

HISTORIC TOWN OF LJUBLJANA

THE PLACE FOR TOURISTS AND/OR TOWN RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The article speaks about the historic city of Ljubljana as one of the youngest capitals of the EU, it explains its historical development at the crossing of different cultures, German, Roman and Slavic. It identifies the problems and potentials of a historic city and gives an overview of the preservation and regeneration strategies in Ljubljana during last 50 years. It explains experiences and instruments in cultural heritage management, preservation, renewal and revitalisation. Finally it investigates the opportunities and threats of tourism on cultural heritage and on the quality of life in historic centres.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE CITY AT THE CROSSING OF GERMAN AND MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

Ljubljana is a typical Central European town with a long and rich history. Its origins go back to the prehistoric period; it developed around a significant river crossing, at the natural passage between two hills, in the so called area of Ljubljana gate.

The first important urban settlement, called Aemona Iulia was founded in the early 1st century A.D. by Roman invaders. It had the typical rectangular form of a Roman military camp with two main intersecting roads (cardo and decumanus maximus), with the forum at the crossing of these two. The heritage of the Roman town is preserved in the layout of the nineteenth century town, in its basic street network and the material remains of the Roman buildings.

The crescent-shaped medieval town was founded in the 12th century by the German Spanheim family. In the 13th century it was conquered by the Habsburgs and remained under their rule for more than 700 years, until the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. The medieval town had the typical shape of a continental feudal central European town. It was located between the river and the feudal castle, which dominated the city administratively and economically and granted the city its civic rights.

The medieval city was composed of 3 town cores, which are still well preserved in the urban form: the linear Mestni trg and Stari trg between the Castle hill and the Ljubljanica river and the rectangular Novi trg on the left bank of the river with its rectilinear street pattern.

The principle of land division was typically medieval: narrow plots of land (8-10m) arranged evenly along the streets in order to allow each house to open on the street. Private and public buildings (the town hall, the bishop's palace and even churches), all obeyed the unwritten rule and were equally placed in the street line, separated by narrow fire fighting lanes. The typology of housing was determined by the size of the narrow plots of land. The most general dwelling type was a house with gables and only 3 window bays on the street, shops or artisans' workshops on the ground floor with a lateral corridor, from which stairs led up to the first floor.

In the Renaissance and Baroque period, the image of the town started to change radically, but did not change the overall medieval urban layout. The land plots began to merge and the fire-fighting lanes were abandoned. During the 17th and 18th centuries the houses of the bourgeois and noble, built of brick, replaced the old wooden houses (Šumi 1992). They extended over two or three land plots far from the street into the depth of the plot, thus allowing the formation of the typical arcaded courtyards between the street, and the rear and lateral wings of the building. The Baroque renewal gave Ljubljana a completely new, Italianate character. A new cathedral, an Episcopal palace, a seminary, the town hall and a fountain, created by Italian architects and artists, formed one of the most beautiful baroque urban ambiances in central Europe.

At the end of the eighteenth century the town walls were pulled down and new streets were laid in their place, squares were created

in place of the previous town gates and quays were arranged along the river Ljubljanica. In the mid-19th century, the railway, connecting through to Vienna and Trieste, crossed the town, giving rise to an extensive modernisation of the town in the second half of the century.

Ljubljana underwent a true revival in the 19th century. The town began to spread quickly outside the perimeter of the medieval walls. Soon after the mid-19th century the first steps towards systematic urban planning were done (Valenčič 1967). New modern acquisitions (gasworks, waterworks, a power-station, the drainage system, street pavements, a tree nursery and the related arrangement of parks and pleasure grounds, public baths and public laundries, refuse collection etc.) contributed greatly to the improvement of health and hygiene, and also to the beautification of the town.

