

# Socialist Postmodernism

## Conceptual and comparative analysis of recent representative architecture in in Pyongyang, Astana and Ashgabat, 1989-2014

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### ABSTRACT

Following the architectural guidelines of the socialist countries, the architecture of North Korea has been formally classified either as architecture of socialist realism or of socialist modernism, with the particularity of the two formal systems coexisting over the years in response to the official ideological discourse. Studies of socialist architecture have rarely included postmodernism until the fall of the Berlin Wall, identifying the appearance of the neo-historicist or technologically inspired forms with the restoration of capitalism, as an opposition to reduced forms (colours and materials) of socialist modernism. In this sense, the architecture of North Korea produced after 1989 -- i.e. since the construction related with the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students in Pyongyang -- remains in a kind of conceptual limbo: still maintaining the socialist character as well as carefully chosen historicist references according to the prescriptions of the Juche theory.

Postmodernism appears in Western architecture starting from the 1970s, claiming historical references and the expression of relationship between the building and its physical and social context. However, the use of these references is rational and depends on a specific narrative; therefore the theorist Robert Venturi introduces concepts like "irony" or "double meaning" in the analyses of architectural works (Venturi et al 1972). The connecting line between socialist realism (as defined by Boris Groys, 1992) and postmodernism refers to this rational and industrial use of traditional forms, traced by Romanian historian and theo-

rist of architecture Augustin Ioan (1999) and more recently by Rem Koolhaas in one of his lectures on Russian architecture (2014).

The article investigates the post-modern nature of North Korean architecture of the last twenty-five years and relates it to similar examples from Russia, China, and the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan where the newly built capital cities have followed the representative trend of Pyongyang.

**Key words:** North Korea, architecture, socialist realism, socialist modernism, post modernism

### RESUMEN

Según los patrones arquitectónicos sobre los países socialistas, la arquitectura de Corea del Norte se ha clasificado formalmente como arquitectura de realismo socialista o de la modernidad socialista, con la particularidad de que ambos sistemas formales coexistieron en los últimos años en respuesta al discurso ideológico oficial. Los estudiosos de la arquitectura socialista raramente han incluido la posmodernidad hasta la caída del Muro de Berlín, identificando con la restauración del capitalismo la aparición del neo-historicismo o las formas inspiradas en el tecnicismo, como una forma de oposición a las formas austeras (colores y materiales) del modernismo socialista. En este sentido, a partir de 1989 --es decir, desde las construcciones relacionadas con el XIIIº Festival Mundial de la Juventud y los Estudiantes en Pyongyang-- la arquitectura de Corea del Norte permaneció en una especie de limbo conceptual: manteniendo el carácter socialista y eligiendo a la vez cuidadas referencias historicistas, de acuerdo con las prescripciones del pensamiento *Juche*.

El posmodernismo aparece en la arquitectura occidental a partir de la década de 1970, alegando referencias históricas y la expresión de la relación entre el edificio y su contexto físico y social. Sin embargo, el uso de estas referencias es racional y depende de una narrativa específica. Por lo tanto, el teórico Robert Venturi introduce conceptos como "ironía" o "doble sentido" en los análisis de obras arquitectónicas (Venturi et al 1972). La línea de conexión entre el realismo socialista (como se define por Boris Groys, 1992) y el posmodernismo se refiere a este uso racional e industrial de las formas tradicionales, trazada por el historiador rumano y teórico de la arquitectura Augustin Ioan (1999) y más recientemente por Rem Koolhaas en una de sus conferencias sobre la arquitectura rusa (2014).

En este artículo se investiga la naturaleza post-moderna de la arquitectura de Corea del Norte de los últimos veinticinco años, y lo relaciona con ejemplos similares de Rusia, China, y las ex repúblicas soviéticas de Kazajstán y Turkmenistán, donde las capitales de nueva construcción han seguido la tendencia representativa de Pyongyang.

**Palabras clave:** Corea del Norte, arquitectura, realismo socialista, modernismo socialista, postmodernidad

### RESUM

Seguint els patrons arquitectònics sobre els països socialistes, l'arquitectura de Corea del Nord s'ha classificat formalment com a arquitectura de realisme socialista o de la modernitat socialista, amb la particularitat que tots dos sistemes formals van coexistir en els últims anys en resposta al discurs ideològic oficial. Els estudiosos de l'arquitectura socialista ra-

rament han inclòs la postmodernitat fins a la caiguda del Mur de Berlín, identificant amb la restauració del capitalisme l'aparició del neo-historicisme o les formes inspirades en el tecnicisme, com una forma d'oposició a les formes austeres (colors i materials) del modernisme socialista. En aquest sentit, a partir del 1989 --és a dir, des de les construccions relacionades amb el XIIIè Festival Mundial de la Joventut i els Estudiants en Pyongyang-- l'arquitectura de Corea del Nord va romandre en una mena de llimbs conceptual: mantenint el caràcter socialista i triant alhora cuidades referències historicistes, d'acord amb les prescripcions del pensament Juche.

