

PARTICIPATORY URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN SAVAMALA, BELGRADE - CAPACITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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This paper analyses the implications of participatory urban design in Belgrade, namely of the series of recent unsolicited activities that has contributed to setting up a specific micro environment in the neighbourhood of Savamala. Its main aim is to promote bottom-up urban development, surpass current profit-oriented trends, and benefit from socio-spatial contradictions as opportunities for creativity and participation.

The Savamala neighbourhood is among the most important landmarks in Belgrade. Endowed with rich historical heritage and extraordinary spatial potential, Savamala is now a traffic bottleneck with intense pollution, urban noise and socio-spatial conflicts. In order to set up an engine for urban development, several streams of participatory activities have been launched by NGOs and IOs, such as: online campaigns and networking, informal research activities, pop-up events and instant actions for societal progress and bottom-up economic activities. The Actor-network theory (ANT) methodological approach demystifies the circumstances of participation and the role of various actors in building pathways of urban transformations in Savamala, while the Multi-agent system (MAS) proposes the framework for tracing their behaviour at the neighbourhood level.

A complex post-socialist framework presents a challenge for these participatory activities to provide opportunities for urban transformations, based on social interest rather than on real estate speculations. In the lack of official strategies and institutionalised support, the MAS-ANT method involves estimating whether an economy of social exchange could contribute to improving the quality of life and functionality of urban systems.

Key words: post-socialist cities, social participation, urban development, multi-agent system (MAS), actor-network theory (ANT).

INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to analyse the often blurred and twisted structure and puzzling development prospects of neglected urban neighbourhoods in post-socialist cities. In the case of the Savamala neighbourhood in Belgrade, the study is grounded upon the recent boom in bottom-up spatial interventions and small-scale cultural projects. These activities have gradually grown into a kind of informal platform for active participation and the management of urban conflicts. Therefore, they put forth an alternative strategy in order to overcome the rigid administrative procedure of urban development and transform the negative side effects of imitating and lagging behind the conventional urbanisation model and unsuitable urban patterns, as well as the gloomy outcomes of accelerating globalisation into a development impetus suited to these societies. These

circumstances make the Savamala neighbourhood a suitable environment for examining the efficiency of bottom-up urban transformations.

In order to make transformations contextually appropriate and resistant to biased power relations and individual interests that thrive in transitional economies, it is important to continually keep track of the wider social repercussions and assess the risk of a range of “inter-states”, which are intersections of the timeline of development and the indicators of swift and biased socio-spatial transitions in post-socialist neighbourhoods. The flexibility and the trial and error iterations of such urban transformations represent a catalyst for change and a means of seizing opportunities inside an urban environment, and converting these into development tools. Thus, such inclusive socio-spatial interventions strengthen horizontal practices and initiatives, unlike the leading urban public institutions, which tend to support vertical urban development decision-making.

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The first part of this paper provides an overview of the spatial and historical circumstances in Serbia and their manifestation in Savamala. This will be followed by presenting the MAS-ANT (Multi-agent system and Actor-network theory) methodology², an innovative methodological hybrid that has been applied to the context of Savamala. Its alternative urban development model is based on the combination of a participatory approach and the principles of the creative economy in order to transform existing urban conflicts, clandestine social potential and spatial capacities into urban development opportunities. Urban conflicts thrive on discriminatory power dynamics, clashes of cultural differences and a series of confrontations of opposing viewpoints within a city, and they tend to progress from a personal level to a socio-urban dimension. Social potential and spatial capacities, in our interpretations are contextual resources that enable horizons of possibilities by making use of the available social, human and spatial capital (Grönlund, 2007). Finally, the aim of this paper is to indicate possibilities for urban transformation, modification and/or change through an iterative process of small-scale bottom-up interventions. The resulting urban state of Savamala will eventually induce economic, political, cultural and spatial transformations and explicate the initial step in formulating urban development prospects appropriate for post-socialist cities.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The development of cities is a contextual category, global and local. Nowadays, it is also a political, economic and spatial category. Therefore, the multilateral nature of urban development in the contemporary world is not only strongly based on global movements of capital, markets, goods and trends, but it is also responsive to local socio-spatial capacities and limitations. Such a complex and perpetual process could only be partially tamed and projected by regulatory practices and organisational solutions in the specific urban environment. On the other hand, socially beneficial urban development starts out from the experiences of all the urban actors and stakeholders and depends on direct individual experience, as well as on the sense of well-being. Therefore, mobilising the population to form an integral part of decision-making processes activates dormant creativity, and builds up an experimental education field and communication strategies for studying local cases that participants can relate to. The Savamala creative cluster is an example of how such a process of collective urban interventions is coordinated and articulated from the ground up.

