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RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORIC CENTER
OF ZAGREB AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

APPROACH, PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE

OBNOVA POVIJESNOG SREDIŠTA ZAGREBA
NAKON POTRESA

PRISTUP, PROBLEMI I PERSPEKTIVE

ZBORNİK PRIOPĆENJA SA ZNANSTVENO-STRUČNE KONFERENCIJE

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Even a ‘diagonal’ reading of this publication indirectly indicates the special organizational effort invested in the organization of the Conference (held in May 2021) and in the publication of the Proceedings itself. It includes 16 independent authors’ papers, 4 texts of broader discussions, and 2 texts of shorter discussions, a total of 22 titles signed by 50 scientists and experts of various professions and professional vocations, ranging from, for example, architects, urban planners, art historians, civil engineers, surveyors, energy experts to economists, sociologists, designers, environmentalists...

In a particularly valuable appendix entitled: *15 Theses for a Better Reconstruction of Zagreb* (written under the editorial supervision of academic Branko Kincl and Prof. Zlatko Karac, Ph.D.), the claim under number 3 highlights the need for a “... holistic approach and interdisciplinarity”. It is evident here that the organizers of the conference consider it to be one of the fundamental strongholds in the search for an optimal approach to post-earthquake reconstruction. If we keep this in mind, the presence of the aforementioned various and authoritative professions at the Conference looks completely natural. It is not useless to repeat what is written about this in the continuation of the 3rd thesis: “... the implementation of the renovation is mainly the task of the engineering professions (architects, urban planners, builders, surveyors, transport and energy experts), but the renovation strategy – which is still lacking in Zagreb – is an extremely interdisciplinary task that must include several complementary professions with indispensable competences in the cultural and social-humanistic domains (art historians, designers, urban sociologists, economists, demographers, lawyers, etc.)”. A valid distinction between these two levels, as well as an understanding of their internal connection, is a key prerequisite for a successful renovation. According to semantic inertia, the term *reconstruction* would refer to the return of the ‘old’. However, even a simple review of historical examples of urban reconstruction suggests that it is not just persistence on the monopoly of previous conditions and relationships, but a complicated

dynamic where the old is established with the aid of the new, but also the new with the aid of the old. In order to bring this complicated dynamic to a practical level, it is necessary to distinguish the aforementioned two-stage nature of the restoration process as early as at the preventive level, when determining the basic foundations of the restoration approach. It has been shown on several occasions that neglecting one or the other level, strategic or implementation wise, leads to predictable pitfalls. Ignoring the implementation level leads to a barren bureaucratic maze, where everyone is to blame and no one is responsible. Ignoring the strategic level leads to temporary pragmatic solutions for which the word *simulacrum* is aptly used in contemporary sociology.

Contrary to various, often undeserved claims by the Croatian public, evaluations according to which the post-earthquake reconstruction, especially the reconstruction of the historic center of Zagreb, exceeds the available intellectual and professional abilities present in Croatian society, in this Collection it is argued in several places that in the period of Croatian modernity it can be easy to extract examples of proven restoration skill. Even the attitude of the city and national participants towards the earthquake in Zagreb in 1880 shows that several guidelines can be extracted from that attitude, relevant either at the implementation or at the strategic level. Examples of the reconstruction of Croatian settlements after the Second World War, among which the reconstruction of Zadar has a special symbolic status, and the reconstruction of Croatian settlements destroyed during the Serbian-Montenegrin aggression, among which the reconstruction of Vukovar has a special symbolic status, despite the special conditions of such reconstructions, demonstrate that Croations knew where and how to find competent experts and rational organizers. In these reconstructions, it became clear that it wasn’t only about the construction of new buildings and new infrastructure networks, but also about the restoration of the social and cultural memory of the city and place. It is also noteworthy to mention the possibility of urban transformation, where a

settlement that is not yet a city is established as a city through post-earthquake reconstruction. In this regard, the post-earthquake reconstruction of Makarska in 1962 is a notable example.

At the same time, welcome assistance from outside, such as, for example, financial support from the funds of the European Union, is not excluded. But everything lies, indirectly suggested by the texts in the Collection, on one’s own abilities. In addition to “classic” sectors of reconstruction, such as construction, finance, infrastructure, housing, law, the Collection also discusses those that have, quite often, been neglected or relegated to the margins. First of all, this refers to the shaping of the development horizon, where the presence and effects of certain risks are rationally calculated. They can be of natural origin, such as an earthquake or flood, and they can also be of sociocultural origin (wars, invasions). Risk prevention imposes a number of new requirements and rules in the reconstruction process. As a sociologist, I am particularly close to emphasizing the importance of communication with citizens, reliance on civic participation and solidarity, and the importance of some symbolic landmarks of Zagreb. In the social imagination of the population they enable the strengthening of ideas about Zagreb as a space and a place of its own life attraction and identity. It is not useless here to recall the urban experiences visible in several, albeit unsystematic, testimonies of foreigners who have permanently moved to Zagreb. On the one side, there is security and good social relations. But on the other side, there is a pleasant city atmosphere. In the urgency of reconstruction, and there will certainly be some urgencies, it should not happen that the success of Zagreb’s reconstruction is documented crosswise, by emphasizing the similarity with the imaginary, ubiquitously identical, city of globalization. That is something that the authors and editors of the Collection don’t have any doubt about. It’s the managers’ turn and, unfortunately, the politicians’. I recommend this Collection to them.

[Translated by Tea Raše]