

# Revitalisation of Blagaj urban core

Potentials of two public buildings in order to revive urban core of the city

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## Abstract

This paper tries to present main values and problems in Blagaj urban core occurred over the past several years. Here presented are just some problems identified in the urban core, problems regarding the fact that inhabitants of Blagaj no more see reasons why they should actively use their city centre. Beside this, paper presents some possible solutions in order to solve identified problems.

## Introduction

The historic urban area of Blagaj with the source of the river Buna and the mediaeval fort known as Stjepan grad constitutes a unique natural and urban-rural ensemble.

Unfortunately, as identification of the current condition revealed, due to the changes that have occurred during long neglecting period and under pressures of now-days development, historic urban area of Blagaj represents today one of the most endangered urban areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unplanned development and tourism without control has led to the „death“ of urban core of the Blagaj.

Therefore, Commission has put revitalization of caršija – urban core and centre of Blagaj as one of the main priorities within its work in Blagaj.

Two buildings were taken as pilot projects in proposed processes of revitalization of Blagaj urban core; Karadoz beg hamam (turkish bath) and Haseci Ali aga han (inn).

These buildings represent few preserved public structures dating from the Ottoman period in Blagaj.

Hamam, even being a ruin today, represents very important building for the local inhabitants; it is situated by the river Buna at the beginning of the pedestrian path and offers a great place for rest and people are used to come and site in front of it. Beside this, hamam is a national monument and represent the only hamam built by the river preserved at least partially,

Han is relatively well preserved structure that offers huge possibilities to economic development of Blagaj based on its location within the town and its plan disposition.

These were the main reasons why these two buildings were chosen as pilot projects in attempt to revive centre of the Blagaj.

## Background

### Description of the Historic urban area of Blagaj – history and current condition

The historic urban area of Blagaj with the source of the river Buna and the mediaeval fort known as Stjepan grad constitutes a unique natural and urban-rural ensemble.

The Blagaj region is specific for the diversity of its above-ground and underground hydrography. The source of the Buna is the finest example of an underground karst river, one of the largest and most beautiful in Europe. The region is also known for the diversity of its flora and a number of endemic species.

The development of the present-day Blagaj region and its socio-political transformation can be traced from the prehistoric era to the present day.

The urbanization of the settlement of Blagaj as we now know it was defined in the Ottoman period, during the second half of the 15th century, and its structure took shape during the 16th century. The mediaeval fortress of Blagaj (Stjepan grad) is constantly referred to in the sources as a distinct territorial entity.

It was during the Ottoman period that building activity began to develop in the outskirts of the fortress, with the erection of houses and of public edifices, with the most important buildings located along the three watercourses.

The centre was occupied by the *caršija*, the trade and crafts centre of the settlement, the mosque complex with its harem and mekteb, and the han.

Public buildings were sited very deliberately in the urban structure as a whole. Among the first to be built was the Careva (Imperial) mosque in 1520/21, with which the settlement acquired the status of *kasaba*, followed by the Karadoz-beg bridge in 1570 and the Leho bridge prior to 1664. The hamam was built between 1570 and 1664, the han before 1664, and a number of shops and more solidly-built storerooms and residential buildings.

Both oriental and Mediterranean features are to be seen in Blagaj's urban layout, while the settlement itself was the outcome of the influence of a number of different factors: the natural configuration of the terrain, and socio-economic relations.

The basic value of the historic area of Blagaj lies in the fact that it is one of the few structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the value of the image, structure and forms arising from the intermingling of natural landscape values and geomorphology with the strata of built values dating from prehistory to the present have been preserved so that they are still recognizable, can still be read to this day.

Blagaj represents one of the most valuable urban-rural structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, distinguished from other similar structures in:

- ✎ its much-ramified, disjunctive urban layout, organically linked solely with the position of the *caršija* (core of the town) as the central functional element;
- ✎ the presence of the fortress of Stjepan grad, to which two minor and one major road formerly led.

The historic urban area of Blagaj is today considered as one of the most endangered historic urban areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Listed on List of the endangered monuments of Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Blagaj is endangered mainly by the illegal construction that is taking place in the very heart of the area. In addition, there is no management of the site and no institution responsible primarily for this site.

