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SHOULDN'T ARCHITECTURE CARE?

A project of ethical reconceptualization of Zagreb's skyscrapers' functions

Skyscrapers are not only parts of the city that can be noticed first. Though, because of its characteristics to take space and to be symbols of a city, the question of ethics and architecture of skyscrapers is significantly important. Let's just, for the sake of argument, mention the 9/11 as an example in which ethics and architecture mix best.

After Cibona-tower was built came a decade without any business towers to appear in Zagreb. The new era starts with the construction of Hoto-tower, the era dominated by apotheosis of towers and business skyscrapers: Eurotower, Zagrebtower, Almeria – being only one of the built or almost built skyscrapers, which already form a new Zagreb's skyline. While the process is under way, the question of ethics comes to our minds instantly. At this point we must ask ourselves in which way these skyscrapers are accessible to the general public. They represent the highest points of the city, and, as such, should be open to the city's population, although they are business towers. Around the globe the entrance to skyscrapers is open to all, and panoramic views on their tops are something very common (Montparnasse, Empire State Building). Beside that, in the Anglo-Saxon world the *open-house* (London) is something very usual. It is the time when skyscrapers are open to everybody once a month, while, for example, in Dortmund the Harenberg City Center testifies to a skyscraper almost entirely designed for cultural and similar programs. None of these exist as something offered by the highest skyscrapers in Zagreb.

The infrastructure of skyscrapers in Zagreb is almost entirely incompatible with the "opening" for general public, so the aim of this project is to make the first step and create a panoramic view at one of them.

The poll carried out among students of art history showed that 90% of the never visited any of the business towers, but, if that was possible, would surely done that. The same figure and answer came from visitors of the biblioclub Booksa in May 2006. This shows that the need for "opening" skyscrapers to the general public and not only for the chosen few is present. The panoramic view is the first, and also the main step of the "opening".

From the answers that were written in the poll* concerning the question of skyscrapers, we can read that skyscrapers in Zagreb evoke the following associations:



Orientation, meeting point,
Basketball, Agrocór, Gotham
City, sandwiches, ...



Interesting shape, architecture,
symbol of Zagreb, leafed,
inaccessible, ...



Unnecessary, big bucks,
Glittering, Babylon, inaccessible
university, massive, capitalism, ...



Mobile phones, new, T-com,
this is not a skyscraper!,
modern, inaccessible, ...

* The poll was carried out among 50 students of history of art during my lecture held in April 2006 at the Faculty of Philosophy Zagreb. I was a guest lecturer, invited by professor Zlatko Jurić, Ph.D

From the following we can see that skyscrapers in Zagreb (both the "old" – Cibona, Zagrepčanka, and the "new" – Eurotower, Hoto-tower) represent mostly symbols of economic prosperity, and that they have nothing in common with general public's everyday life. These skyscrapers are built for a special group of people, while, at the same time, stay inaccessible to the general public. The question in the poll asks which of the skyscrapers they would visit, if at all, and if the skyscrapers should be more accessible to the general public. We read the following answers:

Skyscraper on the city's square. To see if the city is still the same.

Yes, definitely, at this point they are like a prison, totally inaccessible, and you need a special licence to get in.

As most of beings, skyscrapers also want company.

Every quality architecture should be accessible to the people.

Yes, both to get to know the building, as well as of the beautiful view of the city.

The main aim of the project **Shouldn't architecture care?** is to make the desire of general public real. Architecture is in a direct link with desire, says Bernard Tschumi in his book *Architecture and Disjunction*. And, as we know, when desire comes in question, we always have ethics along.

