

Valentina Janičić Milovanović, Građevinski institut Banja Luka, milovanovicv88@gmail.com
Nebojša Knežević, Građevinski institut Banja Luka, nebojsa.knezevic@rf.unibl.org
Dajana Đuka, Građevinski institut Banja Luka, dajana.djuka@institutbl.com

HISTORICAL LAYERS AND THE FORMATION OF URBAN IDENTITY AND MORPHOLOGY: THE CASE OF HOTEL “BOSNA” IN BANJA LUKA

Abstract:

Globalization, the crisis of urban identity, and the endangerment of authentic urban patterns, morphology, and the image of the city represent significant challenges in urban planning and architectural practice. The relevance of this topic has been recognized and, among other aspects, will be the focus of this paper, which includes a case study of a selected micro-location within the central core of Banja Luka. Specifically, the study examines the Hotel “Bosna” building together with its immediate surroundings as a unified entity, which has had a significant impact on the formation of the city’s character, as well as on the application of certain urban planning principles and concepts. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the importance that an individual building can have for a city and its residents, and to suggest how it can serve as a unique guardian of history, tradition, and culture, both in symbolic and material terms.

Keywords: Banja Luka, architecture, urban planning, morphology, identity

ИСТОРИЈСКИ СЛОЈЕВИ И ФОРМИРАЊЕ УРБАНОГ ИДЕНТИТЕТА И МОРФОЛОГИЈЕ: СЛУЧАЈ ХОТЕЛА „БОСНА“ У БАЊАЛУЦИ

Сажетак:

Глобализација, криза идентитета градова, угрожавање аутентичних урбаних образаца, морфологије и слике града, значајна су проблематика у урбанистичко-архитектонској дјелатности. Значај теме је препознат и биће, између осталог, у фокусу рада који подразумева студију случаја одабраног микролокалитета у централном језгру Бањалуке. Наиме, ради се о објекту хотела „Босна“ са непосредним окружењем као цјелином, који је имао значајан утицај на формирање карактера града, али и примјењивање одређених урбанистичких поставки и концепција. Циљ рада је предочити важност коју појединачни објекат може да има за град и становнике, те сугерисати на то како исти може бити јединствени чувар историје, традиције и културе, како у симболичком, тако и материјалном смислу.

Кључне ријечи: Бањалука, архитектура, урбанизам, морфологија, идентитет

1. INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken in response to the observed issue of the crisis of urban identity, as well as the consequences of globalization, which, among other things, manifest through the endangerment of authentic urban patterns and the neglect of the actual needs of users. Hotel “Bosna”, selected as the case study, can be classified among the buildings that have influenced the formation of the morphology and character of Banja Luka, as well as the definition of certain urban planning parameters within a given time period. This paper presents a chronological analysis of the metamorphosis of the space occupied by the building together with its immediate surroundings, and outlines the results of the research on the development of the observed urban unit, as well as its impact on the surrounding area (causal relationships in the formation of the central urban core).

Two primary phases of transformation have been identified, which simultaneously provide a broader overview of the development of both the society and the city itself. The first part of the study focuses on the “old” Hotel “Bosna” — its characteristics and its relationship to the social, political, and economic changes that took place in Banja Luka up to 1969. That year was crucial for the entire city, as a large portion of the built structure, including the existing hotel building, was destroyed as a consequence of the earthquake. Since no original design documentation for the first Hotel “Bosna” has been preserved, photographic documentation and records from available literature served as the primary sources for this part of the research.

The second part of the study involves a similarly structured analysis of the “new” Hotel “Bosna”, officially opened in 1975. In addition to examining its characteristics and its relationship to various developments in Banja Luka, particular emphasis is placed on the concepts of contextualism and post-earthquake reconstruction. In this regard, a comparison was made between contemporary developments on the global urban planning and architectural scene and the urban and architectural undertakings, as well as the work of individual actors, within the countries of the former Yugoslavia, ultimately relating these insights to the city and comparing them with the Hotel “Bosna” building.

The aforementioned segment of the study also includes an examination of structuralism as a specific conceptual framework, which built upon the ideas of Marxism and the International, with the primary aim of moving away from functionalism and aligning with the principles of vernacular architecture. Themes of polyvalent space and place identity, introduced into urban discourse through structuralist theory, were particularly relevant within the context of Yugoslav architectural and urban planning approaches [1].

This paper aims to emphasize the influence and undeniable importance that a single building, together with its immediate surroundings as an integrated whole, can have for a city and its inhabitants. Through the process of its own transformation, Hotel “Bosna” has managed to preserve its essential significance for Banja Luka, both in symbolic and physical terms. From a material standpoint, it is important to highlight the retention of certain elements of the “old” hotel, which were incorporated into the form of the “new” building and have been preserved to this day. Equally important is the transmitted identity embodied by Hotel “Bosna”, particularly in light of Lynch’s observation that every citizen identifies with some part of the city, and that its image is imbued with memories and meanings [2].

Throughout all phases of its development, the subject area has been associated with prevailing sociological constructs, that is, with social norms that have continuously changed within the observed territory, which further reflects the uniqueness of the selected case study. The identification and study of unique urban environments, along with an understanding of the specificities of the local context and place identity, are defined as essential starting points of great importance, both for the space itself and for its users, especially in the contemporary era of uniformity and globalization. The identity of a city is directly related to the collective identity of its inhabitants, encompassing shared ideas of belonging, connectedness, attachment, and community [3].

The identity of a city is formed over many years, even centuries, emerging as the result of numerous factors and events present within a given period. Urban identity is a complex concept, manifested through the multiplicity of its constituent elements as well as the diversity of their interrelations, which change over time and across space [4]. The story of Hotel “Bosna” dates back to the 19th century and continues to the present day, while its symbolic and physical value is reflected in all the transformations it has undergone, arising from various socio-economic, natural, cultural, institutional, and other factors that have alternated within a specific spatial and temporal context.

The research concept is based on examining the development of a specific urban unit and comparing it with other events and activities from the same period, in order to interpret the processes carried

out and the resulting patterns. Analysis of the available material indicates that the observed urban space has undergone numerous transformations; however, it has consistently retained the same name and has always served a hospitality-related business function. Its continuity and metamorphosis are the result of adaptation to constant changes, newly emerging conditions, and evolving needs.

