

Variability of Suburban Preference in a Post-socialist Belgrade

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Abstract—The debate over urban sprawl and its impacts is overarching and closely linked to voluntary or induced resettlement of population from the inner city or from other urban or rural settlements to the urban periphery. Residential preference drive of urban sprawl could diverse in post-socialist countries from a typical suburbanization process in the West. According to different age and income structure, people may look for the same amenities in their preferred type of neighborhood, yet the diversity of motives and the ability to fulfill the key aspirations explain a drive towards inner or peripheral city development. In this paper, a suburban case-study neighborhood in Belgrade metropolitan area was analyzed in terms of variability and continuity of residential preferences. Questionnaire survey has been conducted for obtaining the results on motives that drive people to settle in a suburban neighborhood, their satisfaction with life in it, and variability of suburban preference.

Keywords- neighborhood, suburban, residential preferences, post-socialist city

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban sustainability, which presumes reurbanization and the pursuit of more compact settlement structures, may well be justified and supported by the current urban policy, yet if such policy is out of tune with public opinion, it will never be effective. Therefore, a much clearer understanding of factors which influence people's preferences to both urban and suburban areas is needed, so that we are better placed to use these factors to encourage suburban residents to consider urban living as well as to prevent further expansion of urban sprawl.

The setting for the research on residential preferences in this paper is placed in post-socialist Belgrade, i.e. Belgrade Metropolitan Area, with a focus on one of the largest illegally developed suburban settlements – KaludERICA. The questionnaire survey was conducted in order to analyze underlying dimensions of residential preference in this suburban neighborhood and their variability.

II. RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY LIFE-CYCLE APPROACH TO IT

The general impression on residential areas and their overall spatial (physical) patterns are the outcomes of complex interaction between demographic changes, physical mobility, facility provision and people's preferences. Physical, mental and emotional health of individuals is directly influenced by the quality of living environment. Therefore, residential areas

can either be harsh and impersonal enhancing the feel of discomfort with their residents, or they can encourage people to feel at ease and foster a sense of community for its residents.

Theoretical notions on urban or suburban residents' preferences commence with the exploration of residential preferences components or *dimensions of residential preference*. When dissatisfaction with suburban living is in focus, the following dimensions of residential preferences are found to be significant: *attachment, social and environmental context and physical planning* [1]. In addition, when analyzing neighborhood of suburban type in terms of residential preference variability, i.e. person's willingness to remain in the present neighborhood or to leave it for another one of similar or different type, the *residential mobility* is analyzed as the fourth dimension of residential preference [2]. Through empirical research, attachment to the residential neighborhood reflects how emotion (community sentiment) and rational assessment of the relative advantages and disadvantages of living in a particular neighborhood (community evaluation) vary according to the socio-economic characteristics of residents as well as according to different types of living environments. Social and environmental context form the dimension of residential preferences which is observed through neighborhood contacts, feeling of safety, housing type, infrastructure and other facility provision, etc. Physical planning dimension involves issues of urban design, accessibility, the separation or integration of land uses, commuting distances, and public space. Residential mobility intentions serve as a factor of current residential preference variability, and they are analyzed in relation to the neighborhood type, residents' socio-economic characteristics, environmental characteristics, environmental context and neighborhood attachment.

In a variety of contexts, the research on residential preference development mainly focuses on interrelationship between residential areas and socio-psychological factors, stage in a family life-cycle, duration of living in the neighborhood, etc. On the other hand, variables, which influence the level of satisfaction with residential neighborhood, relate to qualitative characteristics, e.g. *ambience* (nature, mix, and intensity of land uses and the form of the physical environment, *engagement* (safety and security, neighborhood friendliness), and *choicefulness* (opportunities for residents to choose alternative locations, life-styles and living arrangements) [3].

Motives for population resettlement, especially between urban center and periphery, are closely linked to the attributes which residents ascribe to the “ideal” place of living and (in)ability to achieve such qualities in the present residential place. General background for these “small” migrations are economic situation and socio-political system, although the ultimate impulse to move houses happens often by chance [4]. Spatial mobility is also conditioned by resettlement habits of the residents. To illustrate this, average American moves houses almost 12 times in his lifetime whereas the average European makes only 2 – 4 such changes [5, 6].

