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THE TRAGEDY OF THE URBAN HERITAGE OF VUKOVAR

Destruction of the
Croatian and European
Town Identity in 1991

Before Vukovar was destroyed in the 1991 war, it was one of the finest towns in the continental part of the Republic of Croatia, with impressive historical landmarks and many well-preserved monumental structures.

Position of the town and conditions for its development

Vukovar developed on a raised loess plateau on the right bank of the river Danube, at the mouth of the river Vuka. It is situated on the boundary of two historical regions – Slavonija and Srijem – in a picturesque landscape where the low-lying Slavonian plain suddenly begins to ascend the hills of Fruška gora. There are more than 30 metres of topographical difference between the historical town nucleus on the riverbank (78 m altitude) and the raised plateau with the Franciscan Monastery and the water tower (109 m altitude). This gives the town a very impressive silhouette, especially from the north Danubian perspective.

Vukovar developed as a harbour on Danube and a strong commercial and crafts centre (shipbuilding, brickyards, fishing) with good traffic connections along an important royal road and the bridge over Vuka. It was also the processing centre for the rich rural surroundings (mills), and in more recent times, a meaningful industrial centre (“Borovo”, “Vuteks”, “Vupik”).

According to the last pre-war population census, the town of Vukovar had 44,639 inhabitants (1991) and was the 11th Croatian town in size.

Urban topography

The present Vukovar town complex consists of four urban units that differ in terms of character and time of construction.

- OLD VUKOVAR on the right bank of Vuka and Danube was built spontaneously and irregularly, with dense

rows of houses mushrooming along meandering alleyways running through well-hidden gullies. Historically, this is the middle-class commercial and crafts district of Vukovar and is still today the town centre. It was not until the early 19th century that the town's high terraces ("Švapsko brdo", "Milovo brdo", "Mitnica"...) began taking the shape as parts of intentional planning, providing a ringed safeguard to the town centre. These were districts with rows of standardised rural-type houses.

- NEW VUKOVAR, much smaller, located on the left Vuka bank, with a planned network of streets, was not inhabited until the early 18th century (1722). It was originally a feud held by the Eltz family, but later on it was used by the county administration and finally by the military garrison.
- BOROVO, the third and newest town area, appeared as a separate industrial settlement with marked urban traits (since 1931) on a flat land along Danube, which is located several kilometres northwest of Vukovar. It was originally planned as a separate satellite "garden city" but, today, Borovo and Vukovar are structurally connected and form a conurbation.
- LUŽAC, formerly the peasant village of family Eltz, is now entirely merged with the town, linking Borovo and Vukovar by the port zone "Priljevo".

Urban progress and development – creation of the town identity

The wider town area is a locality of several fortified Neolithic settlements (5000 BC), a number of them situated on hillsides or riversides (today referred to as "Lijeva Bara", "Desna Bara", "Kriva Bara", "Supoderica", "Ciglane Eltz", "Najparov vrt", Grammar School platform, "Petri-Skela" and Vučedol outside of town).

In Roman times (100-400 AD) the area around the Vuka river mouth was uninhabited, but accidental archaeological findings (locations "Petri Skela", "Velika Skela", "Olajnica", Eltz's garden) are suggesting the existence of a road station or a fortification (*propugnaculum*) on the Danube *limes*.

The first early medieval settlement and hillfort was built high above the Danube river (around the year 800), on a plateau where the present monastery and grammar school are situated, stretching all the way down to the "Lijeva Bara" where a large old-Croatian necropolis of the Bijelo Brdo cultural circle (1000-1300) was discovered. Similar smaller gravesites were found in "Kriva Bara" and

along the New Vukovar main street, indicating other early-medieval settlements.

By the early 13th century the town must have grown to a considerable size, because the first written records are referring to Vukovar as a county centre (*in comitatu de Wolkou*, 1220). A Romanesque-Gothic castle with three brick towers (*castrum Walkow*, 1231) stood above the “Bečarski križ”, constructed in several stages (demolished in 1752). Adjacent to it, on the present monastery hill, the nucleus of an old military palisade – protected feudal settlement was formed. At that time the commercial suburb (Radić Street and the Vuka banks), was already in existence, which was at a very early stage (1231) awarded the status of the free royal borough. The third town area, the Varoš (*Warasy*, 1286) marketplace, was situated on the left Vuka bank (somewhere near the new stadium) and existed as a separate settlement, until the early 16th century, when the population was relocated. In the Middle Ages, Vukovar had two parishes (1251), the archdeaconry seat (1229) and the Romanesque stone churches consecrated to St. George and St. Lambert.