Alignment with contemporary architectural trends and achievements, as well as shifts in governance, cultures, and ideologies, influenced the definition of the form, functioning, and identity of the observed urban micro-location. At the same time, Hotel “Bosna” had a direct influence on certain urban planning and architectural interventions, serving as a gathering place and a starting point for various social practices — effectively shaping the habits of the city’s inhabitants. Cities offer their users identity, image, memory, reference points, and symbols. In return, by shaping parts of the city, people provide feedback that influences the ongoing creation of the urban environment. Every city is diverse, reflecting the character of its inhabitants [5].

2. HOTEL “BOSNA” UNTIL 1969

Banja Luka is located on the banks of the Vrbas River, at the point where the river loses its mountainous characteristics and enters a lowland area. The city initially developed downstream, while residential neighbourhoods constructed after World War II and the 1969 earthquake expanded laterally, spreading towards the surrounding hills. The location of the city’s origin and its subsequent expansion, its material and spiritual culture, as well as its level of development, were shaped by various civilizations and their respective cultures, ranging from Ancient Roman, medieval Slavic and Hungarian, to Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian influences.

However, the urban development and architecture of Banja Luka can be discussed more precisely only from the period of Ottoman rule, given that very little data from earlier periods has been preserved. Thus, between 1527 and 1878, Banja Luka developed in accordance with the plans of the ruling Ottoman authorities. Construction during this period, initiated at the site where the Suturlija River flows into the Vrbas River, was characterized by smaller clusters of individual residential buildings, as well as commercial shops and workshops in the lower town. Mahala-type settlements developed spontaneously, following the terrain configuration and other natural conditions. The city ceased to be the seat of the pashalik (Ottoman administrative unit) in 1639; however, the period until 1878 was not marked by construction in a new European style.

The documented history of Banja Luka’s development can be reliably traced only from the moment it became part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Accordingly, the first records of Hotel “Bosna” appear just prior to the occupation. Vidaković [6] states that the old Hotel “Bosna”, located on the site of the present-day building, was mentioned as early as 1875 as a guesthouse with a tavern. After 1895, according to a design by Eberhard Wayand, the owner added an additional storey, and Banja Luka gained its first representative hotel. However, Ravlić explains that although the Banja Luka daily newspaper *Nova štampa* reported that Hotel “Bosna” was built in 1885, there are clear indications that this information is incorrect [7]. He suggests that the building appeared much earlier as a pioneer of hospitality in Bosnia, heralding the gradual disappearance of *hans* and *musafir-hans* that existed during the long-lasting Ottoman period.

Even before the addition of the first floor, Hotel “Bosna” already represented an attractive gathering place, featuring a large garden and natural shade. The increasingly pronounced expansion of the city and population growth were recognized as sufficient reasons to improve the quality of the space and increase accommodation capacity. A particularly important factor for these interventions was the immediate proximity of the new Railway Station, built in 1891, through which visitors from various regions continuously circulated. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the first transformations of the building and its surrounding area were conditioned by the prevailing social developments and the modernization of the city at that time.



Figure 1. 'Hotel "Bosna" with a wooden fence, photographed before 1931' [8].

The development of transportation, along with increased mobility and the flow of people, led to changes in the lifestyles and perceptions of citizens, which had a direct impact on the cultural context, the physical structure of the city, and consequently its urban identity. This implies that a city should ultimately be understood not merely as a territory in which a large population and a wide range of activities are concentrated, but also as a symbiotic domain (political power – civil society) and a symbolic domain (integration of cultural elements and the construction of collective identity), in which the city becomes a sphere of potential responses to the economic, political, and cultural challenges of a given era [9].

The twentieth century brought a series of changes to Banja Luka in terms of territorial and socio-political affiliation, resulting in the continuous redefinition of its role, significance, and influence within the region. Banja Luka was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1878–1918), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1943), the Independent State of Croatia (1943–1945), the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1963), and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1992), during which the "new" Hotel "Bosna" was constructed. Today, Banja Luka is one of the larger cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the largest in the Republic of Srpska. All of the above is of crucial importance for urban planning and architectural practice, as it is conditioned by prevailing ideologies, as well as economic, social, and cultural determinants. For example, during the Austro-Hungarian period, the earlier parcel system — with houses set back from the street deeper into garden plots — was largely replaced by a dense building structure and row buildings, thereby defining the basic elements of future modern urban blocks.

Hotel "Bosna" itself had a significant influence on the urban planning interventions implemented during the Austro-Hungarian rule. These were conceived as part of a planned regulation of urban development, in contrast to the earlier concept characterized by spontaneous and unplanned construction. The hotel building influenced the formation of the physical structure and the regulation of the new city centre. Its building line was set at a considerable distance from the regulatory line of the Imperial Road (today Kralja Petra I Karađorđevića Street). In this way, the continuity of the wide profile of the main city street, previously established in its northern section, was preserved. In accordance with the position of the Hotel "Bosna" and its relationship to the surrounding context — aligned with Austro-Hungarian planning principles — a significant portion of the urban matrix in the surrounding area was later defined [4].

The Hotel "Bosna" building from the Austro-Hungarian period, which had two above-ground storeys, corresponded in character to the spirit of European construction and the architecture of public buildings of the time. One part of the building was positioned longitudinally along the Imperial Road, while the other extended towards the northwest (in the direction of present-day Grčka Street). A particularly distinctive space, of great importance to the local population, was located between the hotel and the Imperial Road. This was the garden, whose defining characteristic was — and has remained — a strong presence of vegetation, more specifically, horse chestnut trees.

Although the planting of various types of tall vegetation, predominantly in linear formations, was in accordance with Austro-Hungarian ideas widely implemented at the time, it should be noted that the

trees in the garden of Hotel “Bosna” are significantly older. In this respect, “Bosna” stood out from its surroundings and served as a basis for shaping the city’s identity and appearance (“Banja Luka – the city of greenery”). Regarding the greenery, Ravlić confirms: “The tree-lined streets of Banja Luka began their development in 1880, and the earliest photographs of Hotel ‘Bosna’ show that the trees in its garden — which included a long covered shaded area — indicate, through the thickness of their trunks, a much greater age” [7]. The open space adjoining Hotel “Bosna”, together with the building itself, represents not only an integral part of Banja Luka’s urban structure and its distinctiveness, but may also be interpreted as a factor that shaped the morphology and identity of this urban unit.

