



Public Spaces: Times of Crisis and Change

Transformation of Public Space in Zagreb since 2000 [★]

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TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN ZAGREB SINCE 2000[☆]

Jelena Zlatar Gamberožić and Anđelina Svirčić Gotovac

ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s transition period and especially since 2000 public space in Croatia has repeatedly been violated by private interest. This is visible in coastal regions, rural landscapes, urban green areas, parks, squares, and streets which have been completely or partly privatized. Urban actors (economic, political, civil, and professional) play different roles in these changes, and there is a hierarchy in their relations: economic and political actors are very powerful and have a prominent place in urban and suburban spatial transformations. Civil society actors and professionals, on the other hand, have very little control or influence. Urban actors have different interests and conflicting opinions. The results of our research (qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews with various experts) show that today spatial changes are mostly dictated by economic actors in a close alliance with political actors. It is therefore vital that in future we clearly define public space and public interest and

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educate society about their importance. Only then can inadequate private intervention in public space be prevented and a balance between private and public interest be restored with all actors making decisions together. This is, after all, a real, participatory democracy that all transition societies (including Croatia) aim to achieve.

Keywords: Public space; public interest; urban actors; qualitative research method; Zagreb; Croatia

INTRODUCTION: CROATIAN SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The last two decades of the Croatian transition have been marked by democratic development in activities of all social actors, including civil actors (civil society organizations) and citizens themselves. However, their actions, which have been mostly concerned with the preservation of public space, have not been sufficiently supported by state institutions. Various civil associations (among them ecological organizations fighting against aggressive intervention in urban and rural space) have remained on the margins of real influence on political decisions. Obviously, there is not enough institutional and political willpower to include them in political processes or acknowledge their opinions. It appears that in the two transition decades from socialism to capitalism the civil society sector has developed but not nearly enough.

“Post-communist cities are cities under transformation” (Sykora & Bouzarovski, 2012, p. 44). Beside defective institutions which do not allow for the proper participation of citizens, some reasons for the exclusion of citizens and the civil sector can be found in the sociocultural aspect of transition in Croatia. Sociocultural aspects of the transition reality are the test of its success. The sociocultural capital is accumulated through informal institutions and is exclusively shown in interactions at the social and interpersonal level (Štulhofer & Meštrović, 1999). The state does not favor circumstances which would encourage individual autonomy not only in business enterprise but also in matters concerning social and political issues. Underdevelopment of the civil society points to the deficit in the civic culture, which indicates a general lack of democracy. Civilness is an

individual cultural potential (recognition and expression of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity) without which the sociocultural capital is not possible (Štulhofer & Meštrović, 1999). Therefore it is important to define in which way citizens should be introduced into participatory processes and what their activities should include.¹

“A post-communist city is an important object of study whose investigation brings new insights into urban studies” (Sykora & Bouzarovski, 2012, p. 43). In the last two or three decades we can observe a fast growth of the non-profit sector which sums up the process of democracy, the transition from totalitarianism to democracy (Mastnak in Pokrovac, 1991). In Croatia, the process of transition from a one-party system to a multi-party system, democracy, and private ownership was somewhat problematic because of a large degree of “authoritarianism” left from the previous system. Liberal democracy did not have favorable sociopolitical foundations because the state was the key political actor in socialism. The non-profit sector had a marginal role. It developed spontaneously, with no expertise or clear strategy. In spite of that, some authors believe that activities of non-government organizations from that period significantly “contributed to the making of civil society in Croatia. They helped develop a net of institutions which acted as intermediaries between the state and the market and were based on the participation of citizens” (Bežovan, 1995, p. 211).

Dvornik (2009, p. 238) warns that the passage from “transition” to democracy is not necessarily a natural one. Formal changes are not the first step to real changes. Without civic effort they will not happen. Seemingly marginal actors such as civil society organizations can contribute more than expected. For that reason, the role of civil sector is crucial for the promotion of civic rights and the development of democracy. In addition, people need to be educated about the space around them at the macro and the micro level. The protection of public space is the best public interest and therefore it is a large part of all civil sector activities. For further analysis, it is vital to explain the theory and methodology of the principal subject of our research which is public space. We study it mainly from the point of view of urban sociologists but also take into consideration other related disciplines such as architecture, geography, demography, history of art, traffic and transport, urban economy, anthropology, ethnology, law. The results are obtained through a qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews sorted out in five different groups according to the content of the respondents’ answers (see more about the research methodology in Chapter 4).

