

“Displacing and Disciplining Roma Waste Pickers in Belgrade. Who can become a rightful subject of the 'clean' and 'sustainable' city to come?”

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INTRODUCTION

“Environmental Aspects in Poverty Reduction. Millenium Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability. Related PRSP Main Directions: 1. Economic Growth, 2. Prevention of new poverty, 3. Bringing people out of poverty.

Assessment/Situation Analysis: Poor living conditions and drinking water quality have adversely affected the health of those living in urban slums.... Lack of proper waste management, including open waste dumps, leakage from waste dumps into groundwater and inadequate or inappropriate incineration, is creating health hazards for the urban poor, particularly for Roma, refugees and IDPs. ...

Related Policies/Strategies/Activities: Improve water supply in rural and urban water supply services. Investigate ways to address major pollution issues in environmental hotspots. Develop a consistent and modern legal and institutional system for environmental protection, harmonised with the EU's framework. Improve public awareness of environmental issues. Addressing hazardous waste management issues“

(Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Serbia, 2003:73f.)

“The ‘persistence of poverty’ is a constitutive dilemma for the idea of historical progress. Despite proclamations to the contrary, this is not because poverty is a foundational problem to be solved as such, but rather because the idea of progress demands the counterpoint of destitution in a variety of ways, especially as it is articulated with economic development, capitalist accumulation, and the promise of prosperity.”

(Goldstein 2015:198)

With these sentences Goldstein begins his chapter on the production of discontinuity in temporal imagination of poverty, respectively the construction of historical specificity of poverty and efforts in its alleviation: coming under ever new masks, tied to ever new agendas and practices – agendas and practices which produce new fertile soil for dispossession in the name of development. In my paper I will trace the mobilization of ‘wild dumps’ which as ‘counterpoints of destitution’ are focal point of various corporate, civil society and state actors to open up urban areas, objects, practices and people to establish terrains of development, accumulation and prosperity.

My research project is located in a period that has been declared as the end of a specific kind of state-led developmentalism (and forms of sovereignty over territory claimed thereby). It is a period where states step back from executing development (as it has been the case in Western welfare states and socialist states between the end of the WWII to the 1970s), to mere ‘management of development’: they open their territory, hand over sovereignty and rights (Sassen 2006) to a variety of actors with various interests, agends, practices and sets of knowledge (Li 2007, 2010). However, this does not imply the retreat of the state. Quite on the contrary. As O’Brien remarks in relation to recycling markets: „This is a market whose rational economic actors are begging, cajoling, threatening and coercing the states of Europe to intervene politically into the circulation of wastes precisely because the ‚spontaneous‘ emergence of markets does not generate the values they want out of the rubbish heap“(O’Brien 1999:292).

In my paper I will discuss two different terrains of development that are opened up by various state, corporate and civil society actors around the nuisance of ‘wild dumps’ in the name of environmental protection, modernization of the waste sector and poverty alleviation. Through describing these different

narratives of progress that embed the problem of wild dumps in different terrains of development, fundamental conflicts over territory, sovereignty and rights become apparent.

The **first terrain of development** that centrally targets wild dumps is opened up through the campaign “We clean Serbia” (2009-2012). Here wild dumps are promoted as “biggest source of pollution in Belgrade”¹ and are mobilized in a narrative that unifies the city environment and builds up the state as its protector. The aim is *public order and sanitization of the city* and it is reached through building of underground containers and extraordinary cleaning actions conducted in joint actions of the Public Utility Service (PES) and volunteers. Moreover, the city government organized the displacement of 17 ‘unhygienic Roma settlements/slums’ in that period. The campaign “We clean Serbia” and the accompanying displacements are a demonstration of state-led development: restoration of public order and poverty alleviation is executed through programs provided by the central city government, which centralized different public services during that time. The two pillars through which this state-led poverty alleviation is organized is (a) socialization of displaced Roma families in city-owned container settlements and (b) their employment by the central city government: through part-time and temporary contracts in the Public Utility Services. The **second terrains of development** target wild dumps from the perspective of the recycling industry. The terrains of development and narratives of poverty alleviation mobilized differ according to the material dealt with.

PUBLIC ORDER (SOCIALIZATION AND ACTIVATION POLICIES)

Between 2009 and 2013 Belgrade has become the site of massive displacements of so called ‘unhygienic settlements’. From the over 2,800 people that were affected² around half were resettled to container settlements at the outskirts of the city, whereas the other half was altogether evicted from the city. ‘Unhygienic settlements’ are an ill-defined domain of informal settlements, which have grown mostly from refugees and IDPs in the 1990s as well as repatriated refugees during the 2000s - groups that according to the Master Plan (2003) “brought levels of poverty to the city that were until then unknown”³. During the war these settlements were a last refuge for refugees and IDPs who were not accepted in collective centers and were as such outside the purview of INGOs. Especially with the influx of refugees from Kosovo in 1999, who were predominantly Roma, the city provided some of the settlements with containers for storing waste paper, carton, plastic and cans to secure some kind of income. On the occasion of the survey of Roma population in Serbia for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2003) the City of Belgrade

¹ City Secretariat for Environmental Protection, 2012, Report on the Quality of the Living Environment in Belgrade.

