

# **BEYOND CONTEXT**

**Three Architectural Case Studies  
From Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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# BEYOND CONTEXT

Three Architectural Case Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Sarajevo, 2022.

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## **ABSTRACT**

To understand contemporary architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one has to be familiar with the deregulated context of this developing country. The book *Beyond Context* represents research that tries to reassess the overall situation in the country while seeking out possible answers to how architecture can relate to derogated and degraded contexts such as this one. Creating architecture in these conditions is specific and calls for a creative approach that challenges the status quo of contemporariness by being an extraordinary response to its immediate and broader context through inherently present local means. Such architecture is not taking the context only as a starting point and an unavoidable ingredient. Instead, it aims to affect and improve it while becoming an essential part of it. Therefore, the book consists of three architectural case studies developed in local conditions and explained from the perspective of first-hand experience. The research tries to extract resembling points among each in order to investigate the relation between them and the characteristics of the cultural, social, political, and economic context of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Za razumijevanje savremene arhitekture u Bosni i Hercegovini potrebno je poznavati deregulirani kontekst ove zemlje u razvoju. Knjiga *Beyond Context* predstavlja istraživanje koje pokušava preispitati cjelokupnu situaciju u zemlji tražeći moguće odgovore na to kako se arhitektura može povezati s derogiranim i degradiranim kontekstima, kao što je sredina kojom se knjiga bavi. Takva arhitektura ne uzima kontekst samo kao polazište i nezaobilazan sastojak. Njen krajnji cilj je uticati na njega i poboljšati ga, istovremeno postajući njegov sastavni dio. Stoga se knjiga sastoji od tri arhitektonske studije slučaja razvijene u lokalnim uvjetima i objašnjene iz perspektive iskustva iz prve ruke. Istraživanje nastoji otkriti njihove sličnosti kako bi se istražio odnos između njih i karakteristika kulturnog, društvenog, političkog i ekonomskog konteksta u Bosni i Hercegovini.



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## PREFACE

In the times of global turmoil, worldwide pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the renewed threat of nuclear disaster, it feels strange to be writing about the experiences of creating architecture within the deeply troubled political, social, and economic context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the perspective of an average Bosnian, it appears as if the entire world has become like this country—an unpredictable spot of tense and tangible but still frozen conflict. Twenty-seven years ago, the Dayton peace agreement had stopped the brutal war in this part of Europe but did not truly end it. Since then, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been living a “new normality” for quite a long time within an ethnically divided, corrupt, dysfunctional, and unstable political system burdening the overall economic, social, and spatial development.

Why is this observation essential, and how does it relate to architecture? As everyone practicing architecture knows all too well, architecture does not arise “in a vacuum.” Architecture is far more complex than simplistic narratives and diagrams that architects use to present their works in an appealing, romantic, and politically correct manner. In many cases, whether we are aware of it or not, architects tend to tell the half-truth while emphasizing only the project's specific and easily observable qualities. On the other hand, we mostly tend to remain quiet about the rest of the time-consuming and painstaking process, probably because we consider the “whole story” not pretty or not exciting enough, or maybe, because it is hard for us to admit that we do not “own” the result entirely or to the extent that we would like to be true. From my own experience, the final product, the building, is always the compromise between us and our effort on the one hand and many other actors, occasions, and circumstances that are profoundly influencing the project on behalf of the overall context on the other hand. The result depends on the context it emerges from equally, if not much more than it depends on us.

This book is written for two reasons, both the necessity and the need. It is a product of necessity because it represents an indispensable precondition for continuing my academic career. At the same time, it is a result of the personal strive to systematize and record my own experience of practicing architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past fifteen years. As all those involved in

scholarly work know very well, the terms for pursuing an academic degree must be renewed every five to six years, most often under enormous stress related to the strict deadline schedule. This is particularly true in situations such as this one when the one trying to pursue an academic career is also stubbornly trying to stay active as a practicing architect, despite the chronic lack of available time. However, this combination of two opposing motives, in the end, seems to be working because the pressure of necessity could prove itself as a valuable way to conclude the long-lasting, active learning process and as a tool to produce an overview of the practical and philosophical insights which were being gathered during the significant period. The books that tend to explain the experiences of creating architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina in detail and from a first-hand perspective are scarce and lacking. Hopefully, in this regard, this book might be helpful to my students, me, and anyone trying to understand the complexity of creating architecture in developing and highly deregulated countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This book presents three local architectural case studies. As an architect who was deeply involved in the design and development of all three as a co-author and a project leader, each lasting from three to five years, I do not consider them only as projects but as substantial parts of my life experience. Unfortunately, this bumpy, unpredictable, and often exhausting but overall exciting learning journey has taken a toll on time I could have spent with overwhelmingly supportive members of my family. I owe them a lot, and therefore I will use this opportunity to thank Lejla, Anur, Asja, Anesa, and my mom and dad, Zinka and Muhamed.

## INTRODUCTION

*“History is not static but dynamic. No generation is privileged to grasp a work of art from all sides; each actively living generation discovers new aspects of it.”*

*Sigfried Giedion; Time, Space, and Architecture; 1959 (Giedion, 1959)*

As we all have been witnessing recently, history proved itself again to be truly dynamic. After an extended period of relatively settled and predictable social, economic, and political relations worldwide<sup>1</sup>, provided by the gradually fading *Pax Americana*, at the moment when the global Covid 19 pandemic was announced, suddenly and abruptly, the entire world was compelled to abandon the established daily routine and adapt to strange, new normality. At the same time, global politics kept tumbling down into a novel era of dangerously strained and unpredictable international relationships.

Although everyone was legitimately surprised, from the perspective of an average Bosnian who still remembers the early 1990s, this shift came across more as a *Déjà vu*. The new global situation reminded many of us of an economic and social crisis just before the breakup of former Yugoslavia when the monetary inflation, economic recession, and a complex political situation were only precursing even more significant adversities that followed shortly after. Suddenly, an idyllic image of Olympic Sarajevo became a scene of brutal destruction, and spontaneously, the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina became a synonym for devastation, war atrocities, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and exile. Unfortunately, this was when we all learned a hard lesson that profound historical discontinuities occur fast and without warning.

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<sup>1</sup> To clarify: The period of the last thirty years was far from a *global peace*. As apparent, brutal, in most cases hardly justifiable, and tragic conflicts were raging sporadically worldwide. However, compared to today's situation and the war in Ukraine, they appeared to have more of a regional and local nature, without the potential to spark severe global conflicts, such as the new cold war, World War III, or global nuclear disaster.

Why is this relevant to the book? As prosaic as it may sound, it is hard not to recall war if one is interested in grasping contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural, social, political, and economic context. Although this country had a long history, culture, tradition, as well as various problems before the 1990s, the most critical factors determining its current contextual reality are deeply rooted in unfortunate and traumatic events related to the war and the repercussions of a new, both peace-providing and the structurally dubious, social contract based on ethnic segregation<sup>2</sup> that followed as the aftermath.

What exactly happened? Under the late arrived pressure of the international community, led by the United States of America, the new constitution was hastily drawn up and designed to provide an overwhelmingly fragmented administrative structure following the complex model of shared competences between the central government, the entities of the state, and the cantons (OSCE, 2022). The national sovereignty was preserved, but at the same time, the highly problematic and discriminatory principle of ethnic exclusivity was introduced as a general *algorithm* running the system (Mlinarević & Porobić, 2021). Paradoxically, the organizational model that was supposed to protect the rights of the constituent nations quickly became one of the main reasons for the democratic, economic, and social stagnation of Bosnia and Herzegovina while fuelling the political confrontations based on ethnic animosities up to the present day. (Kivimäki, Kramer, & Pasch, 2012)

Without social consensus and political cohesion, spatial regulation and infrastructural planning were almost left in abandonment within a profoundly fragmented administrative system of governance that has proved itself to be highly susceptible to corruption. Although deregulated urban development was always an issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the

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<sup>2</sup> To clarify: the constitution is based on the so-called *ethnic principle* instead of the principle of *civic citizenship*. What is the difference in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina? The ethnic principle constitutes the country around the rights of three dominant ethnic groups, instead of all individuals complying with the legal requirements of becoming a citizen.

region, probably since the first regulatory plans were introduced to areas of the Western Balkans, due to a lack of effective countermeasures and serious commitment, the magnitude of informal development in the last three decades has become hazardously dominant and more prevailing than ever.

In those conditions, architectural development in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been trapped in a vague labyrinth of bureaucratic mess, a highly deregulated and fragmented legal system, poor spatial planning, informal development, and underdeveloped construction industry while being an essential part of the brutal transitional economy inherent to post-socialist era. Despite the solid tradition of modernist architecture and infrastructural achievements of previous times, the change of rules and the abandonment of the established social relations did not contribute to this sector as one would expect from a society leaving the failing socialism and entering a new and promising capitalist future. Instead, it kept tumbling down into a further cultural, ethical, and developmental regression, probably even more dangerous in the long run than the war and its physical destruction<sup>3</sup>.

How does architecture, as a profession and as a result of professional activity, cope with the context as such? The book tends to dwell upon this question while exploring three examples of contemporary architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It consists of the following parts: the general overview of the context within Bosnia and Herzegovina, an examination of local architectural case studies based on first-hand experience, and the final discussion. The first several chapters of the book offer broad insight into the conditions under which architecture in this country is being created, starting with the common zeitgeist, and ending with specific requirements of genius loci.

The book's second part presents three case studies: the Cultural Center IBC in Zurich, House NHRV in Sarajevo, and House VLHS in Mostar. Although

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<sup>3</sup> To clarify: As seen in post-war Sarajevo, the lack of environmental control and the damage made by informal behaviour in terms of spatial planning can be much more expensive and harder to fix than damage created by the war.

built in Switzerland, the first case study deals with the complex issue of creating a center for the community of Bosnian immigrants while exploring the role of architecture in their specific quest related to collective cultural identity. The second case study presents an experience of creating an affordable housing unit on the outskirts of Sarajevo within the context of the underdeveloped construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The third case study shows the experience of creating a low-energy house within the environment of the rural Herzegovinian landscape. Finally, the book's ending discussion attempts to extract resembling points of experience demonstrated by case studies and investigate their relationship with the overall context elaborated in its first three chapters.

All three case studies are projects created by Sarajevo-based practice Filter Architecture and were all designed by a group of five co-authors: Asmir Mutevelić, Ibrica Jašarević, Kenan Vatreanjak, Nedim Mutevelić, and Vedad Islambegović. However, this book is not a studio brochure. It represents my effort to collect fading memories, facts, insights, and observations gathered throughout fifteen years of professional engagement as an architect in Bosnia and Herzegovina and as a person who was deeply involved in designing, managing and building the above-mentioned architectural works. This book might be viewed as a certain kind of retroactively written memoir, presenting the factually grounded, academically structured, but still very much personal point of view.

Hopefully, someone could find it helpful not only as a collection of potential quotes for future academic works related to this or similar topics but as a somewhat amusing, *practical manual* based on on-site data collection for all those starting to deal with the actual, real-life architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



## I.1.0 The Condition of Post-postmodernity

*“The Balkans is structured like the unconscious of Europe, das Unbewusste Europa’s. Europe puts, projects all of its dirty secrets, obscenities, and so on into the Balkans, which is why my formula for what is going on in [the Balkans] is not as people usually say; they are caught in their old dreams, and they can’t face people here and ordinary, modern, postmodern and whatever reality. No, I would say they are caught into dreams, but not into their own dreams, into European dreams.”<sup>4</sup>*

Slavoj Zizek, Euronews 9, December 2008<sup>5</sup> (Bijedić, 2011)

Despite all the narratives about barely comprehensible, obscure political and ethnic peculiarities deeply indigenous and authentic to the region, everything happening in the Balkans seems to be reasonably well conditioned by the global cultural, economic, and political flows. As Slavoj Zizek jokingly comments, one could argue that the most hidden desires fuelling the common European zeitgeist seek to find fulfilment in these areas almost as repressed, shared fantasies of its unconscious. Well, if the whole Balkans is a synonym for the unconscious of Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina might be seen as the very epicentre of the *complexity and contradiction*<sup>6</sup> within the region.

European zeitgeist is an extensive term, but it is clear that Europe has been far from an ideologically isolated island during the postmodern era, despite appearing somewhat conservative and resilient to changes compared to America. Without question, the worldwide perspective of postmodern thinking was continuously shaping European cultural, political, and economic landscapes for decades while, paradoxically, the promises of all *great endings*<sup>7</sup> have been vital slogans fuelling the creation of the European

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<sup>4</sup> Citation retaken from the article *Is the Balkans the Unconscious of Europe* (Bijedić, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Link to the original video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzM8tqjmCU8&t=61s>; YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/EuronewsUSA>; date of the visit: 28 May 2022

<sup>6</sup> Referring to “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,” Robert Venturi, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the end of history, totalitarianism, the end of wars, and many other proclaimed postmodernist endings in literature, arts, culture, and other areas of life.

Union in a comparable way as grand narratives of the modernist past have been doing on different occasions before the fall of the Berlin wall. Unfortunately, as being apparent right now in the midst of globally renewed power struggles, and as it was evident during the tragic dissolution of former Yugoslavia, the end of history never occurred.

Suppose Žižek's statement is taken even halfway seriously. In that case, it may seem true that complex problems of the society in the Balkans are only reflections of obscene global trends mirroring themselves much more bluntly in territories of Southeast Europe than they do in the developed countries of the West. If this is true, one might claim that the contextual reality within leftover Yugoslav countries has been *more-than-postmodern* for at least three past decades. However, while the world changes in a rush toward new historical experiences, we are hopefully transcending as well.

What do I mean by *more-than-postmodern*? To be clear, by this claim, I mean that many phenomena defining postmodernity as a general term tend to manifest themselves more severely and in advance here in the Balkans while precursing specific trends that are yet to be seen clearly in the developed countries of the West, many years after they occur in this region. In other words, I claim that contextual conditions in the Balkans, and especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are even post-postmodern<sup>8</sup> compared with the general state of postmodernity observed from the western point of view. In the following three chapters, I will elaborate on this premise through several topics related to the global paradigm by connecting certain tendencies exhibited in the region with the general trends partial to the postmodern era.

### ***1.1.1 Postmodern notion of Social Fragmentation, Retreatment of the State, and the Nationalism***

The first several chapters of the book, including this chapter, might appear *off the track* and unrelated to architecture. However, I still hope that they

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<sup>8</sup> To clarify: by this term, I refer to a condition described in the book *“POST-POSTMODERNISM or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism”*, by Jeffrey T. Nealon (Nealon, 2012)

will make perfect sense to the reader as the book continues to develop further. Although I am not a fan of generalized introductory parts myself, in this particular case I find them necessary because it seems impossible for me to go deeply into the social, political, economic, and cultural causes constituting the local architectural experience and its contextual reality without relating them to their global counterparts and the worldwide direction of the movement. So, before observing local specifics and making connections between both ends of the spectrum, I will explore the universal characteristics of the global postmodern condition within the following text, thus heavily relying on the philosophical and sociological premises elaborated by David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and some other authors who have dealt with this topic previously. Again, there is not much storytelling about local architecture and its environment in this part of the book, but please, bear with me.

As boring as it may sound, to continue, let's start from the beginning:

How can we explain Postmodernism?

Of course, although many have written about it, there is no absolute consensus on what constitutes Postmodernism because, as we all know, Postmodernism avoids epistemic certainties. Still, according to many authors<sup>9</sup>, overall social *fragmentation* is probably one of the most significant and agreed-upon properties associated with the postmodern spirit. Although, as an idea, it can be traced to the phenomenon called *fragmentation of meaning* inherent to late modernism, this distinctive characteristic became a prevailing discourse evident in various areas of postmodern life while occurring on the micro-level as opposed to globalization happening on the other end of the spectrum.

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<sup>9</sup> For example David Harvey (Harvey, 1992); Castells (Castells, 2000), (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002), (Castells, Kraj tisućljeća, 2003); Frederic Jameson (Jameson, 1991); Jean-Francois Lyotard (Lyotard, 1984 ); Doyle Paul Johnson (Johnson, 2008)

In philosophy<sup>10</sup>, fragmentation was created as a tool of ideological deconstruction, intended to end the univocity of meaning. Essentially, it has been seen as a remedy to abandon all grand modernist narratives being developed around centered idea systems and culture reliant on the belief that the steady growth of science and technology would ensure continued economic, political, and social progress. While being proclaimed as unnecessary or undesirable in this process, grand narratives tended to be replaced by a multitude of fragmented narratives noncommitted to reaching any consensus concerning general objectivity. Collective idealisms were declared to be dead, and a series of other endings were announced, such as the end of history; the end of totalitarian systems; the ending of reality as a simulated end; the ending of seriousness as the end of nostalgia; the ending of inspiration as the end of literature's sacredness; the ending of creation as the end of originality and the conclusion of the novel as the end of genre purity.<sup>11</sup> (Apolloni, 2017)

However, as experienced from today's perspective<sup>12</sup>, when very Postmodernism seems to be fading, one might argue that fragmentation has become a post-modern metanarrative on its own, although difficult to define by concepts and categories disposable within the modernist tradition. Paradoxically, it seems as if, while being self-proclaimed as *anti-ideological* and opposed to epistemic certainties, this mode of thinking became a *grand promise of cultural, economic, and political liberalization*. This might be why, similarly to the widely criticized aspect of modern and premodern ideologies, fragmentation as one of the most significant

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<sup>10</sup> To clarify: this term refers to the philosophy from the second half of the 20th century and authors such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Taken from the article „The end of the era of endings,“ written by Ag Apollony, 26 June 2017, published on the Eurozine: <https://www.eurozine.com/the-end-of-the-era-of-endings/>; date of the last visit: 28 May 2022

<sup>12</sup> To clarify: at this moment, it is visible that, at least economically, globalization is in crisis due to the War in Ukraine, the economic isolation of Russia, and the US-China trade war. As the situation develops further, the trend may shift to other areas of life. It is already expanding in the example of animosities toward Russian culture and bans related to it and in the case of many multilateral, inter-state agreements cracking. The end of globalization probably means the termination of postmodern times, if they haven't been done already.

postmodern premises can be found everywhere within the fabric of global society while behaving almost like a predominant source-code algorithm running various aspects of everyday life.

For instance, this trait can be easily followed in arts and within the domain of cultural production. It can be seen in media where a large variety of independent, network-based sources is wildly replacing the concepts based on the mass audience; it can be observed in postmodern literature, as well as cinema, where linear chronology seems to get abundant while plots are being built up by using fragmented, collage-like methods; In architecture where the international style was replaced by a variety of different eclectic or regional approaches; In academic life where the long-term trend of increasing specialization may be seen as fragmentation of education in general.

While occurrences in arts and cultural production may seem more of a symbolic and intermediary nature, crucial symptoms of postmodern change can be found within the essence of contemporary economic relations. For example, in the last fifty years, the vertical integration system, reminiscent of the *Fordist* production era, was overwhelmingly replaced by a new organizational model favoring decentralized global production, outsourcing, constant labor force rotation, flexibility, and specialization while avoiding delays at any cost, surpluses that are not necessary, and stockpiling goods by engaging in production only when the commodity is already sold<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the company's internal structure became a system of independent, decentralized units, which prefer dynamic connections based on the network principle. At the same time, workplace relations have ceased to be linear and fixed to become amorphous, adaptable, and changeable (Castells, *Uspon umreženog društva*, 2000). Moreover, they became temporary, established on a "joint project," and

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<sup>13</sup> This sentence describes Toyotism as a production model. This set of production principles replaced Fordism as a model in the 1980s. Opposed to Fordism, a native US model, Toyotism was developed in Japan to cope with the poor access to raw materials. This system is one of the main reasons why the Japanese industry went from underdeveloped to the position of world power in a short period after WWII.

interrupted upon its completion, allowing participants to form new relations and even become rivals on other occasions concerning different business goals or strategies. In other words, the work conditions became based on the principle of flexible working hours and other variable employment conditions while fuelling labor's decentralization and individualization<sup>14</sup>. Both processes have led to increased diversity among the workforce and significantly decreased the number of cultural bonds necessary for social cohesion among the labor itself. (Harvey, 1992)

Building upon economic trends and being further fuelled by new digital assets, social fragmentation also became pervasive in the area of individual identities. Boosted by network-based media of the new age, general culture as the most critical factor of identity formation became an amorphous, temporary, and flexible predicament, unrelated to the traditional community structure. Although this shift has brought personal liberation in many domains of human life, such as areas related to gender equality and gender fluidity, sexual freedom, same-sex marriages, and abandonment of oppressive elements related to patriarchal family structure, at the same time, it led to extreme atomization of society (Castells, *Moć Identiteta*, 2002). The role of community as a medium of mutual support and social cohesion, structurally crucial in modern and premodern societies, became much less potent while leaving too many individuals socially isolated, alienated, and exposed to *liquid anxiety*<sup>15</sup> (Bauman, 2000).

Despite quite radical structural changes, new economic conformations proved themselves much more productive than the models of previous epochs. However, the changes within the system of international relations had to occur for this paradigm to reach its full potential. Therefore, free

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<sup>14</sup> Decentralization primarily refers to the dispersion of the place of production, such as the practice of outsourcing. The term Individualization applies to the flexible and everchanging relationship between employer and worker, which is being concluded in countless diverse ways.

<sup>15</sup> Term coined by Zygmunt Bauman, referring to the state of the *nameless* fear being present in today's societies. The anxiety comes from our inability to recognize the threat inside our complex society and, if realized, from our failure to counter it.

trade and decentralization of production became central premises fostering the shift. In other words, processes that began as fragmentation within economic production became a driving mechanism of worldwide globalization shortly after. How exactly did this happen?

For example, the dollar inflation in the 1960s<sup>16</sup> triggered a trend of peripheral production, invented in search of cheap labor. In other words, to become more price-competitive, big companies started to relocate their production capacities to less developed parts of their home countries (Harvey, 1992). The fashion continued in the 1980s and 1990s but was much more significant in scale. The outskirts of the developed countries have been replaced primarily by Asian and Latin American countries, in which postmodern corporations have found an abundance of cheap, deregulated labor. Various forms of subcontracting have shifted manufacturing all over different continents, primarily to smaller companies, mainly *sweatshops*, across the underdeveloped world (Harvey, 1992). The factor of cheap labor, combined with autocratic governments and a lack of control, has become the new gold mine of global capitalism.

Due to increased productivity and dramatic profusion of output surpluses<sup>17</sup>, free trade became another crucial factor in the world of postmodern economy. To achieve the unhindered exchange of goods and services worldwide, it was essential to create an environment within which it is possible to maintain the global stability of the world currency market. This meant a severe international effort to harmonize monetary policies at the supranational level, including interest rates, and ultimately to diminish the control of the nation-states over their national budgets. Consequently, all of the nation-states involved in this process had to lose, to a large extent or

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<sup>16</sup> Inflation happened in 1966 due to the fiscal problem of declining corporate productivity and profitability, which undermined the dollar as a stable international reserve currency. This led to the cracking of the Bretton Woods agreement under which gold was the basis for the U.S. dollar.

<sup>17</sup> To clarify: the potential for production output surpluses became much bigger than the needs of domestic markets.

completely, control over their sovereign economic policies (Castells, Kraj tisućljeća, 2003).

This led to the gradual deregulation of domestic relations and continuous transfer of competencies from the domain of states toward multilateral organizations, not only in the economic sector but also in other fields such as defense or foreign policy (Castells, Kraj tisućljeća, 2003). For example, International Monetary Fund (IMF) took over many competencies that were traditionally belonging to national banks; World Trade Organization (WTO) globally became the most critical foreign policymaker; even after the end of the Cold War, NATO remained to be the most significant defense policy generator for the countries in the West; Various multilateral environmental agreements have become the basis for the worldwide national policies concerning environment protection.

At the same time, due to increasing urbanization and socio-economic challenges on the micro-level of governance, the shift of state competencies also went in the direction opposite of globalization. Due to the differentiation of internal problems, many local issues proved to be most effectively expressed and dealt with at the local and regional levels. Therefore, many of the decision-making processes went down from the status of state competency to the scale of local community regulations. Consequently, the nation-state's power became substantially reduced while being constantly stretched between the frantic efforts to control the global flows and the inability to be effective at the level of local community problems (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002).

In a world oscillating between two symmetrically opposed tendencies, globalization on one end and fragmentation on the other end of the spectrum, sources of cultural meaning also began to vary radically. While transnational ideas such as environmental protection, gender equality, anti-racism, and human rights in general, have seemed to be capturing enough to mobilize a significant number of people worldwide and create a movement, the identities based on ideas promoting a return to traditional values, such as fundamental religious principles or nationalism, have



become dangerously powerful as well (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002). The distribution of these entirely different worldviews has been resonating with the various access levels to general processes defining globalization within each society and among countries worldwide<sup>18</sup>. The first set of ideas easily coincided with the social strata of people or communities that were more intact with and benefiting from the global flows. In contrast, the second set of ideas resonated with those who were not or refused to be.

Consequently, religious fundamentalism, nationalism, and conservatism, as postmodern mechanisms of identity formation, to a large extent, can be seen as defensive reactions. They oppose several anxiety-inducing trends natural to the era, such as globalization which abolishes the autonomy of traditional social institutions and organizational structures; flexibility, uncertainty, and insecurity regarding work conditions; and the crisis of patriarchy which is creating the basis for crucial change in the domain of general socialization, sexuality, gender equality, gender fluidity, and identity formation (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002).

As perfectly well expressed by Manuel Castells in his book “The Power of Identity,” this phenomenon can be paraphrased in the following way: when the world becomes too big to be controlled, social subjects want to reduce it back to its size and put it within their reach; When global flows tend to agitate structural changes, people anchor themselves in places and dose their historical memory; When the patriarchal family disintegrates, together with the supporting community, people tend to force it back as an expression of God’s will (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002, str. 74).

To be precise, new forms of nationalism and fundamentalism are very different from the state nationalism of the modernist era, which was used as legitimizing narrative to create a domestic civil society and a sense of national purpose. Although behaving as political platforms used by populist

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<sup>18</sup> To clarify: Although it may not always be the case, postmodern nationalism and religious fundamentalism tend to be more amplified in regions and countries that play less critical roles within globalization, or as Manuel Castells names them, *less-connected* countries (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002).

politicians far too often, in essence, contemporary nationalisms have much less to do with state institutions and their systematic effort to produce and retain them. They became significantly more community and culture-based while still being able to create synthetic narratives on their own by using suitable fragments of history, geography, language, and environment as the raw material for the construction of new meaning (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002). Essentially, state-based nationalism loses its ground parallel to the loss of national sovereignty and withdrawal of the nation-state.

The withdrawal of the state is a reasonably well-known expression here in the Balkans, while social fragmentation and nationalism represent the most critical keywords expressing current reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the rest of the briefly elaborated postmodern phenomena from this chapter have set the theoretical background for further explanation regarding historical circumstances and trends deeply connected with the local state of affairs. Dissolution of former Yugoslavia, Balkanization, and the War in Bosnia as an oblique repercussion of postmodernity will be essential topics elaborated upon within the following chapter.

### **1.1.2. *Balkanization and the euthanasia of common sense***

What is balkanization?

Although many academically framed definitions already exist<sup>19</sup>, in my opinion<sup>20</sup>, balkanization is political and social fragmentation brought to its meaningless maximum and the ultimate step toward an atomized multiverse of societies ruled by paradoxes and friction. The only way for it to emerge is through brutal violence and dedicated effort to turn one sizeable, heterogeneous geopolitical entity into a variety of smaller, antagonized but homogeneous units. Each newly formed piece tends to create its very own, small-scale *grand* narrative, its version of truth and

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<sup>19</sup> For example, descriptions of the term given in the book "The Balkanization of the West" (G.Meštrović, 1994); or in the book "Balkanization and Global Politics" (Balkanization and Global Politics, Remaking Cities and Architecture, Nikolina Bobic)

<sup>20</sup> As someone born and raised in Bosnia and Herzegovina and whose life has been relatively influenced by the process of balkanization for the last thirty years.

history, while barely struggling to survive within the global geopolitical context on its own.

If this claim is taken for granted, with all the explanations from the previous discussion kept in mind, it is hard to deny that the description of balkanization sounds genuinely postmodern. Doesn't it?

Thus, having a long tradition of usage related to Balkan wars from the 1800s, the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, and the Congress of Berlin from 1878, balkanization as a term became wildly popular in the 1990s amid wars, violence, and turmoils related to the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. This was the moment in history happening shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the whole of Europe was celebrating unity and the end of geopolitical bipolarity haunting the entire world with the continuous threat of nuclear disaster. While people in neighboring European countries were euphorically cheering and repeating how the war would never again happen in Europe, the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia<sup>21</sup> started to fall apart.

After almost a decade-long struggle, seven separate<sup>22</sup>, sovereign<sup>23</sup>, and quasi-sovereign<sup>24</sup> countries were what was left behind. They all came out of this painful journey internally chaotic, economically, and culturally weakened. From once being a part of a larger society capable of creating and running a nuclear power plant<sup>25</sup>, having its domestic car production, and the production of jet planes, newly formed countries became, to a

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<sup>21</sup> In the rest of the text, I will refer to the full name of the country as SFRY

<sup>22</sup> Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Monte Negro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>23</sup> To clarify: I do not refer to *true sovereignty*, used in the word's whole meaning, because I don't think that complete independence exists in the complex world of contemporary international relations. In other words, the weaker the country less sovereign it is. In this sense, the sovereignty of left-over Yugoslav countries is highly questionable.

<sup>24</sup> To clarify: by quasi-sovereign, I refer to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which came out of the process of dissolution as a strange, new model of the state consisting of two entities (practically *sub-states*) being supervised and, if necessary, managed by the international protectorate.

<sup>25</sup> Such as the one still being operative in Krško, Slovenia

more or less considerable extent<sup>26</sup>, mainly exporters of crude materials, primary products, and a cheap labor force while political chaos, plunder of state property, and corruption became an inevitable part of everyday life. At the same time, most of them got out materially and morally stained by their involvement in savage war atrocities, genocide, ethnic cleansing, exile, rape, and murder. Although preserved in original boundaries, Bosnia and Herzegovina stood devastated in the middle of this show, torn apart in every possible sense.

A few years before this madness started to happen, the people of Yugoslavia thought of themselves as a relatively prosperous and emancipated nation. While many of these self-made presumptions were probably created to reinforce common identity and national self-esteem might have been a pure result of our ignorance, narratives made by ourselves, or the establishment, available historical facts show that Yugoslavia was not a third-world country. For instance, it was the only country in Europe that practically liberated itself from the German invasion in WWII, with the weak support on behalf of Western allies and even weaker support from the eastern communist Block<sup>27</sup>; It was an amazingly sovereign country in the era of the Cold War while being an agitator,

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<sup>26</sup> To clarify: not all countries came out equally damaged and therefore were not recovering similarly slow. For example, Slovenia recovered relatively fast and quickly became a member of the European Union; Croatia was recovering significantly slower but did well compared to other states; Other countries also recorded slow but evident progress, with the Bosnia and Herzegovina recovering at the slowest rate. Although some progress was made in the case of this particular country, at this moment, even regression is evident, especially in terms of domestic political relations.

<sup>27</sup> During World War II, Yugoslav communists, while previously being banned as a movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and therefore doomed to operate undercover, organized themselves as a guerrilla army. While fighting the German occupation, they fought with the enemy forces from within the country in parallel. Those were the forces of the so-called Independent State of Croatia, a state formed during WWII with the support of Nazi Germany, and the remnants of the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which organized themselves as predominately Serb militia. Thanks to clever maneuverings and numerous victories, they gained support domestically and on behalf of the allies by the end of the war and came out of it as declared winners. Yugoslav communism was not a product of internal revolution but a result of the fight against both external and internal enemies.

creator, and a leader of the third block of Non-aligned Countries; Despite being a country with a socialist government, it was not part of the Soviet Block, and it was opposed to it for many years; Until the second half of the 1980s self-governed economy was reasonably stable while sports<sup>28</sup> and culture<sup>29</sup> were blooming.

