

OSNAŽIVANJE PARTICIPACIJE U KULTURI I ARHITEKTURI: AKTIVIRANJE JAVNIH RESURSA ZA I SA ZAJEDNICOM

Empowering Participation
in Culture and Architecture:
Activating Public Resources
for and with Community

Urednice / Edited by
dr Nina Mihaljinac
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Fakultet dramskih umetnosti, Institut za
pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Beograd

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute for
theatre, film, radio and television, Belgrade

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ePica*

Oснаживање participacije u kulturi i arhitekturi:
aktiviranje javnih resursa za i sa zajednicom

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BIOGRAFIJE AUTORA

PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC PRACTICES INITIATED FROM WITHIN COMMUNITIES LIVING IN THE MODERNIST PROJECTS OF COLLECTIVE AND MASS HOUSING

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PARTICIPATIVNE UMETNIČKE PRAKSE POKRENUTE OD STRANE ZAJEDNICA KOJE ŽIVE U MODERNISTIČKIM PROJEKTIMA KOLEKTIVNOG I MASOVNOG STANOVANJA

U radu se prikazuje međusobna povezanost tri kategorije: (1) lokalnih zajednica, (2) arhitektonskih/urbanih modernističkih stambenih celina izgrađenih u drugoj polovini 20. veka i (3) participativnih umetničkih praksi iniciranih u njima tokom 21. veka. U prvom delu se daje prikaz teorija participativne umetnosti (Sruti Bala, Claire Bishop, Suzi Gablik, Gisèle Gantois, Kaija Kaitavuori, Miwon Kwon, Anthony Schrag, Pelin Tan) i kritičkih osvrta na odnos umetnosti i stanovanja (Martha Rosler, Ana Vilenica, Zeena Price). U drugom delu su analizirani participativni umetnički projekti razvijeni sa zajednicama stanara arhitektonskih sklopova u Hrvatskoj i Francuskoj: projekat Čovjek je prostor: Vitić pleše udruženja Bacači sjenki i stanara, šire zajednice i predstavnika različitih struka u stambenom sklopu arhitekta Iva Vitića u Ulici Matka Laginje 7–9 u Zagrebu (1957–1962), te kustoski i umetnički projekti razvijeni i realizovani sa zajednicama stanara Le Corbusierovih stambenih jedinica (*unités d'habitation*) u Marseju i Firminiju. Potom su analizirane participativne umetničke prakse u oblastima urbanog modernističkog jugoslovenskog nasleđa, koje broje oko 40.000 stanovnika, konkretno, dugogodišnja inicijativa *Kulturno Novo naselje* u četvrti Novo naselje (1972–1990-te) u Novom Sadu, Srbija, i akcije koje Udruga za suvremenu umjetnost Kvart od 2006. realizuje sa komšijama iz urbanističkog sklopa Split 3 (1969–1980-te) u Splitu, Hrvatska. Ovim radom se ukazuje

da lokalne zajednice i participativne umetničke prakse igraju važnu ulogu u očuvanju modernističkog stambenog nasleđa, poboljšanju kvaliteta života u njemu, da čak mogu dovesti do njegovog zvaničnog prepoznavanja i zaštite kao kulturnog nasleđa, kao i da mogu voditi povezivanju sa drugim zajednicama koje dele slične probleme.

Ključne reči: modernistička arhitektura, participativna umetnost, savremena umetnost, stanogradnja, nasleđe

INTRODUCTION

Public collective and mass housing complexes that enabled sociality and communality of their inhabitants have been built since the 1950s for millions of workers as part of the post-war reconstruction of many countries. Over time, some of them have been recognized as heritage, such as La Cité des Etoiles in Givors, Lyon (arch. Jean Renaudie, 1974–1981), which was proclaimed the “Heritage of the 20th century” (Patrimoine du XX^e siècle) in 2003. However, many such complexes have been demolished. De Zwarte Madonna complex in The Hague, Netherlands (arch. Carel Weeber, 1985) was demolished in 2007; the Droixhe residential complex in Liege, Belgium (arch. Études en Groupe d’Architecture et d’Urbanisme – Charles Carlier, Hyacinthe Lhoest, Jules Mozin, 1951–1979) was demolished in 2009. In the United Kingdom, there are even more such examples and their demolition mostly took place after their ownership was transferred from public to private: the Heygate Estate in London (arch. Tim Tinker, 1974) was demolished in 2009, the Hulme Crescents in Manchester (arch. Hugh Wilsom and Lewis Womersley, 1972) in 1992, the Red Road Towers in Glasgow (Sam Bunton & Associates, 1964) which contained a high concentration of asbestos were demolished from 2010 to 2015.

