
The Integration of new urban development in cultural landscapes of historical value – The Mahalas

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1. ABSTRACT

Cultural landscapes should be understood as a combined work of nature and humankind. It is quite natural that the result of this interaction affects the quality and the heritage value of the existing Landscapes. Integrating new urban development within these Landscapes often leads to the degradation and destruction of the cultural and historical importance that determine the cultural Landscape itself.

Many existing Landscapes, both natural and cultural, underlie different strategies for their preservation; Strategies that regenerate the cultural and the historical character, social character and natural character of the landscape. The objective of this paper is to identify the main problems of this type of integration and to analyze the strategies that are intended for the preservation of the existing cultural landscape using a local level case study in Sarajevo. The study is applied to "The old part" of the city, within the historical urban settlements, the so-called Mahalas. Underlying the beauty of the surrounding slopes, the Mahalas represent the residential pattern of once Ottoman oriental architecture in Sarajevo, originated in the 15th century and developed during the Ottoman reign in Bosnia.

This paper shows it's possible to define the main link between the historical urban settlements and the new upper hill settlements, to define the „ultimate" and "heritage" limit, the forms of new architectural integration and further urbanization and if landscapes of this nature can be preserved with their cultural and historical significance and withstand future architectural integration.

2. INTRODUCTION

Cultural Landscapes, as a combined work of Nature and Humankind, over time reflected the relationship between the people and their natural environment. The great diversity of this interaction led to new urban development that has a great influence on the existing quality and value of the Landscape itself. Both, natural and cultural Landscapes are determined by their cultural and historical importance. Integrating new inappropriate urban development within these Landscapes and neglecting their importance often leads to the degradation and destruction of their identity.

In order to preserve their identity and sustain their importance, many existing Landscapes, both natural and cultural have been inscribed on the World Heritage List, as part of our common identity. To date 66 properties on the World Heritage List have been included as cultural Landscapes.¹ The present research provides an objective approach towards their preservation, by underlying different strategies: strategies that regenerate the cultural and historical character, social character and natural character of the Landscape.

This paper analyzes the main problem of integrating new forms of urban development through the analysis of strategies that may be used for their preservation: new urban development in form of new architectural integration, new urban development in form of new urbanization and to define the "ultimate" and "heritage" limit. The research is applied on a local level case study in Sarajevo within the historical urban settlements, the so-called Mahala in "The old part"² of the city.

¹ www.whc.unesco.org

² "The old part" of the city is considered as the part of the city that has been established and developed during the Ottoman period, (1463-1878).

3. THE CASE STUDY: MAHALAS IN SARAJEVO

3.1. Historical background and characteristics

In the times of the Ottoman occupation of Bosnia, the city of Sarajevo started to gradually develop itself. Underlying the influence of traditional concept, the Orient, the city consisted of the “Charshiya” (business center) in the valley and the residential units, the so-called “Mahalas”, settled on the surrounding slopes. The Mahalas represent the residential pattern of once Ottoman oriental architecture. A settlement that consisted of 40-50 houses and a mosque became a Mahala. A Mahala is made of small residential units that compose a closely neighborhood area with gardens and courts, streets and paths, a mosque, a religious school (Mekteb), a fountain (chesma): the center of the Mahala, a school and perhaps a small bakery or grocer shop. Back then the city consisted of 99 Mahalas and 99 mosques.³ Back then, a border line between the Mahalas didn't exist. One Mahala was defined with a small number of houses and a mosque. Nowadays, one Mahala consists of a bigger number of houses but the borderlines remained invisible.



Fig.1: The Mahala –Bistrik, 19th Century (Source: www.sarajevo-x.com)

3.2. Analysis of the Case study location

3.2.1. The Street

Every Mahala has four types of streets:

1. The Main road leading to the Mahala;
2. The main streets in the Mahala following the contour of the houses – the so-called “Sokaki”;
3. The steep paths that are connecting the “Sokaki”;
4. The paths leading to the houses – the so-called “Chikme”.⁴

Back then, there were no vehicles and pack animals were the only form of transportation. Therefore, the width of the streets was determined by the pedestrian and his pack animal. The street pattern shows the similarity to a tree branch. The Mahalas and later on the streets were given the names of the most prominent Families who lived over 100 years in them.

