

Urban transition and sustainability. The case of the city of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

The paper analyses the historical trajectory of development processes in the city of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), in order to offer insights into newly-shaping planning systems in South East Europe during the late phase of post-socialist transition. The paper argues that slow development of small transitional cities can suggest new models of sustainable urban development, but societal complexity makes transition more difficult and creates boundaries to a sustainable path development. The paper shows that sustainability has appeared as the new leitmotif of urban planning in the late post-socialist transformation of BiH, but due to many ongoing problems it is reduced to a vague set of fragmented development strategies more open for project-based development, while the country goes through a mainly neoliberal transformation. For BiH cities, locally-adapted sustainability seems to be the suitable development path.

Keywords: urban planning, sustainability, transition, locally-adapted urbanism

1. Introduction to the problem and contextual setting

Perhaps nowhere in the world, different political and economic systems, socialism with capitalism, feudalism with the remains of tribal organization, intersected as aggressively as in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), originally developed by Ottomans, and later shaped by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Yugoslav socialists (Grabrijan and Niedhardt, 1957; Kurto, 1998). The civil war that took place between 1992 and 1995 resulted in at least 96,895 deaths (Ball et al., 2007), 1.2 million refugees, (ICG, 1997), lowering industrial capacity to about 10 to 30 percent of its pre-war production (World Bank, 1999). Mostar, the major centre of the southern region Herzegovina, was heavily affected, with 5,000 deaths, 40,000 refugees and economic activity cut in half

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(Calame, 2005). BiH got its peace-building framework through the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), which took place on November 21, 1995 in Dayton, Ohio, and was signed on December 14, 1995 in Paris, France (Oellers-Frahm, 2005). The agreement stopped the war, but has been criticized for certain failures, including the institutionalization of division, debilitating the state powers by designating it as international protectorate and giving overwhelming powers to the High Representative (HR) (Sherman, 2011; Friedman, 2004). An externally envisioned model of democracy, based on power sharing applied in the post-conflict societies, a speedy transition to free market economy and unrestricted openness to private sector development, became a predominant ideology (Barnes, 2001). The cities suffered severe losses and depended on the international community for financial support in the process of reconstruction, but due to weak city administrations and lack of coordination between external and local communities, the reconstruction process did not achieve significant improvements in many cities, including Mostar (Calame, 2005). Land and demographic manipulation, abuse of power and poor management of resources have created ethnically clean, and economically and ecologically unsustainable cities (Calame and Pasic, 2009), while the international community in large part invested into symbolic projects, which failed to establish the process of urban land management, legislation for the protection of natural resources, and ultimately ethnic unification (Heffernan, 2009; Calame and Pasic, 2009).

The European model of sustainability, as a part of the globalisation project, is connected to the post-socialist transition processes in a sense that in many ways it is a precondition to join the EU (Pickles, 2010; Kostovicova and Bojičić-Dželilović, 2006), while the neoliberal ideology finds ways to disguise itself through sustainable development projects (Djurasovic, forthcoming). Even though sustainability development strategies started in BiH after 2000 (Feigs, 2006), it can be argued that the process has not been successful due to a line of easily recognized and unseen conflicts that prevent establishment of long-term sustainable development (Djurasovic, forthcoming). The concept of sustainability is novel to many transitional countries, many of which are dealing with multifaceted complexities, such as economic instability, poor state of environment and social disintegration, and are faced with the challenge to select between the short path of fast economic growth and the longer path of building stronger community networks (Djurasovic, forthcoming).

The paper intends to provide an overview of the historical development of sustainable processes in BiH and specific theoretical solutions for BiH cities, but will also offer lessons for areas going through similar phases of transition.

2. Research methodology and approach

A general question that motivated this research is: How can small transitional cities create new opportunities for sustainable urban development? To tackle this general question we ask the following specified research questions: (a.) How do locals perceive sustainability and who decides the rules of generating

initiatives for sustainable urban development?, (b.) How are local land use and planning practices representative of ideological shifts, but also national, regional and local policies?, and (c.) How can ecologically sound development be achieved in a city that lacks a normative context for sustainable processes?

The paper is presented in the form of a historical narrative, told chronologically and organized thematically, tracing down a range of trajectories and phenomena related to urban planning, which is observed as an extension of the political-economic reality. Here, taking the historical narrative approach can provide understanding of the emergence of sustainable initiatives, the evolution of local policies that promote new uses of spaces, and how spaces accommodate changes at the urban, national and international level. This is done in order to support the argument that the experiments with sustainability express new specific forms of urban neoliberal approaches, new ways of dealing with local political disagreements, and ultimately, are used to maintain the current regimes instead of changing them. To analyse urban transformation, the research looked into local and national levels of impact. The next step was to show how sustainability manifested itself locally, by focusing on the city of Mostar.

The research uses a qualitative strategy of inquiry and follows a hermeneutic approach. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources, semi-structured interviews and documentary material collection. Interviews spanned over three years of observation and data collection. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2015 to obtain information about BiH post-war urbanism and to construct a more grounded account of urban development. Interviewees were chosen from the field of urban planning and related disciplines, and were targeted because of their expertise. Among the interviewees, there were six NGO representatives, eight academics among which five also work as practicing planners or architects, and six planners (four working and two former planners). The names of all interviewees were kept anonymous because of ethical considerations. Secondary data was used to jumpstart the research and support the data gathered through interviews during the field research. This includes analysing expert reports, academic papers and books, and policy and urban planning documents (urban spatial plans, master plans, and regulatory plans).

