CHAPTER 5

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Belgrade Railway Junction: The Tale of Two Railway Stations

Main railway stations are some of the most important edifices in most cities in the world. Besides operating within a traffic system, these stations are also centers of commercial activity going on in and around railway stations, due to the high circulation of people and goods. They are often situated within easy reach of the main tourist attractions, which would be accessible on foot over a short walking distance or by means of city transportation. Unlike the airports, mostly located far from the city center and rather uniformly designed, the railway stations make the city's first impression on tourists and other visitors. They are usually monumental and specially designed to impress observers to embody the greatness of the nation and the state (like Gare du Nord in Paris, or the Milan railway station). This is especially the case of the railway station in Cologne, located next to the Cologne Cathedral, which immediately makes a huge impression on the passengers.

In the last fifty years, Belgrade has had two main railway stations. There were long periods during which neither station was fully operational. From the 1960s onwards railway traffic was becoming less frequent than road traffic, so that the Belgrade main railway station, situated on the right Sava bank, gradually lost its importance for the life of the city. A spacious terrain with tracks was cleared only recently, due to the Belgrade Waterfront project, and the old station was closed in 2018, together with the old Sava railway bridge. The only operational Belgrade railway station is now "Beograd Center".[1]

There is a broad span of time between the building of these two stations, the first being erected in the 1880s and the second in the 1970s. Both of them, though not always fully operational, were the subjects of international urban planning competitions as well as plans drawn up in ministries and various state offices. They have also been topics of fervent expert debates during the 20th century, and even today. The fact that the old station operated until 2018, despite the fact that its location had been debated on since the 1920s, is proof of the resilience and continuity of old inherited infrastructure.

[1] For the location of the Beograd Centar railway station see on: https://www.planplus.rs/zeleznicka-stanica-beograd-centar-prokop/5184 (accessed on 30.10.2023).

How did it come about that Belgrade would have two main railway stations during the last half of the century, and that the idea of the second station, as well as the location of the presently operational Belgrade station, would be deliberated on almost from the start, back in the 1880s?

Introducing Railway in Serbia: The First Belgrade Railway Station

In most European cities, railway stations were built in the 19th century (mostly after 1860), within the context of industrialization and modern city planning after the model of Baron Hausmann`s reconstruction of Paris. They were usually terminal stations located outside of historical city centers, within medieval walls (which were demolished), and situated in new grid-plan city areas.[2] Thus, the railway stations are inextricably linked to the birth of modern European 19th century cities.

That was, however, not the case with the first Belgrade railway station on the bank of the river Sava. First of all, the period of modern city planning for Belgrade does not coincide with the building of the station, for reasons of both politics and city topology. Belgrade did get its first modern urban design in the 1860s, as did many other European cities, but for Belgrade this planning was done only for the historical city center, within the "entrenchment" – the area enclosed by the city walls in European cities. That part of Belgrade is located on a slope towards the Danube, which made it an unsuitable location for a railway station. More importantly, Serbia was not yet an independent state in the 1860s, but an autonomous Principality of the Ottoman Empire, and the Serbian Government was not in a position to enter into a project of this type and scale. The Austrian banker Baron Moritz von Hirsch auf Gereuth, who later invested in the future Orient Express line, signed a convention with the Ottoman authorities in 1869 concerned with building the section of railway line between Constantinople and the Ottoman-Habsburg frontier in western Bosnia. Serbian territory was not included in this plan. The question of who would be connected to the emerging 19th century rail system rested on decisions that would carry long-term consequences.[3]

For instance, the Austro-Hungarian Government was bent on building a narrow-gauge Bosnian railway system and including it into the wider network of state railways, precisely for the purpose of integrating Bosnia into the Empire, a decision which in the long run made it very difficult for the Yugoslav Governments to integrate Bosnia into the new state network.[4] For this reason the Serbian Government was working on obtaining permission from the Sub-

[2] Cf. Friedrich Lenger, *Metropolen der Moderne. Eine Europäische Stadtgeschichte seit 1850* (München: C. H. Beck, 2013).

[3] Dirk van Laak, "Infrastructures", *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 20.05.2021, http://docupedia.de/zg/Laak_infrastructures_v1_en_2021, 11.

[4] See article in this Collection: Danijel Kežić, "The Bosnian and Serbian Narrow Gauge Railways and Construction of the Yugoslav Transport and Economic Space".

lime Porte to build a connecting line to the Ottoman railway system. In the 1870s the Serbian Government engaged French engineers to do a topographic survey and plan a detailed project for the railroad.

The decisive moment came in 1878, when Serbia was granted full independence at the Berlin Congress, an event followed by the establishment of a Convention between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in 1882. Under the terms of the Convention, the Serbian Government would build a section of the railroad between Belgrade and Niš. The location of the line, station, and bridge had also been determined by another Convention from April 1880. These structures were built from 1881 to 1884 and then, on August 23rd 1884, the first train started its journey from the new station.[5]

The building of the first railroad and station in Belgrade must be seen within the context of the borderline position of Serbia at the time, the relations between Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, and most importantly the Austro-Hungarian policy of "Drang nach Südosten". When the station was built in the early 1880s in the newly-independent Kingdom of Serbia, it lay close to the city but in fact outside of it. Like other railway stations in Europe, it was situated outside of the historical center, but unlike them it was not connected to the city. It lay on marshy land with no streets and very few buildings around it.[6] Therefore, the railway station, the railroad, and the Sava railway bridge served as an important pull force for the urbanization that ensued in the surrounding area.

The Orient Express line had been running through Serbia since 1886, so Belgrade had become a part of the global railway network.[7] Undoubtedly, the Serbian section of the line primarily served the interests of Austria-Hungary by facilitating its connection to the Middle East. But what was the benefit of the railway for Serbia at that particular time in history?

