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THE CONVERSION OF OFFICE BUILDINGS INTO HOTELS IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN BELGRADE: LEGISLATIVE BENEFITS

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ABSTRACT

Conversion, as a type of building adaptation, is becoming an increasingly common kind of architectural practice in many cities. Various aspects of this topic are the subject of numerous analyses and research interests, mostly, focused on drivers and obstacles of the conversion process.

Although the conversion is still not sufficiently present in modern construction practice in Belgrade, several office building conversions to luxury hotels were completed on the territory of the central historic districts. Also, many vacant heritage buildings were noticed. Considering the above mentioned, the Serbian standards for classifying hotels into categories are analyzed, to examine the difference between the procedures for conversion of heritage buildings and non-heritage buildings into hotels, in terms of application of the standards. Although the status of heritage buildings, in many cases, can be an obstacle in the process of building conversion, this paper presents the legislative benefits of converting heritage office buildings into hotels.

Keywords: conversion; heritage; historic office buildings; hotels; standards

1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in the percentage of office buildings out of use is a problem that a large number of contemporary cities are facing in the last few decades. There are several ways to solve the problem of buildings out of use, and one of them is the adaptation of such buildings for other uses (Remoy, 2010). Reusing buildings represents a special form of renovation with possible specific problems faced by the participants (Langston, Wong, Hui & Shen, 2008). The success of the conversion process is determined by numerous factors related to the interests of investors, the market, the characteristics of the building itself, the location, and the current legislative framework of the city where the building is located (Wilkinson, Remoy & Langston, 2011). Changing the class of a building, by the categorization of buildings according to their purpose, requires adapting the building to valid standards for the new purpose (Langston et al, 2008). To encourage the conversion of buildings as one of the types of architectural interventions for the regeneration of the existing built stock, it is necessary to foresee the regeneration of the architectural heritage by regulation (Olivadese, Remoy, Berizzi & Hobma, 2017). The legislative framework can, to a great extent, influence the financial justification of conversion (Remoy & Van

der Voordt, 2014), which is often a decisive factor for starting the conversion process, since a large number of conversions are initiated by the potential financial interest of the investor. The focus of the research of this paper is the influence of the legislative framework on the processes of conversion of the buildings out of use.

In the cities like London and Toronto, the conversion of office buildings into residential buildings is one of the strategies for revitalizing the central parts of the cities (Heath, 2001), while in Amsterdam, in this way, to a certain extent, the problem of lack of housing stock was solved (Remoy & Van der Voordt, 2007). Considering the statistical analysis that dealt with the market of office buildings in Belgrade, a decrease in the percentage of office buildings out of use concerning the total number of office buildings was observed. This result was influenced by several factors: on the one hand, a certain number of vacant office buildings were revitalized (adapted for another or the same use, by current standards) or demolished, and, on the other, a large number of new office buildings were built (CBRE, 2021).

The subject of the research is vacant office buildings located on the territory of historic districts in Belgrade. Analyzing these locations, it was noticed that a certain number of these buildings located within the central historic districts have been converted into hotels of high categories. Given that, these buildings are heritage buildings, the paper examines the influence of the status of a heritage building on the possibilities in the conversion process. The research presented in this paper is based on the analysis of parts of the document named "Pravilnik o standardima za kategorizaciju ugostiteljskih objekata za smeštaj" from 2016, which refers to the standard for hotel categorization. Since the status of a heritage building in the previous research is, mostly, considered an obstacle in the conversion process, the research presented in this paper aims to highlight the importance of the flexibility of valid standards for the successful revitalization of vacant protected buildings.

2. THE CONVERSION OF OFFICE BUILDINGS INTO HOTELS IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT OF BELGRADE

Considering the annual statistical reports and numerous construction sites where the construction of new and renovation of existing office buildings is underway, it can be concluded that the demand for office space in Belgrade still exceeds the market supply (CBRE research, 2021). However, it is the fact that it can see many vacant office buildings in good locations. The conversion of vacant office buildings, which are located on the territory of a historic district in Belgrade, into hotels, can be interpreted as one of the ways of implementing the aims of a document called *Strategije razvoja turizma Grada Beograda*, which, among other things, refer to the increase of accommodation capacity (Grad Beograd, 2019).



