

Mafia Baroque: In search of identity

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Abstract

In the paper, the architectural style Mafia Baroque (or Mutro Baroque) and its connection to national identity will be the topic of historical research. As the movement was first seen at the beginning of the 1990s, it is strongly influenced by the change of political systems in Bulgaria. In search of representation medium, the arising “new elite” of the new democratic republic confidently portrayed themselves in the public sphere through the means of the baroque-like style. The intriguing character of Mafia Baroque could be described as a cocktail of various stylistic elements, along with the ebullient use of luxurious materials. Its aesthetics were and still are ground for controversial discussions among experts / professionals, journalists, and citizens. Either seen as kitsch and tasteless, or purely fascinating, the Mafia Baroque is an active element of the Bulgarian cityscape. On one hand, the style indicates the rejection of expert opinion, as well as the conscious decision to dispel the memory of the socialist past. On the other hand, Mafia Baroque as a phenomenon of the post-soviet time can be seen as the result of an attempt and longing for integration in the architectural context of Western Europe. The thesis will take into consideration how the transition from the Soviet regime to democracy has been the trigger for this new architectural style. Additionally, the movement will be discussed in the context of different phenomena across Eastern Europe. As architectural responses of various political instabilities, the international examples are aiming to map the similarities and differences in the baroque-like architectural language. Through considering the multiplicity of Mafia Baroque the thesis will focus on investigating the characteristics of the movement as an architectural expression of the search for identity in the Post-Soviet time.

Complicated political transitions are often the catalyst for dynamic societal changes. As architecture is the medium, which reflects the needs and goals of the public, it indicates society’s motion. However, what happens if the architectural aesthetics of the Transition period are the core of controversial discussions? Often described as kitsch and tasteless by experts but as fascinating and intriguing by the users, Mafia Baroque is the mirror of the Transition Period of the Bulgarian context.

This architectural movement Mafia Baroque was born at the beginning of the 1990s when Bulgaria was undergoing dynamic political changes from the Soviet regime to democracy. A crucial aspect of this period, also known as the Transition (Prehodyt, Преходът) was the arising “new elite” of the new democratic republic and their strive to be represented and active in the public sphere. That has been identified as the trigger for the emerging of the baroque-like style. However, the exact reasons for its choice of aesthetics are until today an ongoing discussion. On one hand, there is the indication of rejecting expert opinion, as well as the conscious decision to dispel the memory of the socialist past. On the other hand, Mafia Baroque is the result of the attempt and longing to integrate oneself in the architectural world of Western Europe, which for decades was on the opposite side of the Iron Curtain. The vital impact that the political changes after the fall of Communism in 1989 have had on public, has resulted in the question of identity on a national level. When the words „freedom“ and „democracy“ in political context were almost overnight introduced into the vocabulary of a whole nation, the caused effect next to joy was nostalgia. Taking into consideration that nostalgia is a rupture between past and present, a certain separation¹, its main features are longing for the past, as well as the hard acceptance of the present. But what happens when supposedly this longing is for a past that has never existed in reality; a past, created from the fictional idea for the opposite side of the Iron curtain. The

reconstruction of such past of non-existence could be the reasoning for the specific aesthetics of Mafia Baroque’s juxtaposed architectural elements. This thesis aims to investigate the background of the style Mafia Baroque and its connection to the societal dynamics of Bulgaria in search of identity. The importance of this architectural movement is to be found in its force to determine the Bulgarian cityscape as its design principles are mirroring the dynamics of the Transition.

This historical writing will be based on different scale investigations and introduced in 3 phases. Firstly, the political background of the Transition period will be discussed through the political changes and their influence on society. Additionally, in this chapter it will be examined how music and architecture became the media in communicating the complex social dynamics. By clarifying the eventful Transition period a contextual understanding for the emergence of Mafia Baroque as an architectural movement is to be provided. Secondly, the emphasis will be put upon the exploration of the style Mafia Baroque. Taking into account the societal dynamics of the 1990s in Bulgaria, various reasons will be researched as catalysts for the formation of the architectural style. The perception of the movement among Bulgarian experts and citizens, as well as its positioning in the international context are aiming to illustrate the multilayered character of Mafia Baroque. Finally, the paper will focus on the locality through the case study of the resort Sunny Beach (Slynchev Bryag / Слънчев бряг). The historical evolution of the tourism industry at the Black coast will be considered as the reason behind the concentration of buildings with the Mafia Baroque characteristics in the region. To illustrate the specific aesthetics of the style a visualization of the various architectural elements in the facade of the hotel Imperial Palace will be provided.

¹ Todorova and Gille, “Post-communist nostalgia”, p.37



fig 1. Demonstrators at the rally on Nov 18, 1989

Chapter one:
The social and political dynamics

The Transition as the beginning of the end

To fully understand the emerging of Mafia Baroque, there is a vital need of positioning the movement in the context of its time. After the fall of the Berlin wall and the events of 1989 a period commonly known as the Transition began. Thus Bulgaria's strive to position itself in the new European context and as well as the definition of the new democratic political climate became a reality. The beginning of the Transition can be clearly defined with the events of 1989 such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the resignation of the Todor Zhivkov¹ and the legalization of the political opposition (fig. 3). In contrast to this, its exact ending is ambiguous – on one hand, there is the assumption that this unstable economical and political period ended in the beginning of the 21st century, and on the other

hand, there is the understanding that Bulgaria is until current day in the transitioning state as the country still battles corruption, organized crime, and threatened freedom of speech.²

With the uncertain political climate at the beginning of 1990 the ruling communist party made the important decision to realize the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic model in a peaceful way through establishing the opportunity for a "Round Table" (known as well as "National Round Table"). At that time this practice was similarly organized as in other countries of the former Eastern bloc such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Creating the space for discussion and



fig 2. Daily protests in November, 1989

¹ T. Zhivkov was the leader of the Peoples Republic of Bulgaria as a General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party (1954 - 1989)

² "Подмяната 10-ти" / "The Change on the 10th" (2005), documentation movie

³ Transcripts from the Roundtable (January 3 - May 14, 1990), http://www.onda.bg/public/bulg/k_masa/content.html

⁴ *ibidem*

⁵ L. Kaneva, M. Mizov, E. Kandilarov, "Research on the history of socialism in Bulgaria. Part 3: The Transition", p. 54

consultation between the ruling communist party and the opposition, the aim of the Round Table was the successful transition to market economy and democratic state.³ After numerous meetings at the „Round Table“ on May 14, 1990 the Article One of the Bulgarian constitution was modified, declaring the unification of the Communist Party and the government, opening the door for a multi party parliament system.⁴ In the following decades Bulgaria faced multiple government changes, while aiming for the establishment of the new democratic regime (fig. 4 and fig. 5). With the implementation of the free-market policy and the unstable political environment, organized crime groups became slowly involved in corruption schemes at various profitable sectors during the years. As they reached their peak influence in the construction industry at the beginning of the new century, their illegal actions were already established in the Bulgarian post-soviet context. As mentioned in the report from 2007 of the Center for Study of Democracy alongside with other sectors, the construction market was highly affected by the organized crime schemes:

*"With the real estate boom since 2001, investments in construction, construction sites and land have become the number one market for organized criminal groups."*⁵

The formation of the organized crime in Bulgaria is connected to the changes in the social structures accompanying the transition model, and seen as a fundamental factor for the specific transformations.⁶ The idea that the formation of this phenomenon is of a spontaneous character is declined, as Georgi Petrunov suggests - the crime structure is rather "the result of a carefully elaborated plan".⁷ With the loose economic regulations of the newly defined democracy, the Bulgarian mafia began its formation and became a concern for the public in the mid-90s.⁸ The financial schemes, which

resulted in crime-connected personas to gain large amounts of capital, started short before the Transition period and often happened in secret. Georgi Petrunov investigates the major economic function of the organized crime during the Transition through in-depth interviews and unravels the schemes of the early subsidization. The most widest spread practice was the following: state owned-money was given to "confidants", chosen by the former nomenclature elite with the purpose of developing private businesses. Often labeled as 'loan' or 'credit' the granted sums were later to be returned upon request.⁹ Although the free-market policy was indeed active, Bulgaria struggled with corruption and as a result the monopolization of the free market became a reality. The process of recruitment for the expansion of this network was similar to the one of the former Soviet Union, where the recruited members of the criminal structures were sportsmen, formerly involved in martial arts and wrestling.¹⁰ It was exactly these individuals being taken on by the organized crime sector as they were pushed into the crime sector with promises to maintain their high living standards, formerly sponsored by the communist state. The specific qualities of the erstwhile sportsmen proved to be valuable characteristics for the formation of the early mafia: the sense of group solidarity, physical characteristics, ability to work in an environment of secrecy, and unconditional subordination to higher-ups.¹¹ The change of political systems allowed the forming of the new defined elite of businessmen (businessmen), who were often addressed by the public as *nutri* (mobsters). This new elite tested the newly defined freedom of democracy and as a new social class started searching for its identity and way of expression in the Bulgarian post-soviet society.

⁵ Center for the Study of Democracy, "Organized crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends", p.34

⁶ Georgi Petrunov, "Organized Crime and Social Transformation in Bulgaria", p. 298

⁷ *ibidem*, p. 309

⁸ Max Holleran, "Mafia Baroque", p.33

⁹ Georgi Petrunov, *idem*, p. 315

¹⁰ Georgi Petrunov, *idem*, p. 307

¹¹ Max Holleran, "Mafia Baroque", p.33

⁹ Georgi Petrunov, *idem*, p. 304

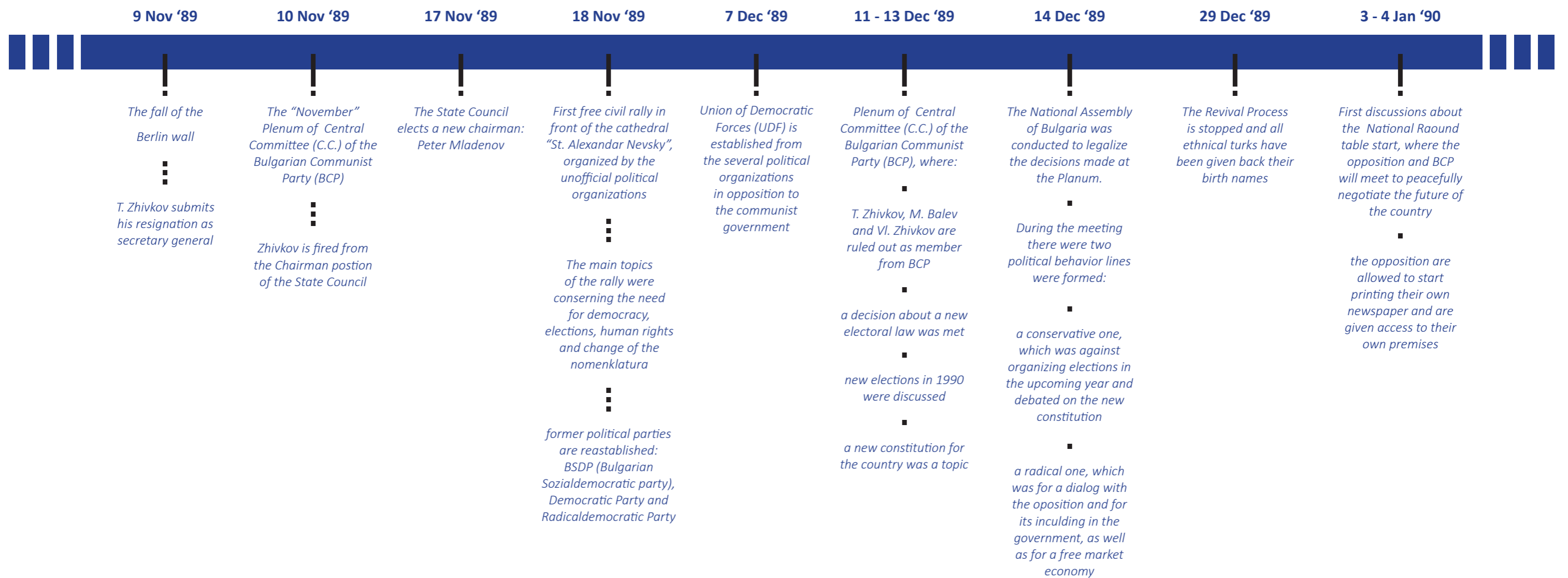


fig 3. Timeline of the events in 1989 after the Fall of the Berlin Wall



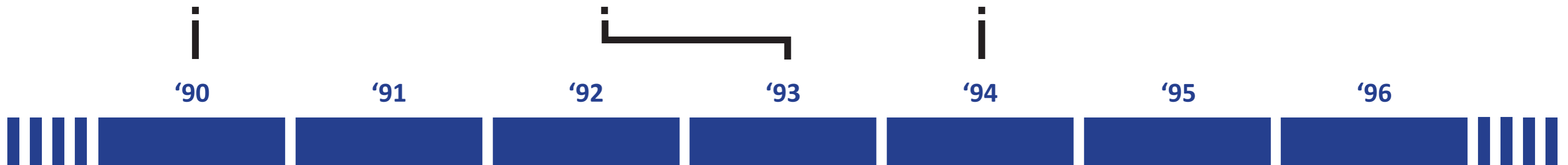
fig.5 Removal of the Red Star from the Communist Party house, Sofia



fig.6 First deal for privatization of a state enterprise: the Belgian company "Aluminum" buys the factory for corn production in Razgrad



fig.7 Establishment of DOCOMOMO Bulgaria



The Government of Filip Dimitrov and UDF*

- **8 Dec '91** - Filip Dimitrov is elected for Prime Minister and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) forms a government with the support of Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The government focused on a structural reform of the economy and establishing new laws, concerning the restitution and privatization
- **22 Jan '92** - Zhelyu Zhelev and Blaga Dimitrova are elected at the first official presidential elections
- **7 Mai '92** - Membership at the Council of Europe

The Expert Government of Dimitar Popov

The temporary government was originally planned to be in power for no longer than 6 months and its main goal were:

- to start part of the economical reform, which included the Monetary Policy and as a result to "free" the prices of goods
- to organize the local and national elections, which were later slowed down by the National Assembly of Bulgaria with one year

The Caretaker Government of Reneta Indzhova

The Government of Lyuben Berov and MRF

It has been declared that the program of the previous government would be followed but there are still a lot of protest, organized by the supporters of UDF. During the next two year UDF has submitted 6 votes of no-confidence against the ruling government. Between '92 and '94 the political life was still unstable and there was a failure in the attempt to reform the government institutions and to start the privatization of the enterprises.

