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## TRANSFORMATION OF SMALL SLOVAK TOWNS IN THE ERA OF SOCIALISM EXAMPLE OF BÁNOVCE NAD BEBRAVOU

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**Abstract.** Several decades of socialism had their effect on urbanism and architecture of towns. These processes can be found in several post-socialist countries. One of the examples in Slovakia is the town of Bánovce nad Bebravou. Until the end of the 19th century the town was not economically important. During the time of socialism the city underwent significant architectural and urban changes due to large industrial development. The definitive image of the historic core changed according to the principles of modern urbanism. Nowadays with the compact city policies, it is important to find the balance between the traditional compact urban form and the modern urban form. The contribution deals with mapping and the process of former urban changes. The aim is to find locations for the transformation and refurbishment of the town's historic core, in order to its preserved cultural and historical values, while fulfilling the requirement for an ecological and sustainable city.

**Keywords:** urban development, historical core, transformation, potencial.

### Introduction

We are post-gradual students at the Faculty of Architecture, Slovak University of Technology. We are assigned at the Institute of History and Theory of Architecture and Monument Restoration and the Institute of Urban Design and Planning. Our mutual research is focused on medium and small towns in terms of their historic evolution and future development possibilities. For the purpose of this study, small towns are defined as ones with the population between 2 000 and 20 000 inhabitants and medium towns as those with population between 20 000 and 50 000 inhabitants (Bitušiková, 2003). This classification is different from the global definition, due to the actual conditions in Slovak cities<sup>1</sup> (Doxiadis, 1968).

Bánovce nad Bebravou is situated on the confluence of the streams Radiša and Bebrava. From the archeological

point of view, the location is regarded as one of the centres of Slavism in the 9th century. The town was mentioned for the first time as “Villa Ben” in a deed of donation given by the Hungarian King Ondrej II. in 1232. The municipal privileges were granted before 1376 (Obert, 1995). In the Middle Ages, it was a renowned craft centre – the seat of prestigious cloth makers, shoemakers and weavers. During the first Czechoslovak Republic, agriculture and crafts dominated the town's economy, after the World War II., the machine /car factory Tatra/, furniture, and textile industries developed here.

The HC of Bánovce was chosen to become a conservation zones. However, it had undergone a dramatic change, many of the buildings were demolished and replaced by new structures in the era of socialism. The historic values were lost, together with the need of the protection of the HC (see Figure 1).

We studied historic maps, books, and towns chronicles to acquire information about the progress of each project and how did its construction influenced the town. Predominantly, we focus on the transformation of the historic core and its structure. To achieve our goals, we visited the town of Bánovce nad Bebravou to confirm the current situation in situ. These transformations were built according

<sup>1</sup> Konstantinos Doxiadis (1968) defines the settlement hierarchy, where Large city is a city with a large population and many services. The population is <1 million people but over 300,000 people. City would have large number of services, but not as many as a large city. The population of a city is between 100,000 and 300,000 people, large town has a population of 20,000 to 100,000, a town has a population of 1,000 to 20,000

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Figure 1. Destruction of historic urban structure in Bánovce nad Bebravou. Archive PÚSR, collection of historic photographs and view of the construction of the Dubnička panel housing. Archive PUSR, collection of historic photographs

to modern urban design, which ignored the traditional forms of public spaces. We also seek future possibilities of new urban development to revitalize the towns structure and make it more compact.

## 1. Protection of historic urban sites

### 1.1. The process of institutional protection

A dramatic change in development of HCs of towns occurred after the World War II, when Europe was divided into Western European – Capitalist and Eastern European – Socialist Block with central economic management, that had a huge impact on development of the countries, influencing it long after the disintegration of the socialist system (Nestorová-Dická & Lovacká, 2009). Between 1945–1948 the main focus was on the reconstruction of towns destroyed during the war. However, this period of restoration was interrupted in 1948 by the radical change of political establishment, resulting in change of ownership, from private to collective. It was a significant milestone in the modern history of Czechoslovakia and all the countries under the influence of socialism (Vodrážka, 2015) (see Figure 1).

