

## FRAGILE REPUBLIC: Defragmenting the public space in Sarajevo's Museums Quadrant

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“The public sphere [i]s a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes it as the bearer of public opinion”. (Habermas: 1974:50)

### Introduction

The perceived key dimensions of public space are associated with its inclusiveness, facilitation of meaningful activities, comfort, safety and pleasurability, all the elements that can be rendered by architectural design. Architecture as a discipline is considered to be public art, but its materiality is not enough to make it appropriated by the public. The architecture occupies space and forms the spaces in-between, which in turn need to be occupied in order to be activated. In recent times, from Dublin to Athens, Bucharest, and beyond, the public space has been a scene of political practices which differ from what is ordinarily associated with the public sphere. The claim, presence and organized participation of various members or public groups, albeit temporary, are a manifestation of the use of space through the four elemental categories of action: development, change, conflict and resistance. This paper looks into the transformation of public space around the central zone of Marijin Dvor in Sarajevo, Bosnia and in reference to the structural transformation of the public sphere and the *theory of communicative action* by Jürgen Habermas.

### Habermas and the Communicative Action concept

In her article “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style”, Williams Goldhagen (2005: 159-163) argued that the on-going conversation in architecture about its place and role in modernisation, and in the previous and current conceptualisations of the built environment, could be seen as the manifestation of the concept of *communicative action*, as coined by the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1929-) (**Fig. 1**).

ACTION		
	Oriented to results	Oriented to shared understanding
<b>Social</b>	Strategic	Communicative
<b>Non-social</b>	Instrumental	

**Fig. 1.** Brand's table based on Habermas' concept of action (Brand, 1990:25)

According to Brand (1990:26), the 'wider notion of rationality' has been central to the

most of Habermas' work, and based on the linguistic dimensions of the reason and the recognition of collective learning processes, both in technological-scientific and in moral-practical domain. He demonstrated his concept as operative in 'the most basic form of societal action, namely communicative action', coordinated 'through a use of language or corresponding non-verbal expressions oriented towards reaching understanding'. At the point when an understanding, 'a common definition of the situation' is reached, there is an implication for action. When a listener or observer reacts to a claim presented in a speech/act the action is coordinated in a following sequence: a/ understanding the meaning, b/ taking a 'yes' or 'no' position to it and c/ follow up with action on 'yes', according to the conventionally established action obligations). In case 'no' position is taken, the interaction can be switched off or change into a discourse in which both participants can change their positions (Brand, 1990:26).

Habermas introduces various aspects of the rationalisation of action, such as *teleological* (goal-oriented) or *norm-regulated* (oriented to the moral-practical knowledge), or *dramaturgical* (oriented to effect or deception), but in terms of social action, he was mostly interested in the element of a *shared understanding*, rather than goal-achieving, and consequently in the 'interpretive' aspects of it (Brand, 1990:31).

With regard to the question "whether 'rationality is culture-bound', Habermas's position favours its universality, as long as it does not only represent goal rationality and if it considers the validity claims concerning the social world and the world of inner states and feelings (Brand, 1990:33). In reference to social groups and their inter-relationships, he introduces the category of Lifeworld, as a reference system comprised of society, culture and personality (Habermas, 1987: II 138). Culture is here 'the stock of knowledge [...] which provides interpretations' and personality is defined as 'competencies that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in apposition to take part in process of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity' (Habermas, 1987: II 138).

Habermas believes that the Lifeworld is in a process of *structural differentiation*, (**Fig. 2**), where the dynamics between each element can be described as follows (Brand, 1990: 35-36):

- Between culture and society, the trend is an increased disconnection of institutional systems from world views;
- Between personality and society, the trend is the coming about of an increasing scope for the creation of interpersonal relations;

- Between culture and personality, the renewal of tradition becomes increasingly dependent on the critical and innovative activities of individuals.

