

# The Influences and Implications of the European Capital of Culture on Intangible Heritage: Novi Sad 2021

Nebojša Čamprag<sup>1</sup>, Aleksandra Stupar<sup>2</sup>, Darko Polić<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Technical University of Darmstadt, Faculty of Architecture, Darmstadt, Germany, [camprag@stadt.tu-darmstadt.de](mailto:camprag@stadt.tu-darmstadt.de)

<sup>2</sup>University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture, Belgrade, Serbia, [stupar@arh.bg.ac.rs](mailto:stupar@arh.bg.ac.rs)

<sup>3</sup>Urban Planning, Development and Research Centre - Urbanizam, Novi Sad, Serbia, [darko.polic@nsurbanizam.rs](mailto:darko.polic@nsurbanizam.rs)

**Abstract:** As one of the most prestigious initiatives through which the European Union aims to promote richness and diversity of its cultures, the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) also holds an enormous potential for promoting urban regeneration and development. The aim of this paper is to examine the influences and implications of this program on the ways intangible heritage has been evaluated, treated and promoted. The focus is on Novi Sad, the capital of the Serbian province of Vojvodina, elected to be one of three ECoCs in 2021. Representing an example of transitional environment, it has experienced a shift from a socialist to a neo-liberal socio-economic framework that triggered a process of quasi-regeneration. However, during the bid for the ECoC title, urban heritage was (re)used as an important competitive advantage and local uniqueness. Both the Bid Book and implementation process have provided an interesting merging of tangible and intangible heritage, in which urban spaces will be used as a setting for promotion of urban brand through selected elements of intangible heritage. Consequently, the place identity was (re)created through images and narratives connected to European, national and local level, integrating place branding strategy, stakeholders (especially community) and urban policy.

**Keywords:** ECoC, heritage, regeneration, branding

## Introduction

Since the launch of the program ‘World Decade on Culture and Development’ (1988-1998), the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) started to strongly advocate for greater contribution of culture in national and international development policies. Along with the rising awareness of its development potential, the notion of cultural heritage considerably expanded in the following decades to encompass more than just monuments and the collection of objects. With the adoption of the ‘Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’ in 2003 (UNESCO, 2003), UNESCO divided heritage typologies on ‘tangible’ and so-called ‘intangible’

component, which assumes inherited traditions or living expressions, such as “oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts” (UNESCO, 2011: 3). However, contrary to clear division, cultural heritage remained characterized by deep-seated interdependence of its two major components, in which the fragile intangible cultural component became an increasingly important factor for maintaining cultural diversity and ensuring sustainable development in the face of growing globalization (UNESCO, 2003).

Being a supreme international body setting the standards in culture, UNESCO’s policies strongly influenced many other international institutions to start promoting similar initiatives. In 1985 the European Union (EU) responded to these emerging trends with the launch of the pilot project ‘European City of Culture’, transforming it to the project ‘European Capitals of Culture’ (ECoC) in 1999. Since then, more than 60 cities have held this prestigious title, which boosted their cultural, social and economic development. The title has also had a positive impact on the overall quality of life, strengthening the sense of community, attracting visitors and (re)gaining international recognition. During the recent years in particular, the increasingly competitive bid for the ECoC title initiated innovative and integrative approaches to both planning and policy-making of these challenging urban settings, influencing modifications of the outdated methods of heritage preservation, while stimulating public participation.

Due to numerous and diverse benefits triggered by the ECoC program, this European framework has become particularly interesting for urban governments in the formerly marginalized or disadvantaged contexts of ex-industrial and/or post-socialist cities, in need of thorough and effective restructuring. The focus of this paper is Novi Sad, the capital of the Serbian province of Vojvodina, whose identity represents an outcome of recent post-socialist, post-conflict and post-transitional turbulences. Following the fall of state socialism and the breakup of Yugoslavia, the hardships associated with internal conflicts and international isolation aggravated and postponed necessary socio-economic transformation, while international image and reputation of Novi Sad faced rapid deterioration. The conditions for re-inclusion of the city in international trends have been met only after the fall of the socialist regime in the year 2000, along with the shift towards the neo-liberal model of governance. However, planning practice, cultural management and heritage preservation remained characterized by a lack of transparency and quasi-regeneration that mostly aimed to satisfy the needs of the newly established real-estate market (Polić & Stupar, 2015).

