

# Contribution of slovenian architect Franc Avbelj and “Planinka” Company To The Development Of Tourism In Serbia: A Case Study of the Urban-Architectural Solution of Kuršumljija Spa

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*Architecture, Urbanism, Tourism, Žubor Center, Kuršumljija Spa*

## /Abstract

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, tourism was gaining mass character worldwide. Nevertheless, in Yugoslavia, the ruling ideology significantly contributed to the transformation of tourism into a mass phenomenon. Through trade unions, union branches and self-governing interest associations for leisure and recreation, tourism became a part of the ruling narrative advocating equal rights for all. The focus of the paper is on the analysis of cooperation between the Planinka company from Kuršumljija in Serbia, as a carrier of tourism in the region and the architect Franc Avbelj from Slovenia, as an expert in designing tourist facilities. In a series of projects created in this cooperation, the urban and architectural design of Kuršumljija Spa and the Medical and Recreational Center Žubor stood out. During its construction, the Žubor Center was the first tourist and healthcare facility of this type in the wider region. The aim of the paper is to point out the interrelation of all participants during these extensive efforts, to present organizational and aesthetic characteristics of these projects and to highlight the immeasurable consequences of the long-standing marginalization of the former republic's construction achievements.

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## Introduction

In the first post-war years, the architectural practice of the newly-formed Socialist Yugoslavia was characterized by Socialist Realism, which was formally abandoned as a concept in 1950 at the Counseling of Architects and Urban Planners of Yugoslavia in Dubrovnik, Croatia. During the period which was labelled in historiography as “socialist aestheticism,”<sup>1</sup> the state continued to integrate art and architecture into its mechanisms of control,<sup>2</sup> disguised as creative freedoms, the progress of the entire society and in order to legitimize its own disobedience towards the USSR.<sup>3</sup> While the initial period of the post-war construction was primarily characterized by the reconstruction of residential fund, during the following years and especially in the 1970s, the state immensely invested in the construction of facilities intended to reflect economic prosperity and social progress.<sup>4</sup> During the 1960-1980 period, tourism, i.e. the construction of tourist facilities, stood out as a particularly suitable activity through which it was possible to present both the modernization of society and the idea of social equality.<sup>5</sup> Vice versa, from a sociological point of view, tourism was considered to be an area through which it was possible to identify different social aspects and their interrelations.<sup>6</sup>

## Tourism in Socialist Yugoslavia

Although the transformation of tourism into the mass phenomenon was a feature of world scales during the second half of the twentieth century, it is necessary to highlight the contributions of the ruling socialist ideology that enabled and accelerated its emergence in Yugoslavia. In the Yugoslav context, the socialism influenced the emergence of mass tourism by popularising it through its official narrative of social equality and under the slogan “vacation for all.”<sup>7</sup> It was noted that the turning point for tourism in Yugoslavia was 1952 and

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1 Miloš Perović, *Srpska arhitektura XX veka: od istoricizma do drugog modernizma* (Serbian architecture of the 20th century: from historicism to the second modernism) (Belgrade: Arhitektonski fakultet, 2003), 148-209.

2 Milan Popadić, “Novi ulepšani svet: socijalistički estetizam i arhitektura (New improved world: socialist aestheticism and architecture),” *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti*, no. 38 (2010): 247.

3 Vladimir Kulić, “Architecture and Ideology in Socialist Yugoslavia,” in *Unfinished Modernisations: Between Utopia and Pragmatism*, eds. Maroje Mrduljaš and Vladimir Kulić (Zagreb: UHA, 2012), 42.

4 Aleksandar Ignjatović, “Tranzicija i reforme: arhitektura u Srbiji 1952-1980 (Transition and reforms: architecture in Serbia 1952-1980),” in *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji XX vek*, ed. Miško Šuvaković (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2012), 689-710.

5 Nebojša Antešević, “Arhitektura socijalističkog hedonizma. Turistički objekti moderne arhitekture u SFR Jugoslaviji od 1960. do 1980. (The architecture of socialist hedonism. Tourist objects of modern architecture in the SFR Yugoslavia from 1960 to 1980),” in *Međunarodni simpozij studenata povijesti umjetnosti. 1. Susreti mladih povjesničara umjetnosti u Rijeci 2014. Knjiga sažetaka* (Rijeka: Filozofski fakultet, 2014), 30.

6 Catherine Schmidt, “The Guided Tour: Insulated Adventure,” *Urban Life* 7, no. 4 (1979): 441.

7 Igor Duda, “Turizam narodu. Godišnji odmor kao proizvod socijalističke modernizacije (Tourism to the people. Vacation as a product of socialist modernization),” *Čovjek i prostor* 05-06, no. 684-685 (2011): 32.

that tourism during 1952-1953 became "almost a strategic factor for Yugoslav development."<sup>8</sup>

The development of tourism in Yugoslavia had a dual character, reflecting labor rights guaranteed by law on the one hand, and representing a mass profit-oriented industry on the other hand.<sup>9</sup> In the field of workers' rights, the Sixties are considered the milestone during which the vacations "became a part of a new social contract" and a minimum of three-week paid vacation was granted by the Convention no. 132 of the International Labour Organization in 1970.<sup>10</sup> Significant is the statistics which indicates that in 1961 the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture in Yugoslavia was 58%, whereas in 1981 this number was reduced to 27%.<sup>11</sup> This implies the extent to which the urbanisation of Yugoslavia was forced during the observed period, further supporting the thesis that a large percentage of the population found themselves in the environment that had changed on multiple levels and to which they were completely unaccustomed. As Duda stated: "Tourism habits are yet to be created for many."<sup>12</sup>

A key role in creation of those habits was played by mass social tourism managed by trade unions, trade union branches and self-governing interest associations for leisure and recreation.<sup>13</sup> The state contributed by investing in the construction of resorts for students and workers, and by economic benefits for employees as well. Social tourism was considered to be a "good lesson" for all those who were not used to this type of vacation.<sup>14</sup> In the 1980s, tourism became a common practice of everyday life,<sup>15</sup> but during the same period, social resorts also "lost the race" in favor of commercial accommodations.<sup>16</sup> Namely, in the decades immediately after the war, tourism had a highly social and emancipating character, and it was also used as a "tool of ideological propaganda,"<sup>17</sup> while in the 1960s and 1970s it replaced the political dimension with a sustainable one and focused on commercial tourism, following modern

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8 Nebojša Antešević, "Socijalistički estetizam u turističkoj arhitekturi Jugoslavije (1960-1980) (Socialist aestheticism in Yugoslav tourist architecture (1960-1980))," in *Arhitektura i urbanizam posle drugog svetskog rata – Zaštita kao proces ili model: zbornik radova*, eds. Vladimir Mako et al. (Belgrade: Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda, 2015), 188, 201.

9 Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism in-between: The Mediator Architecture of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012), 180; Antešević, "Socijalistički estetizam u turističkoj," 188, 201.

10 Igor Duda, "Od radnika do turista. Prava, želje i stvarnost socijalnoga turizma u jugoslavenskome socijalizmu (From labourer to tourist. Rights, wishes and reality of social tourism in Yugoslav socialism)," in *Sunčana strana Jugoslavije. Povijest turizma u socijalizmu*, eds. Hannes Grandtis and Karin Taylor (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2013), 57.

