

VISUAL POLLUTION OF THE HISTORICAL CITY CORE – A CASE STUDY, THE CITY OF NIŠ

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Summary: *Niš is the third largest city in Serbia, placed in the southeast part of the country. The most important and characteristic symbols and doubtlessly the first association of the city of Niš is the Fortress with its central city core – King Milan Square and Obrenovićeveva Street. This historical city core have changed and developed through centuries along with customs and construction techniques of people who were passing and staying here for a certain period of time. Each nation upgraded the city and adapted it according to its needs, so that today we have a vivid pedestrian zone, full of history, complemented with traces of most diverse cultures.*

Unfortunately, the historical core of the city is barely noticeable, it is closed and inaccessible to the eyes of tourists, as well as those who are almost every day passing here, are deprived of a wealth that lies beneath glossy and colourful advertisements. Some of these buildings suffered improper changes, unworthy of their value and in that way lost their identity.

This paper analyses historical core of the city and recovery possibilities of its identity, through reconstruction and conservation of facades, and of course, prohibition of all inappropriate alterations and advertisements. The aim of this paper is not causing damage to the companies that use facades for their own profit, but creating the environment that the city of Niš has built for ages and most certainly deserves.

Keywords: *advertisements, heritage, main street, pollution, visual*

1. THE CITY IDENTITY

Observing one space and staying in it, can provide a person with considerable satisfaction. The city represents a structure in space, such as an architectural structure, and in some way it is a form of complex urban and architectural work occupying a larger area that was created during the longer period of time. Not one part of that space can be analysed independently, but as a piece of entirety, atmosphere, environment [1].

The atmosphere that characterizes a city or a town has been created over time but can be felt in one single moment. Peter Zumthor in 'Atmospheres'[2] divided the atmosphere of

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the city into nine parts: The body of architecture – the presence of the material (the frame); Material compatibility – the way in which materials react to each other; The sound of the space and its temperature/climate; Surrounding objects; Composition of the space – movement organization; certain tension in space; Levels of intimacy – proximity or distance, and the light – the play of light and shadows. He emphasizes the complexity of the factors that influence the creation of one part. Zumthor speaks of individual parts of architecture – buildings, but I strongly believe that his thoughts may be applied to a city or any other inhabited place, because, however, the organization and existence of such a space is similar to that of creating one single building.

The identity of the city is created by people. Mostly their culture, customs, beliefs, their skills and abilities. In the end, it is shaped by habits, which are created out of all things mentioned. Since people have their own character, it is also unique to one inhabited place. Cities function as complex organisms - they have their own bodies, veins, branches; they then have their own thoughts, because each city is somewhat predictable and responsive in a way unique to it, to its identity and atmosphere.

2. THE ANALYSED AREA

Based on the archaeological data, it is believed that the location of today's city of Niš was inhabited in the Middle Palaeolithic Age. It was formed as a settlement in the period between 5800. – 5500. BC, and the earliest archaeological layer belongs to Starčevo cultural group. Niš was formed by Celts in III century BC, and named it Navissos – the Celtic name for '*The River of Fairies*', so Niš became *The City of Fairies* [3].

The Romans conquered the city in I century BC, during the Dardanian wars. Shortly after that, Navissos became Naissus. This Roman city was also a military fortification – castrum, stretching east-west. In this area, a Turkish Fortress was formed later, and it still stands proudly in the center of Niš [3].

As the city at the crossway of the most important Balkan and European roads, it is often mentioned in history as '*The Gate Between the East and the West*'. It is the point of intersection of three strategically important directions of road and rail transport: from the north from Belgrade, the Morava valley to Thessaloniki, then Nišava to Bulgaria and Turkey, and finally the connection of Europe with the Adriatic [4]. It is precisely because of this position that it had been conquered several times, and different cultures had left their mark here.

Therefore, Niš can boast of rich cultural heritage. The monumental heritage of Niš was mentioned as early as during the Turkish occupation, and shortly after the liberation it became the subject of interest for many travellers and scientists [21], which only confirms its value. Today Niš is one of the tourist destinations of Serbia, and the reopening of Constantine the Great Airport has enabled easy travel of tourists from all over the world.. Obrenovićeva street, along with Kopitareva street, Known as 'Kazandžijsko sokače' and the Fortress create one of the major city attractions.

2.1 OBRENOVIĆEVA STREET – THE IMPORTANT MARK OF THE CITY

Obrenovićeva street covers the area of 11.520sq m and it is 720m long. In the beginning, it was covered by cobblestone, later by cubic pavement (1932.), and after that by granite

pavement. Electric lightning was implemented in 1909, shortly after hydroelectric power plant Sv. Petka started to work [6].

