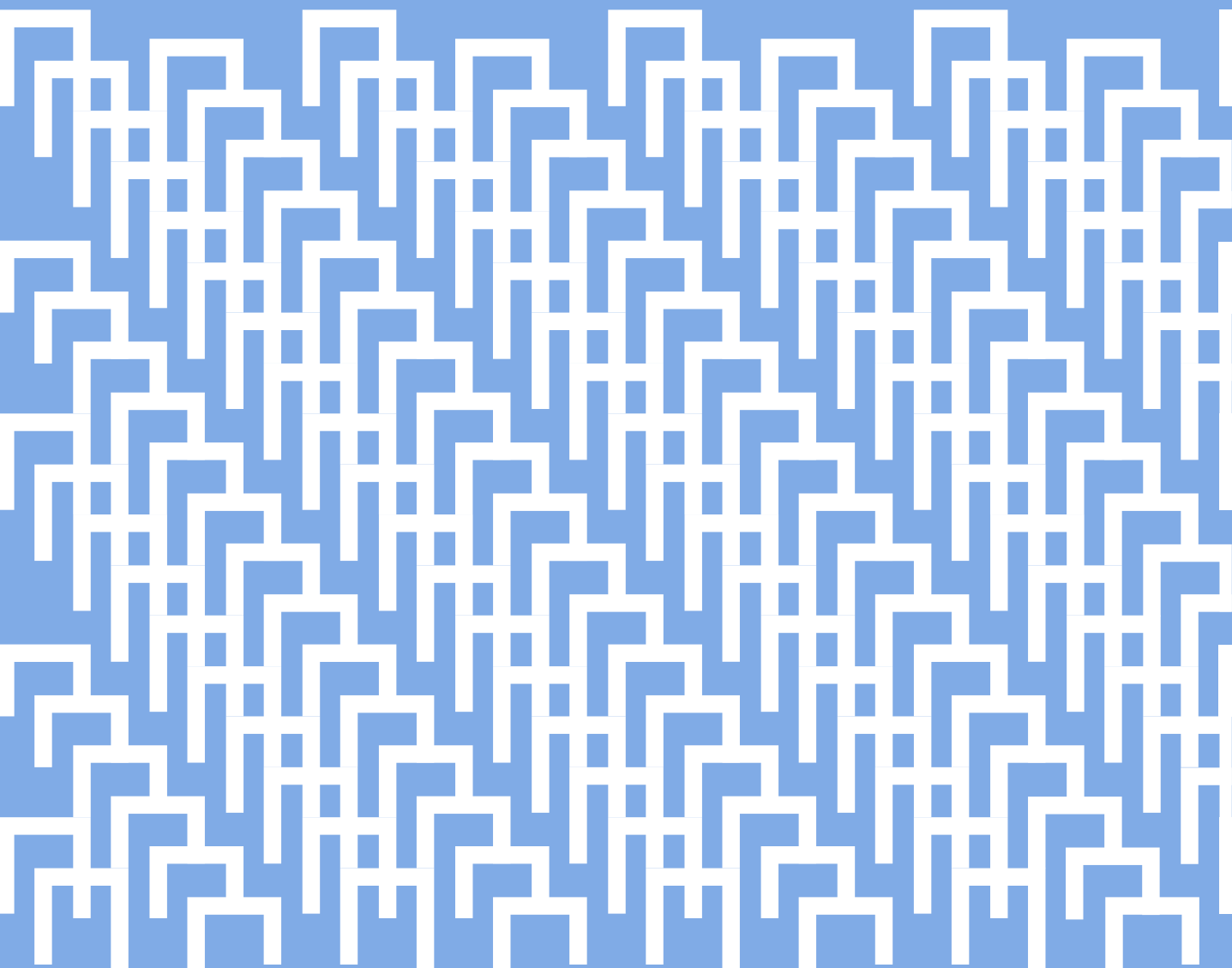


Working Group 1
MCMH Atlas

European Middle-Class Mass Housing: Past and Present of the Modern Community



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Editors

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Serbia

Belgrade, Novi Sad, Bor, Subotica

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(Middle Class) Mass Housing in Serbia. Within and Beyond the Shifting Frames of Socialist Modernisation