11 Duda, "Od radnika do turista," 70-71.

12 Duda, "Od radnika do turista," 71.

13 Duda, "Turizam narodu," 29; Duda, "Od radnika do turista," 60.

14 Duda, "Turizam narodu," 31.

15 Duda, "Od radnika do turista," 76.

16 Duda, "Turizam narodu," 32.

17 Antešević, "Socijalistički estetizam u turističkoj," 190.

tourism standards.<sup>18</sup> After the breakup with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's tourism potential was directed towards the Western market, in line with its foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> Due to the need for achieving the commercial goals, in this building typology the aesthetic criteria became normative over time.<sup>20</sup>

After the enthusiastic phase of socialist construction, tourism proved to be a far more complex and demanding economic field.<sup>21</sup> As Antešević noted, the construction of tourist facilities, hotels and resorts on the mountains was especially topical in Serbia and Slovenia.<sup>22</sup>

### Planinka company as the main carrier of tourism development in Toplica district in Serbia

Planinka company was founded in 1964 as The Working Organization for Natural Health Resorts, Tourism and Hospitality in Kuršumljija, with the aim of developing tourism in the municipality of Kuršumljija.<sup>23</sup> It was created by merging directorates of three resorts located in the territory of this municipality - Prolom, Lukovo and Kuršumljija Spas i.e. by integrating the catering company Ugostiteljstvo from Kuršumljija and climatic-spa medical resort Kuršumlijska Banja (which included Kuršumljija, Prolom and Lukovo Spa).<sup>24</sup> In addition to thermal mineral waters, a special tourist potential was the natural monument Devil's Town, located within this municipality. The company has been operating as a joint-stock company since 1999 and its employees are shareholders of 95% of the capital. Planinka built the overall tourism infrastructure and the superstructure of Prolom, Lukovo and Kuršumljija Spas and, nowadays, it is considered to be the main carrier of tourism development in the area of Toplica district.<sup>25</sup> Besides tourism, catering and medical rehabilitation, the company is also engaged in production of Prolom water.<sup>26</sup>

18 Duda, "Od radnika do turista," 60; Nebojša Antešević, "Regionalizam u modernizmu vs. turizam u socijalizmu. Rasprava o uticajima regionalizama na arhitekturu modernih turističkih objekata Jugoslavije druge polovine 20. veka (Regionalism in modernism vs. tourism in socialism. A treatise of the influences of regionalism at the architecture of modern tourist facilities in Yugoslavia during the second half of the 20th century)," in *Međunarodni tematski zbornik: Umetnost i njena uloga u istoriji: između trajnosti i prolaznih –izama, posvećen sećanju na prof. dr Miodraga Jovanovića (1932-2013)*, eds. Zoran Jovanović et al. (Kosovska Mitrovica: Filozofski fakultet u Prištini, 2014), 499.

19 Igor Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put do međunarodnog turizma. Otvaranje, decentralizacija i propaganda u prvoj polovici 1950-ih (The Yugoslav path to international tourism. Opening, decentralization and propaganda in the first half of the 1950s)," in *Sunčana strana Jugoslavije. Povijest turizma u socijalizmu*, eds. Hannes Grandtis and Karin Taylor (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2013), 150; Antešević, "Regionalizam u modernizmu," 496.

20 Antešević, "Socijalistički estetizam u turističkoj," 191.

21 Antešević, "Socijalistički estetizam u turističkoj," 194.

22 Antešević, "Regionalizam u modernizmu," 496.

23 "Planinka Istorijat," Planinka, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.planinka.rs/istorijat.php>

24 Milivoje Mačejka and Radovan Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija: turistička monografija i vodič* (Kuršumljija Municipality: tourist monograph and guide) (Niš: Punta, 2008), 25.

25 Marko Gašić, Vladan Ivanović and Goran Perić, "Materijalna baza razvoja turizma na prostoru Topličkog okruga (Material basis for tourism development in Toplica district)," in *Synthesis – International Scientific Conference of IT and Business Related Research* (Belgrade: Singidunum University, 2015), 497.

26 Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 26; "Planinka Istorijat," Planinka, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.planinka.rs/istorijat.php>.

In the founding year of Planinka, economist Đorđe Eraković, born in 1936 in Kuršumljija, was appointed its director. According to him, the newly-formed company was created without any expert analysis and without any plans for work and development. An aggravating circumstance was not only the lack of professional staff, but also the fact that no electricity was still available in Prolom Spa in 1964. On his initiative, the company turned to the Institute for Tourism in Ljubljana for assistance, the main institution of this kind in Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup>

Collaboration between Planinka and the Institute for Tourism in Ljubljana started with production of the Programme for Tourism Development for the area of Kuršumljija municipality with three medical spas. Based on the Development Program, urban plans were drawn up, natural and other resources were recorded and the method of putting those resources into operation was determined. For each architectural object, conditions were defined based on existing demands and statistics, and forecasted trends based on the expected results of the Development Program implementation. As the initiator and investor of these ventures, Planinka did not set specific requirements and guidelines in terms of architectural design of buildings. The orientation of the company was to engage numerous experts and professional institutions in different fields for each facility and investment. According to Eraković, "Nothing was done without extensive research, because we did not have the means to follow the current political tendencies, instead we were led by a safe calculation."<sup>28</sup>

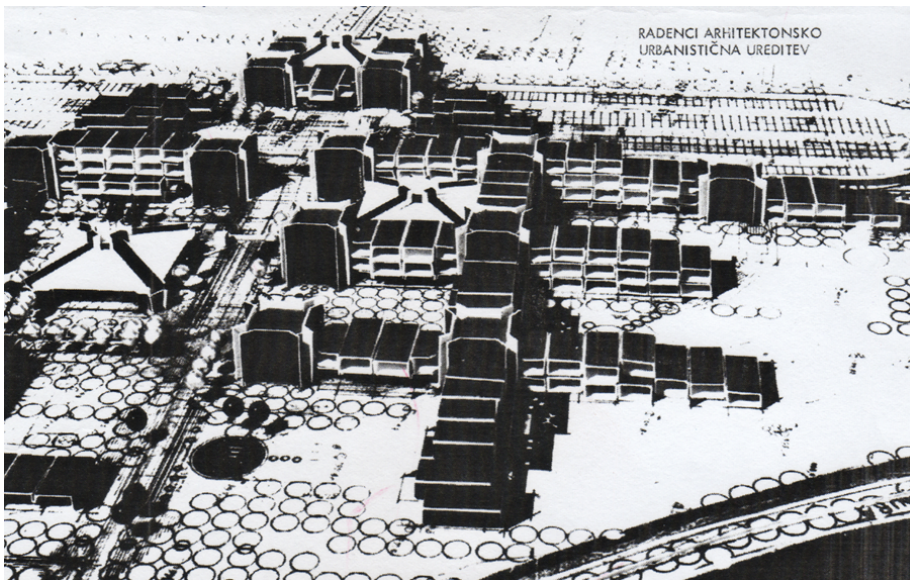
The efforts of Planinka regarding construction of sites for tourist purposes and others, affected the wider area of Kuršumljija municipality and the three surrounding medical spas. The construction of tourist facilities for the company's needs required the construction of infrastructure and other facilities throughout the whole municipality. Due to the spatial disposition of mentioned destinations, these ventures implied considerable investment in a large area and significantly contributed to the overall level of development in the entire area. According to the statistics, in the early Seventies in this area, this was the presence of the activities: agriculture 45%, industry 23%, and catering and tourism only 1.8%, which testifies to the underdevelopment of this area.<sup>29</sup> Infrastructure development and new accommodation facilities also provided a large number of job opportunities for local people. Apart from the undoubted contribution to local urbanisation, efforts of Planinka also resulted in the emancipation of the local population. All employees had the opportunity to cooperate with a large number of experts of different profiles and knowledge. In that way, they were gaining experience for their independent work. According to data from their site, in 1964, the company numbered 60 mostly unskilled workers, whereas nowadays there are 367 workers, 60 of which have university degrees, and "special attention

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27 Reuf Bravo and Selma Bravo, *Yugoslav Scientific Research Guide 1970* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1972), 517.

