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Reshaping Social Spaces After Socialism Through Citizen Participation: The Case of Novo Sarajevo's Post-Conflict Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Architecture embodies the social context from which it emerges. In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, architects and planners have played a pivotal role in translating the ideals and values of political systems into physical space. The socialist programs of "brotherhood and unity" and "worker self-management" were articulated in various public architectural typologies, open and accessible to all, and shaped a new social framework. Less emphasized but equally present is the historical continuity of self-organizing architecture, representing the shared goal of population survival and adaptability to forthcoming changes. In the aftermath of the 1990s war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is undergoing a multifaceted transition: from socialism to capitalism, from conflict to peace, from post-war recovery toward sustainable development and democratic governance. More than 30 years later, this radical paradigm shift has significantly impacted the urban landscape of Sarajevo, affecting both new developments and the approach to the urban legacy of previous epochs. By correlating the socio-spatial factors of transition, this article explores the post-socialist residential neighborhoods of Novo Sarajevo that were once divided by the frontline during the siege of Sarajevo, particularly their current status and the potential for the transformation of the remaining indoor and outdoor social spaces. The model employed for redefining social spaces in vulnerable areas emphasizes user participation, and was tested through an academic research project to address collective issues. This research has shown the role of the participatory approach as an instrument for the reinvention of existing, even contested, social assets to create an inclusive, sustainable urban environment in post-conflict conditions. The approach may be able to heal the remnants of the collapsed system, its neglected legacy, and the damaged urban and social structures.

1. Introduction

The transition from socialism to capitalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex process that has significantly shaped the country's socio-economic landscape since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. It is an ongoing process influenced by its unique historical context, political landscape, and socio-economic conditions. Ex-Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, operated under a unique form of socialism that blended self-management and a market economy. The breakup of Yugoslavia led to a brutal war from 1992 to 1995, devastating the economy and infrastructure and necessitating extensive reconstruction. The economic transition involved privatizing state-owned enterprises, often marred by corruption and favoritism, resulting in economic challenges and social inequality (Jović, 2001). Establishing a market economy required new legal and institutional frameworks to support private property, market competition, and foreign investment (Donais, 2005). Bosnia and Herzegovina's political system, established by the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, created a complex governance structure based on ethnic quotas and power-sharing, sometimes hindering economic and political reforms (Pugh, 2002). Three decades after the war, the current political and social conditions can be described as "politics as the continuation of war." Indeed, Bosnia and Herzegovina's transition since the mid-nineties, following the war's end, has proven exceedingly complex. The fragmentation of society caused by the war resulted in a loss of social cohesion and trust, while the consequences of the conflict in society can be defined as comprising the following three elements: (a) a power-sharing regime, (b) a deficit of social capital, and (c) social inequality and exclusion (Blagovčanin, 2024).

The political and socio-economic complexities of the transition have manifested in the city of Sarajevo in a particular way. While the new developments reflect the features of neoliberal urbanization, accompanied by informal housing developments in the city's periphery, the urban legacy of socialist modernism has been subject to neglect and decay. Differing from the other capital cities of the former Yugoslav republics, Sarajevo experienced severe destruction and urbicide during the 1992–1995 siege. As a result, the ongoing transformation of post-socialist society in Sarajevo also encompasses the urban phenomena of post-war recovery and the social processes of dealing with *collective trauma* (Table 1).

Table 1. The distinct case of transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina: from socialism to capitalism, war to peace.

Yugoslav Socialism	Transition to Capitalism	Post-Socialist Urbanism and Society
Brotherhood and unity Self-management	Introduction of a liberal market economy Democracy	Privatization Neoliberal urbanism Urban decay of socialist neighborhoods
	1990s War	**Post-War Urbanism and Society**
	Conflict Destruction Urbicide	Post-war reconstruction Collective trauma

In this research, the described urban and societal processes are observed in the residential neighborhoods of the municipality of Novo Sarajevo (New Sarajevo). Two study areas, namely Grbavica and Trg Heroja, were selected as they embody features of a post-socialist and post-conflict urban environment. Constructed in the post-World War II period, they epitomize the ideals of socialist modernism. However, during the 1990s war, these areas were divided by the frontline within the besieged city. As in other Yugoslav cities, mass urbanization and a housing boom in Sarajevo represented the socialist projects of self-management and social ownership (Mrduljaš, 2018).

During socialism, the political system and state ideology acted as critical cohesive factors for establishing a collective identity and producing social spaces within residential neighborhoods, as observed in the Novo Sarajevo municipality. After the collapse of socialism and after the war, with the advent of capitalism, these former cohesive factors were no longer relevant, and the private realm dominated over the public, which is reflected in the private appropriation, fragmentation, and decay of social spaces, as well as in the break in community links. The term *social spaces*, referring to indoor and outdoor areas for collective use, is intentionally placed alongside *socialism* in the title of this article to highlight the hypothesis addressing the prospects of social spaces in post-socialist society. This article examines the tension between the abandoned collective values of the past and the uncritical embracing of new values and searches for new cohesive factors in the post-socialist transformation of social spaces. It recognizes post-conflict society as a problem and a significant obstacle in the renewal of cooperation. However, it is argued that broken bonds can be restored even in sensitive post-socialist and post-conflict contexts, such as the neighborhoods in Novo Sarajevo, by employing participatory approaches to create an inclusive and sustainable urban environment. This hypothesis will be explored by referencing the relevant theoretical concepts of post-socialist urbanism, supported by an in-depth study of the neighborhoods of Novo Sarajevo and the findings of the participatory project. The analysis will be correlated to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, focusing on the role of participatory approaches in fostering vibrant public spaces, inclusive urban development, and enhancing sustainability and resilience.

The methodology of this research involves a theoretical background study encompassing critical concepts concerning *socialist urbanism* and *post-socialist urban transformation*, focusing on *social spaces* in residential housing, urban and social aspects of *post-war recovery*, and concentrating on *social capital* and *citizen participation* as the critical assets aligned with the specific targets of UN SDG 11. Moreover, a historical analysis and mapping of the study areas are accompanied by an interpretative and comparative exploration of the two selected areas. Finally, detailed case studies of participatory initiatives from the architectural studio course Community Architecture Studio are presented to highlight the impact of these initiatives on urban development and community cohesion. The article concludes with broader implications for reshaping social spaces, emphasizing resource coordination, knowledge sharing, and sustainable urban policies, and offers recommendations for future citizen participation efforts and potential replication in other contexts.

