

The consequences of urban policies in socialist Yugoslavia on the transformation of historic centres: the case study of cities in Northern Serbia

Aleksandra Djukić¹ · Aleksandra Stupar¹ · Branislav Antonić¹

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Abstract The socialist and the post-socialist paradigms of urban development are usually described by scholars as radically opposing. However, the cities in the socialist ex-Yugoslavia (1945–1992) present a different development model, defined by the unique position of the country during the Cold War. Balancing between two main ideological blocs, ex-Yugoslavia adopted the values of the non-aligned movement, simultaneously acting as a stage for the cooperation and exchange of professionals. The distinctive combination of socialist and market-driven elements reflected in urban policies, introducing an innovative approach of local decentralization, unprecedented in the communist and socialist world. The evolution of locally based urban policies was especially favourable for the cities with preserved elements of self-government, inherited from previous periods. The cities presented in this article (Pančevo, Sremska Mitrovica, Zrenjanin and Kikinda) follow this pattern due to the Habsburg legacy of strong local governance. Situated in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, these four small cities used the benefits of locally modified urban policies creating a balance between Modernist interventions, implemented during socialism, and the protection of the general outline of their refined historic cores. Considering these specificities and their impact on the urban continuum, this article will use the selected examples and their planning practice for highlighting a new perspective on the urban development manifested before, during and after the period of Yugoslav socialism.

Keywords Urban transformation · Historic centre · Urban policy · Urban heritage · Socialist city · Legislation · Serbia

✉ Aleksandra Djukić
adjukic@afrodita.rcub.bg.ac.rs

Aleksandra Stupar
stupar@afrodita.rcub.bg.ac.rs

Branislav Antonić
antonice83@gmail.com

¹ Department of Urbanism, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Architecture, Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/II, Belgrade, Serbia

1 Introduction

The relationship between the socio-political context and the process of urban development and transformation could be identified and analysed at many levels, but the aspects of urban policies and practice reveal a comprehensive image of the dominant ideological flows and preferences, embedded into urban life and structure. The turbulent historic circumstances could be traced both in urban tissue and in planning documents, revealing the unique features of a political system, its aspirations and mechanisms of control (Gutkind 1972; Lozano 1990; Kostof 1991, 1992; Steger and McNevin 2011).

Cities in the former communist/socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe are frequently named as good examples of the interaction between ideology and urban space (Bernhardt 2005; Petrović 2009). Centralization and the state-established control of political and economic activities were profoundly mirrored in urban matrices and urban life (French 1995) since the state promoted and implemented the “total planning” of the cities, from their position and size, to the design of urban blocks and architecture (Hirt and Stanilov 2014). The lower level of urbanization and less prominent role of cities and towns in the pre-war societies just fuelled the implementation of this concept (Szelenyi 1996; Bodnar 2001).

The post-socialist city negates the elements of the socialist city, neglecting the previous planning practice and urban policies. Its overall commercialization of urban space becomes highly visible, the quality of public services decreases, and the general quality of urban space becomes questionable due to its intensive privatization (Hirt 2012). Thus, this challenging process of urban transformation leads to chaotic urban development, spatial and socio-economic polarization and segregation (Stanilov 2007; Petrović 2009). In this situation, urban governance has retreated from the previous planning paradigm and practice, giving more attention to free market and private incentives (Hirt and Stanilov 2014).

However, both the socialist and post-socialist city have very visible variations. The development patterns of socialist cities differ greatly with respect to time and space (Bernhardt 2005). Post-socialist cities are even more diverse, depending on their treatment of historic heritage. Therefore, the concept of the (post-)socialist city should not be interpreted as a single type, but studied with a focus on regional differences (Petrović 2005; Tosics 2005).

The development of cities in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY, 1945–1992) had its own specificities. Despite preserving several major pillars of socialism, ex-Yugoslavia was an “in-between” country, bridging the gap between dominant political blocs and creating its own influential niche in the non-aligned movement (Stupar 2015). This unique situation facilitated innovations in various sectors. For the study presented in this article, it is exceptionally important to underline profound decentralization process, unprecedented in socialist world, which allowed a lot of freedom in developing local/urban policies (Petrović 2004). This practice also had an immense impact on the development of very independent urban-policy agendas across ex-Yugoslav cities, visible in their urban tissue. Considering this, Petrović (2005) defined a distinctive “ex-Yugoslav sub-type”, also applicable in the territory of the present-day Serbia. It has two major features which were defined by the urban policies from the socialist period: (1) the inclusion of market-like elements in planned economy, urban planning and governance; (2) noticeable illegal development in urban areas, especially their suburban zones.

