



# Rethinking Dissonant Heritage: The Unabsorbed Modernisation of Novi Sad

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## 1 Urban Identities and Dissonant Heritage

Culture is defined through adopted patterns of opinion, feelings and behaviour, and its values are inscribed in space through their construction and continuance. This is how an urban landscape, consisting of historical layers of the built environment, is created. This landscape is a complex kaleidoscope of history and a reflection of the continuity of human life, where the symbolic functions of human activities, beliefs and values are realised through construction, in addition to utilitarian function. The presence of symbols in a space renders it a place, an ‘affective realm of experience and meaning’ (Stevenson, 2013, p. 40). Thus, symbols connect people with place, through identification.

Contemporary cities represent the most complex form of the cultural landscape. They serve as a repository of architecture from which the architectural heritage that is crucial for the materialisation of collective identity is selected. At the local level, the selection of its symbols, or layers of the city that serve this purpose, reflects the national and local cultural policies. The architectural layer that is part of the ‘Authorized Heritage Discourse’ (Smith, 2006) creates the physical framework of the desired identity and its visual reference. It becomes the material basis for political constructs, as well as the visualisation of identity that was until that moment an abstract category. Just as the city is a society’s mark in space, so is architecture a kind of litmus test of social conditions (Pušić, 2009, pp. 67–68), reflected in the programme and physical structure of individual buildings. Each building contains multiple meanings and can be considered a formation of functions of architecture, in a constant state of reconfiguration (Žugić, 2017, p. 58). Cultural narratives give ultimate meaning to buildings, complexes and neighbourhoods. These ‘texts’ are

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closely related to the formation of collective memory, where architecture is the ‘keeper’ and ‘container’ of history.

Within the framework of cultural politics, collective memory is ‘regulated’ and focused on desirable narratives, which help build a desirable (national and/or local) identity, authorised ‘from the top’. However, architecture and the built environment also ‘preserve’ the memory of less desirable periods of history or minority identities. As a result, the city develops the potential for fostering a pluralism of cultural identities, as in the concept of multiculturalism, but it also becomes a place of suppression of ‘undesirable’ identities that acquire the status of ‘contested cultural heritage’ (Silverman, 2011). The coexistence of authorised and contested identities in the domain of the built environment is called heritage dissonance (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1995; Kisić, 2016). Dissonant heritage is an integral part of the urban landscape, providing the basis for understanding culture and the city as layered and changing categories with multiple identities.

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## 2 Urban Identities of Novi Sad

The city of Novi Sad relies heavily on the paradigm of the multicultural Central European city in its official cultural policy and identity. This platform is recognised as the generally accepted form of promoting European values, whose potential can be expressed on the territory of Novi Sad. At the level of the city, this platform signifies, at least declaratively, the promotion of multiple (but not all) identity layers and points that represent multiculturalism, as a reflection of the coexistence of different ethnic groups in this region, through the recognition of ethnic characteristics of marginalised minorities and not through a global and cosmopolitan dimension (Tomka & Kisić, 2018). However, even though Novi Sad is a relatively young city, it has witnessed multiple shifts in cultural paradigms, which have had their unequivocal impact on the city’s urban planning and architecture. Since the current cultural policy relies on the multi-ethnic and multicultural principles that were most pronounced in the earlier stages of the city’s development (Strategija kulturnog razvoja, 2016; CultTour, 2021), premodern buildings and neighbourhoods from this period have been selected by the policymakers and those in charge of the official promotional channels of the city<sup>1,2</sup> and to a certain extent ‘romanticized’ to the level of architectural heritage. This encompasses the city centre (more precisely the central square and the surrounding streets) and particularly the Petrovaradin Fortress and the adjacent *Podgrađe* neighbourhood. According to Pušić, the Petrovaradin Fortress is the most prominent artefact of the city (...) and the most common symbolic association among the citizens of Novi Sad, whose experience of this material artefact as a symbol comprises several layers—temporal, visual and aesthetic (Pušić, 2009,

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<sup>1</sup>The official website of City of Novi Sad: <http://www.novisad.rs/eng/gallery>

<sup>2</sup>Tourism organisation of the city of Novi Sad: <https://novisad.travel/en/>

p. 305). Other buildings of the nineteenth century have a similar status,<sup>3</sup> creating an image of belonging to the former territory of the progressive Austro-Hungarian Empire, albeit on its very periphery.