The Savamala neighbourhood is situated in the central urban zone of the city of Belgrade, on the southern bank of the Sava River. It is a unique area in Serbia with plausible collision between traditional and modern and past and present; it is rich in tradition, history and heritage. But world wars, authoritarian rule and the current economic crisis have left their marks. Savamala is now a traffic bottleneck with intense pollution and urban noise. For decades its existing spatial conflicts and socially disadvantaged population have

been neglected by both the authorities and professionals ("Urban Incubator Belgrade", 2013). Before the spin-off of cultural organisations, activities, and conversions of old neglected houses into trendy cafés and restaurants in the neighbourhood, Savamala had a reputation as a home to outcasts, a place of prostitution and criminality.

Even though Savamala was known as a Christian neighbourhood in Ottoman Belgrade, its rich cultural and architectural heritage dates back to the period of the Serbian monarchy from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Furthermore, during communist rule Savamala was disregarded as the legacy of the capitalist era and was turned into a transit roadway surrounded by corresponding building stock (warehouses and manufactures). After the major political shift in 2000, the attractive location of this neighbourhood put it at risk of becoming a training ground for the interests of corrupted public authorities and powerful private developers, working together under the hood of urban development and economic prosperity. Despite the ownership change, Savamala was saved for a while from this new development trend, mostly because of its long-term decay that had made it a complicated case for the limited investments with short-term turnovers that were dominant in Serbia. However, it has recently changed, as powerful international investors found a counterpart in Serbian authorities at various levels to jointly use their economic and political dominance for gaining control over a highly profitable waterfront area of the capital city (Zeković et al., 2016; Cvetinovic et al., 2016b).

In the meantime, taking advantage of the long gap in development, a number of local and international organisations and cultural entrepreneurs have focused their actions on Savamala. Their initiatives to transform abandoned places and to reactivate them through participatory, cultural, artistic and educational activities have been mainly supported by the local municipality Savski Venac and international cultural institutions and programmes. What at first seemed like a sum of ephemeral local activities has become a driving force for the possible urban future of Savamala, at least the future preferred by most local urban actors who have taken an active role in it. According to the organisers, it has gradually grown into a testing ground for the implementation of an innovative tool for "action and learning by doing" (Lydon, 2012) in the urban planning of transitional post-socialist cities (Cvetinovic et al., 2013). However, this new picture of a trendy and rather safe Savamala renders the same with facing threats of expulsion of the local population and hidden gentrification (Krusche and Klaus, 2015). Participatory activities are mainly rounded up in an urban transformation programme named *Savamala Civic District*, in the *Urban Incubator Belgrade* project activities and their successors, and cultural entrepreneurial collectives.

All these circumstances bring to light that Savamala has kept its shape³, but different social conditions have influenced its development. Namely, four crucial political periods have left their mark on Savamala: pre-socialist, socialist, post-

² For more details on Multi-agent system (MAS) see Crooks et al. (2014); and on Actor-network theory (ANT) see Latour (2005).

³ A triangular form of a neighbourhood on the right bank of Sava River dates back to the times when it was a village only a kilometre away from the city centre and outside the walls of a Turkish city.

socialist and transitional⁴. All of its cultural and architectural heritage dates back to the pre-socialist period when Savamala was promoted as a major trade and artisanal area and a communication hub with bus and train stations in its proximity, while noise and pollution have been caused by its role as a passageway for heavy transit introduced during socialism. Therefore, we could summarise its life-cycle as follows:

- Pre-socialist period: amorphous urban form of the neighbourhood, recognisable cultural and architectural identity;
- Socialist period: disintegration of tradition and heritage, middle-class society and marginalised groups living in the area;
- Post-socialist period: lack of data on social structure, deteriorating industrial area and abandoned buildings, and leasehold of empty plots to private investors without transparent bidding procedures;
- Transitional period: market led economy, dominance of private ownership, vivid night life, creative cluster and limited citizen participation governed by the non-governmental sector, and start of the huge redevelopment project initiated by a foreign investor.

However, several important characteristics have been continually developed during the different periods such as (Figure 1): (1) restricted and ideologically-framed civil rights, (2) state control over capital areas, resources and infrastructure, (3) a top-down approach to spatial and social development, renovation and revitalization, (4) public ownership of land and building stock, (5) hybrid market circumstances, and (6) societal self-management planning (Vujošević and Petrović, 2007; Petrović, 2009; Vujošević et al., 2010; Simmie, 1989). These characteristics have made Savamala a scaled example of a “pre-socialist material legacy, socialist cultural and societal matrix, a transitional reality and a condensed case of multi-faceted circumstances of post-socialist urban development” (Cvetinović et al., 2016a).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Post-socialist urban development induced radical political, economic and cultural shifts in neighbourhoods in Belgrade. Savamala is therefore a representative case for intensive

⁴ The pre-socialist period ended with WWII; 40 years of self-managed socialism finished in the 1990s; the period of Milošević's rule is marked as post-socialist; and the transitional period started the political shift in 2000 and is still at play, even though the post-socialist period is not over yet.

