



**CLOSE-UP OF THE OFFICIALLY  
ADOPTED VERSION  
OF THE DETAILED URBAN PLAN  
OF VRBIČ, FIRST IN A SERIES  
OF REVISIONS THAT WOULD  
DRASTICALLY DEGRADE THE  
FRAGILE BALANCE OF THE TWO  
CO-EXISTING URBAN SYSTEMS**

DETAIL OFICIÁLNE PRIJATEJ VERZIE  
PODROBNÉHO ÚZEMNÉHO PLÁNU  
VRBIČU, PRVEJ ZO SÉRIE REVÍZIÍ,  
KTORÉ BY DRASTICKY ZHORŠILI  
KREHKÚ ROVNOVÁHU DVOCH  
KOEXISTUJÚCICH URBANISTICKÝCH  
SYSTÉMOV

**Source** Zdroj: Detailed Urban Plan  
of Vrbič [PUP Vrbič], Urban Planning  
Bureau of the City of Zagreb, 1987

# Foregrounding of Individual Lots in Zagreb – From Sensible Critique Towards Rampant Speculation

Otázka individuálnych pozemkov v Záhrebe  
– od zmysluplnej kritiky k búrlivým špekuláciám

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Táto štúdia sleduje vývoj zriedkavej, Západom ovplyvnenej stratégie komplexnej urbánnej obnovy v kontexte neskorých fáz socialistického územného plánovania vo východoeurópskych krajinách. Táto stratégia sa uplatnila v centrálnej časti Záhrebu tvorenej pozostatkami kapitalistických priemyselných komplexov a pásmi neformálnej vidieckej výstavby, ktoré boli „vynechané“ vo fáze rozvoja mesta po druhej svetovej vojne. V rámci prebiehajúcej diskusie o tom, či sú oprávnené tvrdenia o jedinečných charakteristikách socialistických miest v porovnaní s ich západnými náprotivkami, je Záhreb viac než reprezentatívnym príkladom mnohých často citovaných javov a prvkov organizácie mesta v tomto referenčnom rámci. R. A. French a F. E. I. Hamilton vo svojej zásadnej publikácii *Socialistické mesto* z roku 1979 abstrahujú urbanistickú formu a štruktúru Záhrebu až na úroveň prototypového príkladu rastu východoeurópskeho socialistického mesta. Autori dokonca podčiarkujú všeobecný charakter centrálnej štvrte Trnje a považujú ho za charakteristickú zónu socialistickej transformácie či obnovy a zároveň za jasný príklad pokusu o vytvorenie nového socialistického centra mesta. Ivan Szelenyi túto štruktúrnu analýzu rozšíril o tézu, že závažný nedostatok investícií a neschopnosť pustiť sa do komplexných plánov búrania a čistenia v 'prechodných zónach' nachádzajúcich sa medzi historickým centrom mesta a zelenými oblasťami, kam expandovali nové sídliská, sú jednou z hlavných čŕt socialistického rozvoja miest.

Hlavné body odchýlenia od zavedeného kánonu územného plánovania neskorého socializmu spočívajú v miere neochoty záhrebských úradov zaoberať sa touto neformálnou historickou štruktúrou v strede mesta, ktorá viedla k nezvyčajnému pretrvávaniu jej rozsahu i významu, aj v navrhovanej stratégii riešenia z 80. rokov. Paralelne s úpadkom veľkoplošného plánovania sa v Záhrebe mohla rozvíjať sebareflexívna medzinárodná debata o územnom plánovaní, ktorá sa snažila aplikovať stratégie obnovy na úroveň všadeprítomných pretrvávajúcich poľnohospodárskych pozemkov. Rozvoju tejto debaty výrazne napomáhala špecifická geopolitická poloha Juhoslávie formálne sa nachádzajúcej mimo železnej opony, opatrne rozkročenej medzi Východom a Západom, ktorá sa v porovnaní s inými východoeurópskymi krajinami tešila relatívnej absencii obmedzení hospodárskej a intelektuálnej výmeny. Táto diskusia sa čoskoro začala presadzovať v plánovacom diskurze v Záhrebe a nakoniec sa stala vedúcim étosom posledného socialistického všeobecného

územného plánu. Miestni územní plánovači zamerali svoje úsilie na centrálnu oblasť Trnje posiatu roztrúsenými zónami neformálnej zástavby, niekoľko generácií odolávajúcu ambicióznym plánom premeniť ju na centrálnu reprezentatívnu a komerčnú časť Záhrebu, a postupne formulovali inovatívny systém obnovy mesta, ktorý by umožnil túto oblasť programovo a morfológicky začleniť do historického mesta. Opúšťajúci vtedy už vyčerpanú expanzívnu stratégiu veľkoplošného plánovania na zelenej lúke sa snažili zamerať budúci rozvoj mesta na zahusťovanie a zlepšovanie kvality predtým „vynechaných“ oblastí spolu s novým vedomím a ocenením osobitostí a zložitostí existujúcej poľnohospodárskej morfológie a rôznorodej zástavby. Osobitý a zámerný výber tohto druhu základných mestských vrstiev ako základu procesualnej obnovy mesta, ktorý by využil potenciál komerčných aj súkromných subjektov, sľuboval výrazne odlišný urbanistický výsledok ako prístup 'tabula rasa' uplatňovaný na vrchole modernistického územného plánovania len o desaťročie skôr. Hoci sa zdanlivo úplne upustilo od megaštruktúrnych alebo historizujúcich návrhov zo 70. a 80. rokov, procesualna a heterogénna podoba želaných konštitutívnych prvkov tohto nerealizovaného mesta predsa len prezrádza výraznú vieru v to, že sa Trnje stane novým metropolitným centrom, vieru, ktorá sa v následných neoliberalných sociálnych a urbanistických premenách ukázala komplexným spôsobom ako neadekvátna. Zložitý proces tvorby požadovaných výkonných dokumentov, absencia dostatočných kontrolných mechanizmov a následný nástup súkromného vlastníctva ako dominantnej priestorovej hodnoty však začali obdobie frenetickej individuálnej výstavby signalizujúce náhly koniec tohto experimentu.

