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## Girls Build! Female Architects who Shaped the Modern History of Novi Sad

The recovery from the Second World War brought significant changes and the implementation of socialist ideology in Yugoslavia that went in parallel with the emancipation of women. This is particularly noticeable in the rise of women with university education and their enrolment in various occupations, such as construction engineering and architecture. The increased interest in pursuing architectural education among women has been rising since the 1950s, when they already represented 46% of total students at Belgrade University. The rebuilding of the country meant great urbanistic and architectural projects, with radical reconstruction and reconceptualization of cities and public spaces. Young female architects embraced an opportunity to be equally involved and active in urban development. Their roles and impacts were diverse: they held positions within planning institutes, architectural bureaus, and public offices in urbanism and construction; furthermore, they were responsible engineers at the construction sites; and they became teachers and educators for the new generations of architects and civil engineers. They worked individually, in pairs, and in teams, demonstrating the ability to be actively and equally involved in the profession in every possible aspect and domain. The research positions their roles and contributions within the broader framework of the process of female emancipation in socialist Yugoslavia, focusing on three remarkable architects engaged in the postwar reconstruction of Novi Sad: Julka Majtan, Tatjana Vanjifatov Savić, and Milena Đorđević.

*Key words:* architecture, female architects, modernism, modernisation, socialism, Novi Sad

## Девојке граде! Жене архитекте које су обликовале модерну историју Новог Сада

Опоравак од Другог светског рата донео је значајне промене и примену социјалистичке идеологије у Југославији која је спровођена паралелно са еманципацијом жена. Наведено је посебно приметно у порасту броја жена са универзитетским образовањем, као и њихово укључивање у различита занимања, као што су грађевина и архитектура. Повећано интересовање за образовање у области архитектуре код жена је порасло након педесетих година 20. века, када оне чине 46% од укупног броја студената на Универзитету у Београду. Обнова земље значила је покретање великих урбанистичких и архитектонских пројеката, који су укључивали радикалне реконструкције и реконцептуализације градова и јавних простора. Младе жене архитекте пригрлиле су шансу да буду подједнако укључене и активне у урбанистичком развоју. Њихове улоге и утицаји били су разноврсни: заузимале су позиције у оквиру завода за планирање, архитектонских бироа, јавних служби за урбанизам и грађевинарство; надаље, деловале су као одговорни инжењери на грађевинским локацијама, постале су наставници и едукатори нових генерација архитеката и грађевинских инжењера. Оне су радиле индивидуално, у паровима, у тимовима, показујући своје способности да активно и подједнако буду укључене професионално у свим могућим аспектима и доменима. Ово истраживање приказује њихове улоге и доприносе у ширем оквиру процеса еманципације жена у социјалистичкој Југославији, фокусирајући се посебно на три изузетне жене архитекте укључене у послератну реконструкцију Новог Сада: Јулку Мајтан, Татјану Вањифатов Савић и Милену Ђорђевић.

*Кључне речи:* архитектура, жене архитекте, модернизам, социјализам, Нови Сад

### INTRODUCTION

Despite particular progress and social movements promoting women's rights appearing throughout Europe in the 19th century, women seem to have won their legal rights only when it became profitable for the economy (Aritonović 2009, 233). At this time, various women's associations were

emerging, intending to fight for gender equality, the right to education, and the right to vote, and the entrenched patriarchy in Serbia started to change slowly, adapting to new social conditions. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the educational system in Serbia still restricted where and when women could be educated, as most girls attended segregated schools, being trained for employment in traditionally female occupations. Overcoming Serbia's long-standing resistance to female education was a significant focus of the emerging women's rights movement that sought to improve girls' notoriously low literacy rate and provide opportunities for city girls to attend high schools and even universities. The emancipation process spread mainly through feminist and women's actions in the interwar period, primarily through the literary and artistic activity of women that directly or indirectly conveyed the message about the subordinate position of women in a patriarchal society and argued the need for its transformation (Stojanović 2014). These changes first appeared in Vojvodina and Belgrade, later spreading to other parts of the country (Aritonović 2009; Stojanović 2014). With the deficit of men because of the First World War and the need for a new workforce to rebuild the country, women gained the right to employment for the first time, although they were still largely discriminated against in many aspects (Aritonović 2009, 233).

Considering the presence of women with higher education in Serbia from 1919 to 1949, as a measure of emancipation, the representation of women with university degrees in Serbia was only 10% in 1919. Still, their number progressively grew until 1939, when the participation of women with higher education reached 20.6%, to be continued in the following periods. The Second World War brought even more significant changes in Yugoslavia's social and political system. With the country's gradual recovery from war events, implementation of socialist ideology, and the parallel emancipation of women, there was a noticeable jump in the presence of women with university education. The participation of women in the National Liberation Movement and the communist ideology will, in many ways, improve the status of women in society, allowing them equality, education and jobs. It stemmed partially from an ideological commitment to women's emancipation rooted in the core theories of socialism and to women's growing demands for economic independence from men (Ghodsee & Mead 2018). An increased number of female students, who later became professionals, actively participated in the renewal and building of the country on the paradigm of modernism and the new social order grounded in socialism.