The influence of decentralization policy in ex-Yugoslavia was more visible in the cities developed in the pre-socialist period, with preserved elements of local self-government

(Djukić 2011). Cities in the northern Serbian province Vojvodina have that kind of background, because two centuries of the progressive Habsburg government traced the path of their urban development. The status of a free royal city, given by the Habsburg court, enabled the establishment of local political, economic and cultural elites and reflected in the general outline of the refined urban cores (Pušić 1987). This urban setting remained even nowadays, in spite of inevitable modifications brought by consequent historic periods, the pressures between international tendencies and local urban policies, changing life styles and trends. However, the process of change has been marked by two important periods, which will be underlined in this article—the period of socialism (from the end of the World War II to 1990) and the ongoing period of economic transition (from 1990).

Considering the socio-economic and spatial uniqueness of selected cases in Vojvodina, the article tends to provide an insight into the relationship between the pre-socialist general context, socialist urban-policy framework and related spatial (post-)socialist transformations of the historic urban centres. The results of this approach reveal that a specific system of urban policies and practice, as the one in ex-Yugoslavia, could blur the differences between pre-socialist, socialist and post-socialist urban development. Instead, the processes of decentralization and the preservation of local self-governance opened a new perspective on the phenomenon of (post-)socialist cities which preserved the elements of the continual urban development. However, it is important to notice that the socialist period also had its modifications visible in dominant urban policies—from the total negation of urban heritage during the 1950s to intensive efforts to preserve and revive it in the 1980s. The article also emphasizes the fact that local awareness represents a major condition for the successful adjustment to the innovative global agendas which tackle the sensitive issue of urban heritage.

2 Research structure and resources

The article is based on four case studies, and the empirical, inductive analysis is applied. The first part presents the theoretical background of the research, focusing on several relevant issues—the relationship between ideological context, urban-policy and urban transformation; the concepts of socialist and post-socialist cities; the treatment of historic cores in post-war and transitional societies; and the specificities of the local (Yugoslavian/Serbian) planning context. The second part introduces the local context during the two underlined periods. The main planning documents and prevailing practices are explained in accordance with their influence on urban space, especially in a domain of central historic areas. The third part presents the outcomes of four selected cases, contrasting the periods of socialism and post-socialist transition. The conclusion part uses the results of the comparative analysis as a starting point in formulating the main features of the relationship between historic context, planning framework (i.e. urban policies and practice) and spatial transformations.

Four small cities from Vojvodina (Pančevo, Sremska Mitrovica, Zrenjanin and Kikinda) are selected as the examples of this process, based on several criteria. Their environmental and historic backgrounds are similar, and they are categorized under The Classification of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS; French: *Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques*) as NUTS 4 level (10,000–100,000 inhabitants), but their position and the development of urban matrices differ. Since the WWII, the path of their urban transformations has been significantly influenced by their importance and position within state borders.

Zrenjanin has always had a central position, but it lost its importance during the transition period. The increased pace of development of Pančevo has been the result of its proximity to Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia/Serbia. Sremska Mitrovica improved its significance after the construction of the highway Ljubljana–Zagreb–Belgrade–Skopje (part of European the corridors E70 and E75, finished in 1977), while Kikinda, due to its peripheral/border location, has always lagged behind in terms of urban development. All these circumstances influenced the level and scope of urban restructuring, led by the national planning documents and local/metropolitan specificities. Resulting in the different treatment of the built environment in historic centres, the selected cases depict the (im)balance of inherited and recent spatial, functional and social elements. The main documents used for the analysis include: general/master plans, detailed urban plans of central areas, historic maps of the cities, legislation, agendas and charters, targeting the general treatment of historic centres, as well as the local interpretations (both legislative and spatial).

3 Urban heritage in ex-Yugoslav cities: between historic context and new urban policies

The World War II marked a radical historic shift for the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in many ways (Haug 2012). Aside to a significant destruction of the country and the above-average human casualties—7–8% of pre-war population (Tomasevich 2001), Yugoslavia witnessed the profound changes of political and economic systems and elites. It was transformed from a multi-party kingdom with a liberal market economy to a one-party socialist state with a state-controlled economy. The old, pre-war elite was completely swept away in the war, or shortly after it, through both emigration and the nationalization of properties and economy. New socialist elite emerged from the war, usually without previous experience for this position. Furthermore, the previous centralist state was divided into 6 republics and 2 autonomous provinces, which had an immense impact on later historic events (Burg 2014).

