

**Future
Architecture
Platform**

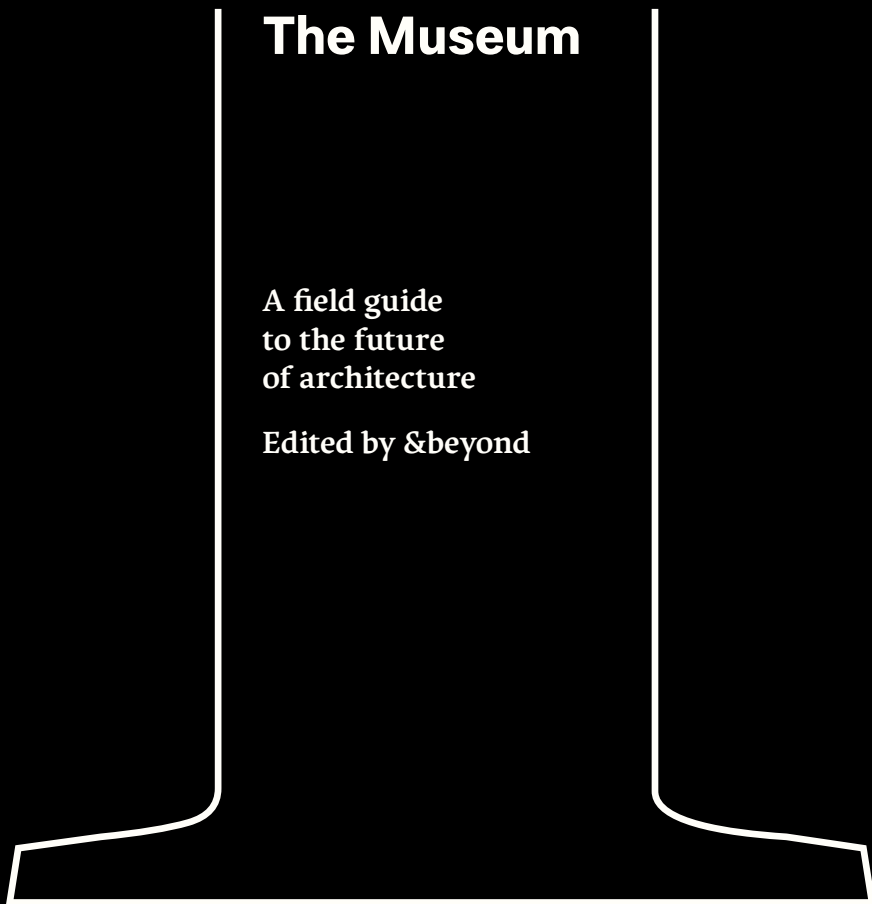


Archifutures

The Museum

A field guide
to the future
of architecture

Edited by &beyond



A stylized world map in a light blue color, set against a dark blue background. The map is composed of solid shapes for continents and thin lines for coastlines. A small white circle is positioned in the North Atlantic region, between North America and Europe.

**Copenhagen
Architecture
Festival**

Beyond the Biennial Bubble

**Three festivals,
three approaches**



**Belgrade
International
Architecture
Week**



**Tirana
Architecture
Week**

**Beyond the Biennial Bubble
Three festivals, three approaches**

Interview by Léa-Catherine Szacka

Beyond the Biennial Bubble

Belgrade / Copenhagen / Tirana

“Biennials,
triennials and other
festival-like events
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world that *on site*
is probably not that
close to architecture.”

Architect and writer Léa-Catherine Szacka sat down with the organisers of the Tirana Architecture Week (Saimir Kristo), the Copenhagen Architecture Festival (Josephine Michau) and the Belgrade International Architecture Week (Danica Jovović Prodanović) to reflect on the growing popularity and role of architecture biennials, triennials and other such festivals.

Week-long celebrations, biennials, triennials and other architecture festivals are popping up all over the globe these days, bridging topics from the centre to the periphery and back again. What forms do these different events take? What is their scope, temporality and line of action? Who are they really for? And who pays for them? The following discussion explores three approaches from three architecture institutions in three very different European countries: Albania, Denmark and Serbia.

