

Др **Сања Игуман**, научна сарадница
Институт за филозофију и друштвену теорију, Београд, Србија
iguman.sanja@gmail.com

ЛОКАЛИТЕТИ БАШТИНЕ ИЛИ ГРАЂЕВИНСКО ЗЕМЉИШТЕ – БЕОГРАДСКО УШЋЕ

Апстракт

Рад истражује осетљив однос између градитељског наслеђа и модернизације у урбаним контекстима. Наслеђе потиче из прошлости, али је општепознато да је политичко и оријентисано ка садашњости, јер одлуке о томе које наслеђе је довољно значајно да буде сачувано и на који начин, играју кључну улогу у томе како групе људи схватају своју историју, колективни идентитет и сећање и како то рефлектују ка спољашњем свету (Graham, Ashworth i Tunbridge 2007).

Фокус анализе је на ушћу двеју међународних река – Саве и Дунава – стратегијске почетне тачке за развој Београда према његовим природним и топографским карактеристикама (Свијић 2013). Ова зона је још једанпут у историји Београда у центру пажње, овај пут као главна локација у процесу радикалне урбане промене града.

Неодвојив од наслеђа, истраживаће се појам пејзажа у контексту Ушћа, јер се односи на сложен и флуидан концепт, који савршено приказује однос физичког окружења и културних и социјалних значења одређеног места (Bonadei, Cisani i Viani 2017). Отуда се инструменти и процеси идентификације, очувања и управљања локалитетима од изузетног значаја све више приближавају обичном, свакодневном пејзажу (Savet Evrope 2000).

Кључне речи: Београд, модернизација, наслеђе, пејзаж, Ушће

Sanja Iguman, PhD, Research Fellow
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade, Serbia
iguman.sanja@gmail.com

HERITAGE SITES VS. CONSTRUCTION SITES – BELGRADE’S UŠĆE

Abstract

The paper explores sensitive relation between built heritage and modernisation in the urban context. Heritage reflects the past, but it is now widely accepted to be inherently present-oriented and political, because decisions concerning which parts of the past should be protected and in what way, play a key role in how groups portray their peoples’ history, shared identity and collective memory to the outside world.¹

The focus of the analysis is on the area around the confluence of two international rivers – the Sava and the Danube – in Belgrade, locally called Ušće, which was a strategic point for the city’s birth and development on the account of its topographical and natural features.² Once again in Belgrade’s history, this area is in the centre of attention, this time as the main location of the ongoing process of Belgrade’s radical urban change/development.

Impossible to separate from heritage, the term landscape will be explored in the context of Ušće, as it refers to a complex and fluid concept, which perfectly depicts the relation between physical environment and cultural and social meanings of a certain place.³ Hence, the tools and processes of identification, conservation and management of both extraordinary heritage and ordinary landscape are growing ever closer (Council of Europe, 2000).⁴

Keywords: Belgrade, confluence of rivers, heritage, landscape, modernisation

Introduction

The word *heritage* carries different and varying connotations across languages. The difficulty to define it more precisely is about the subject itself: what we actually consider *heritage*, who owns it, or who is supposed to consume it.⁵ The most accepted explanation of heritage is that it represents something that the previous generations have created, preserved, and bestowed, hypothesising that it would be preserved and in turn passed on to future generations.

Another issue with defining heritage might be the fact that it is not one, constant, and therefore easily identifiable entity. On the contrary, heritage is a fluid, dynamic concept and that characteristic affects the perception and identification of heritage and its value, meaning that one generation may not necessarily share the same perspective with the previous or the following generation.⁶

People's perception and acceptance of their past has always been a vague issue, especially in multicultural contexts, with turbulent past. That is why choosing which segments of the past are to be preserved for the future generations and in what way, is quite a complex and delicate work, especially if we consider the fact that awareness, attitudes and perception that people have in the present are inevitably based on the events from the past. Here, it is crucial to understand that heritage is a political concept. Political ideologies are changeable, unstable, which often leads to blurring the past and ignoring or jeopardizing heritage attached to it. An example that perfectly fits in the mentioned context of multicultural, turbulent territories is Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. In its very centre, two transnational rivers meet – the Sava and the Danube. In the middle of their confluence, there is a 211-hectare large the Great War Island (locally called Veliko Ratno Ostrvo), a protected natural area, one of the few oases in the city.

