

**FRIDAY, APRIL 12**  
**SESSION 2**  
**10:00 - 11:00**

ROOM C - SALA DE VIDEOCONFERENCIAS

**Dezire Tilinger**

**Alternative urban scenarios  
of the Sava amphitheatre - a  
comparative analysis of  
three plans from three  
different planning periods  
with space syntax –**

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**- a comparative analysis of three plans from three different planning periods with space syntax –**

The research examines the role and possibility of applying hypothetical/speculative models, or alternative urban scenarios, in contemporary architectural and urban practice in order to explore the complex relationship between the planned and realized. The research project aims to show how three very different planning paradigms, the socialist-modernist, the postmodernist and the neoliberal, compare to each other through the example of the Sava amphitheatre.

The Sava Amphitheatre is located on the right shore of the Sava River in Belgrade, near the old city centre. It was mostly unbuilt and was a popular bathing spot before 1884. When the main railway station was built there, the site was suddenly occupied by a large number of railroad tracks. At the time, because it was convenient for the transportation of goods, most of Belgrade's industry was located at its shores, limiting the access to the riverfronts for its residents.<sup>1</sup> But, due to its attractive location on the riverbank and the emergence of New Belgrade, a massive socialist urban development from the Yugoslav era, across the river, it was realised that the Sava amphitheatre had potential to expand the old city core and link it to the then new socialist city rising on the left riverbank.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, it has occupied the imagination of architects and urban planners alike for decades, but despite the many plans prepared for it during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was only recently developed, as displacing the Main train station has proven to be quite a challenge. Out of the many plans available for the analysis, as this part of the city has a very complex urban history, three were chosen to represent three different planning paradigms that marked Belgrade's development: **1) The Home of Friendship**, or monumental congress centre complex proposed for the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Non-aligned (1975) – as a representation of the socialist planning paradigm and one of the first plans for the redevelopment of the area<sup>3</sup>, **2) The Town on Water** (Varoš na vodi, 1990) that proposed a wide variety of open public spaces – the postmodern paradigm<sup>4</sup>, and lastly, **3) The Belgrade Waterfront project** that is in the last phases of its development for the neoliberal paradigm.

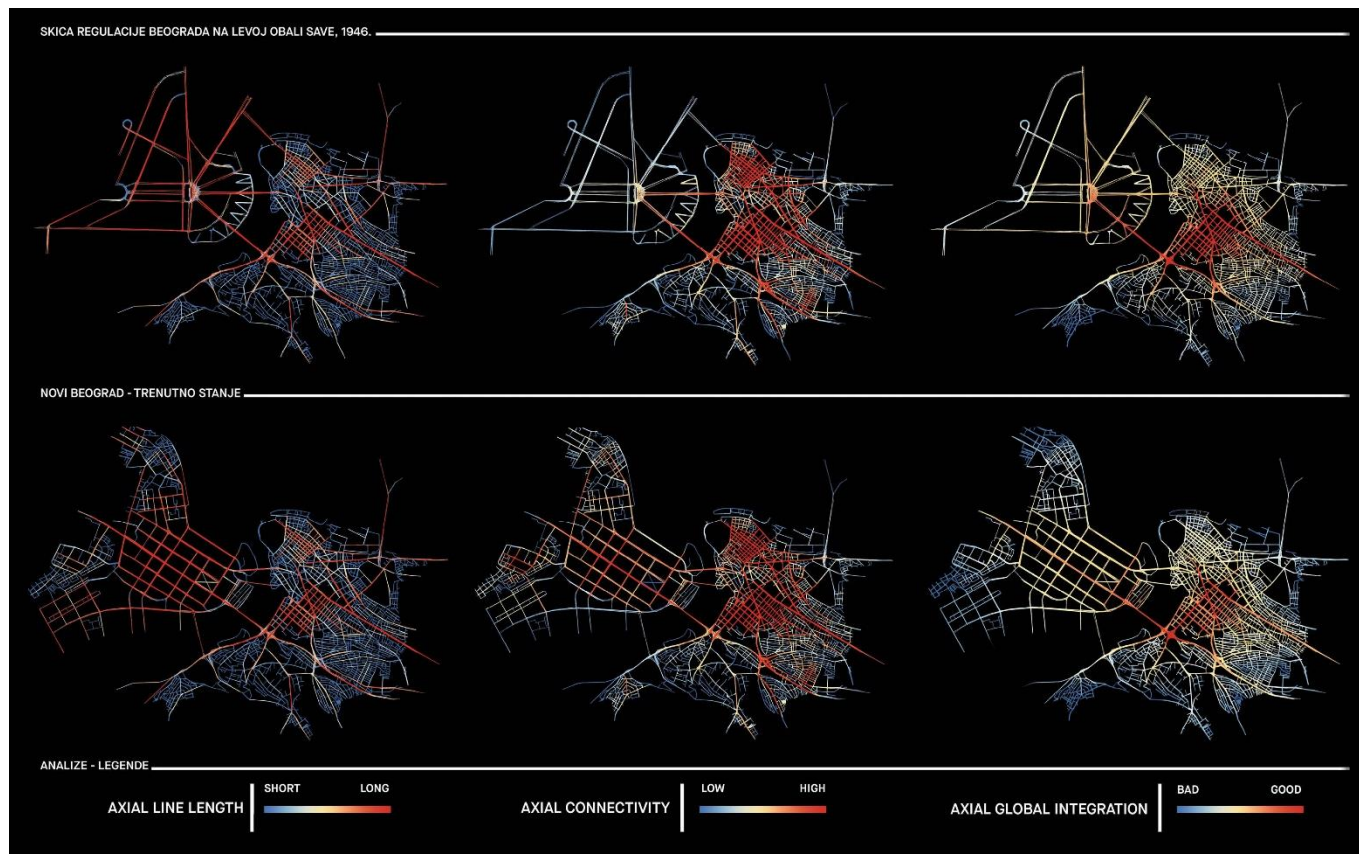


1. Plans that will be analysed: 1) The home of friendship; 2) The Town on Water; 3) The Belgrade Waterfront project (Source: 70 godina Urbanističkog zavoda Beograda. Knj. 2. Planovi. (2018).

