Public Green Areas and their Devaluation in a Dense City Fabric of Sarajevo: Case Study of Hastahana Park

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Abstract. In a country that is still considered to be in the transitional period, even though the last war was more than two decades ago, the laws and legislations of the urban development with the focus on green areas, are loosely interpreted into reality in today’s Bosnia. The laws on urban planning and development stipulated in the time of former Yugoslav republic were precise in defining parameters in planning. In the former system, these laws were implemented resulting in string of great urban developments. Such big urban projects were executed all over former Yugoslavia in the late 1950s and 1960s when industry grew and cities expanded and modernized. These urban projects included residential buildings, public buildings such as schools, kindergartens, municipality buildings, commercial areas as well as healthcare and recreational facilities including sports terrains and public green areas. The ratio between built and un-built was greatly respected leaving enough green spaces for leisure activities. Nowadays, the laws and regulations inherited from the former system are loosely interpreted or are being changed in favour of private investors at the cost of quality of life of cities’ inhabitants. This paper aims to explore the importance of green areas, or lack of the same, in urban developments within dense city fabric in the period of post-war Bosnia focusing on current developments in Hastahana Park. The Park is located in popular and largely discussed area of Sarajevo’s Marijin Dvor, were recent urban developments characterized it as new business district of the city. Today, the remaining of Hastahana, the only public park on Marijin Dvor is endangered. Its future is uncertain because the site has been proclaimed, by the municipality authorities, as construction site. Despite attempts by citizens to stop sales and construction in the park area, city authorities ruled in their own favour (or in favour of fast money gain) versus welfare of citizens. The example of Hastahana Park shows that due to strong political pressures the norms and regulations can be changed, the need for big investments is stronger than the care for the need of citizens. While European cities stream to improve the amount of public green areas in cities contributing to healthier environment, at the same time, Sarajevo decreases valuable green areas in favour of giving advantage to construction, increasing already heavy traffic and air pollution in the city. Such reckless and irresponsible decisions have long-term impacts on city development and quality of life of its citizens.

1. Introduction

Mythological Garden of Eden, as first mentioned in the Book of Genesis, is often referred to, in the modern times, as a reference to its divine beauty and abode for Adam and Eve offering them all the goods of the world. Translating this into contemporary form we can understand that the green areas within dense urban fabric should play essentially the same role in today’s society.
Unfortunately, in today’s Bosnia, there is poor, if any, urban development that respects and gives importance to the Gardens as mentioned above. Many old green areas in the city have been neglected due to ignorance, having negative impact on the health of its inhabitants.

It is a common known fact that green areas in the cities are important for variety of reasons. They do not only enhance the aesthetics of the city but ensure better quality of life in the urban settings. The greenery in the cities regulates air temperature and flow, decreases the noise and pollution, increases the air humidity, provides shadow in the summer, prevents soil erosion, enhances social integration and public health and of course has recreational and aesthetic function.

The amount and position of green areas in the city are conditioned by several different factors. These components are size of the city, topography of the area, number of inhabitants, historic development of the city, culture of living and people’s awareness of importance of green spaces, climate, economic development and political influence. All these factors influence the preservation of existing and planning of new green zones in the city within the general urban development.

There are different norms within the urban planning that define the amount of green areas in the city. They differ significantly from city to city because they depend on National and local guidelines. The WHO recommends a minimum amount of 9m² of green open space per person [1]. Some cities struggle to reach recommended minimum while others try to provide even more than recommended. Positive examples of Italian planning law recommend minimum of 18m² of green area pp in the new developments [2].

Different norms in defining the minimal amount of green space in the cities depend on the authorities identifying the parameters for the green areas. Professors from the University of Niš, Serbia, have divided the green areas in the city in accordance to their purpose. These can be classified in three categories:

- Resting and recreation areas (city parks of general and special type, amusement park, children's playgrounds, squares);
- Areas for physical education (sports fields, playgrounds, etc.);
- Areas of utilitarian restricted use (zoos and botanical gardens, cemeteries, nurseries, greenery of cultural, educational and health institutions, block greenery, etc.).

Besides this, they have made further divisions between general, specific and special purpose of green areas. Green areas with general purpose would be playgrounds and sports grounds; traffic greenery; terrains for social events; greenery around and within industrial complexes, airports and cemeteries; greenery within the building blocks; greenery of schools and universities; kindergarten greenery; greenery of health care institutions; greenery of tourist and catering facilities; greenery of memorials and monuments, zoos, and botanical gardens, etc.

Specific green areas in the city would be Central City Park, city parks, square, boulevard, greenery in front of public buildings, street greenery, greenery along the coast, beaches, quays, park - forests and resorts whereas greenery on the roofs (green roof surfaces) and vertical greenery is defined as city greenery with special purpose [3].