El postmodernisme apareix en l'arquitectura occidental a partir de la dècada de 1970, al·legant referències històriques i l'expressió de la relació entre l'edifici i el seu context físic i social. No obstant això, l'ús d'aquestes referències és racional i depèn d'una narrativa específica. Per tant, el teòric Robert Venturi introdueix conceptes com "ironia" o "doble sentit" en les anàlisis d'obres arquitectòniques (Venturi et al 1972). La línia de connexió entre el realisme socialista (com es defineix per Boris Groys, 1992) i el postmodernisme es refereix a aquest ús racional i industrial de les formes tradicionals, traçada per l'historiador romanès i teòric de l'arquitectura Augustin Ioan (1999) i més recentment per Rem Koolhaas en una de les conferències sobre l'arquitectura russa (2014).

En aquest article s'investiga la naturalesa postmoderna de l'arquitectura de Corea del Nord dels últims vint anys, i el relaciona amb exemples similars de Rússia, la Xina, i les exrepúbliques soviètiques de Kazakhstan i Turkmenistan, on les capitals de nova construcció han seguit la tendència representativa de Pyongyang.

**Paraules clau:** Corea del Nord, arquitectura, realisme socialista, modernisme socialista, postmodernitat

### **Introduction: hypothesis, objectives, methodology, examples.**

The architecture developed in North Korea, regardless of the date of buildings or monuments construction, is usually recognized and explained as a socialist-realist -- or even more often as Stalinist, linking its representative function for the regime with the similar use of architecture in the Soviet Union between 1930s and 1950s (Day, 2003). North Korea's specificity is found in the coexistence of the neoclassical forms of socialist realism with modernist architecture, prefabricated construction and reduced decoration that always respects the same ideological slogans. Unlike other socialist countries where it is possible to trace the stylistic succession between socialist realism, socialist modernism and postmodernism, historically linked with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the change of political system, in North Korea the entire architectural production apparently belongs to the same level, following the petrified discourse of national form and socialist content.

The aim of this article is to place the conceptual margins of recent North Korean architecture produced since the publication of *On the Art of Architecture*, the theoretical treatise on architecture written by North Korea's second Supreme Leader, Kim Jong Il, and published on May 21, 1991. The treatise was released at time of political upheaval for North Korea's allies, a process that had started with velvet revolutions Eastern Europe and the fall of Berlin Wall at the end of the 1980s, and culminated in the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, followed by those of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. With these political changes, cultural and aesthetic paradigms began to alter as well, and the representative models in architecture and design changed to resemble Western postmodernism.

With the collapse of communist party-states in the 1990s, the architecture created in the former socialist countries included historical elements in a more explicit manner, with the intention to expand the meanings and include national identity and classical references. With the change of investor from the state to the private developer, urbanism decreased its scale to approach the human vision, saturating the urban space with equipment and advertising. This paper will examine the influences of these changes on North Korean architecture, exploring the postmodern nature of its new forms and also to define their divergence from the architecture other (post-) socialist states, considering that the links between North Korea and the former socialist countries in many cases continued despite political differences.

Following a brief account of North Korea's architectural history from the post-Korean War reconstruction of the 1950s to the end the 1980s, the paper explores the visual and compositional characteristics of the North Korean architecture and urbanism described by Kim Jong Il in his 1991 treatise, highlighting North Korea's links with the Soviet-based socialist realism. Next, the theoretical foundations of western postmodernism developed since the 1970s will be examined, in order to recognize similarities and proximity between the two aesthetic systems based on the physical and social context and on the reaction to the simplicity of the forms of modern movement. The paper then returns to the architecture of North Korea, analysing the most important buildings and representative complexes built mainly in Pyongyang since the 1990s, i.e. after the construction boom related to the attempt to co-host the 1988 Olympics and the subsequent organization of the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1989. However, the main focus will be on recent constructions of the Kim Jong Un era, stressing the shift towards architecture as a representation of consumerism in terms of socialist postmodernism specific for the North Korean context.

Finally, the paper establishes links and parallels, formal or conceptual, with architectures developed in former Soviet republics such as Turkmenistan and Ka-

zakhstan, countries that have experienced massive new construction following their independence and creation of new capitals as model cities. These points of reference are useful to enlarge the picture of this specific leader and identity-oriented postmodernism, which shared – despite political differences – among North Korea, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan today.

## North Korean Architecture and Soviet Socialist Realism

The utter destruction of North Korea's cities by American bombing during the 1950 – 1953 Korean War, particularly the capital city Pyongyang where allegedly just two modern buildings were left standing at the end of the war, gave North Korean city-builders and their Soviet and East European advisers a virtual tabula rasa on which to reconstruct cities according to socialist principles (Armstrong 2005). The Soviet Union was by far the largest influence on North Korean architecture and urban design in the early years of the DPRK. During the period of Soviet occupation in northern Korea (1945 – 1948) and in the two years leading up to the Korean War, a number of buildings were erected in the neo-classical style favoured in the USSR and Eastern Europe at that time (Ahn, 2014; see also Meuser, 2012). These included Kim Il Sung University (1946), Pyongyang Hospital, Haebang ("Liberation") Hotel, and others. But the urban landscape of North Korea's cities, particularly the capital, were radically transformed under Soviet and East European guidance in the post-Korean War period. The Pyongyang Reconstruction Plan of 1952 was outlined by Kim Jong-hui, an architect trained in the Soviet Union. Hamhung, North Korea's second-largest city, was rebuilt with the guidance of engineers and architects from East Germany (Frank, 1996). Soviet and East European advisors played key roles in designing and building North Korea's cities, and the reconstruction of the country was heavily financed by aid, equipment, and labour from the socialist bloc.

