

As emergent sites of transient and paradoxical spatial production, Izmailovo Market Moscow, Topkapı Market Istanbul and Arizona Market Brčko (BaH) are explored.

Spaces of encounter: informal markets in Europe

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Informal markets in Moscow, Istanbul and Brčko

In the past two decades numerous large-scale informal markets have emerged on the fringes of European cities in the wake of global geopolitical transformations. Relying on individualised long-distance connections and adapting to diverse local situations, they produce a proliferating array of unregulated urban architectures while providing habitats for millions of undocumented existences. One such case is the infamous Arizona Market not far from the north Bosnian town of Brčko, a place that has been transformed from a border guard post into a major hub for people trafficking and prostitution and now into a multi-ethnic centre of ubiquitous consumption. Another one, Izmailovo Market in the north-east of Moscow, the largest informal trading centre in the region with links to all parts of the Russian Federation and beyond, has grown into a Babylonian site of 15 specialised trading areas that rivals the Moscow Kremlin both in terms of size and visitor attractiveness. And when the 22nd World Congress of Architecture was held in Istanbul under the motto 'Grand Bazaar of Architectures', a bazaar of a very different kind traded outside the tourist centres: a vast network of provisional, informal street markets that establish themselves right alongside the building sites of official urban regeneration, beneath terraces of motorways and next to newly constructed tram lines. Before exploring the dynamics of these spaces in more detail, let us address briefly the socio-economic conditions underlying the rise of informal markets.

The term 'informal market' refers to widely scattered trading phenomena whose dynamics and forms of spatial materialisation differ greatly in character, even though they are generally tied to political and economic transformations. At the economic level, the term applies to incomes whose generation is 'unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated'.¹ Informal markets refer to uncontrolled activities by travelling enterprises operating over large areas, such as the East European 'suitcase traders' and the mobile and border-crossing networks of the kiosk trade, as well

as the rampant agglomerations of temporary grey and black markets that are provisionally occupying vacated plots everywhere. The globally distributed nodes of the informal economy are usually the product of political upheaval, global economic deregulation, migratory movements and new labour situations. These days they emerge in periods of transition, between omnipotent government control and globally oriented neoliberal societies, in which the state's role is confined to optimising 'informal' arrangements.

Hand in hand with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, new nodes of exchange have sprung up in previously peripheral regions of Europe. These spots have turned into transient agglomerations of thriving informal trade, bringing different cultures together along the new axes of commercial gravitation. This development accounts for an abundance of uncontrolled interactions, indeterminate spaces and eclectic imageries. From the improvised shanties of post-war economies, such as street traders and kiosks, which provide basic supplies in derelict urban areas, to the widely ramified infrastructures of Eastern Europe's shuttle trade, informal markets have become prime sites for economies of survival to impinge upon contemporary forms of spatial organisation. Driven by the new imperative of social mobility and the undertow of expanding transnational spaces, these sites have evolved into novel and extreme material configurations.

Among the best known European markets of this kind are Arizona Market in the north-east of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Izmailovo Market in Moscow, Seventh-Kilometer Market in Odessa, Jarmark Europa in Warsaw's Dziesięciolecia stadium and the so-called 'suitcase trade' between the Balkans and the Caucasus with its Istanbul base Laleli. These sites contribute to a proliferation of transitory spaces in which different cultures engage in a variety of encounters alongside the homogenising forces of globalisation, and in doing so have become a vital source for architects, artists and theorists to study the potential of accelerated spatial appropriation and self-organisation. What is common to all these



endeavours is the question of how to organise a space, which has neither centre nor specific end; a space that is neither characterised in relation to a central authority nor through programmed identities and strict objectives.

Informal markets are spaces of transition in one way or another. For one thing they act as places of transient inhabitation, for another, they are themselves seen as mere 'boundary effects'; as adaptors between deregulated conditions and controlled order. The shortcoming of such thinking is that it presents transition as a linear process whose endpoint is a foregone conclusion. It also presupposes the existence of a central plan governing the slightest manipulation, as well as the

presence of a regulatory scheme that has the power to cover the totality of progress. The notion of transition that we prefer in our own deliberations is more connected to a slide into a condition as yet unknown, whose particular spatial character reveals itself slowly.²