URBAN ACTORS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

Etymologically “public” means concerning people as a whole, open to all people, shared by all people, universally available to collective life of citizens. “Public” takes into account everybody’s interest (Kuper, 1995, pp. 661–662) or interest of certain population groups defined as target groups.² By definition, public space and activities which take place there are available to everyone 24/7. They are managed by city authorities for the benefit of all citizens (Low, 1992). There is a physical and a social component of public space. The physical component are streets, squares, green areas (parks, gardens, lakes, forests), pedestrian zones, river banks, abandoned industrial plants, buildings, etc. The social component refers to social contacts and relations. According to Weintraub (in Kasinitz, 1995, p. 285), there are clear distinctions between *the hidden and individual* (in private space) versus *open/visible and collective* (in public space). Public space in a city is open for collective use and owned by everyone. Within this frame social interactions take place. Something new and different is always happening there and it is one of the main attractions (e.g., “to see and to be seen”). This element appeals to various groups of people who want to become part of this processuality. Some like to meet their friends, talk to them, walk around for a while, some want to be “where the action is,” among “the famous” who are frequent visitors of such places (Svirčić Gotovac & Zlatar, 2008, p. 59).

Social interactions happen between groups or actors who can be divided into different types. We have chosen Bassand’s division (2001) as the most suitable for our analysis. Bassand divides urban actors into four different types: political, professional, economic, and civic actors.³ According to Bassand, economic actors initiate various activities and changes in urban planning. Political actors support or question their initiatives. Professional actors are advocates of political and economic decisions. Civic actors serve as their corrective: They express their dissatisfaction with them and protest against them. Similar relations among urban actors can be observed in Zagreb.

According to Vujošević and Petovar (2006) in socialism/communism public goods were identified with the state. This political actor was the only protagonist of both public interest and public goods: only the state-owned property had the status of public goods and as such were protected by the state (Petovar, 1998 in Vujošević & Petovar, 2006, p. 375). That was a rather mutilating approach which reduced the concept of public interest and goods to state property and activities beneficial to the state and its political and administrative machinery.

In the 1990s the relations among urban actors started changing and since 2000 the center of power has shifted completely from the state and the secondary (industrial) sector to the tertiary sector (trade) and new actors – investors and banks. They “dictate” the city development. It is worth pointing out that the city itself and its institutions play an increasingly inadequate role in these circumstances: they meet the needs of investors (via political representatives) at the expense of Zagreb’s economic growth and development. Economic and political actors (often in cooperation) take over the management of the city whereas its citizens and experts play a minor role and are not adequately involved in the urban planning process (Čaldarović & Šarinić, 2008; Seferagić, 2007; Svirčić Gotovac & Zlatar, 2008). Also, there is no satisfactory communication (interdisciplinarity) among various professionals. The consequence is unequal participation of all actors in the city planning and management which results in a serious imbalance between the private and the public. All this considerably affects the future development of Zagreb.

Two types of civil society actors, citizens and non-government organisations (NGOs) are the main representatives of public interest and public good. They criticize the existing situation in an effort to change the decision-making process and ensure more extensive participation of the public. Thus they serve as “regulators” of democracy. Citizens need to be included in the city-planning process which is unfortunately not the case in Croatia. Although they are representatives of public interest, their participation in urban planning is limited to criticizing programmes, without actually being able to change them. Their participation is insufficient today and reduced to formal public consultations and hearings without any real influence on town planning or decision making. Toš and students (2012, p. 11) point out that individual citizens cannot take part in early stages of decision making. Only the state and town authorities have a say in it. He suggests we should follow the Slovenian example: a building proposal is presented to the public who can speak their mind before spatial plans are made. In this way the public is informed about the investor’s intentions from the very beginning and not only during a public hearing. In order to be well informed, citizens should also regularly visit the web page of the City of Zagreb because according to Toš and students (2012, p. 11) spatial plans can be found on the Internet and in daily papers.