2. Theoretical Background

Socialist urbanism in Yugoslavia can be portrayed as a marriage between the communist ideological values of self-management and collective ownership with modernist architectural principles and aesthetics. In the first two decades post-World War II, the capital cities of the former Yugoslav republics turned into large-scale construction sites. Today, residential complexes like New Belgrade in Serbia, New Zagreb and Split 3 in

Croatia, Novo Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and many others embody the critical features of Yugoslav socialist housing projects. These areas showcase diverse residential typologies, including freestanding apartment blocks, cascading structures, towers with standardized layouts, prefabricated constructions, and expressive modernist forms, epitomizing the architectural and social ideals of socialist urban planning (Bjažić Klarin, 2018). Despite these residential dormitories being critiqued as modernist mono-functional and homogenized environments lacking public life (Lefebvre, 2014), the socialist residential neighborhoods encompassed various indoor and outdoor *social spaces*, such as public areas, green zones, and community facilities like kindergartens, schools, local centers, sports amenities, and workers' clubs. These spaces were integrated with varying degrees of success, resulting in both effective and unsuccessful spatial solutions. Although *self-management* and *social ownership* policies implied the ideal of social justice, formal participation was often destabilized due to informal hierarchies (Dragutinovic et al., 2022) From the 1970s onward, the country focused on creating spaces of representation (Kulić, 2012) to epitomize significant political and sporting events, including the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. The 1990s war marked the radical shift from socialism to capitalism, with urbicide taking place in the cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the decades following the war, Sarajevo underwent essential reconstruction and economic privatization. The rise of a liberal economy was accompanied by new urban developments mainly comprised of commercial architecture and real estate projects in urban voids throughout the city while disregarding the public domain. In parallel, informal housing continued to sprawl on the city's slopes (Islambegović, 2020). The interaction of these processes resulted in the loss, deterioration, and fragmentation of existing public spaces, as well as in the neglect of the social infrastructure built by the socialist regime throughout the city (Zagora & Samic, 2021).

In post-conflict societies, collective trauma significantly impacts social dynamics, often leaving deep psychological scars and disrupting communal ties. This trauma can hinder reconciliation efforts, perpetuate mistrust, and complicate rebuilding social cohesion (Volkan, 1997). Indeed, the shift from conflict to peace requires more than just the end of violence; it necessitates establishing systems that promote long-term stability and reconciliation (Lederach, 1997). Essential for this process are: inclusive governance, trust-building, and the reintegration of marginalized groups (Doyle, 2000). Moreover, the social and psychological effects of collective trauma manifest in widespread distress, intergenerational transmissions of trauma, and impaired social functioning (Hirschberger, 2018). Rebuilding social cohesion in post-conflict settings thus presents significant challenges due to deep-seated mistrust, social fragmentation, and enduring ethnic or political divides (Putnam, 2000). However, opportunities for cohesion arise through inclusive dialogue, community engagement, and the creation of shared goals that transcend past grievances. In this context, solidarity plays a crucial role in post-conflict recovery, enabling collective action, mutual support, and rebuilding trust within communities. It allows individuals and groups to unite around common goals, overcoming divisions and working together towards a more just and peaceful society (Jabri, 1996). Strengthening solidarity through grassroots initiatives and inclusive policies is essential for the long-term success of post-conflict recovery efforts (Lederach, 1997).

Citizen participation and social capital can theoretically be a powerful means to overcome collective trauma, particularly in post-conflict societies. High levels of social capital can facilitate collective action and cooperation, which is essential for addressing the psychological and social consequences of collective trauma (Putnam, 2000). Citizen participation enhances a sense of agency and empowerment among individuals and communities affected by trauma. When citizens actively engage in decision-making

processes, it can restore a sense of control and collective efficacy, often undermined by traumatic experiences. This engagement fosters social inclusion, which is vital for rebuilding trust and reducing the sense of alienation that can accompany collective trauma (Lederach, 1997). Building strong social connections and actively participating in the community enhances social capital, aiding healing by providing emotional support and access to resources. This shared identity helps create a collective narrative that includes all community members, reducing the risk of further social disintegration (Hirschberger, 2018). In addition, citizen participation in post-conflict reconstruction efforts can help address the root causes of trauma by promoting inclusive and participatory governance. This approach ensures that the voices of those affected by trauma are heard and their needs are met, fostering a sense of justice and reconciliation (Fung, 2004). Theories of deliberative democracy suggest that participatory processes can lead to more legitimate and widely accepted outcomes, which are essential for long-term peace and stability.

All these theories and studies addressing social capital suggest that citizen participation and social capital can overcome collective trauma by fostering social cohesion, trust, and a sense of collective agency. By creating safe spaces for dialogue, civil society organizations can bridge divides between communities and offer support systems for individuals affected by trauma. They contribute to accumulating bonding and bridging social capital (Leonard, 2004). Rebuilding social capital in post-conflict cities involves social networks and the physical infrastructure which enables social interaction. Research shows that the design of public spaces, availability of social services, and urban planning all impact the restoration of social capital by facilitating interactions and fostering a sense of safety and shared ownership among citizens (Colletta & Cullen, 2000).

Social capital is a multidisciplinary concept with numerous definitions and theoretical assumptions that differ based on the perspective from which the phenomenon is observed. It is "the association of individuals in interactions and networks to generate profit" (Lin, 2008). James Coleman defines social capital as the ability of people to work together in groups and organizations for common goals (Coleman, 1988). This means that social capital is an organized and directed form of individual action with pre-formed common goals. Traumatic events, such as armed conflict and massive and systematic human rights violations, can have profound and long-lasting, even transgenerational effects on trust and social capital. According to the renowned regional public opinion survey Balkan Barometer, trust in Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions is among the region's lowest (Blagovčanin, 2024). Trust in certain Bosnian citizens is notably low, with more than two-thirds of people expressing distrust in the judiciary, government, and parliament. This skepticism extends to the belief that institutions cannot effectively tackle social issues, as reflected in the low engagement in civic and political activities (Blagovčanin, 2024). The UN and the World Bank stress that an effective management system is essential for conflict prevention, addressing interconnected issues like citizen participation, exclusion, marginalization, and weak state capacities. Participatory urbanism is vital for creating urban spaces that are responsive and adaptable to local needs and priorities, fostering social trust and collaboration, which is essential for rebuilding social capital. Participatory methods, such as community-based workshops and co-design sessions, can help reconcile diverse community needs while reinforcing social cohesion (Gebhardt, 2020). The mechanisms of effective citizen engagement in urban regeneration emphasize that participatory practices must be inclusive and context-sensitive, especially in communities with historically low institutional trust (Wilson & Tewdwr-Jones, 2021). If adequately supported, participatory processes can strengthen social capital by fostering relationships and mutual support, which is essential in post-conflict city dynamics.

Encouraging citizen participation in urban redevelopment involves involving residents in planning and decision-making. In alignment with the UN SDGs, particularly SDG 11, local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina should commit to enhancing "inclusive and sustainable urbanization and [the] capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management" (UN, 2024). This can be achieved through various methods such as public consultations, community workshops, participatory budgeting, and collaborative design processes, which can contribute to UN SDG 16 in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, accessible to all, and accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (UN, 2024). Citizen involvement helps identify local priorities and provides valuable insights that planners and developers might overlook (Arnstein, 1969). Moreover, citizen participation fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among residents. When people are involved in shaping their surroundings, they are more likely to support and take pride in redevelopment outcomes. This involvement can lead to greater social cohesion and a stronger sense of community identity (Innes, 2004). Moreover, involving citizens in the planning process can help to build trust between the community and local authorities, which is essential for the long-term success of urban redevelopment initiatives (Fung, 2004). Citizen participation enhances transparency and accountability in redevelopment. Open, collaborative decision-making increases the chances of public-focused outcomes and helps reduce conflicts, as residents feel their concerns are acknowledged (Forester, 1999).

