

Two faces of Belgrade waterfront: The contradictory creation of new urban identity *

Dos caras del frente fluvial de Belgrado: la creación contradictoria de nueva identidad urbana

KSENJA KRSMANOVIC

PhD Student

Early Stage Researcher in UrbanHIST Project

University of Valladolid, Instituto Universitario de Urbanística (Valladolid, Spain)

kсенija.krsmanovic@uva.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7475-4460>

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Abstract: Over the last decades, urban regeneration programs involved inner city waterfronts globally, influencing in that way the cities’ spatial quality, urban character and market competitiveness. Transiting countries are not an exception. Hence, this paper focuses on the unique post-socialist context of Belgrade, where two different urban models were recently implemented at the same Sava riverbank. By applying comparative methodology, the spatial and social impacts of Savamala creative district and Belgrade Waterfront real estate development are contrasted. The aim is to critically explore processes, their outcomes and the way they contribute to the creation of the new urban identities. Results indicate the relevance of transparency and participation in decision-making, as well as the risk of standardization in urban interventions.

Keywords: Urban riverfronts, Belgrade Waterfront, Savamala, urban identity, urban regeneration.

Resumen: Durante las últimas décadas, multitud de proyectos de regeneración urbana han incluido los frentes de agua, influyendo el desarrollo espacial, el carácter urbano y la competitividad económica de las ciudades. Los países en transición no son una excepción. Este trabajo se centra en el caso particular de Belgrado, donde bajo un contexto post-socialista, dos modelos urbanos han sido implementados en la misma ribera del río Sava. A través de una metodología comparativa, se contrastará el impacto social

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y espacial del distrito creativo de Savamala y el desarrollo inmobiliario de Belgrade Waterfront. El objetivo es la exploración crítica de los procesos de estos casos, sus consecuencias y cómo afectan a la creación de nuevas identidades urbanas. Los resultados muestran la relevancia de la transparencia y la participación ciudadana en la toma de decisiones, así como los riesgos de la estandarización de las intervenciones urbanas.

Palabras clave: Frentes fluviales urbanos, Belgrade Waterfront, Savamala, identidad urbana, regeneración urbana.

It has been several decades since cities around the world started securing their place on world's map, by reinforcing economic growth and becoming attractive centres of production and consumption. To tackle this challenge, local authorities are implementing different policies and strategies for regeneration in the inner city, striving to achieve urban quality and increase livability (Dovey, 2005). This global urban evolution is a testimony of intercultural processes and a tool for cities to create a new identity (Stupar, 2009). The results of these actions compose a heterogeneous set of practices, among which are the formation of creative districts and large-scale real estate developments.

Areas that are mainly caught up with new urban transformations are those that have undergone industrial decline and that are in need for urban regeneration policies. Often, that is the case with urban waterfronts. According to Marshall, waterfronts in post-industrial cities worldwide are frontiers that reflect complexity of contemporary urban problems, ideas, culture, and society. They are testing grounds which prove how market forces shape our cities (Marshall, 2001; Glaeser, 2011) and possibly lead to wider urban dualities (Florida, 2017; Sennett, 2018). Belgrade's waterfront is not excluded. The unique, politically turbulent context of the city's history led to discontinuity in its urban development. Consequently, in the last decade, Sava riverbank underwent two urban transformations that are the main scope of this study.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the political and historical circumstances in Serbia to understand the urban evolution and transformations on Belgrade riverbanks. Due to a thirty-year-long membership in Non-Aligned Movement followed by turbulent decade of the 1990s that have put the country into the international isolation, the post-socialist context of Serbia differs from other CEE countries (Kulić, 2013; Radosavljević, 2014). Therefore, the analysis of Belgrade's urban discontinuity and its unique socialist institutional legacy could offer a valuable contribution to the discourse. After providing insights to the contextual specificities, the work analyses how Sava's right riverbank got exposed to two considerably different transformations, Savamala creative district with a bottom-up and Belgrade Waterfront (BW) real estate development with a top-down approach.

Further on, the steps of conducted interventions are illustrated following the timeline in order to answer what the drivers for these major urban transformations and their possible outcomes were. The data are obtained from primary sources: planning documents, newspaper reports, and media published in the period from 2014 to 2020; interviews on this topic with place users conducted in Belgrade in 2017, and secondary sources. By applying comparative methodology, the paper detects a list of differences between two contrasted models, which indicate the relevance of a transparent participatory decision-making process and the threats of market driven large-scale development. Albeit considerably different, both cases reveal how the homogenization and standardization of urban interventions are potentially jeopardizing urban identity.

