METROMILIEU

Rural economy as a relational gap between inhabiting scales

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METHODS

Intro

Anđelka Bnin-Bninski, Ana Nikezić, Pieter Versteegh

The contemporary notion of rurality is tensioned between intelligences of autonomy and networking. Rural space is disposing stability in terms of specific economical units – from household to local community, closely networked in the nexus of rural environment. On the other hand, rural space is tied into numerous economical, socio-political and cultural relations to urban conditions, both considered necessary and more and more endured as constraints. This tension is ambiguous – simultaneously problematic and nourishing for rural life modalities. It results in peculiar mechanisms and procedures inherent to situations of in-betweens – often of largely understated importance, such as that of food economy systems entirely disconnected from local stakes.

This ambiguous context has largely influenced the thematic framework of the interdisciplinary research event "Metro-milieu: (alter)Rurality as a relational gap between inhabiting scales" organized in collaboration between the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture and the ARENA Architectural Research Network. The event has included various formats and levels of discussion in order to experiment with knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building structures in the academic context. Our objectives were twofold – thematic and pedagogical. The event included activities throughout the spring semester 2019: research seminar "Towards new ruralities" and two student workshops – "Among scales" and "Rural shower" and two-day international symposium 23rd and 24th May 2019 (international researchers, keynote speakers, roundtable debate, investigative walk and the exhibition). The open processes of questioning the contemporary issues of rurality is navigated through different debate structures.

The aspect of economic reasoning is highlighted on the fringe of two distant scales of inhabited environment – connected to the urban in the sense of a metropolitan inscription in global economy and local with the connotation of ambiental rooting. The metropolis, etymologically a mother-city, is one of problematic contemporary connotations: of size, of polarity, of exemplarity, single unit of global financial economic and political power. The metropolis of today tends to substitute itself to the welfare-state in an unprecedented neo-liberal growth race. It has annexed and absorbed rural space, nature, and the entire biosphere as its economic, political and socio-cultural sub-system.

Rather than opposing two scales (in their geographic meaning of qualities) of inhabited environments in a binary lock-in inevitably returning to this predominant figure of rural resource landscape, this interdisciplinary research event introduces the notion of metromilieu, let us say metro-environment in English. The stronger French term metromilieu, by is pleonastic character, emphasizes its etymological meaning of a motherly, uterine space or environment. It opposes the predatory polarity of the metropole competing for global productive power and suggests a smoother continuity of connectedness – always umbilically related to earth as a complex finite motherly state of precarious nature sustained by collaboration and surrounded by care. A metromilieu is an environment that houses scales of locally rooted, bottom-up phenomena of resilience, giving them meaning within a new global economic construct – searching global compatibility without giving away to global neoliberal growth economy.

Through the notion of Metromilieu or Metroenvironment the event investigates the current relational gap between inhabiting scales while giving it a globally compatible and holistically constructed identity. Within a school of architecture, this means that the ancient paradigm of the house on a site, of the city in a landscape needs to be deconstructed, that a new paradigm needs to be constructed from a holistic, that is a broad interdisciplinary field. With the focus on two-fold objectives in knowledge-sharing and

knowledge-building initiatives, we have experienced challenges of interdisciplinary discussions where methodologies and vocabularies were revised. This interdisciplinary interweaving connected research, teaching and practice, locally and internationally while engaging 2nd and 3rd cycle studies at the Faculty of architecture in Belgrade.

This publication collects a selection of texts contributed by the event participants. The first group of articles, under the subtitle Perspectives of Rurality and Metromillieu, gathers a few studies on the possible strategies for the rural in relation to the urban setting. A particular set of models, initiated from other disciplines, like economy or tourism, or through diverse schools of thought in a good tradition of assemblage or flexible design thinking search a new alternative and cosmopolitan global vision for the rural. Somehow a different spirit of ruraliity spreads, creating a new culturally independent and socio-economically sustainable environment.

The second group of articles, under the subtitle New Understanding of Rurality, provides an opportunity to dive into a concrete case study and explore the full potential of rural development, in a creative, but also responsible way. While one study starts from a specific place, another offers an interpretation of the already confirmed and tested model in a new environment. Understanding means to embrace and enjoy the particularity of the place tracing its character and identity through contemporary practices.

The third group of articles, under the subtitles A New Reading of the rural, brings a new fresh look on the way we perceive and understand rurality with respect to the urban and in terms of identity patterns, neighbourhood communities, landscape character and alike. A specific rural landscape is analysed and investigated offering a new set of values when the development of rurality is in question. Proposed methodological tools expand the borders and scope of rurality, i.e. metromillieu.

The variety of topics explored and perspectives shown provides a small but valuable hints, looking at the broad value framework of what the rural is and could be, both as a setting, a mechanism or a structure, creating a new kind of cosmopolitan rurbanity; an attractive, open, accessible and adaptable culturally aware and responsible metromillieu.

