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SIBERIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY



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# Urban Form and Social Context: from Traditions to Newest Demands

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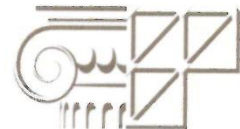
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**DEPARTMENT STORE'S ROLE IN MODERNIZATION AND  
"DEMODERNIZATION" OF CITY CENTERS  
IN EX-YUGOSLAVIA**

**Abstract:** *The period between 1966 and 1995 is characterized by a constant need for the modernization of society and cities. Department store, introduced as a Western economic model of consumer culture, was established in Yugoslavia after the 1960's economic reform. This typology had great influence on the market and consumer society in Yugoslavia but had also changed the image and the way central areas in the former Yugoslavia functioned. This paper has two goals. On one hand, it should examine the influence of consumerism in the socialist society of Yugoslavia on the positioning, function, design and construction of the "Belgrade" Department Stores buildings. On the other hand, we believe that the politics of consumer society, mass production and consumerism, integrated into the objects of department stores, significantly influenced the planning and design of city development which can be followed through morphogenic approach. Today, "Belgrade" department stores, built in more than 30 cities with 44 buildings in total, cannot satisfy newest demands in shopping and trade, remain as such in central positions, but with marginalized function. They cannot be perceived only as an economic model, as it was done during the 2009 reconstruction, since this approach cannot provide an adequate solution for reuse, nor can their meaning be understood in the history of city development. These buildings have been printed on postcards, and as such presented a symbol of modernization and tradition, as well as a hallmark of a time and ideology that is still insufficiently known. Research on department store's previous role in modernization and today's unfortunate contribution to demodernization of city centers can not only help establish a different approach in a contemporary design and reconstruction but can also address the need to bring them back the significance that they had for society and city or give them new one.*

**Keywords:** *department stores, Yugoslavia, morphogenesis, modernization, demodernization*

**Introduction**

The golden age of the consumer society, which reached its peak in the fifties and sixties of the past century, was the time of the formation and shaping of a mass consumer society in Europe through jazz, rock'n'roll, film, and spaces of everyday life such as convenience and department stores. The cathedrals of the modern age were no longer the temples of spiritual and ideological restoration, nor the power and administration facilities, but the places occupied by department stores – sanctuaries of the created generations of consumers (Turato, 2015). These changes have left significant traces to the architecture and urbanism of the former Yugoslavia as well.

With strong social and cultural influences from the West and with the economic reform introduced in 1964, the Department Stores "Belgrade" (DS "Beograd") were established. This enterprise was founded on January 1, 1966, by joining companies "Belgrade", "Nama", "Gramag" and "Fashion House". Enterprise was shaped according to the business model of DS "Kaufhof" from Germany and "Turiz" from Sweden (Anđelić, 2003). DS "Belgrade" were planned and built at central places on city squares across the former SFRY generating a new place of meeting, culture and consumption enabled by the increased standard of living. The basic

principle of commercial activity of DS “Beograd” was the freedom of choice and self-service, which was seen as a powerful driver to boost purchase since it enabled every consumer to evaluate goods and to spend as much time as he wants without disturbance and the mediation of the seller (Andjelic, 2003).

DS “Beograd” started with 9 facilities and 22 235 m<sup>2</sup> of office space, reaching a number of 43 buildings in 32 cities and more than 300,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space with daily servicing of over 400,000 consumers in 1992. There were 37 facilities in Serbia, 4 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 2 in Montenegro. In the capital cities, beside the main department stores built on the central square, they had the function of decentralization and bringing commercial activities to all peripheral urban municipalities. Accordingly, in small and medium-sized cities they were built in the main town squares, with the role of establishing the centrality, directing the further development of the city center and representing the modernity and prosperity of the society.

The successful management of the Belgrade Department stores lasted until the 1990s. Break-up of Yugoslavia, inflation and sanctions imposed by the international community directly affected supply and demand, which greatly influenced the total turnover of DS “Belgrade”. Till August 20, 2003, all of the DS “Beograd” facilities were half-empty due to the proclamation of the pre-bankruptcy in 1995 and final bankruptcy in 2002 (Archive documentation of the association of shareholders of RK Belgrade, 2007). The Company was sold to Verano motors in 2007 and from that time department stores have been partially opened and reconstructed. Their impact on modernization and today’s unfortunate contribution to demodernization of city centers have not been researched yet, and our work presents a step towards understanding those impacts.