To be clear, it was far from being a perfect country. The one-party system running the government was not democratic; Corruption was significantly present as a social behavior, although to a much, much lesser extent than now, in many of the left-over countries; The freedom of speech and academic freedoms were limited as well as political behavior opposite to the prevailing one, and despite enormous investments and significant public development, spatial informality was always present. Still, it was not as oppressive as its Soviet counterpart. The citizens of SFRY enjoyed a substantial amount of freedom compared to the nations within the SSSR while living in a system providing ample protection of labor rights. Compared to many other capitalist countries in Europe and worldwide, it was a relatively stable and prosperous country, not precisely liberal but liberal enough.

So, how did we become so savage? Although many problems preceded this transgression, the shift from socialism to extreme nationalism seemed to have happened in an instance. Bizarre political figures with their radical ideas, nationalists, religious fundamentalists, and the masses of their followers showed up in the media and public domain almost overnight. At the same time, previous socialist politicians and elites started changing their old uniforms for new ones in an instance, while citizens brought up by the Yugoslav idea of civil plurality, summed up in the official slogan *brotherhood and unity*, were observing this change almost in disbelief. It was by no means clear where all these characters came from, given that everyone believed how the old system had successfully dealt with that kind of

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<sup>28</sup> For example: The Yugoslavian national team was among the top three teams worldwide, next to US AND Soviet Union. It won eight World Cups and three Olympic medals.

<sup>29</sup> For example: In 1984, Yugoslavia was hosting the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo.

ideology during the previous four decades. The whole situation seemed as if everything that Yugoslavia claimed to be had been turned upside down, and all the narratives taught in schools and openly proclaimed by everyone, not only state apparatus, appeared merely a farce. In other words, for many people, this turnover was overwhelmingly shocking and fear-inducing.

The most common explanation for such reversal is, as always, the most simplistic one. For example, in international and local media, most often, one can hear how interethnic hatred seems to be deeply seeded within the region's history and, as such, appears to be an almost primordial characteristic while dooming the whole of the Balkans to be what it always seemed to be- an irrational, disorganized place ruled by tribal animosities. If understood like this, the phenomenon of balkanization seems almost like cultural heritage, a deeply rooted nature of things with the final message being that one shouldn't invest time to go further in an attempt to understand it because the problem is too abstract and, therefore, hard to solve. *Don't bother... it's a cultural issue. A matter of tradition, you know.*

As an interested reader would probably have assumed already, the explanation is more complex than previously given. If observed with more interest, local nationalism appears more as a reaction to painful structural changes and uncertainties associated with it while having more to do with the global condition of postmodernity described in the previous chapter than with the region's premodern cultural habits and traditions. To fully understand it, one must get familiar with the specific Yugoslav economic system and its connection to global economic relations inherent to the era.

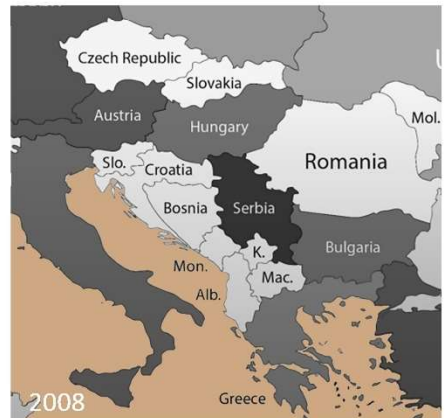
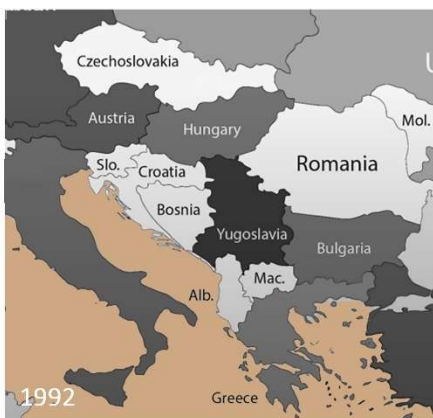


Figure 1- Balkanization illustrated© illustration by Amir Bašić

### ***1.1.3 Cultural Transgression***

Since the mid-1970s, Yugoslavia was not a typical communist country with a central, planned economy. Although previous constitutional changes indicated significant shifts in this direction, the new constitution, created in 1974, brought substantial reforms that strengthened the country's unique economic experiment. This was the moment when the system of self-management, although present as a concept even in the constitution from the 1950s, was reinforced to become fully applicable and, in a great measure, protected from the interventions of the central government. Simultaneously, these reforms represented a structural change whereby a significant amount of federal government competencies were shifted down to the level of individual republics while further reinforcing the act of the country's federalization from 1964. In essence, constituting republics became in charge of their economies, not as management institutions but as regulating bodies<sup>30</sup> overlooked and supported by the Federal Government.

What did self-management exactly mean? It was an attempt to create a *socialist market economy* by giving workers control over the enterprises and separating the company's decision-making process from the direct influence of state entities on every constitutional level. Like in capitalism, the enterprises became independent and capable of competing against foreign companies and each other in the domestic and international markets but were run without capitalists. They did not exist in this model because everything became society-owned<sup>31</sup>, that is to say, owned by the workers. In other words, on a larger scale, this model represented a unique attempt to create a *third way*, an economic system between the classical

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<sup>30</sup> To clarify: their role became more similar to the part of the governments in free-market societies. The federal government's role was, more or less, to overlook their work without much direct interference.

<sup>31</sup> To clarify: society-owned is crucially different from state-owned. The workers are at the center of this model while influencing the decision-making processes and having the right to share a portion of the surplus revenue.



market economy and the centralized communist framework, by simulating agile economic relations from the West within a socialist society.

Observed through the prism of global financial shifts and monetary crises from the 1960s, mentioned in the previous chapter, it is symptomatic that these reforms occurred shortly after the termination of the Brenton-Woods agreement, the volatile dollar inflation in the 1960s, worldwide production reset, and the dislocation related to it. Clearly, this domestic change pointed out three global postmodern marks described earlier in the book: flexibilization of the economic relations, structural decentralization, and the withdrawal of the state.

Similar to the structural changes within the modes of production occurring in the West at the time, Yugoslavian reforms aimed to solve the problem of decreasing productivity and the inflation caused by abolishing the dollar to gold monetary standard, previously defined by the ceasing Brenton-Woods agreement. Before 1974, interest rates related to the WWII loans given by IMF and the World Bank to Yugoslavia were going wild while almost tripling in the early 1970s. Industrial growth slowed down tremendously in the early 1960s, dropping from a 15% growth rate in the previous decade to only 4% in a few years period (Calic, 2019, p. 213). It became clear that production had to become more efficient to counter-fight foreign trade deficits, decrease inflation, and reduce unemployment. Therefore, numerous reforms were performed concerning the banking sector, market liberalization, and foreign exchange control throughout the 1960s, only culminating in 1974.

Reinforcement of self-management did improve the economy and society as a whole. Despite still being a one-party system, the country became more democratic, at least at the level of direct engagement within the workplace environment. The workers became allowed to express their opinions freely within the company, oppose the management, and insist on their constitutional right to participate in decision-making processes. The generation shift among functionaries<sup>32</sup> also co-occurred, allowing a new

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<sup>32</sup> To clarify: Probably coinciding and being induced by the structural transformation.

generation of managers and politicians, who cherished more liberal attitudes and promoted more democratic lifestyles, to obtain influence.

It also showed significant shortcomings. The whole concept was based on the theoretical idea that the rise of productivity will occur naturally when workers obtain the power because the company's future is being merged with their individual, existential interests. This thesis proved itself significantly wrong because workers tended to redirect the surpluses in favor of their private interests, such as increasing wages, rather than in the company's interests, such as, for example, the technological renewal.

However, structural changes from 1974 and the prior decades proved to be economically effective only in the short run. The crisis settled for a while, but the next great recession came pretty soon with the 1979 global oil crisis when Yugoslavia's foreign debt reached almost five times its size from the 1950s. It kept rising unstopably during the 1980s to become the highest per capita in Eastern Europe, only in 1983, while growing in the coming years. By the end of the 80s, it was time for new reform attempts as the crisis seemed to reach its peak.

They were proposed in 1989 by the prime minister Ante Marković and got the support of the Federal Government, only this time under the severe pressure from the IMF. Sponsored by the International Monetary Fund, the latest, unprecedented reforms proposed privatization, liberalization of trade, and the fixed exchange rate while shifting the country toward capitalism. Although proving itself capable of reducing inflation partially, the new system generated a series of bankruptcies of society-owned enterprises, reduced wages, and job losses while putting profit above the social rights previously granted by the system. Consequently, dramatic social outrage emerged in an instance... And this was when nationalism started to awake.

How did this exactly happen? The answer to this question is excellently elaborated in Jake Lowinger's book *"Economic Reform and the "double movement" in Yugoslavia: An analysis of Labor unrest and ethnonationalism*

*in the 1980s.*" (Lowinger, 2011), one of the first academic books that do not approach this problem from the aspect of primordial ethnic hatred but as a transition which had its prelude in the economic crisis and the labor unrests of the early 1990s and late 1980s. The book explains how, despite emerging almost overnight<sup>33</sup>, this phenomenon was not a result of accumulated ethnic tensions or the act of the long-awaited national liberation but an occurrence induced as a reaction to the crisis. In other words, nationalism was not a product of evolving ethnic struggles in the thirty-year-long history of Socialist Yugoslavia but a violent cultural transgression, a way to cope with the emerging existential disaster.<sup>34</sup>

In his book, Lowinger argues that the emergence of ethnonationalism in Yugoslavia can be explained by the concept of *double movement*, a scheme initially developed by Karl Polanyi in the book *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi, 2001) as a dialectical model describing global development by using the dichotomy of tensions between the social marketization and the push for social protection.

In the case of Yugoslavia, the dichotomy was developed between the IMF and the Federal Government on the one hand and the worker organizations on the other hand. While the first group was trying to implement reforms to achieve economic stability, the latter group, the workers, comprehended them as an attempt to reduce their social and economic rights. Nevertheless, when the unrest started, the wave of strikes led by worker organizations did not show any signs of ethnonationalism, while protests had a noticeable class character. On the overwhelming majority of

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<sup>33</sup> As described in the previous chapter.

<sup>34</sup> Comment: This conclusion strongly resonates with premisses regarding nationalism and religious fundamentalism as reactive identities, elaborated in the first chapter of this book. It reinforces Castells's point that they emerge as a defensive opposition to anxiety-inducing treats, primarily related to the issues produced by globalization and the withdrawal of the state. In the case of Yugoslavia, this was a reaction induced by both global and local factors: pressure on behalf of the IMF represents the international factor, and the incapability of the Federal Government to implement meaningful solutions to the crisis can be seen as the domestic one.

occasions, the workers did not act as a union of different ethnic groups but as a united working class demanding better living and working conditions, a way out of a series of bankruptcies, and fewer benefits for the managers running the companies.

However, despite the character of solidarity, this movement failed to produce a political and structural alternative to the Federal Government that would oppose the country's dissolution. Consequently, both sides found themselves trapped in a stalemate position: while the Federal government could not implement reforms, workers were not able to accomplish their objectives. They were not politically organized, and therefore political alternatives expressing their position were not created to oppose the existing Federal establishment. Thus, the political vacuum arose just before the upcoming elections.

This was when nationalist politicians, former state enemies, religious fundamentalists, and other bizarre figures started to show up while filling up this gap as the only political and ideological alternative opposed to the existing structure and its fading credibility. Outraged workers voted for them to bring down the ruling establishment, and the whole drama precursing the dissolution started: newly formed republic governments began blaming Federal Government for the crisis while proclaiming that the existing situation was a direct outcome of the socialism<sup>35</sup> as a structurally flawed system of ideas; the wealthiest and the economically most stable republics started to pursue policies that benefited themselves rather than inter-republic solidarity; and Yugoslav army, controlled by the Federal Government began considering options for military coups within constituent republics.

Shortly after, individual republics started gaining independence by their rights defined within the Federal constitution, and various armed conflicts

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<sup>35</sup> This was tremendously paradoxical because the Federal Government was at the same time being blamed for reforms that reduced labor rights while trying to implement reforms that were a clear shift toward capitalism.

arose due to different nationalistic claims. The war escalated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an ethnically most heterogeneous republic, followed by horrific atrocities and genocide. Finally, enormous hatred which was produced due to suffering, and ethnic animosities, together with extreme nationalistic divisions, became an everyday reality.

As clearly visible even now, thirty years later, things went too far in the Balkans at the end of the previous century and even further in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a consequence of the war, the people of this country have been living in an ethnically divided, apartheid-like society for over three decades while ethnonationalism became the country's most prominent trademark, deeply embedded in the local contextual reality. For example, the state has been divided into numerous administrative fragments run by different nationalist political elites not bothering very much to find political consensus; although we all speak the same language, three separate national languages have been synthetically produced and imposed as the national standard; three different versions of history are being taught, and children are being separated in schools according to their ethnicity in some parts of the country; we have three presidents, each representing one constituent nation while members of minorities and the undeclared citizens cannot run for this position.

Although we, as a society, would have probably been a serious option for a world champion in bigotry in some bizarre alternative universe much more racist than this one, unfortunately for the postmodern world, the turn of events leading to such an outcome is not something authentically unique to us. As seen in the previous rows of this chapter, the nature of ethnonationalism in the Balkans fully complies with almost all characteristics of the postmodern zeitgeist explained at the beginning of the book: social fragmentation, geopolitical globalization, the crisis associated with it, and the withdrawal of the nation-state.

To sum it up: the global financial crisis of the 1990s produced structural changes in Yugoslavia as well as in the rest of the world; structural changes introduced economic flexibilization and the and the significant withdrawal

of the state competencies in the advantage of lower constituent levels of governance; withdrawal of the state produced further social fragmentation, and economic shortcomings; domestic financial crisis, reinforced by the interventionism of multilateral forces created severe social problems and revolts associated with it; weakened nation-state did not have the means to handle the newly formed situation while being stretched between the liabilities on the global level and issues emerging at the lower, local structural levels; escalating social crisis produced ethnic tribalization as a reaction, leading to further territorial and cultural fragmentation and eventually ethnic tribalization led to armed conflicts, war devastation, discrimination, and hatred.

Amid the contemporary global crisis, some universal lessons can be learned from this experience: economic problems produce social turmoil; social emergencies make structural changes within the system itself; **structural changes do not always grant a positive outcome and the transition into a better future.**

Having the global geopolitical situation in mind throughout the last fifteen years, does this sound familiar? For many people who survived the crisis in Yugoslavia and are still struggling with the challenges of the post-dissolution era, it does, even frighteningly so.

In a world that desperately needs geopolitical cohesion to face tremendous global challenges such as climate change, rising social inequality, energy crisis, and international migration, fragmentation seems far more intensive than ever in the modern age. Bizarre political figures with crazy ideas, greatly resembling politicians from the Balkans, have started to emerge on the worldwide political scene while even running the most powerful countries in the world. Advocates of political dissolutions on various levels are becoming lauder globally, with some significant, internationally important withdrawals, such as Brexit, already made. Physical conflicts based on social tribalisation, racism, and nationalistic or religious fundamentalism have become forceful internationally and even started to emerge in developed countries of the West. The global multilateral system

of relations is seriously cracking, and, right now, we have a situation where one powerful nation is attacking another weaker sovereign country while using the model of nationalistic and territorial claims already tested in Bosnia and Herzegovina three decades ago.

As wonderfully explained by Stjepan G. Meštrović in his book “Balkanization of the West: Confluence of Postmodernism and Postcommunism,” (G.Meštrović, 1994) we all tend to forget that, although opposed to each other ideologically, both western capitalism and the eastern communism are crucially refractions of modernity, models based on the values of Enlightenment. Despite discrepancies, their essential aim was to control and suppress anti-modernist tendencies, such as religious fundamentalism, racism, ethnic hatred, and regressive tribalism. Arguably, Communism has been buried for a while, but that does not mean that the end of history has occurred and that the capitalist nation-state or the global order based on a market economy cannot fail. If that happens, we all might regress into a post-postmodern state of conscienceless, a society similar to those of premodern times, only now juiced up with digital technologies and armed with the nuclear arsenal.

The contextual reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina might be a perfect example of a society where both models have failed: communism has disintegrated, and capitalism did not deliver its promises of a better future. What is left behind is a country run by a system based on pre-modern tribal values, parasitizing on the infrastructural remnants of the old system while selectively adopting elements of Western capitalism. I see it as dystopian, post-postmodern territory, a Mad Max<sup>36</sup> situation in the heart of Europe.

However, I am aware that there are too many more demanding environments in underdeveloped countries worldwide than this one. Some readers from a third world might be laughing out loud right now while thinking *you don't know what real Mad Max's situation is*. However, I still believe that this one is genuinely worth taking a look if not for any other

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<sup>36</sup> Referring to the movie Mad Max from 1979 (Miller & Kennedy, 1979)

reason than its unique para-logical internal structure of organization and conditions emerging from it.

So, what does living, working, and creating architecture in such conditions look like? The following chapters of the book seek to answer this question.

## **1.2.0. Contextual reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

*“There he goes. One of God’s own prototypes. A high-powered mutant of some kind never even considered for mass production. Too weird to live, and too rare to die.”*

Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 1972 (Thompson, 1972, p. 38)

I hope that I won’t go too far if I claim that, at least from a Bosnian perspective, architecture literary appears as the frozen politics. This thought occurred to me only several years after I started practicing real-life architecture locally and has stayed with me since as a more convincing lesson than the original saying from Goethe<sup>37</sup>. It might be a subjective exaggeration and a debatable issue, but I don’t think I am entirely wrong. What do I mean by this?

With previous chapters taken into account, it may seem as if citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been living in a social experiment for more than eighty years, first as citizens of a country with an authentic self-managing, *third-way* economic system and then, after the dissolution, as citizens of some society created by doctor Frankenstein, as I will try to elaborate in the following parts of the book.

Well...to be exact, the country’s new constitution was not designed by doctor Frankenstein but by US foreign policy experts collaborating with the international community, primarily European. I don’t want to be misunderstood with this sentence – people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are

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<sup>37</sup> The original saying from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Architecture is frozen music*



genuinely grateful for the effort to put the war to its end, as it would have probably ended with the extinction of at least one out of three constituent nations in this country, in a situation without foreign intervention. It is hard to judge it because maybe it couldn't have been different due to the complex condition of war within the country at that moment, but undoubtedly its repercussions are tremendously bizarre. As many would agree, this peace-providing solution has proved far from the common-sense model of countries' internal organization.

To be clear, this is not the only reason for the country's stagnation. There are many other problems dating from the modern or even premodern era, such as the problem of land nationalization or the issue of privatization that has criminally gone wrong in many cases, and it certainly does not pardon us for the prevailing corruption almost becoming almost inherent to the culture. Still, it can undoubtedly be seen as the malfunctioning algorithm running the whole system.

As one could guess, similarly to the whole story of Yugoslavia's disintegration, this new constitutional solution is genuinely postmodern. After all, it is a product of Bill Clinton's administration, being described as one of the first postmodern US presidencies, as precisely elaborated in the book "Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics" by Steven Schier (Schier, 2000). As I mentioned in the introductory part, it was hastily written to stop atrocities from becoming wild at the moment when the genocide in Srebrenica had already happened, and it indeed represents an embodiment of the postmodern *anything-goes* culture. What does this mean?

It means that the new constitution reflects the situation in Bosnia in Herzegovina *as found* when it was written, without any ambition to bring any change or create a functional society at least similar to the countries of the West in terms of fundamental civil rights or state efficiency. While creating a situation of the *frozen war*, it accomplishes several things that were considered significant at that very moment: it stops the fights and atrocities, calms the agitated western public within the peace providing

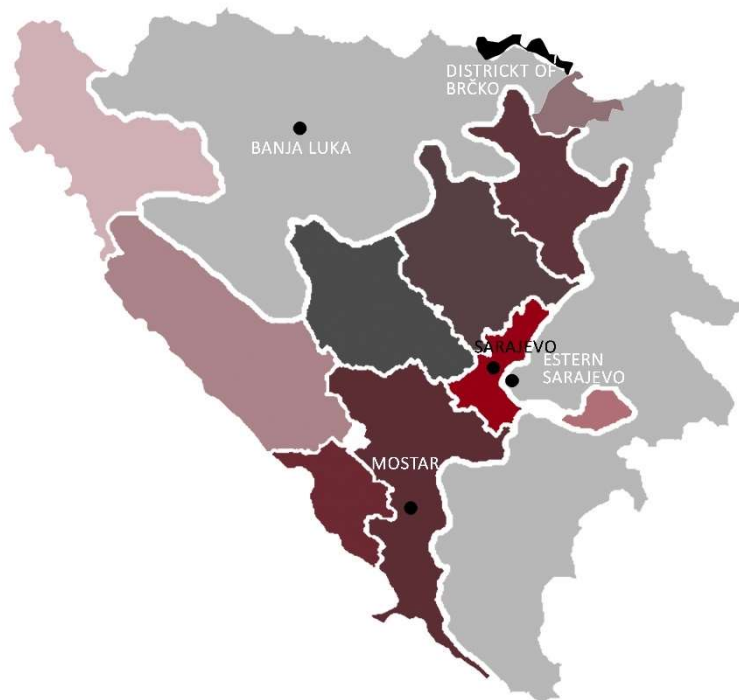
countries, and prepares a fruitful political narrative that was going to be used in the upcoming presidential re-election in the United States. What emerged as an outcome is defined by cynicism, relativism, and pragmatism as major visible postmodern traits. The final result is a nihilistic society based on an ideology without ideals, where three different nationalisms play the role of sedatives and painkillers.

What does this have to do with architecture as a profession or as an outcome of professional activity? Well, everything. For example, due to the permanently unstable political situation, lack of foreign investments is directly influencing architecture while dooming it to small scale or middle size projects; complex political and structural problems within the county have been influencing slow economic growth and have been reducing the amount of overall architectural development; highly fragmented administration has created deregulated spatial development and fostered a situation where architects and even more urban planners, have become almost redundant. Also, architecture as a profession has become deregulated as well while not being able to create a national chamber of architects due to the extreme political and administrative fragmentation; due to corruption and the lack of transparency, it is hard for the architects who are not well connected with the ruling elites to take part in the public procurement system.

In a chaotic environment where common sense seems to be losing its ground, architecture has further suffered significant deviations in terms of the professional culture. In a society where even essential collective decisions cannot be made unanimously, it is hard to expect any consensus concerning the quality of architecture. Everything is *relative*, and *anything goes* are primary catchphrases defining local professional reality (Ibelings, Post-Everything: Architecture and Ideology after the 20th Century, 2014).

In the following text, I will make an effort to elaborate on the issues of bureaucratic mess, underdeveloped economy, deregulated spatial development, and professionally deviant culture as essential factors

defining the contextual reality of architecture being created in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



*Figure 3- administrative fragmentation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*  
© Illustrated by Amir Bašić

### ***1.2.1. Bureaucratic mess and the underdeveloped economy***

Although much has been said about the specific internal structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the previous text, to continue with this chapter, let's try to sum up everything and elaborate on it a bit more precisely.

As I already wrote, the Dayton peace agreement was signed almost four years after the beginning of the war. It marked the era of new social and political relations within the country, based on strict ethnic divisions that were not part of our previous historical experience. To satisfy ethnic principles, the governance system based on a new constitution had to be designed as a massive and confusing bureaucratic clutter, even much bigger than the previous one dating from the socialist era. The country was divided into three administrative units, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and District Brčko. Further on, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while being the largest of three units, was organized as an ensemble of ten cantons, each with its own administration, specific laws, government, and significant level of autonomy. In addition to the abovementioned structural units, Bosnia and Herzegovina obtained 143 municipalities with a considerable amount of independence, out of which 79 became a part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 64 became a part of the territory belonging to the Republika Srpska.

So, what does the decision-making structure in this system look like?

The Council of Ministers exercises executive power within the country. In contrast, the legislative power is shared by the Council of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. Their members are being chosen by the proportional representation system, with the ethnic key playing a crucial role.

Parliamentary Assembly consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives, being elected by proportional party-list representation, and the House of Peoples, which consists of an equally distributed number of three constituent ethnic groups (5 members each). In other words, the system is structured so that laws cannot be passed until politicians of all

three constituent ethnic groups, each having a right of veto, are not agreed upon.

The country's judiciary system is also complex and consists of several levels following the logic of divisions between the state entities. There are two different courts on a state level: the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further, a court system within the Federation has the following structure: Constitutional Court of the Federation of BiH, Supreme Court of the Federation of BiH, Cantonal Courts, and the Municipality Courts. As one could expect, the juridical system within the Republika Srpska was designed similarly, only without cantonal levels, while consisting of the Constitutional Court of the Republika Srpska, Supreme Court of the Republika Srpska, District courts, and Basic Courts. The court system within District Brčko is a bit simpler while having only two instances: Appeals Court and Basic Court.

As seen from the previous enumeration, the structure of institutions providing justice is exceptionally stratified and fragmented. Its design, combined with continuous disputes among different instances, makes it significantly ineffective, allowing processes to stretch over long periods of time while moving between different levels. However, constitutional discord is not the only reason for its dysfunctionality because many of the behavior that can be observed seems to be unrelated to it. Corruption and inter-ethnic animosities play a significant role from within, while the administration "... seem to do everything to obstruct any change that they consider not to be in their own interest"<sup>38</sup> (EU\_Delegations, 2019). In such a mess, at least according to the OSCE "Third Annual Report on Judicial Response to Corruption: The Impunity Syndrome,"<sup>39</sup> local politicians and their subordinates seem to be positioned far above the law.

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<sup>38</sup> The document can be visited at:

<http://europa.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ExpertReportonRuleofLawissuesinBosniaandHerzegovina.pdf> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>39</sup> (OSCE, Third Annual Report On Judicial Response To Corruption: The Impunity Syndrome, 2020)

One of the most absurd facts about the established system is that the citizens ended up with a country run by three presidents, each representing its ethnic group. Paradoxically, the members of minorities such as the Jewish or Roma community, undeclared citizens, and other national groups are not allowed to run for this position, despite blatant and brutally obvious discrimination against fundamental human rights. In this regard, several lawsuits were issued following European Human Rights Convention, out of which the most famous one was the *Sejdić-Finci vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina*<sup>40</sup>. All of them were won at the European Court of Human Rights many years ago, but the verdicts have not been implemented to this date due to the, you can already guess, domestic political discord.

In addition, the organizational structure gets even more complicated with the figure of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina being appointed by the Peace Implementation Council, an international body in charge of the Dayton Peace Agreement implementation. Jokingly referred to by the general public and even by his own office (OHR) as *viceroys*<sup>41</sup> (Lušić, 2006), this political actor has the highest political authority in the country, even being able to dismiss elected politicians or other officials, as well to pass laws or even overturn them.

To fully understand the issue of political complexity, one must remember that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a relatively small county, with a territorial size of only 14.34% of Germany or 9.28% of France, while taking 27th place among 51 European countries. It has only around 3.500.000 citizens according to the official census from 2013<sup>42</sup> (EPRSauthor, 2014), with the numbers probably being significantly smaller at this moment due to the low birth rate and mass emigration of young people. Although the official government data on this matter describing the actual situation right now

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<sup>40</sup> To clarify: there were also many other, such as *Zornic vs B&H*, *Pilav vs B&H*, etc.

<sup>41</sup> The interview can be read on: <http://www.ohr.int/interview-christian-schwarz-schilling-high-representative-for-bih-the-last-bosnian-viceoy/>; last time visited: 28 May 2022.

<sup>42</sup> The data can be found on: <https://epthinktank.eu/2014/01/27/bosnia-2013-census/> last time visited: 28 May 2022

do not exist, according to the data presented by the World Bank, the population size has allegedly dropped to 3.280.815 in 2020<sup>43</sup> (The\_World\_Bank, 2022).

In a country with a population size smaller than the population of some major European capital cities, a highly complex system of governance like this one is genuinely struggling to meet its needs. First of all, it is relatively hard to find proper, competent personnel for all the positions required by the system in a country sparsely populated as this one. Individuals in charge are often inadequate in their competencies, abilities, and skills, with loyalty to the ruling party as their only and most significant merit.

This issue concerning the lack of human resources is further complicated because young and educated people have been leaving the country in great numbers for years now while seeking better opportunities and everyday normality abroad, primarily in Germany or Austria, or elsewhere. In addition to this tremendous amount of work-capable population has been harshly devastated during the war while being directly exposed to it. Many young people who would have been taking over the different positions after the war<sup>44</sup> were either killed in direct warfare, displaced, or had deep psychological traumas, making them not fully functional within society. This is particularly true concerning the generation of the 1970-1975s, the one being immensely exposed to the atrocities on the battlefield at the beginning of the 1990s.

Further, this system of governance has proved itself very difficult to maintain and fund. With many ministers, presidents, chairpersons, advisers, and other government officials with their surrounding staff, a government

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<sup>43</sup> The data is retrieved from:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BA> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>44</sup> BIH has gone through a four-year-long conflict that has resulted in 95,904 deaths or a loss of 2.2% of the total population. In addition, almost 2.4 million refugees and displaced persons. Although more than one million displaced persons have returned to BIH, 1.2 million BIH residents have remained permanently displaced within BIH relative to their residence before the armed conflict. (Zeravčić G. 2018.)

of this kind, probably the most complicated one in the world<sup>45</sup> (Nardelli, Dzidic, & Jukic, 2014), would be difficult to sustain even in a much more developed environment than the existing one. Despite this, the salaries of the country's lawmakers are six-time as big as an average salary, while putting them in the position of the best-paid politicians in Europe, relatively speaking (Nardelli, Dzidic, & Jukic, 2014).

This is particularly problematic when combined with several issues plaguing the local economy. First of all, the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been burdened with the backlogs of war devastation present as an aggravating factor of development until today. Besides human losses, infrastructural destruction was enormous, forcing the country's regression from a relatively developed industrial state to an almost preindustrial environment. For instance, out of the 1.1 million housing units registered in BiH before the war, 453.000 housing units, or 42%, of the pre-war housing stock, were destroyed (Žeravčić, 2018, p. 7).

Almost all industrial infrastructure was also destroyed during the warfare, and much of it was plundered simultaneously, while the total damage has been roughly estimated at 200 billion euros<sup>46</sup> (Sito-Sucic, 2006). The large socially owned enterprises have diminished, either destroyed or led to bankruptcy after failed privatization attempts, while more than a few have remained in a state-owned position. The country's economy has not yet reached pre-war levels, while the percentage of remittances in the GDP structure, mostly coming from the two million large international diasporas, has been the highest in Europe for years after Albania (Žeravčić, 2018, p. 10).

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<sup>45</sup> Referring to the article "Bosnia and Herzegovina: the world's most complicated system of government?"; link: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/oct/08/bosnia-herzegovina-elections-the-worlds-most-complicated-system-of-government#:~:text=Bosnia%20is%20home%20to%20what,with%20the%20Dayton%20Peace%20Accords> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>46</sup> Detailed study can be visited at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bosnia-and-herzegovina/bosnia-sarajevos-war-damage-totalled-185-bln-study> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022



Yet, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic and social system is still dominated by a disproportionately large public sector dating back to Yugoslav times. Public spending reaches almost half of the gross domestic product, and if one adds publicly owned, state-owned, and entity owned enterprises with corruption related to it, the publicly-run economy might be estimated at nearly 70% of BiH's GDP (Žeravčić, 2018, p. 8). This represents an enormous problem in the country because it creates a situation where state-owned companies and their *satellites* are the biggest employers in the country, whereby large numbers of citizens are being directly influenced by political parties running the system. In other words, these companies have become the way of funding and reproducing ethno-nationalistic electoral masses.

