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– VERTICAL GEOGRAPHIES, POLYVOCALITY AND THE EVERYDAY IN A DIVIDED CITY

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Abstract

The vertical turn in urban scholarship is a critique of the overly horizontal perspectives used in studying cities in academic research. This article broadens this scholarship by engaging with the ways that horizontal perspectives on urban conditions dominate not only scholarly perspectives but also professional responses to urban change. By drawing on research in the divided city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it argues for a 'polyvocal' approach to studying professional responses to urban conditions, one that facilitates a productive juxtaposition of those responses with city dwellers' everyday engagements with the vertical qualities of the built environment. It also seeks to understand how vertical geographies—here, tall landmarks—in divided cities are seen as part of the complex urban realities of city dwellers in strategies of urban planning and heritage-making related to postwar reconciliation. These findings are compared with ethnographic data about how people make sense of tall landmarks in divided cities and how they experience and interpret them in relation to senses of togetherness and belonging to divided cities. By putting these two lines of research in a dialogue, the 'polyvocal' approach offers a way to rethink conventional strategies of urban reconciliation and taken-for-granted ways of conceptualizing cities.

> 'Many buildings were utterly destroyed and incapable of later repair, and these were totally cleared. The most important example was the Razvitak Building on Maršala Tita Street, a nine-storey reinforced concrete slab block, built in the 1970s. It was very ugly and its removal greatly improved the skyline.'
> John Yarwood (1999: 70)

Introduction: towards a new vertical agenda

In the history of cities, place-makers have, for the most part, seen tall landmarks as pretty or ugly, and not as part of the complex urban realities of city dwellers. The quote above is from John Yarwood, the main architect and urban planner responsible for the rebuilding of the city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Bosnian wars (1991–5). It illustrates how, even in the complex context of a contested land, one of the tallest landmarks in the city, the Razvitak Building, was considered only from the perspective of monumentality and was subject to mundane categories such as 'ugliness' in the strategies of postwar urban reconciliation.

Urban scholarship has only recently been inflected by a vertical turn. Vertical geography studies argue that urban research is mainly horizontal; it fails to see the vertical dimensions of urban change and thus overlooks many of the realities of cities. Graham and Hewitt (2013) argued for a volumetric 'off the ground' urbanism that 'addresses the ways in which horizontal and vertical extensions, imaginaries, materialities and lived practices intersect and mutually construct each other'

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(Graham and Hewitt, 2013: 74; see also McNeill, 2005; Harris 2015). At its core, the vertical geography turn is a call for a new perspective from which to look at cities.

There is a broad range of spatial formations that have already been studied from the vertical perspective: air defence, forms of militarization and surveillance (Graham, 2004; Adey, 2010; Williams, 2010; 2013; Gregory, 2011; Lin, 2017), colonial occupation (Weizman, 2007; Charney and Rosen, 2014), formations below the surface (Elden, 2013; Lin and Schofield, 2014), or city and state branding (Bunnell, 1999). Studies of the urban beyond design and aesthetics show how skyscrapers, high-rises and vertical technologies are dividing cities vertically (and not only horizontally) by perpetuating new forms of exclusion and urban secession (McNeil, 2005; Jacobs, 2006; Graham and Hewitt, 2013; O'Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela, 2013; Graham, 2015; 2016). Verticalization of residential urban space for the elites often means a 'luxification' of the city skylines, (Graham, 2015), and also a strategy employed by those same elites to abandon street-level public space (O'Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela, 2013: 378).

As it currently stands, the vertical turn in urban scholarship is mainly a critique of the scholarly perspectives on studying cities—of the theoretical, methodological, conceptual and historical perspectives of understanding and analysing cities. This article explores the ways in which the vertical perspective on urban conditions can be useful not only in scholarly analyses, but also in understanding taken-for-granted professional responses to urban change—in this instance, those reflected in strategies of urban planning and heritage making. The vertical strategies of planning and heritage making are mainly seen as deliberate (even manipulative) actions on the part of state and nonstate actors in order to reach a particular goal, such as colonial occupation (Weizman, 2007) or high-rise capitalistic ambitions amid ethnonational rifts (Charney and Rosen, 2014). This way of thinking about professional responses to urban change relates to what Harker (2014: 321) called the rendering 'politically suspect' of verticality in scholarly research. This article moves beyond such interpretations and seeks to understand how vertical qualities of space are taken into account in professional solutions to urban problems. Rather than looking at how professional responses to urban conditions play out in practice for different political goals and thereby affect vertical spatial formations, it examines if and how the vertical dimensions of cities play a role in the often taken-for-granted, implicit rather than explicit ways of imagining and understanding space embedded in practices of planning cities and making heritage.