### **Methodology**

This study aims to discover the general rules of positioning, design and influence of Belgrade Department stores to the modernization and “demodernization” of city centers in ex-Yugoslavia. The study will be conducted through the research of morphological transformation of the city center structure. The research is based on the premise that the politics of consumer society, mass production and consumerism integrated into the objects of department stores significantly influenced the planning and design of city development in given time and those changes are evident today.

The conceptual framework is based on theoretical research of the issues of consumerism, consumer culture and the socialist regime in Serbia and the research of audiovisual advertising material created while DS “Beograd” were running a business successfully. This research served for perceiving ideals of consumerism through architecture and urban design. In the study, the case study method was used for the analysis of Serbian examples where the aforementioned relationship was observed. The case studies have been selected in relation to the territorial distribution in Serbia and different historical and cultural influence (South – Vranje – Ottoman empire, Central Serbia – Jagodina – Ottoman empire, north – Sombor – Austro Hungarian) (Figure 1). Preserved material from City archives was used as a basis for the research, as well as the documentation of former members of the Association of stockholders of the DS “Belgrade”. Additionally, interviews conducted with employees from local urban institutes and architectural offices that followed the process of construction, reconstruction and “decay” of DS “Beograd”, were significant for the research. Case studies will serve to draw out general rules that can be observed in other cities in ex-Yugoslavia, using the previous morphological research conducted by Djokić in 2009 (Djokić, 2009).

### **Measurement and analysis**

The impact of DS “Belgrade” to the modernization and demodernization of the city center will be accomplished by linking the ideals of consumer culture with the issues of modernity, universality and functionality in the architecture of department stores in three selected cities. In order to understand the morphological transformation and impact of the department stores to city centers from 1960 onwards, we will briefly overview the issue of mass culture and modernity, supply and demand as well as the freedom of choice in the time of socialism.



Figure 1. Spatial distribution of DS “Belgrade” in ex-Yugoslavia and position of three selected case studies

Mass culture as a system of organized behavior was promoted through products which served to fulfill and shape work and leisure time while entertaining the working class so as not to rebel (Adorno, 1944). At the same time, mass culture was itself the product of the time and regime. The starting point was that all individuals have the same needs, resulting in mass production of the same products. This was seen as a suitable context for economic progress through the development of accelerated mass production (Adorno, 1944).

Modernization in time of socialist Yugoslavia implied changes in society, economy and politics, while constantly creating new and better living conditions, as it was presented by the ruling regime. Major changes came with the establishment of economic reform in 1964. This reform enabled the greatest industrial growth in Yugoslavia and new forms of market economy, which reduced the role of the state in the economy and introduced market socialism, which did not happen in the communist world until 1989 (J. R. Lampe in Vučetić, 2015). Established on those bases, the department stores presented a socio-economic product in the function of ideology, aiming to offer people at one place everything they need, regardless of their material status. We can follow this phenomenon in the slogan of the DS “Belgrade” – “All the nice things are purchased in the Department stores “Belgrade”.

In the DS “Belgrade, products were offered at the most favorable prices and conditions of sale and a very wide range of goods of over 100,000 articles that nobody managed to reach in this region, not even in our modern days (Archive documentation of the association of shareholders of RK “Beograd” 2007). The biggest part of the offer consisted of clothing, footwear and leather goods, while sales of toys, perfumes, sports and camping equipment were in constant increase

due to a reduction of working hours to five working days and an increase in leisure time. The sales of furniture and floor coverings were constantly decreasing (Archive documentation of the association of shareholders of RK “Belgrade”, 2007), which can be related to the 1980s decrease of massive construction of apartments that were previously designed and constructed on the premise of egalitarianism and classless society.

After the understanding of the socio-economic context in which DS “Belgrade” were established, we can explore their impact on modernization and demodernization of city space.