With the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918, Banja Luka became the seat of the Vrbas Banovina. During the tenure of the first Ban, Svetislav Tisa Milosavljević (1929–1934), the city acquired numerous representative buildings that defined its modern urban core. In the first half of the twentieth century, Banja Luka underwent a period of intensive cultural development and the formation of a monumental urban centre in the spirit of European culture. This development can be characterized through the architectural paradigms of eclecticism and early modernism.

After the Second World War, within the context of the socialist system, the city entered a period of development of urban structure and architecture grounded in the paradigm of post-war international modernism, predominantly realized through collective housing (Novaković N. 2015, 148). Accordingly, the construction of residential neighbourhoods followed only after the realization of buildings from the Banovina period, which had already defined the central urban zone (the Palace of the Ban’s Administration, the Banski Dvori Palace, Hotel Palas, the Mortgage Bank, the National Theatre, etc.). Simultaneously with the construction of the aforementioned buildings, extension and adaptation works were carried out on Hotel “Bosna”. At that time, all works on the hotel were entrusted to the Croatian construction company led by engineer Mate Crnjić.

Emeriko Paskolo, who was the owner of the hotel in 1931, added another storey and reconstructed and adapted the existing part of the building in the spirit of modernism, to the extent possible, in order to meet the standards of contemporary European hospitality and the needs of the time. During these works, the inscription “HOTEL BOSNA” was removed from the façade and relocated to another position — namely, to the ceremonial entrance section of a new fence executed in the spirit of historicism, which replaced the previously existing wooden fence. Based on the available photographic documentation, it has been established that the newly constructed fence was low, composed of pillars with a square cross-section crowned by stone spheres at their highest points, and connected by vertically oriented elements.

After passing through the entrance — which involved moving through a “triumphal” gate composed of two pairs of massive Doric columns with an architrave beam above — visitors were directed towards the garden. The aforementioned entrance gate and the horse chestnut trees are the only elements that formed part of the original hotel and have been preserved to the present day. They represent material structures that testify to the history of Banja Luka and continue to complement the overall expression of the city even today, in accordance with the view of Castells and Borja that every part of the city should contain elements of interest, symbols, and identity [9].

Extensive construction works on Hotel “Bosna” were undertaken primarily with the aim of keeping pace with trends in European hospitality. Although this investment represented a considerable risk at the time, there was a certain potential for increasing its significance and popularity, as well as the frequency of use by both international and domestic users, thereby generating multiple benefits — not only for the owner, but also for the city and its tourism. Indeed, with the addition of another storey, the number of rooms was almost doubled, while the number of beds increased to 150, which had not previously been recorded in this region. Although the aforementioned interventions may have been less impressive in comparison to the new architectural examples being realized in the city at the time, and although the architectural expression of Hotel “Bosna” may have appeared somewhat “old-fashioned”, it nevertheless represented a significant example of pragmatic architecture from the period of the Vrbas Banovina.



Figure 2. Hotel “Bosna”, entrance gate and lush vegetation, photographed after 1931. [8].

The contemporaneity of the observed building was reflected not only in its materialization, but also in its thoughtful design approach, simplicity of form, absence of ornamentation, and adaptation to function. If elements of modernism can be identified in the extension of this building — conditioned by the existence of a lower structure from an earlier period — they are primarily evident in the use of construction materials widely applied in contemporary architecture, such as concrete, glass, and steel. Furthermore, the building is characterized by undecorated and clean façade surfaces, simplicity in the treatment of window openings, functionalism, and, above all, a rational architectural approach, conditioned both by the building’s purpose and the period in which it was developed, as well as by attempts to align with more modern buildings of this type [6].

The outcome of the works carried out on Hotel “Bosna” during the period of the Vrbas Banovina, in terms of its final appearance and functioning, to a certain extent followed early modernist trends that were at the time subtly emerging on the architectural scene of Banja Luka. However, all of the aforementioned interventions simultaneously responded to the existing local context, which is evident in the concept of adapting to the already established physical structure. For example, the earlier version of the hotel was functionally adequate and visually defined by rectangular windows extending along the entire façade; accordingly, in the added storey, the existing system was retained, and the organization and rhythm of the window openings were effectively replicated. In addition, certain original elements of the building were preserved and assigned new positions, while the natural elements of the garden were also maintained.

In the transformation of the observed space — reflected in the modernization of form and the increase in functionality, alongside the subtle incorporation of certain elements of historicism — a shift in the morphology of the urban fabric can be identified. This transformation resulted from changes in social norms and the need to follow contemporary trends. Accordingly, the appearance of part of the central urban core was once again primarily defined in relation to prevailing social conditions, but in a manner that remained aligned with the local context and tradition — most notably the Banja Luka “ritual” of drinking coffee in a garden beneath the canopies of horse chestnut trees. As Giddens explains, in combination with the inertia of habit, tradition continues to play a significant role even in the most modernized societies [11]. However, this role is far less significant than is often assumed by authors who focus on the integration of the traditional and the modern in the contemporary world. A “justified” tradition is therefore one that is, to a certain extent, constructed and derives its identity through the reflection of the modern.

Through the modernization of both its exterior and interior, Hotel “Bosna” increased its own value while simultaneously contributing to everyday social and cultural life. It was precisely in this hotel that, in addition to hosting numerous prominent domestic and international figures, many gatherings took place that also involved the participation of citizens. Within “Bosna”, several important organizations were founded, including KAB (the Academic Club of Banja Luka), RSK “Borac”, RKUD “Pelagić”, the Banja Luka Football Sub-Association, and many others. The economic prosperity of Banja Luka during the tenure of Ban Milosavljević, the emergence of modernism, as well as the overall development and dynamics of the city, were continuously accompanied — if not

actively encouraged — by Hotel “Bosna”, which accordingly remained a central focal point of social life.

However, these events were not always of a formal nature — quite the contrary. This is evidenced by the fact that from 1933, when Hotel “Palas” was opened, another local “ritual” emerged: the custom of strolling along the avenue “from Bosna to Palas”, which persisted for many years thereafter. An article from the newspaper *Bosanski glasnik* from 1915, describing the custom of residents beginning their walks from Hotel “Bosna”, indicates that the building had already been regarded as a recognizable reference point in the city at that time. Accordingly, the entire ambience of “Bosna” has always held crucial importance for the local population, serving both as a starting point for various social practices and as a central place of social interaction.

