

## THE LIFE AND DECLINE OF A PLANNED INDUSTRIAL TOWN: THE CASE OF LIČKI OSIK<sup>1</sup>

*For a city, like a man, has its own fate.*

Pliny the Elder

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This paper discusses the emergence, existence, and fate of a planned, systematic town in a passive region of the then Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia – later renamed to Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – in the period after World War II. The author critically assesses the reasons for the creation and construction of a modern town at the locality of Lički Osik in central Lika. The town was entirely dependent on and shared the same fate with the military industrial facility “Marko Orešković”, as it was built to support its production. Economic, social, and cultural ups and downs marked the half-century existence of this town, defining both its uncertain present and its promising future. Based on unpublished archival documents from that period, the author has reconstructed the reasons and modes of existence of the planned military enterprise as well as the associated town, which remains emblematic as an unrealistic and misunderstood economic development project in this part of Croatia.

**Keywords:** military enterprise, Lika, socialist regime, Marko Orešković, Lički Osik, urban planning

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## Introduction

One of the most intense periods in modern Croatian history was certainly the time after World War II, when the territory of Croatia became part of a new and spacious communist state called Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Reconstruction and large state projects in the fields of economy, military industry, agriculture, etc. started immediately. In the framework of five-year development of the new state under the direct control of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, vigorous renewal of the war-torn and devastated Lika region began as part of these endeavours. One of the most significant projects in this area was the construction of a military industry plant for the purpose of strengthening the great military force of the Yugoslav People's Army.<sup>2</sup> One of such megalomaniacal and fast-growing project was the creation of the military enterprise Ivan Gošnjak, with an adjacent settlement that would come to be called Lički Osik, although it was different from the existing town of Lički Osik.

In order to determine the factors of its urban identity, that is, how the planning and construction of the settlement came about, the introductory part must offer a concise account of its urban-architectural genesis and to pinpoint its factors of identity. This has been done on the basis of scholarly literature, source material from the residential communities of Lički Osik, archival documents from the Marko Orešković d.d. Lički Osik company, which are preserved at the State Archive in Gospić, and the available master plans, old photographs, and newspaper articles of that time.<sup>3</sup>

## Construction of the settlement and the company, with the achieved results (1949-1961)

The new town of Lički Osik was planned and built as a product of the political programme of the socialist regime, which included urban reforms among other things.<sup>4</sup> The new settlement was to be a model example of the

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<sup>2</sup> The factory and town in Lički Osik were not the only such example in Yugoslavia. A number of planned social-realist and industrial cities were built in the aftermath of World War II – very similar examples include Novi Travnik in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Titovo Velenje in Slovenia, and Kardeljevo (Ploče) in Croatia.

<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive overview of the emergence and development of Lički Osik is that of Jasenka Kranjčević, Izidora Marković, and Nikša Babić, "Lički Osik – Urbanističko-arhitektonsko naslijeđe moderne kao razvojni potencijal turizma" [Lički Osik: The urban-architectural heritage of modernism as a tourism development potential], *Sociologija i prostor* 54 (2016), 205 (2): 108.

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Law on the Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Economy in the People's Republic of Yugoslavia 1947-1951*, the then People's Republic of Croatia included among

new social order, with all the functions necessary for the daily life of its inhabitants, but it was primarily intended to meet the needs and standards of the military industrial enterprise “Ivan Gošnjak”.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, its emergence was not based exclusively on economic calculations, but also followed the postulates of modernist urban humanism. In the urban-architectural sense, it was a high-quality project, with consistently implemented urbanist standards based on post-war modernist and functionalist urban planning and architectural aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

It should be made clear that, in terms of identity and landscaping, the project departed considerably from the traditional way of living and earning livelihood in Lika, weakened by the previous wars. But regardless of the modernist approach to architecture, with elements of social realism, Novi Lički Osik soon “merged” with the regional features of Lika and created a more homogeneous zone. Many of the buildings, such as the main hotel Velebit, the large Community Centre, and the Primary School, as well as the successful afforestation of the north-western and northern sides of the settlement, give the impression that the town’s planning was strongly subordinated to the demands of human life and needs in this new environment.<sup>7</sup> However, due to the need to start military production as soon as possible, there were some visible constructional errors, which is why the Institute of Urban Planning of SR Croatia launched another project to have the town better fitted into its environment.<sup>8</sup> One may say that Lički Osik, same as some other planned workers’ towns,

