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Unrealized Crematoria: Clash of Ideas and Administrative Dysfunctionality in Belgrade 1904–1964

Introduction

From the end of the 19th century, Belgrade experienced a process of infrastructural transformation: a water supply system was constructed, electricity appeared in the city, and roads, transport, and housing were improved. This process was fraught with problems and not always successful,¹ but the municipality paid attention to these issues. Unlike the previously mentioned projects, urban deathcare infrastructure received little attention. Although attempts to expand the cemeteries and improve the work of the funeral homes were made, they proved insufficient given the conditions of the constant growth of the city's population, and the cemeteries continued to overflow and grow. Many cities faced this problem at the turn of the century, and one of the ways to solve it was the development and use of cremation. However, in the case of Belgrade, the municipal authorities remained inert to this innovation, and the private cremation society known as Oganj, founded in 1904, became the leading actor in the introduction of cremation. It aimed to promote cremation and deal with the practical issues of building a crematorium. Despite the group's advocacy, the crematorium in Belgrade would not be built until 1964.

During this period, the main Belgrade cemetery (*Novo groblje*) expanded, and a new cemetery (*Centralno groblje*) was founded, but the modernisation of deathcare infrastructure through the introduction of a crematorium proved difficult due to a clash of ideas.

On the one hand, within the cremationist community itself there was an ambivalent image of cremation (as a modern, but at the same time an ancient method of burial, as well as both a devotional and a non-religious method), which made it difficult to find an architectural expression for the crematorium. In Belgrade, this led to repeated deferrals of the project and the lengthening of the terms for its approval.

On the other hand, the clash of views between supporters and opponents of cremation (the latter group finding its base within church circles and the

¹ Cf. Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt: urbanizacija i evropeizacija Beograda 1890-1914* (Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2009).

administration) proved to be a more complicated issue. The positions of the opponents of cremation made it difficult to obtain approval for the construction of the crematorium. However, in addition to this there were problems in the very organization of the administrative system, and cooperation issues within it, which hampered the decision-making process.

Jens Engels suggests that studying infrastructures, their functioning and formation, can make power and power relations visible². However, a focus on infrastructure projects is also suitable for analyzing administrative performance and the system of governance as a whole. For such research, a negative case methodology could be helpful. In her article “The Power of Negative Thinking”, Rebecca Jean Emigh proposes that “the use of negative cases makes it easier to distinguish between important and irrelevant events, processes, structures, and patterns”.³ In the history of infrastructure, realized projects demonstrate the joint contributions of various participants, because implementation is only possible when all actors have accomplished their tasks. In contrast, unrealized projects could help to reveal which factors “break” the chain of decision making and obstruct the implementation process.

The study of unsuccessful attempts to build a crematorium in Belgrade, a feat not accomplished until 1964, demonstrates administrative dysfunction. On the one hand, the failure of that project represents the effect of administrative pathology, as the possibility that individuals’ personal views (including religious ones) influenced the decision-making process within the relevant institutions. On the other hand, there were inefficiency problems in the functioning of those institutions and in the coordination between them.

However, this case can be considered an example of continuity in the presence of these managerial problems. After the Second World War, the Belgrade municipality continued to show the same inertia and inefficiency in response to incentives from the Oganj society.

Thus, the first part of this article examines the attempts to build a crematorium with regard to administrative aspects, analyzing the aforementioned clash of ideas and the dysfunctionality of institutions. The second part of the article analyzes the architectural side of the crematorium, taking into consideration the presence of different ideas within the cremationist society itself.

Oganj, its Supporters and Opponents and Their Ideas

The cremation movement, which had been developing in Europe during the second half of the 19th century, arrived in Belgrade in the early 20th century when the cremation society Oganj was founded. It aimed to promote cremation

² Cf. Jens Ivo Engels, “Machtfragen. Aktuelle Entwicklungen und Perspektiven der Infrastrukturgeschichte”, *Neue Politische Literatur* 55:1 (2010), 51-70.

