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# The Soundscape of Change: The Reculturalization of Savamala\*

## Zvočna krajina spremembe: rekulturiziranje Savamale\*\*

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## IZVLEČEK

V članku analiziram strategije rekulturiziranja, ki so bile uvedene v Savamali, mestni četrti sredi Beograda. V minulih letih smo bili priča več poskusom, da bi Beograd nanovo označili kot varno, sodobno, kozmopolitsko in turistom prijazno mesto. Takšne pobude preoblikujejo zvočno krajino Beograda; včasih so spremembe stranski produkt drugih okoliščin, toda sem ter tja, kot pokažem na primeru Savamale, je zvočna krajina spremenjena namerno in z jasnim ciljem.

## ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze the reculturalization strategies implemented in Savamala, an urban quarter in central Belgrade. Recent years have witnessed many efforts to rebrand Belgrade as a safe, modern, cosmopolitan and tourist-friendly city. These initiatives transform the soundscape of Belgrade; sometimes the changes are byproducts of other developments, but sometimes, as I demonstrate using the example of Savamala, the changes in soundscape are done deliberately and with a clear purpose.

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## Introduction

Savamala is the oldest urban quarter in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. During the decades of the Communist Party rule after World War II, this area at the right bank of the river Sava was largely forsaken. However, recent years have witnessed some successful attempts to revitalize and transform Savamala by developing private sector and encouraging local residents and the visitors to the area to reclaim this urban zone by means of certain cultural and artistic practices. These initiatives foster a utopian vision of Savamala as a leisurely, artistic, carefree, alternative, yet entrepreneurial and socially involved part of Belgrade.

The largest city in the Western Balkans, Belgrade has been the capital city continuously since 1841, although the country that it has been the capital of has changed its name, status, borders and constitution multiple times.<sup>1</sup> During this period, the development of Belgrade was unregulated, intermittent and uneven (not to mention three war destructions only in the last 100 years), resulting in a conglomerate of very diverse urban characters and soundscapes. After the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, the consequent dethroning of the regime of Slobodan Milošević in 2000, and the beginning of economic transition, there have been many attempts to rebrand Belgrade as a safe, modern, cosmopolitan and tourist-friendly city. These initiatives also transform the soundscape of Belgrade; sometimes the changes are byproducts of other developments, but sometimes, as I will demonstrate using the example of Savamala, the changes in soundscape are results of conscious effort, i.e. they are done deliberately and with purpose.

The term *transition* here refers to *post-socialist transition* (see Švob-Đokić 2004: 9).<sup>2</sup> The change of ownership – *privatization* – is the most important systemic change and the basis for the restructuring of post-socialist societies. However, the results of the process of ownership change were disappointing in almost all former-socialist countries, including Serbia, because the way privatization had been conducted led to unemployment, the rise of the criminal groups and organized mafia, marginalization of the once-leading social strata and the rise of the new economic elites (Švob-Đokić 2004: 144-145; Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević 2005: 22).<sup>3</sup> A majority of cultural institutions in Serbia belong to the public sector and they are heavily dependent on subsidies received either from the Ministry of Culture, or from city councils (Medić and Janković-Beguš 2016).<sup>4</sup> However, the recent reculturalization of Savamala is one of the few success sto-

1 Miloš Obrenović made Belgrade the capital of the Principality of Serbia which gradually gained independence from the Ottoman rule (1841–1882); afterwards, it was the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia (1882–1918), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1945; renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929), the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1992, renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963), the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003), the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006) and, finally, the Republic of Serbia (2006–present).

2 Nada Švob-Đokić, ed., *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe*. Collection of papers from the Course on 'Managing Cultural Transitions: Southeastern Europe', Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, 9–16 May 2004. Culturelink Joint Publications Series No. 6. (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2004).

3 Milena Dragičević-Šešić i Sanjin Dragojević. *Menadžment umetnosti u turbulentnim okolnostima*. Beograd: CLIO, 2005.

4 Ivana Medić and Jelena Janković-Beguš, "The Works Commissioned by Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS) 2002–2013: Contemporary Music Creation in a Transitional Society," in: Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, Vesna Mikić, Tijana Popović-Mladenović and Ivana Perković, eds., *Music: Transitions / Continuities* (Belgrade: Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music, 2016), 317–329.

ries related to private cultural entrepreneurship in transitional Serbia. Thus, after defining the term *reculturalization*, I analyze the reculturalization strategies in Savamala, a majority of which revolve around *sound*, whilst also discussing the challenges posed before the protagonists of these initiatives.