Figure 1: Belgrade Art Hotel, (a) Image, and (b) Disposition of the hotel building in the district "Područje Knez Mihailove ulice"



Figure 2: Hotel Center No 1, (a) Image, and (b) Disposition of the hotel building in the district “Istorijsko jezgro Beograda”



Figure 3: Courtyard by Marriot Belgrade City Center (a) Image, and (b) Disposition of the hotel building in the district “Istorijsko jezgro Beograda”



Figure 4: Hotel Zepter, (a) Image and (b) Disposition of the hotel building in the district “Terazije”

Photos 1-4 represent examples of hotels that are the results of conversion-protected former office buildings out of use. All hotels are located in the inner-city center and are high-category hotels (four stars).

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STANDARDS FOR CLASSIFYING HOTELS INTO CATEGORIES: NON-HERITAGE AND HERITAGE BUILDINGS

The required conditions, the fulfillment of which is influenced by the spatial characteristics of the building and location are presented in Table 1 (Pravilnik o standardima za kategorizaciju ugostiteljskih objekata za smeštaj, 2016), since the aim is to consider the potential advantages of conversion of heritage office buildings into hotels, which relate to architectural-urban planning parameters and construction technologies, and, therefore, have an impact on the financial justification of the whole conversion procedure. The conditions related to the type and quality of available services and room equipment (number and type of furniture, decorative elements, devices in accommodation units, lobby, restaurant, etc.) required for the hotel to receive a certain category were not considered.

Table 1: The standards for classifying hotels into categories: heritage and non-heritage buildings

	<i>Non-heritage buildings</i>	<i>Heritage buildings</i>
<i>The standards for classifying hotels into categories</i>	<i>The external appearance of the building and horticultural arrangement:</i> - arrangement of existing green areas and footpaths; - external appearance: the use of materials of different quality levels, which achieve a standard, first-class, and exclusive appearance;	<i>The external appearance of the building and horticultural arrangement:</i> - arrangement of existing green areas and footpaths; - external appearance: the use of materials of different quality levels, which achieve a standard,
	<i>Parking and garage:</i> - the ratio of the number of parking places next to the hotel and the number of accommodation units; - parking service;	<i>Parking and garages:</i> it does not apply to the inner-city core and heritage buildings;
	<i>Entrances:</i> - the main guest entrance is separated from the staff entrance; - covered main guest entrance or entrance with windbreak; - covered vehicle access in front of the main guest entrance; - the possibility of access by tourist buses to the main guest entrance; - the separate entrance;	<i>Entrances:</i> it does not apply to the inner-city core and heritage buildings;
	<i>Elevator:</i> - The guest elevator for different number of floors depending on hotel category; - The additional guest elevator; - The service elevator and the freight elevator for more than 3 floors; - The food elevator for more than 3 floors;	<i>Elevator:</i> it does not apply to the inner-city core and heritage buildings;
	<i>Food services area:</i> restaurant - obligatory for hotels that offer main lunch and/or dinner; for bed and breakfast hotels - breakfast room;	<i>Food services area:</i> restaurant - obligatory for hotels that offer main lunch and/or dinner; for bed and breakfast hotels - breakfast room;
	<i>Accommodation unit (including the surface of all rooms in an accommodation unit):</i> - At least 80% of the total number of rooms has a minimum surface area for a certain category (20% of the room may have a surface for one category below).	<i>Accommodation unit (including the surface of all rooms in an accommodation unit):</i> In the case of the hotels in heritage buildings, there may be deviations concerning the minimum surface area of an accommodation unit;