### Case study 1 – Vranje

Vranje is a medium sized city in the South of Serbia, developed as a settlement of the Oriental type. Vranje was a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1878, when the town was liberated. Although in many cities in Serbia after the liberation from the Osman empire, complete demolition of buildings and old irregular streets and plots was carried out, this was not the case in Vranje. The 1878 Plan, designed by Rinek and Mihalek, prescribed a slight straightening of streets, retaining the street matrix and preserving most of the housing stock (Đokić, 2009). DS “Belgrade” in Vranje was built in Marshal Tito street, on the site of the former National Warehouse facility (NAMA), which was one of founders of the company. Additionally, it had left great effects to the urban structure, since it directly resulted in demolition of 11 buildings, while 17 more buildings were demolished in order to straighten up the street that goes by the department store. This intervention affected in disappearance of triangular shaped square in front of the Church. After the construction of the department store, new facilities for business, service and residential purposes were built. Functionally and formally different, with their floor and materialization, contrasted with the existing physical structure of the city, with the aim of emphasizing the modernity and prosperity of the socialist state, as well as directing every further development of the city. Accordingly, the Director of Urban Planning and Communal Construction of the Municipality of Vranje demanded from the investor of DS “Beograd” and the investor of Housing High rise buildings simultaneous document submission and harmonization of general projects in terms of materialization and use of natural concrete and bricks as final processing (Vranje Archive, 1978). On figure 2, we can notice that the object of DS “Beograd” does not fit in the character of the space in which it was built, by its size and mass. Additionally, street around department store was transformed into pedestrian one (Arhiv Vranja, 1979), thus redirecting people from the traditional and historical main square to new area. Today, DS “Belgrade” is occasionally visited by customers due to the limited offer – Chinese market store, Sports equipment and drogerie store.

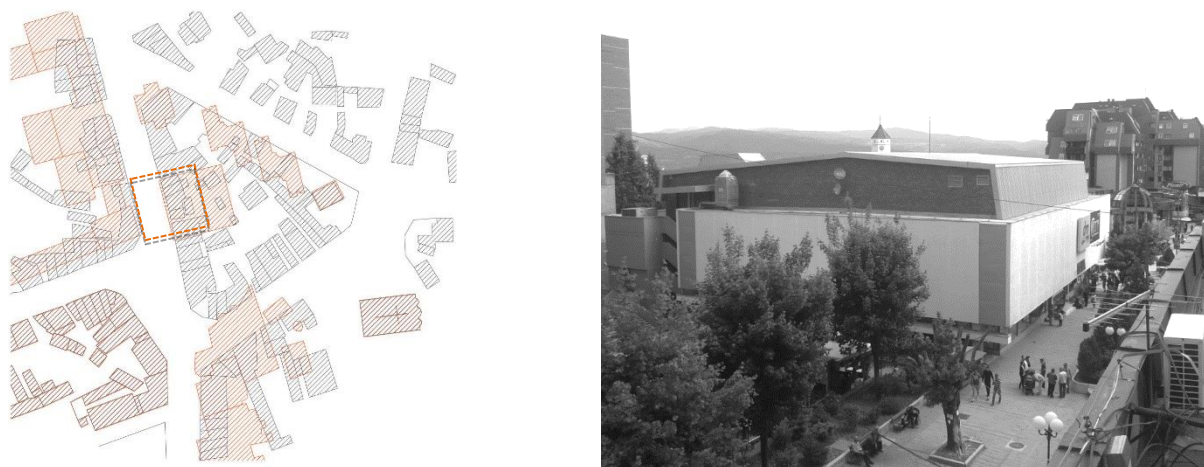


Figure 2. Morphological transformation of Vranje city centre  
(in gray – state in 1951, in red – state in 1971)

### Case study 2 – Jagodina

The building of the Department store in Jagodina was built on the square which surroundings consisted of buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th century. One of the buildings is St. Peter and Paul Church, the renowned work of the famous architect Svetozar Ivačković. In 1940, elementary school, designed by the famous modern architect Milan Zloković, replaced the building of the Municipality. Department store was built in 1972/1973, on one of the squares facing the street Marshal Tito. Construction caused the demolition of 17 buildings, 5 of which were demolished for the construction of a parking lot (Jagodina Archive, 1971). Main facades of the department store are turned to the other side of the square, while economic facade was the one facing the square (Djokic, 2009).

This treatment showed the lack of understanding of the importance and character of the public space. After construction of DS “Beograd”, hotel Jagodina was built in the same block in 1978, which completely changed the morphological characteristics of the square – it became divided into two parts due to the position and dimensions of the facilities of the department store and the hotel. The first part is characterized by harmonious objects and the other one is characterized by free-forming forms of large dimensions (Djokic, 2009). Marshal Tito Street represented one of the major roads, and it was closed for car traffic partly, from the Regional Museum to the Department Store, during the summer period of the year (Tasić, 2015). Today, DS “Belgrade” is not anymore the central area for shopping, since new shopping mall was built on the edge of the city center, equipped by a large number of parking lots and modern shopping facilities. Area around DS “Belgrade” is abandoned and without any function in these modern days.



