# REPRESENTATIONLESS URBAN IMAGES: CONTRASTING FORMAL PLANNING NARRATIVES AND INFORMAL REALITIES IN SARAJEVO

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## Abstract

The level of urban competitiveness and positioning in the elusive global network/hierarchy of cities have in post-Fordist paradigm change, become crucial criteria for determining the successfulness of proper urban development. Following this logic, the strategies of representation of urban space have been, for some time now, the main focus of entrepreneurial urban governments. Indeed, the construction of the urban image, and such that is believed to be intrinsic to the successful global city, nowadays directs institution of urbanism in each of its practices – from crafting of planning narratives to design of the development projects. The ready-made contemporary urban representations, such as knowledge and creative districts, the landmark "starchitectural" commodities by famous authors or globalist commercial and leisure centers booming around the World thus gain symbolic primacy over plethora of small but significant symbolisms that surge daily in urban space as the result of its appropriation by the people of the city.

To reflect on the relation between appropriation and domination in the contemporary city, this investigation focuses on the city of Sarajevo where informal /illegal/ settlements built on the hilly urban periphery, mainly by war migrants and refugees, have gained strong visual presence in the urban image, and became a far-reaching symbol of sorts for the space-appropriation processes. Comparing the European city of Sarajevo to the urbanization boom in Latin American cities, such as Sao Paolo or Caracas, the similarities are becoming very visible as informal settlements are being systematically ignored and excluded from any development or upgrading plans.

By analyzing how this self-generated, informal urban reality of extreme appropriation contrasts with the recent planning narratives and strategies of the city's representation it will be demonstrated how contemporary urban governments fail to contain appropriation processes and the resulting symbols in their representational strategies, even when these constitute an imposing urban image. Keywords: urban representation, planning narratives, informal settlements, urban identity, appropriation of space

"Words are never 'only words'; they matter because they define the contours of what we can do." (Žižek, 2008)

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## 1. Introduction

Ever since the 1960s, the issue of relation between representation and space-molding disciplines has been intensively addressed by the protagonists of (broadly defined) critical theory (Debord, 1995; Foucault, 1970; Baudrillard, 1995; Lefebvre, 1991; De Carteau, 1998). The identification of the rising primacy of the visual in the field of philosophy, sociology and critical cultural studies coincided with the abandonment of self-assured modernist doctrine in the field of urban planning. By the early 1980s, the struggling discipline of urban design liberated general planning theory from concern with the questions of form (Palermo and Ponzini, 2010), while the simultaneous rising importance of strategic spatial planning introduced myriad new media of representation – amongst them that of the text – as a way of giving shape to the intentions of the discipline regarding urban space and society as a whole (Healey, 2004). The political dimension of these texts cannot be overemphasized. Their mobilization by local authorities, along with those of culture and heritage, as a part of promotional activities, secured the emergence of urban branding – the ultimate representation of the urban reality in the global market of cities. Accordingly, the use of stories based on cultural content of places has been recognized as increasingly important for understanding the planning practice and political discourses on development. (Jensen, 2007; Sandercock, 2003)

Upon deliberate simplification, it could be argued that representational democracy implies, in its basic settings, even representation of all of urban existentialities in the workings of the public. However, under the auspice of selectivity implied by the notion of strategy, the agency of the institution of strategic spatial planning does not display this kind of balanced treatment – a praxis resulting in what theory un-ambiguously entitles: deprived urban neighborhoods. Another theoretical concern related to the same matter is distinguishing between that what is formal and that what is, in counter-position, informal in the contemporary city.

Present investigation seeks to deliberately ignore these kinds of theoretical naturalization of givens in planning and social sciences, trying to throw a fresh analytic glimpse at urban facts and their representation by using systems of categories developed through the cutting-edge work of scholars such as Michel De Carteau and Henry Lefebvre.

At stake here is the important notion of social appropriation of urban space that is always tightly related to the possibility of use. Appropriation of space has been conceptually applied by scholars to address questions of signification by users' spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991), community empowerment and interactivity of identity production in terms of space-community relation (Feldman and Stall, 2004), ontological security, and familiarization of public space (Giddens, 1984).

The products of appropriation are dispersed and, often, hardly identifiable signs – either material traces, in the form of real changes in urban spaces, or the common stories strongly bounded to certain places in the city. In both cases, these are representations of

sorts, signs of civic life and activity, signals of existence of people in the city. They are weak, ephemeral, fleeting, and, precisely for these reasons, easily ignorable vital elements of urban existence. Appropriations of space and their clustered uses produce informal urban geographies and cultures.