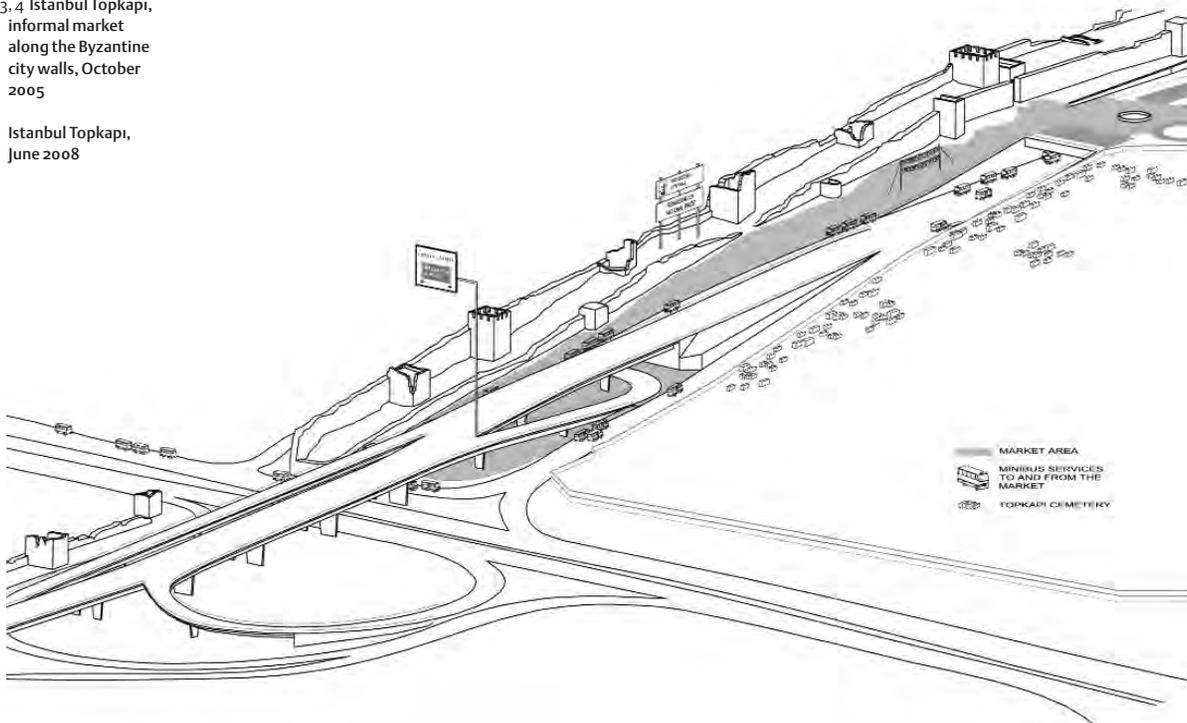
This transition is a-physical in the first instance, but generates an accelerated space saturated with an abundance of conflicting signs and practices of signification. In this sense, transition characterises indeterminate sites prone to a constant reshuffling and reinvention of subjectivities, and informal markets become unsurfaced places, hidden in the matrix of territorial and ideological belongings of individuals and cultures. They form trajectories in



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1, 3, 4 Istanbul Topkapi, informal market along the Byzantine city walls, October 2005

2 Istanbul Topkapi, June 2008



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which cultures begin to interact with the forces of globalisation beyond the assigned sites of encounter. The underbelly of the liberalised capital market performs a shadow play, whose relation to the homogenising force of globalisation, is most of all characterised by a paradoxical production of micro sites of cultural heterogeneity. Here, the cultural paradoxes of globalisation make themselves manifest conspicuously; the traditions of spatial appropriation and self-organisation of markets are intimately tangled up with the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation, in the shape of accelerated network formation, movements of capital, people and goods, transterritorial spatial production and cross-cultural experience. Looking at these sites, we

cannot condone the convenient co-optation of survival strategies of the global South by neoliberal myths that equate informality with a nebulous expression of free individuality. Mobile and transient accumulation are as much a constituent mechanism of black-market worlds as of efficient capital markets. There seems to be a certain structural alliance behind this kind of ephemeral accumulation, which renders informality a 'shock absorber of globalisation' beyond the means of the welfare state. Thus considered, it ought to be located through structural changes in the interaction between global, national and local economy following the requirements of global competition.³

Circulations

Indeed, the complex entanglement of neoliberal technologies of government and forms of self-organisation, alongside the incorporation of a market mentality into the organisation of creative processes and critical practices,⁴ has led to an unfortunate point of departure in approaching the question of how we can organise cultural experience that creates a space for expressions whose form is yet to come. In Saskia Sassen's sceptical view, informal markets are the low-cost equivalent of global deregulation, which act first and foremost as modes of incorporation into the advanced urban economies. The only difference they make is that at the bottom of the system all risks and costs are to be taken over by the actors themselves. Her main concern is that:

*'the growing inequalities in earnings and in the profit-making capabilities of different sectors in the urban economy [...] are integral conditions in the current phase of advanced capitalism [and not] conditions imported from less-developed countries via migration.'*⁵

In dismissing postmodern myths of informality, Sassen strikes the same chord as Mike Davis in his reflections on the informal sector in *Planet of Slums* (2006): from hidden forms of exploitation and fanatic obsessions with quasi-magical forms of wealth appropriation (gambling, pyramid schemes, etc.) right through to the decrease of social capital effected by growing competition within the informal sector, Davis instances all the epistemological fallacies of those who follow Hernando de Soto's popular economic model of an 'invisible revolution' of informal capital.⁶ Instead of delivering on the promised upward mobility in the unprotected informal sector, through means such as micro credits for micro-entrepreneurs and land titling for urban squatters, the booming informal sector has been paralleled by increased ethno-religious separation, exploitation of the poor and sectarian violence in the 1980s. Davis' idea of a counteroffensive against neoliberal informality consists in strengthening union structures and radical political parties as well as in renewing bonds of worldwide solidarity to refuse 'Informal survivalism as the new primary mode of livelihood'.⁷

This wealth of argument and all its supporting statistics, maps and diagrams seem to suggest a condemnation of informality, a rejection which rests upon well documented dynamics of poverty, exploitation and oppression. The role played by global power has been clearly positioned and seems to be far too immovable to consider the emergence of unforeseen alternative social formations. But what if we, for a moment, tried to suspend the monolithic gravity of these logics. Wouldn't we notice a whole array of shortcomings in the apparatus of global economic control, shortcomings that offer a space for social experience outside the boundaries of its exercise of power? What if beyond the boundaries begotten by the economic system we became aware of a political space of boundaries that is not fully governed by economic agency and thus offers a possibility to break up the dominance of calculative

norms. An arena for all sorts of social and cultural encounters would emerge. Oblivious to what ought to be done under the rule of the capitalist economy, there are minor changes occurring locally through unexpected constellations of actors and spontaneously co-ordinated conduct. These changes may inflict a set of irregularities and interruptions both on determinate movements in space and movements of the mind. Looking away from the clichéd notions of slum culture and economic chaos, social mobility and transitional society, we hope to stir up other notions, expressions, images and experiences, which throw some light upon how local coordination takes place in sites of informally organised trade, and how the virtue of transformation cannot be appropriated and circulated as an analogy of belongings and goods.

In his lectures at the Collège de France (1975–76), Michel Foucault has pointed at the circulation of power, arguing that people are never the inert target of power. While power is exercised through networks, individuals are always its relays. Power passes through individuals and can thus be seized and deflected.⁸ These are the terms that we would borrow to abandon the usual interrogations structured by questions around the true nature of informal markets and their ultimate aims. Instead, we are interested in what they help to enable on another level. The question we direct at informal markets is not oriented at a level of intentions. It is oriented at the point where transformation takes place, effected by the coming together of informal market realities and their fields of application: the local place where they temporarily settle, solidify and provide a basis for widening the field of social perception and behaviour. If we refer to the local as the sphere of illicit trade, then that is because it matches the perspective from which the many transient flows, the movements of aggregation and the dispersal characteristic of informal trade are perceived. And it is also the place in which visual clues, spontaneous scenes, physical mutations and inconsistencies begin to make themselves felt early on. They all play off each other in minuscule movements, and provide an indication of the self-creating flow of meaning that fashions subjects and spaces. Full of indeterminate relationalities and idiosyncratic encounters, these places are at the same time, however, to be seen in an enlarged way, as trans-local sites formed by flows of intensities, pressing ahead in a multitude of combinations.

Istanbul Topkapı: trading among ruins

In 2005 a bustling site of high-contrast undertakings emerged in Istanbul's central district of Topkapı [1–4]: the process of rapid urban transformation involving the strong political gestures of reconstructing the Byzantine city walls and building the tracks of a state-of-the-art low-floor tram, was suddenly faced with kilometres of informal trafficking. This spontaneous black market took place just outside the gates of the historic city, along the construction sites of the high-capacity interchange between Topkapı Edirnekapı Caddesi

and the eight-lane Londra Asfaltı. Squeezed in between newly delivered and derelict building material, busy freeways and almost impassable heaps of crushed stone, thousands of people formed an endlessly meandering and pulsating structure. The lower end of this formation is marked by the Metro station Ulubatlı, the upper end by Cevizlibağ, a new stop along the ultramodern tram line which runs from Zeytinburnu past the Grand Bazaar (Kapalı Çarşı) to the old centre of the city and across Galata bridge up to the Bosphorus. The merchandise consists of heaps of second-hand goods and clothes laid out on the bare ground blending in with new TV sets, refrigerators, computers and pieces of furniture. In stark contrast to this 'wild' and bustling accumulation, the whole place is bordered with an immaculate but deserted layout of formal green, whose ghostly abandonment is amplified by the garish colour of the artificially irrigated lawn. In 1852 Théophile Gautier wrote about this stretch along the city walls:

