

# STUDIO ©

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FREQUENCY

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# UPON THE FREQUENCIES — TRANSMITTERS

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# SARAJEVO. A MULTIPLE FREQUENCY CITY

BY STEFANIA GRUOSSO

All images © Stefania Grusso

Socialist Sarajevo

FREQUENCY

Austro-Hungarian Sarajevo

Ottoman Sarajevo

Previous page: Sarajevo map  
Below: 1a. Bascarsija Square

Some cities seem to have been forgotten and Sarajevo is among them. The capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina still appears to be linked to the images of a battlefield – yet it should be appreciated as one of the most beautiful examples of a city “in progress”.

It is a city in the middle – both geographically and culturally, in a junction where the East meets the West. This condition has made Sarajevo a place where cultures, ideologies and religions meet and clash. Sarajevo finds its uniqueness in being a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multilingual and multicentre city. Yet, the multiple essence of this city is the result of a continuum of invasions, destructions, wars and reconstructions, all of which have recurred with more or less intense frequency over the centuries.

Therefore, if we consider the repetition of the same condition several times over time, Sarajevo can truly be defined as a city with *multiple frequencies*.

Sarajevo’s multiple frequency is characterised by 3 main *sub-frequencies*: external influences, wars, and reconstructions – ambitions.

*External influences.* The history of the city began with the Ottoman dom-



2a. Bascarsija Square

ination, in 1435, when Sarajevo was transformed into the most “Eastern” city in Europe, following Istanbul’s example. The Ottoman domination lasted about 450 years and was then followed by the Austro-Hungarian one, which aimed at adapting the city to European standards. An intense work of urban planning overturned the way the city was designed and lived. The Austro-Hungarians dominated Sarajevo for about 40 years, until the First World War broke out and completely reshaped the European history.

*Wars.* In June 1914, exactly in Sarajevo, the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia were killed. This event was the spark that set in motion a series of conditions contributing and leading to the outbreak of the First World War. The city was neither spared by the violence of this war nor, later, by that of the Second World War in which many Jews – about one third of the city population, lost their lives. After the two world conflicts the ferocity of the war seemed to have finally come to a halt. On the contrary, Tito’s death – Head of the government of the Social Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia, in 1980, caused new tensions between the different ethnic groups, sustained by nationalist rhetoric. Sarajevo, which geographically lies at the centre of the so-called “Balkan tangle”, became once again the theatre of tension, suffering the siege of a horrible war against the Bosnian culture and identity, from 1992 to 1996.

Next page: 5a. Marsala tita street  
Next page below: 7. austro-hungarian villa

*Reconstructions - aspirations.* This third frequency is a direct consequence of the previous ones. In particular, the frequency of reconstruction, follows the intensity with which the city was attacked and destroyed and responds to a primary need to return to the original condition. Instead, the second frequency is the synthesis of an attitude that sees in reconstruction the opportunity to innovate, to look to the future and to (re) launch a new identity. Over time, Sarajevo has been able to show its aspiration to be a more European and global city several times.

These three frequencies have moved along the time line with different intensities, leading the city to react to often extreme situations. Despite their intensity, the city has surprisingly grown in a linear way through a succession of urban layers that have never overlapped, but rather stood side by side with each other without ever mixing and therefore without ever overwhelming and erasing the previous history. The contemporary layout of the city is actually able to operate as a narrative of an urban development that has always taken place along the Miljacka

### THESE THREE FREQUENCIES HAVE MOVED ALONG THE TIME LINE WITH DIFFERENT INTENSITIES

River. Each individual layer has its own historical-morphological identity and witnesses a piece of the city's history.

So, when crossing Sarajevo from Ferhadija Street – the city's main pedestrian axis – westwards, the impression of crossing not one but several cities is strongly perceivable. The transition from one urban area to another is neat: from the typically Turkish atmosphere of Ottoman Sarajevo with low buildings, sloping roofs and a cluster of narrow alleys, to Austro-Hungarian Sarajevo, characterised by tall courtyard buildings with majestic façades, and then gradually moving on to socialist Sarajevo, whose imposing residential blocks resulting from the uniformity imposed by the Tito's era are a distinctive feature. Each urban area is marked by an independent identity, due to past events and space structure, representing phases that have strongly affected the evolution of Sarajevo over the centuries.

