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## Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia



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### Abstract

The twentieth century has witnessed destruction of the built environment and heritage in armed conflicts on an unprecedented scale. In the intense competition for post-conflict reconstruction, cities are often drastically redefined and recalibrated to fit new or imposed political, social, cultural, and economic schemes. Yet, the war-time destruction is rarely the end of purposeful erasure of built environment. Post-war reconstructions, especially the ones that brought change of ideologies and regimes into the mixture, are equally detrimental to the architectural heritages of the past. “Transition Urbicide” discusses post-war reconstruction in post-socialist countries—here primarily focused on former Yugoslav republics—that is entangled with economic and political transition from socialism to unhinged neoliberal capitalism. This symbiosis caused thorough and arguably systematic erasure of modernist heritage of former Yugoslavia that is ongoing to this day. The main goal of this theoretical framing is to explain architectural

engagements with violent transformation of urban morphology within the broader framework of urban geopolitics and post-war recovery in post-socialist societies. By doing so, it seeks to build unique architectural knowledge needed for post-conflict reconstruction in complex and conflicted urban environments.

### Keywords

Urbicide · Post-war reconstruction · Post-socialist transition · Modern heritage · Socialist heritage · Socialist modernism · Former Yugoslavia

### Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed destruction of the built environment and heritage in armed conflicts on an unprecedented scale, inasmuch that acts of violence against cities have become intrinsic parts of both state-building and modernity-building apparatus (Allais 2018). This horrifying destruction has generated a surge of academic research on urban conflicts, although the material related to war and post-war changes of urban morphology remained scattered among many actors and circulated without rigorous critical analysis. On the practitioner side of things, this alarming situation has induced numerous international organizations and professionals to propose plans to rebuild destroyed cities and rehabilitate and preserve their

heritage. But in the intense competition for post-conflict reconstruction, cities are often drastically redefined and recalibrated to fit new or imposed political, social, cultural, and economic schemes. These processes of perspectival adjustment and reconceptualization need to be identified, fleshed out, and critiqued if reconstruction is to proceed on an ethical basis.

The destruction of architecture, one could argue, is old as architecture itself due to the innate characteristic of buildings to provide existence in a place, create meaning, and propel socioeconomic status. Complete erasure of cities, although difficult to achieve, has been attempted, repeated, and even romanticized throughout the history (Vale and Campanella 2005). But, as argued by Phillip Misselwitz and Eyal Weizman (Misselwitz and Weizman 2003), modern destruction of built environment carries something distinctively characteristic for our era. Especially in the past few decades, with the development of high-precision and long-distance weaponry systems, calculated targeting of architecture became the hallmark of contemporary wars. This new kind of warfare puts the emphasis on target-selection process, adding new layers to the myriad of possible readings of built environment (Jovanović Weiss 2000). Yet, the war-time destruction is rarely the end of purposeful erasure of built environment. Post-war reconstructions, especially the ones that brought change of ideologies and regimes into the mixture, are equally detrimental to the architectural heritages of the past. “Transition Urbicide” discusses post-war reconstruction in post-socialist countries—here primarily focused on former Yugoslav republics—that is entangled with economic and political transition from socialism to unhinged neoliberal capitalism. This symbiosis caused thorough and arguably systematic erasure of modernist heritage of Social Yugoslavia that is ongoing to this day.

## On Urbicide

Across a war-torn world rode Elric, his crimson eyes burning with a fierce anger at the sights of wanton destruction he witnessed. Although he had himself lived by his sword for many years and had

committed acts of murder, robbery and *urbicide*, he disliked the senselessness of wars such as this, of men who killed one another for only the vaguest of reasons. (Moorcock 2008, first published in 1963; author’s emphasis)

The emerging field of studies on urban conflicts and urban destruction repopularized the concept of “urbicide”—*the destruction of a city or its character* (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). First written down in 1963 in premonitory fashion by Michael Moorcock, urbicide entered architectural vocabulary through writings of Wolf von Eckardt (1966), Ada Louise Huxtable (1968), and Marshall Berman (1987), who all used it to criticize aggressive urban development of American cities. But it is the vast destruction of cities such as Sarajevo and Mostar during the Bosnian war (1991–1995) that gave the term the connotation in which it is predominantly used today. Writings of Bogdan Bogdanović (1994), but especially two timely publications—*Mostar '92: Urbicid* (Jurić et al. 1992) and *Warchitectre: Urbicide Sarajevo* (1994)—instigated new theories on urbicide as more-or-less calculated destruction of built environment in war-like acts of violence.

