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IDENTITY REEVALUATION OF A PLACE ON THE EXAMPLE OF CVJETNO NASELJE IN ZAGREB

TOŻSAMOŚCIOWA REEWALUACJA MIEJSCA NA PRZYKŁADZIE CVJETNO NASELJE W ZAGRZEBIU

Abstract

The research deals with Zagreb's Cvjetno naselje (built in 1939) that adopts the standards of functionalist architecture and spatial planning, considering its location along the Sava River. The identity evaluation of the site would show how Cvjetno naselje has changed its symbolism from the original planning to the present day, considering changes in the type of users within the settlement and in the city district. The analysis would indicate which elements of urban iconography are retained, which new ones appear and how they communicate socio-political dynamics.

Keywords: Zagreb, Cvjetno naselje, urban identity, urban iconography, symbol

Streszczenie

Badania dotyczą Cvjetno naselje w Zagrzebiu (z 1939 roku), gdzie przyjęto standardy funkcjonalistycznej architektury i planowania przestrzennego, uwzględniając położenie wzdłuż rzeki Sawy. Tożsamościowa ocena miejsca miałaby pokazać, jak Cvjetno naselje zmieniło swoją symbolikę od pierwotnego planu do dnia dzisiejszego, przy uwzględnieniu zmian w rodzaju użytkowników na terenie osady i dzielnicy miasta. Analiza ma na celu wskazanie, które elementy ikonografii miejskiej są zachowane, jakie nowe pojawiają się i jak komunikują one dynamikę społeczno-polityczną.

Słowa kluczowe: Zagrzeb, Cvjetno naselje, tożsamość urbanistyczna, ikonografia miejska, symbol

1. INTRODUCTION

The research deals with the analysis of Zagreb's settlement Cvjetno naselje as an example of a realized planned settlement that adopts the standards of functionalist architecture and modernist planning, taking into account the specificity of location and natural features. Cvjetno naselje is an important part of Croatian cultural heritage which, since its inception in 1939, has shown resistance to changes that would radically transform it, and at the same time sufficient flexibility in adapting to the conditions of the new time. Responding to housing needs, Cvjetno naselje reflects changes in the needs of its users, which are noticeable through the adaptation of mostly ground floor zones, with a smaller number of buildings that

were demolished and rebuilt, respecting basic standards and typology planned by Croatian architect Vlado Antolić.

Since Cvjetno naselje was planned for city officials, it was recognized already in the late 1930s as an urban space that adopted the idea of a higher standard of urban living: in family houses with a garden, sufficiently isolated from city noise, but only a few tram stops from the city center. Living in the immediate vicinity of the Sava River also takes into account the potential risks, which unfortunately materialized during the flood of 1964, which initiated a change in the immediate environment – the construction of embankments and the potential for construction along the very coast.

Although Cvjetno naselje is a highly defined urban and architectural ensemble within which it was not possible to significantly intervene without violating its value, it is its symbolic significance that defined the design standard, and thus the type of users of the surrounding area. In the following decades, the southern and western areas flanking Cvjetno naselje were defined: in the south the Jedinstvo factory completed in 1946, *The Cube* by Ivan Vitić completed in 1968 and skyscrapers for army officers built in the 1980s, in the west the Elementary School by Zlatko Neumann built in 1962, residential buildings from the late 1960s, and Vjesnik's skyscraper from 1972 by Antun Ulrich. In 1985, the sculptor Ratko Petrić initiated the Alley of Sculptures directly on the Sava Embankment, which is an ongoing project to this day.

An interdisciplinary re-evaluation of the site would include a formal technical analysis of Cvjetno naselje and buildings from the socialist and post socialist era in its vicinity that are significant for the urban identity of the whole city district, to determine the most important elements on which their historical and contemporary value rests. An identity evaluation of the place would show how Cvjetno naselje has changed its symbolism from the original planning until today, considering changes in the type of users not only within the settlement but also in the city district (from officials, factory workers, government officials, military personnel, students, journalists and wealthier citizens in the newly built apartment building in Veslačka Street). Also, the analysis would indicate which elements of urban iconography are retained, which new ones appear and how they enter into a dialogue with socio-political dynamics.