28 Interviews with Đorđe Eraković were conducted in writing form in February 2019 and then verbally in June of the same year in Kuršumljija.

29 *Conceptual Architectural Project of the Medical and Recreational Center in Kuršumljija Spa* (1973), in Planinka Company Archive, Kuršumljija.



is paid to further education of personnel.<sup>30</sup> According to Eraković, since its establishment, employees of Planinka have been constantly engaged in professional field trips to European countries, vocational training and various seminars. When Motel Rudare was built, its entire staff was undergoing extensive training at the Motel Grosuplje in Slovenia, while workers of carpet factory at Lukovo Spa spent two months on a training course in Pazova.

### Architect Franc Avbelj

During the initial collaboration between Planinka and the Institute of Tourism from Ljubljana, Slovenian architect Franc Avbelj was engaged. Within his involvement at the Institute, the architect participated in the creation of a long-term Program for Development of Tourism of Kuršumljija municipality (1966). The collaboration continued until today, resulting in numerous projects in the territory of Kuršumljija municipality [Fig. 1].

Franc Avbelj was born in 1938 in Slovenia and graduated architecture from the University of Ljubljana, in the class of professor Edvard Ravnikar.<sup>31</sup> During his career, he was employed in different companies and in 1998 he founded his own bureau called Art.A Design in Ljubljana.<sup>32</sup> His conceptual designs for tourist facilities include hotel complex at Radenci Spa (1967), Motel Barjak in Ljubljana (1968), Hotel Vič in Ljubljana (1968-1971), a hotel in Dubrovnik (1972) and Hotel Rožnik in Ljubljana (1976). These projects indicate influences of world trends (from Japan, United States of America, United Kingdom) which characterized

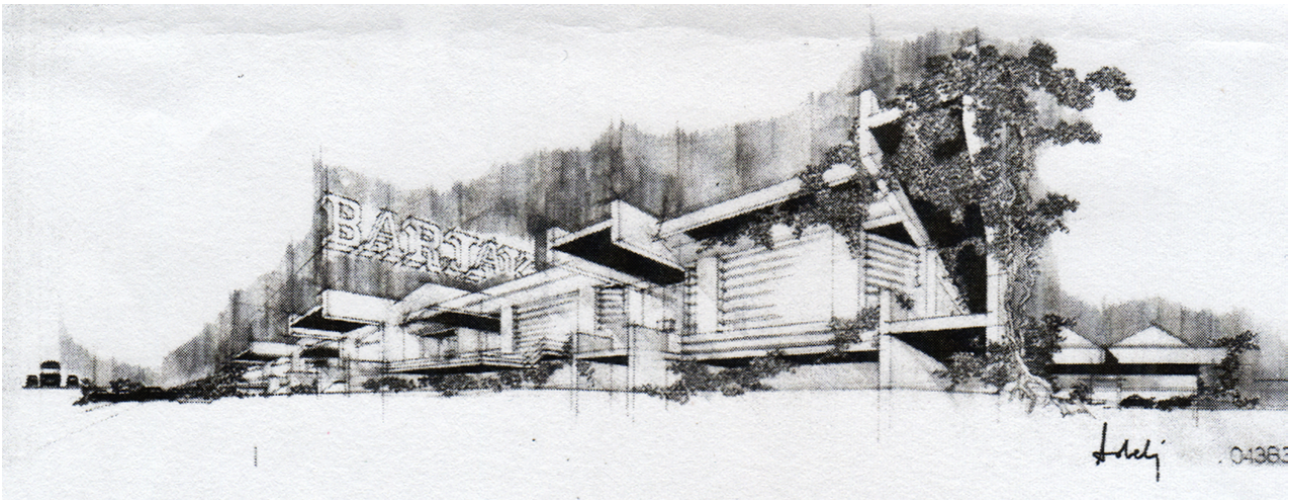
30 "Planinka Istorijat," Planinka, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.planinka.rs/istorijat.php>

31 Aleš Vodopivec and Rok Žnidaršič, *Edvard Ravnikar: Architect and Teacher* (Wien: Springer, 2009).

32 Avbelj was born on December 24, 1938. In the 1960/61 school year, he enrolled the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Ljubljana and graduated in 1965. Before founding his own bureau, he worked at the Institute of Tourism in Ljubljana (1965-1967), at the IBT Urban and Architectural Design Company in Ljubljana (1967-1983) and at Interexport Company in Ljubljana (1983-1998). Until now, architect Avbelj's work has not been the subject of historiographical research, and the only available bibliographic units about his work are related to the construction of the Kuršumljija Spa.

Fig. 1

Franc Avbelj, Urban and Architectural Project for Radenci Spa (1967), photography of model (Source: Private archive of architect Franc Avbelj in Ljubljana, Slovenia)



architectural creativity throughout Yugoslavia during the Sixties and Seventies of the preceding century.<sup>33</sup> Thus, strong aesthetics reflect influences of the brutalism while the influences of structuralism are noticeable in the way the form of objects was articulated through smaller units [Figs. 2-3].

Since 1967, Avbelj lived and worked in Kuršumljija, Serbia, for almost two decades.<sup>34</sup> During his collaboration with Planinka, Avbelj was the author of urban plans for Kuršumljija (1973), Prolom (1978) and Lukovo Spa (1978), whereby the Development Program of Lukovo Spa, with the eastern part of Kopaonik mountain, was developed in cooperation with experts from UNESCO in Paris. The collaboration between Avbelj and Planinka also resulted in numerous architectural projects, among which Hotel Radan in Prolom Spa (1968), Cultural Center in Kuršumljija (construction started during 1974-1975 but was never completed) and the Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa (1973-1982)

33 Ivan Štraus, *Arhitektura Jugoslavije 1945–1990* (Architecture of Yugoslavia 1945-1990) (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991), 93; Danica M. Stojiljković, "Strukturalizam u arhitekturi Jugoslavije u periodu od 1954. do 1980. godine (Structuralism in architecture of Yugoslavia in the period from 1954 to 1980)," (PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2017).

