

[zmaj]: serbian; dragon

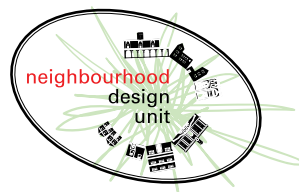
Zmaj Colony is urban development on the outskirts of Serbian capital Belgrade, some 30 km from downtown.

Zmaj Colony



Psychogeographical Portrait

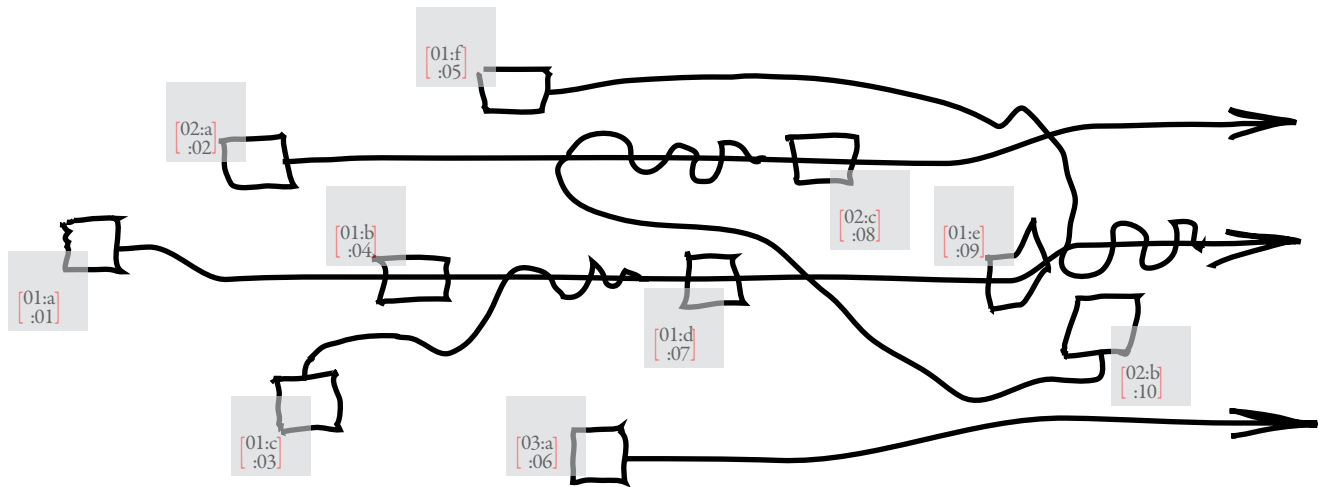
Seneca
Centre for the Built Environment



psychogeography

[urbansquares.com definition]

The subjective analysis, mental reaction, to neighbourhood behaviours related to geographic location. A chronological process based on the order of appearance of observed topics, with the time delayed inclusion of other relevant instances.



Psychogeography, as understood here, is the active search for, and celebration of, chance and coincidence, concurrently with the divination of patterns and repetitions thrown up by the [meeting/collision] of the chaos and structures of cities, personal histories and interpretations. It is based on the technique of the "dérive", an informed and aware wandering, with continuous observation, through varied environments. It can be sought and can lead anywhere.

[<http://www.psygeo.org/essays/psychogeography.php>]→

<i>What is unique here?</i>	006
<i>Introduction & History [01]</i>	
<i>Natural organic growth [02]</i>	
<i>How to make it sustainable?</i>	009
<i>Physical structure [03]</i>	
<i>Urbanism [04]</i>	
<i>How to give it expression?</i>	011
<i>Identity and signage system [05]</i>	
<i>How to make it fully functional?</i>	012
<i>Community services [06]</i>	
<i>Traffic [07]</i>	
<i>How to communicate community?</i>	014
<i>Social integration & walkability [08]</i>	
<i>Atmosphere [09]</i>	
<i>Where is this neighbourhood going?</i>	016
<i>Cultural and psychological values [10]</i>	
<i>Future should be of hope and renewal</i>	017
<i>More info & credits</i>	018



Main reason and inspiration for this Serbian psychogeographical walk was visit to my 84 years old aunt. This very energetic and youthful women is living alone in the small, but pretty comfortable, house in this area. She was our guide and gave us few historical facts about this neighbourhood.

Introduction & History [01]

What is unique here?

Beograd was in last 15 years capital of the four different countries. This unfortunate area on the Balkan peninsula in central Europe was crossroad of many different civilizations and all major roads, land water or air. Division between east and west Roman Empire, then Catholic and Orthodox

Christian churches goes through the middle of the country. It was through the history in the center of any turmoil that was happening. Beograd was occupied many times by foreign forces, Turks, Austrians and Germans are just the last ones. It was bombed many times, last time by NATO in 1999.

