

## URBAN ACCESSIBILITY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PLANNING: CASE OF BELGRADE

### **Branislav Antonić**

Assistant scientific researcher of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade  
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/2, Belgrade, antonic83@gmail.com

### **MSc Biserka Mitrović**

Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade  
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/2, Belgrade, biserkamitrovic@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

The right to accessibility is important urban planning issue today and it has a wider meaning. It is not any longer merely understood as physical accessibility, but it also includes transit accessibility and accessibility to social and public services, open spaces and centres. Furthermore, urban accessibility issue has been introduced lately into Serbian planning practice and regulation. These are the main reasons for making urban accessibility key words in this paper.

Urban accessibility is especially important and related to social groups who have fewer possibilities to improve their life in urban environment. Apart from accessibility, these groups similarly realize other rights in the cities in developed societies, such as the right to home/shelter and based on that – the right to access social housing. Social housing has also brought more attention lately in Serbian practice and legislative.

Since both mentioned rights are related to vulnerable social groups, it is easy to notice their interconnection. In the first place, the development of urban accessibility and defining accessibility related criteria can contribute to the development of social housing and also can relate to the housing areas distribution. In Serbian context it is especially applicable in Belgrade, since its size and the role of capital, more severe than in the rest of Serbia, bring about housing and urban transport issues as well as wide range of urban accessibility issues. This paper has intention to present the possibilities of social housing improvement through the theoretical study of urban accessibility, while its aim is to define the set of actions for the improvement of social housing planning, using the concept of accessibility.

**Keywords:** urban accessibility, social housing, service, connectivity

## URBANISTIČKA PRISTUPAČNOST KAO SREDSTVO ZA PLANIRANJE SOCIJALNOG STANOVANJA: SLUČAJ BEOGRADA

### **Branislav Antonić**

Istraživač-pripravnik Arhitektonskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu  
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/2, Beograd, antonic83@gmail.com

### **Mr Biserka Mitrović**

Docent Arhitektonskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu  
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/2, Beograd, biserkamitrovic@gmail.com

### **APSTRAKT**

Pravo na pristupačnost je danas važno pitanje u urbanističkom planiranju i ono ima šire značenje. Ono se ne može više shvatiti samo kao puka fizička pristupačnost, već ono uključuje i saobraćajnu pristupačnost i pristupačnost društvenih i javnih službi, otvorenih prostora i centara. Dalje, pitanje urbanističke pristupačnosti se nedavno uvelo u srpsku urbanističku praksu i zakonodavstvo. Ovu su glavni razlozi da se urbanistička pristupačnost postavi kao ključna reč u ovom radu.

Urbanistička pristupačnost je posebno bitna i vezana za društvene grupe koji imaju manje mogućnosti za unaprede svoj život u gradskom okruženju. Slično pristupačnosti, ove grupe ostvaruju i druga prava u gradovima u razvijenijim društvima, poput prava na stan/sklonište i na tome zasnovanog prava na pristup socijalnom stanovanju. Socijalno stanovanje je takođe privuklo pažnju nedavno srpske prakse i zakonodavstva.

Budući da su oba spomenuta prava vezana za ranjive društvene grupe lako je uočiti njihovu povezanost. Prvo, razvoj urbanističke pristupačnosti i utvrđivanje merila pristupačnosti može doprineti razvoju socijalnog stanovanja i takođe može uticati na razmeštaj stambenih celina. Na nivou Srbije ovo je posebno primenljivo u Beogradu, jer njegova veličina i uloga glavnog grada čine data pitanja ozbiljnijim nego u ostatku Srbije, iznoseći na videlo pitanja stanovanja i javnog prevoza kao i niz drugih pitanja urbanističke pristupačnosti. Ovaj rad ima nameru da predstavi mogućnosti poboljšanja socijalnog stanovanja kroz teoretsko proučavanje urbanističke pristupačnosti, dok je cilj rada definisanje niza mera za unapređenje planiranja socijalnog stanovanja, koristeći koncept pristupačnosti.

**Ključne reči:** urbanistička pristupačnost, socijalno stanovanje, usluge, povezanost

### **BRANISLAV ANTONIĆ - BIOGRAPHY**

**Branislav Antonić** (1983) is an assistant scientific researcher of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia. He graduated 2008<sup>th</sup> at the Faculty of Architecture and started PhD studies at the faculty 2010<sup>th</sup>. B. Antonić has also been an external assistant in several urbanism-related subjects at the faculty since his graduation. He has participated in the creation of urban and spatial plans in The Centre of Research and Management of the faculty at the same time. Besides these duties, B. Antonić has also been active in scientific work and he has taken part in several conferences. These positions have given him opportunity to connect theory knowledge, the experience from lecturing and practice in Serbian planning system. He is interested in the topics of urban and spatial planning, with special attention to the planning of middle size and small communities and rural areas.

