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Chiara Roma, Luca Maricchiolo

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Morphological persistence in Zadar historical centre reconstruction

Chiara Roma Pacte / *Université Grenoble-Alpes*

Luca Maricchiolo *Lab'Urba / Université Paris-Est Créteil*

Abstract

As an Italian exclave in Dalmatia, Zadar was bombed by the Allied army during World War II for almost a year, from November 1943 to October 1944, leading to the destruction of a large part of the old Venetian city. Once gone to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1947, the city managed the reconstruction of the historic centre. A design competition, inspired by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, was launched in 1953, with the aim of developing an organic plan for the whole historic fabric. This has been the opportunity to discuss different approaches and to define a strategy for reconstruction moving away from both identical reconstruction and modern breakout.

This paper aims at questioning the doctrines of reconstruction and restoration at urban scale challenged by the reconstruction of the historic centre of Zadar. It proposes a critical review of such process by comparing some proposals of the competition. Thus, it focuses on the final masterplan, developed under the coordination of the architect Bruno Milic to highlight its specific features and question it through restoration principles, as expressed by Cesare Brandi and the Venice Charter.

The critical review is based on the documentary sources of the presented proposals as well as on literature issues relevant to the debate of the time. It relies, as well, on a comparative approach with other emblematic experiences of post-war reconstruction in Europe, to reveal the particular features of the modern historic centre of Zadar.

In the panorama of post-war reconstruction approaches, Zadar reconstruction process achieves a rare philological interpretation of restoration on an urban scale, integrating gaps and stratifying the urban historical landscape without neither hiding history nor renouncing to its own present time.

Introduction

Founded in IX century B.C., Zadar was conquered by the Romans in II century and rebuilt as a typical Roman city, which cardo-decumanic structure shaped the forming process in the following centuries. The medieval city developed on the sediment of the Roman *insulae*, welcoming the emergence of pre-Romanesque and Romanesque religious architecture up to the XII century. Conquered by Venice in the XIII century, several Renaissance and Baroque buildings were set in the medieval fabric on the Roman grid, and the fortress at the entrance to the peninsula was built. Zadar finally passed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in XVIII century, without undergoing major transformations, till the Italian domination begins at the beginning of the XX century¹. In 1939, the Zadar Regulation Plan ruled the expansion of the city outside the peninsula, and it envisaged the restructuration of the historical centre, involving the reshape of public spaces in front of main buildings. This plan has not been implemented due to the

¹ Marko Rukavina and Mladen Obad Šćitaroci, "Urban Integration of Archaeological Heritage in Zadar", *Annales*, 27 (2), 2017, pp. 227-464

outbreak of war, so the historical centre remains intact till World War II². During war, after Italian armistice in 1943, Zadar was bombed by the Allied Army to prevent it from passing to the Germans. The city was hit seventy-two times between November 1943 and October 1944, leading the eighty percent of peninsula heritage being destroyed or seriously damaged, and the population passing from 30,000 to 6,000 inhabitants³. Hence, the reconstruction of the historic centre of Zadar became a main issue in post-war period, once Zadar passed to the SFR of Yugoslavia in 1947. It was also the opportunity to foster the debate on post-war reconstruction in Europe, whose practices were not yet characterized by a coherent theoretical framework.

Zadar reconstruction has risen in relation to different instances: the socialist ideal, aiming at building a new society through urban planning; the adoption of modern architecture principles, without any yielding to stylistic historicism; the preservation of the historical structure and of the built heritage of the city⁴. Dealing with these issues, it has been a breeding ground for the development of an original methodology in urban restoration.