It is obvious that Zagreb’s urban development today does not completely correspond with democratic procedures which emphasize equal participation of all urban actors. Capitalism, which recognizes Zagreb as a valuable resource open to investment, has enabled new economic actors

(investors) and political actors (mayors) to use public space for private and partial interests. “The power of some actors is the most important determinant of social and urban spatial changes. It eliminates less powerful actors, particularly citizens, regardless of their dissatisfaction with the city development” (Svirčić Gotovac, 2010, p. 207). The following problems of the destruction and disappearance of public space in Zagreb are explained more thoroughly in the chapter: diminishing green space, lack of parks and playgrounds in residential neighborhoods, poor infrastructure in new housing estates (kindergartens, schools, parks, etc.), privatization of some street parts in the center of Zagreb, too many underground garages, domination of private cars in the city center.

DIMINISHING OF PUBLIC SPACE IN ZAGREB SINCE 2000

In Zagreb, public space and public interest were given a lot of careful consideration in the second half of 19th century and in 20th century. The main objective was to satisfy the citizens’ needs. The very center of Zagreb was full of public gardens.⁴ Since the 1990s transition period and social and political changes resulting from it, the interest for public space, its protection and preservation has declined. The diminishing of public space in Zagreb is a result of “urban renewal” which has been carried out partially and without planning. This kind of urban renewal is detrimental to the state economy, tourism etc. “When individual developers get hold of a larger part of collective space than permitted, it is a violation of public space. This often happens in city centers whose specific quality and profitability attract potential investors” (Svirčić Gotovac, 2011, p. 307).

Not enough attention is paid to the use of public space. Private interest prevails over public interest. Also, preservation and improvement of public space are not sufficiently funded. Non-transparent and frequent changes of the Master Plan have negative effects on the city planning. Unregulated and unclear role of the investor as well as unequal power of citizens, city authorities and the state in decision making are some of the problems for the future city development. The result is inadequate intervention in public space and the long-term consequences are: lower life quality, destruction of identity and cultural heritage of the city, violation of the legal system, architectural discrepancies, traffic, and other infrastructural problems and diminishing of public space.

Overbuilding reduces public space in the center and on the periphery of the city. An excellent example of the disappearance of public space is a much discussed Life Style Center project in Flower Square. According to *Svirčić-Gotovac and Zlatar (2008)* after the project was presented to the public at the beginning of 2007, a debate started among different urban actors about its location which was to change the appearance of the square and the city center considerably. Another controversial issue were constant changes of the Master Plan by town authorities favoring the investor. The media presented the project as having the best public interest at heart, whereas in fact its only interest was profit. For the first time, the city core was endangered by joint efforts of the capital and town authorities.

Diminishing of public space in Zagreb is one of the negative consequences of unplanned, unregulated, and random building. This is part of a wider problem: undefined public space and interest. Investing in public space is becoming an economically advantageous option. However, the investor is not the state or a private-public partnership but almost exclusively an individual investor and their capital. Shopping malls and cafés diminish public space to the point where its characteristics are lost. On the outskirts of the city there is a problem of high-density housing and a low quality of life.

METHOD, EXAMINEES, AND PROCEDURE

The main hypothesis of this research⁵ is that public space in Zagreb has significantly diminished since 2000 in the city center as well as on the outskirts, following the policy of insufficiently defined public interest. The goal of the research is to examine basic aspects of overbuilding in the city of Zagreb, its causes and consequences and areas mostly affected by it. Also we look at the groups which represent public interest in Croatia today including economic, political, civil, and professional/expert actors.

We use the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews. This approach aims at obtaining a comprehensive description of a certain phenomenon at a given period of time. "The goal is reached by a detailed study of the respondents' experience which reflects their perception of reality and how they confront it" (*Milas, 2005, p. 572*). In this research interviews were conducted with professionals concerned with urban issues. These educated and knowledgeable respondents were best witnesses of relevant processes and changes.

In interviews we used convenience sampling (*Weiss, 1994*), which accepted almost every member of the target group willing to answer the

Table 1. Number of Examinees According to Their Profession.