## Methodology

My methodology is primarily based on fieldwork grounded on ethnographic documentation on the sound topography of Savamala. Since the beginning of the project *City Sonic Ecology – Urban Soundscapes of Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade* in September 2014 I have done audio and video recording of everyday life in Savamala,<sup>5</sup> including the two festivals taking place in this area: Mikser Festival of Contemporary Creativity<sup>6</sup> and Belgrade Summer Festival (BELEF).<sup>7</sup> Aside from continued recording of the soundscapes of the area, the second stage of the project, which is currently in progress, encompasses quantitative research in the form of interviews with the residents and visitors of Savamala.<sup>8</sup> In terms of theoretical approach, I mostly rely on the concept of *affective economies* developed by Sara Ahmed (2004)<sup>9</sup> in order to determine how specific communities of shared emotions and attitudes are formed through sound in Savamala.

I should mention here that two artistic projects aimed at exploring the sounds of Savamala have already been conducted, but neither of them with any scientific aspirations or the critical (auto)-reflexivity of the project *City Sonic Ecology*. These are:

- 1) *Slušaj Savamala!* [Listen, Savamala!], a sound-art project (part of a larger project *Urban Incubator*<sup>10</sup>) aimed at collecting old and new sounds and feeding them back into the urban space in formats such as installations, concerts, or radio programmes;
- 2) *Zvučna mapa Beograda* [The Sound Map of Belgrade],<sup>11</sup> a guide through the social history of Savamala, with personal stories and memories of its inhabitants.

On the other hand, when it comes to strategic sonic mapping of European cities, the initiative to map urban environmental noise has stemmed from an act of the European Parliament stating: “Define a common approach intended to avoid, prevent or reduce on a prioritized basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise.”<sup>12</sup> This process has involved three stages: 1) creation of noise maps, 2) ensuring public access to information on environmental noise and its effects,

5 A majority of these sound and video recordings will soon be available on the *City Sonic Ecology* website: <http://citysonicecology.com>.

6 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://festival.mikser.rs/en/>.

7 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.belef.rs/en/>.

8 The final phase of the project will involve analysis and critical interpretation of the collected data and a publication of a series of articles and a collective monograph, as well as a creation of the audio walk through Savamala.

9 Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22 (2004): 117–139.

10 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/cs/bel/prj/uic/prj/slu/enindex.htm>.

11 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.zvucnamapabeograda.rs>.

12 Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament of June 25, 2002, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/eur38002.pdf>.

and 3) adopting action plans with a view to prevent and reduce environmental noise. However, since Serbia is not a member state of the European Union, none of these have been accomplished yet, nor is there awareness within the officialdom as to why such sonic mapping is important.

## Reculturalization

The term *reculturalization* has not been properly defined, although it is commonly used as a synonym for *cultural transformation*. Due to a lack of a ready-made, “applies to all” definition, I will give four examples of the varied use that the term reculturalization has found in different cultural discourses. In a 1993 interview in *A Journal of Indigenous Issues*, a Native American activist Reuben Snake, Jr. talked about the repatriation of sacred objects, many of which had been taken from the indigenous peoples and put into museums, art collections and historical societies; hence it became an imperative for them to reclaim those objects and to renew their spiritual life (Snake Jr. and Sackler 1993).<sup>13</sup> Asked whether he considered the use of the word *reculturalization* a fair one, Snake agreed and explained that, for him, “[t]he term reculturalization means regaining what our grandfathers and grandmothers used to know so well. We need to bring that back into the culture of our people.” (Ibid.) On the other hand, the Hong Kong based cultural theorists Wang and Yeh analyse the process of *cultural hybridization* that occurs when popular cultural products such as literature, music and cinema cross linguistic borders and are modified to fit a new audience. They define three processes at work in hybridization: *deculturalization*, *reculturalization* and *acculturalization* (Wang and Yeh 2005).<sup>14</sup> Justin Hodgson uses the term *reculturalization* to refer to a shift from a “longstanding, industrial-based consumerist culture” towards “a culture that is increasingly one of digital consumer-producers, or what we might view as an emerging culture industry by the masses for the masses” (Hodgson 2010).<sup>15</sup> Gerald Bast argues that, after the industrial and information revolutions, the next major societal and economic development will be a *creative revolution*: “the valences of societal paradigms must be shifted – from a mere commercialization toward a reculturalization of the society – which in particular demands consequences for the educational and economic systems” (Bast 2013: 1474).<sup>16</sup> To sum up, the term *reculturalization* can apply to at least four types of cultural transformation aimed at enhancing, improving and bettering what was/is already there:

A return to something old, authentic, valuable, and its reinstatement in its original context;

13 Elizabeth Sackler and Reuben Snake, Jr., “Reculturalization of Sacred Objects,” *Akwe:kon – A Journal of Indigenous Issues*, Cornell University, Fall (1993): 14–15.

