

CHANCES

Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna

CHANCES.
PRACTICES, SPACES AND BUILDINGS IN CITIES'
TRANSFORMATION.

Curator: Prof. Arch. Annalisa Trentin



International Conference, 24th October 2019

CHANCES was an international conference that aimed to explore, from a multidisciplinary perspective, the fragile but continuous urban transformation through the effective contribution of culture, nature and technology.

The conference wanted to provide a deeper understanding of urban transformations' research and practices, focusing on the use, re-use, design, renovation and innovative governance and management of public spaces, urban commons and buildings.

The organizing committee believes that these thoughts will largely contribute to shape and increase sustainable design, construction and planning in constant cities' transformation.

The selected contributions were built on reflections and studies concerning current or historical approaches that are changing or drastically changed the cities we lived in.

The Conference has been organised by the PhD in Architecture and Design Cultures -
Department of Architecture - University of Bologna

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XXXIII PhD cycle, Architecture and design cultures.

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RE-THINKING CITY SPACE IN THE CONTEXT OF NINETEENTH CENTURY BELGRADE

Dragana Ćorović¹, Zlata Vuksanović-Macura², Marija Milinković³

¹Assistant Professor, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Forestry – Belgrade, Serbia

²Research Associate, Geographical Institute “Jovan Cvijić” SASA – Belgrade, Serbia

³Assistant Professor, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture – Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

The split into “nature” and “culture” has lasted for centuries in Western civilization and remains the framework through which we consider various important problems of contemporary society. In the last decades of the twentieth century there has been a clear reaction to this dichotomy, first in a geography discourse then elsewhere, and a move towards studying the construction and representation of nature in cultural history. A very important feature in the approach to design for recovering contemporary urban landscape is urban greenery regeneration as well as the study of the urban greenery past.

The broader historical context of our study is the establishment of new capitalist relations towards urban territory in nineteenth century Belgrade, and with it a new distribution of political and economic power. This process led to the disappearance of the main green spaces in the city and the suppression of the memory they carried. The reconstruction of Belgrade’s historic core was implemented according to Emilijan Josimović’s urban plan (1867). Nevertheless, it contained some very important indications of ecological thinking. In order to elaborate a refined approach to environmental and cultural problems that Belgrade, like other cities, faces today, we bring to light and critically examine those features and aspects of Josimović’s plan that established organic relations and balance between nature, culture, city memory and city development.

Keywords

Plan of Belgrade, Urban nature, Critical spatial practice, Public space

1. Introduction and Context

This text examines the nineteenth-century transformation of Belgrade urban space, specifically the reconstruction of the city’s core, according to the regulation plan developed by Emilijan Josimović (1823-1897). The study focuses on the contemporary border zone of the “city within the moat” (*Varoš u šancu*) and on the case study of one city park designed at the time, and which remains in its intended public spatial function. The layers of the past in that space beg the question of the relation of public urban spaces and their historical basis, in addition to history lessons regarding the complex relation of “nature”/“culture” and a broader understanding of today’s problems in the city.

The notions *public* and *public space*, as parts of *public realm*, in the context of contemporary urban theory “are assumed rather than analysed” (Cuthbert, 2011, 95). Public space is commodified in the course of capitalist enterprise, and, according to J. S. Kayden, its universal degradation is a signifier of that process (Cuthbert, 2011, p. 96). What is a good

public place? increasingly becomes the question How can we save a good public place? and perhaps even more poignantly How can we not forget a good public place? The process of constant modifications of physical space – an inherent characteristic of capitalist metamorphic development – continuously degrades public space (Cuthbert, 2011, p. 85). As a counterpoint, David Harvey clearly points out: “[i]nvestment in the built environment therefore entails the creation of a whole physical landscape for purposes of production, circulation, exchange, and consumption.” (1985, p. 6)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Belgrade, the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia, saw the emergence of strange mixed spaces, which can be recognized in Henri Lefebvre’s notion of the influence of capitalist development on cities: “The history of the city, and of each city, reveals a marvellous unity in which forms, functions, and structures are associated. However, market pressure, especially the global market, tended, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to dissolve it within intersecting networks of

circulation. Although dispersed along the periphery and in suburbs, its centre is strengthened. This results in the paradox (dialectic) seen elsewhere: urbanization, the expansion of the city, the degradation of space. It is no longer urban or rural but is composed of a formless mixture of those two characteristics: ruralisation of the city and urbanization of the countryside” (2014, p. 99).

