

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF LIFE IN THE INNER-CITY OF ZAGREB

Anka Mišetić – Roko Mišetić

1 Introduction

There is a rich tradition of sociological research on the historic cores of various Croatian towns, particularly by some of the researchers of the Urban Planning Institute of Croatia. In the last decades of the 20th century, most of them sought to answer the question of how the historic cores of these cities might be revitalized.

The main impulse for this research was the fact that Croatia has numerous towns with historic cores that have been preserved, especially along the coastline. For instance, there are historic cores which are under UNESCO protection, either in whole or in parts, in the towns of Split, Trogir, Dubrovnik, Poreč and Šibenik.

However, many towns in the inland have also retained their historic cores. Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia, as well as the largest city in the country, belongs to the Central European cultural milieu and it contains a typical Central European historic core. For almost half a century, all such Croatian cities had a similar fate. In his work on the problems of the historic cores of Croatian cities in the period of socialist modernisation (1945–1990), the Croatian sociologist I. Rogić (1991) noted the main forms of environmental destruction, such as pollution, waste, squalor and the decline of symbolic values.

The demand for the renewal of old, historic cores gained a new impetus in the new practices of post-modern urbanisation. In the 1970s an echo of these new ideas resounded in Croatia.

The above-mentioned research showed that in some towns, such as Split, Dubrovnik and Zagreb, the old city cores face numerous problems and difficulties. The most significant among these are demographic losses, ecological and housing problems, areas where inappropriate activities take place, and the destruction of the symbolic and historical heritage of the towns (Rogić, 1991). As an important rehabilitation factor, the same author stressed “the fast growth of Croatian tertiary economy”. After more than ten years of the transitional period he wrote: “We have already mentioned that the capability of the historic core to function economically as a tertiary capital had a great impact on the post-modern

assessment of the place of historic cores in a global strategy of national growth. One of the peculiarities observed in the Croatian growth in that period was a remarkable disparity between the general growth of the tertiary economy and the position of historic cores in that period. It can be easily shown that there were numerous reasons for that disparity. (...) The transitional changes of the 1990s announced a new strategy, and such impediments have been removed, at least in principle. However, this does not guarantee the necessary prerequisites for successful rehabilitation and revival" (*Rogic*, 2002, p. 29).

2 Aims of the study

This paper investigates the need for rehabilitation and revitalisation in the city centre of Zagreb and possible improvements of living conditions. There is an emphasis on the importance of social relations in the process of urban planning, especially if we wish to take the inhabitants' perspectives into account. Namely, their experiences and participation in everyday life confirm them as important social partners in the rehabilitation of the local community. In addition, in our paper the social role and relevance of public communication in the assessment of problems concerning the historical district in the period of transition is emphasized.

This paper is based on empirical research conducted in 2000 on an ad hoc sample of the population (N=200) of the inner city of Zagreb (*Rogic–Mišetić–Stambuk*, 2000). The inner city of Zagreb includes the historical districts called the 'Upper Town' and the 'Lower Town'.

The Upper Town is the older historic core of the city, which developed from the two medieval settlements of Gradec and Kaptol, located on the hills in the northern part of the city. Kaptol was, and still is, the centre of the Catholic Church, while Gradec is the political and administrative centre of the country. The Lower Town developed mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries, forming the central business district of contemporary Zagreb. Furthermore, the Lower Town is important both historically and culturally.

3 Basic demographic features

The city of Zagreb is the capital and the largest city in Croatia, but it is only a medium-sized town when placed in the European context. According to the 2001 census, Zagreb had 779,145 inhabitants. The city area occupies 641,355 square metres. The number of residents who live in the Lower Town and the Upper

Town is relatively small. However, the population density presented in *Table 1* indicates that the inner city of Zagreb is a typical city centre, at least if we consider population density. In addition to this, the population density of the inner city is much greater than the average of Zagreb both in the Upper Town and Lower Town. A greater population density in the Upper Town can be explained as a consequence of typical medieval urbanism, which is characterised by relatively narrow streets, so the whole area is considerably smaller (1,114,467 square metres).