Figure 3. Morphological transformation of Jagodina city centre  
(in gray – state in 1936, in red – state in 2008 (Djokić, 2009))

### Case study 3 – Sombor

Department Store “Belgrade” in Sombor was built in the context of the 18th-century buildings (St. George’s Church and the Church of the Holy Trinity) and the 19th century (residential buildings and public service buildings) that are listed. Although all these buildings are built in different styles – Baroque, Neoclassicism and Neo-Renaissance, they represent a strong Austro Hungarian heritage and architectural context, in which a department store was built. The building of DS “Belgrade” in Sombor was built on the site of the former palace “In Foro”, built in early 1804, listed by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Vojvodina, and which was demolished after the decision to build a department store. This decision was made even though there was the free building site, only 100 meters down the road (Vrcelj, 2015).





Figure 4. Morphological transformation of Sombor city centre  
(in gray – state in 1961, in red – state in 2016)

It is important to emphasize that the building of the department store in Sombor is the only object of such form in the central city area, designed and materialized in natural concrete, which was the reason for its protection by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. The arcades on the ground floor and gentle retracting of facade canvas may be perceived as the only attempt to communicate with an existing built structure. The conceptual design project for the DS “Belgrade” in Sombor also included the construction of a five-floor administrative part of the building for which the permit was not obtained (Archive of the city of Sombor, 1961). The same answer was received for the extension application. Today, DS “Belgrade” in Sombor is abandoned without any function.

### Discussion

Department store’s impact on modernization will be discussed through following criteria: (1) location principles, (2) connection with a further transformation of the city center, (3) the universality of space, (4) construction and materialization and (5) the carrier of modern identity.

1. Location principles. Based on the analysis, we can recognize that all of the facilities of DS “Beograd”, as the most modern facilities at the time when they were built, were positioned in the streets bearing the name of Marshal Tito, with the aim of showing the state of modernity and progress of the state, but also importance of the Tito’s regime in general. DS “Belgrade” implied a break with the history of the city in which they were created. Acontextuality can be observed through the front discontinuity, incompatibility with the city matrix and distinction in typology, design, construction and materialization in relation to tradition and the local context (influenced by Oriental architecture or Austro-Hungarian heritage).

2. Connection with a further transformation of the city center. As we previously noticed, on the one hand, DS “Belgrade” presented a break with the history, while on the other hand, they were initiators of some further “modern” development in the cities (the construction of housing high rise buildings and hotels). In addition, along with the modern buildings, DS “Belgrade” had great influence in pedestrianization of city area, due to the premises of everyday life, need for citizens gathering. These streets retained their pedestrian function to date.

3. Universality required big open space area, usually a square-shaped floor plan. Floor area ranged from 1150m<sup>2</sup> in Vranje (32x36m), 1400 m<sup>2</sup> in Jagodina (35x40m) and up to 1600m<sup>2</sup> in Sombor (40 x 40m). The program task for modern shopping space required open space with as few columns as possible and with a small number of openings on facade walls. Additionally, the need for the creation of a universal supply space influenced the construction of ceilings that can receive enormous loads.

4. Construction and materialization. All of the buildings that were subject of our analysis were built in reinforced concrete construction system, marked as an innovative and modern technology in civil engineering and architecture of that time. If we compare construction load with the Yugoslav standards that were valid during that period, this load corresponds to a load of railway platforms and theater's stages. We can relate this fact to the TV commercials that promoted the space of DS "Belgrade" as the space designed to withstand everything from "a needle to the locomotive". Additionally, all of the analyzed buildings are characterized by the use of natural concrete and bricks as final processing materials, that can be recognized in surrounding buildings constructed afterward.

5. Carriers of modern identity. The buildings of DS "Belgrade" have been printed on postcards, and as such presented a symbol of modernization and tradition as well as a hallmark of a time and ideology of socialism (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Postcards from Jagodina (ex Svetozarevo)

[http://www.jagodina.autentik.net/slike\\_grad/stare\\_slike/2/stare\\_slike1.php](http://www.jagodina.autentik.net/slike_grad/stare_slike/2/stare_slike1.php) and postcard from Sombor

The same criteria were used to follow department store's impact on demodernization of city centers, noticeable in the contemporary context.

