THE CITY IN SELF-MANAGEMENT: THE RISE AND FALL OF NEW BELGRADE'S ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY

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Abstract: The article deals with the development of Socialist Yugoslavia's urban policies in the decades after the break with the Soviet Union. The new openness toward the influence of Western modernist architecture and the resulting changes in the urban planning are reflected in the history of New Belgrade. A special attention is given to the relation between the construction of New Belgrade and the ruling ideology of workers' self-management. Apart from the official policies, the article opens the question of the ways in which the social movements from below influenced the practice of city planning in Yugoslavia. Finally, the text briefly discusses the potency of Henri Lefebvre's concept of 'right to the city' as a potential guidance for answering the social contradictions and public denouncements, which the Yugoslav modernist architecture, faced in the 1980s.

> *I hold that the history of architecture and constructed urban artifacts is always the history of the ruling classes; it remains to be seen what kind of limitations and concrete successes were brought about by the era of revolutions and their alternative conceptions of the city (Rossi 1982, 23).*
>
> *Aldo Rossi*

$\mathcal{I}$N AN EFFORT TO DISTINGUISH THE EXPERIence of the socialist city from the cities in the West, Michael Harloe points out to numerous difficulties the planned economies were facing in their urban poli-

cies. The most obvious ones emerge out of the painful contradictions between the stated revolutionary ideals and everyday practices. Like other state policies, decision making in urban planning was far detached from the influence of the ordinary inhabitants of the socialist cities. The absence of the market was supposed to place the equality and well-being of the citizens over profit. In reality, the drive for rapid industrialization and economic efficiency often mirrored the alienating spatial logic of the market. At the time when many Western metropolises were going through a process of de-urbanization, socialist regimes were still struggling to keep the rate of investments in urban housing in pace with the influx of migrants from the countryside. The failure to do so resulted in the situation where a large section of the blue-collar working class lived in improvised or rural settlements (Harloe 1996, 14). The decaying facades of the socialist cities presented glaring proofs that something went wrong. The writing was on the wall and no amount of agitprop makeup could mask it. The feeling that the socialist countries were losing the battle for modernity with the West came to be a menacing fact for the nomenclature and the population eventually leading to demoralization and outright abandonment of the socialist project as a whole.

On the other hand, a number of authors choose to focus on the positive differences which the city in a non-market environment either accomplished or tried to achieve in contrast to the urban environments trapped in mortgage loans and real estate. According to Ivan Szelenyi, the central planning, along with the state ownership of the land, meant that urban development could be subjected to a much greater control and more ambitious visions than under capitalism. Free from the constraints of the land prices, socialist planners had freedom to use space generously and pay more attention to aesthetics rather than narrow economic considerations in urban design (Szelenyi 1996, 302). These cities showcased the potential for distributing collective consumption on an equal basis and massive scale. The free public provision of housing, symbolized by the apartment blocks, which came to dominate the landscape of socialism, was one of the most important means for rising and egalitarian living standards, thus enabling the avoidance of many ills associated with rapid urbanization processes in developing countries.

In their own unique way, the urban policies inside socialist Yugoslavia encapsulated all of the contradictions mentioned above. Brigitte Le Normand correctly identifies two main goals coming out of the Yugoslav socialist revolution. The first one was to create an egalitarian workers' state governed by the principles of self-management. The second was the rapid industrialization and economic growth necessary to create the preconditions for such a new state (Le Normand 2008a, 4). The negotiation between these two tasks, which were increasingly being seen as mutually excluding by the authorities, marked the entire lifespan of socialist Yugoslavia. Conveyed into the housing policy, these goals implied the process of

integration of peasants from different backgrounds into an urban environment, as well as their transformation into socialist citizens capable of participating in the newly created self-management structures. Most of the urban planning was therefore oriented towards facilitating good neighborly relations and organization of space in accordance with the demands of new political and economic order. The vision of a creative socialist habitat soon came into collision with the need for a fast build up of the housing stock and the malfunctioning of self-management institutions.

