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URBAN REGENERATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF IDENTITY PRESERVATION: A CASE STUDY OF TREBINJE'S KRŠ DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Established in the first half of the 18th century, the district of Krš in Trebinje was the first settlement to grow up outside the town walls. It grew up spontaneously in response to the local natural environment and under a mixture of Mediterranean and Oriental influences. Since the second half of the 20th century, the district has faced dilapidation, a process that has not been countered yet, despite its recognised value as a cultural asset and the quality of its ambience.

In this paper the present state of the district of Krš is analysed, along with the possibility of its adequate protection relative to the applicable spatial and town plans, town planning ordinance and international charters on the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites. Also considered is the formulation of a special strategy that would help regenerating the area under consideration as well as safeguard its intangible cultural heritage and *genius loci*.

Keywords: *Trebinje, urban regeneration, identity, genius loci*

INTRODUCTION

The former Yugoslavia's rapid economic growth and urbanisation after World War II led to the disintegration of the inherited urban matrix and disrespect for the contextual quality of the built heritage in historic districts, leading to a tremendous loss of ambient and visual quality. This development resulted in the erosion of its urban complexes as unique cultural heritage, the loss of its intangible cultural heritage and the disappearance of the *genius loci* of a great many places and sites.

In the late 20th century, greater attention began to be paid to cultural and historic districts and sites. A great number of charters were signed and agendas and recommendations adopted, with the result of contemporary town planning acknowledging and stressing the importance of the contextual quality of architecture, the inherited urban matrix and the tendency to ensure the continuity of urban development. The new approach to town planning, which does not seek to put into effect universal ideas in historic cities, helps the preservation of the urban tissue and makes readable the historical layers marking the urban growth of towns and cities. This allows the preservation of the traditional that characterises urban entities and enables local populations to identify with them.

The history of Trebinje, an old town whose growth has been influenced by different cultures and forces, has been long and eventful, frequently changing the appearance and contents of the town core. The special characteristics and value of its urban structure set it apart from all other Herzegovinian towns. A profound Mediterranean influence on the way of life, customs and residential culture of its population is irrefutable proof that climate is a factor that strongly impacts the formation of urban areas.

Although a Roman military camp is presumed to have existed in the area of the old Trebinje, the town is known to have continuously developed since the early Middle Ages [1]. After the Ottoman conquest in 1466, it became a military headquarters and regional administrative centre, and gradually grew into a trade hub [2]. In this period, Trebinje's urban development followed the same pattern as that of any other oriental town. Its fortress increasingly gained in importance as the centre of the wider military area, with the result of a new, more spacious fort, better known as the Ban-Vir, being erected in 1706. In the 18th century, Krš became the first settlement to be established outside the town walls on sloping ground, and its spontaneous growth pattern and built structure make it a unique urban ensemble in all of Trebinje [3].

This case study of the old district of Krš analyses the kind of attention this potentially valuable urban complex has received in town plans and planning ordinance. Unregulated construction, the lack of utilities and infrastructure and the destruction of its built structures are threatening to impair the value of this neighbourhood. If it is assumed that only an interdisciplinary process of urban regeneration can help the preservation of the district of Krš, along with a restoration plan, it will be necessary to evaluate the development potential and possible development scenarios for Krš, because quality planning must take into account various aspects of development through strategies and create conditions to both improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood and preserve its identity.

A discrepancy between how historic urban environments are dealt with in town plans on the one hand and principles of integrated protection on the other is what has characterised town planning practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study seeks to qualify and measure the impact of the previously adopted plans on the development of Krš. The main goal of the paper is to highlight the necessity to integrate town planning with the need to preserve the district. This implies a process of town planning which underscores the interests, significance, preservation and valuation of historic urban areas, and approaches and treats them as equal to all the other factors of relevance for spatial development.

