

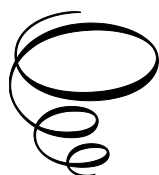
Creative Activism Research, Pedagogy and Practice

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Edited by

Elspeth Tilley

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BELGRADE LOG (BG:LOG): DEMOCRATISING URBAN HERITAGE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY MAPPING

NELA MILIĆ¹

BG:LOG exemplifies the importance of digital heritage praxes being grounded in local, vernacular knowledge in order to understand processes of placemaking. Delivered by the NGO, Kulturklammer, the project consisted of participatory art and design workshops where Belgraders shared memories of their city online, reflecting on their lived experiences of place. They sought to escape traditional representations of the Serbian Capital associated with the wars in the 1990s, by digitally re-assembling the city in accordance with their subjectivities.

Thus, BG:LOG is an online archive of Belgrade, generated through residents' personal and communal narratives and visual artefacts. The project aimed to highlight the significance of public reminiscence, collective memory, and intergenerational exchange in fostering community spirit and musings about place.²

Tension over the authority of Belgrade's account as place emerged between the long memories of its older residents, versus newer depictions provided by migrants and young people. This provoked questions concerning storage and transmission of the past, explored both within the project itself and in this chapter.

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² I want to thank the BG:LOG team: Marijana Simu, Ivan Blagojević, Katarina Šašović and all participants listed on Kulturklammer's website for their generous support during the realisation of this project. This work was funded by Belgrade's Vračar district, the Cultural Secretariat of the city of Belgrade, and the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information.

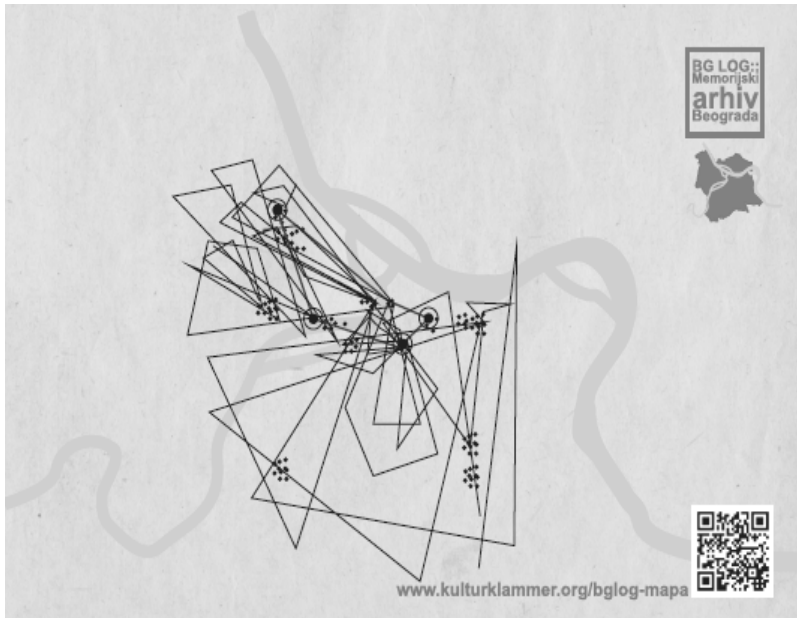


Figure 1: BG:LOG project postcard, design by Katarina Šašović, 2012

Background

The BG:LOG³ project was founded on the belief that fostering a culture of remembrance by communication of memories in public space contributes to community cohesion and incites citizens' involvement in the development of their locale. It aimed at recalling, safeguarding, and conserving artefacts, oral histories, and other mnemonic practices to keep the memory of the Serbian Capital, Belgrade, alive. It sought to preserve aspects of everyday life and the physical surroundings which memories inhabit—family houses, neighbourhood buildings, yards, streets, and squares—through a collection of home-grown stories that we, the project originators, have listened to ever since we were children.

³ "BG:LOG," Kulturklammer, accessed January 10, 2021, <http://www.kulturklammer.org/bglog-mapa>.

BG:LOG was initiated by Marijana Simu, Director of Kulturklammer,⁴ a small but long-standing non-profit organisation in the city centre. Notable for its work in collective memory and public space, it has received support from the government as well as international funders (Serbian Diaspora Ministry, Open Society Institute, Erste Stiftung, Europa Nostra, Belgrade Tourist Organisation, and others). In 2013, Kulturklammer received a grant from the local authorities of Belgrade's Vračar district to further explore the topics of memory, heritage, and place, having initially piloted a project entitled "Days of Remembrance."⁵ Director Simu then commissioned an artist-researcher (me, Nela Milić) to engage Vračar residents in reflections about their changing neighbourhood.