The final aim is to disclose the impact Savamala and BW developments had on urban form, identity, and their inhabitants. In the last part, the paper reveals how these recent regenerations in Belgrade opened the questions of long-term sustainability, extraterritoriality, and citizens' right to the city. Understanding what and how has happened in the setting of the Serbian capital can offer a new perspective on the complex process of contemporary urban developments in post-socialist cities.

1. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: THE URBAN EVOLUTION OF BELGRADE AND ITS RIVERBANKS

Belgrade, the biggest and capital city of Serbia and former capital of Yugoslavia, is well known for its long history and rich heritage that is certainly connected to its strategic location on two rivers, the Danube and the Sava that meet at the confluence just next to the city's old core. Over the centuries, Belgrade has been on the border between influences of Eastern and Western ideologies, and as a result of its important strategic location on the Balkan Peninsula, it has been often attacked and demolished. This made a major influence on urban structure of the city, especially in the 19th century, when the Ottoman power in the region started fading and the reconstruction of the city began (Hirt, 2009).

Nowadays, years after the separation of Yugoslavia at the end of 20th century, Belgrade is a city with a need to prove itself as a European capital and metropolis, although still marked with its specific post-socialist legacy. In this challenging context of the Serbian capital, connection between urban and political transformations is significant. Hence, the history of the urban development in Belgrade is related to political, economic and social changes that appeared in the region (Figure 1), making it crucial to understand specific circumstances in order to follow city's urban evolution (Arandelovic, Vukmirovic & Samardzic, 2017).

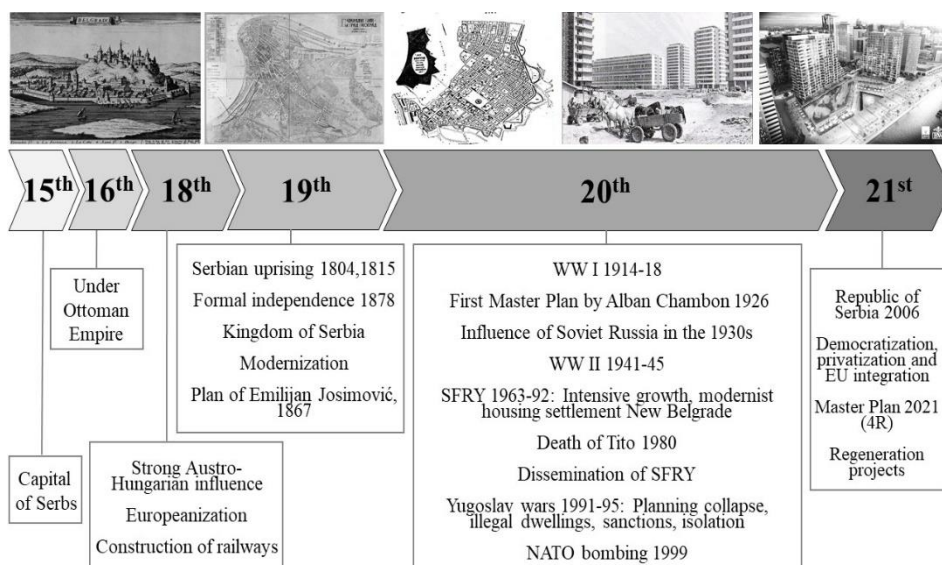


Figure 1: Timeline of the events in the Belgrade's urban development.

Source: author's elaboration

Belgrade is one of the oldest settlements in Europe, with its beginnings reaching 5000 BC. However, it was in 15th century when it became for the first time the capital of Serbs. Soon after, it fell under the Ottoman rule that kept its dominance on Balkans for more than three centuries and left its impact on the urban settlements all over the region. The formal international recognition of Serbia as an independent country came at 1867 (Figure 1). This is when modern regulated urban development of Belgrade started growing for the first time (Hirt, 2009). Being in the city's northern neighbourhood across the rivers, the Austro-Hungarian Empire left during the end of 18th and in 19th century an important stimulus for urban modernization and Europeanization of Serbia. At that time, Belgrade had made its first step toward the modernization with the plan of Emilijan Josimović, who recognized the importance of rivers and provided a connection between wharfs of the Rivers Sava and Danube (Blagojević, 2009).