Extensive research has been undertaken to address causes and consequences of planning practices and development projects in relation to their poor consideration of urban informality, often combined with practices of minority exclusion (Harvey, 1993; Hayden, 1995; Mele, 2000). While formal culture and its representations, such as national monuments, acquire unmistakable introduction to planning and political narratives, insured by the agency of the institution of heritage preservation, products of informal culture are largely ignored – with the exception made when they prove to be prone to commodification and branding (Vivant, 2010; Zukin, 2008).

Especially the recognition of the phenomenon of urban competitiveness and related branding practices had complicated the relation between scientific credibility of planning and issues of urban representation. The quest for the appropriate image that would compel investment and service sector workers has left little space for informal identities in the development agenda. The visual and the visibility play great role in this kind of a game, because, to exist in the city, means to be represented. (Hayden, 1995) In this research, two types of representation are addressed – the one of planning and branding texts; and the one generated by the 'city in itself', captured in the phenomenological concept of *place*.

The city of Sarajevo is studied as a valuable case providing for the possibility to vividly illustrate the discrepancy that often takes place between the two, but is rarely so obvious. In Sarajevo, the informal housing construction that had its first appearance already in the 1950s, dramatically increased in the second half of the 1990s, due to great demographic changes caused by post-war immigration. While in the majority of other cities the existence of zones of informality can be seamlessly 'over-written' through planning narratives and branding practices, in Sarajevo this kind of overwriting is unmistakably disclosed as a result of specific urban topography in the midst of which the 'informal' becomes an imposing part of the overall urban image, thus entering the collective representation of place.

This research will, accordingly, focus on the role of planning in the domain of representation by means of different types of texts /textual explanations of spatial plan, strategic plans, investors' guides, official city presentation /, and the ways in which they oppose the urban realities of extreme appropriation, namely, the informal settlements. In the next section the theoretical background of representation in critical studies and philosophy will be reviewed. By using the main extracted categories, a fresh insight will be offered into the dominant representational logic recognizable in contemporary planning and urban governance, in opposition to the production of informality through processes of appropriation. In the third chapter the clash of formal representational narratives and informal realities of Sarajevo will be exposed as a case study which demonstrates paradoxical confrontation between the city-text and the city-phenomenon.

Finally, the case will be put in a wider context by comparison to similar instances present in Latin-American cities where thriving informality gives rise to what we designate as the phantom-city syndrome.

## 2. Urban representation – the stakes in symbolism of urban form

### 2.1 The city, its representation and - the power

To imagine the future of the city means, firstly, to understand its present urban form and capture its ontology through the available media, and secondly, to use these media to project the ideas and intentions that would, hopefully, introduce change for the better. Both of these processes are, in the realm of space, matters of concern of the practice of spatial planning and both, thus, evolve around the sublime kernel of knowledge and expertise. The challenge to untouchability of this kernel and the deconstruction of its interwovenness with power regimes has been effectively and constantly undertaken by critical theoreticians and philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s, who supplied a range of conceptual tools to address this important issue.

In the work of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1970), the underlying conditions of truth, inherent to the historical moment, decisively shape its related episteme. The question of representation of facts, or truth, through the scientific discourse is thereby put into focus and, with a gradual spatial turn in social sciences (Lefebvre, 1991; Allen et al, 1998; Massey, 2005) expanded to the notion of origins and epistemological justification of the space production practices. Henry Lefebvre has, with special rigor, developed a conceptual framework to address the matters of power relations and their accommodation in the ontology of the spatial (Lefebvre, 1991). The application of his conceptual triad, consisting of *representations of space*, *representational spaces* and *spatial practice*, establishes clear position on joint agency of power and knowledge in the processes of space-production. In the 1970s, in the light of fostering of what, not only, Lefebvre addressed as advanced capitalism, his concern was about the rise of *the abstract space* which promotes the *domination*, as opposed to *appropriation* of space.

In this kind of understanding, the representational aspirations of power or – the production of representations of space – are crucial to the outcomes of contestation processes and overall control over the space of the city.

According to Lefebvre, in the present world order the representations of space, produced by power and knowledge, collide, with the representational spaces of the users, which they seldom manage, or even aspire, to reach. Relying on myriad processes of scientific reductionism they asses and then reproduce what was found through available and officially recognized media, only to set the ways for intervention which is to be based upon and which is justified by the articulated representation.

