

PODGORICA: FROM THE LASTEST TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF EUROPEAN CAPITALS

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ABSTRACT

Podgorica, a name that means “city under the mountain”, is one of the Europe's youngest capitals. As its long history has shown, it is the result of an ongoing rebuilding process: Greek colony, Roman crossroads of rivers and trade, Ottoman fort-gate. After suffering conquests, wars, more than seventy bombings during World War II, it was completely reconstructed in the form of a 20th century soviet city. Based on a floodplain, it shows a hybrid morphology by matching compact urban fabrics to the scattered icons of political and economic power. Today, Podgorica is a dynamic growing city sustained by a close-knit network of international funds in order to become a city in the 21st century. Nevertheless, the rapid transition from a post-socialist model to globalization caused a loss of identity and sense of place. The aim of the research is to bridge the knowledge gap of a relatively recent city and to understand its developing dynamics in the name of innovation and continuity: how can Podgorica represent the next generation of European capitals? Through an integrated approach between morpho-typological analysis and design experimentation, this study attempts to figure out new spatial matrices of urban growth taking into account the traditional home living, the surrounding landscape nature, the functional and economic site vocation. Planning a third-millennium city still means acknowledging the architecture as a vehicle of regeneration and cultural connection between past, present, and future. Keywords: Rebuilding Process, Identity, Innovation and Continuity.

INTRODUCTION

Podgorica, a name that means “city under the mountain”, is the capital Montenegro and one of Europe’s youngest capitals. As its long history has shown, it is the result of an ongoing rebuilding process: Greek colony, Roman crossroads of rivers and trade, Ottoman fort-gate. After suffering conquests, wars, more than seventy bombings during World War II, it was completely reconstructed in the form of a 20th century soviet city. Based on a floodplain, it shows a hybrid morphology by matching compact urban fabrics to the scattered icons of political and economic power. Today, Podgorica is a dynamic growing city sustained by a close-knit network of international funds in order to become a city in the 21st century. Podgorica shares the unfortunate fate of the Western Balkans, nevertheless, the rapid transition from a post-socialist model to globalization caused a loss of identity and sense of place. This is made more evident by the simultaneous presence of the sprawling of contemporary design icons that contrast with the growing absence of collective architectural memory due to the historical fabrics’ pauperisation. The disregard for the main monuments, as well as the fading connection between historical and novel buildings, shows proof of serious political and economic problems hidden by the futuristic image of a developing city, projected towards globalization both of goals and morphemes.

In addition to nourish the limited literature on the subject, the paper aims to bridge the knowledge gap of a relatively recent city and to understand its developing dynamics in the name of innovation and continuity: how can Podgorica represent the next generation of European capitals?

This study analyses the historical changes in urban structure by reading typical morphologies and typologies. Furthermore, through design experimentation, it attempts to figure out new spatial matrices of urban growth taking into account the traditional home living, the surrounding landscape nature, the functional and economic site vocation. Planning a third-millennium city still means acknowledging the architecture as a vehicle of regeneration and cultural connection between past, present, and future.

MORPHOLOGIES OF CHANGE

Podgorica City is initially analysed through an integrated approach between overlapping history and morphology. It is then shown in future perspective according to the experimental design proposals.

Reading the built environment, its urban structure is clearly recognisable in four main historical fabrics with variable extension:

- The first Roman settlement, known as *Doclea*, was built in 168 B.C. in compliance with the typical Roman model with forum, basilica, and temples. After the fall of the Roman Empire and several later dominations, in 1496 the Catholic cities on the coast of Montenegro chose the protection of the Venetian Republic, while the Ottomans conquered the hinterland. The nucleus of *Doclea* was abandoned and the new fulcrum was established on the rivers *Moraca* and *Ribnica* where it preserved a compact framework until 1850. Low quality artifacts feature the historical core: due to the continuous modernization actions, their aesthetic and material characteristics are difficult to identify. Instead, the *Stara Varas* district (16th century) presents contemporary building types coexisting within the original Turkish irregular layout.
- A second sector was designed by the twentieth-century urban planning that led to a polar expansion with respect to the Ottoman nucleus. The orthogonal pattern divided into plots results from the late nineteenth-century town plan (1897) while most of the current constructions were built around the 1960s. At the beginning of the First World War, Podgorica kept growing disorderly and unevenly.
- When Marshal Tito set himself up as head of the state, the city was oriented on westward expansion. Its complex structure configured the *Titograd's* plan (1950), which included new civic institutional and residential buildings. The socialist urbanization is strong, prevailing, evident still today. Its regular setting includes artifacts of different value that is often overwritten by personal interventions by the inhabitants in search for more comfortable spaces. The most recent interventions express the contemporary design research, such as the *Block 5* neighborhood, winner of the award as best urban planning in Montenegro. Dated 1967, this project by *Mileta Bojovic* and *Dusan Vulekovic* consists in 13 tower buildings with massive volumes emerging on the façade and 1800 residential units totally. Such stony overhangs make them dynamic blocks. The public spaces host common functions and green areas. It is necessary to remember another building of great architectural quality, the *Hotel Crna Gora* of *Svetlana Kana Radevic*, realized in the same year (1967). It is settled along the coast of the *Moraca* river and is characterised by a series of terraces projecting on the riverside. Its brutalist style is related to the architecture of the old city located on the opposite bank. One of the modern socialism symbols was the *Galeb Kayak Club* of *Vukota Tupa Vukotic* (1960). Clad in authentic *Moraca River* stone and currently in a state of decay, it initially included a restaurant, a bar and a kayak club. The building is connected to the

rocky coast, finding the right balance between nature and artifice. It was abandoned due to political and social events and suffered from poor maintenance.

- In spite of the main abusive nature of interventions, around 1970 the settlement model shows a regular grid. This reticular pattern persists until 1980 also affecting the suburban areas and their high-density housing targeted to workers. The common phenomenon of urban sprawl has impacted the outskirts of Podgorica, alternating urban voids, fringe belts and low-density self-urbanism.

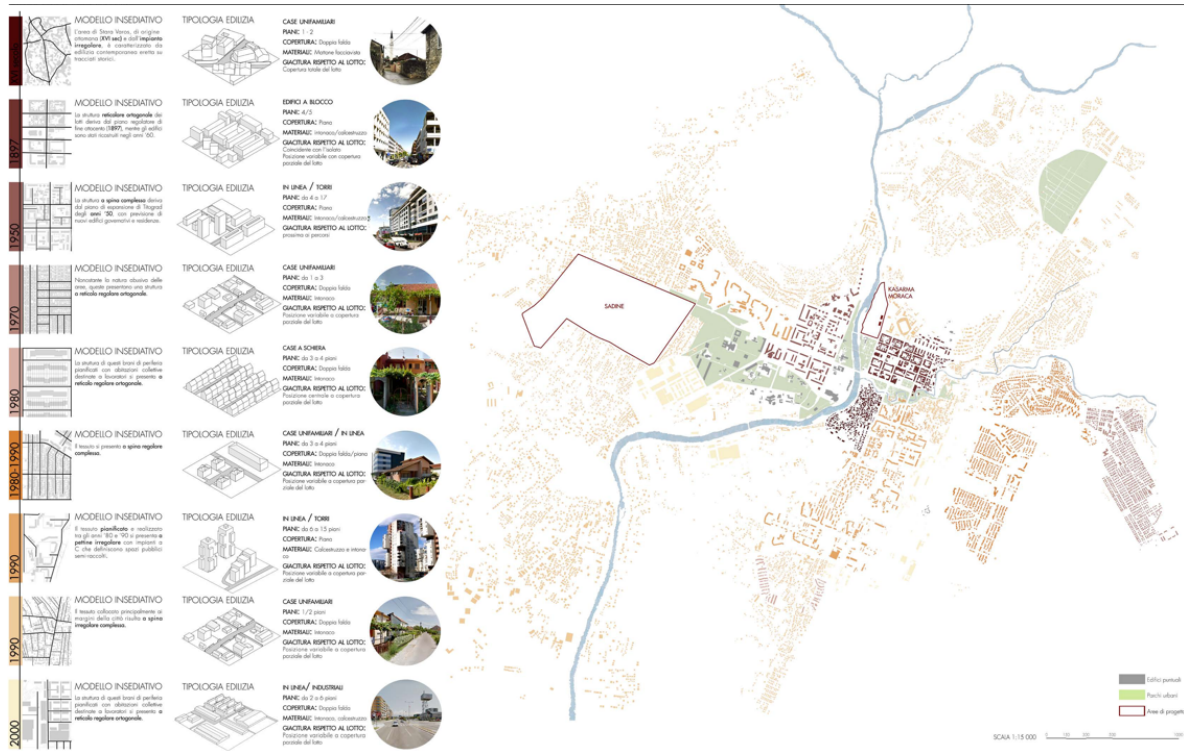


Figure 1. Morphological Analysis of Podgorica (Image from the Master Degree Thesis “Urban projects for marginal landscapes”, by S. Bianchi, S. Corrado, F. Corso, D. Orazi. Thesis supervisor: R. Belibani)

PODGORICA TOWARDS A NEXT GENERATION OF EUROPEAN CAPITALS

In the current social and urban context, Podgorica aspires to become a European capital and it is necessary to understand how to direct its development dynamics in order to represent the next generation of European capitals in the name of innovation and continuity.

For a necessary verification of the objectives of the MDGs, it is necessary to consider the demographic analysis which shows that the city is characterized by a predominantly young population. In most cases, the families, often composed of young couples, are made up of a variable number of 3 or 5 members, mainly living in owned houses. The population, on the other hand, has a low educated workforce: most young people finish their studies concurrently with the end of higher education, but the unemployment rate is quite high.

As a representative city of Montenegro, Podgorica has signed the Millennium Development Goals along with the other 193 UN members with the aim of achieving a radical improvement in the quality of life in these countries. Likewise, the most acceding countries, Montenegro failed to reach the eight targets by the original deadline (2015).

In line with these objectives, several urban renewal initiatives have been promoted. The city has launched international calls for ideas to realize a general urban renewal focused on the suburbs and surrounding natural landscapes. In social and urban terms, nowadays Podgorica represents a young and proactive capital in Eastern Europe.

THE COMPETITION FOR SADINE AND THE PROJECT PROPOSAL

The city, aware of an urban planning that is now resolved in local interventions with a globalizing character, has promoted calls for ideas aimed at the realization of urban projects dedicated to marginal landscapes. The intent is to find proposals that can restore the lost characteristics towards a precise urban identity.

Among these, the international competition for Sadine, a north-west area where a residential and commercial expansion system of the City Kvar, is foreseen in order to turn the urban void into a socio-economic resource to the city. The area is located in the extreme west of the Montenegrin capital and is a great resource for the socio-economic development of the city. The current void creates a caesura between the peripheral fabrics, a sprawl of squatter settlements located in the countryside and of a rural character, and the city center, arranged a short distance from each other. The Sadine area currently marks a boundary between the consolidated urban fabric and the outskirts made by illegal settlements located in the countryside, still close to the inner-city.

The aim of the call is to promote the densification of the area to create a new urban hub that will lighten the urban load of the center of Podgorica and balance it with the introduction of services and architectures such as to project the city towards a European dimension.



Figure 2. Sadine Masterplan (Image from the Master Degree Thesis "Urban projects for marginal landscapes", by S. Bianchi, S. Corrado, F. Corso, D. Orazi. Thesis supervisor: R. Belibani)

The link between the new intervention and the existing city is operated through a green ring equipped by pedestrian and cycle routes. The inner connections are ensured by the large green axis which hosts the soft mobility system, services and public spaces.

The design project aims to densify the area by establishing new polarities that will lighten the urban load of the urban center and balance it with novel facilities and architectures able to usher the new generation of European 21st century capitals.

The study presented was developed within a Master's Degree seminar, promoted by the Master's Degree in Architecture of the Sapienza University of Rome, entitled "Urban Regeneration in Podgorica, Montenegro" which took place in Podgorica, at the Univerzitet Crne Gore - University of Montenegro - Faculty of Architecture, in collaboration with Prof. Ilija Lalosevic and an research team¹. With an approach that integrates type-morphological analysis and design experimentation, the project seeks to configure new spatial matrices of urban growth. The study for the development of the Sadine area summarizes in a complex masterplan the articulation of different urban projects, with specific destinations, which qualify as new marginal landscapes. The project includes a business center near the west limit of the city, already consolidated, the extension of the Crne Gore university center with a center for the visual arts and a sports area with a stadium, a residential area and an agricultural market. The project also includes the creation of two polarities which, through services and public spaces, reconnect the residential fabric to the city by a green infrastructure that runs throughout the Sadine area.

THE MEDIATION PROJECT BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURAL AND URBAN PARKS

With Sadine's vocation as a center the center of economic development, the project places a business center on the consolidated margin, a landmark visible from all over the city, consisting of three skyscrapers, two for offices and an international hotel. The buildings are connected at the base by a common multi-storey platform dedicated to commerce and leisure with a green roof that is characterized as a road-park ring. At the center of this system, a large circular square at zero altitude focuses the perceptual and directional vectors and leads to the common parking lot via a large ramp.

At the north-west edge of the Sadine area, awaiting further development towards the countryside, is the ex novo project of a km0 market and other public and private services for the production, dissemination and enhancement of local resources. The area overlooks a hilly landscape characterized by an existing residential fabric, consisting of houses with pitched roofs with cultivated gardens and equipped with pergolas. The project, the terminal pole of the tram axis, is confronted with a peripheral peri-urban, spontaneous, residential fabric and a rural landscape open to the Montenegrin countryside, creating a formal and functional integration between city and countryside. In this context, the covered market and its square act as a fulcrum: the square as a meeting place and the market as a gateway to the Sadine area, but also as the end point of the functional path, from production to distribution. In the area there is a sequence of functions that make it possible to move from agricultural production to residential fabric. Specifically, services are planned in reserved areas: for agricultural and artisanal production; for the distribution of locally made products; for agricultural residences in direct relationship with the existing fabric.

¹ Prof. G. Svetislav Popović, Prof.ssa S. Stamatović-Vučković, Prof.ssa Sanja Vlahović, Prof. A. Ašanin.

In the central part of the masterplan, the design of a mediation area is envisaged, able to make the historic city and the new rural expansion interact. This is how the new residential district originates, which, along the central axis in continuity with the business center, has a rich fabric of tall buildings, built according to languages that recall the development of a socialist matrix. To connect the high fronts of the new buildings and the pre-existing fabric at the edges, characterized by small single-family houses with vegetable gardens and gardens, a fabric of mediation and completion is inserted: these are low-density and medium-height residential buildings. The project aims at a dynamic interaction of the typologies that characterize the new urban fabric and that already present at the edge of the study area. Thus, a symmetrical central section is created, consisting of residential buildings that are gradually more and more sparse and lower towards the surrounding natural landscape.

In the hypothesis presented, the connection between the new intervention and the existing city promotes sustainable mobility that includes gardens and a green ring, alternating pedestrian and bicycle paths and green areas equipped with services. The connection of the entire Sadine area is operated by this large green axis that houses the soft mobility system, neighborhood services and meeting spaces, sized according to their location and function.

The proposal is completed by a new cultural center on the Morača river which, by arranging itself on the ruins of a former barracks, tries to mend the lost relationship with the river by recalling the original intent of the project for the Kayak Club.

CONCLUSION

In light of the morpho-typological analysis described, between old and new layers overlapping, Podgorica already presents the typical complexity of a European capital. The impulses of programming and planning also seem to project it towards the new generation of European capital. In particular, the intention to adhere to the MDGs and the proposed project highlight its full potential to become a sustainable city at an urban, social and economic level. The relationship between city and nature will play a key role in this evolutionary process and in confirming architecture as a vehicle for regeneration and cultural connection between past, present and future in the city of the third millennium.

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