One of the first urban policies of the post-World War Two authorities was the restraint of the housing market mechanisms. Beside the real-estate confiscated from the fascist collaborators, socialist authorities did not proceed with full scale nationalization of the entire housing stock but set strong limits to the extent of property rights and the ability to extract rent from them instead. Formally, each Yugoslav citizen kept the right to own and occupy a building containing maximum of two large apartments, or three smaller ones, however, rent seeking from this property was practically abolished. It is estimated that a working class family of four was spending 33.6 percent of its income on rent in 1938, while in 1946 this share fell to 5.3 percent and further down to 2.4 percent in 1958 (Le Normand 2008a, 5).

The new inflow of migrants from the countryside was supposed to be accommodated through the construction of state owned housing whose allocation would promote equality and fairness with need, the size of the household and seniority in workplace as the only criteria for distribution. However, the housing stock grew slow within first five year plan as the priority was given to investments in heavy industry and the military. The centralized allocation of the new flats concentrated extensive power in the hands of housing authorities and gave them the opportunity to discriminate and duplicate hierarchical state relations within housing distribution.

The break of Yugoslavia with the Soviet Union in 1948 opened up the door for a re-evaluation and search for the new solutions in the realm of politics, economy, territorial organization, philosophy and art; including architecture and urban planning. The idea of workers' self management, according to which the direct producers should have the right to run the enterprises themselves through elected councils, was supposed to be applied in other non-economic sectors as well, such as: schools, hospitals, scientific institutions and urban neighborhoods.

The increase of consumption and democratization associated with this turn was perceived by the authorities as being possible only together with the introduction of the market incentives, decentralization and the increasing autonomy of companies in their economic decisions. The construction of new housing was relocated to locally-based Funds for Housing Construction, which collected a per-

centage of workers earnings in order to reinvest them into new urban projects. Individual firms and the city authorities were encouraged to take initiative and invest income in local housing projects, a measure which was hoped to raise productivity and economic initiative. In a country with deep inherited structural inequalities and different regional levels of development these measures would prove to have contrasting outcomes.

The thinking of architects and urban planners was profoundly influenced by the intellectual opening and freedom for experimentation which came with de-stalinization. As the editor of the newly established Yugoslav jornal *Arhitektura,* Neven Šegić, proclaimed in 1950:

"The fact that the character of socialist architecture is very much different from the capitalist architecture does not in any case imply that it should isolate itself from the general development of architecture today...Our architecture positioned itself critically from the very beginning to the totality of architectural creation by taking advantage of all progressive, active moments of contemporary architecture" (Blagojević 2005, 89).

Gone was the Stalinesque aesthetic of monumentalism coupled with pre-fabricated five-story buildings one could find in the cities like Nowa Huta or Eisen-hüttenstadt (Hamilton 1979, 236). Following the credo that the implementation of the principles of Western modernist architecture on a grand scale was possible only under socialism, the Yugoslav architects and urban planners embraced the functionalist ideas of the International Modernist Movement and the legacy of Le Corbusier with all their might. The building of New Belgrade presented an opportunity for the construction of a new city whose organization and style would reflect the exceptionality of the Titoist socio-political and ideological project. For many, the switch from the avant-garde to neo-classicism in the Soviet Union, in the early 1930s, symbolized the passage to the Thermidorian stage of the October Revolution. Now, ostracized from the mainstream of world communism, Yugoslavia was set to prove its revolutionary credentials by revitalizing the radical modernist edge of socialist architecture.