The potency of the symbolic, important since the first spatial practices left marks in the natural space, is decisive in the era of abstract space. In Lefebvre's words: "Space may be marked physically, as with animals' use of smells or human groups' use of visual and

auditory indicators; alternatively it may be marked abstractly, by means of discourse, by means of signs. Space thus acquires symbolic value. Symbols, on this view, always imply an emotional investment, an affective charge (fear, attraction, etc.), which is so to speak deposited at a particular place and thereafter 'represented' for the benefit of everyone else. In point of fact, early agricultural and pastoral societies knew no such split between the practical and the symbolic." (Lefebvre, 1991, p.141)
What easily gains crucial weight, when this argument gets to be positioned in the framework of contemporary planning debates is the *separation*, between the symbolic and the practical through representation, which is found here to occur on many different levels as an inherent process of production of planning narratives.

### 2.2 Urban competitiveness and entrepreneurial representational logic

The constitution of global network/hierarchy of cities, the skyrocketing rates of foreign direct investment and the mobility of high-qualified workers have been recognized to had given rise to the phenomenon of urban competitiveness – an imperative for urban governments of 'doing what it takes' to position their assets high in this conceptual, but still very real, scale of desirability. (Friedman, 1995; Castells, 1996; Sassen, 2001) In effect, the entrepreneurial character of contemporary urban governance has been recognized as one of its main features (Harvey, 1989), pinpointing thus the ways in which spatial and its qualities become both tools of, and arena for, the processes of promotion and trading. With the decline of nation states' powers and jurisdictions, these play out, increasingly, as primary determinants of urban futures, while forming expressly naturalized context of planning practices. (Carmona et al, 2009).
It has been widely agreed by now that culture and its spatial manifestations play important role in creation of urban brands (Evans, 2001; Kunzmann, 2004; Landry, 2000; Jensen, 2007). The cultural assets employed in the process of branding can be very varied, from architectural cultural heritage artifacts, which imply the aura of authenticity by the virtue of 'proven' authentic history, to flagship cultural architectural projects which imply the constantly living, regenerating cultural activity that suppose to present the city as a vital part of the global world. (Judd & Fainstein, 1999; Miles, 2005; Strom, 2003) All these fragmentized associations tend to be subsumed under a desirable image, the role model of sorts that we intent to capture in the notion of 'authentic global city'.
Importantly, this city-text is understood here as a representation of the existing place, the phenomenology of which implies myriad complexities that are curated through the process of cultural urban branding. (Chaplin and Stara, 2009) Another concept which intends to systematize and which successfully captures the notion of expanding cultural and place-related bases of planning is that of a narrative approach to cultural urban brands, where planning activities are seen as underpinned and, indeed, frequently fully informed by preconceived stories about the place. (Jensen, 2007)

Similarly, the discursive and semiotic processes at play have been considered by scholars who tried to understand their agency and importance in contemporary planning and governance schemes. (Jensen & Richardson, 2003; Harris & Hooper, 2004; Healey, 2004; Duhr, 2007). The wider picture of sea-change from essentialist to relational geography clarifies the simultaneous popularization of strategic spatial planning (Healey, 2004). The essentialist approach, aspiring to order and objectivity, has given way to relational approach which understands the space as "social construct" and in which "'places of the mind' are as significant as physical objects and flows". Taking this into consideration, in her definition of strategic spatial planning Patsy Healey designates it as "self-conscious collective efforts to re-imagine a city, urban region or wider territory". (Healey, 2004, p.46)

As curating, storytelling and re-imagination equally imply valorization, selection and simplification of uttermost complexity of the urban, it seems that only the "optics" of "representational logic of urban intervention" maintain enough analytic credibility when addressing contemporary urban planning and governance. More specifically, the question in focus is the one of the general 'climate' of the entrepreneurial urban governance, the ways in which it influences the formation of planning narratives when they work with signs and metaphors and, in turn, the relation of these narratives to the phenomenology of the place.

**2.3 The production of the informal - Social appropriation of space, its 'visibility', its symbolic loads.**

The polarization between the formal and informal culture broadly introduces the parallel realities of formal and informal city. While the urban intervention interpellates the user through its formal discourse (Harvey, 1996; Jameson, 1997; Balibrea, 2004), in the realm of the informal the users produce the meaning through the wide variety of their agencies and interactions. Here we consider the manifestations of urban informality in the light of the notion of appropriation, as advanced by Henry Lefebvre.

