

Planning Cultural Sustainability in a Global Economy

1. Central Europe case studies: Warsaw, Budapest, Belgrade, Kiev

One of the greatest challenges in transition economies is the preservation and celebration of cultural continuity in a physical environment determined increasingly by a global and standardized real-estate industry. This paper will refer to actual projects under development in Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Serbia and Brazil that turn this challenge into an essential component of the economic viability of the development.

1.1 Wilanów: - Central Europe's largest test of the strategy in combining demands of the global real-estate industry with the local culture and traditions

Miasteczko Wilanow, is a mixed use community for 25,000 residents on a green-field site within the city of Warsaw. It is an exercise in building a 21st century community by integrating investors from over 10 different countries amidst one of Warsaw's most intact historical settings.

Miasteczko Wilanow was planned to preserve and enhance the original axis or "patte d'oie" that radiates from the nearby Wilanów summer palace. The 169 hectares of Miasteczko Wilanów are the determining keystone in the master-plan established for over 400 hectares of this undeveloped section. The development has prioritized public space planning during an era in Polish development when it is typically an afterthought. It has also focused on the connection of a series of Palaces that were built in the area, notably on top of the Warsaw escarpment which defines the western edge of the site. The physical plan re-knits the lost connections that were the primary features of this landscape during the 18th and 19th centuries.



View from Klimczaka canal towards the New Residence of Queen Marysieńka

Key programmatic features are located along these axis in the new community: this includes a new town hall for the Wilanów district, a five star hotel, office buildings, a public plaza linked to the town center, the largest catholic church built in Poland over the

last two centuries, as well as schools and cultural facilities. The continuity of these axis are substantiated by 4-5 level residential structures, distinctive planting strategies and canals. The park areas along these axis also include equestrian trails that re-iterate the centuries old method of communication between the palaces.

In addition to acknowledging and integrating the presence of the local palace, the plan of the district integrates the prolongation and creation of major Warsaw arteries through the site. The extension of Sobieskiego street or “royal road” from the center of Warsaw, through the site, and the creation of a major east-west street to the Ursynów district will ensure that Miasteczko Wilanów is part of the urban fabric of greater Warsaw. This integration will be further emphasized when the tram link will be completed on Sobieskiego street.

Overall the development texture of the new community echoes that of pre-WWII European cities, rather than the late 20th century American development pattern that is shaping the edges of European cities the last decades. This was done through the program mix and pedestrian friendly orientation established in the master-plan as well by providing clear recommendations for a myriad of residential developers to avoid creating a series of self contained enclaves. Those recommendations, in addition to harmonious architectural guidelines, included the creation of many on-street entrances to ensure that the quality and safety of the street would be of everyone’s concern.

While the investors for the project came from all over the world, the objective was that the architects participating in the project came from Poland. To date almost 15 local practices have been employed in creating the contemporary, yet human scaled, building fabric of the community. It is essential that the detailed texture of a community have a local face, and that local architects be employed in the process. One challenge is to encourage the locals to celebrate their own heritage, rather than to emulate architectural styles that may be in fashion throughout the world at a given moment.

The town center, scheduled to begin construction in 2007 will be the biggest test within the project of the strategy to combine the demands of the global real-estate industry with the local culture and traditions. In order to anchor the kind of commercial and leisure activities that correspond to the image people have of the community, we must carefully integrate a 10,000m² hypermarket and over 3000 car parking spaces. We plan to do this by creating underground parking to create a seamless continuity with the rest of the community fabric and by encasing the hypermarket with more local uses of a human scale.

1.2 21st century fabric in 19th century urban fabric thanks to local companies funds and sources

Corvin Promenade is the transformation of one of Budapest’s poorest and most difficult neighborhoods. A mixed use program that re-position’s the 16 hectare district while building on it’s checkered heritage.

Corvin Promenade is the largest example of center city re-generation in Central Europe. The project area has the dual challenge of changing it’s image of the last few decades, while acknowledging it’s heritage. It is a true test of how to build the early 21st century fabric in an essentially 19th century urban fabric. Some communist era structures are

adjacent to southern edge of the site. The plan calls for the creation of a new street leading to a new linear plaza. Much of the investment comes from international sources.



Corvin Promenade

The project will integrate a mixed use program that will be primarily residential and commercial while building partially upon activities already existing adjacent to the site. Located in the center of Budapest the site is already tied in with the cities subway and tram networks. The fabric of new buildings on the site will be considerably higher than the existing buildings, but in harmony in scale with many of the buildings surrounding the site. Many building materials, including paving stones, have been preserved from the demolished structures on site. Many of those materials will be re-used for the streetscape and by local architects who will create most of the buildings on site. Local innovations, like Lutracon, the translucent concrete, will be used to create an authentic contemporary aspect to the base of the buildings.