The filed work carried out in May 2006. led me to the following conclusions: I could have come on top of all skyscrapers in Zagreb only because I had a press-card of one of Zagreb's respected newspapers for culture. Only because of that I was presented with an opportunity to talk to the manager of the building, and explain why I wanted up. The pretence was always that I was filming the panoramic view. This shows how skyscrapers in Zagreb are (in)accessible. Journalists, as well as employers of the building, are a special, enclosed, group of people, while all the others are not presented with such opportunity. Only Zagrepčanka and Hoto-tower are possible to be open to public, to have a panoramic view. One can come to the top of Cibona through a small hole, as to the attic, and when one comes at the top there are no fences. The space is impossible to redesign to a panoramic view. The top of the Eurotower is used for air-conditioning. The location of Hoto-tower is actually inadequate for "discovering" a panoramic view over the city, so the only choice for the project remains Zagrepčanka. Zagrepčanka with its 95 m is ideal for a

panoramic view, and, as can be seen on the following photo, the space stays completely unused and empty.



What we have here is a huge, unused space, with a beautiful view to the city. There is also another part, a lower "terrace" on the opposite side, so the panoramic view could be combined, and both sides could cast view to the opposite sides of the city. Firstly, it would be enough to fence and secure the terrace, to place benches and chairs, and, in time, a telescope. It would be really the least that the city can do for its citizens, but also for its visitors. The economic cost-effectiveness would be covered with entrance tickets (5-10kn), which everybody would gladly pay to come to the top (as the poll shows). The same stands for tourists, who would probably be the usual visitors of the panoramic view. The suggestion of the project **Shouldn't architecture care?** is to open the highest terrace of Zagrepčanka for one day to all the people interested in visiting it. The invitation should be presented through all the relevant media, and the plan is to allow the public to come up a view the city from entirely different perspective. If a response and interest of the public should be great – and there are no grounds to believe the opposite – the next step would be to talk to the manager of the building, as well as to talk to the architects that would redesign the space for a real panoramic view. During the "Zagrepčanka open-day" the public could express its desires and wishes about the new panoramic view through the on-the-spot poll.

APPENDIX

Srećko Horvat

APOTHEOSIS OF THE SKYSCRAPER: A PARADOX OF URBANISM IN CROATIA?

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Not long ago, on the stretch between Zagreb's Humboldtova ulica nad the Goethe Institute in the direction of the British Embassy, a passer-by could see an old woman – surrounded by mighty edifices, asphalt and exhaust – heading with a bucket or a plastic can to fetch water at a pump on the street corner. This will probably change when the construction of a new skyscraper called *Eurotower* is done at the intersection of Ulica Ivana Lučića and the south side of Vukovarska avenija. If the old woman defiantly decides to live a bit longer, this tower will only deepen the contrast which betrays current trends in urban development in Croatia. The key issue addressed in this essay is whether tower and skyscrapers building is „not only a new trend, but also a symptomatic indication of the state of our society“?

Even though postmodernism has different connotations in architectural discourse, according to Jameson's and Lyotard's definition of postmodernism, the old woman image is postmodern indeed, but it also points to a Croatian paradox of early 21st century urbanism. Children of modernism *par excellence*, skyscrapers in Zagreb (those of later date, that is) do not have the properties of modernism with respect to architectural design, but rather with respect to their use. This is a blatant reflection of the socio-economic conditions in Croatia. Nothing new under the sun, one may add: ever since the pyramids, amphitheatres, churches, cathedrals, avenues and parks, architecture and urban development as segments of society have reflected its structure. Even so, there are a few Croatian distinctions.

Croatian skyscrapers have not yet reached the postmodern stage (i refer to postmodernism primarily in terms of social and political development, and only then in terms of architectural design). This is not bad in itself, but it does suggest where the Croatian economy and society stand. Croatian skyscrapers share one common feature that may not be as obvious with buildings such as Zagrepčanka, the Industrogradnja or Vjesnik skyscraper, but is definitely a trend in recent Croatian (or Zagreb?) architecture – they are all towers. According to Turkulin, „everyone can only think of towers, all of sudden“. That this is not an isolated oversimplification is obvious from comments on the new Hoto Office Tower in Savska ulica which tend to

perceive it as *delivered* to that street, not *built* there. Besides, the *Eurotower* is „under construction“, and new skyscrapers are planned in Vukovarska avenija. The character of this new trend can be broken down into three basic issues:

1. absence of a town plan (for the City of Zagreb)
2. architecture inaccessible to the general public
3. competition inherent to capitalism

ABSCENCE OF A TOWN PLAN (FOR THE CITY OF ZAGREB)

This issue raised by the new architectural trend in Croatia is in fact an old story. With a few exceptions (such as the socialist period and the construction of Novi Zagreb), urban planning has never been a Croatian forte. In addition, there is more confusion about the ideal site for skyscrapers than ever. There are virtually as many proposals as architects. Marijan Turkulin, the designer of the Hoto Tower, Chromos Tower, Hotel Sheraton, and the extension of the University Hospital Zagreb (known as Rebro), thinks the ideal zone for skyscrapers would include Savska ulica, Vukovarska avenija and Heinzelova ulica, forming an „H“. In contrast, Professor Ivo Maroević of the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb, who has authored a number of books on the history of architecture, believes that skyscrapers should be built in the eastern and western city districts and in Novi Zagreb. Nikola Filipović, Professor Emeritus of Modern Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, Zagreb University, a co-designer of the Cibona Tower and of the National and University Library, and the author of the future Eurotower in Vukovarska, believes that it is out-of-date and inappropriate to define the looks of Zagreb beforehand, and that the choice of the building site for a skyscraper should only depend on architectural skills, which in turn should observe the Zagreb Master Plan.

Therefore, the absence of a Master Plan does not mean that there is no plan whatsoever, but that no consensus can be reached about the location of what some already call the „Croatian Manhattan“. Referring to the building practice in Manhattan, NY, Nikola Filipović is absolutely right when he says that skyscrapers are never built in lines, but rather in 'clusters', conferring thus the idea of centres of power. „It so happens that the Manhattan area of 15 x 15 kilometres accommodates two magnificent clusters of skyscrapers, standing for two centres of power, the social and the financial. The same holds true for Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas and Miami, focusing all their power in one place designated as the center.“ Perspective as it is, this argument, as well as Filipović's considerations about the ideal location, help little

to resolve the issue here, as no justifiable reason has been provided for applying the Anglo-Saxon model, Manhattan in particular, to Croatian architecture. The basic argument in favour is that this model would preserve the historical centre. In that respect, Filipović may be providing the best solution for the ideal skyscraper zone in Zagreb.

„Imagine a cluster of about thirty two-hundred-storey skyscrapers at the location where we have the National and University Library and where we plan to build the Museum of Contemporary Art,” says Filipović. „Arriving from the direction of the airport, you first come across something that is the town. Once you get past it, an extraordinary view of Zagreb opens up before you, somewhat romantic and sentimental. You see the cathedral, St. Mark's Church, Medvedgrad by night. I dare say, the resemblance to Paris is striking. From any raised spot along the great city axis, which includes Zrinjevac, the Railway station, the new City Hall square – this being *the* axis because the east-west span comes down to the winding Ilica and winding Vlaška – you could see that Zagreb has started building something new.” Even though this intriguing concept may resolve a few urbanistic, aesthetic and functional issues (presumably) inherent to urban planning, it also points to the other issue characterising the „new trend” of skyscraper building – the inaccessibility of architecture to the general public.

ARCHITECTURE INACCESSIBLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In Paris, so strikingly similar to the Zagreb of Filipović's vision, there is a (relatively) new district to the north-west known as La Défense. It is an axis dominated by office buildings, whose construction started in the 1960s in a locality in which Parisian *Défenseurs* rebuffed the Prussian army in 1871. Although La Défense is, I believe, the pinnacle of urban planning – with its centre embodied in the Grande Arche lying exactly on the line extending from the 'axis royal', which starts from the Cour Carrée de Louvre and runs over the Champs-Élysées and Avenue Charles de Gaulle to the outskirts of Paris – this has its inevitable consequence. The area of 750 hectares is the perfect site for the construction of a fully functional modern city. Furthermore, the Parisian Manhattan embodies high aesthetic achievements, the highest of which is the skyline stretching all the way from the Arc De Triomphe. However, like any other modern project, La Défense draws a clear line of separation between social groups. Office buildings, which dominate over the few residential buildings in the area, send a clear message about the purpose of this part of the city.