Not very many buildings are preserved from the past but basic physical structure, street network and cosmopolitan spirit is still present. Beograd accepted over times refugees from all over ex Yugoslavia and mixture of nations and religions is a natural consequence in this city of approximately 1.8 million inhabitants. Serbia, as an

still underdeveloped country and Beograd as its capital is having lots of problems but also some very good urban experiences that city can be proud of.

This area that we are trying to portray, started as a abandoned land near the large complex of Industry of Agricultural Machines, called "Zmaj" [translated as dragon]. Factory was founded in 1927 as one of the first manufacturers of airplanes [that's where the name is coming from], in the Beograd airport area. City growth swallowed the airport, it was relocated out of the city limits, but factory stayed behind changing its function [map].

During the II World War Beograd was under German occupation and airport and all the buildings around were used by them. They also built several structures [marked yellow on the map on page 18] for stables. These buildings stayed abandoned for years together with the whole area squeezed between rail tracks and newly built highway nearby. →





Introduction & History [01]

Few Gipsy families were first to move in the area and they are still here. There are still several thousand of Gipsies, or more politically correct Roma, living in Beograd today. Soon they were followed by other people in need. Old stables were cleaned and adapted. Soon whole area was busy rebuilding, adding new houses, initially very small, but gradually larger and larger, with more rooms, more permanent materials were used, etc.

It was unlawful settlement [colony] one of few within city of Beograd. Detailed master plan is quite strict in the city but area hidden in the triangle behind the hill where major hospital complex is located and the "Zmaj" factory, escaped destiny of some others: it was not demolished.

This area was and it is still called Zmaj's Colony referring to its location. Even name in the case of this urban area is significant factor. It was named spontaneously by people and term "colony" as oppose the other more usual terms on serbian reflects its isolation from the rest of the city. In recent time effort from city officials were made to legalize this self planned urban neighbourhood where approximately 1200 people now lives. ☼



Natural organic growth [02]



This portrait is showing us all the potential of natural organic growth of the city. Some experts are calling this type of urban planning naive or primitive or nonprofessional.

Two weeks before this walk through the Zmaj Colony I have visited much more well known community of Cannaregio built over long period of time in a very different and wealthy environment of Republic of Venice [photos on the right]. Surprisingly these two neighbourhoods are having lot in common.

Space is enormously valuable and used up to the last available square centimeter. Therefore streets are narrow, traffic is very limited. Sidewalks are nonexistent but there is no need for any regulation. Speeds are very small and neighbours who know each other very well are taking care of each other. Streets are used for more than just traffic, they are often gathering space used for social interaction. Houses and even private areas around them are exposed to the public and used as an occasion to demonstrate to the passers by good taste as a contribution to the community.

There is a specific community taste in both of these communities and even with complete freedom to paint or decorate their houses any way they like, houses blend to each other quite harmoniously.

Main characteristic of organic growth are minimal interventions in the natural environment. Larger trees are kept in place, natural obstacles are avoided and existing structures are incorporated in the "only as needed" street network. ☘





Houses are facing each other and only back yards if any are facing railway trucks. Green space is left between tracks and settlement as a natural sound protection from both trains and intensive traffic on a nearby highway. Settlement is still not completely urbanistically regulated but surprisingly nobody is building in this green space with nice mature trees. Houses are small, mainly individual, built from mainly brick, building blocks and concrete. In most of the cases they are touching each other to use space more efficiently. There is a concern that firefighters with such a narrow streets will not be able to reach eventual fire, but any historic neighbourhood is facing same problems and combination of smaller firetrucks and materials used should be solution to this problem.

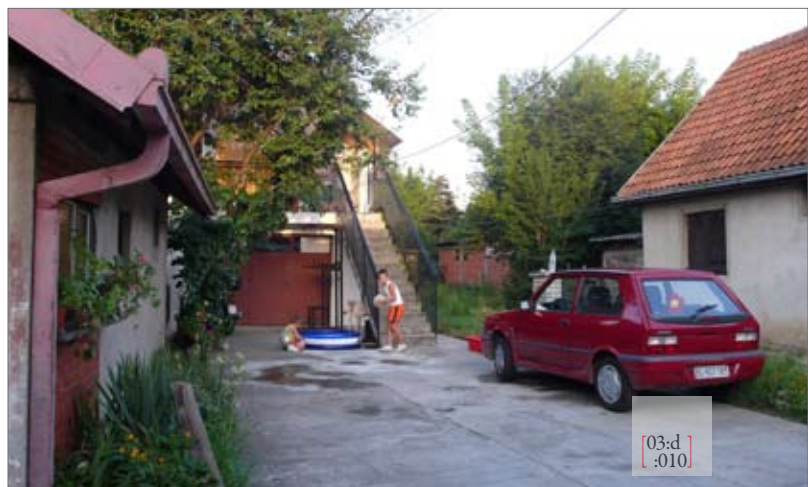
This type of structures are not always pleasing from the architectural standpoint but they are meaningful and created having in mind only social needs and to some degree demand from the surrounding community.

