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THE IMPACTS OF NON-ALIGNED DESIGN*

At the time of the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslavia had a special Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. According to Bojana Piškur, this commission "organised exhibitions outside Yugoslavia", with the "exchanges happening at all levels of cultural production." Piškur continues, however, that "architecture, urbanism and industrial design [had] a special, somewhat different status, being considered state-supported vehicles of new modernist tendencies, compatible with the idea of creating a new socialist society".[1] This is also borne out by archival records which reveal, among other things, that architects, urban planners and industrial designers in non-aligned countries provided assistance in setting up study programmes, lectured at universities and also did much of the planning and building in practice.[2]

1 Piškur, *Južna ozvezdja*, p. 10.
2 SI AS 1140, box 20/453, Zimbabve – angažiranje slovenskih strokovnjakov, 1987–1988; box 20/468, ZAMTES Ljubljana – Iraq; box 36/707, ZAMTES Ljubljana – ILO – roster slovenskih kandidatov, 1985.

In light of the above, our exploration of Slovenian design in the context of non-alignment forks, roughly speaking, into two main directions. One of them leads to the West, the Global North—which for Slovenian designers had always been the primary focus. At the same time, engagement with the Global South in the field of design and architecture merits consideration as well. This is where we find the architects and designers who ventured there on the basis of international economic agreements with non-aligned countries.[3] One of those was, for example, the architect Božidar Janez Gvardjančič, who supervised housing construction in the province of Gharyan between 1968–1970 and then later in Tripoli. He subsequently went to Kenya, where he designed, built and supervised rural healthcare facilities in 1971–1978. Between 1982 and 1983 in Iraq, architect Vlado Emeršič worked as an architect, designer and coordinator. He would later go on to design a pharmaceutical plant in Nigeria and low-cost housing in Sudan.[4] In 1987, working for LIZ engineering under the auspices of Rudis, architects Marija Jugovec, Tanja Robek, Meta Deu and Matija Suhadolc built the Sonipec shoe factories in the Algerian towns of Frenda, El Bayadh and Bousaada.[5]

The present study shows from the outset that the roles of Slovenian designers in the Global North and the Global South were more or less diametrically opposed. In the first case, a desire for recognition and active involvement on the part of the so-called *advanced* Other was evident, while in the latter, the approval was obviously inherent to the role of the one who possesses and *selflessly* shares knowledge. That said, on the Yugoslav side, according to Bojana Piškur, the impetus for the sharing of knowledge was not understood as the desire to civilise others (as had often been the case when done by the "developed and advanced" West).[6] Rather, Yugoslavia "cultivated the image of a culture/state whose goal in helping others was to help them establish themselves in a role that [had] yet to be created and clearly defined". Piškur refers to the latter as the "*Big Brother* paradigm, which from today's perspective is just as problematic".[7]

Despite the sometimes awkward positioning and the endless balancing act that had to be kept up, it should be stressed that for

Slovenian designers and architects during their membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, professional work in the Global North and the Global South were not mutually exclusive. In the text we will use the historical method to illuminate examples of Yugoslav policymakers—building on the Yugoslav Non-Aligned Movement and workers' self-management in the 1970s and 1980s—introducing the idea of decentralisation and questioning of epistemic colonialism to both the Global South and the Global North, and in doing so highlight the role of participation and the importance of taking into account the voices from the so-called periphery of design.

A Brief Overview of the Professionalisation of Slovenian Design and its Background

The professionalisation of Slovenian design was marked by the period after the Second World War, which was characterised by the accelerated post-war reconstruction and deliberate industrialisation of society. There is, however, another factor crucial for the understanding of the Yugoslav path towards industrialisation paved with socialism, namely the active integration of society with the aim of establishing an alternative to the prevailing ideology of the time, which entailed the division of the world into blocs in a perpetual state of Cold War. In the Informbiro period following the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, Yugoslavians chose to reject both of the major blocs' ideologies—the ideology of Western capitalism, as well as the state socialism of the East. In the former, the problem they identified was that in capitalism, the integration of society is mostly carried out by the market, with partial assistance from the state. In the centrally planned socialist societies, by contrast, this integration is predominantly a responsibility of the state, with partial assistance from the market.[8] In the area of international relations, the path beyond bloc politics in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and especially the 1960s was represented by the non-aligned movement—the so-called policy of peaceful co-existence[9]—while the alternative in the area of the sociology of work was built on the idea of socialist self-management. All of the above also proved vital for the further professionalisation and development of Slovenian design. The country's rapid and deliberate industrialisation when it found itself in isolation in 1948 forced the Yugoslav industry to develop its own products, which on the other hand represented the foundation for the professionalisation of industrial design. If the 1950s were a pioneering time in Yugoslav design, the 1960s can

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3   SI AS 1140, box 19/425, Federal Executive Council of the SFRY – Algeria, 1984; 20/459, ZAMTES Ljubljana – Iraq – Realisation of the Agreement on the Cooperation in the Field, 1985; 20/474, Zvezni ZAMTES – North Yemen – cultural and educational cooperation, 1983.

4   Ibid.

5   Špela Šubic's interview with architect Matija Suhadolc, 5 July 2022. Carried out for the purposes of the work by Predan and Šubic: *Zakaj je vaza podobna hiši?*

6   Messell, Globalization and Design Institution, p. 91.

7   Piškur, *Južna ozvezdja*, pp. 13–14.

8   Kavčič, *Sociologija dela*, p. 325.

9   Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, p. 96.

be seen as a time of institutionalisation. This is also evidenced by the development of national and international professional organisations in the field of design.