Amongst those categories defined in Lefebvre's opus, appropriation is one of the few that truly and undeniably "hold the side" of the citizen, standing for the processes that endow the space with symbols implying "time (or times), rhythm (or rhythms)" and spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991, p.357). It especially strongly relates to his favoring of the use value (as opposed to exchange value) of space. For Lefebvre, understanding appropriation lies at the very core of the new science of space, as he calls on to planners to apply the "imaginary invested in appropriation (of time, of space, of physiological life and desire)". (Lefebvre, Kofman and Lebas, 1996, p.155).

Appropriation thus produces symbolic value, also identified as *difference* – alternative to the imposed homogeneity. It is produced through the use that infests the representations of power by means of its collateral symbolisms. The result of this collision is the 'city in itself' – the place and the phenomenon.

Given the pursue for the 'authenticity', imposed by the entrepreneurial climate in urban governance, planning narratives have recently intended to incorporate some of the semantic 'products' of informal practices – the alternative artistic cultures and the allure of their corresponding spaces are increasingly used as powerful material of branding and promotional activities in cities. The dispersed, unsynchronized semantics of the "bohemian" activities are tracked down, recollected, synchronized and introduced into overarching narrative of "the creative and open place to work, invest, create and live" (Vivant, 2010, p.107)

Not all products of informal practices of appropriation, however, can be seamlessly blended in the preconceived city-word of 'authentic global' role-model. The blurred border-line of informality gains again very determined and strict presence when this kind of semantic recycling cannot be easily (or at all) undertaken. And if they are not suitable to be promoted and integrated into the nexus of strategic planning narrative and entrepreneurial governance narrative, the *differences* are disregarded or stigmatized.

Still the "city in itself" exists outside the narratives as a superior *oeuvre* that supersedes the product and enters into conflicting, unclear and dialectical relationships with its institutional form (Lefebvre, Kofman and Lebas, 1996). The structuring of social and cultural urban geography reveals these conflicting tensions, not only in terms of quality of life, but also in terms of identity construction when the semantic hierarchies between the center and the periphery are recognized in the narratives. The urban centers are source-fields of iconographies and symbolisms of representation, leaving the less significant periphery existing "in itself" but, also, at the safe distance from the curated space of representation (Harvey, 1993).The notion of visibility then gains prominence suggesting the "out of sight, out of mind" principle that permits fine-tuning of the representative "city-in-itself" with the narrative, while the distanced ghettos, informal settlements and other *differences* can be seamlessly overwritten by the dominant representational logic.

In Sarajevo, however, the specific topographic context of the city has permitted for a situation of peculiar semantic ambiguity. While the recent investment has tended to 'materialize' into ever-more spectacular architectural forms indicative of global-city well-being, their backdrop, the 'city in itself', all too clearly demonstrates the *difference* as it elevates it to prominent display surrounding the representative city-center.

## 3. Sarajevo, its informal realities and its imagined futures

### 3.1 The hills of Sarajevo – the becoming of the informal city

The social and cultural geography of Sarajevo is, not surprisingly, as complex as the city's turbulent history.

Being founded by the Ottoman Empire in the XV century, as the most western administrative center of the regime, the initial urban structure nestled in the outset of the valley of river Miljacka, taking advantage of the topographic configuration to introduce

the unmistakably oriental urban organization – the market-place in the valley and the residential areas around the hills. In the late XIX c, the city was conquered by Austria-Hungary which continued to fill-in the widening valley towards the west, organizing the Central-European urban structure of blocks in the orthogonal disposition of streets with sustained construction around the hills. In the immediate aftermath of the WWII the newly founded socialist regime revolutionized, yet again, the manner of urban planning and development, relying entirely on the principles of the Athens Charter. Formal and project-based occupation of land continued to be predominantly directed at the flat valley of the river, as the large housing estates and their generous pseudo-parks sprung-up, one by one, to accommodate the ever-intensifying influx of migrants (Figure 1). Coming from the countryside and the smaller cities of the Republic alike, attracted by the possibilities of employment offered by the industrialized capital city, these blue-collar workers were the ones to pioneer the self-initiated construction of single-family homes that were soon stigmatized as illegal settlements. The unfortunate, yet common, socialist approach of putting all stakes of industrialization in the narrow urban areas of the biggest cities and turning blind-eye to the necessity of the regional development, resulted in overcrowding of Sarajevo's housing stock (Bublin, 2006). While around 1910 the city population numbered 21 377, by the 1920s it doubled, only to reach some 70 000 in the early 1940s. With the post-WWII onset of intensive processes of de-agrarization, industrialization and urbanization, the number of inhabitants increased to 213 101 in the early 1960s. The increasing influx of migrants to Sarajevo was unmistakably followed by the growing informal housing that almost exclusively occupied the steep slopes of the surrounding hills – a terrain too complex to be urbanized through the large housing schemes employed by the socialist-modernist planning practices.