² <http://www.praxis.org.rs/index.php/en/praxis-in-action/social-economic-rights/housing/item/575-praxis-published-the-report-%E2%80%9CAnalysis-of-the-main-obstacles-and-problems-in-access-of-roma-to-the-right-to-adequate-housing%E2%80%9D/575-praxis-published-the-report-%E2%80%9CAnalysis-of-the-main-obstacles-and-problems-in-access-of-roma-to-the-right-to-adequate-housing%E2%80%9D>

³ Master Plan Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 2003/27.

financed a comprehensive study of Roma settlements containing data on the status of land occupied, ethnic composition and economic activities pursued (cf. DURN 2002). On the basis of this detailed data on poverty and devastation 'unhygienic settlements' became a preferred site of NGO-driven projects for Roma integration. In the Master Plan (2003) there are plans to build social housing for people from 'unhygienic settlements'. However protests by other impoverished inhabitants over the right of these 'newcomers to the city' to the scarce housing stock brought this project to a halt. It was then in the context of infrastructure projects financed by the European Investment Bank in 2009 that the city government cleared inner-city space and set up the first 'temporary' container settlements.

Container settlements, officially called 'mobile housing units', are a category that does not exist legally. They were set up by the city government in different Belgradian municipalities, but not integrated in the system of centers for social work in the single municipalities. It is the Secretary for Social Security of the city government itself who manages container inhabitants through regular visits, organization of extraordinary cleaning actions by Public Utility Service (PUS) and planning of social housing estates for their further resettlement in cooperation with European Union and UNOPS. The right to a container is established through a 'contract of use' between the inhabitant and the Secretary for Social Security. 'Contract of use' does neither mean rental (like social housing) nor property⁴. These 'contracts of use' tie the right to container to participation in a socialization program: children's school attendance and diverse forms of 'good conduct' towards city officials. More importantly, it is forbidden to store scavenged raw materials near to container settlement (cf. Amnesty International 2011). Scavenged raw material next to residential space has been labeled as 'nuisance' that is conflict with the socializing agenda of the settlements that translates into certain visions of cleanliness. Part of these efforts to socialize people from 'unhygienic settlements' are programs to 'activate' unemployed through part-time and temporary jobs in PUS⁵. On the basis of the various types of transgressions that can be easily declared on the basis of these regulations, whole families lost their right to container and any alternative accommodation and accompanying social rights in Belgrade. In the container settlements the improvement of Roma waste pickers from 'unhygienic settlements' and the question whether they qualify to stay in the city is monitored through their relation to waste: whether or not they store it in front of their containers and whether or not they are willing to participate in the initiative to employ them in the PUS.

The relation between the resettlements and sanitization of wild dumps is quite obvious from one report of the City Secretary for Environmental Protection. In the report on the 'Quality of the Living Environment in Belgrade' from 2012 in the section on extraordinary activities conducted by the Public Utility Services in 2011 we find the following list:

⁴ Conversation with Danilo Curcic (Legal Advisor at Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM), 9.12.14.

⁵ Public Works have been officially introduced in the course of activation policies for unemployed by the National Employment Service (NES) in January 2015. However, with the first resettlements in 2009 the City Secretary for Social Security organized jobs in the Public Utility Service. A refusal of the job could lead to losing the right to container. So the principles of 'activation policies' have been introduced for people from 'unhygienic settlements' already before they became official policy of the NES.



For the campaign 'We Clean Serbia' the then Mayor Dragan Đilas and President of the City Parliament Aleksandar Antić participate in a cleaning action on the territory from which one of the biggest 'unhygienic settlements' in Belgrade had been removed earlier that year.
<http://www.beograd.rs/cms/view.php?id=1509758>

- “Spring action cleaning of coast of Danube and Sava
- Cleaning action of space between blocks
- Cleaning of streets and other public surfaces before and after the Belgrade marathon⁶
- Resettlement action of Roma” (ibd.)