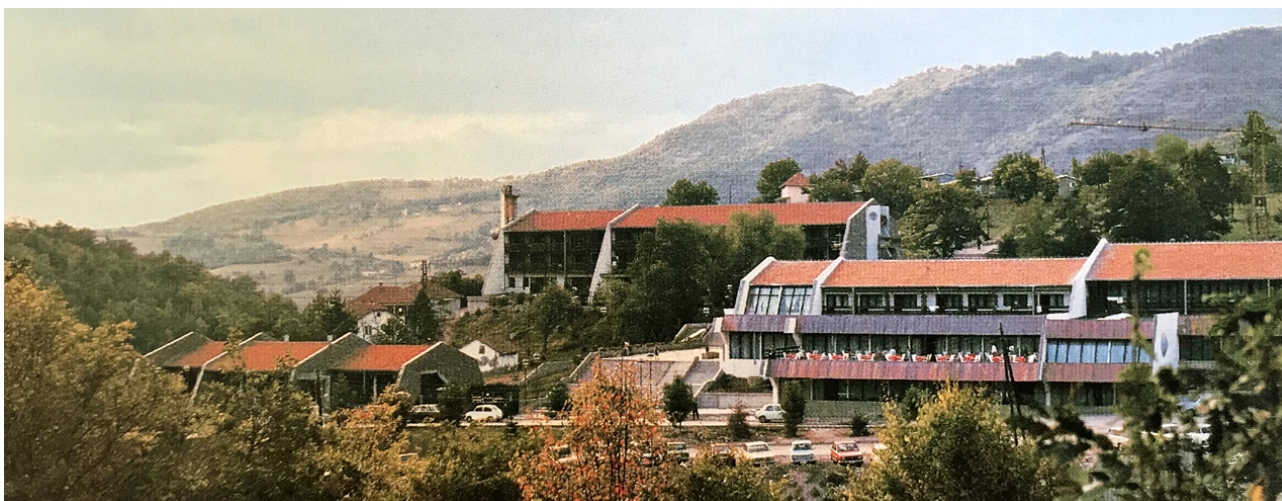
34 Dragan Borisavljević, "Slovenac ponovo u Kuršumljskoj banji (Slovenian again in Kuršumljija Spa)," *Politika*, May 13, 2010, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/134623/Slovenac-ponovo-u-Kursumlijskoj-Banji>

Fig. 2

Franc Avbelj, Project for Motel "Barjak" in Ljubljana (1968), perspective sketch (Source: Private archive of architect Franc Avbelj in Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Fig. 3

Franc Avbelj, Unfinished Project for Cultural Center in Kuršumljija (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)



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stand out.<sup>35</sup> During the celebration of the company's 16th anniversary, the management of Planinka handed a gold plaque to Avbelj "for his outstanding contribution to the development of Planinka by functional and economical designing of buildings as well as development of urban plans with the most original solutions [Fig. 4]."<sup>36</sup>

### Urban planning of Kuršumljija Spa

Urban designs for Kuršumljija Spa were prepared by the consulting company Investicijski Biroji Trbovlje (IBT) from Slovenia, in 1970.<sup>37</sup> After the exploration and water capping work was completed, it was determined that the hotel should be moved in the west direction, compared to the original location. The less humid terrain at the displaced location, as well as the possibility of better insolation were the reasons for that decision. Upon deciding to change the location of the intended facility for therapy (H-1), the municipality of Kuršumljija ordered the supplement to the detailed urban plan (1973) which was part of the conceptual project of the Medical and Recreational Center in Kuršumljija Spa from Interexport, a hotel consulting bureau from Ljubljana. The chief designer was Franc Avbelj and this documentation is kept in the archives of the Planinka company in Kuršumljija.<sup>38</sup> Apart from the municipality, Planinka was the main investor of this venture.

The project study contains extensive documentation from the Institute for Balneology and Climatology of Serbia on the analysis of thermal waters and their balneological quality, historical data of the archeological site related to

35 On demand of Planinka, Avbelj also designed: Motel Rudare in Rudare (1974), the annex no. 1 in Prolom Spa (1976), self-service shop in Prolom Spa, Carpet Factory in Lukovo Spa (1976), Motel Jelak in Jelak (1976, unbuilt), a kindergarten Sunce in Kuršumljija (1977-1979) and a hotel in Leposavić (1979, unbuilt).

36 Plaque to architect Franc Avbelj, January 9, 1980, Kuršumljija, in Private Archive of Franc Avbelj, Ljubljana.

37 After the independence of the Republic of Slovenia, the company went through reorganization and nowadays is working as IBT SPI, Ltd. "IBT About Us," IBT, accessed June 28, 2020, <http://www.ibt.si/>

38 The short biography, which is available thanks to the kindness of Franc Avbelj, shows that he was employed by IBT and Interexport exactly at the time when the urban plans of Kuršumljija Spa were being drafted. A 1973 document, found among the papers of Planinka in Kuršumljija, contains the signature of Avbelj, who at the time was director of the Bureau of Hotel Consulting within Interexport.

Fig. 4

Franc Avbelj et al., Hotel Radan in Prolom Spa (1968) (Source: Private archive of Đ. Eraković in Kuršumljija, Serbia)



Kuršumljija Spa, made by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Institute from Niš, as well as textual and graphic part of the urban plan of this area. Separate chapters, including recapitulation and costs, contain projects of roads, parking lots and bridges, projects of sewerage, water supply, electricity, regulation of the Banjska River and external landscape, all of which testify to the fact that this endeavor was the first extensive effort to urbanize the area of Kuršumljija Spa and to thoroughly examine its entire potential.<sup>39</sup>

Thanks to its hot water sources, the Kuršumljija Spa has been well-known since ancient times, but historical data on spa facilities and water sources have been poorly preserved. In addition to thermal waters, the spa has also been well-known for its healing thermo-mineral mud, unique in Yugoslavia, and the most healing one in Europe.<sup>40</sup> It is considered as one of the medical spas "with the most glorious past," which was especially developed in the period between the two world wars (1930-1941), when it was used as a climatic health resort.<sup>41</sup> After the Second World War, renovation of the existing construction fund was performed, and students from the surrounding cities used to spend their summer holidays there.<sup>42</sup> Possibilities for tourism development in this spa were also considered in 1961,<sup>43</sup> but only in 1963 did the Institute for Health Protection of Serbia carry out hydrological and hydro-technical tests in parallel with the Institute for Balneology and Climatology of Serbia.<sup>44</sup> Taking into account physical and chemical properties of the mineral waters which were tested, the reports showed that the diseases of the locomotor apparatus and gynecological diseases were the main orientation indications.

In the technical description complementing the graphic attachments, the author explained that Kuršumljija Spa and the town of Kuršumljija had been observed as inseparable parts of the whole. That whole was characterized by its rich and turbulent historical past, dating back even to the Roman period and up until the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> This region played a significant role in the communications between East and West. The road from the Adriatic Sea led across Kuršumljija Spa to Niš, where it was connected to the roads of world importance (Belgrade-Thessaloniki and Belgrade-Constantinople). It was noted that due to the general underdevelopment of the municipality of Kuršumljija and despite its spa potential, tourism in that area expanded only after 1980.<sup>46</sup>

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39 The first Urban-Regulatory Plan of this area was made in 1932 and remained unbuilt.

40 Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 42.

41 Mihajlo Kostić, "Kuršumljiska banja (Kuršumljija Spa)," in *Glasnik Srpskog geografskog društva* XLII, no. 1 (1962): 57; Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 40-41.

42 Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 44.

