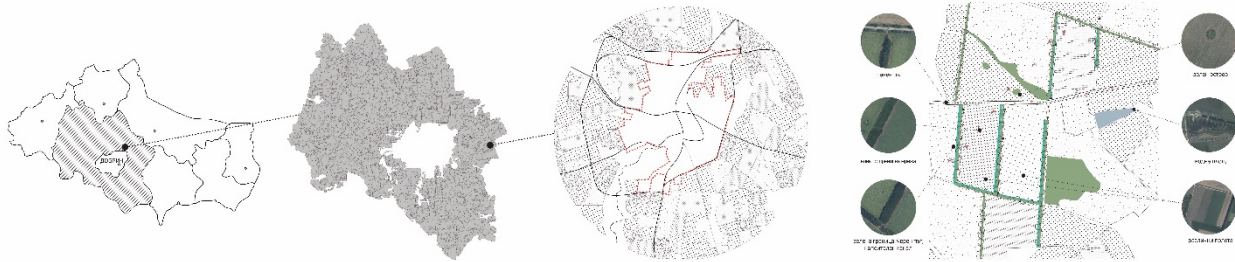


## EXTENDED PRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR THE CENTRAL CITY SECTION OF DOBRICH



*"From the outside, Dobrich does not differ much from any larger provincial town. Near and to the south is the broad and flat hill of Yalanji bair. The road from Varna descends along it and from here you can see the full panorama of the city. All buildings are new. Several white minarets rise high above the roofs, and to the heavy forms of the new architecture are added the exotic lines of the Orient. There are almost no gardens and greenery of fruit trees and nothing softens the bright colors of the buildings. And if there is anything original in the view of this city, it is the strange mirage illusion that inevitably comes during summer days: bathed in the sun, the colorful city is open and solitary shines amid the endless wilderness of the field. But this external silence can only deceive. Inside, the city suddenly strikes with its great movement and noisy life: carts are constantly rumbling through the streets, workshops line up one after another where sanguineously glow the embers of the hearths and ring the blows of the hammer. Three quarters of the city are shops, all kinds of workshops and large warehouses with agricultural machinery. At all hours of the day around them, like ants, crowds of people gather, pass and rush. A hectic and noisy life is bubbling everywhere. It is clearly felt that here is the mighty engine of a large and complex mechanism, that this city is the heart that drives the life of the whole of Dobrudja. And indeed, even before the railway connected it to the sea, it was called Dry Scaffold. And in its significance as a central nerve is the whole secret of its wealth and rapid progress."*

Yordan Yovkov, "Collected Works in Six Volumes"

*"In the past, architecture was primarily focused on creating community and making maximum efforts to symbolize community."*

Rem Koolhaas, "My Thoughts on the Smart City"

Taking on the design task from the organizers of the competition and on additional analysis of the urban environment by our team, the project is an attempt to create central urban spaces, which, in parallel with satisfying the functional requirements of the task, also manage to tell a story - one of inhabiting the city and supporting the development of urban and supra-urban communities.

## EXISTING URBAN CONDITIONS AND CONCEPT INTRODUCTION

### *Existing urban conditions – negative, objective, positive*

As early as the mid-19th century, Dobrich began to change significantly and underwent spontaneous changes due to improvements. The first Bulgarian church in the region - St. George's - was built, and a Bulgarian cell school was opened next to it. Subsequently, a city park, a telegraph connection with the city of Varna, as well as a post office were created.

In the years after the Liberation and during the Romanian period (1919-1940), the city retained its function as an administrative and cultural center in the region, and its central parts acquired buildings with various architectural typologies - a mixture of Western architecture and the architecture of the Orient.

The first modern urban development plan of the town of Dobrich (1944) was the work of arch. Dimo Serbezov. It was provoked by the active urbanization characteristic of the post-war period.

In the 60s of the last century the development of the urban planning in Bulgaria underwent a rapid upsurge, also connected with the rapid reconstruction of the urban centers. The repeated growth of the population in the county towns, both natural and mechanical, becomes a prerequisite for problems related to the housing issue, transportation and the entire public service system.

Street network in 1968: before the major urban planning changes of the 1970s and 1980s. Dobrich (then Tolbukhin), has a commercial and artisan appearance. Its streets are small and winding. The existing urban environment is of low-rise traditional architecture. The main streets passing through the center are the main arteries along which bus and car traffic moves.

