MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Between solidarity and interdependence: Yugoslav infrastructure diplomacy in Zambia and Nigeria during the Cold War

verfasst von | submitted by

Nikola Marković

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 589
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Internationale Entwicklung
Betreut von | Supervisor:	Dr. Goran Music MA

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Zusammenarbeit Jugoslawiens mit Sambia und Nigeria im Rahmen der Bewegung der Blockfreien Staaten während des Kalten Krieges und richtet den Fokus auf die Infrastrukturdiplomatie als zentrales Instrument jugoslawischer Außenpolitik. Analysiert wird, wie Jugoslawien mittels des Unternehmens Energoprojekt die politischen Prinzipien der Blockfreiheit in konkrete wirtschaftliche, technische und institutionelle Kooperation übersetzte. Im Mittelpunkt stehen zwei Joint Ventures – ZECCO in Sambia und NECCO in Nigeria, anhand derer untersucht wird, wie groß angelegte Bauprojekte zu Trägern langfristiger Partnerschaften und zwischenstaatlicher Zusammenarbeit wurden und ob diese Arrangements Formen gegenseitiger, jedoch ungleicher Interdependenz zwischen Jugoslawien und seinen afrikanischen Partnern entwickelten.

Die Forschung basiert auf einem qualitativen, vergleichenden Fallstudienansatz und stützt sich hauptsächlich auf Unternehmenspublikationen und offizielle Monografien von Energoprojekt sowie auf Archivmaterialien und finanzielle Daten. Durch den Vergleich der technischen, finanziellen und politischen Dimensionen beider Partnerschaften analysiert die Arbeit, wie Verantwortlichkeiten, Risiken und Vorteile zwischen Jugoslawien und seinen afrikanischen Partnern verteilt wurden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Zusammenarbeit nicht auf ein einfaches Modell der Abhängigkeit begrenzt werden kann. Während Sambia und Nigeria eine größere finanzielle Anstrengung trugen und auf jugoslawische technische Expertise angewiesen waren, war auch Jugoslawien von diesen Projekten abhängig, um Fremdwährungen zu sichern, die heimische Industrie zu erhalten und seine internationale Beschäftigung innerhalb der Bewegung der Blockfreien zu wahren. Das Ergebnis war eine Beziehung gegenseitiger, jedoch asymmetrischer Interdependenz.

Indem diese Partnerschaften in die breiteren wirtschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen des späten Kalten Krieges eingeordnet werden, bietet die Arbeit eine differenzierte Bewertung blockfreier Zusammenarbeit sowohl als politisches Projekt als auch als wirtschaftliche Strategie.

Schlüsselwörter: *Jugoslawien, Bewegung der Blockfreien Staaten, Infrastrukturdiplomatie, Asymmetrische Interdependenz, Politische Solidarität; Kalter Krieg, Süd-Süd Zusammenarbeit*

Abstract

This thesis examines Yugoslavia's cooperation with Zambia and Nigeria within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War, focusing on the practice of infrastructure diplomacy as a central instrument of foreign policy. It explores how Yugoslavia, through Energoprojekt, translated the political principles of non-alignment into concrete economic, technical, and institutional engagement. The study concentrates on two joint ventures ZECCO in Zambia and NECCO in Nigeria in order to analyze how large-scale construction projects became vehicles of long-term partnership and state-to-state cooperation, and whether these arrangements generated forms of mutual yet uneven interdependence between Yugoslavia and its African partners.

The research is based on a qualitative comparative case study approach and relies primarily on Energoprojekt's corporate publications and official monographs, as well as archival materials and financial data. Through comparing the technical, financial, and political dimensions of the two partnerships, the thesis analyzes how responsibilities, risks, and benefits were distributed between Yugoslavia and its African partners.

The findings show that the cooperation cannot be reduced to a simple model of dependency. While Zambia and Nigeria carried a heavier financial burden and relied on Yugoslav technical expertise, Yugoslavia also depended on these projects to secure foreign currency, sustain domestic industries, and maintain its international standing within the Non-Aligned Movement. The result was a relationship of mutual but asymmetrical interdependence.

By situating these partnerships within the broader economic constraints of the late Cold War, the thesis offers a grounded assessment of non-aligned cooperation as both a political project and an economic strategy.

Keywords: *Yugoslavia, Non-Aligned Movement, Infrastructure Diplomacy, Asymmetric Interdependence, Political Solidarity, Cold War, South–South Cooperation*

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Goran Musić MA, for his guidance, valuable feedback, and support throughout the writing of this thesis. His comments and encouragement greatly contributed to the final form of this work.

I am also grateful to the professors from whom I had the opportunity to learn during this master's program. This period has been an important academic and personal journey for me, and I am deeply grateful for the knowledge, experiences, and new perspectives I gained along the way.

Above all, I dedicate this thesis to my wife and my daughter, whose love, patience, and support carried me through this period.

Table of Content

Table of Figures

List Of Abbreviations

EP	Energoprojekt
ITF	International Trade Fair
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NECCO	Nigerian Engineering and Construction Company
UNICO	United Consulting Company
WB	World Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
UN	United Nations
ZAMTES	The Fund for International Technical Cooperation (Zavod za međunarodnu tehničku saradnju)
ZECCO	Zambia Engineering and Construction Company

Introduction

During the Cold War, Yugoslavia had a distinctive position within the global political and economic order. Following the 1948 split with the Soviet Union, it sought to construct a foreign policy that would preserve its sovereignty while avoiding alignment with either superpower bloc. The establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade in 1961 provided Yugoslavia with an institutional framework through which it could articulate an alternative vision of international cooperation based on sovereignty, anti-colonialism, and peaceful coexistence. Yugoslavia pursued to position itself as a political and economic partner to newly independent countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For many of these states, political decolonization did not automatically translate into economic autonomy. However, Yugoslavia presented itself as an alternative partner offering technical expertise, industrial capacity, and political solidarity without formally aligning with either the Western or Eastern bloc. Infrastructure became one of the most tangible instruments of Yugoslav foreign policy. Through large-scale construction projects, technical cooperation, and joint ventures, Yugoslavia translated political solidarity into material and institutional engagement. Energoprojekt operated at the intersection of diplomacy and economic strategy. Their projects across Africa were not merely commercial contracts, they functioned as vehicles of long-term partnership, symbols of political alignment, and sources of foreign currency essential to Yugoslavia's semi-open socialist economy. While recent scholarship has examined Yugoslavia's architectural diplomacy, its role within the Non-Aligned Movement, and the broader history of socialist development cooperation, less attention has been devoted to the concrete institutional and financial mechanisms through which such cooperation produced structured forms of interdependence. Although previous studies have examined Yugoslavia's development cooperation, architectural diplomacy, likewise political role in NAM, the organizational functioning of joint ventures has not been systematically analyzed through the lens of asymmetric interdependence.

This thesis addresses this gap by examining two joint ventures[1] established by Energoprojekt in Africa: ZECCO with UNICO in Zambia and NECCO in Nigeria. Both cases emerged during the height of non-aligned cooperation and operated within distinct economic environments — Zambia's copper-dependent economy and Nigeria's oil-driven expansion followed by fiscal

[1] joint ventures are companies co-founded by foreign and local partners with shared ownership and management.

crisis. By comparing these cases, the study investigates how infrastructure diplomacy operated in practice and how responsibilities, risks, and benefits were distributed between Yugoslavia and its African partners. They were responsible for the construction of major national projects, including symbolic political and cultural landmarks such as Mulungushi Hall in Zambia and the International Trade Fair (ITF) Complex in Lagos. These projects officially framed as partnerships grounded in solidarity and mutual development, and also raised questions regarding financial arrangements, technological dependence, risk distribution, and the long-term sustainability of such cooperation. The central research question guiding this study is:

How did Yugoslavia, through Energoprojekt, practice infrastructure diplomacy with Zambia and Nigeria within the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War?

And more specifically:

To what extent did these partnerships generate mutual dependence in technical, financial, and political terms?

This is further elaborated through the following sub-questions:

How was technical authority distributed (expertise, management, training)?

How were economic arrangements structured (ownership, contracts, procurement/market reliance)? and

How was financial exposure allocated (funding/credit, risk, vulnerability to shocks)?

This master thesis argues that Yugoslav infrastructure diplomacy did not reproduce classical center–periphery dependency patterns. Instead, it generated structured forms of asymmetric interdependence rooted in Yugoslavia's semi-peripheral position within the global political economy. African states depended on Yugoslav technical expertise, organizational capacity, and project implementation, while Yugoslavia depended on foreign contracts for hard currency earnings, industrial sustainability, and geopolitical relevance within the Non-Aligned Movement. The resulting relationships were mutually necessary but uneven in vulnerability and exposure.

The period under examination spans during the Cold War specifically from the First to the Ninth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement between 1961 and 1989, both symbolically held in Belgrade. Although Energoprojekt operated across multiple continents, the focus on Zambia and Nigeria allows for a structured comparison between two distinct economic contexts within the broader framework of non-aligned cooperation. By situating these joint ventures within the broader economic constraints of the late Cold War — including debt crises, commodity volatility, and shifting global financial regimes — this study offers a grounded assessment of non-aligned cooperation as both a political project and an economic strategy. Infrastructure, however, functioned simultaneously as a symbol of sovereignty and as a material site where global inequalities were negotiated rather than exceeded. The time-based scope of this thesis spans from 1961 to 1989, a period that marks both the institutional rise and the symbolic closure of Yugoslavia's engagement within the Non-Aligned Movement. The year 1961 corresponds to the first NAM summit in Belgrade, which formalized Yugoslavia's leadership role and enabled the expansion of infrastructural and technical cooperation with newly independent states. The year 1989, marked by the final NAM summit held in Belgrade, signals the exhaustion of this political framework. Although cooperation did not end immediately thereafter, Yugoslavia's capacity to sustain infrastructure diplomacy diminished significantly in the context of economic crisis and finally approaching the end of this country.

While the Non-aligned Movement was composed of countries spanning four continents (Africa, Asia, South America and Europe) and Energoprojekt worked in all these regions, my focus is mostly on the infrastructural projects it developed in several African countries and not the overall output of the enterprise. The main reason for this decision was that the politics of non-alignment played the most important role in framing the relationship between Yugoslavia and African countries and as Sekulić notes that this entanglement enabled Energoprojekt to develop organizational and institutional formats and approaches to design and construction that were later applied to other markets (Sekulić 2020: 25-26).

The thesis proceeds as follows: first, it outlines the methodological approach and theoretical framework, drawing on dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and the concept of asymmetric interdependence. It then examines the institutional mechanisms of Yugoslav infrastructural cooperation before turning to the two case studies. A comparative analysis follows, assessing patterns of convergence and divergence across the cases. The conclusion reflects on the broader implications for understanding South–South cooperation within the Cold War political economy.

Methodology and Research Approach

In this thesis I use a historically contextualized qualitative comparative case study based on documentary analysis. A qualitative comparative case study is particularly suitable for examining institutional processes and political-economic dynamics that cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators alone (Creswell 2013; Yin 2018). Since this thesis relies heavily on documentary material, documentary analysis also provides an appropriate basis for interpreting institutional and corporate records as qualitative evidence (Bowen 2009). The case study design enables an in-depth analysis of joint ventures within their historical and macroeconomic contexts. The thesis focuses on two cases: ZECCO (Zambia) and NECCO (Nigeria). These cases were selected purposively because they represent institutionalized joint ventures between Yugoslav and African partners within the framework of the NAM. At the same time, they operated under different macroeconomic conditions — Zambia's copper-dependent economy and Nigeria's oil-driven expansion followed by fiscal crisis — which allows for structured comparison. The case study method is appropriate because it allows for a detailed examination of how political ideals and economic interests converged in concrete institutional forms and material projects (Creswell 2013).

The primary empirical material consists of Energoprojekt's corporate publications, including company magazines and official reports. These documents provide information on project organization, financial arrangements, ownership structures, and managerial distribution. The sources are analyzed both as documentary evidence and as institutional representations of infrastructure diplomacy. To ensure contextualization and triangulation the study also draws on secondary academic literature and macroeconomic data from international organizations. These provide insight into how the company framed its role abroad, the strategies it used to secure projects, and how cooperation with African countries was presented to domestic audiences. The analysis proceeds along three dimensions of interdependence:

1. Technical interdependence – distribution of expertise, managerial roles, and knowledge transfer.
2. Economic interdependence – ownership structures, contractual arrangements, and market dependence.
3. Financial exposure – funding mechanisms, credit structures, and vulnerability to macroeconomic shocks

The objective is analytical insight into how these dimensions interacted within and across cases, not statistical generalization.

Research Design

I implemented a qualitative research design grounded in a comparative case study approach. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the objective is to explore complex social and institutional processes within their real-life contexts and to interpret meanings embedded in political and organizational practices (Creswell 2013). More specifically, case study research enables the in-depth exploration of one or more bounded systems through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (Yin 2018). The subject of this research is Yugoslav–African cooperation through joint venture enterprises, represents a historically embedded and institutionally layered phenomenon. The interaction between political ideology (NAM), economic strategy (export of construction services), and macroeconomic constraints such as debt or fiscal exposure cannot be meaningfully reduced to quantitative indicators alone. Therefore, a qualitative design allows for interpretive analysis of institutional arrangements, technical structures, and financial mechanisms. Following Creswell's (2013) typology of qualitative approaches, this study employs a case study strategy.

Comparative Case Study Structure

Case study research enables the in-depth exploration of one or more bounded systems through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information. The inclusion of two cases allows the research to move beyond descriptive narrative and toward structured comparison. In this sense, the study follows the logic of focused comparison, in which the same analytical dimensions are applied across cases in order to identify both similarities and differences in institutional dynamics (Creswell 2013; George and Bennett 2005).

I structured the thesis as a two-case comparative study, I examined ZECCO (Zambia) and NECCO (Nigeria) Both cases represent institutionalized joint ventures between Yugoslav enterprise Energoprojekt and African state actors during the height of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The case study method may involve multiple cases when comparison strengthens analytical insight (Creswell 2013). The inclusion of two cases allows the research to move beyond descriptive narrative and toward structured comparison. While both joint ventures operated under similar ideological and institutional frameworks, they were embedded in different macroeconomic contexts - Zambia's copper-based economy and Nigeria's oil-driven expansion followed by debt crisis. This variation provides analytical leverage for assessing asymmetry.

Case Selection

The cases were selected through purposeful sampling, a strategy central to qualitative inquiry and especially useful when the objective is to identify information-rich cases that illuminate the research question (Creswell 2013; Patton 2002). Zambia and Nigeria were chosen because they allow for a meaningful comparison within a shared framework of Yugoslav–African cooperation, while also representing significantly different economic and political contexts. Both cases involve formalized joint ventures with Yugoslav enterprises operating under the broader umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement. At the same time, the domestic conditions in which these partnerships unfolded differed substantially. This makes it possible to examine how similar forms of Yugoslav engagement produced different patterns of interdependence under distinct structural conditions.

Zambia in the 1970s and 1980s was heavily dependent on copper exports and faced structural economic constraints typical of smaller, resource-dependent postcolonial states. Nigeria, by contrast, experienced a dramatic oil boom in the 1970s, followed by severe fiscal instability and debt crises in the 1980s. While Nigeria appeared economically stronger during the period of expansion, its vulnerability became evident in moments of global downturn and financial pressure. By examining these two cases together, the thesis seeks to understand whether the patterns observed in Yugoslav joint ventures were shaped primarily by the domestic economic capacity of the host state, or whether certain structural features of the cooperation itself produced recurring forms of asymmetry. ZECCO and NECCO represent proper joint ventures rather than one-off contracts, they were embedded within broader political cooperation under the Non-Aligned Movement, they differ in economic scale and fiscal vulnerability, enabling comparative analysis of asymmetry under varying structural conditions; The selection was therefore not random but theoretically informed. The comparison therefore allows for a more distinctive assessment of whether these arrangements reflected asymmetric interdependence. The selection of Zambia and Nigeria is motivated by contextual variation rather than hypothesis testing. Both cases involve institutionalized joint ventures implemented by the same Yugoslav enterprise, Energoprojekt, within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement, which ensures comparability at the organizational level. In both countries, the cooperation resulted in major, high-visibility flagship infrastructure projects — including Mulungushi Hall in Zambia and the ITF in Nigeria — making the cases particularly suitable for examining infrastructure diplomacy as a long-term institutional practice rather than as isolated contracts.

At the same time, the two countries differ in terms of political proximity to Yugoslavia and relative economic capacity. Zambia maintained particularly close diplomatic relations with

Yugoslavia, whereas Nigeria pursued a more autonomous foreign policy. Furthermore, Nigeria's oil revenues provided it with significantly greater financial resources compared to Zambia's more constrained copper-dependent economy.

Data Sources and Evidence

Consistent with qualitative case study research, this study relies on multiple sources of evidence and uses triangulation in order to strengthen contextual interpretation and analytical credibility (Creswell 2013; Yin 2018; Denzin 1978), they are:

1. Academic Literature

Scholarly works on Yugoslavia's international engagement, construction enterprises, and postcolonial development provide the theoretical and historical framework, which I explained in Literature Review part of my work.

2. Primary Sources (Institutional and Corporate Documentation)

The research draws extensively on Energoprojekt publications, internal magazines, project reports, and professional journals. These materials are approached not only as factual records, but also as institutionally produced texts that reflect self-representation and organizational discourse (Bowen 2009; Scott 1990). These materials are analyzed not only as factual documentation but also as institutional narratives that reflect self-representation and developmental discourse. The central primary source base of this thesis consists of Energoprojekt's corporate publications, most notably its company magazine published continuously from the early 1950s through the late 1980s. All these publications have been carefully examined throughout the period covered by the case study, enabling a detailed overview of how the company's overseas activities developed over time, how its institutional strategies evolved, and how specific projects were carried out.

The magazines contain reports on construction projects, contractual agreements, official visits, likewise interviews with engineers, managers, political representatives, and other actors directly involved in the projects under analysis. These interviews provide valuable contemporaneous perspectives on decision-making processes, technical challenges, financial arrangements, and the broader political meaning attributed to overseas cooperation.

In addition, this study draws on official company monographs published on major company´s anniversaries. These volumes offer quantitative data, project documentation, and retrospective institutional narratives that complement the periodical material and allow for comparison between contemporaneous and retrospective representations of the same projects.

While corporate publications inevitably reflect the official perspective of the enterprise, their systematic analysis enables insight into how Yugoslav infrastructure diplomacy was conceptualized, justified, and communicated. Read critically and in conjunction with secondary literature and financial data, they form the empirical pillar of this study.

3. Interview-Based Materials

The study incorporates interviews conducted by other researchers, particularly Dubravka Sekulić, as well as published testimonies in professional journals and related sources. These are treated as documented primary accounts embedded within secondary sources. They provide insight into managerial structures, operational challenges, and everyday practices within joint ventures.

4. Secondary Quantitative Financial Data

Financial figures regarding project costs and operational expenditures were not fully presented from corporate publications and archival materials. Furthermore, macroeconomic indicators—including debt levels and fiscal trends—were drawn from IMF and World Bank reports.

These data are not employed for econometric modeling. Rather, they serve as embedded quantitative evidence within a qualitatively driven case study. Numerical data are used here only to support contextual interpretation within the qualitative research design (Creswell 2013). In this study, financial data contextualize fiscal exposure and structural vulnerability without transforming the research into a mixed-method design.

5. Visual material

In addition to textual sources, this study makes limited use of visual material, including photographs of infrastructure projects, reproductions from contemporary newspapers, selected symbolic objects such as postage stamps and museum images relevant to the master thesis. These materials are used primarily to provide visual and historical context for the projects under study and to illustrate how Yugoslav–African cooperation was publicly represented. They do not function as independent evidence on their own and are not subjected to detailed visual analysis but serve as complementary material supporting the broader interpretation of the developmental, symbolic, and diplomatic dimensions of the cases.

