

Belgrade, bridges or bridging?

From 80 applicants, I was proud to be selected to join the Safe Harbor residency program. I had the chance to walk and bike (quite dangerous...) around sunny Belgrade for 15 days in October 2019. Besides visiting many different neighborhoods, markets and museums, I explored the riversides of both Sava and Donau. Several time I crossed one of the seven bridges that connect the old city with Novi Beograd and the villages and countryside to the north.

After two weeks of exploration it is my impression that, despite the presence of so many bridges, Belgrade has a bigger need for symbolic bridges. Bridges between socially heterogeneous people and groups. From the Roma family in the slums under the bridge to the inhabitant of the brand new shiny riverfront buildings and from grandma romanticizing the socialist era to the teenager dreaming of a carrier somewhere else in Europe. The famous American political scientist Robert Putnam calls this 'bridging'. In contrary to 'bonding': contact and meetings between members of a homogeneous ('your own') group.

Like everywhere else in the world the gap in Serbia is getting bigger and bigger and bridging is very much needed, because all those people have one thing in common: they all share the same city. And what is the place where different people can potentially meet? Exactly, in the public space!

Based on our handbook 'Pleasant Places, Design Principles for a Good Public Space', I was able to analyze many places in Belgrade on the four basic conditions for a good public space: Safety, Variety, Stay and Move.

During a well visited masterclass, organized in co-operation with Ekonaut, I shared with architects, landscape architects and students our vision, examples from Belgrade and the rest of the world and give lots of practical tools on how to make safe, healthy, social, child-friendly, green and attractive public spaces. To learn how to bring theory in practice we visited and analyzed green space Terazijaska Terasa and the park Luke Čelovića.

In Belgrade still a lot of work has to be done to fulfill the mission of our bureau: 'Pleasant places for everybody!'. But together we can do it. I wish all Serbian urban development professionals success, and thank you for this opportunity!

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"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because and only when they are created by everybody."

Jane Jacobs