

# **Houses at Home**

**Architecture of**

**Displacement**





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**Houses at Home  
Architecture of Displacement**

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**Affidavit**

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A

# Tom and Jerry

## CARTOON

Ne poznam ništa što se može  
usporediti s apsolutnom maštom.

*I know of nothing that can be  
compared to absolute imagination.*



**“So: a Bosnian refugee – let’s call him Zaim – ends up in some small town in the US. Life is tough, there are few friends, the family is far away and the longing for Bosnia is painful. Zaim develops a craving for spit-roasted lamb, the most universally revered food in Bosnia. He wants to do it the way it is supposed to be done – stick a whole lamb on a spit and then slowly revolve it for hours over fire and embers, sipping beer and talking to people, until it is finished. Though piecemeal lamb is available, a whole one is not. Zaim finds himself in some town rife with malls and megamarkets. There is everything there, except, of course, a whole lamb. In his profound craving for spitroasted lamb, Zaim purchases all the pieces needed to assemble a whole lamb: the head, the neck, the breast, the shoulders, the chops, the ribs, the legs. When he collects all the necessary parts, he staples them together. So there it is: a monstrous lamb, which man and history rent asunder, but is now put back together by a determined Bosnian, who, beer in hand, proudly and slowly revolves it over the fire. Despite the heroic effort, it still doesn’t taste the same.”<sup>1</sup>**

**“Like a mythical beast, architecture emerges from the psycho-cultural landscape of its social, political and economical circumstances. Its body may be an exquisite corpse of (biologically impossible) architectural limbs, torsos, heads and tails, yet it is animated, active and alive - like Frankenstein’s monster. At any given moment it projects its historical situation - the great teeming mass of narratives that prefigured its existence - into the contemporary world. And in doing so it fundamentally rewrites that history splicing and sewing narratives together to make a radical new proposition for the future.”<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Hemon, Aleksandar: ‘Bread is practically sacred’: how the taste of home sustained my refugee parents.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob, Sam: Make it real. Architecture as enactment.

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# Introduction

I visited Kozarac for the first time in 2016, as a part of the Master Studio with the Institute of Contemporary Art. The Studio was led by Milica Tomić, and it dealt with the urban landscape of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina: more specifically, it focused on the mining complex Omarska, which was turned into a concentration camp during the War in 1992, only to have its mining operations resumed in 2004, without any memorialization efforts.<sup>1</sup>

We stayed in Kozarac for four days, in October 2016. We were a unique sight in an empty city: twenty students roaming the streets with cameras and filling up one of only two open bars. Emptiness and quietness of the city have been unsettling, especially at night when many houses were in the dark: nobody was living in these houses, and many of them were along the main street. Sudbin, one of our interlocutors, a survivor of the Omarska camp, activist and a permanent resident of Kozarac, called these houses “temples of loneliness and sadness”. Their owners would come back every summer, to clean, repair – maintain them, and go back to their other homes abroad. I had a similar sentiment towards these houses: they can be found all around Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they are usually called *gastarbajterske* or *dijasporske* houses, a standing symbol of an interrupted life. It was not until I read the book *Arrival City* by Doug Saunders that I started rethinking my position.

There was a chapter about Bangladesh and Sylhet where Saunders described, in awe, big, elaborate mansions he encountered there. Sylhet is a traditional rural area, and these houses seemed as if they have come from another world – which, in a sense, is true: they were built by the Bangladeshi diaspora, living in England. Maybe naively, but only at that moment have I realized that building a home, while not living there, is a universal human response to migration, almost like an innate instinct. It is not a uniquely Bosnian or Balkan thing, which I was led to believe; reinforcing the balkanism narratives.<sup>2</sup>

This architecture seemed like a most tangible form of migration, and people producing it seemed very much in favor of life: they have chosen to act, to build, to live, in spite of the forces and violence inflicted upon them.

<sup>1</sup> Sans Souci: Four Faces of Omarska. Master Studio, Winter Semester 16/17, Institute for Contemporary Art, TU Graz.

<sup>2</sup> As defined by Maria Todorova in her book “Imagining the Balkans”: set of pejorative stereotypes which shape the discourse about Balkans.

I wanted to find out more about these houses, their owners, and their way of life. I have decided to choose Kozarac as my case study, being one of the most extreme examples of remittance architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thanks to its contested past. This story is based on the material collected during the fieldwork in November and December of 2019. Apart from my own fieldwork, people of Kozarac have built an invaluable online archive, which is regularly being updated. I have kept the scope of the empirical research within the borders of the official cadastre of the city center, for clarity and manageability. The mapping of remittance objects has been done by combining my observations and word to mouth data collected from the locals, and it is not an official, provable record. Yet, I believe that in spite of these simplifications, the chosen sample faithfully captures the nature and scope of the remittance landscape of the wider Kozarac area and its surroundings.

In an attempt to unravel the remittance infrastructures gradually so that they can be properly understood, this story is divided into five parts. The first part paints a general picture of the field of remittance architecture and Kozarac. The second part is an introduction to the *Gastarbeiter* culture, which was the first wave of migration of people from Kozarac and is still heavily affecting the image of migrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The third part, *Rupture*, is a brief summary of the War from 1992 to 1995, during which Kozarac has been fully destroyed. Fourth part, *Strategies of Recovery*, juxtaposes strategies of post-war urban recovery with the personal recovery after the violence of migration. Remittance infrastructure, or urban remittance landscape, creates a supporting structure for houses at home, houses of diaspora, which are a form of therapy for the migrant body. Fifth part is about maintenance of these structures, consequences of absence and the deferment of return.

Lastly, the Appendix contains a set of interpretative tools, abstract architectural structures which summarize the story and translate the findings into forms, and a collection of all fieldwork photographs.

They should be an addition to the Diaspora archive, not just for the community of Kozarac, but also for the architecture of migration elsewhere, better yet – everywhere.







# 1 Presence of absence

Houses that are empty most of the year are a common sight in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These houses can be primarily identified by their fine state of preservation, closed shutters and general lack of any living paraphernalia: no laundry on drying racks, no garden chairs or forgotten toys. They often form clusters – even whole cities – profoundly transforming landscapes and communal practices.

These houses are known as diaspora or gastarbeiter houses, and are built by diaspora members in their hometowns or villages. They are inhabited yearly, usually during the summer months and holiday seasons. Architectural styles vary widely, yet the most outraging examples – peculiarly shaped, ornate mansions – became indicative of the typology. The general sentiment towards this type of architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina is heavily influenced specifically by the Gastarbeiter culture and afterwards, the War. However, it corresponds to the universal image of a migrant and the representation of a remittance house. It is understood as a symbol of liminality, tragic destiny of a double life, estrangement, luxurious consumption and so on.

Such elusive manifestations of migration are in no way limited to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina or its complicated past. Doug Saunders writes in awe about big elaborate houses he encountered in Sylhet, a Bangladeshi rural area, with long tradition of emigration, and the transformation the area underwent thanks to its diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Sarah Lopez Lynn writes about Mexicans emigrating to the US and investing their dollars in houses, public buildings and infrastructure projects back home – creating a whole new remittance landscape.<sup>2</sup> In the Guatemalan city of San Cristóbal Totonicapán, a company of two sisters called Ferrocasa, specializes in constructing remittance houses, casas de remesa, with the slogan “We will help you construct the house of your dreams”.<sup>3</sup> Villages in rural Kayseri in Turkey are empty for the majority of the year, only to be full for two or three summer months.<sup>4</sup> Similar destinies befall upon all of the “third world” or “developing” countries where emigration is constantly rising. The diaspora or remittance architecture – building a home somewhere, while living elsewhere – is an indication of a global

condition. These buildings are a universal human response to displacement.

However, remittance architecture enters the public discourse more seriously only at the beginning of this decade. Firstly, unlike, for example, celebrating other people’s food, available for consumption by anyone, the durability and permanence of architecture is fundamentally challenging the notion of a mobile, and forever in transit, migrant.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, it is only after the end of the Cold War, with the rapid intensification of the globalization process, that migration proliferates and differences in standards grow enough to be massively manifested in the form of houses and investments in the country of origin. Thirdly, in the spirit of the rebirth of post-modernism and contemporary internet-visual culture, more and more photo projects are emerging that exotify and romanticize these buildings.<sup>6</sup>

Almost all sorts of migrations are lined with some degree of compulsion – caused by demand for labor, rise of poverty, climate changes or basic demand for better social or economic conditions.<sup>7</sup> One’s own narrative is never a simple flow of past-present-future. In a migrant’s case, temporal and spatial disruptions happen in shorter intervals and on a much larger scale – *the diasporic story is always understood to be one of breaks and gaps*.<sup>8</sup> Migrating means entering new, often illegible, spaces. For example, a guest worker who works and lives most of the year in a country whose language he cannot speak, is limited to spaces where he will be understood. Therefore, the guest city is for him quite small, no matter how big it may be. He does not have the infrastructure he possessed in his home town, which creates gaps in his present life. The most extreme example of these disruptions is the destruction of the war and the refugee. His present and past are, spatially and temporally, wiped away.

Ensuring biographical continuity is an active act undertaken by a migrant, with building in the homeland being its most tangible form. Building a house at home cannot be reduced to pointless nostalgia<sup>9</sup> – it entails a set of much more complex political, economic and social circumstances which shape a migrant’s life.

1 See Saunders 2011, 120-130.

2 See Lopez 2015, 36-37.

3 Blitzer, Jonathan: The Dream Homes of Guatemalan Migrants, 05.04.2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-dream-homes-of-guatemalan-migrants>, 31.10.2019.

4 See Alyanak 2015, 1-7.

5 See Lozanovska 2019, 61.

6 See for example: <http://arquitecturalibre.mx/about-arquitectura-libre/>  
<http://farawaybrotherstylewalterioiraheta.blogspot.com/>

7 See Kalra/Kaur/Hutynk 2005, 9-10.

8 See Appadurai, Arjun: Traumatic Exit, Identity Narratives, and the Ethics of Hospitality, in Blanco, L.A.C., Galán, I.G., Carrasco, C.M., Llopis, A.N., & Verzier, M.O. (Eds.), *After Belonging: The Objects, Spaces, and Territories of the Ways We Stay in Transit*, Zürich (2016), 37.

9 See Boccagni 2017, 101.







# Najveći Mali Grad

## Biggest Small City

Kozarac, small town in Republika Srpska, is a showcase of remittance architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While not the only one, it is one of the most extreme examples of Bosnian and Herzegovinian remittance landscapes. All Yugoslav, and later BiH, migration waves were featured in Kozarac. In the Yugoslav era, many inhabitants of Kozarac were part of the Gastarbeiter program, which would prepare the ground for the upcoming chain migration during and following the War. Third migration wave, the brain drain, is ongoing.

Today, Kozarac is known as one of BiH cities with the biggest number of post-war returnees, for its remittance-funded wealth, relative economic stability and, most notably, for the disproportionate amounts of life during different months of the year.

During the quiet months, seeming ordinariness of a small town is disrupted by the absence of its inhabitants. Some eighty percent of the buildings are owned by members of Kozarac diaspora.

The diversity and richness of the architectural language is stunning; locals, Kozarčani, say they can “decipher” where the owner is living based on the appearance of his house. For example, ground-floor houses are in the Norwegian or Swedish style – so owners are most likely situated in one of these Nordic countries. Owners of two-story houses with wide eaves and visible protruding decorative beams are, on the other hand, usually living in Switzerland. These houses are, however, a combination of many elements, from different regions, different times and different lives. One can, for example, see the so-called Pentagon House in Kozarac – shaped as a pentagon – whose owner lives in Sweden, or a re-interpretation of an old Ottoman-Bosnian house, with traditional doksat – a bay window and a contemporary dormer above it. Sometimes the only element that reveals the current address of the owner can be a simple garden gnome with the inscription “Willkommen!”.