The first formal steps towards the professionalisation of design in Yugoslavia were taken in the early 1950s within professional associations.[10] Further professionalisation of institutions at a federal level took place in the 1960s. At the time, the Federation of Associations of Applied Arts Artists and Designers of Yugoslavia (SULU-PUDJ) established SPID YU, the Secretariat for Industrial Design.[11] In organisational terms, SPID YU was considered a typical example of polycentricity and self-management, with the federation bringing together the designers' associations of the individual republics that were formed in 1951–1953. In 1961[12] SPID YU joined the ICSID (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design), an association established in 1957 in Paris. It was founded by European and American designers wishing to improve the professional status of designers, encourage collaboration among industrial designers worldwide and establish unified international standards regulating the design profession.[13] In Europe and America, like here, national design organisations were the first to be formed. The desire for growth and the increasing interest in the internationalisation of design led to the emergence of first design conferences and magazines in the international space and eventually international organisations.[14] The founding of the ICSID was accompanied from the outset by the rhetoric of cultural internationalism, which was meant to transcend borders by building bridges of understanding. However, as pointed out by Tania Messel, from the very start, as its objectives and modes of operation were being formulated, sources of friction were encountered—most often as a direct result of Cold War policies, overly dominant local agendas and conflicting design ideologies.[15]

In the heated atmosphere in 1961, the Secretariat for Industrial Design (SPID YU) entered the international scene with the desire to internationalise Yugoslav design. According to the Slovenian industrial designer Saša J. Mächtig, the decision was undoubtedly, at least in part, based on

10 In 1951, the Designers' Society of Slovenia (DOS), initially named the Association of Artists of Applied Arts of Slovenia, was created. Likewise in the 1950s, the Industrial Design Studio (SIO) began operating under the auspices of the Association of Artists of Applied Arts in Zagreb, as well as in Belgrade under the auspices of their own association (Keller, *Dizajn*, p. 110).
11 Ibid., p. 115.
12 Although the texts analysed mention various years, 1961 is cited most frequently (mainly in connection with the 2nd ICSID Congress in Venice in 1961).
13 Messell, Design Across Borders, p. 131.
14 Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design*, p. 176.
15 Messell, Design Across Borders, p. 131.

Yugoslavia's international credibility and the favourable image achieved through Tito's innovative international politics. The 1st Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which took place in 1961 in Belgrade, was a resounding and high-profile success on a global scale. Building on such accomplishments, however, much could also be done in cultural and other fields, with considerable potential for success.[16]

Among such successes is the first international Industrial Design Biennial (BIO). It was founded in Ljubljana a mere three years after accession to the ICSID. Attesting to the excellence and international visibility of the first two Biennials is the participation of some of the world's leading names in design at the time, both on the jury and on the advisory board: Misha Black, Wim Crouwel, Gillo Dorfles, Charles Eames, Tomas Maldonado, Paul Reilly, Henri Vienot and Marco Zanuso.[17] In 1966, the international relevance of Slovenian graphic design was recognised by the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). Founded in London only three years prior, the organisation held its second congress in Bled, Slovenia.

In the early 1960s, during their studies of design and architecture, those who would eventually become the most active members of the Slovene designers' association were already regularly undergoing further training and attending international design conferences abroad. Standing out with his insightfulness and perspicacity was the aforementioned industrial designer Saša J. Mächtig. The other striking example in this text will be the designer and architect Janja Lap.[18] In the early 1960s, Lap joined a research team at the Royal College of Art in London on a British Council scholarship and, after returning to Slovenia in the 1980s, designed the interior of a army training centre in Libya.

Mächtig's Metamorphoses

Among the Slovenian professional and general public, Mächtig is most known for his red kiosk K67, which dates back to the late 1960s, and as a professor and co-founder of the Department of Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1984. His work in journalism and his regular international engagements, by contrast, are largely unknown. In this treatise, we will focus on the latter, and the mid-1970s period in particular. In this period, Saša J. Mächtig wrote the essay

16 Mächtig, Ravnikar in design, p. 257.
17 Gnamuš, ed., *Katalog BIO*, p. 12 and 24.
18 MAO AJL owns an extensive collection of personal documents, sketches, blueprints, manuscripts and typescripts, photographs and products.

Metamorphoses 2,[19] the idiosyncratic sequel to *Metamorphoses*,[20] which he had published in the *Sinteza* magazine in 1969. Unlike the first essay, which dealt primarily with the role of architecture in society, this 1970s article was much more political and critical towards the broader society. Quoting Mächtig: "The essay is based on the Yugoslav attitudes towards the global process of social and national emancipation and the democratisation of international relations, and, in this context, with the new role of the design profession in modern society."[21] In *Metamorphoses 2*, Mächtig drew special attention to the urgent need for establishing participation in design:

> The recognition of the need for interdisciplinary approach, cooperation of decision-makers and participation of users should shift the focus of our endeavours. Within this framework designers in today's changing world can play a much more important and socially responsible role than was possible in their quality of "form-givers" when they were dependent on a territorially restricted market in industrialised countries and on rich clients.[22]

It is worth mentioning here that the authors who study the field of co-creation and participation in design and co-design—starting from the economic practices of cooperatives and other co-management and self-determination practices of the 19th and 20th century—consider the 1970s to be the time that these topics entered the field of design. Most of them trace the origin of participatory design to the Scandinavian worker struggles,[23] as well as to a conference titled *Design Participation*, which was organised by the Design Research Society in Manchester, England, in 1971, and which remains an exceedingly important reference point even today.[24] User-centred design is considered by the authors of these texts as having origins in the political activism of the civil rights movements;[25] they call it a "US-driven phenomenon" that involves deliberate inclusion of users in the design process.[26] Despite Mächtig's active role in ensuring recognition of the significance of participatory practices

in design, the Yugoslav contribution to the field of participatory design currently remains overlooked. This is despite the fact that, as we will show below, his work left lasting traces.

The first time that Mächtig introduced the essay *Metamorphoses 2* to the public was at the conference of the British organisation DIA in Dubrovnik in the autumn of 1974. A year later, the essay was also accepted for the IX ICSID Congress in Moscow. The author's intent with the article was to provide starting points for the international community to "address concrete questions about the role of the profession in the context of Yugoslav self-management as both a social theory and practice".[27] When he arrived at the Congress in Moscow, however, he learned he would not get to present the text as part of the "Design and State Politics" topic. The official explanation was that there was insufficient time; unofficially, the reason was that the text was considered too political. According to Mächtig's record of the Congress, entitled *Kronologija dogodka* [Event Chronology], he was approached by Vladimir Zinchenko, then the deputy director of the scientific research institute for industrial design VNIITE of the Soviet Union, who "intervened in connection with the part of the text that mentioned Vietnam, Czechoslovakia and Big Brother".[28] Zinchenko warned him, Mächtig reports, that the Congress was not intended to be political in nature, whereas the text in question was highly political, and that since the Congress was supported by politicians, the organisers wished to avoid complications.[29] Mächtig, indignant over these developments, protested loudly both to the local organisers of the Congress and the international organisation the ICSID. His objections did not help, however, and he was not granted any time at the podium.