“On average, some 40% of the surface area of European cities is made up of urban green infrastructure, with around 18.2m² of publicly accessible green space per inhabitant; 44% of Europe’s urban population lives within 300m of a public park.” [4].

Study published by the European Commission on the amount of green area in the EU specifies the minimum requirements of green areas per person in the cities. This analysis included several cities in
Slovenia and Croatia (former Yugoslav republics who are EU members). Majority of the surveyed cities have between 9m² and 15m² of green area per person which is a common result for other South-Eastern European countries and the Mediterranean region. Since there are no accurate data about the situation in Bosnia and particularly Sarajevo as the capital, we can assume that the data would be similar to the surveyed cities in the region.

2. Socio-cultural values of green areas

Culture is a gathering point of ideas, beliefs and customs within a group of people shaping the behaviour and influencing the way this group will conduct daily life. Gardens have played an important part in all of human activities being a playground for ideas, gatherings and many different ventures of human interaction.

Human need for development of the first green areas is visible through the written remains of the gardens in Egypt and Mesopotamia. These gardens most probably started off as simple fruit orchards in the areas that were irrigated from the river Nile developing in the 4th century BC and advancing into delight gardens allocated to the luxurious dwellings in 1500 BC.

The importance of the green areas depended on needs of the cultures that fostered the gardens as well as the rules that were applied into the society. Gardens changed in accordance to development of the civilization. There are three distinct periods in development of the gardens through history: Ancient period (4000BC until the fall of the Western Roman Empire 476 AD), Feudal period (from 476 AD until French Revolution 1789 with the division on Middle Ages and Renaissance and Baroque) and finally the period of Capitalism (1789 until 1917) [5].

Based on the eternal idea of Gardens of Eden as fundamental guideline, green areas in Ancient period developed on cultural and religious believes, outlining the current artistic framework. The gardens became base for enjoyment as well as intellectual and aesthetic norms [6]. These green areas were reserved for the elite of the society and the commoners were using the “greens” outside the safety of the city walls.

In ancient Egypt, the gardens were cultivated adjacent to the noblemen houses and temples. The geometries applied were often rectangular and became base for the development of the European geometric landscaping. Ancient Greece cultivates, besides the private gardens, trees in front of the public buildings or holy places. In ancient Rome a third of the city was developed as green areas and forested, and for the first time geometrical shaping of the shrubs was applied. The shapes were pyramids, spheres, human figures or mythological beings, etc. Water features take important place in the private gardens. The smaller atrium gardens are seen as an extension of the interior living space [7].

Needs of the society influenced the purpose and use of the gardens and in the middle ages new type of gardens were developed; the divine gardens were unattainable and belted with high walls; gardens for cultivation of medicinal and edible herbs within the walls of monasteries and pleasure gardens in the close vicinity of palaces fostered labyrinths and meticulous lawns.

With the return of the crusaders from the East, new elements were introduced into European gardens [8]. These new gardens were heavily influenced by Islamic culture accentuating water features as well as new types of flowers and bushes. Main inspiration for these gardens still was Gardens of Eden; good example is gardens in Alhambra in Granada with their opulent mixture of water surfaces and water features as showcase of the power and prosperity of the society.
Foundations of the European landscaping and garden development start with the Renaissance in Italy with the heavily emphasized symmetry and exploited vistas. The inspiration came from classical ideals of order and beauty. The use of the garden was not only to be physically used but for the enjoyment of all senses (sight, smells and sounds) and individual contemplation. With such complexity of the garden shaping, need for a person, an architect of landscape emerged [9].

Gardens in Versailles, as the great Baroque representative have landscaping compilations with strict geometrical forms and compositions. The gardens were made for the needs of lavish ceremonies and grand events showing social status. The importance of this type of garden has resulted in the mere size of the garden as Baroque gardens cover few hundred acres. They also showed the importance of the complex socio political relations as well as power of the proprietor.

Until the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, parks and green areas in Europe were reserved almost exclusively for the rich and noble families. First parks that emerged and broke off this mode were formed in England as a result of the poor living conditions in the urban areas [10]. English parks defined guidelines for the development of the urban green areas elsewhere. The greens and parks are closely connected to the first industrial revolution and now have different socio economic frame. People from lower / working classes can access and enjoy these parks. The role of the green areas is shifted and the functionality of the space now plays more important part. The strong geometrical forms form the past give place to the natural shapes; the nature is not subordinated to the users.

In 1845, England was the first to bring into action law on Public Green Areas [11]. Green urban areas have a purpose to break the dense urban fabric. Today, they have become recognizable landmarks in cities and are the nucleus of the city’s social activities on many levels.

