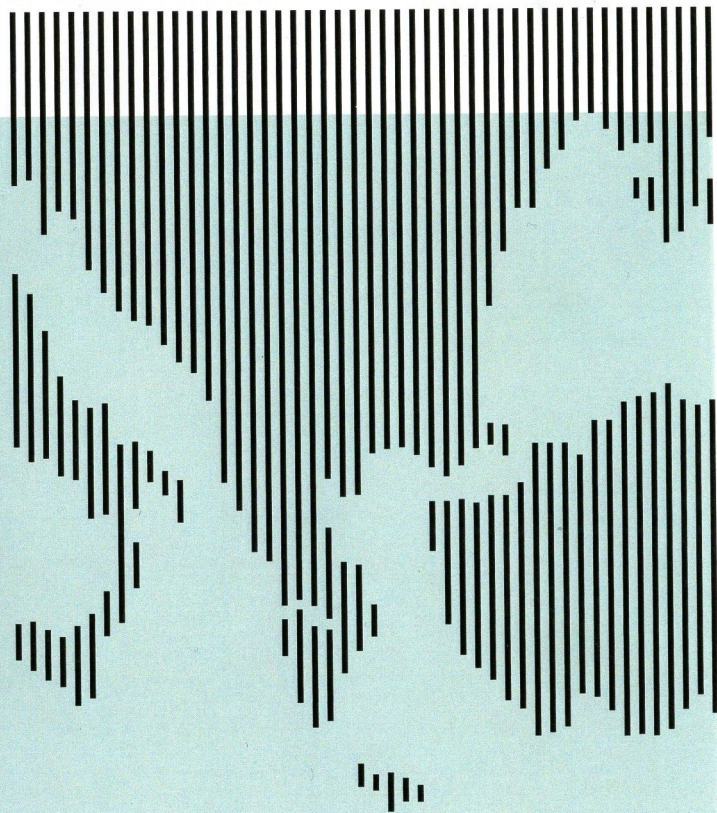


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Balkan Architectural Biennale 2019  
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4<sup>th</sup> BAB INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

## **DECODING BALKAN: ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, PLANNING**

Belgrade, 14-16<sup>th</sup> of November 2019.

Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade

Balkan Architectural Biennale - BAB

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

**KEYNOTE PAPERS**

**ANA VASILACHE , WORKING TOGETHER IN COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS A Facilitator Perspective— ROMANIA, FPDL, keynote lecture**

1

**prof. dr JELENA ŽIVKOVIĆ, RECREATIONAL QUALITY OF URBAN RIVERFRONTS: WHY DESIGN MATTERS? – SERBIA, Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, keynote lecture**

14

**Prof. dr ŽELJKO CVIJETINOVIĆ, MONITORING AIR POLLUTION USING GIS: CASE STUDY FOR THE CITY OF BELGRADE, SERBIA, Faculty of Civil Engineering in Belgrade, keynote lecture**

18

**THEMATIC SESSION: GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM – GIS FOR URBAN PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN – CODING PHYSICAL SPACE INTO VIRTUAL ONE**

**V4DESIGN - VISUAL AND TEXTUAL CONTENT RE-PURPOSING FOR(4) ARCHITECTURE,DESIGN AND VIRTUAL REALITY GAMES , HORIZON PROJECT** Dr Anastasios Tellios, Associate Professor AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, M.Arch (Dist.) Bartlett UCL, PhD AUTH, Dr Despoina Zavraka, Assistant Professor IHU, Dip. Arch. Mackintosh GSA, MLA AUTH, PhD AUTH, Panagiota Koulali, PhD Cand. AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, MLA AUTH, Researcher, Kalliopi Valsamidou, AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, MSc Arch AUTH, Researcher, Georgios Grigoriadis, Dip. Arch. AUTH, Researcher

26

**CHALLENGES OF OBJECT RECOGNITION IN HISTORICAL TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS,** Anastasios L. Kesidis, Associate Professor, Department of Surveying and Geoinformatics Engineering, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece., Kleomenis Kalogeropoulos, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography, School of Environment, Geography & Applied Economics, Harokopio University, Athens, Greece, Andreas Tsatsaris, Professor, Department of Surveying and Geoinformatics Engineering, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece.