In many aspects MCMH development in Serbia/Yugoslavia was unprecedented, determined by a growing and unacknowledged formation of a middle class in the context of Yugoslav socialism, and a widely proclaimed but elusive social ideal of “housing for all”. Two types of MCMH were the most prevalent in the period considered here (1945-1991): a multi-storey collective residential building, in or outside the city centre, and the individual private house, built in formal and informal or so-called “wild” settlements. The Yugoslav housing experiment emerged mostly within the collective residential estates. The appropriation, innovation and even invention of different industrial building methods was further enhanced by excellent standards in urban planning and architectural design, exemplified in this study by selected MCMH cases in New Belgrade, Novi Sad, Bor and Subotica. Due to aging, lack of maintenance and the impoverishment of its inhabitants, the present state of this large housing stock is poor, its future uncertain, and yet, its lessons are of vital importance today.

During the Golden Age / *les Trente Glorieuses*, European countries witnessed unprecedented economic growth followed by massive housing production and Serbia, then a constitutive part of Yugoslavia, was no exception. In the 1950s and 1960s, Yugoslavia was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe that, at its peak in the mid-1970s, produced around 150,000 homes a year (*Jugoslavija 1918-1988*, 1989, p. 275). The initial circumstances for the emergence of middle-class mass housing (MCMH) in Yugoslavia was dictated by immense war damage. In the aftermath of the Second World War the number of home occupants was decimated, twenty five percent of the population left without shelter, and material losses were among the highest in Europe, exceeded only by the USSR and Poland

(Petranović, 1988, p. 179). A deficit of housing units with adequate standards of comfort and hygiene was already a factor in pre-war Yugoslavia (1918-1941) (Vidaković, 1932), when the housing needs of the growing middle class were addressed mainly through the development of single, privately-owned houses and rental apartment buildings. The question of good quality affordable housing was to be systematically dealt with only after the war, in the radically changed social, political and economic situation of post-war Yugoslavia.

Discussing MCMH in a socialist country, however, implies a contradiction in terms and needs additional clarification. Namely, socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991) was not a genuine class-differentiated society and class formation was purposefully discouraged. Although formally unrecognised and undesirable, a new middle-class strata gradually developed in the production and services sectors, encompassing twenty five percent of the active population by the early 1980s (Mrkšić, 1987, p. 203). The first mass housing complexes appeared as part of a policy of “housing for all”, with emphasis on a working class that encompassed all working people regardless of their level of education and profession. This remained the official housing policy of the state till the collapse of the socialist economic and political system.

After WWII, the strong anti-fascist resistance movement, led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), asserted unlimited political power and undertook massive social reforms. The initial alignment with the politics of the USSR significantly changed after 1948, when the Tito-Stalin split occurred, and Yugoslav post-war modernisation and architectural modernism developed through a dual critique, distancing from both Western and Eastern paradigms. This historical “in-betweenness” (Kulić, Mrduljaš, Thaler, 2012), sublimated in the 1960s policy of non-alignment, formed the socio-economic and political background for the emergence of MCMH in Serbia.



Figure 1

The shift to a socialist system was built on the massive expropriation and nationalisation of land and housing stock. The country initially adopted Soviet-type economic planning based on state ownership. In the words of historian Branko Petranović, industrialisation in Yugoslavia became “the new religion of the Party”, derived from the USSR’s model and imposed upon mass organisations and citizens by state authorities (Petranović, 1988, p. 152). The main focus was on heavy industry, and particularly on mining and metal processing, while massive housing construction was likewise based on industrialisation and serial production, in other words precision-planned, rationalised and mechanised construction procedures. At its peak, highly productive procedures of housing development were applied through the adoption and invention of different systems of prefabrication, enabled by the systemic educating of domestic professionals and an international transfer of skills and knowledge.

