

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

UROŠ LOBNIK,¹ PETER GABRIJELČIČ²

¹ University of Maribor, Slovenia
uros.lobnik@um.si

² University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture, Ljubljana, Slovenia
peter.gabrijelcic@fa.uni-lj.si

This chapter examines the fifty-year spatial development of the University of Maribor within the context of social, political, and urban planning dynamics. In its first twenty-five years of operation, despite significant spatial and infrastructural constraints, the university successfully integrated its activities into the urban fabric of Maribor, establishing an extensive network of facilities along the left bank of the Drava River. Over the past decades, the expansion of university infrastructure has progressed dynamically, resulting in the establishment of more than twenty units across eight municipalities, continuously shaped through interactions among institutional demands, urban planning strategies, and broader socio-economic trends. Open and long-term spatial planning, coupled with adaptability, remain core principles underpinning the university's spatial development, which today plays a key role in the sustainable transformation of regional areas and in reinforcing the urban identity of towns and settlements.

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1 Social and Political Influences on the Spatial Development of the University of Maribor

The spatial development of the University of Maribor and the awareness of the importance of establishing a clear spatial concept for the urban development of Maribor were strongly influenced by dynamic social events at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. These events triggered intense political and professional debates on the locations and methods of integrating university buildings into the urban space.

At the initiative of the Association of Higher Education Institutions, the Municipal Commission for Higher Education Development in Maribor commissioned the Institute for Urban Planning Maribor (Sl. *Zavod za urbanizem Maribor*, ZUM) to prepare a programme of spatial solutions and urban planning documentation for the new university. ZUM drafted a proposal for university development zones, taking into account normative spatial capacities totalling 61.8 hectares and adapting to the association's requirements, which anticipated between 37 and 64 hectares of land for 8,000 students. The selection of available vacant and existing areas was approved by the municipal urban planning commission on June 13, 1972, at its 45th session.

At that time, the authorities did not address the spatial development of university infrastructure solely from the perspective of urban development but also through a political lens. Fearing student unrest, which was shaking European university centres at the time, they leaned toward establishing a spatially detached campus on the outskirts or outside the city, enabling greater control over the student population and limiting its direct social engagement in urban life. The alternative was to disperse students and faculties throughout the wider urban area (Gabrijelčič, 2024).

In line with the client's expectations, the Maribor Institute for Urban Planning (ZUM) proposed the establishment of a university campus under Pekrska gorca. The proposal for a spatially detached campus on the western edge of the city's right bank was based on the previously recognized development potential of Maribor. During World War II, the German occupier had already outlined in its urban development plan the concept of creating a green belt as a development zone with public functions of regional importance. ZUM designed the western edge of the city as a green corridor connecting the foothills of Pohorje across the Drava River to Kalvarija, incorporating areas and facilities for health and education. The Maribor hospital was placed between the foothills of Pohorje and a new central area with a

regional media centre under Pekrska gorca, while the proposal for the university campus with sports and recreational facilities extended from Pekrska gorca across the Drava River to the city's left bank.

The concept of a spatially isolated university campus on the city's edge was publicly opposed by students of the Ljubljana School of Architecture. In early 1972, under the mentorship of Edvard Ravnikar, they prepared a proposal for the spatial development of the University of Maribor in Seminar 25, based on its integration into the city centre.

The proposal stemmed from a comprehensive urban analysis, which included a study of students' daily activities – from studying and living to sports, leisure, and cultural activities – and emphasized the need for minimal distances between them. Students warned of the long-term impact of the university's spatial placement on urban development, stressing that the proposed “remote location would be anything but an integrative urban phenomenon – it would be an enclosed and alienated formation.” (Gabrijelčič, 1972b)

Their key argument was that the university must become a generator of urbanity in the city. Therefore, they advocated for a spatial development that would actively contribute to Maribor's urban development and the establishment of a broader urban context. They cautioned against creating an “atmosphere of a university reserve” and argued that the university should be planned as a living part of the city, in the same dialogue with it as museums, galleries, libraries, theatres, or philharmonic halls – “which are not scattered throughout the city, yet do not function as a ‘cultural reserve.’” University facilities should also be accessible to other residents, as “the university should resemble an Italian piazza, attracting all people.” (Gabrijelčič, 1972c)

2 The Concept of a Chain University

In the autumn of 1972, students united in the group **Alternativa**, composed of students from Ljubljana and Maribor, launched a broader social campaign against the establishment of a university campus on the city's outskirts, separated from the urban core. Their initiative was based on the concept of a city-integrated university, in which the rectorate, faculties, university library, and other university facilities would be incorporated into the existing urban structure. On this basis, they

advocated the idea that the university, through its infrastructure, should actively shape the public space of the city centre, and students should become an indispensable part of urban life.