The screening of ‘wild dumps’ started already with the Master Plan (2003) that envisioned a centralized waste management system including the sanitization of one city landfill. The ‘Questionnaire on Old and Wild Dumps’ has been send out to Belgradian municipalities for the first time 2005. In the section ‘recommendations for sanitization’ many municipalities declared that they are taking care of the locations where wild dumps occur through regular cleaning actions. It was only in 2009 within the campaign called “We clean Serbia” (2009-2012) that the city government selected 40 most hazardous ‘wild dumps’ and mobilized ‘wild dumps’ as the biggest source of pollution in Belgrade⁷. The cleaning of wild dumps is presented as an extraordinary activity of the Public Utility Services that can only be managed in ‘cleaning actions’

together with volunteers and unemployed ‘activated’ for this purpose in the form of public works. The cleaning of ‘wild dumps’ is not only directed against the informal sector in waste management focused on recycling that I will describe later on. It also obliterates the history of waste management that the questionnaire send out to municipalities hints at: many of the dumps addressed as ‘wild’ are de facto old municipal dumps that have been closed down during in the beginning of the 2000s. With the Master Plan (2003) there was a decision to sanitize one of them (Vinca) to have a non-hazardous ground for PUS to dispose waste. For the City Secretary of Environmental Protection they are all wild, eg. continually emerged from ‘wild’ disposal practices of citizens with lacking environmental consciousness, who for example don’t know where to bring their old TV. I will discuss the differentiation of waste later on.

While the central city government celebrates its centralized sanitization actions under mobilization of volunteers and unemployed, some of the municipal governments complain about the devastation of container settlements. The fully subsidized, but low quality water pipes are starting to break apart, leaving water soften the not-asphalted ground of the settlements. One municipal official told me about the situation in a container settlement that has been placed on an empty spot in a poor neighborhood in his municipality. He told me that there have been protests in the neighborhood before the installment of

⁶ Part of the cleaning actions of public spaces for the marathon, which takes place every year is also to fence off Roma settlements along the route and covering the fences with banners to hide these settlements from sight.

⁷ Cf. Report on the Quality of the Living Environment in Belgrade, 2012.

containers, people feared devastation of the living conditions if ‘those people from unhygienic settlements’ come. Now that the infrastructure of those ‘temporary container settlements’ is falling apart after 6 years the municipality faces complaints by the neighbors living around the increasingly muddy settlement. The municipal official told me, since the central city government is the owner of the container settlement and has authority over its inhabitants, the municipality cannot do anything apart from ‘acting like a good neighbor’. Part of this acting were small improvements like a new tap or wooden planks to improve the ground. Now that water is running wildly also into the garden of neighboring houses the municipality plans to have its Center for Public Health issue a report on the danger of contagious diseases gathering in the increasingly swampy ground and move the city government to intervene.

RECYCLING

About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total material fed into the recycling industry in Serbia is collected by informal waste pickers. However, the professional collection of household waste is officially prohibited and fined as an offense to communal order: According to the “Decision on the Maintenance of Cleanliness” of the City of Belgrade the collection of waste that is disposed of in plastic bags or containers is prohibited and fined with up to 10.000 Dinar (about 85 Euro)⁸. The resettlement actions are clearly an intervention not only in poverty alleviation, but also to reorganize the relation between a population which largely lives from scavenging and the official waste management system. During the campaign ‘We clean Serbia’ the central city government started to build underground containers in some parts of the city in order to ‘prevent scattering of waste in the streets’ and provide more parking lots⁹. Moreover, in the new waste management strategy (2011-2021) collectors are problematized as the entrance point for ‘illegal waste flows’ and a threat to communal order and public health: “a big problem presents the informal sector that takes recyclable waste directly from containers out of the legal waste flow, and on the other hand, leaves remaining waste spread around the containers which presents a danger for the health of the inhabitants”. The focus on people illegally taking waste from containers produces the image that there is one uncontested system through which waste is managed, eg. a clear difference between ‘legal and illegal waste flows’, with the legal flows being in line with centralized waste management and respective images of public order discussed in the first section.

⁸ According to a publication recently issued on the position of waste pickers by a legal activist until now there are no cases known of where people have been fined (Bajsologija 2015:14).

⁹ Media, 28.2.2013, “Podzemni kontejneri – kako smo upropastili jos jednu dobru ideju” [“Underground Containers – how we messed up yet another good idea”] <http://www.medias.rs/2013/02/28/podzemni-kontejneri-kako-smo-upropastili-jos-jednu-dobru-ideju/>

What I will show in the following are contestations about waste flows, especially around the economy in recovering recyclables. Whereas the Waste Management Strategy of the City focuses on sanitization of the city and socialization/activation of the poor, some municipalities do further support the collection of recyclables for example by providing containers in the proximity of most impoverished Roma settlements. I would argue that recycling operators, who live mostly from the materials collected by scavengers, use existing social policy concern with ‘the informal Roma waste picker’ for their narratives of poverty alleviation through a flourishing green economy. I will analyze these developmental narratives (poverty alleviation through green economy) in the following as ‘cajoling’ (O’Brien 1999) of economic actors to have the state (de-)regulating the market in ways to make recycling profitable.

