**Chapter 6**

**Re-assembling Urban Dynamics within the Multi-Agent System**

Within an urban system, all elements are interdependent. The ANT analysis provides an extensive overview of complex actor-network relations. These assemblages also bound space-time dynamics, linking past-to-present translations of urban decision-making practices and processes. Actor-networks, while influenced by the others, also simultaneously influence them, as do all the agents within the Multi-agent system (MAS) methodological approach (**??**).

Similarly to Actor-network Theory (ANT), the Multi-agent system (MAS) further deconstructs urban complexity and dynamics. It traces agent profiles (assembly of urban agency) and their inter-relations (assembly of operations). The bearers of urban agency are key urban actors operating under the continuous negotiations within the morphology of urban decision-making.

However, the main contribution of MAS lies in tracking down the character of agents’ links. These qualitative categories are reinterpreted by MAS through passive and active contextual elements (objects and relations). They serve for connecting the present to the future based on the past-to-present explanations of agencies and relations. In this manner, MAS also manages to operate the concept of urbanity through the categories of: social practices, urban conflicts and contextual resources (spatial capacities and social potential). While spatial capacities and social potential are passive, social practices and urban conflicts are active contextual elements which are continuously operated by the key actors and within this initial networking.

In Savamala, these contextual elements are entrenched within the Serbian urban regulatory framework, current urban and architectural projects on site, and civic initiatives that activate the social fabric of the neighbourhood. Savamala has been marked by all major transformations of Serbian society over time, the current hype of arts and culture in line with the worldwide spread of hipster neighbourhoods. In addition, it has also fallen under the massive,

but rather disputable waterfront mega-project, that aims to remodel Belgrade’s landscape according to modern high-rise metropolis patterns (Figure X). These overlaps of past, present and future processes and mechanisms are the core framework for socio-spatial patterns in Savamala.

This chapter provides the second stage analysis with MAS. First of all, a narrative of resources, conflicts and practices indicates the links between the current state of affairs in Savamala and future oriented urban system transitions. Further on, associating these socio-spatial patterns with urban agents reveals agent preferences. Within MAS, agent preferences are defined to have bounded up the agent’s capacity to influence the future of the neighbourhood. Finally, this chapter concludes with notes on how these capacities might be operationalized within urban transitions by the hybrid method that combines MAS and ANT.

# Socio-spatial Patterns in MAS: Dynamism of Objects and Relations in Savamala

Any urban environment is in a constant state of flux. In this respect, a kaleidoscope of collected data on Savamala and the first round of analysis on urban assemblages have revealed sets of relationships between urban agents, the morphology of urban decision- making and urban complexity. As discussed above, these relationships contain only the reference to past and present urban processes. Conversely, ”glocalized” 1 socio-spatial patterns cover up the space-time relations of urbanity and address the future prospects of development.

To gain a fuller appreciation of these future-oriented processes, close vivisection of socio-spatial patterns in Savamala relied on the qualitative data obtained in four rounds of consecutive data collection: documents review, questionnaires, workshops, and interviews. Based on these data and in reference to the MAS methodological framework, socio-spatial patterns are divided into:

* + 1. Passive contextual elements or objects in MAS terminology
    2. Active contextual processes or the assembly of relations in reference to MAS.

## Passive contextual elements

As already mentioned, passive objects (contextual elements) are a MAS unit of analysis. In its methodological scope, they are assumed passive because agents (key urban agents) are the core activators/exploiters of their agency. More precisely, this category is not about the individual objects, but rather brings up sets of elements, factors and circumstances that, once united, become the basis for action. Thus, this interpretation already reveals its future oriented span.

1global and local simultaneously

Theoretically speaking, passive contextual elements refer to the concept of urbanity and its potential to be measured (**?**; **?**). Based on the conceptual framework of this thesis (Section 2.1.5), the measurability of the urbanity concept stems from the issue of territorial capital (**?**), and more in detail: spatial (**?**) and social capital (**?**). Moreover, there are several different categorizations of capital, to mention but a few: hard and soft, material, social intellectual, human capital.. (**?**).

However, for the purposes of the MAS methodology, the issue of capital is simply addressed in the sense of resources. In this manner, all possible variations of the term are reduced to its reference to either space (spatial, material, hard capital) or society (social, human, intellectual, soft capital), and the context altogether (territorial capital).

Thus, passive contextual elements are considered as:

* + - * spatial capacities
      * social potentials

### Spatial capacities

Rivers are very important city landmarks of modern cities. As Mann (1988) puts it, there are various trends in waterfront redevelopment, 2 but they all indicate refocusing the attention of planners, investors and citizens on ”the central urban waterfronts with their transitions away from the inefficiencies and clutter of 19th and early 20th century industrial and commercial patterns” (ibid.).

In Serbia and Belgrade, this transition of trends coincided with the moment when the river Sava was not the border anymore.3 Even though Savamala’s rise started much earlier, it referred more to the hinterland while the only sparks of urban life on its waterfront were the docks. According to experts, Savamala was considered as the flooding zone (the whole area below Crnogorska) in those times (Interviewee X). It was only when Belgrade and Zemun became cities of the same country that the Sava waterfront gained importance. Soon afterwards the bridge [Brankov bridge] was built to emphasize this connection and the Savamala hinterland was fortified against flooding.

2Mann (1988) identifies the ten most influential ones: (1) large-scale mixed-use development; (2) an open

and accessible riverside; (3) reducing the railroad and highway capacity along the riverbanks; (4) the development of commercial areas along small bankside waterways; (5) historic restoration of the river corridor;

1. blossoming of market places; (7) world exposition development on the waterfront; (8) environmentally adjusted art; (9) ephemeral events and structures; (10) growing local urban regulations of waterfront sites.

3after the First World War (WWI).

Henceforth, the development of Belgrade was led in such a way that the connection with Zemun and the left Sava riverbank (New Belgrade side) were ever intensified. Therefore, even though Belgrade is physically placed at the confluence of two rivers, it is nowadays perceived as a city on the Sava river with the Danube nearby, rather than as a city on the Sava and the Danube (Interviewee X).

The long, accessible, central waterfront zone largely determined the position of Savamala in the growing Belgrade metropolitan area with not yet efficiently resolved public transport and a heavy traffic infrastructure (Questionnaire X). The combination of the proximity of the river and the city center, but even more so its position in the geometrical center of the vast area of the city of Belgrade was its major capital; ”the middle of the three cities [Belgrade, New Belgrade, Zemun]” as one informant said (Interviewee X).

However, all these favourable factors did not prevent the neglected attitude of the socialist authorities after the Second World War. Actually, it was the high representation of urban, architectural and cultural heritage from previous (prewar) capitalist times4 in Savamala that determined the viewpoint of the socialist regime (Section 4.1.3).

Making its transversal Karadjordjeva street the main road for heavy transport as a way to bypass the city center predominately marked the nature of the Savamala urban neighbourhood during the socialist period. What is more, this transit roadway became increasingly surrounded by poor warehouses and manufactories that replaced the bombed palaces for a while (Section 4.1.3). With the extensive construction of transport infrastructure in the recently industrialized country (SFRY), the growing industry of transportation means, and consequent rising mobility of people; the urbanity of Savamala then was also aggravated by the proximity of the busy bus and train terminals. 5 The socialist Savamala was a crowded, polluted, noisy area and the home for marginalized groups, outcasts and prostitutes. Unfortunately, this atmosphere and image had long surpassed the socialist regime and has followed Savamala to the present day.

The first post-socialist period in the 1990s continued to contribute to its deterioration and devastation. The abandoned industrial plots and derelict and ruined buildings, its problematic social structure and the gloomy circumstances of the civil wars and national turmoil in the Balkan region flagged Savamala as economically underdeveloped, socially disadvantaged, and unsafe with a reputation as a home to outcasts, prostitution and criminality (**?**).

