

YEARS OF SOUND LIVING: MIKSER FESTIVAL IN SAVAMALA (2012–2016)*

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ABSTRACT:

This article deals with the soundscape of Mikser, an independent festival of contemporary creativity, established in 2009 in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia. I focus on the years 2012–2016, during which Mikser was taking place in Savamala, an urban quarter in central Belgrade – which itself has undergone various urbanistic and cultural transformations in recent years. The creative team behind Mikser aimed to turn Savamala into a permanent fixture on the map of Belgrade nightlife and a tourist hotspot; the fact that they did not succeed was on account both of financial issues and conflicting top-down business interests. My conclusion is that the long-term survival of the festival is not dependent on its program or audiences, but on securing official support and infrastructure.

KEYWORDS: Savamala, Mikser Festival, Belgrade, soundscape, soundwalk

In this article I analyze the soundscape of Mikser, an independent festival of contemporary creativity, which took place in Savamala, an urban quarter in central Belgrade, between 2012 and 2016. The reasons for choosing this period are twofold. Firstly, it

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roughly matches the duration of the project *City Sonic Ecology – Urban Soundscapes of Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade*, supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).² For this project I have done extensive field recording in Savamala, observing and analyzing various changes that have affected this part of Belgrade over a relatively short time span. Secondly, this chosen period exactly matches the ‘rise and fall’ of Savamala. Namely, in less than three years, several fundamental changes have shaken up this part of the Serbian capital city and drastically altered its soundscape (and not only its soundscape). One of the testimonies of the rapid changes that have affected Savamala recently is the fact that, less than a year after its publication, my article on the reculturalization of Savamala (Medić 2016a) is already somewhat outdated; moreover, some of the tendencies that I observed in that article and predicted would lead to the disintegration of Savamala as an independent cultural oasis in central Belgrade, have indeed materialized. In the beginning of the period under analysis, the soundscape of Savamala was that of a derelict, traffic-heavy, neglected part of the city, with air and sound pollution. The revitalization of Savamala began as a bottom-up effort aimed at rebuilding, ‘reculturalizing’ and rebranding this formerly neglected and unsightly part of Belgrade (Medić 2016a: 42–44). Next, Savamala became one of the focal points of the European refugee crisis (Medić 2016b); and finally, it turned into a battleground of conflicting business interests, after the Serbian government kick-started a grandiose top-down project, Belgrade Waterfront, aimed at transforming the right bank of the river Sava into an imposing residential and business hub. As a result, the protagonists of the bottom-up reculturalization effort, i.e. the independent cultural entrepreneurs who revived and rebranded Savamala, were priced out of the area to make way for Belgrade Waterfront.



The map of Savamala

² The project itself lasted from 2014 to 2017.

METHODOLOGY

In order to avoid turning our investigation of city soundscapes into a mere ethnographic documentation, researchers from three cities (Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade) gathered around the project *City Sonic Ecology* have implemented a range of theories; the breadth of theoretical approaches is documented in the reading section of the website *City Sonic Ecology* [<http://citysonicecology.com/recommended-reading/>]. These have enabled us to think about soundscape in multiple ways and to compare different approaches and insights. In at least two of the three participating countries, Slovenia and Serbia, “soundscape studies are still a relatively new concept, and their implementation in a variety of working, professional, educational and research fields is underdeveloped” (Kovačić 2017: 61–62). Since embarking on this project, we have invested considerable effort in establishing the field and opening new doors for all future research on soundscape in the former Yugoslav region (Cf. Atanasovski 2015, 2016; Atanasovski and Hofman 2017; Hofman 2015; Dumnić 2016, 2017; Kovačić 2016, 2017; Medić 2016a, 2016b, 2017).

Given that the sound of a festival taking place in Belgrade is the subject of a thorough investigation for the first time (additionally, a festival that has mostly focused on visual arts, design and architecture, while music has played a relatively secondary role), I did not have exemplary models before me and had to devise a research strategy on my own. After trying and rejecting several exclusive methods, I opted for a hybrid methodology; the type of information that I gathered has consisted of the following:

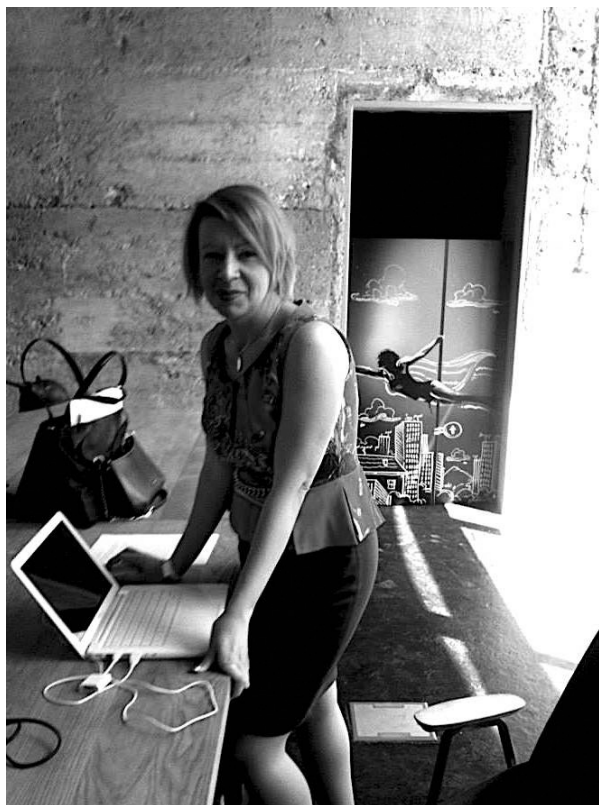
- quantitative research and structured interviews with several groups of interviewees;
- extensive audio recording conducted during the festival in the summers of 2014, 2015 and 2016;
- soundwalks;³
- video documentation of the Mikser Festival.