- **Feb '94** - Membership at NATO's Partnership for Peace
- **2 Sept '94** - Lyuben Berov resigns because a coalition between BSP and MRF was unable to be formed. As a result Zhelev dissolves the government.

The Government of Jean Videnov and BSP

During this period the regulation of the registered production and the international prices of the invested resources is established. As the large-scale production enterprises face difficulties in operating at a loss, the state continues the subsidise and pressurizes the government bank institutions to provide credit opportunities. As a result, in the spring of 1996 a crisis in the bank system becomes the reality and until October 15 banks declare the bankruptcy.

- **2 Oct '96** - Lukanov is murdered in front of his home and Petar Stoyanov takes on the presidential position
- **21 Dec '96** - Videnov resigns as the economic crisis grows

fig. 4 Timeline of the political dynamics after 1990



fig.9 Bulgarian parliament under siege on Jan 10, 1997



fig.10 Demolition of the Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum, Sofia



fig.11 The first buildings of the new Business Park are finished, Sofia



fig.12 Victoria Palace, Sunny Beach (2020)

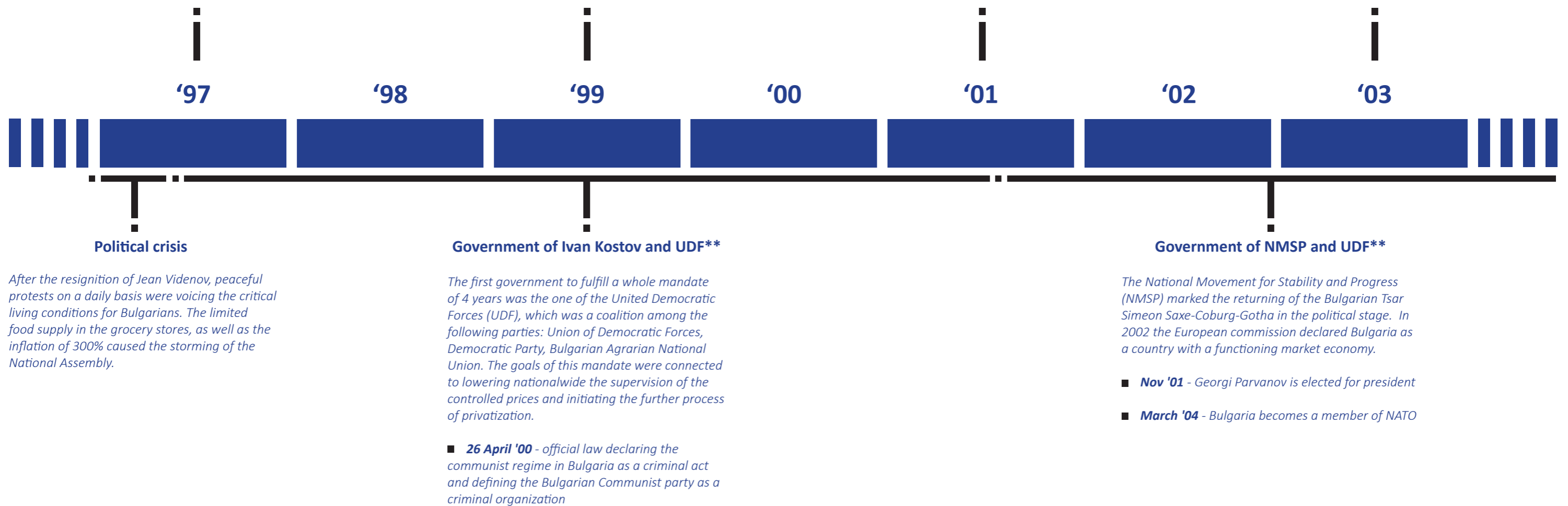


fig.8 Timeline of political dynamics after 1997

The period after 1989 could be described not only as dynamic in a political context but as a catalyst for the dynamic means by which the public started to express itself. After over 40 years of soviet structure and control, the new political system opened doors not only for the free market but also for free interaction. During that period one discovered different shades of freedom and put to the test the boundaries of self-expression.

In the Bulgarian language, there are two words, which have similar sounding, yet different nuances of meaning. It is the word *свобода* (*svoboda*), meaning freedom, which was used often in the Transition period to mark the new possibilities, which the new political regime had to offer. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the freedom of speech and press was marked by two events: the first free civil rally on the 18. November 1989 in front of the cathedral "St. Alexandar Nevsky"¹, organized by the unofficial political organizations, and the first time the opposition was allowed to publish an independent newspaper on 3. January 1990². It is the *svoboda* that the public was protesting for – freedom for a free market, freedom for unheard voices to be heard. Although what happens when this *svoboda* becomes a reality in a context of uncertain political and societal dynamics? *Слободия* (*slobodiya*). This word started slowly to be present in the vocabulary of the Bulgarian society in that particular time frame of the Transition period and until this day it is still broadly used. In the English language, there is no clear and direct translation of the term *slobodiya* and possibly there is a specific reason for such a word to be highly present exactly in the Bulgarian context. *Slobodiya* is to be understood as the event of excessive freedom, a situation where one abuses their opportunities to engage in activities connected to the idea of „being free”.³ It is commonly used to address actions, taking no consideration of the law and of highly

individualistic character; actions, where one is in no concern of their impact on the society and is mostly focused on the own interest. *Slobodiya* is expressing chaotic freedom, unregulated *svoboda*. Exactly the problem of expression is something to be addressed more in detail. After a long period of regulations, during the Transition the public had their first glance into the freedom of expression, which gave rise to important notions about the meaning of identity. Due to the loose regulations the biggest contrast in the means of expression was to be found in the music and the building industry.

The new opportunities and fewer restrictions allowed the public to begin its euphoric search for a new identity. One of the drastic elements of societal changes was the emergence of a new music genre, called Chalga. In his thesis "Chalga – the music in Bulgarian life" Kamburov defines it as an output of voicing the needs in the Bulgarian society and as a coping mechanism for the post-Soviet reality.^{4,5} Gaining popularity in the 90s, this Bulgarian version of the Balkan folk music addressed the specifics of the Zeitgeist and embodied, as well as visualized, the interests of the Bulgarians:

*"There are several themes which reappear since the 90s, which serve as strong symbols of the Bulgarian needs and desires for opportunity and freedom. For 30 years of democracy materialistic needs haven't been generally satisfied. Chalga is the music that gives a peek into a world of abundant riches, it provides joy and excitement and breaks the social reservations (...)"*⁶

Having in mind that during the Soviet times, the music was as regulated as the built environment, the Chalga offered a new fresh understanding of freedom and created the new music industry of the Transition period. A topic, which was highly addressed in a lot of songs was the importance

of Wealth and Status. Alongside the lyrics, the producers engaged in the visualization of those desires through the specific musical videos, where one can find the Mafia-Baroque background as the communicator of status. The portrayal of the power money one has, was a familiar leitmotif not only in the Chalga (more specifically Retro-Chalga) but it became a choice of lifestyle.

If music is an expression of society's desires and values, where does architecture come into this equation? In 2012 Georgi Bakalov, the chairman of the Union of the Architects in Bulgaria (SAB), has openly stated his opinion on the architectural situation of Mafia-Baroque as an expression of the Bulgarian society and an architectural translation of the music genre Chalga:

*The Mafia Baroque is an expression of our society, it is our chalga and this is the our reality.*⁷

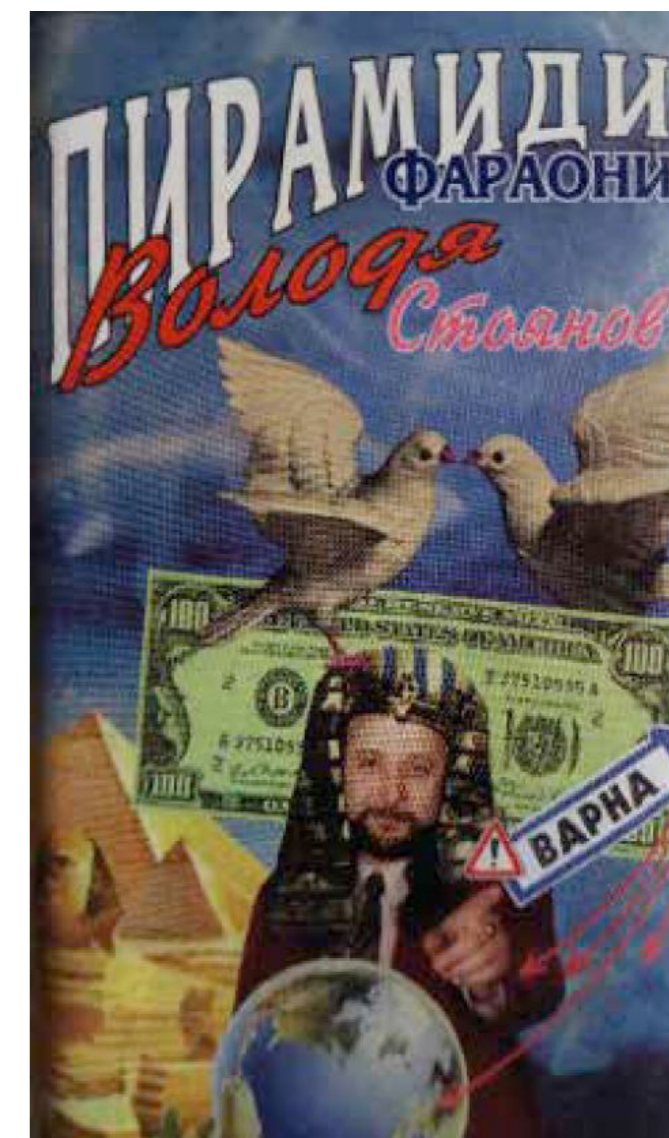
The architect pointed out "this is our reality", creating the emphasis on how the movement should not be looked down on but rather treated as a present element of the Bulgarian post-Soviet environment. Although the question arises: what was the trigger or the thought behind putting the architectural movement and the music genre side by side? They both are the creation of a period in search of identity, where one was facing the new possibilities of expression, which were hardly regulated:

*"Nobody cared. No more rules. There were no copyrights, no censorship, people could sing and act however they saw fit."*⁸

Mafia Baroque and Chalga are vital products of the development into a democratic republic - through these means the individual was given the opportunity to be represented in the public sphere.

Understanding the reasons behind the emergence of those two specific phenomena and their connection is of great importance for translating their meaning in the development of the Bulgarian context. They both are strong indicators of the relationship with regulation after Socialism and suggest the search for identity in this new context.

fig. 13 Cover of Volodiya Stoyanov's music tape "Пирамиди, Фараони" (Pyramids, Pharoans)



¹ L. Kaneva, M. Mizov, E. Kandilarov, "Research on the history of socialism in Bulgaria. Part 3: The Transition", p. 21

² L. Kaneva, M. Mizov, E. Kandilarov, "Research on the history of socialism in Bulgaria. Part 3: The Transition", p. 54

³ Definition by BAN (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). Translated by the author from Bulgarian <https://ibl.bas.bg/rbe/lang/bg/%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%8F/>

⁴ N. Kamburov, "Chalga: the Music in Bulgarian life", p. 7

⁵ *ibidem*, p. 12

⁶ *ibidem* p. 17

⁷ Translation from Bulgarian by author.

<https://www.dnes.bg/obshtestvo/2012/09/27/mutrobarokyt-e-chalgata-v-arhitekturata.169251>

⁸ N. Kamburov, "Chalga: the Music in Bulgarian life", p. 33



fig.14 Royal Castle Hotel, Elenite

Chapter two:
Understanding Mafia Baroque

Mafia Baroque coming to life

As the events after 1989 marked a new historical and political period, the Bulgarian society embraced the Transition with all its opportunities and difficulties. The dawn of the new democratic regime promised a more liberal reality, where self-expression was not muted but embraced, where the voice of the individual was to be heard. The early euphoria of change was mixed with uncertainty and instability, both social and economic.