In the place of today's Obrenovićeveva street, in the Turkish period there was a 'Pokrivena čaršija'³, that stretched from the Fortress all over the Nišava River bridge. It was named after the canopies of the shops that protected customers from sun and rain.

A larger area of the street is protected as Spatial-cultural historical Unity [7][8], and certain objects are individually protected as cultural monuments : a group of buildings that are representing an indivisible whole, Obrenovićeveva no.12,14,16, the house of Andon Andonović, Obrenovićeveva no. 17 (former 41), the building („Libela Celje“), Obrenovićeveva no. 22, a group of buildings under numbers of 28, 30, 32 and Gradina building, Obrenovićeveva no. 38, the Red Cross Building, Obrenovićeveva no. 37 (former 73), the building under the number of 31 (former 67),[8]. The mentioned facilities and as part of the Spatial-cultural historical Unity, and individually, are subject to legal regulations, during each intervention.

Three buildings at the beginning of the street, number 12, 14 and 16, are the oldest ones (Figure 1.), preserved from the period after liberation from the Turks. They were built in 1880 as narrow buildings, mutually attached, with stores in the ground level and living area in the first floor, of the same height. They represent examples of old architecture, characteristic for XIX century period promenades, on the transition from Turkish to modern times [9].



Figure 1. A postcard form Niš which shows objects under numbers 12,14,16. Source: [10]

Under the number of 22. there is a protected building known as the house of trader Petar Dinić. It was built in 1925 as a narrow building, with rich facade decoration. Across the entire width of the building, a balcony with iron fence was created. The house has all the elements of eclecticism. Today, it's housing a small coffee shop in the ground level, called 'L'avenue 22'[9].

The house under the number of 28 is larger than previous ones, and was built as a two-storey building. The central part is shaped as a bay window. A small store was placed in

³ Eng. 'Covered street'

the ground floor, and a workshop on the first floor. The facade has a rich decoration made in artificial stone. It was built in 1927. The house under the number of 30 dates from 1894. It is slightly larger, with two stores on the first floor. This object is known in history as the first house in Niš that got electric lightning. Under the number of 32 there is the House of Jovanović family. (Figure 2) This object was built on the corner of Obrenovićeve and Svetozara Matkovića Streets, in 1900. The house has two levels, connected with a corner tower. The living area was placed on the first floor. The facade had very rich shallow decoration made in mortar. The portals are massive, wooden, monumental and luxurious, with arched glass details on corners. This object was revitalized during the period from 2003 to 2005 in the campaign "Lepša Srbija" (A more beautiful Serbia). The ground level is housing a boutique today [11].



Figure 2. Buildings under numbers 28, 30 and 32. Source: [10]

The Gradina building, number 38 was the business building of the Publishing Workers' Organization Gradina, which still carries this name. It was built in 1927. as a two-storey building with a large selling area on the ground level. It was built by the project of architect Julian Djupon in the spirit of eclecticism and academism, both characteristic for Russian architects from this period. The street facade is simple with narrow front door and accentuated portal plastic. It has a balcony on each floor. In the attic there is a mansard, in which the business premises of Gradina were located [9].

The house of Andon Andonović, one of the major textile importer and trader in Niš in the period between two World Wars, in Obrenovićeve 17 (former 41), represents the most valuable architectural creation from this period. The house was built by the project of Belgrade architect Milutin Borisavljević in 1930 in the spirit of French neoclassicism. It is a two-storey building with a long balcony of wrought iron covering the entire first floor and six smaller balconies covering the second floor. The whole facade is decorated

with relief made in artificial stone. The special emphasis is on long pilasters with rich capitols, covering the first and the second floor. In the center of the facade lies the figure of a naked male holding a bag in one and a scepter in the other hand as symbols of wealth and power [9].

The building in Obrenovićeva Street under the number of 31 (former 67) is a two-storey building, constructed in 1928. The middle part is made as a bay window which has the owner's monogram in the center. On the left and right from that window there are two smaller balconies with iron fence. The shallow geometric decoration enriches the facade. This building is attached to the one constructed on the corner of Kopitareva and Obrenovićeva street. The building under the number of 37 is built in 1921. After the II World War, its owner donated it to The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and it holds, till the present day, the city council of The Red Cross organization. The house has one floor, with a large selling area in the ground floor, which today holds a bookstore. The facade has rich ornamentation, especially in the attic, with sitting figures of a boy and a girl, and floral and geometric decoration around them [9]. Among buildings constructed between two world wars, the ones designed in modernist style should be mentioned. The angular building at the corner of Obrenovićeva and Dušanova Street is made in modernist style. It has business space in the ground floor, which today holds a bank. The entire first floor is drawn-out with bay windows. It was built in 1935 and has a flat roof and poor geometric decoration between the first floor windows [12]. The commercial and residential building under the number of 53 is a project of a well-known architect Aleksandar Medvedev; also, there is the 'Nisim' building at the beginning of the pedestrian area - both are built in the 30s, in modernist style. A shopping mall Gorča got its name after the palace that was placed at the beginning of the Obrenovićeva Street. A part of the building that nowadays holds 'French Institute' represents the replica of Aca Mihajlovic's House. Today, Gorča is a two-storey building, which holds tourist organizations, coffee shops and few more shops with various purposes [13][14]. Besides 'Gorča', there are two more shopping malls in Obrenovićeva street. Kalča, the biggest shopping mall in Niš, was being built from 1991 to 1993. and got its name after 'kafana'⁴ that was once placed here. Today it represents a recognizable symbol of the city. The second one is a shopping mall Forum, built in 2011 in the place of the former department store 'Pionir'.