During the Turkish government (1526–1687), Vukovar, degraded to a *kasaba* or *nahia* (district, 16th c.) and *kadiluk* (court district, 17th c.), had lost its earlier importance. According to the *Defter* (Land Register), by the end of the 16th century the town had ten *mahallas* (streets) with 233 houses. Later, during the 17th century, the number of *mahallas* decreased but by the end of the Turkish government the number of houses had increased to about 350 in a town of 2,500 inhabitants (coefficient 7 persons per house). Turkish Vukovar was covering more or less the same area as the medieval town – 20.5 hectares, and was at that time larger than any other town in the free parts of Croatia. The irregular town matrix and most of the structures continued from the Middle Ages throughout the entire Turkish period, because even though the town was conquered (in 1526) it was not destroyed, nor was there any fundamental degrading or any considerable development in the 16th and 17th centuries (the town stagnated).

On the main road Sultan Suleyman built a big wooden bridge over the Vuka (1526, destroyed in 1787). Seven *mosques*, a *caravanserai*, three *hans* (inns), a *tekia* (dervish monastery), a *hammam* (Turkish baths) a *mekteb* (school) and three smaller bridges were also built.

When the Turks left Vukovar (in 1687) they burnt it down and evacuated it so that the only residents over the next several years were soldiers. The first renewal of

Vukovar in post-Turkish times took place on a new location that had previously not been inhabited, on an islet along the mouth of the river Vuka (after 1691), where a completely new population was colonised from the surrounding villages (according to a 1698 census, *Insula Vukovariensis* had 57 houses). The first baroque revival of Vukovar could not take place until the ruins of the Turkish *kasaba* were completely removed (about 1700), after which the town was rebuilt in its former location but without any structural continuity and on a completely different urban matrix. Thus Turkish Vukovar (known from the 1687 town plan) left no trace on the later development of the town (except in some parts along the main street), and anything that may have survived from Turkish times was completely erased in the later frequent destructions caused by floods and fires, as well as by the urban restructures that followed.

However, under the Austrian government the town began growing again. A number of wooden public buildings in a markedly traditional style were constructed: the first Orthodox Church (around 1690), the first Franciscan Church (1707), and the Postal Office building (1695). Residential houses were at first made of timber; wicker and unbaked brick, covered with shingle or reed, which favoured frequent fires so that entire town districts were simply burned down (e.g. in 1736, 1743, and 1755). Not a single element of this earliest “wooden baroque” stratum was preserved in Vukovar.

The first solid brick-made buildings were baroque churches, nearly all built in the first half of the 18th century: the two-storey Franciscan Monastery (1723–1756) with the St. Phillip and Jacob’s Church (1723–1733) and a monumental belfry (*M. Weichmann*, 1773–1774), the Orthodox St. Nicolas Church (1733–1737, modified in 1755 and 1763), the St. Rock Chapel near the Eltz Castle, with a picturesque wooden bulb on the belfry and other popular baroque elements (built in 1740, modified in 1805 and 1858), the St. Cross cemetery chapel, no longer existent (built 1741–1744, destroyed in fire in 1921), the small St. John Nepomuk Chapel in the park in front of the Franciscan Monastery (1749), and the prison chapel in the County courtyard (round 1780). In addition as many as four schools were built (1730–1743). The oldest one-storey urban brick-houses with their characteristic massive arcades and open arched ground-floor porches were built around the two baroque triangular squares in the Old Vukovar (Houses of Mihailović, Bingulac, Poić... 1750–1790).

The baroque layout of the town is known from Frast's map (1733), Blumen's (1759) and Schraud's maps (1795–1796), which clearly show that at that time Vukovar was still stuck in its medieval and Turkish ductus, except for its longitudinal expansion along the main Osijek-Belgrade road (*Via longa regia*). By the end of the 18th century the town reached up the "Milovo Brdo" and the beginning of *surduk* (gullies). On the eve of the Black Death (1795), after barely one hundred years of the post-Turkish urbanisation, the town had 1000 houses and 5651 inhabitants. At the turn of the 19th century a brick-lined sewerage was constructed in the town centre, which was the first major municipal project.

The old part of the town became linked to New Vukovar on the left Vuka bank with a massive masonry bridge, the last late-baroque project in Vukovar (*J. Rubigger*, 1772; destroyed in 1932). The colonisation of the New Vukovar area did not begin until after 1722. The first settlers were army officers and Habsburg Court officials, followed by the staff of the Küffstein (since 1728) and Eltz estate (since 1736), and the Sirmium County, which had its seat here (since 1745). The only street developed in New Vukovar by the end of the 18th century was lined with about 100 massive ground-floor houses with their characteristic high roofing.