2. CVJETNO NASELJE – PLANNED SETTLEMENT OF MODERN STILT HOUSES ACCORDING TO VLADIMIR ANTOLIĆ'S PROJECT

The period between the two world wars in Zagreb was marked by double modernization processes – industrialization and urbanization, whose processes were only partially harmonized, as evidenced by the problems of working-class housing. Architect and urban planner Vladimir Antolić, through his work in the organizing committee of CIAM and the Zagreb Working Group (RGZ), focused his planning and design problems on social housing at a time when as many as a quarter of Zagreb's population lived in difficult social conditions. The city was burdened by a large influx of population not only due to these modernization processes, but also because of World War I when a significant number of refugees settled permanently in Zagreb. Vladimir Antolić approached the problem through active social engagement, a series of lectures in which he emphasized the need for active social policy¹, but also through the

¹ V. Ivanković, *Arhitekt Vladimir Antolić – zagrebački urbanistički opus između dva svjetska rata*, Prostor, 2009, 2(38), p. 274.

implementation of planned housing for known users whose credit financing would enable the acquisition of adequate housing. In 1939, Antolić planned Cvjetno naselje for city officials in a completely non urbanized area, located south of the railway that had defined the city's space until then. The flood zone along the still unregulated flow of the Sava River became the first planned settlement of low-rise architecture in southern Zagreb, which was recognized for its urban and architectural value immediately after construction². The orthogonal plan includes about 50 built one-storey and two-storey houses (out of 80 planned), with an area of 95 to 170 square meters, on a plot of 20x40 m, which allows tenants comfortable living, but also food from their own garden. Due to the proximity of the Sava River, which often flooded, the houses were designed as modern reinforced concrete stilt houses, with a single-pitched roof with a slight slope, erected on pillars, with only a partially built ground floor with ancillary rooms, and the main residential part on the 1st floor. The central alley, planned as exclusively pedestrian, but realized as a combined pedestrian road, is bordered by birch plantations which, along with the private gardens of each house, give a special quality of housing.



III. 1. S-281-041, Postcard Collection of the Croatian State Archives.

² D. Radović Mahečić, *Socijalno stanovanje međuratnog Zagreba*, Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti, Institute of Art History, Zagreb 1993, p. 153.

In the late 1930s, such a consistently planned and executed housing project is a unique example in Zagreb that arose on the then outskirts of the city, and today is located in the city center, a few tram stops away from the main square, and with excellent traffic connections to the south city planned during the 1960s and 70s. Although many houses of Cvjetno naselje have changed their recognizable appearance in the meantime, the basic value of the settlement has been preserved, which is recognized as a protected historical ensemble by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. Today, the term Cvjetno naselje does not refer only to Antolić's achievement, but to the settlement bordered by the Sava Road on the west side, Slavenska Avenue on the north side, Croatian Radio Television on the east side and the Sava River on the south side.

Cvjetno naselje was built for city officials, but Vladimir Antolić himself and his co-author Zvonimir Kavurić, whose descendants still live in family houses in Cvjetno naselje, built their home there. The first inhabitants of Cvjetno naselje were officials, who were deprived of the originally planned social facilities, built decades later. Social life therefore took place in the greenery of one's own and neighboring gardens, and on the banks of the Sava, which gathered many bathers in summer, and in winter its embankments served for winter joys (Ill. 1). Photos from the family archives and the Museum of the City of Zagreb, as well as testimonies of residents collected for the exhibition *Trnje – space and people*, indicate that the Sava River was not only a factor that determined Antolić's design, but also a key element of urban identity – a space of strong social cohesion to all generations (Ill. 2).



Ill. 2. MGZ 542327, Postcard Collection of the Zagreb City Museum.

3. STUDENT RESIDENCE HALL CVJETNO NASELJE

In 1955, according to the project of Salvko Löwy, west of Antolić's settlement, the student residence hall Cvjetno naselje was built, whose inhabitants will become one of the synonyms of Cvjetno naselje from then until today. The recognizable whole of the residence hall consists

of connecting tracts, building interesting transit volumes that bound the complex and make it open at the same time (Ill. 3). In this way, the dormitory is also a world in itself, but with permeable boundaries that allow it to connect with the environment. Two complexes: a residential area and a student dormitory, permeate in harmonious coexistence, and the interzone of apartment buildings with a park and a primary school built in 1962 according to the project of Zlatko Neumann form points of contact and focus of social life (Ill. 4). It is in this place that the trade and catering facilities are placed, located in the physical center of the settlement, which keeps the peace of the residents within the Antolić settlement to this day, but also the student dormitory. Zones of dynamics and urban noise at short distances are being replaced by zones of silence, which significantly contributes to the quality of urban life.



Ill. 3. Students Residence Hall Cvjetno naselje, Author's Archive (photo 2022).



Ill. 4. Cvjetno naselje with Students Residence Hall in the background, S-281-042, Postcard Collection of the Croatian State Archives.