The ECoC 2021 candidacy of Novi Sad represented the necessary trigger for reconsideration of its urban heritage as a competitive advantage, simultaneously enabling introduction of inclusive strategic governance on local level, as well as urban rebranding. This paper critically investigates the ways intangible heritage has been re-evaluated, treated and promoted during the drafting and implementation of the so-called Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021 project (NS 2021). The methodology relies on analysis of the objectives highlighted in the two most important strategic documents: the new Strategy of Cultural Development and the Bid Book for the ECoC 2021, along with the follow-up in the media and interviews with members of the Foundation Novi Sad 2021 - ECoC.

## Novi Sad: Toward the European Capital of Culture 2021

As a response to growing constitutional crises during the recent decades, such as the Brexit or rising nationalist movements, the EU started to advocate for strengthening identification of its citizens through promoting the concept of ‘Europeanness’, which became profoundly present in the EU policy. The concept is based on various cultural instruments and cultural heritage, as a shared legacy of many European nations, aiming to strengthen the sense of communality, unity, and integration, but also for achieving greater cultural coherence (Lähdesmäki, 2014). It operates through the Creative Europe framework,<sup>1</sup> which encompasses some of the most prominent cultural events, e.g. European Heritage days, the European Heritage Label and the ECoC itself.

Along with stimulating the intensive interaction between built environment, historical values and local community, the ECoC program also aims at creating economic growth, encouraging urban regeneration and tourism development, building a sense of community, and developing European connections (European Commission, 2018). Due to a comprehensive set of objectives, it became of particular interest for the newly joined EU member states, burdened by the challenges of assimilation into the new socio-political, economic and cultural system. On the other hand, the ECoC program also gained on diversity, innovation and creativity. The City of Novi Sad, as the first representative of a non-EU country, was proclaimed an ECoC for 2021 during a particularly interesting selection process resulting with a shared title among three European cities for the very first time.<sup>2</sup> The bidding process led by the urban government of Novi Sad was equally particular. The adopted innovative governance approach assumed the development of the local concept and strategy for sustainable development of the cultural sector while simultaneously working on the candidacy for the ECoC 2021.

Looking upon the experiences of the former capitals of culture, the project NS 2021 was envisaged as the driver of local cultural and creative potentials for development, while fostering urban regeneration, improvement of the city’s international image and tourist offer. Such an approach required reconsideration, re-evaluation and an innovative treatment of intangible heritage, embedded in the new strategies of urban and cultural development. The outcome of these efforts ranged from the strengthening of institutions related to culture and heritage preservation, over the development of cultural and creative industries, the improvement of cultural participation, the decentralization of cooperation, to overall urban rebranding (Foundation NS 2021, 2016).

### *The context*

Resulting from the specific socio-political circumstances, Novi Sad historically holds an outstanding importance in Serbian culture and national identification. It originates from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the present-day territory of Vojvodina was under Hungarian rule. Serbian immigration from the Ottoman territory to Hungary was encouraged by the special status of a recognized nation with extensive rights, in exchange for providing a border militia that could be mobilized against invaders

---

<sup>1</sup> Creative Europe is the European Commission's framework program with a budget of €1.46 billion for the years 2014-2020, aimed at supporting the culture and audiovisual sectors.

<sup>2</sup> Besides from Novi Sad, the ECoC 2021 was awarded to Elefsina (Greece) and Timisoara (Romania).

from the South. However, the absence of a national state during this period rendered Novi Sad to become a political and cultural centre of Serbian minority, labelled as “Serbian Athens” (Aleksov 2009: 277–278). Moreover, the city’s position as a strategic Habsburg military post (Figure 1) made it an important trading and manufacturing centre. The overall importance of Novi Sad further grew after Vojvodina’s unification with the Kingdom of Serbia in 1918, when it became the capital city of the multinational and multicultural province. The rapid industrialization and the rise of urban population started after its incorporation in the newly founded Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, when the city demonstrated a more radical urban development model in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). However, progressive development of Novi Sad, along with a number of other Serbian cities, significantly slowed down during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure 1.

Novi Sad: historic Petrovaradin Fortress (left) and one of its main landmarks, the clock tower (right).  
Photos: Vervin, CC BY-SA (left), Čamprag N., 2016-06 (right).

