

# The Rakitnica Village on the Bjelasnica Plateau: Living on the Way of Sustainability

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**Abstract**— Bjelasnica Mountain occupies a central place in the geographical area of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to this fact, its altitude (2067 m), it is the border between Bosnia, on the one hand, and Herzegovina, on the other, and the border between the changed mediterranean and continental climates (while Bjelasnica itself has a mountainous to alpine climate). Due to these natural inputs, Bjelasnica is a „rain and snow catcher”, and because of its geological structure (mostly limestone), it is also the largest reservoir of water in B&H. That is why Bjelasnica is considered to be the „mother of B&H”, since at its base there are springs of two of the most important rivers in B&H (Bosna and Neretva), and on its own (Bjelasnica plateau) a large number of springs, watercourses, permanent lakes and bars. Natural conditions have been a magnet for inhabiting the Bjelasnica Plateau, from prehistory to the present. Due to its specific natural values, in a combination of favorable social environment, Bjelasnica (with Jahorina, Trebevic and the city of Sarajevo itself) hosted the 14th Winter Olympic Games (1984) and subsequently hosted several FIS races. The Rakitnica village (Geographic coordinates: 43°39'25.69"N; 18°16'23.85' E; about 1165 meters above sea level) is located on the plateau of Bjelasnica, along the river Rakitnica, which divides the area of the Bjelasnica and Treskavica mountains. The village belongs to the municipality of Trnovo (about 13.8 km by air line). Due to the abundance of natural resources (water, arable land, meadows, pastures, forests) the area of the village of Rakitnica is constantly inhabited, from prehistory to the present. The presence of people in this area is witnessed by many cultural and historical monuments, the medieval necropolis of stećak tombstones. Until the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-1995), the village lived in a more or less traditional way, within its traditional physical structure. During the war the village was flooded and its population was exiled. After the war, the village was quickly rebuilt, but in changed socio-economic circumstances, and with architectural structures that in all respects reflect modern life.

The Rakitnica village on the Bjelasnica plateau is an exemplary study of the metamorphosis of settlements (driven by the changing social environment), in the rich natural environment where they continue to live, partly in the traditional way, and partly in the contemporary way, therefore in the way of sustainability.

**Keywords**— Bjelasnica, Rakitnica, water, pastures, traditional architecture, sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

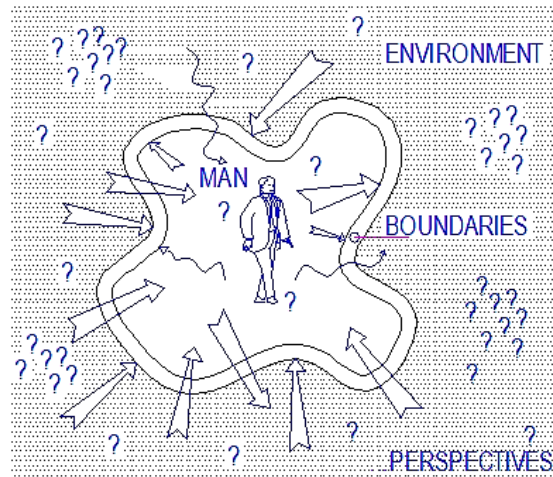
The Rakitnica village (Geographic coordinates: 43°39'25.69' N, 18°16'23.85' E, about 1165 m above sea level) is located on the Rakitnica river, which divides the Bjelasnica plateau from the slopes of Traskavica Mountain (Figure 1). The village belongs to the municipality of Trnovo, about 13.8 km away by air. Following the theory of space developed by the author

in 1987, the Rakitnica village will be considered in this paper as a system, that is, an architecturally defined space (ADP) through consideration of its four basic elements: environment, man, borders and perspectives [1], (Figure 2). Simultaneous representation of these elements will determine their mutual cause and effect relationship and will not leave out anything that is important for forming an image of this space.



**Figure 1:** Rakitnica village. Location

Source: Google Earth (Accessed: 06/10/2021), (left) | Photo: Vladimir Obradović (dron-video, 07/29/2017.), (right)



**Figure 2: Architectural Defined Space (ADS)**

Source: Author (1988)

## 2. ENVIRONMENT

By the term “environment” we mean every possibility in a space in which a person can achieve his existence [1].