The current condition of architectural heritage buildings within the historic centre is such as to require active protection and restitution along with the introduction of a specific function.

The institutions in charge for protection of the historic urban area of Blagaj and all works done on the site are the Federal ministry of urban planning and the Institute for the Protection of Monuments within the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sport. In addition, the Government of the City of Mostar and the “Stari Grad” (Old Town) Agency, located in Mostar, are also responsible for the site.

Unfortunately, due to the many monuments for these institutions are responsible, the limited number of qualified personnel in the field of heritage protection and the lack of financial resources for heritage protection in general, Blagaj today is faced with the fact that only the local community is really involved with its protection and preservation. The local community is composed mainly of young, enthusiastic people coming together in various non-governmental organizations. Although they are able to exercise considerable influence on the decision makers for the site – primarily the Government of City of Mostar – and have a great desire and determination to save their homeland, these young people are unable to stop the destruction of the site.

The local community is strongly attached to its the cultural and natural heritage, and expresses its commitment in the will to participate in protection activities. However, public awareness of the fragility of the heritage and the proper way of managing it is low. Then, too, there is considerable pressure from private developers to exploit the potential of Blagaj’s natural and cultural heritage to make quick profits. This is a serious threat: the cultural and natural heritage is exposed to exploitation for unsustainable tourism based mainly on having “a drink and a meal by the river with a nice view of something old.” The Commission has initiated several activities designed to help the local community and to protect and preserve one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s most interesting and important urban areas as regards the heritage. All these activities are focused on raising public awareness of the importance and value of the site, increasing the general public’s knowledge of proper, sustainable management, and creating management tools focusing on the protection, proper use and presentation of the site.

One of the activities that Commission has carried out up to day pertaining to the protection of the Historic urban area of Blagaj was implementation of the project entitled “Support for the tourist development of Blagaj through sustainable management of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the area – production of the management plan” with the aim of achieving sustainable development of the site and on-going protection of the heritage. It is possible to ensure the on-going protection of the heritage only if it is sustainable. Heritage sustainability is best achieved by linking the heritage and tourism, or incorporating the heritage into the development of tourism. The Management Plan is designed to preserve the outstanding universal value of Blagaj for future generations. In the context of the plan, conservation means not only physical protection from deterioration and other changes, but also enhancing the visual nature

of the townscape and landscape, alleviating and managing environmental factors, preserving cultural values and enhancing their interpretation and understanding by visitors, and setting out a sustainable approach to tourism development.

## Centre of Blagaj – two historical buildings proposed as start points for revitalisation processes

The Karadoz-beg hammam is on the right bank of the river Buna, very close to the Careva mosque and Karadoz-beg Bridge. It was endowed by Mehmed-beg Karadoz, and built between 1570 and 1664.

Typologically, depending on their ground plan and spatial treatment, hamams are classed as *tek*-hamam (single hamam) or *cifte*-hamam (double hamam).

Although the surviving remains of the Karadoz-beg hamam suggest that it was of the *tek*-hamam or single hamam type, Hamdija Kreševljakovic writes that in ground-plan it was of the double hamam (*ciftehamami*) type. The Karadoz-beg hamam in Blagaj was paved with large slabs and roofed with domes and barrel vaults. It is built using regular and irregular stone blocks. According to documentation from Alija Bejtovic and Hamdija Kreševljakovic, as well as remains on the site hamam consists of a *šadrvan*, *kapaluk*, *halvat*, *hazna* and *culhan* (apodyterium, tepidarium, caldarium, boiler room and hypocaustum).

The Karadoz-beg hamam is one of the few hamams built by a river, from which the water was drawn by means of a special channel. It is said that hamam was used as an abattoir for a long time, and was probably abandoned in 1814 after the plague that ravaged the country at that time.

Most of the hamam is now in ruins and all that can be discerned is part of the ground floor walls and part of the dome over the *šadrvan*. The river Buna, time and the elements, and human neglect, have resulted in only parts of the *šadrvan*, *kapaluk* and *halvat* of the Karadoz-beg hamam surviving.

The Haseci Ali-aga han was built before 1664 very close to the Careva mosque. By 1700 it was already dilapidated. It is stone built, with two storeys. It was roofed with hipped roof and covered with stone slabs. The ground floor housed the stables, storeroom and inn, and the first floor the rooms. The remains of three fireplaces are visible on the south courtyard wall, typical of such simple buildings, along the wall on a raised platform.

