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Rebuilding post-communist city identity: The case of Novi Pazar, Serbia

In line with contemporary urban policy to build a competitive city identity, this article deals with the post-communist identity of Novi Pazar, a medium-sized city in southwestern Serbia. Research attention is centred on building urban identity through the dynamic interaction between actors and socio-spatial structures. Following Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the concept of a city's habitus is employed as well as Lefebvre's concept of the social production of space. Special focus is placed on the challenges that post-communist cities face in re-establishing their identity following the former promotion of the "communist (industrial) city" and its subsequent decline.

The analysis is based on a survey of residents of Novi Pazar ($n = 299$) and interviews with experts employed in local government and other local institutions/organizations ($n = 14$), as well as content analysis of the city's official website. Novi Pazar is a city with a potentially strong identity but also with considerable structural constraints that block the local agency needed to activate the city's identity potential.

Keywords: identity, post-communist city, habitus, Novi Pazar, Serbia

1 Introduction

Contemporary neoliberal, entrepreneurial, and neoendogenous urban policy demands constant competition among cities based on their local specific features, due to which building urban identity as a development resource has become a strategically significant focus of urban policy (Campelo, 2015). This article focuses on post-communist cities because they encounter particular challenges in rebuilding their identity. This is due to the particular identity legacy of communist cities as industrial cities that neglected specific local resources – especially the traditional or pre-communist city identity – and thus exposed cities to the significant risk of losing their authenticity under communism (Dragičević-Šešić, 2011). Consequently, the turmoil of post-communist transformation further diminishes the ability of local actors to creatively evaluate local resources, rebuild, and diversify their city's identity as a development resource. Relatively little research has been devoted to this topic in the Balkans and in Serbia in particular (Vujošević et al., 2010; Jovanović, 2013; Spasić & Backović, 2017; Petrović & Toković, 2018; Troch & Janssens, 2019; Bogdanović, 2020), except, to a certain extent, for the largest or capital cities (Bursać, 2009; Nedučin et al., 2014; Doytchinov et al., 2015; Arandelovic et al., 2017; Camprag & Suri, 2019; Spasić & Backović, 2020). This article helps fill that void by focusing on Novi Pazar as a medium-sized city in southwestern Serbia.

The article first sketches out the research background, starting with the assumption that dynamic interaction between actors and socio-spatial structures is the basis for creating an urban identity perceived either as a spontaneous long-term process or a strategic activity. Following Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the concept of a city's habitus is employed as well as Lefebvre's concept of the social production of space. The article then highlights some important contextual features of building post-communist cities' identity, in general and in Serbia. The next section is dedicated to an analysis of Novi Pazar's identity based on data collected through interviews and a survey conducted by the University of Belgrade's Institute for Sociological Research in 2013, as well as content analysis of the city's official website conducted between March 2017 and March 2018. The concluding discussion emphasizes the perceived potentials and obstacles for building a competitive identity for Novi Pazar.

2 Research background

2.1 Rebuilding city identity: Spontaneous processes and strategic activity

Building urban identity as a specific development resource is approached by focusing on the interaction between actors and socio-spatial structures. Building city identity is understood as a long-term and complex process in continuous interaction with both objective and subjective changes to the reality on the ground (Lynch, 1960; Norberg-Schulz, 1979; Neill, 2003; Butina-Watson & Bentley, 2007; Houghton & Stevens, 2010; Nas et al., 2011; Kavartzis et al., 2015). In addition, building the competitive identity of the city (Anholt, 2007) is taken as a strategic activity that also indicates the importance of both (historically developed) material or objective features of the city, and also the meanings, feelings, and expectations that people have about (their) city (Kotler et al., 1999).

Following the idea for connecting the internal development dynamic of a certain territory to the specific code of its local community (Storper, 1997; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003), building urban identity relates to the fact that each city produces a specific mental matrix through constant interaction between the socio-spatial structure of the city and the agency of local actors (Moulaert & Sekia, 2003; Bell & de-Shalit, 2011). Along with such a mental matrix of the city, local actors develop a special view of "the state of affairs" and "how things should be done" (Low, 2012: 321). Each city represents a specific historical and spatial context of particular knowledge and experiences (Spasić & Backović, 2017) or, following Bourdieu's theory, each city has its own habitus (Bourdieu, 1999). The concept of a city habitus in urban sociology is taken as a relatively stable and locally situated pattern of behaviour that gives local actors practical (routine) competence in their immediate environment, in accordance with the specific opportunity structure of key social fields (housing, work, education, culture, and consumption) in a given city (Savage et al., 2005).

Employing the concept of a city habitus in understanding the creation of urban identity both as a spontaneous long-term process and a strategic activity is important in many ways. First, although the world of cities is dynamic and does not necessarily mean the same thing for everyone, the habitus of a city usually generates the same or similar meanings and associations among a large number of people. This is important because sufficiently clear and positive ideas among the local people on what makes their city recognizable and attractive, both to the local population and to potential investors and visitors, is a significant basis for building a competitive city identity (Anholt, 2010). The habitus of the city is also understood as the embodiment

of history, the active present of the entire past whose product it is (Siisainen, 2000). It functions as accumulated collective memory and influences the ability of local actors to creatively evaluate city resources and strategically build a city identity as a development resource (Campelo, 2015).