The natural environment. By the natural environment we mean all those data provided by nature, on which man (mostly) has not exercised his influence: geographical location, geomorphology, water flows and aquatic reservoirs, wildlife, available soil, climate [1] ....

The Bjelasnica plateau is a vast geographical area in the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the summit of the Bjelasnica mountain as a central point, framed by the Igman, Ivan-planina, Visocica and Treskavica mountains [2]. The plateau is about 25 km southwest of Sarajevo. This plateau (along with the Igman mountain

that is part of it) extends about 30 km in a northeast-southwest direction, perpendicular to the Dinaric massif and a width of about 10-20 km. The northernmost part of Bjelasnica (also its highest ridge) extends from east to west for about 12 km. At the far eastern edge of this ridge is the highest corner of Bjelasnica with a meteorological station (observatory). The boundaries of this plateau are the flow of the Zujevina River and Igman mountain in the north, the Hoyta ridge and Treskavica mountain in the southeast, the 25 km long Rakitnica river canyon (which divides the Bjelasnica plateau and Visocica mountain) to the south, the Neretva river valley (which separates the Bjelasnica plateau and Prenj mountain) to the southwest and the Ivan-mountain saddle (which connects the Bjelasnica plateau with the Bitovnja mountain) to the west (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Left: Bjelasnica plateau, from Hoyta to Visocica (view from the top of Bjelasnica);**

**Right: Bjelasnica Plateau. View from Visocica / Source: Author (08/09/2018 and 09/08/2018)**

Bjelasnica is named after the white snow cover (“drops”), which remains there for most of the year, from November to May, sometimes during the summer months (Figure 4). The highest peak of Bjelasnica (2067 m) is also called the Observatory, according to the meteorological station there. Bjelasnica is the Olympic

mountain, today a favorite excursion site for Sarajevo that offers great opportunities for skiing (on Olympic trails), walking and hiking, mountain biking, rafting (on the Rakitnica river), paragliding in the air and in the snow ...





**Figure 4:** View of Sarajevo, Bjelasnica and Treskavica from the Nahorevo Hills

*Source: Author (04/12/2014.)*

Bjelasnica Plateau is rich in various relief forms. From a geological point of view, Bjelasnica is part of the Dinaric Alps, composed of secondary and tertiary sedimentary rocks, mainly limestone and dolomite. The largest part of Bjelasnica is built of middle and upper triassic limestones and dolomites. There are differences in the geological composition of its individual parts. The rocks on the eastern part of the mountain, east of Umljani (the valley of the Rakitnica river around Sabici and Rakitnica villages) are formed into clayey, ie waterproof marls, sandstones [2].

The climate of Bjelasnica is of a transitional character, between mediterranean and continental influences, with dominant characteristics of mountain and alpine climate. In the greater Bjelasnica area below 1500 meters above sea level, there is a mountain climate (type Dfb, according to the Köppen classification of climate, humid boreal climate with warm summer). This type of climate is characterized by large annual amplitudes: mean temperatures of the warmest month  $\leq 22\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , 3 to 4 and even 5 months' temperatures are lower than  $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , coniferous forests and steppes develop in arid regions, and deciduous forests in wetter ones. In areas with an altitude of more than 1500 meters, a mountain climate (type Dfc according to the Köppen classification, humid

boreal climate with fresh summer) is represented. This type of climate is characterized by long, very cold winters and short fresh summers - for only 1 to 4 months the average temperature is  $\geq 10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Due to its geographical location and altitude, Bjelasnica represents the limit of influence of two large climatic units - Mediterranean and Continental. Thus, the Bjelasnica clashes with Adriatic and continental air masses, which results in frequent and rapid changes in weather conditions, frequent and strong winds and heavy rainfall, relatively early occurrence of the first snow and frost (mid-September), as well as long retention of heavy snow cover in higher areas (until the second half of May). There is plenty of precipitation every season. The average annual rainfall in the mountainous area exceeds 1200 mm, and it is mostly snowfall that persists for a long time. The mountain is generally known for strong and frequent winds, and at the top of Bjelasnica sometimes in the winter months they reach hurricane force and speed of over 100 km/h.

Resources are natural resources that are more or less directly used by a person to satisfy a wide range of needs. Most often, we understand resources as natural resources. Given their abundance, we distinguish between renewable and non-renewable resources.



