



Post-socialist discourse of urban megaproject development: From City on the Water to Belgrade Waterfront

Ana Perić^{a,b,*}, Marija Maruna^b

^a Institute for Spatial and Landscape Development, ETH Zurich, Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5, 8093 Zurich, Switzerland

^b Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 73, Belgrade, Serbia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Authoritarian neoliberalism
Belgrade
Discourse analysis
Post-socialist urban planning
Urban megaprojects
Urban governance

ABSTRACT

As many as twenty years after the overthrow of its authoritarian political regime, Serbia remains a 'proto-democracy', supported by the economic ideology of wild neoliberalism. Under such circumstances, urban development is subject to various abuses, such as the misapplication of legal procedures, neglect of the public interest, and politicisation of planning. In particular, urban megaprojects exhibit various distortions, as they require special regulations, additional funding, long-term timeframes, and ad hoc actor-networks. Against that background, this paper examines the main ideological landscapes behind the Belgrade waterfront regeneration, illustrated by two projects – City on the Water and Belgrade Waterfront. By collecting 65 articles from the daily press, we identify relevant stakeholders and present their statements to depict their positions, viewpoints, interests, and specific value frameworks. The research is directed towards 1) recognition of conflicts and coalitions, 2) elucidation of decision-making patterns, and 3) identification of power structures in these two projects. Finally, comparing the key findings in each case helps understand the transformation of the ideological narratives and their effect on urban governance.

1. Introduction

Urban megaprojects require functional unity around a spatial problem, such as a lack of infrastructure for basic services, obsolete transport infrastructure, or dilapidated superstructure in central or exclusive districts like urban waterfronts (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Since public funding is usually insufficient to cover (re)development costs, global economic actors (banks, funds, private consortia) come to the fore (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Shatkin, 2011). Consequently, these projects require less informal but more intense horizontal cooperation among local stakeholders without firm control by higher administrative authorities (Brenner, 2004; Fainstein, 2001). Nevertheless, entrepreneurial spirit, political support and regulatory concessions offered at the national scale are prerequisites for international developers to pursue megaprojects (Brenner, 2004, 2019; Del Cerro Santamaria, 2013; Fainstein, 2008). The 'iron-law of megaprojects' (Flyvbjerg, 2017) is based on the logic of exception (Altschuler & Luberoff, 2003), such as long-term project delivery timeframes, budget overruns, special instruments and regulations, non-standard organisational structures, reduced public accountability, and ad hoc actor networks.

The planning, governance and implementation of megaprojects are

similar regardless of the context, be they in the developed Global North or the developing Global South, as megaprojects in developing countries are implemented according to western models (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2009; Lee, 2012). However, the extent of deregulation, in other words the looseness of public interventions, differs in megaproject management across the globe. For example, in Western traditionally liberal democracies with a strong capitalist outlook, such as the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), governmental support is marginalised (Fainstein, 2001; Petretta, 2020). Weakened but still persevering European welfare democracies provide more room for public deliberation and negotiation of the interests initially defined by developers (Fainstein, 2008; Machiels et al., 2021; Scholl, 2017). In the Global South, the 'privatisation' of planning through megaprojects tends to replace local administration with private governance (Shatkin, 2011). In post-socialist European countries, high-level politicians become crucial partners and enablers of developers' visions, hence, providing a framework for the so-called 'top-top' approach, a regulationist state-led process of urban development (Müller & Trubina, 2020; Zeković & Maričić, 2022).

Accordingly, megaproject developments generally create immense polarisation in power geometries between developers, on the one hand,

* Corresponding author at: Institute for Spatial and Landscape Development, ETH Zurich, Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5, 8093 Zurich, Switzerland.

E-mail addresses: aperic@ethz.ch (A. Perić), marija.maruna@arh.bg.ac.rs (M. Maruna).

and other stakeholders, on the other. How these polarisations are tackled and reduced for the sake of larger social benefits, and not only financial gain for developers at the expense of violating place identity, large public financial subsidies, and regulatory concessions, is of critical importance for the success of megaproject development. Solid rules are essential in this regard: for instance, the 'rule of law' (Haggard & Tiede, 2011) as applied in the UK, which refers to the higher accountability of public institutions in charge of controlling and curbing unilateral benefits of megaproject development; the 'rule of morality' (Taylor, 2014; Lu, 2009; Zhang et al., 2005), depicting China's ability to achieve high transparency and public control of corruption; and, finally, fostering citizen participation amidst liberal planning in Bulgaria (Slaev et al., 2019).

In the context of wild post-socialist neoliberalism, feasible institutional solutions that can guarantee the success of megaproject development are difficult to invent due to the unstable institutional framework these are embedded in. Hence, post-socialist urban megaprojects point to 'social distortions caused by the superior position of the private sector, opportunism within government structures, lack of professional expertise and, finally, neglect of the public interest' (Perić, 2020a: 213). More precisely, in the absence of strict rules and obligatory mechanisms for steering urban development, nation-state politics couples with the developers' core aim of achieving extra profit to jointly play the key role in pursuing urban megaproject development in the post-socialist transitional societies (Perić & D'hondt, 2020; Perić, 2020a; Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019; Machala & Koelemaj, 2019; Koelemaj & Janković, 2020). Consequently, such polarisation of power makes the public willing to contest urban megaprojects, however, they are not fully capable of doing so. Briefly put, the megaprojects' 'excessive nature' peaks in fuzzy social-economic-political settings: it is just the lack of consistent regulatory frameworks and transparent decision-making mechanisms that fuel the planning, governance, and implementation of urban megaprojects (Cook, 2010; Cope, 2015; Zeković et al., 2018).

With this in mind, we intend to reveal the ideological landscape that places megaprojects in such an exclusive position as a tool for urban development, and, moreover, to illuminate the nature of urban governance that lays the groundwork for megaproject development in countries facing transformation towards the liberal economy and political pluralism. Framing the research within the narrative focused on the notions of (non)-democracy, inequity, exclusion, and subordination of public life to both market forces and extra-legal commitments, we address the following questions: What are the positions, roles and relationships among the stakeholders involved in urban megaproject developments? What are the main power centres in the decision-making processes? What are the 'corrective factors' in unbalanced power geometries? In addition to these queries that tend to elucidate the complex actor-networks at hand, the underlying question is: How do the ideological frameworks and their transformation affect the nature of urban governance of megaprojects? Narrowing the research timeframe to the last two decades to encompass both the early democratic (2000–2012) and the quasi-democratic (2012–present) Serbian regimes, we analyse two case studies in Belgrade as examples of flagship urban megaprojects of each regime – City on the Water and Belgrade Waterfront, respectively. Ultimately, this research extends the understanding of the relational nature of the urban processes involved; moreover, it contributes to the growing body of literature on authoritarian neoliberalism by shedding light on the politics of urban policymaking.

The paper is structured as follows. After a concise conceptual part on authoritarian neoliberalism, we present the methodological apparatus used in the research, which revolves around discourse analysis as the relevant tool for discovering not only the given but also the hidden factors shaping the story behind the two flagship projects. The central part firstly presents statements made by the relevant stakeholders (units of analysis), which are then critically interpreted. The discussion compares the two flagship megaprojects, identifying: 1) conflicts and

coalitions, 2) decision-making patterns, and 3) power structures. This comparison helps the observer understand the shifts in the respective ideological narratives behind the two projects and their effect on urban governance. The conclusions are not only deemed relevant for similar (transitional) socio-spatial contexts, but also highlight some trends in urban megaproject development globally.

2. Conceptual background: urban development under authoritarian neoliberalism

The authoritarian neoliberalism perspective illuminates the state–market relationship by attending to the political leadership that, instead of controlling development mechanisms to reduce negative externalities, strongly supports the development visions pursued by market forces, suppressing any other parties (such as social groups and political opposition) (Bruff, 2014, 2016; Di Giovanni, 2016). Affected by the 2007 financial crisis and the enforced changes in the societal sites of capitalism, state reorganisation followed a pattern towards non-democracy, alienating the state from other actors in social and political debates and, hence, jeopardising multi-level decision-making flows (Bruff & Tansel, 2019). Instead of stabilising the conflicts that emerged from socioeconomic reorganisation, the state evolved towards overarching centralisation and thus became vulnerable to contestation. Such a transformation of the state has simultaneously made it both stronger and weaker (Bruff, 2014): coercion and legal and extra-legal instruments increase the state's exclusive position, at the same time diminishing democratic practices of cooperation with other social actors (Tansel, 2017).

Research on the above topics finds fruitful ground in societies with traditionally politically-centralised systems (Bilgiç, 2018; Borén et al., 2021; Fabry, 2020), as well as in contemporary liberal democracies that face social and political suppressions of practices that do not conform to the principles of authoritarian neoliberalism (Fearn & Davoudi, 2022; Grange, 2017; Ward, 2022). Categorising different forms of neoliberalisation, Gallo (2021) defines three varieties of authoritarian neoliberalism: traditional authoritarianism, populist nationalism, and technocracy or 'governance beyond the state' (Swyngedouw, 2018), meaning expert, solution-oriented public-private networks. Having in mind that throughout history Serbian urban development policies and practices were made in the absence of liberal democracy, with the current urban development narrative wrapped into a populist envelope, and with Serbia heading towards an increasingly technocratic European Union (EU) policymaking, Serbia makes an interesting case where three varieties of authoritarian neoliberalism (to a greater or a lesser extent) intersect and coexist. Hence, this research pays attention to the implementation of the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism across diverse socio-spatial settings, thus tackling its varieties.

Recent studies elucidate the topic of spatialising authoritarianism (Borén et al., 2021), thus shedding light on a place-based approach and intertwined urban, nation-state, and even supranational scales when analysing the spatial effects of authoritarian neoliberalism. Piletić (2022) particularly refers to the influence of global actors in the transformation of national governance, highlighting the readiness of national authorities to waive their power for the sake of free movement of capital. The urban scale is also considered a battleground for pursuing authoritarian neoliberalism. For example, Ward (2022) considers gentrification as a neoliberal spatial manifestation and, hence, the basis of new local political hegemonies. More precisely, urban governance inevitably affects higher governmental regimes, as land use policies are crucial for controlling global capital movements. Piletić (2022) similarly considers the urban scale not as a playground for implementing neoliberal policies, but rather as an active element helping to foster authoritarian neoliberalism.