³ Cf. Rebecca Jean Emigh, “The Power of Negative Thinking: The Use of Negative Case Methodology in the Development of Sociological Theory”, *Theory and Society* 26:5 (1997), 658.

and deal with the practical issues of building a crematorium. During the inter-war period, an entire network of similar organizations was active in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia - with those groups acting either as branches of the Belgrade chapter of Oganj (for example, in Novi Sad), or as independent organizations such as Ogenj in Maribor and Plamen in Zagreb.

The active members of such organizations were mainly representatives of intellectual circles: doctors, lawyers, officials (including retired ones), engineers, professors, industrialists, and others. The central figures of both the Belgrade Oganj and the Zagreb Plamen were the medics Vojislav Kujundžić and Dušan Jurinac.⁴ Cremation societies in Yugoslavia held their meetings and yearly assemblies, sent delegations to international congresses, actively published propaganda articles in newspapers, participated in public debates, and published their own newspapers.⁵

Among the main topics of the publications were relevant foreign experiences, cremation throughout history (especially among the Slavic peoples), and debates with opponents of cremation. In promotional articles written by cremation supporters, an emphasis was placed upon such aspects of cremation as hygiene, economy, and modernity.⁶ The key themes of cremationists were the idea of securing the future, in the sense of concern for the environment and for the fate of future generations, on the one hand,⁷ and on the other the idea of cremation as a form of progress, not only in the technical and medical sense, but also on a cultural level. In this way, building a crematorium became a matter of cultural prestige, as well as a communal issue. The service would be part of the municipal infrastructure: the crematorium “completes [the infrastructure’s] bouquet, at the bottom of many of its cultural institutions”.⁸

At the same time, publications attempted to approach the question of cremation outside the bounds of religious and political contexts. However, the discussion of cremation in a religious aspect was inevitable, due to the attitude of the church circles on the matter. Among the opponents of cremation were representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox churches who actively spoke in the press, condemning the cremation movement as anti-Christian.⁹ Representatives of Judaism and Islam ignored the controversy in the public sphere (this was seen by the cremationists as tolerance for the movement), while Protestants and Old Catholics occasionally spoke in support of the movement.¹⁰

⁴ Kujundžić was also active in several organizations (The Sokol movement, Masons, Rotarians, Esperantists), was involved in the work of “Yugoslav educational film”, and was a supporter of the use of “Yugoslav Latin” (a combination of Latin and Cyrillic scripts).

⁵ *Oganj* in Belgrade from 1934, *Plamen* in Zagreb from 1936.

⁶ Sava M. Djordjević, “Spaljivanje mrtvaca i podizanje krematorijuma u Beogradu”, *Beogradske Opštinske Novine*, 1.8.1929, 11-19.

⁷ Nik. Vesin, “Pitanje spalivanja mrtvaca”, *Vreme*, 9.10.1926, 4.

⁸ Sava M. Djordjević, “Opština i krematorija”, *Oganj* 3 (1934), 3f.

⁹ Although in the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the official representatives of the Synod preferred not to engage in public controversy, but the professors of the Faculty of Theology spoke in the press (“Razlozi pravoslavne crkve protiv krematorije”, *Politika*, 7.2.1930, 1).

¹⁰ “Članovi društva Oganj kod Patrijarha”, *Politika*, 12.5.1930, 8.

Due to opposition in religious circles, the cremationists found themselves in a difficult situation - it was necessary to refute the arguments of the opponents of cremation, but at the same time not to oppose the church, which in this period played an important role in society. In this situation, after a wave of discussions in the press in 1930, Belgrade Oganj included a religious element in its identity - the celebration of an Orthodox slava in the veneration of Ognjena Maria.¹¹

The controversy surrounding cremation gave rise to issues regarding the implementation of the practical goal of the cremationists - the construction of a crematorium. The anti-religious arguments made it challenging to get support for the idea of building a crematorium both from the wider public and from the people in decision-making institutions.

