

A Roof Without a House

A Study of Slowness

1. Prologue: Dreaming of Slowness

Makarska is a concrete and stone jungle, almost utterly lacking free space or urban voids. Moreover, the city and its surroundings have become synonymous with unregulated construction and the negative consequences of mass tourism. This can partly be attributed to the legacy of the 20th century's *heavy modernity* that aspired to conquer every square meter of territory on the globe ¹. This aim to always keep getting bigger, better, more productive – to build and expand endlessly – took a visible toll on our urban environment.

In today's vastly more unpredictable, unstable, *liquid modernity*, many a paradigm has been shifted in the way we perceive the roles of urban planning and architectural design. Many of the go-to formulas and approaches of the previous century – most of them still regularly taught in architecture schools – are no longer sufficient to fully tackle contemporary urban issues. In numerous cases – and Makarska is no exception – it is necessary to look at things from a fresh perspective. In this city's particular situation, **rather than boldly introducing a series of aesthetically pleasing new objects to intensify its density even more, maybe it is more important to consider – what part of the excess could be taken away?**



Fig. 1
A private parking sign found on Project site 2

Such shifts in urbanism and architecture, as always, merely follow larger shifts in society as a whole. Just as the premise of rapid expansion and growth is becoming spatially problematic, privately, in everyday life – we yearn to slow down, as well. In the cacophony of the contemporary, hyper-connected world, we frequently find ourselves longing for events, moments and experiences during which the passing of time does not seem so mercilessly fast. **We are continuously accelerating, and yet dreaming of slowness.**

Makarska is an ideal arena for experiments in *slowness*, with the Mediterranean way of life boasting precisely those qualities. Instead of the still widely-spread, toxic narratives glorifying myths of anxious *hustling* and *grinding* – the Mediterranean culture is one of hedonism: taking your time with everything in life ², and enjoying it to the fullest.

2. Strategy: Speculating on Systems

In attempting to formulate spatial strategies suited for today, as well as for tomorrow, **it is critical to recognize all crucial and interdependent actors, systems and networks that help shape our urban environment. Our outlooks thus shift from being purely anthropocentric**, to observing a much wider perspective. Apart from our human realm, this also includes the non-human: plants, animals, natural and artificial elements, substances, and objects. **The aim is to observe, question and develop a better understanding of ways in which these old and new actors can connect, and consequently shape new urban-natural orders, ecologies and systems.**

In Makarska, we chose the systems to be studied and mapped based on the criterion of them having a significant connection with our three project sites. We searched for and observed links between the wider context of the city and the programs and spaces to be designed on our sites. **Our design approach is thus multiscalar – equally considering the XL, the XS, and everything in-between.**

2.1 Roads

The largest-scale system we looked into is the city's road traffic system, given the significant challenges of summer crowds, traffic bottlenecks, and a shortage of adequate parking in the city center. The existing parking lots mostly lack shade and usurp valuable public space on the ground level. Through mapping of the existing and planned parking infrastructure in and around the city center, the necessity for an underground garage on one of our sites became clear. Such an intervention, however, would require the temporary redirection of part of the traffic from *Ulica don Mihovila Pavlinovića*, so we propose using the

¹ Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, pp. 113-114: „To conquer space was the supreme goal - to grasp as much of it as one could hold, and to hold to it, marking it all over with the tangible tokens of possession and 'No trespassing' boards. Territory was among the most acute of modern obsessions, its acquisition among the most compulsive of modern urges.“

² Numerous well-known Dalmatian proverbs center around this idea, for instance *Pomalo* (roughly translated as “Step by step”, “Take it easy”) and *Vrag odnija prišu!* (roughly translated as “May the devil take the rush!”)

existing streets of *Ulica Petrice Alačevića* and *Ulica Slikara Gojaka* as an eastern bypass. The advantages of a **long-term decrease of traffic intensity on Ulica don Mihovila Pavlinovića** have been considered as well. In the following years or decade, this could be additionally facilitated by the proposed new connections (S1' and S2') of the city's road system to the state road D8, *Jadranska magistrala*, which should become an efficient bypass for the city center altogether.