HISTORY OF THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF KRŠ

The settlement of Krš grew up spontaneously on the hillsides overlooking the Trebinje fortress, and in time its steep narrow streets became lined with craft shops. What made this neighbourhood attractive and special were its sloping sides, its narrow, winding, precipitous and cobbled streets, and its houses, which were often built out to the lot lines. Along with the housing, authentic traditional crafts developed in the neighbourhood, which made it even more attractive. A crafts and trade area called Gornja čaršija (Upper Town) grew up along Krš, with the development of trade and crafts in the town in this period leading to the formation of the middle class. Trebinje's oriental town structure began to change under Austro-Hungarian administration, gradually adhering to European town planning principles. In 1896, the town became the home of the Austrian vice consul, who took up residence in a building located in Krš. Unlike the inherited urban structure, which had developed spontaneously, the town was being given a new urban matrix according to the European pattern. Gornja čaršija, which had been the centre of economic activity up until then, began to lose prominence. It was in this period that the trade and crafts zone moved to the valley. The greatest damage was caused after the construction of the new Dubrovnik road, when a part of the town centre (čaršija) and the Bileća Gate were demolished and coffee shops/pubs and crafts shops began to close down, figure 1.

The district of Krš became completely dilapidated in the second half of the 20th century, when a part of it was demolished and the majority of the buildings abandoned because of the low quality of life, lacking utilities and bad infrastructure. Today, Gornja čaršija and Krš are barely recognisable, having

lost most of their previous beauty and splendour. Compounded with the demolition of a part of the Old Town in Trebinje, this has done irreversible damage to this valuable cultural and historic urban area. There were many pleas by Krš inhabitants toward the end of the 20th century to pass an ordinance to revive the old crafts, which would also bring life back to Gornja čaršija, figure 2. Krš once attracted tourists not only with its authentic houses but also with its traditional arts and crafts (blacksmiths, cobblers, bakers, saddlers, traditional attire and costume makers, etc.). However, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of this historic district was never valued, and quite unjustly, it was never listed as a cultural and historic site.



Figure 1. Gornja čaršija in a photograph taken in 1915. Better known as Bileća Street, Gornja čaršija had a highly fragmented built structure, similar to that of the Old Town. It was demolished in 1961 to allow the construction of a thoroughfare.

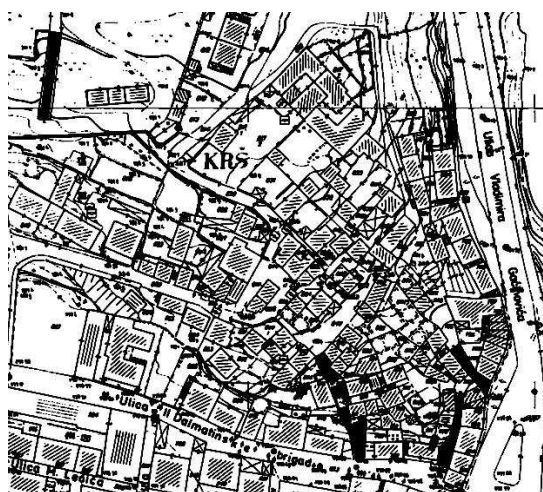


Figure 2. District of Krš – a highly fragmented town structure on sloping ground – an oriental-type settlement.

Other towns and cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina have similarly suffered from mistakes made regarding the protection of their finest public and religious buildings, and in many cases no measures to preserve old residential architecture were implemented whatsoever. This kind of attitude and treatment has led to the partial destruction of the inherited town structure. Nowadays, the district of Krš is used exclusively as a housing area. We are witnesses tradition in this neighbourhood has been neglected and has died, there are no crafts shops, and the old residential buildings are not being renovated, with the effect of Krš losing its distinctive features and value. Many of the residential buildings and houses in the neighbourhood are ruinous, while the newly built ones do not fit in the existing tissue, which is destroying the recognisable appearance and historic value of this area. When adapting their homes, the owners are not concerned with the need to preserve the ambience and tend to use inadequate materials because of insufficient funds. Currently, a valuation report for the district of Krš is being prepared, after which the area will be listed by the Agency for the Protection of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska.

Besides its built structure, Krš is also losing its intangible heritage, which made it recognisable and increased its value as a historic urban district. It began to lose its intangible heritage with the arrival of the Dual Monarchy, when the town centre slowly moved out of this area, whereas its material heritage was mainly destroyed in the 1950s. This led to the disappearance of ambiences, silhouettes, vistas, traditional gathering places, symbols that made the neighbourhood and its inner parts recognisable and attractive for chance visitors and travellers, who would walk its narrow streets, revealing its secrets and trying to absorb and understand its spirit of place.

The new era pushed into oblivion the once busy and thriving Gornja čaršija and Krš. This part of Trebinje was its first neighbourhood to attract tourists. The proximity of the city centre and the preserved urban matrix with some original architecture still remaining should make it possible to rehabilitate the district of Krš, whose spirit survives in the memory of Trebinje's senior citizens.