(Fig.1)

1. Zadar reconstruction process

The reconstruction of the historical centre has been faced even before the end of the war, as the first studies for an urban plan already begun in 1944⁵. In 1947, when the city passed from Italy to the SFR of Yugoslavia, a first plan drawn up by the architects Milovan Kovačević, Božidar Rašica and Zdenko Strižić was approved⁶. The masterplan, adopting modernist principles consistent to socialist ideals, foresees the restoration of main historical monuments, whose surroundings should be freed from rubble or pre-existing structures to enhance the plastic value. Intact *insulae* were as well recognised, leading to the conservation of some preserved fabric. New buildings were freely arranged in the greenery, namely on the south coast, so as to stand, as historical monuments, in a continuous and fluid space. The reference to CIAM principles draws on some radical ideas, as the reduction of historical identity to a series of emblematic elements standing on a neutral ground, echoing Le Corbusier paratactical representation of Paris as a series of main monuments and cruciform towers standing over a cancelled urban fabric⁷. The radical inspiration of the plan leads to its prompt suspension, which arrives in 1948. Nevertheless, the plan provides the legal basis for carrying out the removal of rubble, which ends up aggravating the damage, as entire *insulae* were destroyed during this operation⁸.

At the beginning of the fifties, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, on the occasion of the restoration of the Romanesque Saint Mary's convent, promoted the need

² Dražen Arbutina, "Regulacijski plan Zadra iz 1939 godine", *Prostor*, 9 (1, 21), dec. 2002, pp. 15-30

³ Damir Magaš, "Prostorni razvoj Zadra 1945-1991", in Tado Oršolić (ed.), *Zadar i okolica od Drugog svjetskog rata do Domovinskog rata*, conference proceedings, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, University of Zadar, Zadar, 2009, pp. 1-55

⁴ Dražen Arbutina, "Zadar's unfinished modernisation", in Maroje Mrduljaš, Vladimir Kulić (ed.), *Unfinished modernisations, between utopia and pragmatism*, UHA/CCA, Zagreb, 2012, pp. 445-455

⁵ Dragan Boltar, "Zadar – izgradnja centra", *Arhitektura*, 15 (3-4), 1961, pp. 40-48

⁶ Ivana Lazanja, "The reconstruction of the Croatian coastal city of Zadar", in Luca Verpoest and Nicholas Bullock (ed.), *Living with History, 1914-1964: Rebuilding Europe after the First and Second World Wars and the Role of Heritage Preservation*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2021, pp. 279-287

⁷ Chiara Roma, *Le Corbusier e le suggestioni dei ruderi*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2020, p. 55

⁸ Modrijan, Petar. "Portreti: Ivo Petricioli, Čuvar zadarskog blaga", *Zadar, Biseri Jadrana: Edicija za kulturu putovanja*, Zagreb, 2004, 144-147

for an organic plan of the historic centre. Hence, three architects of the academy – Josip Seissel, Drago Galić and Andrija Mohorovičić – developed the guidelines which became the basis for a design competition⁹.

Launched in 1953 by the Municipality, the Yugoslav national competition for the regulatory basis of the city of Zadar sets the objective of drafting an organic plan for the reconstruction and the development of the historic core of Zadar, fostering a unitary intervention with the aim of “*renovating the existing part of the city so that the whole represents a complex architectural and urban organization*”¹⁰. The tender articulates different objectives in order of priority, regarding the development of the city as a cultural, educational, administrative, touristic, industrial, handicrafts and trade centre¹¹. Furthermore, the competition declared the ambition of stimulating a cultural debate on urban planning, wishing to make Zadar a model in Europe for post-war reconstruction. The announcement raises some cultural issues, problematizing questions to which proposals are called to offer a hypothesis. It requests to preserve the remaining urban fabric, keep the ancient urban structure, make existing buildings the cores of new urban sequences in accordance with the general scale of the city, and convert the centre into pedestrian.

The Academy of Arts points out the value of urban memory in present time. It expects participants to integrate historical elements in contemporary design and preserve the stratifications of the city without falling into historicism nor limiting design innovation, fostering, by that, a methodological approach inherent in restoration practice.

