

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATIONS, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION IN THE SPAS OF SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

Spas as health resorts are specific for their urban structure and use, originating in special natural environments. Urban programme and form of spas are the result of combination of specific regularity, morphological and typological differences, by which, apart from the physical ones, people's spiritual and social needs have been taken into consideration. Spa and health-care centres were springing up due to special natural conditions and needs of the population, and were formed depending on the features of the environment. There is a document which confirms that, in different periods of time, every eleventh town in Serbia used to be a spa. These special settlements were developing rapidly, mostly from the 1830's, to reach their peak in 1930's.

This study shows investigation results of the architectural heritage and urban development of the Banja Koviljaca spa in Serbia.

While conducting investigations, studies, protection activities and heritage utilisation, as processes of improving the monument values and creating conditions for its preservation to be passed on to the future generations, conservators face a host of questions and issues. This time, an issue of responsibility has to be distinguished, both individual and communal, where a certain item of the heritage is located, but also the responsibility of the government, whose duty is enforcing all the legal regulations and international conventions. The final conclusions of the paper consider the necessity of respecting the conservation principles which are often opposed to the transition process destructive interests when the heritage is in question.

SPAS OF SERBIA - ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Spas, as health resorts because of their favourable climate and mineral water springs, are specific for their urban structure since it originates in special natural environment. Urban contents and spa structure are the result of a combination of certain regularities, morphological and typological diversity, by which not only physical needs are taken into consideration, but spiritual and social ones as well. In Serbia, such places had a rapid development mostly since 1830's, to reach their peak in the 1940's. It took a very short period of time to turn a patriarchal village into a modern town environment. By designing the area, arranging the landscape and constructing appropriate buildings, a pleasurable ambiance was created. Recently conducted research has highlighted great efforts put in by previous generations in offering the most appropriate conditions and various programmes to spa visitors.

In the previous systematic, demographic and anthropo-geographic investigations of the settlement development in Serbia, the spa settlements were not distinguished as a special type. They were considered to be the same as towns or villages. Some data show that in different periods every eleventh place in Serbia was a spa settlement. [1] Therefore, it was necessary to conduct further investigations of the spas, in view of their origin and development. Initial experience and documentation analyses strengthened the significance of the research and the discovery of this insufficiently investigated heritage.



Fig. 1 a Spas and hammams in Serbia (mapping Aleksandar Stanojlovic)



1. The map of the most famous spas in Serbia

Fig. 1 b The map of the most famous spas in Serbia

Archaeological findings in Serbia confirm that areas with high-quality mineral water and thermal springs were populated and in constant use since prehistoric times. [2] Written documents and material remains are an undeniable proof of a developed and organised life in the Antiquity, in the vicinity of mineral and thermal springs, but also of their utilisation in health cult and body care.

The period of the Turkish rule was the longest one, lasting almost for half a millennium in the central and south-east regions of the country. Centuries long period of constant presence of the Turks and their permanent influence on every aspect of everyday life of the conquered people left behind numerous material as well as spiritual cultural monuments. [3] Sources from that period confirm utilisation of mineral waters for hygienic needs and habits of the people from the East. According to some traditional stories, many Turkish suites utilised medicinal springs, forcing the local people to wait on them. So peasants frequently covered and hid the springs so as to be spared of the obligation.

These traditions were of use to the first explorers, employed by Prince Milos in 1830's, to begin investigations of thermal springs and spas in the then liberated regions. [4] After extensive investigations of this natural treasures, the state introduced laws of building and building areas in establishing, developing and regulating the spa settlements. [5]

Spas were mentioned by both home and foreign researchers, historians and travellers. Also, the first Serbian physicians wrote about the health situation in Serbia, saying that the medicinal waters were used against some illnesses. [6]

The extant architectural heritage of spas underscores the need to respect and preserve both the valuable architectural mansions, as well as the governing principles at the time of their creation.