For most of the countries and cities of post-socialist Europe, the period of extensive and highly dynamic processes of socio-spatial restructuring was the crucial for their free-market-oriented reforms (Stanilov, 2007). However, in addition to the breakup of Yugoslav Federation and the ethnic wars of the 1990s, Serbia was exposed to severe economic stagnation, international isolation and overall marginalization. Instead of dealing with the challenges of post-socialist transition, political elites in Serbia deliberately delayed socioeconomic reforms in order to keep their power (Vujović & Petrović, 2007). The legacy of the former technocratic planning principles thus long remained a dominant option for municipal governments, reflecting itself in rigid planning models (Vujošević & Nedović-Budić, 2006). For Novi Sad in particular, this was an equally difficult period that harmed its former reputation of an international centre of trade, manufacture, industry and culture. Being the second largest city in highly centralized independent Serbia, its urban development was overshadowed by the national capital Belgrade. Furthermore, the city also suffered major physical damage resulting from the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. Besides from human losses, several damaged residential neighbourhoods and the destruction of three iconic bridges over Danube, bombardment of the oil refinery caused severe pollution and widespread ecological damage (Figure 2). As a result, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its international image was shattered by a plethora of socio-political and

economical problems resulting from a decade of wars and political instability, rapid deterioration of national economy, the legacy of autocratic planning and highly centralized political organization.



Figure 2.

NATO bombardment in 1999 left Novi Sad without its iconic bridges.

Photo: Darko Dozet (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The later democratization of the country and the shift of national governance towards the EU integrations finally opened up some new development perspectives. With enactment of the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2020 (Ministry of Construction Transport and Infrastructure, 2016), polycentric model of urbanization and regional development policy has been introduced to the national policy framework. This strategy looked upon the dominant development trends of urbanization in Europe and finally improved the chances for balancing functional concentration between urban centres. However, considering that both decentralization and development are generally complex and time-consuming processes, local governance and planning of Novi Sad kept on relying on its already existing assets, such as culture and cultural production.

#### *Cultural development strategy as a prerequisite for ECoC candidacy*

Novi Sad became the national candidate for the ECoC title due to several very diverse reasons. First, the city has traditionally been characterized by its multi-ethnic structure comprising around fifteen ethnic groups besides the Serbian majority—Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Romani, Montenegrins, Rusyns, Romanians, Ukrainians, Germans and others. Second, the location of Novi Sad on the Danube River, only 70 kilometres northern from the capital Belgrade and its airport, provided many favourable opportunities for its accessibility, development and marketing (Figure 3). Finally, Novi Sad already had a long reputation as a national cultural centre—there are more than twenty active cultural and artistic societies, while the city also hosts a number of important cultural institutions, such as the oldest cultural-scientific institution of Serbia - Matica srpska, National Theatre, Museum of Vojvodina, Gallery of Matica Srpska etc. There is also a range of important cultural events, such as the Sterijino pozorje theatre festival, Zmaj Children Games, International Novi Sad Literature Festival, Novi Sad Jazz Festival, Festival of Street Musicians, and many others.



Figure 3.  
Novi Sad: the panoramic view on the city from Petrovaradin Fortress.  
Photo: Vervin, CC BY-SA 2.5.

In addition to a range of established cultural institutions and events, the city promoted a new, alternative approach to cultural development, especially after the fall of socialist regime and democratization of the country in the year 2000. The city's cultural and touristic offer has been radically modernized after the establishment of EXIT—a symbolically named cultural event triggered by a student movement that fought for democracy and freedom. Held at the prominent Petrovaradin Fortress (Figures 1 and 4), this event quickly became one of the biggest music summer festivals in Europe. Its official international recognition came with the title of the Best Major European Festival in 2014 and 2018, being one of the most prestigious festival awards in the world (EU Festival Awards, 2014). The skyrocketing success of EXIT has brought Novi Sad back in the international spotlight, causing major shifts in cultural and urban re-branding and marketing (Figure 4).