Urban symbols and rituals are far more than a simple reflection of society. They are rooted in the fundamental structure of the community and the relationships within its constituent groups — across classes, entities, genders, and age groups — and represent a segment of society that both transforms and shapes those relationships. Urban symbols and rituals are a response to everyday urban life; at the same time, they represent phenomena that are continuously observed and interpreted by society. They are equally connected to urban identity and the image of the city [12].



Figure 3. Extract from the section ‘City Chronicle,’ *Vrbaska Novine* – Political, Economic and Educational Review of the Official Gazette of the Vrbas Banovina, No. 321, 1 February 1934 [13].

3. HOTEL “BOSNA” SINCE 1975

The application of the urban and architectural concept, initiated during the Austro-Hungarian period and consolidated in the interwar years, gave Banja Luka a new face as a European metropolis, while allowing the city to retain certain elements of its distinct character throughout this process. However, immediately after the Second World War, post-war reconstruction began, primarily focused on remedial measures aimed at ensuring the basic conditions for adequate everyday functioning. Like other cities affected by war and its destructive consequences, Banja Luka did not undertake significant initiatives in terms of construction or the preparation of planning documentation.

The process of urban reconstruction through planning began in 1950 at the Urban Planning Institute of the Main Administration for Communal Affairs of the People’s Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, with the preparation of a draft General Urban Plan, which never progressed to the next stage of elaboration and adoption. Continuous and organized urban planning activity

focused on Banja Luka began in 1961 with the establishment of the Urban Planning Institute of Banja Luka [10]. In accordance with fundamental modernist principles, the first larger multi-family housing developments were constructed. Other urban functions received less attention, as the primary issue at the time was the shortage of housing, caused by industrialization and post-war migration from rural to urban areas, predominantly driven by the search for employment in the industrial sector.

The application of modernism was, to some extent, reinterpreted and adapted to local capacities and conditions; however, in general, its core principles were adopted and implemented. In the second half of the twentieth century, in various European cities, there was a prevailing tendency to apply planning and construction models based on multi-storey buildings in the form of high-rise or elongated structures, arranged within spacious landscaped open areas. These complexes were designed so that each represented a distinct functional sector, with a continuous emphasis on universal norms and the latest technological achievements.

Although embraced by many, the idea that only what is functional is truly beautiful, and that function determines form and, consequently, all other aspects, also provoked numerous critical responses. The reduced architectural language of the 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by a certain dogmatism, along with a strict set of rules defining what was permitted and what was not. Within this context emerged an idea fundamentally foreign to the built environment: the notion of the full autonomy and independence of the “architectural object”, conceived as an absolutized entity outside space and time. Such a self-referential object gave rise to the ideology of “freestanding buildings in greenery”, as well as isolated structures within the urban fabric — sometimes in harmony, sometimes in dissonance — forming a dominant architectural paradigm. This isolation, separation, and “specialization” of urban sectors and buildings disrupted the enduring dialogue between the city and its built fabric, while also diminishing the subtle but essential sense of urbanity [14].

The earthquake that struck Banja Luka in 1969 significantly altered the existing urban morphology and everyday life, disrupted previous development concepts, and influenced the subsequent course of the city’s growth. Shortly thereafter, several key steps were undertaken: defining a basic concept for the construction of larger residential areas on previously non-urbanized land, reconstructing destroyed structures or introducing replacement facilities, and preparing the first urban plan. In addition, during this period, a number of urban and architectural competitions were organized in Banja Luka, with the primary aim of obtaining optimal solutions for the central urban zone and several specific sites.

Certain buildings, including Hotel “Bosna”, were irreversibly destroyed, at least in terms of their original form. The impact of this destruction on the population is best described by Ravlić’s testimony: “The people of Banja Luka parted with heavy hearts from buildings and spaces that meant so much to them, that enriched the city’s character. Every demolition, carried out in the best possible way by units led by two lieutenant colonels — Dragor Radunović and Jovo Pejčinović — was followed by numerous citizens. Not merely out of curiosity to witness their ‘grounding’, but with the intention of paying their final respects to each of these damaged buildings; they were both dear and essential to them” [7]. The beginning of the second era of Hotel “Bosna” can be marked by the opening of the new building on April 22, 1975.

A few years after the earthquake, the city recovered and became enriched with numerous individual buildings, as well as entirely new residential neighbourhoods. In terms of urban and architectural interventions within the central area, the most significant was the winning competition design for the city centre. The first prize for the central urban space was awarded to Velimir Neidhart, Ljerka Lulić, and Jasna Noso, who in 1973 developed the project for the so-called “Center 1”, including the architecturally and urbanistically developed “Boska” department store, Hotel “Palas”, and the “Dom radničke solidarnosti” building. All of these structures, as addressed in the award-winning proposal, were treated as an inseparable segment of the planned surrounding space, defined through mutual integration. The authors’ main idea was to create a completely new spatial order and a dynamic whole composed of irregularly shaped structures — buildings and terraces — descending from the central zone towards the Vrbas River.

“Center 1” encompassed a shopping centre, a hotel, and a cultural facility — a space of collective urban life — conceived as a distinct unit. It was designed without direct formal references to local heritage, yet fully adapted to the existing spatial flows of the city centre. This project represents an example of “late modernism” or “productivism”, as it is difficult to determine where architecture ends and urban planning begins. This is due to the fact that the spatial structure is interconnected both horizontally and vertically, enabling it to integrate with existing urban functions and circulation, effectively creating a dispersed program of an entire urban centre concentrated within a relatively compact area [15].

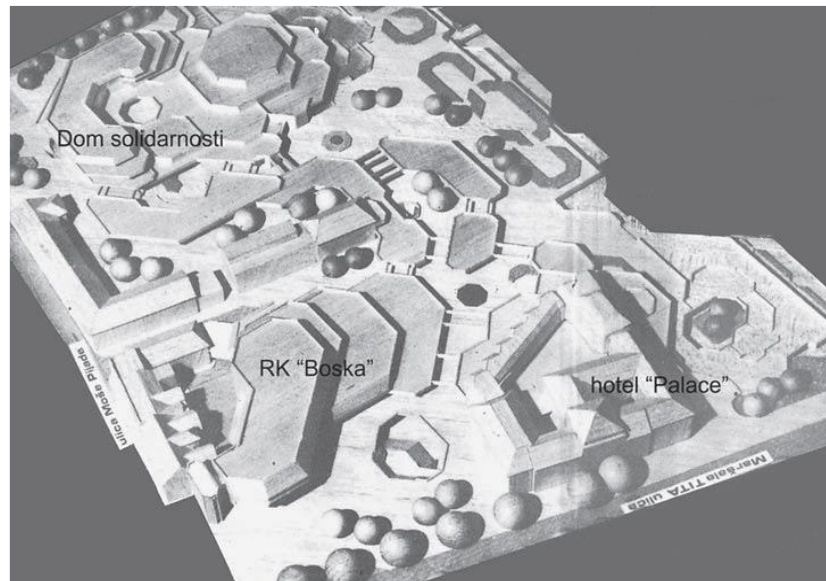


Figure 4. , Model of the winning design for the “Center 1” complex in Banja Luka, 1973. [16].