An urban analysis of modern Novi Sad, however, reveals completely different facts. The modernisation of the city had begun in the interwar period when Novi Sad became the regional capital and continued even more intensively after the Second World War. Statistical indicators unequivocally point to the great intensity and scope of construction activities, not only in terms of the floor area of buildings but also in respect of the increase in population from 40,000 after the war to almost 300,000 by the end of the 1980s<sup>4</sup> (Republički zavod za statistiku, n.d.). It was these activities that infrastructurally and urbanistically defined the city as it is known today: a city of boulevards, connected to the river, with large public buildings, residential districts and an industrial zone along the Danube–Tisa–Danube canal. Its dominant urban character was formed by a major remodelling that began in the second half of the twentieth century, which inscribed *modernist code* into its urban tissue. This was the period when Novi Sad became a city, according to urban criteria (Figs. 1, 2).<sup>5</sup>

If these are undeniable facts visible in space and expressed through statistical parameters, the question arises as to why the modernist layer of the development of Novi Sad is its contested identity and why it has not been ‘absorbed’ into contemporary cultural trends and urban policies.

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### 3 In Search of a ‘Modernist Code’

One of the reasons for the suppression of the modernist identity of Novi Sad is certainly the socialist past of the state during which this architectural oeuvre was realised. The consequences of this historical period,<sup>6</sup> which ended in the state’s dissolution and traumatic transition, also define the historical narratives that are

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<sup>3</sup> Official presentation of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the City of Novi Sad: <http://www.zzskgns.rs/kulturna-dobra-online/>

<sup>4</sup> More on the topic of city growth in Jović S, Konstantinović D. and Peško I. (2022) Urbanisation as a tool for economic growth – Novi Sad the developmental city. *Advances in Civil and Architectural Engineering*. Vol. 13, Issue No. 25. pp. 1–13 <https://doi.org/10.13167/2022.25.1>

<sup>5</sup> Before extensive reconstruction and industrialisation in the second half of the twentieth century, Novi Sad could hardly be considered a city, in terms of its urban morphology and character. By the number of inhabitants, Novi Sad was categorised as a medium-sized town, but the urban density (less than 100 inhabitants/hm<sup>2</sup>), number of workers employed in industrial sector and services (less than 15%), predominant housing type (single family housing) indicated the character of more rural environments. For more on the topic, consult RSO data, or the research *Urbanisation as a tool for economic growth – Novi Sad the developmental city*

<sup>6</sup> This specific period could be defined by 1950, the year of the first modern General Urban Plan and 1985, the year by which major investments in the city were completed. After 1985, the state gradually entered a period of political instability, which ultimately led to its dissolution and civil war.



**Fig. 1** Novi Sad—the city on the left bank of the river Danube facing the Fortress © 2023 by Konstantinović & Zeković



**Fig. 2** South section of the main city boulevard in the late 1970s (Liberation Boulevard, former Boulevard October 23rd) © 1980 Urban Centre—Urban Planning, Development and Research Centre, Novi Sad, Serbia

connected to this period and whose architecture is the material basis. As such, it takes on the quality of dissonant heritage that represents an ‘undesirable’ past. While in contemporary Western European cultural policies, diverse cultural landscape became clearly acknowledged, emphasising that ‘heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations’ (UNESCO, 2001), in the current cultural policies of the Former Yugoslavia region, this is still not the case. The stigmatisation of the socialist past extends to the architecture of this period, despite its indisputable qualities—the modernising and humanist dimension, which undoubtedly improved people’s living conditions in the past—and is still considered a reflection of high construction standards in the present.