The archivist Aleksandra Sekulić once remarked that 'Vračarci' (people from the Vračar district) are blameworthy for the feeble state Serbia currently finds itself in.⁶ As Simu and I had both lived and worked in this area, we wondered what had we done to make it so? If not us, who then are the people she referred to, how are they responsible and related to each other? To delve into these questions, we combined an ethnographic approach with a participatory arts practice as our primary method of investigation.

Affluent and sought-after, Vračar has a local reputation as an elite and intellectual part of the city—a desirable postcode for the nouveau riche to buy out impoverished citizens. Particularly, from those who lack the means to maintain their homes built before World War II, which are now a shadow of their former glory. The new wealthy residents have turned old bungalows into high-rises, sometimes illegally, transmorphing small streets into tunnels, blocking out the light and, with it, the history of this neighbourhood.

Witnessing the city's rapidly changing material heritage and shifting demographics, as well as learning about the social tensions it birthed, we were inspired to look for creative ways in which to conserve the city's past, while bringing to the forefront the narratives of Belgrade's communities through oral transference, text, and visual communication. We figured out that the destruction and damage of Vračar's reputation as the city's well-known historical quarter inflamed the resentment of Belgraders towards not

⁴ Kulturklammer, Centre for Cultural Interactions, accessed December 29, 2020, <http://www.kulturklammer.org/view/64>.

⁵ "Days of Remembrance," Kulturklammer, accessed January 10, 2021, <http://www.kulturklammer.org/days-of-remembrance>.

⁶ Aleksandra Sekulić (Caca), interview by Nela Milić, Belgrade, audio interview, July 11, 2007; for discussion of wider issues relating to Serbian representation, see also Nela Milić, *Balkanising Taxonomy*, accessed January 9, 2020, <http://balkanising-taxonomy.arts.ac.uk>.

only the area but its older residents too, as it was assumed that they had failed to protect its heritage from commercial exploitation.

Although some developers had hoped to profit from the newly built flats, expecting buyers to commit to large mortgage loans, the country's failing financial climate combined with the inexperience of these new developers meant that construction was commonly abandoned halfway through, leaving sites across Vračar derelict. Therefore, Vračar now finds itself made up of a mixture of high-rise buildings, 19th century houses, socialist-realist constructions, villas, and neglected building sites. It is an architectural mishmash; a place without regulated planning permissions or landscape design standards.

Participatory arts practice

For BG:LOG, we chose to adopt a participatory arts practice as it underpins Kulturklammer's "belief that cultural development of the community... is based on citizens' participation."⁷ Participatory arts provided and facilitated interactions with people who would support and sustain the creation of the project's outcome—a community archive of Belgrade in the shape of a digital map. We set up workshops to generate collective archival material through oral history and object elicitation methods. From the obtained repository, we made postcards, posters and a blog that were integral to ensuring a bottom-up approach to the production of the archive/map and its promotion within the local community.

The artist Loraine Leeson, who has been active in the field of participatory arts for five decades, simply calls it "working with people,"⁸ dismantling the rich and broad contemporary terminology concerning this type of praxis: socially engaged, collaborative, relational, situated, interventionist, community, dialogical aesthetics, activist, social, co-design, or new genre public art.⁹ This method stems from "practice as research,"¹⁰ a contemporary phrase for

⁷ "Profile," Kulturklammer, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.kulturklammer.org/view/16>.

⁸ Loraine Leeson, "Art: Process; Change; Inside a Socially Situated Practice," (Lecture, Four Corners Film, London, March 2, 2018).

⁹ Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2010).

“arts-based research” (ABR),¹¹ that has an impetus to creatively address and examine social issues through the use of arts praxes.

Conducted in Serbian, our participatory arts approaches were inclusive but reliant on intergenerational collaboration between senior Belgraders, who were retirees over 65, and young Belgraders, a mix of teenagers from local high-schools and young adults. We taught the young people: how to conduct interviews, image-making, archiving, web data visualisation, and techniques that they then used to digitally capture stories and artefacts from the elderly.

This chapter relies on Vračar as a primary case study of the BG:LOG project and utilises the work completed alongside three other Belgrade districts—Savski Venac, Zemun, and New Belgrade. It explores the process of memory making via participatory art. For, like art and artistic practice, memory is a construction that senses itself in space and adapts accordingly.

Intergenerational memory

Maurice Halbwachs’ sociological assertion that memory only functions within a collective context posits memory as agile, dependent, and selective.¹² Working in Durkheim’s tradition, Halbwachs believed that groups of people have different collective memories, which influence their different modes of behaviour. We explored this idea in our artwork and used it to enhance dialogue between our chosen groups as well as to find common threads in their recollections.