DISTRICT OF KRŠ IN TOWN PLANS AND THE PLANNING ORDINANCE

Cities around the world have searched for ways to show their distinctive qualities, and for many of them the process of urban regeneration has been a lengthy and painful one. This kind of experience should serve as a pointer for approaching and ensuring the preservation of this remarkable cultural and historic site in Trebinje. As far as the district of Krš is concerned, no spatial or town plan or ordinance has ever been adopted to guide its development or formulate a method to employ for its urban regeneration and rehabilitation.

Trebinje's urban development in the modern period is connected to "Guidelines for a Comprehensive Town Plan", the first ever planning document written for the town of Trebinje (1958). This document provided a basis for the Trebinje Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1968. Only several years later, in 1971, a decision was made to prepare a new town plan, "Trebinje 2000". Previously, in 1970, "A Study of Long-term Development of Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina" was written, which pointed out the special qualities and potential of Herzegovina to help stimulate the country's economy, especially tourism. It proposed a division of the country into regions, with Trebinje as one of the regional capitals, thanks to its rich cultural and natural heritage and the fact it represented a kind of gateway to the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, and the city of Dubrovnik [4].

The comprehensive plan "Trebinje 2000" was developed as heavily influenced by the above-mentioned tourism development study. This document dealt with many of Trebinje's cultural and historic areas and land use in separate chapters, with the exception of the district of Krš, failing to recognise its exceptional qualities as a distinct historic area that commanded special attention and treating it instead as part of Trebinje's urban core, which was in need of rehabilitation, figure 3-4.



Figure 3 - 4. Old photographs of the Krš neighbourhood

As for the applicable master plan of Trebinje adopted in 2002 and its approach to the preservation, regeneration and treatment of the built heritage, all it offers is general specifications: “It is possible to identify the mediaeval districts of the Old Town and Krš, as well as the town centre built during the Austro-Hungarian period, as historic urban areas of special importance. The possibility and terms of intervention and reconstruction in these areas as well as in the case of the cultural and natural heritage monuments mentioned elsewhere in this Plan will be specified by the Study of the Agency for the Protection of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska. These cultural and historic sites were recognised as such according to the available information and their list is to be amended according to the said Study currently under preparation”, [5].

The applicable Trebinje master plan is a glaring example of the absence of the integrated approach to the regeneration of historic urban areas. The plan separates the process and activities of town planning from those aimed at the preservation of the built heritage.

The *Sjeverni Logor* (Northern Camp) Regulatory Plan, which comprises the district of Krš, was recently completed, without a clear vision or taking account of the recommendations of the still unfinished valuation report of the Agency for the Preservation of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska. This is the first detailed plan of this area [6] and it stipulates the careful reconstruction of the neighbourhood to take into account its reuse as a tourist precinct. It also stipulates the demolition of dilapidated buildings and the construction of open amphitheatres and little piazzas in their stead. Some of the main reasons for the disappearance of residential buildings in many towns have been their poor condition, the fact they are small-sized and the utilities and infrastructure are at a unsatisfactory level, which all increases the cost of neighbourhood renovation, in circumstances where building owners are mostly not in a position or cannot secure the proper funding, as generally belonging to a lower-income population, figure 5-6. This is very conspicuous in the analysed draft plan, which readily proposes the removal of all dilapidated buildings and their replacement with public facilities. This opens the door to modifications to the existing neighbourhood structure, which may easily result in a complete change of the identity and genuine character of this urban area.



Figure 5 - 6. Krš today – dilapidated buildings

Nowadays, when private capital plays a major role in the urban development of towns and cities and whose main interest lies in reaping profits from investment, there will be no future for this historic district without a broader and clearer vision on the part of the local administration, which should promote its value as based on the past, figure 7-8. The local administration does not have the adequate funding to preserve and maintain the inherited physical structure in its original form, while the private sector is not interested in investing in the cultural built heritage, which thus suffers from gradual decay

[7]. As a consequence, certain buildings and public open spaces in the district of Krš, which were once important tangible heritage and were of value as spiritual symbols of the town, gradually disappeared.

