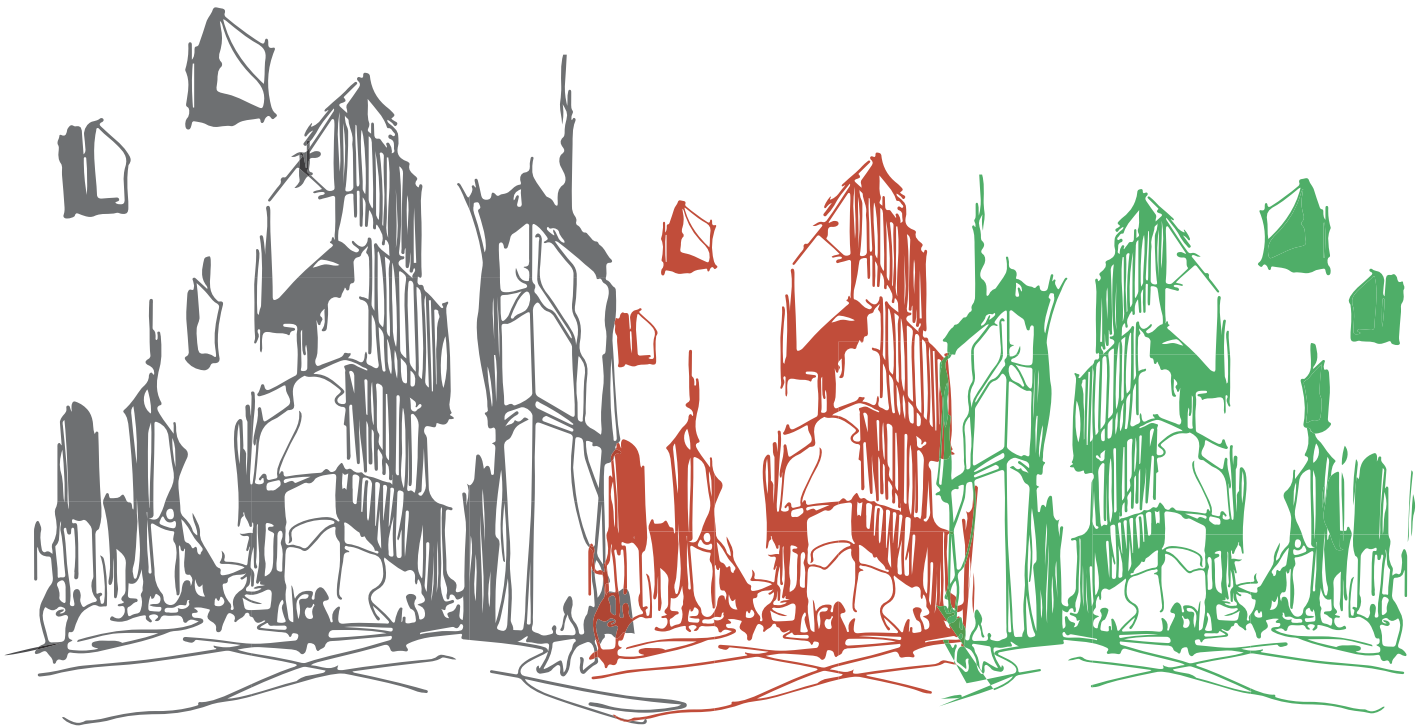


ALBANIA_{IN THE} THIRD MILLENNIUM

ARCHITECTURE, CITY, TERRITORY

VOLUME 02

Edited by
Nilda Valentin
Armand Vokshi



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From Project to Realization. The Feasibility Study for the Restoration and Recovery of the Academy Theater - University of the Arts in Tirana.

Fabio Capanni, Riccardo Renzi, Andia Guga

Faculty of Architecture, University of Florence, Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio, Tirana

This paper presents an interdisciplinary research work on Architectural Design carried out by a group of professors and researchers within the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence entitled "Feasibility Study for the Restoration and the Recovery of the Theater Building of the University of the Arts in Tirana" begun in 2019 that has recently completed and realized and implemented.