This new part of the town was growing along with the baroque Old Vukovar, but most of the buildings were bearing the early classicist marks imported by army engineers. By the middle of the 18th century on the site of the present Court, a cavalry garrison complex was completed (destroyed in 1902), followed by two smaller army barracks. On the site of an old feudal manor (from 1736), the monumental classicist Eltz Castle was built (1749–1751, extended in 1781, 1811, 1824 and afterwards), as well as the elegant Country House with its prominent central risalto overhanging the ground-floor porch (*J. Hatzinger*, 1773). Opposite the Eltz Castle were five estate administration manors (late 18th century) and further on, nearer to the bridge, the still preserved Classicist one-storey Rogulić House, Uglješić House (destroyed 1991), Adamović mansion (around, 1840) and "Lion Hotel" (1856; demolished after the 1965 flood) were located. By the end of the century a big one-storey silk manufacturing facility, two breweries, two flourmills and a series of watermills along the Danube bank were built.

In the baroque environment of Old Vukovar the classicist style appeared at a later stage, not before the early 19th century, represented only by few buildings, like the

Stanišić corner house and the elegant buildings of the Town Magistrate's Court (*Domus oppidana*, A. Semper, 1817–1818). A wooden bridge was built at the mouth of the river Vuka (in 1847). Originating from this time were traditional reed and “stamped-mud” houses (Kačić St., Podvuka). And just outside the town (at the “Dobra voda” water spring) the Orthodox St. Petka's Chapel was built (1808–1811). Valuable public sculptures included the stone-made “Bečarski križ” (1805) and the wrought iron *Ex Voto* crucifix in front of the Franciscan Church (1840), both destroyed in the War 1991.

Biedermeier left very few traces in Vukovar (the Ensminger House at the main street).

The 1795–1796 plague and recurrent fires (in 1809, 1822, 1833 and 1836) caused stagnation in the town's growth and development in the first half of the 19th century. Extremely disastrous was the fire in 1822, which wiped out 327 houses and 600 outhouses – one third of the then Old Vukovar (*G. Homer's* regularisation plan for the town centre has been preserved). In 1850, Vukovar had 6,178 inhabitants and 1,233 houses.

In the second half of the 19th century the town rapidly expanded along outgoing roads leading toward neighbouring villages, especially at the “Mitnica” and “Švapsko brdo”, the latter entirely consisting of uniform rows of rural houses. It was then that Old and New Vukovar merged into a single municipality (1873), ushering in an era of rising prosperity. Most streets were cobbled (since 1876). The railway was introduced to Vukovar, too (in 1879 to the suburbs, in 1891 to the town; the extension around the town was built in 1912). Electricity was introduced in 1909. The main street in New Vukovar sank into the luxuriant greenery of a fourfold tree line (*M. Lancosz*, 1903). At the turn of the century the town had 2,610 buildings and a population of 10,032 (1901 census).

In the second half of the 19th century a number of pseudo-period buildings were built in the centre of Vukovar: Paunović (1867), Jirkovsky (*K. Kaellcseny*, 1874), Landesmann palaces (1893), the German School on “Švapsko brdo” (1891), the Crafts School (1892), Grammar School (*F. Streim*, 1894), “Grand Hotel”, later Workers' Cultural Centre (*V. Nikolić*, 1895–1897), District Court (*A. Tokos*, 1902–1903), Serbian Centre (1905) and the Historicist-Art Nouveau Serb Orthodox Municipality building (*M. Matić*, 1909–1910). Also worth mentioning is the neo-baroque adaptation of the Eltz Castle (*V. Sidek*, 1895–1907) and the elegant “Paladian” Knoll Villa, later the Small Eltz Castle (around 1860). Paunović (*A. Tokos*,

1898), Eltz (*V. Sidek*, 1907), Panić and Stanić (*M. Pilar*, 1906) Chapels stand out among a dozen of historicist mausoleums, as well as the Our Lady of the Oak-Tree Chapel on Priljevo (*I. Möller*, 1891–1892). Especially impressive among the monumental religious buildings were the domed synagogue (*L. Schöne*, 1889; destroyed in 1958) and the large annex to the Franciscan Church (*R. Jordan*, 1896–1897). Many early-industrial structures were also built: the Eltz granary (1860), mills, a fire fighters' storehouse (1866; pulled down after 1965), a slaughterhouse (*A. Tokos*, 1901).