During the Soviet regime, the building industry was highly dependent on the state apparatus, as it was its only client.¹ As a result the architectural and urban planning professionals had to work in an environment void from individual impact on the design process. The architectural concept and aesthetics during this time were considered as a part of the stylistic dogma, fitting the framework of the soviet understanding. Self-expression took place within the provided structure, suiting the common comprehension of the envisioned Zeitgeist. After the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the suppressed need for self-expression had been presented with an opportunity to become reality outside of the Soviet principles.² The freshly defined democratic reality, in combination with a newly defined elite, resulted in a desire for an excessive publicly perceived identity. Max Holleran, who made a valuable academic contribution on the subject of Mafia Baroque, defines the architectural movement during that period as an indicator of the particular social class and their attempt to impact the public sphere:

*The style is often understood as reflecting the tastes of the new elite and their desire to put their mark on the public.*³

Architects in the Transition were facing a new project structure from state-based to firm- or client-based, while their professional prestige and importance were questioned. Due to changes in political systems, the expert knowledge of professionals in various fields was associated with the previous regime, and the significance of their

capabilities was challenged.⁴ The desire for an influential presence in the public sphere, combined with the decreasing substance of expertise and the lack of clear building restrictions, resulted in the emergence of the architecture style commonly known as Mafia Baroque (or Mutro Baroque). The term, used to describe the particular architecture presence in the cityscape, has become a narrative for addressing the architectural aesthetics, as well as the elite it was sponsored by. The emphasis of the movement's name is put upon the first part of the linguistic description, suggesting the style's perceived connection to the newly formed social class during the Transition period. The second part of the terminology ("Baroque") is associated with the highly decorative and theatrical architectural identity and it addresses the expression of the architectural connection to politics:

*"The reuse of the word 'baroque' in describing an architectural style has come to signify a shorthand way of connecting dubious politics to changes in the built environment and to explain not just excess but the ways in which political regimes make themselves visible."*⁵

"Reuse" in the quote above refers to the use of the word "Baroque" in the context of late Stalinism, where it was similarly used to address political presence in architecture. Stalinist Baroque describes the neoclassical style in Bulgaria of the late 1930s to early 1950s common to the Soviet Union: well-known examples are the demolished Mausoleum of the soviet leader Georgi Dimitrov and the Largo (fig. 6 and fig. 7), the architectural ensemble of the former Communist Party Headquarters in Sofia.⁶ Although there are no visual stylistic similarities between the two movements, the theme of political power present in two different time-frames binds together the styles through the term "Baroque". In both Mafia Baroque and Stalinist Baroque, the scale of the buildings and the use of particular materials are communicators of a political statement to address the importance of power, status, and identity.



fig. 15 Communist Party house as part of the Largo (1964)



fig. 16 Building of the Parliament (2011)



fig. 17 The Hotel Chaika Beach Resort in Sunny Beach, realized in the Mafia Baroque style

¹Max Holleran, "Mafia Baroque", p.25

²Borislav Angelov, "Ornament Because of Crime: Learning from Mafia Baroque", p.31

³Max Holleran, *idem*, p.26

⁴Borislav Angelov, *idem*, p.31

⁵Max Holleran, *idem*, p.31

⁶Max Holleran, *idem*, p.31



fig. 18 Private Balcony, Plovdiv



fig. 19 Municipality District Odesos, Varna (2019)



fig. 20 Residential Building, Sofia

As Mafia Baroque is a strong visual statement in the built environment, a further understanding of its architectural characteristics are needed. The movement is quite hard to grasp as it is defined by the juxtaposition of various historic architectural styles, taking no consideration of the contextual surroundings. The forced composition of elements such as Corinthian columns, expressive arches, traditional Bulgarian stepped stories, Art Nouveau balustrades, porticos, and huge portions of glassed surfaces (sometimes in the same building) create an image, where the voicing of identity can be categorized as bipolar. On one hand, the composition of architectural elements can be perceived as a strong identity statement. On the other hand, the aesthetics communicate an identity crisis as the design decisions are based on the influences of multiple architectural movements. Additionally, the strong stylistic presence of the Mafia Baroque buildings is supported by the use of excessive materials and lack of human scale. These design elements contribute to the attempt for portraying an identity, connected to a certain social status – a status not only associated with the developer/owner of the building but additionally with the user. As the new elite was formed and the desire for communicating status in the public sphere became a reality during the Transition, Mafia Baroque thrived in the city landscape. The buildings, part of the Mafia Baroque family, as Holleran explains are often portrayed in the media:

“serve new post-socialist functions: large banks, mansions, shopping malls, ski resorts, and hotel and casino complexes in the rapidly developed shores of the Black Sea”.¹

Besides the luxurious private housing, Mafia Baroque as architectural expression is most present among the typology, connected to private businesses. These use the specific building's aesthetics as self-advertisement in a Las Vegas-like character.

¹Max Holleran, “Mafia Baroque”, p.25

²Sonia Hirt, *Landscapes of Postmodernity: Changes in the built fabric of Belgrade and Sofia since the end of socialism*

³Kristina Veselinova, *The new challenges of Mafia Baroque - one “contemporary” style*
https://archive.ekip7.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22652&Itemid=42

The perception of Mafia Baroque is contradictory, indicating a contrast in the assimilation among professionals in the architectural field and citizens / users. In Holleran's publication, the focus is put upon Mafia Baroque's perception through numerous interviews of professionals, unambiguously defining the Baroque-like movement as an expression of the post-soviet time in the context of marginalized architectural expertise. On the other hand, while engaging in conversations with Bulgarian citizens in regards of the Mafia Baroque style for this thesis, it became clear that many were highly intrigued by the aesthetics and don't consider them kitsch but rather categorize them as a “fancy and modern” architecture, contrasting the soviet surroundings. It is of high importance to be clarified that while buildings in the Mafia Baroque style were being erected in high speed after the mid-1990s, most of the Bulgarian citizens, were still living in the affordable housing complexes, built during the Soviet times.² This contrasting architectural fabric indicates that Mafia Baroque buildings are not just a “show-off” in the urbanscape – they are the high representative elements of the social dynamics. Took active part in the conversations for this paper about Mafia Baroque, some citizens confided feelings that overwhelm them caused by the composition of architectural elements, whereas others felt comfortable in the representation of the same surroundings, individually perceived as luxurious. Intriguingly, both groups associated the large-scale Mafia Baroque buildings, providing leisure activities, with the process of „money laundering” connected to corruption schemes. In the past decade, the architectural style has become a symbol for architecture, financed by non-transparent money transactions.³ Mafia Baroque should be perceived and treated as an architectural phenomenon mirroring a specific period of identity search.

Mafia Baroque isn't only an architectural movement voicing out the new elite's identity - it marks the new architectural reality where the expert opinion is marginalized when money and politics come into play. As the Bulgarian economy gained more stability in the mid-1990s and the organized crime groups became more engaged in the building sector, Mafia Baroque became an inseparable element of the modern cityscape. Although the schemes behind the financing of buildings with Mafia Baroque characteristics are becoming more transparent, the social importance and the reason for the chosen aesthetics are still not clearly identifiable. The process behind this movement is hard to define as it is formed by various traces connected to the Transition period. Max Holleran summarizes the opinions of the interviewed by him practicing architects, urban planners, and activists as follows:

*"Mafia Baroque was interpreted in three different ways by those interviewed: as a truly disturbing, display of mafia power and bad taste (the most common response), as a natural, although regrettable, stage in urban development common to many other countries, and as a populist response to socialist architecture that celebrates entrepreneurial culture and the rise of newly affluent."*¹

The Identity Search: Representation in the Public

As the county was introduced to a more liberal political regime, there was a major change in the regulation laws with introducing the free-market policy. During Soviet-times the building industry was regulated precisely by the state and as a result realizing individual design decisions was unimaginable. In contrast, the Transition marked the period of self-expression. The interaction between the emergence of a new social class and the loose regulations resulted in a complex situation, in which clients had an influential and final say in the realization of the projects. Architects felt excluded or even pressured to make design decisions, which weren't coherent with their aesthetic understanding:

¹Max Holleran, "Mafia Baroque", p.36

²ibidem, p.35

³ibidem, p.30

⁴Hirt, Sonia. "Landscapes of Postmodernity: Changes in the built fabric of Belgrade and Sofia since the end of Socialism", p.803

*"... there was a general agreement that even with the limits imposed by the state during socialism, architects now had even less of a role in the design process and their judgment was often challenged by clients. When asked about stylistic control, one architect interviewed laughed and said: "It's not even the guy with the money who has the last say: it's his wife." He paused and added: "Wait, I'm wrong, not even her: his mistress."*²

The new architectural expression of Mafia Baroque is often classified by professionals as kitsch and bad taste, describing the electric nature of the architectural substance in the urban environment. In addition, most of the professionals, interviewed by Holleran, couldn't identify with the newly built fabric. Not only does the juxtaposition of elements from various architectural styles create the characteristic stylistic expression of Mafia Baroque, but so do the carefully selected materials. Mafia Baroque can be understood as a phenomenon of the post-communist reality, where the response to the previous economy of shortage plays an important role.³ The use of particular materials and techniques such as marble and gilding were classified in the socialist past as "luxurious" and were not commonly used. This perception of materiality has a particular influence on the aesthetic language of Mafia Baroque, where excessive quantities of the materials are used as a demonstration of wealth. When analyzing particular buildings in Sunny Beach, it becomes clear that the focus is not put upon the architectural composition of the material used but rather on the mere presence of those materials— the collage-like appearance relies rather on material and element shock than a specific coherent aesthetic message.⁴ Mafia Baroque's image is visualizing publicly a message of status, connected to the act of "possessing and portraying wealth". In the new democratic context, where if the needed finances were present one had the possibility of representation in the public sphere in any desired way. The most desired language tends to be the display of wealth as it contrasts the former socialist minimalism specific to Eastern Europe.

Looking towards the West: Stylistic Importation

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Bulgaria as other satellite countries was oriented towards the East and more precisely – the Soviet Union. The soviet influence was crucial in political, cultural and architectural sphere. With the introduction of democracy on the political ground, the Western influence started playing a vital role and the desirable integration in the new European context became a reality. As the new free-market now allowed a flood of Western products⁵, the importation of Western architectural aesthetics seems like a natural evolution of the building fabric. Mafia Baroque is perceived as an unsuccessful translation and integration of specific western architectural movements:

*"The style is indicative of the post-1989 inability to effectively import contemporary styles from the West."*⁶

In the Bulgarian architectural sphere style importation can be traced back long before the Transition period. At the beginning of the twentieth century, architects attempted to cleanse Ottoman architecture with the grandeur of Central European styles and the demolition of numerous mosques and hammams. By the 1930s Bulgaria embraced a German masterplan, only to return to multiple

varieties of Soviet constructivism in the post-war era.⁷ The geopolitical position of the country can be seen as the reason behind this constant pursue adaptation – as Bulgaria is "on the edge" of the Balkan peninsula and has a dynamic political history, it is through a stylistic importation that the country is aiming to achieve the so-needed integration in the envisioned context. Following the events of 1989 the desired connection, which at the time is portrayed in the constant flow of media information and products, is the one with Western Europe. Another factor which plays a significant role in the emergence of Mafia Baroque is the lack of a particular style to refer to during the Transition, which is not connected to the former Soviet-regime:

*"Bulgarian architecture both does not have a strong domestic style to draw upon nor does it fully live up to the proper execution of imported styles."*⁸

After the fall of the Berlin Wall Bulgaria didn't have a particular contemporary architectural style to look back to and the Soviet aesthetics were perceived as the symbol of the near past. The importation and translation of the Western styles without a strong architectural base resulted in the specific interpretation of historical elements in an excessive way, resonating with the European Post-Modernism.



⁵Svetlana Boym, "The Future of Nostalgia", p. 39

⁶Max Holleran, "Mafia Baroque", p.27

⁷ibidem, p.27

⁸ibidem, p.31

fig. 21 Varna South Bay, Beach Residence

Mafia Baroque and nostalgia

Next to the word *slobodiya* (слободия), there is another word which was not present in the Bulgarian lexicon before the Transition, as it was considered extremely anti-socialist: nostalgia.¹ The major difference between the two terms is whereas *slobodiya* was something unthinkable due to the strict regulations defined by the state, nostalgia was a forbidden reality. During the pre-1989 times if one felt nostalgic about the life before World War II, they were often labeled as “enemy of the nation” (vrag na naroda / враг на народа) and were endangering themselves in a political sense. The label was often followed by a punishment from the state and resulted in a social isolation. With the dynamic societal changes during the Transition period there were two different notions of nostalgia forming: as the economic and political instability continued, nostalgia for the close soviet past was becoming more present. Once the increase in the corruption became perceptible to the public, the secure memories of the regulated Soviet times provided an easy and safe escape. Simultaneously, a second movement driven by a feeling of nostalgia formed – one towards the un-lived past. Nostalgia is commonly connected to the longing of past times, a sort of a fantasy escape from reality – but those past experiences don’t have to actually have happened. As the act itself is an escape it can be towards an imaginative past that has never existed:

*"Nostalgia (from nostos – return home, and algia – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy"*²

As part of a fantasy world, this alternative nostalgic reality is highly dependent on the individual's perception and longing. This personal perception could be a shared one among the members of society – therefore it could be found in the basis of visual representation of the new elite in the public sphere and formation of the unique Mafia Baroque characteristics. The core of Mafia Baroque is seen in the communication of specific values and understandings, as distinct from the “old-fashioned” Soviet ones as possible. The specific aesthetics in dialog with the longing to be accepted by Western Europe leave the architecture to be perceived as

an “ersatz nostalgia” or “armchair nostalgia” - an attempt for recreation of a past, which has never happened:

*"Rather than expecting the consumer to supply memories, while the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia, now the viewer need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered. This relationship might be called armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory."*³

This artificially created sense of history and understanding of Western Europe was most often created in secret as anything Western was categorized as illegal and anti-communist. The fragments of a foreign reality, which were experienced in high secrecy, led to the creation of a specifically idealized shared understanding of the West. An objective shared memory is created by the means of dialogue, so no one-sided subjective perception is to become the reality:

*"The notion of shared social frameworks of memory is rooted in an understanding of human consciousness, which is dialogical with other human beings and cultural discourses."*⁴

As dialogue with Western Europe was impossible due to the Iron Curtain, it resulted in a reflective nostalgia, where one is left to create their own understanding of reality. In her book “The Future of Nostalgia” Svetlana Boym distinguishes two types of nostalgia – restorative and reflective.⁵ Restorative nostalgia is a clear reconstruction of the past and its time, while the reflective nostalgia engages with the individual and cultural memory, where the longing of another place and time are the main actors.

As there is no actual past to reconstruct but the longing of a fragmented foreign reality has been the escape, literal and figuratively, the choice of its aesthetics comes as no surprise in the search of identity. The chaotic and overwhelming implication of historical styles can be traced back to the lack of the historical period in the architectural context. Basing the architectural aesthetics on personal longings and commissioner's perception of what

is “good architecture” in combination with the marginalized architectural profession, resulted in this collage-like exaggeration of the historical elements. Mafia Baroque can be seen as an indicator of the formerly perceived West during the Soviet times and as the fragmented reconstruction of it during the Transition period:

*"If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes time."*⁶

Reflective nostalgia can be found in two different architectural scenarios in Post-Soviet Bulgaria – one towards the East and one towards the West. A product of the first nostalgia stream is the Restaurant “Checkpoint Charlie” in Sofia characterized by Gerald W. Creed as a fragmented nostalgia about the Soviet past, translated into a consumption enterprise. On the other hand, there is Mafia Baroque, which has been created with no notion of humor but as a serious attempt to visualize a new identity:

*"The style is often understood as reflecting the tastes of the new elite and their desire to put their mark on the public."*⁷

The question about nostalgia as an influential element for determining the aesthetics of the architectural scene is something to be highly considered in an unstable economic period. With the free-market opportunities, nostalgia becomes a highly profitable identity of an existing or non-existing past as it found a niche in the entertainment market. Mafia Baroque and its strong presence through the overwhelming use of specific architectural elements can be translated into the strive not for a better future, as more for a better past.

