AN ADAPTIVE REUSE PROPOSAL FOR KING "ZOG" ROYAL RESIDENCE IN DURRES, ALBANIA

Edmond Manahasa , Dorel Habili
Department of Architecture, Epoka University
Tirana, Albania
emanahasa@epoka.edu.al*; *dhabili15@epoka.edu.al

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the Royal Residence of King "Zog I," located in Durres, Albania. Designed at first as presidential palace and later reconceptualized as a summer royal residence this building was subject of different architectural proposals from Armando Brasini, Kristo Sotiri, Hans Kohler, and Florestano di Fausto.
This research aims to reveal and revive the architectural values of the Royal Residence, which for years has been abandoned in a degraded situation. To achieve this goal, the study proposes an adaptive reuse approach. This proposal is seen as a strategic solution for providing the needed sustainability for the maintenance and conservation of the building.
The methodology includes archival research, documentation of the architectural evolution of the building through redrawing, and visualization. Archival research is used to provide original drawings of buildings different periods, from National Technical Construction Archive [AQTN] and National Central Archive [AQSH]. Redrawing includes plans and section which are reproduced based on the original drawings from the archives. Visualization is used to achieve three dimensional images of the building's exterior proposals and also interiors of the spaces according to the new functions.
The adaptive reuse proposal, respects the restoration standards and architectural style of the building. Based on this, the new spatial configuration of the building is conceptualized into two main scenarios, including the first one of the permanent exhibition of Albanian Monarchy and the second, which adapts certain spaces for temporary usage to function for public/private events and conferences.

Keywords: Adaptive Reuse, Sustainable Maintenance, Proposal, Royal Residence, Durres, Albania

PRESIDENTIAL/ROYAL VILLA DESIGN AND URBAN CONTEXT DURING ZOG REGIME IN DURRES

Like many other Albanian cities, Durres had inherited an Ottoman organic urban morphology in the early twentieth century. Built in a spontaneous way over the old city of Dyrrachium, the city had not a regular urban system. However, it used its position near the sea as a favorable element to help the city connect with the world (Zheku, 1997). The urban developments in Albania during the Zog regime (1924-1939) are strongly connected with the contributions of Italian architects and planners. Their contribution was made possible through SVEA (Society for Economic Development of Albania), that Mussolini used as a financial tool to increase his control in Albania.
The first planning efforts are reported from Migliaccio (2012), according to whom the Minister of Public Affairs of Albanian government Musa Juka requested from Pompeo Aloisi in 1926 (who was appointed at the Italian Legation of Durres and later in 1927 will become the president of SVEA) Italian architects for construction works in Albania. Based on this request, the Italian government provided Brasini, who, apart from the planning works in Tirana, requested a regulatory plan for Durres. In addition, President Zog will request Brasini to design in 1926 a presidential villa as well (Vokshi & Nepravishta, 2013).

The villa location is visible on a map, including surveying information prepared in 1926 by Ugolini, which shows the borders of the city and two important administrative buildings: the presidential villa and the prefecture (Godoli, 2012). Likewise, the special importance of the presidential villa is given in the plan of 1928 (prepared by the Military Geographical Institute of Florence), which foresaw the construction of new streets within the existing organic urban pattern. Apart from the road to the villa, it included the Rruga Tregtare (Merchantile Street), which connected the town to the port, and Spitalla (Priftuli Semini et al., 2014; Prifti, 2017).
Since the scope of this research is related to the adaptive reuse of Royal Residence in Durres and giving further urban information about the period would exceed the scope of the study, in the next section, the study explains the architectural evolution of this building. Moreover, in the further sections, key theoretical definitions on adaptive reuse are given. Finally, adaptive reuse proposals are provided, including permanent and temporal activities, which are useful for possible sustainable maintenance of the building.

ARCHITECTURAL EVOLUTION OF ROYAL RESIDENCE IN DURRES

The Royal Residence was planned as Presidential Residence in 1925 to serve as a ceremonial villa of state. To meet the required standard, it was decided to be built on the top of the hill as one of the most impressive views across the bay of Durres. After the establishment of the Albanian Monarchy and the proclaim of Ahmet Zogu as King of the Albanians (1928), it was renamed as the "Royal Summer Residence." The building was finished in 1937, a few months before King married Queen Géraldine Apponyi de Nagyappony. Prior to the accomplished version of the building designed by Florestano di Fausto, there were three other versions designed by Armando Brasini, Kristo Sotiri, and Hans Kohler. In the below section, the three versions are explained chronologically.

First Version of Royal Residence

The proposal of Brasini was characterized by the neo-historicist style “Novecento.” It was composed of one central cylindrical volume, which was covered by a dome and two flanking rectangular prismatic ones on both sides (Figure 1). Furthermore, it provided a fortress-like image (Vokshi, 2013). Although Brasini had foreseen a cost estimation of 2.500.000 Italian lire, it was not implemented (Procida, 2012).