4A helpiful circumstance for the socialist authorities was the almost complete destruction of Savamala during the bombardments in WWII (Section 4.1.3).

5”Savamala hosted the enlargement of the state’s major traffic infrastructure, including the nearby main

train station, the bus terminal, the river terminal and two of the city’s main bridges connecting the city centre to New Belgrade, the newly constructed capital of a socialist Yugoslavia that projected its high collective ideals onto urban development by appropriating the concept of modernist urban development.” (**?**)

Conversely, the urban and architectural richness of the pre-socialist times was also preserved to date. The architectural masterpieces from the beginning of the 20th century, the Belgrade Cooperative [Geozavod], Bristol Hotel, Vuca’s House) still adorn the neighbourhood and the city. Their accessibility (to the bus and train terminals and city center) and even more so its promotion by the recent hubs of hype culture, which have been placed in the neighbourhood, put these buildings on the tourist maps and make them the ”must-see” of the post-socialist south-eastern European capital (Questionnaire X).

The amorphous urban form and small, irregular street matrix below Karadjordjeva street (Questionnaire X) has been the recognizable urban structure of Savamala until quite recently, when it was forcefully and illegally destroyed for the purposes of the Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP). 6

The recent terrain clearance is actually the most radical, but also most consequential step of national and city authorities, the legal framework and planning bodies, resulting from the continuous political and economic pressures to solve an old issue of Belgrade’s peak waterfront area. 7 After multiple competitions and projects for the Sava amphitheatre (Section 5.1.1), the Urban Planning Institute came out with a circumstantial urban analysis and a programme for the area. Referring to much of what is herein said and with extensive multidisciplinary expert analysis, they specify the spatial circumstances and developmental capacity of Savamala as such (**?**):

* + the bounding network of major city roads directly connected to the Savamala street map and limited by surrounding private property structures;
  + the importance of the wider city context and utmost priority of linking its urban development to that of the corresponding area on the left bank of the Sava (the New Belgrade side);
  + the outstanding quality of the location and its urban vizuras on the city;
  + the priority of waterfront revitalization as a significant spatial resource of the city and its common good;

These positive traits as well as being in the vicinity of the major transportation hubs of Belgrade 8 were the main linchpins for the first civil and cultural initiatives to settle in 6Under the pressure of the BWP agreement obligations and under murky circumstances on election night between the 24th and 25th of April, the shabby structures in Hercegovacka street were razed to the

ground by a group of masked men armed with baseball bats (**?**).

7These initiatives date back to the 1920s (Section 5.1.1). The exact area of intervention in these planning phases has varied from Gazela Bridge to beyond the Dorcol marina, but their common denominator is the relocation of the bus and railway station.

8”having visitors/tourists coming by chance on their way from the bus terminal or the train station”

(Interviewee X)

the neighbourhood. According to the informants, the choice of Savamala was made after preliminary draft mapping of its contextual resources (spatial and social ones) (Intervie- wee X). Another important quality emphasized by the civil sector is the disposition of plots and buildings to be reactivated and offered to citizenry to use for recreation, cultural and community activities (Questionnaire X).

In terms of spatial capacities, it is also crucial to stress that, even though they may sound permanent, spatial capacities (and conversely spatial drawbacks) are highly dependent on the distribution of urban activities and the indirect moderating of the situated urban practices and urban conflicts. In Savamala, even though there has not been significant urban reconstruction of buildings and spaces at play before the BWP was instated, the devastated and deteriorating state of the neighbourhood was reduced by the cultural, artistic and civic activities happening there, giving it rather a hype than ruined appearance. Even more importantly, with the increasing number of users from different social backgrounds and accompanying services, Savamala became a posh and safe area, but conversely without obvious signs of gentrification and change in social status as there was not any significant increase in rents and apartment costs (Interviewee X).

It has been conspicuous that Savamala’s position and provision of empty spaces and buildings, brown- and greenfield areas was a ready-made trigger. Once activated, it becomes an almost unstoppable drive of urban transformation or radical change, even though its urban essence within the image of the whole city of Belgrade stays the same for a while with its run-down buildings, derelict empty plots and open spaces. 9 However, with the lack of a sustainable, participatory, transparent, feasible, and long-term development model, these spatial capacities may easily turn into social impediments and setbacks.

### Social potentials

Urban planning and urban design are the offspring of architecture and spatial development that mold urban transformations in contemporary cities (**?**). While planning anticipates an urban future through the debates and decisions on the playing field of different interests, urban design focuses on urban form aiming to capture its dynamics in compliance with human objectives (**?**: 201).

However, while urban forms represent designers’ intentions at a particular time, its life cycle outgrows these intentions and forms the contextual urban processes (**?**). Physical structures are formative for what goes on in an urban setting, but urban reality is in constant flux through its merging with particular urban practices at play. The on- going everyday transformations and future urban design solutions thereafter are set by social capital, rational action that embodies social relations (**?**).These are social

9Even with the large waterfront intervention of the BWP, from a certain perspective and in certain areas (i.e. the Savamala hinterland, known as Upper Savamala), Savamala looks exactly the same as it did a few years ago when it was only a cultural and creative hub of the city.

potentials bounded in any urban context. In Savamala, the morphology of urban decision-making sets forth and catalyses transformative social forces.

Top-down urban planning interventions bound the planning mechanisms emerging from the new political context, the universal and regime-based forces and trends, society-specific and culturally unique features of the context and the applicability of experiences and tools in the local system (**?**). Participatory, transparent mechanisms and public interest aims have already been defined in the regulatory and strategic documents in Serbia (**?**). However, the particular practice and patterns show that institutional and organisational frameworks at play are rather the clients of developers and private actors (**?**). In this manner, certain individuals in institutions, while they can be the executors of such interest, also can contribute to promoting and supporting participatory and transparent processes. For example, at some point, the municipal authorities officially supported the civil and international initiatives to extend the urban life of Belgrade down to its riverbanks and to reactivate Savamala spaces (**?**). 10

On the other hand, the small-scale cultural and civic initiatives that were popping up around Savamala from 2008 onward signified as the actual congregators of social potential. This conglomerate of artistic practices, crowdsourcing activities, creative industries, urban manufactories, and cooperative economies was growing, gradually infusing the sparks of new urban life in Savamala. Conversely, these activities also aimed at returning Savamala to its former pre-socialist fame through the attempts to revive old arts and crafts still present but almost disappearing in Savamala.

The first driver of this trend was Urban Incubator Belgrade (UIB) with two projects focusing on the recognizable cultural identity of Savamala and its richness of tradition and crafts. ”Savamala Design Studio” aimed to produce a manual of local knowledge, practices and cultural values through participatory action research (**?**). The idea was to work with residents and other urban actors, learn from them and map their everyday practices (i.e. preserving food, recycling waste, barter economy, illegal building construction) (ibid.).

Similary, ”Micro factories” was another participatory activity targeting collecting local materials (usually from abandoned apartments or other places) and working on the design of products that reflects firstly what they had found in Savamala and secondly its tradition of small craft workshops (i.e. carpentry) (ibid.). These new small production facilities are intended to be microeconomic structures establishing the relationship between urban space and industrial production and boosting the local pride and identity of a once prestigious trade

10For example, Nemanja Petrovic, the Assistent Mayor of the Municipality ”Savski venac” and Nina Mitranic, the chief architect of the Municipal building inspection (**?**). Their positive role was also emphasized by the civil sector informants (Interview X, Y).–

and artisanal area (**?**). This initiative was nurtured and extended with UIB successors, such as the projects: ”Cooking together”, ”Healthy living in Savamala”, ”Heritage of the ship graveyard” and ”Zupa Zupa”. All these activities were situated on the old abandoned steamboat Zupa (**?**).