Beneath the, occasionally flashy, residences is an infrastructure tailored specifically for such a way of life. In order to unravel these infrastructures, it is important to understand the historical and political frame of migrations in Kozarac.



“Normally an awareness of a life’s time is like a space around and yet within the person. [...] The felt space of a life’s time may be represented by a circle. The circle is filled at any given moment with past, present and future. The self cannot relate to single point in time because it is predicated upon a continuity. I was, I am, I may be, is the minimum proposition of the word I when pronounced by itself. Within the circle the past exists in the form of buried and free-standing memories, the future in the form of fears and hopes; the present enters as it occurs and, immediately, the past and the future relate to it. The three form an amalgam which is expressed in intentionality of the person’s actions at the moment. Such intentionality is informed by the past, it exists in the present and it is directed towards a future. [...] Elements of past and future are free to form an amalgam with the present.”<sup>1</sup>



1 Berger / Mohr 2010, 180-181.







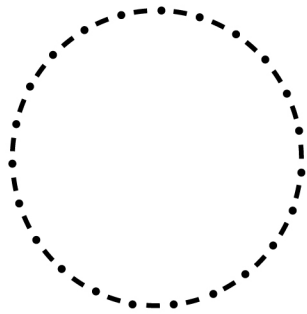






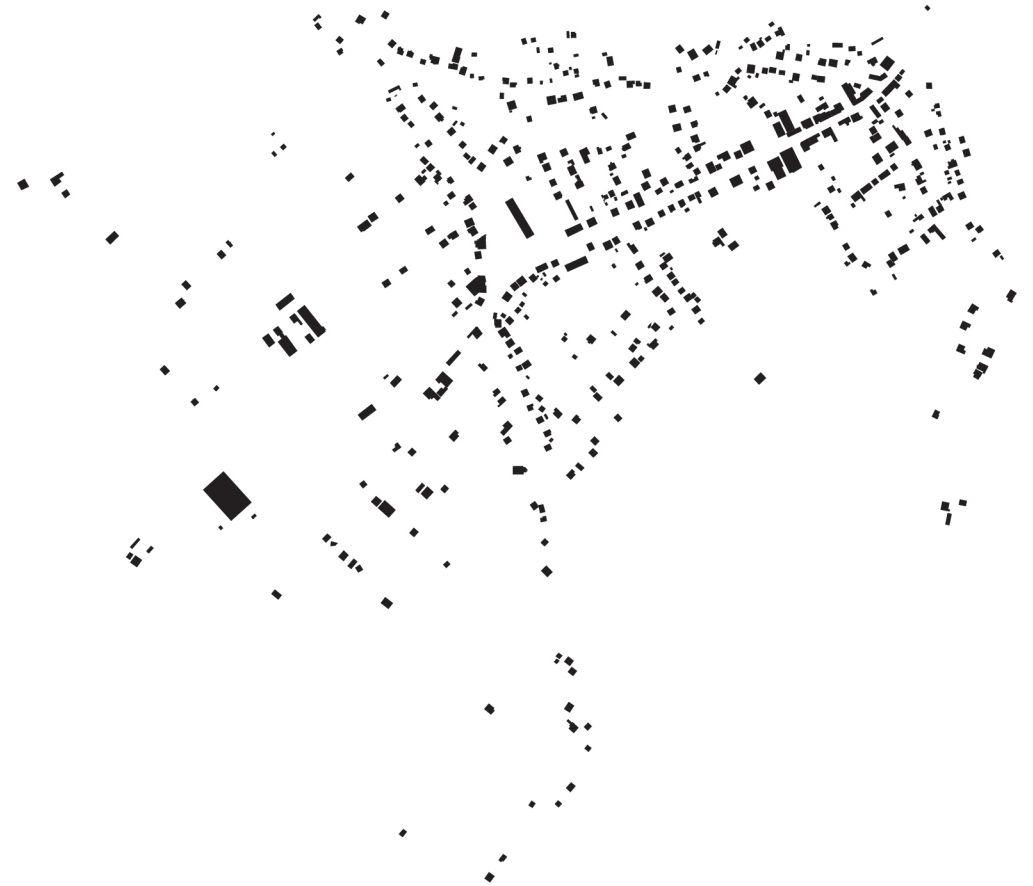


“The prisoner suffers the double pain of absence. He misses everything he feels as absent. At the same time, that which is absent, continues without him. He lacks and he is lacking. Yet absence is not the final loss. His sentence has an end. He can envisage how he will rejoin the absent. This is a source of hope but it is also the pivot of violence of imprisonment. Increasingly he may begin to live by way of memory and anticipation, until the two of them become indistinguishable, until he anticipates his release in the future as the moment when he will rejoin all that was left in the past. [...] Imprisonment can cause past and future to lock together against the present. Today the temporary migrant worker suffers a kind of imprisonment in a prison without frontiers.”<sup>1</sup>



1 Berger / Mohr 2010, 182.

Kozarac 1970





## 2 Gastarbajteri “Outside as if I were inside”

First remittance houses in Kozarac were built by Gastarbeiters in the times of SFR Yugoslavia.

Kozarac was a small town, with around 8000 inhabitants. Kozara, the mountain, where the famous Kozara Offensive took place, an important battle of the Yugoslav Partisan resistance in the World War II, is just a couple of kilometers away. One of the famous Yugoslav monuments, Monument to the Revolution (Spomenik Revoluciji), built in 1972 in the National Park Kozara, contributed to the popularity of this area. Kozarac profited from many tourists passing by and was a wealthy town for that era. There was a cinema, health clinic and the biggest primary school in Bosnia.<sup>1</sup> Another wealth source were remittances, since a big number of Kozarčani worked abroad. After Kozarac lost its municipality status to the city of Prijedor in the sixties, and the Yugoslav unemployment issues skyrocketed, almost everyone from Kozarac had a family member abroad. Many were working for big construction companies like Montmontaža, in other Yugoslav Republics, mostly Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia, and other non-aligned countries like Libya. Others were working mainly in Germany and Austria. This work abroad often stretched itself through multiple generations: grandfather - Croatia, father - Croatia - Libya, son - Austria and so on. These guest workers were only leaving for work, but have never imagined their lives being anywhere else but in Kozarac. Usually, there was only one member of the family abroad, providing for the family back home. Some of the gastarbeiters were eventually joined by their families in their guest countries.

The gastarbeiter legacy is still alive in the ex-Yugoslav countries and the word itself has taken on a derogatory meaning. This has been caused by the systematic shortcomings from both the gastarbeiter programs of the host countries and the homeland - SFR Yugoslavia.

<sup>1</sup> See Neuffer 2002, 20-21.

## The Yugoslav Experiment

After the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, SFR Yugoslavia positioned itself as the “Third Way” between the superpower blocks - USA and the Western Bloc on one side and the Soviet Bloc on the other. The core of the Yugoslav experiment, which lasted from 1945 until 1992, was workers’ self-management or “Market Socialism” where workers played a role in management of their own workplaces, with the ultimate goal: withering away of the state.

The main paradox of workers’ self-management has been that the program which was in itself an alternative to capitalism, was dominated by the market as well. SFR Yugoslavia was founded on various debts and grants, and growth and quick return of investments were a priority since it was impossible to artificially raise quotas like in planned economy of the Soviet countries and control the inflation.<sup>2</sup> Since hiring new workers was always juxtaposed with, for example, a number of new flats to be acquired, as the right to housing was one of basic workers’ rights in SFR Yugoslavia, it was more beneficial to hire less workforce for more efficiency. Unemployment became an acute problem.<sup>3</sup> In attempt to solve this issue, in 1961, country legalized labor emigration.

Remittances of around one million migrant workers mitigated the worst effects of balance of payment deficits until the crisis of the early ’70s.<sup>4</sup> Workers were emigrating either to one of the non-aligned countries in Africa and middle East or post WWII Western Europe, usually Germany, Switzerland or Austria.

## Guest countries

As it was initially supposed to function on the basis of short-term contracts and workforce rotation, the concept of guest labor force was not followed by the systematic efforts of integration (for example, language courses, kindergarten places, permanent accommodation and so on). The name itself, the gastarbeiter - guest worker, emphasizes the transitory nature of the concept. With the oil crisis in the ’70s, imperative of the Western democracies was to send the guest workers back to their homelands as technical surplus. However, glitches in the system started to reveal themselves and it was becoming clear that the concept was in itself faulty. Many workers decided to stay (since their homeland did not provide any security whatsoever).

<sup>2</sup> See Unkovski-Korica, Vladimir: Self-management, development and debt: the rise and fall of the ‘Yugoslav experiment’, in Štiks, I. & Horvat, S. (Eds.), Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia, London (2014), 21-43.

<sup>3</sup> See Sekulić 2012, 19.

<sup>4</sup> See Unkovski-Korica, Vladimir: Self-management, development and debt: the rise and fall of the ‘Yugoslav experiment’, in Štiks, I. & Horvat, S. (Eds.) Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia, London (2014), 38.



ever) by changing employers, and in this way getting around the one-off employment. Many have, up until then, already brought their families.

On the other hand, employers also started extending contracts in order to avoid training a new wave of workers.<sup>5</sup>

So, without any integration efforts from the side of the state, and therefore also from the workers' side, gastarbeiters remained in their liminality, visiting their homeland frequently, in order to make up for the lack of agency in the guest country. Many decided to build houses in the homelands, and since they were not officially allowed to get or purchase an apartment (the right to housing did not apply to gastarbeiters since they were not part of the working collectives in SFR Yugoslavia), they were often engaging in illegal construction.<sup>6</sup> Gastarbeiters and their eponymous houses became a symbol for liminality. Extra-legal way of building, distance between the builders and the built, contested return and the constant lack of agency on every side, created a specific image of a house, which fits the remittance architecture category. Described often as a "palace", it is spacious, richly ornate, with plastered statues of heraldic animals in front of the entrance, and with mixture of styles<sup>7</sup> – it became a typical representation of the nouveau-riche.

However, although such examples became a representation of the whole gastarbeiter culture, many houses were rather simple or just improved and modernized versions of the old houses. For example, gastarbeiters popularized gabled roofs in areas where the traditional Ottoman-Bosnian house, with the hipped roof, had still been more common. With recognizing the benefits of more attic space many decided to embrace this way of building.<sup>8</sup>

## Outside as if I were inside

In the short documentary "The place from which I write letters to you" ("Mjesto odakle vam pišem pisma"), Nikolina Bogdanović juxtaposes photos and textual descriptions from the letters her grandmother sent her sister after moving to Germany from SFR Yugoslavia, in the '50s. She is describing their new life

in Germany, primarily through their new house. Every piece of furniture and appliance is meticulously being catalogued – photographed and described. Daily activities, like drinking coffee and listening to music, are framed solely within the interior of the house.<sup>9</sup>

Migration entails entrance into a completely new legal, social and cultural system – entry point being the language of the host country. Interior and exterior are not anymore a connected, fluid system. The exterior is foreign and illegible, making one's world confined to the interior of one's dwelling. In her book on migrant housing in Australia, Mirjana Lozanovska writes about Macedonian migrants and their houses in Australia: "Metonymic eruptions of the motherland, the fabrication and ornamentation of the old cultures, define the migrant housing interiors. Surfaces – walls, floors and furnishings – are veiled with a myriad of thin coatings: embroideries, lace, photographs, books, cloths, mirrors and souvenirs."<sup>10</sup> The house takes on the role of the mother-land, site for the secret language of the migrant: the mother-tongue.<sup>11</sup> One Kozarčanin described the feeling of living abroad with the words "Outside as if I were inside".<sup>12</sup>

5 See Dolečki, Jana: "Home, Foreign Home" - Commemorating the 50-year Anniversary of the Signing of the Agreement on Labor Migration between Austria and Yugoslavia, in Buden, B. & Dokuzović, L. (Eds.), *They'll Never Walk Alone: The Life and Afterlife of Gastarbeiters*, Vienna i.a. (2018), 89-101.