Analytical Strategy

The analysis proceeds through structured comparison across both cases, applying the same analytical dimensions to each. This follows the logic of focused comparison in qualitative case study research, where theoretically informed categories guide cross-case interpretation (George and Bennett 2005). In examining the dynamics of Yugoslav infrastructure diplomacy, this study analyzes three key dimensions: technical interdependence, economic interdependence, and financial exposure. Technical interdependence is reflected in the distribution of expertise, managerial control, and processes of knowledge transfer between partners, highlighting how operational practices and decision-making were shaped by collaborative arrangements. Economic interdependence is explored through ownership structures, contractual agreements, and patterns of market dependence, revealing the ways in which joint ventures were constituted and sustained. Financial exposure encompasses considerations of project scale, funding mechanisms, and the broader macroeconomic debt environment, situating each project within its fiscal context. By systematically comparing these dimensions across cases and drawing from diverse sources including company records, interviews, and financial data, the research assesses whether cooperation reflected classical dependency or more asymmetric forms of interdependence, providing insight into both the practical and structural aspects of international joint ventures.

Documents, interviews, and financial data are interpreted through these lenses in order to evaluate whether the cooperation aligns more closely with classical dependency patterns or with forms of asymmetric interdependence. The purpose of comparison is analytical generalization rather than statistical inference (Creswell 2013).

Limitations

A limitation of the study lies in the predominance of Yugoslav documentary sources which also raises questions of perspective, representativeness, and institutional bias, particularly because official and corporate sources often privilege one side of the relationship and one mode of self-representation (Scott 1990). By using different types of sources, I attempted to provide a detailed analysis of how these joint ventures operated and what their broader economic implications were. Archival material from African countries ministries, parastatal companies, and professional associations remains largely inaccessible. Because the Yugoslav side was more accessible than sources from African states. To address these limitations, Yugoslav sources are combined with international reports, secondary literature, and official NAM documents (declarations). By combining them, this thesis does not aim to offer a definitive economic history of the Yugoslav enterprise Energoprojekt but rather to analyze how it exemplified the potentials and flaws of infrastructure diplomacy within the Non-Aligned Movement.

Ethical Consideration

This study does not involve direct interaction with human subjects or fieldwork-based research conducted by the author. Nevertheless, ethical considerations remain important in relation to the use of sources, interpretation, terminology, and representation. Since this thesis relies

heavily on corporate publications, institutional documents, and publicly available historical sources, these materials are not treated as neutral records. They are approached critically, with the understanding that they often reflect official viewpoints, self-representation, and retrospective narratives. The analysis therefore seeks to avoid both uncritical praise of Yugoslav-African cooperation and overly simplified interpretations that reduce these relations to a single explanatory model. Attention is also paid to the use of historical terminology. Terms such as Third World, Global South, developing countries and Western powers are used mainly in their historical sense, because they were widely used by political actors and in primary and secondary sources for this work. Their use here is therefore contextual rather than normative. As this research relies on sources in multiple languages, I carried out the translations, taking care to preserve the original meaning and context.
Overall, this thesis aims to present the actors and contexts under examination in a balanced way and to remain transparent about the available sources and their use.

Relevance to Development Studies

From the perspective of development studies, this thesis highlights how sovereignty and dependency were not mutually exclusive but closely intertwined. Political sovereignty had often materialized and symbolized through large infrastructural projects, built in concrete and steel, while economic and technical dependency remained embedded in the loans, maintenance costs, and supply chains required to sustain these projects over time. As Paul Stubbs suggests, Yugoslavia occupied a complex and often contradictory position within the Non-Aligned Movement, as practices of South–South cooperation in industrial, techno-managerial, and architectural spheres coexisted with continued engagement with Western markets (Stubbs 2023: 17). Similarly, Prashad argues that the broader "Third World project" sought to create alternative institutions and development strategies but on the other hand remained constrained by debt and the unequal structures of the international financial system (Prashad 2007: 71–72, 231–232). In this sense, Yugoslav–African cooperation illustrates a broader dilemma central to development studies: political solidarity and economic pragmatism can coexist, yet they generate tensions that become visible across the entire life cycle of development projects—from construction to long-term operation and upkeep. Understanding these tensions is crucial for analyzing development not as a one-time achievement, but as a historically situated and structurally conditioned process.

Here, sovereignty and dependency were not opposites but went hand in hand: sovereignty was staged and symbolized in buildings of concrete and steel, while dependency was embedded in the loans, maintenance, and supply chains needed to keep those buildings running. For debates on international development, the lesson is that political solidarity and economic pragmatism can work together, but they also create tensions that become visible over the entire life of a project from its construction to its long-term upkeep.

Literature Review

This thesis builds on a body of scholarship examining development and infrastructure in the Cold War, particularly within the framework of the NAM and Yugoslavia's position within it. Recent historiography has demonstrated that postcolonial states were not merely passive recipients of aid but active participants in shaping global development agendas. Corinna Unger shows that development was deeply entangled with Cold War rivalry, as both superpowers promoted their own models as universally applicable. As she argues,

> "The two superpowers argued that their own experiences with development provided a valuable resource for the so-called developing countries… The competition over models of social and economic organization neatly reflected the intense ideological component of the Cold War" (Unger, 2018: 84–85)

Against this framework, NAM positioned itself as an alternative platform, articulating a vision of South–South cooperation that sought to sidestep the binary logic of East–West rivalry.

Vijay Prashad's concept of the "Third World Project" provides a key theoretical departure point for this study. For Prashad, the Third World Project represented a collective political and economic endeavor by decolonized states to construct a more just international order, grounded in sovereignty, solidarity, and development outside imperial dependency (Prashad, 2007: xv – xvi). Non-Aligned Movement established in Belgrade in 1961, was one of the institutional embodiments of this vision. In the African cases, the ideals of the Third World Project encountered material limitations. Projects such as Mulungushi Hall and International Trade Fair symbolized sovereignty and solidarity, yet at the same time created long-term commitments financial, technical, and institutional - that tied both partners together. Rather than reproducing colonial patterns of domination, these commitments reflected a form of mutual, though asymmetrical, dependency. By adopting this framework, Yugoslavia's infrastructural engagements in Africa such as the joint ventures ZECCO and NECCO can be understood not only as technical contracts but also as materializations of a broader project of solidarity and political self-assertion.

At the same time, more critical perspectives shade this idealistic reading. Burton, Mark, and Marung emphasize that socialist states' involvement in the Global South was far from uniform. While many operated within Moscow's orbit, "Yugoslavia was the most enthusiastic about an alternative economic world order, yet even here, bilateralism served as a way to work with states of a similar size freer from the influence of the world's superpowers." (Burton et al. 2022: 95) This bilateral pragmatism created space for Yugoslav enterprises to pursue economic opportunities that simultaneously served domestic needs for hard currency and employment. In this way, Mark et al. argue that the concept of "socialist development" was often constrained by economic interdependencies that mirrored those found in Western-led projects. Moreover, as Eastern European states sought to adapt to a shifting global economic order, they increasingly integrated their development strategies into a "new international division of labor" in which economic interdependence became a key feature. This shift, as Burton et al. explained, complicated earlier commitments to socialist solidarity, as economic pragmatism often took precedence over ideological purity (Burton et al. 2022: 83-84).

This duality is at the center of Dubravka Sekulić's notion of "Yugoslav architectural diplomacy." Her research demonstrates that Energoprojekt and its joint ventures acted both as instruments of foreign policy and as enterprises embedded in Yugoslavia's own economic system. As she observes, a contract for Energoprojekt often meant a contract for a network of Yugoslav enterprises and a boost for the whole economy. While projects such as conference halls, housing complexes, and dams expressed the rhetoric of solidarity, they were equally mechanisms for sustaining Yugoslavia's domestic economy (Sekulić 2013: 145). This perspective underscores the contradictions between the ideals of South–South cooperation and the economic imperatives that underpinned Yugoslavia's presence abroad. Additionally, scholars such as Rubinstein (1970), Jakovina (2011a; 2011b; 2017) and Stubbs (2023) have further emphasized Yugoslavia's global economic positioning and the transformation of socialist economic strategies in the late Cold War period, while Johanna Bockman (2011) has shown how market practices were embedded within socialist systems long before the neoliberal turn. Existing scholarship has examined Yugoslavia's engagement in the Global South and provided detailed analyses of specific projects and institutional arrangements, the question of whether and to what extent such cooperation generated mutual dependence in technical, financial, and political terms has not been systematically addressed as a primary analytical focus. Furthermore, existing studies tend to emphasize diplomatic, architectural, or organizational dimensions, whereas the relational structure of dependence within these partnerships remains less explicitly conceptualized. This thesis therefore centers its analysis on the degree and shape of interdependence produced through joint venture enterprises.

Theoretical Framework

To further examine this context, my research draws on concepts from international political economy, beginning with dependency theory. Developed by Latin American scholars in the late 1960s and 1970s as a critique of modernization theory, dependency theory challenged the assumption that all nations follow a linear path toward development. As Santos argued, underdevelopment in the Global South was not a transitional "stage" but rather "a condition produced by the historical expansion of capitalism and its incorporation of peripheral economies into a global system dominated by the center" (Santos 1970: 231). Dependence was therefore structural and enduring, "a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which their own is subjected." (Santos 1970: 231)

This structural perspective provides the macro-level framework for situating Yugoslav–African cooperation within global economic hierarchies. At the same time, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto emphasized that dependency did not imply passivity or absolute domination. Peripheral states retained agency and could pursue forms of "dependent development," combining reliance on external capital and expertise with domestic political strategies (Cardoso and Faletto 1979: 21–23). Dependency, therefore, was not monolithic but historically variable, shaped by internal political coalitions and international alignments. This refinement is particularly relevant for the Yugoslav case, where cooperation cannot be reduced to unilateral domination but may reflect negotiated and context-dependent forms of structural asymmetry.

However, classical dependency formulations often relied on a binary center–periphery model. To better capture Yugoslavia's structural position, this study draws on Wallerstein's world-systems theory. According to Wallerstein, the semi-periphery occupies an intermediate structural location: it is simultaneously dependent on the core while exercising relative economic and institutional advantages over peripheral regions (Wallerstein, 2004: 28-29). This concept is crucial for understanding Yugoslav–African joint ventures. Yugoslavia did not possess hegemonic global financial power, yet it held technological expertise, organizational capacity, and access to international markets that exceeded those of many postcolonial African states. At the same time, Yugoslavia itself remained economically vulnerable within the broader world-system. The relationship thus reflects a semi-peripheral configuration of unequal capacities rather than classical imperial dependency. While dependency theory establishes the structural background and Wallerstein (2004) clarifies Yugoslavia's intermediate position, a more precise analytical tool is required to examine how these asymmetries operated within specific institutional arrangements. For this reason, this thesis draws on Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's concept of asymmetric interdependence which implies mutual reliance, however this reliance is rarely symmetrical. The concept of interdependence cannot be measured by a single quantitative indicator. Instead, it requires a multidimensional analytical framework that captures the degree of mutual dependence among states. Central to this framework is the distinction between sensitivity and vulnerability, which represent the key dimensions of interdependence in international relations (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10-14). In the context of Yugoslav–African joint ventures, both sides exhibited forms of dependence: African states required technical expertise, project management, and infrastructural execution, while Yugoslavia depended on overseas contracts for foreign currency earnings, industrial sustainability, and geopolitical positioning within the Non-Aligned Movement.

The distinction between sensitivity and vulnerability allows for a more differentiated assessment of these relationships. While both partners were affected by disruptions, their capacity to absorb costs, adjust policies, or seek alternatives was not necessarily equal. The analytical task, therefore, is to evaluate the degree to which these partnerships produced dependency in technical, financial, and political terms, and to analyze how authority, exposure, and adjustment costs were distributed between the partners. In this way, dependency theory situates the global structural context, Wallerstein's semi-periphery clarifies Yugoslavia's intermediate position, and asymmetric interdependence provides the conceptual instrument for analyzing concrete joint ventures.

Keohane and Nye's Power and Interdependence as an Analytical Framework

Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye's book "Power and Interdependence" was first published in 1977. This thesis refers to the fourth edition of Power and Interdependence from 2012, which retains the original framework while incorporating later reflections on globalization, complex interdependence, and the continued relevance of asymmetrical interdependence. Keohane and Nye developed a framework for understanding situations in which states and other actors are connected through economic, institutional, political, and transnational relations. Their aim was not to reject realism entirely, but to show that power in international politics can also operate through interdependence, especially in areas such as trade, finance, institutions, and international regimes. This approach is particularly useful for my thesis because Yugoslav–African cooperation cannot be explained only through military power, formal domination, or classical dependency. The relationship between Yugoslavia and African non-aligned states was structured through contracts, joint ventures, technical expertise, credit arrangements, and institutional cooperation. Keohane and Nye's concept of asymmetrical interdependence makes it possible to analyze these relationships as mutual but uneven. Both sides benefited from cooperation, but they were not equally dependent on it and did not face the same costs if the relationship was disrupted. Their distinction between sensitivity and vulnerability is therefore central to this study, because it helps explain how technical, financial, and organizational reliance could become sources of power within development partnerships (Keohane and Nye 2012: 9-16).

1. Yugoslavia’s Infrastructure Diplomacy in the Global South

Yugoslavia’s position within the Non-Aligned Movement was shaped by both ideological commitments and strategic considerations. Following the 1948 split with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia found itself politically isolated and economically vulnerable. Aligning with the newly decolonized states of Asia and Africa offered an alternative international orientation one that enabled Belgrade to craft an identity independent of both superpowers. As Kulić specifies non-alignment was not only a global project but the project of globalization that “imagined and enacted an alternative globalization that short-circuited the global peripheries in order to counter the imperialism of the centers.” (Kulić 2025: iii)

During the Cold War, Yugoslavia actively promoted economic cooperation with countries of the Global South within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (Kullaa 2012; Jakovina 2011a). Through infrastructure and engineering projects carried out by various companies, Yugoslavia participated in development initiatives that can be interpreted as early forms of South–South cooperation (Prashad 2007; Mawdsley 2012). These partnerships can also be analyzed through the concept of asymmetrical interdependence (Keohane and Nye 2012), particularly in cases where technological expertise and project management remained concentrated in Yugoslav firms.

Non-alignment also provided Yugoslavia with a framework through which it could project international influence beyond what its size and economic capacity might otherwise have allowed. Rubinstein emphasizes that participation in the Non-Aligned Movement enabled Yugoslavia to gain diplomatic visibility, establish relations with emerging postcolonial states, and maintain a degree of strategic autonomy unavailable to countries firmly embedded within the Cold War blocs (Rubinstein 1970: 49). Before the first conference of non-aligned countries in Belgrade, criteria were drawn up according to which each country that intended to join the Movement was evaluated. The member country had to lead an independent policy, which was based on active and peaceful coexistence, and had to support movements for liberation and independence. A member state was not allowed to be a part multilateral military alliance such as NATO and was not allowed to participate in bilateral military alliances with a major power USA or USSR. The last criterion says that there must not be a foreign military base on the territory of a member state that was established there by agreement or with the consent of the member state. In practice, however, not all members fulfilled these conditions, partly because the Movement lacked a formal statute that could strictly enforce them (Radovanović 1973: 24).

Yugoslavia occupied a semi-peripheral position within the global political economy. It was economically dependent on access to Western markets and financial institutions, yet it possessed technological, managerial, and organizational capacities that exceeded those of many newly independent African states. This dual positioning is central to my argument that Yugoslavia was structurally vulnerable within the global system and on the other hand relatively privileged within specific bilateral partnerships. The asymmetry analyzed in this study therefore operates within a layered hierarchy — global vulnerability combined with regional or bilateral leverage.

A key aspect of Yugoslavia's approach to international economic cooperation was its emphasis on infrastructure projects as a pathway to economic self-sufficiency in newly independent states. As Ljubica Spaskovska argues, Yugoslavia's economic engagement with newly independent states formed part of a broader project of South–South cooperation and "collective self-reliance," which aimed to redefine existing global economic hierarchies and enable developing countries to participate more equally in the international division of labour (Spaskovska 2017: 10). Unlike the Soviet model of development, which was primarily state-driven, Yugoslavia's approach allowed firms like Energoprojekt to act as semi-autonomous agents, directly negotiating contracts with African governments while still maintaining strong economic and political ties with Belgrade. This model created opportunities for African leaders to exercise agency in shaping development partnerships, but it also embedded recipient states within financial and technological structures that required ongoing Yugoslav involvement (Stanek 2020: 152-153). Africa occupied a particularly important place within Yugoslavia's international image. As Blagojević notes, Africa's political geography as a non-aligned continent was integrated into Yugoslavia's vision of a "geography of peace," positioned as the counterpart to the unstable world of superpower confrontation and rigid "spheres of influence". In this vision, Africa represented the largest concentration of non-aligned actors and the region where Yugoslavia maintained the greatest number of political allies (Blagojević 2020: 73). Cooperation with African states therefore carried both ideological and practical significance. Yugoslavia relied on foreign markets, hard currency earnings, and diplomatic visibility, while African states depended on external technical expertise, organizational capacity, and infrastructure financing. A revealing illustration of this logic appears in Energoprojekt's company magazine from June 1976, which quoted the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia Stane Dolanc during his visit to the company: "By constructing abroad, you are building the Yugoslav economy." He further emphasized that Energoprojekt had "proved the reality of Yugoslavia's economic interests in the markets of developing countries" (Dolanc in Lukić 1976). This statement captures the essence of Yugoslav cooperation with non-aligned states, showing that through its projects abroad, the company helped implement the ideas of non-alignment in practice, while at the same time reinforcing Yugoslavia's economic and political interests. Infrastructure projects thus became both economic projects and tools of diplomacy, and at the same time shaping long-term relationships between Yugoslavia and its non-aligned partners.

This combination of ideological solidarity and pragmatic economic engagement shaped Yugoslavia's relations with newly independent states. As Jakovina notes, socialist Yugoslavia was one of the key initiators of the Non-Aligned Movement and remained among its most committed and influential members (Jakovina 2011b: 401), and the one with most at stake "in keeping the idea alive when it was in crisis" (Jakovina 2011b: 393). After the split with Stalin in 1948, foreign politics started to play an ever-increasing role, initially waging the struggle to save the country's sovereignty and then carving a space for a specific position in the world outside its bipolar division, but open to dialogue with everyone. Yugoslav foreign policy was based on the concept of "peaceful and active coexistence, which accepts the struggle for peace, independence and equality" and the active support of such struggles not only on the level of diplomacy but often also in terms of military and financial aid (Jakovina 2017: 468). The Yugoslav position sought to "derive maximum benefits from both sides in the Cold War" (Jakovina 2017: 472). While it seemed to be pulling Yugoslavia out of its immediate European context, its foreign policy was probably the most successful and the most consistent element of the Yugoslav project in the period between from the 1950s until its ending into wars in 1990. The sophisticated and pragmatic foreign policy, Jakovina said: "enabled a small but ambitious country to play a globally important role in the United Nations [...] and in the Third World" (Jakovina 2017: 504). Thus, it could be said that achieving a global recognition far surpassing the country's size or its real economic potential.

The political message of non-alignment was reinforced through symbolic gestures and diplomatic initiatives. During a visit to Guinea in 1961, President Tito suggested that Yugoslavia could serve as an example of how a country that had once been underdeveloped and dominated could achieve significant economic and political progress. Tito said that Yugoslavia is an example of how a country, enslaved and underdeveloped in the past, is able to rise to such a level Yugoslavia had attained nowadays (Tito 1961 quoted in Sekulić 2013: 163). As Sekulić observes, this statement implicitly presented Yugoslavia as a model for newly independent states seeking alternative development paths. In this context it was hardly coincidental that the first summit of Non-Aligned leaders in 1961 took place in New Belgrade, which at the time represented the largest active construction site in Europe. The rapidly developing urban landscape served as a powerful visual demonstration of Yugoslavia's modernization and its construction industry's capabilities. Therefore, in following years several Yugoslav companies were hired to execute ambitious infrastructure projects, including dams, roads across Africa, Buildings, Conference Halls, railways, with the Belgrade based firm of Energoprojekt being the most prominent example (Sekulić 2013:164-165). In many ways, these contracts functioned also as material symbols of non-aligned solidarity, where architecture and engineering became diplomatic tools as much as they were instruments of development. As Sekulić explains, cooperation with decolonizing regions became one of the central narratives of postwar Yugoslavia. This friendship with newly independent countries was frequently celebrated in the press and institutionalized through the politics of the Non-Aligned Movement. It was also materially expressed through the large-scale export of knowledge, materials, and labor to construction sites across Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Reports in Yugoslav newspapers often highlighted the scale of these projects and the profits generated by domestic companies, emphasizing their significance for the national economy (Sekulić 2013: 37). From the first NAM Summit in Belgrade in 1961, where Yugoslavia positioned itself as a central convening power, Tito framed the Movement as a moral and political community committed to sovereignty, anti-colonialism, and equitable development. This discourse strongly appealed to newly independent African states. As Vijay Prashad argues, the Third World should be understood as a political project that emerged from decolonization, aiming to construct an alternative developmental and political order outside Cold War bipolarity. He emphasizes "thrown between these two major formations, the darker nations amassed as the Third World. Determined people struck out against colonialism to win their freedom. They demanded political equality on the world level" (Prashad 2007: xvi). Within this framework, Yugoslavia's leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement can be seen as an attempt to translate these abstract demands for political equality into concrete institutional and material forms. Through the diplomatic initiatives and, crucially, through large-scale infrastructure and technical cooperation, Yugoslavia sought to position itself as both a political ally and a practical partner for postcolonial states. Non-alignment allowed Yugoslavia to establish political and economic relations with a broad range of newly independent states, opening access to markets and diplomatic arenas that would otherwise have been shaped by Cold War bloc politics. Through the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslavia was able to engage bilaterally and multilaterally without being tied to either the Western or Soviet sphere of influence.