Collective memory equivocally inherits the exchange between two generations establishing it as not only a cultural and commonly shared past, but also a jointly remembered one.¹³ Our map became a platform where different groups with different histories came together to negotiate their views of the past. As Zerubavel asserts, when mediated by others around us personal accounts can transcend subjective experiences and this transformation provides a critical knowledge of history and establishes united visions of the future.¹⁴

¹¹ Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1975).

¹² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory [1950]*, ed. & trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

¹³ Eviatar Zerubavel, “Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past,” *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 3 (September 1996): 283–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02393273>.

¹⁴ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscape: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

At the workshops (Figure 2, below), senior citizens compared notes on physical changes of locality, while young citizens recorded their accounts, acknowledging that over the last 60 years, their sense of commons and sharing had significantly altered. The elderly, as community custodians of social memories, have traditionally served as “mnemonic go-betweens”¹⁵ and here they were continuing to do so.



Figure 2: Pilot project, “Days of Remembrance” workshop, photograph by Marijana Simu, 2011

They described how the visible shift in urban landscape and architectural development had been triggered by political makeovers and the young people joined in by communicating their daily experiences of living with that change.¹⁶ Thus, both generations empirically understood the everyday consequences of this political process that had profoundly affected everyone in the community.

This cultural transmission between generations was bound by the space within which they lived but indicated that learning was reciprocal. As deliberated by Vanderbeck and Worth in their book *Intergenerational*

¹⁵ Zerubavel, “Social Memories,” 291.

¹⁶ Belgrade was the capital of Yugoslavia from 1945–1991 that consisted of six republics, which are now independent states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Space,¹⁷ scholars often recognise the benefits of interaction with the aged, who transfer culturally established patterns of cooperation and mutual concern.¹⁸

However, scholarship acknowledging that the young also contribute to the cultural shaping of society is less frequent,¹⁹ even though this was evident in our project. For example, recollections were sometimes prompted by visual clues and place-making tools mostly on their mobile phones with which the teenagers digitally explored territory. In this way, their present time was demarcated by their links to the locality, neighbourhood, and sense of home, and thanks to the elderly, influenced by practices of reminiscence about the past.²⁰

Friedrich Nietzsche argued that humans must find a means by which they will constantly maintain their nature through generations.²¹ Although that preservation, in Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka's view, does occur as a result of socialisation and customs,²² they offer a more open approach to understanding transmissions of the past, that is by inaugurating "communicative memory" that arises from informal everyday memory. This was an idea we encouraged in our project. Assmann and Czaplicka's "communicative memory" falls between Halbwachs' collective concept that connects

¹⁷ Robert. M. Vanderbeck and Nancy Worth, eds., *Intergenerational Space* (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁸ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1973), 153, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/twoworldsofchild00bron/page/n229/mode/2up?q=culturally+established+patterns>; see also Glen H. Elder, Jr., "Age Differentiation and the Life Course," *Annual Review of Sociology* 1, no. 1 (August 1975): 174, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.01.080175.001121>.

¹⁹ Some of the few examples we drew on included Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York: Doubleday for the American Museum of Natural History, 1970); Leng Leng Thang, *Generations in Touch: Linking the Old and Young in a Tokyo Neighbourhood* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Dawn Mannay, "Mother and Daughter 'Homebirds' and Possible Selves: Generational (Dis)Connections to Locality and Spatial Identity in South Wales," *Intergenerational Space*, ed. Robert M. Vanderbeck and Nancy Worth, 109–22 (London: Routledge, 2015).

²⁰ David Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, eds., *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths, and Memories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1964), vol. 3.

²² Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" in "Cultural History/Cultural Studies," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (Spring–Summer 1995): 125, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>.

memory and the group²³ and Warburg's notion of memory and cultural forms that hone society's self-image.²⁴

Our work aimed to unearth the challenges of articulating discourses of collective memory, but also relished those moments when the working groups conceived of their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their future, rather than of their past. During workshops, we appreciated initiations into the communal forum but were wary of the perpetuation of many societal practices and power dynamics that were constantly at play too. Those interactions could simultaneously provoke a pleasant nostalgia for us as well as an unsettling attachment to the community.

From analogue to digital map

For our pilot project, "Days of Remembrance," we held workshops at the pensioners' club located in the historic Krunska Street, in Vračar. In this spacious place we utilised the bar; spreading out our recording equipment, books about the Serbian Capital and coloured pens across an array of tables. We printed A3 greyscale sheets with contours of the most-loved Belgrade map, made in 1974 by the Geodetic Institute (Figure 3), and invited 25 participants to make marks on it. Hence, we conducted analogue before digital geo-tagging.

Some would start by telling stories and we would ask them to point to where the story had happened, while others would highlight the spots on the map first and then tell us why they were important. Some would pull out a photograph from their family album and fit it in between the streets, establishing the location of an event, place, or person in the image.