It is difficult to believe there is a living city behind these dead ramparts! I do not believe there exists anywhere on earth [a thing] more austere and melancholy than this road, which runs for more than three miles between ruins on the one hand and a cemetery on the other.¹⁹

The informal market repeats the archaic model of the city's organic emergence at the intersection of traffic routes and trading places. In the case of Topkapı, however, trade flourishes in the shadow of official urban planning, transforming the latter into a vehicle of informality. The widespread impact arising from this informal economy is not confined to the market's own dynamics, though. It is amplified by a series of secondary services linked to it: shuttle buses, street kitchens, intermediaries, suppliers, vendors and occasional street performers. It is through this bizarre entanglement of modern transport systems, symbolic sites of national renaissance and short-lived subsistence economies, through the complexities of legal work, third economies and informal trade, that this temporary market accounts for more than just an incidental set of happenings. Certainly, the mutual permeability of formal and informal structures, the aberrant utilisations of urban space and the acceleration of spontaneous cultural eruptions, designate the emergence of new urban networks, trajectories and hierarchies.

What black markets like Topkapı render visible is the increasing pace with which vast networks of self-organised economies enter, inhabit and eventually withdraw themselves from unsettled territories, without being mitigated or isolated from the politics of formally organised space. There are neither recognisable borders nor consistent frameworks on whose grounds an exchange between systems would take place. Hence, participation in socio-spatial processes, for which the informal market situated amid the hustle and bustle of Istanbul stands, echoes the performance – used as a metaphor by Ernesto Laclau – at which we always arrive too late.²⁰ We live as *bricoleurs* in a world of imperfect systems whose rules we co-determine and transform by retracing them. It

is in this very moment, according to Laclau, that we find the key to (acts of) emancipation: in the middle of a performance that has started unexpectedly, we search for mythical and impossible origins but are unable to rise above the impossible task facing us. What counts, however, is that we struggle and strive to arrive at decisions that have to be made because there is no overriding monitoring or control system.

Parallel economies: Izmailovo Market Moscow

Izmailovo is the largest open market in Europe, its footprint three times larger than the Moscow Kremlin [5–8]. More than 100,000 workers, traders and buyers frequent the location on a busy weekend. The former site of the historic Izmailovo village and the Royal Estate, 15 kilometres east of the Kremlin, Izmailovo served as one of the main venues to host the XXII Olympic Games in 1980. The Olympic event facilitated the regeneration of the 1930s 'Stalinet' stadium at Izmailovo, the construction of a new all-purpose sports hall for the weightlifting tournaments and, on the southern fringes of today's market area close to the metro station Partizanskaya, the biggest hotel complex built for the Olympics to accommodate some 10,000 visitors and participants. As public investment in the sports facilities decreased after the Olympic Games, owing to the worsening financial situation of the Soviet Union especially after the demise of the USSR, traders began to move into the vacated parts of the complex and to use ever expanding sectors of the adjacent outdoor area. In 1989 a private company took charge of the stadium and, while keeping the football pitch intact, developed it into a curious mix of historico-cultural venues and sports and health facilities, equipped with massage and beauty parlours, a shooting gallery, an underground concert hall, a war time museum, restaurants and other recreational facilities open to the general public.

Over more than 80 hectares of retail area, Moscow's Izmailovo Market, and its Cherkizovsky Rynok in particular, is one of the most important nodes in the transnational suitcase trade between Eastern Europe, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, the Caucasus region and Turkey. Traders travel long distances in crowded overnight buses or lorries to buy large amounts of goods, which they sell on at domestic markets. Assisted by the rapidly sprawling Eurasian market, the former sports complex has been transformed into a fathomless labyrinth of improvised stands, containers, warehouses and open market areas. The stadium and its new amenities are completely engulfed and dwarfed by thousands of small retail spaces of what is one of the largest European hubs for goods, capital and humans. The stadium itself, which still stands in the middle of the grounds, was built during the 1930s. It is a fragment of the envisaged 'Central Stadium of the Soviet Union' planned by Stalin to accommodate 120,000 spectators. Never completed, it also served to camouflage the 'Reserve Command Centre of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, I.V. Stalin'. Ultimately, the construction of the stadium was inspired by more than purely sporting