PROCESS OF DIFFERENTIATION OF THE Lifeworld		Form	Content
	CULTURE		
	SOCIETY		
	PERSONALITY		

**Fig. 2.** Table based on Brand's explanation of Habermas' concept of action (1990:35-36)

On the cultural level, Habermas sees a process of separation of form from content, in which the core of cultural traditions is transformed into formal elements and increasingly separated from the concrete content of these traditions, thus turned into procedures of argumentation, abstract and standardised values (Brand, 1990:36). On a societal level, such separation appears in the legal order and morality, which have less to do with concrete contents, and on the level of personality, it is visible in the separation of cognitive structures from the concrete contents of cultural knowledge, in favour of 'the "formal-operational" skill of quantitative reasoning' (Brand, 1990:37).

Habermas describes the *increasing, functional specification of processes of the reproduction of culture, society and personality*, which can be seen in the way the specific institutions and forms of discourse are developed 'for the pursuit of the sciences, humanities and arts, (culture); in [...]the coming about of specific institutions in the political sphere which provide the basis for "discursive formation of the will" in political matters (society); [...] [and] finally, [...] of specific institutions for the education [...] and [...] the reflection on education as a specialised task in the form of pedagogy (personality)' (Brand, 1990: 37; Habermas, 1987: II 146-147).

Lifeworld is for him one aspect of the society, the other being the System, and therefore he distinguishes between *social integration*, as part of the symbolic reproduction of society among the participant agents, and *system integration*, perceived as the 'functional intertwining of action consequences' (Brand, 1990:38). The processes of differentiation, according to Habermas, imposes 'heavy demands on the interpretive capacities of actors', so that the whole areas of societal action, primarily in the systems of governance and finance, 'drop out of language' (Brand, 1990:38).

Accordingly, the Public Sphere in the Social Welfare State Mass Democracy is characterised by the compromise negotiated between social organizations which deal with the state in the political public sphere, be it directly with administration or through political

parties (Habermas et al., [1964],1974:55). The public and private realm is interwoven, whereby the political authorities assume certain functions in commodity exchange and social labour and vice versa, social powers assume political functions. The political public sphere of the social welfare state is characterised by a peculiar weakening of its critical functions, which resort to the “public relations” forms rather than to the organic growth from the social structure, even though it operates within the extended fundamental rights of the welfare state. Habermas saw a danger of the disintegration of this model, due to the transformations of the public sphere itself and called for a new rationalization of power through a medium of public discussion among private individuals and under the mutual control of the rival organizations committed to the public sphere, by their internal structure as well as in their relations with the state and each other.

When Williams Goldhagen (2005: 159) argued for a change of “modernism’s biography” in favour of a new framework for a *discourse on modernism* which would be conceptualised *itself as that discourse*, she implied the need for the broadening of a “community of recipients (architects, urbanists, critics, curators, historians, and theorists”. Bringing the perspective of practitioners and scholars in the same intra-disciplinary discourse pool, would, in her opinion, create an opportunity to build on “the many important findings and insights of several generations of scholarship [...] while resolving some of the major problems that have either emerged in, or were not resolved by that scholarship” (Williams Goldhagen, 2005:159). This would necessitate the examination of discourse in its *synchronistic flux*, taking into the account an impact of the external phenomena and the consequences that would have shaped the four central dimensions of the internal structure of the discourse: cultural, political, social and formal.

The notion of synchronistic flux brings dynamism to a complex matrix in which a combination of a timeline and changing phenomena of the generally agreed categories and elements can be observed, acknowledging also the inherent limitations and the potential for an observer to change position. At this point, the question is posed, borrowing from the communicative action as an outline reference framework, if and how Habermas’s concept of public sphere could be applied to public architecture and public space (as manifestations of culture). Could these be then, in terms of social action, categorised as *non-verbal expressions oriented towards reaching understanding*, where the users of architecture, *public*, become counterparts with a position of *observer* or *participant* (as personality and as society), with an inherent potential of interpretive understanding and with *the potential to provide interpretations* (culture)? Further question can then be asked: what role the architects have

(as society and culture), in the structural differentiation, on one hand in the ‘increasing scope of interpersonal relations’ and on the other, in the ‘critical and innovative activities’ serving the ‘renewal of tradition’ (Brand,1990: 36).