²³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

²⁴ Aby Warburg and Matthew Rampley, "The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past," *Art in Translation* 1, no. 2 (2009): 273–83, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175613109X462708>.

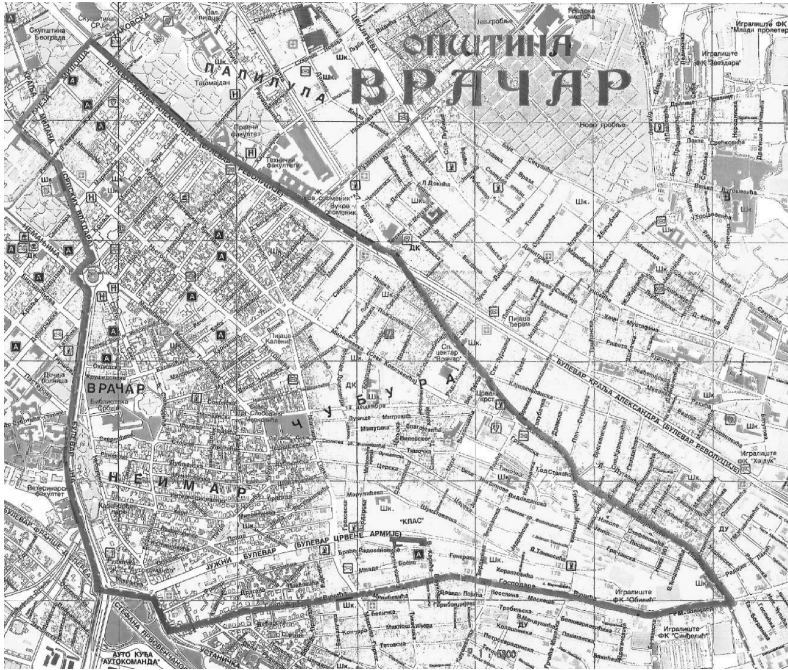


Figure 3: Map of Vračar, extract from Belgrade Map, 1974

Word of mouth about the project spread quickly among Vračar's retirees who were showing up in great numbers. Young people were not as enthusiastic about taking part in our activities, even though we had posted a call online for participants, made visits to local schools, and given presentations about the project to officials and teachers. They initially enjoyed the interaction with us and the elderly, but after some time young people disengaged, overwhelmed and apathetic to a history that seemed tiresome and endless. Stories gave birth to other stories, a dot on the map begot another one, an image created another vision and, for many of the young people, the work became hopeless rather than hopeful. History felt repetitive and depressing. Although we provided them with cameras to keep overnight for their own purposes, they did not seem captured by our work in the long run. That being said, some did later reappear a day or so after they left our workshops with unexpected and valuable recordings of their house-bound elderly neighbours.

We welcomed everybody who turned up at the pensioners' club, asked what they would like to do and strived to bring their requests to life—

whether it was photographing sites of interest or simply talking over a coffee. This subjective approach to data gathering came from initially setting up an arts project and working towards making it an example of digital heritage, liberated from static, formal, and established representations of the city and celebrating the use of vernacular knowledge.²⁵ By organising the community's past beyond 'official' narrative structures, we sought to contest history and provide alternatives through championing citizens' agency as found in their rhetorical accounts.

This digital reassembling of memories and space was performed online through the creation of a map, hosted on Kulturklammer's website. It comprised numerous categories depicting citizens' stories clustered in a variety of themes: education, culture, traffic, building, security, friendship, spirit, city waters, childhood, work, technology, sounds, smells, and tastes. The stories were located in particular geographical sites, featured on the website, whereby clicking a dot on the map meant opening up new windows and new portals of memories. Sometimes, the stories continued outside of those starting sites, losing their tethered place and transgressing boundaries of the city as well as their topical classifications. These stories were simultaneously situated in multiple places and nurtured by heterogeneous "connective communities."²⁶ Other stories we had to emplace because our chosen software did not provide the digital alternative to the concept of collective memory existent in analogue form, so we appropriated their content by visually enhancing its elements of place.²⁷ This process was indicative of one of the project's limitations: however democratic, open, and accessible we intended our map to be, it would—like any artwork—be modelled and restricted by the tools, methods and practices we used for its realisation.

Subsequently, our digital map will continue to be shaped by the Internet and sustained by algorithms. In this mobile sense, it will find itself in a seemingly intangible place, much like memory, as it will be virtually suspended in air, in 'the cloud'. We will see it when we search for it online and make it present. In those moments, we will encounter the past as the network distributes memory.²⁸ This network redesigns memory once more,

²⁵ Danielle Endres, "Environmental Oral History," *Environmental Communication* 5, no. 4 (2011), 485–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2011.610810>.