On the one hand, the emphasis is placed on the recognition of the cultural value of the city, with the aim of redeveloping it valorising what was saved from war. The solid analytical basis provided to participants reflects this orientation¹²: the city is divided into fifty-seven blocks, for each of which are defined the guidelines for interventions¹³. The announcement provides a detailed survey of the historic fabric of the peninsula, going from maps at 1/25,000 to plans at 1/500, and including the elevations of the street fronts. Furthermore, the documentation is provided with a detailed inventory of the heritage and with a diagnostic of the existing building status,

On the other hand, the hierarchy of the sought design features is revealed by the evaluation criteria¹⁴: the prefiguration of a balanced urban complex, characterized by the harmonious relationship between built and unbuilt space; the design of modest dimensions public spaces, adapted to the medieval architectural heritage, to Mediterranean climate and lifestyle; the new morphology, to better integrate the historic street network; the waterfront proposal, which height and shape should not obscure main landmarks of the city's identity.

Fourteen entries have been submitted to the competition, twelve of which met the criteria. Three ex-aequo winners have been elected: Berislav Kalođera with the proposal n. 16124; Bruno Milić and Miroslav Kollenz with the proposal n. 39393; Vlado

⁹ Ivana Lazanja, “The reconstruction of the Croatian coastal city of Zadar”, in Luc Verpoest and Nicholas Bullock (ed.), *Living with History, 1914-1964: Rebuilding Europe after the First and Second World Wars and the Role of Heritage Preservation*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2021, pp. 279-287, p. 283

¹⁰ People’s Committee of the City Municipality of Zadar (ed.), *Natječaj za Regulacionu osnovu grada Zadr*, Zadar, 1953

¹¹ Ines Merćep, “Natjecaj za regulacijsku osnovu Zadra iz 1953. Pedeset godina poslije”, *Prostor*, 13 (1,29), may 2005, pp. 67-78

¹² People’s Committee of the City Municipality of Zadar (ed.), *Natječaj za Regulacionu osnovu grada Zadr*, Zadar, 1953

¹³ Antonija Mlikota, *Četrnaest arhitektonskih i urbanističkih vizija povijesne jezgre Zadra nastalih 1953 godine*, in: *Ars Adriatica*, 5, 2015, pp. 163-192, p. 164

¹⁴ Ines Merćep, “Natjecaj za regulacijsku osnovu Zadra iz 1953. Pedeset godina poslije”, *Prostor*, 13 (1,29), may 2005, pp. 67-78, p. 72

Ivanović, Radovan Mišcević, Branko Petrović and Branko Vasiljević (Urban Planning Institute of Croatia) with the proposal n. 50105.

2. Alternative approaches

The competition specifics considerably frame design towards a prevalent conservation of the historic layout and the integration of the existing in an organic vision of the whole. Nonetheless, a variety of approaches emerges from the comparative reading of the presented proposals, while commission's judgments mostly appreciate proposals that are more respectful of the existing. The research of Antonija Mlikota¹⁵¹⁶, based on the primary sources of the competition, is a precious reference to acknowledge the presented projects, whose comparative analysis allows to draw some critical reflections. These point out four main design hypotheses.

(i) The hypothesis of the reconstruction *ab nihilo*, founded on the reduction of historical identity to the preservation of a series of extraordinary buildings; around, a new system of urban relation should be re-established. It seems to be in harmony with the Modern educational tendencies, affirmed, for instance, in the plans for the reconstruction of Saint-Dié des Vosges by Le Corbusier or Le Havre by Auguste Perret. According to this stance, design is a tool for the construction of identity – although structured by a series of punctiform emergencies – rather than for the enhancement of the existing one. The churches, the ramparts and the archaeological site of Zadar become the focal points of a self-standing design, unconcerned with the urban forming process, providing for a massive dose of demolition of the ordinary fabric. The envisaged new morphologies refer to opposite, whilst equivalent, radical approach to reconstruction, replacing ancient fabric by modern isolated buildings¹⁷, closed blocks fabric¹⁸, or new patterns emphasising around main monuments¹⁹; their implant, according to the jury, would establish a fake historical nucleus, denying the history and the culture of Zadar²⁰.

