Albanian Universe

Design between Vacuum and Energy

XXI TRIENNALE di MILANO Design after Design

The Albanian Pavilion
Curators: Besnik Aliaj & Antonino Di Raimo
The Pavilion at Le Cavallerizze,
photographs of the main exhibition stage
Installation by G. Qendro for The Albanian Pavilion
Project Description

Albania is a country that is so close to Italy, yet at the same time unknown be it to the great majority of Italians, as well as to the international public. Despite its tormented history, the “Albania of today” finds itself amidst rapid changes, yet inviting for numerous reasons to better know the Albanian society, its hopes and ambitions.

For the first time in its history, Albania takes part in the Triennale through an Academic Institution based in the capital, Tirana. POLIS University, a research and development platform in the Western Balkans, together with its founding entity Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development, introduce a reflection on the subject of design after design, based on their story within the Albanian context during the past 2 decades.

The approach of the first Albanian Pavilion in the history of Triennale, is based on the socio-economic and political situation of a country, a kind of radical cross-section of the Albanian society, where the design challenges are always coupled with a critical and problematic element actually existing within that context. Following a brief introduction on what is now Albania, the Albanian pavilion focuses on demystifying the challenges related to the consolidation of a democracy and a market economy through the POLIS and Co-PLAN works, addressed in four main columns. Each column represents a challenge of the Albanian context and its concrete answer as a project of physical and cultural change, which can be possible only because of the existence of an Institution focused on Education. These are four dichotomies, which would build four major themes representative of our work:

INFORMALITY vs. INTEGRATION

CRIMINALITY vs. EDUCATION

EXTRALEGALITY vs. ENVISIONING

HYPOCRISY vs. INNOVATION
Photographs of construction stage at Le Cavallerizze, Museo Nazionale Scienza e Tecnologia, Leonardo Da Vinci, Milano
Therefore, for each dichotomy, a specific narrative has been proposed. The narrative is aimed at showing how a dimension belonging to an educational institution can be crucial in answering to that dichotomy. The narrative tells a story by using images, assembled in slow films, projected on 4 screens, which have been embedded inside a curved wall. These narratives retrace the history of Albania emphasizing what has been done or what can still be done (the project of change), by involving disciplines such as planning, urban design, architecture, design and finally scientific research.

So, for example, the dichotomy INFORMALITY Vs. INTEGRATION is told through the story of the courageous Co-Plan, the first Albanian NGO capable to introduce the concept of co-participatory planning in a reality that after the Communism collapse hated planning just as a concept.

The layout is resolved through a diagonal wall that separates Albanian Expo from the Greece one. The wall is a compact and rounded container that returns different stories from a reality, which remains too often unseen. In the adjacent space an installation designed by Gezim Qendro, evokes the Albanian urban landscape, through a collection of bricks, which can be continuously disassembled and reassembled, inviting the observer to play with them.

While different sentences can be formed with the words imprinted on the faces, the game is actually also a way to get engaged with the Albanian reality, where, depending on the political power in charge, the urban context is continually cancelled and rebuilt, in search of a representation of the political power itself, definitely a witness of the long road towards a full European integration.
changes

take shape

la città
The Pavilion at Le Cavallerizze, photographs of the entire exhibition space (shown on these pages and the next two pages)
Images from the Catalogue of the XXI TRIENNALE di Milano, Design after Design
(shown on these pages and the next two pages)
Albania Neighboring Albania is a small Balkan country (app. 3 million people) of a very unique history and language. Positioned very strategically, it has been subject to lengthy Roman, Slavic and Ottoman rule, with the exception of the last century of independence. As result of such cultural and religious geo-strategic clash between East and West, Albania has been almost considered a "border" country. Unfortunately after the Second World War, such pattern was reinforced by the total self-isolation of the country from the rest of world for ideological reasons. The authoritarian regime of Tirana proudly proclaimed "We are no East, no West", introducing the concept of a "buffer country" in between the "Iron Curtain". With the collapse of the "Berlin Wall", Albania also entered a vivid rush towards pluralism and market economy, trying to somehow catch "the last train to Europe". But this transition has not been so easy. A lot of dramatic events happened during the 90's, including: the migration abroad of app. 1 million people, the collapse of the financial pyramidal schemes, the social unrests that followed, the war in Kosovo and the refugee crisis, etc. However, progress as well as ups and downs has followed up to today, with periods of up to app. 6% of economic growth per annum. Since 2003 Albania has embarked upon a firm process of integration into EU and NATO. But while the membership of the latter is already a reality, the process of European integration has been more challenging due to the desperate need for reforming legislation and state institutions, fighting corruption and organized crime, formalization of economy and establishment of the social justice and the rule of law. At present, the official national GDP of Albania amounts to 13 billion Euros, which is also equal to the estimates of the extra-legal economy. This means that there exists a big gap between the energy of people and society, versus the actions of new laws and state institutions. Incorporation of such "frozen capital" and "hidden wealth" of the nation, within the formal channels of economy is one of the main challenges for the Albanian society in the coming decade. Yet the undertaking of such operation does not just require the adaption of the new legislations and physical documentation of the extra-legal wealth. What is desperately needed above all is promoting a new concept of social justice and good governance that inspires and encourages the excluded ones to move them consciously from an extra-legal status towards the rule of law. Therefore such operation must move ahead from the big-scale national framework measures, towards small-scale piloting projects, which inspire country-wide upgrading and integration programs.
1. INFORMALITY INTEGRATION → Co-POLAN

2. CRIMINALITY EDUCATION → U_POLIS

MetroPolis

3. EXTRALEGALITY ENVISIONING → Research International PhD POLICY/UNIFE

4. HYPOCRISY INNOVATION → IF/INNOVATION