Inspiring urbanity

Improving the public environment in Grosuplje, Slovenia

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Master degree project in Landscape Architecture, 30 hp
Självständigt arbete vid LTJ-fakulteten, SLU
Landscape Architecture Programme, Advanced level
SLU - Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Alnarp, 2011

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Foreword

Before you set out for a journey through the results of my studies, I would like to thank everyone, who has encouraged, helped and inspired me in the process towards the completion of this thesis. Most of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Eva Gustavsson for all the guidance, support and knowledge she has offered and shared with me throughout the past months. It meant a lot to me and it always will.

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Abstract

The central theme of this thesis is urban design, which combines architecture, landscape architecture and city planning in order to make urban areas functional and attractive.

The first part consists of a literature study, starting with different theories of space and place, untangling the meaning of sense of place for urbanism; continuing with a short research about cities, towns and urbanism in general, outlining the main problems of the cities today. The thesis then approaches the more specific topic of urban design, investigates its main problems and different measures for solving them. This is also one of the main objectives of this project, together with the discussion about what kind of a design would attract more people to use public environments and thus contribute to more lively urban spaces.

These statements and guesses continue throughout the paper, moving on to the practical part that focuses on the central area of a small town of Grosuplje, Slovenia. The case study first focuses on the context of Grosuplje with the wishes and demands of its inhabitants, which are explored through a short survey and a sociological study made for the preparation of spatial documents in the municipality. The practical part ends with a conceptual proposal for the revival of the town centre, trying to draw together the preferences of its inhabitants and the main cognitions of the literature study.

The final part of this thesis presents a short overview of the previous parts and shortly discusses the main cognitions and tries to draw a few conclusions concerning the approaches to improving of urban environments.

This master project aims to contribute to a discussion about how to approach the design of urban areas and whether it can contribute to livelier in-between areas and public places, and thus improve the quality of life in the city. No final answer or solution can be given here, the goal of this work is only to unfold how some of the qualities and cognitions of place-making could connect people and places, the natural and the built fabric, as well as the functional and the aesthetic. Transferring those cognitions to an existing situation in Grosuplje is only one way of trying out whether the lessons were successful or not.

Keywords: public environment, city, urban design, city planning, Grosuplje, landscape architecture, landscape design, user participation, improvement, sleeping cities, urban plaza, urban square, park.

Content

Introduction

Background

I believe public space to be one of the most important parts of our towns and cities. The fact is that everyone uses it and needs it, no matter if they are aware of it or not. As soon as we step out of our home we are in a public place, whether it is a path, street, square or a park. Public environment is available and of benefit to anyone: rich or poor, young or old. It is where a great amount of human contact and interaction takes place, which makes it one of the main constructors of city life. This fact is often overlooked or ignored, because the majority of people still focuses on buildings and architecture, while seeing the remaining areas as the in-between places or openings between buildings, without being aware of their true importance and all the ways people could benefit from them, if only they were designed and planned for in a fresh and stimulating manner. I think this is a common problem all around the globe and there is a large need to care about our urban environment more or less everywhere.

I come from Slovenia, which is a small country with only two million inhabitants. Despite this fact or maybe exactly because of it, the country's urban distribution is rather diverse. There are many small cities in Slovenia that lack the liveliness and vividness in their public spaces, which in my opinion are essential qualities a city should posses. A common problem of many Slovenian cities is that they are rather small and situated close to the capital, Ljubljana or to another larger city. This makes them so called 'sleeping cities' or 'bedroom suburbs', which means that most people work, go to school and spend their days in the capital. As they are at home only in the evenings, they are not contributing very much to the vitality of the city and its public space.

I live in Grosuplje – a small town of around eight thousand inhabitants; it is a nice place, which comprises all the necessary facilities a city like this should offer, but not much more than that. Its central structure is more or less the same as it was twenty or thirty years ago. Regardless of the fact that the town is growing and many people are migrating there, the signs of its improvement or transformation into a more progressive and stimulating environment are quite rare. Its spreading is mostly happening on its margins, where people seek the closeness of functional necessities and the peace of the countryside at the same time. The majority of people only use the central part of the city when they need to run some errands there and not for a simple walk, coffee at the town square or a short rest on a park bench. Due to this habit the centre appears dead.

The objective

With this thesis I intend to contribute to the general exploration of the main problems of urban design and planning, and to investigate in what ways they can be improved and which aspects are worth considering in relation to this. I will make an analysis about what makes cities more used and alive, and then try to apply these cognitions to a design proposal for a town centre in Grosuplje, Slovenia. With this project I would like to try out my ability to design for a place in such a way that it would contribute to a more people-friendly urban environment.

Definitions

In order to get more familiar with the topic I decided to depict some of the keywords according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (WP1).

Improve: improved, improving (transitive verb). To enhance in value or quality: make better.

Public (adjective). Exposed to general view: open; accessible to or shared by all the members of the community.

Environment (noun). The aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or a community.

Town/city (noun). A cluster or aggregation of houses recognised as a distinct place with a place-name. A compactly settled area as distinguished from surrounding rural territory.

Urban (adjective). Relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city.

Design (noun). Deliberate, purposive planning. The arrangement of elements or details in a product or work of art.

Main goals

To summarise the introductive part I extracted three main goals of this thesis:

What are the main problems of today's urban design and different approaches to solving them? - Literature study and a theoretical report, presenting different examples.

What kind of a design would attract more people to use public environments and thus contribute to livelier urban spaces? - Landscape analysis, a short survey and a design proposal.

Reflecting back upon my proposal and discussing whether it comprises the cognitions of my literature study. - Reflections and conclusions.

Method

As a starting point of this thesis I am introducing its main topics through a literature study that presents the subject regarded from different perspectives, starting with more universal and intangible themes concerning space, place and cities in general, proceeding to more specific topics of urban design and its problematic. The literature study is followed by a case study of Grosuplje, presenting its context and problematic central structure. The research about Grosuplje includes multiple site visits and spatial observations in order to carry out applicable site analyses, which are presented through different methods. It begins with a mental picture of the town Grosuplje, showing its main structures and elements. This is followed by a SWOT analysis, which introduces the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the central part of Grosuplje. Most of the detailed analyses are a combination of maps (provided by the municipality of Grosuplje), photographs and computer drawings showing the existing situation and the problematic of the spatial structure in Grosuplje. The contextual part together with the analyses concludes with a short survey among its inhabitants, investigating their wishes, demands and expectations regarding the spatial rearrangements in Grosuplje.

The design process is presented through introductive hand sketches and proceeds to computer-drawn plans and perspective visualisations, which are a combination of computer drawings and photographs of existing situation serving as background.

The work of this thesis concludes with a reflective discussion, which analyses different parts of it and also tries to bind them together into a logical whole.

Space and place

"To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: To be human is to have and to know your place." (Edward Relph, 1976: 1)

I believe space to be the main prerequisite and the fundamental substance in landscape architecture, which is why I decided to make a brief exploration on the topic before moving on to public space, its problems and characteristics. I see space as the empty sheet of paper, as the beginning of everything. It is where we move and dwell – where we live; we are tied to it and project our personalities into it. Space is not just perceived, it is lived. (Relph, 1976: 10)

According to the Canadian geographer Edward Relph (1976: 8), space is formless, intangible, undefined and not an entity that can be directly depicted or analysed. Space provides context for places. Relph (1976: 22) makes considerations about architectural and planning space, where he describes it as space created by an interaction between volumes and relationships between them. Another common aspect is comparing and manipulating relationships between inside and outside space, which is an important part of a landscape architect's work as well.

"The space of urban planning is well linked to architectural space – indeed in the Renaissance they were essentially the same and there was a resulting continuity between buildings and streets and squares." (Relph, 1976: 23)

Ten years earlier Bacon (1967: 16) also made an assertion that architectural design basically consists of mass and space. The essential role of design is to interrelate both. He argued that many designers in our culture are 'space blind' and thus preoccupied with mass, while ignoring space.

Yi-Fu Tuan (1974: 228) is another geographer, who calls attention to the concept of group experiential space, which is a space of experience, defined by the presence of other people. I believe this is actually more relevant than the individual experience, because we are, especially in urban environments, mostly surrounded by others and rarely alone. Tuan (1974: 233) shortly explains his point of view: *"From my discussion of space, it is clear that I believe the meaning of human relationship to be basic*." Further on he distinguishes place from space and thus argues that they have different meanings and cannot be used mutually, even if they need one another in order to be fully defined.

According to Tuan (1977: 6), there is another important difference between space and place; this is due to the fact that he relates space with movement and place with pause, even if this halt in the pause is so short and subconscious that it is hard to notice. As I understand this reasoning, space is more abstract and undefined, while place is a location we know and have ascribed meaning to.

It is commonly believed that geometrical space is the objective reality, and that personal and cultural spaces are just distortions. This question about objective reality is impossible to answer and in a way also meaningless. There is no objective truth about the world; there are only different perceptions of it. Each person sees his or her individual world differently, as a result of numerous factors and historic as well as contemporary conditions in our environment. Tuan thus defines place as a location or a unit among other units, which are linked together in a circulation net, but he also argues that place has far more substance than the word location refers to: *"It is a unique entity, a 'special ensemble'; it has a history and meaning."* (Tuan, 1974: 213f)

Also Relph stressed that places are unique, and that each one has its own order, which is distinct from another place, even if they all are interconnected by a system of spatial interactions and transfers. Places are localised and parts of larger areas. They are emerging or becoming, which means that old elements disappear and new

elements are added according to cultural and historical change. Places are characterised by people's beliefs and in this way they are loaded with meaning. Places consequently have an inside and outside. (Relph, 1976: 3)

Personally, I see place as people's space. Space without intervention by people seems vast and undefined, as any room anywhere in the world. Following this opinion, place needs to have something more, because it evokes meanings, thoughts, memories and even emotions. It is an area that we know or for some reason can call ours. Bacon has explained this matter in a good way: *"It is one thing to delimit space by structural devices such as walls. It is quite another to infuse the space with a spirit which relates to the activities that take place in it and which stirs the senses and emotions of the people who use it. Architecture encompasses both."* (Bacon, 1967: 18)

Places thus become more than just points on a map defined by geographical coordinates; they constitute a phenomenon, which needs to be explained and understood from several perspectives. The most important of them is probably people's perspective, because we are the ones, who have given it meaning, made it more than a specific physically identified spot and transformed it into a living, breathing fabric on our planet. According to Relph, *"A place is not just the 'where' of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon."* (Relph, 1976: 3)

Sense of place

It is often claimed that places can have their own 'personality' or 'spirit', but only human beings can have a sense of place. Having a sense of place means applying moral and aesthetic cognition to sites and locations.

> *"Modern man, it is often claimed, has lost this sensitivity. He transgresses against the genius loci because he fails to recognise it; and he fails to recognise it because the blandness of much modern environment combined with the ethos of human dominance has stunted the cultivation of place awareness."* (Tuan, 1974: 235)

According to Tuan (1974: 235), a sense of place also has its point of departure in a visual or aesthetic meaning and places are consequently locations with a visual impact. It is important that the eye is trained to see the beauty where it exists, but also places need to be created aesthetically in order to please the eye.

To create interesting and beneficial landscapes, a personal connection to the land and to the environment is thus required. I believe that anyone, who is about to shape the environment for many people, must be able to read it first. This means understanding different perceptions of time, being and memory and translating them through forms, materials and details, so people can relate to them and render personal meaning to the newly created landscape.

Tuan writes that "*a place is the compelling focus of a field: it is a small world, the node at which activities converge*" (Tuan, 1975: 236). Even if a street has a very strong visual identity, like Champs-Élysées in Paris or the Fifth Avenue in New York, it is rarely called a place. One small part of it or a street corner may be a place, but the street itself is not – it is a passage and a crossing. However, sometimes when a street is, for example, closed for traffic and transformed into an area of an event or a festivity, it becomes a place.

In brief you can say that creating a place means creating a small world of its own; a centre of meaning that is distinct from its environment. These places can then become public symbols that attract attention and evoke affection. This is something I would like to create – a place of meaning, not just an area one passes through every day without really noticing it.

Towns, cities and urbanism

"Cities are all the same, cities are all different." (Vickers, 2009: 6)

Not even two cities in the world are the same; they are all different – in their totality and their parts. Yet it is easy to recognise a city when entering one. They are identified by their structures, streets and patterns, by their buildings, parks and people.

Pioneer of the Space Syntax analysis Bill Hillier writes about how architecture is a thing and an activity at the same time and opens a discussion about what it essentially is. Trying to find an answer to this seemingly simple question, he comes down to building, but halts at its duality again; is it a product or a process? He notes that we usually regard building(s) as a product defined by its function, whereas architecture is more defined as a science-based activity. (Hillier, 2007: 14) While reading about this, I found the topic quite hard to process, because it all seems so intertwined and hard to analyse. When we walk the streets of our cities, we rarely even think about the origins of those places, how it all began and often take it for granted, as if it has been there forever.

