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ЗАПОСТАВЉАЊЕ МОДЕРНОГ АРХИТЕКТОНСКОГ НАСЛЕЂА У ЦРНОЈ ГОРИ – СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА ХОТЕЛА „ПОДГОРИЦА“

Апстракт

Промене законског и институционалног оквира у којем се одвијају процеси просторног и урбанистичког планирања у Црној Гори током последње две деценије довеле су до приоритизације приватног у односу на јавни интерес, што се одразило и на питање третмана градитељског наслеђа. Ово се нарочито уочава у случају архитектонског наслеђа из послератног периода модерне (1945–1990), које убрзано нестаје под налетом нових таласа урбанизације, док га институције задужене за заштиту културних добара готово у потпуности занемарују. Како би предочио резултате који произилазе из спреге пасивног односа институција културе и агресивног планерског процеса фокусираног на остваривање краткорочних приватних интереса, овај рад представља студију случаја детаљног урбанистичког плана *Рекреативно-културна зона на десној обали Мораче* и његовог погубног утицаја на хотел „Подгорица“, објекат који је 1967. године награђен савезном *Борбином наградом* и који представља важан пример критичког регионализма у Црној Гори.

Циљ рада је да представи последице нетранспарентног процеса планирања и да докаже важност партиципативног доношења одлука у урбанистичком планирању. У истраживању је примењена метода анализе планске и пројектне документације, правних прописа, основа и механизма за заштиту архитектонског објекта као културног добра. Анализом су обухваћене и активности које предузима цивилно друштво у процесу покушаја заштите градитељског наслеђа, као и реакција надлежних институција. Резултати истраживања упућују на важност дефинисања наслеђа и механизма његове заштите у оквиру планерског процеса.

Кључне речи: модерно архитектонско наслеђе, партиципација, урбанистичко планирање, Хотел „Подгорица“, КАНА / ко ако не архитект

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THE NEGLECT OF MODERN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN MONTENEGRO – CASE STUDY OF THE PODGORICA HOTEL

Abstract

Over the last two decades, changes in the legal and institutional framework of the spatial and urban planning processes in Montenegro have led to the prioritization of the private over public interest, which is reflected in the treatment of the built heritage. This is especially the case with the architectural heritage of the post-war Modern period (1945–1990), which is rapidly disappearing under the onslaught of new waves of urbanization while being almost completely ignored by the institutions in charge of cultural heritage protection. To explain the effects of the cultural institutions' passive stance, combined with the aggressive planning process focused on achieving short-term private interests, this paper presents the case study of a detailed urban plan themed „Recreational and cultural zone on the right bank of the Morača river“, and its detrimental impact on the Podgorica Hotel, an important example of critical regionalism in Montenegro and the winner of the 1967 federal Borba Award.

The aim of the paper is to present the consequences of non-transparent planning processes and to prove the importance of participative decision-making in urban planning. The methods include the analysis of planning and project documentation, legal regulations, as well as reasons and mechanisms for the protection of buildings as cultural heritage. The analysis also covers the actions undertaken by civil society while trying to protect the architectural heritage, as well as the governing institutions' reaction to these actions. The results of the research point towards the importance of defining both the heritage and the mechanisms of its protection within the planning process.

Keywords: modern architectural heritage, participation, urban planning, the Podgorica Hotel, KANA/Who if not Architect

Introduction

The cities of Montenegro have undergone a radical transformation in the period after 1990. With the transition from the socialist to the neoliberal model of economic and social production¹, it became possible, what's more, necessary, to determine the price for every aspect of our urban environment. Appropriation of urban space by capitalism in what Golubchikov² calls "the urbanization of transition" was and is an all-encompassing process, resulting in changes to how the cities are envisioned, planned, and used. In Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, this process produced a distinct set of changes in urban morphology: an excessive growth in planning and construction of new residential blocks without developing a proper public infrastructure³, a decrease in urban greenery⁴, and a neglect of the built heritage in general – and the post-1945 modern architectural heritage in particular⁵. The process of making the strategic and spatial planning decisions that lead to these outcomes has been non-transparent and increasingly centralized, leading to civic campaigns demanding accountability for the deteriorating quality of urban space and more inclusive and participatory planning procedures⁶. The aim of this paper is to show how the current planning practice impacts the urban environment by examining the case of the Podgorica Hotel, an exquisite piece of modern architectural heritage⁷, and to argue the importance of civic participation in urban planning.