In the late nineteenth century Ljubljana had already become a typical Austro Hungarian town. At the end of the century the central government in Vienna tried hard to preserve the unity of the empire and also to tie up the peripheral urban centres of the culturally diversified empire into a homogenized civilisation by means of architecture. It centralized the building activities within building departments of different ministries. Typical building plans for administrative buildings, railway stations, schools, cultural premises, hospitals etc. for the whole empire, from Lvov to Krakov, Trieste, Zagreb were promoted there ... Also the architecture of the peripheral urban centres of the monarchy was influenced by Vienna. In particular the circular boulevard – the *Ringstrasse* – with its eclectic architecture became the model for the reconstruction of many provincial towns all over the monarchy. The Ringstrasse had a symbolic significance, and it meant the enforcement of historic styles and gave rise to the creation of a kind of supra national style which, still today, defines the boundaries of the imperial state (Achleitner 1999).

After the devastating earthquake that struck the city of Ljubljana in 1895, the municipal council started an extensive reconstruction of the town. The best experts in urban planning of the time were invited to participate in the task, including Camillo Sitte (Gaberščik 1966) and Maks Fabiani (Fabiani 1895) and an official regulation plan (Šumi 1954; Valenčič 1967; Mihelič 1983) based on the proposed solutions was commissioned from the municipal engineer Jan Duffé. It served as the basis

for the construction of the town for almost fifty years. Shortly after the earthquake the municipality adopted new building regulations (Stavbinski 1896) as a legal framework for the implementation of the plan.

At the turn of the 19th century the power of the central imperial state started to decline and national conflicts increased all over the monarchy. National requirements were louder and the resistance against the prevailing German influence was perceived also in the architecture of the peripheral centres. In Ljubljana the national awakening was fully supported by the municipality and the mayor. Many architects and builders from other Slavic provinces of the monarchy, mainly Czechs, were invited to come to work in Ljubljana and important architectural tasks were commissioned from them (the theatre, the national community hall, the palace of provincial government ...). In less than 20 years the city was completely reconstructed and a new town quarter in secessionist style was built, giving the town an entirely new, national character (Mihelič 1998).

The First World War was the final rupture with the 19th century and the Habsburg dynasty. The incorporation of Slovene national territory into the new state, the monarchy of Yugoslavia, and the new role of Ljubljana within it stimulated the development of the town. Important new cultural institutions were founded (the National Gallery, the Municipal Museum, the Academy of Sciences and Arts, the National University Library, and the radio station) giving the city a modern Slovene character. The most important development was the opening of the Slovene University in 1920/21. Within the technical faculty the School of Architecture was founded, which was directed by Jože Plečnik and Ivan Vurnik as the leading professors. By the end of the Twenties the first generation of architects had already graduated from this school and took over the most important tasks in the field of architecture and urban planning.

Thanks to Jože Plečnik Ljubljana again developed a more Mediterranean character in the interwar period. He created a series of magnificent urban spaces and a number of significant architectural monuments, mainly within the actual city centre. His urban plan for Ljubljana (Plečnik 1926), designed in 1926-28 and implemented gradually until the late 1950s, was the synthesis of a functional and artistic approach.

In opposition to the contemporary anti-urban ideology of the international functionalist movement, which promoted the modern city, based on the separation of functions and the use of the car, Plečnik advocated traditional city and classical urban elements – the street, the square, the park, public monuments. He designed the city for the pedestrian. For this he created stops and multiplied memories, reorganized the castle, designed the parliament, the squares and a garland of churches around the city and planned the cemetery at Žale, the city of the dead. His urban design strength lies in his sensitivity to detail and the craft side of architecture. In more than twenty years he gave the city his own imprint and symbolic value, and it is quite usual today to identify Ljubljana from the interwar period as Plečnik's Ljubljana (Hrausky *et al.* 2006).

Functionalism didn't take radical forms in the architecture of Ljubljana, but remained moderate in the period before the Second World War. Modern functionalist thought developed in the shadow of Plečnik's personality and needed more time to expand. In particular it affected residential architecture. In the late 1920's the earliest collective housing estates which expressed modern ideas were built in by the first generation of Slovenian architects, Vladimir Šubic, Vladimir Mušič, Ivo Spinčič, and Josip Costaperaria etc., mostly influenced by contemporary German and Austrian architecture. A new town quarter of modern residential villas (Levstikova ulica) reminds us of the contemporary Weissenhof in Stuttgart built for the German Werkbund Housing exhibition in 1927. In the town centre the group of apartment houses (Dukić apartment blocks), was the first example of free standing apartment blocks in green surroundings. New concepts of residential architecture were largely adopted especially after 1935, when the Municipality launched a large social housing program and engaged a number of young architects (Mihelič 1983).

