



Article

Culture-Led Urban Development vs. Capital-Led Colonization of Urban Space: Savamala—End of Story?

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Received: 28 June 2020; Accepted: 3 August 2020; Published: 6 August 2020



Abstract: The city quarter of Savamala, as an integral part of Belgrade, has had a very turbulent development path during the last two centuries. This path included several ups and downs, and culminated in tension over the last decade. Savamala fell into silent oblivion in the 20th century, but succeeded in re-emerging into the focus of the public and interest groups, mainly due to the cultural milieu that developed in this area at the beginning of the 21st century. The cultural vibes of the city quarter attracted various urban actors, who created a new image of Savamala. Eventually, cultural functions started to fade; however, after several years and through vague political decisions, Savamala became the part of the largest construction site in Belgrade, the Belgrade Waterfront. This article highlights the development of Savamala in the 2010s—from a forgotten city quarter to a rising cultural quarter and finally to the ‘future centre of the city’. This analysis shows the participation of different stakeholders at different stages of development (their influence, power levels, and the mechanisms they used), as well as the footprints that urban development left in the quarter.

Keywords: cultural quarter; artists; creative economy; urban regeneration; Savamala; Belgrade; Belgrade Waterfront

1. Introduction

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe entered the complex process of political and economic transition. Political and economic systems had to be transformed from one-party to democratic, as well as from a planned economy to a free-market economy. Urban transition followed these transformations [1].

Post-socialist transition in the ex-Yugoslavian states had to be postponed as a result of the civil war and disintegration of the state. Serbia particularly entered a post-socialist transition in 2000 after a ‘democratic revolution’, which happened after a decade marked by armed conflicts and international economic and political embargo. Such development initiated specific frames for social and economic [2], and finally urban development [3].

The Serbian capital, Belgrade, is the biggest urban centre of the country, as well as its political and economic centre. Its urban development is driven by turbulent historical processes in Serbia and ex-Yugoslavia. The urban tissue of Belgrade and its city quarters preserve the footprints that those processes have left, but are still a playground for new urban interventions.

Savamala is the urban neighbourhood of Belgrade, which has garnered significant attention from the general public, academia, political actors, and media during the last decade. Its urban development in the second decade of the 21st century was very intriguing and versatile, while numerous changes were compressed on a relatively small space. Therefore, the aim of this article is to depict and reflect that development, and to provide an analysis from different perspectives. Expectedly, such analysis

will provide insight into the contemporary and still ongoing urban transformation in the city, and will crystalize the forces lying behind it.

Recent urban transformation in Savamala was the focus of different studies [4–6], and was mainly led by cultural activities [7–9]. Culture and artistic activities are capable of initiating new urban dynamics [10] and reviving the city neighbourhoods [11]. Hence, cultural-led development, and particularly the dynamics that have followed, are the initial focus of this article. Secondly, this article also aims to analyse the development of the Belgrade Waterfront, a megaproject which raised considerable attention among citizens, policy makers, experts, media, and academia in the last several years [12–16]. Nevertheless, this megaproject does not represent the natural continuation of urban development, but powerfully influences the future development of Savamala, and eventually the entire urban region of Belgrade.

This research relies on already established concepts in urban studies, in order to detect their interrelation in a specific social geographic setting, and it derives tendencies valid not only for Savamala and Belgrade, but also for other urban neighbourhoods and regions that are influenced by similar urban development drivers. It contributes to the academic discussion about urban development in cities of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, and provides insight into the urban dynamics of the particular neighbourhood of one post-socialist capital.

The article is based on results achieved through ethnographic fieldwork and multiple research visits. Research fieldwork in October 2013 (with a group of professors and students of geography from the University of Belgrade and the University of Bamberg) provided initial insight into the problematics through field observations, conversations with actors in Savamala's urban development and discussions with colleagues. In July 2014, the author visited an open presentation of the Belgrade Waterfront project. A deeper understanding of development was achieved through eight semi-structured depth-in interviews in May 2015. Six of the interviews were conducted with representatives of the cultural and creative organizations in Savamala, while two interviews were conducted with representatives of the local municipality government. The research results were also achieved through fieldwork (observations, taking photographs, mapping) in August 2015, June 2016, and June 2020. Additional information regarding cultural development in Savamala, as well as the Belgrade Waterfront project, was obtained from existing academic literature, but also from press and online sources. These sources were important, keeping the pace of changes in Savamala in mind.

2. Recent Urban Development and the Role of the Cultural and Creative Activities

De-industrialization in the West during the 1960s and 1970s caused economic restructuring [17], but also the restructuring of urban regions when numerous vast spaces around the US and the Europe appeared [18]. Similar phenomena happened in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe after the fall of socialism [19]. In such altered urban environments, different economic and social groups were searching for favourable urban environments for their activities. Among them were also artists, cultural activists, and other creative groups [20–23]. Culture was seen by some local communities as the substitute for the lost factories and warehouses, as well as a creator of a new attractive urban image [24] (p. 640).

Discussions that followed such urban development brought into focus new concepts, such as creative city [25] and creative class [26]. Creative class consists of a wide pallet of professions, and it is questionable if some of them should be on the list [27]. It was clear that artists have different urban practices and generate an impact compared to the rest of the creative class [28]. Artist influence on local development is limited to specific industries, and is focused on the context of urban regions [29]. Generally, creativity and creative production (and consumption) with all its complexity is tightly related to the urban context [30].