In order for infrastructures to truly come into existence, they need to become available to, and even indispensable for, large parts of the population.[8] At that time, there was virtually no visible economic benefit for the mostly rural Serbian population, which did not make its products available on the European market by means of the railway, simply because Serbian agriculture was mostly based on subsistence rather than traded in a market economy. However, infrastructures are a "prerequisite for market activity that the market itself cannot

[5] Душан Бајић, "Осврт на студије, пројектовање и изградњу железничких пруга у Србији и Југославији", in *Пројектовање и изградња београдског железничког чвора. Зборник радова са међународног Симпозијума одржаног у Београду 20-21. јуна 1995. год* (Београд: Саобраћајни институт ЦИП, 1996), 19f.; Братислав Стојановић, "Београдски железнички чвор" I део, *Годишњак града Београда* (*ГГБ*) 1977, XXIV, 253; Анатол В. Груњински, *Прилози за историју београдског железничког чвора (Сто година железничке станице Београд)*, (Београд: Служба за информисање радника ООУР СТД, 1984), 25, 32, 38.

[6] Груњински, *Прилози за историју,* 14, 25, 32, 35, 38.

[7] The Belgrade – Niš – Leskovac- Vranje section was biult in 1886, but the Orient Express line could go through Serbia only from 1888, when the Serbian section of the railway was connected to the Bulgarian and Turkish one.

[8] Van Laak, "Infrastructures"*,* 6.

create".[9] The benefits of the railway system in Serbia were felt only in due time, when other geopolitical factors had become more favorable, with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) and the relocation of the state border further north from Belgrade.

The Interwar Period: The Planning of the Railway Junction and another Railway Station

In the aftermath of WWI, Belgrade became the capital of a much bigger state, and the state leadership was bent on creating an important traffic junction in and around Belgrade. However, building railway facilities in the area of Belgrade turned out to be a very difficult task: one that had to address the problems of establishing a state railway network in the first place, then the issue of constructing the Belgrade railway junction, and finally (and, as it happened, least importantly) the problem of the city planning of Belgrade. The topography of the city area - the layout of its settlements and residential quarters, as well as the proximity of two big rivers - proved to be a great challenge. [10]

In 1918 Belgrade had a station suitable for a town of up to 50,000 inhabitants, while already by the eve of WWII the Belgrade population had almost doubled, reaching a total of about 100,000.[11] It was clear by 1905 that the station would have to be reorganized and enlarged, even though such a project was not feasible at the time.[12] After 1918, Belgrade was meant to become a junction of no fewer than six domestic and international railway lines.[13] However, a challenge lay in the question of how to turn a station built for the purposes of conducting Austro-Hungarian foreign policy into an infrastructural object fit for the capital of a country with great ambitions in the international

[9] Ibid.,18.

[10] For instance, during the geological survey in 1990s more than 2000 landfalls have been identified in the Belgrade area. (Петар Локин, Милутин Игњатовић, „Геотехнички услови изградње објеката београдског железничког чвора", in *Пројектовање и изградња београдског железничког чвора. Зборник радова са међународног Симпозијума одржаног у Београду 20-21. јуна 1995. год*. (Београд: Саобраћајни институт ЦИП, 1996), 19-29, 51-66, 51, 53).

[11] Милош Црвчанин, "Београдска железничка постројења", in *Београд. Генерални урбанистички план 1950* (Београд: Извршни одбор НО Београда, Урбанистички завод ИОНО, 1951), 102; The traffic intensified steadily at the Belgrade railway station in 1920s. The number of trains coming to Belgrade increased from 8825 in 1919, 29.392 in 1920, to 69.243 in 1921, and for the 1922 it was expected to reach 72,300. Душан Илијин, "Обнова железнице у Краљевини СХС (1919-1924)", Докторска дисертација (Београд: Универзитет у Београду, Филозофски факултет, Одељење за историју, 2014), 280.

[12] Груђински, *Прилози за историју,* 34, 39, 41 f., 74.

[13] Istorijski arhiv Beograd (IAB), fond 488, Opština grada Beograda, The Belgrade Masterplan. Reconstruction and regulation of the traffic within the Belgrade railway junction. Belgrade, May 1923; Belgrade was to become a junction of the Adria railway (Beograd – Kotor), Belgrade – Odesa railway (through Romania), Belgrade – Zagreb – Ljubljana railway, Belgrade – Niš – Thessaloniki railway and the local railways through Serbia and Bosnia. (Илијин, "Обнова железнице", 369).

arena. This is a typical example of "path dependencies" and the accumulated power of imperial states in old infrastructure. The problem would persist for the whole following century.

On this question, two alternatives were debated: either turning the existing terminal station partially or totally into a transit station, or building a new station at a different location. As it concerns city planning, however, there are no fixed rules with regard to determining the location of a main railway station. It all depends on historical circumstances, building density, future development perspectives, and the conditions necessary to include the station in the network of city and intercity transport.[14] Thus, when the argument in favor of its present location was first raised by some experts and state authorities in 1931,[15] one of its lines of reasoning centered on the intention for Belgrade to overcome its borderline city heritage and enable its development on the other side of the Sava.[16]

This latter part of the project had a special political connotation, besides being just a city development project. It was believed that a "great" Belgrade, stretching out from both sides of its rivers, would never again be reduced to its former borderline position and that, therefore, any attempts at secession made by northern (former Austro-Hungarian) parts of the country would be neutralized. Hence, the project was meant to serve a long-term political agenda. However, until the end of WWII this idea was in fact abandoned, due to the extreme difficulty and cost of its realization at the time, and its relation to other important issues surrounding the development of the Belgrade railway junction. For example, the types of railway connections that would be used on the right banks of the Danube and Sava, as well as the prospective location of the marshaling yard had to be settled, all of which depended on how the route of the Adria railroad would be planned. So, according to most of the interwar plans for its reconstruction, the railway station was meant to continue on at its then-current location, perhaps only to be partially turned into a transit station in the direction of Pančevo (facilitating the connection to Banat and Eastern Europe).[17]

During the international competition for the Belgrade Masterplan in 1923, there was talk in many of the projects that envisaged the reconstruction of the main railway station of a possible third station (the second being a local station on the Danube) "somewhere in the background of the city".[18] The Committee decided, however, to enlarge the existing station and turn it into a transit one.[19]

[14] Стојановић, Београдски железнички чвор I део, 260.