In view of that, this article argues for a 'polyvocal' vertical approach to studying strategies of urban planning and heritage making in cities. This approach facilitates a critical engagement with, on the one hand, professional solutions to urban conditions and, on the other, the experience and meanings of, and engagement with, the vertical qualities of the built environment from the viewpoint of city dwellers. This approach is based on Llewellyn's (2003) account of polyvocality in critical historical geography of architecture according to which the makers of architectural spaces should not be the main valid objects of study. Rather, any comprehensive account of the built environment should also include the experiences of those who inhabit those spaces (see also Lees, 2001; Jenkins, 2002; Llewellyn, 2003; 2004; Jacobs, 2006; Lees and Baxter, 2011; Harris, 2015). In line with this understanding of polyvocality, my own approach in this article is to put the ways vertical geographies are seen in professional responses to urban conditions (here, urban planning and heritage making) in a dialogue with the ways they are experienced by city dwellers. The aim is to broaden the emerging scholarship on vertical geographies towards understanding how the combination of these (often separate) research agendas in a single study can lead to the development of 'polyvocal' methodologies not only for studying the vertical qualities of cities but also for analysing taken-for granted ways of planning cities and designating heritage.

I investigate this topic by looking at a specific type of vertical geography: tall landmarks in cities radically divided along ethnic and religious lines, in which political

and administrative ethno-religious divides define the processes of urban change and the everyday lives of people. I study the ways in which tall landmarks are seen (or not) as 'shared' places that represent senses of togetherness in the divided city both in professional responses to urban ethnic segregation and in the everyday lives of city dwellers. In this article, tall landmarks are those that shape the skyline of the city, the minarets, church bell towers, office blocks or residential buildings that are the taller than their surroundings, in other words all those landmarks visible to the city dwellers that live on the 'other side' of the city. The empirical material is produced in the divided city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina: a city that was destroyed in the Bosnian wars and then administratively divided into East side, dominated by a population of Bosniacs (Muslims), and West side, in which the majority of the population are Bosnian Croats (Catholics).

In the next section, I explain my conceptual understanding of the 'polyvocal' approach to studying professional responses to urban change in order to develop an argument as to what this approach can offer to the study of tall landmarks in divided cities and how it builds on the current work on verticality. Then, in the subsequent sections, I move on to the empirical data devoted to the urban planning strategies, heritage initiatives and ethnographic observations.

The rationale: a polyvocal study of tall landmarks in a divided city

Before the war, Mostar, with a population of slightly more than 100,000 people, was often celebrated for its ethnic and religious diversity. Its population was composed of roughly one third Croats, one third Muslims (later called Bosniacs) and one fifth Serbs, and it had one of the highest percentages of mixed marriages in Yugoslavia. Because of this demographic mixture, Mostar suffered more destruction than any other city in Bosnia and Hercegovina, its urban fabric being the main target of armed forces during the Yugoslav wars (1992–95) (Grodach, 2002; Wimmen, 2004; Charlesworth, 2006). The war left an indelible mark particularly on the eastern side of the city. While most of the residential quarters were also destroyed in the war, the main targets were buildings, monuments and infrastructure that symbolized urban diversity and ethnic cohabitation. Almost all the mosques and churches were destroyed, together with the city's Old Town, the world-famous Old Bridge, and a series of nine other bridges over the river Neretva. The purposeful erasure of the urban fabric was also extended to other urban infrastructure such as public areas and meeting places, the water supply system and manufacturing industries. When the war ended with the Washington agreement of 1994, Mostar was administratively divided into the East and West side.

In this context, together with Sarajevo, Mostar was the most challenging project in negotiating reconciliation between ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Udovicki and Ridgeway, 1997: 201). As in Beirut, Nicosia and Sarajevo, most strategies of urban reconciliation focused on grand urban planning and heritage projects framed around the idea that the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure of the city and the making of 'shared' or 'neutral' places are primary conditions for urban reconciliation (for urban planning see Charlesworth, 2006; Bollens, 2007; 2008; for heritage see Grodach, 2002; Wollentz, 2007). This approach to urban reconciliation is based on the assumption that the city dwellers attach and map their ethnic and religious 'we' only onto places on 'our' side of the city, and that the city as a whole is not a locus for self-identification for the city dwellers on both sides. Thus, 'shared' places to which people of both ethno-religious groups can relate need to be made.

The vertical approach to such an (already very problematic) understanding of 'shared' spaces and senses of togetherness in the divided city implies adding a new, vertical dimension to the analyses of professional responses to ethnic segregation in cities. In divided cities, and particularly in Mostar, tall landmarks play a peculiar role in the ways city dwellers navigate their everyday lives and imagine, reproduce and

experience the built environment. In these contexts, those (many) city dwellers who do not cross the inner-city border in their daily routines get to know the 'other side' of the city by looking at it from afar, from their standpoint, with the skyline of the city and the tallest landmarks dominating their view. Here, tall landmarks play a role in the construction of senses of togetherness across the border.

