

An aerial photograph of a city model. The model features a large, irregularly shaped lake in the upper right quadrant. A complex road interchange with multiple lanes and overpasses is visible in the center. The surrounding urban area is represented by numerous small, rectangular blocks of varying heights, suggesting a dense city center. The overall scene is captured from a high angle, providing a clear view of the city's layout and infrastructure.

**LEO**

ZORAN ERIĆ

**DIFFERENTIATED  
NEIGHBOURHOODS  
OF NEW BELGRADE**  
PROJECT OF THE  
CENTRE FOR  
VISUAL CULTURE  
AT MOCAB

TAMARA MARIČIĆ  
JASNA PETRIĆ

# HISTORY AND PERSPECTIVES OF NEW BELGRADE NEIGHBOURHOODS

NEW BELGRADE IS ONE OF TEN URBAN MUNICIPALITIES IN BELGRADE. According to different criteria (economy, population, services), it is today one of the most developed municipalities/local communities in Serbia (Strateški plan opštine Novi Beograd 2006:3). Since the time it was constituted in 1952, the municipality of New Belgrade has spread over the area of around 4,100 ha. It is located in the plain, at the altitudes between 72-110 m. With 217,773 inhabitants according to the 2002 Census and presently estimated 300,000 inhabitants, it is the most populated municipality in Serbia and Belgrade (with almost 15% of Belgrade population), and with average population density of 5,328 persons/ km<sup>2</sup>.

Only 60 years ago New Belgrade was a marsh moorland, which served through history as a no-man's-land between the borders of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empire. Although there were some attempts in the

past regarding the urbanisation of the left bank of river Sava (*Appendix to the Master Plan of Belgrade 1923, Revision of the Master Plan of Belgrade in 1939, Sketch for the regulation of Belgrade on the left bank of the river Sava by Nikola Dobrović in 1946*), this area was mostly neglected till the end of the Second World War. The first move towards city extension to Sava's left bank was the construction of the "Old Belgrade Fairground" (*Picture 1*), which was opened in 1937 and mostly destroyed during the Alliance bombing in spring 1944.

Mass reclamation actions in New Belgrade began in 1948, when this vacant site (with no urban history) was seen as a new beginning of the new state — SFRY (The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). New Belgrade, as a "heart" of the capital of a newly created socialistic/communist country was supposed to represent it in a strong ideological spirit connected to rupture with the old monar-

Picture 1: **Belgrade panorama, with Old fairground on the left hand side**





Picture 2: **Aerial view of the collective housing in New Belgrade**

chy, and in accordance with the plans of radical modernisation and urbanisation. It was seen as the centre of administration, culture and economy, and planned as a modern and functional urban area. It was designed by the most prominent Yugoslav architects and, compared to Soviet model of socialistic realism, as well as to the Western International style, surely represented a discrepancy. The outcome was a new concept of urban landscape (made with strong influence of Le Corbusier and Hans Sharoun), gathered with invention of "contemporary socialistic architecture" which reflected the specificity of Yugoslav "self-management" socialism. At that time, glorification of the state and the party seemed more important than communal life of people in the new city (Blagojević 2007:172). The monumental architecture based on simple

expression of primary geometric forms dominated in massive housing construction intended for working class. This was the prevailing urban form in all European countries that lived through real socialism. People used to say that "New Belgrade was build to look great from above" (*Picture 2*). Stiff zoning emerged from mega-transport matrix of wide boulevards that forced the inhabitants to orientate themselves to "micro-communities" — the blocks. Prefabricated buildings of unified urban forms and flat structures led to the loss of identity within the blocks. The need for efficient system of communication induced people to create innovative names for the blocks which were initially known only by numbers. For example, part of Block 21 is called "Chinese Wall", Block 28 became a "Horseshoe", then there are "Three Sisters", "Six Corporals", "TVs", "Mercedes", "The Western Gate of Belgrade", "The Match Boxes", etc.

The "sea" of collective social housing left no space for commercial functions, therefore New Belgrade's dwellers were oriented to the city centre for purchasing basic goods. Morphological monotony of constructed buildings and absence of humanly conformed space influenced the alienation among its inhabitants (Savić 2000:353). This is why the task of creating the identity of the place was quite difficult. Sociological studies have shown that youngsters are more adaptable to such environment and could identify much easier with it, thus creating the specific image of New Belgrade.

Only in recently developed blocks, with market oriented design, there is a new approach to architecture: forms are diverse, streets network is better adapted to people, public contents are of multiple use (often applied pattern is the one with shops at the ground floor and residential apartments at the upper floors). Today, New Belgrade is increasingly filled with contents that hadn't existed in socialist era: large commercial developments and new churches, providing satisfaction of consumer society's needs as well as of some other "spiritual" needs (*Picture 3*).