³ Grabrijan, Dusan: The Bosnian oriental architecture in Sarajevo: pp.22.Ljubljana, 1984.

⁴ Grabrijan, Dusan: The Bosnian oriental architecture in Sarajevo: pp.22.Ljubljana, 1984.

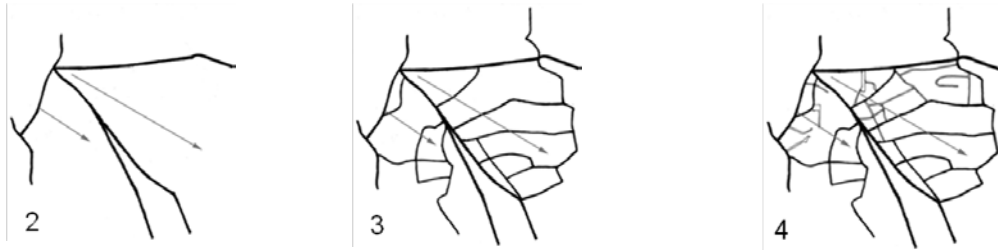


Fig. 2: The street pattern (Source: Sarajevo-Paris Workshop 2007, Students: Nerma Harbinja, Olivier Darcel)

3.2.2. The House

The Houses in the Mahalas were developed and placed so that each of them had a clear view, light and greenery. The development of the House was mainly influenced by the Orient. The living areas were divided according to the weather conditions, into the winter and summer part. The winter part represented the Ground floor where the Family lived during the winter. The summer part represented the First floor where the Family spend their time during the summer. Apart from this division, the House was divided into the men's (selamluk) and women's (haremluk) living area.

The First floor of the house is enclosed with a court wall facing to the street that reflected the need and respect for privacy. The upper floor of the House was usually extended overhanging the street. It represented a remarkable pattern of the street and was called "the Doksat". The entrance to the House was usually provided through the main gate of the court wall, that led to the inner court in front of the House, called "the Avlija". This part of the House was mainly intended for receiving the guests. Considering the fact that the women of the house were not allowed to be seen, they had their own private garden in the back of the House, that could be entered directly from "the Avlija". Some examples of these houses have been preserved and nowadays represent a historical symbol in our society that reflects the cultural identity of once Ottoman architecture.

