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Discussion of Spaces as Palimpsest Through an Architectural Design Competition Project: The Case of Student City Complex in New Belgrade

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Abstract

Since their foundation, cities have been in constant change as physical spaces that directly reflect the lives of their inhabitants. The numerous layerings that urban spaces have undergone throughout their history and the continuity of this layering in a space has a palimpsest quality. This study discusses the spatial dimension of the palimpsest concept through the winning project from an international architectural design competition. In this competition, which created an international platform for discussion, the design approaches of the projects in the award group were comparatively evaluated within the framework of the palimpsest concept. As a result of the evaluation, it was concluded that using the palimpsest nature of cities, especially in historical areas, as an input is a design approach that produces holistic solutions in many aspects, such as protection of the space's spirit, sustainability of collective memory and coexistence with the past.

Keywords: Palimpsest, Belgrade, international architectural design competition, urban memory, adaptive reuse.

Palimpsest Olarak Mekânların Bir Mimari Tasarım Yarışması Projesi Üzerinden Tartışılması: Yeni Belgrad Öğrenci Şehri Kompleksi Örneği

Öz

Kentler, kuruldukları tarihten itibaren bireylerin yaşantısının doğrudan yansıdığı fiziksel mekanlar olarak sürekli bir değişim içerisinde olmuşlardır. Kentsel mekanların tarihi boyunca geçirdiği üst üste sayısız katmanlaşma ve bunun mekandaki sürekliliği palimpsest bir nitelik taşımaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında, palimpsest kavramının mekânsal boyutunun, uluslararası bir mimari tasarım yarışmasında birinci seçilen proje üzerinden tartışılması hedeflenmiştir. Uluslararası alanda bir tartışma platformu yaratan bu yarışmada, ödül grubunda yer alan projelerin tasarım yaklaşımları palimpsest kavramı çerçevesinde karşılaştırmalı olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Değerlendirme sonucunda, kentlerin özellikle tarihi alanlarda izler barındıran palimpsest doğasının bir tasarım girdisi olarak kullanılmasının, mekânın ruhunun korunması, kolektif hafızanın sürdürülebilirliği ve geçmişle bir arada yaşama gibi birçok açıdan bütüncül çözüm üreten bir tasarım yaklaşımı olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Palimpsest, Belgrad, uluslararası mimari tasarım yarışması, kent belleği, uyarlanabilir yeniden kullanım.

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1. Introduction

When looking at the development of architecture throughout history, its essence is accumulative and layered progress. People's needs and cultural relations have constantly changed and transformed spaces throughout history. This layering of spaces creates a deeper and richer architectural atmosphere and contributes to the continuity of memory by establishing a link between new and old. Most old buildings in a city are isolated then transformed into unused and dysfunctional spaces or seen as architectural monuments representing the past and completely preserved without being involved in daily life. Neither situation is beneficial to the city and its inhabitants. Although it is not possible to make a basic definition of architecture, it would not be wrong to say that architecture's mission to "create living spaces for people" includes more than just leaving buildings alone or preserving them as monuments. In this respect, the possibility that the rich and complex qualities of these old buildings layered on top of each other can serve as grounds for the creation of the new has made it possible to associate architecture with the metaphor of "palimpsest".

Although "palimpsest" basically means parchment that has multiple writings on top of each other, it has been used as a metaphor in a theoretical context in works from different branches of science and art. It has been especially used as a concept in intertextuality and mental layers contexts, where theoretical literary works come to life again with new texts. It has been the subject of studies by critics and theorists such as Gérard Genette (1992) and Jacques Derrida (2016). As a multidisciplinary concept, palimpsest has been the subject of many different studies as a metaphor in architectural literature (Lanz, 2024; Maskineh, 2021; Turgut, 2021; Noppen & Morisset, 1999; Botta, 2012; Machado, 1976). In one of these studies, Öymen Gür, in a text focusing on understanding and creating space, states it is necessary to preserve the existing in order to create urban spaces with character and privilege. For this, it is necessary to understand the palimpsest as a differentiating, laborious but sensitive method (Öymen Gür, 2017). Another important study on this subject is Şentürk's article published in 2018. Through the concept of palimpsest, he diagrammatizes communication technologies in the city's two hundred years of history as the subject of his research (Şentürk, 2018). The concept of palimpsest in architecture has also been the subject of many studies at masters and doctoral levels in international graduate programs (Tran, 2008; Campos, 2005; Soğancı, 2001). One of the comprehensive studies on the concept of palimpsest in the fields of architecture and urbanism is Sağlam's PhD research (2018), completed at Politecnico di Milano - Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, focusing on the urban palimpsest features of Istanbul. The study emphasizes the multifaceted nature of Istanbul's Galata - Pera district, with its rich architectural traces of Byzantine, Genoese and Ottoman periods, and the connections, transitions and continuities between them.

Although many theoretical and philosophical studies exist on the palimpsest concept in various branches of science and art, including architecture, no research addresses this issue as an important design input in international design competitions that will enter the implementation process. This research gap constitutes the main motivation for this study. While the theoretical research in the literature is a valuable guide, it is undoubtedly an important approach to discuss these conceptual perspectives through international competition projects and guide them as important design inputs for future implementation projects. From this viewpoint, the main subject of this study is the international competition on "Student City Complex in New Belgrade" by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia and the Council of Europe Development Bank. The competition's aim was to increase the accommodation facilities' capacity intended for students by implementing the latest standards in sustainable construction and using student dormitories in university centers – "The Student Housing in Serbia" project was put forward. The project was financially supported by the European Union Development Unit, realized in partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and implemented by UNDP in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and the European Investment Bank (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

This study was carried out with the idea that discussing an international architectural design competition opens a historical area through the winning project with the palimpsest concept revealing important results. The multi-layered characteristics of architectural heritage, or traces of history forming many layers in the city, have created a theoretical context in which the palimpsest concept

can be used as a metaphor. The study's main purpose is to discuss the importance and necessity of using the city's palimpsest feature as an input while designing or implementing architectural design for important historical layers of cities through an international architectural design competition. The findings obtained from this study are aimed at guiding future designs, competition proposals and architectural practices by emphasizing the multi-layeredness of cities – that is, the palimpsest feature – as an important input in architectural design.

2. Material and Method

This is a qualitative case study that focuses on the palimpsest feature in architectural space production and discusses the prize-winning project of the International Architectural Competition for Student City Complex in Belgrade, which concluded in 2022. In the discussion, the palimpsest concept is used in its basic meaning of physical layering. The study discusses the physical layering of spaces and formal relationship established with the existing built environment in the context of establishing a relationship with traces of the past, which is also included in the palimpsest concept.

Within the scope of the study, first the palimpsest nature of architectural spaces is explained with data from the literature, then the architectural design approaches of the winning project in the competition are discussed through the palimpsest concept. This discussion is based on the primary and official published data from the international competition project.

The officials from the architectural company that prepared the winning project were interviewed to obtain information about the design process and ideas. In decision 2 by Kocaeli University Science and Engineering Sciences Ethics Committee at meeting number 2023/17 dated 26 December 2023, it was decided there is no drawback in terms of scientific research and publication ethics to use the interview data. The design sketches received from the company officials, with written permission to publish, were used as data to understand the design process within the scope of the study.