The trends of growing informal settlements continued through the 1970s and 1980s, only to escalate after the Serbian aggression and the siege of the city that ended in 1995, when the wave of war-provoked migrations splashed hillsides of the Miljacka valley.

This distribution of the formal city in the valley and informal city on the hills (Figure 2) not only created a clear social and cultural geography in which the line separating the valley from the slope and the flat from the steep turns into borderline between two different worlds, but also collaterally produced a complex and problematically rich urban panorama in which the image of the city, however and wherever contemplated, pays equal tribute to formal and informal through the monumentality of the visible (Figure 3).

### 3.2 Fostering the formal representation in transition: the plans, the pamphlets, the prescriptions

The second half of the 1990s in Sarajevo has been profoundly marked by the overall shift of epic proportions: from socialism to neoliberal democracy, from Fordist to Post-

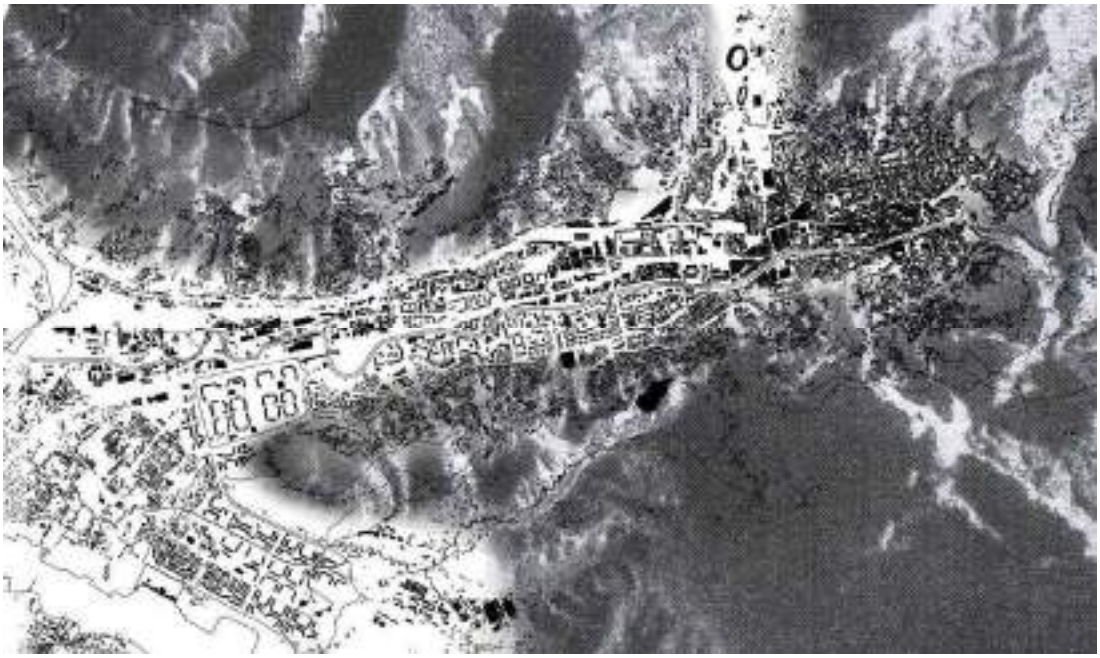

Figure 1. Urban morphology of Sarajevo in its topographical context

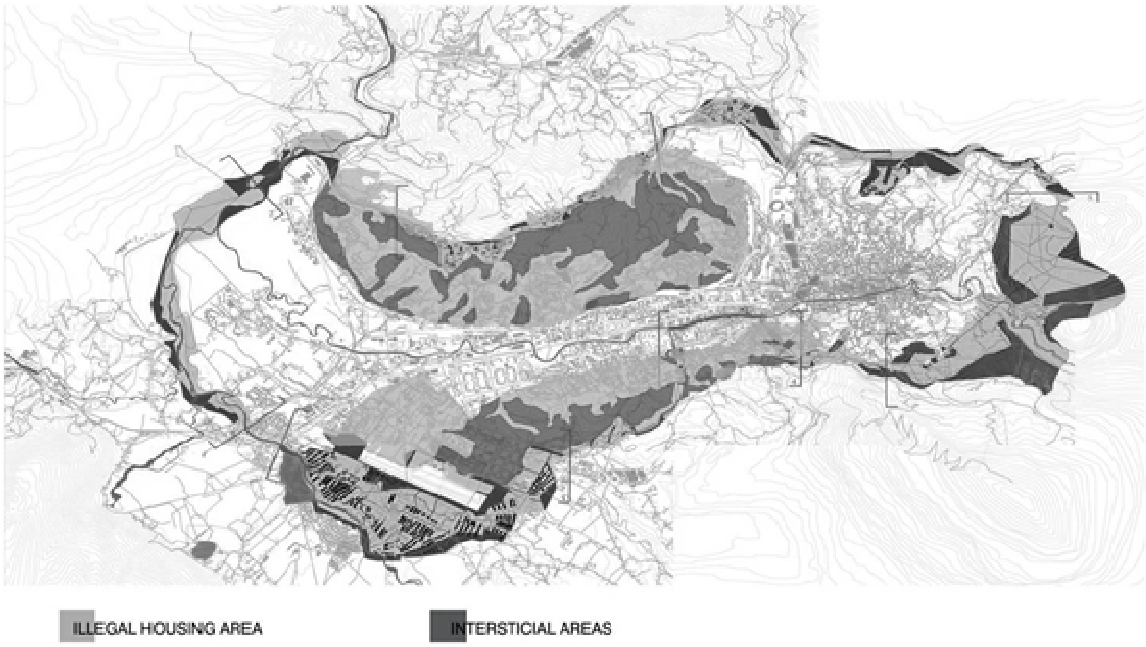


Figure 2. Distribution of informal housing areas on the hills surrounding the city

Fordist economy, from war to peace. All these intertwined processes have been immediately articulated, both popularly and academically, by being subsumed under the concept of transition, the recognition of the overall "abnormality" which asked to be overcome by applying "good practices" of the "normal" world (Stening and Horschelmann, 2008). In the realm of planning and urban governance, this meant, among other things, the introduction of the new logic of representation, the one that would supersede the nation-building identity formation, so typical of the socialist era, and answer to the new situation of the neoliberal global market (Pichler-Milanović, 2005). The recognition of the unfolding urban competition and of the fact that development and investment depended directly and uncompromisingly on the quality and skillfulness of representation, introduced range of innovations into activities of the Development Planning Institute of the Sarajevo Canton (DPISC), the ultimate institutional authority in the realm of spatial and economic planning of the city.

