EMERGENCE OF PROBLEM AREAS IN THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF POST-SOCIALIST ZAGREB

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The period of economic transition has resulted in complex social, functional and morphological transformations which have left their mark in the urban structure of Zagreb. At the beginning of 2000s fundamental planning acts have been passed – Zagreb spatial plan and the City Master Plan – to serve as concrete strategies and guidelines in developing the city area. However, none of the regulatory rules and acts have been completely successful in managing the city development.

Significant changes and problems the city is facing in the post-socialist era serve as a research framework and are discussed in this paper. The main goal is to register and explain crucial causes of these spatial transformations. Based on the research of cartographic sources and conducted fieldwork four representative types of problem areas of the city are recognized. According to their functional and morphological characteristics, they are: converted urban land areas, derelict areas, newly built areas and densified areas. Each of these four types of problem areas is individually analyzed in the context of possible negative consequences on the urban environment.

Keywords: Zagreb, problem areas, urbanization, spatial planning, post-socialist city

INTRODUCTION

Zagreb is the capital and with almost 700,000 inhabitants the largest city in Croatia. Split, the second largest city is four time smaller than Zagreb while Rijeka, ranked third in Croatia has almost five times less inhabitants than the capital. Zagreb is economic, transport, cultural and political hub of the country. Its functions, above all services (tertiary sector), made it one of the largest and the most prominent metropolitan areas in Central Europe. Zagreb has a long urban tradition dating back to Roman times (3rd century A.D.), but only in the last 100 years it has been fully valorised thanks to the city’s strong economic development and demographic expansion. Zagreb grew because of its strong production and service functions changing its inner core as well as surrounding environment, and finally in the second half of 20th century forming a large urban region.

The process of economic and political transition during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century had a great impact on the transformation of functional, social and morphological components of the urban structure. In the process of urbanization a state no longer plays a leading role due to an appearance of new actors (private investors, NGOs, experts, public) in urban space. These new and old actors work in conjunction, transforming and confronting each other within urban space (Seferagić, 2008; Svirčić Gotovac, Zlatar, 2008). Modifications in the system of spatial (physical) planning had a significant impact on urban space as well. Socialist planning has renounced its place to a new paradigm of spatial planning. In the first half of the 1990s it still depended much on the ideas established in the period of socialism. Only in mid 1990s the spatial planning started to integrate into a new socio-economic framework.

Dominant processes which take place in urban-spatial transformation of post-socialist cities are well documented in scientific literature (Dimitrovska Andrews et al., 2007; Stanilov, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Molodikova, 2007; Rebernik, 2007; Andrusz et al., 1996; Cavić, Nedović-Budić, 2007; Blau, Rupnik, 2007). The processes taking place in Zagreb are very similar to those in other post-socialist cities in Europe.

Economic factors have played a key role in changing the urban structure. Their main spatial characteristic are commercialisation of the inner city and the expansion of traditional central business district (CBD), formation of new business districts, revitalisation of a derelict land, densification and infiltration of new elements into an existing urban fabric, residential and commercial suburbanisation, erosion of public space and automobilisation (Bašić, 2003, 2005; Čaldarović, Šarinić, 2008; Jakovlić, Rebernik, 2008). Besides functional and morphological changes, there is a significant increase in socio-spatial differentiation (Prelogović, 2004). The outcome of these changes has both positive

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2Statistical data refers to a compact urban area or formal city. Administrative-territorial unit of City of Zagreb has around 780,000, while urban region has nearly 1,000,000 inhabitants.
and negative impact on a daily life of the citizens as well as on the urban space itself.

The aforementioned changes and problems the city is facing in the post-socialist era serve as a research framework and are discussed in this paper. Based on the research of cartographic sources and conducted fieldwork four representative types of problem areas of the city are recognized. According to their functional and morphological characteristics, they are:

- Converted urban land areas
- Derelict areas
- Newly built areas
- Densified areas

Each of these four types of problem areas is individually analysed in the context of possible negative consequences on the urban environment. Therefore the main goal of this paper is to register and explain crucial causes of these spatial transformations, mostly their functional and morphological components.