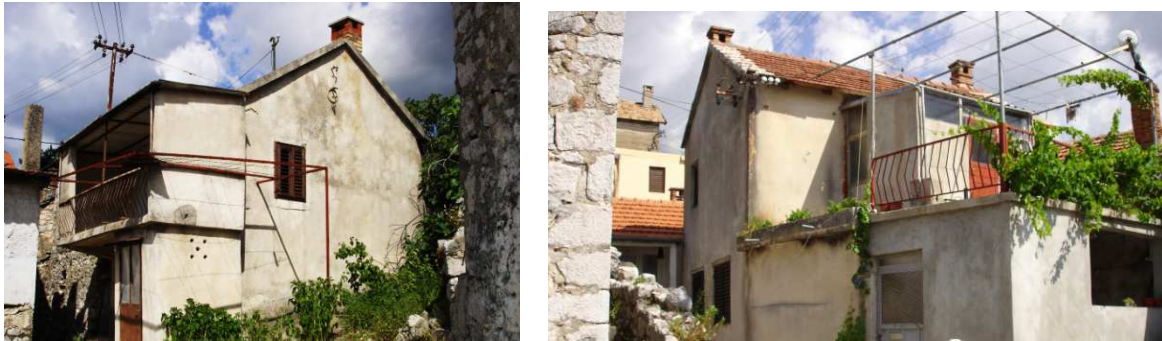


Figure 7 - 8. Photos of buildings that do not fit in the historic environment of Krš and decrease its ambient quality

An interdisciplinary approach to preparing plans and other related documents is typically not favoured locally. The above-discussed plan perpetuates the practice of preparing town plans and planning ordinance while excluding protection experts and agencies, whose opinions and recommendations should indeed be the point of departure in this process.

The Trebinje Municipality Development Strategy 2009–2018 analyses the advantages and potential of the town for urban development. One of the strategic objectives stated in the Strategy is the creation of “an inspiring environment, with preserved cultural and natural heritage and excellent utilities and infrastructure”, and its operational objectives are as follows:

- Harmonisation of the spatial and architectural aspects of all new commercial and residential facilities and infrastructure with Trebinje’s cultural and natural ambience/environment;
- Exploration, promotion and valuation of Trebinje’s cultural and natural heritage as part of the world heritage;
- Ensuring sustainable development by means of socially responsible environmental management and use of karst as a natural resource;
- Ensuring a high level of citizen satisfaction with the state of utilities and transport infrastructure and the quality of local administration services;
- Excellent transport links and communication connections with the adjacent regions, both coastal and continental [8].

The Strategy envisages the future transformation of Trebinje to make it one of the most attractive little towns in southeastern Europe and specifies the support measures and projects needed to achieve this. It proposes the preparation of the plans and accompanying documents required to attain the first strategic objective. With the recently adopted the City Law [9] the Republic of Srpska has devolved part of its jurisdiction over the cultural heritage and its protection upon Trebinje, as well as other cities and towns. The new circumstances advise the formulation of a new development strategy for Trebinje Municipality.

It is imperative to prepare new town plans and town planning projects in compliance with principles of integrated protection, which should insist on the optimal treatment of the existing built heritage as the main goal of urban regeneration. First and foremost, an effective urban regeneration scheme for the district of Krš presupposes its comprehensive and reliable valuation by the relevant protection agencies. The Trebinje Tourist Organisation points out the importance of reviving the old crafts, as a key resource for the neighbourhood, and is of the opinion that if treated not simply as a *mahala*, a residential district, its attractiveness will double, in light of the fact it used to play a special sociological and cultural role in the past [10].

HISTORIC URBAN SITES – THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

The last two decades of the 20th century saw the application and promotion of new approaches in the protection of the natural and cultural heritage. Principles and methods of work changed depending on how successful they showed to be. The first charter on the architectural heritage was adopted in Amsterdam in 1975, which was the European Architectural Heritage Year [11]. With the adoption of the Declaration of Amsterdam the notion of integrated heritage protection was introduced, and it was also proposed to make protection an integral part of spatial and town planning. This was a turning point in how the protection of the cultural heritage was understood, making the protection and preservation of the architectural or built heritage a matter of fact.

As understood today, protection does not only mean the physical maintenance of historic areas but also ensuring their transformation and development, providing this happens gradually and the main characteristics of an area are preserved [12]. Also, Agenda 21 provides a definition of the term sustainable development, which promotes the idea that all resources should be preserved, including towns and cities viewed as such, with all their inherent qualities [13].