I will show how these different interventions of recycling industries (in plastic and in e-waste) make coalesce two types of informality that have been discussed in anthropology of labor: one concept of informal labor was created to designate a from Western perspective atypical ‘Third World unemployment’ (cf. Portes et al 1989, Hart 1973) that emerged when Third world cities in the in the 1970s grew ‘without formal growth’. In contrast to this post-fordist informality has been diagnosed by Harvey (1989), to talk about flexibilized, temporary or quasi-self-employed work in the neoliberal era in cities around the world. Harvey argued that a new mode of capitalism that arose in the 1970s in increasingly build on ‘flexible accumulation’ which makes *subcontracting* gain center stage and supersedes big factories. Labor force is now being disciplined in smaller dispersed production sites that build on “older systems of domestic, artisanal, familial (patriarchal), and paternalistic (‘godfather,’ ‘gub’nor’ or even mafia-like) labour systems” (152). However, third world informality is still discussed as a form of informal labor different from this subcontracting. With his term *need economy* Sanyal (2007) talks about economic activities in the service sector (most prominent example food hawkers and scavengers) that do not reach beyond self-sustenance because of the quasi ‘inherent non-profitability’ of this activity. The activity can only be maintained by the developmental state, which thus secures entitlements for its most impoverished citizens. He argues that now that the state increasingly withdraws from this function also the segment of labor for the most impoverished is increasingly policed and loses rights and territory in urban centers (cf. Sanyal 2007, Anjaria 2009).

In the following I will describe some of the ‘cajoling’ of the recycling industries towards the state that is directed exactly at regarding scavenging as a ‘need economy’ to protect impoverished citizens, although this industry relies on scavengers in a classical subcontracting logic. Designating them as part of a need economy, however, possibly secures state subsidies for the collection labor. I will focus on ways in which state and corporate actors use informality in strategies of accumulation and authority (Roy 2009). As Roy (2009) emphasizes, states as (de-)regulating entities increasingly make strategic use of rendering formal and informal – dynamics that provide the ground for new modes of accumulation and authority. Roy/Alsayyad (2004) suggest to understand formality as operating through “the fixing of value, including the mapping of spatial value” and informality as operating “through the constant negotiability of value”. Accordingly new modes of accumulation and authority have to be analyzed in terms of which subjects,

objects and territories are targeted by state interventions that promote formalization and transparency and in relation to which actors, practices and territories does the state engage in practices of de-mapping, de-regulation, and rendering opaque (Bhuwaneswari 2012).

SCAVENGING THROUGH THE LENS OF PLASTIC vs. E-WASTE

UNEP and ILO recently developed an interest in scavengers and the promotion of green economic growth in Serbia. What I learned from studying the reports is that there is not one need economy in recycling - there are multiple and populations have to be divided accordingly and these different populations of scavengers have to be treated in different ways. The differences do not arise from ethnicity, or gender, or status of refugee - but from the materials treated. Different materials are processed in different waste flows that have to be organized in different logics in order to become profitable. Accordingly, these waste flows have to incorporate scavengers in different ways. Different terrains of development open up.

UNEP (2013) in cooperation with ILO wrote a report on the “Potential for green jobs: the waste recycling sector in Serbia”, which focuses on reaching ‘economies of scale’ in the fields of packaging, e-waste and cooking oil. Collection of packaging waste is fashioned as a need economy within which Roma in a decade long tradition make their living:

“Informal collectors of recyclables have been the base of the recycling pyramid in Serbia for decades. They collect paper, metals, glass and plastic bottles, old bread and clothes. In Serbia, there is a long-established history of waste recovery through the informal system. Traditionally, within the waste management sector, activities are not fully registered and often not acknowledged by formal authorities. These activities are usually conducted by large numbers of poor and vulnerable populations, particularly Roma, for whom collecting waste serves as an income generating opportunity that provides for their families” (UNEP 2013:44)

The informal sector in packaging waste is included in the formal sector in Serbia through a technical term: ‘non-communal waste’. This term seems to hint at non-household waste, so packaging waste from shops, however, by definition of the Law on Packaging Waste (2009)¹⁰ it is waste that recycling operators receive from *actors other than public utility services*. For the big recycling operators the ratio of non-communal to communal packaging waste is between 3:1 to 5:1. Although scavenging (collection from public containers) it officially prohibited and fined, certain subjects in the city are supported in their collection activity: as it was the case with unhygienic settlements filled with refugees in the 1990s, as well as some impoverished Roma settlements have been provided with containers for the separate of packaging waste by some municipalities.

¹⁰ Sluzbeni Glasnik RS, no. 36/2009, Zakon o ambalazi i ambalaznom otpadu.