14 Georgette Wang and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, “Globalization and hybridization in cultural products: The cases of *Mulan* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8/2 (2005): 175–193.

15 Justin Hodgson, “Reculturalizations: ‘Small Screen’ Culture, Pedagogy, & YouTube,” *Enculturation* 8, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://enculturation.net/reculturalizations>.

16 Gerald Bast, “Preparing a ‘Creative Revolution’ – Arts and Universities of the Arts in the Creative Knowledge Economy,” in: Elias G. Carayannis, ed., *Encyclopedia of Creativity, Invention, Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (New York: Springer, 2013), 1471–1476.

A step towards adaptation and acceptance of a certain cultural value in a new context;  
 A fundamental change in production and consummation of cultural goods in a certain environment;

A stand against commercialization of consumer societies by means of comprehensive systemic changes.

I will now show how all these types of cultural action have been implemented in Savamala and with what outcomes.

## Savamala Today

As the oldest Belgrade urban zone, Savamala is rich in tradition, history and heritage. Its name is a compound of two words: the name of the river *Sava* and a Turkish word *mahala* contracted to *ma(a)la*, meaning a neighborhood or a small settlement. It is situated under the Belgrade Fortress, alongside the southern bank of the river Sava. It was settled in the early eighteenth century, when Austria-Hungary conquered Belgrade and initiated the move of Christians from the fortress to the right bank of the river Sava – the so-called Serbian Village (Đurić-Zamolo 1977).<sup>17</sup> The urbanization of Savamala began in the early nineteenth century. Knjaz [Prince] Miloš Obrenović, the first ruler of the newly independent Serbia, wanted to turn Savamala into the merchants' part of the city. Thus, in 1834 he forcefully relocated the villagers from Savamala to Palilula (at the south bank of the Danube) and financed the building of the first stores; then he also forced the merchants to move to Savamala (Jovanović 1964).<sup>18</sup> The quarter soon flourished, both economically and in terms of architecture, with several imposing edifices, including the main railway station built in the heart of Savamala in 1884. However, the development of the railway gradually separated the city of Belgrade from both its rivers. Since the early twentieth century there have been numerous plans to redevelop the areas at the banks of the Sava and the Danube, but none of them were realized. Instead, after the World War II, with the state-controlled industrialization of the country and degentrification, numerous warehouses, depots, factories and other industrial facilities were built in Savamala.

After the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the transition towards liberal capitalism, with numerous unsuccessful privatizations of former socialist industrial giants, a lot of these industrial facilities were abandoned, neglected or ruined. Today, Savamala is economically underdeveloped and socially disadvantaged. It is characterized by heavy traffic, with air and sound pollution. It hosts the main railway station and the main intercity bus station. Next to it is a park, commonly known as *Picin park* [The Pussy Park], because its vicinity to the rail and bus stations makes it the site of street prostitution and petty crime. There are several bridges that connect the 'Old' and New Belgrade (Novi Beograd), with the overwhelming noise of cars, trams and trains that operate 24/7. Finally, there is the area just under Branko's Bridge, which has been the main site of the reculturalization initiatives in the past decade, the boundaries of this area

<sup>17</sup> Divna Đurić-Zamolo, *Beograd kao orijentalna varoš pod Turcima 1521–1867* (Beograd: Muzej grada Beograda, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Živorad Jovanović, *Iz starog Beograda* (Beograd: Turistička štampa, 1964).

roughly encompassing the streets Karadorđeva, Braće Krsmanovića, Travnička, Mostarska, Gavriła Principa, Kraljevića Marka, Crnogorska, Hercegovačka and Železnička.



Figure 1: The Map of Savamala.

## A New Beginning

The reculturalization projects in Savamala started approximately a decade ago, as a bottom-up process, thanks to entrepreneurship and enthusiasm of the natives of Savamala who wanted to revitalize their neighborhood, and in doing so were financially supported by various European funds. Savamala was a suitable site for such efforts because of the existence of numerous abandoned and semi-ruined objects, which could be reconstructed and repurposed. It should be said that those who kick-started the reculturalization initiatives were not the impoverished railway workers or the Romas living at the riverbank, but the educated, middle class, young professionals and artists, many of them trained abroad, who knew how to apply for European funding. Nevertheless, their vision was that everyone in Savamala, including the working class and the socially excluded Romas would benefit from these reculturalization strategies in one way or another, because they would contest the notoriety of Savamala, stimulate local entrepreneurship and bring visitors to this area.