The first post-war spatial plan, issued in 2006, demonstrates these changes in a multiplicity of ways (DPISC, 2006). The document opens up with enumeration of 'general and specific goals' that give it a strategic dimension. Three of these acquire specific prominence for their mobilization and circulation in range of other documents and turn into a motto of sorts that synthetizes the main aspirations of the city (DPISC, 2006, p.4) The first one: "Profiling of the space of Sarajevo Canton as the ambience of lucrative (sustainable and highly profitable) business" is further elaborated to designate science and knowledge-based economy, small and middle-size enterprises, food-production and tourism as the principle economic bases of development. The second one relates to the "ambience of enjoyable living" that sets the goal of providing "humane, healthy and creative living through the elevation of quality and standards". Finally, the third one demands that Sarajevo Canton be profiled as "regional and European metropolis", and thus encompasses the previous two by stating that 'the environment has to be made attractive for the international capital", as well as for the "young professionals", so that it provides for their permanence in the country. The framework narrative that these basic strategic goals constitute echoes, despite its generality, in the subsequent chapters that intent to specify "The Projection of Spatial Development and Spatial Systems". Inside the proposed categories (natural resources and conditions, population and settlements, economy, dwelling and residential development, social infrastructure, agricultural land, etc.) the informality is addressed exclusively as a process and as technical entity – "the informal construction" – a problem that requires rehabilitation and control.

Springing from the bases set by the Spatial plan, this kind of overarching strategic spatial narrative divaricates and reappears in other, more specific documents. Two are addressed here with particular curiosity: The Investment Guide – Sarajevo: a Profitable Business Location (DPISC, 2008a) and Sarajevo – Presentation (DPISC, 2008b). Both are available for download at the official web-site of the DPISC, and both are intended to represent the city, following the basic strands posed by the strategic goals.