To what extent has demolishing public mass housing become a cultural norm, shows a recent acquisition by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London: a three-story section of the Robin Hood Gardens (arch. Alison and Peter Smithson, 1968–72) that are being demolished in phases since 2017. The Museum exhibited the section as architectural heritage at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2018), used it to open public discussions on the topic of the future of housing and to initiate an open call for young participants from east London (16–24 years old) to “develop new skills and work towards a co-produced piece that will be displayed at V&A East Storehouse alongside the Robin Hood Gardens installation opening in 2025” (Selig, 2024). However, despite the efforts of the Museum to preserve the segment as architectural heritage, its action is “serving only to aestheticize the act of displacement” (Price, 2017: 1) because of “unwillingness to address working class spatial stigmatization and its symbolic and material erasure from urban space” that has direct consequences for the present debate on social housing (*ibidem*, 77).

Between being protected as cultural heritage and being demolished, many public collective and mass housing complexes exist in-between,

endangered by privatization of public areas and treasured as unofficial heritage by the wider neighborhood and their tenants, who consider it their home and is often part of family history and identity. Such changes in socio-urban landscapes are critically approached by many artists. For example, in 2015, the British artist Richard DeDomenici initiated a participatory performance *The Death of Social Housing* in Belgrade, Serbia. The artist organized a silent funeral cortege and invited the passers-by to mourn the disappearance of social housing. The cortege followed a route from the Belgrade Youth Center to the Belgrade Waterfront development, where, at the end, the participants could assemble their own papercraft models of Balfon Tower (arch. Erno Goldfinger), whose social residents had been relocated previously. At the end of the route, the participants in Belgrade were invited to give eulogies to their models and set them into water “and possibly set them on fire in a nod to Nordic sea burial” (DeDomenici, 2016). Even though the performance was primarily oriented towards the disappearance of social housing, the choice of its location also made it critically oriented towards the extensive privatization of public spaces and the public land.

In this paper, we are interested in such critical, artistic, participatory events, in particular, in the relation of three interconnected categories: community, architectural/urban modernist housing built in the second half of the 20th century and participatory artistic practices initiated within them in the 21st century. Our hypothesis is that local communities and participatory artistic practices play an important role in preserving the modernist housing projects, improving the quality of living within them and may even lead to their official recognition and protection as cultural heritage. We put special focus on artistic participatory practices that have been developed together with the local communities living at the sites, and present several such examples realized within collective and mass housing complexes of different size.

COMMUNITIES AND PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC PRACTICES – THEORETIC FRAMEWORK

The term *community* is used for a group of people who construct their common/communal identity (or whose identity is constructed by third parties) within a complex discursive field. As such, the term can refer to people who globally share similar efforts, such as “the women around the world who organize their buildings and their blocks and their neighborhoods to secure decent living conditions for everyone and to maintain a sense of place” (Rosler, 1991: 43), to whom Martha Rosler dedicated her book *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*.¹ However, the term is most commonly used to refer to a group of people who are in

1 The book summarizes the contents and conclusions of the series of exhibitions and panel discussions that Rosler curated at the Dia Art Foundation in the period February 11 – June 17, 1989.

regular contact, besides sharing a sense of common identity. Community “starts from relations, not from subjects, and builds on the notions of ‘being-in-common’ or ‘being-with’” (Kaitavuori, 2018: 158). Following Jean-Luc Nancy’s text “The Inoperative Community” (1986), Kaija Kaitavuori notes that community “is not a product that can be built or ordered into being, or used as a tool for other objectives” (*ibidem*).

When it comes to relation between communities and architectural heritage, especially in cases of restoration and development projects, Gisèle Gantois points out that it is very dangerous to use communities, to do things *for* them instead of *with* them, and to overlook that communities are fluid concepts. She emphasizes that there is also a peril of using terms ‘participant’, ‘local actor’ and ‘user’ “as if they are fixed entities with a fixed description. Users can be individuals as well as public institutions; the participants might be well-known stakeholders, such as clients, administrators, action committees, engineers and neighbors” (Gantois, 2022: 66). Because of that, “a single, unique meaning of place cannot be defined, as it may vary considerably among the members of a community” and narratives about a heritage place should “involve different voices” (Gantois, 2022: 66).

