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## Modernist architecture as part of contemporary urban identity: Plečnik and Ravnikar in Ljubljana, and Grabrijan and Neidhardt in Sarajevo

This article examines the influence of modernist architecture on the formation of urban identity in two post-Yugoslav cities: Ljubljana and Sarajevo. A comparative analysis explores the contributions of key architects to shaping the urban fabric and identity of each city during the twentieth century, considering their shared socialist past and divergent sociocultural trajectories after the 1990s. The legacy of modernism is considered in light of sustainabil-

ity, resilience, and the fluctuating notion of cultural identity. Special focus is placed on the works of Jože Plečnik and Edvard Ravnikar in Ljubljana, and Dušan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt in Sarajevo.

**Keywords:** city identity, context, heritage, legacy, “human-centred” urbanism, Jože Plečnik, Edvard Ravnikar, Dušan Grabrijan, Juraj Neidhardt

## 1 Introduction

Urban identity, which distinguishes cities from one another, has been especially contested in recent decades, marked by globalization and homogenization of culture and the built environment. Although the advent of the international style and modern architecture in the early twentieth century embodied powerful universalizing and standardizing forces, there were also more sensitive practices that sought to respond to local contexts. Today, modernist heritage is contested, particularly from the perspective of sustainability, yet it remains important to assess its contribution to the contemporary urban identity of cities, particularly through the works of architectural avant-garde figures. This is particularly compelling in the case of the Western Balkans, especially the capitals of the former Yugoslav republics, which have been shaped by turbulent histories at the crossroads of cultures and further transformed through their shared socialist past and their post-socialist transition. This article examines the cities of Sarajevo and Ljubljana, which were both part of royal Yugoslavia until 1941 and in the second half of the 20th century under Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

This research highlights the key twentieth-century modernist architects that profoundly contributed to the unique urban identities of Sarajevo and Ljubljana by advancing contextual approaches and developing distinctive architectural expressions. A comparative interpretation of the works of Jože Plečnik, Edvard Ravnikar, Juraj Neidhardt, and Dušan Grabrijan reveals divergent yet context-sensitive articulations of urban modernity. This article first examines how local context resonates in each architect's work within his urban, cultural, and political environment. The research compares their contributions during the formative period of the urban identities of Sarajevo and Ljubljana amid the rise of modernism. It also explores how these modernist architectural legacies are reflected in these cities' contemporary urban narratives. The article has three main sections. After the introduction, a discussion of the background and concepts analyses notions such as the image of the city, urban identity, *genius loci*, critical regionalism, and contextualism. The next section presents the research methodology and case studies of Ljubljana and Sarajevo, focusing on the evolution of twentieth-century urban identity in dialogue with the local context. Finally, the results offer a comparative framework interpreting the contributions of these key architectural figures and reflecting on their significance today.

## 2 Theoretical background and key concepts

This study addresses urban identity with reference to the concept of the image of the city, as Kevin Lynch defines distinctiveness from other cities. This has three components: identity, structure, and meaning: "A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. . . . Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional" (Lynch, 1960). In other words, architecture and objects play a vital role in shaping the character of a city – not in isolation, but in interaction with the broader urban context. Ultimately, urban identity is shaped not only by physical elements, but also by its intangible aspects – its sociocultural and symbolic dimensions, and the way people relate to and experience the city. The distinctive character of a city emerges at the intersection of its physical form (environmental, urban, architectural framework) and its social, cultural, and symbolic meanings. The exploration of urban identity in Sarajevo and Ljubljana cannot be separated from their complex historical backgrounds. Because this research focuses on the modernist legacy, it examines only one layer among many that constitute urban identity. Another valuable analytical tool is Christian Norberg-Schulz's theory of phenomenology of space and place, particularly his concept of *genius loci*, or the spirit of place: "A place is a space which has a distinct character. . . . To belong to a place means to have an identity" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

Despite its diverse expressions, regionalism is predominantly interpreted as a theoretical framework that opposes globalizing, universalizing, and standardizing forces, which often lead to the erosion of local identities and cultural diversity. Mumford (1947) reconceptualized regionalism as an active engagement with the global rather than a posture of outright resistance. Four decades later, Tzonis and Lefaivre (1981) introduced the theory of critical regionalism as a conceptual approach that invites reflective engagement with tradition, identity, and context, encouraging a critical self-examination within global architectural discourse. Further developed in 1983 by Frampton (2007), critical regionalism advocates for a cultural strategy to mediate between universal civilization and local culture. The approach also encourages dialogue between modern technology and natural context, accentuating architecture's experiential and tactile qualities. However, the importance of context in architecture and urbanism was fully recognized only in the last decades of the twentieth century. As Derrida (1967) famously stated, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte"

(‘there is nothing outside the text’), highlighting the inseparability of meaning from context. This notion gained particular emphasis during the postmodern period and was advanced by architects and theorists such as Aldo Rossi, Thomas L. Schumacher, and Colin Rowe, who asserted that the architectural object should be understood as a fragment within a larger urban whole (Nesbitt, 1996).

Context can be analysed in both its physical (natural and built/urban) and non-physical (social and cultural) dimensions. In architecture and urban planning, context may be evoked either directly or implicitly (Zagora, 2012). The contribution of modernist architects to urban identity is exemplified by figures such as Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona, Oscar Niemeyer in Brasília, Otto Wagner in Vienna, and Alvar Aalto in Helsinki. These contributions predate the rise of the “star-architect” phenomenon, city branding strategies, and the commodification of architectural landmarks (Zhukin, 1995). In examining modernism and the shaping of urban identity in European cities during the first half of the twentieth century, it is essential to revisit the pioneers of the international style in architecture, who demonstrated a nuanced sensitivity to context. Le Corbusier (1930) emphasized the fundamental connection between architecture and urban planning, stating “Architecture en tout, urbanisme en tout . . . Une cellule = un homme; des cellules = la ville” (‘Architecture in everything, urbanism in everything. . . . One cell = one man; many cells = the city’). In other words, building design and city planning are inseparable and can be compared to individual living units that together form a cohesive whole. Although Le Corbusier acknowledged that modern techniques, challenges, and solutions had become increasingly globalized over the decade prior to 1930, he stressed that local factors such as climate, geography, topography, and cultural diversity continued to play a crucial role in guiding context-sensitive design approaches. This article addresses how the concepts of context and *genius loci*, along with critical regionalist approaches, even prior to their formal articulation, and the philosophies of avant-garde modernist architects, influenced the work of selected Balkan architects throughout the twentieth century.