2.2 OBRENOVIĆEVA STREET TODAY

Obrenovićeva Street, along with the King Milan Square, represents an important landmark of the city. This historical core is overflowed with modern coffee shops and stores, which are usually located on the ground floor, while the rest of the building is holding business and residential areas. Every day, thousands of people pass through this city artery. It also serves as a place for break and relaxation, with a big number of pastry shops, bakeries, restaurants and coffee shops, but it also represents a major touristic attraction because of its architecture and environment, the Fortress and the Nišava river are close, and a good connection with other parts of the city. Unfortunately, this area is insufficiently observable. Its architecture is hidden under advertisements and installation cables. The pedestrian area is partially occupied by cafes and their gardens, so the

⁴ A type of a Serbian restaurant

communication is reduced to its edges. All of this is terribly inconvenient for the main city focus. A detailed and studious analysis would determine its flaws and needs, and enable a successful revitalization. This would also have a great influence on the quality of life and provide more capacity for various activities.

3. THE CONCEPT OF URBAN POLLUTION

“Good design also means respecting the environment. Designers must contribute to preservation of natural resources; visual pollution is equally harmful as physical one.”
[15]

Today we mostly speak of the physical pollution – air, water and soil pollution. We rarely speak of visual pollution, which, although younger, has a great negative influence on the quality of life.[16] Visual pollution refers to all alterations which are inappropriate and diminish the opportunity of people to enjoy the space. These alterations could appear as garbage, improper graffiti or murals, cables which interrupt visual communications, advertising light that is too bright, damaged facades, poorly designed billboards, etc. All of them, although created to attract attention and customers, are doing the opposite, because people do not have tendency to stay long in the environment like this. In the environment with too many sounds, smells, lights and textures, a human being is not capable to react to everything at once, so the perception must be selective. A perception strategy is developed in such a case. Only the information necessary for locating the object of interest is processed, and everything else is dismissed [17]. The negative influence of visual pollution could be found in several aspects. It includes distraction, loss of identity, eye fatigue, it reduces the natural diversity and quality of life. Children that grow up in highly visually polluted environments have tendency to lose sense for aesthetics and natural need to fix and improve it. Urban visual pollution is more and more present in cities, and in large amount eliminates its uniqueness and characteristic ambiance [16].

3.1 THE CASES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Almost every inhabited place has a problem with visual pollution to a greater or lesser extent. In some of these cases, this problem has reached great proportions, so it was necessary to take certain measures. A similar case took part in Northern Ireland, when in 2006 the law on outdoor advertisements was brought up, under the name of *The Planning Policy Statement*. This law aims to ensure that anyone who has any contact with outdoor advertising has a positive contribution, including the city itself. A special accent was that the alteration does not draw attention from the unique qualities, nor in any way violates the archaeological or architectural heritage. On the contrary, every well designed advertisement or alteration could have positive influence on space and environment [18].

Similar project was organized in Barcelona, under the name of ‘Barcelona posa’t guapa’. This project for its goal had cleaning of the city from street art, and conservation of ruined facades which are of the exceptional significance for the city. During this project, Barcelona achieved a new glow, and a large number of buildings, among which were *Casa Milá* and *El Arco del Triunfo*, were conserved [19][20]. The case of the largest

South American metropolis of São Paulo is also known. Because of the uncontrollable visual pollution, a new law was brought up in 2006 under the name *Clean City Law*. This law included the prohibition of all outdoor advertisements, billboards, posters or flyers. Before its implementation São Paulo had over 15,000 billboards, 16,000 signs and 1,300 panels. One of the law's main goals was improvement of the city landscape and preservation of the cultural heritage. After its implementation São Paulo finally gained healthy visual communications. The cost was almost equal to zero. The company owners were obliged to remove ads and alterations at their own expense, and billboard removal was financed by private investments. *Clean City Law* was also very popular among citizens. Over 70% of them approved the removal of advertisements and physical barriers. The architecture finally flourished and the buildings, previously hidden under shiny and colourful ads, could be fully observed [21].