This research aims to acknowledge the various roles that women architects in Yugoslavia had in the scope of rebuilding and modernisation of the country and clarify some professional constraints that limited, to a certain extent, the path to gender progress in architecture. This article dissects the case of architecture, which allowed Yugoslav women to enter and be equally represented in the profession since the 1960s. Still, in practice, the route toward professional equality in recognition of female architects was challenging but slowly progressing.

There are several research on women's contribution, their positions, and role in the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia (Woodward 1985; Sklevicky 1989; Ramet 1999; Jančar-Webster 1990; Massey, Hahn & Sekulić 1995; Dugandžić & Okić 2016; Bonfiglioli 2014). The female architects are addressed in more recent research, which includes the social and professional role of women in the interwar period (Aritonović 2009; Đurić-Zamolo 1996; Novakov 2014; Perović 1998; Stojanović 2014; Toševa 2013; Toševa 2018), and only a few papers and research about practising female architects in the period of socialist Yugoslavia (Milivojević 2021; Ivanović-Vojvodić & Zindović 2020; Zindović 2016), what can be contributed to the contesting architectural heritage of the socialist period.

### *Methodology*

The study includes several methods: desk research with a historical approach to secondary sources, including content analysis. Further statistical analysis was applied to primary data extracted from various sources, primarily from the Statistical Yearbooks of the Republic of Serbia (1954; 1975) and Lists of graduate students from the Technical Faculty of Belgrade, but also different related databases. Furthermore, the study includes interviews with some female architects to provide a first-hand experience and reflection on the women's position in the architectural profession at the time.

## HISTORICAL OUTLOOK ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION

A significant shift towards women's education was made with new laws, obligating Serbian female children, like males, to attend elementary schools since 1872. Still, girls attending secondary schools in Serbia were rare, while higher education for girls started with the opening of the Higher Women's School in Belgrade in 1863 (Perović 1998). At the end of the 19th century, state policy was to send talented Serbian students to the leading European university, among which we can find

several women mostly studying in Switzerland (medicine, pedagogy) (Trgovčević 2003, 297). After establishing the University of Belgrade, significant growth in women's education was evidenced, particularly in the inter-war period. However, before 1919, we may say that women with a university education were scarce, and women were significantly underrepresented in schools preparatory to engineering careers (Massey, Hahn & Sekulić 1995). Since the 1920s, there were enough female students to support the Association for University Educated Women, which had its inaugural congress in 1927 in Novi Sad. Interestingly, in 1926-1927, female students' share at the University of Belgrade was 26.3%, whereas 57% of all female students attended the Faculty of Arts (Novakov 2014).

A significant rise of women obtaining university diplomas was evident during and after the Second World War. In the school year 1949/1950 in Serbia, 18 Faculties (all within Belgrade) and 15 colleges and higher schools (2 in the Vojvodina region) existed. In Serbia's higher education (university and college schools), there were 28,929 students, of which 37.8% were females. In the Vojvodina region, as no University existed, only 588 students attended two colleges, of which 42.5% were girls (Statistical Office of the Republic Serbia 1954).

As early as 1943, legal measures guaranteed women equal rights in political, legal, educational, and occupational development, intended to increase women's participation in the public sphere (Einhorn 1993, 21). By 1949, Serbia's labour force comprised 39.630 women employees, 22.96% of the total labour force. Among these women, only 18% were qualified, 33.6% were trained, and almost half (48.2%) of female workers represented the unskilled labour force. In public services, only 34 women were employed (9.8% of the total number of public employees). In the period immediately after WWII, women in Yugoslavia resumed their traditional roles, but due to the rapid industrialisation and transformation of the social fabric of Yugoslavia over the next two decades, many urban women entered the paid workforce (Mihovilović 1975; Massey, Hahn & Sekulić 1995). The situation will soon change in favour of women as more and more women acquired higher education, and their numbers in various professions progressively rose to equal representation by the 1970s.

Some authors argue that state-socialist governments supported women's rights in ways that dramatically improved the material conditions of hundreds of millions of women's lives, giving them opportunities for personal advancement and economic independence from men long before the West caught up. Moreover, Ghodsee and Mead (2018) argue that the

socialist legacy of promoting women in math, science, and engineering has created a social environment conducive to women's success in these fields, which reflects in the highest percentages of women working in the technology sector nowadays being from former socialist countries. The field of architecture reflected the same trends. Observing changes in state architecture are vital as they designate vertical and horizontal power allocation and impose new opportunities and constraints for civil society, including social movements seeking access and influence of women in policy-making processes. Women's engagement in architecture and engineering was a logical step forward. The need for extensive re-building of the country moved females towards more pragmatic and practical professional choices, towards the architectural sector. The reason for this can be found in state-induced socialist policies, which immediately after the war allowed, supported, and even stimulated women's education and professional progress in architecture and other technical sciences. The presence of women in this field is undeniable. However, still, they were to struggle with other gender-related issues, such as the proper recognition of their contribution to the development of architectural design and urban planning. In terms of broader societal changes and acceptance of female architects in traditional society, their actual position mostly remained in the shadow of their more prominent male colleagues, with few remarkable exceptions.