### **A Field Report from Sarajevo’s Marijin Dvor**

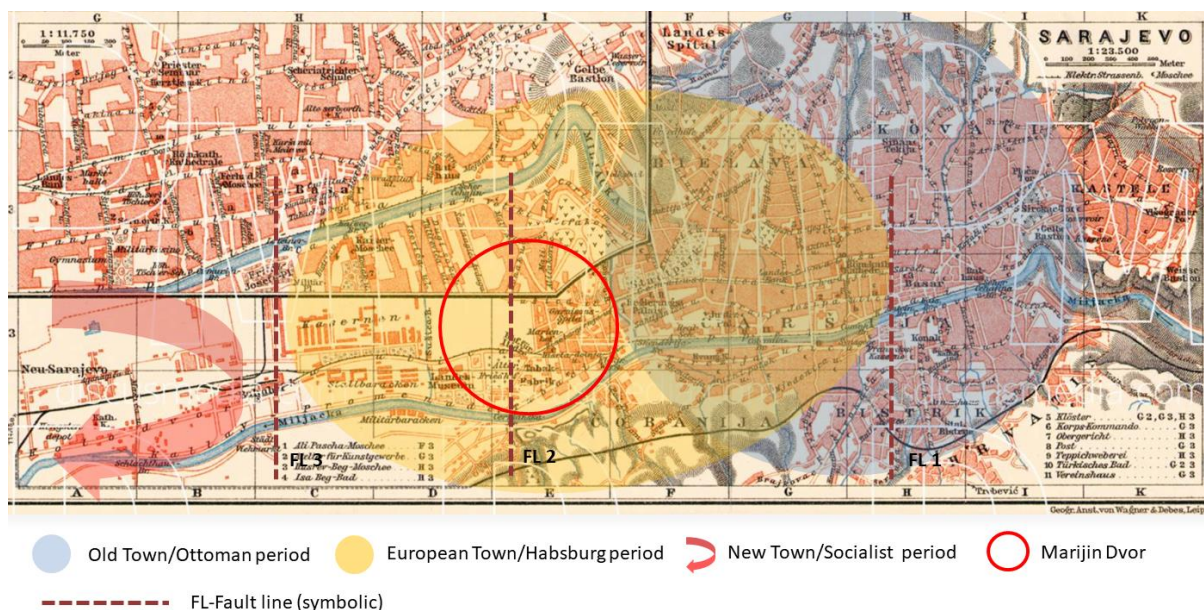
Taking from the notion of public space as a *non-verbal expression oriented to reaching understanding*, a graphic model can be constructed with the four aspects of action: development, change, conflict and resistance, supplemented with the communication outputs within each aspect, in a simultaneous timeframe. It is suggested that a series of such models can be developed as an analytical template using the historic timeline references to observe the synchronistic flux and the position of architecture and urban space in it.

As an illustration, the central Marijin Dvor zone of Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is used here to simulate a field action in public sphere, based on the few critical hours in the recent history of the city. A short gaze to its history shows that the urban field of Sarajevo witnessed several close historic encounters of different urban concepts and urban forms, which left some symbolic fault-lines in its urban fabric. The first one was drawn between the Old Town, founded as a provincial capital after the Ottoman conquest (1463-1878), and the Central European city which grew under the Austria-Hungary rule (1878-1918). While this line demarcated where East had symbolically surrendered to West, the second fault line has marked the end of a Habsburg city at the edge of Marijin Dvor, with the exception of the landmark complex of the National Museum/*Zemaljski muzej* and the Military Barracks to the west beyond the line. The boundaries were slightly moved westward during a short period of the Yugoslav Kingdom (1918-1941), during which a number of buildings from the first phase of Modernism in architecture have been built across the city (Žuljić, 1991: 37-43). After World War 2, Marijin Dvor zone grew as an imagined socialist city (1945-1990), based on visions to make it into the institutional headquarters of government, higher education, culture and public enterprise organizations. Other developments, predominantly residential and industrial, spread on the north, north-west and west side of the city, highlighting the remaining third fault-line at the intersection of Old core of Sarajevo (Ottoman and Habsburg) from New Sarajevo (Yugoslav/Kingdom and Socialist) (Žuljić, 1993:102).