### 3 Materials and methods

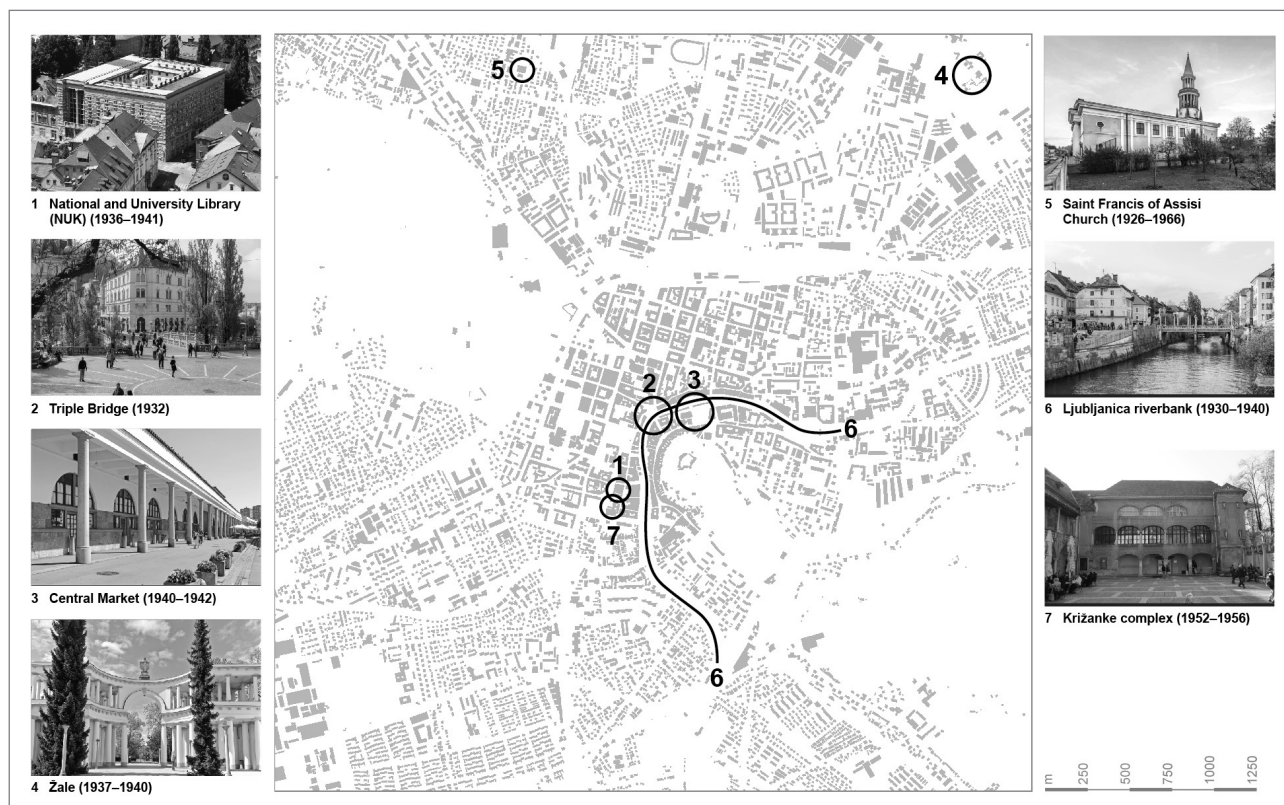
The research methodology applied in this article combines a historiographical approach with contextual and interdisciplinary perspectives. The literature review is followed by a historical analysis of both cities. This is complemented by case studies of selected works by key architectural figures, typological analysis, and mapping, concluding with superimposition and comparative analysis. The urban identities of the two cities encompass all the historical layers in its streets, buildings, and

riverbanks, from Roman to medieval times in Ljubljana, and in Sarajevo its Ottoman past as well. Both cities share an Austro-Hungarian, royal Yugoslav, and socialist Yugoslav history. Whereas Ljubljana evolved as a central European provincial capital, Sarajevo embodies the coexistence of Oriental and Occidental culture. The area and population of the two cities, historically and today, are comparable. This study focuses on how modernism was introduced in these two cities, how it evolved throughout the twentieth century, and which intellectual and professional exchanges shaped the distinctive approaches of their key modernist architects, particularly in dialogue with the local context. These approaches took diverse and distinct forms in each city. How did these modernist, context-aware approaches emerge and develop in Sarajevo and Ljubljana, and who were the key international modernist architects that influenced their architectural evolution?

Alongside other key avant-garde figures of the international style, Le Corbusier – the father of European architectural modernism – played a pivotal role in transmitting modernist architectural influences to the Balkans, also in Sarajevo and Ljubljana, not only because of his international reputation, but also due to his direct and implicit connections with Yugoslav architects of the time. When considering context and place-identity in these two cities, it is essential to examine the foundations of their urban identity formation. In Ljubljana, place-identity was shaped through references to classicism, particularly evident in the work of Jože Plečnik (Long, 2000), whereas in Sarajevo it was rooted in tradition and regionalism, as exemplified by Juraj Neidhardt (Idrizbegović-Zgonić & Džumhur, 2024). Ljubljana and Sarajevo were predominantly modernized by internationally educated architects that actively engaged with global networks of knowledge exchange while seeking inspiration from their local contexts. This duality highlights the critical role of international networks in disseminating modernist ideas while underscoring the enduring significance of context-sensitive design in shaping urban identities.

#### 3.1 Ljubljana

The architectural and urban development of Ljubljana in the twentieth century was strongly influenced by Jože Plečnik (1872–1957) and Edvard Ravnikar (1907–1993), whose approaches to design and planning articulated a human-centred vision rooted in cultural specificity, historical continuity, and spatial symbolism. Plečnik profoundly reshaped Ljubljana through an approach recognized by UNESCO as a unique example of human-scale urban design that transformed the city’s identity through sensitive integration with its historical context (Figure 1, Table 1). He played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural and spatial identity of Ljubljana through interventions that transformed the city into the symbolic capital of the



**Figure 1:** Plečnik's prominent works on a map of Ljubljana's city centre (source: authors; photos: Wikimedia Commons, Flickr Creative Commons, and B. Zupančič).