Since then, in an avalanche of texts, the understanding of urbicide became increasingly flexible, encompassing a wide range of damaging actions directed against the built environment. The field is shaped by Robert Bevan’s notion on destruction of memory (Bevan 2007), Andrew Herscher’s theories on the creative entanglement of violence and cultural production (Herscher 2010), and Francesco Mazzucchelli’s study on semiotic value of places in times of destruction and reconstruction (Mazzucchelli 2010). Attempts to systemize urbicidal discourses focused primarily on political motives for urban destruction, two pivotal books in that regard being Stephen Graham’s *Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Graham 2004) and Martin Coward’s *Urbicide—The Politics of Urban Destruction* (Coward 2008). Graham gave both historic and contemporary overview of damaging actions against cities, hinting where potential perils may lie in the near future. Coward, on the other hand, was more systematic in designing his

classification and definitions, using Heidegger's concepts of *Dasein* and *Mitsein* to conclude that urbicide is destruction of built environment that constitutes the possibility of "being-with-others in the World"—theory that has been proven in the process of ethnic, religious, and cultural homogenization of territory during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

However, the destruction of built environment in wars is only rarely the final act of urbicide. To date, scarce attention has been dedicated to the systematic examination of post-conflict urban reconstructions in transition societies that often are more sophisticated and more comprehensive forms of killing of the cities. The word "transition" is a straightforward association to the specific set of processes that characterize political, economic, and cultural transition from socialist to capitalist society, that is, from centrally planned economy to a market economy (Åslund 2002; Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012; Koleva and Magnin 2017). Although borrowed from economy sciences, the term is widely accepted and already rooted in the interdisciplinary studies of post-socialist urban transformation of the former Eastern Bloc (Vujošević 2003; Tsenkova 2009; Drummond and Young 2020; Günther et al. 2024; Staničić and Schwake 2024). Those processes directly contribute to the further deterioration of architecture already damaged in violent conflicts, producing a specific kind of "transition urbicide."

The usage of the term "urbicide," especially in the Balkan context, is very charged and, admittedly, can gain some unwanted connotations. Its scholarly and popular usage over the years became universal and, unavoidably, vague, so much so that it became an alert word whenever there's some unfavorable action against built environment. In the local context, however, the term is being predominantly used to describe calculated destruction of architecture of others (mostly religious or heritage buildings, but also large number of private homes) that accompanied ethnic cleansing and "balkanization" of the territory—the trademark of Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. When it comes to the 1999 NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the destruction of

built environment did have some elements of urbicide (e.g., destruction of city's character through symbolic targeting of governmental buildings in Belgrade). The definition of urbicide used here is expanded to include the variety of detrimental actions in post-war reconstruction of damaged buildings in Yugoslavia. Since these actions stem from the complex processes of post-socialist transition, they are something that all countries of former Yugoslavia have in common. Hence conflating all former Yugoslav republics in this research happens in reference to the post-war reconstruction processes, not the nature of destruction.

In these intense processes of post-conflict reconstruction, cities are often drastically redefined and recalibrated to fit new political, social, and economic realities. The distinctive symptoms of this process—contested ownership, private takeover of communal resources, and unbridled investment plans—reflect in the urban sphere through appropriation of public spaces, erasure of historical architectural styles, or even failure to produce (re)construction at all. In addition, in conflicted and divisive societies, post-war reconstruction is interpreted as a continuation of the conflict by other means that is equally detrimental to urban fabric (Makaš 2012). Failing to understand and address these phenomena may lead to irreparable devastation of architecture that has already been severely damaged in an act of calculated violence.