The first modern planning appeared when the general living conditions in Serbia improved at the end of 19th century. Being affected by the Austrian influence, as well as having a Balkan-Oriental legacy from the past centuries, city struggled through ages to ensure its recognition and form its identity. The Rivers Sava and Danube in Belgrade were presenting the border between two major empires, until the city became again part of Serbia after World War I (WWI). Belgrade prospered as the capital of the unified Kingdom of Serbs,

Croats and Slovenes, and underwent rapid industrialization, urban and infrastructural development.

In the period between the two World Wars, urban planning was led by domestic Yugoslav planners and architects who worked under the influence of the Soviet Russia. This made an important mark in the city's appearance in the 1930s, as it left an imprint on its architectural heritage (Kulić, 2013). Being the centre of the region at that period, Belgrade became home of many refugees after WWI and recorded a big population increase, followed by industrialization, infrastructure development, and urban regulations. Moreover, it is important to mention that both phases of urban development considered planning and strengthening the Sava riverbanks, which testifies its importance recognized one century ago (Petrović Balubdžić, 2017). The most significant urban changes of this period were the expansion of the city on the left bank of the Sava (Belgrade Fair complex was built in 1937), the building of the bridges across the river, the reinforcement of the railway and the establishment of thirteen new municipalities of the city (Hirt, 2009).

After World War II (WWII), the new regime of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1963) brought fundamental changes in city-building. The state took the role of the primary urban developer, with objectives related to industrial expansion and production of large new city quarters. As a result of the social stratification and the lack of housing, working class was planned to move along the banks of the Rivers Danube and Sava that had lost their former residents. Consequently, functionalist mass housing settlement Novi Beograd (New Belgrade) arose on the left bank of the Sava, built according to the modernist principles proposed by the CIAM (Petrović Balubdžić, 2017). Although planned since 1923, its building was interrupted when Yugoslavia broke its connections with Stalin (1948). New Belgrade was resumed as a major proposal of the Master plan from 1950 (Le Normand, 2014), while the right bank of the Sava was left out of scope. In this period, the urban riverfronts started to be a popular issue in the Belgrade city planning. They were the main topic of the competitions in 1947 and 1986, that reinforced the integration of the rivers in city's core, communication between two sides of the city and creation of new centralities on the riverbanks. This significant moment presents a switch in the role of riverfronts, from the former neglected industrial backyard to the new urban front.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963-1992), experienced huge turnover at the beginning of 1990s when the governments of all six Yugoslav republics became dominated by nationalist elites who led to country dissolution after oppressive civil wars. Having a devastated economy after hyperinflation that followed the cruel war years (1991-1995), Serbian GDP fell by 60% in four years. As a result of economic crisis, chaos, immigration, decline of municipal powers, sanctions, and poverty planning almost collapsed

in the country causing the rising number of the illegal dwellings. Society was exposed to corruption, international isolation, and unemployment. The implementation of urban projects at that time, showed tendencies for a delay due to national crisis, instability and society's discontent (Arandelovic, Vukmirovic & Samardzic, 2017).

Only after year 2000, Serbia started to slowly keep the pace with the surrounding countries. Being in a transition as a potential candidate on its road to European integration, it attracted foreign interests and investments. The new phase of the urban development in Belgrade started with the appearance of the Belgrade Master Plan 2021 and the Regional Spatial Plan adopted in 2004, proposed by Urban Planning Institute¹. Belgrade needed a plan for reparation, regeneration, renovation and reconstruction ("4R plan"). Hence, the proposed interventions in the city included abandoned industrial zones, transportation system, economic activity, illegal construction and destroyed buildings. The focus of the plan has been put on the regulation of the Sava and the Danube riverbanks. In the next chapters, this paper will elaborate in detail two projects at the right bank of the Sava, that represent two phases of the revitalization process.

In years that followed the plan, urban development of Belgrade has stepped into a new phase of neo-liberal trends. Several projects for the strategic development of priority areas around the city centre were created. Among them, various locations along the Belgrade's riverfront received proposals for regeneration designed by the "star-architects": Boko Masterplan (Zaha Hadid), City on Water (Daniel Libeskind and Jan Gehl), Ada Bridge, and Beton Hall (Sou Fujimoto architects). While Ada Bridge was finalized in 2012, the others remained on the project phase due to the privatization and legislation issues (Vukmirović, 2015).

Nowadays, Belgrade is changing its urban identity with an ongoing real estate project aiming to respond to immediate needs addressed by the Plan 2021. Despite numerous appeals of citizens and the criticism of national experts, lack of transparency and institutional power, Belgrade Waterfront real estate project is being implemented on the right bank of the River Sava. Considering city's dynamic history and weak participatory planning, this major development is bringing uncertainty and unrest regarding its outcomes.