¹ Gerald W. Creed, “Post-Communist Nostalgia”, p. 36

² Svetlana Boym, “The Future of Nostalgia”, p. XIII

³ Arjun Appadurai, “Modernity at Large”, p.78

⁴ Svetlana Boym, *idem*, p. 52

⁵ Svetlana Boym, *idem*, p. 41

⁶ Svetlana Boym, *idem*, p. 49

⁷ Max Holleran, “Mafia Baroque”, p.26



fig. 22 Restaurant “Checkpoint Charly”, Sofia



fig. 23 The making of "Skopje 2014" (2011)



fig. 24 The "Eye" Bridge in Skopje (2014)

Architectural styles are known to be a mirror of society's values and often travel beyond the borders of countries, transforming cityscapes. While Mafia Baroque marks specific Bulgarian dynamics, it is not an isolated event. Bulgaria as a part of the Balkan family has always been in close economic and cultural connection with its neighboring countries. The presence of the eclectic architectural movement is an indicator of the specific processes happening during the Transition period when the new elite was searching for a way to express its identity. This same question of expression has been present in other Balkan countries in a different context during a similar time-frame. Although the emerged architectural styles are similar in their aesthetics, they are representing very different social groups and processes. In order to illustrate the meaning of this architectural phenomenon, four different Balkan countries are selected to discuss similar Baroque-like movements. As the topic is not yet that broadly discussed in academic sources, the content of this chapter is largely news- and article-based.

Northern Macedonia: Skopje

In 2010 the Macedonian government initiated a large scale extraordinary refurbishment project for the capital, named "Skopje 2014". By concealing and replacing the mid-century socialist and Ottoman-era architecture¹ the urban intervention aims to create a new modern image of the city. However, it appears that the treatment of the urban fabric in Neoclassical and Baroque styles is not based on a coherent master plan but rather relies on singular fragments, consisting of buildings, facades, and monuments. The project focuses on the heart of the capital intending to create an attraction for international tourism, alongside the attempt of answering the national identity question. Although the design decision was challenged by many since it was publicly announced, the experts' opinion seemed to be devaluated and left unheard, while at the same time millions of Euros over budget were being further invested in the project.² As a result, the conversation about this drastic urban refurbishment had turned away from architecture and towards politics, corruption, and money laundering. The aftereffect of the protests in May 2015 was the resignation of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who was responsible for the launch of "Skopje 2014".³ The architectural aesthetics of this big scale intervention seem to be a response to the national identity question and the need for new positioning in the European context. As those specific architectural characteristics were not to be previously found in the urban context of Skopje, one is left to question their choice. According to an interviewed architect by Rachel Ling for the platform of "Failed Architecture" the choice of these expressive historical styles has no particular reasoning besides the personal favoritism of certain politicians:

"Speaking to a member of his party VMRO DPMNE, and someone who knew the Prime Minister personally, I asked why they had chosen the baroque style. He shrugged and replied "I don't know, it is the Prime Minister's taste."³

As a result, this creates the space of discussion is to be deciding how national self-awareness is to be envisioned. The project for the new city center of Skopje touches upon various topics and communicates the complexity of architectural expression in the search for identity.

¹Andrew Graan and Aleksandar Takovsk, "Learning from Skopje 2014: Architectural spectacle in the 21st century", p.68

²Santora, Marc. "Dancing Nymphs and Pirate Ships: Notes from a Capital of Kitsch"

³Rachel Ling, "How Skopje's Urban Makeover Alienated Locals"

⁴Rachel Ling, "How Skopje's Urban Makeover Alienated Locals"

Romania: Buzescu

The town of Buzescu, situated in the South of Romania, has approximately 5 000 inhabitants and is to be described as a bipolar architectural settlement. From traditional Romanian vernacular architecture to very expressive mansions, the built fabric of the village is hard to be grasped as a uniformity. The contrast in the aesthetics between the main street of Buzescu and the outer-center creates a cat-walk character of eclectic architecture. The phenomenon of this extroverted architectural language started to emerge after the collapse of communism and the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's regime in late 1989. The democratic reality of the 1990s created new market opportunities, which were not strictly regulated by the government and as a result, the Roma community of Buzescu gained most of its capital.⁴ The possibility to affirm their identity after years of oppression in combination with climbing up the social ladder was translated into the specific architectural language, which combines elements of various styles carried out to the extremes. As Mafia Baroque in Bulgaria, the architecture of Buzescu integrates elements

from the Classical architecture within the regional expression in an excessive scale. This collage-like perception is not only to be seen in the buildings themselves but is to be further recognized in the scale of the street/neighborhood. Every house is expressive in its particular way, representing the specific perception of the owner. In addition the building's dimensions are often connected to the owner's position in the Roma community.⁵ A vital aspect of the Buzescu architecture is its representative role of status, as the photographer, Iosif Kiraly suggests in an article for the internet platform Cafe Babel:

*"It is already typical that the most expensive construction sites and buildings are on the main street. These houses are for prestige purposes only."*⁶

Often related to as 'kitsch' this particular architectural expression of the Romanian Roma community rather embodies the important search of identity in the representation of the minority.



fig. 25 Buzescu (2015)

⁴ Booth, Hannah. "Big picture: The Wealthy Roma Of Buzescu, by Ivan Kashinsky"

⁵ Camelia Teodorescu and Iulian Dinca "Valorization by Tourism of Gypsy Culture in Romania", p. 25

⁶ Lazar, Natalie and Lazar, Anik, "In Buzescu, Roma architecture is surreal real estate"



fig. 26 Buzescu (2015)



fig. 27 Buzescu (2015)



fig. 28 Buzescu (2015)



fig. 29 Residential building, Dedinje (2015)



fig. 30 Residential building, Dedinje (2015)

Serbia: Belgrade

A similar architectural phenomenon to the Bulgarian Mafia Baroque is to be found in the built fabric of Serbia. The radical individualism, combined with the choice of eclectic styles creates the post-communist architectural language of the Serbian nouveau riche. Often seen in the newly emerged residential neighborhoods such as Dedinje and Padina, the specific architectural movement illustrates the emphasis on status through the use of the classical or traditional styles and vibrant colours. Sonia Hirt describes in the publication "Landscapes of Postmodernity" the similarities in the process and aesthetics of the newly designed neighborhoods for the new elites of Bulgaria and Serbia:

*"There, the startled visitor has the dubious privilege of viewing a diversity of styles that cross time and space, from Bulgarian and Serbian Revival to Tudor and from neogothic to neomodern."*⁶

These Serbian residential buildings are the by-product of the post-soviet reality, where self-advertisement plays a key role in the urban perception. The introduction of capitalism changed the means of self-expression and has put the emphasis on the search for a new modern identity. As a result, the opportunities of a more liberal regime have led to the expressive architectural spontaneity of the 1990s. Both Bulgarian and Serbian Mafia Baroque styles are associated with the newly rich and their portrayal of new, often illegally earned money.



fig. 31 Gate, Dedinje (2015)

⁶ Hirt, Sonia. "Landscapes of Postmodernity: Changes in the built fabric of Belgrade and Sofia since the end of Socialism", p.803

Greece

Although there are no published academic sources on the Greek phenomenon in the context of Mafia Baroque, it is part of the broader spectrum of expressive individual architecture. Due to the lacking literature body to draw from, the following analysis is based on publications of the internet blog "LiFO" and conversations with architectural colleagues with first hand experience.

While Greece doesn't share the Eastern Block past with the Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia, an architectural expression similar to Mafia Baroque is recognized. The recurring theme in the Greek context is the connection to the local identity and the portrayal of the specifics of the locality. It carries in itself a lot of pride in the heritage

as the exaggeration of specific elements are communicating the shared identity of the past. The traces of the particular architectural language are to be seen as more of an individual choice, rather than a national movement. The use of expressive colours and compositions of various architectural elements creates a narrative of self-expression in the urban fabric. A characteristic binding the architectural solutions is often the prominent use of sculptures, integrated into the buildings facades as an expression of personal taste. The means of architecture are used here to create a physical communication between the owner/designer of the building and the viewer through the expressive architectural decisions.

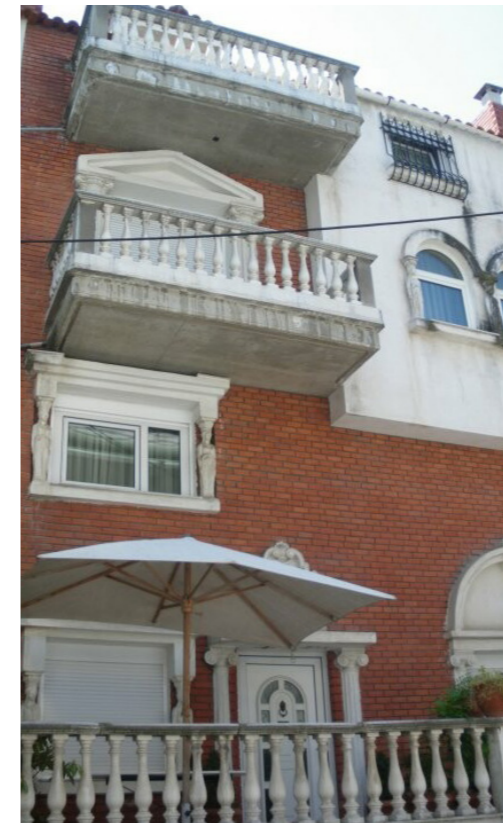


fig. 33 Residential building, Thessaloniki



fig. 34 Ionic columns in a grass field, Skotina



fig. 32 Replica of Myron's Discobolus, ready to kick a golden ball



fig. 35 The apartment building with the 12 Gods, Egaleo

While there are aesthetic similarities in the excessive use of architectural elements, the selected examples portray different topics, connected to the identity question: in the context of Skopje, the Baroque-like architecture is creating a narrative for addressing identity on a national scale; the Romanian example deals with the representation of a minority; the Serbian and Bulgarian Mafia-Baroque styles are the self-representation of the newly emerged elite in the public and private sphere and in the Greek context one can speak about an individual expression of nationalism in a local setting. Although every country tackles a specific notion, a similar architectural language is to be seen. Next to the eclectic aesthetics, the binding element between those various examples is the aim of representing a particular identity in the public sphere. This search for defining and portraying status is connected among all the above-mentioned countries by the introduction of freedom and the opportunity it gives for self-expression in the new democratized context. Undergoing a similar political climate, the different Baroque-like scenarios have similar traces in the exaggerated use of architectural-historical elements as a result of the Western cultural influence. Although similarities are present, those styles have emerged due to particular local influences and challenges. As they are an evolution of form and style with a similar but not identical character, the labeling of either “international” or “local” can be questionable. One can consider those movements as distinct architectural hybrids of translating and incorporating international elements in a strictly local context, defined by particular political and social events. The result of this process can be categorized as “glocal”, a term which Svetlana Boym uses to describe “a culture that uses global language to express local color”.⁷ Mafia Baroque can be seen as a Bulgarian phenomenon that is part of a wider spread movement among the Eastern European countries after the democratization as a reaction to the search for identity.

⁷ Svetlana Boym, “The Future of Nostalgia”, p. 67



fig. 36 Sunny Beach (2009)

Chapter three:
Past and present

Although Mafia Baroque architecture is not restricted to the hotel typology for this case study it has been seen as an appropriate example for further investigation. The holiday sector offers a great opportunity for exploration of how the eclectic architectural style has developed since the start of the Transition period. As the culture of tourism has been present since communism and has been evolving even more in the past decades, the Mafia Baroque characteristics have simultaneously developed with time. Since the 1950s the potential of the Bulgarian coast has been recognized and the tourism industry became, along with agriculture, one of the main focuses for development of the soviet ruling.¹ The concentration of holiday resorts was restricted to a few locations in the attempt to conserve the nature of the Black Sea coast.² With the Fall of the Berlin Wall the annual tourists from the COMECON³ countries were offered with the opportunity to explore various new destinations and the tourist market of Bulgaria was faced with suffering an upcoming crisis. As precautionary measures the Black Sea resorts were a part of the privatization process during the Transition:

*In order to save tourism, the Bulgarian government initiated a process of privatization where the major resorts were broken down into smaller units in order to facilitate private individuals.*⁴

This action in combination with the unregulated building restrictions allowed private individuals to invest in vacation businesses along the coast. Ever since the introduction of democracy the Black Sea resorts have been growing.

¹ Borislav Angelov, "Ornament Because of Crime: Learning from Mafia Baroque", p.49

² Michael Zinganel, "Holidays after the Fall. Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia", p.27

³ COMECON is an organization established in 1949 to facilitate and coordinate the economic development of East European countries belonging to the Soviet Union.