Another reason for this status of the modernist heritage of Novi Sad is the broader phenomenon of ‘unabsorbed modernisations’ (Konstantinović & Jović, 2020), which is also characteristic of other post-Yugoslav cities. In opposition with the current traditionalism, the extremely intensive development process in the post-war period that was expressed through modern architecture could hardly be recognised as a value. In this respect, it is interesting to note that modernism in the past meant modernisation, but today it only implies socialism. A survey carried out as part of research accompanying the planning of the Mišeluk settlement (Karapešić et al., 1982, pp. 187–188) established a list of symbols of the city, the first being the City Hall, and the second the Post Office building. The latter was not chosen by citizens because of their understanding of the ‘stereometric monumentalism’ (Mitrović, 2010, p. 351) of Brašovan’s<sup>7</sup> late modernist expression but because the Post Office tower is primarily a signifier of the social progress behind its construction—the telecommunications infrastructure that brought the telephone to the city. The failure to understand the importance of these buildings<sup>8</sup> is all but a negation of the entire process of modernisation in all spheres of life, which seeks its expression even today. This raises the question of whether the socialist past also defines our relationship to the modernist past and whether these relationships can be viewed independently of each other.

Modernism was recognised in the young socialist state as a system of architectural creation that manifested the state’s determination to be modernised and hegemonised through the construction of Yugoslavism using a style without nationalist subtext, as well as ‘differentiate’ itself from the USSR and contextualise itself

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<sup>7</sup>Dragiša Brašovan (1887–1965) was a prominent Serbian architect and one of the leading figures of early modernism. In Novi Sad, he designed three buildings along the route of Mihajlo Pupin Boulevard (former Maršal Tito Boulevard): the Workers’ Chamber in 1931, the Seat of the Government and Assembly of the Danube Banate (Ban’s Palace) in 1939 and the Main Post Office in 1961. These buildings witness Brašovan’s personal exploration of Modernism and its application in the design of public buildings.

<sup>8</sup>The listing of the protected heritage sites in the city: Official presentation of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the City of Novi Sad: <http://www.zzskgns.rs/kulturna-dobra-online/>

within the European cultural space (Konstantinović & Terzić, 2021, p. 307). Its programmatic basis was adapted to the developing socialist society and reflected its authentic values. This permanently linked modernist architecture and socialist ideology within the oeuvre of Yugoslav modernism, which also marked the urban fabric of Novi Sad. Therefore, this oeuvre can only be viewed within the defined framework, which makes it difficult to define a contemporary approach to its evaluation: separating the oeuvre from the ideological corpus strips it of its primary quality—social purpose, while its consideration within this framework distances it from contemporary acceptance in the complex conditions of post-Yugoslavism (Konstantinović, 2014, p. 233).

The abovementioned reasons are why the path to ‘absorbing’ the modernist identity of Novi Sad is challenging on several levels. It is part of a wider cultural discourse that must ‘open itself up’ to these parts of history, in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the ‘truth about us’. At the local level, direct and indirect action is required in order to create new narratives through education, representation and promotion and present an oeuvre that must be understood beyond the ‘authorised identities’ of the desirable past and, through a new system of interpretation, be brought closer to its users and the public (Konstantinović & Jović, 2021, p. 29)—the citizens of Novi Sad. On this path, creative curatorial practices are facilitating the expansion of the social dialogue, as well as the recognition and understanding of the urban reality—one in which Novi Sad is a modern city.