Street network in 1988: the center is completely free of car traffic, the main streets straightened and widened, and the commercial establishments and the building stock along them renewed. On the one hand, the radical urban planning changes create conflicts in the urban fabric and erase a large part of the architectural heritage, but on the other hand, they leave an extensive pedestrian area and a variety of public buildings.

In 1970, the construction plan was approved, aiming to direct the development of the city toward meeting the requirements of the modern socialist urban planning: the streets are straightened and widened, and the scale of the environment and the development is drastically changed. However, in order to free up space for the new construction, almost all emblematic buildings from the first half of the 20th century were destroyed. The appearance of Shadravana Square (now Svoboda Square) was also radically changed, as it should be much more spacious.

The legacy these changes leave behind is **an impressively sized system of squares and pedestrian streets**. They are, on the one hand, remote from the scale of the human body and difficult to master, suitable only for organized events of the type of demonstrations and meetings, **formally uniform and non-communicating with the entrances and facades of the buildings** that define them. Often the environment is blocked by elements of the spontaneous development, such as the raised planting beds, but on the other hand, there is plenty of extensive spaces, freed from car presence and accessibility problems and **containing a huge potential** to connect meaningfully, in addition to physically, the variety of different scale and type of public and commercial buildings, located in the center of the city.

### *Concept – poetic / pragmatic*

In order to satisfy the desire of the citizens of Dobrich, expressed in the survey, to have an emblematic, well-designed and attractive market square, in order to restore the connection between "public" and "space", the project takes into account and re-applies the part of the currently operating in space **principles, based on communication**, and rejects those, which fragment and hinder. The new interventions in space are based on analyzes of **the principles of harmonious inhabitation of public spaces** in the sustainable modern

city, which is at the same time historically determined and with a view, directed to the future of the planet.

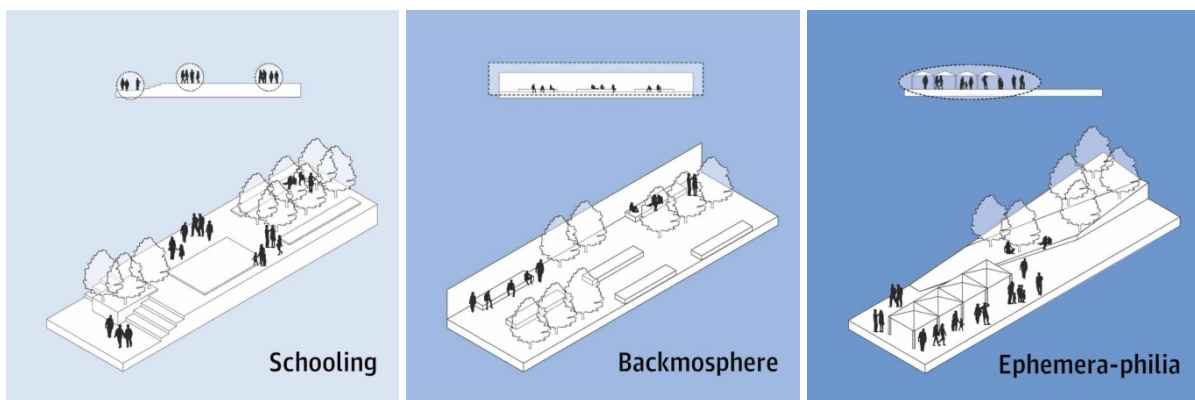
### HUMAN SCALE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE SPACES

The center of Dobrich offers many public square spaces, inner courtyards of buildings and various "pockets" along the periphery of the pedestrian streets.

If we measure these public spaces, not in square meters, but in a unit of measurement based on the dimensions of the human body (points at a distance of 2m from each other), we can get a clearer idea of the diversity in the area and the volume of the pedestrian environment in Dobrich.

In line with the motivation of the authors of the task contained in the poetic subtitle of the competition - "Of ants and men" - the potential of these large-scale pedestrian urban spaces is contained in the possibility of them being rethought in the direction of encouraging liveliness and taking into account the different models of habitation of the modern urban spaces.

In an up-to-date look at *people's intuitive behavior in public spaces*, inspired by William H White's seminal 1980 work *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, New York researchers SWA Group, authors of *A Guide to Town Squares* (published 2019) identify a series of behavior patterns, most of which reflected in the present project.