This dual logic solidarity fused with self-interest became especially evident in Yugoslavia's relations with African countries. While Yugoslav´s President Tito promoted the language of mutual respect, equality, and anti-imperialism, the Yugoslav state also recognized the developmental needs of African partners as an opening for economic engagement. For many states on the continent, the early post-independence decades were marked by urgent infrastructural demands, a shortage of trained professionals, and limited access to Western financing without political conditions. Yugoslavia presented itself as an alternative, as country which is technologically capable, ideologically sympathetic, and politically neutral in the Cold War. As Radina Vučetić emphasizes, anti-colonialism was one of the cornerstones of Yugoslav foreign policy in the postwar period, and Tito consistently offered economic and technical assistance to countries engaged in anti-colonial struggles. At the same time, Yugoslav engagement in Africa was not driven by ideology alone. Cooperation with countries of the Third World enabled Yugoslavia, as a small and independent state, to pursue broader political and economic ambitions and to expand its international influence beyond what its size would otherwise allow (Vučetić 2017: 13-14). Vučetić further illustrates this point through a propaganda brochure describing Tito's visits to Asia and Africa in 1958–59, which framed the agreements signed during these trips as being endorsed not only by political leaders, but symbolically by "600 million citizens" of Yugoslavia and partner countries (Vučetić 2017: 13-14). This rhetoric reflected a clear awareness of the political and economic potential of these relationships. According to Vučetić, this policy helped Yugoslavia gain global political prestige, open new markets for its goods, and secure access to raw materials. Diplomatic relations in Africa, initially established with Ethiopia in 1952, expanded rapidly by the end of the 1950s, allowing Yugoslavia to launch both a political and an economic campaign across the continent as new states achieved independence (Vučetić 2017: 13-14). Griffith assumed that owing to its openly anti-colonial stance and its policy of peaceful coexistence within the United Nations, Yugoslavia was widely perceived as a friendly "white" state (Griffith 1964: 119 quoted in Vučetić 2017: 48) This early combination of political messaging and economic calculation provides important context for understanding Yugoslavia's later emphasis on technical cooperation and large-scale infrastructure projects. Rather than representing a departure from non-aligned principles, these projects can be read as an extension of a strategy that sought to translate political alignment into durable economic and institutional relationships.

By the early 1960s, cooperation with African countries had moved beyond diplomatic symbolism and ideological rhetoric. Technical assistance and large-scale infrastructure projects increasingly became practical instruments through which Yugoslavia translated political alignment into economic cooperation. Roads, public buildings, industrial facilities, and conference centers did not simply address developmental needs, they also anchored Yugoslavia's presence and visibility within the postcolonial world. Vučetić has shown, Yugoslav initiatives in Africa were shaped by a dual logic ideological commitment to anti-colonialism and a strategic effort to expand political influence and economic opportunities for a small, independent state (Vučetić 2017: 13-14). Yet by the 1970s, Yugoslav architecture had earned remarkable international prestige in Africa, which was built on work and expertise. Yugoslav experts and political elites often framed their engagement in Africa as proof of the country's professional competence and technological capacity, presenting these projects as evidence of Yugoslavia's ability to compete internationally (Cvitanović 2016: 95).

Within this framework, enterprises such as Energoprojekt emerged as central actors, operating at the intersection of foreign policy, economic reform, and technical expertise. Their activities represented the point at which Yugoslavia's non-aligned foreign policy intersected with its economic interests and technical capabilities. From the late 1960s onward, cooperation through joint ventures was enabled by broader economic reforms in Yugoslavia that marked a shift toward what is commonly described as "market socialism." (Stanek 2020: 152) Stanek explains that the 1967 economic reform formally allowed the establishment of joint ventures between Yugoslav and foreign firms, preparing the ground for a more export-oriented and internationally integrated economy. This shift moved Yugoslavia away from the postwar emphasis on import substitution and toward an industry capable of competing on foreign markets (Stanek 2020: 152).

As Johanna Bockman argues, Yugoslav economists played an important role in developing economic ideas that combined socialist institutions with market coordination, enabling enterprises to operate competitively while remaining formally embedded within a socialist system (Bockman 2011: 87). In this sense, Yugoslavia's model of market socialism encouraged firms to engage with international markets and seek opportunities beyond domestic economic planning (Bockman 2011: 100-101). As Stanek explains, collaboration with Western and non-aligned partners was expected to bring several advantages such as access to foreign capital, modern technology, managerial knowledge, and easier entry into international markets. At the same time, Yugoslav policymakers preferred joint ventures over other forms of direct foreign investment, since this organizational form did not formally contradict the principle of workers' self-management (Stanek 2020: 152).

This institutional and economic background is essential for understanding Yugoslav cooperation with African states. Within this broader context, Yugoslav enterprises increasingly expanded their activities abroad, linking the country's economic reforms and foreign policy ambitions with concrete forms of international cooperation in the Global South. Joint ventures abroad were not improvised solutions, but extensions of a domestic economic model that sought to reconcile political ideology with economic pragmatism.

1.1 Mechanisms of Infrastructural Cooperation

Yugoslavia's infrastructural engagement with African states did not rely on individual projects alone, but on a set of institutional and financial mechanisms that made long-term cooperation possible. Technical assistance, joint ventures, and credit arrangements formed the practical pillar of this model. These mechanisms linked foreign policy objectives with the economic needs of Yugoslav enterprises and enabled companies such as Energoprojekt to operate across different political, legal, and economic environments. Rather than functioning separately, they worked together to provide access to markets, secure financing, and maintain a continuous Yugoslav presence on the ground. By the 1970s Yugoslavia had become an important reference point in international debates on development and economic organization. As Johanna Bockman notes, Yugoslavia's system of worker self-management attracted global attention and circulated through networks of international institutions, professional associations, and academic exchanges. Yugoslav economists participated in organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, where their experience with market socialism and enterprise reform made the Yugoslav model a subject of international interest (Bockman 2011: 100-101).

As Stanek notes, Energoprojekt's international expansion was closely connected to its financial partnerships with Western banks and international institutions. The company maintained relations with British, French, and Italian banks as well as with the World Bank, and often participated in arranging loans that financed development projects in African countries where Energoprojekt later acted as the contractor. These projects were frequently facilitated through the company's subsidiaries located in major financial centers in Western Europe and the United States, including New York, which had originally been established to procure machinery for construction sites abroad. In some cases, the financing agreements included conditions that required the use of materials supplied by the lending countries. Similar arrangements could also be observed in projects carried out together with Comecon partners in Africa and the Middle East (Stanek 2020:152). Stanek further points out that one of Energoprojekt's earliest comprehensive commissions abroad was the construction of the hydroelectric power plant at Kpime in Togo in 1963, which included research, design, construction, delivery, and installation of equipment. Projects of this type were often implemented in cooperation with other Yugoslav contractors such as Astra and Ingra from Zagreb, as well as with producers of industrial equipment from different Yugoslav republics. They were also accompanied by training programs organized both in the recipient countries and in Yugoslavia. Large infrastructure projects frequently generated additional architectural commissions, which eventually led to the establishment of Energoprojekt's architectural department in 1971. Among the best-known examples were conference centers designed by Dušan Milenković for the third Non-Aligned Movement conference in Lusaka followed by similar projects in Kampala and Libreville. These projects often opened opportunities for further commissions in the same cities during the 1970s, including hotels, office buildings, and municipal facilities (Stanek 2020: 150).

These examples demonstrate that Yugoslav infrastructural cooperation with African states was inserted in a broader network of financial, institutional, and technical arrangements. Infrastructure projects were therefore not isolated construction contracts but part of a wider framework that combined diplomatic relations, international financing, and industrial cooperation. Through this model, Yugoslav enterprises were able to secure long-term access to foreign markets while simultaneously presenting their activities as a form of development cooperation within the Non-Aligned Movement. At the same time, the reliance on international credit, foreign materials, and transnational financial networks demonstrates that these projects operated within a structure of interdependence linking Yugoslav companies, African states, and global economic institutions. As Rubinstein observed, Yugoslav policymakers understood that the long-term viability of the non-aligned countries depended on cooperation in forward-looking political and economic fields rather than on symbolic opposition alone (Rubinstein 1970: 128). In practice, this orientation was reflected in diplomatic initiatives as well as in the development of concrete mechanisms of cooperation, including technical assistance, joint ventures, and credit arrangements.

1.1.1 Technical Expertise

Technical assistance was one of the earliest and most important instruments of Yugoslavia's cooperation with non-aligned countries. It was based on bilateral agreements signed between Yugoslavia and individual African states, often following diplomatic visits or Non-Aligned

Movement meetings. The coordination of these programs was carried out by ZAMTES[2] which managed the placement of Yugoslav experts abroad (Sekulić 2020: 146).

Through these schemes, architects, engineers, planners, and other specialists were temporarily assigned to African ministries, public works departments, and state agencies. Their tasks included preparing development plans, drafting technical documentation, supervising construction works, and advising local administrations. Formally, technical assistance was presented as an expression of solidarity and support for postcolonial development. At the same time, technical assistance had clear practical implications for Yugoslav companies. As Dubravka Sekulić has shown, Yugoslav experts working inside African institutions often became important points of contact between host governments and Yugoslav enterprises. Their familiarity with local administrative procedures and upcoming projects helped Yugoslav firms position themselves for future tenders (Sekulić 2020: 136). In this sense, technical assistance did not guarantee contracts, but it facilitated access and information, effectively opening doors for further cooperation. The placement of experts therefore served developmental and economic purposes and linking as well state-led assistance with enterprise strategy.

More broadly, Yugoslav companies and technical institutions frequently provided engineering expertise, project design, and on-site supervision for large infrastructure projects across the Global South. Such projects often involved the deployment of Yugoslav engineers, architects, technicians, and skilled workers responsible for planning and implementing complex construction works (Spaskovska 2017). Technical assistance represented one of the most significant mechanisms of cooperation between Yugoslavia and African states. Furthermore, it has often been understood as an important mechanism for the transfer of knowledge, technology, and administrative expertise in development cooperation (Mawdsley 2012). In the Yugoslav example, this form of cooperation frequently involved the deployment of engineers, architects, and planners who contributed to project implementation and training programs in partner countries.

As Stanek notes, Energoprojekt's multidisciplinary organizational structure further supported this model of cooperation. Engineers, architects, and planners collaborated across departments, allowing technical knowledge to circulate internally within the company. For instance,

[2] ZAMTES (Zavod za međunarodnu tehničku saradnju/The Fund for International Technical Cooperation) was a Yugoslav state institution responsible for coordinating international technical cooperation and development assistance, particularly with countries of the Non-Aligned Movement. It facilitated the deployment of Yugoslav experts abroad and acted as a link between state authorities and enterprises involved in development projects.

engineers working on complex hydro-engineering structures often collaborated with architectural units, where their expertise contributed to optimizing reinforced concrete designs. This internal flow of knowledge enabled the company to undertake increasingly sophisticated projects and eventually placed Energoprojekt among the world's largest engineering companies by the 1980s (Stanek 2020: 149). The company's expansion abroad was closely connected to Yugoslavia's diplomatic initiatives. As Stanek emphasizes, many of Energoprojekt's early international commissions were facilitated through Yugoslav technical assistance programs and financed by loans extended to partner countries within the Non-Aligned Movement. This pattern was particularly visible in West Africa, where the company's general director Živko Mučalov accompanied President Tito during his diplomatic tour of the region in 1961. Representatives of Energoprojekt and other Yugoslav firms subsequently traveled to cities such as Accra, Bamako, Kpalime, and Conakry in order to explore opportunities for future cooperation (Stanek 2020: 149). Such technical cooperation played an important role in development partnerships, particularly in countries where domestic engineering capacity was still developing. However, reliance on foreign technical expertise could also create longer-term dependencies related to maintenance, operational knowledge, and access to specialized equipment. In this sense, large infrastructure projects often required continued cooperation with the original contractors responsible for their design and construction. In this sense, technical assistance was a mechanism for knowledge transfer and a potential source of long-term technical interdependence between African partners and Yugoslav enterprises as the original contractors responsible for their design and construction.

In relation to the research question, technical assistance can be understood as one of the main mechanisms through which interdependence was produced in Yugoslav–African cooperation. The provision of engineering expertise, technical documentation, project supervision, and operational support created relationships in which partner states depended on knowledge and skills that were not easily transferable in the short term. This was especially important in large infrastructure projects, where the original designers and contractors often retained a privileged position in matters of implementation, maintenance, and troubleshooting. Keohane and Nye's discussion of asymmetrical interdependence helps clarify why this mattered politically. As they argue, unequal interdependence can become a source of power when one actor is less dependent on the relationship and can bear the costs of change more easily than the other (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10). In the case of technical assistance, both sides benefited from cooperation, but they were not equally exposed to its disruption. African partners relied on external expertise to complete projects and, in some cases, to maintain or operate them effectively. Yugoslav firms, by contrast, used technical cooperation to secure access, information, and long-term contracts, yet they generally faced lower adjustment costs if a specific relationship weakened or came to an end. For this reason, technical assistance should not be seen only as a transfer of knowledge. It also created an uneven form of interdependence. Sensitivity arose because interruptions in expertise, supervision, or technical support could immediately affect project implementation. Vulnerability was deeper, because replacing foreign specialists, technical documentation, or established organizational routines could be costly and difficult for the receiving side over a longer period of time. In this matter, technical assistance could strengthen asymmetrical interdependence by linking development cooperation to unequal capacities for adjustment and substitution (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10, 14–16, 268).

1.1.2 Joint Ventures

The expansion of Yugoslav enterprises abroad was increasingly supported by networks of subsidiaries and joint ventures established in different regions. As displayed in Energoprojekt´s Anniversary Newspaper, Energoprojekt had developed an extensive international presence consisting of locally incorporated subsidiaries, joint venture companies, and permanent representative offices in various parts of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East (EP 2011). These structures enabled the company to coordinate projects, manage local operations, and maintain long-term engagement with foreign partners. As Stanek's study of Yugoslav construction enterprises demonstrates, the international expansion of companies such as Energoprojekt intensified after the economic reforms of the late 1960s, which increased enterprise autonomy and encouraged participation in foreign markets (Stanek 2020: 152). Within this context, joint ventures became an important organizational mechanism through which Yugoslav firms were able to operate in foreign regulatory environments and maintain cooperation with local partners. Stanek also notes that governments sought to regulate the presence of foreign firms by requiring shared ownership, local incorporation, and the gradual transfer of managerial and equity control. For Yugoslav enterprises, joint ventures offered a practical solution they ensured continued access to domestic markets while indicating respect for national sovereignty and regulatory frameworks. This was particularly important in countries such as Nigeria, where indigenization policies introduced from the late 1960s onward limited the activities of foreign-owned companies (Stanek 2020: 151-153). At the same time, joint ventures enabled Yugoslav firms to stabilize their operations abroad. Through locally registered entities, companies could manage labor relations, procurement, and taxation more effectively, while maintaining a permanent institutional presence. These structures also facilitated the training of local staff and the integration of Yugoslav experts into national development projects, reinforcing long-term cooperation beyond individual contracts.

Joza Tucakov chief editor of Energoprojekt's newspaper offers a clear insight into how the company itself understood and valued joint ventures as a form of international cooperation. He explicitly stated that "when we look at the countries in which these organizations were established, it immediately becomes evident that Energoprojekt, following the policy of its home country, pays particular attention to the markets of developing countries." (Tucakov 1973: 10) This statement is crucial, as it directly links Energoprojekt's international expansion to Yugoslavia's state policy. Joint ventures were not formed randomly or solely based on commercial opportunity but were closely aligned with Yugoslavia's broader political orientation toward the Global South and the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement. In same article was emphasized that the objective of most of these organizations was not limited to the execution of specific projects. Instead, there was a permanent intention to include personnel from the host countries, who would be trained through participation in daily work and gradually prepared to take over managerial responsibilities not only in individual projects, but also in the management of the joint ventures themselves. According to Tucakov (1973), this form of cooperation was not inspired solely by economic interests, but predominantly by a shared interest in the development of these organizations and the improvement of their technological capacities. A further common feature of these joint ventures was their organizational structure. Their operational capacities were described as almost unlimited, since they could be supplemented with personnel and, in the case of larger projects, with financial resources from the company's headquarters in Belgrade. At the same time, Energoprojekt's own staff covered only the minimum number of specialized positions considered necessary, while the remaining workforce consisted largely of local employees. The average ratio between Yugoslav and local workers reached up to 1:30, which local authorities viewed as a highly positive contribution, both in terms of employment creation and the training of domestic personnel (Tucakov 1973:10). Finally, Tucakov noted that all of these organizations were connected by their proven business performance, the quality of completed projects, their cooperative relationship with local institutions, and their continuous financial solvency. These factors enabled them to build a strong reputation and solid recognition in host countries, thereby creating favorable conditions for further development (Tucakov 1973: 10).

However, the expansion of joint ventures also revealed internal tensions within the Yugoslav economic system. While such arrangements strengthened international competitiveness and opened access to capital, technology, and overseas markets, they also altered patterns of decision-making inside enterprises. Managerial authority and technical expertise increasingly outweighed the role of workers' councils, especially in foreign operations where commercial risk, contractual obligations, and legal constraints required faster and more centralized decisions. In this sense, joint ventures reflected a wider contradiction of Yugoslav market socialism because they supported global expansion, yet at the same time weakened important elements of socialist self-management. Joint ventures became one of its most practical organizational forms. They translated political commitments to cooperation, development, and sovereignty into concrete institutional arrangements, while also revealing how difficult it was to reconcile ideological principles with market-oriented practices. In practical terms, joint ventures connected Yugoslav enterprises to the development strategies of newly independent states through shared projects, technical cooperation, and long-term contractual obligations.

From the perspective of this research, such arrangements can also be understood as mechanisms of interdependence. They created lasting organizational ties between partners, but these ties were not necessarily balanced. As Keohane and Nye argue, asymmetrical interdependence may become a source of power when one actor is less dependent on the relationship and can therefore bear the costs of change more easily than the other (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10). This point is especially useful for understanding joint ventures. Even where cooperation appeared mutually beneficial, the relationship could still favor the partner with greater control over expertise, management, finance, or access to external markets. That partner was usually in a stronger position when decisions had to be made, contracts renegotiated, or disruptions absorbed. In this way, joint ventures did not simply organize cooperation, they could also stabilize unequal bargaining positions within development partnerships.

1.1.3 Credit Arrangements

Financial arrangements constituted a third crucial mechanism of infrastructural cooperation between Yugoslavia and African partners. Large-scale development and construction projects required substantial capital, which many newly independent African states often lacked in liquid form. In this context, credit arrangements became an essential instrument through which Yugoslav enterprises were able to secure contracts and implement projects abroad. Rather than functioning as a secondary or supportive feature of cooperation, access to long-term credit was often a precondition for the export of Yugoslav machinery, engineering services, and construction expertise.