The Serbian Technical Journal, the official newsletter of *The Society of Serbian Engineers and Architects*, published three articles on the development of Belgrade in 1907, where the relation between the social, political and spatial development was clearly established (Manojlović, 1907). The study was a critical examination of the process of urbanization of the city. Namely, a large part of Belgrade were informal squalid settlements for poor people. The article described the suburb as “an incurable living wound” (Manojlović, 1907, p. 109). In 1907, the entire Belgrade region covered some 5,000 ha, with the central city area 1,100 ha of that. The streets took up 152 ha, the plazas 20 ha, parks and squares 28 ha, and empty spaces and wolds 219 ha. There was also a built area of 376 ha and 40 ha Fortress. The remaining 265 ha was uncategorized, lost land, in unlisted and empty plots, unsurveyed (unusable) roads, brickyards, fields and meadows (Đurić, 1912; Vuksanović-Macura & Ćorović, 2016).

All of this was the result of the transformation of Belgrade in the early nineteenth century from an Ottoman to a European city, influenced mainly by the capitalist development of the Principality and then Kingdom of Serbia (Ćorović, 2017). The planned, but also random transformation of physical space was a comprehensive reflection of society in general in a certain period, and also indicated the crux of current economic relations, means of production, cultural standards and techniques of expression of cultural practices. (Cosgrove, 1998 [1984]). Tendencies towards the modernization of society, which appeared simultaneously with the establishment of capitalist social relations, were visible in the entire physical space of Belgrade, throughout the period (Ćorović, 2018).

The consequences of urban development of industrial cities in Europe were apparent even in the course of the nineteenth century, much earlier than in Belgrade. By their nature and scope, urban problems of capitalist development in Belgrade reached their apogee in the period between the two

world wars. They were generally best visible in the poor quality of residential living and the scarcity of housing (Vuksanović-Macura & Macura, 2018), as well as in the lack of publicly open spaces.

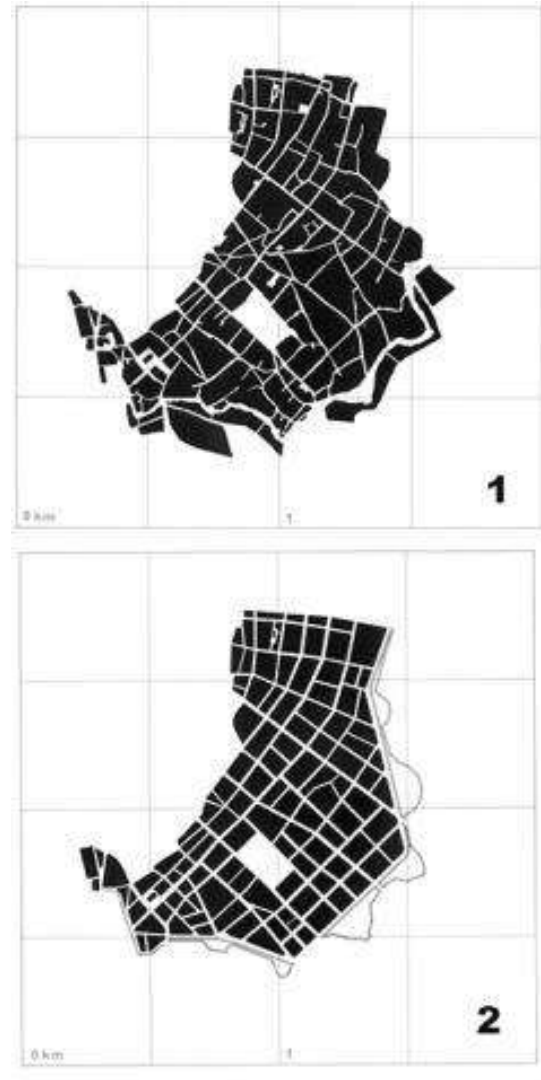


Fig. 1: Urban transformation of Belgrade. (1) Ottoman street network, before 1867 (2) New street network, according to the Regulation Plan for Belgrade, by Emilijan Josimović, 1867. Source: Perović, 1985, p. 8.