Unlike many a tourist, a common Parisian would seldom venture into La Défense. This was not changed when a new pseudo-square was built in front of the Grande Arche. Like many contemporary squares, it has lost its function of gathering people, and the only building which has contributed to the widening of the functions of this mainly office district is that by Aiko Miyawaki. La Défense is an excellent example of what could happen to Zagreb: an isolated district, connected only by infrastructure with its users belonging to a specific social group. Judging by the current building trend in Zagreb, this district, unlike the Parisian one, would only increase social stratification, as no one in Zagreb cares about additional content, which does exist up to a point in La Défense. A case in point is the Hoto office tower. This may be due to its specific location, but as soon as you see it you get a clear message about its purpose. The garage entrance is barred by two tollgates and the entrance hall in the building has a large counter with security devices. The Internet services offered by T-Mobile in the lower section of the building, in a café decorated with plasma screens and white leather chairs, are obviously meant for a specific type of a customer with a specific credit limit. In other words, even though the Hoto Tower is a part of the very city core, the La Défense type plan would only increase social stratification. In this respect, the arrangement of skyscrapers in the form of the letter „H“ is a better solution, but the Croatian architectural paradox remains: skyscrapers whose form is seldom modern, but rather combines several styles and schools, and whose siting is rather postmodern, are clearly modern in function.

One of the key features of postmodern architecture is that it gives free access to everyone, elite and general public alike, yet how many of us have ever been in the Zagrepčanka or Cibona Tower, let alone visited the roof?

While it may be true that free access to these and future buildings would not reduce social stratification, this is the least Croatian architecture (and investors) could do for „regular“ citizens to broaden their worm's eye view of architecture (such as Cibona or Hoto Tower). Evidence of this old practice is found everywhere abroad, from the Empire State buildings and other buildings worldwide to yet another example from Paris, the Montparnasse Tower, whose height of 210 metres offers a remarkable panoramic view stretching as far as 40 km, for the admission fee of only one Euro. This may also be commented on as socially stratifying – tourists being a specific social group with specific interests, but the eventual result would be a widening of the circle of potential users, which should be the goal of contemporary (or ideal?) architecture.

COMPETITION INHERENT TO CAPITALISM

The last issue raised by the new architectural trend in Croatia which I tend to describe as „competition inherent to Capitalism“ provides a key to the question why everyone can only think of towers and why most skyscrapers built today in Zagreb have something of a tower.

A reason plain and simple, but not less important for that, is that tower is perfect spot for a trademark or company logo. A case in point is Agrokor's A-shaped logo on the Cibona Tower twinkling red in the wee hours when all lights in the building are off, reminding us of Gotham City (the mythical home of Batman) and thus clearly showing who has the power there. It has been a while since Mukařovský in his structuralist aesthetics explained the functional theory of architecture, according to which the aesthetic function of a piece of architecture is defined within the context of the following functions: 1) *immediate* (use); 2) *historical*, related to conventions of historical architecture; 3) *socioeconomic*, indicating the social status and resources of the building's owner and 4) *individual*, indicating the building's unique properties. Unfortunately, I can not go deeper into the semiotics of architecture at this point, but these criteria, when applied to the Cibona Tower, shed more light on this last feature of the new architectural trend in Croatia. The immediate function of the Cibona Tower is to provide office space (1). Its construction started in April 1986 and was completed in 1990. The Tower has 22 storeys and is 92 m tall. It was designed by M. Hržić, I. Piteša and B. Šerbetić (2). The owner of the building is Agrokor, a company owned by Ivica Todorić, a tycoon everyone knows or thinks he does (3). What is unique about the Cibona Tower, beside its shape, is, of course its name: it was named after the basketball team Cibona, one of Zagreb's hallmarks. There is also a radio station of that name associated with the building (4). The Tower is also a major landmark in the city („see you at Cibona“, „to the left of Cibona“, „Cibona tram stop“, and so on), which is clearly a modernist function of architecture. Despite this modernist characteristic, the Cibona Tower is flanked by an unmistakably postmodernist creation: Trg Dražena Petrovića. The thing is that this square does not have the classical function of a square, save during basketball matches when the team supporters and police crowd the place. Unlike the central city square, Trg Bana Jelačića, which is still a place of gathering (though not in the Greek sense of *agora*, but rather as a meeting point from which one moves on to a café, a restaurant, or a walk), Trg Dražena Petrovića is only a name ('trg' – 'a square'), a signifier which has