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#### **4 Popularisation of Yugoslav Heritage Through Top-Down and Bottom-Up Curation**

The complexity of the idea about the possibilities and necessity to separate the socio-political context of socialist Yugoslavia from the modernist heritage that arose from it, in order for the value immanent in this type of heritage to be absorbed, has made it impossible to adopt simple strategies and tactical solutions for presenting the spatial achievements of the modernisation of Yugoslavia. The justified current dilemma related to the acontextual consideration of this type has made the states of the former Yugoslav republics uninterested in radical interventions, especially in terms of promoting the built and spatial values inherited from the common state. On the other hand, during the past two decades, architects and artists have over time taken on the role of promoting the value of the region’s modernist heritage. An understanding of the ‘futuristic’ narrative, as well as ideas of progress and the well-being of users embodied by the legacy of modernism—and explicitly readable in its spatial forms—has opened the possibility of selecting and editing content rich in modernist heritage. Certain conventional but also alternative curatorial practices were established with the idea of promoting segments of the unabsorbed legacy of modernism, including the historical and political narratives of the countries of the former Yugoslavia to a greater or lesser extent. As a result, two extreme approaches to curating the modernist content of this region can be noticed, both of which have,

without reservation, criticism and qualification, contributed to the visibility, education on and dissemination of the story of the neglected architectural heritage filled with potential.

One of these approaches is the favourite bottom-up curatorial practice, informal and uncontrollable, present dominantly on social networks, whose rules are dictated by popularity and ‘likes’. The wide reach of the rediscovered socialist architecture of Yugoslavia and engagement with a broad, diverse and unexpected audience is based precisely on the popularisation of simple, fetishised images, most often Yugoslav war monuments and memorials. Although the feelings of the profession regarding this are ambivalent, this type of heritage promotion has undoubtedly influenced its popularity. Since the disdain of popular forces makes it impossible to mobilise popular energy in order to initiate social changes of any kind (Fiske, 1991, p. 215–216), it is undeniable that these forces are in the direct interest of promoting the contested legacy of Yugoslav modernism—when something becomes even superficially familiar to a wide audience, it simultaneously becomes recognisable, thus creating the basis for gaining further knowledge on even a peripheral topic. One of the more popular social media profiles, *Spomenik Database* (Spomenik Database, 2016), highlights in its Instagram bio that it ‘explores the history & imagery of the abstract memorials (spomeniks) & modernist architecture of the former-Yugoslav region’ (Spomenik Database, n.d.) describes the ‘mystical’ and ‘enigmatic efforts’ of the abstract symbols of the Yugoslav anti-fascist struggle and invites contributions on this topic from its wide circle of followers, which not only popularises the topic but also points to the specific historical and narrative layers of Yugoslav modernist heritage, opening it up to a completely unexpected audience.

Informal online archives of this kind, such as *Socialist Modernism* (Socialist Modernism, 2021) or *Belgrade Socialist Modernism* (Belgrade Socialist Modernism, n.d.), offer all the necessary archival information about modernist heritage, so they can be considered relevant data sources. Vladimir Kulić cites ‘a social media-driven Brutalist revival that has afforded modernist buildings mislabelled as belonging to that school a new lease of life’ (Eror, 2019), which, by analogy, includes the legacy of Yugoslav modernist heritage as well. And although it is possible to conclude that due to the multiplication of the material and superficiality of its dissemination, such practices have become tiresome (Wilkinson, 2019), they are undeniably continuing to spread, their achievements akin to those of highly aestheticised and theoretically established top-down curatorial practices, acting within official institutions.

The first official and widely announced global exhibition of Yugoslav modernist heritage was opened in New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in July 2018, opening the door to a new reception and understanding of the phenomenon. Vladimir Kulić, one of the curators of the exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia 1948–1980*, counted precisely on the influence and proven potential of the organising institution to change the perception of architecture (Kulić, 2018, p. 5), in the hope that an exhibition of this level would transform the public view of Yugoslav architectural heritage, formed through the prism of digital reproductions of individual fetishised modernist structures distributed through media channels