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its goals the planned construction of 15 million m<sup>2</sup> of housing area, whereby a significant part was workers’ towns. Cf. Daine Glavočić, Jasna Rotim Malvić, and Srđan Škunca, *Riječka radnička naselja* [Workers’ towns in the Rijeka area] (Rijeka: Udruga “Pro torpedo”), p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> The “Ivan Gošnjak” enterprise was founded by a decision of the Government of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, Conf. Doc. 490 (April 11, 1950). Cf. “Brojke našeg uspona” [Figures of our growth], *MOL – list radne zajednice*. Lički Osik, 3/23 (December 1964), cover page. The company was named after a prominent member of the Communist Party, general Ivan Gošnjak (Ogulin, 10 June 1909 – Belgrade, 9 February 1980). In World War II, he was the commander of the General Headquarters of Croatia and after the war he held numerous positions, most notably that of the Federal Secretary of Defence, at the time when this military enterprise was being built. Cf. <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=10> (last accessed on March 1, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Kranjčević, Marković, and Babić, “Lički Osik,” p. 109. The project was conducted by the Institute of Urban Planning of SR Croatia and the project leader was architect Branko Petrović.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Zevi, *Povijest moderne arhitekture I*. [History of modern architecture I] (Zagreb: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga and Arhitektonski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2006), p. 587.

<sup>8</sup> Boro Pavlović wrote about the problems during the construction of Lički Osik in *Lički kalendar*. He mentioned several significant errors, such as the fact that the main road to the factory passed straight through the village and next to the Hotel, that there were no green areas or harmonious smaller construction to make the appearance and feel of the village more organic, rather than its dry geometric representation of space. Cf. Boro Pavlović, “Problem reprojekta naselja Lički Osik” [The problem of re-planning the town of Lički Osik], *Lički kalendar* (Zagreb, 1958), p. 24.

suffered from the syndrome of aggressive building, where architecture was only a technical service.<sup>9</sup>

There are several reasons why the area of Lički Osik and Široka Kula was chosen for the construction of the largest military investment project in the history of Lika. One of them was the excellent strategic location of the area – its favourable climatic and geographical conditions, railroad connections, and the proximity to the largest town in Lika, Gospić – while another was that the area was populated almost exclusively by Catholic Croats. Jakša Raguž is probably right in arguing that the area between Gospić and Perušić, a small town with mainly Croatian population that had sided with the puppet state called Independent State of Croatia in World War II, was selected by the senior military officials in Belgrade precisely in order to settle and strengthen the Serbian population in Lika, which had largely fought on the side of the victorious army, that is, the partisans.

After the first land expropriation in the cadastral municipalities of Lički Osik and Široka Kula in 1950, the first factory halls were built, as well as the first housing units for the construction workers. These covered an area of 30,000 m<sup>2</sup>, where the military enterprise “Ivan Gošnjak” – from 1954 under the new name “Marko Orešković” Working Organization Lika (abbreviated MOL)<sup>10</sup> – performed an expropriation worth over 20 million dinars. A total of 952 households were paid out in 1950 and 1955, although 84 of them were not satisfied with the manner and modality of payment, so they lodged a personal complaint with General Ivan Gošnjak, without any positive outcome.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ivo Maroević, “Hrvatska arhitektura pedesetih” [Croatian architecture in the 1950s], *Život umjetnosti* 71/72 (4): 141-145, 142.

<sup>10</sup> The decision to change the name of the company could not be found in the Official Gazettes of NR Croatia and FNR Yugoslavia. It is to be assumed that it was part of the process of decentralization in 1953 and the reorganization of the company’s operation, as it was no longer to be just a military production facility. The second assumption is related to the name of the company, where a new name from the People’s Liberation War was adopted, this time one of local significance: Marko Orešković (codename Krntija, Široka Kula near Gospić on 3 April, 1896 – Očijevo near Drvar on 20 October, 1941) was a partisan hero from the neighbouring town of Široka Kula. A metalworker and a logger on Austro-Hungarian warships in World War I, he was arrested in 1918 in Boka Kotorska for his anti-militaristic activities. From 1925, he was a member of the Communist Party, and in 1929 he was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison in Srijemska Mitrovica and Lepoglava. From 1937-1939, he fought in international brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Upon his return in 1939, he became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia, and in 1940 a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but was soon thereafter interned in the Lepoglava concentration camp. After the outbreak of World War II, he organized the anti-fascist movement in Lika and was appointed a member and political commissioner of the General Headquarters of the Croatian National Liberation Army. Killed by the Chetniks. Cf. <http://enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=45447> (last accessed on March 1, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Hrvatska (Croatia, HR) – Državni arhiv u Gospiću (State Archive in Gospić, DAGS) 112, Marko Orešković Lika d.d. Lički Osik (hereafter: MOL), box (b.) 280, on the expropriation of land in Lički Osik and Široka Kula in order to build the military industry enterprise Ivan Gošnjak.