### **How to Investigate "Transition Urbicide"?**

Complex investigation into modalities in which violence and war influence the transformation of cities requires new methods of documenting and cross-referencing multiple architectural sources and histories. Taking into account the vast array of actors—architects, city planners, private investors, institutes for protection of cultural heritage, government departments, and mass media—across different time layers, before, during, and after the conflict, generates various perspectives for academic research. Interdisciplinary sources

(such as architectural and urban projects, zoning and protection laws, corporate internal documentation, newspaper articles, TV video material) that would enable the investigation of the transition urbicide processes are not documented in “standard” archives due to novelty of those processes (for many buildings damaged in the 1990s, it is still an ongoing development), nonexistent archival regulations, and lack of a unifying archival system. Creating a reference model that would expose interconnections and power hierarchy between different actors involved in post-war reconstruction has the potential to identify abstract schemes, procedural steps, and dynamic networks that are guiding the reconstruction of ex-Yugoslav cities, as well as reveal hidden power loops that are contributing to the destruction of Yugoslav modernist heritage (Staničić, Staničić 2021a, b). Because it is unfinished and ongoing process, special emphasis should be given to the temporal dimension of these connections that are in the state of constant dynamical flux and their evolution and re-articulation through time.

Constructing a *histoire croisée* of the multiple actors that are involved in post-war reconstruction processes offers multiple advantages. Werner and Zimmermann (2006) argue that:

*Histoire croisée* aims to utilize the intercrossing of perspectives and shifts in points of view in order to study specific knowledge effects. Starting from the divergences among various possible viewpoints, by bringing out their differences and the way in which, historically, they emerge, often in an interdependent manner, *histoire croisée* makes it possible to re-compose these elements. The reflexivity to which it leads is not empty formalism, but is rather a relational field that generates meaning.

This approach gives us the chance to look at identified problem with many different sets of eyes, not only the ones of an architect or architectural historian. Perils of a single story can be multiple, and although personal biases are hard to eliminate completely, observing the playfield on a relational level generates new meanings that correspond more accurately to the realpolitik happening on the ground. Secondly, overlaying different actors’ roles and decision-making procedures reveals surprising level of

interdependence, sometimes in unexpected places, but also shows how architects are marginalized and excluded from any kind of executive power. Finally, this approach also offers a solid tool to reexamine architectural research scenarios that can be applied to war and post-war contexts, as currently existing methodology does not offer adequate approaches (Wang and Groat 2013).

### **Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Transition Architecture of Post-war and Post-socialist Yugoslavia**

Socialist Yugoslavia was built on a maxim of “brotherhood and unity.” It was a home to six republics, three major religions, one official, and many unofficial languages, myriad of local cultures and ethnicities. On a global political scene, Yugoslavia managed to carve itself a special niche between Western and Eastern Blocs as a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement and, arguably, an unofficial leader of the Third World. In distancing itself from the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia rejected socialist realism as an official architectural style and embraced the postulates of modernism as desired mode of architectural production (Kulić 2009a). This led to creation of unusual hybrid architecture, capitalist in form, and socialist in nature, where architects had unlimited creative freedom, and they used it to be the driving force in social, cultural, and economic transformation of the country. Socialist architecture got international acclamation from both sides of the Iron Curtain, and it served as a platform for cultural exchange in the process of building the Non-Aligned Movement (Kulić 2009b; Sekulić 2016). It mimicked the globalist aspirations of the Yugoslav Communist Party but, at the same time, managed to attract global attention for its playfulness and originality (Stierli et al. 2018).