People’s propensity towards urban living (either as their wish to remain city residents or to reconsider moving back to it from suburbs) is often analyzed through the typical family life-cycle. Life-cycle stages presume change of people’s affluence, job changes, moving from renting to owning a house or flat, and from being single to starting a family. However, changes in households are probably the most important reason why families move [7]. A starting point in making hypothesis about changes of residential preferences throughout a family life-cycle is with couples who decide to live together. They often become tenants in a multi-family building. For many of these couples, a critical moment arrives when their first child is born. Urban environment, which till that moment seemed attractive and vibrant, may then become potentially confining (lack of housing space) or not safe enough for a child upbringing. On the other hand, a provision of quality education and health facilities within the place of residence plays an important role in residential choice of couples with children, and that favors residential preferences toward urban environments. Next stage in a family life-cycle is represented by so-called “empty nesters”, i.e. couples whose children have grown up and left the parent’s house. Accessibility to various services starts to play an important role in their residential preferences structure and it may appear that in this stage “empty nesters” would want to move to a smaller place of residence. This hypothetical trajectory of behavior does not have to be universally supported hence it is not always the case that couples whose children have grown up prefer urban to suburban or even rural living. Smaller household may require less in terms of housing space, but this again does not have to be a universal rule. Similarly to single young households, senior people’s households may be again attracted to urban living, mainly because of better accessibility to a variety of services adapted to this group’s needs. Therefore, the hypothesized changes of residential preferences throughout family life-cycle require testing in various contexts because certain dimensions of residential preferences are with changeable primacy for various population groups as well as preferences depend on differences in cultural and sociopolitical heritage [8].

TABLE I. RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE MOTIVES AND ATTRIBUTES

Motive	Attributes
1. Housing	Size and Quality of the House or Flat
	Property Values/ Re-sale Values and Maintenance Costs
	Property in Ownership
2. Environment/ Neighborhood	Environmental Quality
	Safety/Security
	Social Milieu
	Social and Technical Infrastructure
3. Accessibility	Public Transport Organization
	Proximity to the Place of Work
	Proximity to Education, Health, Culture and Social Services
	Proximity to Shops
	Green/ Open Spaces
	Intensified Contacts with Family and Friends
4. Life-Cycle Stage	Household Size and Age of Household Members
	Change in Marital Status
	Newborn in the Family
	Employment Change / Retirement

III. INFLUENCE OF (SUB)URBAN PREFERENCES ON URBAN SPRAWL

The debate over urban sprawl and its impacts is a long standing one. In the early 1990s, qualitative definitions of sprawl were conceived, linking it to the following urban forms: 1) leapfrog or scattered development, 2) commercial strip development, 3) expanses of low-density development, and 4) expanses of single-use development [9].

Following the EU planning propositions for a sustainable urban development, urban form should aim at more compact and less land consumptive urban pattern that places greater emphasis on higher densities, mixed uses, quality shared space and facilities, and public transport. Some common denominators of urban sprawl are: lower residential densities in new (planned, discontinuous or dispersed) areas at the urban periphery; high automobile dependence; and the lack of public space and public services. Though urban living has been supported through policies and greatly promoted, in reality people often look for alternatives that offer them certain amenities and values they cannot find or cannot afford within compact cities. This paves the way to continuous process of urban sprawl being a global phenomenon.

Over the last half a century, there has been much more research of urban sprawl in the USA than in other parts of the world. However, North American, Australian or West European types of sprawl are not always correspondent to the experience of urban sprawl elsewhere. The western type of sprawl is characterized by zoned areas with a single dominant

use and low land-use intensity, relative uniformity of housing, weaker connections and lower accessibility (lacks in different types of transport), and reduced walkability.

Urban sprawl of European cities happen through physical expansion of urban areas into the surrounding rural or natural (forest) lands. In terms of spatial and temporal analysis of urban sprawl, there are certain differences between post-socialist and other countries of Europe [10]. In contrast to the Western countries, suburbanization in the post-socialist countries has been less pronounced as their cities managed to remain spatially quite compact and densely populated [11].