In the long-run, they strove to physically transform the neighbourhood and to influence urban transformations that are based on social interest rather than on real estate speculations. However, the choice of Savamala was not accidental. The availability of abandoned buildings, abundance of architectural heritage might have been the major instigators of that choice (Questionnaire X) Several organisations testify to mapping Savamala before installing there and except for its spatial capital, the sparks of night life (cafes, clubs) were the main reasons for their decision (Interview X)

The goal was to change Savamala’s urban image by converting abandoned warehouses into socially productive facilities, activating riverfront usage, encouraging local community participation, attracting new visitors to the neighbourhood (professionals and the general public, both local and global), and finally revalorizing and repositioning the Savamala neighbourhood within the physical and functional scheme of the whole city of Belgrade (**?**).

Yet, through qualitative investigation of these activities, it was revealed that this wave of action was only possible with the high influence and strong presence of national NGOs and, even more, international NGOs and formal organisations (Questionnaire X) ”Urban Incubator Belgrade” was based on Berlin experience (Interview X) The rationale of this project was also embedded in Goethe Institute strategy, whose focus has been urban development, urban transformations and creative industry. As creative industry is an important sector of the German economy (**?**), such financially and logistically supported activities may also be interpreted as an economic strategy for the export of services (Questionnaire X) In any case, the outburst of these and similar projects, events and activities (Section 4.2.3) made Savamala the nexus of creative capital in Belgrade (**?**).

In sociological terms, Savamala developed a multiple identity recognizable on the national and international scene. For the limited artistic scene in Belgrade, Savamala with its several important galleries (Figure X) is an national, urban, artistic hub. For cultural and civil workers, it is a cultural cluster. Finally, for numerous tourists and visitors, it is a place to party all night long (Interview X).

While Savamala was very peaceful area during communism,11 it was only during the turbulent wartime of the 1990s that it became unsafe. The neighbourhood kept that image 11As an informant, a Savamala inhabitant for many years, recalled: during the SFRY era there were a lot of local police in the streets and the social discipline was different (Interview X). Such circumstance

might have created a different safety net then.

until these new fusions of urban life settled in Savamala (Interview X).

This new spirit, accompanied by the many night clubs12 settling in the neighbourhood, put Savamala on the city map as a party area with a vivid night life (BureauSavamala2013). The gradual reduction of heavy traffic, which was caused partly by the construction of the Pupin bridge over the Danube, was replaced with intensive and loud music from the clubs that created severe noise all night long in Savamala (Interview X). Consequently in 2012, Belgrade and indirectly Savamala were internationally presented as the major party capital in the world by Lonely planet (**?**).

Similar to the wasted potential of this uninstitutionalized culture that has never been included in any official cultural strategy of the city and the state (Section 5.2.1), this potential of making Belgrade internationally famous was abruptly stopped by the regulation of 2011 when the commerce of alcohol was banned after 11 PM and the bars were to close at that time as well (Vreme 2011). On one hand, this had a bad influence on tourism; on the other, the ban changed Savamala, too. That is to say that even more bars moved there as its location offered a possibility to extend the party hours. Less populated and close to the riverside recreation area and abandoned plots, in Savamala people were still able to party the whole night (Interview X). Even though the ban on alcohol is no longer in effect, the party places stayed in Savamala and have been influencing its image as a cultural and civic hub.

This recent sequence of events testifies that the city authorities did not apply any sustainable strategy for either the spatial capacities of Savamala (empty spaces and plots) or for cultural and tourist activities (Interview X). This rather sporadic interest in envisioning developmental options was even more obvious in terms of the Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP). Taking into consideration the circumstances around BWP deals, the attitude of the city and national authorities towards the exploitation of the spatial capacity of the Sava waterfront contained little, if any, concern for public interest and relinquished this outstanding resource to the whims of the interest of the private investor.

Fortunately, the initiative NDVBGD took this real estate transformation very seriously and critically addressed the issue from the very beginning (**?**). The initiative assembled local organisations and individuals around the issue of urban and cultural policy and urban development in Belgrade. As soon as the first irregularities appeared, accompanying the collaboration between the RS and the company from the UAE (”Eagle Hills”), the activists from the initiative raised their voices and organized public performances against, what they call ”investor urbanism” (**?**). At the beginning, they were mainly active through social media (Facebook, Twitter) and with sporadic public performances that made them visible beyond the city scale.

12Over several years, the famous clubs and cafes in Savamala included: Disko Klub Mladost, Brankow, Apartman, Corba, Magacin, Ben Akiba, Dvoristance, Prohibicija etc.

As the irregularities rose, so did the activities from the initiative. The social role they took in Savamala, also contributed to raising the consciousness and involvement of citizens in urban decision-making. Following this path, the initiative has been continuously organizing critical events in parallel with the BWP project and its planning proceedings. The adoption of the Belgrade Waterfront Spatial Plan for Special Purpose Area (BWPSPSP), GUP Belgrade 2021, Lex specialis, as well as the signing of the contract with the foreign investor, the start of construction work, and the gloomy demolitions in Savamala have all been marked by citizen protests (**?**), symbolic public performances (**?**) and a range of critical texts from local (**?**) and international experts (**?**; **?**).

However, to understand how they set the right actions at the right place and time, it is crucial to mention the genesis of their involvement in Savamala. Their parental organisation ”Ministry of Space” was present in Savamala within Urban Incubator Belgrade (UIB), through the Bureau Savamala as the critical commentator of the project. Moreover, the collective ”Ministry of Space” has been persistently pointing out the problems in urban policy, management and civil rights in the Serbian Capital.

After the scandalous demolition in Savamala in April 2016, NDVBGD organized several protests with up to 20,000 participants at one point (**?**). Not only did these actions make this flawed fast-lane approach to investors internationally visible (**?**; **?**), but these manifestations of civil disobedience also made the local population less afraid to protest and express their concerns for the public interest and public good (Interview X). The slogan ”Whose city? Our city” (**?**), even though a political phrase, expresses the rise of consciousness about civic rights and the capacity to understand the importance of participation and transparency in urban management after the decades long citizen apathy and authoritarian governance model.

According to the herein presented state of the affairs, it is obvious that social potentials are highly variable and easily shifted from the positive ability for transformation into a retrograde and dangerous urban conflicts. Yet, if anything, they are an essential force for transforming the negative effects of the conventional urbanisation model, accelerating globalization influences, neoliberal trends and unsuitable urban patterns into a contextually appropriate developmental impetus.

## The Assembly of Relations

Based on the convergence of urban agency toward the context presented above, several issues seem to be stumbling blocks throughout all the layers of urban decision-making (Questionnaire X):

* + - * the lack of transparency;
      * correlation between political and economic interest groups;
      * neglected estimation of real circumstances and feasibility;
      * social polarization and unfair wealth redistribution;
      * total dependency on global trends/guidelines.

These obstacles surpass the local context of Savamala and further characterize the urban development circumstances in Belgrade and in Serbia in general.

The urban development of Belgrade is revealing routines, challenges and traumas both from the historical perspective and the traits of culture and mentality 13 and the analyses of the current condition (**?**). The dynamics of these antagonistic relations set forth the complex system dynamics. While it is essential to incorporate the transformative capacity of passive contextual elements, congregating the relations of system maintenance and system collisions sets a comprehensive overlay of procedural resilience of the system and urban scenarios for radical interventions.

In this respect, active contextual relations in Savamala are categorized as:

* + - * urban practices
      * urban conflicts

### Urban practices

Social practices are embedded in the local context. Therefore, situated urban practices generate space production and its usage (**?**), so that they are the engines of urban system evolution.