Profession	Number of Examinees
1. Sociologist	7
2. Ethnologists, anthropologists	4
3. Art historians	3
4. Economists	4
5. Geographers, demographers	3
6. Architects	5
7. Lawyers	3
8. Traffic engineers	4

Source: Authors.

questions and we started with experts who were immediately available. Then they suggested other experts which made snowball sampling possible. The chain referral sample is, by definition, obtained among the people who know each other (Weiss, 1994). For this research 33 experts were interviewed from April to August 2011 (Table 1).

The examinees are experts interested in urban issues. The following professions are included: economists, architects, sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, geographers, demographers, art historians, lawyers, and traffic engineers. We group all examinees according to their professions although most of them take part in various interdisciplinary activities.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The examinees' answers point to the following key aspects of diminishing public space (we arrange them in 5 groups): (1) Zagreb in the 1980s, (2) New urban (over)building, (3) Public interest and new urban actors, (4) Non-existent public participation, and (5) Example: Flower and Kvaternik Square in Zagreb

Zagreb in the 1980s

In the 1980s, more attention was paid to public space, planning and development: "*Many parts of New Zagreb were planned like this: housing, work,*

traffic, recreation. But everything was studied in advance. Some parts of New Zagreb is really good and praiseworthy urban planning" (E1).⁶

Today's attitude to urban space is different from what it was in the 1980s. Then urban planning was concerned with the use value of space and the esthetic value of the city. Building was "minimalistic" taking care of the totality of urban space. Social housing prevailed (big residential buildings and new estates). Until the 1990s planning (and scrupulous implementation of plans) was present at all levels: "In socialism there was some real town planning and everything was part of a bigger picture: not random elements within an already existing structure but complete new units in terms of time and space" (GD3).

New Urban (Over)Building

Diminishing of public space can be seen both in the city center and on the outskirts. High-density development is more present in residential areas than in commercial areas of the city: "Overbuilding is mostly present in residential areas. It started in Trešnjevka but expanded to the outskirts of the city. For example, most apartment buildings in Malešnica were planned and built in socialism. Since the mid 1990s, however, there has been a boom in smaller houses built in the area without any plan or order" (GD3).

The most obvious examples of overbuilding and interpolation are housing estates in Trešnjevka, Trnje, Malešnica, Špansko (Figs. 1a and b), Radnička Street (Figs. 2a and b), Vukovarska, Heinzelova. For example, new houses in Špansko (north and south) used to have a ground floor and maximum 3–4 floors; today there are 6–8 floors on the same sized parcel of land which, of course, brings a profit. A lot of empty apartments in Zagreb are another proof of overbuilding. The examinees point out the fact that the city is losing inhabitants while the number of apartments is rising. They also point to the problem of poor infrastructure and some regulations which make further construction in overbuilt areas possible: "There is no pavement, you step straight onto the road. These streets are so narrow that there is not enough space to build a pavement. And it is public space. Public space is not only a square, it is all space that makes our daily life possible" (EA1).

The so-called "podsljemenska zone" (the elite, northern part of Zagreb) has been devastated by urban villas: "I want to mention the so-called 'podsljemenska zone.' A lot of 'urban villas' and houses have been built in places where they shouldn't have been built at all. Land plots are too small for houses built on them and pathways leading to these villas are too narrow. It is not human to live in such conditions" (GD2).



Fig. 1. Špansko – Example of High-Density Development. *Source:* Authors.

The examinees consider this prestigious northern part of Zagreb devastated because of overbuilding and constant conversion of the protected area into building sites. The so-called “urban villas” have become a status symbol of the higher “class” but in fact lack some basic services and facilities. The name “urban villa” itself is incorrect, according to the examinees, since “villa” in its original meaning is a place for one family whereas these house up to ten families: “*Urban villa*” should be put in at least ten quotation



Fig. 2. Radnička Street – The New Business Zone. Source: Authors.

marks It is simply a marketing trick. They are not urban villas but buildings with five or six apartments” (A1).