2. The Regulation Plan for Belgrade, 1867

The main phase of urban transformation of Belgrade in the nineteenth century began in 1867. The plan coincided with the end of a turbulent period of parallel presence of both Ottoman and Serbian authorities in Belgrade, lasting from 1815, to 1878, when the Principality of Serbia gained full independence (Ćirković, 2004). The transformation of the existing urban tissue (Fig. 1), i.e. the communication network maze, followed the

establishment of the Belgrade Cadastre, and was twinned with the implementation of the new regulation plan for the city.

The regulation plan for today's historical core of Belgrade was designed in 1867, after a three-year geodetic survey of the city, by Emilijan Josimović, a civil engineer, educated at the Technical University in Vienna. Along with the plan, Josimović published a study of the state of affairs and an argument. In his book, he deals foremost with the traffic problem of contemporary Belgrade, that is, dysfunctional existing urban communications (Josimović, 1867, p. 1). An important and extensively discussed topic in the plan were the green spaces in the city.

Josimović was born in Moldova Veche, in Romania, came to Belgrade in 1845, and spent the following decades doing, among else, pedagogical work. In addition to numerous books, he published the first two textbooks in the field of technical education in Serbia, *Građanska arhitektura* [Civic Architecture] (1860) and *Praktična geometrija* [Applied Geometry] (1862) (Jevtić-Novaković &

Centuries prior, the rhythm of city life was divided among various cultural, religious and ethnic groups. Serbia became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1459, while Belgrade joined in 1521. The city's already rich layers of multi-confessional, multi-ethnic and multicultural history had been further enhanced by the two periods of eighteenth-century Habsburg rule. If Josimović's plan is seen from the perspective of Ottoman and Austrian Belgrade, it would appear that it was a critique of these dominant urban layers. With its ordered rectangular street network, Josimović's plan erased previous internal city borders, establishing a superstructure of "abstract formalism" (Boyer, 1994, p. 61), in clear, rational and precise form. In that sense, it resembled modern functionalist city plans of the twentieth century: "Everywhere the architect and city planner cut the fabric into discrete units and recomposed them into a structured and utopian whole: disorder was replaced by functional order, diversity by serial repetition, and surprise by uniform expectancy" (Boyer, 1994, p. 46).



Fig. 2: The Regulation Plan for Belgrade, by E. Josimović, detail. (1) Vojvoda Vuk Park. Source: The University Library "Svetozar Marković", Belgrade and the Collection of Zlata Vuksanović-Macura.

Divac, 2018). He became professor at the University in 1869, having participated the year prior in the founding of the Technicians Association, of which he was the inaugural president. In the century after the creation of the Belgrade plan, Josimović was lauded as the man with a vision of the transformation of city and the capabilities of "an economist, an architect, a philosopher and a naturalist" (Macura, 1968).

The political moment in the year of publication of Josimović's plan was defined by the departure of the Ottoman army from the Belgrade fortress.

Josimović sought to create a functional city in the best tradition of progressive nineteenth century modern city planning, creating efficient connections between its new 119 blocks. His plan meant the erasure of previous urban layers to the extent necessary for the creation of a new system that incorporated the functioning of all communal equipment. The rectangular network he designed between the fortress and the moat, which is to say, over the historic core of the city, became the basis for the establishment of uniform development in this space. The new street matrix, along with the

newly planned green belt (Fig. 2) along the former city moat, the previous long-term city border, was to comprise a unified, inter-connected system (Josimović 1867; Vuksanović-Macura, 2018; Ćorović, 2018).

3. The Belgrade City Moat

The Belgrade city moat, a remnant of previous periods, can be understood as a line in space, that is, an *edge* of the landscape, appearing in different forms (Casey, in: Malpas, 2011). Depending how one understands the *edge* in space, whether it limits, surrounds or distinguishes two different kinds of space, we differentiate “rims, gaps, borders, and boundaries” (Casey, in: Malpas, 2011, p. 94). The given forms suppose specific physical, spatial, social and cultural properties. In these terms, we will first look at the Belgrade city moat as a border or borderline.

Such a structure is established and/or built by people in order to divide spaces, but also to be able to control and defend the border. Also like this are state borders, with the use of power primarily to prevent or control the transfer of people and goods from one side of the barrier to the other.