The first example of an object of industrial heritage turned into a cultural center was Grad [City] – European Center for Culture and Debate. It was initiated by a mar-

ried couple Ljudmila Stratimirović and Dejan Ubović and founded on April 16, 2009 by the NGO *Belgrade Cultural Front* and the Felix Meritis Foundation from Amsterdam, with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>19</sup> The old depot, built in 1884 was redesigned into a multifunctional space where various programs are now organized: exhibitions, concerts, debates, conferences, workshops, etc. As asserted by Edin Omanović, the success of Grad triggered the flourishing of the entire quarter, cultural scene and the way of thinking (Omanović 2015).<sup>20</sup>

The next up was the 2013 Goethe-Institut “project of excellence” *Urban Incubator*,<sup>21</sup> aimed at improving the quality of life in Savamala. *Urban Incubator* encompassed more than ten local and international projects from the fields of art, architecture, urbanism and social engagement, with participants from Zurich, Hamburg, Berlin, Amsterdam and Belgrade. The idea was that the quarter’s cultural and social values should drive Savamala’s revitalization, rather than commercial and real-estate business interests; hence this is an example of a *participatory approach* to urban development.

The year 2013 also saw the opening of an imposing new edifice called *Mikser House* – *Balkan Design Center* in Karađorđeva street, which now dominates this area under Branko’s Bridge. Conceived as a diverse cultural platform and festival of contemporary creativity, Mikser was another family enterprise, developed by Maja and Ivan Lalić. The first editions of the Mikser Festival, since its inception in 2009, took place in the lower Dorćol, at the south bank of the Danube, in the space formerly occupied by the agricultural giant “Žitomlin”. However, after Mikser House opened its doors in Savamala, the annual Mikser Festival was also relocated to Savamala; the House itself now serves as a multifunctional concert venue, café, nightclub, exhibition space, conference venue, market place etc.

Very soon many new cafes, fast food parlors, beer pubs, nightclubs etc. opened in the vicinity of Grad and Mikser House (e.g. Berliner, Transit, Monsoon...). The owners of these venues do not actually own the buildings that they occupy (not least because, in many cases, the ownership of these spaces is uncertain or disputed); but they have invested their own money in refurbishing them. Other derelict buildings, such as the Spanish House (built in 1880), right next to Grad, were partially reconstructed and repurposed. So, in the short span of a few years, the entire subculture formed in the heart of Savamala, which now attracts both Belgrade residents and foreign visitors.

Currently, there are four main clusters of Belgrade nightlife, distinguished by their *sound*, i.e. the type of music they play and the overall sonic experience, which, in turn, attract different visitors and require different branding strategies:

- 1) *Skadarlija* in central Belgrade is dominated by the discourse of *nostalgia*, and the music performed there is the urban folk music from the early twentieth century – the so-called *starogradska muzika*. This type of music fosters the simulacrum of old Belgrade and attracts tourists who are drawn by its claims to “authenticity” and the evocation of “good old times”,<sup>22</sup>

19 Accessed on September 23, 2016, [http://www.gradbeograd.eu/index\\_en.php](http://www.gradbeograd.eu/index_en.php).

20 Edin Omanović, “Zemunska zemunica,” *Before After*, August 14, 2015, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.beforeafter.rs/grad/enterijer-zemunska-zemunica/>.

21 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/cs/bel/prj/uc/enindex.htm>.

22 See Marija Dumnić’s article in this issue of *Musicological Annual*.



- 2) Upper Dorćol, particularly the street Strahinjića Bana, is locally known as *the Silicone valley* because of a large number of silicone-enhanced girls. It is also frequented by members of the new, transitional elite, the *nouveaux riches* – bankers, politicians, media moguls, tycoons. The music that dominates this “fancy” area is popular, but not too trashy: it is mostly pop, pop-dance, ambient, soft jazz, Latin jazz and such;
- 3) The boat-café, popularly known as *splavovi* [rafts], on the banks of the rivers Danube and Sava, constitute a significant part of Belgrade nightlife, since they are open throughout the night. The music associated with the rafts is the notorious pop-folk, or *turbo-folk*, similar to *chalga* and other types of contemporary Balkan pop music with oriental influences;
- 4) Finally, Savamala does not have one specific musical genre associated with it, but a mixture of genres which have one thing in common: they provide an “alternative” to the previous three, more mainstream types of entertainment. Thus the music played and performed in Savamala comprises alternative, indie rock, jazz, blues, electronic music, arthouse music etc.