Human Scale Space and Polarised Communities: New Ruralities as New Forms of Reciprocity and Moderation within the Transition of Modernistic Landscape

Milica P. **Milojević**, Assistant Professor, PhD (M.M.)
Mladen **Pešić**, Teaching Assistant, PhD (M.P.)

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
m.milojevic@arh.bg.ac.rs (M.M.); mladen.pesic@arh.bg.ac.rs (M.P.)

The mega block pattern was widely used in the construction of new settlements in Belgrade in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the modernist landscape of New Belgrade. The mega block model has been challenged, among others by sociologists and psychologists for the alienation of man, that is, for the inability of a large agglomeration to establish a relationship with the environment and develop a sense of belonging to the community and place. Planned on the concept of a dwelling community (*stambena zajednica*), these neighbourhoods have undergone significant changes over the last three decades. Close-up view of the mega block's ambience indicate the presence of the idea of human scale space, whether it was designed or planned that way originally or if it was cultivated that way by residents. Today, in urban practice, planning frameworks are being created for new construction within the mega block, with the model being taken from the traditional city structure (infill of the block's inner space and building on the regulation), that is supposed to be cost-effective and acceptable for market conditions. The pattern of a traditional city block is being incorporated into the peripheral unbuilt parts of the mega block and as a result social polarization in space is visible. In the 1980s, this pattern of transformation of the mega block by inert filling up of undeveloped surfaces was advocated precisely with the idea of restoring human scale to the oversized public spaces of modernist settlements. Absurdly, the result is just the opposite. In parts of high-density settlements, as a consequence of

the construction of new structures in the mega block, we find incomparable differences between polarized communities and reconsider the human scale of megastructures. In what way, under what conditions, in the tension between these two opposing concepts, can we see an opportunity for New ruralities as new forms of reciprocity and moderation?

Key words: **rurality, mega block, New Belgrade, moderation, modernistic landscape**
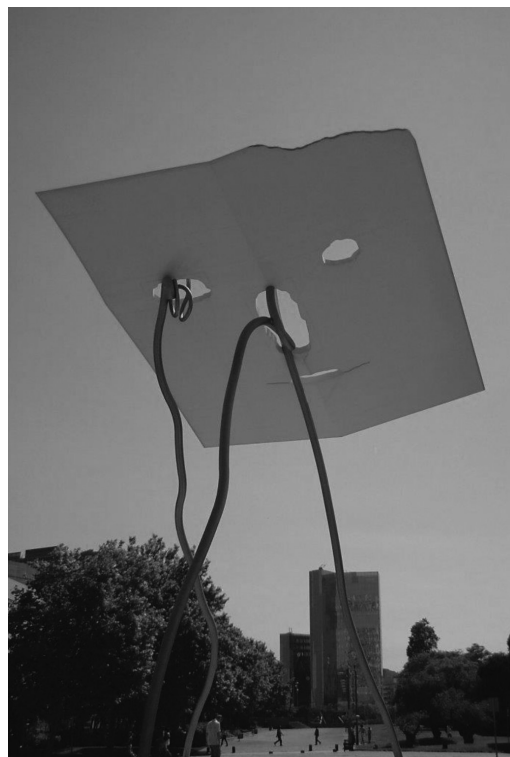
Figure 1.
Thematization – Human vs Megastructure; David and Goliath, Barcelona, (*Antoni Ilena*).
Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/206461964154392330/

1

Introduction

New forms of urbanization are taking part on global level. Built environment is evolving every day and according to Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid "framework, as regulations, policies, and "rule regimes" is reconstituted both upward at transnational scales and downwards at national and subnational scales" (Brenner, Madden & Wachsmut, 2011). which is resulting in "the spatial outcomes, of neoliberal restructuring than can be understood, most precisely as "planetary" phenomena." (Brenner, Madden & Wachsmut, 2011) Effect of this processes is conception of urbanization "that surpasses and radically rescales the spatial-political extents of its influence beyond any traditional conception of bounded, city-centric urban scale." (Ghosh, 2017) Tale of urbanization, after going global, now is being localized through the prism of local landscapes. Urban growth has been for a long time described as an exclusively positive process but in the present discussions this has been questioned especially in the relation with the results of it. It is within this framework that Brenner and Schmid argue that "the category of urban as a spatial and morphological descriptor has to be reformulated as a "theoretical" category that can capaciously accommodate all that was previously considered exurban or nonurban, while at the same time discarding the epistemological coin of the urban-rural where the urban (the city) and the "nonurban" (everything that is not the city) are a mutually reinforcing, dialectical pair." (Brenner & Schmid, 2011)