Slovenian nation (Vodopivec in Žnidaršič, 2010). His architectural language was characterized by reinterpreting classical forms, using local materials, and incorporating symbolic and spiritual motifs to articulate a unique urban identity within European architectural discourse (Mihelič, 2012; Prelovšek, 1992). His redesign of key public spaces – including the Triple Bridge, Congress Square, the Cobbler's Bridge, and the banks of the Ljubljanica River – established a distinctive urban morphology that transcended utilitarian function, introducing symbolic and aesthetic dimensions into the city's fabric. Major architectural works such as the National and University Library, Žale Cemetery, the Central Market, and the Krizanke complex are not only iconic landmarks but also loci of national identity and collective memory, reflecting Plečnik's conception of architecture as both cultural narrative and civic ritual. His vision of the Ljubljanica River as a central urban axis has been reaffirmed through contemporary revitalization efforts, culminating in international recognition such as the European Prize for Urban Public Space in 2011. As a professor at the University of Ljubljana's former Technical Faculty, Plečnik developed a pedagogical model that profoundly influenced generations of Slovenian architects, embedding artistic, ethical, and contextual dimensions into architectural education (Mihelič, 2012; Vodopivec in Žnidaršič, 2010). By combining classical architectural vocabulary with modern functional imperatives and grounding them in local cultural and symbolic references,

Plečnik's architectural language is a synthesis of classical and modern elements, positioning Ljubljana within the European architectural canon (Zupančič, 2019).

Edvard Ravnikar, a student of Plečnik and a leading figure in postwar Slovenian architecture, acquired his mentor's sensibility to place, context, and symbolic meaning, which he later reinterpreted through the lens of architectural modernism. Deeply influenced by Plečnik's artisanal and contextual approach, Ravnikar embraced Le Corbusier's modernism, the rationalist and functionalist principles of Bauhaus (especially the Ulm School of Design), regional traditions, and eventually structuralism and metabolism, continually evolving his architectural language throughout his career. His comprehensive and systematic approach to urban planning established the conceptual foundations for Ljubljana's postwar development, introducing a spatial language that synthesized international modernist principles with the local cultural and historical context (Mihelič & Kerbler, 2024). Ravnikar's urban vision was grounded in an open, polycentric city model that encouraged dialogue between historical structures and contemporary interventions, thereby redefining Ljubljana's civic and symbolic core (Figure 2, Table 2). This approach is exemplified in the design of Republic Square, a monumental civic space intended for democratic and state-forming functions, which redefined the urban core of Ljubljana (Mihelič & Kerbler, 2024).



**Table 1:** Plečnik's key projects and their impact on Ljubljana's identity.

Year	Project	Key architectural features	Impact
1936–1941	National and University Library (NUK): monumental library with brick and stone façade, symbolic design	Iconic symbol of Slovenian culture, education, and national identity	A cultural monument of national importance since 2009, NUK is well preserved and remains in active public and academic use, continues to shape the urban image, and serves as a model of heritage integration into contemporary city life.
1932	Triple Bridge: unique ensemble of three interconnected pedestrian bridges over the Ljubljanica River, connecting the medieval old town with the modern city	Iconic urban landmark uniting old and new	The Triple Bridge is fully preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and remains a vibrant pedestrian hub in the city centre. Its unique design continues to define the city's contemporary identity and international image.
1940–1942	Central Market: covered market complex with colonnades along the river	Connection between urban life and architecture	The Central Market is fully preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and remains the city's main marketplace and a vibrant social hub. The market continues to shape Ljubljana's identity as an open, lively, and people-oriented city.
1937–1940	Žale: cemetery complex as a "city of the dead" with a monumental entrance, chapels, and symbolic landscaping	Humanization of death and respect for tradition; space of collective memory	Žale is fully preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and continues to shape the city's identity as a place of respect, inclusion, and architectural excellence.
1926–1966	Saint Francis of Assisi Church: modernist church with brick columns and distinctive bell tower	Distinctive landmark, reference for modern sacred architecture	The church is fully preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and remains an active parish centre and a distinctive landmark in the Šiška neighbourhood, strengthening local identity and serving as a reference point for modern sacred architecture in Ljubljana.
1930–1940	Ljubljanica riverbank: urban design of riverbanks, promenades, terraces, tree-lined avenues	Transformed river into central urban axis, green and lively space	The riverbanks are well preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and form a central part of Ljubljana's public space. The riverbanks remain a key space for social life, events, and tourism.
1952–1956	Križanke complex: transformation of former monastery into open-air theatre	Major cultural venue, strengthens Ljubljana's festival identity	Križanke is fully preserved, protected as a cultural monument of national importance, and functions as Ljubljana's main open-air cultural venue. Plečnik's transformation of the former monastery into an outdoor theatre created a unique urban space for festivals and public events.

Source: authors.

The square's spatial composition – anchored by twin towers and a central platform – was envisioned as a modern agora, integrating symbolic, functional, and aesthetic dimensions. Through architectural works such as the Cankar Centre (slo. Cankarjev dom), the Museum of Modern Art, and Republic Square, Ravnikar implemented a synthesis of functionalist design and symbolic spatiality, placing particular emphasis on the role of public space in shaping the urban experience. Rather than asserting architectural dominance, Ravnikar integrated new structures into the existing urban fabric with subtlety and precision, demonstrating a nuanced engagement with historical layers and topographical conditions. As an educator and founder of the Ljubljana School of Architecture, he institu-

tionalized a discourse of contemporary architecture in Slovenia that emphasized intellectual responsibility, interdisciplinarity, and continuity with tradition (Vodopivec in Žnidaršič, 2010).

### 3.2 Sarajevo

The urban fabric of Sarajevo is characterized by a dynamic – and at times ambiguous – relationship between traditional and historical architecture on the one hand, and modernist and contemporary architecture on the other. Sarajevo's architectural heritage – ranging from the Ottoman, through the Austro-Hungarian, royal Yugoslav, and socialist Yugoslav periods, to the present – resembles a multi-layered amalgam,