The oldest Ottoman centre, still preserving its original layout, is characterised by a dense and compact urbanisation in which a specific relationship between open space and built fabric is endlessly repeated. The Ottoman dominion was also responsible for splitting Sarajevo into two large districts: aršija, the commercial area, located in the valley, and Mahala, the traditional residential neighbourhoods that followed the morphology of the hilly territory, alternating narrow streets and a system of public spaces and buildings sized on a human scale. The choice to build on the hills guaranteed each accommodation the "right of view" on the valley. Each Mahala contained about 40-50 typical dwellings with sloping roofs and high walls to ensure privacy. The traditional Bosnian residence is a translation of Ottoman and Islamic socio-cultural values into architecture. The house consisted of two separate but connected parts. One part was devoted to public life and was called the "male house".



Previous page: 8. building along  
Feradija Street 1939-1947



The other was named “female house” and was dedicated to family life. Women used to live in the “female” part of the house and could never leave the house alone. However, they had the possibility to meet their friends who lived in the adjacent houses through a door in the garden wall, the “komšika”. The aspect that most influenced the spatial organisation of the house was *privacy*, since private life had to be jealously protected. The Bosnian house was a single-family house organised on two floors, the ground and first floor. The structure was made of wooden beams and unbaked bricks and this did not allow further development in height. The internal distribution of space was defined by a series of rooms, all alike. Because of their organisation, such rooms can almost be considered as the predecessors of a studio, in its contemporary meaning. Each room had the same type of furniture and could serve as a living room, dining room or bedroom. One of the room walls was the support of a service space, consisting of a large wardrobe that contained the pillows and everything needed to transform the room into a bedroom. The ceramic stove was also used to heat the water in a small shower cabin. This has been the housing model in Sarajevo for almost five centuries. The urban space and the Ottoman living habits were conceived and dimensioned on a human scale.

In 1878, after annexation to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the European style also reached Sarajevo. The city expanded westwards following the canons of a completely new trend, together with a doubling of its inhabitants. The Habsburg domination aimed to transform Sarajevo into an exact copy of the Empire capital - Vienna. Sarajevo was then organized according to a grid of large courtyards of Viennese style, often replicating projects already in place in Vienna or around the empire. In this way, Sarajevo could also close the standard gap with other European cities. The new planning system of the city was also followed by an innovative way of conceiving housing. The urban structure

consisted of large courtyards where the ground floor was dedicated to commercial activity and the upper levels to residential purposes. The Hapsburg era also brought innovation in construction methods, making it possible to create multi-storey buildings. The traditional Bosnian living model was overturned. The layout of the rooms in the house reflected the European model, with each room having its own function. Modernity, however, was limited by one common aspect: all flats on the same level had to share one bathroom. A new term was added to describe the way of living: *sharing*. And sharing was a difficult condition to accept for an entire population who had traditionally lived in extreme privacy as a cultural heritage. The Austro-Hungarian residences were in fact described as “barracks to rent”, because flats were rented out to have a maximum profit rather than to offer comfort to their inhabitants. However, elegant villas were also added - surrounded by large gardens owned by the wealthiest families. The Habsburgs ruled Sarajevo for about 40 years, until the First World War changed the course of events in Europe. During this period the city limits extended

## SHARING WAS A DIFFICULT CONDITION TO ACCEPT

up to the Marijn Dvor district, which became the symbol of modernism opposed to the traditionalism of Bašcaršija, the Ottoman centre.