#### *Education of Female Architects*

Women were rarely educated and employed in construction and architecture, commonly considered a male profession. Preceding the establishment of the Technical Faculty, the profession appeared within a technical section of the Great School (Lyceum) in 1863–1905. Since 1905, the Technical faculty was established as a particular unit within the University of Belgrade, separated into three departments – civil engineering, architecture, and mechanical engineering (1905–1948) (Popov 1980). The first woman to be admitted to this profession was Jelisaveta Načić (1878–1955), who enrolled as the first generation of architecture students in Belgrade (1896) and graduated in 1900. Soon after, Angelina Nešić (1975), Vidosava Nikolić, and Jovanka Bončić (1887–1966) joined her in the architectural profession (Toševa 2018). After World War I (since 1919), the presence of women who graduated from the Department of Civil Engineering of the Technical Faculty in Belgrade was very modest, with one to five women per generation of students.

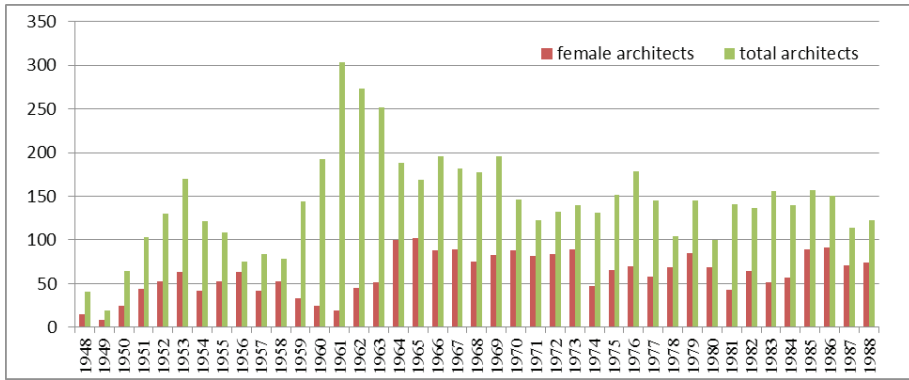


Figure 1. Participation of women in architectural education at the University of Belgrade, 1948–1988; Rakoëviæ, 1996. Authors' calculations.

From 1919–1948, 144 women enrolled the Department of Architecture of the Technical Faculty, of which 65 graduated before the war (21% of the total number of graduated architecture students) (Đurić-Zamolo 1996, 12). The same study outlines that only 10% of these women succeeded in their profession. Despite the common stand that this profession is untypical for the gentile sex, the presence of women in this profession continued to grow in the following decades. An increasing number of women started appearing in architectural offices and public services, which is a tendency that has persisted to this day. The increased interest in pursuing architectural education is even more evident after WWII; from 1948–1957, they comprised 46% of total students. The popularity of the profession slightly decreased in the following decade (1958–1967) when their share was reduced to 35%, but not for long, as already in 1968–1977 and 1978–1987 women's share was 50% and 52% of all architecture students at Belgrade University. This trend continued in the following periods (Figure 1).

### *Women in the Architectural Profession*

Most women engineers and architects who graduated before WWII were employed in public services, the Ministry of Construction, and the Department of Architecture of the Municipality of Belgrade, rarely the private practice. These women often faced gender discrimination. Due to legal provisions, Jelisaveta Načić was not able to get the position of the architect at the Ministry as the law stipulated that the public official cannot be a woman, but only men who finished the army (Vukotić



Lazar & Milašinović Marić 2017, 442). Other women architects, Jovanka Bončić Katerinić (1887–1966) and Milica Krstić (1887–1964), working in the Ministry, were also graduates of the Architectural Department of Technical Faculty of Belgrade. They had been working in various fields of architecture: urban planning, designing public and private buildings, and developing complex projects created by their senior male colleagues. However, women architects' most significant architectural contribution was innovations in school design in Serbia between 1908 and 1938 (Novakov 2014; Ivanović Vojvodić & Zindović 2020).

After the war, the Ministry of Construction stopped acting as a project bureau, entrusting large infrastructural and building projects to the construction companies like "Energoprojekt", "Srbijaprojekt", "Rad", etc., shaping generations of architects who worked and created in Serbia, Yugoslavia and beyond (Ivanović Vojvodić & Zindović 2020, 381). In 1949, 237 companies, six public institutions, and 44 authorities operated in the construction industry, employing 79,739 people. Of this number, about 7% were engineers, 8.5% were administrative employees, and 76% were workers (26% were qualified).