Few buildings that are not residential are larger structures from the past, now used for Center for the Adult Disabled People and they blend very well into this neighbourhood. These buildings being much larger and higher than the rest are used by locals and visitors as a physical dominant and an orientation point.

Some of the buildings are in bad shape, unfinished or made of poor quality material. According to the locals they are rapidly improving and at this moment only few of them are disgrace for the community. →

Physical structure [03]

How to make it sustainable?





[04:a]
:029

Size and proportions of the streets, density and overall size of the neighbourhood is close to ideal, there is estimated 1200 people in the area 500m x 500m, or 25 ha.

It is really hard to give up the impression that best urban designs are those created by the "life flow", those that are having most obstacles on their path. Zmaj Colony is not, of course, even close to the best examples but there are so many good sides that much more expensive communities developed by the professionals can pick up some very useful experiences.

Improvements in the community services and infrastructure as well as repairs to the buildings itself needs to be made. Neighbourhood is obviously poor, but also self conscious, so regulatory procedures like grass on the front lawn, uniform fences or similar are not desired here. Further development of community taste and sensitivity for public space could be encouraged and assisted by city guided community initiatives. ☘



[04:b]
:043



[04:c]
:036

Most of the people when asked about identity of the place think about monumental or heritage content, something significant and that something is hard to find here. I think that identity can be found even in places like this, favelas in Brazil, or any other neglected or misplanned communities anywhere.

In this case extraordinary intimacy of the space resembling old towns in south of Europe or Middle East, human proportions, functional attractiveness of the space, and sense of social integration is what is making identity of this colony.

There is still a problem here. Not only that this community is hard to find on the map, it is hard to find it even when you are in the area. Street names are non-existent. There is only one street with the name. All the others are nameless and it is impossible to find anybody by this address: left B2/13 meaning: 13 house counting both left and right houses [or sometimes just house doors, on the second street left on the second [B] street from the bus stop going south?!! - ufff!

But there is a tip, we used it when looking for my aunt, ask anybody for the person by the name and maybe additional information about person age or family members. Neighbours know each other.

Naming the streets properly, trying to make signage system appropriate and unique for this community, might help give more expression to the community and make it quite attractive. In my opinion just smart thinking and some community effort can change things significantly.

Bring tourist here, probably the most interested will be some city experts. Favelas in Brazil are one of the most favourite tourist destinations. That will bring money to the community, city officials might get interested and help further improvements. ☘

How to give it expression?



Community services [06] It is quite understandable knowing the fact that city did not participated in any of development, that the community services are almost non existent.

How to make it fully functional?

No schools, nearest elementary school is 6 long bus stops away, no community centers, no sport or recreational facilities and even the shopping is reduced to the bare minimum. There

is only one convenience store, and one bakery open in the residential house. Few people are offering their handyman services and announcing death in the family using as a community communication board abandoned and neglected store directional sign on one of the corners [see photo on the previous page].

On the very edge of the colony, near the last stop of the only bus line servicing the area, new development is almost finished. It looks to me very similar to sights in any North American city: stores at the ground level, apartments above and parking in front of the store [photo bottom right].

Lot of improvements need to be made. Until the missing functions are added to the community it will be showing the signs of decay and negligence. →





The other very important issue is very neglected traffic. Except main road [the only one with name] and two or three more side streets all others are not paved. Very uneven gravel is covering them, and during the rain [it was raining during our visit] in some streets it is almost impossible to walk and in some even to drive.

Some individual efforts are visible but it is not consistent and certainly not enough for decent life.

We observed one very interesting aspect of the traffic in the area.