30

**MINDSPACES: ART-DRIVEN ADAPTIVE OUTDOORS AND INDOORS DESIGN ,** Dr Anastasios Tellios, Associate Professor AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, M.Arch (Dist.) Bartlett UCL, PhD AUTH, Dr Despoina Zavraka,

Assistant Professor IHU, Dip. Arch. Mackintosh GSA, MLA AUTH, PhD AUTH, Panagiota Koulali, PhD Cand. AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, MLA AUTH, Researcher, Kalliopi Valsamidou, AUTH, Dip. Arch. AUTH, MSc Arch AUTH, Researcher, Georgios Grigoriadis, Dip. Arch. AUTH, Researcher

38

**3D REAL ESTATE CADASTRE -ASPECTS AND POSSIBILITIES** — prof. Mladen Šoškic Faculty of Civil Engineering in Belgrade, SERBIA, Assoc. Prof. dr Nenad Višnjevac, Faculty of Civil Engineering — Belgrade, SERBIA

42

**NEW DIGITAL SYSTEMS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES**, Paola D'Antonio, Presidente del Corso di Laurea in Paesaggio Ambiente e Verde Urbano, Università degli studi della Basilicata, ITALY; Francesca Vera Romano, Università degli studi della Basilicata, ITALY, Carmen D'Antonio, Università degli studi della Basilicata, ITALY, Francesco Saverio Lopinto, Masseria Lopinto, Melfi ITALY

48

**THEMATIC SESSION: PARTICIPATORY ACTION IN PLANNING, DESIGN, MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY — INSTRUMENTS AND TOOLS FOR CODING AND DECODING COMMUNICATION**

**CITY TOURISM MARKETING OF JAEN (SPAIN) AND DENIZLI (TURKEY) IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABILITY**, Naci Polat, Tourism Faculty, Pamukkale University, TURKEY

54

**PORT-CITY WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT \_ PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN PLANNING PROCESS**, Afroditi Pitouli, PhD Candidate, National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, GREECE, Yiota Theodora, Associate Professor, National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, GREECE

60

**BUILDING ON EARTH WITH EARTH**, Hana Nekrep, Architect, Faculty of Architecture, UL, Slovenia; Matjaž N. Perc, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, University of Maribor, Slovenia

66

**BALKAN URBANISM: THE CASE OF POST-SOCIALIST BUCHAREST**, Kleoniki Gkioufi, Architect-Urbanist, PhD Candidate, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, GREECE

76

**CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE RELEVANCE WITH CULTURAL DESIGN: THE CITY OF TRIKALA**, E. Konstantopoulou\* Postgraduate Student in Department of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece

82

**THEMATIC SESSION: URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT — CODING STANDARDS, PROCESSES AND TRANSFORMATIONS**

**DEALING WITH SHRINKING CITIES THROUGH URBAN DESIGN** Dr. Branislav Antonić, Department of Urbanism, University of Belgrade — Faculty of Architecture, SERBIA; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Djukić, Department of Urbanism, University of Belgrade — Faculty of Architecture, SERBIA;

84

**CONTEMPORARY CONCEPT OF A COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY: SLOVENIA CASE STUDY**, Vesna Žegarac Leskovar, Assoc. Prof. Dr., University of Maribor, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, SLOVENIA, Maja Žigart, Assis., University of Maribor, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, SLOVENIA, Lea Korošec, MF Arhitektura, SLOVENIA, Vanja Skalicky Klemenčič, Assis. Dr., University of Maribor, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, SLOVENIA