TABLE 1
Number of population and population density in Zagreb, 2001

| | Total | Area (sq. m) | Area's average |
|------------|---------|--------------|----------------|
| ZAGREB | 271,183 | 17,958,929 | 66.2 |
| Lower town | 18,171 | 1,289,499 | 71.0 |
| Upper town | 13,810 | 1,114,467 | 80.7 |

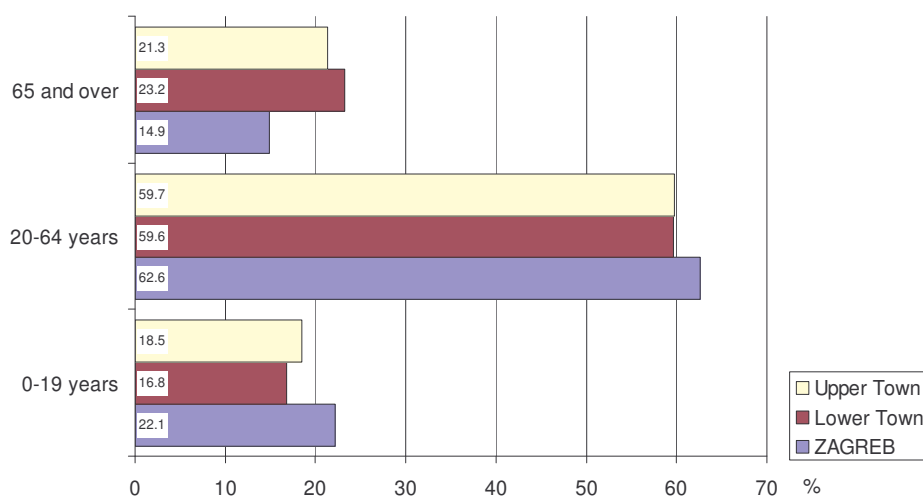
Source: Census 2001.

The population structure indicated by *Figure 1* shows that the Upper Town and the Lower Town in particular are inhabited mostly by elderly people from higher age groups. Another characteristic of the inner city's population is that it is better-educated than the average, particularly in terms of the presence of graduate people (*Table 2*).

Household structure also reveals great differences (*Figure 2*). There is a significant number of non-family households in the Lower Town, while there is a somewhat smaller percentage of the same household type in the Upper Town. It is important to stress that the majority of them fall into the category of 'one-person households'. In other words, the Upper Town is a quarter where the structure of resident population did not change through immigration processes during socialist industrialization after World War II, when the city grew rapidly. Also, it can be noted that the area has not been significantly altered through renovation and revitalization processes.

Another difference between the old-town neighbourhoods and the rest of the city is indicated by the average size of dwellings. *Table 3* shows that the average size of living space is larger in the Lower and Upper Towns, in comparison with Zagreb as a whole. It must also be noted that in the past urban planners created larger flats than modern ones, which is significant for the architecture of the Lower Town. The large average size of living space in the Upper Town is mostly due to the vast number of extensive mansions and family houses situated within it.

FIGURE 1
Population structure in Zagreb, 2001



Source: Census 2001.

TABLE 2
Population aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, 2001, %

| | Zagreb | Lower Town | Upper Town |
|--|--------|------------|------------|
| No schooling or incomplete Basic school | 8.7 | 5.2 | 3.8 |
| Basic school | 16.3 | 10.5 | 11.1 |
| Secondary schools | 52.0 | 46.2 | 43.0 |
| Non-university colleges, I. (VI.) level of faculty or professional study | 5.8 | 6.7 | 7.0 |
| Faculties, art academies and university studies | 14.9 | 26.6 | 29.4 |
| Master's degree | 1.0 | 2.2 | 2.5 |
| Doctorate | 0.7 | 2.2 | 2.6 |
| Unknown | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.4 |

Source: Census 2001.

FIGURE 2
Households by family structure in Zagreb 2001



Source: Census 2001.

TABLE 3
Occupied dwellings in Zagreb, 2001

| | Total | Surface area (sq. m) | The average size of flat |
|------------|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Zagreb | 271,183 | 17,958,929 | 66.2 |
| Lower Town | 18,171 | 1,289,499 | 71.0 |
| Upper Town | 13,810 | 1,114,467 | 80.7 |

Source: Census 2001.

If we were to summarise the presented demographic profile, it can be stated that there are marked differences between the inner city neighbourhoods and the city of Zagreb as a whole. The demographic structure and housing infrastructure in the city-centre is characterised by an elderly and better-educated population, with more single-member households and larger living spaces. Since this is a very attractive part of the city, with a growing demand for flats, investment continuously increases, and a subsequent transformation of the social structure can be expected. Thus, the renewal of the inner city, particularly the rehabilitation of the old city core, needs to be carefully planned, especially with regard to social sustainability.