2.2 Rocks

Excavations for underground garages are always a kind of aggression in space³ and should not be taken lightly, so our aim is to do our best to justify the process. Therefore, the next system we follow is **the flow of excavated earth, stone, and rock**, the latter of which makes up the majority of the underground, as well as above-ground, layers in Makarska. This is clearly indicated by the massif of Biokovo which towers over the city, as well as a series of tourist postcards of the city of Makarska – stone and rocks are part of the identity of the region of Dalmatia in general. Therefore, we act as follows: firstly, we leave some of the excavated parts of the rocks visible, making up the walls of the underground garage. Secondly, we attempt to reuse as much of the excavated material as possible, by crushing it on-site and using different scales of crushed material for different building elements of our design⁴: coarse or fine aggregate for floor coverings or concrete, and larger pieces as landscape elements.



Fig. 2
Rocks featured in an old postcard from Makarska

2.3 Rainwater

The third observed system refers to **the flow of rainwater through the city**. Large areas of the city are covered in steep inclines, and as they are mostly paved with asphalt, water naturally flows down them. As a result, the city can be seen as an XL rainwater collector. It is thus speculated that the existing draining structure might be upgraded in the future to collect the rainwater more systematically, filling underground rainwater tanks, around which it would be possible to build **new points of interest** above ground: for instance, contemporary public water features or pocket parks. Part of the water could also be reused to irrigate green spaces or cool the overheated paved public areas of the city.

2.4 Fish

The last analyzed system is related to **the movement of caught fish to and through the city**, the importance of which is indicated in the project brief. The fish reaches the city by trawlers and purse seines arriving at the waterfront. The early-morning uncertainty and thrill of waiting for the catch to arrive is an authentic, locally specific experience. **Refreshingly unlike the 21st century supermarket experience**, the town authorities should preserve this gem in its purest form, modernizing it only minimally. One possible suggestion is placing a digital screen on the waterfront, through which fishermen would announce their arrival and the type of catch to customers on land via an app. Minimal, movable cooling infrastructure could also be installed at the waterfront, enabling fishermen to sell their catch directly from the boat for an extended period of time, creating a lively morning pop-up fish market on the waterfront. The remaining part of the catch travels to the freshly re-designed city market, which includes an indoor fish market. During the day, part of the fish can be instantly prepared as street food, right on the spot. To make tourists more aware of the gastronomic link between the waterfront and the market, as well as indicate pedestrian routes connecting the two, pedestrian signage could be introduced: fish symbols imprinted in the covering of walking or wall surfaces.

Strategically, apart from looking at these four systems, it is also crucial for us to envision the future construction process for our design, and **enable a phased implementation** of the planned interventions in accordance with realistic financial and timing parameters at the City's disposal. In the stage planning, we see the construction of the underground garage as a priority procedure, given that it solves the acute infrastructural problem of traffic in the city center. Another argument in support of this is that we plan to use the by-products of the excavation for further interventions on all Sites (these by-products, mostly excavated stone and parts of rocks, can temporarily be stored on Site 3). The second phase would be the reconstruction of the city market area, which aims to significantly improve the quality of the city center's urban space, as well as offer a wide array of daytime and evening activities and programs. The third phase is the adaptation of the old fish market building and the realization of the ground floor elements on Sites 2 and 3, with minimal new construction.

³ In areas such as Dalmatia, more often than not, the underlying layers of rocks are blown up with explosive!

⁴ Easterling, K. (2003.), 'Subtraction', *Perspecta*, Vol. 34, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), USA, pp. 80-90: „When construction debris is treated not as waste but as a material stream, subtraction can be an economy of rearrangement and reuse.“

3. Sites: A Roof Without a House

In all 3 project sites, we feel the strong urge to react to Makarska's overbuilt urban fabric: therefore, our design strategy begins with drawing out a demolition plan. Through this symbolic act of physically drawing out spatial excesses, we elucidate our design aspiration. **Rather than taking up square meters at the city's ground level by designing classic buildings⁵, new architectural additions to a hypersaturated space, our priority is to develop a continuity of open public spaces** that serve as lively new focal points of the city center. For those programs defined as enclosed by the project brief, we aim to find solutions that fit them into existing objects found on the project sites: plateaus, walls and adjacent buildings (i.e. the Old Fish Market)⁶. By spatially articulating the boundary conditions of each site, we emphasize the significance of the newly created (or preserved) urban void.