This project, which was only partially realized due to its complexity and other factors (the “Boska” department store and the “House of Workers’ Solidarity”—today the city library and museum—were fully constructed, while Hotel “Palas” was only partially completed), has been analyzed in order to enable a comparison with the prevailing modernist principles whose implementation in Banja Luka intensified particularly after the earthquake. The “Center 1” complex was conceived as a central space intended for communal urban life, aligning with one of the key modernist ideas—the primacy of function in the processes of planning and design. In this case, a clearly defined functional sector was established, that is, a zone with a precisely determined purpose and mode of use. As indicated in the available sources, the award-winning design did not entail the establishment of a direct relationship with the structure of the existing local context, which had either been preserved or rehabilitated after the earthquake. Rather, the project emphasized integration into the existing circulation flows, as well as a deliberate spatial connection with the Vrbas River.

It can therefore be concluded that, although the planned program tended to impose itself upon and reinterpret the existing environment and structures, there was nevertheless a certain degree of recognition and consideration of specific local elements and spatial characteristics. Accordingly, it cannot be argued that the proposal represented a complete isolation from or negation of the existing context, although, on the other hand, a certain degree of “self-sufficiency” of the proposed solution is clearly evident. With regard to construction and materials, certain parallels can also be identified between global modernist achievements and this example from Banja Luka. These similarities primarily relate to developments in construction technology, particularly the use of reinforced concrete, which in the twentieth century enabled innovative architectural solutions.

In order to achieve a clearer morphological understanding of the “new” Hotel “Bosna” and its surrounding spatial context, the following section will present a more detailed analysis of the site in relation to both its immediate and broader urban setting, alongside a comparison with the aforementioned “Center 1” project. When considering the relationship between Hotel “Bosna” and the surrounding urban fabric, it is important to note the existence of two primary modes of interaction between interior and exterior space—direct and indirect connections. The indirect connection is defined by the character of the functions within different parts of the hotel. Thus, in areas intended for social activities, large glazed surfaces were envisaged as the finishing treatment of the external walls, whereas in accommodation units, smaller window openings were designed. These openings allow visual connections and “draw” the city into the interior, while simultaneously providing a significantly higher level of privacy. In order to avoid the conventional placement of the building within a strictly rectangular plot, the entire mass of Hotel “Bosna” was conceived without pronounced corner articulation, while the floors were treated as distinct volumetric elements that converge at central and terminal points. In this way, diversity of views and compositional dynamics are achieved regardless of the observer’s position. The setback of the ground floor toward the interior, in addition to its practical function, reflects an intention to create both functional and visual relief, while also contributing to a sense of spatial comfort. A clear design intention can be observed

— to shape the hotel in such a way that pedestrians experience continuously changing perspectives from all surrounding viewpoints, with the composition of the building mass appearing in constant “motion” relative to the observer’s position.

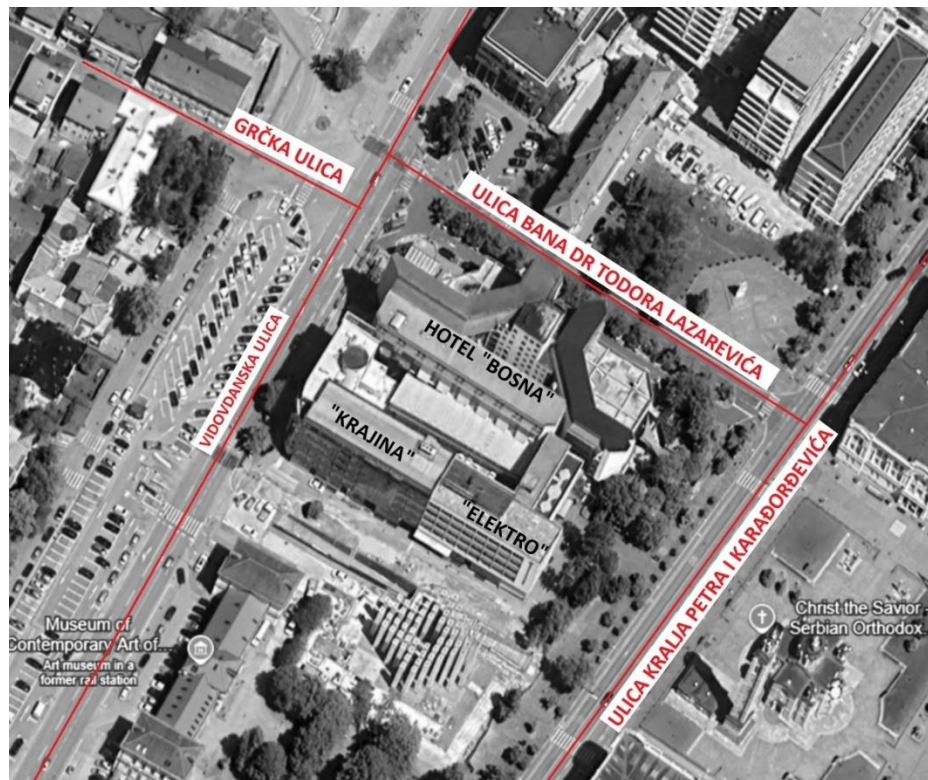


Figure 5. Current state of Hotel Bosna, aerial photograph. Source: Google Earth. Redone by the author.