collision of top-down and bottom-up pressures. Endowed with a prime location in the Serbian capital, Savamala has been directly or indirectly targeted by most General Urban Plans since the beginning of the 20th century (GUP 1923, GUP 1950, GUP 1972, GP 2003 (revised in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2014), and GUP 2016) as well as having captured the attention of national and international capital through large-scale architectural projects (“Town on the Water”, CIP Europolis, Beko Masterplan, Belgrade Waterfront Project etc.). In Savamala, a complement of post-socialist urban development is found in small-scale cultural practices, crowdsourcing activities, creative industries, urban factories, and cooperative economies which, slowly but surely, spread from upper Savamala to the riverbanks (Cvetinović et al., 2013). The hybrid field of overlapping the MAS (multi-agent system) and ANT (actor-network theory) methodological approaches proposes an innovative concept for defining causal relationships between different urban elements, and the developmental prospects of their interrelations and interconnections.

Data were collected from context-based information and knowledge and also traced from relevant influences, interests and interpretations on Savamala.⁵ In this respect, the actors in the bottom-up participatory activities in Savamala taken into account here are (Figure 2): (1) Cultural centre “Kulturni Centar Grad” (KC Grad), (2) Old depository in Kraljevića Marka Street (MKM), (3) Mikser multidisciplinary platform, (4) Nova Iskra design incubator, (5) Urban Incubator Belgrade project (UIB), (6) Ministry of space collective, (7) Ne da(vi)mo Beograd initiative (NDVBGD), (8) My piece of Savamala – participatory urban design workshop, (9) The game of Savamala – participatory urban planning workshop, (10) Savamala, a place for making participatory project, (11) Streets for cyclists NGO, (12) Common space in Kraljevića Marka 8 street (KM8).

We applied ANT for interpreting the state of the local context. The most prominent characteristic of ANT is flattening the social by symmetrical treatment of all human, social and technical elements (Latour, 2005). Therefore, ANT serves for structuring the data on human and non-human agents and urban assemblage networks at the neighbourhood level. An actor's existence is its status in a connection or connections. According to ANT, actors do not exist if their networks are not labelled. In this way they become agents.

⁵ Key informants on these issues were: (1) experts, (2) young professionals, (3) participatory cultural and design activities, and (4) documents on Belgrade Waterfront Project.

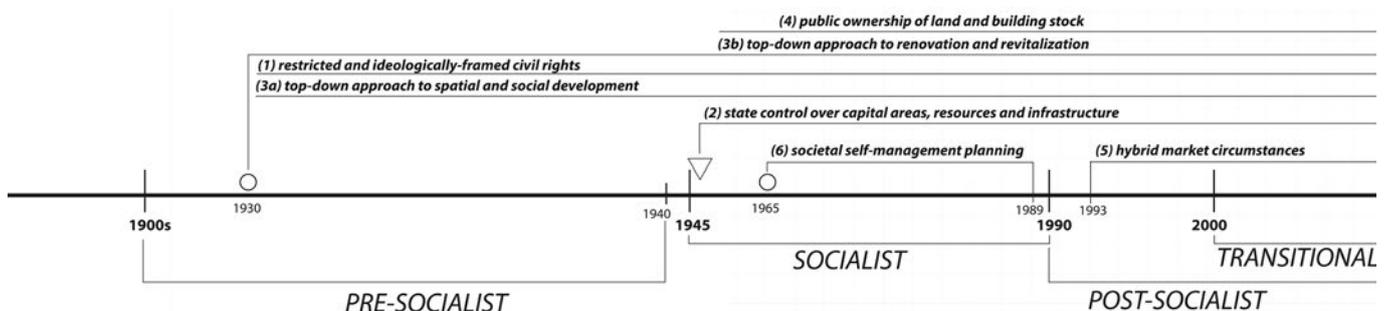


Figure 1. Savamala time-frame
(Source: authors)

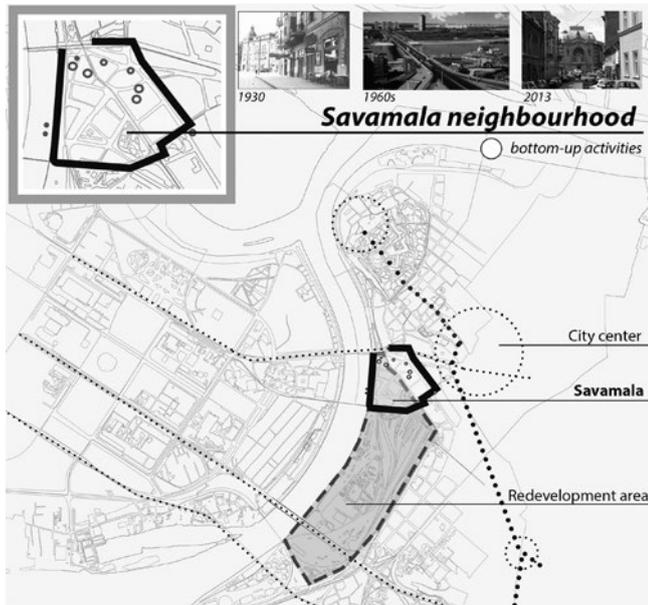


Figure 2: Savamala neighbourhood - its position and distribution of activities (Source: authors)