Based on the assumption that a creative and original approach that considers the palimpsest nature of spaces in architectural design is preferred by the architectural authorities in the jury, the projects in the award group were evaluated based on five criteria, which were determined comparatively in the context of the palimpsest feature of the space:

1. Considering physical traces in site plan decisions.

2. Considering physical traces in the transformation of existing dormitory buildings.

3. Establishing a formal relationship with existing buildings in the design of new dormitories.

4. Creating a common façade form throughout the campus.

5. Promoting social revitalisation by considering the historical meaning and life in open space design.

In the context of these criteria, the design ideas of the top three projects in the competition were comparatively evaluated.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

This study addresses the concept of palimpsest in the production of architectural space through a recent international architectural design competition. First, the palimpsest characteristic of architectural space is explained then this concept is discussed in the context of adaptive reuse. These concepts are evaluated through the project selected as the winner of the international architectural design competition. These evaluations are supported by the official jury notes and design sketches. It examines the place of the stratification of today's cities throughout history in architectural design and its guidance for new production methods. At the same time, the other projects in the award group are discussed comparatively in terms of similar and different aspects, thus it discusses and brings to the agenda the extent to which the layers of architectural space are effective in the design and how they guide expectations in current architectural design competitions.

3.1. An Architectural Space as Palimpsest

The palimpsest concept has been used metaphorically in the works of many authors from different disciplines. As a concept, it usually indicates a critical approach to the phenomena of collective memory and stratification (Benacer et al., 2022). Etymologically based on the Greek word "palimpsestos", it derives from the root words "palin" meaning repetition and "psestos" meaning smooth rubbed (Ren, 2021). The concept represents an accumulation in the general sense of the word. Although it is used in the first sense as "an ancient document from which part or all of the original text has been removed and replaced by a new text", it has mostly been used in academic literature in its secondary meaning as "something that has many different layers of meaning or detail" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1997).

Throughout history, cities accumulate many meanings of the past and these layers are covered by new ones over time. Therefore, these layers carry many traces of the city's collective knowledge (Apaydın, 2019). Failure to protect these traces will undoubtedly damage the city's historical knowledge and spatial memory. In his seminal book *The Architecture of the City*, with its critical approach to urban design theory, Aldo Rossi emphasizes that cities are built in layers over a long time and the importance of preserving the collective memory in these layers (Rossi, 1984). Memories in the city, which can be described as whole layers, also have a palimpsest feature that overlaps and intertwines. In this way, the memories that take place in the society are coded through urban images and transferred to the future (Al, 2011).

When a city is viewed in layers through the palimpsest concept, the power of architecture to influence and change collective memory becomes even more evident (Aydın & Yaldız, 2022). Layers carrying historical data appear as spatial productions when considered at the architectural level. Urban actors, who have a say over the city, have incredible influence and at the same time a responsibility over which of the layers will be excavated and revealed or erased. This can lead to erasure of "unpleasant" layers of history from the collective memory or to make more visible the layers that are desired to be in the public eye (Ren, 2021). The palimpsest characteristic of architecture can be emphasized or removed through ideological spatial interventions in line with aims and demands (Cengizkan, 2007). In this context, an important responsibility for architects as space designers is to preserve the tangible and intangible traces of the city while enabling the creation of new original traces.

As Italo Calvino mentions in his book *Invisible Cities* (1974), cities are places of exchange for tangible and intangible phenomena. This expression points to a place where memories and experiences are also exchanged, thus a memory is created that includes common new meanings. It can be said that the palimpsest feature of the built environment, with all its layers, has the potential to create new meaning for design in this context (Tschumi, 1996). Acting with this design approach allows for a respectful approach to the traces of the past while being open to traces that carry new potentials. Thus, historical parts of the city, which are often spatially excluded and neglected, can reach the present day, find an active life and coexist with new traces. In this context, it is important to re-functionalize buildings in line with current spatial needs and demands so they can rejoin daily life.

3.2. Discussing the Architectural Space as Palimpsest Through Adaptive Reuse

As one of the smallest components of urban spaces, buildings are the most important representatives of the city's layers (Lynch, 1990). The palimpsest characteristic of architectural spaces can be read directly through buildings because they carry and reflect important clues about the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the periods in which they were built. The buildings that have survived in different periods contain traces of each and these traces are of great importance in keeping the collective memory of the city alive. However, due to reasons such as changes of society and the city over time and technology advancements, buildings may become unable to respond to current spatial needs. At this point, there are two solutions: demolishing the dysfunctional building and constructing a new functional one in its place or preserving the existing building and making it usable again. The path chosen by the urban actors who have a say about the buildings is of critical importance in order to preserve the city's memory.

For the continuity of collective memory in the built environment, it is important in many respects to preserve buildings that have lost their function and find fresh uses for them within the framework of today's spatial needs and participate in daily life (Eryiğit & Anıktar, 2021). This is also a sustainable approach that respects nature, which causes less damage to nature by utilizing the existing building stock and prevents carbon emissions caused by the production of new construction. With the basic approach that sustainability is a process, not an outcome, it is of great economic and social importance to efficiently use natural resources and adapt existing ones to the life of the individual in the most effective way (Darlow, 1996). From this perspective, all decisions taken for buildings that are brought into daily life provide a significant gain to the city and its users (Hangi & Zabihi, 2012). Building without demolishing can be made possible by rehabilitating the existing elements.

In the literature, studies to bring dysfunctional buildings to the present day mostly focus on disused industrial buildings at central points in cities (Köksal, 2005; Çetinkaya, 2015). However, the issue of adaptive reuse covers the rehabilitation and reuse of all buildings that cannot fulfil their current function or provide comfortable conditions for their users. From this viewpoint, new sustainable design approaches can be developed for all building types, where the existing spatial quality can be improved with the same or a different function. As mentioned earlier on the palimpsest feature of architectural space, this approach, in essence, makes it possible to not just restore dysfunctional buildings to their former glory, but to add new meaning potentials to them in daily life.

Kalman and Letourneau (2020) mention that a two-stage approach should be followed in the design approach for building reuse. The first of these is structural analysis, which includes structural and spatial analysis of the existing building that will be compatible with the determined function and the other is a needs analysis of the people who will use the building. According to these analyses, another issue that should be considered in the functionalization of buildings is to realize spaces that provide comfort conditions in line with user needs while respecting the building's original value. With a correct functionalization study within the framework of architectural value, spatial organization and environmental factors, the building can be sustainably preserved and transferred to the future with its original values; thus, social and cultural continuity can be ensured (İslamoğlu, 2018; Biber & İslamoğlu, 2023).

3.3. Designing with the Architectural Heritage of Belgrade

Belgrade has been occupied by many civilizations throughout history due to its strategic location and natural resources, thus been fed by different cultures (Özkan, 2021). Since antiquity, the urban layers of each period have accumulated on top of each other. In the ancient period, different Balkan races ruled the city until the occupation of the Roman Empire. The city was named with the word "singidun" meaning "castle" in that period and with the Latin word "singidunum" in the Roman period (Aslantaş, 2011). The city, which was occupied many times during the Roman Empire, faced sieges in the Middle Ages as the Ottoman Empire advanced westward. After two failed sieges, the third siege attempt was successful and the city came under Ottoman rule (Katić, 2005; Eroğlu, 2017; Municipality of Belgrade, 2024).

During this period, it became the second most populated Ottoman city in Europe after Istanbul. The city, which was the gateway to the west and an important base for the Ottoman Empire, was named "Dârü'l-Cihâd", which means "Home of Jihad" (Figure 1). During the reign of the Ottoman Empire, the city, which had been under the influence of Christianity for many years, began to be influenced by an architecture with Orientalist characteristics in the built environment (Özkan, 2021).

Figure 1. An illustration of the Ottoman siege of Belgrade in the 16th century (Furst, n.d.)