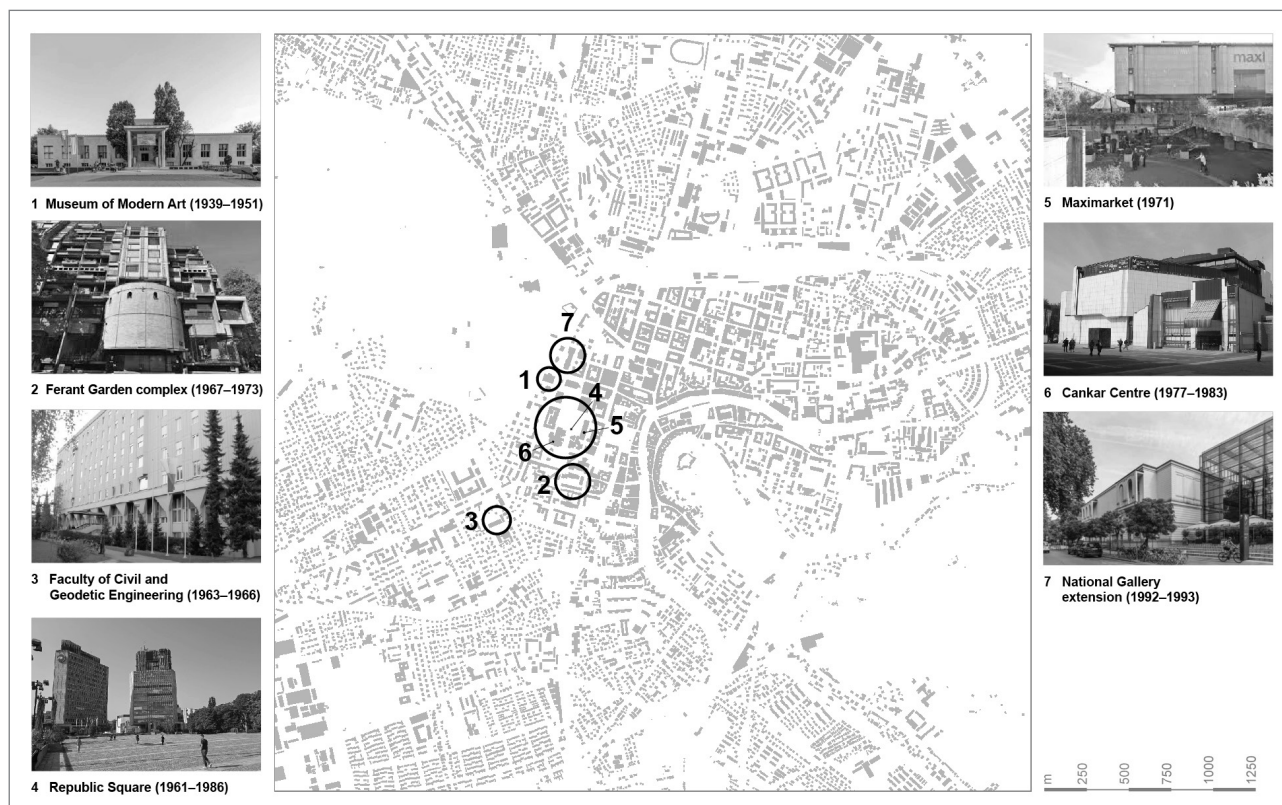
**Table 2:** Ravnikar's key projects and their impact on Ljubljana's identity.

Year	Project	Key architectural features	Impact
1939–1951	Museum of Modern Art: first purpose-built modern art museum in Slovenia, modernist stone façade, innovative lighting	Sets national standard for museum architecture, reinforced Ljubljana's cultural role	The museum has been protected as an architectural monument since 1993 and is well preserved after a comprehensive renovation (2008–2009), which respected Ravnikar's original concept. Today it serves as a reference point for museum architecture and urban integration in Ljubljana.
1960–1986	Urban Planning Vision for Ljubljana's City Centre: postwar vision for a new city centre, realized through Republic Square, a monumental public space	Modern urban core, symbol of statehood, central space for public life	The area is protected as a cultural monument of national importance and remains a central space for public life, major events, and civic gatherings, and it continues to shape Ljubljana's contemporary urban image and serves as a model for sustainable urban renewal.
1967–1973	Ferant Garden complex: mixed-use residential and commercial complex, distinctive modernist architecture	Model for urban living, promotes openness and metropolitan character	The complex is well preserved and remains in residential use, with its mixed-use design and distinctive architecture contributing to the metropolitan character of central Ljubljana. The Ferant Garden complex continues to shape the city's identity as an open, diverse, and resilient urban environment.
1963–1966	Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering: university building with innovative structure and clear functional organization	Strengthens university district identity, integrates modernist architectural and urbanistic values	The Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering remains in active academic use, and its presence strengthens the identity of the university district and demonstrates the integration of modernist architectural and urbanistic values into the urban fabric of Ljubljana.
1961–1986	Republic Square: main public square with monumental towers, Maximarket department store, Cankar Centre	Symbol of independence and modern identity, venue for civic life	Republic Square is protected as a cultural monument of national importance and remains the central public space of Ljubljana. Its spatial and symbolic role continues to shape the contemporary image and collective memory of the city.
1971	Maximarket: modern department store, open to the plaza, vibrant commercial activity	Supports multifunctional, accessible city centre, daily urban life	The department store (now Maxi) remains an active commercial and social hub on Republic Square and is part of the protected cultural monument ensemble. Its design supports the multifunctional character of Republic Square and reinforces its role as a vibrant, people-oriented urban core.
1977–1983	Cankar Centre (slo. Cankarjev dom): Slovenia's central cultural and congress centre	Designed as a multifunctional complex with large underground halls, a monumental entrance, and a modernist stone façade	The Cankar Centre is protected as part of the Republic Square cultural monument ensemble and remains Slovenia's central venue for cultural events, congresses, and national ceremonies. The building is well maintained and continues to reinforce Ljubljana's status as a cultural capital, and it is a symbol of national culture and public life.
1992–1993	National Gallery extension: modern exhibition wing, integrated with the historic National Gallery	Enhances the role of the National Gallery, connects tradition and contemporary art	The extension to the National Gallery, completed in 1993, is functionally and visually integrated with the historic building and is protected as part of national cultural heritage. The extension strengthens the role of the National Gallery as a central cultural institution and contributes to Ljubljana's identity as a city that values both tradition and contemporary art.

Source: authors.

which has evolved into a stimulating and unique urban context. Within this setting, it is particularly interesting to examine the dawn of architectural modernism in Sarajevo during the 1920s, when the first generations of architects educated

in European academic centres returned to Sarajevo. Among the first avant-garde architects were graduates of the Prague Faculty of Architecture, including Dušan Smiljanić, Helen Baldasar, the brothers Reuf and Muhamed Kadić, Emanuel



**Figure 2:** Ravnikar's prominent works mapped in Ljubljana's city centre (source: authors; photos: Wikimedia Commons, Flickr Creative Commons, culture.si, and B. Zupančič).

Šamanek, Leon Kabiljo, and Jahiel Finci, followed by graduates of the Vienna Faculty of Architecture, such as Mate Baylon and Juraj Neidhart (Čelić, 1988). A large part of architectural production in Sarajevo during the 1920s and 1930s primarily consisted of individual interventions such as infills in Austro-Hungarian urban blocks or reconstructions of existing structures. The prevailing architectural typologies included schools, large family residences, banks, savings institutions, and public agencies, as well as mixed-use residential-commercial buildings and rental housing blocks. A significant influx of architects, distinguished by their clear advocacy for pure and simplified volumetric forms, guided Sarajevo onto a trajectory toward the international stage of modernist architecture. Gradually, the work of the first generations of modernist architects in Sarajevo branched into two distinct directions: one was a pure functionalist stream, rooted in strict adherence to modernist principles and largely detached from the local context; the other was a contextually sensitive approach, in which each architect responded to the local urban, cultural, and political environment (Kahrović Handžić, 2023).