Renewable resources are: Solar radiation, water, forests and living things in general. Non-renewable resources include oil, gas, coal and minerals. In our considerations, we will treat water, forest, soil (as a “derived” natural resource, without or with human activity) in the emergent forms of forest pastures, cultivated meadows and fields, and orchards (as man-cultivated and especially purposeful trees, ie plant) as renewable resources. biomass). Of non-renewable resources, stone is the most important, as building material, above all.

The Rakitnica river springs at the western end of Treskavica near the Rakitnica village, at an altitude of between 1300 and 1500 m and flows into the Neretva on the Bjelasnica-Visocica-Prenj mountain tributary, as its right tributary, not far from Boracko Lake (Boracko jezero), at an altitude of 324 m. This typical mountain river cuts deep between Bjelasnica on the right and Visocica on the left, forming a canyon, a morphological phenomenon and an idyllic wonder of nature, with a series of rapids, waterfalls, waterfalls and peaceful pools (Figures 5 and 6).



**Figure 5:** Rakitnica river canyon

Source: Author (08/13/2016.)

Rakitnica canyon is the longest and deepest in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is over 20 km long and the depth ranges between 800 and 1000 m. The beginning of the Rakitnica canyon is at an altitude of 1120 m. It is a stream of 4-5 km with a fall of about 300 m and numerous waterfalls and waterfalls. Until the 1992-1995 war, the Rakitnica River was the site of a large number of watermills, and today it is a natural attraction for many visitors.



**Figure 6:** Rakitnica River canyon

Source:

- [https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipM6v-ZfjjScbfix1oSMQV\\_vTlj1sORwvBUtG0jH=w1440-h1440-pd](https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipM6v-ZfjjScbfix1oSMQV_vTlj1sORwvBUtG0jH=w1440-h1440-pd)
- <https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipPH3Cu1i7J5shMcC3JN8U9auqfEssGKBcsU7Wax=h1440>
- <http://dimitrijeostojic.com/blog/medjurecki-potok-canyon/>, Accessed: 01/21/2020.

For the village of Rakitnica, the Rakitnica river is of vital importance. It is completely clean and, as such, meets a range of life needs. Along its shores are fertile plains suitable for growing cereals and various vegetables, with the possibility of irrigation, as needed (Figure 7.)



**Figure 7:** Potato cultivation in the Rakitnica (Scenes from the documentary Bjelokapic)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfBhqQoVizk>, Accessed: 01/24/2020.

In the traditional way of life, several water mills were installed on the Rakitnica river. In the village itself, the Ladjevac stream flows into the Rakitnica river, which is full of water throughout the year. There are fertile plains along the stream suitable for growing cereals and vegetables (Figure 8).





**Figure 8:** Left: Rakitnica River is the backbone of the village of Rakitnica

Source: Author (01/02/2020)

Right: Ladjevac stream in the village of Rakitnica

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Jh5wwYLhc>, Accessed: 01/17/2020.

Around the village are vast pastures suitable for animal husbandry (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Livestock breeding in the Rakitnica village (Scenes from the documentary *Bjelokapić*)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfBhqQoVizk>, Accessed: 01/24/2020.

There are abundant conifer forest complexes near the village: on the Hoyta hill and on the Traskavica mountain (Figure 10).



**Figure 10:** Rakitnica village

<https://www.facebook.com/63806849895/photos/a.108713999895/10152876909369896/?type=3&theater>  
Accessed: 01/29/2020.

Social environment. The social environment represents everything that man has created and what sets him apart

from the world of other living beings. It encompasses both physical structures (various material, more or less ordered products of their activity), as well as the intangible world that we recognize by intellect (science, philosophy, religion, law, morals) through an ordered system of abstract symbols (letter, signs). According to research to date, part of today's villages on the Bjelasnica plateau can be traced back to the 14th century, when they were still used for the summer grazing of Herzegovina's nomads [3, 4]. However, there was life on the mountain before, as evidenced by numerous necropolises of stecak tombstones, as well as archeological findings from earlier historical periods (Neolithic, Illyrian times, such as Gradina, fortifications near the village of Umoljana). There is also the site of Crkvina, located not far from the Rakitnica river on a hill above the medieval cemetery. For a long time, there was a conviction that the area of Bjelasnica villages was an area of worship, where this teaching and world view persisted for the longest time [5, 6, 7].

