

REHABILITATION OF URBAN IDENTITY OF CITIES IN THE BANJA LUKA REGION THROUGH URBAN FORM REGULATION

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This paper points to the possibility of codification of urban planning and application of physical regulation standards in urban form design to establish such instruments of guidance as will ensure the recognition, appreciation and development of local urban identity. The purpose of establishing general principles and making quality recommendations that would aim at urban form design regulation and be implemented as qualitative criteria and regulation standards is to propose a methodology for the rehabilitation of the City of Banja Luka's identity applicable to similar cities in the region, with due adjustments to allow for contextual specificity, with the possibility of coordinated regional city development.

The discontinuity in the urban development of Banja Luka and other cities in the region has jeopardised the inherent characteristics of their identities, resulting in reduced recognisability and impaired integrity. This study covers the period since the beginning of Banja Luka's guided urban development (Austro-Hungarian administration, 1878), which should allow a review of its urban morphogenesis and an understanding of its key elements, as well as identification of the general principles and rules of urban form regulation as laid down in the local ordinance and planning legacy.

Key words: urban form, identity, renewal, regulation, principles.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The development of the urban identity of Banja Luka and most cities in the region is marked by problems identified as reduced recognisability and impaired integrity, which seriously jeopardise its main elements. These problems stem from a discontinuity in the urban development of these cities, affecting their overall development; also perceptible is the disintegration of their urban form, arising from urban transformation. The contemporary social and cultural contexts of these cities are plagued by the actualisation of three mutually incompatible concepts: globalisation; the political, economic and cultural unification of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the insistence on the regional peculiarities of the Republic of Srpska.

This paper starts with the thesis that urban identity is a process and must be observed as such, taking account of the influence of natural-

morphological, socio-economic, cultural and other factors on its development. This study understands identity as a whole that preserves its major characteristics despite constant change (Majstorović, 1979), and it seeks to identify the key characteristics of a city's urban identity, whose protection and preservation should be the priority line of action when it comes to the renewal and advancement of that identity. The goal is to create a methodological framework for relevant research and application concerning other cities in the region, and to form a theoretical platform for strategic investigation into the possibility of a concurrent and compatible regional development of these cities. This study covers the period since the beginning of Banja Luka's statutory planning (Austro-Hungarian administration, 1878) to date, in order to identify the general principles and rules behind urban form regulation as laid down in the local town planning ordinance legacy.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE PHENOMENON OF URBAN FORM

Urban form is recognised as a point of convergence, a meeting place and source of theoretical and practical effort; it is a reflection of and a framework for scientific and professional activity when drawing up a concept of regulation and establishment of urban order. Theoretical research into the urban environment sees urban form as a heterogeneous and composite urban phenomenon, and its contemporary investigations insist on interdisciplinarity and contextualisation. In this

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paper *contextualisation* of urban form translates as concurrent consideration of a range of spatial and temporal aspects for the purpose of understanding its complexity. Urban form is observed from the perspective of urban morphology, as inseparable from urban landscape, to understand its composite nature and multiple meanings. It is essential to see the various aspects and levels of space as urban landscape, and to understand urban form as a temporal design process.

In this paper urban form is observed as an area of representation of urban identity and recognised as a domain in which possibilities to improve urban identity may be actualised. It is implied that it is precisely urban form, which is an integral part of urban landscape and is both symbolic and objective, that makes legible the physical and symbolic manifestations of urban identity. The issue of identification and examination of possible physical elements of representation, functional standards or symbolic meanings of a distinct urban environment is thematised accordingly. The possibility of implementing principles of urban codification in planning on the one hand, and of physical regulation standards in urban form design on the other, is indicated in order to activate appropriate planning and design tools to ensure the recognition, appreciation and development of local or regional urban identity.