The first peoples that were attracted by this peculiar location were Celts in the 3rd century BC, when they settled around the Sava and the Danube confluence and the location of the present-day Belgrade Fortress, and named their settlement *Singidun*. This was a strategic point, a well-defended spot, located on a hill, surrounded by rivers from three sides and with a perfect outlook, the same reason fortress and other infrastructure were built there later on. In the following centuries, numerous peoples passed through Belgrade, visiting, trading, laying siege or conquering it. These centuries of intense human activity strongly influenced the transformation of this space to the present day⁷. The layers of heritage that these peoples left created the foundation for the development of a "multi-cultural, post-socialist, metropolis on the crossroad".

In the following sections, I will briefly present several theoretical concepts and policies that I believe could be useful if applied to the case study proposed in this work – the urban transformations around the Belgrade confluence.

Built heritage of Historic Urban Landscape

The studies on Historic Urban Landscape are becoming more and more important in leading the discourse on countless heritage sites around the world, trying to recognize

and properly understand the complexity of the urban environment surrounding them – a dynamic symbiosis of natural and cultural features.

The first term to pay attention to is *landscape* – a complex and productive concept that is rapidly becoming significant in the academic areas of cultural studies, anthropology, geography and environmental studies. Ingold⁸ offered a definition that is worth mentioning here:

“Landscape is a multi-layered concept: it includes nature in the meaning of earth, water, plant and animal life, biological and geological diversity; it includes human-made objects, buildings, roads, sculptures, the products of culture; it also includes movements and action. But on top of all these visible phenomena, landscape includes the invisible. The invisible relationships which emerge in people’s actions, movements, speech, thoughts, imaginations and narratives are intertwined with the visual; they emerge in an interaction with the visual.”

The most important context for understanding landscape here is political: every government leaves visible and invisible marks on the city in line with their politics. Landscape is a product of countless transformations of its past and contemporary consumers that are trying to realize their ambitions, desires and plans that way.⁹ However, these visible marks usually stay forever and change the city’s appearance for good.

As we will see, the current Serbian government is changing the area around the Belgrade confluence by urban mega-projects that might change its form and meaning forever. This confirms the notion that the representation of landscape is never detached from politics, but very much embedded in a sense of power. Landscapes are created or destroyed within a certain ideological context, in a particular place and time.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Serbia neither recognizes nor protects the concept of landscape in practice, although the country signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (Florence) in 2011 together with another 38 European countries, and committed itself to the protection, management, and planning of landscape. The importance of such a convention lies in the emphasis of the value of landscape for a certain community and/or society in cultural, environmental, social and economic sense.

In my view, the confluence of the Sava and the Danube should be recognized as *landscape*. The significance this natural nucleus of two transnational rivers, their confluence, The Great War Island, and the territories along their riverbanks have for Belgrade, is enormous. According to some well-known scholars, this geographical position and the natural features are directly responsible for the birth and development of the city. As already mentioned, numerous peoples were attracted because of this position and the natural setting.

Potentially, the policies and treaties of the most prominent international bodies, such as UNESCO, European Commission, Europa Nostra, ICOMOS, etc. could be the suitable legal framework for culture and heritage implementation strategies for the whole area of the Belgrade confluence.

For instance, an applicable convention in the case of the Belgrade confluence might be the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005).¹¹ The particularity of the Faro convention lies in the emphasis of the significance of heritage in the light of democracy and human rights. Rather than on traditional idea “how to preserve the heritage”, this convention focuses on “why preserving the heritage”, which actually

deepens the relationship between heritage and society. Besides focusing on heritage *per se*, this convention emphasizes the value and the meaning that a certain society and/or community assigns to their heritage, that way affecting their sense of identity. Personal or even collective identity is strongly supported by a *sense of place* – place being the central element of the embodied experience.¹² This confirms the fact that heritage might be considered as a benefit for social cohesion, rather than just having its own independent value.

Although, as I already mentioned, it is difficult to identify the owners of heritage, local community should certainly have a priority in consuming the heritage that surrounds them, since it is a crucial part of their personal and collective past, memory and therefore identity.

