



RESEARCH PLAN

AN INVESTIGATION IN THE RELATION
BETWEEN *NOSTALGIA*, *ANOMIE* AND
THE BELGRADE *BLOKOVI*

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MSC3/MSC4 GRADUATION STUDIO: POSITIONS IN PRACTICE//

CHAIR OF METHODS OF ANALYSIS & IMAGINATION//

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// BLOCK 23,
COLONNADE VIEW

Figure 1. Block 23, Colonnade View. Photograph by author, 2021.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basis of the present research proposal has been somewhat “in the making” long before the start of the studio. It goes beyond my initial awe-inspiring encounter of Belgrade’s modernist heritage this summer and well into my own and very early fascination with the architectures produced within the former European Socialist States. Perhaps it also lies well within my interest in the mass housing projects developed by State Socialist regimes. And then it might also stem from the environment of my own family, where communism remains a contentious subject and where any sigh for the apparent stability of that age is met with grunts, sighs and requests to change the subject swiftly. Much like Ishiguro’s Ono in “An Artist of the Floating World”, I have unassumingly grown to think that any relatives raising such subjects suffered from either fallibility or denialism.

The project that I hope the present research will set the basis for is, at its core, trying to address two distinct personal concerns: on the one hand, challenge the Western-centric context and system that I have so far been educated in, and on the other hand, question any personal biases related to State Socialism and the (Post)Transitional States. At the same time, the present research proposal has been directed to a visible extent by the group

analysis concerning Belgrade’s Old Sava Bridge. This research has brought forward several themes that I hope to be tackling over the next semester: the relationship between state politics and built form, the embodied memory in architecture and the continuity resulting from the previous two. Notwithstanding, these issues can be incorporated within a larger field of architectural concerns examining integration methodologies and the prevention of social exclusion. Therefore, in tackling these issues in Belgrade (with potential implications for the broader Serbian context), the proposed research aims to understand how the architecture of New Belgrade *blokovi* harnesses *nostalgia* for the elderly population suffering from *anomie*?



2. CONCEPTS



// BLOCK 23, SCHOOL VIEW

Figure 2. Block 23, School View.
Photograph by author, 2021.

The following section will expand individually on the three main concepts of the proposed research: the New Belgrade *blokovi*, the *anomie* of the elderly population within the Serbian society, and the *nostalgia* harnessed by the Yugoslav architectures still present and prominent in New Belgrade.



// BLOCK 23,
INTERNAL
COURTYARD VIEW

Figure 3. Block 23, Internal
Courtyard View. Photograph by
author, 2021.

2.1 BLOKOVI

The term *blokovi* defines colloquially the 72 *superblocks* that form the grid of New Belgrade. The design development of the *blokovi* has changed with the political and identity perceptions of the socialist New Belgrade and is inherent to the new city's character. As such, while the first Socialist master-plan for Belgrade (issued in 1950) was primarily concentrated on the provision of housing, New Belgrade would be envisaged as administrative, a leading regional and Yugoslav centre (Waley, 2011). However, given the austerity caused by the Tito-Stalin split and the introduction of self-management in 1950, New Belgrade became a subsidiary of the old city. In 1956 Aleksandar Đorđević, who would lead the Belgrade Town Planning Office starting with 1958, argued that the Tito-Stalin split would be reflected ideologically and architecturally in the added value attached to housing provision (Le Normand, 2014, p.106). This move would adjoin political symbolism to the construction programme ongoing in New Belgrade. Thus, the *blokovi* became a medium of demonstrating the *Brotherhood and Unity* ideology, as well as a laboratory of architectural experimentation. This view would further be cemented by the concurrent exhibition "Dwelling for our Conditions" organized in Ljubljana, which established collective housing as the political and architectural focus of the Yugoslav *Humane Socialism* (Le Normand, 2014, p.89). This shift in priorities, combined with the liberalization of the housing production market with the introduction of market socialism

in 1965, allowed for a wide diversity of architectural approaches in designing the New Belgrade *blokovi* (Klarin, 2016). At the same time, the Town Planning Office was organizing Yugoslavia-wide design competitions for the development of the *blokovi*, further emphasizing the ideology of Brotherhood and Unity (Kulić, 2016). Practically the variety of stylistic approaches became a testament to the Yugoslav self-governing socialism. At the same time, according to Brigitte de Normand, the Town Planning Office and Đorđević, having earned the favour of the political apparatus, were firmly in control of the *blokovi* design, ensuring vast control over the ideological imagery of the developments (Le Normand, 2014, p.120-126). In this manner, the development of New Belgrade took off starting in 1960, and by 1971, 92.200 inhabitants lived in the new *blokovi* (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 1971).