However, the key decision-making powers concentrated within the national government mostly prevail over rescaling towards either lower or higher authorities (Tansel, 2019). This is particularly seen in

countries that historically lack democratic political regimes. For example, the Turkish authoritarian neoliberal state has been transformed through the centralisation of power in executive governmental structures (Tansel, 2019), whilst the dominant Hungarian and Polish political parties and their oligarchs control nearly all public institutions and increasingly large parts of the economy (Fabry, 2020; Stubbs & Lendvai-Bainton, 2019). Consequently, such a concentrated decision-making power geometry excludes the voices of citizen groups, the general public, and expert communities (Tansel, 2019). However, an authoritarian state does not necessarily imply brute force: in representative democracies, institutions have been transformed to legitimise the exclusion of dissent, meaning that political compromise and consensus are no longer seen as proper tools for handling divergencies (Fearn & Davoudi, 2022). Briefly, although affected by external factors (such as transnational corporations or intergovernmental institutions) or internal ones (including domestic companies, and city and regional authorities), the state is a central, crucial force (Gallo, 2021).

The concept of authoritarian neoliberalism is closely associated with 'authoritarian populism' (Sager, 2019), where the strong leader receives praise but other stakeholders are excluded, and 'neo-populist neoliberalisation' (Shields, 2007), where governments declaratively use the anti-neoliberalisation narrative but reinforce the practical implementation of neoliberal policies. Hence, the nation-state is considered not only a legal and regulatory provider of exceptional measures, but develops further towards non-democratic political patterns, seen in the discrediting of political opponents, misuse of public service media, and neglect for the needs of certain population groups (Borén et al., 2021). For example, the narrative on 'national will' in case of the redevelopment around the Gezi Park in Istanbul concealed the economic, political and cultural components of Turkish national governance by promoting the dichotomy between the false representative democracy, on the one hand, and the so-called 'others', represented by dissident social forces, on the other (Bilgiç, 2018). In addition, decisionism, supporting non-grounded decisions as non-disputable just because they stem from the highest governmental tiers, flourishes, as 'any law, principle or general rule is (exclusively) the result of decisions of political and legal authorities' (Zeković & Maričić, 2022: 531). Looking closely at the field of urban planning, decisionism triggers the politicisation of planning, whereby planners become loyal to neoliberal politics (Grange, 2017).

However, authoritarian neoliberalism also arises through technocracy, meaning technocratic governments led by independent 'experts', seen particularly in the EU (Gallo, 2021). In its essence, technocracy means the rejection of political parties and democratic processes in favour of unaccountable bodies and agencies that adopt ideas of fiscal austerity, stabilisation, and support to privatisations (Gallo, 2021). The implementation of the concept of technocracy in urban development has different outcomes in different societies. In case of the urban redevelopment of Antwerp, Belgium, Ward (2022) sees the autonomous municipally owned for-profit real estate company as a means towards more entrepreneurial governance regime coupled with land financialisation and institutional fragmentation, jointly aiming at deregulation of the planning process. In Russia, privatisation has contributed to clientelism as the role of experts has been recognised as significant (Gallo, 2021).

Against this background, the empirical research section will elucidate both the procedural and the underlying factors that have contributed to the specific features of urban megaproject development in Belgrade. Attending to the expert networks, language employed during the promotion of megaprojects, and the roles of the various administrative levels will generate new knowledge on the mutual relationships between urban governance styles and the ideological envelopes these are embedded in. This appears relevant not only for the local case (the post-socialist socio-spatial setting), but also for the global trend of neoliberal urban megaproject development.

3. Methodology: discourse as a tool for understanding the social world

As this research aims at elucidating the effect of ideological landscapes on the nature of urban governance, we focus on the methodological tool that goes beyond descriptive content analysis. More precisely, we focus on the discourse analysis as the main methodological device, albeit contextualising it through an analysis of the various (legal) planning documents, visits to megaproject sites, and long-term observation of the planning and decision-making processes in both cases.

The cases selected for analysis are the flagship projects of Belgrade's urban development as experienced since the beginning of the 21st century. City on the Water was the capital project promoted by politicians in power from 2000 to 2012, whilst Belgrade Waterfront is the best practice example according to political structures in power since 2012. As the main goal of the research is to elucidate the ideological narrative behind these projects and reveal the major driving forces that shaped the projects' planning and implementation – all ingrained in the different stakeholders' positions, viewpoints, interests, and value frameworks as the main variables – we choose newspaper articles as the source of information. More precisely, we selected three reputable daily papers – *Blic*, *Danas*, and *Politika* – as they provide reliable information based on investigative journalism, analyse current topics from different angles (urban planning, economy, politics), and treat all the relevant stakeholders equally to comprehensively show various perspectives. We collected 65 articles (27 addressing City on the Water, for which the sampling period was between 2007 and 2010; and 38 revolving around the Belgrade Waterfront project, collected between 2012 and 2015). The units of analysis are the statements of the relevant stakeholders, those that showed both interest and readiness to provide an opinion on the megaprojects mentioned. For the sake of conciseness, in the following sections we analyse 33 key statements (16 for City on the Water and 17 for Belgrade Waterfront).

The key variables ingrained in the newspaper articles' statements – stakeholders' positions, viewpoints, interests, and value frameworks – are constantly produced and reproduced in the context of power and domination. Consequently, some discourses are privileged over others, making the language the medium through which ideology is produced and transformed (Farthing, 2015). In other words, not only do dominant discourses elucidate the specific policymaking, but they also set the terms of the debate about policy issues by depicting specific ideological narratives.

The newspaper articles aim to provide insight into how stakeholders speak about the megaprojects, what they highlight as the projects' advantages, and how they deal with the projects' shortcomings. Hence, discourse analysis was the main method used to analyse the newspapers articles. A hermeneutic approach to understanding social phenomena through interpretation and understanding of a text, discourse analysis has as its primary task to expose power in society, meaning to understand the reality that emerges from different power relationships and aspirations for power. Discourse analysis is considered a valuable method for urban research which emphasises understanding the influence of power and ideology on decision-making processes. The methodological assumption of discourse analysis is that different stakeholders tend to establish specific narratives or versions of events in order to pursue their own goals (Fairclough et al., 2004). Hence, discourse analysis helps discover the background of political objectives, and the way of achieving these objectives (Getimis, 2012; Jacobs, 2006).

Discourse analysis reveals not only the leading tone of the general narrative, but also identifies what has not been said in announcements and what that also says about the projects. The hidden meanings and the background of a phenomenon are the subjects of discourse analysis (Skillington, 1998). In other words, discourse analysis elucidates the context – ideological, political, and economical – which shapes powerful stakeholders aimed at creating a hegemony of their interests (Fairclough, 2003; Lees, 2004). The analytical structure of critical discourse

analysis is based on a three-dimensional framework that entails three phases (Fairclough et al., 2004):

- (1) Text analysis: its structure, vocabulary and grammatical cohesion;
- (2) Discursive practice: the analysis of the process within which the text is created, which is, in fact, the context that generates the views and further debates;
- (3) Social practice: the analysis of discourse concerning broader power structures and ideology.

Accordingly, the steps of discourse analysis start from data collection and description, followed by interpretation, and, finally, explanation. Firstly, our initial field research, documentary analysis, and local knowledge obtained through long-term observation of the selected megaprojects' planning, governance, and implementation (Maruna, 2015; Perić, 2020a; Perić, 2020b; Perić & D'hondt, 2020; Perić & Maruna, 2012) enabled us to focus on key stakeholders and their respective statements related to flagship megaprojects. Furthermore, we analysed the statements using a coding technique to allow grouping the stated preferences according to their mutual similarities or differences. In doing so, we determined the various positions, viewpoints, and interests of stakeholders based on their particular value systems, which further produced (or blocked) specific actor-networks as a core feature in illuminating urban governance. Finally, such an analysis revealed stakeholders' conflicts and coalitions, decision-making patterns, and power structures. These aspects indicate the extent of democracy in establishing social patterns and creating the public interest. More precisely, the discourse analysis recognised the intertwined relationships between oligarch-initiated urban development, state re-centralisation, a politics-led planning process, and weak civil engagement, thus pointing to the fundamental tenets of the current governance of urban megaproject development globally.

4. Flagship megaprojects in post-socialist Belgrade

This section firstly presents the key features of post-socialist urban development in Belgrade. It then provides a brief description of the selected cases and their position within the urban pattern of Belgrade. This is followed by an overview of the analytical units, the statements of the key stakeholders that influenced the process of urban megaproject development in each case. As the key milestone in both cases was the adoption of the amended Belgrade Master Plan, the analytical units were collected two years before and one year after the Master Plan was adopted, as this was the time when the debate on the pros and cons of the urban megaprojects was at its most intense. The statements are presented in chronological order, with the name and date of the newspaper in which they were published, title of the article containing the statement, and highlighting the parts of each statement that describe the core features depicting the positions, viewpoints, interests, or value orientation of the stakeholder who made the statement. In addition to discourse analysis, the findings of the desk review of legal documents as well as crucial secondary sources (the authors' previous research into the two case studies) serve to interpret the overall findings, as presented in the final part of each subsection.

4.1. Belgrade's post-socialist urban development

Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, inevitably underwent tremendous changes as a result of the political and economic transitions at the beginning of the new millennium. The call for a shift to a market-driven economy and a democratic society happened overnight: the public protest that preceded the overthrow of the authoritarian political regime on 5 October 2000 left the country in a stalemate with no institutional mechanisms for dealing with the new social reality (Lazarević Bajec, 2009; Nedović-Budić et al., 2012). The absence of a smooth social,

economic, and political transformation, and Serbia's rudimentary political pluralism allowed wild neoliberalism to flourish (Perić, 2020a). Unregulated privatisation of state-owned land and resources (such as dilapidated central city areas and abandoned, bankrupt public companies) fuelled the capture of public goods, land and facilities, first to the benefit of domestic oligarchs, and, after 2012, in favour of foreign private developers as well (Nedović-Budić et al., 2012; Perić & Maruna, 2012; Zeković et al., 2015). In terms of politics, the first 12 years of the new millennium were a testbed for political plurality, mainly reflected by the many different political parties active on the national scene, yet without administrative and financial decentralisation of local authorities against the national apparatus. The political shift of 2012 continued to strengthen the trend of declarative decentralisation against the backdrop of the monopoly of one political group, the Serbian Progressive Party (Maruna, 2015).¹ In sum, in the 2000s, Serbia exercised 'proto-democracy' (Vujošević, 2010), soon to be considered a semi-consolidated democracy (between 2010 and 2018), and, finally, since 2019, assigned the label of a 'competitive authoritarian', 'transitional' or 'hybrid' regime (between democracy and autocracy) (Freedom House, 2022a).