Urban planning regulation

In order to explain the current problems in spatial development planning and management in Podgorica, it is important to provide a brief overview of the regulatory framework. Spatial planning is organized in a centralized manner; the process has been gradually shifting towards centralization over the last decade⁸, leading up to the adoption of a new Law on Spatial Planning and Construction⁹ which entirely abolished the established planning system and the hierarchy of planning documentation, replacing local and municipal plans with one General Regulatory Plan (GRP) for the entire territory of Montenegro. The processes inscribed in the new Law on Spatial Planning and Construction remove the planning procedures even further from citizens, as planning instruments have been transferred from the municipal to the state level. Even before the adoption of the new Law, the residents of the area for which the plan is being made have often not been aware of this process – even though it profoundly impacts their immediate living environment – because the process was designed in a way that does not encourage civic participation or, more generally, citizens' general knowledge of how the urban space is produced¹⁰. This was also the case with the planning process concerning the Podgorica Hotel, treatment of which points to the shortcomings in the system regulating the management and protection of cultural heritage.

Modern architectural heritage: regulatory framework and state of the art

Cultural heritage is the domain of the Ministry of Culture, more precisely of the Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (DPCH). This institution, founded by Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage¹¹ has not demonstrated significant results in recognizing, let alone protecting the modern architectural heritage of Montenegro. Although the 2012 annual Program for the protection and preservation of cultural property¹² stated that there were significant XX century architectural achievements in Montenegro which had not been properly cared for and protected, not much has been done since then to ameliorate the situation, at least not by the responsible institutions. Conversely, the most significant initiatives for protection came from outside of the system: in 2012, architect Andrija Markuš from the architectural organization *Arhitektonski Forum* submitted to the Ministry of Culture a list of the 48 most important modern architectural structures¹³; this initiative has not yet been processed. In fact, during the ten years of its existence, DPCH has put under protection only two works of modern architecture in Podgorica: the relief on the Post Office building from 1948, by architect Vujadin Popović, and the Kayak Club *Galeb* on the river Morača from 1960, the work of architect Vukota Tupa Vukotić. During this time, several modern buildings integral to urban identity of Podgorica were systematically neglected and destroyed in the processes largely ignored, if not even aided, by inaction of this institution.

In general, buildings created in modern style during the 1945–1990 period are being increasingly targeted by the private investors in Podgorica, due to occupying central locations attractive for redevelopment. As none of them are protected as cultural heritage, demolitions are easily granted. Hence the new urban plans, although approved by the DPCH, often plan for these buildings to be torn down, usually to make room for the new, lucrative residential developments.¹⁴ In the last few years, several modernist hotels in Podgorica were either altered, like the iconic Crna Gora hotel from 1953, designed by architect Vujadin Popović (partially demolished and completely redesigned during the construction of the new Hilton Hotel) and the Podgorica Hotel from 1967 by architect Svetlana Kana Radević (interior inadequately redesigned in 2004, the entire building later jeopardized by the construction of a nearby tower), or entirely demolished, like the Ljubović Hotel from 1982 by architects Badnjević, Horvatov, and Ivančević. In all three cases, the original buildings and their urban settings were transfigured in order to make space for projects of low value, funded by the same investor, Normal Company. Thus, they provide a telling example of how a valuable architectural heritage can be degraded and lost if managed by a private company with neither institutional oversight nor guidelines and measures for its protection. The existing urban plans foresee further demolitions: buildings of the *Republic Institute for Urbanism and Design* (RZUP) and the *Pobjeda* newspaper are planned to be torn down, even though both of them are important achievements of the award-winning architect Ilija Šćepanović and significant for their role in the post-1945 history of the city¹⁵. A similar fate befell many famous and award-winning buildings in Montenegro, primarily those on the Adriatic coast, including the Korali Hotel in Sutomore, for which the architect

Milan Popović received the Republic Award Borba in 1968 and which is currently undergoing reconstruction without proper conservation, and the Fjord Hotel in Kotor (designed by Zlatko Ugljen), completely demolished to make space for a new development.