Therefore, based on Lefebvre's argument that space is a political tool and can generate the environment necessary for a capitalist class gap (Lefebvre, 1975), New Belgrade can be understood as a representation of the success of the Socialist Regime. Concurrently, the left bank of the Sava became the breeding ground for the Socialist Yugoslav Ideology by providing an ideologically clean slate (Lefebvre, 1975). With the shift in policy and precedence, this clean ideological slate allowed the development of the *blokovi* as the prime socialist symbol of Belgrade.

2.2 ANOMIE

Anomie is defined as the sustained “social instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). In the context of Post-transition Serbian society, this term becomes crucial in characterizing socially vulnerable population categories. Among these categories, and in line with post-transition phenomena evident across the entire former Eastern Block, the elderly appear as one of the most pervasively affected groups. A Red Cross report issued in 2018 signalled that 64.4% of Serbian elderly do not live in the presence of younger residents (Babović et. al, p.48), take little part in social activities such as sports, humanitarian, political, religious or artistic organizations (Fig.4) (Babović et. al, p.49), and are generally reluctant to participate in public gatherings (Fig.5) (Babović et. al, p.51). At the same time, the political transition has generated several stressors for the elderly population: a generally lower long-term quality of life due to exposure to politically and socially traumatic events, decreased integration in the neo-liberal workforce, and decreased income and health security (Đorđević et. al, 2019). It is also noteworthy that the current public estimations assume that more than a third of the New Belgrade population is above the age of 50 (City Population, 2020).

At the same time, throughout the 20th Century, contemporary Serbia has been afflicted by a series of rapidly succeeding events of traumatic impact on the general population. The break-up of Yugoslavia, the Milošević regime, and the NATO bombings

mostly succeeded rapidly, which allowed for little internalization time and led to post-event public discourse primarily driven by state directions. This typology of public discourse has concentrated primarily on what Derrida refers to as the justice of the living present (2006, p.XIX). As such, affordances for the spectres of the erasure of several modalized presents (and intrinsically modalized futures) have only been made in as much as it suited contemporary political discourse and did not destabilize the current political divide. Through the politicization of the remembrance discourse, the urban tissue of Belgrade sustains evidence of physical and, most importantly, political violence. As such, the living cannot overcome trauma due to the cyclical re-encountering of a spectral past that has not been appropriately internalized and addressed and is only starting to offer the necessary distance for assessment. Therefore, in line with Venturi Scott-Brown's finding in “Learning from Las Vegas”, the architecture of New Belgrade defines the new city as a communication system, and it uses this symbolic charge as a method of spatial domination (1972). In the political transition process, this symbolic charge remained as a spectre of the apparent past security that was lost. What is more, the re-encountering of this symbolism daily keeps alive the loss of a promised future.

INVOLVEMENT WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN NOT INVOLVED	PERCENTAGE OF MEN NOT INVOLVED
CHURCHES OR SOME OTHER RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS	92.7%	96.3%
SPORTS OR RECREATIONAL ORGANISATIONS	99.7%	95.9%
ARTISTIC OR EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	98.6%	97.4%
HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ORGANIZATIONS	99.7%	98.9%
PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	99.3%	95.5%
POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS	96.9%	98.1%

Figure 4. Involvement in Civil Society. Figure by author, 2021, based on Babović, M., Veličković, K., Stefanović, S., Todorović, N., Vračevi, M. (2018). *Socijalna uključenost starijih osoba (55+) u Srbiji* [Social inclusion of the elderly (55+) in Serbia]. Serbia Red Cross. p. 49.

INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC GATHERINGS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN NOT INVOLVED	PERCENTAGE OF MEN NOT INVOLVED
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS	99.3%	99.3%
POLITICAL PARTIES	97.5%	94.9%
UNIONS	99.6%	98.9%
SOME OTHER ORGANIZERS	98.3%	99.4%

Figure 5. Involvement in Public Gatherings. Figure by author, 2021, based on Babović, M., Veličković, K., Stefanović, S., Todorović, N., Vračevi, M. (2018). *Socijalna uključenost starijih osoba (55+) u Srbiji* [Social inclusion of the elderly (55+) in Serbia]. Serbia Red Cross. p. 51.

// VIEW FROM
GENEX TOWER OF
BLOCKS 1 AND 3

Figure 6. View from Genex Tower of
Blocks 1 and 3. Photograph by
author, 2021.



2.3 NOSTALGIA

In determining a relational methodology for communities that have been marginalized through the transition process, the proposed research aims to utilize the concept of *nostalgia* as a catalyst for social inclusion. The word *nostalgia* itself first entered medicinal use in the 17th Century to describe a seafarers' affliction and was etymologically related to the Greek terms *nostos* (meaning *to return home*) and *algos* (meaning *pain*) (Willson, 2014, p.21). Due to paradigmatic shifts in the late 19th Century, nostalgia became integrated into the social sciences field of study. At this point, nostalgia was defined as "a yearning for a different time" (Boym, 2007). Similar on a conceptual level, *yugonostalgia* represents the remembrance of collective experiences strongly tied to the social system of Yugoslavia (Young, 2010). At the same time, the term *yugonostalgia* first appeared in the context of post-separation politics in the former Yugoslavia and swiftly became a politically charged pejorative label. Despite this, as Zala Volčič notes, *yugonostalgia* is "less a longing for a real past than a kind of longing for the desires and fantasies that were once possible" (2007, p. 27). Therefore, despite the apparent overlap in interest, given the unnecessary political charge of the term *yugonostalgia*, the present research will only utilize the term *nostalgia* from this point onwards.

Starting from the definitions above, Svetlana Boym identifies two types of *nostalgia*: a *restorative* type (and therefore more leaning on the *nostos*) representing an attempt to revive

the past and the way it was before; and a *reflective* type (referencing the *algos*) that implies dwelling on feelings of remembrance (2001). At the same time, Mitja Velikonja categorizes the phenomenon as *feeling or idea nostalgia* (a *nostalgia* that is present in individuals and their collective and individual memories of the past) or *materialized nostalgia* (present through material objects such as monuments, buildings, and souvenirs) (2008, p.30). As will be discussed in Section 3, while the design resulting from the present research aims to integrate both the *nostos* and the *algos* as a response to societal *anomie*, the research will primarily concentrate on the connection between the architectures of Belgrade *blokovi* and the contemporary reflective process of *nostalgia*. We, therefore, understand that the architectures identified will be read as a materialization of *nostalgia*. Much along with Janelle L. Wilson's suggestion, "the act of recollection and reminiscence, and the experience of nostalgia can ground a person." (2014). Indeed, employing *nostalgia* can help bridge the social distance to the individuals who experienced disenfranchisement with the political changes in Serbia (and inherently Belgrade) in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

3. METHODS

The research takes a primarily correlational approach in analysing case studies in their historical and socio-political context and aligns the findings with built form development. Therefore, the analysis takes a similar form to the group research conducted towards producing the P1 analysis of the Old Sava Bridge. As such, the research is positioned at the epistemological confluence of *material culture* (understood primarily as relating to *form* and *detailing*), *praxeology* (socio-spatial patterns of *use* and *interaction*) and *semiology* (the *symbolism* associated with architectures by both users and designers). Therefore, the episteme listed above will serve to analyse the interrelation of *nostalgia* and *anomie* in the context of Belgrade *blokovi* (Fig.7).

As developed in the previous sections' literature review, the *blokovi* have been proven to be a prime ideological element of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia, being widely conflated with a vision of bettered living conditions and societal development (Section 2.1). At the same time, the violent process of political transition has pushed the elderly population towards social exclusion (Section 2.2). Post-transitional studies have widely documented the spread of *nostalgia* among the contemporary population (Maksimović, 2016; Bosković, 2013). Given the strong political imagery associated with the development of *blokovi* and their pervasive prominence with Belgrade's urban fabric, it becomes evident that these structures carry the spectre of the socialist society and can harness a *nostalgic* feeling in socially excluded brackets of the population (Section 2.3).