(ii) The hypothesis of the interpretative reconstruction, which maintains the historical plot while reshaping typo-morphologies. Moving from a comprehension of the identity of the fabric, some proposals respect ordinary fabric scale and typologies to develop innovative solutions, harmonious with the context. Therefore, some proposals receive averagely good appreciations, since they are considered globally consistent with the request of the tender. They respect layouts and morphologies, adapting new architectures to preserved historical monuments, responding to the expectation of a non-invasive completion of the urban fabric. At the same time, some derogations to the continuity of the existing city are proposed: the introduction of morphological variations, as buildings jutting out onto the coast profile or new commercial axes²¹; the redefinition of squares proportions²² or hierarchies²³; the new relationship between monumental buildings and the ordinary fabric, freeing up spaces previously defined by

¹⁵ Antonija Mlikota, *Obnova i izgradnja povijesne jezgre Zadra nakon razaranja u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, 2013

¹⁶ Antonija Mlikota, "Četrnaest arhitektonskih i urbanističkih vizija povijesne jezgre Zadra nastalih 1953 godine", *Ars Adriatica*, 5, 2015, pp. 163-192

¹⁷ Design proposal n. 35281

¹⁸ Design proposal n. 77711

¹⁹ Design proposal n. 77771

²⁰ Antonija Mlikota, "Četrnaest arhitektonskih i urbanističkih vizija povijesne jezgre Zadra nastalih 1953 godine", *Ars Adriatica*, 5, 2015, pp. 163-192, p. 165

²¹ Design proposal n. 74174

²² Design proposal n. 123121

²³ Design proposal n. Z-00001

building fronts²⁴. These have been criticised for to the non-compliance with historical sequences; particularly interesting is the refusal of new concentrations of activities inconsistent with the matrix path and hierarchy, to avoid the upsetting of urban dynamics and pedestrian flows.

(iii) The hypothesis of philological reconstruction, which echoes some methodological principles of restoration theory. According to the jury evaluations, the three winning projects propose a similar approach. They keep the Roman street pattern to install new architectural typologies in respect of the urban alignments and shapes. The proposals given by Kalođera and Milić are carried with a scientific approach which anchors design to the analysis of the formative process of the historical fabric, foreseen low rise typologies consistent to historic city space. They propose a Mediterranean-type spatiality made of a strong articulation between masses and voids, public and semi-public spaces, such as courtyards, arcades, passages. New buildings for forum area and the waterfront comply with the fabric scale and do not hide historical landmarks. Milić's proposal was praised for the accordance of building heights to medieval row houses, and for designing forum area under reserve of archaeological excavations. Kalođera proposes greater typo-morphological freedom, by a composition of modern buildings into the street pattern, respecting alignments without reconstituting the entire perimeter of the block, to keep more open spaces and greater ventilation. This stronger modern imprint has been appreciated for articulating the monotone ancient street pattern with modern composition.

The proposal from the Urban Planning Institute of Croatia also takes up the Roman network, respecting the scale and the layout of the streets. However, it adopts a too decisive approach to urban morphology: the serial repetition of the open block typology and the provision of some large, monumental squares moves away from the idea of an ancient Mediterranean city.

(iv) Finally, a single proposal adopts a stronger philological approach²⁵, closer to restoration practice: it stands at pure conservation of the existing building, foreseeing the liberation of the demolished areas and their transformation in parks, seeming to be neutral colour filling of *lacunae*. Its negative evaluation is due to the lack of new housing.

3. The modern historic centre of Zadar

As a result of the competition, in 1955 Bruno Milić was commissioned to draw up a regulatory plan considering the other two awarded works. The plan integrating some analyses and strategies from other works and from the jury. The methodological leap lies in the rejection of two antithetical models – modern breakthrough as well as historicism – towards a project based on the method. Among the main planning trends in post-war Europe, Milić's synthesis goes through a *via media* of urban design, used to be run by some Italian²⁶, Portuguese²⁷ or Spanish²⁸ practices, but, at the time, less common in Central Europe. *Zadar aurea mediocritas* primarily defines itself in relation