The goal is to find and apply specific methods in the process of contemporary approach to the integral protection, in order to preserve the buildings, revitalize the visual and symbolic value of architectural heritage and the settlements bearing a historic message.

BANJA KOVILJACA

The area around Banja Koviljaca, besides the already existing natural values – mineral waters sources, plant and animal life, also features an urban matrix – a uniquely arranged park, promenades, as well as purposefully designed buildings in the last hundred years. [7]

Banja Koviljaca is situated in the western part of Serbia, in the region along the Drina river, on its right bank, at the foot of Gucevo mountain, at 125 m elevation point. It is 6 km away from Loznica and 142 km from Belgrade. The road Ruma – Sabac – Loznica leads to Banja Koviljaca.

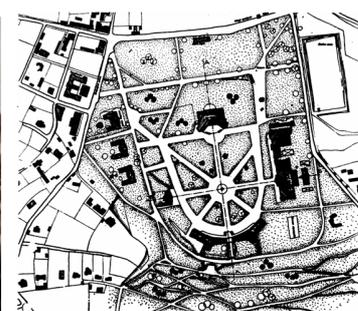


Fig. 2 Aerial view of the park

Fig. 3 A card photo made in the late 1910

Fig. 4 Situation (according to the Prof. Dr B. Maksimović)

Archaeological findings confirm that the area of Banja Koviljaca was populated even in the Roman times. In the Middle Ages, under the walls of the “Koviljka Town”, there were mineral water springs exploited by the people in the region. In the 17th century, the wealthy Turks of Macva and the Drina valley used to come to Banja to convalesce.



Fig. 5 County Hall



Fig. 6 King Peter I sulphuric bath

The construction activities and urban planning of Banja Koviljaca took place in October 1902, when a concession contract was made to a 50 years' period of exploitation in the Drina region, based on

the 1898 act. The spa is also known from much older sources as “*Smrdan Banja*” (a smelly spa), due to unpleasant odours from sulphurous and ferrous waters and peloid. Mineral waters (15^o-28^oC) and medicinal mud are the natural resources of Banja Koviljaca.

The most extensive building activities were taking place from 1902 to 1912 and from 1920 to 1940. The architects of the Ministry of Building formed a unique area with central, radially laid out park with a fountain in its centre from which eight park paths stretch with structures at their ends: to the east the *King Peter’s Sulphurous Bath* going on to the *Mud Bath*, to the west the *Administration building*, the *Podrinje Hotel* and two villas, *Koviljaca* and *Bosna*.

Eclectically planned buildings, erected during the 1920’s and 1930’s, were placed around the perimeter, at the end points of the main lanes – to the north is the Spa Hall – “*Kur salon*” of concave ground plan shape, with architectural and decorative elements taken from various historic styles. At its south end are, symmetrically placed, the *Dalmatia* and *Hercegovina Hotels*, displaying details inspired by the folk architecture.

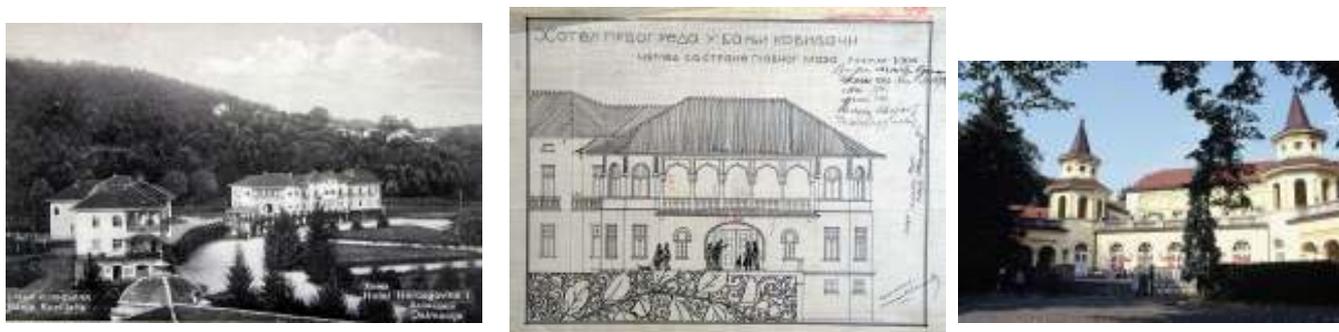


Fig. 7 Dalmatia and Herzegovina Hotels

Fig. 8 A drawing by an architect Milan Minić, Dalmatia and Herzegovina Hotels in Koviljača