Therefore, urban form is treated as a constituent of urban landscape, which ensures *optimal spatiality*, i.e. visual encapsulation of the various spatial elements of urban landscape into an *organic, preorganised compositional whole* (Dobrović, 1998). Because urban landscape is understood as composite, something that merges urban morphology with the visual character of a city; since it is analysed and interpreted as man's habitat, urban form and physical structure, permeated with and fused by the landscape structure, thriving with human activity and laden with symbolic value, meanings and messages – it is recognised as an expression of the conceptualisation of the city and as an instrument of research, planning, design and preservation of the environment (Simonović *et al.*, 2011).

URBAN FORM REGULATION

Urban form is an expression of spiritual, social, historical, spatial and physical continuity. The continuity and endless succession of urban frames, expressed as the co-existence, at multiple levels, of various urban forms originating in different time periods and social sources, confirm the existence of a lasting link between human power and the changing social

tissue. In this paper, the concept of urban form is used in an *integral* sense, which combines the objective and symbolic aspects of this complex phenomenon, i.e. physicalness of the urban environment and its mental and symbolic projections or *images*, which carry symbolic meanings and emanate communicative significations. Urban order, as established, is embodied in urban form as understood above, through its physical and functional as well as normative and cultural aspects. Since the physical or material ingredients of urban form are present in its built structure, open spaces, the natural and morphological characteristics of a place and inherent spatial relations, we believe urban order can be established through the physical regulation of urban form. By urban order we mean a system of spatial elements and their interrelations, patterns of use and meanings of urban form, established through a process of harmonisation with social and legal systems, which guarantees the development of urban identity (evaluation, protection, conservation, rehabilitation and enhancement of the quality of the key inherent elements of identity).

Understanding urban regulation as a way of organising and harmonising spatial relations and managing urban development, as well as a means of translating various goals, values, interests and needs into urban form norms, this research takes into account town planning standards as operational instruments of regulation, and categories of town planning codes and norms as tools for unifying and striking a balance between research findings, planning and construction experiences, and the changing needs and potentials of the urban environment.

Legacy and challenges of Banja Luka's changing urban form regulation

Building codes and standards are that which connects the inherited values and meanings of the building heritage with contemporary practices of planning, design and production of urban space. They may be labelled keys to the interpretation of historical layers of meaning, or the DNA of our cities, as Andreas Duany does in his review of the book *The Code of the City* (2005) by Eran Ben-Joseph. Analysis of the urban development of the City of Banja Luka from the perspective of urban regulation provides insight into the evolution of the codes and standards used, and into their impact on the design, creation and transformation of its urban form and urban landscape.

The lifespan of codes, standards and town-building rules varies: some are implemented continuously and in different contexts, which

over time earns them the attribute of universality; others last for as long as a given social system or cultural context; finally, the longest-standing ones are those which substantively reflect local or regional characteristics and meanings. Today's high-tech societies are protected by all kinds of rules, not truly universal but widely used in different local conditions; understandably, such codes, rules and regulations gradually become alien to the local conditions in which they originated. Understanding this phenomenon necessitates an explanation of the birth of town planning norms and their use, from the beginnings of urbanisation until today. This should tell us how to shape our environments to be sustainable and desirable – by implementing flexible codes and standards reflecting the authentic conditions and particularities of a given local and regional social and cultural context (Ben-Joseph, 2005).

Records of statutory town planning and development and written construction codes may be found in the history of any culture or civilisation, and date back to antiquity. Worth mentioning are Aristotle's principles of how to build beautiful and safe towns, Vitruvius' recommendations on the foundation of towns (Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, 1990), and Byzantium's Julian of Ascalon's treatise of construction and design rules. Because of their flexibility, these rules and norms developed over a long period of time and often stemmed from customary law and communal ethics. Their emphasis on the right relation between adjacent buildings, the right of first use, privacy, etc., influenced the development of most Mediterranean cities in the Byzantine era (Ben-Joseph, 2005).