In 1948, the second wave of industrialization and the process of modernization began, which affected most of our settlements. The abolition of private ownership was reflected in rapid urbanization and in the gradual deterioration of valuable objects, which suddenly had no one responsible for their maintenance (Kissfazekas, 2017)

In 1950, the first historic urban structures were proclaimed urban reservations and the process of targeted monument protection began. Despite the Act no. 22/1958 Coll. concerning cultural heritage, the decay of HCs continued throughout the 1960s. In terms of investments, priority was given to particular buildings rather than to the maintenance or renovation of existing urban structures. These were intended to be replaced with new and modern structures. Two opposing views began to emerge, on the one hand, there were the modern innovators, on the other hand, the protectors of old values (Dulla & Moravčíková, 2002).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the first evaluation of the effectiveness of Act. no. 22/1958 Coll. on *The Protection of the Monuments and Historic Sites* came about, as well as the functioning of SÚPSOP. Its results proved unsatisfactory. Under existing conditions, the protection of the HCs of towns, except from areas declared as historic sites, depended on the discretion of the concerned authorities (Husovská, 2013).

In the 1970s, the rise of industrial complexes and monofunctional panel houses disrupted the historic panorama of many towns. This contrasted not only with the landscape, but also with the character of preserved historical monuments or the HC of the towns. The new panel housing districts were constructed according to modern urban trends. The concept of functional segregation created unified panel houses areas surrounded by green spaces. The response to Act no. 50/1976 Coll. was the development of documents for the protection of historical urbanism: *the Principles of Monument Protection*. It included the procedures for regeneration and possible reconstruction of HCs and was meant to be the basis for the elaboration of the land-use and urban planning documentation (Act no. 50/1976).

Unification and standardisation took place not only in housing, but also in the construction of civil buildings, such as cultural and commercial buildings. These phenomena have significantly influenced the final form and expression of architectural works concentrated in HCs, as new centres were often not necessary, especially in small towns.

In 1983, the 5th International Colloquium on Monument Surveying in the SSR took place, where a summary of the declared historic urban sites was published. The main point of colloquium was to discuss an overview of the new proposition for creation of *conservation zones*<sup>2</sup>. These were outlined on the basis of field surveys and methodologies elaborated for the purposes of setting the

<sup>2</sup> The need for a lower degree of protection in the form of zones arose from the new construction and demolition of former structures.

conservation assessment criteria and the disruption of original (historic) urban structures.

At the end of the 1980s, the Law no. 27/1987 Coll. on *State Monument Care* was declared, which defined the term “*conservation zone*” for the first time in Slovak monument preservation history. The subsequent proclamation of the zones took place during the period of 1989–1996, i.e. at the time of the changing political and social establishment and foundation of the independent Slovak Republic (Dvořáková, 2013).

In 2002, after a long monument protection practice, a new law has been enacted, which is still valid today (Act no. 49/2002). Between 2004 and 2005, the task of the *Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic* was to review protection areas and the data is still being processed today (Dvořáková, 2013). The purpose of this revision is to verify the justification of the protection of the declared conservation zones.

## 1.2. The principles of the protection

Current views on the protection, care and further guidelines for the cultural heritage of sites are summarized in the *Principles for the Protection, Reconstruction and Presentation of the Sites*. The current *Principles of protection* rise from the former Guidelines for monument protection and creates an elementary foundation for protection of buildings and sites and an extent of development in protected areas.

The new document is divided into three main parts. The first part deals with urban historical research, and it describes the historical development of the towns from its inception to the World War II. It describes the cultural and historical values of the area, with categorization of the valuable monuments. The result of this section is vindication of reasons for their protection.