A significant part of the remaining privately-owned economy is further being pulled into this vicious cycle through the corrupt public procurement system or the capital directly coming from the country's political elites. In such conditions, the whole market system of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be described as a model of a highly fragmented political economy, in a way similar to the system of the previous era, but much more corrupt and a bit more open to a free-market economy. This imbalance between the private and public sectors has divided the country's society into three major groups: a small productive group, the vast majority of BiH citizens being financially and existentially dependent on the public sector, and the citizens dependent on the remittances, or basically, help from abroad<sup>47</sup>. (Žeravčić, 2018, p. 9)

Due to the high numbers of people leaving the country, the population of pensioners has drastically increased within the last seven years. According to the reports funded by the European Union, it has grown up to 6.5% in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and up to 7.5% in the Republika Srpska within the period from December 2015 to December 2020 while increasing total public spending for senior retirement funds<sup>48</sup> (Ramhorst &

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<sup>47</sup> Mostly retired, old people

<sup>48</sup> The document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.esap.online/docs/150/performance-of-western-balkan-economies-regarding->

Numanović, 2021, p. 43). Combined with the unemployment rate of 15.9% recorded in 2020 (Ramhorst & Numanović, 2021, p. 77), the ratio of employed people to the retired population is slightly better than one worker to one pensioner.

In terms of mentality, society in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects typical transitional post-authoritarian nature, with a significant number of citizens who have been living for several decades in a more or less authoritarian society, shaped by a collective way of thinking and state-induced social norms. In this context, most of the BiH population has severe reservations and resistance to the necessary reforms, creating a climate of negative perceptions regarding the private initiative and capital (Žeravčić, 2018). The experience of too many failed and criminally implemented privatizations of socially owned companies reinforce this attitude further.

The abovementioned problems represent a significant burden to a healthy part of the country's economy, surprisingly still showing signs of vitality. According to US Country Commercial Guides for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2021<sup>49</sup> (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2021), the country suffers a significant trade deficit while the amount of imported goods and services is almost twice the amount of the exports. The country primarily exports electricity, essential construction industry parts and elements, coal and coal-related products, leather seats and other types of furniture, iron structures, and insulated wire while having an average growth of 3%, which will probably increase to almost 5% in the coming years (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2021, p. 4).

Still, besides the small economy not being fully able to perform at its best domestically, lacking a single internal economic space, and being burdened by the complex government structure, one of the most significant problems

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[the-european-pillar-of-social-rights-2021-review-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina](#) ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>49</sup>The document can be downloaded from:

<https://ba.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/270/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-CCG-2021-FINAL.pdf> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the deeply embedded issue of structural corruption. While probably it might be perceived as a cultural trait predating even socialism, the new constitution has provided this phenomenon with the perfect environment necessary for it to flourish within the country's untransparent, dispersed, and fragmented hierarchy of state-related competencies and jurisdictions.

According to the Anti-corruption Resource Center's report "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption,"<sup>50</sup> this trait can be observed on multiple levels: within the state capture and conflict of interest; widespread bribery in public offices; political corruption; corruption present within the justice providing system; political influence, clientelism, and patronage (Lee-Jones, 2018). Within the same report, several mechanisms have been recognized as the primary drivers fuelling the phenomenon: fragmented state structure and legislative framework being excessively complex, uncoordinated, and therefore ineffective; ineffective justice and law enforcement weakened by shared competencies among different judicial and anti-corruption bodies, and the political patronage networks being deeply present within the system on all levels (Lee-Jones, 2018).

Although many declarative efforts have been made to reinforce anti-corruption policies and institutions, not much has been made in the meantime, primarily due to the lack of clear lines of accountability within the public sector provided by the constitutional framework. Consequently, according to a Transparency International survey from 2016, "People and Corruption: Europe and Central Asia,"<sup>51</sup> 54% of Bosnians claim that most members of the parliament are corrupt, while 27% admit to having been paying a bribe to access essential state services (Pring, 2016).

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<sup>50</sup> The document can be downloaded from: <https://www.u4.no/publications/bosnia-and-herzegovina-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption.pdf> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>51</sup> The document can be downloaded from: [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2016\\_GCB\\_ECA\\_EN.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2016_GCB_ECA_EN.pdf) ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

Let's try to score the above written and extract several conclusion points from it: the highly fragmented system of governance has proved itself significantly inefficient in terms of policymaking primarily due to the prevailing *ethnic key* principle and existing ethnopolitical animosities; the complex doctrine of shared competencies is numbing the executive state efficiency; the costs of excessive public administration are highly burdening country's economy and slowing the overall development; a vague labyrinth of bureaucratic and juridical mess creates a perfect environment for structural corruption; deeply embedded political and administrative corruption significantly affects general culture and the economy as an overwhelmingly present element of everyday life.

### ***1.2.2. Professional Deviations***

So how do these general traits relate to architecture?

Let's start with the issues related to urban planning. For instance, there is no available physical<sup>52</sup> plan at the state level due to political discord. Although, according to the juridical practice, in a situation where no current plan is existent, the previous, vastly outdated one from the socialist era is still the one that is supposed to be in effect. However, the plan from this era is hardly usable due to its obsolescence in the current situation regarding the new constitutional structure.

Therefore, the entities of the Republika of Srpska and District Brčko have their own separate, totally unrelated spatial plans while, in addition, the Federation of B&H has only adopted the plan draft due to discrepancies between its constituent cantons. Consequently, cantons have adopted their own inconsistent and disconnected physical plans acting almost as separate autonomous states. Further on, local municipalities' high independence has fostered this chaos while allowing them to create their regulatory plans with significant autonomy.

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<sup>52</sup> To clarify: by the term physical plan I refer to the spatial plan of the highest order in the country.

Aside from the issue of urban planning, each state entity has its own set of spatial planning laws in addition to cantonal laws and municipal regulations. This creates a truly bizarre situation where rules in different parts of the relatively small country are not mutually related and first and foremost without the apparent reason. Consequently, the high administrative fragmentation has created a large number of diverse and conflicting professional codes that are almost impossible to comprehend. Some entities and cantons have even adopted a licensing method whereby architects from neighboring cantons or entities cannot practice architecture unless they pay a fee and enter the painstaking administrative procedure without any common-sense justification.

Similarly, the chamber of architects and urban planners at the state level is not feasible due to a non-existent legal framework. Still, there is a permanent threat of cantonal and other lower-level chambers emerging. Luckily, these chambers have not been formed yet. However, if they get created in the future, this act will add a tremendous amount of unnecessary complexity to an already ridiculously complicated state of affairs.

In addition, architecture as a profession is burdened by the underdeveloped construction industry. What do I mean by this? First of all, the slow economic development, administrative clutter, and corruption have been significant obstacles to substantial foreign investment. This reflects in the construction industry, urban planning, and architecture as the lack of large-scale development that would further advance the construction-related skill-set, introduce new, advanced construction systems and technologies and provide the industry with a stable financial flow. In a situation as such, the entire industry is doomed to small-scale and middle-scale developments, unstable financial flows, and a very fragmented structure of the micro-enterprises forming networks on a joint project and diminishing it when it's finished.

The local construction industry, including architecture as an essential part of it, is also burdened by the constant workforce fluctuation produced by the trend of skilled craftsmanship leaving the country while being absorbed

by the developed economies of the European Union countries. This creates a domestic situation where one permanently has to deal with the laborers having a very limited range of employable skills. Consequently, the whole construction process is condemned to conventional, easily masterable systems that can be learned in the most time-efficient manner. The remaining skilled labor force consists mainly of older adults who obtained experience in the previous system, now not being able to reproduce their knowledge and pass it to the young generation due to fluctuation and the constant migratory outflow. While being very valuable in such circumstances, they are primarily organized as a fragmented set of independent, privately owned small-scale workshops working as subcontractors in various projects.

Furthermore, due to being a small-scale market additionally burdened by fragmentation, many advanced construction systems are not available in the country. Therefore, if needed within the project, they are most commonly imported with a great struggle or custom-made domestically through the reverse-engineering process. In these conditions, if willing to achieve mid or high-range quality standards, architects must put much more effort during the construction process than otherwise in a more developed context. This means they have to create numerous drawings to explain even the most superficial details to the inexperienced workforce; they must be overwhelmingly present on the construction site and involved in construction management, and they have to be very skilful in technical detailing and general engineering.

Although this opportunity to work directly with the labor force and be deeply involved in the construction process might sound even appealing to the western observer as an exciting narrative that could be attributed as an authentic quality to the project, trust me, it is not. It is a labor-intensive, exhausting, and time-consuming process leaving you less time for conceptual thinking.

And finally, there is the factor of corruption involved in architecture. How does it work? In many cases, the architect is either working with investors

who use corruption to reach their goals or is directly involved in it while getting paid to use personal political or bureaucratic connections to obtain permits. The third option is being a part of some patronized political network and earning from a highly suspicious public procurement system.

Although being the least criminal of them all, the first option is professionally devastating because it puts an architect in a position where all the most critical decisions have been made before he was even reached on behalf of the people operating behind the *scenes*. In other words, in a situation as such, architects are dealing with projects based on suspicious permits or regulatory plans made with a high amount of corruption involved. They seem professionally wrong, but they somehow became a valid part of the legal framework, and one has to work with it.

The second option floats somewhere in the grey zone while strongly leaning toward the crime if bribery or conflict of interest is involved in the whole story. For example, this is one of the significant reasons architects tend to become members of the ruling political parties. They do this to create connections with public administration members overwhelmingly being part of it as well, or to be close to the verdict politicians who are most commonly the most prominent local capitalists and influential people.

Besides this, the scheme where different members of the family or friend circles combine their private business with public engagement is also trendy. For instance, there are many cases where one family member runs the architectural office while another member, the spouse, for example, works as a public employee in some of the state-run urban planning institutions.

The brutal scheme involving direct bribery is also pretty standard, where the members of public administration are directly working for an architect and getting paid by percentages related to the project's overall cost. Besides the *managerial rates* as they call them, there are other debt settlement methods as well, such as expensive gifts, compensations,

student loans for their children, or even payments in fixed monthly amounts similar to the salary only provided cash on hand.

The most obscure method of corruption in architecture is the one related to the public procurement system. There are many options for it to be done, but the most popular one is the method of 3.000-euro budgetary limit. To be exact, according to the existing law<sup>53</sup>, 3.000 euros is the highest amount that can be paid in the name of the public administration directly to an architect or any other company without public announcement. Consequently, politically connected architects are getting the majority of publicly funded projects while breaking them down into many separate lots, each valued at the abovementioned amount of money. This behavior is highly reflected in the lousy quality of the public investments, unfortunately being visible late only when public space or a public building has been already built. In addition, this is one of the main reasons why architectural or urban planning competitions rarely occur in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Corrupt architects involved in public procurement schemes oppose it behind the scenes while openly proclaiming otherwise.

All the methods mentioned above seem to be the most devastating issue related to architecture in this country because they tend to turn the whole system of professional values upside down. In other words, they create an environment where creativeness or professional quality do not matter as business negotiating positions. The only thing that becomes important is the capability of an architect to provide an investor with the necessary permissions and other public administration-related documentation. Architecture becomes a matter of secondary importance in such circumstances, something to be dealt with superficially after *more important* things have been settled.

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<sup>53</sup> To clarify: I am referring to the Law of Public Procurement of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the option of *direct agreement*, defined in article 90. The Law is available for download on the link: [https://advokat-prnjavorac.com/zakoni/Zakon\\_o\\_javnim\\_nabavkama\\_BiH.pdf](https://advokat-prnjavorac.com/zakoni/Zakon_o_javnim_nabavkama_BiH.pdf); last time visited 28 May 2022. The option of direct agreement is further elaborated by the *Rulebook on the Direct Agreement Procedure* visible on the following link: <http://sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/Np6FZDFrroh24nh78h77I=>; The last time visited: 28 May 2022.



Architects and investors who choose to go through the whole process without relying on connections, political patronage, clientelism, or are unwilling to be involved in bribery are doomed to a prolonged process of obtaining necessary permissions, insane administrative micromanagement, and passive-aggressive bureaucratic harassment.

Still, as blasphemous as it may sound, it's hard to judge architects involved in such schemes because one must be fully aware that their behavior is just an adaptation to the grotesque structural deviance and harsh environment of everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I know a lot of them, and although much greed and selfishness are involved in the whole story as well, many of them are only ordinary people trying to do business, pay mortgages, provide their employees with salaries, and afford enough to take care of their families. They are a part of an unstable and broken local economy, and definitely, it is not easy being part of it. I understand this behavior as a pure example of the *banality of evil*<sup>54</sup>.

In the next chapter, I will try to elaborate on the issue of informal development as a manifestation of structural failure in the country and as something that strongly relates to political corruption. To continue, it feels as if I should conclude this chapter with the following quote:

*“In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity.”*

Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 1972 (Thompson, 1972, p. 33)

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<sup>54</sup> Referring to Hannah Arendt's book „Eichmann in Jerusalem, a Report on the Banality of Evil “ (Arendt, 1963)



Figure 5- informal settlements in the mist © Anida Kreco

### ***1.2.3 Informal development as a way to go***

To be fair, unlike many other problems, informal<sup>55</sup> development is not a new, dysfunctional constitution-related issue burdening Bosnia and Herzegovina only for the last three decades. As I already mentioned, informal settlements have been present in the country and the whole region of the Balkans, probably since the first spatial and regulatory plans were introduced to this part of the world. For example, even in the articles that were written in the 1930s, during the period of the Kingdom of

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<sup>55</sup> To clarify: I deliberately use the term *informal* instead of *illegal*, because many of the buildings belonging to this category became legal through various options of retractive legalization. However, all of them were originally built illegally.

Yugoslavia<sup>56</sup>, informal housing units on the outskirts of Sarajevo were being mentioned with the same amount of public concern being seen in the newspaper articles written after the WWII, and even in comparison to those published after the war from the 1990s.



*Figure 7- Informal settlements and the city of Sarajevo © drone photography- Ibrica Jasarevic*

With this in mind, it is interesting to notice that this spatial behavior successfully moves across completely different epochs and diverse economic and political systems while continuously transcending radically opposing ideologies despite all other cultural discontinuities occurring in the early 90s. In my opinion, informal development, mainly manifested in the form of housing settlements, is the most significant indicator of the prevailing structural corruption and social inequality across at least one hundred years of Bosnia and Herzegovina's history. What do I mean by this?

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<sup>56</sup> Referring to the book „ Graditeljstvo istanje drugih djelatnosti u Sarajevu u XX i prethodnim stoljećima “ (Aganović M. , Graditeljstvo istanje drugih djelatnosti u Sarajevu u XX i prethodnim stoljećima, 2006)

First of all, I don't want to relativize efforts being made in different epochs concerning the issue. Without a doubt, despite significant failures, the socialist system has been the most persistent one in an attempt to produce serious urban plans and implement them successfully compared to the previous epoch and especially compared to the existing one. Moreover, the socialist system was very successful in its endeavors between the end of WWII and the 1970s. However, things started to change significantly after a while, indicatively coinciding with the structural changes occurring after the reforms of 1974, when the phenomenon began to prevail.

While previously being an issue occurring in parallel to the continuous planning efforts, after the last war and new structural changes producing political, cultural, and economic mess, informality became the primary, overwhelmingly present trademark of the physical development in the country. To understand these discrepancies better, let's take a brief history of informal development in Sarajevo as a case study. So once again, let's start from the beginning.

Like many other cities worldwide, Sarajevo has been developing tremendously in the period after 1945 and all across the following decades until the mid of the 80s due to persistent modernist efforts to produce progress and social welfare. Industrialization was happening almost overnight, and vast flows of the primarily rural population were migrating into the city. They were coming mainly from the less developed eastern parts of the country or less developed neighboring Yugoslav countries. Even though Sarajevo was never a largely populated city compared to other capital cities worldwide, the intensity of its growth was enormous. For example, its population grew from 78,173 citizens in the 1930s to 454,319 just before the dissolution of Yugoslavia while increasing almost six times in forty years (Zavod\_za\_planiranje\_razvoja\_kantona\_Sarajevo, 2020). The most intensive immigration was happening in the period from 1953 to 1961 when almost 37.000 new citizens have found a permanent residence within Sarajevo (Islambegović, 20016). During SFRY, the average growth in five-year

periods performed 9.1%, while occasionally even reaching 18.4% (Islambegović, 20016).

The main reasons for immigration on this scale were unprecedented industrialization and a prevailing spirit of modernization, similar to other cities from this era worldwide. The differences between the periphery and the city regarding the living standard were significant, while permanent industrial growth demanded a constant inflow of the new, fresh workforce.

Undoubtedly, the incredible public development from back then has no precedent in local history even until today. Large infrastructural projects were being implemented all around the country and Sarajevo, such as roads and railroads, airports, electricity networks, electricity production facilities, and gasification of the city, together with industrial buildings, public administration facilities, cultural buildings, and facilities for sports and recreation. In parallel, sizeable public housing projects emerged to create apartments for the newly arrived workforce throughout the country and most intensively within its capital city. The apartments were being given for free usage according to the, at the time existing, allocation rules treating the right of having a *roof above the head* almost as a fundamental human right. Most certainly, this was the golden age of South-Slavic infrastructural and overall cultural development, being used not only as a remnant but as the most prevailing existential, physical structure of the city today.

While huge, planned public development was happening within the east-west axis of the Sarajevo valley, basically determined by its topography and the available flat land, informal development processes started to quietly occur in parallel while taking the north-south direction and spreading all across the hills surrounding the city. The scale of the phenomenon was discouragingly immense and, for instance, in the early 1970s, just five years after the adoption of the General Urban Plan, at a time when social construction was celebrating the creation of 9,773 housing units and the implementation of capital projects which were to improve general urban infrastructure, for a total of 5,556 built buildings, only 2,588 regular urban permits were issued (Aganović, Stanovanje u SR Bosni i Hercegovini, 1980, p. 196). This

trait mainly manifested itself in individual housing settlements being primarily built by newly arrived workers and their families.

Before the mid of the 70s, informal development was not predominately present in the areas near the broader center of what was considered the city back then. It was mainly present as a phenomenon related to the periphery and the semi-rural regions connected to the city core. However, as I mentioned previously, it became a predominant issue visible in the central urban parts after the 1970s, taking place within the same time frame as political and economic changes elaborated in several book chapters. Although one can find many claims which try to explain the phenomenon as the outcome of an imbalance regarding the low amount of the housing units provided by the state or state enterprises, as opposed to the real needs and the numbers related to the workforce, that was not the only issue fuelling the process.



*Figure 9- Sarajevo and the informal settlements from the air © drone photography Ibrica Jasarevic*

As is clear from the official surveys dating before the 1990s (Aganović, Stanovanje u SR Bosni i Hercegovini, 1980, p. 239), the class divisions were significantly present as a factor of spatial segregation in this case. In other words, the presented data shows that the worker population was represented by the figure of 65% in informal settlements. In contrast, the situation appears to be reversed in the case of the planned areas and state-built apartment settlements, expressed as the figure of 70% in favor of the ruling managerial or political elite, together with their low- and high-ranking officials (Aganović, Stanovanje u SR Bosni i Hercegovini, 1980, p. 239).

How was this possible within a system based on the premise of social equality? Simply put, this issue was something strongly related to the good old structural corruption happening even back then. To be precise, although there were no significant differences among people in terms of money possession, such as in the case of capitalist systems, and there were no millionaires or billionaires present within the society, the social inequality was exposing itself regarding the unequal access to social rights provided by the state. In other words, socialist elites had more opportunities to enjoy and reach state-provided goods and services, such as publicly developed housing, than the rest of the population.

How was this being done in the case of public-provided housing? Besides the classical method of personal connections or bribery occurring in particular circumstances, this form of corruption was deeply embedded into the legal structure of the system running the state-owned enterprises and other public institutions related to this sector. For example, as being claimed by Aganovic, the very Law on Allocation and Direction of Funds for Housing Construction, which came into force in 1954, was promoting this kind of social inequality (Aganović, 2006). How? The Law was setting the rules prescribing that 4% of each salary of all employed persons and pensioners had to be allocated to the Public Housing Construction Fund. The same Law gave Fund the power and the right to determine its own regulations concerning the allocation of housing units and users' distribution.

In other words, apartments were being given to the employees of socially-owned enterprises and the public institutions, through this sluggish and partially corrupt institution (Aganović, 2006), according to its self-established regulations, which at the time were favoring references regarding a position within the workplace and the level of education. Basically, the rules favored high-ranking and mid-ranking managerial and political, middle-class positions compared to the workers. However, everyone was allocating precisely the same percentage of the individual salary, and while some were getting the apartments relatively quickly, others had to wait for years while even losing hope.

This behavior became much more prevalent and visible after the reforms in 1974, when republics became more autonomous from the Federal government, together with self-managed, socially owned enterprises becoming almost independent. As I explained previously, this was when the workers became much more in charge of the companies while directly influencing the decision-making. Unfortunately, most of their decisions were focused on personal interests such as bigger salaries, more extended and well-paid vacations, less control, and of course, the matter of accommodation for them and their families. Consequently, all surpluses made by enterprises were being redirected to meet these needs, and very little of it was used to modernize and maintain existing production while leading companies on the slow path to bankruptcy.

However, the tensions between more and less privileged classes also started to rise slowly, mostly revolving around the issue of housing allocation. In parallel, the failing economy could not produce enough apartments to meet the needs, and the companies, together with the government, kept taking more loans domestically as well as from international institutions. To prevent social rebellion, informal housing development became something that was being tacitly tolerated and even supported by the companies but, at the same time, treated as a publicly condemned phenomenon. This kind of hypocrisy can be well observed in the fact that all informal housing units at the time were provided with the



basic infrastructure such as electricity and water, and in some cases with the sewage system, telecommunication, and even gas. This could not have happened if the authorities hadn't given a silent approval.

To be clear, informal settlements in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and neighboring left-over Yugoslav countries from the era before the dissolution have differed from the slums and other informal categories flourishing worldwide. In contrast to the majority of cases globally, they were not predominantly a consequence of the financial inequality due to the nature of the socialist system. The population building them, mostly workers, were not poor people struggling to survive but people with relatively good living standards, enjoying many workers' benefits provided by the principle of self-management. However, they were underprivileged in terms of their right to access the public housing offered by the system. This has been highly reflected in the relatively solid built quality of informal housing structures, significantly different from well-known, slum-like structures built from wasted materials and without access to basic infrastructure.

Still, public opinion was raging about the problem while expressing concern and appealing for something to be done. Authorities were launching contradictory and vague measures on different scales, varying among the different city institutions, republic institutions, and municipalities. Although there were some severe demonstrations of effort, such as the dozens of demolitions, the response was primarily symbolic, further proving the lack of capacity and will to deal with the issue.

The wave of informality started to slow down in the second half of the 80s, primarily due to economic problems, and then, as we know, the war happened. After the war, informality has become a hazardously dominant, less quietly and more openly accepted, prevailing way of spatial behavior within the country-scape. The migration toward Sarajevo was enormous again, but the reasons driving it became radically different.

At the very beginning of the war in 1992, hundreds of thousands of people, mainly from eastern parts of the country, were forced to leave the place of their permanent residences while fleeing the horrors of war, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. Almost 300,000 people found refuge in Sarajevo in a few months while leaving all their belongings in their hometowns and villages (Bublin, 1999). Many years after the war, they were housed temporarily, mostly in communal accommodation facilities or apartments and houses abandoned during the conflict. They had been waiting for refugee return programs to be implemented for as long as ten years, and after realizing that their return was hardly going to happen, they started solving existential problems individually (Islambegović, 20016). For this reason, a new, enormous wave of informal development has arrived into the city.

Again, city authorities were indecisive and paradoxical in their behaviors. While publicly stating concern and opposition, they did nothing to prevent further devastation in practice. One can argue that authorities tolerated informal behavior in space more than before 1992 while quietly giving consent or even encouraging it in some instances (Aganović M. , Stanovanje u SR Bosni i Hercegovini, 1980). Although there is no solid proof that behavior as such was the conscious, joint political decision, some indices are pointing out the possibility that there might have been a certain kind of political agenda (Islambegović, 20016).



Figure 10- regulated development in the Sarajevo valley © Anida Kreco

No records were kept regarding the number of illegally constructed buildings for decades after the war. According to preliminary estimates, almost 30.000 informal buildings were erected within the city's territory and an additional 21,000 in the rest of the Sarajevo Canton from 1995 to 2013 (Aganović 2006.). These figures suggest that more than 200.000 people within the Sarajevo Canton live in informal settlements, while an additional 120,000 live inside the city area. When turned into percentages, these figures mean that almost 50% of people living inside the Canton of Sarajevo are accommodated in informal settlements and 43% within the city's territory (Jašarević & Islambegović, 2021).

Many of these buildings got their legal documents through the process of so-called *legalization*. The first legalization appeared shortly after 1995, being justified as an 'act of reward' for the soldiers who survived the conflict (Aganović, 2006). After that, legalization kept emerging right before local

elections while continuing to do so even nowadays. In other words, it became a kind of traditional behavior happening in regular, predictable cycles.

Although most informal buildings were ordinary, small housing units built by everyday people trying to solve the problem of their family having a roof above the head, many significant investments, worth one million euros or more, started to emerge by following the same informal path of behavior. Despite apparent differences between these buildings and ordinary houses, most obtained the necessary permits retroactively, through legalization, without any logical public explanation. At the same time, only several were demolished in the aftermath, primarily due to political tensions.

Informal settlements have caused a tremendous hazard to the city of Sarajevo. According to the current estimates, illegal construction has covered almost 4,000 ha of the city's land (Aganović & Krzik, 2006), including areas planned for the city's major public facilities and recreation areas. Besides this, vast areas intended for collective housing were irretrievably lost, together with a significant amount of green urban areas and industrial zones. Even some protected areas that are crucial for the city's water supply have become contaminated due to the informal development. In addition, the threat of landslides has drastically increased due to many improper, informally-built water and sewage networks, together with the amount of air pollution becoming dangerously high in the winter because of the inefficient heating systems used in informal houses.

How does informal development influence architecture? First of all, it changes the cityscape and the infrastructural environment in the most bizarre and problematic manner. For this reason, many of the locations for new buildings have inherited problems related to the informal development that happened around them previously, such as, for example, the issue of highly narrow informally formed streets or unclear and insufficient infrastructural networks. In many cases, the surrounding informally built buildings do not comply with the professional standards and create almost impossible circumstances for new buildings to emerge.

Therefore, architects are forced to improvise in order to obtain any feasible solution when dealing with such construction sites.

Moreover, in many cases, buildings designed by architects are being informally built because investors find the process of legalization much more effective than the prolonged and nerve-wracking process of obtaining official permits. Situations like these put architects in a strange position where their professional credibility can be jeopardized easily. In addition to this, for some architects, especially those living in smaller towns with insufficient architectural production, legalizations are the way to earn their salaries. Commissions like this can be very professionally degrading because they are positioning an architect into the place of someone who has to produce documentation justifying something most probably bizarre and built without many professional codes involved.

Finally, in an environment rich with informal development, architects are not needed because anyone can be an architect. In such conditions, professionals are only required on occasion when construction workers or an investor cannot solve the problem, most commonly produced by their own stupidity, or when legal documentation for building permits is unavoidably needed. As well-known Bosnian architect Amir Vuk Zec once jokingly commented- it is not easy being an architect in a city with more than 30.000 informal buildings because one has to deal with at least 30.000 other architects competing in the market.



*Figure 11- informal settlements from inside © drone photography Ibrica Jašarević*

I might be subjective, but even when observed in terms of their appearance, informal settlements seem to express postmodern traits such as the prevailing aspiration for individuality and uniqueness, combined with the selfishness and narcissism related to it. Despite being very uniform in their structure, inner layouts, typology, and urban behavior patterns, all houses are very differently colored and superficially overdecorated while competing among each other in terms of the size, used materials, and symbolic additions. The lack of essential public spaces such as sidewalks and narrow self-made streets connecting them express not only selfishness but also great ignorance. The residents struggle to use them whenever they try to enter their property and every time when they drive or walk through the neighborhood. This happens primarily because none of them wanted to allocate a few more meters of their plot for the common purpose that would serve them all together.

Contrary to the prevailing public opinion nowadays, as we could see previously, informal settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially in urban areas such as Sarajevo, are not solely a consequence of the war and its aftermath. Basically, the same forces tearing the previous system

apart have been ripping planning practice for years as well. If so, then informal settlements represent the most significant physical, postmodern legacy in this country. They might be seen as a grand, self-made monument to an era claiming to avoid epistemic certainties and all grand narratives. In my opinion, they present a masterpiece of postmodern fragmentation carved by brick, mortar, and concrete.

### ***1.2.4 Traumatized Society and The Terrifying Freedom***

There is a reason I don't use the term *transition* in this book very often, nor similar words frequently applied to describe cultural, economic, and political conditions in post-communist countries worldwide. To be fair, it might be used, relatively speaking, to describe the various phenomenon observable in contemporary societies of all other left-over Yugoslav countries, but, in my opinion, it definitely does not apply to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For example, some countries, such as Slovenia, recovered very quickly after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and reached a relatively high standard of living, similar to the developed rest of the European Union; it took a while for Croatia, but eventually, it became a member of the European Union, as well as NATO member; despite internal political struggles, Serbia is experiencing significant economic development while Montenegro and North Macedonia, although politically still not stable enough, are also doing progressively better in terms of their financial performance. Moreover, both countries have become a part of NATO. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina is deteriorating further, and as time passes, the condition seems far from being *transitional*.

This narrative was holding ground for a while, especially in a decade after the war, when citizens wanted to believe that this abnormal state of society was not permanent and that things would be refined over time when everything that was destroyed during the war, including the economy, culture, and civil society, gets rebuilt and eventually even exceeds the

standards set by former Yugoslavia. In other words, after four years of misery, people suddenly felt great relief. They euphorically started to deal with everything that had to be done to compensate for material and all other losses generated by destruction. There was so much that had to be done that even the complexity and oddity of the system provided by the Dayton peace agreement seemed like a problem of a secondary nature.

At the time, improvement was visible almost on an everyday basis compared to the condition of where everything started. Despite being irritating and sometimes even depressing, the prevailing progress-related mess, such as the grey economy or the lack of control in spatial development, seemed partially logical and bearable as a temporary phase of growth. Back then, if not the majority, then many wanted to believe that capitalism and the free-market economy would cure everything over time and that political struggles would be over if we entered the European Union sometime in the future.

Of course, the ethnonationalist elites were fuelling this attitude while turning it into various sub-narratives suiting them and their political position extraordinarily well. As one could guess, despite being confronted among each other and while creating further ethnic animosities, all of them had one thing in common - they were unanimously blaming communism and the socialist legacy for the prevailing chaos. Although fractions of truth could be found in their lullabies, the whole story was arguably designed to cover, similar to today, the malfunctioning system, lack of intellectual and political capacity in their rows, and, foremost, the massive corruption happening behind the scenes. However, transition-related hype started slowly fading away as time passed while gradually revealing the structural nature of the problem. From my perspective, the term *transition* eventually evaporated from everyday conversations and the media, somewhere between 2010 and 2015, after more than fifteen years of welter. Still, the prevailing chaos did not.

