

HUMANISTIC URBANISM: EXPLORING THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN-CENTERED URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE THROUGH A CASE STUDY OF THE CERAK VINOGRADI RESIDENTIAL AREA IN BELGRADE

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ABSTRACT

Designing planned residential areas in Belgrade has historically been a challenge for architects and urban planners. After the Second World War, due to the change in the political and social structure of the country, and the consequent expansion of the city beyond its previous borders, the concept of a satellite settlement was developed. At the end of the 1970s, uninhabited land near the city municipality of Čukarica was designated for the project of a residential area, the authors of which were architects Milenija Marušić, Darko Marušić and Nedeljko Borovnica. The urban planning and architectural solution of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement was conceived in accordance with the needs of the population.

An analysis of the existing architectural and urbanistic corpus was realized and contextualized through the lense of humanistic design in architetcural practices and urban planning. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the goal of establishnig a clear communicative bond between the people and their environment.

It was determined that the Cerak Vinogradi settlement was indeed concieved as a humano-centric residential area, with a focus on providing it's inhabitants with a pedestrian-friendly environment with plentiful open spaces, which it remains to this day.

The design of Cerak Vinogradi reflects a balance between urban development and maintaining quality of life for residents. Its emphasis on pedestrian spaces and limited commercial activity ensures a residential focus. Due to its architectural and urban significance, the settlement remains well-preserved and continues to contribute to the cultural and architectural heritage of Belgrade.

KEYWORDS _ *Urbanism, Architecture, Humanism, Cerak Vinogradi, Belgrade*

INTRODUCTION

Construction activity on the expansion of Belgrade after the Second World War, in accordance with the consistent rapid urbanization, changes in the existing city fabric and population growth, was reflected in the design of residential areas on the city's periphery. They were conceived in the form of localized *micro-centers*, with the aim of breaking the overload of the central city fabric and infrastructure. In accordance with the concepts of the *garden city* developed during the interwar period, but also with the socio-political and cultural tendencies of the post-war, socialist state, they were formulated with accompanying infrastructure and secondary content (Весковић 2015: 120; Marušić 1978: 50-54). The increased construction of residential areas in Belgrade during the eighth and ninth decades of the twentieth century took place mainly on the outskirts of the city, in the form of new, auto-centralized zones created on free, undeveloped, and often agricultural land (Baklaić-Punišić 1980: 206).

An emphasis was placed primarily on improving the quality of housing and life within the settlement as a whole, and numerous aspects relevant to the improvement of the space and environment in which one lives were in focus. Thus, in new, peripheral settlements conceived as *self-sufficient centers*, residents are not faced with the *mimesis of nature*, but have direct contact with it. As Tomić states: "(...) we should strive to re-establish contact with nature, among other things, through the predominant construction of buildings with fewer floors, surrounded by dense vegetation, in which a larger part of the city should be immersed." (Tomić 1980: 184). In the mentioned context, when he refers to *the city*, the author sets the benchmark for newly created peripheral settlements, which can be seen as a *city in miniature*. He particularly emphasizes the importance and role of nature for the purpose of humanizing living spaces, in which recreation, leisure and rest would take place in a spontaneous and natural course, which leads to an improvement in the quality of everyday life. The creation of gardens and garden areas directly next to residential buildings in the area opens up the opportunity for the community of tenants to participate in relaxing and recreational activities. In addition, the preservation of the existing natural environment was one of the key aspects of the construction of a new residential area on the outskirts of the city. Following this, as one of the more significant features, the relocation of the traffic network and accompanying infrastructure towards the edges of the settlement zone is proposed and emphasized, which achieves harmony of the space, reduces air pollution and the amount of noise, and creates an atmosphere of peaceful surroundings. (Tomić 1980: 184-185). As he further states, in these new centers, the individual will be able to "*return to the smaller community he lost in the big city, and continue to experience and share everyday joys and sufferings (...).*" (Tomić 1980: 185)

With the concepts of *community, individual well-being and humanized space*, numerous residential areas were built in the capital in the period between the 60s and 80s of the twentieth century, among which *Cerak Vinogradi* by architects Milenija Marušić (1941-), Darko Marušić (1940-2017) and Nedeljko Borovnica (1938-2017) stands out. The paper presents the spatial planning concept of the settlement through the sphere of the urban plan aligned with human needs. The principles of human-centered spatial planning that were applied to Cerak Vinogradi resulted in an extremely positive reception by the public, which is a feature that has been retained in the modern context.

