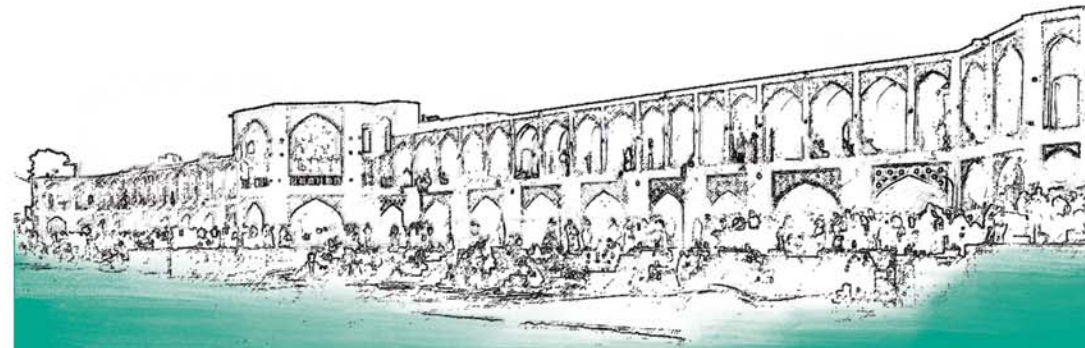


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First International Conference on
FUTURE OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

TARBIAT MODARES UNIVERSITY, TEHRAN, IRAN
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Edited by:
Mohammadreza Pourjafar
Ehsan Ranjbar



PROCEEDING OF THE **FU²⁰¹⁸PS** CONFERENCE

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The Urban Policy of Open Public Spaces in an Arising Cultural-Tourism Destination: Golubac Town in Iron Gate Gorge, Serbia

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ABSTRACT

An ordinary practice in urban planning and design in an already existing urban space is to study the local needs and aspirations to understand how this space should be regenerated, both physically and functionally. The regenerated place that can address them can be a new driving force for the revitalisation of wider urban fabric or, even, the entire settlement. However, in some unusual situations, it is very hard to explore and evaluate “local” needs and aspirations. This is the case with the settlements with strong tourism industry, where tourist visitors periodically outnumber local residents. Therefore, their influence for the context of these settlements is immense and it cannot be omitted in any future urban plan and project for this space.

Golubac Town in Eastern Serbia is a perfect example for this consideration. The town is located at the entrance of the largest gorge of the Danube, a major European river and water-transit corridor. This unique position of a “guardian” at the entrance has left medieval Golubac Fortress as a cultural heritage of national importance. Furthermore, the gorge is protected as a national park, with preserved landscape and many endemic species. Nevertheless, all heritage sites are not in Golubac Town. Moreover, the town itself is small and weighted with socio-economic problems from post-socialist transformation. Thus, the recent inflow of cultural tourists has not been sufficiently responded by local tourism sector.

One of the main reasons is inadequate physical environment in the town, which requires general modernisation and, even more, better adaptation to prospective cultural tourists. The aim of this research is to explore if official urban policy towards open public spaces in Golubac, as the main elements of its physical environment, corresponds to the current needs of the prospective cultural tourists. It is organised through the analysis of the main urban plan for the settlement, the implementation of relevant planning actions and the actual use of open public spaces in Golubac by different users, done through modified method of space syntax. The findings of the presented research are the gaps between the official urban policy of the town and reality. Finally, they are a base for recommendations for new planning directions, which mainly refer to the improvements of open public spaces.

INTRODUCTION – OPEN PUBLIC SPACE IN CULTURAL-TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Cultural tourism has become one of the fastest developing sectors in already blossoming tourism globally. At the beginning of new millennium, international tourism represented almost 30% of global service exports (OECD 2009). In the case of cultural tourism, it is predicted that it will rise by 15% in the forthcoming years (UNWTO, 2017). In accordance to this, cultural tourism has been seen as a prospective factor to boost the overall socio-economic development (Richards 1996; van der Borg & Russo 2005; Bellini et al. 2007; Djukić & Vukmirović 2012).