The reasons for this decision by the organisers are likely to be found in the events preceding the start of the Moscow Congress. As Dmitry Azrikan writes, throughout the preparation phase of the IX ICSID Congress, themed "Design for Human Beings and Society", the VNIITE institute's cooperation with the Science and Technology Committee was exemplary. Before the start of the Congress, however, the opening of the multimedia exhibition in one the most prestigious Moscow halls, the Rossia Concert Hall, was forbidden. In the exhibition, which had already been set up, the designers from VNIITA were hoping to present the role of industrial design in everyday life on 16 large screens, highlighting its ubiquity and its impact on the quality of life. Azrikan wrote, however, that

19   MAO, Mächtig, *Metamorfoze 2*.
20   Mächtig, Metamorfoze.
21   MAO, Mächtig, *Kronologija dogodka*, p. [1].
22   MAO, Mächtig, *Metamorfoze 2*, p. 22.
23   See Bødker, Creating Conditions for Participation, in Greenbaum and Loi, Participation, the camel and the elephant of design.
24   Cross, ed., *Design Participation*.
25   See Sanoff, Three Decades of Design and Community, in Luck, What is it that makes participation in design participatory design?
26   Sanders in Stappers, Co-creation and the new landscapes of design, p. 5.

27   MAO, Mächtig, *Kronologija dogodka*, p. [1].
28   Ibid.
29   Ibid., pp. [1–2].

a couple of days before the Congress opened, a mysterious panic suddenly came over the Committee. Although everything was built, organized, and prepared, all now was totally banned, including slides which were to support the [Soviet] panelists presentations. Nothing was explained. The Soviet portion of the Congress was converted to a boring bureaucratic format. I tried to draw something with a marker on a piece of paper during my presentation. All of my slides were locked up.[30]

Azrikan saw this as a clear signal to the design profession from the Soviet authorities at the time. The political authorities evidently identified design as a potential threat, since it involved social changes in the cultural and economic sphere. Mächtig's Event Chronology does not make clear the extent to which the Yugoslav delegation of designers was aware of the situation and these developments. In light of the criticism directed at the organisational deficiencies and the view that articles by the Eastern European delegates were "either restrained or low quality",[31] it is reasonable to assume that they were not really aware of the political pressures behind the scenes. A critique by Goroslav Keller likewise includes only a brief observation that the Congress in Moscow felt lethargic and lacked meaningful discussions, reactions and disagreements.[32] Despite everything, however, the event would prove to be of key importance for Mächtig's subsequent steps and his active participation in the ICSID's international events.

Mächtig would speak again in 1976, this time at the IX ICSID General Assembly in Brussels. It is readily apparent from the minutes of the General Assembly that the Yugoslav delegates' presentation was carefully thought-out and well prepared. As delegates from a non-aligned country, members of the Yugoslav association of designers SPID YU objected to the excessive centralism displayed by the international organisation. The result of such a regime, they felt, was the loss of regional contributions from less developed countries. At the same time, at the General Assembly, Mächtig, proceeding from his *Metamorphoses 2* essay, advanced a thesis that the West ought to recognise that "there is no single model that would make it possible to easily transfer experiences and principles from one profession, or one country, to another".[33]

In the 1970s and 1980s, similar criticism began to be voiced by individual Latin American countries. With the creation of ALADI (Asociación Latinoamericana de Diseño) in 1978, the pressure on

the ICSID's overly centralist organisation intensified.[34] As Tania Messell explained, the ICSID, promoted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), expanded deliberately in the 1970s, with developing countries actively joining. But the main problem soon became apparent in that the ICSID simplistically imagined its cooperation with these countries as the gathering of international design experts aimed at "facilitating the implementation of foreign productivity guidelines in large and small-scale industries".[35] They proclaimed themselves the holders of knowledge and progress, as someone who wishes to and is capable of helping, yet they were not actually interested in knowing the whole picture. This is evident from the minutes of the executive council of the ICSID from 1970. Josine des Cressonnières, Secretary General of the organisation, explained the reasons for the dissemination of aid to developing countries as follows:

The only justification of the ICSID is to help. We must do it with all the assets and means particular from the ICSID which derive from its international status and allow for: A) exchange and information (which we can do better than anyone). B) a channel of assistance of more advanced countries, no longer in need of help (Sweden for instance) towards those who need [sic] it acutely.[36]

This view, held with the blind conviction of its own correctness and uncritically following the guidelines set by UNIDO that call for focusing on industrial development, deliberately ignored the broader social, cultural and educational impacts of such an approach. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, this attitude gradually became a target of strong criticism, even by some of the active members of the ICSID from developed countries. Calls were made to cease doing things for the so-called periphery and instead begin doing things with them, as it is only through cooperation that technological independence can be achieved.[37] Among those critics, several stood out in particular: Gui Bonsiepe, Victor Papanek, Paul Hogan[38] and finally, Saša J. Mächtig. At the IX General Assembly of the ICSID in Brussels, the latter offered the following two proposals: "The statute of the ICSID should prepare the basis that would provide a place for a representative from the so-called developing countries on the executive board. 2) A working group should be established

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30   Azrikan, VNIITE, p. 64.
31   MAO, Mächtig, *Kronologija dogodka*, p. [3].
32   Keller, Kongres bez freed-backa, p. 19.
33   MAO, Mächtig, *Metamorfoze 2*, p. 20.

