

Park East and Bosniak Mahala (1)

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Philosophers cast conceptual nets in order to facilitate understanding of the human experience. In tossing his net, the Cambridge philosopher Raymond Geuss wrote that in a very broad sense, politics “means simply any human activity of structuring or directing or coordinating the actions of a group.” It is a way of “considering the human world,” a world that is potentially within our grasp to do something about.

As a fellow philosopher, I too have stretched conceptual frameworks to understand and interpret the world. Being broadly political, however, I also have a Marxian predilection to “doing” things, to changing the world, rather than only interpreting it. So I piece together ideas in ways that allow them to be transformative in peoples’ lives even in the remotest of ways.

These peoples are not just in my “backyard.” They are scattered around the world. Due to recent changes in my neighborhood, I have returned to some old ideas in order to re-understand the place in which I live and, more importantly, a place that I have visited. What emerges here is a new appreciation of neighborhoods and those peoples who intersect in or bump up against neighborhoods—residents and non-residents alike. As Geuss would have it, I am interested in “the politics of neighborhoods,” tinkering with cityscapes to direct the actions of groups in multiple ways.

Omaha, Mitrovica, and Neighborhoods

My current home is Omaha, Nebraska, but I have a fondness of the Balkans, including Mitrovica, Kosovo. This fondness dates back almost two decades. What interests me about these two cities, however, is not so much my familiarity with them as it is their neighborhoods, and in particular, two neighborhoods and their immediate surroundings—Park East in Omaha and Bosniak Mahala in North Mitrovica.

Neighborhoods naturally vary in size, number of residents, ethnic/racial makeup, and boundary type. Some neighborhoods could even be called enclaves, with discernable boundaries and made up of populations distinct from those surrounding it. Park East is larger in both area and population, and is ethnically/racially more diverse than Bosniak Mahala, but its borders are those of an enclave similar to its Kosovar counterpart.

By **Rory J. Conces**
Special for **Serbia Daily**
University of Nebraska

On the face of it, neighborhood enclaves seem innocuous, simply being parts of a larger whole. But this view overlooks the dynamism and the influence that such enclaves can have on not only the city itself, but also on the country as a whole. Neighborhood enclaves can be targets for urban renewal, often pitting city authorities and developers against residents of the neighborhood. They are places where residents and non-residents collide, for better or worse, in something comparable to class warfare. Neighborhood enclaves can also be places of contention that have more to do with long standing ethnic antagonisms than class fissures. When there are many of these enclaves (regardless of their size—neighborhood, municipality, or larger), separating dominant and minority groups from one another, the plural monoethnic society becomes a reality, a society in which there is little integration and interaction between ethnic peoples.

This brings us back to Geuss and the ever-present politics of neighborhoods. On the one hand, the politics of neighborhoods like Park East includes the process of gentrification, which involves both economic development and the displacement of people. It is primarily about the penetration of capital into an

area so that even more capital can be created for a select few, rather than about the well-being of the original residents. It disrupts the status quo. On the other hand, the politics of neighborhoods like Bosniak Mahala includes the process of “communification,” which involves obstructing one ethnic Other from entering the neighborhood of another. It struggles to maintain the status quo. Can these processes be reversed?

Four Main Thoroughfares

My neighborhood, called Park East, is small and largely inhabited by those on the lower half of the socio-economic scale. There is poverty and homelessness, as well as robbery and murder. It is bounded and intersected by four main east-west arterial thoroughfares. The word ‘thoroughfare’ is an apt word because most of those who use these four streets are going elsewhere. Many of the cars that travel around or through Park East travel rapidly, steered by drivers who have no intention of venturing down any of the neighborhood’s side streets. But who could blame them? My neighborhood is peppered with houses in various states of disrepair, abandoned lots cluttered with an old couch or worn out tires, gang graffiti, and an occasional person living in a makeshift tent on a sidewalk or in an alley. These objects are evocative for many non-residents,



triggering a myriad of thoughts and feelings, many of which are severely negative. Socio-economic class distinctions are ever present, with physical boundaries that more or less represent class partitions.