(Zeković et al., 2019, p. 55). As a well-coordinated curatorial team, Kulić and Stierli gathered a group of theoreticians of Yugoslav heritage, who used the opportunity to send a message through MoMA to the entire world, about the ideology of brotherhood and unity, the concepts of togetherness, federation and solidarity, from which the Yugoslav modernist spatial solution arose. Additionally, through the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue and interviews, Kulić continuously underlines the pragmatic nature of constructing a new society, pointing to specific typological achievements and presenting the cultural centres of Yugoslavia as instruments of spatial emancipation, thus forming the idea of modernism as an agent of modernisation (Kulić et al., 2012, p. 217). By presenting a notion that possibly would have remained unnoticed in other frameworks—despite representing an essential premise for understanding the value of Yugoslav modernist heritage—through the exhibition at MoMA, de facto changes the perception of the neutral observer/reader, translating the previously completed, partially absorbed process of one society's modernisation into a global phenomenon that can be applied to societies in general. On the MoMA website, curated segments related to the exhibition can be viewed: a 40-min conversation with the curators, a walk with the curators through the highlights of the exhibition and a meticulously curated gallery with 123 images of the main exhibition display. By reviewing this material, those interested receive enough information to form an idea about the phenomenon and the importance of modernist heritage in Yugoslavia. This enables the education of the public that did not attend the exhibition, which closed on 13 January 2019. The sustainability of such top-down curatorial practices is a clear indication of the aptness of the approach and is reflected in the still growing interest in the legacy of modernism.

Between the aforementioned extreme examples of practices directed by institutional authority and others, arising from sometimes superficial intentions, which are often obsolescent, there is a range of regional and local, usually interdisciplinary practices, focused on the research, presentation and representation of modernist heritage of individual or multiple cases. Non-governmental organisations, artist and creative collectives, platforms for heritage research and actors with similar goals, have succeeded in using the momentary interest in researching this phenomenon (which, again, is reflected in open access to the funds of various European and global institutions) to promote their projects, in most cases aimed at the general public, not professional circles, through exhibitions.

The curatorial practices established by these processes are primarily and deeply creative, because they arise from an often-informal approach to the subject, and encompass mostly hybrid practices that combine analogue and digital models of depicting artefacts and spaces. 'These transitional—liminal models affect changes in the audience's perception (...) In anticipating the development of the audience in this way, exhibitions, in any type of space using any type of curatorial practice, must remain a kind of laboratory, and not a static, hermetic entity' (Zeković & Konstantinović, 2022, p. 55).



## 5 Case Study: Novi Sad—Modern City

An example of one of the possible types of practices positioned between the aforementioned extremes that has, for now, shown positive outcomes and created interest among the audience, which can be further structured, is a hybrid practice based on the model of creative use and interpretation of heritage. In the production and organisation of the Spatial Praxis Platform—BAZA, a local agent in the cultural life of Novi Sad, the project *Novi Sad—Modern City* (Novi Sad—moderni grad) was realised in February 2021. Formatted as a multimedia exhibition, the project was focused on depicting the urban development of Novi Sad, in light of the industrialisation of the city, radical infrastructural changes, new spaces for living in the city and places for the social life of citizens in the second half of the twentieth century. The project researched and interpreted narratives about the modernisation of Novi Sad, with the aim of creating a complete picture of the spatial development of the city, from today's perspective. The exhibition was not led by nostalgic reflection, or idealisation of the past, but by an aspiration to shed light on the processes that shaped the city and to convey to the public the possible role of these processes in shaping future urban development (Fig. 3).