Public Interest and New Urban Actors

Public interest implies high-quality public facilities, legal regulation of their use by the public and their availability to the public. Our examinees point out that in Croatia the term public interest has not been fully or

transparently determined yet. In Zagreb the concept of public interest has not been sufficiently defined since 2000: *“Public interest and public space are still undefined and vague terms. There are still many debates going on about the meaning of public interest, public space etc. In the meantime the term ‘citizen’ has disappeared. It is the duty of the city government to represent public interest but in the transition period this is not happening. In fact, they are doing the exact opposite, standing for their own interest or interests of some other groups”* (S1). It is therefore difficult to know what it refers to when used in a political or scientific context. Our efforts should be directed toward defining public interest and creating strategies and institutions to protect it. The examinees also note that today private interest is far more important than public interest. The cause of overbuilding is primarily profit.

Undefined public interest and citizens who do not voice their opinions show the anomie of politics and the incompetence of the government to run the city in a democratic manner. *“In the ‘anomic’ political process public interest is lost. Politics fails to understand (or refuses to understand) that public interest is its responsibility (...). Therefore, Zagreb is incapable of providing a solution acceptable for other actors”* (E3).

When putting private interest first, the city is causing itself long-term harm. The investors’ interest should be limited by public interest and regulated by law: *“I think the plan is being adjusted all the time to suit the investors. However, entrepreneurship can be limited. We have forgotten what the Constitution says: in public interest it can be limited. Capital must have its limits”*(AH3).

Non-Existant Public Participation

The public have an unspecified role in the decision-making processes; still some groups have appeared as key promoters of public interest. *“The thing I find most problematic as a lawyer is that usually only formal criteria are satisfied: for instance, public hearings are announced and held. But there is no proactive education of the public. Their participation is only desirable because it might result in a broader range of solutions or prevent future conflicts and confrontations”* (L2).

One problem with the citizens is the absence of proactive behavior. Everything is rather formal (e.g., public hearings are held, etc.) but essentially, this is a minor part of the planning and development process. According to some authors, in the sociocultural space of Croatia citizens

are discouraged and passive rather than full of self-initiative or confidence (Bežovan & Zrinščak, 2007). Various civil (non-government) organizations in Croatia often receive criticism for not being better connected. *“As long as there are a few hundred activists in Zagreb, a few hundred in Split and Dubrovnik, these are small numbers. But when you put together all kinds of professionals, you realize that a lot of people care about the space in Croatia. It turns out the number is quite big. It’s all about synergy”* (AH3).

In our interviews the examinees mention four groups of actors that represent public interest:

- (a) NGOs (non-government, civil society organizations) such as Green Action, Right to the City and Platform 9.81. They have been very visible organizing numerous activities in connection with the Flower Square project and other controversial changes of the city space, but these actors don’t have any executive power: *“Public interest is represented by certain non-government, civil organizations. They are the only voice of public opinion”* (GD2).
- (b) The media can represent both public and private interest, but: *“It is quite obvious how easily the media can be manipulated”* (AH1).
- (c) The Croatian Society of Architects and the Croatian Society of Art Historians and their activities (presentations, meetings, workshops) at least partly represent public interest: *“The Croatian Society of Architects and the Croatian Society of Art Historians both protect public interest. It might not look very convincing because all these people have their price and can be bought. But on the whole, they do prevent some things and defend public interest”* (AH1).
- (d) Web forums of citizens where they have the opportunity to express their opinions, agree or disagree with the activities in their neighborhood or other parts of the city. *“In 2003, 2004 and 2005 associations of citizens in Trnsko, Travno etc. were formed”* (E2).

These groups, as representatives of public interest are not enough. Citizens need to be part of economic and political spatial planning, they cannot be left out. Attempts to include citizens in urban planning are present in many projects and initiatives all over Europe.⁷

Flower Square in Zagreb

Squares – old city centers – often resist the necessary and inevitable changes in work organization, housing, traffic, etc. The most important distinction

between squares and the rest of public space (e.g., streets) is their symbolic and practical “sense of duration.” Squares are “places where we stop and idle, places of social communication and collective memory, historical memory” (Ivančević, 1997). Squares have always been free, open, attractive places which meet various needs (business, political, and cultural) of urban life.

An important example of diminished public space is Flower Square in Zagreb and its transformation (Fig. 3). Sociopolitical situation allowed intervention in public space with little concern for the law. An “agreement” was reached between the investor and the city government (primarily the mayor), public interest was ignored and numerous alterations of the Master Plan were made to give the project a green light. Private interest of the investor was behind the construction in Flower Square: “*Entrepreneurs have always tried to avoid legal problems. They said: Let’s just find a place to build on, let’s not bother with the system and regulations because it costs a lot of money*” (A2).

