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JELISAVETA PETROVIĆ & VERA BACKOVIĆ

# EXPERIENCING POSTSOCIALIST CAPITALISM

URBAN CHANGES AND CHALLENGES IN SERBIA

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**Postsocialist Capitalism:**

*Urban Changes and Challenges in Serbia*

*Edited by:*

*Jelisaveta Petrović and Vera Backović*

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*For publisher*

Prof. dr Miomir Despotović

*Reviewers*

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*Proofreader*

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## THE SPECIFICITY OF GENTRIFICATION IN THE POSTSOCIALIST CITY: THE CASE OF THE BELGRADE WATERFRONT PROJECT<sup>4</sup>

Vera Backović

**Abstract:** Gentrification is a general pattern of urban core transformation with significant variations depending on local contexts. It changes built structures or their functions but also the categories of people for whom these structures are intended. There are two basic approaches to the study of gentrification. First, the production-side approach focuses on restructuring the urban economy and emerging spaces suitable for gentrification. Second, the consumption or demand-side approach deals with the actions and choices of those who create or use gentrified spaces. One can recognize three types of gentrification according to the actors involved – these are: pioneer, profitable and state-led gentrification.

The analysis of gentrification in postsocialist cities is a good occasion to explore the impact of the local context. The key analytical question is what types of gentrification exist and to what extent. In general, the majority of actors on both the production and the demand side are mostly foreigners, while the role of the public sector is different when compared with developed (capitalist) countries. Comparing Belgrade to other postsocialist cities one can see to what extent gentrification is influenced by the postindustrial economic development (advanced services and symbolic economy), and by foreign investments, also what influence the demand for gentrified space.

**Keywords:** postsocialist city, pioneer gentrification, profitable gentrification, state-led gentrification, Belgrade

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## Introduction

Gentrification is a visible transformation of contemporary cities, but it is manifested differently depending on the given socio-spatial context. One could define gentrification as a process where the physical structure of residential buildings is changed or their use is changed to residential (in the event that the buildings previously served a different purpose), primarily in the central-most locations of cities. This process is followed by changes to the social categories of people for whom these new or refurbished buildings are intended. One can understand gentrification as spatial reflection of key socioeconomic processes in the contemporary city – i.e. postfordism and postmodernism – the effects of which are powerful.

There are two main approaches explaining this process. The production-side approach deals with structural changes (restructuring of the urban economy, circulation of capital), which creates the space and frees up properties suitable for gentrification<sup>1</sup>. The consumption-side approach deals with demand – the actions (choices) of actors who make or use gentrified spaces<sup>2</sup>. As ideal types one can distinguish pioneer, profitable and state-led gentrification/mediated gentrification. In pioneer gentrification the actors are mainly artists, who renovate space for work and living, thus gentrifying the neighbourhood. In the case of profitable gentrification, investors and construction firms build residential buildings, which are intended for representatives of the (new) middle class (service and/or creative class). Meanwhile, state-led gentrification is initiated by national or local governments as part of entrepreneurial governing strategies. State-led gentrification is one of the strategies of the entrepreneurial city in which urban policy accepts the gentrification practices and thus the process starts in less developed cities. In the entrepreneurial city there is partnership between the public and private sector (firms and investors), and in city planning the branding of space and the advertising of the city as a commodity take on a more important role (Harvi, 2005). Therefore,

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1 Smith (Smith 1979, 1987, 1996) highlighted the importance of the capital accumulation process through the urban real estate market. Suburbanization and deindustrialization of the urban core led to a reduction in the value of land in the centre of the city and created a gap between its potential and actual value. This rental gap is being closed by the new logic of the housing market formed in the process of gentrification.

2 Ley (Ley, 1980, 1986, 1996) emphasized the importance of cultural values, consumption practises and specific lifestyles of the new middle class or creative class/artists (Florida, 2002, Ley, 1996). Ley pointed out that changes to the value system – such as women's self-realization, alternative forms of family organisation, the postponement of marriage and parenthood – motivated people to live in the city centre thus creating demand for gentrified space (Ley, 1986, 1996).

gentrification unites several important dimensions of urban transformation: restructuring of the economy, new models of city administration and city planning, along with changes in social structure that stem from economic restructuring. Thus, the increase of service and creative classes affects the diversification of social values and lifestyles which are visible in the urban space.

In this chapter, following the geography of gentrification<sup>3</sup> (Lees, 2000), we will show the specificities of this process in postsocialist cities<sup>4</sup> and in Belgrade. The variations of the gentrification phenomenon fall firmly under the influence of socio-economic conditions such as the characteristics of the urban economy (industrial and postindustrial development); the characteristics of the housing market and the role of its key actors: state/local authorities; the private sector/investors and construction firms; creative and service fractions of the middle class. In the analysis of gentrification, one also needs to include the established socio-spatial structure during the socialist urban development.

## The Socio-Spatial Transformation of European Postsocialist Cities

The new use of core spaces in the cities of the most developed capitalist countries emerged with the closing of the rental gap that arose as a consequence of suburbanization during the industrial phase of development and the subsequent deindustrialization that attracted new investment and initiated gentrification of previously abandoned or derelict sites. The question of demand is the other side of this process, i.e. are there the actors who will realize this process on their own, or will instigate private sector actors to become involved. Initiation of the process (pioneer gentrification) is connected with a diversification of lifestyles, the mobility of the population and the availability of space (i.e. a dynamic real estate market).

In postsocialist cities one finds possibility for the initiation of the gentrification process in under-urbanized central city areas inherited from the socialist period. Urbanism and the spatial economy of socialist cities were

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3 To examine gentrification in various contexts it is necessary to appreciate the socio-economic and historical conditions which cause the modifications of the phenomenon. Following that analytical logic, the so-called geography of gentrification has been constituted (Lees, 2000).

