

Stand up for Public Interest! Active Frame Construction of the *Ne davimo Beograd* Movement in a Post-Yugoslavian Context

Analysing the frame construction of an urban social movement through multiple scales

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ABSTRACT

The framing literature on (urban) social movements mainly pays attention to the local scale and either micro- or macro- influences and therefore overlooking contextual influences. By analysing the framing process of the *Ne davimo Beograd* (we won't let Belgrade drown) movement in Belgrade, that protested a large-scale urban regeneration project, this research, first of all, contributes to filling this gap by integrating both micro- and macro- influences. It became clear that during this process frames are constructed through several spatial scales that reinforce each other. Secondly, this research contributes to displaying the path-dependent effects of socialism but pleads for nuance in this categorization. Through conducting interviews and observations, it became clear that the movement successfully constructed a *normal citizen frame*, causing the mobilization of other citizens and leading to a general questioning of Serbian authorities in the negotiation on public space and the Serbian society.

Key words: Urban Social Movements, Framing, Agency, Post-Yugoslavia, Scale integration, Serbia

INTRODUCTION

The *Ne davimo Beograd* movement garnered big media attention in 2016 when they organized a massive protest against the Belgrade Waterfront Development project, which recently finished its first development phase. The project is a public-private partnership between the Serbian government and a private investment partner from the United Arab Emirates. The *Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)* used the project as a political tool in the 2012 elections. Whilst Serbia had an unemployment rate of 28% and was suffering from brain drain, this project was presented as the saviour, bringing a bright future and increasing the public interest. With this argumentation, the government passed special laws and overrode spatial planning processes (Pond, 2013; Stankovic, 2016; Maruna, 2015; Lalović, Radosavljević, & Đukanović, 2015). However, despite all protests organized by *Ne davimo Beograd* the project is being realized. This begs the question of how the movement positioned itself to combat these governmental processes.

Social movements play an active role in positioning themselves. This process is called *framing* and forms the legitimization of movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). It is essential to construct the right frame since it can mobilize, gather support and demobilize the opponent (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). These frames are internally constructed through *insider outsider establishment*, *network development* and *common meaning to experiences* with other movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). However, Staggenborg (2002) points out a key issue with an analysis that only focusses solely on such micro developments. She states that most of the research focuses on either micro conditions or macro influences, and therefore neglects to give an overview of the process.

First of all, this research aims to fill this gap by analysing frame construction from a relational approach. To analyse the micro-macro relationship, the framing process of *Ne davimo Beograd* will be analysed by integrating macro contextual elements and especially the path-dependent influence of socialism with the micro-processes of frame construction. It will become clear that the debate surrounding the usage of the concept of post-socialism should be spatially nuanced. In this sense, post-Yugoslavia is the more applicable concept. In this way, this research will contribute to theory development around current processes in the Balkan (Chelcea & Druță, 2016; Zekovic, Maričić & Miodrag, 2016; Štiks, 2015; Hirt, Ferencuhová & Tuvikene, 2016).

Secondly, Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans (2012) point out that most geographers who analyse urban social movements frame their analyses in terms of the 'right to the city' and don't look further than the local scale. They, therefore, also plead for a relational approach. In this research, it will be demonstrated how framing processes in the *Ne davimo Beograd* movement evolved on multiple spatial scales.

Through eleven semi-structured interviews with *Ne davimo Beograd* activists, five expert interviews, protest observations and field observations it is demonstrated that the framing process is based on an interplay between the activists and the post-Yugoslavian socioeconomic and political context. In doing so, it will be demonstrated that urban social movements have a spatial complexity that reaches beyond the urban grassroots.

This article is, therefore, structured as follows. First, the relevant literature will be reviewed hereby describing the social movement and framing theory. Whilst describing the macro context, the path-dependent influence of post-socialism and the relevance of using post-Yugoslavia as a replacing concept will be demonstrated. In the end, the micro frame construction theory will be elaborated upon. Subsequently, the methods used in this research project are described. Third, the findings of this research will be displayed by first explaining the context and rise of the *Ne davimo Beograd* movement. From thereon, it will become clear that through relational interplay the movement successfully constructed a *normal citizen* frame that reaches through multiple spatial scales.

Social Movements as Banners for Public Action

Social movements are seen as a '*trumpet call, as a counterweight to oppressive power, as a summons to popular action against a wide range of scourges.*' (Tilly, 2004, p.3). New social movements focus on cultural, quality of life and lifestyle issues (Offe, 1985; Pichardo, 1997; Touraine, 2002). Since the 1960's, urban social movements have been seen as a separate form of new social movements, composed of local collectives that focus on the local state (Novy & Colomb, 2013).

Civic collectives are important agents in negotiating their daily lives. Touraine (2002) claims that the revival of civic action is the way to conquer a totalitarian world, which is dominated by the will of the state. For instance, a Berlin-based movement successfully organised a referendum regarding the urban development of the *Spre* area (Scharenberg & Bader, 2009; Novy & Colomb, 2013).

Identity became crucial in igniting social and cultural change because these movements provide participants with attachment since they focus on personal issues (Macionis & Plummer, 2012, p.563). In their study of feminist movements, Taylor and Whittier (1992) demonstrate that the narrative of a movement influences the willingness of people to join the movement and to identify with it.

Movements influence this narrative, by creating specific frames. Frames can be defined as: '*... action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization*' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). These frames are consciously constructed

and define the movement's position in the debate surrounding the disputed subject. These frames are influenced both by an interplay of macro process.