However, some types of waste types of waste are policed in this need economy as hazardous: In a public cleaning action of wild dumps in the municipality Cukarica in September 2012, the municipal government decided to install containers to facilitate the selection work of waste pickers. With the installment of the containers the municipality at the same time made a distinction. In a statement headed “Removing dump from the unhygienic settlement Čukarica landslide” the municipality proudly reports that it “finally succeeded to tackle the multiannual problem of continually extending rubbish heaps and spread of bad smells from the burning of tyres, because of which citizens constantly faced big ecological harm”¹¹. Moreover, it stated that after the cleaning action the ‘local Roma’ “promised to keep their settlement clean”¹². This promise included that they would not engage in the burning of tyres that goes along with the more profitable processing of electronic waste. Instead had to retreat to the realm of packaging waste, e.g. mostly paper and glass.

From the UNEP publication on the creation of green jobs we learn informal collection of e-waste is problematic and needs formalization because of its ecological harm and its inefficiency in terms of resource recovery: “formal recycling companies collected ... about 30% of obsolete computers generated in the country. The rest ends up in informal hands, where only the ‘easy-to-sell’ material fractions are of value, the rest being dumped illegally, abandoned or incinerated in open fires” (UNEP 2013:32).

The Heinrich Boell Foundation (of the German Green Party) financed in 2010 a project to connect civil society actors and corporations to improve e-waste management. Apart from the hazardousness of the current practices the resulting publication extensively discusses the problem that in e-waste management the collection from individual households is too expensive for bigger operators. So it is suggested to mobilize the existing stock of “collectors of secondary raw materials” (BOS 2011:21) either individually or organized in social enterprises to close the gap between consumer and recycling operators. Individual collector of secondary raw materials is referred to as a segment that exists independently from the recycling industry and can be mobilized for certain needs without directly ‘employing’ them. Instead of entering a relation of employment with these people, it is suggested to organize this ‘informal sector’ in the form of social enterprises. This would formalize the informal activity of an ‘otherwise not employable working force’ of Roma and the most impoverished and solve certain communal problems like wild dumps. The other model suggested by BOS to make e-waste collection more efficient (eg. make household collection of e-waste profitable for recycling operators) is to oblige Public Utility Services to separately collect e-waste. They remark that this solution requires a bit of investment and extra labor and thus might meet “resistance on the side of the municipalities” (BOS 2011:20). However, providing a permanent collection facility for e-waste on the yard of the Public Utility Services could be opened easily since “fulfillment of legal requirements for such a yard is not a demanding process” and PUS brings with

¹¹ Gradska Opština Cukarica, 17.09.2012,
http://www.cukarica.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1373%3A2012-09-17-14-06-49&catid=7%3Aakcije-projekti&Itemid=74&lang=lat, my translation.

¹² Ibid.

it an already “established system of charging (waste producers) and employed labor force, so that the use of these resources should lead to a reduction in costs in the collection of e-waste” (ibid:21). With the ‘system of charging’ the authors hint at the fact that at the moment households producing e-waste are used to give away their waste to scavengers without fee or even get something for it. This is regarded a major problem in making the recycling of e-waste a profitable sector. In order to make e-waste recycling grow as an economic sector private waste consumers have to be socialized in a system where they have to pay eco-taxes for pollution and won’t get money for raw materials. This can be introduced best by aligning e-waste with other services that people are used to pay for.

The eco-tax can only be earned by operators that convincingly perform environmental protection and pollution control¹³ - current collectors of e-waste are made to lose this status since all the hazardous practices involved in the recovery of valuable components in e-waste are unveiled in relation to ‘informal Roma waste pickers’. An association of e-waste recycling operators from the Balkan for example issued a report that details hazardous practices of waste pickers and give the advice that they should rather retreat to the sector of packaging waste (BEWMAN 2010). In one of the strategy papers it drafted for the Serbian government it targets Roma waste pickers:

The picking of communal recyclable material further strongly relies on the Roma population; in those areas where fewer Roma live, the job is sometimes also taken over by other endangered populations. [...] The waste collection is done in an unregulated and disorganized way. The picking of paper and carton is mostly done by Roma as their dominant activity, but it can also be said that they engage in the collection of old electronic devices. [...] Characterized as a *dirty* job, the management of waste does not attract a large number of interested entrepreneurs [...] [Waste] pickers *choose* this job because of the advantages that it offers (flexible working hours, no pressure of norms, independence) in relation to construction work or agriculture which are physically much much demanding. (BEWMAN 2010:45)

The strategy paper then differentiates between measures that shall be taken for the employees of big companies that engage in the recycling of e-waste (such as provisions for protective clothes) in order to limit the harm involved in this process, and for informal Roma waste pickers, for whom it is recommended to retreat to recycling domestic waste because of the harms involved in the process. Although the strategy paper acknowledges that „Roma often inhabit a key position in tying together different actors in the recycling of e-waste“ (ibd.). They do not treat them as entrepreneurs with