Representing the latter line of thought, the architects Dušan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt recognized the compatibility of traditional Bosnian houses and the local context with the universal values of modern architecture, demonstrating their vision in theoretical discourse and practice. Both architects

were from elsewhere in Yugoslavia and settled in Sarajevo, bringing with them international educational and professional experience. Grabrijan was renowned for his educational background in the theory and history of architecture from Ljubljana and Paris, and Neidhardt's international experience from Zagreb, Berlin, and Paris combined with sensitivity to vernacular traditions enriched the modernist paradigm. Their theoretical and practical work is one of the earliest exemplars of critical regionalism, predating the formal articulation of its theories by Tzonis and Lefaivre (1981) and Frampton (1983) by approximately four decades. Their extensive correspondence fostered both a deep friendship and the theoretical foundations of a context-sensitive approach.

The Slovenian architect, urban planner, and architectural theorist Dušan Grabrijan (1899–1952) had a profound impact on the development of architectural thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first half of the twentieth century. Grabrijan was educated in Ljubljana and Paris, where he encountered modernist ideas and the work of Le Corbusier (Čelić, 1970). Although shaped by a central European cultural milieu, Grabrijan devoted the greater part of his professional career and theoretical work to Sarajevo, where he taught at the Secondary Technical School (Abadžić-Hodžić, 2021). He was particularly distinguished by his advocacy of the idea that architecture embodies the spirit of place – encompass-

**Table 3:** Grabrijan's key works and their impact on Sarajevo's identity.

Year	Project	Key features	Impact
1942	<i>Sarajevo i njegovi trabanti: Arhitektonsko-urbanistička razmatranja uoči nacrtu za regulacije grada Sarajeva</i> (Sarajevo and its Satellites: Architectural and Urbanistic Considerations Prior to Drafting the City's Regulatory Plan): an urban study coauthored with Neidhardt exploring the relationship between Sarajevo and smaller surrounding settlements	The publication combines theory with urban design proposals, an important source for understanding the cultural heritage of Sarajevo, while advocating for a modern approach to urbanization of the city	Although part of Grabrijan's theoretical work was published posthumously, its impact on contemporary research in architecture schools in the former Yugoslavia was through publications and exhibitions. <i>Architecture of Bosnia and the Way toward Modernity</i> gained international recognition by being featured at the exhibition <i>Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia 1948–1980</i> at MoMA in 2018 and 2019.
1957	<i>Arhitektura Bosne i put u suvremeno</i> (Architecture of Bosnia and the Way toward Modernity): a theoretical work coauthored with Neidhardt advocating a dialogue between the traditional and modern architectural idioms	A seminal book that blends research with a visionary manifesto of the urban development of Sarajevo	
1984	<i>Bosanska orijentalna arhitektura u Sarajevu</i> (Bosnian Oriental Architecture in Sarajevo): a 1940s urban study of Bosnian Muslim vernacular architecture and lifestyle, first published in articles and later issued posthumously as a book	A pioneering study exploring the relationship between sociocultural patterns of the Oriental lifestyle and the spatial and aesthetic qualities of traditional housing in Sarajevo	

Source: authors.

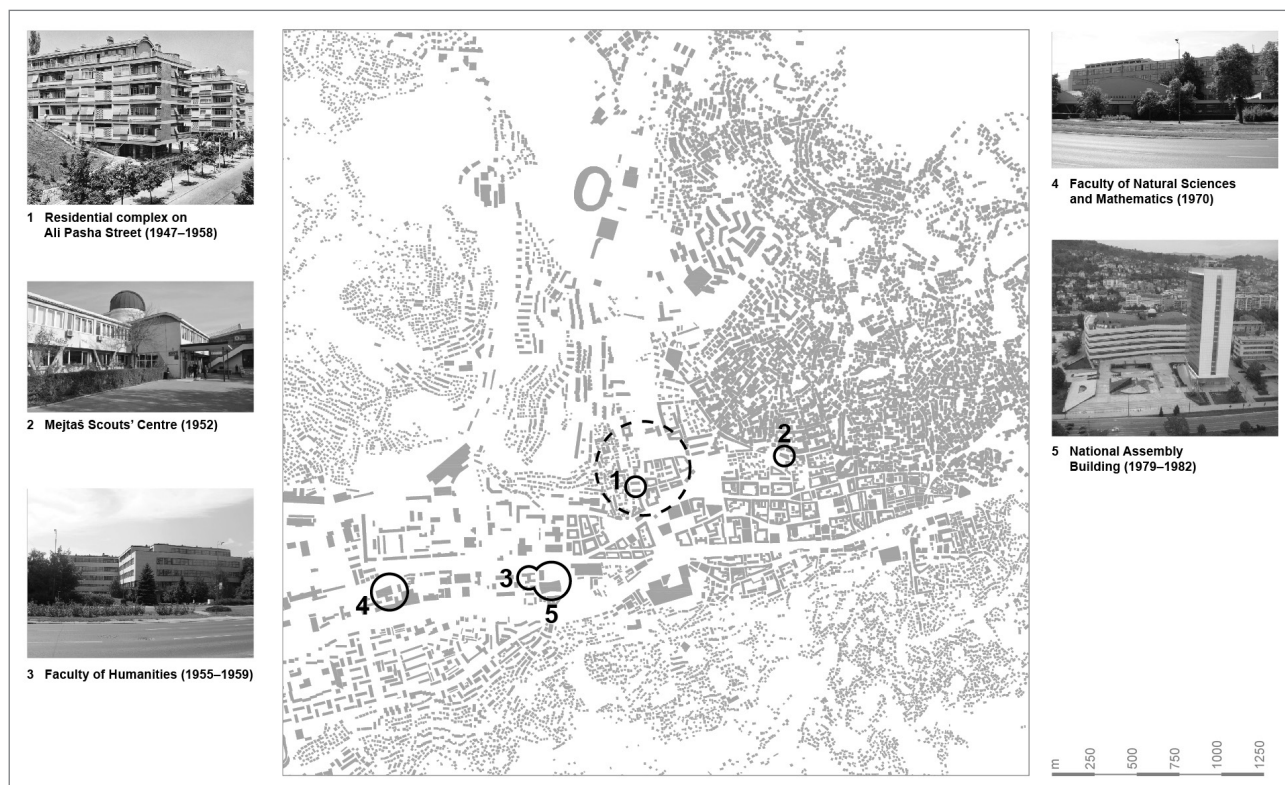
ing its cultural, historical, and functional features. Grabrijan's methodology was rooted in the analysis of lived experience and the tangible realities of the urban context. This approach yielded formal and spatial strategies that anchor site-specific architectural interventions, thus fostering a dialogue between past and present in the process of city-making. His theoretical reflections on the significance of local tradition in shaping modern architectural expression found fertile ground in his collaboration with Neidhardt, with whom he shared a vision of architecture that transcends mere functionality to become a bearer of cultural identity. Grabrijan and Neidhardt believed that the oriental house was the foundation for the kind of modern architecture that Le Corbusier was developing, thus bridging vernacular traditions with avant-garde design principles.

