Architectures in the Shadow of “Investors’ Urban Planning”—Case Study of Avala Hotel in Budva, Montenegro

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Abstract: Avala Hotel in Budva, Montenegro, has undergone three reconstructions. Each of them led to significant spatial changes. The first hotel established the foundation of urbanization process in Budva, the building was too high compared to the old town walls in the surrounding and thus not well integrated. The second reconstruction was the only successful achievement. At this time, in the first detailed urban plan including hotel and its surrounding area, the conclusion was that it represents “high-quality, seaside-favorable ambience” that should not be harmed by further building expansion. The last, illegal reconstruction in 2006 resulted in over enlarged new building disrespectful of the surrounding and the previous design. Similarly, the 2008 new detailed urban plan was the creation of “investors’ urban planning”. Entirely driven by profit, it arranges building reconstructions with multiple enlargements. This study tends to point out contextual impacts of the three hotels on the surrounding area, with special focus on the last reconstruction and “investors’ urban planning” phenomena. The applied research method is comparative, chronological analysis of the three hotels. The aim of this research paper is to inspire initiatives that will help overcoming declining and harmful synergy of architecture and new socio-economic phenomena. It is the only way leading to the significant architectural goal: creating refined, harmonized and high quality ambience.

Key words: Avala Hotel’s reconstruction, investments growth, investors’ urban planning, illegal construction, building expansion, spatial devastation.

1. Introduction

Avala Hotel in Budva is associated to the beginnings of urbanization and tourism at the Montenegro seaside. The transformation of hotels and the surrounding area is followed by specific socio-political circumstances.

Comparative analysis of the three hotel designs and buildings enables chronological insight into interactions among economy, politics and architecture, with special focus on the contemporary tendencies that created “investors’ urban planning”—a term related to urban planning and highly influenced by investors’ requirements.

This architectural research is among the first in this field of study. It is based on architectural criteria related to the question of context (physical, historical and socio-political) and the building (hotel) in relation to it.

The first hotel was built between the two world wars, establishing the foundations of urbanization and tourism in Budva. The building was not well integrated in the surrounding, because of its height that surpassed the old town walls nearby. It was damaged in the earthquake in 1979. Consequently, and due to Avala’s insufficient accommodation capacities at the time, the demand for hotel’s reconstruction and building enlargement occurred.

The second project included the reconstruction of the previous building and its expansion according to the competition winning design of architect Vladislav Plamenac in 1978. For this design the architect received “Borba award”, the most significant...
Yugoslav recognition at the time. At this period, the first detailed urban plans were made.

Finally, the third design (second reconstruction) followed the new millennium investments growth. Once again, Avala’s accommodation capacities were insufficient. This illegal reconstruction resulted in the over enlarged new building that bears no resemblance to the previous one. In addition, the new detailed urban plan in 2008 was also the creation of “investors’ urban planning”. With no relation to the previous plan and entirely driven by profit, it arranges building reconstructions with multiple horizontal and vertical enlargements.

This contemporary tendencies in architecture and urban planning in Montenegro have led to irreversible spatial devastation. Hence, the objective of this research paper is to inspire initiatives that will help overcoming this declining and harmful synergy of architecture and new socio-economic phenomena.

2. Hotel Avala between the Two World Wars

2.1 The Beginning of Building

Back in the 1932, Budva was small, undeveloped and unurbanised town. Only the old town was built. The rest was green land with only a few private houses (Fig. 1).

Radomir Stojic, a pharmacist from Belgrade, have spotted the site close to the sea, suitable for building the hotel. In order to get a building permit, he had to provide new road to the building and new plumbing system, that would supply not only the hotel, but the entire old town [1]. After this was done, the owners of the land in the surrounding were consulted and asked for approval, and the building process could begin.

2.2 The Discovery of Necropolis, the Myth of “Cursed Hotel”

Finally, in the 1937, the building process began under the supervision of the engineers Ivan Valanda and Dragomir Tadic. Very soon after, the problems occurred. During the foundation process, the remains of a large, two-level necropolis were found. It consisted of many precious objects buried along with the deceased. The upper level originated from Roman empire, while the bottom part dated from the Ancient Greece time [2].

The collection was partly placed in the national museum in Belgrade. The rest was in historical museum in Cetinje, but during the war years every trace of it was lost. Nowadays, only small number of photography reminds people on this significant discovery.

It is a common belief that building on the burial site brings bad luck and curse. Superstition or not, no architect of the hotel succeeded in keeping his work. The first builders lost their hotel in the earthquake, while the architect of the second hotel could not preserve his master piece under the turmoil of building expansion in 2000’s.

2.3 The Hotel Opening, the Foundations of Urbanization in Budva

The construction had been completed and the first hotel Avala was opened in 1939. It was a modern and remarkable building, the tallest in the surrounding with its five stories and roof top terrace (Figs. 2 and 3). However, being significantly higher than the old town’s walls in the close surrounding, it was not well integrated and caused negative spatial impact.