²⁴ Design proposal n. 201153

²⁵ Design proposal n. 99066

²⁶ For instance: Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi, *Quartiere Tiburtino*, Roma, 1949-1954; Adalberto Libera, *Unità di abitazione orizzontale*, Roma, 1950-1954; Giancarlo De Carlo, *Collegi universitari*, Urbino, 1962-1983; Vittorio Gregotti, *Quartiere residenziale a Cannaregio*, Venice, 1981-1985

²⁷ Alvaro Siza, *Quinta da Malagueira*, Evora, 1973

²⁸ Josep Martorell, Oriol Bohigas, David Mackay and Albert Puigdomènech, *Vila Olímpica del Poblenou*, Barcelona, 1992

to the compatibility with the historical and landscape context, even, perhaps, by renouncing to an innovative impulse that would slip into self-referentiality. The plan reads and interprets the city in a contemporary key, keeping distinctive urban spaces, street pattern and squares, dimensions, proportions, and volumetric relationships. Architectures are shaped with respect to historical monuments, as to preserve views and to valorise pre-existing buildings. The overlay of masses and voids articulates inner courtyards and vibrant ground-floors, while external fronts shape urban sequences, combining modern dwelling typologies with Mediterranean spatiality.

(Fig. 2)

Milić's plan was presented in 1955, but it has never officially approved by the City of Zadar; indeed, it has finally been rejected in 1958. A new competition, launched in 1959 by the invitation of major Croatian architects, ended without any result²⁹. Hence, the guidelines for reconstruction have been finally developed by the jury³⁰, and an *ad hoc* commission managed design and construction, combining three strategies: the restoration of damaged buildings, the stylistic reconstruction for iconic monuments, the contemporary graft in accordance with the existing.

In the absence of any official regulatory plan, Milić one was still an essential reference: the guidelines comply with its principles, which have often been implemented by architectural design: residential building 53/15, designed in 1954 by Alfred Albini, and the Krsevan block, by Neven Šegvić in 1954, takes up the meander configuration of Milić's plan; similarly, the residential building for tankers by Božidar Rašica, winner of the west coast development competition in 1955³¹.

The 1959 guidelines developed a specific model for the reconstruction of the Kalelarga matrix path, introducing galleries on ground floor - not foreseen in Milić's plan - and some passages towards the courtyards: these variations, however, emphasize the imbrication of spaces typical of Mediterranean urban. The model assigned the different plots: blocks A, B and D, which define Kalelarga urban fronts, are designed by Bruno Milić and Ivo Bartolić; blocks C, along Kalelarga, H and I, which define the void of the Forum, are assigned to Božidar Rašica; the block E, the Archeological Museum in front of the Church of San Donatus, is designed by Mladen Kauzlarić. Blocks F and G, envisaged on the site of the forum to close the square towards the sea, will not be built³².

(Fig. 3) (Fig. 4)

The architectures have a synthetic, minimalist language, taking up modern stylistic features in dialectical relation with historical buildings. Thus, the achieved reconstruction complies with the aim suggested by the Academy statement and Milić plan: it keeps contemporary interventions exceptional and recognizable, while enhancing the preservable heritage and fostering the legibility of urban stratification.

4. Conclusion: on reconstruction epistemology.

Zadar reconstruction process adheres in a pertinent and potentially fruitful way to the methodological approach of restoration, particularly in the philological approach having

²⁹ Antonija Mlikota, "Četrnaest arhitektonskih i urbanističkih vizija povijesne jezgre Zadra nastalih 1953 godine", *Ars Adriatica*, 5, 2015, pp. 163-192, p. 186

³⁰ Antonija Mlikota, *Obnova i izgradnja povijesne jezgre Zadra nakon razaranja u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, p.134

³¹ Natječaju za arhitektonsko i urbanističko rješenje zapadne obale povijesne jezgre Zadra, 1955

³² Anđela Galić, *Stambena Arhitektura Zadra 1950-ih i 1960-ih*, Master thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, 2017, p. 25

been theorised by Cesare Brandi and the Venice Charter. Restoration is, according to Brandi, “*any intervention intended to restore efficiency to a product of human activity*”³³. Its conceptualisation will differ depending on the nature of the product of human activity, and particularly on the recognition of it as work of art. It follows that “*restoration is the methodological moment of recognition of the work of art, in its physical substance and in its dual aesthetic and historical polarity, in view of its transmission to the future*”³⁴.