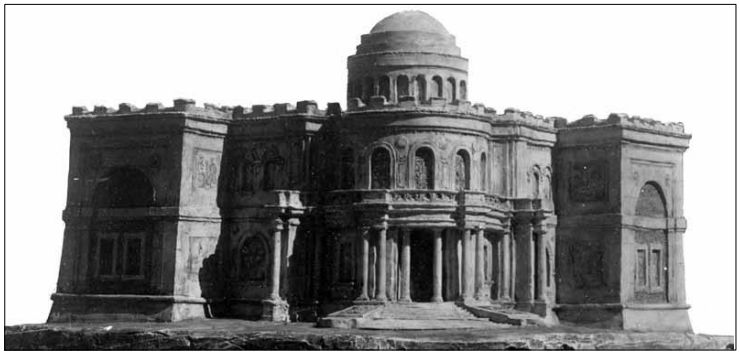

Figure 11. First Proposal Model by Brasini in Novecento style (from Brasini Archive from Procida, 2012).

Second Version of Royal Residence

The project was credited to a well-known Albanian architect Kristo Sotiri. He was born in Pogradec but left early, immigrating to Romania. After graduating from Padua University in Italy, he had a long experience working for Queen Elizabeth of Romania as one of the royal court architects (Giusti, 2006). The project of Sotiri respected the volumetric composition of Brasini, keeping the central volume but transforming it into a tower (Figure 2 & 4). The main body of the building is two floors high. In contrast,

the central octagonal tower is three floors providing a panoramic view over Durres and the Adriatic Sea. Historicist elements like arched framed windows feature the exterior of the building, overhanging arched framed eaves and the balustrades concealing the roof and tower scape. Migliacio (2012) considers its design to have French taste.

Figure 12. Presidential Residence by Kristo Sotiri (Source: AQSH)

The entrance was designed as an arcade porch in the form of a semi-open lobby that protects the double-door entrance, leading to the main hallway and providing distribution throughout other spaces. Opposite the main entrance was the staircase, which ended with a secondary exit to the courtyards. The main reception hall ended with a pergola overlooking the sea (Figure 3). The hall was enlit by natural light and had sea views because windows were placed on the exterior walls. At the right of the main entrance were reception and service spaces. The first floor had a more intimate character serving for night spaces. The building suffered serious damages during the devastating earthquake of 1927. Its reconstruction was not seen as reasonable, causing the need for a new building project.

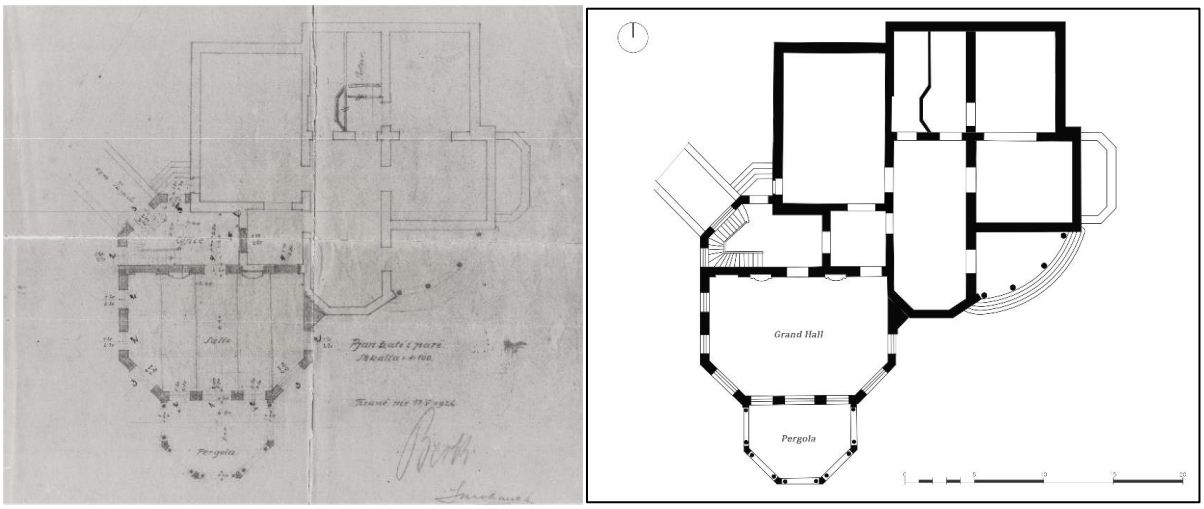

Figure 13. Ground floor plan by Kristo Sotiri-left (Source: AQTN) and right redrawn from (©Dorel Habili)

Figure 14. 3D Visualization of Kristo Sotiri's Presidential Residence (© Dorel Habili).

Third proposal of Presidential Residence in Durres by Hans Kohler

After Brasini, the urban organization of the city of Durres was led by the Austrian architect Hans Kohler. At the same time, he was requested to make a reconstruction project for the presidential villa damaged by the 1927`s earthquake. The reconstruction was difficult and expensive, so the Zog administration approved a new project for a new Presidential Villa.
In the new project, he kept the northern part of the previous building unchanged and made extensions on the southern and western parts (Figure 5). The spatial organization remained the same. He placed the ceremonial reception hall facing the sea with a grand entrance and staircase. This project's exterior was different from the previous, characterized by purist design without decoration, straight lines, and rigid shapes. Modern for the period, one can easily perceive the influence of the German school of architecture (Figure 6 & 7).
Kohler kept the interior spaces as well with a purist approach. The project was very ambitious to be the next Royal Villa. It did not fulfill the expectations of the Albanian King for his new royal residence, so it remained only in papers and was not executed.