The statistical outlook from 1953 registered 62,106 employees in the construction industry (12% professionals, 3% administrative staff, 85% workers). It also shows the presence of women in the construction sector, where they represented 4.7% of employees (2931 women), among which 37.6% of workers (3% qualified, 20% semi-qualified, 77% unqualified) and 62.4% officials (77% professional, 23% auxiliary). Almost half of all employed women in this sector were engaged as professionals (48.1%). Despite being present in the profession, the women-man ratio among professional staff was 1:6. Still, among the workforce in the construction sector, there were only 2.1% women. The presence of women in the early post-war period indicates the increased popularity of the architectural profession in the process of women's emancipation in Serbia and Yugoslavia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 1954). In 1971, among experts and artists, women made up 45.4% of employees (49.6% in Vojvodina), while in the construction industry, women made 9.7% of employees (in Vojvodina representing 8.5%) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 1975).

Female architects made significant contributions, working individually, in teams, and in pairs as employees of large state construction and design companies. Milica Šterić (1914–1998) acted as a lead architect at "Energoprojekt" bureau on various projects but is renowned for her design of industrial buildings and complexes. She received the Seventh July Award in 1961. Some public buildings that women architects fully realized became



architectural symbols of Belgrade, like the Eastern Gate of Belgrade – “Rudo tower” signed by architect Vera Ćirković; impressive business complex of the Union of the Chambers of Commerce realized by Zagorka Mešulam, and the business tower “Jadran” in Nemanjina street as a creation of Dobrila Lalković; the residential complex in Medaković Street by architect Vera Kordić, etc. Some of Belgrade’s tallest buildings, like “Voždovac towers”, were designed by architect couple Stana and Branko Aleksić in 1969–1973, while the headquarters of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (nowadays the “Ušće Tower”) in Belgrade was designed by architects Mihailo Janković, Dušan Milenković and Mirjana Marijanović. Ljiljana Bakić designed the Institute for Rehabilitation of non-specific lung diseases in Sokobanja. At the same time, her projects in cooperation with her husband, architect Dragoljub Bakić, include settlements “Nova Galenika” and “Višnjička Banja” as well as the famous “Pionir Hall” in Belgrade (Ivanović Vojvodić & Zindović 2020, 283). Architect Ivanka Raspopović worked in several architectural bureaus, “Rad”, “Srbijaprojekt” and “Zlatibor”, designing industrial, residential, and commercial buildings. Her most successful projects, usually attributed to her senior colleague, architect Ivan Antić, include the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Belgrade in 1960, for which, as author-team, they received the October Award of the City of Belgrade in 1965, and the Memorial Museum “21<sup>st</sup> October” in Kragujevac completed in 1976 (Popadić 2009; Ivanović Vojvodić & Zindović 2020, 382). These two buildings are regarded as the most successful examples of modern museum architecture.

Many regulation plans for towns and settlements in early socialism (1947–1953) in Serbia were developed by women architects and urban planners, among which Ružica Ilić, Jovanka Jeftanović, Ljiljana Petrović-Durini and Olivera Jeftić, who signed 14 urban plans. The general plan of towns of Užice and Šabac from 1947 was the most significant professional contribution of the architect Ružica Ilić, whose contribution to Užice and Serbian urbanism and architecture was neglected based on a silent consensus between politics and the profession (Milivojević 2021, 726). This evidence shows that the women professionals at an early stage of socialism acquired highly responsible positions and had important roles in the country’s urban development.

Women showed great solidarity, often engaging on the same projects and acting in teams. Those few at leading positions, like Jovanka Bončić Katerinić, have shown great understanding and frequently employed women and supported their professional advancement. They often covered and finalized projects developed and initiated by their female

colleagues who were prevented from doing so due to family obligations, like maternity leaves and childcare. An excellent example of women's solidarity in the profession is the establishment of the architectural atelier "LIK" in Belgrade, established and managed by women. Starting their professional cooperation in 1953, working together in the architectural bureau "Oblik" Sofija Nenadović and Vesna Matičević recall "We worked during the day in the bureau and developed architectural solutions for architectural competitions in the night (...) The women were equal to men. That is what we had at that moment after war (...) Among young architects of both genders ruled friendship and healthy competition" (Zindović 2016). Inspired by the success of their male colleagues, four women created a female team and entered architectural competitions and won the first prize for the design of an Elementary school in Niš in 1954. After winning the competition for the building of the Belgrade airport in Surčin (1957), disappointed with their position in "Neimar" building company, these women established their bureau - Atelier "LIK" (Sofija Nenadović, Dušanka Menegelo Aćimović, Nadežda Filipon Trbojević, Vesna Matičević, Vladislav Ivković, and Nada Blagojević as first director). Great architectural successes followed their professional solidarity and creative spirit in numerous projects. After the Belgrade Airport, the Atelier "LIK" developed projects for another 11 airports of former Yugoslavia, but in different team combinations (Airport in Osijek in 1970 was a project of Sofija Nenadović and Nadežda Filipon Trbojević; Airport in Podgorica by Vesna Matičević, Dušanka Menegelo and Vladislav Ivković; the airport in Dubrovnik awarded to Vladislav Ivković with additions of Sofija Nenadović). Still, in scientific circles, Vladislav Ivković, who later became a professor at Architectural Faculty, was acknowledged as the most renowned expert for airport projects in the country (Zindović 2016).