¹³ E-waste pays not only because of the resources recovered, but because of a system of exchange values of ecological systems. It does not reach ‘economies of scale’ by formalization of the status of waste pickers (which allegedly leads to increase of productivity of labor force or better credits that enable purchase of equipment). Instead formality is needed in order to set in motion the eco-tax system: first ecological system has to be ‘protected’ (in the form of policing wild dumps, not obscure recycling practices of big operators), consumers have to understand that they are polluters and have to pay for the disposal of e-waste and then operators, who have acquired licenses for green processing of e-waste can earn the ‘exchange values of ecological systems’ (Weinberg et al 2000:38). However, the existence of non-hazardous ways of recovering resources from e-waste is disputed and eco-taxes are earned by operators who export e-waste to zones of unregulated labor facto and conceal hazardous practices (cf. Tong/Wang 2004).

companies that could be targeted by the suggested improvements in working conditions. Rather they are treated as a precarious informal *individual* labor force that should retreat to the recycling of less dangerous types of waste, e.g. types of waste that could be dealt with without much equipment and machines (and without much profit).

THE PROMISES OF FORMALIZATION

“Multiple reasons for lower productivity of the informal sector are usually cited in the literature: The first one is the informal sector’s limited access to finance. Poorer access to formal finance ... forces these entities to seek finance from more expensive informal source, or rely exclusively on their own sources of finance .. . Limited access to finance means that these companies employ less capital: this in turn means that they cannot be more efficient due to division of labour, or achieve economies of scale and size. The second reason is that the informal sector, as a rule, retains a less productive workforce. The third factor is that these entities cannot seek protection from the state (say, if informal contracts are not met), nor do they have access to the various forms of assistance provided by the state. Finally, these business entities are often unable to report corruption in government bodies, and are thus frequently forced to bribe corrupt officials themselves” (Krstic/Schneider 2015:33)

The UNEP (2013) publication on green jobs says that the informal sector is the biggest hurdle in achieving economies of scale in recycling, yet when it comes to suggestions for formalization of the status of scavengers. According to the UNEP publication the blessings of formalization are multiple: from then on collectors could be “provided access to health insurance, physical space for recycling activities in the city, access to (micro-)credit ... and professionalization of informal waste collectors should be encouraged” (UNEP 2013:46). As I have indicated in the above section, there are different interests that coalesce over ‘formalization’, which do not necessarily pertain to health insurance, better income or OSH for scavengers.

In the remaining paper I would like to argue that this discourse of formalization actually conceals question of socio-economic rights of scavengers, which reaches into deeper conflicts over territory, sovereignty and rights that I’ve mentioned in the above analysis. I give two examples to illustrate this. Both are initiatives celebrated in publications of INGOs on the ‘informal sector’ in recycling in Serbia.

In 2010 ‘individual collector of secondary raw materials’ has been entered as in the registry of occupations of the National Employment Service. During the conversation with one recycling operator I mentioned the official acknowledgement of collector as occupation and with surprise heard my interlocutor saying that this should implicate that the state will finally pay them health insurance and it will be much more easy for them to go from container to container to collect the materials without being harassed by the communal police¹⁴. What is apparent from this description is that it is not clear, which bigger entity - state or bigger companies - will provide securities for collectors or has responsibilities towards them. Moreover,

¹⁴ Although I didn’t come to know of any cases where collection from containers has been fined, there are other forms of harassment by communal police that waste pickers are exposed to, most frequently inquiries in the legality of the vehicles they are driving.

their right to collect the materials remains undefined, since the introduction of collector in the registry of occupation did not change anything in the legislation on public order ('scattering of waste around containers', need to resettle 'unhygienic settlements' in efforts against 'wild dumps' etc.). For the National Employment Service (NES) the entry of collector in the National Registry of Occupations does not have any consequences. In the department for further vocational training of the NES I was told that they actually thought about offering courses to professionalize waste pickers, but the recycling operators they contacted as possible units conducting these trainings told the NES that waste collectors usually already know more about safety measures and types of materials than the recycling operators. So the idea was abandoned. Actually recycling operators often offer 1 day courses where they familiarize waste collectors with the type of material wanted and how to ensure high quality of the material (for example by picking PET bottles that have not or only briefly been in contact with other household waste, PET bottles picked from the public junk yard do have lower prices on the recycling market).