6 See Sekulić 2012, 36.

7 See Zimmerman, Tanja: *Between Nomadism and Sedentariness: Figuration of Space in literary and visual Culture of Migrant Workers from Yugoslavia*, in Bulatović, B., Longinović, T., Maksimović, G., Sedlar, Lj.B., Vladušić, S., Di Giacomo, P.L., Vladiv-Glover, S., Tatarenko, A., Duronjić, T.T. & Nomachi, Motoki (Eds.), *Serbian Studies Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Novi Sad (2017), 200.

8 In Conversation with Vedina Babahmetović, 08.11.2019, Zenica

9 Bogdanović, Nikolina: *Mjesto odakle vam pišem pisma*, HR 2018

10 Lozanovska 2019, 39.

11 See Ibid.

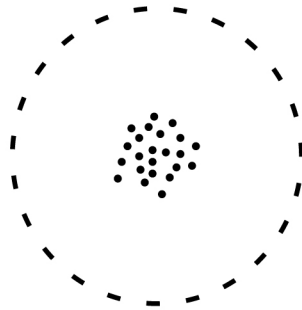
12 Personal interview, Kozarac, 30.11.2019





“There is only the stillness of death. None of the life which is over can now be changed. The bereaved goes back to live again his part in that life. If he could re-live it as he originally lived it, he would be able to experience the still open possibilities of the life now ended. But when the bereaved return to the past, they can never entirely forget what has prompted their return: they go back to the past to foretell a death.[...] In bereavement the past becomes fixed and the future withdraws. The past acts as a wall which prevents the present entering the life’s time.”<sup>1</sup>

Kozarac 1995  
destroyed during the war



<sup>1</sup> Berger / Mohr 2010, 181.

## 3 Rupture 1992-1995

Following the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, some of the worst war crimes since the World War II were committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. After the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia and the Referendum on the independence of BiH in 1992, Bosnian Serbs, supported by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and the Serbian government, mobilized their forces in order to secure the Serb territory. This was to be achieved by different forms of ethnic cleansing.

In April of 1992, Serb party SDS and other nationalist groups launched a coup in Prijedor, overtaking all the key buildings and functions of the city. In matter of days, all of the mainly non-Serb villages and cities have been targeted. In May of 1992, Kozarac disappeared. It was completely destroyed in the course of three days. People were either killed or displaced, their houses burnt to the ground and then bulldozed to prevent people from ever coming back.<sup>1</sup>

Almost all of the population of Kozarac went through some, or all of the concentration camps during the period between May and August 1992. These camps were Omarska, Trnopolje and Keraterm, all of them in the surrounding villages. Photo of an emaciated man behind a barbed wire, that became a symbol of the war atrocities, was taken by a team of British journalists exactly in one of these camps, Trnopolje, which caused international outrage and their shut down in November of 1992.<sup>2</sup> The survivors were displaced all around the world – Germany, Austria, Sweden, the US, Canada, Australia. Some 2000 people were killed or are still missing.

Already well established diaspora-network from the Yugoslav years, was instrumental for the formation of the 17th Krajina Brigade, which was of the one the best units of the Army of BiH. Survivors of the ethnic cleansing and expats from Western Europe formed a brigade with the main leadership from Kozarac. Having nothing more to lose, since their villages were already destroyed, they were fighting to come back home. This would later prove to be one of the most important factors of paving the way for return after the war - the leadership of the Brigade overtook the negotiations of the daily practical challenges of contested return.<sup>3</sup>

In December 1995, Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, which ended the War and divided the country in two entities, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Kozarac was now located in Republika Srpska, an entity with the Bosnian Serb majority.

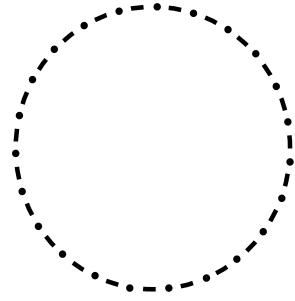
Now in exile, the time and space continuum of people of Kozarac was ruptured. The city with all the memories has been physically destroyed, members of families were gone, the present was non-existent, and the future was unimaginable.

1 See Sivac-Bryant 2016, 30.

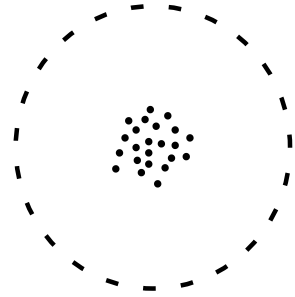
2 John, Tara: The Story of This Shocking Image From a Prison Camp in Bosnia Continues 25 Years Later, 22.11.2017, <https://time.com/5034826/fikret-alic-time-cover-bosnia/>, 25.07.2020

3 See Sivac-Bryant 2016, 75.

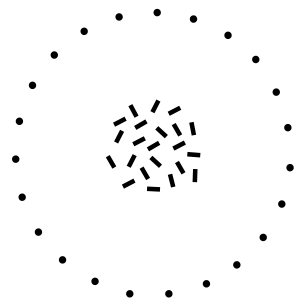
Gastarbajteri are fixed in their liminality. Past and future are locked against the present.



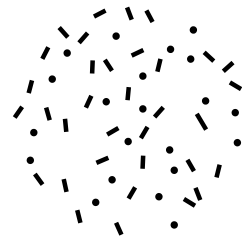
War destruction causes past to act like a wall. Future seems unimaginable.



Process of recovery is directed towards the future, the past withdraws.<sup>1</sup>

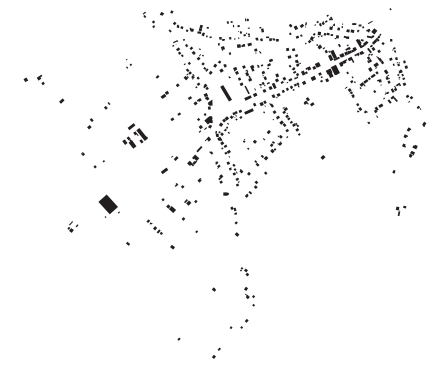


Maintenance processes keep future and past free and unfixed.



<sup>1</sup> This drawing is own addition to the concept of life-time of Berger and Mohr

Kozarac 1970



Kozarac 1995



Kozarac 2007



Kozarac 2020



## 4 Strategies of recovery collective therapy

“My body is everywhere: the bomb which destroys my house also damages my body in so far as the house was already an indication of my body. This is why my body always extends across the tool which it utilizes: it is at the end of the cane on which I lean and against the earth; it is at the end of the telescope which shows me the stars; it is on the chair, in the whole house; for it is my adaptation to these tools”.<sup>1</sup>

### Architecture as a body extension

Architecture as a body is not a new concept, yet in case of the migrant it gains a new meaning. Migrants inevitably lose the surrounding in relation to which they used to define themselves – they lose their subjectivity. All of the things that have been lost – beginning, house, family, friends, memories, language – were inscribed in their physical surrounding. The memories you have are connected to the specific places in the village or the city, as your friends and family are. You can read your surroundings, metaphorically and also quite literally: everything is written in the language you speak. While the architecture is being created by the body, it is also this same architecture that defines the body: *the very notion of a human subject does not exist outside the object of architecture*.<sup>2</sup> Surely, the most violent instance of migration is that of a war refugee. They were not just moved away from the architecture that defined them: that architecture does not exist anymore.

In the short film *My Father's Invisible Hand*, artist Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze from Georgia tells the story of his father, a former director of a car factory, who, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was forced to work in Portugal as a construction worker where his right hand was dragged, twisted, and ripped off by a concrete mixer. He returns home and lives as a farmer with a prosthesis that he mostly does not use because it only slows him down. His lost hand, however, is still somewhere out there, a phantom limb, which continues to work invisibly and provide its owner with a livelihood in the form of a Portuguese pension.<sup>3</sup>

Lozanovska writes about Atanas and his Churuk House – a Macedonian term for a bad, ugly house.

1 Sartre 1992, 325.

2 Lozanovska 2019, 44.

3 Gagoshidze, Giorgi Gago: *The Invisible Hand of my Father*, GE 2018

Atanas comes to Australia as an economic migrant from Macedonia and buys a house in the 1960s, which he continues to change, upgrade and adapt 40 years later. Despite his efforts, it remains a Churuk House for him, his body dismissing it as its natural extension.<sup>4</sup>

### Phantom Pain

Migrant's loss causes phantom pain: the loss that cannot be replaced. In order to relieve the phantom pain, one creates an illusion: if, for example, a patient feels pain because of a clenched fist that he does not have, the only way to release the clench is to do it with his healthy fist, looking at it in the mirror – creating the illusion of a lost limb. The mirror therapy is used as a strategy that produces architecture, a tool for reclaiming the lost and turning fiction and social constructs into reality – *in understanding architecture as both performance and imperative, we understand it as an entity which does, rather than is*.<sup>5</sup>

House at home is a cure for migrant's phantom pain; it is an extension of the body, a synecdoche for all that is lost, a reflection of the past and inevitably, the present. But it is not a mere reflection or illusion – it is very real.

In the case of Kozarac, the mirror method had been enabled through various strategies which created the needed infrastructure for the collective therapy of its inhabitants and its diaspora. Individual houses needed the functioning supporting infrastructure, which eventually fully adapted to the remittance lifestyle.

### First returnees

Right to return was a part of the Dayton Peace Agreement, yet the implementation of that particular Annex was extremely strenuous. The official political leadership of Prijedor was continuing with the war politics, trying to deny the return to the displaced, and keep the area ethnically clean. Furthermore, many of these people were indirectly or directly involved in war crimes: many of them were afterwards convicted war criminals. The generals of the 17th Brigade, Kozarčani, were the first who started negotiating the terms of their return. Together with them, the NGO “Srcem do mira”, a women-led organization, was another force paving the way back. As Sivac-Bryant wrote, women and elderly are often the first returnees to be tolerated since they are seen as not being able to pose any threats to challenging the status quo.<sup>6</sup> The year 1998 was declared the “year of the minority returns” by international agencies, and large sums of

4 See Lozanovska 2019, 34-36.

5 Jacob 2012, 38.

6 See Sivac-Bryant 2016, 70.

money were offered for the infrastructure rebuilding and as an incentive for local authorities to support the process. Kozarčani started coming back and cleaning the rubbles of their destroyed homes. They erected tent settlements for those who did not have accommodation in the nearby towns and NGO “Srcem do mira” was organizing mobile kitchens. From the 2001 “Handbook for Returnees to Bosnia & Herzegovina” by UNCHR:

## 2. Reconstruction

- If your house was destroyed or damaged during the war, you can seek assistance from cantonal/municipal offices of the Ministries for Refugees and Displaced Persons, Displaced Persons’ Associations and NGOs involved in reconstruction and implementing reconstruction projects in your area of return.

- Please note that only basic housing structures are reconstructed in order to make them habitable.

- Due to the scarcity of funds available for reconstruction, only those persons who first return and repossess their property or take part in cleaning activities of destroyed houses will be considered.

- To be considered for reconstruction in RS (Republika Srpska), authorities may request that you have submitted an Application for Voluntary Return of Displaced Persons and Repatriates for the Territory of the Republika Srpska to the Municipal Office of the Department of the Ministry of Refugees and Displaced Persons (OMI).