B. Antonić is currently engaged in research project "Research and systematization of housing development in Serbia, in the context of globalization and European integrations, with the aim of housing quality and standard improvement" (TR 036034), financed by Ministry of education and science of Serbia.

### **BISERKA MITROVIĆ - BIOGRAPHY**

**Biserka Mitrović** is assistant professor at Faculty of Architecture, Department for urban and spatial planning, University of Belgrade. She has received B. Arch and MSc from the University of Belgrade and is professionally interested in sustainable development and design, social cohesion, methodology of urban and spatial planning and urban regulation. Focus on her work with students currently is on urban regulation, sustainable urban master planning and urban design as well as on the theory of integral urbanism and sustainable planning. She is also an author of more than 40 research and professional papers in edited books, refereed journals, and refereed conference proceedings. B. Mitrović has been and is engaged in 9 national (supported by the Ministry of Science, Serbia) and international research projects. Currently she is engaged in research project "Research and systematization of housing development in Serbia, in the context of globalization and European integrations, with the aim of housing quality and standard improvement" (TR 036034), financed by Ministry of education and science of Serbia.

B. Mitrović is certified urban planner and spatial planner and has worked on more than 70 community development, urban planning and design projects in Serbia and for most of it was an urban/spatial planner in charge.

### **PAPER TITLE**

#### **Branislav Antonić**

Assistant scientific researcher of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade

#### **Mr Biserka Mitrović**

Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade

## PAPER HEADING URBAN ACCESSIBILITY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PLANNING: CASE OF BELGRADE<sup>1</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The right of accessibility has recently become well-known among experts and public in Serbia. The term of accessibility has got wider dimension at the same time. It isn't only mere "physical accessibility" today, which is usually related to "micro-actions" in space. On the contrary, the issue of accessibility currently includes both the accessibility to services and centres and the accessibility to public transport. This is more familiar with "macro-actions" in space, which are matter of urban planning. In accordance with this, this paper is aiming to define the term of urban accessibility, covering new and wider meaning.

When the issue of accessibility is identified in wider context it is obvious that the issue is especially important to urban users who lack it. These users often belong to vulnerable social groups that have special social rights in developed societies. Many of these rights are novelty for Serbia. The good example is in the field of social housing. It has recently got much attention in both police framework and practice in Serbia.

As both mentioned urban issues are connected to similar social groups, the interconnection between them can be easily noticed. The relation between two issues can be base for further research of how social housing can be improved by the upgrading of urban accessibility. Otherwise and more operative, the principles and directives of urban accessibility can be appropriate "foundation" for the distribution and the zoning of social housing as important questions in contemporary practice in this field.

This paper tries to show the importance of this conditionality, researching Belgrade as a case study. Its size and the role of a capital bring out both issue of social housing and issue of urban accessibility more severe than in the rest of Serbia. Hence this paper intends to present the possibilities of improvement of urban planning related to social housing through the theoretical study of urban accessibility in the case of Belgrade.

### 2. URBAN ACCESSIBILITY

#### 2.1. The right of accessibility

The term of accessibility is more understood by the modern theory of accessibility today, although it has wider initial meaning<sup>2</sup>. Some experts even recommend naming it as the concept of accessibility<sup>3</sup>. This concept is strongly related to the issue of accessibility of people with disabilities or special needs, especially in build environment (Aragal et al, 2003, p. 14). Setting as a concept the accessibility is becoming more and more noticeable and recognisable in everyday life.

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<sup>2</sup> The most common meaning of accessibility is that it is ability to access.

<sup>3</sup> Aragal and other argued that the whole theory of accessibility should be formed and named as a concept in order to "give shape to our environment, so that it becomes suitable for each and every one of its users" (Aragal et al, 2003, p. 18).

The most universal document in this matter is certainly “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”<sup>4</sup>, which is signed by United Nations<sup>5</sup> in 2007. The key element of the Convention is the recognition of “the inherent dignity and worth and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the World” (UN, 2006, Art. 1). This is the base for the definition of the right to accessibility – the ensuring of appropriate measures to persons with disabilities to access, with the aim to make them equal to others (UN, 2006, Art. 9).