Through their professional, cultural, and political actions, supported by the wider cultural public, the students initiated a debate that was not merely urbanistic and architectural but also sociological, political, and ideological. It opened key questions about university autonomy, the social role of students, and the nature of education. The student proposal did not rely on the spatial concentration of university functions in one area but on the idea of a **chain university** (Gabrijelčič, 2024), composed of interconnected thematic university clusters distributed across different parts of the city. This way, university activities would establish a dynamic network of knowledge, culture, and social life, and the university would not be isolated but would become a city-forming element actively shaping urban development and social dynamics. The students demonstrated the boldness of their proposal through a public forum and an exhibition in the building of today's rectorate (then a secondary and primary school) on Slomškov trg.

The proposed chain structure of the university was based on the development of four interconnected spatial-programme clusters:

- economic-commercial cluster in the block between Prešernova ulica, Razlagova ulica, Partizanska cesta, and Cafova ulica,
- technical faculties cluster in the block between Strossmayerjeva, Prežihova, Koroška, and Gosposvetska cesta,
- natural sciences cluster and Faculty of Agronomy under Kalvarija,
- university centre cluster with the rectorate, library, multi-purpose congress centre, and large lecture halls in the block between Slovenska, Orožnova, and Strossmayerjeva ulica and Slomškov trg, connected to the area of the Faculty of Law and the Pedagogical Academy in the block between Gregorčičeva, Strossmayerjeva, and Vršarjeva ulica

On September 22 and 23, 1972, *Večer* published a two-page article titled “Ali univerza v Mariboru ali Maribor kot univerzitetno mesto” (Eng. *A University in Maribor or Maribor as a University City*) (Gabrijelčič, 1972a, 1972c), and just a few days later, on September 26, a full-page interview with Edvard Ravnikar and Emil Kržišnik under the title “Univerza da, toda kje?” (Eng. *University Yes, But Where?*)”

(Čepič, 1972). In it, Ravnikar strongly supported the student initiative and emphasized:

“I favour locations in the city centre for several reasons. A campus, or a university with student dormitories and other facilities, separates students from the city. Student do not integrate into the city, and as I have been told, Maribor faces the problem of losing highly educated people. If we want to attract students to the city, and that is the ultimate goal of the university in Maribor, we must include them in it.” (Gabrijelčič, 1972a)

Kržišnik expressed a similar view:

“The professor and I stated that we advocate for a university in the centre and not for a campus because the student must be included in social life, and therefore the locations of new buildings should be in the middle of existing schools. All this offers great opportunities for the city’s development, and any fear that students will burden the city is unnecessary. On the contrary, they will give it life. Finally, a marginal remark: the student is ultimately also a consumer.” (Čepič, 1972)

2.1 Development and Impact of the Chain University Concept

The concept of the chain university gained broad support among architecture and urban planning experts, both in Maribor and at the national level. In its efforts to secure wider professional backing, the Alternativa group partnered with architect Branko Kocmut, one of Maribor’s key architectural and intellectual figures, who, as a former assistant to Ravnikar, had previously proposed integrating the university into the city centre of Ljubljana. In collaboration with students, by the end of 1972 he prepared a location assessment for the chain university concept in the block between Gregorčičeva, Strossmayerjeva, and Vršarjeva ulica. The zoning test was based on the idea that the university’s central administrative and social sciences hub would grow within the medieval city core and along its western edge. The assessment confirmed the feasibility and rationale of a complex investment on the northern edge of the city centre, but the initiative sparked heated debate due to its spatial complexity and numerous unresolved issues. Architect Milan Černigoj pointed out two key problems with the proposed location near the Pedagogical Gymnasium. The university’s development could require the removal of areas and facilities intended for youth sports. Increasing traffic could cause similar problems to those in

Ljubljana, where most faculties are located along polluted and noisy Aškerčeva ulica, which even triggered student protests there.

Due to time pressure, complicated property ownership issues, and limited possibilities for further development of university infrastructure, the original chain university concept had to be adapted. Although the plans were not fully realized, the concept had a crucial impact on the university's spatial policy.

The most important achievement of the student initiative was preventing the establishment of a politically controlled and spatially detached university campus. Students convinced city policy-makers that only a city-integrated university could contribute to the long-term development of the city and society.