- If you suspect that any mines or minefields may be located on your property, you should contact the local civil defense office and request mine clearance to be carried out. Exercise extreme caution if you suspect mines to be present and under no circumstances touch them.<sup>7</sup>

Main organization for implementing the reconstruction projects in Kozarac was the German Bundesanstalt Technisches Hilfswerk or THW, funded by various European organizations and governments. Until 1999 they reconstructed 131 houses in Kozarac.<sup>8</sup> This way of post-war aided reconstruction, which had to be as fast and cheap as possible, introduced inevitable standardization which was not always successful. Houses were usually built on foundations of destroyed houses, retaining the dimensions of the house but introducing the standardized layout. This meant that the bathroom would be huge with the toilet and shower shoved in one corner and there would be one, or maximum two bedrooms for families of five, with unnecessarily wide corridors. Only the ground floor would be equipped, with the system of half a house, where further floors or spaces were to be built in the future by the owners.<sup>9</sup> A. remembers a story from

7 Handbook for Returnees to Bosnia and Herzegovina 2001, 6.

8 Grothe, Niels Freiherr: Besuch in Bosnien, in: Technisches Hilfswerk 4/99, 31.12.1999, 30.

9 Personal interview, Kozarac, 30.11.2019

1999 when all of the water heaters and sockets were stolen from their newly reconstructed home. These houses were essential as an impulse for further development and return, but yet they were not the instruments for regaining subjectivity and control.<sup>10</sup>

## Relinking the community

In the early 2000s, Kozarac did not have a proper physical infrastructure – water was usually available only one hour a day, electricity was an occasional occurrence and telephone lines were still not properly connected. Yet, there were satellite dishes on minarets forming a local internet access, and afterwards antennas on houses creating the first wireless network in BiH in 2003. This was initiated by a Kozarčanin, Švabo, whose friend from Zagreb asked him if he wants to play video games with him. They hooked up a wireless network, created an online gaming server which evolved into a blogging platform “bihcom” and lastly into [www.kozarac.ba](http://www.kozarac.ba).<sup>11</sup> Kozarac.ba had a column called “Jutarnji trač” – the Morning gossip, written by Švabo, where he would write something about Kozarac every morning. Kozarčani in the diaspora were reading this with their morning coffee – “We were waking up, and lying down with Kozarac.ba”.<sup>12</sup> Another important part of the page was the forum, which replaced the lost physical community with the online one. This was the place where returnees and diaspora were meeting, discussing, organizing events, construction projects, memorials and much more. Arjun Appadurai writes about the importance of the electronic archive in the diaspora stories: it is not just an instrument for debate and interaction, it can as well compensate some of the indignity that the migrant encounters by being a part of a minority in a new society, creating a relatively safe cyberspace.<sup>13</sup>

These initial years of enthusiasm, images of the future and the present constructed through the wireless lens and the post-war recovery, initiated many projects in Kozarac. This was the catalyst for many wealthier members of diaspora to invest in Kozarac and others to organize themselves into umbrella organizations for diaspora members with the goals to invest into back home.<sup>14</sup>

10 Personal Interview, Graz, 22.11.2019

11 See Sivan-Bryant 2016, 149-165.

12 Personal interview, Graz, 30.10.2019

13 See Appadurai, Arjun: Traumatic Exit, Identity Narratives, and the Ethics of Hospitality, in Blanco, L.A.C., Galán, I.G., Carrasco, C.M., Llopis, A.N., & Verzier, M.O. (Eds.), After Belonging: The Objects, Spaces, and Territories of the Ways We Stay in Transit, Zürich (2016), 38.

14 See Sivan-Bryant 2016, 149-165.







## Public infrastructure

While individual investors focused on profit gain which meant residential buildings and office spaces, others focused on community-building projects. One of such projects is the Monument to the Victims of Kozarac 1992-1995 (Centralno spomen-obilježje žrtvama sa regije Kozarca 1992-1995), built in 2010. It was an action initiated by the mothers of victims, led by the NGO “Srcem do mira” and funded mainly by Kozarčani – locals and diaspora. The project cost around 500.000 BAM (approx. 250.000 EUR), which was a significant sum for the time and the BiH standard. The round structure, designed by a BiH architect, has 1226 names (more were added afterwards) of the deceased inside, and numerous light rods on the outside.<sup>15</sup> The project was officially supported by the local government and introduced into the official zoning plan.<sup>16</sup>

Memorialization and culture of remembering – transitional justice - is still an extremely problematic topic in the post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of the concentration camps around Kozarac are yet to be marked in any way as such. Trnopolje is a school again, with a monument to the fallen Serb soldiers in its yard. Omarska is a fully-functioning ore mine, owned by ArcelorMittal Steel Company. In front of Keraterm there is a 50x80 cm big memorial stone, while the building itself is still being used. Yearly commemorations are the only time of the year where they are officially and collectively remembered as concentration camps. This indicates of what importance the erection of such a monument was, but as well as how impossible this task would have been without the self-management of people of Kozarac and Kozarac diaspora, since there are no systematic government efforts for collective memorialization. Already in 2012, first issues arose with the maintenance of the monument<sup>17</sup> – official Monument Board was initially in charge of the maintenance, until it would eventually fully fall under the local government’s jurisdiction. The object started to show the first signs of negligence, such as rust and burnt out light bulbs on the rods. In December 2019, these issues with maintenance persisted - at night, the monument stays in the dark.<sup>18</sup>

In the center of the city, there are many business spaces and residential buildings, some of them unfinished and partly empty. Locals say that many of these are owned by two, three main

<sup>15</sup> Personal Interview, Kozarac, 30.11.2019

<sup>16</sup> Tranziciona pravda u postjugoslovenskim zemljama, Izveštaj za 2009. godinu, 2009, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Svabo: Kozarac – Jutarnji Trač, 06.03.2012,

<https://kozarac.ba/2012/03/06/5559-838-kozarac-jutarnji-trac/>, 26.07.2020

<sup>18</sup> Field notes, December 2019

“investors”, Kozarčani living abroad. Investor urbanism is a common, even default state, in the transitional societies. Zoning plan of Kozarac can easily be altered, according to the investor proposals, wishes, and financial strength. The fact that it is being built with the capital being accumulated abroad (which equals more capital), strengthens the negotiating power of the investor but, together with the general indifference of the state and lack of appropriate legal frameworks, the distance lessens their responsibility towards the built even more. The investor uses the land, builds and moves forward if the current project does not fulfil his expectations. He is not there to witness the daily deterioration.

In her book on the remittance landscape of Mexico, Sarah Lynn Lopez writes about the persistent gap between initial migrant aspirations and ultimate project outcomes. Many public projects erected by migrant groups or individuals stay out of function or are never finished. The Rodeo Arena, which was supposed to be a catalyst for economic development in the rural area of the home village, ended up being a catalyst solely for further rodeo building; the community center built by migrants in their hometown challenged the socio-spatial logic of the town’s center which deepened the social tensions between the locals and migrants; asilo – a retirement home was built by migrants who never articulated a clear plan for managing the institution which left the asilo locked and empty since 2007.<sup>19</sup>

These public projects often reveal *the limitations of physical infrastructure to bring about social change in the absence of larger institutional, social and spatial transformations*.<sup>20</sup>

“Optimisti”, an organization founded in the Netherlands in 2004, led many smaller actions, such as renovation of the school gym, basketball court, dressing room, garbage bins and so on in Kozarac. Following the basketball court, they organized a yearly basketball tournament to honor their deceased friend, who was an avid basketball player. This summer event attracted (and still does) many Kozarčani from everywhere and one of them, after witnessing the event for a couple of consecutive years, decided to rebuild his house right behind the basketball court. Very soon almost all of the houses in Kozarac were rebuilt. These houses were now far away from the THW humanitarian houses. They were big, contemporary, built with the newest (and often imported) materials and they were exactly as their owners imagined them to be.

<sup>19</sup> See Lopez 2015, 225-256.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 256.







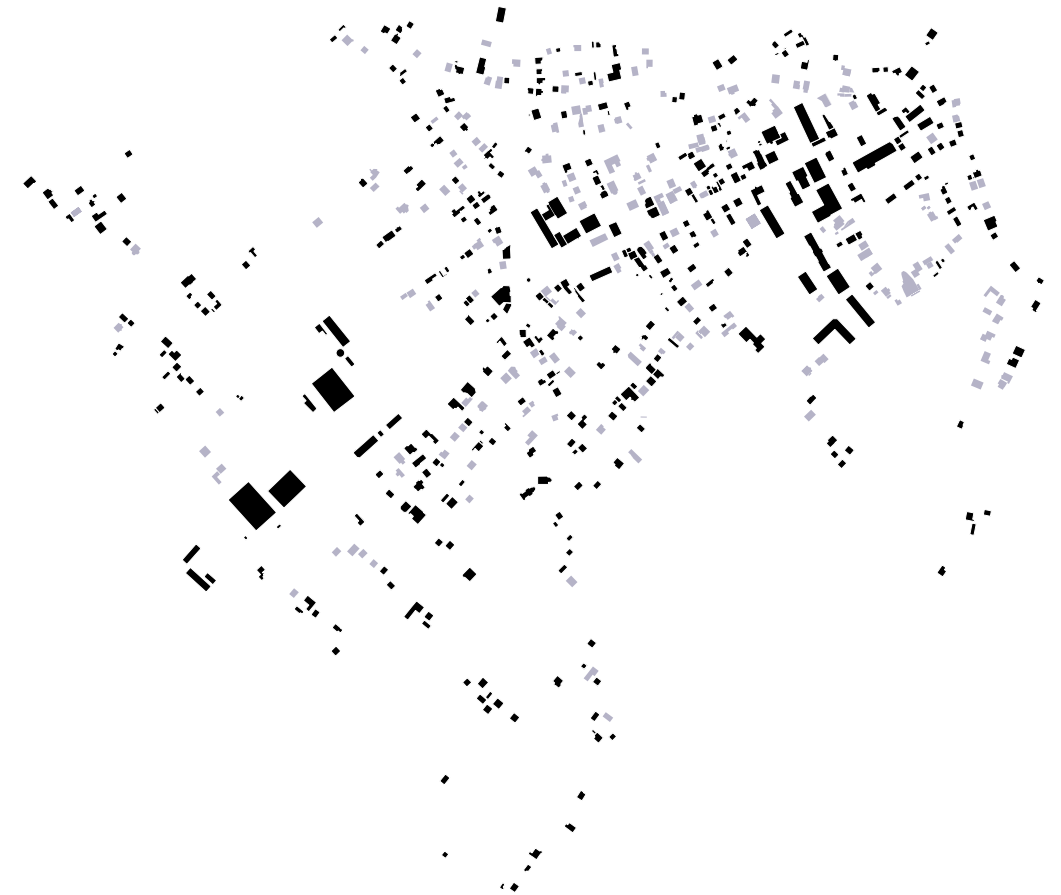






# Houses at home

houses owned by diaspora members











F. initially did not want to rebuild his house, which is located in the center of Kozarac. He had been living in Germany from the early '70s together with his family, had a successful business there and the war memories (he, as most of the population, went through the camp system) were strong. The house, which he and his wife built before the war, was designed by an architect and in its yard it accommodated a popular café in Kozarac, which was successfully operating for seven years prior to the war.

Coming back for the first time in 1998, he could not find Kozarac, because it did not exist. Today, a painting of the ruin their house was back then, has a prominent spot on the wall in the living room. Smaller photographs of the ruins are framed and scattered through different spaces in the house. It is a constant reminder of what they have been through, but more importantly - the reminder of what they have overcome.

Initial resignation to build disappeared with the collective enthusiasm of the cleaning rubble and sight of a neighbor who started planting flowers in front of the remains of his pre-war house. It was the solidarity and the sense of responsibility towards the destroyed city. Yet, for the past 40 years F. and S., his wife, constantly built their lives simultaneously in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany.<sup>1</sup> It is their accustomed way of living, or more precisely – the only way of living. Not having the house in Kozarac was, therefore, unimaginable.