4 In this analysis, the concept of postsocialist city is used due to a significant influence of socio-spatial structure formed during the socialism on the process of gentrification.

based on the redistributive power of the party elite whose primary aim was to invest in industrial development. Thus, the socialist city was marked by the prevalence of industry and housing over other functions, especially the commercial. Development of the tertiary sector and infrastructure, excluding infrastructure indispensable for direct industrial development, were not seen as productive activities (Enyedi, 1996). The social (i.e. state) ownership of a city's resources and the non-market economy resulted in ineffective use of space and insufficient development of urban services. Thus, under-urbanization as a key characteristic of socialist urbanization has two aspects: quantitative – a lower degree of urbanization in comparison to achieved industrial development; and qualitative – undeveloped infrastructure (both communal and commercial) (Szeleny, 1996).

The socialist city created a different socio-spatial structure compared to the capitalist city, both in the urban centre and the periphery. The process of suburbanization did not take place in the same way as in capitalist cities, where members of middle and higher classes moved to the suburbs, which offered them a higher quality of life. Contrary to that, in socialism cities were expanded by migration from rural areas<sup>5</sup>. The infrastructural development of suburbia was on a considerably lower level in comparison with more central locations. Thus, the periphery remained even more under-urbanized (Petrović, 2009). The centre of the socialist city<sup>6</sup> remained a desirable place to live and its “emptying” by the higher classes did not occur. In addition, due to urban and housing policies, the neighbourhoods of these cities were more class heterogeneous.

Socialism constrained the pluralization of lifestyles (generally through consumption) and the spatial mobility of the population<sup>7</sup> via established housing policy<sup>8</sup>. The residential mobility of all social classes in capitalist societies is considerably greater (compared with socialist societies) and results in the harmonization of income possibilities and housing characteristics, which is connected not only to the main phases of lifecycles (marriage, birth of children, departure of grown up children from the household) but also to changes in career path (Petrovic, 2004: 304).

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5 For example, the basic architectural-urban design of the settlement on the outskirts of Belgrade is a mix of legal, semi-illegal and illegal family housing construction (Vujović, 1990:114). The increase in the population of Belgrade was not accompanied by an adequate development of communal and social infrastructure. On the periphery of the city there is lack of sanitation infrastructure, inadequate public transport connections, as well as an underdeveloped network of facilities such as kindergartens, primary schools, healthcare provision, etc. (Vujović, 1990).

6 Examples include Prague, Budapest, Belgrade and Zagreb.

7 This does not refer to the rural-urban migration that was characteristic for this period but rather to poor mobility when finding a job and solving the housing issue.

8 The principle of housing policies was to provide moderate housing to each household, thus solving their housing problem for a lifetime.

The dominance of heavy industry and the neglect of the production of consumer goods were systemic constraints that hampered the transformation of socialist societies and cities<sup>9</sup> well into their postindustrial phase. During the 1990s, postsocialist countries fell under the simultaneous influence of several processes: their transformation towards a capitalist system, which changes the entire structure of society<sup>10</sup>; their transition from industrial to postindustrial economies; and complex (economic, political and cultural) globalization based on technological information revolution. Thus, the postsocialist city reflects changes towards the market-based, postindustrial city on the one hand, and changes to governance from a dominant state command model towards entrepreneurial and potentially cooperative models of governing, on the other (Harvi, 2005). Under socialism only a small number of actors could influence urban policy and urban development, which primarily depended on state planning and the distribution of funds from a central budget. The fall of socialism enabled the constitution of other actors who became able to influence the tempo and direction of a city's development. Thus, urban development came to be influenced by political actors (the state and local authorities), economic actors, urban planning experts and the general population. There is also the increasing influence of external / supra-national actors such as supra-national institutions and international companies (Tosics, 2005; Vujović, 2004). These actors form very complex mutual relationships resulting in changeable coalitions, which direct the priorities of city development (Stoker, 2005; Basan, 2001). The most significant change relates to the fact that foreign capital starts to exert a great influence on the urban economy and urban space.<sup>11</sup>

Important changes on the city level are the decrease of state control over land and housing stock, privatization and restitution of housing/buildings<sup>12</sup>, and the decentralization of decision-making processes. However, the transmission of power from state to other actors (the private sector and local authorities) and their participation in city development, without an institutional framework to direct them, has left a lot of space for violation of

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9 State/social property and planned investments did not take into account the value of land and profit, so that socialist society produced a different city.

10 The most important changes are: in the economy – the introduction of private property and the market and the privatization of state property; in the political system – the introduction of political pluralism and declarative decentralization of decision-making processes.

11 At the beginning of the process of postsocialist transformation, the property/real estate market became the most internationalized area of the local economy (Sykora, 1993).

12 As restitution returns whole buildings to their previous owners, it contributes to the gentrification process. In the case of privatization of apartments, the existence of several owners or/and different statuses of ownership in the same building less stimulate gentrification.

the public interest, and the domination of private interest.<sup>13</sup> Thus, because of the weakening of the state as a central authority and the arbitrariness of city authorities in applying the principles of governing an urban system in accordance with market conditions, a chaotic model of city development has been established (Stanilov, 2007; Petrović, 2009). Equally important are the rule of law and local autonomy in deciding on investment projects, since local authorities should also have the ability to absorb the negative effects of wider political changes. Privatization of the public sector is not a sufficient reform measure in postsocialist cities, it is also necessary to create a public sector that assumes a regulatory function and the function of social protection (Petrović, 2009). Thus, the entrepreneurial strategies of postsocialist cities are reduced to client-centred coordination and negotiation, while the non-transparency of the political elite's decision-making process channels the influence of private capital through corruptive rather than partnership strategies<sup>14</sup> (Petrović, 2009: 65).