[15] There was an illegal settlement on the spot, a shanty town called Jatagan mala, from 1919 until late 1930s. (Jatagan mala, https://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Јатаган_мала, 9.12.2020; See also: Zlata Vuksanović Macura, "Jatagan mala – Nastanak, razvoj i nestanak jednog od najpoznatijih beogradskih sirotinjskih naselja", *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 17 (2010), 151-173.

[16] Cvrčanin, Beogradska železnička postrojenja, 102.

[17] Dušan Nikolić, "Istorijat nastanka kapaciteta železničkog čvora do njegove rekonstrukcije", I deo, *Urbanizam Beograda* 44-45 (1977), 28.

[18] Cited in: Zlata Vuksanović Macura, *San o gradu. Međunarodni konkurs za urbanističko uređenje Beograda 1921-1922* (Beograd: Orion Art, 2015), 55, 69.

[19] AJ-148-12, "The Commission. Belgrade Masterplan. Belgrade Railway Junciton. Comparison of the 8th draft of the new main passenger's railway station project"; IAB, 488, fond Opštine

This decision also reflects the accumulated power of old infrastructure, since it is always easier to reconstruct the existing infrastructure than it is to build that infrastructure anew. All reconstruction depended on the aforementioned Adria railway route, and therefore such reconstruction was not to be expected in the near future.[20] Since the 1924 Belgrade Masterplan was never fully implemented, and the post office building was erected right next to the station in 1929, all ideas about the enlargement of the station were now off the table.[21]

When in 1931 the General Directorate of the State Railways opened an international competition for the Belgrade railway junction project, the failure to reach a decision among the experts and authorities resulted in the formation of a new commission by the Ministry of Traffic. The president of the commission, engineer Petar Senjanović, came upon the idea of using the present location (Prokop), a shanty town whose displacement had just been decided upon in 1931.[22]

However, the idea of the railway station in this location, or somewhere in the surrounding area (in the valley of the Mokrilug river), was in fact very old. A map kept in the Austrian State Archives dating from before 1884 (when the station on the Sava was built), put the station very near to that area: to the East of its present location but in the same river valley.

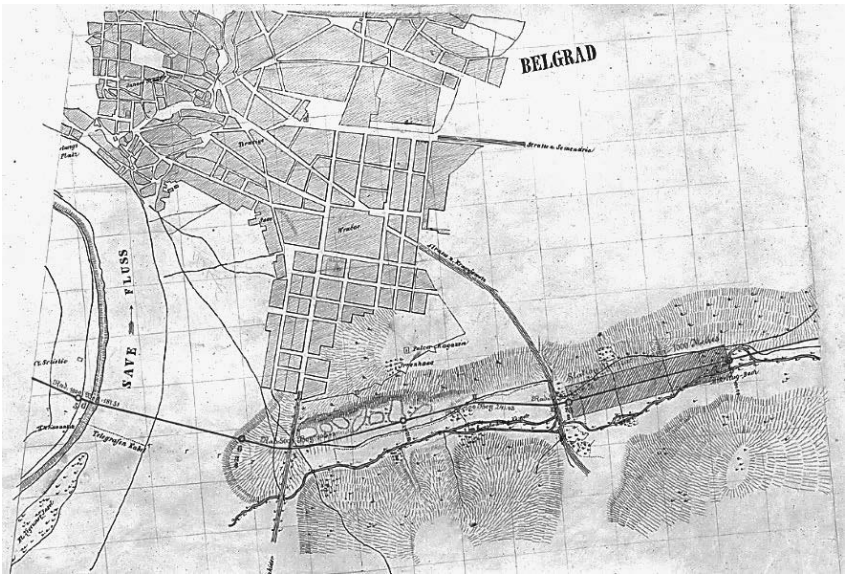

Fig. 1: The Austrian plan for the location of the Belgrade railway station in the Mokrilug river valley, before 1884. (source: Z. Vuksanović Macura, "Bara Venecija i Savamala: Železnica i grad", *Nasleđe* 16 (2015), 9-26, 10, sl. 1; original:*ÖStA, KA BIXc 789/II*)

grada Beograda, Katastarsko odeljenje OGB, The Report of Ranislava Avramovića, member of the Commission, submitted on June 10th 1923 to the president of the Commission for the Belgrade Masterplan, Belgrade, Braće Jugovića str. 1 (in Generalni plan Beograda. Izrada, rekonstrukcija i uređenje saobraćaja beogradskog železničkog čvora. Beograd, maja 1923)

[20] IAB, OGB 488, The Report of Ranislav Avramović submitted on June 10th 1923...

[21] Груђински, *Прилози за историју,* 80.

[22] Vuksanović Macura, "Jatagan mala"*,* 168.

The French Society for the Building and Exploitation of the first Serbian Railway also suggested before 1880 a possible location at a "municipal hay storage" ("senjak") near Topčider road, also very close to Prokop. The valley of the Mokrilug river was also discussed within the circles of Serbian engineers and decision makers, but the possible use of that location represented a minority opinion at the time.[23] Another minority opinion opting for a location "at the junction of the Kragujevac Road and the Mokrilug river" was expressed by a major in the Serbian Army in 1881, for reasons of national defense. He believed it to be a better way to secure a connection to the Danube as an important European trade route. Furthermore, at the time the Danube valley, in which the industrial zone of the city was located, was considered the most probable direction for the future development of the city.[24] All of these ideas refer more or less to the present location of the Belgrade main railway station in Prokop.