A new house was built on the existing foundations, retaining the original outline. This new version had one floor more, to accommodate a flat for their other son. First son's flat was on the first floor, and the second son's flat was still being under construction at the time of my visit. S. furnished the first flat, in the nuances of white and brown, to the tiniest detail, such as the decorations and curtains which were made-to-measure. The second flat, still under construction at the time of my visit, had the exact same layout. Both flats had separate entrances, apart from the main entrance to the house.<sup>2</sup>

“Floors for children” are a common occurrence in BiH, which derive from the Balkan tradition of communal living. Yet, in the case of the diaspora house, they take on a new meaning. F. tells me his son, who grew up in Germany and lives there, has not been particularly interested into the process of building. His hope is that in this way he will motivate him to start participating. These additional floors for the descendants are now an instrument for ensuring the participation of new generations in the preservation of home – of origin. Maintaining, upgrading, changing a house is a performative act which translates into

1 Personal interview, Kozarac, 23.12.2019

2 Field notes, December 2019





maintaining parts of their identity.

On the ground floor there is a garage that is equipped with the necessary infrastructure in case it is to be used as a business space. The former famous café has been turned into a holiday house and a laundry room. This flexibility and ability to swiftly adapt to the given conditions is another characteristic of the diaspora houses. They are not mere replicas of the past; they are, on the contrary, future-oriented; intermittent, mobile, changeable life is being mirrored in their architecture.

D. fled Kozarac for Switzerland in 1992 with his family. He and his wife have settled in Zürich, where they had many jobs, found an apartment on the outskirts and had two daughters.

In 2002 they started building their house in Kozarac. The house has been mainly conceived by his late wife H., who drew the preliminary design plans. She had some experience in construction through a family member who was a civil engineer. The construction has lasted for three years. Both D. and H. were coming every second Friday to overlook the construction process, and going back to Zürich on Sundays. They were staying at a relative's house in the nearby city, while their parents, who were also in Zürich, took care of the children.

As a couple in their early thirties at the time, who were building their first house, they had a pragmatic and organized approach to the building. They hired a construction company which was following the whole process. Supervising the construction personally two to three times a month, accelerated and ensured the completion of the house. It is a two-story house, with a semi-basement as a garage. It took over some characteristics of a Swiss Chalet style, like gabled roof with wide eaves and stylized exposed beams.

Basement is a rarity in Kozarac because of the underground waters but also due to the tradition of the Bosnian house, which never had an underground floor and the cost factor. The first thing D. mentioned as a special characteristic of the house is the basement – this is also something that has been mentioned by other diaspora Kozarčani, as an example of a foreign influence in their ways of building. Many did not execute the idea of the basement, because of the water, and sometimes because of the inconvenience of building it on the existing foundations. In Switzerland, D. works for a well-known company that produces bonding and sealing construction materials.<sup>3</sup>

The interior of the house is minimalistic, with little color, mainly brown, white and black hues. Everything is impeccably clean and every object was bought specifically for the house,





like color-coded soap dispensers and towels. Most of the furniture has been imported from Switzerland, since there is never enough time during the holidays to buy it in BiH. D. is an avid cyclist, and everywhere in the house one can find traces of it, like small bicycle sculptures or wheels on the wall. In his garden, he is currently constructing a small pavilion where various historical agricultural tools will be exhibited.<sup>4</sup>

The Diaspora house is the predestined space for accommodating the ideal of settling down - of a fixed, uninterrupted life. One inscribes himself in every aspect of the space, putting pieces of what constitutes him as a person together, as a human being with aspirations, wishes and imagination.

D. is now the one who spends most of the time in the house, whenever he gets free days from his job in Zürich. His daughters are grown up and he is realistic - he does not expect them to ever come back, as they grew up in Switzerland and built their lives there. His parents are also living in Switzerland, and he cannot leave them there and they do not want to come back due to the state the BiH health system is in. His probable return is constantly being deferred.

S. was working first in Slovenia, then in Libya. His first house in Kozarac was the house built with his parents, traditional Bosnian house, based on the Ottoman oriental house principles. It was made out of *ćerpič*, adobe bricks molded of clay and dried in the sun. They were held together by clay plaster in the wooden frame, called *hatulas* and then plastered. After some years of working abroad, remittances enabled making of a new house on the foundations of the old one, this time out of conventional brick, with a more conventional - westernized layout. The members of his family living in Kozarac were managing the construction - S. would come on weekends while working in Slovenia, and every couple of months while in Libya.

There are almost no photos of Kozarac before the war since all of them were destroyed together with the city. In 1986, following the Chernobyl disaster, a couple of girls from Belarus came for a month to Kozarac, to recover and escape the radioactive air, at least for a while. One of the girls stayed with S. and his family. In 2019, they reconnected on Facebook, and she sent them a photo from that time - on the photo there is a house in the background and this is the only photo they have of their pre-war house. War destroyed this second version of the house, and drove the family off to Italy, Trentino - South Tyrol. Both S. and his wife A. were working with the idea of eventually returning to their homeland. Every month, a certain amount of their





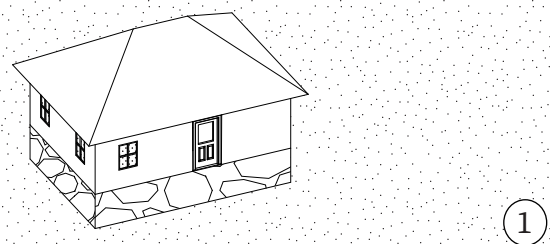
paychecks would be put aside, for the house in Kozarac.

Their house was under construction since 2002. The son of his aunt, who lives in Kozarac, has been in charge of the construction and numerous photographs and videos of construction have been exchanged. The process was time-consuming, intuitive and informal - the whole house was built on a daily wage. The original dimensions of the house are still partially visible under the various additions and extensions, conceived along the way, adjusting to the current situation. For example, out of the two floors for children, one was swiftly converted into a guest floor after the daughter married another Kozarčanin. She no longer needed her parents' house since she had another house in Kozarac to eventually come back to. The wall in the guest bedroom thus has the necessary kitchen outlets.

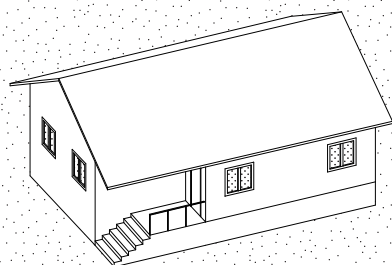
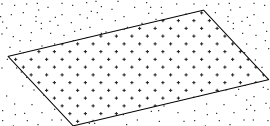
While S. claims there were no foreign influences on the design of the house, one can find traces of pseudo-alpine style like for example masonry cladding on the ground floor or half-hipped roof. S. asked why did not I ask him why is the TV on the fireplace, finding the fact amusing. The son of his aunt had the idea to build it as a decoration in the living room, and at the time it sounded like a good idea.

In their retirement, homeowners finally returned and started living in the house they have been building for the last twenty years. When asked when the house was finished, the answer was: "When it is finished, it will be time to go." New additions are constantly in the making, the latest one being the designated space for grilling.

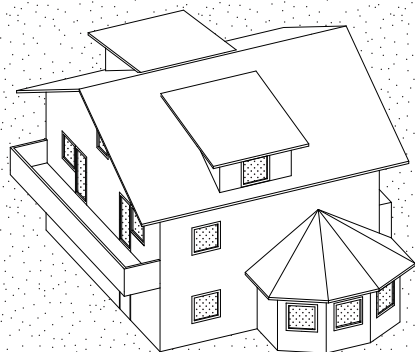
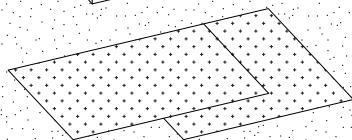
Now, in addition to the keys of his own house, S. also has the keys of eight other houses. These houses belong to his neighbors who are still a part of the diaspora and visit Kozarac once or twice a year. While some, as F., hire people to take care of their house during the absence, some hand over the keys to their neighbors. S. waters the plants, turns on the heating upon the yearly return of the owners or takes the shutters up to deceive the potential burglars. Sometimes, a neighbor who owns a house across the street, connects with his surveillance camera so he can observe the work on his house – from Switzerland, where he lives.<sup>5</sup>



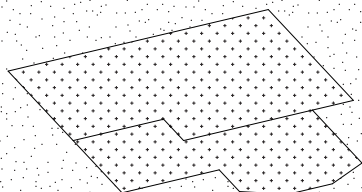
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## Evolution of the house

Since many Kozarčani were working abroad during the Yugoslav times, many have already erected their remittance houses in the seventies. Those houses were the upgraded versions of the vernacular Bosnian-Ottoman houses built out of čerpići - adobe bricks.

The first remittance houses were simple, usually with gable roof, built out of conventional bricks, a bit bigger and with more westernized layouts.

The second remittance houses were built after the War. They have become significantly bigger, providing the floors for future generations. Gastarbeiters lived with the idea of return; the second, post-War generation had a less hopeful outlook. Diversity of the architectural languages, combinations of many elements and constant growth in size of these houses was a natural consequence of the life abroad.

1 1960s traditional Bosnian house

2 1970s first remittance house - Gastarbeiters

3 2000s second remittance house - Diaspora





## Diaspora house is:

spacious  
adaptive  
flexible

future-oriented  
inter-generational  
performative

Houses at home are often big in size. They have to be able to accommodate future generations. The house requires maintenance, and the migrant builds floors for his children hoping the house will tie them to their roots. Yet, this sometimes does not happen, and the floor would be swiftly turned into something else. The migrant quickly adapts, and contrary to the popular belief, he lives in the present and the future more often than in the past. Intermittent, mobile life is inscribed in his way of building. Maintaining the house is a performative act, the act of maintaining the identity, roots, and defining a belonging. These houses are always being built, upgraded and adapted and they are rarely ever finished. Yet, the absence and distance are often a hindrance difficult to overcome, and houses at home remain empty most of the time.