The aforementioned structural changes in postsocialist societies are manifested at several levels: on the global level postsocialist cities are involved in the network of European cities. Postsocialist capitals are the first points of "entry" by foreign companies to these countries<sup>15</sup>. They evolve as places for the relocation of leading European/global industrial, commercial and service chains (Petrović, 2009: 57). The deindustrialization of postsocialist cities is the result of collapse of industry rather than its transformation into the service economy and industry of culture. On the city level, how property and space are used has changed. Sykora analyses changes to the use of urban space<sup>16</sup> through the theory of rent<sup>17</sup> and the functional gap. The activities present in the central city zones under socialist urban economy have quickly been replaced by more profitable

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13 Local authorities remain under the strong influence of national authorities because in many cases the national political elite is not ready to allow decentralization and transfer management of economic resources to local governments (Petrović, 2009).

14 As *Burazer* political capitalism is being established, favouring economic actors close to the political elite and from which the political elite has economic gain, it creates monopolistic markets and blocks economic and spatial development (Trigilia according to Petrović, 2009).

15 Capital cities of postsocialist countries occupy a semi-periphery position (Backović, 2005). There is a polarization between the capital and other urban settlements at the state level (Musil, 1993).

16 There are several ways: 1. The use of empty and deserted buildings; 2. The replacement of less efficient industrial or commercial activity with some more efficient activity; 3. Converting apartments into office space; 4. Rehabilitation of old apartments into luxurious ones; 5. Constructing new buildings on unused land (Sykora, 1993:290).

17 The rent gap plays an important role in the urban renewal process for it attracts a great number of construction firms which buy real estate at low prices, invest in its renovation and then sell it on at higher prices (Sykora, 1993; Smith, 1987).

activities, which brought about a considerable commercialisation of space (Sykora, 1993, 1998). The growth of business and service activities demanded new commercial space in postsocialist cities. However, without residential functions in revitalized and converted spaces, these adaptations cannot be understood as gentrification.

In Prague's central zone a great number of apartments were returned to their owners<sup>18</sup>, thus stimulating investment by foreign construction firms because the new owners could not afford to pay for renovation (Sykora, 2006). There are some parts of neighbourhoods in Prague which we can speak of as gentrified.<sup>19</sup> The realised revitalisation of housing units, which contains aspects of gentrification and commercialisation, influenced a change in the population of the neighbourhood. Thus, the number of inhabitants of two central Prague districts, 1 and 2 (the city's historical core and Vinohrady)<sup>20</sup>, decreased by almost a fifth between 1991 and 2001, which is a direct consequence of the decreasing number and increasing size of residential buildings<sup>21</sup>, while the social status of inhabitants has increased<sup>22</sup> (Sykora, 2006).

In Budapest, the process of suburbanization was intensified when the new upper middle class left the city centre, which continues to be inhabited by lower status groups. In the meantime, there has been an increase in the number of members of the new middle class whose residential preference is the city centre and an urban lifestyle. The increased number of international investors and corporate construction firms have integrated the city into global capitalism. It is especially significant that residents are willing to invest in the renovation of apartments acquired during privatization. Kovacs et al. (2013) conclude that urban regeneration and improvements in devastated Budapest districts were realized without major problems and obstacles, as the process was not accompanied by massive displacement or social tensions among the population, due to the size of the ownership sector but also due to the social responsibility of local authorities<sup>23</sup>. A Western model of gentrification was realized in smaller areas – SEM IX and Rev 8 (Kovacs et al., 2013).

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18 In some central parts as much as three quarters of all buildings (Sykora, 2006).

19 The neighbourhood is inhabited by both new residents (gentrifiers) and old; there are new and old buildings, those that have been renovated and those that have not (Sykora, 2006).

20 The main gentrified district in Prague.

21 In the process of gentrification smaller and more modest flats are often expanded or joined together, thus becoming larger, more luxurious apartments.

22 The number of inhabitants with university degree increased especially in Prague's districts 1, 2 and 6 (districts with private villas, traditionally inhabited by the higher class).

23 This model could be named "localized gentrification", due to interventions by local authorities and the aspect of keeping the process under control by the public sector (Kovacs et al., 2013).

In postsocialist cities pioneer gentrification grows at a slow pace, but Pixova perceives an increase of alternative use of space in Prague (Pixova, 2012). Alternative activities are related to the rise of a new middle class (young artists, creative experts, members of sub-cultures, students, academics and activists). Pixova notes that they have the same characteristics identified by Lay (1996): special needs and a taste for the consumption of culture, lifestyle, and also in preferences for urban space. Some of the members of the new middle class in Prague has become an important actor in creating new alternative trends and spatial patterns, as well as establishing new alternative spaces – art galleries and exhibition spaces have opened in formerly industrial zones.<sup>24</sup> This use of space can be brought in a certain relation with the pioneer gentrification – different lifestyles and a new aesthetic – although it is important to emphasize that these spaces do not contain a residential function.

Also, one of the specificities of gentrification in postsocialist cities is the non-investing into neighbourhoods of the working class already in the middle-class neighbourhoods. One invests into neighbourhoods according to their social rather than physical characteristics (Sykora, 2006). Undoubtedly, gentrification will continue to expand, but if it is not about large spatial transformations<sup>25</sup>, the inherited heterogeneity of the neighbourhood will to some extent be retained.