In Serbia what happens in the local context very often deviates from what is planned. So, this tendency may rather be spoken of as a practice of abandoning urban plans and the discrepancy between plans and realizations than of serious strategies with parameters of economic development, a comprehensive socio-spatial analysis and feasibility studies. Therefore, the approach to urban planning documentation is technocratic with loose links to implementation and actions in actual space.

Usually attributed to the socialist inheritance in planning (**?**), such praxis is aggravated by the dominance of political party or private investor interests (Workshop 1). In post-socialist Serbia, the pluralist political life made the dominance of political and powerful economic actors highly dependent on everyday politics and the shifts of political parties in power. Consequently, the activities of the high planning and decision-making authorities rarely produce sustainable urban practices when brought down to the neighbourhood level.

13Under cultural traits and mentality, Samardzic (2015) gives these examples: poverty, sharp social, cultural and ideological differences, inheritance and influence of nationalism, socialism and political religion, undeveloped, inappropriately or poorly maintained developed infrastructure.

Yet, the social coherence of urban neighbourhoods in Serbia is also inherited from the socialist period. Still present in public land ownership and the significant amount of accessible open spaces bind civic activities to urban space (Workshop 3). Numerous empty plots and abandoned buildings in Savamala have allowed an urban related framework for a rise in civic activities (Section 4.2.3).

Moreover, the distribution of these places and the compactness of urban forms and spaces spatialized these activities even more than they intended to. Mikser festival, for example, even though its initial relationship to Savamala was only as a site specific event, in its later festival years incorporated more and more urban and Savamala related activities (**??**). Furthermore, seen as an important local actor, Mikser House staff testify that locals often come there for advice or to express their doubts and fears about the current spatial transformations coming from the BWP interventions (Interview X)

On the other hand, during the period 2008-2015, the design, communication and creative industry were the main drivers of urban revitalization of Savamala. This global trend created local impact through micro interventions and private ventures in urban space. Even though informal liaisons among urban actors and stakeholders were set off locally, the supreme authority were international and national formal and informal organisations (NGOs and collectives) (Section 4.2.3).

These new circumstances arose as a result of the transitional marketization of society, increased interest in the service economy and the spur of consumerism. The dominance of international actors, new creative class, young cultural entrepreneurs and local hype design activities created a strong, yet uninstitutionalized and informal cultural and artistic base in Belgrade (Workshop 2). However, although it is widely known that such circumstances are key triggers for gentrification (**?**), this generally was not the case with Savamala (Interview X). Namely, the residence structure in Savamala has not significantly changed during the years of intensive cultural activities, neither do the rents, which are are still in the same price register as before (Interview X). An important circumstance in this favour is that 90% of the building stock in Savamala is owned by its inhabitants, so that they are to decide on selling the apartments (**?**). Furthermore, the real-estate market and the policy on urban services in the city is not yet regulated so that it is difficult to expect that the prices in Savamala are susceptible to current social trends. Finally, the legal process for obtaining construction permits is cumbersome and complex, so that even small changes and adaptations as well as initiatives coming outside the circle of authorities and those close to them is unlikely to happen (ibid.).

Yet the change in residential structure actually happened later, with the advancement of the BWP, their relocation programmes and forceful evictions of the local population (**?**). The case of the Belgrade Waterfront mega-project and its blatant focus on residential and commercial purposes almost exclusively 14 also results from low suburbanization trends in Belgrade as there are plenty of attractive areas in the vicinity of the city center that have empty or deteriorating land available for such development (**?**).

Even more so as the transport system in Belgrade seems old-fashioned, inefficient and centralized (**?**) and the best accessibility mainly characterizes central urban locations (the historical center and New Belgrade). Therefore, any significant change in land use is grounded upon re-conceptualized transportation patterns, which is the core of the new urban development strategy for Belgrade 2016-2020 (Interview X)

In this regard, the development of sustainable transport, walking paths and especially cycling, came up as an overall priority and consistent urban practice that is being raised, regardless of the circumstances. While the rising civic protests against the BWP are widely ignored by the authorities, similar activities coming from the biking community were taken into account and their voices were heard in official meetings (**?**). Their requirements were met regarding the new temporary bike lines while the waterfront is occupied with the BWP construction site (**?**).

Generally speaking, urban policy agendas on one side and localized civic engagement on the other have produced a certain consistency in socio-spatial interventions in Savamala. However, the lack of transparency of all decision-making procedures, inaccessibility of all the following documentation and biased and provisory participatory mechanisms and instruments destroy any such positive effects and transform practices into conflicts (**?**).

### Urban conflicts

Cities entail urban conflicts. The dynamics of spatial distributions and social relations in cities unavoidably produce conflictive urban issues (Interview X). Though the task of good urban management is to reduce them to the minimum and ensure a harmonious urban environment for all citizens, in reality, the tensions between antagonistic interests and power poles collide within the morphology of urban decision-making. The escalated urban conflicts lead to the shifting points in urban system development.

The socio-spatial patterns of post-socialist development and transition entail the majority of current urban conflicts in Serbia (Section 2.3.1). The socialist system instated a certain vision of the urban and institutionalized a range of practices toward its achievement. So far, institutional and legislative reforms and ad-hoc interventions in recent years have contributed to the dissolution of the old system, but with poor legitimacy

14According to the Belgrade Waterfront Spatial Plan for Special Purpose Area (BWSPSP) less than 2% of the total area is allocated to public and non-commercial urban functions (**?**).

for the proposed reforms (**?**; **?**. Therefore, it may be concluded that the hyperproduction of current conflicts stems from keeping ”the worst of both worlds”. Savamala with its accentuated antagonism of interests undoubtedly reflects these circumstances.

The recent course of events in Savamala show the dominance of an **anti-planning concept and unsustainable development patterns** (**?**) in dealing with the highly profitable land in the capital. The non-institutionally managed cultural and civic activities in Savamala informally built the base for what was suggested in the General Plan 2021 (2009), insisting on the importance of culture to promote the attractiveness of urban areas with planning and organisational solutions (**?**). The obvious lack of data on the social and physical structure was recognized and partly dealt with through the Urban Incubator Belgrade (UIB) and the Model of Savamala project.

The 3D representation of the Savamala neighbourhood incorporated soft data (**?**). All urban spaces and urban structures in Savamala were tracked through ”passports” that comprised objective facts (i.e. height of building, type of roof, façade, number of units, age of the building) and subjective references (the historical layers, social structure and general impression of the structures) (**?**). All these non-governmental initiatives revived the image of forgotten architectural and urban heritage in Savamala and produced its current recognizable cultural identity (Questionnaire X)

The reactivation of Savamala spaces and filling them in with new functions also reflected the domination of free market ideology for generating socio-spatial configurations (**?**). At the beginning having the bulk of the country’s creative human capital coming and staying in Savamala was seen as a social potential for revival and urban revitalization. In reality, Savamala soon turned into the heart of mainstream world culture and urban trends in Serbia. Spaces of alternative culture were neither further extended nor diversified, but insistently more and more surrounded by hipster hubs, services and gathering places, and even more with fancy clubs, cafés, restaurants. In general, **marketization** and **globalization** patterns in Savamala also became rendered from the ”quasi” ground up.

The international and particular interest-based (popular art and culture) network generated in this way held the bonds that surpassed the spatialized identity of these activities represented in the image of Savamala. Recent unfoldings of the situation show that even though they are weak in confrontation with powerful economic interests and local authorities, they are able to keep their audience and actors and move them around the city (**?**). On the other hand, the actual cultural policy in Serbia and Belgrade was rather reduced to **city marketing** - without an overall cultural policy or a law on culture and cultural activities (**?**).