Within an urban system, all agents are interdependent. The agent, while being influenced by the others, also influences them simultaneously (Bousquet and Le Page, 2004). MAS traces agent profiles and the character of their inter-relations and inter-connections. An agent profile is a combination of the agent’s structure, preferences, and behaviour. The behaviour of agents is identified by qualitative surveys and analysed using multi-criteria MAS analysis of their profiles and references to system development (maintenance, transformation or change). We defined it here through the categories of: social practices, urban conflicts and contextual resources (spatial capacities and social potential), which are continuously produced within this initial networking.

They come into existence from already identified agents and have a crucial role in tracing the urban development process: (a) resources instigate transformations, (b) practices identify system maintenance, and (c) conflicts boost potential changes. Moreover, these interactions also define what is possible (through contextual resources) and what is happening (urban conflicts and social practices). The analysis of the identified bottom-up agents according to these principles gives us the opportunity to determine their influence on the system evolution, their capacity to intervene and their biases that cause eventual negative effects.

CASE STUDY OF SAVAMALA BOTTOM-UP ACTIVITIES

For the analysis of the Savamala bottom-up urban transformation, we relied on the defined agent profiles. First of all, we investigated agent structure and preferences. We treated these as dynamic features of urban agency in Savamala. Then we tracked the behaviour of these agents and their influence on the state of the urban environment in Savamala. Finally, this allowed us to sum up their capacities and limits to influence urban transformations and changes.

Dynamism of urban agency in Savamala

Contextual analysis of the social circumstances in Savamala has shown that the contextual capital, which was identified therein, has been gradually attracting a number of small-scale public initiatives and creative services to settle in Savamala (Cvetinovic et al., 2013). The very first bottom-up activity in Savamala was the establishment of MKM cultural space in 2007. However, the intensive aggregation of participatory activities started when *KC Grad* gained an abandoned building in Braće Krsmanovića street for their cultural activities in 2009, though the peak came at the end of 2013, and this condensed interaction between urban spaces and civic life lasted for 2 years (Figure 2).

When we analysed the structure of the agents, we addressed their basic characteristics already identified within the key categories from the ANT methodology (Figure 3). These ANT categories indicate the figuration of the chosen agents in their environment. They are adapted according to our interpretation of the ANT methodological approach. Agent structures are circumscribed based on the roles these agents play in Savamala, as follows: (1) agent nature – its operational manifestation, (2) level of influence – the boundaries of the activities and target groups, (3) structural networks – the agent’s primary activity, (4) socially functional networks – social function, and (5) secondary networks – subordinate function(s) (Cvetinovic et al., 2016b, Cvetinovic et al., 2016a). In terms of agent nature, the chosen bottom-up agents figure as sets of horizontal entities of events/projects/activities. In our case, the strict focus on bottom-up activities has limited the scope of secondary network characteristics mainly to either those focused on the urban or NGO sectors or small-scale services. Moreover, socially functional networks formed from the ground up are mainly formal/informal collectives with non-transparent or unclear internal organisational or foundational procedures.

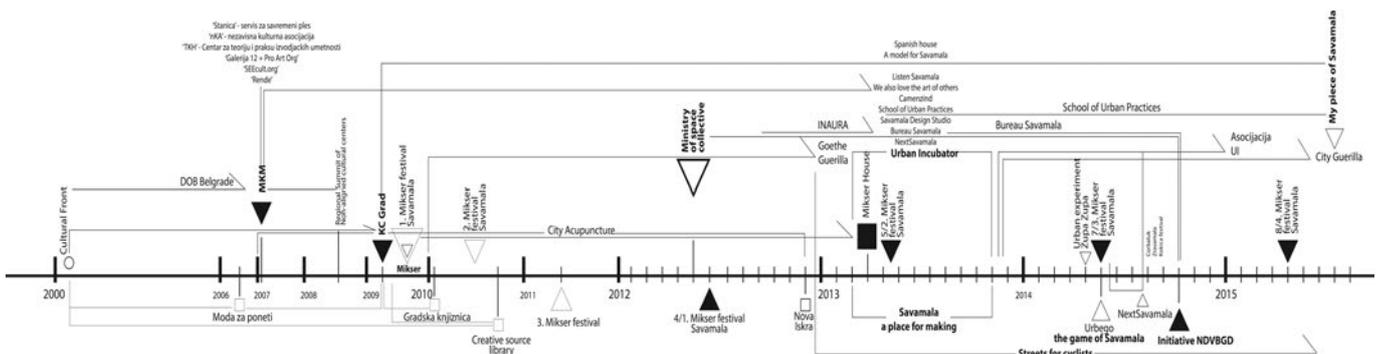


Figure 3: Timeline of bottom-up activities and actors in Savamala (Source: authors)

Consequently, various structural networks clarify agents' roles and indicate the paths of their behaviours and networking capacities at the local level.