The town centre began to move from the old medieval core towards the North West and the new business centre of six-story business premises, owned mainly by banking and other financial institutions, expanded the overall scale of Ljubljana. The final accent was given by the 13 – story «skyscraper» «Nebotičnik», the first tower like building in Ljubljana, designed in 1930-33 by Vladimir Šubic as a symbol of the new economic prosperity of the town (Zupančič 2001).



Fig. 2 - Medieval town between the castle hill and the river of Ljubljana (photo Ljubljana Tourist Board).

Fig. 3
 Baroque town core in front
 of the town hall with the fountain
 and the cathedral in the background
 (photo B. Mihelič).



Fig. 4
 The nineteenth century town
 with the National community hall
 (Postcard, Historical Archives
 of Ljubljana).

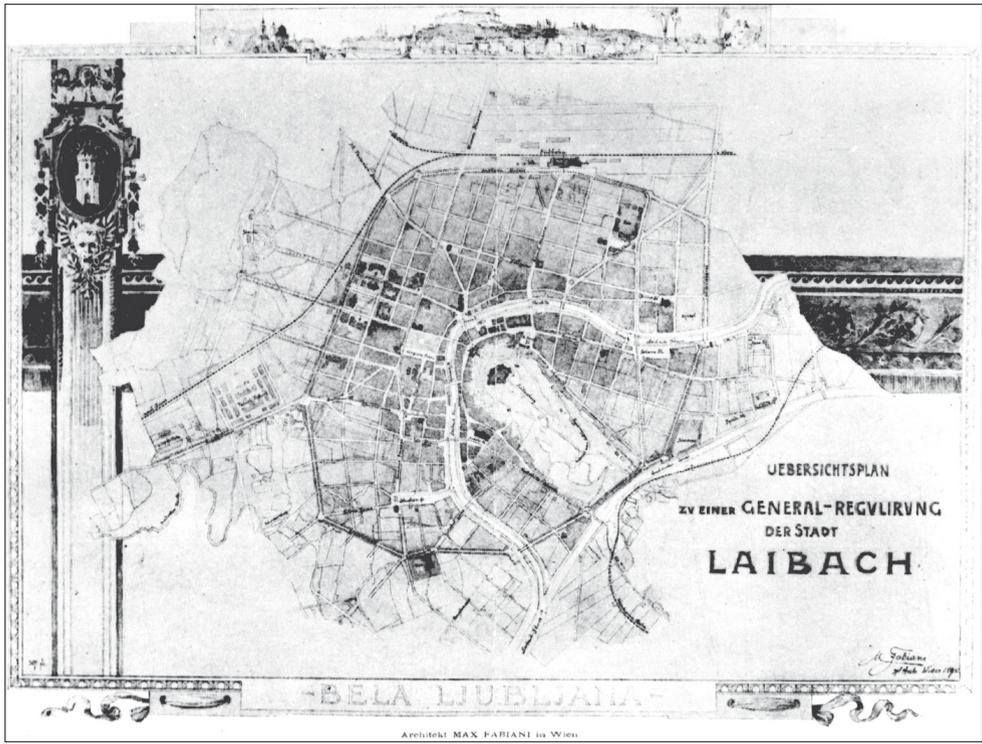


Fig. 5
 Maks Fabiani Regulation plan for Ljubljana, 1895 (scanned copy).



*Fig. 6
Secessionist Ljubljana, Miklošič Street
(photo Historical Archives
of Ljubljana).*



*Fig. 7
Secessionist Ljubljana,
Miklošič park
(postcard Historical Archives
of Ljubljana).*



*Fig. 8
Jože Plečnik, Three bridges, linking the medieval town core with the nineteenth city (photo K. Pollak).*



Fig. 9
Jože Plečnik, Study for the regulation plan of Ljubljana, 1929 (scanned copy).