Through its influence on urban planning and political decisions in the following decades, the student proposal consolidated the concept of the university as an integral part of the city and its social life, and established conceptual foundations for the future spatial development of the academic community:

- University as a university centre – academic forum: The university should unite faculties, libraries, research institutes, and student dormitories within the city core, intertwining them with existing urban structures and public life, enabling intensive interaction between the academic community and city residents.
- Cultural and educational role of the university: University infrastructure should include cultural and social activities such as theatres, galleries, concert halls, and spaces for student initiatives, thereby strengthening the connection between academia and the wider public and establishing the university as a centre of cultural creation and exchange of ideas.
- University as a generator of healthy urban life: The university should create a system of sports and recreational areas located in close proximity to the urban fabric, accessible to both students and the wider community, promoting quality urban living and a healthy lifestyle.
- Housing policy and social integration of students: Instead of concentrated student dormitories, the university should establish a network of student apartments dispersed across different parts of the city, enabling greater social integration of students into the urban environment and encouraging daily interactions between students and residents.

3 The First Twenty-Five Years – Pragmatic Development of University Infrastructure on the Left Bank

During the first twenty-five years, a pragmatic yet strategically significant model of university development was established, firmly anchoring the university within the urban fabric and contributing to its role as a generator of urbanity and social life in Maribor.

Spatial, financial, and infrastructural constraints required adjustments to the original plans for locating university infrastructure in Maribor. Instead of an ambitious concept of a chain university or an isolated campus on the city's outskirts, a pragmatic solution was chosen, one based on feasibility and gradual development. Unlike Ljubljana, where the construction of university infrastructure was often separated from the process of urban renewal, Maribor's urban planners recognized an opportunity for simultaneous restoration and revitalization of areas damaged during World War II. University development was thus directed toward inner-city regeneration, filling gaps in the built fabric and reviving degraded areas.

A key decision was made at the end of 1972: university infrastructure would primarily develop within the existing urban fabric on the left bank of the Drava River, while construction on the right bank was placed in the background. This decision had long-term consequences for the city's development:

- The university became part of the urban fabric rather than retreating to an isolated peripheral campus.
- The remediation of post-war voids contributed to the structural and functional renewal of the city centre.
- University buildings were integrated into the existing urban design, fostering dynamic coexistence between the academic sphere and city life.

Initial proposals for spatial integration of university infrastructure into the urban fabric, prepared by ZUM in 1973, were based on five strategic areas. The concept preserved the key idea of a university centre while considering city-forming and functional aspects that would enable the interweaving of university, economic, and social life. The university centre, with the rectorate and university library, was planned on the western edge of Slomškov trg, in the building of the former Savings Bank and its hinterland. This decision followed the concept of an academic forum,

establishing a link between the university and the city's cultural-historical core. An economic-commercial complex was envisaged in the eastern part of the city, near the business centre, to support university activities and enable synergy with the urban economy. Student housing was planned along the southern edge of the City Park, ensuring proximity to recreational areas while maintaining urban integration of the student population. The bulk of university infrastructure was to develop west of the medieval core, along Smetanova ulica, where spatial possibilities for expansion existed. The social sciences complex, with the Pedagogical Academy as its central building, represented a key open question, as the most suitable location for its integration into the urban context had to be found. In searching for the optimal location for the social sciences complex, the issue arose of balancing spatial accessibility, traffic constraints, and the long-term development of university capacities (Reichenberg, 2016). This decision was crucial not only for the university's functionality but also for strengthening its role as a generator of urban life and social dynamics.

3.1 Establishing University Campuses and Filling Voids on the Left Bank

After World War II, the left bank of the Drava River, particularly its western part, was assigned the role of a space for renewal, transformation, and future development. Urban voids created by wartime destruction, depopulation, and demolitions represented not only a spatial challenge but also an opportunity for a new institutional identity for the city. Filling these voids was not merely a construction process but an urban planning reflection on how to shape a new urban fabric that would not simply restore the past but lay the foundations for the future – the future of knowledge.

University campuses in Maribor did not emerge as the result of a unified vision but rather as a collection of spatial decisions, responses to available land, and pragmatic solutions accompanying the institutional growth of the higher education system. Thus, educational zones gradually formed on the left bank—first along Smetanova ulica, then on the eastern edge of the city centre, and finally with the campus on the Vrbanski plato. This linear spatial logic of development, stretching between the city centre and its edge, inscribed university infrastructure into the very structure of the city – as a backbone connecting different parts of the urban organism.

The first university buildings in Maribor were established in areas heavily damaged during World War II. Planning of university facilities was entrusted to the company Komunaprojekt, led by architect Ljubo Humek. Humek played a key role in shaping the city's urban development – he prepared the regulatory plan for Maribor in 1949 and directed the renewal of war-damaged areas. His strategy of urban renewal through measured spatial interventions was so self-evident at the time that later experts largely overlooked it. However, his urban planning perspective was broad enough to confidently outline the development of higher education.

The beginnings of university infrastructure development in Maribor must be understood in the context of the city's urban planning programme in the early 1960s. In 1962, an urban design competition was announced for the city centre, which had been almost completely destroyed after the war, especially in its eastern part. With the construction of Titov most, the area was further divided by a new main road, and the city was intensively developing its spatial development concept.