The second part contains requirements for adequate functions for the area, maintenance and restoration of the historical plotting, material and object structure and spatial layout of buildings, architectural expression, elements of the interior and street parterre, historical greenery, characteristic views, silhouettes and panoramas, archaeological findings, and other cultural and natural values of the conservation area.

The third part contains graphic attachments displaying the above mentioned parts in maps, plans and photo documentation.

Our research focuses on the changes made in the second half of 20th century, these objects are viewed as “objects that do not respect the historical and cultural values of the area” and should be corrected by existing architectural instruments, such as changing the colour or material of the facade, or be replaced by new objects respecting the historic plotting and architectural form. Here comes the question: Is it necessary to correct these structures? How to replace those parts of the territory, that completely disappeared during the 20th century and were replaced by a “new” development?

## 2. Compact city

The publication *Compact City Policies a Comparative Assessment* is the final report of the OECD’ project. Its goal was to gain a better understanding of the compact city concept, its role in today’s urban context and the potential outcomes. Compact city policies are expected to play a significant role in meeting the urban sustainability goals, such as economic viability, environmental quality, social equity, etc. Although the term compact city is widely known, there is no general understanding of what it means. There is also an extensive debate regarding whether compact city policies actually result in solid, positive impacts on urban sustainability.

The term “compact city” is considered first to be used by Dantzig and Saaty (1973) (OECD, 2012). They proposed a city with these key characteristics: high dense settlements, clear boundaries form surrounding areas, less dependence on automobiles, mixed land use, diversity, clear identity, social functions, self-sufficiency of daily life, and independent government. Thomas and Cousins (1996) (OECD, 2012) argue that a more decentralised pattern of development may provide a settlement which is not only more environmentally sustainable but can also meet the economic demands. They define the characteristics of the compact city as: compactness in scale, accessibility for all on foot, by bicycle or by public transport, and greater respect for wildlife.

Another vision of sustainable and livable city design is described in the ECOCITY project. They ask for a compact, pedestrian oriented, mixed-use quarters or neighbourhoods integrated into a public transport system in combination with attractively designed public spaces, integrating green areas and objects of cultural heritage (Schubert, 2001).

Koucký, a Czech architect and urban designer, criticizes contemporary methods for creating urban development plans in czech cities. To achieve the qualities of a compact city, the key elements are contrast and density that together create the potential for spatial recyclation and intensification of city’s structure. The starting point for the urban development plan is a concept – vision of the town, that defines the system of free and built-up areas (Koucký, 2006). Koucký uses the method of first and the second “line”. The first line represents the border of the town which should be respected and no development should be created within this area. It defines the economic and naturally ecological size of the town. The second line should create internal contrast in the urban structure, the differentiate between public and private space. The principle of density is to increase the quality and diversity within the town’s existing structure (Koucký, 2014).

## 3. Character and development of small towns

Small towns remain one of a distinct European types of settlements. They retain a specific spatial organization, forms of social life and greater variety in different regional

types. In scholarly discourse, small towns are classified as those that maintain their traditions and memory, while large towns focus on the future with a progressive loss of memory. Small towns are categorized as societies of memory, the large ones as societies of change (Klusáková et al., 2017).

The Slovak Republic is not an exception. There are 140 towns and cities, from which 130 are towns of medium size or small towns. The contemporary urban plans consider the inner city as a stabilized structure. New development areas are planned outside the existing borders of towns. It is questionable whether such great areas for new development are necessary, especially, if we are dealing with a small town like Bánovce nad Bebravou.

#### 4. Bánovce nad Bebravou – mapping of urban development in the second half of 20th century

The development of Bánovce nad Bebravou was determined by the expansion of industry in the town. With the construction of new industrial works and enterprises, need for the construction of whole new housing areas arose. As the town grew and its population was increasing, many new facilities were built, such as sports stadium, hospital, cultural facilities, department stores, etc. Small towns, such as Bánovce, were not planned as polycentric structures, so the new facilities were mostly located in or near the HC.