Chvályhodná, no naivná viera v potenciál malých súkromných iniciatív, formulovaná výlučne prostredníctvom koncepčného rámca starostlivej obnovy miest vychádzajúceho z IBA, a schopnosť plánovačov riadiť tieto iniciatívy pri vytváraní živšej a heterogénnejestskej štruktúry ponúkajú pohľad na veľmi rozumný a ambiciózný plánovací program, ktorý sa však v následných neoliberalných sociálnych a mestských transformáciách ukázal ako úplne neadekvátny. Ide o vzácny príklad uplatnenia tohto prístupu vo východoeurópskych krajinách pred rokom 1990. Rozhodnutie aplikovať túto stratégiu nie na štruktúru mestských blokov z 19. alebo zo začiatku 20. storočia, ale na neformálnu a poľnohospodársku morfológiu historických periférií, navyše robí túto stratégiu potenciálne jedinečnou dokonca

aj v kontexte nedávnych komparatívnych štúdií v oblasti dejín globálnej bytovej výstavby a stratégií obnovy miest. Konečné zlyhanie tejto ušľachtilej stratégie napomohlo práve neoliberálnym transformáciám a urbanisti sa ocitli v ťažkej pozícii – medzi tlakom na dereguláciu a túžbou zachovať zvyšky socialistickej plánovacej kontroly zakotvené ešte stále v plánovacej legislatíve a praxi. Skutočnosť, že táto schéma nepriamo a nevedomky ulahčila nástup týchto procesov, ponúka alternatívny výklad doteraz prijímaného názoru, ktorý stratu kontroly nad rozvojom miest považuje za nutnú charakteristiku prechodu na kapitalizmus, namiesto toho, aby ju považoval za vyvrcholenie

procesu spusteného o desaťročie skôr. Pretrvávanie historickej a vlastníckej štruktúry Trnje aj v 21. storočí, štruktúry, čo prežila údajne neobmedzené právne a plánovacie prostriedky, ktoré mali k dispozícii socialisticke orgány, predstavuje jedinečnú príležitosť a zároveň náročnú úlohu pre súčasné územné plánovanie pokúšajúce sa o novú inštanciu stratégie obnovy miest. Takú, čo by bola uspôsobená tomuto špecifickému miestu a zároveň sociálne inkluzívna, na rozdiel od laissez-faire rozvoja zameraného na zisk, ktorý bol (a stále je) synonymom postkomunistických transformácií vo všetkých veľkomestách východnej či juhovýchodnej Európy.

## Introduction

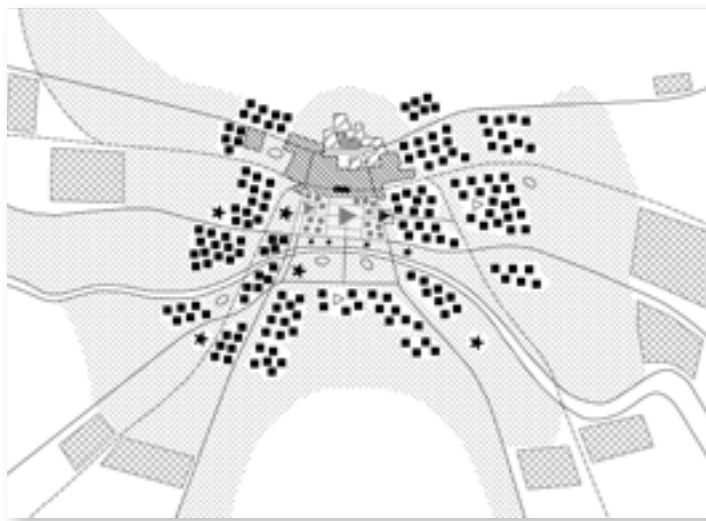
This article traces the evolution of a rare Western-inflected comprehensive urban renewal strategy within the context of the late stages of socialist urban planning development in Eastern European countries. This strategy was deployed in a central urban area of Zagreb, consisting of vestiges of capitalist industrial complexes and swaths of informal and rural construction left as “skipped-over” by the post-WWII development of the city. Considering the ongoing debate<sup>1</sup> about the validity of claiming distinct characteristics of socialist cities as opposed to their Western counterparts, Zagreb is more than representative of some of the most-cited phenomena and elements of urban organisation in this frame of reference. Furthermore, in the seminal 1979 publication on the Socialist City, the urban form and structure of Zagreb is abstracted to the level of a prototypical example<sup>2</sup> of the growth of an East European metropolis of this type. The authors even emphasise the ubiquitous nature of the central Trnje district as both a characteristic zone of socialist transition or renewal, and a clear-cut example of an attempt to create a new socialist city centre. Ivan Szelenyi expanded on this structural analysis by proposing that the overwhelming lack of investment and the inability to engage in comprehensive campaigns of demolition and clearance in *transitional zones*<sup>3</sup> situated between the historical city centre and the areas of greenfield expansion of new housing settlements, are one of the main characteristics of socialist urban development.

However, the noteworthy reluctance of the Zagreb authorities to deal with this historical inner-city informal fabric<sup>4</sup>, leading to its uncharacteristic persistence in scope and significance, and the proposed 1980s strategy of dealing with it, are major points of divergence from the established canon of late socialist urban planning. Greatly facilitated by the specific geo-political position of Yugoslavia formally standing outside the Iron Curtain, carefully straddling the East-West divide and enjoying the relative absence of restrictions<sup>5</sup> of economic and intellectual exchange as compared to other Eastern European countries, Zagreb was able to nurture a self-reflective and international urban planning debate that culminated in the adoption of the 1986 General Urban Plan.<sup>6</sup> With

THE HIGHLIGHTED AREA OF TRNJE AS THE LOCUS OF THE NEW CITY CENTRE, IN THE IDEALISED DIAGRAMMATIC MAP OF ZAGREB AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE GROWTH OF A TYPICAL EAST EUROPEAN SOCIALIST CITY

OBLASŤ TRNJE ZVÝRAZNEŇÁ AKO NOVÉ CENTRUM MESTA NA IDEALIZOVANEJ SCHEMATICKEJ MAPE ZÁHREBU ZNÁZORŇUJÚCEJ RAST TYPICKÉHO VÝCHODOEURÓPSKEHO SOCIALISTICKEHO MESTA

**Authors** Autori: Melita Čavlović, Antun Sevišek, source of data French, R. A. and Hamilton, F.E.I., 1979, p. 228



**AN EXAMPLE OF ONE OF THE HUNDREDS OF INFORMAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF TRNJE THAT HAVE OUTLIVED NUMEROUS GENERATIONS OF URBAN RENEWAL ATTEMPTS**

PRÍKLAD JEDNEJ ZO STOVIEK NEFORMÁLNYCH STAVIEB V TRNJE, KTORÉ PREŽILI MNOHO GENERÁCIÍ POKUSOV O OBNOVU MESTA

Photo Foto: Melita Čavlović, Antun Sevšek, 2023



the introduction of “careful urban renewal”<sup>7</sup> as one of the main structural elements of the plan, it represents a rare<sup>8</sup> example of a pre-1990s deployment of this approach in East European countries. Furthermore, the decision not to implement this strategy on the 19th or early 20th-century urban block fabric, but on the informal and agricultural urban morphology of historical peripheries, makes this proposal potentially unique, even in the context of recent comparative studies<sup>9</sup> in the history of global housing construction and urban renewal strategies. The ultimate failure of this noble strategy facilitated the neoliberal transformations that followed after the fall of communism, leaving the city planners in a difficult limbo between the pressure to deregulate and the desire to maintain vestiges of socialist planning control still embedded in the planning legislation and practice.<sup>10</sup> The persistence of the historical fabric and ownership structure of Trnje in the 21st century, surviving the supposedly unlimited legal and planning means at the disposal of socialist authorities, represents both a unique opportunity and a daunting task to contemporary planners striving to achieve a new iteration of a place-sensitive and socially inclusive urban renewal strategy, diverging from the laissez-faire profit-driven developments that were (and still are) synonymous with the post-communist transformations in all major urban centres of this vast region.