The Convention was ratified by the European Union<sup>6</sup> in 2011 (EU, 2011). But, the EU has had long history with the dealing of this issue; it began in the middle of 1980s. In order to this, it can be argued that the issue of accessibility is “European heritage” (Aragal et al, 2003, p. 1). The reflection of this stance can be proved by newer EU documents, which are more operative than previous ones. The last EU document is the “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020” from 2010. This document accents the actions and implementation, so it tries to make “appropriate environment” of the implementation of general principles and aims (European Commission, 2010, p. 9-11).

The issue of accessibility also influences to Serbia, although it is still a novelty in local context. But, there have been many positive actions and directives related to the issue in recent time. For example, Serbian parliament adopted the law of the ratification of the UN Convention in 2009. Besides this, the issue is introduced in the Law of planning and construction, which is the most significant law for the field urban planning. The law defines the standards of accessibility (Parliament of Serbia, 2009-2011, Art. 2), which must be set up in all planning documents (Parliament of Serbia, 2009-2011, Art. 30).

## **2.2. The accessibility in planning context**

The elaboration of the right to accessibility clearly directed the right to the persons with disability. But, the issue of general accessibility is becoming much wider. In many important documents the term of accessibility is more related to other aspects of accessibility, such as the territorial or social aspect. The next citation from European Spatial Development Perspective, which is the main EU document in the field of spatial and urban planning, is especially illustrative for this statement:

“Promotion of better accessibility in cities and metropolitan regions through an appropriate location policy and land use planning that will stimulate mixing of urban functions and the use of public transport” (European Commission, 1999, p. 23).

Similar use of the term is also noticeable in adequate Serbian documents. For example, there are many mentions of the term in the current spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia, particularly in correlation with transport, the network of centres and public services (The Parliament of Serbia, 2010). The phrase “transport accessibility” is even included in the vision of spatial development of the plan as one of key attributes of future development.

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<sup>4</sup> Hereinafter: The Convention.

<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter: the UN.

<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter: the EU.

This, wider meaning of accessibility is in focus of this research. Due to all mentioned documents placed this kind of accessibility in relation to transport, centres and public services as an important urban functions<sup>7</sup> it will be named as URBAN ACCESSIBILITY,

### **2.3. The elements of urban accessibility**

Following the previous definition, two elements of urban accessibility will be proposed: transport accessibility and the accessibility to (urban) centres.

The transport/traffic accessibility can be easily seen in the context of urban accessibility, because transport seen as a main link in urban area. "Transport looks like fluid or circulation; it consolidates urban facilities; it directs and synchronizes activities and regulates the rhythm of urban life" (Maletin, 2005, p. 1). Some resources even equalize the question of transport in urban area with the accessibility. "This section considers accessibility within the urban area – how easy it is for people to travel and the choice they have about how they travel" (EP, 2000, p. 70). In order to this transport accessibility includes the questions of distances and number/frequency of transport choices.

The accessibility to (urban) centres is the accessibility to the places with the most intensive life of its inhabitants in all its aspects. These places include: retail and similar central facilities, public services, transport interchanges, open public places, such as square, parks or quays, etc (EP, 2000, p. 42). This is quite similar to the definition of centre (Badovinac, 1997, pp. 56-57). One of the characteristics is the accessibility to centre, which is usually connected to the attractiveness of centre (Badovinac, 1997, pp. 64-65). In accordance to this the structure and capacities of urban centres influences the inhabitants' needs for access.

These two elements of urban accessibility will be the basis for the analysis of case study. Their role will direct to crucial criteria and indicator(s), by which chosen locations in urban structure will be analysed.

## **3. SOCIAL HOUSING AND URBAN ACCESSIBILITY**

Generally, urban accessibility is important factor for the planning of social housing. Urban accessibility is especially important to such inhabitants who belong to social groups who have fewer possibilities to improve their life in urban environment. Apart from accessibility, these groups similarly realize other rights in the cities in developed societies, such as the right to home/shelter and based on that – the right to access social housing. Hence the interconnection between social housing and urban accessibility can be noticed.