This time frame coincided with the moment when it became clear that the country was being far from entering the European Union primarily because



it became trapped in the vicious loop of internal political problems fuelling corruption and corruption feeding various devastating political issues in return. For example, judiciary reforms that represent an essential part of the European integration priorities have not been adopted yet by local politicians and, as cynical as it may sound, for no convincing reason. Despite being quarrelled on almost all other policy levels, they strongly agree to disagree on this issue, though it has nothing to do with their ethnicity-driven divisions and animosities. At the same time, there was no substantial political interest in the country's admission on behalf of the European Union being occupied with its own internal agendas, nor was much attention paid to the situation on behalf of the international community responsible for creating the country's constitution and for the implementation of peace.

Even though migration toward developed countries of the West was permanently present after the war and even before, the period after 2010, at least from my memory, was precisely when young, educated, and skilled people started leaving the country in large numbers. Compared to the previous flows, this time, it was different because the trend included an overwhelming number of the middle-class population who could have provided themselves with a living standard significantly higher than the average within the country.

The departure was literally visible on bus stations across the country, where dozens of busses were standing prepared to take new passengers and take them abroad. This trend became particularly severe after 28<sup>th</sup> October 2015<sup>57</sup>, when Germany relaxed the access conditions to its labor market for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and suddenly the whole issue of emigration was brought on an entirely new level of hysteria.

This came closely after massive social riots occurred in February 2014, mainly in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and partially in the Republika Srpska. The demonstrations were more or less unrelated to the

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<sup>57</sup> Take a look at <https://www.nds-fluerat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BA-Bosnien-Herz-bosnische-Version.pdf>

established ethnic boundaries and were very violent. Besides physical confrontations with the police, protestants have set several public buildings in different municipalities on fire, including the building of the BiH Presidency.

Although everyone expected radical changes, nothing happened in the aftermath. Again, protesters could not articulate themselves as a political movement that would oppose the existing positions of power. The existing left promoting civil rights and liberal values found itself in complete disarray, and the next elections, allegedly full of electoral fraud<sup>58</sup> (N1\_BiH, 2020), were again won by nationalist parties. Although I might be wrong, I claim that this broke many people's spirits at the time. Why?

I could observe the attitudes of discontent, despair, and even fury among my students, colleagues, friends and family members rising back then. Arguably, this attitude was further intensified with social networks and other digital means while creating the notion of a *long-longed normality* somewhere in the developed West, which appeared to be easily reachable and nearby. Still, it felt as if nobody wanted to waste their energy while waiting for things to become better in a country with no clear future. Despite more than seven years have gone by, this notion still persists.

What does this have to do with the culture? In my opinion, a lot.

Let's try to sum everything up and explain it this way: Besides various existential problems and, in some cases, curiosity and adventurism, too many people, who could have provided themselves with a decent standard of living even in this country, were and are still leaving because **they cannot identify** with the system structurally failing even in the most practical manner. In other words, the system constantly proves itself not being able to produce a rule of law and functional civil society. Therefore, it cannot

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<sup>58</sup> The article can be read on: <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/a487312-prevare-koje-su-obiljezile-izbore-u-bih/>; last time visited: 28 May 2022

provide essential cultural sources of meaning for many people, if not for the majority than certainly for those leaving the country.

This is, in my opinion, highly related to culture because, generally speaking, **societies and their cultures revolve around identities<sup>59</sup>, and identities are based on ideas that provide sources of everyday meaning. So, suppose sources of meaning are missing or not convincing enough. In that case, the whole society, together with culture, seemingly operates around the meaningless void.**

This might depend on the particular point of view and partially apply only to certain parts of the population. Still, let's take a look at the notion of a *meaningless void* and elaborate on it further before we make a conclusion about the general state of contemporary culture and its related formal expressions.

This phenomenon highly resonates with the *flying plane* metaphor used by Zygmunt Bauman when explaining the concepts of *liquid modernity* and the *liquid fear* related to it (Bauman, 2000). What he claims is that in a situation where states are losing their *most solid* and *least questionable* elements such as *sovereignty, credibility, and trustworthiness* while obtaining a less compact form, the experience of their citizens resembles one of the "...airline passengers who discover, high in the sky, **that the pilot's cabin is empty.**" (Bauman, 2000, str. 133).

In my opinion, this metaphor is crucial to understanding the cultural context of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, as I will discuss by the end of this chapter. Still, an even more important question for further discussion is: What will the passengers do? Hypothetically speaking, some of them will undoubtedly try to jump off the plane, with the parachute or without it; some will probably try to take on the steering wheel despite being aware

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<sup>59</sup> To clarify: by the term identity, I primarily refer to the dominant ethnic identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are failing to legitimize themselves by providing the rule of law and functional civil society. Identities that are opposing them are also failing to prove their claims due to the fact that the Constitution favors the first-mentioned ones.

that they don't have a clue of how to fly a plane. But still, I claim that a **significant number of them will do nothing while either behaving hysterically or simply being numb.**

To explain how this notion resonates with the contemporary society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, first, let's try to describe cultural conditions and, even more importantly, elaborate on how the cultural behavior relates to the nationalist ideology in power. I will begin with the latter.

How to define ideology? To be clear, I will try to explain how I understand it after listening to hundreds of hours of Slavoj Žižek's lectures and reading some of his books<sup>60</sup> without mentioning the philosophical terms he usually uses. Basically, what he is trying to say on this matter is relatively simple: culture is ideology. The best example of what it is and how it operates is presented by his famous paradigm related to the movie "They live" from 1988 (Carpenter, 1988).

Essentially, this film is about a construction worker from New York who accidentally finds seemingly ordinary sunglasses, which soon turn out not to be so typical after all. What he quickly finds out is that when he puts them on, they enable him to see actual messages lying all around the city streets while covering everything he perceives as reality. For instance, when observed through sunglasses, ordinary money appears as pieces of paper with the message "this is your God" written on it; an advertisement for vacation placed on the billboard, with the lady lying on the beach, appears as a message "obey and reproduce" written on an empty canvas.

So, how does this movie explain ideology? In contrast to the classical Marxist explanation, which describes it as a superficial illusion placed before our eyes so that we do not see reality, the film turns the whole thesis upside down. It expresses precisely what Žižek claims: the whole of what we perceive as reality is an ideology, and to see the truth, one has to put a

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<sup>60</sup> For example: (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, 1999); (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 1989)

certain kind of filter in front of its eyes, such as, for example, Lacan's theoretical model explained in his lectures.

Still, the thing that is even more important for the topic covered in this chapter is his explanation of how ideology operates. Basically, he says that ideology consists of two deeply connected sides: one being declarative and expressed openly, and the other, working behind the scenes, never outspoken but deeply included in the meaning of what is being claimed overtly, even when both sides seem to be logically opposed to each other. What does this mean?

For example, in the case of modernist ideologies, such as communism, state capitalism, or even fascism declarative part of ideology sounds very similar, even though all three of them have been proposing different structural mechanisms and organizational systems to reach what they perceived as the final goal- the progress. It might be approximately described as "enough of the decadence; we have to work hard to achieve progress; we have to work together, create the society, the nation, etc."<sup>61</sup>. (Žižek, 2019)

On the other hand, its unspoken part operates as a certain kind of favor being offered by the system to compensate for the sacrifices needed to achieve the overtly proclaimed goals. It often comes in the form of socially prohibited, deeply suppressed freedoms and enjoyments while literally working as the profound mean of bribe. For instance, in communism and state-capitalism, sexual promiscuity, among other similar behavior, operated precisely in this manner – it was regarded as something socially condemned, but it was cynically tolerated and overwhelmingly practiced within the system. Similarly, in the case of fascism, the payoff tended to play out as the quiet permission to practice sadistic aggression and indulge in the plundering of what was considered to be the unwanted, problematic

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<sup>61</sup> The whole interview can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm5tpQp6sT4> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

Other<sup>62</sup> or its physical property. (Žižek, Down with ideology? – Talk with Slavoj Žižek | Sternstunde Philosophie | SRF Kultur, 2019)

This is also precisely how the general culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina works, being driven by the nationalist ideology in power. **Informality** as its main keyword, ranging from everyday corruption and grey economy up to the scale of spatial development, is precisely the aspect of prohibited freedom, covertly tolerated and secretly promoted by the system in exchange for the lack of its own efficiency and benevolence.

As one could intuitively notice, previously described informal settlements are probably the most culturally prevailing and most visibly present manifestation of the abovementioned ideological dynamics within the realm of the man-made environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most obviously, their wild behavior occurs under the umbrella of unspoken ideological permission to indulge in the law-breaking freedom, to build houses, hotels, restaurants, or anything else, wherever and however one wants, under the condition that those in power, legitimacy of their political position, and structurally embedded corruption are not to be questioned.

In other words, human rights, the rule of law, civil society, spatial planning, and a healthy environment have become means of exchange for the terrifying notion of freedom. Why terrifying? Simply because freedom loses its appealing, postmodern connotation when given to this extent. It instead becomes a synonym for Bauman's concept of *liquid fear* – a deeply rooted anxiety similar to the experience of living in a world full of unexpected, lurking dangers and a highly competitive world where only positions of real power offer a degree of protection (Bauman, *Liquid Times, Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, 2007). I claim that precisely this state of mind is symptomatically reflected in the overall aesthetics of informal settlements. In other words, this might be why they appear fragmented and individualistic, competing and selfish, as I mentioned earlier.

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<sup>62</sup> such as Jews, homosexuals, and other populations considered less worthy.

### ***1.2.5 The Pain-killing Culture***

So, can this concept of understanding be applied to the most prevailing cultural tendencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina? First, let's try to understand what I mean by *the most prevailing cultural trends*.

First of all, the culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, like any other culture, is far more diverse and complex than I can cover in this chapter. To make a point, I will elaborate only on what I consider the dominant culture in this country while explaining popular trends in music and architecture. Again, I will not cover what is regarded as a high culture but rather a widespread phenomenon, greatly accepted by society on average. However, in a more extensive work, indeed, certain connections could be drawn between both.

Let's start with the music. Briefly, turbo-folk is by far the most popular genre of music in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the most widespread type of music in the Balkans. For all those unfamiliar with it, it represents an extraordinary mixture of sounds, such as high-powered electronic components of western pop music, combined with the elements of the local folk music and the other Slavic, Mediterranean, or Oriental traditions. It emerges in various forms, expressions, and moods, while its lyrics cover multiple topics. It even transcends the boundaries of the Balkans while going further into the east of Europe and, surprisingly, into the west as a cultural code of the growing regional diaspora.

Although this combination of sounds can be traced in the Balkans even decades before the dissolution, it got its name only in 2005, with regional jazz musician Rambo Amadeus being the one to coin the expression turbo-folk and give it a definition:

*"Folk is the people, and the turbo is a system of pressurized fuel injection into the cylinder of an internal combustion engine. Turbo-folk is the combustion of the folk. Any acceleration of this combustion is turbo-folk, the ignition of the lowest passions in homosapines. Music is the darling of all*

*muses—the harmony of all arts. Turbo-folk is not music. Turbo-folk is a darling of the masses. The cacophony of all tastes and smells.*”<sup>63</sup> (Amadeus, 2005)

So, what are the connections between turbo-folk and topics elaborated in previous chapters? Answers to this question are wonderfully elaborated in the book “Turbo-folk Music and Cultural Representations of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia,” written by Uroš Čvoro in 2014 (Čvoro, 2014). First of all, this book traces the beginnings of the turbo-folk back to the 1970s and the era of self-management, basically to the moment exactly coinciding with the wave of informal development described in the previous text. Secondly, it elaborates on the relationship between the genre and the ideology in both systems- communism from the self-management era and the nationalism from the period after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

What is being claimed in this book in terms of ideology and turbo-folk is practically the same as what has been declared in the above-written text of this chapter concerning the informal development. Čvoro concludes that this kind of music, even though being publicly condemned as kitsch by both the nationalist and socialist systems in Serbia, was at the same time tolerated and supported as a medium of ideological compensation. In other words, it played a significant role in the economics of “...directing and commanding enjoyment.” (Čvoro, 2014, p. 4)

Further on, Čvoro argues that turbo-folk can be observed through Fredric Jameson’s concept of the *vanishing mediator*, further developed by Žižek. What is the *vanishing mediator*? It’s a term describing a cultural phenomenon that serves as an agent of transformation, mediating between different stages of the ideological change, that is to say, between socialism and capitalism in the case of the Balkans. Basically, it represents the change by which the cultural phenomenon takes the remnants of the vanishing culture, for example, socialist self-managing culture, and recombines them

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<sup>63</sup> Pušić, Antonije aka Rambo Amadeus., 2005, Turbo Folk, B92, album „Operem dobro “, <https://www.discogs.com/release/3128867-Rambo-Amadeus-Oprem-Dobro> , my own translation



to fit the content of a new ideological framework, such as neoliberal capitalism. In the end, it disappears entirely or remains as the *displaced mediator*. (Čvoro, 2014, p. 78)

The mediation process consists of three transitional stages: immediacy, the negation of immediacy, and mediated immediacy. The first stage reflects cultural phenomenon in a state where its form and content are intact with each other; the second stage reflects the moment when the old form remains the same, but the content changes; and the third stage is when the mediator disappears altogether or drops its prior form to obtain a new one<sup>64</sup>, fitting the latter ideological framework better<sup>65</sup>. Essentially, it serves as a *shock absorber*, mitigating the trauma of cultural change to some extent. (Čvoro, 2014)

This explains the transition of turbo-folk music from the socialist *Newly Composed Folk Music*; across the phase when it represented a genre that is closely associated with the Serbian nationalism and nationalism from the Balkans in general; to the broadly excepted, pan-regional musical expression openly proclaiming neoliberal values, much more similar to the popular music worldwide. Still, its role as a shock absorber arguably remains the same, only this time serving more as a pain-killer, a drug offering lustful enjoyment and self-exoticism in exchange for the lack of structural order.

Exactly the same trends can be observed in the prevailing architecture of the Balkans and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina. Again, in this chapter, I do not deal with the high culture and architecture as such, occasionally occurring in this country or the region, but with architecture that makes up a large percentage of the newly built infrastructure, visible all around. I am aware that many architects will resent me for calling these buildings architecture at all, but I will continue in this direction for lack of a better word. So, what is this building culture that I am talking about?

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<sup>64</sup> in a more considerable or lesser extent

<sup>65</sup> becomes the displaced mediator



Figure 12- turbo architecture, example 1 © Ibrica Jašarević

Well, it is a phenomenon closely related to turbo-folk music, basically a spatial manifestation of everything previously described regarding the music. In my opinion, it is the same trend, only much more permanent and, therefore, much more dangerous while built with brick, mortar, and concrete. It's called *turbo-architecture*.

Turbo-architecture is strongly related to informal settlements and informality by its nature and origins, similarly as turbo-folk music was related to Serbia's politically connected criminal milieu during the 1990s. Still, it is a phenomenon involving many local architects in its design and construction processes. To be clear, it is a professionally condemned direction of movement even here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this reason, the majority of architects involved are silent about it while trying not to get exposed in professional circles. However, some embrace it and see nothing wrong with it. For them, either being sincere, blunt, or disillusioned, this is just a way to earn a salary in a market keen on it.



Figure 13 - turbo architecture, example 2 © Ibrica Jašarević

So, what does turbo-architecture look like, and what does it express? Similar to the music of this kind, it has a specific *folk* tune to it. Although, in some cases, direct architectural quotations of the local heritage can be observed in it, the majority of turbo-buildings are just trying to create a certain kind of atmosphere by referring to the tradition with any means available. By *means available*, I mean any decorative elements cheaply disposable at local storehouses of construction material. Those are mainly imported decorative parts referring to different cultural environments and their historical resonances, having nothing to do with local tradition, which, by the way, resembles more the reductionist aesthetics of the modernist era than the facilities being constructed in the case of the turbo-movement.



Figure 14- turbo architecture, example 3 © Armin Mešić

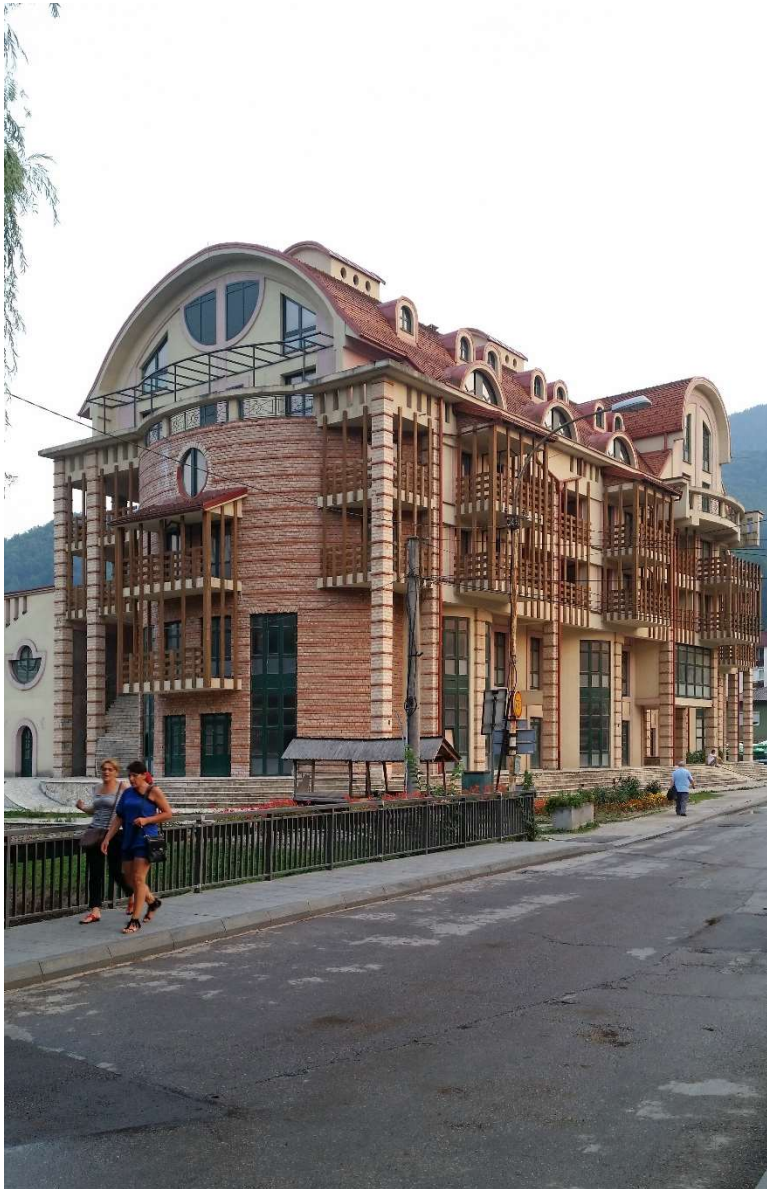


Figure 15- turbo architecture, example 4 © Anida Krecó

Further on, this trend appears very *neo-vernacular*. This is, of course, related to its historical origins closely connected with informal development. Still, this revival of the vernacular attitude remains a general trait even when applied to buildings of the same style but built legally. In both cases, with or without architects involved, they appear very similar, almost as an unconscious celebration of all pre-modern values, only this time mixed with modern industrial elements and today's technology. In other words, the final result highly resembles the Po-mo movement from the late 1960s, well known as a style that was very critical about modernist architecture.

Generally speaking, this kind of architecture avoids straight lines, simple geometry, and uniformity of materialization. However, this tendency exposes itself only on the surface, where complexity is visible, while buildings remain bland and rudimental regarding the internal layout and structure. Still, despite structural simplicity, they tend to be very flexible and bizarrely innovative in occupying the available building plot in an attempt to increase the overall net area of the building.

As I mentioned earlier, turbo-architecture is very competitive and intrusive, while its appearance significantly complies with Christopher Lasch's notion of *narcissistic culture* from the 1980s (Lasch, 1991). Still, despite individualistic tendencies, they create an impression of cacophonous uniformity when observed on a larger scale, as a settlement, for example. Instead of expected diversity, one gets a final result in which everyone tries to be different, but they all somehow appear the same. Srđan Jovanović Weis wonderfully synthesizes all these tendencies in one of his essays on turbo-architecture:

*"Turbo architecture wants to win. Turbo architecture has elitist aspirations. Turbo architecture does not blindly accept the past; it gradually negates it through mimicry. Turbo architecture wants to be accepted by the world as an integral part of the world itself. Turbo architecture has to be radical and highly inventive in order to survive. Turbo architecture will exist only if it is on the edge of survival. Turbo architecture survives by inflating every aspect*



*of a real possibility. Turbo architecture wants to be permanent. Turbo architecture may remain for good. Turbo architecture cannot be concealed, and is the unruly effect of the black market. Turbo architecture is the proof that architectural production depends neither on a stable market, nor on a stable political system. Turbo architecture is not about size; it is about scale. Turbo architecture is a mix of romantic and technological desires; it is roman-tech. Turbo architecture has a global character. Turbo architecture is not alone. Turbo architecture is internally divided: one side pushing to the exterior, an extrovert exhibitionist, the other pushing to the private inside, both exacerbating the divide. Turbo architecture, like many things before, is built out of greed. Turbo architecture is compared to, and often literally is, a bunker. Turbo architecture is trying to become harder than bulldozers can break. Turbo architecture has spread. Turbo architecture prefers no rules, but in the long run needs them, because it loves to break them openly.”<sup>66</sup> (Weiss, 2011)*

Observed strictly from the phenomenological point of view, turbo-architecture consists of two major parts: relatively pragmatic and structurally simplistic, ad-hock core, and the very diverse, fairly complex cloak full of symbolic intentions, surrounding it. From my impression, when observed from the outside, these buildings appear as if struggling to reconstruct the missing order on their own, at least on a symbolic level. They don't know how to do it, so they babble nonsense while inventing a strange, highly individualistic architectural language that nobody understands. Clearly, it does not work, but still, it's an improvisation, a substitute meant to fill the symbolic void. Why? Because, most obviously, **the future is uncertain, sources of meaning are missing, and therefore the whole culture revolves around the meaningless void.** In a situation as such, every person feels as if being left up to himself.

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<sup>66</sup> The essay can be found on: <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/t/turbo-architecture/turbo-architecture-srdjan-jovanovic-weiss.html> ; last time visited: 28 May 2022

Let's go back to Bauman's plane and elaborate on this notion while using a metaphor.

So, the plane is flying, and nobody is in control. Some passengers are jumping out of it, some are trying to steer it despite not knowing how to do it, some are hysterical, some are praying to God, and some are just being numb. Now, imagine someone pulling out a pack of hallucinogenic drugs in that very moment and offering it to the passengers. I claim that almost everyone would take it only to enter a different reality and forget about the inevitable plane crash.

Don't blame them – it is not easy facing the fact that nobody is in control and nobody is flying the plane... **The pilot is the one who is missing.**



### **I.3.0. The Current State of Architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

*“When the s\*\*t hits the fan, some guys run, and some guys stay.”*

Al Pacino in the role of Lt. Col. Frank Slade; Movie: Scent of a Woman, 1992. (Brest, 1992)

Much has been said about the current state of architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the previous chapters. Still, in this one, I will cover what is perceived as *genuine* architecture locally, architectural education, professional organizations, and various aspects of professional activity in the country. The chapter will be much shorter than the previous two because major contextual paradigms concerning the following case studies have already been elaborated on. The final ambition of this chapter is to show that within the overall state of complexity and its connatural chaos, some people, groups, organizations, institutions, and offices are still putting an overwhelming effort to create progress, hope, and meaning, at least within the realm of the architectural landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, to round out the story concerning the overall context, let’s begin by looking at the general professional settings local architects operate within. What do I mean by *professional settings*?

By this term, I refer to the most critical challenges within the discourse of the local profession itself. In other words, the first subchapter will discuss all the essential things influencing the everyday living conditions of architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Why? Because these topics are seldom covered in books about architecture and in my opinion they are essential to the quality of the professional result. Besides competencies, architects are selling the time spent on their projects. The less they are being paid, the less time they can spend on their designs, and, as everyone involved in this profession knows all too well -any design needs time to reach the limit of at least sufficient quality. On the other hand, architecture needs creativity. Creativity is an internal psychological process and is crucially related to one’s mood and state of mind. Therefore, the living conditions within which architects operate, making them either frustrated or inspired, are essential to the quality of

their professional outcome. The following text will revolve around this topic.

### ***3.1. The Professional Settings***

Well, besides being an intriguing art/technique of creating physical space and an inspiring profession, architecture is also at least a salary-providing activity, if not a serious business. This also means that the result of an architectural engagement depends not only on architects but also on the type of commissions they deal with and the kind of investments/investors they have an opportunity to work with. Why? Simply because they are being paid by someone to deliver results, and the one who is paying wants to be involved in the decision-making process.

For instance, the experience of working for public institutions is not the same as the experience of working with corporations, and both are very different from the individual private commission. By referring to this, I don't mean that the design is being influenced only in terms of the requested building typology and the program. The design process, the evaluation criteria, and the final goals depend very much on the nature of our clients.

Consequently, at least from my local experience, public investments tend to be very bureaucratic. Often, they require an administrative effort even more exhausting than an effort needed to complete the design process itself. However, despite various panels, committees, and paperwork involved, professional decision-making freedom is relatively high as long as it stays within the boundaries given by the original design brief and mainly formal bureaucratic requests.

On the other hand, corporate commissions tend to be a bit less bureaucratic or at least bureaucratic in a different manner. Still, the decision-making process seems much more limited, market-driven, and brand-related. The contract defines the relationship between the architect and the client, but different nerve-wracking requirements keep popping out during the design process, and the contract keeps changing frequently.

Private commissions are very different from the other two cases. They involve the least amount of bureaucracy, while contracts tend to be loose, if any exist at all. Still, professional decision-making freedom is significantly reduced, either when one is working with a private company or with a private individual. Why? Because, in this case, the investment is much more personal, and clients tend to insist on being involved more significantly.

Don't get me wrong – there is nothing wrong with clients being involved in the design process. This can be an enjoyable experience and an exciting process whereby fascinating architectural concepts can be created. However, the quality of the result and the character of the process are significantly dependent on the client's personality, cultural background, level of education, and social status.

This exactly is where things get a bit more complicated in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As one could guess, architectural commissions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily private, and architects primarily work with individual clients. Social fragmentation among clients is very high, and they appear to be very diverse in terms of their backgrounds and behavior. Still, one must be aware that this country was run by a communist system only thirty years ago when no billionaires or even millionaires were part of the local society. This means that most people financially capable of taking part in serious architectural development are specific kind of the new-rich.

Again, there is nothing wrong with being new-rich, and I admit that the quality of the professional relationship significantly depends on their personality traits. Still, the origin of their capital is very often related to the war or post-war era, dubious privatizations, corruption, and suspicious political connections. Therefore, frequently, they are the kind of people whose personalities have been forged within the brutal, *wild west alike* environment of post-Dayton times. Consequently, not all but too many of them behave very intrusively in relation to the professional competencies of an architect. In other words, besides not having adequate education on

the matter, they tend to behave bluntly while being very determined to achieve set goals by any means possible.

I am aware that this situation resembles many other capitalist environments worldwide and that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not an exemption. Still, I claim that in highly deregulated environments such as this one, there is an additional amount of brutality present within professional relations, frequently making the design process far less enjoyable.

Why are private commissions prevailing? For several reasons. For instance, foreign corporate commissions are scarce due to the failing juridical system whereby the whole country is considered a high-risk investment territory. If they occur, they mostly have some connection with the local capital, such as being part of a certain joint-venture. However, most commonly, the closest that local architects get to the corporate experience is on occasions when they have a chance to work with large, regional, privately-owned companies. Although these two cases may resemble in the process-related dynamics, there is a significant difference. For example, in the second case, there is no board of shareholders in charge, but only one or more persons having their own subjective values and giving the final word.

Another reason for private commissions being prevalent is simply the lack of public investments and related development. In other words, public buildings, such as schools<sup>67</sup>, museums, public sports facilities, opera halls, public administration buildings, as well as open public spaces, in general, occur only on rare occasions as commissions in this country do. If and when they occur, they quickly vanish under the umbrella of the 3.000 Euros public procurement method or become the subject of imposition within the public procurement system, whereby only the rule of the lowest offer is being taken into account as a negotiating position.

The latter procurement principle has proved highly problematic because the quality of design and related technical documentation is not being

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<sup>67</sup> To be fair, schools are also not being built due to the low number of new born children.

considered. The architects are forced to compete with each other in terms of the lowest fees offered, and most commonly the lower prices mean the lowest amount of time spent dealing with the project. In the end, publicly procured designs are mostly delivered as low-quality, ad-hock conceptual solutions made in a hurry. At the same time, the process of architectural research rarely occurs in such circumstances.

As I mentioned before, architectural competitions are rare as well, partly due to the corruption in our own professional rows and partially because they are much harder to organize than the *lowest price* procurement method. Inert public administration dislikes it mainly because such competitions require far more competencies on their behalf, such as skills and knowledge needed to create an adequate brief and a clear definition of judging criteria. They also find it far more stressful because the final results based on quality judgments represent a much more publicly debatable issue than the results expressed in numbers referring to the lowest price offered.

Commissions in Bosnian and Herzegovina mostly revolve around various housing typologies, less around commercial buildings and much less around industrial facilities. I am aware that this is very similar to what is happening in the rest of the world because housing typologies, amid the most massive wave of urbanization in the world's history and the related housing crisis, present the most indispensable category of buildings worldwide.

Still, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the process of urbanization during the last ten years is far less present, primarily due to emigration, low living standards, and partly low birth rates. Only major cities, such as Sarajevo, are still experiencing an influx of population, mainly from smaller cities, towns, and villages all around the country. Consequently, most urban and rural settlements within the country are experiencing a decrease in the number of inhabitants, even though some have proved themselves capable of producing miraculous economic and industrial growth.

However, despite decreasing population, collective housing is still being built all around the country, with prices going very high compared to the average standard of living. Why is this happening, and who is buying the apartments? A high percentage of the newly built housing stock is sold to the enormous international diaspora, mostly buying it as a form of saving. Many apartments are not being used at all, while owners preserve them for the times when they retire and probably go back to their homeland. Still, a significant proportion of the available housing is being used for rent, especially in Sarajevo and other bigger cities, because Bosnia and Herzegovina has become an exotic destination for adventure tourism during the last ten years.

For this reason, the housing prices maintain to be high and hardly affordable for the remaining young population and start-up families. Like the low-energy and environmental initiatives, housing developments are being publicly subsidized only occasionally and in a small amount. The symbolic subsidies are being given to the critical categories of users/buyers in the form of tax reductions or direct public grants with no intention of influencing existing prices on the market. This is mainly why architectural methods and strategies of providing affordable housing in a *lacaton & vassal* manner tend to be hardly applicable within the context as such. In other words, attempts to reduce the cost of housing with architectural tools and innovation, in most cases, are only producing more significant profit for the investors. Why? Because the housing stock prices stubbornly tend to remain the same with no state intervention involved.

The living standard of architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not particularly high. According to the online survey<sup>68</sup> conducted by the Association of Architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, at the time,

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<sup>68</sup> The survey was published online on [www.aabh.ba](http://www.aabh.ba) in 2018, but it was taken down due to the website reconstruction in 2019. The data presented in the book was obtained directly from the Association of Architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

their net salaries tended to be lower than the country's average,<sup>69</sup> (Federalni\_zavod\_za\_statistiku\_Bosne\_i\_Hercegovine, 2019) for astonishing 49.1% of the survey participants. An additional 27.9% claimed to have a net salary 50% higher than the national average, while the remaining 23% reported wages bigger than that. To be clear, the national average in 2018 was slightly below 450 Euros.