This location was also occasionally deliberated in the interwar period. In the guidelines of the International Competition for the 1924 Belgrade Masterplan, there was an option for another railway station. One of the competing projects actually considered five railway stations, with one of them situated in Prokop, next to the Mokrilug river.[25] The managing director of the State Railways also favored this idea in 1926. However, by the end of 1920s it was abandoned as infeasible.[26] When it was put back on the table again in 1931, a debate ensued about its pros and cons. The arguments in favor went as follows: the uninhabited area rendered the usually expensive expropriations unnecessary, the distance from the city meant that it would not disrupt the city transportation network, and, very importantly, the complex and expensive reconstruction of the then existing station would not have to be undertaken. This new station would serve for international lines, while the old one would be used for cargo and local transportation, and serve as a marshaling yard. Still, there was the issue of connecting the new station to the Sava railway bridge and to the old station, by way of tunnels. Despite this, the plan was adopted by the authorities in February 1932 and was presented as an integral part of the second, 1931/32 Belgrade Railway Junction plan.[27]

[23] Милован Костић, *Комерцијално железничарство (ручна књига за ученике трговачке школе)* (Београд: Штампарија Д. Димитријевића, 1900), 13. (Cited in: Груђински, 12).

[24] Груђински, *Прилози за историју,* 12f.

[25] The international competition project "Santé, beauté, commerce et traffic" by authors from Hungary (Vuksanović Macura, *San o gradu*, 123).

[26] Здравко Васковић, "Београдски железнички чвор", *Технички лист* 16:3-4 (1934), 206.

[27] Петар Миленковић, "Београдски железнички чвор", *Технички лист* 16:3-4 (1934), 54; Dušan Nikolić, "110 godina beogradskog železničkog čvora", in *Beogradski železnički čvor*, (Ed.) Poslovni sistem "Grmeč", (Beograd: Privredni pregled, 1995), 15f.

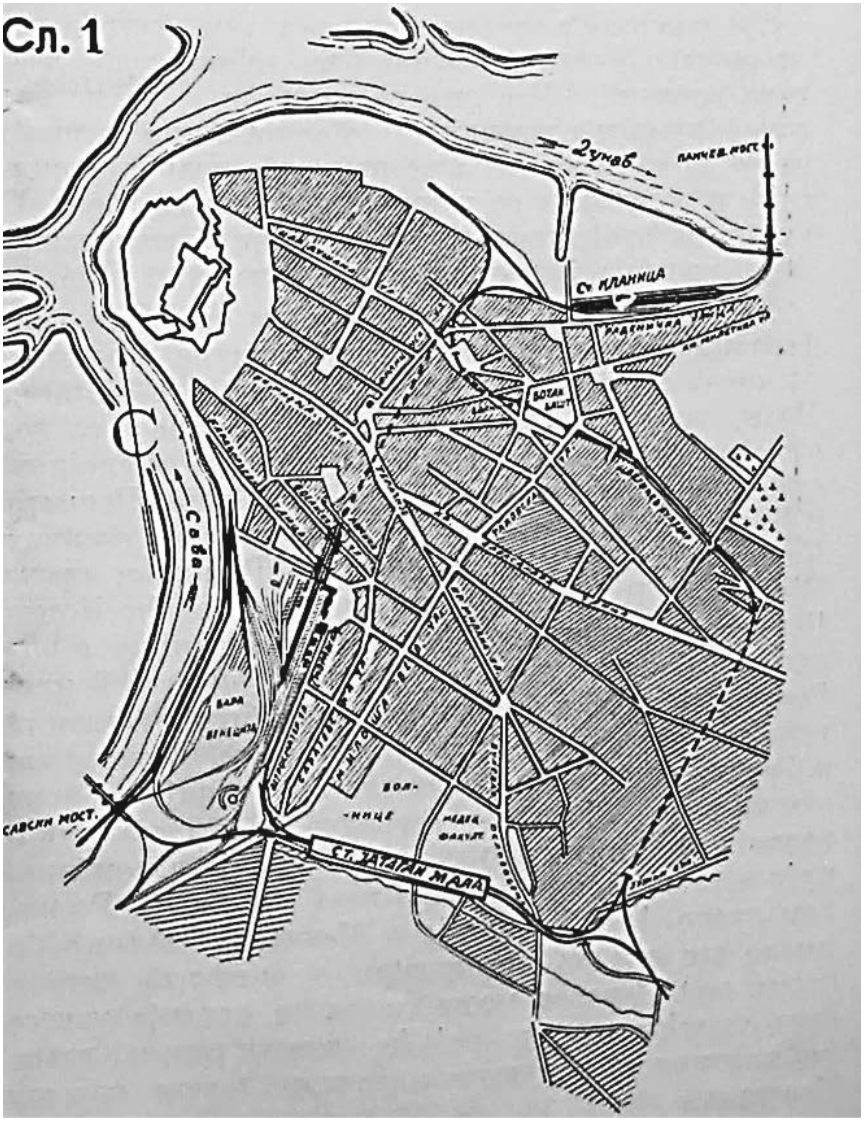

Fig. 2 The second railway junction project in 1931/32 (Source: Zdravko Vasković, "Beogradski železnički čvor", *Tehnički list* 3-4 [1934], 204-213, 207)

However, the opponents of the plan won the day, and this idea was not entertained any further until 1939, when the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army suggested building a new station "at the confluence of the Kumodraž and Mokrilug rivers" for strategic reasons in the context of a political crisis and the probability of war. The existing station at the Sava bank was considered by the Army an easy target for enemy bombs.[28] Some expert opinions differed: the

[28] IAB, OGB 481, Inspection of the National Defence. A letter of General Bor. M. Ristić to the City Council on December 21st 1939.

