

*The Magic of Belgrade – A City Where Heritage Meets the Modern*¹

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Abstract

The capital of Serbia, Belgrade, is a city with a lengthy history dating back to the seventh millennium BC. In the third century BC the Celts named it Singidunum, whereas since the ninth century AD it has been known as Beligrad, meaning The White City. Strategically located on the crossroad between the Occident and the Orient, between the Pannonian Valley and the Balkans, at the confluence of the Danube and the Sava River, this city, in which heritage meets the modern, is also the meeting point of influences from West and East. The city has been depicted by many authors, both Serbian and foreign, but among these literary works stands out the oeuvre of Momo Kapor, who devoted his whole life to writing about and painting scenes of life in Belgrade. Kapor was well known and successful both as a painter, having exhibited his work in renowned galleries in Serbia and abroad, and as a writer, since his forty-odd novels and short story collections are bestsellers in Serbia and have been translated into dozens of foreign languages. In *The Magic of Belgrade*, Momo Kapor does not only describe the monuments and people of this beautiful city, he even searches for what he calls ‘the spirit of Belgrade’. The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint such elements of Kapor’s work that capture the spirit of the place by reflecting, on the one hand, its heritage and, on the other, its urban growth which has resulted in its modernity.

Keywords: Belgrade, Momo Kapor, heritage, modernity

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"Belgrade is not simply a city – it is a metaphor, a special way of life, a viewpoint. Belgrade is in the idea which impregnates the world wherever its spirit reaches. Belgrade is found in a joke, in a random gesture, in the congenital casualty with which victories and defeats are received, where the unit for measuring style is charm!"²

(Momo Kapor: *Hello, Belgrade*)

Brief History of Belgrade

The spirit of Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, is best described by the following passage, pinpointing both its modernity and its heritage, since according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Belgrade is "a *cosmopolitan* city at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers; Stari Grad, Belgrade's old town, is dominated by an *ancient* fortress called the Kalemegdan and includes well-preserved examples of *medieval* architecture and some of eastern Europe's most-renowned *restaurants*." (Belgrade – National Capital, Serbia, emphasis ours) What can better illustrate the mixture of heritage and modernity, or in other words, "this whirlwind of past and present times" (Velmar-Jankovic 2009: xiii), than the mixture of the words *cosmopolitan* – *ancient* – *medieval* – *restaurants* in the same sentence. Describing Belgrade's fortress Kalemegdan, David Norris writes: "It is here that the story of Belgrade begins in all its incarnations: a city ruled by many different regimes and the capital city of various countries – Serbia, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, communist Yugoslavia, and most recently of Serbia again." (Norris 2009: 2)

It is quite true that Belgrade has survived despite many turbulences it has gone through over the centuries – it has been demolished over forty times and then rebuilt again, occupied in various periods by different foreign powers and changed hands between Romans, Franks, Bulgarians, Austrians, and Ottoman Turks, among others. Its lengthy history started as early as the seventh millennium BC, when Neolithic settlements were founded in its surroundings, which means that Belgrade is among the oldest European cities. However, it was only in the third century BC that a Celtic tribe (Scordisci) established a town at the confluence of the Danube and the Sava River and named it Singidun³, which later on the Romans – who occupied this territory in the first century AD – turned into Singidunum. During the Roman rule of several centuries, the town was extremely prosperous, especially after Emperor Hadrian granted it municipal rights, and in the fourth century AD due to its favorable strategic location it became an important settlement in the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire.

This meant, likewise, that it was also an attractive target for invaders because of that same strategic location on the crossroad between the Occident and the Orient,

² For the translation of all the texts quoted in this paper that were originally written in Serbian credits go to Bosko Francuski, one of the authors of the paper.

³ The first part of the name probably originated from Sings – a Thracian tribe living in the area before the Celts (cf. "Singidunum, the fortress of the Singi", Norris 2009: xi), while the second part is derived from the Celtic word *dun*, meaning a fortress, a lodgement or a town – still visible in the name of *London*.

between the Pannonian Valley and the Balkans, at the junction of three main Eurasian roads: the first one following the course of the Danube in the direction west (Vienna) – east (Black Sea), the second one going from Belgrade westwards towards Italy, and the third one southwards towards Greece and the Mediterranean. On the other hand, it was therefore exposed to different cultures and influenced by traditions of each of these conquerors, be it from the east or the west. Having been razed to the ground by ferocious Huns in the fifth century AD, Belgrade continued to be the prey of conquering campaigns undertaken by numerous other invaders, such as: Sarmatians, Goths, Gepidaes, Avars, Slavs, Byzantium again, Franks, Bulgarians, Habsburg Austrians, Hungarians, Ottoman Turks, and of course by the Austro-Hungarian and German armies during the two World Wars, respectively.

