



# Urban Recycling: A Way to Save the Character of the Cities

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## Abstract

Urban recycling is a process of physical, spiritual, social, cultural transformation of urban areas, buildings or whole old towns in order to save the memory of the cities and improve the level of their urban culture.

Here will be shown basic ideas on urban recycling and examples from Yugoslav practice, seen on XXI COMMUNICATION conference, 1996.

Reconstruction & revitalisation are well-known activities in wealth and highly educated urban societies. Transition of East and Central Europe and the slow development of other pure countries as well, are a threat to heritage, especially in urban areas. Variety of "recycling" methods, at the same time, could save the memory of cities and improve the condition of historical objects.

The main Conclusion of the Conference, as well as that drawn by this paper, is that objects, areas and towns suited for recycling must be recognised, registered and their treatment incorporated in urban policy or specific towns development programs.

Methods for realisation are those already known in domain of urban planning, design and construction, but the most important and new in Yugoslav practise, urban management and decision making.

## Introduction

The primary idea of RECYCLING is to initiate a new cycle - new life. In urban and town planning, recycling involves all possible physical, spiritual, cultural or other transformation aimed at improving the global level of urban culture.

One of the recycling methods is embodied in the activity of heritage protection institutions, constituted on a local, municipal or global level. Those activities are incorporated in global urban policy, and are used in planning. Problems in



revitalisation are well-known activities in wealth and highly educated urban societies. Transition of East and Central Europe and the slow development of other pure countries as well, are a threat to heritage, especially in urban areas. Variety of "recycling" methods, at the same time, could save the memory of cities and improve the condition of historical objects.

Other objects and ambience with no historical or architectural values registered by institutions, are left to the sensibility of planners, architects and city governments. Their characteristics, environment or meaning in authentic time are worth saving for future generations. Those are the objects for real urban recycling. There are various types of objects like: underground spaces, technical culture objects (old industrial installations, stores, factories...), historical places, old and abandoned houses...

Urban recycling is a new specific urban action. It consists of all the experience gathered in urban renewal policy. Time of transition is time for synthesis and promotion of the new renewal method. Dealing with Yugoslav potentials, projects and implementations, we have shown individual efforts in this specific field. Together with the participants of the COMMUNICATIONS, we have also tried to prompt specialists and local authorities to act and incorporate those transformations in urban policy.

## Motivations

Some meanings of Urban recycling have long been part of the good urban planning practice. A moderate city, shaped according to man's needs, and context-oriented architecture are the principles that have been followed even before the generally popularised sustainable development theory. Terms that have been used are rather known: revitalisation, protection, transformation, and were only a part of this process.

A prosaic but essential argument in favour of "recycling" is based on the fact that this approach is always more profitable than demolition and new construction, especially if non-material advantages are taken into account.

At the last year's Communications conference, searching BETWEEN extremities, we have found that the devastated environment of Belgrade's technical culture can serve as a wonderful backdrop; we have also seen how architects transformed the London powerplant into a gallery.

Meanwhile, in scrutinising the "Bulevar zone" - one of Belgrade's main avenues surrounding, we have analysed the abandoned summer Belgrade open cinema-garden, recycled the tram-DEPOT, suggested the introduction of vintage tramways...

In the town of Kotor and on Mt. Durmitor, Montenegro, working on Regional plans, researched the possibility of revitalising the UNESCO heritage, old buildings, environments and natural settings;



In Belgrade we watched theatrical shows and productions in the old sugar-mill, in the Kalemegdan fortress, in the BITEF Theatre - recycled church...

Lately, the thrifty and rational West has been concentrating all its forces in the revitalisation of central city quarters, warehouses, factories and docks. In the East - in Romania, world-renown architects are now involved in the transformation of Bucharest - an alternative to the demolition and the construction according to a new genial plan.

During the Conference we've confirmed our theory about necessity of this specific action. We've seen or heard about thirty locations, buildings and towns that were recycled, or involved in revitalisation projects. Some of them were only devastated and proposed for recycling. Taking care of those forgotten places as a part of city renewal would be one of the goals to reach in our project. Finding appropriate regulations for those objects treatment, in (or beside) Yugoslav urban policy, would be the other one. This study tends to be only the beginning of a serious but creative process of urban recycling.

## **Key Studies**

There are various types of objects suitable for recycling. We have tried to define a few categories to ease comparison and the drawing of conclusions. One example for each category has been drawn from the multitude of materials gathered through our planning experience or presented at the September Conference.