The second example reached deeper into the antagonisms of waste management in Belgrade. In the following I want to give the example of a social enterprise for recycling that was set up in the context of big resettlements between 2009-2012 and is an effort to tie together corporate actors interested in recycling with the public utility services that is otherwise involved in the sanitization of the city and activation policies.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE - FROM GREY TO GREEN ECONOMY

In 2013 the City of Belgrade opened a Center for Social Entrepreneurship, this year the law on social enterprise should be adopted. The law is expected with certain anxiety, since too much regulation might limit the range of models implementable in Serbia and discourage INGOs financing different models of social enterprises. One of the most prominent players in lobbying for social entrepreneurship is USAID with its sustainable communities program. Parallely, they finance a project that shall establish networks between different corporate actors to open the market in recycling for bigger investments. In February USAID financed a conference of social entrepreneurship in Belgrade where different entrepreneurs were invited to talk about best practice experiences. We were told that it is crucial to tell a moving story that is as close to the community affected by the social enterprise as possible in order to attract corporations to invest their CSR-budget. It is good to have exact figures of people living under the poverty line or states of environmental devastation. These stories easily come to conceal more conflictual questions about property relations and trade agreements. After telling the story of employing elderly Roma women for picking forest fruits in the south of Serbia, one social entrepreneur was met with critical inquiry from the audience: who is the owner of the forest where those fruits are collected? The social entrepreneur got a bit nebulous on this question, land ownership is not entirely clear, however, there are certain rights of use and until now, no complaints occurred. Another question related to the cooperation with the corporate

sponsor for selling the products: what if the products do not meet the required quality to be placed in the shops of the sponsor? In that case the social entrepreneur is 'free' to find other possibilities to place his products. The social entrepreneur is left with a lot of risks and uncertainties. During the break I discussed this question with Nebojsa, who set up the first social cooperative for recycling in Serbia. He said, why should it be that people go from container to container to pick waste without any license just because they are Roma?¹⁵. This is a good question to engage into a reflection on the construction of a need economy, blurred property rights and flexible accumulation. The social enterprise I look at has been funded even way before the Center opened: SWIFT recycling yard.¹⁵

It is significant to mention that this is the only social enterprise in recycling, although social enterprises are, as I've shown above, one of the main forms celebrated to 'formalize collection' and remains in the imaginary of UN and EU agents who promote the recent EU funds for self-employment and Roma integration. Talking about this with a counselor working at the Center for Social Enterprise, he told me that no one of the Roma participating in the program applied to open a recycling yard. He suspected collectors do not expect increased income by investing in equipment in the recycling sector and rather apply for other business like hairdresser salon. The void they fill with their collection and separation activity is apparently quite squeezed and they do not expect any upscaling effect on their business through professionalization or financial means for equipment.

SWIFT has to be understood in the context of the large scale displacement of Roma settlements between 2009-2012. Although all of the resettlements have been conducted by the City of Belgrade, who is the owner of the container settlements and conducts the socialization program, there are differences between container settlements: five settlements have been singled out through EU funds called "Livelihood Enhancement for the Most Vulnerable Roma Families in Belgrade" which target those container inhabitants which have been resettled within the frame of an infrastructure project financed by the European Investment Bank. For these people containers have been found inadequate as a 'permanent alternative housing solution' as requested by the International Convention for Social, Economic and Cultural Rights signed by the EIB¹⁶. People included in the scheme "Livelihood Enhancement for the Most Vulnerable Roma Families in Belgrade" will be resettled to social housing estates build for this purpose. The first location where a social housing estate has been set up is Orlovsko settlement, which

¹⁵The enterprise is significant for my argument about the construction of a need economy in so far as it has been set up in the only settlement that was legalized through a project focused on Roma integration and poverty alleviation. The enterprise had accordingly a strong focus on 'sustainable community building' - this agenda covered deeper conflicts around the economic activity that should bless the community with sustainability.

¹⁶ Serbia signed this Convention as well, but it's application in the context of providing housing solutions for people from unhygienic settlements is contested

depicted as the oldest Roma settlement in Belgrade, which has been legalized as such through an internationally funded project in the beginning of the 2000s.

Natasa Ivanovic is lawyer, around 40 years old, was hired by UNOPS only last year, so she apologized for not being able to answer my questions regarding the old recycling yard. As she emphasized already in her email (“SWIFT Project (now EU Support to Roma Employment) which is focused on employment and recycling area”) there is a new project on the employment of Roma in the recycling area financed by UNOPS, but they don’t like to call it SWIFT2 or new SWIFT, because SWIFT went bankrupt and they don’t want to transfer the bad image on the new project. They quickly found technical explanations about what went wrong and try to spread SWIFT recycling yards under the name ‘EU Support to Roma Employment’:

“SWIFT recycling centres [are] to be integrated into the Serbian waste management system, or support establishment of public – private partnership between the City of Belgrade and private recycling operator in order to secure sustainability and better market approach of the recycling centre” (UNOPS job vacancy, march 2015)

UNOPS had a lot of vacancies since the closure of the recycling yard in 2012 for solving legal issues surrounding the bankruptcy (question of property of recycling facilities) and re-envisioning Roma employment in the recycling sector – with each vacancy presenting a new technical problem.

