

The Possibility of Qualifying the Courtyards of Religious Buildings as Open Public Spaces: a Case Study of the City of Brčko

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1 ABSTRACT

Open public spaces are those parts of an urban morphology that make the city whole. These spaces essentially represent integral parts of the city's urban structure, and as such, they are always in the process of change and transformation. With the rapid expansion of cities in recent years, the planning and development of open public spaces in many cities and states have been neglected. At the same time, more and more attention is on the construction of new residential and commercial buildings. Therefore, it is important to find an open space in an already built urban space that has the potential to become a new open public space, such as inner courtyards of residential buildings or courtyards of religious complexes. Although they are open spaces, the courtyards of religious complexes are not considered public space. Religion, and therefore the religious complexes, has a significant role in people's lives, and their role has changed during the turbulent era of war and afterwards. Nowadays, religious communities mostly use the courtyards for their own needs, without users' ability to satisfy their needs for socializing, creating new social relationships, and recreational activities. Due to the characteristics of other public spaces, these courtyards potentially represent ideal parts of the urban structure that can become a new open public space in the city. Also, the advantage of these open spaces around religious complexes is that they already have urban landscape elements. Using the criteria for determining the quality of open public spaces, equipment, availability, and other spatial characteristics it is possible to decide whether the courtyards of religious complexes can meet users' needs. The territory of the city of Brčko was chosen for the case study because there is a large number of religious complexes that belong to different religious communities and which differ from each other in their internal structure. By analyzing the courtyards of religious complexes, with the help of the criteria for determining the quality of open spaces, it is possible to assess the potential of these courtyards to become new open public spaces.

Keywords: public space, criteria, quality, courtyards of religious buildings, Brčko

2 INTRODUCTION

The structure of the city and urban settlements and the quality of life of the inhabitants in the urban environment is greatly influenced by open public spaces, i.e. their existence, position, equipment and other attributes. Open public spaces are places where people from a particular settlement gather, perform recreational and other sports activities, spend their free time, and create new social relations. In other words, open public spaces allow for informal gatherings and therefore encourage interaction between a broader range of society (Oldenburg, 1999). Also, open public spaces are places where the population of a particular community interrupts the daily routine due to physical and mental rest (Đukić, Vlastos & Joklova, 2019). On the other hand, open public spaces represent the connections between the built urban units within the city, i.e. these spaces essentially make the city a whole. Spatial configuration and urban forms, which depend on open public space and layout and the number of buildings around it, have the most significant impact on the quality of urban life and human relations in the urban environment (Moughtin & Mertens, 2003). Due to the considerable importance that open public spaces have for the urban structure and the population's quality of life, their existence in urban areas is no longer a luxury but a necessity. In recent years, due to the increase in the number of inhabitants in cities and the growing need for new residential and business premises, the concept of development and preservation of open public spaces has been endangered. For this reason, it is crucial to find open spaces in already built urban areas, where this problem is present, which can and must become new public spaces that will be accessible to all residents regardless of their demographic characteristics.

Before finding areas within a settlement that could become new open public spaces in the future, it is necessary to list those spaces that already are open public spaces. The category of open public spaces

consists of a more significant number of available spaces due to different interpretations of the terms "public" and "open". The term "public" can mean a space owned by the state or city. Still, it can also mean a space owned by a particular company or private person, but which, regardless of the ownership structure, can be used publicly, i.e. which is available to all categories of the population. Also, the term "open" can mean an unfenced, open space, and it can also mean a space that is open for public access or public recreation (Kollarou, Lantitsou & Athanasopoulou, 2014). Open public spaces are easiest to describe as parts of the built or natural environment to which citizens have free access (Carmona, De Magalhaes & Hammond, 2008). Based on the above, open public spaces include parks, playgrounds, markets, areas around memorials, unfenced schoolyards, plateaus, common public gardens, promenades, and sections of roads intended for pedestrians (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992). Schoolyards we can classify as open public space, but they can also be closed, i.e. spaces intended exclusively for scholars. In the category of spaces that can become open public spaces under special conditions, schoolyards can include the inner yards of apartment blocks. This paper will examine the possibility of classifying the courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces. Let's consider those religious complexes are present in all urban areas. All these buildings have certain courtyards in which there are elements of the urban landscape; thus, they can become new open public spaces, which is why they are an ideal subject of research.