Socialist Skyscrapers

> *The uniformity of the units that compose the picture throws into relief the firm lines on which the far-flung masses are constructed. Their outlines softened by distance, the skyscrapers raise immense geographical facades all of glass, and in them is reflected the blue glory of the sky. An overwhelming sensation. Immense but radiant prisms* (Le Corbusier 2003, 319–324).
> *Le Corbusier*

The swampy, terrain spreading between the Austro-Hungarian city of Semlin and the Kalemegdan fortress cliff– the last base for the Ottoman troops inside Belgrade– was a no man's land for centuries, a suspended space bordering the Occident and the Orient. Ljiljana Blagojević notes that this *tabula rasa* quality turned it into a perfect space for the urbanist fantasies and ideological projections. Inherited old city centers in Eastern Europe presented a challenge for the urban planners as they unavoidably maintained much of the pre-socialist spatial and functional structure, physical appearance and marked interzonal differentiation (Hamilton 1979, 227). For this reason, the concept of new cities carried great appeal for the socialist authorities. In the Yugoslav case, the uninhabited plane, just outside of Belgrade, had an additional implicit political value of extraterritoriality. Its neutrality in relation to the old historical centers, cultural diversities and national divisions inside the new federal state made it a suitable point for the projection of New Belgrade– the capital of multinational socialist Yugoslavia (Blagojević 2005, 248).

In the first post-war years, there was nothing unusual or dissenting about the concept of New Belgrade inside the country and the regime seen as one of the most loyal adherent of the Moscow line. The new capital was envisioned as a representative center for the federal organs with all appropriate infrastructures and a diplomatic quarter. The only two buildings which were explicitly named in the government's public competition for the urban plan of New Belgrade in 1947 were the headquarters of the Communist Party and the Presidency of the new federation. The main project of the Serbian Institute for Urbanism suggested hierarchical circles of buildings, intersected with traffic arteries radiating around the main governmental building, and a large circular square in the center ornamented with a five-pointed star. The monumental character of the project was matched by the usage of unqualified voluntary work brigades as the main force for socialist construction works. It is calculated that in the first post-war years, between 1946 and 1952, some million men and women, from all regions of Yugoslavia, participated in these efforts to make up for the mechanical deficits with revolutionary élan (Blagojević 2005, 73–85).

The fact that this model was highly criticized by the architectural community and finally rejected, one year before the formal break of Yugoslav communists with the Cominform, shows the strong resistance the dogma of social-realism faced inside the country from the very beginning. The year 1948 finally brought the strong cleavages brewing inside the architectural community to the open along with the political changes in the country. *Arhitektura* carried strong exchange of words between the advocates of modernism and social-realism with the latter usually ending up in minority. Former modernist Branko Maksimović, for instance, negated the revolutionarily nature of modernism, equating it with the system of rotting capitalism. On the other side, Andrija Mohorovičić reminded his colleagues that

the radical Yugoslav architects always stood against the historical styles and academism of the 19th century. In the context of the time, these words clearly implied a refusal to compromise and incorporate the so-called progressive styles of the past (see: Maksimović 1948, 80; Mohorovičić 1948, 6–7).

The outcome of the discord was clear by 1950, when, on the pages of *Arhitektura*, one of Tito's most trusted cadres in the field of culture and art, Vladislav S. Ribnikar, criticized the housing units built up to that point as 'ugly, dreary and heavy'. Instead he called for:

Housing buildings made for the life of people…optimistic, light and luminous, expressing the joy of life, optimism and happiness of the working man, a socialist man for whom they are meant for (Ribnikar 1950, 22).

With the change in the political nature of socialist Yugoslavia, the concept of New Belgrade switched dramatically. The idea of a centralized symbol of the state and the party was abandoned and new plans now gave priority to the creation of communal living spaces and integration with the old city center. The demand for a monumental touch remained, however, it was now about to find its expression in high modernism of the skyscrapers and geometric abstractions. The new plans were adjusted to the administrative organization of self government in smaller units. The living space was broken into regions and micro-regions, each with its own set of public infrastructure such as: primary schools, kindergartens, playground, library, restaurant, ambulance and spaces for social and political meetings. This functional micro-unit (popularly known as 'the block') was envisioned as a community of citizens set up to govern and develop social work and everyday life in the spirit of self-management (Blagojević 2005, 136).

