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Migration and Usage of the Designers' Concept Balkan Typeface System

Abstract

In contemporary society, design and typography are very important parts of visual communication and culture. I will analyze migration and usage of the designers' concept Balkan Typeface System, created by the designers Marija Juza and Nikola Đurek in 2012. The Balkan Typeface System is a part of the experimental project Balkan Visual Systems, which raises questions about visual identity of the Balkans.

In the past, both scripts, Latin and Cyrillic-were bearers of cultural, ethnic, religious and political identities. Today, the Balkan Typeface System is used on many different occasions that connect and communicate within the cultures of the Balkans. As the authors point out, the typeface system Balkan is primary a font, then a translator and a converter between Croatian Latin and Serbian Cyrillic. The Balkan Typeface System is a series of fonts that decode Latin and Cyrillic; it demystifies and de-politicizes both letters for the purposes of education, tolerance and cultural communication. I will analyze the typeface system from three different perspectives. First, as a design and art concept I will analyze it in relation to the theory of design and visual communications. I will describe the use of color, styles and the relationship between the Latin and Cyrillic. The second perspective analyzes the Balkan Typeface System primarily according to the theory of the Language of New media by Lev Manovich.

*In the third part I will apply migration and cultural transfer theories to the three examples of usage of the Balkan Typeface System. These examples are visual material for the film *Atomski z desna*, by Srđan Dragojević, headline font for the independent Serbian weekly magazine *Novosti* and the last example is a project called *Balkan floods*. Usage of the Balkan Typeface System is an excellent example of the migration of the idea and concept and also example of cross cultural communication. Five years since the creation of the Balkan Typeface System, it has successfully migrated throughout the common cultural area of the Balkans and the rest of the world.*

Key words: *Balkan Typeface System, Balkan, Cyrillic, culture, font, image, Latin, migration, text, usage, visual communication*

The history of the Balkans is marked by hostility toward everything that is connected with national and religious identities and that is suggesting dissimilarities of other inhabitants of the Balkans. The violence was directed towards cultures, art, religious buildings, monuments, books, and letters. "In the Balkans, we have a poetic-military complex." (Slavoj Žižek).¹ The people of the Balkans share a common geographic and cultural space and a rich cultural and artistic heritage which implies numerous transfers and migrations in visual culture, mutual cultural influences and similarities, as well as linguistic similarities of language and writing. Along the lines of reconciliation and understanding between the Cyrillic and Latin scripts, which are historically present in the entire Balkans, Croatian designers Marija Juza and Nikola Đurek created the designer's concept *Balkan Typeface System* (2012).

It is chosen as an example for the recent migration in visual culture. The migration of *Balkan Typeface System* is still ongoing and will only be in a position to be analyzed fully after the process is over. Migration and usage of the designer's concept in visual culture of the Balkans and globally are analyzed through the text from three perspectives. The first part discusses the *Balkan Typeface System* and analyzes it in relation to the theory of design and visual communications, describes the use of color and font styles. The second part analyzes the *Balkan Typeface System* from the perspective theory of the *Language of New Media* by Lev Manovich. The following includes theories of cultural transfer and migration in culture and the last part analyzes the context of migration and the usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* by way of three examples. Selected examples differ in some of the three main factors of the concept of cultural transfer as well as in the context and purpose of usage. The first purpose of usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* is as the part of visual communication in materials of art projects that are made in collaboration between Croatian and Serbian artists. The second purpose of usage is in the projects of international recognition. In this type of visual materials the scripts, Cyrillic and Latin, place those projects in the common cultural context of the Balkans.

Artistic concepts that are based on dual literacy of Slavic people have been known since the avant-garde movements. One of the most significant representatives is Ljubomir Micić, editor and publisher of the *Zenith* (1915-1946), a magazine for culture and art. Besides Marija Juza and Nikola Đurek, the designers of *Balkan Typeface System*, including Croatian artist

1 N. Đurek, M. Juza, *Balkan Type Specimen*, Zabok 2012, 8.

Siniša Labrović also used Cyrillic and Latin scripts together in the performance *Breaking the Latin* (2016).