As a relational category, identity formation includes comparisons (Jenkins, 1996) – in the case of a city identity, with the opportunity structures of other cities. These external identity relations between “us” and “them”, primarily those with the capital city and other levels of government (regional or national), are also mediated by the city’s habitus. In Bourdieu’s view, social reality spontaneously translates into physical/natural space, and space makes a significant contribution to the naturalization effect of social differences. If the capital city is a place where the highest-quality resources are concentrated, the relationship of the capital to other (peripheral) cities is taken as an essential relationship of inequality (Bourdieu, 1999; Savage et al., 2005). The habitus of a peripheral city reflects the inhibitions of local people’s perception in terms of what is possible/impossible or normal/abnormal for “people like us”, thus lowering their innovation, initiative, and self-confidence. In other words, the local atmosphere of peripheral cities, marked by passivity and apathy fuelled by the low autonomy of local actors in the face of centralized decision-making models, is taken as an unfavourable characteristic of their habitus regarding the ability of local actors to activate city resources and rebuild the city’s identity as a development resource (Campelo, 2015).

Because rebuilding a city’s identity in urban policy is strongly influenced by actors that have the power to categorize values (Anholt, 2010), this study also employs Lefebvre’s triad concept of the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). From this perspective, building a competitive city identity is dominated by the representation of space (strategies, documents, plans, and websites of official institutions), which legitimizes a certain vision of the city that is in accordance with the interests of those in power. This significantly narrows the scope of a spontaneously built city identity, which, in line with Lefebvre’s ideas, reflects not only representation of space but also the spatial practices inscribed in the routines of everyday life and the space of representation, a domain for imaginatively challenging the given structures. It means that a strategic redefinition of a city’s identity cannot achieve the required authenticity if it does not take into account the spontaneous identity characteristics of the city. Achieving this requires a cooperative approach to city governance, a trusting relationship, participatory principles, and assessment of the attitudes of various local actors whose internal differences (social, economic, political, ethnic, etc.) should not grow to the extent that they prevent consent about the identity (Anholt, 2010; Kavartzis, 2010). The most frequently mentioned of these actors include

those employed in the city administration and institutions, the local population, local interest groups, entrepreneurs and their associations, and chambers of commerce (Kavartzis et al., 2015). In practice, however, the local population is often neglected, including a lack of research regarding its behaviour and expectations (Kotler et al., 1999; Insh & Florek, 2008; Bell & de-Shalit, 2011; Brabazon, 2014). The research presented here focuses on the local population’s perspective: that of citizens and local experts in Novi Pazar.

2.2 Contextual specifics of post-communist cities

The legacy of communism exposed cities to the significant risk of losing their authenticity due to the idea of a “communist (industrial) city” promoted according to a top-down model (Dragičević-Šešić, 2011). On the other hand, the post-communist period has introduced new challenges, especially for smaller and more peripheral (mainly industrial) cities. They have been facing the very serious consequences of technological decay and are burdened by insufficiently developed or neglected infrastructure, declining skills in the labour force, and an exodus of young people (Jaško & Finka, 2010; Domanski, 2011; Kiss, 2011). All of this, along with the disappearance of the industrial brands that medium-sized and smaller cities used to be known for, has caused further deterioration of the foundation of their identity as industrial cities. On the other hand, the previously developed habitus of an industrial city often has the effect of limiting local actors when they consider possible developmental options, fuelling collective fatalism and apathy. Moreover, the underdeveloped culture of cooperative governance (Tsenkova & Nedović Budić, 2006; Stanilov, 2007; Ferenčuhová & Gentile, 2016) as another communist legacy nourishes the habitus of a peripheral city and weakens the capacity for redesigning the city’s identity.

At the level of representation of space, primacy is given to the legitimization of the city’s new economic and political trajectories, with special attention placed on attempts to evoke the economic dynamism of the pre-communist era while presenting the post-communist period as a rebirth of entrepreneurial spirit that had been suspended under communism. This might also be perceived as a reflection of the peripheral habitus in external (international) identity relations, where cities feel burdened by their communist legacy and often try to reject it as a historical aberration, a deviation from the right path, or a historical mistake that should be forgotten (Adler, 2005; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008).

Serbian cities face severe challenges in redefining their identity, most of which they share with other post-communist cities but

that are reinforced by a specific social context. First, due to the prolonged and difficult process of post-communist transformation that took place in the context of wars and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the slowness of economic restructuring and attracting new (direct foreign) investment has caused a severe decline in industrial output and the collapse of many industrial (or mono-industrial) cities (Vujošević et al., 2010). Second, the developmental disparity between Belgrade, as the capital, and other cities has been increasing significantly (Molnar, 2013), due to which most Serbian cities have become or remained peripheral (Stojković, 2009). Third, within Serbia's highly centralized decision-making model, local authorities are typified by incompetent local administration and underdeveloped communication between the public, private, and civil sectors (Vujović & Petrović, 2007; Vujošević et al., 2010; Petrović & Toković, 2016, 2018).