### **The Importance of Trnje**

With its uncompromising centrifugal expansion, prioritisation of distinct zoning rules and primacy of vehicular traffic, the 1971 General Urban Plan of Zagreb, the first official plan after WWII, represented the apotheosis of high modernist planning. By the late 1970s, however, some of its key tenets were being tested, both by the gradual disappearance of available greenfield “turf” for the expansion of housing settlements, and by the increasing wariness within the planning profession toward continuing the idea and practice of building housing settlements on remote peripheral sites.<sup>11</sup> In fact, as early as 1975, almost all the coveted “free” surfaces were exhausted, and the Second Midterm Plan from 1976-1980 was tasked with the daunting prospect of preparing building lots for over 43,000 new flats while demolishing over 8,000 existing ones, primarily situated in central clusters of substandard dwellings. Previous generations of planners “skipped over” these lots in favour of vast expanses of land unencumbered by existing conditions.<sup>12</sup> In consequence, the city had to embark on a massive urban reconstruction campaign that was, despite the 1958 *Act on nationalisation of tenement buildings and construction land*, an exceedingly complex and expensive task, since all the current inhabitants had to be provided with adequate replacement housing, either in the same area or, more often, in remote newly-built urban settlements. Nowhere was this situation more complex than in the central urban area between the railway and the river Sava, encompassing the early 20th



**THE REMAINING INFORMAL FRAGMENTS OF CENTRAL ZAGREB OVERLAID WITH THE TRAFFIC THOROUGHFARES AND "RESERVATIONS FOR THE CENTRE OF THE METROPOLITAN CITY" FROM THE 1971 GENERAL PLAN – AUTHORS' ILLUSTRATION ON THE 1968 ORTOPHOTO MAP OF ZAGREB**

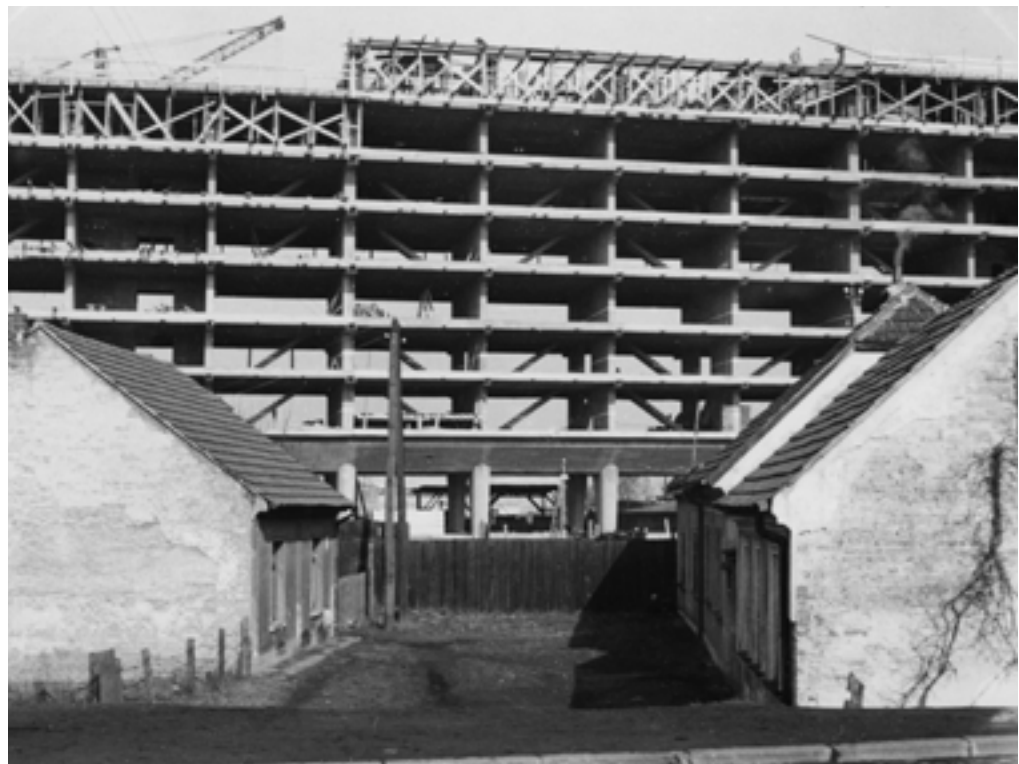
POZOSTÁVAJÚCE NEFORMÁLNE FRAGMENTY V CENTRE ZÁHREBU PREKRYTÉ DOPRAVNÝMI TEPNAMI A „REZERVÁCIAMI PRE CENTRUM METROPOLY“ Z ÚZEMNÉHO PLÁNU Z ROKU 1971 – ILUSTRÁCIA AUTORA A AUTORKY NA ORTOFOTOMAPE ZÁHREBU Z ROKU 1968

**Source** Zdroj: ISPU. 2023. Geoportal [online]. Available at: <https://ispu.mgipu.hr/>, © Croatian State Geodetic Administration