The paper has four main parts. The introduction remarks are followed by a short note on planning system, emphasizing the role of particular spatial (physical) plans in urban transformation of Zagreb. The third and the main part of the article brings detailed analysis of problem areas in Zagreb. In the final part concluding remarks are given.

POST-SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN SPACE – A NOTE ON THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Croatia and Zagreb have a long tradition of institutionalised planning system dating back to times of different socio-economic and political relations. Through all of that time planning practice was clearly defined with hierarchical organization of both institutes and spatial plans (Mrak-Taritaš, 2008). After the Croatian independence significant changes occurred in the planning system. New legal acts were introduced and relations between actors who participate in the planning process were considerably modified. Unfortunately the whole planning process didn’t adapt efficiently to the new economic and societal circumstances at the beginning of the 1990’s (Cavić, 2009; Magaš, 2007). As a consequence, for a period of time an inappropriate and outdated planning policy was in practice, reflecting negatively within the urban space.

Only in 1994 the first Act on spatial planning was passed (Zakon o prostornom uređenju NN 30/94). This Act reinforced the structure and hierarchy of different kinds of spatial plans, and established integral system of planning. In light of Croatian accession to EU, after 2000 entire legislation and planning system had to be accommodated according to EU standards. It took several years to introduce a new Act on spatial planning in October of 2007 (Zakon o prostornom uređenju i gradnji, NN 76/07). On the basis of this Act all of the planning documents are divided in two groups: strategic and implementation plans.

The City of Zagreb as a political, economic and cultural hub of the country is the strongest engine of all the major activities and processes in the space. Plans that are reinforced for the City are strategic. It is important to emphasize that City of Zagreb didn’t have any new spatial plans, neither strategic nor implementation for an entire decade. First Master plan was reinforced in 2000 and its content has been a subject of change for several times. It is very indicative that precisely the changes and supplements of the Master Plan have contributed to significant changes in the urban fabric.

PROBLEM AREAS IN THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF POST-SOCIALIST ZAGREB

In this chapter four aforementioned problem areas are discussed. Their spatial distribution is showed on Figure 1.

Converted land use areas include Preradović square (Cvjetni trg/Flower Square), business and shopping centres of “Ban centar” (currently in construction), “Importanne Galleria” and “Prebendarski vrtovi”, parts of industrial zone Žitnjak, Vukovarska street-east, Heinzelova street- south, Radnička road, Zavrtnica, city quarters and neighbourhoods of Sopnica, RiS and Špansko-Oranice. Newly built areas include city quarters and housing estates of Lanistne, Središće, Borovje and Buzin as well as shopping centres “Avenue Mall” and a cluster of shopping centres and specialized hypermarkets in the western part of the city.

Densified areas encompass city quarters and neighbourhoods of Vrbik, Trešnjevka, Kajzerica, Dubrava, Podslijepe area, and Vukovarska street-west. Derelict areas include the former textile and haberdashery factory “Nada Dimić”, steam mills of Paromić, liquor factory “Bade”, cement factory “Sloboda” and the Tobacco Factory Zagreb.

A number of city areas have been functionally and morphologically transformed in the last fifteen years due to significant social, economic and political changes. One of the most notable processes is converting urban land with previous industrial or military function into residential and business areas, as well as converting residential areas into business and retail districts. Processes mentioned above are often accompanied by transformation of public spaces into private land.

After the 1990s there was a rapid growth in the service sector of countries in transition, which led to a greater need for new office and retail areas (Stanilov, 2007c). Most of the required land has been found in former industrial zones, neglected after the production has been halted or moved to another place (usually to the city periphery). The expansion of the tertiary sector was the most influential factor in transforming such city spaces.

Today, in the area east of what is traditionally referred to as Zagreb city centre, a new business centre is being formed. This is the area approximately enclosed by the streets Vukovarska-east, Heinzelova-south, Zavrtnica and Radnička road, where industrial facilities, warehouses and low-quality housing once stood (Sić, 2007). Functional changes led to a noticeable morphological transformation of the space in question. Building new, mostly business facilities in the form of tall and modern high-rises characteristic of CBDs in western countries has significantly changed the...
symbolic landscape of that part of the city, thus “emphasizing private and foreign investment” (Sýkora, 2007:138). Development of new office spaces has resulted in physical and economic revitalisation of the industrial land and gradual formation of the polycentric structure of the city.