*Fig. 10
Ljubljana- my city campaign,
Renovation of the river quay Breg
(photo K. Pollak).*



*Fig. 12
Rent-a-bike to improve
inner city transport
for tourists
and residents
(photo K. Pollak).*



*Fig. 11
Renewas
of public spaces
for disabled
(photo K. Pollak).*



*Fig. 13
Tourist animation in open public spaces (photo K. Pollak).*

The liberation in May 1945 made Ljubljana the political, cultural and economic centre of the Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia. Its population quickly increased and the city began to spread beyond its existing borders, demanding urban and architectural modernisation. In the post war period the old medieval city was more or less left behind in the modernisation fever. The new administrative centre, dominated by two towers – symbols of the new economic and political power of the state – was built outside the original town boundary in the nineteenth century town quarter (Koselj 1955; Bernik 2004).

During the period of Yugoslav rule between 1945 and 1991 the character of the original city remained much the same. Unlike many western cities there was little incentive to redevelop the central core buildings.

After the declaration of independence and international recognition of Slovenia in 1991, Ljubljana became the capital of the new state – the Republic of Slovenia. According to its new role it has assumed a number of new functions and has become a seat of numerous international economic and diplomatic institutions (Čelik 2007).

2. PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS OF THE HISTORIC CITY

Today Ljubljana faces much the same problems as most European industrial cities: an ageing population, loss of population, loss of residential function, physical degeneration, loss of historical identity and decline in the quality of life etc. This is particularly true for the historic city as the most precious and at the same time the most vulnerable part of the town. It has lost 40% of its population in the last 40 years, and almost 9% in the last 10 years. At the same time, the percentage of children aged below 15 has fallen to almost 40% and the number of people aged over 65 has increased remarkably. The index of ageing grew from 112 in 1991 to 165 in 2002, which is alarming when we consider that the replacement rate (i.e. limit at which the population stops regenerating) is only 72.

On the other hand Ljubljana's historic centre has a great potential. It is rather small, well organized and suitable for the pedestrian, which makes living very pleasant. It is also very well connected with the river

and with green surroundings. It is no more than 5 minutes by foot from the town hall under the castle hill to the park which is directly linked with the natural world.

3. PRESERVATION AND REGENERATION OF THE HISTORIC CITY

Since WW2 the historic centre of Ljubljana went through different phases of regeneration and revitalisation. Between 1950 and 1960 the first comprehensive urban plan for regeneration was elaborated and implemented. Its goal was the renewal of public open spaces (streets, squares, the castle hill and the embankment of the Ljubljanica), the restoration of particular monuments, housing, commercial premises and offices along with the planning of new activities in public places and inside historic buildings (Mihelič 2005).

The leading idea of this regeneration program was to preserve through reuse and renewal and to incorporate the protection of heritage into urban planning. This was a very modern idea at the time when aggressive interventions threatened a large number of historic towns in Europe. It was contemporaneous to the so called Malreaux law on the protected sites (1962), the first important legal act in favour of historic towns. Unfortunately, this advantageous era did not last very long. Already in the mid-1960s, the changing political and economic situation pushed back the endeavours to regenerate the old town and allowed the town's modernisation to start with giant strides similar to that which was happening in other European countries. Fortunately such interventions remained outside and did not affect very much the historic city core of Ljubljana. The dilapidation of the historic city therefore remained the result of bad maintenance and not of new interventions.

In the 1980s the municipality of Ljubljana launched a new plan for regeneration (Sinteza 1982), which had ambitious objectives: to realize a comprehensive regeneration of the entire historic city, to renovate the building stock, the public open spaces and also the whole infrastructure and to revitalize the city with new programs. The most important objective was to enable young families to move into the city centre.

The project was only partly realized. It was blocked by strict legislation and also by the lack of money. It has to be stressed that the whole program was planned to be implemented by public funds from the municipality.