Consequently, if we speak of the relationship between heritage and identity, it must be clear that heritage cannot be perceived only as an aspect of tourism, as a tool for gaining financial benefit, but as a part of everyday life of people to whom it belongs.¹³

Urban studies

Another important issue for the topic is found in the wide range of urban studies. They offer interesting and useful tools for the so-called reading of the city.¹⁴ Many authors speak about city as a palimpsest – something that contains many layers that are written, deleted, copied, re-written. Segments of these layers are city's streets, buildings, parks, fortresses, and everything else that has defined a certain place or period of the city.¹⁵

The initial "writing" was done on an empty, natural layer, much before the city has become a city. Then, these vast, empty spaces have been gradually manipulated by human interventions (through history, culture, construction, technology, art, etc.) and that way urbanized into the shape of the contemporary city as we know it¹⁶.

Accordingly, we might apply this notion to the confluence of the Sava and the Danube, a remarkable geomorphologic case where three different elements: water, wood, and stone/sand, have given shape to a specific urban form over the long span of time.

Further, there is a question of the use of public space. The significance of proper comprehension, planning and managing cities is becoming increasingly important due to the rapid urbanization on a global scale. By 2050, around 2.5 billion people will be living in cities, which puts cities in a dominating position over the social, economic, and political landscapes (United Nations, 2018).¹⁷ In this light, one of the burning issues has become the use of public spaces and the fact that they are increasingly gaining commercial instead of communal function in cities (Council of Europe, 2012).¹⁸ The most prominent institutions worldwide are working hard on the creation of tools and their implementation that would allow public spaces to be expressions of democracy and freedom, which would consequently improve the quality of citizens' lives. The first step in achieving these goals is the involvement of citizens in decision-making, which obviously never happened in Belgrade in a proper way.

The importance of this bottom-up approach, together with the potential use of culture and heritage as an engine for a sustainable development of a city, is enormous. Cities, districts, public spaces are not given *per se*, on the contrary, they are created by people who have used them, through cultural and social constructs.¹⁹ Again, in Belgrade we can

detect the problem of so-called decontextualization of the city – the presence of misused and perplexed layers in Belgrade’s structure, referring especially to *reading* and using culture and heritage in the public space.

Heritage vs. Modernisation

The main issue built heritage faces in urban contexts is modernisation. The clash between conservation and modernisation is deeply embedded in the story of practically any urban development. This has been obvious in several epochs in history – in the 19th century, when European cities started getting their present-day forms; after the major destructions during the Second World War; and in the last several decades, when radical and global technological development accelerated the modernisation all over the world.

Several issues stem from the conflict between heritage and modernisation. The first issue present in Serbia is still sharp distinctions between cultural/natural and tangible/intangible heritage (in their perception, protection, interpretation, and management). Even though international organisations for the protection of heritage have been insisting for years that these sharp distinctions be softened or even erased, Serbia is still lagging behind in that sense. This is quite a problem because it complicates approach to various issues, application of certain treaties and policies, dealing with problems, etc. – all because of the lack of holistic approach to managing heritage. In addition, forgetting and ignoring the importance of including flora, fauna and human beings in the context of heritage, is dangerous not only for natural and cultural resources and heritage around us, but for the whole society as well.

Further, the aesthetic dimension of the relation between heritage and modernisation has always been present in the urban discourse, ever since the Athens Charter (1931), which recognised this problem as fundamental and it has remained at the forefront of contemporary heritage legislation: ICOMOS 1964; ICOMOS Australia 2013; ICOMOS China 2015.²⁰

Tracing further the issues between heritage and modernisation, we come to the British sociologist John Urry, who claims that one of the motives or excuses for radical modernisations in developing countries or those countries in transition is “designing for the tourist gaze”. His comments on the postmodern architecture of a city are quite suitable for the current urban development and modernisation in Belgrade. We often hear that certain urban project “will attract tourists”. In Urry’s opinion, the location of such object, its compatibility with the environment, its style, aesthetics, size and the purpose, are very delicate issues, since they directly provoke and attract “the tourist gaze” that will consequently create an impression of the city.²¹ Therefore, these issues must be faced with caution, with high level of expertise and objectivity.

Many other scholars emphasize danger of unplanned or radical modernisation in developing countries in terms of jeopardizing built heritage and natural sites. They speak of destruction of historic sites in urban areas because of shopping malls, hotels, residential and commercial structures that offer more immediate economic benefits. These so-called non-places²² can be found anywhere and have no specific value for the local

community (besides the economic value for some people only), while heritage is authentic and directly responsible for the creation of personal and collective identity and therefore should be prioritized.

As already mentioned, many scholars explain the danger of (rapid or even unplanned) modernisation in developing countries on the account of jeopardizing historic cores or heritage in a city.²³ Exploring a worrying historical pattern of inconsistent development, these authors put under the spotlight demolition of or threatening to historic sites in urban areas in favour of shopping malls, hotels, residential buildings and other commercial structures.