The theme of the project and its objectives raised the question of the place of the exhibition's realisation, as a key decision, on which the project's success potentially depended. The sustainability of the Sports and Business Centre of Vojvodina—Spens, an icon of the city's modernisation, has been the topic of discussion in recent



**Fig. 3** Spens—the Sports and Business Centre of Vojvodina, exterior. Photo by Igor Đokić; © 2022 by BAZA—Spatial Praxis Platform

years, with decisions about its reconstruction or demolition seeming equally possible in regard to its future (Konstantinović, 2021, p. 155). Besides being a symbol of the culmination of the urban and social modernisation process, the Spens building is a reflection of the capacity of Novi Sad at the end of the 1970s to build a complex city sports centre, a ‘city under one roof’, a catalyser of the city’s urbanisation. Claiming that Spens is the mark of the city, that is, a mirror of its urbanity—a demonstration, symbol or even monument to modernity, in the past, present and also in the future (Konstantinović et al., 2022, p. 9), the spaces of Spens were recommended for the *Novi Sad—Modern City* exhibition, a decision that underlined the very theme of the project on multiple levels. The public spaces within the building defined the final form of the exhibition, particularly those that were established by the Development Strategy of the Spens Building (Kolaković et al., 2021) as cultural spaces: the Street of Culture and its related programmes, which will be instituted by the future reconstruction project. In this way, the project simulated the potential of the building’s current and future programme, highlighting the importance of its enclosed public spaces and the diversity of public functions that the Centre can accommodate.

The complex configuration of the space correlated not only with the multimedia character of the exhibition but also with its specific conceptual installation. A central pavilion was placed in the space of Hall 8, the main entrance to the first floor of the building from the direction of Radnička Street. Its base was dedicated to a spatial structure for the projection of the video installation ‘Modernisation in Six Stories’. Each of the six films, composed of creatively curated and re-edited segments of previously unseen archival recordings of the construction of the city by ‘Neoplanta Film’,<sup>9</sup> navigates through the key processes of the modernisation of Novi Sad. Fragments of this valuable documentation of the intensive remodelling of Novi Sad in the 1960s and 1970s were structured into video collages—vertical diptychs—which illustrate the outlined topics. ‘Birth of a Modern City’ shows the creation of Novi Sad, which was ‘destined’ to be a city from its establishment; ‘Long live the Industry!’ deals with the large infrastructural endeavour of moving the production and railways to the north of the city and the expansion of the city towards the Danube; ‘Novi Sad Boulevards: Life In-between’ describes the changes the city underwent with the realisation of the concept of modern planning and the construction of boulevards; ‘City on the Sand’ gives an insight into the concepts behind the construction of large residential areas in the city; ‘Life of the City’ shows the improvement of living standards in the city, while ‘Mišeluk: Epilogue of

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<sup>9</sup>The Neoplanta Film archive, which is being successively digitalised, is a unique film archive of the city’s construction process, documented by a group of young filmmakers. Their amateur activities in the 1960s were formalised by the establishment of the production house ‘Neoplanta Film’ in 1966, whose work was dedicated to the production of documentary, cultural and educational films and video documentation of events from the economic, social, political and cultural life of Vojvodina. Upon its foundation, the cinematographic work of the group and external collaborators was aimed towards documenting modernisation efforts in the city and the province, which helped mould significant creators whose film careers continued in other contexts and formats (Bede, 2018, p. 154).

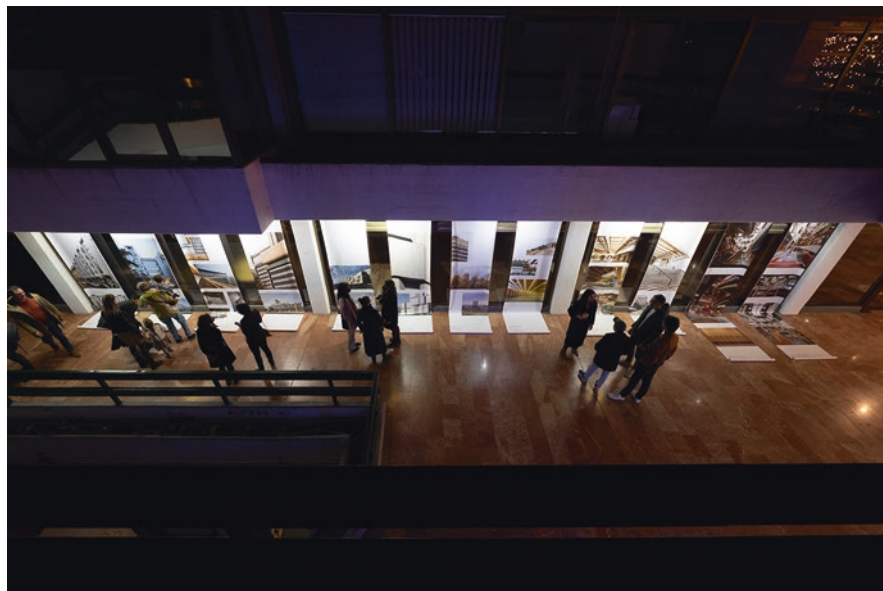
Yugoslav Optimism’ is about planning and constructing the Mišeluk settlement as one of the last stories of Yugoslav urban planning.