Fig. 9 *Kur salon* in Koviljača

The concept of the Koviljaca urban structure is an example of a successful symbiosis of urban environment and landscape elements. Numerous buildings – villas, lodgings and sanatoriums – were built in a ring around the park in the period between the two World Wars, and are of representative designs.



Fig. 10 Dr Petrović’s villa, an old card

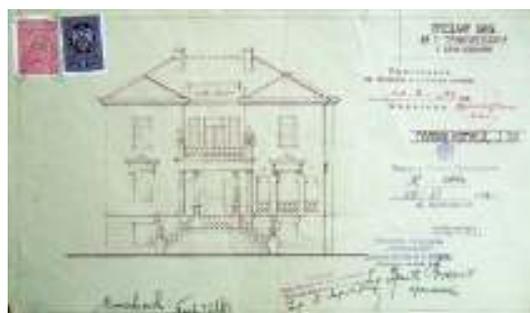


Fig. 11 Villa Katarina, design

The existing architectural heritage needs to be respected and preserved as buildings of special value, representing principles of the period they originated in.

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATIONS IN BANJA KOVILJACA

Protection and revitalization of the monument units are based on the principles and methods that imply the preservation of the original urban-architectural, historic, artistic forms and values for purposes of prolonging their existence. [8]

Its basic goal is arresting any further deterioration of the cultural, historical and natural heritage, and defining a strategy of local development based on the heritage values. Its particular activities are to include additional investigation and valorisation of the heritage as a resource of the utmost and universal value, so that the cultural and natural treasure potentials could be utilised in the best way for the development purposes of this border region along the Drina river. It should also help the local community accept the responsibility for the recognised values, as well as make the heritage a leading factor in the developmental process. It expresses a clear need for dealing with a condition of a generally low living standard coupled with overall lethargy and discontent.



Fig. 12 a, b, c Panorama with the Railway Club at the front – old cards, ground plant

The study of urban origins and architectural heritage of spas of Serbia aims at protecting the cultural landscape (historic ensembles and its surroundings), as well as at conserving the historic urban and natural areas, with the final goal of rehabilitation of spas, in order to better utilise both the natural and the acquired heritage values. The *Programme of investigation, protection and revitalisation of Banja Koviljaca*, as a joint Project of the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments, Belgrade and the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments, Valjevo, derives from a years-long project, *Topography of the architectural heritage in the spas of Serbia*. The *Project of protection and landscape design of the cultural and natural heritage for purposes of socio-economic development of Banja Koviljaca* derived from the *Programme of investigation, protection and revitalisation of Banja Koviljaca*, both launched by the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments – Belgrade. [9]

The Banja Koviljaca Project points to the potential directions of development and provide activities for the local people, so that they could utilise the heritage and the cultural landscape as an economic potential of sustainable tourism (health, education, sports and recreation, countryside), as well as for the related branches of industry (old crafts, organic food and local medicinal herbs production). [10]

Strategies are based on the following: elevating the level of investigations and revitalisation of the cultural and natural resources, which is now mostly at an unacceptable level, so that the given resources could become well-known cultural and tourist points in the wider region; creating a cultural environment which will attract visitors and provide an unforgettable experience based on sites of historical interest; scientifically based research of the cultural treasures with a clear-cut

cultural geography; identifying a sustainable area capacity, so as to avoid overexploitation of the heritage and quality deterioration of the historical ambiance; connecting all the potential partners at all levels, so that the project would become part of the everyday life, giving back its beneficial results; publishing its individual and summary investigation and protection results; setting up education workshops; getting included in the international support projects and programmes.