railway engineer Zdravko Vasković believed that the plan did not take into consideration the overall solution of the railway junction, and that it also overlooked the difference in height between the new station and the railway bridge.[29] Dragomir Popović, the architect and expert in city planning, held that the proposed location was not in the interest of the city.[30] According to the 1933 railway junction project (designed by Vasković) the main railway station was neither to be relocated, nor to be reconstructed into a transit station.[31]

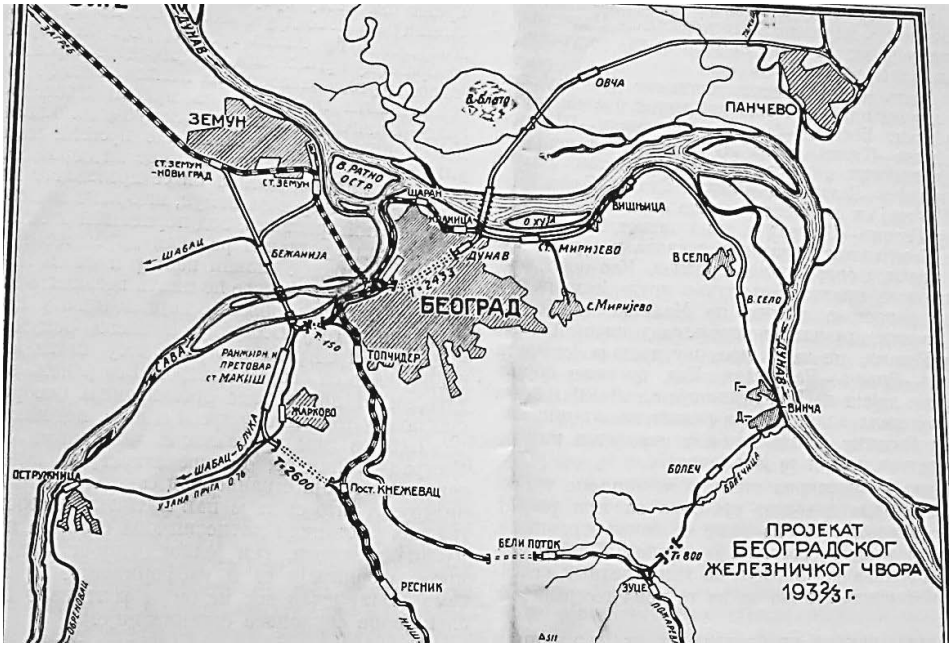

Fig. 3 The third railway junction project in 1932/33 (source: Petar Milenković, "Beogradski železnički čvor", *Tehnički list* 3-4 [1934], 48-59, 53)

In the meantime (between 1933 and 1939), only the possibility of relocating the station was deliberated, either closer to the Sava River, or upstream along the river.

Unlike the situation in the aftermath of WWI, when the state authorities had unrealistically high expectations in terms of international railway traffic through Belgrade, more precise data had become available in the 1930s. It turned out that the number of express international trains had increased from nine in 1922 to twelve in 1938, and the number of passenger trains from seven in 1922 to twenty two in 1938.[32] Since only the Orient Express line was passing

[29] Васковић, "Београдски железнички чвор", 206.
[30] Драгомир Поповић, "Београдски железнички чвор", *Београдске општинске новине (БОН)* 2 (1938), 72.
[31] Nikolić, "110 godina", 15f.
[32] IAB, OGB 481, The railway network in the Regulatory plan for Belgrade. The 1938/39 Competition Rules.

through Belgrade, and all of the other international trains terminated in the Belgrade station, one of the railway experts, engineer Vasković, raised an argument against its reconstruction in 1938. The anticipated high volumes of transit from Pančevo to Belgrade suggested in the 1924 Belgrade Masterplan had so far not materialized.[33] As a result, the benefits of this great infrastructure enterprise were not so great for the population or the economy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at that point. However, for political reasons it was held as an imperative to keep going the international route from Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean, through the Pančevo-Belgrade section. Consequently, the focus of the next two Belgrade railway junction plans (of 1935-36 and 1938, respectively) was on relocating the station by a few hundred meters or a few kilometers upstream, and reconstructing it as a transit station**.** But again, a debate ensued on whether it should continue to be used as a terminal for some lines, or as a transit station for all the lines.[34] Opinion was divided not only between the state and municipal authorities, but also between city council, planning, and railway experts.[35] When in 1939 a wide consensus was reached for turning the station into a transit station for all lines and directions,[36] engineer Vasković raised an argument against spending large sums of money "only to accommodate no more than 330 passengers".[37]

The whole project was capital intensive, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was not able to procure enough financial support for its realization. Due to

[33] Васковић, "Београдски железнички чвор", 210; Vasković also argued that the idea of two-storey and trasit railway station was abandoned in Europe, and that terminal stations, enabling much easier access to the passengers were, therefore, to be found in most of European cities. (Здравко Васковић, „Београдски железнички чвор [предавање одржано 24. феб. 1938. у секцији Београд УИАЈ], *Технички лист* 20:7-8 [1938], 79f.).

[34] Nikolić, "110 godina", 15f.; IAB, OGB 488, A Commission Report on the recent railway junction project (Kirilo Savić and Pavle Riškov), submitted on September 3rd 1936, to the Belgrade City Council; Васковић, Београдски железнички чвор (предавање...), 91.

[35] IAB, OGB 488, A Commission Report on the recent railway junction project (Kirilo Savić and Pavle Riškov), submitted on September 3rd 1936, to the Belgrade City Council; „Зашто Београд ни после 20 година није добио железнички чвор (предавање Драг. Поповића, арх – урбанисте у Клубу архитеката)", *Политика,* 15.2.1938, 6; IAB, OGB 493, A letter of the Minister of Construction, Dr Kožulj, to the Minsiter of Traffic, on October 21st 1936, concerning the opinion of his Ministry on the Belgrade railway junciton project; IAB, OGB 488, The position paper of K. Savić, R. Avramović and P. Riškov on the ways of connecting Belgrade railway station on the Sava bank to the Danube bridge, without a railroad through the tunnel and below the fortress. Submitted to the City Council on November 5th 1936; IAB, OGB 488, The position of the City Council on the so called "Belgrade Railway Junction" and its projects, made by the Ministry of Traffic (sine datum); Васковић, Београдски железнички чвор (предавање…).