In parallel with the expropriation, the construction of the first plant facilities started, as well as the first housing units for the future workers. In 1955, the company started with production with 250 workers, and five years later, 1060 workers were employed at MOL with an average salary of 23,000 dinars, which was generous for the time.<sup>12</sup>

Not only housing units were built in the town, which was some 500 meters away from the company, but also the most representative building: Hotel Lički Osik. At that time, it was the most modern facility in Lika, with a capacity of 280 beds, and was managed by a separate company called Velebit, which had its headquarters in Lički Osik. Its conference room was the site of almost all major political and economic events, especially when persons from outside Lika attended. The centrepiece of social life, especially for the younger generation, was the hotel restaurant or bar.<sup>13</sup> With the increase in the number of company employees, there was an urgent need to build a hotel for singles in the town, since at first they also lived in the main hotel building. Such a hotel was built in 1965, and in addition to 122 beds, there were well-equipped rooms for social and cultural life as well as sports activities.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the hotel for singles and the main hotel were obvious examples of good care for the 3,000 residents and workers living in the new town, but today they are left to decay.

As the late 1950s brought vigorous economic growth to the company and an increase in the number of MOL's employees, which in turn meant more permanent residents in the town,<sup>15</sup> there was a need to produce fruit and vegetables for the needs of the company and the residents. Therefore, in 1960, the People's Committee of the Gospić District decided to build a kitchen garden and an associated storehouse at the cost of over 10 million dinars, which were to be invested by the company itself. Namely, supplying food for the residents of the new town cost more than 3 million dinars a year. The implementation of this project started at once, in the area south of the healthcare centre.<sup>16</sup> By 1960, most of the town had been built and its streets and squares had received their names: the central square was named the Square of Brotherhood and Unity, and the side streets were named after the national heroes Stanko Opsenica and Boris Kidrič, the neighbouring Orthodox town of Ljubovo, and

<sup>12</sup> HR-DAGS-112, MOL, b. 19, list of working positions and average salaries for June 30, 1960.

<sup>13</sup> Ads section in *Ličke novine* 11 (435), June 1, 1955, 11.

<sup>14</sup> M.H. "Samci uselili u svoj dom" [Single workers have moved into their hotel], *Ličke novine* 6 (286), March 15, 1965, 4.

<sup>15</sup> In 1971, almost 3000 persons from various parts of Lika and Yugoslavia lived in Lički Osik. In the very town, Serbian nationals were the majority. See Fig. 2.

<sup>16</sup> HR-DAGS-112, MOL, b. 72 (1955-1960), on the development of economy in the town of Lički Osik, nr. 10-27.

the greatest “Yugoslav” scientist, Nikola Tesla.<sup>17</sup> The central square was, of course, adorned with a statue of Marko Orešković.

### **The period of easy living in “brotherhood and unity” and the gradual stagnation of economy (1962-1990)**

As early as the late 1960s, an industrial crisis could be felt in the company, the effects of which were also visible in the quality of life of the town’s population, that is, their consumption and the costs of living. Twenty years after the company started its operation, the losses started to show: it operated at only half the capacity and mainly produced heating appliances, i.e. radiators. The reasons for this development included the lack of trained workers in the region and the frequent change of work programmes. This key problem of the entire Lika was discussed during the visit of Jakov Blažević, President of the Parliament of SR Croatia, and Dragutin Haramija.<sup>18</sup>