3. Green areas in Sarajevo

Urbanization is a dynamic and vibrant process that represents a community, society, often political conflicts and turmoil. All transitions and values in society are manifested in changes of principles and modes of construction, urbanization as well as creation of green areas.

Today’s Sarajevo is mainly built during the three main periods of expansion: the first 140 years of Ottoman rule (up to 1600), in the quiet years of Austro-Hungarian rule (from 1883 to 1914), and in the formative period of the socialist authorities (from 1945 to the 1984 Olympic Games. years) [12]. To this, period after the last aggression (1992-1996) until today, can be added.

During the Ottoman rule, Sarajevo culminated in the 16th century and consisted of the main market area that developed on the banks of the river Miljacka and the residential areas, called mahala. Mahala consisted of houses, positioned on the slopes of the hills in order to get the maximum of sunlight. The houses had their own gardens and some of the elements resembling life in the countryside, for which Sarajevo distinguished itself as a garden city [13]. However, there was a lack of public green areas in the city, and the greens that existed were exclusively used by the landlords. These gardens were belted with high white walls and inside divided into male and female gardens. They were heavily influenced by the Ottoman architecture whose inspiration was found in Islam with a strong emphasis on water, sun and fragrance (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Anonymous painted illustration of the garden of Sa'dabad at Kagithane, Istanbul, ca. 1720.

The first public parks were erected with the transition of the political authorities during the Austrio Hungarian period 1878-1918. This was the period of change and influences from the west; period of industrialization and social shifting. Transformation of the city happened in its architecture and urbanization bringing green areas to the public.

There are 3 main public green developments from this period; two on the north side of the river Miljacka, on the slopes of one of the hills leading to mahalas and one on the south bank of the river. Old cemeteries Kemalbeg and Şehitluci were the locations for placement of the new park that is still known as Mali Park (Little Park). On the east side of this park, the same landscape architect Hugo Krvarić, on the grounds of yet another cemetery Čekračja (whose name evolved from the nobleman who was buried there) developed a park called Veliki Park (Big Park). Some of the tombstones still remain in the parks as a silent reminder of the past. The third big green development in the city was Atmejdan (coin of two words of Turkish origin at –horse and mejdan – square); it sits on the south side of the river on the site of a 17th century hippodrome [14]. In the 1913, acclaimed Bosnian architect, Josip Vancaš, designed a small music pavilion that remains to the day (Figure 2).

Figure 2. At Mejdan park with a music pavilion nowadays used as a cafe
Although not a part of the city at the time of Austro-Hungarian rule, Parks at Ilidža were also developed on the grounds of old Roman baths. These Parks are in today’s Sarajevo and represent first landscape-designed parks in Bosnia (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Park at Ilidža with surrounding hotels](image)

After the WW II Sarajevo witnesses thorough urban growth. As the country economically evolved, it resulted in great amounts of development with the complete change in the physical structure and spatial expansion of the city. The period of socialist construction of the city (1945-1984) brought with it the planned deployment, lengthwise the river Miljacka towards the Sarajevo field, creating small centres along the longitudinal axe.

This period of industrialization brought with it the development of residential settlements, in order to meet the needs of population migrated from rural to urban areas. Modern apartment blocks, which were built as a combination of anti-historicism and contemporary style, resulted in a homogeneous appearance and excessive use of concrete with planned green areas around them; in 1961 each resident was allocated 4m2 of green space [15].

4. City’s green areas in the post war period
In the course of the four years of aggression, Sarajevo was under siege for the longest period in modern history, 1425 days. During this period the city was tremendously destroyed, being exposed to the devastating power of heavy weapons. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Sarajevo recovered slowly; many buildings were reconstructed and some new public and residential buildings have been built.

Unfortunately, this meant that the city’s green areas were converted to construction sites. After 2010, the construction trend continued and new residential settlements emerged. Unlike the settlements form the socialist period, the new developments do not have any of the elements necessary for the residential areas. To the day, the emerging settlements solely consist of high-rises closely positioned to one another with not enough light, privacy or airflow and no public green area between them (Figure 4). This kind of expansion of the city is controversial on many levels, where newly created blocks become ruins and very often unpleasant to live in missing all the functions of the city. Lewis Mumford calls this growth “growth at the expense of exhausted citizens”[16].
Figure 4. Tibra Pacific development as an unsuccessful example of post-war residential planning