[36] IAB, OGB 481, The railway network in the Regulatory plan for Belgrade. The 1938/39 Competition Rules. (sine datum), by: R. Avramović, V.Žakić and Božidar Bojović; "Предлог инжињера г. Жакића да железничка пруга у будуће пролази кроз Београд надвожњацима", *Политика*, 6.2.1938, 6.

[37] "Треба ли због 330 путника преиначити београдску железничку станицу у пролазну и утрошири за то 600 000 000 динара?", *Политика*, 7. 3 1938, 6; "Београдски железнички чвор", *Привредни преглед,* 4.6.1938.

the fact that the railway company was run by the state, direct investments were not an option.The state railway company was dependent on foreign loans, which were very difficult to raise at the time of the Great Depression in 1929. War reparation funds were available, though their use was limited to the acquisition of materials.

And so it happened that none of the plans for either the railway station or the railway junction as a whole were realized until WWII. During the war, Belgrade was once again a border city between occupational zones. The German Wehrmacht troops carried out some repairs on the railway infrastructure that was damaged by the bombing in 1941 (the Sava and Danube bridges). They also built two marshaling yards (Topčider and Pančevo-Airport), and reconstructed another one at Bežanijska Kosa (Zemun). Another track was laid from Topčider to the Danube railway station, through the main railway station. The Orient Express did not run during the war; instead, only some German military and ambulance trains were running. The whole railway infrastructure was either totally devastated or at least seriously damaged during WWII.[38]

Socialist Yugoslavia: the New Railway Station

In the aftermath of WWII, starting from the 1950s, all dilemmas of the interwar engineers and decision makers concerning the railway station(s) were resolved within the new sociopolitical order and new geopolitical context of Yugoslavia. Between the political and military blocks, decisions were made regarding the number and type of railway stations that would be needed (i.e. several stations, all of them transit) and finally, in the 1960s, the decision was made to transfer the main station to its present location. However, there was still a long way to go.

The emerging settlement of New Belgrade on the left bank of the Sava river had now risen to even greater political importance than had been the case before WWII. The new city, based on modern city planning principles, was meant to become the center of a Balkan federation in the aftermath of the war.[39] After the Tito-Stalin break in 1948, its importance was "reduced" and it served as the new capital of Yugoslavia, an integral part of Belgrade, and the administrative center for some of the top institutions of the socialist Yugoslavia, such as the Central Committee of the CPY and the Federal Government of Yugoslavia. Therefore, it had to be integrated into the state railway network.

After 1945 it was deliberated whether there should be two or even three main railway stations located on both sides of the Sava. When discussing the new 1950 Belgrade Masterplan, the Belgrade City Planning Institute (Urban-

[38] Груђински, *Прилози за историју*, 114f.

[39] Vladimir Kulić, "New Belgrade and Socialist Yugoslavia's three globalisations", *International Journal for History,Culture and Modernity* 2:2 (2014), 131; Branko Bojović, "Od prestiža do humanizma iliti moje viđenje budućnosti Novog Beograda" in *The Future of New Belgrade/Budućnost Novog Beograda*, special issue of *Arhitektura Urbanizam,* 25 (1986), 11.

istički Zavod) pleaded for one main station, to be located in New Belgrade or alternatively Jatagan Mala (Prokop). The Institute director and the Belgrade chief architect Nikola Dobrović (1945-48) also pleaded for only one main railway station to be located in New Belgrade, for reasons of both politics and modern city planning.[40] The position of the old station was, according to him, impeding the development of Belgrade, occupying the large terrain on the right bank of the Sava. By removing the station and the railroad below the Belgrade fortress, between the main station and the Danube bridge, the city would gain both valuable space, which could be used for cultural and recreational purposes, and unhindered access to the river.[41]

Incidentally, architect Dragomir Popović, a pre-WWII expert in city planning, had precisely the same notion in 1938. He wrote that "….the main station should be located on the other side of the river, if the existing one is to be removed." The idea was to connect Belgrade to Zemun, to drain the marshy land on the left bank of the Sava, and to erect a new part of the city, thereby forestalling any possibility of future political secession of the northern part of Serbia (Yugoslavia). In that respect, the politics of pre- and post- WWII Yugoslavia did not differ – a fact that presents yet another example of the continuities in the "infrastructure politics" of Yugoslavia.[42] The railway station in New Belgrade was built in 1970, within the network of other city transport stations (Vukov Spomenik, Slavija, and Dunav).[43]

The Ministry of Traffic, however, held that one railway station would not suffice, and suggested building another two stations for international traffic, while keeping the existing one in its place.[44] In the final version of the 1950 Belgrade Masterplan, the decision was reached to abandon old stations in both Belgrade and Zemun and build several stations on both sides of the Sava, which would be included into the city transportation network.[45] The railway line was

[40] On the engagement of Nikola Dobrović as a city architect in the mid 1940s see: Nikola Dobrović, *Obnova i Izgradnja Beograda. Konture budućeg Grada [Reconstruction and Construction of Belgrade. Contours of the Future City]* (Beograd: Urbanistički Institut NRS, 1946); Марта Вукотић Лазар, "Улога архитекте Николе Добровића на имплементацији савремених урбанистичких иархитектонских теорија и поетика у институционално планирање урбаног развоја Београда. Прилог сагледавању и тумачењу "Добровићевог Генералштаба" у контексту визије "Великог Београда", *Гласник Етнографског института САНУ* 63:2 (2015), 411f.