Urban neighbourhood is a usual term for spatial units, where frequent face-to-face interactions and personal contacts occur among people [31] (p. 62). Each neighbourhood still has specific socioeconomic, physical, and social structures [32], which build a unique environment. Artistic and cultural activities

have shaped many urban neighbourhoods around the world in the last few decades. Still, not every urban environment is supportive to cultural development [33], since such development needs a specific framework embodied in creative scenes and creative milieus. Creative scenes are informal social constructions, and represent preconditions for the formation of creative milieus [34]. Creative milieus are places with certain soft and hard infrastructures for generating ideas and inventions [25] (p. 20).

City quarters with rich historical heritage can spontaneously attract artists, and therefore gradually transform into cultural quarters, while some city quarters are the result of policy mechanisms for urban regeneration [35]. Cultural quarters are parts of the city with a focus on cultural and artistic activities [36]. There is a distinction between cultural and creative quarters. Cultural quarters indicate a focus on local development, preservation, promoting identity, and local/non-for-profit culture, while creative quarters are more business oriented [33].

There is an extensive stock of literature researching the connection between artists and gentrification [37–41]. Even though artistic-led development often leads to neighbourhood gentrification, they are not to blame for that [28] (p. 1937). Gentrification was originally perceived as a process of social and aesthetical change to districts, where working-class groups were displaced by affluent middle-class groups [42]. It can also be observed as “social and spatial manifestation of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial urban economy based on financial, business and creative services” [43] (p. 2402). Gentrification developed from occasional phenomena in North America, Western Europe, or Australia, to a ‘global urban strategy’ of neoliberal urbanism [44].

Cultural quarters are prone to support the development of consumption spaces such as cafes, clubs, art and entertainment sites, or street markets [45]. Different forms of entrepreneurship and business follow cultural development, such as those obviously connected to the culture [34], and promoting cultural values [46]. They built networks with other entrepreneurs and interconnected with the local environment [47]. Cultural quarters also support the development of other (non-cultural) businesses, thereby developing mixed-use areas [45,48,49]. The expansion of a night-time economy in the cultural quarters is also evident [50].

Post-socialist urban development followed urban development from the West, with similar processes, but in different social geographic frameworks and different urban legacies, and therefore, with different outcomes [51]. Transition to democracy, market economy, and to a decentralized system of governance drove urban changes, especially economic and social changes, changes in urban governance, and spatial changes [52]. Accordingly, major trends in the post-socialist city are connected to globalization and economic restructuring, social differentiation, new institutional contexts of urban development, as well as spatial restructuring [53]. Additionally, there is a transformation of aesthetical character by pluralism and importation of Western styles, as well as post-modernism and the ‘Las-Vegas-ization’ of built environments [54] (p. 38). Recent literature regarding post-socialist urban development shows that urban dynamics are the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic and political factors [55]. The current urban development of post-socialist cities is the result of intertwining economic, cultural, and political forces [56]. It is therefore important to consider changes on different levels, the heterogeneity of those changes, and the connection between the processes and forces that influence the transformation of post-socialist cities.

Cultural policy was not the focus of the policy makers in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe during the transitional period [57] (p. 106). Similar situations were evident in Serbia also [58]. Therefore, urban creativity developed at the beginning of the transitional period spontaneously, and without notable supporting mechanisms and policies [59] (p. 32).

Insisting on urban creativity, culture development and art promotion was one of the concepts in post-industrial transformation, and hence also in the post-socialist cities when distinguishing themselves from the dominant industrial legacy and changing their image in a globalized world. In some of the cities, art and culture became one of the leading urban development drivers [60]. Any urban development, and so culture-led development, is initiated by some type of governance. Three main types of governance are self-governance, co-governance, and hierarchical governance [61,62].

While self-governance represents bottom-up approaches and cooperation networks without (or with minimal) support of the government, hierarchical governance is a top-down governance where the government has crucial influence on the governance process. Co-governance is a type of governance that includes local groups and governmental structures on a roughly equal basis. Hierarchical and self-governance often lead to a certain type of co-governance [63]. Creative economy and artistic and culture-led urban development are not susceptible to top-down governance, due to its flexible nature [64]. However, megaprojects in transitional societies are susceptible to top-down governance and a prominent role of the national state [65].

Gentrification was not a major factor, at least in the initial transformational phases of the post-socialist cities [66]. There are two possibilities of how the development of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern cities should be observed: (1) on one hand, it is a catch-up process where gentrification eventually comes as an inevitable process or (2) on the other hand, it is through the lances of idiosyncrasies of a local context, such as specifics of privatization and restitution, regulation frameworks, housing culture, and other concepts [67]. Post-socialist urban transformation developed different modes of gentrification, which can be typologically classified into early-stage gentrification, classic gentrification, super-gentrification, and special forms of gentrification [68]. Early-stage gentrification documented in some Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern cities is driven by artists, students, or by the arrival of young and childless early professionals, while classic gentrification was evident in smaller urban areas, and is not a dominant phenomenon. Super-gentrification includes newcomers with very high income and implies new-built variants. Because of the special social-economic and political framework in the countries of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, every type of gentrification vastly differs compared to the Western models. It is still questionable in some cases, if physical and social upgrades can be immediately labelled as gentrification and define *gentrifiers* in the Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern urban framework [69]. Post-socialist development varies by region, and levels of informality in parts of the Balkans resemble to the Global South more than Western Europe [70] (p. 4). State-led gentrification in the Global South is often connected to large, new building projects, the demolition of previously existing buildings, and the extremely changed morphological and social structures of the cities [71] (p. 134).