Socio-cultural development in Serbia (within SFR Yugoslavia at that time) since the World War II has taken place in defined social and political conditions that directed development of both villages and cities (rural and urban territories). These conditions can be identified on general and on a specific level. General level is the level of ideology where conflict of old and new, traditional and contemporary took place (Bunjak & Pešić, 2016). Specific level brought along specific actions directed toward annulment of differences between the village and the city, or to say rural and urban. The process of deagrarization was often reconsidered as an indicator of industrial and other progress of a country, and it was usually followed by an adequate urbanization. The urbanization process in socialist Yugoslavia was too slow comparing to the intense and deliberate deagrarization. Socialist accumulation brought a gap between urbanization and deagrarization and created deeper conflicts between the village and the city. Differences created back then left the consequences that can still be sensed in the rural areas. The process of transition from 1990 and 2000 left even greater consequences in these areas, resulting in declining small-scale agriculture, abandonment of fertile land, lack of investment etc. Having in mind some of the topics mentioned, the importance of researching *rural* areas parallel with the *urban* highlights the importance of rural research today, in a time defined by the processes of globalization, re-industrialization and re-urbanization. Traditional relations between *urban* and *rural* are questioned, and new dialectic between these two terms is being established.

As stated by Pieter Versteegh "perceptions of the rural are multiple, and vary according to disciplines, domains and cultures" and because of that exploring the rural "demands an awareness of the urban, without positioning it in opposition to, subjected to or inscribed within the urban." (Versteegh & Malfroy, 2013) Urban is often associated with urban growth caused by the industrial revolution and it separates places of life and work, imports resources, and "continues expansion

beyond critical size." (Versteegh & Malfroy, 2013) The urbanization process is still active and, in most cases, considered as positive action. In this constellation, the urban is civilized, desirable, and global process. While globalization has had a more or less positive effect on urban areas, its impact on rural areas has been more negative. It is within this context that we would try to find a suitable and contemporary understanding of rural and new rurality, not only to describe it in its totality but also to open up new positions on reciprocity with urban along with the better understanding of its moderation. Also, while researching present day transformation of urban areas of New Belgrade along with informal practices of its residents, we will try to establish a correlation of so-called rural activities that are happening in urban areas in order to incorporate them as "new rurality" in urban settings that could enhance a 'metromilieu'. On this way it will be possible to understand the concept of rurality better along with opening of new possibilities in achieving new futures of open spaces within the mega blocks, which are a "particular feature of the morphology of New Belgrade" and that are "characterized by a developed infrastructure, easy access to transportation, and public ownership of land." (Milojević, Maruna & Djordjević, 2019) It is within this context that we are trying to explain new practices of rurality within the urban surrounding.

2

New Rurality Vs. Glocal Culture

Historically, rural implied to spaces and territories that are "outside the city walls" (Milić, 2011). Seen from an economic aspect, rural marked the territory used for food production primarily, while from sociological point of view rural is "environment characterized by backwardness in relation to technological and cultural development." (Milić, 2011) In the contemporary context, all three characterizations are equally valid and applicable but over time a number of new fields have opened up in which it is possible to further define the notion of rural as well as the notion of rural territory.

Some studies have long portrayed rural as a homogeneous social platform located in a timeless zone where obsolete values and associated life forms still exist (Murdoch & Pratt, 1997). Such simplification of the rural has also brought with it a specific socio-spatial dualism and rural was positioned opposite to urban and as inferior to it. In this framework, we will try to consider the notion of rural, which can no longer be conceptualised only as a group of physical and social differences (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). In his researches Marc Mormont claims that "rural is no longer a unique space, but a multitude of social spaces (…) each with its own logic, its institutions, and its network of actors" (Mormont, 1990). The process of defining rural is conditioned by various factors. Some of them are connected to disciplinary approach, priorities given to individual attributes and criteria, level of socio-economic development of the country, etc. Notably rural is based on specific processes and relationships, cultures and habits, and one of its most important characteristics is the question of locality and local settings. In some cultures, rurality implies a way of life, an ethical and social position. Individuals find the value of a village in its diversity and locality.

It is common knowledge that throughout history rural architecture followed the requirements of the local environment and created in accordance with them. This primarily relates to the local materials and different responses to climate

conditions, but we should not forget the influence of culture, religion, society. Regarding this question Ranko Radović wrote: "Traditional architecture is not a style; it is a philosophy of the world and life, nature and spirit of the place; it is an attitude towards life processes and materials, towards locality and authenticity" (Radović, 2005). It is exactly this that makes rural principles of life that should be transferred to urban areas. There is a set of local characteristics unique for each rural area. In this case we are talking about different development needs, potentials and contexts within globally imposed conditions but with local solutions and community reactions.