Under such circumstances, urban megaprojects are seen as a tool the ruling political regime uses to strengthen its power and influence, regardless of their side-effects on society as a whole. Therefore, high-level politicians' nationalist narrative dominates the advertising of urban megaprojects, which are seen as a source of income and new jobs for the local population, strengthening the national economy, boosting overall prosperity, and positioning the city on the global map (Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019). Nevertheless, the reality is different – populist language usually serves only to hide corruption and political patronage under a veil of authoritarian entrepreneurialism (Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019; Perić, 2020a; Perić & D'hondt, 2020). Although six similar megaproject developments are currently being negotiated in Belgrade (Zeković & Maričić, 2022), the most convenient ones for tracing this narrative are two, City on the Water and Belgrade Waterfront, which will be described in the following sections.

4.2. City on the Water

City on the Water was promoted as Belgrade's flagship project between 2000 and 2012. The development covered the 96-ha area around the underused main city port on the right bank of the river Danube, with the option of using an additional 110 ha east of the bridge (Fig. 1). The area is two kilometres away from the city centre and well-connected to other parts of the city by various modes of transport. The existence of complete water, sewage, electrical, and gas infrastructure on site and the small number of pre-existing buildings (Port of Belgrade facilities) reduced the upfront costs of the redevelopment. The company operating the port was sold to a private investor, the foreign-registered company Worldfin, which was, however, owned by Serbian oligarchs Miroslav Mišković and Milan Beko, who did not intend to use the land for its original purposes (as a river port) but foresaw a new mixed-use residential and commercial quarter, according to the preliminary design by Daniel Libeskind and Jan Gehl (Figs. 2, 3). The desired change to the Belgrade Master Plan happened four years later (OG CB 63/2009).

4.2.1. Overview of the units of analysis

A total of 16 statements, collected for the period between 2007 and 2010, were the main analytical units, as shown in Table 1 below.

¹ At the peak of the dominance of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), after the local, provincial, and general elections of June 2020, no more than three of the 174 local authorities were not governed by the SNS, and only six of the 250 seats in parliament were not controlled by the ruling party (Ko je na vlasti, 2021).

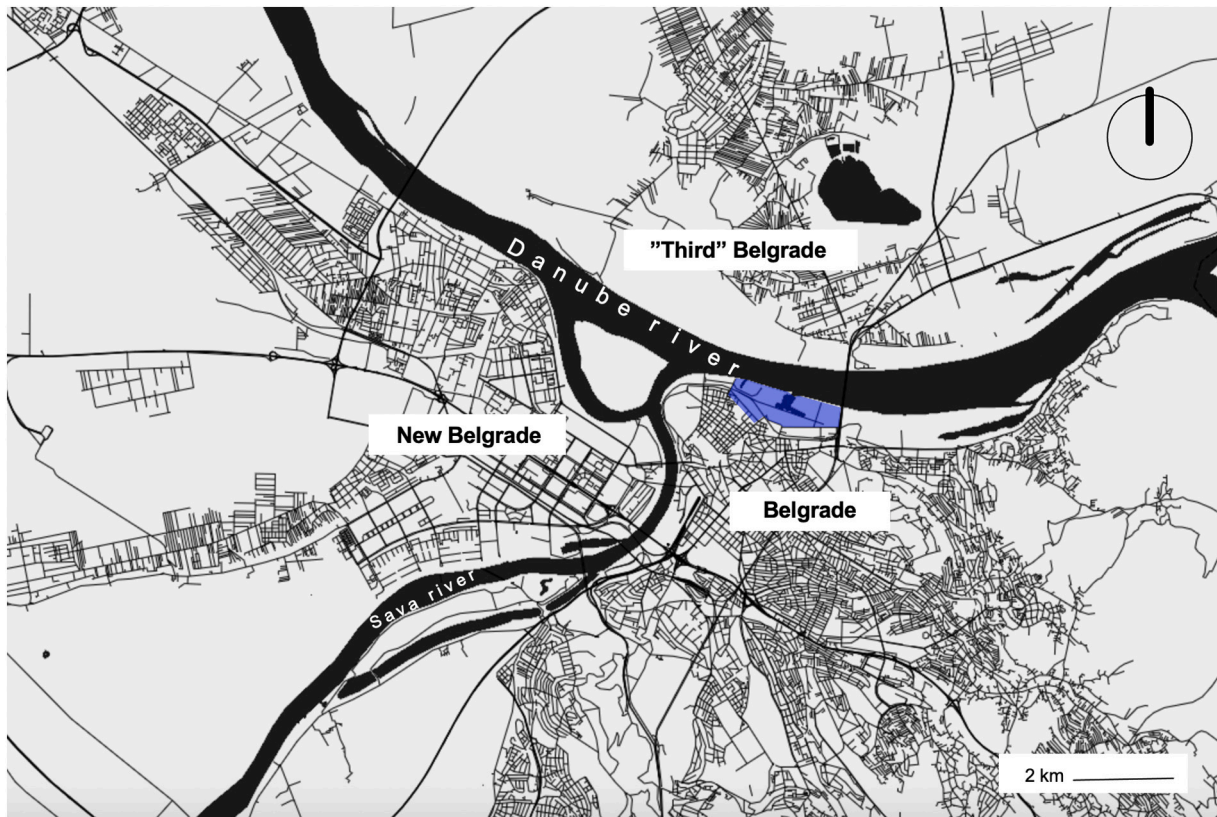


Fig. 1. The position of the City on the Water project within the Belgrade city pattern. Source: Authors.



Fig. 2. The City on the Water project (rendering). Source: www.lukabeograd.com; copyright: Luka Beograd.



Fig. 3. The City on the Water project (rendering). Source: www.lukabeograd.com; copyright: Luka Beograd.

4.2.2. Discourse analysis of the City on the Water project

The story of the City on the Water first became known to the broader public in the summer of 2007, when urban planning experts first set the stage by describing the beneficial effects that the redevelopment of the port area (after the port was relocated to the far bank of the Danube) would have ‘for all’, as the City Architect put it. This simplification of the entire process, which demands cooperation between numerous stakeholders, could be, on the one hand, a sign of limited expertise on the part of the City Architect, or, on the other, of close collaboration between city authorities and private investors in pursuing short-term benefits for the city and ensuring a large profit for the developers. In view of the City Architect’s wealth of experience, it was unlikely he had not been aware of the private sector’s possible misuse of the land.

The Anti-Corruption Council, one of the key stakeholders in this narrative, first entered the fray half a year later, when its President explicitly named a series of individuals suspected of having abused their position. Here, the same people who had previously worked for a public authority (the Privatisation Agency) ended up on the side of the developers throughout the process that led to the purchase of the port company.² Specific accusations and a call for judicial authorities to investigate the transaction and the status of an additional 110 ha of land highlighted the Council’s readiness to have the irregularities examined. This action drew a response from Belgrade’s Public Attorney Strahinja Sekulić, who understood the cost of such abusive practices. Similarly to the Council, the Public Attorney firmly and confidently stated that the City of Belgrade was in charge of the area in question, according to the available land use and legal documents. Moreover, Mr. Sekulić was very

² A series of abuses tainted the purchase of the Port of Belgrade, including the fact that the company’s shares were not a subject of trade on the stock exchange, but only based on a bidding system; Worldfin, a phantom company registered in Luxembourg, appeared as the leading bidder, whereas the transaction was based on the lowest threshold of actions value (2.5 lower than a real one). This fact was hidden until the company was sold to Worldfin (Perić & Maruna, 2012).

decisive in his intentions (‘Beko and Mišković mean nothing to me’). On the other hand, support from the national government seemed to be lacking. The Minister of Economy and Privatisation, closely cooperating with the discredited Privatisation Agency, in a statement full of indefinite pronouns (‘somebody’, ‘something’), attempted to dissociate himself from the private sector. Coming from a cabinet minister, this statement triggered considerable suspicion over any of the authorities’ future actions in the case.

In early 2009, City on the Water was presented at the Cannes International Expo. However, the newly elected Mayor of Belgrade was consistent in his intentions not to make the land accessible to the domestic investors, despite some negotiations having taken place, with a Memorandum of Understanding having been signed between the developers and the city on 19 March 2009. This coalition was unacceptable for the Anti-Corruption Council, which continued publicly warning about the negative consequences of the possible land reuse. The responses to the Council’s efforts were interesting: the Port of Belgrade claimed the developers were subjected to an atmosphere of tension, whilst the Mayor first spoke of the re-zoning in highly negative terms but accused the Council of turning residents against the city authorities. However, this narrative gradually softened as the Mayor accepted the possibility of redeveloping the area. Mayor’s inconsistent messaging was a sign that he was not committed to protecting the public interest and could also have been read as a sign that the city officials lacked responsibility and power to engage with the developers. Finally, the Mayor seemed incapable of communicating with the higher tiers of government when dealing with the issue.

In April 2009, the Board of Inquiry for the Port of Belgrade was established to examine all documents in this case. Nevertheless, the Board was limited only to identifying the city’s accountability and lacked ‘authority to investigate the role of the national government in the privatisation process’, which remained unrevealed. A lack of response from any national body, coupled with the positive tone assumed by the Port of Belgrade and the City Architect, heightened the sense of opaque decision-making and illegal transactions over the land at the expense of

Table 1
Overview of stakeholders' statements about the City on the Water project.