Except for the very successful adaptation of the Calvinist Church (*F. Funtak*, 1910), and Hungarian School (1911, annex 1922), genuine Art Nouveau is poorly represented in Vukovar. There are only composite forms of the Tirolese and Hungarian Art Nouveau, e.g. the Tachler Hardware Store in the centre of the town (1914). Highly valuable are the Art Deco productions between the two wars by *F. Funtak*, *Karlovsky*, *A. Freudenreich* (Croatian Culture Centre, 1919–1922), and, especially, *E. Gölis* (villas in Kidrič St., the corner houses of the "Gaspar Pharmacy" (1927), Paediatric Clinic, Serbian Bank (1922), "Tehničar" House, Milanković House (1925), etc.). In the twenties and thirties of the 20th century there were numerous local Vukovar builders: *F. Trembl*, *F. Kundl*, *M. Kerek*, *M. Puches* and others.

In the nearby Borovo, a large industrial urban complex, a paradigmatic example significant on the European level, named "Bata-ville" was under construction (*F. L. Gabura*, *V. Karfik*, *A. Vitek*, since 1931–1938). Immediately before the outbreak of the World War II Vukovar had as many as 60 streets and 6 squares.

Important developmental projects during the period 1945–1991, especially those after the flood in 1965, in which the town centre was heavily damaged, were entrusted to *M. Maretić*, *R. Mišćević*, *A. Paunović* and *M. Salaj*.

In more recent times, praiseworthy architectural projects were designed by *A. Dragomanović* (department store, 1969–1970), *M. Salaj* ("Danube Hotel", 1976–1980), *P. Kušan* – *S. Kolobov* (new Water Tower, 1962–1968), *M. Šosterić* (Bakery at "Priljevo", 1972–1976), *B. Velnić* ("Nama" department store, 1979). An interesting residential interpolation in Nazor Street was designed by *B. Marušić* (1976–1978). Many new modern blocks of houses and industrial buildings were designed by Vukovar architects: *I. Mikić*, *M.* and *T. Papić*, *V. Pokas*, *A. Kedmenec*, *S. Marušić*, *V. Štimac*, *Đ. Skrbín* and others.

Before the Croatian Homeland War, several valuable sculptures by *A. Augustinčić*, *G. Antunac*, *Ž. Janež* and *B.*

Crljenjak stood in public places of Vukovar. In Dudik, on the outskirts of Vukovar, there is a memorial park dedicated to victims of the World War II (first monument by *Z. Kolacio*) later on successfully rearranged by *B. Bogdanović* (1980).

Destruction of town in 1991 and pre-requisites for renewal

During the three-month long Serb occupation of Vukovar in autumn 1991 (August 25th – November 18th) over 100,000 shells were fired at the town. The town continued to be systematically devastated during several years of occupation (until January 15th, 1998, when the reintegration process ended). When it was all over, the historic town and almost all of the monuments in Vukovar were destroyed. The most important urban landmarks, symbols of the town's Croatian identity, were particularly severely damaged: the Franciscan Monastery and Church (estimated war damage of 6.15 million Euros on that complex alone), many chapels, the Eltz Manor (estimated War damage 5.56 million Euros), County Palace (2.67 million Euros) Grammar School (2.38 million Euros), birth house of the Nobel Prize winner Ružička, the baroque town nucleus... Furthermore, almost the entire industry was also destroyed, the public utilities and almost three quarters of the houses. The total war damage in the town was estimated at 1.1 billion Euros.

Vukovar is being renewed (renewal started in the summer of 1998) on the basis of documentation prepared by UNESCO for the *Vukovar Project* (1995–1996), the *Master Plan* (1996) and *Detailed Regularisation Plan for the Reconstruction of the Historical Nucleus* (1997). Most of the historical monuments are being renewed as part of the national donation programme, competently and conforming to requirements, supported by conservational expertise and supervision, but only a small number of the most important structures have been included so far. Results on the level of the town planning renewal completed to date may be assessed as unsatisfactory because no effort was made to correct (or not to renew) parts of the town that had not been well planned or of unauthorized construction, especially the extensively built-up suburbs, the port and “Priljevo” industrial basin. The political decision – “each to his own site, each to his own house” – resulted in the unsystematic renewal of individual structures interspersed with numerous sites that are covered with ruins or are completely empty. Moreover, they are currently not planned for renewal; about 40% of the urban structure has

not been included in the renewal programme due to population losses caused by war or other demographic factors including migration, and because the owners are unknown. It seems that Vukovar will remain to be a *destroyed town* for a long time to come.