⁴ Borislav Angelov, *ibidem*, p.49

⁵ Georgi Nikolov, "How Slynchev Bryag (Sunny Beach) became Slynchaka"

⁶ Petar Mihaylov, "The Fall of Sunny Beach"

⁷ Georgi Nikolov, *idem*

⁸ Scribbr, "The architecture of the former Sunny Beach in 20 unique photos"

⁹ Petar Mihaylov, *idem*

¹⁰ *ibidem*

¹¹ Elena Anastasova, "1.2 billion BGN are the revenues from Sunny Beach"

Sunny Beach:

Today Sunny Beach (Slynchev bryag / Слънчев бряг) is one of the biggest and most popular retreats on the Bulgarian coast, offering a rich selection of hotels and attractions for its visitors. Situated in a near proximity to the old town of Nessebar, the development of the resort was first initiated in June 1958 by the Communist government of Bulgaria.⁵ The large scale initiative was highly influenced by the architect Nikola Nikolov⁶, who after creating the project with his team for the "Globus" Hotel was given the responsibility of main architect for the masterplan of Sunny Beach. The natural resources such as the wide sandy beach, the dunes and the dense coast forests were recognized as quality to be preserved. Therefore alongside with the planning of the built fabric, a large project for a forest park was initiated and over 150 000 000 BGN (currency at that time) was invested in its realization. As a result, in the 1980s the ratio between built fabric and green spaces in the resort was 20/80.⁷ During the communist period this green paradise was a beloved vacation spot for multiple Bulgarian politicians, as well as vacationers from abroad. With its 112 hotels and 36 000 beds in 1989, Sunny Beach offered a space for vacation where architecture and nature were in a balanced relation.⁸ With the democratization, new opportunities for private developments were possible and after the economical crises of 1995/1996, the resort underwent a construction boom in 1999.⁹ Since the beginning of the Transition, the city has grown exponentially and as a result, the Mafia Baroque movement has slowly determined the predominant Las Vegas atmosphere. Nowadays the resort has approximately three times more hotels than at the end of the communist ruling and offers over 300 000 beds.¹⁰ The high density of the built fabric has created a concrete jungle, where quality green space is rarely to be experienced. The construction of hotels as close as possible to the sea shore has had a tremendous impact on the nature in the area, where the dunes are now no longer existent. Although the natural element doesn't have a strong presence in the cityscape, the resort attracts millions of tourist every year and in 2019 according to Nikolina Angelkova, the minister of Tourism, Sunny beach provided 20% of the revenues in the sector.¹¹



fig. 37 Development of the resort Sunny Beach



fig. 38 Postcard from Sunny Beach (1975)



fig. 40 DIT Majestic Beach Resort, Sunny Beach



fig. 41 Royal Palace Helena Sands, Sunny Beach

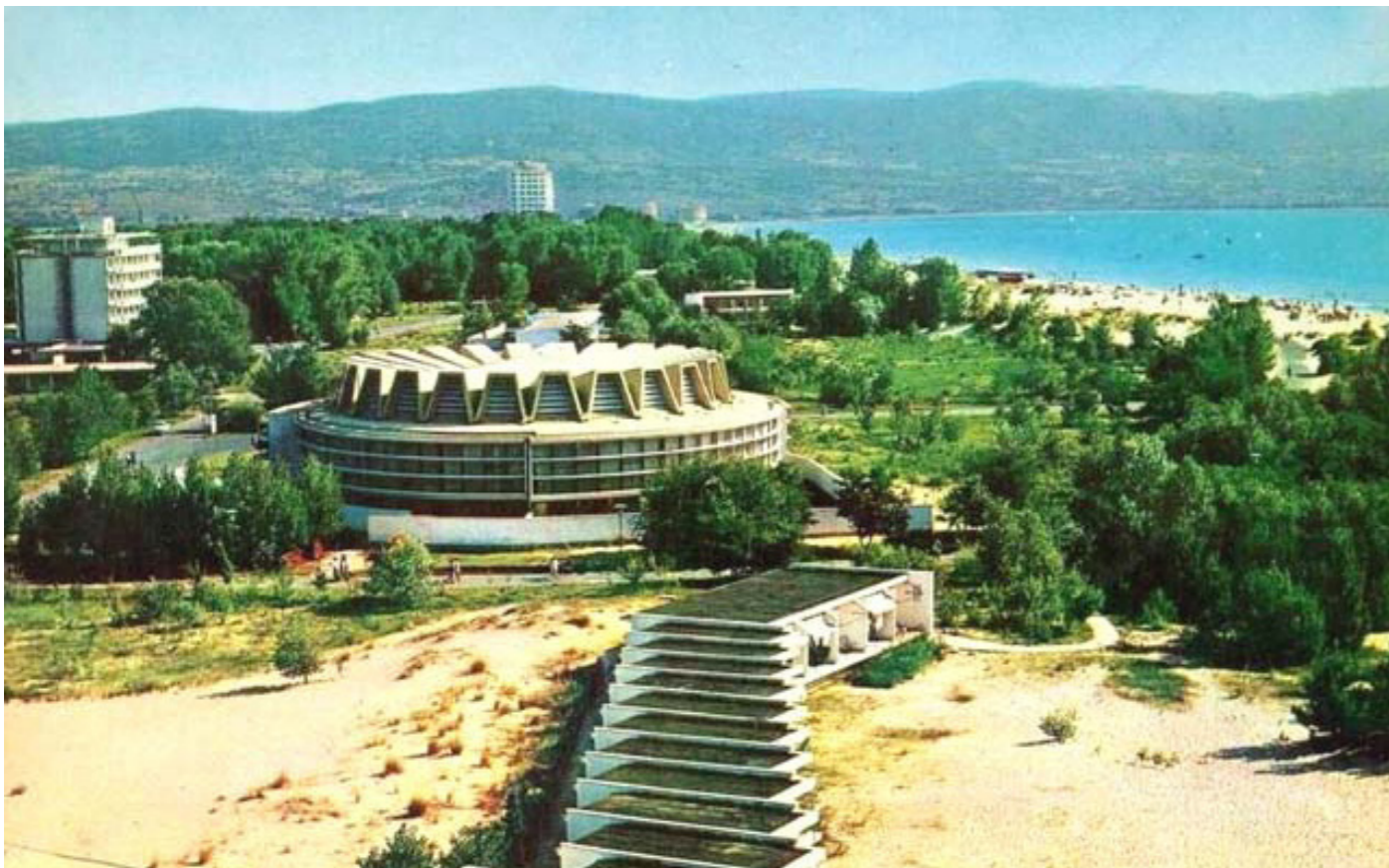
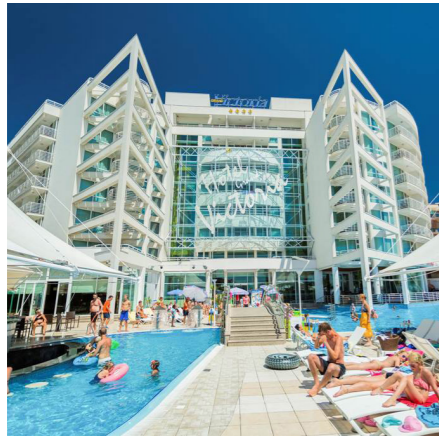


fig. 39 Postcard from Sunny Beach (1975)



fig. 42 Sunny Beach



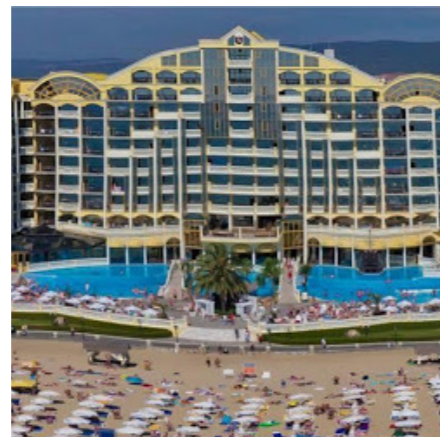
Effect Grand Victoria Hotel



Arcadia



Chaika Beach Resort



Victoria Palace



Marlin Beach



Menada Sunny Day 1 Apartments



DIT Majestic Beach Resort



Royal Palace Helena Sands



Barcelo Royal Beach



Efir 2 - Menada Apartments



Grenada

The following timeline offers a visual representation of the Sunny Beach evolution in the period between 2002 and 2018. The aim of the selected 31 hotels is to trace a possible development of the aesthetics in buildings with Mafia Baroque characteristics. The scale and strive for excessive representation in the urban context stay constant elements as the architectural style develops through time. Although the collage-like character is still present in the more recently built hotel complexes, a more coherent expression in the choice of architectural elements is to be found. While Mafia Baroque emerged at the beginning of the Transition period, in the past years one can speak of the slow evolutionary transition to a Post-Mafia Baroque style.

'02

'03

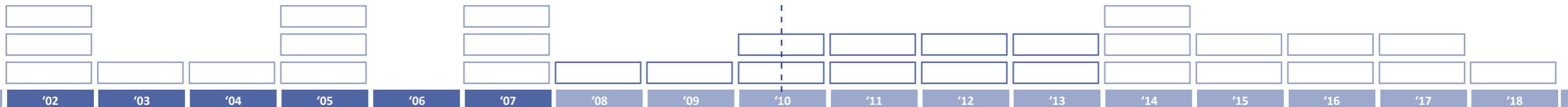
'04

'05

'06

'07

fig. 43 Evolution of the built fabric in Sunny Beach, 1992- 2007





Hotel Babylon



Royal Sun Apartments



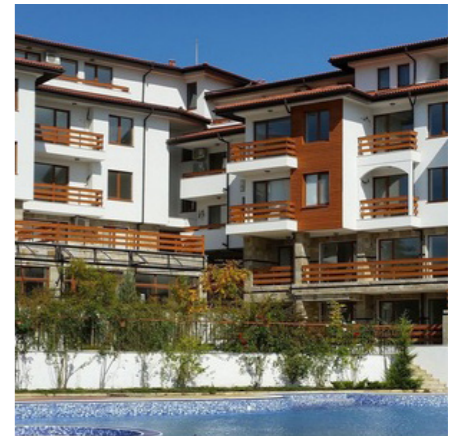
Carina Beach



Sun Flower



Harmony Palace



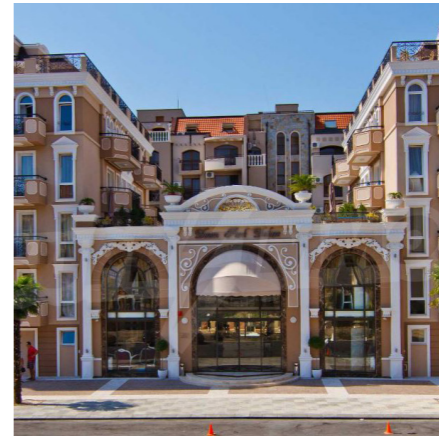
Gardenia Hills



Messembria Palace



Harmony Suits: Jungle



Dawn Park Deluxe



Golden Hermes

'08

'09

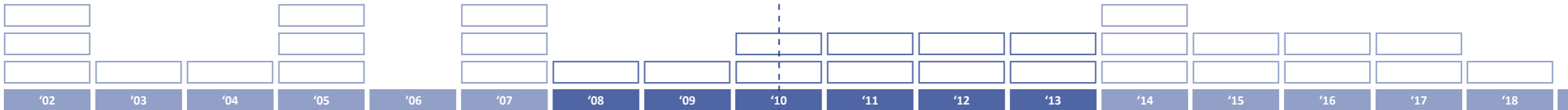
'10

'11

'12

'13

fig. 44 Evolution of the built fabric in Sunny Beach, 2008 - 2013





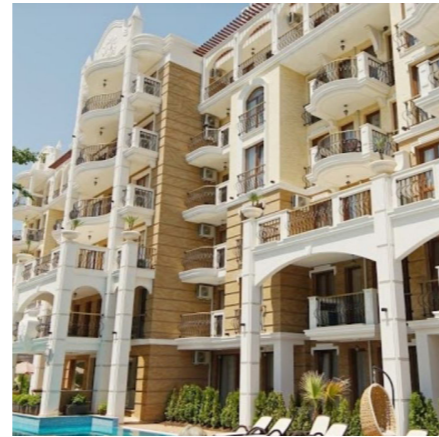
Villa Aria



Dawn Park Royal Venera Palace



Aphrodite Gardens



Harmony Suits: Dream Island



Baikal (renovated)



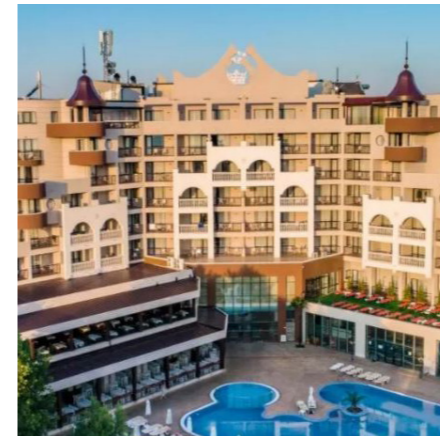
Rome Palace Deluxe



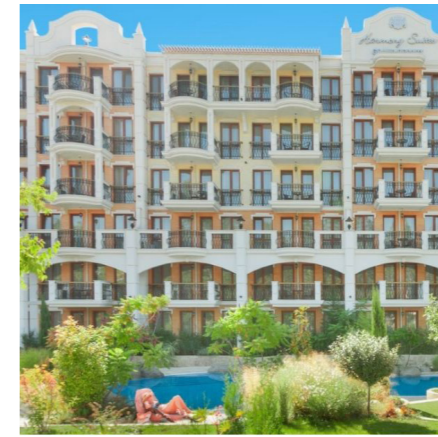
Harmony Suits: Monte Carlo



Severina



Hotel Imperial (EX Victoria P.)