When I first spoke to the protagonists of the bottom-up initiatives in Savamala, they confirmed my initial hypothesis that the efforts to reculturalize and “rebrand” this ugly, noisy, smelly, derelict, polluted and neglected part of the city had to start with *sound*. In other words, the main task of the cultural entrepreneurs in Savamala was to create a soundscape that would attract desired visitors: (relatively) young, middle class, hip, European or local but pro-European, etc. The general idea was (I am paraphrasing now): “If we cannot make Savamala look and smell nice, than at least we can make it *sound* nice!” This new sound of Savamala was achieved by playing all sorts of “cool”, alternative music, in order to attract visitors who would appreciate such offer (which, at that point, did not exist in other parts of Belgrade). In other words, the intervention in the soundscape had a crucial role for creating this new affective community in terms of identity building and politics of belonging.

Since the traffic noise could not be removed or ignored, the entrepreneurs from Savamala decided to promote this noise as something “cool”, i.e. as a symbol of living in a traditionally urban zone. As Jacob Kreutzfeld, the co-author of *Copenhagen Sound Map* puts it: “The challenge for planners, designers, and architects is to deal with the auditory not only as pollution, but also as an integrated part of urban experience, promoting fellowship and liveliness as well as distress.” (Kreutzfeld 2011: 67)<sup>23</sup> In his landmark 1977 study *The Tuning of the World* R. Murray Schafer, one of the pioneers of the soundscape studies, observed that the soundscape is not only an indication of the social; it can be “... a deliberate construction by its creators, a composition which may be as much distinguished for its beauty as for its ugliness” (Schafer 1977: 272).<sup>24</sup> He defined the *keynote sound* as “those (sounds) which are heard by a particular society continuously or frequently enough to form a background against which other sounds

23 Jacob Kreutzfeld, “Copenhagen Sonic Experience Map,” in: Brandon LaBelle and Cláudia Martinho, eds., *Site of Sound #2: Of Architecture and the Ear* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2011), 67–79.

24 R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977).



are perceived”, while *soundmark* is “a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (Ibid). When these definitions are applied to the case of Savamala, one may argue that the *keynote sound* of Savamala is the heavy **traffic** – the overwhelming noise of the trains, buses, trams, lorries, cars. On the other hand, the creative entrepreneurs from Savamala have created their *soundmark* – the sound of the cool, alternative, hipster **nightlife** which is now associated with Savamala.

Of course, there are different perceptions of this radically altered soundscape and conflicting interpretations of what is unwanted and what is to be embraced. Not everyone in Savamala is happy with this bursting nightlife – for example, some older residents whom I have interviewed complain about the noise and feel that their neighborhood has been “invaded” by tourists and revellers. Moreover, the underprivileged inhabitants of Savamala have not really benefited from the reculturalization efforts, and neither is the cultural offer of Savamala aimed at this particular local demographics.

Jean-Paul Thibaud’s notion of *ambiance* also merits discussion here. In his view, “an *ambiance* can be defined as a time-space qualified from a sensory point of view” which “relates to the sensing and feeling of a place, with all senses working in synergy” (Thibaud 2011: 43).<sup>25</sup> Thibaud makes a useful distinction between three main dynamics involved in the creation of an *ambiance*, which complement one another:

*Tuned ambiance* that emerges as the place is brought into tune with the conduct it supports; his term *acclimatization* refers to the process by which *ambiance* and conduct are brought into resonance (Ibid, 44–45);

*Modulated ambiance* that involves slight variations of the sensory context of the place; Thibaud’s term *variation* refers to the city-dwellers’ power to modulate urban ambiances, which vary depending on how a place is used and occupied (Ibid, 44; 49);

*Framed ambiance* that emerges through conditioning of the place by social practice itself; Thibaud’s term *alteration* refers to the work done by the public to format a place’s *ambiance* (Ibid, 44; 51). City-dwellers do not merely take advantage of the resources offered by a place, but they produce the very conditions of their actions and transform ambiances into an essentially practical domain. (Ibid, 53)

If we now apply this theoretical model to the soundscape of Savamala, we can observe these discernible, but complementary and overlapping dynamics:

Thibaud’s first category can refer to the soundscape (and viewscape) of Savamala before the reculturalization attempts began (and this is still the sound of Savamala during the day). Everyone who comes to Savamala must *acclimatize* to the sound pollution and the other elements that create the *ambiance* – the smog, the smell of the river and the sewers, the sight of sex workers in the Pussy Park etc. – and adapt, e.g. by raising their voice in order to be heard amidst the overwhelming noise.