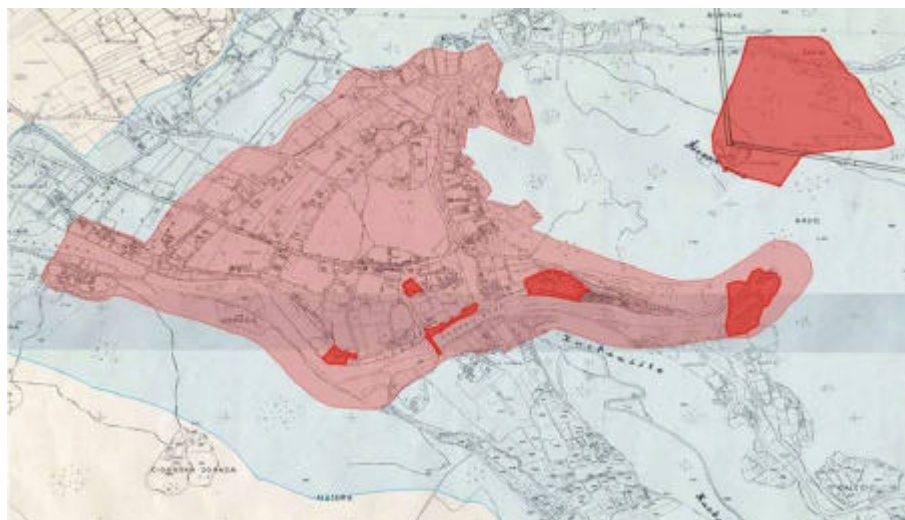
The original appearance of the han was changed by various alterations and additions, as can be seen from walled-up windows, new construction, and new windows. Most of the building is in a state of neglect

Both buildings are characterised by the following:

- ? They are abandoned and with no use.
- ? They are owned by the municipality.
- ? They are in the state of neglect
- ? They both have suffered serious damages as a result of lack of regular maintenance and exposure to the elements
- ? They both are situated by, what used to be before, very important road linking Blagaj with Stolac, another important

town. Today, that road is used as pedestrian path with beautiful views on residential quarters, old fort and Tekke.

- ? They both are witnesses of the rich past of the Blagaj and its importance.



*Map of the centre of Blagaj showing location of the buildings and connections*

### Values of the buildings

Three main values can be applied for both buildings; historical, architectural and townscape/landscape value.

Buildings were built in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century when Blagaj was one of the most important towns in the region. They testify on way of life, culture of the inhabitants and economic development of the city. They also testify the way the buildings were built, used materials and techniques. They are examples of the architecture of the time, evidence of a particular type of the public buildings.

Buildings are located in the very centre of the Blagaj, by the road that used to connect Blagaj with Stolac. Today, part of that road is turned into pedestrian path. Benches, trash canes and information boards are placed along the pedestrian path. Han, placed in the centre of the town and hamam, placed on the river banks, represents two land marks in the morphology of the Blagaj.



### *Picture showing urban core with the mosque, han and hamam*

Beside described values, buildings also have strong significance for the local people since they represent the past and importance of Blagaj.

Although being changed over the time (use of new materials in order to adapt the building to a new use), han saved its authenticity regarding for, design and use. Hamam has not been restored or adapted to a new use and therefore it has preserved its authenticity regarding all elements.

### Legal protection

The historic urban area of Blagaj with all its individual monuments has been legally protected since the very beginning of the legal protection of heritage monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, just after World War II. The Karadoz beg hamam has been listed as national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments. Procedure for designation of han as national monument has started.

### Problems identified

Unfortunately, among other changes that have occurred in Blagaj in past 50 years, following a long period of neglect, the urban centre of Blagaj has lost its principal function – as a meeting and market place. Nowadays, tourists spend all their time in restaurants by the Tekke, situated at the very end of the settlement, which were erected without planning permission along the narrow site of the source of the river Buna, since the centre of the town offers no attractions. Tourist pressure leads to unplanned development and the erection of restaurants, which has resulted in major damage to the ambient value and natural setting of the Tekke, a national monument. Furthermore, the 1992-1995 war and the changes it has wrought on society mean that most of Blagaj's residents no longer work in Blagaj. Blagaj has thus become a largely residential or "dormitory" area with very few year-round social activities.