The greatest interest for private investors lies in business and residential facilities, but their interests is not always in accordance with the existing regulations and city planning documents. Thus, some of the facilities in the newly established CBD are oversized and the access infrastructure, due to large number of vehicles, does not completely fit their needs. The formation of the new CBD has generated more traffic and has caused additional traffic congestion. Former industrial areas have been remodelled not only for business purposes, but also for residential or at least partly residential purposes. A typical example of this is the new residential area under construction, named Sopnica-Jelkovec, situated in the eastern outskirts of the city called Sesvete. The residential area was built on a land previously used as a pig farm, and is a part of the so-called Zagreb model of housing construction for the low-income families. It is spread across 39.54 hectares with 2,722 apartments (Source 1). The project was heavily criticized by the experts as well as residents (Source 2). There are several major flaws in the new residential area: great housing density, absence of large green areas, additional facilities (although planned, they haven’t been constructed yet, so dwellers are left without some basic services), lack of communal and parking spaces (Source 3, 4).

In the buildings’ ground-floor area there are lots of unsold office spaces. Empty or dilapidated office spaces within business-residential buildings are fairly common in other parts of the city as well, reflecting badly on the aesthetics of the whole residential area (Source 5).

Former military areas within the city have also undergone through a gradual functional and morphological transformation. One of the best known examples of such converted military area is found in the eastern part of the city where a former military camp has been transformed into a university campus. Another example is the new residential area called Špansko-Oranice in the western part of the city.

Furthermore, transforming public spaces such as city squares, pedestrian zones or housing estates into private places is another well known process in the post-socialist city (Engel, 2007; Ioan, 2007; Stanilov, 2007d). Due to the privatization of urban land in the transition period, public space is drastically shrinking. Little attention is given to its prior functions and its importance for the general public (Stanilov, 2007d). Privatization of public spaces prevents access to certain areas of the city to its inhabitants, thus changing their well established routines. A great deal of responsibility for this lies with the political elite which (with their actions and disregard for the public opinion) grants access to public resources to private investors. There are many examples of this in Zagreb, but the best known ones are the privatization of city courtyards, squares and street sections, as well as the devastation of cultural symbols in the historical city centre of Donji grad. Investors often do not follow regulations and disregard the contextual character of the surrounding buildings, thus creating new buildings that do not fit in the
existing urban structures. Shopping mall “Importanne Galleria” was built on an inadequately small plot and it is a lot taller than the surrounding buildings (the same stands for the business and trade centre “Prebendarski vrtovi”). “Ban centre” is another business-residential centre that is awaiting construction in the very heart of the city, on a plot that was formerly used as a public parking lot.

By far the most famous example of transforming public space into private place is that of Preradović Square (Cvjetni trg/Flower Square). At a place where the former cinema “Zagreb”, an old printing house, and a few residential blocks once stood, a private investor is building a new business and housing complex. The fact that the Zagreb’s City Master Plan has been changed several times in the period between 2007 and 2008 to favour the private investor, led to public protests and debates. The planned oversized complex will take a strip of the public pedestrian zone of the Varšavska Street for the entrance into an underground garage with 360 parking spaces. Besides contributing to the erosion of the public realm, this is a paradoxical way of solving traffic problems in the city, even though the investor and certain politicians claim otherwise. Underground garages will only attract more vehicles into the city centre which is already congested and away from large traffic nodes (Sýkora, 1999; Svrčić Golovac, Zlatar, 2008). Apart from the existing seven parking garages in the city centre, three more are being planned for construction (Kliađeva Street, near HNK-Croatian National Theatre, Preradović Square).