In view of this, this article asks two questions linked to two methods. First, it studies strategies of urban planning and heritage making in a divided city to understand the ways they include vertical geographies in the professional responses to urban segregation. This is accomplished by means of content analysis of the decisions and strategies employed by the institutions that governed Mostar after the war, the European Union Administration Mostar (EUAM) and the Office of the High Representative (OHR), as well as heritage-making initiatives by local and international heritage organizations that were aimed at the making of 'shared' places. The focus is on the urban planning project 'Central Zone' and the heritage initiatives devoted to rebuilding the famous Old Bridge in the historic centre of the city. The analyses are aimed at understanding how these strategies of urban planning and heritage making consider tall landmarks as important in the making of 'shared' places.

Second, the article emphasizes the need for ethnographic research to understand how city dwellers make sense of tall landmarks in divided cities and how they experience and interpret them in relation to senses of togetherness and belonging to the city. In scholarly analyses the tallest landmarks in divided cities are most often seen as perpetuators of different forms of exclusion and urban secession and as an expression of political fragmentation and controversies over sovereignty, belonging and land. The making of landmarks that are taller than their surroundings in these cities are interpreted as results of political manoeuvres by different actors, such as legal and urban experts, media, local governance officials or international organizations, as well as of the manipulation of procedures and resources (Weizman, 2007; Charney and Rosen, 2014; see also Roy, 2005; Yiftachel, 2009). Such accounts start from the perspective that ideologies of nationalism and senses of belonging to a nation or to a city are produced and reproduced in the everyday lives of people in many ways (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Brubaker, 2006; Antonsich, 2015), in which architecture and monumentality have a principal role (McNeil and Tewdwr-Jones, 2003). In cities like Mostar, Jerusalem, Nicosia, Beirut or Sarajevo, control over land is of the utmost importance and the city itself is the territory where struggles to gain the right to the land are most intense and visible (Bakshi, 2014). The skylines in cities prone to ethnic or religious conflicts are often defined as being imbued with competing meanings of visual domination and as arenas for the display and celebration of identities and the rights to history and land. Crosses, flags, tall church towers, lightbulbs on minarets or language signs are often placed at the highest points in these cities with the intention of marking territories and conveying messages about belonging, identity and land.

The ethnographic analysis is aimed at understanding how tall landmarks are used, experienced and imagined by city dwellers in their everyday lives in relation to senses of togetherness and belonging to the divided city. The ethnographic research was based on the methods of observations and informal 'walk-alongs', which included accompanying city dwellers on their 'natural' outings (Kusenbach, 2003: 463), conducted on several occasions between 2010 and 2016. This research is part of a wider project on the urban changes in postwar Mostar. City dwellers from both sides of the city were engaged in the research: people I met while doing fieldwork or in the institutions where I conducted archival research, neighbours I became acquainted with in the several neighbourhoods where I stayed, professional contacts, peers and others. The research builds on what Harker (2014: 320) called 'ordinary topologies', that is, the 'complex quotidian practices through which the majority of urban dwellers co-constitute the cities in which they live'. His study on Palestinian family spaces and services in the city

of Ramallah is an account of the everyday practices of city dwellers in dealing with the Israeli Occupation. His ordinary topological perspective is an ethnographic response to Weizman's (2007) analyses of the politics of verticality of the Israeli occupation. Weizman (2007) and Harker (2014) study the spatial politics of the Israeli occupation from different perspectives: while Weizman examines how the Israeli architecture of occupation in the West Bank is characterized by complex politics of vertical space, Harker's ethnographic explorations of the everyday spaces of city dwellers in the occupied Palestinian territories highlight the relations and forms of practice that construct everyday life in contested cities.

In the spirit of polyvocality, this article proposes a research design based on juxtaposing the data produced by these two methods as a way of producing new insights with a view not only to understanding the 'ordinary topologies' of the vertical (Harker, 2014), but also to unpacking professional responses to urban change. The methodological principles of studying cities from the vertical perspective have not been a topic of much debate (Squire, 2017). Several ethnographic studies have explained how city dwellers imagine, reproduce and experience vertical geographies in their everyday lives (Strebel, 2011; Harker, 2014; Baxter, 2017). Yet the vertical approach to studying cities for the most part lacks a more systematic engagement not only with the everyday and embodied experiences of verticality (Harris, 2015), but also with the overall methodologies for studying the vertical from qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

The making of 'shared' places in a divided city: overly horizontal endeavours

The strategies of urban reconciliation in postwar Mostar included grand urban planning and heritage projects based on the idea that 'shared' places—those that are visited by all, regardless of their ethnicity or religion—need to be made and planned. The leading principle of 'design as reconciliation' (Charlesworth, 2006) was formed around the idea that the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure of the city is a primary condition for urban reconciliation. The major urban planning project 'Central Zone' and the grand heritage initiatives to rebuild the historic centre of the city, the Old Town, including the world-famous Old Bridge, are notable examples of the ways planning and heritage strategies include vertical geographies in their responses to urban divides.