Now the focus is on the integration in the Serbian waste management system. Together with ILO they produced a new analysis of the waste sector in Belgrade and came up the ideal gap to be filled by Roma waste pickers: old cooking oil from restaurants (for fuel production) and glass. Both materials are difficult to collect and therefore until now not profitable waste flows. However, even with these not really profitable materials, Natasa told me that they are currently presented with a vicious circle around the issue of private-public partnerships:

“Roma collectors would be employed in private recycling companies according to labor law with contracts of temporary and occasional work and will have of course proper salary, but we were faced with a bit difficult situation to connect all these relevant actors in one scheme, why, the JKP GC oh I don’t know, we have vehicles, we would be owner of the vehicles, but private recycler would have increased profit because Roma collectors would use our vehicles for their profit, on the other hand private recyclers said, yes, but I need that the city provides big containers in the city recycling yards only for my company, because I don’t want that Roma collectors mix collected material with some other materials, I want my container. Then the city, actually secretariat for environmental protection actually said, I can’t give you container only for you, because other recycling companies will ask the same thing.”

Because of this problem, the new SWIFT project cannot do much at the moment “but write project reports and analyses”. However, Natasa is hopeful. The City of Belgrade Secretary of Environmental Protection signaled them that there will be major changes in 2016: “underground containers will be introduced on the whole territory and landfills will be fenced off”. Obviously this will change a lot, but it is not clear how that will solve the problems she described.

CONCLUSION

The conflict between waste management from the perspective of public order and public service provision on the one hand and from recycling and its promises of development are part of expert debate.

One of the experts who wrote the Waste Management Strategy for Belgrade is Goran Vujic from the Technical Institute in Novi Sad, which positions as a think tank against the blind adoption of waste management models from ‘developed countries’. **Vujic regards waste management as a public service** that has to be paid for by citizens and that has to be done under reasonable prices compared to the development state of a country (GDP). He argues for the invention of waste management models in developing countries which suit their economic situation and does not bring them in dependency of investors through expensive technologies (Vujic/Milanovic 2012).

“Concepts that are widely applied in developed countries such as incineration and mechanical waste treatment are not suitable methods to reach waste management goals in countries where people cannot spend more than 10 Euro per person for the collection, treatment and disposal of their waste”

Following a study by Brunner/Fellner he suggest sanitary landfilling for developing countries. Brunner/Fellner (2007:240) argue: “Before emphasis is placed on reaching the goal of resources conservation, the main objective of waste management, that is to protect human health and the environment, must be fulfilled”. Moreover, other models like separate waste collection would not be implementable as it would cut the income of thousands of scavengers who are doing the separation work.

Vujic depicts waste management as a public sanitation service to protect the environment and leaves the issue of resources recovery out of the picture – one might assume he ignores it as a sector occupied by an informal need economy in scavenging, tolerated by the state, but not part of the public waste management. In this model scavengers are to be tackled by social policy – at the moment this is done through including some of them in public works that tied back to ideas about cleaning the city. On the other end of the specter are activities aiming at the recovery of resources, eg. Recycling, that advocate a different set of governmental strategies towards waste pickers, tied to formalization of waste picking activities and promises of prosperity through a green economy (in ‘ecological exchange values’). This year the ILO issued a publication called “Tackling Informality in e-waste management” which advocates the formalization of scavenging in cooperative enterprises. The case studies are from Bolivia and Serbia. ILO talk about recycling market as field for developing certain communities through regulating zones of labor they engage in:

“Informal collectors operate in very poor working conditions, using no OSH (occupational safety and health) equipment and having no access to OSH training. Moreover, a vast majority of them are not part of any social security system and thus depend entirely on the revenue that comes from their informal engagements. At the same time, employees of formal recycling companies work in conditions

similar to those in any other modern manufacturing industry, they enjoy full social security coverage - with the exception of seasonal workers. However, like most of the labor force in the Serbian private sector, these workers are not unionized” (ILO 2015:37)

The demarcation build up here between formal and informal labor seems to conjure up the imaginary of informality as an exception in an otherwise still fordist industry. Against the background of my above discussion about the recycling industry actually living from putting the scavengers in a need economy and the public sector employing people in the PUS through activation policies on precarious contracts¹⁷ this division between formal and informal seems artificial and brings the focus of the question of regulations in the recycling market down to the question of the status of scavengers instead of discussing questions of territory and rights.

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¹⁷ De facto the labor force engaged in the PUS through activation policies and people working at the low end in the recycling industry are flowing between the two more than it might seem from my analysis. In the conversation with one of the employees at the City Center for Social Entrepreneurship when I asked about people in the Roma employment program applying to open recycling yards, he said no, but I should talk to PUS, they are usually the ones contacted by owners of recycling yards when scavengers are needed.

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