For further analyses we have chosen the most influential public and private organisations. However, several of these agents have an unclear and non-transparent funding structure – while they receive some public funding, they are also partly profit-oriented (*KC Grad, Mikser*). *Nova Iskra* is the only explicit privately-based organisation. The social function of the agent is strongly connected to their level of influence in this case. All these bottom-up actors are active at the local, but less often at the city and international levels, though their international visibility is also more in the domain of funding – several are recipients of international financial support (foreign embassies and foundations, European cultural and art organizations and programmes) or under direct supervision of international entities (*Urban Incubator Belgrade* was the initiative of *The Goethe-Institut*). However, there are others with transparent financial schemes (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograde* initiative⁶). Even though some of the activities of *KC Grad* and *Mikser*, for example, are publicly funded, they also incorporate profitable services (café-bars, shopping areas, concerts, exhibitions and other lucrative events/activities).

Furthermore, following the nature of these agents, we apprehend that the cultural and artistic activities in Savamala do not belong to institutionalised art and culture. In this respect, most of them relate to the NGO sector or they acquire or occupy publicly owned spaces which they use for these activities. MKM and KM8 are municipal spaces shared with different NGOs and offered for multiple projects/activities/events by different actors. Finally, the majority of these agents aspire to have a consulting role on a wide range of urban issues, culture, art and education or to implement a range of ideas/solutions/interventions at an urban or social level. In the Serbian context, they aim to provide an alternative body for catalysing available human resources and translating global knowledge into the local context of Savamala and Belgrade.

Based on the MAS-ANT methodological pollination, agent preferences are defined in relation to their relationality towards the contextual resources, social practices and urban conflicts figuring in Savamala and the social artefacts they are influenced by or they have influence on. In this manner, we become aware of their field of manoeuvres in Savamala. In order to identify and elaborate how participatory activities influence urban development in Savamala, it is essential to translate these qualitative categories into factors which could denote a positive impetus. Contributing to the body of local social practices, and benefitting from social potentials and spatial capacities (contextual resources), as well as addressing urban conflicts involve the continuous reviewing of how the collision of these positive and negative influences actually produces a variety of opportunities for transformation and change. In this case, the conceived social aspects (political, economic and cultural) of Savamala are those that contribute to local resources, conflicts or

practices and thereafter aspire to generate qualitative urban transformation or change (Cvetinovic *et al.*, 2013).

Based on our qualitative research on Savamala, the most prominent aspects in direct correlation with agent functioning at the local level are: political (participation, transparency, and institutionalization of culture), economic (public funding), and cultural (global flows of ideas, trends, information and knowledge). Consequently, we recognise the following clusters of resources, conflicts and practices (Figure 4):

- Spatial capacities (SpC): (1) accessibility; (2) central position in the city; (3) brownfield area; (4) architectural diversity; (5) proximity of the river; (6) deteriorating area; (7) green area; (8) waterfront area; (9) recreation area;
- Social potentials (SoP): (1) lack of private investment in the area before 2012; (2) architectural and cultural heritage; (3) social diversity; (4) aroused interest in this neighbourhood from cultural and artistic groups, individuals and organisations; (5) trade and artisanal area – cultural heritage and traditional crafts; (6) creative cluster; (7) participative and self-organisational initiatives in the area (*KC Grad, Mikser*, etc.); (8) small commercial area; (9) underdeveloped area; (10) diversity of interests and power poles in the area;
- Urban conflicts (UC): (1) disintegration of heritage; (2) lack of systematic investments in the construction industry (debt crisis 2008-2012); (3) lack of data on the state of physical structures; (4) lack of data on the social structure of the neighbourhood, (5) attractive location for private investments, (6) poor population, squatters and marginalised groups in the area;
- Social practices (SP): (1) support of urban related activities (urban design & public participation); (2) support design activities (interior, fashion, graphic), art, culture, education at the city level; (3) translation of global trends into local and regional practices; (4) design, communication and creative industry activities in Belgrade; (5) local and global economic trends in the area; (6) develop the waterfront recreation area and sustainable transport (cycling).

The data in Table 1 show how different agents opt for these contextual resources, urban conflicts and social practices in Savamala and what the relation is between their nature and these preferences. Accordingly, we may conclude that contextual resources, either spatial or social, are the attraction factors that make Savamala a neighbourhood saturated with different actors and interests. On the one hand, all bottom-up agents that have an active approach to the urban environment through projects, activities and events, also direct their initiatives toward solving urban conflicts. On the other hand, those that include profit converge more to social practices that maintain the current urban order. Consequently, these agents refer to their contextual preferences, and they organise and engage in networks at local or superior levels, in this way influencing the state of the urban environment in Savamala.