The population of Serbia mostly consists of South Slavs, who settled in this region starting from the sixth century AD, and they gave Belgrade its present name – Beligrad, meaning The White City, which was first mentioned in the ninth century, in a letter written by Pope John VIII in 878 (cf. Norris 2009: 7). Nevertheless, at that time Belgrade still remained the battlefield of neighbouring powers⁴, and it was only in 1284 that the city came under the rule of Serbian nobles, for the first time ever, when Hungary gave it as a wedding gift to the then Serbian King, Stefan Dragutin. Even after that, the town was again seized by other foreigners, so it became the capital of Serbia as late as in 1403, when Despot Stefan Lazarevic became a Hungarian ally and obtained it as part of possessions he received from Hungary, but after his death in 1427 Belgrade was reclaimed by Hungary yet another time.

Be that as it may, this was not the end of Belgrade's plight since the worst was yet to come – the Ottoman Turks started besieging Belgrade from 1440 (Sultan Murad II), then in 1456 (Sultan Mehmed II), in 1521 (Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent), after which Turkey and Austria took turns in occupying the town until the end of the eighteenth century. It was only in 1807, during the First Serbian Uprising against the Turks (1804-1813), that the Serbs, led by Djordje Petrovic Karadjordje, liberated Belgrade, but when the uprising was crushed in 1813 the Turks occupied it again. During the Second Serbian Uprising (1815-1817), led by Milos Obrenovic, the Serbs drove the Turks out of Belgrade, and Serbia was granted partial autonomy, but a Turkish garrison remained in Belgrade until 1867, when Serbia gained full independence and Belgrade was finally liberated.

Unfortunately, not long after that, the first half of the twentieth century was marked by two world wars that ravaged Europe, and Belgrade was not an exception. In World War One, Belgrade was shelled and captured by the Austro-Hungarian army, and in World War Two it was bombed and invaded by the Nazi German army (on April 6th 1941). However, it is worth mentioning that the enemy's bombs still could not manage to bottle up the famous 'spirit of Belgrade' because "their grenades did not

⁴ From the ninth to the thirteenth century alone, it changed hands eight times only between Hungary and Byzantium, not to mention occupation by Bulgaria and several destructions by Crusaders on whose route to the Holy Land it was situated.

even reach Slavija⁵, and the square was swarming with people who moved freely. The cafes and markets were full of people." (Deroko 2000: 87)

For the last time, Belgrade was shelled on the very eve of the twenty-first century, over the course of two and a half months in 1999 (March-June), by the NATO forces, with many casualties and lots of destroyed buildings, some of which had testified before they were torn down to it being one of the oldest European capitals in which culture had thrived long before many others were even founded. Therefore, we can fully agree with the statement that in the case of Belgrade "the price of freedom was heavy indeed" (Yovitchitch 1926: 72), but now our city faces the future, treading towards progress and development, so it was rightly named⁶ "City of the Future of South Europe".

Books on Belgrade

Of course, Belgrade has been the subject of numerous articles and books written by both its citizens and visitors. Even though the Serbian authors will be represented in the next chapter by Momo Kapor, so this one will mostly consist of a short summary of those coming from abroad, the books written by Serbs that are also worth mentioning are *Belgrade* (1984) by Slobodan Glumac, *Uspomene Beogradanina* (in Serbian, *Memories of a Belgrader*, 2000) by Aleksandar Deroko, *Belgrade – the City of Secrets* (2004) by a group of authors, *Belgrade, Cultural Treasury* (2004) and *Belgrade Past and Present* (2005) by Branko Vujovic, *On the Hill above the Rivers: Belgrade in Guidebooks for Travellers (1800-1945)* by Djordje Kostic (2009), and *Belgrade, the Eternal City: a Sentimental Journey Through History* (2015) by Aleksandar Diklic.