Little was built between the two world wars. Immediately after the Second World War, the city was free but destroyed and impoverished and facing not only the problem of reconstruction but also an economic and social crisis. In response to the housing emergency a simple and utilitarian architecture was favoured: the use of economic materials, sometimes even ruins produced by the war, resulted in poor quality construction. If, on the one hand, the quality of the architecture was not comparable to the majesty of the Austro-Hungarian palaces and facades, on the other, the living model restored a condition of privacy, since each flat was autonomous and had its own bathroom. The city continued to expand westwards. New neighbourhoods, such as Cengic Vila, Grbavica and Harsno, were built following the dictates of "socialist modernization". In post-war Sarajevo the influence of the modernist European movement made its appearance again thanks to a group of architects trained in the most important European schools of Architecture, such as Vienna, Prague or Paris, who moved to Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. Interesting buildings were erected, as well as entire neighbourhoods. The district of Dzidzikovac, designed following the natural hilly inclination of the land, is certainly to be considered among the most interesting building experiences. The residences are simple volumes organized on terraces, whose facades are marked by large windows, loggias

9. the Dzidzikovac residential complex  
1947



and balconies.

In the 1960s, the economic boom and the opening of numerous factories made the city attractive again, and the number of inhabitants increased so much that the housing supply could no longer meet demand. The housing shortage led to the proliferation of illegal dwellings which sprang up spontaneously and in large numbers in the hilly areas along the right and left bank of the Mijlicka River.

In the 1970s an attempt to curb the phenomenon of illegal building resulted in creating new neighbourhoods that contributed to the further growth of the city westwards. The new districts of Ciglane and Alipascino were born. They were real "residential colonies" organised around a geometric order defined by large streets and open spaces. These neighbourhoods, which had to provide for the housing needs of the working class, were an expression of the gigantism of the socialist period, based on a system of blocks and super-blocks scattered around open spaces. The intimacy and privacy of the Mahalas proved forgotten. Alipascino, for example, is made up of four blocks of giant short courts, with ramped profile housing an estimated population of 60,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most populated neighbourhoods in Sarajevo. The residential units are organised around a central core accommodating the stairs and the lift. The super-blocks offers different types of flat with one, two or three bedrooms, but they all have a loggia or balcony.

12 Socialist Sarajevo Ciglane  
neighbourhood



Next page: 11.Socialist Sarajevo  
Alipascino neighbourhood

The 1980s were flourishing years for Sarajevo. The city gained international attention as the venue for the Winter Olympic Games in 1984. And yet, after just under a decade, the city fell victim to another atrocious war. Sarajevo lived under siege from 1992 to 1995. During those years everything lost its meaning and even the house was no longer a safe place.

However, the tragedy of the war did not prevent Sarajevo and its citizens from living. People continued to work and go to school as far as possible, risking their lives every time they stepped outside the house. Houses were ransacked and mortar fire damaged them. Entire neighbourhoods were burnt down. The end of the siege and the destruction brought Sarajevo back to the emergency condition of rebuilding the city, but also the lives and identity of its inhabitants. The end of the war has opened an equally complex chapter. The European Community allocated funds to restore some public spaces and buildings, but the reconstruction of the houses followed a much slower process. Despite all the difficulties, Sarajevo was born anew. War wounds are still visible, but the city is now a new city projected into the future.

Today, in the time of the pandemic, the question of housing as a priority theme is undisputed. Sarajevo's challenge as a resilient city is to show its ability to adapt to the times and its inhabitants by providing a response to the issue of living model, without involving further land consumption, but supporting the development of more sensitive urban strategies, able to adapt settlement models to change. The regeneration of the city needs to start - again - from new processes and tools, able to foresee a sudden change without limiting its innovation skills. This does not mean creating an unplanned city. On the contrary, the city needs a direction in touch with the community, to give answers to the new housing requests. Another important aspect to consider is not reducing the issue of living to mere functional aspects and bringing back a dusty (if not even neglected) concept: "beauty".

For a long time Sarajevo has had to deal with the issue of living in emergency situations, and has addressed the topic by putting utility before quality and beauty.

Today, the Bosnian capital is still in transition which makes it possible to think about the best practices of renovation. Sarajevo has still time to experience a new season as a leading example in architecture and urban settlement. From this perspective Sarajevo is a city that can continue to surprise. If it is true that people are the mirror of the places they live in, it is no longer possible to neglect taking care of humanity through caring for the city. Partly due to the acceleration prompted by the global crisis we are all experiencing, time has come to recreate and rethink the city as the *ideal principle of all stories* (Carlo Cattaneo), as a place not simply to live.

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