Unsuccessful attempts to build a crematorium in interwar Yugoslavia, as well as after the war, can be explained by administrative pathologies in the structure of the state itself. Firstly, it was possible for the personal views (including religious ones) of individuals to influence the decision-making processes within institutions, such as, for example, municipalities or ministries. Secondly, there were the problems of organizational performance and the inefficiency of the work of the institutions. Thirdly, there were the issues regarding the distribution of competencies and coordination between them.

Administrative History of the Construction of the Crematorium in Belgrade

The cremationists used public communications to achieve their goals (both ideological messaging in the form of promoting cremation, and practical argumentation such as making a case for the construction of a crematorium). Namely, they tried to influence the public through publication activity, paying particular attention to press treatment, believing that the press would help to turn their ideas “into a concrete and living reality”.¹² When necessary, Oganj used other methods of communication: for example, in 1937, after having received a complaint from the owner of a plot adjacent to the site allocated for a crematorium in Belgrade, Oganj organized a lecture and distributed leaflets in the area, and as a result, the neighbor withdrew the complaint.¹³

In order to influence the authorities, Oganj worked through personal communications (containing petitions and studies), and occasionally the content of these appeals would also be published in the press. When it came to individuals who did not share the views of the cremationists, communication was rarely successful (messages went unanswered). Nevertheless, in cases involving

¹¹ Sava M. Djordjević, “Naša Slava”, *Oganj* 1 (1934), 2f. In 1934, the Synod forbade the priests of the Orthodox Church from participating in the slava of Oganj.

¹² “Urednikova reč”, *Oganj* 1 (1934), 1.

¹³ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 2 (1938), 4f.

like-minded people, the cremationists not only sent relevant information but also tried to act through such individuals.¹⁴

The first attempt in this direction was addressed to the head of the Department of Hygiene at the Ministry of Public Health, Andrija Štampar, whom Oganj asked for approval for cremation in 1922. However, such approval would require changes in legislation. In the 1920s, during a period of active lawmaking geared towards bringing the legal order to uniformity in Yugoslavia, the cremators tried to get cremation included in sanitation law.¹⁵

The situation turned in favor of the cremationists when Čeda Mihajlović, a doctor and a supporter of cremation, became Minister of Public Health on July 27th, 1928. His mandate lasted until January 6th, 1929, but on December 27th, 1928, he managed to sign decree no. 57775, which stipulated that “following Article 22 of the Law on the Organization of Sanitation, corpses may be burned in this country. Therefore, the municipality may begin work on establishing a crematorium”.¹⁶

However, despite permission from the Ministry and the support of the Municipal Sanitation Department, a problem arose with deciding on a location for the crematorium. The municipality took almost a year and a half to adopt the decision. In 1930, a site was allocated for the crematorium in the New Cemetery in Belgrade,¹⁷ and this decision was included in the regulatory plan of the cemetery. In addition to the issue of land for the crematorium, there was also the issue of funding. During this period, Oganj was trying to convince the municipality to invest in the construction of the crematorium (one of the key arguments was the cheaper cost of burying the so-called “administrative corpses”), and to use German reparations to purchase machinery as well.¹⁸

In 1930, Oganj tried to come to a mutual understanding with the church, initiating a dialogue with the Holy Synod and making visits to the Patriarch Varnava, but all attempts to reach an agreement proved unsuccessful.¹⁹

The cremationists used the problem of lack of space in cemeteries in their promotional materials, creating apocalyptic pictures of how the city of the dead does not leave enough space for the city of the living. However, it was

¹⁴ This tactic was also used earlier, immediately after the formation of the Oganj society, when alderman Dragiša Lapčević supported the idea of building a crematorium. Then the idea was approved by the Minister of the Interior, Stojan Protić, but the process was stopped due to the criticism from the Orthodox Church. Cf. Aleksandra Pavičević, *Plamena tela: spaljivanje mrtvih u Srbiji - od paganskog rituala do moderne kremacije* (Beograd: Etnografski institut SANU, 2016), 110.

¹⁵ By using the presence of supporters of the movement in different political parties, and among deputies (cf. Vojislav Kujundžić, “Za spaljivanje mrtvih, jedan apel gostima”, *Vreme*, 5.10.1926, 4).