Figure 4.  
Petrovaradin Fortress during the EXIT Festival in 2005 (left) and marketing of the festival in the city centre in 2006 (right).  
Author: Aleksandar Kamasi, CC BY-SA 3.0 (left), copyright-free photo (right)

Along with its strategic location and historic significance, a number of existing cultural assets and recent initiatives thus made Novi Sad to become national candidate for the ECoC 2021 bid. However, in order to become eligible contestant and to increase chances for winning, the city government

required a more comprehensive development approach, implying a new cultural development strategy that would comply with the complex EU requirements.

### **NS2021: a new approach to culture and cultural development**

As a consequence of both foreign investments and the process of privatization during the immediate transition period after the year 2000, Novi Sad became exposed to a rapid commercialization of urban space and real estate development. The extremely neo-liberal investment climate initiated uncontrolled construction of collective residential units until 2008, jeopardizing spatial identity in some areas. The former planning framework was not capable of dealing with the needs of the emerging market, resulting with poor quality of urban design, and inconsistent and questionable construction principles, implemented without any consideration of environmental contexts (Balestrieri, 2013; Polić & Stupar, 2015). The shift of urban governance in Novi Sad towards a more systematic approach to urban development planning occurred only a decade after democratic changes. The enactment of the Economic Development Strategy in 2010 emphasized the need to attract more visitors and investors for the overall objective of repositioning the city in the international arena of free market economy (Local Economic Development Office, 2010). At the same time, the necessity of strategic planning in the area of cultural development was recognized. The rising influence of the City Council and the City Department for Culture in the local cultural policy management finally generated concrete aspirations toward the candidacy for the ECoC title. One of the major prerequisites for gaining this prestigious brand, however, assumed a local strategic document that would bring culture and urban development together (European Capital of Culture, 2016).

The procedure of drafting this strategic document was generally based on inclusive, integrative and democratic principles that regarded culture as a public property, with the right to culture assumed as one of the basic human rights. It involved an intensive participative process, which included a large number of administration departments, institutions, diverse civil and private organizations and informal groups. Series of presentations, discussions, and workshops were organized, aiming at achieving an equal representation of stakeholders included in the decision-making process. After the five-year long efforts, the Assembly of Novi Sad enacted the new Cultural Development Strategy for the period of 2016-2026 (City of Novi Sad, 2016), based on a synergy of local, national and EU policy-making levels. The highly diverse and comprehensive tasks spanned from the recognition of current problems, over the definition of directions and priorities, to the determination of implementation instruments and methods. However, what makes this strategic approach even more important is that the process of its elaboration has been conducted simultaneously and in accordance with the drafting of the so-called Bid Book for the ECoC candidacy (City of Novi Sad, 2015).

Although the heritage area of the traditional urban core was luckily spared of harmful interventions during the 2000s, the inherited values and continuity of urban historic areas of Novi Sad have been seriously affected, challenging the vital parts of its urban memory and uniqueness. Fortunately, the academic network of the University of Novi Sad, local NGOs, national minority associations and others timely recognized the importance of intangible heritage in the very early preparatory phases of the Bid Book for the NS 2021 program. Some small-scale research and projects have been conducted even before launching of the open call for the Bid Book, with a few of them later included in the draft. This approach was generally based on the premise that the urban identity and other intangible values should be preserved and emphasized as the reflection of the city's multinational, multicultural and

tolerant character, as well as its strong determination to embrace the future challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (European Capital of Culture, 2016). Among the six strategic objectives of the strategy finally proposed by the Bid Book, most were focused on establishing participative cultural policy based on intercultural dialogue and internationalization, with a strong spatial reference. The sixth objective exclusively targeted promotion of cultural heritage, underlining the need of protection and inclusion of the public in revitalization process and (re)use. Cultural sector was thus envisioned as the central stage for propelling public participation, intercultural dialogue and cultural identity building, with the final aim to reinsert the city into wider cultural environments by redefining its identity within the challenges of transition, de-industrialization and post-war traumas. Finally, the new brand of Novi Sad was supposed to promote rising optimism, supported by the image of a hub based on services, innovations, software development, gaming industry and series of cultural activities.