- 1 ground floor, parents' apartment
- 2 first floor, apartment for the son
- 3 second floor, apartment for another son
- 4 entrance to the parent's apartment
- 5 entrance to the first son's apartment
- 6 entrance to the second son's apartment
- 7 storage room, garage, possible office space
- 8 ancillary rooms for possible office space
- 9 entrance to the office space
- 10 front yard
- 11 back yard













# Remittance Landscape

houses owned by diaspora members



residential buildings with most of the flats owned by younger diaspora members



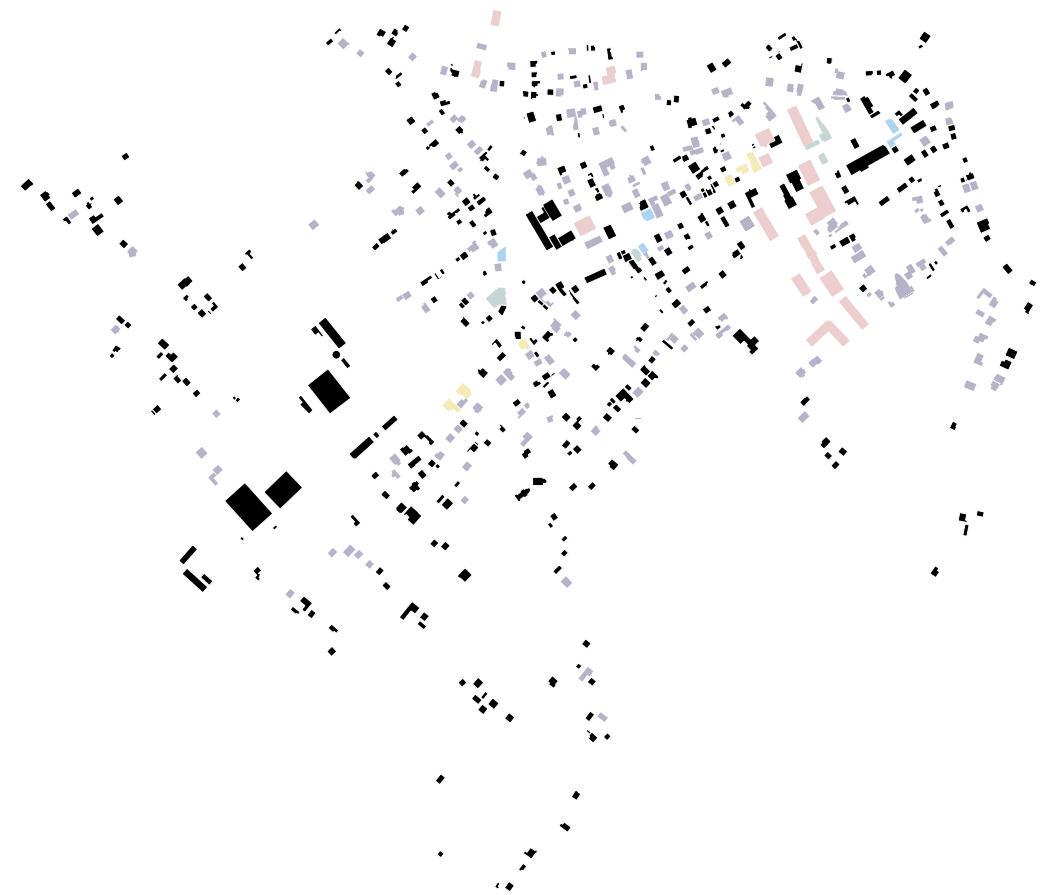
houses owned by diaspora members with a rented ground floor, usually for commercial purposes



public objects which remain completely or partially empty or unfinished



restaurants and cafés which operate seasonally









## 5 Maintenance

### Maintaining the reclaimed

#### The Ones who stay

After what is lost has been recovered - the lost limb has been materialized - the issue of maintenance remains to be solved. While the migrant has filled the gaps in his narrative and ensured the continuity of his space-time continuum, this continuum of the permanent residents of the hometown has been distorted.

Kozarac completely adjusted to the seasonal lifestyle. It lives excessively in the two summer months in which the diaspora comes back, bringing their extended families. These summer months are filled with many happenings, like Dani Kozarca (Days of Kozarac), a three-week long event with concerts, sport events and so on. Aside from the festivities, yearly return is ensured by the commemorative practices – collective rituals of mourning. Mass funerals are still occurring every year, since the mortal remains of many Kozarčani killed in the War are missing and are being found and excavated partially every year. The anniversary of the attack on Kozarac in May and the commemorative visits to the former concentration camp of Omarska, in August, are the two main communal practices for all people from Kozarac.

During the year, not only are the members of Kozarac diaspora absent, but also members of their families who live in Kozarac. They visit their children and grandchildren and usually stay for a couple of months. Younger people take on summer jobs in Switzerland or Germany. Young people from nearby villages and towns are taking on summer jobs in Kozarac. Most of the coffee shops and restaurants operate seasonally, with only a couple opened during the whole year. Prices rise according to the busiest months in the year.

“The winter period is the worst - I am saving my energy for the summer.”, one Kozarčanin told me. Locals, especially those involved in the summer events organization and various services, are hibernating during the year, working moderately, knowing their working hours during the summer will exceed twelve hours or more. Locals are servicing summers of the diaspora, while the diaspora struggles to be more included into the regular life during the rest of the year. The gap between diaspora, the displaced, and the locals remains. Conversation with the locals of Kozarac unveils the tensions between the two. As in every aspect of a migrant's life, ambivalence is the overarching sentiment. It is expected of the diaspora to be involved in the public

and communal life, especially in the form of investment, and the diaspora members are not *perceived as guests or visitors, but this is what is, in fact, expected of them.*<sup>1</sup> Yearly diaspora visits are, simultaneously, eagerly anticipated and frowned upon.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Remittance landscape

The infrastructure of the city is run by the locals, but often financed by the diaspora. Apart from the introverted, fenced houses, various public projects have been financed largely by the members of the diaspora, like the monument in the center, roads, the Aqua Park or residential buildings. Diaspora houses also very often have commercial spaces in the ground floor which are then used by the locals, for their small businesses. Residential buildings are half-empty as well – not because the flats have not been sold, quite on the contrary – almost all of the flats have been sold, but to the members of the diaspora. Usually younger Kozarčani, who do not want to embark on the strenuous venture of building their own house, buy these flats. Instead of houses at home, they choose flats at home – more practical, cheaper and a more contemporary option. This is becoming a prevailing choice of the third migration wave – Brain Drain. Consequences of the War, Dayton Accord and the transitional processes created an extremely unstable economic and political conditions in BiH. Young educated people are leaving for the lack of any kind of stability.

As discussed previously, maintaining the remittance-funded public projects comes with its own set of problems. It is hard to make clear distinctions between the responsible ones without wider political and infrastructural support. Being the Bosniak enclave in Republika Srpska, therefore a minority, Kozarac further lacks proper institutional support. Apart from the lack of political support, an ongoing issue is the absolute ignorance the urban planners expressed towards the remittance character of the city. In the latest description of the zoning plan, issued in 2007, it is written:

*Individual housing is present in this area, but there is a need to increase the capacity that will be in the function of the planned new work zones. New areas intended for housing are planned next to the already existing residential zones. In addition to individual housing, there is a need to introduce a more rational form of housing organization - individual housing in a row, as well as collective housing. In addition to housing, business activities compatible with housing are also planned.*<sup>3</sup>

1 See Boccagni 2017, 94.

2 Field notes, December 2019

3 Regulacioni Plan Kozarac 2007, 11.



There is no acknowledgement whatsoever of the seasonal character of the existing houses and the effects of absence on the urban scale of the city. This resulted in a zoning plan which has foreseen rows of many more residential objects on every free plot, between the existing buildings. Typologies of remittance architecture are a rather new concept and there are still no strategies for development of cities like Kozarac. Yet, completely disregarding the existence of the absence leaves no space for rethinking the existing strategies.

One summer in Kozarac there were twenty-eight weddings in one day. The local hairdresser had the same women coming every couple of hours for a hairstyle-fix, using up short breaks between weddings. Wedding receptions seized urban landscape of Kozarac, transforming big yards of the diaspora houses into venues and filling up a few restaurants to the last square meter.<sup>4</sup> Congestion of space indicated stretching of time.

## The Services

Security systems are a lucrative business in Kozarac. Almost every home is secured with multiple sensors and surveillance cameras. These are integral elements of the diaspora architecture, as a logical consequence of the frequent absence.

After multiple social networks took over the internet, tight community of Kozarac.ba disintegrated. Post-war optimism was fading away after its peak in 2008, following the global financial crisis and coming to terms with the difficulties of the fragmented, post-Dayton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Almost 80% of the objects were already completed at the time, and the need for a tight-knit community gradually started declining.<sup>5</sup>

House turned into an extremely private space, and the measures of securing it in the times of absence further inverted it, alienating itself from the surrounding.

The houses are protected with all kinds of fences which are another lucrative business in Kozarac. These fences come in many peculiar forms, shapes and materials. Often they do not have any real protective role, but rather a symbolic demarcation and emphasis on the owned – the piece of home.

A famous anecdote in Kozarac is about a man who installed the surveillance cameras in his stables so he could watch the sheep from his home abroad. Yet, while the cameras increased the control and blurred the lines between here and there, the human infrastructure of Kozarac is still needed. The case with the Kozarčanin from Switzerland who connects to his neighbor's camera so he could follow the construction of his house across

<sup>4</sup> Field notes, November 2019

<sup>5</sup> Personal interview, Kozarac, 30.11.2019

the street, illustrates this statement.<sup>6</sup>

Surveillance cameras supervise the houses in the absence of their owners, yet they still have their limitations. Human maintenance cannot be avoided. Keys of the house are usually given to the neighbors or members of the family who are permanently settled in Kozarac. If there are no family members or neighbors, men and women are hired to take care of the house. They clean the house, ventilate it, turn on the heating upon arrival of the owners, roll up the shutters to deceive the burglars and take care of the overgrown grass in the gardens.

This virtual connecting tissue lessens the feeling of absence, and takes over the role of the mirror, where the two presents of the migrant are becoming one, and neither of the two is an illusion anymore – at any given time. The act of collecting and archiving is always an active, ongoing process in a diasporic story. New videos are emerging every week: of Thursday market days, streets of Kozarac, new houses being erected and diaspora visits. Situations which could crop up in different spaces are experienced simultaneously.<sup>7</sup>

## The Ones who left

The father's lost hand secured his Portuguese disability pension and enabled him to retire and live in Georgia. The invisible hand is working somewhere and taking care of its owner.

The migration and loss caused by it is paradoxically at the same time an instrument that enables the construction of a house and the return of the lost. This person has to remain a member of the diaspora in order to be able to afford the maintenance of his way of life. Simultaneously, its place of origin becomes gradually more and more dependent on the remittance inflow.

Globalization, as Ellen Meiksins Wood writes, is in fact a phenomenon based on strengthening nation-states and economies, maintaining "competitiveness", promoting free movement of capital while restricting labor within national borders, and so on. Neo-colonialism or modern imperialism, imposed upon "third world" or "developing" countries is no longer based on direct colonial domination, but on the imposition of financial manipulation, debt, foreign investment, and labor imports. Therefore, there is one "real" state of belonging, within the

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> García, C. & Barajas, D.: Urbanisms of remittances. (Re)productive houses in Dispersion, in Goldberg, Mackenzie: S/P #61: Husos Architects trace the role of remittances on migratory urbanisms, 03.08.2017, <https://archinect.com/features/article/150020570/s-p-61-husos-architects-trace-the-role-of-remittances-on-migratory-urbanisms>, 24.09.2020





clearly defined boundaries.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely the great economic differences between nations that make this depreciated “double” life possible.