In the 19th century, when Serbia declared its independence, the city was designated as the country's capital and became known as "Beograd" (Belgrade), a Slavic origin word meaning "White (Beo) City/Fortress (Grad)" in reference to its castle built on a white ridge (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). The city experienced a significant population explosion due to migration; as a result, housing problems emerged. Many unregulated houses built in this period were mostly made from wood and mud and did not even meet minimum hygiene conditions. Under these adverse conditions, one of the most important steps for the country's development was the construction of the railway line. This established a strong connection between Western Europe and important cities in Eastern Europe, such as Sofia and Istanbul. In the late 19th century, foreign travelers recorded that this city, with strong Eastern influences, modernized at an extraordinary pace and resembled Western cities. It is possible to understand the atmosphere of the city at that time from the detailed sketches of Hungarian traveler Felix Philip Canitz (Figure 2) (Blagojecic, 2015).

Figure 2. Sketches of Belgrade's city center in the 19th century by Felix Philip Canitz (Canitz, n.d.)

In the first half of the 20th century, several planning studies were carried out for the city in response to its irregular growth (Figure 3). The first plan for the area west of the Sava River (New Belgrade area) was prepared in 1923 by Russian architect Djordje Kovaljevski. Due to the unfavorable terrain and lack of investment in the New Belgrade area, only a major road, railway line, airport and fairground were built in the area during this period. Another proposal for New Belgrade was put forward by Dragisa Brasovan, one of the leading modernist architects of Serbia in 1941. Called "Sava New Settlement", it included a radial connection between Zemun and the Old Town and was planned to accommodate a population of 500,000 people. This settlement proposed new spatial solutions that responded to social and public needs as well as housing (Dukic, 2015).

Figure 3. Early 20th-century Belgrade cityscape (Chusseau-Flaviens, n.d.)

In Belgrade, the capital of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia established after the Second World War, the New Belgrade district was chosen as the center of government. In this area, which was chosen to represent the ideologies and goals of the new socialist government, urban planning in the form of a grid based on Le Corbusier's modernist approach was realized in CIAM (The Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in 1928. In the context of the principles of modernism, prismatic mega blocks with flat roofs and horizontal transparent surfaces, where form follows function, began to be produced and these structures began to shape the city's face. The construction of New Belgrade began in 1948 with a workforce of 100,000, including the participation of youth labor brigades. Although the period's architectural style is compatible with the idea of "socialist realism", it includes a different approach from other socialist countries. Especially after its separation from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Yugoslavia, while trying to establish its socialist order, established closer relations with Western Europe and the influence of modernist Soviet architects in the city decreased. To create a "contemporary socialist architecture", the architects in Yugoslavia considered the political, social, moral and artistic dimensions of architecture and declared it should serve the people as a whole, not a select group. It was emphasized that there was no place for historical elements in contemporary architecture (Dukic, 2015).

3.3.1. History of the Student City Complex in New Belgrade

In the 1940s, the housing and living conditions for students at the University of Belgrade were uncomfortable, so the issue of building a student complex was raised. The first works for a student complex with 4,500 beds started in 1947. In the wetland area between the Belgrade city center and Zemun district, the post-war New Belgrade was planned to be built and Student City became one of the first large complexes in this area (Figure 4). In 1948, construction of the complex was initiated by the University of Belgrade. Student City, the largest student campus in the Balkans, was built and put into use in phases between 1948 and 1955. It was officially established on 25 September 1952 by a decision adopted by the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

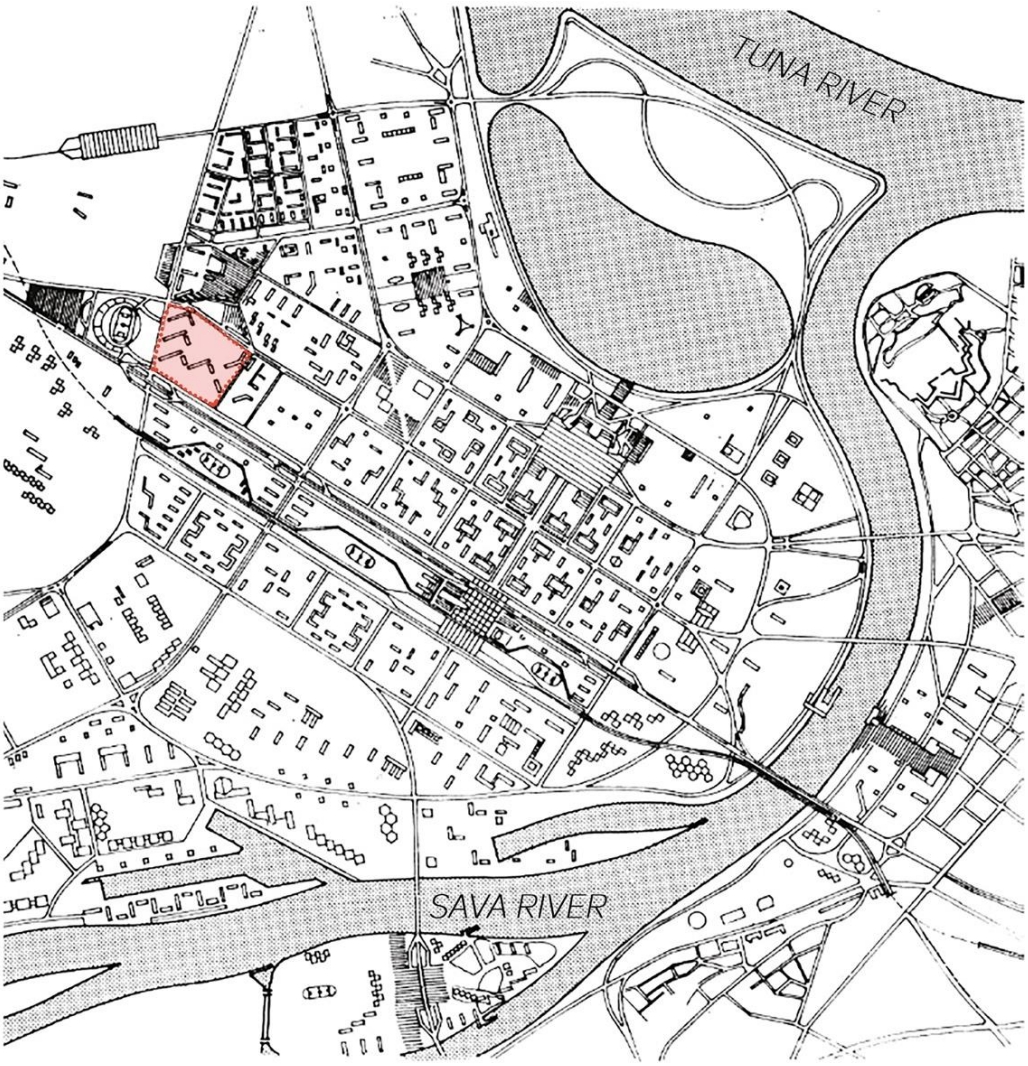

Figure 4. The location of the Student City Complex on the master plan of New Belgrade prepared by the Belgrade Urban Planning Institute in 1958 (Maric, Nikovic & Manic, 2010)

The complex was designed by Croatian architect Drago Korbar. Student City consists of four dormitory buildings with basic support units and each dormitory is independent in terms of management and organization. The special function units within the dormitories complement each other, making Student City a special environment favourable for students to live and work. By the end of the 1950s, 5,340 students were accommodated in the complex. Since its foundation, Student City has hosted a unique social life. Within the first 10 years of its establishment, it became a representative of student solidarity and the revolutionary spirit. The famous student protests of 1968 started in front of Block 1 of Student City. In this respect, it has symbolic value (Figure 5) (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