The Investment Guide is directed at potential investors with the purpose of providing a range of useful procedural information (founding the company, getting construction permit). More importantly, however, it provides a list of potential investment locations in which undertaking of construction is preferred, as well as the intensive visual support in the form of images and maps that are to represent the city as the "profitable business location". Here the representation is employed in a rather more pragmatic form - the territory of the city is reduced to the range of locations "covered" by the Master plans that selectively reproduce the city of the future (Figure 3) Without an exception, all 17 Master plans are situated in the flat valley, promising further polarization between the normality of the formal and otherness of the informal settlements. This kind of 'selective recognition' is reinforced through the rich photographic documentation that accompanies the entirety of the text and that 'narrates' the 'authentic global city' into being – a task accomplished by means of romantic panoramic views (Figure 4) and snap-shots of recent examples of global architecture (Figure 5), in each one of which the heavily populated hills are somehow eluded.

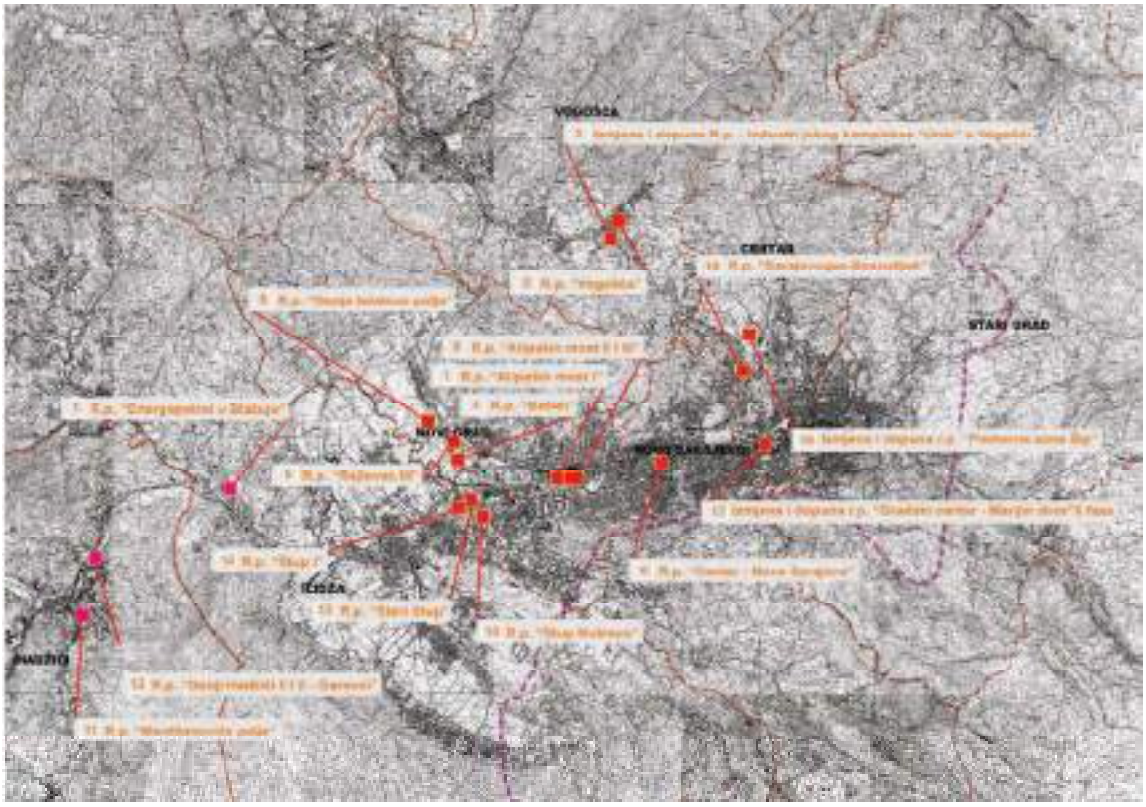

Figure 3. Future is selective: the position of the potential investment locations exclusively situated in the Sarajevo valley

Figure 4. The panorama of Sarajevo on its blurred background – the handy 'fog' disguises the informal world

Figure 5. The recent architectural "prides" of the city photographed from the fortunate vantage point that evades the visibility of informal housing

Figure 6. Sarajevo by night and its hills covered by night-tome fog

Figure 7. The 3D view of the Marijin Dvor new city center and its upcoming architectural wonders