Novi Pazar reflects most of the aforementioned challenges in terms of redefining the identity of post-communist cities, as well as those arising from the specific context of Serbian society. Although Novi Pazar is categorized as a functional urban area of national importance (Šećerov & Nevenić, 2009), its opportunity structure is rather unfavourable. Namely, the city has remained cut off from the main national and international road corridors since the establishment of new national borders. Furthermore, Novi Pazar faces significant economic problems and, with a level of development that is between 60 and 80% of the national average, it is among the underdeveloped local governments in Serbia (Regionalni razvoj, 2014), marked by considerable economic (industrial) decline in the post-communist period. Moreover, it is one of the few cities in Serbia with positive population growth, which demands constant increases to infrastructure investment in the city. Today, Novi Pazar is a city with a significant concentration of Bosniaks within Serbia in spite of its significant economic problems and insufficient infrastructure. In accordance with the rather restrictive opportunity structure of Novi Pazar, it is presumed that the city habitus has inhibiting effects on local actors' perception of its identity – this particularly applies to its industrial habitus due to the city's economic (industrial) decline and its peripheral habitus in external identity relations (toward the capital city and other cities in Serbia) due to spatial marginalization and a centralized governance model.

3 Method and analytical aims

For insight into (re)building Novi Pazar's identity, two perspectives were included: one related to spontaneous long-term processes, and the other related to strategic urban policy endeavours. Data were collected via a survey with inhabitants of Novi Pazar ($n = 299$) and through interviews with experts

($n = 14$) employed in local government departments (primarily in economics, culture, and social services), at key local institutions (such as the chamber of commerce and cultural institutions), and in non-governmental organizations that cooperated with local government on developing city projects. Although the perspective of both actors is more or less spontaneously generated under the influence of the city's habitus, the experts' perception also includes strategic conceptualization (or representation) of the city's identity. In addition, the representation of space is analysed through content analysis of Novi Pazar's official website.

Bearing in mind that the identity of a city is stronger if its habitus invokes the same or similar positive meaning among the local people, the first analytical aim is to obtain insight into the various features of Novi Pazar's identity through respondents' perceptions of distinctive markers and city symbols – including how others in Serbia perceive the city. This involves checking the possible negative impact of an unfavourable opportunity structure in Novi Pazar on respondents' perception of and differences from shared views, depending on their ethnic background, age, education, and other sociodemographic characteristics. The analysis then focuses on designing a competitive identity for Novi Pazar while bearing in mind the impact that the city's habitus has on local people's perceptions of the general state of affairs and how things should be done in their city. Here the goal is to determine the extent to which the habitus of an industrial city and the habitus of a peripheral city impede building Novi Pazar's identity. Finally, the study turns to content analysis of Novi Pazar's official website to explore whether the city identity markers represented correspond to those expressed by the respondents, taking this as a kind of a precondition to achieve the required authenticity of the city identity. For the same purpose, the level of communication is assessed between the website creators and the public, including internal (local residents) and external (tourists and investors).

3.1 Spontaneous consensus on key identity markers

This section analyses Novi Pazar's identity through respondents' perceptions of distinctive markers and city symbols, including how others in Serbia perceive the city. The goal is to assess whether the habitus of Novi Pazar invokes positive associations and the same or a similar meaning among the local people, which is taken as a potential for building a strong city identity. The analysis is drawn from the same questions in the survey and interviews. The key identity markers of the city are operationalized through the following dimensions: 1) recognizable markers of the city, 2) city symbols, 3) characteristics of the city residents, and 4) perception of the city by external