The campus underwent renovations in 1985 and 1997 to take its current form. This process increased the accommodation capacity, renewed roofs, added lifts to the blocks, renewed the rooms' sanitary installations and added kitchenettes (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

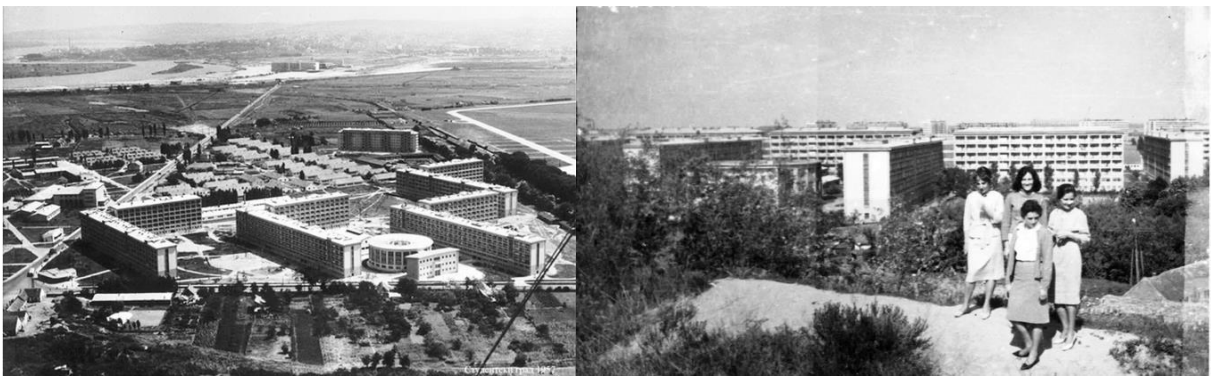

Figure 5. Photographs of Student City Complex (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023; International Centre for Archival Research (ICARUS), n.d.)

This center, which has been a common place for university students of the former Yugoslavia and present-day Serbia for 60 years, is an important part of the collective memory from its smallest component, the rooms, to all other social units (Figure 6). For example, according to oral history data, when the accommodation units were separated by gender, the front of Block 5, next to the park, was a place for students to meet and spend time together (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

Figure 6. Photographs of the Student City Complex show the collective memory (ICARUS, n.d.)

3.3.2. Architectural competition for the design of Student City Complex in New Belgrade

Student City Complex, built between 1948 and 1955, covers approximately 10,360 hectares in the north-western part of New Belgrade, between Tosin Bunar Street to the west and Zorana Dindica Boulevard to the north. The buildings in the complex underwent extensive renovations between 1985 and 1997, during which the accommodation capacity of each building was increased and lift cores were added. Today, the complex includes four dormitory buildings, a student restaurant, a boiler room facility, a student cultural center and café, open park areas and sports fields. The main gate for access to the estate is on Studentska Street. Vehicular and pedestrian access is also provided via Tosin Bunar Street and Zorana Dindica Boulevard. The dormitory buildings are divided into north and south blocks, with the north block labelled “G” and the south block labelled “F”. Both blocks are connected via pedestrian bridges on the upper floors. The lift cores added after the last renovation work are in G block (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Competition area – Student City Complex (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Since the student dormitories were not only unable to meet current accommodation needs but also needed revitalization throughout the complex, solutions to these problems were sought through an international single-stage architectural project competition. The competition was organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the Embassy of Sweden. It was funded by the European Union (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development identified the need for accommodation for higher education students in Belgrade at a 1,000 bed capacity. The competition scope was focused on meeting this accommodation need with new buildings within the same complex. The competition aim was to design a new accommodation unit to meet user needs, considering the historical significance plus potential and actual conditions of the site, as well as to produce arrangement and adaptation solutions for the Student City Complex area and existing dormitory buildings. The design and revitalization proposals were expected to have original, modern

multifunctional design qualities and be integrated into the complex, considering the built and natural environment data plus the site's functional and semantic value (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

The competition was announced internationally on 25 July 2022. The criteria to be considered by the jury for evaluation of the competition proposals were grouped under four headings. In the first criterion, the jury explained its expectations for spatial concept and architectural expression. In this explanation, the importance of understanding the unique historical background of the existing construction in the design area and establishing the relationship between context and urban identity were emphasized. The relationship of the design with the cultural heritage and improvement of the urban space's quality were the focus. The second criterion in the jury evaluation was the functionality of the proposed solution and meeting the expected spatial needs. In this context, it was expected to produce spatial solutions that offer efficient and comfortable use. The third criterion was the social and environmental sustainability of the proposed solution. While improving the conditions of the existing environment, it was expected to develop an ecological and sustainable approach in terms of social and environmental aspects. The last criterion evaluated by the jury was the technical and financial feasibility of the proposed solution. In this context, the proposal should be technically easy and economically feasible (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

The deadline for competition submissions was 25 October 2022. A booklet describing the general project concept and graphic visuals, 2D and 3D drawings, 3D animations and 2D and 3D visuals for the electronic exhibition were required for submission. As the competition was open to international participation, project proposals were submitted electronically. Twenty-one projects were submitted and, after the review of the rapporteurship, it was concluded that all projects met the official requirements and would be evaluated. In the first online meeting held on 3 November 2022, the jury members shared their initial opinions on the projects. In the second online meeting held on 7 November 2022, a comparative analysis and pre-selection of the designs were made within the framework of the previously determined criteria. In the third jury meeting on 9 November 2022, a second-round elimination was made after detailed analyses. On 10 November 2022, in the last jury meeting, after a third round of elimination, evaluations were made regarding the award group and rankings were determined (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

In the evaluation, the winning project was selected because it was clearly distinguished from the other projects in terms of the criteria. The jury emphasized that the project selected for first prize offered the most precise, complete and appropriate solution and there was a major qualitative difference between it and the other projects. No project was found worthy of second prize and two projects were given equal third prize. Five projects received honourable mention awards. The results were published on the Union of Architects of Serbia website, along with the official jury evaluations, on 14 November 2022.

The scope of this study is a detailed design approach analysis of the project from Türkiye that won first prize in this international competition. The determination and effect of the palimpsest quality of the space in the design will be discussed within the framework of reuse. It is important to understand that the project represents Türkiye on the international architectural platform and is planned to be built with the support of the European Union in all its details; thus, it is important to examine the conceptual infrastructures of the spatial solutions it produces.

3.3.3. Discussion of the winning project of the Student City Complex Competition

The starting point of the project was the site's historical meaning, referring to its palimpsest character. The aim was to make the most effective use of the existing buildings dating back to the ideological brutalist architecture of the socialist era and to develop a proposal that could integrate with them. The basic approach was to "build without demolishing and coexist with the existing heritage" with the idea that the palimpsest would gain a new quality and richness as it layers on top of each other. This approach is also important in terms of ensuring physical and social sustainability. For this area, which is a part of the city's socialist collective memory, the preservation of memory has been one of the sensitivities in architectural design. In this context, the preservation and survival of the traces of the city's physical and social layers shaped the design. This basic idea provides the opportunity to use the

existing by eliminating its deficiencies and using less cost and energy (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul).

When the idea of "demolition" in architecture is considered ideologically, it leads to the erasure of the city's political and social layers, memory and history, and there is no valid rational reason for this situation. While demolition requires a lot of energy and cost, it also destroys people's memories. In this context, demolition cannot be considered an ecological or sustainable approach. The physical and social stratification referred to as palimpsest is what forms the basis of architecture. Therefore, the design was initiated with the basic assumption that these buildings, which are still standing, in use and have witnessed an important period for the city, are no worse than the new buildings to be designed and contain important historical meaning (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, 10 October 2023, Istanbul).