Harmony Suit: Grand Resort

'14

'15

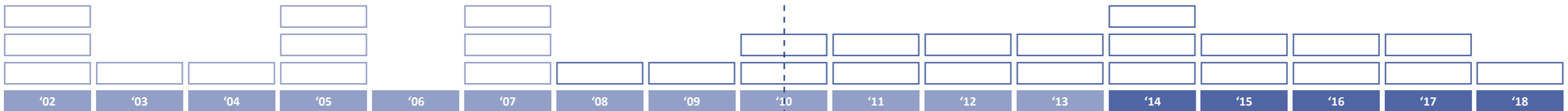
'16

'17

'18

'19

fig. 45 Evolution of the built fabric in Sunny Beach, 2014 - 2019



Traces of Mafia Baroque in Imperial Resort Hotel

For the further understanding in the aesthetics of the Mafia Baroque movement, an analysis of the Imperial Resort Hotel will visualize the various layers in the exterior of the building. Built in 2003 on the coast of Sunny Beach, the hotel was first established by the name of "Victoria Palace".¹ The resort was owned by the "Victoria Group" until 2017, when it was sold for over 50 mill. BGN to "S.B. Royal Hotels".² As a result, after the change of ownership the hotel was immediately renamed as "Imperial Resort" and a renovation took place. With its 3400m² the large complex offers a spa center, numerous restaurants and bars, as well as a sizeable pool with view to the shore. As one of the frontline resort complexes, positioned only meters away from the sea, the scale and architectural language of "Imperial Resort" are active elements in defining

the image of Sunny Beach. The symmetrical facades of the hotel are to be perceived as composition with a collage-like character of various architectural elements. Through the use of multiple elements, from excessive glazing to classical balustrades and fortified-inspired towers, the extroverted character of the building is to be portrayed. The Baroque-like style is highly present not only in the exterior of the hotel but it is as well the main medium in the shared interior spaces in the interior of the building. In the interior design the main aspect is put upon the choice and use of materials and architectural elements, often associated with a luxurious status. With its expressive nature and scale "Imperial Resort" is a great example of the Mafia Baroque hotel typology.



fig. 47 Interior of Imperial Resort (2020)



fig. 46 South-East Facade of Imperial Resort, Shore View (2020)

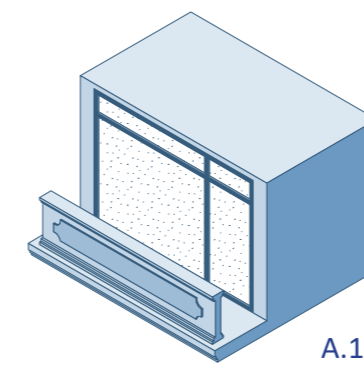


fig. 48 North-West Facade of Imperial Resort, Street view (2020)

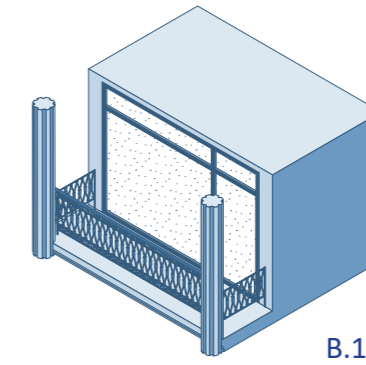
¹ Information retrieved from Amigos Travel, <https://www.amigostravel.eu/hotel-victoria-palace-sunny-beach-oferti>

² Maria Atanasova, "Vetko Sold "Victoria Palace" for 50 Mill. BGN"

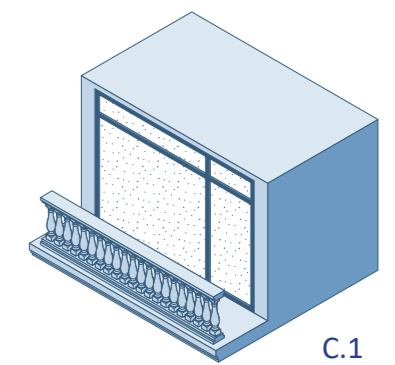
There is a high variation in the typologies of the balconies, used for creating the exterior of the hotel complex. The architectural elements are combined in various scenerios and as a result 3 main streams in the outdoor extension of the hotel rooms are to be traced. Through this analysis a design methodology of addition is to be clearly detected. The additive character is to be found not only on the scale of the living units, but as well in on the building scale, where the selected balcony typologies play a vital role in building the character of the building: their composition is a strong element in creating a narrative for the facade. This design approach of additive layering seems to be a constant feature not only in the case study of the Imperial Resort Hotel but rather it is a general Mafia Baroque characteristic. The act of addition allows for numerous architectural elements with similar or contrastic aesthetics to be integrated in the collage-like appearance.



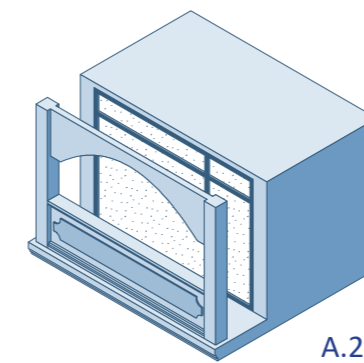
A.1



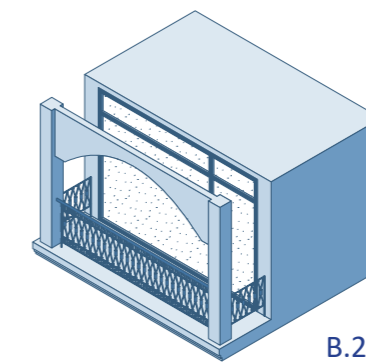
B.1



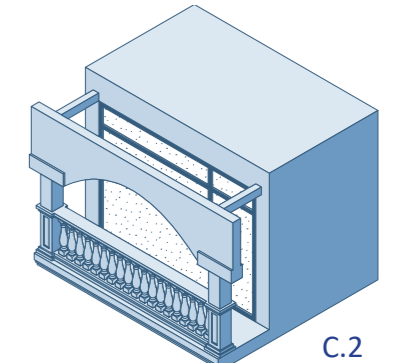
C.1



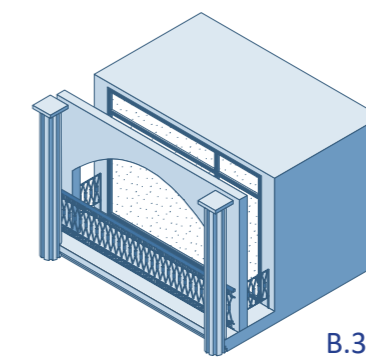
A.2



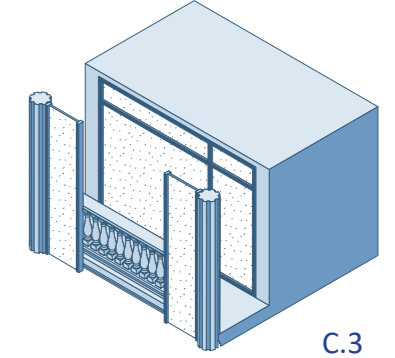
B.2



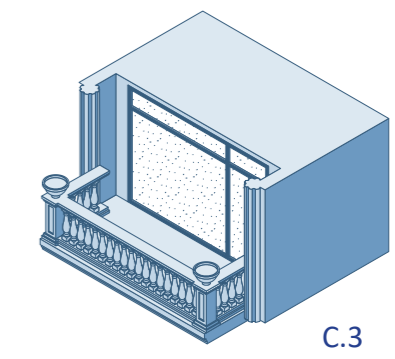
C.2



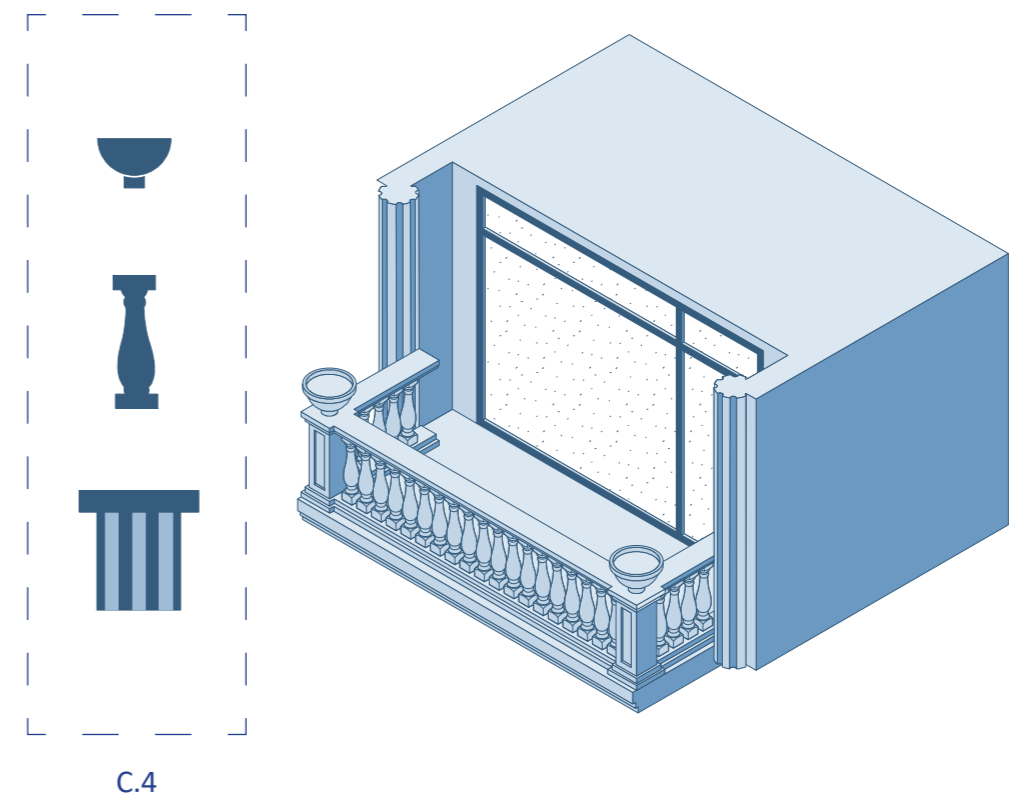
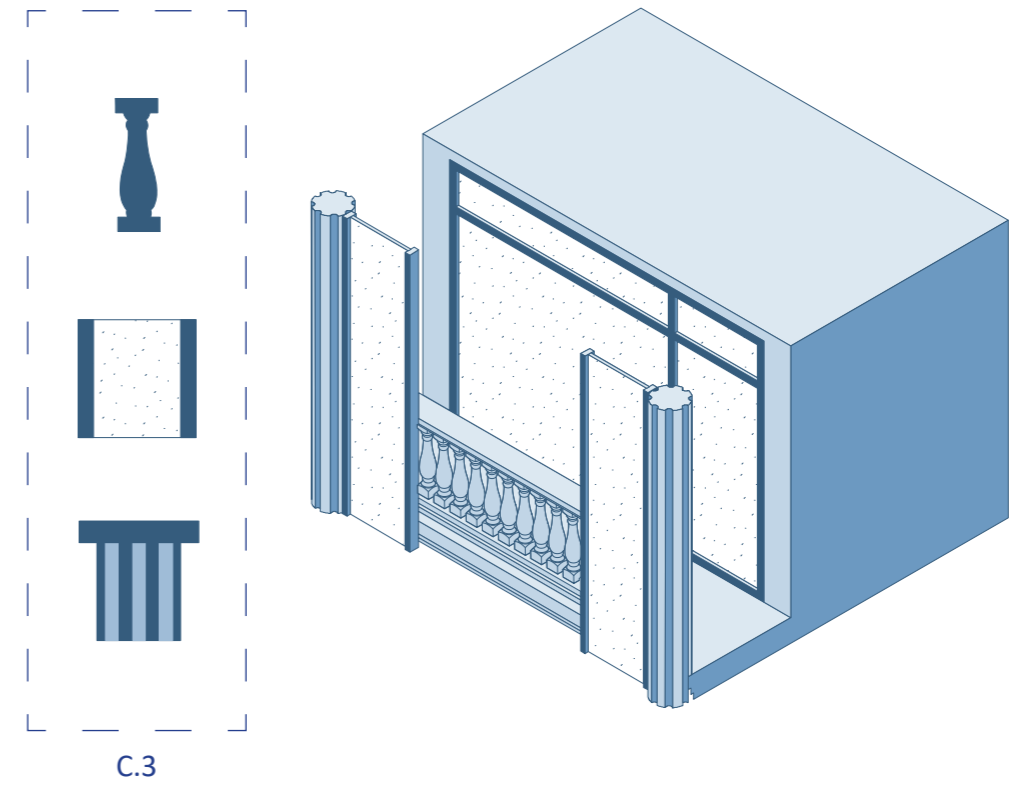
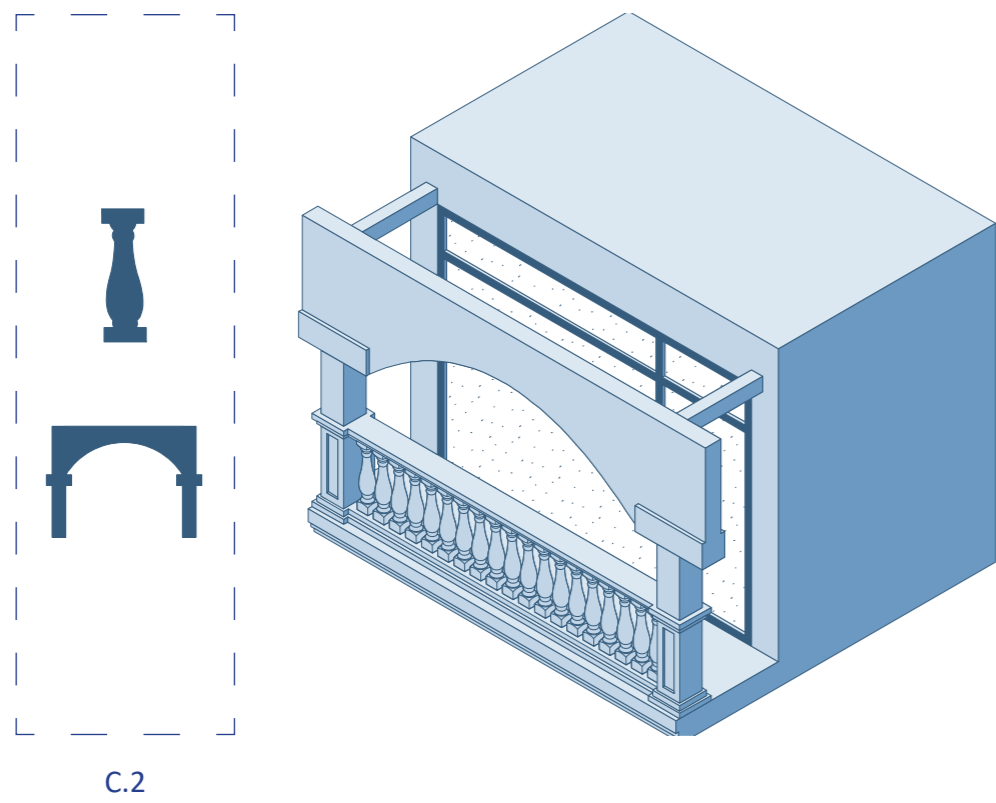
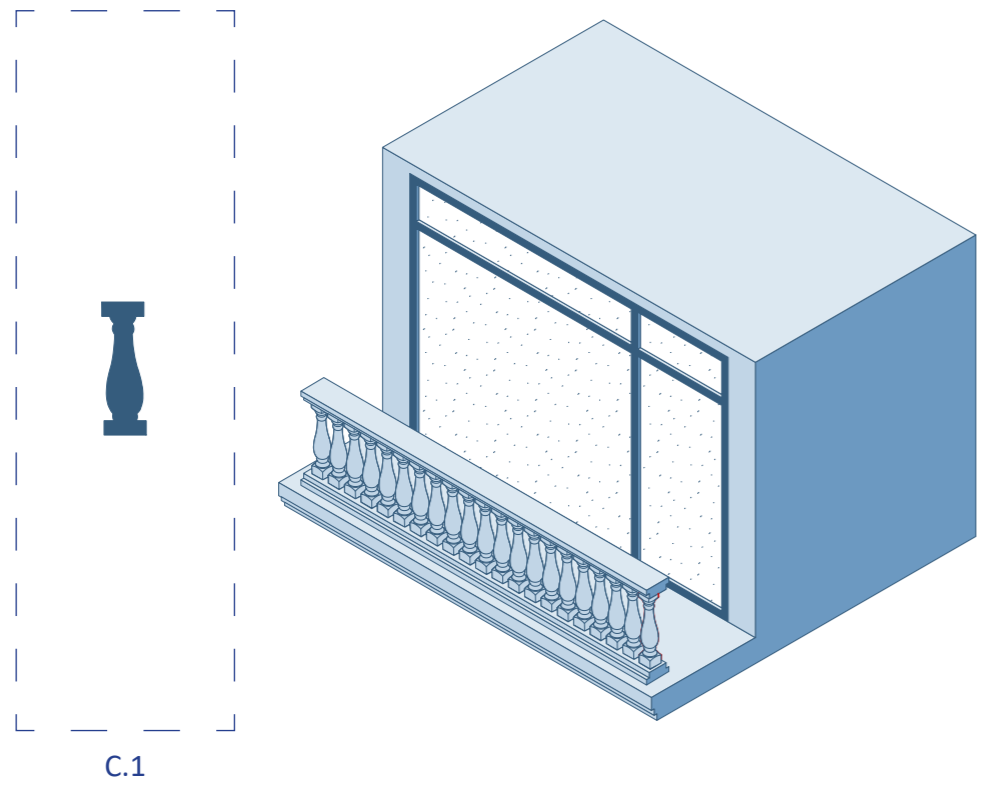
B.3