## The Presence of the Phenomenon of Gentrification in Belgrade

The uniqueness of postsocialist transformation in Serbia has influenced the socio-spatial development of Belgrade and how the process of gentrification in it is manifested. Initially, during the period of so-called blocked transformation (from 1989 to 2000), the process of social transformation began and was intensified after political changes in 2000 (Lazić, 2005, 2011). After political stabilization the inflow of foreign investment and the arrival of international firms began. Belgrade<sup>26</sup> attracted the larg-

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24 At the same time, several alternative grassroots community projects were also realized in Prague. These centres served for socializing and non-commercial culture, despite multiple challenges imposed by the local authorities (Pixova, 2012:102).

25 Such as the Belgrade Waterfront project.

26 The city, especially New Belgrade, attracts investors due to its location, the vicinity of the old city centre, relatively good infrastructure, with enough free space, without unresolved property-legal relations. In central parts of the city one can identify an accelerated commercialization of space: the opening of stores of world brands, branches of banks, restaurants and cafes in prestigious urban locations (Backović, 2010).

est number of domestic and foreign investors in Serbia. The economy gradually began to grow and the rate of GDP growth increased (2000: 7.8%, 2001: 5.0%, 2002: 7.1%, 2003: 4.4%, 2004: 9.0%)<sup>27</sup>. The structure of the economy gradually changed, so about 60 percent of the national product comes from the tertiary sector. Trade and similar activities account for about a third of total GDP and industry no longer dominates as was the case before (SRGB, 2008: 14). GDP growth in this period is due to the growth of economic activity in the service sector. However, the trend of inflows of investments, economic restructuring and growth has stalled under the influence of the global economic crisis.<sup>28</sup> Although economic reforms after 2000 led to certain increases in production, living standard and poverty reduction, trends in employment decline and increase in unemployment<sup>29</sup>, which were characteristic of the 1990s, are still visible.

As in the case of Zagreb/Croatia (Čaldarović & Šarinić, 2008; Svirčić Gotovac, 2010), in Belgrade/Serbia institutional framework has not adequately kept pace with changes on the ground and, therefore, private sector actors came to dominate the city's urban spatial development (Vujović & Petrović, 2006; Petovar, 2006). The interests of investors became entrenched as the dominant factor in urban planning, regardless to the consequences for the surrounding areas regarding the quality of housing and living conditions in the neighbourhood and in the city as a whole. The practice came to be known as investor urbanism and denotes the adjustment and subordination of the city's space to the interests of investors, that is, those interested in building in or reconstructing a certain urban area (Petovar, 2006: 76).

Although the process of commercialisation of space and the construction of new residential buildings is taking place, gentrification in Belgrade has not been explored sufficiently, with the exception of Todorić and Ratkaj (2011) and Krstić (2015). The analysis in this paper is focused on prerequisites for the emergence of the phenomenon that have been identified in other, primarily postsocialist, cities. In spite of structural

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27 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Republic of Serbia 1995–2017. (ESA 2010) <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/PageView.aspx?pKey=61>, accessed 15/12/2017.

28 In 2009, GDP receded by –3.1%; the rates were barely positive in 2010, 2011 and 2013 (0.6%, 1.4% and 2.6%, and negative growth rates were again recorded in 2012 and 2014 (–1.0% and –1.8%). In the last three years, there has been a gradual economic recovery with positive growth rates (2017, 1.9%). GDP of the Republic of Serbia 1995–2017. (ESA 2010) <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/PageView.aspx?pKey=61>, accessed 22/03/2018.

29 The unemployment rate in Serbia is among the highest in the region and is significantly higher than the unemployment rate in the EU27. Only Greece (23.6%) and Spain (19.6%) (Eurostat) had higher unemployment rates than Serbia in 2016.



changes, the centre of Belgrade did not cease to be the most desired living location. During the socialist period, the city centre was a prestigious residential location<sup>30</sup>, in addition to the pre-war elite settlements of Dedinje, Topčidersko brdo, Senjak and Kotež Neimar. These were inhabited by the elite, the political, military and police leadership, as well as the intellectual elite, artists and scientists (Vujović, 1990). The postsocialist transformation did not instigate changes to these developmental trends and served merely to intensify them. The 2002 census (Appendix 1) shows that the highest concentration of the highly educated is in communities in the city centre.<sup>31</sup> Data from the last census (2011) show an even higher concentration of the highly educated, especially in the municipalities of Stari grad and Vračar, in which every second resident has a higher education or university diploma. The data show that there was no change in the socio-spatial structure, the centre of the city was and remains a desirable location. Also, Western-style suburbanization as seen in some postsocialist cities (Budapest), did not occur in Belgrade.

Construction of residential buildings is not concentrated in central areas<sup>32</sup>, where the number of higher middle-class inhabitants continues to increase. This indirectly means that members of this class choose to move to the centre, and not necessarily to new residential buildings. This kind of mobility cannot be considered to be gentrification. Also, if a single residential building is built and there is no spatial transformation of the neighbourhood this also cannot be seen as gentrification.

Analysing the demand-side (actors), we can identify that foreign actors have not yet become a significant demand generator. This due to low rates of foreign investment and the small number of local people em-

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30 Based on the 1991 census data, it is possible to analyse the socio-spatial structure that was established during the socialist period. The central city locations are distinguished by a concentration of highly educated people, especially the municipalities of Vračar and Savski venac. Certain neighbourhoods, here designated by the name of their community centres (*mesna zajednica* – MZ), exhibit an unusually high proportion of those with higher education attainment: MZ Zapadni Vračar with 30.39%, Fourth of July with 29.56%, MZ Trg Republike, 29.58% and Obilićev venac with 29.89%.