The Belgrade city moat was built at the same time as the reconstructions and additions to the fortress walls, in 1723-36, during the short-lived Habsburg control over the city. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the moat was an earthwork rampart, 6 m tall, reinforced with a 2 m tall, wooden palisade, bound together with woven branches. On the outside, it was 4 m deep, and was punctuated regularly with conical openings for cannons supplied with ammunition from subterranean arsenals. It stretched from the river Sava, across the Belgrade ridge, down to the Danube. The most important points along this line were the four city gates: Sava, *Varoš* [City], Stambol and Vidin, through which one entered the city. As early as the 1820's, the structure of the city moat began to erode. The palisade existed until 1825, and individual elements were broken down over time: “as the Belgrade poor would break through the fence and remove the palisade and branches under the cover of night, the wooden stakes disappeared quickly” (Jovanović, 1964, pp. 25-27). In 1866, the main, Stambol gate was demolished. Although the decision regarding the complete removal of the moat was passed in 1864, the carting of earth and the other parts of this

structure began in 1880 and lasted three years (Ranković, 1939).

4. The Plan's Green Belt

The interaction between the modern city and nature, the establishment of an approach to city land derived from political power and economic muscle, conditioned the disappearance of nineteenth century city gardens and the memories they carried (Vuksanović-Macura & Ćorović, 2016). Apart from being an engineer and professor, Emilijan Josimović was also active in civic life, often critical of city and state authorities' decisions regarding public space. He discussed the problem of the loss of private Oriental gardens in Belgrade, expressing dismay about society's and municipal authorities' attitude towards the natural heritage of the city. All of which clearly shows Josimović's refined understanding of Islamic culture, and particularly what we would today call its ecological aspect. In the plan, he attempted to overcome the noticeable lack of greenery in Belgrade by providing for a green belt around the city core. It was to comprise a boulevard with six public parks of different sizes. The projected green boulevard was to extend the length of the former city moat, in the process incorporating into the communal, public green structure two of the largest formerly private gardens.

The boulevard was to be a distance of 2.3 km in total, consisting of three traffic elements: a carriage path with a pavement, a parallel riding lane, as well as a treelined pedestrian path. The carriage way and pavement were to be 17 m in width, the riding lane 6, while the pedestrian walkway was to be 4 m wide (Josimović, 1867, 12-13). The design also served to establish communication between the internal and external movement of traffic, connecting the boundary road (the green belt) and the rectangular street network. Comfortable and pleasant roads, taken on foot, horse or in carriages, following the terrain topography, from one river to the other (Sava and Danube), were also supposed to be vantage points from which to gaze upon the surrounding landscape (Josimović, 1867, 14).

Had Josimović's idea been turned into reality, the new, public, multi-purpose and broadly useful space would also incorporate the history of the city, that is, the legacy of previous cultures: its main defense structure, the city moat, on the one hand,

and luxurious family gardens in the very heart of the civic space, on the other. Aside from projecting the form and function of the spatial elements of the green belt, and how they were to fit into the terrain topography, he also imbued this linked set of public open spaces with the capacity to be historical and cultural legacy-bearers. That is to say, the belt sections linked by the boulevard were to be named after the geographic entity to which they were in one way or another connected (Srem, Bosnia, Vračar, Avala, Stambol, Vidin and Danube). Each of the six public parks within their respective green belts were to be named for the most prominent persons from Serbian history: Prince Miloš, Karađorđe, Dositej Obradović, Lukijan Mušicki, Miša Anastasijević and Vuk Karadžić (Josimović, 1867, 14, 20-23), and each was to have a public monument. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, German-speaking countries developed “people’s gardens” (*Volksgarten*), that is, aristocratic gardens, open to the public and intended to inform and educate about German history (Jellicoe, Jellicoe, Goode & Lancaster, 1986). The first public parks in Great Britain appeared in the first decades of the nineteenth century, in response to the needs of the industrial city. With Central Park in New York (by Olmsted and C. Vaux, 1858), the movement for forming public urban parks (*the Parks Movement*) reached powerful momentum. Josimović conceived the green belt and its parks precisely as public city space on public land, providing also for compensation to the owners whose land was to be expropriated. Nearly all the information about the planning of this space indicates that he completely followed the patterns of development of the modern nineteenth-century capitalist city. Nevertheless, the fact that the green belt was designed to integrate into its space physical artefacts of a previous city age, make it a paradigm within which it is also possible to consider contemporary urban issues.

In the following decades, Josimović’s regulation plan for Belgrade dictated the establishment of a new urban network, the framework for entirely new spatial and functional relations. The notion of a green belt around the town appears again in 1888, twenty years after Josimović’s suggestion (Fig. 3). It was Konstantin Glavinić, contemporary member of city parliament and later several-term President of the Municipality of Belgrade, who submitted a suggestion for the formation of a new green belt.