4. URBAN POLLUTION OF OBRENOVIĆEVA STREET AND THE SOLUTION PROPOSAL

Visual pollution of Obrenovićeva Street is evident and highly expressed. Along with shiny advertisements placed on the facades of commercial facilities and shops, billboards are also very dominant in this area, and one of them, located at the very beginning of the street represents a dangerous distraction for drivers (Figure3). This electric billboard definitely attracts the attention of passers-by, but unfortunately also the drivers. Blinded by its glossy monitor, they are taking their eyes off the road, and putting themselves and passengers at risk (Figure 3). On the other hand, installation cables are expanded between buildings above people's heads, so they are creating visual disturbance and inconvenience. They are also representing an obstacle to emergency vehicles, so in cases of emergency vehicles are prevented to approach the buildings.

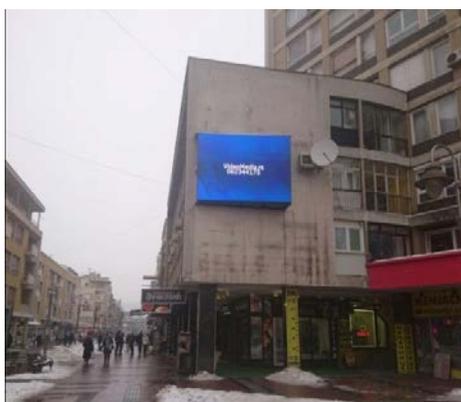


Figure 3. Electrical billboard at the beginning of Obrenovićeva Street. Foto: M.C.

The gardens of coffee shops halved the promenade, and pedestrian communications are shifted to the edge of the street, which leads to great crowds, especially in the summer period, when Obrenovićeva street is one of the more prominent arteries of the city.

6. МЕЂУНАРОДНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА

Савремена достигнућа у грађевинарству 20. април 2018. Суботица, СРБИЈА

Because of this, people, especially tourists, have no tendency to stay here, and the central focus of the city becomes only one overwhelmed communication, uncomfortable for retention, largely due to the lack of transparency of the space and improperly adapted facades. The cleaning of this city core, in addition to the reconstruction of the facades and the removal of all advertisements and accessories, would have to include the implementation of the installations under the pedestrian zone in order to clear the space from the cables. All improper alterations, like large billboards, especially the electric ones; garden canopies that 'strangle' the area and all street furniture that belong to companies and in some way represent a kind of an advertisement, would have to be removed. The gardens of the cafes would be allowed, but with a detailed space analysis, and designed so that they do not in any way endanger or obstruct the views. The shop windows could be designed simply, with only a few indications of what is in the building, while not representing the dominant point of space. [22][23][24][25]



Figure 4. The house of Andon Andonović, current state and after virtual cleaning of advertisements. Foto and processing: M.Cvetković



Figure 5. Example of visual 'cleaning', the building in number 22. Foto and processing: M.Cvetković

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ВИЗУЕЛНО ЗАГАЂЕЊЕ ИСТОРИЈСКОГ ЈЕЗГРА ГРАДА – СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА, ГРАД НИШ

Резиме: Ниш је трећи по величини град у Србији, позициониран на југоистоку земље. Најважнија и најкарактеристичнија обележја и прва асоцијација на град Ниш, јесу Нишка Тврђава са централним језгром града односно тргом Краља Милана и Обреновићевом улицом. Ово историјско језгро града кроз векове се развијало и мењало у складу са обичајима и начином градње народа који су пролазили и изванредан период остајали на овом простору. Сваки народ је град надограђивао и прилагођавао својим потребама, те данас имамо живописну пешачку зону, препуну историје и употпуњену амбијентима и трговима најразличитијих култура. Нажалост историјско језгро града једва да је приметно, а затворено и недоступно како очима туриста тако и оних који овде готово свакодневно пролазе ускраћени за једно богатство које лежи испод сјајних и шарених реклама. Неки од објеката претрпели су неприличне измене, недостојне њихове вредности и као такви изгубили свој идентитет. Овај рад се бави како анализом историјског језгра града, тако и могућношћу повратка његовог идентитета и пуног сјаја кроз реконструкцију и конзервацију фасада и, наравно, њихово чишћење од свих сувишних, недолучних делова и реклама. Циљ овог рада није стварање штете предузећима која фасаде користе како би увећала свој профит, већ поновно стварање амбијента који је град Ниш вековима градио, и какав засужује.

Кључне речи: рекламе, наслеђе, главна улица, загађење, визуелно