In the Middle Ages, between the 12th and 14th century, European cities established city authorities in charge of urban development (Bern, Siena, Venice, Dubrovnik). These authorities were guided by rules, regulations, instructions or recommendations for planning, design and construction. Respecting strict and detailed rules of construction (codes), they made their cities develop uniformly, creating unique vistas and cityscapes, for which many of them are still well-known today. The same construction rules applied between the 13th and 19th century, eventually allowing the reconstruction of street fronts in ways pertinent to the new practices of the modern era, while respecting the existing proportions (Dimitrovska-Andrews, 1994). Both in the Renaissance and later, with the application of the rules of perspective, many cities were planned and their physical appearance designed with great precision and in detail.

The second half of the 19th century saw a romantic revival of the ideas of ancient architects and the Renaissance, those which were concerned with bringing order to city composition and image, leading to the development of modern town planning in European cities based on new principles, as the art of city building according to aesthetic rules. Camillo Sitte combined Aristotle's principles with Vitruvius' building recommendations and Renaissance aesthetic principles into the fundamental principles of town design (Zite, 1967). In this period, town planning was not strongly influenced by architectonic aesthetics in only Austria and Germany, but also in other European countries and the United States (Dimitrovska-Andrews, 1994).

From customary law to building rules, laws and codes to statutory planning and construction

The oldest records of construction standards in the form of rules or codes as applied in the process of Banja Luka's statutory planning and development are found scattered in a number of historical sources. They are parts of customary law, a kind of codex – a set of rules pertinent to different issues of social life, which were locally observed for a long time. The most important of the above rules were the right to a view (vista or prospect), the road right-of-way and free access to other common goods, and the inviolability of private property. *The right to a view*, i.e., entitlement to a view (vista), was unique as a rule originating in customary law and communal ethics, since it was a standard that ensured the provision of high-quality housing. In the aforementioned treatise by Julian (6th-century Byzantine architect, native of the Palestinian coastal town of Ascalon), this rule is called *the preservation of a view*. The rule stipulated the preservation of direct views of the sea and harbour, with specific guidelines in relation to three different view categories, the foreground, which pertained to the coast, harbour and docked ships, the middle ground, and the background.

Based on the analysis of historical records and maps related to Banja Luka, it is possible to conclude that the most prominent element of the local planning and construction code legacy concerns its impact in terms of the redesign of urban form and landscape, which is natural, logical and rational relative to the existent physical resources, in that construction was adapted to correspond with the land morphology. This resulted in flexible rules, which meant consistently adjusting to concrete cases, finding solutions that relied on the outcomes of previous experiences, and

preventing the spoiling of landscape and other public and common goods of the urban community. These rules were observed in their fundamental form for a long time, and their adaptation to particular cases did not significantly change them; it even made them ubiquitous to an extent. Also, having formed in such a way, the codes resulted in consistent urban form and are visible in the foremost and permanently inherent characteristics of the city's urban identity.

Banja Luka's spatial development under Ottoman occupation resembled that of the majority of settlements in the region. New habitations emerged one after another in the form of a chain or string of neighbourhoods; these neighbourhoods were called *mahale* and formed Banja Luka's recognisable longitudinal layout, following the river and/or the main thoroughfare. A new neighbourhood would form on vacant land downstream, right beside the previous one, after it had reached its optimal size. In addition to linearity, Banja Luka became polycentric in the 16th century; these two features have characterised its urban development through all its stages.

When the Austro-Hungarian administration began its activities of formal spatial planning and the exploitation of natural and other resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina, many of the rules originating in customary law had already taken deep roots in the period prior to and during Ottoman occupation (along with the above-mentioned *right to a view*, *road right-of-way and free access to other common goods*, and *inviolability of private property*, there were also strict rules concerning the use and maintenance of common urban spaces, like marketplaces, town centres, streets, and especially endowment complexes or related facilities). Between 1880 and 1884, the Austro-Hungarian administration surveyed Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted and implemented the *Building Order Act – Bauordnung* – and other useful laws, which helped implement its strategy of statutory planning and spatial development in the country.

