

Innovations of Reformist and Modernist Urbanism in Yugoslavia, with emphasis on Belgrade, Serbia

Preface

I chose the region of Yugoslavia as a focus, because it was difficult to find a clear line between city-level urban policies and the state-level ideologies. The period following WWII was pivotal for Kingdom of Yugoslavia, when it broke away from the Soviet Union and formed a new socialist state with Yugoslavian characteristics. Specifically, self-management of workers and decentralisation of state power into districts and communes (territorial units of varying sizes with varying social, economic and political power) was influential in the ways policies like zoning and regional planning were carried out.

Nonetheless, even if all policies were governed by socialist ideologies, decentralisation and self-management, cities developed and carried out their own ideas. For example, the Garden Cities in Belgrade were designed by the Serbian architects and planners and were specific to the national, cultural context. I focus mostly on Belgrade, as it was the capital and largest city of Yugoslavia.

Garden Cities in Belgrade, Serbia

Major events, projects, legislation

- **Mid 19th century to early 20th century:** an intense growth of Belgrade, the capital city. It followed that there was a need for modern urban planning practices, particularly to address the hygienic standards in housing - or lack thereof
- **1908:** the *Society of Serbian Engineers and Architects* publishes an issue of the *Serbian Technical Paper* introducing the concept of the Garden City. It was seen as a way to bring in the benefits of rural regions (extensive space, nature, unpolluted air, quiet surroundings) into industrial and modernising regions
- **Post-WWI:** the *Society of Yugoslav Engineers and Architects* publishes films, academic journals and public media to promote the concept of Garden Cities
- **1923:** the *General Plan of Belgrade* proposes new towns around Belgrade built “in the spirit of contemporary views on founding the garden settlements outside the city area” (Corovic, 2014)
- **Post-WWII:** Garden Cities are criticised as elitist and as encouraging individualism in Yugoslavia, thus are abandoned for collective housing

Comments

- The garden city movement in Serbia is closely linked to the provision of social housing. In the context of early 20th century Serbia, social housing was limited - but the capital was industrialising and modernising, and as such needed better and healthier dwellings for its workers. Leko, an architect of the time, critiqued the new social housing as undesirable because it would encourage companies to build small and cheap apartments. As a response, he proposed a plan along the concept of the Garden City
- After WWI, Belgrade doubled in size, and the majority (85%) of its population was living at or below the poverty line, in dwellings that lacked basic hygiene standards. Workers’ protests arose, and the city had to propose solutions. It is in this context the Garden City became attractive to citizens, planners and governments alike, as a way to achieve healthy housing standards
- In the inter-war period, around 20 new settlements emerged in Serbia in line with the Garden City ideal
- The Garden City wasn’t simply “copy pasted” from the British, French or German examples, but adapted to the local Serbian context. Specifically, planners proposed integrating the design of typical Slavic villages and traditional trade towns into Garden Cities
- In some Garden Cities such as *Kotež-Neimar*, speculative investments rose the price of the land and the ideal of rent controlled housing was forgotten. In other cases such as *The Professors’ Colony* or *The Clerk’s Colony*, particular attention was put on providing diverse housing types with different market values, and housing residents from a diversity of professional backgrounds, which corresponds to E. Howard’s egalitarian idea for the Garden City
- Lack of government financial support and legislative measures in interwar Serbia restricted the possibility of Garden Cities, and eventually, after WWII, high-rise and high-density buildings were prioritised in line with the modernist concepts of rationalisation and standardisation

References

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Social Housing in Belgrade, Serbia & in Yugoslavia

Major events, projects, legislation

- **Early 20th century:** social housing is extremely limited in Yugoslavia, and cities like Belgrade are struggling to provide adequate housing for growing number of industrial workers
- **1911:** Belgrade has the first social housing building of the region, designed by architect Jelisaveta Nacic (first female Serbian architect!), specifically for housing workers
- **1950s:** Yugoslavia breaks from the Soviet Union and introduces self-management and territorial decentralisation, resulting in the decentralisation of housing governance from state to local levels
- **1959:** the *Law on Housing Relations* is passed and grants the *tenant right*, which translates as the citizen's right to (public or private) housing. The state now has a responsibility to provide all citizens with housing, or monetary support for housing construction or rent
- **1960:** the *Federal Law on the Financing of Housing Construction* provides public loans for housing construction, and amortises 50% of the cost of rent of social apartment housing.
- **1960s:** State owned-companies act as real estate developers, and are responsible for providing housing for workers
- **1970s-1980s:** most active period for mass social housing construction in Yugoslavia. In Serbia, the multi-family housing stock is 66% social housing. Notable constructions include the imposing housing blocks in New Belgrade
- **1990s:** after the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1992 and with economic liberalisation, cities like Belgrade see their social housing stock go from 80% (at its peak under socialism) to 0.8% today

Comments

- Although Belgrade had the first social housing complex of the region, it was criticised by some architects as economically unsound, cheap, and unhealthy. But at the same time, the city saw it as necessary to prevent speculation and uncontrolled rent increase in the pre-WWII era
- In the decades that followed, and like many other states at the time, Yugoslavia made great efforts to provide quality housing through large-scale state interventions
- When Yugoslavia broke away from the Soviet Union, it developed its own style of socialism where self-management and decentralisation were central concepts. This gave regional and local planners a lot of freedom, notably in the housing sector. New housing developments depended on local authorities and local housing cooperatives
- Nonetheless, Yugoslavia still retained some socialist elements. For example, the state supported the construction of publicly-owned housing for the proletariat. These were almost exclusively multi-family buildings, built in cities, which went hand in hand with the strong urban population growth but ignored the rural housing. And following socialist egalitarian principles, it was usual to find socially mixed housing, with people of different socio-economic status living together. Architects and planners put extra effort into designing housing that would promote community, and erase ethnic, religious and class segregation between groups
- However, even with decentralisation and an impressive effort from the state to construct housing, construction was slower than demand and not always of the highest quality