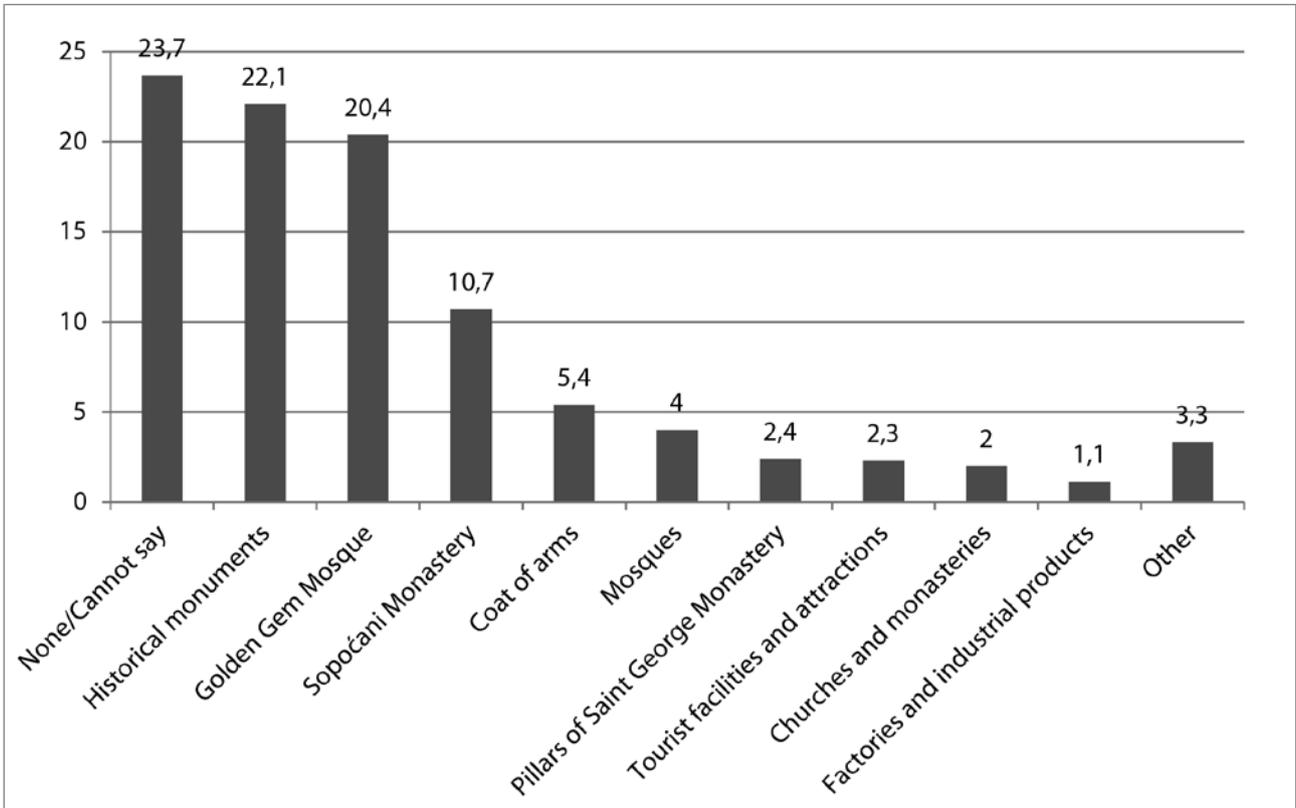


Figure 1: City symbols (illustration: authors).



Figure 2: The Golden Gem Mosque (source: Mathematical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, 2022).



Figure 3: The Sopoćani Monastery (photo: Irena Petrović).

actors. The questions related to these dimensions in the survey were open-ended. The answers obtained were first coded, and then further data processing was performed in the SPSS statistical program, relying on descriptive statistical analysis. The same principle for coding the responses was applied to the interview transcripts. The qualitative data were processed with the Maxqda program. After separate analyses of quantitative and qualitative data, an analysis of matching (i.e., noting the differences between the citizens surveyed and the actors interviewed) was performed to examine the level of consistency in their perception of Novi Pazar’s identity.

Because Novi Pazar is a city with a rich history dating back to the medieval Serbian state and the Ottoman Empire, its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional heritage is significant for both Serbs and Bosniaks in terms of identity. Therefore, it is no surprise that both the survey respondents and interviewees predominantly mentioned cultural and historical monuments as markers and/or symbols of their city. In the survey, 40% of the selected symbols were religious monuments, whereas secular structures were mentioned in 22% of the answers. Analysis of the interviews points to a consensus around the selected symbols, in terms of both selecting the type of monuments and specifying particular structures: "I definitely believe that the Fortress (SCr. *Bedem*) is a symbol of the city, the Fortress along with the Watchtower (*Kula Motrilja*)" (interviewee 7); "We have mosques such as the Golden Gem Mosque (*Altun-alem džamija*), then Saint Peter's Church (*Crkva Svetog Petra*), the Sopoćani and Pillars of Saint George (*Đurđevi Stupovi*) monasteries; all these are symbols that in some way characterize this city" (interviewee 11).

The remaining answers regarding the city identity markers or symbols include traditional food and drink – predominantly rolled kebabs (SCr. *ćevapi*) and baked dumplings (*mantije*), 17.0% – factories and products (mainly jeans, 14.2%), and characteristic business activities (predominantly trade, 10.6%), thus moving the focus from material to behavioural symbolism (Nas et al., 2011; Spasić & Backović, 2017). Such behavioural symbolism became particularly noticeable in answers to questions about the specific traits of people from Novi Pazar, where as many as 38% of respondents cited hospitality. In the interviews, such traits were also pointed out and described as aspects of relationships between people indicating rather harmonizing effects of the city habitus and the predominance of positive identity associations: "The relationships among people in Novi Pazar are specific, somehow, they are straightforward with each other and there is a warm-hearted atmosphere" (NP4).

The same might be concluded regarding the material symbolism of the selected markers and symbols through which respondents indirectly emphasized the centuries of the coexistence of two religious and ethnic groups in the city, although fewer than 1% of the respondents mentioned the "mixed population" as something that Novi Pazar is known for. In the interviews, the multiculturalism of Novi Pazar was explicitly emphasized as an important aspect of the city's identity: "This multicultural community is very specific, with monuments of the two completely different cultures, all in one place" (NP7).

Prevailing positive identity associations, such as hospitality or a commercial spirit, and the multi-ethnic character of the city, are consensually related to the historically based habitus of a trade-oriented city and its impact on shaping the entrepre-

neurial skills of the local population. These qualities are also seen as crucial for overcoming potential internal conflicts, even during the war years of the 1990s:

You know, we the people of Novi Pazar, no matter how extreme and silly we may seem to be, when tough times arrive, whether it's better to wage war or trade, it's always better to trade, and that's because we are traders. Novi Pazar is a multi-ethnic city and, now let's not pretend, relations between Serbs and Bosniaks are not ideal, but we are proud of the fact that in the worst times, during the nineties and the war in Bosnia, that war did not affect us over here because we succeeded (as this was the desire of both sides) in not having any conflict here. The city managed to preserve itself. (NP9)

Therefore, it appeared that the unfavourable opportunity structure of Novi Pazar does not significantly affect the respondents' perception of the city's identity. The only negative connotation was related to the fact that Novi Pazar is demographically among the youngest cities in Serbia. In general, those surveyed very rarely (only 2.3% of them) stated that the city is known for being a city of "young people", whereas in the interviews this was stressed as both a positive feature of the city, but also as a problem: "I see this as the biggest and most overwhelming obstacle, because you have a huge number of young people . . . and then every year you get a thousand new unemployed people, so the fact that Pazar is a young city is a significant thing, but at the same time it makes things difficult" (NP6).