Saimir Kristo (SK), Tirana Architecture Week (TAW)

Over the last 25 years Tirana has undergone a series of radical changes not only in its political and social character, but also in terms of its urban and aesthetic character. The capital of a post-communist state that existed in isolation for over 45 years, Tirana since the early 2000s has become known as the city of colours, thanks to the

Léa-Catherine Szacka

Léa-Catherine Szacka is an historian, writer and assistant professor at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO). She studied architecture at the Université de Montréal and IUAV before completing a PhD in architectural history and theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Her research focuses on the history of architecture exhibitions and of postmodernism and she is the author of *Exhibiting the Postmodern: 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale* (Marsilio, 2016).

Whereas the Belgrade International Architecture Week (BINA) has existed since 2006, Copenhagen and Tirana launched their Architecture Festivals far more recently - in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Explain briefly the background to each of your events and how they came into being.

Tirana Architecture Week

Saimir Kristo is an architect, urban designer and lecturer at POLIS University. He was the curator of Tirana Architecture Week 2014 - [En]Visioning Future Cities.

Tirana Architecture Week's aim is to promote international knowledge exchange amongst professionals and enhance public interest in architecture, art and design, as disciplines deeply concerned with the contemporary city development.

Neverending Community Table, TAW © Eranda Janku

painting of the façades of old communist buildings in order create a more vivid atmosphere. The city may have undergone a rapid but also informal urban transformation process, but beyond this period of transition it is also necessary to look past plain aesthetics towards tangible, strengthened strategies for urban development. This means it has become crucial to create a reference point for architecture in Albania.



In order to respond to this new condition, The Tirana Architecture Week (TAW), an initiative of POLIS University, was launched in 2012 with the theme of *(Re)appropriation of the City*. From the start, our approach was to not just to address theory, but to also to implement practical, applied examples. It is a philosophy that stems from our work with co-PLAN, an NGO founded in 1995 that studies the development of habitat.

Josephine Michau (JM), Copenhagen Architecture Festival (CAFx) Copenhagen Architecture Festival was created with the aim of communicating architecture to a wider audience through film, talks and debates. Coming from a background in documentary film distribution, I found out that I shared a broad, amateurish interest in architecture with a lot of people. It was whilst distributing *Copenhagen Dreams*, directed by Max Kestner in 2010, and *The Human Scale*, directed by Andreas Møl Dalsgaard in 2012, that I truly realised how I could engage a wide audience through these films, from politicians, architects, city planners to anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and artists. This made me want to expand further by concentrating it into a festival focusing on film and architecture. Together the architect Peter Møller Rasmussen, the more theoretical Mads Farsø and myself

Copenhagen Architecture Festival

Josephine Michau is director of Copenhagen Architecture Festival (CAFx), which she founded in 2014 together with Peter Møller Rasmussen and Mads Farsø to explore how architecture characterises our lives and the world around us and how, in turn, our lives shape architecture. In 2016 they launched two further local festivals in Denmark: Aarhus Architecture Festival (AAFX) and Aalborg Architecture Festival (ALAFX).



formed what the festival is today: still with a film focus but also communicating through other media, such as seminars, conferences, exhibitions, performances, walks and workshops.

Still from *Concrete Love* screened at Copenhagen Architecture Festival
© Maurizious Staerkle-Drux

Belgrade International Week of Architecture

Danica Jovović Prodanović is programme director of Belgrade International Week of Architecture (BINA). In 2006, she was one of six architects and enthusiasts who established BINA as an independent project, under the patronage of the Association of Belgrade Architects (ABA) and the Belgrade Cultural Center as a festival that encourages and promotes inter-cultural dialogue, trans-national cooperation and mobility in the field of architecture.

Danica Jovović Prodanović (DJP), Belgrade International Architecture Week (BINA) The BINA festival started in 2006 as an initiative of six architects, colleagues and friends. We felt then, as we still feel today, that architecture, together with all of its accompanying processes, is conspicuously absent from the cultural and everyday life of the city of Belgrade. We were also concerned by the lack of interactive, participatory programmes that engage an audience of citizens. At the time, the majority of existing programmes were designed exclusively for a professional public (e.g. *Salon of Architecture* – an annual exhibition of realised buildings, awarded competition entries and retrospective or thematic exhibitions). We thought that there was a need for opening this kind of activity up towards a general audience, to present, discuss, promote and to criticise architecture.