The building was symmetrical, consisted of three parts: central part containing high glazed surfaces on
The construction of hotel Avala provided Budva with the new road and new plumbing system. The hotel was the town mark—a representative building that will attract the tourists [3]. On the opening day, the public lighting system was active for the first time. It can be said that the building established the foundations of the urbanization process in Budva, and determined the beginnings of its development as a touristic center.

3. Hotel Avala in the 1980’s

3.1 The Yugoslav Competition

Since the accommodation capacities of the old hotel became insufficient for the touristic requirements in Budva, an architectural competition was announced in 1978. The Jury, among others, included Uros Martinovic and Milorad Pantovic, well known architectural experts at the time. It was unanimous decision to give the first prize to Montenegrin architect Vladislav Plamenac [4].

The competition’s design task did not include the reconstruction of old Avala building, but the architect Plamenac incorporated it in his design. Before the building started, a severe earthquake in 1979 damaged the old hotel. Consequently, the reconstruction was inevitable.

3.2 The Winning Design

The winning project offered skillful graduation of volumes of the new hotel. The old Avala building, the closest to the old town, consisted of two stories instead...
of the previous five. The height of the building gradually rises with the distance from the old town walls. Like that, the building was very well incorporated into the town panorama from the sea (Fig. 4).

The urbanistic aspect of the winning design is especially important (Figs. 5 and 6). Hotel is well connected with the surrounding area through multilevel plateaus with attractive viewpoints towards the sea and the old town. The open space in hotel’s surrounding becomes the open public space.

The visual and spatial connection of the plateaus and the sea is achieved by opening in the middle part of the old Avala (Fig. 6). This “framing” of the view emphasized the main direction of the pedestrian path towards the beach, the sea and the horizon.

The new hotel Avala was very skillfully incorporated into the surrounding, so that it was hard to believe it included 700 beds and still “not looking bulky, heavy or frightening” [5].

The Avala is made in postmodern style, with many decorative, un-functional elements: columns, balusters, moldings, etc.. The roofs are both, partly flat and partly pitched, covered by roof tiles and sheet metal. The openings are framed by orthogonal beams and arches. It seems that too many elements are incorporated, without any special reason or purpose.

Regardless of the some stylistic flaws, Plamenac’s building is a remarkable master piece, the example of the contextual architecture successfully grown from the surrounding, with the harmonious scale and proportions. For hotel Avala, in 1984, the architect received “Borba award”, the most significant Yugoslav recognition at the time.

3.3 The Detailed Urban Plan “Gospostina” in 1982

Detailed urban plan “Gospostina” (hotel Avala’s surrounding area) has been done according to the master plan of the southern Adriatic coast, the general plan for Budva and the existing detailed plan for the central area of Budva [6].

The land of Gospostina is in slope, and all the plots had already been occupied with buildings (residential houses). The approach to the houses is enabled with one traffic lane in a dead end street and there is a very limited number of parking lots.

The ratio of the built and open, green area is considered to be harmonious. The maximal occupancy of the land is 40%. The maximal height of the residential houses is three stories (ground floor, first floor and second floor or loft).

The overall conclusion was that Gospostina represents “high-quality, seaside-favorable ambience” (Fig. 7) and therefore should not be harmed by further building expansion and decrease of green areas.

After this detailed urban plan, the following one has been done in 1995. However, it was without any significant difference to the previous one.
4. The Hotel Reconstruction in 2006

4.1 The Socio-political Circumstances, the First Building Initiatives

The new millennium brought investments growth and significant building expansion at Montenegro seaside. Large amount of foreign capital triggered numerous, uncontrolled building initiatives that caused permanent spatial devastations. Almost all existing hotels were reconstructed with multiple horizontal and vertical enlargements, regardless of the context, or the previous urban plans.

This was the case with hotel Avala, in April 2004, the Department for Urban Planning, Building and Planning in Municipality of Budva provided the investor, “Beppler & Jacobson” Company, with the urbanistic requirements for the hotel Avala reconstruction. It is specified in the requirements that the reconstruction is strictly limited to the existing building. The size of the building remains the same (overall dimensions, number of stories). Also, it is mandatory to consult architect Plamenac and to get his approval before any further action is taken.

Since the hotel is located in the preserved area of the old town, on the important archeological site, it is regarded as the cultural monument. Hence, the preservation requirements from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments were obligatory. After having insight into the competition material, the institute established the preservation requirements in which is emphasized: “the competition Jury took into consideration the proportions and the height of the new hotel compared to the height of the old town walls and its silhouette. This is presented in the photomontage of the new hotel next to the old town, where can be seen that the new hotel is subordinated to the entity of the old town’s walls and the fortress as the dominant feature of the old town Budva” [7]. Furthermore, the preservation requirements confirm the urbanistic requirements by limiting the height and the size of the reconstructed hotel on the existing ones.


Major building actions had to have an appropriate “justification” in urban plans, provided before, during the building process, or after the building was completed. These are the typical examples of the “investor’s urban planning” phenomena when the urban plan is completely driven by profit and investor’s requirements. These urban plans “make” the reconstructions legal and justify all the building actions taken.