In the Life Style Center project a part of the pedestrian zone in Varšavska Street was converted into the underground public garage. Two historic buildings were knocked down (architect Herman Bolle’s house and poet Vladimir Vidrić’s house, Picture 3). Non-government organizations *Green Action* and *Right to the City* organized demonstrations and protests against the project but could not stop it.⁸ “*In the case of Flower Square the investor said: Let’s have such regulations which will allow me to go ahead with my project*” (E4).



Fig. 3. Transformation of Flower Square. Source: Authors.

Urban renewal of Flower Square is not renewal of the city center in the full sense of the word; it is a reduced process of gentrification: “*The investor built lots of high-rise flats and intends to sell them for 2000 euros per square meter. He will make money as long as there are foolish buyers*” (E2).

The multifunctional object in the square offers extravagantly expensive apartments for the new, elite class of residents. It offers yet another shopping mall and thus promotes consumerism in the center of Zagreb. “The process of gentrification in the case of Flower Square has been encouraged by private investment and capital (the same is true for other transition countries). The city authorities have played an important role in attracting the investment and facilitating the project realization. But instead of opting for the public-private partnership model, the city has gratified only private investors and private capital” (Svirčić Gotovac, 2010, p. 206). A public garage opposite the street in which children go to elementary school and a heavy flow of traffic in a historic street is an unfortunate urban intervention because the area of the Lower Town should be an extended pedestrian zone.

The project was also problematic because of the time context (Croatia was about to join the European Union) as it showed a complete lack of understanding of Zagreb’s role and function as the capital city in the future: “*It is total madness to concentrate so much traffic in the street which witnesses the medieval past of the Lower Town. It is crazy to reduce the pedestrian zone in the town whose population has risen by 25%. This is the worst possible project for the time we live in. It does not correspond with 21st century, the role of Zagreb in Croatia and its responsibility for the development of the Southeast Europe*” (E3).

The quality of life in this part of the city has deteriorated because of a reduced pedestrian zone, coffee bars, traffic confusion and increased number of cars: “*Flower Square has completely disappeared. It has been swallowed up by chairs and tables*” (AH2).

The biggest part of Flower Square is taken up by coffee bars. Just a couple of years ago there was far more free space. Today, there is place for maybe 30 people to sit in the square without having to pay anything for it. Metal benches in front of the former Zagreb cinema have “drowned” in the sea of coffee bar tables: “*The centre of Zagreb is turning into a big fair-ground! It is going 150 years back into the past when there was a big market place in the main square. Today there is no central square left*” (GD1).

Our respondents conclude that there was no strategic planning and the investor simply did what was in his best interest. The open space of the square has “disappeared” because of a big number of coffee bars and a huge shopping mall. Some questions remain to be answered: Are protests

and activities of the civil society organizations at all effective? Is Center Cvjetni just the beginning of an unrestrained invasion of public space by private interest?

Kvaternik Square

Kvaternik Square is another example of transformation of squares⁹ (Fig. 4). The renewal which took place in summer 2007 was primarily concerned with the surface of the square and the traffic around it. The main idea was to make the place attractive to people who would spend time there, rest and have fun. Unfortunately, Kvaternik Square has received a great deal of criticism. The principal objection is that the square has become a drab surface lacking previous charm because of the dark steel and metal pavillion which dominates the space (Matejčić, 2008). Also the feeling of the square is lost due to the passages built beneath and the new regulation of pedestrian traffic (completely unnecessary in view of traffic intensity and size of the square).

Urbanist Uzelac (in Matejčić, 2008) mentions several flops in the project: garage entrance ramps, pedestrian passages below, paving of the square, benches, the pavillion's roof. The ramps diminish the space of the square and give it a transitory character. They serve as a good reminder for other parts of Zagreb where garages are to be built.



Fig. 4. Kvaternik Square after the Last Major Transformation. *Source:* Authors.