After 1991 the socio-economic conditions changed radically. The existing approaches to urban renewal were no longer suitable. New methodologies had to be developed and adapted to the new property structures. Transition from public to private ownership of housing had an important impact on the processes of regeneration of the city. Privatisation of the housing fund completely atomized the property structure. On one hand privatisation encouraged renewal of the housing fund, but on the other hand such atomized property made it even more difficult, because it became almost impossible to harmonize the different interests of numerous owners regarding maintenance or renewal. It seems that comprehensive regeneration is still an illusion and also today regeneration remains limited to punctual interventions in single buildings.

Since 1991 regeneration and renewal have been supported by different instruments, created at national and local level. To improve physical environment and cultural heritage the Ministry of Culture of the RS developed two supporting instruments: the first, called the «Cultural Tolar» (Kulturni tolar ..., www), involves a subsidy to support the restoration of the most endangered and most important cultural monuments, while the second (Sofinansiranje projektov ..., www) involves subsidies for the elaboration of project documentation, for restoration and conservation work. Both subsidies are given to the owners or managers of monuments on the basis of public tender.

To improve the housing conditions in condominiums a law (Rezervni sklad..., www) has been adopted which obliges the owners of flats in blocks and condominiums, older than 10 years, to raise funds for the maintenance of their buildings.

Several instruments to support the preservation and renewal of cultural heritage were established at the local level. One of the most successful called the «Ljubljana – My City» campaign (Ljubljana-moje mesto ..., www) was created in 1991 with 3 main objectives: to subsidize the renovation of facades and roofs, to finance the renovation of public spaces and to reduce obstacles in public spaces for the handi-

capped population. With the support of this instrument 350 buildings have been renovated in the last 20 years.

For the maintenance and the improvement of housing the Municipal housing fund provides housing loans (Posojila ..., www) with a low interest rate.

In 2002-05 Ljubljana was the partner in the international project «Regeneration on the condition of demographic change» (Re Urban Mobil, www). The aim of this project was to develop instruments for the regeneration in a sustainable way. A catalogue of 140 instruments was prepared for the municipalities to help them detect and to confront the problems of de-urbanisation and to stimulate re-urbanisation of the inner city residential areas.

4. STRATEGIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORIC CITY

The historic centre of Ljubljana, which embraces the medieval town core and the neighbouring medieval suburb, is statutorily protected as a Heritage site of local importance. All interventions within the protected area have to be approved by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage.

The Cultural Heritage Protection Law (ZVKD 2008) obliges the municipality to include the conservation requirements and guidelines in all urban and spatial planning acts. Furthermore the law also binds all actors in the process of urban planning to take into consideration all the provisions of acts of proclamation and of the Central register of Heritage.

In accordance with the regulations of the ZVKD, the Strategic plan for Ljubljana (SPN MOL, www), which is in the process of preparation (the second draft has already been adopted by MOL), emphasises the preservation, maintenance and sustainable planning of the town and particularly of the historic city. These are among the most important objectives of the future development of the town. It also foresees the increase of housing in the historic centre, particularly for young fami-

lies, better maintenance and adaptation of old housing to the new lifestyles, reduction of motor traffic and organization of public transport, sustaining the vitality of the city, shortly the increase of the quality of life for social groups of all ages. It also stresses the need for the promotion and development of a distinct urban structure, based on historical and cultural identity as key values.

The protection of the cultural heritage and the sustainable development of the historic city are theoretically well organized and legally supported. But in practice these principles do not always work as they should. New investors often try to avoid the law to intervene into protected areas. They put pressure on the authorities to enforce building permission and unfortunately they are often very successful (for example Kolizej).

5. TOURISM

In the last twenty years Ljubljana has become an important tourist destination. In 2009 Slovenia was placed 7th on the list of best rated tourist destinations by the National Geographic Traveller and Ljubljana was described as «colourful, vibrant and architecturally appealing» and «one of Europe's most attractive small capital cities». The experts who made the list saw in Ljubljana «an evident sense of local identity».