Religious complexes have always played an essential role in people's lives because religious beliefs and attitudes that influenced people and their behaviour were presented within them (Kulagina - Stadnichenko, 2016). Also, within these complexes, people performed religious rituals that evoked different feelings, from hatred to complete devotion (Teller, 2016). Religious buildings had such an impact on people, especially during or after the war. In such difficult times, people express the need to visit religious complexes to a much greater extent because it creates a sense of calm. Religious buildings during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s were of great importance in the lives of all inhabitants of the country. Yet religious complexes had, and still have, far greater significance after the war. This significance is reflected in the fact that these complexes, due to their role in people's lives, can and must become the main actors in the peace-building process (Preljević, 2017).

On the example of the urban structure of the city of Brčko, with the help of criteria for determining the quality of open public spaces, we will research the possibility of treating the courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces. A unique advantage for this research is that in the city of Brčko, the facilities of different religions are close to each other. Thus, we will conclude whether the courtyards of religious complexes can become spaces for connecting people and creating new social relations between the inhabitants who during certain historical events clashed with each other, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Essentially this is the aim of this research. The paper will research the possibility of courtyards of religious complexes becoming new open public spaces in those cities facing the disappearance of other types of open public spaces. Courtyards of religious complexes can be places where the inhabitants of certain areas create new social relations without endangering religious complexes and the needs of the religious community.

3 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

As already mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, open public spaces are those parts of an urban morphology that make the city whole, i.e. represent the city's urban connective tissue; therefore, the existence of these spaces is essential for the city structure. The visitors of open public spaces can view these as outdoor living rooms or as entertainment and recreation centres (Kaftangui, Welling, Masalmeh & Anbar, 2019). With the rapid expansion of cities, open public spaces have been neglected in recent years in that development, i.e. in cities and countries around the world, the planning and development of these spaces are ignored. On the other hand, the focus is on the construction of new residential and commercial buildings. For that reason, researchers in the built-up urban space are looking for new types of open public spaces, such as the inner courtyards of residential buildings (Jona, 2018) or schoolyards to provide citizens with open public space. The citizens need these spaces to be able to perform the activities already mentioned in the introductory part of this paper.

In addition to the above mentioned, another type of courtyard within settlements and cities represents an ideal space that we can potentially classify as a new open public space in the built urban fabric. These are courtyards of religious complexes that are open spaces but not public at the same time because religious

communities mostly use them for their own needs. For that reason, the possibility for citizens to satisfy their needs for socializing, creating new social relations and performing recreational activities has been reduced. The fact is that the courtyards of almost all religious complexes, regardless of which religious community they belong to, are equipped with some urban landscape elements that visitors to these areas can use. One example is the monastery courtyards in Iceland and Norway, described by Per Arvid Åsen (2021) in his research. In his work, Åsen states that some of the essential elements of these courtyards are fountains, garden ownership, green areas, etc. We can find similar examples in India, where architects and urban planners are trying to create a theme park in a Hindu temple courtyard that would simultaneously satisfy religious needs and enable other cultural activities. (Ghose, 2012).

Courtyards of religious complexes and school and inner block courtyards can be intended only for certain citizens. If we consider that public spaces are those to which all categories of residents and users have free access, we cannot observe these spaces as open public spaces. On the other hand, courtyards of religious complexes can be intended for all residents, regardless of their affiliation to a specific demographic category. We can conclude this by observing the various religious complexes that today, together with the surrounding area, represent tourist attractions such as the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul or the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. These two mentioned religious complexes and the spiritual and tourist significance for the social community also connect visitors with different demographic characteristics. It is clear that religious complexes, i.e. their courtyards, can have a much broader application than the usual religious activities if they are classified as open public spaces. These courtyards can become places of reconciliation and reunification in territories where there have been conflicts between the inhabitants of the social community.

The conclusion is that no matter what religious community the buildings belong to, there is almost always a fenced or unfenced open space around them representing the courtyard of that building. This open space and its use are under the control of the religious community to which it belongs. Since the courtyards of religious complexes almost always cover a larger area, these courtyards tend to become new open public spaces in urban settlements and the city. Based on the analysis of previous research on open public spaces and religious complexes, we can conclude that so far, these complexes have not been sufficiently researched, i.e. the possibility of treating these complexes as open public spaces has not been explored. For the courtyards of religious complexes to be classified as open public spaces, their possibilities must first be analyzed, which would ensure quality spending of citizens' free time, but which at the same time would not conflict with the needs of religious communities.