Under socialism, the main factors of urban sprawl were underurbanization and prioritized industry development that conditioned enhanced in-migration from rural areas and towns to bigger urban centres. Most researchers on the post-socialist era (after the 1990s) have argued that at the beginning of the transition period, the characteristics of suburbanization were also different than in Western countries. Socioeconomic status, or the lack of financial sources would drive people of post-socialist cities to find cheaper housing at the urban periphery. Also, some returned to the suburban homes due to unemployment issues in the city, since they lost job and life commodities in the inner city [12]. These factors are contrasted by the ones which drive suburbanization in Western countries - aspiration of the better-off population to attain "higher" quality of living and realization of dream about owning an individual house in suburbs.

Residential preferences play an important role in the process of urban sprawl. With that in view, their influence can be dual since they can either stimulate further suburbanization, when larger share of population wishes to settle in the urban periphery, or they can promote reurbanization, i.e. population flux towards inner parts of the city. This thesis is further elaborated on the example of the Serbian capital Belgrade and its suburban neighborhood.

A. Belgrade Metropolitan Area in Changes Prior to and During a Post-Socialist Transition

Serbia as a part of former Yugoslavia is the example of post-socialist European country with a prolonged transition period. Within the Serbian urban system, Belgrade, i.e. Belgrade Metropolitan Area (BMA) has always had a special position. Presently, BMA encompasses 3226 km², or 3.6% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, which is inhabited by 1.6 million people (2011 Census), or 23% of the population of the Republic. BMA consists of 17 municipalities, out of which 10 are urban and 7 suburban.

The city growth and all changes in the spatial-functional structure of the urban area of Belgrade were rapidly induced after the Second World War due to emphasized industrialization. For then Yugoslav capital, this presumed the construction of a number of massive chemical, metallurgical, and machine-building factories. This was accompanied by an explosive population growth in Belgrade in the decades after the 1940s [13]. The state took the role of primary urban developer. This was possible because most urban land and large production means were put in public ownership. In

contrast, almost 90% of agricultural resources remained privately owned [13].

Certain issues were effectively addressed by the state in the first post-war planning period of Belgrade, i.e. within about a decade or so. Those issues were: rebuilding of the war-damaged urban fabric, restoration of the vital civil services, housing provision, economic growth, etc. Great population in-migration initiated urgent building of mass housing in Belgrade. Egalitarian ambitions of socialist society were expressed through "public ownership" of flats, which were developed by the state companies for their workers. Namely, public organizations and state organs were financing housing development for their employees, and the major intensity of construction of the so-called "state flats" on available urban land was achieved throughout 1960s and 1970s in order to accommodate waves of immigrating population (employees and their families). Even though this type of housing development was considerable, it wasn't able to fully cover the housing demand of all employees, not to mention immigrants who were yet looking for the employment in Belgrade. The housing demand was neither met in the terms of quantity of "state flats" nor in the terms of quality of their residential function, facility services, proximity to work, etc. Therefore, the way was opened to peri-urban concentration of people whose housing needs weren't provided by the mechanisms of the then prevailing system. Such situation nourished illegal construction in the urban outskirts (on agricultural land). Illegal construction in Belgrade urban periphery emerged as an issue in the 1970s, and it would continuously grow throughout the 1980s with a culmination peak in the 1990s.

At the beginning of the transition of former communist/socialist countries, Yugoslavia was in much better position than any other East European country because it was already much more open to changes and performed "experimentation with quasi capitalist reforms" [13]. However, 1990s brought totally opposite prospects for Belgrade as the capital city of the country because of the break of civil wars in former Yugoslavia. Urban sprawl by illegal construction grew immensely. On the one hand, a major factor to that was a radical shift to the market as a "self-regulating" mechanism which should solve housing issues. Therefore, public sector withdrew from housing production as well as from housing maintenance. The second important factor to aggravated problems in post-socialist Belgrade was the inflow of a great number of refugees and internally displaced people from former Yugoslav republics and Kosovo and Metohija throughout the 1990s. The estimated figure of refugees/internally displaced people who came in this way to Belgrade alone was around 100000 [13]. Consequently, unauthorized housing construction escalated in a form of relatively modest huts on the periphery of Belgrade, where it was more affordable for people to acquire land for building new home and where they already had some connections with relatives who previously came to the city. It is important to stress that in the same period of time Belgrade also lost some of its most perspective (young and educated) population due to brain-drain to foreign countries. This has caused deterioration of the natural population growth, hence BMA lost over 20000 people in the last intercensus period (2002 – 2011) because of