CERAK VINOGRADI: CONCEPTS AND DEVELOPMENT

At the end of the 70s and during the 80s of the twentieth century, the architectural sphere was subject to new changes in the field of stylistic tendencies and trends, and the modern paradigm changed to postmodern ones, which resulted in the reaffirmation of traditional values in architecture (Milašinović Marić, Vukotić Lazar 2017: 15). The transformations were reflected in the pursuit of retrograde, hidden historicism in collaboration with modern materials and constructions with the aim of more humane housing (Весковић 2015: 120). Numerous legal changes, social regulations and agreements conditioned the development of new concepts, which was also a consequence of large, individual

investor communities. In the case of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement, the construction agreement was signed between the YPA Housing Association and the Belgrade Housing Association in November 1976, thus both acting as owners. The competition for the settlement project was announced in May 1977, ending in September of the same year, and the project by architects Marušić, Marušić and Borovnica was unanimously adopted. As the Detailed Urban Plan of the settlement had already been implemented the previous year and the construction agreement had been signed, the first works began in 1978, as well as the extension of the planning and development of the main projects (Marušić et al. 1978: 36-37).

Construction lasted from 1978 to 1985, with the first zone, known as Cerak 1, including the North, South and East settlements, while the Cerak 2 zone, which includes the West settlement, was realized from 1980-1985. The first generation of tenants moved in as early as 1981. The residential zones of Cerak 1 are connected by a clearly defined movement network, while in the center there is a large park with Austrian Oak trees. In addition, the residential areas are clearly defined, as well as the center with accompanying, secondary facilities: elementary school, preschool institution and Military Medical Center. The spatial organization of the center of the Local Community buildings is based on the linear orientation of the mentioned buildings, which means that they are accessible from all directions and do not disturb the macro-environment of the settlement. The western neighborhood of Cerak 2 is also clearly connected to the main part of the settlement, and there is no visual or formative division between them. The project was supposed to have a multiple purpose: residential, sports-recreational and cultural-educational, but it was never realized to the end - only a residential area was built (Весковић 2015: 122, Милосављевић 2022: 6-13; 19-26).

The settlement was initially conceived as a local community in which approximately 10,000 inhabitants would live. Observing the division of settlements into functional layers, we get:

1. Residential and secondary buildings;
2. Residential street;
3. Neighborhood;
4. Settlement.

This division clearly expresses the intentions of the design team to formulate a residential zone aligned with the previously mentioned values and aspirations towards the formation of free space, communication networks and natural ambience. The objects are grouped in rows that follow the shape of the terrain, thus forming pedestrian, residential streets, which group together to form the main neighborhoods: North, South, East and West (Marušić et al. 1978: 38-39; Весковић 2015: 125). (Figure 1)



Figure 1: Aerial view of the Cerak Vinogradi residential area. (Left to right: West neighbourhood, South neighbourhood, North neighbourhood, East neighbourhood.) Source: Google Earth, accessed April 2025.

According to the proposal of the authors of the project, the streets were named after rows of trees of different species, and the space between the buildings was strictly reserved for pedestrians. The arrangement of the facades of residential buildings, which are uniform and grouped by level and elevation, also contributed to the formation of a specific ambience. Brick cladding in pleasant, earth tones, uniform window openings, terraces and loggias contributed to the realization of a warm, welcoming environment in which residents feel comfortable and relaxed. The spaces between the buildings are filled with gardens, flower alleys, decorative trees, but also with urban furniture that promotes recreation and interpersonal communication, and they form inseparable and significant micro-environments of the settlement. Children's playgrounds, exercise areas, sports fields are only part of the entire human-centric area of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement. At the same time, the neighborhood centers emphasize these features, because they state that collective recreation and gatherings are foreseen in a direct way through the basic project. (Figures 2-4) The architectural team Marušić, Marušić and Borovnica won the October Award of the City of Belgrade in 1981, and then many others, and the settlement was declared a protected cultural asset in January 2019 by the Decision on Determination.



Figure 2: An example of the spatial conceptions of Cerak Vinogradi. Source: photographed by the author, April 2025.

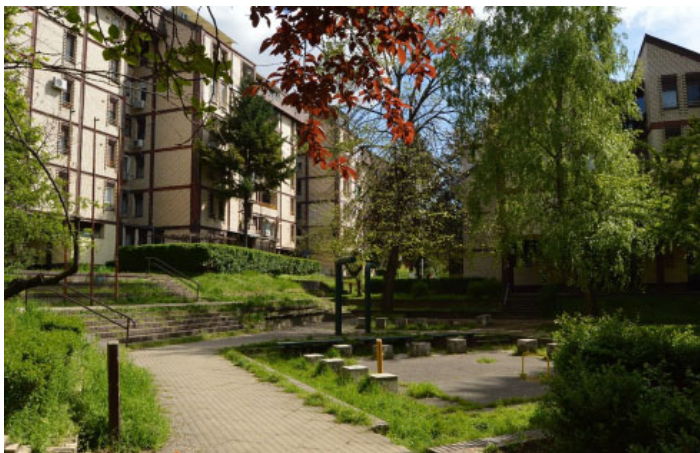


Figure 3: An example of the spatial conceptions of Cerak Vinogradi. Source: photographed by the author, April 2025.