31 Vračar (MZ Cvetni trg, 37.57%), Savski venac (MZ Četvrti juli, 39.58%), Stari grad (MZ Moša Pijade, Obilićev venac and Čukur česma with just over 35%) and Palilula (MZ Tašmajdan, 36%) (Backović, 2010).

32 According to the data on housing construction in Belgrade, among central city municipalities, Stari grad has the lowest rate of housing construction (1.1 in 2009), while this parameter is much higher in Savski venac (4.8) and Vračar (8.2). New housing production is concentrated in New Belgrade, Voždovac and Zvezdara so these municipalities have a construction rate higher than the city average (Todorčić & Ratkaj, 2011: 68).

ployed by foreign firms. In Belgrade<sup>33</sup> only 6.1% of employees are employed by foreign companies, only one fifth of which are classified as experts (20.6%). Although the structure of economic activities indicates an increasing share of services and a decrease in the activities of the primary and secondary sectors, the city's low GDP and the structure of economic activity (Radonjić, 2012) show the underdevelopment of the post-industrial economy and, therefore, the creative and service class. Consequently, the number of potential demand creators for gentrification is rather low compared with other postsocialist cities.

The analysis of the real estate market in Belgrade shows that, on one hand, the high price of newly built apartments<sup>34</sup> in better city locations make this type of housing affordable only to members of the elites. In mid-2000, when the political and economic situation stabilized, some investment was initiated into mid-range residential buildings in the form of gated communities (Oasis and Panorama in Dedinje – by local investors City Real Estate and Meridin Balkans, respectively). Subsequently, larger residential complexes were built away from the city centre, partly funded by foreign capital: Belville in New Belgrade (2000 units) and Oasis Golf Course in Surčin (6000 units) (Hirt & Petrović, 2011). The realization of such large-scale projects caused an increase in demand. The expected residents of Bellville and the Oasis Golf Course were foreigners as embassies and banks were interested in renting housing facilities for their employees in buildings with controlled access (Hirt & Petrović, 2011). However, the worsening economic situation then caused this demand to decline<sup>35</sup>,

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33 The structure of GDP by activity in 2016 for the Belgrade region was as follows: Agriculture, forestry and fishing (1.8%); Mining; manufacturing industry; supply of electricity, gas and steam and water supply and waste water management (16.8%); State administration, defence and compulsory social security; education and health and social protection (10.8%); Professional, scientific, innovation and technical activities and administrative and support service activities (10.1%); Financial and insurance activities (6.3%); Construction (5.4%); Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles; transport and storage and accommodation and food services (24.2%); Real estate (with imputed rent) (10.1%); Information and communication (11.8%) and Art, entertainment and recreation; other service activities; the activity of the household as an employer and the activity of extraterritorial organizations and bodies (2.8%) (Source: Working document Regional Gross Domestic Product, Regions and areas of the Republic of Serbia, 2016, RZS).

34 Average selling price in euros per square metre of apartment space in new-builds: Voždovac (1500–1700); Vračar (2300–2500); Zvezdara (1650–1850); Zemun (1200–1400); New Belgrade (2300–2600); Palilula (1700–1900); Stari grad (3000–3300); Čukarica (2000–2300) and Savski venac (2300–2700). Source: Colliers Overview of the real estate market, 2011.

35 Even five years after construction was completed in Belville, not all apartments had been sold.

so in the forthcoming period smaller complexes are again planned (Colliers data for 2013). On the other hand, the average price of housing (per square metre) in central city locations remains rather high and thus cannot encourage pioneer ventures of space conversions or adaptations that would lead to the concentration of artists (i.e. pioneer gentrification).

Regarding the conditions perceived as necessary for pioneer gentrification, it is important to note some additional facts. First, although the economic position of professionals in Serbia in the period after 2000 had improved relative to the 1990s, for most of them the increase was insufficient for housing to become a matter of choice.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, privatization of the housing system also did not increase housing mobility, since the high incidence of homeownership does not contribute to frequent change of housing (Petrović, 2004). Second, although there are some examples of urban space conversion in Belgrade (Beton Hala, KPGT, BIGZ, KC Grad, projects in Savamala, Cigłana etc.) – with devastated (industrial) areas revitalised primarily to offer alternative cultural scenes or create cultural centres – without a new residential function this does not categorise them as examples of pioneer gentrification. Although these projects certainly have influenced the creation of alternative cultural spaces and contributed to a diversification of lifestyles and the related broadening of how urban space is used.<sup>37</sup>

## The Belgrade Waterfront Project: An Example of Profitable Gentrification

This part of the paper will analyse the Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP) as an example of profitable gentrification that is radically transforming the centre of the city. The BWP is located in the Savamala district<sup>38</sup>, which is a very attractive location in the city and, therefore, vari-

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36 In addition, the living standards deteriorated in 2012 compared to 2003, so the deterioration of the economic position is visible for all classes in Serbia, except the highest (Cvejić, 2012: 149; Manić, 2013: 24). Lower middle economic position (38.4%) dominate the categories of professional, self-employed, lower management and freelance professional with higher education (Manić, 2013: 23). In Belgrade, the economic position of this class is higher, 36.4% have a middle and 24.2% have higher middle economic position, but that is also insufficient to create new residential choices (regarding location, type or quality of housing). The illustrated data show that there are structural limitations for the initiation of gentrification.

37 In Western cities, the trend of “returning to the city centre” is based on alternative lifestyles, so analysis of gentrification should not ignore this very important dimension.