The postwar urban reconciliation processes started in 1994 with the signing of the Washington Agreement, which signalled the end of the war between the Bosniac and Croat armed forces. For the following decade, the city was governed by international organizations: the European Union Administration Mostar (EUAM) governed the city from 1995 until 1997, when it was replaced by the Office of the High Representative (OHR). Guided mainly by international expertise and foreign resources, urban planning strategies and heritage politics were the main means of reconciliation in the city after the war (Charlesworth, 2006; Bollens, 2007; 2008). The core of EUAM's strategy of 'design as reconciliation' (Charlesworth, 2006), applied also in Beirut and Nicosia (*ibid.*), was the planning of a 'shared' Central Zone in the middle of the city made up of joint public facilities, such as the post office, bus station, schools, and meeting places, and administered by an ethnically balanced city council (Yarwood, 1999). The rest of the city was divided into six municipalities divided along ethnic lines, three Bosniac and three Croat, each with separate administrations. In reality, EUAM's plan meant a division of the city into two halves with a shared Central Zone in the middle.

The Central Zone was envisioned as a 'horizontal' project—only places 'on the ground', such as cafés, schools or post offices were envisioned as 'shared'. The idea of the Central Zone was based on the assumption that ethnic and religious 'we/they' divides can be attached and mapped only onto horizontal places in the city and that vertical geographies cannot be joint loci for senses of togetherness and belonging. In the policy

reports about the Central Zone, there is only one single reference to the skyline of the city—the statement by John Yarwood quoted at the beginning of this article. In 2004 when this urban plan was revised and upgraded by the Office of the High Representative of Bosnia (OHR), the vertical dimensions of the city were still not included in the new city plan. Instead, the failure of the Central Zone to provide conditions for cross-ethnic cohabitation was explained by means of 'horizontal' reasoning: urban planners saw the small number of meeting places, cafés and restaurants, as one of the main limitations (Bollens, 2008: 1274). The lack of joint meeting places in the Central Zone was also noticed by the city dwellers—many of them saw it as a place where no social events took place. The Central Zone and the overall urban planning strategies of EUAM did not give the city dwellers long-term functional administration and urban reconciliation (Bieber, 2005; Bollens, 2007; 2008; Makas, 2007; Calame and Charlesworth, 2012). Bollens (2008: 1277) writes that the urban planning strategies of EUAM represent 'both the promise and pitfalls' of 'neutral' planning and spatial buffering. The deputy director of OHR, Alexander Rhothert (2005: 24), in one of his final reports on his work in Mostar called these urban planning strategies a 'waste of government'. The split in city governance caused parallel ethnic institutions, which manipulated and obstructed the reconciliation of the city and did not manage to form functional non-politicized institutions for basic public services such as water, education and urban planning (*ibid*.). In the absence of a functioning city administration, the urban reconciliation projects became completely dependent on international resources and expertise (Charlesworth, 2006), and the attention remained on the remaking on the symbolic 'shared' places in the city, rather than creating a long-term functional city.

Yet, contrary to the idea that places 'on the ground' are the only possible locations where reconciliation can be played out, in postwar Mostar vertical frontiers became in fact the main arenas for reinforcing postwar urban divides. The rebuilding of the city happened in a situation in which political, economic and religious actors from both ethno-religious groups were using the design of monuments and places to reinforce ethnic divisions (Wimmen, 2004; Makas, 2007). What is more, these same actors used a strategy of consciously designing tall landmarks to convey messages about belonging, identity and land. In Mostar vertical frontiers were made mainly by rebuilding mosques and churches with striking vertical visibility, sponsored by foundations that were divided along the same ethnic and religious lines (Walasek, 2015; Wollentz, 2017). Several tall landmarks dominate the postwar skyline of the city because of their proportions and striking visual impact. The most contested projects on the West/Croat side of the city are the bell tower of the Franciscan Church of St. Peter and St. Paul and the Jubilee cross placed on top of Hum Hill. The Franciscan Church was rebuilt in 2004 on the remains of a church that was destroyed in the war. Yet, the new church is not a replica of its prewar predecessor: although its main body has a similar height to the prewar church, the new bell tower is three times higher than its prewar version (see Figure 1). The bell tower now stands 100 meters tall and overshadows every other landmark in Mostar, its main aim being to dominate the skyline and mark the Catholic presence in the city (Charlesworth, 2006; Makas, 2007; Wollentz, 2017). The bell tower is not only the tallest bell tower in the territories of the Croats, standing one meter taller than the towers of the Cathedral in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, but is the tallest bell tower in the entire Balkan peninsula (Makas, 2007: 263). It is not only the size of the bell tower that matters, but also its position within the city. It is located right next to the Central Zone, on the street that divides the city into two halves. These qualities were interpreted differently by the church's supporters, who often call it 'a place where differences meet' in local newspapers published on the Croat/Catholic side of the city.[1]