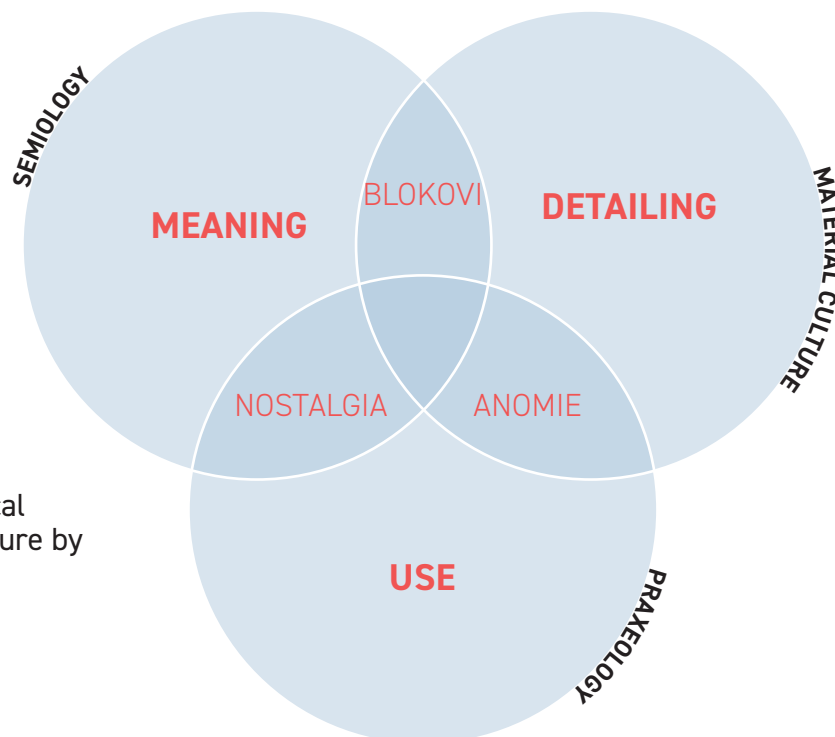


Figure 7.
Epistemological
Approach. Figure by
author, 2021,

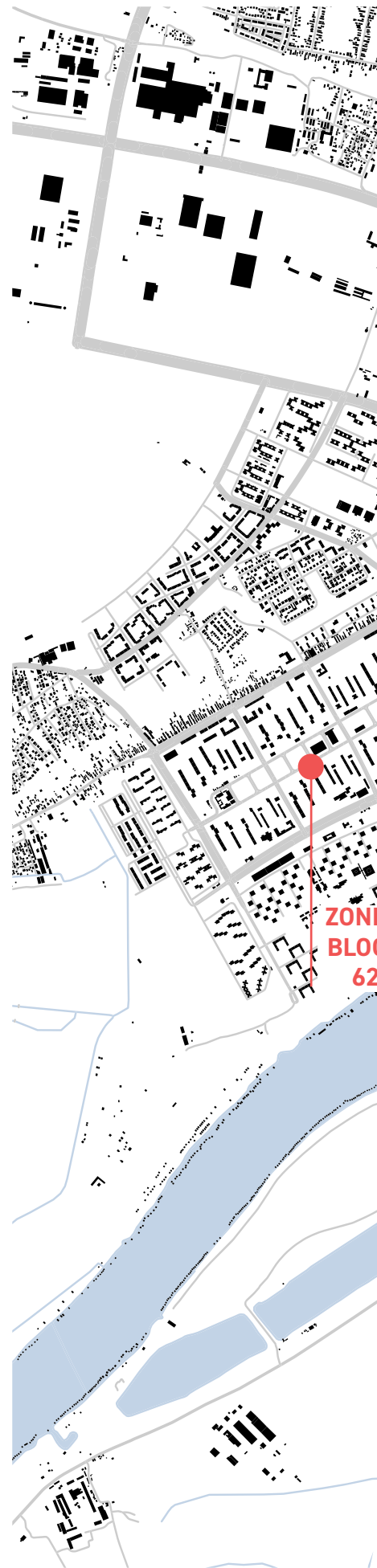