The central pavilion also marks the new location of the recognisable ‘Alfa’ chandelier—a symbol of Spens, whose reconstruction is the permanent legacy of the entire project. In 1981, one of the largest chandeliers in Europe at the time was built as part of the original interior design for the Spens building: an 80-m-long modular hexagonal structure, with 2500 light bulbs. It was produced by the lighting manufacturer ‘Dekor’ from Zabok under the name ‘Alfa’, while employees unofficially called it the ‘Svemirac’ (*Cosmos*), inspired by the floating lighting structure contemporary in expression and materialisation. The chandelier was located in the North Hall of Spens, and due to high electricity consumption, it was only used on special occasions. When ‘Svemirac’ was alit, the people of Novi Sad knew with certainty that something important was happening in the city (Fig. 4).

Over time, the North Hall underwent numerous transformations, and the chandelier was fragmented and forgotten. As part of the project, its remaining segments were restored, fitted with energy-efficient bulbs and assembled into a new configuration in Hall 8, with the idea of ‘signifying’ new events in the life of Spens and the city. This act represents a permanent intervention in the exhibition space and announces the building’s reconstruction, in which the elements of the building’s identity are treated as key segments of the new identity of Spens for the upcoming decades (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 4** Central pavilion in Hall 8 with the reconstructed ‘Alfa’ chandelier. Photo by Igor Đokić; © 2022 by BAZA—Spatial Praxis Platform

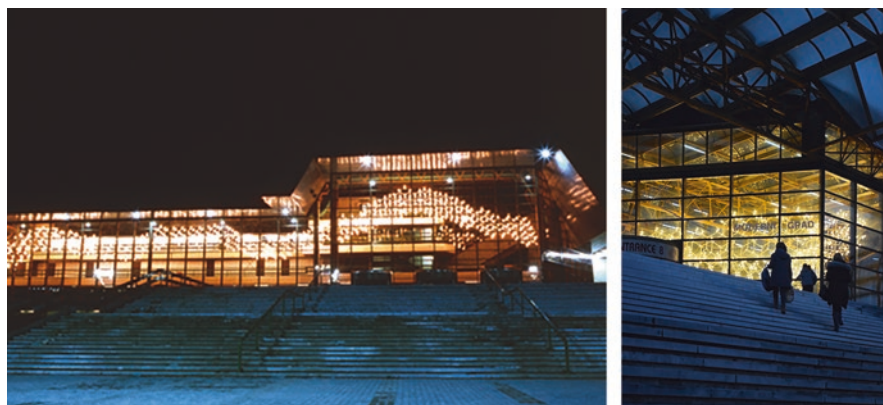


**Fig. 5** The street of culture with accompanying programmes. Photo by Igor Đokić; © 2022 by BAZA—Spatial Praxis Platform

The exhibition was accompanied by additional programmes and segments, all with the aim of spreading interest primarily among citizens, in the hope that their increased interest could affect the actualisation of the need for the reconstruction of this valuable centre dedicated to sport and culture. An equally important motive for the organisers and authors of the exhibition is the ongoing need for the acceptance and absorption of valuable elements of the city's modernist heritage, its protection and further management. Without awareness of the value of this heritage, which, in the turbulent urban-architectural context of the countries created by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, must be accepted and continuously highlighted, it is arbitrary to expect organised responses from citizens (Fig. 6).