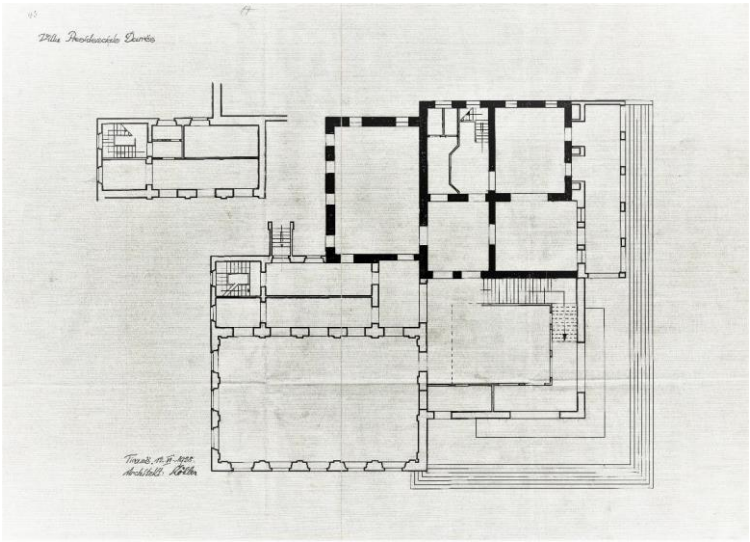

Figure 15. Ground floor plan by Hans Kohler (Source: AQTN).

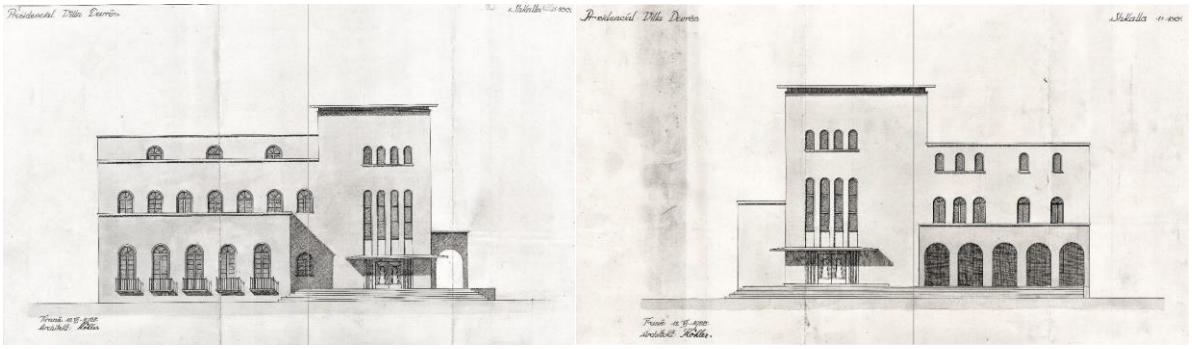

Figure 16. South and East Façade of Kohler's Proposal (Source: AQTN).

Figure 17. 3D Visualization of Kohler Proposal (© Dorel Habili).

Final Version (Realized) of Royal Residence in Durres by Florestano di Fausto

In 1928, King Zog was introduced with the project of the governmental complex in Tirana center, capital of Albania. After expressing his consent about this architectural work that fulfilled his tastes, he decided to commission the new Royal Summer Residence project in Durres to the Florentine architect Florestano Di Fausto. He was one of the most esteemed architects in Fascist period Italy, who designed buildings characterized by different styles varying from Neo-classical to Rationalist (Vokshi & Nepravishta, 2013).
He referred to the Kohler project keeping a major part of it unchangeable, including the distribution of spaces (Figure 8). However, the new project compared to the previous one was more expressive in shape and style (Figure 8-below left). The new façade follows the basic lines of the previous one, although he made some changes in the floor level that gave to the front entrance monumentality and made it more inviting. There were no volumetric changes in both side wings. Di Fausto kept unchanged the arcade, which was positioned on the right-wing, but stylized it in neoclassical style. He made horizontal volumetric protrusions on the upper floors to create different terraces on all levels. The front façade retained symmetry, culminated in a belvedere balcony resembling the idea of Kristo Sotiri belvedere tower from where the whole bay of Durres could be seen.