While looking for ways to be functional and creative in design, it is aimed at developing a design that puts students at the center. In the proposal, which focuses on students in the context of quality of life, the revitalization and reorganization of the Student City Complex, which has not sufficiently fulfilled its function, has been realized with the adaptive reuse approach. It is aimed at creating a healthy transformation project with the idea of revitalizing the social life in the complex as in the old days, increasing the functionality of the dormitories, adapting the new dormitory building well to the complex, creating a walking corridor on the ground floor and creating a living campus. In this way, a common bond was established with the old physical and social layers of the city that formed the palimpsest (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul) (Figure 8).

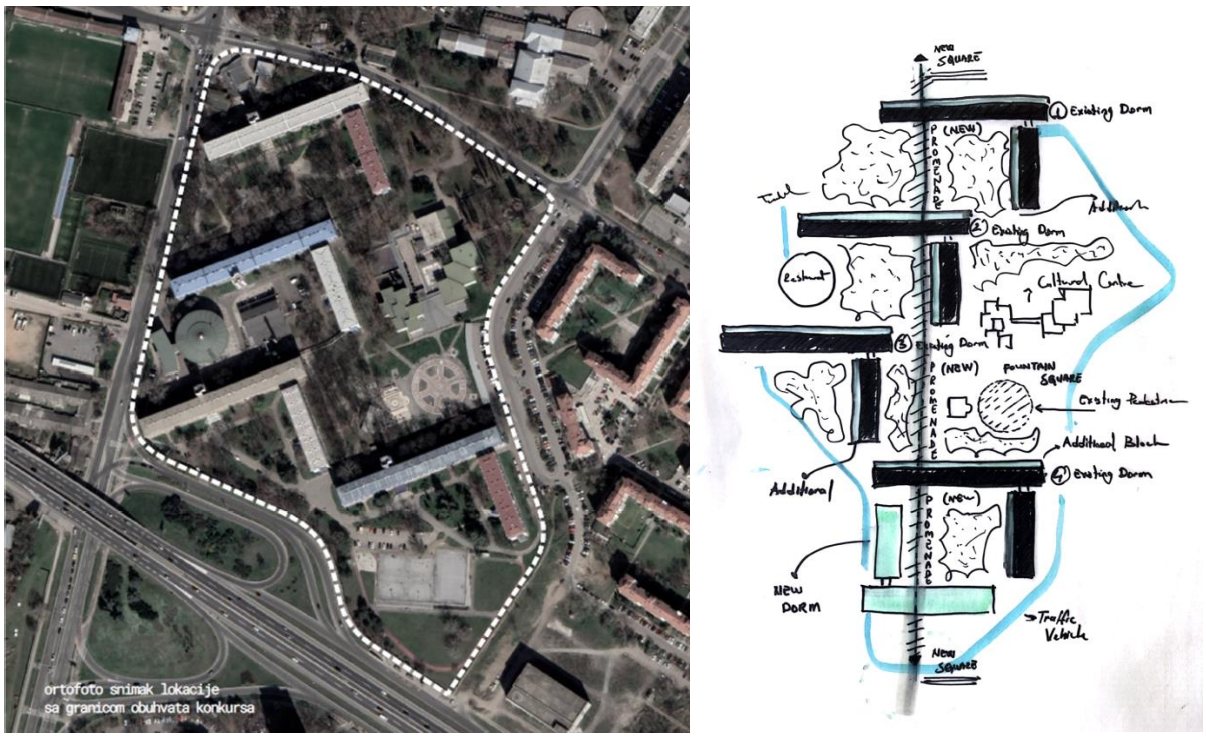

Figure 8. Aerial photo of the project area (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023); sketch of the first design decisions (Sevindik, 2022)

In light of all these design inputs, the new design for the site is based on the idea that the historical buildings to be revitalized and made suitable for reuse should have a common upper architectural language and form a contemporary architectural layer within the campus. The basic idea is to bring together and harmonize the old layers that form the palimpsest and the new layer in a common contemporary layer. In this context, knowing the architectural language of historical buildings reflecting the period in which they were built is the basis for the new architectural layer. The difficult part of the design is to distinguish between the architectural layers of the past and present while reading the layers of the past and respecting each other. In the design, the idea is to deliberately create contrast in the use of materials to emphasize the existing architectural layer, while preserving the

architectural language of the existing historic buildings by maintaining their scale and proportions and harmonizing with the original structures(Figure 9). Throughout the design, a common contemporary architectural layer is realized, targeted by this principle (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul) (Figure 10).

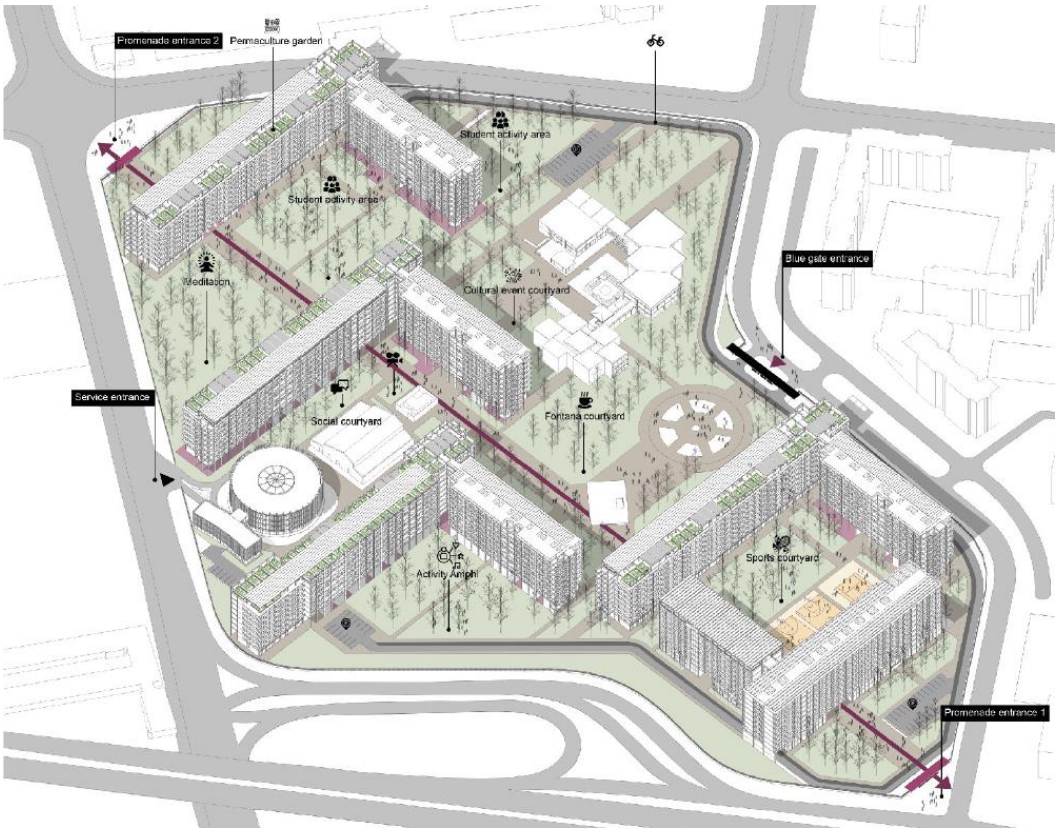

Figure 9. Functional diagram of the winning project's design proposal for the campus in axonometric perspective (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Figure 10. All layers of the built environment in the campus have been handled with a holistic and harmonious design approach - photomanipulation of the new design proposal with its surroundings (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

An important aim of the design was to revitalize the spiritual/social layers of the palimpsest, which are part of the collective memory. The most important component of this aim is the pedestrian promenade that connects the focal points that support the active revitalization of social life on the ground. All dormitory blocks are physically connected to this pedestrian promenade (Figure 11). In the pedestrian-

oriented design, the square at the main entrance connects the pedestrian promenade to the common socio-cultural activity areas with courtyards built between the buildings (Figure 12). The spaces on the ground floors, which are directly connected to the garden and street, are designed as spaces where students can gather. The landscape, which creates a rich architectural atmosphere with the inner streets and courtyards around the pedestrian promenade, is also intended to create an ecological corridor. The existing vegetation on campus is home to impressive endemic plant species. With the ecological corridor idea, these species are preserved and street and courtyard life are enriched (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul).