The *variation* of the soundscape occurred when the opening of the first cultural centres in Savamala brought *music* to this area. The unpleasant sights and smells

25 Jean-Paul Thibaud, “The three dynamics of urban ambiances,” in: Brandon LaBelle and Cláudia Martinho, eds., *Site of Sound #2: Of Architecture and the Ear* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2011), 43–53.

and the traffic noise could not be eliminated; but they are now complemented by the sounds of the bursting nightlife – music performed live indoors or outdoors, the chatter of the revellers, etc. These new sounds modulate the ambiance and, in turn, the variations in Savamala's soundscape attract yet more visitors to this area.

The final stage, the *alteration* of the soundscape and the entire ambiance, can be said to occur during the Mikser and BELEF festivals, when this area is literally invaded by the people who either participate in the festivals or visit their programs – including the outdoor concerts and gigs, the arts and crafts open air market, exhibitions, musicals and other theatrical productions, the outdoor cinema etc. Although the visuals also change, due to the banners advertising the festivals, the barriers that close certain streets for traffic, the increased number of people in the area and so on, it is still the *sound* of the area that is altered most drastically. The traffic noise is almost suffocated by the sound of live music blasting from the loudspeakers, with musics from different venues mixing with each other, the murmur of exhibitors and customers in the outdoor market in the Travnička street, etc.

The fact that the efforts aimed at the reculturalization of Savamala have paid off in a relatively short time-span (less than five years) garnered lots of publicity and received very good press, both domestically and internationally – for example, *The Business Insider* has listed Savamala among “The 12 coolest neighborhoods in Europe”, stating that “the Savamala district continues to grow as one of Serbia's cultural centers” (Avakian 2015);<sup>26</sup> and British paper *The Guardian* published a report stating that “Creativity is blossoming in Belgrade, where a riverside cultural hub has sprung up in the derelict mansions and warehouses, led by free thinkers looking to the city's future” (Coldwell 2015).<sup>27</sup>

If we now return to the various understandings of the notion of reculturalization, one may observe that all four types of cultural transformation that I have outlined above have been achieved in Savamala:

A return to something old, authentic, valuable, and its reinstatement in its original context – this relates to the cultural entrepreneurs' desire to revive the “glory days” of Savamala, the oldest urban quarter, once the pride of Belgrade and Serbia, before this area was brutally industrialized and degentrified;

A step towards adaptation and acceptance of a certain cultural value in a new context – this is associated with the cultural entrepreneurs' efforts to convince the old residents of Savamala that everyone will benefit from the changes brought about by the reculturalization, even if they disrupt their customary way of life;

A fundamental change in production and consummation of cultural goods – this applies to the abandonment of the still-prevalent socialist model of state-subsided cultural centers in favor of private investment and/or support provided by the NGO sector and making the most of the international funding opportunities, as well as the model of peer-to-peer creation of cultural programs “by the neighbors – for the neighbors”;

26 Talia Avakian, “The 12 coolest neighborhoods in Europe,” *The Business Insider*, Jun 16, 2015, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-coolest-neighborhoods-in-europe-2015-6?op=1#ixzz3ftaF0a25>.

27 Will Coldwell, “Belgrade's Savamala district: Serbia's new creative hub,” *The Guardian*, February 7, 2015, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/feb/07/belgrade-savamala-serbia-city-break>.

Finally, the proponents of reculturalization have taken a stand against commercialization of consumer societies by initiating a bottom-up transformation that insists on participatory approach, rather than succumbing to the idiosyncrasies of a belated (and often unethical) transition towards the late liberal capitalism.

## Challenges

The fourth point above may serve as a headword to discuss some recent challenges faced by the protagonists of the reculturalization efforts, which also influence the soundscape of Savamala in rather unexpected ways. The first challenge was brought about in the summer of 2015 by a massive influx of immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and other Asian and African countries.<sup>28</sup> Since the escalation of the refugee crisis in 2015, Serbia has been a transit country on the refugees' route towards the European Union. A large numbers of immigrants sleep outdoors in makeshift tents in Savamala, due to its vicinity to the main railway and bus stations. The refugees usually stay in Belgrade for a few days before they are collected by their traffickers, who then transport them across the borders – although this has become increasingly difficult since some of the EU member states erected fences along sections of their borders (Stearns and Tirone 2016).<sup>29</sup> The influx of immigrants has contributed to the changes in Savamala soundscape; the change is primarily linguistic, since now a number of Asian and North African languages are now spoken in Belgrade city center, plus occasional broken English when they communicate with the traffickers, the police, the journalists etc. This multilingual chatter of people camping in the city parks has added yet another layer to the already multilayered soundscape of this area.