Initiative called *woonerf* (naked street) is one of the most revolutionary ideas in contemporary urban planning. The idea is to introduce natural traffic calming zones by removing all traffic signs, lights, markings, signage and barriers, to make streets wider and then narrower, in order to reduce the normal implied priority given to motor traffic; reintroducing eye contact between all the participants. A significant reduction in traffic frequency, speed, noise and injuries have been recorded by trials all over Europe. Example on the photo bottom right is from Poundbury, UK community designed by the prominent "HRH The Prince of Wales's Affordable Rural Housing Initiative" and published as a case study in "Creating a Sense of Place: A Design Guide". Look how similar are streets in Zmaj Colony: Streets are without sidewalks and unequal width. Vegetation and obstacles in the form of waste containers etc. are traffic calming elements. It is impossible to speed more than 20 km/h and eye contact with anybody on the streets are constant. Result: unique self planned or most probably not planned organic "woonerf".

The only existing traffic sign [photo left] is a STOP sign at the natural border of the colony near the turning circle of the only bus line serving community. It is marking the border. Fascinating! ☘

Traffic [07]



As mentioned before social integration is remarkable. It is clearly visible that everybody in the community is having very similar needs and that is resulting in very similar approach to community problems.

Spirit of the place [Genius Loci] so missing in very many planned neighbourhoods is present everywhere. This is definitely not only a bedroom, people are living here. Walkability

How to communicate community?

is strong contributing factor. Social bonds are so strong, people know each other and that is building the sense of safety and security.



Communication between people within colony is very well developed. Sometimes they are little over curious towards visitors. I hope that this has to do something with security? Concerned person from the photo left trusts his neighbours but he is still warning strangers: "do not park here or you you will fell in septic tank - thank you"!

Outside of this community hardly anybody ever heard of this suburb. Totally hidden it is living its own quiet life. Most of the locals want this situation to stay this way. They are partially afraid that more attention might bring some illegal activities [land grab?] but also attract intruders and disturb their precious peace. →





Atmosphere in the Zmaj's Colony is best reflected by the calmness of this cat [photo right] sleeping on the middle of this narrow street enjoying pleasant evening sun.

Calm and reasonable happiness is visible anywhere you look. Visible enthusiasm for the space created by owners themselves and admiration for the product of their own imagination [and hands] is one of the most noticeable characteristics.

Anybody we talked to surprisingly are not having to many complains. They like what they have and they are not expecting too much from the politicians.

Does this community need any introduction to the outside world? Yes it does. Planners can learn a lot from the experiences here and their contribution in return can supply additional ideas for improvements that are necessary for this neighbourhood. ☘



Where is this neighbourhood going?



Already mentioned
“Spirit of the Place”
[Genius loci], functional
attractiveness of this
place that originally has
completely different function,
popularity and newly born
flexibility of expression is
making this community - colony
quite interesting and among
most valuable experiences in
my psychogeographical walks
from the “understanding urban
neighbourhoods” stand point.

People living here love their colony, and
very few of them are requiring significant
changes. Of course they would like nicely paved
roads, better sewage system, school or community
center, but they are afraid that planners will
convert their neighbourhood to other “planned
community” with endangered security, overall
unhappiness, and ugliness!? ☹



Future should be of hope and renewal

Future belongs to communities where Intensive involvement of its inhabitants and their understanding of community needs is making life much easier for planners. Analyses of the existing spaces and special attention to self developed [non professionally designed] communities, where people living there are also financing community needs, is valuable experience.

This new concept of urban life integration is future and probably only solution [and is giving great deal of hope] to growing number of problems that specially suburbs in large conglomerations are facing today.

Problems of the city are not only problems of functioning they are also finding new functions for the city. Exploring this type of communities and of course any historic neighbourhoods where life flow was main creator and where need for new functions and connections were present over long period of time is opening new vistas for urban experts. Investigating this new options is triggering creative anxiety and opening new possibilities. ☘



[11:a]
:041



[11:b]
:038



[11:c]
:042

More info & credits



This **psychogeographical walk** was performed on August 10, 2007. It was initiated few days before by the visit to my aunt who lives in the area. Two of us observed the situation: Slobodan Markovic, young designer living in downtown Beograd and me from Seneca College's Neighbourhood Design Unit, Toronto, Canada.

Area marked blue is "Zmaj" Industry of Agricultural Machines, yellow buildings are former stables built by Germans during occupation in 2nd world war. Purple is Center for the

Adult Disabled People. Red line on the map below is marking our path.

The **objective** of this mental reaction to the observed situation is to be used as one of the case studies for the project 'Digital Neighborhoods' at the Centre for the Built Environment of Seneca College in Toronto.

All the **photos** and texts as well as the concept, design and production of this document, have been created by Aleksandar Janicijevic and they remain his intellectual property. ☞

Toronto, October 8th, 2007