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considerations. Not only was the stadium intended to be bigger than Berlin's Olympic Stadium, and its peculiar asymmetrical form designed to hold grandiose military parades at which the columns of tanks could roll into the stadium unhindered from the parade ground to the east. It was also conceived as part of a vast military infrastructure covering the entire Soviet Union. Situated 17 kilometres to the east of the Kremlin, a bunker beneath the stadium was designed as an intermediary stop-over point in case Hitler should launch a surprise attack on Moscow and the Soviet Command have to be evacuated to Samara, 1000 kilometres away in the Urals. Consequently, sports events in Izmailovo have always been part of a far greater system of deceptions and compensatory gestures.

One of the ironies of Izmailovo is that its sprawling main part is itself masked by a quixotic *mise-en-scène*: a maze of wooden turrets and walkways, the souvenir market Vernisazh is a popular tourist attraction in Moscow. It is located towards the southern tip of the market, shielded from the adjoining subsistence economies through a mock

5 Former Stalinets Stadium in Moscow Izmailovo, June 2008

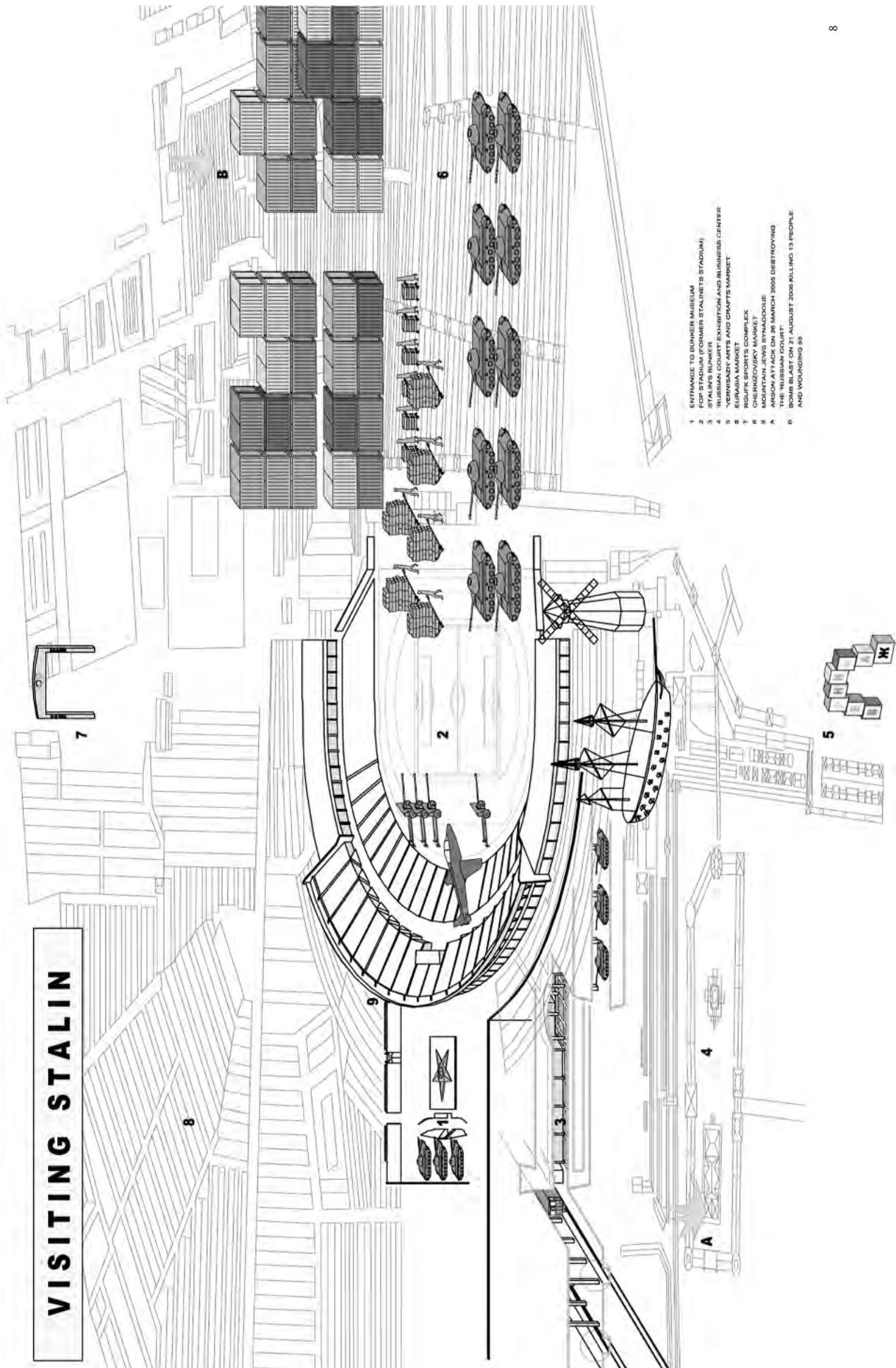
6, 8 Cherkizovsky Market surrounding the former Stalinets Stadium, Moscow Izmailovo, June 2006