Throughout the duration of the project *City Sonic Ecology*, almost all researchers engaged in participant observation⁴ in various contexts. While I could not fully pursue such strategy, due to the fact that the ‘community’ of festival goers only formed during a few days each summer and was neither coherent nor consistent, over the course of multiple editions of the festival I did play the dual roles of an ordinary reveler and a

³ Hildegard Westerkamp has defined soundwalks as “any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment” (Westerkamp 2007: 49). On the relevance of soundwalks for the project *City Sonic Ecology* see: Dumnić 2017; Sweers 2017.

⁴ Participant observation has been defined as “a process in which the observer’s presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation. The observer is in a face-to-face relationship with the observed, and, by participating with them in their natural life setting, he gathers data” (Becker et al. 1968: vii).

researcher who was studying the phenomenon while simultaneously enjoying being a part of it. Furthermore, on 6 June 2014 I took part in the festival segment called *Edu[cational] Zone*, held in Galerija Štab under Branko's Bridge, where I gave a talk about my experiences with distance learning as implemented at the Open University in the United Kingdom, where I had previously worked as Associate Lecturer.



The author of this text participating in the 2014 Mikser Festival

While in her contribution to this volume Marija Dumnić focuses on Skadarlija's *musi-cscape*, i.e. a type of soundscape that is aesthetically and socially structured (Dumnić 2017), when analyzing Mikser Festival I was primarily interested in communicative and affective aspects not just of various musics, but also of other types of sound created, heard and 'consumed' during the festival.

MIKSER FESTIVAL

When conceiving Mikser as a festival of contemporary creativity and innovation, its creators Ivan Lalić (playwright and producer) and Maja Lalić (architect and designer) were inspired by the formerly derelict quarters in the world's metropolises transformed into cultural and tourist hotspots, such as New York's Tribeca. Hence, they

decided to occupy and renovate the abandoned former socialist industrial facilities at the riverbanks, such as warehouses, depots and halls, and turn them into alternative cultural spaces. Initially it was the abandoned silos of the former agricultural giant Žitomlin at lower Dorćol, at the south bank of the Danube, while a few years later it would relocate to the right bank of Belgrade's other major river, the Sava. The festival was named Mikser (i.e. Mixer) due to its eclectic and all-inclusive scope.

Mikser Festival began its 'life' in 2009, the year marked by a global financial collapse. Serbia was not spared the effects of the global financial crisis, which affected all sectors; thus, the public funds for culture underwent drastic cuts. In such unfavorable circumstances, the first Mikser festival was organized without support from either the Serbian government or Belgrade City Council; it was sponsored just by one bank, all participants and organizers were unpaid (Lalić 2012), and it attracted alternative audiences who appreciated such unpretentious, do-it-yourself approach. While in the following years the festival would occasionally receive some support from the city of Belgrade, its producers were nevertheless forced to rely primarily on animating the private sector. Mikser also received support from international cultural funds and artistic platforms, as well as foreign embassies and councils (ibid.).

Since its inception, Mikser Festival focused on various types of contemporary art and creative industries, encompassing industrial design, architecture, urbanism, visual arts, film, literature, video art, multimedia projects etc. Each year, the festival is given an umbrella theme, which corresponds with the most pressing issues and challenges faced by the city of Belgrade and Serbian society in general. The festival is also characterized by an affirmation of the leftist idea(1)s and policies, including a reappraisal of the former-Yugoslav socialist legacy; moreover, artists from the entire former Yugoslav region participate in the festival every year. Based on the annual reports prepared by the festival organizers, their main goals could be summed up as follows: discovering and activating abandoned industrial locations around the city of Belgrade; talent discovery, education, training, workshops and a dissemination of knowledge; initiating projects with local companies and manufacturers and involving local talents in the production process; fostering and improving exchange between the creative sector and the local community; finally, mixing creative, niche audiences with the audiences interested in mass popular culture.

In stark contrast to the specialized music festivals, Mikser initially treated music as just one of the many arts to be showcased, since the emphasis was clearly given to visual arts and architecture. Gradually, however, music became increasingly important in attracting the audience. As I argued in an earlier article, the entire project of the reculturalization of Savamala started with the intervention in the *sound*: namely, the soundscape of this quarter was modified, then commodified and 'sold' to city dwellers and revelers (Medić 2016a: 46). In the same article, I identified the *keynote* sound of Savamala as the sound of the heavy traffic, while the creative entrepreneurs from Savamala created their *soundmark* – the sound of the cool, alternative, hipster nightlife (ibid.: 47). After relocating to Savamala in 2012, Mikser Festival decisively contributed towards this soundmark, by adding new layers to Savamala's revamped soundscape. The boundaries between pleasant sound and noise thus became blurred,

and the overall experience became dependent on the individual's tastes and preferences. As observed by Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec:

once the sound is projected somewhere it is not expected, or is put in spatial relation to objects, it becomes free to carry extra-musical connotations. Then the whole new world of conceptual, associative, poetic and social connotations of sound opens up. In such situations sound keeps its fluidity and ephemeral nature and at the same time becomes object/like, and thus gains symbolic and semantic meanings (Vrhovec Sambolec 2011: 55).

When applying Jean-Paul Thibaud's model of the three main dynamics of the ambiance (Thibaud 2011: 43; cf. Medić 2016a), I argued that his first category, that of *tuned ambiance*, referred to the soundscape of Savamala before the reculturalization efforts; Thibaud's second category, that of *modulated ambiance*, applied to the arrival of cultural entrepreneurs to Savamala in the early 2010s, who brought *music* to this area. Finally, I associated Thibaud's third category of *framed ambiance* with Mikser Festival. Namely, in Thibaud's theoretical model, *framed ambiance* emerges through conditioning of the place by social practices; he uses the term *alteration* to refer to the work done by the public to format a place's ambiance (Ibid: 44; 51). In the case of Mikser Festival, the alteration of Savamala's soundscape and the entire ambiance occurred because this area was 'occupied' by the festival, featuring, as I have described earlier,

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 festival, 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. (Medić 2016a: 48).