⁶Information on funding
<https://nedavimobeograd.wordpress.com/podrzi-nas/>

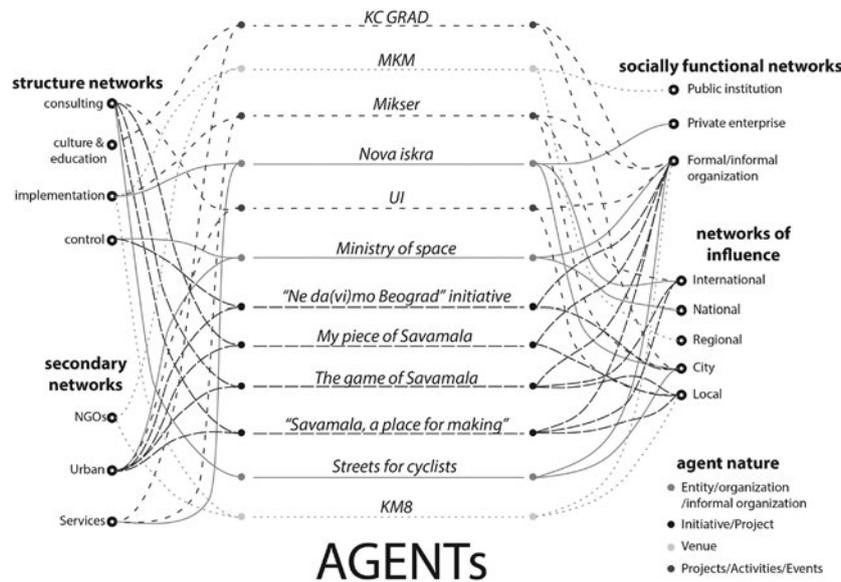


Figure 4: Agent structure
(Source: authors)

Network of civic engagement

The agency and relationships between the above identified human/non-human actors in Savamala are the cornerstone of bottom-up networks constituted at the local level. As they primarily depend on the contextual preferences which the agents attribute to their activity and relations, tracking these associations is also a crucial factor of urban transformation or change, if changes occur. Therefore, with the MAS-ANT method we aim to estimate whether this bottom-up management of social exchange and urban transformation contributes to an improvement in the life and functionality of urban systems.

The analysis of the agents' structure and preferences and qualitative data on the Savamala neighbourhood indicates urban assemblage networks formed and contributed to from the ground up. Namely, the implementation and management of participatory activities is the focal point of urban interventions in Savamala, and these networks involve a range of local and city NGOs as well as several IOs, initiatives and collectives. In a few cases (*Urban Incubator Belgrade*, *Mikser* festival etc.) the municipal authorities provide support in these managerial networks. However, local, municipal and city authorities as well as international funding organisations (embassies, foreign institutions) take part in financial networks (funding instruments) and in several projects in the implementation networks (*Savamala, a place for making*; *The game of Savamala*; *Camenzind*, *NextSavamala* and *Savamala design studio* projects within UIB). In the case of UIB, the activities in Savamala also comply with the Goethe-Institut campaign to focus some of their activities in their branches worldwide on "Cities and Urban space". Speaking of these participatory projects, they are pillars of bottom-up research and education networks and in this manner they cooperate with Serbian and European universities⁷. At a limited level, a few agents

(*My piece of Savamala*, *KC Grad*, *Mikser*) engage in consulting networks with municipal and city authorities (City mayor, City architect, Municipality of Savski venac) and real-estate actors (*Eagel Hills*, *Belgrade Waterfront Project*). Finally, the sole interest of the *Ministry of Space* collective and *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* initiative, which are overlapping in the course of individual participants and actions like NDVBGD, is the initiative led by this collective, namely the activation of control and verification networks for all urban questions, problems and solutions, and they refer back to the city and national urban and political authorities and experts.

Figure 4 visualises the MAS-ANT analysis of these bottom-up networks with reference to the agent structure, preferences and behaviour. In this diagram the relations between contextual preferences, the social aspects addressed and the agents with their explicit structure (level, nature, and functions) are explicitly represented. In this respect, we can acknowledge urban system references - the indicators of maintenance, transformation and/or change.

Based on agent profiles and networks, we have identified multiple maintenance, transformation and change actions that influence the state of the urban environment in Savamala. First of all, the settlement of civil organisations has supported service and commercial activities and recreation zones already present there. Several traditional craft shops have been in Savamala for decades and now, following the hype of its low-profile bars and restaurants, as well as art and culture initiatives fostering cooperation, globalisation and modern business trends have positioned themselves there. Their significance, not only at the city but also the international level, promotes Savamala among architects, artists and all young creative workers of the region and Europe.

