurated by King Victor Emmanuel III.

The Park surrounding the Palace stretches over 36 hectares. This Park is a real gallery with myth-inspired sculptures, built between 1930 – 1943, according to the model of the Temple of Muses of the mythological cult of Apollo. The residence served as a Royal Palace only once during the visit of Emperor Victor Emmanuel III to Albania in May 1941.

It took the name The Palace of Brigades in 1945, in honor of the partisan brigades that liberated it. This name was used during the communist regime. Since 1992, after the fall of the communist regime, the official name of this institution is The Presidential Palace.

17 The Prefabricated Apartment Buildings

During the 1970s and 1980s, with the intention of lowering the costs, the work began for the construction of homes using prefabricated concrete modules, based on the experiences of the Eastern Bloc.

Apartments in prefabricated buildings were cheap and were built using Chinese technology. It is a fact that these unsightly buildings set the seal on the entire socialist architecture. Thus, during the 1970s in Tirana, in order to completely eliminate private property, urban and non-urban structures were destroyed and replaced with residential complexes-prefabricated apartment buildings of a modest quality.

18 Former Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re"

This neoclassical complex was designed by a group of Soviet architects and constructed by Albanian specialists during 1950-1952. It was once the building of the Albanian National Film Studio known as Kinostudio. The Albanian National Center of Cinematography, the Marubi Film and the Multimedia Academy, the Ministry of Culture, the Institute of Cultural Monuments, etc. are currently located there.

The building includes elements of religious origin such as the portico that resembles those of Greek temples, the Corinthian columns, the liturgical objects on both sides of the entrance gate, the medallions, etc. The only socialist symbol is the figure of a woman holding a red star.