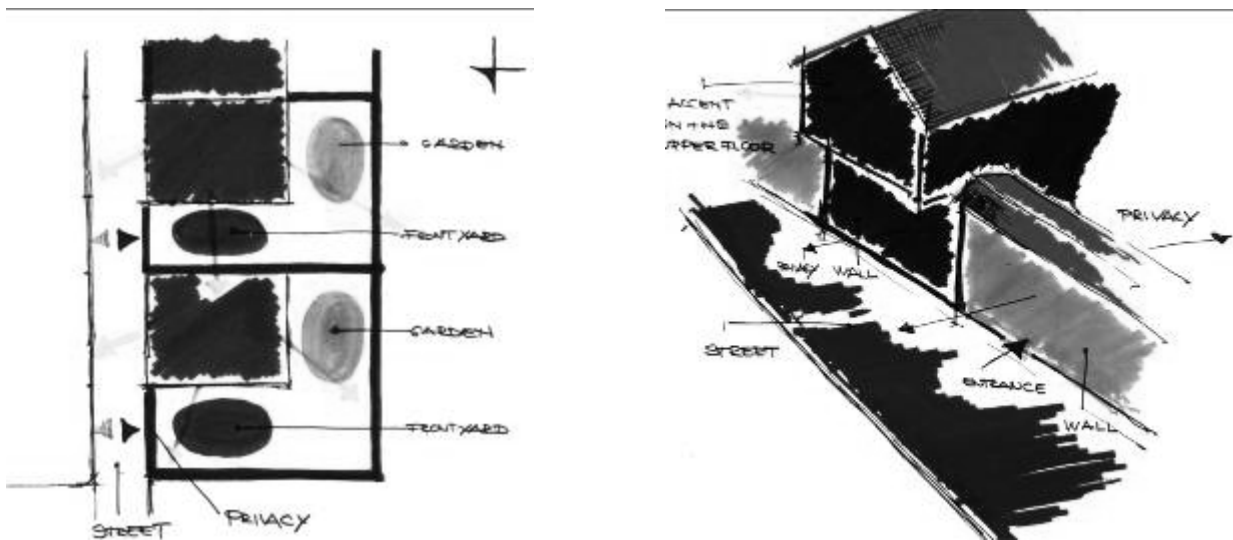


Fig. 3: The relationship between the House and the street (Source: Sarajevo – Paris workshop 2007, Students: Nerma Harbinja, Olivier Darcel)

3.2.3. Existing functions and facilities

Unlike the Mahalas in the Ottoman period that consisted of a relatively small numbers of houses and other small facilities, the Mahalas nowadays represent a large number of houses with small commercial centres. Today, with the increased development of technology and urban transformation, the need of additional facilities and functions had to be adjusted to the new urban development.

The new residential communities increased the need for more educational and health facilities. Although the Charsija remained the business centre of the Old part of the City, the increased expansion of the Mahalas developed the need for a closer approach towards the required facilities. The case study analysis the existing functions and facilities within the Mahalas “Kovaci, “Vratnik” and “Sedrenik”.

3.2.4. Existing green and open public spaces

The Mahalas developed as a large number of small residential units with only private courts and gardens. Open green and public spaces didn't exist. Over time, green spaces were created, but during the War (1992 – 1995) all these spaces were transformed into Cemeteries and are considered as protected green spaces within these Cultural Landscapes.

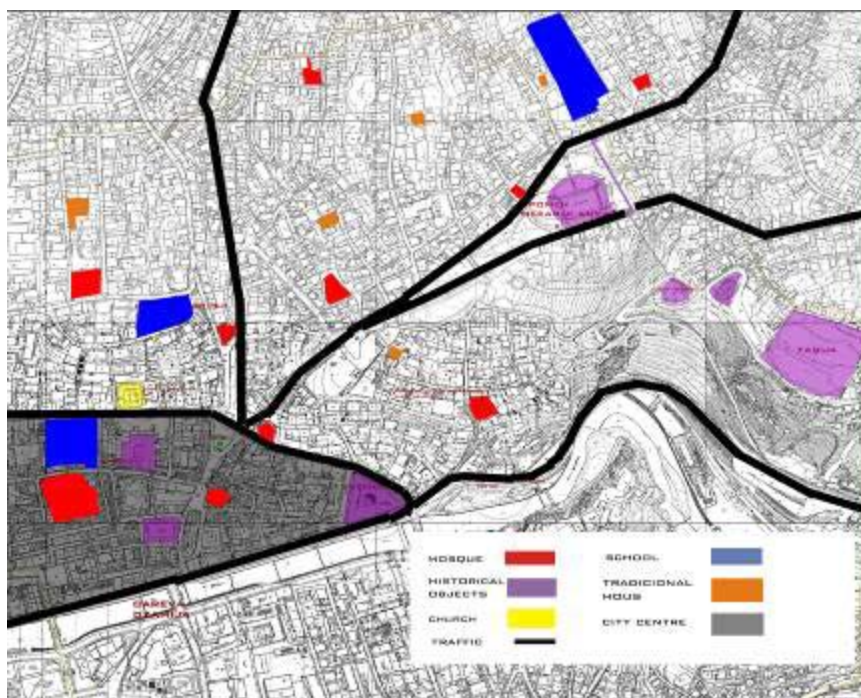


Fig. 4: Main functions and facilities in the case study Mahalas,
(Source: Sarajevo – Paris workshop 2007, Students: Nerma Harbinja, Olivier Darcel)

4. NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN FORM OF ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRATION WITHIN THE MAHALAS

The Mahalas as a preserved Cultural Landscape today underlie the influence of new architectural integrations in form of new urban development. The problems started to occur since the Government didn't establish a regulation Law for the expansion of further development and establishment of main building and constructions principles. Since these regulations have never been implemented, nowadays the Government is facing a the destruction and degradation of this Cultural Landscape.