While some may expect the protagonists of the reculturalization efforts in Savamala to complain that the unsightly presence of migrants is detrimental to their businesses, they have actually been actively involved in helping the refugees, with the extension of Mikser House at Mostarska street called *Miksalište* as the central point. Opened in January 2015 as an ice rink and an open-air concert venue, Miksalište transformed into the Refugee Aid Serbia's main center for collecting and distributing aid.<sup>30</sup> The very same energy and drive, the *collective affect* that used to form in Savamala with respect to its cultural and entertainment offer, has now been channeled into this local activism, and the residents and visitors of Savamala are encouraged to sympathize with the migrants' plight and to volunteer to help. This call for solidarity has struck a chord not least because, only two decades ago, it was the Serbs and other former Yugoslav peoples who were refugees, fleeing in large numbers from the war-torn regions of Yugoslavia. The memories of this exodus are still all too vivid, which is why it was possible to mobilize

28 See "Refugee Crisis in Europe." *European Commission – Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection*, accessed on September 23, 2016, [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/refugee-crisis\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/refugee-crisis_en).

29 Jonathan Stearns and Jonathan Tirone, "Europe's Refugee Crisis." *Bloomberg*, June 17, 2016, accessed on September 23, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/quicktake/europe-refugees>.

30 Refugee Aid Miksalište, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://refugeeaidmiksalište.rs>.

the locals to form this new *affective community*. This activity can still be regarded as part of the reculturalization effort, because it empowers the residents of Savamala and promotes the image of Savamala as a generous and welcoming place for everyone, including the refugees.

As to the second challenge, a new top-down initiative has threatened to jeopardize the reculturalization projects and to destroy everything that has been accomplished in Savamala in the last few years. It is a grandiose construction project *Belgrade Waterfront*, headed by Serbian government in partnership with the Eagle Hill Group from Abu Dhabi (UAE), which aims to turn the right bank of Sava into a business hub for the Western Balkans. So, unlike the previously discussed bottom-up initiatives that insist on participatory approach, this competing project is all about commercial and real-estate business interests.<sup>31</sup> In order to start developing Belgrade Waterfront, the city officials' first endeavor was to depopulate the right bank of Sava, i.e. to forcefully resettle the poor – the Romas, the railway workers, the refugees from former Yugoslav republics etc. – which strikingly resembles Miloš Obrenović's forceful relocation of the original residents of Savamala almost 200 years ago!<sup>32</sup>

The Belgrade Waterfront project is now housed in the imposing building known as the *Geozavod*, right next to Mikser House. Just like the entire project is surrounded by a veil of silence, the building itself is eerily quiet, unlike the hustle and bustle of the Mikser House, Grad, Monsoon and other clubs in its vicinity. Actually, the first sounds were heard when the citizens and activists gathered into the initiative *Ne davimo Beograd!* [Do not drown Belgrade]<sup>33</sup> staged a protest in front the Geozavod while the Belgrade Waterfront contract was being signed. The protagonists of the entrepreneurial subculture that has become synonymous with the reculturalization of Savamala rightfully feared that they would be suffocated by the flashy new development and priced out of the area; and their fears were brutally confirmed in September 2015 when some of the cafés and pubs in Savamala were demolished without prior notice, in order to clear land for construction work. Soon, the soundscape of Savamala was “enriched” by yet another layer, the sound of the heavy machinery. Then, on April 24, 2016, a group of men wearing balaclavas destroyed several family-owned businesses and a restaurant in the Hercegovačka street,<sup>34</sup> while the volunteers in Miksalište received a notice that the Refugee Aid Centre would be demolished within 48 hours (at it was indeed flattened on April 26). The undeterred volunteers quickly found a new location in Gavrića Principa street, nearby yet sufficiently far away from the riverbank, and the new Miksalište opened its doors on June 1, 2016, with a new goal: to put an emphasis on the integration of refugees into the society. The refugee crisis continues, but so do the efforts

31 Belgrade Waterfront, accessed on September 23, 2016, <https://www.belgradewaterfront.com/en>.

32 Serbian government even approved a *Lex specialis* at very short notice in order to expropriate the land. See “Lex specialis za Beograd na vodi,” *Vreme*, March 23, 2015, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1282511#inicijativa%20za%20povlačenje>.