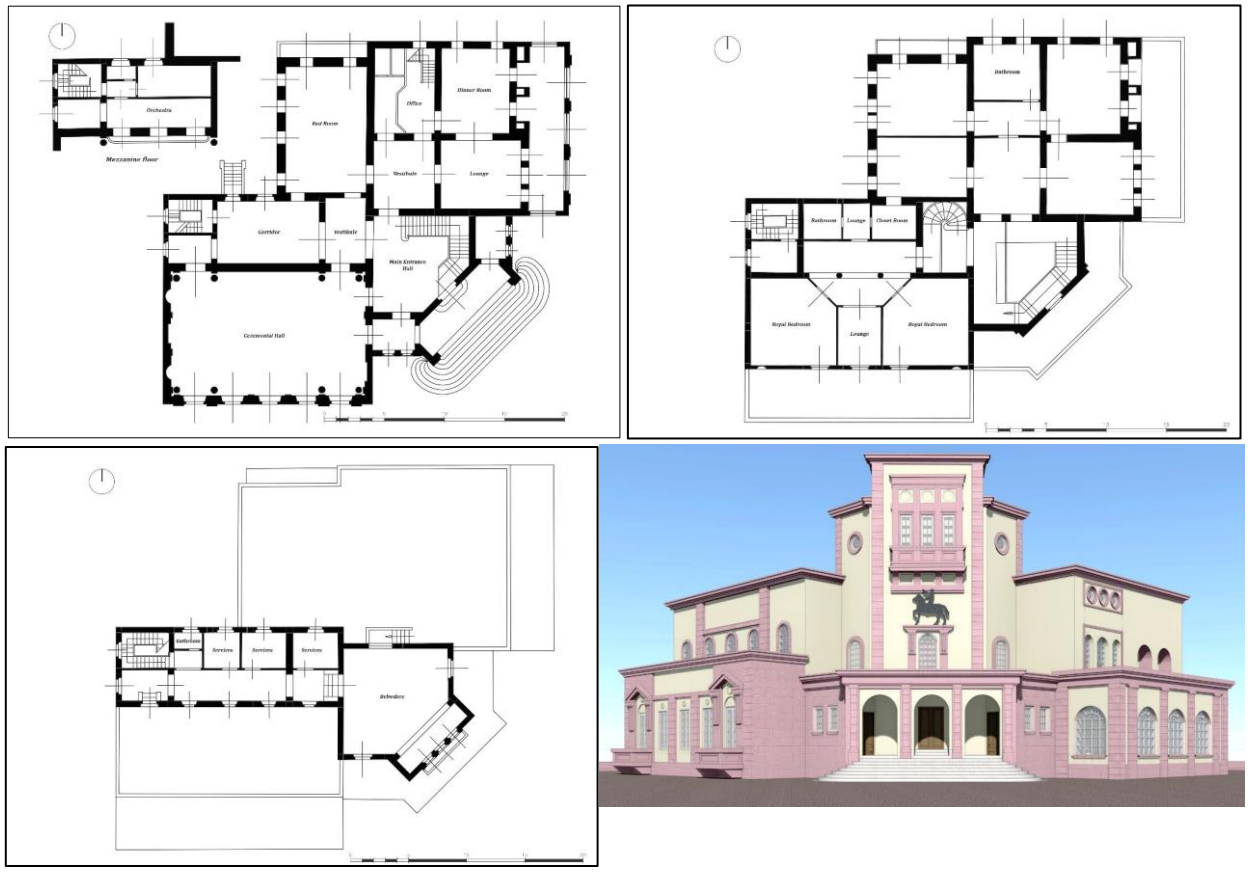

Figure 18. Royal Villa Ground and First Floor Plans (up) and (below)-Second Floor Plan (redrawn ©Dorel Habili) and 3D Visualization of Royal Villa by Di Fausto (©Dorel Habili).

On the ground floor were located mainly spaces with public character. In front of the main entrance was placed the monumental grand staircase worked in detail with Italian marble. On the left was the ceremonial or throne hall, a large unique space designed to welcome the most important gala events of the monarchy. It was the largest space throughout the building. The hall has a large opening that faces the southwest position, which made possible direct sunlight and a view of Adriatic Sea. Also, it was accessed from other directions to make it more fluid and easily circulation.

This main hall was designed in neo-classical style, decorated with marble Corinthian pilasters with gilted bronze capitals and doorways designed in marble frames and portals. Although the original plan of Di Fausto designed with columns, in reality they were not built. The floor design was executed with high precision using imported Italian marbles. In the center of the ceremonial hall, the floor was decorated with a two-headed eagle symbol of Albanian state and monarchy. In the front wall there was a relief work of the royal family emblem. The ceiling was designed decorated in gilted bronze wooden square coffers. It was also equipped with six hanging chandeliers. Another interesting element was the mezzanine floor that ended on a small grey marble balcony decorated with gilted bronze details.

On the right-wing was designed the formal dining room preceded by two vestibules that served as auxiliary spaces, in cases that the number of invited persons was more than usual. These spaces had access to the arcade, which functioned as a winter veranda with a sea view. In the northern part, the most important space was the red room, a space for formal state meetings and special honored guests.

The royal family and their closer guest accessed the first floor only. In the central core is the grand stairs gallery. The left side was designed as royal apartments for the King and Queen. The royal apartment was composed of two main bedrooms, a lounge between them, two closet rooms, and a

shared bathroom for the royal couple. The left wing was reserved for another part of the family and closer guests; it includes four bedrooms and one shared bathroom.
The second floor was projected smaller than others. In this floor were placed some small service room and a huge veranda from where Durres Bay could be seen. Also, a longitudinal corridor that guides to the highest point of the building, a beautiful belvedere balcony that would serve as the King's office.
The neoclassical decoration was predominant in the interior were simplified on the exterior more rationally, similar to other Fascist period buildings. The project was finished in 1934 and inaugurated in 1937 on New Year's Eve in a ceremony called by the King.