Taking into account previous changes, the post-war Yugoslavia was an “excellent polygon” for radical urban transformations. After the enactment of the constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1946), the settlements in Serbia and its province Vojvodina underwent through several transformation phases, which Obradović and Mitković (2012) identify as the periods of renewal and reconstruction (1948–1961), growth and economic reforms (1961–1974), self-management (1974–1985) and long-term economic stabilization (1985–1990).

The post-war situation in devastated cities and the general ideological background influenced the idea of long-term planning, determining also the first concept of renewal, which supported fast reconstruction of the country. The period between 1945 and 1953, as a period of centralized state administration with a centralized planning system, was structured around two important documents—The Basic Decree of Construction (1948) and The Basic Decree of General Urban Planning (1949). However, the political changes initiated in 1948, after Yugoslavia left the Soviet orbit following the conflict between their leaders, J. B. Tito and J. V. Stalin, influenced the shift towards economic liberalization, overall institutional decentralization and western cultural influences, which also reflected on the planning system (Stupar 2015). The concept of workers’ self-management was introduced during the early 1950s (Elander 1997), and the process of nationalization of land for construction purposes started in 1958 (SCT 1979). It influenced the changes of functions

within city centres, as well as the attitude of its citizens towards the maintenance of buildings and open spaces. The 1961 Law on Urban and Regional Spatial Planning marked the period of the so-called first generation of Serbian urban planning laws (Djordjević and Dabović 2009). The period of negligence continued in historic centres, because new urban plans treated them as zones for radical reconstruction.

The period of growth and economic reforms brought another set of urban laws, and the new Law on Urban and Regional Spatial Planning of Serbia was adopted in 1965. Djordjević and Dabović (2009) emphasize the fact that this document, complemented by urban planning legislation of all constitutional entities, redefined the role of the federal level. Providing a general framework for policies and harmonization, it increased a decentralized approach to planning and increased proliferation of planning documents for all spatial levels (from republics to municipalities). The 1974 Spatial Planning and Management Act, as well as its versions from 1985 and 1989, additionally supported this practice, but the main problem was discrepancies between high planning responsibilities and low implementation power on the lower levels of governance. Nevertheless, decentralization policy had an impact on territorial issues at municipal level—municipalities enacted and used separate norms and standards for local purposes in many territorially related sectors, such as urban planning or housing (Hirt and Stanilov 2014; Antonić 2016). For example, the cities presented in the article had their own development objectives in urban planning and implementation; some of them preferred new large-scale neighbourhoods, while others focused on small urban interventions throughout urban tissue. Some of the cities added new blocks while reconstructing their historic cores, while others tried to preserve the continuity.

The post-war treatment of urban heritage was shaped by the prevailing concept of urban reconstruction, based on Modernist principles which were embraced as the official expression of the dominant ideology and political system. Several exhibitions, which were organized in Belgrade and other Yugoslav urban centres, strongly promoted these ideas—for instance, the exhibition of the post-war reconstruction of British cities (1948), the Le Corbusier retrospective in 1948 (Kulić 2009), “The Contemporary Art in the USA” (1957/1958—including architectural examples of the International Style) and the exhibition of Swedish architecture (1959) (Stupar 2015). Consequently, this period clearly denied all the inherent values of the historic cores, which was the attitude visible in master plans as well. Proposing a radical reconstruction of city centres and their main streets, with a complete demolition of urban matrix and change of existing urban pattern, these plans suggested the replacement of traditional compact blocks by open mega-blocks, the negation of previous regulation and the introduction of new landmarks (Pušić 1987). This approach was justified by the ideological premise present in all communist/socialist countries, which marked historic centres as “former bourgeois hubs”. Therefore, the protection and restoration of old buildings and historic ambience were usually omitted, leaving them to decay, general negligence or even planned destruction (Djukić 2011). Nevertheless, some regional differences played a significant role in the perception of historic centres in socialist Europe. This was noticeable in the example of ex-Yugoslavia, along with the implementation of the concept of self-management which gave more freedom and independence to local self-governments (Hamilton et al. 2005). Recognizing the potential and uniqueness of historic heritage, some radical actions in urban cores were prevented. The increasing living standard enabled the development of the retail sector in historic centres, which additionally stimulated and supported their economic and social sustainability and attractiveness (Petrović 2004). This was visible through the different treatment of these areas in the first and the second/third generations of general urban plans of the cities in Vojvodina; the first

generation proposed the radical reconstruction of historic cores into new modernist centres (Pušić 1987), while the second and third generations recognized the value of heritage and its preservation (Djukić 2011).