1 See, for example: https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/franjevacka-crkva-u-mostaru-ima-najvisi-zvonik-u-bih-to-je-mjesto-susreta-razlicitosti/191223023

FIGURE 1 A view of the Franciscan Church with its bell tower from the East side of the city (photo by the author, July 2016)

Another part of the skyline of the Croat part of the city is a giant 30-meter cross on the top of Hum Hill, located in the vicinity of the Franciscan Church, from which Croat forces used to shell the city during the war (Bakshi, 2014), giving even more vertical visibility to the Croatian and Catholic presence in the divided city. In the East/Muslim part, the building and rebuilding of mosques and minarets have also been seen as attempts to reinforce vertical boundaries (see Figure 2). The number of mosques doubled after the war (Strandenes, 2003, quoted in Wollentz, 2017). The minarets of the postwar mosques are also illuminated with lightbulbs which city dwellers perceive as brighter than before the war (Makas, 2007). The way the city sounds has changed too: city dwellers perceive the volume of the call to prayer as much louder now than before the war, which gives greater prominence to the Muslim presence in the city.

Heritage: a horizontal signifier of senses of togetherness

Many international and local heritage organizations, often in joint efforts, were engaged in the (re)making of built heritage in the city after the war—from UNESCO, the European Union, and the World Bank, to small-size heritage organizations such as the Aga Khan Historic Cities programme, as well as other state and nonstate bodies with specific ethnic or religious agendas (Charlesworth, 2016; Wollentz, 2017). In their efforts, which mainly included grand restoration projects for key monuments, heritage was a tool to restore the prewar multiethnic character of the city and to articulate new definitions of local identity that would reshape the perceptions of the city for the international community and for tourists (Grodach, 2002).

The heritage politics of these organizations affected the vertical geographies of 'spared' places. These organizations favoured the rebuilding of churches and mosques

FIGURE 2 The skyline of East Mostar dominated by minarets (photo by the author, July 2016)

and, with that, of (tall) bell towers and minarets, while excluding other tall landmarks that had dominated the skyline of the city. Heritage is a powerful signifier of senses of togetherness and belonging (Harvey, 2001; Graham *et al*., 2000), but it validates only certain parts of the built environment, while excluding others. The national and international heritage sectors in general, including those involved in the rebuilding of Mostar, value inner monumentality and authenticate policies, practices and values involved in making heritage that give preference to aesthetically pleasing material objects (Smith, 2006; Bendix *et al*., 2017). These heritage sectors impose the idea that heritage needs to be presentable and performative and have the potential to be promoted as inherently 'good' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006: 190). This is particularly evident in Mostar. As a result, many non-monumental and non-performative tall landmarks that previously shaped the skyline of the city have not been restored in the postwar years. Besides the Razvitak Building, another telling example is the so-called 'Glass Bank' (Staklena Banka), a tall building that used to dominate the skyline of the city and overlook the Central Zone (see Figure 3). It was destroyed in the war, and not renovated in any of the urban reconciliation projects. It is now abandoned and serves as a favourite spot for street artists (Carabelli, 2018: 137). This building has not been a subject of interest to any of the heritage organizations that operated in the city; its lack of the monumentality and aesthetically pleasing façade favoured by these organizations have put it beyond their notice. In addition, what makes this heritage discourses 'authoritative' (Smith, 2006) is their inability to recognize alternative values. Thus, the vertical geographies of heritage remained out of the sight—the heritage organizations had no means of understanding how lights on minarets, louder calls to prayer, or immense hights of bell towers may affect senses of togetherness among the city dwellers.

FIGURE 3 The abandoned 'Glass Bank' (Staklena Banka) as seen from the main street in the Central Zone (photo by the author, July 2016)

Like the urban planning strategies, these heritage sectors reinforced a place-bound, tangible, horizontal dimension of heritage and supported grand heritage projects that promoted only horizontal 'shared' places. A telling example is the city's historic urban centre, the Old Town, including the Old Bridge, which was destroyed in the war. The rebuilding of the Old Bridge, as a UNESCO cultural heritage site and a subject of pride and self-identification for most locals, was a priority for the international heritage actors; the director of UNESCO in Bosnia-Herzegovina even referred to its postwar reconstruction as 'the most certain event amid the postwar uncertainty'. The main aim of the heritage initiatives was the rebuilding of this historic city centre by reinventing its Ottoman architectural history in light of the postwar cultural and ethnic divisions. In the efforts of the international and local heritage sectors, the Old Bridge was transformed from a masterpiece of Ottoman architecture into a symbol and metaphor of a 'bridge between cultures' (Grodach, 2002; Walasek, 2015: 212). At the very first meeting of UNESCO representatives with local heritage experts in November 1998 in Mostar, even before its reconstruction began, the Old Bridge was seen as a powerful symbol of the