The area of Marijin Dvor, focus of this research, was already in 1963 through the General Urban Plan envisioned as a new city centre that would include several educational facilities, galleries and museums, healthcare center, a hotel, Radio and TV house, etc. [17]. Since then, only a small number of these facilities have been allocated to Marijin Dvor. Large buildings of mixed use, predominantly shopping and other content (Importanne and Alta Shopping Centre in 2010, Sarajevo City Centre in 2014) as well as the new building for the American Embassy in 2010 have been built in the area. Latest addition of big shed architecture, Multiplex cinema complex, is being supplemented to the hijacked green area next to the hotel Holiday. Almost all green spots in the area of Marijin Dvor have been converted to construction sites and sold to private investors. The same destiny befell the only remaining park in the area of Marijin Dvor, Hasthana Park (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Hastahana Park during Winter season holidays

These lamentable decisions are suited to the municipality authorities for several reasons. The officials will have financial gain selling the land to the interested investors and only financial loss if the Park remains as it is, as there will be park maintenance cost. The park is frequently used by many inhabitants from the surrounding area, especially by the children and the youth, as it is the only skate park in the town. It is also a venue for special events throughout the year (amusement/sports events, concerts) attracting larger audiences from the entire city.
In spring 2019, the Municipality Centre, one of 5 municipalities in Sarajevo, announced the future plans for Hastahana Park designating it as construction site. The citizens then, established the association called “Hastahana Park” fighting against this decision. Despite their efforts and public hearing with Municipality representatives, the Park was sold. Its prospect is now in hands of the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina who purchased the whole park area. It is still unclear what the further actions of the CBBH are and if the public will lose another valuable green oasis in the city centre. The story of Hastahana Park is “the story of the defeat of the idea of public space, the defeat of social planning, the defeat of democratic control and the defeat of the procedure.” [18].

Modern trends in Sarajevo in the years after the last aggression (1992-1996) are manifested in extensive illegal construction or construction, which is consolidated with valid documents and permits, but in spite of the rules of the profession or respect for the traditional historical values of the city’s urban area. As a result of such bad practice many green areas in Sarajevo have diminished.

When analysed, there are several important green zones in the city that existed before 1992 aggression. They are two walking alleys along the river Miljacka, Wilson’s walk and Ambassadors Alley, as well as Vrelo Bosne Park near the spring of the river Bosna. As an addition to these there are several parks in the city dating from the Austro-Hungarian time, the small zoo established during the Yugoslavian period, a small botanical garden within the National Museum and the general greenery around the residential settlements from the socialist period.

The city’s authorities have sparsely invested in upgrading or creating new green areas in town in the period after the war. One positive example, in the municipality Novi Grad, is that on the grounds of former military barracks; a new Educational, Sports and Recreational Centar ‘Safet Zajko’ opened in 2015 (Figure 6). The barracks themselves have been reused as educational buildings, administration or cafés whereas the green areas between the barracks are given new functions: different sports fields, playgrounds, gardens, artificial lake, etc. The whole area covers 15 hectares and 54,500m2 are green surfaces [19].

Another positive example of reuse of green public space in the same municipality is Mojmilo Park (Figure 7). This protected natural corridor covers 10 hectares and hosts about 1,000 saplings in the arboretum that represent more than 100 varieties of specific and autochthonous plants. This park also offers a children playground, a fitness path, an amphitheatre for outdoor education, maintained walking paths, tubing lanes and Eco House for visitors to enjoy some refreshments and prepare their own food [20].
5. Conclusion
Globally, the amount of green areas and parks in the cities varies. This is due to the different legislations and procedures in forming these areas as well as specific geographical and political inherent situations. In order to properly develop green areas and allocate adequate amount of green space in urban settlements, it is of great importance to have standards and norms and to follow them.

As a downside of proper development of parks, planners are faced with strong political pressures as the publicly accessible green areas do not generate revenue, but need public funds for development and maintenance. On the other hand, positive planning and development of the greens fulfils socio-ecological functions of the society and contribute to the healthy environment.

Sarajevo’s relationship to its greenery, unfortunately, cannot set a positive example as seen in similar situation of other ex-Yugoslavia cities. The green areas in Sarajevo diminish for the sake of new private investments.

The example of Hastahana Park is just one example in the row of similar actions. It shows that due to strong political pressures the norms and regulations can be changed; the need for big investments is stronger than the care for the need of citizens. While European cities stream to improve the amount of public green areas in cities contributing to healthier environment, at the same time, Sarajevo decreases valuable green areas in favour of giving advantage to construction, increasing already heavy traffic and air pollution in the city. Such reckless and irresponsible decisions have long-term impacts on city development and quality of life of its citizens.

Beneficial turns can be made with changing consciousness of majority of people, and not just small groups or professionals. Shift in believing that monetary underwriting is the only way for development of green areas to placing the focus on the health and social wellbeing of individuals / users in the cities must happen very soon, otherwise the consequences for the life of Sarajevo citizens might be severe. Hoping to become a part of the European Union, city’s authorities must focus more on sustainable solutions of urban development in all its segments including the increase of public green areas and parks in the city.

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