The Department of Architecture has a stable relationship with the city of Tirana due to the double degree with the Catholic Faculty "Our Lady of Good Counsel," whose Faculty of Architecture is chaired by Prof. Fabio Capanni. Many professors from the University of Florence are engaged in classes and labs here. Furthermore, research on 20th-century architecture and urbanism in Albania is ongoing at the Department of Architecture in Florence.² These researches have taken place over the past decade within the Ph.D. programs in Architectural and Urban Design, and still, some of them focus on the Italian architects who designed and built architecture in the period 1920-1945 in Albania, with special attention to the establishment of the Albanian Building and Urban Planning Central Office.³

The theater of the University of the Arts of Tirana⁴ is considered one of the most significant examples of Italian architecture of the first half of the last century, and its relevance is considered primary in the Albanian architectural panorama.⁵ So, the study's main objective was to identify the methods to be adopted for the restoration of the theater hall and its technical systems and regulatory adaptation to safeguard the building's historical, cultural, and architectural values.

The study has invested in various aspects necessarily linked to each other: from urban planning and regulatory ones to historical and architectural; from structural and technological supply to those related to acoustics; and up to the finishes and furnishings, which, in this specific case, have

a significant value and contribute to determining the particular value and character of the building.

Safeguarding has been taken as a guiding principle. In addition to the awareness of the building's objective value, it was dictated by the current legislation, which, in the context of the Urban Planning Regulations of Tirana, defines the theater as an asset protected by the Ministry of Culture, subordinated to the Institute of Cultural Monuments "Gani Strazimiri."

The stylistic unity of the building, which can be found in the general composition of the finishes and furnishings, was taken as one of the key values around which to develop the Feasibility Study.

Although the current state of the building is substantially the original design made by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators in 1939, over the years, some parts have undergone changes that have made it more difficult to identify the situation and identity of the original project. For example, some substitutions of finishes and, in some cases, as in the hall, of furnishings are noteworthy (pavements, wall colors, bathroom sinks and toilets, seats, armchairs, wardrobes, etc.), or even some changes in the use of spaces have emerged, sometimes with suppressions of rooms.

From 1943 to 2020, the surrounding area of Tirana changed significantly in terms of the settlement structure of the monumental area of the city.

In fact, starting from the end of the Second World War conflict, a moment preceded by the Italians' departure, the city was populated by new architectures that emerged mainly to occupy the free areas in the great urban axis designed by Italian architects⁶ Armando Brasini, Florestano Di Fausto, and Gherardo Bosio.

Subsequently, new volumes arose and saturated those free spaces of "pause" placed between the buildings that in the original project had ensured the perception of the places, rhythmically timed