reunification of the city and a new postwar 'shared' place.[2] At the same time, the rebuilding of another war-torn bridge in the city, Carinski Bridge, was not a subject of such symbolism. The rebuilding of the Old Bridge provided an opportunity for the heritage sectors to construct a different kind of 'shared' place, materialized in the bridge metaphor they helped to make. Yet, the bridge metaphor, while it may have successfully generated tourist profit, is appealing mainly to the international community (Grodach, 2002). The Old Bridge became a central image symbolizing the international aid in rebuilding the city and the region after the war, appearing on the covers of many books, policy reports and news articles aimed at the postwar reconciliation strategies. The bridge metaphor, and the idea of a 'shared' place it promoted, did not appeal to the city dwellers—the perceptions of city dwellers about how tall landmarks and vertical geographies are related to senses of togetherness in the divided city challenge these 'horizontal' understandings of 'shared' places imposed by the strategies of urban planning and heritage making.

Tall landmarks and senses of togetherness in a divided city: ethnographic accounts

Tall landmarks have particularly pronounced meanings in the everyday lives of Mostarians. The people often tell stories about lost and new landmarks, and the challenges of grappling with the city's new skylines and of positioning themselves within it. The skyline of Mostar before the war was marked by the proximity of buildings reflecting different ethnic and religious traditions and they physically and visually reinforced the city's ethnic and religious diversity. Today, the skyline of Mostar is divided: one half of it is defined only by church bell towers and a big, illuminated cross on the highest hill in the city and the other half by minarets with light bulbs and a louder call to prayer in comparison to the prewar years. Even though tall buildings are an inseparable part of landscapes of communism (Hatherley, 2015: 205), no residential high-rises dominated the skyline of prewar Mostar. Nowadays, too, most people live in family houses or low-rise residential buildings. The postwar 'big things' (Jacobs, 2006) are new shopping malls (see also Aceska and Heer, 2019), consumer spaces and a few roof-top bars and restaurants built mainly on the West/Croat side of the city—yet none of them dominates the skyline of the city or is visible from afar. The intrinsic duality visible in the skyline can also be seen in other urban formations: there are two central squares, two municipal bus companies and two central bus stations, two main promenades and even two universities, one for each half of the city. Even though the city has been administratively reunited since 2004, it is still divided into 'this side' and the 'other side' in the everyday lives of people. The border between the two sides is not impermeable for some city dwellers. Some people go to shopping malls, cafés and restaurants on the 'other side', and the city on both sides is lively and noisy, the many restaurants, bars and night clubs are often full of people, and in many ways the city is not defined only by its ethno-religious conflicts. City dwellers from the two ethno-religious groups appear to have a lot in common: they speak the same language with minor differences, although officially divided into Bosnian and Croatian after the war; there are no visible differences in the way they dress or eat or in the ways they appear in public. Yet, despite these similarities, they live separate lives to a large extent—there are no diverse neighbourhoods since the war and there are only a few cases of postwar mixed marriages, joint businesses or other forms of cross-ethnic cooperation.

In such a context, tall landmarks, because of their materiality, height, form and infrastructure, are important in the ways people define senses of togetherness and separation across both sides of the divided city. My ethnographic observations and informal 'walk-alongs' showed that it is the visibility of tall landmarks from the 'other

2 For an overview of the meeting (in Bosnian), see: http://www.most.ba/02122/025.htm.

side' of the city that affect, first, people's narratives about senses of togetherness (or the lack of them) across both sides of the city and, second, the capacity of tall landmarks to be loci for self-identification and shared concern of people from both parts of the city.

Tall landmarks are visible from the 'other side' of the city in many of the daily choreographies of people—when they sit in a café, wait at the bus stop, walk through the city, or look out of their office windows, people only see the tall landmarks that are visible from afar and not the small landmarks on the 'other side' of the city. The changes in small landmarks and other urban manifestations like street names (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002) or number plates (Leib, 2011) are less visible. In postwar Mostar, the street names and the street signs have changed since the war (they are blue in the East and red in the West); visitors can also pay with Croatian currency in the shops on one side only, while they must pay only with Bosnian money on the other; one side of the city sells one kind of newspaper, and the other side sells another; beer produced in Sarajevo is not available in the bars on the Croat side of the city but runs freely on the Bosniac side. All these urban boundaries are equally powerful in constructing ethnic and religious divides, yet they are not visible from the 'other side' of the city. It takes a visit to the 'other side' to notice how some urban changes are played out on a smaller scale—but many people do not go to the 'other side'. The bell tower of the Franciscan Church and the brighter bulbs on the minarets, however, are visible from everywhere. More than other landmarks, they communicate the divided city to the city dwellers and to outsiders. The story of Selma (not her real name) is a notable example. At the time of my research, Selma had a simple administrative job, a husband and two children with whom she lived in a family house on the East/Muslim side of the city. Throughout the many years since the war, she had been on the 'other side' of the city only once, but exactly then and there, in unfortunate circumstances, she saw the man who had killed her father in the war and decided never to go there again. In her daily routines and narratives about the divided city, she knew only selected stories about the 'other side'. She also had limited knowledge of many smaller heritage projects that didn't involve major landmarks and she used to say that the Old Bridge would never be the same for her, even though it was rebuilt in the same form. Her impressions and her narratives about the 'other side' were most often told using the example of the bell tower of the Franciscan Church and the cross on Hum Hill. When she wanted to make a point about the divided city, she would say 'Look at that bell tower and you'll get my point'. The bell tower was her main way of illustrating what it is like to live in a divided city. In this very banal way, the bell tower of the Franciscan Church was her main example from the built environment that reflected her opinions, thoughts and perceptions about living in a city split into two ethno-religious halves. This resonates with the story of Jasmina, a law student from the East side, as well. Jasmina is one of those city dwellers who mainly go to the 'other side' simply to visit the new shopping malls. In our walks there, she always took the same route, did not make any stops or contacts with locals, and went back to her part of the city as soon as she was done with shopping. She was well-informed about the new malls and often commented on the lack of shopping opportunities on East side, but she was not very interested in the other urban changes on the West side of the city, like the new street names or monuments. Even so, she had a very pronounced opinion on the bell tower and emphasized how uncomfortable it made her feel whenever we passed by.

The visibility of tall landmarks is not limited to how they are viewed from a distance—tall landmarks have a complex relation to the street-level of cities as well: there is no distinct dichotomy between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of cities (see also Harris, 2015: 611). The Franciscan church, for example, is also a place for visitors and believers; in contrast to the divisive character of the bell tower, the ground floor of the church is open and welcoming for visitors. In addition, there are the labour and resources invested in the construction of tall landmarks. In a city the size of Mostar, many people know each other and run into one another on the street. The church

administrators, the workers who built the bell tower, the employers in the mosques who set the volume of the call to prayer or switch on the lights on the minarets are known to certain groups of people. This shows how the materiality of a building is a result of numerous collaborations and is always 'made' (Jacobs, 2006). City dwellers would perceive the tall landmarks differently if they had been made by other people in the distant past; however, the bell tower, the crosses on the highest points, and the lightbulbs on the minarets were built or set up recently, during the lifetime of these city dwellers, by their contemporaries and in organized efforts. The main promenade in East Mostar, Fejicheva Street, where I stayed during the research, was a place where one could run into almost everybody from that side of the city. In my daily walks and observations, I frequently used to encounter the employees of the mosques, the main spokesman for the Islamic Community of the city, members of the city administrations and the city planners. These examples show that the dichotomy between what Zukin (1991) identifies as the vertically dominant landscapes of the powerful, such as cathedrals and skyscrapers, and the landscapes in which the everyday lives of people take place, such as the local church or shop, is not a straightforward one.

What is more, tall landmarks can be loci for self-identification and shared concern for city dwellers from both sides and can represent the city as a whole. Allen (2006) writes that tall buildings have an ability to include people because of their striking visual impact on the whole city. This was particularly evident among certain groups, like the self-proclaimed urbanites and cosmopolitans (most of whom self-identify with the label '*rogjeni*', meaning 'native', that is, either born in Mostar or having known the city before the war). In many conversations during my research, self-proclaimed *rogjeni* attached and mapped a joint identity 'we, Mostarians' to tall landmarks, in opposition to 'we, Bosniacs' or 'we, Croats', thereby emphasizing their self-identification as dwellers of the whole city, and not of just one half of it. My conversation with Marija, a pensioner and resident of West Mostar, ground to a halt when I asked her about the bell tower of the Franciscan Church. She said that questions about the bell tower insult her personally. 'It is not who we used to be', she repeated constantly in front of me—the outsider—trying to explain how the tower represents an image of the city that she, as a *rodgjena Mostarka* does not identify with. On other occasions, people talked about tall landmarks in relation to the identity of the city as a whole, mainly when they compared their city with other cities in the world, or when they talked about its turbulent past and uncertain future. Neno (not his real name) compared the bell tower of the Franciscan Church to the Eiffel tower in Paris when we walked through the city together. There are also other groups who feel misrepresented by this dominant visuality of tall buildings—like those Bosniacs/Muslims who find the bright bulbs on minarets unsuitable for a divided city, or those who think of the skyline of the city as a form of representation for tourists and outsiders, not representative of how they feel about their own city.

Tall landmarks are indeed a form of representation of the city as a whole for outsiders, too; they are noticeable from the first moment of arrival, predominant in tourist photos and images of them are sold as postcards. The divided skyline shapes outsiders' perceptions of the city in many ways—images juxtaposing tall bell towers and illuminated minarets are often found on the covers of magazines, books, and exhibition catalogues as worldwide symbols of divided cities. The postcards sold in the touristic locations in Mostar, for example, almost always include the tallest landmarks, and yet they refer to the city as a whole, and not only to the Bosniac or Croat part of the city. And the sound which includes a mixture of the Muslim call to prayer and tolling Christian bells are the background music to many films and digital representations of the Bosnian wars. The examples given so far show that tall landmarks and the ways they are imagined and interpreted by city dwellers are strongly related to narratives about togetherness, separation and urban reconciliation in a divided city. These empirical observations

provide a contrast to the accounts of 'shared' places and senses of togetherness that are imposed by strategies of urban planning and heritage making.

Conclusion

This article argues for a 'polyvocal' approach to studying professional solutions to urban conditions through vertical metrics. This approach facilitates a productive juxtaposition of two often separated research agendas: professional solutions to urban conditions and the ways city dwellers attribute meanings to and engage with the vertical qualities of the built environment. I have argued that this approach broadens the emerging work on verticality not only towards understanding the 'ordinary topologies' of the vertical (Harker, 2014), but also towards unpacking taken-for-granted ways of understanding and conceptualizing cities. By putting these two research foci in direct conversation, the 'polyvocal' approach to vertical geographies offers an opportunity to ascertain which vertical practices and meanings in the everyday lives of people are normally left out of urban planning and policy-making strategies. The 'polyvocal' approach is both a research perspective for analysing space and a method for questioning taken-for-granted ways of planning and governing cities.

In this study the 'polyvocal' approach means putting the ways in which tall landmarks in divided cities are seen in professional responses to ethnic divides that involve the making of 'shared' places into a dialogue with the ways those landmarks are experienced by people in their everyday lives. This research showed that in strategies of urban planning and heritage making, places 'on the ground' were seen as the only possibility for constructing 'shared' places and a sense of togetherness in the divided city. These strategies were based on the assumption that the ethnic and other 'we/they' divides separating city dwellers can only be attached to and mapped onto horizontal places in the city and that vertical geographies and tall landmarks cannot be loci for togetherness and belonging that embrace city dwellers from both sides. The ethnographic data about the ways tall landmarks are imagined and interpreted by city dwellers in their everyday lives challenge these 'horizontal' understandings of 'shared' places—they show that tall landmarks in divided cities can be loci for self-identification and shared concern for city dwellers from both sides and a form of representation of the city as a whole.

These findings prompt rethinking of the common assumptions embedded in top-down professional solutions to ethnic divisions in cities. The strategies for urban planning and heritage making in divided cities are based on the assumption that city dwellers have a sense of home and belonging linked to 'their' side of the city only and do not identify with the built environment on the 'other' side of the city. The 'polyvocal' approach to urban verticality challenges such dualistic understandings. This study shows that the built environment that is visible from afar can be related to senses of togetherness and self-identification with the city as a whole. The divided city, like any other, is an assemblage of spatial practices and meanings related to the ways that people live, work, shop and worship, some of which are visible to scholars and practitioners only outside the 'horizontal' perspectives of urban change. These findings give an answer to the question of why good professional solutions to ethnic divisions are rare (Calame and Charlesworth, 2012).

Regarding the work on verticality in urban scholarship, articulating tall landmarks through the 'polyvocal' approach addresses the overall lack of engagement with the practices and embodied experiences of vertical geographies in people's everyday lives (Harker, 2014; Harris, 2015). In this article I have presented a partial ethnographic approach focusing on ethnographic observations and informal 'walk-alongs' (Kusenbach, 2003). Though beyond the scope of this article, more comprehensive ethnographic research into the ways tall landmarks are experienced by city dwellers in their everyday lives in a divided city should include a wider array of methods and

techniques, such as in-depth interviews, comparative historical approaches (before and after the war), a combination of archival research with oral history methodologies (Llewellyn, 2003) or house biographies (Blunt, 2008), as well as research relating to affect and emotion (Lees and Baxter, 2011). Future research should seek to extend emerging ethnographic work on how verticality is actively constructed through practices and routines (Strebel, 2011; Baxter, 2017). Such research can highlight more ethnographic detail—such as the specificities of the relationships that tall landmarks shape or the differences between groups in how they experience tall landmarks in divided cities.

As this article has shown, more attention needs to be devoted to the ways vertical perspectives on professional responses to urban change can point to other potential blind spots beyond the context of ethnically divided cities. The vertical and the horizontal dimensions of cities intersect in the everyday lives of people in many unexpected ways and often in the most mundane urban experiences. Tall landmarks, skyscrapers and high-rises are points of orientation for city dwellers in most cities, they are popular tourist destinations, and they also perpetuate other forms of socio-economic exclusion and secession (Graham, 2015). Future research should seek to understand how these qualities of vertical geographies are included in urban planning strategies. This question is even more important in strategies of heritage-making. Heritage regimes in general value inner monumentality and authenticate mainly aesthetically pleasing, presentable and performative heritage sites (Bendix *et al*., 2017). The question how vertical geographies in cities across the globe fit (or do not fit) these narrow perceptions of heritage is an important one for future urban research.

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