

Case study ID

SR_03

PETI PARKIĆ

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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PETI PARKIĆ

Case Study at a Glance

The Peti Parkić case study in Belgrade serves as a significant example of how community-led initiatives can successfully safeguard vital public urban spaces. In 2005, when a private investor planned to replace a 3500 m² neighborhood park with a mixed-use commercial complex, local residents mobilized a rapid, unified response. Under the banner of the newly formed Initiative Committee for the Defense of Peti Parkić, an intergenerational collective of citizens organized structured protests, extensive petition drives, media campaigns, and collaborative cultural actions to contest the development.

Their persistent sixteen-year campaign (2005–2021) underscores the capacity of long-term civic engagement to reshape local urban governance. Residents actively pursued formal legal challenges, forged strategic alliances with external organizations and public figures, and maintained a continuous dialogue with municipal and city authorities. Despite conflicting property interests and highly complex administrative procedures, this sustained community advocacy ultimately led the City of Belgrade to cancel the commercial development plans, reclaim the parcel, and execute a collaborative, resident-approved spatial revitalization. Today, the park stands as a functional community asset, offering integrated playgrounds, green infrastructure, and dedicated spaces for public socialization, and serving as a clear structural model for the “right to the city” paradigm and the essential role of public open spaces in enhancing neighborhood-scale quality of life.

This report was prepared by the team of the University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica within the UPRUN project. The team of the University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica is responsible for the content and the accuracy of the statements presented in this report.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☐ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☒ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☐ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☐ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☒ Block scale
- ☐ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☒ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☒ social & cultural resilience
- ☒ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☒ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☐ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☐ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☐ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☒ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☒ Private sector
- ☒ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☒ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☒ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☒ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☒ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☐ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☒ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☒ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☒ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☒ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☒ Empowerment
- ☒ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

The Peti Parkić case study examines how a community in the Lipov Lad neighborhood of Belgrade successfully organized a sixteen-year spatial preservation initiative to safeguard a 3500 m² public green space from being replaced by a mixed-use building. Triggered by the sudden removal of 27 mature trees, residents of all ages utilized civic advocacy, protests, legal appeals, neighborhood watch networks, and collaborative cultural events to pause development, eventually convincing city authorities to reclaim the land and redesign the park in cooperation with the local community. This sustained community effort lasted from 2005 to 2021 and established a significant precedent for civic engagement and collaborative urban governance models in Serbia.

To understand how the Lipov Lad neighborhood successfully protected its green space over the long term, the research combined three main approaches: interviews with key participants, a review of official records, and on-site physical mapping. The study used multiple data sources to track how a sudden, protective neighborhood protest developed into an organized movement capable of positively influencing city planning policies.

The work began with a review of academic literature on local urban activism, community protest strategies, and the socio-environmental value of neighborhood parks. The core timeline and official history of the land dispute were built by studying a large collection of written documents. This involved checking city zoning documents and administrative decisions to reconstruct a complicated twelve-year legal battle and the final land-swap agreement used by the city government to resolve the spatial conflict. At the same time, the study analyzed television reports, newspaper articles, and online community pages to track the events in order and understand how both city officials and local citizens presented their sides of the story to the public.

To reveal the social dimensions of the initiative, neighborhood solidarity, and the ways in which residents reached an internal consensus, the documentary research was combined with qualitative fieldwork. Detailed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three different stakeholder categories. A member of the “Initiative Committee for the Defense of Peti Parkić” explained the day-to-day organization of the campaign, including how residents set up neighborhood watch systems, raised their own funds, ran environmental workshops, and gained support from famous public figures. A city government urban planner shared the official perspective, explaining the administrative pressures, technical rules, the revision of land-use plans, and the legal difficulties of taking back the land and paying financial compensation to the private investor. A neighborhood resident described the community’s firsthand experiences, including how residents managed initial information gaps, how they united to take collaborative action, and how they negotiated with each other to balance the spatial needs of both children and elderly residents.

Finally, the information gathered from interviews, regulatory laws, and media reports was verified on-site through direct physical observations and spatial mapping of the park area. This physical evaluation

focused on the changes made to the 3500 m² plot of land. It examined how the final layout, negotiated directly with the residents, successfully balanced active spaces like the rebuilt basketball court with quiet green areas and lawns, all while respecting the privacy and walking routes of the surrounding apartment buildings.