To a certain extent, **we perceive all the sites as a connected system**, taking into account their programmatic compatibility and close location in the city center. On an **urban planning scale**, this connection is manifested by proposing a stronger pedestrian connection of all 3 sites. This could be realized through long-term plans of reducing the intensity of traffic on *Ulica don Mihovila Pavlinovića* and forming a new city promenade from the Cathedral to *Ulica Slikara Gojaka*. Traffic access to the promenade would only be provided to delivery vehicles for the *Market* and *Gastronomy Center* and vehicles intending to park in the planned public garage on Sites 2 and 3⁷.

On an architectural scale, the link between the project sites is the main architectural element used in all of them: the roof. It is crucial to point out that in this project, it is never a *roof on a house*, but rather a *roof without a house*. On each site, a roof only partially covers the *common ground* of the designed public space. As an architectural proto-element, the roof performs its elementary duty of sheltering people from the weather (be it sun or rain), as it has done for thousands of years. This way, in a simple manner, it responds to the idea of *slowness*. By conditioning the atmosphere beneath it, making it more pleasant and livable, the roof enables and encourages us to slow down, pause and linger for a while, instead of just hurriedly pass by. On each of the 3 locations, the roof appears in a different form: a flat, walkable platform of the market roof; an archetypal, inhabited, pitched roof of the Gastronomy Center; and a natural substitute for a man-made roof on Site 3, a Mediterranean canopy of pine trees.

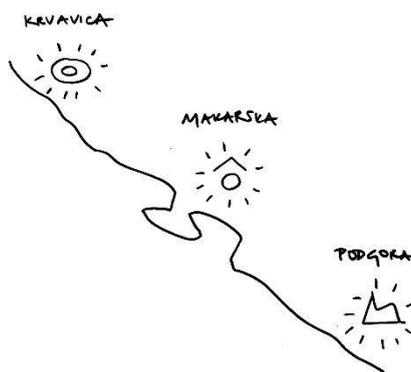


Fig. 3
Expressive, organic, concrete forms in Makarska's surroundings: Krvavica Sanatorium and Podgora church

3.1 The Market: A New Focal Point

By analyzing the market site's urban context, we realized that the space is already enclosed from all sides: by the church facades to the south, the shop to the west, walls of residential objects to the north, and the road to the east. Therefore, rather than introducing new walls or vertical divisions to the space, **we focus on two important horizontal planes: the floor and the roof.** Due to a significant terrain incline, the floor negotiates with its surroundings via gentle ramps. The ramps vary in scale, the largest one being big enough to double as an auditorium for after-hours events⁸, or just a place to sit and observe the lively outdoor marketplace⁹. **The circular geometry of the roof results from an aspiration to harmonize the surrounding, rather chaotic forms, as well as to serve as a recognizable new landmark in the city center¹⁰.** The roof also doubles as a large rainwater collector, in the tradition of the Dalmatian *gustirne*, and an elevator makes the impressive panoramic views from its top accessible to everyone. During the evening, when temperatures fall, the roof, as well as the lower market platform, can also be used as an event space, offering a different perspective and atmosphere to the various possible programs and their ideologies: from sunset yoga to an open-air cathedral mass.

⁵ Easterling, K. (2003.), 'Subtraction', *Perspecta*, Vol. 34, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), USA, pp. 80-90: „Methods for demolishing, imploding, or otherwise subtracting building material are not among the essential skills imparted to architects in training. Believing building to be the primary constructive activity, the discipline has not institutionalized special studies of subtraction. In fact, for architects building envelope is almost always the solution to any problem. (...) Architectural authorship is measured by object building rather than by the admirable removal of material...“

⁶ Nevertheless, most of these closed spaces are also considered public. On an imaginary *Nolli map* of Makarska, most of our design interventions would be white.

⁷ Of course, the prerequisite for the realization of this long-term plan is are the necessary infrastructural actions described in Chapter 2.1.

⁸ Open-air cinema projections, theatre plays, music recitals, business or private party events...