This progressive trends regarding cultural tourism are especially visible in **Europe**, with the high concentration of cultural and natural heritage and, even more important, with well-developed supplementary services and infrastructure. By report of Europa Nostra (2005, p. 12), “more than 50% of tourist activity in Europe is driven by cultural heritage and cultural tourism is expected to grow the most in the tourism sector.” Some recent research pointed that cultural heritage is crucial element to the attractiveness of European space, equally contributing to all spatial levels: cities, towns, rural areas and regions, generally (Europa Nostra 2015).

Relating to the size of a place, the potential of cultural tourism is certainly more evident in smaller settlements – **small towns and villages** – especially if they are far away from major cities (Jamieson 1993). European smaller towns and villages can be even more attractive than bigger cities, which are well-promoted and thereby more exposed to prospective tourists. In contrast to them, small towns and villages are seen as more accessible to local culture, tradition and customs (The Conversation 2017).

However, the transformation of small towns into the future destinations of cultural tourism is a **challenge**, because it can bring both opportunities and obstacles (Bucurescu 2015). Small communities usually have limited resources and inaccurate data to reinvigorate their socio-economic prospects within the scope of cultural tourism. Then, many of these towns are in somnolent state before the external revelation of their heritage by tourism sector. Therefore, their aim to position themselves in cultural-tourism market often concurs with necessary **urban regeneration**, which can be implemented in different ways and with different outcomes (della Lucia, Trunfio & Go 2016).

Planning strategies to simultaneously facilitate cultural tourism and urban regeneration has been considered as crucial for sustainable urban development of the locations that are rich in heritage (Paskaleva & Besson 2006). This joint approach is challenging even for major cities (Uysall & Özden 2011). One of the main problems related is how to measure the **social and physical impact** of cultural tourism in urban areas (Urda Peña 2012). In the case of smaller towns, relevant information and procedures are even scarcer.

This deficiency is starting to be noticed by relevant international bodies and organisations. **Open public spaces** in urban areas are a good example for the understanding this link between urban regeneration and the development of cultural tourism because both society and culture are reflected through them (Siláči & Vitková 2017). The findings of the World Tourist Organisation (WTO) show that qualitative urban regeneration by the development of cultural tourism had to include the actions to improve walkability in urban public space, which is in line with less energy consumption, healthy lifestyle, balanced spatial reallocation of business, the increase of estate value, and the better support to restoration and reuse of heritage assets (WTO, n.d.). This elevates the importance of open public space in urban areas as the main “grounds” for urban-regeneration projects connected with cultural tourism (Ramlee, et al. 2015).

A good example for research is **Golubac Town** in Eastern Serbia, which vicinity is rich in cultural and natural heritage. With the recent improvements of accessibility and better promotion of local heritage, Golubac area is witnessing the boom of cultural tourism. Cultural tourists even outnumber local population during short summer period. Therefore, their influence for local context is immense and it cannot be omitted in any future urban policy. However, cultural tourism has been mostly limited to the heritage localities outside the town and minimised socio-economic benefits for the town inhabitants thereof. This gap sets up a task to redesign urban-policy documents. In this process, open public spaces in the central part of Golubac are a good reflection to check the current situation.

Understanding all mentioned statements, the aim of research pertains to certainly **the first step** in the creation of any urban-regeneration policy – to check if already existing, “classic” urban planning documents supports cultural tourism and corresponds to its recent boom. In this research, it is done

though the context of open public spaces in Golubac; their position and objectives in the main planning document, their implementation, and the current use by different users. It is expected that this combined research will present the **gaps between the official urban policy and reality** and recommend new planning directions based on them. These recommendations mainly refer to the improvements of open public spaces.

METHODOLOGY

The organisation of the research is tailored a “**policy and practice**” approach. It checks the main urban-policy document of Golubac regarding the intersection between cultural tourism, urban regeneration and open public spaces and to compare acquired planning actions with current state of the town. It is expected that the obtained planning actions are not adequate for the recent development of (cultural) tourism in open public spaces in Golubac.