38 For more about the historical development of the Sava riverbank and plans for its reconstruction see Dajč (2012) and Kadrijević & Kovačević (2016).

ous ideas and plans for its renewal and revitalisation had been developed earlier but none of them came to be realized.<sup>39</sup> Recently, the area has also been revitalised by an infusion of cultural content. The initiative was neither made by individuals as a result of their autonomous actions or involved the adaptation of residential buildings, which are the peculiarities of the pioneer phase of gentrification in Western cities. The revitalization process was reduced to the opening of cultural centres, entertainment spaces (cafes, bars, clubs) and places used by the civic sector for their activities (in culture, education, etc.) with the support of local authorities<sup>40</sup> and the private sector (small-scale entrepreneurs).<sup>41</sup> The transformation of the abandoned Nolit warehouse into the Magacin Cultural Centre<sup>42</sup> (initiated in 2007 by the Belgrade Youth Centre, an official institution of the city) can be taken as the beginning of this revitalisation cycle. Following this, many other facilities were opened: The Grad European Centre for Culture and Debate<sup>43</sup> (2009), the multifunctional Mikser House (2012), Nova Iskra (2012), etc. A series of activities were organized<sup>44</sup> as part of the Urban Incubator project in Belgrade<sup>45</sup>, initiated by the Goethe Institute, as was the Savamala Civic District.<sup>46</sup> From 2012 to 2016 the Mikser Festival was held in Savamala<sup>47</sup>. The opening of new facilities and the organization of various programmes and activities drew attention to Savamala, which, among other things, became a tourist attraction. In local and foreign media, this part of the city gradually took on a new image as a place of creativity, culture, nightlife and entertainment (see more in the chapter by Selena Lazić in this volume).

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39 As Savamala is located in a central location, almost all General Urban Plans (GUP 1923, GUP 1950, GUP 1972, GP 2003 (amendments 2005, 2007, 2009, 2014) and GUP 2016) dealt with this area in detail (Cvetinović, Maričić & Bolay, 2016).

40 More about the role of local authorities, primarily the Municipality of Savski Venac, and foreign funds in Jocić, Budović & Winkler, 2017. As the authors point out, there was no official plan for the revitalization of Savamala, while the idea was created in 2006 (Jocić, Budović & Winkler, 2017: 129).

41 The private sector invested in activities relating to art, culture and entertainment.

42 The space is intended for exhibitions, lectures and other cultural content.

43 KC Grad was opened in an old warehouse building from 1884, representing an example of the conversion of the industrial into cultural space, while preserving the authenticity of the space. Workshops, conferences, concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, literary evenings, etc. are held here. This project was initiated and realized through partnership between the Municipality of Savski venac and Felix Meritis – an independent European centre for art, culture and science (Amsterdam, Netherlands). <http://www.gradbeograd.eu/partneri.php>, accessed 10/03/2018.

44 More about the Urban Incubator Project in Cvetinovic, Kucina & Bolay, 2013.

45 <http://www.goethe.de/ins/cs/bel/prj/uic/sav/enindex.htm>, accessed 09/03/2018.

46 More in Cvetinovic, Kucina & Bolay, 2013.

47 In 2017 the Mikser Festival returned to the grain silos of the former “Žitomlin” mill in Lower Dorćol, the location where it originally began.

These processes do exhibit certain characteristics of “pioneering” urban revitalisation, primarily due to the fact that they were not guided by strategic plans and projects, although they were carried out with the support of local authorities. With time, the shift from this kind of transformation to profitable gentrification happened with the initiation of the Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP)<sup>48</sup>.

The construction of the Belgrade Waterfront complex began on 27 September 2016, with the laying of a foundation stone for a tall tower, which is a symbol of the project and has ambitions to become a new symbol of the city.<sup>49</sup> The event was attended by the highest national and local level representatives (the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Belgrade) and the owner of Eagle Hills (investor). Although the city authorities were initially involved, national level politicians soon took over the realisation of the project.

The investor’s official website<sup>50</sup> announces the construction of more than 6,000 luxurious apartments; 24 centres with business premises; the new Belgrade Tower; eight hotels; a new 1.8km-long riverside promenade; the BW Gallery, a new shopping district which is planned to become the main destination in the region for shopping, entertainment and vacations; the Belgrade Park and accompanying cultural and artistic centres.<sup>51</sup>

The signing of the agreement between the investor and the Serbian state was preceded by the adjusting the institutional framework to allow the implementation of the proposed project. The national government declared BWP to be a project of national significance, which was the starting point for changing urban planning regulations and city planning documents. From May 2014 to April 2015<sup>52</sup>, urban planning regulations were

48 The BWP was presented by the investor, Eagle Hills, in January 2014. The project relates to the right bank of the Sava River, covering an area of about 100 hectares between Belgrade Fair and Branko’s Bridge and between the Sava River and Savska Street. The value of this investment project is estimated at around EUR 2.8 billion for the construction of over 1.5 million square metres of housing, business and commercial space and space for cultural, artistic and sporting events: <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1276219>, accessed 10/03/2018.

49 It was declared that the 160m tower would be named the Belgrade Tower: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/5/Економија/2051831/Постављен+камен+темеља+за+”Београд+на+води”.html>, accessed 10/03/2018.

50 <https://www.eaglehills.com/sr/our-developments/serbia/belgrade-waterfront/master-plan>, accessed 28/04/2018.

51 It is not specified which content will be included therein.

52 The Agreement was signed on 26 April 2015 between representatives of the state, the city and international private capital – Eagle Hills (the company’s headquarters are in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates). The contract was signed by the director of Eagle Hills, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Construction, Transportation and Infrastructure, Zorana Mihajlović, and the Director of the BW company, Aleksandar Trifunović: <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/13/>

changed so as to fit the investor's proposal. In July 2014, amendments to the Master plan of Belgrade (MPB) were proposed, stating the need to review the following: the rules for the implementation of the proposed plan (the obligation to hold a tender and seek expert opinion for individual locations)<sup>53</sup>; permission to build high-rise buildings throughout the city; and repurposing land in the area of the Sava Amphitheatre<sup>54</sup>, especially the relocation of rail traffic (IDGPB2021, 2014: 2).<sup>55</sup> By adopting amendments to the MPB 2021, regulations related to protection of the panoramic view of the old city were also abolished.