Daily newspaper, date, article headline	Stakeholder in the City on the Water project Stakeholder's statement
<i>Blic</i> , 27.08.2007 Dressing-up bankrupt factories	City architect, D. Bobić 'It makes no sense for factories to be in the centre of the city. The privatisation of these companies enabled industrial production to move from the central city areas. <u>Everyone will benefit</u> : the city, from collecting rates for the up-zoned urban areas, the residents, who will get the infrastructure, and the investors, who will make money.'
<i>Blic</i> , 27.02.2008 Port of Belgrade sold to Mišković and Beko for next to nothing	President of Anti-Corruption Council, V. Barać 'I expect that the judicial authorities will <u>determine whether it is really nothing more than a coincidence that the same people appear first at the Privatisation Agency which is selling the land, then on the payroll of a consultancy, and finally as managers in the company that has been bought.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 04.04.2008 Mišković and Beko stripped of another 50 ha	Public Attorney of Belgrade, S. Sekulić 'We will determine who is the owner for each square metre [of the area]. <u>For me, Beko and Mišković do not exist, I am interested in the Port of Belgrade, and in resolving the disputes brought by other land users in the area.</u> No one should dare to give such a huge property for free.'
<i>Blic</i> , 25.04.2008 The state loses millions of Euros	Minister of Economy and Privatisation, P. Bubalo 'I cannot legally <u>tell someone not to do something</u> if they want to do it [to buy the Port]. <u>So, if someone is interested, we cannot stop it.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 11.03.2009 Belgrade offers City on the Water	Mayor of Belgrade, D. Dilas 'The project offered by the Port of Belgrade will be attractive only in the coming years, when <u>some other issues are resolved.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 10.04.2009 Council: Tadić and Cvetković to prevent re-zoning of the Port of Belgrade	President of the Port of Belgrade, I. Veselinović ' <u>The Port of Belgrade has been suffering for a long time due to the release of untrue and partial information</u> by the Anti-Corruption Council. We want to show all the fake news that the [Anti-Corruption] Council has made public.'
<i>Blic</i> , 12.04.2009 Djilas: [Anti-Corruption] Council should tell the truth or resign	Mayor of Belgrade, D. Dilas 'At the very least, any accusations made by the Anti-Corruption Council about agreements with the Port of Belgrade are <u>meaningless. It is a shame to accuse the city government</u> that started the story about the Port of Belgrade land of now <u>wanting to do damage</u> to the people of Belgrade.'
<i>Danas</i> , 13.04.2009 Who will pay for a new cargo port?	Mayor of Belgrade, D. Dilas 'It makes no sense for industry, a port and a paint and varnish factory, to be only two kilometres distant from the city centre. That area is intended for a residential and business centre, and industrial facilities should be moved away. (...) I think that any responsible company planning to build something in Belgrade must consider residents' interests, and that is the <u>basis for the talks we started with the Port of Belgrade.</u> '
<i>Danas</i> , 16.04.2009 We will ask to see all the documents	Chairman of the Board of Inquiry, D. Randić 'We have full capacity to look at property deals made between Belgrade and

Table 1 (continued)

Daily newspaper, date, article headline	Stakeholder in the City on the Water project Stakeholder's statement
<i>Blic</i> , 20.11.2009 The city comes to its river	investors, but <u>we lack the authority to enter into issues such as the privatisation process.</u> ' Director of the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, Ž. Gligorijević ' <u>The Belgrade Master Plan cannot be implemented directly, which means that nothing can be built based on it alone,</u> and we have yet to adopt detailed regulation plans that will allow construction to take place.'
<i>Blic</i> , 23.03.2010 Barać: Privatisation of the Port is grand theft	President of the Anti-corruption Council, V. Barać 'If there ever was a <u>prime example of what happens when you mix big money, crime, and politics, it is the Port of Belgrade.</u> This thing with the Port (...) was done directly in agreement with the [Serbian] Government – the Ministry of Economy, the Privatisation Agency, the Share Fund and the Securities Commission.'
<i>Danas</i> , 04.06.2010 Anti-Corruption Council files criminal charges against 17 people for selling the capital's largest port	President of the Anti-Corruption Council, V. Barać ' <u>This transaction is a classic money laundering operation involving not only the owners hidden behind a phantom company but also public institutions.</u> This time, I expect the Prosecutor's Office to react because some authorities have wholeheartedly cooperated with the Council and submitted all the documentation relevant to the case.'
<i>Danas</i> , 31.08.2010 Dilas takes case to Supreme Court	Public Attorney of Belgrade, S. Sekulić 'This decision of the Higher Court only directed the parties to lodge private lawsuits, and next week the city government will ask <u>the Supreme Court</u> for an injunction to stop the land transactions.'
<i>Blic</i> , 21.10.2010 Beko wants an agreement with the state	Representative Office of the Port of Belgrade The Port of Belgrade wants to be a development and investment partner of Belgrade and Serbia in today's most important construction project, Libeskind's City on the Water. In this light, <u>we propose and always gladly accept constructive dialogue with the competent public institutions.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 22.10.2010 Government to receive hundreds of millions of euros from Port of Belgrade	Mayor of Belgrade, D. Dilas 'If the problem can be solved through an <u>agreement to unlock the whole thing that is acceptable for the current owners, for the state, and for the city of Belgrade, I will always support it.</u> '
<i>Danas</i> , 22.11.2010 Oligarchs follow the laws they write	Architect and foreign investment consultant, M. Bušatlija 'There is nothing in our laws that prevents benefiting from insider information, so Milan Beko, for example, was not asked how he learnt that the Belgrade Master Plan for the Port of Belgrade area would be changed. In the developed world, leaking such information would land someone in prison for 15 to 20 years. (...) <u>But the fact is that our oligarchs are well-informed, so they always know more than others about the government's intentions.</u> '

residents. The lack of transparency on the part of the national government with regard to the developers left the general public puzzled about the main power centres, and threats to the public interest remained high.

The amended 2021 Belgrade Master Plan, Phase 2 (OG CB 63/2009) was adopted six months later. According to this document, some 70 ha (including land subject a legal dispute) initially foreseen for port facilities could be re-zoned for mixed residential and commercial use. If the courts ruled in their favour, this plan would result in profit for the developers. The experts were vague: to soothe public opinion, an officer of the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade claimed that nothing could be built based on the Master Plan alone; she failed to mention, however, that all regulatory plans had to comply with the Master Plan itself, which would ensure the proposed zoning arrangements were respected.

With all other bodies remaining deaf to the ongoing fraudulent practices, the Anti-Corruption Council continued to raise the matter in public. The Council President's explicit statements and direct accusations could be read as indicating the state was ready to seek the truth in the midst of the fraud and corruption. In August 2010, the court case between the Port of Belgrade and the City of Belgrade was resolved in favour of the developers, who gained sole rights to use the 110 ha of land. The only concrete response came from the Public Attorney of Belgrade, who asked the Supreme Court to reveal the owner of the disputed land. The private investors understood the complexity of the process and the seriousness of the city officials in pursuing the legal process further, so they ended up ready for the compromise with the Mayor, who was prepared to accept it to ensure prosperity 'for all'.

These words – 'for all' – brought the story full circle. Nevertheless, having in mind the different poles of power, an ad hoc decision-making process, hidden interests, and general inactivity of the national government in protecting the public interest, City on the Water reflected unregulated urban development, with many of its aspects requiring attention. Experts outside public authorities described the situation with the greatest accuracy: architect and business consultant Mahmut Bušatlija highlighted the climate of deception in no uncertain terms, further underscoring the sense of crisis in society. His final comment

could be interpreted as pessimistic but pointing to the core of the long-lasting problem: urban development understood as the relationship between governmental structures and private developers for the benefit of the latter. Shortly afterwards, the City on the Water narrative ceased as the country braced for a general election that led to a change in government. This milestone marked the end of the City on the Water, as its counterpart, Belgrade Waterfront, slowly moved onto the political stage.

4.3. Belgrade Waterfront

The Belgrade Waterfront project became the paradigmatic example of Belgrade's contemporary urban development after the newly elected regime took power in 2012. Since the turn of the millennium, the 90-ha area on the right bank of the Sava had been continuously deteriorating, and finally became transformed into a vast brownfield area occupied mainly by an obsolete shunting yard, part of Belgrade's central railway station, and some dilapidated housing (Fig. 4). Embedded in the central city core, the site has always attracted significant attention, not only nationally but from throughout the world. It was announced as a priority project during the 2012 election campaign of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), at the time the most prominent opposition group. After winning the elections, the SNS fulfilled its promise: the preliminary design by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (Figs. 5, 6) served as the basis for the final design by local planning and architectural offices and informed 2014 amendments to the Belgrade Master Plan (OG CB 70/2014). The construction of this grand political project, financed by Eagle Hills, a firm based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and represented by Sheikh Mohamed Alabbar, with considerable subsidies from the Serbian government, commenced in September 2015 (Fig. 7).

4.3.1. Overview of the units of analysis

A total of 17 statements, collected for the period between 2012 and 2015, were the main analytical units, as shown in Table 2 below.

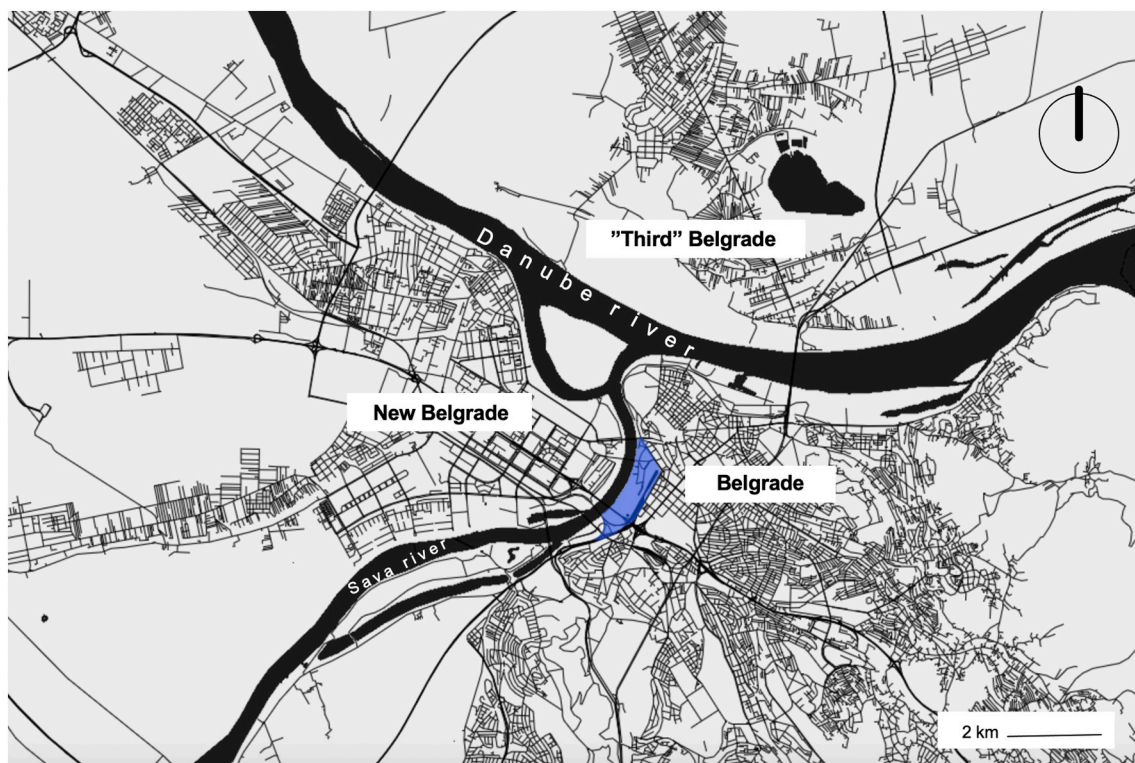


Fig. 4. The position of the Belgrade Waterfront project within the Belgrade city pattern. Source: Authors.