## GIRLS BUILD: RECONCEPTUALIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF NOVI SAD

In Novi Sad, the more substantial construction activity and the emergence of Modernism occurred in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the city was declared the capital of the Danube region. The architects Dragiša Brašovan, Đorđe Tabaković, Lazar Dunderski, Milan Skulić, Danilo Kačanski, and Daka Popović brought a new vision to the capital city, transforming it from eclectic Austro-Hungarian city to the modern one. The female architects active at that time include Jelena Tomić Bokur, who graduated from the Department of Architecture of Technical Faculty in Belgrade in 1913, working at the Ministry of Civil Engineering. Her

referential project in Novi Sad includes a collective building for the Banovina officers in Sonja Marinković Street 3-5 (1936).

After the Second World War, the major reconstruction of Novi Sad was initiated. It included remodelling the existing urban fabric and expanding the city by conquering the marshland beside the river Danube. The Master plan for Novi Sad envisioned radical reconstruction and reconceptualization of the city based on the principles of new urban planning, as defined by the Athens Charter. The concept of the new city rested on the paradigms of Modernism, as was the case in all other Yugoslav cities of the time. In Novi Sad, it resulted in a radical collision between the old urban matrix and the new, modern one. The implications of the planning approach were evident in urban space: the new boulevards with modern apartment blocks emerged, with a diverse network of local institutions for education, social and medical care, sports, and culture (Konstantinović & Zeković 2023). This fundamental change in urban fabric gave the city the spatial, structural, and demographic capacity to evolve into the contemporary urban environment. The comprehensive construction activity was expressed by a specific architectural interface that is included in the *oeuvre* of Yugoslav modernism (Konstantinović & Jović 2021, 25), even though the city centre visually kept its 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century image, created mainly by Austrian and Hungarian architects.

The process of post-war remodelling and building was led by relatively young architects who belonged to the first generation(s) of the afterwar students of architecture. They gained their degree from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, but also in other schools of architecture (Zagreb, Ljubljana, and later Sarajevo and Skopje) and were directed to the specific organisation that needed experts. Among them, the prominent role had female architects, who also took different positions in the reconstruction process of Novi Sad, partly or fully recognised for their important contributions. They started their professional work after WWII as the first-generation graduates of the Architectural Faculty in Belgrade (the 1950s and 1960s). Their careers are interwoven into the modern urban history of Novi Sad.

#### *The Builder: Julka Majtan and the Construction of the Railway Station in Novi Sad*

The train station in Novi Sad was among the first buildings that shaped the Boulevard of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, cut from north and south, as a new city axis, which introduced modern urban planning. The city remodelling was based on a significant infrastructural shift – the relocation of the industrial

sites and rail along the Danube to the north of the city, next to the canal Dunav-Tisa-Dunav. The new railway station was a symbol of change – it marked the north end of the major Boulevard and a new route of the rail, but also introduced new standards for the emerging socialist society. It was envisioned and designed by architect Imre Farkaš, with associate Milan Matović, as a complex urban structure, a new “city gate” and a new interface of the city for passengers who reached the city by railroad.

“The capacity of the main station hall testifies to the ambition of establishing rail traffic as the dominant form of arrival in the city and to theatricalise the encounter with the city through an impressive view through the glass membrane upon descending from the platform” (Konstantinović 2021, 98), inadvertently fulfilling the mission of the propagandist of the provincial capital (Krstonošić 1965, 38).

The need for more highly educated professionals in Novi Sad was a burning issue for newly established construction companies and large urban projects envisioned for the city. Immediately after graduation in 1961, Julka Majtan came to her hometown of Novi Sad, facing multiple job offers. She decided to take a position in the construction company “Neimar”, one of the largest companies operating in Novi Sad, Vojvodina, but also in Third World Countries. A driver was sent to take her for the job interview, clearly indicating the company’s interest in hiring an expert for numerous assignments it took in the reconstruction of the city. At age 26, she was assigned to follow the construction site for the new train station in Novi Sad, where she was the only architect monitoring the process. Her boss, Teodor Ačanski, was only 36, and she was his first assistant on such a complex project.

Although the building was ambitious in its programmatic and structural terms, the reality was completely different. The construction site had only primary working conditions. They used trained horses for maneuvering the material and only essential technical equipment. The support of the railway company, city, and provincial authority was immense; they solved any shortage of material, delay, or technical problem. The importance of the railway station project was beyond its primary function; it demonstrated the programmatic upgrade in the function of new socialist welfare. Thus, it became society’s statement about new living standards and the ability to provide a material base for a new life, although the means were still in their pre-industrial phase, and thus demonstrated the prospects for the future. The change in the city generated by a new train station was evident for years to come. New neighborhoods and housing quarters emerged, and the Boulevard began to take shape.