*"A Guide to Town Squares", SWA Group, 2019 - illustrations of patterns of occupancy of urban spaces - from left to right: uneven distribution of visitors in 'flocks' or 'passages'; positive attitude of the visitors to spatial configurations, offering them a protective back; the ability of a public space to host temporary events/campaigns increases its popularity, especially among those, living nearby.*

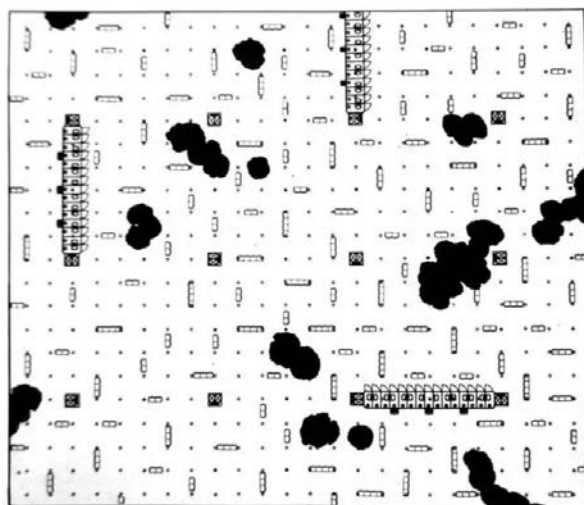


Figure 1: Image of BRANZI's No Stop City representing the chairs that people can sit on.

Additional inspiration on the topics of **habitation of cities by the modern man**, who is both technological and historically determined, our team also looks for in the theoretical developments of the avant-garde architectural group "Archizuum", founded in 1966 in Italy. An advocate of the concept that new relationships

should be established between man and the built environment, Arkizuum created radical architectural concepts such as Wind City (1969) and No-Stop City (1970) in an attempt to demonstrate, among other things, that if rationalism in urban spaces is taken to an extreme, it becomes illogical and therefore irrational.

No-Stop City is based on the idea that advanced technology can eliminate the need for a centralized modern city. This plan illustrates a fragment of a metropolis, which can be infinitely expanded by adding **homogeneous elements adapted to different uses**. Housing units and **free-shape repeatable organic forms**, representing parks, are placed randomly on a grid structure, allowing a large degree of freedom within a regulated system. Highly ironic, but designed with committed political ingenuity, the proposal questions the normative nature of the existing city and speaks for new concepts of life, expressed in a revolutionary urban form.

### *Concept – poetic / pragmatic*

The historical overlays of the 20th century have almost completely shaped the appearance of the center of the city of Dobrich.

The heart of the central area, composed of Svoboda Square, Vazrazhdane Square and the transitional space locked between them, represents an initially complex and multi-layered urban fabric. The possibility to master it goes through a careful analysis, made first of all from the point of view of the human user - the human view, scale, dynamics and needs. Within the area of 16,000 sq.m. there are park-nature areas, important communication arteries, reference points that enable a large number of people to gather in one place, squares, commercial establishments, children's attractions, places for active and passive recreation. The territory is diverse to the same extent in terms of microclimate. Heavily shaded and exposed to constant sunlight areas enter in sharp contrasts. Each subspace needs a specific approach, a response to its dynamics and problems. We found a symbolic answer to these problems in the landscape of the area, formed mainly by the cultivated lands, characterized by their strict geometrical logic, richness and pattern.

The project seeks for a realistic manifestation of the poetic reading of the territory, which can adequately fit into the budget requirements. Thus, the proposed interventions are rarely based on grand architectural gestures, but rather on a careful look at the individual zones and the improvement of urban living in each of them. Borrowing structural and visual devices from the territory of the Dobrudja Plateau, our proposal burdens with new meaning **the relationships between the center and the periphery** of the square and street pedestrian spaces, to uncover their hidden potential.

**The center preserves the good connectivity** that the extensive pedestrian areas of the central city currently provide, emphasizing, by analogy with the organization of the suburban territories, the possibility of transit for both pedestrians and bicycles, in the middle most open section of the main squares and streets. It is envisaged to remove the unnecessary physical obstacles, such as raised planting beds around the existing trees and functionally unnecessary terracing and curbs, and in their place, according to the possibilities arising from the way of planting the tree vegetation, which the project preserves in full, leveling of the pavements, smooth hilly transitions in them or new seats under the shade of the trees are foreseen.