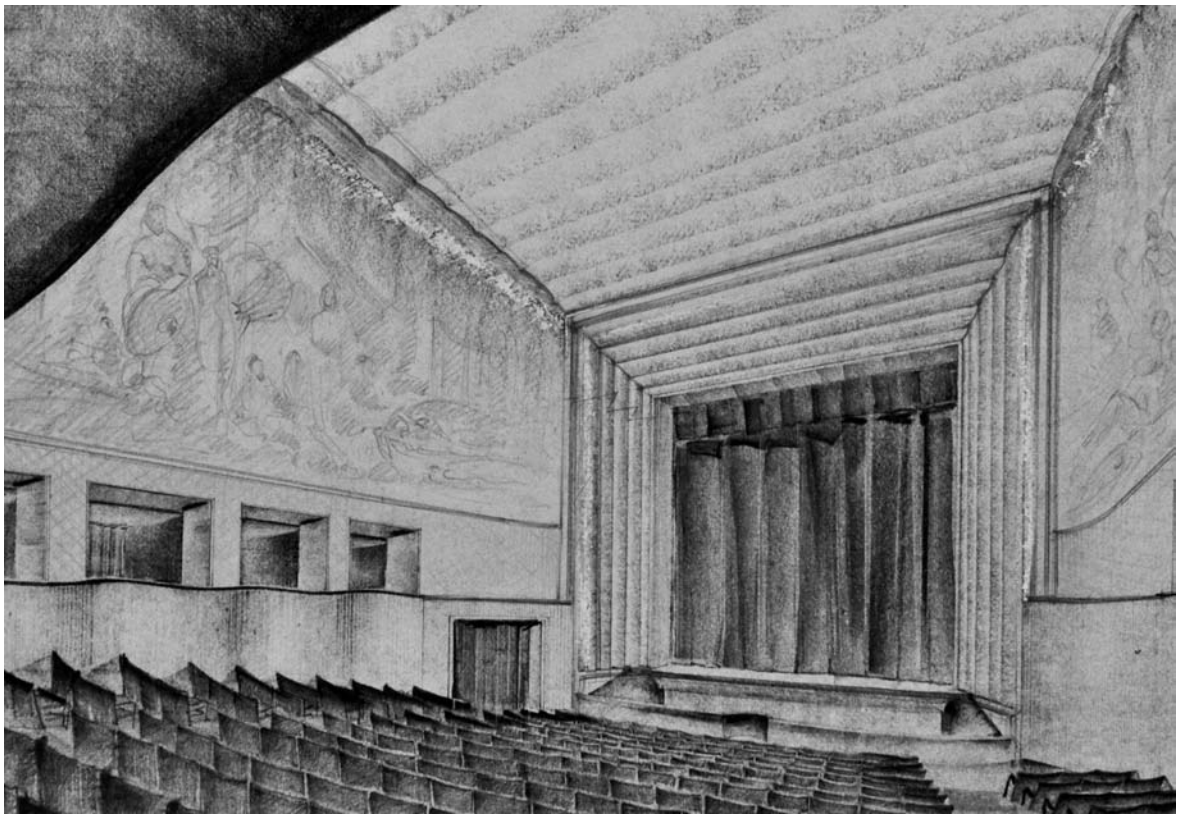


Fig.1 Interior perspective, original architectural design (courtesy of AEGB Firenze).

between the great monumental axes and the vast Square entitled to Mother Teresa. This space was thought to appear as an elevated and monumental acropolis of the capital.

Currently, the situation is fully saturated, and modifications and additions have been made to the Italian buildings designed by Bosio for the monumental acropolis.

The Politecnico, born as a linear building with a big central mass tower, has undergone the birth of two "wings" sides. These, combined with a third building on the back, have shaped the creation of a central courtyard system, which is actually very large even compared to the already vast original plant.

The theater building of the University of the Arts had, after the end of the original project, the building of two volumes attached to the scenic tower with the probable function of structural reinforcement of the tower itself; a third building is also connected to the rear part of the scenic tower and joins the two buildings that have risen to the side of it.

These three volumes have a functional use and support both the theater and the University of the Arts activities. In the north-side space, a linear building arose about 15 meters from the theater building and was parallel to the theater hall. On the back, beyond the scenic tower, some buildings were built, and today, they are used by the University of the Arts.

The original features of the original theatrical building are deeply linked to both the linguistic definition of the Polytechnic building and the Archaeological Museum, which completes the monumental triptych. In fact, it also included the recently demolished Stadium. In common, there is particular attention to a *classic* topic of the architectural project that will figure in the design practice of Gherardo Bosio in Italian, African, and Albanian projects.⁷

Taking note of the current situation of the monumental system represented by the three buildings: Polytechnic (originally born as Casa del Fascio) - Archaeological Museum (originally born as the place of the Albanian Littoria Youth) - University of the Arts (originally born as the place



Fig.2 Interior seat room, 2020 (photo Riccardo Renzi).

of the Albanian Opera Afterwork), the Feasibility Study started from the constitution, step by step, of a cognitive framework which, starting from an in-depth historical-archival research, was then clarified through a series of inspections and a direct survey of the building carried out with cutting-edge methods and tools.