The contours of Marijin Dvor zone are legible from the early urban survey maps and are flanked by the Military Barracks/*Kasarna Maršala Tita* on the west and anchored with



the Marijin Dvor /Maria Court residential block, to the east, with Gorica hill marking the northern boundary and the river Miljacka the southern one (Fig. 3).

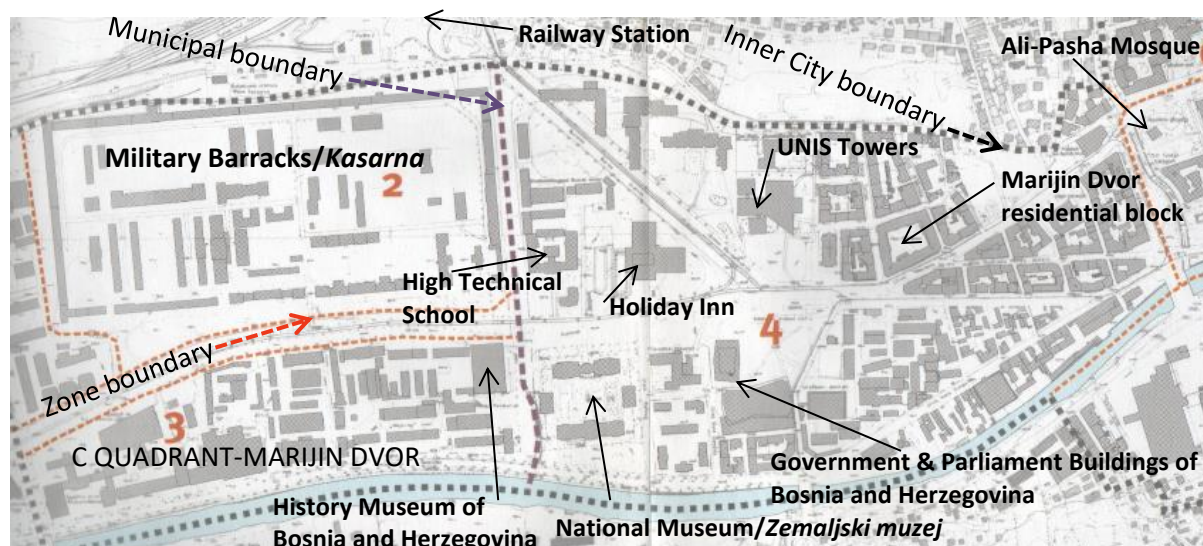


**Fig. 3.** Urban Map of Sarajevo, 1913, Annotated by the Lead author (Source: [https://www.discusmedia.com/maps/old\\_maps\\_of\\_sarajevo/4393/](https://www.discusmedia.com/maps/old_maps_of_sarajevo/4393/) (accessed 14.01.2019))

Conceived after the World War 2 as the new administrative centre of the city, Marijin Dvor zone has been in focus of some forty architecture and urban competitions and in many ways, an ideological battlefield among planners and architects (Ugljen Ademović and Turkušić, 2012:233). In 1955, the architect Juraj Neidhardt (1901-1979) with his team won the first award at the competition for the outline urban design and conceptual designs, which included the building for the new National Assembly on this location. The winning proposal was presented as “urbanism with human scale” and inspired with the Bosnian vernacular architecture, in which the authors saw a representation of a “proto-Modernity” (Grabrijan and Neidhardt, 1957). However, there were other visions and the project was caught between the economic restrictions, and the political and professional interference, as well as the delayed approval of the general urban plan by the City Urban Council in 1977. As a result, the National Assembly and the government buildings complex were completed between 1974 and 1980 (Kapetanović, 1988:367-368; Ugljen Ademović and Turkušić, 2012:242).

The northern side above the East-West longitudinal which runs through Marijin Dvor, two prominent new structures designed by Ivan Štraus (1928-2018) and his team, were added to the field. Directly opposite the National Assembly, a stocky volume of the Holiday Inn Hotel and the twin towers of the UNIS company rose almost equal in stature to the government and the executive power centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the exception

of the modern residential apartment blocks behind the High Technical School building and others to the back of the field, Neidhardt's urban vision of the 'zigzag sequencing' and 'a Carpet City' pattern of architectural volumes was completely downplayed (Ugljen Ademović and Turkušić, 2012:240) (**Fig. 4**).