All the accumulated problems that the industrial company MOL faced in the early 1970s were commented in speech and writing by Vajo Skendžić, its director at the time.<sup>19</sup> The company received no financial assistance from the local community, there was no consensus about it in the Lika region, and there was poor project planning and connection with other republican institutions and organizations. After all, the company covered an area of 30,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with a large workers’ colony, or rather a whole new town (Novi Lički Osik), with its own energy supply and small production, which since its establishment had failed to provide the infrastructure for ensuring normal life and development.<sup>20</sup> Despite good rehabilitation programs and investment plans in MOL, there was no substantial growth, mostly because the influence of its founder, the military in Belgrade, was still strongly felt; on the other hand, no significant assistance came from the Parliament of SR Croatia as its executive council. Certainly, such negative balance, poor interpersonal relations, and failed modernization of production, with the “loss” of trained workers, also affected the social life in Novi Lički Osik.

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<sup>17</sup> S. Kljajić, “U naselju Lički Osik određeni nazivi ulica i trga” [The square and streets of Lički Osik have received names], *Ličke novine* 15 (104), August 1, 1957, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> T. Čanić, “Potrebna pomoć šire zajednice” [Support of the wider community needed], *Ličke novine* 21 (433), November 1, 1971, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Vajo Skendžić was the general director of the company and one of the prominent Army and Party officials in this position.

<sup>20</sup> Vajo Skendžić, “Razvoj metalne industrije u Lici i njene dalje perspektive” [Development of metal industry in Lika and its further outlooks], in *Lika u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, vol. 5, ed. Branimir Gusić, Milan Majstorović, and Đuro Zatezalo (Karlovac: Historijski arhiv u Karlovcu, 1973), p. 625.

In the town itself, more specifically in the local utility companies, health-care and educational institutions, and the factory itself, the Workers' Council (the Communists) played a key role.<sup>21</sup> If a person was member of the Communist Party or had parents who had participated in the People's Liberation War, he or she had considerable advantages and benefits, although for a while the level of training was crucial for working at MOL. According to the Company' Statute, the Workers' Council, elected solely along the Party lines, played a key role along with the director.<sup>22</sup> The Workers' Council was also the loudest when it came to emphasizing and asserting political and social commitment to the authorities and the President of SFRY, Josip Broz Tito. At a time when student protests were taking place all over Europe, including Yugoslavia, especially SR Croatia, MOL's workers held a rally in which they unanimously supported Josip Broz Tito and strongly condemned the student protests and documents such as the Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language.<sup>23</sup> Josip Broz Tito returned this strong support and spent several days in the municipalities of Lika for the first time after 21 years, accompanied by his wife Jovanka Broz as well as the most prominent officials of the Communist Party of Croatia. This visit was a strong confirmation of the uncompromising support of the people of Lika to the Communist Party led by Josip Broz. The President also visited Lički Osik and the industrial plant Marko Orešković.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most symptomatic events in which political agreement with the Leagues of the Communists of Yugoslavia and Croatia can be positively felt was the unanimous and fierce reaction to the views voiced in the Press Release of the Presidency of the Union of Students of Croatia, i.e. their reaction to the "Croatian Spring". The company's trade union and the local committee of Lički Osik strongly condemned the actions of the Croatian students and fervently advocated "suppressing such nationalist and chauvinistic behaviour in the League of Communists of Croatia."<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, the role of the Workers' Council was not reduced to agitation and emphasizing political loyalties. Owing to the company, a number of

<sup>21</sup> "Komunisti su najpozvaniji da rješavaju pojedine probleme" [The Communists are always called upon to solve problems], *Ličke novine* 6 (238), March 15, 1963.

<sup>22</sup> In more than 40 years of the company's existence, only two directors were Croats, which also shows the political and military function that the director of the largest company in Lika performed at the same time.

<sup>23</sup> Ivica Mataija, *Lika '68*. (Gospić: Državni arhiv u Gospiću, 2018), 16.

<sup>24</sup> "Lika je ostala dosljedna svojim žrtvama - zdravica druga Tita u Ličkom Osiku" [Lika has remained consistent with her victims - President Tito's salute in Lički Osik], *Ličke novine* 20 (348) October, 15 1967, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> "Zaključci" [Conclusions], *Ličke novine* 18 (440), September 1, 1971, 5.

important institutions and organizations were built and established whose programmes ensured better everyday life for the residents.