**The periphery enters a new semantic regime, in which it seeks to account for and affirm the unique identity of the buildings**, which set up the life of the central city territory, by shaping a kind of courtyard in front of each of them, or in front of the meaningfully united groups of buildings, with each of the newly created courtyards possessing its own visual identity in terms of pavements and urban furnishings, but also tangibly belonging to the tapestry of the general urban fabric. The courtyards, formed this way, organically make the transition from the human to the large urban scale and at the same time represent a poetic expression of the eternal connection of the people of our lands with land and yard, stability and comfort. The six types of pavements envisaged at this stage in the project, encoding the identity of the center and the periphery, imply both interchangeability and the possibility of recycling building materials and in this sense have both an ecological and an economic effect on the solution.

Both the central and the peripheral spaces are strategically saturated with **micro-climatic accents** - water, zones with new area vegetation, partitions of tall tree vegetation, and streamlined multi-functional pavilions, which simultaneously house the new cultural and commercial transformable function sought by the assignment, serve as an orientation urban design, and as large-scale lighting fixtures in the night scenography of the city. Elements common to all spaces are also the new forms of street lighting and urban furniture proposed in the project, such as seating, children's playgrounds, etc., each of which, by analogy

with the elements in living nature, undergoes evolution when entering the different sub-spaces. An important aspect of the design interventions is also their **coloration**, sought as a way of enlivening the adjacent neutral facades in light stone and plasters on the principle of chromatic harmony through contrast.

### THE PAVEMENTS

The alternation of different pavements in the newly formed courtyards on the periphery of the reformulated public spaces is a solution to problems in several different directions. In our project, we combine water-permeable and impermeable pavements (while keeping the existing concrete base). Thus, we achieve the sought-after balance of water, as one part is naturally absorbed by the terrain, and the other we manage to collect, take away and reuse for the needs of the square. The diverse treatment and separation of sub-zones is a strong gesture towards approaching the human scale. Large uniformly designed open spaces in cities create a sense of lack of belonging and create a raw, empty and unfinished atmosphere there, contradicting the natural human need for color, liveliness and dynamism. In other words, the scale of the area requires parallel accommodation of a wide range of activities, which we conventionally distinguish by changing materiality.

An important element that maintains the balance in the project is the selection of the types of paving and their ability not only to match, but also to mix and flow into each other. The grassy areas are organized along the periphery of each of the designated open urban spaces, and at the points where they meet communication arteries, they evolve into park pavements of stabilized soil (pozzolan) or are separated by a paved path of concrete slabs. The continuation of the park pavements from stabilized soil to the central areas with a squarer character is brought out as the latter are combined with ensembles of concrete slabs integrated into them. They, in turn, smoothly make the connection with the areas with polished concrete and paving. Asphalt is a finish with an important role that marks the entrances of the central area, integrating them with the external urban environment and the streets with vehicular traffic. This makes it possible at the next stage to smoothly continue the development of the concept beyond the borders of "Zone B".

### THE CENTRAL AXIS

A unique fact of the central part of each of the open spaces, derived both from the understanding of the importance of the center originally embedded in them in the second half of the 20th century, and from the philosophy of the current project to rethink the relationship between the center and the periphery, is the continuous pedestrian axis in the entire direction of "25-ti Septemvri" Blvd. An important aspect of our proposal is the desire to emphasize and complement this axis, in areas where it is partially disturbed. Along the entire length of the boulevard, as well as through the central area, we distinguish a definite "white" strip in the pavement with a width of 3 m. The rest of the interventions in the peripheral spaces are organized around it – the "yards" to the buildings - but it remains unchanged and continuous in its complete entirety. Functionally, it represents an artery for quick passage through the center, indicating a different pace and dynamics from those on the periphery of public spaces. Symbolically, we look at it as an "eco-path", the transit of which allows the observer to take in the view and contemplate everything from the complex landscape unfolding around, but the deviation from which gives the opportunity to experience the uniqueness of each individual zone.

### WATER AREAS AND FACILITIES

Our approach to the integrated water zones in the area is similar to that of the pavements. They are interconnected, flow into each other and change according to the area they fall into or the direction they are going. In the areas parallel to the central axis, the water areas expand and become interactive canals for recreation and children's games. They have various facilities for children and seating arrangements for adults. The perpendicular crossing of the running lines is done with thin water arteries, which are proportioned so as not to interfere with pedestrian and bicycle traffic. They lead to micro-centers with a small water zone in a circular trough. The beginning and the end of the water zones are two leading compositional and accent interventions, located on the two squares - "Svoboda" and "Vazrazhdane". Like many of the other interventions in the project, the water areas also contribute to the improvement of the microclimate in the central urban spaces.