Compendious summary

Introduction

On June 11, 2005, a private construction company removed 27 mature trees on an open parcel within the Lipov Lad neighborhood in Belgrade's Zvezdara Municipality. Prior to this intervention, the open space of Peti Parkić had served as an established recreational and socializing zone for multiple generations of local residents. Site clearance revealed that the City of Belgrade had sold the parcel in 2003 to a private firm planning to develop a mixed-use building equipped with an underground parking garage. In response to the unannounced loss of the shared neighborhood area, residents from the surrounding multi-family housing blocks immediately convened on-site to contest the development and physically halt construction activities, representing a spontaneous, localized mobilization of community resistance.

This initial confrontation in Lipov Lad reflected a broader systemic pattern of legislative and urban planning modifications during that period, which were frequently executed without widespread public consultation or open debate. Local citizens strongly objected to the dense development, or "concretization", of their immediate environment. Their sustained civic advocacy and long-term commitment ultimately led to a successful outcome, preventing the intended construction and preserving the green infrastructure.

The Peti Parkić case study delves into the strategies residents employed in the fight to protect their right, and their children's right, to green spaces. It examines the community's approach through the lens of contemporary urban planning practices, exploring how community action and advocacy are leveraged to achieve goals. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of raising community awareness about the intrinsic value of preserving public spaces, not just for recreation, but also for environmental health, social cohesion, and overall quality of life. Finally, the analysis highlights the necessity of implementing sustainable urban planning principles that maintain a structural balance between necessary development and the preservation of essential green infrastructure.

Neighborhood challenge

The Lipov Lad neighborhood, located in Belgrade's Zvezdara Municipality, is a primarily residential area. It is characterized by taller residential buildings and commercial establishments, particularly along its primary traffic thoroughfare. Home to approximately 5000 residents, most multi-residential buildings here were constructed in the early 1970s, thoughtfully interspersed with lawns, playgrounds, and green spaces. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of its residents – including the pivotal struggle detailed in this case study – the neighborhood has largely preserved its original appearance. Today, Lipov Lad represents a highly sought-after residential zone within the city, a status reflected in its elevated property values and consistent real estate demand.

Peti Parkić constitutes one such vital public open space within the Lipov Lad neighborhood, covering an area of approximately 3,500 m². From the period of the neighborhood's initial construction until 2005,

it functioned as a central node for local recreation and socialization. However, an unexpected change in land-use designation, made prior to widespread public knowledge, and the commencement of site clearance for new commercial development, catalyzed extensive neighborhood-scale protests. Residents organized to preserve the existing spatial functions of their shared environment. Although city planning authorities claimed that Peti Parkić area had been designated for construction since the 1980s and that the mini-park was only a temporary solution, the residents refused to abandon their goal of protecting it.

Response to the challenge

The long-term spatial preservation initiative for Peti Parkić (2005-2021) took many forms and presented numerous challenges. Recognizing that unity and solidarity are essential for resilience, residents formed the association “Initiative Committee for the Defense of Peti Parkić”. This association mobilized approximately 3500 adults and 600 children, all advocating for the right to a quality living space. Their spatial goal was singular: to preserve the green space and children’s playground. The chronology of events related to achieving this goal is detailed below:

2005

- June 11: A private construction company felled 27 mature trees and demolished a basketball court in Peti Parkić, prompting immediate protests from gathered citizens.
- Initial site clearance triggered the formation of the residents’ association “Initiative Committee for the Defense of Peti Parkić”.
- Residents self-organized, establishing a watch system and installing sirens on surrounding buildings. These sirens would sound whenever the private investor returned and attempted to intervene in Peti Parkić.
- Approximately 3500 adult citizens signed a petition demanding the annulment of the permit granted to a company slated to construct a mixed-use building at the Peti Parkić location. They further proposed that the city convert the designated construction land back into a green space and use funds from the National Investment Plan to renovate the children’s playground and replant trees in the park.

2006

- The private investor’s attempts to occupy Peti Parkić continue throughout the year.
- The citizens’ Initiative for Peti Parkić gained significant media attention and public support.
- Various external associations, organizations, and individuals and groups from the arts and culture sphere joined the Initiative.
- The President of Serbia visited Peti Parkić, expressing support for the citizens’ efforts.
- Expert members of the Initiative Committee intensified the legal battle for Peti Parkić.

2007

- Numerous music bands continued to support the preservation campaign for Peti Parkić by holding free concerts at the site.
- Theater troupes, such as the “Pozorište mladih” (Youth Theater), organized children’s plays.