Thus, despite many years of decline in production, MOL's management, through the Fund for Supporting the Development of Culture and Social Life, took an actively part in supporting social life in Lički Osik, most notably in the newly built Community Centre, located on the main Square of Brotherhood and Unity, just across from Hotel Lički Osik, whose interior also served as a 450-seat state-of-the-art Cinema Lika.<sup>26</sup> The then Cultural Society Marko Orešković as well as the Committee for the Administration of the Community Centre, often organized social events – guest appearances by amateur theatres, famous Croatian and Yugoslav actors, numerous educational and political lectures, and various other events.<sup>27</sup>

The company also owned a fish restaurant and a farm in Brušane, a children's seaside resort in Cesarica, and factory resorts in Karlobag and Pag. Considering that more than 2000 workers were employed in the company at one point, and that 3500 people lived in the town itself, it was necessary to invest in education, so a kindergarten was opened besides the school, the first one in Lika.<sup>28</sup>

In Lički Osik, children had been going to school since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. After World War II, far fewer of them attended the school, but it continued to operate successfully in the original, "old" Lički Osik (west of the railroad tracks). It was only with the construction of a new school for the needs of people living in Novi Lički Osik that general conditions were created for new curricula and new professional training programmes, primarily supplying workforce for the "Marko Orešković" company. For this reason, an initiative was launched in the 1970s to introduce a new training centre: it was the Centre for Metalwork and Electrical Professions. It was an investment of 5 million dinars, intended to provide considerable assistance to further economic and industrial development not only of MOL, but also of other businesses in what was then the Gospić district.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in addition to the existing elementary school "Stanko Opsenica", a training centre called "Nikola Tesla" was built

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<sup>26</sup> S. K. "Uskoro prva Kino predstava" [Soon comes the first cinema show], *Ličke novine* 4 (92), February 15, 1957, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, in 1971, Ivo Serdar, a famous actor originating from Lika, performed in Lički Osik together with an actors' company: "Ivo Serdar u Ličkom Osiku" [Ivo Serdar in Lički Osik], *Ličke novine* 12 (436), June 30, 1971, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> "Uskoro i dječje igralište" [The children's playground opening soon], *Ličke novine* 5 (451), March 1, 1972, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> T. Čanić, "Pet milijuna za investicije" [Five million dinars for investments], *Ličke novine* 18 (440), September 15, 1971, p. 5.

in the settlement. Up to 1,200 persons could study mechanical and electrical engineering there after completing their elementary education.

As the town grew along with the company, there was an urgent need for public utilities. The residents often complained of neglected environment,<sup>30</sup> although the master plans foresaw a number of small green areas adjacent to the housing units. Before the Croatian Homeland War, there was also a community service enterprise in the Hotel, which functioned as the Local Office.

In all of SFRY and in the territorial-administrative unit of the Associated Municipalities of Gospić,<sup>31</sup> a time of economic stagnation and poorly planned, or rather failed economic development followed. During the 1960s and 1970s, the area had relied largely on industrial production, but now, due to the weakened market, labour shortage, and megalomaniacal investments, Lika's economy started to suffer heavy losses. In 1962 and 1963, some welfare and security were still felt, but very quickly there were losses in production, and this decline had an impact on the living standard in Lički Osik.<sup>32</sup> Already in 1980, MOL was the most frequently mentioned company among the loss-makers, as its losses amounted to more than 10 million dinars, or one third of the total debt in the municipality of Gospić.<sup>33</sup> The new director of Croatian origins, Dragan Balen, sought to alleviate the situation by implementing new programmes, merging MOL with UNIS in Sarajevo.<sup>34</sup> Two years after the incorporation of RO MOL into UNIS, there was indeed some economic recovery, with increasing exports to the USSR that amounted to as much as 7 million US dollars.<sup>35</sup> Life in town was still very enjoyable – a large number of children were kindergarten beneficiaries, new workers were successfully trained at the Nikola Tesla Centre, the hotel was renovated and modernized, and the last housing units were built. The late 1980s in Lički Osik can well be described as relatively successful and optimistic despite the severe economic crisis of the socialist regime, especially evident in the industrial weakening of the Marko Orešković

<sup>30</sup> As indicated by a town's resident in: "Tu pokraj nas – Zapažanja" [In our midst: Observations], *MOL – list radne zajednice Marko Orešković – Lički Osik* 20 (September 1965), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> The Associated Municipalities of Lika were established in 1974, but soon afterwards, because of the embarrassing abbreviation (ZLO meaning "evil" in Croatian), the unit was renamed to Associated Municipalities of Gospić.