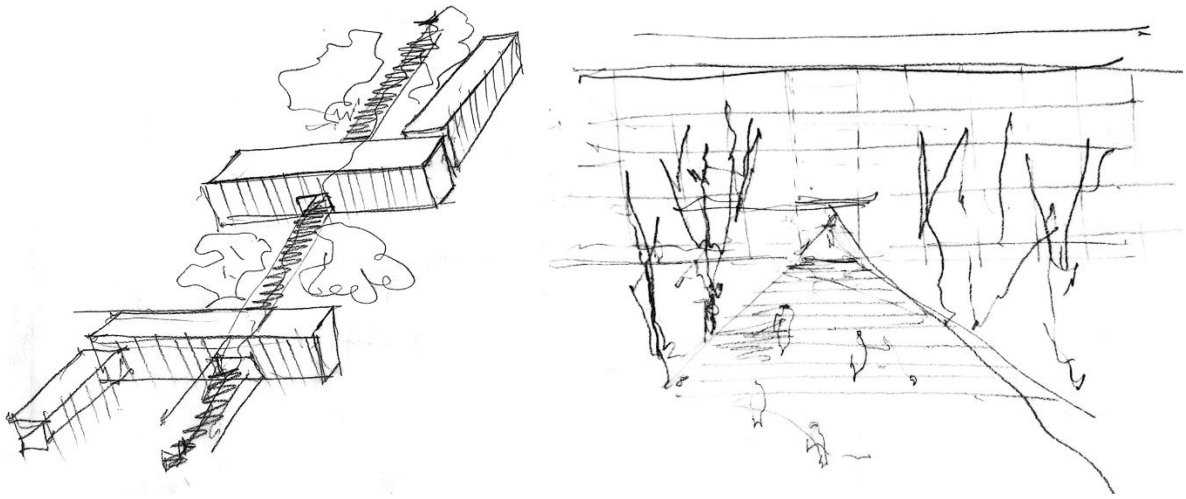

Figure 11. Sketches of the design ideas for the pedestrian promenade between the masses and the entrance – shows a new layer design added on top of the first layer as palimpsest (Sevindik, 2022)

Figure 12. A palimpsest effect was created by addressing the important monumental structures of the built environment with a holistic approach in the design and overlapping the traces of history with the present in the entire design (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

The reusability function, which is at the basis of the palimpsest concept, is reflected in the design by reorganizing the existing dormitory blocks and creating an independent and flexible space that can develop and expand. While the dormitory blocks relate to each other in the north-south direction, they relate to the green area and street in the east-west direction. The dormitory blocks, which have an effective horizontal mass that forms the general architectural characteristic, have a porous structure with the spaces created (Figure 13). In this way, the need for cooling/ventilation in the common areas of the land with the effect of wind is met, while common socialization areas are obtained (Figure 14). The narrow and dark corridors in the existing dormitory blocks are widened as much as the structure allows, creating common working and socializing areas on the upper floors (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul) (Figure 15).

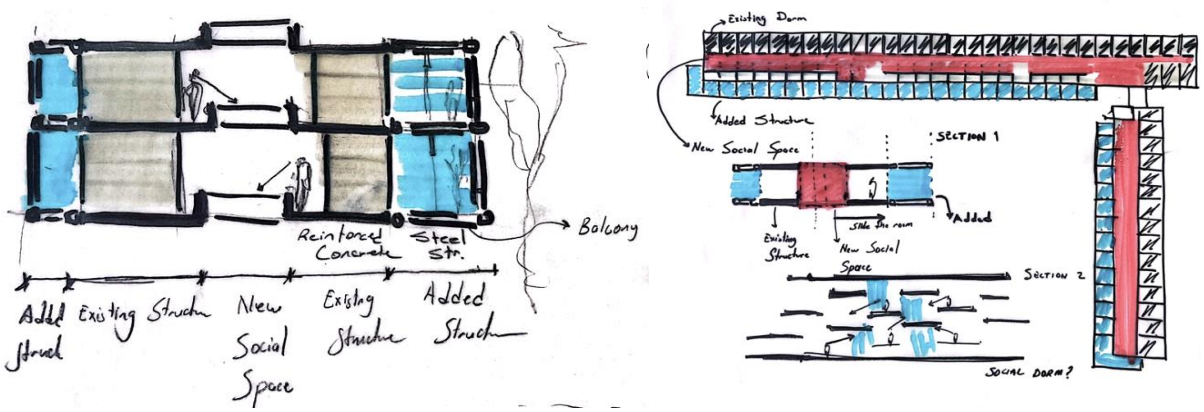

Figure 13. Plan and section sketches of design ideas for the reuse of historical dormitory blocks – preserving the traces of the existing structure and articulating with it (Sevindik, 2022)

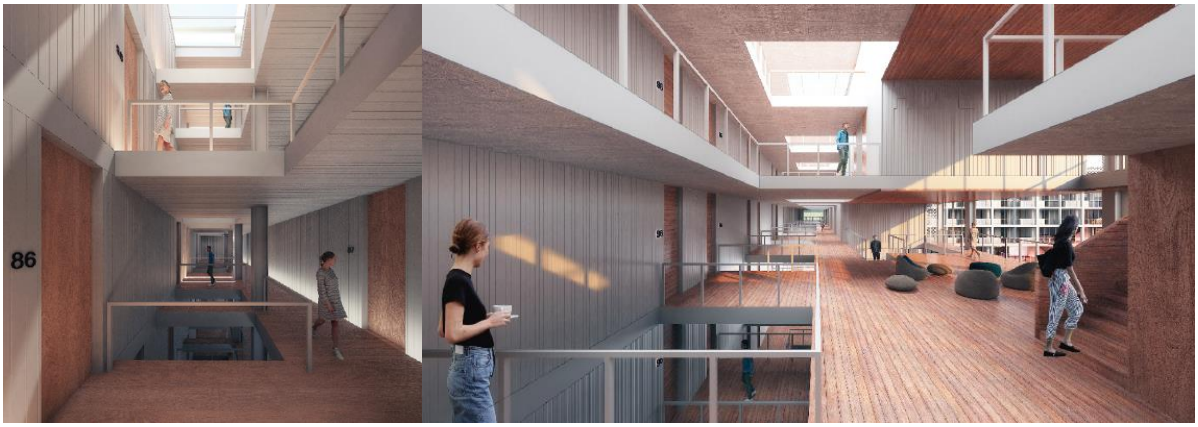

Figure 14. Preserving the interior layers but making them belong to the present day – 3D visuals of the dormitory building interiors (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