7 'The Russian Court' at the Vernisazh complex, Moscow Izmailovo, June 2008

wooden fortress, which provides the backdrop to a bewildering array of matrioshka stalls, Soviet memorabilia, Russian handicraft, Central Asian rugs, antique busts, Georgian *shashliki*, street performers, and bear shows. Considered to be the world's largest exhibition-fair, Vernisazh houses a leisure centre named 'The Russian Court', which boasts the reconstructed Palace of Tzar Alexander and is expected to become part of a new ambitious project to set up a large-scale Trade Centre in the heart of Izmailovo.

While nesting dolls may be Vernisazh's best-selling item, the market moulds itself into a gigantic urban matrioshka, a figure of countless parallel economies nested into each other without visible contact points. Izmailovo is a place of extreme geopolitical entanglement, while the touristy Vernisazh points

VISITING STALIN



- 1 ENTRANCE TO BUNKER MUSEUM
- 2 FOP STADIUM (FORMER STALINETS STADIUM)
- 3 STALIN'S BUNKER
- 4 RUSSIAN COURT EXHIBITION AND BUSINESS CENTER
- 5 YERISBANY ARTS AND CRAFTS MARKET
- 6 ROBUK SPORTS COMPLEX
- 7 CHENKOVSKY MARKET
- 8 MOUNTAIN JEWS SYNAGOGUE
- A ARSON ATTACK ON 26 MARCH 2005 DESTROYING
- B BOMB BLAST ON 21 AUGUST 2008 KILLING 13 PEOPLE AND WOUNDING 85



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out the illusory expectations generated by the Western market, these expectations find their match next door in the informal economies of Eastern transitory societies. The entire market is made up of a plenitude of parallel worlds, zones of Soviet planning interspersed with zones of wild capitalism and numerous deregulated zones of cultural co-existence, whose presence is hardly known to an outside world. As is the case with the cultural renaissance of the 15,000 Caucasian Mountain Jews in Moscow, whose central synagogue is a carpeted room measuring 30 x 8ft under the stands of the multi-faceted Izmailovo stadium.

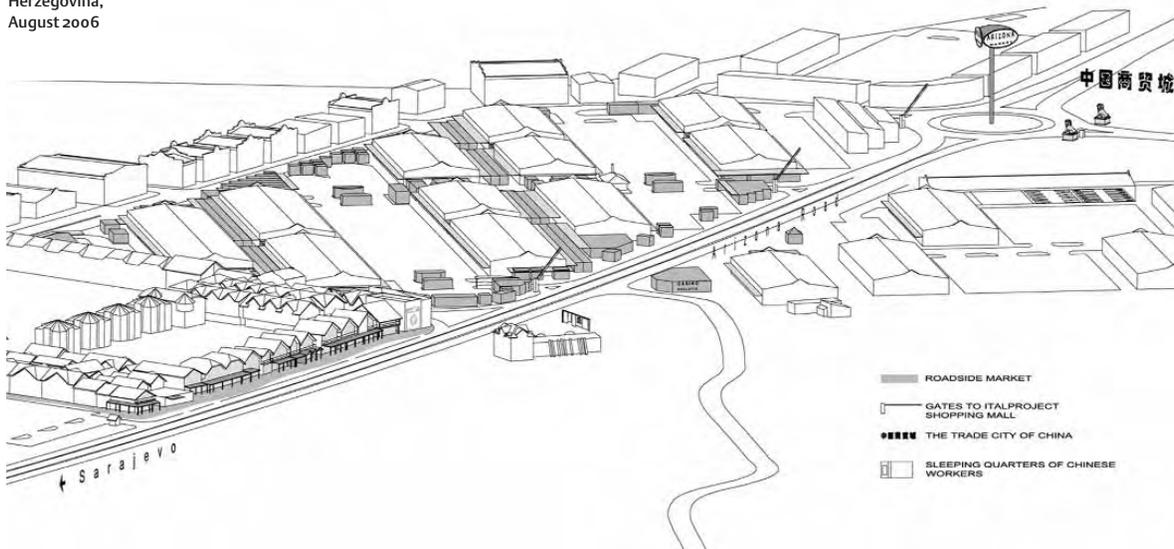
Arizona Market: inter-ethnic collaboration in Brčko (BaH)