Examination of the impact of sex, age, education, occupation, financial status, and ethnic background does not show any extreme division or conflict in how the analysed aspects of Novi Pazar's identity are understood. Thus, it appears that, in spite of ethnic, cultural, and other social differences, the habitus of Novi Pazar generates similar meanings and associations among local people about their city. The findings also suggest that respondents have a sufficiently clear idea of what makes Novi Pazar recognizable and attractive, which might be a good foundation for building its competitive identity. However, the responses regarding perceptions of how others see Novi Pazar show that over a third of the respondents believe that others have a predominantly negative perception of their city. This indicates the impact of a peripheral habitus on perceiving city identity from the perspective of external relations (through comparison with other cities in Serbia).

3.2 Obstacles to strategic rebuilding of the city's identity

This section focuses on questions indicating whether the habitus of an industrial city and a peripheral city have impeding

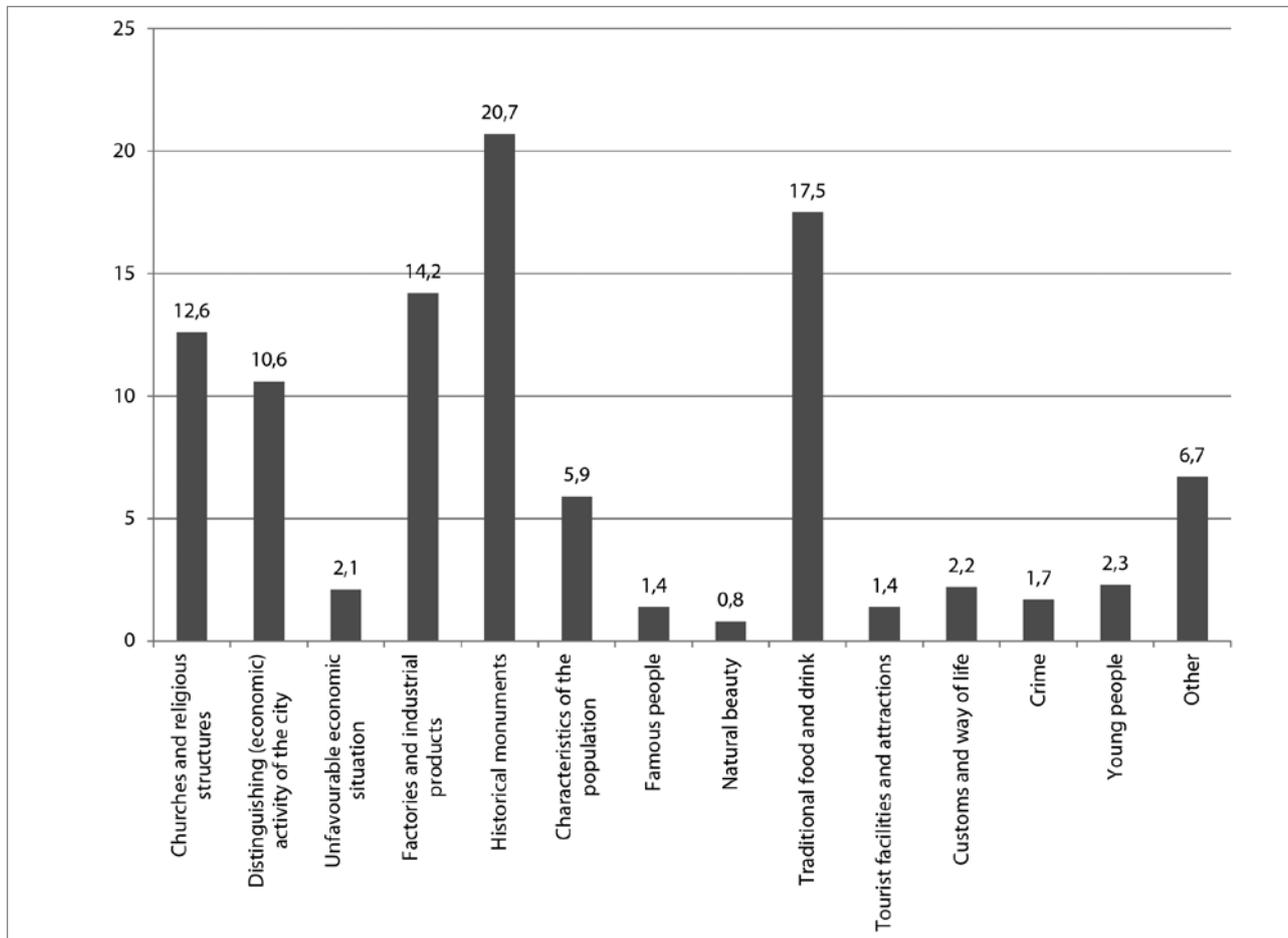


Figure 4: City recognizability factors (illustration: authors).