**Fig. 4.** “Program of the Inner City urban development of Sarajevo”-part, Zoning map, 1997, annotated by the Lead Author. (Source: Zavod za planiranje razvoja Kantona Sarajevo, 2000)

The case of Marijin Dvor and its urban development draws attention to the generational change and the clash of architectural visions, but it also points out to a disconnect between older and newer parts of Sarajevo, which can be observed as differentiation of traditions at cultural level, and at professional level, with architecture acting as a representative of a societal group. At the level of urban morphology the consequences are a weakened coherence and continuity, to the point of exclusion, as was expressed by some Sarajevo authors at the time of a radical pressure on the urban fabric and life of the city (Karahasan, 2012:113; Bakšić, 1997:301).

When this architectural battle-field turned into a real one at the start of the war and the siege of Sarajevo (1992-1996)<sup>1</sup>, it was exposed and targeted almost exactly at the intersection of the Habsburg and Socialist city, along the infamous “Sniper Alley”(Burns, 1992) with aim to break the city (Silber & Little 1995:253; Duraković, 2004:204-205). A number of international authors of historical studies (Malcolm, 1994), military memoirs (Doyle, 2018), or first-hand journalistic accounts of war (Silber& Little, 1995), wrote about this difficult period of history of Bosnia and Herzegovina with detailed insights and understanding of the

<sup>1</sup> For further detail, see the Fama Collection with the Virtual Museum of the Siege of Sarajevo, at <http://www.famacollection.org>, accessed 02.10.2019

events, not discussed here at length. Instead, for the purpose of a communicative action modelling on a micro-urban level, only a snapshot of the *beginning narrative* of the war is outlined here.

## Warchitecture<sup>2</sup>

The anti-war protests took place in Sarajevo on the 5th April 1992 with estimation that some 50,000 to 100,000 Bosnians of all national groups took to streets that day (Malcolm, 1994: 235). The demonstrations were staged peacefully by thousands of citizens of all nationalities who were demanding from the Yugoslav Army and the nationalist Serb Democratic Party (SDS) to remove the barricades mounted the previous day at the southern part of the city. The citizens declared a ‘National Salvation Committee’ and held a meeting at the forecourt of the Parliament building, ‘with speaker after speaker emerge[ing] from the crowd’, denouncing the tri-partite leadership and calling for the new elections (Silber and Little, 1995:250-253). Then, from the upper floors of the Holiday Inn, where the SDS leader Karadžić, had until then had his headquarters, the fire was opened on the crowd, killing six people and injuring dozens more, and in words of Silber and Little (1995: 249-253), ‘the gates of hell’ opened.

In the first years of the war, the architects and planners gathered around the professional Society of Architects of Sarajevo (DAS) held together heroically, managing to produce a war issue of the magazine ARH (1993) which documents the scale of destruction, described in the editorial as ‘horrors we used to watch in films [...] but a pale reflection of all the psychological and physical harassment which has become a part of our everyday life’ (Jamaković and Pleho, 1993: 8). Starting with the *In memoriam* to colleagues, the civilian victims of the aggression (ARH, 1993: 10-19), the magazine contributors give the professional account of various aspects of the war impact. While Željko Jovanović (1993: 107) comments how the ‘war [intrudes] in the process of spatial planning’, another architect and planner, Vlasta Žuljić (1993:104-105) discusses the principles of post-war reconstruction, arguing for the preservation of urban block building patterns from Austria-Hungary period and the integrity of the historic traffic alignment, some of which date from the Roman and Turkish periods.