In terms of music, Mikser Festival showcases a broad range of alternative genres ranging from indie rock⁵ to world music.⁶ In her discussion of Skadarlija, another tourist hotspot in central Belgrade which is characterized by performances of old urban music (*starogradska muzika*), Marija Dumnić observes that music "contributes to the tourist image/representation of the city by giving a local

⁵ Alternative music, especially indie rock, has carried a specific moral dimension in Serbia since the tragic 1990s. While Branislava Mijatović (2008) has overemphasized the role of alternative music in dethroning Slobodan Milošević, it is true that alternative rock was a symbol of resistance to Milošević's regime and a counterpart to the massive civil and student demonstrations held in Serbia in 1996/1997.

⁶ On *world music* in the Serbian context see Medić 2014: 108–116.

specificity/authenticity/heritage to one globally known entertainment concept” (Dumnić 2017). In comparison to Skadarlija, the case of Mikser is quite different, because Mikser’s musical offer is more cosmopolitan than local (although the festival itself does promote domestic brands, homegrown designers, artists, etc.) Moreover, music at Mikser Festival, and Savamala in general, is not openly commodified because, in comparison to the situation at Skadarlija, musicians do not perform particular songs for remuneration (cf. *ibid.*). However, visitors do come to bars, clubs and open-air concert spaces in Savamala to listen to the music performed live or selected by the DJ, where they pay for the entrance tickets and/or drinks, but also for the entire festival experience. Here I borrow Sambolec’s term *nonexpressive performers* (Vrhovec Sambolec 2011: 61) to describe festival goers, who help create the soundscape, but do not do so actively. As observed by Sambolec:

even in that situation though, there is usually a strong identity bond created inside the group – some kind of urban tribe. It creates a very strong social moment resulting from the immersion in the sound, generating a sense of identity for the group (*ibid.*).

In the case of Mikser Festival, even city dwellers and tourists who do not listen to indie or world music on a daily basis visit the festival to soak up the atmosphere. One may conclude that, during the festival, the environment influences the perception and interpretation of the soundscape, and in turn, the soundscape changes the perception of the environment.

MIKSER IN SAVAMALA (2012–2016)

2012 – REVITALIZATION OF SAVAMALA

In 2012, Mikser was relocated from the industrial setting of Žitomlin to Savamala. The festival ran from 25 May to 2 June 2012, and the main theme was the *revitalization of Savamala*, which at that point was only in its initial stage. In line with the strategy for revealing and activating the potential of this (then) neglected city quarter, Mikser Festival expanded both in duration and in location, spreading onto several formerly derelict streets in Savamala (Travnička, Hercegovačka, Braće Krsmanovića). The aim of the festival organizers was to help Savamala regain its long-forgotten status as a cultural and social center of Belgrade (Mikser 2012). The festival featured projects encompassing design, architecture, urbanism, visual arts, music, new media, education and environmental protection, with interventions in public space, exhibitions, workshops, talks, roundtables and performances. The music program of the festival consisted of concerts and DJs sets with performers from Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Germany, UK, US and China, ranging from dub, world music, techno and trance to indie/post-rock bands, including the underground heroes of the Belgrade club scene.

2013 – TRANSIT

The second edition of Mikser in Savamala, from 28 May to 2 June 2013 was devoted to the notion of *transit*; this topic was chosen in association with heavy traffic, as related to the identity and heritage of Savamala (Milosavljević 2013). In the same year, the team behind Mikser Festival opened Mikser House in the heart of Savamala: a hybrid concept space for cultural, educational and commercial activities, in a converted industrial facility of 1000 m². The idea was to provide a 'third place', to use Ray Oldenburg's term, for the residents and visitors of Savamala – a sociable place, the heart of a community's social vitality, inbetween the first (living) and the second (working) place (Oldenburg 1989). The Mikser team chose to establish such a 'third place' in Savamala in order to contribute to transformation into a progressive district with international visibility. In order to offset the expenses of running that venue, Mikser House organized some commercial events there, such as the Balkan Cheese Festival, Mikser Kids Market, Business Café etc. (Lalić 2016)

2014 – SUSTAINABLE UTOPIA

The third Mikser festival in Savamala (and the sixth overall) was held in Savamala from 3 to 8 June 2014. Spreading over 50 locations, it was focused on the idea that, during the festival week, a utopian place could be created, ideal in its social, political and moral aspects – but a place that would also be sustainable, both financially and logistically (Mikser 2014). The program further expanded the idea of fostering collaboration between different sectors and media, by hosting digital workshops, film projections in the streets, installations, humanitarian races, concerts, parties, as well as lectures on sustainable models and practices that promoted urban revival in a socially responsible manner. With hindsight, it now seems quite naive that only three years ago, in 2014, the team behind Mikser believed that they would be allowed to reconstruct and occupy the then-derelict Geozavod building, situated right next to Mikser House – which has since been renovated by the city officials and investors and nowadays hosts a model of the future Belgrade Waterfront.

2015 – ITCH

The 2015 edition of the festival that lasted from 3 to 7 June invited creative people to recognize their 'breaking point' and to talk about their frustrations related to creative work. The program of the Mikser Festival 2015 encompassed almost all bars, galleries, cultural centers, café bars and clubs in Savamala, in a display of solidarity and unity in the face of the imminent threat posed by the Belgrade Waterfront. The music program of Mikser Festival was included in the Savamala Cultural Summer, which was supposed to run from June until September. A space at Mostarska *Street* was transformed into an open-air concert venue Miksalište, with the capacity of about 5000 people, intended to host concerts, musicals, dancing nights, parties and other types of live performances. Consequently, this edition of the festival had the most ambitious music program hitherto, featuring blues performers such as Ana Popović Band and

The Cotton Pickers, Serbian alternative rock bands Kanda Kodža i Nebojša, Artan Lili, E-Play, Goblini, Eyesburn and Straight Mickey and the Boys, veteran rockers Partibrejkers, an alternative a capella choir Viva Vox, numerous jazz ensembles, as well as several bands from Sarajevo.