As Rubinstein observed, “Yugoslavia’s ability to compete with Western firms in developing countries depended heavily on the quantity of long-term credits it can grant to developing countries” (Rubinstein 1970: 211). This point is particularly significant because it shows that credit was not merely a financial supplement to economic cooperation, but one of its central enabling conditions. For a country such as Yugoslavia, whose international position depended not only on diplomacy but also on the practical expansion of economic relations with the Global South, credit became a means of translating political ambition into material presence.

In many cases, Yugoslav banks or federal institutions provided guarantees for projects carried out by Yugoslav companies. These arrangements made it possible for African states to commission infrastructure works while postponing immediate payment. As Dubravka Sekulić, drawing on Marko Verbič’s study, points out, Yugoslav cooperation with developing countries passed through different phases, with the earlier period relying primarily on interstate credit arrangements (Verbič 1977 in Sekulić 2020: 107). Before the mid-1960s, these arrangements usually took the form of credits or loans granted for already agreed contracts, after which the Yugoslav government transferred the negotiated amount in domestic currency to the Yugoslav exporter. Crucially, such credits had to be spent on goods and services of Yugoslav origin, which indicates that they functioned not as untied development assistance, but as instruments directly linking financing to Yugoslav exports, construction works, and technical services (Sekulić 2020: 107-108).

In practice, these credits were closely tied to the export of Yugoslav goods and services. Rubinstein notes that Yugoslavia had extended more than 650 million dollars in credits by 1967, including approximately 200 million to African countries, and that these credits financed the delivery of Yugoslav industrial goods as well as the construction of more than 120 projects by Yugoslav firms (Rubinstein 1970: 211). These projects included hydroelectric plants, cement works, textile mills, tractor plants, ports, slaughterhouses, and food-processing facilities across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. What is especially important for the present analysis is that these were not untied forms of aid. On the contrary, they were explicitly linked to the purchase of Yugoslav equipment, the employment of Yugoslav companies, and the deployment of Yugoslav technicians. Credit arrangements, therefore, operated in conjunction with technical assistance and enterprise-led project implementation rather than independently from them.

This made financial cooperation a particularly dense mechanism of inter-state and inter-firm cooperation. In a single arrangement, credit could secure a market for Yugoslav industrial exports, ensure the participation of Yugoslav contractors, and sustain the presence of Yugoslav experts on site. In that sense, financial instruments reinforced the broader economic strategy through which Yugoslavia sought to position itself within the non-aligned and developing world. As Rubinstein further argues, these credits served political as well as economic purposes: they were granted on favorable commercial terms not only to compete with Western and Soviet bloc countries, but also to generate "political goodwill" among recipient states (Rubinstein 1970: 211). Credit arrangements must therefore be understood as instruments of economic diplomacy.

This dimension is especially relevant for a study of Yugoslavia's role in international development. If technical assistance reflected the transfer of expertise, and joint ventures institutionalized cooperation through shared organizational frameworks, credit arrangements provided the financial basis that made such cooperation possible on a larger scale. They were part of a broader attempt to make non-aligned cooperation materially viable. In that sense, they reflected Yugoslavia's effort to convert the political principles of non-alignment into long-term economic relationships structured around development projects, industrial expansion, and infrastructural modernization.

At the same time, this model involved important limitations and contradictions. Yugoslavia itself was a relatively small economy with scarce reserves of convertible currency, which meant that the extension of long-term credits carried substantial risk. Rubinstein emphasizes that many recipient countries were unable to repay in hard currency and instead insisted on barter arrangements, forcing Yugoslavia to accept payment in raw materials or agricultural products (Rubinstein 1970: 212). His well-known example that Yugoslavia often received "second-rate bananas" in exchange for capital goods captures this structural imbalance particularly well. (Rubinstein 1970: 212). It reveals that credit-based cooperation exposed Yugoslavia to its own forms of vulnerability, especially when repayment was dependent on unstable commodity markets and the limited export capacities of partner countries.

These constraints became even more pronounced as global economic conditions deteriorated during the late 1970s and 1980s. Fluctuations in commodity prices, debt crises, and broader instability in the international economic order increasingly affected the ability of developing countries to service their obligations. As Prashad argues, the broader vision of solidarity and development associated with the Third World project came under growing pressure from debt, commercial lending, and the expanding influence of international financial institutions within an unequal global economy (Prashad 2007: 229–232). This broader context helps explain why many arrangements that initially appeared mutually beneficial later became harder to sustain. What had begun as development-oriented financial cooperation could, under less favorable conditions, lead to debt renegotiation, delayed payments, and prolonged economic dependence.

An additional tension emerged from the internal structure of the Yugoslav economy itself. Rubinstein points out that after the economic reforms of the mid-1960s, the Yugoslav government had fewer subsidies and fewer centrally controlled resources available for foreign economic engagement, while enterprises gained greater autonomy (Rubinstein 1970: 212). This shift mattered because many African and Asian states expected to deal with centralized state trading bodies, as they often did in other socialist countries, whereas Yugoslavia's increasingly decentralized and competitive structure made economic cooperation more complex and, at times, frustrating for foreign partners. In other words, even when credit was available, the institutional form through which Yugoslav firms operated could create uncertainty and inefficiency. This is important because it shows that the limits of Yugoslav development cooperation did not stem only from external pressures, but also from the tensions within Yugoslavia's own model of socialist market reform.

For enterprises such as Energoprojekt, this connection was especially pronounced. As Sekulić notes, Energoprojekt was also directly involved in Yugoslavia's financial architecture as founder or investor in several banks, including Jugobanka, the Yugoslav Investment Bank, and the Yugoslav Export and Credit Bank (Sekulić 2020: 109). This suggests that the company's international expansion cannot be understood separately from the financial institutions that sustained it. To be specific, infrastructural cooperation abroad was supported by a dense domestic network of banks, guarantees, and refinancing arrangements.

When examined through the lens of interdependence theory, credit arrangements can be understood as mechanisms that extend financial and political ties over time. Unlike technical assistance, which is most visible during the planning and implementation of a project, credits create obligations that continue well beyond the moment of construction. They bind recipient states to repayment schedules, but also to the contractors, technologies, and organizational structures through which the original project was carried out. In this regard, credit arrangements produced more than temporary cooperation, they created relationships in which both sides became exposed to the consequences of disruption. Keohane and Nye's distinction between sensitivity and vulnerability is particularly useful here. Credit relations generated sensitivity because fiscal difficulties, delayed payments, or changes in external market conditions could impose immediate costs on both sides. African partner states depended on continued financing and project completion, while Yugoslav enterprises depended on repayment, contractual continuity, and export revenues. Yet the relationship was not balanced in the same way over the longer term. Vulnerability depended on the availability and cost of alternatives. For recipient states, replacing tied credits, imported technology, and foreign contractors was often politically and economically difficult. Yugoslavia, by contrast, was also exposed to risk, especially through repayment problems, barter arrangements, and wider financial instability, but it generally retained greater room to maneuver across different markets and projects. In this sense, credit arrangements did not produce one-sided dependence. They created an uneven form of interdependence in which both parties were tied to the relationship, but not with the same capacity to absorb its disruption or to adjust its terms (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10–15).

2. Energoprojekt as an Instrument of State Diplomacy: Between Enterprise and State

In 1951 Hidro Termo Elektroprojekt, Republic of Serbia´s bureau for design of hydro, thermos- and electric plants founded by the decree on July 11 by merger of two enterprises Hydroelectroprojekct and Thermoelectroproject. Soon company renamed to Energoprojekt by the decision of the Workers´ Council. People such as Živko Mučalov, Energoprojekt´s first director, who combined managerial authority with close ties to state institutions, played a central role in shaping the company's international strategy, this makes important because he became later one of the crucial diplomats of Yugoslavia in Middle East. His public statements as enterprise first person and internal communications reveal how Energoprojekt understood its own position between political responsibility and commercial ambition.

Although formally a commercial company, its activities were deeply embedded in the foreign policy objectives of the Yugoslav state. Energoprojekt served as a bridge between political commitments articulated through the Non-Aligned Movement and the practical demands of development cooperation across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In this sense, it operated simultaneously as a business entity, a diplomatic actor, and a symbolic extension of Yugoslavia's international identity. This dual role is also reflected in the testimony of Zoran Bojović, one of Energoprojekt's leading architects, who, in an interview with Dubravka Sekulić (2013) was asked whether the position of Yugoslavia in the Non-Aligned Movement a decisive factor in the development of Energoprojekt and the expansion of the network of its influence, said that "We weren´t sent there by our government, no, we were doing it following our interpretation of this philosophy. We went there as ambassadors of sort, to put the ideas of the movement to the work," (Bojović 2013: 203) His statement illustrates how professional expertise and political ideology became intertwined, as engineers and architects understood their work abroad as a form of representational diplomacy besides economic activity.

Energoprojekt gradually became one of the central vehicles of Yugoslavia's economic engagement abroad. From the mid-1960s until the late 1980s, the majority of its projects were carried out outside Yugoslav borders, in more than forty countries, most of them within the Non-Aligned Movement. Drawing on the technical knowledge and organizational experience developed during the post-war reconstruction of Yugoslavia, the company operated within the specific framework of Yugoslav socialism, particularly workers' self-management, which granted enterprises a high degree of autonomy. As Dubravka Sekulić has shown, this autonomy enabled Energoprojekt to move flexibly across different political and economic systems, allowing it to work in non-aligned countries while simultaneously negotiating financial arrangements with Western commercial banks. Exposure to international markets strengthened the company's internal corporate culture and reinforced its self-perception as a complex, multidisciplinary organization capable of operating independently on a global scale. This self-image was also expressed symbolically through architecture. The modernist Energoprojekt headquarters tower in Belgrade, completed in 1960 and designed by Milica Šterić, functioned as both a corporate landmark and a statement of Yugoslav modernity. During the first Non-Aligned Movement summit in Belgrade in 1961, representatives of twenty-eight countries encountered this building while moving between key state venues. In this way, the urban landscape of New Belgrade, together with Energoprojekt's own architectural production, became part of a broader visual and political narrative, presenting Yugoslavia as a modern, technologically capable, and internationally engaged partner (Sekulić 2021: 2-3).

From the perspective of the Yugoslav government, combination of technical expertise and political credibility made Energoprojekt particularly important. The company was not seen only as a construction enterprise, but as an actor closely linked to Yugoslavia's broader role within the Non-Aligned Movement. As Sekulić argues, non-alignment should be understood not only as a political project, but as an attempt to imagine an alternative form of global cooperation beyond the usual Cold War divisions. Within this context, Energoprojekt can be seen as a useful lens for understanding how different systems East and West, North and South, capitalism and socialism became entangled through concrete economic and technical cooperation. Sekulić was particularly interested in how a socialist enterprise with an anti-colonial orientation operated within the principle of collaboration that is not exploitation, which was promoted by the Non-Aligned Movement. In adapting to foreign markets, Energoprojekt did not only change its own internal organization, but also influenced broader economic and market relations in Yugoslavia. Through its work abroad, the company helped present Yugoslavia as a modern and reliable partner, while its buildings, master plans, and engineering projects became visible expressions of Yugoslavia's political presence and development ambitions in newly independent states (Sekulić 2020: 15).

At the same time, Energoprojekt answered to a set of domestic economic needs within Yugoslavia. By the mid-1960s, the Yugoslav development model increasingly relied on the expansion of exports particularly services and technology in order to secure hard currency. From 1961 onwards, Energoprojekt began to expand its business operations beyond

Yugoslavia, especially in non-aligned member countries. As Dubravka Sekulić notes, citing Đokić, Energoprojekt was one of several Yugoslav construction enterprises whose early attempts to enter foreign markets were described as "shy, unorganized, and individual," before developing into a more "well-organized and articulated action of engagement and involvement." (Đokić 1969:15 as cited in Sekulić 2017:209) This shift was further reinforced by the 1965 economic reforms, which encouraged self-managed enterprises to seek foreign markets and external contracts as a means of stabilizing both their own operations and the broader Yugoslav economy.

Alvin Rubinstein explains, economic expansion toward the developing world became especially attractive because Yugoslavia sought to avoid excessive dependence on either the Western or Eastern bloc. At the same time, Yugoslav industries struggled to compete in established hard-currency markets, while newly independent African states offered more accessible and politically receptive environments. These countries provided dependable outlets for Yugoslav expertise, technology, and construction services, which domestic industries urgently needed. Rubinstein further notes that economic cooperation was closely tied to political considerations, the Yugoslav leadership believed that expanding economic ties would also strengthen political relationships within the Non-Aligned Movement (Rubinstein 1970: 78-79). In this way, economic objectives and non-aligned diplomacy became closely intertwined. These economic motives also shaped the practical way cooperation was organized. Foreign contracts were often not secured through open market competition alone, but through political channels and bilateral agreements developed within the Non-Aligned Movement. Yugoslav technical-assistance programs and state-supported credit arrangements created entry points for companies such as Energoprojekt, especially in newly independent African states. As Lukasz Stanek notes, many early commissions were linked to Yugoslavia's diplomatic networks, including contacts established during Tito's visits in the early 1960s (Stanek, 2020: 149-150). Economic strategy and foreign policy worked together diplomacy opened markets, while companies like Energoprojekt delivered projects that made these relationships visible and lasting.

Energoprojekt's diplomatic role was most visible in projects that carried clear political significance. In many African countries, Yugoslav enterprises were entrusted with the construction of symbolic public buildings such as parliaments, national assembly halls, conference centers, and state guesthouses. This choice was closely linked to Yugoslavia's image as a supportive and non-intrusive partner within the Non-Aligned Movement. These projects therefore had a meaning that went beyond their architectural function. They became places where postcolonial sovereignty, modernization, and political identity were visually expressed. Beyond construction itself, Energoprojekt also contributed to broader forms of institutional and technical cooperation. Through training programs, expert placements, and joint project teams, the company became part of state-led development strategies. Institutions such as ZAMTES coordinated these exchanges, while companies like Energoprojekt often nominated experts for work within African ministries. As Sekulić documents, such arrangements frequently positioned Yugoslav professionals as important connections that helped open doors for future projects and facilitated future contracts, while on same time reinforcing Yugoslavia's image as a partner committed to capacity building rather than short-term extraction (Sekulić 2020: 146).

Yet Energoprojekt's role as an instrument of diplomacy did not remove practical concerns. Although many African governments valued the company's cooperative approach, projects still had to meet financial limits, local political conditions, and the company's own business needs. Energoprojekt was not a development agency operating at a loss, but a profit-oriented enterprise that combined political solidarity with economic interest. As Alvin Rubinstein notes, Yugoslav leaders gradually moved away from rigid ideological positions as they confronted persistent economic difficulties. These constraints encouraged a more pragmatic and cooperative approach in Yugoslavia's relations with developing countries, particularly within the framework of non-alignment (Rubinstain, 1970: 178). Energoprojekt reflected this balance in practice. Its projects abroad generated income, supported employment at home, and strengthened Yugoslavia's position in international relations.

The company's diplomatic role expanded further through the establishment of local subsidiaries and joint ventures, such as ZECCO and UNICO in Zambia and NECCO in Nigeria. These organizational forms helped Energoprojekt secure a long-term presence and operate within local legal and administrative frameworks. As Lukasz Stanek documents, the use of joint ventures was closely linked to Yugoslavia's economic reforms of the late 1960s and to the broader expansion of Yugoslav companies in Africa. In many cases, such arrangements were also shaped by local regulations that required foreign firms to establish partnerships with domestic actors. At the same time, Stanek shows that joint ventures reflected the contradictions of Yugoslavia's "market socialism." While they facilitated access to foreign capital, technology, and markets, they moreover weakened the role of workers' self-management within enterprises (Stanek 2020: 152).

In this sense, joint ventures functioned both as tools of international expansion and as sites where economic pragmatism came into tension with socialist principles. Energoprojekt therefore operated at the intersection of Yugoslav diplomacy and international development. Company documents and cooperation frameworks show that technical and engineering expertise were closely connected to state policy. The firm was neither fully commercial nor purely ideological. Instead, it worked in a mixed space typical of non-aligned cooperation. Through its projects, Energoprojekt contributed to infrastructure development, while also building lasting political and economic connections that supported Yugoslavia's position within the Non-Aligned Movement.

3. Zambia and Nigeria: Contextual Background

3.1 Zambia

Zambia became independent from Britain in 1964 under the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda and the United National Independence Party. Like many newly independent African states, Zambia entered independence with ambitious expectations of political sovereignty, national development, and economic transformation. Infrastructure played an important role in this process. Large public buildings, conference facilities, transport networks, and energy projects were not only practical investments, but also visible expressions of state-building and postcolonial modernity. The country possessed some of the richest copper and cobalt deposits in the world, and its large industrial mines supplied high-grade copper to Western industrial economies, as well as to Japan and China. During the first decade after independence, Zambia was widely regarded as one of Africa's more stable states. Under Kenneth Kaunda, the new government promoted a form of African socialism and invested heavily in social welfare and national development programs. High copper prices provided the financial basis for ambitious development planning, and the early post-independence period was therefore marked by prosperity and optimism (Burdette 1988: 1–2). This apparent stability, however, rested on a highly vulnerable economic structure. Zambia's dependence on copper made state revenues and development planning extremely sensitive to shifts in global commodity markets. Burdette notes that from the mid-1970s onward, the earlier period of prosperity gave way to economic difficulties, growing inequalities, and social dislocation. By 1985, despite its considerable mineral wealth, Zambia was experiencing a serious economic decline. Between 1974 and 1980, GDP per capita declined by 52 percent, while private consumption fell by 21 percent between 1975 and 1979. The mining sector, which had previously provided much of the state's revenue, contributed far less to the national treasury after 1974 (Burdette 1988: 1–2).

This framework is important for understanding Yugoslav–Zambian infrastructure cooperation, because it shows that projects framed as symbols of sovereignty and modernization were implemented within an economy increasingly exposed to external commodity shocks, fiscal pressure, and long-term financial vulnerability. For this reason, Zambia represents a particularly important case for this thesis. Its cooperation with Yugoslavia took place at the intersection of postcolonial state-building, non-aligned diplomacy, and growing economic vulnerability. While infrastructure projects such as Mulungushi Hall symbolized sovereignty and international recognition, the wider economic context made their financing, maintenance, and long-term sustainability increasingly dependent on external conditions.

3.2 Nigeria

Nigeria entered the postcolonial period as one of the most politically and economically significant states in Africa. After independence from Britain in 1960, the country experienced severe political instability, including military coups and the civil war of 1967–1970. By the late 1970s, under the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian state was still engaged in the process of national consolidation and preparing for a return to civilian rule. In order to reduce the disruptive potential of large regional political units, the federal structure was reorganized, with the number of states increased from twelve in 1967 to nineteen in 1976. At the same time, the government planned a new federal capital closer to the geographical center of the country and strengthened local government authorities (World Bank 1977: i).

Nigeria's development prospects in the 1970s were transformed by the oil boom of 1973/74. Petroleum production expanded rapidly after the war, while revenues increased dramatically during the 1970s. Government petroleum revenues rose from N166 million in 1970 to N3.7 billion in 1974 and more than N5.3 billion in 1976. By 1974, 82 percent of Nigerian government revenues came from petroleum, making the economy highly dependent on a single source of income (Falola and Heaton 2008: 182). The sharp increase in crude oil export prices enabled the Nigerian government to launch a massive National Development Plan, with infrastructure, education, and industrialization as its main priorities. This created a favorable environment for large-scale construction projects and made Nigeria a particularly attractive market for foreign engineering and construction enterprises.

This oil wealth gave Nigeria great financial capacity. It supported large public expenditures, infrastructure projects, and symbolic investments such as FESTAC (Festival of Black Arts and Culture) and the National Theatre. These projects were intended to display Nigeria's wealth, modernity, and leadership in African and black international affairs. Yet the oil boom also created structural vulnerabilities. The reliance on petroleum made the economy exposed to fluctuations in world oil prices, while agriculture declined and food imports increased. In this sense, Nigeria initially appeared as a stronger and more autonomous partner for Yugoslav enterprises, but its development model was increasingly tied to oil revenues and the political management of state resources (Falola and Heaton 2008: 182–184, 191–194). The oil boom therefore created the appearance of financial strength, but it also tied the Nigerian development model increasingly to one unstable sector. By the late 1970s, Nigeria was already showing signs of fiscal pressure, inflation, and growing dependence on external borrowing, even though its external debt remained modest at that point (World Bank 1977: iii–iv).