Visible spatial transformations are activation of the waterfront area (for a while activities and events were organised on abandoned ships on the Savamala coast before they were removed), and the preservation and improvement of cycling paths (initiative of *Streets for cyclists* NGO). The

⁷ Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade (FAUB), University of Fine Arts of Hamburg (HfBK), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETHZ)

Table 1: Agent preferences – contextual preferences for agent activity

AGENT PREFERENCES				
Key agents Agent nature: ○ venue; ● entity/organisation/informal organisation; ● projects/activities/events; ● initiative/project;	Contextual resources		Urban conflicts (UC)	Social practices (SP)
	Spatial capacities (SpC)	Social potentials (SoP)		
KC GRAD ●	+	+	-	+
MKM ○	+/-	+	-	+
Mikser ●	+	+	-	+
Nova Iskra ●	+/-	+/-	-	+
Urban incubator Belgrade ●	+	+	+	-
Ministry of space collective ●	+	+/-	+	-
"Ne da(vi)mo Beograd" initiative ●	+	+/-	+	-
My piece of Savamala ●	+	+	+	-
The game of Savamala ●	+	+	+	-
Savamala, a place for making ●	+	+	+	-
Streets for Cyclists ●	+	+	-	+
KM8 ○	+	+	-	+

Agent passivity: □ SP; ▒ UC & SpC; ■ SoP & SP;

preservation of skills and traditional crafts (Savamala a place for making); fostering the sense of community and sharing (UIB was the pioneer in participation, followed by *Goethe guerrilla* collective, which organises and supports civil, participatory and design activities and operates in KM8 community space); and informing and educating public (*The game of Savamala*, *My piece of Savamala* etc.) are the major social transformations which have been directly induced by this pioneer bottom-up agency. Moreover, the local population emphasises that these participatory programmes, with reference to their organisational preferences and capacities, take into account the needs of the locals, youngsters (UIB) (Müller-Wieferig and Herzen, 2013) and marginalised groups (*Ministry of space* and NDVBG) (Mitić and Miladinović, 2016). Conversely, the development of Savamala's creative cluster and small-scale hype brownfield regeneration and public place design are major smooth transformations that have made Savamala visible on an international scale.

Finally, urban change induced by these bottom-up activities is limited in its scope, but it shows significant potential if these activities encounter understanding and support from city authorities. Forming the *Savamala civic district*, as well as participatory urban upgrade, and brownfield and urban heritage regeneration are their ultimate goals. It is also important to mention that the combination of Savamala's spatial capacity (its central urban position and the proximity to bus and train terminals) and the primary activity of these bottom-up agents (inclined to boost knowledge and vision building as well as experience sharing potentials) has led to prompt and adequate reactions to the current refugee crisis that has hit Europe, and with it, Belgrade. The activities for helping refugees/migrants are coordinated by *Mikser* and financially supported by many national and international organisations –the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), CARE International (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere), the Red Cross etc., as well as by supplies and care from the locals.⁸ These efficient

⁸ Miksalište, a sister organisation of Mikser, coordinated 1,200 volunteers from 68 countries and provided help (food, advice, clothes, medical examinations, education etc.) for more than 130,000 refugees.

actions also speak of the competence and alertness of bottom-up agents to respond to the dynamics of the modern urban context.

CONCLUSION

Having followed the aims and results of the activities in Savamala analysed herein, we have identified the following capacities for Savamala to transform a crisis of aggregated urban conflicts into an opportunity for urban development: mobilise available local human resources, comply with current global trends in participatory urbanism, low-budget revitalisations and creative economy initiatives, educating the apathetic local population on the importance of active participation in urban planning and development, having a critical attitude and "learning by doing" towards urban planning. It is also important to acknowledge that local citizens are not the main actors in these interventions. In this manner, the bottom-up nature of the agency in Savamala is rather limited to the activation of the alternative and non-institutionalised cultural scene with the focus on the whole city, as well as the aggregation and multiplication of such NGOs in Savamala. However, negative changes have taken place as well – the first intrinsically bottom-up organisation in Savamala (*Club of Savamala fans and friends*) having been placed in the middle of different agendas and interests, has ended up as a type of informal political body in party service.

To this extent, the livelihood of Savamala is still assumed to be at least disseminated from the ground up through the social bonds between different social groups (artists, youngsters, students, senior citizens) and among neighbours and locals, and achieved through the mutual efforts of participation and dialogue from these urban actors with different backgrounds. At some point, these internal relationships have surpassed all their campaigned and institutionalised initiators (UIB, Mikser festival), being followed by informal events such as: meetings of the locals in the "*Spanish house*" space, the co-action of roasting peppers, and open access to spaces for artistic and educational purposes (KM8). Moreover, through several of the activities, a variety of urban actors have become engaged in using these open public spaces (UIB, KM8, Mikser festival) and they are actively