- Citizens continued to defend Peti Parkić from repeated attempts by the private investor to occupy the park space and erect a fence; these efforts were often supported by public figures.
- The conflict deepened between municipal authorities, who advocated for the park's preservation, and city authorities, who sought to uphold the existing commercial permits previously issued for the site.
- The State's Ministry for Capital Investments provided the opinion that the overwhelmingly expressed will of the citizens should be respected.
- The city architect declared that the only legally viable way to meet the citizens' demands was for the investor to abandon plans to build at that location.
- Greening actions, such as the "Spring Mystery in Peti Parkić," were organized at the site, often in collaboration with public figures.
- Peti Parkić became a symbol of civic-led planning advocacy.

2008

- Greening actions continued at the site, with the participation of the public company "Greenery of Belgrade".
- A meeting between the city government and Peti Parkić defenders took place on February 26. Following the meeting, the city architect stated that the defenders of the park had made an important turn in the urban history of Belgrade, showing that it was possible to correct mistakes made by urban planners a decade or two prior. He added that, encouraged by the citizens' struggle to preserve the park a year and a half earlier, he had ordered that all plans must be publicly discussed three times before adoption. The architect noted that municipalities were reluctant to accept this, and explained that the Directorate for Building Land and Construction in Belgrade had tried several times to agree with the investor on changing the construction location. He concluded that the investor could either sue the city authorities or accept the deal, and although the new construction sites offered to him by the Directorate had been good, the construction company that intended to build in Peti Parkić had rejected them.
- Concerts and other cultural events continued in Peti Parkić.
- A creative workshop, "I want to know – Peti Parkić," was organized on May 4, focusing on the procedure for adopting detailed urban plans. Participants tried to answer the question, "If I knew, I would say..." Citizens' messages were later published as postcards.
- Various national and international environmental organizations supported the citizens' fight for Peti Parkić
- The sirens sounded twice again in August as the private investor continued attempts to occupy Peti Parkić.
- The City Mayor promised to help the residents, highlighting that the only solution was to reach a compromise with the investor that would satisfy the citizens so that they could have a park for their children, and the investor would have the opportunity to exercise his acquired rights in another place. He added that they had been working on this for a very long time and he thought that they would soon reach a solution. The Mayor emphasized that it was not good to hire private security, attempt to occupy the lot, and start construction while they were searching for a solution, as all this was on

the verge of conflict and could at some point escalate, which would be catastrophic. He expressed his hope that through this work, with a lot of patience, goodwill, good intentions, and respect for everyone's interests, they would reach a solution in the next few weeks that everyone would be satisfied with.

- On September 30, a private investor filed a lawsuit against the City of Belgrade and eight buildings near the park. However, the investor also abandoned attempts to occupy the park space.

2009

- The struggle for Peti Parkić continued as the land's status remained unresolved despite earlier promises.
- Peti Parkić became a spatial landmark, a symbol of citizen mobilization, and an urban phenomenon worthy of academic research.
- The University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture joined the effort to revitalize the park by organizing a participative master design studio “Peti park”.
- Belgrade City Council ordered the Belgrade Urban Planning Institute to develop a new regulatory plan that would re-designate Peti Parkić as a green space again.

2010

- On June 3, 2010, the Lipov Lad community was invited to share their opinions on design solutions developed in collaboration between students and some residents. Later on, a 1:1 scale solution for the park was drawn on the site using flour. However, the solution was not adopted by the community because of a disagreement about where to place the basketball court.
- The exhibition “Peti park – Fight for the Everyday” opened on June 1 in the “Vuk Karadžić” Library, Mala galerija Miljković.

2011

- A discussion about the “Peti park – Fight for the Everyday” exhibition was held on June 29 at the Rex Cultural Center.
- In December, the Peti Parkić area was cleaned, and table tennis equipment was installed.

2012

- The City Municipality of Zvezdara invited residents to participate in choosing a landscaping design for Peti Parkić. From January 12 to February 3, proposals were displayed both online and at the Lipov Lad local community office. The winning design, intended to be determined by popular vote, would then be implemented by the city municipality. Despite the municipality's expressed confidence that this collaborative approach would yield the best solution for all Zvezdara residents, the initiative was ultimately interrupted without a resolution.

2015

- The theater play “Peti Park or Right to the City” began its run at the Bitef Theater.

2016

- Performances of the play continued.

2019

- The lawsuit concluded; the City was ordered to pay compensation to the investor.

2020

- The City of Belgrade became the owner of the parcel.