34   Buitrago-Trujillo, The Siege of the Outsiders ALADI, p. 55.
35   Messell, Globalization and Design Institutionalization, p. 89.
36   UBDA, No 6, ICD/04/1, Minutes ICSID Executive Board Meeting, 17–18 January 1970.
37   Bonsiepe, Precariousness and Ambiguity, p. 13.
38   Messell, Globalization and Design Institutionalization, pp. 92–93.

to examine the issues related to participation and self-management." He added:

> We are aware that our professional impact on society is not as great as it could be. [...] we have failed so far to develop adequate methods of participation, even though the methods of interdisciplinary work have already become common practice. Nevertheless, as these methods are too professionally oriented and our task is to find new ways and develop new methods that allow the participation of design-makers, designers and users at all levels in our design process, I propose that a new working group be established in order to deal with the problem and methods of participation and self-management.[39]

This principle, he continued, was increasingly becoming "a topic of interest in Scandinavia, Great Britain and some Latin American countries, whereas in Yugoslavia, this has already been implemented within the sociopolitical system".[40] So it was already in the mid-1970s that Mächtig, at numerous international events, called for greater participation of designers, decision-makers and users on all levels. He further called for an understanding that the denial of the fact that our world is shared should cease and that the affairs of all (including those of the developing countries) should be treated as matters of community. He called for the development of methods that would stimulate interdisciplinarity, decentralisation, participation, cooperation and self-management. With just a handful of adjustments to bring them up to date, these words and approaches would not sound out of place in our "new" world of the present. Though it may sometimes appear as if the ideas of self-management and non-alignment are no longer palatable in these "new" times, we can see that the modern efforts to find alternatives to the current economic system—ones oriented more towards sharing, cooperation and co-creation among all the stakeholders in the process—in fact revolve around ideas that had, in the past, repeatedly been implemented or at the very least discussed in professional circles, only now repackaged in new terminology. Jacques Rancière would most likely see this recurrence as the recycling of old ideas from modernity with the old structures remaining exactly where they had already been:

> The so-called "grand narrative" of modernity has not been dismissed. Instead, its elements have been recycled. What happens is not a process

of erosion of power, conflicts and beliefs heading towards some sort of levelling of the old oppositions in and of ideological consensus, but an active attempt at construing an order of domination, able to dismiss any resistance, or any alternative, by imposing itself as self-evident and inescapable. Our time is therefore not a "post-time" but "anti-time". The evolution we have witnessed in the past three decades is, strictly speaking, intellectual counter-revolution.[41]

In this light it is perhaps easier to understand why Mächtig's aforementioned efforts and calls for a different approach were often deemed overly political. The origin of this anti-time—and its resulting cyclicality—in design go back much further than three decades. In his report from the Milan Congress of 1983, Mächtig wrote:

> The discussion on the latest developments in design associated with the most developed countries became even more heated during the Congress. Ever since the 1960s it has become apparent that functionalism has lost motivation in design. Of course the so-called post-industrial era does not understand the historical moment through the denunciation of industry, even though the latter can no longer be the source of cultural inspiration.[42]

Despite the explicitly obvious active constructing of an order of domination by the developed countries, the international council of the ICSID, eventually—at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s—acquiesced to considering the alternative that was being proposed by the Yugoslav delegates and the participants from Latin America. In 1980, at the 11th General Assembly in Paris, they adopted a proposal—based on the amended initiative by Vesna Popović and Saša J. Mächtig—to establish a working group on the "future and structure of the ICSID".[43] As something of a mission statement for the group, they wrote in the report of the General Assembly (under Article 7.3.1.7 – ICSID FUTURE 79–81) that "a 'natural' association of member societies should be promoted in order to improve communication and interaction. [...] This should also be reflected in the structure of the international organisation".[44] The

39 MAO, Minutes of the IX. General Assembly (ICSID), typescript, Brussels 1976, p. 43.
40 Ibid.

41 Rancière, Je čas emancipacije minil?, p. 134.
42 MAO, Mächtig, Report: ICSID Congress and General Assembly – Milan, October 1983, p. 3.
43 The group's report, to be discussed at the General Assembly in Helsinki (1981), was prepared by April 1981. See also (everything by MAO): *Mednarodne novice. Informacije*. ICSID; ICSID News, p. 1. Mächtig, Report from the 1st meeting of the special working group for the ICSID in Great Britain. Mächtig, *Report on the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID*.
44 Mächtig, *Report on the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID*. p. 30

newly established group for the future and structure of the ICSID (ICSID WG/FS) was led by Peter Lord[45] and Mächtig was appointed a member. The umbrella working group also included Françoise Jollant (France), Frans van der Put (Netherlands) and Yuri Soloviev (Soviet Union). Apart from the precept mentioned above, the group's objectives additionally included exploring the options of changing the statute of the ICSID in order to create a more polycentric organisation, delegating the decision-making power to individual regions and establishing better communication, cooperation and democracy among ICSID members. Mächtig's task within the group was to investigate polycentric processes and the practical opportunities for implementing regionalisation.

One of the key contributions of the ICSID WG/FS group's report[46] was the proposal that the ICSID abandon its position of being a so-called super-governmental organ and instead become a catalyst of activity in member associations. There was to be a shift in emphasis from management and domination towards practice, education and promotion in equal measures. Group members built the polycentric nature of the ICSID on the principle of "self-sufficient, self-promoting local (regional) groups congregating around centres that emerge naturally [...] An important role in this process of association will be played by factors such as necessity, culture and language; at the same time, no region should embrace exclusivity".[47] The Yugoslav organisation SPID YU was recognised as an example of good practice in the area of platforms of exchange. Among the newly established regional groups, the ICSID Asian Regional Group, formed in 1979, was highlighted in particular. Despite the tendency towards regional association on a geographical basis, it was stressed multiple times in the document that the regional nature of polycentricity should not derive from maps. As a practical example, they cited India and Pakistan, which they deemed (also on the basis of connections within the Non-Aligned Movement) to have more in common with the Latin American countries than their northern neighbours. The result was a short study that included the initial proposal for regional groups that would employ the logic of self-management to ensure their development and balance the needs of individual countries. In addition, Mächtig's several years of effort and active participation in the group finally bore fruit in

45   Peter Lord, the future Secretary General and President of the ICSID International Council, would later become a key figure, having been an open supporter of Yugoslav designers' work within the ICSID from the very beginning. Correspondence between Lord and Mächtig is kept in the MAO archives.
46   Mächtig, *Report on the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID*.
47   Ibid., p. 30.