Picture 1. Julka Majtan at the construction site of the Railway Station Novi Sad.

Authors' Photo Archive.

The station was opened in May 1964 for the shift to the summer railway timetable. It was completed in 15 months and opened on time, and the public and professionals were impressed with the promptness and quality of realization.

In her interview<sup>1</sup>, Majtan pointed out the high ethical standards of all the people involved, dedication, and seriousness, saying that being a woman was irrelevant; the only relevant thing was your professional abilities and responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> The interview with Julka Majtan was realized within the Master studio "Architectural design – complex programs" in November 2016 (interview conducted by D. Konstantinović, S. Jović, M. Momirov).



Picture 2. Interview with Julka Majtan in the Cinema Hall of the Railway Station Novi Sad, 2016. Authors' Photo Archive.

Julka Majtan continued her career working as a high school teacher in education of architectural and civil engineering technicians. However, Majtan's early work stands for other invisible women experts working in numerous construction sites across the city, being the crucial actors of city development and modernisation.

#### *The Team Player: Milena Đorđević*

Another graduate from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, 1950 generation, is Milena Stanković Đorđević, born in 1924 in Brno (Czech Republic). In 1953 she came to Novi Sad with her husband, Sibin Đorđević (1926–2013). They started their practice working individually but soon as partners on numerous projects in the city. In 1957 the architectural studio "Plan" was established; Sibin was appointed director and head designer, while Milena started working there also. By then, they had jointly designed numerous public buildings, making it hard to distinguish individual contributions. Instead, they both worked on each of them, although only one was appointed principal architect and designer.

The interview with Milena in 2013 (Bede 2015) confirmed their mutual contribution to their design oeuvre: they finished each other's thoughts and lines, she said. She talked about her ideas implemented in his projects and vice versa. Between 1957 and 1963, they designed and executed many vital buildings that marked Novi Sad's modernisation: housing and office buildings in Maršal Tito Boulevard (today's Blv. Mihajlo Pupin), where the architectural studio "Plan" was situated, Novi Sad City Assembly in 1958–1960, marking the new route of the Mihajlo Pupin Boulevard, Hotel "Park" in 1962, which was the most exclusive hotel in Novi Sad, in which president Tito spent New Years Eve of 1977 (Vrgović 2015, 235), and many other residential buildings.



Their work at the beginning of the sixth decade demonstrated the gained experience and personal creative explorations, resulting in the practice of “moderate modernism”, characterized by the free façade articulation, using the cladding, glass, and brise-soleil, and particularly in the elaborate composition of the fifth façade (Mitrović 2010, 245).



Picture 3: Milena Djordjevic (next to the drawing board) at her work in the architectural office in Stuttgart.

Picture is from Archive of Aleksandar Bede.

With the consent of Aleksandar Bede.

In 1963, they left Novi Sad and continued their career in Germany (Stuttgart). Their work in Germany was never officially authored because that was the practice of the state architectural offices at that time. Working at the Public Office for Planning, they had a chance to work on critical educational buildings. Milena recalls the conversation with the office secretary upon their arrival:

“When we arrived, our secretary in the office asked me: “Why do you work?” I said, “That is my call/profession,” and she said, “Here, the wives of the architects and engineers do not work” (...). At that time, their women worked only when their husbands could not earn enough money (...) They found it weird that my husband was an engineer. Unbelievable! In East Germany, that was not the case; there was socialism. In socialism, there have been women” (Bede 2015, 74).

In 2000, Sibin Đorđević received “Tabaković Award” for lifetime achievement given by the Association of Novi Sad Architects. His work was individually recognised for his projects realised in Novi Sad in



1953–1963, “which remarkably and uncompromisingly promoted the modern architectural thought and practice of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the local context. Associate and co-responsible architect of these works was also architect Milena Đorđević, colleague and wife of Mr Đorđević” (Mitrović 2000, 2). This acknowledged that his work from 1959–1962 was realised together with his wife, Milena.

In 2004, architect Zaha Hadid was awarded Pritzker Prize for architecture, the most prestigious global recognition for lifetime achievements, being the first female architect who received this prestigious award since its establishment in 1979. In 1991, architect and critic Robert Venturi received the Pritzker Prize award, which was awarded for him alone, even though his professional work is strongly associated with his wife and colleague, Denise Scott Brown. Denise Scott Brown refused to attend the ceremony. By then, she had published her seminal essay *Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture* (1989), so the decision of the jury added the arguments to her claims that sexism defined her “as a scribe, typist or photographer to [her] husband” since the “body of theory and design in architecture apparently must be associated by architecture critics with an individual”, and, by the rule, the male individual. This led to the Harvard students’ petition in 2013, which requested retroactively adding her name to the award, but the prize jury stayed with the first decision. In 2017, Denise Scott Brown was awarded Jane Drew Prize.