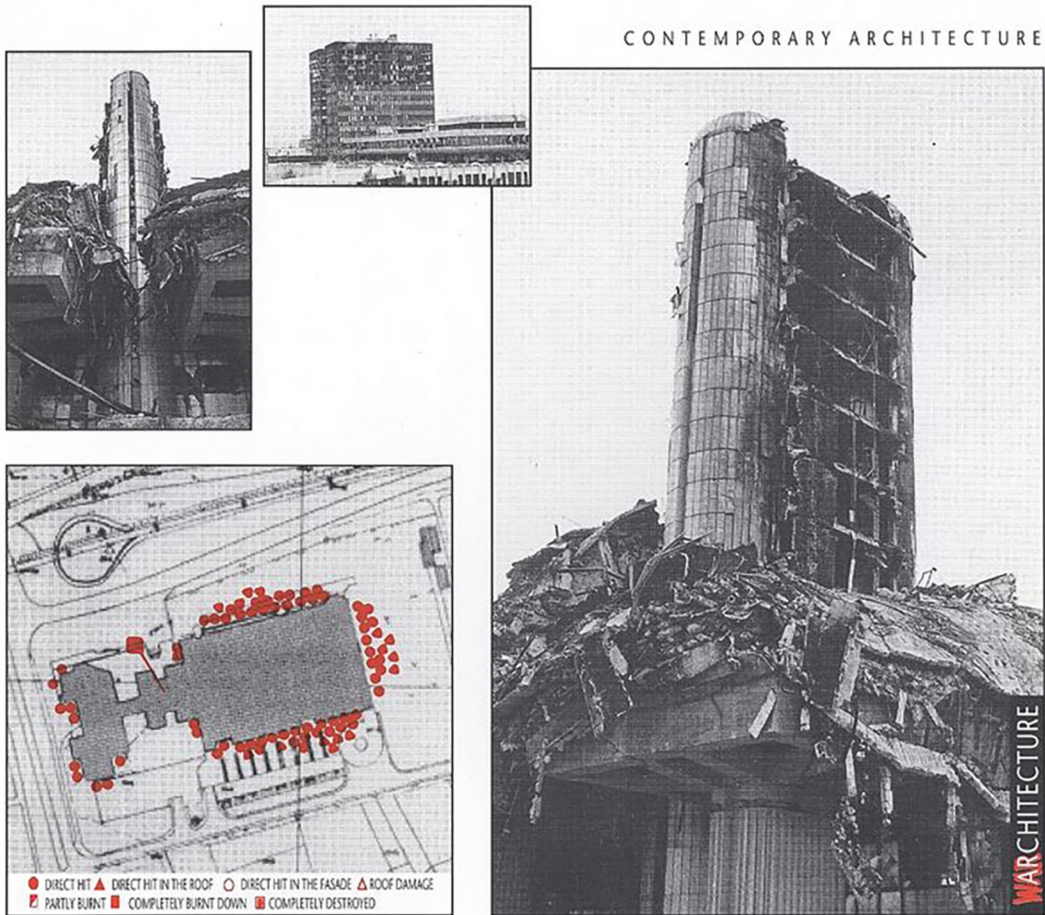
At the end of the Cold War, while walls across the Europe were falling down, Yugoslavia started building walls of its own (Ramet 2002; Rogel 2004). More than a decade-long violent conflicts torn the federal state apart, destroyed its heterogeneous culture, divided its territory along ethnic



borders, and definitively rejected socialism to embrace an unhinged variant of neoliberal capitalism. Rise of nationalism and calculated destruction of architecture and culture “of others” was the main characteristic of all Yugoslav wars and skirmishes that spanned from 1991 to 2004 (Riedlmayer 1995; Herscher 2008) (Fig. 1). The aim of this destruction was to erase evidence of multicultural cohabitation that flourished in this region for centuries and permanently break up ties among its people (Staničić, interview with Azra Akšamija 2022). During and after Yugoslav wars, socialist architecture was stigmatized both as a symbol of oppression of the centralized communist government and as an unwanted reminder of a shared past (Dašić 2023). It was targeted

alongside the cultural and religious monuments, although its destruction went under the radar for several reasons: its cultural and architectural value was neither recognized nor protected by institutions, its abstract forms eluded any commonly accepted definition and understanding, and hence, its cultural influence inside the confines of Yugoslavia never went outside of the narrow circles of urban and intellectual elites.

Nature of destruction of socialist architecture in Bosnian and Croatian wars from 1991 to 1995 had every characteristic of, in words of Bogdan Bogdanović (2008), “wanton destruction of primitive, anti-urban and hence uncivilized minds.” On the other hand, in 1999, NATO alliance marked modern socialist architecture as a standard bearer



Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 1 Warchitecture: Urbicide Sarajevo, 1994

of Serbia's statehood and exercised its precise destruction as a mode of pressure on Milošević's totalitarian regime (Dimitrijević and Draganić 2013). The effort to reconstruct these damaged buildings, therefore, poses deeper questions about understanding the past, facing unpleasant truths, and setting the course for an uncertain future. In a fragmented society that is still struggling to make sense of these difficult issues, political parties coupled with big investors have a decisive influence on steering public debate, creating the false image of social consensus, and weighing in on architectural design while downplaying the role of architects and urban planners.