The end goal of all the investigation, protection and revitalisation activities of the natural and cultural heritage of Banja Koviljaca is the rehabilitation of the area, with different and new activities, which should connect the Drina banks, Gucevo mountain and the area of the spa into a unique cultural, health, sport, recreation and tourist complex.

The systematic and detailed research of architectural heritage, historical, sociological, and economic circumstances, traffic and infrastructure, and the natural qualities and resources is to provide grounds for a *Pilot study of protection and landscape design of the cultural and natural heritage of Banja Koviljaca* (in collaboration with the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia) with definite end goals of urban revitalisation. The study shall include: topography, identifying natural qualities and resources, historical development and urban growth, methodology of urban revitalisation, identification of the starting points for restoring the historical panoramic view, rehabilitation and revitalisation goals, proposals of heritage integration into a social and economic context of the region, catalogue of individual buildings, etc. The results obtained in such a multidisciplinary investigation and through analyses of conditions and possibilities of development and revitalisation of Banja Koviljaca would allow for an integral cultural and natural heritage preservation through multifunctional urban rehabilitation.

RESULTS

One investigation phase was completed in October 2007. A contact with distrustful locals was finally established, which, based on the adopted project, allowed a team of conservationists to conduct the first investigation phase and technical survey of the buildings in Banja Koviljaca. Historical and architectural data were collected, various sources of information were recorded and studied, and then the results partially publicised. A specially drafted questionnaire was made for every single selected building. Photos were made and architectural sketches of the plan, appearance and characteristic details (construction, façade or ornamentation), and later on drawings were made in the appropriate proportions. In this way the units were recorded – characteristic parts of the settlement, streets, yards, fences, individual buildings, either residential or public ones (villas, lodgings, hotels ...).

Talks with the people, owners or users of the investigated buildings contributed to creating a full picture of cultural circumstances, historical frame, social life and the people visiting Banja Koviljaca. With their considerate approach and explaining the heritage concerns to the locals, conservationist and researchers induced interest in revitalisation of the architectural heritage, thus obtaining all those significant findings, such as the original project designs signed by the authors, land deeds, photos, retrieved memories or even thus far unrecorded villas. Those “concealed” villas used to be in the middle of their land plots, surrounded by parks, whereas today, due to parcelling and extensive building, they are completely hidden, some even devastated.

A significant discovery is also the archive material of the Banja Koviljaca Administration, preserved in parts.

THE HERITAGE PROTECTION PROBLEMS

The second half of the 20th century in Banja Koviljaca is a period of stagnation and deterioration of the quality of life, area degradation and core changes in the approach to and view of utilisation of the whole area.

Banja Koviljaca used to be a municipality where its spa administration authorities had plans for the development with key roles of the spa physician and the architect. Turning it into a local administrative community of the Loznica municipality in the 1960's, all its features were marginalised and then dismantled.



Fig. 13 Dr Jakšić's Villa *Zdravlje* , before and now

After the Second World War, many homeless people were given villas and lodgings, so at first Koviljaca became their temporary and then permanent place of residence; then came the labourers in the newly established industrial zone (the "*Viskoza*" and "*Novi Dom*" factories), who already in the late 1980's became a socially vulnerable group. Bringing industrial facilities to the area, Banja Koviljaca became environmentally endangered.



Fig. 14 Villa *Ivanka* (later on *Partizanka*) before and now

Major social turbulence in the second half of the 20th century caused the devastation of the area and buildings, and single family houses were partitioned into several units. Many impressive architectural ensembles were also partitioned into a host of shapeless ones. The most representative villas were devastated not only because many impoverished residents who were

brought there after the WWII could not manage their maintenance, but also because the new ideology disapproved of luxury, advocating social equality.