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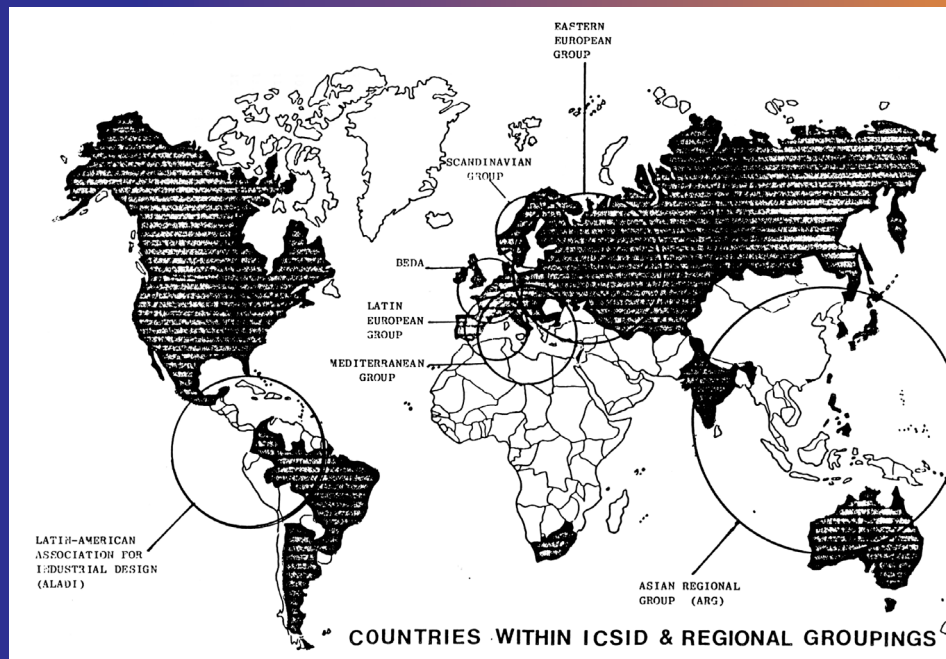**Meeting of the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID.**
Present in the photograph (left to right): Frans van der Put, Mary Mullin, Peter J. Lord, Saša J. Mächtig, Françoise Jollant. Paris 1980.
Courtesy of Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana.

ICSID membership map and proposal of regional associations
(*Report on the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID,* April 1981, p. 40)
Courtesy of Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana.

1992, when he succeeded in bringing the ICSID Congress to Ljubljana—by then the capital of independent Slovenia. It is not insignificant that the international organisation (known since 2017 as the World Design Organisation, or WDO) to this day presents itself to the public as a global community of member organisations from six regions.[48]

Janja Lap's Community Values

Designer and architect Janja Lap, unlike Saša J. Mächtig, is not well known to the Slovenian public (general or professional). It took two years of in-depth research within the scope of the research project *Modeli in prakse mednarodne kulturne izmenjave Gibanja neuvrščenih* [Models and Practices of International Cultural Exchange] to uncover the extraordinary breadth and multi-layered nature of her work in glass and industrial design, as well as scientific research in the field of systems design. It was Lap who, aged 35 and with the help of a British Council scholarship, moved to London in September 1964, where she joined the research team at the London Royal College of Art (RCA). Two years after her arrival in London, she moved to Sheffield, where she worked as a lecturer at the School of Architecture, which is part of Sheffield University. Between 1973 and 1975, she was also lecturing at the famous Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (AA). Following her return to Slovenia, she first took employment as a researcher at the Institute for Sociology and Philosophy at what was then called the Edvard Kardelj University in Ljubljana. Afterwards, in 1979, she began 10 years of employment at Iskra as a designer of electro-optical devices. There she designed at least one (that we know of) project intended for the non-aligned countries. Immediately after her retirement in 1989, on the basis of one of the last Slovenian agreements with non-aligned countries, she went to Iraq for six months to teaching at the Department of Architecture of the University of Mosul,[49] But the key influence on the work detailed below was her time as a visiting researcher at the RCA in the mid-1960s.

In leaving for London, Lap first suspended and later quit her job at the School of Arts and Crafts (known today as the Secondary School for Design and Photography) in Ljubljana. She also left behind her career as an award-winning and established—in Slovenia—architect and designer. In her first year at the RCA, she focused on the research of glass at the Department of Industrial

48 *WDO | People | Regional Advisors and Community Liaisons.*
49 SI AS 1140, box 20/468, ZAMTES Ljubljana – Iraq: Engagement by University Lecturers – Janja Lap, 1989.

Glass under the mentorship of Robert Goodden. In the second year of her residence she joined the research group for hospitals at the School of Industrial Design (Engineering). There, she got to know the head of the research group, professor Misha Black (known for designing the street signs in Westminster; otherwise one of the pioneers of hospital equipment optimisation) and professor Bruce Archer (known, among other things, as the designer of the first systematically developed hospital bed), under whose mentorship she completed her Master's thesis. Bruce Archer came to the RCA in 1962 at the invitation of Black, who entrusted him with leading a research project focused on non-surgical hospital equipment.[50] Before that, he worked for a year at the Ulm School of Design, where he was invited by Tomás Maldonado, working under the design theorist and lecturer Horst Rittl, among others.[51] Archer, as noted by Stephen Boyd Davis and Simone Gristwood, worked at the RCA for 27 years and was not only a key figure but also the driving force of scientific research in the field of design. In the 1960s, he instituted and advanced an approach described as follows:

> to be rigorous, and in particular 'systematic', about the nature and practice of designing. He sought to establish a philosophy of design,[52] even a 'science of design',[53] a phrase often associated with Herbert Simon's *Sciences of the Artificial*. Essential to this science was an understanding that Design Research was the study, not only of design's methods, but also of its ontology as a discipline and an activity.[54]