2021

- The renewal project for Peti Parkić was developed by the city planning department in consultation with citizens. However, when construction began in June, some residents again protested and blocked the work, initiating new petitions and demanding further involvement in the planning process. Specifically, they wanted the basketball court, which had been demolished by the private investor at the start of the Peti Parkić action in 2005, to be rebuilt.
- The renewal project was subsequently revised in collaboration with the residents who signed the petition.
- The renewal of Peti Parkić was successfully completed in November.

2025

- Peti Parkić in Zvezdara Municipality stands as a powerful example of a successful community-led effort to preserve public space. It boasts playgrounds designed for children of all ages, along with areas for rest and socialization. Approximately 1900 m² of the park is dedicated to playground and socialization spots, while the remaining 1600 m² comprises parkland, featuring planted trees and grassy areas.

Mechanisms of civic engagement

Public involvement in the Peti Parkić case was exceptionally high. The broad-based, community-driven effort manifested on various levels. Thousands of citizens directly participated in protests and petition drives, physically occupying the park to prevent construction and organizing a neighborhood watch system. The establishment of the “Initiative Committee for the Defense of Peti Parkić” played a central role in organizing and mobilizing residents, providing a formal structure for coordinated action and sustained engagement.

Residents successfully garnered significant public support, both locally and beyond, through strategic media engagement, extensive outreach to other organizations, and the involvement of influential public figures. This broader public awareness served to inform institutional decision-making and validate the residents’ cause. Furthermore, the community’s involvement extended beyond traditional protests, incorporating creative and cultural actions like concerts, theater performances, and art workshops to engage residents and raise awareness. The significant involvement of both adults and children underscored the park’s importance to families and future generations.

The **stakeholder dynamics** in the Peti Parkić case were complex and evolved over time. Key stakeholders included the residents, the “Initiative Committee”, the private investor, the City of Belgrade authorities, the municipal authorities, the broader public, the media, external organizations, public

figures, and the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture. These stakeholders interacted within a highly complex and at times contested regulatory landscape, particularly between the residents and the private investor. Residents navigated pre-existing administrative frameworks to ensure their perspectives were integrated into the city’s planning decisions.

Crucially, the involvement of other stakeholders, such as the media, external organizations, and public figures, played a significant role in balancing stakeholder influence and ultimately contributed to the residents’ success through networked activism. The varying degrees of support across different governance tiers, with municipal bodies often aligning closely with resident goals, introduced complex internal communication dynamics within the public administration that acted as a critical lever for civic engagement.

The Peti Parkić case demonstrates a high degree of **inclusiveness** in its civic engagement, evidenced by several key factors: broad community participation across demographic groups; intergenerational inclusion ensuring representation of all ages; open communication and information sharing fostering transparency; diverse forms of engagement catering to different age groups, skills, and interests; collaboration with external organizations extending reach and resources; an emphasis on collective decision-making empowering residents; and the sustained commitment to preserve the public space as a vital gathering point for diverse urban users.

Case study findings and lessons learned

The Peti Parkić initiative yielded several **significant impacts**, both locally and potentially more broadly. The most direct and tangible impact was *the preservation of Peti Parkić itself*. The residents successfully prevented the construction of a commercial building and retained their valuable green space and children’s playground. This sustained process and final resolution significantly *empowered the residents of Lipov Lad neighborhood*. It demonstrated the power of collective action and showed that citizens can have a substantial impact on urban development decisions.

The Peti Parkić case received significant media attention, *raising public awareness* about the importance of green spaces and the need for greater transparency and community involvement in urban planning processes. It highlighted the potential for frictional disputes when development decisions are made without considering the citizens’ needs and desires. The case also appears to have influenced urban planning protocols in Belgrade. The city architect’s statement regarding the implementation of mandatory public discussions prior to plan adoption suggests that the Peti Parkić preservation campaign contributed to procedural reforms in municipal decision-making. It increased institutional awareness among city officials regarding the potential for community-led mobilization and underscored the importance of early-stage public integration.

Over time, *Peti Parkić became a symbol of community-led spatial preservation and a clear example of the “right to the city” paradigm in practice*. Through highly organized network activism, the case demonstrated that modifying established commercial development plans is structurally achievable,

inspiring other urban communities facing similar spatial challenges. Ultimately, the preservation of the park yielded a *long-term positive impact on the quality of life within Lipov Lad*, though the subsequent judicial ruling requiring the City to pay financial compensation to the private investor *highlights the complex fiscal liabilities and economic trade-offs associated with reversing finalized land-use decisions.*

The residents of Lipov Lad employed a range of **effective methods** in their fight to save Peti Parkić. Direct action and civil advocacy, including physically blocking construction and occupying the park, even at the risk of confrontation, demonstrated the residents' determination and willingness to take risks. These symbolic acts effectively drew attention to their cause.