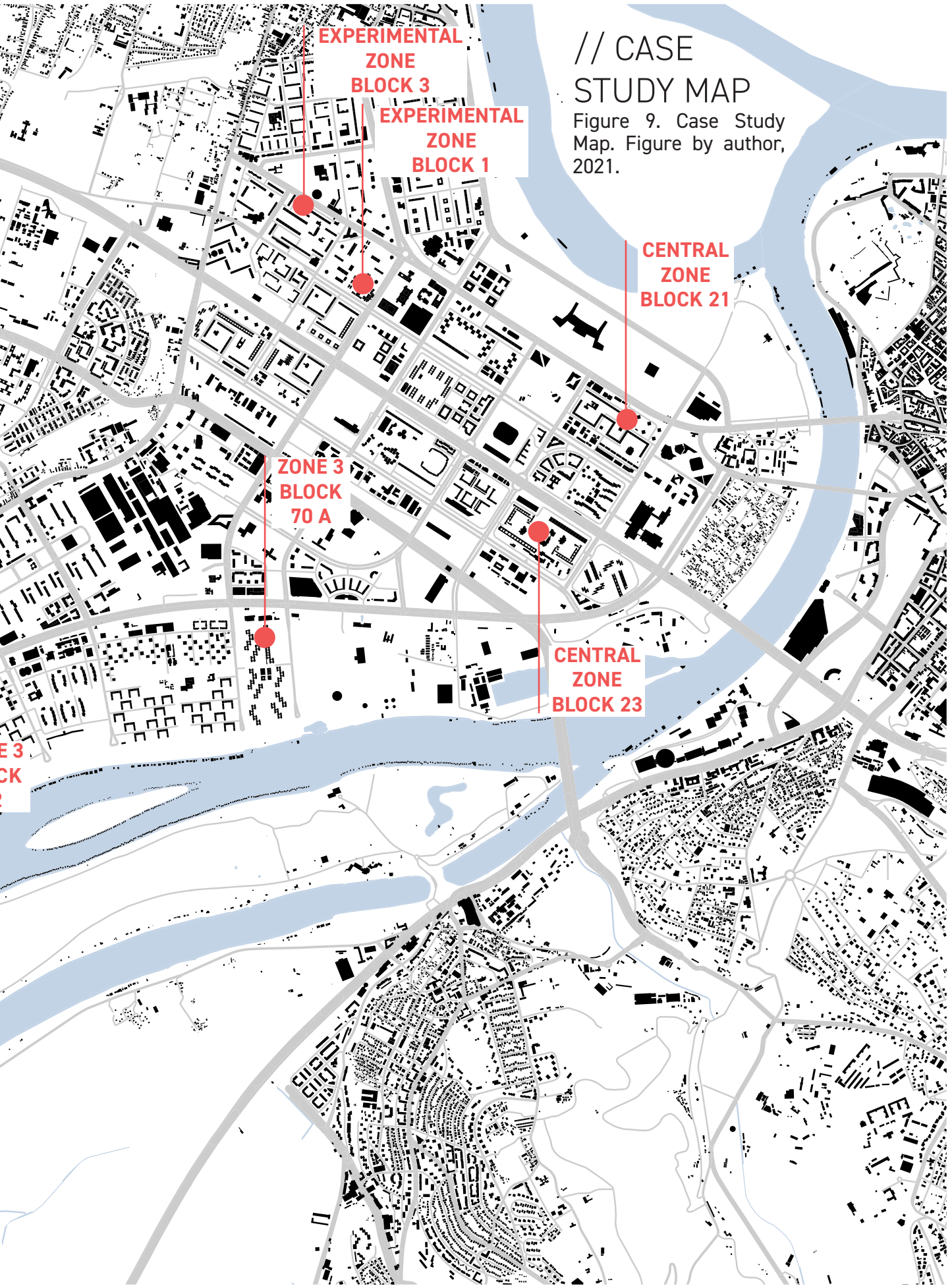
// BLOCK 62, FACADE DETAIL

Figure 8. Block 62, Facade Detail.
Photograph by author, 2021.