New Belgrade served as a laboratory for different ideas about self-management system which would eventually be implemented in the whole country.
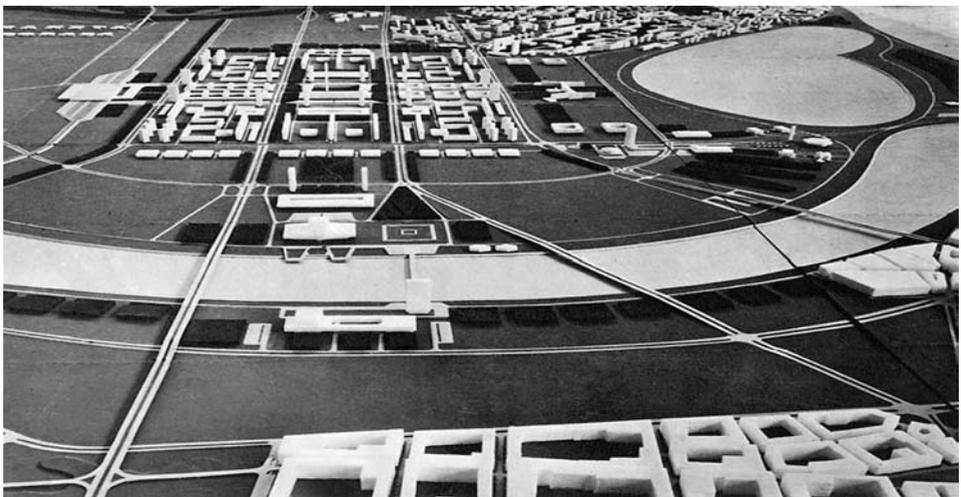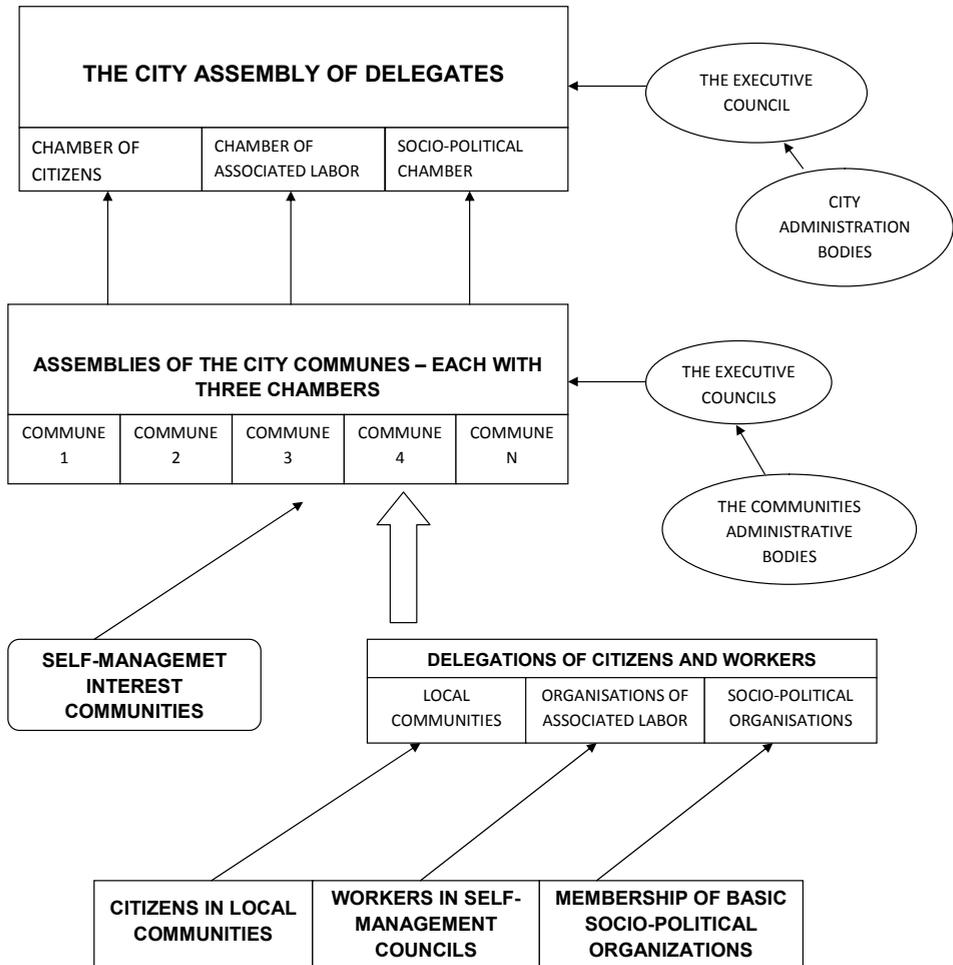
The constitutional changes in the following decades attempted to establish the local community as the locus of socio-political organizing. The 1974 constitution theoretically diminished the power and functions of the traditional state and political apparatuses by transferring executive competencies to non-professional self-management communes. In this way, the local community (*opština*), divided into neighborhoods (*mesna zajednica* or *blok* in the case of New Belgrade), represented the basic political and territorial organization of self-management. The self management institutions– each consisting of chambers with delegates from the communities, work organizations and socio-political organizations–were elected on the level of local communities and the city level (Leonardson and Mirčev 1979, 192).