¹ The Master Plan of Belgrade was made by the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade in 2003, as Belgrade Master Plan 2021 no.27/03. Source: www.urbel.com (accessed: 01-04-2020).

2. URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS OF SAVA AMPHITHEATRE: CASES OF SAVAMALA CREATIVE DISTRICT AND BELGRADE WATERFRONT REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of the current century, the centrality and value of Sava amphitheatre attracted public authorities and private investors to act on a new urban development (Zeković, Maričić & Vujošević, 2018). As a result, two different transformations occurred at the same riverbank: a participatory bottom-up activity in the shape of Savamala creative district (2007) and a top-down real estate development Belgrade Waterfront, realized as a public-private-partnership (PPP) between the Government of Serbia and the private investor Eagle Hills (2013).

The urban regeneration of Belgrade's riverfront is a specific process that is politically, economically, and spatially dependent. The democratization in Serbia after year 2000 has brought liberalization and privatization of the land ownership (Radosavljević, 2014) which created a precondition for the two projects elaborated in this paper to appear. The public sector started losing its former functions and ownerships, and the country started shifting from old socialist towards more Western model of market economy. Despite their global connotation, the two projects were influenced by local spatial conditions and hybrid socio-economical capacities. This chapter will analyse the ways they were implemented at Sava amphitheatre and compare their spatial and social impacts in order to understand better the specificities of the two urban models they represent.

2.1. Savamala creative district

Sava amphitheatre stretches mainly on the right bank of the River Sava located next to the central zone of Belgrade and south of Kalemegdan fortress (Figure 2), while its smaller part extends on the opposite bank, at the side of New Belgrade (Mučibabić & Belić, 2013). The main neighbourhood within is called Savamala, which was first inhabited in the 18th century. It used to be an important port area at the beginning of the 19th century when it started to develop significantly. At the beginning of 20th century, Savamala was blooming as the most dense and wealthy part of Belgrade. At that time, the area had a recognizable architectural and cultural identity, however heavily damaged in World Wars.

In the following socialist period, the focus was switched to the development of New Belgrade housing settlement on the left bank of the Sava, while the right riverbank served as a transportation node. Consequently, the district got deprived and in the 1960s it was inhabited mainly with borough traders and dock workers. At the end of the last century, this area was neglected and marked as a home of outcast, criminality and prostitution (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016).

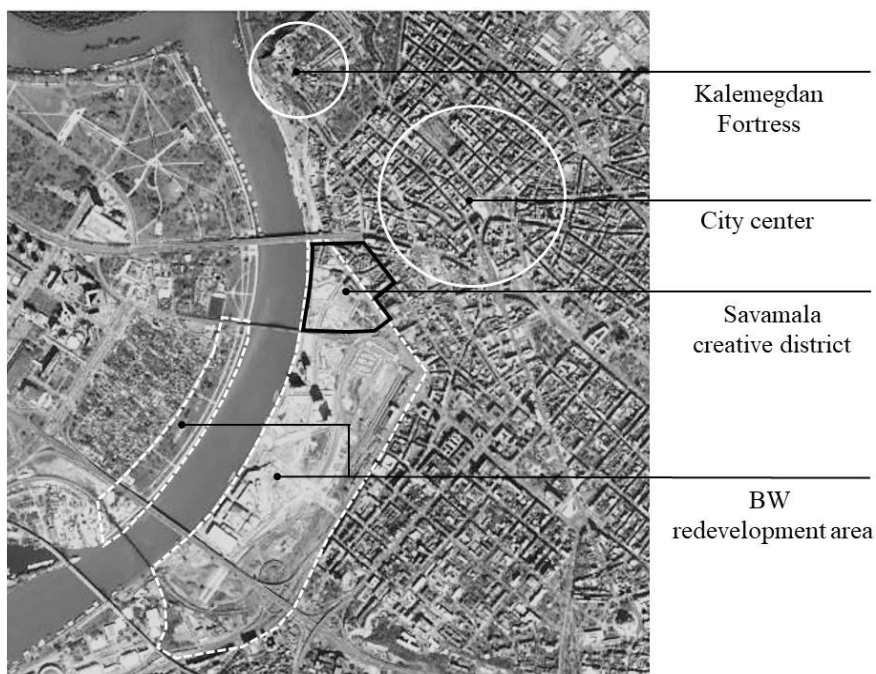


Figure 2: Location of Savamala creative district and BW project area in Belgrade.
 Source: author's elaboration over the aerial image from <https://www.bing.com/maps>
 (accessed: 10-04-2020).