Elements of the monumental valorisation of the town

The dominant style and most of the valuable buildings in historical Vukovar are baroque, and there are also many fine structures from the period of high historicism. The most important historical complexes in Vukovar are:

- INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE (0 category): Vučedol archaeological site;
- NATIONAL IMPORTANCE (A category): "Lijeva Bara" archaeological site, Franciscan Monastery and the Parish Church of St. Phillip and Jacob, Eltz Manor, Srijem County House, the complex of two-floor baroque houses, Old Vukovar town square;
- REGIONAL IMPORTANCE (B category): Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas, St. Rock's Chapel, Eltz curias, Knoll Villa, buildings of the "Grand Hotel", District Court and Hungarian School, and several town houses in the historical nucleus;
- LOCAL AND TOWN IMPORTANCE (C, D categories), nearly all the protected buildings in the town, most of them significant primarily in terms of their contribution to the distinct atmosphere of their surrounding.

In the past Vukovar underwent several important urban reconstructions which strongly affected the historical nucleus and overall urban agglomeration. Most significant among them were: the first urban regularisation after the plague (1796), the regularisation after the great fire (*G. Homer*, 1822), the development of the railway-line belt (1891; extension 1912), and the planned construction of the new satellite-industrial town of "Bata-ville" (1931-1938).

The north panorama of Vukovar from the Danube river and several micro-urban townscapes in the baroque nucleus are of great importance for the overall image of town.

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Picture 1.

Town on the river – the Danube panorama of Vukovar at the end of the 19th century, with major urban dominants: baroque Franciscan Monastery (left) and historicist domed synagogue (right) – *postcard, 1900*



Picture 2.

Acropolis over the baroque town – Franciscan Monastery with the St. Phillip and Jacob Church (founded in 1722); Vukovar Gymnasium is in the background – *postcard, 1910*



Picture 3.

The heart of the civic Vukovar – baroque square surrounded by representative trade houses (built in the period 1750–1780) – *postcard, 1916*



Picture 4.

Middle European identity of the town – baroque castle and garden of counts Eltz (build from 1749 on) – *postcard, 1916*



Picture 5.

Symbols of the historic Vukovar – the “Grand Hotel” palace (1885–1897) and the baroque harbor bridge at the mouth of river Vuka (1772)



Picture 6.

Vista of fin-de-siècle Vukovar – main town street at the beginning of the 20th century – *postcard*, 1910



Picture 7.

In front of the Nobel Prize winner Lavoslav Ružička's birth-house (in the right end) – view of the main street of the so called New Vukovar – *postcard, 1916*



Picture 8.

The Eltz Castle (category "A" monument) – the Town Museum and the alternative war hospital. war damage amounts to 5.56 millions Euro. museum inventory not included – photo by J. Zentner, 1992



Picture 9.

The Eltz Castle – back wing destroyed by an air bomb (the so called blockbuster) of 500 kilograms – *photo: archives of the "Vjesnik" newspaper*



Picture 10.

Franciscan Monastery, the bell tower and the St. Philip and Jacob Church (category "A" monument) – in Television Belgrade reports regularly mentioned as the "Ustasha machine-gun nest": *war damage amounts to 6,15 millions Euro* – photo by Z. Karač, 1998



Picture 11.

Franciscan Monastery, cloister – during the town occupation it served as the shelter for civilians and as the depository for sacral and museum arts, including the Bauer Collection



Picture 12.

The Croatian Home, secessionist Town Theatre (category "C" monument) – building completely destroyed in the fire caused by napalm bombs: war damage amounts to 1,1 millions Euro, equipment not included – photo by Z. Karač, 1997



Picture 13.

The Croatian Home – exterior of the object destroyed by armor piercing shells, fired off by the Danube fleet of the Yugoslavian National Army – photo by Z. Karač, 1998



Picture 14.

Gymnasium (category "C" monument) – school object bombed with incendiary phosphorous bombs (they cause a fire that can not be extinguished): *war damage amounts to 2,38 millions Euro, equipment not included* – photo by "Hrvatska elektroprivreda" / UNTAES, 1996



Picture 15.

Birth-house of the Nobel Prize winner Lavoslav Ružička (category "B" monument) – museum object with the memorial collection, ignited with phosphorous bombs: *war damage amounts to 300,000 Euro, museum inventory not included* – photo by V. Červenka, 1992