Museum Night,
Faculty of Fine Arts © BINA

So after many conversations, we decided to try and change things. We were all working in different contexts

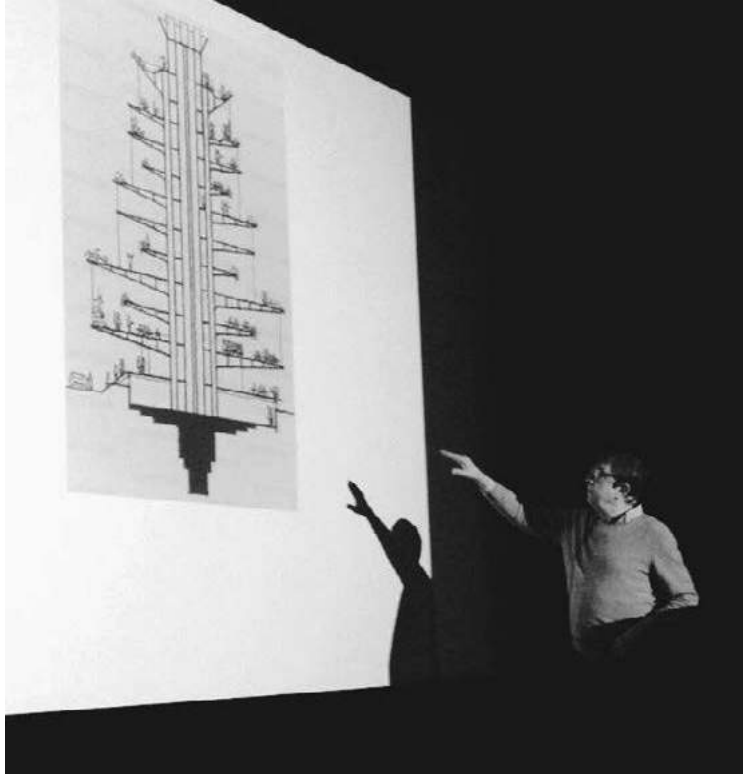
(academic, design practice, cultural institutions) and as a result brought a range of different experiences and professional contacts. We also had a good starting position: institutional support and – crucially – an initial venue for our programme. BINA gained momentum, and has grown ever since. Although we still use the word “week” in the title, the festival lasts almost a month now. Outside of festival time, a number of programmes take place throughout the year in the form of lectures, exhibitions, and BINA on tour.

SK (TAW) TAW was created as an open platform for Albanians, that went beyond simple interaction with architecture and urban planning . It is in direct correlation with Tirana Design Week (TDW), which runs on alternate years with

TAW, making them sibling biennials. That means that the university is always organising similar activities during the academic year, without a specific theme but within the framework of its fields of studies. Organising a greater number of activities under a specific theme increases the impact we can have upon the general public and that is what is very important for us, creating a direct dialogue with the city of Tirana and its citizens.

JM (CAFx) An exhibition is just one of many formats we use to communicate, no matter how radical or non-radical the statement might be. Rather than using the festival as a tool for a specific political or aesthetic statement, we use it to show many positions in architecture.

Does the time interval of your events (annual, biennial, triennial...) deny the potential for making a radical, absolute statement? What is the result of the difference in temporality between a permanent/temporary exhibition and a festival?



Unrealized Utzon lecture by
Carsten Thau © CAFx



Sound & Space concert
by Peter Albrechtsen
and Troels Abrahamsen
© CAFx

DJP (BINA) When we started BINA we wanted to spread the word about architecture and related cultural and social processes, to underline their importance and to make them more visible. We also wanted to educate and raise questions, to involve citizens and to try to influence decision makers. We see BINA as an open platform for discussions, experiments, meetings and hopefully as a starting point, as a nucleus for some more profound projects.

SK (TAW) *[Re]appropriation of the city* aimed to address the way Albanians were dealing with urban space. A lecture series provided the theoretical framework to understand the topic of reappropriation at two levels: public space and private space. Firstly, the reappropriation of public space in terms of the drastic need to engage local communities and to transform and convert leftover spaces into playgrounds and green spaces for neighbourhoods – in some cases we had the chance to physically transform some of these areas permanently. In this regard TAW dealt not only with the urban, but also with the reappropriation of industrial and military “leftovers”, such as bunkers and other structures with the potential for tourism. Also very effective was the temporary transformation of such spaces through the organising of public events and performances by artists and students into places for creativity and critical thinking. On the other hand, private and individual spaces are very important since the city skyline has been evolving not only according to official urban development plans.

Saimir Kristo, can you explain the title *[Re]appropriation of the City* and how that materialised in terms of exhibiting? What were the other themes you tackled in the past?

Informal extensions of balconies, for example, have also shaped the skyline, as a way of gaining more private space inside communist residential buildings, which met only minimum requirements when they were first built.