There are different reasons for such raised interest for the country and its capital city. Slovenia is a new member state of the EU and Ljubljana the new national capital. The interest for the cultural heritage of central and eastern European countries, which was more or less ignored before 1990 by the western public and also professionals, increased significantly after the fall of the Iron Curtain and contributed to the development of cultural tourism. Also the international cooperation within different European programs stimulated the promotion of cultural heritage. Ljubljana is well known for its medieval centre with its rich baroque heritage. It also boasts an art nouveau heritage, together with the work of Jože Plečnik and also with the heritage of modern architecture. The cultural heritage of Ljubljana is more and more appre-

ciated, but nevertheless we cannot speak of mass tourism. In 2009 for example almost 700 000 tourist overnight stays were registered in Ljubljana leaving out of consideration all one-day visitors. This is a lot for a small city, but of course the tourist flow cannot be compared with Barcelona, Paris, Rome or London.

In Ljubljana therefore we cannot speak of mass tourism. Tourism is still considered to be an opportunity and has a positive impact on the development of the city. It has many advantages. In recent years the city has largely improved its tourist facilities (accommodation, transport, information) and cultural activities (festivals, concerts, exhibitions, outdoor performances etc.). Tourism contributed to the regeneration and renewal of the historic town; it stimulates investments and gives opportunities for employment. It has also had a positive impact on the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage in the historic town. Streets and squares were refurbished and also communal infrastructure was largely improved. Many old neglected buildings have been renovated for touristic purposes (hotels and pensions, youth hostels, restaurants and bars, shops and art galleries) since the 1990s.

In 2001 the Municipality of Ljubljana set up the Ljubljana Tourist Board as a public commercial institution aimed at the promotion of tourism, to establish a profile of the capital Ljubljana as a central and suitable tourist destination and to develop highly structured tourist attractions. It carries out different activities, designed to animate the historic city and to improve the tourist service. It organizes alternative means of transport in the historic town (tourist transport on the river and rent-a-bike), improves information, organizes outdoor activities (musical and theatre performances, installations, festivals, concerts, exhibitions) on the public squares of the historic city, which makes the city much more lively and «exceptionally attractive»

On the other hand tourism also presents a threat. The historic city is becoming more and more a tourist resort and it is losing its residential function. The main axis through the historic city and the quays along the river are transformed into leisure places with bars and restaurants and nice shops. This makes living in the historic centre less attractive. The quality of life has decreased; it has lost many advantages and become less attractive and more complicated. High prices of housing are inacces-

sible to young families and also inadequate for what they offer. The basic retail shops and services have moved out to the outskirts of the town into large shopping centres. This makes residents more and more dependant on the car but at the same time they have no possibility to park their cars. They also suffer from the increasing noise and air pollution.

6. CONCLUSION

Ljubljana as the national capital, hosting important institutions and boasting a rich cultural heritage, with a human scale and favourable location has the potential to become one the most attractive cities of central Europe. This is the main objective of the future urban development. But to reach this goal it should change its urban policy in the field of urban planning, cultural heritage protection and the tourist industry. Urban planners, politicians and tourist managers should realize that this goal could be reached only through a close collaboration among all actors in the planning stage, by appropriate protection of the historical character of the city and a good maintenance and reuse of the cultural monuments adapted to the needs of a contemporary life style.

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RIASSUNTO

L'articolo tratta lo sviluppo della città storica di Ljubljana, una delle più giovani capitali dell'Unione Europea, dove si mescolano influenze di tre culture: germanica, romana e slava. Identifica i problemi e le potenzialità della città storica offrendo una rassegna delle strategie di conservazione e rinnovamento negli ultimi cinquanta anni. Inoltre mette in mostra le esperienze e gli strumenti che sono stati sviluppati per la gestione, conservazione e rinnovo del patrimonio culturale. In conclusione richiama l'attenzione alle opportunità che il turismo può offrire alle città storiche come pure ai pericoli ai quali sono esposti il loro patrimonio culturale e la qualità della vita.