3. Belgrade and Savamala—A Brief Overview

Complex social, economic, and political changes in the last two centuries formed an urban tissue of Belgrade and left different footprints in its neighbourhoods. During the 19th century, Belgrade was a bordering town between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, until the definite liberation from Ottomans and Serbian independence in 1878. At the beginning of the 20th century, Belgrade had a population of around 90,000 [72] (p. 66), was the capital of a young, independent Serbian state, and later became the capital of the newly formed Yugoslav Kingdom. During the Second World War, the city suffered severe devastation. After the war, it became the capital of socialist Yugoslavia, while the population growth and the development of the city was triggered by the process of industrialization [73]. Today, Belgrade is one of the largest urban centres of South-Eastern Europa, with a population of around 1.7 million.

Savamala is one of Belgrade's neighbourhoods located on the downtown's outskirts, on the right bank of the Sava River, and just before its confluence with the Danube (Figure 1). The mentioning of Savamala in different historical contexts indicates the different areas which that neighbourhood covers. Moreover, its boundaries are often left open to interpretation [74]. Parts of the Savamala neighbourhood that have seen the most cultural activities during the 2010s [8] are taken into account in this research (parts of following streets: Karađorđeva, Braće Krsmanovića, Travnička, Hercegovačka, Marka Kraljevića, Crnogorska, Svetozara Radića, Gavrila Principa, and Koče Popovića) (see Appendix A, Figure A1).



Figure 1. Neighbourhood Savamala and planned area of the Belgrade Waterfront within Belgrade.

Being part of Belgrade for the last two centuries, this neighbourhood witnessed several ups and downs. Savamala was established on the area close the Belgrade Fortress (Kalemegdan), where the previously existing forest was cut [75] (p. 89). In the first half of the 19th century, there were orchards, taverns, and more than a hundred homes [76] (p. 360). Serbian ruler Prince Miloš was personally involved in the promotion of Savamala's development, by inviting craftsmen to settle there in the 1830s [77] (p. 34). As Serbia was in a dependent status to the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 19th century and the Ottoman garrisons stayed in the Belgrade Fortress until 1867 [78] (p. 53), Savamala appeared as the inception of 'Serbian Belgrade'. After the Ottoman Army left Belgrade, and the town was taken over by Serbian rule, Savamala emerged as the informal new centre. By the end of the 19th century, Custom House was built (1835) [79], the port of Belgrade was gaining importance as the Serbian capital was moved to Belgrade (1841), the main railway station started to operate (1884) [80] (p. 29), and one of the first tram lines in Belgrade was established (1894) [81] (p. 231). Newly developed transportation hubs supported the emerging of a trade centre in Savamala [82,83]. Prosperous merchants of the time settled in the neighbourhood and financed the construction of some monumental buildings at the beginning of the 20th century [81,84,85]. Architecture of that time is the testimony of the development of a young Serbian bourgeoisie [86] (p. 25), and shows a turn towards European trends [87]. Successful economy and lively social life created a very vibrant neighbourhood, which continued to be one of the most prosperous parts of Belgrade at the beginning of the 20th century.

After the First World War, a new affluent generation in Belgrade got an opportunity to move their urban focus to some other areas [82] (p. 115). Social structure in Savamala changed, the neighbourhood became overpopulated, and in the 1930s, an average family was living in a one-room house [88] (p. 82). After the Second World War, major rebuilding of the heavily damaged city was necessary. The new socialist government wanted to distinguish itself from previous urban symbols and create new urban symbols that fit their own vision [89,90]. Savamala fell to silent oblivion, and once shining facades started to decline, due to lack of investment in maintenance and restoration [91]. Once vigorous streets became heavy transport corridors. Numerous depots, warehouses, and other industrial facilities were

built in Savamala, and at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, social problems such as crime and prostitution emerged [92] (p. 43).

The right bank of the river Sava and the area south from the Savamala neighbourhood known also as Sava Amphitheatre has been covered by railways since the 1930s [93], and further territorial spreading of the city was therein obstructed. The long-term strategy of urban planners was bringing the city down to the river. The Sava Amphitheatre was considered for decades as one of the main urban assets and potentials of Belgrade, and was the subject of various official urban planning documents [94,95]. Relocating the railways from the river bank has been a topic of debate for decades. During the 1970s, the intention was to save the Sava Amphitheatre from expanding apartment building construction of that time, and to build something “more appropriate” in the following years [94], such as the construction of cultural facilities—opera, museums, galleries, and other public content [96]. Political passivity, changing the urban focus to other city parts, and lack of financial assets were some of the reasons that these projects connected to the Sava’s River bank have not been realized.