### **Historic and Culture heritage - KNEZ MILOSH AMMAM, Belgrade**

This object - modelled on the Turkish Ammams was built in 1835 as a part of the Prince (Knez) Miloš Court complex. After a long period of disuse and lack of function, it was conserved and restored in 1952. Later it became the Gallery of Children's Drawings, after a reconstruction supervised by the architect Zoran Jakovljević, twenty years ago. Left without financial and community support, the gallery closed down and became a ruin used by the homeless, drug addicts and delinquents. In 1995, the Belgrade authorities decided to reactivate this valuable building, and gave the possibility for an institution to set up a café-gallery there. A team of architects aided by heritage protection specialists made a project for the revitalisation of this house.

Limitations appeared when they tried to harmonise the authentic construction and the available space with the requests of the investor, i.e., the new purpose of the building. On the other hand, the size of the investment - growing with the demands for an adequate restoration of the building - became incompatible with the real estimates for a typical café. Fortunately, the private investor that leased the building, respected the rules of expert reconstruction, displayed great



understanding for the historical element, and fully co-operated with the project designers - enabling the realisation of an exemplary building.



FIG 1: View of Ammam after (1996.) and...



FIG 2: ...before the reconstruction (1995.)

### **Technical culture constructions - Tram-Depot, Belgrade**

The first building for the maintenance and the parking of public transportation vehicles in Serbia was constructed in 1894. along the Constantinople Road . The depot having an area of 500m<sup>2</sup> was designed to house 24 old-type tram-cars, four stables with 12 horses in two lines each, service shops and rigs for undercarriage repairs... As the city developed, the so-called "upper depot" become an insignificant warehouse in the middle of the linear commerce zone that Bulevar Revolucije gradually became. The revitalisation of the depot was prompted by the need to transfer the open-air counters into a closed shopping centre.



The designer entrusted with the project (CEP, 1996.) had to reconcile - within the depot - the market demands and the requirements made by heritage protection, without placing any limitations for the potential use that this centre might have: public transportation museum, shops, a stage for concerts and plays.

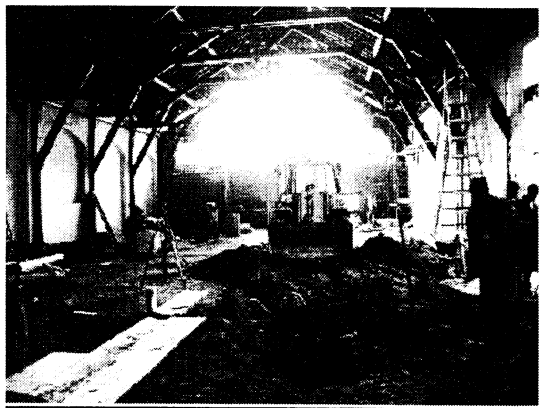


FIG 3: TRAM DEPO, during and...



FIG 4: TRAM DEPO, after the reconstruction

### **The electric powerplant - Dorćol, Belgrade**

It was treated as a Belgrade potential. The complex encompassing the powerstation, the concrete factory, the pump-station and the artificial inlet linking the powerplant to the Danube, constitute an integral but neglected area, with different owners, and unclear and differing development objectives. The institutions involved in preservation have advanced requests regarding only parts of the area, although it should be treated as integral complex. In terms of urban planning, this area is located in the vicinity of the town centre and on the bank of the Danube, has been inadmissibly left at the mercy of the present owners. After an international competition, a similar complex on the banks of

the Thames is now being revitalised according to the project defined by the architect's team Hercog & Meuton, under the sponsorship of the London authorities. The powerplant will become part of the famous Tate Gallery and the backbone of a major cultural centre on the banks of the Thames.

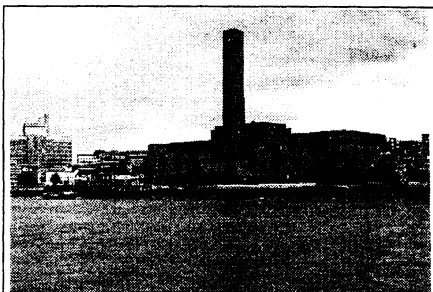


FIG 5:  
Tate Gallery, London

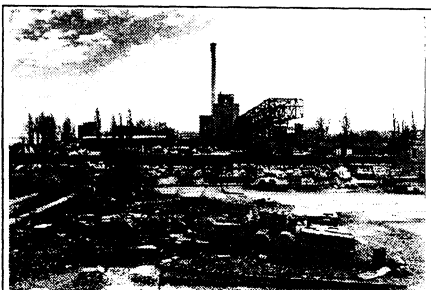


FIG 6: Electric powerplant,  
Dorćol, Belgrade

This is just one of the numerous similar buildings in Belgrade, some of which have been saved. The brewery in Skadarska St. is now a shopping centre, the sugar-mill has been turned into an alternative theatre, the old steam-mill is to be transformed into a hotel. Others are abandoned or are being used inadequately. Only a combined effort of the town administration and of the owners, aided by the expert supervision and strong enough investors, can put these potentials to use and turn them into a specific quality that Belgrade can pride itself of.

