

# GOLD

---

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS  
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND  
VOL. 33**

Edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad

Published in Melbourne, Australia, by SAHANZ, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-7340-5265-0

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

**Dijana Alić.** "Cultural Coexistence Of The City: A Precious But Resilient Commodity." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad, 14-20. Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016.

All efforts have been undertaken to ensure that authors have secured appropriate permissions to reproduce the images illustrating individual contributions. Interested parties may contact the editors.

## **CULTURAL COEXISTENCE OF THE CITY: A PRECIOUS BUT RESILIENT COMMODITY**

*More than two decades ago, in a special catalogue titled WARchitecture: Sarajevo Urbicide (Sarajevo, June 1993), the Association of Bosnian Architects recorded the destruction of Sarajevo's cultural heritage during the 1992 siege of the city. The associated exhibition, which travelled to numerous European and US cities, was publicised by statements such as "Genocide and urbicide" and "The spirit of the city", which passionately highlighted the importance of architecture to cultural identity. The term 'urbicide' came to signify the links between Bosnian ethnic and religious persecution and the systematic destruction of Bosnian architectural heritage. In the context of Sarajevo, destruction of significant cultural and religious buildings was seen as an attempt to deliberately destroy the city's 'spirit' of ethnic coexistence and religious acceptance.*

*This paper explores the connections between Sarajevo's architectural destruction and its multicultural identity. It focuses on specific representations of those connections: the city architects' exhibition and catalogue, showing the physical extent of the destruction; a special issue of an architectural journal published during the siege, presenting the impact of war on both the built fabric and citizens' daily lives; and a postcard series, also published during the siege, showing the intention to eradicate the memory of multicultural coexistence and cosmopolitanism. It will be argued that Bosnian faith in the importance of Sarajevo's religious and ethnic heterogeneity became the city's most precious commodity, and one that transcended the physicality of buildings.*

## The Assault of Sarajevo

On 6 April 1992, the siege of Sarajevo began.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Sarajevo was the capital of Bosnia and Hercegovina, one of the six republics of the former Socialist and Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. The siege was prompted by Bosnia and Hercegovina's declaration of independence from the disintegrating state, and it inaugurated a long war that engulfed the former Yugoslavia. It also marked the beginning of regular brutal assaults on the city by artillery, tanks and other weaponry. It lasted nearly four years, becoming the longest siege in the history of modern warfare, outlasting the infamous siege of Leningrad by a year. The indiscriminate attacks became a daily occurrence, and within the siege's first year most buildings, including historic monuments such as the Gazi Husref Beg's mosque and Baščaršija mosque, came under direct fire. The buildings of the historic Baščaršija precinct and the National Assembly were also targeted. As Sarajevo and many other historic towns and cities (such as Dubrovnik and Mostar) came under attack, the term "urbicide" was used to describe their destruction and the particularly potent assault on the meanings associated with their built form.<sup>2</sup> The aggression was presented as cultural genocide and urbicide, the systematic destruction of aspects of urban life that symbolised Bosnia's coexisting communities. Implicit in urbicide is the desire to annihilate the city's collective coexistence and the ways of life it fosters.<sup>3</sup>

As with other wars, political debate shaped media coverage of the war and underpinned the perceptions and discussions surrounding it. Spectacles of the daily assaults on Sarajevo were broadcast widely, the world watching on helplessly. As foreign journalists and media reported the civilian carnage, a group of city architects and artists took it upon themselves to record the destruction and to show it to the world. Their intended audience was anyone who was interested, and their approaches to documenting and presenting their findings were framed by shared professional knowledge and a belief in the universal value of art and architecture. The project that resulted in a catalogue and exhibition was one insider expression of the cultural devastation of Sarajevo; a special issue of the *ARH* journal - like the exhibition and catalogue, titled *WARchitecture* - brought together representations of the impacts of the city siege; and a series of postcards by the group Trio engaged critically, through a global visual language, with the politics of war and cultural destruction. This paper considers these interventions.

## Documenting dDestruction

In 1993, the Association of Architects of Bosnia and Hercegovina (*Asocijacija arhitekata D.A.S.*),<sup>4</sup> in collaboration with Sarajevo's art and heritage institutions, published *WARchitecture, Sarajevo Urbicide*, an exhibition catalogue that recorded the destruction of the city's significant built fabric and structures.<sup>5</sup> The organisers' intent was to "professionally document the real proportions of the war destruction, which are of the highest level on some buildings" and vitally important to the "urban development, functioning and an identity of the city of Sarajevo."<sup>6</sup> The catalogue comprises loose sheets on the various damaged buildings and places. It is organised, the authors state, to represent "an open structure which enables further supplementation of data from other cities all over the Republic."<sup>7</sup> The introduction broadly and briefly describes four 'periods' of Sarajevo's architectural development in chronological order: Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, the period between the two World Wars and contemporary. The descriptions sketch out the unique characteristics of these periods, as well as their continuing ties and their interdependence.