Staggenborg (2002) points to the importance of analysis at a meso level and, therefore, integrating micro and macro processes. Most of the research so far focusses on micro- or macro factors, but rarely integrates the two. Analysis on frame construction is a suitable means to do this as it is embedded in contextual processes, as explained in the next section, but also actively constructed by the movement, as explained in the final section of this theory review. In the end, this creates a relational dynamic.

The relevance of this relational analysis is expressed by Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans (2012). By analysing movements from a relational perspective, one is able to demonstrate how they connect to other spatial scales, instead of focussing on a localized issue. By including the macro contextual processes whilst analysing the micro framing process of the *Ne davimo Beograd* movement, this research overcomes this issue.

Post-Yugoslavia and its Influence on the Current Spatial and Political Context in Serbia

According to Staggenborg (2002), the macro level contains the changes social structural and political sphere, this can be interpreted as the context leading to the emergence of a movement. Therefore, this part of the literature review will focus upon the socio and economic context of Serbia and Belgrade leading to the rise of a social movement.

The Belgrade Waterfront project can be perceived as a metaphor for the growing neoliberal tendencies in the former socialist Serbian society. Several authors claim that the socialist era has a lasting path-dependent influence on the development of former socialist countries in which neoliberal projects are promoted to break with the socialist image (Chelcea & Druță, 2016). Belgrade had an instable history marked by pronounced caesuras: the formation of Yugoslavia, the Balkan war and the 1999 NATO bombardments. Due to these events, the city had to deal with a high influx of refugees, leading to an informal and corrupted planning system. With the adoption of the Belgrade Masterplan 2021 and projects like Belgrade Waterfront, authorities aim to elevate the city and to compete with other (European) metropolitan cities (Arandelovic, Vukmirovic & Samardzic, 2017; Hirt, 2009; Stankovic, 2016; Zekovic et al., 2016). However, Maruna (2015) argues that the Serbian planning system is still based on socialism and, therefore, lacks a long-term vision and mostly functions as a tool in politics.

The usage of post-socialism as a concept has been criticised since it implies a heavy path-dependent influence. Also, it has been stated that the concept does not acknowledge the differences between former socialist countries and implies one single form of socialist regimes (Hirt, et al., 2016; Ferencuhová & Gentile, 2016). Categorical distinction has been proposed by e.g. Tosics (2005) with his '*other ex-Yugoslavian cities*'. These cities still go through a transitional phase and are poorly governed. *Post-Yugoslavia* is another distinction, by Štiks (2015), who states that the poor governing structure is an inheritance from left-wing politics during the Yugoslavian era.

To understand current political systems in post-Yugoslavia Štiks (2015) distinguishes three forms of left politics: *old left*, *established left* and *new left*. *The old left* depicts the League of Communists of Yugoslavia who had been in power from 1945 until 1990. This regime has been replaced with the *established-left* during the post-socialist era, who are mostly 'rebranded' communists who now call themselves social democrats or socialists. Štiks claims that these parties still get a lot of support because civilians have an ideological attachment to the 'old Yugoslavia' (Štiks, 2015).

The main issue with these established left regimes is that they display authoritative governing methods based on corruption (Bieber, 2018). In Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by Aleksander

Vučić seized power in 2012. During the Milošević administration, Vučić used to be the Minister of Information. However, Vučić's party managed to get seize power again in 2012, claiming to end corruption and failed policies. However, corruption in the whole state apparatus seems to worsen, which led to civil protests (Bakic, 2013; Pond, 2013; Štiks, 2015; Fridman & Hercigonja, 2016).

These regimes are challenged by a *new-left*. This new left is not a formal political entity, but led by civilians. They oppose the corrupt politicians in power that led the country further into debt (and even war) and their neoliberal restructuring of society. These groups can be classified as social movements (Štiks, 2015).

Internal Social Movement Narrative Construction

Jasper states that most academics only analyze movements from a structuralist approach. However, a focus should be added on micro perspectives, as well, by zooming in on the active element in strategical decisions, one of which is the framing of identity (Jasper, 2004). This frame is constructed rightly, movements can gain support, mobilize others and demobilize the opponent (Benford & Snow, 2000; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Firstly, movements gain support by actively selecting certain events, symbols, objects, experiences and actions. This frame convinces bystanders that the movement makes a legitimate claim. When the current situation is demonstrated to be unjust, this can lead to collective action (Tarrow, 2011). The climate justice movement, for instance, demonstrated the unjust geographical outcomes of climate change and was able to mobilize activists worldwide (Taylor, 2000). Secondly, the movement can demobilize the opponent by framing their identity in a certain way. Citizens of the GDR, for instance, framed themselves as 'the people', which made it hard for the regime to intervene with violence (Tarrow, 2011; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Frame construction is a social process and, therefore, the movement has agency in constructing the frame in a favourable way. It is composed out of three components. First, it is important to establish *insiders from outsiders*. Movements, in this way, define who they are, but also who they are not (Gamson, 1997). These outsiders are perceived as the cause for the protested issue and therefore have a negative connotation (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Persons on the inside of the group are perceived positively, because they are the ones who challenge these unjust practices (Robnett, 2002). Secondly, *network development* among members is crucial. It strengthens interpersonal bonds as through this network, knowledge, experiences and resources are spread (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). This results in mutual trust and a sense of solidarity arises. Gerlach (1971) stated that this cohesion is crucial for ideological unity. These social networks also keep members motivated to maintain the movement (McPherson, Mille, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992). Lastly, it is crucial to give *common meaning to experiences*. With this component, the movements reach beyond the local scale and connect with other similar movements. These connections form across space (and time) (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). In the end, a network of similar movements arises and through the technological mediation of the internet – movements can easily exchange information and experiences (Castells, 2004).