Due to the sudden extensive urban development during the era of socialism, the town was planned according to the principles of contemporary urban design. That meant creating clean zones for housing, works / industry and recreation. These zones should have been connected

by road system. In the present, we can see the negative impacts of this planning, such as long distances, or depopulated areas during specific times of the day. This leads to the inability of a district to sustain enough shops, restaurants, etc. (see Figure 2)

##### 4.1. Tatra – the first car factory in Slovakia

The most important factory built after 1945, was Tatra, which for decades influenced the life in the town. The construction started in 1949, when the plenum ONV supported the design of the Škoda factory. The investors were Škoda Works and Brno Industries of Július Fučík. The construction work was carried out by Priemstav Bratislava and Nováky. In the autumn of 1951, the factory officially went into operation. The Industrial area initially consisted only of the production hall A, where workshops and tool storage were located. In 1961, the factory was expanded and the construction of a new production hall has begun. Between 1961 and 1965, the area was expanded by 25 000 square meters, 23 new buildings and facilities were built.

Together with the construction of the factory, it was necessary to solve the housing for the workers and apprentices. First they lived in the industrial area, later began the construction of separate housing. In 1951, residential blocks were constructed on Moskovská street, later, in 1962, housing estates were constructed on Moskovská, Leningradská and Fučíková streets with the capacity of 204 flats and 4 accommodation units. Between 1971 and 1975, 535 families lived in these newly constructed flats. In this era, the facilities, such as nurseries, schools and a sports stadium with a covered tribune for 800 visitors, were constructed (Kasala, 2011) (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. Schemes of urban development in Bánovce nad Bebravou

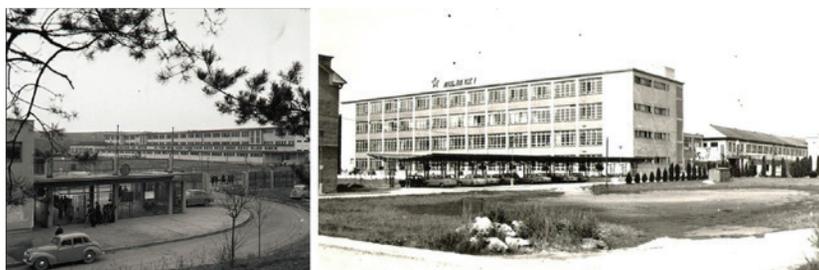


Figure 3. View of the Tatra factory (1958). Archive TASR, author: Cích, K., View of Zornica factory. Archive PUSR, collection of historic photographs

#### 4.2. Tricona – Zornica – Textile factory

The factory was originally used for airplane components. After the Munich Pact, the buildings were emptied. During the first Slovak State, military uniforms were produced here and in 1945 the manufacture was transferred to Vrbové. The factory was later used for producing linen clothing. The products of the brand Zornica were presented at exhibitions and trade fairs up until 1996, when Zornica became a private company (Chronicle of Bánovce nad Bebravou, 1945–1985) (see Figure 3).

#### 4.3. Housing

As mentioned before, the development of industry stimulated the development of residential buildings and whole districts within the town. In 1971, new housing blocks were constructed, such as Prednádražie (585 flats), Sídliisko Sever (405 flats), and Sídliisko Stred (438 flats). Later were constructed more than 600 flats in community housing and 316 detached houses.

#### 4.4. Historical core

The population growth and the construction of extensive residential areas were accompanied by the construction of many amenities and facilities located in the town core. In 1967, KNV gave its approval for designing the new hospital with polyclinic. However, in 1974, there was a change of plans and only the clinic was constructed. It was completed in the HC in 1987. The former compact structure of town houses with workshops on the ground floor was demolished. In 1987, due to increased number of inhabitants, the construction of new culture house under the patronage of Tatra factory began. The construction was located on the square of E. Štúr but due to lack of investments it was not completed. Today it serves as a shopping centre (Šišmiš, 2002).