Due to their characteristics, which are the same or similar to those of other open public spaces, courtyards of religious complexes potentially represent ideal parts of the urban structure that can become new open public spaces in the city. Also, the advantage of these areas around religious complexes is that there are elements of the urban landscape on their surface, which can affect the excellent attendance of these areas and allow the qualification of these areas as public. This paper aims to determine the quality of courtyards of religious complexes with the help of criteria intended to assess the quality of open public spaces and determine the possibility of qualifying courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces.

We must emphasize that the population's attitude towards religious complexes in Bosnia and Herzegovina has changed over the past few decades. Before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, the population visited religious complexes to a lesser extent due to political beliefs that differed from those prevailing today. During the war, and even after it, the attitude of the population towards religion, and thus towards religious complexes, changed. Today, the situation is such that religious complexes and their courtyards are visited much more by citizens than thirty years ago. Many different things influenced that situation, but the most significant influence is the greater accessibility of the church to the population and the people's approach to religion. Precisely because of the better attendance of the courtyards of religious complexes, they gain the opportunity to become public places that will connect citizens of different demographic characteristics.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this part of the paper, we will present the criteria used in the multi-criteria analysis to examine the possibility of classifying courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces. Before presenting the criteria, it is crucial to explain why we chose the city of Brčko for the case study. The city of Brčko is located in the northeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina along the Sava River. It is one of the cities in

Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the structure of the population has changed several times throughout history. Changes in the city's population structure were influenced by various factors, including the conquest of the city by the Ottoman and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After that, the population structure changed with immigration and emigration from the area of today's city due to the formation of new state communities in this area, but unfortunately also due to the war in the XX century. Changes in the population structure have created a multiethnic environment that has led to the construction of many religious complexes of different religious communities. Today, within walking distance of the city centre, there are buildings of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Islamic religious communities. All these mentioned facilities have open spaces that are around them and that represent their courtyards. These courtyards can have a significant impact on the city of Brčko and its inhabitants, because if we are based on the fact that in this city the basic structure of the population consists of three nations that conflicted in the late 1990s, then we can conclude that classifying courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces can help reconcile and bring these peoples closer together. An analysis of the quality of these courtyards should answer whether these courtyards can become new open public spaces. Also, a crucial fact for this research is that near the mentioned religious complexes, an ethnically heterogeneous population potentially represents the users of these open spaces.

4.1 Criteria for determining the quality of open public spaces

Determining the quality of open public spaces cannot be done before the criteria for analyzing and evaluating these spaces are selected. In recent decades, many researchers have written about this issue. From their research, we can conclude that almost everyone used some general criteria to analyze the quality of open public spaces. Jan Gehl uses three basic criteria to determine the quality of open public spaces whose evaluation depends on the answers to certain questions (Gehl, 1987). These three criteria are safety, comfort, and enjoyment.

Determining the safety of open public space, i.e. the degree of protection when using that space, is carried out by answering questions aimed at the safety of space users at any time of day and questions about the level of protection that open public space provides for the users. We can analyze the degree of user protection by assessing the user's vulnerability to traffic activities, noise, wind, etc., while using the space.

Comfort, i.e. the degree of comfort, is determined based on the possibility of using open public spaces by users for different needs. It is crucial for the quality of the open public space that the users can stand undisturbed while using that space. They must be allowed to sit in an open public space and lead each other without compromising conversations. Users must be able to enjoy the view without interruption while in an open public space to feel comfortable. Different sports and recreational facilities can significantly impact comfort if they are present within the area of open public space.

Users' enjoyment while using open public spaces is an essential criterion because it directly affects the quality and improves public space attendance. The facilities near that space can affect the enjoyment of visitors staying in an open public space. Objects surrounding an open public space can evoke different feelings in users, i.e. users may admire the environment or be frightened by the facilities appearance, colour, or dimensions. Also, the facilities surrounding the open public space affect the lighting, airiness, and other fundamental characteristics of the space.

In addition to safety, comfort, and enjoyment, many other criteria can help determine the quality of open public spaces. Some of these criteria were analyzed and presented by Mark Francis (Francis, 1987). He believes that a vital indicator of the quality of open public spaces is the use of space by different age groups. Citizens of varying age groups must want to use the space, regardless of whether they are children, teenagers, adults, or retirees. The equipment of the space indeed affects this criterion because open public space must have specific contents to be interesting for all age groups.