The foundation of Archer's systematic methods of design was the necessity of moving design away from sculptural approaches to technological problems. The task of the designer, he asserted, is to find ways to incorporate into design thinking "the knowledge of ergonomics, cybernetics, marketing and management science", thus keeping up with the trend in technology and starting to "adopt a systems approach that is different than the approach to artefacts".[55]

After joining the research group for hospitals, Lap focused on analysing and understanding the advantages and disadvantages of various hospital feeding schemes. Her first study, *Hospital Feeding*

50 Boyd Davis in Gristwood, "A dialogue between the real-world and the operational model" – The realities of design in Bruce Archer's 1968 doctoral thesis, p. 187.
51 Ibid., p. 186 in Krippendorff, Designing in Ulm and off Ulm.
52 Archer, A view of the nature of design research, p. 33.
53 Archer, *The Structure of Design Processes*, foreword.
54 Boyd Davis in Gristwood, "A dialogue between the real-world and the operational model" – The realities of design in Bruce Archer's 1968 doctoral thesis, p. 185.
55 RCA Archer, Systematic method for designers, p. 1.

Systems, already demonstrated her astute recognition that in order to find an answer, she would have to formulate a unique approach to a problem she first had worked on in a highly analytical and systematic way. Indeed, from today's perspective and in light of the remarkable proliferation of methodological approaches in design in the last decade, the methods described in her research work seem unusually progressive for the mid-1960s and early 1970s period and remain relevant today. She succeeded in incorporating the principles of systemic, service-experience and circular design into her research and planning, while placing everything firmly into the context of the the architectural and urban planning foundation underlying the conception of the functionalist city as understood by her first mentor at the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana, Edvard Ravnikar.[56]

In April 1979, when she took employment as an industrial designer with Iskra Commerce, Lap first entered the world of consumer product design, which offered her an opportunity to examine the applicability of her research work. Despite her ambitious goals, she joined Iskra right when their independent design department was being dismantled. It is no wonder, then, that two years into her employment, upon receiving the international BIO Award, in an interview for the Iskra newsletter, she pointed out:

> I always look at things through the magical prism of the future and it is my utmost wish and hope that design will truly come to life in Iskra and come to permeate, in the positive sense, the whole company. […] This is a goal that all of us together, the whole of Iskra, should be willing to sacrifice a lot to achieve. We ought perhaps to consider that design is no longer a good fit for Iskra Commerce and instead reimagine it as an institute operating at two layers: a service layer for addressing everyday issues and a second layer, where bona fide development would take place in close association with other development institutes.[57]

However, in the context of interpreting Lap's products in the field of industrial design, it is important to keep in mind the aspect that she began to cultivate during her studies of architecture and which she developed further at the RCA, namely the awareness that "we are constantly confronted with the problem of creative heritage, which needs to be examined especially in the context of the diversity of cultural traditions and the existing social structure".[58] In the 1980s she additionally pointed out that

56 Žnidaršič, Metoda projektiranja arhitekta Edvarda Ravnikarja, pp. 9–10.
57 Ovsenik, Oblikovanje iz lastnih korenin, p. 5.
58 Lap, Industrijsko oblikovanje in vprašanje ustvarjalnosti, p. 13.

It is time we asked ourselves if we are capable of recording our periods of life through a deeper engagement with the questions of a nation's cultural and social heritage, and, from these starting points, form our own visual concept of industrial design that would, by virtue of its authentic and original expression, be able to equal the European level of industrial product creation.[59]

The search for uniqueness and cultural authenticity of expression already hinted at the tendencies that would be reflected in society during the breakup of Yugoslavia a decade later. At the same time, Lap, by noting the necessity of searching for the so-called historic aspect of creativity, raised a topic that is still relevant today. This reflection needs to be interpreted together with her statement that she looks at everything "through the magical prism of the future."[60] A similar explanation was put forward by Alison J. Clarke, who argued that it is in fact impossible to look to the future without understanding history, stating that "at the core of the imaginary and the speculative within design, history has always played a major theoretical and conceptual part". This is why it is such a problem "that this explosion in contemporary design now largely neglects, or actively denies through its lack of engagement with histographical framing and its acritical approach to 'the social'".[61]

The above is key to understanding Lap's project, which she designed in the context of the cultural and economic cooperation among non-aligned countries. The project encompassed the interior design of the previously mentioned Training Centre in Libya, which she planned and implemented in 1984 for the Libyan army. In addition to furnishing design, this also included modern computer and electrooptical equipment by Iskra. The planned Training Centre, which also had a second role as a service station, was located somewhere "south of Tripoli in the [Libyan] desert".[62] Božo Vukas relates that Iskra Elektrooptika sold a lot of equipment to Libya at the time; this being the case, they wished to have a service centre, and the building designed by Lap was aimed primarily at training service personnel.

Even a brief look at the blueprints form the green folder bearing the English title "Training center" makes it clear that Lap's design process followed the logic she had developed previously during her

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research in the field of designing for disasters.[63] In her text entitled Disaster Housing in Yugoslavia, published in 1977 in the New York magazine *Disasters, The International Journal of Disaster Studies and Practice*, she wrote that the main challenge in designing for disasters is that "All too often people design an item for a disaster without taking into account the variety of needs that different cultural groups may have. This is important if the aid is to be of value and facilitate the rebuilding process."[64] At the same time, by respecting cultural heritage and understanding diversity, Lap also followed the guidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement itself. While culture—as Piškur notes—was not a priority for the Non-Aligned Movement, the cultural policy of the Non-Aligned Movement strongly condemned cultural imperialism and promoted cultural diversity and culture hybridisation. Western (European) cultural heritage was to be understood in terms of "comparison"; it was to be woven into the living culture of colonised peoples, not merely repeated in new (political) circumstances. Strong emphasis was therefore put on "trans-national appreciation of cultural heritages" and a local approach. Here it makes sense to paraphrase Achille Mbembe, namely that it is not enough to merely create one's own forms and institutions of culture, etc., but that it is also necessary to translate, fragment and break up the realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process to use these forms as an aid to our own development.[65]

The above is also evident in her design of the equipment for the Libyan Tank Crew Training Centre. The preserved blueprints specify the basic furnishings of the interior with seating for 55 people. The plan also shows the rational arrangement of desks, club tables and seats in the main hall (the lecture hall) and in the smaller separate rooms. There are 20 separate rooms intended for individual work and study; one room served as the office of the Centre's Chief Officer, two were service rooms and one was used as a lounge. Other than the blueprint, Lap's estate only includes one more artifact—a single club table, low and stable, of massive and relatively heavy construction. The slats on the table surface are glued together in a pattern derived from the typical Greek meander.