As long as the mechanisms for recognition and protection of the modern architectural heritage do not exist, this practice is expected to continue. For now, the appeals from the concerned professionals remain unanswered, DPCH does not take steps to address the issue, and other effective instruments that could provide at least some degree of protection for the endangered heritage simply do not exist.

The case of the Podgorica Hotel is used in this paper to present the problem in more detail, along with the response to the general problem of institutional inaction in the area of architectural heritage preservation. In the following section the methods of this research are presented, along with the authors' engagement with the object of research. This is followed by presentation of the case study, which is comprised of the analysis of the 2012 detailed urban plan (DUP) themed *Recreational-cultural zone on the bank of the Morača river – southern part*, its impact on the Podgorica Hotel building, and the civic campaign provoked by this impact. Discussion brings the most important findings, followed by concluding remarks which point to lessons learned and policy recommendations.

Materials and methods

This paper results from its authors' direct involvement in the campaign for recognition of the Podgorica Hotel as cultural heritage and its legal protection. As members of the KANA / Who if not an Architect (hereinafter: KANA) group, the authors have since 2015 applied extensive research, including but not limited to the analysis of legal framework concerning spatial and strategic planning, construction, and heritage preservation, analysis of spatial and urban planning documentation, and analysis of the structure shaping participatory practices in policy design in Montenegro. The research practice of KANA group is intertwined with action aimed at improving the urban planning policy and practice, advocating for broad public participation and transparent decision-making procedures. In that sense, this work can be considered a product of action research, as it includes the simultaneous process of doing research and taking action, linked together by critical reflection to seek transformative changes. By doing „a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action“ and using „a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action“¹⁶, KANA group put the results of its research work into practice.

The main method used in this paper is the case study of the Podgorica Hotel building and the planning process which set out to regulate its immediate environment, thereby altering the urban morphology of Podgorica city center and inspiring civic campaign against proposed developments. By presenting the analysis of the process and its outcomes, the paper offers insight into contemporary challenges of urban planning and architectural heritage protection in Podgorica and Montenegro.



Figure 1: Interventions envisaged by the DUP Recreational cultural zone on the bank of the Morača river - southern part: the scale of the planned intervention is marked in red. Source: DUP (2012)

Case study analysis

Spatial plan

DUP *Recreational-cultural zone on the bank of the Morača river – southern part* has been adopted in 2012 and is a telling example of a planning document resulting from the contemporary planning practice in Montenegro. This plan, covering one of the most central zones of Podgorica, was created by amending the earlier plan for this area three times during the 2005-2012 period; these amendments even caused the General Urban Plan of Podgorica (originally adopted in 2004) to be changed in order to allow the additional construction and building height¹⁷.

In addition to the administrative buildings located in the northern part of the area, the plan includes as many as two projects of modern architecture awarded by the Borba Award –the Podgorica Hotel (federal award) and Morača Sports Center (republic award), as well as the public park belonging to the sports center complex (Figure 1). The 2012 changes to the DUP neglect the importance of free public space and urban greenery, which is instrumental to the distinctiveness of these landmarks, reducing their urban plots to the very borders of their walls and using every available square meter for the new private construction – tennis academy with courts, a 6-story office building, a restaurant, SPA center, an office tower of undefined height – as well as for significant extensions of the existing office space. This resulted in the erasure of the area of a 40-year-old public park, which now became basis for some of these new developments.