The local city assemblies therefore represented a complex network of institutions for self-management and local governance with wide jurisdictions (including town planning), filled with delegates mandated by various functional constituencies. This corporatist structure was maintained by three separate chambers at each government level which then formed joint executive councils and city administration bodies. The delegates in the chamber of citizens were elected directly and secretly by all residents of the neighborhood districts. Being the crucial social force for the creation of socialism, the working class enjoyed its own chamber constituted through workers' councils inside the work organizations. The third function from which the delegates were drawn were socio-political organizations such as: the Trade Union Federation, Union of Socialist Youth, Association of National Liberation War veterans, the League of Communists etc. A further addition to these delegate institutions were the ad-hoc elected 'self management interest communities', consisting of delegations from the interested parties in different sphere of social life, deciding on how to carry out the decisions brought by the assemblies (Leonardson and Mirčev 1979, 199).

The modernist view of a functional city divided into self-sufficient zones of regulation and consumption went hand in hand with the growing tendency inside Yugoslavia to equate self-management with decentralization and the market; an idea of integration of various social interests through an all embracing network of self-management bodies.

By the mid-1960s, the gap between theoretical model and daily practice of self-management inside the cities became painfully obvious. The system of *laissez-faire socialism* created a situation where the economic power was withdrawn from the local bodies with banks, import-export companies and other powerful instances withholding much of the social capital under their control. Bureaucratic and technocratic circles occupied the self-management organs with little or no contact with the voters. The agencies with salaried officials, formed by the Commune Assembly, took a life of their own. Single individuals rotated functions or *143*

The City Self-Management Scheme

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kept positions in various bodies, re-appearing from one election to the other. From 1963 to 1969 the numbers of women and youth serving in the Commune Assemblies declined sharply while the education level needed to perform these functions rose significantly. This atmosphere discouraged direct participation and awoke the tendency to rely on the specialists and well positioned people with connections for problem solving in the community and the work place (Leonardson and Mirčev 1979, 194).

