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Slovenska street, the Ljubljana “cours Mirabeu”

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Architecture is not made only by buildings and projects, but also by ideas and circumstances, under which they were created and changed and, what is the most important, the life, that happens in it. That's why for understanding of cities and architecture the broad picture is important: culture, history and politics are their course and goal. If one intends to analyze the contemporary building and urban public space in Ljubljana, one should impose the urbanistic and architectural solutions into historical perspective and political context, forming a clear critical view.

City's development takes place as the triangle, of which one corner represents the city administration and policy, another corner the architects and urban planners, and the third corner the residents. A better place for the residents is the objective of regulating. Politicians are the ones who should identify the need for improvement in the city and develop a vision and strategy for these improvements. Architects and their innovative proposals are those protagonists, who translate the spirit of time into architectural concepts and buildings.

Everything, what is built and made in the city's, affects the lives of the inhabitants. Extremely important is the relationship between citizens, city government and urbanistic authorities, who plans and executes building and arrangement in the city. Important are architects, who make projects but also propone directions and solutions, as the laboratory of the future. Ljubljana has in past times a whole series of such architects and collaborations between professionals and politics. This fact echoes in the naming, which marks different faces of the city in time: Baroque's Ljubljana, Plečnik's Ljubljana, Ravnikar's Ljubljana. Plečnik's Ljubljana is a terminus which emphasizes the Mediterranean character of urban space and build structure. Ravnikar's Ljubljana means the continuation of Plečnik's with language of late modernism.

Today's Ljubljana develops for almost a decade under guidance of Janez Koželj, who, architect by profession, is vice mayor, city architect and professor in one person. Probably today's Ljubljana will not be named in future Koželj's Ljubljana, as today the management of the city is much more complicated and the relation between enlightened politician on power and his chosen architect is replaced with complex and often ineffective system of party's democracy, Meyers bureaucracy and complicated relations between state and city.

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In city's development beside professionals also citizens are active. They are involved in very different, often opposite roles: as protagonists of civil initiatives, NIMBY¹ protests protagonists, the problem solvers on their own and various mediate observers etc. It is extremely difficult to judge, who is driven by real activism and who is interested in pure manipulative actions of different kind. Trustworthy professional critics, who act as the defenders of the city and of the people are extremely important. In not too distant past it was the independent urbanistic council, part of was also Janez Koželj, who systematically valued, criticized and created guidelines for the city development. After Koželj took over the responsibility for the Ljubljana urbanism, the danger for urbanistic council to be misused for political purposes has grown so much, that it has to temporarily cease with active involvement.

City needs critics, who form opinions on planned operations in an understandable and correct manner. Important are permanent formal and informal forums for discussion on the regulation of the city. Blogs and internet portals can help to connect professionals and people. Such international internet portal is *SkyscraperCity*, where professional and laic thinking is articulated in real time. On the forum succeeds a discussion about future of the city in which everybody can take part. What is important is the quality of arguments. Of course there is no consensus about all questions. Important is, that city government follows the decided values and plans and makes them come true. In opposite the development of the city stops and stagnation begins.

Actual example is the renovation of the Slovenska street. It includes several paradigms which show, how wills Ljubljana in the future looked out. Some of these paradigms have general value, others are specific for Ljubljana. Let's look at some most important.

¹ **NIMBY** (an acronym for the phrase "Not In My Back Yard"), or **Nimby**, is a pejorative characterization of opposition by residents to a proposal for a new development because it is close to them, often with the connotation that such residents believe that the developments are needed in society but should be further away.



Ljubljana sees itself in future as *smart city* and *green city*. The biggest change in near future in cities, connected with digital era, ecology and economy, is the end of the era of dominant role of the automobile. This will happen with adaptation of transport to contemporary technologies in similar way, as has in last decades adapted communication and technologies of communication. Smart phones will be followed by smart cars or however they will be called. In every case, the individual ownership and financing of car will be replaced with some sort of public transport. The predecessor's are visible today in ideas of car sharing, Carpooling² (ridesharing), etc. That's way we wouldn't need anymore the traffic corridors, dedicated to dangerous and cars, buses and trucks. Instead, smart light vehicles will ride on narrow traces, digitally guided and network connected, organized as public service.