The analysis of the various building components, from the architectural to the structural, from the technological supply to the acoustic, finally completed the cognitive picture.

In the first phase, in addition to an in-depth survey of the bibliography available on the specific topic, an analysis of the original project was carried out at the Gherardo Bosio Archive (that is placed in Pelago, next to Florence), at the Ferdinando Poggi Archiver (placed in the "Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario Vieusseux di Firenze"), at the Construction Technical Archive of Tirana, at the archive of the University of Arts in Tirana, and the archive of the Istituto Luce in Rome. With the documentation acquired, it was possible to develop a historical profile of the events that led to the building's birth⁸ in 1939 by Bosio and his able collaborators,

including Poggi and Lambertini.

From this analysis, moving on to a perfect combination of original drawings and on-site historical photographs of building phases, it has been possible to retrace the original and final designs built by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators between 1939 and 1943.

Parallel to this first phase of bibliographic-archival investigation, the direct, digital, and three-dimensional survey was carried out through on-site campaigns. It is necessary to point out that the inaccessibility of some environments made their "reconstruction" necessary by comparing the data of the digital survey with the original drawings by Bosio and the difficulty, or impossibility, of obtaining all the necessary data to outline the state current building, both from an architectural and plant engineering point of view, has made it difficult to develop the studio which may appear, even if minimally, to be perfectible.

The survey was carried out thanks to the use of laser scan technologies, which, with about one hundred shooting points, have allowed a faithful and

reliable reconstruction of the building complex's interior, exterior, and roofs. This type of survey allowed us to build a complete model of the building based on point-cloud technology, allowing us to explore and imagine even the inaccessible portions. The technology used also made it possible to acquire, through the numerous shooting points, some station points photographed; these, which can be explored with the possibility of horizontal rotation of about three hundred and sixty degrees, including the upper and lower parts not framed in the photograph, constitute an extremely detailed wealth of information.

Subsequently, an extensive photographic campaign allowed, thanks to about one thousand and three hundred shots, to reconstruct and map the current state of the building in all its parts made accessible. The set consists of the digital survey and the photographic campaign, which constitutes the most detailed survey of the current state of the theater building. It allows, together with the information described below, to monitor all future changes. The accuracy of this information system also made it possible to understand better some elements of unclear and immediate correspon-

dence with the original project. The state of the final project (1941-1942), in fact, does not correspond to the current state of the building in some of its parts, albeit of no particular importance.

Subsequently, a detailed analytical catalog based on the specificity of the intervention was developed to analyze the architectural components, interiors, and furnishings. This catalog represents the "core" around which the various parts of the Studio of Feasibility revolve.

The almost one hundred and fifty "analytic sheets" were dedicated to each room. In addition to detecting the current state of each space from the dimensional, material, and finish points of view, they highlighted their correspondence to the original state of the various parts that they composed and traced a recovery hypothesis compatible with the basic principle of safeguarding and protecting the building.

The principle of the analytic sheet is, in fact, to trace a synthetic analysis by points; in addition, the sheet, an accurate operative tool for architectural design, hosts a detailed description of the current state divided by items and punctually de-

Fig.3 Gallery, 2020 (photo Riccardo Renzi).





Fig.4 Interior seat room, completed 2023 (photo Besart Cani).

finishes the interventions to be performed to recover the analyzed environment.

The sheets are flanked by a series of documents, mainly plans, and sections, with precise indications referring to the room-by-room interventions; the drawings also represent the spaces suitable for the changes necessary for adapting the theater to current regulations and updating the plant system. The works are accompanied by two internal views of the room that anticipate the appearance proposed by the interventions for the recovery of the theater.