Grabrijan and Neidhardt became acquainted in Maribor during their military service. The two maintained a correspondence during Grabrijan's stay in Sarajevo, where he began teaching at the Secondary Technical School in 1930, while Neidhardt was working in Le Corbusier's studio (Zupančič, 2024). Their common approach culminated in the book *Arhitektura Bosne i put u suvremeno* (Architecture of Bosnia and the Way toward Modernity; Neidhardt & Grabrijan, 1957), articulating design methodologies grounded in contextual sensitivity. Reinterpretation of traditional architecture with integration into historical urban configurations resulted in modern architectural discourse rooted in a critical synthesis of historical paradigms. Grabrijan endeavoured to thoughtfully uphold the principles of modern architecture that he regarded as inherent in Ottoman architecture while adapting them to the distinct characteristics of Bosnia (Korolija, 2024). The archive of over

fifteen thousand items generated over the course of Grabrijan's three-decade career – held at the Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO) in Ljubljana (Zupančič, 2024) – bears witness to the remarkable depth and methodological rigor of his scholarly engagement. His extensive body of work offers critical insight into his in-depth study of Bosnian vernacular architecture (Table 3).

Juraj Neidhardt (1901–1979) was a pioneer of architectural modernism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was renowned for his life-long advocacy of a profound dialogue with the local cultural and architectural heritage. His vision of modern architecture was deeply rooted in the spatial, material, and symbolic logic of local traditional architecture, whose values he recognized, analysed, and reinterpreted through the language of modernism. His most significant contribution lies in the translation of modernist principles into the cultural context of Sarajevo. Neidhardt worked in Le Corbusier's studio between 1933 and 1935 together with seventeen other Yugoslav architects (Zupančič, 2017). Ten were from Slovenia, including Ravnikar, who joined Plečnik's studio in 1939. Although the two never met in the studio, they were later inducted into the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb. Another student of Plečnik that spent time in Paris, although he did not work in Le Corbusier's studio, was Grabrijan. During his time in Sarajevo, he maintained written correspondence with Neidhardt. Their exchanges centred on Bosnian Oriental architecture and the challenges of integrating it into modernist discourse (Grabrijan, 1984). In 1936, Neidhardt approached Grabrijan with a request to curate his inaugural solo exhibition in Yugoslavia. The exhibition was held in 1936, at the Sarajevo





**Figure 3:** Neidhardt's prominent works mapped in Sarajevo's city centre (source: authors; photos: Wikimedia Commons, Flickr Creative Commons, and museuminexile.com/index.php/neidhardt).

Town Hall (Karlić Kapetanović, 1990). In 1938, encouraged by Grabrijan, Neidhardt relocated to Sarajevo to undertake a new professional challenge (Karlić Kapetanović, 1990). In the meantime, Grabrijan corresponded with Ravnika in 1939 during his tenure at Le Corbusier's studio in Paris, reflecting on ongoing projects (Zupančić, 2017).

Among Neidhardt's projects, his urban proposals stand out as competition-winning visions for the development of post-war Sarajevo as the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Neidhardt's best-known urban proposal is his 1955 competition entry for the Marijin Dvor neighbourhood, a continuation of his vision first presented in his 1936 competition design for the new railway station, addressing the void in Sarajevo's urban fabric. With regard to Sarajevo's east–west development axis (Žuljić et al., 2015), Neidhardt recognized Marijin Dvor (also *Marindvor*) as a link between the old town to the east and newly planned neighbourhoods to the west, redefining it as “a counterweight to the cultural hub of the Republic embodied in Sarajevo's old town (Baščaršija), which would become an administrative, political, social, and cultural centre of the city, as well as the venue for all social events” (Neidhardt & Čelić, 1956: 95–96). In 1976, a new competition was conducted, this time only for the National Assembly Building; Neidhardt won (the competition was his last before his death in 1979), and its construction was finalized in 1982. Alongside the National

Assembly Building, the design for the Faculty of Humanities was also part of the 1955 Marijin Dvor proposal and was built by 1959; the nearby Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics followed, and construction finished in 1970 (Figure 3).

Other significant projects by Neidhardt contribute to the urban continuity between Marijin Dvor and Baščaršija. One such project is the Ali Pasha Street residential complex, an urban prototype of a larger redevelopment proposal that aimed to extend the city along the street toward the north. Another such project is the Scouts' Centre in the hillside Mejtaš neighbourhood, a transitional zone between the housing blocks from the Austro-Hungarian times and the Ottoman urban clusters (*mahallahs*), designed as a modern translation of interplay of volumes and composition inspired by traditional oriental Bosnian houses (Table 4).

Although they both originated from foreign cultural contexts, Grabrijan's and Neidhardt's contribution lies in reinventing and translating the universal values of the tangible and intangible layers of Sarajevo's local context into a modern language. Their collaborative theoretical work was passed on through education because both taught in Sarajevo, and it was further developed through Neidhardt's many built and unbuilt projects.

The book *Arhitektura Bosne i put u suvremeno* (Neidhardt & Grabrijan, 1957) is an important theoretical achievement. This

**Table 4:** Neidhart's key projects and their impact on Sarajevo's identity.

Year	Project	Key architectural features	Impact
1947–1958	Residential complex on Ali Pasha Street: residential buildings located obliquely to topographic lines integrated with green areas	A new model of urban living in the city centre, accompanied by the introduction of a modernist urban fabric	Listed as a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2022, lacking comprehensive renovation. Although sporadic refurbishments have altered the facades, the impact of the complex on the context remains unchanged, because it is a landmark residential project.
1952	Mejtaš Scouts' Centre: functional tripartite system (cinema, administration, and restaurant), distinguished by paraboloid concrete shells.	Interpretation of traditional architecture in a modern architectural idiom, resulting in an original architectural expression	The building has been used as a primary school since the early 2000s; only sporadic partial refurbishments have been carried out. Due to its disputed legal status, the future of the building remains contested.
1955–1959	Faculty of Humanities: public educational facility with a modernist design, responding to its context	Modernist architecture that incorporates elements reminiscent of traditional architecture, in close dialogue with green areas	The building underwent postwar reconstruction and today continues to serve its original function as a university building. Both its exterior and interior are well preserved, remaining a notable example of modernist architecture to this day.
1970	Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics: public educational facility with a modernist design, an urban landmark in western Sarajevo	Modernist building in Sarajevo incorporating traditional elements, featuring a unique form and serving as an urban landmark	Following postwar renovation, the building has retained its original function. However, installation of a commercial sign atop the tower compromised its original character. Furthermore, the recently proposed regulation plan threatens the open public spaces within the faculty's compound.
1979–1982	National Assembly Building: a key public building and modernist landmark in the administrative centre of Sarajevo	Iconic urban landmark, prominent example of modernist architecture	The building has retained its original function and was comprehensively renovated by 2009, although not entirely authentically. Today, the parliament building, together with its square, is a key landmark and iconic image of modern Sarajevo. In 2022, a petition was submitted to designate the building as national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Source: authors.