**VIOLENT SUPERIMPOSITION OF MODERNIST HIGH-RISES AMONG THE INFORMAL DWELLINGS**

NÁSILNÉ VRSTVENIE MODERNISTICKÝCH VÝŠKOVÝCH BUDOV MEDZI NEFORMÁLNYM BÝVANÍM

**Source** Zdroj: The Collection of Photographs, MGZ fot-3331. Zagreb City Museum

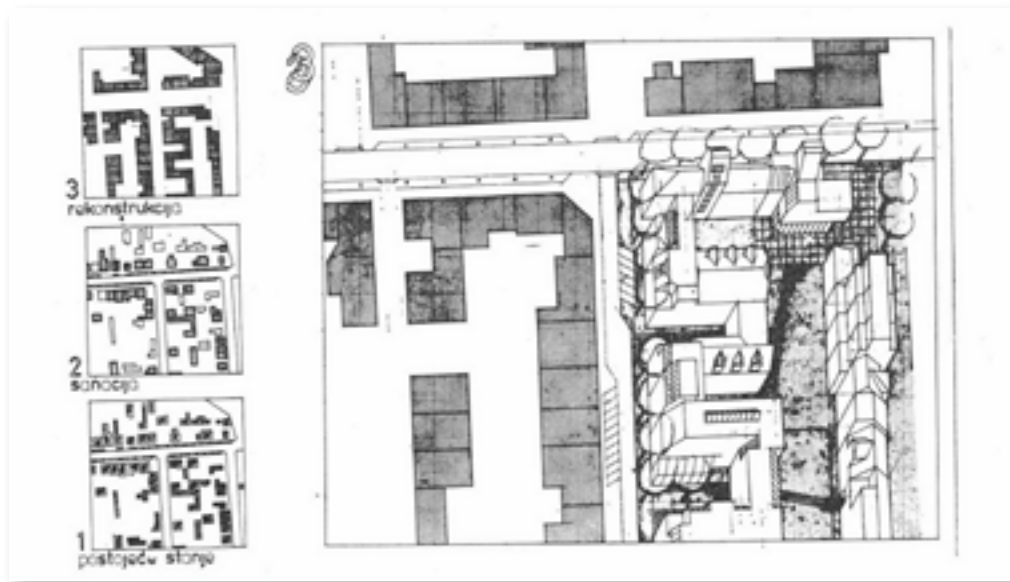


century informal settlements of Trnje. Despite being proclaimed the locus of New Zagreb's expansion, both in the 1936 and the 1949 regulatory plan proposals, comprehensive efforts of reconstruction were continuously put off. Planners and municipal authorities settled instead for the intensive realisation of a few representative buildings and complexes tactically inserted exclusively in large empty lots, with exceedingly ambitious architectural projects tiptoeing around, among, and sometimes even over the growing concentrations of informal dwellings. The main planning strategy in dealing with these lots was to declare large swaths of the area "reservations for the centre of the metropolitan city"<sup>13</sup>, while simultaneously imposing comprehensive bans on any new constructions, or even incremental improvements of living conditions. This effective freezing of the status quo left thousands of inhabitants in a state of perpetual expectation and uncertainty, holding onto their humble plots, in expectation of the announced demolition of their homes and the realisation of the city centre. While construction in these areas was de jure prohibited, the prospective builders continuously probed the cracks in the regulatory system, either resorting to bribes of lower-level municipal officials or braving fines in hopes of the reluctance of officials to execute demolition orders once the houses were inhabited. Furthermore, the continuous evolution of the legal framework, and the subsequent succession of planning documents often resulted in interregnum periods that manifested in wave after wave of populist legalisation deadlines that further entrenched the humble inhabitants of Trnje and created ever denser zones of built-up agricultural plots. Paradoxically, one of the biggest regulatory lapses occurred with the adoption of the 1958 Nationalisation Act, which introduced a three-year-long grace period that prompted numerous individual plot owners to start building houses on their empty land, effectively undermining the process of unimpeded urbanisation that this very law was intended to facilitate.<sup>14</sup>

## Defining a New Optic

Urban reconstruction, at the time, implied the total and complete negation of any existing natural or urban features, without exception deemed impediments to the implementation of comprehensive functionalist urban plans and the optimal organisation of industrialised large-scale construction processes. But, along with the realisation of impending scarcity of "tabula rasa" starting conditions, a new approach to the difficult issue of dealing with existing suburban fabric began to gather momentum. Zones of existing irregular street geometries with individual houses judged either worth retaining or too expensive to demolish began to be included along with the proposed typologies of industrialised housing construction. Furthermore, the arrangement of new housing blocks started to flow and adapt to local geometries, abandoning the strict orthogonal compositions prevalent up to that point. Streets, squares<sup>15</sup> and even semi-open blocks, proudly re-introduced as an internalised critique<sup>16</sup> of the initial results of earlier housing settlements, began to inform the conceptualisation of a new generation of urban design strategies.

A further impetus in formulating a new optic in dealing with the existing leftover suburban strata came from a series of studies led by architect Boško Budisavljević and urban planner Ratko Miličević, which arose from their experience at the postgraduate Drago Galić Workshop for Architecture.<sup>17</sup> Using photographs, films, sketches, site surveys, and interviews, they soon formulated a completely novel way of seeing this part of the city. Suddenly, the heterogeneity and haphazardness of quarters like Trnje appeared to have intrinsic ambient and even urban qualities, such that their systematic demolition, already proven difficult if not impossible, had to be reconsidered. The interest in their initial findings led to the commission in 1978 of a seminal study by the Zagreb Urban Planning Bureau that would prove prophetic in shifting the focus of prevalent urban planning dogmas.<sup>18</sup> The study proposed a pronounced move away from wanton demolition, towards an almost preservationist strategy of surgical removal of a mere 10% of the most problematic buildings, allowing for gradual improvements in the quality of public space, facilitating circulation and providing room for communal facilities and programmes. This method of tactical patching and utilising highly localised incremental improvements would prove fundamental in raising awareness about the potentials of existing agricultural geometry as a viable basis for urban re-development.<sup>19</sup> An extensive sociological inquiry, forming part of the study, gave a clear voice to the inhabitants, and against established notions found that the vast majority of them had no intention of leaving, preferring the opportunity to improve their living conditions rather than moving to a conventional apartment block. Rather than "sentencing" the inhabitants to 20 or 30 years of waiting for the impending resolution of this impasse with no chance to upgrade their homes, they concluded that



AN IDEALIZED FRAGMENT OF THE FABRIC OF TRNJE USED AS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE PROPOSED URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY

IDEALIZOVANÝ FRAGMENT ŠTRUKTÚRY TRNJE POUŽITÝ AKO UKÁŽKA NAVRHOVANEJ STRATÉGIE OBNOVY MESTA

Source Zdroj: Čovjek i prostor, 1984, 31(370), pp. 13–15

SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY FOR THE INFORMAL AREAS OF TRNJE; DEMOLITION IS USED SPARINGLY, PROPOSING INSTEAD THE IMPROVEMENT OF ROADS, PUBLIC SPACES, AND COMMUNAL FACILITIES

NÁČRT NAVRHOVANEJ STRATÉGIE OBNOVY NEFORMÁLNYCH ČASTÍ TRNJE; K DEMOLÍCII SA PRISTUJUJE ZRIEDKA, NAMIESTO NEJ SA NAVRHUJE ZLEPŠENIE CIEST, VEREJNÝCH PRIESTRANSTIEV A KOMUNÁLNYCH ZARIADENÍ

Source Zdroj: Budisavljević, B., Čaldarović, O., Miličević, R., Roca, Z., Vigna, F. and Zlatić, M., 1978



demolitions were not only too expensive and ineffective, but were also detrimental to the future urban development of the areas, since they would erase the social and symbolic fabric of a part of the city that thrived against all odds.<sup>20</sup> Tactical patching was now seen as having potential as a comprehensive strategy of improving the urban qualities of neglected parts of the city.