Based on the best competition entries, the authors of the three awarded projects jointly prepared a synthesis plan for the development of the city centre (Prikovič, 1982). According to this plan, the central urban area was to be divided into two parts: the western part with commercial and cultural functions, and the eastern part with business and administrative functions. A key feature of the proposed layout was the introduction of a transverse pedestrian connection – from the old city core, through an underpass beneath the main road, to the new bus station on Mlinska ulica.

While the first university buildings filled voids in the eastern part of the city, the western part of Maribor, on the left bank of the Drava, gradually developed as a space for living and education. On surfaces designated by city planners for educational activities, the seeds of educational zones were established.

From the beginnings of the secondary school centre along Smetanova ulica (1965), the spatial development and architecture of which were designed within Komunaprojekt by Branko Kocmut, university infrastructure for technical faculties later evolved (Zavrnik, 1994). The urban concept of the secondary school centre was based on the idea of the street as the central organizing element. Smetanova ulica, established as the backbone of the entire educational area, was complemented by a central plaza – a forum in front of the main entrance of the then Junior Technical College, forming the heart of the knowledge space. Kocmut undoubtedly

understood this forum as an “extension” of the transverse pedestrian axis he had already co-designed in the 1963 competition project for the city centre. The entire area was interwoven with open green spaces and thoughtfully designed built environments – paths connecting the “open” building fabric into a coherent whole while enabling links to the broader urban context. The design followed the modernist idea of buildings in greenery. All buildings were planned according to a unified spatial and structural concept, and most were completed by 1970.

Development of the Technical Faculties Area, west of the city centre, progressed gradually – primarily out of necessity to construct and meet the immediate spatial needs of individual faculties, rather than based on a unified concept of spatial structuring for a university campus (Pečnik, 2017). As a result, the original park-like design of the area quickly disappeared.

After abandoning the idea of establishing a cultural-educational zone along the northern medieval edge of the city, urban planners designated a new, less development-constrained area on the western edge of Maribor. There, construction of the university campus began, with the Pedagogical Academy and Student Dormitories forming its foundation. The campus, located outside the originally outlined spatial concept, forced urban planners to seek appropriate connections with the city centre. This opened the possibility of gradually extending university infrastructure along Smetanova ulica.

By placing the campus on the city’s edge, the idea of reorganizing the city centre through the integration of pedestrian connections was reinforced. These connections were intended to link the transport hub (bus station) with the university campus, creating a new university pedestrian axis. This axis gradually materialized through the establishment of public open spaces and – due to its spatial logic – organically integrated into the broader concept of the university’s spatial expansion.

In this context, the idea of developing a university centre along Smetanova ulica – as the backbone of university infrastructure from Slomškov trg to the Vrbanski plato – found its place in the revised city spatial plan in the 1970s. This vision anticipated the gradual spatial growth of the university and the reservation of land along Smetanova ulica, extending to the new university centre in the Koroška campus on the western edge of the city.

The building of the University of Maribor Library, designed by architect Branko Kocmut, filled an urban void on the western side of Slomškov trg in 1989. Its construction significantly contributed to shaping the university core in the city centre. Architecturally, the building reflects Kocmut's understanding of representative architecture, evident in the vertical rhythm of prefabricated concrete façade elements, similar to the new section of the Slovenian National Theatre. The original design envisioned an entrance directly from Slomškov trg, but this solution was not realized after the rectorate was located in the former Savings Bank building. Instead, the main entrance faces west, where a gallery corridor connects spaces with accompanying programmes for students and citizens. Today, the University Library is not only a study space but also an important centre of cultural and social activity. With numerous spaces for various activities – from the Maister Library (1999), newspaper reading room, exhibition area, and multi-purpose hall to the day and night ČUK reading room (2013) – it acts as a generator of public life and strengthens the connection between the university, students, and the city's residents.

3.2 Student Dormitories as Spatial and Social Infrastructure of the University City

The construction of student dormitories in Maribor arose from the need to establish a supportive environment for studying and living during the formation of university programmes. Student accommodations play an important role not only as functional infrastructure but also as spaces that contribute to shaping Maribor's identity as a university city. Four student housing complexes were established in the city, created in three development cycles. Their spatial development occurred in parallel with the stages of university building construction. In total, 15 student dormitories were built, forming areas with the highest concentration of young people in the city today.

Most dormitories have been renovated in recent decades, improving living conditions and raising the standard of accommodation. Beyond providing housing, student dormitories have introduced significant social and intellectual dynamics into the urban fabric. They host numerous extracurricular activities that enable young people's personal, professional, and academic development.