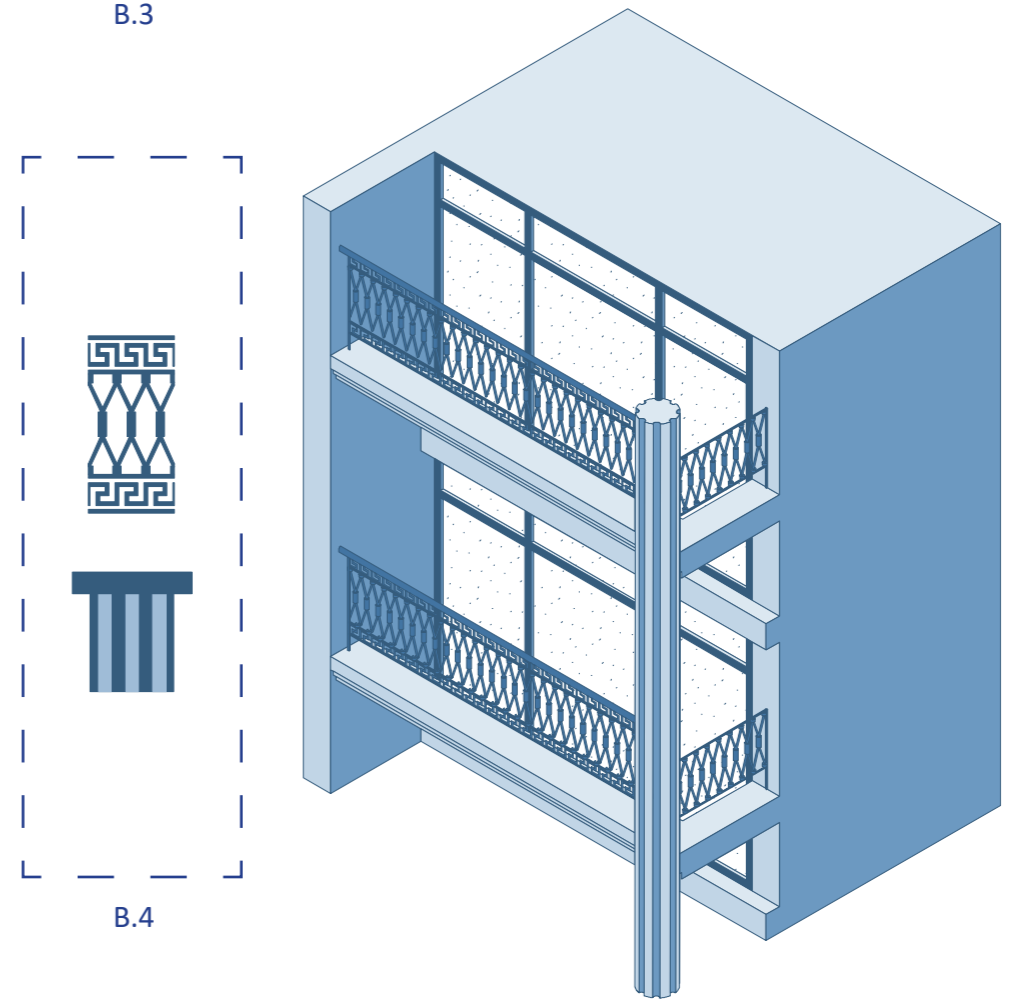
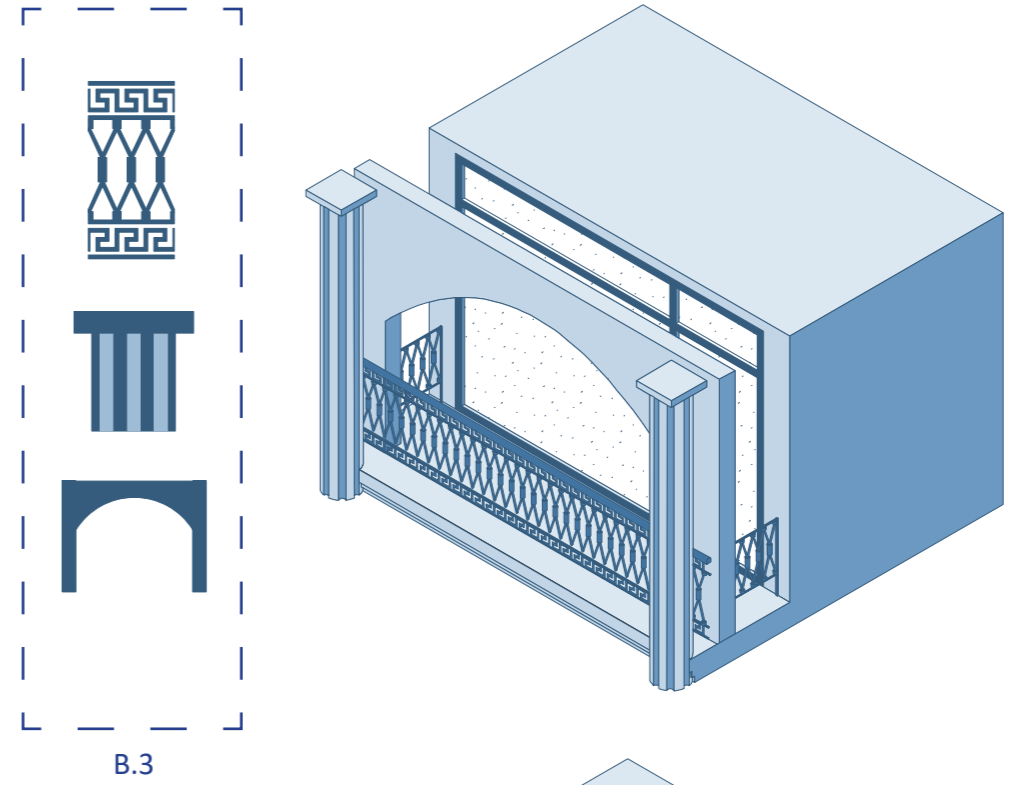
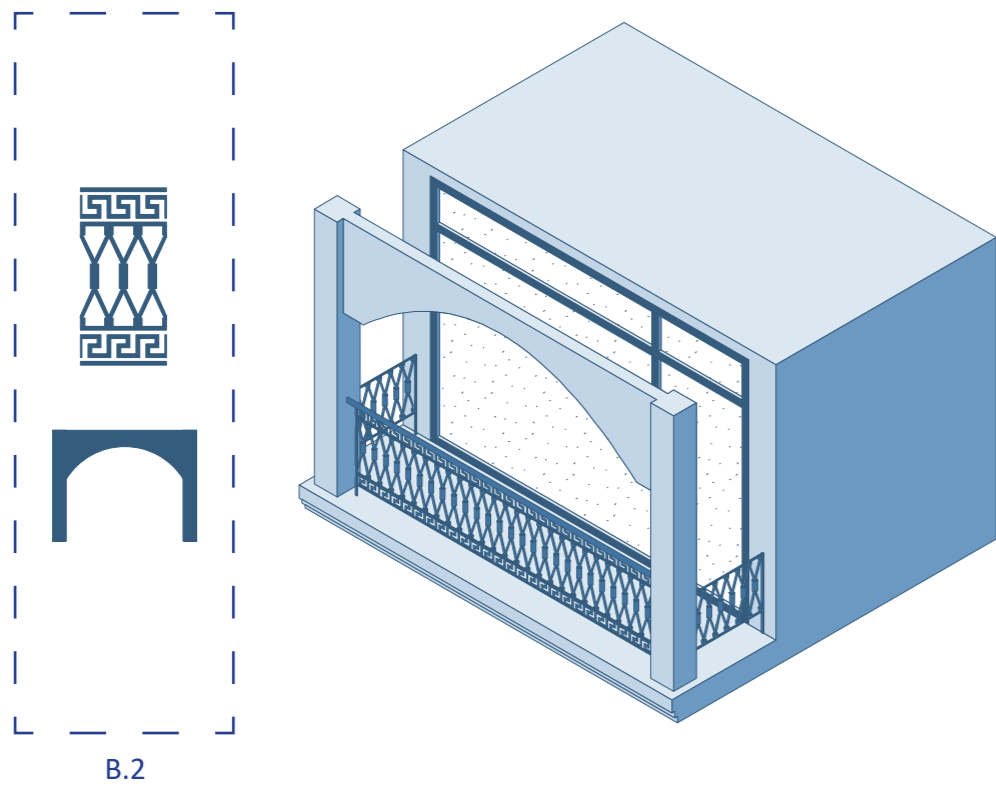
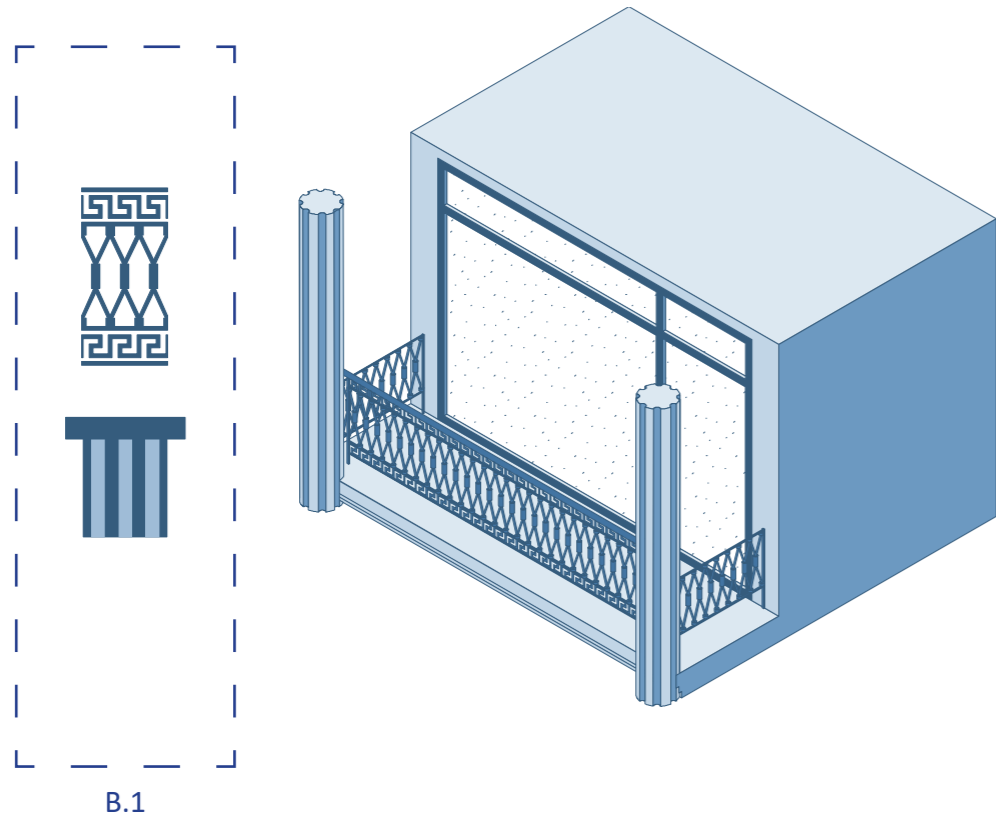