ВСИКИ
ЗЛАТ
ТВОЈА ХРАБРОСТ
НИКАДА НЕ УМИРЕ
НЕМА НА МОРЕ

As shown in Section 2.1, the Belgrade Town Planning Office and Đorđević had a profound influence on the design of the Belgrade *blokovi* in line with socialist ideologies present at the time in Yugoslavia. Therefore, the ethos assigned to housing construction and the imagery associated with the design become a reasonable basis for proposing that the minute architectural language employed reflected the ideological developments. As such, future research aims to develop a catalogue of the elements deemed as pertinent supports for this hypothesis. In developing this catalogue, the research will concentrate on underlining the idiosyncrasies of six different *blokovi* (Fig.9.), selected to represent the variety of approaches within the three main constructional phases of New Belgrade. At the same time, the *blokovi* selected have been chosen to ensure sufficient existing academic data to produce a viable investigation.





// CASE
STUDY MAP

Figure 9. Case Study Map. Figure by author, 2021.

EXPERIMENTAL
ZONE
BLOCK 3
EXPERIMENTAL
ZONE
BLOCK 1

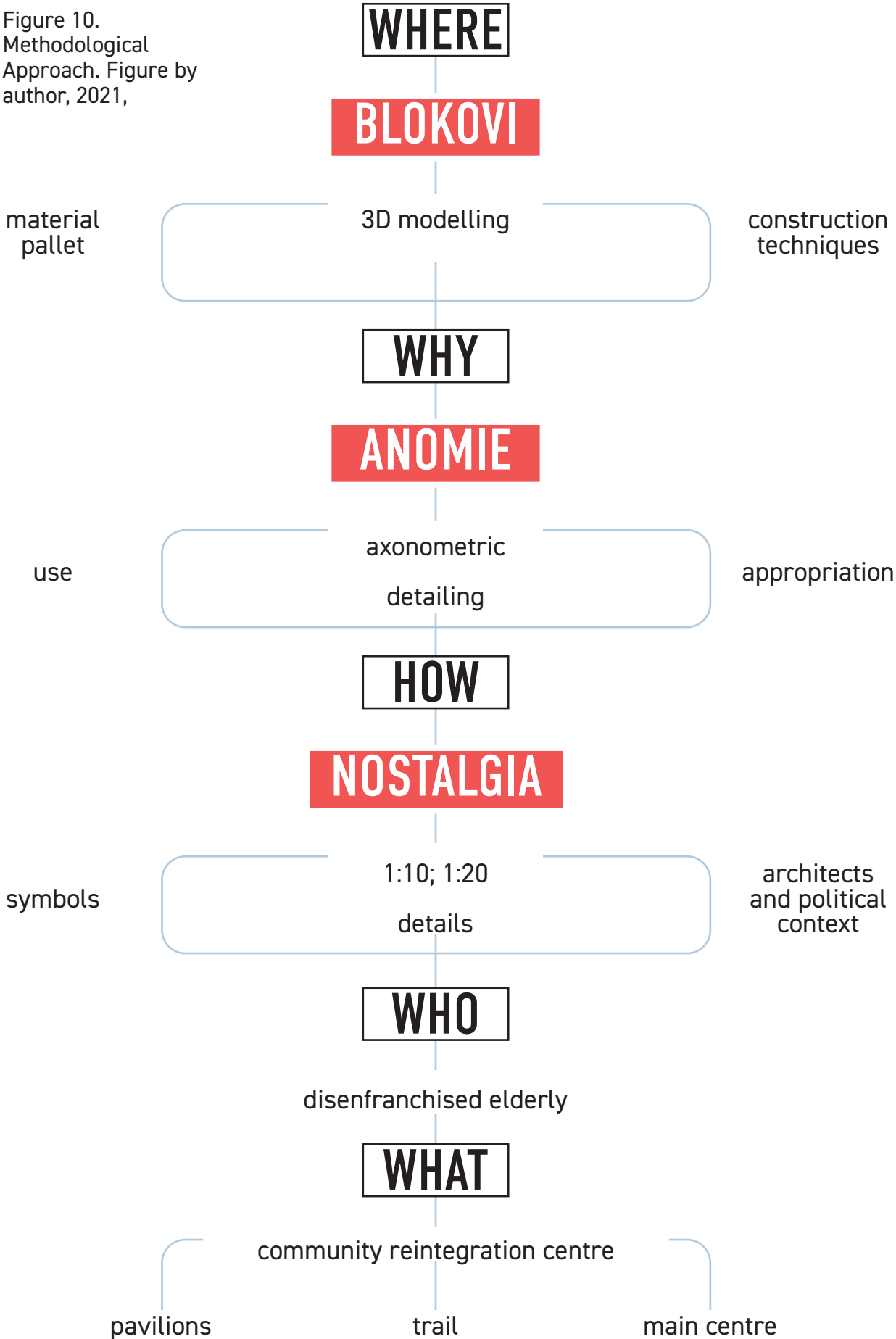
CENTRAL
ZONE
BLOCK 21

ZONE 3
BLOCK
70 A

CENTRAL
ZONE
BLOCK 23

E 3
CK
?

Figure 10.
Methodological
Approach. Figure by
author, 2021,



Within the selected *blokovi*, design particularities will be judged based on a discrepancy between *form* and *function*. As has already been shown, the *Humane Socialism* ideology is deeply interrelated with the design of collective housing in New Belgrade. At the same time, despite the vast proliferation of Le Corbusier's writings across Yugoslavia, the local architectural scene was visibly influenced by the architectural avant-garde of Team X, an opponent of high modernism and strict functionalism (Stojiljković et al., 2018, p. 332). Within this context, we can easily assume that a specific symbolism was directly or indirectly associated with the architectural detailing of New Belgrade *blokovi*, and it can be revealed through the aforementioned discrepancy between detailing *form* and its *function*. Therefore, the research will cover aspects of *material culture*, *praxeology* and *semiology* as shown in Fig. 10 and elaborated below.

3.1 MATERIAL CULTURE ANALYSIS

The initial steps of the analysis will be based on developing detailed 3D computer models of each of the six *blokovi* selected. Each block will be studied over the span of one week in order to understand its detailed material pallet and constructional techniques and particularities.