In 2000, the Student Dormitories became an independent member of the University of Maribor, further strengthening their role within the university system and reinforcing their institutional identity.

4 The New Millennium – Expansion of University Infrastructure to the Right Bank of the Drava

Although it initially seemed that after twenty-five years the University of Maribor would no longer play a key role in further urban development and it did not actively participate in the preparation of the city's urban design between 1995 and 2000, planners nevertheless preserved all development areas where this was still possible. During this period, the university did not exhibit significant spatial needs, yet it became clear that the possibilities for expansion on the left bank of the city were practically exhausted.

With new urban planning approaches that no longer allowed “reservation of large areas” for university expansion, evident in the fact that Smetanova ulica could not withstand the pressure of private investors amid weak public financial support, it became obvious that further integration of the university had to rely on upgrading and expanding existing infrastructure within the built urban fabric, while new development areas needed to “open up” on the right bank of the Drava River.

In the new millennium, spatial initiatives and strategic decisions regarding development were almost entirely left to the university. It began systematically strengthening its presence in the city centre through new constructions and renovations, while simultaneously expanding infrastructure to the right riverbank, primarily in the field of health sciences. The development imperatives of this period were not based solely on spatial expansion but introduced new priorities, emphasizing the quality of architectural design and careful arrangement of associated outdoor spaces – a dimension often overlooked.

During this time, several architecturally outstanding buildings were integrated into or renovated within the urban space, establishing themselves as high-quality examples of Slovenian educational architecture: the Rectorate, renovation and new construction of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, renovation of the Faculty of Law, renovation and extension of the Faculty of Health Sciences, new construction of the Faculty of Medicine, the complex of the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the renovation of the Baronica House and the old Rectorate on Krekova ulica.

4.1 New Constructions and Renovations of Architectural Heritage in Service of the University

At the turn of the millennium, the **Rectorate of the University of Maribor** moved from its building on Krekova ulica to the former Savings Bank (2000), whose renovation was designed by architect Boris Podrecca. In this project, he enhanced the classicist structure of the neoclassical palace with bold architectural interventions that gave the building a contemporary character. In front of the building, he arranged an entrance plaza with an alley of distinguished professors, establishing a symbolic spatial link between the Rectorate and Slomškov trg and emphasizing the university's presence within the urban fabric.

The central architectural feature of the renovation is the elevated atrium with a sunken multi-purpose hall and two vertical structures on the southern and northern wings of the building. This expressive architectural language continues inside, where the new city palace offers several exceptionally high-quality spatial ensembles. Among them stand out: the multi-purpose hall with spaces for the University of Maribor Professors' Association in the basement, the representative atrium with a seating platform sloping toward the entrance – its central part dedicated to inscribing the names of distinguished university members, the reception hall with preserved stucco and paintings, the exhibition space on the first floor, the university leadership offices on the second floor, and the Knights' Hall in the attic. These spaces are largely intended to connect the Rectorate with the public.

The architectural design of **the renovation and new construction of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science** at the University of Maribor, created through an invited competition (2004, architects Ljubo and David Mišič), introduced a distinctly urban-forming building into the western educational part of the city. With its extended canopy over the southern entrance area, it marked the southwestern corner of the technical faculties campus, while its atrium design introduced, for the first time, the element of a covered atrium. This atrium, featuring a small amphitheatre-like staircase on its northern side, establishes an important "living space of the faculty" – a gathering area for students, visitors, and citizens. Its design influences the quality of life and spatial dynamics in terms of light flow, microclimate, and the integration of various faculty functions.

On the right bank of the city, at the northern edge of the educational zone in Tabor, university infrastructure began to develop with the conversion of the western part of the building for health sciences in Maribor – originally built in 1964 – into the **Faculty of Health Sciences** of the University of Maribor (2004). Architect Janko Zadavec designed the renovation of the western wing of the former school and added a distinctive identity extension, giving the building an urban-forming character while introducing a completely new spatial quality through specific vertical stacking of lecture halls. Although the building is relatively small in surface area, it created several unique ambiances, the most notable being the atrium with a fountain element. In 2023, the library (D. Mišič) expanded into the atrium, and project documentation is currently being prepared for an extension and further spatial capacity expansion toward the Magdalena Health Centre.

The renovation of the **Baronica House**, one of the best-preserved Art Nouveau buildings in Maribor, represents a high-quality example of preserving the primary visual and material appearance of a cultural monument. The architecture of Fritz Friedrigger was restored in 2014 under the direction of D. Mišič. Despite necessary adaptations to meet modern standards and its new purpose – research and study activities of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science – the renovation respected the historical character of the building and preserved it as an important spatial landmark within the university infrastructure.