<sup>32</sup> The steep losses in the enterprise could not be halted even by the new plant for the production of radiators. Cf. S.K., "Puštena u rad tvornica čeličnih radiatora" [The factory of steel radiators is now in operation], *Ličke novine*, March 15, 1963, title page.

<sup>33</sup> M.Č., "Nepovoljni rezultati" [Unfavourable results], *Ličke novine* 7 (652), October 1, 1980, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Associated Metal Industry Sarajevo, still in operation today. M. Čuljat, "Kakav razvoj" [What sort of development], *Ličke novine* 20 (765), November 15, 1985, title page.

<sup>35</sup> M.Č., "Povećan izvoz" [Increased export], *Lički vjesnik* 18 (763), October 15, 1985, title page.

Company,<sup>36</sup> but also in the increasingly tensed interpersonal and interethnic relations.

### **Decline of the regime and the town: The occupation period (1991-1995)**

The first rally of the Serbian rebels in SR Croatia took place on June 30, 1990 in Lički Osik, where they made it clear to their Croatian neighbours that there was no more place for them to stay and work in this planned industrial town. The pre-war fears became reality after the so-called “Log Revolution” and the “Bloody Easter” of March 1991. Permanent barricades with armed civilians were set up in the village of Ljubovo, which completely disrupted the traffic.<sup>37</sup>

Villages and towns with a Serbian majority in the Gospić municipality sided with the rebels and on May 28 declared the separation of the eastern part of the town of Gospić and the municipality, and their annexation to the municipality of Gračac. A referendum was held in which the residents of Novi Lički Osik<sup>38</sup> voted to change its name to Teslingrad,<sup>39</sup> a name that had also been an option at the time of its construction. This decision was obviously related to their ethnic identity, which was on the line with the Greater Serbian ideas and sought to demonstrate a strong symbolic connection between the scientist Nikola Tesla and the Serbian people and society.

During the four years of the occupation, the town was practically in a state of lawlessness, with parallel and often conflicting authorities: one of the rebellious local Serbs led by the local military officials, mostly former MOL

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<sup>36</sup> Although the company employed over 2000 workers in the 1980s, a large number were neither trained nor competent for modern production. Thus, the company was looking for metal workers, but they were not nearly enough on Lika's labour market. M. Čuljat, “Traže metalce” [Metal workers sought], *Lički vjesnik* 20 (809), November 15, 1987, title page.

<sup>37</sup> Jakša Raguž, “Đorđe je pokosio travu ustašku... – svakodnevni život u okupiranom Novom Ličkom Osiku (1991.-1995.) u izvješćima Stanice milicije Republike Srpske Krajine Teslingrad” [Đorđe has cut down the Ustasha grass... Everyday life in occupied Novi Lički Osik (1991-1995) in the reports of the Police Station Teslingrad in the Republic of Srpska Krajina], in *Identitet Like: korijeni i razvitak*, ed. Željko Holjevac (Gospić-Zagreb, 2009, p. 722.

<sup>38</sup> The geographical term Novi Lički Osik is used to clearly emphasize the area that was built as a planned town after 1950, and which together with Stari Lički Osik, that is, the original Lički Osik, formed a homogeneous whole. If we were to speak of a “boundary” between these two towns, then it would be the railroad tracks, as it indeed happened in the Homeland War.

<sup>39</sup> “Na osnovi rezultata referenduma o promjeni naziva naselja Lički Osik u Teslingrad održanog 12. maja 1991. mjenja se ime naselja Lički Osik u Teslingrad” [Based on the results of the referendum on changing the name of Lički Osik to Teslingrad, held on May 12, 1991, the name Lički Osik has been changed to Teslingrad]. ОДЛУКА- Промјена имена насеља Лички Осик у Теслинград, Гласник Крајине – Glasnik Krajine 5 (June 20, 1991), p. 195.

employees such as Milan Mirić, and another with the law enforcement of the police from Korenica and Knin. Very often these two sides clashed and accused each other; major violations of humanitarian law such as murder, rape, war profiteering and desertion were also reported.<sup>40</sup> All this strengthened the impression that one could no longer live a normal life in the former Lički Osik, let alone a life of welfare and socio-economic development as it had been in the 1970s.<sup>41</sup>