This approach was further expanded in the same authors' 1981 proposal for the central urban area of Zagreb, among a series of studies commissioned to provide insights into the future development of Trnje. With other entries either continuing with the long-established practice of proposing ever more complex megastructures or introducing the then-novel method of literal superimpositions of interpretations of the historical urban fabric, both assuming an almost complete neglect of the existing conditions, they were the only group<sup>21</sup> that systematically chose to appropriate as much of the existing street network and urban fabric into their scheme. Now working within the Urban Planning Bureau, they explicitly advocated the introduction of urban renewal strategies for existing areas of the city, rather than the continuation of the prevalent greenfield-based urban expansion. Furthermore, they proved that their densification scheme could actually accommodate a favourably high level of density at the fraction of the cost of total demolition and new construction.<sup>22</sup> The more solid buildings would be incorporated into an innovative typology of heterogeneous urban blocks, adapting to the existing street network and agricultural lot structure. Instead of advocating for uniformly designed buildings, this model sought a process and time-based approach to city development, allowing for the participation of different stakeholders and striving for a creative coexistence of the existing fabric with the new buildings.<sup>23</sup> This conceptual turn, along with the overwhelming public and professional support of the findings, helped nudge the overall direction of the planning discourse towards densification, consolidation of the existing urban fabric and place-making.

**THE BLIGHTED AREA OF  
INFORMAL HOUSING IN VRBIK,  
IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE START  
OF CONSTRUCTION OF DEGRADED  
AND EXPANDED VERSIONS OF THE  
PROPOSED OPEN BLOCKS**

ZDEVASTOVANÁ OBLAŠŤ  
NEFORMÁLNEHO BÝVANIA  
VO VRBIKU BEZPROSTREDNE  
PRED ZAČATÍM VÝSTAVBY  
DEGRADOVANÝCH A ROZŠÍRENÝCH  
VERZIÍ NAVRHOVANÝCH  
OTVORENÝCH BLOKOV

**Source** Zdroj: Š., N. and R., V. 1988. Kao  
Vrba iz vode – novi Vrbik. Trnje – list  
općine Trnje, 8 February, pp. 6–7



As early as 1983, this approach was tested in practice in the Detailed Urban Plan (PUP) proposal for Vrbik, where a team led by urban planner Borislav Doklestić<sup>24</sup> from the Zagreb Urban Planning Bureau deployed the adaptive open-block strategy to an undeveloped section of southwestern Trnje.<sup>25</sup> Carefully warping the series of blocks to an organic street pattern as defined by leftover alluvial fragments, and utilising the existing or slightly modified agrarian parcels, they proposed a radically different urban reconstruction scheme. It provided the neighbourhood with a clear urban structure, organized around a central park and while allowing for a substantial increase in housing density, the plan accommodated the majority of existing houses considered structurally fit for their inclusion in the scheme. This approach to planning, with its cohabitation of the new and the old, would not necessitate the “fracturing of connecting spatial elements [...] existing lot structure, street grid, infrastructure, and supporting programs”, enabling the continuation of habitation during the construction process. The heterogeneity of the proposed open blocks was to arise intrinsically from two fundamental conceptual elements of the proposal; firstly the coexistence of new, two or four stories high constructions sharing space with existing buildings that would be allowed to grow with time as a conscious nod to the heterogeneous street frontages of the historical city north of the railway, and secondly, the noble assumption that remaining individual lot users would be allowed to engage in negotiations with public and commercial actors, contributing their share of financial and conceptual input in the completion of the plan.<sup>26</sup> The deployment of urban patches in the initial Vrbik proposal was now elevated to the level of a sophisticated and highly adaptable urban renewal strategy, demonstrating the validity of utilising the complex and irregular geometry of leftover fragments of Trnje as the basis of a new way of their urban development.

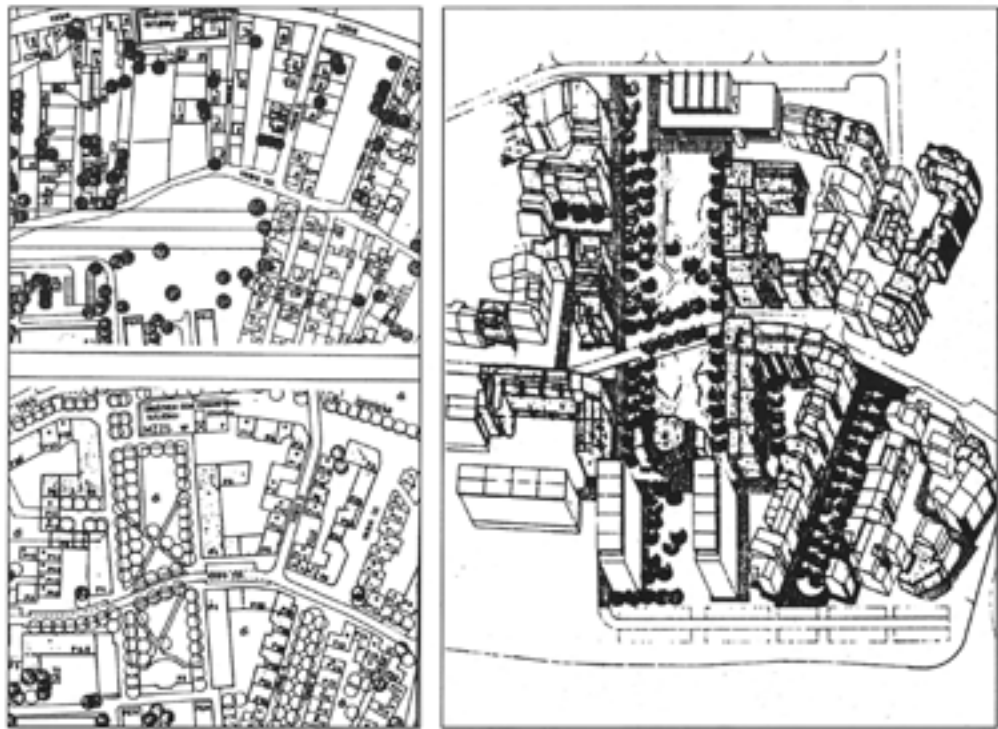
The preparatory period for the new General Plan brought about a renewed sense of self-confidence in the direction of the development of the city, especially in the realisation of an apparent complete alignment with contemporary European critical reconstruction processes. Among them, the preparations for the IBA in Berlin reigned supreme, with accounts of various aspects of the process appearing regularly in architectural periodicals from 1984 onwards, and with the German architect Josef Paul Kleihues, the leader of the IBA Neubau section even visiting Zagreb in 1985 and giving his first-hand account of the Berlin process in a lecture given at the Faculty of Architecture.<sup>27</sup> His confirmation of the vital importance of adhering to the existing urban morphology for the feasibility of implementing a similar program in Zagreb,<sup>28</sup> while affirming the local strategy as being developed in general principle, also clearly revealed the main structural difference between the two concepts of urban renewal. Unlike Berlin, where blighted and partially destroyed areas of the historical city were strategically chosen as the site of the prestigious international showcase