The proposed artistic program was equally positioned at the intersection between urban tangible and intangible values, based around the idea of culture as a bridge between people and a reconnection with the specific historical and socio-political contexts. This topic came as a resonance to the historic bridges over the River Danube destroyed during the NATO bombing in 1999, although with a strong focus on reconciliation and reconnection. The central narrative of building bridges thus runs through the proposed artistic program of the strategy, conceptualized in four different groups, and pointing out to intangible cultural values to be preserved and further developed. The ‘New Way Bridge’ deals with the strengths of the city, such as its distinctive heritage and hospitality; the ‘Rainbow Bridge’ points to the city's weaknesses, such as reconciliation and migration, and search for the ways to meet these challenges. The ‘Freedom Bridge’ stresses the innovative potentials of the city, its young and creative industries, while the ‘Hope Bridge’ highlights the opportunities opening up through cultural facilities and public spaces (Foundation NS 2021, 2016). Within each of the ‘bridges’ were the major flagship projects that aimed at converting urban space into a stage for the active or passive brand promotion—e.g. the ‘Moba Project’ or the ‘Peace Chapel’.

The concept of the ‘Moba Project’ was based on participation and development of a sense of belonging, which connotes the volunteering actions of solidarity for revitalization and maintenance of public spaces, safeguarding of cultural heritage, planning and presenting cultural events in local neighbourhoods. The program also used a multifaceted strategy for the transformation of public spaces, used in the ‘Art in Public Space’ and the ‘Small Scale Urban Space’ projects. Additionally, the focus on heritage through the ‘Moba for Heritage’ introduces the idea of people working together on renovating traditional houses, as symbols of joint cultural heritage in multinational environment. It envisages the renovation of a German, a Hungarian, a Slovak, a Romanian and a Serbian house, as an act of enhancing social cohesion and intercultural cooperation (Foundation NS 2021, 2016). On the other hand, the project ‘Peace Chapel’ generally deals with the ideas of peace and reconciliation. As a public event outreaching international audience, the project envisaged use of urban space as a setting for establishing a dialog on the EU future. Urban space was also to be used as a stage for other events targeting international exchange, cooperation and promotion of diversity, such as ‘Bridging Barriers’, ‘Breed’, or ‘My Voice Travels’. Other targeted objectives were reconciliation (‘Fugitives’), collective memory (‘Brotherhood and Unity’; ‘Where were you when the bombing started?’), and (inter)cultural legacy and identity (‘At the Crossroads’; ‘Gastronomic Identity’).

A year after the ECoC title has been awarded, the projects such as ‘Heritage Walks’ and ‘Intellectual Topography’ were launched in 2017 and later developed in various urban neighbourhoods, including





different aspect and time spans of intangible heritage. ‘Heritage Walks’ have got a wider (European) dimension gaining the recognition of similar initiatives within the Faro Convention Network (European heritage community network), while the Association of Architects of Novi Sad (DaNS) initiated new topics focused on the heritage of the Modern Movement (‘Modern Architecture Walks’).

It is also important to notice that the link between intangible heritage and urban space transformations equally held a prominent role in the Bid Book. For example, the biggest cultural infrastructure project, focused on the conversion of a redundant metal factory to the creative urban district, was based on a narrative of a factory as a Chinese quarter, due to the use of abandoned buildings as warehouses for Chinese products during the 1990s. The ideas for its transformation have been developed and evaluated through round tables, documentary film production and numerous studies. The other significant example represents the refurbishment of the old Silk factory in the historic neighbourhood Almaški kraj. Nowadays, it is an active local cultural centre (‘station’) established through the mutual efforts of the Foundation and the association of ‘Almašani’.<sup>3</sup> The activities of the association included collecting and presenting local oral traditions and a wide range of intangible heritage, while their contribution was officially acknowledged through the partnership in managing the programs of the ‘station’. Finally, the project of 46 urban pockets, focused on the redesign of small public spaces, also included collecting local intangible heritage, as a part of the competition announcement for the redesign of these places.