Compared to Western European cities (for example, Stockholm), in 2007 Zagreb has already had 37% more garage parking places in the city centre (Source 6). Although the number of registered motor vehicles in Zagreb has rapidly grown in the recent years — in the period 1995-2007 the number has increased for 126%, i.e. from 176 970 to 399 283 vehicles (Statistički ljetopis Zagreba, 2008), this kind of city policy is part of the problem rather than an efficient solution. Encouraging the private motorized transport necessarily leads to an even greater congestion and air pollution making the streets unattractive for pedestrians (Stanilov, 2007d). Instead of expensive garages, the focus should be on the enhancement of public transport system, the creation of bicycle tracks and encouraging pedestrian traffic. Different non-governmental organizations have been issuing warnings about omissions like this one, circumventions of the law and the favouring of large scale private investments by changing the existing city planning documents, but their voices are being ignored. As Stanilov (2007e) noticed, the biggest limitation of the planning process in the post-socialist countries is the failure (or the incapacity?) of the planners to involve the public into the planning process, including the establishment of vision and goals, the identification of alternatives, plan development and its implementation.

New land use patterns in a number of city locations have resulted in inadequate spatial interventions that stand out from the immediate urban surroundings, often in violation with urban and construction rules, maximising plot use for a better profit and using low quality materials which, in some cases, led to catastrophic consequences on the environment (Kupska Street collapse, for example).

**Derelict city areas**

There is still a portion of unused industrial land containing the relics of shut down industrial facilities in the city fabric. Such areas undoubtedly represent exceptionally significant development resources. Furthermore, some of this land is located near the city centre which makes it economically even more valuable. Certain industrial objects, old factory buildings and facilities represent valuable specimens of industrial heritage and are protected as cultural monuments. In spite of their architectural, cultural and historical importance, most of these edifices are left to ruin. Good examples are “Paromlin” and “Nada Dimić”, industrial complexes situated near the main train station; areas and buildings of the tobacco factory; city slaughterhouse in Heinzlova Street; factories “Bader”, “Gredelj”, “Gorica” and “Zvijezda” oil factory. The collapse of parts of “Paromlin” and the factory edifice of “Nada Dimić” testify to the on-going degradation of such city areas.

The collapse of “Nada Dimić” was caused by a fire and the construction works near the old foundations of the factory during preparatory works for a future shopping centre (its underground garage to be precise, which was being excavated without the necessary legal documents retained by the private investor). Illegal interventions and not following the regulations, as in this case, is just one of many examples how the large scale private investments are shaping new city areas following their own interests and laws, while bypassing the public and the legitimate ones. Whether because of the perilous and deliberate neglect of these spaces (when they totally decay it is easier to tear them down and build a new business complex instead) as the public suspects, or not, the fact is that much valuable land and objects have stayed neglected for more than a decade. Part of the problem lies in the complex and often unsolved property relations, as well as the unwillingness of the investors to follow the conservationists’ provisions. Only lately the first steps towards the revitalization of some of the above stated objects were taken (for example, the passing of the DPU’s or Detailed spatial plans as well as project tenders), while some other, especially the protected cultural monuments, still await a more concise future purpose. The anticipated new land use patterns include the building of new business or business-residential objects (Textile industry and cement factory “Sloboda”).

There are many cases of successfully renewed industrial facilities in Europe. They demonstrate the possibility to use the city’s industrial heritage for its contemporary needs. Through adaptation and adjustment for new purposes (business, retail, housing, art) and not necessarily neglecting them, former industrial facilities can become valuable development resources. Some of the well known examples include Dublin and London Docklands where old industrial derelict land was converted to different housing, business and retail zones. In addition, parts of German industrial region of Ruhr are included in the “European Route of Industrial Heritage”. Other examples include London (Tate museum), Paris (D’orsay museum), Hamburg (Museum of work) and others where industrial heritage became a successful tourist product.

**Densified areas**

The impact of economic transition on housing sector in former socialist cities, including...
Zagreb, was extensive. Together with large-scale privatisation of companies, both land and housing sector were privatised, which included changes in the ownership structure and management as well as a different means of financing housing construction (Pichler-Milanović, 1994). Turmoil in the economic system caused a downwards trend in housing investment in 1990s. In case of Zagreb and Croatia the situation was further aggravated by the armed conflict following the collapse of Yugoslavia. After a period of stagnation, the last decade has seen an increase of investment in the housing sector (Stanilov, 2007a). For example, in total 6031 buildings were constructed in the City of Zagreb in the 2003—2007 period with 92% being built exclusively for housing purposes. Upgrading and expanding took only between 10—15% of the total amount of construction in that period, and the rest is newly constructed buildings.