**AXONOMETRIC DRAWING OF THE PROPOSED CENTRAL AREA OF VRBIK, ALONG WITH THE RELATION OF THE EXISTING INFORMAL FABRIC WITH THE NEW DENSIFICATION MODEL**

AXONOMETRICKÉ ZOBRAZENIE NAVRHOVANEJ CENTRÁLNEJ ČASTI VRBIK ZOBRAZUJÚCE VZŤAH EXISTUJÚCEJ NEFORMÁLNEJ ŠTRUKTÚRY A NOVÉHO MODELU ZAHUSŤOVANIA

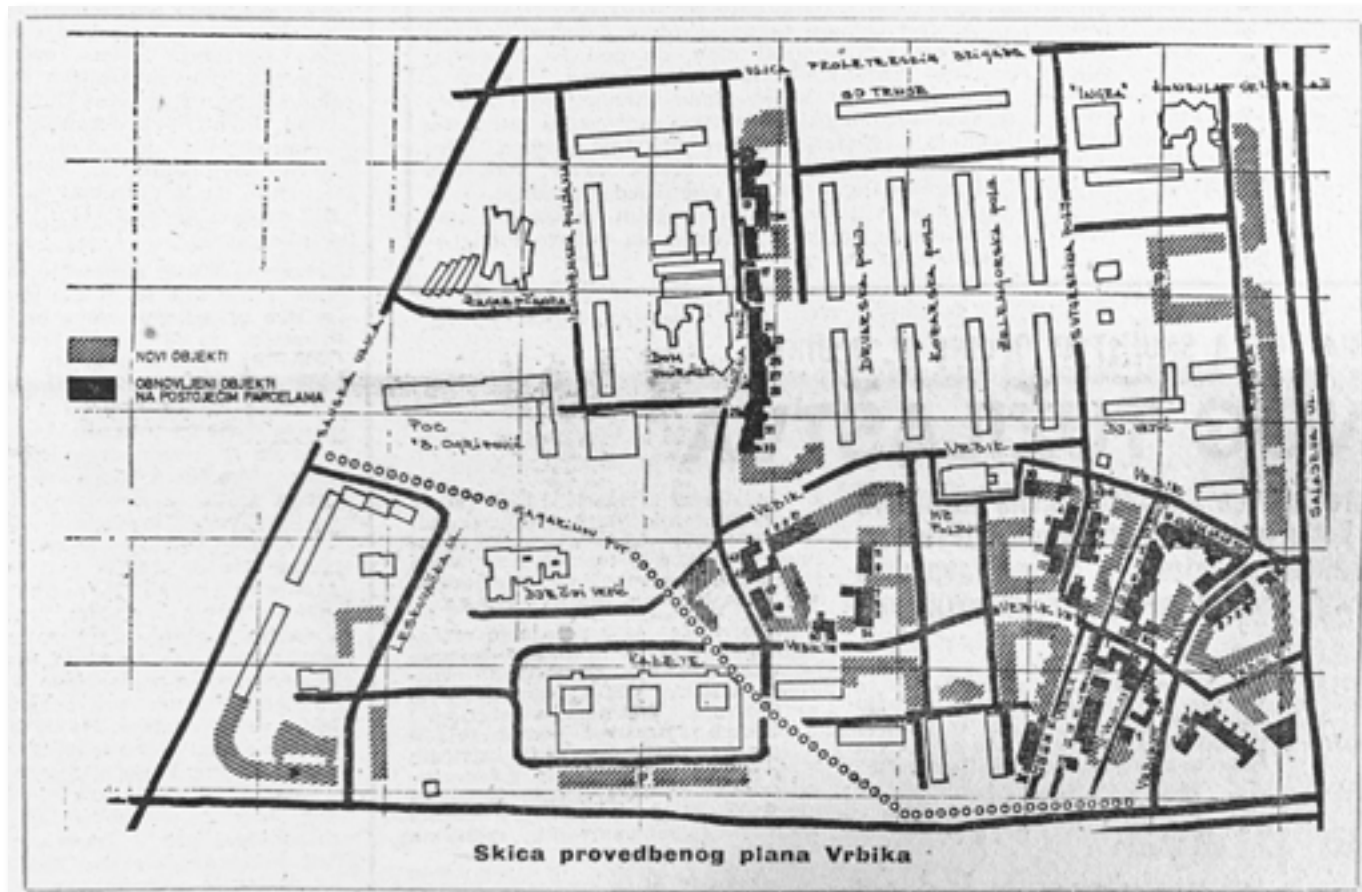
Source Zdroj: Delalle, R. and Kritovac, F., 2000, p. 11



**THE INITIAL PROPOSAL FOR THE DETAILED URBAN PLAN OF VRBIK AND ITS VICINITY AS PUBLISHED IN THE MUNICIPAL BULLETIN OF TRNJE COUNTY – THE NEW OPEN BLOCKS INSCRIBED INSIDE THE EXISTING IRREGULAR GEOMETRIES, CAREFULLY ENVELOPING EXISTING BUILDINGS**

PŮVODNÝ NÁVRH PODROBNÉHO ÚZEMNÉHO PLÁNU OBLASTI VRBIK, AKO BOL UVEREJNENÝ V OBEČNOM BULLETINE ŠTVRTE TRNJE – NOVÉ OTVORENÉ BLOKY VTLAČENÉ DO EXISTUJÚCEJ NEPRÁVIDELNEJ GEOMETRIE, STAROSTLIVO OBKLOPUJÚCE EXISTUJÚCU ZÁSTAVBU

Source Doklestić, B., 1983, p. 3



**THE EXPANSIVE URBAN RENEWAL ZONE IN THE 1986 GENERAL PLAN ENCOMPASSING THE ENTIRE AREA OF TRNJE, INCLUDING THE HIGHLIGHTED AREA OF VRBIK – GRAPHIC EMPHASIS BY AUTHORS**