At the global level, the 1964 Venice Charter, which continued the ideas of the 1931 Athens Charter, stressed the importance of preserving the inherited features of cities, and this influenced changes in perception of heritage and its protection (CATHM 1931; ICOMOS 1964). Environmental values, individual valuable objects and authenticity were emphasized, and the 1966 Resolution of ICOMOS, focusing on regeneration of historic urban areas in medium-sized cities, have further supported this approach to preservation. Yugoslav practice also adopted new recommendations and guidelines of protection in historic urban cores, producing studies for their protection and evaluation, as well as new master and detailed plans which integrated the results of studies into main principles of protection (Djukić 2011). This trend is visible in the master plans of Zrenjanin (1973), Kikinda (1978) or Sremska Mitrovica (1975) (Djukić 1998).

The period of the 1970s and the 1980s was marked by several international declarations, conventions and resolutions, which emphasized the important elements for the protection and revitalization of historic cores:

1. 1973 ICOMOS Resolution—streetscape in historic towns;
2. 1975 ICOMOS Declaration, Amsterdam—European architectural heritage;
3. 1976 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, Warsaw–Nairobi—the importance of historic areas;
4. 1976 ICOMOS Recommendations from Prague and Bratislava—revitalization of historic cities;
5. 1982 ICOMOS Charter, Dresden—Reconstruction of historic sites destroyed by war; and
6. 1987 ICOMOS Charter for Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas.

These documents significantly affected the urban renewal of historic urban centres in Yugoslavia (i.e. Serbia and Vojvodina). Two documents, in particular, had a special importance for local planners, and their elements were applied during the late 1970s and 1980s: (1) the 1973 Resolution of ICOMOS, focusing on façades in historic cities and defining criteria for upgrading and interpolation. The Master plan of Zrenjanin for the first time stressed the importance of the preservation of the historic centre; and (2) the 1975 Amsterdam Declaration, presenting the concept of integrative care and active protection. Consequently, during the 1980s, more attention was given to the regeneration of historic centres. It was implemented in Master Plans of Zrenjanin from 1980 and 1990, as well as in the Master Plan of Kikinda from 1981 (Djukić 2011).

The transition period, which started at the end of the 1980s, brought new challenges to cities, causing drastical changes (Hamilton et al. 2005; Stanilov 2007; Hirt and Stanilov 2014). Although the shift from the socialist to the post-socialist system was generally a turbulent one in all countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the case of ex-Yugoslavia was especially complex (Vujošević 2002; Vujošević and Nedović-Budić 2006; Nedović-Budić and Čavrić 2006). Consequently, Petrović (2005), illustratively, names the most problematic period of the 1990s as a “blocked transformation”. Along with introduction of political pluralism, market economy and privatization, the rising nationalism resulted in a civil war with far-reaching consequences to the stability of the region. All these circumstances reflected on urban policies and related planning

laws (Petovar 2003), creating a severe crisis of planning practice which unsuccessfully responded to socio-spatial challenges with a new legal framework defined by the 1995 Spatial Planning and Management of Settlements Act of the Republic of Serbia, and, respectively, the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (1996). According to Vujošević (2002), this condition could be best described as “the crisis-management planning” which actually supported the ongoing processes of (uncontrolled) market-driven development and privatization, allowing a high level of improvisation during implementation. This practice, combined with insufficient institutional changes and a lack of an economic development strategy, consequently damaged all urban systems and delayed the expected social development (Djordjević and Dabović 2009). However, the 1995 Law used sustainability as a planning premise, ensuring a certain level of public participation (via the public and professional audits of the draft), while the implementation was supposed to be guaranteed by several documents—site-specific conditions, urban permits and agreements. A similar fate happened with the 1996 spatial plan—although general reform at all levels of territorial planning was targeted by this plan, its implementation was very limited due to the complete absence of the necessary tools and adequate institutional and political environment for it (Vujošević and Spasić 2007).