The charm of a neglected neighbourhood was recognized by some creative organizations that started to settle in Savamala in 2009. Their ideas, mostly in the cultural and artistic sector, were financially supported by international funds, while municipality leadership was involved in the searching of suitable spaces and offering them to the representatives of the creative sector [8]. Based on international experiences, local government has seen the possibility for creative-led urban regeneration of a decayed neighbourhood. In the following years, creative-led urban regeneration was certainly ongoing. Creative organizations attracted dozens of thousands of visitors with their cultural and artistic programs and actions. Culture and art created a new vibe in the neighbourhood and re-built its image. For decades, the forgotten neighbourhood again became vibrant and a ‘place-to-be’. Cultural-led development in Savamala promoted Belgrade to a possible ‘new Berlin’ [97] (p. 101), as certain parallels could be drawn between the development of Savamala, and culture-led development in worldwide known neighbourhoods of Berlin, such as Kreuzberg and Neukoelln. The culture and creative development of Savamala reached its peak in 2015, when 10 creative and cultural organizations, as well as galleries, were active there [8]. The night-time economy is a usual collateral consequence of creative-led development. The same development occurred in Savamala, where club and bar scenes could also be described as vibrant.

Culture was kind of keeping pace with emerging nightlife in the quarter, and these two segments were mainly developing ‘hand-in-hand’, even though nightlife always held a more influential role. One rising project appeared and immediately placed itself in the spotlight. The Belgrade Waterfront is a megaproject of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in cooperation with the partners from the United Arab Emirates (Eagle Hills real estate investment and development company).

With its political support and marketing potential, the megaproject immediately became a danger for further culture-led development. According to the first plans presented in 2014 (Figure 1), the Belgrade Waterfront should have 2 million square meters of residential and office space, and investment should be worth more than 3 billion dollars [98]. Only parts of the originally presented plan have been realized so far.

4. Discussion

A look back to the last decade in Savamala reveals two processes that dominated the urban development of the quarter. On one hand, there was development on the cultural quarter, and on the other hand, developing of the Belgrade Waterfront project. Both processes have intention to reshape this urban neighbourhood. Still, both processes have their aspirations, and differ particularly in the implementation mechanisms and power levels. Based on the literature connected to (post-socialist) urban development [52], this analysis follows changes on four levels: economic changes; social changes; changes in urban governance; and spatial changes. Such a framework seems suitable for this research, because it offers a multi-layered explanation of dichotomous urban development, and it should emphasize the contrasting nature of the two dominant processes that shaped Savamala (and the

Sava amphitheater) in the previous decade, as well as the footprints they left in urban development. Analysis at these four levels offers the opportunity to understand the comprehensive processes and draw general conclusions.

4.1. Economic Changes

Some general understanding of the Serbian transitional economic path is necessary, in order to establish a framework for understanding how economic changes influenced urban development. The post-socialist transition in Serbia during the 1990s was prevented by complex social, economic, and political reasons; the 2000s can be marked as the start of that process in Serbia. Political pluralism was officially introduced to Serbia at the end of the 1980s, but was not de facto functional. Victory of the “Democratic Opposition” in the 2000 elections signaled the start of actual political pluralism. New elected government stressed privatisation as one of their major goals. Serbia opened it to the world again, and the influences of globalization began to become visible. Some Serbian enterprises have attracted foreign direct investments, while some were left on the transitional windstorm, and had to enter the open market unprepared.

Warehouses in Savamala belonged mostly to companies which can be described as transitional losers. Most of those companies did not adapt to the new circumstances, and their spaces stayed without purpose and prone to oblivion. Abandoned warehouses were renovated by creative and cultural organizations (such as KC Magacin, KC Grad, Mikser House, Nova Iskra), which have brought new life into the whole neighbourhood. Cultural and creative activities, as well as the development of the cultural quarter, had a significant economic impact on the neighbourhood.

Direct economic contribution of cultural and creative organizations was not the most significant result they have provided [9]. General economic indicators, such as turnover, profit, and number of employees, do not render major cultural and creative organisations also as major economic contributors. Most noticeable organizations did not have large profits; the number of their employees varied, and these did not always show a growing trend. Still, typical economic indicators are not sufficient when observing the economic impact that cultural and creative organizations generated.

The success of the cultural and creative organizations attracted thousands of new visitors to the neighbourhood, and therefore, generated the need for additional enterprises and services. The number of bars and clubs in the quarter started to grow rapidly, and finally overcome the number of cultural organizations. Additionally, growing fast food suited to the needs of people after or during entertainment occasions began. However, it is hard to determine the precise economic impact of those additional services, because many of them were not very traceable. Many employees in the bars and clubs had no full-time jobs, or were not officially employed at all. It is furthermore questionable if the total money circulation in the night-time economy was noted. Still, one simple look on the Savamala's streets during the late hours in the mid-2010s showed that nightlife was very active. Again, the growing number of bars and clubs, as well as the fact that some cultural organizations organized very notable entertainment events, displayed the profitability of the night-time economy in Savamala in those days.

On one hand, the cultural and creative development, the development of the night-time economy, and additional services could be observed in a reasonable economic development chain, and to a certain point, these could be viewed as related activities in an economic sense. On the other hand, the Belgrade Waterfront penetrated into the urban development of the area as an unfair competition and invincible rival. While many creative and cultural organisations were financially struggling and fighting for survival on the market, the Belgrade Waterfront project presented itself as a multi-billion project, financed and supported by investors from the United Arab Emirates and by the Serbian state.

4.2. Social Changes

The economic negligence of Savamala at the beginning of the 21st century was followed by social negligence as well. The rise of the creative quarter turned the spotlight to Savamala and automatically supported the regulation of some, but conversely also backed some new social issues.