One of the key objectives of the project is to re-insert in the fabric of the heart of the city the activities that have tended to move to the cities periphery. Be they shopping centers, cinema complexes, or middle income housing. In this location the institutional investors have adapted the scale of the project to the district, the quality of the place and finer grain of the neighborhood, have found a common ground with institutional Investors. It is important to note that this project is one in a new generation of projects that are developed and financed primary by local firms and capital sources.

1.3. Preserving modern heritage even with a checkered past

In Belgrade the Usce tower had had mixed connotations for the people of Serbia and “Yugoslavia”. The tallest tower of the Balkans since it’s construction in the early 60’s; it was a symbol of engineering prowess. Indeed it was of a level of quality comparable to the best buildings in the west at the time. By the end of the 1990’s it had become a symbol of the Milosevic regime. The Usce tower’s partial destruction by NATO in 1999, raised questions about the cultural relevance of the tower.

Strategies for the re-development of the site followed a long and a design competition for the area surrounding the building. As a participant on the jury I was re-assured that the

winning entry built upon the legacy of the building, rather than erasing the past. When I was asked to oversee the reconstruction of the tower my first reaction was to preserve the integrity of the original building. I revised a proposal by an American design firm to crenellate the top of the building with a post-modern barrel form. Such an approach I felt was meant to disguise a fundamentally good building and would trivialize its importance on Belgrade's skyline. Instead I recommended adding a triple high space to the top of the structure while respecting the straightforward character of the original architecture. The intention was to create a space that would be used for public or semi-public events. The building was reconstructed following my recommendations. Today a taller, more transparent Usce tower marks what will soon be the new mixed-use center of the New Belgrade district.



A new top to Usce – Balkan symbol of engineering prowess and former symbol of Milosević regime

I hope that we managed to preserve an engineering legacy while taking enough of the stigma away from a tower by giving the top back to the people. So far that space has garnered a unique popularity for the people of Belgrade.

1.4 Kiev's future generation's insights. The Harvard and MIT studies results

Development and re-development strategies for the vast Dnipro were the subject of graduate student exercises from both Harvard and MIT over the last two years. Many lessons, some not obvious to the locals, came from this next generation of urban thinkers.

Several studies undertaken regarding the future of the Dnipro riverfront lands in Kiev have revealed insights into the priorities of future generations. The students believed that the center of Kiev had an appropriate density and mix of activities that could sustain itself for the foreseeable future. Most students sought to shift the intense capitalist development pressure in the center to desirable but under-utilized sites, along the waterfront. Several students used the capitalist development pressure to enhance the communist era dormitory areas on the east side of the river developed during the 1970's

and 80's by providing them with quality commercial and leisure facilities. Notably, historically sensitive areas along the waterfront that are currently under significant development pressure, were avoided by the students. They believed that too many cultural artifacts were under pressure to be marginalized and some sites were beyond economic justification.



A forward looking vision of the Kiev Dnipro River Front

The thousands of copies published of both the Harvard and MIT studies found their way to decision-makers throughout Kiev. The press commented that the students had come to grips with many issues that politicians, the development community and even planning professionals had been skirting for over a decade.

1.5. Learning from the desires of the next generation in Sao Paolo

This fall a class of MIT graduate students, in architecture, urban studies and real estate will analyze the development potential of the center of one of the world's largest cities: Sao Paolo. We will not provide the students with a specific objective, other than to create an environment that would be conducive to themselves. What would they do to make it the kind of place that they would like to live and work? The 18 MIT, students that come from all over the world, will be complimented by students from the University of Sao Paolo and Mackenzie University. The outcome of their studies will serve as a basis for a more lucid dialogue about the future of the heart of one of the 21st centuries most important and complex cities.

The student's initial effort will be the first week of September, prior to the ISOCARP gathering in Istanbul. I will share the student's first thoughts as well as the reactions of local decision-makers to them.

2. Final conclusions:

2.1. Key ingredients for cultural sustainability in a global economy

Many different methods may provide the basis for planning cultural sustainability in a global economy. I believe that several elements are key ingredients:

Work with and not against the context. Make the profitability of such an approach evident to global investors.

Embrace the elements of the global economy as a means of sustaining and balancing cities.

Cultural artifacts do not have to be centuries old. All artifacts do not have to be treated as if a museum. Don't erase an inconvenient past, work with it, it might be profitable.

Know when to let certain parts of the city take care of themselves and when to prevent or promote the mechanism of the global economy in other parts.

While building the future listen carefully to the "younger" generations, as they may provide ideas for the future but also have their own perspective regarding what to save from the past. Ideas and perspectives that those with the most experience may have grown blind to.