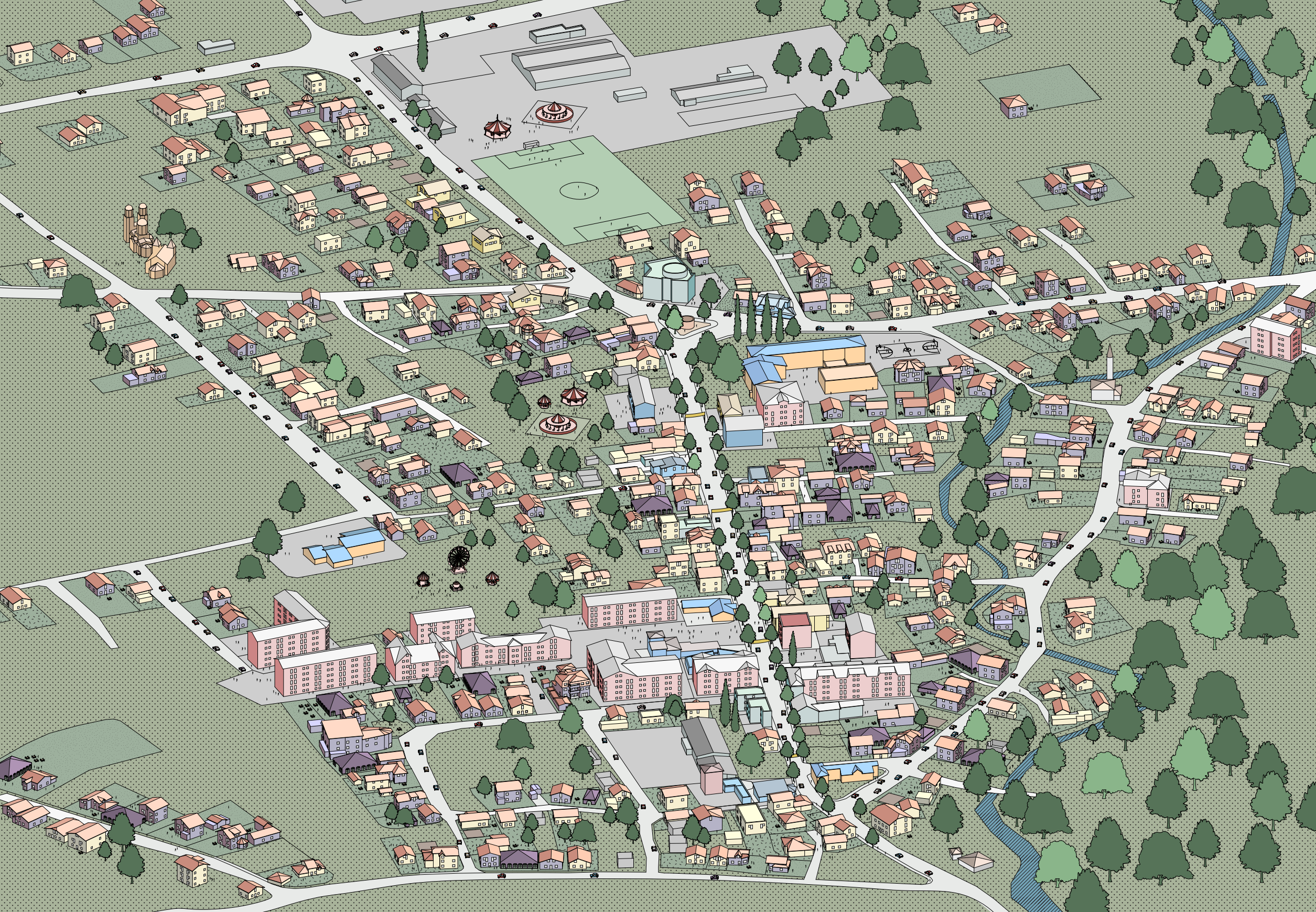
Local family runs a successful construction sheet metal business, being a family of tinsmiths since 1941. They have constructed fences, gutters and roof edge sheets for many houses is Kozarac. H. who works in the family company, describes the wishes of the clients and the way of articulating them. The reference is always based on a geographical location: wide roof edge sheets in Swedish style or an American box gutter. The prices are still universal for everybody, yet H. thinks about introducing a new price system: the Balkan one and the European one. The services in the Balkan catalogue would have the warranty of two years and would, of course, be cheaper. The services in the European catalogue would have life-long warranty and would cost accordingly. Reference system is valued if it originates from the outside. Quality of the materials is measured by an invisible scale of how “German” something is.<sup>9</sup>

The houses are valued in same manner, yet their otherness at the same time degrades the human value of their owners. This is an example of how imposed neo-colonial narratives are being subconsciously cultivated.

8 Meiksins Wood, Ellen: Unhappy Families - Global Capitalism in a World of Nation-States, in: Monthly Review, Volume 51, Issue 03, 1999, online at: <https://monthlyreview.org/1999/07/01/unhappy-families/>, 07.04.2020

9 Personal interview, Kozarac, 23.12.2019







# Afterword

As the story about Kozarac shows, it can indeed be argued that migration is almost always lined with a degree of compulsion. Combined with the nation-state narratives of belonging, neo-colonial identity constructs and the globalization-induced processes, it becomes a complex topic, with the migrant being held in liminality, without a right to claim any of the sides. The architecture produced by the migrant, therefore, occupies the same, transitional, ephemeral space.

Story about Kozarac also shows how the migrant wants to live, reclaim what has been lost and taken from him. Most tangible form of this is manifested in the form of a house, built remotely from abroad with the remittances. The house, apart from metaphorically filling in the gaps and acting as a performative tool for the preservation of roots and the identity, is a very real ownership of the piece of land. Apart from owning the land, with building a house, one captures a piece of space. These houses are a direct product of the intermittent, mobile life: they are future-oriented, intergenerational, performative, adaptable and flexible. They are being built for the whole lifetime of a migrant, ready to adapt to whatever life brings, while leaving spaces of possibility for the next generations.

Migrant remittances are profoundly transforming the landscapes. The house needs the maintenance infrastructure, which is partially provided by the city, partially by the migrants themselves. Diaspora invests in the city, yet these projects are often difficult to maintain without the wider political and infrastructural support. The city lives seasonally, with the summers of abundance and rest of the year, stillness.

Some diaspora members eventually return, usually in their retirement years, but for many this never happens. Some have no possibilities to come, being it that they have a family they would have to leave or the lack of perspective back in the place of origin. Some do not want to return as they have completely adjusted to the life in two places. Many young people are yet to leave, lacking stability and future in the transitional, post-war society. The second generation of migrants rarely ever returns. Still, some keep coming back to Kozarac to take care of the houses their parents built.

I was planning on visiting Kozarac during the summer, but due to the pandemic and the lockdown of the summer of 2020, that was impossible. Kozarčani joked how, for Kozarac, the lockdown seemed just like any other day of the year – if they have not been told it is a lockdown, they would not have even noticed.<sup>1</sup> But, the effects of the pandemic revealed how fragile the constructs of the remittance landscapes are. Many diaspora members did not visit Kozarac this summer, and the balance of the city system has been disrupted again. The number of visitors has been ten times smaller than in the past years and there were only three weddings. Those who did manage to come, mainly stayed home. Coffee shops and restaurants stayed empty and the locals are already feeling the effects on the economy.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to predict how cities like Kozarac are going to develop. But, to start thinking about possible strategies, it is important to insert the diaspora architecture into the discourse. Without analysis of the underlying political, economic and social framework, it is impossible to understand the diaspora architecture. Othering these houses, stigmatizing them as merely nouveau riche, kitsch aesthetics, means othering and stigmatizing their owners as well.

Reading the diaspora architecture is an instrument for changing the imposed narratives, coping with the past, healing colonial mentality, developing strategies for cities like Kozarac and lastly: rethinking the meaning of the house and its roles in shaping new ways of being.

1 In conversation with A.B., July 2020

2 Kozarski Vjesnik: Kozarac: Korona zaustavila dolazak dijaspora, 28.07.2020, [YouTube] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shCRGTDxosM>, 00:00-3:32





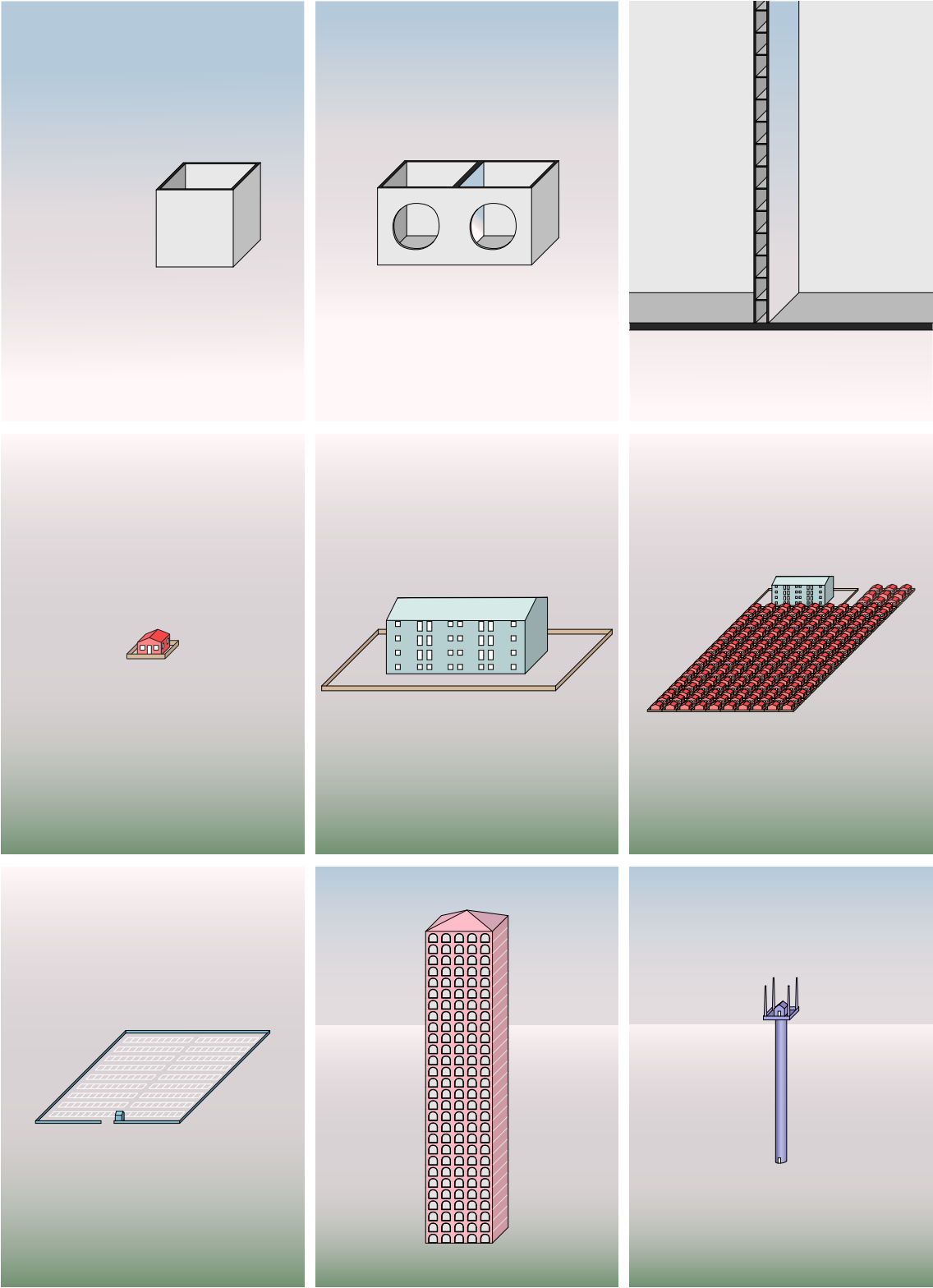


“Operating outside the official spheres of both the home society and the new society, the migrant archive cannot afford the illusion that traces are accident, that documents arrive on their own, and that archives are repositories of the luck of material survival. Rather, the migrant archive is a continuous and conscious work of the imagination, seeking in collective memory an ethical basis for the sustainable reproduction of cultural identities in the new society. For migrants, more than for others, the archive is a map. It is a guide to the uncertainties of identity-building under adverse conditions. The archive is a search for the memories that count and not a home for memories with pre-ordained significance. This living, aspirational archive could become a vital source for the challenge of narrativity and identity in contemporary times.”<sup>1</sup>

1 Appadurai, Arjun: Traumatic Exit, Identity Narratives, and the Ethics of Hospitality, in Blanco, L.A.C., Galán, I.G., Carrasco, C.M., Llopis, A.N., & Verzier, M.O. (Eds.), *After Belonging: The Objects, Spaces, and Territories of the Ways We Stay in Transit*, Zürich (2016), 38.



a) interpretative tools





Displacement may feel as if the world had shrunk. The interior and the exterior are not fluid anymore, the outside is illegible. Many things do not constitute the new world anymore - family, friends, language, memories, subjectivity. This may cause the phantom pain.