The spotlight started to turn to the direction of the neighbourhood with the rising number of visitors. Accordingly, social problems such as crime and prostitution began to cease. On the other hand, supporting infrastructure for accelerated transformation was not available. Issues such as rising amounts of solid waste and noise from the newly opened bars and clubs appeared.

Social activities performed by cultural and creative organizations, institutes, and NGOs played a significant role for the neighbourhood's transformation. Different projects were dedicated to the revival of the forgotten Savamala's spirit (such as Urban Incubator: Belgrade project, established by the Goethe Institute Belgrade), as well as re-establishing important historical records and stories. Other projects were turned to the locals and their needs, aiming to preserve Savamala in the hands of people living there. Local organizations showed a humanitarian side at the peak of migrant and refugee crisis in 2015, when they organized helping centres to support the migrants arriving in Belgrade from the Middle East and North Africa.

In the nightlife scene, changes started to happen in the mid-2010s. Clubs that existed in Savamala at the beginning of the revitalization process represented a kind of underground scene of Belgrade. With the development of Savamala, and the rising influence of the night-time economy, new clubs and bars began to settle there. Some newcomers on the nightlife scene maintained mainstream culture and entertainment. Therefore, visitors' structure of Savamala started to change.

Savamala experienced elements of urban regeneration and in such circumstances, gentrification could be expected if Western examples, but also some examples from Central and Eastern Europe [99,100] were followed. The new affluent and wealthy middle class is one of the prerequisites for gentrification and it was not flourishing in Savamala. Even though the attractiveness of the neighbourhood was rising in some segments, Savamala was actually not an attractive place for living with its traffic jams, heavy transport, rising number of visitors mostly looking for entertainment, hostels in residential buildings, and noise during the night hours. Possible gentrification discussion in Savamala should not be addressed as a classic type or Western-type of gentrification. The lack of classic gentrifiers was obvious, and people living in Savamala at the beginning of the artistic and culture-led regeneration were more or less the same people living there during that process.

If the appearance of the Belgrade Waterfront project was a shocking arrival in the economic kind of sense, its social impact can be described as at least as dramatic. By presenting the project as a project of the highest national interest, the government had to undertake extensive preparations for the beginning and the execution of construction work that largely affected the social structure of Savamala. In that sense, dozens of families were evicted from the area because of the construction work without a real housing solution [98]. Upcoming uncertainty critically undermined the foundations of the artistic and culture-led regeneration, as some of its agents decided to leave the neighbourhood, rendering the neighbourhood without some of the most recognizable activities and newly-generated trademarks (Mikser House which left Savamala, Mikser Festival, and several recognizable clubs and bars are the most prominent examples).

The most shocking incident happened during the night between 24th and 25th of April in 2016, when a well-equipped and well-organized group of people demolished one street in Savamala. Police did not react, despite numerous calls and reports by locals. This fact indicates that the demolition was approved by some governmental structures. It turned out that cleared space was necessary for further construction work regarding the Belgrade Waterfront projects. The area was cleared in the following days by the workers of Belgrade's public communal company 'Beograd put'. Even though the demolition was ignored by most of the mainstream media, it aroused public interest and dissatisfaction which was channelled through a series of protests organized by a grassroots organization 'Don't let Belgrade d(r)own' (Serbian: Ne da(vi)mo Beograd).

4.3. Changes in Urban Governance

Previous analyses of social changes in Savamala offer an effective foreword for the changes in urban governance. Urban governance during the socialist era was mostly centralized, and its decentralization is one of the characteristics related to post-socialist transition.

Activities of cultural and creative organisations that settled at the beginning in Savamala were organized and conducted by their management and members, while financial support was provided through various international funds. Popularity of these activities and therefore, the growing popularity of cultural organisations triggered bottom-up artistic and the culture-led urban regeneration of Savamala. Projects from NGOs and cultural institutes (such as Goethe Institute) deepened and expanded the spectrum of the bottom-up regeneration.

At the beginning of the transformation, local government helped cultural and creative organisations to achieve appropriate space (mainly former warehouses), for their activities at appropriate rents. Although not all creative and cultural participants were satisfied with the role of the local government, this role should be recognized as rather positive. From that point of view, artistic and culture-led urban regeneration in Savamala showed elements of co-governance. Higher levels of government did not have significant influence at that point, other than minor financing of creative and cultural organizations through the projects of the Ministry of Culture.

The Belgrade Waterfront project changed that perspective. From the very beginning, it was a project that represented top-down governance. The controversial partnership between the Serbian state and investors from the UAE opened many questions related to financing and designing the project, as well as consequences for the urban development and general society. Even though the project was labelled as the project of highest national significance, it was followed by a lack of transparency. The non-transparent financial structure left the capacity for marking the project as largely public funding of ‘Sultans’ fantasy’ [101], while non-transparent planning and execution marked it as an “investors solution for a project of national significance” [98].

4.4. Spatial Changes

Unlikely in many other urban neighbourhoods of Belgrade, which were mostly devastated during the World Wars, the architectural heritage in Savamala has been rather well preserved. The problem is that it was not conserved thereafter. At the end of the 2000s, many buildings expressed a long-time negligence, and the facades were in extremely bad condition.