Among other, Žuljić (1993: 105) also addresses the potential of the then deserted “Maršal Tito” Barracks argued for the post-war exploitation, which had previously been

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<sup>2</sup> The title used for the wartime issue of the ARH Magazine No. 24 and subsequently the project by Sarajevo architects to raise awareness about the targeted destruction of the city (Špilja & Ćurić, 1993:82; Asocijacija arhitekata DAS-SABiH, 1994)



inaccessible to citizens and therefore excluded from the city. She saw it as a highly valuable complex, whose careful transformation might provide the important connective glue between the historic core and westward area of New Sarajevo, developed in the socialist period. An international competition for urban design ideas, organized by the Canton Sarajevo Urban Institute and endorsed by the Union of International Architects in 1999, with the program to develop a University campus with a mixture of cultural and commercial content (Zavod za planiranje razvoja Kantona Sarajevo, 1999) showed similar ambition. The subsequent developments here include a new Embassy of the United States completed in 2010 (FENA, 2010) and a partial reuse and adaptation of the badly damaged former barracks for the University of Sarajevo Campus, a current location for several faculties, National and University Library and The Oriental Institute ([www.oslobodjenje.ba](http://www.oslobodjenje.ba), 2017)

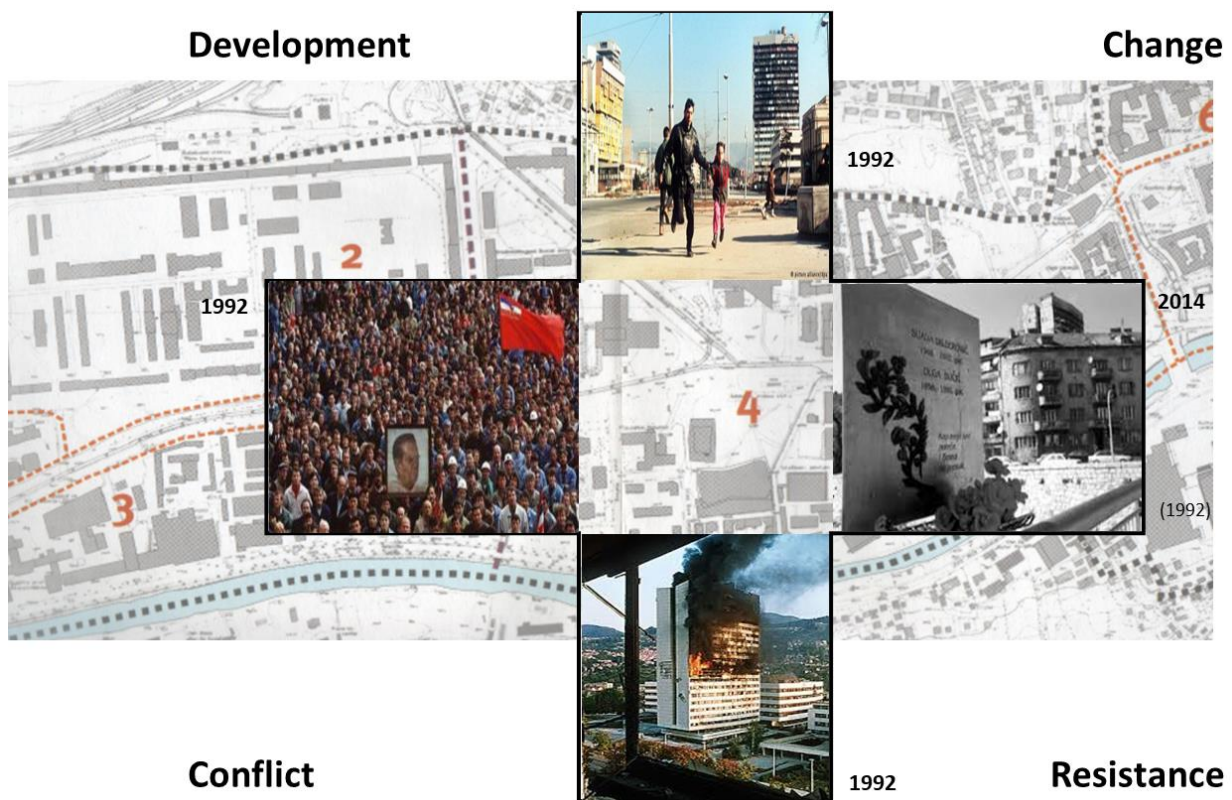
### Communicative action and the shared understanding modelling at urban micro-level