negative natural growth. On the other hand, in the same time it received over 38000 people on the account of in-migration [14]. This demonstrates its strong magnetisms and domination in the national urban system as a concentration hub for people, jobs and income (BMA share in the achieved GDP of Serbia was 40% in the year 2011) [15].

IV. QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY ON RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES IN THE SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD OF BELGRADE

As representative of suburban neighborhood type, Kaluderica was chosen to be the case-study for analyses of its residents preferences. Development of the infamous wild suburban neighborhood of Kaluderica started back in 1967. The impetus for its growth was the lack of available flats in Belgrade. Namely, people coming from all over the country put a high demand over flats in the city. At the same time, development of “state flats“ wasn't able to meet this requirement within the urban boundaries of Belgrade. Therefore, rural settlement of Kaluderica became attractive because of its proximity to Belgrade (10 km away from the city hub), favorable position - road connection, and most of all because the Master Plan of Belgrade that was endorsed in the early 1970s drew the line right in front of Kaluderica allowing individual housing development there and not in the urban part of Belgrade [16, 17].

Within the literature sources, as well as in broader professional circles, Kaluderica is often mentioned as the prime example of illegal housing development. It is reckoned to be the largest completely developed “wild settlement” in Serbia, and potentially largest of that kind in the Balkans and in Europe [16]. Presently, Kaluderica has approximately 27000 residents who are registered by 2011 Census, and 8831 households.

In some previous research during the 1980s, the general causes of illegal construction of Kaluderica were substantiated, as well as subjects of this construction and their motives. Almost 30 years after that study was made, new survey in Kaluderica was conducted. This time, the focus was on the analysis of residential preference (placing the relative advantage to certain type of living) as a factor of choosing Kaluderica for the place of residence, i.e. on the motives and aspiration of people to live in a suburb. Also, without arguing whether the development of Kaluderica was a product of voluntary or “induced” residential choice, this neighborhood can serve as an important case-study for the analysis of suburban preference’s variability.

Residential preference survey in Kaluderica was anonimous and it was conducted in the period February – March 2014 on a sample of 1% of the total number of households (according to 2011 Census). Each participating household was represented by one respondent only who was expressing his/her personal perception on the attachment to Kaluderica, social and environmental context, physical planning issues and residential mobility propensity.

A. General Profile of Respondents

From the total number of 90 respondents to the questionnaire more than half belong to the age group 20-39

years old (Fig.1) whereas the share of man and woman is almost equal. Majority of respondents are with high school as the highest level of achieved formal education, and they are predominantly working as full or part-time employees. The average household size of respondents (4 people/hhld.) is much above the Serbian average. It is not seldom that in Kaluderica 2-3 generations live “under one roof” so their households number up to 9 members. In most households there is at least one person who is less than 19 years old. Kaluderica is neighborhood with large share of people who live there for more than 20 years (Fig. 2). Their houses are mainly individual with 2-3 elevations.