¹⁶ “Ministarsvo narodnog zdravlja odobrilo je podizanje krematorijuma”, *Vreme*, 25.1.1929, 4.

¹⁷ “Oganj će uskoro moći da spaljuje svoje umrle pristalice”, *Vreme*, 28.4.1930, 2. A similar idea was put forward in 1906, when Kujundžić proposed to build a crematorium in front of the St. Nikola Church in the New Cemetery. Cf. Pavičević, *Plamena tela*, 116.

¹⁸ “Pred podizanjem krematorijuma u Beogradu”, *Vreme*, 6.2.1930, 3.

¹⁹ “Uprava društva ‘Oganj’ moli Patrijarha”, *Vreme*, 29.12.1930, 4.

precisely this problem that became an obstacle to the construction of the crematorium - the site allocated for it was used for burials due to a lack of space. In 1931, the municipality planned to purchase a new site for the cemetery, where Oganj hoped to get a location for the crematorium.²⁰

When the municipality acquired the Pionir estate to expand the New Cemetery, Oganj sent a delegation to the chairman of the municipality, Milan Nešić, to arrange for a plot of land. By this time, Oganj already had a plan, a preliminary invoice, and the financial means to construct a crematorium.²¹ The municipality board decided to allocate a plot of land for the crematorium, and the Ministry of the Interior approved this decision.²²

However, there was soon a change of mayor in Belgrade. The post was taken by Milutin Petrović, a man with different ideas from those of his predecessor and who was characterized as a “son of the church”.²³ As a result, Oganj could not get the site allocated by the municipality board; at first Petrović delayed offering an answer, then finally he refused to follow through with the decision of the municipality.²⁴

Thus, the tactics chosen by Oganj, using personal communication and acting through like-minded people within the power structures of the state, failed, due to the lack of continuity and the frequent changes in power characteristic of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Petrović's personal position led him to refuse Oganj's request. The group was unable either to establish personal communication with him (during a visit in 1934),²⁵ or to bring the crematorium project outside of the sphere of competence of the Belgrade municipality. Oganj first tried to buy another site in the city,²⁶ then tried to buy one outside of Belgrade but still close to it - in Zemun or Kneževac, for example. However, the expansion of the municipal area of the city of Belgrade made these efforts meaningless.²⁷

Oganj continued to work in two directions: the search for a site outside of Belgrade (Pančevo and Stara Pazova were considered among the options),²⁸ and the search for an institutional solution to Petrović's “arbitrariness”. Oganj believed that Petrović's position was contrary to the decisions of the municipality board and the Ministry of National Health, and so sent a complaint to the ministerial council. Petrović answered three months later to justify his decision, citing religious reasons. Kujundžić once again tried to portray cremation as a

²⁰ “Slava Društva ‘Oganj’”, *Vreme*, 31.7.1931, 7.

²¹ “Krematorijum u Beogradu biće podignut još ove godine”, *Politika*, 20.4.1932, 7.

²² “Sudbonosna skupština društva Oganj”, *Vreme*, 25.4.1932, 5.

²³ “Slava društva ‘Oganj’ bez sveštenika”, *Pravda*, 31.7.1934, 18.

²⁴ “Religija u Beogradskoj Opštini”, *Oganj* 5 (1934), 2.

²⁵ “U Beogradu se neće podići krematorijum”, *Pravda*, 27.4.1934, 7.

²⁶ This became possible thanks to the legate of Mihajlo Pavlović (about a million dinars). However, residents of the suburb “Kraljević Andrija” opposed it. “Društvo Oganj podići će ipak krematoriju u predgrađu Kraljevića Andreje”, *Vreme*, 23.1.1934, 7.

²⁷ “Oganj u beogradskoj opštini”, *Oganj* 1 (1934), 4f.

²⁸ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1935), 2.

communal and sanitary issue rather than a religious one.²⁹ In this case, the split was not just between the arguments for and against cremation, but also at the level of the very understanding and interpretation of cremation as a cultural phenomenon.