However, the plan to continue with the concerts throughout the summer was disturbed by the influx of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries (Cf. Medić 2016a; 2016b). The festival organizers faced a moral dilemma: should they proceed with their planned activities, or offer a helping hand to those in need. In Maja Lalić's words: "There was no dilemma at all. We built the Refugee Aid Miksalište in Mostarska Street, with the help of thousands of solidly united volunteers and citizens, as well as twenty local and international organisations" (Lalić 2016). Refugee Aid Miksalište opened in August 2015; during the day, Miksalište provided medical help, workshops for children, toilets, shower points and washing machines, points for charging mobile phones, etc. As I have observed earlier, the very same energy and drive, the *collective affect* that used to form in Savamala with respect to its cultural and entertainment offer, was now channeled into this self-organized local activism, and the residents and visitors of Savamala were encouraged to sympathize with the migrants' plight (Medić 2016a). Refugee Aid Miksalište remained in this location until 26 April 2016, when it was demolished by the city officials, because it did not have official permits. The Mikser team then relocated the refugee aid center to a nearby address, at Gavrila Principa Street.

2016 – SENSITIVE SOCIETY

The eighth Mikser Festival was held for the fifth and final time in Savamala from 8 to 12 June 2016 at more than 40 locations. The slogan sensitive society emphasized the themes of gender equality, female creativity, social equality, open dialogue, multiculturalism and conflict resolution. The festival also put an emphasis on the refugee crisis and offered possible directions for the refugees' integration into European societies. According to the press release, the festival organizers aimed "to explore the social concepts with which citizens and creative professionals can influence current social processes to improve the quality of everyday life, open the way for more direct cooperation with sensitive and vulnerable groups, and promote humane values, empathy and love" (Mikser 2016). The festival program again included talks, exhibitions, workshops, lectures, debates, concerts, performances, children and youth programs and cinema.

The music program was even more diverse and inclusive than in previous years and showed an obvious tendency to mix various mainstream genres with the usual alternative. Obviously aiming towards commercialization, due to mounting financial pressures, Mikser Festival incorporated some elements (and performers) typical of the Guča Festival of Brass Bands held in central Serbia each summer. Thus, aside from the expected indie rock and hip-hop performers such as Rambo Amadeus, Elemental, Kralj Čačka, Ti, Dojo, Lira Vega, Bitipatibi and others, the list of performers also included: the only Serbian folk brass bend led by a female trumpet player, Danijela Veselinović; the acclaimed brass orchestra of Boban Marković; a famous

MIF Mikser Festival 2016
 8 – 12. jun / Savamala

**Satnica
& mapa festivala**

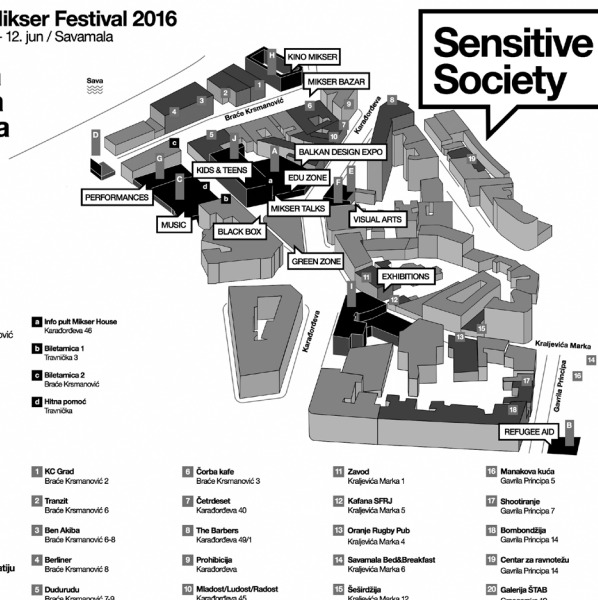
- A** Mikser House
Karadžićeva 46
- B** MiksaLife 2.0
Gavrilca Principa 15
- C** Balkanmala Stage
Travička 3
- D** Womenal Stage
Ulica Braće Krsmanović
- E** Kolektiv 53
Karadžićeva 53
- F** Magaza
Karadžićeva 53
- G** Monsun
Travička 3
- H** Španska kuća
Braće Krsmanović 2
- I** Vučina kuća
Karadžićeva 61
- J** Fakultet za diplomatiju
i bezbednost
Travička 2

- 1** Info pub Mikser House
Karadžićeva 46
- 2** Biltenica 1
Travička 3
- 3** Biltenica 2
Braće Krsmanović
- 4** Hilma pomoć
Travička
- 11** KO Grad
Braće Krsmanović 2
- 12** Transit
Braće Krsmanović 6
- 13** Ben Akiba
Braće Krsmanović 6-8
- 14** Beširer
Braće Krsmanović 8
- 15** Oudunuda
Braće Krsmanović 7-9

- 6** Čorba kafe
Braće Krsmanović 3
- 7** Četvrtak
Karadžićeva 40
- 8** The Barbers
Karadžićeva 49/1
- 9** Prohibicija
Karadžićeva
- 10** Mladost/Ljubost/Radost
Karadžićeva 45

- 11** Zvezd
Krajićeva Marka 1
- 12** Kafena SFRLJ
Krajićeva Marka 5
- 13** Orange Rugby Pub
Krajićeva Marka 4
- 14** Savamala Bed&Breakfast
Krajićeva Marka 8
- 15** Seizurcija
Krajićeva Marka 12

- 16** Marakovo kuća
Gavrilca Principa 5
- 17** Shootiranje
Gavrilca Principa 7
- 18** Bombardija
Gavrilca Principa 14
- 19** Centar za raznovidju
Gavrilca Principa 14
- 20** Galerija ŠTAB
Ciroegjeva 10