You will seat in the vehicle, with your back to the front glass, work on your pad or personal computer, and the car will drive you to your destination in the shortest possible time. This will affect the shape of the car, which in the near future will no longer be walled tanks equipped with airbags, because this will no more make any sense. Smart cars will be ultra light, made of carbon and glass or Kevlar, as the tents. To be printed on a 3D printer is yet another version of the future, which is not far away. As they will be lightweight, they will spend close to zero, all traffic will be managed intelligently and speed, safety and consumption will be optimal. The cars will adapt to each other, connect into the convoys, inform each other, etc. There will be needed significantly less cars because they will be constantly in use and will not spend most of his time in the garage or in the parking lot as it is today.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpool>



Let's see, how it will work. With your smart phone you will order and pay your transport and in two minutes the self driven car will stay in front of your location and drive you to your wish destination. For regional and long distance travels it will take you to the airport, railway or bus station, where you will sit in the self driven bus. So the individual and public transport will merge. What consequences this will have for the future of cities? They are enormous. The public space will blossom again. As on lithography from nineteenth century, where on streets and places stood people and couches. One wouldn't need to consider parking lots and wide streets; all those areas will be available for new functions. Public green, parks and lines of trees will reenter in cities, with people, bicycles and smart cars moving slowly on it. Shared space will become real. First thing, we teach our children how to be afraid of traffic. This will become obsolete. Cars as danger will disappear from public space, in similar manner as before decade smoking has disappeared from public interiors.

Ljubljana is a city that has a distinctive axis north - south. This axis connects the Alps and the Mediterranean. The Alps dominate views to the north, also at the Slovenska road, the main axis. This central axis runs along the same route since antiquity. At the time of Emperor Augustus, the Romans built a military camp Emona, that had *cardo* on the same axis (Gradišče, which toward north continues as Slovenska road) as today's Ljubljana. I imagine Via Appia³, surrounded by tombstones, suburban villas and accommodation. The subsequent history of this road followed the enlargement of the medieval city from the nucleus under the castle on the left bank of the Ljubljanica river, where was the edge between urbanized and rural areas. In the Baroque period the road space was again built with palaces. Later the road evolved with the development of transport. In socialistic period, the Slovenska road was given the political nature of the *prospectus* for the parade, with the expansions and demolitions, which, despite the objections of architects, impoverished town for the palace Kozler, the most beautiful baroque palace in the city.

The process of growth of the importance of traffic spread and multiply roadway lanes. Slovenska road, then named Tito's road, has become a four-lane street; sidewalks have been reduced to a minimum. In recent years, the process is reversed. They first introduced lanes for public transport. Then followed the trial closure of road for car traffic. Traffic flows have slowly started to redistribute on the parallel roads. Jan Gehl⁴ argues that there is a linear relationship between the number and width of the road

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appian_Way

⁴ Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1987

and the amount of traffic in the centers. This means that the traffic is more intense, if there are more areas used for transport. If this surface is reduced, it also reduces, redirects and adapts the traffic. City of the future is the city, dominated by pedestrians.

Prediction of such a city of the future is, as already mentioned, the new arrangement of the Slovenska road. Cyclists and buses slowly drive the two belts in the middle of the road, the rest of the space is dedicated to pedestrians. Wide sidewalks with a rich urban equipment are shaded with avenues of trees. Selected trees types attracts bees and promote urban beekeeping.

The Slovenska Road Renovation Project intends to give the road back to pedestrians, to create the space on the pedestrian scale, to carry on with Plečnik's layouts. It is about regulating the space in relation to the changed traffic paradigm, replacing it with the concept of mobility¹⁵, and the renaissance of the public space. This is why this time, the otherwise understandable skepticism of the citizens in regard to anything new in the city is uncalled for.