In January 1935, there was a change in the Council of the Municipality, with Vlada Ilić becoming mayor. Oganj pinned its hopes on the new council, as Nešić was again a member of the municipal board. Oganj had another chance to acquire a plot of land in the New Cemetery. However, site regulation became a problem. The Ministry of Construction did not want to approve the regulation proposed by the municipality, and the situation only got off the ground with a change of minister.³⁰ However, during the following year the responsibility for considering the project would be transferred several times from the municipality to the Ministry of Construction and vice versa.³¹

The impossibility of regulating the necessary sections of the New Cemetery and the Northern Boulevard (*Severni Bulevar*) without developing a regulatory plan for the whole of Belgrade was a problem.³² Oganj tried to intervene and mediate between the Technical Department of the Municipality and the Ministry of Construction, seeking the recognition of potentially separate regulations for the desired area without having to wait for a regulation plan for the entire city.³³

However, the construction issue now came to the fore in the municipality. It was analyzed by the Department of Cemeteries, the Council for Municipal Goods, and the sanitary section. In the course of transitions from department to department, the proposition “got lost” (according to Oganj, this happened due to a priest who was a member of the department for social care).³⁴ The situation was further complicated because the April 2nd, 1932 document regarding the assigned land disappeared.³⁵

The next step was the approval of plans in 1939, but this time the decision was delayed by the mayor Vlada Ilić. Oganj had to hope that a change of administration and the arrival of the new mayor Vojin Đuričić would alter things. Plus, with another change in the site regulation the project would again have to await the Ministry’s approval for both the regulations and the plans.³⁶ The Ministry of Construction demanded that the details of the project be changed and corrected,³⁷ but Kujundžić claimed that the plans had not been approved during Miha Krek’s mandate as Minister of Construction due to his clerical sentiments (he accused Minister Anton

²⁹ V. K., “Naša Krematorija”, *Oganj* 10 (1935), 70-71.

³⁰ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1936), 2.

³¹ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1937), 2.

³² “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1938), 2.

³³ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1939), 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Istorijски arhiv Beograda (IAB)-OGB-TD-XV-8-1940.

³⁶ “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 4-5 (1940), 2.

³⁷ IAB-OGB-TD-XV-8-1940.

Korošec of obstructing the construction of the crematorium due to clericalism as well).³⁸

In the end, by the second half of 1940, the project was approved, but the Ministry of the Interior entered into the approval process and proposed to turn to the opinions of representatives of various religious communities.³⁹ The religious branch of the Ministry of Justice informed the Ministry of Construction that the Orthodox, Catholics, and Jews were opposed to the crematorium, but pointed out that the decision should not take into account religious arguments since “this is not about imposing obligatory cremation, but a free decision of the individual”.⁴⁰ In 1942, the decision to allocate a plot of land at the New Cemetery was annulled, and a crematorium was proposed at the Central Cemetery.⁴¹

After the Second World War, Oganj and Kujundžić resumed their activities. In January of 1945, Kujundžić published the brochure “Forty Years of Propaganda for a Crematorium in Belgrade”, in which he indicated the conditions primed for the construction of the crematorium: not only the plans for the building and machinery, but also the funding provided by Pavlović and the approval of previous ministries. He did so without taking into account the new political reality.⁴²

Finding a place for the crematorium became a problem. The tactic of acting through like-minded people continued as well – this time through the patron Branko Maksimović (the son of a member of Oganj), but the result was again stagnation. In 1946, Kujundžić again started publishing the newspaper *Oganj*, but died before witnessing the realization of his project.⁴³ The death of its most active member affected the efficiency of Oganj. It began to become active again in the mid-1950s, but despite the fact that religious opposition was no longer a problem, the crematorium in Belgrade was still not built until 1964.⁴⁴

The Architectural Aspects of the Interwar Project of the Belgrade Crematorium

The search for an architectural form for the construction of crematoria was a difficult task for architects. The relative novelty of the phenomenon and lack of built crematoriums, which could be used as examples, complicated work of architects. Moreover, the presence of contradictory tendencies in the ideology

³⁸ Vojislav Kujundžić, *Četerdeset godina propagande za krematoriju u Beogradu* (Beograd: Planeta, 1945), 5-13.