work articulates a path toward contemporary architecture that does not reject tradition but instead embraces it as the foundation for a new, authentic modernity. The universal message that is conveyed through the work is further strengthened by Neidhardt's own words:

However, what worries me is that we have largely lost our architectural individuality, which was once so present in the Balkan Peninsula. This is especially noticed by foreigners. Alienation and monotony are gradually replacing true architectural values. The physiognomy that emerged from a single spatial idea, the playfulness of local architecture, the dualism of the cube and corner, and so on, must not be lost even in contemporary times. Thus, we must not draw such sharp boundaries between the past and the present in the spiritual realm of architecture that we end up like the traveller that, crossing the Atlantic Ocean, searches for the equator. (Karlić Kapetanović, 1990)

The joint theoretical work of Grabrijan and Neidhardt remains highly influential and relevant, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region, but also internationally, with

recognition from institutions such as New York's Museum of Modern Art and Docomomo. Neidhardt's built work in Sarajevo is primarily associated with the Marijin Dvor area. The original master plans were never fully realized, and both the war and postwar reconstruction further delayed the discussion of its future development. This development continues to be occasionally threatened by new construction and proposed urban regulation plans, which are frequently contested and blocked. The original designs of the two university buildings and the National Assembly in Marijin Dvor remain largely preserved, and they continue to serve as landmarks despite political and social shifts. However, their impact on the surrounding context, urban identity, and future development remains uncertain and will only become clear after the new plans are approved. The modernist residential complex is particularly vulnerable – even though it is listed as a national monument – because refurbishment and maintenance are entirely left to the residents. This underscores the importance of a strategic approach to the active preservation of modernist heritage, which should serve as a reference point for the evolving urban fabric.

**Table 5:** Comparison of architecture and urban identity of Ljubljana and Sarajevo.

Architect	Impact on urban form	Contribution to city identity	Relevance
Jože Plečnik: architect and professor in Prague and Ljubljana, influenced by Gottfried Semper and Otto Wagner during his time in Vienna	Reorganized Ljubljana's city centre into a symbolic and ceremonial space; emphasized axiality, monumentality, and civic symbolism	Created a distinctive architectural language that became synonymous with Ljubljana's urban identity	Plečnik's work is a model for integrating heritage into contemporary urban life; it inspires sustainable, human-centred urban renewal
Edvard Ravnikar: architect and professor in Ljubljana, student of Plečnik, key figure in postwar Slovenian modernism	Introduced modernist zoning and spatial openness; emphasized public squares and integration of civic functions	Defined Ljubljana's socialist-era identity as a modern, forward-looking capital while respecting its historical layers	Ravnikar's civic spaces remain vital; his approach to public space and mixed-use planning is increasingly relevant in contemporary urbanism
Dušan Grabrijan: teacher in Sarajevo and Ljubljana, architect, student of Plečnik, moved to Sarajevo in 1930, returned to Ljubljana in 1945	Advocated for human-scale, courtyard-centred urban forms; emphasized spatial intimacy and cultural continuity	Reinforced Sarajevo's identity as a city of layered traditions and intimate, inward-looking domestic spaces	Grabrijan's ideas support today's interest in culturally sensitive, small-scale, and community-oriented urban design
Juraj Neidhardt: professor in Sarajevo, architect, collaborated with Le Corbusier, worked extensively in Sarajevo	Promoted functionalist urban planning; introduced modernist housing blocks and civic centres while respecting traditional spatial logic	Influenced Sarajevo's identity as a modern city rooted in tradition and natural context	Neidhardt's vision of contextual modernism is increasingly relevant for post-conflict and transitional cities seeking identity through design

Source: authors.