3. Review of the main concepts and their manifestation in the BiH context

The underlying concepts of this paper are *sustainable development* and *transition* (post-socialist, neoliberal and war to peace transition). After a brief overview of the main concepts, the section will look into the historical development of the concepts in the BiH context.

3.1. The concepts: transition and sustainable development

The word *transition*, which can be traced to the Latin verb *transeo*, meaning *to cross* (from one point to another), is a movement that is continuous and usually with a connotation that the final goal is more desirable than the state a subject departed from (Fočo, 2005). Kollmorgen (2010, p. 7) argues that the defining motivation behind the post-socialist transition is the goal to abandon communist ideology and “return to Europe”. This change is: political - from a single party political arrangement and self-management governance structure (workers, unions, socialist alliance and the Communist League), towards multiple parties and democratic political arrangement (Fočo, 2005; Harloe, 1996); economic – where economic power is transferred from the hands that managed the economic assets (self-management bodies/workers and the political party), to the hands that own the economic assets (private individual bodies) (Fočo, 2005; Feigs, 2006); institutional – which involves the establishment of a legal framework to establish and execute the new market economy (Pugh, 2005; Kolodko, 2009) and decentralization of power from state to local level (Backović, 2005); and change of actors - various interest groups, external (acting for the process of globalisation) and local (translators of larger goals onto the cities) (Backović, 2005; Vujošević, 2006; Tosics, 2003; Hirt and Stanilov, 2009).

The Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the ends of present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987). Cities are of special concern in the context of sustainability and sustainable development because they represent complex systems that are constantly transforming (Rees and Wackernagel, 1996). Planners play an important role in sustainable development, as they need to develop theoretical bases to protect and support the communities that are impacted by all facets of planning, including development and growth (Beatley, 1989). Ideally, sustainable communities should offer different programs that support various environmentally sustainable initiatives that limit environmental degradation and consumption of natural resources, push economies that have minimal impact on natural environment, and strive towards resolving social issues and creating equality and justice for all (Beatley, 1995). Positive changes within a community are possible if people are “committed, invested and involved [...] know and care about one another, participate in community activities, and take responsibility for the condition and health of the community and the environment” (Beatley, 1995, p. 390).

After the fall down of socialism, urban planners in Central and East Europe (CEE) were challenged to deal with an overwhelming anti-planning position of the public, where, in the context of neoliberalization, the planner was now perceived as the translator of the neoliberal agenda instead of a manager of urban processes (Vujošević, 2006). The changes to urban systems are correlated with the elimination of state- and city-control over land management, decentralization

of state power, and ongoing privatization processes (Backović, 2005). Decentralization seemingly brought the power down to the municipal level, but overlooking financial incapacity of the cities to maintain the quality of urban management, as urban governments were weak and industries obsolete (Tsenkova, 2006; Hirt and Stanilov, 2009). As economic markets restructured, outdated industrial zones were transformed into business zones, now housing entrepreneurial industries and service sector, which was perceived as a more profitable economic development strategy (Strong et al., 1996; Tsenkova, 2006).

BiH transition within this paper is observed within the process of neoliberalization, which in the 1990s was applied as a form of ideology across CEE, Asia, Latin America and Africa (Peck and Tickell, 2002). The restructuring encompassed nation-state and institution-building, expansion of free-trade policies and rapid imposition of market policies and reforms across the world (Jessop and Peck, 1999). The neoliberal ideology acts in favour of free-market competition, fast privatization programs, small state, is against collectivization and welfare programs, and has tendencies to homogenize and convert, licensing short-term strategies, widening a gap between social classes, undermining environmental resources etc. (Haque, 1999; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Post-war reconstruction programs are frequently short, project-driven, and are often imposed by the donors, instead of providing long-term strategies for sustainable recovery (Zetter, 2005). The international community often comes in with preconceived notions and ready-to-apply models for reconstruction and development, lacking adaptability to local standards and uncertainty of war-torn areas (Calame and Pasic, 2009). The agreements, in the process of reconstruction, often enforce externally-envisioned rules (Bollens, 2006), and reconstruction is connected to the imposed governance and economic models, which can be alienating for the local communities and achieve limited success (Zetter, 2005).

3.2. Sustainability, transition processes, and the case of BiH

By the modern definition of sustainability, BiH does not have a long tradition of sustainable development. However, in many ways BiH building tradition during previous epochs was based on sustainable principles. Historically, BiH towns had a profoundly communal organization of the amphitheater-like city surrounded by green pockets of vegetation, offering open views and easy access to the centre. In the town centre there was *Charshiya*¹, surrounded with *mahalas*² that gathered 40-50 houses. Urban planning was organic, but with great order to achieve spatial plasticity, horizontal and vertical terracing of meandering streets and houses, preserve green spaces, gardens and orchards. Cities were envisioned small to keep the 'human scale' (Grabrijan and Niedhardt, 1957). After the

¹ Turkish, *charsi* - business quarters.

² Turkish, *mahalle* - residential neighbourhoods.