Each catalogue entry follows a similar format: a short text that captures a brief history of the building accompanied by photographs and plan diagrams illustrating the extent of damage to the building. The text is divided into a number of headed sections (some or all of which are occasionally omitted, such as for large urban-scale descriptions). These sections include the name of the building, the architect (if known), the period (date of the building's construction/period), the address, a general description (with no heading), the gross area (in square metres), the degree of destruction (percentage) and a description of the damage. The content is presented in parallel translations in French, English and German, and in some versions in Arabic, too, demonstrating an intention to address an international audience. The general description of each building, comprising the majority of the text for each entry, gives information such as the genesis of the building, its relationship to larger trends/historical periods/other structures, a general morphological

and/or stylistic description, and a brief assessment of its value and significance. The latter assessment differs for the various buildings, from an exemplar of a particular style/period or a manifestation of particular building technologies/techniques to the location for significant social activities/programs or its aesthetic value.

The general structure and approach to the description and documentation suggest systematic efficiency and intended brevity, indicating an underlying sense of urgency. The presentation follows professional architectural conventions, with each sheet including a short textual description, a site plan with the building footprint and a view of the structure. The site plan contains the key information: the number of shells or mortars that landed on or around the structure. The approach and focus on quantifiable data appeals to a sense of objectivity; the description of these artefacts sets them apart from any possible 'political' interpretation, as suggested in the introduction to the catalogue.

The catalogue builds on what Susan Sontag in her well-known *Regarding the Pain of Others* suggests is the advantage of photographs in uniting "two contradictory features": the objectivity of the photograph and the photographer's point of view.<sup>8</sup> Photography's credentials of objectivity, Sontag writes, are inbuilt: "Yet, they always had, necessarily, a point of view. They were a record of the real - incontrovertible, as no verbal account, however impartial, could be - since a machine was doing the recording. And they bore witness to the real - since a person had been there to take them."<sup>9</sup>

The catalogue sent a message to the outside world that the destruction was real. It was quantifiable. It was measurable. It was verified by the photographer who witnessed and recorded it. "To be sure, a cityscape is not made of flesh", writes Sontag of the destruction of city fabric, "still, sheared off the buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the street". She lists the cities under consideration, "Kabul, Sarajevo, East Mostar, Grozny, sixteen acres of lower Manhattan after September 11th, 2001, the refugee camp in Jenin ..."<sup>10</sup>

The professional responsibility of the contributing architects binds them to accuracy and precision, and the catalogue engenders a genuine, heartfelt interest in the urban form and its destruction. The images provide evidence of the destruction. "Look", Sontag writes, "the photographs say, *this* is what it's like. This is what *war* does. And *that*, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins* [all emphasis in the original]."<sup>11</sup> Although the catalogue presents no formal political platform, its emphasis on photographic evidence presented a clear call for the world to act and to halt the destruction.

The accompanying exhibition *Urbicide - Sarajevo a Wounded City* was presented in Sarajevo's City Gallery in November 1993. In March 1994, it left Sarajevo and travelled to a number of European and U.S. cities. The exhibition's promotional slogans passionately promoted the role of the architects in protecting the city's urban fabric: 'In circumstances of general destruction', 'Genocide and urbicide', 'Where life is reduced to elementary needs', 'Architects maintain their creative energy' and 'The spirit of the city'.

### The Human Cost of Cultural Destruction

The objectivity and raw reality offered in the exhibition catalogue was balanced by the personal and emotive encounters presented in the special issue of *ARH, Magazine for Architecture, Town Planning and Design*. Also titled *WARchitecture*, the special issue was published in June 1993.<sup>12</sup> Created in conjunction with the catalogue and the exhibition, the journal presented the broader context from which the exhibition emerged. A call for contributions asked the authors to "comment on the situation we are in, from your personal, social and professional point of view ... You can do it by a text, drawing, poem or something at your own choice",<sup>13</sup> allowing for a variety of responses.