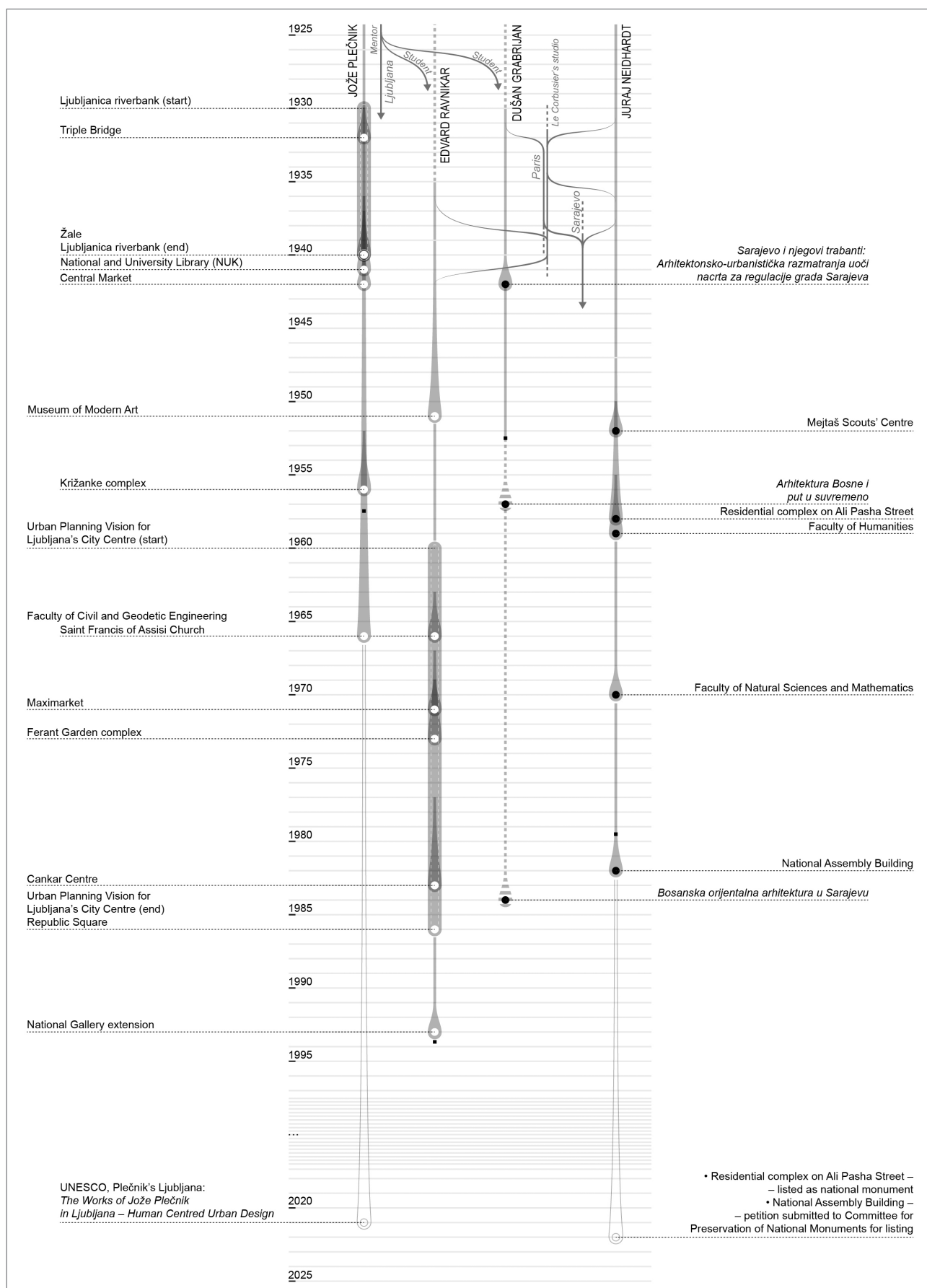
## 4 Results

Two cities, Ljubljana and Sarajevo, were juxtaposed to analyse the contributions of key architectural figures to the creation of urban identity during their twentieth-century development and modernization. The comparison is framed through Kevin Lynch's concept of the image of the city, focusing on identity, structure, and meaning. The analysis was conducted in three stages: first, the work of each architect was individually examined; next, the two architects from each city were compared; and, finally, all four were analysed collectively in relation to their urban contexts (Table 5, Figure 4). All four architects had an international educational and professional background: Plečnik trained in Vienna and Prague, Ravnikar in Paris and Helsinki, Grabrijan in Ljubljana and Paris, and Neidhardt in Berlin, Paris, and Zagreb. Rather than adopting a typical *tabula rasa* modernist approach, their international experience, mutual encounters and correspondence, friendships and collaborations, and teacher–student relationships enabled them to develop a distinctive methodology. This approach allowed them to translate universal modernist principles into context-sensitive interventions within cities undergoing development.

The analyses presented in this article reveal that key distinctions emerge in the architects' language and aesthetics. In Ljubljana, Plečnik's work is associated with attributes such as eclectic, classical, and symbolic, emphasizing memory, hu-

man scale, and human values in both urban and architectural projects. His student, Ravnikar, in contrast, adopted a fully modernist, international style, focusing on civic and cultural expression through architecture and public space, articulated at the urban scale through state representation and structuralist principles. In Sarajevo, Grabrijan dedicated himself to theory, exploring tradition and vernacular forms while advocating intimate and domestic spaces grounded in a human scale. His colleague Neidhardt, building upon their collaborative research, combined tradition with progressive, functionalist, and intuitive design, simultaneously addressing human- and urban-scale projects and integrating state representation in dialogue with local tradition.

Therefore, a key insight of this study is that these architects combined avant-garde, international modernist ideals with a profound sensitivity to local culture, history, and urban conditions, despite variations in their aesthetic expressions and architectural tools (Table 5). The underlying common thread among all four is a context-sensitive, site-specific methodology that actively reads, reinvents, and reinforces urban identity. Their work demonstrates continuity across time and space, linking past, present, and future through both built projects and educational influence, leaving a lasting legacy that shaped subsequent generations of architects. In effect, they were “star-architects” before the concept was coined and, of course, unrelated to the contemporary exploitation of the term for city branding. Their contribution to the urban identity of their cit-



**Figure 4:** Timeline of key modernist architectural legacy in Ljubljana and Sarajevo; white dots: works by Plečnik and Ravnikar in Ljubljana; black dots: works by Grabrijan and Neidhardt in Sarajevo; black squares: year of architect's death; hollow line: continuous impact of Plečnik's and Neidhardt's work on contemporary architecture and urbanism (source: authors).



ies was derived from the site-specific character and thoughtful integration of architecture into the urban context, rather than from artificially constructed city branding.

## 5 Conclusion

This comparative study highlights how the modernist architectural legacy – the work of Plečnik and Ravnikar in Ljubljana, and Grabrijan and Neidhardt in Sarajevo – has shaped the urban identities of these two cities, using Kevin Lynch's framework from *The Image of the City*. The analysis shows that Plečnik's work in Ljubljana emphasizes eclecticism, classical references, symbolism, and the human scale, whereas his student Ravnikar pursued a fully modernist, international style that articulated civic and cultural values at the urban scale. In Sarajevo, Grabrijan's theoretical work explored vernacular and traditional forms, advocating intimate, human-scaled spaces, whereas Neidhardt extended these investigations by integrating functionalist and progressive design, working on both human- and urban-scale projects, and merging socialist-modernist state representation with local cultural traditions. All four architects share a contextually sensitive approach, inspired by diverse local settings and expressed in different architectural idioms, while collectively advancing modernism during the key decades of twentieth-century urbanization. Their work emphasizes human-scale interventions in two cities running along waterways by fusing traditional and modernist principles, and inscribing their distinctive signatures into the urban identity of each city. The study also underscores the historical and intellectual connections among these architects – through mentorship, study and professional training in Paris, and collaboration – revealing how ideas traversed cities and influenced urban form.

Despite the differences in their historical and sociopolitical contexts, both Ljubljana and Sarajevo demonstrate how modernist heritage can function as a powerful identity-shaping tool. In Ljubljana, this heritage has become institutionalized and widely recognized, culminating in UNESCO's designation of the city as "Plečnik's Ljubljana", which highlights the enduring influence of modernist principles on the city's urban identity. Sarajevo holds significant unused potential to strengthen its urban identity through the recognition and endorsement of its modernist legacy, which has been challenged due to political and socioeconomic shifts – particularly the Bosnian War and the subsequent uncritical transitional development.

Despite the differences in aesthetic and architectural expressions, all four architects shared a context-sensitive type of *avant-la-lettre* regionalist approach that reinforced urban identity through site-specific interventions. Recognizing and

preserving these contributions not only safeguards architectural heritage but also provides critical insights for sustainable, resilient, and culturally meaningful future urban development.

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