A different view was presented in the 1960's by Kevin Lynch, who compared the city to a piece of architecture and called it a construction in space, but of a larger scale and perceived in the longer span of time. He stressed that the perception of the city by its users and inhabitants is important and not only the city as a physical structure. Cities are perceived by enormous numbers and varieties of people and built by many constructors, who are all constantly modifying their structures for different reasons. A city may seem as something solid and stable in some aspects, but in others it is ever-changing. (Lynch, 1960: 1f)

Cities can also be seen as one of the greatest achievements of human kind, combining technological, artistic, cultural and social efforts and aspirations. (Tibbalds, 2001: 1)

Marshall designates cities as 'the ultimate human-made habitats', but at the same time he notes that they are frequently perceived as alienating or threatening environments, and often named as 'concrete or urban jungles'. Instead we should be regarding *"urbanisation as a process of adapting the planet to be a more human-friendly habitat."* (Marshall, 2009)

In considering this perspective of Marshall, it is interesting to compare older cities with newer ones. Many cases of old historic cities that never were master-planned, seem to be apprehended as less dysfunctional and more alluring than many of the technologically and thoughtfully planned modern cities. I wonder what could be the reason for this attitude towards our environment. Are we simply afraid of progress and novelty or do we see ourselves as creatures that should continue living in the wilderness of nature? Marshall (2009: 2) believes that finding the answers to these questions could open up to new ways of creating better urban areas.

Fig. 1: Kungsträdgården is a popular urban pedestrian area amongst the people in Stockholm.

Fig. 2: Wolfova street in Ljubljana, Slovenia has recently been renovated and closed for traffic. The emphasis is on the space between buildings and on the scale for people walking.

Trouble in the city

In the endeavour towards a more human life in cities, it is worth considering the following citation of Shute: *"A city ought to be like the human body and for this reason it should be full of all that gives life to man"* (Shute, 1999: 12). We, however, have to realise that we live in an era of fast development, fast cars, fast food and fast living. The majority of people now dwell in cities, and even if we have all the technology and knowledge at hand, we cannot be sure of that it means that our towns and cities are improving. We also have to realise that we are witnessing a decline of the public realm, meaning that many cities and towns of the world have become threatening, unpleasant, unsafe and hostile places to dwell in, often being too dense, polluted, overcrowded with traffic, covered in graffiti and full of mediocre buildings and poorly maintained green areas. (Tibbalds, 2001: 1)
In this way Tibbalds has describes a typical urban area of today and outlined a rather pessimistic, but evident image of the problems in many urban environments around the globe.

"Four fifths of Europeans live in towns and cities. Car ownership is rising. Places are losing their individuality. It is all too easy for a city to destroy its heritage and lose what is unique to it, in favour of a car-oriented, tower-block dominated place that can be seen anywhere in the world. Urban areas are sprawling and land uses are separated in a manner that makes the provision of transport facilities difficult and expensive. [...] New development is often bland and mediocre." (Tibbalds, 2001: 2)

Many cities and towns are changing and growing, but not necessarily for the better. The number of cars is rising constantly, therefore many urban areas are pervaded with noisy traffic and parking space. On the account of this increasing trend the safety and pleasantness of pedestrian areas is suffering. Economical development is often prioritised; land uses and activities are separated, not contributing to the variety and diversity of the living environment. Cities and towns are becoming rather similar to one another, with increased risks for destroying their heritage and too easily losing their uniqueness. Instead of developing a specific culture, the emphasis is on profit and attractions for tourists through new hotels, shops, restaurants and cafes. Large residential districts are growing at their outskirts and the peripheries are often typified by rather dull and soul-less suburbs.
Marshall has expressed the loss of identity and clarity of what a city is and what it should be.

"We today have cities without downtowns, suburbs without cities, 'neighbourhoods' without neighbours, 'communities' without civics, and many other combinations that do not seem to fit our understanding of what a city ever was. As a result, it is not any more clear what a city is, to emulate in the first place." (Marshall, 2009: 5)

In addition to this, there has been an emphasis on the private domain, which probably makes the gap even wider.

"At the same time that the public realm has declined there has been a corresponding flourishing of the private realm – with an emphasis on privacy, retreat, personal comfort, private consumption and security. Looking after 'me first', in a rather nasty thing called the 'enterprise culture'. The public realm is someone else's problem." (Tibalds, 2001: 1)

Sleeping cities

David Brooks (2004: 2) describes the phenomenon of sleeping cities in an intelligible way: *"The people who were in move out, and the people who were out move farther out, into the suburbs of suburbia."*

The term 'sleeping cities' refers to the so-called commuter towns, bedroom communities, or sometimes simply the suburbs. The listed terms originate from the fact that these are primarily residential urban communities, where residents mostly sleep and commute to work elsewhere, usually in a larger city nearby. Another common characteristic of these towns is the underdevelopment of industrial and commercial activity. Sometimes they also lack historical traditions, cultural institutions or universities of their own.

Commuter towns originate from different reasons. One possible case is when a city or a town starts losing its main source of employment, which forces its inhabitants to seek it elsewhere. Or when a town is simply very attractive for residents, but not for large businesses or industrial companies, which requires them to commute to other functional and occupational centres. Sometimes commuters cannot afford to live in the capital or another larger city due to high housing prices and need to move to another town with lower living costs. Another cause is the fast growth of small cities, which is often influenced by developing highway systems and 'ring roads' around metropolitan areas – people often move to small towns outside the ring, seeking peace and quiet of the countryside as well as the closeness of a city with all its advantages. These towns are consequently growing into the suburban area of the capital, but are not developing economically, because they are so close to it. (WP2)

Urban design and planning

"Urban design is not a magic dust that can be sprinkled on to make everything look okay: it is an integral part of the planning and management of an area." (Tibbalds, 2001: 4)

Urban design can be defined as the art of creating and shaping cities and towns. It deals with the planning, design and management of public spaces and the way they are used or experienced. It is the process of giving form and character to the city and its parts – it combines architecture, landscape architecture and city planning in order to make urban areas functional and attractive. An important aspect of urban design is the ambition to connect people and places, urban forms and movements, as well as natural and built fabric. The aim is to create places with distinct beauty and identity by uniting and intertwining the qualities and cognitions of place-making, social equity, environmentalism and economic viability. Urban design draws all the mentioned strands together creating a vision for an area and then developing or unfolding the resources and skills needed to realise this vision. (WP3)

I found Marshall's quote as an interesting complement to the general definition of urban design, as it can be applied to a small part of the city or to the city as a whole.

He refers to *"city design or planning of a city in a definite form at a given point in time, as a finite, whole unit. This sense of design is equivalent to the design of a building, or machine, or any other artefact, as a whole unit, for a particular purpose. [...] City design could be applied to the restructuring of an existing urban accretion, or it could be applied to the founding of a new city."* (Marshall, 2009: 27)

Cliff Moughtin (1999a: 2) suggests there are three main goals of urban design: designing and building urban developments, which need to be structurally firm and at the same time functional, while also representing something pleasant to the eye. Or with other words: durability, utility and the ability to bring a sense of enjoyment to the user. For a satisfactory result all the mentioned qualities need to be united and intertwined.

"City design is a temporal art, but it can rarely use the controlled and limited sequences of other temporal arts like music. On different occasions and for different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across. It is seen in all lights and all weathers. At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored." (Lynch, 1960: 1)

In recent years many opinions have been raised in opposition to those who think that the goal of urban design is to create a strong visual image of the city.
People are central to the study of urban design, especially their values, needs, wishes and abilities to achieve and express them. The best way for the city designer to serve the community is to understand and take into consideration the needs and aspirations of its users. (Moughtin, 1999b: 12)

Fig. 3 and 4: Green areas of cities are just as important as the built fabric. They give colour, volume, structure, contrast and much more to the so-called concrete jungles. Kungsträdgården in Stockholm.

Problems of contemporary urban design

Tibbalds (2001: 21) argues that the quality of a city design is usually more related to the open spaces and spaces between buildings – their nature and memorability, rather than to the buildings themselves. So the streets, squares and plazas of towns and cities are actually the more important elements of our urban environments, but are rarely seen as such.

When Marshall (2009: 50) writes about city design, he does not see it as the main problem, but thinks it can lead to or conceive problems. For example, when cities get too large and break the borders of what initially was designed or when the design is carried out by no more than a few people, it will often fail to fulfil the needs of ordinary people.

Marshall (2009) also sees a problem in cases when the design of a city as a whole becomes the objective, the final aim or result, instead of it being a means to an end. The end here, I suppose, would be creating an attractive and functional urban environment.

Top-down design

One of the main issues for contemporary considerations regarding processes or strategies of design and planning, is the so-called top-down handling of things. The fact is that a well designed and planned urban environment can be of benefit to a large number of people, who work or live within a certain town or city. In order to reach a successful result, it is crucial to include those people in the design/planning process, but this is not always the case. In fact, it rarely is. The biggest impact on this process is made by professionals, such as architects and landscape architects, which are strongly influenced by financial and other interests of the developers. Woolley (2003: 36) argues that all of this affects people's everyday lives by determining, controlling or influencing planning and design issues such as density, mixture and physical layout of developments.

Urban design is in need of going back to its roots and Moughtin (1999: 12) suggests that the relationship between designer and client is central in doing so. But it is not only the artist's duty to consider the people, also the public needs to be interested in improving their environment and willing to cooperate; this participation cannot be forced, it has to start from the bottom up.

"The chasm between city designer and client can be bridged when the problem is recognised as existing and its nature defined: when the complexity and heterogeneity of the client group is admitted and when the designer realises that culture is never static: it is a constant state of change and to some extent, he or she – the designer – is an agent for those changes. Finally, it is necessary to develop methods and techniques for use when working with community groups." (Moughtin, 1999: 12)

Alienating developments

When it comes to urban design and planning I think that this holistic approach is an especially important aspect to consider: *"We need a fresh look at what really matters to people who use urban areas. We need to look at urban areas as a whole and not as a series of unrelated, but competing, sectoral interests."* (Tibbalds, 2001: 3)

Without this fresh look at the city as a whole it will just not work. Nowadays it is often the case that architectural competitions bring new and extraordinary ideas to life. Even if these events might be good in itself, their ideas

Fig. 5: Identity and character of places are important, because they make them meaningful and memorable. A square in Kranj, Slovenia, is an example of a lack of character and contrast in my opinion.

Fig. 6: Areas that are neglected or are not maintained properly can make users feel discomfort and will not stimulate them to visit more often. An example of a neglected urban area in Novalja, Croatia.

rarely establish a strong dialogue with their surroundings. Occasions, where the interests of professionals and the public come to contradiction, are not rare.

Out of context
One of the problems of today's urban design and planning is the inability to read the context and creating something that seems 'natural', appropriate and fitting for its surroundings. New ideas may be fresh and daring but not always responding or communicating with what is already there. This can be a problem if they are supposed to bring something of quality and benefit to the environment. But as Tibbalds (2001: 19) notes, popular and attractive urban areas seem to be those in which a 'contextualist' approach has prevailed; and by this he means being able to read the sense of place and somehow relate to it.

"We need a sound appreciation of the context of a project site or area. This includes its history, its existing townscape and appearance, its planning status and its social and economic role – both current and potential. The context should also include the client's objectives for the site or area." (Tibbalds, 2001: 20)

Lack of a "city feeling" – lack of urban–ness
Thomas Sieverts (2003: 19f) writes about urban-ness acting as *"a kind of counter-concept to provincialness by evoking an atmosphere of cosmopolitanism, openness to the world and tolerance, intellectual agility and curiosity"*. By urban-ness he does not refer to commercial vivaciousness of markets, shops and cafes, but a feeling of liveliness one gets from walking the bustling streets of towns and cities. This feeling is usually an outcome of attractive and diverse environmental order, which brings together different functional establishments and therefore a variety of people using them. Urban-ness of a city in this context is not structurally defined by facades, streets and squares, but as a meeting ground for endless opportunities and a cosmopolitan way of life. Sieverts also writes about how urban-ness, centrality, density, mixed use and ecology sum up the 'good city'. *"Most of our housing and city planning has been handicapped because those who have undertaken the work have had no clear notion of the social functions of the city."* (Sieverts, 2003: 19f)

Lack of identity
Many places or parts of cities around the globe have become practically the same. Buildings and different developments often present the visitor with a familiar feeling as they have been produced as a part of an assembly-line production, without their own 'character' or 'personality'. The fastest and cheapest way is not necessarily the best one and it seldom offers genuine solutions. The identity of a place is important, because it makes it easier for people to relate to it; it makes places meaningful, memorable and therefore more used.
"We must avoid the automatic, standard international solution and the ignoring or destruction of unique traditional values and qualities by drawing on appropriate historical precedents." (Tibbalds, 2001: 23)

Dullness in the city
Environments with distinct separation of functions are quite common in modern cities, but I believe they are not very popular among their users. Residential areas, business districts, shopping centres, and green areas all find

their place in the city, though often completely disconnected from one another. Already from a practical viewpoint, it is easier for anyone, who will have the opportunity, to be able to run different errands at the same place and then maybe take a few minutes for a quick lunch in the park. Even just for taking a walk in the city, an average person would prefer strolling along a bustling street, where there is a variety of people engaged with all sorts of activities, rather than sitting on a bench in a business district for example.