The journal presented a wide range of issues relevant to the citizens of the city under siege, including a philosophical contemplation of "war, architecture, and town", the global aspects of the town's destruction, the significance of the buildings under attack and their destruction, as well as stories of the daily lives of Sarajevo's citizens. The opening statement highlighted the fact the journal was produced under extraordinary conditions, "... written by oil-lamp light and with the sound of a rocket launcher, which is the atmosphere of our everyday lives. Luck be with those who survive. Good luck, Sarajevo!"<sup>14</sup> The difficulties and hardship under which it was produced were also expressed in an introductory statement by a well-known city architect, Said Jamaković: "This volume of the 'ARH' journal was made during the holocaust, but we live in hope that it will end one day. The horrors we used to watch in films are but a pale reflection of all the psychological and physical harassment which has become a part of our everyday life. We live in

constant fear for our children, our dearest, in fear for mere survival.”<sup>15</sup> The tragedy of citizens’ daily existence was captured by a segment entitled ‘In Memoriam’ and dedicated to colleagues killed during the war. A page per person memorialised the ten city architects and artists killed in the attacks, with each entry presenting a picture of the lost colleague and a short description of their life achievements.

An article on daily life in the city warns citizens that chopping the trees for firewood will have devastating effects on the city’s climate, while another, titled ‘Eggless Mayonaise’ [*sic*], a reference to make-do conditions in the city, presents “sequences and characters” from everyday life. “Out of a sequence of sketches, I pick out some of them, which seem to be characteristic. At first sight, they have nothing to do with Architecture itself, but I claim that, as it would be noticeable afterwards, all of them are interwoven from the same threads, events, and situated in the same space and context.”<sup>16</sup>

Unlike *WARchitecture, Sarajevo Urbicide*, in which the political message was subsumed within the exhibition and catalogue’s visual format, the journal clearly signalled its political stance. In his ‘Framework’ for the issue, city architect Jamaković names Serbia and Montenegro as the perpetrators of the destruction and declares the “devastation of the town of Sarajevo ... clearly reveals the intention to destroy both the people and traces of civilisation in this area.”<sup>17</sup> The documentation he and his colleagues prepared and collated, he said, was made in the face of world resistance to comprehending the extent and gravity of the crimes committed. Given the limitations of the foreign press to fully acknowledge the destruction, he suggests the onus to report was on the local population:

The escalation of devastation and killing often made the already collected material outdated, and the uncertainty of the ending of tragedies of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina makes it impossible to fully recognize the crime. We are often discouraged by an incredible disproportion between various declarations, decisions, rhetoric supports to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the indolence of the world to the people who only wish to live in the freedom, which means to be a part of that world. This journal is a document of the time, made in the course of the events from April to September, 1992, in Sarajevo.<sup>18</sup>

Pavle Mašić’s article, ‘Sarajevo Symbols’, argues that the religious buildings represent multi-religious and multi-ethnic coexistence - the city’s core attributes, which the nationalist paramilitary forces were trying to destroy. “Cultural heritage is a remembrance of mankind”, the author argued, referring to the presence of mosques, an Orthodox church, Catholic cathedral and Jewish synagogue within the parameters of the historic quarter, the Ottoman-established precinct of Baščaršija. Carefully describing each monument in its historical context and physical location, Mašić presents “how much and to what extent the cultural heritage is destroyed”, with an aim of demonstrating that the attacks on “mihrabs [niches in the walls of a mosque] and pulpits, mimbars [steps for a preacher in a mosque] and iconostases [a reference to Orthodox churches], towers and clock towers ...” are all a part of deliberate attacks on Sarajevo - “by itself, is one large symbol” of peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence.<sup>19</sup>

A drawing by renowned architect and academic Juraj Neidhardt, who, who presented heterogeneity as fundamental to Bosnian cultural identity, illustrates the opening sequence of the journal. The drawing, titled ‘From old to new pyramid’, presents Bosnian architectural achievements as a contribution to the world that goes well beyond the local context. He represents the ‘five millenniums’, or human architectural achievements and developments, with Bosnia represented by Ali-Paša’s Mosque. Sarajevo’s mosque appears alongside major historic monuments such as the Pyramids and the Parthenon, as well as more contemporary achievements such as the Sydney Opera House. This drawing confirmed for Neidhardt and his close colleague Dušan Grabrijan the importance of small cultures in the development of world art. It also presented Bosnian architectural heritage as a valuable contribution to world culture and civilisation.