Community mobilization and organization, particularly the formation of the "Initiative Committee", provided a structure for organizing protests, coordinating actions, and communicating with residents. The large number of active participants demonstrated the power of collective action. Public protests and demonstrations, including the immediate, on-site protests following the felling of the trees, sent a powerful message and physically disrupted construction. This direct action grabbed attention and signaled the community's resolve. Continued protests and demonstrations throughout the years kept the issue in the public eye.

Media engagement and public awareness were successfully leveraged. Attracting media attention helped raise awareness beyond the neighborhood and put pressure on city authorities. Support from public figures amplified citizens' message. Petitions provided a formal mechanism for challenging the legality of the development plans and holding the city authorities accountable. Political engagement and advocacy, including engaging with politicians at various levels up to the President of Serbia, combined with public pressure, made it difficult for authorities to ignore citizens' demands.

Creative and cultural actions, such as concerts, theater performances, and art workshops, were **innovative ways** to engage the community and maintain visibility. These events also helped to frame the issue as a broader fight for the "right to the city", rather than just a local dispute. Persistence and long-term commitment were perhaps the most crucial factors. The residents' 16-year commitment demonstrates the importance of long-term engagement and refusing to give up, even in the face of setbacks.

Nevertheless, the residents of Lipov Lad faced **several key obstacles** in their Peti Parkić preservation campaign, including:

- A distinct lack of early-stage transparency regarding the initial land transaction, planned development parameters, and early negotiations between the private investor and city authorities;
- Asymmetrical interests and resources. The private construction firm possessed strong financial incentives and structural resources to execute the development, placing the grassroots community at a distinct resource disadvantage;
- Divergent institutional priorities across governance structures. While the municipal-level government supported the neighborhood initiative from its inception, the city-level government

initially focused on honoring pre-existing property and construction permits, aligning with the community's goals in 2008 once a legal framework for land reclamation was established. This initial misalignment of institutional priorities created significant procedural difficulties for the citizens;

- Legal issues and bureaucracy. Intricate legal proceedings and administrative hurdles served as primary factors extending the dispute's timeline, with the site-specific litigation alone spanning twelve years;
- Financial constraints. While the residents' most valuable asset was their collective will, legal action and other campaigns were costly. The residents likely had to rely on donations and volunteer efforts to fund their action, which was a limiting factor;
- Maintaining unity and solidarity. Specifically, differing opinions among residents regarding the park's redesign, including during the 2021 revitalization, necessitated project revisions to reach a compromise, resulting in a several-month delay.

Conclusion

The residents of the Lipov Lad neighborhood demonstrated the immense power of organized community action. Their achievement highlights the ability of united and determined citizens to influence institutional planning frameworks and actively shape local urban development.

Despite facing a private investor with significant financial resources and initial administrative alignment from city authorities, the residents successfully re-oriented the outcome. This shows that grassroots movements, supported by strategic persistence, can successfully balance asymmetrical interest dynamics in urban spatial disputes.

The preservation campaign for Peti Parkić was not a short-term event. It required sustained engagement over multiple years, demonstrating that achieving meaningful change often demands long-term commitment and adaptability. The residents' desire to continue their efforts through various tactics, from protests and petitions to legal battles and cultural events, was essential to their long-term objective.

Furthermore, the Peti Parkić initiative relied heavily on effective communication and cross-sector collaboration. The residents organized internally, shared information transparently, and built alliances with external organizations, media outlets, and prominent public figures. This demonstrates the importance of creating multi-layered networks and mobilizing wider civic support to amplify the impact of community action.

The initial conflict stemmed from a lack of local community involvement in the land-use decision-making process for Peti Parkić, a space that proved highly significant for residents. The citizens' struggle underscores the importance of integrating local communities into urban planning from the outset to prevent such disputes and ensure that development genuinely reflects residents' needs and desires. The residents' staunch defense of Peti Parkić underscores the vital role that public spaces, particularly neighborhood-scale green areas, play in community well-being and social cohesion.