The result was an urban landscape very much in keeping with trends prevailing in the USSR and Eastern Europe at the time. Neoclassical forms dominated, following the model of Soviet socialist realism, and cities were organized along a grid pattern similar to urban centres in Europe but quite unlike traditional Korean cities. Like Moscow, post-1949 Beijing, and other socialist cities, Pyongyang was oriented toward a large public square – in Pyongyang's case, Kim Il Sung square, completed just one year after the end of the Korean War. The main thoroughfare, Stalin Street (renamed Sungri or "Victory" Street in the late 1950s), like Stalinallee in East Berlin, was lined with multi-story showcase residential apartments. Buildings such as Pyongyang Station (1954), Daedongmun Theater (1955), and Moranbong Theatre would have looked quite at home in Moscow, Warsaw, or East Berlin.

However, the socialist realist phase of North Korean architecture peaked in 1960, the official end of the post-war reconstruction period, and from then on the architecture of the DPRK followed a distinctive and self-consciously “nationalist” path. As early as 1954, at the First National Competition for Architects and Construction Engineers, Kim Il Sung declared that North Korea’s architects should design buildings that apply traditional Korean styles to modern aesthetics and needs. The first examples of North Korea’s “neo-traditional” architecture were the Pyongyang Grand Theatre and Okryugwan Restaurant, both completed in 1960 with traditional-style Korean roofs and other features reflecting Korean traditional architecture, albeit with modern materials, proportions and scale. Other neo-traditional structures would follow in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, including the People’s Palace of Culture (1974) and the Grand People’s Study House (1982). This may be linked to the emergence of Juche ideology, that was first articulated by Kim Il Sung in late 1955 and came to dominate political discourse by the 1970s. Juche emphasized self-reliance and Korean national identity in all things, including politics, culture, economic development and architecture. The second competition of the Korean Architecture Association, in 1964, made this connection explicit, relaying the Korean Workers’ Party directive to “overcome formalism and dogmatism by the establishment of Juche for the realization of more, faster, and better architecture.” (Ahn 2014, p. 82). With this declaration North Korea officially abandoned Stalinist neo-classicism and emphasised a “national architecture with socialist characteristics”.

This is not to say that North Korea after 1960 was removed from foreign architectural influences, especially the influences of other socialist countries with which North Korea maintained close connections. Nor was North Korea’s neo-traditionalism, for the most part, an attempt to recreate pre-modern urban spaces or neighbourhoods with vaguely kitschy verisimilitude, as was done in post-war Warsaw or East Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s (Urban, 1980s). With the major exception of the old quarters of Kaesong, which were rebuilt (and are still maintained) in traditional Korean building styles, North Korea’s neo-traditional architecture applies traditional elements and motifs to modern buildings that serve contemporary purposes. Most of these neo-traditional buildings are large public structures such as cultural centres and theatres. Pyongyang’s stock of residential buildings, which has undergone several periods of expansion (most recently around the year 2012, the 100th anniversary of founding leader Kim Il Sung’s birth) have tended toward high-rise modern apartment blocks. Contemporary international design is clearly evident in the architectural boom of the 1980s, which include the Pyongyang Circus, the East Pyongyang Grand Theatre, Pyongyang International Cinema Hall, and sports facilities such as the Pyongyang Ice Rink and the May Day Stadium. The latter two in particular are reminis-

cent of some of the more phantasmagoric structures that emerged in the final years of the Soviet Union (Chaubin, 2011).

With the collapse of the socialist bloc at the beginning of the 1990s, North Korea embarked on yet another phase in its architectural development. This new direction was crystallized in Kim Jong Il's 1991 treatise on architecture, which is both the culmination of long-standing debates in the DPRK as well as a reaction to the remarkable changes in the socialist world at the time of the book's publication. Although North Korea did not abandon one-party rule and is not in that sense "post-socialist," architecture in the DPRK since the 1990s has followed a path parallel but not identical to that of the former socialist countries.

### **Theory of North Korean Architecture According to Kim Jong Il 1991**

The publication of the treaty by Kim Jong Il on the Juche character of architecture followed a long debate on the national and socialist content that all the arts should demonstrate unequivocally. Similar treatises were published for the fields of cinematography, painting, literature, dance and theatre. Especially after the entry of Kim Jong Il on the political scene, including his appointment in 1971 as head of the Department of Culture and Arts of the Central Committee and in 1973 as head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, architecture began to have a very high propaganda value. Although his passion was film, Kim Jong Il also received the title of "great architect". The "Dear Leader's" book serves both as the conceptual resume based on the Juche ideology, developed since the founding of the DPRK, and as a manual of requirements that future architecture should fulfil. Thus, published at a critical time for the socialist world, the Kim Jong Il's treatise ensured the continuity of concepts and forms regarding the past and the future. In his honour, the date of the publication of "The Art of Architecture" instigated the celebration of the most important annual festival that displays the latest projects of architecture and urbanism and presumably has the increasing foreign participations.