#### *Challenges and advancements of the NS 2021 strategy*

Following its submission and evaluation, the EC Selection Panel particularly appreciated the prime topics of the Bid Book, such as its diverse focus on inter-cultural dialogue, reconciliation and the art of peace (European Capital of Culture, 2016). Furthermore, its aims and objectives favourably reflected some of the most important international value frameworks in the field of cultural development by UN, UNESCO and ICOMOS (Foundation NS 2021, 2016). Following the decision for Novi Sad to become one of the ECoCs in 2016 (European Capital of Culture, 2016), the local government established the Foundation NS 2021 as a non-profit, voluntary and independent organization (Figure 5). Its aims were clearly set at the implementation of the strategy’s objectives through developing culture, protecting human and minority rights, promoting arts, democratic values, European integration and international cooperation and exchange (Cultural Center of Novi Sad, 2016). However, the Foundation was also facing the challenge to deal with a number of limitations of the proposed strategy that the EU Selection Panel stressed out in its final report (European Capital of Culture, 2016). Among others, the narrow geographic spread of proposed partners, lack of elaborated audience development, and unclear ownership of the strategy within the city council were highlighted (European Capital of Culture, 2016). There was also a lack of the flagship projects, while the proposed aim at building trust and restoration of cooperation between the countries formerly at war was lacking on clear indications for reaching its key objectives. Finally, the bid also omitted integration of the cultural strategy with the city’s urban development plans, while at the same time suffering from an

---

<sup>3</sup> The local community of the Almaš neighborhood.

underdeveloped legacy beyond the place-branding benefits of the ECoC brand (European Capital of Culture, 2016).

Considering a range of intangible socio-cultural values in the core of the NS 2021 program, reaching a high diversity of its objectives seemed to be a rather challenging task. Additionally, the cultural operators and institutions in Novi Sad generally lacked profound experience and expertise in cultural policy making and management (Tomka & Kisić, 2018). As a final result, the updated version of the Bid Book had very little in common with its earlier version, based on which the award has been made. It showed a number of ambiguous, overstated and conflicting views on many of its integral aspects, generally ranging from the approach to the city itself, over the motives behind the application, to the vision of cultural development and means of achieving this goal (European Capital of Culture, 2017; Tomka & Kisić, 2018). The lack of a clear artistic dimension and its general focus on festivals even threatened to harm the cultural quality and integrity of the overall initiative (European Commission, 2017; Jovanović, 2018). As a consequence, the new urban brand of Novi Sad has been promoted and elaborated by further development of the program Novi Sad 2021-ECoC, along with defining new artistic festival platforms, such as ‘Kaleidoscope of Culture’. The major focus of the Foundation’s management has therefore been placed to the shift from the regional brand of the EXIT music festival to some more advanced artistic concepts.



Figure. 5

The logo of the program emphasizing inclusiveness and diversity (left) and the website of the NS 2021 Foundation, stressing out the participative bases of the program (right).

Source: <http://novisad2021.rs>, screenshot, 2019-05-02

Contrary to a number of evident flaws, the NS 2021 strategy still provided a number of significant advancements;<sup>4</sup> especially regarding the definition of new approaches towards cultural heritage and policymaking. Before the nomination, there were no underlying strategic documents to facilitate the

<sup>4</sup> According to the report by the panel of independent experts from 2017 (European Commission, 2017), representatives of Novi Sad highlighted that since its designation as ECoC the city already benefitted from increasing investments and tourism flows. Besides, local government invested efforts to increase the participation and involvement of locals, which reached more than 2.000 citizens participating in a wide range of proposals for development of cultural and public spaces, along with development of volunteering platforms (Novi Sad 2021, 2019). The NS 2021 project has been declared of national significance, implying that culture finally became one of the priority topics, while there also seems to be an increased awareness about culture among economic stakeholders.

decision making process, which made the local cultural policy highly bureaucratized and extremely non-transparent. Following the appropriation of planning tools and the re-evaluation of built urban heritage, the new Cultural Development Strategy, along with the NS 2021 program, imposed necessary reconsideration of public participation, as well as of the role of cultural heritage in strategic planning for urban development. Furthermore, different levels of governance—from local and provincial to national and international—were brought together to cooperate on a single project, overlooked by a panel of independent experts nominated by the EU. The strategy thereby fostered inclusion of the extremely complex and diverse composition of stakeholders, addressed their conflicts and interest and advocated for more cooperation with other social activities—such as tourism, education, creative industry or urban planning. The entire approach was shaped by the locally specific issues, driven by the need for (re)creation of place identity through intervening on previously unequal approaches to cultural contents of minorities and marginalized groups, insufficient support to local creative work, or unsatisfactory presence of local artists and contents at international cultural scene. As particularly praised by the EU selection panel (European Capital of Culture, 2016), the comprehensive mapping of the cultural sector in the city was seen as a solid foundation for the implementation of the new cultural strategy and the ECoC program. Finally, one of the most important outcomes represented the reconsideration of urban heritage and its treatment as a competitive advantage, which ranged from the common reuse of formally protected buildings, over the renewal and reuse of utilitarian architecture, to the new interpretation of buildings, areas and urban spaces in promoting intangible heritage (Polić & Stupar, 2015). Therefore, the NS 2021 represents a significant shift away from the former authoritarian, discriminative and elitist approach to cultural policy-making and quasi-regeneration, and a more responsive approach towards achieving the goals of place re-branding and, thus, urban competitiveness.