Ottomans left, the Austro-Hungarian Empire brought new ideas of urban development, interpolating new architecture in the old quarters, and damaging historical architectural integrity of BiH cities (Grabrijan and Niedhardt, 1957). Later, the first Yugoslavia³, and then socialist Yugoslavia brought their own dialectic, knowledge and planning, and the city was transformed into a place of modern qualities – industrial enterprises, highways, multi-story buildings, etc. (Grabrijan and Niedhardt, 1957). Although old Yugoslav environmental laws were below international standards, it is important to note that socialist BiH had some tradition in sustainable development. In 1974 BiH adopted the Law on Physical Planning, which was by its content based on the principles of sustainable development, referring to the topics of environmental protection, relation between urban and environmental planning, etc. (United Nations/BiH, 2002). Prior to the Law on Physical Planning, the Law on Environmental Protection, relevant to conservation of biodiversity, was passed in 1961, and the Law on Nature Protection, which has been basis for management of protected area, was passed in 1970 (Chemonics Int., 2003). A local academic/planner, focusing on historical development of planning processes in BiH, elaborates:

All the historic epochs left different layers of planning, culture and values in BiH cities. Different doctrines overlapped, causing discontinuity in the process of planning. The Ottoman period mostly rested on Byzantine logic of land-use zoning (there were ethnically clean residential zones – mahalas, and all people worked in charshiya). This logic changed with the arrival of Austro-Hungarian Empire, which brought a ‘pre-ordered urbanism’. The inner city areas got military barracks and industrial zones, the zoning plan was abandoned and they choose individual interpolations of the inner city, which undermined the found urbanism. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia brought the first ambitious plans, modelled after the European planning principles. Socialism brought a new doctrine: all that is old should be destroyed, divorce from the past, which destroyed a lot of heritage. Socialists were very ambitious and took all that came with socialist dialectic from the Soviet Union, huge capacities and building blocks. Socialist planning was state-dictated, but the development was planned, and there were clear directives and goals. Today, there is no more comprehensive planning, there is a constant change of laws, investors and corporations are dictating the planning and development directions, and little or nothing is for public good.

Since the Yugoslav civil war, certain changes have taken place toward creating a base for sustainable development, including building partnerships on

³ The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1943) (Banac, 1984).

regional and international level, working on sustainable development policy, implementation of international environmental protocols, etc. However, BiH has not resolved laws on sustainable development on any level (national, entity, cantonal or city) (ProMENTE, 2011) to implement and manage sustainable development programs (United Nations/BiH, 2002). There has been very little focus on the role of urban planning in sustainable development (Djurasovic, forthcoming) and actions so far have been mainly focused on sectorial planning of agriculture, forests, energy, poverty alleviation, social policy, etc. (United Nations/BiH, 2002). The international community supported the process as donors, mediators and initiators of pilot projects, focusing on social unification, economic transition and environmental protection. Many projects were not strictly focusing on sustainable development, but were rather an integral part of the reconstruction process (United Nations/BiH, 2002).

BiH is divided into two entities, The Federation (FBiH) and the Republic of Serbs (RS). While the RS has centralist policies, the FBiH took a decentralized approach, composed of 10 cantons (Fox and Wallich, 1997), each self-governed with its own institution and ministries (ex. Ministry of Physical Planning) that replicate those on entity level. Both entities often lack technical capacities and due to the lack of laws, there is confusion over which government has jurisdictional right over legislative decisions, due to overlap in the responsibilities between the cantonal and federal level (Chemonics Int., 2003). This kind of mismanagement caused by a lack of collaboration between the two entities means that BiH has not been accepted as a partner to international programs, often resulting in missing opportunities for financial and technical assistance by international organizations (Chemonics Int., 2003). According to the Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Forestry study, BiH is one of the most diverse European countries in terms of richness in species and biodiversity. However, less than one percent of land in BiH is protected, which implies inadequacy of legislative and system (Chemonics Int., 2003). Threats to biodiversity belong to two categories: Threats connected to post-conflict economies (e.g. exploitation of natural resources, lack of public awareness about environmental issues, incomplete legislative framework, land mine situation, etc.), and immediate threats that have measurable impacts and medium-term solutions (conversion of land from rural to urban, over-exploitation of forests, absence of environmental information and monitoring systems, etc.) (Chemonics Int., 2003). The DPA does not address the issues around environmental protection and environmental components are not included in economic and social development strategies. The responsibility over environmental management was decentralized onto cantons and municipalities in the FBiH, while a clear policy on the national level is missing (Chemonics Int., 2003).

BiH has a unique planning system, as planning laws are not adopted on central, but regional and sub-regional level. The new planning concepts and methodologies for plan production were promoted and supported by the international partners (the

World Bank, United Nations Development Program etc.) and the common characteristics for these methodologies are the inclusion of new stakeholders, including the private sector and civil societies, and public participation (EI Sarajevo, n.d.). In terms of urban planning processes, the designated planning principles for normative regulation in BiH are: integrative local development (integrating economy, social questions and environment), a focus on participation and inclusion of public, private and civil sector, and the standardization approach to urban planning (EI Sarajevo, 2010a; EI Sarajevo, n.d.). However, cities across BiH have been using different methodologies to produce spatial plans (GAP, 2012a; GAP 2012b; EI Sarajevo, n.d.), and the municipalities still do not have a level of independence despite the new institutional framework and laws. The largest weakness relates to the administrative and financial capacities, especially evident in smaller cities (NALAS, 2011). The plans still do not have direct results in realization and planning is not perceived as an urban management tool. Plans are in most cases under a heavy collision of local politics, while planning depends much more on unpredictable possibilities that divided urban governments do not want to miss out on. At the same time, the number of actors and illegal interests that are involved in urban planning processes has significantly increased, among which the private actors dominate (NALAS, 2011). The general urban plan is usually the main planning document for the cities, and has a role to stimulate strategic development. The plan is not a condition for the city to issue construction permits, if there is a local urban-spatial plan. In addition, there are regulatory plans which follow the general urban plan and define the rules for construction (NALAS, 2011).