Although the abovementioned survey does not represent official academic research data, the results indicate almost the same as what can be heard in everyday conversations among local architects. Still, many companies have been trying to overcome this issue primarily by outsourcing their services to more prominent international companies. This has become very popular during the last five years, and there has been some success.

As much as I could notice, the average salaries of architects have risen in the meanwhile. This also has something to do with global monetary inflation and massive emigration of the skilled workforce, including architects. Still, an essential indicator of the gradually improving professional living standard reflects in the simple fact that it is much harder to find an unemployed architect in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, only four years after 2018.

Architectural education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, again, highly fragmented. What do I mean by this? Well, two things. First of all, present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina has more architectural faculties<sup>70</sup> than there were in former Yugoslavia. While Yugoslavia, as a country with a population of almost 24.000.000, had five faculties altogether, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a population of nearly 3.300.000, has nine. Four of them are publicly-owned faculties, organized according to established administrative, ethnic

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<sup>69</sup> The data can be found on:<http://fzs.ba/index.php/2019/02/15/prosjecna-mjesecna-bruto-i-neto-placa-i-zaposlenost-xii-2018/>; last time visited: 28 May 2022

<sup>70</sup> To clarify: this is not just a case with the architectural faculties. It is the most common occurrence in almost all fields of study.

and territorial divisions, while the remaining five are credible and less credible private faculties.

This is important to note because the high number of faculties has led to the overproduction of architects for at least two decades. This created a significant discrepancy between the number of architects in the country and the overall needs of the slow-developing market while producing *inflation* of diplomas and thus reflecting in the general living standard of the local profession. As mentioned before, this issue seems to be settling today, unfortunately, due to the emigration and, luckily, partly due to the growing business of outsourcing and partial market improvements.

The second important thing concerning architectural education is a relatively high fragmentation of the curriculum, present in the cases of almost all faculties in the country. For instance, instead of having modules with several subjects revolving around one topic, the students at the Architectural Faculty at the University of Sarajevo have fifty-six mostly unrelated subjects that they have to pass to obtain both a bachelor's and master's degree. Such a state of affairs is a consequence of many maladroit changes occurring within the transition from the old educational system toward a new *Bologna* system. This topic has been wonderfully elaborated in the HERD Conference book "*Metamorphosis of Architectural of Education in (Post) Transitional Context,*" (Burazor, 2016) whereby it has been noticed that students are spending 43% less of their time at the faculty in a new system compared to the old one while having the number of subjects increased for 54%<sup>71</sup> (Burazor, 2016, str. 12). Consequently, education as such produces very particularized knowledge that diminishes the ability of students to treat their designs holistically. Some efforts to improve the overall educational system are being made lately, and hopefully, things will slowly start to change in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>71</sup> The publication can be downloaded from the link: [https://af.unsa.ba/publikacije/metamorphosis\\_of\\_architectural\\_education.pdf](https://af.unsa.ba/publikacije/metamorphosis_of_architectural_education.pdf); last time visited: 28 May 2022.



However complex and troubling living and working conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina may appear, the attempts to improve the context and create serious architectural results are still present within the local architectural scene. Those are the people, groups, and organizations who, despite obstacles and discouragements, are somehow finding the motivation to push things forward.

They are probably a minority of dreamers, but they are an essential counterpart to the existing cultural context. Why are they so important? Because they are challenging the current status quo.

Although every society needs such people, highly derogated environments like this one desperately need them even more. The following text is committed to them.

### ***1.3.2. The Dreamers***

Before we continue with this chapter, let's briefly go back to the *sources of meaning*.

What are they? According to Manuel Castells and his book "The Power of Identity" from 2009 (Castells, Moć Identiteta, 2002), they are the same as *identities*. By this, he is certainly not exclusively refereeing to ethnic or national identities, but all kinds of identities built upon different elements of cultural material serving the individual to articulate himself as a part of any collective.

For example, they can be sexual, gender-related, political, social class-related, professional, racial, cultural, or any other kind, and one person can possess multiple. Basically, the structure of each persona is a mixture of different variations of collective identities intertwining with its own experiences and forming the sense of self.

Why is this important? Well, if observed as sources of both collective and individual meaning, identities compose the society. In other words, they are

the ideas and beliefs around which communities are being formed and according to which individuals articulate their position/role within the society. More importantly, as the sources of meaning, they tend to set and influence collective and individual goals while providing a glimpse of a vision regarding society's direction of movement.

In other words, identities create projections of the future based on their own ideas and beliefs. Of course, those are social constructs, but at least according to Castells they are essential because they tend to recalibrate the present. As such, the sources of meaning are also means of social motivation, which guide the future of society and at the same time also manage its present.

When explaining modes in which culture operates in contemporary society, Manuel Castells (Castells, *Moć Identiteta*, 2002) discerns three types of collective identities: legitimizing identity – the one being introduced by the state, or those in power, trying to establish order and produce a civil society; resistance identity – the one being generated by the actors resisting established domination, and being based on the logic “different form”; and the project identity – the one being set around the ambition to create a new identity, with the disposable cultural materials. The last category goes hand in hand with the second because identities based on resistance tend to form project identities as a vital part of their struggle and an elemental vision of change.

Let's try to analyze and explain these categories in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course, the situation is far from simple. For example, the legitimizing identity in the country does not exist in its classical form. Instead, we have an imposed constitution that acts upon society almost like a *force majeure*. Although necessary as a peace-providing tool, it cannot be fully legitimized in the classical sense because the local community did not create it, nor does it represent a voluntary result of internal political settlement. Still, while not capable of legitimizing itself, the constitution legitimizes three existing ethnic identities. It gives them the sovereign right

to act as surrogates of the national identity within their administrative and territorial domains.

Further on, ethnic identities in this country are reactive in their nature, primarily acting as a response to the projection of threats regarding the *other* two. Exactly this opposing attitude and the constitutional opportunity to block each other disables them from legitimizing themselves in the classical sense by providing functional civil society and the rule of law. They can do this only partially within their particular domains and, therefore, as legitimate sources of meaning they are not convincing enough. In other words, their impotence in the realm of most practical politics reinforces their reactive character further.

The project identities in this country are still weak but slowly growing. They revolve around requests regarding the rule of law, civil society, and the aim to reach a state of normality, similar to those of developed European countries. However, they are still confusingly intertwined with reactive ethnic identities and administrative divisions while struggling to articulate and define themselves to the full extent. As confusing as it may sound, they are also reactive by nature, but, unlike the previous ones, they oppose the prevailing political and structural mess.

Nevertheless, what I am trying to say is that, despite confusing narratives about different identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the sources of meaning can be simply put into two separate categories: those who comply with the existing status quo and its innate structural chaos; and those that do not and are resisting it while struggling to articulate the vision of a better future. The position of a latter category is still not defined and expressed as a group identity; It is still not cohesive enough, nor does it have clearly set goals. Still, from my everyday experience, I claim that it exists at least as a growing general notion.

Naturally, these emerging identities tend to impose themselves on the structure of society while reflecting even in the field of social roles, such as professions themselves. In other words, I claim that the abovementioned

nascent social division is visible even in architecture, in terms of professional grouping, professional attitude, as well as general architectural production.

This highly resonates with something that Bernard Khoury once said in an informal conversation while staying in Sarajevo as a presenter at the Days of Architecture 2017. Based on his experiences in Lebanon, he expressed one straightforward observation that I will paraphrase like this: *In places and situations where society fails to declare social responsibility, an individual responsibility truly begins.*

Interestingly, although he was probably completely unaware of it, he expressed something very relatable to the emergence and the nature of the event *Days of Architecture in Sarajevo*, where he was at that very moment staying as a lecturer. Briefly, this local annual professional event started as a project created by a group of students at the Architectural Faculty in Sarajevo<sup>72</sup> in 2008, only to become one of the most recognizable professional events in the region by now. As wonderfully presented in the book *“3650 Days of Contemporary Architecture”* from 2019 (Mutevelic, Bošnjak, Mraović, & Mutevelić, 2019), while developing and changing the format, it gradually became a place where some of the most prominent names from various fields of architecture have been presenting their ideas, researches, and projects. However, everything basically started as a reaction to the existing architectural education in Sarajevo, whereby the group of enthusiastic students took a bold step in organizing something that was meant to be its necessary supplement.

In addition to its regional significance, for local architects the festival has become an even more important occasion for exchange and discussion of ideas, experiences or projects. And apart from this it became a commonplace for local professional culture. As such, it created a platform for various initiatives of different types, some being directly connected to it and emerging while being inspired by it. For example, events of a similar

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<sup>72</sup> University of Sarajevo

kind, organized by other groups of people, started occurring regularly or occasionally in other parts of the country, such as Banja Luka and Mostar.

Similarly, the Days of Architecture contributed to the reaffirmation and the renewal of the Association of Architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a factor of inspiration and a direct contributing factor in many other ways. Still, the most important means of contribution was that this festival created enough cohesion and trust within the profession prior to the changes occurring in AABH.

What precisely happened with AABH? The Association of Architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the successor of an Alliance of Architects in B&H, a professional organization operating in the period of former Yugoslavia. It was very active and relatively well organized during and immediately after the war, but over time it started to derogate, lose its members, and get into financial trouble. In the end, around 2015, it appeared to be almost abandoned.

However, in 2016 new steering committee was established consisting primarily of younger and mid-generation architects. The changes started to happen shortly after 2016 and they were directed towards activities that members considered most urgent, such as reaffirmation of the yearly exhibition Collegium Artisticum, additional education, workshops, creation of a hub for architects, and a price calculator for architectural services. One of the main goals of this period was to connect professionals from all around the country, as well as the diaspora, and create a platform for creative dialogue. Consequently, the number of members grew rapidly while increasing the credibility of the Association and making it much more significant in terms of professional consolidation. Basically, the rise of enthusiasm within the professional culture has brought together everyone interested in change and opened a space for basic premises of mutual understanding.

To be clear, contemporary architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not emerging from the scratch. The current production relies upon the solid

roots of the Yugoslav modernist legacy. As a starting point, it has a significant theoretical background, foremost defined by the book “Architecture of Bosnia and a path to modern” written by Juraj Neidhardt and Dušan Grabrijan (Neidhardt & Grabrijan, 1957). Besides the book, the architectural works of Neidhardt<sup>73</sup>, together with the works of Zlatko Ugljen<sup>74</sup> and Ivan Štraus, represent an inspiring backbone of legacy and a valuable source of professional values, which can be very helpful in defining today’s direction of movement. Although these names are probably the most important ones historically, many other architects were also creating high-quality at the time, such as Reuf and Muhamed Kadić, Živorad Janković, Halid Muhasilović, Bogoljub Krupjel as well as many, many others.

Parallel to the culture, contemporary architectural production in Bosnia and Herzegovina has also shown a certain amount of success in terms of increasing quality, despite being far from the magnitude of development set by the standards of the previous era. Although buildings of such quality level are still not represented in high numbers compared to the overall production within the country, they are essential to the community around them because they challenge the existing context and push for change.

Even though the last significant insight into the architectural scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina happened twelve years ago with the book “Restart-Architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1995–2010”, edited and curated by Hans Ibelings (Ibelings, Štraus, & Jadrić, 2010). The abovementioned, slow but significant progress is visible, at least at yearly exhibitions conducted by AABH over the last decade. Still, today, similarly to what was observed before 2010 by Ibelings (Ibelings, Štraus, & Jadrić, 2010, str. 7), the local architectural scene can be described as fragmented in terms of approach and expression.

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<sup>73</sup> I strongly recommend reading the book „Juraj Neidhardt“ (Krzović & Premerl, 2019)

<sup>74</sup> I strongly recommend reading the book „Arhitekt Zlatko Ugljen“ (Ugljen, Bernik, & Martinović, 2002)

Architectural critic Maroje Mrduljaš wonderfully articulated this notion<sup>75</sup> in his review concerning the annual exhibition Collegium Artisticum in 2017 (Mrduljas, 2017), where he was invited to be a member of the selection jury. Although many variations of local architectural approaches exist, in his opinion, the scene is generally marked by two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there is a narrative-rich, eclectic approach, represented by the architecture of Amir Vuk Zec, based on managing the impossible circumstances and the tradition of remodeling, extensions, and alterations while being very open regarding the coexistence of different architectural languages. On the other hand, the opposite tendency is embodied in the works of Studio Non-Stop. Their work exhibits a contextualized ambition to create a metropolitan scale of architecture, both harmonized with the cultural and urban character of Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina but still highly marked by their rich international experience. In Maroje's opinion, the rest of the scene can be found somewhere within the spectrum, leaning more or less toward one or the other end (Mrduljas, 2017). This is precisely how I see it as well.

However, besides those mentioned above, many other local architects are worth mentioning as well. Still, I deliberately decided not to name the rest of them in this book because it would probably go out of focus. Nevertheless, I am well aware that their works deserve deep respect and probably another book dealing with this topic on its own.

I don't want to be misunderstood concerning the previous text – the things are far from perfect, and high or mid-quality architecture, the one communicating the *understandable professional language* or even complying with the professional standards, is all but a prevailing cultural trend today. Again, it is a phenomenon occurring on occasions, but undeniably, in my opinion, some inspiring progress is present. Moreover, it stubbornly keeps appearing, despite hardly being visible between numerous spatial atrocities and uricide happening all around the country.

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<sup>75</sup> The text can be found on: <https://aabh.ba/osvrt-na-izlozbu-collegium-artisticum-2017/> ; last time visited 28 May 2022.

Why? Because some architects are refusing to comply with the existing whirl of nonsense.

I am aware that it is not popular or easy to be optimistic about anything happening in this country nowadays, especially regarding architecture and spatial planning, but yes- the abovementioned contemporary architects and their works are not perfect in many ways. Still, keeping in mind the derogated socio-economic context of this country, together with the lack of human or intellectual resources, one should ask itself a simple question – how do you define perfection?

In my opinion, any kind of progress is highly precious in these circumstances, and therefore it should be embraced. Instead of being sadistic on social media, indifferent or cynical about it, one might try being a bit more constructive and at least spend some time thinking about it.

This does not mean that anyone should be excused from the critique- on the contrary, all architectural works should be observed, criticized, and even judged harshly. What I am trying to say is, please, don't judge too fast, invest some intellectual effort, behave politely, and be benevolent. This fragile and highly antagonized society certainly does not need another frustrated person diminishing the efforts of yet another architect trying to go at least one step beyond the surrounding context.

I consider all exemptional attempts to create better architecture in this context essential because they represent a vital source of inspiration. Why? Again, because these architects are subsisting, creating, and pushing for a change despite the discouraging circumstances. Maybe they are the dreamers, but our society needs them desperately.

**Without them, the remaining sources of meaning would be slowly fading away.**

To express my appreciation and visually underline the statements made in this text, I included some of the contemporary works I find inspiring in this chapter.





Figure 16-Mosque on the mountain Bjelasnica, Amir Vuk Zec © Studio Zec archive



Figure 17-Hotel Pino, Sarajevo; Amir Vuk Zec © Studio Zec archive



Figure 18- Hiža Mišljanova, Zenica; Studio Entasis © Entasis archive





Figure 19- Hiža Mišljanova, Zenica; Studio Entasis © Entasis archive



*Figure 20- Waves apartment building, Sarajevo; Studio AhaKnap © AhaKnap archives*





Figure 21- Kuca M1, Kakanj; Studio AhaKnap © AhaKnap archives



Figure 22- Imortane Center, Sarajevo; Studio NonStop © NonStop archive



Figure 23- Office building Kakanj Cement; Studio NonStop © NonStop archive

## II.0.0 THREE ARCHITECTURAL CASE STUDIES

*“Beauty is a tension between two different things.”*

*Eduardo Soto de Moura, 2009, Interview for the Oris magazine<sup>76</sup> (Moura, Beauty is the Tension Between Two Different Things, 2009)*

Why is this book so personal?

First of all, I did not want to pretend to be an objective observer because otherwise, I would experience it as fake and, therefore, would not be capable of finding the necessary inner motivation for me to carry it out within a very short deadline. I honestly did my best to structure it academically and corroborate it with well-founded facts, as any serious researcher would do. Still, as it appears in the first part, my personal connection with the elaborated topics continuously kept leaking onto the blank pages.

In the end, it seems as if it turned out to be a specific mixture of academic writing and something very close to gonzo journalism . In a way, it resembles the context of a country I write about and which appears at first glance as a strange ensemble composed of pieces that seem difficult to connect logically. Still, similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it works somehow.

I could not escape this approach, and to be honest, I didn't want to because, surprisingly, it became enjoyable after a while. Why? Because I discovered that books, similar to architecture, own a great deal to the context they emerge from. Apparently, personalities do as well.

In other words, I am personal because I am writing about the context of a place where I was born and raised and where I stubbornly continue to work

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<sup>76</sup> The interview can be read here:

[http://www.oris.hr/en/oris-magazine/overview-of-articles/\[122\]beauty-is-the-tension-between-two-different-things,1746.html](http://www.oris.hr/en/oris-magazine/overview-of-articles/[122]beauty-is-the-tension-between-two-different-things,1746.html) ; last time visited: 28 May 2022.

and live despite the tough love and hate relationship with it. This book helped me rediscover something that is somehow, at least to me, visible in my architectural works, something that seems like a simple thought that was always present but never articulated clearly. I realized that I honestly care about this context and that I was always passionate about making it better and improving it somehow. Why?

I will use a metaphor to explain this notion. Imagine it as a movie where this country appears as an abandoned extramarital child of East and West, of Communism and Capitalism, hidden and despised by both parents and left alone to grow up on the streets all by itself. No wonder it's problematic, blunt, uneducated, aggressive, corrupt, frightened, bipolar, attention-seeking, and foremost desperate for love.

I feel like a social worker who somehow got involved with it, probably by a touch of fate. As frustrating as the relationship may appear, the worker feels very compassionate about the child while being aware of the fatal injustice made- this child did not have the same starting point as other well-fed kids.

The plot is full of ups and downs while both take a journey of individual growth and change each other for the better or worse. I still haven't figured out the end of this movie, but hopefully, it will be a happy ending.

I am an architect, and my intentions are, above all, being expressed in my projects. Therefore, from my experience, the abovementioned relationship is precisely the backbone of all projects that I got passionately involved with. Three of them will be presented in the following part of the book.

Again, all three are the projects of Sarajevo-based studio Filter Architecture, and I am only one of five co-authors involved in the design process. Still, they all mean a lot to me because I was deeply involved in their creation from the beginning until the end while spending enormous energy and time turning them into reality. As I wrote before, this was an exciting learning journey and an exceptional experience of individual growth.



However, architecture emerges through time-consuming processes lasting at least three and more years. When they are finished, they appear to an architect as something created by another, different but very familiar person- a bit younger version of oneself.

While writing about these projects, I had the same impression. Nowadays, I would do certain things differently while other would remain the same because they still appear to me as common-sense decisions. Nonetheless, all were made with an almost equal ambition, passion, and care. I am proud of them because I paid my dues, knowing I did my best.

The book is not personal because I want to express the postmodern disregard for objectivity while claiming there is none. Of course, objectivity is a construct being reached through the consensus among a group of individuals. Still, it can be reached if we are willing to reach it.

Hopefully, the reader and the book will reach one by the end of the following part.

## II.1.0 Cultural Center IBC- Zurich

This project is one of the first significant projects I had a chance to do only several years after obtaining a degree in architecture. It was very time-consuming and challenging in a practical sense because it was made at a distance, but, above all, it was a fascinating experience of creating a very specific community space. Why? Because it dealt with the issue of architectural intermediation between two types of seemingly opposing cultural codes and related identities.

It was financed and built by the community of Bosnian Muslim emigrants permanently living and working in Zurich, who initiated the design and construction process lasting from 2011 until 2015 and occurring in different phases. The community consisted of 1.500 families who came to Switzerland during various periods of migration, including both those of war times and the pre-war times, as well as at least three generations of their descendants.

So, in terms of cultural codes, the community was very diverse. What do I mean by this? Well, despite the common origin from Bosnia and Herzegovina, community members had a different starting point regarding the time of their arrival and, therefore, diverse memories and attitudes defining their relationship with their country of origin. What I noticed is that the earlier they came, the more romantic their vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina tended to be.

Furthermore, besides the people who originally came in different waves of migration, many members represented the generations born and raised in Switzerland. They only knew about Bosnia and Herzegovina through brief visits, such as holidays and vacations. Still, their cultural attitudes and relationships with their home country were powerful due to the influence of their parents and their nostalgic memories. However, they were raised and educated in Switzerland and, in my opinion, reflected an interesting mixture of both cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the Prayer Hall was intended to be a public space open for other Muslim guests from all over the world, as well as other Swiss citizens. The whole situation of how all these groups and generations perceive culture, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and religion was evident in various discussions concerning the project.

Therefore, the project's intention was not only to create a purposeful design but also to create a specific design language that would be recognizable to all people using it or coming in touch with it.

So, why did they need a space like this?

Well, the people who have been financing and building the Cultural Centre – IBC Zürich come primarily from working-class families. Upon their arrival in Switzerland, they were the ones who had a dream of making enough money to build a home to live in and eventually go back to their motherland, Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, as it is in life, one can only dream and not be the one who decides- a lot of them realize that their stay in a foreign land is not of a temporary nature.

This is why they decided to build something testifying their presence in this area- a place they and their children could, in a symbolic sense, refer to as "home." The ultimate consequence of their effort is a Cultural Center – IBC Zürich, a place of gathering, cultural interaction, worship, and devotion, situated in a former railway wagon factory within the abandoned brow-field area of Schlieren, Switzerland.

In essence, the Center is an outcome of a bottom-up initiative, being entirely funded by the community members investing not only their money but also physical labor and time. Therefore, from the point of view of all people involved in the process, the challenging experience of designing and developing the Center was not only a process of creating a communal space for a community of Bosnian immigrants. For many, this process represented a journey of building trust and friendships between the members, which, as an outcome, has formed a strong community of people gathered around a

mutual feeling of pride regarding the accomplished result of their joint venture.

While being situated in Switzerland and intended to serve the Bosnian people, the Cultural Center is a product of an active dialogue between architecture, the necessary customs of the people using the space, and the Swiss environment.

Given that the life experience of community members includes two different, sometimes confusing, and opposing cultural backgrounds, the project primarily aimed to discover elements of a new collective identity, the one in which different cultural codes coexist in harmony.

### ***II.1.1. A Brief History of a Project***

First contact between architects and the client was established in December 2011. Architects from the Sarajevo-based studio Filter Architecture were invited not to do a renovation or serious design project but to give advice about minor, decorative refreshments concerning more or less improvised prayer hall existing at that time. After one year and nine months of discussions and the process of design, the community received something far from their initial requests – a fairly ambitious project crucially defining and meeting their needs.

The design team consisted of five relatively young architects, most of us less than thirty years old, and this project was the first significant built design of the studio at the end of the process. It received substantial attention within Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad, especially after receiving the highest-ranking national award for architecture – Collegium Artisticum Grand Prix.

During the design period of the Prayer Hall, lasting from January 2012 until October 2013, besides being assigned to develop the given design proposal further and to readjust it according to the needs of community members, which were expressed in countless and exhausting online discussions, architects were also significantly involved in the process of fundraising. This included several donor events, individual communication with the

community members, involvement in managing strategies for fundraising, and project branding within the community.

For example, architects proposed creating sets of postcards containing renderings and images of the future design proposal, which were sent to each community member via regular post. In this manner, all members who were not attending donor meetings were informed about the initiative and kindly asked to participate in the process of funding and development. Reaction to this strategy was overwhelmingly positive, and it has generated a significant response.



*Figure 24-existing industrial building and the Prayer Hall before renovation © Vedad Islambegovic*

Successful completion of the Prayer Hall in January 2014 has been overwhelmingly well-received as a success by everyone involved, allowing the second phase concerning the School and community Leisure room to start immediately. Design documentation for this phase was made between July 2013 and January 2014 while making it possible for the construction process to occur between January 2014 and May 2015. Results achieved

regarding the Prayer Hall were crucial for the second phase to be implemented without any significant challenges. The fundraising had a stable flow by that time, and the organizational structure within the community was already established.



*Figure 25-Prayer Hall after renovation © Aladin Hasic*

The third phase of the Center, concerning the Restaurant, while discussed and planned during 2015 and 2016, exists only as a blueprint and remains to be built in the future. Although a Restaurant represents a vital part of the Center regarding its financial sustainability, the main reason for this delay is mainly related to the number of resources needed and the fact that the community has become exhausted after completing the first two phases. Hopefully, this remaining programmatic unit of the Center will become a topic of discussion among community members in the foreseeable future.



Figure 26-the School and the Leisure Room after renovation © Aladin Hasic



Figure 27- rendering of the Restaurant space © Vedad Islambegovic

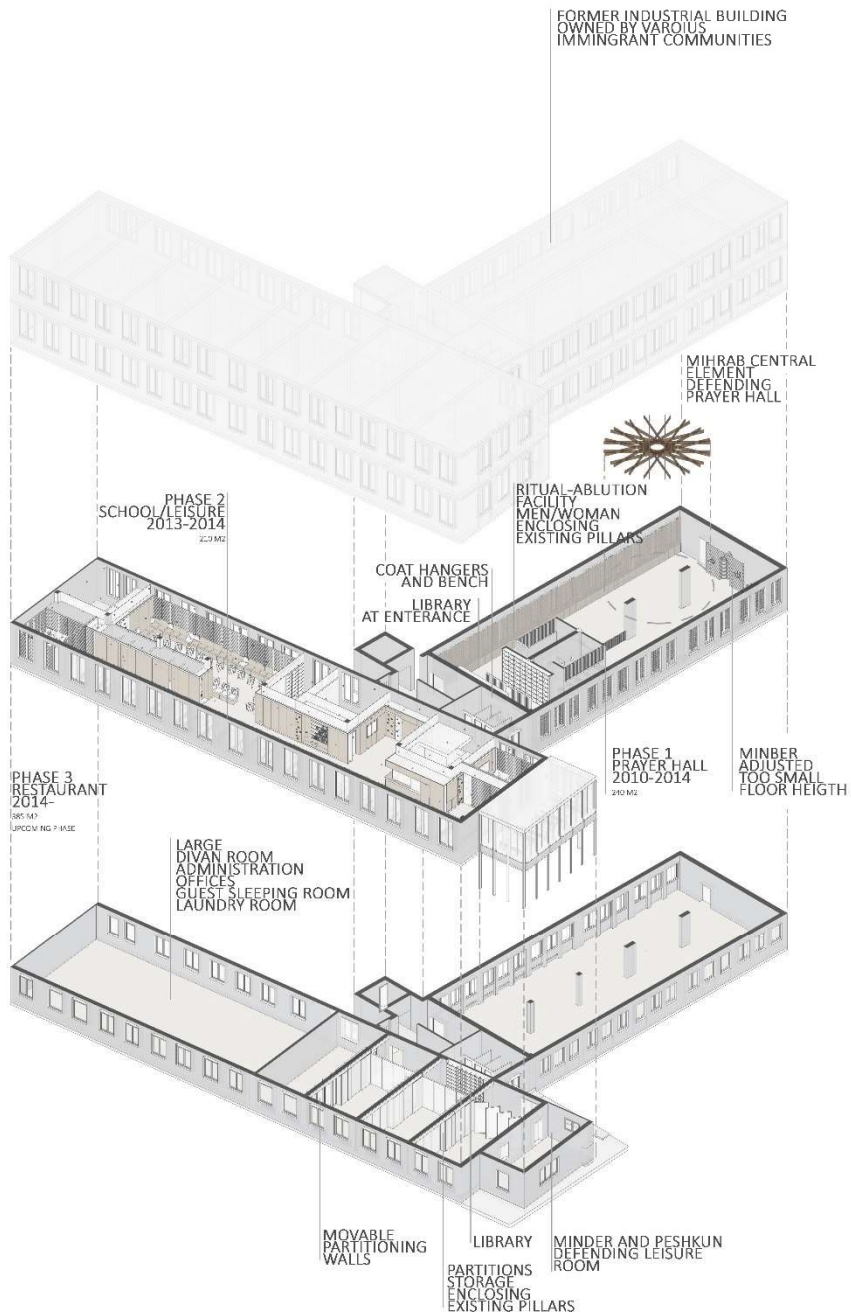


Figure 28- spatial diagram of the Center © Vedad Islambegovic



### ***II.1.2. Design Description***

As mentioned before, Cultural Centre – IBC Zürich is located within the refurbished urban zone, inside the former, four-story-high industrial building, partially owned by the Bosnian community. The rest of the building is owned and used by other immigrant communities in part, and different companies having their offices within. At the moment, the Cultural Center consists of three distinct, renovated functional units: The School and the Leisure Room on the ground floor and the Prayer Hall on the first floor. The restaurant is planned to be situated on the first floor as well, relatively close to the space for prayer. In this manner, the restaurant is meant to complement the Prayer Hall as a form of profane public gathering space.



*Figure 29- ablu-tion room, box-like facility © Aladin Hasic*

Prayer Hall, a space designed for everyday prayer and free-time contemplation, represents the Center's focal point. The general organization of the room has been determined by placing a box-like, ritual-ablu-tion facility inside an elongated industrial hall to introduce new

sequences of space - matching those in a traditional Bosnian mosque. In this manner, the hall, designed for a completely different purpose, has been given proportions and programmatic distribution that is more appropriate for prayer intended space.

Another reason for placing the ritual ablution facility in such a manner was to separate it from the remaining sanitary facilities to accentuate that the ablution represents an essential part of the praying ritual. Similarly, the wall of the “central box” facing the entrance of the Prayer Hall was designed to host the library to emphasize the notion that contemplation, as well as the act of reading and learning, is an activity that is closely bound with the act of prayer itself.



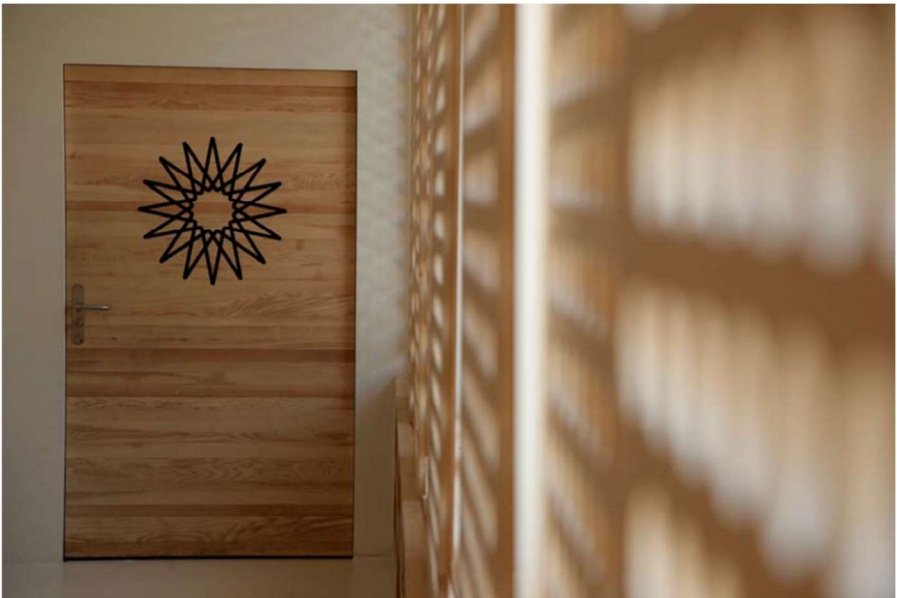
*Figure 30- Library and the interior of the ablution room © Aladin Hasic*

The design of the ablution facility also introduces an unusual approach regarding the spatial division between the men and women, being proscribed by religious principles. In the case of this design, the separation exists only in geometrical terms without any doors at the entrances of any of these two areas. This means that the separation exists only as a symbolic boundary and not as the physical one.