In both those instances, the end of armed conflicts meant the definite end of socialism in Yugoslavia's successor countries and the beginning of the long process of economic, political, and cultural transition into nominally democratic and liberal capitalist societies. Despite new political realities on the ground that kept reigniting newly established divisions, one shared feature that is common and still persists among all ex-Yugoslav republics is deflection from the shared socialist architectural and cultural heritage. In some instances, its mistreatment is being used for reinvention of post-socialist nationalist identities (Staletović 2022), while in others, crony privatization of public properties serves as a short-term injection of capital into porous economies that often directly leads to kleptocracy (Perić and Maruna 2022). While these processes in reconstruction of separate cases have been investigated to some extent (Ristić 2018), so far, the comparative analysis has eluded global academic attention.

After the democratic uprising in Serbia in 2000 that formally ended socialism in former Yugoslavia, the damaged modernist buildings fell into a vortex of ideological and semantic battles, hasty privatizations as instant solution for neoliberal economy, media-filtered placement of information, and the deeply polarized public opinion—all of which caused for some buildings to remain in ruinous state up until today (Staničić 2021a; b). Contemporary Serbian architecture and its institutions blended into these destructive processes and lost the power to be the driving force in post-war transformation of the society, like it was the case in socialist

Yugoslavia after the Second World War (Dobrović 1950). In the case of Bosnia and Croatia, malpractices related to reconstruction of damaged socialist architectural heritage reflect all the difficulties of a post-state-controlled economy, struggling to make this transition and find its way in a neoliberal, capitalist, and globalized world (Čamprag 2024). In retrospective, the violent conflict was just a trigger for continuous devastation of unwanted Yugoslav architectural heritage, whose maltreatment after the war became a way for recreating post-socialist national identities (Staničić 2014).

Yet, interdisciplinary studies that would focus on post-war reconstruction in the entire former Yugoslavia, let alone the ones that would combine diverse architectural sources and documents, are notably lacking. Majority of scholarly papers on the topic are local reactions to bombing or surveys of attacked architecture written during or immediately after the war (Riedlmayer 1995; Krnić and Perović 1999; Anonym 1999; Kulić 1999; Jovanović Weiss 2000). More recently, sporadic critical texts that focus on rare reconstruction proposals have been published (David 2014; Bădescu 2016), but a comprehensive study of architectural production in post-socialist Yugoslavia is still missing. They all fail to ask deeper questions about the links between architectural design, violence, and geopolitics or to make a comparative analysis with ongoing reconstruction of Bosnian and Croatian cities, with which Serbia shares political and cultural background, but not the nature of conflict. One notable exception is Francesco Mazzucchelli's (2010) research on semiology of urban destruction and reconstruction in former Yugoslavia. But, although Mazzucchelli's work constitutes an excellent example of the comparative approach, it focuses primarily on urban semiology, and it does not deal with the economic, social, and political forces in urban planning that significantly overweight the semiotic ones.

## Post-war Reconstruction in the Era of Post-socialist Transitions

Apart from several pioneering, ambitious attempts that came soon after the conflict, when hopes were still high in positive outcomes of reconstruction—



for example, Lebbeus Woods's proposal for the reconstruction of *Elektroprivreda* building in Sarajevo (Pilav 2022), or the 'New Gates of Belgrade' competition (Staničić 2019)—efforts to rebuild damaged buildings soon slipped away from the hands of architects. As the time went by, different power players started to line up for their fair share of influence, so that this educated approach to reconstruction soon got substituted with opportunism, as it will be shown, without any oversight. Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs building in Belgrade, for instance, was sold in 2003 to Israeli investor *AFI Europe* who waited for more than 10 years for the change of the general plan that would allow more favorable urban parameters. Waiting certainly paid off, as at the end city officials changed the whole section of urban regulations to meet the demands of investors (Fig. 2).