According to his plan, the municipality would buy out the strip of land around Belgrade, 500 m wide, stretching again from the Sava to the Danube, intended to be afforested. The Municipal Board adopted the motion, but as it required a ten-year extension of municipal taxes, the citizens rejected this proposal (Ćorović, 2015).

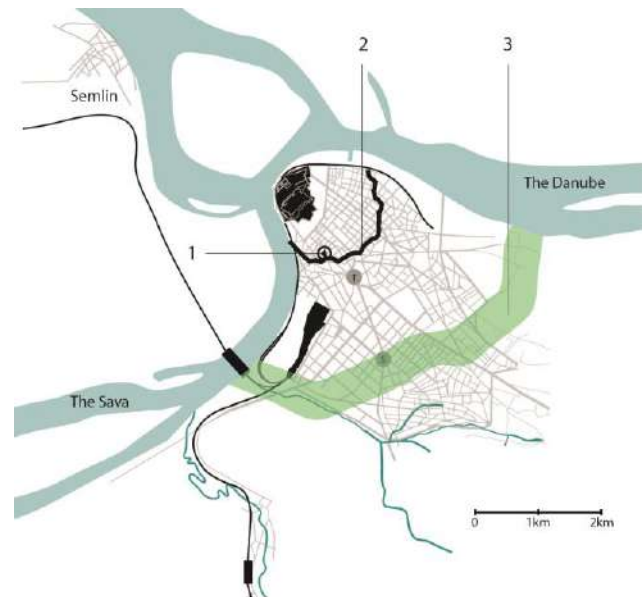


Fig. 3: The positions of: (1) Vojvoda Vuk Park, (2) the former moat and (3) the green belt, proposed in 1888, (T) Terazije square, (S) Slavija square, as featured on the map of Belgrade in the beginning of twentieth century. Source: Ćorović, 2015, adapted drawing 4a, Appendix 2

None of these nineteenth century suggestions of a green belt was executed, although the idea of building a green ring around the city, albeit of shifting placement, scope and size, has remained prominent to this day. Even though only one of Josimović’s six parks along the green belt was actually built, all the locations remained in the public domain (Mićović, Đalović, 2016). The one that was built, the Vojvoda Vuk Park, also known as the Topličin Venac Park, aside from its original public purpose, also preserved the shape given in Josimović’s plan.

5. Re-thinking Josimović’s Green Belt Spatial Heritage

Topličin Venac Park – named after Milan Toplica, a medieval Serbian knight who, according to legend, died at the Battle at Kosovo field in 1389 fighting Ottoman forces – stands on 3,033 m² of what was

partially public, partially private land taken from a Belgrade doctor (Josimović, 1867, p. 23). According to Josimović's plan, the park was to be named after Miša Anastasijević (1803-1885) (Josimović, 1867, p. 23), a wealthy merchant, land owner and philanthropist. It is situated in the very heart of the city core, in the immediate vicinity of one of the most important streets in Belgrade, Knez Mihailova, the Serbian Academy of the Sciences and Arts, the Applied Arts Museum, the hotel Palas, and other important sites and spaces. The location became prominent during the interwar period, as can be attested by the construction of the Privileged Stock Company for Export, the PRIZAD Palace on the park's very edge (Milinković, 2012). On the other end, harbouring a special role for public life was and remains the Kafana Proleće [restaurant "Spring"] situated in the bordering Vuk Karadžić Street.

Officially the park is named after Vojvoda Vuk (vojvoda being old Serbian military rank equivalent to duke), the nickname of Vojin Popović, an infantry colonel, commander of the volunteer units in the Balkan and First World wars. The bronze sculpture placed in the park in 1936 shows the Vojvoda mid-battle, the work of the renowned sculptor Đorđe Jovanović ("Cultural Properties", 2010; Vujović, 2003). The statue is the subject of a passage in the novel *The Houses of Belgrade* by Borislav Pekić, taking place during the historic protests of March 27th, 1941, only days before Nazi World War II assault on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: "At that moment it seemed as if the general rushed out of the forest, out from behind those scattered chestnut trees, with his chest out and one leg bent at the knee, bandaged with a field dressing, while the other leg pushed down with at a sharp angle against the yellowed, rough-hewn pedestal" (1994, p. 123).