Frame construction also has an influence of the choice of strategies of the movement. Most movements choose a certain tactic based on who they are or want to represent. In this way, a certain strategy becomes dominant. Sometimes, a certain tactic can define the movement's identity (e.g. sit-ins are associated with the civil rights movement, the goose step with fascist/ communist regimes). By choosing a specific tactic, new movement can symbolically connect to elder movements and thereby frame their identity. However, tactics can also be progressively developed by the movement. This, too, can support the created identity (e.g. anti-fur activists throwing blood on coats) (Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

In summary, frame construction of movements is important in mobilizing, demobilizing gaining support and making strategical decisions. This frame is influenced by the context, the movement is situated in. But also actively constructed by movements itself by establishing insiders from outsiders, network development and giving common meaning to experiences. In the result section, these micro processes will be analysed with special attention to the macro-contextual processes displaying the relational dynamics behind this framing process.

METHODS

To get more insight into these relational processes, several research instruments have been used from September 2018 until January 2019. Since this research focusses on narrative construction, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Eleven of those interviews were with members of the *Ne davimo Beograd* movement (see table 1 for characteristics of the activists). The participants were recruited through email, Facebook and snowball sampling. One of the interviews also included a walk-along through the neighbourhood before conducting the interview. All of the interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 60 minutes and 80 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and the transcript stripped of any revealing personal information. The names used in this article are pseudonyms.

It was difficult to recruit respondents since there is a lot of societal and scientific interest in this group. To avoid pressuring the respondents, the choice was made to focus the interviews on the narrative construction and to consult experts for more contextual insight. These five expert interviews were with an independent journalist, an urban planning professor, an urban planner employee and two 'regular' citizens. Of these interviews, two have been recorded and notes were taken during the other three. The interviews were coded and analysed through deductive and inductive coding in NVivo.

Name*	Sex	Age	Years active	Part of group	Active	Active in another social movement
Bojan	M	33	5	Core	Yes	-
Davor	M	30	2	Thematic	On pause	Yes
Andrej	M	36	2	Thematic	Yes	Yes
Janko	M	43	3	Thematic	Yes	-
Zoran	M	30	5	Supporter	Yes	-
Valerija	F	29	2	Thematic	Yes	Yes
Jelena	F	21	2	Thematic	Yes	Yes
Jovan	M	21	3	Thematic	Yes	-
Ivana	F	35	5	Core	Yes	-
Senka	F	26	2	Thematic	Yes	-
Dejana	F	24	3	Thematic	Yes	Yes

Table 1: *Ne davimo Beograd* respondent characteristics, *names are pseudonyms

In addition to the interviews, four protests were observed. These were not *Ne davimo Beograd* protests but from movements that are aligned and the anti-government protests in which members of *Ne davimo Beograd* also participated. The movement participated in the protests, and these observations allowed me to develop a network with the respondents and, thereby, gain more insight into the day-to-day operations of the movement. Finally, on-site observations of the Belgrade Waterfront project were conducted. During these observations, notes and pictures were taken.

One has to be aware that the researcher is not Serbian and is coming from the West. Therefore, it was a conscious decision to integrate these different type of research instruments, to grasp an overview of

the complexity of the Serbian context. Ethics have been taken into consideration by clearly informing the respondents about the research, sending transcripts. Attention has been paid to data anonymization, since talking about this topic could be harmful in a corrupt state system.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NORMAL CITIZEN FRAME

First, the local origin of the movement will be presented with its linkage to frames of injustice. Then the general frame of *Ne davimo Beograd*, as described by the members, with its aligned goals will be explained. During that segment, it will become clear that the movement's interest shifted from a local to a national scale. After that, by zooming in on the process of insider-outsider establishment, the influence of post-Yugoslavia is demonstrated. Also, by focussing on the counter-reactions to these frames the relational dynamics will be highlighted. Finally, the (inter)national networks will be highlighted. Here, the interwovenness throughout multiple scales is demonstrated.

Starting at the local scale: The origin of *Ne davimo Beograd*

The Savamala area, where the Belgrade Waterfront project (see fig. 1) is located, had been in need of renovation for a while. It used to be part of a delapidated railway area. Still, some small businesses, creative entrepreneurs, bars and families were located there. The renovation of the Savamala area was announced by Vučić's party at the end of 2012. The location of the project is an inner-city location next to the river Sava and measures 90 hectares (see fig. 2) which will be transformed into a consumption Valhalla financed by a public-private partnership between the Serbian state and an investor from the United Arab Emirates (van der Hoeven & Ivković, 2014).



Fig 1: *Belgrade Waterfront project (Source: Belgrade Waterfront, 2019).*

The initiative *Ne davimo Beograd* started as an initiative to counter this project because, according to the initiative, it was a huge violation of the public interest. A member indicated that the initiative's establishment was quite late. This had not been the first time that a political entity advertised the transformation of the Savamala area. The movement is, essentially, a sequel of the movement called the Ministry of Space, a group of active citizens and artists who were concerned about the urban form

of Belgrade. When the Belgrade Waterfront project was announced, *Ne davimo Beograd* arose as a more thematic movement.