The new type of houses has completely changed the identity of the place. Unlike the building principles that have been established during the Ottoman period, the new houses are freestanding dwellings with one, two or more floors. The scale of the once residential units had been completely disregarded with the appearance of the development. Thereby, the architecture law of the right for the view and light slowly faded away. The new architectural integration illustrates an independent and individual architectural style that only satisfies the people's own needs and requirements.

Nowadays, the government is suffering with the great loss of the cultural and historical identity of the place and tries to establish a solution for the preservation of the exiting and a solution to withstand the future architectural integration.

4.1. Strategies that regenerate the cultural and historical character

For the preservation of these type of Cultural Landscapes it is essential to define the main architectural components and common elements that will illustrate the future architectural regulations for new development. The fragments for the future architectural integration should include the following parameters:

- The existing environment;
- The cultural and historical value of the existing ambient;
- The House;
- Surrounding buildings and their significance; and
- The common elements that define the main structure of the Mahalas.

The future architectural regulations have to relate to the main architectural principles established during the Ottoman period. Using this existing fragments that represents the architecture of the Mahalas, the new urban development will protect and maintain the spirit of the place. The new architectural style will be an used approach based on these fragments, by the new interpretation of the existing elements and structures.

The existing common fragments of the architectural pattern within the Mahalas are defined through the following elements: The height of the Houses; The type of roofs; The court wall; The openings; The plan of the residential units; The entrance to the residential units, and the building materials. The use of this strategy will maintain the historical and cultural importance of the place and it's identity.



Fig.5: The existing common architectural fragments within the Mahala "Vratnik" (Source: Author)



Fig.6: Examples of new architectural integration within the Mahala "Vratnik" (Source: Author)

5. NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN FORM OF FUTURE URBANIZATION ABOVE THE MAHALAS

As the city of Sarajevo developed along the river Miljacka, due the lack of enough space, during the time the town started to spread along the periphery, the surrounding slopes. The Mahalas expanded further more up the hills and increased further urbanization in the form of the so called new upper hill settlements. As the Government is dealing with the new architectural attempts within the Mahalas, a greater concern is the new upper hill urbanization. The settlements are completely placed and developed without any architectural regulations and most importantly threatened by the fear of landslide.

The expansion increased rapidly after the War (1992-1995) and since then continued to spread further more up to the hills. Beside the environmental conditions, the settlements are faced with the lack of the required functions and facilities, especially the educational and health facilities. Inhabitants are forced to go to the nearest facilities within the Mahalas or in the Centre – Bascharsija.

Although these settlements have similarity with the Mahalas, in form of position, they are not related to these type of Cultural Landscapes.

5.1.Strategies that regenerate the social character

The case study analyses the upper hill settlements in the Old part of the City. In order to preserve the existing Landscape, the new upper hill settlements have to be connected with the main existing facilities within the Mahalas. The future architectural regulations will provide the integration of the upper hill settlements with the Mahalas through the existing facilities within them. The longitudinal link that connects the facilities will allow their expansion and renew the existing landscape, (see Fig.7).

This type of integration represent not only an architectural attempt, but a good example of integrating the social, economic and environmental aspects of this place. The upper hill settlements will gain a closer approach towards the required facilities and a better connection towards the business centre.

