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# WOOD FOR THE FUTURE: INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS INDUSTRIES

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**Title of the paper: Beyond Functionality: Wooden Interior Elements as Carriers of Cultural Identity and Sustainability in the Educational Environment**

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# Beyond Functionality

## UNIVERSITIES AS *GUARDIANS* OF HERITAGE

- **Meaning**

Universities aren't just buildings; they're living testimonies to history and culture.

- **Function**

They connect the past to the present by preserving the heritage of previous generations.

- **Context**

The interiors of the buildings hold a deeper meaning beyond their functionality.

# Beyond Functionality

## PROBLEM CONTEXT

- **Spatial Analysis.** Focus on the Aula as a historically and architecturally significant space.
- **The Interior as a Reflection of Early 20th-Century Furniture Production.** The interior serves as an example of how furniture production evolved in the early 20th century, influenced by electrification and new technologies. The integration of electricity enabled new manufacturing processes and the development of innovative furniture designs that were both functional and aesthetically modern.
- **Bearers of Identity.** The wooden elements within the Aula act as bearers of historical narratives and cultural traditions. These intricate designs and materials contribute to the formation of a strong cultural identity, embodying the genius loci—the protective spirit of a place.
- **Comparative Analysis.** This study can be further enriched by a comparative analysis, drawing examples from similar historically significant spaces in Zagreb and Iași. Such a comparison highlights regional variations and shared influences in architectural and interior design during the same period.
- **Sustainability.** The analysis also considers the aspect of sustainability, examining how the preservation of historic spaces like the Aula contributes to both cultural and environmental sustainability. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining historical integrity while adapting to modern needs.

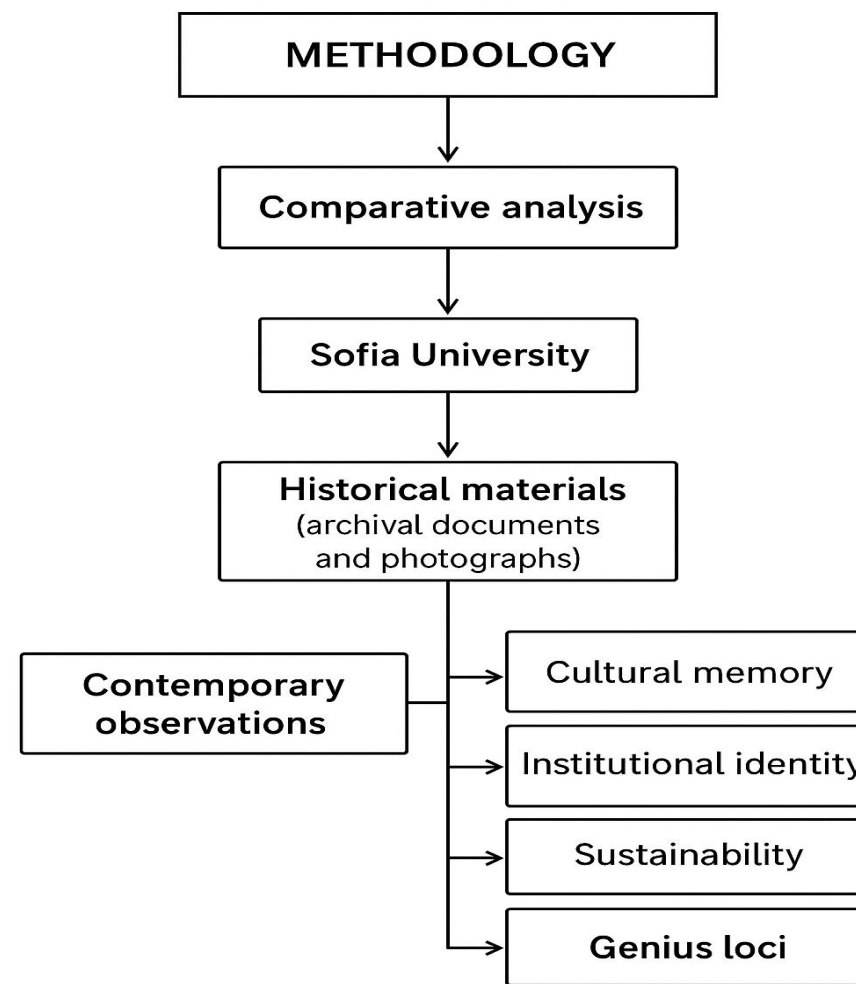
The study was carried under the project “The Invisible University” and social transformations,  
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# Beyond Functionality