Heritage sites vs. construction sites – the Belgrade confluence

The current Serbian government has already implemented or is planning to, several mega-projects around the Belgrade confluence that have already brought major changes to this area and landscape that have symbolised it.

However, there is one project that is particularly a burning issue at the moment – the cable-car that is planned to connect the Belgrade Fortress and Friendship Park across the river Sava. The Belgrade Fortress with Kalemegdan Park represent heritage site of exceptional importance and is under the highest level of protection in the Republic of Serbia. Its significance is seen on different levels: historical, architectural, archaeological, environmental, urban, cultural and artistic, social and religious, touristic. In addition, the significance of this site is not only local or national, but rather European and global, which is confirmed by its presence on the tentative list for the UNESCO protection, as part of the transnational project *Frontiers of the Roman Empire – The Danube Limes*:

“The site where modern Belgrade lies was very important for the defence of the Roman Empire after it established its frontier on the Danube in the 1st century AD. There are indications that legions *III Scythica* and *V Macedonica* were periodically stationed at *Singidunum* as early as the first half of the 1st century. With the military and administrative consolidation in the area of the Danube frontier, *Singidunum* became the base of the *Legio III Flavia*, stationed there until the end of the Roman rule. The remains of a Roman Legionary fortress of the *Legio III Flavia* were discovered and partially excavated during the years of excavations in the Belgrade Fortress area. Its ramparts, the oldest vestige of any fortification on the site were poorly preserved. As a result, little is known about the earliest phase of the Roman fortifications. It has been ascertained, however, that the fortress was located in the Belgrade fortress Upper Town area and in a section of Kalemegdan Park adjacent to Pariska Street, as well as on the nearby zone along the opposite side of the street.”²⁴

Across the Sava river, in Friendship Park is where the lower starting point of the cable-car is planned. This park has the status of prior protection within the historic area called Riverside of the Sava and Novi Beograd. Ušće Park is a modernist, post-WWII urban expansion of Belgrade. In addition, it forms a unique environmental and aesthetic ensemble with the Belgrade Fortress, offering the best viewpoints on the Belgrade Fortress.²⁵

The cable-car project was announced in 2017, and it was supposed to be financed by the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications and the City of Belgrade LSG (EUR15M). It is supposed to connect the Belgrade Fortress with Friendship Park, only 30 meters different in altitude. The idea is to have 30–35 cabins that would transport 3,000 persons per hour in both directions (approximate speed would be around 20km/h and the ride would take 5 minutes. On each end of the cable, there would be massive structures – boarding points. In addition, there would be at least six massive pillars to support this system. The construction of these structures would have a severe impact on the Belgrade Fortress, since it requires massive excavations and concrete piling with profound earthwork and potential removal/damage of significant archaeological remains.²⁶

Besides the physical destruction of the complex in order to build the cable-car system, at least one more reason would possibly remove the Belgrade Fortress from UNESCO's tentative list and that is the destruction of the skyline/landscape. With the construction of the cable-car system, the most iconic landscape of Belgrade, with a unique aesthetic value, would be permanently destroyed. This issue is clearly explained and confirmed by UNESCO in the document themed "The 14 primary threats – The standard list of threats/factors affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties consists of a series of 14 primary factors, encompassing each a number of secondary factors."²⁷

Further, environmental dimension of the site has been already endangered – although the green light to the project has not been officially given, more than 100 healthy trees were cut down on the account of preparing the terrain for construction. As I have emphasized earlier in the paper, the value that the Belgrade Fortress, Kalemegdan Park and the confluence area have, is heterogeneous and implies both cultural and natural elements. Unfortunately, some of these natural elements were destroyed, which has directly jeopardized the value of the site.

Since the very announcement of the project, there have been several bureaucratic and legal issues due to a certain incompatibility of the cable-car project with the present legislation, urban planning documents and both national and international conventions. One of the most serious issues is the fact that a proper Heritage Impact Assessment has never been conducted and the environmental one did not properly include an unavoidable heritage perspective. Also, this project is characterized by the lack of transparency and involvement of professional bodies and individuals – their concerns, criticism and suggestions have not been taken into consideration so far.