Among these works stands out the book published by Lena Yovitchitch in 1926 – *Pages from Here and There in Serbia*. She devoted an entire part of her book (Fourth part: Life in Belgrade, pp. 71-105) to the city of Belgrade. It starts with the words by which she tried to capture the spirit of Belgrade and its inhabitants, therefore they deserve to be cited in full here: "A city undoubtedly reflects the mentality of the nation which conceives, and plans, and builds it. Viewed in this light, mere bricks and mortar assume a psychological interest, and are seen as the tangible embodiment of ideas, to be judged according to their practical utility and esthetic value. Thus, the design of a school building, a church, or a house tells its tale more plainly than any words could do. Despite riches or poverty, the spirit and aspirations of a people are welded into every construction – be it high or low – which meets the eye. This is particularly the case in Belgrade, where the history of the country for several decades back can be traced in the various stages of architecture prevalent in the town." (Yovitchitch 1926: 71)

The fact that Lena came from a mixed marriage, since her father was a Serb and mother British, so that she spent most of her life in Scotland and travelled frequently

⁵ Slavija is one of the main downtown squares.

⁶ In the competition organised by the *Financial Times* for 2006/07.

to Serbia, might probably be the reason why her books exude romantic nostalgia and are thoroughly saturated with the magic of Belgrade and Serbia, as it is obvious from the following passage: "Towards sundown is the time to stroll through the gardens of the Kalemegdan. From here one looks down on the river Sava, which takes a graceful bend in its course as it flows rapidly towards the Danube. The confluence of the two rivers is plainly discernible: where the waters meet, a dividing line runs like a silver thread from bank to bank. Beyond, lie the great plains, formerly Austrian territory. For generations past, the Serbs have gazed across from the Kalemegdan on to this stretch of country, dreaming, hoping, trusting, that some day they would come into their own." (Yovitchitch 1926: 72)

The city of Belgrade has also attracted many foreigners who either lived in it for an extended period of time or passed through Belgrade during their travels, leaving as valuable testimony their written works, be it documentary texts, travelogues, or fiction. These are some of the most important foreign authors and their works on Belgrade and Serbia, listed in chronological order:

- Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui (French), *Voyage en Bulgarie pendant l'année 1841* (*Travel to Bulgaria during the Year 1841*, 1843)
- Andrew Archibald Paton (British), *Servia, Youngest Member of the European Family or, a Residence in Belgrade and Travels in the Highlands and Woodlands of the Interior, during the Years 1843 and 1844* (1845), written and published while the Turks were still in Belgrade⁷, which is evident from some of the titles in the two chapters he devoted to Belgrade: Chapter V (Description of Belgrade. Fortifications. Street and street population. Cathedral. Large square. Coffee-house. Deserted villa. Baths) and Chapter VI (Europeanization of Belgrade. Lighting and paving. Interior of the fortress. Turkish Pasha. Turkish quarter. Turkish population. Panorama of Belgrade. Dinner party given by the prince)
- Felix Philipp Kanitz (Austro-Hungarian), *Die römischen Funde in Serbien* (*The Roman Finds in Serbia*, 1861), *Serbiens byzantinische Monumente* (*The Byzantine Monuments of Serbia*, 1862), *Reise in Südserbien und Nordbulgarien* (*A Journey to South Serbia and North Bulgaria*, 1868), *Serbien — historisch-ethnographische Reisestudien* (*Serbia — Ethnographic and Historical Travel Studies*, 1868), *Römische Studien in Serbien* (*Roman Studies in Serbia*, 1892), *Das Königreich Serbien und das Serbenvolk von der Römerzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (*The Kingdom of Serbia and the Serbian People from Roman Times until the Present*, 1904)
- Mary Edith Durham (British), a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, who was in charge of refugee relief shelters during the Balkan Wars, and on the basis of her experiences she wrote seven books and many articles, among which the most famous is *Through the Lands of the Serb* (1904)
- Alexander Powell (American), *The New Frontiers of Freedom: From the Alps to the Aegean* (1920), *The Danger on the Danube* (1927), *Embattled Borders: Eastern Europe from the Balkans to the Baltic* (1928)

⁷ As it was explained above, in the first chapter of the paper.