The International Memorandum on the Protection and Promotion of Heritage and Regeneration in Central and Eastern Europe, adopted in 2007, made new recommendations, which redefine the concept of protection of historic sites [12]. It promotes the idea that not only buildings should be seen as heritage, but also aspects of tradition, crafts and the way of life. It is thus necessary, for the sake of preservation of these values, to avoid any interventions out of proportion with the surroundings, to limit the height of buildings in areas adjacent to or surrounding cultural heritage sites, and to promote sustainable building technologies, the use of natural materials, the inclusion of local inhabitants in the process and raising public awareness in general [12].

Present-day town planning as practiced internationally places great importance on integrated protection, with town planning and the protection of the built heritage seen as connected processes. Examples of such good practices can be found in cities with long town-planning traditions, which have also traditionally been very careful of how they use their resources, such as the cities of Stockholm, Berlin, Labin, etc.

The project of urban regeneration of downtown Barcelona is probably the best such example: the designers' goal was to keep the urban system complex by attracting people from different cultural backgrounds and walks of life and of different living standards to live there. The project and experience of regeneration of Barcelona's El Eixample urban core may be seen as the implementation of a fourfold plan of its rehabilitation as a residential area, a tourist precinct, which includes its built heritage, a commercial district, and of the quality of life [14].

Improving the quality of life in urban areas and sustainable urban growth have become the goals of every country. Regenerating residential architecture in European cities has been of special importance. Many cities succeeded in reconstructing their residential city quarters, but there are also examples initially celebrated as successes, which later proved to be failures. Town planning projects dealing with the built heritage are seen in today's world as processes that should be creative and secure a future for historic areas. The goal of protection does not simply concern the preservation of the physical or built structure, but also of human needs and customs. What presents itself here as the main task is connecting present-day life with the past, through activities which rely on the experience of active protection, with infill development and reconstruction used to regenerate complete areas [14].

The kind of town planning done in the region in the aftermath of World War II resulted in the making of uniform, monotonous cities, which were architecturally alike. Historic towns and cities came under threat due to these novelties, which negatively impacted their previous continuous development and depreciated both their natural and man-made qualities. Unfortunately, neither our country nor the adjacent ones have created conditions to deal with the built heritage in the process of town planning.

Undoubtedly, there have been improvements, but they are still too negligible for anyone to claim the built heritage has been given a different status. Nowadays, a number of factors impact the treatment of the cultural heritage, as dictated by social and economic change.

The new way of how the cultural heritage is seen by town planners internationally acknowledges the fact urban identity is a resource and presupposes the preparation of studies and strategies that qualify it as an urban growth factor. All urban environments have their own characteristics, problems and peculiarities, which means that no methods used in projects that proved successful should be employed blindly, regardless of how similar individual cases may seem [14].

CONCLUSION

The strategy to regenerate Trebinje must aim for the protection of its built heritage, the environment and its intangible heritage, in the sense of preserving its urban symbols and memory, tradition and customs. The preservation of these values asks that they be addressed in the planning process. Trebinje is a town which cannot afford to grow at the expense of the surrounding arable farmland. That is one more reason for its urban regeneration; instead of occupying more vacant land, the development efforts should focus on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the built heritage, which will not only preserve resources and the heritage itself, but also improve the quality of life in the city.

The possibility of creating a new modern life for the Krš neighbourhood requires a careful application of urban regeneration techniques, that is, adaptation of the existing structures, infill development and redevelopment, rehabilitation and revitalisation of the built heritage, and its compatibility in the sense of adaptation to meet man's present-day needs.

What must not be forgotten is the education of all stakeholders about the value and significance of historic districts and the importance of preserving historic buildings in the process of urban growth. Comprehensive and regulatory plans must be harmonised with the recommendations of protection agencies. Given the great number of donations and bequests of the citizens of Trebinje to their hometown, who are certainly aware of the need to safeguard its identity for the sake of its future and development, they can only be expected to cooperate and assist with carrying out any such activities.

Town planning projects targeting the district of Krš must aim for the transformation of this historic urban district in a way which will turn its dilapidated buildings and neglected spaces into reconstructed streets and squares, more comfortable housing, improved utility networks and transport infrastructure, and better transport links to the town centre. Only town plans and ordinance with a strategic vision for this neighbourhood will stop its devastation, raise the standard of living of its inhabitants and preserve its spatial resources. The success of one such future urban regeneration project will invariably depend on all the stakeholders, on the inhabitants and investors as much as on the town administration and the state government.

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