The right to home/shelter is often interpreted as affordability of decent and healthy homes. This is similar to the statement of the Charter of fundamental rights of the EU (EU, 2000, Art. 34(3)). But, some newer and more directed documents recommend "upgraded view" to social housing. In accordance to this, social housing policy has to ensure "that housing achieves intermediate social needs such as transport and facilities, as well as the ultimate needs of the development of human and social capital and capacity" (UN Habitat, 2012, p. 33). Similarly as in previous case, the president of the Committee of the Regions of the EU, M. Bresso says that "[A] home is much more than just a place to live. It is vital for people's mental and physical health, as well as their social integration" (EU, 2012, p. 6). These

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<sup>7</sup> All these functions are the matter of urban planning.

statements are visible in European agenda for social housing as one the newer documents in this field. The authors of the agenda recommend mixed social environment and vicinity to services, social amenities and transport as the principles to combat social exclusion (EU, 2012, p. 82-84). These principles fully relate to the issue of urban accessibility.

Mentioned principles are huge challenge for Serbia as a post-socialistic and transitional country with serious crisis in recent past. Although former Yugoslavia has robust and long-lasting sector of so-called „construction of socially directed housing”<sup>8</sup>, “true” social housing<sup>9</sup> is novelty in Serbian conditions. Since 2000, the main initiators and organizers of different actions in social housing sector in Serbia are international organizations<sup>10</sup>. They have enabled many programmes of social housing construction as well as alternative programmes of support to the reconstruction of existing housing fund across Serbia (UN Habitat, 2008, pp. 3-4). These organizations have also arranged several social-housing related documents and brochures, which have used as support for implementation “in situ”. In contrary, national level has been slower, so the crucial law, national strategy and other documents have been adopted in recent years. In addition, the national agency for housing, which is the main responsible institution for public provisions of social housing in Serbia<sup>11</sup>, was founded in 2011.

Additionally, social housing is under public interest by its definition (Petovar, 2003, p. 175). This fact directs more accurate definition of possible locations of social housing in the planning process. Serbia is particularly an excellent example, because the locations for social housing are the responsibility of local authorities (Vujošević, Žarković, 2010, str. 24). Hence they usually have limited resources of public land, the issue of possible locations for social housing are often crucial in the whole process. This also makes them more spatially defined than many other urban functions and facilities in Serbian urban plans.

Presented information of social housing is the main reason for making social housing the most important issue of this research. Likewise, zones and locations planned for social housing will be case study areas in the research about importance of urban accessibility

#### 4. URBAN ACCESSIBILITY OF SOCIAL HOUSING – CASE OF BELGRADE

##### 4.1. Belgrade as a polygon for research

Belgrade, being by far the most vibrant city in Serbia over a long period, due to its diversity of economic activities, has been and still is a great demographic magnet (Antonić, Mitrović, 2013). Particular problem to housing sector in Belgrade was intensive and unplanned settlement of many refugees and displaces persons in the outskirts of Belgrade in 1990s. According to the official statistical data, 22.5% of the country's population lives in the city, but unofficially there are more than 25% of country population. This situation makes housing sector of the city so important for further development. But, this sector has mainly been under the influences of market mechanisms since the beginning of transition in Serbia in 1990s (Mojović, Čarnojević, Stanković, 2009, p. 6). Thus, the sector hasn't been ready to this demographics influx and, since then, this combination of these opposite processes made

<sup>8</sup> V. Milić uses this name for such kind of housing construction (Milić, 2006, pp. 152-153). K. Petrovar describes this kind of housing as a social-ownership housing with tenant right (Petovar, 2003, p. 18).

<sup>9</sup> The adequate legislature and strategic framework of Serbia uses only the term *социјално становање* (eng. *social housing*). Besides this, there are several common terms in Serbian literature and practice (especially affordable housing, but also: non-profit housing, low-income housing, etc.) (Milić, 2006, pp. 152-153).

<sup>10</sup> Such as UN Habitat.

<sup>11</sup> These obligations are regulated by the law of social housing (Parliament of Serbia, 2009, Art. 11).

enormous pressure to housing sector in Belgrade. The good indicators of present state of housing sector in Belgrade are the prices of dwelling units in Belgrade and vicinity. They have been among the highest ones in the region for years and usually several times higher than in the rest of Serbia. Finally, this complex position of housing in Belgrade makes it as an excellent challenge for analysis.

Generally, the needs for transport progressively increase with the size of settlement (Maletin, 2005, p. 10). The size of settlement also positively affects to the development of its centres and central activities (Mitrović, 2002, p. 120). Therefore, Belgrade is very suitable for the issue of urban accessibility.