43 Mihajlo Kostić, "Mogućnosti za razvoj turizma u Kuršumljiskoj banji (Opportunities for tourism development in Kuršumljija Spa)," *Privredni glasnik*, no. 11, (1961).

44 This document is signed by the engineer Života Kapetanović and his transcript is part of the aforementioned urban study which was stored in the Planinka Company Archive, Kuršumljija.

45 Jovan Dragašević, "Arheologijsko-geografska istraživanja (Archaeological-geographical researches)," *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, no. 45 (1877): 1-128; Nikola Vulić, Anton von Premerstein and Friedrich Ladek, "Antički spomenici u Srbiji (Ancient monuments in Serbia)," *Spomenik* XXXIX, no. 35, (1903): 43-89; Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 44.

46 Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumljija*, 25.



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Kuršumlija Spa is 11 kilometers away from the town of Kuršumlija and it is located in a small basin of the Banjska river, on an altitude of 442 meters.<sup>47</sup> It is surrounded by densely wooded hills (the last southeastern branches of Kopaonik mountain) on its west and north sides, while it is more open on the east side. The rich nature gives an extremely soothing character to the whole environment. When positioning new buildings, the detailed urban plan sought to retain the existing character of the site and to treat the surrounding nature as an integral element of healing and as one of the most significant factors for the development of tourism. It was suggested that the surrounding forests should be put under protection and their beneficial effects on the psychic mood of spa visitors were highlighted.

The existing constructions comprised buildings with a tourist character (Hotel Yugoslavia, annex Milica, the Old Bath, summer pool and elementary school), and some smaller residential and mixed-use buildings. Considering the lower quality of the existing buildings, it was planned to gradually demolish them. The project envisaged keeping only the Old Bath, as an attractive cultural monument. The facility was expected to be adapted and incorporated into the therapeutic system and the surrounding area was supposed to be converted into a cultural park. The existing summer pool, located near the location planned for the construction of the hotel (H-1), was also planned to be retained. The renewal of the pool with the construction of its auxiliary facilities was supposed to provide a program supplement during summer season [Fig. 5].

The decisive factors in forming the detailed urban plan were the geomorphological characteristics of the terrain, physical capacities of the spa area and the thermal water regime. Findings about required interventions of the primary water provided a relatively modest space intended for the construction of future

47 Danijela Vukočić, *Banjski turizam u funkciji razvoja Opštine Kuršumlija* (Spa tourism in the function of development of the Municipality of Kuršumlija) (Belgrade: Srpsko geografsko društvo, 2008), 143.

Fig. 5  
Franc Avbelj et al., Detailed Urban Plan of Kuršumlija Spa (1973) (Source: Planika Company Archive in Kuršumlija, Serbia)

tourist and health facilities. The new construction fund was located on the edge of the protected zone of thermal water, while the main facility for treatment was located in close proximity. The technical description outlined numerous possibilities that were provided by that kind of concept, such as the possibility of stage construction of the construction fund and the realization of peace zone and traffic zone, as well as the idea of providing a specific character to the Kuršumljija Spa which was conceived as a city of greenery.

The entrance to the tourist complex was located near the preserved environment in front of the Old Bath, which was thus organically incorporated into the center of the medical spa. The future trade-recreational and social center of spa was supposed to be built on the existing and extended route of the spa's road, and in the direction to Kuršumljija, the construction of a business-commercial, residential and service part of the city was envisaged. The recreational part of the medical spa was supposed to be located on the opposite side of the Old Bath, and a healthcare and tourism part was expected to be positioned towards the town of Prepolac.

The traffic solution implied that after the reconstruction of the Kuršumljija-Prepolac road, transit traffic and the bus station would be transferred to the existing bypass. That was supposed to unburden the internal route of the spa, which would continue towards the Kuršumljija-Prepolac transit. It was intended to prevent local community from using road transport within the narrow central area of the spa. Low vehicle traffic has not been completely relocated, for the purpose of partially breaking the daily monotony. In some areas, the pedestrian paths completely separated from vehicle traffic were planned, whereas the trim paths would be located on the nearby mountain slopes and used for therapeutic purposes. The capacity of the provided parking lots (for about 250 vehicles) was 1:3 in compared to the envisaged capacities, with the assumption that stationary guests, referred by the social security, would come by other means of transport. The special attention was paid to the vegetation fund, by designing and landscaping of all park and green areas. The future water tank was to be used for maintenance of these areas. Since the existing communal equipment was completely inadequate, the detailed plans for water, electricity and sewage networks were drawn as well.

The architectural design of planned buildings was subordinated to the basic characteristic of the winding surfaces of the site. According to this solution, the main spatial emphasis was the central composition with slightly curved hip roof surfaces and gentle slopes of the ground floor. In architectural terms, the buildings were supposed to reflect the shape of hillocks. The basic materials provided for the construction were concrete (on the inside), brick (on the outside), wood, glass and copper sheet. The programme of contents included the hotel H-1 with therapy, tourist stationary hotels H-2 and H-3, combined facility intended for housing and commerce, the protected Old Bath, about 40 cottages - apartments, camp for 20-30 tents, sports and recreational swimming pool, areas for sports and recreation, trade-tourist and catering pavilions, bus station,



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cultural pavilions, greenhouses for vegetables and flowers, police station, fire station, branch of the Municipality of Kuršumljija, infirmary, agricultural cooperative and the school with existing and multi-purpose covered hall. Rich program indicates that Kuršumljija Spa was built with an aim of satisfying primarily the social and medical requirements of its time, but commercial aspects of tourism were not neglected either. The spa was also planned to accommodate tourists without the need for medical treatment, and for that purpose the program was enriched with cultural and recreational contents. Spa facilities intended for medical treatment played a significant role in the public health infrastructure of Yugoslavia. For patients, spa treatments were prescribed and free of charge, thanks to the state's action to take care of its working class.

The Interexport company, a hotel consulting bureau from Ljubljana, also designed the architectural part of the conceptual project for the Medical and Recreational Center in Kuršumljija Spa (1973), and architect Franc Avbelj was named chief designer for this part of the project as well [Fig. 6].

## Medical and Recreational Center Žubor

### Medical Program

The program of the Medical and Recreational Center Žubor was developed by Srboljub Stojiljković (in that time the Director of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic in Belgrade), Vojin Šulović (in that time the Director of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Clinic in Belgrade) and Dimitrije Jovanović (assistant professor from the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade). Mićo Milanović, in that time the head of the Department of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic in Belgrade, was also mentioned as investor's expert associate. The expert team consisted of leading experts

Fig. 6

Franc Avbelj et al., Model of Medical and Recreational Center H1 in Kuršumljija Spa (1973) (Source: Private Archive of Đ. Eraković in Kuršumljija, Serbia)

from Serbia in the field of neurological and gynecological diseases.<sup>48</sup> This program was a part of project documentation which is kept in the archives of the Planinka company and explains in which ways the modern lifestyle causes numerous psychosomatic disorders. As a new disorder category at the time, authors pointed out the traffic traumatism the treatment of which involved rehabilitation of the locomotor and peripheral nervous systems. Among other causes that negatively affected the nervous system, technological processes in industry and viral diseases were also included.