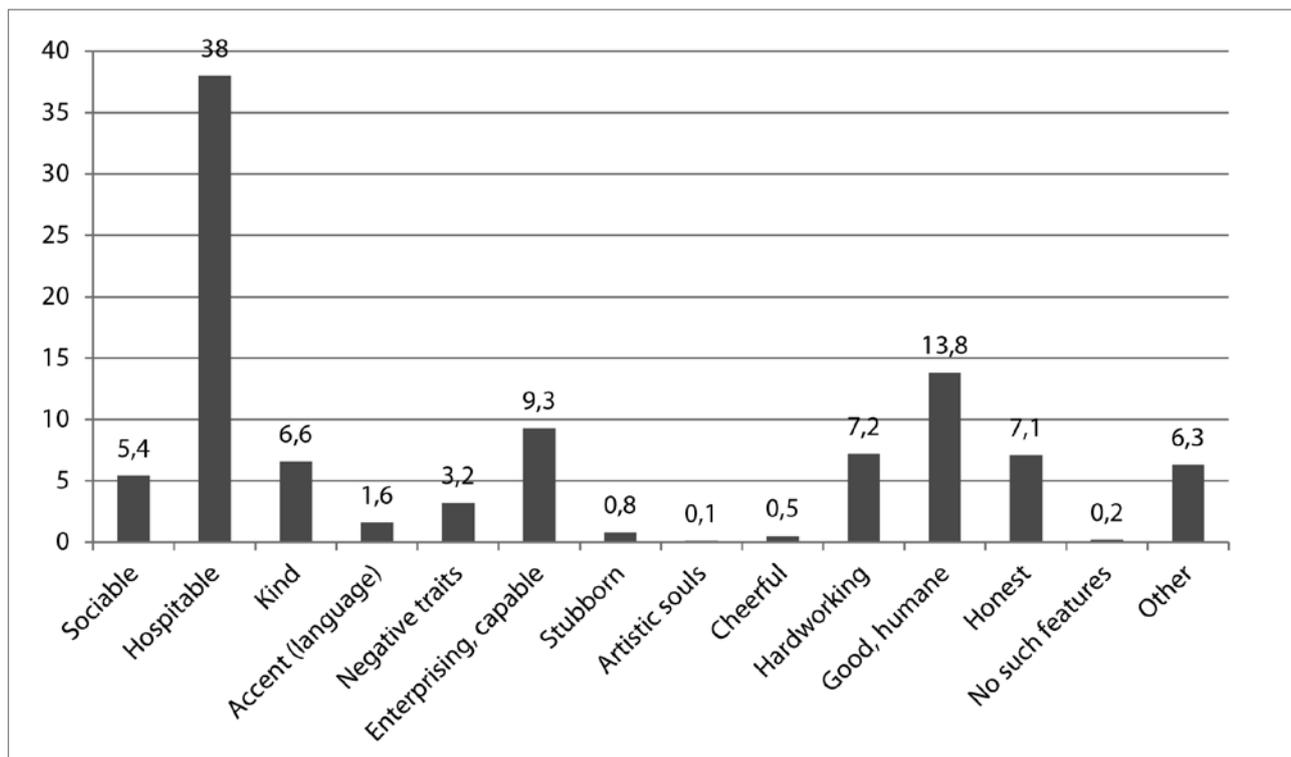


Figure 5: Characteristics of the city residents (illustration: authors)

Table 1: What image of your city do people that live in other parts of Serbia have?

Image	Percentage
Mostly positive	32.1
Mostly negative	36.3
Neither positive nor negative	19.0
I do not know.	12.6
Total	100.0

Source: authors.

effects on building a competitive city identity for Novi Pazar. These questions were related to local people's perceptions of the state of affairs in Novi Pazar in general and in comparison to other cities, and how things should be done in their city, including respondents' ideas of the city's development potential and the key obstacles to its achievement. Thus, these questions were focused more on rebuilding competitive city identity as strategic activity and were asked only during the interviews. The competitive city identity was operationalized through the following dimensions: 1) development potentials of the city, 2) internal obstacles to city development, 3) external obstacles to city development, 4) structural obstacles to city development, and 5) actors' obstacles to city development. Qualitative data were coded in the Maxqda program, according to the dimensions outlined.

In line with the entrepreneurialism of the local people as one of identity markers of the city, which was already emphasized, local entrepreneurialism is almost unanimously perceived as the key development potential of Novi Pazar. In the respondents' view, despite the fact that industrial development was forced onto the city under communism, the industrial habitus has not only weakened but was not even established in Novi Pazar. Therefore, the respondents expressed no sense of loss in this regard, and they did not place much importance on any product that would make their city stand out as an industrial city, but saw the small grocery shop (SCr. *dućan*) as a symbol of the city: "Its name [Novi Pazar] means 'merchant city', and there is no special product to reflect its identity. Then, during communism, large companies were opened. We never had a tradition in it. The tradition was that it was a trade-oriented city. The symbol of this city is a small grocery shop, because that's where we started from and where a large number of people earn their living" (NP2).

The fact that respondents link local entrepreneurship primarily to psychological features, describing it as a deeply rooted mental code of the local community and do not relate it to capitalism (as opposed to communism), seems to feed their self-confidence: "We have a saying that Novi Pazar is located

'on some special waters' in that sense. Meaning that there is no crisis that we are not able to overcome, in any sense" (NP10).

However, the restrictive opportunity structure of Novi Pazar is reflected in respondents' strong feeling of economic decline in comparison to other cities of similar size in Serbia, as well as of territorial marginalization with newly defined borders that have changed the importance of road routes to Montenegro and Kosovo, particularly because this contrasts with the historically established identity of Novi Pazar as a trade-oriented city: "In general, if we look at, for example, the economic aspect, we are in a tough situation, much harder than everybody else" (NP12). "Novi Pazar is the centre of the Sandžak region of Serbia, but it is a 'black hole' compared to the other regions, and that is a shame" (NP4). "Compared to other cities of a similar size . . . not a single state-owned company has survived, so that at least people can stay employed" (NP7). "A commercial city blocked by borders in this new age" (NP2).