4 Living in the inner city – the inhabitant’s perspective

In this section of the paper we intend to present selected results from a survey conducted in 2000. The city of Zagreb has 17 districts, but here we analyse an ad hoc sample of 200 respondents only from two neighbourhoods; 100 respondents from the Lower Town and 100 respondents from the Upper Town, the two neighbourhoods covering the inner-city of Zagreb. We also compare their answers with the opinions of the rest of the respondents from all the other districts.

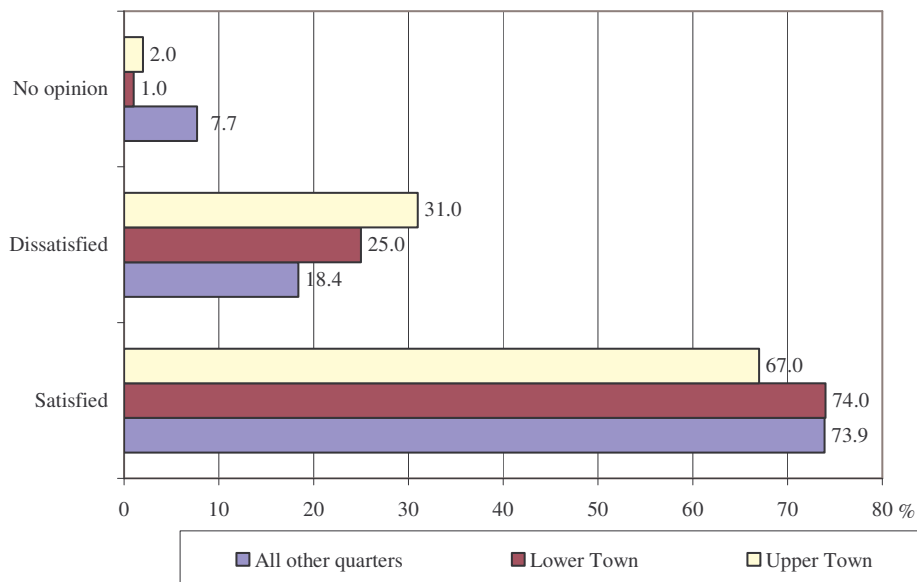
The first question inquired about the respondents’ satisfaction regarding the renewal of the city centre (*Figure 3*).

The majority of respondents in all categories are satisfied; however, the smallest number of them belongs to the Upper Town group (i.e. the oldest part of the historic core). Therefore it is no surprise that the same group is relatively the most dissatisfied with renewal activities taking place in the centre of the town. Obviously, the problems of living in the historic core are best identified by its own residents. The reasons for dissatisfaction with living conditions can be partly related to poorly-equipped neighbourhoods (*Table 4*). The deficiency of

the district heating system is the consequence of a domestic gas heating system, but this problem can be disregarded. In fact, deficiencies in the social infrastructure (such as cultural facilities, recreational and sports facilities) appear to be the main problem, especially in terms of the long-term social sustainability of this area.

Respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with some aspects of everyday life in their neighbourhood (*Table 5*). The sample group from the Lower Town was generally more satisfied, indicating that it is a well-equipped neighbourhood. More favourable living conditions were also confirmed. In the case of the Upper Town, the quality of the environment is the most important advantage, in comparison with the all the other parts of the city.

FIGURE 3
Satisfaction with renewal of the city centre, 2000



Source: Own survey.

TABLE 4
Doesn't exist in my neighbourhood, 2000, %

| | All other quarters | Lower Town | Upper Town |
|---|--------------------|------------|------------|
| Grocery stores | 0.6 | – | 9.0 |
| Primary school | 4.1 | – | 9.0 |
| Health services | 3.0 | – | 4.0 |
| Public parks and gardens | 6.4 | – | 4.0 |
| Waste collection and disposal service | 0.4 | – | – |
| Cultural facilities (e.g. theatre, museum, art gallery) | 37.0 | 1.0 | 35.0 |
| Sport and recreation facilities | 22.8 | 2.0 | 29.0 |
| Public transport services | 0.7 | – | 2.0 |
| Sewage system and communal waste water management | 4.9 | – | 6.0 |
| Electricity supply | 0.2 | – | – |
| Domestic gas supply | 32.3 | – | – |
| District heating system | 62.9 | 47.0 | 77.0 |
| Water supply system | 5.7 | – | – |
| Telecommunications | 0.5 | – | – |

Source: Own survey.