This particular mode of serial production generated different types of collective housing that consisted mainly of apartment buildings organised into large new residential clusters. Furthermore, in cities that were highly damaged during the war, a large number of apartment buildings and towers were built upon and interpolated into the old city fabric. As a result,

the most prevalent type of MCMH was a multi-storey collective residential building within a planned housing estate, in or outside the city centre. These housing estates were typically planned and the construction was financed under the auspices of socially-owned enterprises (the state budget, the municipal budget, etc.), in accordance with the policy of self-management.

Established as the top priority of the socialist community, investments in housing production reached up to 25% of the total national income (Vujnović, 1973, p. 3). Statistics indicate that 1,483,607 housing units were built in Serbia in the period between 1953 and 1987, out of the total number of 3,907,870 that were constructed statewide. More than one third, 556,170 units, were built within the public sector, reaching almost 25,000 units annually by 1976. Alongside this dominant trend, the number of detached, privately-owned single-family houses steadily increased, coinciding with the growth of an upper middle-class strata and a lack of socially owned apartments for all. As a result, this type of individual, privately-owned housing units massively proliferated at the time, so that collective, socially owned housing units have become significantly outnumbered. Consequently 89,014 self-built units went up in 1976, compared to the 60,921 housing units that were built by the public sector during the same year (*Jugoslavija*

1918-1988, 1989, pp. 275-276). It is also important to point out that private/individual housing could be both formal and informal, or so-called “wild” settlements built without authorisation. Entire formal neighbourhoods of single-family houses picked out from catalogues rose on city peripheries. The catalogues were an assortment of different types of single-family houses designed by various state-owned design studios. This was more convenient way to solve housing problem for those families who found themselves outside the system of allocation of socially owned apartments.

In terms of architectural design and urban planning, there are many similarities, interrelations and common grounds between MCMH in Serbia and corresponding housing estates both in Eastern and Western Europe. A certain distinctiveness arose from the massive scale of housing production in this case, and the specific mechanism of the apartments allocation. It stands out for its high architectural quality achieved despite poor prefabrication performances and customary monotony of architectural elements in mass housing production. Notwithstanding, this process resulted in some exemplary apartments, especially those of the so-called *Belgrade School of Housing* (Bajlon, 1975), and a strong emphasis on common facilities, open spaces and social amenities (Stojanović, ed., 1975). While detached houses in private ownership could be found all over Socialist Eastern Europe, the housing sector in Yugoslavia shows particular diversity in this matter. Due to the relatively liberal economy of housing, both the social and private sector were evolving apace with each other².

The first mass housing settlements were conceived according to Soviet models and their design mostly counted on architects employed by the municipalities and the Ministry of Construction, which absorbed the inter-war agency belonging to these bodies. A number of semi-prefabricated worker settlements were put up on the outskirts of Belgrade from 1947-1949, such as *Železnik*, “the new industrial city for 18,000 inhabitants”, with Branko Maksimović at the helm, or *Karaburma*, “microrayon for 6,000 inhabitants”, with so-called Russian Pavilions, designed by Jovan Bje-lović, (Sekulić, 2008, p. 125).

After the “Resolution on Prospective

Construction Development” was announced in 1957, an un-preceded amount of funding was invested into the country’s construction sector, providing the ba-sis for a thorough industrialisation of housing construction. Besides, funding was also allocated for organisation of architectural and urban planning competitions, patent development and overall in-novation. This led to many companies creating proprietary prefabrication systems, such as the skel-et-al prestressed system *IMS Žeželj* or the large panel system *Jugomont*, precursors for the creation of industrialised mass housing on a grand scale and pivotal technologies for the building of housing developments in their respective communities. An open prefabrication system was adopted, uniformising structural elements while leaving the envelopes and layouts completely open for architects to experiment with, within the proscribed guidelines related to size, amenities and finishes. Mass housing construction sites became veritable laboratories of the housing economy, with many innovations cropping up within new housing estates of all sizes and in all aspects of their develop-ment: from the layout design of the units to the technology-based urban and architectural design (often called crane or gabarit urbanism) (Jovanović, 2017).