## Conclusions

In the light of increased globalization, the complex and chaotic nature of the processes behind cultural policy-making could be perceived as a growing and widespread phenomenon (Davies, 2016; Roberts, 2010; Tomka & Kisić, 2018). Taking in consideration a relatively particular case of Serbia, its cultural policy could be characterized by a relatively long period of general confusion, manifested by a deviation from the rational policy norm, as a direct consequence of transitioning state and a lack of democratic cultural system (Dukic Dojcinovic, 2003). It even became an instrument of political communication, along with the shift from the spheres of the state and its actors towards the objectives of political elite (Jevtovic, 2015). Although the project NS 2021 could not have stayed immune to some of these trends, influences, and deficiencies, it could be seen as a rather revolutionary endeavour, primarily due to its high level of innovation and inclusion of diverse stakeholders, jointly working on the first genuine effort for a long-term cultural planning in Serbia.

Particularly significant element associated with the NS 2021 project was modernization of national cultural policy-making through introduction of the EU procedures, expectations and ideals (Tomka & Kisić, 2018). Equally important was a holistic and integrative model of urban and cultural planning and development that the project NS 2021 strongly emphasized. However, in the core of this development strategy is profound reconsideration of cultural values for overall place (re)branding. Imposed by the bidding requirements, the new approach to intangible component of cultural heritage was turned into an asset for urban re-branding, as one of the prerequisites for repositioning in the arena of competitive cities. Creative merging of tangible and intangible components of cultural heritage



thereby turned urban spaces into settings for redefinition and promotion of a new urban brand. Furthermore, (re)created through images and narratives connected to European, national and local levels, and subordinated to the values in the core of the ECoC policy, the emerging urban brand integrated the objectives of the place branding strategy, the stakeholders (especially community) and the urban policy. Therefore, it finally demonstrated the real capacity of intangible urban heritage to launch marginalised communities in the arena of competitive cities. Such an approach to recreation of place identity through reconsideration and enrichment of the core cultural values, while taking in consideration the voice of the local community, qualifies the NS 2021 program as a promising model toward reaching the objectives of urban sustainability.

## References

Aleksov, B. (2009). Jovan Jovanović Zmaj and the Serbian Identity between Poetry and History. In D. Mishkova (Ed.), *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*. Budapest; New York: Central European University Press.

Balestrieri, M. (2013). Contested landscapes. Conflicts of interests and controversies in planning and using space. *Spatium*, (29), 53–58. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SPAT1329053B>

City of Novi Sad. (2015). Novi Sad 2021. European Capital of Culture: Candidate City. Novi Sad.

City of Novi Sad. (2016). Cultural Development Strategy of the City of Novi Sad for the Period 2016-2026. Serbia: City of Novi Sad. Retrieved from <http://novisad2021.rs/en/strategy/>

Cultural Center of Novi Sad. Statute of the Foundation NS 2021 (2016). Serbia.

Davies, W. (2016, August 24). The Age of Post-Truth Politics. Retrieved April 20, 2019, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/opinion/campaign-stops/the-age-of-post-truth-politics.html>

Dukic Dojcinovic, V. (2003). Sedam uzroka tranzicione konfuzije (Seven Causes of Transitional Confusion). *Zbornik Fakulteta Dramskih Umetnosti*, 7, 359–380.