After the political changes in October 2000, the socio-economic context of Serbia was further shifted towards a neo-liberal urban policy and planning, introducing different stakeholders and private investors instead of public funds. The process of urban growth and development was under the influence of both global and local forces, creating a setting exposed to globalization and rules of the international market, drastic shifts in the service sector and the progress of informational technologies (Dimitrovska Andrews 2005). The real-estate market was mostly interested in areas around traditional urban cores, which were exposed to a quasi-regeneration process and profit-led development, without consideration of existing regulations, environmental context or heritage values (Balestrieri 2013; Polić and Stupar 2015). As a response to this situation, the 2003 Law on Planning and Construction of the Republic of Serbia was adopted, extending the list of implementation tools and institutions and adding the category of building permits and implementation contracts. The Law also dealt with the problems of illegal construction, private ownership of urban land, as well as a new system of planning documents. In 2009, a new Law on Planning and Construction entered into force, harmonizing the areas of planning and construction with the Serbian Constitution and the EU regulations and standards. This document, along with the same-year enacted Law on State Survey and Cadastre, redefined the legal framework for real-estate investments. It also provided an additional legal basis for the protection of built cultural heritage (besides the 1994 Law on Cultural Heritage) stating that an urban plan can provide a certain level of protection of the urban fabric (via directives and design rules), including the structures of specific urban and architectural values. Nevertheless, there have been numerous problems in implementation, due to many factors:

1. Very limited financial funds which should follow the implementation of relevant planning actions;
2. Collusion between urban planning institutions and the institutes for protection of cultural monuments in this field—“privatization” of acquired data and competences;
3. Poor and inaccurate database of cultural heritage that has led to problematic planning actions; and
4. Planning rules regarding the protection of historic cores that are often very loose.

The complex socio-economic background of the transition period in Serbia was also visible at the level of the medium-sized cities. For example, the cities in Vojvodina experienced a similar development pattern as the medium-sized cities in Central European countries, where protected structures of historic urban cores represented a certain limitation for development—in a legal sense and due to their spatial and infrastructural inadequacy for contemporary needs. However, the processes of internationalization and globalization facilitated their restructuring, introducing new economies based on culture, creativity and the tourist industry, while diminishing residential functions, increasing traffic congestion and damaging cultural heritage (Hamilton et al. 2005; Dimitrovska Andrews 2005; Polić and Stupar 2015). The transition period is also recognizable on a morphological level which was affected by social and economic restructuring. Petrović (2009) identifies three types of changes: (1) the transformation of basic organizational principles of the social system; (2) social and urban restructuring, linked to the unfinished modernization (in comparison with the developed world); and (3) a change implying the inclusion in the global divisions of labour and power, on modified socio-economical grounds.

Following this pattern, it is important to notice that the substantial reconstructions and development of cities in Northern Serbia started during the 1990s. Due to a new spatial policy, the reconstruction process was followed by private investments, i.e. new construction requests and more intensive use of urban space. As in the case of many other post-socialist countries (Hirt and Stanilov 2014), the lack of local and national mechanisms which would control planning and landscaping, as well as the strong inflow of private capital, created an unregulated construction market. It is locally known as “investors’ urbanism” (Petovar 2003; Petrović 2009). These processes severely lowered the quality of life and activities in both public and private spaces, disturbing existing ambiance and urban identity, and damaging cultural and architectural heritage. Therefore, Gospodini (2002) claims that smaller- and medium-sized cities must protect heritage areas either from decline or from rapid development, in order to constantly attract new investment and new residents. However, there were some positive changes, too. Old city centres, representing traditional commercial zones, were the first areas absorbing the emerging retail sector (Vujović and Petrović, 2005). This trend caused functional differentiation, improved the value of these areas (Nagy 2001) and triggered transformation processes which enabled better pedestrianization, new urban design and introduced public art (Djukic 2011).

Although the period between 2001 and 2009 represented one of the most intense development phases for the real-estate market in the Serbian cities, after the 2009 economic crisis, the declining rate of new investment in residential, retail and other commercial buildings has halted construction activities. However, this period has also enabled the possibility for a different kind of spatial upgrading—the one focused on general quality of life, cultural potential, value of an existing/inherited urban milieu and a recognizable local identity (Vaiou and Kalandides 2016).

4 Restructuring the historic centres

4.1 Setting the urban threshold

The territory of Vojvodina, positioned in the north part of Serbia and the border between Central Europe and the Balkan Peninsula, has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic period (VSUJIA 1924; Medović 2001). The Romans established the first larger urban settlements

in the second part of the first century AD (Jeremić 2012), while the Slavs settled around the 520s (VSUJIA 1924). During the Roman period, Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) was established. During the Ottoman period (1551–1718) some cities received the status of *sanjaks* (seats of administration divisions) which caused their radical reconstruction (Pinon 2008), especially in the central zones. Before the eighteenth century, two types of urban matrices were dominant in Vojvodina—spontaneously generated (Kikinda) or created within the fortress (Zrenjanin, Pančevo) and later followed by the formation of organic urban tissue (Kojić 1961; Dukic 1998). The case of ancient Sirmium is rather unique, since it comprised the remains of three important periods—Roman (some of the main streets), Ottoman (“Serbian quarter”) and Habsburg (“Military-Frontier Quarter”).