## 6 Towards an Inclusive City

The need for diversifying the elements and assemblies of urban identities with the intention of creating options for an inclusive city of the future implies the reconciliation, recognition and acceptance of all existing layers of architectural heritage in cities. This has a special significance in the context of the unabsorbed modernism of the countries formed by the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As the official policies of the region have, for now, shown insufficient interest in re-evaluating the architectural heritage of the second half of the twentieth century, the future of the valuable modernist oeuvre of this region directly depends on the establishment of new actors who



**Fig. 6** North Hall in the late 1980s with illuminated chandelier (left). Archive photo © 2022 by BAZA—Spatial Praxis Platform. (Right) Hall 8 during the event *Novi Sad—Modern City*. Photo by Maja Momirov; © 2022 by BAZA—Spatial Praxis Platform

would take over this role. Without a clear position of the state, local cultural policies rely on unorganised and individual cases of promoting the modernist legacy, in order to demonstrate, within a broader framework, the existence of any kind of association to heritage. Actors on this unusual scene exist nevertheless, and through different methods, approaches and practices, they participate in the reactivation of the dissonant layers of the city's past.

Between the extremes of the rare institutional top-down activities of this type and the frequent vague and sometimes not fully informed bottom-up efforts, a noteworthy position is held by midlevel mediators. Characterised as neither of the offered extremes, but unifying for both, these actors are involved in various activities at the city level—from scholarly, interpretative and curatorial, to educational and promotional activities—with the aim of underlining the importance of modernist heritage. The *Novi Sad—Modern City* project is an example of precisely this kind of practice. Created by connecting an educational institution with a recreational and sports institution through a project supported by the European Union, the project showed that it is possible to sustainably turn the attention directed to the European Capital of Culture, towards the pressing issue of the protection of the heritage of the twentieth century and to the definitive acceptance of the value of the modernisation of the city. Although it might be said that the overall official ECoC support lacked the recognition and the additional promotion of the neglected modernist heritage of Novi Sad, their presence as co-funding organisation did leave a sustainable trace of the projects that happened. The space of Spens, for example, and particularly the Hall 8—the place promoted through the *Novi Sad—Modern City* project—was used multiple times again, most notably as a cultural point for the purposes of the Print Design Photography (PDP) Conference organised in 2022. Also, the reconstructed original chandelier positioned in Hall 8 gained the attention of media and the inhabitants of

the city, so it is set to be preserved during a complex process of the sports' centre reconstruction.

Inclusive cities imply a strong visibility of their layers, coming to terms with the past and learning from it. Also, these layers ensure the sustainability of collective memory, in which architecture is recognised as the most effective 'memory agent' (Radulović et al., 2022) and guardian of urban narratives. The development strategies of inclusive cities are based on precisely these determinations—the coexistence of formed identities that build the diversity and cultural geography of the city. In the architectural heritage of modernism, and especially in the incompletely accepted truth about the modernisation of cities in the former territory of Yugoslavia, there is a still unrealised potential for improving the skilfully established basis of development.

The principles of the *Agenda 21 for Culture* determine the framework for this type of action, while the local challenges of implementation are certainly significant. If 'cultural diversity is the main heritage of humanity' (UCLG, 2004), then connecting the fragments of Novi Sad's history into a complete picture of an authentic, multi-ethnic and multicultural contemporary city is the path towards the realisation of an urban environment based on social equality, coexistence and the sustainability of further urban transformations.

**Acknowledgements** This research (paper) has been supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation through project no. 451-03-47/2023-01/200156 'Innovative scientific and artistic research from the FTS (activity) domain'.

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