The most important definition of the North Korean architecture is the inherited formula of socialist realism: "national in form, socialist in content", coined in the USSR in the 1930s and especially developed during the early post-war period in the socialist countries. It's repetition about 60 years later, when criticism of wasteful and unjustified monumentalism of Stalinist architecture by Khrushchev had already took place and even got surpassed by the formal and structural experiments of the Brezhnev era, can be interpreted in two ways. Commonly, it relates to the isolation of the regime that extends from politics to culture and, secondly, as an expression of identity, i.e., "architecture can be neither supraclassist or supranational". A more flexible reading of the old Soviet slogan describes the

basic features that still govern the North Korean architectural production: planning and state-building, with centralized decision-making mechanisms and designers personified in large professional collectives; the use of national forms as decoration but not as an organization, ignoring their structural or artistic qualities and fixing them as signs of originality. Apparently the architecture that is created in North Korea is unique and cannot be understood or properly used anywhere else.

The choice of representative national elements is a completely rational task realized according to the ideological evaluation: "In the architectural heritage there an obsolete and reactionary part, in addition to the progressive and popular one. We must distinguish well the progressive and popular from the obsolete and reactionary to regain the first and abandon the latter". This consideration of Kim Jong Il was inherited from Leninist idea of the coexistence of culture 1 and culture 2 in all historical periods and was the basis for stylistic formation of socialist realism.

### **Possible theoretical connections between socialist realism and post-modernism**

Architectural modernism -- straight lines, houses as "machines for living" (Le Corbusier, 1998, p. 84) and buildings built according to the principle that the form is a result of the function -- symbolically ended its life in 1972 (Jencks, C, 1972, p 9). The Pruitt-Igoe housing project in Saint Louis, designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki (ironically also the designer of the destroyed New York World Trade Centre Twin Towers) was blown up on March 16th in order to end the social segregation and criminality widespread among its inhabitants. The Pruitt-Igoe project was a complex of thirty-three, eleven-story communal housing blocks built in the 1950s, closely resembling the Khrushchevki built around the same time in the Soviet Union. However, disagreements and parallel streams to the International Style had been around since the conclusion of CIAM<sup>1</sup> in 1959, including criticisms of modern urbanism, the scale of the car and the dissolution of traditional public space into the large green and often undefined spaces.

In his book/manifesto for an unconventional architecture, Robert Venturi argued that he preferred hybrid elements, products of some kind of compromise, over purity; twisted before the straight lines or double over clearly exemplified elements that become equally unusual as impersonal; unconventional than de-

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<sup>1</sup> Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne. The most important international architect's organization that promoted modern architecture, founded in Switzerland in 1928 and led until its last years by Le Corbusier.



signed; inclusive rather than exclusive; those multi-layered more than simple ones generated from the footprints of the past as well as from innovation; inconsequential and mysterious rather than clear and direct (Venturi, 1966, p. 31). Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* advocates for a richness of meanings above their unequivocal clarity. However, it was his next book *Learning from Las Vegas* that definitely changed the paradigms of modern architecture. In this book, Venturi and his co-authors explored complexities between forms and meanings from a popular (or populist) architecture of Las Vegas avenues (Venturi et al 1972), its casinos that include hotels and shopping malls. The importance of signalling the buildings in order to transmit their use through specific formal elements, labels or simple advertising, leaves the architectural form in the second plane: "The symbol dominates the space. Architecture is not enough." (Venturi et al 1972, p. 13).

Postmodernism in Western architecture renewed the idea of the traditional town, with its contrasts and dualities between the monumental and popular architecture, playing with the roles of each of them in a kind of historical collage (Jencks, 1985, p. 454). There is a significant parallel between the proclamations of Anatoly Lunacharsky of 1930s claiming the right of citizens to the columns and that of the Catalan postmodernist architect Ricardo Bofill who in the early 1980s, named his project *Les Arcades du Lac*, near Paris as "Versailles for the people" (Ioan, Leach, 1992, p. 64).

Both postmodernism and socialist realism use the historicist or traditional elements to create an additional meaning to the official function of the building or to its physical context. In socialist realism, this meaning is related to ideology and political discourse, while in postmodernism use of traditional elements has either popular or commercial purpose and is often experimental. Both styles are united by a close connection they have with the popular masses and by the search for greater understanding of the message transmitted by architectural form for a non-specialized audience. Therefore, the two methods avoid abstraction, while still using contemporary materials, structural elements, modern finishing or systems of the internal organization. The architecture of Soviet socialist realism used advanced structural methods, especially in high-rise projects, although their exteriors were built and decorated with traditional techniques causing enormous costs in material, labour and execution time. Postmodernism combined the elements of classical orders with the contemporary construction, prefabricated elements and steel curtain walls. The architecture developed in North Korea since 1980s, and especially in the constructions works related to the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students, used the new technology with architectural elements and traditional decoration superficially attached, suggesting a post-modern collage.