²⁶ Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading, eds., *Save As . . . Digital Memories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁷ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁸ James Gleick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

permanently keeping it in transition and allowing it to reappear in a new digital form.

Digital memory frames the past, space, and community according to the interests of participants whose online dissemination of memory is instrumental in the construction of personal and collective identities, especially on social media. Through reminiscence, digital communities can cultivate a feeling of connectedness and having common agendas, even though memory is eternally in transmission and constantly changing. In the same breath, Ernst forewarns that this digital practice might cause the erasure of history while suggesting that this might also be a chance for us rather than a loss.²⁹

We divided the BG:LOG map into sections that will load online according to the user's desire to view a particular part of the city, in which instance the unity of its intertwined territory appears lost too. This disconnection resembles the condition of work in an archive, where we often find one document free from and of its possible narratives. In its detachment from many representational regimes, this material can become an event in itself, rather than a record of a past happening.

Belgrade Log: Memorial archive of Belgrade

An extension of the smaller pilot project, "Days of Remembrance," BG:LOG became a larger Kulturklammer endeavour which received funding from national and municipal grants to run workshops across the entire city of Belgrade. As we now had to create a substantially bigger map with limited resources, we selected four districts that we found to be representational of Belgrade's diversity: (i) Savski Venac—the most extreme example of contrasting demographics, encompassing rich Dedinje and poor Savamala; (ii) New Belgrade—the biggest and newest district; (iii) Zemun—the most detached, at one time not belonging to Belgrade at all as it held the Austro-Hungarian border, and finally; (iv) Vračar—the already established intellectual, 'elite' hub of the city.

BG:LOG again begun with Vračar's elderly residents in the district's local pensioners' club. They now spoke of their political affiliations unashamedly, even offering them to us: "Here is Mayor Djilas's mobile phone number." We understood this gesture as an example of Belgraders' traditional way of 'getting things done'—through connections. The offer of utilising personal networks was both a sign of respect for our work and a

²⁹ Wolfgang Ernst, "(Dis-)Locating the Techno-Archive: Radically De-Metaphorizing Digital 'Memory' " (workshop, Digital Memories: Art, Archives and Activism, University of Liverpool, London Campus, June 18, 2019).

steely reminder of how Serbia still operates today. Under Yugoslavia, their sympathies for the ruling party kept them under state protection and so they obtained its perks through those contacts, replicating the class order, existent in other middle or upper-class European communities. Many of them also had international relationships to lean on, which they had acquired through their profession, on holidays, via education, sports, and trade.

We learnt of their outstanding professionalism, the pride they held for the companies they worked for, and the appreciation of mostly communist party allegiances that had brought about those employment opportunities. As Archer and Musić claim,³⁰ in spite of socialist state reification of the industrial workforce in official discourse, there were in fact a variety of labour practices, political positions, and working-class subjectivities, from the manual workers on the one hand to the political and economic elites on the other. The socialist class system was not overt, but some enjoyed it more than others and indeed for longer due to benefits that continued as inherited leftovers, keeping the wealthy families afloat even when the country was at war.

Although the hardship faced by the majority had weighed down the whole society, those who were ‘upper class’ revealed to us their stories of comfort. We understood that admission as an assertion of ‘proper’ class, that which differentiated them from the newly rich who are continuing to move into the neighbourhood. Moreover, some of our project participants expressed their class status by revealing they had nine flats in the area and were well-practised in converting Euros into other currencies. Some engaged in ‘posh’ sports such as golf and tennis, they played the violin or piano, they spoke several languages, and some were trained in ballet.

This splendid lifestyle crept into the oral histories of Vračar’s elderly, exposing their ties to the former president Tito’s family,³¹ the Yugoslav secret service, and the country’s current authorities. We wondered how much old age had influenced their lack of care for keeping secrets and also the validity of those accounts, but we now understood the reasoning behind Sekulić’s comment about Vračarci’s formidable ability to impact change in Serbia, especially during Milošević’s reign. If any of their stories were true, Vračarci, as an intellectual elite, were best placed to lobby against and encourage the collapse of the Serbian nationalist regime. Therefore, our

³⁰ Rory Archer and Goran Musić, “Approaching the Socialist Factory and its Workforce: Considerations from Fieldwork in (Former) Yugoslavia,” *Labor History* 58, no. 1, (October 2016): 44–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2017.1244331>.

³¹ Josip Broz Tito was the president of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1953–1980.

Vračar map can also be read as an expose of residents' political power in Yugoslavia and its continuation in Serbia.