Under the pavements of the square, we envisage a network of drainage installation routes that lead to a common central tank for the collection of rainwater and ground water, giving the possibility of reuse for irrigation and water attractions, which again is in the general ethos of the project that all solutions have an economic and environmental dimension.

### SVOBODA SQUARE AND VAZRAZHDANE SQUARE

On "Svoboda" square we keep the position of the monument of "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", creating a new pedestal in harmony with the overall intervention. The front of the pedestal represents a water cascade, which on the one hand introduces thematically the water zones in the other areas, while at the same time a small part of the water spills over the concrete base of the square, creating a thin water mirror, on which the

richly landscaped back of the monument reflects and accordingly further accentuates it. In the wide part of the "Vazrazhdane" square, we envisage a large-scale dry fountain, which in a suitable seasonal scenario of active work would be an attractive area for children's games and activities, but at the same time, when it is turned off, allows the use of the square in a standard form, suitable for meetings and gatherings of a large number of people. In the axis of the fountain, we place an open urban stage (podium), and the steps of the nearby building are to be rebuilt as tribunes.

### COMMERCIAL AREAS

In our intervention, we strive not to limit the micro business at the local level, but on the contrary – to recognize and encourage its potential as an active participant in the formation of the urban environment, which even at the moment contributes to the revitalization of the pedestrian areas. For free-standing commercial establishments, we propose a new type of kiosks and structures, carriers of a modern architectural vision, which with their streamlined geometry allow easy passage and do not impede access to the already established commercial areas in the buildings on the periphery. We also propose in the project places for temporary Christmas or farmer's markets, as well as free areas for other temporary attractions and recreational activities. The color and material range of the modules are drawn from the environment and interpreted in a new way. The everyday context of the urban landscape is found in a particular kind of eclectic harmony, only achievable through gradual evolution and overlay, which is why the materials of the new commercial establishments are also light and modern, deliberately unconventional for the environment, but in harmony with it. An additional aspect of the commercial kiosks is their participation in the night light landscape of the urban open spaces.

### BICYCLE NETWORK

Given the scale of the project area and its previous purpose for demonstrations and parades, we believe that on a daily basis, during hours with less traffic, it would not be a problem for cyclists to move freely around the area. However, it is important to give a clear and easily readable indication of where cyclists have the right of way to avoid accidents during peak hours. The pavement, marking the bike lane, falls within the logic of the overall treatment of the pavements within the project, i.e., crossing the different zones of the designated "courtyards" at the periphery of the spaces, it evolves, but remains always distinguishable from the adjacent pavements and indicated by a pictogram.

The project envisages the bicycle artery to continue north along "25th Septemvri" Blvd., as well as west along "Bulgaria" St., which is wider and less busy than "Nezavisimost" St.

### GREEN AREAS

The grassy areas are organized so that they do not obstruct the main running line, but at the points where they meet communication arteries, they grow into park pavements or are separated by a path made of concrete slabs. We have narrow strips along the squares, richly landscaped with decorative species. The grassing of larger areas within the project proposal is not of a decorative nature and is sought as a natural urban space freed from movable objects, intended for privacy and recreation.

### CHILDREN'S CORNERS AND PLAYGROUNDS

As with the other components, here we envisage many smaller corners, instead of one concentrated area with the specific function. Children's areas with a diverse character fall in the area of the current "COOP" market, in front of the "Bulgaria" hotel, dotted around the green areas, as well as near each of the water facilities.

### SPORT

Sport is integrated indirectly into the area through the structuring of the bike lane, which is suitable for various events, and more specifically in additional designated places we also have table tennis opportunities. In the off-season, the concrete pavements are suitable for skateboarding and other urban sports, and with the idea of intervention on the facade of the Central Mall, which the Municipality of Dobrich could propose as a form of possible public-private partnership, the program of the square spaces would also include sport climbing for children and adults.

Taking into account the positive role of living nature in urban life in general, and in the context of Dobrich - more specifically (the city park "St. George" is one of the most popular public spaces among citizens), the project leaves largely unprogrammed the possibility of a sport, based on seasonality and an awareness of the various urban rituals, associated with it (spending leisurely time outdoors in summer, enjoying spring and autumn colors, spring and winter holidays, implying social gatherings).

### LIGHTING

A linear spatial element marks the boundaries and approaches in the entire "Zone B", and besides being symbolic, its role is also to be the main carrier of the new square integrated lighting, which in a balanced

way illuminates and further structures the entire area of the project interventions. We also envisage lighting integrated into the pavement of the central 'white strip', as well as commercial movable objects constructed of translucent material.

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