3. Novo Sarajevo in Transition

Sarajevo is a linear city that has been chronologically developed along the river Miljacka from east to west, with its urban morphology acting like a timeline and narrating the city's history from its origins to its most recent developments (Figure 1). The typical urban panorama associated with the image of Sarajevo stretches along the main boulevard's linear path of 9.5 km, from City Hall in the east to the crossroad at Stup, rhythmically punctuated by transversal streets and bridges across the Miljacka every 500 m. This study focuses on areas at the midpoint of this city line, the point of encounter between the historical and modern Sarajevo. Still, it is not the typical image usually included in tourist guidebooks. Grbavica and Hrasno (including the local community of Trg Heroja, translated as Heroes' Square) are two socialist residential areas in Sarajevo, each with a distinct historical and social background. Both neighborhoods consist of modernist mono-functionalist residential blocks developed during the Socialist Yugoslav era in the first waves of post-World War II urbanization and population growth. Situated in the most densely populated municipality of Novo Sarajevo, below the central administrative, commercial, and business district of Marijin Dvor, the residential neighborhoods of Grbavica and Hrasno sit in a quiet zone delineated by a green promenade along the river Miljacka to the north and a longitudinal road to the south. The area of the municipality of Novo Sarajevo at 9.9 km^2 makes it the smallest municipality in the Canton of Sarajevo; however, it has a population density of 7,449.3 inhabitants per km^2, which is 21.6 times higher than the average of all other municipalities (Zavod za Planiranje Kantona Sarajevo, 2012). In administrative terms, the analyzed areas are called "local communities": The local community of Grbavica 1 measures an area of 36.5 ha with 10,100 inhabitants, and Grbavica 2 measures an area of 30.7 ha with 7,100 inhabitants. The local community of Trg Heroja is part of the Hrasno neighborhood, and measures a total area of 24 ha with 7,115 inhabitants. This study area was selected due to its strategic location, socialist heritage, and challenging history, which have affected social cohesion and the use of social spaces.
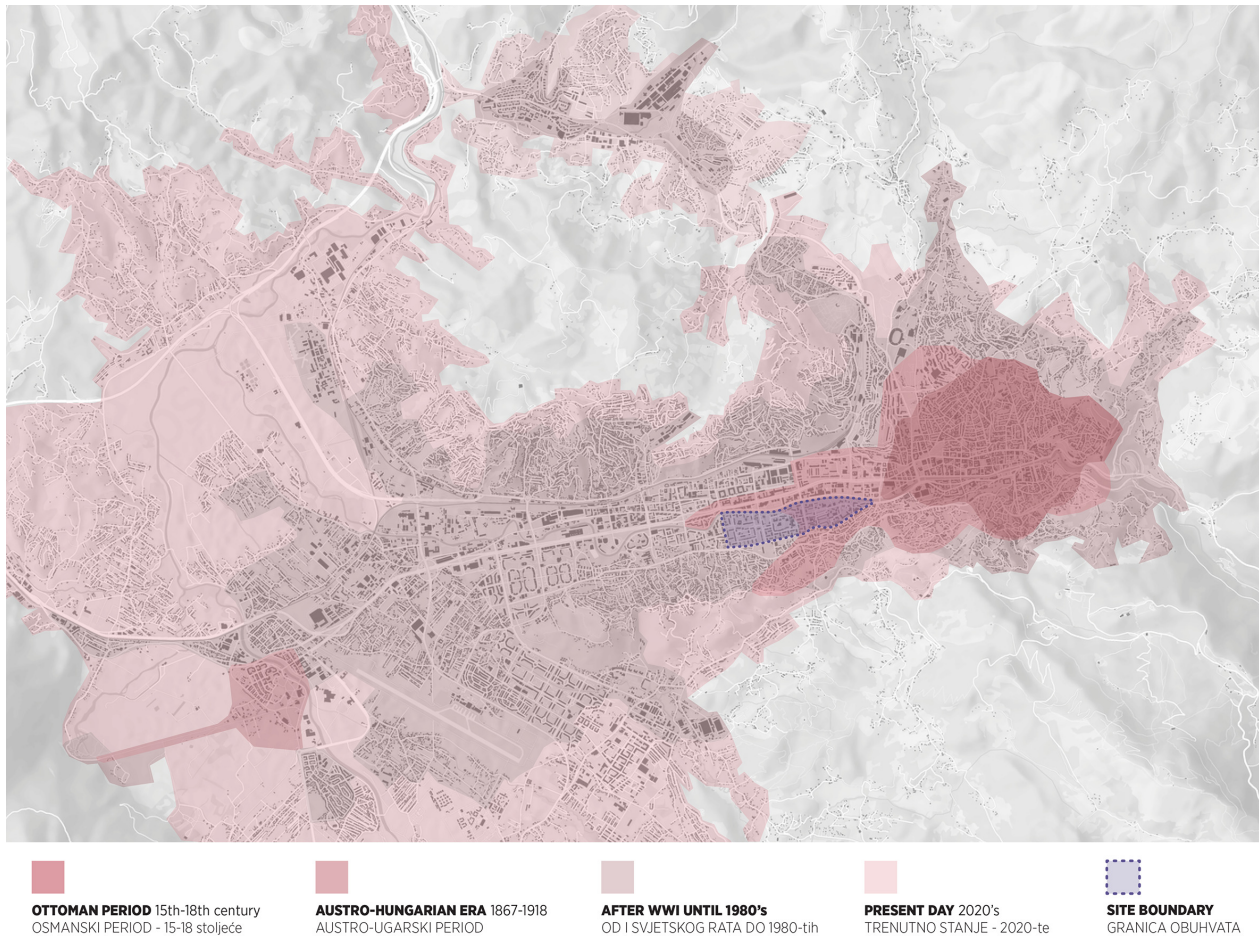
OTTOMAN PERIOD 15th-18th century
OSMANSKI PERIOD - 15-18 stoljeće

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ERA 1867-1918
AUSTRO-UGARSKI PERIOD

AFTER WWI UNTIL 1980's
OD I SVJETSKOG RATA DO 1980-tih

PRESENT DAY 2020's
TRENUTNO STANJE - 2020-te

SITE BOUNDARY
GRANICA OBUHVATA

Figure 1. The city map of Sarajevo indicates the historical development of the neighborhoods in a chronological manner from east to west, as well as the location of the study areas in the municipality of Novo Sarajevo.

