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Proceedings of the 3rd international doctoral–postdoctoral conference organized by the Department of Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME)

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5th October 2019

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moderated by: prof. Barbara ENGEL, habil. PhD / GER
Julianna SZABÓ PhD / HUN
Endre VÁNYOLOS DLA / ROM

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The Urban Imprint of Post-socialist Projects in the Multi-family Housing of Cities in Vojvodina: between Regional Fundamentals and Local Strategies

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Abstract

Urban development in post-socialist Europe has been marked by the collision between old, mainly socialist legacy and the rise of capitalism, further supported with globalization. These new influences have made an imprint in urban fabric, bringing the well-established patterns of urban development from the West. Nevertheless, this process is not monolithic; it presents a variety of different approaches and strategies across post-socialist Europe. A good example is the new, post-socialist multi-family housing in Serbia, which is basically formed on two important pillars; the first one is the decentralized housing policy of the former socialist Yugoslavia with many local customizations; the second pillar is deregulated housing market in present-day Serbia, strongly affected by the Yugoslavian Crisis from the 1990s. Multi-family housing has blossomed in Serbia since 2000, especially in middle-size cities. The aim of this research is to present the imprint of the new multi-family residential development in six middle-size cities in the Northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, considering their location in urban fabric and relation to the other types of housing. The comparison of six showcases is a key for the final conclusions about the importance of regional post-socialist influences in housing and their adaptations to local conditions.

Keywords

Multi-family housing, zoning, post-socialist urbanism, middle-size city, Vojvodina

1 Introduction

Post-socialist transition has marked the general development of all countries in the eastern half of Europe in the last three decades. It has left an immense impact on cities in this region, shaking up their inherited urban structure with the socialist legacy, and bringing them closer to the more globalized form of western cities. In line with this process, the general urban development of post-socialist cities has reoriented towards the already established patterns of post-war urban development, such as the rise of urban sprawl, urban decline of inner city areas, division and polarization between successful new/regenerated urban projects and neighborhoods and marginalized areas with older built stock (Hirt and Stanilov, 2014).

Nevertheless, urban development in post-socialist Europe has not been monolithic; it presents a variety of different approaches, policies, and strategies. A good example is the new, post-socialist housing in Serbia, which is basically formed on two important pillars. The first one is inherited from a decentralized housing policy in the former socialist Yugoslavia, which reflected its higher standard of living comparing with the other socialist countries. The second

pillar is more dramatic – it refers to the Yugoslavian crisis from the 1990s and its consequences. The crisis fuelled a sharp weakening of urban governance, a strong influence of still unpredicted and hardly controlled property market, and a loose control on private urban projects with their negative spatial impact (Petrović, 2004). These challenges have influenced all major segments in the housing sector in Serbia after 2000. Their spatial imprint can be scrutinized under the three following stages.



Fig. 1 Illegally developed residential area at the eastern edge of the City of Sombor. The negligence in this area is visible in the lack of street pavement (source: B. Antonić)

The development of single-family housing was frequent in the first phase of post-socialist transition in Serbia, during the crisis 1990s. In accordance with the crisis

conditions, this housing was mainly developed by refugee population in the form of illegal residential settlements in peri-urban areas. Hence, it was more a simple urban growth than an urban development. After 2000 and the start of the consolidation of the urban and housing sectors in Serbia, these settlements have witnessed a decrease of popularity and general stigmatization (Fig. 1). This consequently led many of them into stagnation and shrinkage (Antonić and Djukić, 2018). Legal part of single-family residential development had a negligible role during the transition period.

Socialist multi-family housing also had a different development trajectory compared with the other post-socialist countries. As in the case of the other countries, socialist multi-family settlements and neighborhoods have aged and the necessity for their refurbishment has become evident. In Serbia and the other ex-Yugoslavian countries, a common approach to their refurbishment is market-oriented; private investors usually get a right to add an extra floor(s) as an upper extension of old, socialist buildings, which is actually their compensation for the refurbishment (Vranic et al., 2016). Many of such extensions were poorly monitored and constructed and their functional and visual appearance is more than questionable (Fig. 2). In the other side, this widespread intervention in Serbian cities indirectly shows that people still positively consider socialist residential neighborhoods as a viable place for life.



Fig. 2 The low-grade top extension of one building in Sodara Neighborhood in Pančevo (source: B. AntoniĆ).

The third stance is related to new multi-family housing in Serbia, constructed in after the fall of socialism in 1991. The Serbian statistical office categorises every residential building with at least four apartments as multi-family housing. This type of residential development has become prevalent after 2000. Jovanović Popović et al. (2013) conclude that post-socialist multi-family residential buildings, constructed 1991-2012, make almost ¼ of all

such buildings at national level (Fig. 3). New multi-family housing is especially present in the most valuable part of Serbian cities, their historic centers, due to the rediscovery of their functional, social and visual potential during post-socialist transition (Djukić et al., 2018). Thus, this type of residential development is a key element in reshaping the entire urban structure (Antonić and Vaništa Lazarević, 2017).