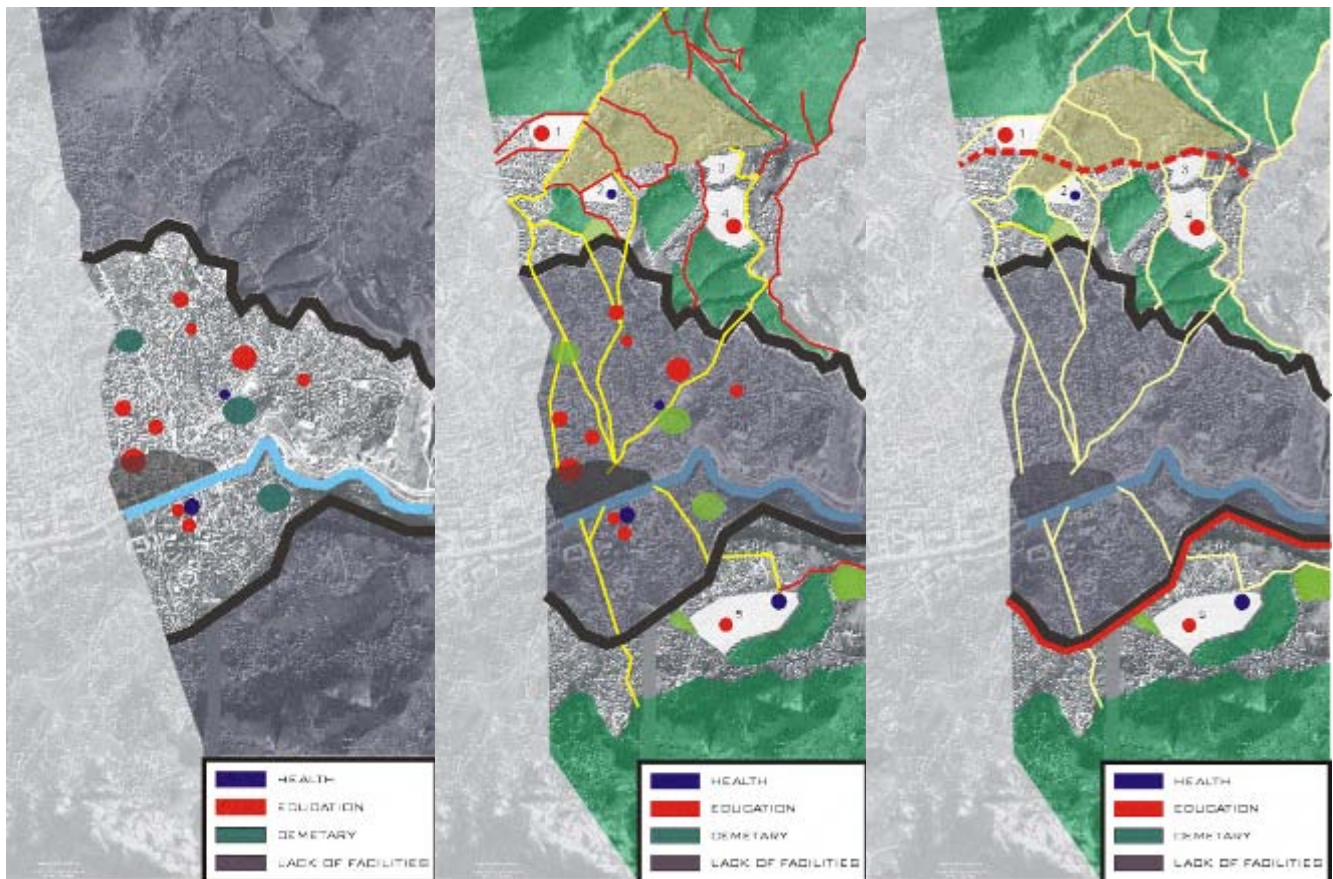


Fig. 7: The Link between the Mahalas and the upper hill settlements (Source: Sarajevo – Paris workshop 2007, Students: Nerma Harbinja, Olivier Darcel)

5.2.Strategies that regenerate the natural character

The main difference between the Mahalas and the upperhill settlements is reflected through the architectural elements, the historical period and place of their development. Still, it is very difficult to actually define the border of this transition, from the Mahalas into the upper hill settlements. We can consider the existence of the so-called historical and urbanisation limit.

The historical limit represents the transition line based on the historical aspect. It's the point when the Mahalas, developed during the Ottoman period, exceed to the upper hill settlements developed afterwards. The Ultimate limit represents the transition line based on stopping the further extension of the residential settlements further along the hills. The urbanization limit will protect and maintain the remaining part of the existing Landscape and it's natural character, (see Fig. 8).