The urban planning policies performed by these bodies were also increasingly being seen as being ineffective in the creation of new flats and weak in application of need and precedence as the sole criteria for distribution. It is interesting to note *144* that in almost fifty years the planned goals for the growth of the housing stock

were not achieved in any single year. The introduction of firm competition on the market and the rising complexity of the production process motivated workers' councils to attract specialists and skilled labor. This was often done with the help of exclusive apartments built by the companies to lure in professionals. A telling example was the situation inside one of the country's largest construction companies, *Trudbenik,* where by the mid-1980s, over thousand workers were still on the waiting list for their own flat after twenty years of employment even though in this time they constructed millions of housing square meters all over Yugoslavia (Nikolić 1986, 11).

The idea of tying the housing policy more closely to the level of productivity of a respective political-territorial unit and boosting of construction efforts through consumption-driven growth created great inequalities. Employees in the more profitable economic sectors enjoyed access to more housing funding than their colleagues in less profitable sectors and underdeveloped regions. Some firms contributed much larger sums to the funds for housing construction than they received, while other firms, in politically favored branches, had no such problems (Le Normand 2008a, 9–11). The shortage of public flats, available for the rising influx of workforce from the countryside, forced the authorities to partly abandon the idea of mass produced standardized housing and introduce incentives for private house-building. Far from resolving the crisis of urban planning, these measures added to the problem with rings of wild settlements with semi-finished houses around the big cities (Simmie 1989, 283). By the mid 1980s, the Belgrade neighborhood of *Kaluđerica*, became one of the largest wild settlements in Europe with 6.000 houses and more than 26.000 inhabitants (Jelačić 1986, 17). New Belgrade was increasingly becoming an area for upper middle classes and bureaucrats, while majority of the unskilled workers lived in improvised housing.

It was around 1965 that someone defined Belgrade as the only communist capital with a parking problem (Rusinow 1977, 139). The distribution of subsidized state housing to higher income employees left space for further conspicuous consumption among the professionals and party bureaucracy. The construction companies were now even seeking to create demand by advertising luxury apartments to the public. As Brigitte Le Normand notes, one such project of an exclusive block planed in New Belgrade triggered a wave of outrage from the communities and the media in the summer of 1968, posing the question who are the citizens able to purchase such high price flats? (Le Normand 2008a, 16) The feeling that socialist Yugoslavia was betraying its promise of egalitarianism was becoming widespread. The resistance to what was popularly labeled as 'enrichment through un-socialist methods' did not stop at the level of dissatisfaction and passive criticism.

In the summer of 1968, the main boulevard of New Belgrade proved to be the place of a violent encounter between the protesting students and the police, marking the first instance of public use of violence by the Titoist authorities against the population. The break-up of the student march from New Belgrade dormitories towards the city center sparked a seven day occupation of the philosophy faculty building in downtown Belgrade, involving more than 60.000 participants. What started as a local protest over living conditions of 5.000 students in New Belgrade soon evolved into one of the most serious political crisis the communist party faced in the post war society (see: Rusinow 1977, 222–224). The students condemned the existence of strong bureaucratic forces and the emergence of great social inequalities in society, demanding democratization of socio-political institutions and systematic application of socialist principles of distribution (Jun-Lipanj 1968: Dokumenti 1971, 62). If we follow Fran Tonkiss, in his argument that urban spaces provide sites for political action and are themselves politicized in contests over access, control and representation, two moments in Belgrade's student mobilizations of 1968 deserve to be highlighted (Tonkiss 2005, 59).

Firstly, the initial incident which motivated the students to protest was a fight with the security, braking out at the entrance gate of a pop concert organized across the street from the dormitories in honor of the guest volunteer work brigade engaged in the building of New Belgrade. Not being part of the work brigade, a group of students were denied entrance and beaten by the police. Concerts of this type, or any other manifestations for that matter, rarely took place in the 'functional city'. The incident was just an indicator of a much larger problem of urban living. A survey, conducted among the New Belgrade residents in 1974, by the Yugoslav Institute for Town Planning and Housing, revealed a whole series of defects concerning the arrangement and use of space in the neighborhoods. Residents of *blokovi* complained that the flats were too small with individual rooms frequently performing several functions. Almost two-thirds of the residents complained of noise. The majority also considered the neighborhood services to be unsatisfactory or non-existing when it comes to children facilities, shops, cultural amenities etc. -forcing the people to journey to the center of Belgrade for their needs (Hamilton 1974, 244).