It is necessary to outline the basics of typography, as the *Balkan Typeface System* is a part of graphic design and thus possesses the principles of visual communication (fig.1).

“Typography (Greek *typos* – stamp, mark + *graphein* – to write) is a term that can be defined as: the science of letters, art of using typographic characters, skills of making, drafting, design and functional usage of letters. Along with logotype and color, typography is the third main component of the visual identity”.² Nowadays typographic systems consist of computer-designed fonts, which are defined as a set of characters (glyphs) within one style of the typeface. The *Balkan Typeface System* is an example of a professional typographic system, which combines two scripts, Cyrillic and Latin and at the same time communicates with both the audience and the cultural context of its creation. As the authors points out: “The *Balkan Typeface System* is a hybrid that decodes Latin and Cyrillic; it demystifies, de-politicizes and reconciles them for the sake of education, tolerance and, above all, communication. Except from primarily being a font, it is an automatic translator and can also be used to convert Croatian Latin into Serbian Cyrillic and vice versa. One could, therefore, think of it as an educational software capable of reconciling discrete scripts.”³ The basic elements of the *Balkan Typeface System* are characters, in this case Latin and Cyrillic. “In general, the most common and important geometric elements of characters are- starting or upper lines, curves or rounded part, the final curves, ascender, descender (...) and finishing line or serif. (...) Typeface style is a certain stylization of a typeface. One typeface may have several different styles (bold, italic, black, heavy, thin...). All styles of a typeface constitute a typeface family.”⁴ The main colors in *Balkan Typeface System* are red and blue, while the typefaces are Balkan Sans and Balkan Sans Stencil. “They consist of four styles – three of them with different alignments where Latin is the upper part and Cyrillic is the lower part and one style in which Cyrillic is the upper part and Latin is the lower part of the typeface”⁵ (fig. 2).

Authors of the *Balkan Typeface System* based designer’s concept on the study the of phenomenon of Balkan Sprachbund. “This term is used for a

2 M. Tomiša, *Determination of qualitative design criteria of graphic products in the process of graphic communication*, Ph.D. diss., University of Zagreb 2012, 59.

3 N. Đurek, M. Juza, *Balkan Type Specimen*, 6.

4 M. Tomiša, *Determination of qualitative design criteria*, 59.

5 M. Juza, N. Đurek, *Balkan Type Specimen*, 6.

Balkan language community, which consists of unrelated languages from different branches of 'Indo-European' languages (Albanian, Greek, Romani, Turkish, South Slavic and Romance languages). Despite their cultural differences, those languages have come to share the same grammatical and phonological features because they are written and spoken by people from the same region"⁶ (fig. 3).

Throughout the history of the Balkans, three scripts were present: Glagolitic, Latin and Cyrillic. Today, Cyrillic and Latin in dual use are characteristic for Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. "Historically, both scripts were bearers of cultural, ethnic, religious and political identities, but their communicative and symbolic functions were often out of step for the sake of multi-ethnicity. On the other hand, close development of languages and scripts throughout history resulted in shared properties. Today some regional languages of the Western Balkans are so similar as to be dialects of the same language."⁷

The *Balkan Typeface System* has been used for ten different purposes so far, which are: *Balkan Type Specimen* (2012), Visual identity for exhibition *Monuments and transition*, (2012), a proposal for visual intervention by *changing* the inscription of Cinema Europe into Cinema Balkan during the Subversive Film Festival in Zagreb (2012), Headline font (logotype) of newspapers *Novosti*, (2013), Typoianchi, Seoul international Typography Biennale (2013), Font on the poster for the film *Atomski z desna*,⁸ by Srđan Dragojević (2014), *Balkans floods* (2014) Young Balkans designers, (2014, 2015) *Exhibition of Croatian design* (2016).

The *Balkan Typeface System* is the contemporary concept of graphic design and as such can be analyzed from the perspective of the theory of new media. The *Balkan Typeface System* will be analyzed considering basic concepts of the theory written by Lev Manovich in the book *The Language of New Media*. According to Manovich, forms of new media are comprised of database and narrative. "After the novel, and subsequently the cinema, privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduced its correlate-the database."⁹

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 English title of this movie is *From Zero to Hero*.

