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- Interview: Studio Non Stop's convincing architecture
- Russia in search of a new identity
- A cross-country tour of contemporary architecture in Slovakia

Section: Organic facades

Anything goes in Almere

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Interview

→
The founders of Studio Non Stop: Sanja Galić-Grozđanić (b.1962) and Igor Grozđanić (b.1962). Sanja Galić graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo in 1994, Igor Grozđanić graduated in 1997. Their first work experience was with the Sarajevo firm, Dom 521 and Arhiform. During 1993 they worked in Studio Rondine in Lucina. From 1993-1996 Grozđanić worked for Henn Architekten, and Galić for Ebe + Ebe, both in Munich. Upon returning to Sarajevo they founded Studio Non Stop in 1999.



Convincing architecture

Sanja Galić and Igor Grozdanić of **Studio Non Stop** from Sarajevo talk about the Bosnian and global conditions that inform their work.

BY HANS IBEUNGS — TEXT: HANS IBEUNGS, PHOTOGRAPHY: ALMIN ŽRNO

Hans Ibeungs: Does the name of the office reflect a programmatic intention you had when you started and if so, is it still functioning as such?

Igor Grozdanić: We tried to find a name that somehow expresses our ideas and our understanding of the social, cultural and economic conditions of architecture. We were looking for the smallest common denominator for these conditions, and we decided that 'non-stop' fitted the bill. Non-stop is omnipresent, both in nature and in culture. Almost everything in nature is a kind of non-stop system, the oceans and the continents are uninterruptedly connected. Energy and matter are non-stop and only change their form.

Hans Ibeungs: Is everything non-stop?

IG: Certainly there are things that are not, but in general we think that most things are non-stop. We are inspired by this concept and we try to understand and define everything as a non-stop process.

Hans Ibeungs: Does it also mean that for you a building is part of continuous process, instead of a finite object?

IG: There is always the question of what is more important, the building in its physical form or the processes that go on inside, and we tend to believe that the physical building is just the outer clothing for the processes inside. Sometimes those processes are not very dynamic and that means that the clothing doesn't have to be dynamic either. But sometimes they are both quite dynamic.

Hans Ibeungs: You spent many years in Italy and Germany, but you finally decided to come back to Bosnia. Why?

Sanja Galić: Germany in particular was a very interesting experience for us, in terms of learning a totally new organization of work, with new design methodologies, and a level of detailing which is very refined. We came back to Bosnia because we wanted to do something for the future of our society, combining the high German professional standards with a typical Balkan temperament.

Hans Ibeungs: Was Bosnia still pretty much the same when you came back after the war?

SG: It was a completely new context. The post-war development of a multicultural and multi-faith society has very specific conditions.

IG: But psychologically it was difficult to accept. It was as if you'd lost a limb but you could still feel it. Obviously one needs time to comprehend that familiar surroundings are no longer what they used to be.

SG: And of course we noticed the complete difference between the over-regulated situation in Germany and the under-regulated conditions of Bosnia's transition.

IG: In a way, Germany was scary for us. There you know precisely that if you are currently living in a one-room apartment and driving a Volkswagen, in five years' time you can expect to be living in a two-room apartment and driving a BMW. And so on...

SG: That ordinary life...

IG: ...continues even when you are holidaying. Everything seemed...

SG: ...fixed. For us it was very challenging to be involved in the development of a post-war society in a multilayered transitional process.

Hans Ibeungs: But hasn't the experience made you more German than most Bosnian architects in terms of your precision and rigor?

SG: That's true. We were of course influenced by those experiences. What we appreciate about Germany is the way the work is organized, the very interesting design programmes and problems, the detailed planning documentation. And yes, of course we are trying to implement this here in Bosnia.

Hans Ibeungs: Talking about the Bosnian context, there is often a direct, sometimes even literal, relation between your work and the landscape and buildings that surround them, but I suppose that context, in your non-stop sense, can mean much more than just the visible forms.

IG: We believe that architecture is the materialization of different contexts, depending on the programme of the building and its location, historical and cultural conditions, clients and their requirements or feelings about the building. The influence of the context manifests in different ways.