Finally, the Presentation of the Canton Sarajevo entitled "Yesterday Today Tomorrow" complements the palette of representational logic by recreating the city in the light of its formal identity (DPISC, 2008b). Informality has no place in neither one of the temporal categories covered by this colorful document that features architectural monuments, events of culture and natural riches. Again, the graphic illustrations selectively "recreate" the favorable views (Figure 6), employing this time also the 3D visualization (Figure 7) to communicate the imagined futures of the city, and all that without any consideration of the part that dozens of thousands of informal households are to play in its construction.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS: Overlooking the vividly visible - The syndrome of the phantom city and its discontents

Informality is pervasive but rarely imposing in its visibility. The very real concept of "periphery" implies its safe distance from the affluent, manicured and identity-forming center. This distance and implicitness are not to be underestimated.

The fostered "dual city" of Sao Paolo (Dear and Lucero, 2010), for an example, exists both in its hybrid physicality and in its dual aspiration to the production of identity and culture: the white, global, corporate, establishment culture Vs. non-white, local, ghettoized culture, that occasionally semantically "harasses" the formality of the center by means of graffiti. Except through this kind of very ephemeral overlappings, the fragmented social geography can be appreciated almost exclusively by studying maps and contrasting snapshot separately taken in the mutually isolated dual realities.

It is the visibility of contrasting artifacts, however, that unsettles the spirits of the liberal democratic myths – the phantasmagoric images of the squatter-tower in Caracas have circulated the world, as an ambiguous message craving decipherment and reaction. The 45 stories high unfinished office tower, hosting some 600 families of the urban poor has provoked wildly varying insights – from those which designated it as "breeding ground for radical social change", to those which saw in it "an unintended parody of the society that created the squatters' dire situation to begin with" (Woods, 2011).

Still the intensity of fascination reveals the concealed civilizational impasse, demonstrating how formal representation of appropriation makes all the difference.

So too, in Sarajevo, the semantic stratification of the panorama has posed a challenge for the policy-makers and the planners alike. (Figure 8, Figure 9) And as it occurs with challenges, it also indicated the open-ended way to innovation, a chance which, if handled with greatest of (technical and humanistic) care and audacity, can result in the invention of something new.

The disappointment of the answer so far given to this challenge has not been in its practice of "overwriting", for the realm of representation seems to be the first frontline of any fight for betterment in the world order pervaded with signs, images and narratives.

Figure 8. The semantic layers of the panorama – new development icons in the foreground and the informal settlements on the hills in the background


Figure 9. New development flagship projects contrast with the 'city in itself'

As for the part of it that falls to planning, it has been already well recognized, that "issues of representation are an important part of the persuasive capacity of strategic planning. They have impacts in carrying framing concepts from the arenas of policy articulation to the arenas where decisions are made about specific investments and regulatory norms and permits." (Healey, 2004, p.46)

This investigation is dedicated, thus, to reflection on the paradox of representation in planning practice, when confronted with the issue of informality.

It has been demonstrated, with these ends, how pioneering strategic spatial planning and policy of post-socialist Sarajevo intent to navigate through the representational realm, by constructing narratives and embedding them in documents that truly hold wagers on the future of the city. Furthermore, it has been shown how these narratives, as semantic constructs, collide sharply with the unarticulated semantic loads of the 'city in itself'. The operativity of these narratives proves to be, therefor, both pragmatic and semantic. While they strongly influence the distribution of investment inside the complex social geography of the city, the signifying capacity of urban intervention is seen as productive of identity.

It has been aimed to show, however, that, before the intervention itself has been made effective, the signification and signs enter the planning practice through the narratives of planning. Separation of the practical and the symbolic can thus be found in the metaphoric content of the spatial vocabulary that pervades contemporary planning practice. The aspiration of urban governments to the 'authentic global city' results in mobilization of spatio-cultural concepts that address those features found to be 'in tune' with the elusive qualities of this ultimate role-model. Meanwhile, informality is what prevents the urban landscape to become, as some scholars address it, 'discourse materialized' (Schein, 1997).

However more the construction of narratives related to places proves to make a crucial part in the creative labor of the contemporary planning practice, it is worth remembering one simple and ingenious observation: identity is not nice (Venhuizen, 2010), and it has never been. The formal identities narrated through artifacts of castles and fortresses managed to incorporate and supersede their original stories, sometimes related to the true traumas of war and subordination. Similarly, when facing the phantomlike existentialities of representation-less urban images, it falls to the planners and policymakers to invent new narratives that will have enough potency to forefront our contemporary battles, many of which are fought in the real space of the informal city.

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