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59   Ibid.
60   Ovsenik, Oblikovanje iz lastnih korenin, p. 5.
61   Clarke, The New Design Ethnographers 1968–1974, pp. 73–74.
62   Interview with the design engineer Božo Vukas, 7 July 2022. He also states in the interview that in 1984, Lap visited the site to make sure everything was carried out according to the plans.

63   In addition to her research in the field of hospital design and improving the quality of meals for the most vulnerable segments of the population, Lap also spent two decades meticulously research the field of design in times of crisis (from wars to earthquakes). She thoughtfully linked the topic to Slovenian partisan hospitals (focusing on the Franja and Jelendol hospitals) and made comparisons of different instances of disaster response. Her research always emphasised the importance and necessity of understanding vernacular design and architecture.
64   Lap, Disaster Housing in Yugoslavia, p. 61.
65   Piškur, *Južna ozvezdja*, p. 15.
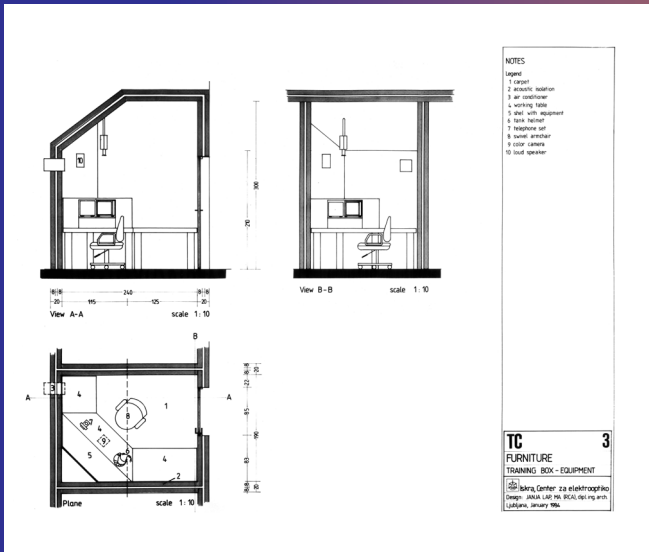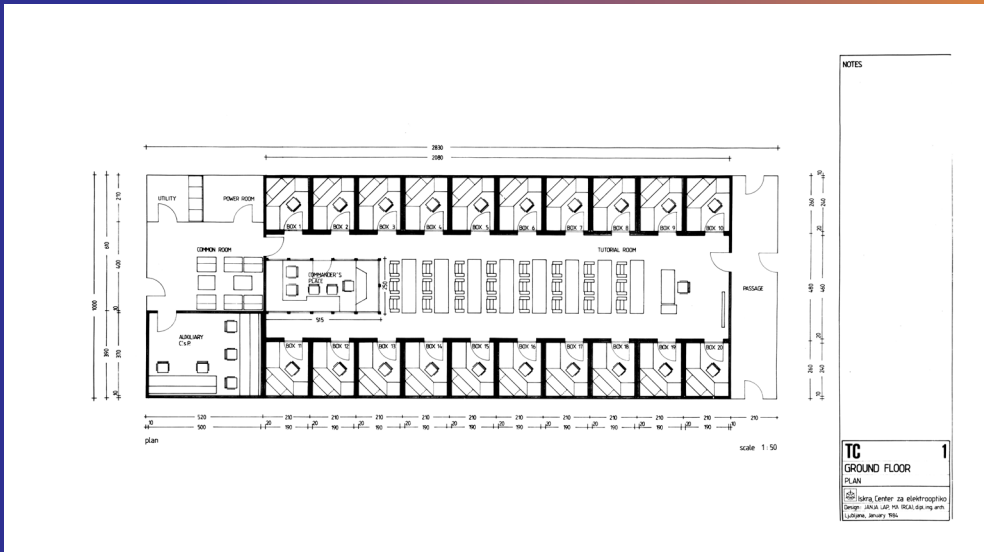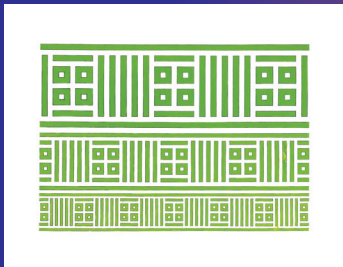
Janja Lap, plans for the Tank Crew Training Centre,
Libya, 1984, Iskra Elektrooptika.
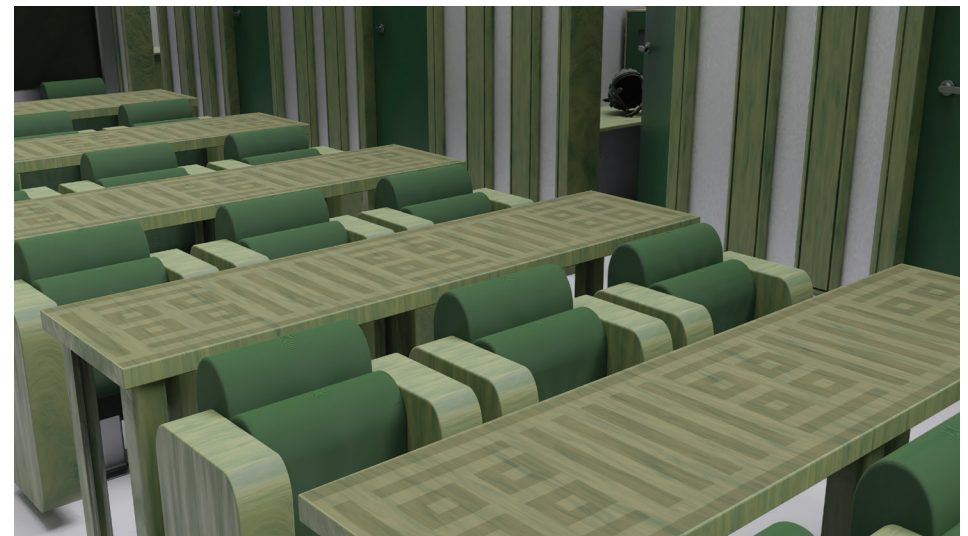Courtesy of Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana.