The population of the celebrated Illyrian novels dealt predominantly with livestock and kiridian affairs. They contacted the Dalmatian cities that traded with the Slavic hinterland. The goods were transported by caravans - horses, mules and donkeys. Among the villages of Bjelasnica are the Lower and Upper Kramari, whose name (probably) comes from the Vlach caravan elders called kramari. The Blessed Peaks of Velika and Mala Vlahinja testify in support of this claim [8].

Several necropolises on the Bjelasnica plateau, including the one in the village of Sabici (near the village of Rakitnica), dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, testify to the existence and teaching of the "Bosnian Church", ie people who considered themselves "Pravi kristijani" ("Real christians") – Bogumils [6]. The Ottoman census of Herzegovina (dating from 1477, fourteen years after the fall of Bosnia under the Ottoman Empire) mentions the Tusila Bjelasnica village, belonging to the Zagorje Grgura vojvode (Gregory of the Duke) [8].

The necropolis of the stecak tombstones in the village of Sabici consists of an agglomeration of a total of 58 tombstones (stecak) that arose during the Middle ages (including the 14th and 15th centuries).

"The necropolis of stecak tombstones is located in the center of the village in the Han site. In this area are represented pedigree cemeteries as well as smaller necropolises of individual families. The necropolis contains 53 stecaks, of which 4 plates, 27 crates, 12 crates with plinth, 4 gabled, 4 gabled with potol and two groups with several remains of shattered pieces of

stećak” [9], (Figure 11). Today, there is a local cemetery next to this necropolis.



**Figure 11:** Necropolis of tombstones in Šabići

Source (Left): <http://trnovo.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/prezentacijaOpcineTrnovo1.pdf>, Accessed: 01/29/2020.

Source (Right): Author (01/02/2020)

The film Bjelokapic provides valuable information about the lives of people in the village of Rakitnica on the Bjelašnica plateau.

The strategic importance of Bjelasnica was already known in the SFRY when a large radar station on one of the peaks of the Vlahinja ridge was built on it, for the needs of the JNA, and a communications center and a tower were built next to the meteorological station at the top of the mountain. Bjelasnica also played a strategic role during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the siege of Sarajevo (1992-1995). During this period, the area of Bjelasnica and Igman, between Konjic and Sarajevo Airport (controlled by UN forces) was controlled by the forces of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina [7].

Due to its exceptional beauty and natural resources and rich cultural and historical heritage and its people (preserved customs, traditional costumes and hospitality), the Bjelasnica plateau attracted many scientists, artists, nature lovers ...

Socio-economic relations, on the one hand, show the degree of development of productive forces and the degree of social upgrading, on the other, reflect the relationship of production forces and production relations. In this way, socio-economic relations become an essential mirror of the whole society [10, 11].

Despite major social changes, people's lives in the village of Rakitnica (and on the Bjelasnica plateau as a whole) remained within the traditional framework until the war (1992-1995), when great changes occurred there. During the war (1992-1995), the inhabitants of many villages (among them the inhabitants of the village of Rakitnica) on the plateau of Bjelasnica were expelled and their villages burned down. In exile (in Sarajevo, Konjic, and around the world), a new generation of people was born, who started a new life there, nothing

like the tradition of their ancestors. In new environments, their parents found new jobs and started new households. With the end of the war, many people returned to the Bjelasnica plateau, made their homes, rarely on the foundations of earlier houses that were devastated, mostly houses in new locations in the village and by patterns of house construction anywhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For some people, building new homes was to maintain a mental connection with their land and their ancestors (since they were still living in the city), while for others it was a rebuilding of an earlier life, with modern agricultural equipment and means of transport (tractors, multi-cultivators), motor lawn mowers, vans, trucks ...). In new circumstances, some individuals spent only a period of summer living in Rakitnica (growing sheep and cattle, cultivating land - mainly potato cultivation, maintaining apiaries), while spending winter in the city.