3.2 PRAXEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Based on the computer models generated in the previous step, detailed axonometric of the facade and interior elevation sections will be produced. These will be used to track *use* (or lack thereof) and *appropriation* patterns.

3.3 SEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Lastly, the axonometric details generated in the previous step will be analysed at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 by comparison to the architects' extended oeuvre to define specific design patterns. These design patterns will further be put in the context of the extended international architectural scene through comparison and case study analysis. Finally, the findings will be solidified through the comparison of discrepancies between Steps 1 and 2 in generating the detailing catalogue mentioned previously.



// BLOCK 62,
FACADE DETAIL

Figure 11. Block 62, Facade Detail. Photograph by author, 2021.

4. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

As shown above, the *blokovi* architectures can and do generate *nostalgia* in the specific target group. The immediate further expectation of the research is the production of a catalogue of elements (see Section 3) over the next academic quarter. At the same time, in composing the present prerequisite for research, it has become apparent that *nostalgia* for the Yugoslav period's perceived stability is strongly related to social disconnect phenomena currently present within the Serbian society. Given this, the initial design proposal that arises from the above data aims to create a series of polynucleic structures which aim to reintegrate the disenfranchised elderly populations of New Belgrade by providing an environment that feels safe and familiar, and creates a sense of societal belonging. As such, the design will present three main components: a series of pavilions located within the selected *blokovi*

which utilise the communitarian symbols identified (to attract the target group) and a community centre for the social reintegration of the disenfranchised communities, all connected by a memorialisation trail. Moreover, the issue of *anomie* is, if addressed, a transient one, and therefore, the design will respond materially in a similar manner. There is an expectation that at least the pavilion structures would disintegrate by themselves over time once the remembrance and integration process has achieved its purposes.

Finally, that developing the proposed research and design creates the bases for a model of social reintegration that is not only valid for the Serbian context, but can also be extended to other post-socialist European states.

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