Although the idea for creating a cultural hub here was introduced in 1985 International competition, Savamala started going through the transition led by non-governmental sector more than twenty years later (Mitrović, 2012). If a cultural district is defined as a spatial agglomeration of buildings dedicated to performing arts, museums, creative industries, services, and entertainment facilities, that has among others, a big impact on night economy and tourism (Smith, 1996), Belgrade's Savamala district could be seen as a good example of this kind of urban innovation, where creative economy had a good potential to force urban development (Florida, 2002; Peck 2012). This could be a consequence of an idea very popular in the last decades- a creative district that boosts urban development and encourages consumption (Ponzini, 2009).

In its peak, Savamala creative district had been a city quarter with strong social life and specific identity, aesthetically characterized with murals and graffiti on the old facades, and warehouses on the Sava riverbank that were transformed into bars, creative workspaces or exhibition places (Figure 3). This aesthetic expressions in form of public art, served as a showcase of the social innovation experiment and as a marker of the creative district (Zukin & Braslow, 2011). Moreover, it communicated the character of the space, its history, present and imagined future.



Figure 3: Murals of Savamala (left) and interior of KC Grad, the centre for culture (right).
Source: Photos by the author.

Urban rebirth of Savamala started in 2007, as a typical example of a model: creativity as a fundamental source for economic growth (Florida, 2002, 2017). As the Figure 4 illustrates, it began slowly by bringing “creative class”: local and international organizations, artists, and entrepreneurs which were supported by the local municipality and international cultural funds (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016). Thus, the neglected post-industrial sight became a place of numerous exhibitions, lectures, and concerts that attracted both locals and tourists (Scott, 2014).

Participatory activities at the area were blooming in 2012, when “Mikser House” brought their annual “Mikser Festival” to the district (Figure 4). This fostered the opening of new galleries, restaurants and clubs in the area, that became a meeting place for the urban spirit and exchange of ideas (“Savamala-čtvrta umetnosti i tri četvrti noćnog provoda”, 2015). Another important actor was the “Urban incubator” initiated by the German “Goethe Institute”, with an idea to reshape and requalify this neglected part of Serbian capital.

From the beginning of its existence, Savamala project included many international participants: “Raumlabor” team of architects from Berlin, the University of Technical Sciences of Zurich, the Academy of Fine Arts Hamburg, “Nexthamburg” internet platform, “Kamenzid” magazine, etc (Coldwell, 2015). For its activities, it was receiving support from the city, municipality and foreign international funds. Also, some of the agents in the district had profit-oriented services and activities: bars, shops, concerts and exhibitions.

According to Cvetinović, Maričić and Bolay (2016), Savamala presented a small-scale and low-budget initiative that activated the neglected neighbourhood and citizens with a “learning by doing” method. Likewise, it promoted the participation, help for refugees and revival of the area by raising the sense of community and culture. Savamala manifested the success of the most recent urban trends in neighbourhood improvement. A statement of Ivan Lalić, founder of “Mikser house“, contributes to understanding of the urban

process that occurred in Savamala: "We see here now, openly speaking, culture as an economic tool to develop the neighborhood and employ some people, it actually presents a new way of promoting the city" (Veselinovic, 2015).

Despite the success of this urban development founded in small-scale cultural practices and creative industries (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016), Savamala activated mainly alternative cultural scene and left behind its original citizens. This intervention created a trendy image that resembles other creative neighbourhoods worldwide, changed the district's identity, and brought gentrification (Figure 4).