According to Uzelac, Kvaternik Square shows a certain trend in Zagreb which is in contrast with the world urban planning processes: cars are given advantage over pedestrians who are driven underground in order to speed up the traffic only marginally. All in all, Uzelac believes that Kvaternik Square is a lost case. Art historian I. Maroević thought as much when he strongly criticized the very idea of the project: “An empty surface, nothing more” (Matejčić, 2008. p. 18).

In 2009 during a round – table discussion about Kvaternik Square a famous quote by Rousseau was referred to: “Squares are oases of sociability in deserts of privacy.” The squares in Zagreb are very different from this inspiring definition and are in fact deserts in the oasis. Kvaternik Square is just one more square in Zagreb which has become cold and bare, a place unvisited by people because there is nothing to do there. This is the policy which abolishes squares – places where democracy was born and has lived up to the present day. Instead of traffic, pedestrians are pushed under the ground and that is the biggest sin of today’s politics. The purpose of a town is not to have a lot of people but a lot of relations. In Zagreb today, according to Ž. Puhovski “There are only two relations – traffic and commerce” (www.kulturpunkt.hr).

Our respondents mention the following consequences of the transformation: devastation of this part of town because of the loss of identity of the square which has become a bare surface and loss of the basic function of the square, inaccessible to pedestrians. Kvaternik Square has been transformed into an empty surface, it has lost its identity and basic functions: representative and social. The square has become inaccessible to pedestrians who now have to use the underground passage to reach the other side of the street: “*Kvaternik Square project is, in my opinion, a total failure. This part of town has been ruined. It is actually a central part of Zagreb and it used to be instantly recognizable for its green market. British Square in the west, Kvaternik Square in the east. Kvatrić now looks like a passing, peripheral station. In my opinion, this is the worst project in Zagreb*” (S6).

We come to the conclusion that Kvaternik Square is now mainly characterized by transiency. It has become a place for people in transit: from trams to buses, from the green market to Maksimirska Street. Only regular and necessary daily activities take place there. Leisure or social activities are present to a lesser degree. A pastry shop is the only place for people to meet and socialize. The rest is unused space: “*(...) people will use the passage below, spend no time in the square because there is nothing to do in it, public space will disappear. There is a pastry shop and a bakery and some*

florists but that is commerce (...). I believe the place should not have been changed in this way, it should have been left to people even if it meant some traffic problems” (TE1).

DISCUSSION

In the 1980s public interest and public space were clearly defined concepts. There was a tendency to preserve space, to avoid megalomania in building. Since the 1990s and especially since 2000 this attitude has changed. Nowadays, space is not regarded as something worth protecting but something worth investing in. Its protection is no longer a matter of public interest.

Flower Square and Kvaternik Square and some other parts of the city (Trešnjevka, Trnje, Malešnica, Špansko, “podsljemenska” zone) are blatant examples of diminished public space in the city core. In the project in Flower Square the investor’s interest came first and foremost. There were no public hearings previous to building work. Besides, the alliance of the investor and the city government resulted in some unlawful actions such as the Master Plan alterations. Public interest was substituted by pseudopublic interest, overbuilding took place. The process of renewal of the Lower Town and its heritage was abandoned as well as the extension of the pedestrian zone. Democracy and civil rights (residents of the square are also property owners) were suspended. And finally, the tradition of Lenuzzi’s green network was broken. Contrary to 21st century aspirations to have towns with the high quality of living, traffic was brought right into the center of Zagreb.

The two main characteristics of public space (public and open) were disregarded in the case of Flower Square. Such privatization of public space was inadmissible. In this particular case privatization did not even begin subtly and gradually, it was rather “rude” and visible. Different events, accessibility, and attractiveness – all elements which define public space – were ignored. Urban renewal was not carried out for the sake of symbolic and morphological development of the town. The national heritage was forgotten when two historic houses were pulled down in Flower Square in order to build the shopping center. Different types of actors came into conflict because privatization led to visual unattractiveness and disruption of the standard usage of public space. Civil society organizations, citizens, Societies of Architects and Art Historians, residents of the square on their web forums, some media and some politicians – all of them raised their voice against the project. In vain. Kvaternik Square has

also been renovated without taking into account public interest or needs and is therefore perceived as a complete failure.