Fig. 5. The Belgrade Waterfront project (model). Source: www.belgradewaterfront.com; copyright: Eagle Hills.



Fig. 6. The Belgrade Waterfront project (rendering). Source: www.belgradewaterfront.com; copyright: Eagle Hills.

4.3.2. Discourse analysis of the Belgrade Waterfront project

The first idea on the Belgrade Waterfront project was drafted by Aleksandar Vučić, who was at the time Vice-President of the SNS, the largest opposition party contesting elections at all levels (presidential, parliamentary, and local) in the spring of 2012. The use of superlatives in describing the project was expected from Vučić, who stood for the

office of Mayor of Belgrade, as he desired the new project to surpass the City on the Water, which had recently been in the news and which the public was familiar with. However, his statement was distinctive in two ways: firstly, he used explicit language in addressing the general public ('I tell you'), and, secondly, he highlighted the need for transparency in pursuing the project. This approach underscored his awareness about



Fig. 7. The Belgrade Waterfront project (implementation, May 2022). Source: www.belgradewaterfront.com; copyright: Eagle Hills.

the obstacles that had undone the City on the Water. Accordingly, the only way to attract voters was to keep them informed and play the conventional urban development instruments.

In July 2012, the SNS came to power, having won both the office of president and a majority in parliament. However, even though it had lost the general election, the Democratic Party remained the largest force in Belgrade's local government. Nevertheless, the growing dominance of the Progressives made it clear the local administration would be replaced soon. Hence, the statement made in the summer of 2013 by Dragan Đilas, the Mayor of Belgrade, using the same vague narrative as in the previous five years that revolved around benefit 'for all', appeared as Mr. Đilas's last attempt to create a close bond with the national government. As expected, he failed.

With the SNS in control of Belgrade, the national parliament, and the government, the Belgrade Waterfront plot began to thicken, revealing details that contradicted Mr. Vučić's pre-election promises. Newly appointed coordinators for the Belgrade Waterfront project (who were also high-level SNS officers) unveiled the peculiar nature of the new megaproject – there would be no tenders and the planning documentation would be flexible, backed up by legislation adopted at the right moment.³ Soon an official of UAE-based Eagle Hills presented the project to the Serbian Government, so Vučić decided to become the leading spokesperson for Belgrade Waterfront, with sporadic support from his political fellows. However, their narrative indicated that Vučić and his party became frustrated by the general public. They directly accused people ('nothing is ever good enough for us Serbs'; 'I have got to ask you where do you think we are living'), disregarded public comments ('someone (...) will find something wrong with it'), and overtly supported private developers ('one must respect other people's money'), instead directly responding to any specific objections (such as those made by the President of the Serbian Architects' Association). What lay

³ The Law Ratifying the Agreement on Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of United Arab Emirates (OG RS 3/2013) legitimises the joint venture agreements to be made without an open tender procedure. At the same time, Serbia was obliged to adopt any changes to other laws and regulations that were desirable for foreign investors. Based on this piece of legislation and the amended Planning Law (OG RS 132/2014), a Joint Venture Agreement was signed in April 2015 to establish an expert body (Belgrade Waterfront LLC) composed of both Eagle Hills and Serbian experts in charge of operations on the Belgrade Waterfront project (Perić, 2020b).

behind such accusatory rhetoric was the wish to safeguard the developers' interests and the need to hide their mutual relationship, already prone to various inconsistencies.

There was little public response to this narrative. The non-governmental organisation Transparency Serbia emphasised the legal grounds underlying the link between the government (which provided land) and the developers (who secured money for urban development), and asked for a path-dependency in terms of respecting existing public-private partnership rules and consulting bodies that could offer helpful advice. The Progressives turned a deaf ear to such demands and continued glorifying 'Alabbar's project', ready to prepare all the planning documents to accommodate it. As this was not a standard procedure, since a project usually follows a plan and not vice versa, Serbian politicians demonstrated they understood well the specific nature of what it meant to develop a megaproject and confirmed their readiness to implement it.

In June 2014, after a snap general election, Vučić became Prime Minister and the determination to succeed with Belgrade Waterfront became more structured, which in turn resulted in a narrative full of superlatives, transposing the image of Belgrade Waterfront onto the entire country of Serbia.⁴ Expert bodies close to the regime (such as the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade) were engaged to prepare the necessary planning documentation to proceed with the project. However, they were not asked for any expert advice, but were rather used as a means to translate 'agreements between politicians and investors' into planning instruments that would ease the project's implementation.⁵ The politicians again proved proactive, undertaking all the procedural steps required to put the project into effect: amending the Master Plan

⁴ This reflected the then recent governmental decision (May 2014) to declare Belgrade Waterfront as an 'area of national importance' for the country's economic development.

⁵ Amendments to the Belgrade Master Plan (OG CB 70/2014) were adopted by the City Assembly in September 2014. However, as this plan had no backing in law (as it waived the requirement to hold an international design competition for the waterfront area and changed the land use rules), the Planning Law was updated in December 2014 (OG RS 132/2014). This piece of legislation included two new special zones – areas with tourism potential and areas of national importance – added under the category of the Spatial Plan for the Area of Specific Use (usually employed for zones with natural and environmental value, mining areas, and areas with hydroelectric power generation potential) (Perić, 2020b).

Table 2
Overview of stakeholders' statements about the Belgrade Waterfront project.

Daily newspaper, date, article headline	Stakeholder in the Belgrade Waterfront project Stakeholder's statement
<i>Politika</i> , 20.04.2012 Progressives bring Rudolf Giuliani to Belgrade	Candidate for Mayor of Belgrade, A. Vučić 'I think that this is one of the <u>absolutely greatest projects</u> that Belgrade and Serbia can have. (...) We have secured investors, I <u>tell you, of course, there will be tenders for everything.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 01.08.2013 Dilas: Belgrade Waterfront and metro to redefine city	Mayor of Belgrade, D. Dilas 'I believe that if <u>national and city authorities cooperate</u> on the metro project and this project, we can do something that is truly good for <u>all Belgraders.</u> '
<i>Politika</i> , 24.12.2013 UAE to fund Belgrade Waterfront shopping mall	Coordinator of the Belgrade Waterfront project / the SPP board member, A. Karlović 'We will attempt to get money from the United Arab Emirates not just for construction works in the Sava Amphitheatre, which have been valued at some 3.1 billion dollars, but also for clearing the site (...) <u>There will be no public competition (...) Planning documentation will be flexible.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 09.01.2014 Vučić: Alabbar to invest \$3.1bn in Belgrade Waterfront	First Deputy Prime Minister, A. Vučić '[Alabbar's] concept calls for us to clear the site: <u>that should be the only requirement for Serbia.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 19.01.2014 Stefanović: Belgrade Waterfront means future for city and residents of Belgrade	Speaker of Serbian Parliament and SNS Vice-President, N. Stefanović 'We have shown that <u>we are able to think in strategic terms</u> and that we are able to attract investors who will bring in money, <u>rather than waiting for some pittance to come from the national budget as a gift.</u> '
<i>Danas</i> , 20.01.2014 Competition announced for Belgrade Waterfront project	First Deputy Prime Minister, A. Vučić 'I know that <u>nothing is ever good enough for us Serbs</u> . Whatever we do, <u>there will always be someone who will find something wrong with it</u> , even if it was the <u>most beautiful project for our country ever.</u> '
<i>Danas</i> , 20.01.2014 Competition announced for Belgrade Waterfront project	President of the Serbian Architects' Association, I. Marić 'Why the rush? I guess that, in this troubled country of Serbia, when it comes to such plans, a <u>broad circle of members of the public, architects, engineers, economists should be asked for an opinion.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 20.01.2014 Vučić talks Belgrade Waterfront: Job will get done	First Deputy Prime Minister, A. Vučić 'We will abide by statutory procedures and adopt everything required by law, but <u>one must respect other people's money.</u> (...) If you think we can (...) joke about other people's money (...), that <u>our cleverness is more important than someone's three billion dollars</u> , I have got to ask you where do you think we are living.'
<i>Blic</i> , 20.01.2014 Transparency Serbia: Is competition excluded from Belgrade Waterfront?	Transparency Serbia, local NGO 'In the future, when a potential investor presents a project that calls for a joint venture where the state or city provides land, and the investor puts up the funding, will this offer be taken up, or will investors be treated selectively? (...) <u>What is the legal basis of this joint venture</u> , is it a public-private partnership, and if so has the Public-Private Partnerships Commission

Table 2 (continued)

Daily newspaper, date, article headline	Stakeholder in the Belgrade Waterfront project Stakeholder's statement
<i>Blic</i> , 01.03.2014 Belgrade Waterfront to be presented in Dubai, premiered at Cannes	reviewed it as envisaged under the 2011 law?' Economic Advisor to the First Deputy Prime Minister, S. Mali 'Tomorrow is the most important day in the development of Belgrade Waterfront to date. This is a key day because after that we can <u>start preparing urban plans and all other planning documents</u> needed to implement the project (...) The final presentation of the project's master plan will be made by <u>Mohammad Alabbar, the author of the project.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 27.06.2014 Model revealed: this is Belgrade Waterfront	Prime Minister, A. Vučić 'Our plan is to change this part of the city <u>and to make the face of Serbia as beautiful and as clean as this building.</u> '
<i>Politika</i> , 05.10.2014 Belgrade Waterfront will be no skyscraper jungle	Director of the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, N. Stefanović 'There was no competition <u>because that was the agreement between the politicians and the investor.</u> This is a project of national importance.'
<i>Politika</i> , 06.11.2014 Serbian Academy presents 22 pages of objections against Belgrade Waterfront	Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) Architecture and Urban Planning Committee 'Unless the draft spatial plan is changed, <u>Belgrade Waterfront will remain an isolated island at the centre of the capital</u> , difficult to get to and move through, and will cause problems with traffic in other parts of the city as well.'
<i>Danas</i> , 15.11.2014 Activists deploy swim rings, songs against Belgrade Waterfront	Activists of Don't Let Belgrade D(r) own group 'We will not allow public funds to be spent on private projects that create nothing but spatial segregation and traffic jams. <u>The development, functioning, and identity of a city cannot be dictated by investors' wishes, but rather must be based on the needs of society.</u> '
<i>Blic</i> , 06.03.2015 Architects call for urgent stop to Belgrade Waterfront project	Academy of Architecture of Serbia 'The project and the way in which it has been implemented are fraught with breaches of laws, all for the sake of a supposedly profitable economic idea, in cooperation with a private investor. (...) The recently adopted Spatial Plan for the Area of Specific Use actually <u>legalises the world's largest illegal construction site</u> . The plan was subject to a fake, farcical public consultation process.'
<i>Danas</i> , 10.03.2015 Mali: Everything we do is transparent	President of the Academy of Architecture of Serbia, M. Mitrović ' <u>Every new idea is met with such [an adverse] reaction from the public.</u> It is a great and fantastic outcome that the Sava Amphitheatre has been cleared. <u>We know that all major projects were built in stages</u> , for instance it took 200 years for the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.'
<i>Danas</i> , 29.03.2015 Lawyers say Belgrade Waterfront is unconstitutional	Group of 15 Belgrade lawyers ' <u>Whether it is legal and legitimate to sign an agreement with a foreign partner, and then change the legal regulations and adopt a special law that enables an opaque agreement, is a question for everyone taking part in the enactment of this special law.</u> (...) If the investor is unready to get clear title by buying the buildings and land from their current owners, why should this purchase be funded by the Serbian taxpayer?'

and changing the Planning Law to enable the production of a spatial plan, thus scaling up the entire procedure resulting in a ‘top-top’ approach to governance and land use.