[41] Никола Добровић, Владимир Марковић, "Железнички проблем Београда", in *Железнички проблем Београда* (Београд: Урбанистички институт, 1946), 30f., 44, 47.

[42] Поповић, Београдски железнички чвор, 69; Cf. Ранка Гашић, "Планови за изградњу Београда на левој обали Саве у међуратном периоду", in Бојана Миљковић Катић (Ed.), *Просторно планирање у југоисточној Европи (до Другог светског рата)* (Београд: Историјски институт-Балканолошки институт-Географски институт САНУ- Универзитет у Београду, 2011), 379-395.

[43] Братислав Стојановић, "Београдски железнички чвор II део", *ГГБ* 26 (1979), 276; Sava Janjić, "Osnovna koncepcija rešenja novog železničkog čvora", *Urbanizam Beograda* 47 (1978), 13.

[44] Стојановић, Београдски железнички чвор I део, 264, 266, 272f.

[45] Id., Београдски железнички чвор II део, 275.

to run through Jatagan mala (Prokop) where also the main station would be located.[46] This strategic decision proved to be final. Two main transit stations for passengers on both sides of the Sava, as well as their connection to the city transportation network, were also foreseen by the 1969 Belgrade Masterplan.[47]

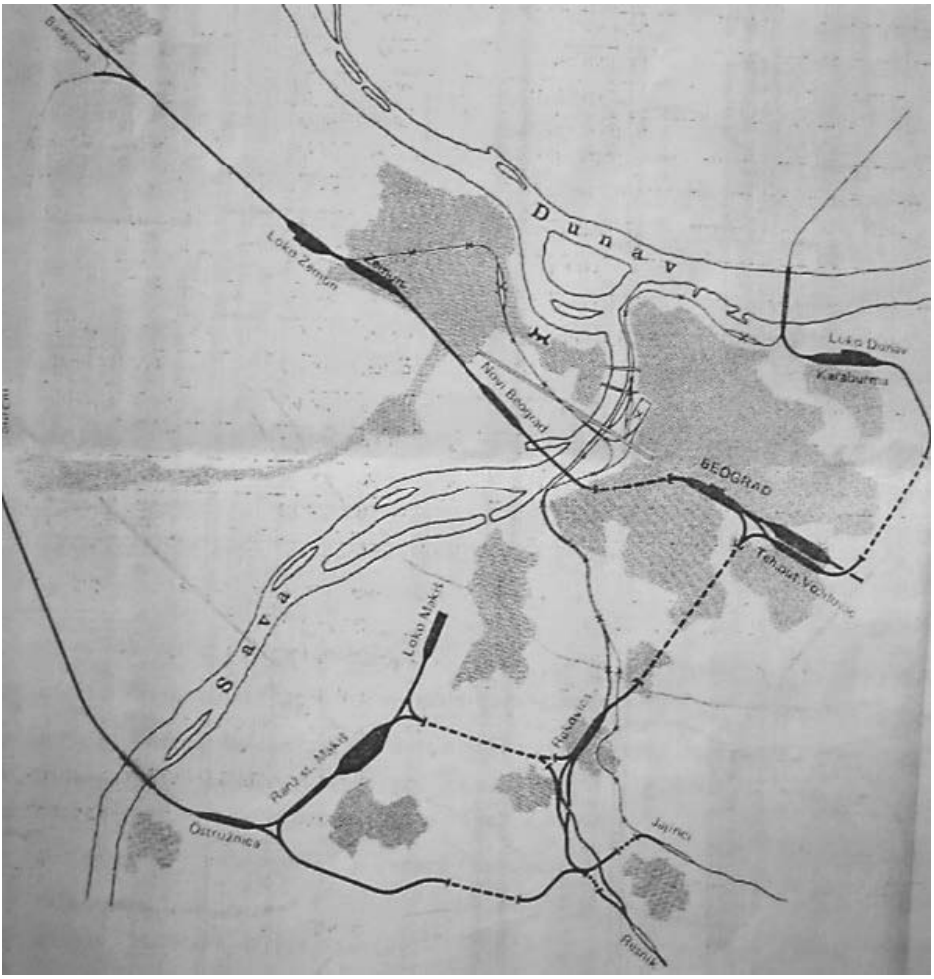

Fig. 4 The Belgrade railway junction project of 1970 (source: Nikolić, Dušan, „Rešenje beogradskog železničkog čvora“, in *Projektovanje i izgradnja beogradskog železničkog čvora. Zbornik radova sa međunarodnog Simpozijuma održanog u Beogradu 20-21. juna 1995. god* [Beograd: Saobraćajni institut CIP, 1996], 35-47, 38)

The process of rail electrification from 1963 onwards made all temporary solutions regarding the location of the main railway station and the entire

[46] Id., Београдски железнички чвор I део, 272.

[47] Душан Николић, “Решење београдског железничког чвора”, in *Пројектовање и изградња београдског железничког чвора. Зборник радова са међународног Симпозијума одржаног у Београду 20-21. јуна 1995. год*, (Београд: Саобраћајни институт ЦИП, 1996), 45.