4. Case study: the city of Mostar

4.1. Development of Mostar until today

Mostar was originally developed on the banks of the rivers Radobolja and Neretva - a natural belt between Adriatic Sea and continental areas. The first urban settlements on the Neretva River Delta date back to the Roman settlements of Colonia Iulia Narona and Vid, but only after the Ottomans arrival did Mostar receive the role of a regional centre. The Old Bridge, a marvel of its time, built by Hajrudin in 1566, connected the river banks, around which the business area developed (ISP Mostar, 1982a; Grabrijan and Niedhardt, 1957). During the Ottoman rule, Mostar had undergone a complete urban transformation with regard to oriental and Mediterranean architectural influences. After Ottomans left, the Austro-Hungarian Empire brought new ideas of urban development. The Empire was a catalyst for new industrial progress, building train tracks on the relations Mostar - Sarajevo and Mostar - Dubrovnik, a water delivery system (1885 - 1893), a sewage system and street lighting (1911), and introduced improvements of traffic, commerce, etc. (ISP Mostar, 1982a).

The expansion continued during socialism, where industrialization reached its peak. The area was rich in wood, metals and water, which explains the rapid industrialization after World War II (WWII), turning Mostar into a strong industrial centre comprising various industries - metallurgy, agriculture and food processing, textiles, construction, mining and later hydroelectric plants (ISP Mostar, 1982a). In the period between WWII and mid-1980s, urban population underwent an increase of 25 percent and working productivity multiplied 5.9 times (ISP Mostar, 1990). In the early 1980s, Mostar was the fifth biggest city in BiH. Its urban area included 8.330 ha (with 4.880 ha of protected space and 2.850 ha for intensive urbanization), and according to the projections by year 2000, based on natural and urban integrity of the place, Mostar was planned to be a city of not more than 120.000 people (ISP Mostar, 1982a; ISP Mostar, 1982b; ISP Mostar, 1990). However, despite rapid urbanization during socialism, some principles of traditional urban planning remained; while the valley was designated for agriculture and intensive urbanization, the surrounding sloping areas were treated as a protective green belt of the city. The historic area surrounding the Old Bridge continued to live as the symbolic centre of the city, with strong synthesis of the old and the new urbanism, offering touristic and cultural programs. Mostar was one of the most significant cities in former Yugoslavia in terms of historic preservation and architectural diversity (ISP Mostar, 1982a). Placed in the area with mixed Mediterranean and continental climate, Mostar Valley offered great potential for agriculture, and in the early 1980s, the metropolitan area of Mostar had 880 ha designated for orchards and grape-wine production, 10 ha for flower production, 360 ha for farming and 16,579 ha for foresting, while the city had 111,486 square meters of public green space designated for parks and squares (ISP Mostar, 1982a; ISP Mostar, 1982b).

As Grabrijan and Niedhardt (1957) wrote, the main urban goal of socialism was to provide housing and jobs for everybody. However, the old spatial plan (ISP Mostar, 1982b) states that rapid urbanization after WWII caused irrational treatment of nature, including exploitation of natural resources, intensive urbanization and degradation of agricultural and forest areas. These conflicts were the result of disconnected socio-economic and spatial planning, lack of reflection on natural environment surrounding the projects, illegal building, lack of scientific research, virtually non-existing information system responsible to follow the spatial changes, etc. (ISP Mostar, 1990). Industrial development also meant higher levels of pollution. The main sources of land pollution in Mostar were industry, motor vehicles, landfills, coal exploitation, etc. The rivers, although described as relatively clean, were especially sensitive to pollution from open sewage canals in the older parts of the city, while sewage water from the municipal sewage system, as well as industrial water, was released directly to Neretva River (ISP Mostar, 1982a). Mostar produced two types of energy, coal and hydro, and air quality was described as moderately polluted (ISP Mostar, 1990). Underground coal exploitation caused ground deformation of 200 ha of urban area and major

damages to the buildings due to ground settling (ISP Mostar, 1982b). Spatial plan (ISP Mostar, 1990) also mentions the increasing soil degradation due to industrial activity and raw material exploitation, among other activities.