Neglected environments
There is probably no other factor that would have such a strong and immediate impact on our liking and general well-being as entering a neglected area with litter lying on the ground, broken benches, cracked pavement, weeds growing all around, graffiti 'decorating' the building facades, etc. Places like this will make their users feel discomfort and they will most certainly not stimulate them to visit more often than necessary. That is why maintenance should be taken into consideration already when planning for a certain area.

Measures for improving public environments
The aim is to create active and busy places, where people of different ages and social backgrounds will linger in and enjoy themselves in different ways at different times; places that can offer various experiences and evoke positive sense of participation.

"The concern is once again for the scale of people walking, for attractive, intricate places and for complexity of uses and activities. The object has now become the public realm – the space between buildings – rather than the buildings themselves. The aim is to create urban areas with their own identities, rooted in a regional and/or historic context. The physical design of the public domain as an organic, colourful, human-scale, attractive environment is the over-riding task of the urban designer." (Tibbalds, 2001: 12)

User participation
It is important to get commitment and participation from inhabitants and users of towns and cities – to get them to care about their urban environment, because this is the only way they will be able to truly relate to it and make it alive. Tibbalds (2001: 3f) argues that it would be desirable to achieve an overall wish and striving for a better quality of city life as a whole. People should commit to achieving this and not only direct their interest at tourist attractions, branding, sustainability or other trendy topics.

Human scale – designing for people
Towns and cities are for and about people, which means people-friendliness should be an important aspect when planning for them. Combining and providing cultural, recreational, social, entertaining, aesthetical and other important activities or factors can result in well-used and lively towns and cities. The aim is to create a sympathetic urban environment, which feels human, holds a sense of ownership and offers usable public space. It is important to provide a place for encountering - a meeting ground, a place that may offer some kind of amusement and cultural experience for a visitor or a passerby. All of the above will make the city more attractive and draw people (locals and tourists) to use it more.

Fig. 7: A combination of different functions and overlapping activities can contribute to the liveliness of urban areas. A part of Gosposka street in Ljubljana is also used as a café garden.

Fig. 8: One of the aims of urban design is to create an urban environment that feels human and offers usable public space. Kungsträdgården in Stockholm is a place of human scale and a meeting ground for people of different backgrounds.

Kevin Lynch draws attention to another important aspect worth considering. He underlines that the city is not built for one person, but for great multitudes of people, of widely diversified backgrounds, characters, vocations, and class. *"While one man may recognise a street by its brick pavement, another will remember its sweeping curve, and a third will have located the minor landmarks along its length."* (Lynch, 1960: 110f)

Following the 'natural' order
It is rather common that people prefer historic or just older parts of towns. They tend to find them attractive, pleasant, user-friendly and comfortable – these towns seem to work in their own way. But why is it so? It might be because they are smaller and easier to master? Or because they have been there for a long time and just seem to have claimed or actually began to represent the identity of the city, which is rarely the case with newer developments that are usually growing around the older parts as something alien and unfamiliar to the city.
Moughtin writes about organic order or order of nature, which somehow could be worth applying to urban design as being a part of a larger order. He mentions Christopher Alexander, who wrote about how we are all well aware of the fact that today's built environment lacks this natural order. Places that were built centuries ago often seem to be imbued with order, which is a result of balancing between the needs of the individual parts of the environment and the needs of the environment as a whole. (Moughtin, 1999: 30)
Older parts of towns and cities may be more alluring, because they possess a sense of place that has been created, transformed and shifted through numerous decades, and denoted by various people and events. In my opinion, this is impossible to recreate or simply imprint to any place, but by following the natural order, as the mentioned authors call it, a newly created area can become imbued with a certain logic and sensibility.

Variety and overlapping activities
The appeal of choice between a variety of activities and experiences; a balanced mix between public and private, and a natural arrangement of the special and the everyday has led to cities and towns, which people both love and enjoy using. Tibbalds argues (2001: 32f) that zoned separation of uses literally kills urban areas and that mixed use offers more safety in our public urban environment, because it attracts different people at different times for different purposes.

"The re-creation of a rich and diverse public environment is one of the urban designer's most important tasks in late twentieth century society. It is my view that environments are necessarily complex, intricate and lively and are undermined by the over-simplification of land uses or activities and the dull uniformity of some built development. We must aim to produce environments, which are of a mixed-use nature and are of a deliberately rich and varied character." (Tibbalds, 2001: 28)

Contrast and environmental richness
Soft and hard landscaping, narrow streets and large public spaces, busy areas and quiet retreats, colourful or patterned and even monochrome elements, big-scale and small-scale, flat and elevated, built and green, monumental and background elements, formal and informal...they all contribute to enrich the experience of a city.
Already simple improvements and additions, such as open green space, sculptures, water features or trees along

Fig. 9: A pedestrian area Aker Brygge in Oslo, Norway, is a well-used place of human scale and overlapping activities.

the road can change the image of the city and make it more pleasant and enjoyable. However, it is important to keep the original consistency of the city design, its style and materials; and by consistency I do not mean monotony or dullness – variety can be achieved even by a limited number of themes.

The achievement of 'good design' should be of crucial importance and the fundamental aim of the planning system. In order to achieve this we must be careful not to make everything too prescriptive – too neat and tidy. *"Urban areas are messy and complex, rich and muddled. The process of urban design needs to leave room for messiness and complexity!"* (Tibbalds, 2001: 3f)

Orientation, accessibility and safety

If cities or parts of cities are legible – easy to read, people will not have any trouble orientating and finding their way around, whether they are entering an unknown or an already familiar area. That is why new places and environments need to be easily accessible and designed in a way that can signify the most important directions and central parts. In order to establish feelings of safety and control it is crucial to devote attention to orientation as a central part of the design. This leads to feelings of safety and control, which are crucial for acceptance and general content among people. Strong views attract attention and can emphasise the sense of direction and orientation as well as enhance the aesthetic or cognitive experience.

Centres, directions, paths and areas must be thoughtfully put together into a logical and artful composition, in order to achieve a visual structure, organisational unity and to facilitate the understanding of diverse and vivid images in our urban environment. (Moughtin, 1999: 33)

After-care

Without good maintenance and after-care all the aspects listed above may lose their meaning. Looking after towns and cities means caring about litter, cleaning the streets, maintaining street furniture and facades of buildings, as well as up-keeping paved and green areas.

"After-care matters every bit as much as getting the design right in the first place." (Tibbalds, 2001: 7)

Fig. 10: Jurčič square in Ljubljana has recently been renovated and it includes ground level differences, greenery, different seating areas, a water feature, lighting, etc. In my opinion it represents an area that is accessible, aesthetic and functional.

Urban squares and plazas

*"Without the square there is no city... there is no substitute for the spontaneous social conflux whose atoms unite, precisely as citizens of the city." (*Goodman and Goodman, 1960)

Squares and plazas are often the most recognisable places of different towns and cities. They are usually situated centrally in the direct nearness of important municipal or even national buildings, representing the civic life and offering space for encountering, resting, demonstrations, celebrations and much more.

Since the town that I am going to work with is not large enough or suitable for a proper city square, I decided to study about urban plazas and smaller places rather than regular city squares. My interest is directed towards all kinds of public areas, which can be re-planned for the enjoyment of their users and in that way contribute to a more pleasant town.

Cooper Marcus and Francis (1998: 14) define urban plazas as mostly hard-surfaced or paved, outdoor public spaces, from which cars are excluded. Trees, flowers and other kinds of planting or softer ground covers are often included, but the predominant surface is hard. If this is not the case and if there is a bigger amount of planted areas than hard surfaces, the space is rather defined as a park and not a plaza. Plazas are not just passing-through areas, like streets or sidewalks, but 'real' places with functions of sitting, resting, meeting others, chatting, eating, strolling or simply observing the city life. According to Kevin Lynch (1981: 443) the plaza is *"intended as an activity focus, at the heart of some intensive urban area."* Their purpose is to attract different groups of people to spend time there and facilitate meetings. It is typical for plazas to be paved, surrounded by buildings or other structural elements and to be in (at least some) contact with streets. J. B. Jackson (1984) suggested that a plaza is an urban form that draws people together for passive enjoyment.

Types of urban plazas

Cooper Marcus and Francis (1998: 20f) write about a rather simple but clear typology of plazas and try to classify them according to the mix of form and use, moving from the smallest to the largest in size.

- The street plaza can be defined as a small part of public open space, which can be used as a plaza and is usually connected to the street or the sidewalk. Examples: the seating edge, the widened sidewalk, the bus-waiting place, the pedestrian link, the corner sun pocket or the arcade plaza.
- The corporate foyer: a decorative entrance part of newly developed building complex, which is usually privately owned but still accessible to the public.
- The urban oasis: usually it gives an impression of a garden or a park, because it includes more greenery and is distanced from the noisy parts of the city. This way it offers a calm and reflective retreat and is popular for eating lunch or reading.
- The transit foyer: more of a pass-through plaza, mostly providing space for easy access of different public transport terminals. Examples: the subway entry place, the bus terminal.
- The street as a plaza (pedestrian and transit malls): a street that is closed for traffic and becomes a place for sitting, eating and strolling – therefore takes on the role of a plaza.
- The grand public plaza: it is a large place that is the most similar to an old town square and attracts larger num-

Fig. 11 and 12: The street as a plaza, representing a place for sitting, eating and strolling. Two examples from Sweden, Knut Den Stores Torg in Lund (above) and Södra Förstadsgatan in Malmö (below).

bers of people than other plazas, which are mostly used by people, who live or work nearby. These kinds of plazas are usually centrally located and also large enough to offer space for cafes or occasional exhibitions, shows and concerts.

Characteristics of urban plazas

Cooper Marcus and Francis (1998: 23f) also depict some of the characteristics and qualities of urban plazas and offer many design recommendations regarding those.

- Location: a good location for a plaza attracts a variety of people, which usually means it is situated in a district of mixed and diverse use.
- Size: it is hard to tell what a good size for a plaza would be, without knowing the location and its context; some places are in need of small intimate areas and others call for a space that is large enough to host events and so on.
- Visual complexity: different forms, colours, textures and landscape elements are important. Also greenery, like trees and shrubs, is often wanted. "*...plazas with higher intensities of use are those with greater variety of colour, textures, sitting places, landscape elements, and so on.*" (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1998: 25)
- Uses and activities: Cooper Marcus and Francis (1998: 25f) write that both passers-through and lingerers should be counted as users of plazas, although the emphasis is usually on those that stay longer. They also make a distinction between male and female users, noting that women usually are more sensitive to various annoyances and more discriminating than men regarding the arrangement and localisation of seats. Women are supposedly seeking experiences of security, relaxation and comfort, while men prefer exposure, social interaction and involvement. All of the above should be jointly offered in one place and not seen as something to be separated. Cooper Marcus and Francis also pay attention to the so-called less desired users, referring to vandals and homeless people, who have the same right to use public spaces as everyone else, but are often discriminated or seen as disturbing by other users.
- Microclimate: different factors, such as sunlight, temperature, glare, wind and overall comfort are important to consider while designing for an urban plaza. Calculations of the daily sunlight and wind movement in different seasons should be defined in order to design for pleasant spots, offering shade in the summer, sun in the winter and shelter from the wind in exposed parts.
- Boundaries and transitions: it is important that a plaza can be perceived as a distinct place, but at the same time generally visible and accessible. The shorter the distance from the street, the more likely a passerby will stop there. Differences in ground level can be helpful with making a plaza more distinct and also for arranging good seating areas. Abrupt variations in level may also have a boundary effect, thus it is important to take measures not to discourage people from using it. "*Street plazas – barely distinct from the adjacent sidewalk – are popular because they provide easy access, a passing parade for people to watch, and a sense of surveillance and security.*" (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1998: 35)
- Subspaces: division of larger plazas into subspaces encourages their use.
- Seating: street furniture is an important feature of urban plazas. Many elements can serve as seating facilities,

Fig. 13: The grand public plaza: Gustav Adolfs Torg in Malmö, Sweden. Visual complexity is reached through a variety of elements, such as trees, different paved materials, grass, elevations, benches, etc.

Fig. 14: A plaza next to Triangeln in Malmö, Sweden. Trees, stairs and ledges create clear boundaries, transitions, and subspaces that contribute to the distinction of the place.

Fig. 15: A plaza at the beginning of a pedestrian area in Nova Gorica, Slovenia. It is wide and simple, without elevations, subspaces or a variety of materials, but it includes benches and water features, which attract people and contribute to a more playful atmosphere.

Fig. 16: In a small square or a plaza in Novalja, Croatia, the seats are formed of straight rectangular concrete blocks with openings for trees.

such as benches, steps, ledges, planting edges, fountain edges and curb stones. Simple seating places are usually more popular than the more arranged ones. Warm materials, such as wood are more comfortable and thus preferred, although harder and colder materials like concrete, metal, tile and stone are also effective for secondary seating.