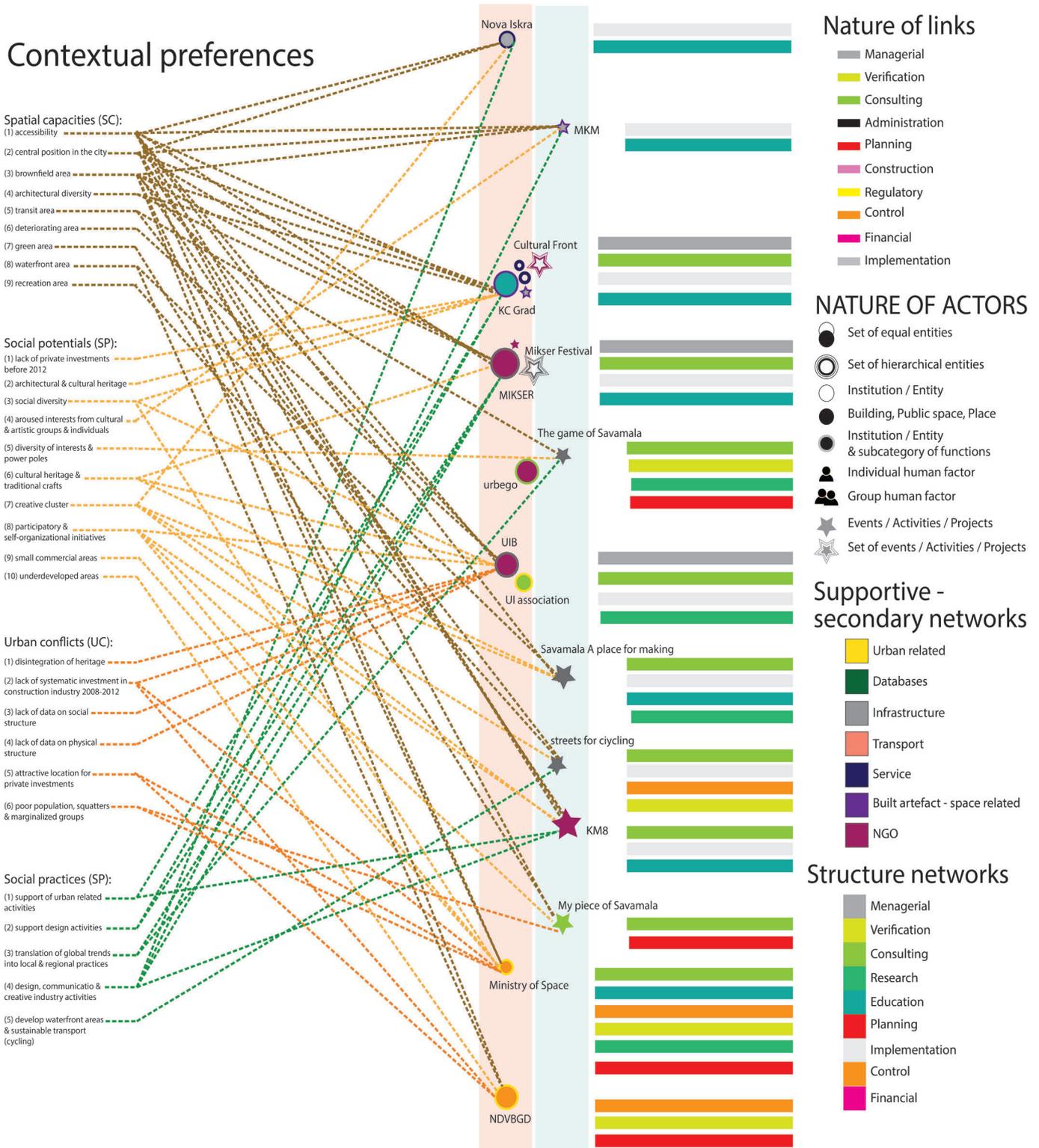


Figure 5: Urban assemblages (Source: authors)

thinking and imagining what the positive future of these places might be. In this light, the major benefit that could transform the socio-urban landscape of Serbian cities is the strong expression and statement of cultural and artistic interests within the agendas of these activities and raising the awareness and promotion of participation in the urban domain.

Though it may also sound pretentious, the intensive UIB

media campaign⁹ and the role of the Goethe-Institut have certainly paved the way for Savamala and have ensured a place for Savamala among the European neighbourhood symbols of creative clusters and urban upgrade potentials¹⁰.

⁹ Bureau Savamala, a project within UIB, attentively followed the UIB project roll-out and acknowledged and analysed its presence in local media.

¹⁰ <http://house.mikser.rs/en/guardian-mikser-house-one-10-best-industrial-chic-spaces-worldwide/>

In response, it should be attentive to the possible negative effects of such a trendy image that could lead to gentrification and the expulsion of the current population. The growing presence of Savamala in the media has also led to the exposure of its contextual resources to several powerful and uncompromising actors. In addition, instead of exploring the potential of bottom-up approaches, actions and actors, certain decision makers have contributed instead to the commodification of culture and space and resorted to transnational companies¹¹ to support their activities. In sum, the lack of strategic development goals, public funding and institutionalised approaches for cultural institutions and agendas certainly makes these bottom-up activities seem ephemeral and sporadic. Consequently, they could be wiped away by any whim of more powerful interests and political influences focused on Savamala spatial capital.

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