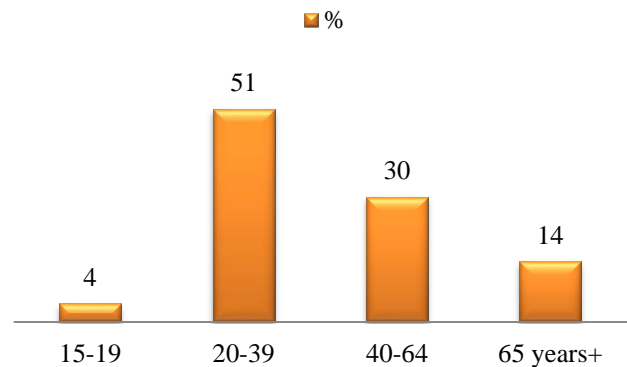


Figure 1. Respondents age

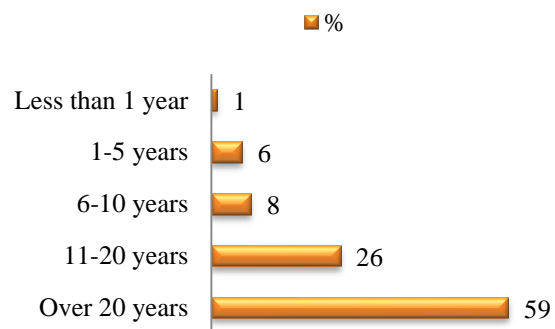


Figure 2. Duration of living in Kaluderica

B. Motives to Settle in Kaluderica

According to the questionnaire survey, the main motive to settle in Kaluderica was *property in ownership*. This is followed by *size and quality of the house* and *property values/ re-sale values and affordable maintenance costs*. Among other factors of choosing Kaluderica for residential neighborhood, *organized public transport system* is also influential (Fig. 3).

C. Satisfaction With Life Commodities in Kaluderica

This research substantiated that resident’s attachment to Kaluderica was divided. Most respondents said they were attached to this neighborhood at the time of this survey but they might move away in the future. However, almost 25% of respondents wanted to live in Kaluderica only. Finally, the least share of respondents said they didn’t feel at home in Kaluderica (Fig. 4).

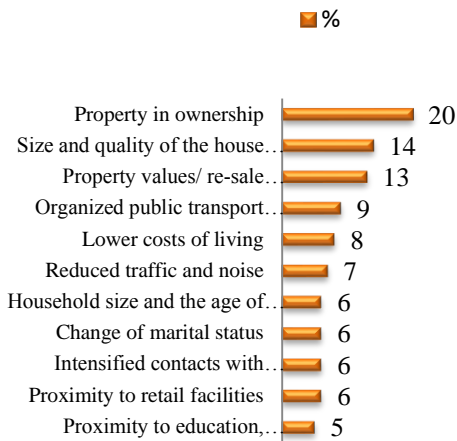


Figure 3. Motives to choose Kaluderica for the place of residence

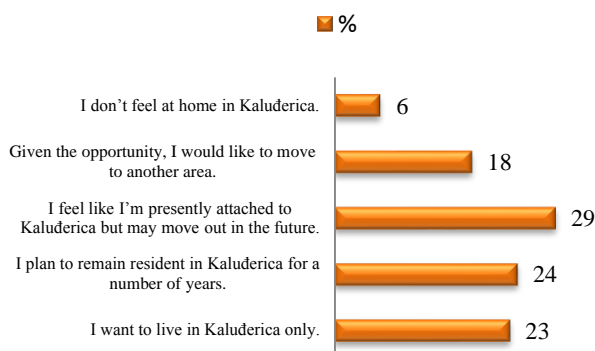


Figure 4. Attachment to Kaluderica

When analyzing the overall satisfaction of people in Kaluderica with its facilities and amenities, satisfaction with the *public transport system organization* is the most pronounced. Then, people are satisfied with good neighborhood, and the location of Kaluderica. On the other hand, a negative stance (dissatisfaction) with environmental quality and the level of hygiene in Kaluderica is overwhelming in the responses (Fig. 5).

