



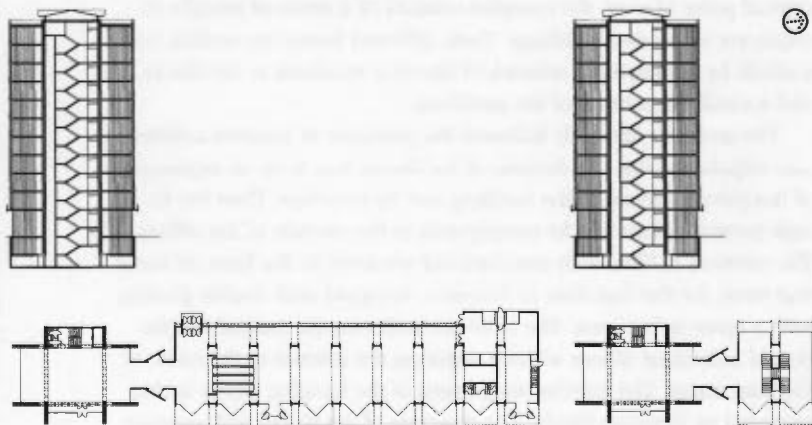
Astra Office and Shopping Centre IRN14297

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|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>Location</i> | Ljubljana |
| <i>Address</i> | Dunajska Cesta 47–53 |
| <i>Planning and completion</i> | 1964–1970 |
| <i>Architect</i> | Savin Sever, engineer Davorin Žitnik |
| <i>Investor</i> | Astra and Commerce trade |
| <i>Contractor</i> | SGP Grosuplje |
| <i>Building type</i> | Complex of office blocks and a department store |

Other buildings by the same architect Workshops of the Institute for Deaf Children (Zavod za gluho mladino, ZGM), Ljubljana 1962–1963, terraced houses in Bežigrad, Ljubljana 1963–1970, Mladinska Knjiga printing house, Ljubljana 1963–1966, Triplex–A garage car park, Ljubljana 1966, AMZS offices and technical centre (Motoring Association of Slovenia), Ljubljana 1967–1968, Merkur department store, Ljubljana 1968–1970, AMZS building for technical inspections, Ljubljana 1980–1981, portal structure of the Karavanke tunnel, Hrušica 1983–1991

Architect Savin Sever designed three office and industrial building complexes along the present Dunajska Cesta in Bežigrad (Ljubljana) in the 1960s. They are characterized by their distinctive appearance, although in different versions of the design. They include the Mladinska Knjiga printing house (1963–1966) and the Merkur department store (1968–1970), the AMZS centre (Motoring Association of Slovenia) (1967–1968), and the workshops of the Institute for Deaf Children (1962–1963), next to the Astra shopping centre (1964–1970).

The Astra shopping and office centre is a continuation of an ambitious urban planner's vision of a business centre along the main city thoroughfare, beyond the railway line, that was initiated with the construction of the Commercial Exhibition Centre (Gospodarsko Razstavišče) in the 1950s and concluded by the World Trade Center complex in the 1990s. The Astra centre consisted of two lower department stores and two office blocks. Both the office blocks for the companies Astra and Commerce were constructed in the first phase (1967), while the department store and a shopping pavilion were added in the second phase (1970). The series of buildings comprises



▲ Floor plan (scale: 0.9mm = 1m)

- ◀ "The architect faithfully followed the principle of modern architecture stipulating that the division of the facade was to be an expression of the internal organization of the building and its structure. Thus the facade network of the blocks corresponds to the module of the offices. [...] The windows on the blocks are technical innovations, functioning as mechanical air-conditioning."

the entire side of the building block. Initially the motif of a high block was exposed in the corner of a vital intersection, and it was concluded on the opposite side by the lower shopping pavilion. The department store shops are less exposed and they conform to the average scale of the street, while the two identical blocks are covered with a glass network integument, thus determining a new scale typical of a large city. The architect developed his idea primarily on the effect of contrasts between the high vertical lines and horizontal building masses that were created by means of serial elements set in a row. From a con-



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ceptual point of view, the complex consists of a series of visually divided, yet connected buildings. Their different forms are unified into a whole by employing a network of identical windows in the blocks and a similar repetition of the pavilions.

The architect faithfully followed the principle of modern architecture stipulating that the division of the facade was to be an expression of the internal layout of the building and its structure. Thus the facade network of the blocks corresponds to the module of the offices. The network is filled with standardized windows in the form of boxes that were, for the first time in Slovenia, designed with double glazing with a space in between. The solution facilitates the natural ventilation of individual offices without exposing the interior to the noise of the busy street. The exterior integument of the hanging facade is also protected by Venetian blinds. The structure of the blocks with supporting corner walls positioned cross-wise creates the area of four corner offices, while the rest of the surface has no supports. The idea of an open floor plan is likewise supported by the cores of staircases and auxiliary rooms removed to the rear of the building. On the ground floor, the area between the corner walls is not filled up and the glass walls of the shop windows are removed from the street line, thus creating the

impression of a hovering cube above the open ground floor.

The design of the two department stores can be compared with the contemporary layout of the Mladinska Knjiga printing house in Dunajska Cesta 123. It is a modular layout of the so-called additive architecture, created with ferroconcrete frames with interpolated cubic bodies. Closed cubes display the supporting structure and are not joined. They are divided by double frames and horizontal slots creating a network of illuminating sections including the entire volume of the building. The lighting slots removed from the level of the facade



Department store ... "It is a modular layout of the so-called additive architecture, created with ferroconcrete frames with interpolated cubic bodies."

accentuate the plastic impression and the rhythm of the facade consisting of a series of standardized elements. The effect is enhanced by the base of the ground floor that is removed from the street line and consists of a diagonal series of glazed shop windows without parapets. It creates the impression of the mass of the building supported by a fragile emptiness.

The windows on the blocks are technical innovations, functioning as mechanical air-conditioning, and the fillings of the department store facades are made of artificial stone with prominent granulation. The stone panels are not joined, so that a typical modular network is created by their slots. The solutions of the lowered ceilings and some details of the interior design are not so fortunate. All the windows in the office storeys of the former Astra block were replaced and appropriately modernized in 2000.

Apart from the renovation of the interior, several studies were drafted for the transformation of the exterior of the shopping pavilion that was to acquire a commercially more attractive exterior. In order to avoid the fate of the AMZS centre (Motoring Association of Slovenia) by the same architect that was utterly degraded by a new office building, the Astra centre should be protected as an architectural whole.

JANEZ KOŽELJ