For this reason, Nigeria is important for this thesis not simply as an oil-rich country, but as a case in which infrastructure diplomacy developed within a large federal state pursuing postwar reconstruction, modernization, and international visibility. Yugoslav cooperation in Nigeria took place in a context of greater initial financial capacity than in Zambia, but also within an economy whose apparent strength depended heavily on one externally dependent sector.

4. Case Study: ZECCO in Zambia

The diplomatic and economic relationship between Yugoslavia and Zambia developed within the broader framework of the Non-Aligned Movement. After achieving independence in 1964 under President Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia emerged as an important African actor within non-aligned politics and hosted the Third NAM Summit in Lusaka in 1970. For Yugoslavia, Zambia was not only a politically aligned partner but also a significant point of engagement in Southern Africa, a region shaped by ongoing liberation struggles in Rhodesia, Angola, and Mozambique (Prashad 2007: 110, 131–132; also NAM 1970).

As I explained before Yugoslavia's foreign policy during the Cold War combined ideological alignment with practical economic interests. Enterprises like Energoprojekt became instruments of what can be called infrastructural diplomacy: large-scale construction projects intended to signal political solidarity, while also generating export revenue and sustaining domestic industries. This duality was particularly evident in African partnerships, where contracts were often negotiated directly between heads of state, bypassing purely commercial tendering processes. Economically, Zambia in the 1960s and 1970s faced the challenge of translating political independence into economic self-reliance. Its economy was heavily dependent on copper exports, which made it vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices. The government's development plans emphasized diversification through infrastructure investment, industrialization, and human capital development. In this context, Yugoslav offers of turnkey construction, technical training, and partial financing aligned closely with Zambia's stated national priorities.

Politically, the relationship was reinforced through high-level visits and mutual support in international forums. President Josip Broz Tito and President Kaunda maintained personal rapport, using bilateral projects as a visible symbol of NAM's principle of "mutual development". And opening speech from President Kaunda says it, how important this for country is, saying: "Zambians all over the republic feel tremendous honor for their country to play host to such a gathering of so distinguished leaders. Lusaka citizens are particularly proud to be among the first in the world to have in their midst such a large number of world leaders under the same roof." (Kaunda opening speech NAM 1970) These projects were often publicized in Yugoslav media, such as Energoprojekt Magazin, as evidence that non-aligned solidarity could produce concrete, modern infrastructure without reliance on Western aid or Soviet assistance. The broader importance of these projects was reflected in the way the company's magazine consistently presented them not only as technical achievements but as matters of national pride, emphasizing their political resonance and the recognition they received from state leaders. However, the structural realities of the global economy meant that financing for such projects often came through commercial loans or credits that increased Zambia's external debt a point underlined by Sekulić's analysis of similar projects in other African states. By the mid-1980s, Zambia was facing a debt crisis that required IMF intervention, raising questions about whether such cooperation truly reduced dependency or merely reshaped it in a South–South context.

Živko Mučalov, General Director of Energoprojekt from its founding 1951 to 1978 said "I think it was, first and foremost, a clear orientation and plan for the company to grow from a classical design organization into a complex engineering organization, and then to develop into a complete contemporary organization. This means that we strive to constantly adapt our activity to the conditions of the domestic and foreign markets, so that the process of work and development, along with the expansion of business activity, is accompanied by appropriate forms for more effective advancement in, primarily, the foreign market." (Mučalov 1970: 2)

In this environment the joint venture ZECCO was established, embodying the mixture of political symbolism and economic pragmatism that characterized Yugoslavia–Zambia relations. The following case study will examine its structure, projects, and legacy. Also, as Sekulić explained joint ventures were used to comply with local regulations. For example, since Zambian law barred a single company from both designing and constructing a project, ZECCO was established in 1965, followed by UNICO (United Consulting Company), which provided architectural services for ZECCO (Sekulić 2020: 124).

As its already explained Energoprojekt was established in 1951 as a construction and engineering enterprise based in Belgrade. Initially tasked with postwar reconstruction in Yugoslavia, it rapidly expanded abroad from the late 1950s, becoming the country's flagship company for international contracts. By the 1970s, Energoprojekt operated in over thirty countries across Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, often in partnership with governments of the Non-Aligned Movement. Its projects ranged from dams and highways to housing complexes and conference halls, making it both a major economic actor and a symbol of Yugoslavia's architectural diplomacy (EP 2006). The company's ventures in Zambia, particularly through the joint ventures ZECCO and UNICO, exemplify how technical expertise, political solidarity, and economic interest converged within the framework of non-aligned cooperation.

In an interview conducted by Dubravka Sekulić (2013) with one of Energoprojekt's prominent architects of the time Zoran Bojović, we could learn the following first-hand insights as Bojović explained: "EP used several strategies to source new projects in new countries. One was to utilize the growing network of Yugoslav professionals who were employed by the ministries and other public institutions in the non-aligned countries under the state agreements for technical assistance and support. In Yugoslavia, the special fund was formed to coordinate this exchange, and professionals seeking this type of employment would usually find it at the local employment bureaus. These professionals, normally engineers of architects working for ministries of construction or equivalent regional bodies in African countries, provided the direct connections with the states that were the largest builders." (Bojović 2013: 167, 201-202) Then Sekulić explained "After a while Energoprojekt started forming companies of mixed ownership with local partners to establish a stronger foothold in countries where it managed to win multiple consecutive and long-term contracts. An additional reason for establishing local mixed companies was to bypass certain regulations. In 1965, jointly with the United National Independence Party, Energoprojekt formed its first mixed ownership company, ZECCO in Zambia, whose focus was construction. Like I already mentioned, Zambian law prohibited the same company from both designing and constructing and a few years later another enterprise, the design bureau UNICO, was formed. The existence of these companies enabled Energoprojekt to extend its presence on some markets, and have more influence on the type of projects it would be commissioned for (Sekulić 2013: 167-168). As defined in Energoprojekt Company´s Magazin, UNICO is one of the four joint ventures in Zambia through which Energoprojekt has earned undeniable recognition, not only from the people and government of this friendly country, but also internationally (Radenović 1971: 6-7).

4.1. Formation and Structure

UNICO was officially registered at the end of 1966 and began operations in January 1967. As sad in company´s magazine, UNICO was a model of "mutually beneficial cooperation" within the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement. The ownership structure allocated a majority share to the Zambian government, with Energoprojekt providing the initial technical expertise, managerial staff, and access to specialized equipment (Radenović 1971: 6-7).

Milenković explained how UNICO was founded:" We were already aware, even before UNICO was established, that the joint venture model was one of the most effective forms of business operations. That's why the general management of the company undertook a detailed study of the possibilities for founding another joint venture (following the earlier establishment of

ZECCO). Given that we already had a construction presence in Zambia (through ZECCO and Energoprojekt), there arose a need for a dedicated project organization of our own one that could stand on equal footing with other (mostly British) project companies. In Zambia, projects are often constrained by both the investor and the contractor, who dictate the materials to be used, the type of construction, and so on. This made it extremely important to establish a joint venture specifically, a project organization like UNICO that would allow us to deliver complete project packages including tender documentation (Milenković 1971: 6-7). When the interview was held, Milenković stated that:

> „Today, in terms of staff composition, headcount, and its ability to handle the most complex tasks, UNICO stands as one of the strongest project and engineering organizations in Zambia. With the team that is expected to be fully formed by the end of this year, UNICO will become the first organization in the country capable of providing fully integrated consulting services. The number of employees at UNICO is in range between 16 and 20." (Milenković 1971: 6-7)

Such joint ventures were strategically important for Energoprojekt they allowed the company to secure long-term contracts, often without competition from Western firms, while presenting the arrangement as a form of South–South solidarity. In practical terms, UNICO functioned as an operational base for multiple large-scale construction projects in Zambia, enabling local coordination while ensuring that Yugoslav engineers and architects retained key decision-making roles during the implementation phase.

4.2. Key Projects and Symbolic Value

The importance and role of UNICO was discussed in the company's magazine by its director, the architect Dušan Milenković. He provided numerous significant details that in themselves point to the importance of this joint venture, highlighting what it represented for the cooperation between the two states as well as for Energoprojekt itself. Among UNICO's most notable achievements was the construction of Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka, completed in time for the 1970 NAM Summit. The symbolic importance of Mulungushi Hall was underscored not only by President Kaunda's remarks at the opening of the 1970 Summit, but also by the Zambian government's decision to issue a special postage stamp to commemorate the event. The stamp, released on 8 September 1970, depicted the newly built conference hall decorated with murals of African masks. Notably, the colors blue and green were produced by embedding azurite and malachite chips, explicitly referencing copper as

Zambia's chief export.[3] In this way, the state celebrated the building as both an international venue for the Non-Aligned Movement and a national symbol tying together culture, economy, and diplomacy.

As noted in the official Summit report and widely covered in Energoprojekt Magazine, the building was designed to serve as both a functional space for high-level diplomatic gatherings and a symbolic representation of Zambia's modernity and international stature. UNICO's and its architects' recognition, especially for the construction of the conference hall and the 60 villas for the heads of delegations attending the Non-Aligned summit, has opened up major opportunities for future projects. One such project involves the development of a complex urban area between the Parliament and the Conference Hall, envisioned as Lusaka's new public center spanning approximately 70 hectares. And most important one, Milenković said, The Independence Stadium in Lusaka, the ZECCO headquarters and operations complex, several architecturally unique villas, two proposals for the headquarters of UNIP (the ruling political party), the teachers' college complex in Kabwe, the second-phase project of the Independence Stadium, the conference building and 60-villa residential compound for the Non-Aligned Movement summit, the Lusaka Arts Center project, and many other major developments. Some of these projects are still in the projecting or conceptual sketch phase (Milenković 1971: 6-7). These projects illustrate how UNICO's work went far beyond a single landmark like Mulungushi Hall. Together they reshaped parts of Lusaka's urban landscape and projected an image of modernity that was closely tied to Zambia's new international role. At the same time, their scale and ambition underline the paradox at the heart of this cooperation: while they embodied the ideals of non-alignment in concrete and steel, they also locked Zambia into long-term obligations of financing, maintenance, and reliance on Yugoslav expertise.

4.3 Financing Models

While official rhetoric emphasized partnership and equality, financing arrangements often reflected the structural limitations of the Zambian economy. Sekulić notes that many such projects across Africa were funded through a combination of Zambian state funds and commercial loans some facilitated through Yugoslav banks, others sourced from international financial institutions (Sekulić 2020: 108-109). In the case of ZECCO and UNICO, public sources do not disclose the exact proportions of domestic versus external financing. However,

[3] General Post Office (Ndola, Zambia), "Special Postage Stamp Issue: Non-Aligned Nations Summit Conference, Lusaka, 8 September 1970," official notice (1970).

the scale of investment reportedly in the tens of millions of US dollars suggests reliance on external borrowing. This raises questions, echoed in the dependency literature about whether such arrangements reinforced economic independence or created new forms of indebtedness.

Director Milenković also said that total completed UNICO´s projects to date exceeds 30 million USD. And also explained that "over the past four years, UNICO has completed 106 projects across various sectors: general architecture, industrial buildings, sports facilities, educational institutions, and more. Based on UNICO's projects, around 200 structures have been built during that time. Although our team averaged just six people, through consistent hard work dedication we succeeded in completing a large number of important projects." (Radenović 1971: 6-7) Such numbers are impressive, yet they also raise questions about sustainability. For Zambia, the sheer scale of construction brought visibility and prestige, but it also implied future costs of maintenance and reliance on foreign expertise. For Yugoslavia, the figures demonstrate how infrastructure diplomacy doubled as an export strategy essential for its market oriented socialist economy.

4.4 Technical Cooperation and Training

A central element of UNICO's mission was the transfer of technical knowledge. Energoprojekt Magazine and official Yugoslav development reports describe initiatives to train Zambian engineers, architects, and construction managers. This included the establishment of specialized training programs and on-the-job learning alongside Yugoslav experts. Milenković also spoke about the importance of knowledge transfer and training; when he was asked about What is a new business direction for UNICO? He answered: "Our company will establish a school dedicated to training local Zambian professionals. Zambia currently has no certified local architects or architectural technicians. That's why UNICO's (more broadly, Energoprojekt's) initiative to create a training school has been enthusiastically received by the country's top government officials." (Milenković 1971: 6-7) This reveals the company's clear long-term plans and illustrates what such initiatives meant for the future of cooperation between the two states.

However, evidence from interviews with project leaders archived in company newsletters and explained from Radenović shows that most of the high-complexity design and planning work remained in Yugoslav hands during the initial decade of operations even though ownership was 51-49 % in Zambia favor (Radenović 1971: 6-7). Sekulić interprets this as a sign that while training was emphasized in rhetoric, the actual transfer of capacity was gradual and uneven, potentially limiting long-term self-sufficiency (Sekulić 2013: 64).

4.5 Challenges and Criticism

Several issues emerged over the lifespan of ZECCO/UNICO:

- **Maintenance costs**: Although projects such as conference halls and representative public buildings symbolized sovereignty, international visibility, and developmental ambition, their long-term upkeep often depended on resources and technical capacities that were not easily available locally. Sekulić notes that, as with many large-scale projects in developing economies, the upkeep of facilities particularly those with specialized imported components proved costly and required continued foreign assistance (Sekulić 2013: 95). A similar critique appears in reflections by Vijay Prashad, who points to the tension between monumental architectural expression and the social and material constraints of postcolonial development. Prashad concerns: "they produced these giant buildings… hard to maintain… you have populations in poverty, and then there is this huge thing… it gives you a sense of pride, but it is not maintainable…cleaning the glass, fixing leaks, sourcing parts, it is impossible to maintain it from leaks. I am optimistic about project but I am not optimistic about this kind of artistic expression in the middle of the project. Somehow it doesn't seem correct. Huge amounts of scarce resources are put into this and then, as I say, it's hard to maintain it. [...] Although to tell you the truth, I can't see many motifs of anti-colonialism here. Where is the anti-colonial motif, where are the people?." (Prashad 2017 speech quoted in Sekulić 2021: 15-16) In the Zambian case, this tension is particularly important because it shows that infrastructure could simultaneously embody political visibility and generate enduring practical obligations.
- **Dependence on foreign expertise**: While some Zambian professionals advanced through UNICO's programs, key technical and managerial positions were often filled by Yugoslav well into the 1980s.
- **Debt burden**: Zambia's growing external debt in the 1980s, culminating in IMF intervention raises questions about whether infrastructure diplomacy contributed to structural dependency, despite its political symbolism.

This is precisely where mutual asymmetrical dependency becomes most visible political pride and international recognition on the one hand, and recurring financial, technical, and maintenance obligations on the other.

4.6 Analytical Synthesis

The ZECCO and UNICO case illustrates the central tension of Yugoslavia's infrastructure diplomacy: its ability to embody NAM ideals while simultaneously serving Yugoslav economic objectives and operating within the constraints of the global capitalist economy. The political symbolism of projects like Mulungushi Hall was undeniable, yet the financial and technical realities suggest that mutual dependency rather than full economic sovereignty was often the practical outcome.

The Lusaka Declaration of the Non-Aligned Movement marked an important moment in redefining the economic ambitions of the movement. Adopted in September 1970, it emphasized the need to work toward a new international economic order and called for more direct and horizontal collaboration among member states. The document also introduced the idea of creating financial mechanisms that would allow non-aligned countries to support one another more effectively. In the aftermath of the summit, Yugoslavia moved quickly to translate these principles into practice by establishing the Fund for Collaboration with Developing Countries, a financial instrument intended to back projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The symbolism of this moment was noticeable, the declaration was signed in Lusaka, inside Mulungushi Hall a building designed and constructed under the carried out by of ZECCO and UNICO. In this way, the ideals proclaimed in the declaration were physically embedded in a space that itself embodied non-aligned cooperation, blending political vision with architectural diplomacy (NAM 1970).

This account sheds light on the pragmatic mechanisms through which Yugoslav firms embedded themselves in African economies. From my perspective, it illustrates how the rhetoric of solidarity was operationalized through very concrete institutional strategies: networks of Yugoslav professionals abroad, state-backed employment schemes, and the establishment of joint ventures like ZECCO and UNICO. For Zambia, this meant access to technical expertise and rapid infrastructural capacity. For Yugoslavia, however, it meant long-term economic footholds and the ability to influence the type and scale of projects commissioned. In this sense Zambia depended on Yugoslav know-how, while Yugoslavia relied on such ventures to sustain its foreign currency inflows and its international prestige within NAM. From the perspective of technical interdependence, the joint venture demonstrates that managerial authority and specialized expertise remained disproportionately concentrated on the Yugoslav side, despite formal majority ownership by the host state. In economic terms, ownership structures reflected partnership, yet access to procurement networks and technological inputs often reproduced asymmetrical capacities. Financially, both partners assumed risks. However, the long-term vulnerability to debt exposure and macroeconomic shocks affected the host state more severely, particularly under conditions of commodity price fluctuation.

Figure 1 - Zambia, 1970. Presidents Tito and Kaunda at the rally in the workers'village at the building site of Kafue Gorge Hydroelectric Power Plant. Source: Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade

Figure 2 - Conference Hall Mulungushi (1970), Source: EP 2011: 23, ephydro.com

Figure 3 - Special Postage Stamp 1970. Non-Aligned Nations Summit Conference. Source: General Post Office Zambia

UNICO - Zambia

Mulungushi : National spectacular number1

Figure 4 - „UNICO – ZAMBIA“, from Energoprojekt Magazine April, 1971: 6-7.

5. Case Study II – NECCO, Nigeria

The diplomatic and economic relationship between Yugoslavia and Nigeria developed within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement but followed a different path than cooperation with Zambia. Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and quickly became an important political and economic actor in West Africa. Its size, population, and natural resources gave it a strong regional position but also led to a more cautious attitude toward foreign partners. At the symbolic handover ceremony of the Lagos International Trade Fair (ITF) in November 1977, Miloš Bošković, director of the construction site, stated:

> "In building over three years this remarkable facility, which will undoubtedly contribute to the development of inter-African and world trade, we wanted to confirm in practice the politics of friendly cooperation among nations that our country Yugoslavia leads. I hope we have succeeded. More than 4000 Nigerians built with us this magnificent object and many of them became skilled in the use of the modern construction technology. We are confident that their new knowledge will be an important contribution to the rapidly developing Nigerian economy…" (Milošević, reported in Lukić 1977: 3)

This statement explained how the project was publicly presented at the time. The highlighting on friendly cooperation, shared construction work, and the training of thousands of Nigerian workers reflects the broader language of non-alignment and solidarity that shaped Yugoslavia's engagement in Africa.

As Sekulić in her dissertation explained, from the second half of the 1960s through the 1970s, Energoprojekt experienced its most productive period of activity in Africa. During these years, the company focused primarily on securing commissions for large-scale infrastructure projects, especially in the fields of energy production and road construction, but also on projects that required extensive architectural and urban design work. A significant number of these architectural projects were directly linked to the integration of host countries into global economic and political networks, such as conference centers, airports, and hotels (Sekulić 2017: 215-216). Energoprojekt's projects that they worked on in Nigeria are the Urbanization of the Seven Cities of Kano in 1973, the IFT in Lagos in 1977, as well as the State Secretariat in Kano - the first phase in 1978. In this thesis International Trade Centre in Lagos is a main center of interest, because it played an important role in the development of cooperation between Yugoslavia and Nigeria and was considered one of the leading projects of that period. Beyond its functional purpose, the ITF represented a visible symbol of Yugoslavia's infrastructural presence in Nigeria and reflected broader ambitions of economic and political cooperation. As Stanek stated, visits to Belgrade by Nigerian officials played a key role in establishing trust and initiating cooperation. One such visit took place in 1965, when Akinloye, the Nigerian Minister of Industry, was introduced to Energoprojekt's projects and Yugoslav industrial achievements, including irrigation systems and hydroelectric power plants. During this visit, particular attention was paid to the New Belgrade Urban Plan, which demonstrated Yugoslavia's capacity to undertake large-scale planning and infrastructure projects. The symbolic dimension of New Belgrade, built on reclaimed marshland, conveyed an image of technological capability and state-led modernization that resonated with Nigerian development ambitions (Stanek 2020: 150-151).