Unlike the opposition to the traditional form asserted by the modernist avant-garde, socialist realism proclaimed: "We Bolsheviks do not reject the cultural heritage. On the contrary, we are critically assimilating the cultural heritage of all nations and all times in order to choose from it all that can inspire the working people of Soviet society to great exploits on labour, science and culture". (Andrei Zhdanov, cited in Groys 1992, p. 40) Through this relationship with the traditional form, socialist realism sought to define and express the national identity, especially important for the USSR of the Stalinist period as well as for North Korea. In postmodernism, the originality and historical context also play important roles as part of the "text" of the architectural form, but in a freer, less ideologically restricted way, playing with historical and popular elements in order to generate potential additional interpretations. Both sought to embellish reality by transforming the reality (including the State) into a total work of art. (Ioan, 1992, p. 65)

Finally, the conceptual parallelism between the two formal systems resides in the rational choice of historical references, conditioned by the intended meaning to be communicated by architecture. Despite their different contextual origins, both claim to represent a non-existing reality, creating scenarios for future societies (Groys, 1992, p. 51). It is of course an optimistic future, especially in the works of socialist realist art and architecture, although also a future determined and controlled by a power, either political or economic. The elements used to represent it belonged to a limited, ideologically acceptable catalogue of forms, unlike the postmodern repertoire whose use of historicist forms is defined as eclectic, ironical and playful. The main difference between the two styles lies in this formal and interpretive freedom.

### **The context and main characteristics of post-modern architecture in the former socialist countries**

Modernism initiated in socialist countries starting from the 1960s and following the Khrushchevite criticism of the Stalinist architecture, suffered a formal and conceptual deterioration, proportional to the distance from Moscow and the relaxation of the tight ideological control over the arts and architecture. So right from the beginning of the 1980s, a period actually close to the beginnings of postmodernism in the West, the architecture in countries like Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and peripheral republics of the USSR developed an eclectic architecture, with experimental forms, rooted in ancient traditions that used local techniques and materials. Prefabrication and mass construction based on

typical projects that generated impersonal and repetitive environments were no longer representative of popular interests and tastes.

Works such as the Ministry of Highways in Tbilisi from 1974 or the palace of marriages in the same city from 1985, Druzhba sanatorium in Yalta built in 1984, circus buildings in cities like Tashkent or Chisinau built in the 70s and 80s, or the Drama Theatre Fyodor Dostoyevsky inaugurated in 1987 in Novgorod, defined a specific modernism that reinterpreted both forms of Soviet constructivism and local traditional architectures. The symbolism was an important part of these projects that avoided typologies and standardization. At the same time in socialist Yugoslavia, a number of architects and sculptors led the construction of a large number of monuments to the revolution, inspired by ancient forms, independent of formal discourse linked to communism or religion. Among them, the best known were the nineteen monuments of the architect Bogdan Bogdanović. In his writings and drawings, Bogdanović reached back into the premodern, or rather into deep layers of urban history such as harmony, logos, symbol, myth, oneiric, cult, ritual, and cosmology. As argued by Ljiljana Blagojević (2011) the main feature of the works of the first postmodernist architects of the Belgrade school was the withdrawal from the modern vocabulary in favour of immersing the expression in the depths of human history. A related but more radical movement was the famous Paper Architecture, a movement emerged in Moscow in the 1980s among young architects like Mikhail Belov, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin Yuri Avvakumov. Their projects, although realized only on paper, used elements from different periods of Russian architecture, including historicism, constructivism, and different architectures of socialism. Their experiments changed the paradigms of architecture promoted by large professional groups and ministries, and managed to win over fifty awards in international architecture competitions. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the socialist system represented a temporary search for a new representative form. In the 1990s it was believed, in both the east and west of Europe, that this great political change would produce a new movement and even a new style in architecture. Despite such speculation, this change did not take place, at least not in a clear, coherent and temporarily limited way. The architecture in the former socialist countries had begun to change, but in very unequal ways, related to the specific contexts of each place, in different logical processes and parallel to the implementation of market economy in the field of production of space. The big news was the return of private promotion of projects superior to the individual housing, which led to the development of investor urbanism.

The most important characteristic of this new way of designing and building was the change of urban scale. From the global vision of the large space (urban sector, microrayon or the urban block) that characterized socialist projects pro-

duced in big professional state companies, the scale decreased to the level of a unique building, sometimes only a part of a building, without regard to the adjacent urban space. The early post-socialist period marked the boom of interior design in all countries, as a way of expressing the particular taste, prestige, professional or social pretension, etc. It is a similar process and precedent of the practice that has taken place in North Korea in recent years.

The return to pre-revolutionary historicism was very important in most countries to formally define and express their new social identities. In Russia and especially in Moscow, the historicist aspect of the new architecture was dictated from the political sphere, as the system of architectural production did not adjust as quickly as the economy liberalized. The dominant voice was that of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, - beginning in the 1990s with the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (destroyed in 1931 to make way for the never built Palace of the Soviets)-- promoted the image of neo-historicism (Goldhoorn, 2009). Apart from the canonical form of the Orthodox Church, new buildings incorporated Art Nouveau or neoclassical elements to suit the taste of the new rich investor. In the country where three quarters still lived in prefabricated buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, the return of decoration was a visual claim of identity. As in Astana, Moscow also has its Triumph Tower, the "eighth sister" of the Stalinist skyscrapers. This kind of self-defined historicism, often built without much architectural criteria, resulted in Serbia in *turboarchitecture* (Jovanovic Weiss, 2006), often a kitsch mixture of neoclassical, modern and Byzantine decorative elements. The so-called *mafia baroque* (Holleran, 2014) in Bulgaria is a similar way of making architecture to underline identities separated from socialist uniformity, although often also away from urban legality.