This historical trajectory is explained by Jasna Dragović-Soso who charted the move from the humanist agenda in Belgrade's intelligentsia after World War II to a nationalist one upheld by the dictatorial command in the last decade of the 20th century.³² These connections to and with power are vital and are generally favoured over the latest official attempts to address citizens' needs. These efforts of new governments seek to promote and model Western democratic states, from online administration to public consultations about local developments.

As Vračar's residents are intimately aware of history and its value, arguably more than contemporary power holders interested in short-term financial gain, the safeguarding of culture now rests on them, who besides their upper-class status, grew their sense of and for community during the socialist era. That sense was less present in our young people, who we found quickly dispersed to work on their own.

During our workshops (Figure 4), old Vračarci were bound together by the Yugoslav communal living principle underpinned by the political slogan "brotherhood and unity,"³³ coined after World War II. Some mentioned the option of choosing where to live through one's work (large state companies had land and housing for their workers) and then building on that property (often literally and sometimes in wealthy areas), but also by supplying subsequent homes for their friends and family. Pensioners were and still seem to be a powerful community in Serbia, as a third of them support their families.³⁴ Once we had earned a recommendation from this Vračar group, we had an automatic 'foot in the door' with all the other pensioners' clubs across the city.

³² Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation? Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002).

³³ "Brotherhood and Unity" was a guiding principle of Yugoslavia's inter-ethnic policy after World War II.

³⁴ *BizLife Magazine*, "Pensioners Support the Third of Households in Serbia and Average Pension is 23.818 Dinars," January 9, 2017, <http://www.bizlife.rs/aktuelno/vesti-dana/penzioneri-izdravaju-trecinu-domacinstava-u-srbiji-prosecna-penzija-je-23-818-dinara>.



Figure 4: Workshop at Vračar's pensioner's club, photograph by Marijana Simu, 2011

Zemun

We moved on from the heart of Belgrade and towards the borders of the city where the district of Zemun lies. Here, we met mostly men at their local pensioners' club who turned up ready for the workshop armed with historical paraphernalia about their locality. Simu and our graphic designer, Katarina Šašović, arrived early and were called into the club president's office where he granted them permission to speak. I was directed to take a seat upon my belated arrival and made to listen to a range of invited lecturers. These high-profile speakers (museum curator, chief of the fire station, etc.) narrated official history and their illustrations and records of it were appealing for digital display—ballroom dance pictures, local signposts, newspaper articles—but we did not collect much of their personal histories.

In Vračar, when one participant or a group arrived late, if one of us was facilitating the workshop, the other would step aside and work with latecomers. We had to be attentive to participants' needs, to notice that someone wanted water or a break, and to also use that opportunity to either re-stage the conversation if it was unproductive or as a moment to press for more information when we were confident with the interaction. We allowed

workshop participants to lead us with their stories, but ultimately, we were in charge of the workshop space—navigating it physically and virtually. Otherwise, we would only collect pre-planned material that the participants wanted us to have or had imagined that we wanted.

So, in Zemun, we asked for the next workshop to be held in the café instead. The club president agreed. In that more relaxed, casual atmosphere, we managed to gather sporting testimonies of former champions, who took us through their triumphant pasts. Zemun's residents were also proud of their Austro-Hungarian heritage as well as the Danube River. Their stories of water seemingly spilled into our next workshop in the district of Savski Venac, an area that lies beside another Belgrade river, the Sava.

Interestingly, these two groups unknowingly played off each other as we worked with each of them separately. The Zemun crowd complained about reckless vagabonds who had knocked watermelons off boats as they arrived from Srem through Zemun's Danube for the city's market sales. Savski Venac residents admitted it was them waiting in the river's estuary as youngsters to pull out one watermelon from the boat so the rest could fall and, as they floated, others would fetch them from the water, trying to avoid a whip from the rascal-ready boatman.

The BG:LOG project participants were corroborating each other's accounts and creating an identity of the Belgrader. They were reminiscing about conflicts from youth but moving beyond a sense of loss from the past and, in our view, gaining a collective future. As Halbwachs asserted,³⁵ their communal identity and collective history were permanently inscribed in space through landscapes, waters, and stones, which retain the past and ways of living. Our project allowed them to share that past whose now visible presence had the capacity to mobilise the younger generation in imagining their common future.

Savski Venac

In Savski Venac, the writer of a local history book attended our first workshop. She did not understand that we were looking for personal, not official, histories. We positioned ourselves in the corners of the room with the help of the young people and from there tried to encourage others to speak as well. Many did, especially when the writer left, and we started acquiring stories from the group.

They were enthusiastic about our activity in their centre and they came again, bringing more stories, documentation (house deeds, family trees,

³⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

recipes), and an offer for other engagements with their local initiatives. We were invited into their homes and we could see some similarities in demographics—class, age, and gender—with Vračar’s pensioners.