The most notable examples in this regard are the residential blocks of New Belgrade’s Central Zone (Blagojević, 2012), Block 23 being the most celebrated of all. The layout of this block incorporates sophisticated modernist typologies - strategically positioned towers and slabs in a way that leaves to a central area to accommodate the infrastructures, services, playgrounds, all



Figure 2



Figure 3

nestling within lav-ish greenery. The residential building consist of modular flats of various sizes, assembled in a two-tract system, with double slabs at regular intervals connected by vertical services. By expanding the building's width to create atriums, this design allows for two and three-sided orientation, cross ventilation and a more flexible spatial organization of dwellings. The façades of the block's buildings feature intricate details in exposed concrete, earning the block its reputation as "concrete ba-roque" and also as an iconic expression of brutalism. The concepts pioneered within the blocks of New Belgrade's Central Zone continued to be further developed, as every new development would build upon the experiences and designs of its predecessors, forming the complex and multifaceted corpus of MCMH architectural heritage.

For example, residential complex built in Vojvodjanska Street on the eastern fringe of the Grbavica neighbourhood in Novi Sad, relied on a project imported from Sarajevo, adapting the design principles to suit the local context. The mass construction of repetitive and

uniform high-rise panel housing in the Liman II housing estate in Novi Sad continued until the late 1970s, when Yugoslav architects took down "the portrait of Le Corbusier off the wall" and made a clean break with orthodox modernism (Hirt, 2008, p. 801). The housing blocks built afterwards exhibit a shift to an 'an-ti-modernist' design, characterized by smaller building scales, pitched roofs and brick façades, dis-tinguishing Liman II as a 'less conventional' socialist housing estate. The particularly notable example is recently protected Cerak Vinogradi 1 & 2 housing estate, that epitomized a total design approach, while also improving the structural framework to accommodate pitched roofs and large cantilevered balconies. This estate is widely regarded as a highlight of Serbia's housing production during its peak.

Furthermore, housing served as a city building incentive for new cities such as Bor, which emerged around the mining industry, and a reconstruction stimulus for older cities such as Subotica. Their post-war development and growth as regional industrial centres had to be supported with an ac-cording replenishment of

housing stock to accommodate the growing influx of workers flocking into the cities. These cities grew one housing community at a time, leaving examples of ambitious and often unfinished regional housing developments such as IV Local Community or Prozivka scattered all over the country.

At the fringes of this movement some exceptional forms of MCMH appeared. As the first response to the housing crisis in the immediate post-WW2 years, the government pushed for the production of prefabricated barracks, predominantly made of timber, as well as for individual housing made of brick, while also utilizing other traditional materials and techniques, such as adobe, wattle and daub, timber and stone construction, depending on the region. These were built according to typified design, supplied through housing catalogues, that were distributed to the local offices and companies. Many of these estates have long since been replaced with permanent housing, but there are also places where they are still in use, after substantial modernisation, such as Staro Selište in Bor.

Over the last thirty years disinvestment in housing has been evident: both new construction and the upkeep of the existing housing stock have significantly dropped, as a consequence of war, isolation, and political transition, augmented by pervasive privatisation and commodification. Any comprehensive renovations and retrofitting are quite rare, while repairs are done only when absolutely necessary, as the tenants-turned-homeowners have been effectively priced out of doing it themselves. There have been recent instances of the most prized examples of housing developments being protected as cultural heritage: examples being the Genex tower, the Central Zone of New Belgrade and Cerak Vinogradi, but their restoration process is still in the early stages.