MUZIČKI PROGRAM
**B BALKANMALA
STAGE / Travička 3**

- SREDA / 8. jun**
- 22:00 Element
- 23:00 Rambo Armatov / Rambo Armatov i
Kornelija Petrović - Best of Best
- ČETVRTAK / 9. jun**
- 22:00 Bala Petrović / Hala
- 23:00 Kralj Čučka / Katarina Jovanović
- PETAK / 10. jun**
- 21:00 Otkloni Dječija / Dječija Vokalno 10
- 22:00 Bora Dugić / Bora Dugić i Ljubla Jovanović
- SUBOTA / 11. jun**
- 21:00 Jovanović / Bora Jovanović
- 22:00 Ota Mamba / Ota Mamba, Katarina
Jovanović, Ema Salarić
- 00:00 Otkloni Bala / Maska
- NEDELJA / 12. jun**
- 21:00 Gula
- 22:15 Muzik / Swedish Reunion + Esma
Redžepova

**C WOMENAL STAGE
Ulica Braće Krsmanović**

- SREDA / 8. jun**
- 21:00 AAA
- 22:15 Mira Marinko
- 23:00 Ota Mamba / Ota Mamba
- ČETVRTAK / 9. jun**
- 22:00 Kaza
- 23:00 Ina Anđelić
- 23:00 Bity / Bity
- 23:45 Zvezd
- PETAK / 10. jun**
- 21:00 Dipo
- 22:45 B
- 23:00 Ana Čurbić
- 00:15 Ljubla / Ljubla
- SUBOTA / 11. jun**
- 21:00 Lina Vrećo
- 22:00 Bala / Bala
- 23:00 Bity / Bity
- 00:15 Otkloni / Otkloni
- NEDELJA / 12. jun**
- 19:30 Namika
- 20:15 Muzik / Muzik
- 21:00 E-Pay
- 22:15 Tessa / Tessa feat. Bala / Bala

Mikser Festival 2016

Serbian virtuoso on the frula (Serbian fife) Bora Dugić; Bosnian sevdalinka singer Božo Vrećo with his band Halka; Mostar Sevdah Reunion with the Romani folk singer Esma Redžepova; and others. As I discussed in an earlier article on Serbian ethno and world music scenes, such a chalk-and-cheese program was possible because some folk music performers (such as Esma Redžepova and Boban Marković) had previously been rebranded as world music performers by Serbian music promoters and record companies; it was only thanks to this ingenious marketing strategy that they became accessible/acceptable to the urban, hipster audiences (Medić 2014: 114–115). At that point, both the festival organizers and the audiences were unaware that this edition of the festival would be the last one in Savamala, and there was still optimism as regards the future of the festival and the refugee aid center.

MIKSER FESTIVAL – A SOUNDWALK

I will now describe one typical soundwalk recorded during the festival. I selected a soundwalk recorded during the 2015 edition of the festival – the year that saw the most drastic changes to the festival format. The soundwalk was recorded on Friday, 5 June 2015, the busiest day of the festival. Even the city dwellers who were not interested in the festival per se descended to Savamala for its regular Friday night clubbing offer.

I began my descent into Savamala at 9pm from Branko's Bridge across the river Sava, which connects the old urban core of Belgrade with New Belgrade (Novi Beograd; a residential quarter built after World War II). I was carrying the Zoom 4 recording device, set

to stereo mode. Due to the overwhelming traffic noise on the bridge, I had to reduce the recording level to 21/100, to prevent it from peaking; this figure alone testifies to the noise level in this area. As I descended the stairs towards Savamala, the noise level never subsided – in fact, it only grew louder in Karađorđeva Street, when the sound of the trams passing under the bridge mixed with the rest of the motorized traffic. However, another sound layer became heard right under the bridge: the sound of music coming from the pubs and clubs in the Karađorđeva Street (*Prohibicija* and *Mladost Ludost Radost*).

Mikser Festival itself was taking place in a triangular area marked by the streets Karađorđeva, Braće Krsmanovića and Travnička. As I turned toward the Braće Krsmanovića Street, one could hear the increasing chatter of the exhibitors at the Mikser Bazaar (market) and their customers, mixing with the disco music coming from the clubs *Transit* and *StevaMala* in the same street. Aside from Serbian (and other ex-Yu languages), one could also catch conversations in German, English or Italian. A majority of voices belonged to adults, but one could also occasionally hear children's voices, since some exhibitors at the market sold products aimed at youngsters – toys, badges, notebooks etc. – and the entire festival was advertized as family-friendly.

As I turned the corner of Braće Krsmanovića and Travnička, I could hear music from a jazz trio (saxophone, piano, drums) playing live at the garden of the beer pub *Dubliner* in Travnička Street. The noisy chatter of festival goers intensified as I came closer to the ticket stand and the food vendors. As I approached *Miksalište*, I could hear the Serbian alternative rock band *E-Play*, playing in front of a very enthusiastic audience. Because of the noise level I had to reduce the microphone level again, to only 15/100. Some chatter was also heard from the jazz club *Dvorištanje*, right across *Miksalište*, although no music was being played there at that moment (and even if were played, nobody would have been able to hear it anyway).