The inhabitants of the Rakitnica village are Bosniaks by their ethnicity. Islam, both as a religion and as an overall view of the world, has determined their psychological profile, value system and practical activity in all segments of life. In this sense, this area is recognizable not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but beyond. The people of this region deeply believe that reverence for God is a basic prerequisite for order on Earth (and throughout the Cosmos). The Velici family from the village of Rakitnica is known for being a “ulema” who has been educating Islamic scholars and practitioners of religion for generations.

Morality is a system of values that determines the relation of man to nature, the relation of man-individual to society, the relation of man to man, and the relation of man-individual to himself. Since this value system is not prescribed, it is not sanctioned in the same way. Nonetheless, he regulated these relations, often in a very rigorous manner, which, more often than not, had greater power than the law. Morality is temporally and spatially conditioned, which also gives it a mark of relativity. Hence, moral values within one and the same social group or community are time-varying and influenced by the value system of other communities, which spontaneously, sometimes more or less intrusively, come into the observed community. Collectivity and solidarity were the foundations upon which it operated and on which social communities developed in the Bjelasnica plateau.

### 3. MAN

The term “man” is a huge question whose essence he himself tries to figure out within his own borders, within the boundaries of the Earth and the boundaries of the Universe. Together with the rest of the living world, he



participates in the process of the circulation of matter and energy in nature, sharing with him the same destiny, birth and dying beyond his will. Being endowed with reason, will and feelings, he is the only one in the living world able to discover the given laws of the constitution of nature.

About the traditional way of life of the people on the Bjelasnica plateau, their customs, costumes, beliefs and morals, a documentary film Bridal customs on Bjelasnica was made for German television WDR in the 1980s. Within a household, there was a hierarchy of duties and responsibilities: at the top of the hierarchy was the husband/father who made the final decisions and whose orders had to be obeyed and obeyed; wife/mother was in charge of running a home economy and doing a number of jobs (servicing the barn with pets, weaving carpets and cotton cloth, making clothes, taking care of children, various field jobs ...); children assisted parents in various jobs and thus, in addition to their concrete effect, acquired knowledge of running the household; the grandparents had no strict household duties, and they did what they could and wanted.

Today's households are contemporary, similar to households in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a rule, people in the Rakitnica village now have their houses in the city (Sarajevo, Hrasnica) where they live a city lifestyle, where they work and educate their children. Some of them go to the village in the summer to cultivate the land (mainly sowing potatoes, onions, carrots, parsley and less frequently peppers and tomatoes), collecting herbs and forest fruits and raising livestock. They have adequate means of transportation for transporting livestock, food and other necessities. Some people have erected catering establishments (eco-friendly restaurants).

Of great importance in the life of the people of the Rakitnica village (and of the Bjelasnica plateau as a whole) is the religious gathering of people, where apart from the religious act, it is extremely important to get to know each other, communicate and socialize, both in mosques and outdoors [12, 13, 14, 15], (Figures 12. and 13.). There is a weekly collective prayer - juma-namaz on fridays, and a seasonal gathering - mevlud, prayer and ceremony to celebrate the birth of Prophet Muhammad, s.a.v.s. (Figure 14.).

In addition to religious gatherings, the Bjelasnica plateau is also known for holding summer teferi, usually at the end of summer, whose significance is multidimensional in people's lives: relaxation and fun, trade, getting to know people (especially young people who are married).



**Figure 12: Mosque in the Rakitnica village**  
Source: Vladimir Obradovic (drone-video: 29/07/2017)



**Figure 13: Mosque opening ceremony in Rakitnica village (2008)**

Source: Author (08/24/2008)



**Photo 14: Mevlud in the Rakitnica village (06/05/2011)**

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aL97t0foKA>, Accessed: 01/27/2020.

#### 4. BOUNDARIES: ARCHITECTURE AS A FRAMEWORK OF LIFE

Boundaries are those places of ADP (Architectural Defined Space) where, in the most materially exact way, the human needs, on the one hand, and the environment, on the other, are expressed. The boundaries are most often physically expressed, and often not mentally [1, 10].

Bjelasnica plateau level. If you look at the Bjelasnica plateau, on the plan and from the tops of the mountains on its edges (Figure 15), it can be seen that each village



has its own area with which it acquires its identity of micro-social community. Each village has, within its range, basic resources that make it sustainable: a water source (with a public fountain), some villages and their own streams where water mills are arranged (with the Rakitnica river being a common resource for all villages), orchards, fields, more or less pastures, and some of the villages and their forest. The wide open areas of the Bjelašnica mountains (and Visočice and Treskavica) are their common resource where large flocks of sheep are grazed during the summer [10].