SG: In addition to this, our intention is, through each of our projects, to tell a story. If we weren't architects, one could imagine these stories being shaped with words instead of construction materials, as a literary work or movie or theatre play. Sometimes it's not easy to recognize the stories at first sight. Each story is based on the relationship between various elements and the context.

Hans Ibeungs: How do you determine which part of the context is relevant for a project. Or to put it another way, how does a design evolve?

IG: We don't have a rigid, logical way of working. We discuss a lot and talk about different things and some elements are pursued from a very beginning in an analytical way, but some things remain...

SG: ...subconscious.

IG: So we don't have a systematic approach, like saying we analyse point A, then point B, then point C and so on...

SG: ...it all depends on the project. It's a kind of project evolution, a natural way of defining the varying importance or influence of different contexts.

Hans Ibeungs: How does it work then with the two of you, being partners in marriage and in work? Do you always design everything together, or is there a division of labour, with each of you working on different projects?

SG: In the early phase we always do everything together. At that stage we talk non-stop about our projects. We are not used to working on something alone. We simply believe that this kind of exchange of personal opinions and experiences brings a new quality to our work.

Hans Ibeungs: One more question about the context, how do you position yourself? Do you see yourself as part of a Bosnian tradition, or as international architects?

SG: Our Bosnian background entails many different influences. Bosnia is a mix of Turkish, Austro-Hungarian, Yugoslavian and international influences. Foreign influences have always arrived here in a filtered form and the same is true of the modern architecture of the international style. And you can see this even today, albeit that a direct global impact seems to be more strongly visible than ever before. In these circumstances trying to find local roots for your work can seem a bit artificial, but still we believe it is possible. You can be very open to international forces and at the same time interpret them in a very local way. And to return to your question, it is evident that this Bosnian tradition is important for us. We are undoubtedly part of it, but we believe we can at least try to present this tradition in a very minimal, sometimes almost invisible way.

Hans Ibeungs: I get the impression that there were more adventurous spirits in Bosnian architecture in the old Yugoslavia than there are today.

IG: That might be true. Yugoslavia was somehow big enough to support both internal diversity and its own development. It was a strong enough basis for innovative and adventurous architectural approaches.

SG: And there was much more public investment in Yugoslavia. For architects it is usually easier to do something in the public sector than in the private sector, and hence the public sector often offers more opportunities for adventure and experiment. But today I find it difficult to talk about Bosnian architecture in the sense of a specific or unique direction in architecture.

IG: Instead, I prefer to define architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an amalgam of different local architectures generated by the diversity of our society as well as global influences.

IG: I think a balance is important. You shouldn't make architecture that is either purely international, or purely related to local conditions.

Hans Ibeungs: How fast has Bosnia changed since the war?

IG: Well, we believe that we have achieved something during this last decade, but we are unhappy with the speed of change. We would have liked things to have moved faster since the war.

SG: Architecture reflects society. I mean, in the architecture of Bosnia you can see that our society is not finished, still not fully recovered. I think that we are trying with our works to do something to resolve this, but I think that only in ten or fifteen years' time we will be able to see the real results of our own work. You have to wait that long to see whether a building actually does something for its environment, whether it has a positive effect on people's behaviour and well-being.

IG: One limitation is that there is almost no critical or public debate about architecture in this society. So it is difficult to discuss architecture. The reactions we get are not always positive, but most are, including from ordinary people. That is the achievement you can talk about right now, but the real impact, as Sanja says, will probably only become visible in ten years or so.

Hans Ibeungs: Usually there is a difference between what you yourself consider important and what other people see in your work.

SG: When a building is finished you leave and the building is on its own, it has to speak for itself. Here we return to our intention to tell a story through each of our projects. When people recognize part of that story, we can say that we did a good job. Although sometimes people recognize things in our projects that were not part of the story, they accept it positively, they just like the feeling of being in it. But we consider that as a success, as well. The issue is whether a building will be able to convince people when the architects depart.

Hans Ibeungs: Which is your most successful building in that sense? Or put it another way, which do you consider to be your signature building?

IG: We couldn't say.

SG: We really can't.

IG: Some architects have one trademark, that always appears. We don't think that way.

'We believe that we have achieved something during this last decade, but we are unhappy with the speed of change. We would have liked things to have moved faster since the war.'