We can define the *local* as pertaining to or being characterized by place or position in space. Defining the local actually means defining all of its important specificities. The local can only exist in relation to the general, common or even global. In most of the cases local is considered as something small, relatively powerless and confined by the global (Gibson-Graham, 2008). In this context global can be seen as a force which is transforming the local on every step of the way. On the other hand, the age of rapid globalisation brought along the growing concern for local, opening broad discussion about the autonomy of places and smaller regions. Influence of the globalisation on changes in the local character of places and regions is evident. It is even more apparent if considering peripheral, mostly rural parts of countries around the world. The prevailing concept sees globalization as a triumph of cultural and other types of homogenisations. But, its effects on rural areas are quite different. Not only that the rural areas are not homogenised during globalisation like many urban, but they differ now even more than before. People create places according to their needs. They and the "spatially-varying nature of humanly-created milieux" (Johnston, 1991) are the reasons why the places continue to differ. Place is a process that requires a cultural interpretation and that brings people into certain specific interconnections (Sutton & Susan, 2011). The purpose of each cultural place is to provide a safe and continuous life of its users. Culture uses the environment and its basic functions in order to meet the physiological and spiritual needs of the people. Creation of habitats and places to live is preceded by the identification of an individual with his environment and surroundings and understanding their meaning. By identifying with the environment, we identify with the place. In this particular case identification with the environment means identifying with the rhythm of particular activities. These activities are regarded as cultivation of free spaces within the residential areas of mega blocks. Through these activities space is occupied and signified as communal which in the end leads to the establishing of community on the level of neighbourhood. On this way the question of communal ownerships is raised regarding the land and modalities of resources. It is within relation between communal space and communal resource that the identification with the environment is established.

With the so called urban perspective as dominant point of view is there an alternative view of dealing with spatial problems that have been happening both on local and global level. With the expansion of cities and urban areas urban design and planning attempted to shape and control urban development, but at the same time areas of transition from rural to urban along with the land use on the urban-rural edge, as stated in some researches, "require the lens of spatial arrangement for both urban and rural perspective to shape, manage, and preserve the ecosystems that people depend on it." (Thorbeck & Troughton, 2016) In his studies Dewey Thorbeck (2012) offers the explanation of rural as a combination of natural and human landscapes along with the comparison between urban and rural design, which is described as similar to urban design in embracing the quality of life but is different in "seeking

to understand and embody the unique characteristics of open landscapes and ecosystems where buildings and towns are components of the landscape, rather than defining infrastructure and public space as in urban design." Both rural and urban areas, despite the geographical location or social and political system are under intense cultural, economic demographic and which is most important environmental changes with direct repercussion on the ecosystems and quality of life for their residents. These critical issues are asking for solutions, which should and could not be restricted on one way perspective, urban or rural point of view, but they should be conceptualised on best practices from *both worlds*.

By using design thinking, planning procedures and community engagement, human and natural landscapes should be used in order to develop new strategies and solutions that will enable better quality of life along with the preservation of resources and already established qualities. On the example of cities, what can we learn from rural areas is that they acknowledge social and cultural values along with natural environment that could be used in enhancing the quality of life in urban areas. New urban planning and design should be more sensitive to resource preservation and physical aspects, so that could produce new liveable environments within the newly built and already existing urban tissue (structure). There are already some examples of good praxis that are in use such as incorporating agriculture in to existing cities and the so called process of 'ruralization' of urban spaces. Urban allotment gardens, community gardens, farmers markets, composting etc. are one way of urban 'ruralization' that is not "only an effect of the sustainability movement but also of the need to rethink the uses of large-scale abandoned, often contaminated sites" (High, 2013) All these examples are showing how can global trends meet local cultures and how could they mutually adopt, react and complement to each other in the process of constructing better living surroundings.

3

Post-socialist Development of New Belgrade and Mega-blocks as Spatial Resources between Construction and Cultivation – New Rhythm of Activities

Changing concepts and practices in urban design and urban policy, from modernist and socialist to postmodern and post-socialist triggered different processes of spatial restructuring that caused patterns of change in urban planning and urbanism of New Belgrade. Also "socialist urban development perceivable through the modernistic setting and post-socialist transition are well-placed to serve as a testing ground for demonstrating value system changes" (Milojević, Maruna & Djordjević, 2019) that established new typologies due to market-oriented planning and entrepreneurial urban governance, that caused growth and urban development but at the same time spatial mutations along with various ironies and contradictions regarding building typology. The change of typology was brought by the process of traditional urban infill that was supposed to establish new balance between built structures and open spaces. Along with the changes in building typology new relations between market desirable density and ecologically responsible availability of urban greenery were established. New dynamics in city building lead to spatial and social changes that established completely new landscape of New Belgrade. These changes questioned possibility of residents to establish relationship with the environment and develop sense of belonging to the community and place that caused the social polarization to be visible in space. Contemporary vision of

urbanization problematized the requirements of the local environment and created in accordance with them new forms of reciprocity and moderation that could be positioned in so called rural practices and activities resulting in people creating places according to their needs.

This chapter analyse relations between modernist urban planning and design of housing estates in the form of mega blocks and theirs later changes in the period of post-socialist city having in mind that they were conceptualized both as physical and functional condition for everyday life of its users and inhabitants. These changes will be conceptualized as new spatial practise that could be referred as rural, transferred to urban areas in order to create set of local characteristics unique for each block.