3.1. First Period: Construction Boom and Socialist Utopia

In the first decade after World War II, housing development in Sarajevo was marginalized to sporadic small-scale projects which, despite the insufficient number of dwelling units, could not respond to the increasing population. According to housing fund statistics, housing standards in Sarajevo were less favorable than those in the capital cities of other Yugoslav Republics (Finci, 1964). The ruling communist regime of the epoch finally addressed these housing issues and in 1955 major construction projects were launched. From 1958 to 1962, the number of dwellings made to accommodate the increased population rate set a record, and the neighborhood of Grbavica was the symbol of this first wave of residential development. However, a quality assessment of the large-scale development shows that the projects had not been based on studies on the actual needs of the inhabitants, and that the newly built estates prioritized rational floorplans which merely adhered to minimal standards, and addressed only economic and technical factors (Finci, 1964). The urban plan of the Grbavica neighborhood was developed in 1948 by architects Zdravko Kovačević, Milivoj Peterčić, and Branko Kalajdžić and is composed of two areas: Grbavica 1 was planned for 12,100 inhabitants, 378 inhabitants per km^2; Grbavica 2 for 11,200 inhabitants, 520 inhabitants per km^2 (Društvo Arhitekata Sarajevo, 1963). The subsequent wave of construction continued toward the west from 1967 to 1969, when the adjacent residential quarter of Hrasno was developed. According to the

General Urban Plan from 1963, Hrasno was planned for 9,900 inhabitants, 471 inhabitants per km2 (Društvo Arhitekata Sarajevo, 1963). In the General Urban Plan of 1963, Grbavica and Hrasno were designated mono-functional residential areas, with a small share of mixed-use and public functions.

Under socialism, the neighborhoods of Grbavica and Hrasno were symbols of Sarajevo's multi-ethnic and socialist identity, characterized by communal living and social harmony. The urban concepts of these neighborhoods were designed as fragmented, modernist blocks consisting of residential buildings with parking and green areas on the periphery, gravitating towards communal public facilities, including shops, cafes, community centers, schools, and kindergartens located in the center. In the original urban plan, the built area and street footprint make up 60% of the area, while the remaining 40% are open, green spaces (Aganović, 1977). The building density increases westwards, from Grbavica 1 towards Hrasno. The urban composition of these blocks was defined by a typical free-form orthogonal arrangement of two typologies of residential buildings surrounded by green areas, including modernist apartment buildings (up to five floors) and residential high-rises (more than eight floors). The area of Grbavica 1, first developed, features a linear arrangement of residential high-rises along the river Miljacka. In contrast, the adjacent regions of Grbavica 2 and Hrasno are also accentuated by residential towers in the block's interior. The main feature of the westernmost region of the Hrasno neighborhood, specifically of its local community named Trg Heroja, is the square placed in the heart of the block, with its urban morphology defined by five-story apartment blocks and emphasized by four 20-story residential towers. The project involved using a prefabricated construction system to develop five different housing types, with half of the units being one-room apartments ranging from 38 to 42 m^2. Unlike the Grbavica neighborhood, where the parterre is inactive, the ground floors of the residential buildings in the Hrasno block were designed to host public functions and are linked with the surrounding public spaces. The critical public facilities within Grbavica that contained indoor social spaces were primary schools, a music school, kindergartens, two youth centers, and a commercial center. In addition to kindergartens and a primary school, the local municipality of Trg Heroja during the socialist period also included more commercial zones, especially ones concentrated in the parterre spaces surrounding the main square. Open public spaces in Grbavica and Trg Heroja were typically sparsely equipped green areas arranged in free-form layouts intertwined with parking zones.

3.2. Second Period: Sarajevo Under Siege. Reunification of the City

During the 1992–1995 aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the siege of Sarajevo, the Grbavica neighborhood was under occupation. The frontline between occupied and liberated territory passed along the transversal road, which separates the neighborhoods of Grbavica and Hrasno (Figure 2). This road, together with the Miljacka River and Vrbanja Bridge on the eastern side, represented the division lines of the city for four years. Grbavica remained under occupation until March 1996, making it one of the last areas in Sarajevo to be reintegrated into the city after the war. The occupation turned Grbavica into a site of severe conflict and suffering. Many of its residents faced violence, forced displacement, and persecution. The war had a profound impact on Grbavica, resulting in devastated physical infrastructure and a torn social fabric with eroded trust among neighbors. The defense operation at Trg Heroja was one of the most complex operations in the Sarajevo area in 1992, preventing the last attempt to divide the city into two parts.

There is a strong community of Trg Heroja veterans who have been active members of the local community since their victorious battle. In March 1996, Grbavica was reintegrated back into the city, leading to the
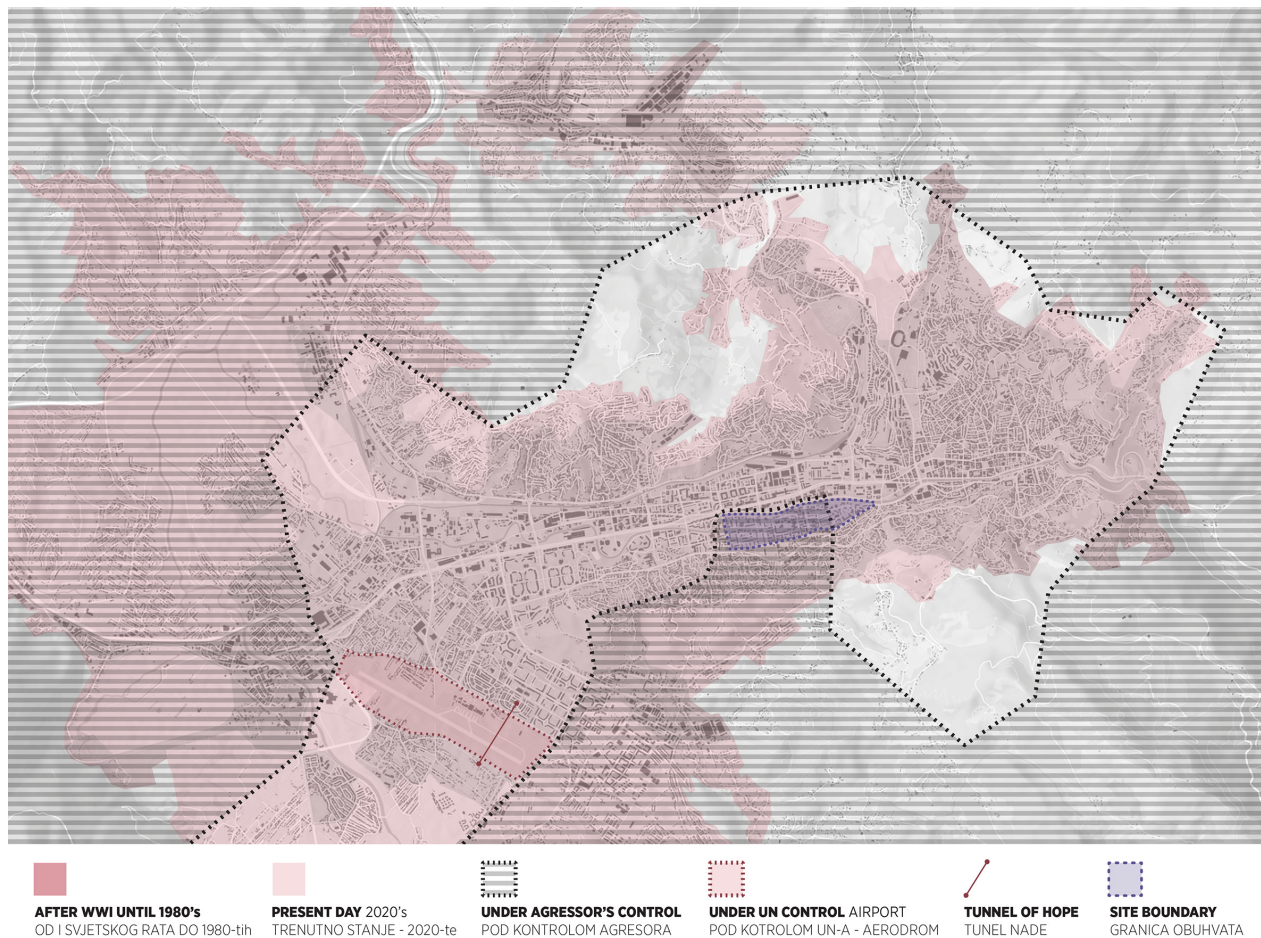
Figure 2. City map of Sarajevo under siege 1992–1995, showing areas under occupation by the aggressor army and the study areas of Grbavica and Hrasno divided by the frontline.