As a common occurrence of a stressful modern life in a society with changed sociological structure, the problems of female frigidity and sterility were cited, meant to be treated by teams of both gynecologists and psychiatrists. The authors noted that such practice had already been well-known in the world, but that in domestic conditions there had been no possibilities for its implementation and construction of appropriate institutions or centers in which the practice would have been applied. At the beginning of the Seventies, in the context of the history of medicine in Yugoslavia, it was stated that there were only four specialized institutions for inpatient treatment of gynecological and obstetric diseases, only one of them being in Serbia, and that there were only gynecological and obstetric wards at general hospitals.<sup>49</sup> Also, in Yugoslavia, there were eighteen hospitals for treatment of nervous and psychiatric diseases, eight of which were located in Serbia.<sup>50</sup> At that moment, in Serbia, there was not a single modern medical and rehabilitation or medical and recreational center in which neurotics, patients with psychosomatic diseases and disorders of nervous or locomotor systems would have been treated. Therefore, as the main motive for its construction and in accordance with the ruling ideology, its importance for the social community was emphasized, i.e. prevention of the emergence of young retirees which would be disabled for work and for making contribution to community.

The team of medical experts pointed out the advantages of locating such center in Kuršumljija Spa and cited numerous reasons for it. Among those reasons, the ones that should be emphasized are the possibilities for the population from south and southwest Serbia and from Kosovo,<sup>51</sup> with no neuropsychiatric services or rehabilitation centers at all, to gravitate towards the Center, as well as an exceptionally favorable climate, natural beauty and wealth in the form of thermal sources with healing effects, all of which were available in Kuršumljija Spa. The advice was to divide the Medical and Recreational Center

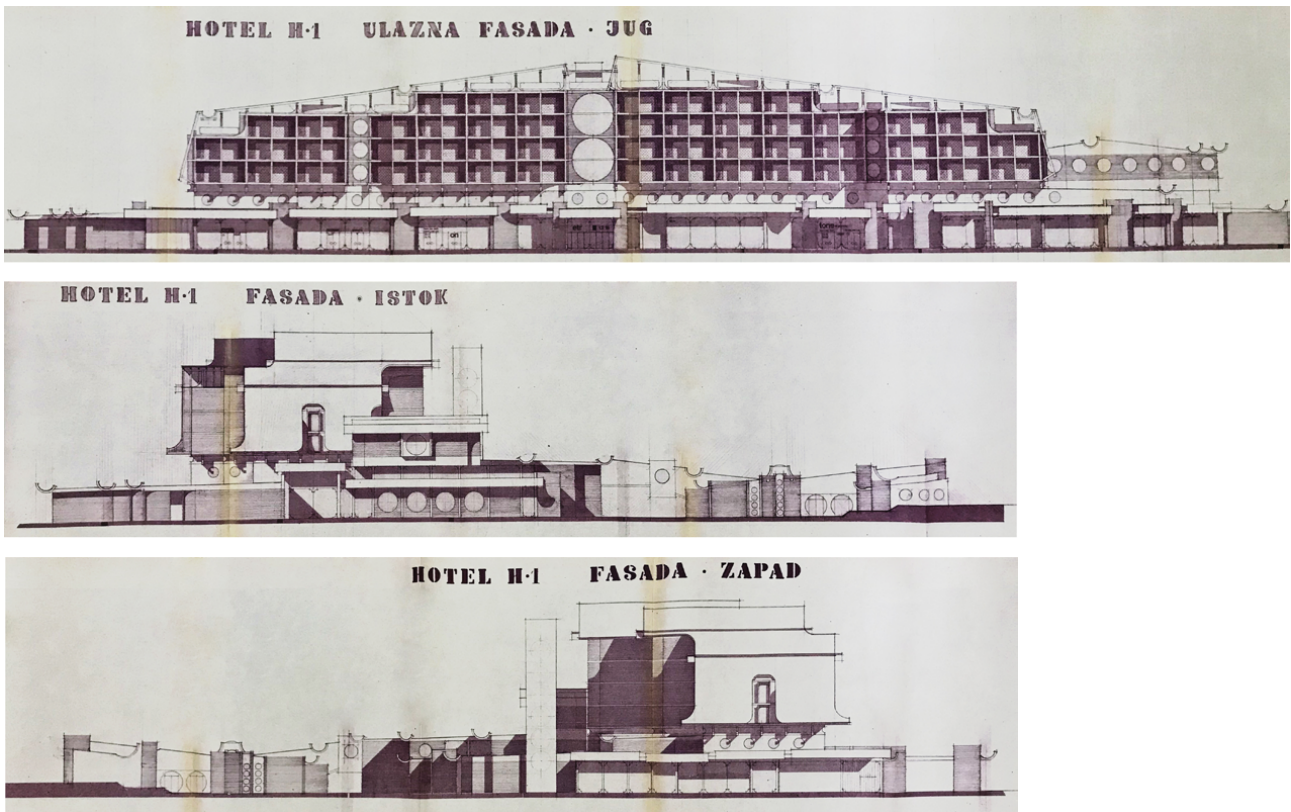
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48 It is interesting that Vojin Šulović was born in Kuršumljija and he is listed on the Tourist Organization of Kuršumljija website as its honorary citizen. Despite that, his engagement in the development of the medical program had nothing to do with his origin, but with the fact that he managed the Gynecology and Obstetrics Clinic in Belgrade and that he was one of the leading experts in the field throughout the SFRY, recognized worldwide. "Vojin Šulović," Kuršumljija, accessed April 25, 2020, <https://tokursumlija.rs/o-nama/pocasni-gradjani/vojin-sulovic/>

49 *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije* (Statistical annual of Yugoslavia) (Belgrade: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1972), 512.

50 *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije*, 512.

51 Kosovo was only 10 kilometers away from Kuršumljija Spa. According to statistics from the Federal Statistical Office, in 1972 there were no specialised hospitals or institutions of a similar type for the treatment of gynecological or neurological diseases in Kosovo.



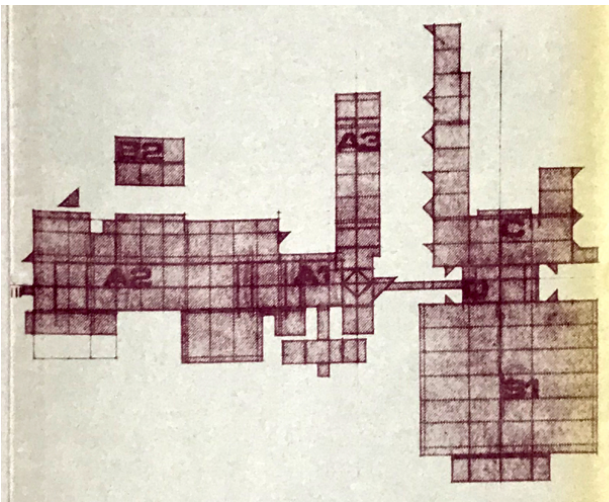
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into two parts, where the first part would be a combination of a tourist-catering and a semi-open stationary healthcare facility, while the second part would be intended exclusively for medical rehabilitation and re-socialization of the sick. The second part of the Center would consist of a therapeutic-recreational section intended for nervous and psychosomatic patients and for neurotics, and a therapeutic-recreational section intended for gynecological patients. In the concluding part of that Program, it was insisted to put efforts that would be synchronised and equally oriented towards the creation of professional staff and facility construction [Fig. 7].