Secondly, the police intervened and dispersed the student march once it approached the bridge and threatened to leave New Belgrade and reach the symbols of power in the old city center. This shows the failure of the Titoist authorities to create a new political space on the other side of the river. Despite the grand initial plans, New Belgrade failed to establish an alternative city center and the majority of the government institutions remained located in the buildings built up in the bourgeois Yugoslavia. A peaceful continuation of the student strike was permitted by the city authorities under a single condition; that the students remain inside the

occupied campus of the Philosophy faculty and do not take their protests to the central squares. The students were therefore forced to create a counter-space, where dominant organization of space and politics was challenged through innovative practices such as the democratic Assemblies and the *Convent*.[1] The squares in front of the government buildings remained reserved for staged events, obviously considered dangerous as the symbol of common political belonging and expression of mass political action.

Two decades later, a new social movement managed to conquer this symbolic space. The number of labor strikes in the country rose steadily in the 1980s, reaching 1.851 factory stoppages involving more than 380.000 workers in 1988. The best organized strikes often rallied in front of the Federal Parliament building in downtown Belgrade defying limitations set by the police. In the summer of 1988, workers from the shoe factory *Borovo* stormed the Federal Parliament, demanding immediate resolution of the severe political and economic crises. If one recalls the definition given to urban social movements by Manuel Castells, implying the transgression the sphere of work and production and circumvention of traditional political parties and trade unions, the Yugoslav labor movement could hardly be labeled as one of them (Castells 1977). At a rally commemorating the protest in front of the Federal Assembly in 1989, the president of strike committee from the metal factory, situated in the working class Belgrade neighborhood of *Rakovica*, Milinko Jovanović, proposed the forming of strike committees on the

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1 The convent was an open discussion forum in which a speaker would engage in a free, question and answer, spontaneous communication with the crowd. Free from all formality and taboos, these sessions could go on for hours debating everything from philosophy and culture to current political themes.

neighborhood (*opština*), republican and federal level. This idea was never tried out in practice (Jovanović 1989, Rad br. 2918).

Nevertheless, if one looks at the strike demands in those years, disputes over housing emerge as the main object of contention, next to the wages and production. The longest strike in the Yugoslav history, staged by the migrant mine workers in the Croatian city of Labin in 1987, went directly against the policy of tying the housing to the work territory by demanding house-building credits for their home towns in other republics (Tarlo 1987, Rad 53). That same year, workers from a textile factory in the Serbian city Prijepolje went into strike demanding larger influence over the housing policy in their community and investigation over machinations in the local housing funds by the company management (Jovanović 1987, Rad 56). In an interview given to the Serbian trade union paper *Rad*, one striking worker in Split furiously explained that his decision to leave the communist party after twenty-five years of membership was motivated by the fact that an average waiting period for workers' flats inside his factory was twenty-five years, while in contrast the waiting period for managers was three to four years (Juraga 1987, Rad 64).

The self-management housing policy was therefore taking shape not solely over the drawing boards presented by architects and urban planners to communist politicians, but also in the media, on the streets, inside the student dormitories and the factory halls All of the places where the citizens contested the existing solutions and proposed alternative visions.