In focus of the research are housing estates (mega blocks) that were built in New Belgrade in the second half of the 20th century, with special emphasis on blocks 61 to 64. Various examples are used in order to show and analyse relations between physical structure of mega blocks and their surroundings that have been debated and questioned in recent years. As stated in the title this research will question developing strategies that are taking place in the transformation of modernistic urban blocks on the example of New Belgrade along with the questioning of relation between built space and people that are occupying it on general level along with the urban – rural dualism.

Changes of planning paradigm that took place in the post-socialist period offered different strategies and allocated resources in order to change and re-build *empty spaces between buildings*. Historically this process could be observed, as Paul Waley suggested, "as a paradigm for the intermingling of Modernism and Socialism in urban form and space" and as "paradigmatic of postmodern and post-socialist urbanism and of the attendant insinuations of the neo-liberal market into Modernist urban form and space" (Waley, 2011). Comparisons between modernist environments and traditional urban blocks have been made, despite lack of adequate concepts for the specific spatial settings and along with mainstream criticism of open space and modernist urban design, but is it all that a good strategy?

Morphological developments of modernist environments, on the example of New Belgrade, and housing estates that were built in the period after the Second world war showed that newly built urban structures were based on the type of mega block with its specific rules regarding the size of physical structures, land-use, relation between built and unbuilt spaces and urban parameters that were achieved. Buildings, streets and open spaces were combined on a specific way in order to define characteristic spatial configuration that was supposed to create unique potential for human encounters. Having in mind modernist settings, open space was established as one of the key elements of modernist urban design, along with its specific relation with physical structure and movement through these spaces. Ironically, open space as one of the most important urban elements in modernist environments became one of the most criticised features in contemporary discussion both academic and professional.

One of the problems with these *uncompleted* and *large sites* within the mega blocks of New Belgrade is problem with affordable maintenance. Although they were planned as plots for community centres, that were never built, and nowadays they are regarded as green spaces along the residential buildings, under the contemporary market pressures they are more valuable as empty plots for new buildings. Under

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these circumstances the sense of local values and environment is under threat because of the global trends of liberal urban development. Local qualities of mega blocks are sacrificed under the pretext of making thing more human scale, but the truth is they are sacrificed because of the market request for new available building land. Open plan layouts along with functional zoning and traffic separation have been criticised as out of human scale, inefficient and unsustainable, and it was debated to improve them along with the use of traditional dense grid. Transition from socialist system to market based one, left its mark on spatial issues as well, and in this process mega block was challenged, questioned and criticized. At the same time it was regarded as a space to use and develop, as market asset and not as a resource that should be analysed and developed in order to improve not only its market value but also its spatial configuration as existing quality that could inspire new ways of land use.

Through comparing traditional and mega block as specific urban types, it is obvious that these two spatial configurations have specific relations between physical structures and plot on which they are constructed. In traditional urban structures the plot is regarded as structuring spatial element that have direct relationship with street and built structures (buildings). On the other side modernist urban structures with mega block as an constitutive element did not considered the significance of the plot as a structuring element which influenced the relations between street and building to be more loose. The question of human scale of these structures was also raised at the time of the construction of mega blocks. Although the idea of a functionalist city was being advocated in the construction of new settlements and large-scale urbanization is being implemented, the questions of comfort, ecological comfort and humanization of leisure space are also being raised. Significant for this research are the approaches that point to the shortcomings of normative planning, while progress and comfort are not expressed in numbers but in the relation of the natural and the artificial elements whose optional form enhances life in the city - how does one tree restore human scale to the over-sized space of a mega block?

As stated before one of the problems with open (public and green) areas within the mega blocks of New Belgrade is problem with affordable maintenance and under-utilization (Milojević, Maruna & Djordjević, 2019). In the context of responsible resource management, the question arises of the use and maintenance of open spaces within urban blocks through a combination of institutional and informal practices. Spatial changes and maintenance so far are the result of uncoordinated actions by both amateur local residents and collective institutional organizations who view the open space of the mega block in different ways. The size of these spaces, as well as the administrative division of competences in their maintenance, lead to paradoxical situations in which this space viewed both as a public resource and as a place for new construction and private investments. Due to their size, these spaces are unmanageable for individual actions of local actors, and some kind of institutional organization and synchronization is required. Institutional maintenance, on the other hand, deprives local actors of re-colonizing this open space within the block within rhythmic activities of new ruralities. It is exactly in these places, that individuals could identify themselves with environment and surroundings through creation of new activities and places that could be established as rural leading to developing new practices of rurality in dominantly urban areas. As stated earlier through these activities space is occupied and signified as communal which in the end leads to the establishing of community on the level of neighbourhood.