Something similar is happening with Hotel Yugoslavia, one of the first modernist buildings

erected in the new socialist utopia called New Belgrade. Targeted by NATO in an attempt to execute Milošević's closest allies, soon after the war, it was sold to Kempinski Hotels who commissioned professor of the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, Goran Vojvodić, to produce a reconstruction and extension proposal. Vojvodić suggested a vertical elevation as a counterbalance to the strong horizontality of the original building, but the project halted because of the regulation that limited the height of buildings, whose purpose was to protect views on the old city center from New Belgrade. However, when those regulations were scrapped because of the notorious Belgrade Waterfront project (Maruna et al. 2023), all obstacles were removed to create not one but two towers. Vojvodić declined to participate in these actions, so he was removed from the project. The current owner of the hotel, "MV Investments" group, announced in 2024 that the



**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 2** *Belgrade Skyline*, AFI Group, Israel, 2017. Architect: Ami Moore

project will move forward following the latest proposal by Dutch UN Studio, where two dominant towers overshadow the original building (Fig. 3).

But maybe the most striking example of political and architectural alchemy comes from the building that was built as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, today *Ušće Business Center* (Fig. 4). In a staggering transformation, the building was first turned into a central economic hub of Milošević's government for which it was bombed by NATO, and after the war, in 2001, it was sold to a private investor with strong ties to the regime, MPC

Properties (Kulić 2007). Its transformation into a complex of twin towers with a shopping mall between them had all the elements of an architectural melodrama: out-of-context reconstruction proposal of a foreign design studio, staged architectural competition, changes of architects and master plans to accommodate significant increase of urban parameters, a lawsuit. It is fair to say that, at the beginning of transition processes, liberation of market and entering the global scene caught local architects off guard and ill-prepared for international competition. But also, one could claim that the playfield was not levelled, since the rules of the game apparently did not apply to



**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 3** Hotel *Jugoslavija*, Belgrade, UN Studio, 2024. (Source: Beobuild)





**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 4** *Ušće* Business Center (former Central Committee Building) and Tower Two,

preliminary design, 2018. (Author: Chapman Taylor, London. Source: MPC Properties)

foreign and domestic investors. Effort to attract fresh capital from abroad led to a political and economic alchemy called “investor urbanism,” in which master plans and planning laws were in subordinate position to ready-made design solutions brought from the outside.

In multiple instances, the presence of foreign investors and the international community has many characteristics of a neocolonial project. In Bosnia, one-side initiatives of countries such as Turkey reveal the fight for influence over their former colonies, while freshly forged connections with Saudi Arabia and USA (on Bosniak side) and Russia (on Bosnian Serbs side) show signs of postcolonial practices, namely, boosting collaboration with countries that are perceived as ideological nemesis of the opponent to galvanize nationalistic and anti-Yugoslav feelings. There are many such instances in reconstruction of religious buildings and monuments, but if we stay with contemporary architecture, examples that stand out are the International University of Sarajevo and the International Burch University (Fig. 5). They are both Turkish built and funded and host a significant number of Turkish students. Maybe the most extreme case is former Hotel “Ruža” in Mostar, today part of the Marriott

Hotels chain, whose reconstruction was so out of proportion in Mostar’s Old City that even UNESCO had to intervene (Fig. 6). The architectural language of these buildings resembles the one present in the countries that funded them, and it being different from the local architectural traditions, it slowly erases the distinct legacy of Yugoslav modernism.

Similarly, post-war reconstruction initiatives in Yugoslavia led by important international players such as UNESCO, although promoted as an act of community healing, served predominantly for self-acclamation and led to creation of particular forms of symbolic violence (Makaš 2012). The sheer presence of some high-profile international institutions and officials had damaging impact on the ground. If we take the city of Priština as the most representative example of this phenomena, we will see that harsh economic stratification of city neighborhoods caused by high demands for elite housing directly led to creation of international sub-city within the city of Priština (Vöckler 2008). What left behind the international presence in the city were abandoned buildings and oversized houses mostly constructed illegally, hence without aesthetic input or professional guidance of architects. Such practices led to a social



**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 5** International University of Sarajevo, 2010. Investor: Turkish International Co-operation and Development Agency (TIKA)

segregation between the local and the international community, but also among the local population (Jakupi 2012).