Many elements of Sitte's *city planning according to aesthetic principles* were included in the Manifesto of the Austrian Society of Engineers and Architects (1877), and the spatial development of Austrian cities at that time was strongly influenced by aesthetic principles. To what extent were these principles incorporated in the building rules and regulations that came into effect in Bosnia and Herzegovina the final decades of the 19th century, and what was their effect on the spatial development of its towns? The answers to

these questions can be found in the legislation as adopted and implemented by the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the goal of bringing formal order to local construction practices. The key documents are the Building Order Act, or *Bauordnung*² (1880), and Building Order Regulations, respectively adopted for all regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The effects of the adopted principles on urban form are interpreted relative to the statutory and construction plans and other related documents on urban transformations.

Two codebooks were used in Banja Luka, *The Building Order Regulations for Public Technical Service in the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia* (1894)³, and *The Building Order Act for the National Capital City of Sarajevo* (1893)⁴. Importantly, the Building Order Regulations included rules of design and planning of settlements and towns. *Municipalities and Building Departments* were in charge of the regulation of town planning and construction, and they adhered to the relevant legislation and plans as approved by the National Government. The legislation guided the building of new town quarters or neighbourhoods, and space for public facilities such as squares and streets was acquired through municipal purchases or given away by legal owners. New streets and roads were laid in line with adopted town plans and width specifications for five different road categories. The length, width and height of structures were strictly defined by the *Building Departments*.

A second Building Act was adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1931, during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, drawn up to be applicable across a vast and heterogeneous region, parts of which previously developed in distinct circumstances and according to different scenarios. Its significance stems from the fact it combined two types of codes, those relating to the development, expansion and regulation of settlements in general, and those pertaining to the construction of buildings, construction land, and buildings themselves. All towns were required to adopt a *regulatory*

² Bauordnung für Sarajevo – I band Sammlung der für buch Erlassen Gesetze, Verordnungen und Normalweinsungen – Allgemeiner Theil-Politische Verwaltung, (Wien: 1878-1880, 14 May 1880), pp. 249-287 (АРСБЛ IV 71/1878-80).

³ Propisi za javnu tehničku službu u kraljevinah Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji (Zagreb: Kr. Hrv.-Slav.-Dalm. zemaljska vlada; 1892, 1894) (АРСБЛ II 1167).

⁴ Грађевински ред за Земаљски главни град Сарајево, Гласник закона и наредба за БиХ, 1893. година (Сарајево: Грађевна управа, No. 75, 15 August 1893), pp. 543-581 (АРСБЛ IV 16/1893).

plan, ordinance and building code, as prescribed by the Act, thus adopting custom-made building ordinance. The Banja Luka Building Code was adopted in 1936/37, but the preparation of the Regulatory Plan was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. The Building Code (1931) contained town planning specifications concerning sanitary and technical standards, as well as architectural codes stipulating the design and building of streets and squares and maintenance of monuments; it also had special stipulations regarding *historical-artistic cities*. It specified *construction zones*, i.e., land intended for city or town development and expansion, as defined by regulatory plans. *Construction zones* were divided into *high-density housing*, which consisted of row or terraced buildings, *medium-density housing*, with semi-detached buildings, and *low-density housing*, with detached buildings and houses (§ 14). This division into high-, medium- and low-density housing corresponded to the previous division of *building orders (rows)* into *closed, half-closed and open construction*.