Used **research material** is customised to these intentions. The initial material is a relevant urban-policy document - the plan of general regulation of Golubac. The additional material is received by on-site research by the modified method of space syntax and in talks with the experts of the town administration.

GOLUBAC TOWN IN SERBIA – CURRENT ASSESTMENT IN RELATION OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Golubac Town in Eastern Serbia belongs to those localities in Serbia that are rich in cultural heritage and “magnets” for cultural tourism thereof (Fig. 1). By the latest survey of National Tourist Board, cultural heritage is the most important tourist attraction in Serbia for foreign tourists; 65% of them in this survey confirmed that this is the main reason for visit Serbia (RTS, 2018). Golubac town is located at the western edge of “**Đerdap**” **National Park**, the largest in Serbia. This park was formed in 1974 to encompass all natural and cultural heritage located in Đerdap/the Iron Gates Gorge, the longest and exceptionally picturesque gorge of the Danube River, which is itself the second longest river in Europe (Fig. 2). Then, Tumane Monastery, the main pilgrimage site in Eastern Serbia, is 9 km south to the town.



Fig. 1: Position of Golubac and Iron Gates Gorge in Serbia (Author: B. AntoniĆ); Fig. 2: The Iron Gate Gorge, the longest gorge of the Danube River, with magnificent landscape (Author: A. Djukić).

The-same-name **Golubac Fortress** is certainly the most important heritage asset in the vicinity of the town (Fig. 3). This medieval fortress is recently renovated by the joint fund of national (Serbian) and EU tier, worth 7 million Euros. After the reconstruction, the fortress has become the most visited fortress in Serbia outside those located in major cities (RTS, 2018). Nevertheless, the experts of local tourist board point out that the fortress is 4 km far away from the town, so the most of tourists in

organised tours just pass the town to reach the fortress. Hence, they usually do not spend much time in the town, leaving no or a little of revenue to **local community**. However, this is a common approach of loosely developed cultural-tourism industry – without appropriate marketing, private tourist agencies usually simplify tours and visits to the most iconic sites (Urda Peña 2012).



Fig. 3: Recently renovated Golubac Fortress at the entrance of the Iron Gates and close to Golubac Town (Author: B. Antić); Fig. 4: The socio-economic difficulties in Golubac Town are visible in the main street – many buildings are not finished and streets are usually in pretty bad state (Author: B. Antić).

The problem in background is a long-lasting natural isolation by the gorge, which has left **negative socio-economic consequences**. The Danube in the gorge is also a national border with Romania. This combined, “physical-political” isolation has caused weak economic situation since the World War II. Furthermore, the lack of economic perspective has influenced on negative demographic figures. Golubac town has lost approximately 20% of population in the last three decades. Moreover, with less than 1,700 inhabitants, Golubac is the smallest urban settlement along Serbian Danube. Rural surrounding is in even worse condition; it characterises rampant depopulation, one of the most severe in the country (SORS, 2014). At the end, this “chain of problems” has mirrored in urban fabric, leaving many unfinished buildings, obsolete urban design and dilapidated urban furniture in open urban spaces in the town (Fig. 4).

INDIRECT EXPLORATION OF TOURISM NEEDS IN GOLUBAC

Investigation of the current urban policy

Urban-policy documents are the most significant ones to address to the prospective development of (cultural) tourism. Consequently, the rise of tourist activities must be followed by the customisation of urban policy (Barrera-Fernandez, Hernández-Escampa & Balbuena Vázquez 2016).

In the case of Golubac Town, such document is the **Plan of the General Regulation** of Urban Settlement of Golubac (hereinafter: Urban Plan). This plan was officially adopted in 2013 by the assembly of the Municipality of Golubac, with the planning horizon of 25 years. Such type of the plan is very important in Serbian planning system. By law, the plan of general regulation is to be “necessarily enacted for each settlement that is the seat of municipality” (MCTI, 2009-2014, Art. 25). The uniqueness of this planning document is also that it is the only plan in Serbian system which is both strategic and regulatory, which place it as crucial document for local development; it includes the general trajectories of future development, as well as prescribes the concrete rules for building permissions.