Consequently, numerous national associations, organizations and groups of experts, supported the Europa Nostra Serbia who launched the petition against this project that was signed by more than 15,000 people. After several successful and unsuccessful discussions with the governmental bodies, the project is apparently halted, but the government officials still assure Belgrade citizens that the cable-car will happen eventually.

That have led to two most effective actions in this case: RERI (Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute) filed the appeal to the Administrative Court to stop this project, and Europa Nostra put the Belgrade Fortress and its surrounding area on the list of "The 7 Most Endangered Programmes – A Civil Society Campaign to Save Europe's Herita-



Figure 1. The view of the Belgrade Fortress and Kalemegdan Park from Friendship Park (source: author)

ge in Danger". The aim of this program is to identify endangered monuments and sites in Europe and to mobilize public and private partners on local, national, and European levels to find a viable future for these sites. This programme was launched in January 2013 by Europa Nostra, with the European Investment Bank Institute as a founding partner and the Council of Europe Development Bank as an associate partner. It is also supported by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.²⁸

UNESCO, Europa Nostra, ICOMOS, ICOM, Council of Europe, Creative Europe are the most prominent bodies for safeguarding and promotion of heritage around the world. Since the presence on their protection and support lists is highly significant for certain site, a city or a country, it would be a misfortune to jeopardize that. UNESCO World Heritage designation can have several recognizable economic and non-economic benefits for the local community, but the most obvious are: civic pride, conservation, education, development of tourism (which immediately means additional tourist spending in the area). That is why the Serbian Government's explanation that the cable-car would develop tourism in the area around the Belgrade Fortress seem contradictory: jeopardizing the possibility to become UNESCO World Heritage Site means jeopardizing the possibility to develop further cultural and heritage tourism in the area. In addition, tourism experts gathered and explained that a cable-car in such a context, would not improve tourism of the area, on the contrary, it could deteriorate it. In addition, this costly, invasive project is not backed up by any proper study/analysis on how it could benefit the city in terms of transportation, tourism and economic growth.

However, at the moment of writing this paper, the breaking news is spreading around Belgrade: the Administrative Court annulled the illegal permit for the preparatory works on the con-

struction of the Kalemegdan–Ušće cable-car, thanks to the complaint of RERI and the work of Europa Nostra (among many others).

Conclusion

Finding a perfect balance between past and future, traditional and modern is extremely difficult task. On the one hand, heritage and all its history cannot be neglected, nor destroyed, while on the other hand, a space for new, modern urban development must be provided. This topic is obviously very popular and worrying, since numerous actions have been undertaken around the world in order to provide instruments for successful dealing with the issue.

This problem of sustainable development is particularly evident in complex societies, like those in developing countries, in multicultural contexts, in places with turbulent past, etc. Serbia definitely belongs here and at least some of the reasons for the problematic sustainable development could be traced in Serbia's turbulent political, economic, and social past over the last 30 years. However, at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, these reasons should not be used as an excuse.

If Serbia would only put in practice all the treaties it signed and ratified (regarding the protection and use of heritage, landscape and culture), that would be a significant step in the sustainable approach to fast and radical urban development happening at the moment. Also, all questionable planning documents, measures, and permits must always be taken into consideration and respected. Prior to that, whenever an invasive project like the cable-car is proposed, a thorough and proper analysis must take place first. If we speak of heritage sites and objects, then Heritage Impact Assessment must be conducted before making any decisions or taking action.

Another step in the right direction would definitely be more noticeable involvement of citizens in decision-making. Increased number of local activist groups in Belgrade (and the rest of Serbia as well) is showing dissatisfaction of citizens regarding the pace and the way their cities are developing.²⁹ This is also quite evident through social networks, media and on the streets, in a form of countless protests and neighbourly initiatives.

Belgrade is a city the layers of which were created and destroyed more than 100 times and that fact should always be taken into consideration when speaking of its urban development in general. However, we live in time of extreme global technological development and modernisation, which means that on our fast, one-way journey towards future, we need to bring along what previous generations bequeathed to us. Even though economic security and prosperity are crucial for survival (although in this case they are not supported by any study/analysis), we must not forget the importance of natural resources like air, water, soil that we continuously pollute and destroy on our way to constructing big, modern, fast cities. Equally, we must avoid causing irreversible damage to the authenticity and integrity of the multi-layered heritage around the Belgrade confluence. Finally, although tourism can bring a lot of benefit to a certain community, we must not forget that community is the owner and the everyday consumer of heritage that we neglect or destroy on the account of (possibly) attracting a few more tourists.

Notes

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