Fig. 15 Villa Zora, before and new buildings in Koviljača now

Turning the settlement from a spa resort into a permanently inhabited place increased the population density, causing building construction in its oldest zones. Such changes also generated a need for rearranging utility and sanitary facilities and systems by changing or building new roads and other facilities. In order to overcome the problems of inadequate communal utilities and low grade sanitary conditions, or to avoid expensive maintenance, many buildings lost in their authenticity through inadequate and unprofessional reconstruction works. Also, the identity of the place and its old structure have been lost, as many new buildings are covered by climber plants and greenery, and new commercial centres have replaced old crafts shops.

There are also examples of disturbed both urban structure and unique designs, where due to unprofessional interventions, original urban forms or unique architectural features, both interior and exterior, have been changed, damaged or destroyed.

Banja Koviljaca is 5 kilometres away from the Republika Srpska border. Therefore, it was in the direct vicinity of the 1992-96 war zone, and saw several waves of refugees, who were placed in hotels and lodgings. So, the already neglected and devastated architectural heritage was now once again endangered by uncontrolled individual interventions of the newcomers – all sorts of partitioning, extensions, displacement of openings, adaptations to temporary residential conditions and everyday needs.

Negligence, lack of understanding or absence of any need for co-operation between various utility, urban or protection services, as well as narrow-mindedness and conflict of individual interests and understanding produced a degraded area, neglected basic function and overall dilapidation of Banja. Characteristic panorama, well-known sights and the whole cityscape layout are disturbed or even destroyed in reckless interventions of city planners and narrow-minded and short-sighted local authorities. Interrupted urban development, random destruction of the inherited area, inadequate reconstructions and waves of spontaneous building have damaged the picturesque view of Banja, obscuring, dimming, secluding and confining its extraordinary beauty.

Particularly damaging and dangerous is the fact that all the new buildings and submitted requests for the construction of new ones are concentrated in the central town zone and the resort area. If all

such requests were to be approved, it would endanger, destroy and degrade what little preserved values have left.