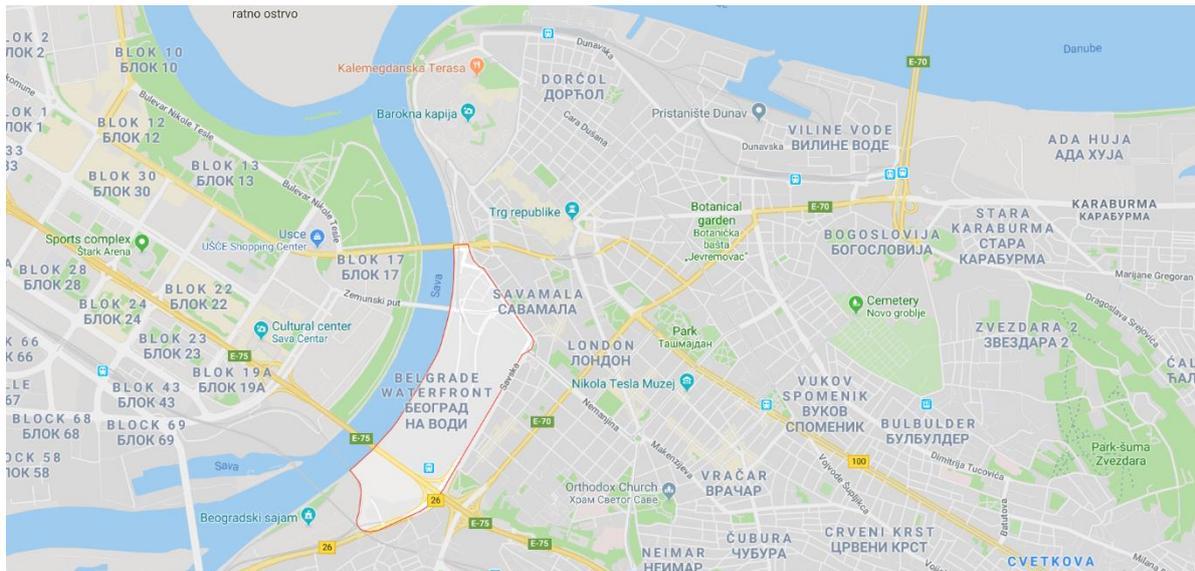


Fig. 2.: *Belgrade Waterfront's (red lined) project site within Belgrade (Source: Google Maps)*

The group contested the government, and the project, using a yellow duck as their symbol. In Serbian, duck also can be a synonym for *fraud* or *penis*. According to the respondents, it is a perfect symbol since it hints at fraudulent practices and displays their attitude towards the project. Also, a duck lives on the water which is an essential part of the Belgrade Waterfront project.

So, *Ne davimo Beograd* evolved from the movement *Ministry of Space* and was specifically founded for the local issue of the Belgrade Waterfront project. After this introduction, it will become clear how the movement grew by successfully linking itself to frames of injustice.

Frames of injustice: The Savamala Incident

During their protests, the movement already referred to frames of injustice when considering the outcomes and procedures of the project. However, the most successful link was made by actively standing up for the Savamala incident. According to the respondents and several other (media) sources, the government had the task to clear the Savamala site for reconstruction. However, in 2016, this was done through a rough evacuation by 'people with ski masks and construction vehicles' (Andrej). According to another respondent: 'the constitution of the country was suspended for those couple of hours' (Davor). This night transformed the whole discourse around the Savamala renovations and Belgrade Waterfront. The movement organised a street protest to commemorate this incident and was able to mobilize 20,000 people to join.

Most of the respondents stated that they had been following the initiative's activities for a while but decided to become active after being aggravated by the Savamala incident. The incident was called a 'breaking point'. Some respondents proclaimed they made a conscious decision to participate because of their personal biography and historical awareness. One of them claimed that he was always blaming older people for letting the nineties (Balkan wars) happen, so why should he not be fighting now? A lot of the respondents felt like if they would not stand up, nobody would and nothing will change in Serbia. Also, they claimed that it was important that people realized that there are persons who are against the practices of the government.

According to the respondents, the government presents Belgrade Waterfront like it will bring stable jobs, stop the brain drain and stimulate foreign investment and tourism. However, when one looks at the pricing it is mostly marketed towards the international Serbian diaspora. One respondent stated that the government had to create this opportunistic frame to sell the project to the Serbian people.

So, the Belgrade Waterfront project and specifically the Savamala incident, which actively links to an injustice frame, mobilized the activists and protest participants in the *Ne davimo Beograd* initiative. Respondents felt that they had to become active because, otherwise, nothing will happen and, likewise, out of concern for moral historical perception. However, the government states that the project will bring prosperity to Serbia and specifically its economy. In the following section, the movement's frame, as *normal citizens*, and the reason for this specific frame will be explained.

Moving from the Local to the National: Positioning as Ordinary Citizens

The movement opposes government outlets about the progress the project will bring, and state the following on their website:

'We are a group of people of various profiles, interests and beliefs, gathered around a common goal: putting an end to the degradation and plunder of Belgrade on behalf of megalomaniacal urban and architectural projects, primarily the "Belgrade Waterfront" project.' (Ne da(vi)mo Beograd, n.d.).