³⁹ IAB-OGB-TD-XV-8-1940.

⁴⁰ IAB-OGB-TD-XV-8-1940.

⁴¹ Pavićević, *Plamena tela*, 124.

⁴² Kujundžić, *Četerdeset godina*, 16.

⁴³ He was buried, but after 22 years he was exhumed and cremated. Cf. Pavićević, *Plamena tela*, 145.

⁴⁴ Pavićević, *Plamena tela*, 146.

of the cremationist movement made it difficult to find an architectural expression for a crematorium.

The discourse of the cremationists included two opposite tendencies: an orientation towards the past and an orientation towards the future. Attitudes concerning the past were expressed in terms of the practice of cremation amongst older cultures, especially the ancient Greeks. Conversely, the view towards the future was epitomized by a focus on the fate of our descendants and the environmental, hygienic, and progressive aspects of cremation. The attitude towards the sacred was also ambivalent - on the one hand, cremation could be considered exclusively outside of a religious context, but on the other hand, practices associated with cremation could be perceived as a replacement for religious practices.

With these factors in mind, an architect searching for a form for a crematorium faced two dilemmas: firstly, whether the appearance of the crematorium should aim for similarity to or dissimilarity from sacred buildings; secondly, whether to design an antique or modernist style of building.

Also, the lack of traditions and standard solutions for buildings of this type opened up the scope of possibilities for experimentation and creative freedom for the architect. On the other hand, the desire to rely on previous examples gave rise to uncertainty.

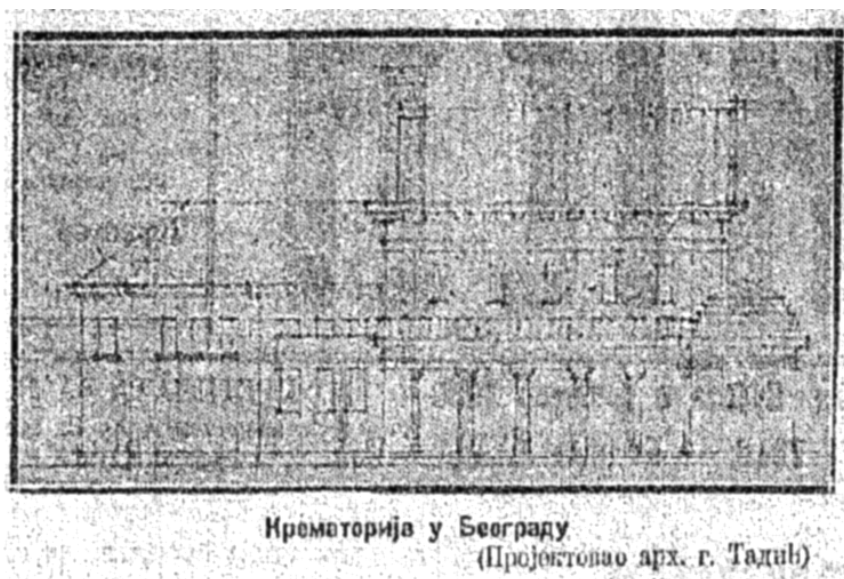
Even before the creation of a project for Belgrade, the subject of the crematorium appears in the field of “paper architecture” in the form of fantasy projects for exhibitions (for example, by Momir Korunović or Dragiša Brašovan) or as themes of student works.

The first project for Belgrade was created by the architect Dragomir Tadić in 1930 when Oganj received a land plot in the New Cemetery.⁴⁵ Tadić, an architect at the Ministry of Construction, took the ancient Greek temple design with a pediment and a colonnade as the prototype for his project, but complemented it with ziggurat-like elements. Thus, this project was dominated by references to ancient and even pagan aspects of cremation.



Picture 1: Belgrade crematorium project, 1930 (Source: *Vreme*, 6.2.1930)

⁴⁵ “Pred podizanjem krematorijuma u Beogradu“, *Vreme*, 6.2.1930, 3; “Oko beogradske krematorije“, *Politika*, 2.8.1930, 2.