The previously discussed design concept closely aligns with the approach adopted by the authors of the winning “Center 1” proposal, as confirmed by Vukić (2001, 34), who notes that, in order for all buildings to function as components of distinct urban vistas, the architects made a deliberate effort to further enrich the “language” of an already complex formal composition. Accordingly, each position within the city offers a different visual experience, which becomes particularly dynamic at the points of contact between the “abstract” forms of the new structures and the “figurative” façades of the existing buildings. Of the entire urban project, only one segment was realized, within which the department store building occupies a particularly prominent position, conceived in a highly sculptural and unconventional manner in relation to the aesthetic principles of modernist architecture. Given that the project for the central zone of Banja Luka from 1973 was designed and constructed contemporaneously with Hotel “Bosna”, and that both were situated within the same spatial framework of the city’s core, a more detailed comparative analysis of these solutions is justified.

The newly formed architectural expression of Hotel “Bosna” represents the final outcome of the work of engineers Ante Džebo and Predrag Bulović, who won the Yugoslav architectural competition organized by the newspaper “Borba”. As previously noted, the hotel constructed at that time exhibited a completely different and innovative architectural expression compared to its predecessor. The only direct link between the old and the new structure was reflected in the retention of certain built and natural elements (the ceremonial entrance gate and the garden with mature vegetation), which were the only components preserved and incorporated into the new design solution.

It should also be noted that the building lines on the northwest and southwest sides of the “new” Hotel “Bosna” were defined in relation to the positions of the existing buildings of the companies “Elektro” Banja Luka and “Krajina” Banja Luka, which were already present within the block during the 1970s. However, the building lines of these structures had themselves been previously determined based on the position of the demolished “Bosna”. In other words, the original hotel initially influenced the positioning of the surrounding buildings, which subsequently played a primary role in determining the placement of the new hotel. This can be interpreted as the result of

a combination of a conscious planning decision and the so-called “spatial inertia”, understood as the influence of existing conditions on future design processes and the tendency to continue previously established spatial structures. Considering that such alignments resulted in a clearly defined street frontage along the main urban thoroughfare in Banja Luka, as well as in the continuity of open public urban space, it may be assumed that the planning component played a dominant role in the overall process. Nevertheless, it is evident that the existing conditions on site served as a foundation that encouraged further development in continuity. The direction of the building lines was accepted, subsequently reinterpreted, and integrated into the new architectural structure in a manner that ensures coherence and spatial articulation.

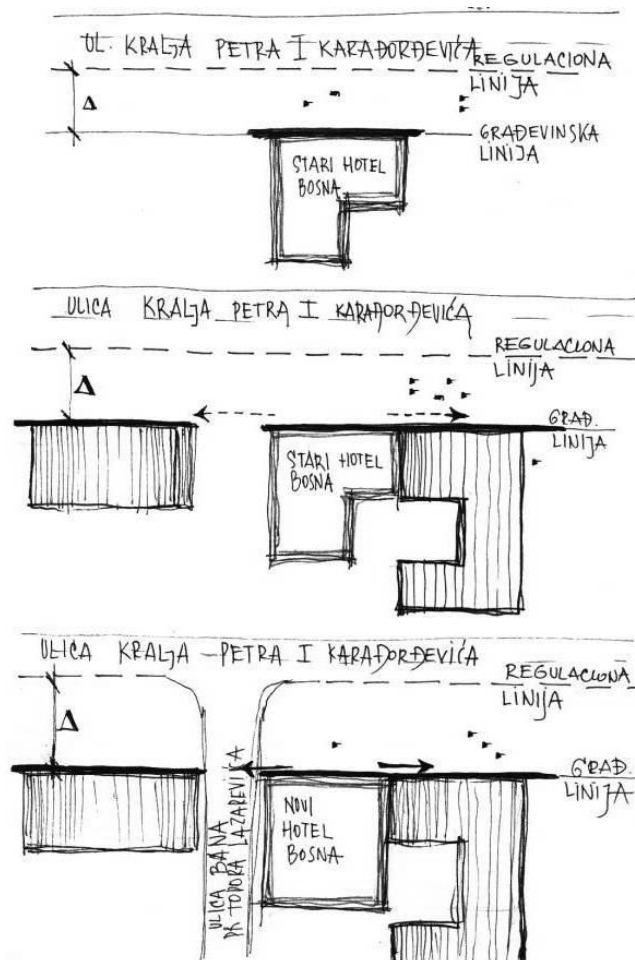


Figure 6. Schematic representation of the principle for defining a building's alignment according to established regulations. Sketch by the author.

The significance of the existing garden and ceremonial gate for the citizens of Banja Luka was clearly recognized by the project authors, as evidenced by their integration into the “new” hotel. Respect for the existing context is further reflected in the building's positioning within the inherited spatial framework. Accordingly, it can be concluded that, in defining the urban-architectural solution for Hotel “Bosna”, greater emphasis was placed on acknowledging the local context than was the case with the “Center 1” project. Nevertheless, the use of reinforced concrete for the primary structural system, the articulation of form through the avoidance of right angles, the application of geometric principles, flat roofs, terraces and volumetric segmentation of varying heights, the linear arrangement of openings, simplified façades employing concrete and glass, an open ground floor, and spatial permeability were common objectives shared by the design teams of both projects.

The intention to preserve local values and character — through respect for and upgrading of the already established image and identity of the place — is clearly evident in the technical description of the new Hotel “Bosna”, which states that the café garden occupies the site of the former one and retains all attributes of its earlier treatment. This approach can also be related to research on vernacular architecture as a response to the negative aspects of functionalism, particularly monotony and the absence of expressive character. In this regard, Alić emphasizes that the integration of

historical fabric not only establishes a meaningful connection to place, but also serves to demonstrate the continuity of cultural development in Bosnia. The presentation of historical fabric as something that continuously transforms, yet inevitably improves, enabled Grabrijan and Neidhart to assign new positive meanings to inherited structures [17].

It may be argued that the conceptual framework of Hotel “Bosna” partially corresponds to structuralist principles, which, in contrast to earlier approaches, emphasized history and local specificity. At the same time, it can be noted that the application of structuralist ideas in this case was not as metaphorical or subtle as suggested by Grabrijan and Neidhart. Unlike functionalism — which is based on the premise that form strictly follows function and often neglects architecture as a complex system of interrelated parameters — structuralism recognizes flexibility as a key element and assigns greater importance to the role of users. In the design of the new Hotel “Bosna”, the ground floor was conceived as a relatively open and adaptable space, capable of accommodating multiple modes of use and transformation. In addition to its standard operational function, this space hosted New Year celebrations, receptions for prominent public figures, and various events organized by sports, academic, cultural, and other associations. Influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Marxist ideas, the designers shifted the emphasis from individual experience toward collective spatial experience and social interaction. A shift is also evident in the relationship to the surrounding environment, particularly in the recognition of existing spatial relationships and urban fabric — green structures, preserved elements of the former hotel, and the visual experience created through multiple viewpoints.