### **Historical sites and buildings**

This group of structures and environments encompasses not only those that are linked to some particular event, but also buildings that represent a valuable civilizational heritage because of their architectural importance in the period they were erected. The old Belgrade Fairground is an example - a neglected, devastated area, combination of slums and warehouses without official owners. In its history, this complex has served many purposes: it housed European exhibitions and fairs but also a concentration camp during WW II. The type of recycling to be applied to this complex is a matter of a specific study, and we will provide here only a historical indication of what the Belgrade Fairground looked like in 1938.



FIG 7: Aerial photo of the old Fairground, 1938.



FIG 8:  
The old Fairground today

This group also includes old parts of Belgrade like the Kosančićev venac (Kosančić Square), and the Terazijska terasa (Terazije Sq. terrace), as well as the immediate surroundings of protected fortified old Yugoslav towns (such as Kotor, Petrovaradin or Smederevo, Kalemegdan) which are not protected themselves but are an inseparable part of the urban texture.

This category includes all the ancient mountain settlements in the fringe area of towns like Kotor or Tivat, because they are also part of the local history and civilisation. Their recycling should become part of the standard urban planning procedure and they should be taken into account by the heritage preservation institutions.

A special category is constituted by the fortresses and towns that are protected - some of them even by UNESCO. Kotor or Perast are largely neglected zones and they must be reactivated, whilst urban recycling is merely a transitional phase.

## Underground

Last, but not the least - underground structures and spaces are unlisted in municipal land books and remain unseen by the passers-by. They can be divided into two basic groups: civilian structures accessible by the public and special-purpose ones used by public and special institutions, shelters, depots, military installations and warehouses, cellars etc.

According to some estimates, at least another 20% of the visible or noted constructed area of Belgrade lies underground. Most of these spaces are completely unused, a smaller part is used for by the tenants for storage, many are abandoned old boiler rooms, part of them are within the Belgrade fortress etc. Besides the fact that there is no list of users or owners of these spaces, and that their actual dimensions can not be established, there is also the problem of their controlled usage. The potentials and the possible use of such spaces can only be hinted, and until now we have seen two examples of usage.



One of them was the short-lived Belgrade cultural centre in the Belgrade fortress arsenal - met with acclamation even though it operated only for several months, whilst the other is the transformation of basements in the downtown area - mostly in office buildings - into cafes, jazz and night-clubs.

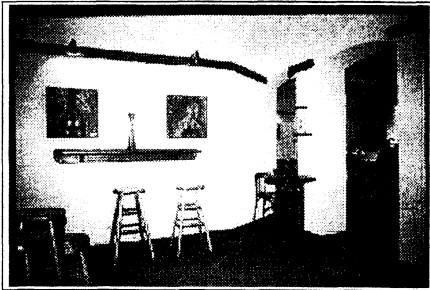


FIG 9: Jazz club in a basement in downtown Belgrade

## Conclusion

This study of examples is the motive and the cause prompting a serious involvement of the urban planning experts in the new urban action. The adequate usage of the city's recourses and environment potentials is already included in postulates of their sustainable development and our urban policy. According to our practice, only new effort in urban recycling, and monitoring its effects could provide those potentials remain, or become qualities.

Process of urban recycling is nowadays a suggestion for serious studies in order to become a part of legislation and urban policy. It can be the way to save the heritage for the time of it's final purpose, and also a possibility for constant urban renewal process in our inner cities.

One of the goals in urban recycling is also including all kinds of specialists, municipal and private investors, so as social groups in projects of saving, activating and prospering town's recourses.

Recycling process is constant, and not final till the objects and places exist. It can be started again any time when outer or inner conditions are changed. If towns are treated as living organisms, with constant economic, social and spatial changes, this process can provide their vitality.

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FIG 10: "Kommunikations '96"  
placate for Urban Recycling