As we have seen, such historicism was present in North Korea continuously since the 1960s, although with varying intensity and in combination with traditional and modern elements. Unlike other socialist countries, the construction never stopped being controlled from the political centre and designed as a part of large urban complexes. However, the entertainment spaces of small size and certain quest for diversity of expression in the interiors seem to be gaining ground. The high-tech architecture characterized by the expressiveness of the structure and installations taken to the exterior, and often exaggerated for decorative purposes, also determined the architectural paradigm change after the fall of the wall. It was based on the exchange of information with the West and the great landing of the Western architects in China, starting with their presence in Hong Kong. The spectacle became an important part of the thinking and designing of buildings as well as of urban space, and is increasingly visible in the architecture of Pyongyang of the recent years.

## Formal parallels: North Korea, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan

In North Korea, the construction boom associated with the celebration of the Kim Il Sung's 70th birthday in 1982 marked a climax of architecture that widely used traditional elements, especially the forms and motifs of the typical hapkak roof with green tiles, and its wooden substructure tugong transformed to fit the pre-fabricated concrete construction. Subsequent work showed increasingly less explicitly national references that were summarized in details, sometimes almost artificially added up over the modern forms. The clearest examples of this modernizing trend were the six pavilions that form the Permanent Exhibition of the Three Revolutions (ideological, technological and cultural) built in 1992. They are formally close to brutalist architecture, finished in raw concrete with abstract geometry -- except the pavilion for electronic industry that resembles the planet Saturn.

Traditional architectural elements were selected from the national past according to their progressiveness or North Korean character supposedly come from distant historical periods when, as in the kingdoms of Koguryo and Koryo, the capital of the nation was located on the northern part of peninsula. Despite remaining as necessary elements of architectural form, in the 1990s their presence was considerably reduced and architects increasingly carried out Kim Jong Il's instructions to seek original, authentic and imaginative solutions in response to social and representative requirements (Mateos, Prokopljević, 2012, p.133). The Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia Pavilion built in 2002 is an example of this tendency, being a scaled structure with large inclined surfaces finished in blue glass, with the change of material between glass and stone pieces as the only decorative elements. Although one might argue for some reference to the traditional roof in the inclined planes of the pavilion, this form is rather abstract and the dominant feature of the pavilion is the modern expression of the large glass surfaces. Glass architecture had, until recently, the most prominent representative in the high volume of Yanggakdo hotel situated in the visual centre of Pyongyang, on Yanggak Island (Yanggakdo). The hotel opened in 1995, preceding the famous Ryugyong hotel as the tallest and most modern among the finished city skyscrapers. With these two buildings Pyongyang took part in the height race, very present in the Middle and Far East metropolises (Shanghai, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai etc.), and that extended also to the ex-Soviet space as a seal of modernity in its new visual identity. The two skyscrapers, as well as the Kimilsungia pavilion, more than other buildings in the 1990s, are comparable to a post-socialist postmodernism that looks for a connection with the international modernity through technological shapes and structures, following the high-tech stream of Western postmodernism. The excessive use of glass, reflective at first

and coloured and opaque later, visible steel structure, aluminium finishes and details and, above all, extravagant and risky forms are elements that summarize this architecture.

The Ryugyong Hotel in particular is a structure that most clearly brings together North Korea's socialist post-modernism, international capital, and the skyscraper ambitions of the Middle and Far East. Begun in 1987 for the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students, construction on the 105-story hotel was halted in 1992 with the economic crisis in North Korea following the collapse of the socialist bloc. For nearly two decades the enormous pyramid-like building, which would have been the tallest hotel in the world, was a white elephant in the centre of Pyongyang. Finally, in 2008 the Egyptian company Oroscom, which was also contracted to build and run North Korea's 3G mobile-phone network, restarted work on the hotel. In July 2011 the reflective glass and metal exterior was declared complete, in time for the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth the following year. In November 2012 the Kempinski hotel group announced that it would manage the hotel, although it failed to open as scheduled in 2013.

The urban development in the new millennium, and especially the construction boom associated with the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of Kim Il Sung in 2012, show a further step in the modernization of forms and construction methods. Still, the work organization and construction-related slogans continued the immobility of the national form and socialist contents, although with results comparable to other former socialist countries. Like the previous Kim Il Sung's birthday celebrations, the 100th was also accompanied with the opening of several residential, cultural or sports complexes. These include blocks around Changjeon Avenue, near the grand monument to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il on Mansu Hill. Residential skyscrapers of 40 floors include modernised versions of the Kwangbok Avenue rounded towers with more aluminium and glass, which considerably changes the skyline of Pyongyang – making it look much more like a contemporary international city. In the same area, the new drama theatre reinterprets in a modern and abstract key the complicated traditional roof with curved eaves, while the traditional green tile is reinterpreted with decorative lighting.