Housing policies supporting such developments in MCMH evolved accordingly. After the initial, temporary laws from 1947 and following the *First Five-year Plan* (1947-1951), a huge set of regulations nudged housing construction towards industrialisation and mass production. The early 1950s were marked by a desire for decentralisation and moved towards a concept of self-management. The "Residential Unit Administration Decree" of 1953 implemented the constitutional "right to housing" by granting

a subjective right to the permanent use of the allocated apartment in an act of social ownership. Investment in construction of housing stock was decentralised through making available a range of funds, the Solidarity Housing Fund first and foremost, with each employee contributing with a part of their personal salary. In terms of housing design, most influential of all was the "Construction Manual by the Yugoslav Peoples' Army" (1955) that defined strict building norms and, coupled with advancements in prefab systems, eventually was able to offer spacious and flexible apartments to residents.

The 1963 Constitution marked a turn towards a liberalised market economy and consolidated the previously introduced idea of self-governing housing communities. Business associations and construction companies competed to provide mass housing on the still-regulated housing market. The 1974 Constitution further decentralised economic power. The "Law on Spatial Planning and Design" established the concept of self-management and interest-based communities and sought to further improve mass construction and dwelling design on the basis of advanced research practices. The Yugoslav housing economy, although striving to eliminate the *de facto* existence of class differences and contradictions, paradoxically became an instrument for middle-class community building. Affordable housing (either rented or purchased) once allocated to the resident(s) would free up a significant amount of one's income, previously put aside for commercial rent or travel expenses, which could then be spent on a consumerist lifestyle, which further aggravated class divisions.

During the disintegration of Yugoslavia, from 1991-2003, the Republic of Serbia passed through a process of turbulent social transition and turned towards a neoliberal democracy. Following the new "Law on Housing Relations" of 1990, almost the entire socially-owned housing stock was initially nationalised and turned over to state ownership, and with the 1992 "Housing Law", flats were then privatised by offering them to their tenants for purchase at bargain rates. Except for the social housing sector, over the next thirty years this sector was almost completely left to market whims and housing policy in Serbia today is still based on the same paradigm. The present day is again characterised by high but insufficient and inadequate housing production, without thorough planning strategies and ultimately, out of reach for



Figure 4

a middle class in decline.

In response to what would be the lessons and contemporary implications of the Yugoslav housing experience, in this brief review we have outlined the specificities and the unique historical conditions of the emergence of middle class mass housing in Serbia. The insights they contain are epitomised through studying the following select case-studies of MCMH projects. Block 23 in New Belgrade stands as a remarkable housing development that transcends the borders of Serbia and Yugoslavia, demonstrating progressiveness and innovation. Liman 2 in Novi Sad signifies a departure from orthodox modernism and the creation of more human-scale neighbourhoods. IV Local Community in Bor and Prozivka in Subotica are representative examples of specific local manifestations of the dominant paradigm. These case studies offer valuable insights that can guide contemporary approaches to housing development and shape housing policies and practices, addressing critical issues such as affordability, sustainability, community integration and the importance of long-term maintenance. By comprehending the challenges and successes of the past, we can strive to create more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable housing solutions for the future.

¹The very notion and critique of the formation of the middle class in 1970s was the reason for temporarily forbidding one number of the renowned international journal for philosophy and social theory, Praxis (Kangrga, 1972).

²While there is no denying the social sector built an enormous number of apartments, it is important to mention that “the private sector has accounted on average for 60-70% of the total annual production” (Mandic, 1992, p. 238).

Figures

Cover - New Belgrade, Central Zone, Blocks 21-23 © TANJUG, Archives of Yugoslavia, 1972.

Fig. 1 - Block 28 (I. Arnautović, O. Miličević-Nikolić, C. Davičo), New Belgrade, 1968-1974 © Petar Petričević, 2022.

Fig. 2 - Block 61-64 (D. Marušić, M. Marušić, M. Miodragović), New Belgrade, 1971-1976 © Jelisaveta Petrić, 2020.

Fig. 3 - IV Local Community, Bor © Ljubomir Markov, Public Library, Bor, 1983.

Fig. 4 - Town of Bor © Dejan Motić, 2020.

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