Observation on Current Situation.

The King Zog villa was used as a guest house during the socialist period (Myzyraj, 2020), and it was quite well preserved. However, during the post-socialist period, it underwent different situations. During the riots of the year 1997, it was vandalized, resulting in numerous serious damages. From that period, it remains in a poor situation (Figure 9). The inheritor has not been able to restore the building, and in 2015 it was auctioned by him.

Figure 19. Exterior Image of King Zog Villa (left) and (right) Damaged Fenestration of the East Wing Arcade (July 2020 © Dorel Habili).

According to our observation, considerable interior parts almost do not exist anymore, as most of the marbles have been stolen. Also, the walls and floors are in bad condition. Many unique details have disappeared on the ground floor, and all spaces are in a degraded situation (Figure 9). The marble frames the windows and doors in the ceremonial hall are partly removed, including those in the balcony. The space is open from all sides because there are no doors and windows (Figure 10). Elements that made the hall unique, such as the front relief statue with the monarchy emblem and the six gilted bronze chandeliers, were stolen. The red room suffered the same consequences: all the luxury items disappeared and also walls, floor, and ceiling are in miserable condition. The grand stairs have also been damaged. A part of its marble balustrades is broken.
The first floor is also in bad condition (Figure 10). Royal chambers and the secondary spaces lack windows and doors that expose them to climatic conditions and help degradation (Figure 11). Also, and in these spaces, no symbolic element of the monarchy of the building are left.
The last floor still retains its grandeur by overlooking the bay of Durres, but like other spaces, suffers from degradation. A major part of the wooden floor was removed. Also, the ceiling and walls are damaged. Thus, based on the current situation, we think an adaptive reuse proposal could be a potential alternative to provide a sustainable solution for building maintenance.

Figure 20. Image of Current Situation of Ceremonial Hall (left) and (right) of the Grand Staircase (July 2020 © Dorel Habili).

Figure 21. Current Situation Image of Royal Apartment (left) and (right) of Guest Bedroom (July 2020 © Dorel Habili).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS ON ADAPTIVE REUSE

Since the building subject of this research has lost its original function as a royal villa, adaptive reuse is considered an appropriate sustainable solution. Based on that, this section aims to give certain theoretical underpinnings about the concept of adaptive reuse. While the maintenance of historical buildings can be subject to concepts like preservation, refurbishment, rehabilitation, restoration, or renovation, adaptive reuse is used as a potential solution when the edifices have lost their original function. However, as a new function is adapted to them, their architectural character and authenticity must be preserved to transmit historical architectural values to the further generations (Günce & Mısırlısoy, 2016). Scholars claim that a major challenge in adaptive reuse is the decision of the new function (Langston & Shen, 2007), which apart from conserving the architectural, historical values, should be holistic and scientific, aiming to provide sustainability concerning its economic, social-cultural aspects (Cramer & Breitling, 2007). According to DEH (2004), a successful adaption process respects the historic fabric of the building by adding a contemporary layer that does not eclipse the values of the building. In addition, adaptive reuse can also increase social, cultural, and economic benefits to communities where they are built (Bullen & Love, 2011). Thus, apart from preserving its architectural authenticity, it achieves the much-needed socio-cultural economic sustainability, which plays a key role in building longevity.

ADAPTIVE REUSE PROPOSAL ON ROYAL RESIDENCE IN DURRES

Based on the current conditions of the building and referring to the theoretical framework, the research proposes the restoration of the building in the first step and then in a second step the adaptation of the building to new functions.

The restoration of the building will restore to the original condition the main elements such as ceilings, floors, and walls based on the detailed documentation of the original projects by the architect Florestano Di Fausto. Also, it includes the production and installation of identical of windows and doors that are missing in most of the spaces. Treating the remaining murals and replicating the missing parts based on the existential ones will help bring back the style identity that is currently incomplete.

The interior is completely non-existent, and the original furniture was stolen during the 1997 vandalism. The furniture was designed for the Royal Residence in Durres by the well-known interior architect Gherardo Bosio. Based on his designs, they can be recreated as symbolic elements that preserve the originality of the style. The other part requires a contemporary rehabilitation by using modern elements that do not interfere with the original style and materials and do not fade the historic layers. The harmony between the two different styles is crucial. However, the contrast between the new and the old part is important in highlighting the identity of the building.

As for the adaptive reuse strategy, our proposal includes two scenarios (Figure 13-right) following its potential and do not fade the historical value of building as below:

i. The first scenario uses its spaces as a permanent exhibition on the Royal Family and their advanced lifestyle during the kingdom period. Some of the space that are unique in terms of their history, are proposed to be exhibition hall where, by using photos and projected videos.

ii. The second scenario is to rent certain spaces for different private/public events. Ceremonial hall could adopt flexible furnishing to adjust to different events. Also, the grand staircase gallery hall and two vestibules act as secondary spaces when number of people is larger.