The recognition of Milena Đorđević’s work in joint practice with her husband, Sibin, followed the same path. In the joint professional work – working as a couple, “from within the community for the community” (Bede 2015, 104) her part remained unawarded by the prize’s jury, although her contribution was recognised. However, unlike the Pritzker prize, “Tabaković Award” was previously awarded to female architects: in 1997 to architect Tatjana Vanjifatov-Savić and in 1998 to Zora Mitrović Pajkić. Milena’s exclusion from the award could be attributed to the higher office position of Sibin and the lack of information about their deep and overwhelming collaboration from the perspective of the Jury in 2000. In 2018, the same prize was awarded to Milenija and Darko Marušić for their joint architectural contribution, which could be taken as a change in the overall perception of women’s contribution in cooperative architectural design teams.

#### *The Designer: Tatjana Vanjifatov Savić*

Tabaković Prize laureate, Tatjana Vanjifatov Savić, started her career in 1953 after graduating at Architectural Faculty in Belgrade. In 1957 she returned to Novi Sad and started practising architecture in various design offices

and institutions. A substantial part of Vanjifatov Savić's work represents the design of kindergarten and school buildings. During her long career, she built over 30 school buildings across the city, Vojvodina region, and Yugoslavia. In the early seventies, she designs her most elaborate buildings: two elementary schools in the neighbourhood of Liman ("Jovan Popović" in 1972 and "Toza Marković" in 1975), and during the period 1970–1976, "SOS orphanage – children's village" in Sremska Kamenica. Her lifelong experience in working and designing for children was embodied in the catalogue of design solutions for various types of kindergartens and schools. She envisioned the buildings in two basic types – urban and suburban, and then used modules – cubes, with flat or sloped roofs to organise the space. This system provided adaptation to the specific needs of the investor and site. The kindergarten in Kamenički park is one of her early works in which she demonstrated the approach. In this project, the sloping terrain was used as an advantage for the composition of the cubes cascading toward the Danube. As a result, this strategy created a new quality in the surrounding area. For her contribution to these typologies, she received the October Prize of the City of Novi Sad in 1965 and the Award of Self-interest Community (SIZ) for Children Care of Vojvodina for the achieved results in the field of children protection in Vojvodina region in 1977 (Mitrović 1997).

In 1976 her team received the "Borbina nagrada" award for the best building realized in Vojvodina in 1975. The team of authors consisting of Miroslav Grujić, Tatjana Vanjifatov Savić, Jožef Tot, Natko Marinčić and Olga Marinčić was recognised for their design for the new type of orphanage – children's village. A project presented a significant and specific contribution to children's care, where exceptional architectural quality represents integration into the context while integrating the quality of Kamanički park, architecture, landscaping, and horticulture (Stanojević 1976). The children's village demonstrated the new approach to this kind of institution which was distributed in eleven "family" houses, on the sloping terrain, in each of which lives 9 to 11 kids, with a guardian. The organisation of the units reflects the single-family house organisation and atmosphere. The surrounding area combines the setting of the housing and public area, creating a domestic atmosphere but still indicating that this is not the *ordinary* house. Belousov concludes that the planning of the "houses" is dedicated to the comfortable organisation of the collective, which feels like a family. In creating the architecture of the single house (...), authors tried to stress and underline the tradition of the built environment and the simplicity of the construction for this unusual social experiment (Belousov 1986).

The career of Vanjifatov Savić reflects her continuous professional development and advancement, taking the highest positions in the offices and institutions she was employed in. From 1974–1980 she was appointed the head designer and director of the Design Institute of Vojvodina (Projektni zavod Vojvodine). During the eighties and nineties, she was awarded various prizes as an acknowledgement for her professional contribution, proving the high professional status of female architects during socialist times.

## TOWARDS EQUALITY OF RECOGNITION

“Even when the path is nominally open – when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant – there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is, I think, of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved” (“Professions for Women”, Virginia Woolf).<sup>2</sup>

In the period of socialism, gender equality was especially emphasised and advocated, and the change in the role of women in the social life of the SFRY is particularly noticeable due to their belonging to the working class and their essential role in restoring the economic strength of the state. The *Constitution of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia* (1946)<sup>3</sup> in Article 24 regulates the position of women in a new socialist country:

“Women are equal to men in all domains of state, economic, and socio-political life. For equal work, women are entitled to the same salary as men and enjoy special employment protection. The state especially protects the interests of mother and child by establishing maternity hospitals, children’s homes and kindergartens, and the mother’s right to paid leave before and after childbirth.”