Independent experts, those not close to the regime, such as the Architecture Committee of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, argued against the draft Spatial Plan for Belgrade Waterfront. However, they did not tackle the essence of the problem with the project, referring instead only to its adverse impact on the city in its functional terms (‘isolated island’, ‘problems with traffic’). By contrast, activists struck at the heart of the issue, clearly emphasising the opaque and opportunistic decision-making process at the expense of the ‘needs of society’. Another group of independent experts (Academy of Architecture of Serbia) raised its voice against the project, calling it the ‘world’s largest illegal construction site’. However, these protests were in vain, as the Spatial Plan for Belgrade Waterfront (OG RS 7/2015) had been adopted two months before, in January 2015. Incongruously, the President of the Academy of Architecture appeared to come out in favour of the project and added throwaway remarks (‘every new idea is met with such [an adverse] reaction’), aiming to cause confusion in the public. This questioned the independence and reliability of any public expert body in fighting for the public interest. As the issue of legitimacy always coloured the Belgrade Waterfront narrative, it was finally it a group of Belgrade lawyers who questioned the decision-making process, the preparation and adoption of the planning documents, and even the announced enactment of a specific piece of legislation⁶ aimed at enshrining into law the ostensible public importance of the Belgrade Waterfront project. The law was fast-tracked through Parliament in April 2015, revealing firm support from public officials for the controversial megaproject initiative.

5. Discussion: towards a shift in discourse on Belgrade's megaprojects?

A discourse analysis of daily press reporting on the two flagship megaprojects of Belgrade shed light not only the details of the planning procedures, but also the political and ideological narrative within which the ideas on urban megaprojects were nested. Though it is challenging to examine the ideological landscapes, as political intentions behind urban megaprojects are usually fuzzy, elusive, and not fully disclosed, attending to the contextual details is of the utmost importance in disentangling the complex actor-networks. As ‘misinformation about costs, schedules, benefits, and risks is the norm throughout [mega]project development and decision-making’ (Flyvbjerg, 2017: 8), discourse analysis proved a tool able to trace the facts that (sometimes purposefully) stay hidden or become revealed rather late in the process (such as when a key decision has been already taken). Below, we look in detail at both megaprojects’ procedural features and difficult-to-perceive contextual factors, comparing the two cases through the lenses of conflicts and coalitions, decision-making patterns, and power structures.

5.1. Conflicts and coalitions

In the City on the Water, coalitions only appeared when they secured the position of private investors. The Mayor – mostly ambivalent and always see-sawing between advocating either the public or the private interest, though always adopting the stalemate position of ‘benefit for all’ – ‘referred’ the investors up the political chain to higher levels. However, the high political representatives stayed covert in the entire process: the public authorities (the Privatisation Agency and the Ministry of Economy and Privatisation) diligently ensured the entire process ran smoothly yet rejected any accountability once the public called them to account. This silence of the national government – invisible President

⁶ Lex Specialis – Law Establishing Public Interest and Special Expropriation and Construction Permitting Procedures for the Belgrade Waterfront Project (OG RS 34/2015).

and Prime Minister, frivolous and rare voices from the responsible ministers, and a Board of Inquiry without the competencies needed to investigate support for the project from national authorities – was much louder than any direct statements: the national government tended to be hidden yet remain directly involved. Ultimately, this attitude did not go unnoticed: public anger mounted, and the next election was lost. Yet despite a strong symbiosis between the political power and financial resources, a key coalition was forged between the Anti-Corruption Council, which continuously spoke in public about abuses with land transactions, and the Public Attorney of Belgrade, ready to prosecute the matter in the courts.

As the proponent of the Belgrade Waterfront project, the newly elected government had learnt its lesson and chose not to hide when pursuing its desired megaproject. Instead, it excessively used the euphoric narrative about a ‘project of national importance’ and incorporated this phrase into all the necessary legislation to ensure the project was implemented. In this symbiosis with Eagle Hills, high-level politicians (as embodied by Mr. Vučić, initially as Prime Minister and then, since 2017, as President of Serbia) were determined to push for private interests at the expense of national priorities. Interestingly, such close feedback between politics and money did not cause a substantially adverse public reaction. Opposition political parties sporadically interrupted the populist discourse, professionals in public institutions became the service of politics, whilst independent experts lacked consistency and clear argumentation, and their reactions usually came late. As expected, this response did not put the experts in the spotlight and left the public with little or no trust in the validity of professional comments. The civil sector emerged as the only actor to show fierce and constant revolt against the dominant political panegyric. The fact that public voices appeared in the newspapers only at the end of 2014 confirmed that public to-the-point comments on the irregularities that attended the numerous procedural steps were taken seriously by politicians, who purposefully limited their public visibility.

5.2. Decision-making patterns

The usurpation of public land in the case of the City on the Water required a long-term preparation process. It started with the privatisation of public companies in 2005 and ended when the option of converting leasehold into freehold was allowed under the 2009 Planning Law (OG RS 72/2009). Particularly problematic was the timing of the adoption of the key planning document. Here, the amended Belgrade Master Plan (OG CB 63/2009) – enabling the port infrastructure land to be converted into a mixed-use area – was adopted before the legal dispute over the land covered in the plan was resolved. This illustrated the compromised position of the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade as the creator of the plan and put pressure on national legal institutions (such as the Supreme Court). The final loss of public land was stopped only due to the change in the political establishment.

However, the protagonists of the Belgrade Waterfront story learnt important lessons from the previous case where legal disputes were the main obstacle in the process. Additionally, they did the necessary homework to legitimate all planning decisions needed for the foreign investors’ schemes. The Planning Law was amended (OG RS 132/2014) to enable the creation of particular categories of ‘spatial plans for special-purpose areas’ to fit the Belgrade Waterfront project (OG RS 7/2015), and a piece of legislation was fast-tracked that made the private interest of a UAE-based company equal to the public interest of Serbia (OG RS 34/2015) within the space of only one year. This speed proved politicians had been ‘quick learners’ eager to secure the conditions required for an ‘exceptional’, ‘special’, ‘non-standard’ megaproject development at the expense of public accountability.

5.3. Power structures

In the City on the Water, Mišković and Beko dictated the steps to be

followed throughout the process, as the atmosphere of corruption and the practice of staff leaving public authorities to join private companies run by the oligarchs were considered mechanisms for abuse. Political patronage and the absence of scrutiny over public authorities provided systemic support to misuse of the land. In addition, the highest (national) bodies imposed decisions on city authorities, thus limiting their willingness to investigate all conditions for the land transactions. The expertise that planning professionals possessed was widely questioned as the city architect overtly supported the developers' ideas whilst the city planning office was never officially confronted with the investors' plans and undertook all the steps necessary to deliver the project. In short, the experts were subordinated to the holders of financial power. The only contrast was provided by the Anti-Corruption Council: by offering the relevant information to the general public, it also became more recognisable by the civil sector representatives, media and citizens.

The Belgrade Waterfront project, by contrast, displays a significant reversal in how power was presented in public. Instead of vocal investors and quiet politicians, Belgrade Waterfront found a strong spokesperson in Mr. Vučić, whilst Mr. Alabbar's name was mentioned on rare occasions. This made the impression that the key actors were silent and, hence, kept their power far from the public eye. The top level of the Serbian political establishment purposefully adopted an autocratic role assuming decision-making power and excluding all other parties but foreign developers. The illusion that Belgrade Mayor Siniša Mali had been heard at any point in the process came from the fact that he was a high-ranking SNS member and, hence, under the direct control of the party chairman, a key national figure. The absence of civil institutions – no active Public Attorney or Anti-Corruption Council, and only the civil sector acting as a counterpart to the political hegemony – illustrates the utter collapse of institutions, legal regulations, and society as a whole. Experts were undermined. As shown by their statements, the experts were lost in the whirlpool of conflicting interests: lacking the skills necessary to curb private interest in a rudimentary market economy, they were sidestepped to serve only as 'puppets' required to prepare technical documentation under the reins of the national leader. Strategic thinking and strategic planning did not exist.

To summarise the above findings, some of the key remarks shedding light on the shift in the ideological envelope and its effect on the urban governance of megaproject development have been highlighted. The initiative for both urban megaprojects came from oligarchs strongly supported by the national government: either domestic (as in the case of the City on the Water) or foreign (as in the Belgrade Waterfront case), developers were motivated to maximise their profit by weak regulations and immature institutions; either covertly (for the City on the Water), or overtly (as with Belgrade Waterfront), the national government played the crucial role in steering the process and pushing development decisions forward. The difference in governmental support to megaproject developers can be found at the local level: in contrast to Belgrade Waterfront, where lower governmental tiers did not directly participate in the process as the local authority was directly subordinated to the national government, the local authorities were ambivalent in the case of the City on the Water: the city government hesitated to support the ideas of the developers, who had become wealthy in the opaque privatisations of the 1990s, and, accordingly, lacked widespread public acceptance, yet was not entirely determined to make the entire process as transparent as possible. Therefore, the question of the public interest in the City on the Water was debated to a much larger extent in the official public bodies. With Belgrade Waterfront, the influence of public institutions weakened due to obstruction by the highest governmental tier, which served as the only decision-maker. The public interest narrative vanished as the national political leader (at the same time President of the country and leader of the ruling political party) consistently undermined public voices and opinions contrary to foreign investors' visions. In the turmoil of the two decades of social and political transition, planning professionals have been trying to become

independent from political decisions. Yet little has changed due to the limited room for public intervention: from providing technical services to high-level politicians (as in the case of the City on the Water), the role of public authorities and planning institutions shifted to merely rubber-stamping political developmental ideas (for Belgrade Waterfront). In the Belgrade Waterfront project, grassroots movements appeared as the last champions of public interest, responding to the oppressive governmental structures. Nevertheless, they could not displace the state as the primary power holder and key decision-maker. Poor regulatory mechanisms and unstable institutional structures made the national authorities the critical strategic partner of oligarchs, discrediting all other parties interested in protecting the public interest.