TABLE 5
Satisfaction with some aspects of everyday life in the inner city, 2000, %

| | All other quarters | Lower Town | Upper Town |
|---|--------------------|------------|------------|
| Grocery stores | 86.2 | 100.0 | 67.0 |
| Primary school | 72.5 | 91.0 | 58.0 |
| Health services | 70.6 | 92.0 | 74.0 |
| Public parks and gardens | 43.9 | 53.0 | 70.0 |
| Waste collection and disposal service | 72.5 | 53.0 | 89.0 |
| Cultural facilities (e.g. theatre, museum, art gallery) | 19.4 | 90.0 | 22.0 |
| Sport and recreation facilities | 28.8 | 34.0 | 20.0 |
| Public transport services | 78.2 | 86.0 | 75.0 |
| Sewage system and communal waste water management | 75.1 | 93.0 | 84.0 |
| Electricity supply | 92.6 | 99.0 | 97.0 |
| Domestic gas supply | 49.5 | 100.0 | 98.0 |
| District heating system | 23.3 | 15.0 | 3.0 |
| Water supply system | 85.3 | 99.0 | 96.0 |
| Telecommunications | 91.3 | 94.0 | 93.0 |
| Life conditions, in generally | 78.1 | 93.0 | 86.0 |

Source: Own survey.

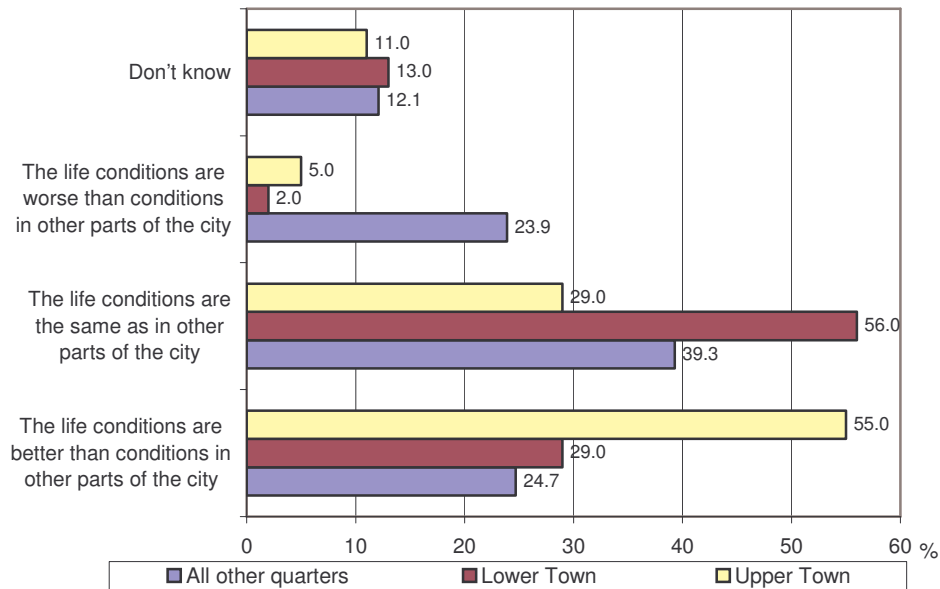
Replies to the question about housing problems indicate a more problematic situation. Despite the assessment of living conditions being relatively favourable, housing problems give a clearer picture of life in the inner city. The described problems are ranked in each category of the neighbourhoods:

| <i>All other quarters</i> | <i>Lower Town</i> | <i>Upper Town</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| High housing expenses | Air and environmental pollution | Derelict buildings |
| Poorly maintained part of the city | Noisy | Poorly maintained part of the city |
| Air and environmental pollution | Derelict buildings | High housing expenses |
| Too small living space | High housing expenses | Noise |
| Noise | Poorly maintained part of the city | Too small living space |
| Poor residential social structure | Poor residential social structure | Air and environmental pollution |
| Derelict buildings | Too small living space | Poor residential social structure |

Despite the many housing problems mentioned, the residential attraction of the inner city is confirmed by the answers of residents presented in *Figure 4*.

However, living conditions in the inner city are assessed as of equal or even better quality than elsewhere in the city. What does this mean for the social sustainability of a historic district? It means that historic cores have a specific quality which makes them attractive, regardless of their pragmatic problems (*Figure 5*). This quality can be described as part of the social capital of the city. Historic cores are also the centres of urban memories. “The urban landscape asks for a new attitude towards history... The contribution that buildings and neighbourhoods from different times make to the image of the city, brings the city alive...” (*Christiaanse, 1997*). The historic core is the source of urban identity and it has a symbolic value, which is not possible to express by objective financial ratios or economic indicators. This fact has an important impact on the quality of life in the city. In other words, “The old city core is the stock capital, significant for the development of the city, and its significance cannot be exhausted or diminished if it is technically provided or if it makes some profit (...) the significance of the old city core is much deeper than it is shown in its everyday activities.” (*Rogic, 2002, p. 31*).