9 L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge 2001, 218.

The *Balkan Typeface System* consists of a database and a narrative. "As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause- and- effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world."¹⁰ In the *Balkan Typeface System* - database there are Cyrillic and Latin characters, which can be used as a translation system to convert Croatian Latin in Serbian Cyrillic. The database is also the usage of the font as an educational software. In the future, the database could be expanded to include other Cyrillic alphabets. The *Balkan Typeface System* also consists of narratives. Over the centuries, narratives were created by the inhabitants of the Balkans, on the other side narratives and prejudices about inhabitants of the Balkans were created by others. Some of the well-known narratives are the perception of the Balkans as a *Land of blood and honey*.¹¹ The Balkans are also known as a homeland of vampires and savages. There are many theories about the origin and meaning of the word 'Balkan'. Narratives about the Balkans were thoroughly studied in the book written by Katarina Luketić, *The Balkans: from geography to phantasy* and in the academic papers of Maria Todorova. When the authors of the *Balkan Typeface System* worked on the concept, they could not and did not want to avoid the narratives about the Balkans, so they explained "There are several theories about the origin and meaning of the word 'Balkan'. It is believed that the word derives from Turkish and stands for 'mountain' or 'mountain forests'. Balkan also describes the historical and vaguely defined geographic and cultural region of Southeastern Europe."¹² The fact is that the word 'Balkan' implies many meanings, associations and narratives, while the *Balkan Typeface System* does contain some of these multiple meanings, on the other hand, it is a very specific database with Latin and Cyrillic script. Therefore, the *Balkan Typeface System* maintains the relationship between narrative and database and precisely this relationship creates dynamics, which is, according to Manovich, very common in new media.

The theory of cultural transfer can also be connected with migration of the *Balkan Typeface System* in visual culture. "The core concept of cultural transfer processes comprises transmission and mediation of cultural artifacts

10 Ibid., 225.

11 *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011) title of the film directed by Angelina Jolie.

12 M. Juza, N. Đurek, *Balkan Type Specimen*, 6.

(literary and other texts, discourse, media, etc.) between the cultural systems. As a methodological concept, cultural transfer includes three main factors. The first one is a review of the selection process (the logic of choosing and transferring texts, media discourse, etc.), the second one is to observe the processes of mediation (various types of intercultural mediators are processed – individuals, groups, institutions), and the third, trying to cover the overall process of reception”.¹³ These three factors are applicable to the *Balkan Typeface System* as whole. Hence, the first factor is the selection process; in this case the example for observing the selection process is the *Balkan Typeface System*. The process of mediation is visual and linguistic. And the third factor is the process of reception; so far the *Balkan Typeface System* was used more than ten times for different purposes. Following is the application of the theory of cultural transfer on three different examples.

The first example of usage and migration of the *Balkan Typeface System* is on the poster for the film *Atomski z desna* (2014) by Serbian director Srđan Dragojević. The film is a comedy, while the font is used on the poster, in the title of the film and film credits. The film is set in a hotel resort on the Adriatic coast, where various characters from whole territory of the former Yugoslavia spend their summer (fig. 4).

It is about the transfer of posters and film credits that include the font *Balkan Typeface System*. In the center of selection process is the *Balkan Typeface System*. In the process of mediation are participating individuals, groups and institutions, in this the case production companies Delirijum and Artikulacija, Radio Television of Montenegro, Film and Music Entertainment, and the distributor of the film is Turkish company Movimax Festival. In the process of reception the whole audience who saw the poster and a film takes part. The *Balkan Typeface System* migrated from Zagreb, Croatia to Belgrade, Serbia and then to all the cities of the region where the film was distributed. The second example of usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* is the headline font for *Novosti*, “Serbian independent weekly magazine which has informative character and as such publishes critical writings about all the relevant political, social and cultural events.”¹⁴ The weekly magazine *Novosti* is published by the Serbian National Council in Croatia and it has been using *Balkan Typeface System* as a headline font since 2013.