Involving different voices concerning heritage-related projects or any topic relevant to the community, can be achieved with the help of participatory artistic practices. Such practices often place the community in focus, while the aesthetics of the produced art are less important. They are based on dialogue, collaboration and reflexivity, aiming to build more respectful, reciprocal and relational collaboration with(in) communities. To achieve this, participatory art becomes socially responsive and takes many forms, including dialogic art, socially engaged art, community-based art, research-based art, collaborative art and/or empathic listening through which “[i]nteraction becomes the medium of expression, an empathic way of seeing through another’s eyes” (Gablik, 1995: 82). Participatory art is “as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself,” it needs to be continually “performed and tested in every specific context” (Bishop, 2012: 284). It is impossible to create a definitive description of what it should be like, because participation itself cannot be defined once and for all. Such an attempt would deny its democratic, polyphonic and pluralistic character, and would not “do justice to all the forms the phenomenon has taken through modernity into the present” (Stierli and Mechtild, 2016: 5).

Participatory artistic practices are long processes of creating situations, as well as creating “an atmosphere in which people want to be active” (Nešić et al., 2019: 223). They “are based on the production of social situations and relations in which given positions of power are changed, deconstructed or radically decentered” (Cigić, Ristić, Đorđević, 2025 [this volume]: 192). As part of an overall ongoing knowledge production, they are involved in the production of unconventional knowledge, which leads to “alliances that choose to think and discuss together rather than inherit the imposition of a normative structure” (Tan, 2016: 17). As such, they have the capacity to transform society, which the artist Joseph Beuys started promoting in 1970, hoping “to see a more just society evolve in line with

the terms of his 'theory of social sculpture'" (Thierolf, 2014). Such practices create interdisciplinary communities that "are not only capable of critically approaching complex issues from new angles, but they also have a good standpoint for approaching them internationally over longer periods of time, thus having good chances of contributing to their solution" (Jankov, 2021: 209).

However, participatory artistic practices can also be restrictive, especially when "we are only able to participate in ways that are already deemed acceptable or proper, then, sooner or later, our participation becomes an instrument of our own subjugation and pacification rather than a means of freedom" (Bala, 2018: 7-8). In such cases, they can be misused in pseudo-participatory processes that "imitate democracy in decision-making [...] and put different vulnerable groups in a competitive relationship in the process of achieving their rights" (Mihaljinac, 2024: 124). In housing complexes, there is also a peril of forced participation when artists are allowed to rent vacant property for lower-than-market prices, but they are required to create participatory artistic works for the community (Vilenica, 2018).

Depending on the level of involvement of a community in initiating and shaping participatory artistic practices, artist and researcher Anthony Schrag recognizes several models: (1) *Community Arts Movement*, within which an artist most often uses community-constructed objects to empower "communities perceived as being in a disadvantaged condition (poverty, substance abuse, etc.)"; (2) *Socially Engaged Practice*, which is "concerned with 'social betterment' of a community" and "committed to social change via consciousness-raising activities where the 'art' becomes a mechanism to reflect on political and social processes"; (3) *Relational Aesthetics*, which engages with the public within institutional frameworks (galleries, museums, biennials); (4) *Activist Art* that is mostly "direct intervention into power structures via events, creative protests, posters, graffiti, publications, etc."; (5) *Dialogic Art*, conceptualized by Grant Kester, "is in service of dialogue and discussion on topics that are important to their lives, including community politics"; (6) *Critical Approaches*, that "promotes tensions and discomfort rather than seeking to ameliorate, educate, or declare political intentions" (Schrag, 2023: 114-115).

Apart from that, art historian Miwon Kwon uses the term *community-based site specificity* to refer to practices in which a community is "simultaneously a viewer/spectator, audience, public, and referential subject" (2002: 95). Art created in such context is issue-specific and community-specific, activist and communitarian, directly intersecting with social issues, it "encourages community coalition-building in pursuit of social justice and attempts to garner greater institutional empowerment for artists to act as social agents" (Kwon, 2002: 105). However, neither Schrag nor Kwon go deeper into the topic of whether an artist belongs to a community, that is, whether the participatory artistic approach was initiated from within or it came externally. As we will see, such difference can influence the duration of participatory practices and willingness of a

community to take part in activities and to continue to work together on problems that are common to them. As such, it can lead to results that go beyond participatory artworks.

PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The first energy-efficient renovation of modernist housing complex in Croatia is the result of over a decade long participatory project of a community. Designed by architect Ivo Vitić and built between 1957 and 1962, the housing complex in 7–9 Matko Laginja street in Zagreb is specific for its composition of two horizontal blocks and one vertical, as well as by the combination of colors and brise-soleils on the façade. They became very damaged over time, to the extent of becoming life threatening if pieces would fall down. The complex “functioned as ‘spatial evidence,’ as an artifact whose form reflects narratives about the weakening of the ideology in which it was created, and the historical layers that followed later” (Žugić, 2017: 162). In 2003, when the artists’ association Shadow Casters (Bacači sjenki) started using one of the flats within the building as its office, it became evident that it would be impossible for them to develop an artistic project that would combine performing arts and architecture, if the building would remain in such devastated condition. That is how they initiated in 2004 the project *Vitić Dances*, an international, interdisciplinary *site-specific* community project (human-urban network).

Starting with organized meetings between the tenants and invited specialists in the flat they were renting, Shadow Casters continued building a network among the tenants, architects, artists, writers, composers, by organizing cultural events, lectures, workshops and open-desk discussions. They also invited other professional associations, members of the wider neighborhood, non-profit organizations, and representatives of municipal and republic institutions. Soon, the cultural and historical importance of the complex became evident among all the participants – it was an irreplaceable part of many fond memories of living in Zagreb. The rediscovered cultural capital of the complex and social network created within/around it, resulted in its wider recognition as material and immaterial heritage, which led to its protection as a cultural monument in 2005, and later to its sustainable renewal and maintenance. All the flat owners agreed to start the process of energy-efficient renovation, which was partly funded by their self-contribution to maintenance of the buildings, but largely through the European Fund for Sustainable Development and the monument annuity in Zagreb. By 2018, the complex was completely renovated.

The whole project was community-specific and issue-specific, leading to changes that were beneficial to all members of the community. As the reconstruction raised the market value of the flats, some owners sold theirs, which they were unable to do when the building was in a devastated state. After the experience in Zagreb, for the past eight years, Shadow Casters have been working with Filip Jovanovski and the Akto Festival of

Contemporary Art in Skopje on the renovation of Željezničarski blok, a housing complex that contains a cinema hall. The process proved to be far more complicated than expected, because the legal regulations are different in North Macedonia from those in the European Union, so the process also included attempts to change the legislative framework for the protection and renovation of modernist housing heritage (Bakal, 2024).

Vitić Dances is an example of a long-term participatory project that was sustainable and gave concrete results partly because the initiating artists lived with the community for several years. Working with a community of tenants for a shorter time can also result in participatory artistic works and reanimate a building, giving it additional cultural value. We find such examples in relation to Le Corbusier's housing units. Conceptualized in 1945 as La Cité Radieuse, a new housing typology that would contain 23 housing units in Marseille, Unité d'habitation is the only such building realized in Marseille, finished in 1952. Le Corbusier later built almost identical buildings in Nantes-Rezé (1955), Berlin (1957), Briey (1963) and Firminy-Vert (1965), while the first one in Marseille was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2017.

In the Unité in Marseille, on February 25, 2005, artist Domènec realized a situationist intervention, *Unité Mobile (Roads are also places)* by placing an interactive sculpture that anyone in the building could navigate. The sculpture was a combination of a remote-controlled truck toy and a scale model of the Unité, which Domènec placed instead of the trailer. Contemporary artists have been using "the semantic and documentary aspects of architectural scale models" in their works to economically, technologically and politically refer to social issues, or to "present reality in a wider sense" (Jankov, 2018: 27) and Domènec's intervention can be viewed in this sense. It took place in the common spaces of the Unité (corridors, halls, rooftop), showing that this Le Corbusier's typology gave "a large place to 'extensions of the home,' to common services and to spaces of sociability, carried as a manifesto built on the community and social utopia" (Maire, 2014: 71). The interactivity and mobility of the sculpture illustrated that such program remains the same, regardless of the location and time, and that in the 21st century, perhaps more than ever, people are in need of quality, affordable housing.