On 3 June 2014, the Government of the Republic of Serbia took a decision to pass the Spatial Plan for the Special Purpose Area and Development of Part of Belgrade Coastal Area – the Riverside Area of the River Sava for the Project “Belgrade Waterfront”. The process that enabled the implementation of the project was completed on 8 April 2015, when the National Assembly passed a *Lex Specialis* on the BWP, known as the Law on Determining the Public Interest and Special Expropriation Procedures and Issuing the Building Permit for the Project “Belgrade Waterfront”.<sup>56</sup> It is of particular note that Article 2 of this Law determines that the construction of the BW business-residential complex is in the public interest.

The realisation of the BWP led to a displacement of population and the relocation of existing content from Savamala. In April 2016, 234 families<sup>57</sup> were displaced, the Miksalište<sup>58</sup> refugee centre was evicted and more than 1,000 square metres of office space in Hercegovacka Street, Mostarska Street and Braća Krsmanović Street were violently torn down. Some clubs moved to Skadarmala.<sup>59</sup> In May 2017 Mikser House closed its doors, explaining that their rent had been continuously increased by the owner of the property.<sup>60</sup>

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ekonomija/1900785/potpisan-ugovor-za-beograd-na-vodi-vredan-35-milijardi-evra.html, accessed 11/03/2018.

53 Namely, if the Government of the Republic of Serbia determines that one location is important for the Republic of Serbia, a tender for that location tender is not obligatory.

54 The height and number of storeys defined by regulations on the height of buildings can be increased through the creation of a Detailed Regulation Plan.

55 In September the Belgrade City Assembly adopted amendments to the MPB.

56 <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/zakoni/2015/547-15%20lat.pdf>, accessed 11/03/2018.

57 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/timotijevici-i-bez-vode-brane-svoju-kucu/>, accessed 23/02/2018.

58 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/beograd-izbeglice-miksalište/27699370.html>, accessed 23/02/2018.

59 In March 2016, some bars and clubs from Savamala “Kenozoik”, the former “Peron” and “Dvorištanje” continue to work in the area of the former brewery.

60 <http://house.mikser.rs/dovidenja-savamala/>, accessed 22/02/2018.

Once it had been made public, the proposed plan for the BWP was sharply criticised by industry professionals and Belgrade residents. The Initial Board for Architecture and Urban Planning of the Department of Visual Arts and Music of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) submitted remarks to the Republic Agency for Spatial Planning<sup>61</sup> (October 2014). The Academy of Architecture of Serbia<sup>62</sup> (AAS) adopted a Declaration on BWP<sup>63</sup> (March 2015) and a debate was held on the topic: Under the Surface of the BWP (October 2014). The negative consequences of the project and criticism of various aspects of the project are related to: changing the institutional framework, socio-economic and architectural-urban impact and infrastructural problems.

From a legal standpoint, the *Lex Specialis* adopted is considered harmful, unconstitutional and contrary to the fundamental principles of International law. The BWP lacks sufficient facilities for public use, although it is claimed that its construction is in the public interest. In fact, the plan contains primarily commercial content, intended for sale.<sup>64</sup>

The in their adopted declaration the AAS pointed to violation and alteration of urban plans and call for the immediate suspension of the project. The MPB was amended under pressure from the executive branches of the national and Belgrade governments. A clause stipulating that the central part of the Sava Amphitheatre be reserved predominantly for structures with a public function with a limited number of storeys was removed. Riverside areas are not protected as a common good.<sup>65</sup> In the remarks made by the SANU, it is alleged that cooperation with domestic experts is lacking and that the institutions are reduced to the role of the executors – to create conditions that will suit the investor's plans.

Critics also highlighted the fact that the project's implementation will jeopardize the symbolic image of the city, with significant consequences for the infrastructure of that area and its surroundings. The ASS Declaration criticizes the idea of creating a new image of Belgrade by building the Belgrade Tower. It asks who ordered and profiled this new identity. In addition, the style and quality of architecture proposed by the project

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61 Remarks and suggestions on the Draft of the Special Purpose Area Spatial Plan for Regulation of the Coastal part of the City of Belgrade – riverside area of the river Sava for the project “Belgrade Waterfront” (Remarks and Suggestions).

62 An independent professional-artistic association of distinguished creators in the field of architecture, urbanism, history and architecture theory.

63 <http://aas.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Declaration-AAS-o-Beograd-na-vodi-05.-mart-2015.pdf>, accessed 09/01/2018.

64 [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/pravo\\_danas/advokati\\_projekat\\_quotbeograd\\_na\\_vodiquot\\_neustavan\\_.1118.html?news\\_id=299519](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/pravo_danas/advokati_projekat_quotbeograd_na_vodiquot_neustavan_.1118.html?news_id=299519), accessed 10/01/2018.