90

**URBAN IDENTITY REVISITED: THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF STRUGA BETWEEN 1991 AND 2019**, Damjan Balkoski PhD. Student, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, R.S, Aleksandra Stupar, PhD, Ass. Professor, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, R.S

100

**USING NARRATIVES AND STORYTELLING TO VISUALIZE TALES OF AN INDIAN URBAN STREETScape IN A COMMERCIAL DISTRICT**, Arindam Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of

## DEALING WITH SHRINKING CITIES THROUGH URBAN DESIGN

Dr. Branislav Antonić, Department of Urbanism, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture, SERBIA;  
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Djukić, Department of Urbanism, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture,  
SERBIA;

### Abstract

This paper aims to clarify the role of urban design as a tool to redevelop demographically and economically shrinking cities, which are becoming more and more frequent across the world. Traditionally, scholars and practitioners position urban planning, the second “pillar” of urbanism, as the main tool to deal with the problems caused by urban shrinkage. Despite this widespread opinion, urban design cannot be omitted in urban policies for shrinking cities, but its role is still insufficiently defined. Therefore, this paper is the review of the theoretical knowledge and the best practice about the potential of urban design to redevelop shrinking cities and its parts. To properly define this role, urban design is compared with urban planning. Final results from the comparison determine how the role of urban design can be further improved in this process.

*Key words: Shrinking cities, urban design, urban planning, city redevelopment, urban policy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION — BASICS ABOUT SHRINKING CITIES

Shrinking cities are becoming a ‘new normality’ in modern urban development. Their main characteristic is a population loss, mainly caused by the bad performance of local economy. Just in Europe, approximately 20% of all bigger cities were shrinking in the period 1990-2010 (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017). Some cities, like Detroit and Cleveland in the USA, have been shrinking for decades (Kaufman, 2011). Hence, this phenomenon has received the attention of both scholars and practitioners, who have recently embraced the concept of shrinking cities (Fol & Cunningham-Sabot, 2010).

The ongoing scientific efforts in this concept are concentrated on redevelopment solutions for affected cities. Two intentions are differentiated into two types of solutions: (1) the reurbanisation based on economic renaissance and (2) customisation to the current state with the prevention of the further economic and demographic decline (Hospers, 2014). Both types concern the entire urban areas to properly understand local urban shrinkage and respond to it. Moreover, urban shrinkage as a phenomenon is very complex and multifaceted, which requires the introduction of comprehensive innovations in urban development (Jessen, 2006). Therefore, urban planning is the main domain to deal with the issue (Antonić, 2018).

The other pillar of urban development — URBAN DESIGN — is usually omitted as a possible solution in this constellation. This paper aims to determine the role of urban design as a tool to redevelop shrinking cities.

## 2. SHRINKING CITIES AND URBAN DESIGN

Urban design as a tool in urban development is mainly orientated to micro-interventions in urban space. In built-up areas, such projects are usually used in urban renewal (Fig. 1), to prevent the (further) physical and physical decay of an open public space, urban block or quarter (Djukić, 2011). Urban design projects are not just sole physical interventions in urban space, but they also form its new sense and perception and the formation of new social relations in it (Strauß, 2012). This underlines that urban design offer also the multi-dimensional solutions that matter shrinking cities.

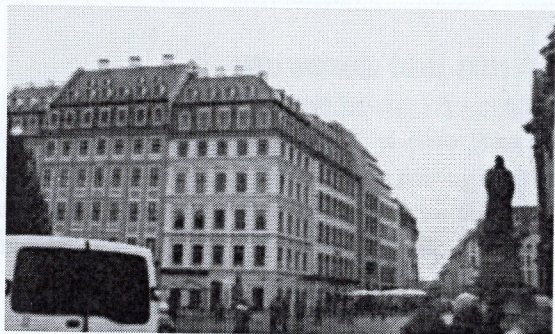


Figure 1: *The completely renewed historic core of central Dresden, Germany, which has been utilised to prevent its urban shrinkage (Author: B. Antonić)*