The proposed model for testing the interpretive potential of the shared understanding is based on the four types of action: development, change, resistance and conflict, shown on an urban segment onto which the simplified frames (Huseinović, 2017; Mulić-Bušatlija, 2002) of the narrative are superimposed, using the public area of Marijin Dvor and the date of the 5th April 1992 (**Fig. 5**). The scene of public action is recreated at the open space between the Holiday Inn building, the National Assembly/Parliament and government buildings, and the Vrbanja Bridge to the south of the latter two, shown on the 1997 Zoning map (Zavod za planiranje razvoja Kantona Sarajevo, 2000: 34). The two-dimensional sketch is used here to retrospectively map the sequence of action in space in four frames, as a template for communicative action exercise, in which the four action forms are inter-related and interchangeable.

The illustration of four forms of action offers a radical case of the *structural differentiation*, where the dynamics between each element can be discussed as follows:

- What happened between culture and society (the increased disconnection of institutional systems from world views): the imagined federal Yugoslav culture and the social/political groupings increasingly distrusting and fearful of one another; the disconnect with Sarajevo's urban population and the elected political structure, unable and unwilling to overcome the nationalistic divisions, which ultimately became radicalised;

- What happened between personality and society (the trend is the coming about of an increasing scope for the creation of interpersonal relations): here the democratic elections and new political associations have radically fractured the old ones and created new forms of public sphere with disparate groups, more and more dis-associated with the old system and with one another ;
- What happened between culture and personality (the renewal of tradition becomes increasingly dependent on the critical and innovative activities of individuals): the disassociation with old system – shared identity, shared belief systems, shared social practices are invalidated and the new associations of individuals seek new solutions in the old traditions and quasi-traditions, thus further alienating the shared culture.



**Fig. 5.** Mapping the communicative action model based on the images of the first day of war in Sarajevo in Marijin Dvor area around the National Assembly and Holiday Inn buildings, 5 April 1992 (Photo credits from top clockwise: [www.alamy.com](http://www.alamy.com), DTAEJ, 19 Feb 2014; @ picture alliance/dpa at <https://www.dw.com/sr/dan-kad-su-po%C4%8Dele-da-padaju-granate/a-38317833>; Anon at <https://www.bhdani.ba/portal/arhiva-67-281/251/t25122.shtml>; Evstafiev, Mikhail Evstafiev at [www.en.m.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org); [www.photoarts.com](http://www.photoarts.com) at <https://goo.gl/images/iwt737>; Annotations by the Lead Author)

## Concluding notes

The impact of war on the built environment and public space in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sarajevo was radical and utterly destructive, as both the older heritage of various periods or social groups and the newer heritage of the shared traditions and identity were indiscriminately targeted (Mustafić, 1993:26-31). The fact that destructions of that scale continue to occur in different places in the world and in a variety of forms makes such irrationality universally difficult to comprehend, but not less urgent to understand and adequately address.

There has to be more investigation into the suggested applied method of the communicative action concept in order to use it for the analysis of architecture and public space and decide whether such rationalisation of public sphere and practice has a role in reconciling the destructive or conflicting trends. On a more pragmatic level, as long as both are being a part of the public sphere, a more detailed understanding of the user needs, practices and reactions is called for, in particular during the early development of new public architecture briefs. The application of communicative action principles could find its use with the methods of user behavioural mapping, as well as in forms of post-occupancy spatial assessments which could better serve the future user-focused urban and architectural tasks. It can be useful for an architect in the role of outsider-creator to better understand the position of user, without which the outcome of the architects' work ultimately can 'drop out of language'. The disconnect with the user, as opposed to connecting with the client might be the downfall of the contemporary architecture and the cause for rejection by the public. In the radical scenario, such disconnect might explain some of the causes for the destructive behaviour by societal groups who feel excluded or threatened and therefore opt for a different interpretive understanding and radically different action, as was recently the case with the burning of the hotel in Rooskey, Co. Leitrim, Ireland, which had been earmarked to provide accommodation for asylum seekers (Surve, 2019).

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