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Zoning legislation in Belgrade, Serbia & in Yugoslavia

Major events, projects, legislation

- **1866:** E. Josimovic makes the first attempt at creating a plan for Belgrade. He publishes basic principles for land regulation, as basis of a new law. However this was never enforced, because at the time urban planning and development of settlements wasn't regulated
- **1923:** the *Master Plan* of Belgrade emphasises specific city zones such as parks, residential, commercial, industria, social and cultural areas, and a differentiation between the city centre and the suburbs. A major theme of the Plan is to decrease housing height and density in the city centre, and move people into the suburbs
- **1931:** the *Construction Act* is published and considered the foundation of urban legislation in Yugoslavia. It regulates "zoning, densities, building heights and bulk, buffer zones, land use and building zones public landmarks, and infrastructure corridors" (Zivac et al., 2021). Every city and town should have its own precise plan and building regulations, in line with the Act
- **1960s:** the *Law on Urban and Regional Spatial Planning* is put forward, and defines specific plans for different typographies like national parks, protected areas, infrastructure corridors, industrial or mining sites, tourist sites, etc. These are regional-level plans and not so precise

Comments

- The first zoning regulations in Serbia appear in the 1830s, where private and public functions are separated (eg. housing and schools) and the towns planned in an orderly manner. However, it would take a long time until zoning regulations were inscribed in the law and enforced on a city and regional level
- In the late 19th century, plans and regulations for Belgrade start to appear, and eventually land-uses are defined in the 1923 Master Plan. This Master Plan is particularly important for the city, since it is the first plan after WWI, after borders are redrawn and Belgrade is the capital of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia
- The *Construction Act* was the first law in Yugoslavia that incorporated zoning. It designated specific areas as construction zones or national parks, and regulates the technical aspects of constructions like materials and sizes. It was considered innovative for the time, and planning became a practice that was exclusively for engineers and technical professions. At the same time, the ruling class criticised the prescriptive nature of the regulations.
- Further plans in Yugoslavia, such as the *General Urban Plan* in 1949, didn't include land-use zoning but focused mostly on socio-economic development and decentralised, regional planning practices. Therefore, it seems like zoning was not a planning priority in post-WWII Yugoslavia
- Similar to regional planning as we will see in the next section, land-use regulations were influenced by the political, socio-economic and institutional context of the state. With the decentralisation of state power, zoning and land-use regulations were more or less precise when they were developed on the district (regional) or commune (local) levels

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Regional Planning in Krapina district & in Yugoslavia

Major events, projects, legislation

- **Post-WWII:** Yugoslavia introduces the workers' self-management, a socialist form of industry management where works have varying degrees of power and ownership. The objective is to decentralise power through a new political, social and economic mode of governance
- **1950s-1960s:** intense urbanisation is underway, with urban populations growing by 170%+, as rural farmers turns into an industrial labour force
- **1955:** the *Organisation of Communes and Districts Act* transfers the self-management model from industry to social and territorial organisation. This creates self-managed districts made up of communes (territorial and administrative units) to which the state could transfer responsibilities. Over the next 5 years, economically weaker communes are incorporated into wealthier communes, such that the number reduces by 55%
- **1950s:** the *Urban Planning Institute of Croatia* developed the first Yugoslavian methodology for regional planning by proposing "urban planning councils" at all administrative levels including communes. The focus was not on cities but on integrating rural and urban areas into coherent regions. The goal is to have communal social, economic and political equality
- **1950s:** regional planning took a scientific and interdisciplinary approach, based on aerial photography, data collection, cartography, statistics, etc. in order to optimise the organisation of urban centres and rural regions, where disparities between urban and rural are effaced
- **1955-1957:** the Krapina district north of Zagreb receives the first Yugoslavia regional plan as an ideal test region. Plan followed the principle of separating functions (to create inter-dependence), but at the same time needed to follow Yugoslavian principles of decentralisation (self-sustenance)

Comments

- By shifting power from the state to the new territorial units (ie. communes and districts), Yugoslavia created the conditions for the shift from urban to regional planning. Regional planning was driven by the economic ideal that all regions, urban or rural, should be economically prosperous. This is different from the examples we have seen in class, where regional planning was about incorporating smaller satellite towns and commuter belts for practical matters without a strong emphasis on the economy
- This was a challenge for regional planners, given that some communes like Klanjec in the Krapina district, had only low-income agriculture and no one employed by industry. This meant the commune of Klanjec was underdeveloped compared to surrounding communes. The challenge is then, how to provide equal economic opportunities and services in this commune, to follow the egalitarian socialist principle?
- Regional planning operated on a 20-30 year scale, which I find particularly interesting in the context of Yugoslavia, where not only rural and urban areas had to be united, but also a diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages... only for the state to dissolve 40 after the emergence of regional planning. What happen to cross-border regional plans after the dissolution of Yugoslavia?

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