6. Concluding remarks

This paper traces the nature of contemporary planning, governance, and implementation of urban megaprojects in a society, which is, on the one hand, considered a hybrid regime (between democracy and autocracy), and, on the other, influenced by a number of global financial players (including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). In view also of the relatively recent shift from an autocratic political regime (overthrown in 2000) followed by ad hoc privatisations of hitherto state-owned land and facilities, the Serbian capital, Belgrade, has proven a relevant case for the analysis of urban development under authoritarian neoliberalism. Despite the elusiveness of the concept and variegated forms of neoliberalisation, the analysis depicts an array of features that reflect the varieties of authoritarian neoliberalism: traditional authoritarianism, populist nationalism and technocracy.

Regarding the features of traditional authoritarianism, the comparative analysis of the two megaproject cases in Belgrade reveals an attachment to the inherited (socialist) institutional structure and urban development mechanisms, which remain in use despite being considered weak and inadequate for the present. Although socialist Yugoslavia had practised some participatory urban development tools and procedures, hardly a single bottom-up initiative could be realised without being allied to the more general visions and goals set by higher tiers of government (Blagojević & Perić, 2021). In fact, any decision on urban development was largely a political one. The first years after the overthrow of the autocratic regime saw some progress towards increasing the accountability of public institutions in charge of safeguarding the public interest (such as the Anti-Corruption Council and the Public Attorney's Office). Instead of a continued transitional transformation towards democratic, open, and transparent principles of urban governance, as had been expected, contemporary urban planning and policymaking in Serbia have been facing a steady decline towards centralisation of the state, coupled with what almost amounts to idolatry of one figure (the President). Serbian contemporary urban development (as with any other sectorial policy) observes the shift in the ideological landscape and so faces deterioration due to the regime's espousal of autocracy. However, one feature is new compared to socialist times: the growing alliance between high-level politicians and private developers.

Referring to populist nationalism, the concentration of power among national politicians is immense, reaching a level where the voices and interests of other social actors except for developers tend to be ignored. The consideration of both higher (supranational) and lower (city) authorities in policy- and decision-making, as seen in developed societies, is just declarative in Serbia. Compliance with European Union urban governance mechanisms (such as the 'place-based approach' and 'multi-level governance') remains at the level of conformance, meaning that these terms are included in the main urban policy narrative, but there is no real performance, since the arrangements are not implemented in planning practice (Perić et al., 2021). Excessively powerful national political bodies also weaken the local authorities' financial and institutional capacity, erodes professional competences, and suppresses public opinion. Such an exclusive steering approach is also reflected in a

particular populist narrative ('project of national importance', new jobs, strong national economy as a 'factor of stability'), possibly due to political pressure on civil society organisations and the media, owing to which Serbia regressed to a country seen as 'partly free' in 2019 and remained so at the time of writing (Freedom House, 2022b).

In terms of technocracy, urban megaprojects in post-socialist Belgrade reveal the trend of real estate deregulation and subordinate financialisation whilst questioning the role and purpose of urban planning instruments, all under conditions of high-level political favouritism of private-sector interests. As a result, a 'top-top' approach in planning, governance, and implementation of megaprojects relies upon a series of legitimisation procedures supported by the state to protect the controversially defined public interest, identified without expert input and public opinion, and tailored only to developers' demands. This is particularly seen in the case of the Belgrade Waterfront project, where several legislative documents were adopted using fast-track procedures. Significantly, the entire operation of the project (control over the elaboration of the main architectural and urban design project, and, more importantly, amendment of land use regulations, as well as oversight of construction without any compulsory tendering procedure and regulation of the sale of the building stock) was outsourced to a public-private expert body: Belgrade Waterfront LLC. This approach, which limited state intervention in market regulation, coupled with powerless stakeholders, was a clear example of the 'governance beyond the state' approach.

In short, the foregoing discussion revealed nuanced differences between the two megaprojects in terms of how planning and decision-making processes were organised and nested into the ideological envelope. Cast narrowly, the two megaprojects depict the following features: oligarch-initiated urban development, state re-centralisation, a politics-led planning process, and weak civil engagement. Cast broadly, the institutional structure and instruments behind megaproject developments were rudimentary in both cases, however, with a distinctive deterioration of control mechanisms in the case of Belgrade Waterfront.

These findings hold true not only for Serbian cases of urban megaproject development, which moves forward according to the premises of authoritarian neoliberalism. Some similarities can be drawn with global examples of contemporary urban development. Nevertheless, several anomalies in the both the planning and the decision-making process, as well as in implementation, are more pronounced in Serbian urban development than in other cases.

Developers' decisive role in urban megaproject development is omnipresent, but capitalist democracies (such as the US) employ more transparent tools: fundraising campaigns are public, and it is easy to trace who supports particular mayoral or even presidential candidates and may afterwards expect preference in the planning application process (Giroux, 2017; Perić et al., 2021a). In Serbia, oligarchs do not overtly influence politicians' election campaigns in return for fast-tracked decision-making procedures in favour of developers. This creates room for speculation on potential abuses, including the mutual (financial) benefit for both parties. What is certain is that such an approach opens the door to clientelism, as practised in other post-socialist societies (Gallo, 2021; Stubbs & Lendvai-Bainton, 2019).

When it comes to the role the nation state plays in pursuing urban megaprojects, there is a clear division between liberal democracies, where the local level, with strong mayoral functions, emerges as the critical actor in pursuing ideas on development and cooperating directly with developers (Fainstein, 2008; Perić et al., 2021b; Petretta, 2020; Ward, 2022). In post-socialist societies familiar with autocratic regimes and the significant role of a 'national leader', either key leaders dominate, as in Serbia and Turkey (Tansel, 2019), or the dominant national figure becomes accompanied by oligarchs who insinuate themselves into the inner circle of the dominant leader (Fabry, 2020; Gallo, 2021).

Urban planners and other professionals are side-lined in politics-led planning, no matter the socio-spatial setting. Stretched between developers' visions and political goals, planners are left to nest the

developers wishes into the already modified regulatory frameworks. Such limited room for manoeuvre is less obvious in traditionally capitalist societies, where the planners' role has been to approve and/or modify developers' planning applications (Grange, 2017; Perić et al., 2021a). In societies where the autocratic approach is on the rise, expert voices are neglected, as are those of other parties, such as civic groups, NGOs, and the political opposition (Fabry, 2020; Tansel, 2019).

Community response to megaproject development is generally weak due to the essence of authoritarian neoliberalism aimed at suppressing any public opinion, and, particularly, dissent. Nevertheless, in democratic societies, community feedback is more structured: community interacts with both private and public sector representatives through various communication channels, such as direct exchange, round tables, online surveys, blogs, and the like; community boards, i.e., committees that steer community planning initiatives, are strengthened by expert involvement, and community organisations liaise with diverse expert and non-expert groups outside their territories, so becoming part of larger and more influential groups of stakeholders to balance the power of developers (Perić et al., 2021b). Such soft measures cannot be replicated in autocratic societies. Hence, the Serbian community response is considered an ad hoc and partly disorganised public protest. On the other hand, Turkish experiences depict community feedback underpinned by formal legal instruments such as lawsuits against decisions made by the highest judicial instances (Tansel, 2019) or informal tools, such as establishing an arena for debating different manners of policy-making (Bilgiç, 2018).

Despite all the adverse externalities of the urban megaproject developments, some positive aspects could also be identified. Examples of recent megaprojects worldwide crystallise the disadvantages of the current planning, governance, and implementation approach to offer some ideas for institutional improvements. Most significantly, institutional advancement such as the adoption of various formal and informal rules among existing and newly formed structures, is of crucial importance for the success of megaproject development in that it restrains its negative effects on broader societal actors (Haggard & Tiede, 2011).

Firstly, megaprojects intrigue the general public and increase their awareness about the need for direct participation in steering urban development. This has ideally been followed by the synergy between experts and citizens to improve public dialogue and facilitate participation. Such an effort consequently calls for changing the planners' role, transforming them from those who promote uniformly defined public interest into facilitators of dialogue about the public interest. More precisely, the professional public recognises the necessity of changing the planning paradigm towards accepting interests from different sectors (public, civil, private) as equally legitimate determinants in creating the public interest. Accordingly, to foster the public accountability means to ensure the protection of property rights and create corruption control mechanisms. Ultimately, the discourse, planning, governance, and implementation of urban megaprojects depends on the respective ideological landscapes and their desired 'shift from government to governance'. The latter is, however, a long-term and uncertain process, involving not only local, but also global conditions in geopolitical and market trends. With this in mind, exploring the changing nature of megaproject development in curbing its 'iron law' is an ambitious task for both planning research and practice.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ana Perić: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. **Marija Maruna:** Methodology, Investigation, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, grant number 451-03-68/2022-14/200090.