Covering the impact of war on everything inside the siege zone, the journal presents a comprehensive picture of the effects of war on a city and its people. “The photographs”, writes Sontag, “are a means of making ‘real’ (or more ‘real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore.”<sup>20</sup> The articles, the descriptions of the daily lives of ordinary people, their struggle to provide shelter and protection for their families, all, in Sontag’s words, provide opportunities for the international community to regard “at a distance, through the medium of photography - other people’s pain.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Politics of Postcards

The graphic design group Trio used a series of postcards to publicise the war suffering and destruction. The three young graphic designers were well known in Sarajevo when the war started. The group worked in the tradition of political poster making, and designed award-winning album covers for Yugoslav bands, film posters and other publicity documents. The postcard series was part of the larger *WARchitecture* project and its distinctive card format implied the outgoing and postal nature of the message. "This document has been created in war circumstances. No paper, no inks, no electricity, no water. Just good will", declared the message on the back of each postcard design.<sup>22</sup>

The postcards established abstract and often satirical connections between renowned promotional and propaganda images and the desperation and tragedy of the situation in Bosnia. The iconography drew on images recognisable to a Western audience and connected with the specific conditions in Sarajevo. The postcard titled 'Sarajevo Winter 1992' showed the city's architectural icons, such as the Catholic cathedral and the historic Town Hall, scrambled together on a black background under a title referencing the heyday of the Winter Olympic Games, held in Sarajevo in 1984. A similar message was depicted more clearly in a postcard '1984 Sarajevo 1994', which showed the five Olympic Rings punctured by gunfire. The postcard 'Wake up, Europe!' referenced the well-known World War I propaganda poster 'Wake up America'. With its changed slogan, background of Sarajevo in ruins and its subtitle – 'Sarajevo calls every man women and child' - the postcard challenges Europe to get involved and questions the lack of support for Bosnians.

Playing on the commercial and economic interests of large corporations during war, one postcard is a take on Andy Warhol's famous 1962 artwork *Campbell Soup Cans*. The well known 'Campbell's condensed' slogan is transformed to 'Sarajevo's condensed', and the can is punctured by bullet holes. Another postcard shows the city name 'Sarajevo', written in the recognisable style and font of the Coca-Cola sign, but here it is written in two scripts - Latin and Cyrillic.



FIGURE 1 "Sarajevo Winter 1992" postcard by Trio graphic designers. Source: Design "Trio" Sarajevo.



FIGURE 2a and 2b "1984 Sarajevo 1994" and "Wake up, Europe!" postcards by Trio graphic designers. Source: Design "Trio" Sarajevo.

The postcard in Latin carries the message 'Enjoy Sarajevo 1993' while, while the one in Cyrillic claims 'It will never be Sarajevo 1993' - a play on the fact that Serbian language is written in Cyrillic and the message that Sarajevo will never become a Serbian city.



FIGURE 3a and 3b “Enjoy Sarajevo 1993” and “It will never be Sarajevo 1993” postcards by Trio graphic designers. Source: Design “Trio” Sarajevo.

Unlike the content of the exhibition, catalogue and journal, which strive for precision and academic recognition, the postcards sent a sardonic message about the absurdity of war. In an interview published in 1995, one Trio member stated: “We wanted people to think about Sarajevo whenever they saw the Coke logo, but the word enjoy also has a special meaning. We think there is a lot of cynicism about our fate. We wanted to show what we feel about this.”<sup>23</sup>

The format of a postcard allowed the message to be easily and widely spread. A clear and powerful message established through recognisable imagery allowed Trio to circumvent the elaborate task of searching for fine points of connection between sender and recipient. Pop art and shared cultural references ensured that both sender and recipient spoke the same language. With the city under assault and the buildings and heritage tumbling around them, these works conveyed a spirit of resistance, defiance and survival.

**A City in Pain, a City on Display**

Following the 1992–6 war in former Yugoslavia, a large number of historians, independent writers and prominent thinkers of international justice argued for inseparable connections between the deliberate, systematic devastation of built heritage and attempts to destroy cultural identity of the people. The Association of Bosnian Architects’ concerted effort to document and reveal the extent of the destruction of Sarajevo’s culturally significant buildings highlighted the impact of this damage on collective identity and the memory of peaceful coexistence in the city.

The various representations of the city’s destruction captured the complexities of city life and the effects of the war on the population. The involvement of the city’s architect in organising and presenting the exhibition and the catalogue ensured professionalism and confirmed the destruction was real and the people recording were its witnesses. The depth of pieces presented in the magazine, which included sketches of daily life and considered academic responses, added a human dimension to the reports, while the postcards extended the complexities of the message sent out from the besieged city. The collaged images in the postcards combined the past and present of Sarajevo, connected the city’s icons to international counterparts and framed local events within a broader context of previous wars. They showed that histories are shared, just as responsibilities for the future should be also shared.