- Planting: various textures, colours, heights and masses of plants can add to visual complexity and variety of a plaza and thus make it more enjoyable and attractive for people. According to Cooper Marcus and Francis (1998: 44f) planting with its diverse shapes, smells and colours is the second most appreciated quality of a plaza right after the primary concern for orientation and direction. In some cases people are more drawn to stay in a plaza for its oasis effect, that is: if they are alone, if they are without something to do (like eating lunch or reading a book) or if there are only few passersby to watch.

- Difference in ground level: changes of level are usually preferable, since they may increase the aesthetic, functional and psychological qualities of a plaza. Level changes can add spatial logic to a plaza, divide it into subspaces, add seating areas and function as a stage or a platform. Lower or sunken parts may offer a more secluded and intimate sense to its users, while the parts elevated above street level may give a sense of attention, advantage and overview.

- Paving: as mentioned before, paving is an important element of plazas. In being the most basic material it can preferably be used in transitional areas to facilitate for passerby to cross as efficiently (in a direct line) as possible. Changes in paving may also serve as a defining and distinctive element in plazas, marking entries, different functions, adding visual diversity, etc. "A change in surface that is readily apparent to the feet and eyes, such as the transition from sidewalk paving to brick, can define a plaza as a separate place without discouraging entry." (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1998: 51)

- Maintenance: maintaining lawns, emptying the litter containers and mending pavement irregularities are only the basic maintenance jobs that should be taken care of on a regular basis. If people notice that the managers maintain their environment in a good way, they will also take care and use it with pleasure.

Context

Slovenia

Slovenia is a small but colourful country, which lies in the heart of Europe. More precisely in the southern part of Central Europe and in the uttermost northern part of the Mediterranean; below Austria, above Croatia, east of Italy, and west of Hungary. It is the third most forested country in Europe and is also known for its geographical and natural diversity. Slovenian landscapes are very diverse as a consequence of a juncture of the Mediterranean, Alpine, Pannonian and Dinaric worlds, each one of them leaving a mark on its geography. The majority of Slovenians live in cities, but also the countryside is still rather inhabited. Agriculture is not the prevailing workforce branch anymore and most people work in services and manufacturing. (WP4) I will not waste too many words on the characteristics and development of Slovenia, because it is a rather typical story, similar to that, which most European countries once have gone through. I will pay more attention to Grosuplje, which is a town, where I come from and will be a focus of my project work for this thesis.

Fig. 17: Slovenia is located in the southern part of Central Europe.

Grosuplje

The municipality of Grosuplje is a medium sized community of Slovenia. It is located at the south-eastern border with the capital Ljubljana. The whole municipality has around 19000 inhabitants, and the largest settlement – Grosuplje – counts around 8000 inhabitants (this information is taken from the last statistic count of population carried out in 2002). As the distance from the capital is only 15 kilometres and the highway connection is good, Grosuplje has developed to a sort of a suburban area of Ljubljana. Going by car to Ljubljana only takes about fifteen minutes. The development towards a suburban or a sleeping town has increased during the last years as many people from Ljubljana search for a home here, while still working in the capital. (WP5)

Fig. 18: Grosuplje is located in the central part of Slovenia, south-east from the capital, Ljubljana.

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Sociological study for the preparation of spatial documents in the municipality of Grosuplje

The Centre for Spatial Sociology of the Faculty of Social Sciences of University in Ljubljana made a research in year 2006, called the 'Sociological study for the preparation of spatial documents in the municipality of Grosuplje'. Within this frame a survey of public opinion has been made about spatio-developmental dilemmas in the municipality of Grosuplje. The aim of this study was mainly to find out what the inhabitants of Grosuplje think about their town, what has changed in the past years, what they miss and think would be necessary to change in their environment.

A demographically representative sample included 560 inhabitants of the town of Grosuplje and 15 villages around it. The examiners noted that people showed a big interest in the survey and were very willing to cooperate. This can be seen as an indication that they are aware of the importance of long-term management and spatial planning in order to achieve better quality of life in their municipality.

In the research special attention was paid to the spatial influences caused by the nearness of Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana. The question of mobility of the inhabitants was together with the dynamics of municipal administration of crucial importance for further socio-economic and spatial development of the municipality. Migration processes have a direct influence on how the limited space is used for exploitation purposes. The key developmental dilemma is how to solve the contrariety between economic progress and the growing demands for preservation, protection and regulation of the environment. This expectedly causes unpredictable, discordant and conflicting situations between public-social interests and private interests, where it seems logical that particular criteria of spatio-environmental assessment prevails. Another key dilemma is how to stimulate economic growth, which presupposes immigration of new inhabitants as well as higher demands for preservation and protection of the environment. The main aim of this research was to answer this question and to find out what people in Grosuplje think about the demographic, social and economic trends and their spatial effects.

More than one third of the people in the interview believe that they live better than they did ten years ago, which is an encouraging finding. Almost two thirds of the examinees would like to continue living in the same area as they did at the time when they were asked. For those, who would like to move, the two most attractive locations are Pod gozdom and Sončni dvori. Inhabitants of the town Grosuplje, according to their territorial identity, relate themselves better to a wider urban Ljubljana region, while the ones, who live in smaller villages of the municipality, are more attached to Grosuplje and the south-eastern Dolenjska region. It came as a surprise for the researchers that the inhabitants of Grosuplje are weakly attached to their municipality, in spite of the fact that they generally estimated the quality of life in it as positive. Younger and better educated people are expectedly more critical and generally everyone strongly support the economic progress of the municipality, especially the development of infrastructural objects and tertiary business branches.

In order to understand how people would prioritise spatial aims, the examinees were asked for which activities spatial planners should destine the largest amount of space in the future. In the first place came parks (87%), followed by recreational and sports facilities (79,1%), parking spaces (75%), tourist attractions (75%), and bio-agricul-

ture (67,7%). The inhabitants of Grosuplje would intend less space for new apartments, traditional industry and farming as well as shopping centres. The majority of people think that there is enough space for new buildings and that there have been too many new apartments built in Grosuplje in the recent period. People mostly appreciate the quality of different locations in Grosuplje according to their accessibility to the highway, which apparently is one of the most important factors of everyday life of an average person. This only confirms what I have been writing about Grosuplje being a 'sleeping suburb'. The analysis of place attachment and the assessment of the territorial and administrative status of Grosuplje shows that the majority of the examinees denoted it as a suburban area of Ljubljana (38,7%) – mostly people that live in the town of Grosuplje, or as a countryside town (33,2%) – mostly people that live in the villages around Grosuplje. (WP6)

To summarise the results of the survey, the researchers wrote that they thought there would be influential differences between inhabitants that have lived in Grosuplje for a longer time and those, who had moved there recently. They were surprised to find out that the differences in answers were mostly a consequence of socio-demographic characteristics, especially education, age, lifestyle and partly gender. Differences in answers were also noticeably influenced by the so-called urban and rural values.

More space in Grosuplje should be intended for:

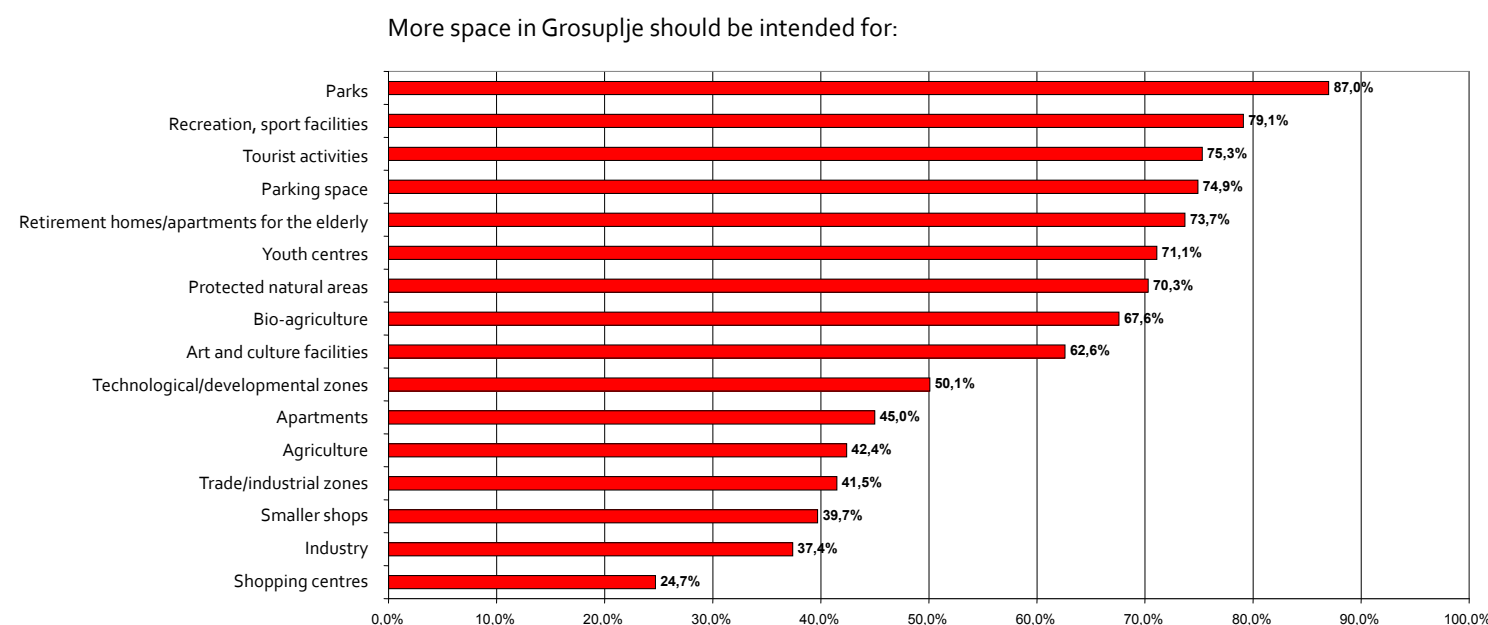| Category	Percentage
Parks	87,0%
Recreation, sport facilities	79,1%
Tourist activities	75,3%
Parking space	74,9%
Retirement homes/apartments for the elderly	73,7%
Youth centres	71,1%
Protected natural areas	70,3%
Bio-agriculture	67,6%
Art and culture facilities	62,6%
Technological/developmental zones	50,1%
Apartments	45,0%
Agriculture	42,4%
Trade/industrial zones	41,5%
Smaller shops	39,7%
Industry	37,4%
Shopping centres	24,7%

Fig. 19: A graph taken from the study shows that the inhabitants of Grosuplje believe more space should be intended for parks, recreation and sport facilities, tourist activities, parking space, apartments for the elderly, youth centres, etc.

The problematic structure of Grosuplje

After I had read the results of the sociological study, I started to think about what I miss in Grosuplje, what my family and friends miss, what we missed as small children and what the elderly miss.

As I mentioned above, Grosuplje has a problem of being a 'sleeping town' with suburban characteristics and with focus on its inhabitants' daily lives in Ljubljana. This is the way it has been for a long time and it is very likely that it is a pattern, which will not easily change. Despite this fact there are many things to be improved in Grosuplje in order to make it a more pleasant and lively place for the ones who actually do or would like to spend more of their time there.

It is not hard to notice the lack of a significant spatial element in Grosuplje. The fact is that it is a town without a real centre, without a place for meeting people or just taking some time to relax on a bench. Another important element that is missing, is a park or at least a smaller green area that could serve as one. Grosuplje does not have any parks, greenways or public gardens; the only exceptions are schoolyards or playgrounds belonging to kindergartens, which are consequently occupied by teenagers, because they do not have anywhere else to go. I believe that the public environment of Grosuplje could be significantly improved by creating some sort of a meeting point, perhaps in the shape of a small square or a plaza. Since people, according to the sociological study, miss parks the most, I believe it would be beneficial to include a green area somewhere in town. Perhaps it would be possible to combine a park and a plaza in one, especially as plazas nowadays include park features and *vice versa*, and as the lines between different urban areas are not so clear anymore.

According to people's opinion, Grosuplje is lacking parks, sports and recreational facilities, tourist attractions, parking spaces, youth centres and ecological farming. In my trials to find a solution, I think it is important to figure out how to include and combine those demands and activities in one or two areas. With reference to my literature review, mixed use, overlapping activities, a diverse and varied character are key elements for a successful urban space.

Choosing places to work with

As long as I can remember, I have lived in Grosuplje, so it seemed like a good idea to make my own mental map of the expected needs and the possibilities for improvement of the life quality of its inhabitants. After some consideration, I found the two most appropriate central places in Grosuplje to be the Kolodvorska street and the small market place by the brook Grosupeljščica. However, I decided that it would be best to only focus on one, since they have a rather similar character and are not located very far from each other. I chose Kolodvorska street, because I believe redesigning it would play a big role in improving the urban environment of Grosuplje.

Fig. 20: A mental map of the town Grosuplje.

Districts

Yellow areas represent larger housing districts of similar character. Family houses and terraced houses are prevailing in the northern part of Grosuplje, apartment blocks are mostly located in the eastern and southern parts. Green areas represent larger surfaces that are or may be used for recreation. The largest district is a forested hill called Koščakov hrib. Purple areas are showing different industrial and business districts in Grosuplje.