Open public space will be much more visited and used by residents of a particular community if those residents are allowed to participate in creating and arranging the space. Therefore, participation and control by users are considered an essential quality criterion. Small urban gardens are one example of user participation in space management, resulting in high daily attendance (Francis, Cashdan & Paxon, 1984).

Another crucial quality criterion is the representation of green areas within the boundaries of open public space. Green areas, tree lines, landscaped flower spaces are a vital part of open spaces. The representation of

green spaces significantly impacts attracting visitors and the overall quality of urban design of open public spaces (Lewis, 1979).

The accessibility of open public space can directly affect the greater or lesser attendance of open public space. The location of buildings, distance from promenades and roads, and connect with other open public spaces significantly impact the quality of a particular open public space. Also, access to space must be provided to all users, including the elderly, people with disabilities, pregnant women, etc. (Jacobs, 1995).

Privatization can also have an impact on the quality of a specific open public space. Suppose an individual or a company privatizes an open public space or part of it. In that case, it may result in several detrimental effects, such as a change in the primary purpose of the land, or it may prohibit certain visitors from using the space. The quality of the surrounding open space can also be impaired if privatization results in the construction of new facilities (Korosec - Serfaty, 1982).

The equipment of the space, as mentioned, dramatically influences the higher attendance of the space. A space with elements of an urban landscape such as benches, lighting, promenades or bike paths, etc., has a more significant potential to be visited, which affects the better quality of the space. The equipment of the playgrounds is essential, and the presence of additional facilities such as certain types of art, monuments, or fountains can undoubtedly affect the much higher quality of open public spaces.

	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION OF CRITERIA
<i>GENERAL</i>	Accessibility	Evaluating the possibility of access to the courtyard of the religious complexes
	Equipment	Equip the courtyard of the religious complexes with urban landscape elements such as benches, playgrounds, etc.
	Comfort	Valorization of the possibility of using the courtyard of the religious complexes for different purposes (sitting, walking, sightseeing, etc.)
	Enjoyment	The position of religious and other buildings in the courtyard of the religious complexes, i.e. the impact of buildings on courtyard characteristics
	Adaptation to different groups	Possibility to use the space for different groups of residents (children and the elderly, residents of different nationalities, genders, etc.)
<i>SPECIFIC</i>	Space design	Participation of users in the space arranging, i.e. the possibility of adapting the courtyard space of the religious complexes to different needs
	Overgrowth of green areas	Are the green areas in the courtyard of the religious complexes represented, and to what extent?
	Location improvement	Evaluating the possibility of adding new, different elements of the urban landscape to the courtyard of religious complexes

Table 1: Description of criteria for determining the possibility of classifying courtyards of the religious complexes as open public spaces

We can use many other criteria to determine the quality of the space. It is also possible to use the instructions given by the Urban Design Compendium from 2000, which Milena Vukmirović analyzes in her doctoral dissertation (Vukmirović, 2013). Based on the instructions, Vukmirović singled out aspects that could create new open public spaces regardless of the urban fabric within which these spaces are located. On the other hand, based on those aspects, it is possible to create new criteria for determining the quality of existing open public spaces. Aspects that Vukmirović singles out include places for people, improvement of existing locations, a mix of content and form, harmonization with the landscape, establishing connections, investment management, and design that accepts change. Based on these aspects, it is possible to create new quality criteria, such as improving existing locations. This criterion would determine the possibility of creating new open public spaces based on existing contents and activities in a particular area. Also, by analyzing the design of the space, it is possible to determine how much the open space can be adapted to different contents and adapt to the requirements of other groups of users. Another criterion that could evaluate the quality of

open public spaces is a mix of content and forms that would help select new content based on existing architectural and landscape structures. The stated criteria, of course, cannot be used without the general, already stated criteria because they could not be evaluated independently.

5 RESULTS

With the help of the presented and selected criteria, we will determine the possibility of classifying the courtyards of religious complexes as open public spaces. We will use the criteria to assess the quality of selected courtyards of religious complexes, which generally have similar characteristics as courtyards of religious complexes in many other cities. Before conducting a multi-criteria analysis, first, we will present the courtyards of religious buildings selected for this research.