Savamala hosted some of the architecturally most notable and monumental buildings of Belgrade, such as the Hotel Bristol, the Belgrade Cooperative building (later Geozavod) [84], Spanish House (see Appendix A, Figure A1), and several former family homes of famous traders and businessmen from the 19th and the beginning of 20th century [81]. The architectural legacy consisted of styles, including Academism, Art Nouveau, Secession, as well as modernistic, romantic, and Neo-Renaissance details.

Diverse experiences showed that neglected space [10], empty sites, and ‘urban wastelands’ [102] with rich historical heritage [35] attracted artists who trigger artistic and culture-led urban regeneration. Similar patterns were revealed in Savamala as well.

Artists and cultural and creative organizations brought a special mood into the neighbourhood, on what was also visible on the spatial level. Streets in general became more vivid and more colourful. Street art and graffiti became typical spatial practices in Savamala [103] (Figure 2). The urban focus was on the rich architectural and cultural heritage of the quarter, which was snatched from decades long oblivion through various projects. Still, artists and cultural organizations could not do much more than rise awareness about cultural heritage value and its decline. They could though perform some symbolic interventions in the public space. One of them was setting up bicycle routes through the streets of the neighbourhood, a practice very common for numerous European cities, but not very typical for Belgrade (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Street art, graffiti, and bicycle route in Savamala (source: author's collection, August 2015).

The flourishing nightlife was also leaving their footprints in the neighbourhood. The most noticeable were the names written on the facades around neighbourhood. Those names also highlighted the diverse nature of Savamala; some were locally based, while international role models inspired others (Figure 3). In all that diversity, Savamala succeeded in keeping an original spirit, which was recognizable not only in Belgrade, but also internationally. Mikser House for instance, is one of the most recognizable sites of Savamala early in 2010s, and was included in the Guardian's list of the ten best 'industrial-chic spaces' worldwide [104].



Figure 3. Local and international motives in Savamala (source: author's collection, August 2015).

The Belgrade Cooperative building as a central historical building and cultural heritage of the neighbourhood was in the middle of many projects led by cultural organizations and NGOs. Besides various ideas about how this abandoned building could be used for cultural purposes, it stayed empty and in bad condition until the Belgrade Waterfront project was activated. The Belgrade Cooperative building was renovated in 2014, and became the headquarters of the Belgrade Waterfront project, where promotional activities are currently held. It is questionable if that renovation process was made adequately, while "the basement remains soaked in water and not all interventions respected the heritage protection propositions" [98]. Active promotion of the project immediately changed the visual image of Savamala. Banners promoting Belgrade Waterfront were placed all over the streets of the neighbourhood (Figure 4).

The Belgrade Waterfront is planned as a large residential and business complex. It is certain that intensive demographic growth in the area (around 18,000 new inhabitants) [14] will bring extensive spatial and urban changes in the area. One of the key issues is regarding the functionality of the future neighbourhood and its impact to the rest of Belgrade. In that sense, transportation solutions, public transport, parking possibilities, as well as housing and communal services, are often considered as vague [105]. An additional issue is that Serbian and Belgrade's governments are investing into missing infrastructure, while investors obtain profits.

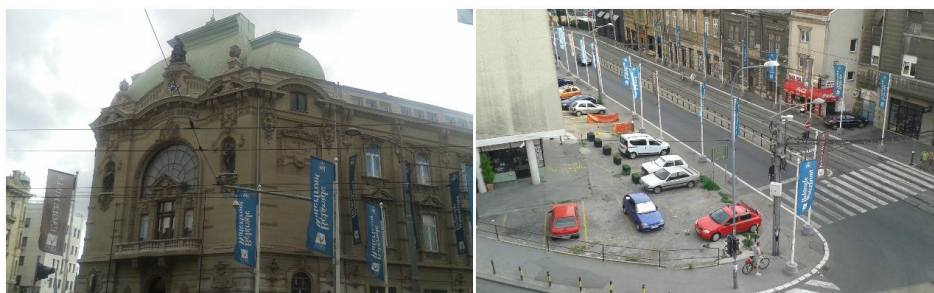


Figure 4. Renovated Belgrade Cooperative Building and banners promoting the Belgrade Waterfront project in the streets of Savamala in 2015 (source: author's collection, August 2015).

4.5. General Outcomes

The cultural quarter Savamala and Belgrade Waterfront project essentially do not share many common characteristics. In effect, probably the singular point of the intersection is the geographical area that they both are interested in. In order to understand urban development in this area, these two processes should be observed separately (see Appendix A, Figure A2 for the development timeline of both processes).

Credit for revitalizing Savamala in 2010s should go to creative and cultural organizations, as well as institutes and NGOs who have brought innovative artistic, cultural, and social activities into the quarter. Artists are often seen as the engine of the changes in the neighbourhood and should get the credit also, especially for spatial changes, as well as for supporting positive images of Savamala in the public and creating a special charm of the neighbourhood. Still, it could not be said that they had some decisive and independent roles in urban planning, and their role could be explained as more visible than actually influential [9] (pp. 113–115). Artists were mostly involved through cultural projects organized by cultural and creative organizations and NGOs, who certainly were central channels for artistic and culture-led urban regeneration.