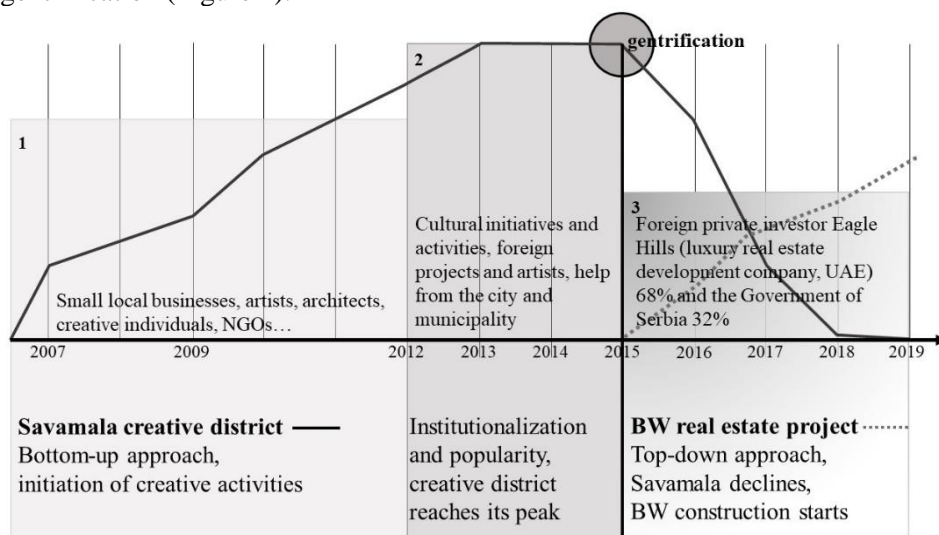


Figure 4: Scheme of the urban processes and actors involved at Savamala regeneration.
Source: author's elaboration

2.2. Belgrade Waterfront real estate development

As a result of the radical political shifts in Serbia shortly after, the Sava riverbank has undergone another regeneration in the shape of the Belgrade Waterfront (BW) project. The Government of Serbia recognized the potential of the sight for enhancing economy and attracting capital. The project is occupying 116 ha of Sava amphitheatre and a part of 27 ha of the New Belgrade area (Figure 2). Due to the lack of public resources to conduct this major urban regeneration, the government was searching for the investment of foreign private real estate developers.

The project was introduced in public for the first time in 2012 via media and in the political campaign of former Prime Minister and current president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić (Kristović, 2014). The proponents of the BW promised that the project will revive under-utilized riverside with its new mixed-use development and will represent city's new core: district of business,

technology and design (“Flagship project Belgrade Waterfront Serbia, begins constructions”, 2015). In the following year, BW was promoted in Serbia with several 3D models (Figure 5) and presented in 2014 Real Estate Exhibition in Cannes. Nevertheless, the promotional campaign of the project was lacking completed documentation, verified and signed by the experts.

With the purpose to start the construction and conceal public disapproval, Government of Serbia undertook several implementation steps. First, the contract between the governments of Serbia and United Arab Emirates was signed in February 2013, based on an international agreement between the two parties on realization of the major urban development in Belgrade. In the following year, it was announced that the project will be developed by the Abu-Dhabi based real-estate company Eagle Hills willing to invest 3.5 billion of dollars. Secondly, Serbian government formed Belgrade Waterfront Company in Belgrade as a contractor in charge for the project (Radosavljević, 2014; Lalović, Radosavljević & Đukanović, 2015). Still, the project was not yet in accordance with the Serbian national legislative and current urban plans, hence it demanded more institutional reframing. The answer was found in the amendment to the Master Plan 2021, adopted to evade the need to open an international competition for regenerating Sava amphitheatre. Furthermore, the regulations and a Study of building heights was aborted for this area, despite its valuable vistas and architectural heritage.

Finally, the Government of Serbia proclaimed BW a project of great national importance and tourism potential, and in June 2014 created a framework for the Spatial Plan Belgrade Waterfront through the Republic Agency for Spatial Planning in charge. In this way, the city and the municipalities (Savski Venac and Novi Beograd) were bypassed, while the BW implementation became exclusively a matter on the national level of governance (Lalović, Radosavljević & Đukanović, 2015).

To initiate the project, the old buildings and former rails were removed from the sight. Seemingly, the high groundwater level in the base of Sava amphitheatre was also ignored by the builders as it is a floodplain not suitable for such a change. Despite that, on March 8, 2014 the construction works have started (Figure 5).

BW is mainly intended for housing and commercial activities. Hence, the core of the project is a shopping mall spreading on 140,000 square meters, which will turn the area into the centre of consumption (Wright, 2015). On the other hand, it was propagated by Serbian politicians and the BW company, as the project that will draw new residents and international visitors, and correspondingly start a new era of prosperity for Serbia. Relevant questions that arise are: What is the opinion of experts and citizens about ongoing large-scale development that will completely change the identity of the city? Moreover, how will this urban transformation work in their favour?



Figure 5: 3D model of BW (left) and BW construction site seen from Savamala (right).
Source: Photos by the author.

3. COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION: LOCAL IDENTITY VERSUS GLOBAL MARKET

After a decade of the social unrest caused by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, civil wars, and NATO bombing in 1999, arrival of democratic parties that started governing the country strongly motivated inhabitants to redevelop and innovate Serbia. However, the changes in the regime and turbulent period of international isolation during the 1990s, made Serbian post-socialist context unique. Due to these reasons, global models for urban regenerations were adopted in Belgrade much later than elsewhere. Only in the last fifteen years the country started to form its own socio-economic way for urban development. In this period of transition, solutions were found in the participatory small-scale intervention illustrated with the case of Savamala and in the top-down large-scale development, presented with the BW project.