Figure 4: An example of the spatial conceptions of Cerak Vinogradi. Source: photographed by the author, April 2025.

CERAK VINOGRADI: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

Among the key features of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement, the relationship between the space and its inhabitants stands out. Due to the specific formulation of the original ownership structure, the spirit of community was expressed from the beginning, through the already established acquaintances of members of the YPA - the first generation of tenants. In April 2025, an interview was conducted with the architects, members and founders of the association *Kulturni Cerak* - Olivera Gaborov Lazić, Nađa Vujović and Tamara Nikolić Prodić, with the aim of defining the contemporary relationship and reception of the settlement community towards the space.¹ The association is made up of experts in the field of architecture, history of art and other cultural spheres, who are also tenants of Cerak Vinogradi, and was created to preserve, improve and promote the cultural identity of the architectural-urban complex. In addition, they actively advocate in the social domain at the level of the entire settlement, and with their activity directly contribute to nurturing the previously prominent community spirit. They organized numerous events and social actions in which the tenants of all four neighborhoods participate at the local level, and in this way contribute to the vibrancy and liveliness of their area. (Novaković 2025).

Among the spatial, architectural and urban aspects of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement, which make it a human-centric living space, a key role is played by the social class that has developed over several decades. Concepts of open space very directly and unambiguously influence people's communication, in which park areas play a key factor. Due to the specificity of the existence of a large number of micro-environments, in the formation and development of which they themselves often participated, the tenants feel a strong spirit of community, which is also reflected through communal leisure time. Despite the existence of special premises of the local communities, they are closed to the public, and residents of the settlement gather in smaller spaces for street house councils or in public intermediate spaces such as amphitheaters or parks. (Novaković 2025).

¹ The author extends gratitude to the representatives of the *Kulturni Cerak* association for their cooperation and assistance.

Apart from the events organized by the Association, part of the citizens independently organize themselves into smaller groups in order to carry out ecological cleaning actions, which is an indicator of their commitment and concern for the space that surrounds them. In contrast, some tenants, also on their own initiative, for the sake of personal comfort, undertook interventive measures, and installed street lights, paved areas for parking, glazed and walled terraces, changed window frames and other minor changes. These acts were mostly viewed negatively by the rest of the community, because such actions violate the existing concept of the total design of the settlement and the previously prominent micro-environments. But despite that, the general consensus of the residents of the Cerak Vinogradi settlement is that, due to the specificity of the space, the preservation of the original, natural environment, open spaces for communication and interaction, as well as nurturing a sense of community and belonging (Novaković 2025).

Additionally, for the purposes of documenting the existing livability coefficient as well as planning possible enhancements and improvements in the settlement's engagement, digital tools such as GIS-based livability analysis could be used and adapted for this purpose. (Kovacs-Gyori 2019: 290-294). Following this, through the use of various contemporary methods and technologies many historically significant urban environments and neighbourhoods would benefit from the use of digital preservation.²

CONCLUSIONS

The design of cerak Vinogradi reflects a balance between urban development and maintaining quality of life for residents. Preserving the original natural environment and formulating clearly defined spaces according to the needs of the inhabitants, the architectural team marušić, marušić and borovnica successfully implemented the return to nature which was strived for in the second half of the twentieth century in socialist yugoslavia. By moving the residential settlement outside the city core, they enabled the development of cerak Vinogradi in the form of a separate microcenter. Its emphasis on pedestrian spaces and limited commercial activity ensures a residential focus. This was especially achieved by the positioning of traffic routes on the perimeter of the residential zone, which reduced air pollution and the amount of noise, and at the same time enabled greater use of the park's green surfaces for recreation and community purposes. The architecture of residential buildings also contributes significantly to the phenomenon of human-centric design - the uniform composition of buildings covered with brick in earth tones caused a feeling of comfort, warmth and hospitality in the residents, which significantly affected the overall quality of life in the settlement. Due to its architectural and urban significance, the settlement remains well-preserved and continues to contribute to the cultural and architectural heritage of Belgrade.

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² More on this subject: Zheng Qi, Chen Kang, Peng Wang and Wei Li. 2024. „Application of Digital Art Technology in Architectural Heritage Preservation and Digital Reconstruction in the Construction Industry” in *Computer-Aided Design & Applications* 21(S11): 14-27.

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