4

Historical Review of Dwelling Community

After the experiences of the socialist system and planning procedures within it, Belgrade is facing the issue of spatial and social atomization. These processes could be observed as localized tale of urbanization through the prism of individual actions and activities. Nowadays in the shadow of the capital projects in various parts of Belgrade such as the construction of the bridges, shopping malls, business and residential complexes structure of the city is changing dramatically in its social and in physical notion. In the post-socialist period of the city major changes happened in the modernist landscape of the New Belgrade. Considering those changes within New Belgrade residential environment it is necessary to study the possibility for re-conceptualization of the modernist mega blocks. These blocks were conceptualized both under the influence of modernist urbanism and on the specific political and social relations that were established in Yugoslav socialist state. As stated in some previous researches these "Residential zones in New Belgrade were built not only by the 'gifts' of the government, voluntary local taxes and the labour of the dwellers of the dwelling community, but also on the basis of the complex, rational, responsible and systematic approach of the experts." (Milojević, 2009)

Specific spatial concept of the new territorial unit was established in that period, known as the Dwelling community (Stambena zajednica) of 5000 people. It was established from the year 1958 and on which bases the local communities in New Belgrade were formed. The dwelling community concept was a comprehensive approach in the conceptualization of the new settlement unit presented in the illustrated magazine for the economic and public affairs dating 1958, "Dwelling Community"[1].

Figure 2.

Thematization – Human vs
Cover page of the catalogue
of exhibition "Family and
Household, 1958

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1   The publication "Dwelling Community" was published under the sponsorship of the Organization of the Board of the Second International Magazines Exhibition" "Family and Household 1958". In this review, the political discourse was supported by the arguments provided by the experts. The complexity of the approach of that time is seen in the content of the publication: political discourse (ideology of socialist self-management), conceptual and program based explanation of the experts (supported by the institutions), illustrations of everyday activities (simulations of the desired relationships and activities in the community) and the reviews of the realized settlements (the results of construction of the settlements in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia).

The concept itself was a mixture of political-administrative and spatial unit. In establishing the system of local communities the dwelling community is perceived as the form of the social management in which the initiative of each citizen will be allowed. New community concept developed new terminology as well along with the urban parameters that were supposed to connect he density of population and dwelling community functions. At that period in Yugoslavia experts abandoned the system of urban planning methodology based on the traditional composition forms and notions: parcel of land, street, city block and study a more general, more connected and full image of the collective form which could meet the rate of construction and the vision of the new society – Dwelling Community for 5000 people. Through this action the intention of the state was to establish the territorial and social cohesion.

The implementation of the dwelling community pattern led to the phased construction and steady growth of urban settlements during the period of socialist self-management. This form represents the idea of equality, accessibility and participation. In addition to the efficiency of construction and urbanization of the outskirts of the city (expansion of the construction zones), this form has also enabled the establishment of a uniform standard of living for a large number of inhabitants. The concept of a dwelling community along with the open space of the block was planned as space for community life. The structure of the housing unit, common spaces and open spaces in the block were dimensioned and organized in order to motivate living in the community, but at the same time to reduce the size of the housing units and optimize the cost of construction of new housing settlements.

The concept of a dwelling community made it possible to arrange and equip public spaces and associated spaces in the vicinity of residential units in order to raise housing standards on an equal basis. The standards for the design of these spaces provided comfort for the whole community that is for quality leisure time outside the apartment. The dwelling communities were organized and equipped to encourage socialization of the inhabitants, while the privacy of leisure time was reduced to a minimum of comfort. Each block was planned along with a number of community facilities. Besides residential buildings, it was planned that each block should have elementary school, nursery, post office and supermarket as well as sufficient green space and playgrounds, placed in the centre of the block. By the end of the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties the government implemented the concept of the local community as the administrative unit of the city and mechanism of the socialist model of self-management at the territory of Belgrade. During this process normative planning was used, urban parameters were carefully planned and calculated in order to establish best urban and architectural design and efficiency of the community. On the following four diagrams (Figure 3), on the example of dwelling community different parameters and design principles are presented.