In order to more clearly articulate the significance of the preserved elements of the local context incorporated into the “new” Hotel “Bosna”, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of continuity: material (physical) and immaterial (spatial and conceptual). In terms of material continuity, the ceremonial “triumphal gate” appears to be the only clearly identifiable and deliberately preserved architectural fragment of the original structure. Although other elements may have existed (such as foundations or structural remnants), available sources do not indicate their visible articulation or interpretative emphasis within the new design; rather, they may have been incorporated solely at a technical level without architectural expression. On the other hand, immaterial continuity is considerably more pronounced. It is reflected in the retention of regulatory and building lines, the preservation of spatial relationships with the street and surrounding environment, and the reinterpretation of the building’s position and significance within the urban fabric. These aspects suggest that the legacy of the former hotel was transmitted primarily through spatial logic and urban structure, rather than through the literal preservation of physical elements. In this sense, the “triumphal gate” stands as the dominant and almost the only clearly recognizable historical fragment, while continuity with the former structure is achieved largely through more abstract, yet urbanistically and architecturally significant, principles of integration and transformation. It should also be emphasized that, in a broader theoretical sense, city gates are often considered fundamental attributes of urban form and identity, frequently functioning as metaphors for the city as a whole [18]. The interpolation of the new within the old — or the old within the new — as well as the recognition of both material and symbolic values, thus represent key principles guiding the designers in this project.



Figure 7. Hotel “Bosna” today. Author’s photograph, Banja Luka, 2017.

Such a view was supported several decades later by Borja and Castells, who argued that urban structures must be articulated within public spaces that function as central places, as well as sites for the formation of districts and the city itself. Public spaces must be accessible and safe, and must possess symbolic characteristics that allow residents to identify with their place of residence. The degradation of such spaces, resulting from inadequate conservation, excessive vehicular presence, and insufficient integration of the needs of the residents themselves, leads to alienation and a lack of identification of users with the spaces in which they live, work, and which they use [9].

Ultimately, it can be concluded that the general structuralist idea - referring to the careful treatment of all elements with historical and traditional value - was also implemented in the design of the "new" Hotel "Bosna", as reflected in the preservation of the triumphal gate and its integration into the newly formed architectural solution. In addition, other structuralist parameters are evident in this case, including the right to a healthy living environment and humane living conditions (preservation of existing greenery and the garden, provision of diverse visual perspectives, absence of barriers, adequate insolation, etc.), integration into the existing terrain, and consideration of the natural landscape. Polyvalence, understood as the flexibility and adaptability of space - namely, allowing users to modify patterns of use according to their needs - stands out as an important characteristic of structuralism, primarily related to the interior of the new Hotel "Bosna" and its garden, as previously discussed. The associated open space and large halls have, for many years, been used as venues for exhibitions, manifestations, gatherings, and various other events. When considering the concept of growth in structuralism, which refers to the capacity of an architectural system to develop, expand, and transform over time, it can be observed that, in the case of Hotel "Bosna", a modular system was employed that is capable of accommodating growth (in terms of form, positioning of openings, interrelations of elements, etc.) without compromising the integrity of the building as a whole. However, given the position of the hotel - attached to a neighboring structure on one side and bordered by traffic routes on the remaining three - its expansion through the addition of new modules is not feasible without altering the surrounding public space. Due to this complexity, the idea of architecture as a process, rather than a final product, was never fully realized.

At the same time, in the development of the urban-architectural solution for the observed hotel, there was also a clear inclination toward modernist tendencies, particularly in the strong subordination to function and the continuous emphasis on its importance. As a result, the newly constructed Hotel "Bosna" incorporated numerous facilities intended not only for hotel guests but also for external users, primarily the residents of Banja Luka. Since most of the building's characteristics were determined by its function, it can be stated that the design of Hotel "Bosna" was also guided by a functionalist approach. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the urban-architectural design approach applied in the case of this hotel was dual in nature, meaning that the proposed solution intertwines certain characteristics of functionalism with specific properties of structuralism.

4. CONCLUSION

The examined example confirms what Đokić states, namely that every created physical form, in a certain way, compresses history and represents a particular culture. For this reason, the spatial forms of a city cannot be fully understood without knowledge of the social and historical context, the economic status of its inhabitants, their characteristics, religion, legal norms, and political system. The development of cultural values and forms is interdependent and reciprocal. The purpose of forms changes over time, as does their interpretation. From this, it follows that the social context represents a key generator of the physical characteristics of space, that is, it reflects the cultural identity of a community [19]. Through the study and analysis of available sources, it has been established that Hotel "Bosna" has undergone numerous transformations and alterations, while consistently retaining its primary function and name. The preservation of both its name and function symbolizes the continuity and resilience of the local community and its citizens, despite the many adversities that have occurred over time.

It has been observed that the examined space did not have a passive role in any period of its existence; on the contrary, it occasionally directly influenced the course of certain urban and architectural processes taking place at a given moment. It represents an embodiment of modernization, considering that it was precisely in this location that features such as a lift, central heating, telephone connections, and similar innovations were introduced in Banja Luka for the first time. Although from today's perspective these may appear as minor technical elements, their significance as markers of progress should not be overlooked. At certain periods, the analyzed building also served as a venue for cultural events, shaped the habits of the local population, and became a starting point for specific social customs (so-called "rituals"), which are of considerable

importance when discussing the quality of everyday urban life. Throughout the entire process, from its initial construction to all subsequent transformations, a clear cause-and-effect relationship can be identified between Hotel “Bosna” and contemporary developments at both the local and global level. Regardless of the triggers for change, the hotel consistently succeeded in preserving its essential meaning for Banja Luka, both symbolically and physically. Considering the numerous adverse circumstances and destructive events that have characterized the territory within which the hotel was built, its phenomenology can be understood through continuous physical transformations, adaptation to frequent changes, emerging demands and needs, while preserving values essential to its citizens. The conducted research has led to the conclusion that transformations of the observed space were most often conditioned by social changes and trends, which in turn had a direct impact on the morphology of the city centre (in terms of form, position, materialization, regulation, dimensions, function, and other characteristics of the surrounding built structure). However, as Lefebvre notes, every form presents itself through its dual existence – material and social [20]. The analysis of Hotel “Bosna” throughout all phases of its existence has shown that issues such as preservation of the local context, respect for the existing environment in both material and symbolic terms, recognition of social “rituals” associated with a specific place, appropriate treatment of the image of the city, and consideration of urban identity in general, can be adequately addressed even under conditions of constant modification, new circumstances, and the demands imposed by the modern age.