The **main objectives and actions** regarding the development of open public spaces and their link to the strengthening of cultural tourism in Golubac Town by the selected plan are presented in the following list:

1. The main objective - the revitalisation of the urban core of Golubac, in line with the needs of cultural tourism;
2. The displacement of main transport corridor outside of the centre (the construction of the town bypass);
3. The construction of (passenger) pier at the Danube riverside;
4. The reconstruction of “Golubački Grad” hotel with its surrounding (the main square, town park, the main parking);
5. 7-km long town quay with flood-protection measures and pedestrian and cycling paths with reconstructed already existing central part and new parts at western and eastern sides;
6. The improvement of parking zones (reconstruction and widening) according to the possibilities of transitive types of tourism;
7. New parking sites for buses in the town core;
8. The physical and functional upgrading of upper town marina, with new additional facilities (restaurant, rowing club, etc.);
9. The transformation of lower town marina into new tourist zone (‘fishermen village’);
10. The relocation of existing bus station to new location and the transformation of its site into a new tourist zone.

Since the enactment of the plan some mentioned planning actions are fully implemented, few are in progress, but majority are still waiting to be done (Fig. 5):

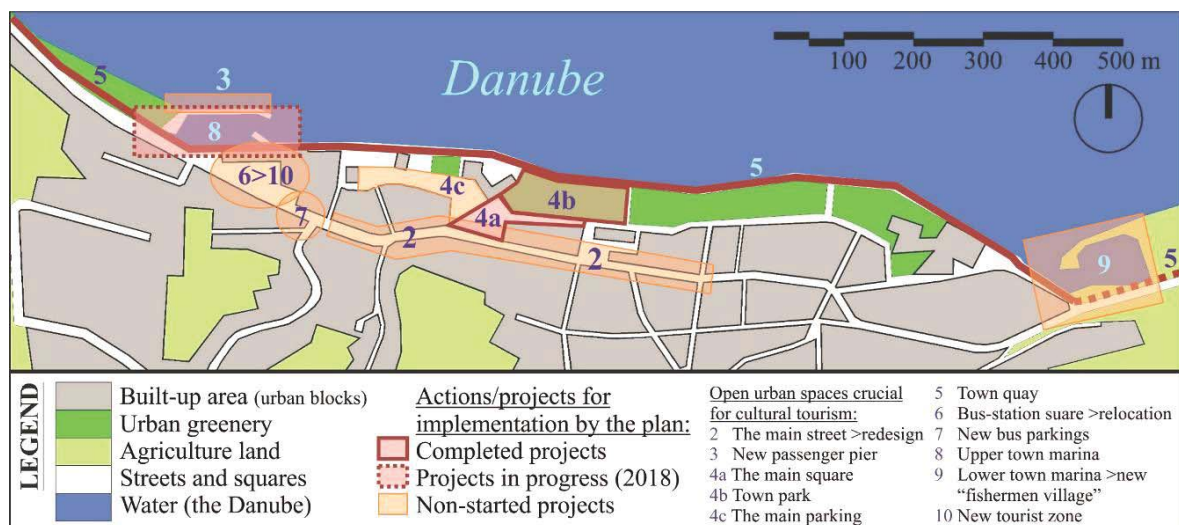


Fig. 5: The Plan of the General Regulation of Urban Settlement of Golubac: the implementation of the planning actions related to open public spaces that are valued as important for the development of cultural tourism (Author: B. Antonić).

On-site research by modified space-syntax method

Nevertheless, it seems that many of these actions are **in collision to the current use** of open public space in Golubac (Fig. 5 & 6). This preliminary conclusion is based on the on-site investigation, conducted by the staff and students from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade on March 2, 2017. The day of the investigation was a market day (Thursday) with relatively high temperature (approximately 15 degrees). Actually, it was purposely chosen to present a combination of different users: local residents, visitors from nearby villages, transit passengers and cultural tourists, i.e. to exclude the extreme months,

such as July (summer season with many non-cultural tourists) or January (rare tourists due to harsh weather).