Fig. 3 Four examples of new multi-family residential development in Kikinda (1), Sremska Mitrovica (2), Zrenjanin (3), and Subotica (4). All of them have a common denominator – their position in outer city core, where the protection of historic fabric is not strict and a location is still very central (source: B. AntoniĆ).

Unexpectedly, this blossoming in multi-family residential construction has been very much present in middle-size Serbian cities, which have had problems with urban shrinkage since 2000. In this characteristic, they are more a norm than an exception in post-socialist Europe, where shrinking cities dominate, especially among small and middle-size cities (Restrepo Cadavid et al., 2017). Moreover, these cities do not possess a strong historical tendency towards multi-family housing. They preserved a sprawled structure with detached houses even during the socialist period, despite the ideological support to multi-family housing for the proletariat. The decentralization policy of the former Yugoslavia prevented strict ideological interpretations in local affairs and allowed for local adaptations of both urban and housing policies (Petrović, 2004).

The aim of this research is to present the imprint of this new multi-family residential development in urban space in Serbia. It is done by on-site investigation in six case studies – middle-size cities in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina – where their position and concentration in urban structure are in focus. Final conclusions aspire to find how local strategies and socialist legacy in the housing

sector adapt and transform global influences in the urban space of middle-size cities in Serbia.

2 Methodology

This research is shaped as a multi-case study. Before the analysis of the case studies, the fundamentals about the urban dimension of post-socialist housing in Serbia are explained. The comparison of general knowledge and fieldwork on case studies leads to the final findings and conclusions.

Six middle-size cities in Vojvodina have been purposely selected as case studies due to their similarity: Kikinda, Pančevo, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica, Subotica, and Zrenjanin. Their common characteristics are:

- Middle-size cities in Serbia, with 30,000-100,000 inhabitants;
- Seats of administrative districts in Serbia with similar urban functions and public facilities;
- The same modern history, since the 18th century;
- Similar urban genesis since the start of the modern era, i.e. since early industrialization in the late 19th century;
- The same position in relation to Serbian system of urban planning. All cities require general urban plans for their urban development, which is not the case in smaller cities.

3 Results

The analysis is based on the on-site investigation of the location of new multi-family housing buildings (built 1991-2017) in a built-up area in six selected cities. Their location is further analyzed regarding several important parameters of urban development:

- 1) The location, relating to urban centers / historic cores;
- 2) Their location in old, socialist multi-family areas and neighborhoods. The minimal size of such neighborhood is three buildings with open public space between them;
- 3) The location relating to industrial zones;
- 4) The concentration of new multi-family buildings.

All buildings identified by on-site investigation were collected and mapped. They are marked as red dots in the urban area (Fig. 4). In total, there are 199 buildings:

Selected city	Number of buildings	Number of buildings in historic core	In %
Kikinda	8	7	87%
Pančevo	44	22	50%
Sombor	26	10	38%
Sremska Mitrovica	58	26	45%
Subotica	72	35	49%
Zrenjanin	27	15	56%

Table 1 The number of post-socialist multi-family buildings

Thematic maps are even more illustrative regarding the trends in new multi-family housing:

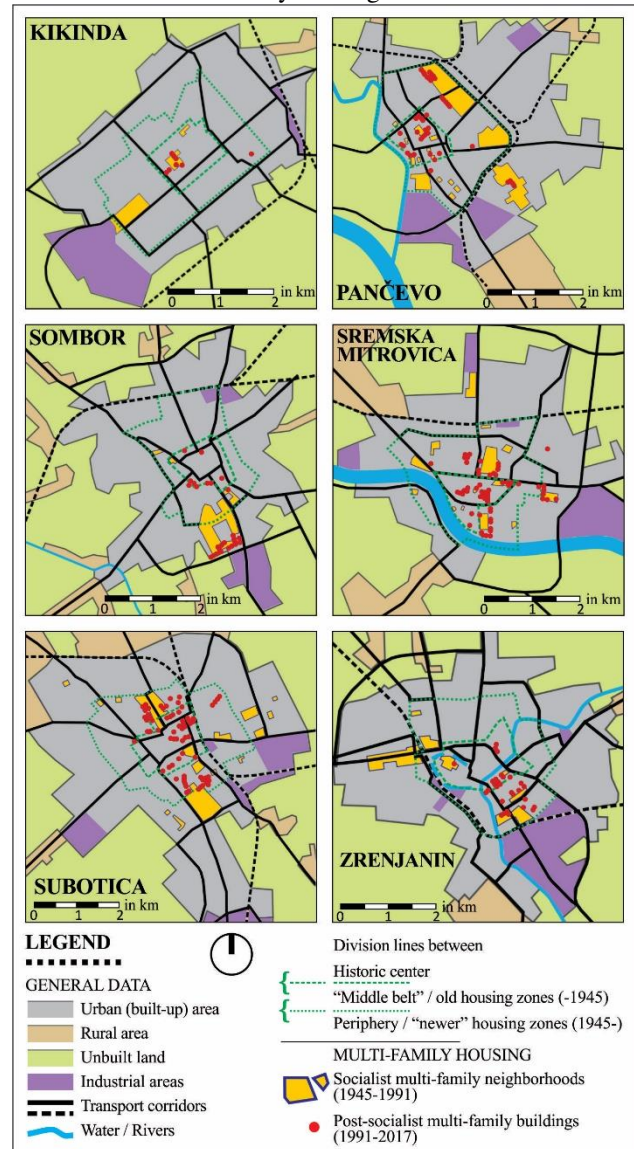


Fig. 4 Maps of multi-family residential buildings from the period 1991-2017 in selected cities in Vojvodina (author: B. Antičić).

The main findings regarding the number of new multi-family residential buildings in the six selected cities in Vojvodina basically confirm that this type of post-socialist housing is becoming very present in Serbian cities. Thus, in the case of Sremska Mitrovica with approximately 38,000 inhabitants, more than 50 new buildings have been built in the last 25 years. Pančevo and Subotica show similar trends; there are 72 and 44 new buildings, respectively. Nevertheless, the number of new multi-family buildings in these cities is smaller given their size. In the other side, on-site investigation acknowledged that new multi-family buildings in both Subotica and Pančevo are bigger and taller than in Sremska Mitrovica.

The number of new buildings is smaller in Zrenjanin, Sombor, and, in particular, Kikinda.

4 Discussion and conclusions

The further examination of identified new, post-socialist multi-family buildings in the six selected cities in relation to theoretical fundamentals, opens more complex conclusions. They are linked with the distribution and concentration of these buildings in the context of the whole urban area, as well as regarding demographic indicators within the process of the aforementioned urban shrinkage.

First, it is obvious that there is a tendency in new multi-family construction towards more central locations. Despite this, new buildings are rare in inner historic centers. This is especially true in the case of Sombor and Zrenjanin. Obviously, protection measures for the well-preserved inner historic cores of cities of Vojvodina have mainly prevented new construction. An exception is Pančevo, where its historic core was significantly transformed during the socialist period. Hence, this is a continuation of the previous urban and housing policy. A different example is the historic core of Subotica, whose eastern half has been recently transformed, but as a novelty in development.

The second and more unexpected conclusion is that new multi-family buildings are often located in or around older, socialist multi-family areas and neighborhoods. Actually, the most frequent location of new buildings is between inner city centers and the biggest multi-family neighborhoods from socialist period. This indirectly underlines that these socialist neighborhoods are still popular for living in Serbian cities.

In contrast with the attractiveness of the previous urban zones, the relation to industrial zones, situated at the edge of the urban area, is totally invisible. The only exception is Sombor, where half of new buildings is located at the southern edge of urban area. The reason for this unusual position is that a big plot of unbuilt public land was, already designated for multi-family housing in the last years of socialism.

Last, the tendency towards the concentration of new multi-family residential buildings in one ambient, street or urban block is also observable in all cities. In these cases, the influence of some important urban node (riverside, the main park, district hospital) seems to be crucial.

All these conclusions clearly imply that multi-family housing boomed in the six selected cities in Vojvodina, during post-socialist transition. Comparing this increase with their demographic decline, it is obvious that there is a gap in urban development. However, more complex

explanations, further interpreted within wider patterns, regional development in post-socialist Europe, can be added. First, housing has ceased to be just a necessity; it has become a commodity or, even, a “safe haven” for investment in the course of the rise of the market. Therefore, attractive locations in historic ambient, around parks or along riversides, have become an imperative for new buyers. Similarly, the transition from a socialist economy, based on industry, to a post-socialist economy, dependent on services, has brought the new nodes of concentration, including historic cores or big-format services, such as hospitals.

The deeper meaning of these concentrations also underlines the basic importance of urban densities; both historic centers and socialist neighborhoods represent the zones in the cities with a higher concentration of dwellers and facilities. Hence, they are currently the most active poles of urban development in cities. To conclude, the localization of new multi-family housing in these areas profoundly highlights the rise of the market economy, based on rational decisions regarding desirable locations to live in post-socialist cities.

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