Considering that they were planned integrally with the associated open space, any change within the block directly reflects the comfort of the residential complex, but also of each residential unit of the complex. This is especially important in the case of construction on the free surfaces of the block and when the question of the reciprocity of the transformation of these spaces with the transformation of the block is raised. What and how much does the local community get if they allow construction in these areas and what if it they organize their activities within the process of their cultivation?
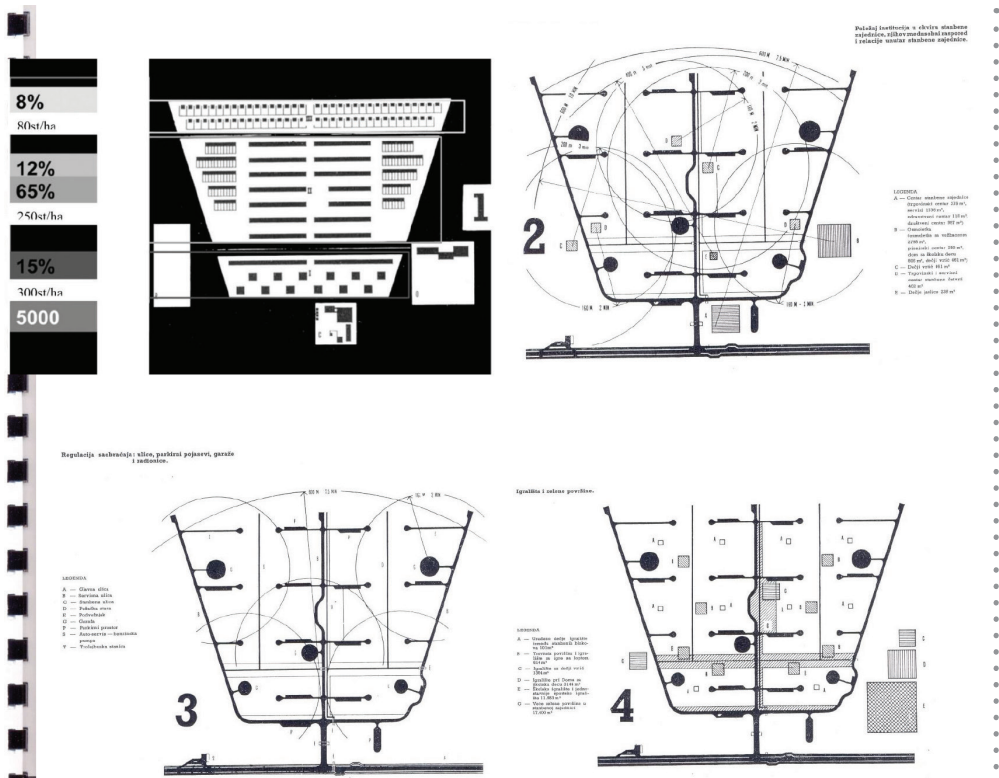
Figure 3.
Availability of common areas and facilities of the Dwelling Community

5

Transformation and Transition of Local Landscape

Thirty years after it was conceptualized concept of dwelling community was heavily criticized during the 1980s, along with the idea of functionalist city on a global level. During this period various attempts were made in order to develop models for transformation of mega blocks and their humanization. Two projects of city's Town Planning Institute were done – Research of alternative urban models by Miloš Perović and Study for reconstruction of New Belgrade and Sava Amphitheatre by Miloš Perović and Branislav Stojanović. These studies offered models for transformation of mega blocks and for re-urbanization of settlements in the spirit of Athens charter. Both studies criticized lack or complete absence of diverse, complementary to residential, activities and functions as well as disproportional relationship between the built physical structures and large open areas that were separating them. New Belgrade blocks were described as unattractive, passive monotonous, dispersed and uncompleted. In the following years due to these critiques and most importantly due to transformation from socialist to marker economy, where free space and plots were re-examined as a valuable resources for new constructions, New Belgrade blocks were under the pressure of new development and emergence of new functions, primarily commercial facilities.

With the request for more human principles in the built environment (the principle of man as a measure of things) on one side and newly established relations between economic and spatial development (capital – space interactions) on the other, the character of space started to change. As a result urban development or changes of New Belgrade areas were characterised by the process of filling undeveloped parts of blocks under the pressure of new commercial and residential facilities. Along with the changes in urban form and typology of built structures, changes of relationship between the residents of New Belgrade and their environment also took place.

Transformation of blocks 61-64 on New Belgrade was planned in 1985 and this plans enabled the transformations of blocks in question by building of new housing and administrative buildings on free spaces of mega blocks. New buildings were planned based on the model of buildings from traditional city block – on the edge of block, with height of four stories on the plot that was formed inside the mega-block. Transformation of mega-blocks continued and intensified during the period of transition and deregulation after the 90s. Due to economy and political crisis during the 90s along with the migrations to the city of Belgrade that were caused by the war in Yugoslavia, this process was more or less informal and against the existing planning procedures. Collective spaces were threatened by private interests. Problem of large open spaces around the built structures becomes major threat and it is one of the reasons why mega blocks were seen as building resources, especially their periphery parts. The first deregulation indications are noticed in the areas of dwelling community boundaries and continue through increasingly more expressive transformation. During the post socialist period shopping centres, traditional blocks of residential buildings and business complexes have been constructed just next to the major traffic avenues. Those new structures blocked already established everyday paths of dwellers and have dramatically altered the original physiognomy of collective form. Actual transformation of buffer zone of the residential zones in New Belgrade should answer the question: which are the design principles that regulate the boundary in the manner that the in hospitable community area reveals its communicativeness? Symbolic of the urban and architectural form is also changed during the transitional period. High rise brutalist buildings in the blocks from the 70's once considered as symbols of progress and development of society are changed. New technologies of constructions and significance of urbanity changed the perception of progress and its symbolic value. Present day symbols are more connected to aesthetics of consumer society, market economy and liberal values. Once perceived as architectural exponents of progressive society mega blocks are today analysed only in the light of land that should be re-colonised and re-built.