33 Accessed on September 23, 2016, <https://nedavimobeograd.wordpress.com>.

34 The investigation into this event is ongoing, and the perpetrators have not been caught yet, although the Prime Minister of Serbia admitted that senior Belgrade officials were behind these demolitions, which sparked huge public demonstrations. See Miliwoje Pantović, “Serbian PM Blames Belgrade Officials for Demolitions,” *Balkan Insight*, June 8, 2016, accessed on September 23, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/belgrade-s-officials-involved-in-savamala-demolitions-vucic-says-06-08-2016#sthash.DFXbZc5t.dpuf>.

of the community of Savamala to ease their suffering and to help them regain some dignity on their long journey.

So, instead of drawing definitive conclusions, I must acknowledge that nobody knows what will happen in the coming months, as our project *City Sonic Ecology* enters its final year. I can only promise is that I will continue to record the soundscapes of Savamala and to analyze how this microcosm reflects and documents the rapid changes in transitional Serbia, which continues to be a battleground of conflicting interests and ideologies, but also how the global crises spill over and affect local ventures and transformations.

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## POVZETEK

V članku analiziram strategije rekurituriziranja, ki so bile uvedene v Savamali, mestni četrti sredi srbske prestolnice Beograda. Od preloma tisočletja se je Beograd že večkrat poskusilo nanovo označiti kot varno, sodobno, kozmopolitsko in turistom prijazno mesto. Takšne pobude preoblikujejo zvočno krajino Beograda; včasih so spremembe stranski produkt drugih okoliščin, toda sem ter tja, kot pokazem na primeru Savamale, je sprememba zvočne krajine rezultat zavestnega truda. Sama Savamala, območje od desnem bregu Save, je bila v desetletjih vladavine komunistične partije po drugi svetovni vojni pretežno zanemarjena. V zadnjih letih pa smo bili priča več uspešnih poskusov revitalizacije in prenove Savamale z razvojem privatnega sektorja in s spodbujanjem lokalnega prebivalstva in obiskovalcev, da bi se ta urbani prostor ponovno naselilo z določenimi kulturnimi in umetniškimi praksami. Takšne iniciative vzpostavljajo utopično vizijo Savamale kot ležernega, umetniškega, brezskrbnega, alternativnega, a hkrati tudi podjetnega in socialno participatornega dela glavnega mesta. Ne le to, rekurituriziranje Savamale je ena redkih uspešnih zgodb, povezanih s privatnim kulturnim podjetništvom v tranzicijski Srbiji. Poleg analize strategij rekurituriziranja, večina katerih se vrtili okrog *zvoka*, prav tako opazujem izzive, pred katere so postavljeni udeleženci teh iniciativ. Vzporedno z obravnavo pojma rekurituriziranja, ugotavljam, da je ustrezen za vsaj štiri tipe kulturnih iniciativ, ki so bile izvedene v Savamali:

- 1) vrnitev k nečemu staremu, avtentičnemu in vrednemu in ponovni uporabi le-tega v izvirnem kontekstu: to je povezano z željo kulturnega podjetništva, da oživi »zlate čase« Savamale – nekoč ponos Beograda in Srbije – preden je bilo območje divje industrializirano in degentrificirano;
- 2) korak k adaptaciji in sprejetju določenih kulturnih vrednot v novem kontekstu: to bi lahko bilo povezano s poskusi kulturnega podjetništva, da prepriča stare prebivalce Savamale, da bo vsak na boljšem zaradi sprememb, ki jih bo prineslo rekurituriranje; četudi bo njihov običajni način življenja moten;
- 3) temeljna sprememba v produkciji in potrošnji kulturnih dobrin: to velja za opustitev še zmeraj prevladujočega socialističnega modela kulturnih centrov, ki jih financira država, v prid privatnih investicij in/ali pomoči, ki ga nudi sektor NGO-jev, ko tudi v prid temu, da se čim bolje izkoristiti možnosti mednarodnega financiranja; kot tudi v prid modelu medsebojnega ustvarjanja kulturnih programov v smislu »sosed sosedu«;
- 4) in naposled upor proti komercializaciji potrošniških skupnosti – v tem primeru z zagonom transformacije od spodaj navzgor, ki vztraja na participatornem pristopu, namesto da bi podlegel idiosikrazijam zapoznele (in pogosto tudi neetične) tranzicije k poznemu liberalnemu kapitalizmu.