### Architectural and spatial concept

In the part of the documentation where Avbelj explained the basic architectural and spatial concept of the future facility, he stated that the desire of his working team was not to arrogantly direct the architectural content to visionary trends, but to apply realistic and possible insights to this facility. The idea was built on the concept of the future building contributing to the needs of society which enabled the realization of the project. According to the architect, masses of objects followed the given natural elements and “the anthropometric measures in all possible physical situations.” The interior design was approached with the tendency to avoid the impression of a clinical and hospital stationary, but the opposite – to provide impression of rest, relaxation and recreation in the form of interior ambiances, which would have an immense effect on the psyche.

Fig. 7  
Franc Avbelj et al., Project for Medical and Recreational Center H1 in Kuršumljija Spa (1973), Front (up), East (middle) and West (bottom) facade (Source: Planika Company Archive in Kuršumljija, Serbia)



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As the architect said: "There is only one wish, to respect nature, peace, an atmosphere of calmness and mental and physical relaxation [Fig. 8]."<sup>52</sup>

As the most important accommodation facility in Kuršumljija Spa, Žubor was categorized as a two-star hotel and its usable area was about 17,800 square meters. The entire complex consisted of several buildings forming a single unit [Fig. 9]. Within the height dominant part of the building A1, there was a central hall with the reception on the ground floor, on the ground floor of the part A2 there were a boiler room, a kitchen with the capacity of 2,000 meals, a restaurant with 250 seats and offices for management, whereas on the upper levels, as well as in the part A3, there were rooms for accommodation on three levels. In areas where parts A2 and A3 were connected with the central part A1, infirmary rooms on duty were located. The facility had 158 rooms and 240 beds.<sup>53</sup> Rooms for accommodation were single or double, with en suite bathrooms. The B1 facility contained a hydrotherapy pool and inside facility C there were clinics and diagnostic rooms. While solving communications within the facility,

52 *Conceptual Architectural Project of the Medical and Recreational Center in Kuršumljija Spa (1973)*, Planinka Company Archive, Kuršumljija.

53 Goran Perić, Marko Gašić and Jelena Simić, "Strateški pravci razvoja turizma u opštini Kuršumljija (Strategic directions of tourism development in the Municipality of Kuršumljija)," in *VII naučni skup Mediteranski dani Trebinje 2012 – Turizam: izazovi i mogućnosti – Turistička privreda i povezane teme, Trebinje*, ed. Slavoljub Vujović (Belgrade: Ekonomski institut), 256.

Fig. 8

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa After Its Construction (1976-1982) (Source: Private Archive of Đ. Eraković in Kuršumljija, Serbia)

Fig. 9

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center "Žubor" in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), Scheme of the Floor Plan (left) and Front Facade (right) (Sources: Planinka Company Archive in Kuršumljija, Serbia (left). Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019 (right))

the communication system for guests and the system for maintenance technology and facility operation were completely separated. Similarly, the entrances to the facility were separated, specially designed for guests on one hand and for the service and technical staff on the other hand. Special attention was paid to communications for guests where the corridor system was avoided, but those flows were transformed into social rooms intended for rest, entertainment etc.

The structure of the building was completely made in skeletal system and of reinforced concrete. The foundation engineering was done on the fortified embankment. Due to its large size and in order to avoid later strains, some dilations had to be made [Fig. 10].



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According to the author, the exterior design and parterre decoration were striving for peace and harmony, and for the synthesis of water with the surrounding greenery as well. The symbolic fountain was located near to the main entrance. The fountain included the sculpture the author of which was Slovenian artist Janez Boljka (1931-2013). In addition to his works, the interior of the Center was enriched with paintings by the prominent Slovenian artist Jože Ciuha (1924-2015) [Fig. 11].



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Although the intention of the architect for the central A1-A3 part of the complex was to resemble a mountain massif with its silhouette, its dominantly futuristic effect cannot be denied. In order to provide connection between the building and the natural environment, tracts A2 and A3 ended with a slope where green terraces were located.<sup>54</sup> The complex set of facilities was shaped in the spirit of megastructural projects, and the impacts of structuralism can be especially observed on the side tracts with accommodation units. In these

<sup>54</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s and in the spirit of structuralism, terraced forms were a frequent feature of the exclusive hotel facilities built in Yugoslavia, especially in the Adriatic shore. Stojilković, "Strukturalizam u arhitekturi Jugoslavije," 329.

Fig. 10  
Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), Sculpture of Janez Boljka (left) and Front Facade (right) (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)

Fig. 11  
Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center "Žubor" in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), Details of Entrance Zone (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)



zones, narrow vertical arrays of windows appeared on the facades, at the same time emphasizing the rhythmicity of the base. Monumental dimensions and the dominant height of the entrance were partially reduced by glass windows with a sharp and pyramidal shape. These elements slightly diminish the predominantly brutal character of the concrete cube, ending with semicircular openings in the concrete at its top [Fig. 12].



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The sloping part of the facade in the entrance area, together with the canopy of trapezoidal shape, strongly defied the ambience in which they were found. From aerial perspective and from the direction of the entrance zone, the whole object gave the impression of a powerful rival to all the wealth of the surrounding nature. The lateral building (which was made of parts B1 and C) tended to blend in completely with the surrounding by its glass facade and low height, at the same time not interfering with the accommodation part of the complex (A) in any way. In the main part of the Center (A), the ground floor was distinguished by a glass facade, while shallow triangular ornaments were placed in lower zones of concrete parts. Openings on the terraces, which were placed at smaller facades of the facility, containing infirmaries and diagnostic rooms (part C), were also shaped triangular [Fig. 13].



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## Construction and doom of the Žubor Center

The construction of the Medical and Recreational Center Žubor began in 1976 and was carried out by the working organization Hidrogradnja from Čačak. Planinka was the major investor for the construction of the center,<sup>55</sup> and

55 Đorđe Eraković, "Među nama. Šta je istina o izgradnji Žubora? (Between us. What is true about the construction of Žubor?)," *Politika*, August 28, 2016; Đorđe Eraković, "Među nama. Planinka većinski investitor Žubora (Between us. Planinka is major investor of Žubor)," *Politika*, August 24, 2019, 20.

Fig. 12

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), The Tallest Part of the Center - A1 (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)

Fig. 13

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), Back and Side Facade (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)

the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund also invested in its construction.<sup>56</sup> The construction of the facility was monitored through the daily press in Serbia, where the Kuršumlija Spa was named “the spa of the 21st century” and “the modern natural health resort.”<sup>57</sup> The ceremonial opening of the center took place on May 30, 1982. During the same year, according to the memories of Eraković, who was then the director of Planinka, electricity was deliberately turned off in this facility on the day of New Year’s celebration. Actually, during the Eighties, in the decade after the death of Josip Broz, the cultural climate in Serbia turned to ethno-nationalisms and was based on the refutation of the socialist order and the Yugoslav federation.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that there was a tendency to sabotage the celebration in the newly created facility, construction of which symbolized successful functioning of the concept of “brotherhood and unity” and solidarity between the two republics. Only two years later, in 1984, the Kuršumlija Spa was separated from the Planinka company. That happened precisely in the year when the issue of paid holidays was presented as “the burning issue,” due to the economic crisis and decreased living standards among workers, and when the abandonment of workers’ resorts throughout Yugoslavia was recorded.<sup>59</sup> According to the statistics, a record number of 103, 651 overnight stays was achieved in 2004.<sup>60</sup> In 2006, the facility which employed 130 workers was closed,<sup>61</sup> due to unsettled tax debts, which was followed by the devastation of the entire Kuršumlija Spa [Fig. 14].