The central part of the Prayer Hall was symbolically emphasized by the central ceiling lantern, which acts as a substitute for the dome. This element invites people to gather beneath it practically and figuratively. This element serves as the primary light source during the night-time prayers while creating a dim and contemplative atmosphere.

Although it looks complex, the geometry of the lantern is quite simple: a multitude of linear elements - the tangents of a circular orbit around the center of the composition, but in a way that they never touch it. While circling, the features embrace and intertwine, creating a scene of complex harmony. The center of the composition is left empty, and in a symbolic sense, it represents the spiritual center of a human being. In a figurative sense, the center represents a metaphysical place, a point where the inner-self meets with prayer.

Due to its recognizable pattern and the visual impact on the space itself, this symbol became a trademark of the Cultural Center. Since the beginning of the renovation, it has been used as a new logotype within the rebranding strategy and all the material associated with it.



*Figure 31- Entrance to the Prayer hall and the porous wooden elements on the side © Aladin Hasic*

A similar framework of logic has been applied to all other elements of space. The main design intention was not to reproduce copies of the past but rather to adopt them as far as their purpose can be justified in a given

situation today and adjust them in line with contemporary modes of production, technology, and lifestyle. As the final result, an atmosphere of traditional space for prayer has remained recognizable, while at the same time, new spatial phenomena have been successfully revealed.

In general, the design of the Prayer Hall was steered by a notion that the conventional form of sacral spaces has an important symbolic function related to collective memory. The major challenge was to create a design that could be recognized as conventionally sacral by the community while clearly achieving a character of contemporariness.

For example, Porous wooden elements have been placed over the large, transparent area of industrial windows to recreate an introverted atmosphere full of diffuse light traditionally present in Bosnian mosques. Seen from the outside, these elements underline that a change of function has appeared.



*Figure 32- outside appearance of the Prayer Hall © Vedad Islambegovic*

In the same manner, the Bosnian carpet pattern, traditionally used as mere decoration, in this case, has served as an element indicating the actual direction of Kiblah, one inclining seventeen degrees away from Mihrab. This inclination results from the fact that the space was not originally intended to be a prayer hall. Therefore, this innovative design solution had to be introduced as a corrective measure.

Unlike the Prayer Hall, the design of the School refers to the tradition to a much smaller extent. The spatial concept was far more driven by the pragmatic need to host a broad scope of activities, ranging from the part-time school, occasional workshops, and auditorium lectures, until occasionally becoming an extension for the prayer hall. Therefore, by introducing movable partitioning walls, the school has been designed as a convertible space, capable of changing the inner layout according to the need.



*Figure 33- Transformable space/movable partitioning walls inside the School © Aladin Hasic*

The visual connection between the school and the other parts of the Centre has been established using a similar color range, textures, and materials. Still, it is much less symbolic, a bit more plain, and more generic in terms of design.

### ***II.1.3. The Process of Development***

The design process was characterized by a constant discussion between architects and the commissioner. Given that the client was a community represented by many individuals, the primary task of the architect was to hear and articulate many individual opinions. This process often included different roles in which architects had to educate, articulate, conclude, and arbitrate among members while reconciling their diverse points of view.

The design process was a specific type of research that included technical, economic, sociological, and psychological aspects of the given task. The communication and the project surveillance were almost entirely done over the internet because the architects resided in Sarajevo, which added even more challenge to the process. For the same reason, many detailed technical drawings had to be done to substitute face-to-face communication.



*Figure 34-Demolition phase © Vedad Islambegovic*



The demolition and the significant number of craftworks, in general, were made voluntarily, or for the basic, free-of-profit price, on behalf of the community members. Fortunately for the project, many members were skilled craftsmen already professionally involved in the construction industry. After their regular working day was over, they would usually come to the Center and continue working as volunteers until late at night or spend their weekends doing the same. This effort lasted for many months until development was over.

Done in this manner, the construction process was not merely a process within which physical space was being created but the process inside which emotional bonds between people and the space were being generated. It has also helped the community become much more organized and form new hierarchy levels necessary for it to be much more effective. Developed organizational relations remained influential even after the completion of the process.



Figure 35- Different phases of construction © Vedad Islambegovic

Wooden elements and the stone basins for the ritual ablution were produced in Bosnia. Primarily, this was done to reduce expenses, but the very fact that these almost perfectly made elements originate from the homeland added even more symbolic value to it. In this sense, besides being practical equipment, they became physical artifacts of emotional attachment.

Individual wooden elements have been designed as independent, free-floating objects. Their free-standing character refers to a nomadic condition of community – they are not attached to a place but allow one to move and migrate. Given that they represent standard parts of the mosque equipment, the design was driven by the notion that they should preserve generic, recognizable forms. Still, the design allows one to see clearly that it was steered in accordance with the contemporary means of production, such as CNC technology. All of these elements were custom-made without a prototype. Therefore, the production process was demanding in terms of the necessary precision and detailing, and each step had to be carefully discussed and controlled. CNC technology played a significant role in the process, giving the final product a recognizable mark of contemporariness.



*Figure 36- Free standing elements © Aladin Hasic*

As mentioned before, the fundraising process lasted parallel with the construction process. As more work was becoming visible in terms of developments, more donations by community members were becoming available. Among many fundraising strategies being employed, the



construction process proved to be the best method to encourage people to participate even more.



Figure 37- children playing in the PrayerHall © Filter archive

### ***II.1.3. The Life of the Project Afterwards***

Besides being necessary for the self-esteem of the Bosnian community in Zürich, it is notable that within a short period, the Centre has made a significant impact on the broader population of Muslim people in Switzerland, as well. Simply on the grounds of being a success story of a joint initiative undertaken by ordinary people, the Centre has become an inspiring reference point for many other immigrant communities.

Although many different events have taken place inside the Prayer Hall since the opening ceremony, such as forums, discussions, lectures, and weddings, the most exciting fact is that it has become a certain kind of “tourist” attraction, not only for the Muslim people visiting Switzerland for a short period but also for the domestic population intrigued with the space of the Prayer Hall itself.

Shortly after the end of the renovation, they started visiting it in organized groups almost daily, with 10-15 people per day and 30-40 people on weekends. This trend was overwhelmingly present several years after the completion when everything was new and refreshing, but it still exists only to a bit smaller extent. In that sense, it has become more than a place for community, but rather a unique kind of open public space.

Further on, the Centre has become a place of intercultural dialogue between different groups of immigrants and between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of Switzerland and Europe in general. For example, initially the school space was planned to serve as an extension of a Prayer Hall only several times a year, nowadays, it is being used at least once a week, hosting Muslim people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Further, numerous inter-religious gatherings have been organized inside the Centre, and even on occasions, different religions used it as a space for prayer. Besides intercultural dialogues, many other secular events were also held in it, such as police education seminars, primary and secondary school visits, TV reports and interviews, etc.

Students of Architecture from the ETH-Zurich and their professors have visited the Center on several occasions while researching Muslim sacral spaces. At the same time, the project was published in several Swiss magazines dealing with design and architecture.

Even a theatrical play was organized by "*Theatre Neumarkt*" within the Prayer Hall, where many Muslims and non-Muslims gathered to watch the performance named "Urban Prayers." Briefly, while hosting up to one hundred visitors outside the community per week, the Centre has become a small-scale attraction for many Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of Europe.

As far as Community is concerned, the development process made it much more organized and agile. Although the design of the Prayer Hall proved itself to be very successful in terms of its appealing effect, it is evident that the participatory character of the process had played a crucial overall role in creating strong bonds among members, as well as in building the relationship between the community and its surrounding cultural environment.

## II.2.0 House NHRV

The House NHRV is a small-scale, single-family home on the outskirts of Sarajevo, surrounded by the natural environment of the semi-rural mountain landscape. The project's primary aim was to recreate a culturally sensitive architectural setting while using spatial relations inherent to the site. At the same time, the project represents an attempt to achieve both a low-cost result and a low-energy audit while using ordinary, widespread, and locally available means.

In essence, it was an experiment trying to prove that it is possible to create a quality-based architecture in the same framework where the ordinary surrounding houses emerge. This was intended to be done with a budget even smaller than the average while even taping a relatively low maintenance cost in the long run.

Both goals were reached while producing an affordable building with a final cost of 500 Euro/m<sup>2</sup> in 2014 and a low-energy audit with a thermal transmittance value of 0.29 W/m<sup>2</sup>. This was made possible very much by a technical approach, engineering, and the overwhelming on-site presence of the architects as well as their involvement in the processes of resource management.

The following text will present data predominately relying on the first-hand experience of designing, supervising, quality control, and cooperating with the municipal services, all the way to the interior design and the building exploitation, all happening within the period 2012-2015.

The first two paragraphs will discuss the parameters of the location and the role that site choice played in terms of low-cost management and the conceptual setting of the house. The last paragraphs will focus on the technical aspect, the choice of materials, the process of development, and the sustainability achieved.

### ***II.2.1. The Choice of the Building Site***

Only ten minutes away from the center of Sarajevo by car, one can reach a completely different environment of harsh mountain climate, meager vegetation, and extraordinary views. This area near the city traditionally has been sparsely populated, often inaccessible, with small cattle settlements mainly used only in the summer, during the season of grazing, and favorable summer conditions.

Today, the shepherds and the cattle herds can be found there less frequently because these areas represent spaces that have been subject to the development of residential and weekend settlements for decades. Under the influence of planned and unplanned tendencies of physical infrastructure development, the area is slowly becoming a certain kind of suburb, constantly populated site near the city.



*Figure 38 - House surroundings © Filter archive*

The House NHRV is located within this environment, inside the broader area of the Bukovik mountain, north of Sarajevo. It is placed at the very top of the hill, on a site with sparse vegetation and astonishing views which extend in the direction of the north-south axis. Toward the south, the view reaches dozens of kilometres away, reaching even the distant mountains of Herzegovina. On the other hand, to the north, the rocky mountain range of Bukovik, positioned on the other side of the valley, can be seen in its entirety.

Particularly this openness can be described as the most crucial feature of the house's surroundings. For this reason, access to residential areas of the

house is being reached through the buried gap of the northern courtyard, inside of which the volume of the house stands like a wall. Only those who enter can discover the best part of the overall experience – and that is the view to the south.



*Figure 39- House surroundings © Filter archive*

Besides natural qualities and astonishing views, the choice of this area for the construction site is strongly related to the affordability of the whole project because land in this area, at that time, tended to be cheaper than in other locations which are relatively close to the city center. In order to fully understand the principle of land distribution concerning the price in Sarajevo one must be familiar with the historical context of land use in the city.

First of all, one must be aware that Sarajevo is a city located in a valley, where traditionally, people used to live on the slope and work in the fields. The flatlands were highly appreciated throughout history because they were the center of agricultural production inside the city. At the same time, slopes were considered a space to be occupied by houses since this kind of land was less fertile and much more challenging to cultivate.

In the modern decades which followed, this logical relationship became the first significant determinant of the city's urban development, although practical reasons have changed significantly. With the Ottoman colonial conquests, the public spaces and buildings of the city expanded to a fertile

plain land along the Miljacka River, and the process of urbanization in the east-west axis began, continuing the inherent relationship between fields and slopes. With the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the city expanded further to the west. Classic European city blocks were built, leaving the hill equally unregulated and left to fragmented individual development, where mostly poor people were struggling to put the roof above their heads.

The period between the two World Wars was similar. With the arrival of the new economically potent state of the SFRY, this process of parallel urbanization of the Sarajevo valley started to experience a certain kind of culmination when the city began to expand much more intensively along the east-west axis. Informal housing settlements continued to occupy the city's hillsides, mainly because this was the area with little or no interest for the authorities managing the city planning.

Nowadays, Sarajevo cultivates the exact relationship between these two topographic areas. In other words, the further one goes up the hill in a quest for affordable pieces of land, the chances of finding cheap land parcels increase significantly. Further on, price tends to drop with the angle of the slope, and the steeper slopes tend to be more affordable because construction cost increases significantly on terrains as such.

Another critical parameter concerning the price of the land is the level of existing infrastructure and, if not existent, the relative proximity of the necessary infrastructural equipment to the site. As expected, the land with basic infrastructure or no infrastructure tends to be much more affordable than the opposite.

The reasons mentioned above played a significant role in the process of finding the appropriate location for the House NHRV, as well. As clearly visible from the figures, the house is located on the furthest part of the hill, basically the very top, with a small, paved mountain road accessing the site. Regarding infrastructure, at the time of the purchase (2012), the area was equipped only with electricity, besides the abovementioned road. Water, sewage, gas, and telephone lines were not existing at the site. However, in

communication with the city planning office and according to available plans, it was clear that this location should obtain all necessary infrastructure several years from the purchase, which seemed to be a reasonable amount of risk to be taken.

Fortunately, infrastructure was implemented according to the urban plans shortly after the house was built, finished, and equipped. However, the water tank was already constructed according to the initial architectural plans and nowadays tends to serve the house as additional equipment, which proved helpful even today as a place to put water reserves during water shortages in the city.

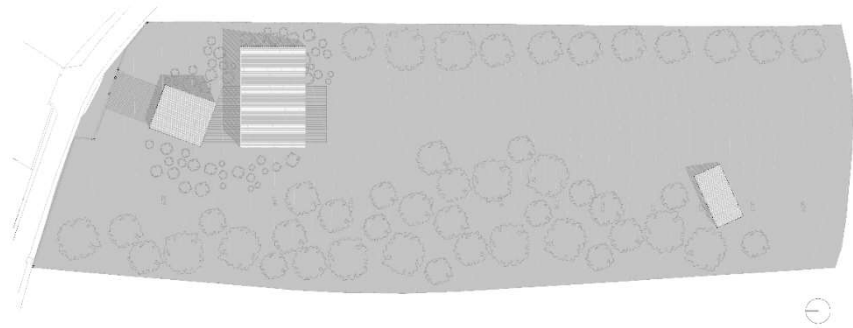


Figure 40- Siteplan plan © Vedad Islambegović

The disadvantages of locations are primarily reflected in the excessive amount of time necessary to obtain all requested building permissions because areas as such are commonly not covered by regulatory and urban plans. For this reason, in Sarajevo, all permissions have to be approved by the authorities at the Cantonal planning institute, which tends to extend the time needed excessively. For instance, the time required to obtain all permissions for the House NHRV lasted almost 18 months.

However, savings made by appropriate location choice significantly contributed to the overall affordability of the House NHRV while allowing financial means of the budget to be allocated to other aspects of the



construction. Obtaining long-awaited building permissions was the first important step that allowed the development process to continue.

### ***II.2.2. The Conceptual Setting***

Compared to “worldwide” contemporary architecture, the House NHRV does not have the ambition to introduce anything new and extraordinary in the conceptual sense. However, inside the context of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, it represents an attempt to create something relatively different from its intermediate surrounding.

The composition consisting of two sloped volumes (a house and a garage), together with a third, planned volume (the summer canopy), refers to the ordinary, generic shape of the house- being disassociated to relate with the fragmented morphology of the built mountain landscape. Separate volumes (existing and planned) are placed together to form different sequences of outdoor space related by a given setting to the house's inner program. In this sense, the inner courtyard emerges as an outcome of interrelation between the first two volumes as a semi-introverted open space creating an outdoor bond between two separate programs. This space serves the house as an outdoor living room during the summertime because it is positioned on the cool north side of the main building (the house). For this reason, the position of the kitchen inside the house has almost an identical relation to the courtyard as to the inner living room while being positioned in between them. At the same time, the courtyard space serves the garage as an extension of service areas, such as the workshop area.

With a volumetric relationship as such, the House NHRV refers to a mountain hut archetype. Compact volume, steep roof, and openness toward the direction of the slope are significant elements that define the spatial character of the house. Like *Katun*<sup>77</sup>, the House NHRV is just a simple

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<sup>77</sup> local mountain hut

roof above the ground, primarily covering the central living room area and other programmatic units oriented toward the center.

In addition to experiential reasons, the house is composed of several volumes due to the differential potential associated with the spatial environment. In other words, the garage, the canopy, and the house are separated to enable subsequent construction of each independent volume. This approach allowed the construction process to be more intact with the available budget, which had been collected gradually during the construction process. Within the process, the first volume that emerged was the house, followed shortly after by the garage, while the canopy was built several years later, only after the first two volumes were finished and inhabited.

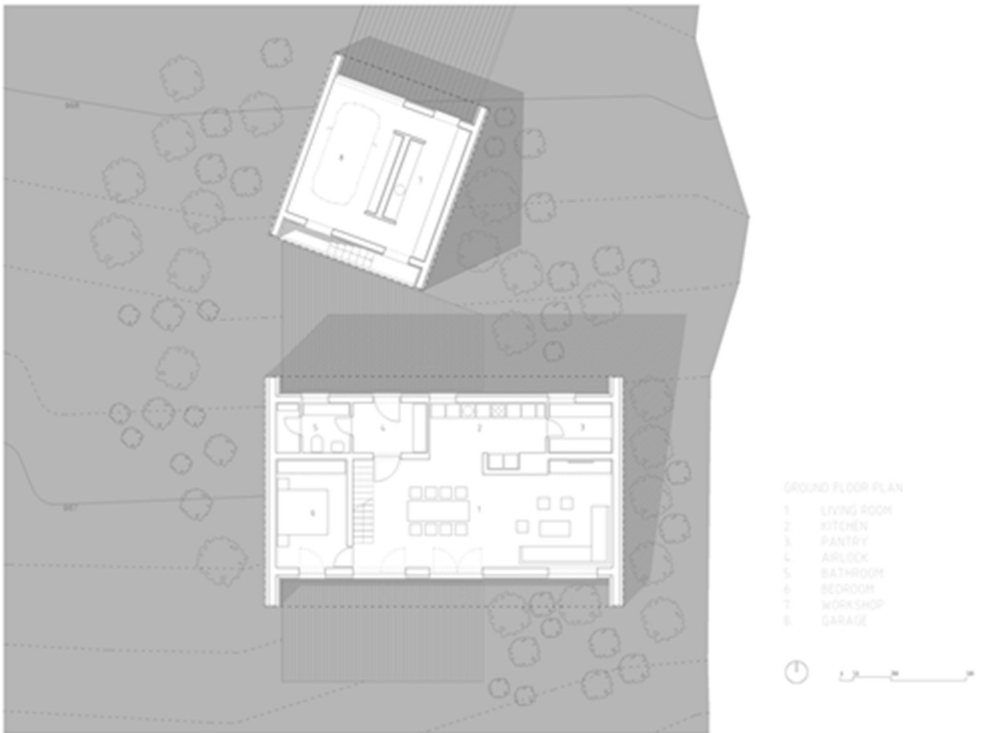


Figure 41- Ground floor plan © Filter archive

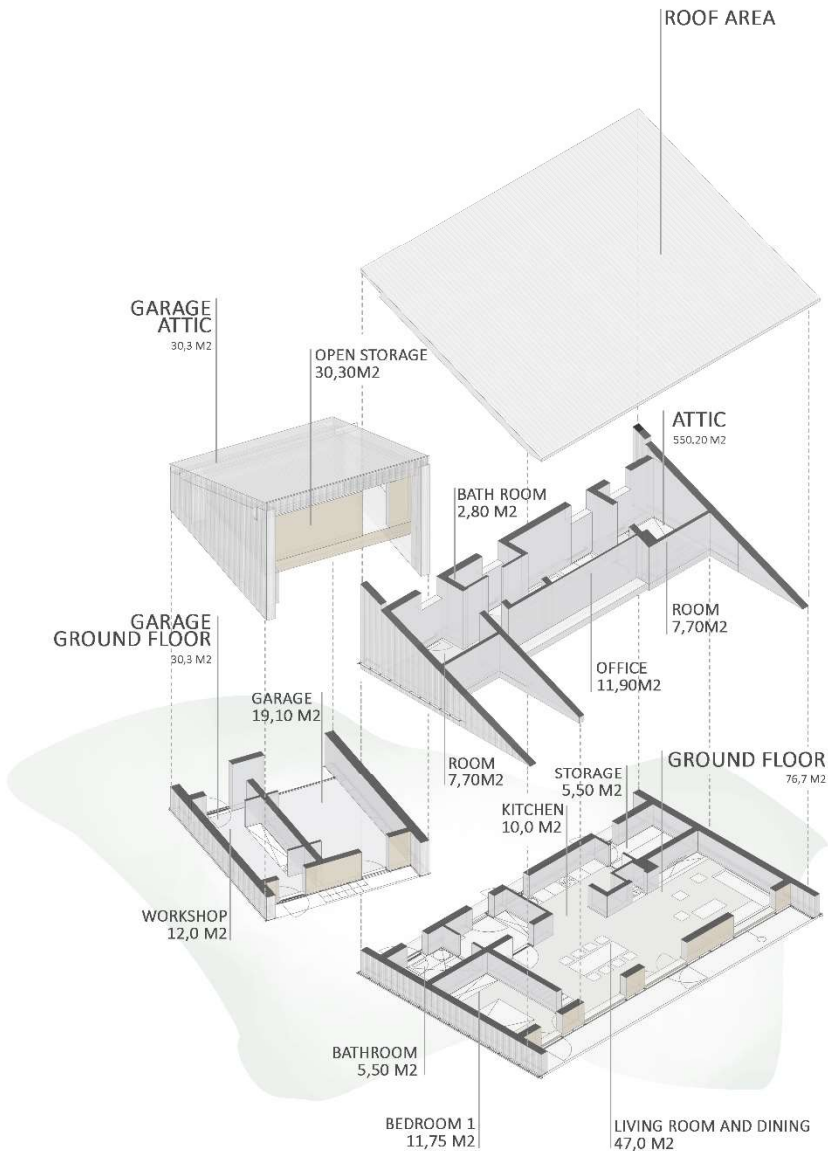


Figure 42- Axonometric view © Amir Bašić

The volume representing the house, in simplified terms, consists of four outer walls and one inner wall, which, while being placed longitudinally, divides the space of the ground floor into two different programmatic areas: the tract of services and the tract of the served space which includes a dining room, living room, and the main bedroom. The service area consists of the entrance space, the bathroom, the kitchen, and the kitchen storage while being oriented toward the northeast. Together with the main bedroom, the living room area faces the northwest and opens along with the view.



*Figure 43- View from the southwest side © Filter archive*

The upper floor of the house occupies the area above the services on the ground floor. It consists of two small bedrooms, a small bathroom, and an open study area with direct visual and acoustic contact with the living room below. In this manner, the main spaces of the house obtained a double height while still having a certain amount of spatial unity with the areas that were placed above. The attempt to unify the different spaces of the house

in a vertical sense is further amplified by the open, cantilevered staircase leading from the living room upwards and ending at the upper floor glare.

The inner spaces of the two remaining volumes in the household, the garage, and the canopy, are organized most efficiently. The garage is divided by a freestanding partitioning wall into two separate areas, the parking spot and the workshop area. The latter space is connected with the courtyard and serves as a transitional space between the parking area and the house. Both garage rooms are covered with the attic, which provides additional storage space for the home.

The canopy, represented by the third volume, is a relatively simple structure even compared to the garage. It tends to reproduce an identical visual appearance to the remaining two volumes. At the same time, in terms of inner layout, it consists of a straightforward, one-room space hosting the outdoor kitchen.



*Figure 44- View from the northwest side © Filter archive*

As visible from the presented layouts, the house was designed to avoid unnecessary spaces for transition, such as corridors, hallways, and anterooms. In this way, the size of the house has been reduced to crucial areas which communicate with each other directly, primarily to create more space-efficient and affordable housing units. Further on, rooms within the house were sized in a way that tends to achieve an “optimal minimum” avoiding all unnecessary excess surface area that could affect excessive price increases concerning the overall budget.

Two materials determine the house’s appearance- a white frame made of corrugated metal sheets and wooden infill at the front and back facade - both referring to the dominant, south-north orientation along the slope, toward the sun and the view. Both materials are locally manufactured to avoid transportation costs and high-profit margins related to imported products. In addition to that, chosen materials are commonly used for industrial development, such as factories and storage facilities, and therefore are cheaper while being regarded as the *basic category* of the material. For instance, corrugated metal sheets used in this case are not of the type commonly used in housing but belong to the class of durable, highly profiled sheets that are widely used for roofing in the case of industrial buildings.

Further on, wooden cladding used is not highly sophisticated in terms of protection or section cut but is somewhat of a type commonly found in local sawmills with the addition of the protective coating applied manually and on-site.

Wooden window blinds, made out of the same material as the facade, give a double character to the house: scattered, vital openness- when the house is inhabited; and a monolithic, restrained appearance- when it is not being used. Their primary purpose is to control the amount of sun and visibility inside the house and provide a significant amount of protection against burglary when inhabitants are not present. Although shutters might appear as a sophisticated mechanism, in reality, they are not. They are just a simple wooden frame with a wooden infill made on-site. A rigid fitting used as a

mechanism for opening and closing the shutters is the one that was, at that time, most commonly used locally, with minor improvised customizations also made on-site.

From the minor scale up to the whole, the House NHRV is a combination of simple spatial forms and trivial construction details, matching the logic of the underdeveloped construction industry inside Bosnia and Herzegovina, while at the same time trying to achieve a relatively low expense by carefully balancing cost priorities, choice of materials, and construction methods.

Although built within the limits of a relatively restricted budget, the house has a low heat loss during the winter and high resistance to summer conditions because it has an efficient, ventilated envelope ( $U= 0.25 \text{ W/m}^2\text{K}$ ). This kind of section allows continuous airflow, the proper mass of the building, and optimal orientation toward the sun.

Emerging under the same socio-economic parameters as the majority of houses in Bosnia and Herzegovina- within a small budget, an underdeveloped construction industry, deregulated urban planning conditions, and chaotic building permit bureaucracy- the House NHRV is an attempt to subvert the banal reality of a contemporary house in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It challenges the status quo of contemporariness by being an unexpected and diverse response to its immediate and broader context through inherently ordinary means.

### ***II.2.3. Technical Aspects and the Affordability***

One of the biggest technical challenges of the NHRV project was the design of the envelope that was able to meet the criteria of a low-energy building, for pronounced conditions of harsh continental climate, with long and cold winters and short but warm summers, within a relatively limited budget. As mentioned in previous parts of the chapter, the solid envelope of the house contains two types of ventilated façade with different final claddings: a solid envelope covered with white, plasticized, corrugated metal sheets and a solid envelope covered by natural wooden cladding, made from White

Pinewood. The metal cladding has been placed on the east and west elevation, including the roof of the building, while the wooden paneling has been laid on the north and south elevations of the house, on the surfaces containing glass openings.



*Figure 45-Wooden cladding on the south façade © Filter archive*

In both cases, baring substructural elements of the façade were made from ordinary wooden billets covered with a protective coating and attached to the baring wall surface over a thin layer of neoprene that served as a thermal bridge barrier. This unusual choice of material was made to avoid unnecessary expenses, which would occur in the case of a standard aluminium substructure usage. It allowed the price reduction of the façade by two-thirds. It made it possible for a simple house such as the House NHRV to obtain a ventilated façade and increase thermal stability during the summer.

Because thermal insulation such as mineral wool was, at that time, significantly more expensive than polystyrene claddings, the latter type of



thermal insulation was the material of choice for the house. Expanded polystyrene was laid in between the wooden billets of the abovementioned substructure, three centimeters behind the final cladding. The gaps between the billets and the thermal insulation were filled with polyurethane foam to reduce negative thermal intrusions in places not entirely covered by primary thermal insulation. The polystyrene surface was coated with reinforced plaster cladding to protect the gaps between the insulation panels and add a certain amount of fire protection regarding exterior walls and the roof. Upon layering, such cladding materials were attached to wooden billets while leaving visible joints made by a screw in the case of wooden cladding and water-tight bolts in the case of corrugated metal.

In addition to thermal insulation, thirty centimeters thick aerated concrete masonry blocks were used as the material for the primary wall structure to increase the overall thermal resilience of the building during cold winter conditions. The same system was used for the ceiling structure between two floors and the material used for the sloping roof ceiling. Besides reasons related to energy efficiency, this system allowed further savings within the budget for multiple reasons.

First, the system made significant savings in terms of costs associated with the labor hours because it was significantly more efficient than standard adobe systems. Further on, due to the advantages of this construction system, the inner surfaces of the walls did not need cement mortar cladding but were only covered by the simple, smooth plaster cladding.

The masonry mentioned above proved itself cost-effective in terms of the prefabricated system of scaffolding used for horizontal and vertical concrete cerclages. Aerated concrete blocks with circular openings were used as captured formwork for the vertical concrete elements.

In contrast, U and L-shaped blocks were used in the case of the horizontal concrete elements. Again, this method proved itself useful regarding equalization of heat transfer coefficients on the spots where the concrete



The thermal insulation on the floor surfaces touching the ground was again provided by the ten centimeters thick layer of expanded polystyrene, placed above the concrete floor slab and covered with the plastic foil to prevent water damage during the screed pouring process.

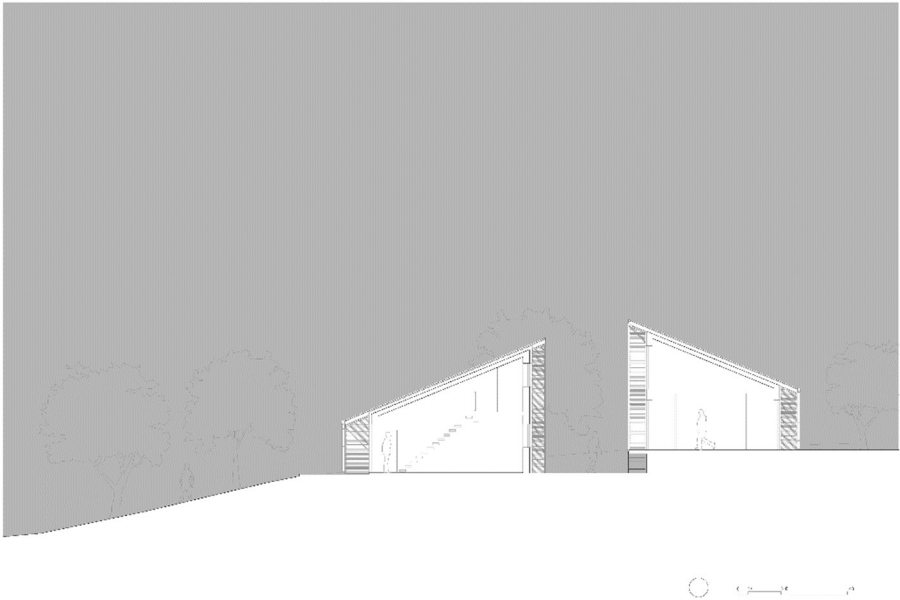
The glass openings of the house were made with high-quality wooden frames and probably present the weakest points of the house in terms of thermal protection while having U values equalling 1.0-1.5 W/m<sup>2</sup>K. However, to reduce the heat losses, glazed surfaces of the house were reduced to a “minimal optimum” while still following the sizes recommended by the local standards. For instance, windows located on the northern exterior wall of the building are much smaller than glazed surfaces on the south side. This decision was made to reduce heat losses on the cold side of the building and to allow more effective sun entry on the warm, southern side of the building.

Calculation of thermal protection made through the software URSA Building Physics proved that the envelope meets the low-energy criteria. In addition, the calculation of thermal stability on the summer regime and the analysis of water vapor diffusion showed that the construction of ventilated envelopes also meets the standards.