Except for the objects mentioned above, other facilities were built in the HC, as well. Another department stores and a hotel building can be mentioned. Their excessively large forms contrast with the former historical structure. In addition, the hotel creates a vertical dominant disrupting the panoramic view and overshadows the structure of the Trinity Church.

These new objects in the HC were constructed according to modern urban planning methods, meaning, they

were not built within the street line, but created open spaces in their surrounding areas. These were mostly used as parking lots, used by customers of the services located in the buildings or created urban voids and areas without any function. The public space was created only on the side of the main square, which, by this intervention, lost its compact outline. These kinds of structures can be found in every small or medium sized town in Slovakia. Bánovce are just one example.

### 5. Urban plan and vision

The Urban development plan of Bánovce lays out many new zones behind the existing border of the town. Some of them are residential but there are also recreation zones and a transformation of a former industrial area to a poly-functional town structure.

In relation to the HC, the urban plan proposes to create conditions for achieving the compactness of the originally homogeneous structure that has lost its compactness by negative interventions from the 1960s and 1970s. The authors of the development plan also ask for clear articulation and definition of public spaces, such as streets, squares, passages and parks. The exposed areas of the wider centre should be gradually intensified, modernised and reconstructed, with the priority of amenities and housing.

### Conclusions

The main problems in the historic cores are not caused by the new buildings were built in the second half of 20th century, but by the areas that surround them. Many of them are flanked by large parking areas and residual green spaces created to surround the solitary building – a design used in the era of modernism. Due to the socialistic common ownership, it was possible to demolish the whole streets of historic houses. This was not possible in democratic countries. This resulted in the need of protecting the surviving historic structures as urban protection zones. However, these new regulations, made to defend the historic values, do not allow new development in historic centres. From this point of view, Bánovce came out advantageous, as there are many possibilities to its internal development, especially concerning the residual green spaces and spacious parking lots located in the town's centre.



Figure 4. Current aerial view of the HC. Retrieved from <http://www.tourist-channel.sk/banovce-nb/indexen.php3> and map of HC

It is most needed to redesign the public spaces and find a proper way to intensify the panel housing areas. Those remain a significant problem, due to their single (residential) function and many green spaces that lack any use. The new design should create a compact block structure and the new building should add the missing functions, such as job opportunities, amenities, etc. to create a living city during every hour of the day. This is also what the urban plan proposes. It is left to architects and urban designers to find the best solution for each space (see Figure 4).

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## NEDIDELIŲ SLOVAKIJOS MIESTŲ KAITA SOCIALISTINIŲ LAIKOTARPIU BANOVCE NAD BEBRAVOU PAVYZDŽIU

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Santrauka

Keli socialistiniai dešimtmečiai padarė poveikį miestų urbanistikai ir architektūrai. Šie procesai akivaizdūs keliose postsocialistinėse šalyse. Vienas iš tokių pavyzdžių Slovakijoje – Bánovce nad Bebravou miestas. Iki XIX a. pab. miestas nebuvo ekonomiškai reikšmingas. Socialistiniu laikotarpiu miestas patyrė reikšmingų urbanistinių ir architektūrinių pokyčių dėl pramonės vystymosi. Išraiškingas istorinio branduolio vaizdas pakito pagal modernistinės urbanistikos principus. Remiantis dabartine kompaktiško miesto politika, svarbu rasti pusiausvyrą tarp tradicinės kompaktiškos urbanistinės formos ir moderniosios miesto formos. Straipsnyje naudojantis miestų planais sekamas ankstesnės miesto kaitos procesas. Siekiama aptikti miesto istorinio branduolio transformavimo ir pertvarkymo vietas tam, kad būtų išsaugotos jo kultūrinės ir istorinės vertės, kartu užtikrinant ekologiško ir tvaraus miesto reikalavimus.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** miesto vystymas, istorinis branduolys, miestų kaita, potencialas.