EU Festival Awards. (2014). And the Winners Were.... Retrieved March 3, 2019, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20141007141112/http://eu.festivalawards.com/latest/and-the-winners-are-3/>

European Capital of Culture. (2016). The European Capital of Culture in 2021 in candidate countries and potential candidates for membership of the EU. The Selection Panel's report. Final report. Brussels. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-final-selection-report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-final-selection-report_en.pdf)

European Capital of Culture. (2017). Novi Sad: European Capital of Culture 2021. First Monitoring Meeting. Brussels. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring_en.pdf)

European Commission. (2017). Novi Sad: European Capital of Culture 2021. First Monitoring Meeting. Report by the panel of independent experts. Brussels. Retrieved from



[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring_en.pdf)

European Commission. (2018). European Capitals of Culture.

Foundation NS 2021. (2016). Novi Sad 2021. European Capital of Culture: Candidate City. Novi Sad.

Foundation NS 2021. (2018). First Progress Report for the Monitoring Panel. Novi Sad, Serbia. Retrieved from <http://novisad2021.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Izveštaj-o-radu-eng..pdf>

Jevtovic, A. (2015). Културна политика и стратегије политичке комуникације (Cultural policy and strategies of political communication). Kultura Polisa. Retrieved from [http://kpolisa.com/KP26/KP26-VII-1\\_Jevtovic.pdf](http://kpolisa.com/KP26/KP26-VII-1_Jevtovic.pdf)

Jovanović, N. (2018, March 8). Novi Sad 2021: Privatna prestonica kulture (Novi Sad 2021: Private Capital of Culture). Javno. Retrieved from <https://javno.rs/analiza/novi-sad-2021-privatna-prestonica-kulture>

Lähdesmäki, T. (2014). Discourses of Europeanness in the reception of the European Capital of Culture events: The case of Pécs 2010. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 21(2), 191–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412448092>

Local Economic Development Office. (2010). Novi Sad Economic Development Strategy. Novi Sad.

Ministry of Construction Transport and Infrastructure. (2016). National Report of the Republic of Serbia to the HABITAT III Conference. Belgrade. Retrieved from [http://www.spia.vt.edu/SPIA/docs/shirt/Revisiting\\_Urban\\_Planning\\_in\\_the\\_Transitional\\_Countries.pdf](http://www.spia.vt.edu/SPIA/docs/shirt/Revisiting_Urban_Planning_in_the_Transitional_Countries.pdf)

Novi Sad 2021. (2019). Rezultati konkursa „Šetnje kroz nasleđe” (Results of the competition “Walks through Heritage”). Retrieved April 20, 2019, from [http://novisad2021.rs/rezultati-konkursa-setnje-kroz-nasle/?jez=lat&fbclid=IwAR25R1XWM-YtQvoZ\\_N1AKpH-e5190mIXpXJOI3Aza0PXHUxJFIj3ACzVhQ](http://novisad2021.rs/rezultati-konkursa-setnje-kroz-nasle/?jez=lat&fbclid=IwAR25R1XWM-YtQvoZ_N1AKpH-e5190mIXpXJOI3Aza0PXHUxJFIj3ACzVhQ)

Polić, D., & Stupar, A. (2015). Urban heritage reconsidered: Redefining the planning approach to historical areas of Novi Sad. *Spatium*, 1(33), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SPAT1533092P>

Roberts, D. (2010, April 1). Post-truth politics. *Grist*. Retrieved from <https://grist.org/article/2010-03-30-post-truth-politics/>

Stanilov, K. (Ed.). (2007). *The Post-Socialist City. Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism*. Springer Netherlands.

Tomka, G., & Kisić, V. (2018). From Inconsistencies to Contingencies - Understanding Policy Complexity of Novi Sad 2021 European Capital of Culture. *Croatian International Relations Review*, XXIV(82), 62–89. <https://doi.org/10.2478/cirr-2018-0010>



UNESCO. (2003). The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507137-8>

UNESCO. (2010). The Power of Culture for Development. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2015.11519334>

UNESCO. (2011). What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?

Vujošević, M., & Nedović-Budić, Z. (2006). Planning and societal context - The case of Belgrade, Serbia. *Contributions to Economics*, 275–294. <https://doi.org/10.1007/3-7908-1727-9-14>

Vujović, S., & Petrović, M. (2007). Belgrade's post-socialist urban evolution: Reflections by the actors in the development process BT - *The Post-Socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism*. In K. Stanilov (Ed.) (pp. 361–383). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6053-3\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6053-3_18)