When I turned around and walked towards Mikser House, situated at the corner of Travnička and Karađorđeva Streets, I went past the warehouse-turned-concert venue *Magacin Depo*; however, no music was being played there at that time, because the venue hosted the exhibition *Young Balkan Designers*. The exhibition itself was louder than expected, because of the acoustics of this former industrial warehouse, whose plain concrete walls amplified sounds. As I started approaching Mikser House, I could hear the clutter of the numerous guests sitting in the garden outside, and loud rock music coming from the inside. It was an evening that welcomed three bands from Sarajevo: *Velahavle*, *Skroz* and *Dvadesetorica*. Mikser House was packed to capacity and the festival crowd, which included the acclaimed theatre director *Kokan Mladenović*, actor *Branislav Trifunović* and composer *Irena Popović Dragović*, fiercely supported these bands from neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Since it was impossible to record inside Mikser House because of the exceptionally loud sound, I returned to *Miksalište*. *E-Play* had finished their set and were replaced by *Eyeburn*, a reggae-hard rock band from Belgrade that has been active since the 1990s. Their set was heard not only by a packed auditorium at *Miksalište*, but also by numerous fellow musicians, members from other bands playing at the festival, thus blurring the lines between festival goers and participants. I observed that the audience mostly consisted of people in their 20s, 30s, even 40s (myself included), while there were hardly any teenagers: the festival program did not include performers popular among the youngest audiences. Simultane-

ously with this gig, other programs were happening at Cultural Centre Grad [City] and the derelict Spanish House, both in Braće Krsmanovića street. There was a rumor in the streets that the famous American pop singer Lady Gaga, who was known to be in Belgrade at that time, was seen among the festival goers, and was most likely 'hiding' in Transit, on account of the heavy security in front of that club.

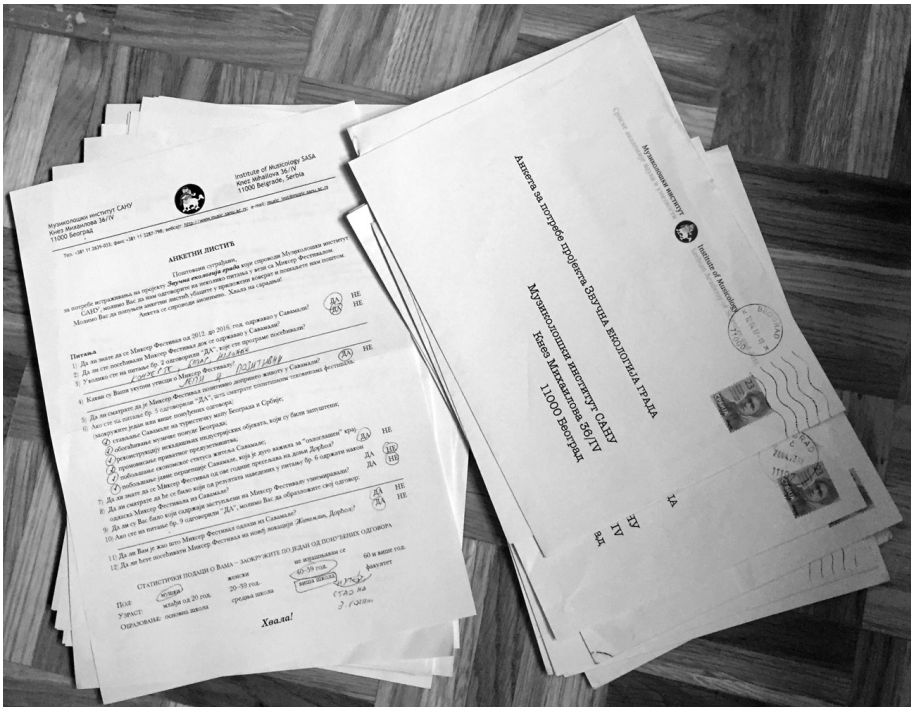
As I walked back towards Mikser, I went past the refurbished Geozavod building, which at that point had just been chosen to host the miniature model of the future Belgrade Waterfront. Unlike the hustle and bustle of the festival in its immediate vicinity, the Geozavod edifice was eerily quiet, with just a few security guards in front of the entrance. At that time, the construction work for Belgrade Waterfront had not started yet; but the silence of the Geozavod building served as an ominous warning that, in less than two years, the entire festival area would be – silenced.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

As observed by Marija Dumnić (2017) in her contribution to this volume, when analyzing musical preferences one may focus on the issues of “taste (Bourdieu 1986), types of audience (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), popular music preferences of the youth (Johnstone and Katz 1957), musical preferences in interpersonal communication (Rentfrow and Gosling 2006) and social group membership (Sheperd and Sigg 2015), influence of identity markers (such as ethnicity, gender, age) on music preferences (LeBlanc et al. 1996, LeBlanc et al. 1999, North 2010) ...” (Dumnić 2017). On this occasion, I felt it necessary to investigate the demographics of the visitors of Mikser Festival in the period between 2012 and 2016, i.e. while it was taking place in Savamala. I did not focus on their perception of the sound(scape), but rather on the question of what brought them to Savamala and how they reacted to the festival. I was also interested in their overall impressions of Savamala, and whether they felt that the festival had contributed positively to the life of this formerly neglected part of Belgrade; but also, to see whether there were some lessons to be learned by the festival organizers. Based on these findings, I will conduct the next stage of quantitative research, in which I will explore the visitors' impressions about the soundscape of Mikser Festival, and compare them to my own field recordings and written impressions collected over the three-year period (from 2014 to 2016).

The quantitative research was conducted over a three-month span, from February to May 2017. The participants were divided in two groups: the primary group (PG) comprised Savamala revelers, visitors to Mikser Festival and/or Mikser House, who were randomly selected. I did not interview the residents of Savamala, but precisely the visitors who came there on purpose i.e. to attend Mikser's programs. I distributed printed questionnaires in self-addressed and stamped envelopes, and asked the interviewees to return the questionnaires by regular post. I distributed 100 envelopes and received 68 of them before the set deadline (5 May). On the other hand, the control group (CG) consisted of researchers working at various institutes in Belgrade, all of them with postgraduate degrees, as well as art students. I chose this relatively homogenous group not only because their educational level was already known, but also because intellectuals and art students would be expected to be enthusiastic atten-

dees at a festival such as Mikser. This control group received and returned questionnaires either in person or online, thus making it possible to separate them from the primary group who sent their replies by post. I limited the number of participants in the control group to 68, thus equating it to the number of respondents in the primary group.