reunification of Sarajevo; this was followed by the removal of barricades from the bridge of "Brotherhood and Unity," a name both symbolic and ironic, reminiscent of the famous slogan of the communist party of the collapsed socialist system. All the buildings which stood on the frontline were destroyed by fire and bombshells. In contrast, the ones in the interior of the quarter were primarily vacant, the streets full of garbage and rubble, evocative of post-apocalyptic scenery. Significant demographic changes occurred before, during, and after the siege, from mortalities to population migration to and from the areas in focus.

3.3. Third Period: Post-War Transition. Citizen Activism and Participation in the Post-Socialist Period

In the case of the study areas in Novo Sarajevo, most of the buildings on the frontline sustained severe damage, and their primary structural refurbishment became a priority in the first decade after the war. Moreover, post-war recovery included rooftop extensions on the existing apartment buildings and structural refurbishment to accommodate the incoming population. In the last decade, the municipal administration supported, launched, and implemented energy efficiency projects, focusing mainly on public buildings and providing subsidies for the energy refurbishment of collective and single-family housing (Ured za Energetsku Efikasnost, 2024). Residential buildings, together with public facilities, primary schools, clinics, kindergartens, and cultural centers, have been, for the most part, refurbished in the past two decades. There are also two

marketplaces, one in Hrasno and the other in Grbavica, the Faculty of Forestry (university building) and a Franciscan student dorm, several newly built commercial buildings, and two mosques (Figure 3). Fortunately, the completeness of the urban layout in the two analyzed areas left little room for ambitious post-socialist commercial developments, which largely preserved the character of the quiet and safe residential neighborhoods. The green areas, especially in the neighborhood of Grbavica, were initially preserved in the post-war period; however, they later became endangered by a significant increase in parking spaces and appropriated by private, illegally built, and subsequently legalized single-story provisional commercial facilities to compensate for the passive ground floors of the residential buildings (Zagora & Samic, 2021). Moreover, due to unresolved legislative issues regarding the jurisdiction of communal services over the management, supervision, and enforcement of maintenance, public spaces have continued to deteriorate (Jusić, 2013), which is reflected in the urban decay of social spaces originating from the socialist period. Social research on the maintenance of common spaces in residential areas has shown the decline of collective activism, social cohesion, and trust in general among the citizens of Sarajevo (Jusić, 2013).

On the other hand, the law guarantees official public participation in urban development matters. According to the 2017 Sarajevo Canton Law on Spatial Planning, the participatory process is obligatory once spatial planning documentation is drafted. However, citizens are not included in preparing the planning documentation. The official public consultation period lasts from 30 to 90 days, depending on the level of planning documentation, and takes place in the so-called "Local Communities." This is another piece of legacy from the socialist period, representing local governance units known as the "Mjesna Zajednica" (Local Community), the relevance of which has even been promoted by international organizations and NGOs. Similar to European models of sub-municipal or neighborhood-level governance, this structure has the potential to support the democratization of society (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024). However, civic activism and responses have only emerged recently in urban issues and remain insufficiently expressed. One of the first citizen initiatives was the City and Nature project launched in 2013. This initiative included Gradology, an online activist platform that assists Sarajevo's citizens in identifying and mapping urban open spaces, such as parks, squares, abandoned buildings, and underutilized areas
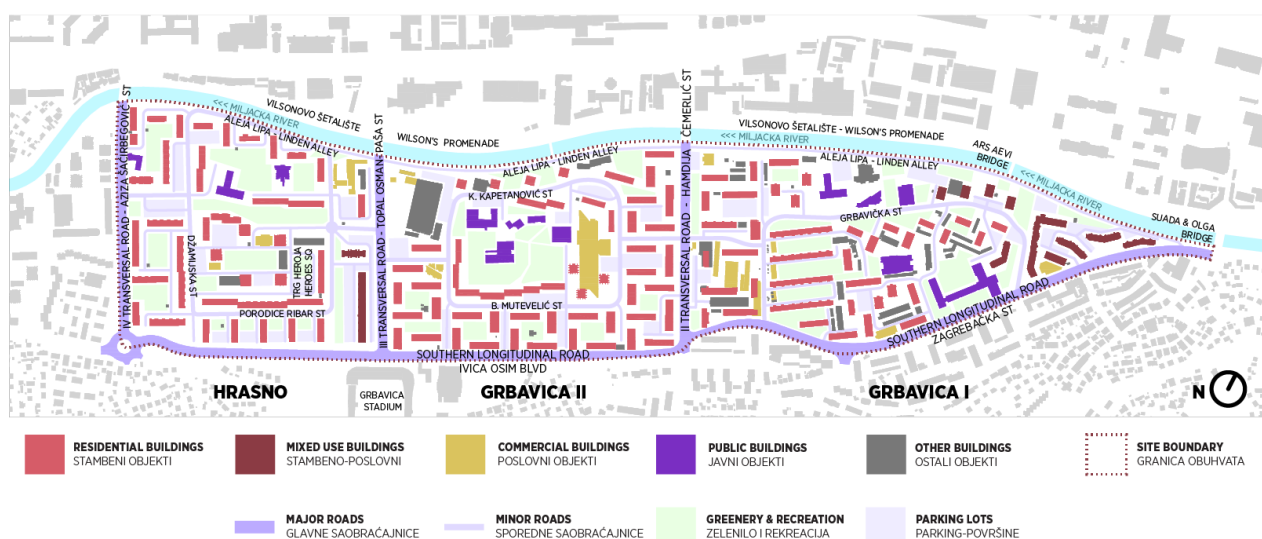

Figure 3. Map showing the current urban layout of the Grbavica and Hrasno (Trg Heroja) study areas within the municipality of Novo Sarajevo.