Arizona Market, one of the best known open markets in the Balkans [9–12], is based in the district of Brčko, a separate entity at the intersection of the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian territories. The market is made up of 2500 stalls and shops sprawling over 25 hectares of land, three million visitors per year and some 20,000 people working there. For some, it is a model for all multi-ethnic communities in the region, for others the largest open-air shopping mall in south-east Europe. And for others still it is hell on earth. The difference in perspective rests upon the



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9–12 Arizona Market along the Arizona Corridor near Brčko, Bosnia and Herzegovina, August 2006



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numerous stages and transformations of what is commonly called Arizona Market.

Initially, Arizona emerged as a black market at a US military checkpoint, along the main road connecting Sarajevo and eastern Croatia, via Tuzla and Oražje in post-Dayton Bosnia. The informal trade was fostered by the international SFOR troops as a way of encouraging inter-ethnic collaboration and economic growth. As the shanty of mobile stands, livestock, produce stalls, CD shops, motels and night clubs flourished and grew into a bustling site of commercial activities, the area also saw the arrival of unauthorised dwellings ranging from improvised

shelter to single-family houses. The illicit building structures were set to be the harbingers of a self-organised urbanisation process. At the same time, Arizona increasingly attracted human trafficking and the trade in drugs and weapons. When Brčko came into existence in 2000, political decisions were made to confer legal status on the market, to regulate it and to collect revenues from the commercial establishments. After years of hard struggle against the proposed masterplan, large parts of the initial structures were cleared, bars and brothels were shut down, and a vast private shopping mall erected on the adjacent piece of land.

This further period of transformation, between the years 2002 and 2007, highlights the complexities and limits of converting the informal structure of a black market into formal businesses. The protest of resident traders had little effect on the development of the privately managed shopping centre, a joint venture between Brčko and the Italian consortium Ital Project. An estimated 120 million Euros will be invested to build 100,000 square metres of retail area, storage and warehouses, restaurants, entertainment facilities and even residential units. Once at its peak, the 'economic and merchants centre for south-east Europe' will include multiplex cinemas, hotels, casinos and a conference centre. More than a hundred Chinese businesses will be housed in a separate mall billed as 'Trade City of China'. Fifteen million Euros in taxes and fees annually contribute in turn to what is now one of the richest districts in this region.¹¹

In architectural terms, Arizona Market comprises two different areas, one predominantly occupied by commercial premises, and another boasting an idiosyncratic hybrid character: two storeys of sales floors are supplemented with a third storey, which resembles the typical features of contemporary residential estates. Flower arrangements, garden furniture, awnings, loft conversions, balustrades and miniature turrets of different style and colour produce a scene of patched domesticity, some seven metres above industrialised retail space. The improvised individual fit-out of the corporate master structure exposes the self-regulated hierarchies of these trading networks, the bizarre mix and structure of this development echoing the struggle between official planning and the dynamics of informal economies. In this small segment of Arizona Market, the clash of the two systems has led to a paradoxical co-existence of contradictory cultural claims and practices. Bringing into existence a whole set of eclectic and contradictory aesthetic expressions, the parallel worlds of Arizona Market materialise the tension between formal and informal spatial organisation. They make manifest the relationship of determinate and indeterminate forces and create an antithesis to the fixity of the masterplan. This ground-level cultural and economic contestation facilitates a strange aesthetics of spatial use, which Srdjan Jovanović Weiss has termed 'Turbo Architecture':

*'Turbo Architecture is an unconcealable, unrestrainable effect of the black market. Turbo Architecture is proof that architectural production depends neither on a stable market nor on a stable political system.'*¹²

Informality's market test

The production of architecture may not depend on a stable market, but the market does depend on architectural production within the structures of civil society. As Foucault has noted in his writings on *homo oeconomicus*, there are several preconditions for the functioning of markets, including relations of mutual trust, expedient spatial production and a proper socio-institutional layout. The question is always just how much market we can afford within the matrix of civil society.¹³ Along the fringes of this

matrix, informal markets behave as a mobile stage on which civil society and its relation to territorial, political and global power is questioned and negotiated through temporary arrangements and an unmediated collision of worlds. This is showcased in the attempted nation building around the now disappeared informal market in Topkapı Istanbul, in the initiation of a regional economy in Brčko and in the abstruse revitalisation of a former Olympic site in Moscow.