Mirror therapy box expands the existing world, what is missing can be reclaimed. The displaced regains the control and recreates what has been lost.

As the two worlds are being newly established, negotiated and reconstructed, the mirror is what connects the two. It houses an endless electronic archive, series of servers for linking tools. After Kozarac, ba, which created an online community in place of a missing one, social networks and security cameras took over the role of the connector. The act of collecting and archiving is still an active, ongoing process. New videos are emerging every week: Thursday market days, streets of Kozarac, new houses being erected, diaspora visits and numerous drone footages.

Every Diaspora house needs to be maintained, and the prolonged absence of its owners requires external services provided by other people: cleaning, ventilating, gardening. This requires caretakers - human infrastructure.

Younger diaspora members buy flats in the newly constructed buildings in order to avoid strenuous house building. All the residential buildings are full of sold, empty apartments. These also require maintenance.

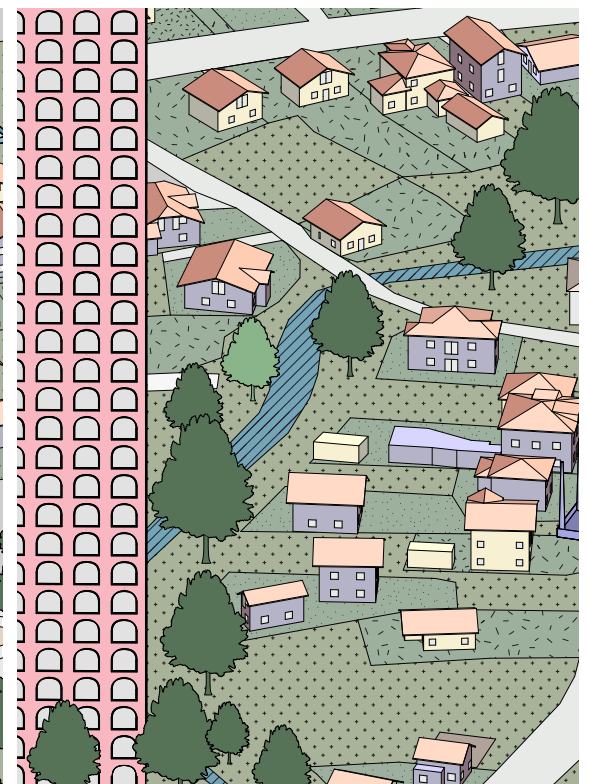
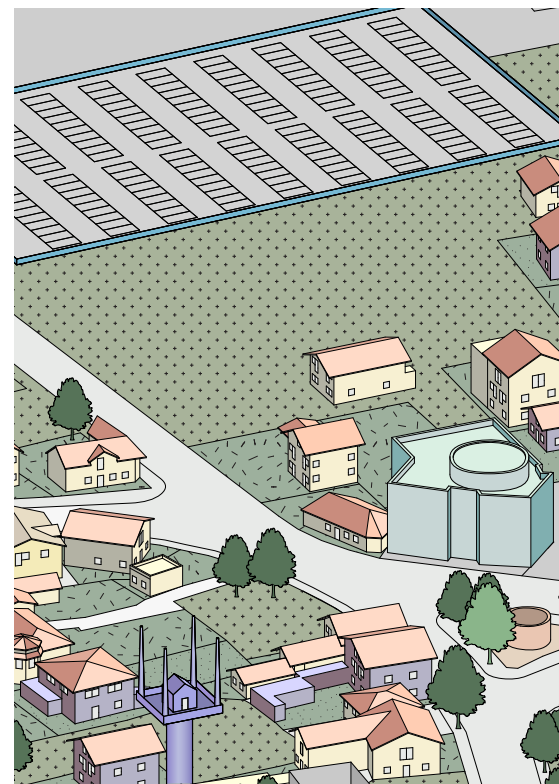
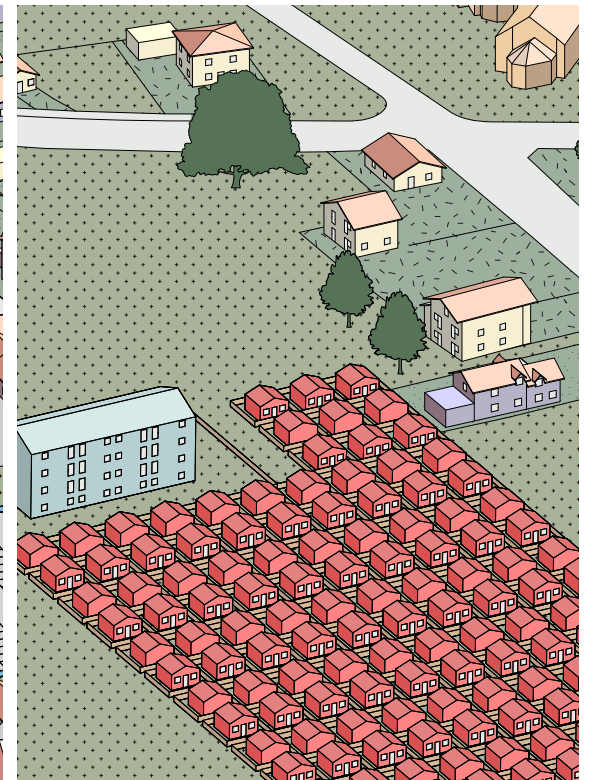
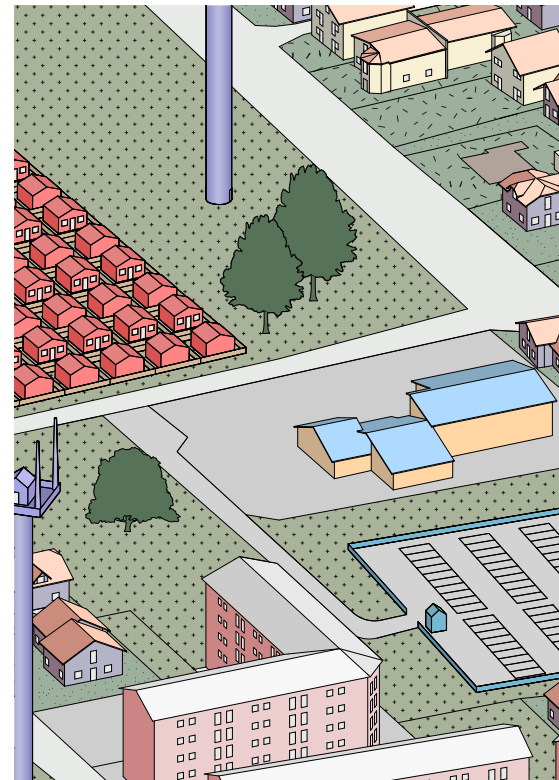
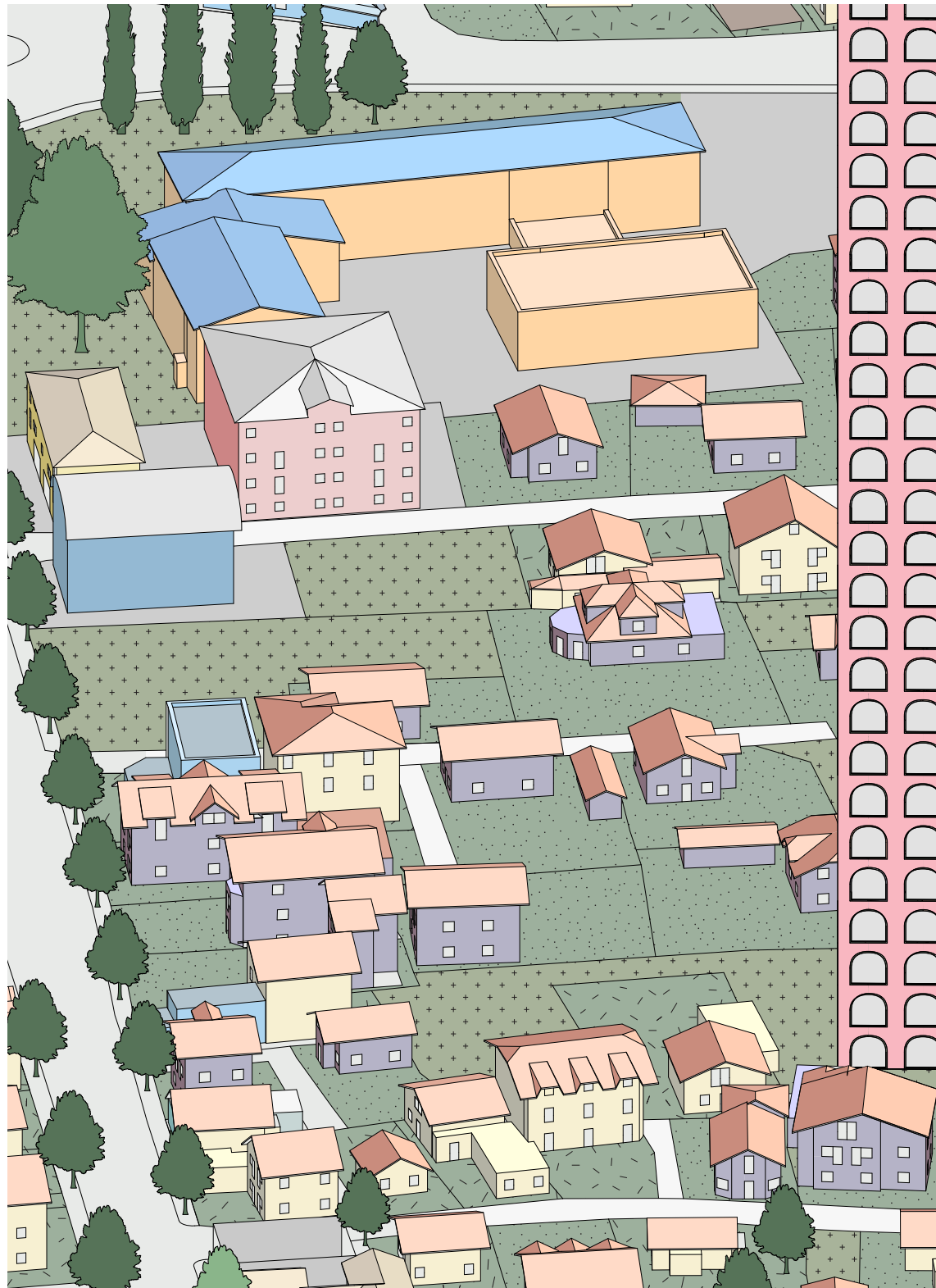
In Kozarac there are 179 maintenance houses and a maintenance apartment building with 15 flats.

Diaspora house is secured with numerous surveillance cameras. Some connect to their neighbors' house cameras to see their houses across the street. This way the worlds become one, the construction process of houses is being followed - the distance is being bridged. Surveillance towers offer live transmission for life elsewhere.

Those who return when retired especially appreciate not having to wait on the borders for hours during the holiday seasons. Cars with foreign license plates fill up Kozarac every summer only to leave behind the void during the rest of the year.

A summer day with 28 weddings is still being remembered in Kozarac. Number of weddings is the indicator of how normal the summer was. Pandemic of 2020 limited the summer to three weddings only.







b) fieldwork photo collection



















“When was the house finished?”

“When it is finished, it will be time to go.”



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## Fieldwork

Interviews in Kozarac conducted by Ajna Babahmetović during the periods of 30.11.-01.12.2019 and 22-25.12.2019.

Field notes produced during the same period.

## Figures

Ajna Babahmetović - all photos except for p.112 and p.113

Adnan Babahmetović - photos on p.112 and p.113

Figures on p.24, p.32, p.40 and p.44 are based on drawings from “A Seventh Man” by John Berger and Jean Mohr.

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