- David John Footman (British), *Balkan Holiday* (1935), *Half-Way East* (1935)
- Malcolm Burr (British), *Slouch Hat* (1935)
- Lovett Fielding Edwards (British), *Profane Pilgrimage: Wanderings through Yugoslavia* (1938), *A Wayfarer in Yugoslavia* (1939), *Danube Stream* (1941), *Yugoslavia* (1971)
- Rebecca West (British), *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), an extremely important book on almost twelve hundred pages, based on the events during her 1937 visit to the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia, containing valuable facts about the history, ethnography and culture of the country
- Lawrence Durrell (British), who worked as Press Attaché in Belgrade from June 1949 to December 1952, and wrote several works based on his experiences⁸: *White Eagles over Serbia* (1957), *Esprit de Corps: Sketches from Diplomatic Life* (1957), *Stiff Upper Lip* (1958), *Sauve qui peut* (1966), *Spirit of Place, Letters and Essays on Travel* (1969)
- Nicolas Bouvier (Swiss), who used the entries made in his journals during the trip made in an old Fiat from Geneva all the way to the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with Belgrade as its first destination, and wrote his miraculous⁹ *L'Usage du monde (The Way of the World)*, 1963)
- Florence Hamlish Levinsohn (American), *Belgrade: among the Serbs* (1994)
- David A. Norris (British), *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth: Questions of Identity and modernity* (1999), *Belgrade: A Cultural History* (2008)

This last volume is the crown of all these books, as it is devoted specifically to the city of Belgrade, its history, traditions, culture and inhabitants, written in a scientific manner but also full of emotions and tenderness for the White City, its destiny and its inhabitants – "a metaphoric Belgrade, a synecdoche for a nation, a state, a government, for which it stands symbolically at the head [...] the city as an experience in itself. Belgrade is more than the sum total of its buildings and inhabitants; [...] it is a small world in itself. It has its own history and unique identity that set it apart from other places and even acts upon the people who live there, shaping their lives as it is shaped by them" (Norris 2009: xx), concludes the distinguished Professor at Nottingham University David Norris.

Momo Kapor – a True Belgrader

Although Momo Kapor was born in Sarajevo¹⁰ (in 1937), when he was only four years old his mother was killed by a bomb during a Nazi air raid, trying to protect

⁸ See more about Lawrence Durrell's impressions of Belgrade in Djoric Francuski 2007, for instance: "It can certainly be said that, when he wrote about Yugoslavia, Durrell managed to catch not only *the spirit of the place*, but also of the times spent in our country and depicted in his writing." (Djoric Francuski 2007: 156, emphasis ours)

⁹ This is not an exaggeration given that Bouvier appealed with astonishing power to all senses, especially the ones of smell and hearing, so when he describes a small café on the bank of the Sava river from which he liked to watch the sunset, "breathing in *the odour of the town* as if I might die the next day", he delicately mentions 'fragrant plum brandy' and the smells of melon and boiled cabbage (Bouvier 2007: 41, emphasis ours).

¹⁰ Now the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

him, so after the war was over he moved to Belgrade with the rest of his family, once his father was released from the prisoner-of-war camp in Nurnberg. From that moment until his death (in 2010), he spent his days in Belgrade, undeniably leaving his stamp on the city itself and on all of us, its residents. He graduated from the Academy of Art at the University of Belgrade, major in painting, but his another great passion was writing, so his career combined both and Kapor always illustrated his works himself. In those two streams of his career, he was equally successful, and his artwork was displayed at many exhibitions and in renowned galleries in Belgrade, as well as abroad, while his literary output was also extremely fruitful, counting over forty novels, numerous collections of short stories, travelogues, screenplays and autobiographic works, translated into more than twenty languages.

It is very hard to single out the best of Kapor's works because they all marked entire generations and over the years we were looking forward to each of his books with impatience and enthusiasm, as we knew that another gem would embellish our lives. Among these books, however, some are devoted especially to Belgrade which was his everlasting inspiration – to the everyday life in this city, Belgraders and their loves and hopes, joys and sadness, 'victories and defeats' as Momo Kapor would call them, as well as their relationship with the city in which they live – in one word, the spirit of Belgrade. Those are: his *Belgrade Trilogy*, consisting of *011*¹¹, *Istok–Zapad (East–West)* and *Halo, Beograd (Hello, Belgrade)*, published in 1990; *Blokada 011 (Blockade 011, 1992)*; *Legenda o Taboru*¹² (*The Legend of Tabor, 2002*) and of course *Magija Beograda (The Magic of Belgrade, 2008)*.

The Magic of Belgrade

The title of the first chapter in this book is simply "Belgrade is Belgrade". On the very first page, its author poses the eternal question that has puzzled us all: "I have spent years and years poring over hundreds of written pages, trying to solve the riddle of *the spirit of Belgrade* and to understand what it is that draws us back into its embrace, and here I am, knowing today less than I knew at the beginning." (Kapor 2008: 5, emphasis ours) Well, the answer may be right in the title of this chapter: "Belgrade is Belgrade". As simple as that.