4. JEDINSTVO FACTORY TRANSFORMED INTO POGON – ZAGREB CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT CULTURE AND YOUTH

The Sava River has in many ways determined the appearance and functioning of this part of the city, and due to its wild nature, it has long provided a wide green, undeveloped belt of its shores. However, after the Second World War, southeast of Cvjetno naselje, Jedinstvo factory (founded in 1946) in 1978 merged with the Institute for Process Production that was located at the bank of the river. Jedinstvo factory was already in 1947 declared a state company of federal importance³. Until 1990, the then factory giant employed 1,700 workers (at the Trnje and Jankomir locations), and the workers, along with former officials and their families, formed a significant segment of the urban dynamics of this settlement (Ill. 5). The strategic use of the Sava for industrial purposes has changed its symbolism, changing and supplementing the previous identity patterns – quiet housing in urban greenery, which is interspersed within the settlement, gets its counterpoint in a modern factory hall that within its functionality, over large glass walls accepts the surrounding space. Due to the change in the political and social order in the late 1990s, the factory hall was being converted into a site for cultural purposes, and up to this day has played one of the key roles in the alternative culture (Ill. 6). Instead of workers, Jedinstvo has become synonymous with an independent cultural scene, which has transformed the entire surrounding area with alternative cultural and artistic content and activated the local population through participatory practices. It was by integrating art into the life of the local community that an important identity transformation of the place was achieved, which finally gave Cvjetno naselje a social content, which Antolić planned already in 1939, right on the eastern edge of the settlement.



Ill. 5. Jedinstvo Factory, published in *Jedinstvo 1946–1971* (ed. Krstulović et al.) 1971.

³ G. Arčabić, *Vrijeme giganata: planska industrijalizacija i naslijeđe 1947–1952*, Muzej grada Zagreba, Zagreb 2017, p. 57.



Ill. 6. Jedinstvo Factory, Author's Archive (photo 2022).

5. *THE CUBE* – IMPORTANT FACTOR OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FORCE OF ZAGREB IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

The next significant transformation of urban identity within the settlement happened with the construction of one of the most important buildings of political content – the popular Cube by architect Ivan Vitić, the first state administration building located on the southern edge of Cvjetno naselje. The building was built in 1968 on the newly built embankment of the Sava River. Namely, in 1964 the flood caused great material damage to this part of the city and the regulation of the river flow was finally started, which enabled a different regime of using the coastal area. Vitić's building is one of the most significant architectural achievements of its time, and was designed by merging two volumes – horizontal, which follows the line of the embankment and vertical, which creates a strong emphasis directly opposite the Zagreb Fair on the opposite coast. The building is located on a plateau leading to a monumental staircase, and the isolated position in space emphasizes the symbolism of the political temple, which corresponds to the function it performed at that time – the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia and the League of Croatian Youth. The modernist glass palace in the function of representing political power brings a significantly different identity definition of the settlement – a new social stratum of high political officials with accompanying protocols creates a new recognizability of Zagreb whose former periphery became a place of recognition at the state level. Located on an almost completely unbuilt embankment, built on a plateau – a square to which a wide staircase leads, the Cube will remain an unquestionable symbolic sign that will affect the identity of the entire settlement (Ill. 7). As early as the 1980s, 70-meter-high skyscrapers were built on the embankment west of the Cube, for

officers and government officials who also recognized the potential of life along the Sava, in a loose density of the settlement whose greenery has become valuable city capital since Antolić's beginnings. The dynamics of urban habits, from bureaucratic settlements, through factory (today cultural) workers and political officials, complicate the identity of a place that is re-identified and evaluated with each transformation.



Ill. 7. The Cube, Author's archive, (photo 2022).

6. ALLEY OF SCULPTURES

The uniqueness of the location was also recognized by the artist Ratko Petrić, who launched the Alley of Sculptures initiative in 1985. The Sava embankment, right between the Jedinstvo factory on the east side and the railway bridge popularly known as the 'Hendrix Bridge' on the west side, has been gradually transformed into a sculpture park that includes the most important names in contemporary Croatian sculpture: in addition to Petrić, Branko Ružić, Mladen Mikulin, Zvonimir Lončarić, Dora Kovačević... (Ill. 8). But in addition to the artistic content, the embankment is a place of intense socializing, sports recreation, family walks and outdoor learning (thanks to the proximity of the students' dorm). In this sense, the Alley of Sculptures functions truly as a link, whose surfaces reflect the vibrancy of life of various users, not only residents but also occasional visitors, recreationists, users of the Bowling Lodge built along the embankment in 1991... Although the Sava flows through Zagreb in the length of 30 km, the synonym of the Sava embankment implies a narrow stretch of 4 km on which the Alley of Sculptures is located and which is recognized as a highly positive space



Ill. 8. Alley of Sculptures, Author's Archive (photo 2022).