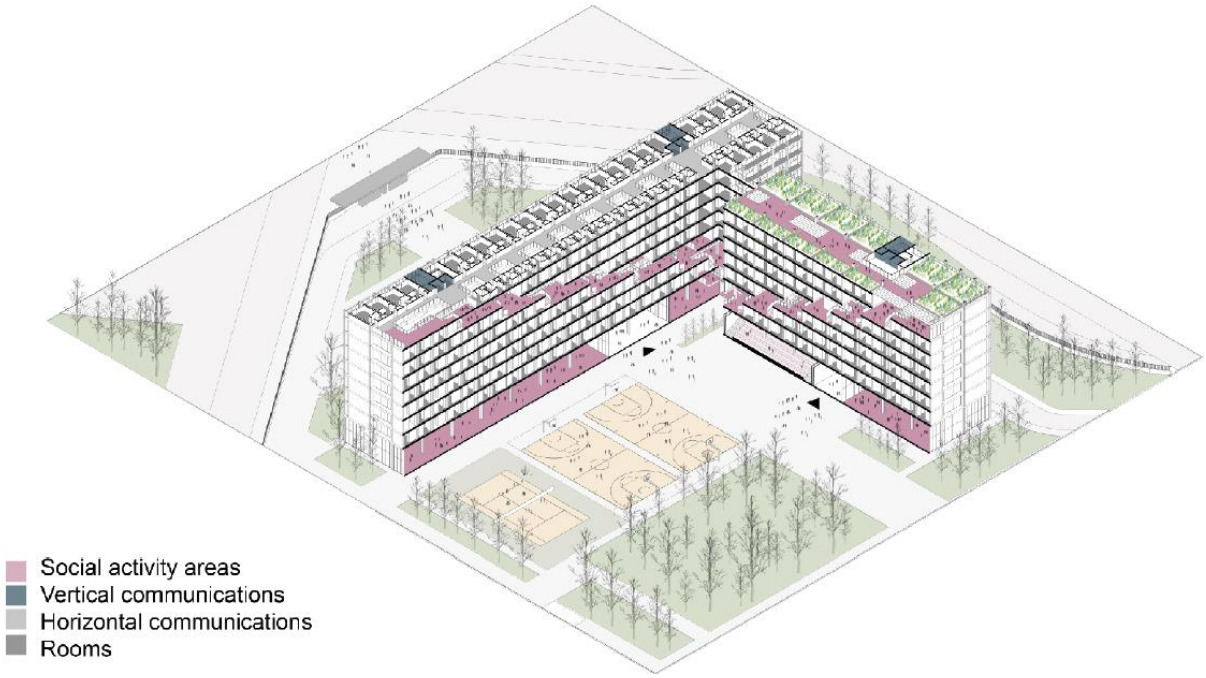

Figure 15. The new dormitory building was designed in harmony as part of the existing structures – functional diagram of the new dormitory building in axonometric perspective (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Existing site data, physical and semantic relationships were analyzed for the new dormitory buildings. The historical and social layers that emphasize the palimpsest nature of the site have been meticulously considered, respected and made visible. The design aims to create flexible spaces while

remaining faithful to the idea of "simplicity" seen throughout the campus. Ecological criteria are considered in the building positioning and one of the main goals is to create a solution that would maximize the benefit of natural sunlight and ventilation. The new design is intended to engage with the campus' collective memory, create flexible spaces that can be shaped by young people instead of rigid spatial solutions and provide a vibrant social life (C. Sevindik & S. Güvendi, personal interview, October 10, 2023, Istanbul). In the entire design, the idea of "multilayeredness" is addressed from a holistic perspective through the historical, social, physical and semantic layers of the area, and with awareness that the layers are the most important components of the collective memory, respecting them and exploring ways to coexist with them today. With the awareness that destruction of memory is tantamount to destruction of a culture, ideas were developed to ensure the continuity of architectural culture in the region, which is a modern architectural heritage site, and these ideas were found successful and suitable for implementation by the jury members.

While the jury of national experts evaluated the design's strengths, they particularly appreciated the design proposal that transforms contemporary social life, as well as the basic principle of the design that respects the existing architectural heritage, urban texture and old layers of New Belgrade. However, since the winning project will enter the construction process, the jury suggested some minor modifications to improve the project's spatial quality and applicability (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023).

Since there was no project worthy of second prize, two equal third prizes were awarded (referred to as A and B). The first of these prizes (A) was deemed worthy with the basic idea that it contributes to research on student housing. The proposed new dormitory building aims to create contrast with the existing dormitory blocks in the geometry of its circular form. However, the closed off characteristic of the geometric form carries the danger of the new dormitory building becoming an autonomous structure that is separated from the campus. This was seen as a problem as it could create separation in social life. At the same time, it has been stated the circular form, which cannot establish a relationship with the existing architectural heritage, urban texture and layers, does not produce a successful solution in terms of ecology and sustainability. The proposed architectural construction and façade solution was generally evaluated negatively in terms of technical applicability and cost (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023). Although the design promised a lively student life within the new dormitory structure, it was not successful enough in establishing a relationship with the existing historical background and architectural heritage of the land (Figure 16). At this point, the fact the proposal is shaped independently from the historical layers of the complex was seen as a point that weakened the design (Figure 17).

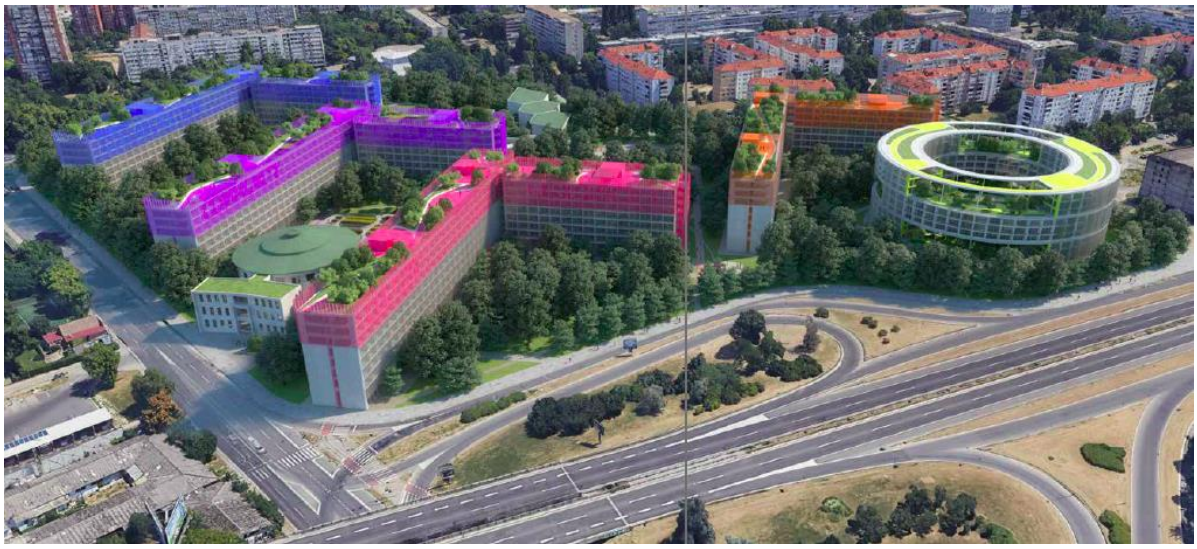

Figure 16. 3D visuals of the design proposal for third prize A (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Figure 17. 3D visuals of the new dormitory building and existing dormitory buildings for third prize A (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Unlike the other solutions proposed for the competition, the second project that was awarded the third prize (B) analyses the new dormitory building not in a single mass but in five fragmented masses. The project was evaluated positively for its accessibility on the ground and first floors and its multi-directional design (Figure 18). However, the jury criticized the façades of the new dormitory building for containing a formalist architectural design approach with decorative shapes (Figure 19). Although a positive intention for the utilization of the floor area was understood, it was seen to be problematic in its implementation. Although it is valuable to create a rational improvement plan for the existing buildings and realize this with minimum intervention, it was seen as a deficiency that the proposal was not detailed enough on how it will be implemented (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023). Although this project relates more to the existing architectural heritage compared to the other third prize project, the new dormitory area is differentiated in the decisions on the ground layout throughout the campus. It was perceived that the relationship of the new dormitory buildings with the existing dormitory buildings is weak. Although the historical layers of the land were considered in the design, the solution was seen as insufficient.