According to the 2001 Census there were 779 145 people living in the City of Zagreb, and mid 2007 estimates show an increase of 1%. Therefore, population growth couldn’t have played an important role in expanding the housing sector. The actual reason lies in the fact that the shortage of apartments existed in the socialist era and was inherited—the small increase in population number was compensated by a reduction in the size of the average household (Stanilov, 2007a; Mandić, Clapham, 1996).

There are two dominant processes in the spatial distribution of the newly built facilities: one is the construction of new residential units or commercial facilities on aforementioned converted land use areas or on previously unused plots, which will be discussed later. The other one is so called densification of already built-up areas which is, in the case of Zagreb, one of the main goals of the city planning regulations. The 3rd paragraph of the 2007 GUP (City Master Plan) clearly states that the goal of the spatial organization of Zagreb is urban renewal and consolidation of its urban areas which will be achieved through the following planned measures: densification of the build-up areas and the rehabilitation of the built-up stock. Even though this measurement was de jure a planned one, the densification of urban areas in Zagreb has demonstrated different characteristics. One of the reasons is that after a change from planned economy to market economy the idea of Government control over private investment was regarded as inadequate. In urban planning it resulted in a liberalized and individual approach in investment decisions, because restricting private investment was seen as a hindrance to economic development (Stanilov, 2007e). Without a clear strategy of urban development and for the purpose of maximising profit, oversized buildings were being built on relatively small plots and without adequate supporting infrastructure.

Zagreb district of Trešnjevka, its northern parts in particular, is a prime example of densification. 62 371 residents live in an area of 5.2 km² (data for Trešnjevka-North city quarter). At 10 700 people per km² (Source 8) it is the second most densely populated city quarter in Zagreb, second only to the Donji grad area. Trešnjevka was built in the interwar period as a residential quarter for working class families. Single storey houses used to be dominant in the area, but recent decades have seen these houses condemned and tall buildings built in their place, mostly without any urban planning. The city panorama became disfigured, new buildings aren’t compatible with morphological characteristics of the surrounding terrain, and they are built too close to each other with a total disregard toward the need for green spaces. Traffic congestion is also a major issue. All that has resulted in the reduction of quality of life. Examples of urban devastation on this scale aren’t limited to...
of a new, more liberal real estate market facilitated the domination of commercial services in city centres, pushing residential functions into suburban, un-built areas. The advantages of suburban areas are multiple – in addition to noticeably lower prices of land, its suitability for large scale construction (especially important for large shopping centres which are usually too big for available building zones in the city centre), the psychological factor shouldn’t be disregarded: people want to move out from multi storey large buildings into so-called “green oases” outside the loud, densely built urban areas.

**The process of suburbanisation is clearly visible in today’s Zagreb, not only in its residential aspect, but also in the commercial functions with large shopping centres sprouting in the eastern and western city limits.** The appearance of shopping centres is usually a result of increased purchasing power of the people and an overall growth of the tertiary sector during the transition period. Unlike in the West, where suburbanisation had started with the residential function and was followed by relocation of commercial functions, post-socialist countries often saw large shopping centres precede the influx of residents into the suburbs. According to Stanilov (2007a), the reason behind this was the desire of large shopping centres to penetrate new markets as soon as possible. Low purchasing power of Zagreb’s citizens had somewhat delayed that process in Zagreb, as did unresolved land ownership issues and a series of other problems (Lukić, Jakovčić, 2004). There were many favourable factors for the construction of shopping centres in the city periphery – in addition to lower real estate prices the area has good traffic connections with main city routes such as Zagrebačka and Slavonska avenues. Furthermore, several city quarters (Malešnica, Prečko, Špansko) are located to the north and south of Zagrebačka Avenue. Their proximity was one of the important contributing factors for the construction of several shopping centres and specialised hypermarkets in the western Zagreb rim (Sić, 2007).