1. We primarily recognize the break with the historic character of the city in which they were created. It can be observed through the incompatibility with the city matrix as well as the distinction in typology and design, different than the existing local character. This problem is more noticeable now, when they lost their primar function and when their position can no longer be justified.

2. Although the buildings of DS "Belgrade" were once the initiators of modernization and transformation of the central areas, today they prevent almost any transformation of these areas. With their position and volume that vary from city to city, they are seen as an obstacle to the flow of central activities in the city. The degree of protection of certain buildings of the DS "Belgrade" as a sort of historical heritage, as well as the fact that it is a part of private property often contributes to the stated problem.

3. In the contemporary context, the idea of the spatial universality of DS "Belgrade" can be perceived in negative terms due to the impossibility of the division of space and adaptation to the specific needs of modern trade. Companies of the same scale as DS "Belgrade" was, are not interested in locating in small and medium-sized cities, so it becomes very hard to find any suitable use, and companies interested in renting the place.

4. Construction system in which department stores were built allows adding elements to the given structure, but not deductions – it is not possible to create any opening on facade walls. It is also difficult and irrational to demolish them, especially considering the fact that the facilities of DS "Beograd" are located in the central city zones. Additionally, the hard concrete facade prevents any major reconstruction. The best indicator of this problem is numerous examples of

alternative facade *dressing* solutions that some of the DS “Beograd” went through in order to create a more attractive image within the city.

5. In today’s conditions, individual stores that are freely distributed in the city centers and shopping on the city peripheries have main role in trade activities, to whom DS “Belgrade” cannot compete. Not so long ago, influential symbols of modernity became spatial historic features, testifying to the success and failure of one regime.

Using the previous morphological studies of city squares in Serbia conducted by Vladan Djokic (Djokic, 2009), we can further examine presence and absence of the identified criteria how DS “Belgrade” led to both modernization and demodernization.



Figure 6. Morphogenesis of other small and medium-sized cities in Serbia (Djokić, 2009)

Table

Analysis of the criteria of modernization and demodernization in 6 medium and small towns in Serbia ((□) – yes, (X) – no, (-) – neutral)

Cities:		Niš	Zaječar	Kragujevac	Knjaževac	B. Bašta	Kraljevo
<b>Criteria for Modernization</b>							
1	Positioning on main city squares or streets bearing the name of Marshal Tito	□	□	□	□	□	□
2	Break with the history by mass and volume	□	□	□	□	X	□
3	DS caused the demolition of numerous buildings	□	□	□	□	□	□
4	DS affected regulation of streets and public spaces	X	X	□	X	X	X

5	Universality of space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Reinforced concrete construction and concrete finishing of the facade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Carriers of modern identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Cities:		Niš	Zaječar	Kragujevac	Knjaževac	B. Bašta	Kraljevo
Criteria of demodernization							
1	Acontextuality, incompatibility with city matrix	-	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	-	X	X
2	Obstacles to the flow of central activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
3	Impossibility of space division	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Impossibility to attract big companies to rent the space	X	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	-	X
5	The impossibility for new openings on the facade and interior reconstruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Living the facade in the same condition or “dressing” the façade walls	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Marginalized place in city trade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	-

## Conclusion

Based on the case study analysis of three completely different cities, and after the discussion that examined six more cities, we can conclude that the department store was a model, developed as a product of the culture of consumerism and the ideology of socialism. With its design, visual character and locational strategy, it was a manifestation of modernity, a desire for modern society and prosperity, a tendency of freedom, of access and use. DS “Beograd” were by the rule positioned on the main city squares or on the streets bearing the name of Marshal Tito causing the demolition of numerous buildings but not always affecting the regulation of streets. Concrete façade, volume and brand name served as carriers of modern identity. They can also be observed as main initiators of radical changes in historical cities.

However, all the analyzed objects experienced a similar fate, because now, at the time of a pluralistic postmodern society, with a completely different concept of freedom, culture, choices of behavior and life, they remain victims of unpredictable future changes. In case when DS “Beograd” was built in existing urban structure respecting the front continuity, they don’t have negative affect to the flow of central activities but neither they have contributed. They remain in central positions, but with marginalized functions. As such, the structures of department stores are a hallmark of a time and ideology that, similar to the socialism itself appeared and had a major role in society and city space and disappeared leaving behind material and immaterial memories of the time that no longer exists. Further research of department stores can not only help in creating a different approach in a contemporary context but can enable examination of the possibility of transformation in order to return them old significance to society and a city or to find a new one.

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