For these purpose, the **modified method of space syntax** is conducted. This method basically analyse the flow of pedestrians at the main nodes in open public spaces - intersections of streets and squares ((Hillier, 1999). However, the size of town and the existing load of open public spaces enabled the extending of the on-site investigation to cyclists, cars and heavy vehicles – buses and lorries. The results of the investigation showed how different users occupy and exploit open public spaces, as well as the differences during the mentioned day (Fig. 6):

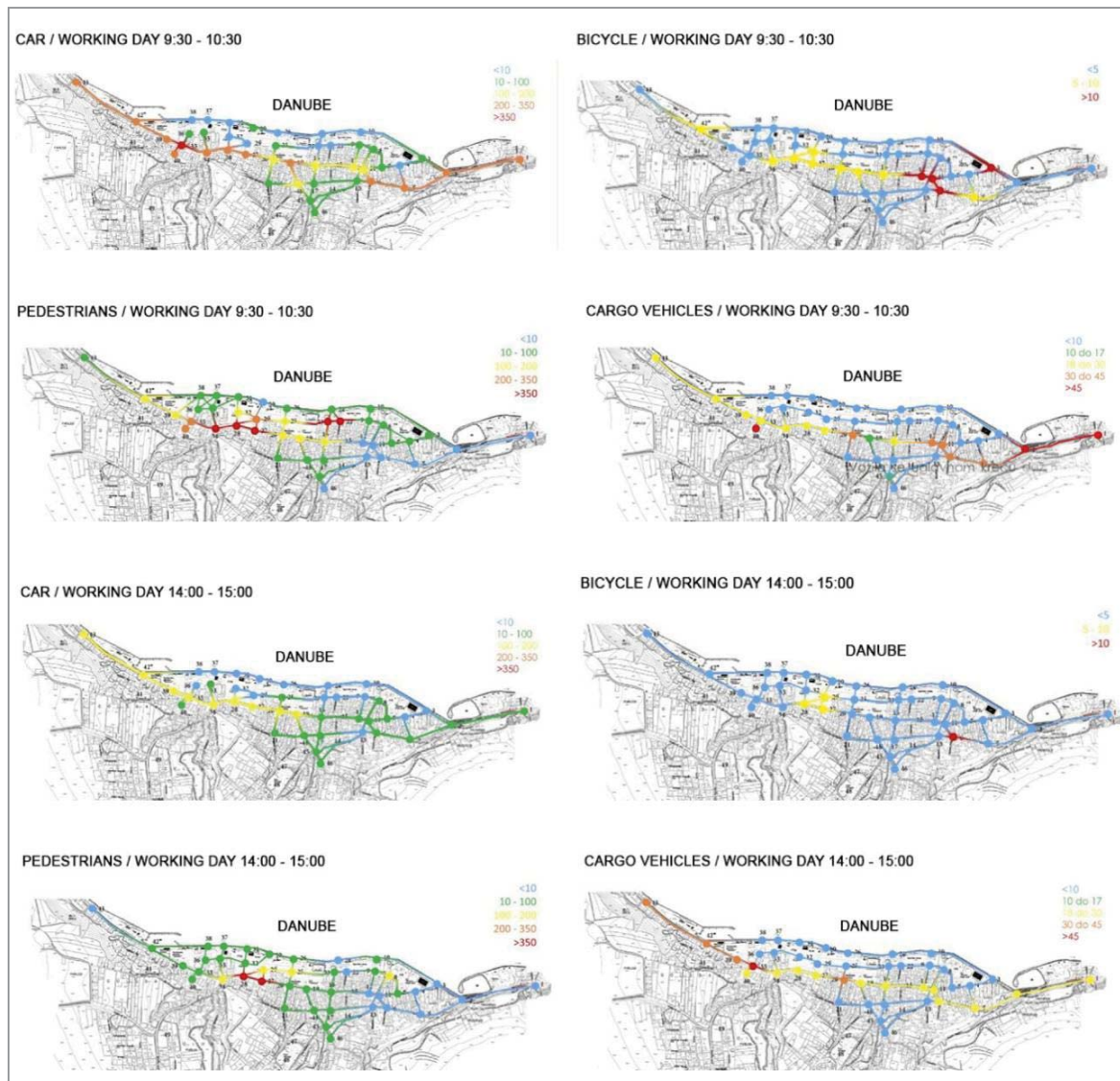


Fig. 6: Modified space-syntax investigation for the central part of Golubac Town, done two times during March 2, 2017 (Authors: A. Djukić, B. Antonić, T. Radić & E. Vaništa Lazarević).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the analysis of open public spaces in Golubac Town as prospective generators for cultural tourism present a gap between the official urban policy of the town and situation in reality. The main urban-policy document, the urban plan for the town, prioritises the development of those public

spaces that are in vicinity of the Danube riverside. Knowing that the Danube is one of the major attractions in the town (and in the whole region of Eastern Serbia), is an ordinary approach, which can be noticed in many places along the river. This 'preoccupation' of the river is even more evident in the implementation of the plan. During recent years, only the projects next to the river (quay, the main square, town park, upper marina) have been active. Thus, the **impetus** of planned development of open public spaces dedicated for (cultural) tourism is **along the Danube**.

The results from space syntax **differ greatly** from afore explained findings from urban policy. All counted actors in open public space (pedestrians, cyclists, cars and heavy vehicles) use more the **main street**, which is the main transport corridor through the town. This street is further away from the Danube. This means that the flow of various users is more attached to easy accessibility and better explosion due to transitive character of the street than to specially designed and recently refurbished places such as the town park or the central part of quay. The results also show that the area around bus station is more vibrant than the rest of the town centre, which also supports the previous conclusion about **spatial accessibility and transitivity**. Finally, the conclusion doubts the validity of the ongoing approach proposed by the urban plan to develop open public spaces along the riverside.