The next chapter, "The Spirit of Belgrade", brings a more detailed answer to this question for all readers, especially Belgraders, as Kapor claims that "There are few things in it that I have not already seen elsewhere... Maybe only three: its rivers, its sky and its people. Out of these three primeval elements, *the unique spirit of Belgrade* is born." (Kapor 2008: 12, emphasis ours) What's more, Belgrade itself is a *spirit* because, unlike other cities, it is not materialised in its buildings and streets (cf. Vladusic 2015: 40), whereas according to Kapor two of its primordial components represent two of the three elementary elements: water (its rivers) and air (its sky), which could mean that the third one – fire – remains as the symbol of its people. This is what has resulted in the correct statement that "Belgrade is the point in which

¹¹ The area code for Belgrade.

¹² The Bohemian restaurant Tabor is still a cult place in Belgrade.

special city metaphysics has developed" (Vladusic 2015: 40), especially taking into consideration its uniqueness and openness to modernity while still cherishing tradition.

It is, however, the chapter "Belgrade Is the World", devoted to each and every one of those Belgraders "scattered on all four sides of the world" (Kapor 2008: 160), in which Kapor equates Belgrade to their photos, ideas and names, that "perhaps best evokes such an immaterial existence of Belgrade: a city that exists in memory, in the past, in memories, an emigrant city." (Vladusic 2015: 40) To all those who, for some reason, do not live in Belgrade any longer, Kapor dedicates the following words of yet another great Belgrader, Dusko Radovic¹³: "If this morning you woke up in Belgrade, you have done enough for one day!" (cited in Kapor 2008: 175)

Another segment of Belgrade's magic consists of food and drinks, for instance the delicacies like "*sarma* (pickled cabbage leaves stuffed with minced meat)" and "a calf's head in tripe" (Kapor 2008: 396), or strawberries and horseradishes that are bigger and redder than elsewhere (cf. Kapor 2008: 251), while entire chapters are devoted to: "Grill Cooks", "Roast Lamb", "Coffee"¹⁴, "Cabbage", "Pastries", "Vanilla Cookies" and "Fish Chowder" which we call *riblja corba*. In the following passage Kapor reminisces about his childhood and compares Belgrade to New York: "The appearance of the first cherries was a true festivity. The first cherries were bought in small bunches (to make children happy), while those in pairs were hung on ears, like springtime earrings. I have never seen prettier jewelry! What do I care for the December cherries in New York? They only take away from me the sweet, superstitious waiting for real cherries, because when you eat them for the first time you must wish upon something and your wish will come true, without fail!" (Kapor 2008: 254)

As for the drinks, of course there are numerous references to our national alcoholic drink – *rakija* (a kind of brandy), which is drunk especially when it is cold, as well as Serbian wines, which are the best in the summer, when many Belgraders leave for holidays, so the city's magic is further intensified by its emptiness, or in Momo Kapor's words: "In summertime, Belgrade should be sipped through a straw. In July, it turns into a therapeutic provincial spa [...] To start with, you have to relax sitting at some shady table with a view to a bottle of white wine, a siphon of soda water and exciting sidewalks, trod upon by a flood of agitated beauty in search of itself. The city discovers once more its long-lost measure of humanness and turns into a small town." (Kapor 2008: 403)

Another element of Belgrade's magic are some of its unique places which differentiate it from other big European cities, although it can also be considered as a

¹³ Dusko Radovic was the greatest Serbian aphorist ever, especially famous and loved because of his numerous collections of aphorisms entitled *Good Morning Belgrade*.

¹⁴ Unlike many European countries in which tea is the national beverage, in Serbia this place is taken by what we call 'Turkish coffee' (although Turks nowadays also mostly drink black tea) – or, as Kapor says: "Coffee is the most important secondary thing in our lives. It seems we can do without everything but coffee!" (Kapor 2008: 82)

megalopolis. Those are, above all, its green markets, "the space which restores the city to the rhythm of nature" (Vladusic 2012: 198), and especially the famous downtown Kalenic market, which Kapor describes as "a sort of village embassy in the capital" and adds that "It is where, every morning without fail, green credentials are handed over to wan Belgraders, who lost their roots and contact with the soil and its fruits a long time ago." (Kapor 2008: 252)