nothing to do with the signified. People do not meet there, and barely anyone even knows that there is a square of that name in Zagreb.

There is no doubt that the towers setting this new trend in Croatian architecture are built for a particular socioeconomic group, but what is often overlooked is that they mirror the development of a society. In our particular case, this trend reflects the Croatian Establishment in transition to the Western European model of capitalism. One peculiarity of this trend is that it includes some Anglo-Saxon features, which in turn has its own implications. A tower standing alone is the metaphor of individualism, the cornerstone of capitalist enterprise, and belongs to modern architectural mythology. A case in point is the Empire State Building. True, for a while this concept had been defied by the WTC towers as the symbols of the end of competition and loss of reference point (Baudrillard). Along these lines, we can conclude that Croatian architecture is still modern. The competition and monopolism they embody have not yet given way to correlation. The user is the least important here

THE PARADOX OF URBANISM IN CROATIA?

The above examples suggest that Zagreb skyscrapers are enshrouded by a kind of „anaesthesia“ and „amnesia“. Anaesthesia „as a sign of the failure or loss of sensitivity, of public interest in the status and the fate of skyscrapers“ leads to the question whether it is „of any concern to the people who live in this city who will be the long or short-term occupants of the skyscrapers and what defines the size of a building – a known group of users or the market (that is, partly or completely unknown users)“ (Fedor Kritovac) Other perfectly legitimate questions are where the occupants and visitors eat (a number of implications about the character of the skyscraper arises from whether they eat inside or outside); how traffic is organised (e. g. how it flows in) or parking, or leisure, and so on. Amnesia is manifested as a loss of memory, „including the silent question about the real life of skyscrapers in Zagreb. What is going in and around them? What is it like when a fire breaks out in flats or garages in Srednjaci, Branimirova ulica or Siget...? What is it like when lifts break down and the pipes run dry? Are flats popular or not? What is it like at the square in front of the Chromos Tower in any given season? Why do they even call this space in front of the Cibona Hall a 'square'?“ These questions and the issues raised by the current trend in Croatian architecture support the thesis that architecture is not independent of society, and that society sets the frame for a certain piece of architecture or even an entire period. However, Croatia still does not

know where it stands with architecture, just like with ICTY, the secret service, and the payment of scholarships, it still vacillates, so there is little wonder that the line between modern and postmodern is blurred or that Croatian architecture combines evidently elitist modernist functions and often utterly confused postmodernist features. While Stefano Boeri, the selector of the 38th Zagreb Salon (of architecture) was saying that Croatia could play a major role in the future of European architecture, Antun Vujić, former minister of culture, was expressing his satisfaction with the fact that Croatian architects no longer shunned tradition. Sadly enough, neither of them was right. The paradox of Croatian architecture and urbanism is therefore no paradox at all; it is fully in line with the political setting defining „contemporary“ Croatia, regardless of whether we speak about opposition in position or position in opposition. The apotheosis of the skyscraper, which seems only to be beginning, clearly shows that Croatia has not yet found its place, and even though it no longer struggles with traditional limitations, it can not forsake them. As we have seen, this is less related to implementation, which only seemingly defies Wittgenstein's thesis that aesthetics is also ethically, and more with (dys)function and final use.