Paths

Main roads and streets are painted black. The two most important streets are Ljubljanska street (from north to south) and Adamičeva street (direction from west to east), which is also adjacent to Kolodvorska street.

Edges

Most noticeable edges are marked with dotted blue lines. The one that is most easily visible is the forest edge in the northern part. The lower line follows the railway, which represents the edge of Grosuplje in a way - there are no housing areas below it except for one (Sončni dvori). The line on the right follows the stream Grosupeljščica.

Nodes

Main nodes are marked with red dots and represent meeting points and places where people usually dwell in Grosuplje. The first dot on the left is the main train station and the second one is at the beginning of Kolodvorska street, where there is a small platform with a monument.

Landmarks

Important landmarks are denoted with an orange star. The most northern star represents a school that has been built ten years ago and stands out because of its modern architecture. There are two landmarks on Kolodvorska street; the one on the left is the train station with the fountain and the second one is the library, which was renovated a few years ago and represents the centre of Grosuplje, in my opinion. Another landmark is St. Michael's church, which also stands out because of its distinct architecture.

Fig. 21: The library of Grosuplje has been renovated in 2007 and has been classified as one of the most beautiful libraries in Europe. The old part (on the right) has kept its appearance, while the extension (on the left) has a more modern look and imitates the shape of books.

Fig. 22: St. Michael's church with its rather distinct architecture can be regarded as one of the landmarks in Grosuplje.

Fig. 23: Elementary school Brinje was built in 2001 together with a large sports hall. It stands out for its modern architecture and represents an important node in Grosuplje, because of the numerous events that take place in the hall. The school playground is used by many people and also includes a skate park.

Fig. 24: The brook Grosupeljščica can be seen as one of the edges and paths in Grosuplje. The path that runs along the stream has a potential of becoming a recreational area.

Fig. 25: The railway represents the edge of Grosuplje in a way, because there are practically no residential areas beyond it.

Fig. 26: According to the sociological study, Sončni dvori is one of the most popular residential districts in Grosuplje.

Kolodvorska street

Kolodvorska is the most obvious choice for improving public space in Grosuplje. The reason is its central location and because it represents the main node in Grosuplje, being encircled by the town library (1), the municipal building (3), the train and the bus station (8), the bank (6), the post office, the pharmacy and some other shops and restaurants (4, 5). A few years ago some changes were made at the beginning of Kolodvorska street (2). They added some greenery, benches and a statue, which was an improvement from what was there before. In my opinion, it is however still far from making good use of all the potential this place has to offer. This area has the largest flow of pedestrians and as most of the daily errands can also be done here, it would be easy and sensible to arrange for overlapping activities and a mix of uses. My aim is to redesign this zone into a node that will represent a firm centre of Grosuplje as a self-standing town, and not only a transitional area or a suburb of Ljubljana. I believe the whole Kolodvorska street could be converted into a pedestrian zone, which would significantly contribute to the pleasantness of the whole area. Besides, it is a rather short street with not that many residential buildings, so it could actually be feasible.

Fig. 28. 1- 28.10: The following photographs represent a walk through Kolodvorska street, showing different parts of it, starting at the library and the small square, continuing along the street to the bank and the train station.

Fig. 27: A map showing different segments of Kolodvorska street, presented in the following photographs in a numerical order.

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SWOT analysis

In order to start with the analysis of the site, I turned to the SWOT analysis, which is a strategic planning method used in different fields or proffesions to evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats regarding a certain project, plan or business.

Strengths:
- Central location
- Closeness to the majority of important town buildings, the main train station and the bus station
- An avenue planted with old linden trees on both sides
- An important link (between the library and the municipal building to the bank and the main train station)

Weaknesses:
- Traffic and cars parked along the street as well as on the side that is primarily meant for pedestrians
- Staircase blocking the views and the passage in the middle of the paved walkway
- Not well maintained or neglected areas
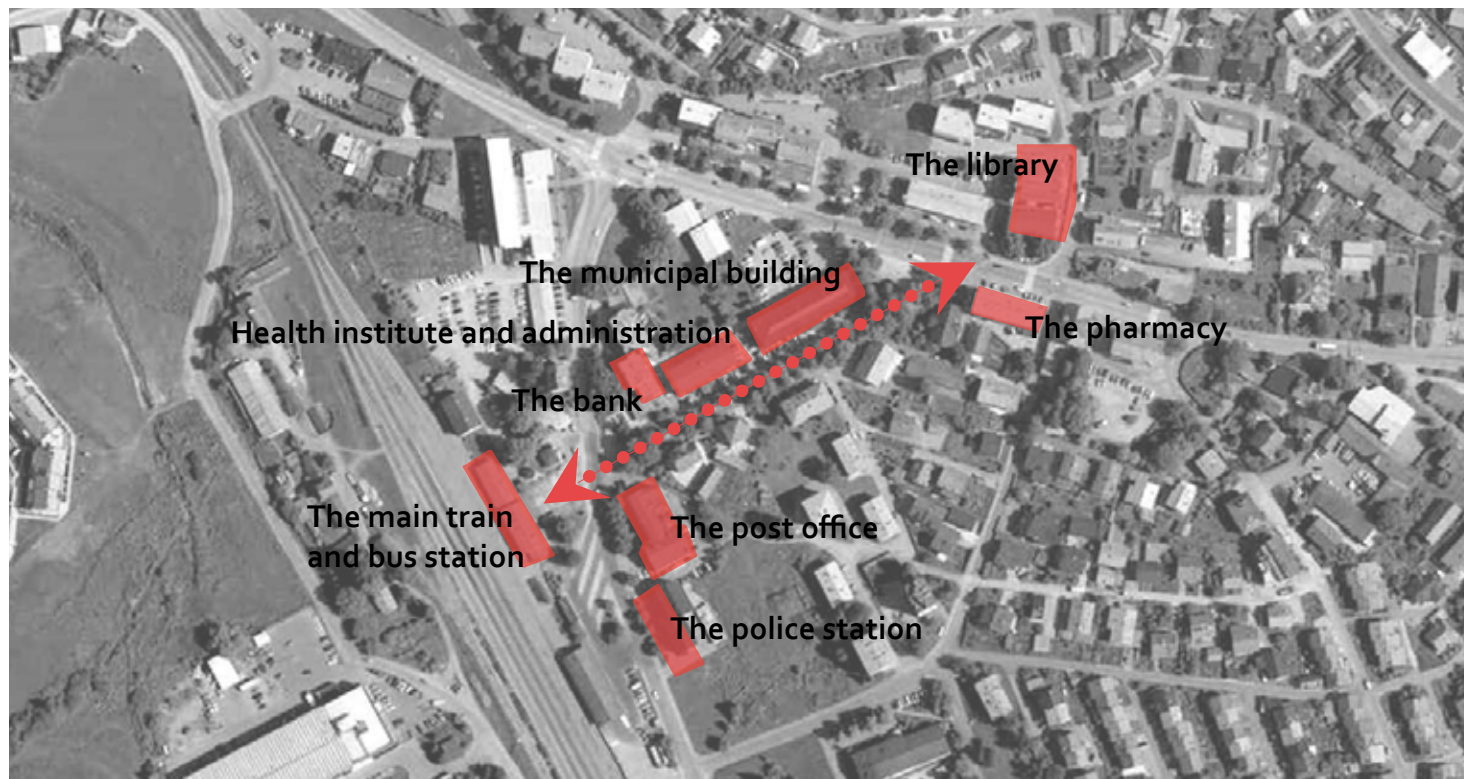
Fig. 29: Kolodvorska is surrounded with the majority of important town buildings, which makes it a notable and busy street, although its appearance is not what it could be.

Fig. 30: One of the strengths of Kolodvorska street is undoubtedly an old avenue of linden trees.

Fig. 31: Looking at the wider area of the town Grosuplje, Kolodvorska street has a rather central location.

Fig. 32: One of the main weaknesses of Kolodvorska street are the cars, which are parked practically everywhere, even on areas that are primarily meant for pedestrians.

- The small platform with a monument in the beginning of the street is not well used or functional
- Lack of diverse activities (mostly offices and bureaucracy, only one restaurant and a few shops)
- Not many benches along the street

Opportunities:
- A pedestrian street
- Creating a small square instead of the unused platform
- Recreational elements
- Playful elements for children and adults
- Overlapping activities, livelier atmosphere
- New functions, giving the town what it needs

Threats:
- Problems with removing cars, people will complain about parking elsewhere
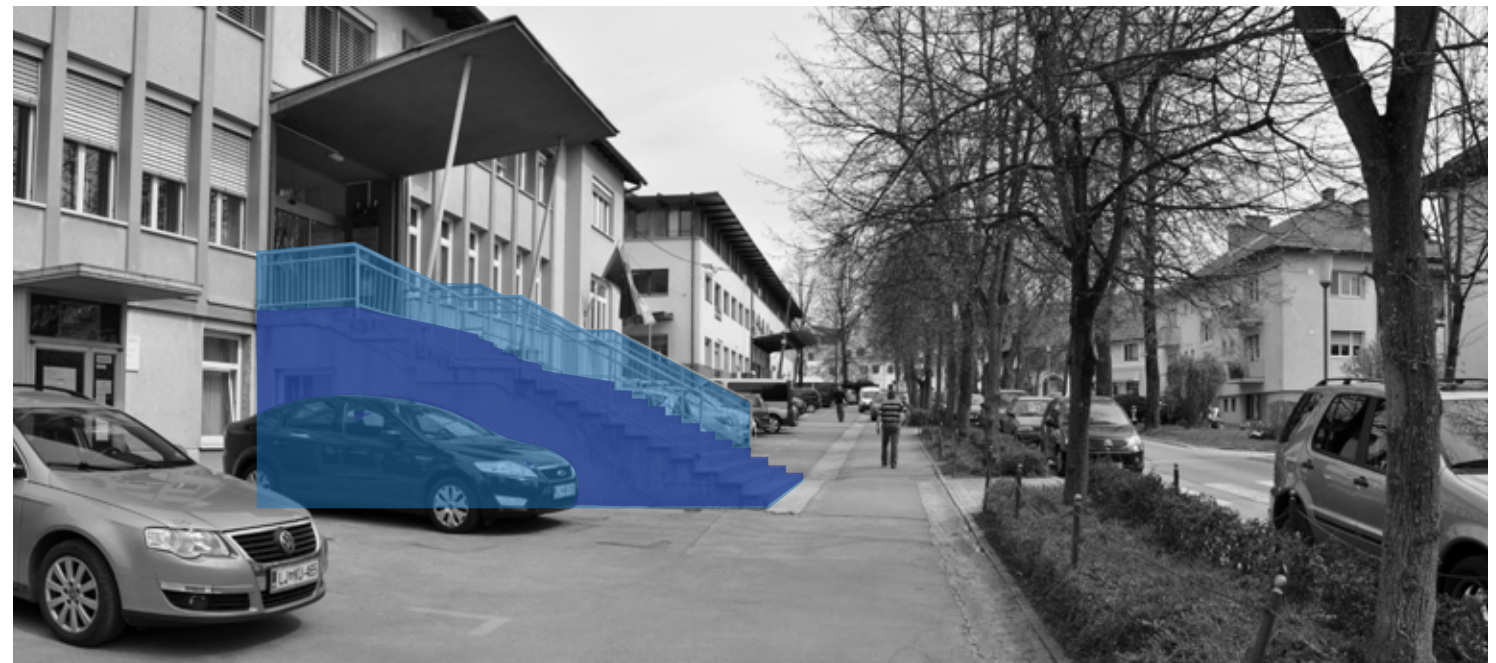
Fig. 33: Another weakness is a staircase of the health institute, because it is blocking more than half of the pedestrian side of the street.

Detailed analysis

Dwelling of people

The picture is show-ing spots, where people usually stay on Kolod-vorska street, due to running errands, taking a walk or simply sitting down and having lunch or coffee. The biggest dots are located by the municipal building, by the bank and the train station.

Please note that all of the detailed analyses below (Fig. 34.1 - 34.7) are a result of my own observations and site visits, thus they can-not be completely precise. However, I believe that they show the overview of the existing situation on Kolodvorska street quite well.

bench
seating area belonging to a bar/restaurant
'unofficial' sitting places (ledges, kerbstones, stairs, etc.)

Existing seating areas

There are some seat-ing possibilities on and around Kolodvorska street, but most of them are not located properly in order to be used and consequently they are often vacant.

Fig. 35: Photographs showing different seating possibilities on Kolodvorska street.

Fig. 36: Different types of trees and shrubs on Kolodvorska street.

Greenery
The picture is showing areas with noticeable plantings, such as shrubs, trees or groups of those. The most distinctive is the avenue of old trees alongside Kolodvorska street.

built volumes
'soft' volumes, plants
planes or surfaces

Volume vs. surface
There is a good proportion of volumes and surfaces on Kolodvorska street, but the empty space or the in-between space is not well used. It is yet another case, where the 'space between buildings' is not appreciated or seen as something important for the quality of life in the city.