In these circumstances, close social relationships are developed at the individual village level, within individual families, and at the village family level. The interconnection of two or more villages on the level of the Bjelašnica plateau, where each village from the perspective of the other “alien world” with its peculiarities, takes place in the inter-familial relationships established by marriage / marriage, teferici, villages, meetings in mosques, trade, meetings in open pastures, mills on the central river-Rakitnica ... It seems that in this way a sufficiently rich social life is ensured that ensures the integrity of the individual-individual and his social collectivities. The distance between the villages is large enough to allow people from one village to visit (especially earlier when walking or riding a horse) to experience an “event” rather than a routine.



**Figure 15:** View from the coast to the Bjelašnica plateau

Source: Author (02/04/2017)

Rakitnice village level. The main resources of the Rakitnica village are water (Rakitnica river, Ladjevac stream and many springs), fruitful gardens adjacent to houses, arable land and meadows near the village, and pastures around the village and beyond, on the Bjelašnica plateau and on Treskavica. In addition to the village itself, springs and public fountains with livestock feeders are found in the pastures themselves [10, 11].

During the 1992-1995 war, the village was set on fire, so we can get an insight into its traditional architecture based on literature and preserved old photographs (Figure 16). After the war, many new houses were built (Figure 17), which in rare cases follow the patterns of rich traditional architecture of the area (Figure 18).



**a) Rakitnica village (1932)**



**b) Chardaklija house (1970) c) Rakitnica village (1980)**

**Figure 16:** Traditional architecture of Rakitnice village

Source:

Kadić, M. (1967.), *Starinska seoska kuća u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Veselin Masleša, Biblioteka kulturno nasljeđe, Sarajevo

<https://www.dinarskogorje.com/bjelascaronnica---vodi269-po-planini.html>

<https://www.dinarskogorje.com/bjelascaronnica.html>, Accessed: 01/17/2020.



**Figure 17:** New houses in Rakitnica village

Source: Author (01/02/2020)







**Figure 18: Ismet Velic's House by the Ladevac stream**  
(Architect: Prof. dr Ahmet Hadrovic)

Source (Up):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Jh5wwYLhc>,

Accessed: 01/17/2020.

Source (down): Author (08/21/2010 and 01/02/2020)

## 5. CONCLUSION

The natural environment is more or less a constant of the Rakitnice village, while the social environment and man are flexible categories whose content is changing faster. The natural and social environment of the Rakitnica village will continue to be a prerequisite for living according to its traditional patterns, with a lot of facilitation brought to it by the construction of asphalt roads, dedicated vehicles (for transporting livestock in winter and summer season, from plateaus to houses in sub-Belashta settlements - Tarcin). Pazaric, Hadzici, Ovcari ...) and the introduction of modern communication systems (mobile telephony, Internet). The natural and social environment of the Rakitnica village is the basis for the whole spectrum of new activities of people: local food restaurants, boarding houses, household arrangements and their rent for the whole season ...

Mountaineering, visits to the Rakitnica river canyon, visits to cultural and historical monuments (pupils and students of all educational levels) are activities that will not bring direct tangible benefits to the inhabitants of Rakitnica village, but will certainly contribute to its promotion on the international level, which will bring economic benefits. The Rakitnica village (as well as the entire Bjelasnica plateau) will continue to be a valuable resource for the people of Sarajevo, where everyone, according to their needs, will have the space to meet a wide range of their needs - appropriate to the people living in the city.

Architecture as a framework of life on the Bjelasnica plateau will always find its new patterns (Figures 19 and 20) and the language of expression, since the future inputs of life are very powerful, and with some good perspectives [10].



**Figure 19: Healthy food restaurant in Rakitnica village**

Source: Author (01/02/2020)



**Figure 20: Recreation playground in Rakitnica village**

Source: Author (01/02/2020)

In this case, the local cemetery is an “outdoor book” that bears witness to the past of the Rakitnica village in Bjelasnica (Figure 21.).



**Figure 21: Cemetery in Rakitnica village**

Source: Author (01/02/2020)

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