The above analysis and comparison of the Building Order Act (1880) and the Building Act (1931) and of their corresponding codes and regulations reveal similarities and common features in the two documents. Despite a fifty-year gap, both pieces of legislation included *all the modern urban standards and principles of the science of town planning and construction* (Обрадовић, 1931). The building code adopted in the late 19th remained in effect and was observed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia until 1931, with some adjustment to the new circumstances. The two codebooks share certain flexibility because of the need for applicability across a vast and diverse area; accordingly, this allowed their easy adjustment to local conditions and requirements as needed. Both pieces of legislation were grounded in the principle of functionality and paid heed to structural aspects, visual and aesthetic aspects, and design and perceptual aspects (*image* of the city and *image* of the street; criteria concerning the quality of the built environment, such as *harmony, integrity, and singularity*, the principle of protection of public interests and common or public goods). They both strongly insisted on keeping as much vacant land as possible in areas with high-density housing, as well as on architectural design in compliance with aesthetic principles and particularities of the site and surroundings. Evidently, it was possible to interpret the stipulations as formulated in the two documents to meet the requirements in ways sensitive to specific contexts. This recognition of the importance and value of

local particularities, recognisable features of specific places, and respect for the local building code legacy lead to the conclusion that the key elements of the identity of a place subject to these acts were effectively preserved thanks to their flexible code formulation.

The most drastic changes to Banja Luka's urban landscape induced by transformations of the social and cultural context were effected during the period of intensive urbanisation and regional economic development in the socialist Yugoslavia. The key change compared to the time before was that building in the city was now directed through town and spatial planning, as opposed to the implementation of building codes in line with plans. Another important factor was the nationalisation of private land, which was appropriated by the state; municipalities became the sole owners of construction land and made decisions single-handedly with regards to land boundaries, ways of use and terms and conditions of land use. Spatial and urban plans of towns and cities in the SFRY treated land as a planning resource, and the state used planning to control and direct urban development.

In the period after World War II, no comprehensive federal law on the building of cities was adopted comparable to the one from 1931. The 1931 Act remained in effect until 1949, the year of adoption of the Master Plan Ordinance⁵, which basically 'reduced building legislation to planning legislation' (Krstić and Pajović, 1987). The Spatial Planning Act for the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1974) was the first in a series of the *town planning laws* modified, amended and adopted in the period until 1986. The spatial planning and construction laws implemented in the 1980's were based on communal agreement and *communal planning*: urban planning professionals practiced *town and spatial planning by agreement*, spatial planning was integrated into 'societal design', and legislation was removed from the source matter of city building, spatial planning and environmental concerns (Krstić and Pajović, 1987).

As stipulated by *The Republic of Srpska Spatial Planning Act* (1996), spatial planning means directed, comprehensive care for the natural and built environment and involves measures and multidisciplinary activities pertaining to the construction process, spatial and urban planning, urban, architectural and building design and construction. However, its authors make no mention of principles of sustainable development, at a time when sustainable development was by

and large debated, promoted and integrated in the EU and regional legislation. It is mentioned in the Republic of Srpska Spatial Development and Construction Act adopted in 2011, but neither of these laws contains regulatory elements pertaining to town planning and construction; instead, they specify the manner of development, adoption and implementation of plans, and are highly normative.

We believe that general rules and regulations should be introduced based on urban codification, i.e., that general building codes should be introduced with the goal of bringing urban order at the state or entity level. They should allow for sufficiently flexible implementation at the regional and local levels, reviving the practices of treatment of space and traditional building codes as found in the related legislation of the former times.

TOWARDS A REHABILITATION OF URBAN IDENTITY

In the last two decades, the development of Banja Luka and other towns and cities in the Republic of Srpska, bearing the consequences of the socialist development and civil war, has been marked by two trends, degradation of natural and urban landscape and urban form disintegration, which has had a negative impact on the urban identity and genuine character of cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their rehabilitation is urgent – it will open up possibilities to reinstate the shared but neglected and hidden qualities and meanings in our environment.

How can this be achieved? First of all, the key features of identity can be read in urban form and urban landscape, observed integrally and in mutual interaction (their physical and symbolic aspects combined). Their identification and valuation must be based on the recognition of the quality of urban form through both qualitative criteria (sufficiently broad to be used in a range of circumstances) and quantitative or measurable criteria (acting as indicators). The process should include laws and codebooks, as tools to transpose and balance research findings with the traditional building and planning experience and shifting needs, opportunities and particularities of a specific urban environment.