A participatory work that included both the tenants of the Unité in Marseille and Berlin was carried out in 2012 and 2013 by composer Bill Dietz (Ensemble Zwischentöne) and stage designer and director Janina Janke (Oper Dynamo West), in association with CIC – Cultur in the Corbusierhaus, the owners' advisory board of the Corbusierhaus Berlin and the Association des Habitants de la Cité radieuse Marseille. After extensive recordings of sounds in the buildings and interviews with tenants, Dietz compositionally edited the materials following Le Corbusier's Modulor size system. The result was an artwork that presented the audio portrait of the buildings as living organisms, in which the visitors and the tenants took part through guided walks and by using numerous speakers, stereo systems and listening devices. The resulting ephemeral work, entitled

Das Wort haben die Benützer / La parole est aux usagers (The users have the word), performed architecture following Le Corbusier's concept of the "promenade architecturale," while its dramaturgy was carried out by the places and spaces themselves (Rebstock, 2017: 553).

A larger, curatorial project, *Unité* (1/6–30/9/1993) was realized in Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* in Firminy, which was built in 1967 as part of the larger composition that includes a stadium, a church and a youth center. It is monument to the start of the green development of the city heavily polluted by the mining industry. However, in the early 1980s, the building was half empty which is why the then major attempted to demolish it, but the association of tenants managed to save it. One of its wings, nevertheless, remained empty for over ten years. Within this context, curator Yves Aupetitallot initiated a project that brought 40 artists, architects and designers to live for four months in the apartments in the closed wing and produce works *in situ*. They were later shown in the final exhibition, which was for him "a juxtaposition of different models of an exhibition typology" (Aupetitallot, 2014: 103). For Claire Bishop, the newly created relationship between the building, tenants, artists and their works for those four months was "more important than a final exhibition of 'works'" (2012: 199).

The whole project took four years of preparation and since November 1992, three issues of "Journal Unité" were circulated, containing essays by Rem Koolhaas, Anthony Vidler, Beatriz Colomina and others. When the residencies started, several artists developed works with the tenants. Martha Rosler created a video, *How Do We Know What Home Looks Like?* from interviews with the tenants about the closed wing. She documented their reflections about living in the building and struggling to save it from demolition, giving voice to both the president of the association of tenants and the women and children living in the building. Collective Premiata Ditta also interviewed tenants through questionnaires and, based on the answers, made visual *Relationship Maps* that present the Unité as a living organism. Clegg & Guttmann created *Firminy Music Library* after the tenants gave them their favorite music compilations and exhibited them in a cabinet-shaped scale model of the building, placing every tape in a slot that corresponded to the position of the apartment where its music donor lived.

Several artists created works (activities) that were a direct response to the needs of the tenants. Heimo Zobernig converted one apartment into a café, since the building lacked such an active common space where people could gather and relax. Christian Philipp Müller hired experts to record the sound levels in the building, since due to poor sound insulation the tenants could hear their neighbors during their daily activities. Regina Möller created interactive workshops for children, titled *Doll's House* (*Maison de poupée*), based on Le Corbusier's architecture of children's rooms in the Unité in Firminy. The workshop allowed children to play with architectural elements and change their rooms, which Möller correlated to Le Corbusier's concept of an apartment as a playful pedagogical space.

The majority of works, however, focused on the building itself at the given time – its characteristics, symbolism, relation to nature, relation to

the ideology of housing, relation to the history of the city. Because of this, the project was criticized for not creating a community between the invited artists and tenants, for the fact that the invited artists and architects were spatially separated by being placed in the uninhabited wing, and for the fact that such decision made it difficult for them to interact with residents (De Lena, 2019: 15–17). Hal Foster even wondered if modernist architecture becomes exoticized by being treated by curators like Aupetitallot as, as he puts it, an ethnographic site (1996: 196). However, in our opinion, Aupetitallot's and the artists' decision not to force the participation of the tenants was actually the best approach in such situation, when the artists are living for a short time with the community. Their project was a specific demonstration of how the building known to the tenants was seen by others, but also a demonstration of co-living and co-working when some flats in the empty wing were transformed into artists' studios.

PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND URBANISTIC HERITAGE

In the case of single buildings or compositions of buildings, it is easier to coordinate participatory events between the artists and the tenants than in cases of larger urban structures. However, there are examples of good practices in those cases, too, when participatory art can contribute to the strengthening of community and the improvement of communal living. They include many artistic community-based works in modernist mass housing areas that represent “a good but often overlooked practice in urban planning today – the practice of planning green areas around the buildings,” which are the most threatened or have already been destroyed (Jankov, 2019: 50). For that reason, there have been actions like the half-day festival “See you at the quay?” (*Vidimo se na keju?*), conceptualized and carried out by the local activist group *Za naš Kej* in New Belgrade on September 11, 2021. It “involved several local primary school groups, activists and artists who worked together in five educational workshops on the same topic: the recognition of local environmental problems and ways to solve them” (Iguman, Mijatović, Nikolić, 2022: 135). On this occasion, we are focusing on two examples of long-term participatory artistic practices taking place within urban housing areas built in Novi Sad, Serbia and Split, Croatia. Both areas have communities of approximately the same size.

The most populous part of Novi Sad, Serbia, is the urban area *Novo naselje*, where around 40,000 citizens live, organized in two administrative local communities (*mesne zajednice*). The urban plan for *Novo naselje* was finished in 1972 and its realization started in 1974, while the largest part was finished during the 1980s and 1990s. Besides the urban planner Rodoljub Radosavljević, several architects were included in designing the housing blocks (Slavko Županski, Bora Radosinović, Radoje Cvetkov, Leonid Nešić, Ruža Jovanović, Dušan Krstić, Slobodan Kuzmanović, Milorad Milidragović, Mile Popov) and public facilities (Albert Josipović – school, Slavko Odavić – health care facility, Miodrag Lozić – Gerontology center and retirement home). Despite the thoughtful urban structure and its size,

Novo naselje doesn't have a cultural center, which was recognized as one of its main shortcomings. Apart from that, as in all the other urban areas built during the socialist Yugoslav period, there is evidence of public areas being privatized.

Gathered around the initiative to advocate for the establishment of the cultural center in Novo naselje, a group of local independent cultural workers formed association New Cultural Neighborhood (Novo kulturno naselje) in 2014. From the start, they approached the idea of the cultural center as the participatory project developed with the community. Starting with in-depth interviews with the closer and a bit further neighbors in the area, the members of the association started drafting the program having in mind that "regardless of the outcome of the initiative, they remain and continue to co-exist with the citizens, with each other complementing and upgrading" (Nešić et al., 2019: 220-221). From the interviews, they understood that the community wanted programs wider than those usually offered by cultural centers in the country, including "skill and language courses, public space actions, art and educational workshops for children, young people, parents and pensioners, YouTube channel with video articles recorded about (and in) the neighborhood, history, sights, urban myths and legends as inseparable parts of modern folklore" (Nešić et al., 2019: 221).

Based on the responses given by the community, the New Cultural Neighborhood has been organizing an outdoor festival "Welcome to the Neighborhood" (Dobro došli na Naselje), but also a number of smaller events throughout the year, such as interactive walks, quizzes, the action *Report an artist neighbor* (Prijavi komšiju umetnika) and the *Lexicon of New Neighborhood Creators*. Over time, they started connecting different stakeholders such as the public Urban planning office, the first pizzeria "Alo" that figured largely in the memories of the local community, individuals who had or have been living locally, such as television directors, creative writers, visual artists, urban planners, professors in architecture, as well as regional and European cultural workers, artists, architects and other professionals. The New Cultural Neighborhood with its programs also participated in European Youth Capital – Novi Sad 2019 and European Capital of Culture – Novi Sad 2021, and in the preparation of the Local Action Plan for Youth of the City of Novi Sad for the period 2019–2022 in the field of "Culture and leisure time of the youth" (Nešić et al., 2019: 221-222). Apart from that, they joined several ecological initiatives in Novi Sad and connected with other local organizations.