Figure 18. 3D visuals of the design proposal for third prize B (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

Figure 19. 3D visuals of the new dormitory buildings for third prize B (Union of Architects of Serbia, 2023)

When the three prize winning proposals in the international competition are analyzed in comparison with each other, considering the jury's valuable comments, it is seen that the first project differs because it prioritizes establishing a respectful relationship with the historical background and layers, meaning and modern architectural heritage of the land as the first and main goal of the design (Table 1.). The results of this competition are valuable as an indicator of how far the historical overlapping and layering of the space, considering its "palimpsest" feature and shaping it as an important and guiding input of the design, carries the project proposal forward.

Table 1. Comparative design ideas evaluation of the prize winning projects (prepared by the author)

Evaluation Criteria	First Prize	Third Prize A	Third Prize B
1. Consideration of physical traces in site plan decisions	The site plan maintained the same design style in all dormitory blocks. The physical traces of the existing buildings were maintained.	In the site plan, a new circular mass was designed in contrast with the existing prismatic masses. A connection between the circular squares was established in the ground circulation fiction. It could not be determined that the physical traces of the site plan formed input in the design.	In the site plan, new dormitory buildings consisting of five small blocks were designed differently from the existing large dormitory blocks. It could not be determined that the physical traces of the site plan formed input in the design.
2. Consideration of physical traces in the transformation of the existing dormitory buildings	It preserved the existing dormitory blocks as much as possible, but eliminated the problems that make the spaces dysfunctional.	Since detailed information on how the existing buildings will be transformed was not provided, this criterion cannot be fully known.	Since detailed information on how the existing buildings will be transformed was not provided, this criterion cannot be fully known.
3. Establishing a formal relationship with existing buildings in the design of new dormitories	It continued the design approach of the historical dormitory blocks and created a holistic architectural atmosphere on the campus.	The new dormitory building was completely separate from the existing dormitory buildings and designed to be closed inwards as a result of the circular geometric form.	The new dormitory building was completely separate from the existing dormitory buildings, designed in small blocks and with different geometric façade motifs.
4. Creating a common façade throughout the campus	The façade design of the existing dormitory buildings was applied in the newly designed	A common façade form unity could not be achieved throughout the area. The historic	A common façade form unity could not be achieved throughout the area. The historic

	dormitory buildings, creating a holistic visual perception.	buildings were clearly differentiated from the new dormitory building.	buildings were clearly differentiated from the new dormitory building.
5. Social revitalisation by considering the historical meaning and life in open space design	Allocation of the ground floors was entirely to social activities, supporting the streets that will feed the activities with landscaping and creating a pedestrian promenade, which created a strong approach for the campus to regain its prior vitality.	Although the idea of integrating pedestrian passages on the ground with the existing buildings suggested social revitalisation in the open space as in the first project, it was not sufficiently detailed in this project.	Although it was a positively evaluated project in terms of its efforts to create a clear organisation scheme and socially vibrant ground function within the complex, these arrangements were found to be irrational in terms of implementation.

As Andreas Huyssen stated, cities contain complex networks of historical signs that point to their heterogeneous structure (Huyssen, 2003) and these historical markers manifest as urban traces and components of the palimpsest. In its most basic meaning, the fact that palimpsest creates new traces on existing traces that have never disappeared points to a dual situation. The first is to preserve the existing and the second is to construct the new. These two opposite actions contain a contradiction because to create/build something is to make it visible (Botta, 2012). This complexity harbors similar contradictions in the urban space. With the palimpsest metaphor, it conveys that meaningful coexistence of this unity is possible. This coexistence refers to physical and spiritual coexistence. As Freud mentions in his work *Civilization and its Discontents* (2014), an intense relationship exists between spiritual layers and the city/built environment. Collective memory is defined by this network of relationships that individuals establish with urban spaces. In this sense, the palimpsest metaphor expresses the spiritual and physical layers that together make up collective memory. In a built environment created by recognizing and respecting these layers, the sustainability of collective memory can be ensured (Rossi, 1984). This is crucial in terms of enabling the continuation of the society's history and culture.

The components that make up the palimpsest concept, which constitutes this study's idea, are considered an important design input from site plan decisions to the smallest detail of the architectural design in the winning project. In addition, the design is shaped within this framework, which enables the architectural design to be in accordance with the place's spirit, to preserve the collective memory, to enable people to coexist with the traces of the past and to preserve the sense of belonging of the people. The palimpsest approach, which forms the basis of the winning project selected in the international architectural design competition, is also a successful example and guide for future competition projects and architectural applications. This emphasizes the importance of the palimpsest feature in architectural design.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Collective memory is a crucial component for the continuity of a city's cultural heritage. It is created, defined and sustained by the environments in which we live. Each layer of the overwritten palimpsest of history has unique significance in a city's history. Therefore, it is one of the most important responsibilities for an architect to sensitively touch a city by reading these traces and recognizing their existence in a respectful design relationship.

Architects can take various approaches when designing historic heritage sites. While this issue is highly political, it also reflects the architect's professional responsibility. The first of these approaches may be demolition of the existing. This approach would physically erase all layers of history and produce a new and context-free design ground. Another approach could be to completely preserve the existing and not intervene with the site. This approach would weaken the use value of the existing building and may cause it to become inactive over time. The right way to design cultural heritage sites is to seek

ways to co-exist with the past. In this way, while collective memory and traces are preserved, new memories can be created. Past and future can be holistically brought together in the same space.

It is undoubtedly valuable to design such heritage sites through international architectural competitions in order to create a quality and sensitive architectural environment, because these sites are international cultural heritages, which shed light on an era beyond national identity and belong to everyone. In this approach, it is important that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, the Association of Architects of Serbia and the United Nations Development Unit, which played an important role in organizing this competition with their support, consider this site as a valuable heritage site at the international level and organize an impartial architectural competition open to architects from all over the world.

The results of the jury's work, which was meticulously conducted and contributed by nationally competent academics and experts, emphasize the importance of the palimpsest nature of the spaces that are the subject of the study. The physical overlap in the built environment, the holistic preservation of the traces of history and the respect for this physical layering can be clearly seen in the design of the project, which was selected first with significant difference from the other projects. The jury's comments state and appreciate that living spaces are created in relation to the existing built environment, in accordance with the historical meaning and spirit of the region. With the idea that the spirit of the place is hidden in its layers, the concept of preserving and coexisting these layers adds life to the space with the concept of palimpsest.

This study has shown that the multi-layeredness, physical and spiritual traces of today's cities – in other words, the palimpsest feature of a city – can be effectively preserved and transferred to the future through architectural design. Considering the palimpsest characteristic of space and seeing it as an important component of design – being able to exist in the present with the past without destroying it – is an important responsibility for the architect as a fundamental design approach that connects the past and future, providing spatial potentials. This design approach, which was sustained by the winning project, will provide ideas and guidance to future competition projects, architectural practices and architectural design students.

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Author Contribution and Conflict of Interest Declaration Information

There is no conflict of interest.

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