Belgrade railway junction infeasible.[48] It was now imperative to reach a final decision. In long discussions among various experts and state institutions (including the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) from 1968 to 1971, this more than a century long conundrum regarding the Belgrade railway junction at that moment finally seemed to have been resolved. The future station in Prokop was part of the network, comprised of the New Belgrade station, the Danube bridge, the tunnels connecting the Danube and Sava rivers, and the new marshaling yard in Železnik (also on the right bank of the Sava, but further from the river and close to Prokop).[49]

Construction of the new main railway station began in 1977. However, it took almost half a century to make the station fully functional. Funds were already lacking by 1980, and in the following decade Yugoslavia went through an economic crisis, which was followed by dissolution and war in the 1990s. Meanwhile, the construction of the station was progressing very slowly. Due to completely new political and economic circumstances, the strategic decisions of the 1970s, which had seemed to be final, were now constantly being reexamined. In the following two decades the station was far from being completed.[50]

The Period of Transition: from the 2000s until Today

In the 2000s it was decided to build facilities for commercial use in and around the station, which would in turn help finance the completion of the construction. Since the Serbian State Railway Company could not afford it, the project was carried out by means of an international open call in 2005. However, an agreement was not reached with the Hungarian firm Trigranit, which won the tender, but instead with the Serbian firm Energoprojekt, with the contract being limited to the completion of the station building only, while the agreements concerning the commercial premises were offered in an open tender. It was only in connection with the Belgrade Waterfront project and the ensuing closure of the old railway station that the construction of the new station was finally completed, in the period between 2014 and 2018.[51] Since 2021 the "Beograd Centar" main railway station has been fully operational for all railway traffic though Serbia.

[48] Nikolić, Istorijat nastanka, I deo, 28, 37, 38.

[49] Id., 38-45, 47f.; Zorica Slavković-Marjanović, "Od koncepcije do realizacije - duga pruga", *Glasnik inžinjerske komore Srbije* 4 (2006), Janjić, Osnovna koncepcija, 13, 16; Зоран Жунковић, "Путничка железничка станица Београд Центар у Прокопу", in *Пројектовање и изградња београдског железничког чвора. Зборник радова са међународног Симпозијума одржаног у Београду 20-21. јуна 1995. год*. (Београд: Саобраћајни институт ЦИП, 1996), 215-226**.**

[50] Жунковић, Путничка железничка станица, 215-217, 219, 223f.

[51] Železnička stanica Beograd – Centar, (https://sr.m.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/Железничка_станица_Београд_центар, 17.2.2021).

Railway Station today
(source: *https://www.gradnja.rs/prokop-dron-beograd-centar/*)

Conclusion

The resilience and continuity of old infrastructure is certainly reflected in the case of the Belgrade railway stations. The problems of the reconstruction and relocation of the Belgrade main railway station have lingered on for the most of the 20th century, starting in 1918, when the problem first arose with the new geopolitical position of Belgrade and the emerging new state of Yugoslavia, and then seemingly being resolved in the early 1970s with the new station being constructed in its present location in Prokop. In fact, it was only recently (in 2018) that the old station was closed, but the question is still highly controversial in the public discourse. In any case, the solutions and, perhaps even more so, the lack of action at the appropriate moment have affected the development of Belgrade in the long run. The old station building together with the railroad below the fortress, built in 1938, have been a significant hindrance to all plans regarding the beautification of the river banks, and have in fact paved the way for what was happening (or rather not happening) in the area of the right bank of the Sava during the next century. In the so-called "Sava amphitheater", the station, with its ample yard by the river, divided the city from the river bank. Thus, the accumulated power of old infrastructure was heavily imposed on Yugoslav and Serbian decision-makers throughout the 20th century.

Another example of continuities in that respect is the history of the present railway station location in Prokop. This question had already been raised in the 1880s, and was resolved in the 1970s. It was on and off the table for shorter and longer periods. However, the fact that this idea was discussed for so long a period of time, in different states and by different political regimes, only to be finally and fully realized only recently was, in fact, "the other side of the coin"

of the powerlessness that political and expert elites felt in face of the accumulated power of old infrastructure.

After WWII great efforts were made to overcome the problems of inherited infrastructure. The opinion widely shared among the experts was that the Belgrade railway junction was impeding the development of the city, not only in the aftermath of the war, but also in the 1970s, when most of the structures of the junction were completed. The railway was actually paving the way for and predetermining the development of the city.[52] However, Belgrade was no exception in that respect, since in the 19th and 20th centuries railway junctions usually formed the cornerstone of the modern redesigning of European cities, and were included into the network of other modern means of transportation.[53]

One very important feature of great infrastructure systems is how accessible and usable they are for the general public. In the case of Belgrade, it seems that history repeats itself when it comes to the connection of the railway station to the city. When the old station was built in the 1880s, it was located outside of the city`s inhabited area. The backfilling of the terrain and building of avenues and streets around the station were done afterwards, in order to enable access to the station for public use. When the building of the new station started in the 1970s, the location was also lacking in appropriate access to the city. It was only in 2016 that two city bus lines leading to the station were introduced, and another tram line is probably going to be instituted in the near future.[54] Many Belgraders are not quite sure how to get to the "Beograd Centar" railway station. At the present moment, it is even uncertain whether the station will be connected to the city by metro line in the foreseeable future or, indeed, ever. Hence, the present Belgrade main railway station may be, in a way, even further from the city than the old one was, back in the 1880s.

Unlike Western Europe, where deregulation and privatization have slowed down considerably since 2000s, (and in some cases the process has reversed),[55] Belgrade has seen quite the opposite effect. These processes only started in the 1990s and have accelerated considerably in the last decade. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the geopolitical position of western Balkan states has been reduced to the periphery of global capitalism, and these states bear all the marks of the world's economic and power inequalities. Connecting to the network of the regional and supraregional traffic system is certainly the future of Belgrade and the railway system in Serbia. Whether its position in the "global periphery" can be overcome does not solely depend on that. However, one important feature of great infrastructure projects should not be ignored: once they are in existence, any further development is highly dependent on them.

[52] Janjić, Osnovna koncepcija, 12-19; Dušan Nikolić, Tatjana Katić, "Ranžirna stanica u Železniku", *Urbanizam Beograda* 27 (1974), 14.

[53] Стојановић, Београдски железнички чвор II део, 276.

[54] Bulevar Oslobođenja – Klinički centar – Prokop (Železnička stanica Beograd – Centar; eKapija |(https://sr.m.wikipedia.org/sr/Железничка_станица_Београд_центар#Реактивирање_и_тренутно_стање, 24.08.2021).

[55] Van Laak, "Infrastructures", 17.

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