These differing forms of representation conveyed a comprehensive and inclusive depiction of the impact of war on Sarajevo. Although presented in printed formats, which have limited political power, especially when published in a besieged city, the message was highly political. It was an appeal to the world to stop the carnage and protect the city and its population. If the term ‘urbicide’ describes the ideological battle between the heterogeneous, multicultural, and cosmopolitan values and the ethnic, ethno-nationalist, and tribal forces, then, the city artists and architects argued,



the war-damaged city of Sarajevo represented that conflict in its physical form. The *WARchitecture, Sarajevo Urbicide* project - comprising the exhibition, catalogue, journal and postcards - connected the real places of Sarajevo to its citizens' experience and understanding. It sent a detailed and comprehensive record of the violent destruction of the city of Sarajevo to the outside world, and the architecture, it demonstrated, plays a crucial role in defining the identity of the city and its people.

## Endnotes

- 1 The Siege of Sarajevo lasted from 6 April 1992 to 29 February 1996. During its 1425 days, more than 11,500 people were killed.
- 2 It is beyond the scope of this paper to establish the exact origin or first use of the term 'urbicide' in relation to the destruction of Sarajevo. Professor Bogdan Bogdanović from Belgrade University is commonly credited for introducing the term into the discussions about the destruction of cities of the former Yugoslavia. 'Urbicide' is often used to set up an oppositional relationship between the heterogeneous, multicultural, cosmopolitan on the one hand and ethnic, ethno-nationalist, tribal on the other. For further discussion, see Andrew Herscher, "Urbicide, Urbanism, and Urban Destruction in Kosovo," *Theory & Event*, 10, no. 2 (2007), [https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v010/10.2herscher.html](https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2herscher.html) (accessed on 10 January 2016). Herscher suggests that since the war, urbicide has been used to describe the violence against the cities such as Sarajevo and Mostar.
- 3 Herscher credits Professor Bogdan Bogdanović for using the term 'urbicide' in presenting "the destruction of cities as flagrant, wanton opposition to the highest values of civilization". See Herscher, "Urbicide, Urbanism, and Urban Destruction in Kosovo".
- 4 Architectural Association (*Asocijacija arhitekata Bosne i Hercegovine*) was previously called Architectural Union of Bosnian and Hercegovina (*Saveza arhitekata BiH*).
- 5 *WARchitecture, Sarajevo Urbicide*, Association of Architects DAS SABIH, 1993, exhib. cat., np. The project was undertaken in association with other institutions, such as the Special Unit for Cultural Rescue of City Civil Defence, the architectural unit of the headquarters for the protection of cultural heritage, the Commission for Cultural Heritage Rescue and City Assembly.
- 6 *WARchitecture*, "Introduction," np.
- 7 *WARchitecture*, "Introduction," np.
- 8 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 23.
- 9 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 23.
- 10 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 7.
- 11 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 7.
- 12 *WARchitecture: ARH, Magazine for Architecture, Town Planning and Design*, no. 24, June 1993. The project was undertaken in association with other institutions, such as the Special Unit for Cultural Rescue of City Civil Defence, the architectural unit of the republican headquarters for protection of cultural heritage, the Commission for Cultural Heritage Rescue and City Assembly.
- 13 *WARchitecture, ARH*, 100.
- 14 *WARchitecture, ARH*, 100.
- 15 Said Jamaković, "Framework", in *WARchitecture, ARH*, 8.
- 16 Ilica Prolić, "Eggless Mayonnaise, sequences and characters of my everyday life," *WARchitecture, ARH*, 72.
- 17 Jamaković, "Framework", 8.
- 18 Jamaković, "Framework", 8.
- 19 Pavle Mašić, "Sarajevo Symbols," in *WARchitecture, ARH*, 42.
- 20 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 6.
- 21 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 11.
- 22 "This document has been created in war circumstances. No paper, no inks, no electricity, no water. Just good will", postcards by Trio graphic designers. Credit: Design "Trio" Sarajevo.



- 23 Tyler Marshall, "Market Scene. Ironic Postcards from a City at War: Two graphic artists portray the soul of Sarajevo from a palette of dark humor, anger and hope," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1995, [http://articles.latimes.com/print/19950328/news/wr47888\\_1\\_darkhumor](http://articles.latimes.com/print/19950328/news/wr47888_1_darkhumor) (accessed 15 February 2016).