Nevertheless, there are still some traces of professional initiatives to improve and up- date urban planning approaches in Belgrade, even though usually with gloomy prospects to be realized. The Urban Planning Institute in 2012 established a project to create an integrated urban development plan for Savamala, which would rely on previous studies of the Waterfront area (2007) (**?**) and of the Sava amphiteatre (**?**). The project relied on an up-to-date account of the activities in Savamala, its brownfield capacities, and addressed global sustainable development, creative industry, and climate change trends (**?**). This forward-thinking project was the result of professionals and experts in the Urban Planning Institute and their non-governmental partners ”Ambero Serbia” (Service for Strengthening of local land management in Serbia) and ”GIZ Serbia” the Serbian branch of GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fr Internationale Zusammenarbeit), which tried to keep track of what is going on in the city. Unfortunately, this is not the regular practice, as the procedures, strategies and plans in Serbia are more often than not detached from actual space (Interview X).

Generally speaking, the regulatory framework in Serbia supports an **administrative approach to urban-land management** that becomes inefficient with market rules at work in post-socialist urban practice (Interview X). The initiatives for improvements have mainly ended with rushed-in decentralization and problematic horizontal coordination (**?**). Top-down regulatory structures and individuals in these institutions tend to keep power in their hands (**?**), while there is a general lack of political will and institutional and expert capacity to solve the issue of missing or inefficient regulatory mechanisms and institutions (**?**). In this manner, even cultural ventures, interventions, and policies when they have repercussions in the urban economy become politically biased.

The prolonged regulatory gap in terms of the instruments of the urban economy, real estate investments, urban development mechanisms were even further deepened in the local contexts of SEE (South Eastern Europe) with the global economic crisis (ibid.). No wonder that such contextual conditions put forth the appetites of private investors as the fast-lane, short-term approaches to dealing with the disastrous consequences of transition: low economic growth, high public debt, high unemployment, and the rise of poverty (**?**). Megaproject development for the very attractive location at the Sava waterfront that relied on government interventions and was dependent on external investments more closely reflected the peak of the **commercialization of the urban fabric** that actually started in 1989 (**?**) than an effort to establish a systematic investment policy in the country’s construction industry (**?**.

While the choice of the Sava waterfront, which partly pertains to Savamala, was made because of its spatial capacity, the biased planning process, the disputable change of legislation and the institutional framework and unprecedented top-down political pressures that followed, turned decision-making on the BWP into a highly conflictive issue at local, city and national levels. The fragmented approach to the evaluations of such a project (non-defined priorities, no feasibility studies, poor if any cost estimations) and a generous attitude toward the economic interests of the investor (the contract between the RS and the investor with detrimental consequences for the Serbian taxpayers, regulated the ability

of the investor to privatize urban land and convert the leasehold on urban land into property without a fee) contributed to thriving **commercialization, commodification and privatization mechanisms in the urban economy** (Questionnaire X). The inadequate and unstable regulatory framework and its selective and solely administrative application make these mechanisms far from strategic spatial and urban development instruments and contribute to an unregulated, proto-capitalist market with limited legal and regulatory independence and reliance for the protection of the public interest (Questionnaire X)

Moreover, the planned urban functions and aesthetization of the Sava waterfront proposed by the BWP reflect major conflicts rooted in post-socialist and transitional spatial patterns. **Socio-spatial fragmentation of urban land**, the segregation of the rich and poor, and de-industrialization of the urban economy may further result from luxury residential and over-sized commercial areas planned for the area. Reliance on automobile transport and commercial functions for mass use 15 in the central urban area testify to the territorialization approach in the urban economy (**?**), but without elaborated strategies for long-term turnovers and urban development in the public interest. Promoted as the local driver of economic growth in the media, the roll-out of the BWP actually does not touch upon the current situation at the wider city scale.

The issues of traffic bottle neck, the poor population and marginalized people living and gathering in the area, illegal building, the informal economy and petty crimes are not fought against, but only moved to other areas in the city. Namely, the violent measures of terrain clearance and unjust circumstances of citizen relocation have even worsened the situation (**?**). And what should have been a project of urban regeneration, in reality has created the threat of disintegration of the urban and architectural heritage and tradition. Offering the most important historical heritage in the neighbourhood (e.g. Hotel Bristol, Belgrade Railway station headquarters, Belgrade Cooperative, Post office, Paper Mill) as contributions in kind for BWP represent a high disregard by the decision-making bodies (the Government) for what should be cultural heritage of national importance (**?**).

All measures, incentives, instruments and mechanisms put in place to enable a smooth path for the BWP epitomize **the lack of political dialogue and consensus** on what the public interest is and what the modalities to achieve it are VujosevicEtAl.2010b. As an expert explained, people in Serbia and Belgrade do not trust community actions and bottom-up engagement, because, as an impulse inherited from socialism, they expect the authorities to organize them (Interview X). Jumping from socialism into neoliberalism and wild capitalism, which highly value the conflict of interests and competition, the citizens are introduced into democratic procedures with nominal equity but with no measures

15”the biggest shopping mall in the Balkans” (**?**)

and means of participation and cooperation, the expert further explained (Interview X). In such circumstances citizens are resigned and passive, so that voting has become the only act of participation in Serbia, he concluded (Interview X).

**Non-transparency and low communication** in and around the BWP have led to social exclusion and misinformation of the general public (Questionnaire X) Citizens, independent and local experts, media and civil society, namely the broad public and the representatives of the public interest in general, were not informed adequately and on time about what was happening, What is more, they were not explicitly warned about the actions and consequences and generally were excluded from all planning phases (**?**). It is not surprising at all that several actions in particular (signing the contract between the RS and the investor; the unclear circumstance of the night terrain clearance in Savamala, setting up legal processes against the media workers who reported on the phantom demolitions for the BWP) were followed by protests by the civil sector and thousands of citizens in Belgrade (**??**).

The most disastrous effects came from **the systematic exclusion of local experts**. Being bluntly skipped in the strategic and planning phases of the project, the educated public, professional and expert organisations and individuals loudly advocated against various aspects of the projects and the legal and planning adaptations and changes that accompanied it (**?**; **?**; **?**; **?**). Even though there were multiple competitions, analysis and studies that aimed to optimize the urban design solution for the Sava Amphiteatre and the pertaining waterfront, none of them were taken into account in the preparatory phase of the BWP (**?**). Not only was that vast amount of effort and solution framing wasted, but the BWP is also under threat to entail the exact conflicts and construction deadlocks already predicted in the that documentation (i.e. difficulty of construction on the wetland, threats of flooding because of the low ground level of the Sava waterfront etc.) (**?**).

The National Anti-Corruption Agency in its report on the 2013-2018 period presented detailed analysis of the BWP and the corresponding regulatory framework adaptations. All the ambiguities, biases. flaws and deviations in official procedures and documents and in the work of institutions were analysed by the multidisciplinary expert team and elaborated and precisely referenced in 70 pages of text (**?**).

Apart from the various documents analysing and critisizing the whereabouts of the project by the civic sector (wth the NDVBG in front) (**?**), others raised their voices against the project, including the independent (**?**) and international media (**?**) and the professional organisations of architects (**?**). The Association of Serbian Architects (ASA) officially published two declarations against the BWP. The Association of Belgrade Architects (DAB) also reacted and officially filed complaints against the BWPSPSP and against the changes and adaptations of GUP 2021 in favour of the BWP (**?**).