Drawing on his personal experience, Zoran Bojović explained in an interview that Nigeria represented a special case for Yugoslav enterprises. During the 1960s, Nigeria was affected by a civil war triggered by the secessionist aspirations of Biafra. Yugoslavia, partly due to the position taken by one of its ambassadors, supported Biafra, a decision that negatively affected bilateral relations between the two countries. As a result, Nigeria was initially viewed with caution by Yugoslav companies. According to Bojović, Energoprojekt's general director Živko Mučalov even considered Nigeria to be at the bottom of the list of countries in which the company should pursue business activities. Over time, however, political relations between Yugoslavia and Nigeria improved. This shift gradually opened space for economic cooperation, and Energoprojekt's first significant commission in the country became the Ministries Complex of Kano State in northern Nigeria (Bojović 2013: 87-88). This makes Nigeria a particularly useful case for understanding how political relations, diplomatic changes, and economic pragmatism influenced Yugoslavia's infrastructural cooperation in Africa.

5.1 Formation and Structure

Similar as Zambia, cooperation between Yugoslavia and Nigeria was organized through a mixed joint venture company. The Nigerian Engineering and Construction Company or shortened NECCO was established as a partnership between Energoprojekt and the Nigerian government, with majority ownership held by the Nigerian state. As Stanek stated, "the establishment of joint ventures with socialist countries was an attempt on the part of the Nigerian government to offset the dominance of Western firms in the country´s economy" (Stanek 2020: 153).

According to the founding agreement, 60 percent of the shares in the new joint venture were owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, while 40 percent belonged to Energoprojekt. This ownership structure was reflected in the composition of the board of directors, which included both Nigerian and Yugoslav representatives. However, despite this formal arrangement, Energoprojekt remained the main contractor for the International Trade Fair in Lagos, while NECCO was initially engaged as a subcontractor. Its first assignment was the construction of the bridge connecting the Lagos–Badagry Road with the Trade Fair area (Stanek 2020: 155). The establishment of joint ventures in Nigeria must also be understood within the framework of domestic regulatory changes. The institutional framework of cooperation between Energoprojekt and the Federal Government of Nigeria was formalized through the establishment of a mixed construction enterprise. On 16 November, a contract was initialed in the hall of the Workers' Council of Energoprojekt, marking the creation of a joint venture with the Nigerian federal authorities. The capital of the new company was set at two million naira, with Energoprojekt holding a 40 percent share, while the remaining 60 percent belonged to the Federal Government of Nigeria. At the initial stage, both partners committed to paying 20 percent of their respective shares. According to the article published in Energoprojekt Magazin, the Nigerian government selected Energoprojekt among several well-known foreign firms active in the Nigerian construction sector. As part of the agreement, the government committed itself to providing the new joint venture with construction commissions in the field of high-rise building. In addition, it guaranteed the transfer of Energoprojekt's profits from Nigeria to Yugoslavia. These provisions underline the political importance of the agreement and the level of state involvement on both sides, confirming that the establishment of NECCO was not merely a commercial arrangement, but part of a broader framework of bilateral cooperation (Paunović 1973: 3).

As Stanek demonstrates, while Yugoslav companies were familiar with joint ventures from reforms introduced in Yugoslavia during the late 1960s, in Nigeria such organizational forms were often not a matter of choice. During the 1960s, Nigerian governments introduced a series of restrictions on foreign firms operating in the country. These measures included the indigenization of management in foreign-owned companies, which also applied to architectural and construction firms. By 1968, all foreign companies were required to be incorporated in Nigeria. This tendency was further strengthened by the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Indigenization Decree of 1972, which excluded foreign firms from certain sectors and imposed minimum Nigerian equity participation in others. For companies exceeding specific thresholds, at least 40 percent local ownership was required, a figure that was raised to 60 percent for contractors in the 1977 reform. Additional restrictions applied to construction-material industries such as cement, timber, and plywood (Stanek 2020:155).

This organizational structure reflected Nigeria's regulatory framework, which required foreign companies to operate through locally incorporated entities and emphasized national control over strategic projects. Nigeria represents a particularly interesting case because Yugoslavia did not enjoy the same level of political closeness as it did with Zambia. Initial cooperation was therefore more cautious and depended heavily on diplomatic mediation within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement. Energoprojekt's engagement in Nigeria built on its earlier experience with joint ventures in countries such as Zambia and Guinea during the late 1960s. As new contracts were signed in northern Nigeria and local incorporation became mandatory, Energoprojekt Engineering and Contracting Company Ltd. was established in Kano in 1971. The company's statute allowed for a broad range of activities, including construction of buildings and infrastructure, research and design, delivery of mechanical equipment, execution and operation of complete facilities, as well as ancillary activities such as transportation and leasing of machinery. This wide scope of operations enabled Energoprojekt to adapt to local conditions and secure a more stable long-term presence in the Nigerian market (Stanek 2020: 155). The Nigerian perspective on NECCO further clarifies the political and institutional expectations attached to the joint venture. Speaking in 1976 to the reconstituted board of directors of NECCO, the Federal Commissioner for Works, O. E. Obada, outlined the ambitions of the company as a parastatal instrument of modernization. He encouraged NECCO to actively participate in competitive tenders, with a particular focus on the urban development of Lagos, including housing projects. Obada also supported plans for the construction of steel and concrete production facilities that would allow the company to become largely self-sufficient in building materials. At the same time, he assured the directors of continued governmental support, already demonstrated through new commissions such as the Administrative Staff College in Badagry, the Federal Secretariat in Ikoyi, and irrigation projects in Yola. Most importantly, Obada explicitly framed the partnership with Energoprojekt to increase executive capacity within the Nigerian construction sector. He expected NECCO to set professional standards, particularly in contract pricing, and thereby help the government address inflationary pressures in the construction industry (Stanek 2020: 155).

5.2 Key Projects and Symbolic Value

During the 1970s, Energoprojekt significantly expanded its portfolio in Nigeria. Its projects came to include over 1,000 kilometers of electricity networks, the electrification of sixty towns, and, most importantly, the International Trade Fair in Lagos. As Bojović notes, the Lagos Trade Fair became the most visible symbol of Yugoslav engagement in Nigeria and a key reference point for Yugoslavia's infrastructural presence in Africa. The project was presented as a major success also at the level of the Yugoslav federal government. Official statements emphasized that Energoprojekt had been selected despite "numerous competitors," reinforcing the perception of the project as a competitive victory in the field of modernization. In what can be described as an official narrative of Energoprojekt, the Lagos Trade Fair was framed as a moment in which Yugoslavia had even "surpassed" the developed world. Testimonies by architects from Energoprojekt, as well as professionals working within Nigerian government institutions, consistently referred to the project as an unavoidable point of reference for Yugoslav achievement in Africa (Bojović 2013: 206).

As Dubravka Sekulić also notes in her interview with Zoran Bojović, cooperation between Yugoslavia and Nigeria during this period was marked by relatively weak political relations. In this context, she asked Bojović how it was possible that, despite these limitations, Energoprojekt was awarded such a significant project in Lagos. In his response, Bojović emphasized that the decisive factor was the company's approach to the competition, which left a very strong impression on the Nigerian side. According to Bojović, when Živko Mučalov visited Nigeria in 1973, Nigerian officials presented him with a range of potential projects that Energoprojekt could undertake, among which was the Lagos Trade Fair. At that time, the competition for the project was already underway. Two other participants were involved: the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Works and a Hungarian design office. After receiving the official program for the Trade Fair, the Energoprojekt team concluded that it did not meet the standards of an international exhibition of that scale. Bojović explained that instead of following the given brief strictly, Energoprojekt developed its own proposal, described as a "trade fair plus" concept. This proposal went beyond the original requirements and envisioned a complex that could function as a world-class exhibition site, including all necessary supporting facilities. In comparing their proposal with those of the competitors, Bojović noted that key functions were missing from the other submissions, such as a post office, a bank, and basic services required by exhibitors located more than twenty kilometers from the city. Energoprojekt's proposal clearly defined all functions, spatial requirements, pavilion layouts, and the overall urban concept of the site. The complete proposal was prepared and submitted within only fourteen days, a speed that reportedly surprised the Nigerian authorities. Seven days later, Energoprojekt was informed that its proposal had been selected. According to Bojović, it was precisely this comprehensive and proactive approach that impressed the jury and proved decisive in securing the commission (Bojović 2013: 87-88).

5.3 Financing Models

Sekulić explained that: "One of the instruments for preserving the economic and social development of the small, underdeveloped non-aligned countries was the creation of a special solidarity fund during the Fourth NAM Conference that took place in Algiers in September 1973. The fund was charged with issuing credits to non-aligned countries whose economic difficulties came because of international economic pressures, sanctions, or economic blockade. Furthermore, immediately after this conference the Yugoslav government decided to form a special Yugoslav Fund for Solidarity." (Sekulić 2017: 208)

In a report published in Energoprojekt's internal newspaper under the title "Our New Markets," Damjanović offered a critical assessment of Yugoslav performance in the Nigerian market. He argued that the limited competitiveness of Yugoslav companies was not primarily the result of political disagreements, but rather of less favorable credit conditions compared to those offered by Western and Eastern firms (Damjanović 1970: 2). This statement highlights the central role of financing in infrastructural cooperation and foreshadows the importance of credit arrangements in Yugoslavia's engagement with Nigeria.

5.4 Technical Cooperation

Technical cooperation in the Nigerian case did not operate only through the transfer of abstract knowledge or planning models but was deeply embedded in the concrete organization of construction processes, supply chains, and labour relations. Based on the contract with Nigerian Government, the set of agreements defined Energoprojekt's position as the "technical partner" within NECCO. In this role, Energoprojekt was responsible for managing the enterprise, providing professional and managerial staff, and acting as an agent in the procurement of equipment and construction materials. Beyond participation in profit-sharing, the agreement also secured Energoprojekt the transfer of six percent of the net salaries of its employees working in Nigeria, intended to cover costs incurred in Yugoslavia (Petković 1973: 3).

This arrangement illustrates a specific model of technical cooperation. While NECCO formally operated as a joint enterprise with majority Nigerian ownership, operational control remained largely in the hands of Energoprojekt through its expertise, personnel, and organizational capacity. At the same time, the agreement explicitly emphasized benefits for the Nigerian side, including rapid and high-quality construction, training of local workers, and collaboration with a partner experienced in large-scale infrastructure projects. Technical cooperation thus operated a practical mechanism for project delivery and a channel through which Yugoslav expertise shaped the development of Nigeria's construction sector (Petković 1973: 3).

An interview with Zoran Bojović provides valuable insight into how this cooperation functioned in practice during the construction of the Lagos Trade Fair and reveals the logic behind Energoprojekt's broader business strategy in Nigeria. According to Bojović, most of the materials and equipment required for the project were imported. Local resources were limited mainly to basic construction inputs such as gravel, aggregates, and local labour, while most building materials, machinery, and technical equipment were sourced through Yugoslav and international suppliers. Cement, for example, was imported from Dalmacija Cement, a Yugoslav enterprise, while electrical equipment was supplied by companies such as Rade Končar and Torpedo, alongside selected Western firms such as Siemens. Bojović emphasized that existing business relations with Yugoslav companies played an important role in procurement decisions, and that subcontractors outside Yugoslavia were used only when certain materials or services could not be sourced domestically. At the same time, the company avoided transporting large numbers of machines and workers from Yugoslavia, as this would have significantly increased costs (Bojović 2017: 216). This type of operation highlights an important aspect of technical cooperation it was closely linked to Yugoslavia's export-oriented industrial strategy. Infrastructure projects abroad functioned not only as construction sites, but also as platforms for the international circulation of Yugoslav industrial products, technical standards, and organizational practices. In this sense, technical cooperation supported domestic industries while simultaneously embedding Yugoslav expertise within host-country development projects.

The organization of labour on site further illustrates the dual logic of solidarity and economic pragmatism. Bojović explained that the employment of local labour was shaped both by the political principles of the Non-Aligned Movement and by practical cost considerations. Given the high expenses associated with bringing large numbers of Yugoslav workers to Nigeria such as accommodation, food, and logistics Energoprojekt relied primarily on local labour. This workforce was not limited to unskilled workers; skilled workers and technicians were also recruited through open competitions. At the same time, Bojović emphasized that employing and training local workers was understood as a welcomed and deliberate practice within the political framework of non-alignment. Training local labour contributed to confidence-building and facilitated cooperation on construction sites. This approach became particularly visible during the Lagos Trade Fair project, when the company faced a shortage of lower-level technicians, especially draftsmen, due to the large volume of technical drawings required at a time when all documentation was produced manually. In response, Energoprojekt organized open competitions and employed local technicians, integrating them directly into the production process (Bojović 2017: 217). To strengthen its position in Nigeria, Energoprojekt also relied on multilateral frameworks of technical cooperation. As Stanek notes, in 1963 the company registered with the UN Special Fund, which financed technical documentation in fields such as energy infrastructure, agriculture, and water supply. This registration made Energoprojekt eligible to apply as a contractor for internationally funded development projects and widened its access to markets where bilateral agreements alone were not sufficient (Stanek 2020: 152). This form of cooperation shows that technical assistance was not limited to state-to-state solidarity within the Non-Aligned Movement. It also required engagement with international development institutions, especially in more competitive environments such as Nigeria. While framed as technical cooperation, such mechanisms also shaped patterns of dependency, as access to projects increasingly depended on external funding structures.

A report published in Energoprojekt's newspaper described how responsibilities within NECCO were formally divided between the partners. According to the report, Energoprojekt took on the role of the "technical partner," which meant leading the enterprise, providing professional and managerial staff, and taking responsibility for the procurement of equipment and construction materials. The agreement also regulated employee salaries and the repatriation of profits, while noting that the Nigerian government committed itself to providing NECCO with future commissions. Also, the report emphasized that Energoprojekt valued "long-term, mutually beneficial business cooperation over quick profit." (Petković 1973: 3) This formulation is important, as it reveals how Yugoslav cooperation was officially understood and presented within the context of the Non-Aligned Movement. Rather than focusing on short-term financial gain, the company framed its activities around continuity, repeated engagement, and sustained presence in the host country. Long-term cooperation was also a structured way of organizing economic activity abroad, not only a political statement.

5.5 Challenges and Criticism

- Maintenance Cost: While large-scale infrastructure projects carried out by Energoprojekt in Nigeria were presented as symbols of modernization and technical success, their long-term maintenance posed significant challenges. Facilities such as the ITF in Lagos, power infrastructure, and public buildings required continuous technical upkeep, specialized equipment, and stable financial resources. In practice, maintenance costs often exceeded the initial expectations of Nigerian authorities, especially in periods of economic slowdown or fiscal constraint. These challenges were not unique to Nigerian–Yugoslav cooperation but reflected broader structural problems faced by many postcolonial states. Large and technologically complex projects demanded institutional capacities that were still in the process of being developed. As a result, some infrastructures deteriorated over time or required renewed involvement of foreign experts, revealing a gap between ambitious development goals and long-term operational realities.

- Dependence on foreign expertise: A second critical issue concerned the continued reliance on foreign expertise. Although technical cooperation agreements and joint ventures such as NECCO formally aimed at training local professionals and transferring knowledge, the most complex tasks like design coordination, project management, and technical supervision often remained in the hands of Yugoslav experts. Interviews with Energoprojekt architects and engineers indicate that Yugoslav staff frequently occupied key supervisory roles, while local workers were more strongly represented in execution and support functions. This situation created a form of dependency that was not intended as permanent but proved difficult to overcome. On the one hand, Nigerian authorities valued the reliability and experience of Yugoslav professionals. On the other hand, the sustained need for external expertise limited the full localization of technical capacity. Cooperation thus produced uneven outcomes: while skills were transferred, strategic control over complex systems often remained external.

- Debt burden: Financial arrangements represented a further structural constraint. Many of Energoprojekt's projects in Nigeria were made possible through credit mechanisms, including Yugoslav-backed loans and mixed financing schemes. While these arrangements allowed projects to move forward in the absence of sufficient domestic capital, they also contributed to Nigeria's growing external debt. As global economic conditions worsened during the late 1970s and early 1980s, repayment obligations became increasingly difficult to manage. Rising interest rates, fluctuating oil revenues, and broader international financial instability placed additional pressure on public finances. In this context, infrastructural cooperation that was initially framed as mutually beneficial began to be reassessed through the lens of financial sustainability. Debt thus became one of the key factors complicating long-term cooperation and reshaping perceptions of non-aligned development strategies

5.6 Analytical Thought – Link to the Research Question

From an analytical perspective, this form of technical cooperation reveals the layered nature of Yugoslavia's engagement in Nigeria. On the one hand, cooperation was presented and partially experienced as a practice of solidarity, training, and inclusion, consistent with the principles articulated in Non-Aligned Movement declarations. On the other hand, it remained strongly shaped by economic rationality, cost efficiency, and the strategic interests of Yugoslav enterprises. Knowledge transfer and local employment were real, but they unfolded within a framework in which key technical capacities, decision-making processes, and supply networks remained largely controlled by foreign actors. This combination produced a form of cooperation that was both enabling and limiting. While local workers and technicians gained access to skills, experience, and employment, the overall structure of the projects reinforced long-term reliance on imported expertise, materials, and organizational models. Technical cooperation thus contributed to development and capacity building, but also to a pattern of mutual yet asymmetrical dependency that lay at the core of Yugoslavia's infrastructural diplomacy in Nigeria. As Stanek notes that the low salaries for Nigerian workers enabled Energoprojekt to optimise the costs in a project which had a slim profit margin, and the enterprise was internally and publicly justifying this treatment of local workers by claiming that they were learning skills during the process (Stanek 2020: 161).

The rapid escalation of Nigeria's external debt in the 1980s indicates that development cooperation and infrastructure diplomacy were embedded in broader national financial strategies that extended far beyond individual projects. While infrastructure projects like the Lagos ITF aimed to symbolize modernization and political partnership, they took place within a context of increased borrowing and fiscal vulnerability (Moser et al. 1997: 16). This underscores that the forms of mutual dependency described in this thesis were not limited to technical expertise or bilateral agreements alone; they also intersected with external financial pressures that shaped national economic trajectories.

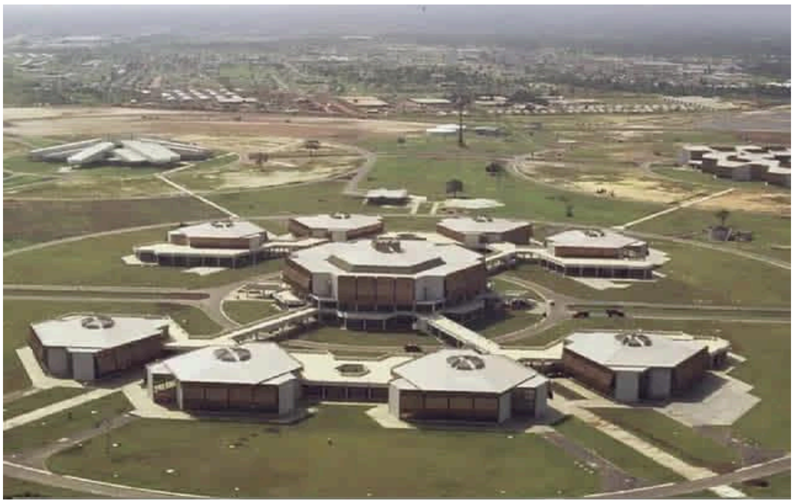

Figure 5 - The central building of the International Trade Fair in Lagos. Source: Dubravka Sekulić 2013/Zoran Bojović Archive

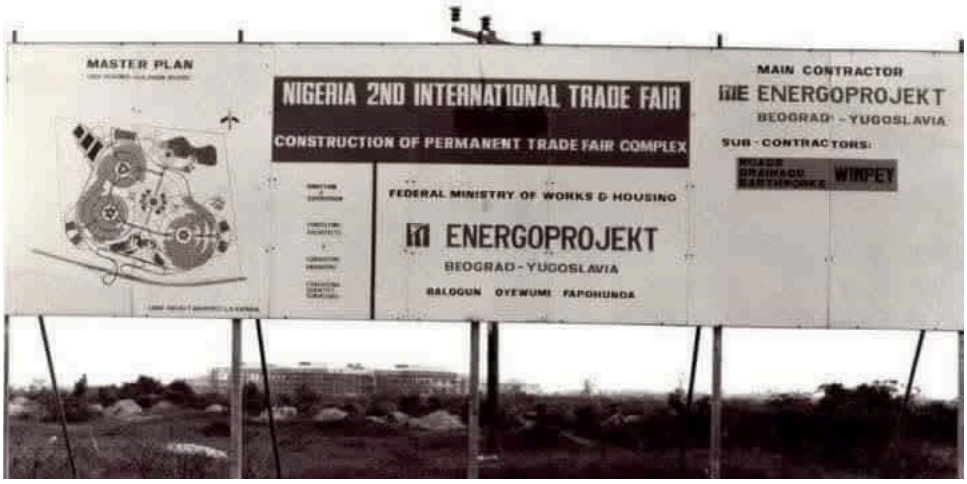

Figure 6 - Construction Master Plan with details. Source: Historical Nigeria Facebook page

6. Mutual Interdependency: Economic, Technical, and Financial Dimensions

6.1 Yugoslavia's Dependence on Foreign Contracts and Markets

From the mid-1960s onwards, the Yugoslav economy increasingly relied on foreign trade and service exports to sustain its domestic model of self-management socialism. Construction contracts in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia became a critical component of this strategy. Energoprojekt and other enterprises were not only economic actors but also extensions of Yugoslavia's foreign policy, securing hard-currency inflows through projects abroad. The Non-Aligned Movement provided a political framework that opened otherwise inaccessible markets. Many contracts were awarded directly through bilateral agreements, bypassing Western-dominated tender systems. In this sense, political solidarity translated into economic opportunity. However, this also meant that Yugoslavia's economic stability became tied to the success of such projects and the availability of foreign contracts. When competition from US- and Soviet-backed companies intensified, Yugoslav firms struggled to maintain their foothold, revealing the structural fragility of this model (Sekulić 2020: 142-143).