Savamala represented new wave of cultural activities where artists and creative entrepreneurs were redefining the identity of Belgrade by promoting local history, community and sight capacities. This was attempted by preserving and transforming empty, neglected buildings belonging to diverse architectural epochs into contemporary restaurants, bars, and exhibition spaces enriched with designed furniture (Krsmanovic, 2017). It gathered NGOs and citizens that could be considered as a “creative class” (Florida, 2002) in the strategically and aesthetically important area of the Sava riverbank and turned it into the first creative hub of Belgrade that was internationally recognized. Therefore, Kristović (2014) considers it as a creative district one would expect to find in the most modern cities worldwide.

Yet, after the birth of the creative district, Savamala neighbourhood had around 35,000 inhabitants which is three times less than in the middle of last

century, and it was still decreasing. Even though residents were encouraged by innovators to be part of the revival of the district, their living conditions kept being poor (Veselinovic, 2015). Savamala represented social interests of certain groups on the broader city level (Figure 6), yet it failed to address the needs of its initial, poor inhabitants who were not playing a significant part in the neighbourhood revival. Additionally, the bottom-up initiative has put the lights on the spatial and cultural values of this area that sadly, brought gentrification (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016; Florida, 2017) and more powerful actors who deepened the spatial segregation.

<u>Comparative criteria</u>	Savamala creative district	BW real-estate development
Approach	Bottom-up / Grassroot / Open	Top-down / Institutionalized / Closed
Actors	Multi: NGOs, entrepreneurs, citizens, venues, initiatives (Mikser, KC Grad, MKM, Urban Incubator, Nova Iskra, Ne da(vi)mo Beograd...).	Bilateral: Governments of Serbia and UAE presented through Eagle Hills and BW company.
Funds	Public (city, municipality), EU cultural program grants, foreign funds, profit-oriented services and activities.	PPP: Private foreign investor Eagle Hills (68%)-market and services profit; Government of Serbia (32%)-land, taxation.
Decision-making process	Participatory / Democratic	Centralized / Authoritarian / Capitalistic
Spatial quality/ Identity	Maintaining hist. buildings, respecting architectural heritage; added murals and graffiti, hype atmosphere; preserves existing panoramic views; sight-specific.	Out of architectural context: new modern high-rise housing and commerce buildings, closes existing views on the city, global, universal.
Socio-economic activities	Fostering community and tolerance; refugees support; concerts, exhibitions, workshops, creative industry; recreation (cycling paths).	Market / profit oriented; probably for global elites with high purchasing power; exclusive; more to be seen in the future.

Figure 6: Comparative analysis. Source: author's elaboration

Unfortunately, the following BW project appeared as a less respectful one to Belgrade's urban heritage and inhabitants, considering their criticism, dissatisfaction and exclusion from the decision-making process and potentially from the area. This is a consequence of the fact that BW is expected to provide

mainly luxury housing and business units whose success depends on the real estate market. Nonetheless, in the moment of its implementation there was no real need for such utilities in Belgrade. Additionally, previous studies indicated that the area of Sava amphitheatre was originally intended for public functions: cultural and educational institutions, public parks, and traffic system that would serve everyone (Radosavljević, 2014; Lalović, Radosavljević & Đukanović, 2015; Petrović Balubdžić, 2017; Machala & Koelemaj, 2019). With the apartment prices far beyond the purchasing power of an average consumer in Serbia, it is threatening to reinforce socio-spatial inequalities and create extraterritoriality in the central area of Belgrade.

By now, the BW project has drawn strong criticism from local architects, urbanists and residents who were eliminated from the planning process. The experts from the Academy of Architecture in Serbia addressed to the public their strong appeal on violation of the laws and planning legislations, lack of transparency and democracy that the project has brought (“Deklaracija o Beogradu na vodi”, 2015). Architect Bojan Kovačević, member of the Academy, highlighted that BW allows complete freedom to the private investor, since there are no legal obligations to fulfil the initial plan and deadlines for the development of this area (Kovačević, 2015). This means that the investor can leave project works in any moment depending on its profitability. Therefore, the construction of the project is already significantly delayed. Moreover, during the 2014 and 2015 the project has triggered numerous protests of the citizens who went out on the streets, led by the “Do not drown Belgrade” opponent movement. One of their members had characterized the project as “a spaceship that landed on the riverbank” (Coldwell, 2015).