Besides the structural detailing and characteristics of the envelope mentioned above, the energy efficiency of the building during the hot summer conditions was also increased by the proper mass of the building, which was achieved by using the heavy, solid masonry system for the walls, as well as for the roof ceilings. Further on, the vertical openness of the house enables very efficient cross ventilation of the main living areas while allowing air to flow right beneath the roof ceiling in a south-north direction.

For similar reasons, the northern roof eave was extended to protect increasingly glazed surfaces of the house from overheating during the summertime. At the same time, wooden window shutters were designed to control the amount of sunlight during hot days of spring.

To reduce the overall cost, reinforced concrete was only used in parts of the building where it was impossible to introduce different and more cost-effective materials. Therefore, reinforced concrete was used only in the case of vertical and horizontal cerclages and as a material for the foundation strips and foundation walls. In this manner, the amount of steel necessary for the reinforcement was brought to a minimum while affecting the cost efficiency of the house in a very effective way.



*Figure 47- Section @ Vedad Islambegovic*

Finishing craftworks were also oriented towards the aspect of affordability, especially for the reason that these works were taking place close to the end of the construction process when the general budget tended to reach its limits. In such a situation, the developer and architects had to be creative to achieve the goals on a shoestring budget.

For example, the ceramic tiles, as well as many other features of the interior, were bought on sale at discounts as mildly damaged goods or less

valuable material leftovers in warehouses. The final part and the rest of the process were very time-consuming for all participants due to the extreme necessity of on-site presence and intensive cost management while working within discouraging conditions of the underdeveloped construction industry of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### ***II.2.4. The Lessons Learned***

Again, everyone involved in the development process was facing many challenges, such as the atypical combination of conventional building systems and materials, severe cost management, local bureaucratic clutter, and the lack of resources as a general trait of the underdeveloped construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, when observed from a time distance, no matter how exhausting this experience was, the final result does not appear to me as an outcome of the ambition to create yet another house in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, I see it as a successful product of an exciting learning journey on behalf of all the people involved. When compared to the intermediate surrounding and complicated conditions in which it was made, the House NHRV seems like an extraordinary response to the local context, assembled from locally available means while at the same time being crucially engaged in changing it for the better. As such, it was nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award in 2015.<sup>78</sup>

However, concerning affordability, several things can be learned from this experience. First of all, cost management starts even before the design of the building is made, and it begins with finding the proper and affordable location. As visible from the abovementioned, this is not an easy task but rather a time-consuming effort that requires a lot of research and professional involvement. Still, making the right decision is crucial for

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<sup>78</sup> The full name of the award: European Award for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award; more detail at: <https://miesarch.com/work/2422>

further development and the overall cost-effectiveness of the whole project.

Further on, the incremental strategy of the development, if embedded within the design concept, proves itself as an efficient tool in cost management. The case study shows that it affects the overall process while allowing a significant amount of flexibility within the budget and available time frame.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the building layout is one of the crucial parameters of cost reduction. In other words, unnecessary spatial surpluses tend to create unnecessary expenses. Therefore, it is essential to avoid useless and extensive areas, such as transitional spaces inside the house or spaces that are not precisely defined in their functional role.

Although it may sound simple, the choice of proper materials and construction systems is one of the crucial aspects of affordability, which takes a lot of time to research and make the right decision. This task requires an effort to collect all the necessary data regarding locally available materials and the related prices. The data gathered must be processed through so that one can make the right decision.

Finally, an important lesson that can be learned from this experience is that cost-effectiveness and energy efficiency may not be goals opposed to each other. However, if willing to achieve this goal, both architects and developers are challenged to think “out of the box.” In other words, besides design, a certain amount of technical creativity is critical in a situation as such.

Although this project is several years old, hopefully, the experience presented in this chapter might provide valuable guidelines for the contemporary situation when the meaning of the word “affordability” has gained much, much more significance than it had just a few years ago.



Figure 48 - House NHRV in snow © Filter archive

### II.3.0 House VLHS

This project is undoubtedly the most challenging and exciting one I had the opportunity to deal with. It marked almost five years of my life as an immensely preoccupying task consisting of numerous conceptual, technical, and developmental decisions that had to be made almost daily. At the same time, the whole process was very comprehensive while going as far as it can get with the total design approach nowadays. Still, it certainly proved itself to be worthy of an effort because, in the end, it was awarded as the best-built design at the yearly exhibition Collegium Artisticum 2021 and, similar to the House NHRV, it got nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award the same year.



*Figure 49-House VLHS, south-west elevation © Anida Krečo*



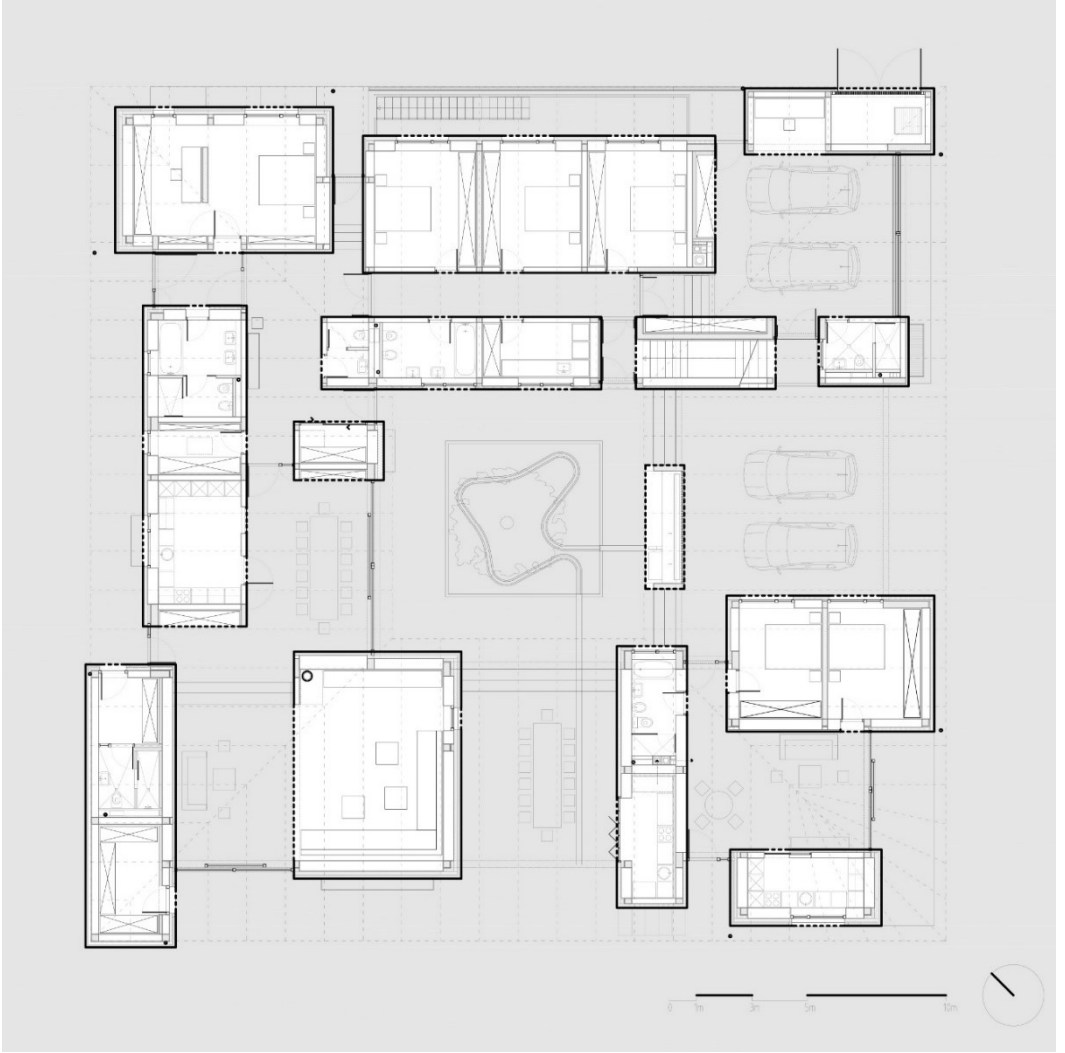


Figure 50-House VLHS, ground floor plan - © Vedad Islambegović

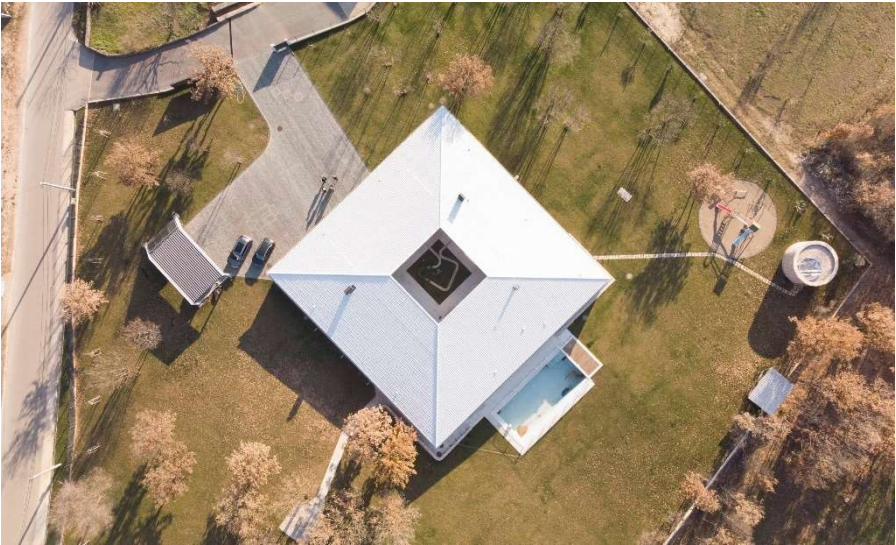
The house is situated in the sunny southern part of the country, within the rural landscape of the Mediterranean inland. It is surrounded by beautiful rocky slopes of Herzegovinian mountains, girding the valley of the breathtaking Neretva River, while being placed in the area relatively close to Mostar – a city with a vibrant cultural heritage foremost marked by the astonishing bridge from the 16th-century.



*Figure 51-House VLHS, central atrium with the tree and the element of water © Anida Krečo*

In terms of conceptual design, the house is structured as an indoor extension of the surrounding outdoor space while creating an active environment where traditional boundaries dividing the exterior and interior of a building tend to be vague and much less rigid. At the same time, the space is designed as a set of highly customized sequences created to meet the specific needs of the user, as well as to reinvent culturally sensitive architectural patterns inherent to the local habits of living.

In addition to the unconventional conceptual approach, the House VLHS is also an ambitious low-energy edifice with low audits represented by the figure of only 12.7 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year for the net conditioned area of approximately 600 m<sup>2</sup>. Besides the complex technical approach and careful engineering, passive design-related methods were other critical factors in achieving this outstanding environmental result. By this, I primarily refer to the sensitive architectural design including careful programmatic distribution in regards to orientation; liable organization of the layout, allowing passive airflow or blocking negative environmental impact; balanced volumetric scaling of the interior space; environmentally responsive geometric modelling, and the choice of materials.



*Figure 52- drone photography © Vedad Viteškić*

Despite being a very challenging task in its essence, the one of a type that would be difficult to handle anywhere, the house was boldly developed under the parameters of local contextual reality. All issues that I have elaborated on in the first part of the book, such as bureaucratic chaos,

underdeveloped construction industry, and lack of state subventions, have also been present in this case from the first day of the development process.

The following sub-chapter will provide a detailed conceptual explanation of the project, while the second will deal with the technical aspects of it. The third will focus on the construction process experience and issues occurring within. Finally, the last one will offer a concluding point of view on the challenges of creating a low-energy edifice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like the other case studies presented above, all of the data presented in the case study are based on direct involvement and first-hand experience.

### ***11.3.1. Conceptual description***

Generally speaking, in a conceptual sense, the House aims to reinterpret culturally sensitive spatial patterns inherent to the local customs of living and specific phenomenological aspects of Herzegovinian urbanity. However, this proved not to be just another architectural narrative but a sensation that can easily be experienced directly within the house. By this, I refer to spatial relations and especially the flow of movement highly resembling a notion of a small local village, only this time placed under one big roof.

This design intention is also evident within the programmatic distribution of the house. The general layout consists of carefully scattered box-like structures placed on several levels of the terraced platform following a mild terrain-levelling present on the site. In a practical sense, these boxes represent the intimate and servant units of a house while the space being formed between them becomes a served, public space of the building.

So, in an abstract sense, visually and in practical terms, the concept highly recalls the phenomenological experience of streets, squares, and plazas being surrounded and defined by small-scale, solid volumes resembling urban-tissue. The whole system is covered and held together by a shallow quadruple roof while circling an atrium, an open void placed in the center of the house.

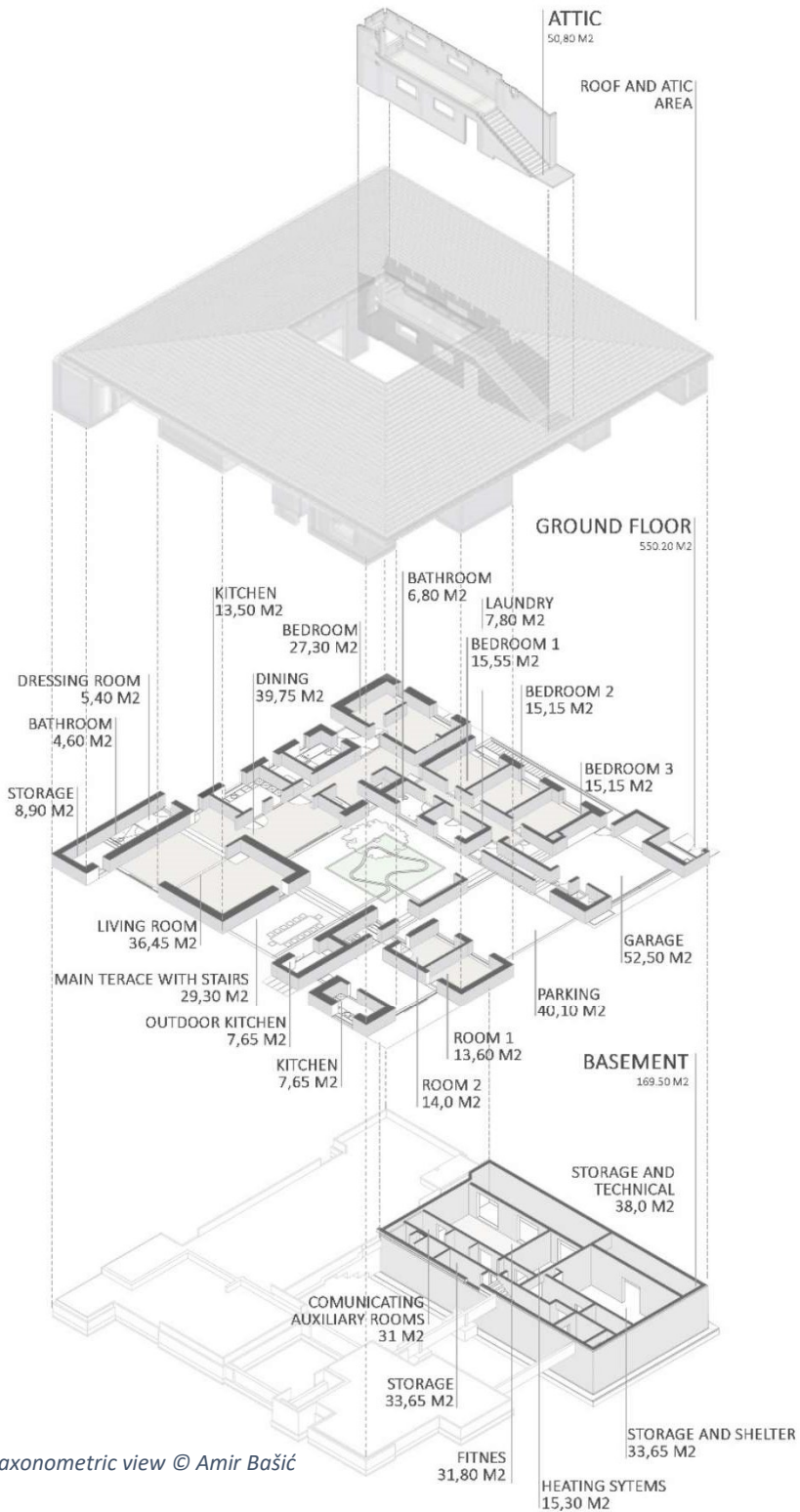


Figure 53- axonometric view © Amir Bašić

As a consequence, the inner landscape of the House contains a variety of different scales made by the collision between the regular geometry of *boxes* and the sloping geometry of the roof. In such conditions, many visual and pedestrian “gaps” between inner and outer space emerge in response to the fragmented horizontal layout. At the same time, the roof starts to be experienced as a canopy, covering both the exterior and interior spaces of the house. Consequently, physical boundaries become flexible and unclear, while a strong bond between inner space and the surrounding landscape appears as an outcome.

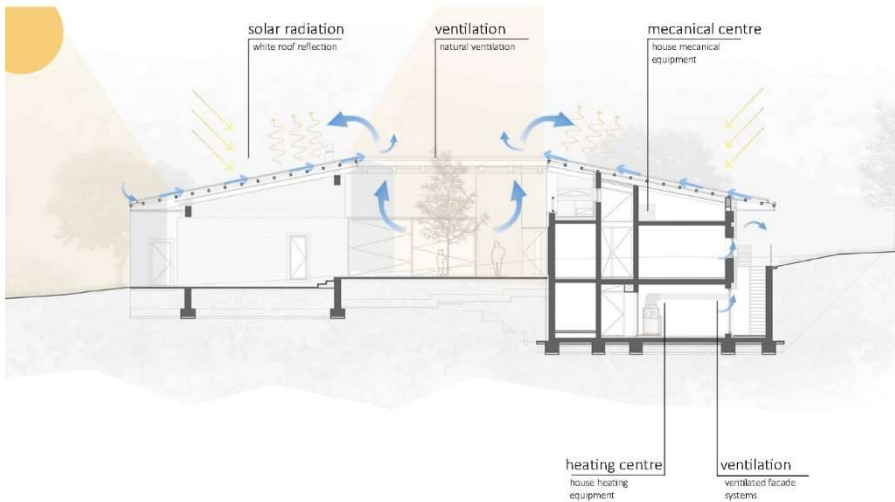


Figure 54-House VLHS, natural cooling and ventilation principles, together with mechanical systems © Vedad Islambegović

This conceptual approach also reflects different design decisions dealing with various environmental issues, apart from the abovementioned phenomenological reasons. For example, wide openings between solid volumes, glazed or not, are scattered all around the house, allowing easy and effective cross-ventilation between the external perimeter and the central atrium, as well as between differently sun-oriented sides of the building. In this manner, the atrium becomes a certain kind of solar



chimney, a spatial setup pulling the hot air out and providing a house with a temporary, controllable airflow when glazed surfaces are open and with the permanent breeze on the open terraces.

Further, the scattered layout of the building allows efficient control of sun-level entering the house. In other words, fragmented solid box-like elements are placed in a manner blocking the solar radiation in the periods when it's too high. Unequally distributed depth of the roof eave serves the same purpose while being differently proportioned regarding the orientation of the perimeter it covers.

On another level, the house is designed as a certain kind of movie strip whereby movement through the house offers separate experiential sequences happening in continuity. This means that every single corner of the house is detailed, scaled, and equipped in a manner that reflects activities happening around it and functions that are being associated with it.



*Figure 55- House VLHS, entrance to the atrium with the lattice for the fragrant creeping roses on the left, and a detail of the small "stream" inside the atrium on the right © Anida Krečo*

For example, the area of the eastern terrace, serving as the main entrance into the atrium, has been equipped with the lattice for the fragrant creeping roses grooving next to the small water basin. This was done to pay respect to the Herzegovinian customs, according to which a delightful smell should be welcoming the people when they enter the house. To have this pleasurable experience throughout the year, three types of roses have been planted, each flowering in separate periods. For the same reason, short

extensions of the stairs leading to the elevated terrace of the atrium have been designed as a place for a colorful variety of flowers growing in the pots.



*Figure 56- lattice for creeping roses © Anida Kreco*

At the same time, the water basin was designed not only to serve its primary purpose but also to be a place of rest next to the roses. Besides the integrated bench, it consists of two water beds, the main one serving the most common purpose and the second one, most often filled with the water, playing the role of the natural cooling device for drinks and food being served on the main terrace.

Similarly, a cantilevered bench has been placed right next to the main entrance, which, apart from being a place to sit down and take one's shoes on or off, also serves as a shade above the storage space for outdoor footwear. This is very important because the outdoor footwear tends to overheat in the boiling Herzegovinian summertime.



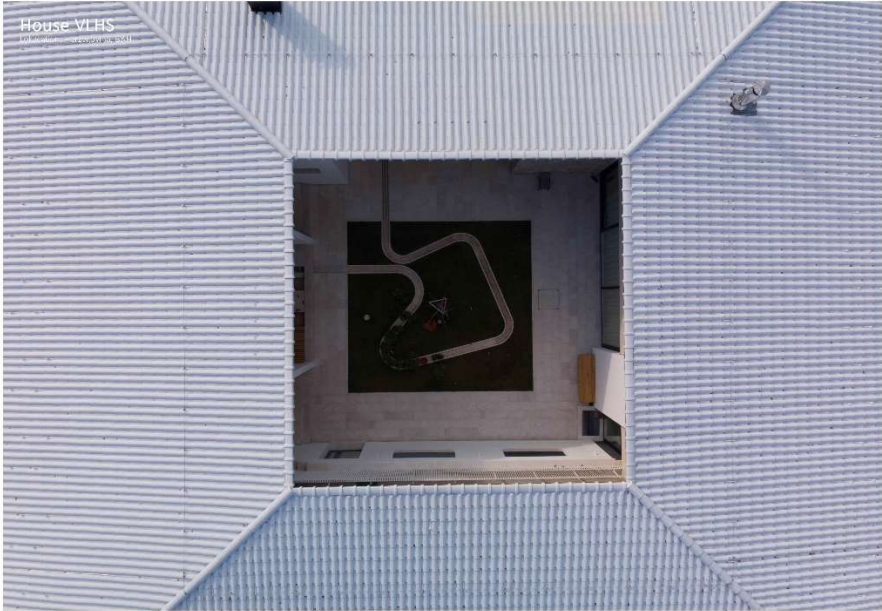
Two similar benches have been placed on other sequences of the house, one below the kitchen window facing the pool, which, besides being a place to sit down and rest, also serves as a particular form of the snack bar for the food being prepared in the kitchen; and the other one placed on the southern wall next to the glazed opening of the living room, serving as the place for quick breaks after work in a garden, as well as the shelter for the firewood needed in the living area.



*Figure 57- stair leading to the upper terrace © Anida Kreco*

Further on, the elevated terrace within the atrium was formed to create an allotted, more intimate space inside it. The deck also serves as a place for sleeping on hot summer nights while having a bed-like niche designed for this particular purpose. This small space is covered by the roof eave and surrounded by walls on all three sides to protect people using it from the rain and heavy winds occurring in these areas. The horizontally angled fence gridding the terrace on the south side is designed to block the views from the atrium but still allow eye contact between the deck and the eastern entrance into the area of the house.

With similar intentions, wooden ladders have been installed below external openings leading to the attic. Besides serving as ordinary ladders, this element also serves as an instrument for physical recreation, such as Swedish ladders and a hanger for portable shelves. These shelves are being assembled to serve as an additional outdoor furniture used daily and taken off when ladders are needed for another purpose occasionally.



*Figure 58- the atrium and the waterstream© Anida Kreco*

The most exciting detail of the house, the small-scale water stream, is placed in the atrium's center. It surrounds a tree standing in the middle of the composition, and it waters it while spontaneously flowing in the direction of the garden. Although it looks unusual, it represents a simple and practical utility. A watercourse is placed on the surface instead of a pipe below the ground, connecting a home well with the water tank needed for watering the garden.

In addition, the creek is an instrument providing the main terrace area with the murmuring pleasure of water while creating at least a bit more pleasurable sensations of the refreshing atmosphere. The tree growing in the center of the atrium has been planted with the same ambition- to completely cover the central opening, provide the house with forest sounds, and create a natural shade in the foreseeable future.



*Figure 59- the ladders © Anida Kreco*

On an abstract level, the water stream going through the house is a homage to the hotel Ruža in Mostar, the work of Aga Khan Laureate and Bosnian academician Zlatko Ugljen. This masterpiece of modern Yugoslav architecture had a small sleeve of the river Radobolja flowing through its primary public, both internal and external spaces. Unfortunately, the building got highly damaged during the war and was destroyed afterward to provide space for another building, much less worthy of attention than the previous one. The creek within a house is a small-scale monument paying tribute to this lost modernist heritage.

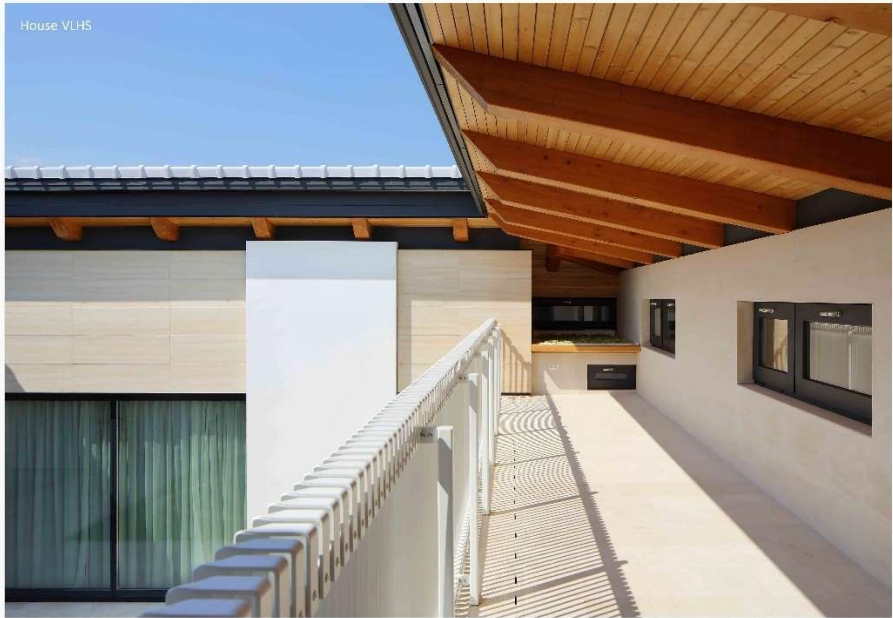


Figure 60- elevated terrace and the sleeping niche © Anida Krečo

The house abounds in similar sequences and details, inside and outside the home, each matching its particular purpose and making each corner of the space a unique experience. They all contribute to the general impression of spatial multiformity, while various corners serve specific activities, events, and moods emerging as an outcome.

The following text will provide further explanation of technical details concerning the project.

### ***11.3.2. Technical aspects***

The House VLHS can be classified as a category A low-energy house with minimal heat transfers ranging from 0.114 to 0.326 W/m<sup>2</sup>K. In other words, the simulated and achieved results match while reducing the overall consumption of energy needed for cooling, heating, and air conditioning to 12.7 kW/m<sup>2</sup>/year or astonishing 28 euros per month in conditions of

current energy prices in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, a 10-hectare property consumes additional energy for irrigation, pool use, lightning of the entire property, and power supply of household appliances, which approximately represents a significantly higher cost than the one needed only for climatization of the house.

As I mentioned before, despite being far from the sea, the house is still situated in the hot surroundings of the Mediterranean inland. This area is characterized by a hot, dry climate with temperatures reaching even 45°C in the summer. Although winter temperatures are mild compared to the central parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, going down only to -6°C on average, the cold periods are extraordinarily windy. However, this area is considered to be the hottest part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the one having the highest number of sunny days.

For this reason, the environmental stability of the house during the regime of summer conditions was a crucial part of the energy-saving strategy. This was foremost achieved by the correct orientation of the house, the layout's geometry, protective building elements, the appropriate mass of the structure, the right choice of the materials, and the adequate mechanical systems integrated.

Although a passive design-related approach plays a significant role in the conditioning of the whole structure, additional mechanical systems have been introduced as inevitable support, being active when the passive energy-saving capacities of the house reach their maximum. Regarding this, the house relies on the energy-efficient, air-water heat pump technology, supplying the house with both cooling and heating. This technology is combined with floor heating/cooling systems and air temperature controlling fan-coil devices.

In addition to this, due to the low air exchange within the house and very tight openings, energy-recuperating mechanical ventilation has been installed to provide the building with the inflow of fresh air. Further on, the house's water heating strongly relies on the system of solar heat collectors

providing heat even on sunny winter days. Instead of using the roof, they have been installed outside the home and integrated into the carport structure foremost to achieve more manageable maintenance and easier access.

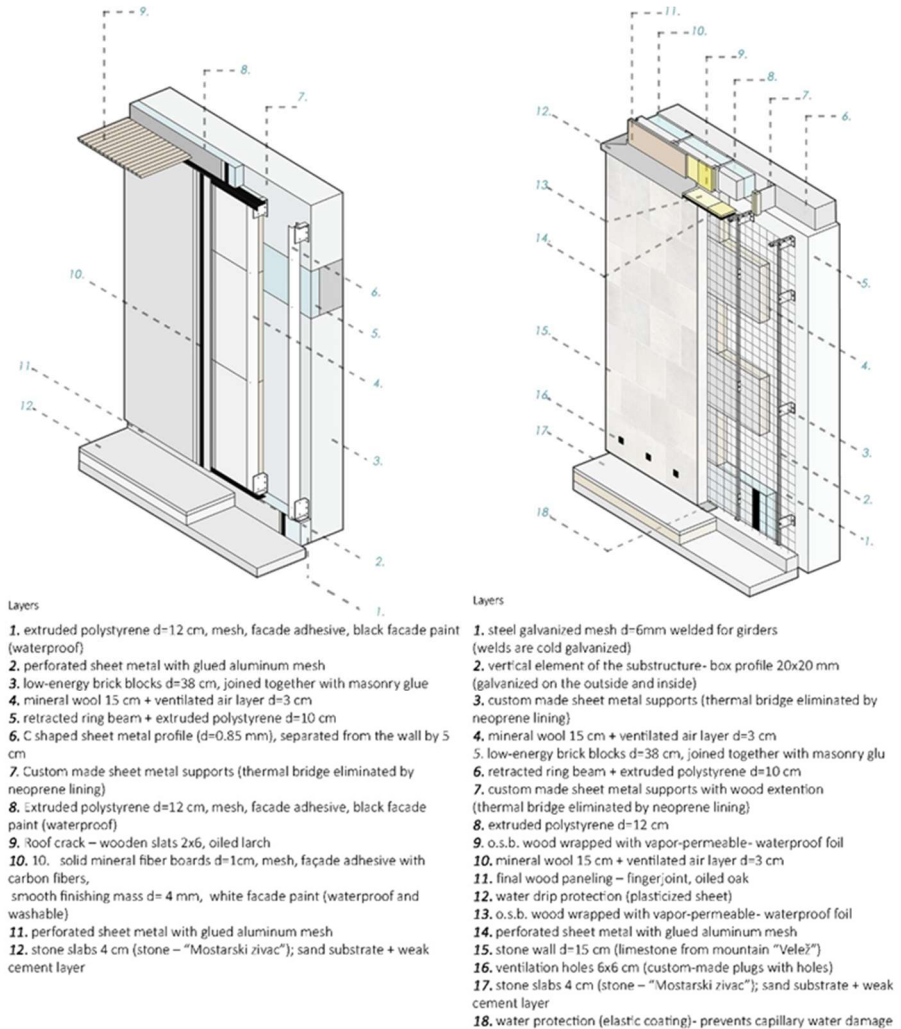


Figure 61- House VLHS, ventilated façade details © Amir Bašić



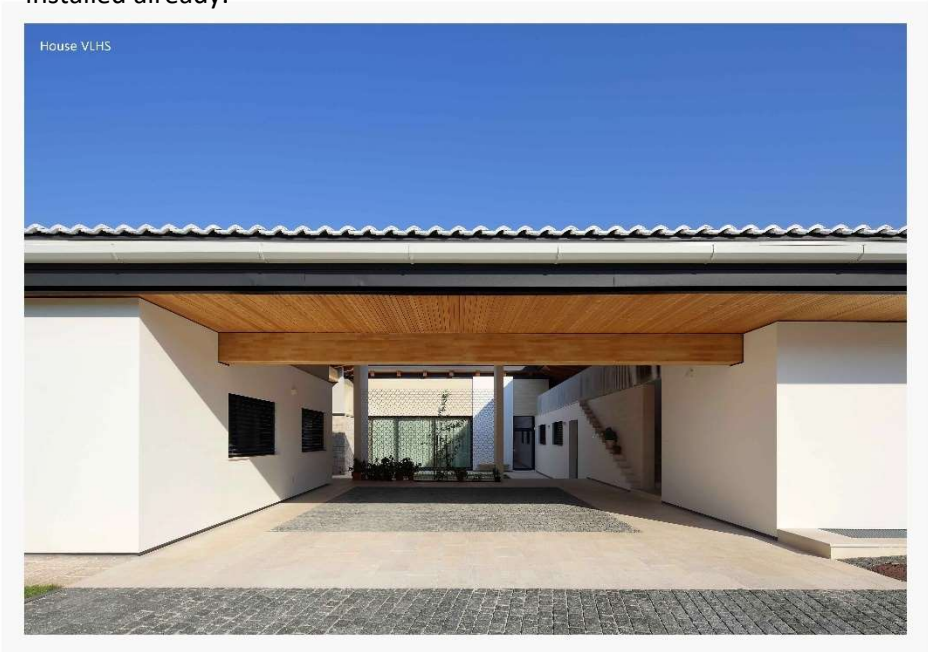
Although being considered an option, photovoltaic systems have not been used as a technical support system in this project. This was primarily because their price was far above the affordable 1\$ per Watt limit at the time when the house was being designed. An additional problem in this regard was related to underdeveloped network exchange systems and non-transparent legal procedures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are related to it. In other words, it takes a lot of time to obtain permits from government institutions in charge, in order to be considered a small-scale energy producer, selling energy surpluses on the existing grid. Without these permissions, home electricity producers are doomed to rely on batteries storing the energy, which makes the whole thing even much less affordable in the long run.