Ill. 9. Veslačka Street, Author's Archive (photo 2022).

in researching places of pleasure and displeasure in Zagreb⁴. The Alley of Sculptures is the largest park space in the entire settlement, which connects heterogeneous contents throughout its length: it connects the endpoints of the former Jedinstvo factory, now a cultural center on the eastern branch, and an elite apartment building in Veslačka Street built in 2018 by Svebor Andrijević and Luka Korlaet, which is, with its indented structure and fluid form, oriented towards the Sava (Ill. 9). It was this last constructed building that again brought

⁴ Z. Stiperski, *Percepcija mjesta ugođe i neugode u prostoru grada Zagreba*, Prostor, Croatia 2015, 2, p. 338.

about the re-evaluation of the place, creating an identity, recognizable and symbolically valuable meaning to the settlement, attracting a new group of users who recognize the values of built heritage and natural position. The immediate vicinity of the new buildings consists of 3 skyscrapers that form the western edge of the settlement, and are the work of architect Slavko Jelinek from 1972, who separated the settlement from the busy Savska Street with recognizable verticals. Jelinek's skyscrapers are marked by an interesting grid of cut and prominent, full and glazed surfaces, whose play in free interpretation can be seen in the horizontal composition of the building of Svebor Andrijević and Luka Korlaet.

7. VJESNIK SKYSCRAPER – CENTER OF THE NEWSPAPER AND PUBLISHING HOUSE

Although Cvjetno naselje was originally defined as a low-rise residential area, over time skyscrapers were built on the edges of the wider area, contributing to the town's urbanity and intelligently forming a quadrangle, whose northwest corner forms the Vjesnik skyscraper, designed by Antun Ulrich and completed in 1972. Recognizable from a greater distance, the specific brown color for which the inhabitants call it the Chocolate Tower, Vjesnik's skyscraper had a high symbolic capital and even during construction it appeared as a motif on postcards of Zagreb from the socialist period (Ill. 10).



Ill. 10. Vjesnik skyscraper, MGZ 43789, Postcard Collection of the Zagreb City Museum.

However, the construction of the business tower meant another re-evaluation of the place defined by new users. Not only students inhabited the settlement, but with the construction of the Vjesnik skyscraper along came the journalists from one of the leading newspapers in the country. The dynamics of the space is once again being transformed, and the night look of the transparent tower, where famous journalists are recognized in its offices, also contributes to the image of the city. Although the business tower creates new rituals in the surrounding area, the specificity of the journalistic profession creates a vibrant atmosphere first on the western edge of the settlement, and then on the eastern one, which will be completed by the construction of the Croatian Radio Television complex started in 1975, but finished in 1983. Due to changes in the market in 2012, the publishing house Vjesnik was shut down, and the skyscraper remains empty, almost a ghostly giant whose neglected exterior remains only as a reminder of the dynamics that it framed until recently.

8. CONCLUSION

Cvjetno naselje is a unique example of a planned and built settlement that adopts high standards of modernist architecture applied to individual construction, and which has basically been preserved to this day. Gradually adding new content, which attracted new groups of users, changed not only the built landscape, but also the way of its use and representation. With the construction of the student dormitory, the peaceful bureaucratic settlement in its neighborhood gets a new dynamic of urban life that comes with young intellectuals from all over Croatia, who enrich the identity of the settlement and create new symbols of the place. Unlike most of the settlements that were built in the interwar period, Antolić's settlement was not a workers' settlement, but an official one, achieving a very pleasant standard of living that has remained to this day. The upper class and students represented the dominant social groups that recognized the values of the built environment and formed an affirmative attitude towards functionality, aesthetics and new materials of the architecture in which they lived. At the same time, the Jedinstvo factory was being built in Cvjetno naselje, and the exclusively residential purpose of the settlement was being transformed into a space of work and significant daily transit. It was the workers who were the legitimation base of Yugoslav society, and their integration into the settlement, in addition to the practical ones, also had ideological implications. Factories symbolized development, progress, their large lighted halls signified post-war optimism. In the 1957 documentary *Camera through the City* (Zagreb film), factories, including the Jedinstvo factory, are called popular ambassadors of their country and their city. Even more explicit political symbolism of the settlement is brought by the construction of the Cube, intended for use by the political elite, with the symbolic representation being raised to the state level. Every next decade, new contents, new users and new symbols are inscribed in Cvjetno naselje, where the identities of the places become more heterogeneous. The interpolation of two large media houses on the western and eastern edges of Cvjetno naselje (Vjesnik and Croatian Radio Television) brings another significant contribution to identity re-evaluation. Journalists, editors, photographers, cameramen, politicians and other media personalities are becoming part of the neighborhood. However, despite the transformations that are happening not only in the new zones of the settlement, but through changes in traffic and the addition of secondary facilities (restaurants

and sports facilities, art facilities, new parks), Cvjetno naselje retains a recognizable identity whose constant is marked by the Sava River and rich greenery, intersperse between built buildings. Controlled construction values not only the advantages of natural position, but also the formal characteristics of the existing architecture. Therefore, the planned urban development of Cvjetno naselje does not degrade its primarily valorized values, but they remain the backbone of further development.

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