People did their best to achieve normality, but it was very difficult so near to the front line of battle. Still, the ambulance, shops, and schools remained open. The primary and the secondary school operated in one building, since the main school building was destroyed during the 1991 war. Much of the inventory was devastated in the bombing and also fell prey to massive robbery while the SAO Krajina army was lodged in it.<sup>42</sup>

Beside the fact that the so-called Teslingrad was located near the battlefield – despite the arrival of UN's blue helmets in the area – its most important business facility was out of operation, which was MOL. As of August 26, 1991, all Croatian nationals were informed that they were no longer employees of this company, because they had not come to work for more than five days. That same day, the old town of Lički Osik was attacked by missiles and shelling. A few days later, the church of St Joseph, the Rectory, and numerous private houses were demolished.<sup>43</sup> A week later, the Serbs also lost their jobs because of the war, because they had to engage in warfare. Representatives of the Government of RSK (Republic of Srpska Krajina) spoke about how MOL should resume business only in May 1993. Although designated as a company of strategic importance for RSK's economy, it was clear that due to the "unsettled foreign relations of RSK, the lack of commodities and labour market, and the high risk that anyone who might want to invest in MOL will have to face, this

<sup>40</sup> There is a well-known case of the Serbian Orthodox Rakić family, whose members were executed and thrown into the surrounding caves. This case showed that there was lawlessness in Teslingrad. Cf. *9. korpus JNA (1991.)*, Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat 1990.-1995. [9<sup>th</sup> JNA Corps, Republic of Croatia and the Homeland War 1990-1995], Documents, vol. 19 (Zagreb: Memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2016), p. 140.

<sup>41</sup> Statements of the members of the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Yugoslav People's Army truly give the impression that life was almost impossible at the end of 1991: "In the area of Lički Osik, the situation is quite bad, there is no single command among the militia, the Territorial Defence, the Yugoslav People's Army, the civilians, etc. There is also a private marshal court, allegedly formed by the Territorial Defence and the Secretariat of the Interior of SAO Krajina. The population lives in fear of arrest and disappearance..." Ibid., pp. 139-140.

<sup>42</sup> The school's operation was on the lowest level as the staff could not do much when the army needed fuel for warfare. DAGS – From the annals of the Primary School Stanko Opsenica and the Secondary School of Teslingrad, 1992/93, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Alojz, Kukec. *Ratni vjhor u Gospiću i okolici* [Warfare in Gospić and its surroundings] (Kastav, 2013), pp. 15 and 20.

will not be possible before the first half of 1995.<sup>44</sup> It was clear that nothing would come of MOL's revitalization, as in August the same year the liberation military action Storm followed, which brought the area of Novi Lički Osik under the control of the legal authorities of the Republic of Croatia.

Following the reestablishment of Croatian rule in the Lički Osik area, life stabilized and the town was rebuilt. The elementary school resumed its operation and there was new commercial and communal activity.<sup>45</sup> After the liberation, Novi Lički Osik was largely populated by Croats from the neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, although its number of inhabitants was not nearly equal to that before the Homeland War.

The redevelopment of the company did not proceed as originally planned. Late in 1996, the Supervisory Board of MOL was established. All six hundred apartments owned by Marko Orešković d.d. Lički Osik were transferred to the Gospić Fund for Housing and Communal Services, and their value was not included in the capital assessment of the company.<sup>46</sup> An interim director was appointed, who tried to find a strategic investor to relaunch the production. After several unsuccessful privatization acquisitions in 1999, the bankruptcy of MOL was initiated,<sup>47</sup> leaving the entire former military complex at the mercy of time and/or future, more reasonable investments and developments.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this new millennium, the town of Lički Osik still awaits and seeks a new opportunity for the proper development of its space and a better life for its inhabitants. Its fast construction in just five years, from 1950 to 1955, its urban planning, and an effort to achieve solid coexistence regardless of origin and nationality, were not really adequate or organic. The new town and the company that initiated and moderated all major events were to be the engine of development for the entire region. Initially, these plans came to fruition, but with the decline in production and trained workers, and the departure of residents for temporary work abroad, many cracks and difficulties arose for the population who had hitherto lived a harmonious life. Economy and daily life in a town that seemed perfect with regard to its environment declined due to nationalist and Greater Serbian aspirations that

<sup>44</sup> Slaven Ružić, *Djelovanje "Vlade" Republike Srpske Krajine 1991.-1995.* [Activities of the "government" of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, 1991-1995] (Zagreb, 2017), p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> Željko Popović, "Lički Osik – Život se vraća" [The revival of Lički Osik], *Vila Velebita* 11 (January 21, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> HR-DAGS-112, MOL, b. 20: Contract on the lease and value of the company, 1996.