The cognitive framework was implemented by analyzing the structural system, which was initially developed after consulting the documents of the original project and analyzing the photographs of the construction site from 1939 to 1942.⁹ Inspections and punctual endoscopic investigations were also added.

The acoustic quality of the room was the subject

of particular attention: direct tests and measurements were done, and simulations were carried out using a digital model to verify the characteristics of the current acoustic performance. From these data, it was then possible to imagine physical interventions aimed to guarantee the protection of these acoustic respondent characteristics and, if possible, their improvement.

Regarding the performances that the theater, once restored, will have to guarantee, there is certainly the safeguarding of the current acoustic quality of the hall, which is the flagship of the University of the Arts and of the whole city of Tirana. In this regard, the study has identified the solutions for maintaining the current acoustic quality and previewed some measures for its further improvement thanks to the replacement of curtains, currently not present in the originals, with sound-absorbing panels placed in strategic positions and integrated with the existing walls.

The technological supply equipment played a decisive role in the Feasibility Study: having acknowledged the need to prepare a completely new system of systems, an air treatment solution adequate to the functionality of the room was previewed, initially with motors placed on the underground floor and inlet placed below the seats of the stalls and the gallery with shots were instead considered in the roof vault of the room. This system was subsequently reduced to have a minor impact on the supporting structures of the hall and the gallery.

Regarding the design of the electrical and special systems, the location of the main vertical distribution channels in the scenic tower was identified. Special care was taken to image the layouts of the distribution of the technological systems so that they do not modify the architectural image of the interior spaces, also providing for any shielding compatible with the architectural features of the building. The Feasibility Study also included an economic evaluation of the intervention and a forecast of the planning and implementation times.

The system of interventions previewed in the Feasibility Study aimed to preserve the building's original characteristics and restore all its main architectural components. Where this was not considered possible, new materials, furnishings, and objects based on Bosio's original design and Italian supplies of the time were considered.

By limiting the perimeter of the interventions to the internal space, particular attention was paid to integrating the theater's original condition with the technological supply equipment necessary to make the building completely adequate to contemporary standards and in compliance with current regulations.

Once the goodness of the reinforced concrete structural framework and its good state of conservation have been verified, structural reinforcement interventions have been considered mainly for the scenic tower's machinery system and the floors of the stalls. Also, in the gallery, structural reinforcement was initially thought to allow the passage of the necessary air supply channels. Still, it was abandoned by changing the approach to the mechanical systems.

The Feasibility Study, therefore, on the one hand, prefigured a philological restoration; on the oth-

er, it previewed a technological adaptation, starting from the observation that the current system supply equipment was completely obsolete, inadequate, and therefore, it was to be dismantled, making prevail the original character of this important example of twentieth-century Italian architecture, of its spatial systems, of its structural characteristics, of its multiple identities expressed thanks to highly refined interior architecture.

Following the feasibility phase, which saw approval by the Albanian Ministry of Culture in April 2020, the work continued with the drawing up of the definitive and executive project by the Tirana architecture firm Atelier4; in these two phases, the Department of Architecture assumed the role of Consultant until the recent completion of the work, of which some photographs are attached here awaiting the official inauguration and re-opening of the Academy Theatre.

Notes

1 The feasibility study, coordinated by Prof. Fabio Capanni and written in Italian and Albanian, was conducted for the client Trans Adriatic Pipeline AG (TAP); full title: *Feasibility study for Restoration, Reconstruction, and Refurbishment of Concert Hall, at the University of Arts in Tirana*. The working group of the Department of Architecture was composed of the following: survey professor Alessandro Merlo with Gaia Lavoratti, Giulia Lazzari, Domenico Palatella, Francesco Tioli, Michela Notarnicola; historical, urban, and architectural design Prof. Fabio Capanni, Riccardo Renzi, with Andia Guga; structural aspects prof. Giacomo Tempesta with Jacopo Vitale; acoustics prof. Simone Secchi; economic evaluation and planning prof.ssa Alessandra Cucurnia, three-dimensional internal views Alberto Becherini. The working group of the Department of Architecture made use of the collaboration of the Albanian studio Atelier 4 based in Tirana, which, in the figure of the architects Olsi Efthimi and Altin Premti, coordinated the studies on the plant aspects developed by Eng. Spiro Drita and Eng. Dëshira Mena.