	<p><i>Air conditioning:</i> - Air conditioners with the possibility of individual adjustment (the ratio of the number of accommodation units with air conditioners depends on the hotel category);</p>	<p><i>Air conditioning:</i> in heritage buildings where it is not possible to install air conditioners with individual adjustment, there is a fan in an accommodation unit;</p>
	<p><i>Bathrooms:</i> at least 30% of accommodation units have to be equipped with a separate toilet; surface area of 80% of bathrooms >5m²;</p>	<p><i>Bathrooms:</i> at least 30% of accommodation units have to be equipped with a separate toilet; surface area of 80% of bathrooms >5m²;</p>
	<p><i>Additional contents:</i> Swimming pool, national restaurant, garden, terrace, meeting room, club, boutiques, library, bank, post office, spa,...</p>	<p><i>Additional contents:</i> Swimming pool, national restaurant, garden, terrace, meeting room, club, boutiques, library, bank, post office, spa,...</p>

3.1. Discussion

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be determined that the following groups of conditions, the fulfillment of which is required for the hotel to receive a certain category, are invariably, regardless of the status of the heritage building: the external appearance of the building and horticultural arrangement, food service area, bathrooms and additional contents. The group of conditions related to the food service area has the greatest influence on the classification of the converted building, because if it is not possible to implement a kitchen block whose structure is clearly defined (Pravilnik o uslovima i načinu obavljanja ugostiteljske delatnosti, načinu pružanja ugostiteljskih usluga, razvrstavanju ugostiteljskih objekata I minimalno tehničkim uslovima za uređenje i opremanje ugostiteljskih objekata, 2012;2016) in the existing structure, only breakfast can be served in the hotel, which means that the hotel's service is limited to "bed and breakfast".

The focus of the research is on groups of conditions whose provisions are variable when it comes to hotels within protected buildings: parking and garages, entrance, elevator, accommodation units, and air conditioning, within the accommodation unit. The importance of the flexibility of provisions within each group will be discussed.

3.1.1 Parking and garage

The provisions of this group refer to the number of parking spaces next to the hotel in relation to the number of accommodation units and, optionally, the number of garage spaces at a distance of up to 300m from the hotel or next to the hotel (1:5). The higher the potential category of the hotel, the greater the required number of parking spaces and varies from a ratio of 1:5 (one parking space for every five accommodation units) required for a two-star hotel to a ratio of 1:1 for a five-star hotel (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016).

When it comes to heritage buildings, it was stated that the obligation to have parking spaces and garages does not apply to buildings located in the inner city core or within the framework of natural assets or historic districts and their protected surroundings. Also, it was stated that there may be deviations when it comes to the relationship between the number of existing parking spaces and the number of accommodation units prescribed by the standard (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016). Considering the fact that one of the basic ways of potentially achieving a financial profit of the reused building (which is directly related to the financial justification of the whole conversion procedure, since the costs of reusing are considered in relation to the planned financial profit realized during the period of exploitation of the converted building) is the provision of accommodation services, the number of possible accommodation units in the building and the high category of the facility are of great importance. According to the provisions of this group of conditions, the hotel category and the number of accommodation units are

closely related to the number of possible parking spaces. The aforementioned flexibility in the provisions relating to heritage buildings allows for a higher category of building and a larger number of accommodation units, with a smaller number of parking spaces.

3.1.2 Entrances

The provisions related to the entrances include a separate main entrance for guests from the entrance for goods and staff, a covered main entrance for guests or an entrance with a windbreak, covered access for vehicles in front of the main entrance, and, optionally, the possibility of access for tourist buses to the main entrance of the facility and a separate luggage entrance (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016).

In cases where, due to the architectural characteristics of the existing buildings, on the one hand, and the impossibility of major changes due to the status of the heritage building, on the other hand, it is not possible, for example, to achieve a sufficient number of entrances, permitted deviations for protected buildings enable a higher category of hotels.

3.1.3 Elevator

The provisions of this group determine the necessity of a guest elevator concerning the number of levels, a food elevator for more than three levels, and, optionally, an additional guest elevator, a staff elevator, or a freight elevator for more than three levels. According to the regulations, it is necessary that the facility, which has four or more levels, has an elevator, to receive the category of three stars, which is a middle-category hotel. To obtain higher categories of four or five stars, an elevator is necessary even for three-story buildings (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016).