These three markets vary significantly in how they deploy structures of indeterminacy, but they are all recognised as urban catalysts in the making of cultural co-existence: Moscow's Izmailovo Market is a complex assemblage of layers held together through formal and informal segments of economic activities, Arizona Market could be seen as the transformation of a black market into a strategically formalised economic hub in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Istanbul's Topkapı market simply disappeared after the modern transport infrastructure had been completed and the market site cleared [2]. In close vicinity to strategic elements of urban planning, military and transport infrastructure, sports facilities and tourist attractions, these markets all employ creative structures based on principles of non-linear interaction between many different people and produce effects that were neither planned nor intended. Given their proximity to the transformation of large-scale urban infrastructures, what can be the role of these markets in terms of subject formation?

In his essay 'Actor Network Theory: The Market Test' (a term borrowed from Foucault's analysis of political economy), Michel Callon has argued that market transactions depend on continuous processes of decontextualisation and dissociation of sellable things from other objects or human beings. Actor Network Theory pictures a market world in which the disentanglement of objects from producers, former users or contexts enables buyers and sellers to achieve a market situation where both ends of the transaction are quits once the deal is done.¹⁴ This suggests a view of the market in which framing dissociates individual agents from one another and allows for the definition of objects, spaces, goods and merchandise which are perfectly identifiable. As one withdraws from old relations, transformation takes place through turning associated goods into commodities. As the dynamics of informal markets demonstrate, however, the terms of transformation that pertain to these sites have much more to do with structures of prolonged entanglement; it is not *despite* but *because* of this entanglement that such assemblages transform themselves into something new. They reshape themselves into amphibian structures, meaning that rather than disentangling themselves, they multiply. This mechanism has less to do with a dissociation of market transactions from other cultural contexts than with a multiplication of entanglements on various levels. And this is precisely the structure through which information passes between

informal market structures and the political subjectivities emerging from these complex sites. The subject as a boundary process, a deformable and deforming composite, a resilient force that defies determinateness in trading objects as much as in trading itself.

There is a lively entanglement of actors evoked by the processes which stimulate the self-organisation of informal markets and guide their transactions. It is because of family ties, the prospect of a brisk sale or the chance to sell items on at other markets, because of friendships, dependencies, liabilities or debts to suppliers, because of unexpected twists in one's life or in the light of newly emerging relations, that people come together in an environment where they can benefit from other worlds. It is not the constitution of leakage points – points where overflowing is allowed to occur and the commodification of things is partially suspended – but a much more generous and inconspicuous opening up of many different worlds to each other that generates the exuberant dynamics and maximises the turnover of the informal market.

Drawing on analyses by the Swiss sociologists Urs Bruegger and Karin Knorr Cetina, Brian Holmes has pointed out how markets can be described as knowledge constructs. They act as epistemic objects within a sphere of technological and institutional frames. They are highly unstable and variable in their nature, as they always remain incomplete and changing. This variability makes them seem alive

and unpredictable.¹⁵ Informality adds another epistemic dimension to markets: as much as they can be conceptualised as knowledge constructs, they also act as a knowledge *filter*, allowing only parts of the goings-on of the market to become intelligible, while certain seccies, dubious relations and equivocal transactions are to remain unframed. It is particularly these sites of knowledge and interest, the deferral, obfuscation and active fragmentation of archival composition, which accounts for much of the activities that define informal trade as well as accounting for the spatial emergence, dispersal and re-aggregation of informal markets.

Perhaps, this is the model of fertile undercodings and misapprehensions which emerges in the trajectories of informal markets: the lack of price tags, the false trade descriptions, the improvised trading places, the mutability of constellations, the devalued spaces filled with hybrid cultural entities, the abundance of strange objects that can be used for almost anything. They allow us to consider the potential of cultural encounters outside the formal market prerequisites of transparency, clear calculation and disentanglement. A cacophony of sounds, voices and accents making themselves heard publicly, prior to any neatly designed arrangement for ideal speech situations. Scattered informal arrangements of stalls, trailers, trucks and tent cities that do not lead to what architects, politicians and planners might consider a rich form of cultural cohabitation but to a place elsewhere.

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