Movement directions
The most important directions are on Kolodvorska street and on the two streets around it; the upper one is Adamičeva and the lower one is Taborska. Kolodvorska is a one-way street, but in spite of that it is rather crowded with cars and pedestrians.

Adamičeva street

Taborska street

Kolodvorska street

Pedestrian movement
The picture is showing pedestrian movement on Kolodvorska, with a distinction between directed and undirected movement. The former is linked with different obligations or running errands and the latter with relaxing walks or going for coffee.

directed movement (running errands)
undirected movement (walks, free time etc.)

Fig. 37 and 38: Disorderly parking is a significant problem of Kolodvorska street. Illegally parked cars are negatively effecting the pleasantness of Kolodvorska street for pedestrians.

official parking space

'unofficial', illegal parking space

Parking space

There is quite many official parking spaces on and around Kolodvorska street, but that does not stop people from parking illegally. In my opinion, this is a significant problem, because it strongly affects the streets appearance and pleasantness, especially for pedestrians. Turning Kolodvorska street into a pedestrian area, would be of benefit for many.

Getting opinions (short survey)

In order to see if I had made the right assumption choosing to redesign Kolodvorska street, I decided to make a short survey among people I know and other randomly chosen inhabitants of Grosuplje, asking them a few questions regarding the centre of their town and what kind of changes they would like to see in it.

"Where is the centre of Grosuplje, according to your opinion?"
Answers to this question confirmed my assumption – almost everyone agreed that the centre (if they must specify it) would be Kolodvorska street, different parts of it or places in the immediate nearness of it – the part around the library or the main train station. Some even answered that *"there is no centre of Grosuplje"* or simply *"it does not exist"*, but I expected those answers because they are true in a way, which brings me back to the problematic structure of Grosuplje.

"What do you miss most in the central part of Grosuplje (spatially)?"
The following answers were: a main square (65%), a park (50%), a pedestrian street (29%), a recreational area (24%), shops, bars or restaurants (15%), children's playground (10%). Those were the answers I suggested, but some also mentioned other things, such as: a community centre, bicycle paths, parking house, a fitness centre, a cinema centre, jogging tracks, more pedestrian areas, and two people even said they would like to have a tram in Grousplje.

"How often do you visit Kolodvorska street?"
The following answers were: rarely (less than twice a month) – 12%; twice a month – 25%; once a week – 32%; two or three times per week – 27%; almost every day – 5%. The majority of the questioned people visit Kolodvorska once a week, which is less than I expected.
This question was followed by a sub question: ***"What is usually the purpose of your visit; different obligations (visiting the bank, post etc.) or relaxation (taking a walk, having lunch etc.)?*** Only 14% of the examinees chose the latter, and 86% chose the former, which tells me that not many people visit Kolodvorska street in their free time, but only if it is necessary.

"What do you miss on Kolodvorska street and what kind of changes would you like to see there?"
I suggested some options and there were two that received the largest number of answers: more possibilities for cultural activities (outdoor shows and events) – 66% and more park elements (greenery, seating areas, playful elements, water etc.) – 64%. The following options that received the most answers were: removing traffic and making a pedestrian area or at least removing the parked cars – 53%; including more shops, pubs and restaurants – 36%. There were also other individual answers like: a parking house, something that would strengthen the identity of Grosuplje, a community centre.

I found asking people these questions quite useful. Although the answers were not very surprising, they made me more sure about my choice of area and about what could be done on Kolodvorska street in order to make it more used and pleasant for the inhabitants of Grosuplje.

Design proposal

Design process, sketching...

After reading about all the different theories regarding the improvement of urban environments and after going through the whole analytical part, many creative thoughts and ideas had already formed in my head and I was eager to start designing for the chosen area.

My design process began with simple hand drawn plans and perspective sketches that were more or less brainstorming and just getting different ideas out of my head and on the paper. In order to think of a design that could please most of the people's wishes and demands regarding the central structure of Grosuplje, I tried to keep the results from both mentioned surveys in the back of my mind throughout the whole process.

With the two main nodes, the Cultural plaza and the Train station square, I decided to follow the existing urban forms and tried to add elements that would contribute to their character and popularity among the inhabitants of Grosuplje. My aim was to make them more used and alive. The In-between represents a pedestrian area that is more organically shaped, adding to the pleasantness and agitation of Kolodvorska street.

My main intention with the Cultural plaza was to create an area that could grant a rather strong demand for a place, which could be used for small open-air cultural events. The structure of the Train station square remains more or less the same. It is renovated with a few additions, which have a role of adding to its aesthetical image and popularity among people. When I began designing for the In-between area I saw a good opportunity to be more playful and offer possibilities for different activities. This results in a pedestrian area with a character of a playground park.
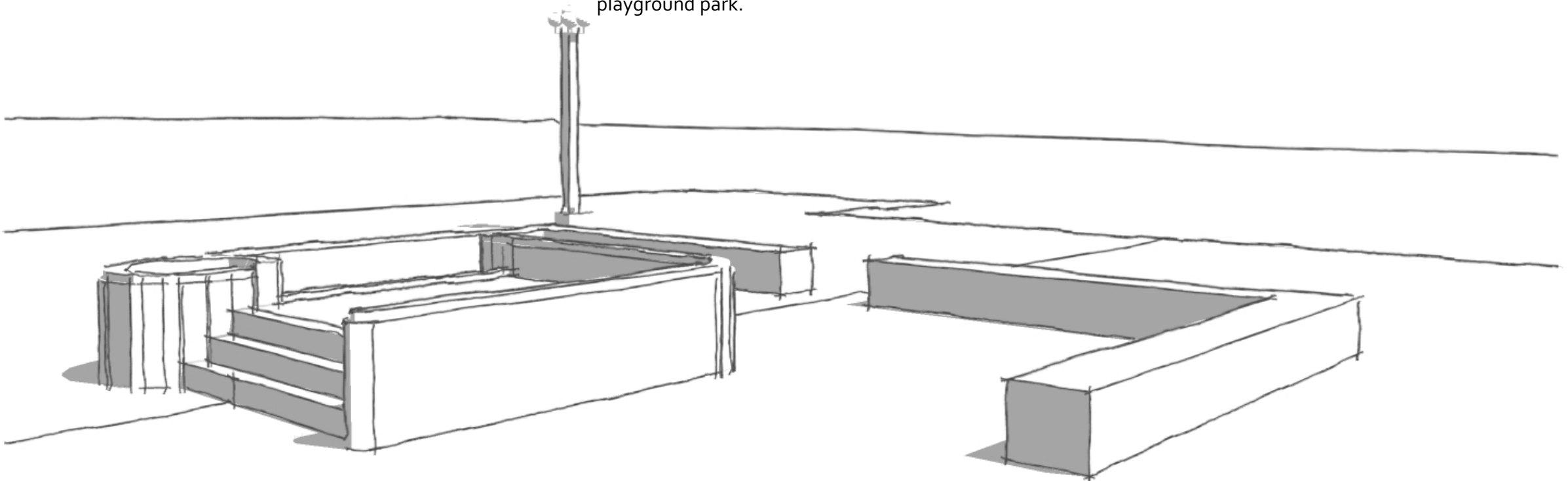
Fig. 39: One of the sketches for the Train station square.

This page is dedicated to a short insight of the beginning of my design process, showing a few schemes, plans and sketches that represent concepts and ideas for the three areas of focus.

The sketch below represents an early conceptual scheme of Kolodvorska street. The emphasis is on the connection between two important nodes - the small platform and the train station. On the sketch they were named 'the stage' and 'the retreat' and they were linked together with the pedestrian area of Kolodvorska street.

On the right there are more detailed sketches of all three areas, showing pre-final ideas that were later on transformed into computer drawings, which are presented on the following pages.
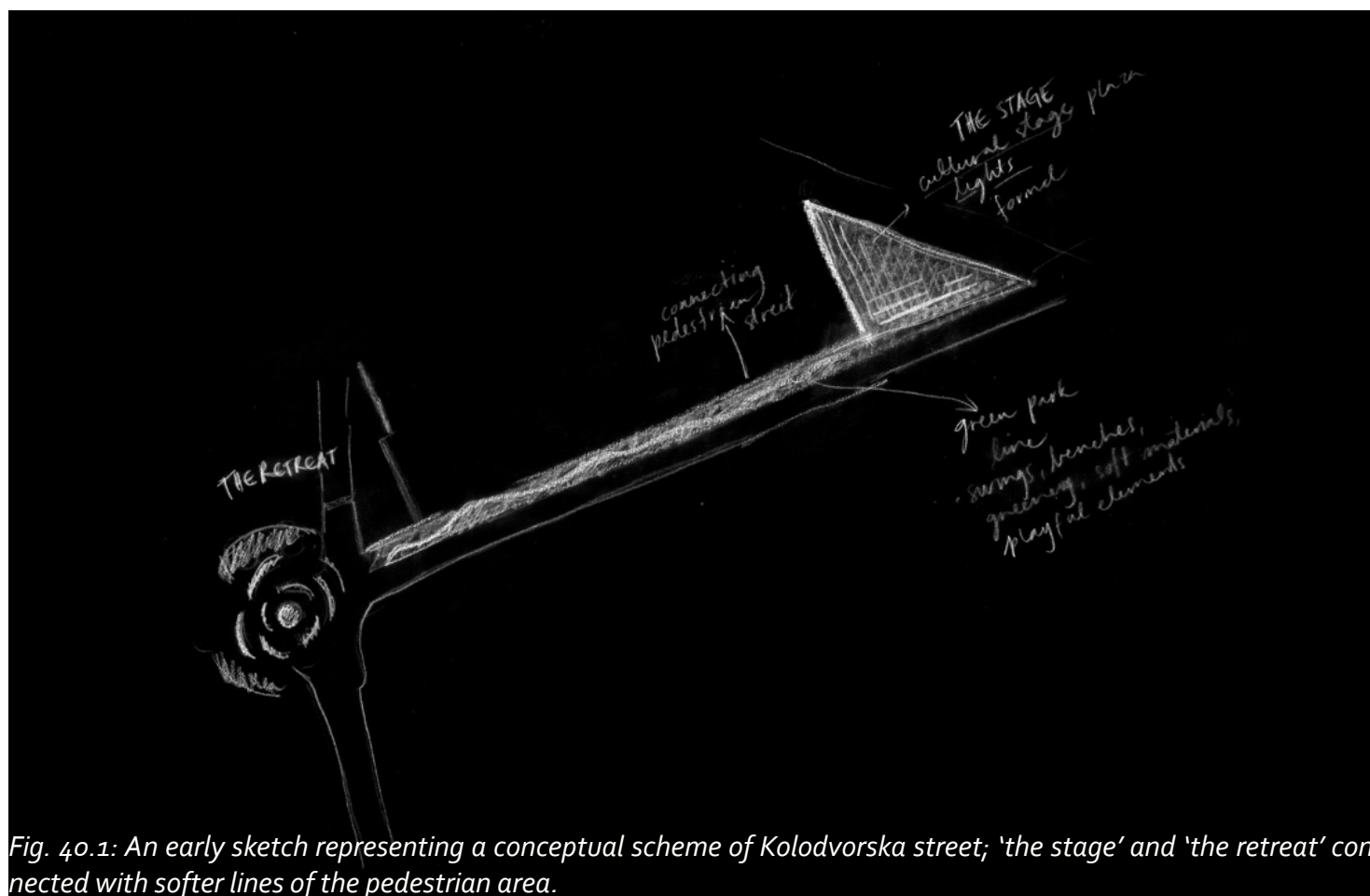
Fig. 40.1: An early sketch representing a conceptual scheme of Kolodvorska street; 'the stage' and 'the retreat' connected with softer lines of the pedestrian area.

Fig. 40.2 - 40.4 : Hand-drawn sketches of my three areas of focus, the Cultural plaza, the In-between and the Train station square.

Fig. 41: The Cultural plaza is located in the beginning of Kolodvorska street, close to the library.

Fig. 42: A typical 'entrance view' of the area.

Cultural plaza

The majority of people, who were approached in my survey, agreed that Grosuplje is in need of a main square that would represent its centre, but at the same time they expressed a wish for more possibilities for cultural activities and also more park elements in Grosuplje. With the design proposal for the Cultural plaza I tried to combine and unite the wishes that had been expressed and aimed to create a place that the citizens of Grosuplje need and would use with joy.

The Cultural plaza is located at the beginning of Kolodvorska street, which is the centre of Grosuplje, according to many of its inhabitants. The main idea is to transform a rather empty and unused platform into a pleasant pass-through area while running errands or getting off the bus. The aim is to create a place for meeting friends or eating lunch with co-workers, as well as a stage for local cultural events such as concerts, song recitals or short theatrical performances.

The overall design of the place is geometrical and follows the existing triangular form of the square. Formal shapes and hard materials are softened with rows of trees and sprinkling water features.