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Genius loci** - Comprehending the essence of a place, requires an examination of its physical attributes and spirit of place, alongside human endeavours, intentions, and shifting values that influence the perception of its authenticity and relevance across time - Jive'n, G. & Larkham, P., 2003.
- **Concept of the University (universum)**
- The University exemplifies the intersection of historical preservation, **sustainability**, and education, illustrating that tangible structures can cultivate intangible values that, in turn, uphold institutional and cultural identity across time - Whitton, P., 2018.



# Beyond Functionality

## HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND OF SOFIA UNIVERSITY

- Establishment and Historical Significance of Sofia University
- Funding and Construction of the Rectorate
- Architecture and Development of the Building

# Beyond Functionality

## THE INTERIOR OF THE Sofia`s University RECTORATE: CULTURAL MEMORY AND SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES

**Synthesis of Architectural Styles** - elements of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classicism. This combination was intentionally designed to evoke a sense of institutional dignity and to articulate a clear national identity for the newly established Bulgarian state.

**Symbolic and Decorative Significance.** The wooden elements throughout the building are not merely decorative. They are integrated with other luxurious materials such as marble, mosaics, and stained-glass windows, all of which carry profound symbolic meaning.

**A Narrative of History.** The stained-glass windows depict key figures from Bulgarian history, including Saints Cyril and Methodius, Prince Boris I, and Tsar Simeon the Great. These images tell a story of historical and cultural continuity, linking the university's mission to the nation's past.

**Restoration of Heritage** - after bombings of 1943-1944

**The University as a "Temple of Knowledge".** Features like the triumphal arch, the columns as a tree of life, and the ascending staircase leading to the Aula symbolize a spiritual and intellectual journey, suggesting that education is a path to higher enlightenment.

**Universality and Wholeness.** The Aula's richly ornamented spherical ceiling represents the cosmic egg, a powerful metaphor for universal wholeness and intellectual completeness. This design element underscores the university's role not only as a national institution but also as a hub of universal knowledge and thought.

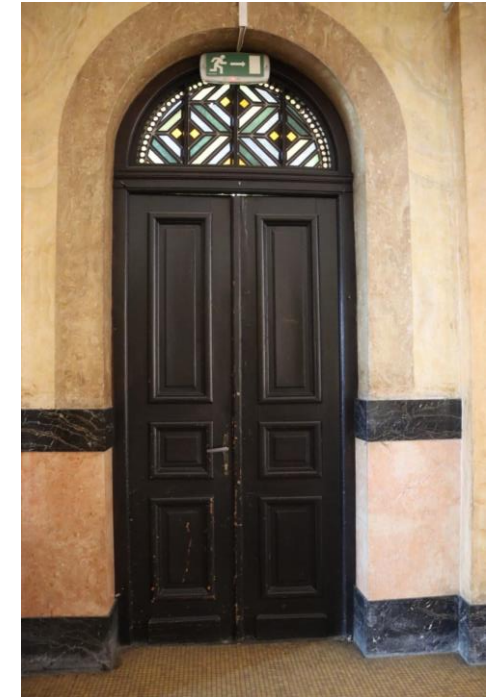
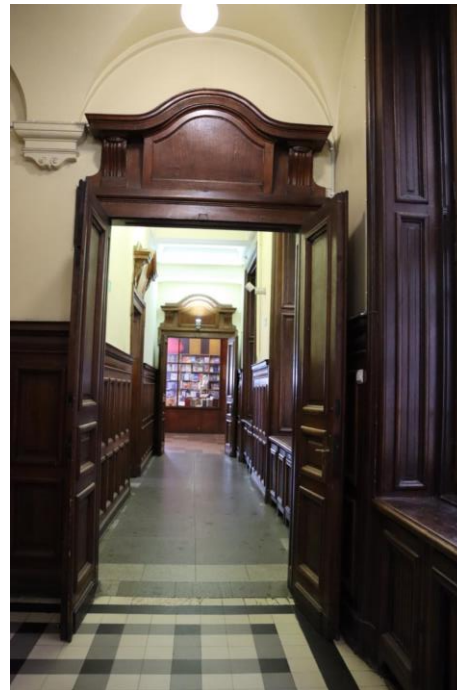
**Guardian of National Memory.** Ultimately, the entire interior expresses the university's role as a guardian of national memory. By integrating historical figures, symbolic motifs, and architectural grandeur, the building itself helps to shape public values and civic identity.