References

- Altshuler, A., & Luberoff, D. (2003). *Mega-projects: The changing politics of urban public investment*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Bilgić, A. (2018). Reclaiming the national will: Resilience of Turkish authoritarian neoliberalism after Gezi. *South European Society and Politics*, 23(2), 259–280.
- Blagojević, M., & Perić, A. (2021). The diffusion of participatory planning ideas and practices: the case of socialist Yugoslavia, 1961–1982. Advance online publication *Journal of Urban History*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442211044501>. SSCI.
- Borén, T., Grzyś, P., & Young, C. (2021). Spatializing authoritarian neoliberalism by way of cultural politics: City, nation and the European Union in Gdańsk's politics of cultural policy formation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 39(6), 1211–1230.
- Brenner, N. (2004). *New state spaces: Urban governance and rescaling of statehood*. Oxford University Press.
- Brenner, N. (2019). *New urban spaces: Urban theory and the scale question*. Oxford University Press.
- Bruff, I. (2014). The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism. *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, 26(1), 113–129.
- Bruff, I. (2016). Neoliberalism and authoritarianism. In S. Springer, K. Birch, & J. MacLeavy (Eds.), *The handbook of neoliberalism* (pp. 107–117). Routledge.
- Bruff, I., & Tansel, C. B. (2019). Authoritarian neoliberalism: Trajectories of knowledge production and praxis. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 233–244.
- Cook, A. (2010). The expatriate real estate complex: Creative destruction and the production of luxury in post-socialist Prague. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(3), 611–628.
- Cope, B. (2015). Euro 2012 in Poland: Recalibrations of statehood in Eastern Europe. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 22(2), 161–175.
- Del Cerro Santamaria, G. (Ed.). (2013). *Urban megaprojects: A worldwide view*. Emerald books.
- Di Giovanni, A. (2016). Urban transformation under authoritarian neoliberalism. In C. B. Tansel (Ed.), *States of discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order* (pp. 107–128). Rowman and Littlefield.
- Fabry, A. (2020). From poster boys to black sheep: Authoritarian neoliberalism in Hungary and Poland. *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 86, 304–332.
- Fainstein, S. S. (2001). *The city builders*. University Press of Kansas.
- Fainstein, S. S. (2008). Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(4), 768–785.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N., Graham, P., Lemke, J., & Wodak, R. (2004). Introduction. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 1–7.
- Farthing, S. (2015). *Research design in urban planning: A student's guide*. Sage.
- Fearn, G., & Davoudi, S. (2022). From post-political to authoritarian planning in England, a crisis of legitimacy. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 47(2), 347–362.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2009). Survival of the unfittest: Why the worst infrastructure gets build and what can do about it. *Oxford Review Economic Policy*, 25(3), 344–367.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2014). What you should know about megaprojects and why: An overview. *Project Management Journal*, 45(2), 6–19.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2017). Introduction: The iron law of megaproject management. In B. Flyvbjerg (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of megaproject management* (pp. 1–18). Oxford University Press.
- Freedom House. (2022). Freedom in the world – Serbia country report. (July 3, 2022). <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2022>.
- Freedom House. (2022). Nations in transit – Serbia country report. (July 3, 2022). <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2022>.
- Gallo, E. (2021). Three varieties of Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Rule by the experts, the people, the leader. *Competition & Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10245294211038425>. Advance online publication.
- Getimis, P. (2012). Comparing spatial planning systems and planning cultures in Europe. *Planning Practice and Research*, 27(1), 25–40.
- Giroux, H. (2017). *The public in peril: Trump and the menace of American authoritarianism*. Routledge.
- Grange, K. (2017). Planners – A silenced profession? The politicisation of planning and the need for fearless speech. *Planning Theory*, 16(3), 275–295.
- Grubbauer, M., & Camprag, N. (2019). Urban megaprojects, nation-state politics and regulatory capitalism in central and Eastern Europe: The Belgrade waterfront project. *Urban Studies*, 56(4), 649–671.
- Haggard, S., & Tiede, L. (2011). The rule of law and economic growth: Where are we? *World Development*, 39(5), 673–685.
- Jacobs, K. (2006). Discourse analysis and its utility for urban policy research. *Urban Policy and Research*, 24(1), 39–52.
- Ko je na vlasti. (2021, March 4). *The results of local elections*. Ko je na vlasti. <https://kojenavlasti.rs/rezultati-lokalnih-izbora/>.
- Koelmaij, J., & Janković, S. (2020). Behind the frontline of the Belgrade Waterfront: A reconstruction of the early implementation phase of a transnational real estate development project. In J. Petrović, & V. Backović (Eds.), *Experiencing postsocialist capitalism: Urban changes and challenges in Serbia* (pp. 45–66). University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy.
- Lazarević Bajec, N. (2009). Rational or collaborative model of urban planning in Serbia: Institutional limitations. *Serbian Architectural Journal*, 1, 81–106.
- Lee, C. C. M. (2012). *The fourth typology: Dominant type and the idea of the city*. Doctoral dissertation. TU Delft. TU Delft Theses Repository.
- Lees, L. (2004). Urban geography: Discourse analysis and urban research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(1), 101–107.
- Lu, Y. (2009). The historical background and main contents of Chinese traditional moral construction. *Economic and Social Development*, 7(9), 47–51.
- Machala, B., & Koelmaij, J. (2019). Post-socialist urban futures: Decision-making dynamics behind large-scale urban waterfront development in Belgrade and Bratislava. *Urban Planning*, 4(4), 6–17.
- Machiels, T., Compennolle, T., & Coppens, T. (2021). Explaining uncertainty avoidance in megaprojects: Resource constraints, strategic behaviour, or institutions? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 22(4), 537–555.
- Maruna, M. (2015). Can planning solutions be evaluated without insight into the process of their creation? In M. Schrenk, V. Popovich, P. Zeile, P. Elisei, & C. Beyer (Eds.), *Plan together—right now—overall – Proceedings of the REAL CORP 2015 Conference* (pp. 121–132). REAL CORP.
- Müller, M., & Trubina, E. (2020). The global easts in global urbanism: Views from beyond north and south. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 61(6), 627–635.
- Nedović-Budić, Z., Zeković, S., & Vujošević, M. (2012). Land privatization and management in Serbia – Policy in limbo. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 29, 307–317.
- OG CB 63/2009. (2009). (Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade 63/2009). Amendments on the Master Plan of Belgrade, Phase 2.
- OG CB 70/2014. (2014). (Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade 70/2014). Amendments on the Master Plan of Belgrade.
- OG RS 132/2014. (2014). (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 132/2014). Law on Planning and Construction.
- OG RS 3/2013. (2013). (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 3/2013). Law ratifying the agreement on cooperation between the government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of United Arab Emirates.
- OG RS 34/2015. (2015). (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 34/2015). Lex Specialis – Law establishing public interest and special expropriation and construction permitting procedures for the Belgrade Waterfront Project.
- OG RS 7/2015. (2015). (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 7/2015). Regulation on the special use spatial plan for the waterfront of the River Sava for the Belgrade Waterfront Project.
- OG RS 72/2009. (2009). (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 72/2009). Law on Planning and Construction.
- Perić, A. (2020a). Public engagement under authoritarian entrepreneurialism: The Belgrade waterfront project. *Urban Research and Practice*, 13(2), 213–227.
- Perić, A. (2020b). Citizen participation in transitional society: The evolution of participatory planning in Serbia. In M. Lauria, & C. Schively Slotterback (Eds.), *Learning from Arnstein's ladder: From citizen participation to public engagement* (pp. 91–109). Routledge Press.
- Perić, A., & D'hondt, F. (2020). Squandering the territorial capital in the Balkans? Urban megaprojects between global trends and local incentives. *Urban Design International*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-020-00146-2>. Advance online publication.
- Perić, A., & Maruna, M. (2012). The representatives of social action in waterfront regeneration – The case of the brownfield site 'Belgrade port' (in Serbian). *Sociologija i prostor*, 50(1), 61–88.
- Perić, A., Trkulja, S., & Živanović, Z. (2021). From conformance to performance? A comparative analysis of the European Union territorial policy trends in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 28(2), 21–41.
- Perić, A., Tufek-Memisević, T., & Nedović-Budić, Z. (2021). Collaborative planning mechanisms in urban megaproject development: The case of Chicago. In P. Lorens, H. H. Magidimisha, & N. Balamiento (Eds.), *Planning unlocked: New times, better places, stronger communities (Proceedings of the 57th ISOCARP World Planning Congress)* (pp. 1271–1281). ISOCARP.
- Petretta, D. L. (2020). *The political economy of value capture: How the financialization of Hudson yards created a private rail line for the rich*. New York: Columbia University (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Piletić, A. (2022). The role of the urban scale in anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: A look at post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia. *Globalizations*, 19(2), 285–300.
- Sager, T. (2019). Populists and planners: We are the people. Who are you? *Planning Theory*, 19(1), 80–103.
- Scholl, B. (2017). Building actor relationships and alliances for complex problem solving in spatial planning: The test planning method. *disP – The Planning Review*, 53(1), 46–56.
- Shatkin, G. (2011). Planning privatopolis: Representation and contestation in the development of urban integrated mega-projects. In A. Roy, & A. Ong (Eds.), *Worlding cities: Asian experiments and the art of being global* (pp. 77–97). Blackwell.
- Shields, S. (2007). From socialist solidarity to neo-populist neoliberalisation? The paradoxes of Poland's post-communist transition. *Capital & Class*, 31(3), 159–178.
- Skillington, T. (1998). The city as text: Constructing Dublin's identity through discourse on transportation and urban redevelopment in the press. *British Journal of Sociology*, 49, 456–473.

- Slaev, A. D., Kovachev, A., Nozharova, B., Daskalova, D., Nikolov, P., & Petrov, P. (2019). Overcoming the failures of citizen participation: The relevance of the liberal approach in planning. *Planning Theory*, 18(4), 448–469.
- Stubbs, P., & Lendvai-Bainton, N. (2019). Authoritarian neoliberalism, radical conservatism and social policy within the European Union: Croatia, Hungary and Poland. *Development and Change*, 51(2), 540–560.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2018). *Promises of the political*. MIT Press.
- Swyngedouw, E., Moulaert, F., & Rodriguez, A. (2002). Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: Large-scale urban development projects and the new urban policy. *Antipode*, 34(3), 542–577.
- Tansel, C. B. (2017). Authoritarian neoliberalism: Towards a new research agenda. In C. B. Tansel (Ed.), *States of discipline* (pp. 1–28). Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Tansel, C. B. (2019). Reproducing authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey: Urban governance and state restructuring in the shadow of executive centralization. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 320–335.
- Taylor, T. (2014). Economics and morality. *Finance and Development*, 51(2), 34–38.
- Vujošević, M. (2010). Collapse of strategic thinking, research and governance in Serbia and possible role of the spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia (2010) and its renewal. *Spatium*, 23, 22–29.
- Ward, C. (2022). Land financialisation, planning informalisation and gentrification as statecraft in Antwerp. *Urban Studies*, 59(9), 1837–1854.
- Zeković, S., & Maričić, T. (2022). Contemporary governance of urban mega-projects: A case study of the Belgrade waterfront. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 10(4), 527–548.
- Zeković, S., Vujošević, M., & Maričić, T. (2015). Spatial regularization, planning instruments and urban land market in a post-socialist society: The case of Belgrade. *Habitat International*, 48, 65–78.
- Zeković, S., Maričić, T., & Vujošević, M. (2018). Megaprojects as an instrument of urban planning and development: Example of Belgrade waterfront. In S. Hostetter, S. Najih Besson, & J. C. Bolay (Eds.), *Technologies for development: From innovation to social impact* (pp. 153–164). Springer.
- Zhang, Y. B., Lin, M. C., Nonaka, A., & Beom, K. (2005). Harmony, Hierarchy and Conservatism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Confucian Values in China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. *Communication Research Reports*, 22(2), 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036810500130539>

Further Reading

www.blic.rs
www.danas.rs
www.politika.rs