Moving forward, Peti Parkić can serve as a highly replicable template for other communities facing similar spatial challenges. It offers valuable lessons regarding community mobilization, advocacy, and the power of collective action. Ultimately, the collective campaign for Peti Parkić represents a practical manifestation of the “right to the city”, the fundamental right of citizens to actively participate in shaping their immediate living environment and to have an ongoing voice in the planning and development of their neighborhood.

Attachments

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Photos



Figure 1. Revitalized Peti Parkić space, 2024 (adapted from Google Earth).

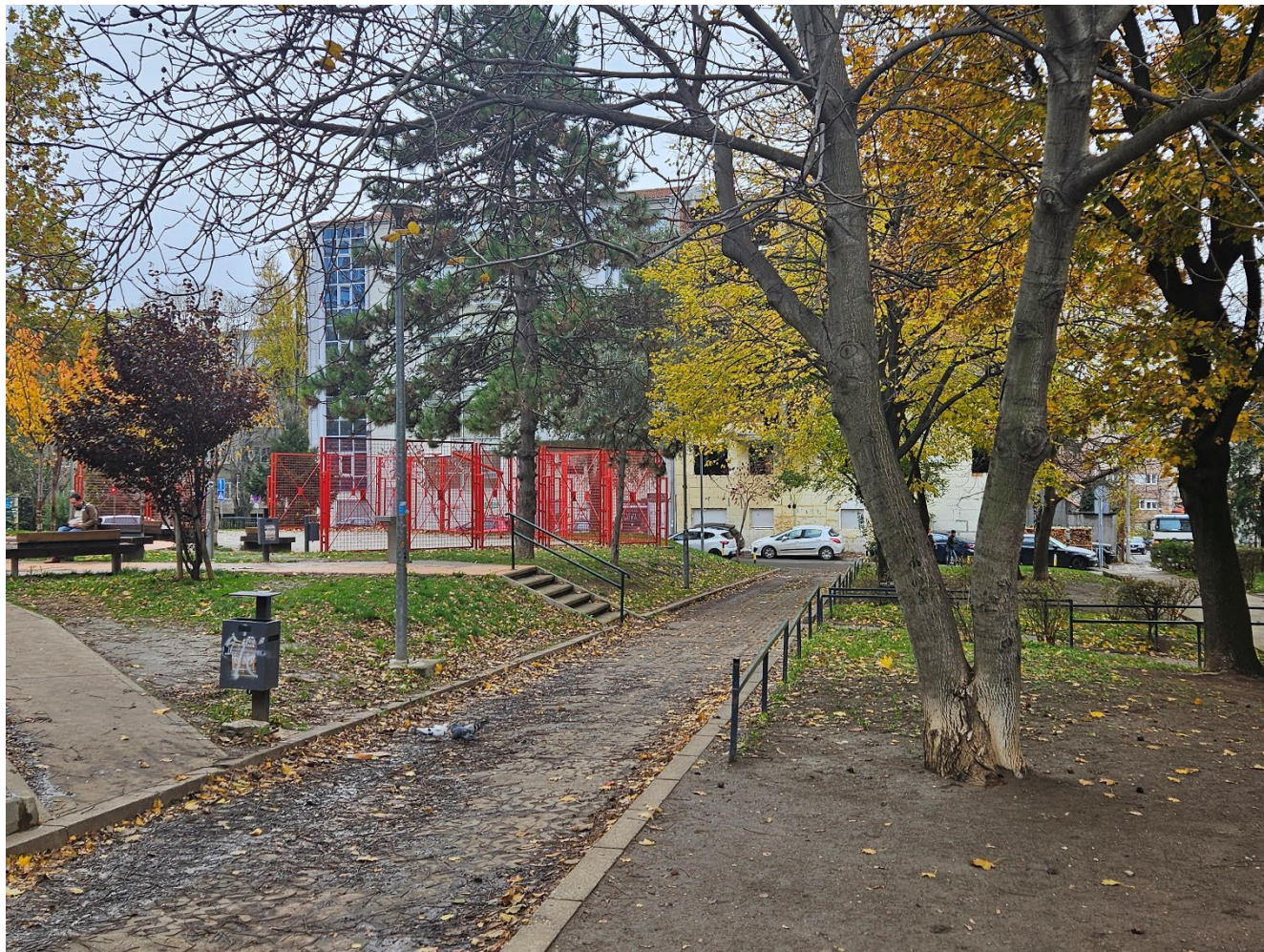


Figure 2. Peti Parkić, November 2025.

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