(LIFT, 2015). Similarly, a self-organized group of young activists known as Dobre Kote has focused on transforming neglected and uninviting urban areas into gathering places for the local community, particularly children, through collaborative efforts (Association of Architects of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017). Since 2019, an informal group of citizens has been active in civil revolts against appropriating and converting part of Hastahana Park in Sarajevo into a construction site. This citizens' initiative was a signal to initiate a collaborative planning approach on this and other significant sites in Sarajevo. In response, in July 2021, the UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the municipality of Centar, in partnership with both the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sarajevo and the City of Sarajevo, launched a pilot sustainable urban transformation initiative titled "Re-Imagine My Street." The initiative focused on five selected public micro-locations within the municipality of Centar, Sarajevo, organizing urban labs—interactive, outdoor, and creative workshops—to gather place-based ideas and visions from citizens and businesses for the sustainable future of their streets and neighborhoods, accompanied by the launch of an online digital platform (Municipality Centar & UNDP, 2022). After the Urban Lab Hastahana event and a digital survey, an international competition for the "Hastahana – Public Space for Everyone" design was held. The winning concept was chosen through public voting, and by June 2023, the detailed design was in the process of being finalized, with implementation set to begin soon. Today, social consciousness and civic activism around key urban issues have slightly increased, thanks to various activities like urban walks, workshops, and participatory actions led by organizations such as Crvena, LIFT (organizer of the Days of Architecture in Sarajevo), and DKC Sarajevo (a socio-cultural center). A recent collaborative project that has brought together multiple institutional and municipal partners, and includes participative mechanisms in urban planning, is the Urban Transformation Project Sarajevo (ETH Zurich et al., 2024). Participatory activities of this project include the establishment of the Urban Design Studio Sarajevo as a collaborative workshop space open to the public, and The Studio Mobil as a visionary outdoor city laboratory which invites citizen participation.

Although case studies of citizen activism and participatory projects in Sarajevo are few and relatively recent, they, alongside international examples of the best practices, illustrate that the benefits are multidirectional. Such initiatives add value for all stakeholders, including for the public and private sector, civic organizations, the broader community, researchers, and educators, mitigating the negative impacts of transition and striving towards a more inclusive and sustainable transformation of the post-conflict and post-socialist environment.

4. Case Studies: Citizen Participation in Grbavica and Hrasno (Trg Heroja)

4.1. Methodology of the Citizen Participation Project "(Re)Construction of Community"

In line with local and international good practices striving to achieve UN SDGs 11 and 16, Community Architecture Studio, conducted by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sarajevo, was designed to educate students in critical spatial action within the contemporary political, ideological, artistic, and philosophical context of architecture at a micro-social level in the community. The course aimed to unlock the community's potential by fostering shared spatial and social interests. The three-year project was based on the hypothesis that utilizing the potential of the ex-socialist community and its values could change the narrative of community disengagement, manifested in general distrust and "learned helplessness." Indeed, to strengthen micro-social forms of community, it is crucial to build upon the collaborative practices and traditions of the ex-socialist community. These practices are seen as a foundation for regenerating,

reconstructing, adapting, and sustainably managing community structures (Hardt & Negri, 2017). The methodology was developed based on research on user participation in the design and use of social resources in architecture (Tatlić, 2017). The (Re)Construction of Community project in Sarajevo was an integral part of the Community Architecture Studio course at the Faculty of Architecture through which local communities were engaged by means of a participatory spatial and architectural planning approach. This initiative was developed in conjunction with the NOVO! Novo Sarajevo (NEW! New Sarajevo) research project organized by the Faculty of Architecture focusing on the methodology of a comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive urban transformation of this municipality (Zagora et al., 2024). The course was divided into several phases and organized through interdisciplinary activities and alternative teaching methods. The (Re)Construction of Community project unfolded in three stages: expert panel discussions, social activism, and participation in design, all organized through multidisciplinary activities and alternative teaching methods.

The (Re)Construction of Community project, part of Community Architecture Studio, utilized a participatory action research approach to engage residents and students in a collaborative planning process. This model actively involves the community in research and design, emphasizing user participation and architectural planning within a shared social context. Deriving from Lewin's work on action research, participatory action research combines elements of community-based research, popular education, and action for social change (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). In our project, data collection methods included surveys, interviews, case studies, workshops, and panel discussions. Initial surveys were conducted with residents to understand their spatial needs and preferences. These internet and written surveys aimed to capture demographic data and specific requests for community enhancements. Questions addressed aspects such as the use of community spaces, desired facilities, and levels of engagement with local initiatives. Municipal employees and local community leaders were interviewed, focusing on administrative roles, budget constraints, and challenges in implementing citizen suggestions. Structured questions allowed insight into the municipality's procedures for receiving and handling citizen feedback. The project used a case-study approach focused on two settlements in Sarajevo's Novo Sarajevo municipality. This area was chosen for its socialist background and history of conflict, making it ideal for exploring participatory urbanism. A series of panels and workshops (e.g., the first and second citizen panels) were organized as interactive sessions where community members discussed their priorities and mapped their needs on physical models. Using the Charette procedure, small groups could contribute iteratively to the discussions.

The methodology used for the study areas of Grbavica and Trg Heroja was the same. It began with interdisciplinary lectures featuring faculty from various fields, including architecture, political science, sociology, and cultural anthropology. The lectures focused on community architecture, social research methodologies, decision-making processes, and the social context of spatial interventions. The goal was to encourage students to move away from traditional technical thinking and adopt a more socially responsible approach. After the lectures, student groups researched to define their goals for public participation. They surveyed the local community to understand the needs of its citizens better. Using spatial analyses and mapping techniques, they identified potential social spaces. This information informed the communication plan for the first citizen panel, which focused on promoting social activism and community engagement. Additionally, students developed an interactive 3D model to help participants visualize their needs and suggestions. This model served as a "communication starter," encouraging open dialogue without imposing spatial decisions (Figure 4). The Charette procedure was used to organize the panel and promote open

communication. Participants were divided into small groups to discuss the needs of the neighborhood and potential social spaces. The input from community members was then synthesized to identify critical spatial potentials and issues (Figure 5). The project's final phase involved the community in the design process. Students identified the needs discussed in the initial panel and created a spatial model to represent the panel's conclusions. The visual representations were designed to remain open-ended, encouraging ongoing citizen engagement in future panels. During the second citizen panel, students presented their findings and proposals. They focused on mapping user needs, identifying problems, and suggesting opportunities.

Figure 4. The Charette procedure applied to the case study of Grbavica.

Figure 5. Mapping the needs of citizens on a 3D model in the Trg Heroja case study.

The communication throughout the process was flexible, fostering a sense of openness and creativity to encourage ongoing dialogue. In the final phase, the students divided themselves into groups to develop spatial solutions for the issues identified by the community. These solutions were later presented to the local community, the municipality, and the Faculty of Architecture for final consideration.

Throughout the project, various stakeholders played crucial roles. The students were central to the initiative, conducting research, facilitating discussions, and developing spatial proposals. They collaborated closely with local community members, municipal officials, and experts from various disciplines. As the project progressed, the municipality became a critical stakeholder, recognizing the importance of community participation and expressing satisfaction with the communication and design outcomes. Experts from various faculties and NGOs provided valuable insights, helping to shape the students' approach to community engagement and spatial planning. The project faced challenges due to the limitations of traditional technical education, which often overlooks communication and social studies in architecture. Additionally, the established nature of architectural and city development posed obstacles to implementing the project's open methodology and participatory approach. Moreover, Sarajevo's post-war political transition has led to a sense of "learned helplessness" among the community, making it challenging to foster active participation. However, the project successfully engaged the local community in spatial planning, creating a new habit of citizen participation with positive feedback from community members and officials. The project signified a shift in the students' experience from a traditional architectural education to a more socially engaged approach. The municipality acknowledged the project's significance and engaged the Faculty of Architecture to develop participatory approaches further, with one student's Trg Heroja project currently in the executive design phase, and another's Grbavica project in the municipality's budget proposal.