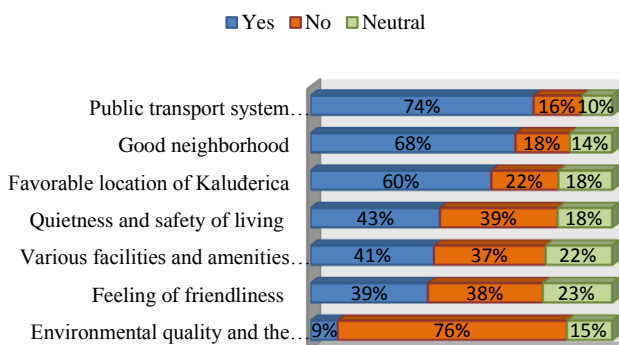


Figure 5. Satisfaction with life commodities in Kaluderica

D. Variability of Suburban Preference in Kaluderica

If there is to be omitted 37% of respondents who didn't want to leave Kaluderica at all, those that expressed variability of suburban preference showed willingness to exercise the residential choice in the following parts of Belgrade urban area (Fig. 6).

1) Municipality Zvezdara (Lion area)

This area is attractive because respondents used to live there in the past; it is close to the city center yet it doesn't have drawbacks of the city center; its advantage is proximity to schools, hospitals, green market and other retail services; and it is well connected in terms of transport facilities.

2) Stari grad (Dorćol)

This area shows attractiveness because it's the hub of the old town of Belgrade and it enjoys favorable location, presence of various services and facilities; people can go everywhere by foot instead of using a car or public transport system; etc.

3) Municipality Vračar

Vračar is attractive because it offers greater choice in public transport system; people are less car dependent and can rely on pedestrian choice; it is a place of cultural activities and is close to universities.

4) Municipality Voždovac (Banjica)

This area is attractive for people of Kaluderica because it has a good quality of air; its public transport system is well organized; and because of emotional attachment of people who originated from this area.

5) Other destinations in the City of Belgrade

Among other attractive destinations in Belgrade, respondents opted for moving to: Zemun (because of family ties); Košutnjak (because of greenery); Mirijevo (because of its proximity to Kaluderica and because of family ties); Dedinje (because it is affluent area of the city, and because of work location); Beli Potok (open/ green areas); and Konjarnik (because of its location in the city; greater choice of public transport; and retail facilities).

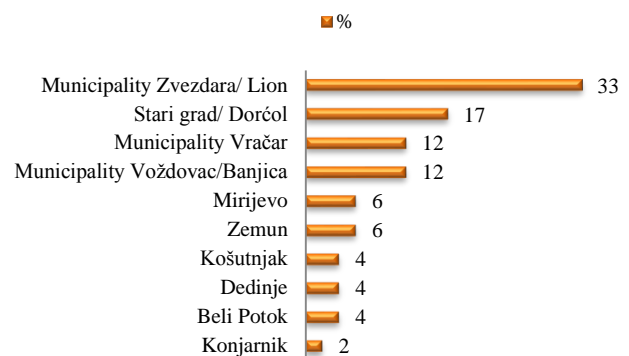


Figure 6. Alternative preference destinations in Belgrade

V. CONCLUSION

The residential preference study in a suburban neighbourhood of post-socialist Belgrade showed that the key aspirations to growth of urban periphery are driven by different motives to some other cities in the Western world.

The main difference is in the people's evaluation of the public transport system organization. It is sticking that even though Kaluderica is suburban neighbourhood, people there do not dominantly rely on private car transportation. They place high importance on public transport organization with which they have been satisfied to a high level.

Unlike Western countries' sprawl, where suburbanization is stimulated by the affluent population's wish to move out of the city, people of Belgrade suburban neighborhood Kaluderica were primarily driven by the ability to afford house in private ownership in this area instead of somewhere else within or nearby the city.

Some residential preference dimensions or their attributes are shown to be equally important for people in Kaluderica as for people in any urban or suburban neighborhood, e.g. emotional attachment (link with a place of origin); social and environmental context (infrastructure and other facilities provision); physical planning issues (accessibility on foot or by public transport system); and environmental quality.

Main dissatisfaction with suburban life in Kaluderica is expressed towards lacks in the level of hygiene and environmental quality. Some parts of the inner urban area of Belgrade are perceived to be much cleaner and healthier for living by the residents of this particular neighborhood.

With all this in view, stances of people in Kaluderica are not anti-urban. Given the opportunity, more than 60% of respondents would consider to move to the urban part of Belgrade. However, exercise of that choice relies on the economical circumstances, and while they are not significantly improved, residential mobility is not likely to happen.

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