This paper relies for its conclusions on the results of the urban-morphological study of Banja Luka's urban form and the development of its urban identity by Симоновић, 2010. Banja Luka's urban form is assessed on the numerous criteria of the quality of spatial characteristics, which all imply additional criteria for evaluating the quality of more complex features of the built

⁵ Službeni list FNRJ, no. 78/49.

environment, and others. The aforementioned study helped recognise the key elements of Banja Luka's identity, the conspicuousness of the natural (landscape) in its urban environment and a balanced complementation of elements of the physical structure and landscape, as well as the complementary constituents of its integral and harmonious urban landscape. The key features of urban identity in its urban landscape are easily observable. The character of the city is determined by its relationship to the water flow and topography, which has been disrupted by the latest developments. Clear boundaries between private and public spaces, a mark of identity originating in the local tradition, are gradually disappearing. The evaluation and comparison of the quality characteristics of urban identity have shown a major discrepancy between discrete parts of the city and the city as a whole.

Banja Luka's *multilayeredness* is a special feature of its identity, which means that a number of architectural and cultural codes can be seen in its urban form. In the recent decades, due to extraordinary circumstances, this multilayeredness has degraded to fragmentation, leading to the city's urban form disintegration. Research findings on urban landscape were used to evaluate the effects of various transformations of Banja Luka's urban landscape on the inherent characteristics of its identity (Simonović *et al.*, 2011). The study identifies the existence of problems due to large-scale transformations of natural landscape into construction land, in turn also reducing its diversity and creating new urban landscape images, without a foothold in its urban identity. The conclusion is there has been a gradual transformation of urban landscape by means of constant intrusion of developments into natural landscape, followed by urban sprawl to include adjacent habitations or villages, resulting in a conurban form, continuously spatially linked with the urban core. In addition to the structural, morphological and functional transformation of the urban landscape, there have been peculiar socio-cultural changes, with implications for the most important characteristics of the City of Banja Luka's urban identity.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded from the above discussion that there is a problem-based, methodological interdependence between the processes of urban identity renewal and improvement and those of urban form reintegration and urban landscape regeneration. Hereby we recommend

the adoption of a developmental, interdisciplinary and integrated approach when dealing with these processes, which should comprise methodological and problem-based considerations and actions taken from various aspects, in order to activate the recognised potentials of space (physical, social, economic, ecological, cultural); renewal of existing values and creation of new ones; and production of high-quality, distinctive wholes with strong identities. Thus, culture as an important resource of memories, images and events, purification and regeneration as an opportunity for reanimation of neglected areas, and, finally, national dignity and reconciliation as catalysts of numerous global and local tensions have been emphasised as places of urban identity (Stupar and Đukić, 2007).

These processes take place by means of statutory planning, through the establishment of general principles and recommendations for quality planning and urban form design, in the form of town planning standards. The determination of qualitative and formal urban form criteria must be based on the identification and valuation of identity features and the development of a strategy for their protection and restoration. The established criteria (as quality attributes of the built environment) become standards or norms, as operational statutory planning instruments, determining the relation between the desirable and the possible. It is possible to identify elements and spatial relations to be governed by standards at all levels of space consideration. In addition to physical regulation instruments, the process is guided by means of urban codes and legislation or various kinds of state or public intervention (Симоновић, 2011).

The implementation of principles of urban codification, understood as the introduction of the category of construction rules, which would be general to the extent necessary for bringing order to town planning at the state and entity levels, but also flexible enough at the regional and local levels, would enable the creation and introduction of the necessary spatial planning tools, aimed at protecting and improving the features of the local or regional identities of cities. It is possible to apply the proposed method (allowing for adjustment to respect the principles of contextual specificity and local identity) in Banja Luka and other towns and cities in the region. Eventually, the process would help establish a common dispersion network that would give these cities local and regional distinction.

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