Their *Majdan* headquarters was built for children as per the residents’ request. That intergenerational context resonated throughout our workshops because most of the stories were from childhood or related to children. Consequently, one of the participants potentially explained the persistence of solidarity during socialist times—there were more children then. This was evidenced by a photograph of about fifty who had lived in one building.³⁶

New Belgrade

When we arrived in New Belgrade and its post-war pensioners’ club our enthusiasm deflated. Most of the residents in this district were police and military personnel from Tito’s and Milosevic’s times when they endured great bereavements. We heard about lost homes, sons, and jobs and Belgrade turned sour and bleak. Our workshop participants rarely smiled even when they joked, and they spoke about acceptance of poverty, war, and hardship.

They projected hope but had little of it. They were angry about the current state of affairs in Serbia, grieving the past lives of both the living and the dead and they constantly asked: what were we fighting for? We heard mostly about Yugoslavia rather than Belgrade and again witnessed the urge to express the unspoken, to tell the stories that press chests, choke throats and when they came out, they did so in smoke of cigarettes encircling every site in the city.

For this reason, New Belgrade’s side of our map does not have as many dots as other ones. Instead, the stories are connected to Yugoslavia because most of our participants lived dotted around it, which was revealed in their accents. New Belgrade was built mostly for residential housing, even though imagined as the new state’s administration centre,³⁷ without strong cultural and tourist landmarks, so participants felt that they had no geographical anchors to narrate from. They were talking about places they

³⁶ “Day 5” in “BG:LOG,” Kulturklammer, accessed January 10, 2019, <http://www.kulturklammer.org/view/187>.

³⁷ Jelena Prokopljevic, “Do Not Throw Concrete Blocks! Social and Public Housing in New Belgrade and their Representations in Popular Culture,” *Fusion Journal*, no. 6 (2015), <https://fusion-journal.com/issue/006-fusion-the-rise-and-fall-of-social-housing-future-directions/do-not-throw-concrete-blocks-social-and-public-housing-in-new-belgrade-and-their-representations-in-popular-culture>.

were happy in before they came to Belgrade, where they now live for their children rather than themselves.

Practice and data analysis

Our project demonstrated that divisions between rural and urban Serbia were vast and had always been substantial. People who arrived in cities from the countryside had and have difficulties adapting to town rules and so, Belgrade is hardly a metropolis. Both host community and the newly arrived act with suspicion and judgment towards each other. Their relationship has been complicated during and after the wars because many of the newcomers are refugees who were either protected or let down by the state. They adjusted to that differently, some by acting negligently through grabbing local resources, disrespecting the city space or its residents, and some by continuing to suffer with ill health, poor working conditions, and living on the streets.

Halbwachs suggests that abrupt uprooting from habitus and topography disorients us, so we can appear disconnected with the present, unsettled, and unfamiliar, as new sights are to us.³⁸ This was the lens through which some 'native' Belgraders viewed some new residents for whom our diverse pool of methods worked well because they did not have a linear account of their neighbourhood. They did not have the images of themselves 'here' and their sense of solidarity stayed elsewhere, with another community they came from. The nostalgic, old, Belgrade-born citizens could not detach an uncertain present from these newcomers and so they equated the physical changes of their surroundings with a demographic shift.

Occasionally old age, loss of health, loss of a working role in society due to their retirement, and the lack of care from friends and family took their toll and histories never before heard poured out of the elderly, often leaving us sad, disconcerted, and sometimes frightened. We would burst out on the road as soon as we rounded the last corner out of a district, competing with each other about who got the more powerful experience of the day, speaking loudly as we could not contain the excitement of the testimonies that we heard.

At home, we would exchange and listen to workshop recordings and transcribe those accounts of the country that we never knew. This parallel Serbia sometimes inserted itself in our lives—we could identify the places, the daily practices, the family dynamics and it could have been ours. Other

³⁸ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

times, it was another world that we walked through, enjoying the exclusivity of preview that was, in fact, an aftermath of the Yugoslavia we grew up in.

Within the BG:LOG project, we were all connected through Yugoslav socialism. Both young and old Belgraders were not enthused by modern Serbia or they would rather not talk about it. Paradoxically, the socialist past offered much more stable predictions of the future whose development was interrupted by the wars and after them, stopped. Even though it was clear that the interest in further application of the Yugoslav social contract persists, the current political climate is not oriented towards that possibility, but revolves around party politics, often in response to the desires and pressures of the European Union and wider international agencies.

The project's approach saturated a sense of community, but ironically it seemed to be emerging precisely from this recognition of the many who felt ostracised from power. For that reason, our map contained records of our workshops, to remind participants that they were in our project together should they wish to develop that communal practice further. Their partnership with us continued after the project too, although more as a friendship. They spontaneously collected and shared more archival material among themselves and with us, and we were invited to join the group's celebrations—birthdays, family name days, local events, etc.