However, a rising number of visitors has triggered the necessity for additional services. Clubs, bars, fast-food restaurants, as well as numerous taxis, started to concentrate in the neighbourhood. Artistic and cultural programs often have problems regarding their economic sustainability and resilience. It is normally not the case with bars and clubs. In a vibrant environment, they operate successfully. In Savamala nightlife, it was a very important part of everyday life—even some creative organizations opened their bars and organised entertainment events. External sources often have to support culture and art [106], while culture and art have not always commercial, but also symbolic value [107]. In that spirit, creative-led urban development would need support by welfare governance mechanisms. Economic resilience of the night-time economy, on the other hand, is shown on Savamala's example; as the number of cultural and creative organizations was declining, the number of clubs and pubs was rising (Figure 5).

As the importance of economic actors is rising in the post-socialist urban development of Belgrade, political actors are rather supportive through corruptive behaviour. Therefore, illegal strategies of urban development are flourishing [108]. Officially, Belgrade Waterfront project is not illegal, because its construction is legitimized by *lex specialis* [109,110] which implemented significant changes in existing planning and legal documents [16]. Such change of planning and legal documents represents obvious examples of the top-down influence of urban development. Still, an urban development without open public debate, and consensus with local population, but with side-lined architectural competitions, violent implementation methods, and uncertain public benefit should be put on a legitimacy test. Even the former Belgrade City architect said that it will be enabled that investors achieve their goals [111]. Transition from bottom-up and co-governance to top-down governance came back to the beginning with citizen protests. Protests erupted in 2016 (Figure 6) as a result of the undefined legitimacy of the Belgrade Waterfront project and as the fight against 'neoliberal instrumentalism' [112].



Figure 5. Clubs and bars in Savamala and KC Grad as one of still existing representatives of the cultural and creative sector in 2020 (source: author's collection, June 2020).



Figure 6. Protests organized by the Don't let Belgrade D(r)own organization on 13 June 2016 and 15 February 2017. The first protest was organized on 11 May 2016, and the protests that followed gathered thousands of people dissatisfied with the demolition in Savamala. After the activism was triggered by development in Savamala, this organization started to pay attention to different urban and social issues, and began political involvement taking place in progressive left side of the political spectrum (source: Facebook page Ne da(vi)mo Beograd).

The next important outcome of urban development in Savamala that should be emphasized is gentrification. Again, the cultural-led urban development of the neighbourhood on one hand and Belgrade Waterfront on the other should be observed separately. Even though the phase of cultural-led development showed elements of urban regeneration characteristics for earlier phases of gentrification, gentrification in the classic sense did not reach the full maturity level. The reasons for this can be found in the missing affluent class of gentrifiers, as well as the fact that Savamala is a noisy entertainment zone and a transit zone that has not become an attractive residential zone [9] (pp. 172–173).

The case of the Belgrade Waterfront can be categorized as a profitable gentrification [15] (for investors of course), and fits into Davidson's gentrification's reflection as the "capital-led colonization of urban space" [105] (p. 493), while political elites also play a crucial role. In such a framework, the agents of gentrification are governments, corporations, and corporate-governmental

partnerships [44]. The diverse typology of gentrification in post-socialist urban regions [68] provides a possibility to mark actual urban development in the Belgrade Waterfront, as an organized gentrification or a new-built super-gentrification (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The Savamala neighbourhood and the Belgrade Waterfront that rises above in 2020 (source: author's collection, June 2020).

Two dominant processes in Savamala created severe conflicts in urban development. There are many reasons that influenced these conflicts, such as the crisis of common social values and civil society standards, lack of fair competition, arguable public interest, and power pressures and interference of interests from authorities, business actors, and civil initiatives [4] (p. 153). Both dominant processes in Savamala owe their (un)successful development to those factors. Urban development in Savamala uncovered some characteristics evident in the transitional Serbian society, such as questionable democratic mechanisms, inefficient institutions, as well as the immature free market.

The question is, who had the right to claim the legitimacy of its development? “The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire” [113] (p. 939). Even though culture-led development was not ideal for the local community, it has to get credit for trying to involve and revitalize important local factors. This development attempted to synergize local components with internationally known processes of urban schemes. Therefore, the narrative built in public was that this was a Berlin-alike development [97]. The Belgrade Waterfront project appeared as an instrumentalized project, with economic motives that overwhelm social ones, with no involvement of local community, and strong influence from above—both from government and investors from the Middle-East. Taking into account the aggressive top-down urbanism, which initiated the Belgrade Waterfront and authoritarian mode of urban governance, it is not surprising that this development is often labelled in public as Dubai-alike [110].

Examples from Savamala reveal the importance and structures of power in the urban development of transitional cities. It reveals not only the massive power level of capital, but also the enormous power of political elites. Such urban development represents a mixture of centralized and autocratic urban planning, as the legacy of the socialist era and the opportunity-led urban development characteristic for transitional societies [114]. It also reveals that urban transition is not a completed process, and calls for further democratization of urban planning and firm definition of the public interest. It is especially true for immature and fragile democracies such as Serbia (the Freedom House report ‘Nations in Transit 2020’ concluded that the state of democratic institutions and freedoms in Serbia has been at its lowest level since 2001 [115]). Instant changes of regulations and procedures for the benefit of investors establish an incoherence that cannot be constructive in the long run. Such urban planning disqualifies public participation and debate as a guardian of the public interest, favors privileged participants, and deepens inequality. Although the Belgrade Waterfront seems to have taken total dominance in the urban development of Savamala (and the Sava Amphitheater), and is the final solution for this part of the city, political elites, planners and citizens can learn important lessons for development processes in other parts of the city. If urban development will not be democratized, the only channel through which citizens and their movements can fight for their ‘right to the city’ is the streets which can lead to the future escalation of demonstrations. Proactive actions such as petitions and demonstrations by citizen

movements in Belgrade have already proven effective in several cases, and they have saved some urban niches from investor driven urbanism (for example, one park in the residential area Banovo Brdo—Čukarica, and ongoing, proactive petitions to save the forest at the edges of Belgrade from being cut down; in both cases investors want to build new residential complexes).