The implementation of an elevator shaft in the existing structure is a large-scale and demanding intervention that represents a major change that may not be possible in terms of the degree of protection of the building and permitted interventions. Given that, on the one hand, a larger number of potential buildings for conversion has higher floors and, on the other hand, higher categories are aimed for cost-effectiveness conversions, allowed deviations are important.

3.1.4 Accommodation unit

The provisions of this group refer to the minimum area of accommodation units for each category and the equipment of accommodation units (which is not the subject of this analysis). The minimum square surface is given for single, double, and family rooms and apartments. In a higher category hotel (four stars), the accommodation unit must have a minimum area of 16m² to be classified as a single room, 20m² to be classified as a double room and 24m² to be classified as a family room or suite (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016).

Given that a large number of subject potential buildings for conversion date from earlier periods when, in construction practice, smaller spans were more often applied, these square surfaces of accommodation units cannot be realized in a certain number of these buildings due to the existing grid. Allowed deviations for buildings under protection allow a higher category of hotels and buildings with accommodation units of slightly smaller square surfaces.

3.1.5 Air conditioning

The air conditioning of the accommodation unit is part of the provisions related to the equipment of the accommodation unit and is the subject of this analysis, given the fact that the existence of air conditioning in the accommodation units can affect the appearance of the facade of the building, which in the case of heritage buildings, mostly, is not subject of change. The deviations are allowed for heritage buildings in

terms of applying some other method of air conditioning (Pravilnik o standardima, 2016), since the issue of room air conditioning directly affects the comfort of users.

4. CONCLUSION

The vacant office buildings represent, more or less, a part of the urban fabric of a large number of world cities. By reusing these buildings into temporary or permanent housing facilities, following the development goals and tendencies of each city, unused buildings are repurposed, and the offer of the housing stock is expanded.

An analysis of the inner-city core of Belgrade, on the territory of several historic districts, revealed a certain number of high-category hotel facilities (four stars) that were created by reusing vacant office buildings. Given the fact that they are the part of protected areas, it is clear that the observed buildings themselves are protected.

The paper presents a part of the research into the process of conversion of these buildings, which refers to the legislative benefits observed during the analysis of certain valid Standards related to the ways of classifying hotels into categories, which are a consequence of the status of the heritage building. Allowed deviations in the provisions of this Standard encourage the conversion of protected buildings out of use, enabling a high category of hotels that operate in buildings whose spatial characteristics and location characteristics, to some extent, deviate from the prescribed ones. On the one hand, it can be concluded that a hotel in a reused heritage building can, with less fulfilled conditions, get a high category and, therefore, a higher price for the services provided, which is significant from the aspect of potential financial profit during the period of exploitation of the converted building. On the other hand, as a consequence of the permitted deviations, certain expensive and technically demanding interventions were avoided, which reduced the investment required for the conversion of such a building. Many of these interventions could not be carried out, first of all, due to the degree of protection of the building, so if these interventions were insisted on, the conversion of the existing building would be questionable. Finally, it can be concluded that the shown deviations affect the reduction of the costs of realizing the conversion and, at the same time, contribute to a higher potential profit in the exploitation period, which can achieve a higher degree of financial justification of the whole procedure and, to a greater extent, ensure the economic interests of the potential investor.

In addition to the presented legislative benefits in the conversion process, which are a consequence of the status of a heritage building, the fact is that this status is often considered an obstacle, primarily due to the long-time procedures for obtaining the necessary documentation (which, in the case of heritage buildings, is extended in compared to non-heritage buildings) which delay the start of works, so in the future, it is necessary to improve the efficiency of those procedures. Further research is focused on creating a multi-criteria decision-making model, which will include parameters from different areas that affect the financial justification of the conversion process, to understand the conversion potential of each building out of use at an early stage.

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