The factors that contributed to the relocation of commercial functions to the city periphery were no different when it comes to building new housing units in Zagreb area. Compared to the socialist period, there are some similarities in housing construction. The typical block structure – multi storey apartment buildings – was kept, but their distribution within the city is more heterogeneous. In addition, building blocks are built much closer to each other and with more stores, and in part they have a mixed residential-commercial function (Sić, 2007). There are several examples for such residential suburbanization in Zagreb, with Lanište in the southwest and Borovje in the southeast being the most well known. The first housing unit in Lanište was built in the early 1990s, and 3 500 people live in the city neighbourhood today (Source 9, 10). Problems occurring in the area are similar to those in densified zones – buildings up to 9 storeys high are being constructed too close to one other, population increase is accompanied by more cars which cause traffic congestions, the number of parking places is insufficient, the supporting infrastructure is inadequate and green areas are shrinking. In case of Lanište major problem is the connection of the area to the city centre via the so called Rotor (roundabout), one of the trouble spots of Zagreb traffic network. The solution for that problem is the construction of a new bridge across Sava near Jarun. Preparatory works for that haven’t even started.

The state and local authorities haven’t completely withdrawn from housing investments. Subsidized apartments for lower class citizens and Homeland war veterans at several locations are an example of that, as are apartments for junior researchers financed by the Ministry of science, education and sports in Borovje. Although the latter was highly praised in the beginning, the results were soon...
criticized (Source 11) due to poor project management, inadequate architectural solutions and an overall bad result. Additional projects at the un-built Borovje-south area are planned.

One of the ways how government and local authorities try to control the chaos created by opening the real estate and construction sectors to private investments is so called “urban reparcelling” (“komasacijacija”) which was put into the Act on spatial planning and construction from 2007 (NN 76/07). According to the Act, urban reparcelling is a mean of reshaping parcels together and solving ownership issues and other legal matters, in order to enable construction. Urban reparcelling also allows expropriation of land and it should ensure a proportional level of construction of roads, green areas and facilities of public importance as well as housing units, but also prevents possible speculative management of real estate used for maximising profits (Source 12).

CONCLUSION

Carried out research of the urban structure of Zagreb confirmed the existence of four problem areas which mirror social, economic and political changes of post-socialist urbanisation. Key initiator of these changes is interrelation of economic (transition from planned to market economy and strengthening of a private sector) and political factors (forming of a new legislative and planning framework). This symbiosis has made possible for new actors (political, economic, professional, NGO’s, public) to operate in the urban space. As a consequence many areas in the city have faced functional and morphological transformation. The process of physical and economical regeneration of former industrial and military land is noticeable, i.e. its conversion into spaces for tertiary and quaternary sectors and housing. The transformation of public spaces (such as city squares, pedestrian zones or housing facilities) into private spaces noticed in other post-socialist cities is also present in Zagreb. Part of the still underused and derelict industrial land with accompanying buildings that undergo or await transformation represent important city development resources. Its transformation will lead to a further differentiation of urban landscape.

In spite of new development possibilities and big investments, not all revitalization concepts and public space use represent the best solution. This is particularly apparent in the urban densification process. Although conceived as a carefully planned measure aimed at revitalizing parts of the urban stock and regulated by the City master plan, its effects were complete opposite. Individualized and liberalized decision making policies regarding investment decisions resulted in the devastation of certain urban areas through construction of oversized buildings and inadequate infrastructure. Increasing suburbanisation saw a number of residential quarters and retail objects appear in hitherto undeveloped areas of the city outskirts. Instead of streamlining the development through adequate planned regulatory measures, the process was, for the most part, left to unfold on its own, reacting solely to immediate market demands and disregarding the long-term needs of the urban area’s population. A large number of actions conducted in the city landscape have irreversible characteristics meaning that any solution, no matter positive or negative, is long-lasting. Therefore every intervention in the urban fabric should be a result of a scientifically based act of spatial planning. In addition, as long as existing laws are violated, problem areas will continue to emerge.

Changes in the urban landscape and the general disregard for regulations, coupled with many amendments to planning documents in favour of large scale private investments are an everyday occurrence in Zagreb. “Rampant capitalism” and the need to maximize profits have left a deep mark in the urban fabric, which will reflect negatively on the quality of life of its citizens for times to come.

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