EUFOR HOSPITAL, RAJLOVAC, SARAJEVO (2003–2004)
The emergency military medical centre consists of a group of four volumes protected by concrete 'armour plating' with a camouflaged finish. It is located in the military barracks in Sarajevo, a typical example of a pavilion-type layout. With due regard to this context, the programme is organized into four pavilions: the emergency and theatre block, the X-ray and laboratory block, a clinic and an infirmary. Each pavilion is in a different pastel shade symbolizing its particular function.



BJELAŠNICA SKI CENTRE, SARAJEVO (2006–)
The design brief was to create the future centre of this tourist complex, with all the usual retail, catering and sports facilities, a fitness centre and a swimming pool. The design exploits the topography of the site to create a 'Balkan matrix' in which the high concentration of urban facilities is located underground, forming a new mountain plateau on which an arrangement of small similar structures of a hybrid mountain village take shape.

Work by Studio Non Stop

BJELAŠNICA SKI APARTMENTS, SARAJEVO (2004–2006)

The design of the ski apartments creates an artificial topography, its shape and materials echoing the natural surroundings of mountains, forest, rocks and snow. The layout, consisting of four separate apartment buildings, is inspired by the kašun type of traditional mountain village where the detached buildings form a single spatial and functional entity. The materials used are local wood and stone, and the colours are local too – green and white – reflecting the natural surroundings.

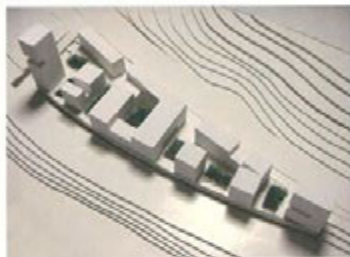


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ALTA SHOPPING CENTRE, SARAJEVO (2004–2010)
The Alta Shopping Centre is in the form of a tall, continuous winding street enclosing a hub of pedestrian flows. The building is designed to serve as an urban shopping mall with exclusive retail and service facilities over four stories. By absorbing urban pedestrian movements, the building will be anchored in the urban matrix, of which it will become an integral part.



MILKOS RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, SARAJEVO (2009–)
Sited on a site in between the city highway and the railway, a new topography is created – an urban plateau with a collage city formed by different housing typologies which are characteristic of collective living in Sarajevo. The newly established residential plateau is a traffic-free environment with parks, sports fields and children's playgrounds for residents. This concept of a collage-town offers a wide range of housing types that correspond to specific market demands.



(Convincing architecture)

SG: We don't want to be repetitious. We want every building to be completely different, because we are always working in a different context.

HJ: But it could be said that you can't escape from yourself and your personal way of expressing yourself.

IG: Well, in that case, I would say that our signature lies not in a building but in our approach, which is something that is present in each of our projects.

HJ: You are clearly ambitious in your work, but do you think there is a critical mass for this, and sufficient support for it?

IG: We have to take into consideration the post-war society in Bosnia, all the suffering, the transition, from the war until now, and the very specific and problematical political situation of this multicultural, multi-faith society. Young people are strongly influenced by this difficult transitional situation in Bosnia. It may be one of the reasons for this lack of ambition, not only in architecture, but in all other activities. There are examples of exceptionally good films, literature, music and art in our country, but what's missing is a kind of...

SG: ...good-quality average.

IG: And that is certainly connected with the present state of society. Sometimes we are in an optimistic frame of mind and believe we can see things improving here, but at other moments it is not easy at all to keep faith in a society that is in a very, very turbulent process.

HJ: I think that it is only possible to be constantly optimistic if you are totally naive.

IG: But in the long term we could certainly be optimistic, because we believe that this whole Balkan region, not only our country, has a potential for development. We hope the Balkans might eventually have a development similar to that of the Iberian peninsula...

SG: Or at least part of it. ←

www.studiononstop.com.ba

IMPARTANJE CENTRE, SARAJEVO (FIRST PHASE 2005–2010)

The Impartanje Centre consists of eight towers interconnected by vertical gardens and facade voids. The buildings constitute a multi-functional business centre with offices, a hotel, flats, a shopping centre and an underground car park. This creates an interesting dynamic of interconnection, interaction and communication between the separate yet interlinked towers of the urban multi-block, providing a range of functional links in response to market demands and tenants' needs.



A10 readers selection

Sunburnt

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