Although the respondents do not indicate apathy or a lack of enthusiasm as typical markers of a peripheral city habitus, the expressed feelings of economic and territorial marginalization speak in favour of it. Thus, some respondents fear that Novi Pazar is becoming a city known for low-wage labour, an illegal economy, and underdevelopment: "Novi Pazar is very poor . . . a lot of money is taken at the expense of the city's income, and therefore some other things cannot be done; all that you see is the informal economy" (NP11).

The features of a peripheral city habitus become even more noticeable when respondents explicitly speak about how the centralized model of governance and the concentration of power and valuable resources in the capital city foster a lack of interest among local politicians and representatives at the national level to support their own cities. The respondents spoke about the lack of initiative and self-confidence among local actors, lack of trust and enthusiasm between local politicians and experts, limited decision-making autonomy of experts due to the imposed supremacy of loyalty to a political party over expert knowledge, lack of participative practices in local governance, and so on: "Now, Rasim's [Rasim Ljajić, a local politician with a career at the national level] political party has a greater role, and he shows little interest . . . he moved away and Novi Pazar is not interesting to him anymore, he's only interested in Belgrade" (NP6). "Political party affiliation is the priority, while competence doesn't matter at all" (NP1). "Here you neither have the cooperation of local government with the university, nor the university with the local economy, nor of local government with the non-governmental sector" (NP8). "The crisis is never due to a lack of money, but a lack of trust or, rather, a lack of enthusiasm" (NP4).

3.3 Representation of city identity on the official website

This section analyses the content of Novi Pazar's official website (Grad Novi Pazar, 2017) as a specific representation of space in the service of building a competitive city identity. In general, official websites pay particular attention to cultural and historical heritage as the most important aspects of a city's identity (Morgan et al., 2004; Dragičević Šešić, 2009), and monuments and architectural heritage are among the most recognizable markers and symbols. In Lynch's terminology, Novi Pazar could be described as an "imaginable" city because it is easily visualized through what can be seen thanks to its numerous monuments and architectural legacy of profound historical and cultural significance (Spasić & Backović, 2017). Visual identity as an analytical category was constructed to determine whether architectural heritage and monuments are recognized as significant symbols of the city on Novi Pazar's website and to explore the level of consistency between the website content and respondents' attitudes in that respect. In addition, the analytical category of processing local history was constructed to detect how the historical stages of the city's development are presented. It is assumed that, if they are presented in a continual manner, this contributes more to the preservation of collective memory and does not reflect the peripheral habitus of the city than if they are presented discontinuously and the communist period is neglected.

Analysis of the Novi Pazar website showed that the potential of cultural and historical heritage remained insufficiently exploited and that the website failed to display a strong visual identity for the city. The Fortress of Novi Pazar is recognized as the dominant symbol of the city, but there are no photographs on the highest-priority pages. Places of worship were not presented as symbols, even though photographs of churches and monasteries as well as mosques prevail throughout the website, implying that multiculturalism stands out as a characteristic of Novi Pazar. However, these photographs are also not presented on the highest-priority pages, and there are no special sections or videos dedicated to the cultural and historical heritage of the city. It could be concluded that the way in which the key identity markers and symbols are represented on the website correspond to respondents' perception, including their opinion that the promotion of the monuments and architectural legacy of Novi Pazar has been neglected: "Our tourist organization and we as the city don't even have a single postcard" (NP14).

The historical memory of the city starts with the first mention of its name, *Yeni Bazar* 'new bazaar', in a written document from 1461, and the description of the city's history ends with the last decades of the nineteenth century, when, according to the creator of the website, the city lost its former political and economic role (Grad Novi Pazar, 2013). There is certainly a discontinuity in the processing of local history, but it also confirms the long-held identity of Novi Pazar as a multicultural trade-oriented city (Opština Novi Pazar, 2017). Despite the fact that any reflection on the twentieth century or even the city's communist past remains invisible, the website creators do emphasize several identity features of Novi Pazar as a contemporary city: a university city, a city of entrepreneurs, a city of youth, a city of opportunity, a city of jeans, and a European city (Gradska uprava Novi Pazar, 2016). This is consistent with the findings of studying the websites of other post-communist cities that point to discontinuity with the communist past or its fragmentary display (Adler, 2005) and to the modern, capitalist, European city as the dominant discourse in promoting the city. Neglect of the communist past suggests that Novi Pazar shares a kind of peripheral habitus typical of post-communist cities regarding their external identity relations; that is, in comparison with other cities at the European level.

Finally, the communication features of the website are explored as an indication of how interactive local government is with both internal audiences (i.e., residents) and external audiences (i.e., tourists, potential developers, etc.) to allow a participative approach in designing the city's image (Varbanova, 2007; Florek, 2011). The Novi Pazar website is alternatively written in Latin and Cyrillic script in accordance with its internal multicultural image, but its content has not been entirely translated into English, which indicates that the external audiences are not sufficiently and consistently addressed. The interactive website matrix relates only to utility services, and navigation to social media has been completely omitted, even though this is now the most suitable interactive platform. All the findings above indicate that, despite the interactive potentials that the website provides for a more participatory definition of competitive city identity, these have remained almost entirely unutilized.