The initiative of the New Cultural Neighborhood resulted in the architectural project for the cultural center that has been built since 2023. More than that, their presence and programs over the last ten years have connected many different cultural workers and created an atmosphere in which they can cooperate and participate in decision making processes at all levels of social life. Their participatory actions, that combined cultural production, social entrepreneurship, civic activism and alternative education, resulted in the urban development in which the "culture is the main driving force of social change and not entertainment and the last item on

the city budget list" (Kuč, 2017: 11). Unlike the standard processes of urban planning, their approach "requires a change in civic consciousness and perception of what it means to be communal" (*ibidem*).

Similarly, a group of local artists in Split, Croatia, has been creating an environment for the participation of the community in Split III and raising awareness about what it means to be communal. Split III is a specific urban-architectural complex for 40,000 inhabitants, for which the urban plan was created in 1969 by Vladimir Braco Mušić, Marjan Bežan and Nives Starc. It is characterized by pedestrian zones, streets and residential buildings suitable for the Mediterranean climate and cultural environment, designed by architects Ivo Radić, Frano Gotovac, Dinko Kovačić, Mihajlo Zorić, Danko Lendić, Ante Svarčić, Marjan Cerar and Tonko Mladina. The construction, coordinated by architect Josip Vojnović, lasted until 1977. Over time, there have been interpolations on green areas and areas planned for sports and recreational facilities, which created many problems, including blocked access to emergency vehicles.

In such an environment, the artists' association Kvart was established in 2006 as "a response to the need for a pure critical position and the problems faced by the local community, which arose as a lack of public space" (Čukušić, 2019: 108). Their exhibitions and actions, directed towards connecting the inhabitants of Split III and returning the trust in the local micro-community, took place in many non-gallery spaces such as garages, beaches, a stream, streets, playgrounds, green areas, billboards, concrete barriers and walls, building of the Uzor factory, and premises of the headquarters of local community. Most of them were participatory in character and realized in cooperation with neighbors, especially those that included performative actions against changes of the general urban plan. Inhabitants of Split III also took part in exhibitions by Kvart, as when, for example, the members of the association went through cafes and playgrounds in 2012 and asked people to draw a crocodile and later exhibited all drawings at the *World Crocodile Exhibition*. In 2014, after a unique campaign that they started because they wondered if the neighbors would trust the artists to represent them, the association won the elections and Saša Varmuža, a member of Kvart, was named the representative/president of the administrative local community. For this reason, the activities of the association Kvart are "a specific form of struggle to preserve the quality of living in Split 3" (Jankov, 2024: 179).

Already in 2012, the association stated that they are looking for new models of action, recognizing politics and agriculture as potential future directions (Čukušić, 2019: 43). Even though they continued with artistic activities, their most successful participatory activities since were oriented towards planting and growing vegetables in large urban planters, which are usually used by city services for urban greenery to plant flowers. At first, Kvart planted potatoes in 2019, leaving them to the neighbors to take care of them. The action was very successful and many people took part, especially children. After potatoes, they planted *Auris elephantis*, autochthonous Dalmatian variety of collard greens. As with potatoes, the

neighbors were taking water from the nearby cafe to water the plants, organizing themselves by their availability. The idea was to use the greens around Christmas for a feast for the neighbors to celebrate common and communal spirit.

CONCLUSION

In all analyzed cases, the local communities have been constructing their own common identity by themselves, in relation to their urban surroundings and in some cases with the help of participatory artistic practices. Artists who collaborated were either part of those communities, or they were sensitive to their needs. In all cases, the condition, shape, symbolism, cultural importance and other characteristics of housing complexes directly shaped the activities of communities within them, including the artistic activities, while they reciprocally preserved the material and immaterial heritage from degradation, privatization and other perils. The diverse participatory artistic practices often highlighted all the areas of sociability within such heritage, taking place in a number of common spaces – green areas, entrance halls, rooftops, garages, streets, ground-level windows, common premises, etc.

The selected examples show that participatory projects developed with the communities over a shorter period of time, can contribute to the cultural values of architectural heritage, especially if it is not officially protected and/or if it is devastated. When it comes to the participatory artistic practices initiated from within, they usually last longer (even for over a decade) and are not dependent on a single project-based funding. Over time, many anticipated and unanticipated problems related to the quality of living arise, and communities interconnected in that way are prepared to address them and deal with them. They are also open to connect to other communities with similar problems, network, exchange knowledge and apply for resources. In both cases, it is of crucial importance that the tenants and artists fully cooperate because any activities, as well as inactivity, directly influence the quality of living in modernist housing projects.

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