All the projects proposed the displacement of the train station, which sparks a broader debate about what kind of relationships the analyzed paradigms had towards built heritage, but that is where similarities stop. The main difference between the earlier projects and the current development lies in their attitude towards the plot on the riverbank across it, known as block 18 and one of the few still undeveloped New Belgrade blocks. The 1975 and 1990 projects insisted on connecting the two blocks opposite of each other with bridges and treating them as one single development and spatial unit. The underlying logic of the projects was that those two plots, which also happened to be the geometric centre of Belgrade, formed a link between the old and the, then new, socialist part of the city and should, therefore, function as a public space accompanied by cultural and educational facilities. The projects were developed by prominent architects and the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, as well as through architectural competitions, with the aim of achieving an urban unit that integrates the two very different Belgrades on its side, but is also well suited to the morphology of old Belgrade behind it and is thoughtful towards the new skyline it will form.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to that, The Belgrade Waterfront project is an urban megaproject criticized for its lack of public spaces, open and built, as it is essentially an exclusive residential, commercial and office space, which in the opinion of experts is ruining Belgrade's skyline and identity, as well as questioning the resilience and sustainability of the project which is regarded to have "national importance". It is financed by Eagle Hills, a foreign investor from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with considerable subsidies provided by the Serbian government. The government which put the project into motion sees it as a good example of urban development, but many professionals and citizens point out that the project is a usurpation of the planning procedures and practices and that many laws had to be changed or bypassed in order to legitimize the project, while also highlighting the lack of participation and transparency.<sup>6</sup>

The methodology is based on the comparison of the three observed plans through a dialogue of qualitative and quantitative methods by crossing a historical-interpretive approach and space syntax, a tool for quantifying results in the field of urban morphology, resulting in a comparative analytical drawing of the current and hypothetical states of the former Main Railway site. Combining these methods provides a more holistic view of the case studies, as the historical-interpretive approach allows for a detailed understanding of the socio-political context from which the three analysed projects arose, as well as a better reading of the drawings derived from the space syntax software. On the other hand, space syntax is a well-known methodology and a viable way to add a layer of quantifiable data to support the interpretation process.

The aim of the research is twofold: firstly, it provides insight into the pros and cons of the three planning paradigms it tests and argues that, for this case study, implementing some design principles from the first two projects could have improved the current urban development; and secondly, it tests the potential for using space syntax methodology in a historical-interpretative research framework rather than only a tool used in the design process. The paper is divided into three parts: 1) the introductory - describing the thematic and methodologic framework; 2) the application – which will further describe the case studies and apply the previously described methodology; and lastly, 3) the discussion – which will deal with describing and analysing the results and identifying the next steps of the research, as well as its weak and strong points.



2. Example of drawings that will be produced through the research process – artefact (Source: drawing by author for previous research on similar topic)

### The role of EXPERIMENTATION in the research project

The experimentation aspect of the proposed research lies in the unconventional use of the space syntax methodology, which, even though it has a wide spectrum of uses, is mainly used in practice as part of the design process to test various design options, or in theory as a way to research the relationship between space and different social patterns, but rarely as a tool for testing urban scenarios from different periods within the same urban context. This could be because many questions arise regarding the precision of the proposed usage and the nature of the research itself (speculation), as it is more complex than just drawing in old plans instead of the existing condition to the place of interest. The built environment around the analysed spot also changes more or less, depending on the case and analysed period, making the implementations of old plans within it a lot more complex and forcing the researcher to work in a sort of anachronous state (reflection), shifting the research more towards the qualitative and interpretative than the experimental (evaluation), which space syntax (interface), due to its ability to quantify data is often used for. The proposed retroactive observation of plans represents, first of all, an abstract and complex exercise and a possibility for testing the limits of space syntax usage in combination with the historical interpretative method, but it also creates an opportunity to extract lessons from previous urban planning experiences, that could then be translated into recommendations for planning in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Nikolić, Marko, and Milena Vukmirović. "Industrial Heritage along Belgrade Waterfront in Planning Documents." *Arhitektura i urbanizam*, no. 51 (2020): 86–103. <https://doi.org/10.5937/a-u0-28961>.

<sup>2</sup> Perić, Ana. "Public Engagement under Authoritarian Entrepreneurialism: The Belgrade Waterfront Project." *Urban Research & Practice* 13, no. 2 (2019): 213–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2019.1670469>.

<sup>3</sup> *70 godina Urbanističkog zavoda Beograda. Knj. 2. Planovi.* (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Perić, Ana. "Public Engagement", 213–27.

<sup>6</sup> Perić, Ana, and Marija Maruna. "Post-Socialist Discourse of Urban Megaproject Development: From City on the Water to Belgrade Waterfront." *Cities* 130 (2022): 103876. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103876>.