Condition of culture

We began our project just after cultural workers in Belgrade held a demonstration against the government's decision to drastically reduce the support to cultural programmes. I felt guilty for getting the grant from such a state, guilty for working when my local colleagues did not, guilty for taking money as they were capable of doing a better job and greater projects than me. I also felt guilty for talking Simu out of closing her organisation after seven years of good work. "I do not take pleasure from foreigners being delighted with my work, I want to be appreciated here," she stated. I also did not take pleasure in being the foreigner (I now live in London) that she described.

We contacted the Geodetic Institute to clear the copyright of the map that we intended to use. They not only refused the partnership with us but forbade us to customise their Vračar part of the Belgrade map, which we got from the council authorities. They threatened us with court proceedings and demanded payment. Simu wanted to give up her organisation precisely because she did not see the will for collaboration and hence, she did not believe in the city's cultural sector progress.

We removed Vračar's map from the Kulturklammer website and discussed a different one as a team. Our programmer Ivan Blagojević showed us examples of other maps, but History Pin or Google Maps were already set pieces, which I was reluctant to mix with our original artwork. Šašović wanted to make another map, but the advantages of navigation installed by Google were impressive. We tried to contact other Belgrade map providers to see if they would recognise the benefits of working with us, but Simu was reluctant to continue hoping for partnerships that she already saw as professional agony and encouraged me to accept the freely available Google map as the background for ours.

Conclusion

Participatory practice in this project demonstrated that memory production is a creative process that affects communities. Everyone is using it in some way, but as artists and designers, we are able to extract the method of creation, which we wanted to unmask for our project participants, so they can be empowered by the knowledge of its use. The awareness of cultural production allows rethinking and questioning of the established edgings, from social systems to state narratives and so, enables us to evaluate them critically.

Our map opposes a chronological approach to history, where one event happens after another and instead, advocates for it to be accepted as mediated, just like memory is, which remains deeply engraved in our environment.³⁹ Even though it privileges a contemporary, post-modern, deconstructionist style of practice, the map directs our attention to representation as implicated in depictions of memory, technology, and art.

As Wulf Kansteiner asserts:

collective memory studies should adopt the methods of communication and media studies, especially with regards to media reception, and continue to use a wide range of interpretative tools from traditional historiography to poststructural approaches.⁴⁰

³⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

⁴⁰ Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (May 2002): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0018-2656.00198>.

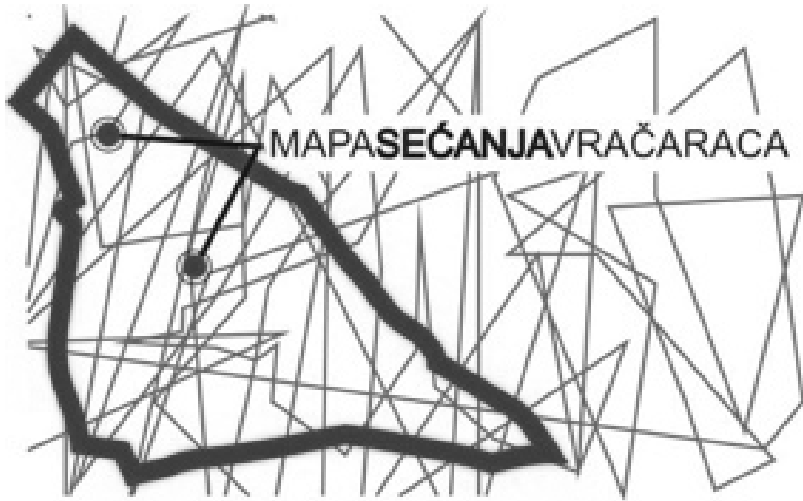


Figure 5: Days of Remembrance project postcard (front), design by Katarina Šašović, 2011

The versatility of records achieved by creative approaches to memory work enriches the memory studies field through disclosing stories that would not be obtained otherwise. Kansteiner's plea for more attention to be paid to the ways memory makers and users communicate, and to focus on the possibilities inherent in visual and discursive objects, supports the use of created images (Figure 5) in our and other arts and design projects, and urges the public to challenge traditional representations of memory and possibly democratise memory work.⁴¹

For our participants and for us who coordinated the project, art and design practice was a vessel with which we could safely travel through our difficult past, shielded by the imagination it needs to survive. Memories must be creative so we can maintain them. As much as they can obstruct the knowledge of the past, they are the reason why it exists. Their potential is in the building of the world around our narratives—the whole universe on the back of those accounts, points of view, illustrations of what might have been and what can be, with support of our communities.

⁴¹ Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 197.

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