#### 4.2. The analysis of urban accessibility

Due to the size of Belgrade and its role of the capital of Serbia some simplifications of further analysis will be introduced. Since the paper is aiming to achieve concise and clear analysis, the main analysed document is Master Plan of Belgrade 2021<sup>12</sup>, the main urban-planning document of Belgrade urban area and also a plan with general data. It is also the main urban-planning document of Belgrade urban area. The sector of social housing is independent unit of the part of housing in the plan. The plan prescribes 58 urban blocks (area 228 ha) with this urban function. They are organized in 47 zones, which are graphically presented through the thematic map of housing.

The analysis of urban accessibility for social housing in Master plan of Belgrade is done as follows: analysis 1 is related to transport accessibility and its indicator is the distance in metres of mentioned locations from main planned transport corridors in the Plan; analysis 2 is related to the accessibility to centres and its indicator is the distance in metres of mentioned locations from marked planned centres in the Plan.

This spatial limit is considered in relation both to possible urban transport stop<sup>13</sup> or to possible local centre on walking distance. P. Badovinac defines appropriate pedestrian distance from home to local centre as a limit between 500 m (optimal) and 800 m (extreme) (Badovinac, 1997, p. 76). Similarly, practice in Great Britain sets up the maximum of walkable distance in scale 400-800 metres (EP, 2000, p. 35). B. Mitrović places the distance of 800 m as an approximately critical distance for primary schools, which are one of the basic public services (Mitrović, 2002, p. 195). This is also quite similar to the most optimal distance between two stops in public transport, which is 600-800 metres (Maletin, 2005, p. 88). Finally, the distance of 600 metres is the used radius in the case of the centres with intensive new development in the Plan (Thematic map No 13: *Planned Retail Zones and Urban Centres*). Considering presented data, chosen limit for the analysis is 600 metres as the average distance. This usually roughly corresponds to the period of 10-minutes walking.

Graphic technique is used for the analysis of urban accessibility in the case of 47 planned zones of social housing in Belgrade. The analysis is represented as a map (Figure 3). The results are as follows (Figures 1 and 2):

Parameter	Number	Share
The zones of social housing where only transport accessibility is high	23	49%
The zones of social housing where only the accessibility to centres is high	22	46%

<sup>12</sup> Hereinafter: the Plan.

<sup>13</sup> Which is the starting point of transport link to far distance, such as centres, working places, leisure areas, etc.



The zones of social housing where overall urban accessibility is high <sup>14</sup>	28	60%
The zones of social housing where overall urban accessibility is low	19	40%
<b>All zones</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 1. The table with the results of the analysis – All zones

Parameter	Share
The percentage of zones of high transport accessibility which also have high overall urban accessibility (19/23)	83%
The percentage of zones of high accessibility to centres which also have high overall urban accessibility (19/22)	86%

Figure 2. The table with the results of the analysis – The zones with good urban accessibility

The main conclusion is that 40% of the planned zones of social housing has low urban accessibility, which is important in case of contemporary social housing. It is well-known that isolated social housing areas are usually the “introduction to social segregation and ghettoization”, mentioned zones are not appropriate areas for the development of social housing.

The other, slightly less important results, are given at the map (Figure 3). Firstly, there is extraordinary correspondence between planned transport corridors and planned centres, which support the issue of urban accessibility. Secondly, the zones which are nearer to downtown of Belgrade tend to have higher urban accessibility. Thirdly, the size of zone is not related to the issue of urban accessibility. Finally, the zones which have high transport accessibility and/or high accessibility to centres often are not directly positioned on the transport corridors or in centres, but in their vicinity.

<sup>14</sup> There are several zones positioned on “border” between good and bad urban accessibility. These cases are counted as good.