In the last twenty years, the drastic social and economic changes have occurred in Serbia, being induced by diverse factors, e.g. political instability and civil wars on the territories of former Yugoslavia (with great immigration of refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the latest migrations

**1** Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Municipalities in Serbia*, 2005, Belgrade, 2006.

**2** When the Law on Planning and Construction (2003) envisaged the legislation of illegally built buildings, about 150,000 legislation applications have been submitted in Belgrade alone, but an estimate is that this accounts for about 60% of illegal construction in the city (see: Petovar, 2007)

of the "temporarily displaced persons" from Kosovo and Metohija), economic crisis, post-socialist transition (privatisation accompanied by plunder of social property, lack of concern for ecology/environment issues, weak instruments for planning and construction control, etc.); all of this resulted in different kinds of problems, whereof the most significant ones include: extremely high unemployment rate (officially it is 22% in Belgrade, compared to Republic's average of 28,5%,<sup>1</sup> but estimations are that it is even more than 30% just in Belgrade); prolonged crisis of economic growth; pauperisation of the majority of people (extended by even greater economic stratification of society and loss of the middle-income group); "brain-drain"; over 113,500 refugees and over 56,000 "temporarily displaced persons"; environmental pollution, degradation and deterioration; illegal construction<sup>2</sup> which resulted in "urbanistic chaos", unhygienic (Roma) settlements even in the city core, etc. (Vujošević, 2002:2)

From Serbia, and especially from Belgrade, a lot of young and well educated people went to West European countries, Canada, USA or Australia, many of them never to come back. This "brain-drain" has left Serbia without at least 30,000 highly-skilled and professionally experienced people only during the 1990–2000 period (Grečić, 2002:257), and the estimates on their number in the period from 1990 till today vary from 40,000 to more than 100,000.

In parallel with emigration of its citizens to developed Western countries, Belgrade received a number of different migrants. From 1961 till 1991 the population in New Belgrade had been permanently growing, mainly based on immigration from other parts of the country. A great number of refugees that came to Serbia (14.5%) settled either temporarily or permanently in New Belgrade. They represent 7.4% of New Belgrade's population in 2002, and therefore made a significant demographic contribution.

Surprisingly, the population analysis shows that there is a small decline (-0.4‰) in the number of inhabitants in New Belgrade between the last two

censuses partly due to negative natural population growth (-2.4%) and lower pressure of immigrants from the other parts of Serbia. Without the group of refugee immigrants, New Belgrade would decline in demographic terms even more (-7.3%). In the same period the number of households has grown (14%). This reflects the latest tendency of smaller families formation (instead of three generations, there is just one or two generations living together, with less children), so that the average household size has been reduced rapidly only in one decade, from 3.2 people per household in 1991 to 2.7 in 2002.



Picture 3: **New/old forms of architecture in New Belgrade**  
photo by Dušan Bogdanović

The age structure of population shows that largest is the age group of people between 40 and 59 years (30% of the total population); followed by the group of people who are 20 to 39 years old (27%); then elderly population 60+ (24%); and young population of less than 20 years old (19%).

Structure of manpower shows that almost 70% of New Belgrade's population is in the working age, whereas 64% is economically active.

The inhabitants of New Belgrade are quite well educated — only 1.6% didn't attain any school, while 50% have secondary education, and 31% have the higher education or University degree.

Contemporary New Belgrade represents a huge building site, with mainly housing programs. With around 200 skyscrapers and 600 huge constructions, this highly urbanised area accommodates around 86,000 flats, whereof majority is with central heating and other installations. The average size of a flat is 67 sq. m. Despite relatively high prices of residential space (1,100 up to



4,000 EUR per square meter in "Arena" neighbourhood), the demand is still high. The construction never stops, owing to existence of available building lots, e.g. just in 2005 there were 900 new apartments built in this municipality. Main building contractors are private investors.

In the period of transition from planned to market economy many things have changed. The "dormitories" got new functions which they lacked before — shops at the ground floor, supermarkets and shopping centres erected mainly on the green areas between the buildings. However, the cultural needs were not supported/developed along with it, so more than 200,000 inhabitants of New Belgrade have to travel either to the city centre or old urban hub of Zemun to satisfy their cultural needs. The famous old cinemas "Fontana" and "Jugoslavija" are not working anymore, due to economic difficulties. There are still, though, famous culture venue "Sava Centre" and Students Cultural Centre with cinema theatres, as well as new multiplex cinema recently opened in one of the shopping malls. Apart from the Belgrade history archive the only museum is the Museum of Contemporary Art near Ušće. There are no theatres,

Picture 4: **The Belgrade Arena, south-east view**



though slight chances exist that the new Opera House will be erected in New Belgrade instead of being placed in the core centre. A note must be made of the newly erected multiple function hall "Arena" (building started in 1992, but the works were stopped due to the lack of money and political instability, so it was finally completed in 2004) which, apart from being a sport venue, is also used for cultural events and other manifestations (*Picture 4*).