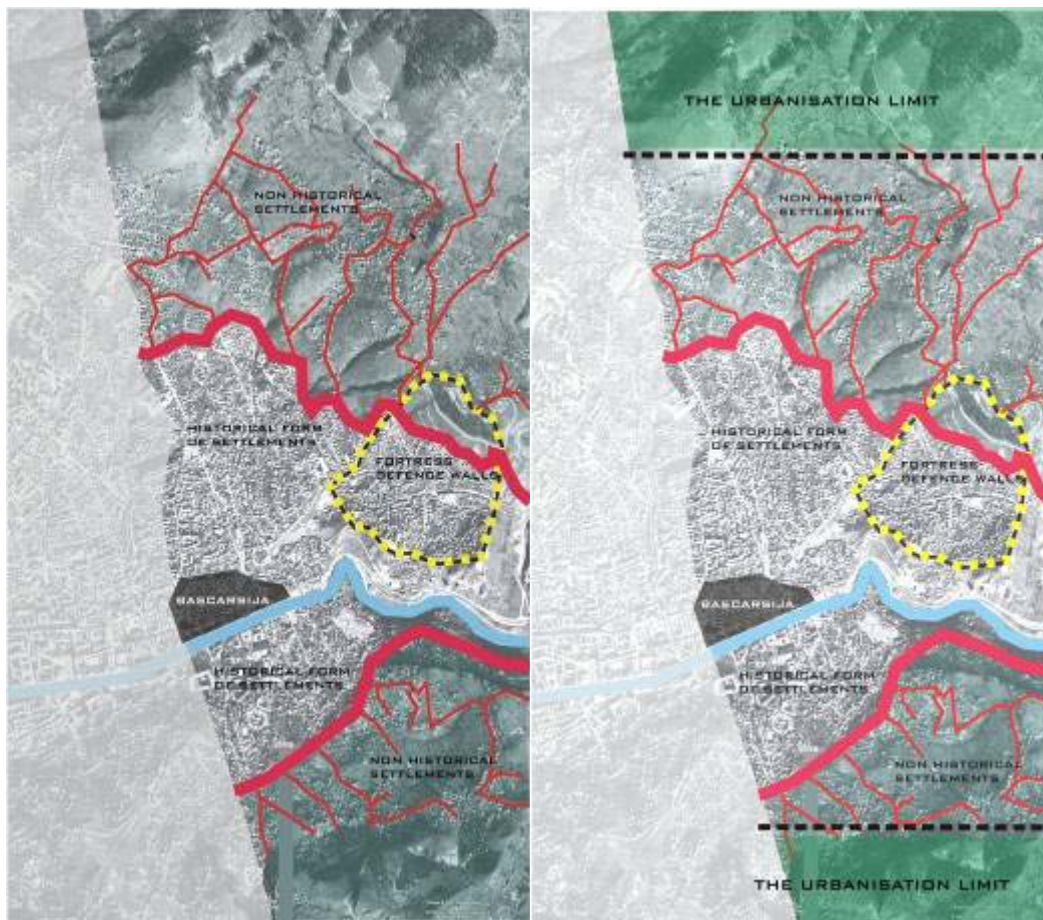


Fig. 8: The historical and urbanization limit within the Old part of the City, (Source: Sarajevo – Paris workshop 2007, Students: Nerma Harbinja, Olivier Darcel)

6. CONCLUSION

Underlying different urban integrations, the preservation of Landscapes should integrate five fundamental principles: Protect and conserve quality landscapes; develop a clear vision and strategy for an area; apply collaborative design principles; allow resources for long-term aftercare of new landscapes; enhance biodiversity; social stability and economic development.⁵ Therefore, it is essential to define the design strategies that can be used in their preservation.

Each strategy is related to a different landscape characters. The case study presented, allows the use of three different design strategies on the preservation of one case study of historical and cultural significance. In order to withstand future architectural integration, the use of these different design strategies will establish a new sustainable cultural landscape, developed on the achievements from the past.

After analysing the case study and the design strategies used in its preservation, it's possible to conclude that new forms of architectural integration within cultural Landscapes can be maintained through the

⁵ Punter, J.:The Welsh Development Agency Design Guide-It's role in raising standards in Wales. Cradiff, 2002

guidance of the design process. The historical and cultural character can be maintained by the use of the existing architectural fragments established during the past in the architectural expression of the new urban development. The social character can be maintained through the integration of the social, economic and environmental aspect of the place. The natural character can be maintained by setting the limits for future urbanization and protection of the landscape most important aspect, nature itself. Of course, the involvement of the entire “system” is crucial.

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