4.2. Case Studies and Their Influence on Community Cohesion in Urban Development

The initial stage of the project focused on the Local Community Center of Trg Heroja. It involved 12 students who aimed to explore the hypothesis of expanding or adapting an existing local community center into a new, functional community facility. Several NGOs were active on location, but veterans' and pensioners' associations also actively participated in local politics; indeed, there are ongoing efforts to restore local self-governance, and local community members and administration have appealed to the European Union to regain powers lost following the collapse of the socialist system, during which local communities had more authority and managed their funds through accounting systems (interview with Z. Babić, Secretary of the Local Community Office of Trg Heroja, March 2023). Following an expert panel's guidance, students mapped current social spaces and explored the potential for new ones. They surveyed 59 participants, most aged between 15 and 30. The survey was conducted through various methods, including oral interviews, written questionnaires, and online surveys within the local community. In conclusion, the data highlight diverse engagement patterns within community spaces such as Trg Heroja Square. Some individuals, though a minority, actively engage in local community initiatives, suggesting potential for collaboration. Key findings show a preference for outdoor recreation, highlighting the need for improved amenities such as green spaces and seating areas. The results of the survey showed also a greater desire for community involvement in decision-making (Tatlić, 2024). Although the students were actively engaged in the project's transparency, social media, and communication with the community, the primary role of engaging citizens in panels was assigned to a local community secretary. In the first panel, there were 19 participants. Almost half of the participants were seniors (52.63%), with adults constituting the other half (47.37%). Most seniors returned

to reclaim the space for gatherings the municipality had taken from them a few years ago. Although they had actively participated in discussions during the first panel, mapping out the problems and needs in their community and offering their vision for local spaces, they reappeared at the following two. Their needs were mapped onto the model and synthesized into a needs map (Figure 6). They were highly engaged in creating new social spaces alongside students. The local community in Trg Heroja was actively involved in the decision-making process, especially during the citizen panels, where their input played a crucial role in shaping the project's outcomes. Many older residents who lived there during socialism asserted their right to access public spaces, and although initially skeptical about the project, they expressed satisfaction with the process after three meetings and demonstrated a strong sense of community cohesion. Students frequently changed their groups based on the tasks and their interests but, ultimately, organized themselves into five groups to work on the final designs for a central park, a seniors' area, a youth area, an inclusive playground, and a dog park. The project was recognized as a valuable achievement of research and established communication with the local community, and as such, it was further included in the municipality's budget proposal. Subsequently, the municipality of Novo Sarajevo has contracted the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Sarajevo to develop a proposal for a Central Park design.

Due to the established cooperation, the municipality proposed to address the problematic and "lost" public spaces in Grbavica. The architects in Novo Sarajevo anticipated that the Community Architecture Studio and its students would tackle the problem of deteriorating public spaces while engaging with the community to create new social spaces. The course included 15 students. They had an example from Trg Heroja and a presentation of a previous project, which allowed them to learn from past mistakes and improve the project
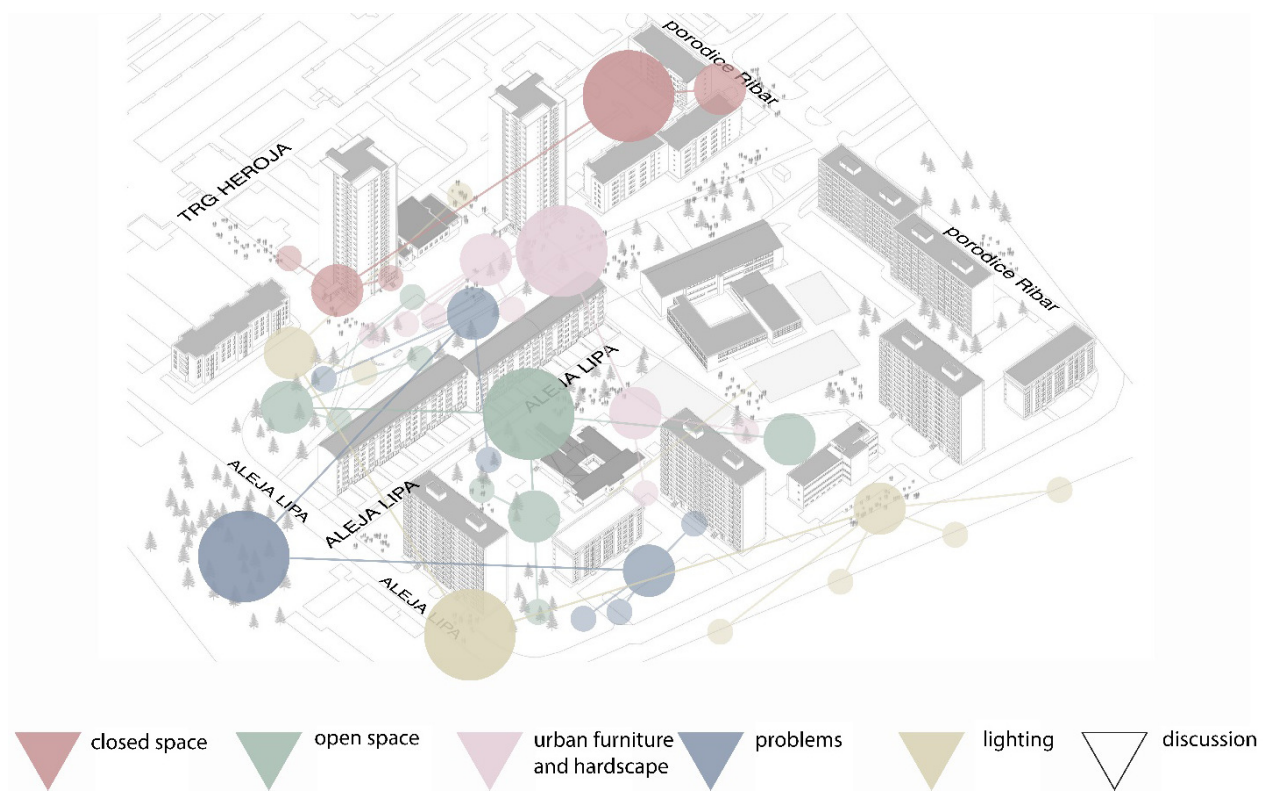

Figure 6. Map of citizens' needs.

and their communication with the community. The students conducted a thorough spatial analysis to identify issues and potentials within the designated area. This analysis focused on four main categories:

1. Identification of Problems: The students identified several problematic areas, including abandoned buildings that contribute to spatial degradation, unmaintained structures that pose safety hazards, and the privatization of green spaces, which restricts accessibility and undermines communal use. These factors create a fragmented and less cohesive urban environment.
2. Assessment of Potential: Opportunities for improvement were highlighted, emphasizing the addition of community amenities such as parks, kindergartens, inclusive recreational and sports spaces, and improved landscaping. These interventions aim to enhance the overall accessibility and quality of life, creating an inclusive environment that caters to diverse community needs (Figure 7).
3. Analysis of Open and Closed Social Spaces: The spatial layout was examined to assess both open, publicly accessible spaces and restricted or privatized spaces. The presence of closed spaces limits movement and social interaction within the neighborhood, indicating the need for more integrated and open environments to support community connectivity.
4. Review of Municipal Spaces: The study also identified existing municipal spaces that are currently occupied or underutilized, proposing that these could be repurposed or redesigned to meet communal needs better. This would enable a more efficient use of public resources and enhance the functionality of the urban fabric. The students effectively identified critical spatial issues alongside actionable recommendations through this analysis (Figure 7).