Beside this, as a result of unplanned development of the tourism and bad economy of the Blagaj, centre of the town is slowly dying.

Han, although being in relatively good structural condition and offering an ideal place for market and fair space is not in use.

Both buildings are exposed to the elements and municipality as the owner is showing no interest in restoring them and putting them in proper use.

Only non-governmental organisations show interest in giving some use to the han.

### Proposal for the buildings

One of the main aims of the intervention in the historic urban area is revitalization of the Blagaj caršija and rehabilitation of its historical structures through incentives to open new shops, souvenir shops and restaurants attractive to tourists in the urban centre of Blagaj. This would lead to protection of the endangered parts of the cultural-historical and natural heritage around the source of the Buna.

Proposal for the buildings are:

- ? Han should be restored based on documentation on original state of the building;
- ? All original elements of the building should be preserved,

- ? Original function of the building should be preserved (building was originally used as inn with shops and cafés)
- ? Hamam should be conserved
- ? All original elements of the building should be preserved,
- ? Hamam should be maintained as an archaeological site.

## Needed steps and assumed budget

### Hamam

Broad assessments of priorities in the conservation of the Karadozbeq hamam are as follows:

- ? Cleaning of the building from self grown vegetation,
- ? Detailed architectural record of the current condition of the building and its fragments,
- ? Study on stability of the building (ascertaining the condition of the existing foundations and walls and geotechnical characteristics of the soil ),
- ? Conduct a structural analysis of the load bearing structure of the remains of the dome and walls,
- ? Removing parts of the structure that the analysis has incontrovertibly shown to be in danger of collapsing,
- ? Drafting a conservation project in order to preserve stability of the building and secure its visibility to the visitors (repair and structural consolidation of the remains of the dome and conservation of walls)
- ? Conservation works
- ? Maintenance Program
- ? Drafting of a Projects for Horticulture and Electrical illumination of the monument.

For all above stated works preliminary analyses showed that budget of approximately 25.000 EURO would be needed.

All above stated works could be finished in 12 months.

### Han

Broad assessments of priorities in the restoration of the Haseci Ali-aga han are as follows:

- ? Cleaning of the building from self grown vegetation and fallen structures,
- ? Detailed architectural record of the current condition of the building and its fragments,
- ? Study on stability of the building (ascertaining the condition of the existing foundations and walls and geotechnical characteristics of the soil ),
- ? Removing parts of the structure that the analysis has incontrovertibly shown to be in danger of collapsing,
- ? Drafting a conservation-restoration project in order to preserve original elements and make necessary adaptation to meet modern requirements regarding safety and accommodation of the proposed functions;
- ? Conservation - restoration works
- ? Maintenance Program
- ? Drafting of a Projects for Horticulture and Electrical illumination of the monument

For all above stated works preliminary analyses showed that budget of approximately 45.000 EURO would be needed.

All above stated works could be finished in 18 months.

## Intended results

- ? To enable the development of the Mostar region by increasing knowledge and understanding of the values of the past.
- ? To promote and enhance the tourist attractions of the rural area, an area with a rich cultural, historical and natural heritage.
- ? The integration of the cultural, historical and natural heritage into the development programme of Mostar region, primarily tourism.
- ? To serve as a model for restoration works on this kind of buildings,
- ? To contribute to the economic development of the Blagaj.

The conservation of the historical building of the hamam and han would start a process and contribute to the systematic, long-term protection, presentation and revitalization of the cultural, historical and natural heritage, contributing to the protection of the built heritage from further deterioration.

## Current Status of the project proposals

- ? Commission has applied with the project for conservation of hamam building to the USA Ambassador's fond for culture.
- ? Within the project "Support for the tourist development of Blagaj through sustainable management of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the area – production of the management plan" han building will be cleared from the self grown vegetation and fallen structures. An analysis of the building and one proposal for restoration has been done.
- ? Commission has started a campaign in order to find persons or organisations that are willing to restore these buildings and use them in proper way.
- ? Commission has produced management plan for whole site. Currently Commission is working with local government in order to find a way to implement management plan.



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