Advocating for the revalorization of the city’s physical structure and the importance of urbanity within the layered nature of its historical development, Radovan Delale started from the premise that the city is not a finished work, but an ongoing process of construction. Accordingly, he emphasized that every city possesses its own memory, its “genius loci”, and a unique meaning, along with distinctive symbols and motifs that differentiate it from others. The study of the historical continuity of development and growth of different cities reveals hidden relationships and patterns in the formation of the urban core [1]. Furthermore, Delale explains that the uniqueness and specificity of a city are reflected in its identity, while the absence of such identity implies a sense of disorientation in time and space, similar to a person without memory. Banja Luka, like any other city, can be observed as a phenomenon of civilization and as a reflection of development in economic, social, and cultural terms. In this paper, such an approach has been applied through the case study of Hotel “Bosna”.

Therefore, Hotel “Bosna” is not merely a building, but also a kind of record that can be read through its form, function, symbolism, and events. The selected object can be understood as an illustrative example of how architectural and urban achievements may function as a “text” that is interpreted over time, in different ways and under varying conditions. By establishing an appropriate relationship between the contemporary context of Banja Luka in the 21st century and the layered and constantly shifting architectural paradigms of the past, this research aims to highlight the importance of finding inspiration in the city’s local values. By defining new starting points that imply the preservation and enhancement of specific urban concepts and characteristics, it becomes possible to open new opportunities for the reinterpretation of inherited structures, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and contemporary practices.

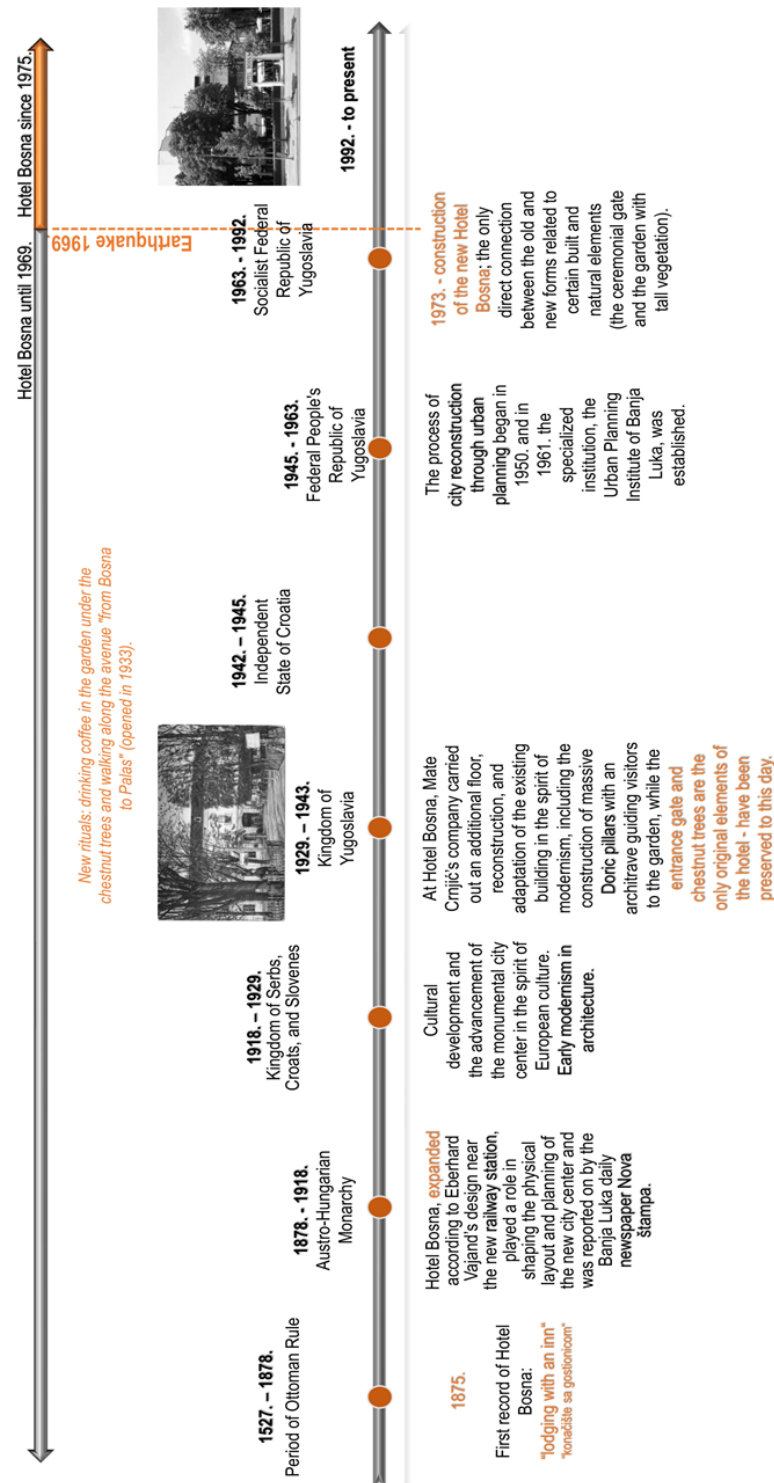


Figure 8. Hotel "Bosna" – A Timeline. Authorial Graphic Contribution, Banja Luka, 2026.

As a final conclusion, it is important to emphasize the significance that a particular urban unit can have in shaping the urban environment in which it is located, as well as in creating topographical distinctiveness, visual identity, and recognizability. The micro-ambience, as an integral part of the city's identity, in addition to its characteristic appearance, carries a series of symbolic meanings, and in the observed case also includes the preservation of original landscape qualities. This research, which among other approaches applies the fundamental principles of morphological studies, may serve as inspiration for further interventions within the observed urban environment, as well as in a broader context.

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