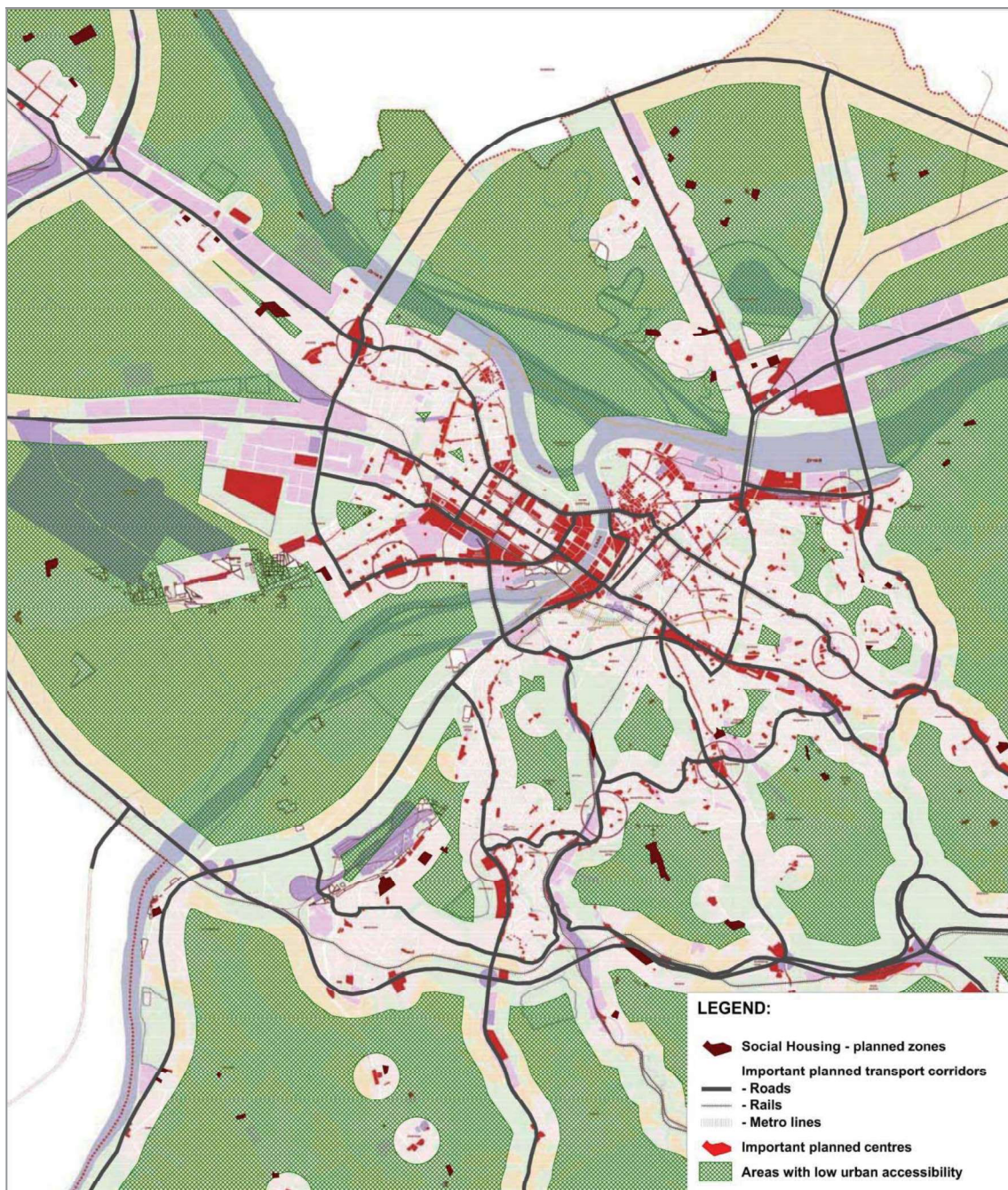


Figure 3. The map of urban accessibility – The case: the planned zones of social housing in Belgrade (Design: B. Antić)

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research was made to prove the importance of urban aspect of accessibility, which is named as *urban accessibility*. The first part is arranged as a theoretical support, while second part is made as a case study in urban-planning context of Belgrade, which intention is to present the usability of urban accessibility in practice.

Theoretical background has the role to prove the validity of the issue of urban accessibility. The starting point of this part uses to show that the idea of accessibility is greater than the legally adopted right to accessibility. The proof is current development in developed countries. In addition, this is also supported by the usage and connotation of the term of accessibility in different urban-planning contexts.

Next part was organized to connect theoretical base with the case study. The task is the finding of appropriate case by the use of elaborated theory. The case was chosen by similarities to the character of urban accessibility. In according to this, social housing has been chosen as the case field.

The final part referred to the analysis of the Belgrade case study, in particular to the Master plan of Belgrade and its planning solutions about social housing. This analysis has led to the conclusion about urban accessibility of planned zones of social housing in Belgrade. In addition, this concept of analysis is recommended for the measurement of the quality of urban zoning if other elements, such as transport network, the disposition of centres and central facilities, are known.

Concluding, the analysis proves the need of further development of the concept of urban accessibility as a proper tool for contemporary urban planning. The precondition for this is the development of set of corresponding criteria and indicators. The concept can be even developed into much broader one, which would refer to the wider territory, such as regions.

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