In this blog post, but also during interviews, members frame themselves as ordinary, but concerned, citizens and not as a political entity. The *insider-outsider establishment* is therefore based on citizens versus politicians. In this way, the movement smartly positioned itself in a frame that is hard to combat for a government. Since the task of a government is to serve the interests of its citizens, this frame demobilizes the government in its potential counterclaims. An explanation for this is, first of all, a general lack of trust in politics. Since a lot of Serbian politicians changed ideology during their careers to stay in power, this created a vague political spectrum and a lack of civilian trust in the government and politics in general.

A second element that subverts Serbian trust in politics is a vague ideological spectrum. In the post-war era, politicians who claimed to be socialist or democratic implemented a neoliberal agenda. This led to suspicion, especially towards the left. Whilst reading the city election programme of *Ne davimo Beograd* the central topics seemed leftist. However, respondents were hesitant about being labelled 'left' because of these unclear ideological boundaries. Some members preferred the label 'left-liberal', 'democratic-oriented' or just 'people with common sense'. On the other hand, others claimed that if someone would actively read the election materials from *Ne davimo Beograd* it was quite obvious that all these values and goals are leftist and sometimes even socialist.

When asked about the goals of the movement, none of the respondents immediately mentioned the Belgrade Waterfront project. It became clear that values evolved from single-issue, regarding the Belgrade Waterfront, towards the broader societal level. Two members stated that they perceived the Belgrade Waterfront project as a metaphor for all the misdeeds conducted by the government.

Andrej: *'...if you could sum up all of those problems, like not only Belgrade; the whole of Serbia. If you could sum them up it will look like Belgrade Waterfront project. Like every problem, every aspect of society that has any problem you can see it on that spot.'*

By framing themselves as ordinary citizens, members set themselves apart from the 'other', namely the politicians. The reason for this lack of trust in politicians is a lack of civilian trust in politicians and a vague political spectrum. It became clear that by opposing the government's practices, the members

shifted from localized issues towards national ones. In the next section, the ideological goals that underline this frame are elaborated.

Goals that Align: Public Interest, Citizen Participation and Equality

'To stand up for the public interest', was the most frequently mentioned goal. Members stated that this was a value shared by the group but also one that mobilized them into participation. In this way, the goals serve as a mobilization factor for new participants but also gives members space to identify with the movement. Most respondents stated that they felt that being active in *Ne davimo Beograd* was part of their personal identity or issues they cared about in life in general.

According to the members, the government does not act in public interest. This is a clear example of the negative connotation that comes when defining outsiders, whilst attributing a positive connotation to the own group. This claim was often illustrated by referring to the Belgrade Waterfront project, the Savamala incident and the disregard for the law. Other examples were the selling of public goods and services like river coasts or garbage disposal, involvement in profitable (illegal) real-estate development, the construction of an unnecessary fountain or eight-month lasting Christmas decorations which were highly overpriced. This angered the members.

Dejana: *'We want people to know that they can still fight for what is theirs, you know. You are paying for the land; you are paying for the maintenance cleaning of those common spaces. And you are paying for your electricity bill and everything. You have the right to say that you don't want some business building or some mall right in front of your window.'*

This links to the next value that *Ne davimo Beograd* represents, namely public participatory mechanisms. By advocating a bottom-up governing structure, the right to decide about their own environment should be given back to the people. Members advocated that people, themselves, know what is best for them – not some politicians who mostly think about their own interests. Also, this was suggested as a way to combat false promises by politicians.

Equality was the ultimate goal. This goal was presented in three forms. Regarding equality of opportunities, *Ne davimo Beograd* advocates equal opportunities for everyone which requires a government who is there for its citizens and facilitates their needs. In addition to that, they promote equality amongst citizens, to end the tensions between people. And finally, they advocate for gender equality, as Serbian society was called patriarchal and women's participation also inside the movement was highly valued. This was facilitated by a thematic group inside the movement who works on gender issues in the city, like women's perception of the safety of spaces.

So, the goals of public interest, bottom-up democracy and equality underline this normal citizen frame. This frame essentially aggregates against the politicians in power. These goals are mainly underlining the fact that *Ne davimo Beograd* wants to stand up for the normal people and is accessible for normal people also they give a feeling of solidarity among members. In the next section, it is demonstrated how the members explain why the government is not able to do this.

New Left on the Rise: Insider-Outsider Establishment – Defining and Portraying the 'Other'

The frame of *Ne davimo Beograd* mostly rallies against the Vučić administration, which functions as a clear 'other'. While explaining their issues with this administration, the role of post-Yugoslavia and the period after the collapse of Yugoslavia, was acknowledged by the respondents. By referring to these *established left* practices, *Ne davimo Beograd* can clearly be seen as an example of a *new left* movement.

Members explained that they were frustrated by the continued position of power of president Vučić. He used to be part of the Milosevic administration, which led the country to war and fell on 5 October 2000 after mass protests. Despite this, he managed to regain power.

Valerija: *'They are like well we survived the 5th of October, we will survive everything, they are saying that. So, you can do everything in every government. But it is scary.'* Zoran: *'Now he is awarded, now twenty years later, he is one of the most influential people in this country.'*

The respondents sounded bitter when they referred to Vučić's role in the Milosevic administration and claimed that he had learned from *'notorious war criminals', 'the most corrupted and evil members of the ruling parties'* (Andrej & Zoran). Also, they noted that the power continuation led to passiveness and disappointment among the Serbian people when it came to protesting.