Since the mid-1990s, urban planning in Mostar has been a direct product of variegated processes as the outcome of the war. The initial unification that started with the Washington Agreement (March 16 1994) ended the war between Bosniaks and Croats (ICG, 2000; Yarwood, 2010), and signalled a long-lasting period of reunification, reconstruction, revitalization and major challenges that would have great impact on spatial politics in Mostar. Mostar was chosen as a pilot project by the EU (Bose, 2002), and initially, the major force behind urban processes was the international community, which was granted great powers by DPA (Mitrovic, 2008). The period between 1995 and 2004 can be divided into those for unification and others for division of the city. The European Union Administration Mostar (EUAM) mandate lasted 2 years (1995-1997), and was later replaced by the Office of High Representative (OHR) in 1997 (Yarwood, 2010; Bieber, 2005). Despite international efforts to reunify the city, due to extreme local politics and logic that partitioning the city into smaller units would allow easier management of divided and contested city, the Interim Statute imposed by the EUAM in 1996 officially divided Mostar into six districts (Mitrovic, 2008; Bieber, 2005), that would for six years act as administrative units, with their own budgets, self-proclaimed powers to issue building permits, etc. (ICG, 2003). The second imposed Statute of the City of Mostar from 2004 abolished the districts and established a unified city administration (OHR, 2004), but left six electoral units and 31 Bourough Councils to manage the city (OHR, 2003).

Urban planning very much reflected the political processes that took place in the years after the war. The Institute for Spatial Planning was dismantled during the war, and in the years after the war, the international community was very much behind the initial reconstruction processes. There were many attempts by the international community to unify the planning department and involve the local experts in the process of reconstruction, but the ongoing administrative division ended up in nationalist land-grabbing and against what the international community was trying to achieve through their efforts (Yarwood, 1999; 2010). While the reconstruction itself was successful, the social and political aspect of reunification was a disappointment, leaving the city with no industrial capacities and a superficial economic revitalization that gave meagre base for a more sustainable economic recovery (Yarwood, 2010; Bose, 2002).

The Institute for Spatial Planning was reopened and reunified in 2006, and given responsibility to develop and implement development strategies and urban spatial and regulatory plans for the city, while the City Administration Office was responsible to cooperate with the planning house by providing all necessary data and documentation (e.g. information on building permits) (Grad Mostar, 2006). The decision to develop the new spatial plan for the city of Mostar was passed in 2008, and the institute was given two years to complete and adopt the plan (n.a.,

2012), which has not been done up to date. Instead, the city decided to pass a number of regulatory plans for specific urban zones, seeing it as the most important requirement to legalize the found situation and find investors to help economic revitalization of the city (Djurasovic, forthcoming; Drlje, 2011). Today, there is very little left from Mostar's pre-war industry. While most industrial enterprises were destroyed in non-transparent privatization processes (n.a., 2009), the only large industrial enterprise still functioning is the aluminium company, which is dealing with problems such as unfinished privatization, electrical energy supply, social issues, etc. (Transparency International BiH, 2009).

4.2. Findings from the interviews

The goal of the field research was to find answers to the three research questions: How do locals perceive sustainability and who defines the rules of generation initiatives for urban sustainability?; How are local land use and planning practices representative of ideological shifts, but also national, regional and local policies?; and, how can ecologically sound development be achieved in a city that lacks a normative context for sustainable processes?

Sustainability has not become a path

The majority of the interviewees confirm that sustainable strategies came with the local motivation to join the EU, which is perceived as the only hope to create a sustainable development path and implement laws and regulations. After the year 2000, the international focus in BiH shifted toward sustainable development, when the international community raised concerns about local issues and started a line of sustainable initiatives - anti-corruption, people and property return, unification of the city and the state, etc. Sustainability has served as an umbrella strategy for many development goals, such as creating more democratic and transparent local governments, reinstating multiculturalism, privatization processes, historic protection, eco-tourism, energy policy, etc. Some planners claim that the European standards are somewhat implemented and that the new laws and plans respect and contain sustainable principles of development.

Other interviewees argue that sustainability has not become a trajectory because there is major resistance to sustainable processes by the locals. Many locals either reject the concept, or do not perceive it as important, while only a small number of people are familiar with it. The concept is often stigmatized and humoured as an 'external import', but is also seen as an additional cost. Most of the talks on sustainability remain frozen in academic discourse, and the sustainability principles are not manifested through planning or building. Even though sustainability path started in the second phase of international involvement and sustainability finds its way through some development projects, because of the internal complexities and actors' negative perception, sustainability has not

become a long-term strategy for urban planning and development. An academic/architect dealing with sustainability within her research elaborates: “Before the war, sustainability was directed towards the ecological protection of the city, while today it is not a factor in planning and building. There are almost no people knowing about the post-Rio version of the concept”. Most interviewees agree that there need to exist continuously reproduced events for sustainability to become a trajectory.

Sustainability is an externally imposed and locally interpreted strategy

Most interviewees agree that the current model of sustainable development has been ‘imported’ by the international community. Some local planners and architects argue that the international community was given omnipotent powers, leaving the local representatives without control over planning and development processes, overwhelmed with the international interpretation of the local situation and needs. Instead, they argue that BiH cities need a new model of sustainability that is adapted to the local conditions.

Since the war, there have been many externally imposed projects and initiatives that were both hard to understand and to implement by the locals. Since the war, donors have decided development directions, set up the long and rigid procedures for the new spatial plan, etc. Donors invested in the reconstruction, which gave them the right to act over urban space. Some older planners refer to this as ‘neo-colonial processes’. They continue that symbolic projects were often valued over economic revitalization projects, fixating on some aspects of local development, but disregarding the long-term economic revitalization. Methodologies and programs were externally thought out, often form filling, taking on a project-based approach, and fixating on some projects but not the others (i.e. multiculturalism, unification). The efforts were often placed on development along the line of division instead of the city as a unit of development.