Due to rapid and huge economic development, mainly directed to tertiary sector / sector of services, residents of New Belgrade enjoy the second highest average salaries in the Belgrade region (18% higher than the Belgrade's average). At the same time, this municipality achieves the highest GDP in the whole Belgrade region — 22.5% of the Belgrade's total. The Municipality has a qualified manpower, great number of enterprises (around 5,000) that are dominantly in private ownership, with the biggest number of craft and trade shops (7,580) in the Republic. Since the year 2000, New Belgrade has got the greatest investments in Serbia and became the most attractive destination for domestic and foreign investors. The Master Plan of Belgrade (2003) and the Regional Spatial Plan of Belgrade Administrative Area (2004) aim at activating the urban potentials in creating dynamic and vibrant city, by perceiving New Belgrade as an alternative centre suitable for business and commercial activities; and the riverbanks as a future multipurpose centres with marinas, recreation and entertainment facilities.



Picture 5: **Gazela slum**

This is the area with extreme contrasts. While the apartments near Arena are very expensive and attract higher income groups, in the Block 70 or Block 45 near the "Chinese marketplace" Chinese families (with up to 20 members) occupy rented apartments whose market price is much cheaper. In close proximity to the "Sava Centre" and luxury hotels like "Hyatt Regency" and "Intercontinental", there are illegal slums where members of Roma minority live in the cardboard shacks. Up to 900 people live "invisibly" in the Gazela slum ([Picture 5](#)).

In creation of multicultural identity of New Belgrade, the significant role is played by new cultural/ethnic community, i.e. Chinese community. During the 1990s, in the turbulent period of conflicts in former Yugoslavia, a lot of Chinese people came to New Belgrade, mainly to Block 70. There is no accurate data on the population that forms this community; however the estimations on their number go between 10,000 and 40,000 people. The majority is represented by young people, married couples or even entire families from southern Chinese provinces. Most of them consider Belgrade as merely transition place before they move to some other European country (see: Maruna 2006:266-269).

Except in shopping malls or on playgrounds between skyscrapers, inhabitants of New Belgrade meet each other often in well-known restaurants and bars in so called "houses on water" (in Serbian: *splavovi*) on the rivers Danube or Sava. The "culture of night life" on New Belgrade's *splavovi* creates a special atmosphere, attracting younger people and tourists especially in the summer. These "houses on water" are also used for daily relaxation during the summer ([Picture 6](#)) or even for permanent living in case of some rather poor citizens ([Picture 7](#)).

Picture 6: "**Splavovi**" (restaurants and cafés) on Sava



The current extensive development of New Belgrade in business and housing area needs to be supported with adequate facilities in the cultural sphere. Although today's inhabitants of New Belgrade came from different parts of the country/region or from abroad, meaning that they are of different economic, social and cultural backgrounds, they manage to coexist; sometimes completely uninterested/unaware of their neighbours, and sometimes fully united in creation of better life in their community. Diversity is quality, but since New Belgrade becomes one of the strongest development poles in Belgrade region and in Serbia, its inhabitants need to take a more pro-active role in creating their municipality a desirable place for living.



Picture 7:  
**"Houses on water" used for permanent living on Sava**  
 photo by Milenko Vasić

## REFERENCES

- Blagojević, Lj. (2007), "Strategies of Modernism in the Planning and Construction of New Belgrade", In: Gustavsson, Swen (ed.), *Stockholm — Belgrade. Proceedings from the Third Swedish-Serbian Symposium in Stockholm, April 21-25, 2004*, Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie Och Antikvitets Akademien, Konferenser 63:165-177.
- Galic, J. (2007), "Seductive city", *Ekonomist*, special edition, 5 March 2007: 28-31.
- Grečić, V. (2002), "The role of migrant professionals in the process of transition in Yugoslavia", *Međunarodni problemi*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 253-271.
- Institute for Informatics and Statistics 2006: Statistical Yearbook of Belgrade 2005. Beograd.
- Maricic T., Petric J. (2008), "Physical Expansion and Sub-Regional Disparities in the Growing Metropolitan Region of Belgrade", *Ethnologia Balkanica* 13 (in print).

- Maruna M. (2006), "City of difference", In: *Belgrade the capital*, eds. Milic V. & Djokic, V., Faculty of Architecture University of Belgrade, Berlage institute Rotterdam, Belgrade, p. 265-285.
- Republički zavod za statistiku Srbije 2007: Opštine u Srbiji, 2006. Beograd.
- Savić, M. (2000), "Novi Beograd — Stvaranje identiteta mesta", *Izgradnja*, 54: 353-357.
- Strateški plan Opštine Novi Beograd 2006: Gradska opština Novi Beograd. Beograd.
- Vujošević, M. (2002), "On New Methodological and other Standards in Planning. The Case of the Master plan of Belgrade 2021", *Arhitektura i Urbanizam* 9, IAUS, Beograd.
- Vukotić Lazar, M., Đokić, J. (2006), "Complex history as a source of planning problems: Old Belgrade fairground", *Spatium* 13-14, p. 34-40.