Jelena: *'...other people they are like: 'Oh, it is great you are like fighting and protesting but you will see. Like, I have been young, I have protested and it always turned out that someone is paying them, but you are too young, you are too naïve.'* Like: *'You will see, don't worry, when you come to my age you will give up.'*

One member came to the conclusion that people, therefore, perceive politics as something that belongs to the party. This is a narrative *Ne davimo Beograd* seeks to challenge, to demonopolize politics from professional politicians. Another member claimed that they are the ones who have to set this straight and show that it is okay to be involved in politics.

The second reference to post-Yugoslavian influence was anger because of widespread corruption. One of the respondents claimed that there is a *'meta-synthesis of crime and politics'* (Zoran) dating back to post-war profitters. It was hard for the respondents to give concrete proof of these corruption practices, but the examples given were often based on common sense.

Jovan (brackets added): *'If you have something that is state owned and you give it to some private investor who is your friend, I mean it is obvious what is going to happen there. You are going to share the profit and [you] both have money in your pockets.'*

The third reference was towards neoliberal policies, initiated by the transitional government but further developed by the current government into *'turbocapitalism'* (Valerija). Most members stated that during this process, it appears that a lot of politicians only think about their own stakes and pockets. Belgrade Waterfront was often cited as an example for this.

Finally, members stated that Vučić learned the importance of controlling the media during the Milosevic era. According to the respondents, the government has an enormous influence on national broadcasters. In Serbia, there is a big part of the population that does not have access to the internet and is, therefore, dependent on newspapers like in socialist times.

Dejana: *'We trust media, we trust television, we trust news reporters. Because we were communists and we were communist for so long and you have a trust between media and people. [...] if you ask my grandma, she will say: 'But I saw it on the television.' I will say: 'Okay but why would you believe it?' [...] And you can't argue with that [her]. [...] there is no chance with any evidence you can show her that her favourite politician is corrupted. [...] like families are literally, not falling apart, but I know so many examples where kids are forbidden for seeing grandparents because they [the grandparents] believe in Vučić as a god.'*

In the state-run media, *Ne davimo Beograd* was often portrayed in a negative way. Aggregations varied from personal (tabloid-ish) attacks of the private sphere to incorrect journalism about the protests.

For instance, false claims about the number of people that attended protests were made. Most outlets were aimed at portraying the members of *Ne davimo Beograd* as a foreign-funded organization, either by the CIA or George Soros. According to one of the respondents, the claim of foreign enemies dated back from the beginning of the 20th century. However, most of the respondents thought it could be traced back to the narrative during the Milosevic era.

Davor: *'...Milosevic propaganda. When you say: you are a foreign spy. Everybody will think 'Oh, then you are against our country'. So, nowadays still it is like 'oh if you are a foreign spy, that means you are against our country'.'*

The claim of *Ne davimo Beograd* members who are not 'supporting the country' was underlined by claim that they were stopping the progress of Serbia. Which, again, aligns with the story that Belgrade Waterfront in the first place is a project of Serbian national interest and will bring prosperity to the Serbian people.

So, post-Yugoslavia had an influence in the narrative construction of the members whilst constructing their legitimization of aggregating against the 'other', namely the Vučić administration and corrupt politicians. The construction of this outsider aligns with the normal citizen frame. First of all, their narrative explained the political passiveness of the Serbs and the discourse that people feel like politics belong to the party (due to power continuation), corrupt practices and limitations on media freedom. This 'state-led' media portrays *Ne davimo Beograd* as people who are against the country and progress. In the next section, the reaction of members towards these claims is displayed.

Network development: Reaction and Action

The governmental claims strengthened feelings of solidarity between the members because it made them feel like a mutually supporting group. Likewise, it gave them a clear enemy to set themselves apart from. However, the members explained that they did not directly react to the claims of the government but tried to continue their actions.

The movement had a horizontal governance structure based on a concentric model (see figure 1). This was done to combat their opponent's top-down way of governing and to support the call for a horizontal democracy. However, this structure wasn't always positively perceived, since it made it difficult for members to make final decisions and create a balanced workload. Also, some respondents claimed that it could be difficult to enter the movement because the core group had been through a lot. This made it sometimes difficult for newcomers to find a connection. However, the network did make it possible to coordinate actions.

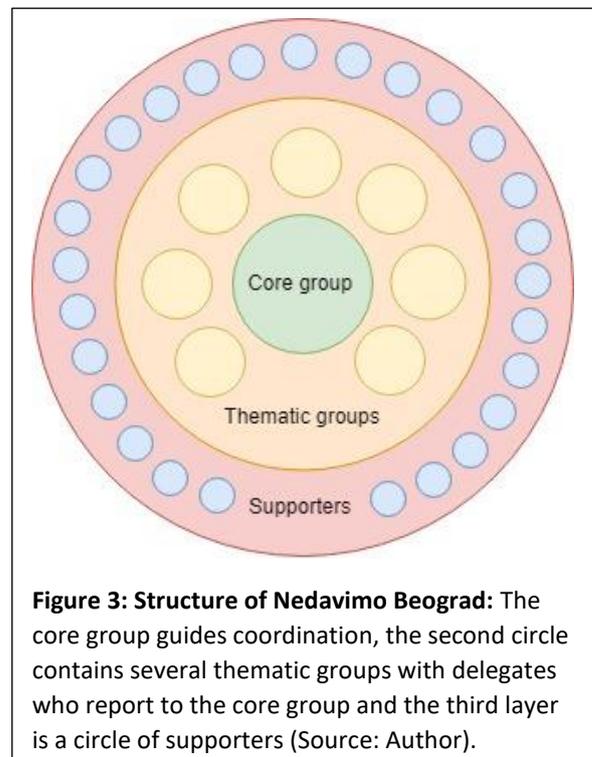


Figure 3: Structure of Nedavimo Beograd: The core group guides coordination, the second circle contains several thematic groups with delegates who report to the core group and the third layer is a circle of supporters (Source: Author).