Although objects are sometimes intentionally positioned to send a message to onlookers, these are not. They are parts of peoples' ordinary lives; they are old, broken, or discarded objects. Or, as some would say, the detritus of awful lives. As a result, these objects have a centrifugal effect on non-residents, discouraging them from being in my neighborhood and interacting and establishing relationships with its residents. In effect, these objects make up the physical background against which drivers (and others, such as runners and would be tenants) make choices. Perhaps Cass Sunstein's notion of "choice architecture" includes those neighborhood objects that some take to be "eyesores," moving people in one direction or another whether or not they are aware of it.

Some of those passersby might take my neighborhood to be a fixture, that the poverty and the rest have a permanency that must be put up with, and the way they will do that is by driving through it without stopping. But if what triggers their disdain and revulsion is the sight of those evocative objects, then none of this must be. Park East and their experience of traveling through it could easily change. And in fact, that is what is happening.

Park East is undergoing the Capitalist phenomenon of gentrification, resulting in upscale coffee and bicycle shops, as well as new and renovated higher end flats. Objects that evoke poverty are being replaced with those that reflect affluence. Along some of its thoroughfares, development projects are beginning to have a centripetal effect on non-residents, welcoming and encouraging them to stop. University students, mostly white, are starting to find refuge in the cafes with their designer coffee and free Wi-Fi. Of course, for many of the long-standing residents of the neighborhood, these cafes and shops remain unaffordable and, thus, off limits to them. The message to them is that they have become "outsiders," so they are no longer welcomed. But it is not just an unwelcoming stare or harsh word. What follows the widespread replacement of the old with the new is the rise in property values, which leads to many of the long-time residents being displaced and forced to move elsewhere in the city. If gentrification is to acquire a human face, the gentrifiers themselves must redefine development and temper both inequality and displacement.

(to be continued)

Handball Federation Bans Serbia Over Cancelled Kosovo Match

The European Handball Federation has banned Serbia's junior women's team of Serbia from the World Cup after it cancelled a match with Kosovo on Friday

Serbia's women's under-20 handball team has been excluded from the handball World Cup qualifiers by the European Handball Federation, EHF, after it cancelled a match with Kosovo due to security reasons. "Under the circumstances of the match cancellation and the failure of Serbia to play the game, the EHF has decided that the Serbian national team will be excluded from further participation," the European Handball Federation said. Serbia's Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic pulled the match, saying that he wanted to avoid any violent clashes between Serbian fans and police.

"Could we arrange for this match to be held? For sure. But what would be the price? Conflicts between our people and police over things we do not believe in [and] are contrary to our interests. So we aren't ready for the police to beat people to ensure a match goes ahead that is contrary to all our stances," he told Serbia's Tanjug news agency on Friday.

The government called off the match after videos showed Serbian fans heading to Kovilovo, near Belgrade, where the match was supposed to take place, singing nationalist songs. While Serbia's team has ended its journey, Kosovo's team is scheduled to continue with other qualifying matches.

"Based on the information available to the EHF, the remaining matches between Norway, Slovakia and Kosovo are expected to be played without any further issues," the state-



ment of the EHF reads.

Kosovo's government blamed Serbian state institutions for the debacle. It said "the irresponsibility of the Serbian state and the institutions of Serbian rule and security" had created a fearful situation.

"Nationalistic acts that are impeding the development of international coercion matches are to be condemned, just as efforts are being made to ease relations between our states and Euro-Atlantic integration processes," the Kosovo government stated.

Previously it was agreed that the match would be played in Serbia without fans or media present, and without national anthems or the display of national symbols. For security reasons, the game was also moved to the small town of Kovilovo from the city of Kragujevac.

Jagodina Gets New Aircraft Plant

The City Council of the Municipality of Jagodina has allocated a plot of land of 1.14 hectares to the company Aero East Europe for the construction of a new light aircraft plant. The publically-owned construction land is given to the investor without compensation under a direct agreement, says that decision of the City Council, and the investor obliges to build a facility of five thousand square meters with accompanying features in line with its core activity. The investor must start building the

factory within 12 months of the signing of the agreement and complete the construction in two year, to employ at least 50 workers from the territory of Jagodina initially and 100 to 150 workers in the next three to five years, and the jobs must be maintained for at least five years. Aero East Europe has been operating in a rented space in Jagodina since November 2017, and it delivered two light Sila aircraft to clients in the USA in late February.