Although some of the chapters are devoted to Belgrade's heritage and monuments, like those two on the Bohemian quarter called Skadarlija, or the one entitled "A Stroll in Kalemegdan" – Belgrade's old fortress, while in others Kapor mentions "the inconsolably ruined facades shedding their flowery ornaments in the Vienna Secession style", "its snug urban homes", "the most beautiful architectural masterpieces" (Kapor 2008: 395-396), on the other hand, he also praises its rapid urban development: "Carried away by our success, skipping centuries, we managed to raise modern buildings almost overnight" (Kapor 2008: 396). In *The Magic of Belgrade*, "Belgrade functions as a necessary correction of modernity, and not as an absolute value against modernity. It takes us back to the archaic and human that has not melted in modernity, but not by closing the door in front of the modern" (Vladusic 2015: 40), and in this way Momo Kapor emphasises that *Belgrade is truly a City where Heritage Meets the Modern*.

Conclusion

Belgrade's history has been extremely lengthy and turbulent, and the traces left in it by its numerous occupiers are still visible, thus reflecting its antiquity. For instance, the old part of the city is crowned by the well-preserved fortress, Kalemegdan, dating from the third century BC. Furthermore, this ancient area is still based on the network of roads built by the Romans at the beginning of that millennium, and "the line of one such road, probably Singidunum's main street, has been preserved more or less to today" (Norris 2009: xi). Later on, Belgrade was invaded by Ottoman Turks, and "Long years of bondage under Turkish rule have left their imprint upon many a house." (Yovitchitch 1926: 71)

Nonetheless, though Belgrade cherishes its heritage, on the one hand, it has managed to develop and progress, on the other, towards becoming a modern European city: "The Belgrade of today is an agglomeration of Eastern and Western ideas moulded and adapted to meet the requirements of this corner of the world. The contrast between the old and the new town is thus accentuated." (Yovitchitch 1926: 73) No matter how true it is that Belgrade is marked by a contrast between its tradition and modernity, the heritage and the progress, they still coexist in great harmony and the city is moving forward at an unbelievable pace: "Belgrade has earned a reputation for changes, rapid changes, in more senses than one perhaps. [...] The remarkable rapidity with which the changes are being accomplished is almost unbelievable. [...] One can call it nothing else than 'transformation'." (Yovitchitch 1926: 82, 84)

Belgrade's ability to transform itself innumerable times, to survive after so many attacks and to rise literally from the ashes like a phoenix must be one of the reasons

for its being so magical. In the course of its history, full of falls and rises, Belgrade has managed to preserve its cultural scene and to offer its inhabitants the opportunity of being as educated and cultivated as any citizen of contemporary Europe. In his *Diary of a Nobody*, Branko Lazarevic follows the thorny road Belgrade has trodden and underlines that prior to World War One "books published abroad, especially in Paris, would be in the hands of our intellectuals in a matter of days [...] People travelled and knew languages. Journals and magazines were subscribed to. [...] the National Theatre staged plays soon after their premieres abroad. [...] Then came the war of 1914 to 1918, which wiped the slate clean. [...] However, in the years leading up to 1941 Belgrade cultivated itself once again with literature, science, architecture, music, painting and sculpture. [...] All of that did not amount to much, but it was evidence that Belgrade cultivated itself and began to resemble, at the very least, Central European towns. Then came the collapse of 1941, and everything which followed it." (cited in Milutinovic 2011: 14)

The period of the two world wars was only one of the turbulent stages that Belgrade has gone through: "The history books say that Belgrade was razed and put to the torch forty times. This, then, would mean that it was rebuilt forty-one times. Yet different each time, different from the preceding community, almost as if to deny its very existence." (Glumac 1984: 21) However, Belgrade's 'transformation' has not been restricted only to its buildings and roads, because we know that "Cities are more than built spaces: they are historical, social and political products. [...] Cities are the ever-fluctuating product of an array of forces, including social, political, and imaginative ones, that operate both from the top down and the bottom-up. In this sense, cities are collective intentions and plans." (Estrada-Grajales, Foth, Mitchell, 2018) Consequently, Belgrade has been transformed and reshaped by its inhabitants, who are the ones to be thanked for having *collectively* created its unique 'spirit of the place' and magic.

We hope that in this paper we have managed to show that Belgrade is a modern European city which deserves to be visited not only due to its historical and cultural value but also because of the fact that its citizens have managed to shift "from passive residents to city co-creators" (Estrada-Grajales, Foth, Mitchell, 2018) and thus helped enrich the spirit of the city and create *The Magic of Belgrade*.

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