In accordance to this statement, several **new planning directions**, referring to the improvements of open public spaces for cultural tourism, can be recommended:

The main street should be in the first place for renovation in the future, because it generates the highest frequency and variety of users. Furthermore, its transitivity should be preserved in appropriate manner for cultural tourism – exclude heavy vehicles, but preserve welcome users, such as pedestrians, but tourist buses, too. The renovation project had to be particularly customised to secure the comfort for different users.

Two of planning actions propose the transformation of **bus-station area** in the western part of Golubac into a new tourist area. Nevertheless, this area is already vibrant and multi-functional. It seems that the function of a bus station influence to the development of the other, tourism-friendly functions (retail and services). Therefore, it is questionable why nearby open market is not mentioned in relevant actions in the plan. Space syntax indicates that the market is very popular by users, having a "dose of eastern-European open-air bazaar", embedded within local culture and tradition. The future urban policy must reconsider this planning action, with respect to already obtained qualities of bus-station area.

In contrast to western part, it is disappointing that the **eastern part of Golubac centre** is almost forgotten in planning actions. This part is in a somnolent state today by the results of space syntax although it has large underused open public spaces, many public facilities which are compatible to the development of cultural tourism (sport hall, school) and many empty properties which can be easily transformed into new tourism facilities. These unrevealed qualities in eastern part of Golubac centre should be appropriately recognised in the future urban policy, to widen the offer (cultural) tourism of the town. Moreover, this area can be a "ground" for **innovative functions and facilities** in open public spaces, such as a cyberpark, ITC-mediated square, interactive playground for children, etc.

In addition to the previous recommendation, it appears that the urban plan does not clearly support the eventual **physical connection of the town with Golubac Fortress**. In this case, afore mentioned revival of the eastern part of the Golubac centre will be the first step towards the fortress. Hence, the future urban policy should encourage the formation of the long-desired system of open public spaces which can link 4-kilometres distance between the town and the fortress.

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