Other interviewees who had a chance to cooperate with the international community argue that there were good intentions, and that the problem lies with the locals who refused to cooperate, while today, the negative interpretation of the international presence and action prevents sustainable implementation. They believe that the local politicians relied on the EU to resolve internal complexities and problems, and in that process, the city missed out on many services the international community was willing to offer. The interviewees conclude that the international partners brought order in a chaotic political setting, and without their help initial reconstruction processes would have lasted longer.

Sustainability is a vague and flexible concept with shallow criteria, and a branding strategy rather than development path

Interviews reveal that, compared to the strict and concrete planning principles before the war, sustainable development is a vague concept. Most interviewees agree that sustainability is a flexible concept and even the worst development can be called sustainable if it satisfies certain criteria. Older planners refer to sustainability either as economic long-term planning, or an environmentally friendly approach to planning, while a couple of younger planners and academics view sustainability as a synergy of economy, ecology and social aspects of development. The overall consensus among interviewees is that there are many ambiguities and inconsistencies within the concept, and sustainability in Mostar has shallow criteria anyone can implement, impose, or adapt, which makes one question the honesty of the concept. An academic of planning notes:

Sustainable development is something completely vague to the local population and more of a brand and commercial than the essence. Our universities also 'bite into' the concept, but we also realize that there are many pending questions and discrepancies and that there is a gap between theory and possibilities for implementation.

The concept is often masking bad development in Mostar. It means accepting options that are expensive and opulent instead of modest and affordable. This shallow strategy will pay the price, an academic of economics argues, and will irreversibly impact on the cities. Prioritizing over economic development, she continues, would be acceptable if certain projects did not later have to pay a certain price. One danger is that the current approach the cities are taking, with the main focus on economic development and dealing with social and ecological issues ex-post also means that the cities did not establish criteria for investors to take care of the responsibility over issues like pollution, social exclusion, health of the communities, workers' rights, etc. Most interviewees agree that if a system is to be sustainable, clear criteria need to be established, where the investor grants responsibility to take care of the costs of the project impact, such as the ecological one, paying the insurance for people and environment that were affected, etc.

Some planners and architects add that sustainability is often used to fill certain elements that will give room for various ploys and planning implementation. Just like sustainability is masking neoliberal development in many parts of the world, sustainability also justifies various developments in Mostar. An architect/academic states that sustainability is starting to be used as a city branding strategy, where arguments such as "if foreign than sustainable", "if expensive than sustainable" and "if trendy than sustainable" are often used to sell ill-envisioned implementation of projects. The new branding strategies, she

continues, introduced many faces of Mostar. The city has been branded as a “historic city”, presented through the image of the Old Bridge to promote local tourism, a “tourist destination” with summer and winter activities, a “divided city” and a “symbolic city”, where the unification of Mostar means unification of BiH, etc.

Sustainability is a fragmented concept and does not provide a future vision

Some interviews show that the sustainability concept is fragmented and that, within the sustainable development agenda, long-term planning was replaced by ad-hoc incremental processes, some of which target sustainable development.

Mostarian planners argue that the main condition for sustainable development of the city is the existence of a plan document. However, they continue, this view is at odds with the existing situation, where the city is not covered with a comprehensive spatial plan that acts on the city level, and only recently a number of regulatory plans covering individual city neighbourhoods have been released. Although the City Statute from 2004 administratively united the city, the planning area is still divided in a sense that political parties treat the area as fragments, bargaining urban zones via regulatory plans. Interviewees argue that the non-existence of a comprehensive spatial plan is a reflection of a dysfunctional legislative system at the state level.

According to the majority of the interviewees, the main problem is in that the current situation allows political and economic elites to manipulate urban processes, based on the principle ‘those who have money can build’. The post-reconstruction period represents wild urbanization characterized by an “everything goes” strategy. Illegal development is present in the commercial districts and other inner city and peripheral developments, which the local planners refer to as “ambulance urbanism”, “location urbanism”, “parcel urbanism”, etc. In many cases, ad-hoc projects do not respect urban principles, degrade spaces, convert green areas into construction spaces, endanger seismically prone areas, usurp urban land, and, in most cases, have a low architectural value.

A local NGO representative, who has worked closely with the international community, notes that there have been a number of individual projects targeting sustainable development. Here, single projects may make incremental differences but in a context where there is no plan or vision they do not ensure significant long-term changes. These are often pilot projects that last for a limited amount of time. Many of these projects usually focus on one facet of development, mainly service economy, which is most often a short-term envisioned venture that is not sustainable on the long-term. Other times the focus is on social sustainability, and the best example is the ongoing fixation on the historical zone Old Town. This, according to a former planner, is accepted by half of the population, while others do not recognize the benefits of a historic site. The smallest value, a project

manager for the regional environmental NGO argues, is given to environmental projects. Most interviewees agree that current approaches are based on single project activities targeting individual city potentials, and as such, resulting in incremental change.

Resolving local complexities is a precondition for sustainable development

The transition process brought many complexities that have had large repercussions on the city, with costs that are big and visible and improvements that are slow and incremental. All interviewees agree that as long as BiH cities are politically unresolved, one cannot attempt to envision sustainable urbanism. An international NGO representative states:

The more I analyse the country, the more I realize that it is in the deadlock situation. I would say the Dayton Agreement did stop the war, but it did not end the war. The biggest part of the population is aiming for the EU, which I think would be positive, but right now there is an unsolved conflict, and I would not dare to make a prognosis. We have seen other countries where change suddenly happened, but also countries where decay is ongoing.