A similar approach characterizes the renovation of the building at **Krekova ulica 2**, the former Rectorate, also designed by Fritz Friedrigger. In 2016, the building was renovated for the needs of the Department of Architecture (renovation authors: J. Zadavec and U. Lobnik). This is an example of carefully considered interventions in a neoclassical structure, demonstrating that with a well-thought-out spatial concept and rationalized architectural details, a high-quality renovation can be achieved even with limited resources (Kosec, 2017). The minimalist architectural approach, which simultaneously establishes a clear pedagogical spatial structure, was awarded the Plečnik Medal.

4.2 Searching for New Sites on the Right Bank

With the introduction of medical studies in Maribor, the question of selecting the most suitable location for a new faculty – one not foreseen in previous urban plans – was reopened after a long time. Architect Igor Recer prepared expert studies with

several possible locations, and the university, in cooperation with the Municipality of Maribor, decided to build along the Drava River, in the immediate vicinity of the city hospital (Nikolić, 2013). The design of the building was entrusted to architect Boris Podrecca, who, with a rational, functional, yet distinctly urban-forming concept, exploited numerous spatial potentials of the Drava riverbank near the Old Bridge.

In 2012, north of the University Clinical Centre, **the new building of the Faculty of Medicine** of the University of Maribor was erected, transforming a centuries-old degraded urban area into a high-quality city environment. The building is considered one of the most urban-forming architectural designs in Slovenia. Podrecca introduced numerous city-making elements into the elongated volume, articulated in its two upper floors into a larger educational and a smaller research block. The building establishes a striking vista along the Drava River and is distinguished by open public spaces and new urban dynamics. The most prominent spatial element is the pedestrian path running through the building, connecting Taborški plato with the riverside promenade. The outdoor arrangement was coordinated with the redesign of the river space, as defined in *Scenarij prostorskega razvoja mesta za potrebe Evropske prestolnice kulture 2012* (Eng. *Spatial Development Scenario for the European Capital of Culture 2012*) (Lobnik, 2012). This document envisioned revitalizing both riverbanks by introducing three new footbridges: to Maribor Island, at the site of the medieval bridge, and near the railway station, thus creating a circular riverside promenade.

The Municipality implemented the circular riverside path in 2024, while the university, together with the University Clinical Centre, developed a strategy for further development of the clinical complex and expansion of research and educational capacities. Projects are also underway for a new Tabor Promenade, planned to run from the Pekarna Youth Center to the secondary education zone with the Youth Park. Its design is based on the competition project for the new Tabor Health Centre building and envisions the establishment of a pedestrian zone connecting all educational facilities in this area.

5 Strategy for Spatial Development of the University in the New Millennium

Although it often appears that the spatial development of the University of Maribor is not the result of a long-term spatial strategy or the city's urban planning policy, but rather a series of unrelated, seemingly random social situations and events that gradually intertwined with the urban fabric through the spontaneous integration of university infrastructure, a significant shift occurred with the Spatial Development Strategy of 2012.

With this strategy, the university systematically defined its spatial interests for the first time and began actively co-shaping the development of both the University Clinical Centre and the broader educational zone on the right bank of the Drava River. The strategy is based on the principle of compaction – concentrating university functions within the city – and envisions two main approaches: expansion of existing university areas onto adjacent surfaces, and infill development within already established university structures.

Since 2016, the Department of Architecture at the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering, and Architecture of the University of Maribor, under the leadership of Uroš Lobnik, has systematically prepared strategic foundations for these directions (Lobnik, 2016). The key guideline remains the establishment of well-designed, spatially clear, and urbanistically meaningful university zones. Design experiments developed by students and experts of the department are based on the realization that, after three decades, it is time to complete the development of certain university areas, primarily through spatial restructuring and high-quality integration into the built structure of the city.

5.1 Co-Shaping and Increasing the Share of Public Open Spaces

The Spatial Development Strategy establishes guidelines for upgrading the existing integration of university infrastructure into public space and city life. Since 2012, the university, in cooperation with the municipality, has been systematically improving the quality of connections between university infrastructure and the city's existing open spaces, significantly co-shaping them. During the construction of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Maribor, a pedestrian path was created leading to the Drava riverbank, with a link to public restrooms in the pier of the Old Bridge.

A ramp was established, connecting Trg revolucije to the entrance of the Faculty of Medicine, and with the decision to demolish the building in front of the main entrance, a pocket square with a small amphitheatre and drinking fountain was formed just before the completion of construction, serving as an extended forecourt of the main entrance. By relocating the sculpture by D. Čadež from in front of the Art Gallery to the park in front of the university trio on Koroški plato (2012), the university revived the process of enriching public open spaces with sculpture, a practice that had faded since the Forma Viva project in the 1960s. In front of the building on Krekova ulica, a Parklet was arranged as a pilot example of introducing sustainable urban mobility policies and connecting university buildings (Šmid, 2022) or their spaces with the city (House of Architecture Maribor exhibition space). The process of sustainable redesign of Koroška cesta, which includes narrowing the road profile, establishes a linear pocket park with green islands and a drinking fountain, and generates a new entrance area to the city campus (Lobnik & Novak, 2022).