The central issue in the economic transition from socialism to capitalism is, of course, the question of ownership of communal goods. The entire industry and service sector in socialist Yugoslavia were built on cooperative grounds, embedded with strong regional character, and formally owned by people who worked in them. After the crash of common market, sanctions, and closing of borders, many of those cooperatives collapsed dragging down with them local economies. Ownership over the property of bankrupt firms was transferred to local government entities who saw fast privatization as the easiest solution to surging economic crisis. However, new owners would usually have different ideas. First, they would sell all movable equipment to cover the expenses of privatization, and then they

would use the high value of the land to build luxury apartments and commercial buildings, often way above allowed urban parameters. The most interesting examples, architecturally speaking, come from Croatian seashore (Croatian Radio-Television 2023). Large hotel chains such as Haludovo were completely devastated by new owners who are conditioning new construction by putting limitations on public access—a phenomenon that keeps occurring in all former Yugoslav republics (Fig. 7).

On the other hand, reconstruction of cultural heritage, religious buildings, and vernacular architecture in all post-Yugoslav countries had a side effect—enforcement of nationalism and reinvention of post-socialist identities. But nowhere is that more evident, and at the same time controversial, than in instances where new nationalistic symbols were put next to, and sometimes even tried to override, modern architectural heritage. In





**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 6** Former Hotel “Ruža,” today Mostar Marriott Hotel, 2005–present. (Photo: author)

a series of nationalist outbursts, Serbian government recently announced that 120-m-high flagpole carrying Serbian flag will be built in the Peace and Friendship Park, former symbol of Yugoslav globalist aspirations where many world leaders from the Cold War era planted trees of friendship (Kulić 2014). In addition, Serbia is nowadays trying more and more to anchor its post-socialist identity to pre-Ottoman era by creating new memorials dedicated to its medieval rulers. In 2016 it was announced that the Yugoslav General Staff Building (*Generalštab*), heavily damaged by NATO on two occasions, will be transformed into “Museum of Medieval Serbia” and that the monument dedicated to Stefan Nemanja, the founder of medieval Nemanjić dynasty, would be erected in front of it (Čović 2017). After harsh public debate and opposition from architects’ guild, decision has been made in 2018 to relocate the monument just couple of hundreds of meters away to Savski Square, right next to the Monument to the Fallen of the Wars of

the 1990s. For that occasion, Savski Square is dressed in “traditional” architectural style, pushing those practices to the extreme and mimicking the Macedonian scenario from *Skopje 2014* project (Fig. 8).

In similar fashion, memorialization of past wars in Yugoslavia is a mixture of victimization, defiance and denial, and letting temporal solutions become permanent. Spatial manifestation of mnemonic practices ranges from memorials being marginalized and neglected to memorial installations being weaponized for political purposes (Jelić and Staničić 2022). For example, in Serbia, Avala Tower and Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS) memorial in Aberdareva Street in Belgrade, both targeted in war against Milošević’s “propaganda machine,” showcase a textbook example of a state-controlled media making decisive influence on public opinion and even navigating the reconstruction process (Staničić 2021a, b). Restoring the silhouette of Avala Tower, 200-m-high TV transmitter on eponymous mountain on



**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 7** Haludovo Palace Hotel, Malinska, current state after privatization. (Source: *Betonski Spavači*)

outskirts of Belgrade, was pushed by RTS as a question of national pride, attracting “one million small donations” from Serbia and abroad. On the other hand, transforming ruins of RTS building—where 16 civilians lost their lives—into a memorial was advocated by victims’ families who also played a huge role in defining architectural competition brief. This and many other examples show that veterans organizations, victims’ families, and various NGOs, supported by state-sponsored media, play a huge role in deciding the fate of damaged socialist architecture.

Official institutes for valorization and protection of cultural heritage proved to be powerless and they often succumb to the pressure of politicians and investors, also because the people leading them are by rule political appointees. But this also raises a bigger question of how to evaluate modernist heritage and what kind of values are attributed to these buildings by professionals, but also general public. While socialist residential architecture is still appreciated widely for its

quality of construction, functionality, and spaciousness, modernist institutional buildings fail to generate public affection. We can speculate that modernism in general was detached from ordinary people and revered mainly by intellectuals and elites, with addition that in post-socialist Yugoslavia, many of these state institutions didn’t survive the ideological tinge. On the other hand, while acceptance of modernist socialist architecture comes mainly from professionals, listing those building as heritage is an arduous process due to the lack of well-established rules and guidelines. For instance, many of these relatively recent structures do not meet the unofficial “50-year old” criteria, which leaves professional with the impossible task of having to prove their elusive aesthetic and cultural value. These criteria are not the priority of politicians and their minions who above all seek profit and at the end have the final word in decision-making.