⁹ Not unlike the waterfront pop-up fish market, the experience of bargaining for fresh produce on a Mediterranean market is a beautiful adventure, nostalgically distant from the hyper-controlled conditions of contemporary shopping centers. Whether we are just observing or actively taking part, the experience is synonymous with *slowness*.

¹⁰ In fact, the Makarska region already has a modernist tradition of expressive organic forms, for example, Rikard Marasović's *Krvavica Sanatorium* or Ante Rožić's *Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary* in Podgora.

3.2 The Center of Mediterranean Gastronomy: A Social Platform

The existing plateau in *Site 2* is inhabited from below by a two-storey public garage¹¹. Most of the mandatory programs defined by the project brief are accommodated in the reconstructed interior of the *Old Fish Market*, thus freeing up the public space of the plateau in the front. **A part of the public space is shaded by a large archetypical gable roof**, supported by a light steel construction, that also carries a light upstairs gallery. The roof is covered in fiberglass, a light and translucent material locally widely used in the construction of small boats. At night, it serves as a glow-in-the-dark attractor for visitors. An open kitchen and a large communal table are housed under the roof, ideal for all kinds of events, workshops, parties and festivals. However, apart from commercial programs, the *open roof* could also have a strong social agenda. During the year, it could double as a public canteen or soup kitchen, targeting students and impoverished or senior citizens of all age groups and backgrounds. This would also create job opportunities for Makarska's citizens. Thus, **Mediterranean gastronomy is used not only for tourism, but also as a platform for social action**, inclusivity, and connection. What better thing to bond over than food?

3.3 The Garden: Let the Birds Sing

The natural recession from the road level makes the space of *Site 3* inherently introverted, a natural retreat from the noise and traffic of its dynamic surroundings. Given that Makarska's city center lacks almost any kind of park or green infrastructure, the whole of this site, excluding just the spiral parking ramp leading to the underground garage, is planned as **a new public garden** – a *hortus conclusus*. **On this site, the idea was to *unbuild*, rather than *build***. Mediterranean pine trees and other types of local vegetation are planted in order to provide a shaded, cool and quiet environment. A mild decline at the south-eastern edge of the site gently leads passers-by from the road level into the garden. Access is also provided from the western side, through the existing passage in the old wall. The garden is equipped only with minimal infrastructure that allows it to house occasional events with programs complementary to the ones planned on *Site 1* and *Site 2*, just within a different atmosphere. The rectangular niche in the garden is used as an open bar with minimum necessary storage. The spaces enclosed by the circular ramp are also connected to the garden: a passage under the ramp leads to an alcove with public toilets, and on the road level above it, a semi-circular pedestrian niche is formed, featuring a water-feature reusing the rainwater collected on-site. Crushed stone from the public garage excavation is used as aggregate for the rounded walls of the spiral ramp, showcasing and encouraging the use of (hyper-)locally sourced materials for new building developments. The garden is also seen as the first phase of a new green infrastructure that should spread through Makarska in the years to come, battling ecological issues such as urban heat islands, and housing biodiverse, multi-species ecologies.

4. Epilogue

For us, every design process is to some extent ambiguous and open-ended. Apart from parameters defined by the project brief, each architect, consciously or subconsciously, aims to address his or her internal preoccupations, underlying themes of their work, through their designs. This adds layers of complexity to the project and often enables numerous readings of the design.

This is very much in line with the post-truth environment we are all immersed in. Rather than ruling each other out, opposites may coexist harmoniously.

The *built* and the *unbuilt*,
the *human* and the *non-human*,
the *urban* and the *natural*,
the *rapid* and the *slow*.

We hope this text helped elucidate our main viewpoints, as well as where they came from.

We are deeply passionate about them.

¹¹ Due to Makarska's sloped topography, the upper floor of the garage is only partially underground, allowing natural ventilation. As the width of the building plot on *Site 2* was not sufficient for an economic garage with a two-way ramp connecting its levels, the entrance to the garage has been planned via a one-way circular ramp descending from the road to *Site 3*, and continuing towards the lower level of the garage on *Site 2* via an underground link below the road level. Upon arriving on the lower level, the driver is digitally signaled if there are any free spots there, or if they should continue upwards to the upper garage level. Part of the upper level is on a mild incline, rising to the road-level on *Ulica don Mihovića Pavlinovića*, where the exit from the garage is planned.