Picture 2: Crematorium in Belgrade (Source: *Politika*, 2.8.1930)

However, at the beginning of 1931, when a delegation of cremationists visited Milan Nešić to discuss the issue of obtaining the land plot on the Pionir estate, another crematorium project was mentioned, which had been devised at the end of 1930 by the architect Dragomir Popović.⁴⁶ Judging by a journalist's commentary, the project of this crematorium "glorifies death, and leaves a ceremonial impression", while at the same time being devoid of references to religion (as a universal building for all confessions).⁴⁷ Later, an image of the crematorium that had served as a model for the Belgrade project appeared in the press⁴⁸ – it was the crematorium in the city of Most in Czechoslovakia, built in 1923-1924 according to the design of the Viennese architect August Kirstein.

Kujundžić himself, in an article published in *Oganj*, pointed out the project's need to move away from the image of a Christian church,⁴⁹ and how the public nature of the architecture of the crematorium should contrasted to residential architecture.⁵⁰

Due to the issues involved in obtaining a land plot and gaining approval from the municipal authorities, the question of moving forward with this or any similar project was postponed until 1939. A draft of the project appeared in the newspapers in a modernist style, but it referred to the appearance of a "monumental temple, similar approximately to the Monument to the Unknown Soldier".⁵¹

⁴⁶ "Ostvaranje beogradske krematorije nije više daleko", *Politika*, 19.1.1931, 7.

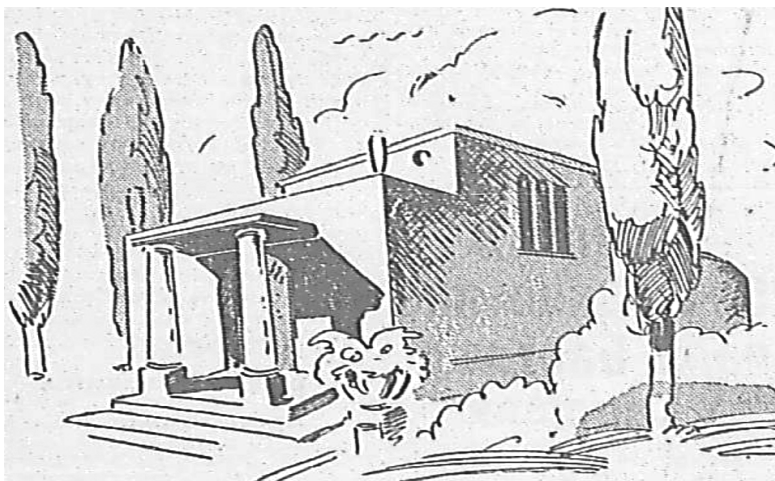
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Skupština društva Oganj", *Vreme*, 27.4.1931, 7.

⁴⁹ V. K., "Naša Krematorija", *Oganj* 10 (1935), 70f.

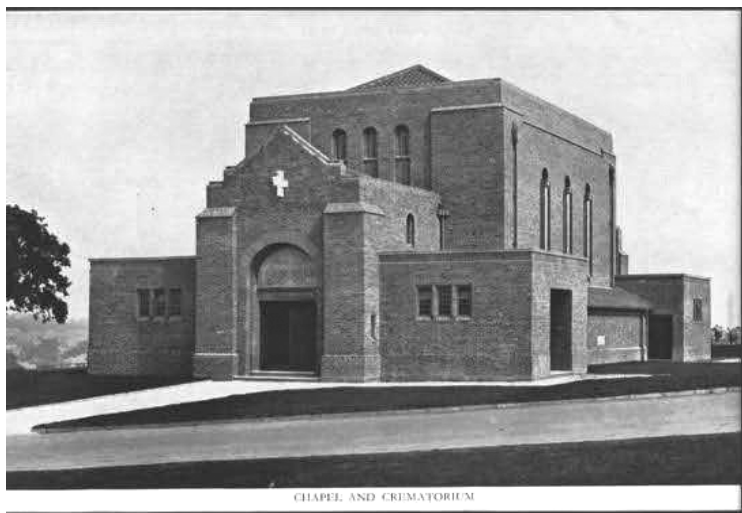
⁵⁰ V. K., "Šta je to krematorija", *Oganj* 3 (1940), 17.