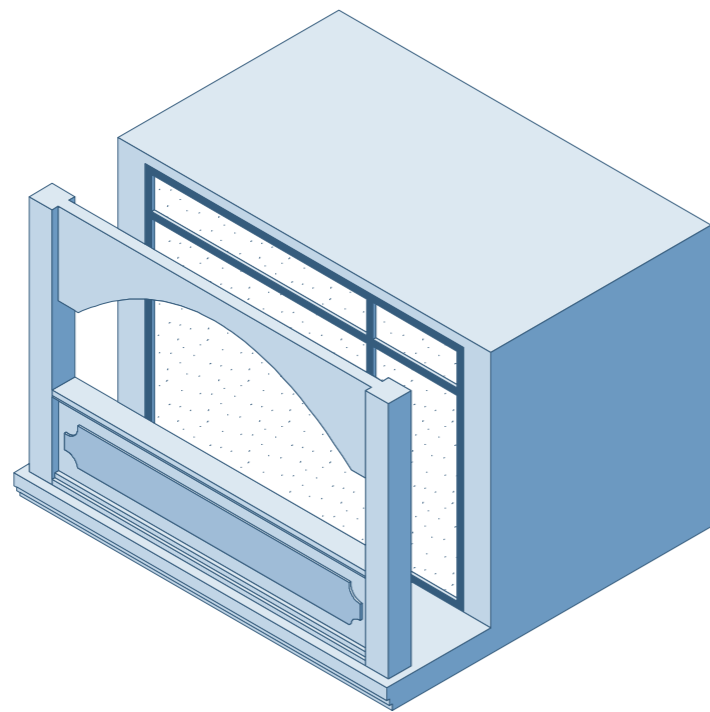
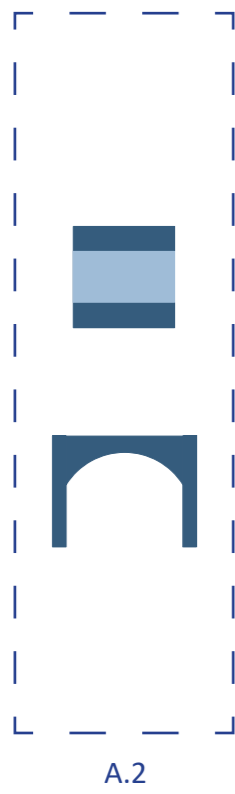
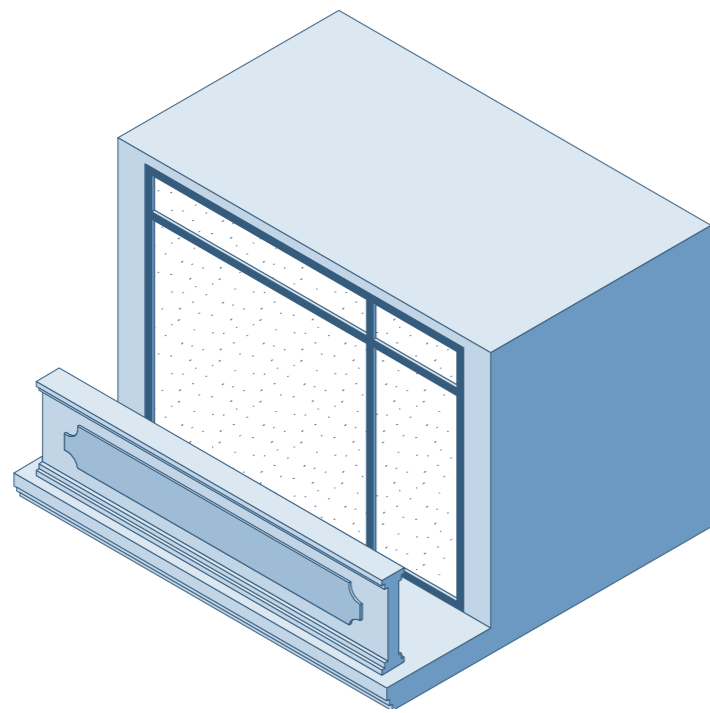
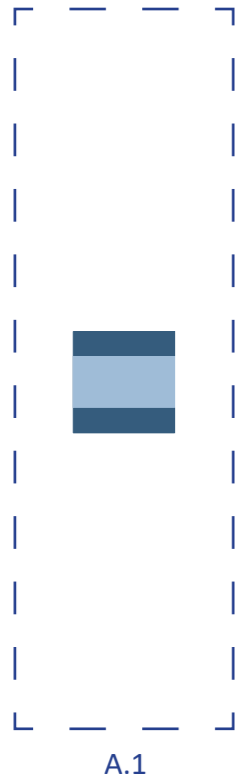
C.3

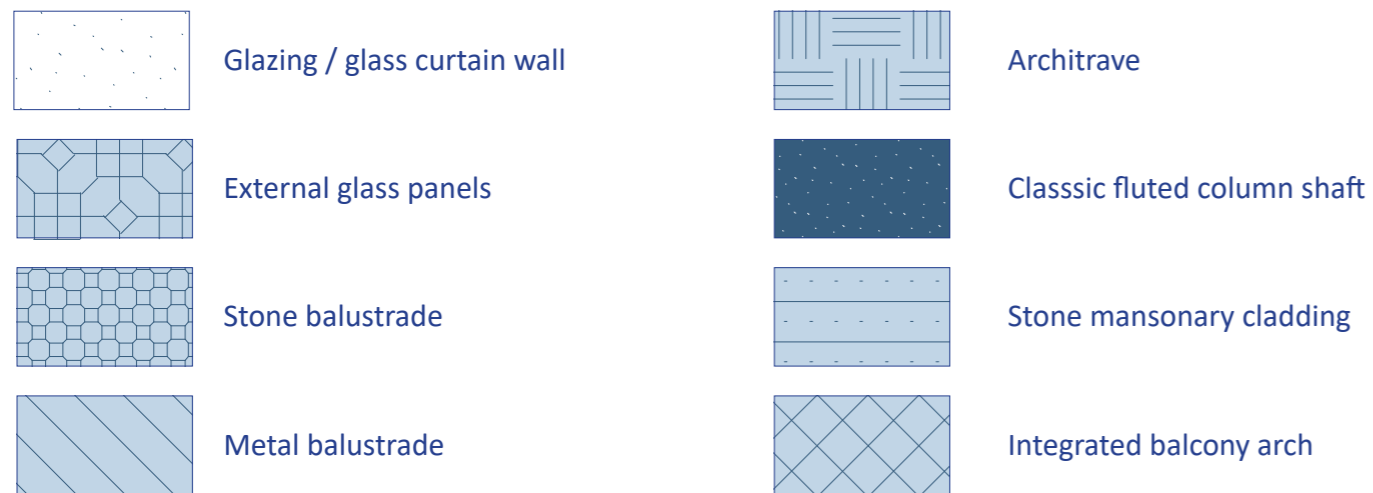
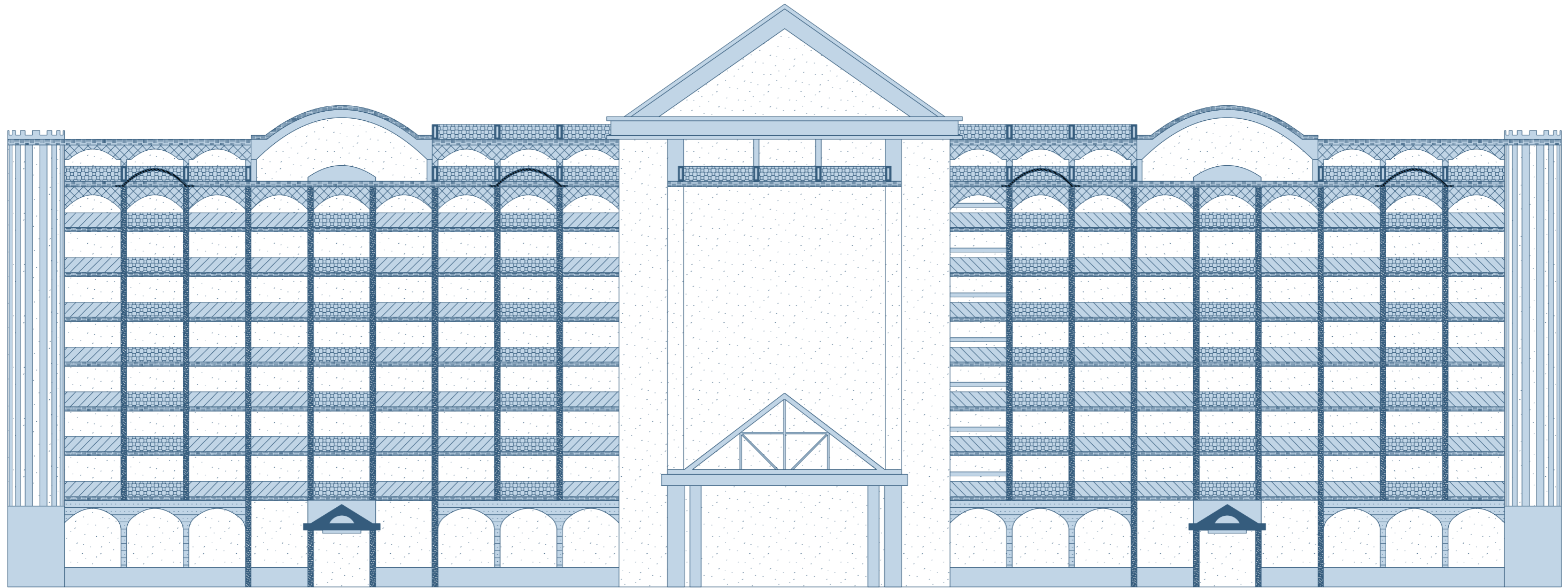


C.3

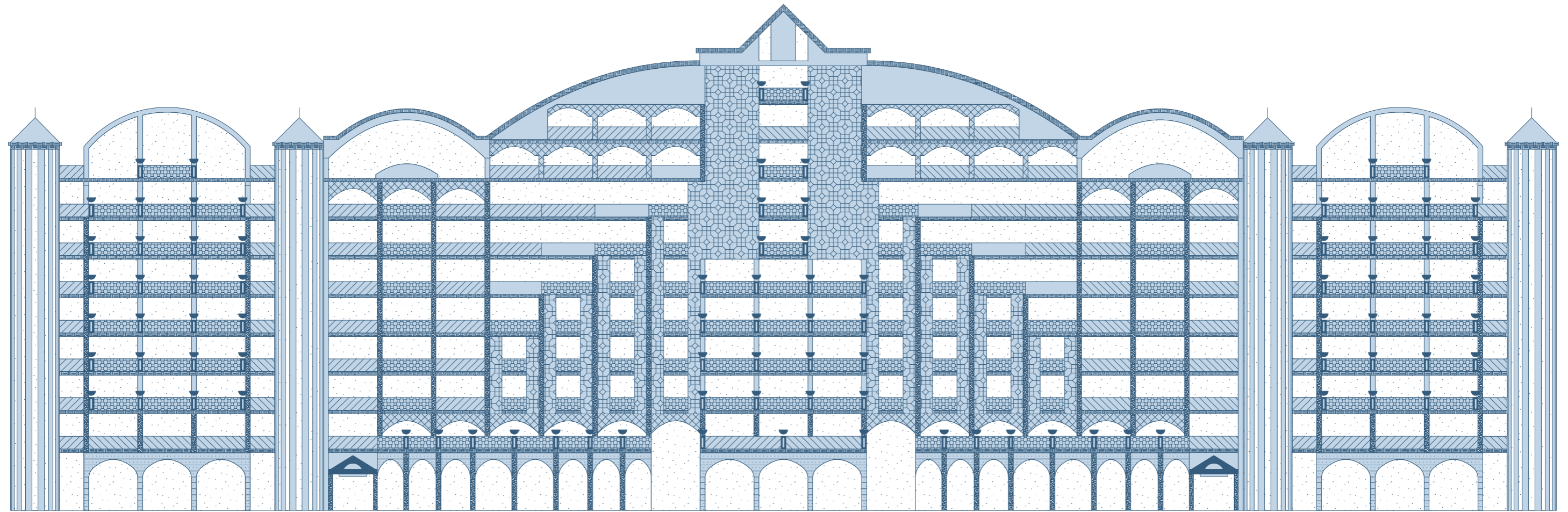


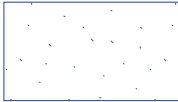
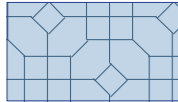
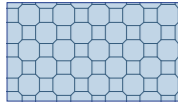





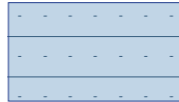





In the following illustration, the additive methodology can be seen in the design decisions regarding the facade composition. Through the combination of the architectural elements, an expressive multilayered image has been communicated. Additionally, the symmetrical approach plays a key role in the formation of the facade. This characteristic symmetry use is a shared attribute among buildings, portraying the Mafia Baroque aesthetics.



-  Glazing / glass curtain wall
-  External glass panels
-  Stone balustrade
-  Metal balustrade

-  Architrave
-  Classic fluted column shaft
-  Stone masonry cladding
-  Integrated balcony arch

Conclusion

The Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the beginning of a new chapter throughout Europe and was the catalyst for the Transition Period in Bulgaria. Becoming the narrative in the post-communist time for the dynamic relations, political and social, this time frame created new challenges in the context of government-based regulations. As reaction to the particular dynamics, the emergence of Mafia-Baroque had provided the new elite with the opportunity for excessive self-expression. The eclectic style is not an isolated architectural phenomenon, although its aesthetic expression is unique to the Bulgarian context. Creating a link between the selected neighboring Balkan countries, it becomes clear that similar movements are naturally emerging in the geopolitical space, once the search for identity becomes the main focal point.

The reasons for the eclectic architectural aesthetics are multilayered and not easy to take apart, as their complexity is based on the intertwining of various factors. From the emerging of the new elite and their strive to establish a clear identity of self-representation to the bottled-up need for self-expression and a fragmented perception of Western Europe during Communism – those are several factors, which have shaped the underlying fundamentals for Mafia-Baroque. The presence of a national-wide nostalgia, fed by the uncertainty of the political future, and the marginalized role of experts, created the needed space for the portrayal of a particular individual understanding of wealth and status. This alternative architectural reality emphasized the manifestation of ornament as a key element in the communication of individuality. Being an active element in the cityscape, the Baroque-like movement is not to be perceived as a singular event in the built environment. Its' strong presence in various urban locations acts as an indicator for the influences of the transition between the soviet regime and early democracy. Shaping the built fabric of Bulgaria, Mafia-Baroque draws attention to how architecture can be the medium in visualizing complicated relations between state, experts and clients. In addition, the contrast in perception acts as an indicator for the style's ambiguous interpretation of its' nature. Although the slow development of Mafia-Baroque towards a more coherent Post-Mafia-Baroque is to be seen in the recent years, the movement continues having a great impact not just on singular architectural interventions/projects but the style has an influence the urban environment as a whole.

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