From the Yugoslav perspective, cooperation with African countries through ZECCO, UNICO and NECCO represented a strategic extension of economic and political objectives pursued within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement. The agreement ensured that Energoprojekt secured long-term access to a major African market at a time when Yugoslav enterprises increasingly depended on foreign contracts to stabilize production and employment at home. Financial arrangements further reinforced this dependency. The contract explicitly regulated the transfer of profits from Africa to Yugoslavia, as well as the transfer of a portion of employees' net salaries to cover costs incurred at home. These mechanisms tied the success of Energoprojekt's international operations directly to the stability of cooperation with Nigerian authorities. In this sense, Nigeria became not only a project site, but an essential component of Yugoslavia's broader export-oriented economic strategy.

Technically, Energoprojekt's role as the technical partner placed Yugoslav expertise at the center of joint ventures. By leading the enterprise, providing professional staff, and controlling procurement processes, Energoprojekt ensured that its engineering standards, organizational methods, and technological practices were reproduced abroad. This sustained Yugoslavia's reputation as a reliable provider of complex infrastructure and reinforced its political position within non-aligned forums, where such projects were presented as evidence of practical solidarity and developmental competence. In this respect, Bogdan Kavčić's empirical study of highly efficient self-managed enterprises in Yugoslavia is particularly relevant. Although Yugoslav self-management formally assigned decision-making authority to workers' bodies, Kavčić shows that in practice top managers often exercised much stronger influence, especially through their role in preparing proposals, controlling information, and organizing implementation. His findings also indicate that the most successful Yugoslav enterprises were characterized by strong market orientation, export orientation, emphasis on product quality, development based on their own financial resources, and strategic investment in technology and personnel (Kavčić 1990: 845–46, 851). This is important for understanding Energoprojekt, since its international expansion did not represent a departure from Yugoslav self-management, but rather one of the ways in which highly efficient enterprises adapted that system to competitive foreign markets. In that sense, Energoprojekt's dependence on foreign contracts was primarily a result of external economic pressures and also reflected the internal strategic logic of successful Yugoslav enterprises operating within late socialist market conditions.

6.2 African States' Dependence on Yugoslav Expertise and Training

For many African partner countries, collaboration with Yugoslavia provided access to skilled labor, technical knowledge, and modern construction techniques that were often unavailable locally. Projects such as from ZECCO and UNICO in Zambia promised not only infrastructure but also capacity-building through training programs for young engineers and architects. Yet, the degree of actual transfer of knowledge remains debated. Interviews and official reports often highlight the symbolic importance of these training efforts, but evidence of lasting self-sufficiency is limited. In practice, many projects remained dependent on continued Yugoslav technical assistance from the design phase through maintenance. This created a paradox, while such cooperation was presented as fostering independence, it often reinforced new forms of dependency on foreign expertise.

A central component of Yugoslavia's engagement in Zambia was technical cooperation, which created not only channels for knowledge transfer but also forms of structural dependency. According to archival research presented by Dubravka Sekulić, the first bilateral agreement on technical cooperation between Yugoslavia and Zambia was signed on 23 October 1968 and was managed through ZAMTES. Under this scheme, Yugoslav experts were placed in Zambian ministries and public institutions, often acting as "door openers" for Energoprojekt and other Yugoslav enterprises by providing information on upcoming projects and regulatory environments (Sekulić 2020: 146). In her research, Sekulić documents the case of architect

Danilo Dančević, who worked for Energoprojekt and UNICO before taking up a position in Zambia's Ministry of Works, Transport and Power in Lusaka. Between 1968 and 1977, he rose through the ranks from architect to chief architect, while maintaining professional and personal ties to Energoprojekt. His trajectory illustrates how individual experts embodied the intersection of solidarity and dependency: while formally serving the Zambian government, they also facilitated Yugoslav access to new commissions (Sekulić 2020: 147). Energoprojekt itself encouraged employees to register with ZAMTES and often granted them leave to serve abroad, knowing that upon return their experience would strengthen both the enterprise and Yugoslavia's wider international profile. These arrangements were not without tension. Reports noted that Zambia sometimes rejected or delayed the acceptance of Yugoslav experts, with suspicions that remnants of the British professional community resisted the influx of non-English specialists. Yet Yugoslavia persisted, viewing Zambia as one of its closest African partners. Ambitious plans even included a proposal to finance an Educational and Training Centre in Lusaka, explicitly justified as a long-term investment: locally trained professionals would later act as "promoters" of Yugoslav firms. By the mid-1970s, however, the cooperation faced crisis. Joint committees met repeatedly between 1974 and 1976, and again into the early 1980s, to resolve disagreements. Discussions increasingly centered on Zambia's inability to service its growing debts to Yugoslav creditors and enterprises, and on Belgrade's proposal to accept copper as repayment in kind. These difficulties reveal the limits of solidarity: what began as technical assistance and knowledge transfer gradually evolved into financial entanglement, with Zambia dependent on Yugoslav expertise and Yugoslavia reliant on Zambia's ability to honor its commitments (Sekulić 2020: 146-147).

From the Nigerian perspective, cooperation with Energoprojekt addressed pressing developmental needs. The agreement enabled rapid and high-quality construction at a scale that would have been difficult to achieve using domestic capacities alone. Access to Yugoslav technical expertise, organizational know-how, and equipment supported Nigeria's efforts to modernize its construction sector and expand its infrastructural base during a period of rapid urban growth and economic transformation. At the same time, the joint venture framework created long-term reliance on foreign expertise. While local workers were employed and trained, key managerial and supervisory positions remained largely occupied by Yugoslav professionals. This limited the pace at which full technical autonomy could be achieved. Financially, the reliance on external partners and associated credit mechanisms contributed to ongoing fiscal commitments that extended beyond the completion of individual projects.

Nigerian authorities did not perceive this dependency as purely negative. Official discourse emphasized the benefits of cooperation with a partner that prioritized continuity and long-term collaboration rather than short-term profit. NECCO was presented as a vehicle for building domestic capacity, stabilizing employment, and introducing modern construction standards. In this sense, dependency was accepted as a transitional condition within a broader strategy of development and modernization.

6.3 The Financial Burden of Development Loans

A further dimension of dependency emerged in the financial structures of these projects. While the rhetoric of NAM emphasized solidarity, most large-scale contracts were financed through commercial loans, often facilitated by international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. African states, eager to demonstrate progress and modernity, took on substantial debt to fund infrastructure, including those built by Yugoslav enterprises. One Dubravka Sekulić notes that „A whole new market, to which Yugoslav companies gained access through the NAM, started paying off rather fast and by 1964 the total credit and bank transactions between Yugoslavia and the newly decolonized countries reached 360 million USD while trade exchange in the period between 1958 and 1964 was 300 million USD, which made up 17 to 18 percent of Yugoslav international trade. This increased further throughout the 1970s. The NAM was actively involved in creating the context in which movement countries could rely on each other, despite their unfavorable economic position." (Dušan Bilandžić 1979 as cited in Sekulić 2013: 165) Sekulić noted "It is also important to mention that one of the instruments for preserving economic and social development of the small, underdeveloped non-aligned countries was the creation of special solidarity fund during the Fourth NAM Conference that took place in Algiers in September 1973. The fund was charged with issuing credits to non-aligned countries whose economic difficulties came as a result of international economic pressures, sanctions, or economic pressures, sanctions or economic blockade. Furthermore, immediately after this conference the Yugoslav government decided to form a special Yugoslav fund for solidarity." (Sekulić 2013: 190; NAM 1973)

As Dubravka Sekulić shows on the basis of archival material from the Archive of Yugoslavia, the final phase of the Lagos ITF was marked by serious financial tensions between Energoprojekt and the Nigerian federal authorities. A note submitted by Energoprojekt on 7 March 1978 to the Yugoslav federal body responsible for coordinating technical cooperation documents prolonged negotiations over the final billing of the project. According to Sekulić, although construction works were largely completed on schedule, the period between 1976 and 1977 was characterized by constant disputes over rising costs. Inflation, changing material prices, and unanticipated expenses made it increasingly difficult to adhere to the original financial calculations. The document reveals that Energoprojekt sought assistance from Yugoslav authorities in recovering outstanding payments from the Nigerian Federal Ministry, indicating that financial responsibility and risk were unevenly distributed despite the formal framework of joint ventures type cooperation. Sekulić interprets this episode as a moment when the expectations placed on joint ventures particularly the idea that they would optimize costs and stabilize construction markets were tested in practice. Rather than eliminating financial friction, the ITF exposed the structural limits of such cooperation, especially under conditions of economic instability (Sekulić 2020: 176).

By the 1980s, countries such as Zambia found themselves heavily indebted, increasingly unable to service loans, and progressively drawn into IMF-led adjustment frameworks. As Prashad shows, the debt crisis of the former Third World was not simply the result of short-term shocks, but of a broader international political economy marked by inflation, commodity instability, commercial lending, and IMF-backed financial discipline (Prashad 2007: 229–230). In his concluding assessment, he further notes that "in 1970, when the Third World project was intact, the sixty states classified as 'low-income' by the World Bank owed commercial lenders and international agencies $25 billion," whereas three decades later that debt had risen to $523 billion; despite having paid $550 billion in principal and interest on loans worth $540 billion, these states still owed $523 billion, which led him to conclude that "the alchemy of international usury binds the darker nations" (Prashad 2007: 276–277) Prashad's numbers make it clear how many Third World countries were caught in a vicious cycle of debt. Zambia was no exception. Projects like Mulungushi Hall were built to showcase sovereignty and the strength of independence, but financing and maintaining them eventually tied the country more closely to global creditors and international financial institutions. Cooperation with Yugoslavia at first looked like a genuine alternative it came from a fellow non-aligned state and carried the language of solidarity and technical exchange.

Researching official IMF´s and World Bank´s data, by the early 1980s, Zambia's external position had deteriorated sharply. Successive arrangements with the IMF an Extended Fund Facility in 1981 and stand-by arrangements in 1983, 1984 and 1986 signal the depth of the balance-of-payments crisis and the turn to structural adjustment (IMF: Zambia). World Bank data likewise show a steep rise in Zambia's external debt stock through the 1980s, culminating in debt levels that far exceeded the 1970 baseline; a World Bank country note records total external debt of about 7.19 billion USD by 1991, roughly eleven times the amount in 1970. Already in the 1970s, the United Nations acknowledged that Zambia's adherence to sanctions against Rhodesia and the reorientation of trade placed "severe strains" on the economy and called for at least 800 million USD in additional international assistance by end-1980 to stabilize the external accounts and sustain development efforts (UN: Zambia).

While Nigeria entered the 1970s with a seemingly strong fiscal position driven by oil revenues, this stability proved fragile. According to IMF data, oil accounted for nearly 80 percent of federal government revenues and 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, masking deep structural vulnerabilities in the economy. External debt remained relatively low at the end of the decade, amounting to approximately 5 percent of GDP in 1980 (Moser et al. 1997: 3-4). However, the collapse of oil prices in the early 1980s fundamentally altered Nigeria's economic position. Between 1980 and 1985, external debt increased sharply to over 20 percent of GDP, while fiscal deficits widened and foreign exchange shortages intensified. This broader macroeconomic context helps explain the financial tensions documented in the final phase of the Lagos ITF. More generally, Sekulić's discussion of Yugoslav cooperation in Africa points to the importance of credit arrangements, delayed payments, and broader financial risks in such forms of cooperation (Sekulić 2020: 210). An article published in Energoprojekt newspaper in January 1979 reflected on what it described as "Nigerian dilemmas," drawing on assessments by the Rockefeller Foundation and international economists. The article noted that the depreciation of the US dollar had disproportionately affected Nigeria as a major oil exporter to the United States, reducing real oil revenues and leaving the country approximately 1.5 billion USD short of its planned income. This shortfall was compensated through borrowing from international banks, thereby increasing Nigeria's external financial exposure (Lukić 1979a: 8).

At the same time, the article emphasized the structural imbalance of the Nigerian economy. Despite oil export revenues reaching nearly ten billion USD annually, agricultural production stagnated, forcing the country to rely increasingly on food imports. As a result, Nigeria faced a recurring monthly trade deficit estimated at around 300 million USD. The military government under General Olusegun Obasanjo, the article observed, warned of the need for fiscal restraint after years of expansive public spending on large-scale construction projects (Lukić 1979a: 8).

This contemporary assessment is significant for understanding the financial context in which projects such as the Lagos ITF were implemented. Rather than being isolated technical undertakings, these projects were embedded in an economy experiencing the contradictions of rapid oil-led growth, rising debt, and mounting pressure on public finances. The concerns expressed in Energoprojekt newspaper closely align with later IMF and World Bank analyses, which identified the late 1970s as a period when Nigeria's apparent prosperity masked growing structural vulnerabilities. In this sense, the financial difficulties encountered during the execution of Yugoslav-led projects reflected broader systemic pressures rather than project-specific failure.

Nigeria's subsequent turn to IMF-supported structural adjustment programs in the mid-1980s underscores the limits of non-aligned cooperation in shielding participating countries from global financial volatility. While projects such as the Lagos ITF symbolized modernization and international visibility, they were embedded in an economic system increasingly constrained by debt servicing and fiscal austerity. In this sense, Yugoslav–Nigerian cooperation produced tangible infrastructural outcomes yet also became entangled in the structural dependencies that the Non-Aligned Movement sought to overcome.

As explained in IMF Report from Moser et al (1997) in Nigeria's experience further complicates the narrative of development loans within the framework of non-aligned cooperation. While oil revenues initially delayed Nigeria's exposure to external financial discipline, the first half of the 1980s marked a decisive shift toward debt dependence. Prolific external borrowing during this period increased Nigeria's official external debt from 4.1 billion USD at the end of 1980 to 24.6 billion USD by the end of 1986, while the debt-service ratio rose dramatically from 6 percent to 72 percent. As documented, this escalation reflected both the federal government's assumption of state-level debt obligations and the sharp contraction in export revenues, particularly after the collapse of oil prices in 1986. In response, Nigeria pursued a strategy of debt rescheduling and financial normalization through a series of agreements with Paris Club creditors (1986, 1989) and London Club creditors (1986, 1987, 1989), complemented by the introduction of a debt conversion scheme in 1988. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) thus marked Nigeria's formal entry into the global regime of debt management and conditionality (Moser et al. 1997: 16).

7. Between Solidarity and Pragmatism: Critical Reflections

7.1 Navigating Ideals and Economic Necessity

Non-alignment offered a powerful vocabulary solidarity, sovereignty, and mutual development within which Yugoslavia justified its overseas engagements. Yet these ideals were inseparable from pressing economic realities. Energoprojekt Magazine celebrated the completion of the Lusaka Conference Hall as a "National Spectacular No1," sharing and citing a headline from the prestige Zambian Daily Mail, framing the project as both a triumph of non-aligned solidarity and a symbol of Zambia's nationhood (Radenović 1971: 7). Such rhetoric underscored the ideological narrative of Yugoslavia's presence in Africa: that building in Lusaka was an act of friendship, proof that developing states could achieve independence and modernity outside the orbit of the superpowers. Similar narratives accompanied projects in Nigeria, where large-scale infrastructure was framed as evidence of modernization and international recognition. In this sense, infrastructure diplomacy functioned as a form of political storytelling, translating the abstract ideals of non-alignment into concrete, material form.

At the same time, these projects were inseparable from economic necessity. Yugoslavia's overseas engagement was driven not only by ideological commitment, but also by the structural needs of its economy. Foreign contracts mobilized entire domestic production chains, including design institutes, construction firms, equipment suppliers, and financial institutions. They secured employment, generated hard currency, and sustained Yugoslavia's international economic presence. Joint ventures such as ZECCO and UNICO in Zambia and NECCO in Nigeria illustrate this dual logic. Formally grounded in political affinity and cooperation, they also functioned as mechanisms for securing long-term business opportunities and reducing dependence on Western markets.

International observers were aware of this pragmatic dimension. As reported by foreign media in the early 1980s, Energoprojekt "build an international market," (The New York Times 1983), which means increasingly operated as a global contractor, that extended well beyond the language of solidarity. Yugoslav infrastructure diplomacy therefore did not succeed by separating ideals from economics, but precisely by combining them. Solidarity and pragmatism were not opposing forces; they were mutually reinforcing elements of Yugoslavia's engagement with the Global South. In other words, Yugoslav infrastructural diplomacy thrived not because it separated ideals from economics, but precisely because it combined them. In this sense, solidarity and pragmatism were not opposites but two sides of the same coin.

7.2 Infrastructure as Symbolic Power and Its Limits

Large-scale infrastructure projects were designed to operate as instruments of soft power within the Non-Aligned Movement. Conference centers, government complexes, and cultural institutions made solidarity visible and allowed newly independent states to stage sovereignty on the international stage. The Mulungushi International Conference Hall enabled Zambia to host the 1970 Non-Aligned Summit and symbolized both national independence and Yugoslavia's technical capacity. Similarly, projects such as the Lagos ITF were intended to integrate Nigeria into global economic and political networks.

Yet the very characteristics that gave these projects symbolic power also revealed their limits. Advanced construction techniques, imported materials, and complex organizational structures often required ongoing external expertise. Maintenance, repair, and operation depended on continued access to specialized knowledge, spare parts, and financial resources. As Stanek notes, such projects promised autonomy and modernization, but in practice relied on the sustained circulation of experts, technologies, and institutional ties across borders (Stanek 2020). In this sense, infrastructure functioned as a way of projecting symbolic and developmental power toward both Cold War blocs. Through this projects Yugoslavia and its non-aligned African partners presented themselves as capable of producing alternative forms of development cooperation outside the dominant East–West framework. At the same time, these projects were also material sites of long-term technical, financial, and organizational interdependence. Buildings embodied independence and solidarity, however, their long-term functioning depended on external inputs. This dependence was rarely visible at the moment of inauguration, when political symbolism dominated. It emerged progressively over the life cycle of the project through maintenance costs, technical reliance, and financial obligations. Infrastructure diplomacy therefore created durable connections that were both enabling and constraining, reflecting what Keohane and Nye describe as interdependence shaped by unequal vulnerability and different costs of adjustment (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10–16).

7.3 The Political Capital – Economic Reality Gap

Yugoslavia's international standing during the Cold War was closely tied to its leadership role within the Non-Aligned Movement. Tito's diplomacy and Yugoslavia's active engagement allowed Belgrade to position itself as a mediator between blocs and as a key voice of the Global South. As Bogetić has argued, Yugoslavia's global role and the vitality of the Non-Aligned Movement were mutually reinforcing, he said:

> “The Non-Aligned Movement would never have achieved its global role in the Cold War polarized world without the continuous, skillfully designed and offensive performance of Yugoslav diplomacy and Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito. On the other hand, socialist Yugoslavia could never have played such a significant role in that bloc-divided world without the constant, well-organized and efficient action of this broad and democratically organized Movement.” (Bogetić 2021: 239)

Without Yugoslav diplomatic initiative, the Movement would not have achieved its international visibility; without the Movement, Yugoslavia’s political relevance would have been significantly reduced.