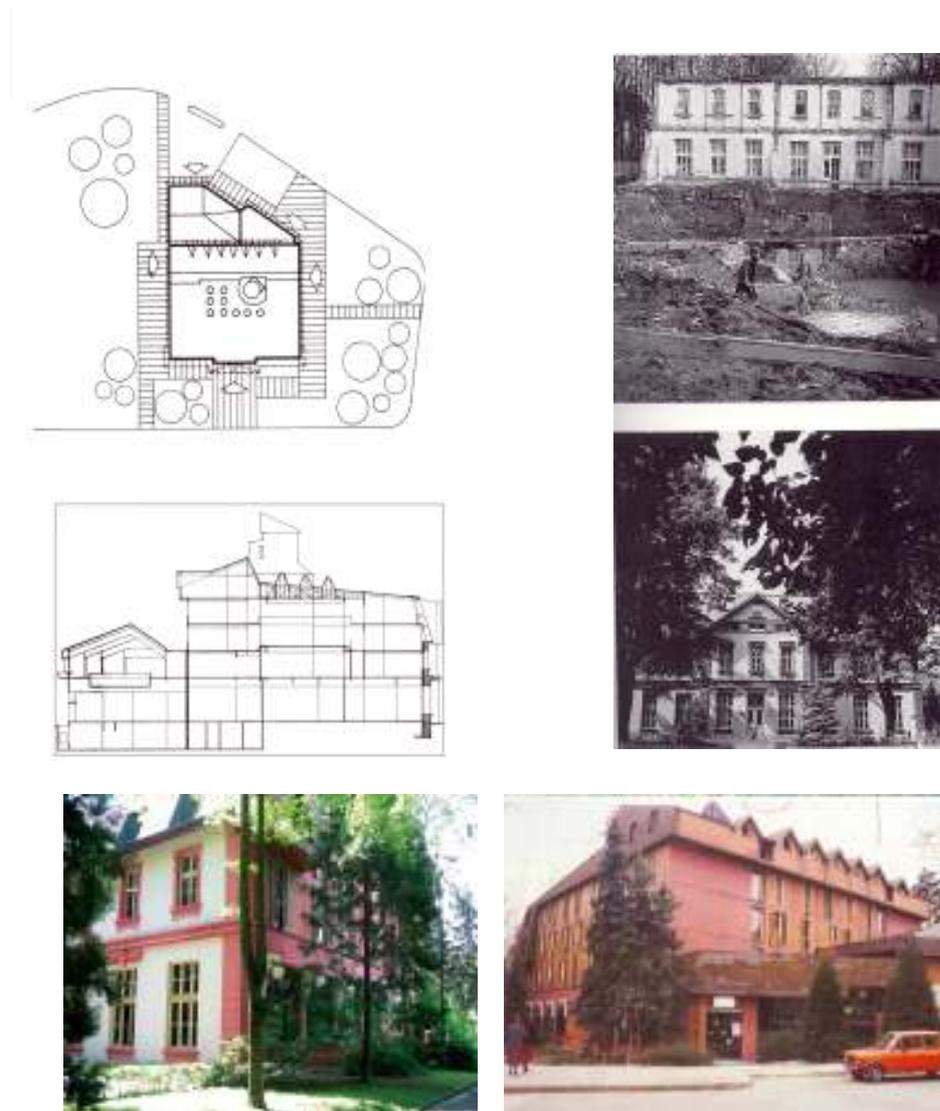


Fig. 16 Podrinje Hotel, before and now

PROJECTS REALISATION

The study calls for thorough research with regard to protection and revitalization of the monument units and rehabilitation of the area, based on the protection principles and methods that imply the preservation of the original urban-architectural, historic, artistic forms and values for purposes of prolonging their existence. The goal is to find and apply specific methods by the process of a modern approach to the integral protection, in order to preserve the buildings, to revitalize the visual and symbolic values of the architectural heritage and the settlements carrying an historic message. The study points to the potential directions of development and provide activities for the local people, so that they could utilise the heritage and the cultural landscape as an economic potential of sustainable tourism (health, education, sports and recreation, landscape),

as well as in the related branches of industry (old arts and crafts, organic food and local medicinal herbs products).

Practical realisation of the idea requires preparatory activities at both the local and national levels, as well as at the international ones, so that the agreement on future region administration strategy could be carried out.

Project of the protection and landscape design of the cultural and natural heritage for purposes of socio-economic development of Banja Koviljaca is envisaged as a years' long plan.

CONCLUSIONS

Project of protection and landscape design of the cultural and natural heritage for purposes of socio-economic development of Banja Koviljaca is of a regional and developmental character, aiming at further investigation and valorisation of the heritage as a resource of the utmost and universal value, so that the cultural and natural treasure and resources potentials could be utilised in the best way for the development purposes of this, today stagnating, border region along the Drina. It should also help the local community accept the responsibility for the recognised values, as well as make the heritage a leading factor in the development process.

Social and cultural rights rank among the basic human and civil rights in all democratic societies which strive for creating a better quality of life. Therefore, the need for overcoming the low standards of living requires that the Project should point to all the potential directions of development and provide an environment for the local people to be involved, so that they could utilise the heritage and the cultural landscape as a distinguished economic potential. At the same time, it should provide new jobs in the context of sustainable tourism (health, education, sports and recreation, countryside), as well as in all the related branches of industry (reintroducing the old crafts, organic food and local medicinal herbs products, hunting, fishing ...). In co-operation with the municipal authorities, a modest research and education centre (Project Office) may be planned in one of the buildings of cultural value, which would be included in the restoration - conservation project.

The end goal of all the investigation, protection and revitalisation activities on the natural and cultural heritage of Banja Koviljaca is making a strategy for the rehabilitation of the area and make it as a master plan. Such master plan, with its different and new activities, should connect the Drina banks, Gucevo mountain and the area of Banja into a unique cultural, health, sport and recreation and tourist complex.

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