The Scenario for Spaces with Permanent Function.

The first and permanent scenario highlights the original function by showing building history and architectural evolution to the locals and tourists. The idea is to create an exhibition about the monarchy in Albania to present important events of the kingdom including period's the lifestyle and architectural heritage. This scenario will include the three floors of the building in a chronological circulation method.

The tour will begin from the grand staircase on the first floor (without including ground floor spaces like a ceremonial hall). Aiming to have a fluidity among spaces, the exhibition spaces are conceptualized from the right to the left-wing showcasing important historical moments in chronological order from the kingdom establishment till the exile of King Zog in 1939.

The first room (5) shows the situation before the proclamation of the kingdom (Figure 12 & 13-left). The second room (6) is an exhibit of photos, videos, and documents related to the proclamation of the monarchy. The third and fourth room is about social life during the monarchy. The government is trying to install a European spirit and mentality. They show the life of the King and his sisters, which remains an exotic theme even today (7), and architectural work including different proposals for the Royal Residence in Durres and some main buildings in Albania (8). The exhibition continue with The Royal Apartment, Jewelry Room, Royal Collection, and toilet services in the left-wing. In the south part, the Royal Apartments (10) exhibit a replica of the original interior, which is disappeared during 1997 vandalism, based on documentation by the architect and photos. The Jewelry Room presents the collection of tiaras and accessories worn by queen Geraldine (11). The last space, defined as Royal Collection, exhibits the royal dresses and uniforms worn by the royal family (12). The secondary stairs lead to the upper floor at the end of the corridor (13).

Finally, the tour ends on the ground floor, accessed by secondary or grand stairs (Figure 12). It has the most exclusive spaces since it was the only floor accessed by visitors in the past. Red Room (Figure 16-left) was where formal meetings and governmental receptions were held (2). The adaptive

intervention proposes restoring the original decoration to revive the authentic interior style. The aim is to create a memory room that will transmit the grandeur of royal life atmosphere to the visitors by photos and projected videos of the public/private activities.
The Ceremonial Hall (Figure 16-right) was a unique space for that period because it was the only hall projected for glamorous events of reception by King Zog in Albania (3). Being unique in terms of interior finishings, the hall was covered by Italian marble of different types, square coffered wooden ceiling, and gilded bronze chandeliers. The adaptive intervention fully restores all its elements in a detailed way to bring it into the original elegant phase. The hall will stand as an empty, unfurnished space, as originally designed, providing the focus on the neoclassical details and the panoramic view toward the Adriatic Sea. The exhibition tour in the Royal Residence in Durres ends with the ceremonial hall.

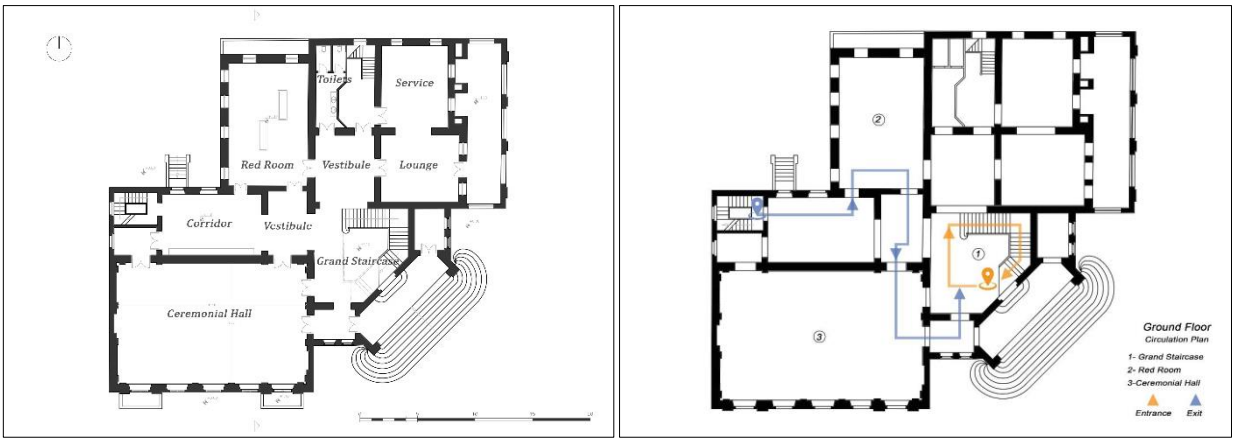

Figure 22. Ground Floor Permanent Scenario Plan Scheme (left) and (right) Circulation Diagram (© Dorel Habili).

The second floor is redesigned as a touristic spot, including services with panoramic views toward the Adriatic Sea and Durres Bay (Figure 15). It has three main spaces, two verandas, the first oriented from the south (15) and the other from the north (16), that serve as open-air rest terraces, and the most important, the belvedere tower. The Belvedere tower is placed on the top of the building. It is used as a spot for photos and sightseeing and serves as a bar where visitors can relax and enjoy the view (17).