The process initiated by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Art is founded on the acknowledgement of the artistic value of Zadar built heritage, in its both aesthetic and historical meanings. The competition announcement and the evaluation criteria are particularly concerned by the recognition of the cultural value of the surviving heritage, as well as by the way to restore efficiency and transmit it to the future. Furthermore, academy approach cares about basic issues of restoration, as: (i) is the conservation of the matter of the work of art, in its both structure and appearance³⁵, applying to existing buildings and viewpoints preservation; (ii) the reconstitution of the potential unity of the work of art, to be researched in the wish to complete the fabric as a whole without making a false³⁶; (iii) the respect of work of art duration and the timing of restoration in present time³⁷.

Some further principles should be drawn from the Venice Charter³⁸, which defines the methodological milestones of restoration operations : (i) the philological certainty of the history of the work aimed at its comprehensibility; (ii) the respect for the stratification of all historical epochs (against the prerogative of a real or presumed state of origin); (iii) the recognizability of the restoration work, while respecting the legibility of the whole; (iv) the exceptional nature of the completion or integration intervention, within a primary purpose of the restoration which is the conservation and transmission to subsequent generations; (v) the reversibility of the intervention.

Restoration principles do not belong to urban design discipline, emerging in architecture and art restoration practices. City is not a unitary work of art, it is like a work of art composed of parts, each one with its time and duration. Thus, the historicity of urban landscape is made of the relation between every historical present of the forming process of its parts and the current present that recognizes it.

The importance accorded to the *duration* of forming process and to the *stratification of the whole* makes reconstruction process both historical and aesthetic instances of post-war heritage: the first, through the methodological approach based on scientific and documentary knowledge as a requisite for design; the second, in the aim of philological valorisation of every present time, including contemporary fillings.

As a result, every layer is still visible and recognizable in Zadar historical landscape. The outcome is appreciable in nowadays urban quality and touristic attractivity, talking about the success of a post-war reconstruction which offers an original point of view on the European scene. Original, as it stands out from the practice of assuming destruction as a cathartic event for the emergence of a new story, which also boasts a thriving tradition in modern Europe, from Catania³⁹ to Lisbon⁴⁰; instead, it deals with the

³³ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1963, p. 3

³⁴ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1963, p. 6

³⁵ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1963, p. 10

³⁶ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1963, p. 17

³⁷ Cesare Brandi, *Teoria del restauro*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1963, p. 27

³⁸ *International Charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites*, II International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, Venice, 1964.

³⁹ Giuseppe Lanza duca di Camastra, *Plan for the reconstruction of Catania after the earthquake of 1693*, Catania, 1694

⁴⁰ Manuel de Maia, *Plan for the reconstruction of Lisbon after the earthquake of 1755*, Lisbon, 1758

medieval practice of spontaneous settlement on previous eras ruins⁴¹, continuing the stratification of landscape within a consistent plot. In this way, it enriches the epistemology of urban design, including the scientific methodology of restoration to produce a design method attentive to the past without abjuring the historical present that generated it.

⁴¹ For instance, Split medieval forming process over Diocletian Palace ruins

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Captions

Fig. 1 – Zadar after World War II bombing, 1944

quarter page

Fig. 2 – Bruno Milić, Masterplan for the reconstruction of Zadar historic centre, 1955

half page

Fig. 3 – Model for the reconstruction of Kalelarga and the Forum area, 1959

quarter page

Fig. 4 – Architectural infills. Left: Kalelarga, defined by blocks D and C on the left, by blocks E and B on the right side. Right: the Forum area with the Archeological museum (block E)

quarter page