Lefebvre in Yugoslavia

The mobilizations from below managed to initiate greater changes inside the socialist city than one would expect. As Brigitte Le Normand notes, the anger at social inequality eventually lead to an abandonment of building luxury houses as the poles of economic growth (Le Normand 2008a, 17). The student strikes of 1968 resulted in the release of space in downtown Belgrade, formerly occupied by the military, for the purpose of a student culture center (SKC). It was exactly in the ateliers of SKC where some of the most innovative architectural solutions in the following years were conceived. The younger architects rebelled against the uncritical imitation of modernist models from the West and developed a distinct 'Belgrade school of living' (*beogradska škola stanovanja*) with original concepts drawn from experiences in the building of New Belgrade blocks and the influence of the Scandinavian architecture. There existed an active search for new, more humane and intimate use of space, for a critical modernist urban planning.

However, by the 1980s, when the labor movement appeared on the streets, these sentiments were gone. The global turn toward post-modern architecture

rejected the grand narratives and emancipating spirit of traditional modernism and reintroduced historicism and ornament. In Yugoslavia, this trend developed parallel with the rising nationalist mobilizations and neo-traditionalism. Surveys showed that the majority of people preferred to live in single family houses instead of communal buildings. The majority opinion in the architectural circles turned against high-rises as inhumane and alienating. In addition, the critics went overboard, blaming New Belgrade architecture for all kinds of health problems and social ills. For instance, it was claimed that apartment towers create negative effects on the peoples' psyche through fear of heights, wind noises and dizziness. Living at great heights was even held responsible for bone and lung disease in children (Le Normand 2008b, 149). By the late 1980s, New Belgrade was not any longer a symbol of new Yugoslavia or self-management communal relations, but of yet another failed socialist project. The anti-communist dissidents often used the metaphor of a 'grand concrete sleeping room' to discredit Titoist urban policies. Most of the Yugoslav architects and urban planners turned away from New Belgrade and focused on the restoration of the central city quarters and legalization of wild settlements.

Unexpectedly, the new interest came from abroad. In 1986, the French team of architects and sociologists, headed by Henri Lefebvre participated in the International Competition for New Belgrade Urban Structure Improvement.[2] Lefebvre's critique of New Belgrade was equally harsh as the ones delivered by the Yugoslav architects hostile to the socialist legacy, if not more so. What distinguishes his analysis is the location of causes and the proposed solutions to the urban problems.

For Ljiljana Blagojević today, the root of the failure of New Belgrade to become a dynamic city filled with social content and service, lies in what she calls the 'functionalism of the free apartment'. Reflecting a widespread belief, she states that an ideology, according to which use-value should dominate over exchange-value in housing, is responsible for the loss of economic dynamics. For Blagojević, if the flats do not reflect the market value, the city cannot be truly modern. The key problem therefore is not the alienation and lack of communal voice but the socialist concept of 'free apartments for everyone' (Blagojević 2005, 209).

For Lefebvre, who developed his critique in the West, the problem is the practice of fragmentary urban planning divorced from the citizens. Far from helping to create urban life, the market and exchange value decentralize and destroy the city. The urban planning under capitalism comes down to providing as quickly as

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2   Interestingly enough, unlike the English speaking scholars who 'discovered' his writings relatively late, Lefebvre was well known inside socialist Yugoslavia. His books were translated as early as the 1950s and he even visited the Croatian Island of Korčula for the summer schools organized by the Yugoslav Marxist journal *Praxis*. Lefebvre has described his Korčula experience as 'Dionysian Socialism'. (See: Erić 2009, 17).

possible, at the least cost, the greatest number of housing units and usually ends up in market speculation (Kofman and Lebas 1996, 86–94). The exit from the urban crisis in New Belgrade, according to Lefebvre and his team, is connected to what they call the 'right to the city'. This should not be understood in the same key as the general human rights, but as the right of the citizen to control the space he inhabits as a *homo politicus.* Therefore, when Lefebvre states in 1986 that *Yugoslavia today is one of the rare countries able to pose the problem of a New Urban* (Bitter & Weber 2009), it is not because he is flattering the hosts, but precisely because he is able to appreciate the delicate heritage of urban self-management, something that many Yugoslav planners and architects themselves were unable to do.

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