2 XXII Ph.D. programme Cycle (2007-2009) *Analisi dell'opera progettuale di Gherardo Bosio. Tematiche a confronto* (Riccardo Renzi); Ph.D. programme Cycle XXV (2010-2012) *Tracce dell'architettura italiana in Albania 1925-1943* (Armand Vokhsi); Ph.D. programme Cycle XX-VII Ciclo (2012-2014) *L'architettura razionalista italiana d'oltremare. Gli edifici teatrali tra analisi e confronto* (Andia Guga). Furthermore, since 2017 the Department of Architecture has a research agreement with the Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario Viesseux (Florence) for a complete research on architecture and urban design



Fig.5 Gallery, completed 2023 (photo Besart Cani).

made by Ferdinando Poggi title as: *studio dell'opera progettuale di Ferdinando Poggi* (ref. R. Renzi).

3 Cfr. G. Paladini, *Ricordi di un Ufficio di Urbanistica Integrata*, in «Bollettino Tecnico», 10-11, 1954, pp. 118-123.

4 Cfr. R. Renzi, *Gherardo Bosio. Opera Completa 1927-1941*, Edifir, Firenze, 2016, pp. 278-301, pp. 318-325, pp. 362-363 e pp. 365-367.

5 The building, owned by the Albanian state, is protected by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the Institute of Cultural Monuments. It is currently the seat of the Rectorate (in the recently restored head building) and theater of the University of Arts, Academy of Arts.

6 Cfr. M. Giacomelli, A. Vokshi (eds), *Architetti e ingegneri italiani in Albania*, (conference proceedings 2011), Edifir, Firenze, 2012; F. Pashako, M. Pessina, A. Vokshi (eds), *L'interpretazione dello spazio urbano e architettonico dell'asse strutturante di Tirana*, (conference proceedings 2014), Edifir, Firenze, 2017; N. Valentin (eds), *Albania nel terzo millennio. Architettura, città, territorio*, Gangemi, Roma, 2021.

7 Regarding the theme of the classic as a recurring element in architectural design, see R. Renzi and Gherardo Bosio's work. *Le ville*, Alinea, Firenze, 2010 and R. Renzi, *Regime e rappresentazione. Il padiglione del lavoro italiano in Africa ed il padiglione dell'Albania alla Mostra*

Triennale delle Terre d'Oltremare del 1940, in «Bloom», n. 13, 2012, pp. 73-77.

8 The birth of the building is included among the numerous Italian creations in Albania during the 1930s. It is hinged on the completion of the Tirana Master Plan by Bosio and collaborators. Precisely, it fits into the monumental complex defined by the great urban axis (originally Viale dell'Impero today Boulevard Deshmoret and Kombit) and Piazza Madre Teresa (originally Piazza del Littorio). Together with the main buildings of the Albanian capital, this building, today weakened in its linguistic strength by the many architectures that have arisen close to and around it, expresses an idea of architecture perfectly in line with the contemporary experiences that associate it with the Italian architecture of mature Rationalism. The building completes, together with the headquarters of the Polytechnic (originally Casa del Fascio), the headquarters of the Archaeological Museum (originally headquarters of the Youth Associations for Sport - Gioventù Littoria Albanese), and the Stadium, now destroyed, the monumental complex of Tirana, the capital.

9 These documents are in the Gherardo Bosio Archives and Istituto Luce Roma archives.

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