5.2 Consolidating University Infrastructure – The Role and Significance of the Urban University Campus

The conceptual foundations for establishing processes of consolidating university infrastructure in the city centre are based on the creation of a “smart urban university campus”, which:

- combines educational, research, and social functions, shaping the city’s identity and cultural pulse of urban life, and acts as one of the key generators of urban development;
- encourages interaction among students, professors, entrepreneurs, and residents through open spaces, accessible libraries, public lectures, interdisciplinary centres, and research infrastructure, creating synergy between academia, the economy, and society at large;
- develops innovation infrastructure and exerts economic influence through the development of start-ups, technology parks, and laboratories for experimental projects; its connection with industry enables the direct application of research into practice, fostering the development new industries and attracting investors;
- relies on urban regeneration and enhancement of architectural quality, energy efficiency, and building resilience; in this respect, it incorporates eco-oriented buildings, green spaces, and sustainable mobility solutions, making it a generator of sustainable development.

The university plans to establish two campuses on the left bank, continuing the process of integrating university infrastructure into the built fabric and thus into the city's vibrant life.

5.3 Strategy for Establishing the Technical Faculties Campus of the University of Maribor (INNOVUM)

The development area of the Technical Faculties campus currently consists of eleven interconnected buildings that host higher education and research activities. The existing built infrastructure is over forty years old, worn out, and in need of renovation or replacement with new constructions. Over the years, faculty spaces have become dispersed among different buildings; therefore, the goal of establishing the campus is the final redistribution of activities, enabling the autonomous operation of four faculties while maintaining shared facilities and spaces.

In this context, expert foundations have been prepared (Lobnik et al., 2024a, 2024b), offering the basis for a comprehensive study of all surfaces and a proposal for space reallocation. It is planned that by 2029, the complex will be reorganized and expanded into a campus of four spatially connected yet operationally autonomous faculties with integrated research infrastructure. With a special extension to the north side of Smetanova ulica, a clear spatial ensemble will be established, where individual faculties will be arranged as follows: Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science in the southwest part, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture in the southeast part, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in the northwest part, Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering in the northeast part of the area. Such redistribution and transformation of the complex will enable greater functionality, improved connectivity, and synergy among faculties, contributing to the further development of an innovative and integrated university campus.

5.4 Strategy for Establishing the Koroška Vrata Campus (INNOVUM)

The university plans an extensive restructuring of the campus area on the western edge of the city in cooperation with the municipality. In this area, three new faculty buildings will be constructed on the southern side of the pedestrian axis running through the campus, while the entire zone will gradually be transformed by increasing the share of outdoor green spaces, areas for sports and recreation, and

expanding the capacity of student dormitories (Lobnik & Novak, 2022). In this context, the redesign of the ŠTUK building is also planned, improving the quality of spaces for student socializing and short-term activities, as well as the university sports hall.

5.5 Strategy for Establishing the Faculty of Medicine Campus of the University of Maribor (INNOVUM)

The development of faculties that are or will be linked to the University Clinical Centre Maribor has been thoroughly analysed in cooperation with the Clinical Centre and representatives of the Municipality of Maribor. The spatial development study (Lobnik & Novak, 2021) established guidelines for further spatial development, aiming for the highest possible quality of urban integration of university infrastructure within the Tabor city district. This approach considers the fact that urban development in the second millennium east of Titova cesta encroached on areas long reserved for the expansion of the University Clinical Centre. Design experiments were carried out in the area of the Pekarna Youth Cultural Centre, west of the Psychiatry complex, and east of Titova cesta, in the immediate vicinity of the railway triangle. In 2024, the university decided to locate the university research centre of the Faculty of Medicine on land east of Titova cesta, thereby outlining the future development of the University Clinical Centre on the right bank of the city.

6 Development of University Infrastructure Outside the Municipality of Maribor

At the beginning of the new millennium, a process of expanding university infrastructure beyond the Municipality of Maribor was initiated, strengthening the significance and role of the University of Maribor in Slovenia, particularly in the northeastern part of the country. Here, university infrastructure assumes a similar role as in Maribor – it acts as an urban regenerator of smaller settlements by revitalizing undeveloped or degraded areas, supports the renovation of historical zones and buildings, and enables the development of research centres and faculties in industrial and craft zones. With strong support from local municipalities, the University of Maribor has, over fifteen years, developed infrastructure in the municipalities of Hoče, Celje, Velenje, Krško, Brežice, Ljubljana, and Kranj.