Finally, the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (SANU) published voluminous documents with complaints and suggestions concerning this new Spatial Plan for Special Purpose Area. The document maintained a neutral tone and the authors tried to substantiate their arguments by elaborating on the issues of: (o) the adequacy of the area for special purposes plan and the planning and legal basis for such attribution; (o) the reliability of the 3D model; (o) the subordinate function of local institutions; (o) the methods, measures and instruments of planning at play; (o) capital investment and infrastructural design solutions; (o) the distribution and choice of urban functions for the area; and (o) the choice of the implementation instruments, among others (**?**). However, according to several informants, this harsh criticism was diluted in the individual engagement of professionals and experts when they were directly, openly confronted by the political authorities or when they were offered official engagements (Interview X,Y)

Away from its broad consequences at the national and city level, the BWP substantially **changed the atmosphere** in Savamala and the social structure of people now present there (Interview X). Bicycle paths are gone or re-routed and the way from the city center to Ada Ciganlija is not straight forward anymore. The urban poor are evicted and their shabby, partly illegal structures are replaced with a big, muddy construction site. Even tourists, when they inquire and are informed of all these circumstances become affected by the corrupt project and instinctively build a hostile attitude towards it (Interview X). No information about what is going on and what is going to happen is reported as a problem especially for local entrepreneurs (Interview X). Hitherto, the toll of the BWP is that it ruined a lot, created insecurity, covered the project with a veil of obscurity and secrecy, made things hard for local businesses and forcing them to decide whether to move or to stay (Interview X). In sum, the BWP is not only the creator of conflicts, but a sort of inherit conflict in itself. Consequently, the greatest fear of all is that the project will never finish, and the situation may entail enduring aggravated urban conflict at a city scale and seal the fate of Savamala for many years.

### ”However, the biggest urban conflict of all is such that actually certain people (”those close to the authorities and the investor”, speculated an informant) take advantage of the situation (renovating facades, renting places, even the City architect has a bar in Savamala) while the others are under constant threat of eviction and their business plans and projects are consequently abode and at risk.” Interview X

* 1. **Agent Preferences: Scope and Operationality**

Contextual analysis of the social circumstances in Savamala has shown that the contextual capital, which was identified therein, has always been a driver of top-down propositions and solutions for the Sava amphiteatre and Sava waterfront. However, in recent years, it has also been gradually attracting a number of small-scale civil initiatives and creative services to settle in Savamala (**?**). Only later, and independently, did the attractiveness of the waterfront bring a very powerful international actor to the neighbourhood. The links to high political structures enabled tremendous changes to the regulatory framework. The negligible and violent attitude of the dominant and powerful actor new to the context in Serbia and Savamala was later the main source of local conflicts.

Historically speaking several important characteristics have been continually developed and finally escalated in recent transition years in Serbia (Section 2.3.1; Section 4.1.1). They have influenced the distribution of urban conflicts and management of contextual resources during the different periods through (Figure 1) (**?**; **?**; **?**; **?**): (a) restricted and ideologically-framed civil rights, (b) state control over capital areas, resources and infrastructure, (c) a top-down approach to spatial and social development and renovation and revitalization, (d) public ownership of land and building stock, (e) hybrid market circumstances, (f) and societal self-management planning

The antagonistic societal values hidden within the political background of the issues in practice heavily endangered the legitimacy, contents, and procedures regarding the space management (**?**). The authority of law and traditional social rules are left in limbo through newly generated distortions in the power - knowledge - action triangle (**?**). In the broader social and spatial context of Belgrade, this meant a contradictory and inconsistent manner of city branding and urban management (**?**).

Reduced to the neighbourhood level, these circumstances made Savamala a scaled example of the pre-socialist material legacy, the socialist cultural and societal matrix, a transitional reality and a condensed case of multi-faceted circumstances of post-socialist urban development (**?**. The extreme variations in societal circumstances to which the regulatory framework and planning practice should respond offer rich opportunities to observe the distribution of decisions from top-down and from outside-in (**?**). Bearing this in mind, Savamala is a good illustration of the changing political and socio-economic circumstances, including both the challenges and traumas from the recent turbulent history (Chapter 4) and the long term social values and mentality (**?**).16

Based on the previous analyses *{*historical/contextual (Chapter 4), actor-network (Chapter 5) and object-relations (Section 6.1)*}*, the therein aggregated urban agency is retained in the layers of urban decision-making and disseminated through the networks of influence (national, city, local). In this respect, it has been noted that urban agency is distributed among various and dispersed elements, but several agents exceed and overtake the direction of contextual elements and relations.

16As mentioned previously in this chapter, under mentality, the author alludes to poverty, sharp social, cultural and ideological differences, inheritance and the influence of nationalism, socialism and political religion, an undeveloped or inappropriately developed attitude towards capital investments and infrastructure development (ibid.).

The most influential top-down agents are: (1) The Ministry of Construction, Urbanism and Infrastructure (MCUI), (2) Belgrade General Urban Plan 2021 (GUP BGD 2021), (3) Belgrade Waterfront Spatial Plan for Special Purpose Area (BWPSPSP), (4) City architects (CA), (5) Urban Planning Institute (UPI), (6) the City mayor (CM), (7) Lex specialis (LS), (8) The Republic Agency for Spatial Planning (RASP), (9) The Prime Minister (PM), (10) Planning and Construction Act (PCA), (11) Belgrade Urban Development Strategy (BUDS).

As follows, the agents of investor-based real estate transformations are human actors assembled around (12) the Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP). Moreover, Savamala’s recently established hotbed of creativity and participation of national importance and the main protagonist of bottom-up participatory activities are also protagonists at the local scene: (13) the cultural centre ”Kulturni Centar Grad” (KC Grad), (14) the Old Depository in Kraljevica Marka Street (MKM), (15) Mikser multidisciplinary platform, (16) Nova Iskra Design Incubator, (17) the Urban Incubator Belgrade project (UIB), (18) the Ministry of Space Collective (MSC), (19) ”Ne da(vi)mo Beograd” initiative [Don’t drown Belgrade] (NDVBGD), (20) ”My Piece of Savamala” participatory urban design workshop, (21) ”The Game of Savamala” - participatory urban planning workshop, (22) ”Savamala, a Place for Making” participatory project, (23) ”Streets for Cyclists” NGO, (24) and the Common space at Kraljevica Marka 8 (KM8).

Agent preferences are defined in connection to their relationality towards the contextual resources, social practices and urban conflicts figuring in Savamala and the social artifacts they are influenced by or they have influence on. In this manner, we become aware of their field of maneuvers in Savamala. In order to identify and elaborate how urban planning, real estate interests and participatory activities influence urban development in Savamala, it is essential to translate these qualitative categories into factors which might denote a positive impetus.

Accordingly, with regards to the definition of urbanity in this research (Section 2.1.5), it may be concluded that contextual resources, either spatial or social, are the attraction factors that make Savamala a neighbourhood saturated with different actors and interests. Based on our qualitative research on Savamala, the most prominent aspects in direct correlation with agent functioning at the local level are: (o) political (participation, transparency, and the institutionalization of culture), (o) economic (public funding), and (o) cultural (global flows of ideas, trends, information and knowledge). Consequently, the following clusters of resources, conflicts and practices have recognized (Figure 4):

* + - **Spatial capacities (SC)**: (1.1) accessibility; (1.2) central position in the city; (1.3) brownfield area; (1.4) architectural diversity; (1.5) proximity of the river; (1.6) deteriorating area; (1.7) green area; (1.8) waterfront area; (1.9) recreation area; (1.10) empty plots.
    - **Social potentials (SP)**: (2.1) lack of private interests before 2012; (2.2) cultural heritage; (2.3) social diversity; (2.4) aroused interest for this neighbourhood from cultural and artistic groups, individuals and organisations; (2.5) historical trade and artisanal area - traditional crafts; (2.6) creative cluster; (2.7) participative and self- organisational initiatives; (2.8) small commercial area; (2.9) underdeveloped area; (2.10) diversity of interests and power poles in the area; (2.11) educative initiatives.
    - **Urban conflicts (UC)**: (3.1) disintegration of heritage; (3.2) lack of systematic investments in construction industry (debt crisis 2008-2012); (3.3) lack of data about the state of physical structures; (3.4) lack of data on the social structure in the neighbourhood; (3.5) attractive location for private investments; (3.6) poor population, squatters and marginalized groups in the area; (3.7) dominance of profit-oriented activities from 2014 onward; (3.8) property issues;
    - **Social practices (UP)**: (4.1) support of urban related activities (urban design and public participation); (4.2) support design activities (interior, fashion, graphic), art, culture, education on the city level; (4.3) translation of global cultural trends into local and regional practices; (4.4) design, communication and creative industry activities in Belgrade; (4.5) local and global economy trends in the area; (4.6) develop waterfront recreation area; (4.7) sustainable transport (cycling); (4.8) technical planning activity; (4.9) land management.