Envelopes with questionnaires (the primary group)

With respect to the primary group, I wanted to investigate who were the visitors of Mikser Festival, what brought them to Savamala, how they responded to the program, and whether they developed an awareness of Savamala as a cultural hub; in other words, how they reacted to the ‘brand’ of Savamala and whether they regretted the fact that it was about to be destroyed.

The participants in both primary and control groups were asked to state their age group (under 20, 20–39, 40–59, or over 60 years of age) and gender (male, female or unspecified), while the primary group was also asked to state their educational level (elementary school, secondary school, college or university), which with the members of the control group was already known.

This investigation has shown that the audience of Mikser Festival in Savamala was heterogeneous in terms of identity markers: age, gender and education. Among the festival goers from the primary group, 53% were under 40 years old, while the remaining 47% were 40 and older, which contrasted my initial presumption that a majority

of festival goers would be younger. In terms of gender, 53% of visitors were female, 47% male, making it an almost even distribution. When it comes to education, 29% of visitors had secondary education, 12% college education, and the remaining 59% university education, thus making them an overwhelming majority.

As to the control group, 71% of the respondents were female, and only 29% male; 65% were under 40 years old, 32% between 40 and 59 years of age, and only 3% over 60. But while a majority of members of the control group fit into the overall profile of an ideal Mikser Festival visitor, the actual results showed that, although 91% knew that the festival was taking place in Savamala between 2012 and 2016, only 26% of them actually visited the festival – thus leading me to conclude that the festival had not fully succeeded in attracting its desired audiences, i.e. intellectuals and art students.

When asked what type of program they were attracted to, more than a half of interviewees (53%) singled out music programs – concerts and gigs. Another 35% selected Mikser market (bazaar), where small entrepreneurs and artists sold their products, while only 12% chose another type of activity (lectures, exhibitions, round tables, children's workshops etc.). Among the members of the control group who attended the festival, 60% opted for music programs, 30% for the bazaar, and only 10% for other types of events.

All participants from the primary group (100%) and all festival goers from the control group had very positive impressions about the festival. Among the descriptions that they used one finds: "Belgrade needs a festival of this kind;" "excellent festival, well organized;" "great people, great atmosphere;" "very trendy, successful and well attended;" "very dynamic;" "good location, cool venues, interesting program;" "great for the economy and private entrepreneurship;" etc. Other positives that they observed were that a formerly derelict part of the city was revitalized and filled with cultural and artistic content. A few respondents said that the festival offered quality programs, but that the space was inadequate, and that they could not overcome their negative preconceptions/prejudices concerning Savamala. Some respondents complained that concert tickets were quite pricey, but that there was also a good offer of free programs. One respondent opined that the festival provided an alternative to the musical life of Belgrade, but preferred its first incarnation in Žitomlin and argued that, by moving to Savamala, the festival became "a hipsters' oasis."

Except for a sole respondent in the control group, all other respondents in both groups, including those who did not even attend the festival, responded that the festival influenced the life in Savamala in a positive way. When asked to reflect on this, 100% in the primary group and 74% in the control group said that the festival helped put Savamala on the tourist map of Belgrade and Serbia; 76% in the primary group and 85% in the control group said that it enriched the musical life of Belgrade by offering a new quality; 82% in the primary group and 59% in the control group opined that it improved the public perception of the formerly notorious quarter. Other benefits observed by the participants were: reconstruction of former industrial objects that had been abandoned and neglected (82% PG, 47% CG); promotion of private entrepreneurship and small businesses (58% PG, 12% CG); improvement of the economic status of the residents of Savamala, an area known for high levels of deprivation (41% PG, 15% CG).

When asked whether they were bothered by certain segments of the festival, four interviewees from the primary group complained of the aforementioned Guča-like aspects of Mikser – be it food stands in the streets, brass bands, or inebriated crowds: “It has become a folk fair, just like Guča, with barbecue stands, which is *kind of grotesque*.” Several respondents also stated that they were bothered by many events taking place at the same time, because it meant that some of them could not be properly enjoyed: “A cellist was playing in Mikser house at a corner, with no amps, and at the same time an urbanist was talking on the stage, using the microphone, which meant that the cellist could not be heard at all.” While not numerous, these respondents felt that the festival was losing its identity and becoming too populist and commercialized.

While 76% of participants in the primary group knew that the festival would be moving from Savamala to lower Dorćol in 2017, only 53% in the control group knew that (with one participant correctly remarking that this information was not even available on the festival’s official website as late as April 2017). Exactly the same percentage of respondents in both groups (53%) thought that the good things achieved in recent years in Savamala would be sustained even with the festival’s removal from the area; one respondent remarked that “Savamala will obviously be diminished in terms of its tourist importance; however, the musical offer in Belgrade will not be poorer – it will just be transferred elsewhere.” While 76% of interviewees from the primary group said that they regretted that Mikser would be leaving Savamala, 65% of the control group said so; moreover, 100% of respondents from the primary group said that they would continue to visit Mikser in Žitomlin, while only 62% of the control group said so (whilst adding that their attendance would depend on the festival program, timing and other factors).

POSTLUDE: BACK TO THE FUTURE

Listening to the soundwalks recorded during the Mikser Festival in 2014, 2015 and 2016, whilst preparing this article, I was reminded of the infectious optimism and the visionary spirit of the festival organizers. Unfortunately, their idea to turn Savamala into a permanent fixture on the map of Belgrade nightlife and a tourist hotspot only materialized for a few years, before it was halted by the top-down business interests.

Based on the research discussed above, there are several conclusions and lessons to be learned. First, in spite of Mikser Festival’s primary focus on contemporary architecture, design, creative industries and such, it was *sound* i.e. music of all genres that primarily drew visitors to the festival and kept them interested in it. This conclusion corresponds with my already cited observation that the reculturalization and transformation of Savamala was predominantly achieved by means of changing the *sound* of the area, i.e. by bringing music into this ugly, derelict quarter. It was music and sound that enabled the festival goers to form identity bonds and to become members of Mikser’s urban tribe, immersed in its sound.