Nevertheless, urban design has a minor role than urban planning regarding urban shrinkage. There are several reasons for this. First, urban planning as a spatially broader tool enables socio-economic benefits for the entire urban area faster (Ryan, 2012). Second, physical interventions, typical for urban design, are considered as the most expensive way to deal with urban shrinkage (Schenkel, 2012). The case of a very expensive urban renewal of shrinking Dresden (Fig. 1) clearly illustrates this obstacle. Third, the successful examples of urban renewal through urban design projects in shrinking cities are mainly spatially restricted to the level of urban block or neighbourhood, i.e. they hardly can impact the entire city.

Although urban design has a limited influence in this issue, it cannot be fully omitted. L. Laursen (2009) claims that urban design had to be able to handle the “different scenarios of urban change”, regardless is it a case of urban growth or shrinkage (p. 21). The key is the adaptations of urban design, where its tasks must encompass three categories of improvements: visual, physical, and socio-economic ones (Wassenberg, van Meer & van Kempen, 2007). Primarily, they had to adapt to the current conditions of the entire urban area in shrinking process (Hollander et al, 2009). Two common approaches are created:

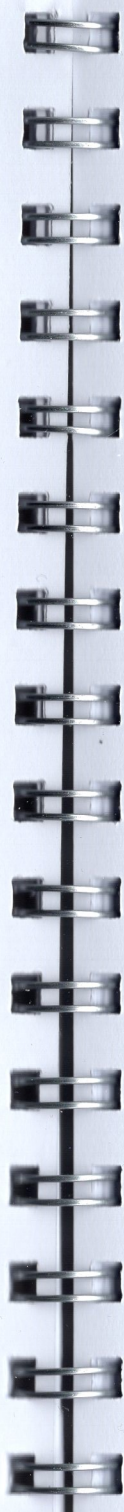


Figure 2: *The regenerated old city port in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, based on several flagship projects (Author: B. Antonić)*

1. **FLAGSHIP PROJECTS** usually use the brownfield sites in inner city parts. These sites are mainly the former industrial and port zones with a certain level of pollution (Haase, 2013). Due to their location in inner parts they highly contribute to the negative image of a shrinking city. In the other side, the regeneration of such brownfields is regarded as a big potential for the revitalisation of urban economy (Panagopoulos, 2009; Djukić & Vukmirović, 2012). Many cities in developed countries have used this approach (Fig. 2);
2. **URBAN ARCHIPELAGO** is the approach that is closely attached to urban planning. The aim is to implement urban design projects just in those areas in shrinking cities that have higher population density and better possibility for redevelopment and reurbanisation thereof (Cepl, 2006). Such examples are especially frequent in cities in the USA.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The previous data indicates that urban design has an impact in the redevelopment solutions for shrinking cities. Two main findings are:

Urban design cannot have the same features as in cities with urban growth. In essence, the logic behind all urban design interventions in shrinking cities is different; it targets to revive, redevelop, and rebrand an already existing city instead to create something new. In accordance to this, urban design should be focused on the most important parts, with higher densities and more significant for wider population.

Comparing with urban planning, it is obvious that urban design has a minor role in dealing with urban shrinkage, but it is also noticeable that urban design can make an influence if it is adequately linked with urban planning. Being related to micro-urban interventions, it can be a perfect addition to the macro-measures of urban-planning. Thus, urban design should be a phase after urban planning, with a role to the further elaborate and detail urban-planning measures in the concrete physical environments of shrinking cities.

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space for all, overcoming obstacles in communicative approach through art and creativity.

**MODULE 4: Mobility systems in promoting city brand, Uroš Radosavljević, Robert Pressl**

The objective of this module is to raise knowledge on mobility systems in urban planning and design and its role in branding the territory. The focus will be on soft measures that can be used as alternative thinking of movement through the city and its power in place branding. The participant will gain particular knowledge and skills on mobility tools and techniques for better accessibility and reading the place and territory

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