5.1 Case study - Identification of potential open public spaces in the city of Brčko

As already mentioned in the paper, on the example of the courtyards of religious complexes located in the city of Brčko, will be examined the possibility of classifying these courtyards as open public spaces. Based on the fact that according to the 2013 census, there are about 40,000 inhabitants on the city's territory (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, May 18, 2021), it is clear that there are a large number of religious complexes and their courtyards. After the war events from the 1990s, the national divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Brčko, are enormous in all spheres of society (Clarke – Habibi, 2018). Therefore, the role of religious communities and open spaces around religious complexes could be in connecting different groups of residents. This research will analyze the potential of three courtyards of religious complexes to become new open public spaces.

According to the data from the Urban Plan of the Brčko District, which was valid for the period 2007-2017, the Catholic Church in Brčko was built in 1883. Next to the church in the same courtyard is a building intended for a monastery. The other area that belongs to this religious building is its courtyard, which consists of green spaces and pedestrian paths in the most significant percentage. In the courtyard of the Orthodox Church in Brčko, in addition to the church and cultural centre, there are three other buildings, while the spaces that connect these buildings are green areas and pedestrian paths. There is also a children's playground in the courtyard of this church. The open space around the church is enriched with benches. The mosque in Brčko is located in the western part of the city at the exact location of the old mosque that was demolished during the 1990s. There are green areas around the mosque through which there are pedestrian paths to the mosque, and next to these pedestrian paths, there are benches for the visitors to this area.



Fig. 1: Position of selected courtyards of religious complexes on the territory of the city of Brčko



Fig. 2 (left): Orthodox Church courtyard. Fig. 3 (right): Orthodox Church courtyard (children's playground)

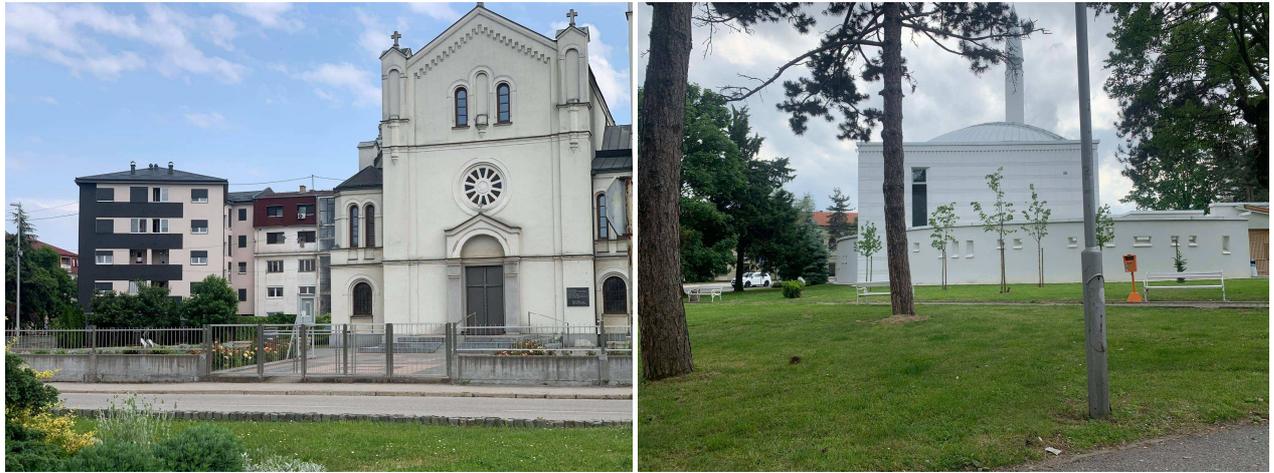


Fig. 4 (left): Catholic Church courtyard. Fig. 5 (right): Mosque courtyard

Fig. 1 shows the location of three courtyards of religious complexes in the inner city, and the figures below fig. 1 show the courtyards of the Orthodox Church (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3), the Catholic Church (Fig. 4), and the mosque (Fig. 5).

5.2 Possibility of classifying courtyards of religious buildings as open public spaces

To determine the possibility of classifying the courtyards of religious complexes into open public spaces, we will analyze selected courtyards of religious complexes from the territory of Brčko, based on the selected and described criteria in table no. 1. The criteria presented in this table are divided into general and specific because the general criteria answer whether the courtyards of religious complexes can become new open public spaces. Many researchers consider these criteria general because these criteria apply to any other open space that we want to classify as the open public. On the other hand, special criteria from table no. 1 can help explore the possibility of courtyards of religious complexes to adapt as potential open public spaces to different population groups and different community requirements. In other words, these criteria may answer the possibility of combining different elements that are characteristic of open public spaces with the existing courtyard structure.