The interviews reveal that sustainable development is tightly connected to the process of transition, as the end point of transition was intended to be a sustainable BiH society. However, the majority rates transition processes as slow, stagnant and destructive for the city for several reasons. The privatization process has been destructive for the local economy and is associated with the decay of the industry that previously supported the cities. A local academic/urban planner, who practiced planning during and after the war, argues that with the new system, based on the capitalist mode of production, urban land became a cheap commodity, where the city lost control over urban processes, letting private bodies take care of urban development, environment, etc., without a clear idea about what kind of industry should replace the old one to provide employment to the impoverished population.

Some interviewees elaborate on the post-war decentralization process, arguing that decentralization into entities and cantons muddled responsibilities over planning processes. The decentralized space, according to an academic of planning, is intended to be a better controlled space, but in reality it is a dangerous space because, as power is brought down to the cities, it has become unclear who decides, who is responsible for what and what are the roles of the entities, cantons and local planning institutions. This institutional vacuum, according to some interviewees, creates insecurities among planners, practitioners and laypersons. Several interviewees mention that local plans are not developed in accordance to state directives, while cities and cantons receive little or no support from state,

which is a problem considering that cities are left alone to finance themselves and plan according to their possibilities and budgets.

An academic of planning argues that locals were not familiar with the western model of democracy. In socialism, there were complimentary participatory and bottom-up decision-making processes, while today, activism is in conflict with the BiH version of democracy because democratic processes are not real, citizens are powerless and economic and political elites hold the decision-making powers, blocking many potentially good individual initiatives through non-transparent decision-making. Due to debilitated political and economic processes, the public interest is lost, where previously public and collective interests were replaced by private and individual ones. A practicing local architect/planner states that all public good that was created for generations has been degraded by private interests and social and natural resources are seen as private resources. Interviewees agree that the political sector is not really interested in public goods. Processes are non-transparent, decisions are made behind the closed door, and there is no ethical responsibility on the higher level, which translates onto cities. A shift in the value system, according to some, is a product of conflict, economic stagnation, and division, leaving many citizens inert and stuck in the past.

The main problem, according to most interviewees, remains the division and lack of consensus along the political line. Division blocks urban processes, pollutes urban spaces and prevents from establishing a common long-term vision. The city is divided in terms of organization, where planning institutions (the Institute for Spatial Planning and the City Administration Office) are politically divided. The planning institutions, according to planners, use different approaches to planning processes and continuously reproduce division, which has resulted in uneven urban development. Division carries into the city council, which also stands divided along ethnic lines. Urbanism in Mostar is a clear expression of internal division and political problems, and political and economic elites reproduce the current situation. Political elites work with investors, where the planning institutions often legalize illegally built projects. The new economic system brought new actors, among which the investors are the strongest. The irony, some interviews note, is that only economic elites can manage to produce dialogue on sustainability, as the new projects are expensive, and now it is the investor who defines the standards of development.

Local planners need to look into the local model of sustainability

Most interviewees have an almost utopian memory of the old urban planning system. The planning department in Mostar had a long tradition, was well organized and exemplary across former Yugoslavia. Planning was strategic and gave long-term development directions. It was easier to plan because land was nationalized, and planners were more influential in urban management processes.

Old plans were socialist but satisfied all urban parameters; land use patterns were logical and efficient, and the city had clearly defined zones, i.e. industrial, residential, recreational and historical zones, etc., and the city was approached at as a comprehensive planning unit. A local NGO dealing with environmental issues states:

Today, legislative regulation is developing slowly. In socialism, we used to have sustainable development, which was packaged differently, but was more potent than today. The goal was to have a balanced relation between development and preservation and planning strived towards preserving the equilibrium, preventing development of one segment over another.

Some planners, academics and architects, think that reviewing the old principles and incorporating past methodologies into the new spatial plans is essential in envisioning a new local model of sustainability. The city needs to come back to some of its basic and original urban development principles - small spaces, small parks, walkability, new cleaner industries, etc. Some argue that the locals need to understand local potentials and create a historic continuum expressed spatially, in combination with modern elements of development. Change can happen along open spaces, spaces for socialization, with careful consideration of future development, by returning to the old physiognomy, and analysing what differentiates the city. The city needs to plan new green areas, look into local materials and local building styles. The majority of the interviewees state that in a setting where there are existing comprehensive spatial plans, the starting point can be locally-adapted urbanism. This includes preserving historical integrity and protecting historic and ambience zones, as well as the local architectural building styles, local materials, natural potentials, local climate friendly elements, etc. The city also needs to think of some new uses as there is very little left of the pre-war industry. All interviewees agree that the new development is acceptable if it is a product of participative governance approaches, including public sector, business sector, civil sector, non-government sector, etc.

5. Discussion of findings and concluding remarks

The research shows that sustainability has not become a guiding criterion for urban development in the city of Mostar. The locals perceive sustainability as an externally imposed and locally interpreted strategy. For the locals, sustainability remains a vague and flexible term with shallow criteria, a branding strategy rather than a development path, and a fragmented concept that does not provide a vision for the future. The research illustrates that resolving local complexities and establishing a legislative base are the pre-condition for sustainable development in BiH cities. Externally dictated models of sustainable

development should be taken into account, but the city needs to envision a local model of sustainability.