Although planned much earlier, Vojvoda Vuk Park was only built in the early twentieth century, that is, in 1907 (Fig. 4). Since the eighteenth century, in times of battle, this space served for the immediate relief of the wounded, since it lay between two city gates, behind the city moat. Otherwise it was nothing but a desolate, muddy patch, until the circus Henri, complete with camels, giraffes, elephants and beautiful white horses landed there in 1903. A wooden structure was erected for the purpose, featuring shows for a year. As the Belgrade chronicler Nikola Trajković wrote about it: "This abandoned piece of earth provided

both children and adults with magic, the kind unseen even in their own imaginations" (1984, p. 68). During the Austrian occupation of Belgrade in World War I, it served as a military graveyard. Also, the park area is an archaeological site of the Roman Singidunum, just like several nearby places in the historical city core. Various cultural layers are superposed one on top of the other in the compact space of the park, while the streets that outline and border the park space additionally emphasise its value. Through different historical periods, this relatively small extension in Josimović's green boulevard route did not only provide a pedestrian thoroughway, but allowed various aspects of city life to take place.



Fig. 4: Vojvoda Vuk Park, Topličin Venac, postcard, the beginning of twentieth century. Source: the Belgrade City Museum, Ur_15088

The likely most valuable aspect of this place is that citizens still consider this place in the city's core as public good, an urban common and open resource. Differing views of city space and opposed interests of various stakeholders have resulted in conflicting actions regarding questions of civic life. Thus, the ongoing reconstruction of Topličin Venac Park was part of a broader redevelopment of the city centre. The official web page of the City of Belgrade announced the reconstruction of the park, publishing along with it portions of a conversation with the prominent European architect, Boris Podrecca. He was engaged to design the projects of several central city spaces, which will, according to him, become not only "more peaceful, beautiful, but also healthier" ("Podrecca", 2018). "City hygiene", or "a reanimation", as Podrecca calls the process, fits into the current conversion of the historical core into a 5.5 km pedestrian zone (e.g. two and a half times larger than the pedestrian zone

of Milan, a city of over 3 million compared to Belgrade's 1.7 million). In Podrecca's words, Topličin Venac Park has so far been an "autodrome", while the reconstruction is supposed to turn it into a continuous paved surface, punctuated with "green islands" and eight sculptures of the renowned sculptor Olga Jevrić (in addition to the existing monuments). Since the announcement of the park reconstruction, there have been tumultuous public reactions, culminating in the spring of 2019 (Fig. 5), when a "human shield" around the park was formed (Mirković 2019) to prevent gentrification of this space. In the meantime, the City government have abandoned Podrecca's project, and the work has been halted in July 2019.



Fig. 5: Vojvoda Vuk Park, Topličin Venac, April 2019. Source: Pešaci nisu maratonci – Kretanje je život [Pedestrians are not marathoners – Mobility is life]; Mirković, 2019)

6. Conclusion

The particular significance of Topličin Venac Park within Belgrade's open spaces can be gleaned from the recent reactions of the public – people who use the park and live in its immediate vicinity as well as other citizens – to the announced and begun reconstruction that is laying waste to this open public space.

A particularly important part of renovating landscapes and city greenery is the study or historical enquiry of those spaces (Milinković, Ćorović, Vuksanović-Macura, 2019). Landscape theorists and architects promote the idea that along with the necessary study of their history, the renewal of a city's green spaces can indeed contribute towards solving current ecological problems, primarily through overcoming general environmental and cultural amnesia (Girot, in Corner, 1999). As Alexander Cuthbert writes in his

book *Understanding Cities*: "[o]ur capacity to implement our mandate – the symbolic attempt to express an accepted urban meaning in certain urban forms – totally depends on our willingness to excavate the archeology of meanings that lie beneath the superficial expression of urban form." (2011, p. 289)

The revival of green spaces in a city, elements of a cultural landscape, is important for solving contemporary ecological problems. By comparing, that is, presenting clear parallels between today's theoretical positions on landscape renewal and Emilijan Josimović's mid-nineteenth century ideas of forming a green belt around Belgrade, we wish to point out the historical precedents of ecological thinking, a refined relationship in preserving organic relations and a balance between nature, culture, city memory and civic life.

A deeper understanding of these historical processes, and their integration into contemporary processes of spatial transformation, can result in quality public spaces organically growing from their surroundings, achieve recognition and be preserved as "good places". They can indeed be crucial strongholds in the struggle against the general erosion of values in public spaces and the public sphere more broadly.

7. Acknowledgements

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