The data in (Table X) show how different agents opt for these contextual resources, urban conflicts and social practices in Savamala and what the relation is between the decision-making layer (Section 4.2) they represent, their actor nature (Section 5.1) and these preferences.

## Civil and Creative Articulation of Agents

Speaking chronologically about this aggregation of urban agency in Savamala, the so-called ”bottom-up activities” are the first to revive the image and the role of this neighbourhood at the city and national scale and beyond (Section 4.2.3).

The very first bottom-up activity in Savamala was the establishment of the MKM cultural space in 2007. However, the intensive aggregation of participatory activities started when KC Grad gained an abandoned building in Brace Krsmanovic street for their cultural activities in 2009. Mikser House (MH) was officially opened in April 2013, while the Mikser Festival moved to Savamala in 2012. Before that, the MH building served the festival in 2012 and was occasionally used for exhibitions and markets immediately prior to the opening (Interview X).

Beforehand, the premises of MH had been a warehouse and a garage used by the current owner, who bought it during the mass privatization initiatives after the 2000 regime change (Interview X). With other cultural activities coming from the Goethe institute initiative, moving into Savamala exploded at the end of 2013. This condensed interaction between urban spaces and civic life lasted for around two years (Figure X).

The instigator for the choice of Savamala may therefore primarily be its location and the availability of affordable places for these activities. However, the further concentration of similar activities was based on the social potential and appeal generated with these first cultural forerunners. Finally, the settling of a significant number of commercial activities (clubs, cafés, restaurants) was incited by both spatial and the recently added social quality of the neighbourhood (Interview X).

As the cultural, artistic and educational activities continued to settle there, the neighbourhood started to gain the attention of the other top-down (municipality) and international actors (foreign embassies, cultural centers, formal and informal institutions), but with the very limited actual involvement of local citizens (Interview X; Workshop 1). Therefore, for further explanations, the focus for the most part shifted to influential public and private organisations involved in these civil initiatives.

With the entrance of top-down and outside-in actors to the local scene, the issue of funding appears as an important distributive factor. Namely, several of these agents have an unclear and non-transparent funding structure - while they receive some public funding (usually from the municipality and foreign funds), they are also partly profit-oriented (KC Grad, MH) and incorporate profitable services (café-bars, shopping areas, concerts, exhibitions and other lucrative events/activities). Nova Iskra is the only explicit privately-based organisation. However, there are others with transparent financial schemes and crowd- sourcing attempts (NDVBGD). 17

Above all, the exploitation of Savamala’s contextual capital at the international level is based on the recently attractive issue of creative industry and its economic potential (**?**). The Goethe Institute officially emphasizes the focus on urban development (especially the fields of architecture, culture, urban planning, public space, public participation, urban art) in their programmed activities (**?**). In collaboration with motherland universities, international stakeholders (i.e. other cultural centers) and local actors, they promote this creativity as an asset for city branding across the transitional and developing countries (Hamburg, the Baltic region, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Vietnam) (**?**).

In the local context, the targeted audiences are at all levels of decision-making: policy makers, professionals, scientists, artists, NGOs, and the general public (**?**). In this respect,

17The data on gains and spendings are presented in detail on their website **?**.

they also touch upon delicate social issues and address urban planning and research, by asking questions (such as who owns the city, who creates the city, what is a good city) and producing the documentation on what is achievable based on their urban interventions in developed cities (**?**). By promoting practice-led urban research, these institutions also foster their influence on various local contexts around the world. While the creative economy is an important source of income in Germany (**?**), it is also a product for exportation

through such initiatives. 18

Contextual resources in Savamala were recognized and used by these civil and creative agents, but it must be clear that the ideas and organisational initiative did not come from the ground up. The torrent of cultural and participatory activities was instigated from the outside, even though they were seen as an asset for economic upgrading and local recovery (**?**).

The consequences of civil-oriented catalysis of the Savamala contextual capital under the watchful eye of international cultural organisations and actors, formed in Savamala what everywhere else in the world is a creative sector and urban creative hub: co-working spaces, initiatives of local cooperation (crowdsourcing of activities, open sourcing for vacant self- organized spaces and industrial lots, creative commons, vacant industrial lots), and visibility at the city, national and international scenes.

According to the experiences of the developed cities, this might be the long awaited impulse for the diversification of the social power structure and cultural development (Workshop 1). Furthermore, following the nature of these agents, the researcher apprehended that the cultural and artistic activities in Savamala do not belong to the national cultural and artistic frameworks and programmes. Having said that, 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.

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. 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. However, those that include profit converge more to social practices that maintain the current urban order. Consequently, these agents refer to their

18In different countries around the world, through similar activities, the Goethe Institute also introduces German scientific and creative actors (universities, collectives, NGOs, freelance individuals and small enterprises) into new markets (**?**).

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.

## Top-down Technocratic Approach to Space

The socialist tradition of planning as a technical activity (**?**), results in having documents often detached from the actual space, users, architects and designers who actually intervene in reality. On the other hand, laws and bylaws give orders not recommendations, and that is also the case with laws on spatial and urban planning and construction.

In the context of Belgrade, the Urban Planning Institute (UPI), according to law, receives the strategic tasks concerning urban development (**?**). Therefore, UPI represents the city authorities in the planning process through drafting bodies, inspections and commissions (Interview X). While the research and professional education are not requested or supported by the authorities, as a professional institution, UPI collaborates with European planning bodies and local educational institutions, but these happen rather on a personal basis than as an official, institutional activity (Interview X).

However, the underdeveloped legal framework and political party power over the social domain allow for private and group interests to rule the actions of planners (**?**). In this manner, planning bodies do not actually relate to the real context and contextual resources, but engage only in reproduction of the current social order (social practices) by the application of minimum urban standards (ibid.) or engender new urban conflicts by succumbing to the investors’ dictate and political pressure (Workshop 1).

Planners are actually deprived of dignity and professional authority, and the low capacity of their actions is characterized also by the lack of overall planning principles (**?**). In the case of public participation and public hearing, the fear of defending the public interest marks the behaviour of planners (Workshop 1).

The Planning and Construction Act (PCA) prescribes that planners have to consult everybody: public power holders (nosioce javnih ovlascenja) and the general public through public hearings (one in an early planning phase and the other for the draft of the plan) (**?**). The public hearing is the moment when conflicts come out, should be dealt with and, in the end, all the solutions must be argumented (Interview X). Taking into account recent experience with the Amendments to the PCA and the adoption of BWPSPSP (**?**), public participation was rather a farce and public hearings were a pure formality with obvious and maybe even illegitimate disregard for negative comments (Workshop 1).