The case of Mostar mirrors the political complexity and stagnant political and economic processes at the state level, which makes urban transition more difficult and creates barriers to sustainable development. This research has shown that the foremost aspect the BiH cities need to resolve is a line of ongoing societal and institutional complexities (e.g. division, spatial plan development, legislative base for preservation and development etc.) that block sustainable development. Mostar is lacking an adequate organizational structure, research knowledge base, political will and financial capacity to start and manage sustainable projects that would directly benefit the local population. An unresolved political situation, corruption and societal division debilitate public participation, which is a necessary condition for finding common solutions and development of more sustainable initiatives and policies. These are all cautionary aspects of current city development in the city of Mostar that planners need to recognize before the city fabric is permanently destroyed. An academic of economics argues:

There is no economic strategy that would be a base for any kind of urban development if there is no consensus about the base values, and Mostar is the perfect example of that. One can ignore this fact, but if there is no consensus about some local sustainable values, exercise of those values will be impossible. It will have a detrimental impact on the economy, exhaust the local budget, keep the current level of corruption, etc.

Twenty years of industrial inactivity left the country economically stagnant, but opened a door for a new type of development along the lines of sustainability. We argue that the greatest potential for reconciliation and mutual collaboration is exactly in the cities. This means that the cities should be adapted to the local resources and need to create a balance between future development, social needs and environment.

The elements of sustainable city development appear to be present in Mostar since its initial development, and legacy of such building partially persevered until the civil war in the 1990s. The city inherited a lot from its ancestors – organically planned stratification of neighbourhoods overlooking the city, a strong historic core, preserved raw river banks, etc. In a context such as Mostar, which lacks a normative framework for sustainable development, sustainability means activating the tools that original city builders used, and if tried to transcribe the old into the new vernacular instead of mahalas, today we have new neighbourhoods with architecture of different sizes and orientations. In these neighbourhoods, social establishments replaced the religious ones, tall residential buildings replaced the single-family houses and playgrounds came where local shops used to be. The Ottoman principle of meander can be applied

in the modern architecture, where objects on steeper slopes need to be smaller and lower, while the space needs to remain elastic – something can always be added and changed, proportionally enlarged, but the principles of the open view and connection with nature remain.

Regarding the economic side of sustainability, the old industry should be abandoned because it was a major regional pollutant and new means of production and economic basis need to be (re)discovered. The city should look into its natural advantages, such as abundance of sun and water, fertile land for agriculture, low levels of land, air and water pollution, its small size, where public transportation and bicycles can replace individual motor vehicle fleet, etc. In ecological terms, sustainability encompasses small and medium scale agriculture, allocating urban land to create community gardens, harvest energy, promotion of clean transportation systems, implementation of clean industries, etc. Economic sustainability can help to galvanize the reconciliation process through people's willingness to hire workers across community lines, while enabling sustainable production, trade and investment.

From the point of ecological biodiversity, BiH represents one of the five richest regions in Europe (Chemonics Int., 2003) and there are opportunities to use the rich natural surroundings to promote eco-tourism (ISP Mostar, 1990). However, the region of Mostar contains areas that are still not protected as national parks. This kind of natural wealth and diversity can be planned and incorporated in economic activities, such as tourism, which would add additional value to these natural resources (EI Sarajevo, 2010a). Mostar has six rivers and the Herzegovinian – Neretva Valley sits on the underground water reservoirs. The best land for agriculture is located in the river valleys, which are also the areas where residential settlements, industry and infrastructure tend to expand (EI Sarajevo, 2010a), which raises the argument that, in order to enhance future agricultural production it would be essential to protect valuable agricultural land. The region of Mostar contains several areas with significant wind potential and studies done for one of these areas predict that the future location of wind plants would not have a negative influence on environment and bio-diversity. There are many ambitious plans to build wind plants, but the procedure is slow due to a lack of financial support for potential projects, an unclear development orientation, a missing regulatory framework, a long and complicated procedure for project permits, etc. (EI Sarajevo, 2010b).

Tackling some of these issues is the responsibility of planners, such as providing mixed use development located in near proximity to living dwellings, providing allotments for urban agriculture, locating new development in geologically stable areas, protecting natural resources within and around the city, promoting and supporting transparency and accountability of planning institutions, public participation, etc. The role of the local politicians would be to create laws for taxation and reinforcement systems that would prohibit

degradation, such as air and water pollution by local industries, unified and sustainable waste systems, release spatial plans, support education programs in schools and adopt national strategies for environmental protection and sustainability.

Environmental sustainability is intrinsically connected to economic and social sustainability. It impacts social aspects which, in the case of Mostar, entail improving relationships between formerly opposed and isolated ethnic groups, public participation in planning processes, and strengthening the multicultural character of the cities. It is also interlinked with economic sustainability, which can help to permeate the physical ethnic division and galvanize the reconciliation process, while enabling sustainable production, trade and investment. However, we end this paper with the conclusion that the city needs to resolve some of its pending complexities, in particular establish a stable legislative base, reconcile its opposing groups, and develop a future vision before any of the aforementioned potentials can be utilized in a satisfactory way.

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