Janja Lap, model club table for the Tank Crew Training Centre,
Libya, 1984, Iskra Elektrooptika, photo: Aleš Rosa.
Courtesy of Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana.

The assumption, in light of the designer's fondness for ancient cultures, is that she sought inspiration in Antiquity, when Cyrenaica—Libya's north-eastern region—was a Greek colony. The wood stain colour choice was green—unsurprising, considering this was the Islamic world. The ornamentation, discreetly integrated into the table surface, and the choice of the table colour are the only culturally specific details, skilfully woven by the designer into a rational and purposefully designed object. While the choice of wood for the furniture was not informed by an understanding of local goods, it was logical, as the centre's design process was carried out in cooperation with the Slovenian industry that furnished the buildings.

Records of her work in Iraq can be found in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia.[66] They tell us that in the winter semester of 1989/1990 she spent six months in Mosul, teaching Interior and Industrial Design at the School of Architecture of the University of Mosul. Fragmentary anecdotes from this period are also preserved in the report she wrote after her return, which was broadcast on Ars, the 3rd station of Radio Slovenia, in 1993. In the radio programme entitled *Spomini, pisma in potopisi* [Memories, Letters and Travelogues] she recounts that during her stay, she was thrilled with working with the students, the well-equipped lecture theatres and the remarkable history, which she studied rigorously every week on her days off. At the same time, her report makes it clear that she did not let the historical beauty blind her to the critical perception of Iraqis' degrading treatment of women, the Kurds and foreigners, as well as the exploitation of foreign experts that she witnessed. Despite that, she managed to break the ice and build mutual trust with the students, as she sensed their hunger for knowledge from a part of the world that they otherwise found largely inaccessible at the time.

This last thought reaffirms the strength potential of meetings that go beyond the national perspective and that can result not only in the sharing of knowledge but also in the creation of opportunities for the generation of new knowledge and experience that transcends political ideologies. In this, both Janja Lap and Saša J. Mächtig were without rival.

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Janja Lap, Tank Crew Training Centre, Libya, 1984, Iskra Elektrooptika, render: Bor Jarh. Kept by: Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Ljubljana

66   SI AS 1140, box 20/468, ZAMTES Ljubljana – Iraq: Engagement by University Lecturers – Janja Lap, 1989.

Shaping Space and Time

Our chosen examples illustrate how Slovenian (and Yugoslav) designers, in accordance with the Yugoslav social order, actively worked to introduce into the international space the ideas of decentralisation and the necessity of emancipation to draw attention to voices from the so-called periphery of design. They focused on understanding and developing a holistic approach in the broader cultural, social and geographical context. They introduced discourse on decolonisation into and via their work in design, as well as the possibility of designing new approaches for addressing overlooked and non-aligned cultural elements in design. The main emphasis was on understanding the significance and role of active participation both in the design profession and in the community, as well as its role in society in general.

Both examples, however, also serve to illustrate the difference mentioned at the beginning of this text. Whereas the engagement of Slovenian experts in the Global South was (usually) welcome, establishing a voice in the Global North actually required confrontation. There had to be an attempt to silence, or as Rok Benčin would put it, there had to be "an attempt to usurp the privileges of thinking and creating".[67] In response to the event, the Yugoslav designers, in a clear critique that exposed the weakness of the international organisation, showed that privileges are not the property of the self-appointed few, but are inherently universal. And it is at this point that we can detect the rudiments of emancipation, which, according to Benčin, "requires us to break up the consensus and introduce a confrontation that exposes seemingly insurmountable social divisions".[68] Jacques Rancière wrote that emancipatory politics "depend on the multiplication of those operations of subjectivation that invent the worlds of community as worlds of disagreement".[69] This is exactly what Mächtig and his colleagues managed to achieve as part of the of the Working Group on the Future and Structure of the ICSID. They succeeded in pointing to the seemingly insurmountable social divisions between the Global North and the Global South, and then, by introducing polycentricity and an understanding of the regional approach, to link these into new worlds of community with the possibility of forming their own voice in the global community. They also gained recognition from an international organisation that the world is a community of plural and equal voices, where the voice of the periphery is not to be ignored, but entrusted with self-organisation and given the opportunity for cooperation. In doing so—if what has been described is put into actual practice—we all gain.

The examples provided therefore show that even a voice from what is seen as the periphery, from a different everyday life—a voice like the Yugoslav one, shaped by non-alignment and socialist self-management—can, through practical experience, influence the wider international community. Shaping space and time. However, the selected examples also show that voices from the periphery, that is to say, voices from countries with systems considered objectionable by the international community, or as unorthodox experiments, are quickly forgotten by history and design theory. It thus undoubtedly falls on all of us who draw on this heritage to keep reminding the world of this, albeit still from the periphery. It needs pointing out that a plurality of voices in the design community is not something to be feared;[70] that what Western authors keep telling us in their current books—how to participate, how to co-create, how to give voice to carriers of capability—is something that needs to be actually practiced in earnest in the context of writing design history and theory.

67   Benčin, *Med mimesis in aisthesis*, p. 214.
68   Ibid., p. 218.
69   Rancière, *Nerazumevanje*, p. 75.

70   Petra Černe Oven and Marija Nabernik emphatically assert the opposite: we need to be able "to effectively describe the actual situation and trigger changes that are necessary at all levels of society". Development of Scientific Illustration, p. 41.

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