The largest and slightly elevated triangular element represents a stage for cultural events. It is facing a number of concrete and wooden benches of different lengths in order to give some visual energy of motion and excitement to the area. During the day the plaza may offer a short rest to the visitor, whereas during the night it can be transformed into a small outdoor theatre. Another feature contributing to this cultural atmosphere is the lighting of the 'stage' and some of the surrounding elements, which also make the plaza noticeable and more pleasant to use in the evening hours.

Rows of different tree species are planted in such a way that they outline the edge of the plaza and contribute to framing a 'city room' that in a way is distinct from its surroundings, yet still visible and easily accessible.
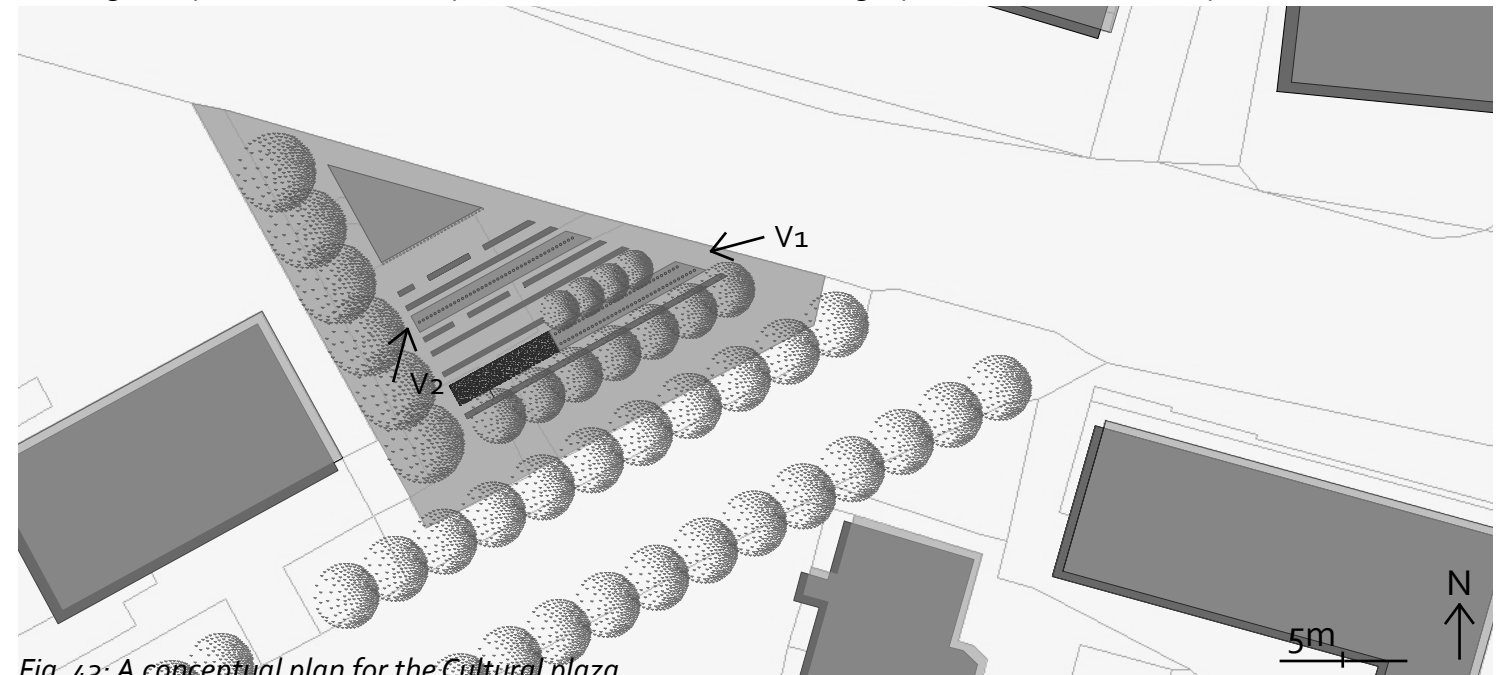
Fig. 43: A conceptual plan for the Cultural plaza.

The proposal can be summarised as:
- Triangular composition, following the existing shape of the area
- Long benches for daily use, also functioning as a small open-air theatre in the evening hours
- Trees creating volume, offering shade and retreat as well as contributing to the diversity of the area

- Combining simple materials, such as concrete, pebbles, water and ornamental grass
- A stage for cultural events
- Water features as a refreshment in the city
- Trees forming an 'oasis in the city' and a distinct 'city room'
- Lighting creating a special atmosphere during the night and contributing to a general feeling of safety

Fig. 44: An illustration showing the proposal for the Cultural plaza as seen from the beginning of Kolodvorska street (V1).

Fig. 45: A view of the Cultural plaza in the evening, showing its possible use for different cultural events (V2).

The Train station square

The main train station usually represents an important node and meeting point of any town or city, and Grosuplje is no exception. It is also important that the first view of Grosuplje, after getting off the train, makes a good impression on the visitor or presents a resident with a pleasant homely feeling.

The station is located at the end of Kolodvorska street with a small angular platform unfolding in front of it. There is a fountain in the middle, four street lamps around it and a few benches at its edges. The place lacks character, but still works in its own way.

In my proposal all of the existing elements are preserved but renovated and retouched. There are only a few new seating features, trees and lights, which are all outlining and emphasising the shape and centrality of the fountain. The colour difference of the concrete contributes to the distinction of the square, adding contrast and character, thus making it more alluring to the visitor or passer-by. Newly planted trees add volume and agitation to the area, as well as they offer some shade and retreat to anyone that is waiting for the train, bus or a simple friendly gathering. They also add to the diversity of the place by breaking the symmetrical composition of the fountain, benches and lamps. There are small concrete pillars separating the area from the street traffic and preventing people from parking on the square.

Fig. 46: The Train station square is located at the end of Kolodvorska street.

Fig. 47: A conceptual plan for the Train station square.

Fig. 48: An entrance view from Taborska street, with the fountain in the front and the main train station building in the background.

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Fig. 49: A visualisation of the proposal for the Train station square, showing an important node and a busy area during the day (V1).

The proposal can be summarised as:
- Keeping and renovating the existing elements
- Trees emphasising the shape of the fountain and its centrality; also adding volume and breaking the symmetry of other elements
- Adding contrast and difference in colour to make the area more clear and noticeable
- More seating possibilities
- Lights outlining the structure of the area during the night, contributing to its pleasantness and safety

Fig. 50: An illustration showing the Train station square in the evening (V2). Numerous lights illuminate its elements and outline its structure, while they also contribute to the safety and pleasantness of the area.

Fig. 51: The In-between is located along the greater part of Kolodvorska street.

Fig. 52: A view of the existing pedestrian area of Kolodvorska street with the avenue of linden trees on the right and the problematic staircase on the left.

The In-between

The existing pedestrian part of Kolodvorska street is one of the main nodes and busiest places in Grosuplje. It has the potential of becoming a pleasant place for people walking, but it is mostly occupied by parked cars, which give it a character that is far from being people-friendly.

This area is named the In-between, because it is connecting the Cultural plaza and the Train station square. It acts as a link between them as well as a counterpoint to both. They are shaped rather formally, while the In-between represents a place of softer, organic shapes and more spontaneous interaction. It includes colours, playful elements, and a variety of materials and greenery. All along the pedestrian part of Kolodvorska street there are benches, hammocks and swings, stimulating children and adults to stop for a while, play or just have a short rest on the bench. The existing linden tree avenue is enriched and complemented with different shrubs cut into winding shapes, which contribute to the playfulness and agitation of the area. The coloured paving adds contrast and contributes to a livelier atmosphere of the street.

My concept for the In-between area also includes renovation of the existing asphaltic surface, removal of the cars from the pedestrian part of the street and rebuilding the staircase in a way it would not disturb the view or act as an obstacle for people walking.

This concept could also be applied in some other streets in Grosuplje, which could be connected at some point and form a playful recreational net.
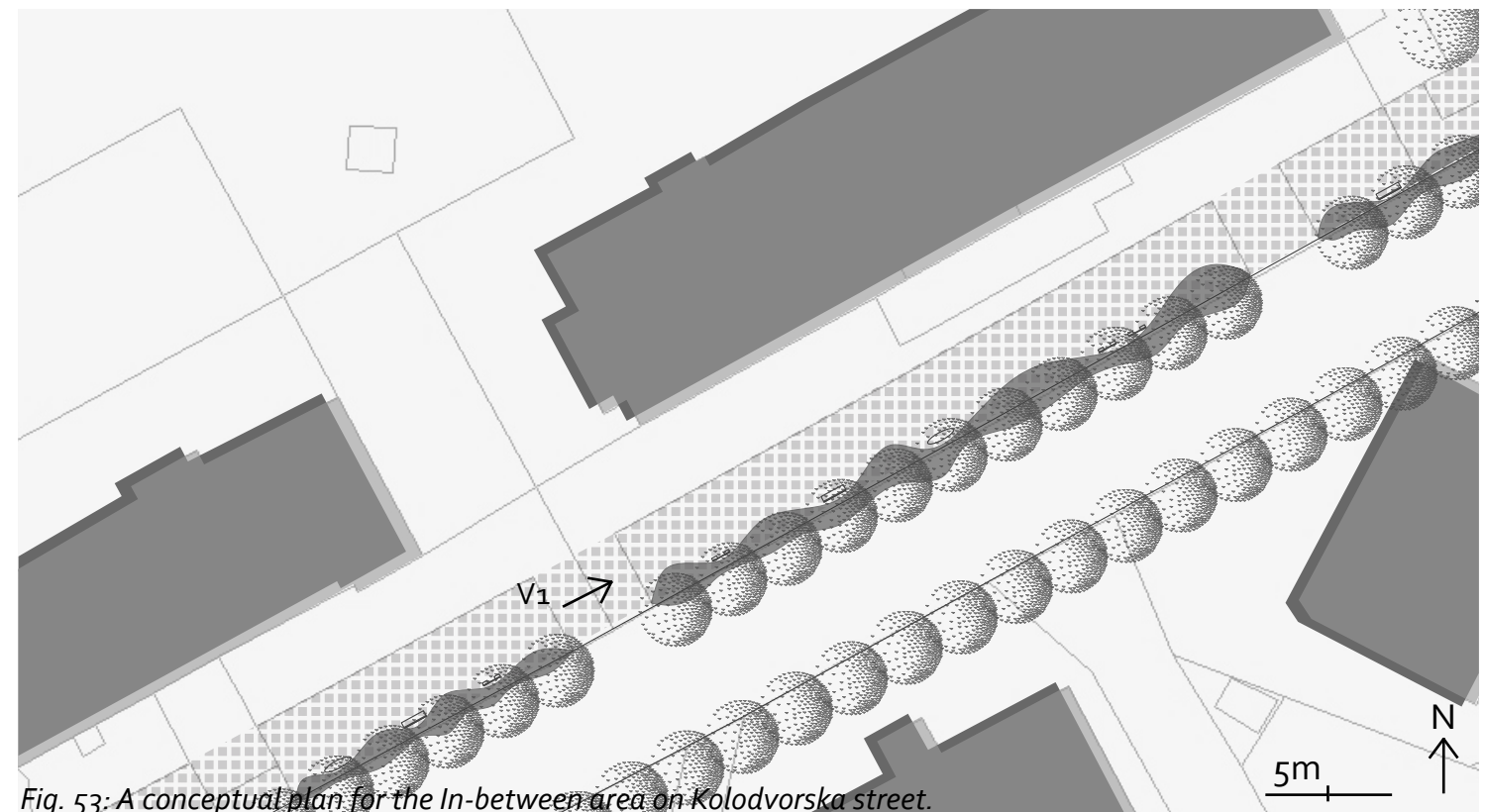
Fig. 53: A conceptual plan for the In-between area on Kolodvorska street.

The proposal can be summarised as:
- The link and the counterpoint between the Cultural plaza and the Train station square
- A place for spontaneous interaction
- Softer, organic shapes
- Playful elements, hammocks, swings and benches along the whole Kolodvorska street
- Colourful materials and greenery adding contrast and volume
- Stimulating children and adults to stop, rest or play for a while
- Removal of parked cars

Fig. 54: An illustration showing the proposal for the In-between area of Kolodvorska street with its soft shapes and playful elements (V1).

Concluding discussion

Fig. 55: Dvorni square in Ljubljana with the Ljubljana castle in the background.

Fig. 56: Open spaces and spaces between buildings are important constructors of life in the city, thus they should receive the same amount of attention as the built fabric. Hribar embankment of the river Ljubljanica in Ljubljana.

Reflections

Reflecting upon the theory. When I first began writing this thesis, I did not have a real notion where it would take me. I have always been interested in urban landscapes and urban design, but I did not feel like I have much knowledge of the topic. This thesis seemed like a good opportunity to change that, so my process began with the search for various literature sources. I soon realised that very much has been written about towns and cities, how they have been changing throughout the years and in what ways they could be improved.