In the case of Avala, the reconstruction started in 2006, completely illegally, without any legitimate document or permit provided. In 2008, the new detailed urban plan “Budva Center” is accepted justifying this and other building initiatives in Budva by including regulation plans that are, surprisingly, completely compatible with the new reconstruction projects.

In the new DUP (detailed urban plan) Budva is seen as “exclusive touristic center, recognizable at global level” [8]. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to “raise the level of Budva’s attractiveness and make it recognizable as a brand, which means that the urban space should be modern, amusing, provocative and fluent”.

This concept is followed by “appropriate” regulation parameters that enable multiple
enlargements both, horizontally and vertically. These regulation plans bear no resemblance to the previous ones given in the DUP Gospostina. Almost each building can be increased for at least two floors (Fig. 8). The land occupancy index went from previous 40% to 60%. The building lines are moved towards the plot regulation lines.

In the case of Gospostina, it is difficult to imagine a fluent urban space when the only access to the houses is one traffic lane, dead end road.

Also, the existing rich, high-quality greenery is irrelevant for the planners. Having more built area at the attractive location seems to be the only important goal of this “investor's plan”.

4.3 The Reconstruction of Avala, Designed by Architect Djordje Mitrovic

4.3.1 The Copyrights

Before this design, architect Djordje Mitrovic had one successful hotel reconstruction for “Bjanka” hotel in Kolasin, Montenegro.

However, it seems that this design task was much more complex and demanding, especially having in mind the recognition previous architect received for the building that became one of the main marks of Budva. It was even more difficult considering mandatory consulting with the architect Plamenac.

Unfortunately, the architects could not agree on the future building interventions, so the reconstruction began without engaging competition winning architect.

The architect Plamenac have not succeed in keeping his copyrights, despite the fact that the low was on his side. He sued at low the investor for copyrights abuse and he won the case. In spite of the verdict on Plamenac’s behalf, the reconstruction was not ceased. This case imposes the question: Is it even possible to protect a valuable architectural work in Montenegro nowadays, under the pressure of political and economical power?

4.3.2 The New Design

The new architect Mitrovic emphasized that the architectural concept of the hotel design was “not only to increase the hotel’s accommodation capacities, but

Fig. 8  Regulation plan in DUP “Budva center” (grey lines-new building lines).
to define a new, simple volume that will not visually endanger the old town” [9]. The concept was also to bring back the previous appearance of the old Avala, which referred to adding four more floors to the existing building.

How justified is to “bring back” the old Avala appearance having in mind that the decrease of its height enabled harmonious visual unity with the old town? The answer is clear: the contextual architectural values are of no importance compared to the additional square meters gained at the most attractive and profitable location. Furthermore, the architect’s intervention (Fig. 9) included adding two glazed volumes to the old Avala building, so that it lost much of the resemblance to the old building.

It is debatable if a building in a close surrounding of the old town, much higher than the old town’s walls, can make a harmonious unity with it. Also, the black tiles coating of the new part of hotel makes the contrast to the old town’s shades of light grey and beige even bigger.

In the new design, the “sea frame” was glazed and turned into restaurant, as it was in the old Avala, so that the spatial and visual connection between the plateaus and the sea was lost. Another design’s failure is the entrance part of the hotel that looks heavy and bulky, over emphasized in contrast to the previous design concept where everything was subordinated to the impression of openness and largeness of the plateaus extended to the sea.

However, it is important to mention some of the advantages of the new design. The excessive decorations from the previous hotel were removed and by placing large glazed openings on the sea facade the better view on the sea has been provided in hotel rooms.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The transformation of hotel Avala through the three designs and buildings erected accordingly demonstrates the change of the socio-political and architectural tendencies throughout the 20th century at Montenegro seaside.

It seems that the valuable architecture and urban planning were important only during the time when the second, competition winning design was realized.

The first building was strategically important because of the contribution to the tourism development in Budva. Also, it influenced the beginnings of urban planning in this area. However, the first hotel surpassed the height of the old town and imposed itself with the size. It was not well integrated and harmonized with the surrounding and thus had a negative spatial impact.

Furthermore, the Yugoslav competition points out the importance of hotel at this location as well as the necessity of gaining high-quality design proposals. The winning design of the architect Plamenac proved
to be a successful response to the design task given. The building he designed harmonized with the surrounding and offered new, open public spaces that enriched and refined the existing ambience. The recognitions architect received for this work are just another prove of its success. Urban planners of that time were aware of the appropriate built-open area ratio, and respectful of the valuable architectural work. This is the time when the attentive and considerate creation of urban space was of the highest importance.

Finally, the new millennium brought uncontrolled, illegal building expansions and the “investor’s urban planning” phenomena. The first priority was to gain more building space and to make more profit. The urban plans and architectural designs were subordinated, in the shadow of these economical goals, regardless of the legitimacy of the actions taken, or the spatial devastation they caused.

To conclude, it is of a high importance to consider all contextual influences on a building site and design accordingly. Creating a building harmonized with the surrounding, aimed at refining the ambience is among the first design priority. Hence, there is no justification for the building interventions disrespectful of the existing surrounding. These initiatives are leading to the spatial devastation and should be highly controlled and restricted.

References