4 Discussion

The first analytical aim was to show how respondents perceive the identity markers and symbols of Novi Pazar, bearing in mind the city's unfavourable opportunity structure and the hypothesis that the city identity is stronger if its habitus invokes

the same or a similar positive meaning among the local people. The results indicate that Novi Pazar is potentially a city with a strong identity. Namely, it appears that Novi Pazar's habitus predominantly generates positive associations among the respondents without major discrepancies in attitudes among different social groups (by education, age, or ethnicity). The most frequently mentioned city markers and symbols primarily cover cultural heritage, particularly monuments and the architectural legacy of Novi Pazar's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional history. In addition, a commercial (entrepreneurial) mentality and corresponding hospitality, as well as inter-ethnic and cultural tolerance, are particularly noticeable in answers to questions about the specific traits of local people. However, such affirmative self-perception of the respondents about their city contrasts with their perception that others in Serbia have a rather negative image of Novi Pazar. This indicates the impact of the peripheral habitus on respondents' perception regarding external identity relations (through comparison with other cities in Serbia), which appears more visible in answers related to the key obstacles to achieving a competitive city identity for Novi Pazar.

The second analytical aim was to examine whether the habitus of an industrial communist city, perceived as the embodiment of the city's recent history, and the habitus of a peripheral city, taken as possibly inhibiting local people's action capacities, impede the building of a competitive city identity for Novi Pazar. This proved to be a rather complex research issue because, on the one hand, the respondents strongly emphasize local entrepreneurialism as a key city identity marker and development potential, which does not indicate a lack of enthusiasm and apathy among the local population, which is typical of the habitus of a peripheral city. In addition, according to the respondents, the deeply embedded habitus of a trade-oriented city based on local entrepreneurialism diminishes the identity crisis that Novi Pazar could face in the post-communist period due to the impact of the habitus of an industrial communist city. In fact, the respondents claim that an industrial identity was never established in Novi Pazar, even under communism. On the other hand, the respondents point to the low autonomy and integrity of local actors typical for a peripheral city habitus caused by the governance mode dominated by political parties and centralized state power in the post-communist period. This, as the respondents emphasize, mainly pushes local entrepreneurialism to the margins, into the informal economy, which in their view decreases the city's external reputation and contributes to underdevelopment and peripheral features of Novi Pazar as well as to its territorial marginalization due to new borders after the demise of Yugoslavia. Based on the image of Novi Pazar primarily as a trade-oriented city in the past, present, and future, respondents expect to overcome its current peripheral position with the anticipated entry of Serbia into

the European Union: "To open the borders and to make Novi Pazar the trading centre of a modern region of Serbia and the European Union" (NP4). It seems, however, that respondents underestimate the possible impeding effects of the peripheral city habitus with the appearance of post-communist cities on the European scene, as the experience of other cities has shown.

The third analytical aim was to explore whether the city identity symbols on Novi Pazar's official website correspond to those expressed in the survey. It was hypothesized that such correspondence is a precondition to achieve the required authenticity in the production of the city identity. Although this research confirms the needed consistency between the website content and attitudes expressed by the respondents and interviewees, the interactive website potentials remain almost entirely unutilized for a more participative definition of city identity through communication between the website creators and the public. Moreover, there is a lack of continuity in presenting the centuries-old history of Novi Pazar as a reflection of the post-communist city's peripheral habitus in external (international) identity relations. The fact that the recent history of Novi Pazar, including the communist period, has been neglected on the website might be in line with intention of other post-communist cities to reject their communist legacy, although the respondents in Novi Pazar did not have negative connotations regarding the communist past, possibly due to the more liberal character of communism in the former Yugoslavia (Lazić, 2011). Moreover, in contrast to the post-communist cities of central Europe, which emphasize their economic vitality and entrepreneurship from the immediate pre-communist time, both the website presentation and the respondents place no noticeable emphasis on pre-communist Novi Pazar in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. This might also be related to the fact that the respondents primarily perceive local entrepreneurialism as a mental code deeply embedded in the historically long tradition of Novi Pazar as a trade-oriented city, without linking it to capitalism. Finally, it is possible that the website creators wanted to avoid internal or external disagreements in the interpretation of recent history, thus alleviating the problems of redefining the city's identity in a post-communist Serbia burdened by ethnic tensions.

5 Conclusion

This explorative study sought to gain nuanced insight into whether the building of a competitive city identity has a sufficient foothold in a medium-sized city facing development problems. In the case of Novi Pazar, the respondents' agreement about the city's key identity markers and their strong enthusiasm regarding local entrepreneurship and multiculturalism indicate the city's potential for building a competitive identity. However, at the same time, the respondents' feelings

of economic, political, and territorial marginalization indicate the obstacles stemming from its peripheral habitus. To summarize the key research findings in line with the neoendogenous urban policy inputs, which seek to build the identity of a particular city as a development resource and postulate that the best development effects are achieved through a synergy of exogenous and endogenous development factors (Vanclay, 2011), one might ask what programs should be supported by external development funds (national or supranational) in the case of Novi Pazar. The authors feel that programs aimed at ensuring the synergy of endogenous and exogenous development factors should primarily aim to empower local entrepreneurship, which is now facing considerable structural constraints. This would help unblock the local agency needed to activate the local potential for (re)creating both the opportunity structure and competitive identity of Novi Pazar.

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