The most controversial proposition of this plan was, however, the office tower. The DUP placed this development on the plot next to the delivery entrance of the Podgorica Hotel (at only a couple of meters distance from the hotel walls) and left the height of the future office



Figure 2: The Podgorica Hotel and the new tower on the bank of the Morača river, Podgorica.
Photo: D. Malidžan

building undefined – a highly unusual decision, especially for such sensitive spatial context. It is important to note that until the adoption of this plan, this was never the case: the maximum height was always clearly specified by the plan. Once the plan was adopted, the owner of the plot announced the competition for the development of the conceptual design of the new office building; however, the competition was not public but invitational. The design of architect Sonja Radović Jelovac won the competition, and her design was eventually built (Figure 2).

The Podgorica Hotel as neglected heritage

The plan presented above redefined the context of the Podgorica Hotel by introducing tectonic changes to its surroundings. The Podgorica Hotel, built in 1967 by architect Svetlana Kana Radević (1937–2000), is one of the most valuable buildings of modern architecture in Montenegro and beyond; its author announced a turn towards critical regionalism by literally integrating its surroundings (the pebbles from the Morača riverbed) into the walls of the hotel. For this work, built according to the winning competition entry, architect Radević received the federal *Borba* award – the highest recognition for architecture in the former Yugoslavia. The original drawings and photographs of the newly built hotel were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2019, as a part of the *Towards a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* exhibition, while the old photographs (which, conveniently, do not show the contemporary additions to the hotel's interior and exterior) adorned several Montenegrin pavilions at the Venice Architecture Biennale.¹⁸ Exceptional value of this building lies in its superb integration with its surroundings – only two stories high, it follows the riverbank perfectly and compliments the old town and the remains of the stone fortress on the other bank of the Morača river, while discretely enveloped in the green background.

The DUP of 2012 and the construction developments it permitted ignored the value of this balance entirely, jeopardized the physical integrity of the Hotel, and permanently destroyed the surrounding landscape. This was not an accident, but a deliberate and coordinated decision of several responsible institutions – a decision which, in this case,

was openly and publicly contested in a year-long campaign conducted by architecture professionals, civic activists and general public which, after this campaign, started showing more interest in the matters of spatial development in Podgorica.

Civic campaign

Due to the insufficiently promoted public debate and the general lack of public participation in the planning process, the plan to build a 12-story tower next to the Podgorica Hotel became public knowledge only after the construction works started. The dissonant voices opposing the construction came together after Ivan Jovičević, a young architect from Podgorica, published an article condemning the project and the urban planning practice behind it¹⁹. The article raised serious issues concerning the social and spatial consequences of the current planning process and the treatment of modern architectural heritage. It reached broad audience and inspired public interest, but even more importantly, it brought together many architects, as well as students of the Faculty of Architecture in Podgorica, who began working together towards improving the planning and heritage protection practices. The first activities took form of protest walks and aroused much-needed media attention; the next step was formation of the group, and soon after the non-governmental organization, KANA/Ko Ako Ne Arhitekt? (KANA/Who if Not Architect?).²⁰

From the very beginning of its work, KANA outlined the goals related to the development on the Morača riverbank: to protect the hotel building as a cultural property, and to halt the construction of the tower which threatened the building and its surroundings. The activities of the group over the following year included analyzing the planning process, the resulting documents and building permits. Materials they gathered and the analysis they produced instructed the Urbanism Inspection and the Administrative Court of Montenegro to take the legal steps and request the building permit to be revoked²¹. In a parallel process, KANA filed an initiative to the Ministry of Culture requesting protection of the hotel building and its surroundings for their urban, architectural and landscape value.