Actions evolved from serious towards extravagant. In the beginning, the movement tried to maintain a serious attitude by following official procedures. Members made formal complaints and attended meetings. However, all the formal procedures were ignored by the government and the project

developer. Then, the movement adopted new extravagant ways to stand out. By using public space as a means, creative solutions included art, for instance a car transformed into a driving duck, a big blow up duck in the water and leaving a pile of rocks outside the office of the politician responsible for the Savamala area. By using these extravagant protest actions, outsiders were informed about the movement. Plus, it made it more difficult for the government to ignore *Ne davimo Beograd*.

Since the movement does not have any access to national media, an email database and social media were often used. Mostly, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter gave the opportunity to inform their followers during actions. Also, direct interaction with citizens by talking or applying stickers and posters in public space were means to broadcast the message. One of the members described this as 'guerrilla marketing'. However, another member was sceptical, because she thought it was hard to reach the people in the countryside, who still form the largest support base for Vučić's party.

Dejana: *'...as I said we live in a bubble. So, [...] even though we are people from the nation. We are not the representatives; you have to go to the really small villages and talk to people. Because yeah, change will start in the major cities [...] being [more] international, you know. But we are totally disconnected from the people in the villages. Because they are the ones who are the majority. They are the ones who are manipulated by the government and not current government. Like any government.'*

Ne davimo Beograd did not directly respond to the government claims, they did react by their actions. For instance, this was done by structuring the movement in a horizontal way to enhance the normal citizen frame. To maintain a serious attitude, official (planning) procedures were followed. When this was not effective, more extravagant ways are used to display the message. Public space is used in a strategical way to reach outsiders. However, one can debate the impact of this, since it does not reach people outside Belgrade. In the next section, this issue will be addressed.

Moving from the National to the International Scale through Common Meaning of Experiences: (Inter)National Network Development

To combat these spatial problems, the movement used an extensive network across several spatial levels. First, the European Network will be highlighted, then the Belgrade one and finally the Serbian one.

Ne davimo Beograd is part of a European network of urban social movements, called Fearless Cities. This network is used mostly to exchange information about strategies but also to communicate internal issues. One of the respondents explained to me that the horizontal structure inside *Ne davimo Beograd* was based on the structure of the Spanish movement *Barcelona En Comu*.

Ne davimo Beograd organizes a three-day conference for other Urban Social movements in June 2019. One of the respondents explained that it will focus on Eastern Europe. It was explained that there are a lot of movements that are active in this region, but that most developments focussed on Western European contexts. There is a need for more focus into the Eastern European contexts which differs from, for example, the German one, which makes it difficult to adopt some strategies:

Andrej: *'...it's hard to implement. For example, there were like people from Berlin, I think, that were like: 'Okay, we did have some type of event. So, what we did; we made a huge, like a great press release and the press release was so interesting to the media that they published it.' And I was like, yeah, not possible. [...] I cannot say that we didn't have some experiences that we were able to use, but most of the stuff is different.'*

The need for a more contextualized approach for collaboration was fulfilled by a mutual support network of Serbian social movements, in- and outside of Belgrade. Some members were also active in these movements or mentioned their goals during the interviews.

Inside Belgrade, there is a support network between movements. *Savski Nasip* is another of these movements. This organization combats illegally constructed real estate on the Sava dam, which is threatening the residents of the neighbourhoods that live behind the dam. The second movement is *Krov Nad Glavom*, that supports civilians who are threatened with eviction. According to one respondent, the government was responsible for creating a profit-oriented system that abuses in-debt homeowners, resulting in them to be threatened with eviction. These movements target local goals and also stand up for the public good.

Respondents explained that there are plans to form a coalition that will have a formalized institutional character. Members were aware that change will start in the cities, but that there is, ultimately, a need to include all the Serbian civilians. By creating a national coalition, a network could be rolled out which would not just be centred on Belgrade since that would not reflect their bottom-up advocacy. These movements were also supporting each other's activities.

Finally, respondents stated that there was a need for a legitimate left representation that can influence the political establishment.

Senka: 'People, and we ourselves, were asking like if elections were like now, who are we going to vote for? [...] And I think nobody was like having a choice you know. [...] Where are all those young, not all of us are young, but when are all those new people going to come? To gather like new faces and people [...] who don't have a history in like corruption or lying or transitioning in between like left to right or right to left. [...] But like a coalition of new people that are interested in local problems.'

There was a post on *Ne davimo Beograd's* Instagram officially announcing a coalition called *Građanski front* (Civil front). It contains *Ne davimo Beograd*, *Udruženog pokreta slobodnih stanara iz Niša* (Joint movement of free tenants from Niš) and *Lokalni Front* (The Local Front).

'Today we talked about new plans for the initiative [...] In addition to continuing to work on the local issues we are facing in our city, we want to build a new political force with [...] similar movements from other cities of Serbia, the Civil Front. [...] we want to further expand and expand our activities to the national level. [...] transformed into a truly new political alternative to the existing system' (*Ne davimo Beograd*, 2019, February 24, translated from Serbian, brackets and underlining added).