It is my opinion that on the one hand, the residents of Ljubljana need more knowledge and insight, but also more patience when it comes to the issues of regulating the city. The way in which a city changes is gradual; at first, the changes are irksome, even painful, yet the passage of time causes the new - if it's good - to »catch on« and be eventually taken for granted. Like a new park, which at first feels empty and unfinished, but if we wait, the trees grow and the park bursts into full bloom. A similar thing

⁵ see e.g. Ilka Čerpes, Transport-oriented Development, ab 197/198, Ljubljana 2013

will happen with Slovenska Road: when the new layout takes off, the trees grow, and the establishments open for business, Ljubljana will be enriched by a promenade with the character of a boulevard - or, in the words of Edvard Ravnikar, it will gain its own Cours Mirabeau⁶.

With the paving and the greenery been finished, Ljubljana finally get the *promenade* that has been on the architects' minds at least since Plečnik; a similar task on a smaller scale was executed by him on the parallel Vegova Road and its two endpoints, Kongresni trg Square and Napoleon's Monument.. And in this way, the main road extending between the Castle and Tivoli spatially connect the Forum (Trg republike Square with the Parliament building, Cankarjev dom, and the two towers symbolically representing the Ljubljana Gate) and the head (the transportation hub with the railway and bus stations along Masarykova Road), which is the symbol of the 19th-century city. This is not just about buildings and paving's, it's chiefly about ideas and visions what Ljubljana could be like, how wonderful it could be, and how logically laid out. Such an approach requires the conflating and complementing of political philosophy and practice with architectural and planning philosophy, and a third factor which must not be overlooked, namely economics. If the commercial, hospitality, and service business in the retail spaces along Slovenska Road do not survive and grow at least in the midterm, the entire operation may be at risk.



⁶ Cours Mirabeau is a 440-metre long and 42-metre wide promenade on the edge of the old part of Aix-en-Provence. It was created at the request of Marie de' Medici around 1650, "pour se promener en carrosse aux heures les plus fraîches de l'après-dîner" (to stroll in a carriage during the coolest hours of the afternoon). Ravnikar visited Aix-en-Provence in his youth and Cours remained one of his permanent inspirations, particularly in designing the Magistrala main road in Nova Gorica.

Slovenska road becomes stylish and mundane move through a sequence of buildings in different scales, from rural to metropolitan. Contrasts of architectural styles and materials, from baroque to post-modern, the sculpted stone and the aluminum façade elements and curtain walling glass - color, size, style, mass, space, light, shadow, full and empty, high and low - all of these elements of Slovenska Road are connected with the new carpeted pavement to a new meaningful whole. Thus, modern Ljubljana continues Plečnik brilliant urban traits such as the Congress Square with Vegova Street and the embankments of the Ljubljanica.



Put yourself in the middle of the intersection of Slovenska and Cankarjeva road (City Hall - Stritarjeva - Three Bridges-Čopova - Cankarjeva - Tivoli is today's Ljubljana *decumanus*) and look at the corner of Bata building (today's Nama) respectively. The modernist building glows in the renewed whiteness. To the left is the historicist Post offices building, opposite stands the Hotel Elephant, between them the Čopova Street descends towards the Three Bridges. To the back the metropolitan Skyscraper Building rises proudly, across the street Šestica Building reduces the scale of the city to that of the village. Hereinafter follows not clearly defined space, which culminated in the square in front of Metalka high-rise building.

The relationship between the interior and the street in this segment is still too much vague, to assure to this part of the Slovenska Road an upgrade in the associated urban experience. I hope that the ground floor and back yards with passages and open bars occupied the wide sidewalks and urban energy, which characterized the embankments of the Ljubljanica, will reach far beyond the New Slovenska Road toward Tivoli Park.



Every street, every city has its own order of space and the combination of buildings and architecture is the one that creates the city. And they themselves use, which must be diverse. What creates a successful city is diversity: diversity of use, diversity of users, and diversity of space. Diversity creates movement; architecture is a mere framework for human activity, either commercially or socially. The basic argument, translated into avenues, wide sidewalks, mixed-use, can be expressed by using the "eternal" Jane Jacobs words: "The part of the street the street where I live, every day passing the scene of a complex and diverse sidewalk ballet."⁷

⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, 1961





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