Figure 4.

Changes to land-use and land ownership (planned land-use of dwelling community centres on public land and newly built structures of mixed use.

5

Concluding Remarks

Socio-spatial restructuring that is taking part on global level could be observed on local level. Spaces that were designed as collective today have new roles. Contemporary troubling perspectives of urban areas from aspects of sustainability and resilience could be analysed through the lens of rural. On this way urban and rural would not be positioned as asymmetrical categories, but they will be questioned as mutually co-dependent and complementary. Positive praxis from both sides should be used in order to develop new models of cohabitation that will enable more conventional and liveable lifestyles both in urban and rural spatial settings.

We should observe rurality not only as specific forms of physical structures and their relation with open space but as cultural capital and as a characteristic way of living and socializing between inhabitants based on respect for nature and its cycles. New rurality could be explained as specific mechanism that should introduce healthy rhythm in urban areas - a mechanism of free time that will harmonize us with nature and its cycles. New rhythm of individual and group activities synchronised with natural environment and schedule, would enrich urban areas, organise free time of inhabitants, and help them with cultivation of space around them. In this way basic physiological and spiritual needs of people will be tackled, stronger relationship would be established between inhabitants, their neighbours and spatial layout.

The phenomenon of human relations as the form of co-existence which is both cultural and sociological in its nature and at the same time could be seen on different spatial levels – micro and macro. The manner in which people synchronized their relation in the space of common existence can be considered and compared depending on

the culture and climate, regionally and through the history of settlement systems. All these parameters could be analysed from local point of view, in order to create residential environments that will be more territorial. In this case territoriality is connected to the manner in which people use the land, regulate their relationships and give meaning to the specific place.

The reorientation of urban governance, form socialist and modernistic to more liberal, post-socialist and postmodern urban governance brought changes on different spatial levels as well. In this case we have analyse mega blocks of New Belgrade, with special emphasis on blocks 61-64. The form of mega blocks according to some critics seemed to supress public life and creates inhuman scale and isolation along with destroying of traditional street system. On the other side through the process of urban renewal of modernistic landscapes, space was primarily reconsidered as economic resource, where only aim was to build new more valuable and efficient structures without consideration of human interactions.

Successful reorganization of inherited built structures implies knowledge of the concept that the comfort of residential units is coupled with the comfort of open spaces in the environment. As stated in previous researches particular aspect in considering the transformation of a residential complex is the redefinition of contact between the residential complex and the terrain in the immediate vicinity of the assembly (Milojević & Đokić, 2011). On this way new cooperation and cohesion, and use of mutual resources could be established resulting in new positive effects on spatial structures and their quality. It is only to be expected that residents in cooperation with public institutions should jointly take care of corresponding land plots as well as maintain space of common interest for both public and civil sector. In this process the ability to establish individual, group (neighbourhood) and institutional control over changes in the immediate environment of the housing complex is questioned. Different stakeholders and groups are in constant struggle to establish mechanism of control and use, in a specific context where there is a huge gap between different institutional and individual actions and efforts regarding this question.

Figure 5a.
Maintenance of green areas by communal services without citizen participation

Figure 5b.
Cultivation of open spaces. Joint actions of groups and initiative of an individual

The issue of coordination of these activities, division of competencies and cooperation in maintaining open spaces of the mega blocks should be resolved by using the mechanisms of new ruralities. This would be one of the possible solutions, scenarios or practices that will incorporate new rhythms from rural practices, in concordance with natural cycles and culture of free time. The mechanism would first introduce and then harmonize the rhythm of free time with the rhythm of nature through the cultivation of open space in the city. In a time of globalisation when a man is deprived of free time and the opportunity to choose when to do what, established mechanism of new rurality and specific rhythm in concordance with nature will give new context and potential to urban areas building a new spatial framework of 'metromilieu'.

Acknowledgments

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03

Appendix

Interdisciplinary research event

Metro-milieu: (alter)Ruralty as a relational gap between inhabiting scales

Organization

University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture and ARENA Architectural Research Network, AlterRurality project

Scientific Committee

Vladan Đokić, Pieter Versteegh, Chris Younès, Zoran Lazović, Ana Nikezić, Sophia Meeres, Dominic Stevens, Ben Stringer, Nataša Teofilović, Vasilije Gvozdenović, Michael Woods, Đorđe Stojanović, Anđelka Bnin-Bninski.

Organizing Committee

Anđelka Bnin-Bninski, Ana Raković, Ksenija Pantović

Venue

Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade