

Post-privatisation (residential) landscapes: the case of spatial secessions in neighbourhood of Starčevica, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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1. Statement of the problem

In 2001, privatisation of socially owned apartments was initiated in Republika Srpska (one out of the two post-war emerged entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, here referred to as 'the entity'). The process, which was considered an integral part of political 'preparatory strategies for the inevitable economic and political transformation' (Petrović, 2001, p. 216), resulted in variety of socio-spatial changes, producing 'more serious negative (social) effects than expected' (Petrović, 2005, p. 10). *The new post-privatisation era* was first and foremost characterised by the *epidemic of the new means of behaviour* of local population, who started setting themselves free what was suppressed during the socialism – e.g. 'personalism, spontaneity, fragmentation' (Hirt, 2012, p. 65) by reshaping *their own* apartments according to *their own* needs and, more importantly, *their personal taste*. These informal practices soon became so widespread and highly tolerated that 'one might even hesitate to call them illegal' (Petrović, 2005, p. 18). They led to anarchy and 'overwhelming feeling of disorder' (Hirt, 2012, p. 46), resulting in specific type of illegality I define as *the new residential landscapes*.

2. Objectives

Since no research was ever done on this matter, this paper aims to add more of an understanding on how and to what extent the neighbourhood of Starčevica in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was changed by the induction of *the external force* – e.g. the phenomenon of privatisation. How has the change of the ownership

pattern contributed to the emergent of the new means of the local population's behaviour and, moreover, what I call *the new residential landscapes*? To what extent have the 'new practices of private usurpation, withdrawal and partition' (Hirt, 2012, p. 49) altered Starčevica? In addition, taking into account that most of the researchers dealing with the (post-socialist) transformation of former Yugoslav cities have so far mainly focused on Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, believing that 'socialist housing policy outcomes were the most visible in big cities' (Petrović, 2001, p. 217), this paper contributes to the body of knowledge by explaining the extent and the outcomes of the transformation of a former Yugoslav medium-sized city of Banja Luka.

3. Methodology

The paper analyses various academic works dealing with the processes of post-socialist transformation, as well as laws, legislations and studies related to former Yugoslav housing system and the housing policy of the city of Banja Luka itself. Significant amount of the data is obtained from the press reports. However, since the paper primarily aims to get as close as possible to *the human experience*, the author's personal experience of the resident of the neighbourhood is employed in order to obtain *more personal* information, including anecdotal evidences. Apart from that, the online questionnaire is created for the purpose of getting *more personal* feedback regarding the daily life experience of the homeowners. However, the research is largely based on personal observations and the use of what one of the author's former professors, Filip De Boeck, defined as 'the anthropological approach of "the vocabulary of the legs"' – e.g. lots of long walks and photographs taken.

4. Main results and contributions

The paper is divided in four parts. I firstly explain how the neighbourhood of Starčevica *came to be*, in order to point out its significance for the local housing policy, as well as its relevance for the city of Banja Luka itself. Secondly, I describe *the roots of the change*, offering an overview of the process of privatisation, in order to explain why hardly anyone resisted becoming an *owner of their own* property. In the third part of the paper, I describe the outcomes of the privatisation – e.g. the visual change of the neighbourhood and the rise of the *spatial secessions* – e.g. 'the wilful act of disjoining, disassociating, or carving space for oneself from the urban commons' (Hirt,

2012, p. 49). I argue that privatisation served as the catalyst for the emergence of ‘a particular mass mind-set’ – e.g. the one ‘that pursues the perpetual decomposition of urban commonality not only with impunity but also without regrets’ (Hirt, 2012, p. 56). I aim to conclude that privatisation of socially owned apartments in Starčevica led to personal taste being adopted as ‘a significant landscape management canon’ (Czepczyński, 2008, p. 150), which resulted in the *illegality* that ‘attained such an air of banality and ordinariness’ it became the new ‘social norm’ (Hirt, 2012, p. 56). Moreover, I argue that privatisation gave birth to *the new residential landscapes*, which, in broader sense, may represent the example of the shift from *the (socialist practice of) living together* to *the (post-privatisation tendency) of living alone*.