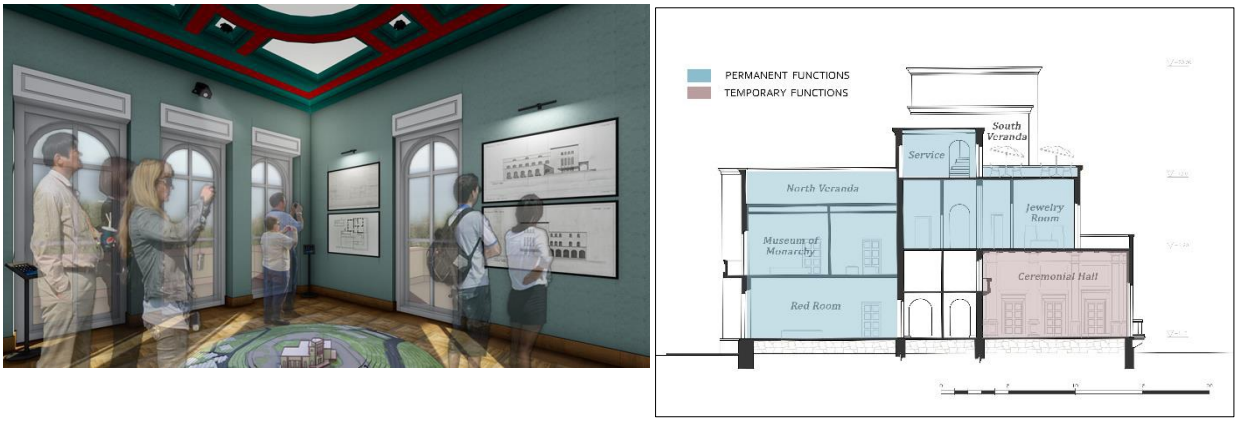

Figure 23. Visualization of the Before-Kingdom Exhibition (left) and (right) Section (© Dorel Habili)

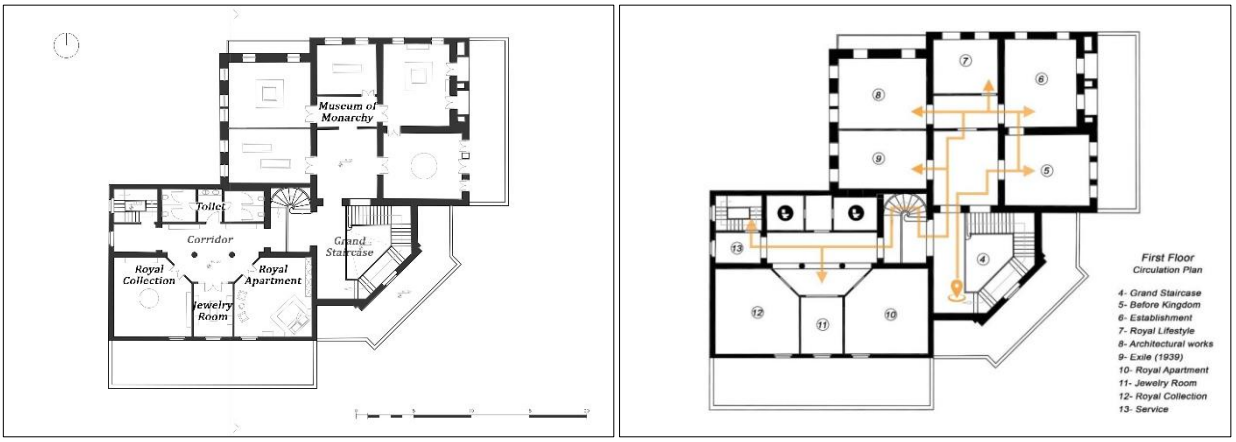

Figure 24. First Floor Plan Permanent Scenario Plan (left) and (right) Circulation Diagram (© Dorel Habili).

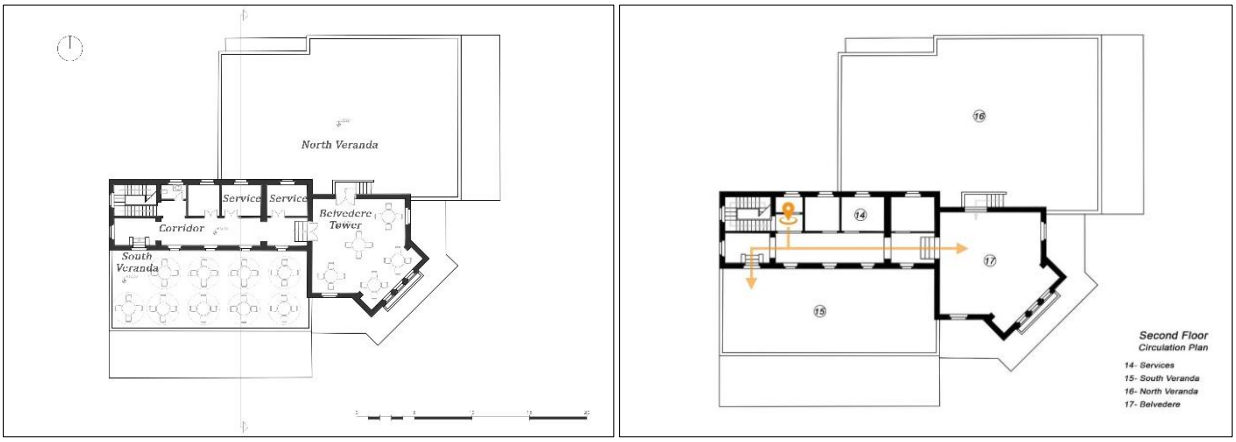

Figure 25. Second Floor Plan Permanent Scenario Plan (left) and (right) Circulation Diagram (© Dorel Habili).