Our research shows that the major problem in Zagreb today is the definition of public interest and public space. They have become undefined phrases which various interest groups use to their advantage. The problem is related to the fact that the public (civil actors-citizens and civil organizations) do not take an active part in planning, designing and managing public space. They are insufficiently organized and inadequately present in decision-making processes about the development of their living environment. Their participation is reduced to belated, formal public hearings with little or no influence on anything. Instead they should be able to speak up their mind about individual projects every step of the way: from early stages of first ideas, through public hearings about the project realization and then before the proposal is passed on to the City Assembly. In this way, along with political and economic decisions about urban planning, a high level of citizens' participation would also be ensured.

In the "post-socialist" period the definition of public interest and the protection of public space should equal giving citizens one of the main roles and encouraging their activities at all levels. Without the citizens' participation there is no pluralism, social capital, civic culture, or democracy. In order to include citizens in spatial studies, examine their daily needs and ways in which they could contribute to reshaping public spaces, formal and informal education of citizens is needed.

In comparison with economic and political actors, professionals and civil society actors concerned with space are not sufficiently involved in the urban planning process. There is not enough communication between various professionals, no interdisciplinary work. The result is the imbalance of power and influence between private and public interest. This balance should come first and foremost in future city planning and development. It is the only way to come up with a long-term and transparent definition of public space and interest and to advance our perception of them, bearing in mind their importance for the sustainable city development.

NOTES

1. The World Bank has developed a typology which divides this participation into four levels, further divided into low and high level of participation (Sumpor & Đokić, 2008, p. 15; World Bank, Participation Sourcebook, 1996): (a) *Low level of participation*, 1: Information (one-way communication), 2: Consultation (two-way

communication), (b) *High level of participation*, 3: Collaboration (division of supervision over decisions and resources – higher level of collaboration), 4: Empowerment (transfer of supervision over decisions and resources).

2. Children and young people, the handicapped, etc.

3. Political actors are political leaders, political parties, their representatives, the state, large companies with strong political influence. Professional actors are architects, town planners, engineers, art historians, economists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other spatial experts. Economic actors are representatives of industrial companies, owners of municipal land, banks, entrepreneurs, corporations, developers. Civic actors are residents/users/citizens (of different social standing, lifestyle, age, and education) and civil society organizations (NGOs) (Bassand, 2001).

4. In the first two Master Plans in 1865 and 1887 public space was a foundation for every development policy. The three major city projects: Lenuzzi's Green Horseshoe, Tuškanac, and Mirogoj became cultural goods in the second half of 20th century.

5. This research is a small part of a doctoral thesis entitled "The influence of social actors on urban transformations and renewal of Zagreb since 2000" defended in Zagreb in 2012 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

6. In this chapter S stands for sociologists, E for economists, EA for ethnologists and anthropologists, AH for art historians, GD for geographers and demographers, A for architects, L for lawyers, and TE for traffic engineers. The number next to the letter is the number of different examinees in the same profession.

7. Studio BASAR in Bucharest was founded in 2006 and called Search-and-Rescue team. They negotiate the role and potential of various actors in the process of urban development. They focus on temporary interventions as part of the strategy of re-appropriation of public space. In Germany there is the *Mitbestimmung* concept (of participation), the creation of the social environment where public participation is possible and desirable. (<http://pogledaj.to/arhitektura/kako-se-prostor-moze-proizvoditi-u-gradovima/>). The project *Regenlab* (2011) is connected to urban issues in all their dimensions and with the creative potential of cities as a means of urban regeneration, as a vehicle to promote the participation of citizens in contemporary society (<http://www.nomadit.co.uk/sief/sief2011/panels.php5?PanelID=721>).

8. *Life Style Center* project (investor Tomislav Horvatinčić) in Flower Square (later named Center Cvjetni) started in 2007 and was completed in 2011. It is the sixth shopping center at the very heart of the city. It has 50,000 square meters and a six-level underground garage. It clearly shows the difference between public and pseudopublic space: presented as made for the public, it has in fact very little public potential (Zlatar, 2011).

9. Since the 1930s Kvaternik Square has been a place of solid modern high-rise buildings (both flats and business premises), various shops, bars, restaurants, and the Urania cinema. Unfortunately, in recent decades there has been no consistent urban planning and no adequate solution regarding the square (Nadilo, 2007, p. 626).

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