⁵¹ "Beograd najzad dobija krematorium", *Vreme*, 15.7.1939, 5.



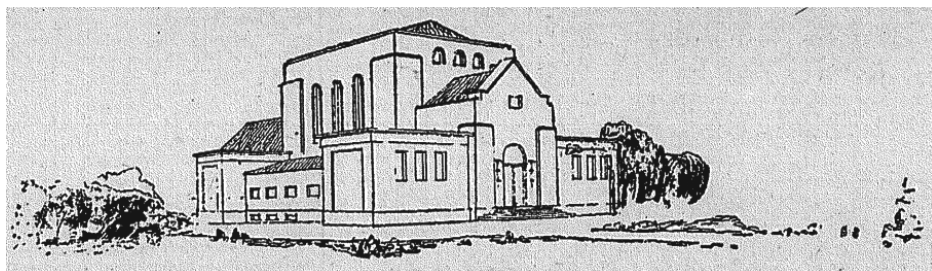
Picture 3: Belgrade crematorium project, 1939 (Source: *Vreme*, 15.7.1939)

Yet Oganj rejected this project for unknown reasons, and by 1940 a new plan was being developed. Developing a new plan for the Belgrade crematorium included considerations of “English, German, Swedish, and Czech” crematoria. The society’s council decided to make the structure similar to that of a crematorium in Birmingham, England, and again entrust the development of the plans to Dragomir Popović, but the final decision on the project was made by the philanthropist Mihajlo Pavlović.⁵² The model for Belgrade’s project would be the crematorium and chapel at Lodge Hill Cemetery, designed by Holland W. Hobbiss in 1936–37.



Picture 4: The crematorium at Lodge Hill Cemetery, Birmingham Lodge Hill Crematorium booklet (City of Birmingham Parks & Cemeteries Department publication)

⁵² “Izveštaj o radu Glavne uprave društva Oganj”, *Oganj* 2 (1940), 2.



Picture 5: Belgrade crematorium project, 1940 (Source: *Politika*, 10.3.1940)

At the same time, the project documentation itself, stored in the Historical Archives of Belgrade, was signed not by Dragomir Popović but by the private bureau of the architect Dušan Babić.⁵³ This is most likely because Popović was an architect in the municipal service, and he could not sign projects created for third-party customers. On the other hand, if the municipality knew who the real designer was (Popović's name was actively published in connection with this project), then the problems that arose with the approval of the project in the municipality itself may not have been due to bureaucratic procedures, or even a hidden struggle against the construction of a crematorium, but rather due to personal relationships which affected the decision-making processes in the fields of architecture and construction.

Conclusion

Sixty years passed between the founding of the Oganj Society and the construction of the crematorium in Belgrade. During this period, construction attempts remained unsuccessful. On the one hand, there was a problem that stemmed from the clash of different points of view. Proponents of cremation, due to the ambivalent connotations carried by the very idea of its practice, found it challenging to choose an appropriate architectural form for the crematorium itself. Opponents tried not only to agitate against the project at the level of public discussion, but also to influence decision-making processes within the administration. On the other hand, the very inefficiency within the administrative bodies, the Belgrade municipality and the government ministries, hampered the process of coordinating the construction of the crematorium. At the same time, cooperation between bodies was also unsuccessful. After the Second World War, the Oganj Society continued to face the same issues that resulted from the inertia of the Municipality of Belgrade, despite the weakening position of religious opponents of cremation. Eventually, after years of efforts and debates, the first crematorium in Belgrade was opened in an adapted building at the New Cemetery in 1964, and a new crematorium at the Lešće cemetery was built by 1981.

⁵³ IAB-OGB-TD-XV-8-1940.

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