ROZSIAHLA ZÓNA OBNOVY MESTA VO VŠEOBECNOM PLÁNE Z ROKU 1986 ZAHŔŇAJÚCA CELÉ ÚZEMIE TRNJE VRÁTANE ZVÝRAZNENEJ ČASTI VRBIKU – GRAFICKÉ ZVÝRAZNENIE AUTORKY A AUTORA

Source Zdroj: General Urban Plan of Zagreb, Urban Planning Bureau of the City of Zagreb, 1986 – Map no. 5 – Forms of Interventions



**NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR A BLOCK INFILL BUILDING IN VRBIK DESIGNED 3 FLOORS HIGHER THAN WAS ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR THE SITE**

NOVINOVÝ INZERÁT NA BLOKOVÚ VYPLŇAJÚCU VÝSTAVBU VO VRBIKU O 3 POSCHODIA VYŠŠIU, AKO SA PŮVODNE NA DANOM MIESTE PLÁNOVALO

Source Zdroj: Večernji list, 1988, p. 10



that IBA would become in 1987, the historical urban core of Zagreb was still to a considerable extent intact, both in terms of its perimeter block-based urban morphology and the persistence of its historical building stock. Rather than utilising the urban renewal strategy in addressing the state of its historical urban fabric, which after decades of dis-investment and over-exploitation exhibited considerable physical decay, Zagreb planners chose to direct it towards the “skipped-over” fabric of the centrally located pockets of substandard dwellings, predominantly built on historical agricultural lots. Areas such as Vrbič in Trnje were supposed to become the sites of Zagreb’s IBA.<sup>29</sup> In a premonition of the possible intrinsic inadequacy of the area south of the railway to serve for an IBA-style critical reconstruction, Kleihues described both the leftover organic geometries and fragments of modernist urban fabric marked by freestanding volumes that together formed this area as lacking the rational morphological clarity and geometric structure of the city north of the railway, preventing the area in its current form from being able to foster the desired level of urban quality in the near future. This veiled critique, however, was lost in expectation of the upcoming adoption of the city’s key planning document.

### The Instrumentalisation of Critique

The new General Plan officially adopted in 1986, proudly professing its preference for urban density and quality over quantity and expansion, elevated the concept of urban renewal to the level of its main agenda. It sought “evolution, rather than a radical transformation of the city”. Instead of “skipping over” existing parts of the city, it hoped to “renew, infill, and improve the hitherto overlooked parts of the urban periphery” and, “wherever possible, to maintain the basic existing urban structure; the existing streets, squares, and parks”<sup>30</sup>. Most of the area between the railway and the Sava, previously slated for demolition, was now designated as an “Urban Renewal Zone”. Here, it became necessary to draw up detailed urban plans to explore the possibilities of adapting the leftover geometries with later interventions, to usher in a gradual, and process-based approach to city building. The Vrbič plan proposal was seen as proof of concept of Zagreb’s model of urban renewal, both in terms of allowing for the gradual reconstruction of the area, and drastically reducing the costs of demolition and relocation.<sup>31</sup> Announcing the approaching end to the protracted uncertainty among the inhabitants of areas slated for demolition, with another generation of plans that would finally either unequivocally determine the extent of new constructions, or give criteria for incremental improvements of informal areas that would be allowed to remain, a total of 12 detailed plans covering most of the area of Trnje were initiated and commissioned in 1987.<sup>32</sup> The preparation and official adoption of these detailed plans, under the exclusive legal purview of the Urban Planning Bureau of



**A CRITICAL COLLAGE OF VRBIK AT THE ZENITH OF ITS CONSTRUCTION**

KRITICKÁ KOLÁŽ VRBIKU NA VRCHOLE JEHO VÝSTAVBY

Source Zdroj: Delalle, R. and Kritovac, F., 2000, p. 10

the City of Zagreb, proved daunting and difficult to accomplish, especially since the expected total number of various executive and detailed plans at a citywide level exceeded 230. With proposals for central Trnje still in the early stages of development, due to longstanding expectations for their future use as the representative and commercial centre of Zagreb, the plans for more peripheral areas such as Vrbik, with their predominant program of highly coveted new housing units, were among the first to be officially adopted.

Unfortunately, the realisation of the Vrbik proposal, developed through a laborious process of revisions and gradual degradations of its initial intentions, soon proved fatal to the flagship project of the aspired Zagreb model of urban renewal. Each of these revisions gradually eroded the delicate balance of the “new and the old”. The pressure introduced from large construction companies now entering the process as the main investors, builders and flat sellers resulted in the merging of lots to facilitate construction of larger buildings, conversion of parks into parking, and devaluating pedestrian routes into roads. The streets, squares, and unbuilt lots designed as prime distinguishing features of this future neighbourhood became locuses of dispute between local inhabitants and large capital interests. Some of the largest construction companies in the country, including Gortan, Industrogradnja, and Tehnika, soon started flooding daily newspapers with adverts for flats in buildings to be constructed in Vrbik. The adverts portrayed buildings with heights far exceeding the initially intended 4 stories, and their unabashedly post-modernist envelopes engulfed ever larger segments of the constrained irregular blocks proposed by the plan.<sup>33</sup> Street fronts were now developed as a marketing image-making campaign, not as the outcome of a process-based urban design strategy. Hopes of pleasant cohabitation of the new buildings with the remaining small houses were shattered from the onset of construction, with residents regularly reporting evident breaches of the declared building parameters.<sup>34</sup> As early as 1991, the popular press was already declaring Vrbik an unmitigated urban planning scandal, and a part of the city irrevocably lost to uncontrolled development, with planners decrying the violent introduction of profit-centred logic of large “systems” in the delicate urban texture as the main culprit.<sup>35</sup> Finally, with the official *Decision on Termination of Validity of Detailed Plans* from 1995, the neighbourhood of Vrbik, along with the entire area of the City of Zagreb was left only with broad and totalising provisions of the 1986 Urban Renewal General Plan<sup>36</sup>, the sole planning document regulating all construction in the city.<sup>37</sup> This eliminated any remaining obstacles for the construction of additional floors, enlargement of building footprints or further encroachment towards remaining vestiges of public spaces, leading towards the almost complete building up of available lots. The eventual exhaustion of this process further consolidated Vrbik as a dark chapter in the recent planning history of Zagreb.