The Faculty of Organizational Sciences of the University of Maribor, based in Kranj, is integrated into the broader urban environment. The educational area on the edge of the historic part of the city allows close interaction with the local economy, public institutions, and the wider regional community. It is located near Kranj's main transport infrastructure, ensuring good accessibility through various modes of mobility (public transport, private cars, cycling). Thus, the faculty is embedded in the city's urban rhythm and well connected to key points (e.g., the city centre, railway station).

The Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security of the University of Maribor, which evolved from the College of Police and Security Studies in Ljubljana, became a full member of the University of Maribor in 2003. After two decades of coordination, the renovation and upgrade of a historic building in the centre of Ljubljana is underway, aiming to provide safe and functional spaces for modern teaching and criminal justice and security studies. State-of-the-art laboratories will enable further research development in the field of criminal justice and security and provide high-quality study environments. The reconstruction project, expected to be completed in 2026, indirectly represents an investment in broader safety.

The Faculty of Logistics of the University of Maribor opened its premises in 2005 in the municipalities of Celje and Krško. In Celje, the faculty initially operated in the business core on the northern historic edge of the city, while in 2023 a decisive step was taken – the agreement with the Municipality of Celje was signed to relocate the faculty to the former Economic School building in the city centre. Project documentation is currently being prepared for the conversion of the Economic School into new faculty premises, which will be part of a co-located technological and innovation hub situated in the educational zone of the city centre.

The Faculty of Energy Technology of the University of Maribor, established in 2007, is based in Krško with a permanent unit in Velenje. The locations for its activities were not chosen randomly, as Krško and Velenje are Slovenia's largest energy hubs. Students thus have direct contact with major energy systems, which is an added advantage for teaching and research work. In both Velenje and Krško, after the faculty's establishment and initial "hosting" in historic city areas, decisions matured to develop university infrastructure in the industrial zones of both cities. In Krško, the faculty's headquarters will be located in the Vrbina industrial-business zone, near the GEN-I company and the nuclear power plant, adjacent to the faculty's

existing research facility. In Velenje, relocation to the premises of the Old Power Plant is underway, with strong municipal support providing infrastructure for the university.

The renovation of Hompoš Castle in 2008 (L. and D. Mišič) into premises for the **Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences of the University of Maribor** marked a significant departure from traditional castle renovations in Slovenia, demonstrating that heritage building restoration can be planned innovatively and with high quality. An important segment of the complex is the educational landscape of the university campus, which connects its activities to the broader urban and regional space. The Botanical Garden, one of the most recognizable public gardens in the region, serves as a socialization space where the university engages with the local population. In the case of Meranovo, the viticulture centre, the renovation of cellars and farm buildings established an infrastructure forming the basis for further development of an educational and research hub.

The Faculty of Tourism of the University of Maribor began operating in 2009 in the historic centre of Brežice, generating one of the most important public functions in the town. In cooperation with the municipality, preparations are underway to relocate the faculty to new premises in a former industrial building on the northern edge of the historic core, meaning the university acts as a regenerator of a degraded urban area.

7 Preserving the Tradition of the Principle of Openness

Over the past fifty years, the University of Maribor has established more than twenty university zones across eight municipalities, all closely connected to the local environment and the built fabric. Their development occurs in constant interdependence between the needs of faculties and the university and the goals of urban development of municipalities, making it subject to dynamic spatial planning adapted to future challenges.

The direction of built infrastructure development still follows one of the key principles formulated fifty years ago by students of the Alternativa group, who advocated for the university's active role in the city and society:

“Planning the yet unknown form into which the university will evolve must be intensive and always open to all new possibilities. The principle of openness to development opportunities and the orientation accompanying the development process must become the deeper meaning of the urban plan.” (Gabrijelčič, 1972a, 1972b)

The Office for University Infrastructure Development carefully shapes modern development guidelines based on ecologically oriented sustainable construction, qualitative upgrading of the existing building stock, and integration of university infrastructure into urban environments. It strives to establish inclusive, sustainable research zones – “smart campuses” – that emphasize the socio-economic role and significance of the university in urban spaces and offer new standards of living quality grounded in the principles of the New European Bauhaus. This approach not only preserves and connects the existing spatial potentials of the university’s wider areas but, through cooperation with municipalities, enables university zones to develop into the highest-quality urban spaces, serving as models for the city and providing additional vibrancy.

The further spatial development of the University of Maribor is not limited to static solutions but remains adaptable and boldly oriented toward the future, as the university continues to strive to play an active role in regional development, urban growth of settlements, and shaping a responsible society.

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