Like his father and grandfather, Kim Jong Un has continued to follow closely the most important projects and construction sites, offering his opinions and guidelines on how the works should proceed. During his visit to the remodelling works at Pyongyang Sunan Airport, recently inaugurated and involved in a media polemic of whether Kim Jong Un had assassinated the chief architect, he reflected on the design: "the airport should have its appearance as an airport of the socialist country in contents, and architectural style as required by the accommodating

capacity because it should provide both international and domestic air service". The renovation of the country's main airport is part of a broad movement of city beautification, following a 2013 law which stipulates the repair of facades, the organization public spaces, and the amount of newly created spaces for leisure, sports and consumption. The renewal of the Central Zoo (June 2015) forms part of this movement, as well as the extensive reform of the site of the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Army during the Korean War including a new Museum of the Revolution, a primary school and broader memorial parks (May 2015).

Although it is not the first foreign construction in North Korea, the newly approved project for the new Wonsan airport awarded to the Hong Kong-based team of Karolis Kazlauskas & PLT Planning & Architecture, Ltd., is a strategically important precedent. The distinctly modern forms it proposes, called to place Wonsan and North Korea on the map of international modernity, are inspired by national tradition. As specified in the treaty on architecture by Kim Jong Il and even more in the speech Kim Il Sung in 1978, the design of the tourist area of Wonsan had to be the showcase of the national culture. Therefore the shape of the modern airport, its structure and details are inspired, according to its authors, by the national drums used in both Koreas.

These latest projects, together with the makeover of cities, bear a conceptual similarity with the new capitals of the post-Soviet states, especially with Astana (Kazakhstan) and Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). Astana (meaning "capital" in the Kazakh language) was appointed in 1997 as the new capital of Kazakhstan to replace Almaty, capital of the former Soviet republic. The city was largely developed from scratch in the territory of the ancient city of Aqmola, in Soviet times known as Tselinograd. Like Pyongyang in North Korea, Astana is the model for the whole nation, promoted especially from the imagination of President Nursultan Nazarbayev perusing the creation of a new post-Soviet identity. "As to my views on Soviet architecture, I will say that each epoch leaves its creations. Some of them live forever, others do not pass the test of time, quickly become morally outdated and wear out physically." (Nazarbayev, 2010, cited in Koch, 2014)

The level of investment in new construction is proportionally comparable with the effort that North Korea had used to create its showcase city Pyongyang. Although the master plan of the city was designed by renowned Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, one of protagonists of the metabolist movement in architecture and urbanism, the general pattern has undergone changes in its final implementation, allowing a very irregular development among different areas in Astana and dissociation of the new centre from the historical parts. The neuralgic and sym-

bolic centre of new Kazakhstan state is located in a linear zone a bit more than 3km long, extended between two works by British architect Norman Foster: The Pyramid of Peace and Reconciliation opened in 2006, and the Khan Shatyr Tent, opened in 2010 as a leisure centre. The tent refers to the traditional architecture of yurts built by nomads of this region. The national forms are used punctually in modern buildings with gleaming aluminium finishes and reflective, even golden, glass. However, the most important representative of the new national architecture is the Presidential Palace, finished in 2004 with its traditional blue dome placed on a neoclassical basis, and the new ministries complex with two golden towers by the city's chief architect Shokhan Mataibekov. The central attraction is the tower called the Bayterek, a traditional tree of life that holds a golden egg of the bird of happiness called Samruk. It opened in 1997 with a height of 105m and a spectacular hyperboloid structure of steel and concrete, designed to offer 360-degree views of the growing city.

This historicist architecture, resonant of the works of Michael Graves from 1980s, was used to highlight the Kazakh character of the new capital, to overcome its Soviet past and to insist on a Eurasian character in response to the multinational nature of the state. This is especially noticeable in the different residential complexes such as "Lazurny Kvartal" (2011) that apparently employs a golden decoration with national geometric motives on blue reflective glass; the new concert centre designed by the study of Manfredi Nicoletti in 2009; and the Palace of Creativity, Shabyt, with an imposing circular and concave cover. The new Astana also appropriates some spectacular forms from the Soviet era, represented in Astana Triumph skyscraper, a replica of the famous seven Stalin towers from Moscow and similar to the eight one built in the Russian capital; the national headquarters of the gas company, a historicist version of the unbuilt project by Vesnin brothers for the Moscow seat of the Labour Ministry from 1934; and the Kharkov Gosprom building from 1928 by Serafimov, Felger and Kravets architects. Similar to many other post-socialist countries, the new architecture developed in Ashgabat was mainly promoted by the first state president, Saparmurat Niyazov, who sought national referents rooted in the distant past to define the new national identity away from the clichés of Soviet architecture. The president's cult of personality has been the unifying factor for all ideological aspects of the new Turkmenistan, making the name and the figure of Turkmenbashi omnipresent in all cities and towns of the country. With countless streets and squares named after Niyazov or members of his family, state institutions, cities, villages, mountains, even some stars and months of the year, the physical and spatial paternalism of Turkmenistan's supreme leader exceeds by far the presence of portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in North Korean public space.