“The Invisible University” and social transformations



# Beyond Functionality

## THE INTERIOR OF THE Sofia`s University RECTORATE: CULTURAL MEMORY AND SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES







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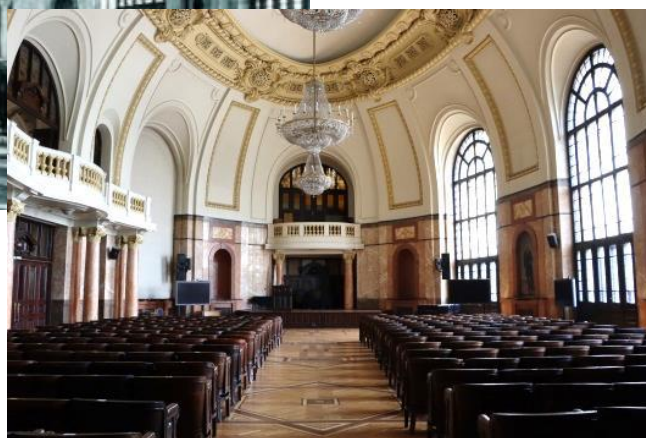


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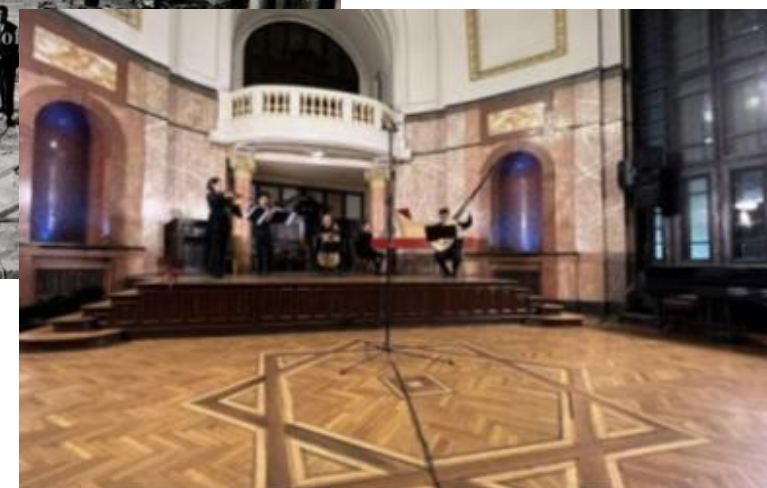
Aula, 1934 г.



Aula, 2025



*A moment from the construction of the Rectorate of Sofia University - craftsmen laying the parquet floor in the Aula, early 1930s.*



Aula, 2025



# Beyond Functionality

## THE ROLE OF WOODEN INTERIOR ELEMENTS IN EXPRESSING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

**Significance** . The wooden elements in the Aula and representative halls of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" are crucial for the cultural memory, the identity of the institution, and its sustainability.

**Materials**. Solid oak and walnut were used, a conscious choice in line with prestigious European academic architecture from the early 19th century.

**Symbolism**. Wood symbolizes stability, dignity, national aspirations, and the continuity of the early Bulgarian state.