Discussion

The case study analysis shed light on the three important aspects of the modern architectural heritage recognition and protection in Podgorica: the urban planning process, which does not welcome public deliberation and is attuned to expansive development rather than to careful intervention and conservation; the state of the heritage itself, which is often presented as important to the foreign audiences²² but continuously neglected by planning authorities and cultural institutions; and the independent civic action, with organized citizens gradually becoming more aware of the importance of urban planning and architectural heritage, but also of their own capacity to influence the processes related to spatial development and protection. In the case of the Podgorica Hotel, the results of the interplay between these three aspects were discouraging: even though serious irregularities were found in the process of granting the construction permit for the office tower and

even though the validity of the permit was disputed by the official Administrative court ruling, the office tower was built. Likewise, the DPCH did nothing in their considerable power to protect the hotel building as the cultural property, which it doubtlessly is²³. However, the civic action ignited by the struggle to protect the Podgorica Hotel and oppose the harmful urban planning practice stayed active and vigilant, as evident in numerous urban initiatives organized since 2015²⁴.

Conclusion

The results of this research demonstrate how the pressure of the neoliberal mode of production of urban space²⁵ and the institutional inability to resist that pressure affect important modern architecture heritage in Podgorica. Squeezed between the powerful private interests and the dormant institutions which should, but often do not advocate for public interest, built heritage faces neglect, deterioration and ultimately demolition. This is especially true for modern architectural heritage, vast majority of which is not even recognized for its cultural value yet. Contribution of this research, combined with purposive action, is to demonstrate that it is possible for independent experts and activist citizens to steer the public debate towards questioning the status quo, and to inspire conversation about and engagement with the forces that shape our urban environment and past and present cityscapes.

The case of the Podgorica Hotel shows that there is a great deal of potential in local communities which are, through common action, gaining sensitivity for the spatial consequences of economic and political decisions. These communities have, in Burckhardt's sense, acquired certain skills of a planner: they did "comprehensively observe and assess the ways in which local authorities use planning to change their environment"²⁶. These skills could be productively used in a more participatory, more open, and transparent planning process, focused on providing public services and building sustainable living environments. However, the institutional framework is still lacking – this might be due to the lack of knowledge, interest, ability, or some combination of the three. Therefore, recommendation for further research includes the assessment of the potential for more transparent and participatory model of governing the spatial development and planning in Montenegro.

Notes

- 1 Harvey, D. *The right to the city*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2003, 27, pp. 939–941.
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- 6 Vujošević, M., Rabrenović, J., Dragović, S.: *Urban planning approach: Public participation in planning of the Block 5 in Podgorica* (in Serbian), KANA, Podgorica, 2017.
- 7 Throughout this paper, we refer to the Podgorica Hotel and the other buildings of modernist architecture in Podgorica as "heritage". To the buildings recognized and protected by the competent cultural institutions, we refer to as "cultural property". (See: the Official Gazette of Montenegro, 49/2010. Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, 2010.)
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- 9 The Official Gazette of Montenegro, 64/2017. *Law on Spatial Planning and Construction*, 2017.
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- 12 Ministry of Culture. *Program for the protection of cultural property for 2012*, 2011, p. 14.
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- 14 Spatial Urban Plan of Podgorica (PUP), 2014–2025, advises caution in planning new residential buildings since there are more apartments than demographic projections deem necessary.
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- 18 The Podgorica Hotel was featured at the Venice Biennale for the first time in 2004 (see Slobodan Danko Selinkić (ed.), *Montenegrin Eco-logic Lab: Interfaces Between Architecture and Environment: Pavilion of Serbia and Montenegro*, Republic of Montenegro, Kappa 2004). It will be presented in Venice again at the 2021 Biennale, within the exhibition titled "Skirting the Center: Svetlana Kana Radević on the Periphery of Postwar Architecture" (see <https://kanaradevic.me/>). These presentations are supported and funded by the Montenegrin institutions, while the actual architectural works of Svetlana Kana Radević, generally unprotected, are unrecognized by the cultural institutions, and left to the mercy of neoliberal urbanization.
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- 20 KANA is a wordplay – an acronym of the question "Who if not an architect?", as in, who if not an architect will advocate the protection of architectural heritage?, and also an homage to architect Svetlana Radević, the author of the Podgorica Hotel, Kana being her nickname.
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