Second, it is clear that the marketing campaigns in the past years were not entirely successful, because a large percentage of the urban, hip, educated audiences did not even know that the festival was taking place in Savamala; or, even if they knew,

they were often put off by the notoriety of the location, or insufficiently interested in the festival program. Perhaps a clearer emphasis on music, instead of talks, exhibitions and such, would have helped in attracting the audiences in larger numbers. However, those who did attend the festival carried very positive impressions. While on this occasion I did not investigate the attendees' perception of the sound, almost all of them expressed their enthusiasm for the festival's lively atmosphere and enjoyed being part of the festival crowd.

Third, both those who attended the festival and those who did not, felt that the festival contributed positively to life in Savamala and the tourist offer of Belgrade in general, which needed an alternative event of this kind. A major lesson learned was that Mikser Festival, in spite of its good intentions, visionary ideas, regional networking and private and international support, could not survive without support from Serbian officialdom. It was not just about finances, although Ivan Lalić admitted that the reason for leaving Savamala and closing down Mikser House was the fact that the project was financially unsustainable (Ljuna 2017). More importantly, in the present-day transitional Serbia, the very fact that the festival was organized independently and not endorsed either by the City of Belgrade or Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information exposed it to political whims and competing business interests. Even as the festival relocated from Savamala to Dorćol, it remained vulnerable to such influences.

The ninth edition of the festival was held from 25 to 28 May 2017 at the place where it had begun – in the former Žitomlin silos at the south bank of The Danube – under the aptly chosen title *Migration*. The previously-announced location for the festival and the new Mikser House, also in the lower Dorćol – the factory IMK Beograd – had to be changed at the very last moment, because the administrative procedure for this defunct factory was suddenly accelerated and its immediate sale announced (thus confirming my observation from the previous paragraph). The organizers of Mikser were then forced to opt for the first former industrial location that they 'discovered' for the Belgrade audiences in 2009. Unless they manage to make common interest with cultural officialdom and negotiate their support for the festival, it will not come as a surprise if they were forced to move again.

As of now (end of May 2017), Ivan and Maja Lalić are still searching for a suitable location for the new Mikser House in Belgrade. Simultaneously, preparations are underway to open a Mikser House in Sarajevo, the capital of the neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus expanding the already established regional collaboration in a more tangible way. The years of sound living in Savamala may have ended much sooner than expected, but the idea of Mikser as the all-inclusive, barrier-breaking, sustainable utopia has not been abandoned.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire used for quantitative research

For the purpose of research on the project City Sonic Ecology, please answer several questions about Mikser Festival. Please put the questionnaire in the enclosed addressed and stamped envelope and send it to us. The research is conducted anonymously. Thank you for your collaboration!

Questions

- 1) Did you know that Mikser Festival was taking place in Savamala between 2012 and 2016?
- 2) Did you visit Mikser Festival while it was taking place in Savamala?
- 3) If your answer to the question no. 2 with “Yes,” which programs did you attend?
- 4) Describe your overall impressions of Mikser Festival.
- 5) Do you think that Mikser Festival contributed positively to life in Savamala?
- 6) If your answer to the question no. 5 was “Yes,” what do you regard as its positive features (choose one or several of the answers below)
 - placing Savamala on the tourist map of Belgrade and Serbia;
 - enriching the musical offer of Belgrade;
 - reconstruction of derelict and abandoned former industrial objects;
 - promotion of private entrepreneurship;
 - improving the economic status of the residents of Savamala;
 - improving the public perception of Savamala, which has long been considered a “notorious” neighborhood.
- 7) Do you know that Mikser Festival is moving to Dorćol in 2017?
- 8) Do you know that any of the results stated in the question no. 6 will be sustained after Mikser leaves Savamala?
- 9) Did you find any of the programs of Mikser Festival disturbing in any way?
- 10) If your answer to the question no. 9 was “Yes,” please elaborate.
- 11) Do you regret that Mikser Festival is leaving Savamala?
- 12) Will you visit Mikser Festival at its new location (*Žitomlin*, Dorćol)?

Statistical information about you — please choose:

Gender:	male	female	other	
Age group:	under 20	20–39	40–59	over 60
Education:	primary	secondary		university, postgraduate

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Ивана Мегућ

ГОДИНЕ ДОБРОГ ЗВУКА: МИКСЕР ФЕСТИВАЛ У САВАМАЛИ (2012–2016)

(САЖЕТАК)

У овом чланку разматрам звучни пејзаж (саундскејп) Миксера, независног фестивала савремене креативности, покренутог 2009. године у Београду, главном граду Србије. Фокусирам се на раздобље од 2012. до 2016. године, када се Миксер одржавао у Савамали, урбаној четврти у центру Београда, која је била подвргнута различитим урбанистичким и културалним трансформацијама у разматраном периоду. У тексту се најпре бавим историјатом и концепцијом Миксер Фестивала, као и појединачним годишњим издањима фестивала током његовог „живота” у Савамали. Након тога, описујем једну „звучну шетњу” снимљену током фестивала, а затим наводим резултате квантитативног истраживања спроведеног почетком 2017. године, а у вези са утисцима посетилаца и укупном рецепцијом фестивала. Креативни тим који је покренуо Миксер, предвођен брачним паром Мајом и Иваном Лалићем, имао је за циљ да Савамали обезбеди трајно место на мапи београдске културно-туристичке понуде и ноћног живота. Чињеница да у тој намери нису успели првенствено је била проузрокована финансијским разлозима, али и околношћу да су се нашли на путу амбициозном економско-урбанистичком пројекту, чији је циљ комплетна трансформација десне обале реке Саве. Ово наводи на закључак да дугорочни опстанак независног фестивала у транзиционој Србији не зависи ни од понуђеног програма нити од интересовања публике, већ од обезбеђивања званичне подршке и инфраструктуре.