Two members emphasised that change (in society) comes slowly, not overnight. One of them highlighted the fact that during her first protest 400 people showed up. However, at the latest anti-government and *Ne davimo Beograd* protests, numbers reach thousands of people. Lastly, there was an emphasis on the fact that change in Serbian society should not be driven from Belgrade, but nationally supported. That is why the national coalition is crucial in bringing a new voice to Serbian political culture.

Respondents also noticed that some of their actions had raised awareness among other civilians. In December 2018, the #1od5milliona (#one of five million) protest started in Belgrade. This is a weekly anti-government protest and is still continued at the time of writing. Most members claimed that they thought that they had awoken the Serbian population and led them to manifest their anger.

Members of *Ne davimo Beograd* also walked along in these protests. However, they were not part of the organization because they didn't agree with all the parties who participated. Some of those parties

can be perceived as nationalist or right wing. The #1od5milliona protest is heterogeneous in parties that participate. Since a lot of people critique the government.

By linking itself to other movements, *Ne davimo Beograd* is thus able to reach local, national and international scales. These networks work in a complimentary way and do not act exclusively. In fact, they are intertwined.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Concerning the dynamic between the government and *Ne davimo Beograd*, the movement positioned itself through the *normal citizen frame*. With this frame, I mean that the members highlight that they are concerned citizens who rightfully stand up for their (public) spatial interest against corrupt politicians. With the aligning goals of public interest, citizen participation and equality, the movement tried to bring politics back to the people. This frame can be classified as a form of identity politics, instead of class politics for an equal society. Members could align themselves with the goals of the movement and, therefore, felt like it was part of their identity; to stand up for justice (Benford & Snow, 2000; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Tarrow, 2011).

The need for an integration of micro- and macro influences on the framing of movements has been answered with an analysis from a relational approach and, therefore, framing processes were approached, whilst integrating context (Staggenborg, 2002; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). It became clear that both micro- and macro processes influencing *Ne davimo Beograd* display themselves on multiple spatial scales, and that the movement's issues are hardly localized in the local atmosphere (Uitermark et al., 2012).

Firstly, it became clear that during the mobilization process, the movement mostly targeted local issues. By successfully positioning the Savamala incident as unjust, the movement was able to mobilize new activists and supporters (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Tarrow, 2011). However, during the process the movement transformed from a one-issue movement to a left-representing movement lobbying for change in Serbian society as a whole.

Despite this, the members were hesitant to be labelled 'left' or even as a political entity. They did recognize the need to institutionalize and even formed a national coalition with other movements to change the Serbian political discourse. Therefore, the movement can definitely be classified as part of the *new left* that challenges the *established left* (Štiks, 2015).

Secondly, during the *insider-outsider* establishment, respondents acknowledged the linkage between the project and the government. A clear boundary was drawn between concerned citizens (as a non-political entity) and the government (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). During this process, post-Yugoslavia played a central element whilst attributing negative connotations; by naming the power continuation of Vučić, corrupt practices, neoliberal policies and lastly a media power vacuum (Robnett, 2002). One can, therefore, conclude that a path-dependent influence of socialism is present. However, this research demonstrates that this influence should be approached in a nuanced way and therefore the concept of Post-Yugoslavia is adopted. In this way, the research contributes to the need for theory development from the former socialist states (Ferenčuhová & Gentile, 2016).

The movement demobilized the government through the normal citizen frame, therefore clearly stating what they are not (Gamson, 1997). The government's reaction consisted out of claims of linkages between *Ne davimo Beograd* and foreign powers. These aggregations did enhance the members' feelings of solidarity towards each other and their actions in the movement (Gerlach, 1971; McPherson et al., 1992). Strategical decisions were mostly formed by the contextual influences; to

overcome the monopoly on the dissemination of information, mostly protest actions and guerrilla marketing in public space were used (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). However, in doing so, it was difficult to reach people outside Belgrade.

Whilst referring to the *common meaning of experiences* with other movements, *Ne davimo Beograd* had connections on the local, national and international scale. This final point especially demonstrates that movements do not simply operate on the local scale: to pursue change in the society, a national coalition with other movements had been set up. In this way, they also reflect bottom up democratic values, through setting up a national movement instead playing a normative role from the capital. The international scale is inked to other European social movements and the organisation of an international conference (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Through this network, knowledge was exchanged but not always applicable due to contextual differences (Castells, 2004).

For further research, it would be interesting to extensively analyze the effect of these international networks over time. And in how far can these networks contribute to change on the local scale? Since the (inter)national coalition is made up out of several movements, in how far can local interests be advocated in the proper way? Also, it can be interesting to compare other *new left* urban social movements in the former Yugoslavian region. As Štiks (2015) mentioned, this is a new trend. Since one of the outcomes of this research is that post-socialism is nuanced towards post-Yugoslavia, it is interesting to see whether inside post-Yugoslavia one can find more nuance.

Even though one could question the actual influence the members had on the Belgrade Waterfront project, the members had a positive outlook on the future. With the current weekly anti-government protests in Belgrade, one can state that the *Ne davimo Beograd* movement had an influence on the awareness of Serbian citizens and relighted their spirits to get up the barriers again. Therefore, the importance of social movements can rightfully be pursued as entities that can negotiate the daily lives of citizens in their interaction with the state (Touraine, 2002).

All the above, this does not mean that the future of Serbia is set in stone. It has been demonstrated that civilians *do* have an influence on their social reality (Touraine, 2002). However, one has to realize, just like the respondents stated: change does not happen overnight and does not depend on one single protest but on a constant questioning of the authorities.

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