From the analysis of the courtyards of religious complexes located on the territory of the city of Brčko, we can conclude that these courtyards have the required quality and become new open public spaces. The advantage of these spaces is undoubtedly in the equipment and access. However, the great advantage is that religious communities do not limit the use of the courtyard to those residents who do not belong to that religious community. Basically, it is one of the primary and main characteristics of all open public spaces.

Using specific criteria for determining the quality of courtyards of religious complexes in Brčko, we can conclude that these courtyards generally have certain green areas or tree lines or other elements of green infrastructure. Even if there were no green areas in these courtyards, it would be possible to add them. In the

courtyards of religious complexes, it is not a practice for visitors to participate in creating and arranging space, which could be their only negative characteristic.

Criteria	Courtyards of religious complexes
<i>Accessibility</i>	Religious facilities always have secured access from the street, promenade, or other POS
<i>Equipment</i>	Around religious buildings, there are primary elements of the urban landscape such as benches, buckets, and in some cases, even children's playgrounds
<i>Comfort</i>	In the courtyards of religious complexes, in addition to meeting spiritual needs, it is possible to perform other activities
<i>Enjoyment</i>	Religious buildings are positioned mainly in the centre of the courtyard and generally have a positive and pleasant impact on the users of the space
<i>Adaptation to different groups</i>	Courtyards belonging to religious buildings can generally be used by all residents of a particular community, regardless of their demographic characteristics

Table 2: Courtyard analysis of religious complexes based on general criteria

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As already mentioned in the paper, open public spaces significantly impact the quality of the urban structure of settlements and cities and the quality of life of the city's inhabitants. Creating new open public spaces in an already built urban form will be a real art in the future. Suppose we know that open spaces have always been important places of cultural, political, and economic life from the earliest civilizations until today (Stanley, Stark, Johnston & Smith, 2012). In that case, the existence of these spaces in the urban structure must be imperative. Therefore, finding open spaces in the city and classifying them as new public spaces is one possibility in creating new open public spaces so that urban settlements would not become traditional dormitories. The main target of this paper was to explore the possibility of classifying courtyards of religious complexes as new open public spaces. The classification of a particular open space as an open public space is impossible without determining its quality. For that reason, we used the criteria for assessing the quality of open public spaces in this paper.

Courtyards of religious complexes are spaces that exist in almost all urban areas. These courtyards belong to religious communities and are therefore minimally endangered by constructing new buildings, dramatically affecting the non-existence of other types of open public spaces. The advantage of preserving this space is that these courtyards in urban areas are mostly fenced, but this can also be a disadvantage because open public spaces with no isolation boundaries are far more appreciated because they actively communicate with the surrounding space (Dormidontova & Belkin, 2019). Also, the advantages of these courtyards are that their location in the city and urban settlements is perfect, which ensures their accessibility and connection with other areas. Also, the advantage of religious complexes is that they generally do not cover a large area within the courtyard that belongs to them, allowing locating other facilities in the courtyard and ensuring good lighting and airiness of the open space.

The transformation of the perception of religious complexes that have taken place in recent years has provided a significant opportunity and accessibility for every user to engage in religious courtyards and other activities such as urban parks or different types of open public space. This transformation took place by placing elements of the urban landscape in the courtyards of religious complexes. Recently, special attention of younger users of those spaces has been attracted by children's playgrounds set up in the courtyards of

religious complexes, as is the case with the courtyard of the Orthodox Church in Brčko. The far better attendance of these yards is also encouraged by the significant representation of green areas, but they are also inspired by the benches placed along with those areas.

Based on the analysis of the courtyards of religious complexes in Brčko conducted in this research, we can conclude that these courtyards have excellent quality and potential to become new open public spaces. It is certainly possible that in some urban areas, the courtyards of religious complexes may differ from those analyzed in this paper. Still, the possibility of classifying them as open public spaces almost certainly exists. Categorizing these courtyards as open public spaces would represent a new chance for a population that has conflicted during specific historical periods. It would be a chance to establish new connections between people and create a better living environment for all citizens regardless of nationality.

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