13 M. Car, Proceedings on the transfer in culture, The art of words, *Journal of Literary, Theatre and Film Studies* 56 (2012), 213-217, <http://hrcak.srce.hr/109217>

14 <http://snv.hr/eng>

The difference between the movie poster and credits- is that the front page of *Novosti* is much more common because it is published once a week every month during the year. Institutions are participating in the process of mediation which in contrast to commercial distributors of the film, have a greater national importance; they are the Serbian National Council, the Council for National Minorities Croatia, the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. The Serbian minority in Croatia, readers of newspapers, both print and online edition participate in the process of reception (fig. 5).

The migration and the usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* starts again from Zagreb and in this case still takes place every week at the newsstands in Croatia and in other countries where the news is distributed, as well as in all countries where the website of the *Novosti* is opened.

The third example of the usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* is the project *Balkan floods*. In May 2014, large floods hit the Balkans, particularly Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, where areas and settlements along the Sava River were damaged. A *Balkan flood* is conceived as a donor project for the rehabilitation of the flooded areas. The *Balkan Typeface System* is applied to different artifacts, such as T-shirts and paper bags. Money from the purchase of artifacts is donated to charity. Authors of the *Balkan Typeface System* also waived the fees for the distribution and actively participated in the project; while the concept proposal was created on the initiative of "Cause. works team consisting of members of the Rijeka association Kombinat."

The project was presented in May 2014., in Zagreb on D-Day, which is an event organised by the Croatian Designers Association. In this example, the selection process besides *Balkan Typeface System* consists of T- shirts and paper bags. The mediation process does not include state institutions nor commercial distributors, but rather the authors and members of the Kombinat and organization team of D-Day. All visitors of D-Day and the purchasers of those artifacts participate in the process of reception, while indirectly also people whose homes were devastated by floods, for whom the money from the sale was intended also participate. Migration in this case took place from Zagreb and Rijeka to Zagreb and indirectly to all areas affected by floods (fig. 6).

The paper analyzes the migration and usage of the *Balkan Typeface System* in visual culture from multiple perspectives. The *Balkan Typeface System* is

analyzed with consideration to basics of typography, then in relation to the theory of new media and in relation to the concept of cultural transfer. The *Balkan Typeface System* participates in the selection while differences existed in the process of mediation, particularly in institutions involved in migration. In the first case, it was the Turkish production company, in the second the state institutions of Serbia and Croatia, while in the third case it was a creative cluster of young freelancers and authors who aimed to help. In further research, a detailed analysis of the process of reception is possible to carry out. The migration of the *Balkan Typeface System* mainly started in Zagreb and continued to migrate to other cities of the region. Migration of *Balkan Typeface System* in visual culture is still ongoing and specific analysis can be made about the completion of migration or by observing migration in a specific time period. The *Balkan Typeface System* exists as a font that can be purchased through the website so it is complicated to follow all the migrations. Further research should include the comparative analysis of the *Balkan Typeface System* and two other artistic concepts that are based on the dual literacy of Balkan nations. Research should include *Zenith*, an avant-garde magazine for arts and culture edited by Ljubomir Micić and the performance *Breaking the Latin* by Siniša Labrović.



Fig. 1: Example of *Balkan Typeface System*, quote by Slavoj Žižek, Private archive by Marija Juza

I LEARNED TO LOVE THE
ВАЛКАНС
БАЛКАНС
 WITHOUT THE NEED TO BE PROUD OR ASHAMED OF THEM.
ВОЛТМ БАЛКАН
 БЕЗ ПОТРЕБЕ ДА СЕ ЊИМЕ ПОНОСИМ ИЛИ ДА СЕ СТИДИМ.

Fig. 2: Example of Balkan Typeface System, quote by Maria Todorova, Private archive by Marija Juza



Fig. 3: Balkan Sprachbund, Screenshot from film Balkan Visual System by Marija Juza, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz7Lg1leDqY&t=60s>



Fig. 4: The poster for the film Atomski z desna, Private archive by Marija Juza



Fig. 5: Balkan Typeface System as headline font for Novosti, visual design by Parabureau, Private archive by Marija Juza



Fig. 6: Examples of artifacts, Private archive by Marija Juza