FIGURE 4
Life conditions in comparison with other parts of the city, 2000



Source: Own survey.

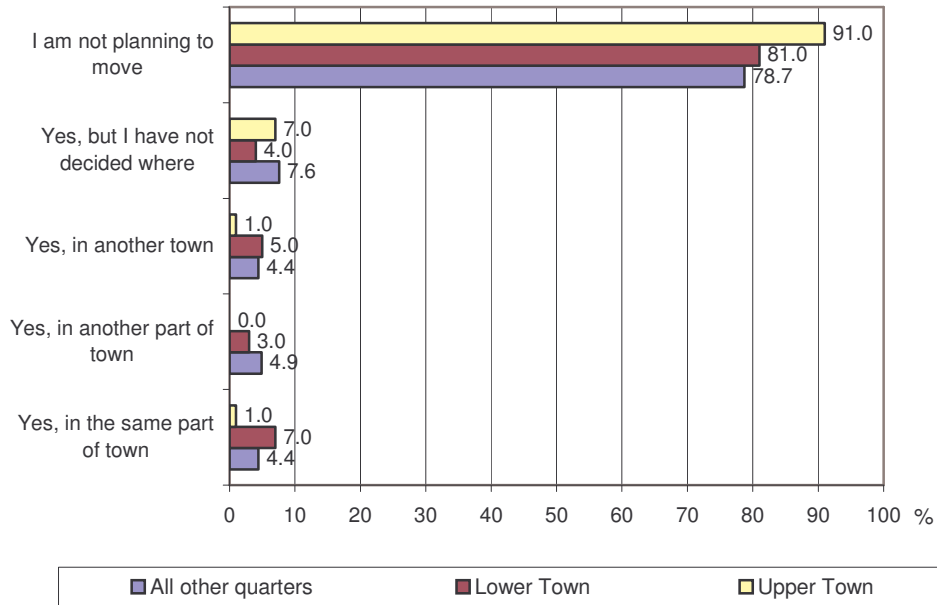
5 Conclusions

K. Lynch (1998) wrote: “What makes a good city? – might be a meaningless question. Cities are too complicated, too far beyond our control, and affect too many people, who are subject to too many cultural variations, to permit any rational answer.”

In this paper, we tried to investigate some social aspects of life in the inner city of Zagreb from the resident’s point of view. Understanding social groups and local community needs can help us in understanding the quality of urban life and in improving social sustainability.

From a residential perspective, the Lower Town has some advantages in comparison with other neighbourhoods. It is well-equipped with both social and communal infrastructure. However, this part of the city also has some disadvantages which are mainly ecological problems, such as air pollution and noise, and to some extent communal problems (derelict buildings).

FIGURE 5
Are you planning to move?



Source: Own survey.

In contrast, the Upper Town is characterised by strong ecological advantages: the quality of the building stock, public parks and gardens and peaceful neighbourhoods. The disadvantages are related to the deficiency of social infrastructure, poorly maintained houses and streets, high housing expenses.

The Lower Town and the Upper Town together form the historic core of the city, but their development has been different and their social functions are also distinctive. The two neighbourhoods which constitute the inner city of Zagreb differ in many ways and, accordingly, require different approaches in the process of their renewal.

In compliance with these concluding remarks, revitalisation should be developed along the lines of the following recommendations:

- Inclusion of ecological factors in rehabilitation;
- Reconstruction of buildings in the historic core;
- Renewal of social infrastructure by using the symbolic value of the historical and cultural heritage.

The rehabilitation of old city cores cannot be considered as something that can be completed once and for all. On the contrary, it is a continuous process of maintenance, adaptation and improvement of the existing conditions. In this sense, issues about the social sustainability of any development concept are of great significance. New social processes, such as globalization and decentralization bring complex changes in the social, economic, physical and environmental milieu. They also reopen old and generate new questions about the future of towns. These processes would contribute to increasing the attraction of towns, as well as set new challenges for the successful planning and management of the city. Issues that will arise in the future will demand both a multidisciplinary and a multiactor approach as the main condition for forming a quality base for the sustainable development of the city.

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