From the beginning of the 1950s onwards, in its reconstruction, the state moved from essential infrastructural investments to the construction of prominent and representative public buildings and spaces, for which

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<sup>2</sup> “Professions for Women” is an abbreviated version of the speech Virginia Woolf delivered before a branch of the National Society for Women’s Service on January 21, 1931; it was published posthumously in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

<sup>3</sup> Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije, 31. januar 1946, Član 24.

design proposals were obtained through open architectural competitions in which female architects, working individually, in pairs and teams achieved significant success. That allowed them to realise some of the most important architectural pieces in the country. Since then, more and more women have appeared as architects and construction engineers in project bureaus in Yugoslavia, but still, the number of recognised female authors has remained small. Despite some women being acknowledged and rewarded for their success across Yugoslavia, Ivanović Vojvodić and Zindović (2020) argue that their architectural contribution was rarely researched and even less valued, while the teamwork was often disadvantageous for many female architects as their contribution was often ascribed to more prominent male colleagues.

The recognition of their contributions is contested in at least two levels.

The modernisation of the country, evident in radical changes in cities such as Novi Sad, implanted the Modernism in the core of the city fabric, creating a new, contested identity which remains “unabsorbed” (Konstantinović & Jović 2020). Being active participants in shaping the modern urban image of the city, they stay on the margins of urban history, along with their significant architectural legacies. In that sense, they share the same “invisibility” with their fellow male colleagues, witnessing contemporary society’s inability to deal with the socialist legacy more objectively and unbiasedly while evaluating the built environment. The humanising and modernizing quality of the modernist *oeuvre* remains overshadowed by the socialist aura and modern era of the city, visible in every aspect of the urban identity, underappreciated by the official cultural history nowadays.

During their careers, female architects undertook a complex social role, which was a mixture of the previous traditional comprehension of the women’s position in the family, and a new one, which opened up during socialism – being the vital member of the professional and social community. That brought an immense burden for women professionals, who had to balance their professional and private life and sometimes take less responsible positions, adding to the risks of professional marginalisation (Adams & Tancred 2000, 93; Fowler & Wilson 2004). This became almost a rule – for women to be in “professions for women”. That is why the recognition of their role in teamwork, with their colleagues or husbands in architecture, sometimes is seen as a supportive, not a collaborative one.

Despite some progress towards equality since the 1950s, as more women have entered various professions (Valian 1998), men continued to benefit from

advantages in recruitment, pay, and promotion in most jobs (Fowler & Wilson 2004). The current trend remains the same, as Fowler and Wilson (2004, 117) conclude “while liberating architectural stars from parochial boundaries and deploying a rhetoric of flexibility or authenticity which might appear to favour women, the harsh economic climate has undercut the conditions which are conducive to gender equality”. Even at the point of entry into the architectural profession, there is a disparity between men and women students and those registered as architects, as the proportion of women architects seems to be low internationally. These numbers rise in architectural education with a share of women between 1975 and 1985 in the United Kingdom ranging from 13% to 26% up to 34% in the 2000s (RIBA 2001), of which only 12% were registered architects (5% in 1975). In Scandinavian countries, only 20% of architects are women (Lorenz 1990), in Scotland (9%), in Spain, France, Germany, and Iceland share of women architects’ ranges from 10 to 16 per cent, while the emancipated USA possesses only 8.9% women among registered architects, and 8.7% among architectural academic staff (Fowler & Wilson, 2004). Thus, despite the decades of feminist activism success in Western Europe, women in the former socialist countries of the Eastern bloc, former Yugoslavia likewise, seem to enjoy greater access to jobs in the technological sector. The explanation for such disparity is seen in the long history of state-socialist commitments to women’s education and employment (Ghodsee & Mead 2018).

The presented cases of architects Julka Majtan, Milena Đorđević and Tatjana Vanjifatov-Savić are paradigmatic for the roles, positions, burdens, (lack of) recognitions, and careers of all female architects who participated in shaping the new urban environment<sup>4</sup>. Their practices were placed in Novi Sad, which reflects all the misconceptions, challenges, and contestation in dealing with its modern urban identity.

The proper recognition and valuation of the socialist architectural legacy is the first step towards historical recognition of all the actors – architects, engineers, policymakers, planners, and builders. This process is part of a broader cultural discourse that must be “opened” to these points of the past as part of the overall understanding of the “truth about us”<sup>5</sup> (Konstantinović & Zeković, 2023: 18). The gender equality right

<sup>4</sup> In Novi Sad, aside from the presented and mentioned ones, the female architects who contributed significantly were Katarina Babin, Nada Babić Novakov, Ana Jankov, Margita Radovanović, Natalija Reba, and many others still invisible female contributors.

<sup>5</sup> In his explication for design project for the Museum of Revolution in Belgrade, arch. Vjenceslav Rihter, dealing with a new building type, stressed that the mission of this kind of museum is to “hold the truth, the truth about us”, indicating the complexity of the Yugoslav society of the time.

introduced by the new social order was the catalyst for women education and professional work, which brought a new group of professionals in the process of the post-war reconstruction. Their roles, contributions, and legacies should be recognised within this framework – not as an excluded group of (women) professionals but as equally presented and evaluated participants of modern urban history.

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