This extensive weakness of the urban planning regulatory framework was evident from the blurred transition of old, socialist institutions into neoliberal ones, with the conversion of political capital into economic ones (**?**). In Serbia, wealth and power are

concentrated in the hands of political and economic actors. While the politicians are focused on the image of the Serbian capital in the world and their short-lived success in the elections (Interview X), private investors dominate Belgrade’s urban development and are solely interested in construction land, especially that of the capital. As the most valuable part of the territorial capital of the country, the land market in Belgrade has not yet been regulated according to market principles and therefore has had the land on offer below its market value (**?**; **?**).

### ”The most dramatic problems of Belgrade’s urban development during the last 15 years, in the planners’ views, were linked to the pervasiveness of uncontrolled and illegal development. In the city, such patterns of development led to the deconstruction of its urbanity and the abuse of its public spaces.” citeVujovicAndPetrovic2007

* + 1. **Belgrade Waterfront Whereabouts**

Current large-scale redevelopment of the Sava Waterfront is commissioned to privileged foreign and domestic developers (Workshop 1), according to the schemes mentioned above (Section 6.1.2). The simple calculation is such that they received a good bargain from the Serbian authorities for the highly profitable urban land in the capital city (**?**). Even though Serbian tycoons had managed before to secure similar successful investments (**?**), experts say that the limited financial capacity of the state and the current financial crisis have contributed to urgent needs for real estate investments after its sudden halt in 2010 (**?**).

The Belgrade Waterfront Project (BWP) is a typical megaproject (MP) and a flagship of the dominance of the neoliberal doctrine in the Serbian context (**?**). A widely known hypothesis states that the success of a MP depends on its appreciation of the local historical and current context, its ability to respond to the contrasting aims and objectives and the integration of communities and localities involved (**?**).

However, what happened in the case of the BWP was quite the opposite, and it more closely corresponds to a Machiavellian formula for a MP’s roll-out with under-estimated costs, over-estimated revenues, undervalued environmental impacts and exaggerated developmental effects (**?**: 18).

The situation in Belgrade (and Savamala) can be rather explained as a classic case of investor urbanism with powerful political figures having a fetish for investments, a powerful financial investor and a shiny, faulty 3D model - as an interviewed expert explained (Interview X). Interestingly, another explained that having the actual model made all the socio-spatial faults of the project visible 19 (Interview X) And, without a doubt, the BWP is the instigator of a plethora of urban conflicts within Savamala (Interview X).

19Contrary to this, usually urban plans in Serbia have no spatial interpretations so that their flaws and conflicts stayed hidden, especially for design and construction professionals and citizens (Interview X).

A very important legal precondition for the realization and distribution of benefits within the BWP was a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) 20 between the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade Waterfront Capital Investment LLC, Beograd na vodi, d.o.o. and Al Maabar International Investment LLC 21 (UAE). The agreement was signed in April 2015 and publicly announced on the website of the Serbian Government five months later (September 2015). The consequences for Serbian society are also as follows (Workshop 1; **?**): (a) prompt law and urban regulation changes (Lex specialis, GUP 2021); (b) cultural patrimony and architectural heritage contributed without financial benefits,; (c) exemption from any legal duty (Law on Applying Agreement on Cooperation Between Serbia and the Emirates); (d) protected assets provided for the private developer (BWPSPSP); (e) state aid and expropriation for elite-housing and commercial spaces (Lex specialis), (f) and lease of public land without a fee. Conversely, the investor does not have to wait for construction to end and wait for the future gentrification of the entire area to make a profit; he gains that profit easily with minimum investment and with the minimal realization of the plan/agreement (Interview X).

As worldwide examples show, urban decision-making on MPs is often exclusive with an ex post integration into planning documents (**??**) and with possible serious legal and ethical issues (**?**; **?**). In this case, the BWPSPSP also allows the Serbian Government currently in power to gain the exclusive right to act in the center of Belgrade (Interview X). Such legal adaptations weaken the local authorities by imposing orders from the national level and the top-down pressure to realize projects with neither interference nor objection (Workshop 1).

In sum, there are no local power poles or real decision makers in Savamala, and everything is grounded upon the powerful, centralized nation state (Questionnaire X). Moreover, the BWP exemplifies the closed wheel of decision-making procedures circumscribing political and economic actors into an interconnected and interdependent system.

### ”Belgrade stepping into neoliberal trends, disregarding the relevant planning documents and causing them to change, lacking long term vision.”

**?**

20While the shares of profit are: 32% for Serbia and 68% for the UAE partner (**??**), the actual division of costs according to the agreement is estimated as fully reversed (there are unofficial estimations that 88% to even 98% of invested funds are to be borne by the Republic of Serbia).

21The data on this company owned by the investor are officially proclaimed secret by the Commission

for Protection of Competition. According to online data, the company was licensed in 2015 with 0 money share and with a limited license for 1 year (**?**).

# 6.3 Conclusion

This chapter displays the MAS analysis of the current urban reality of Savamala. It presents the analysis of urban agency in terms of elements and relations. The terminology of the MAS method is contextualized through the story of local contextual resources, social practices and urban conflicts. Such a structuralization of elements and events in Savamala sheds new light on the analysed actors and their networks (Chapter 5). The aggregation of agent preferences summarizes the socio-spatial patterns identified in Savamala. Finally, setting up the relations of urban agency and the identified resources, practices and conflicts offers an explanation of its dynamics within the scope of urban decision-making layers.

In theoretical terms, the interaction of urban agency with contextual elements and in contextual relations defines urbanity (Section 2.1.5) - the level of urbanity in Savamala is created from the fluctuating relationship between the agency and the context. While the initial imbalance produced in 2011-2014 worked pro social potentials and the activation of spatial capacities toward a vivid and diverse urban life, the intensive aggregation of urban conflicts from 2014 onward proved to be the other way around. There is a growing unification of functions and activities in Savamala, while civil life has been slowly retreating and moving away. Conversely, the waterfront area is growing at a stable pace with architectural mastodons bringing in a new, modern architectural front to the historical hinterland. The level of urbanity in Savamala seems to trot up and down various scales while its contextual elements and relations are exposed to the battlefield of multiple human and non-human agents.

Following the operationalization of agents and their preferences presented in this chap- ter, several causal relations on the current circumstances in Savamala become conspicuous. The social and spatial capital of Savamala were accentuated and activated through these abundant civic and creative initiatives. These initiatives responded to global trends and the urgent need for social and cultural spaces in the city. However, this alternative status of Savamala has insurmountable limitations - the obstruction and neglect from the State. Thus, this relationship between alternative culture and institutions, instead of becoming a harmonized practice, has germinated into an urban conflict generator.

Moreover, this theme park narrative of the BWP’s projected future, the disastrous estimations of the obligations for Serbia and the secretive and murky circumstances of its current realization is an immense and even bigger source of urban conflict and a kind of exploitative mechanism for local capacities and potentials. In these circumstances, urban planning institutions and documentations appear passive and figure only as an instrument of power and interest, replicating thusly either the practices or the conflicts at play.

The identification of agent preferences through the links between the agents/actors and the context work out the current state of urban dynamics in Savamala. However,

as urban dynamics allude simultaneouusly to the continuous changes and constitutions of new realities and urban development prospects, the aggregation of agents’ preferences and the structure of their agents’ nature evolve into a dynamic category forming agent behaviour. The consequences of this agent behaviour are actually the forces of maintenance, transformation and/or change processes of an urban system. The proposed hybrid method that combines MAS and ANT could serve for setting up an iterative procedure that refers to urban development in terms of urban system transitions. Such a narrative may provide a framework to reframe urban complexity and to capture urban dynamics at the neighbourhood level.