This accumulation of political capital opened doors. It facilitated access to African leaders, enabled bilateral agreements, and created favorable conditions for joint ventures such as ZECCO and NECCO. However, political prestige did not automatically translate into economic stability or success. Yugoslav enterprises operated within a global economy marked by competition, volatile commodity markets, and tightening credit conditions, especially from the late 1970s onward. The experiences of Zambia and Nigeria reveal different trajectories within this shared framework. In Zambia, dependence on copper exports and external financing quickly exposed the financial vulnerability of large infrastructure projects. Political recognition and international visibility were accompanied by long-term debt obligations and reliance on external technical support. In Nigeria, oil revenues initially postponed these pressures, allowing ambitious projects to proceed without immediate fiscal strain. Yet the collapse of oil prices and the rapid accumulation of external debt in the 1980s revealed similar structural limits, as cooperation became increasingly entangled with debt rescheduling and structural adjustment.

The outcome was a form of mutual, but asymmetrical, dependency. Yugoslavia secured contracts, hard-currency earnings, and international legitimacy, while African partners absorbed the long-term financial and technical risks associated with infrastructure development. Political capital sustained cooperation but could not fully bridge the gap between ideological aspirations and economic realities. Viewed through the lens of dependency theory, as articulated by Dos Santos and further developed by Cardoso and Faletto, these cases illustrate that cooperation framed as solidarity could still operate within broader structures of dependency. While such relationships were not simply imposed from outside, they were shaped through the interaction of external economic ties with domestic institutions, political strategies, and uneven capacities, thereby reproducing structural asymmetries in new forms (Santos 1970: 231–233; Cardoso and Faletto: xxi-xxii).

8. Comparative Analysis

8.1 Patterns of Technical and Economic Interdependence

The case studies of Zambia and Nigeria show that Yugoslav infrastructural cooperation within the Non-Aligned Movement followed similar organizational logics and at the same time unfolded under different political and economic conditions. In both countries, cooperation was structured through joint ventures, technical assistance agreements, and state-backed financial arrangements. Both ZECCO and NECCO were established as joint ventures combining Yugoslav technical expertise with local state participation. In formal terms, these arrangements reflected the principle of partnership rather than autonomous control. Yugoslav enterprises did not operate as purely commercial actors, but within a framework shaped by diplomatic relations and political trust developed through the NAM. Hence, access to projects was closely linked to political channels rather than open market competition, as shown in both case studies on Zambia and Nigeria, initial contacts were often established through high-level diplomatic visits, bilateral agreements, and the placement of Yugoslav experts in local institutions. Technical cooperation formed the core of both partnerships likewise allowed Yugoslav companies to secure a long-term presence and adapt to local legal requirements. It is important to mention that Zambian and Nigerian engineers and administrators participated in project implementation, on the other hand the organizational model and technical standards were shaped primarily by Energoprojekt. Yugoslav engineers provided design, project management, and implementation expertise. Training programs enabled local participation, yet the maintenance of complex infrastructure often continued to rely on Yugoslav knowledge, imported components, and institutional support. This created a structural asymmetry in expertise, even within formally cooperative arrangements. These similarities confirm that cooperation was based on a shared institutional model rather than ad hoc arrangements. I recognize this like a created form of long-term technical interdependence. African partners benefited from capacity-building and infrastructural modernization, and on the other hand developed reliance on Yugoslav expertise for specialized maintenance and system continuity. Simultaneously, Yugoslavia depended on the successful execution of these projects to maintain its reputation and credibility within the Non-Aligned Movement.

The financial dimension reveals clearer divergence between the two cases. Zambia, facing economic constraints and dependence on copper exports, entered cooperation under more limited fiscal conditions. Infrastructure projects represented substantial financial commitments, often financed through complex credit arrangements. As a result, the financial burden and long-term repayment obligations weighed more heavily on the Zambian side.

Nigeria, by contrast, entered cooperation during a period marked by fluctuating oil revenues. While the oil boom of the 1970s initially increased state income and expanded fiscal capacity, subsequent volatility in global oil prices and difficulties in revenue collection exposed structural vulnerabilities within the Nigerian economy. Large-scale projects such as the ITF Center in Lagos therefore unfolded within a context of both temporary fiscal expansion and growing macroeconomic instability, requiring substantial capital commitments and long-term maintenance costs. In both contexts, Yugoslavia also assumed economic risk. Energoprojekt depended on foreign contracts to secure hard currency earnings and sustain domestic industries. Overseas projects were not merely diplomatic gestures but essential components of Yugoslavia's semi-open socialist economy. The financial interdependence was therefore mutual, though uneven in scale and exposure.

Evidence from Energoprojekt's internal publications further illustrates the financial vulnerability of NECCO during the late 1970s. A report discussed in Energoprojekt Newspaper (Lukić 1979b: 5) reveals that the joint venture was unable to meet its financial obligations toward suppliers and Energoprojekt itself. Construction sites in Jola and Kano experienced delays primarily due to shortages of working capital. The report attributes losses not only to external constraints but also to managerial decisions in Lagos, including prolonged preparatory works, oversized temporary settlements, and the purchase of new machinery paid in cash at peak demand levels (Lukić 1979b: 5).

In response to the crisis, the Workers' Council of Energoprojekt's construction division adopted a series of stabilization measures: postponement of credit installments, additional capital injection of approximately 600,000 USD, restructuring of the management board, and the dispatch of senior engineering staff from Belgrade to reorganize operations. Significantly, the report concludes that responsibility for the difficult situation lay with both the Lagos and Belgrade leadership. While the crisis affected both partners, the structure of exposure was not symmetrical. NECCO's inability to service its obligations directly affected local operations, wage payments, and ongoing construction activities, thereby placing immediate fiscal and political pressure on the Nigerian side faced financial losses and reputational risks yet remained institutionally embedded within Yugoslavia's state-supported construction sector (Lukić 1979b: 5). The costs of disruption were therefore distributed unevenly, illustrating a configuration of asymmetric interdependence rather than balanced partnership.

8.2 Diplomatic and Political Dimensions

Beyond economics and technology, both ventures had significant political value. For Zambia and Nigeria, cooperation with Yugoslavia reinforced international visibility and affirmed alignment within a non-bloc framework. Infrastructure projects symbolized sovereignty and developmental ambition.

Radonjić stated that economic experts who studied Africa from an ex-cathedra position often imagined Yugoslavia and African countries as belonging to the same world, united by the need to resist imposed global hierarchies and unequal relations (Radonjić 2020: 211). From this perspective, cooperation was framed primarily in terms of political solidarity and shared historical experience. At the same time, however, business actors and foreign trade specialists began, at a very early stage, to view Africa as a promising export market. While cooperation initially carried elements of solidarity, it gradually produced a different perception, in which African states were increasingly seen either as easy markets or as unreliable debtors. As Radonjić notes, Africa was consistently understood as a victim of the global economic system. In some cases, this victim was treated as a partner, while in others it was subjected to various forms of exploitation (Radonjić 2020: 211). For Yugoslavia, such projects strengthened its leadership role within the Non-Aligned Movement and enhanced its diplomatic capital. Infrastructure diplomacy functioned as a tangible manifestation of solidarity, yet also as a strategic instrument of foreign policy.

8.3 Assessing Asymmetry

The comparison demonstrates that the partnerships cannot be understood as classical dependency in a center–periphery sense. Yugoslavia did not exercise hegemonic financial control, nor did African states operate as passive recipients.

However, the distribution of vulnerability was not symmetrical. African partners drag greater financial exposure and longer-term maintenance burdens, while Yugoslavia's dependence was primarily linked to foreign currency earnings and geopolitical positioning, and finally the costs of disruption would not have been identical for both sides.

I can conclude that these cases therefore illustrate a configuration of mutual yet asymmetrical interdependence. Cooperation was necessary and beneficial to both parties, but embedded in structural inequalities shaped by technological capacity, financial resources, and global economic constraints. To conceptualize this configuration, Keohane and Nye define interdependence as situations characterized by reciprocal effects between actors then emphasize that such relationships are rarely symmetrical. Power derives from differences in vulnerability that is, from the relative costs actors would incur if the relationship were disrupted (Keohane and Nye 2001: 7-12). They distinguish between sensitivity, referring to immediate reactions within a given policy framework, and vulnerability, which concerns the availability of alternative options and the long-term costs of adjustment, (Keohane and Nye 2001: 10-13). Applied to the Yugoslav–African cooperation, this framework shifts the analytical focus from hierarchical domination to differentiated exposure to economic and institutional risk. The relevant question is therefore not whether dependence existed, but how vulnerability was distributed within the partnership structures.

At the same time, I found important differences. Zambia entered cooperation with Yugoslavia as a newly independent state with limited economic resources and a strong political commitment to NAM solidarity. Nigeria, by contrast, was a larger and economically stronger country, whose engagement with Yugoslavia developed more cautiously, especially after the tensions caused by the Biafran War. These differences shaped the quantity of projects and the balance of power within joint ventures, while Zambia relied heavily on Yugoslav expertise and financing, Nigeria retained greater bargaining power and pursued cooperation more selectively. The Nigerian case reveals a more complex and internally stratified form of cooperation than is often assumed in narratives of South–South solidarity. While NECCO was formally structured as a joint venture and publicly framed as a vehicle for training and capacity-building, its internal organization exposed significant asymmetries in authority, remuneration, and decision-making. As Stanek shows in his analysis of the International Trade Fair project, the labor force during peak construction phases consisted of more than one thousand Nigerian workers supervised by fewer than one hundred Yugoslav foremen. Although some Nigerian workers received certificates of professional qualification upon leaving the site the institutional architecture of the joint venture remained hierarchically organized (Stanek 2020: 161).

Stanek undernotes crucially, that the self-management bodies established within the joint venture included only Yugoslav workers and explicitly excluded Nigerian employees (Stanek 2020: 161). This exclusion undermined the rhetoric of shared management and demonstrated that the transfer of Yugoslav organizational models did not translate into equal institutional participation. Differences in wages and accommodation generated tensions between Yugoslav and Nigerian staff, and episodes of wildcat strikes were recorded as Nigerian workers demanded salary increases (Stanek 2020: 161). These conflicts indicate that cooperation operated within a differentiated labor hierarchy rather than a fully integrated partnership.

The limits of technology transfer are further illustrated by the project's material structure. Under pressure to meet deadlines and facing an unstable domestic market for construction materials, managers relied heavily on Yugoslav and international supply chains. Steel structures, façade elements, furniture, and other components were imported from Yugoslav republics, while additional systems were sourced from Western European and American producers (Stanek 2020: 162). Therefore, a substantial share of the project's economic value was generated outside Nigeria, limiting the developmental spillover for the domestic construction-material industry.
Stanek also situates the project within a broader climate of fiscal scrutiny and political investigation in 1970s Nigeria, including the Cement Tribunal and the Festac Tribunal, which examined cost overruns and procurement practices in large-scale construction (Stanek 2020: 162). Although the ITF itself avoided major scandal, this context underscores the financial and political volatility within which the joint venture operated. Taken together, these dynamics reveal a layered configuration of interdependence. Nigeria and Zambia required technical expertise, organizational capacity, and access to transnational supply networks, while Yugoslavia depended on overseas contracts for foreign currency earnings and industrial reproduction. Yet authority over management structures, wage hierarchies, and supply chains was unevenly distributed. Therefore, this illustrates asymmetrical interdependence embedded in institutional and material inequalities.

8.3.1 Sensitivity of the Partnership

In the framework of Keohane and Nye, sensitivity refers to the degree to which changes in one actor generate immediate and costly effects in another actor within an existing policy framework, before significant adjustments are made. It captures short-term responsiveness and exposure to external disruptions (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10–11).
In the case of Yugoslav–African joint ventures, sensitivity can be observed in the day-to-day functioning of infrastructure projects and their dependence on stable financial flows, technical coordination, and political conditions. Delays in payments, fluctuations in state budgets, or interruptions in supply chains could directly affect ongoing construction activities, project timelines, and the availability of materials and labor.
For African partner states, sensitivity was particularly visible in their reliance on Yugoslav technical expertise and project management. Any disruption in the availability of engineers, managerial staff, or imported equipment could immediately slow down or halt construction processes. This created a situation in which project continuity depended on the uninterrupted presence of Yugoslav organizational capacity.

On the Yugoslav side, sensitivity was reflected in the dependence on timely payments, contract stability, and continued access to foreign markets. Since infrastructure projects were closely tied to the acquisition of foreign currency and the functioning of domestic industries, delays or disruptions in African partner states had immediate economic consequences for Yugoslav enterprises.

Thus, sensitivity in these partnerships operated in both directions. However, the forms of exposure differed: African states were more sensitive to disruptions in technical execution, while Yugoslavia was more sensitive to financial and contractual instability. This demonstrates that interdependence was not only mutual but also structured through different channels of short-term responsiveness.

8.3.2 Vulnerability and Alternatives

While sensitivity captures immediate reactions to external changes, vulnerability refers to the costs actors face even after they attempt to adjust to those changes. It is determined by the availability and cost of alternative options, and it reflects the long-term dimension of interdependence (Keohane and Nye 2012: 11–14).

In the Yugoslav–African partnerships, vulnerability was distributed asymmetrically. African partner states, particularly Zambia and to a lesser extent Nigeria, faced limited alternatives in terms of technical expertise, project management, and organizational capacity. Although Western or Eastern bloc firms could in principle serve as substitutes, these alternatives were often politically constrained, financially more expensive, or less aligned with the principles of non-alignment. As a result, the cost of replacing Yugoslav partners was high, increasing the vulnerability of African states.

At the same time, Yugoslavia was not without vulnerability. Its economy relied on foreign contracts to secure hard currency, sustain domestic industrial production, and maintain its international position within the Non-Aligned Movement. However, Yugoslavia generally had a broader range of potential partners across the Global South and beyond, which reduced the cost of substitution compared to its African counterparts.

This asymmetry is particularly visible in the financial dimension. African states often bore long-term debt obligations associated with infrastructure projects, including loans, maintenance costs, and repayment schedules tied to volatile commodity revenues. These structural constraints limited their ability to disengage from existing partnerships without incurring significant economic costs.

In contrast, Yugoslavia's vulnerability was more closely linked to market access and contract continuity rather than to structural dependence on a single partner. While the loss of specific projects could be costly, Yugoslavia retained a higher degree of flexibility in reallocating its economic activities.

Therefore, the partnerships examined in this thesis can be understood as cases of asymmetric interdependence: both sides depended on each other, but the distribution of vulnerability was uneven. African states faced higher long-term adjustment costs, while Yugoslavia operated with comparatively greater strategic flexibility.

Conclusion

Yugoslav cooperation with African non-aligned states should not be understood either as a purely altruistic project of solidarity or as a straightforward reproduction of classical dependency. The cases of Zambia and Nigeria show that it functioned as a specific form of development cooperation in which political solidarity, economic interest, and infrastructural modernization were closely intertwined. Yugoslavia sought to position itself as a partner in postcolonial development; however, it did so through mechanisms that simultaneously expanded its own economic reach and diplomatic influence. The analysis has demonstrated that Yugoslavia's engagement with African countries formed part of a broader strategy through which Belgrade sought to strengthen its position in the Global South while also advancing national economic interests. Thus, Yugoslavia's relationship with the Third World cannot be reduced to symbolic diplomacy alone; it also involved practical efforts to build long-term political and economic ties through trade, development initiatives, and institutional cooperation. In this sense, Yugoslav cooperation with countries such as Zambia and Nigeria should be understood as part of a wider project of non-aligned development diplomacy that aimed to translate the political language of non-alignment into concrete forms of international engagement. A central finding of this thesis is that this cooperation functioned through a set of interconnected technical, economic, and financial mechanisms. Most clearly, the study shows that Yugoslav-African cooperation generated a form of asymmetrical interdependence. African partners gained access to infrastructure, technical knowledge, and international visibility, while Yugoslavia secured contracts, hard currency, export opportunities, and a strengthened position within the Non-Aligned Movement. Yet these benefits were not structured equally. Control over expertise, project implementation, financing, and institutional frameworks often remained on the Yugoslav side, which gave Yugoslav actors a stronger structural position within the partnership. When viewed through Keohane and Nye's framework, this asymmetry becomes more precise. At the level of sensitivity, the relationship was reciprocal. African partners were highly sensitive to the continued presence of Yugoslav engineers, organizational capacity, and project coordination, since disruptions in technical execution could immediately affect construction processes and project completion. Yugoslavia, in turn, was sensitive to delayed payments, contractual instability, and shifts in the fiscal capacities of its African partners, because such disruptions directly affected foreign currency earnings, corporate planning, and the functioning of domestic industries linked to overseas contracts. In this sense, both sides were exposed to short-term disruptions generated by the other (Keohane and Nye 2012: 10–11).

At the level of vulnerability, however, the relationship was more clearly asymmetrical. African partner states generally faced higher long-term adjustment costs because alternatives to Yugoslav technical expertise, institutional arrangements, and financing structures were limited, politically constrained, or more expensive. Zambia in particular appears to have faced a narrower range of viable alternatives, while Nigeria, despite its greater financial resources during the oil boom, also became vulnerable once fiscal conditions deteriorated. Yugoslavia itself remained vulnerable to repayment problems, external financial instability, and the broader constraints of the global economy. However, it retained greater room to maneuver through access to multiple foreign markets and a broader portfolio of international partnerships. For this reason, the concept of asymmetrical interdependence provides the most convincing interpretation of these relationships. It captures more accurately than dependency theory alone the fact that both sides relied on the relationship, but not to the same degree and not in the same way (Keohane and Nye 2012: 11–14).

The partnerships examined here were therefore reciprocal, but the distribution of risk, control, and vulnerability remained uneven. In that sense, non-aligned cooperation did not eliminate structural inequality; rather, it reconfigured it within a framework of negotiated cooperation rather than colonial domination. This also shows that South–South cooperation should not be seen as automatically equal or free of imbalance. The Yugoslav case demonstrates that cooperation between non-aligned and postcolonial states could produce real developmental results and offer an alternative to Cold War bloc politics. At the same time, it could also generate new inequalities through financing arrangements, technical dependence, and institutional control. Its significance lies precisely in the fact that it reveals both the possibilities and the limits of a development model that sought to combine solidarity with concrete economic and political interests.

As Prashad has argued in relation to the wider "Third World Project," the political aspirations of postcolonial solidarity were repeatedly constrained by the material pressures of the global economy, including debt, inflation, and financial volatility (Prashad 2007: 229-232). This master thesis confirms this insight. Yugoslav-African cooperation did create space for alternative development trajectories outside the dominant East–West framework, yet it remained deeply conditioned by international financial structures and unequal access to capital, technology, and markets. In this respect, South–South cooperation did not stand outside the global political economy; rather, it operated within it and was ultimately shaped by its limits.

The weakening of Yugoslav-African developmental engagement coincided with both the death of President Tito and the global debt crisis of the early 1980s. Without Tito's personal political authority and under intensifying financial pressure, neither Yugoslavia nor its African partners were able to sustain the same level of cooperation that had characterized the 1970s. This development shows how closely political capital and economic conditions were intertwined. The success of non-aligned infrastructural cooperation depended not only on ideological commitment and diplomatic solidarity, but also on the continued viability of the financial and institutional arrangements that supported it.

The infrastructural projects examined in this thesis continue to stand, even today, as material reminders of a moment in which infrastructure and architecture were invested with political purpose and developmental hope. Seen from this perspective, the Yugoslavia–Africa partnership offers an important historical lens for understanding both the possibilities and the limits of South–South cooperation in the twentieth century. It was more than a passing episode in Cold War diplomacy. It demonstrated that cooperation among countries of the Global South could generate real infrastructural, developmental, and political outcomes, even if it remained conditioned by unequal capacities and the wider constraints of the global economy. Its historical importance lies precisely in this tension: it was neither a simple success nor a simple failure, but a serious attempt to create development through cooperation under conditions of persistent asymmetry.

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