Figure 62- south-west elevation with the roof eave © Anida Kreco

However, the project has provided an option for the addition of such systems in the future, and as the prices of photo-voltaic systems tend to drop, there will probably be a small-scale powerplant emerging next to the

house. This will not be hard because all the necessary outlets have been installed already.



*Figure 63 - main entrance to the atrium @ Anida Kreco*

Despite being just a single-family home, the House VLHS is a relatively complex building in structural terms. The house walls are built with a massive masonry system implying low-energy brick blocks interconnected with the special polyurethane masonry glue, reducing thermal bridges up to 17%. The structural thickness of the external walls varies between 38 and 50 cm while depending on the particular orientation of the wall curtain. The inner walls are also heavy and made of brick to increase the overall mass of the building. Their thickness varies between 20 and 25 cm, including even not load-bearing walls.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an area prone to earthquakes. Therefore, the walls had to be stabilized with the concrete anti-truss elements, so-called cerclages, forming a frame around each masonry curtain. To balance the



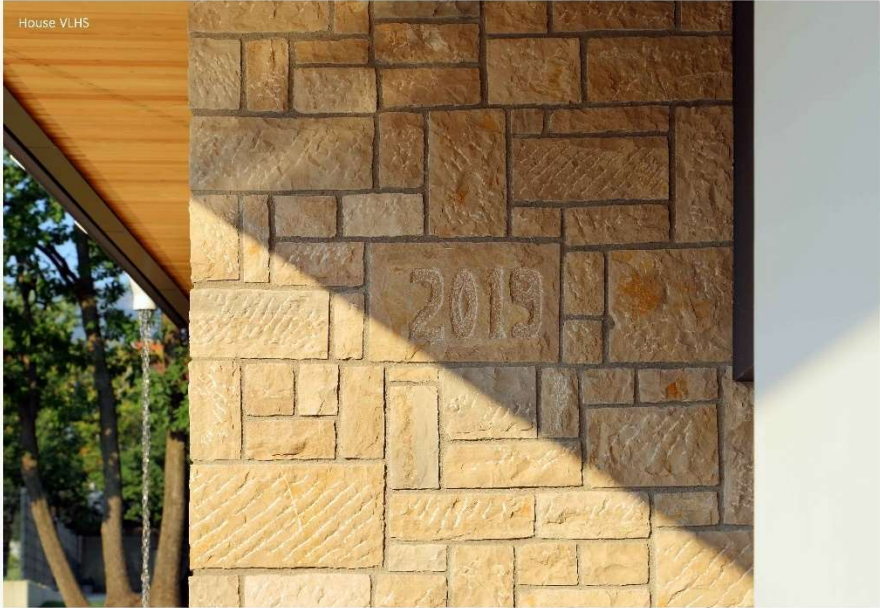
heat transfer coefficients between the masonry surfaces and those made from concrete, these concrete-frame elements have been retracted for 10 cm from the external edge of the wall . This gap was additionally covered with thermal insulation made of extruded polystyrene. However, besides reducing thermal transfer significantly, the whole system plays a significant role as an element of passive cooling while magnifying the overall thermal capacity of the house.

Similarly, the sleeping area structure is overwhelmingly massive due to the mass-related thermal cooling capacity, and all rooms have been covered with the additional 15 cm thick concrete slab beneath the roof. In other words, a concrete slab provides extra mass to the sleeping area while creating an attic as a buffer zone between the inner conditions and external temperatures. Additionally, this space is being used as the area for mechanical equipment of the house, such as air-recuperating devices and installation lines.



Figure 64- The living room © Anida Kreco

The issue of the proper building mass was one of the most critical conceptual premises determining many other decisions made in the project. For example, this is why the inner sides of the walls have been covered with a layer of dense cement mortar; the predominant pavement in the house has been made from the 3 cm thick white stone, and some inner walls have been additionally covered with the 15 cm wide layer of rough stone masonry.



*Figure 65- stone façade © Anida Kreco*

Besides their role in the passive cooling of the house, the stone surfaces also serve their phenomenological part of blurring the boundaries between the exterior and interior space by simply crossing differently conditioned areas and negating the separation in the visual sense.

All structural surfaces of the house connected with the external environment, including those in touch with the ground, have been covered with thermal insulation, varying from 10 cm to 20 cm. Ground floor concrete slabs have been sided with the 10 cm thick layer of the extruded

polystyrene facing the earth and with 8 cm wide expanded polystyrene facing the upper surface of the slab. Foundation walls and basement walls have been treated similarly while having 10 cm of extruded polystyrene on the perimeter facing the earth.

While most external walls are covered with different types of ventilated facades which include at least 15 cm of low  $\lambda$  mineral wool, some exterior walls of the house, which belong to the service areas, have been covered with 15 to 20 cm of extruded polystyrene.

To cool the exterior walls further, two types of ventilated facades were used as final outer cladding: a facade with a 15 cm thick masonry coating and a monolithic ventilated facade with a base of mineral-lime plates. Besides final cladding, these systems, by default, include 3 cm of the circulated air gap and at least 15 cm of the energy-efficient mineral wool.

Both types were relatively difficult to build because the supporting systems were not available in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they were too expensive to import due to the relatively small amount needed on the construction site and challenging to implement concerning unconventional building geometry and structure. Therefore, supporting systems used in this case were locally custom-made while using reverse engineering methods. That is to say, standard systems which were not available were examined and contextualized to create a similar system that could be produced locally on a small scale.

Total heat transfer coefficients at the glassed surfaces of the house range from 0.07 to 0.9 W/m<sup>2</sup>K and are covered with Low-E glass in three layers. Used systems had to be imported from abroad, specially tailored locally, and installed according to the manufacturer's instructions. To do this, a local co-manufacturer had to be trained. Unfortunately, many mistakes were made during the process.

A particular challenge in the project was the roof surface and its potential for overheating in the context of sunny Herzegovina. Its basic structure consists of the high-span laminated wood beams with cross-section size of

40 x 20 cm, while the secondary structure was made in three layers of ordinary wood, with cross-section of 5 x 8 cm. The space between the primary beams was filled with 30 cm of low  $\lambda$  mineral wool, while the distance between secondary elements was filled with an additional 10 cm to achieve the U value of 0.11 W/m<sup>2</sup>K. Besides thermal insulation, a 10 cm thick ventilating layer was used to produce the airflow beneath the roof's surface. In contrast, white-colored tiles were used as final cladding to reduce the thermal burden to an unavoidable minimum.

Relying on the rich heritage of stone carving of the Neretva basin, the House was built with a broad spectrum of different indigenous materials, ranging from the paving of the house made of white Mostar stone called 'Živac' through protected wall surfaces lined with Herzegovinian 'Tenelija,' all the way to the rustic facade coating made of limestone from the Velež mountain tops. It is very likely that one of the last generations of people who practiced this, unfortunately, extinct craft showed their craft skills at this house.

### ***II.3.3. The Process of development***

Development of the house lasted more than four years, while two years and nine months were dedicated to the process of intensive construction. Conceptual design lasted a year including the development of the numerous technical drawings. Further, additional detailed technical drawings were being made all the time throughout the process of development.

The preliminary design process started in 2014 and lasted until 2015, while the construction process started two years later, in 2017, and lasted until 2020. As visible from these periods, the project experienced a two-year delay in development due to health issues experienced by the construction site manager and personal issues experienced by the client.

Challenges occurring during the development process can be roughly divided into two separate categories: government policy and support

regarding the low-energy buildings and the general problem of the underdeveloped construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Figure 66- construction process © Vedad Islambegović

The first category of challenges represents only a tiny part of the policy problem that anyone involved in the construction process can experience on an everyday basis, ranging from the lack of regulatory and urban plans to prevailing bureaucratic clutter, lengthy procedures, up and complicated and expensive process of obtaining building permissions. However, several specific observations concerning low-energy houses can be made in this regard from the experience of the VLHS House:

First of all, obtaining building permits for energy-efficient buildings is as lengthy as for traditional buildings. It lasted even longer - more than one year and six months in this particular case. This delay can be found in the fact that project documentation literally “got lost” inside the bureaucratic mess within the local municipality. Luckily, the client had preserved initial documents that stated the project was handed over to the city authority, but the process of obtaining permission had to be restarted. In the end, it lasted two years.

From the direct, on-site experience, one can claim that many informal buildings built nearby, at the same time as this house, got their permissions retroactively much sooner than this particular one. Although this experience does not only concern low-energy buildings, it represents a somewhat discouraging start to the process, especially from the point of view of someone who, in an environmental sense, is trying to build something that reaches far beyond the average.

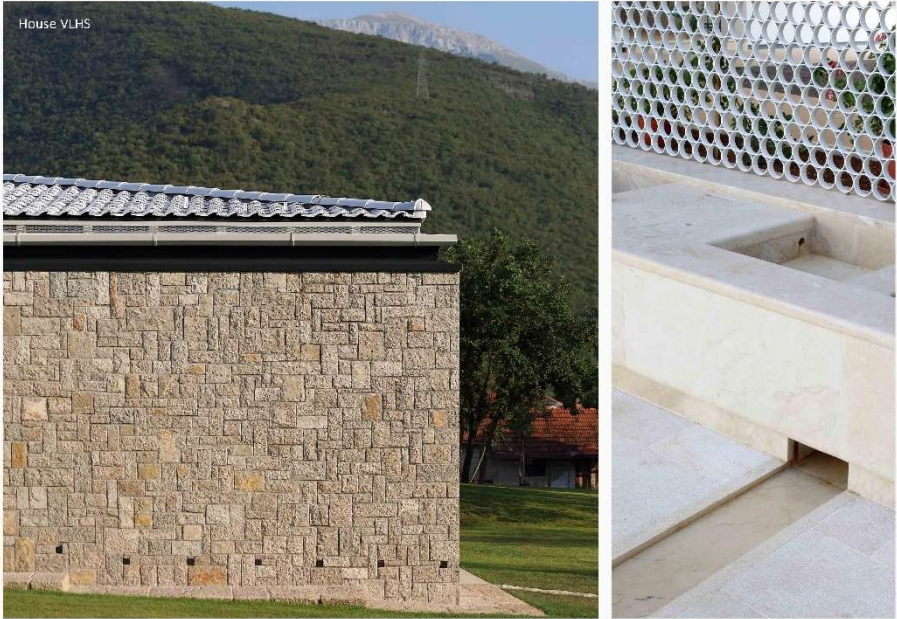


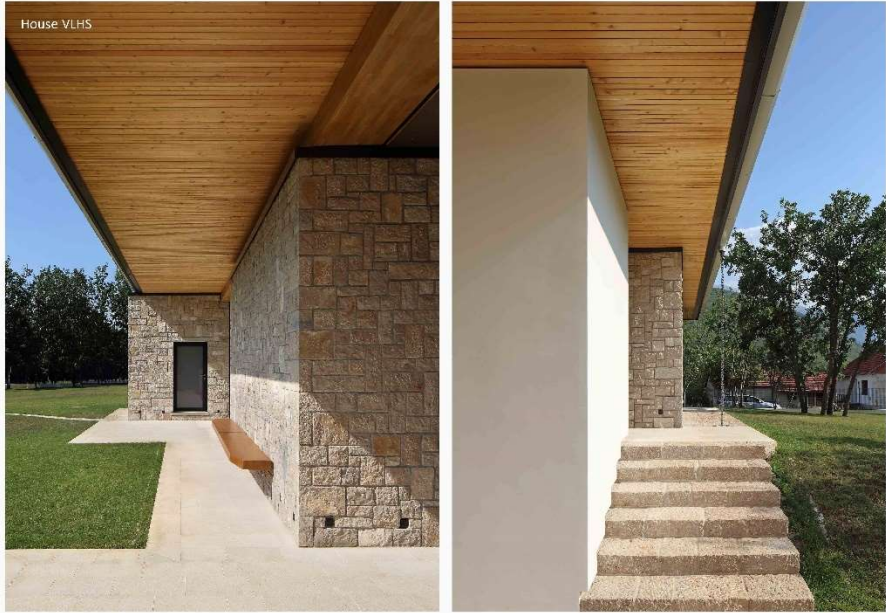
Figure 67- stone detailing © Anida Kreco

Secondly, obtaining building permits for low-energy buildings costs equally compared to traditional buildings, and it is even less affordable than the legalization of informal structures. As irrational as it may sound, the latter appears to be even more cost-effective than the first two cases because it saves time at the beginning of the process.

Further on, Initiatives to support or subsidize low-energy buildings are lacking at the local or national government levels. This may vary regarding the different state entities and cantons, but when this house was built,



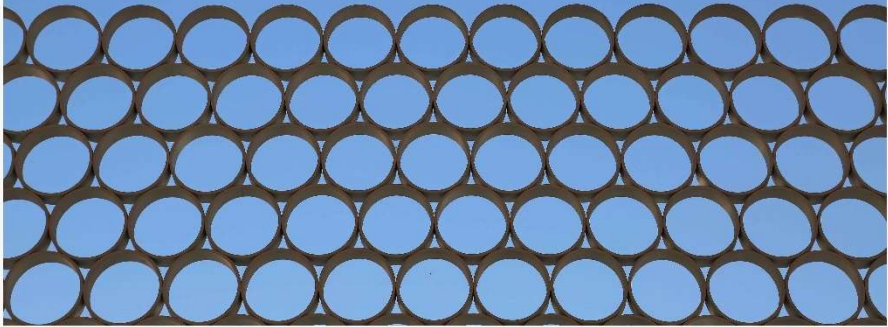
there were almost no subsidies that could be useful in the development. However, one private bank was offering limited interest-free loans for low-energy buildings with the help of an EU grant. Again, this subsidy was not provided by the local or national government.



*Figure 68- detail of the roof eave © Anida Kreco*

In addition to this, specific materials and systems necessary for low-energy construction development are also not subsidized. As might be discussed, it would be reasonable for certain critical systems to be imported with the VAT exemption or VAT reduction. The same could be done for the insulation or the Low-E wall/roof materials.

Photovoltaic systems are problematic in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the underdeveloped network exchange systems and non-transparent, complicated legal procedures.



*Figure 69- lattice detail © Anida Kreco*

The second category of challenges strongly relates to the general problem of the underdeveloped construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with specific problems regarding low-energy construction:

The construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks a specialized and trained labor force in low-energy systems. This problem is also a broad issue in the construction industry because the qualified labor force is leaving the country due to low wages and low living standards in this economic sector. In the case of the House VLHS, it was relatively hard to keep the flow of construction intact due to the constantly present lack of labor force, labor fluctuation, and especially lack of qualified labor force, such as professional bricklayers, stonemasons, tinsmiths, welders, and many others.

The construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina is inexperienced in low-energy development. Although the House VLHS had many experienced artisans involved in the process, none had any previous experience building



a Low-E building. Before starting any abnormal activity on the construction site, many elaborate explanations and technical drawings had to be made on behalf of the engineers involved. In many instances, craftsmanship had to be additionally educated, slowing down the process.

The time needed to implement unconventional low-energy systems and materials is almost impossible to calculate by using available time norms provided by manufacturers. This problem is closely related to the lack of experience regarding new materials in the Bosnian construction industry. For example, the masonry construction with special masonry glue took three times more than expected because clay blocks were heavier than the standard ones. They were harder to cut because special equipment was needed, and craftsmanship was hesitant to use them.

It is hard to estimate the consumption of unconventional materials despite the norms provided by the manufacturer. This problem proved to be a case at the VLHS construction site. For example, much more concrete, up to 30% more than calculated, was used in horizontal wall reinforcements because the gaps in the masonry blocks were sucking too much concrete inside. It took a while for the engineers to come up with the solution. In another instance, mortar on the masonry blocks kept cracking because the thick blocks absorbed the water more quickly than expected, so many walls had to be overdone two times. Some quantities of material were also lost due to the lack of adequate tools.

Support systems on behalf of manufacturers are insufficient, mainly when unconventional materials are used. Again, the main reason for this issue is the lack of experience, even on behalf of the people representing the manufacturers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of the House VLHS, engineers were misinformed by the manufacturer's representatives or were given too many technical instructions to read without any direct, on-site support.

Some unconventional materials and systems are tough to obtain in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in small quantities, and if inevitable, they have

to be custom-made locally. This was the case with the structural support systems for the ventilated facades at the VLHS building site.

Despite many obstacles and challenges that emerged during the construction process, the House VLHS did not suffer almost any reduction or deviation compared to the original design goals. Although most of the work was done far above the local average expectation, the most critical resource sacrificed was the time itself.



*Figure 70- the pool area © Anida Kreco*

As seen from above, all artisans involved in the construction process were faced with several challenges such as atypical building systems, specific spatial elements, complex spatial-geometric relations, unique technology, and the general problem of the underdeveloped construction industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, when observed from the time distance, the long and exhausting experience of working on this project did not present a process of creating just another house but rather an exciting

learning journey and an adventure of building friendships, which finally resulted in creating a micro-community gathered around a mutual feeling of pride related to the accomplished result.

The experiences presented here show that almost all of the challenges that emerged during the developmental process are either policy-related or related to the lack of practical knowledge regarding the energy-efficient construction.



*Figure 71- the entrance © Anida Kreco*

The latter challenges might probably be solved as the number of low-energy buildings rises in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More companies and craftsmanship would obtain the necessary experience, and hopefully, some of them would become specialized. Further on, if, eventually, low-energy buildings start to rise in numbers, materials that are viewed as

unconventional at the moment would become more convenient and easier to obtain

However, to have low-energy buildings more present in the environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, many of the state policies have to be changed, especially those that elaborate on the issue of economic subsidies. Hopefully, this aspect will be approved in the foreseeable future, as the country will continue to approach the legislative standards of the European Union. (Islambegović, Challenges of Creating a Low-energy House in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Case Study: House VLHS, 2021)



Figure 72- the atrium and the bench next to the entrance © Anida Kreco

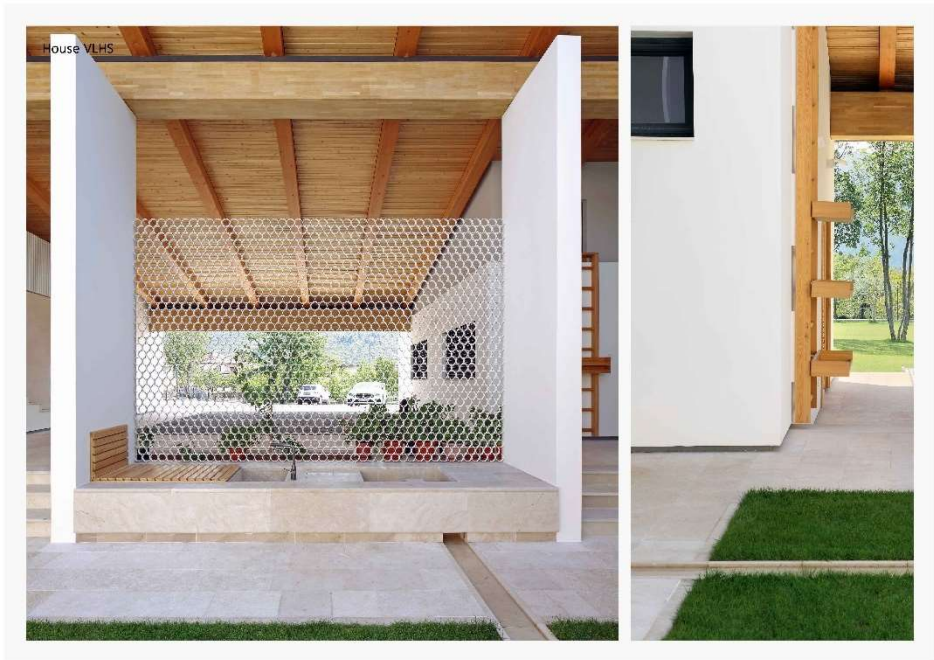


Figure 73- the water well and the ladder © Anida Kreco

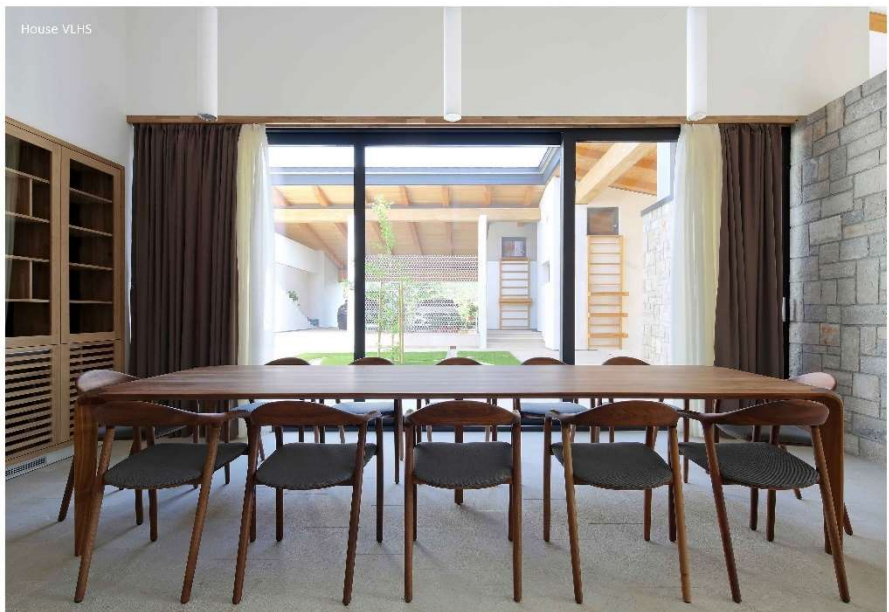


Figure 74- the dining room © Anida Kreco

### **III.0.0. Final Discussion**

The book is slowly coming to an end, and it's time to summarize the content.

In my experience, most books revolve around several essential thoughts, and those provide the essence of the books. At the same time, the rest of the content on the pages serves only as filler, connecting, justifying, and explaining these focal points. So, in the case of this book, what would they be?

Well, obviously, the first part of the book tends to describe and explain the existing context of living, working, and creating in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the perspective of someone being deeply immersed in it.

The first chapter of this part explains how the local reality, despite appearing incomprehensible and maybe even exotic and unique, is just an outcome of the same old, globally well-known postmodern features and traits, only going a bit too far in this case. What does this mean?

In other words, when compared to the global direction of the movement, particularly as seen from today's geopolitical perspective, the same processes leading to individualization, state withdrawal, reactive nationalism, and cultural fragmentation have been more intense here or have even occurred ahead of time.

The final result is a country where all systems structured around enlightenment values have failed. What has been left is a context and a society with no clear direction of movement, cynically relying only on what has been left as a default setting – a set of historically misplaced premodern values. In other words, it's a dysfunctional and nihilistic society where identities are being formed almost exclusively as a reaction against something and not around ideas fuelling further development.

The second chapter deals precisely with this thought while comprehensively explaining the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all its repercussions, including those of economic, professional, and cultural nature. It also focuses on the prevailing spatial deviations, such as informal settlements and turbo-architecture.

The third chapter attempts to review the current status of architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina while also seeking answers to how architecture relates to derogated and degraded environments like this one. The chapter concludes with an examination of two locally prevalent professional tendencies: one that conforms to the existing context and the other that challenges the status quo. What is the difference?

The first tendency is the pragmatic and the most prevailing one. There is nothing wrong with it, except that this approach has obviously failed either to produce solid-quality architecture and a functional spatial environment or even to improve the living standard of most local architects over the last three decades.

The other tendency is a bit harder to describe because there is no clear consensus regarding what is being considered the right approach. It is far from being prevalent, the professional fragmentation is still high, and there are many examples of attempts that went in this direction and failed. However, what keeps it together as a category is an ambition not to take the context only as a starting point, an unavoidable ingredient, and the easiest way to go. Instead, it almost irrationally aims to affect, improve and go beyond it while serving it as an essential point of reference. Why is this ambition important?

In my opinion, it is vital because it attempts to reinvent the significance and the necessity of architecture in a troubled and chaotic society, the one rapidly losing its sources of meaning.

I am aware that this claim may sound vague and unconvincing. Still, I am sure that many people sharing the same or similar contextual reality with me at least intuitively resonate with what I am talking about. At the same

time, I see many local architects cynically laughing out loud while reading this statement. Well, if one considers the contemporary reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and local professional experience pleasing, that is precisely what one deserves. If so, go ahead, close the book and enjoy your life.

The book's second part deals with three case studies based on first-hand professional experience. Their role within the structure of previous chapters is to provide examples of final claims made regarding the abovementioned tendencies.

The projects described in the book obviously belong to the latter category, at least in my opinion. I don't claim that they are the best examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina and that there haven't been any better to present. I simply chose them instead of writing about someone else's work because I was involved in their development, and I know much more about them than any other piece of local contemporary architecture.

All three projects are very different in their character. They even tend to elaborate on various conceptual topics and issues and one of them is not even situated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Still, they have many things in common regarding the general approach.

First of all, they all revolve around topics that are essential to contemporary architectural discussion worldwide, such as affordability, sustainability, energy efficiency, or the use of renewable materials. Why? Because however alienated and authentic the local context seems to be, too many issues troubling it are also well known to the rest of the world. In other words, these projects express the ambition to become a part of the global discussion and bring authentic, local contribution to it. This is more important for the local context than the global one since it initiates a conversation and paves the way for additional local projects experiencing similar issues.

On the other hand, all three projects seem to be very culturally sensitive in their conceptual approach. How? Despite their desire to introduce



conceptual structure and other design aspects that communicate the worldwide language of architecture, they are made of the same cultural materials as the rest of their contextual surroundings. In this manner, they combine various cultural codes to produce something different, authentic and challenging to the local average - to produce a possibility that is showing better prospects.

To be clear, this book is not trying to be an apathetic narrative about how hard it is to create architecture or to be an architect in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If you think that this is hard, please go ahead and have a conversation with some architects working in Palestine or some third-world country. Even architects from developed European countries are nagging about the professional devaluation and the stress related to it. Without a doubt, creating architecture anywhere in the world is very hard.

This book is claiming quite the opposite- however complex and discouraging the context seems to be, someone's reluctance in trying to make it better cannot be justified.

Your attempts will maybe fail. Take a rest and try again. Eventually, you will make it. If not, you will at least know that you did your best.

## Conclusion

Architecture cannot change the world.

I always felt that there was something very suspicious about this famous postmodern statement. It somehow seemed to me that there is more to it than being stated. It might be this undeclared, ideological rest implied but never outspoken clearly, similar to the examples discussed in this book previously. So, if we tried to strip the naked ideology from this sentence what would we see in Žižek's sunglasses?

What I would probably see is a simple message ordering: do not try, comply, and consume. Why? Because today it is not popular to believe in changes even when they are desperately needed.

Let me try to explain this notion. I don't think modernists claiming the opposite ever seriously thought that they and their architecture alone could do it. The claim architecture can change the world was just a simple declarative catchword stressing the seriousness of their intention to be involved in creating what they believed would be a better future. Were they successful? Well, when I open a window and look at the modernist buildings all around Sarajevo and all the infrastructure made in the same period surrounding it, I wouldn't say that they did a lousy job at least compared to where the development started after World War II. I am sure that the world they created did not become exactly as they had imagined it, but apparently, it did not remain the same either.

Again, architecture cannot do it alone. Still, among many other factors, it does play a significant part. The buildings we design are part of the public domain; they display values and strive to last very, very long. So, what we do does matter.

Like Bosnia and Herzegovina, today's world desperately needs to change for the better. Maybe I'm a dreamer, but I am willing to participate and do my best.

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## REVIEW



**doc. dr. Elša Jurić Turkušić d.i.a.**

This book can be observed as author's conversation with himself and with the results of his works. However, this book initiates discussions with all those who intuitively question the spatial manifestations of social framework in the post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. Just as well, it stimulates the dialogue with those who strive to rationally understand this context. The author thus managed to contextualize his life experiences, as an architect-builder and an architect-actively engaged in vocational and educational institutions, within a broader social framework whose dominant characteristics he seeks to reveal in the past times and previous periods.

## REVIEW



**V. prof. dr. Mladen Burazor d.i.a.**

What makes this book specific is the broader interpretation of the context and the establishment of causal links on the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina and architectural production. Usually, the physical context (primarily natural and created conditions) is the one that mostly determines the way of acting in space, therefore author's elaboration about cultural, sociological and temporal interactions on projects seems interesting. This book has a very good philosophical base which is connected to the local context and that is why the stories presented in chapters seem so close and familiar to us. The very fact that the projects presented in the book were either nominated or awarded with prestigious awards, speaks about the quality of architecture. This book is first and foremost intended for students of architecture, but also for the wider audience that generally does not have much knowledge about the importance and responsibility of acting in a specific environment. On a regional scale, this book presents a complementary supplement to the book "Why Nations Fail", because we can sense the truthfulness of the thesis where the importance of political stability influences the development of societies and countries. The large amount of time spent on all phases from design to project implementation, speaks primarily about the enthusiasm, commitment and responsibility of the authors' team to complete the projects to the mutual, their own and the investors' satisfaction. While such an attitude certainly went beyond financial justification, it says more about the ideals that should not be neglected.