It is however a fact that because the built fabric and architecture of cities always have been in the spotlight, the areas and parts in-between have been disregarded, ignored or simply perceived as the less significant for the city, which is the largest and most complex structure of humankind.
In the recent years the interest for the living conditions has raised. People began to realise that urban landscapes, with their streets, squares and parks included, are great contributors to a better quality of city-life and thus should be investigated more thoroughly. Interesting is Tibbalds' thinking that the quality of a city design mainly is related to the open spaces and spaces between buildings – their nature and memorability, rather than to the buildings themselves. But even if the streets, squares and plazas of towns and cities actually are the most important elements of our urban environments, they are rarely seen as such. (Tibbalds, 2001: 21)

Bill Hillier (2007) begins his work 'Space is the machine' with a few quoting lines that summarise this point in a clear way, starting with Le Corbusier's famous idea that "*a house is a machine for living in...*" and then a student's response saying, how he thought that all functional things had been refuted and that buildings can not be regarded as machines. After these statements Hillier concludes with a quotation of a computer pogrammer Nick Dalton, saying: "*You have not understood. The building is not the machine. Space is the machine.*" Hillier (2007: 262) indeed sees cities as things made of space.
When reading this, I first began to realise that in order to truly understand cities and urbanity, I need a good insight into the phenomenon of space. With a growing insight into different theories about space and place, it became even more clear to me that it is something intangible and hard to grasp, but at the same time completely fundamental. Only with a deepened understanding of the sense of place you can start to mould it into something new – something of a different function and meaning.

From the rather indefinite and wide theories about space and cities in general, I decided to continue to more specific topics of urban design and small-scale urban forms, like squares and plazas.
According to Hillier (2007: 111), urban planning usually begins with approaches to buildings or larger urban areas, but often hesitates to deal with the city as a spatial and a functional whole, which can cause cities and towns never to develop into real places. Consequently the urban designers and architects today are occupied with trying to recreate towns and cities into places part by part or piece by piece, but I guess it is hard to reach integrity this way. Since the physical is the means to the functional of any city, the form-function relationship is probably the most important in the planning process. Whenever I think of urban design, Moughtin's words come to mind, saying that anyone who is about to design for urban areas always needs to consider three important aspects – firm structure, functionality and aesthetics – and stick to those, without compromising any of them if not necessary. Actually, I

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see this as some sort of basis of any kind of design.

In my work I have delved quite deep into topics concerning the main problems of urban design as well as measures for improving urban environments. Out of this, I have also tried to group strong points about both into a logical order. I believe it is good to have an overview of both, the problems and the possibilities for improvement, because it would be reckless to continue repeating mistakes from the past. With having some ideas about the problems and possible measures, it is easier to decide where and how to start improving things and to be able to orientate during the design process. However, this does not mean that I believe that mistakes can be avoided and that perfect environments are about to multiply. The magic formula for urban design has not been invented and most probably it will never be, but in my opinion a solid theoretical basis is most necessary.

I tried to conclude the theoretical part with presenting smaller but important composing units of urban environments – squares and plazas, which I felt like I needed to understand in order to move on to the context and more practical part of the assignment.
Different theorists describe a city or town square in different ways, but in the end all of them agree that it is a crucial and most recognisable element in the heart of the city. A square is an empty space waiting for something to happen, to be filled with meaning and function; always there and ready to serve its purpose. It draws a variety of people and spontaneous activities together, offers opportunities for social interaction and observation of the city life. Without this essential element, a city or a town lacks character, identity and as it cannot meet the urban needs of its residents, it will neither be memorable. I also studied a bit about different types of plazas and their characteristics in order to better understand different possibilities and how different functions and activities affect their design.

Reflecting upon the context and design process. Grosuplje is an evident example of a town that is pleasant and nice to live in, but it is obviously missing a central structure that would present it with a feeling of urbanity. The majority of people, who participated in the sociological study agreed that they are satisfied with their life in Grosuplje and would not like to move elsewhere, but on the other hand they also agreed that they miss a main town square, a park and a pedestrian street, which all are essential elements of any town or city.

As I began to read and carry out research about 'sleeping cities' or 'bedroom suburbs' I could draw many parallels with Grosuplje. It is a town that is attractive for old as well as new residents, but not for large businesses and industrial companies; some people move from the capital because of lower living costs and others may want to escape the city life and seek the closeness of nature. I think that most of the mentioned migrational patterns are applicable to Grosuplje and point out to the fact that it is a 'sleeping city'. This fact will not change easily, because in order for that to happen the town would have to go through infrastructural changes and processes of branding (so people would start to perceive it differently). I only wanted to present this problem as an additional factor that influences the centre of Grosuplje to be empty or its lack of centre in general.

The spatial structure of Grosuplje offers empty, open spaces, which are in some ways functioning as squares, tho-

Fig. 57: Prešern square is the main square of Ljubljana, which is often transformed into a stage to provide space for different cultural and sports events.

Fig. 58: A pedestrian area at the embankment of the river Ljubljanica includes playful elements for anyone, who wants to stop and relax for a while.

ugh they lack their characteristics. In my opinion a square needs to be at least functional or aesthetic, if not both at the same time. This was one of the main reasons why Grosuplje seemed like a challenge and a perfect choice for my case study and for the practical part of the thesis. The other reason was the fact that I know the context and circumstances rather well, because I have lived in Grosuplje since I was a little girl. Going through the whole process of analysing, thinking, sketching and designing made me realise many things I have not noticed before. When I went to take some photographs of Kolodvorska street and its surroundings, was probably the first time that I noted how much unexploited potential it has and what an unfriendly place it is at the moment. Whenever I went there before, it was mainly to visit the bank, post or something similar, so I did not pay attention to what was going on around me. Pedestrians walking on the footway have to avoid parked cars almost every step of the way, the few benches that are located along the street are surrounded by vehicles, which is the reason why they are vacant most of the time. This situation reminded me of the book I read by Francis Tibbalds, describing cities as unsafe and hostile places to dwell in, being polluted and overcrowded with traffic. Of course Grosuplje cannot measure up to large cities of the world in many ways, because it is a small town of rather strong rural identity at its margins, but I can see that as yet another reason why it should have a small but enjoyable town centre.

From the beginning I was not sure whether I should make a short survey about Grosuplje among its inhabitants, because I had already found the sociological study, which was made especially for the spatial development prent of the municipality. I thought that I would probably not find out anything new or interesting myself. After I had come a bit further in my process I decided to do it anyhow, but with an emphasis on the centre of Grosuplje and Kolodvorska street. In the end I was glad I went through with it, because it opened my eyes to the way people in Grosuplje perceive its central spatial structure. It also made me more confident about what I had been doing, which part of town I had chosen to work with and what I had wanted to change and propose on Kolodvorska street from the beginning. The biggest surprise of the survey was the fact that the majority of the people I had approached, were saying that they missed more possibilities for outdoor cultural events and wanted to have a place, which could support that. This was the main reason why I chose to propose for a small cultural plaza at the beginning of Kolodvorska street. It is a small area, which could not provide enough space for any larger event, but it would be a start and it could still culturally revive the town centre in its own way. Many people also mentioned how Grosuplje lacks a pedestrian street as well as park elements. The former was in my mind from the start, because Kolodvorska has a great potential of becoming a pleasant pedestrian street and, in my opinion, it should have been one already. So I started brainstorming in this direction and wanted to combine a pedestrian street with playful elements and greenery in order to present it with a feeling of a city street park. Including park elements and greenery all along Kolodvorska street could contribute a great deal to the pleasantness of Grosuplje, because these elements are an indispensable part of any city.

After reading through many pages of literature, the sociological study and also my own survey, thoughts about what could be done to improve the town centre of Grosuplje became intertwined with what I already knew and what I have imagined before. The ideas that I have proposed in this thesis are just a few of the endless possibilities for changing the centre of Grosuplje into something more pleasant. It is a concept that could and should be developed further with the cooperation of its inhabitants, municipality, planners and landscape architects.

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Conclusions

When I began to work on my master project, I set myself a few goals that I wanted to reach throughout my working process.

Trying to depict some of the main problems of urban design seemed like an easy task at the beginning, but it turned out to be a bit more complicated than that. The wickedness of the problems is easy to understand if only I think of Vickers' genuine quote "*Cities are all the same, cities are all different.*" (Vickers, 2009: 6) Its point is to show, how easy it is to generalise when it comes to cities and simply think that applying the same rules to all would work. It is then harder to realise that each city is different and needs to be approached in a way that follows its forms, reads its sense of place and listens to its users. Cities are physically stable, but ever-changing at the same time; however they always seem to retain a certain character, no matter what processes and modifications they go through.

There are numerous aspects worth considering when it comes to bettering, renovating and restoring public places, but yet again they are not all applicable to any town or city in the world. In my opinion, this is what makes urban design and planning a hard and sometimes ungrateful task. Improving public environments is a long and multilateral process, and judging whether a place has improved or enhanced in value is something that cannot be done over night, but over a longer period of time.

Trying to reflect back upon my proposal and discuss whether it comprises the cognitions of my literature study does not seem like an easy task either. It was hard to unite and combine all the grand wisdoms of the theoretical part to a real, tangible situation of a small city, and thus try to contribute to a more people friendly town centre, which its residents would enjoy using. Obviously, Grosuplje is not a place that would benefit from any kind of spectacular, exceptional or extra-modern intervention, but a small town with small-scale areas, carrying potential for becoming places that attract people and different activities. This is the reason why my conceptual proposals are mostly about following the existing forms and adding a few rather functional elements that could fill the place, give it function, draw attention, and also please the eye.

To conclude, I decided to summarise a few aspects of urban design that I have found to be the most important for creating successful and pleasant urban landscapes.

<u>Experiential dimension of a place.</u> In order to create a place that will be of benefit to people, it is important to understand how they experience it. What they notice and appreciate must be taken into consideration and it should be ranked in the first place.

<u>Significance of places.</u> Places become important to their users for different reasons, one may be the functional necessity, which means regular visits and consequently importance of some kind. Another may be satisfying people's motivational needs, recreational pursuits or need for meaning and beauty. (Thwaites and Simkins, 2007: 41)

<u>Restorative places.</u> People need to have a possibility of retreat and relaxation; some places offer this sense of being away in different manners. One rather common way is by including 'nature' or 'natural' features, such as greenery or water, but it can be practically anything, offering any kind of visual fascination or interesting experience that invites one's mind to wander or causes some sort of psychological engagement.

Fig. 59 and 60: Prags Boulevard is a unique street in Copenhagen. It includes seven activity areas that offer various playful possibilities for people of all ages.

Fig. 61: People talking while sitting on the edge of a statue pedestal, Kungsträdgården in Stockholm. Offering possibilities for social interaction and stimulating social activities is an important feature that most urban areas should comprise.

Fig. 62: A small outdoor theatre in the town Zipari, island of Kos, Greece. When it is not used as a stage or a place for local events, it serves as a meeting point and a place for a short rest.

Possibilities for social interaction. Social interaction is an important part of our everyday lives. If people will know that there are good possibilities for a short chat or a stimulating conversation, they will visit a place more often and with bigger joy. However, it is always good to have different options. According to Thwaites and Simkins (2007), a truly successful place is one that offers both options – areas, where one can draw back and hide, as well as parts, where one can be revealed, seen and receive attention.

Stimulating optional and social activities. Gehl divides outdoor activities in public spaces into three simplified types; necessary, optional and social activities. Necessary activities are the ones that are more or less compulsory and which we all are required to participate in (running errands, going to work, going to school, going to the shop, waiting for the bus, etc.). These activities will take place anytime all year long, no matter what the outdoor conditions are and regardless of the quality of the public environment. Optional activities are a different matter, because they are wished for, but they are also dependent on exterior physical conditions – weather and place must be inviting, otherwise the users will not pursue them. Examples of optional activities are mostly relaxing and recreational acts such as taking a walk, jogging, sitting in the sun etc. The third category of activities is social activities, which coincide with both other categories and are dependent on the presence of other people in the public space. Social activities occur all the time and in many places, but as Gehl implies *"social activities are indirectly supported whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public spaces."* (Gehl, 2006: 9f)

I believe that all the viewpoints described above are crucial to consider when designing for any urban area. People with their experiences, wishes and preferences should come first in the process. Another important thing is that a quality urban environment stimulates optional and social activities, which makes it vivacious and pleasant. The town centre of Grosuplje is a typical example of a place that is mostly used for necessary activities. It was one of my main challenges to propose a design for areas, which I believe could change for the better, but it is up to you to judge, whether I succeeded or not.

The theoretical study, my analysis, different observations and the design process have all directed me to see different sides of the multilateral science of urban design, which was also one of my personal goals of this thesis. My point was not to find any final solution of how to create quality public environments, because I believe this is something that should be ever-improving. Working on this project seems like a long process of the past five months, but now, when I am close to the finish line, I feel like every step of the way was necessary in its own manner and has left me with much to reflect upon, which is what counts in the long run.

"If we acknowledge that an objective of life is the achievement of a continuous flow of harmonious experiences, then the relationship of spaces to one another, as experienced over time, becomes a major design problem. [...] Since designers should provide a setting for a totally harmonious life experience, the dimensions of their designs should encompass the whole of a day, the whole of a city." (Bacon, 1967: 19)

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Illustrations