5. Conclusions

A few years ago, when the Belgrade Waterfront project was introduced, it was not clear if it was a project that would be realised, or it was an unattainable plan. Representatives of creative and cultural organisations had similar doubts, but all of them had concerns regarding further artistic and culture-led regeneration of Savamala. The development that followed confirmed their concerns. As the situation on the playground shows, the Belgrade Waterfront dominated urban development without trying to establish a coexistence with the cultural quarter.

Jared Diamond [116] wrote that crisis is caused by external and internal pressures, and one individual or even a whole nation should apply ‘selective’ change in order to cope with the crisis, and finally to resolve it. According to him, ‘selective’ is a key term. One should preserve good functioning areas, and find the solutions for those which are problematic. Oblivion is what Savamala felt in the most of the 20th century, and could definitely be perceived as a local urban crisis. Culture-led development and the ensuing effects were not appropriate for all urban actors in Savamala. Still, culture-led regeneration that has tried to respect the rich, urban and social heritage of the neighbourhood, as well as the local community, was a good step in the direction of detecting problematic urban issues, coping with them, and eventually attempting to resolve them.

David Harvey was writing about a utopian vision—‘spaces of hope’ [117]. It would be probably too pretentious to claim that Savamala was a place of hope, but culture-led development left another message. It has showed that urban development other than oblivion, and other than neoliberal, is hard to reach (even more to preserve and to improve it), but is still possible.

Funding: The APC was funded by The University Library of Erlangen-Nuremberg and the University Administration’s Department of Research Services and Research Development.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

The Spanish House, the Belgrade Cooperative building, and the Hotel Bristol are some of the buildings in Savamala that played an important role in the history of the neighbourhood. Their importance and architectural value were emphasized during the cultural-led development in the 2010s.

The Belgrade Cooperative building was built in 1907, and is a cultural monument of great value. It was renovated in 2014, and the Master Plan of the Belgrade Waterfront was presented in the same year. The headquarter of the Belgrade Waterfront project is located in that building. The Hotel Bristol was built between 1910 and 1912, and is another representative building in Savamala.

The Spanish House was built around 1880 and served as customshouse, warehouse, and museum. During the Urban Incubator: Belgrade project (established by Goethe Institute Belgrade), this building served as a space for organizing artistic and cultural events and exhibitions.

The Cultural Centre Grad, the Mikser House, the Cultural Centre Magacin, Nova Iskra, as well as the Goethe Institute, are organizations that played crucial roles in culture-led development in Savamala. The Cultural Centre Magacin started to operate in a former warehouse in Savamala in 2007. The Cultural Centre Grad was established in 2009, and in a renovated former warehouse. Both organizations are still in Savamala. They create cultural and artistic programmes and offer exhibition spaces for artists.

The Mikser House was active in Savamala from 2013–2017. During that period, the Mikser House hosted numerous creative and cultural events, and supported cooperation between creative scenes

from Serbia and the surrounding region. Five Misker Festivals were held on the streets of Savamala. They raised great public attention and were the driver of Savamala's cultural development. The Goethe Institute and its project Urban Incubator: Belgrade had a similar effect; it was an urban regeneration project that raised awareness of the urban and social values of Savamala.

Design incubator Nova Iskra opened in a vacant residential building in 2012. It is still active and offers a coworking creative space.



Figure A1. Important buildings and organizations in Savamala.

Timeline - Savamala & Belgrade Waterfront	CULTURE-LED DEVELOPMENT	BELGRADE WATERFRONT
		2019 The construction of first residential building is finished
		2018
	Mikser House left Savamala Last Misker Festival in Savamala	2017 Demolition in Savamala
		2016 Lex specialis & signing of the contract
		2015 Removing the railroads and presenting the Belgrade Waterfront plan
	Mikser House is opened Urban Incubator: Belgrade Nova Iskra is opened First Mikser Festival in Savamala	2014
		2013 Belgrade Waterfront idea presented during the election campaign in 2012
	Involvement of Goethe Institute	2012
	KC Grad is opened	2011
		2010
		2009
	KC Magacin is opened	2008
		2007

Figure A2. Important occasions in the cultural-led development of Savamala, as well as on the Belgrade Waterfront.

The idea of the Belgrade Waterfront was presented during the election campaign of the Serbian Progressive Party in 2012. After this party won the election, the project was labeled as one of ‘national significance’. Preparatory work, such as removing railroads from the Sava Amphitheatre, was conducted in 2014. In the same year, the Master Plan of the Belgrade Waterfront project was presented in the former Belgrade Cooperative building. After the legal issues concerning the project were resolved by *lex specialis*, the contract for the realization of the project was arranged between the Serbian government and the Belgrade Waterfront Capital Investment LLC (owned by Eagle Hills from the United Arab Emirates). Illegal demolition took place in Savamala in April 2016, and it remains unsolved. The first residential building in the Belgrade Waterfront complex was completed in 2018.

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