Many architects participate in these processes reluctantly because poor economic situation does





**Transition Urbicide: Post-War Reconstruction in Post-Socialist Yugoslavia, Fig. 8** Design proposal for the monument to Stefan Nemanja, Serbian Mediaeval ruler, at Savski Square in Belgrade, 2018

not allow fully independent professional practice, but also because they are not part of political processes. Argument could be made that this has become a global problem, but in former Yugoslavia, there are some factors that are worsening the situation. For example, after the Second World War, there were only three architectural schools that produced several hundred architects annually (Yugoslavia had 23 million inhabitants in 1990). At this moment, Serbia alone has five faculties of architecture that together produce over 1000 architects per year. When this number is combined with the illegal construction that is blooming (Serbia currently has over 2 million illegal buildings), one starts to comprehend why architects became dispensable workforce and why are they forced to accept all kinds of inappropriate commissions. In socialist Yugoslavia, architects were carriers of not only urban but social and cultural development, while today they became

redundant, unessential component of a city-building. The entire decision-making process, from urban planning to architectural design, is in the hands of investors, without any effective professional or scholarly critique. What we are witnessing is the collapse of institutional systems of control, and it is happening on both local and regional levels. What all ex-Yugoslav republics have in common is the hybrid mixture of globalization, corruption, and nationalism, demographic changes that cause radicalization of cities, suspension of planning laws and master plans, and finally, marginalization of architectural guild and its social and humanistic agenda.

One of the solutions to these problems can be return to the inclusive model of decision-making. Architectural competitions, for example, are a confirmation that, when given a chance, architecture is perfectly capable of engaging into social dialogue and offering answers that are socially

and culturally responsible. Alternative seems inevitably pessimistic, as this transition from one extreme to another is happening in front of our eyes; there is a risk that the whole Balkan region will become a polygon for experimentation in unhinged, neoliberal capitalism. This plea gains particular weight in the light of the destruction that is currently happening in conflict regions around the world, particularly in Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, Armenia, and others. Since international investors and large corporations are already lining up to jump in on the ground as soon as wars are over, it is a duty of academics to warn that blind acceptance of questionable capital without control or critical reflection can cause permanent consequences on built environment. There is a need to reinject the humanistic principles of inclusiveness, understanding, sensitivity, and empathy into the discourse developing around the idea of urban reconstruction and humanitarian relief. The goal is to probe the ethical engagement of professionals and stakeholders in post-war reconstructions and draw them into critical dialogue with local and regional ethical frames.

## Summary

The post-war reconstruction in post-socialist Yugoslavia is destroying the inclusive, modern, and regional character of Yugoslav cities, producing a unique type of “transition” urbicide. The main goal of this theoretical framing is to explain architectural engagements with violent transformation of urban morphology within the broader framework of urban geopolitics and post-war recovery in post-socialist societies. Through architecture, conflict, and cross-referencing data from multiple sources, it defines urban space as a battleground for various displays of power and influence among multiple actors—state institutions, private capital, and citizens—in the complex context of post-war, transitional society. Furthermore, it seeks to build unique architectural knowledge needed for post-conflict reconstruction in complex and conflicted urban environments. The post-war urban and social transformation of Yugoslavia, taken here as an example, can serve as a harbinger for expected

reconstructions of active conflict zones, particularly in contested, transition societies.

Furthermore, the goal of this framing is to develop new research protocols for management and interpretation of the big collections of architectural documents, creating in the process the interdisciplinary research guidelines for investigation of cities in war and post-war contexts. By constructing a *histoire croisée* of multiple stakeholders, it becomes possible to engage the wide spectrum of actors, many of whom are witnesses or active participants in both destruction and reconstruction processes. Through architecture, conflict, and cross-referencing of multiple sources, this framework perceives urban space as a battleground for various displays of power and influence among multiple co-creators in the complex context of post-war, transitional society. It can enthuse new research strategies for architectural historiography of post-conflict cities and offer new set of guidelines for impending urban reconstructions in active conflict zones that will shape the research of war and post-war transformation of cities in the coming years.

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