Seemingly, there is a significant gap between the initial narrative and the reality behind the BW project implementation. The previous researches and the experts’ opinions indicate many uncertainties and problems it has put on the table. The first contemporary large-scale development in Serbia was made possible by reformulating national planning documents (Lalović, Radosavljević & Đukanović, 2015) and by implementing a non-transparent authoritarian approach for the real estate development that some define as a process of “neoliberalization” (Lalović, Radosavljević & Đukanović, 2015; Petrović Balubdžić, 2017) while others as “Dubaification” (Koelemaj, 2020). The BW project represents the power of a national authority that is still the main actor of the urban development in Serbia. Being aesthetically out of the existing architectural context (Figure 7), it will contribute to the creation of the city’s new identity formed by global trends for market competitiveness. In that sense, this identity is no-identity, or rather a multi-identity shared and seen in the numerous cities around the world (Figure 8).



Figure 7: Visual identity of historical city on Sava. Source: Photo by Akos Hajdu, available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sonic182/32206394557> (accessed: 10-04-2020)



Figure 8: Visual identity of BW project. Source: BW Press Kit, available at: <https://www.belgradewaterfront.com/en/press/press-kit/> (accessed: 10-04-2020)

The comparison between Savamala and BW illustrated in Figure 6, aims to contrast two different urban approaches implemented one after other at the same Sava riverbank. This paper points out numerous differences between the two urban regeneration projects (in scale, decision-making process, actors, funds, intended users, and propaganda) but interestingly, it indicates also certain similarities. Both models of urban regenerations promoted economy and contributed to the creation of new identities of Belgrade. Additionally, both prove that the homogenization and standardization of urban interventions can threaten specificities of the locality and make cities look alike. Finally, the BW transformation process brought uncertainties for the future of Sava amphitheatre due to the lack of transparency, regulation, and control applied by the public authorities so far. Questions remain as to how sustainable this urban development is in the long run and who will benefit from this change.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a comparative analysis of two projects implemented in the same urban waterfront in Belgrade, their approach, and the impact on the city and its inhabitants. Both projects testify to the attempt of transiting countries like Serbia, to ensure their competitiveness on a global level (Laundry, 2012) and create a new identity. Nonetheless, it illustrates how adopting non-innovative models for urban interventions can have diverse outcomes in the same post-socialist urban context, and possibly lead to deeper socio-spatial inequality. This resonates with Marshall's visions of waterfronts (Marshall, 2001) and proves the multi-layered complexity of the contemporary urban developments, as well as a need for widening perspectives on the 21st century urbanism.

Although it is challenging to fully explain implemented urban processes, this work attempted to point out the contradictions of the two interventions by comparing their main features. Savamala creative district was a participatory transformation of a neglected site of Sava amphitheatre that raised the sense of community and belonging (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016). Even though it provided care for locals and refugees by focusing on social interests, creative industries did attract gentrification and private investors to the sight. On the other hand, the succeeding BW project showed the predominance of the public sector joint with a private investor over the collaboration between the local authorities and citizens. It appears as a non-transparent hybrid public-private-partnership, since it is operated on a strong national level with inherited institutional regulations (Machala & Koelemaij, 2019). As a result of such a regeneration that excluded existing regulations, local professionals, and citizens, the project lacks local support and positive social reception.

Regardless of initial propaganda for sustainable, profitable, and attractive urban change, we should bear in mind that large-scale project outcomes will

significantly affect both spatial characteristics and sense of belonging to the city. After the project construction is done and the urban form is changed, what will matter in the long term is how well it affects local citizens in the economic and social sense and whether the new district will be adequately integrated in the wider urban context.

To plan for future prosperity and avoid growing dualities in the city, the solution could be possibly found in combining soft actions that will bring the “spirit” into the new large-scale urban interventions. Instead of adopting a model from elsewhere, creating a highly contextualized hybrid solution might respond better to the local needs. As suggested by Radosavljević (2014), this could be achieved by citizens’ inclusion, transparent and participatory decision-making process, democratization of institutions, and clear development policy.

The main outcomes of the BW development with national importance are expected to satisfy both private and local public interest and lead to a long-term sustainable growth of the city. Time and possible future research will tell to what extent is the finished BW project effective for the socio-economic benefits. However, at this very moment, it could be stated that it is creating, in its own contradictory way, a new global identity of Belgrade.

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