Figure 26. Red Room Visualization (left) and (right) Ceremonial Hall (© Dorel Habili).

The Scenario for Spaces with Temporary Function.

The second scenario foresees the temporary usage of certain spaces used for private events and conferences. This scenario is applied only on the ground floor. Due to its original design by architect Di Fausto the ground floor has fluid spaces very appropriate for big ceremonies, as it planned to serve for governmental receptions in the past. It is easily adjustable to different types of events in terms of organization. Also, many secondary spaces help with preparation, catering, and other services. The scenario which is like the case of Villa Erba in Como (2019) offers the hall for rent which

then can be adapted by event companies depending on the type of event. Since there is no room for an original kitchen installation, a catering company will offer this service. Also, the building has additional spaces to install temporary auxiliary structures that do not damage the originality of the building.
The second scenario includes two alternatives, which are dependent on the type of activity. The first alternative (Figure 17-left and 18) shows an adjustment of the hall for private events or gala dinners. The hall can hold in maximum capacity approximately 100 people. In events with more people than usual, the secondary spaces or vestibules help for guest reception. Also, these spaces can be used in case of cocktail receptions before the dinner. The second alternative is an adaptive proposal usable in the case of public audiences or mini-concert hall (Figure 17-right and 19). This space is projected to host reception between 90 to 100 people, and it is appropriate in terms of acoustics.
Besides the two alternative examples for different events, the hall offers possibilities for new proposals based on the event to be held. These proposals should be appropriate with their interior design without interfering with the architectural identity.

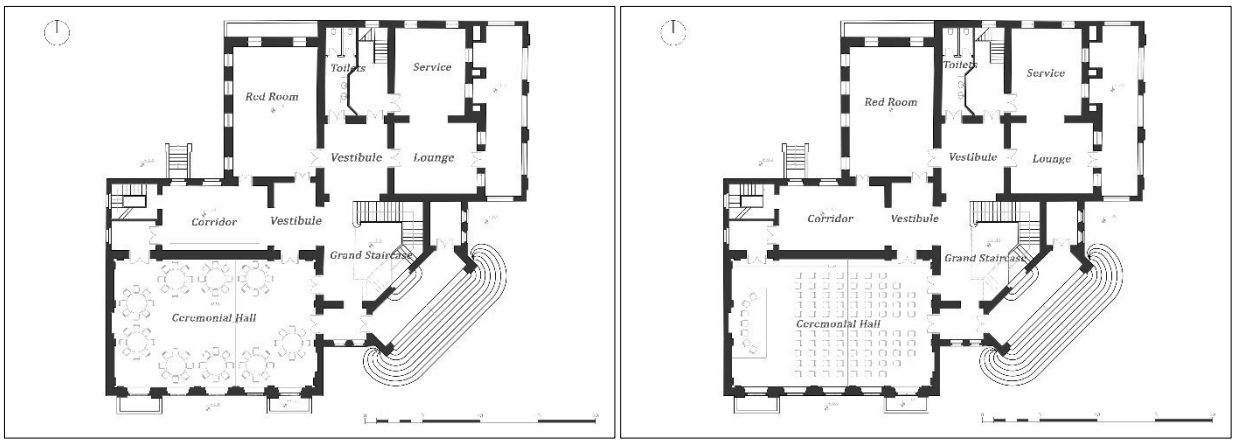

Figure 27. Second Scenario Ground floor plan First Alternative (left) and (right) Second Alternative (© Dorel Habili).

Figure 28. Ceremonial Hall Visualization of First Alternative (© Dorel Habili).

Figure 29. Ceremonial Hall Visualization of Second Alternative (© Dorel Habili).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides an explanation of Royal Residence of King Zog I main architectural features within the urban development context of Durres. Furthermore, it brings to light building's different historical periods and project proposals of the architects Brasini, Sotiri, Kohler, and Di Fausto. The study's main contribution relies on the provision of a sustainable solution for its maintenance, taking into consideration the degrading state of the building.
The study used as a tool to achieve the goal an adaptive reuse strategy. This strategy includes the proposal of adaptation of the building with new appropriate functions that will serve to its maintenance in the future. This proposal includes two alternative scenarios for its spatial organization: the first scenario adapts most of the spaces with permanent functions to serve as an exhibition for the monarchical period and Albanian royal family, whereas the second one adopts the ceremonial hall with temporary functions which are used in different alternatives as rental space for private/public events and conferences.
The authors are aware that some of the visualizations need further detailing, although it could be a subject of another research work, which focuses specifically on the restoration of the building. Finally, an important outcome of this study is that it can be used as a development model for other historical buildings with similar architectural values and under the same circumstances.

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