### Craftsmen and Origin of Materials

**Origin**. The main material is solid oak from the state forestry "Ticha," chosen for its durability and symbolic value.

### Furniture Design and Styles

Early Period: In the 1930s, heavy and representative solid oak furniture was popular in Sofia.

After 1945: There was a trend towards mass production of furniture for lecture halls and offices, influenced by postwar events, lack of funds, and modernism.

Influences: The interior combines traditional craftsmanship with modernist influences, including elements of German medieval design, Viennese Renaissance, and the Art Deco style.

**The university's interior is multi-layered, combining functionality, durability, and visual splendor, thus serving as a "guardian" of cultural identity and academic symbolism.**

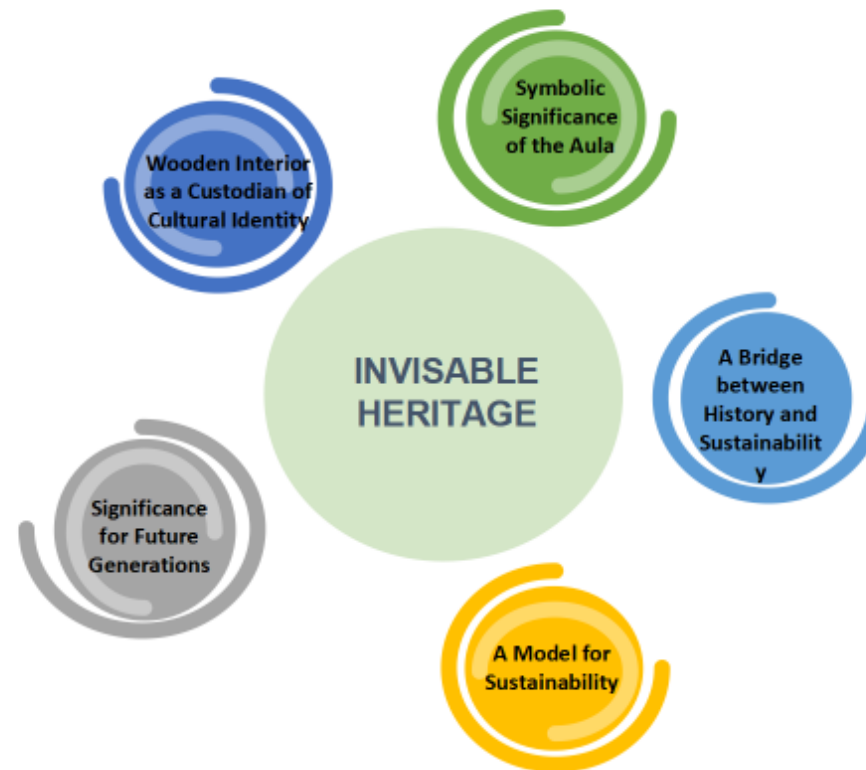


# Beyond Functionality

## COMPARATIVE ARCHITECTURAL APPROACHES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

- **Symbols of Identity.** The universities in Sofia, Zagreb, and Iași were conceived as national symbols of cultural identity and prestige. They were intended to express the values of the community and education.
- **Community Centers.** The buildings were constructed to serve not only as educational institutions but also as "guardians of memory," preserving the history and culture of the nation.
- **Differences in Approach**
  - Long and Complex Construction Process: The construction and development of the university buildings were a painstaking process that took decades, and sometimes even centuries.
  - Different Construction Methods: Iași University: Built with luxurious oak interiors, which demonstrate strength and cultural sophistication. Zagreb University: Steel structures were used, which was a progressive method combining new technologies with traditional materials. Example of Sofia University: The planning of Sofia University took into account the practices of other institutions, which helped in making important decisions regarding the functions and layout of the space.
  - **Unique Path to Modernization.** The differences in construction and design show each nation's unique approach to modernization and the formation of its own identity.

# Beyond Functionality: Wooden Interior Elements as Carriers of Cultural Identity and Sustainability in the Educational Environment





# Thank you for attention!