<sup>47</sup> HR-DAGS-112, MOL, b. 33: Initiation of the bankruptcy procedure, 1999.

emerged in the early 1990s. A town that was once a symbol of prosperity in new forms of development and a different chance for the slow-modernizing Lika region is today just a dying urban fabric. A new impetus would be needed to revitalize the town and the associated abandoned enterprise, respecting their urban identity and specificity.

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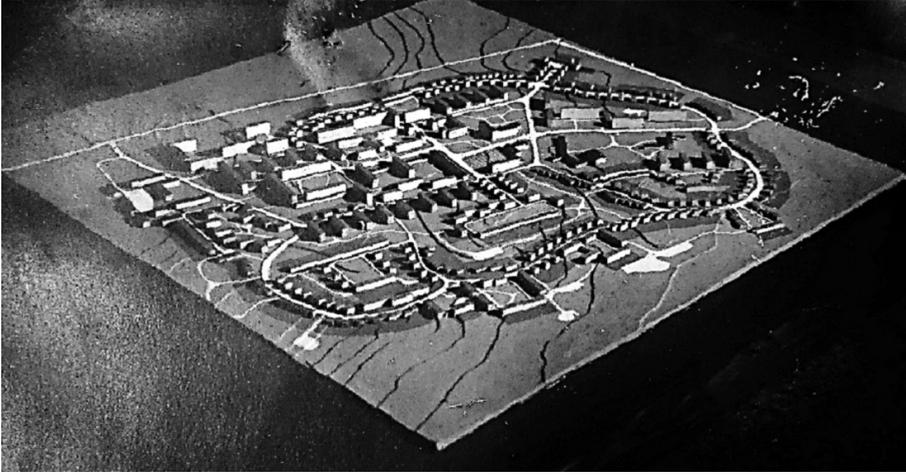
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## List of Illustrations:



**Fig. 1.** Model of a possible planned city in the cadastral municipalities of Lički Osik and Široka Kula. Source: HR-DAGS-05, NOK Gospić, cad. no. Cadastral file for land expropriation for the purpose of building the military enterprise Ivan Gošnjak, conf. nr. 3972/1950; HR-DAGS-240, SZIS Lički Osik, b. 1, Model of the town of Lički Osik

	Croats	Serbs	Muslims	Czechs	Hungarians	Ukrainians and Rusyns	Slovaks	Slovenians	Jews	Regionally defined	Yugoslavs	Others and undefined	TOTAL
1900	1082	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		1083
1910	1040	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		1041
1948	803	3	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		806
1953	865	100	/		5	/	/	2	/		1	4	977
1961	1482	994	/	4	12	/	1	39	/		9	13	2554
1971	1420	1621	9	1	8	1	1	4	3		139	85	3292
1981	1123	1343	12	1	2	/	/	2	/	4	517	41	3045
1991	1156	1570	5	/	4	/	/	1	/	4	89	56	2885
2001	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	1772

**Fig. 2.** Ethnic composition of Lički Osik (including Stari Lički Osik and the town of Lički Osik). Source: Kostrenčić, *Narodnosni i vjerski sastav stanovništva Hrvatske 1880.-1991., po naseljima* [Ethnic and religious composition of the population of Croatia, 1880-1991, according to settlements], Zagreb, 1998, State Institute for Statistics, census of 2011 (available at: <https://www.dzs.hr/>)



**Fig. 3.** Statue of Marko Orešković, Square of Brotherhood and Unity in the town of Lički Osik. Source: *Ličke novine* 3 (February 1, 1970)



**Fig. 4.** View from Hotel Lički Osik towards Boris Kidrič Street in 1958. Source: “Plodovi izgradnje Lički Osik u slici i riječi” [Fruits of building up Lički Osik, in images and words], *Ličke novine* 6/24 (136), December 15, 1958, 3



**Fig. 5.** Hotel Lički Osik, present situation. Photo: I. Brlić (December 1, 2018)