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During 2010, the municipality of Kuršumlija negotiated with the Ministry of Economy on the revitalization and reconstruction of Kuršumlija Spa and the Žubor Center.<sup>62</sup> On that occasion, in May, Avbelj visited Kuršumlija and the leaders of the Planinka company and toured the facilities which were built according

56 Ljubiša Mitić, “Planinka preuzima Žubor? (Planinka takes over Žubor?),” *Južne vesti*, February 2, 2010, <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Planinka-preuzima-Zubor.sr.html>

57 *Daily press* (1979-1983), Private Archive of Franc Avbelj, Ljubljana.

58 Aleksandar Ignjatović, “Poricanje i obnova: arhitektura postmodernizma 1980–1991 (Denial and renewal: the architecture of Postmodernism 1980–1991),” in *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji XX vek. Radikalne umetničke prakse*, ed. Miško Šuvaković (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2010), 663–670.

59 Duda, “Od radnika do turista,” 55, 69.

60 Mačejka and Tanasković, *Opština Kuršumlija*, 47.

61 Lj. M., “Kuršumlijska banja dobija novog vlasnika (Kuršumlija Spa is Getting a New Owner),” *Južne vesti*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Kursumlijska-banja-dobija-novog-vlasnika.sr.html>

62 Ljubiša Mitić, “Planinka preuzima Žubor?,” Ljubiša Mitić, “Opština oživljava hotel Žubor (Municipality revives hotel Žubor),” *Južne vesti*, April 28, 2010, <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Opstina-ozivljava-hotel-Zubor.sr.html>

Fig. 14

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumlija Spa (1976-1982), Details of Terraces (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)

to his projects.<sup>63</sup> According to the documents preserved in the Planinka Company Archive, it was debated that Avbelj in cooperation with other authors who had participated in the construction of the Žubor Center should prepare a report and offer the necessary preparatory works, as well as the financial evaluation of further necessary investments in order to enable the facility to operate according to contemporary standards. One of the letters from Planinka to Avbelj welcomed the renewal of this cooperation even “after the breakup of our common Yugoslavia.” In 2019, after numerous discussions with the Government of Serbia,<sup>64</sup> the Directorate for Property of the Republic of Serbia decided to make Planinka the owner of the Kuršumljija Spa,<sup>65</sup> which was built and arranged mostly by the efforts of the Company itself [Fig. 15].



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Đorđe Kadijević observed that: “Those who successfully removed Yugoslavia from the physical space of the world have been outdared by its persistent presence in the cultural space.”<sup>66</sup> In parallel, related reasons for the long-standing devastation of the facility which was created by the united efforts of experts from two former Yugoslav Republics can be assumed. Apart from the history of its construction, the aesthetic features of this object also greatly reflected the ideas of the time in which they were created.

## Conclusions

In Yugoslavia, tourism was one of the main drivers of the modernization process,<sup>67</sup> which in turn occupied the supreme place in hierarchy of social values towards which the newly-formed community aspired. Observed as a Socialist experiment, Yugoslav tourism influenced the urbanization and modernization of the entire state and its economic development, but it also significantly contributed to the “development of contemporary architectural concepts and their

63 Borisavljević, “Slovenac ponovo u Kuršumljskoj banji.”

64 Lj. M., “Kuršumljsku banju uskoro preuzima Planinka (Kuršumljija Spa will be soon taken over by Planinka),” *Južne vesti*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Kursumlijsku-Banju-uskoro-preuzima-Planinka.sr.html>

65 Lj. M., “Kuršumljska banja dobija novog vlasnika,” *Južne vesti*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Kursumlijska-banja-dobija-novog-vlasnika.sr.html>; Eraković, “Među nama. Planinka većinski investitor,” 20.

66 Đorđe Kadijević, *100 kritika* (100 reviews) (Belgrade: Orion art, 2019), 172.

67 Duda, “Turizam narodu,” 28.

Fig. 15

Franc Avbelj et al., Medical and Recreational Center Žubor in Kuršumljija Spa (1976-1982), Details in Glass (Copyright Aleksandra Jevtović, 2019)

social actualization.”<sup>68</sup> The Planinka company has outlasted all ideological structures of its time and persisted as one of the main carriers of tourism in Serbia, especially in the Toplica district. Its timely consideration of the concept of sustainable development and simultaneous efforts to involve and emancipate the local community and to engage eminent experts in various fields cannot be disputed.

Among numerous projects designed by architect Franc Avbelj in Serbia, the project for Kuršumljija Spa, i.e. Medical and Recreational Center “Žubor” stands out not only by the complexity of the functional program and its scope, but also by the creative freedom it expresses. The specific architectural task that was assigned to him and his team did not have role models in the practice of his time. During the designing, the only role models were the related clinics in Scandinavia and the United States, which were mainly aimed at more prosperous social structures, whereas that Center was created according to the criteria of “economic and social equality.”<sup>69</sup>

Perennial decay of Kuršumljija Spa and the Žubor Center would seem incomprehensible if the fate of monuments and memorial parks of Socialist Yugoslavia were not known. They were built with the aim of reinforcing the ideology of Socialist Yugoslavia through its universal forms and in the last decades of the twentieth century, they were marginalized in the consciousness of the population of the former republic.<sup>70</sup> Just as the revaluation of memorial objects unburdened by ideological options is envisaged from the architectural heritage point of view,<sup>71</sup> so is the investing in utilitarian objects from that period equally important. Bearing in mind that tourist facilities as such also witnessed an authentic historical period and that their actuality is constantly growing in the world scale, investing in their revival would have multiple benefits, both cultural and material.

68 Antešević, “Regionalizam u modernizmu,” 494.

69 *Conceptual Architectural Project of the Medical and Recreational Center in Kuršumljija Spa* (1973), in Planinka Company Archive, Kuršumljija.

70 Olga Manojlović–Pintar, “Uprostoravanje ideologije: Spomenici Drugog svetskog rata i kreiranje kolektivnih identiteta (Spacing of ideology: monuments of the Second World War and the creation of collective parks),” in *Dijalog povjesničara/istoričara*, 10/1, ed. Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Friedrich Neumann Stiftung, 2008), 287–307; Olga Manojlović–Pintar, *Arheologija sećanja: spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918–1989* (The archeology of memory: monuments and identities in Serbia 1918-1989) (Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju: Čigoja, 2014); Aleksandra Jevtović, “Arhitekta Aleksandar Đokić (Architect Aleksandar Đokić),” (PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2018), 254-255, 510.

71 Vladana Putnik Prica and Nenad Lajbenšperger, “On the wings of Modernity: WWII memorials in Yugoslavia,” *Docomomo Journal* 59 (2018/2): 74–78; Aleksandra Jevtović, “Arhitekta Aleksandar Đokić,” 510-511.

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