The renewal of the capital started with the construction of the presidential palace, Oguzkhan Palace, that opened in 1997 and served as the residence and workplace of Saparmurat Niyazov until his death in 2006, similar to the role of Kumsusan Palace for Kim Il Sung. The new representative city centre develops in avenues with succession of different pavements, parks and fountains, with the totally designed public space, a kind of update of the representative avenues built in Pyongyang of the 1980s. The palace was renovated and expanded in 2011 according to the mandate of the new president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, adding to the complex the Grand Hotel building of similar appearance as a symmetrical counterpoint situated on the opposite side of the square, and the Ruhyyet Palace for special events of the highest level in the southeast side. All these palaces share formal elements: a base of neoclassical-inspired colonnades and golden, blue or decorated domes as traditional elements that dominate the cityscape.

As in Pyongyang, a multitude of monuments and statues focus the views in the city, starting with the Arch of Neutrality, a marble tripod inspired by the three national principles promoted in the great book by Turkmenbashi called Ruhknama (Book of the Soul), and crowned with the golden statue of Father of the nation that rotates following the sun. There is also the 91-meter high monument to independence, as well as the large replica of the book Rukhnama that opens and displays selected passages in the form of videos.

Recently built representative architecture in Ashgabat presents decreasing saturation with traditional elements, limiting their presence to the most significant ones like the Oguz Khan eight pointed star, golden profile of Turkmenbashi or corn leaves symbolizing (as in socialist times) fertility and wealth. New buildings seek the visual impact through form and material: Ashgabat was recently included in the Guinness Book of Records as the city with the biggest number of white marble facades. Like in new Pyongyang constructions, large areas of coloured or reflective glass with aluminium or steel structural details dominate buildings like the Hotel Ýýldýz built in 2013, over 100m high, the Ministry of Health from 2006 and several residential quarters. The new Turkmen architecture pretends to look spectacular: the Matrimonial Palace has a form of the great traditional star that holds a globe in its centre, Älem Cultural and Entertainment Center or Turkmenistan Tower, telecommunications centre and observatory, all built between 2011 and 2012 mix elements of traditional sensitivity with large scale, modern materials and technology. Despite having limited variety in possible meanings and interpretations, these works belong to a specific postmodern architecture, ideologically dominated and always attributed to the creative genius of the Leader of the Nation.

## Conclusions: North Korean socialist post-modernism

The architecture developed in the post-Cold War era in the former socialist countries is related to Western postmodernism at different levels: the search for the expression of identity, connection with traditional national architecture or the neoclassical legacy of the pre-revolutionary times, by free mixture of influences. It is sometimes close to kitsch, but always distant from the principles and appearances of uniformity typical of socialist modernist architecture. This article has traced multiple relationships and parallels that can be set at a conceptual level between socialist realism and postmodernism, although these two have been separate historically for at least thirty years. Among their commonalities is the rational choice of motifs and historical influences linked to a certain narrative that aims to transmit the work of architecture. The vision of architecture as a sign would be the most important common point of these two ways to project that separates them from the functionalism of modernist architecture. The most remarkable difference between socialist realism and postmodernism lies in the overture and the range of inherent interpretations of works: while in postmodernism the multiplicity of meanings is sought, in socialist realism the meaning is allegedly controlled and reduced to the ideological doctrine. This, however, doesn't have to be a fixed feature in the long term, and with the passage of time the socialist architectural heritage begins to have new interpretive nuances. North Korean architecture was developed under the strong influence of socialist realism and with the direct participation of professionals from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China during the reconstruction after the Korean War. At the time of the thaw in Soviet architecture, following the criticism of Khrushchev in 1954, North Korea decided to develop its own style, a mix of industrialized construction and traditional elements adapted to prefabrication and large-scale construction. The most important feature of the new representative buildings was their "North-Korean-ness" expressed through certain historical elements essentially used as decoration applied over the new structures.

The article draws parallels between this neo-national architecture of North Korea, instigated and theorized by Kim Jong Il in his book "On the Architectural Art", with expressions of new national identities reflected in the architecture of the new ex-Soviet states, especially in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. These countries also share the omnipresent figure of the leader, Saparmurat Niyazov and Nursultan Nazarbayev respectively, in formal decisions on important architectural projects or urban developments. The new capital cities, renovated in the case of Ashgabat or re-established in the case of Astana, use urban form based on large lineal avenues similar to those of Pyongyang, the fully designed public spaces ordered on the basis of hierarchy and symmetry. The shapes of the new palaces combine contemporary materials like glass, steel and aluminium, as

well as more traditional marble and granite with sculpted or gilded decorative motifs inspired by national traditions and legends.

The North Korean architecture of the recent years has followed the course of decrease, although not of exclusion, of national elements as an important part of the external form, in addition to increasingly evident modernization of materials and construction techniques. Its architecture has been adopting and adapting the elements of Western high-tech architecture, as a sign of modernization of its economy and the consequent social welfare. Following the opposite path to the western postmodernism that intended to enrich the bold and functional modern form with contextually based elements, North Korean, as well as other post-socialist national architectures, tried to simplify and modernize the nationally-inspired forms developed according to socialist realist principles. In this way and with the connections and specificities that analysed in this paper, the North Korean architecture can be conceptualized as part of postmodernism of the former socialist countries and more broadly as part of the global architectural postmodernism.

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