65 <http://aas.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Declaration-AAS-o-Beograd-na-vodi-05.-mart-2015.pdf>, accessed 09/01/2018.

is commonplace elsewhere in the world, and offers no unique or local identity.<sup>66</sup> The comments of the SANU also paid attention to the issue of identity by pointing that the planned buildings are in conflict with the basic topographic and morphological characteristics of the area, since they completely block most of the vistas of the city and almost all the prominent places that make up the historical identity of Belgrade. The proposed height of the new tower is also considerably above the angle of Terazije, Slavija, the Boulevard of King Aleksandar and Vračar plateau. Thus, visually Belgrade will be completely cut off from its waterfront and turned into a hinterland behind gigantic structures.<sup>67</sup>

As the centre of the city already struggles with infrastructural problems, especially traffic problems, the question is how existing capacity will endure the additional pressure. The BWP is projected to accommodate 14,000 residents and over 12,000 employees.<sup>68</sup>

The price of housing in the BWP has also come under criticism. The lowest price announced per square metre is 2,500 euros, while the price of the cheapest apartment is 156,000 euros.<sup>69</sup> The announced prices indicate that the housing space will undoubtedly be available only to members of the elite and foreigners. In the remarks of the SANU, it is pointed out that it is not clear how the number of housing units was calculated, nor for whom this category of apartments is intended (in other words, what is the benefit for the city or the Republic of Serbia?).<sup>70</sup>

In addition, it is alleged that existing small- and medium-sized shops will be compromised by the construction of a large mall. There is also a remark that the complex does not contain enough green spaces or squares. The BWP does not pay enough attention to public spaces, parks and other green areas, which are extremely important contents and purposes.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to the opinions of experts, ordinary people have also expressed criticism and dissatisfaction with the proposed project. In particular, the initiative *Ne davimo Beograd* (Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own)<sup>72</sup> has

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66 <http://aas.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Declaration-AAS-o-Beograd-na-vodi-05.-mart-2015.pdf>, accessed 09/01/2018.

67 The highest structures in Belgrade on the waterfront will reach an altitude of 175m above sea level (75 + 100) while the Terazije plateau is at 117m, Slavija at 119m, and Crveni krst is at 157m. Remarks and Suggestions, p. 16.

68 Remarks and Suggestions, pp. 8–9.

69 [https://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&dd=21&nav\\_id=1179096](https://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&dd=21&nav_id=1179096), accessed 09/01/2018.

70 Remarks and Suggestions, p. 13.

71 Remarks and Suggestions, p. 14.

72 This Initiative was created by a civil society organization called the Ministry of Spatial Planning, which has since 2011 dealt with the urban transformation of Belgrade and other cities in Serbia and advocates responsible use of public property: <https://issuu.com/ministarstvoprostora/docs>, accessed 12/02/2018.



followed the whole process of the BWP.<sup>73</sup> The greatest public reaction was caused by the events in Savamala on the night between 24 and 25 April 2016, when a group of masked people used earthmoving machinery to tear down buildings at the location of planned construction for the BWP. This violent demolition of buildings in Hercegovačka street became a critical issue that spurred people to become more involved in the protests. According to various estimates the number of people taking part in the protests during the summer of 2016 was between 5,000 and 25,000 (see more in the chapters by Jelisaveta Petrović and Mladen Nikolić in this volume).

The implementation of the BWP shows the dominance of investor urbanism in Belgrade. In this case, criticism came from the expert community and civil initiatives. The inability to influence its implementation to some extent shows how other actors, beyond the political and economic spheres, have become irrelevant in directing the development of the city.

## Conclusion

Some rare cases of pioneering gentrification are evident in postsocialist cities, however, in most cases it is profitable gentrification – where housing facilities are intended for members of the service class, primarily foreigners and the employees of foreign companies.<sup>74</sup> Thus, another peculiarity of gentrification is that foreign companies are present as investors, while foreigners are also the end users of residential space. Profitable gentrification is directly related to the development of the service economy and in postsocialist cities it is primarily dependent on the presence of foreign capital. The main actors are investors and entrepreneurs who build facilities for the middle classes (Prague, Budapest, Tallinn) or the economic and political elite (Zagreb<sup>75</sup>, Belgrade).

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73 The Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own initiative has highlighted non-transparency of decision-making. The first activity they organized was participation in a session of the City Assembly, where a public debate was held on the construction of the Belgrade Waterfront project. Subsequently, they protested when the Agreement was signed on 26 April 2015: [http://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?Yyyy=2015&mm=04&dd=26&nav\\_id=985118](http://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?Yyyy=2015&mm=04&dd=26&nav_id=985118), accessed 12/02/2018.

74 In Hungary (Kovacs, Wiessner & Zischner, 2013) this has changed since the country joined the European Union. Unrestricted rights of foreigners to own property increased investment in the housing fund at central locations in Budapest because foreigners and highly-paid local professionals employed by international companies wanted to live near the workplace.

75 In the case of Croatia (Svirčić Gotovac, 2010), the middle class was replaced by the elite, who are the only ones able to afford apartments with a very high price per square metre (i.e. 7,000 up to 10,000 euros).

The BWP (commercial and residential luxury space) is an example of profitable gentrification whose implementation significantly transforms a central core of Belgrade. The constructed facilities are intended for members of the elite and for foreign citizens, in accordance with findings in other postsocialist cities. This foreign investment has undoubtedly been supported by national and local authorities. The implementation of this project shows that the involvement of foreign investors is too great and that the actions of the public sector are emblematic of the dominance of state level central power, non-transparent decision-making, disregard for expert opinion and the exclusion of the civil sector.

## Appendix 1

Table 1 Increase of spatial concentration of highly educated residents in central Belgrade municipalities<sup>76</sup>

Municipality / Year	1991	2002	2001
City of Belgrade	11.7%	13.7%	27.8%
New Belgrade	17.7%	20.9%	40.6%
Savski venac	23.6%	27.5%	46.6%
Stari grad	23.8%	29.6%	50.2%
Vračar	27.6%	31.9%	52.3%

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<sup>76</sup> Although New Belgrade does not belong to the old city core, due to the development it has experienced during socialism (in terms of housing) and in the postsocialist period (business and retail) it is now perceived as one of the city's central locations.

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