In Venice, the Architecture Biennale was born out of the Art Biennale in the late 1970s with Vittorio Gregotti. Later, there was no consensus on the disciplinary position of architecture at the Biennale. Since the 2010 edition, curated by Kazuyo Sejima, architecture has made attempts to define itself through the appropriation of terminologies, methods and concepts belonging to other fields of knowledge. How can the intersection between architecture and other disciplines (artistic, but also social and political) be productive or counterproductive in the context of an architecture festival?

SK (TAW) Interdisciplinarity is an important aspect of TAW since the context itself requires a systemic approach. The layered interaction of different disciplines is also part of the philosophy of POLIS University, in order to promote the collaboration between architects, urban planners, designers, engineers, and environmental specialists. We tried to enhance this character in the second edition of TAW with the theme of *[En]Visioning Future Cities*, inviting architects and visionaries such as Peter

Eisenman, Emilio Tunon, Jesse Reiser and Hitoshi Abe, but also John Allen, who is director of research at Biosphere 2, an earth systems science research facility. In this case we are able to study, understand and intervene across a full spectrum of topics and interests, but always refer back to the theme of the festival, which serves as the general framework of understanding.

Opposite page: Thematic walk at a former WWII Concentration Camp © BINA



DJP (BINA) We feel that today the intersection of disciplines is a must. Disciplinary boundaries between architecture, art, social and other sciences have become porous as knowledge and interests flow. We believe in presenting architecture as a layered phenomenon that affects everyday life in a more complex way than just aesthetically or structurally.

Back in 2007, the art historian and curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev talked about the “Biennale Syndrome” to qualify “The rise of biennales (and other periodic international exhibitions)” that had, she says, “decentralised art and created multiple art systems”. The rise of biennials and triennials started in the art field about a decade ago, but with architecture different issues are at play. What does this “-ennials” syndrome mean for the discipline of architecture? Does it only contribute to the creation of a parallel (and often closed) system of production in and around our discipline or can it have a wider, more positive implications for architecture?

decision-making processes of their cities.

BINA (DJP) Biennials, triennials and other festival-like events do create a parallel world that *on site* is probably not that close to architecture. But still, we feel that these exhibitions and festivals are important because they raise awareness about certain topics by opening and provoking discussion.

SK (TAW) Architectural festivals should provide a dual view, combining theoretical frameworks with examples of practical approaches. In this sense, they are a great opportunity not only for well-established architects and practices to communicate their work, but also for young architects to attract attention and, for the even younger generation of students, to find inspiration and positive models. From our experience, a festival is also a tool to raise awareness for those citizens that want to become more involved in the

This is valuable for both general and professional audiences. These festivals and exhibitions are also opportunities for experiment. In a rigid, precise and very expensive discipline such as architecture, experimentation is a pure luxury – and therefore it's very valuable. From my point of view, a good example of a well prepared and conceptualised programme or exhibition was the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled *Reporting from the Front* and curated by Alejandro Aravena in 2016. This was all about architecture, invention and the future – but took a modest approach. It showed the impact that architecture, as a discipline, has or could have, upon daily life.

SK (TAW) As an academic institution educating young professionals in Albania, we believe that there is a lot more to be done for both the country and the region in order to provide a platform for action in architecture. But it is important to note what TAW has achieved in that it is already considered a significant open platform for debate at both the national and regional level. However, it is important not only to express the methodology of one university but also to bridge communication between other academic institutions, organisations and architectural associations to stimulate constructive discussion.

JM (CAFx) We too are proud to have established and consolidated ourselves as an important voice in the field of architecture at a national level.

**What is your festival's best achievement?
Are there any accomplishments that can
be measured on a scale longer than a
single year?**





Previous page:
Bed and Bunker workshop
© TAW

DJP (BINA) Apart from regular annual programmes, BINA participates in a number of international projects and exchanges. BINA also initiated Do.co.mo.mo Serbia – an organisation working for the protection and preservation of modernist architecture – and has established long-lasting cooperations with numerous cultural and academic institutions and organisations in its home country and abroad as a solid base for further collaboration. But I would say that a very special achievement, both professionally and in terms of social responsibility, is the BINA pavilions (BINA KABINA) that were built in the garden of the Faculty of Visual Arts as an outcome of a student workshop. The first temporary pavilion was built in 2012 in one of the main city squares. Now this BINA KABINA is used as a venue for student workshops, exhibitions, meetings – a motor for dialogue in and around architecture. ■