**ANALYSIS OF EXPONENTIAL GROWTH OF SPECULATIVE CONSTRUCTION ON AGRICULTURAL LOTS IN THE TREŠNJEVKA NEIGHBOURHOOD, REGULATED EXCLUSIVELY BY THE PROVISIONS OF THE 1986 GENERAL PLAN**

ANALÝZA EXPONENCIÁLNEHO RASTU ŠPEKULATÍVNEJ VÝSTAVBY NA POĽNOHOSPODÁRSKÝCH POZEMKOCH V ČASTI TREŠNJEVKA REGULOVANEJ VÝLUČNE USTANOVENIAMÍ VŠEOBECNÉHO ÚZEMNÉHO PLÁNU Z ROKU 1986

Source Zdroj: Glasinović, J. and Sevšek, A., 2003

## Official Retreat from Urban Renewal

The apparent continuity of this process, spanning the comprehensive political, economic and societal changes following the violent break-up of Communist Yugoslavia, reveals the complex dismantling process of the existing urban planning system, with some of its constituent elements persisting well into the 1990s. The ascension of private ownership as the dominant social, and therefore spatial, value was itself effected in a series of legislative steps, with a succession of laws that gradually eroded the framework of societal ownership of land.<sup>38</sup> The revisionist 1986 General Plan, with its densification provisions and sympathetic outlook towards idiosyncrasies of existing urban conditions, was now the only planning document in place. Its vast zone of urban renewal covering the entire central area of the city was rapidly involving into a haphazard patchwork of ever-higher extrusions of existing lots. With the central areas of Trnje still weighed down by persisting moratoriums on construction, neighbouring areas such as Trešnjevka saw rapid transformations of their fabric, with manifold increases in density in the time-frame of mere years.<sup>39</sup> The processes initiated in Vrbik had unfortunately become paradigmatic, spreading as a dominant *modus operandi* to other unconsolidated urban areas, albeit on a less organised level, but nonetheless on the comprehensive and cumulative scale of the entire city. The galloping privatisation processes and the temporal vacuum in opportunities for large building sites resulted in the disappearance of the majority of established construction companies, with most of the building carried out by small and opportunistic building entrepreneurs.<sup>40</sup> The planning system was reduced to the issuance of building permits for single lots, prompting the now powerless planners to proclaim this “patch (point) urbanism” to be synonymous with the perceived irrelevance of their profession.<sup>41</sup> Individual lot owners, long bystanders in determining the fate of their property, suddenly became relevant actors and investors in the emerging speculative housing market. Despite numerous stopgap revisions to combat unregulated building, the 1986 plan was superseded by the next General Plan only as late as 2003. Urban renewal as a concept finally no longer applied to the explicit idea of urban improvement of the “skipped-over” parts of the central city, but was watered down to a general concept of homogenising the level of “urban culture and the culture of urban development” of the entire area of the city.<sup>42</sup>



**THE REMAINING FRAGMENTS  
OF THE INNER-CITY INFORMAL  
FABRIC OF TRNJE AS PART OF THE  
NEVER-COMPLETED CENTRE OF  
MODERN ZAGREB**

POZOSTÁVAJÚCE FRAGMENTY  
NEFORMÁLNEJ VNÚTROMESTSKEJ  
ŠTRUKTÚRY TRNJE AKO SÚČASŤ  
NIKDY NEDOKONČENEHO CENTRA  
MODERNEHO ZÁHREBU

**Source** Zdroj: GEOPORTAL ZAGREB.  
2023. Geoportal Zagreb [online].  
Available at: <https://geoportal.zagreb.hr/Karta>, © Croatian State Geodetic Administration

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The contemporary local assessment of this transitional period from the planning profession, even if devoid of nostalgic sentiments for a planning paradigm predicated on societal ownership of land, is a resigned affirmation of the fundamental obsolescence of totalising planning in the local context of ascending dominance of private ownership and absence of any control of speculative financial interests. The abolition of detailed plans, and the failure to establish executive instruments such as urban land consolidation procedures that would enable their continued utility, even within a capitalist system of urban reproduction, are universally regarded as the final chapters in the gradual process of bureaucratisation of urban planning, now reduced to catering exclusively to the whims of private interests. The persisting humble lots were no longer seen as potentials for sensible densification strategies, but isolated fragments in a vast quasi-urban village, completely oblivious to any idea of improvement of the quality of public space or communal infrastructure.<sup>43</sup> Rather than merely affirming this oversimplified causality between the ascension of rampant transitional capitalism and the comprehensive degradation of urban regulation procedures, however, this article attempts to trace deliberate strategic planning realignments and conceptual positions that, at least indirectly, made some of these transformations possible. Despite the almost complete consensus about the drastic consequences of the elimination of detailed urban plans, there were some practitioners that, frustrated by the exhausting procedures of their adoption, were explicitly calling for simpler, lot-based building codes<sup>44</sup>, unintentionally anticipating the post-1995 period of determining building parameters directly from the General Plan. Surprisingly, nowhere was this sentiment more explicit than in the accounts of leaders of the Zagreb Urban Planning Bureau and the authors of the 1986 General Plan. By the early 1990s, they were so confident in the parameters of this urban renewal plan to curb the possibility of uncontrollable urban growth that they hailed the fortune of “existing lots becoming almost sanctified”, while enabling the realisation of any possible need of, now liberated, citizens of Zagreb.<sup>45</sup> Further proclaiming the existing system of obligatory detailed plans as the very facilitator of building excesses such as the Vrbik debacle, they championed the prospect of private initiative to produce “a wealth of building forms and coexistence of the old with the new”, all deriving simply from the General Plan and the accompanying local regulation parameters.<sup>46</sup> Building on the initial assessment from Kleihues about the insufficient morphological qualities of the vast area of Zagreb’s urban renewal zone, Vladimir Mattioni poetically sums up the insistence on choosing the informal geometry of Trnje that in reality had never been urban to start with. He sees this planning preference as a unique example of a continued “hypnotic obsession” with this urban area as a future centre of the city.<sup>47</sup> While seemingly completely abandoning the megastructural or historicist proposals of the 1970s and 1980s, the procedural and heterogeneous guise of the desired constituent elements of this unrealised city nevertheless betrays a pronounced belief in the possibility of Trnje becoming a new metropolitan centre.

The praiseworthy, yet naive, belief in the potential of small-scale private initiatives formulated uniquely through the conceptual framework of an IBA-styled Careful Urban Renewal and the ability of the planners to steer them in creating a vibrant and heterogeneous urban fabric, offers insight into a sensible yet ambitious planning scheme, comprehensively proven inadequate by the subsequent neoliberal social and urban transformations. Since this scheme indirectly and unwittingly facilitated the onset of these processes, it offers an alternative reading of the established notion that equates the loss of control over urban development with intrinsic characteristics of transitional capitalism, rather than seeing it as a culmination of a process set in motion a decade earlier.

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- 21 The entry with the official designation “Study no. 3” was authored by a group comprising Radovan Delalle, Borislav Doklešić, Niko Gamulin, Ivan Tepeš, Boško Budisavljević, Ratko Miličević and Hrvoje Jamnicki.
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