A survey of 114 participants showed a diverse user base, with 60.4% of respondents female and 39.6% male. The age distribution was balanced, with 33.9% aged 18 to 34 and 26.8% aged 55 and above. Most participants were employed (53.2%), followed by students (29.7%) and retirees (13.7%). A significant number (47.7%) reported visiting the area "continuously," while 17.1% said "often," indicating its importance in daily life. However, 43.2% expressed dissatisfaction with community engagement in development decisions. Support for activating the space is strong, with 73.9% favoring improvements. Key concerns included a lack of parking (37.8%), waste management issues (19.8%), and insufficient recreational facilities (17.1%). Respondents particularly prioritized additional walking paths (30.6%), parking improvements (27%), and community interaction spaces (18%) as crucial projects for enhancing quality of life. These findings emphasize the community's interest in functional and social enhancements to foster a more inclusive and interactive environment. In conclusion, the survey highlights a clear community interest in improving the Grbavica 1 area through increased public engagement, enhanced recreational facilities, and better infrastructure, which collectively could contribute to a higher quality of life for its residents.

Figure 7. Analysis of location character and identification of problems and potentials.

The Grbavica community experienced a management change which was reflected in subsequent panels. The new secretary was a young employee unfamiliar with the neighborhood and viewed the secretary position merely as a job. As a result, he did not attend or actively participate in the organization of any panels. The panels were primarily promoted through student posters and social media, resulting in 18 citizens from various age groups attending the first panel (Figure 8). Attendees were adults (70%), seniors (15%), and young people (15%). The attendees were strangers to each other and came out of curiosity, with their own interests or specific expectations. Some of them attended subsequent panels, resulting in different people being involved in each panel. This situation prevented the formation of a cohesive group and community but also led to a larger group being involved. Most people primarily came to listen and observe the process. It was more challenging to involve them in a collaborative process than it was to involve the seniors at Trg Heroja. However, the young and adult groups showed they were well-informed about participation practices in other European countries and displayed particular interest in the process. The case study of Grbavica demonstrates the significant potential for citizen participation, but requires more time and examples to establish it as a regular practice.

After the second panel, students participated in the KuliSa workshop, organized in collaboration with the faculties of architecture of the University of Zagreb, the University of Sarajevo, and the University of Split. During and after the workshop, they implemented the conclusions of the second citizen panel into six project design groups: (a) activation of above-ground garages; (b) activation of passages; (c) sensory fence; (d) Grbavica 1 square; (e) art line; and (f) activation of green areas between residential buildings. They presented their proposals at the third citizen panel at Children's House, a youth center in Grbavica. Following this, the project to activate green areas was included in the budget of the Novo Sarajevo Municipality.

The primary achievement of both projects was the enhancement of citizen engagement in the decision-making process for creating social spaces in their neighborhoods. The university served as a moderator for communication between the local community and the municipality, addressing the administrative barriers of the current communication system. All the processes included gathering data and

Figure 8. Visual identity of Grbavica created by the (Re)Construction of Community design studio.

reaching conclusions which were then presented to the city; in the case of Grbavica, municipality employees even participated in the panels. The local community presented this information to the students as necessary, reflecting systematic and organized community demands. The students then acted as moderators between the local community and municipality, effectively representing the neighborhood and its residents' needs. Members of the local community expressed their satisfaction with both the process and the outcome. The municipality members, particularly the architects, recognized the potential to enhance the living conditions of local communities efficiently and realistically. Strengthening solidarity and fostering collective action and mutual support among community members and students played a significant role in rebuilding trust during this period of post-conflict recovery. The disparity in social cohesion between the two neighborhoods, however, indicates that communities like Grbavica, due to a necessary demographic change after the city's reunification, need more time and intervention to encourage cooperation, compared to more coherent local communities like Trg Heroja. The project (Re)Construction of Community was the first step towards sustainable and inclusive change through community participation. The (Re)Construction of Community project in Trg Heroja greatly enhanced community cohesion and urban development. Residents actively participated in the decision-making process, which fostered a sense of ownership and engagement within the community. This engagement was crucial in rebuilding trust and promoting collaboration in the post-war context. In contrast, the impact on social cohesion in Grbavica was less immediate. The residents were from diverse age groups, and there was a lack of local community organization or leadership. However, the project did succeed in establishing new social spaces through the collaborative efforts of the community.

5. Conclusions

This research focused on citizen participation in the post-socialist and post-conflict neighborhoods of Grbavica and Hrasno (Trg Heroja) in Sarajevo, areas that historically symbolized socialist ideals and modernist urban planning. Selected for their sensitivity, these neighborhoods were divided by the front line during the siege of Sarajevo. The article provides a historical overview and examines the impact of this context on community dynamics and urban development. Two participatory projects were conducted in these neighborhoods as part of a studio by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sarajevo in collaboration with the Municipality of Novo Sarajevo.

Even though the impact of creating and participating in new social spaces varied significantly between the two neighborhoods, the participatory approach encouraged dialogue among community members, municipal officials, and students in both locations. This interaction strengthened social ties and promoted a more inclusive atmosphere. The project enhanced community perceptions of the municipality and encouraged participation in public affairs while altering the administrative process for citizen engagement. Regarding urban development, the project demonstrated how community input could directly shape the planning and design of public spaces. The active involvement of citizens led to the identification of critical issues and needs within the neighborhood, which informed the development of more responsive and sustainable urban interventions. The project's success also highlighted the potential for participatory approaches to become standard practice in local governance, as evidenced by the municipality's decision to continue supporting such initiatives. This approach addressed immediate spatial concerns and laid the groundwork for long-term, community-driven urban development, ensuring that future projects align with the needs and desires of the residents.

The transition from socialism to capitalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina has profoundly impacted the country's social, political, and economic landscape. The legacy of conflict and the complexities of its political structures and economic privatization have led to challenges in rebuilding social cohesion and trust. Moreover, the fragmentation of society and the development of a liberal democracy and market economy have created a hybrid regime. This research has shown that encouraging citizen participation and urban redevelopment in line with UN SDGs 11 and 16 offers a way to tackle some existing challenges. By building social capital and involving community members in decision-making, local communities can address the underlying causes of collective trauma and work toward rebuilding trust among residents. The case studies in post-socialist neighborhoods in Sarajevo demonstrate the potential of community-driven projects and offer hope for a more democratic and socially cohesive future. The engagement of citizens and the commitment of local governments to participatory processes can substantially contribute to Sarajevo's post-conflict recovery and development towards a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future (Bjažić Klarin, 2018).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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