The Habsburg Monarchy took control over this territory between 1699 and 1718, introducing significant socio-economic progress, expanding industrialization and initiating the planned and regulated development of cities in the late eighteenth century (Gutkind, 1972). The bylaws of Maria Theresia (1779) were used as the main planning and management document (VSUJIA 1924; Demeter et al. 2008), while some of its parts defined separation of the inner city (as a representative urban centre) and the periphery, as well as its design. According to the “prescribed” spatial and functional typology of buildings and their materialization, the inner city was supposed to be an area consisted of only representative civic houses, with longer facades oriented towards a street and made of high-quality building materials. On the other hand, the rules for suburbs were more flexible, allowing the construction of rural houses with gables oriented towards streets and the use of lower-quality building materials.

During the nineteenth century the main characteristics of cities in Vojvodina were created (Djukić 2007). Their built structure increased significantly, while the form of the main open public spaces remained, showing the higher level of urbanity. The concept introduced by the bylaws was additionally developed and included in a new document—the *Book of Building Rules* (1882), which became a part of subsequent regulation plans. The effects of these plans are still visible in many cities, particularly in inner city areas which became the protected sites of built heritage, creating a recognizable urban identity.

After Vojvodina became a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians during 1918–1929), all planning activities were subordinated to the three major laws—The Construction Act (1931), The Act of Designing Regulation Plans (1932) and The General Act of Settlement Planning (1936). They targeted issues of obligatory regulation plans and their implementation in several categories of settlements, but in spite of the well-elaborated elements, their implementation was almost non-existent due to the lack of penal provisions (Maksimović 1948; Obradović and Mitković 2012).

4.2 The socialist period (1945–1992)

Considering the fact that the first post-war documents followed the imperatives of fast renewal and reconstruction, it is not surprising that the respective Directive urban plan of the city of Sremska Mitrovica (1953), Directive urban plan of the city of Zrenjanin (1959) and the Directive urban plan of Pančevo (1961) proposed the radical urban transformation of the historic urban centres. Zrenjanin was supposed to replace a “high percentage of non-functional, neglected and inadequate buildings” with modern, hygienic and technically correct ones. Following the Modernist paradigm, the plan insisted on the morphological change of the urban pattern, proposing open blocks, varied street fronts and free-standing buildings ranging from 2 to 22 stories (Fig. 1). However, the plan also underlined the value

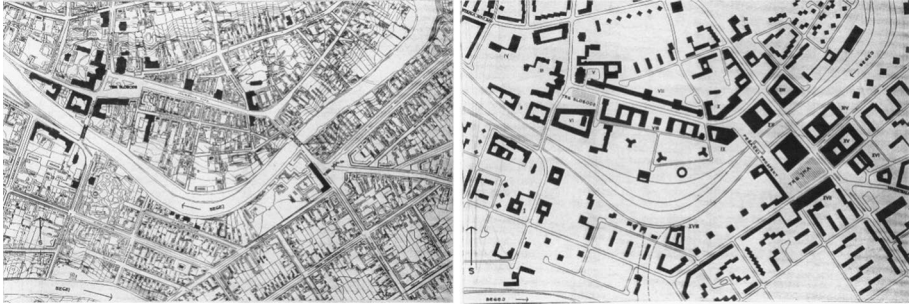


Fig. 1 The historic urban centre of Zrenjanin in 1958—situation before the Directive urban plan and the planned situation

of some areas of the city centre, described as old, stylish and unique, which should have been saved (Djukić 1998).

Similarly, the plan of Pančevo proposed another radical transformation of the historic urban centre, with a huge boulevard passing through the historic core. The existing buildings were supposed to be replaced with high rises. Finally, Sremska Mitrovica witnessed similar planning tendencies (Fig. 2)—new directive plan should enable “the creation of a new city on contemporary urban principles, but with the ‘remnants’ of past and uniqueness” from “very neglected settlement” (Pušić 1987). Consequently, radical reconstruction of street matrix in the historic core of the city was addressed as a key element of its modernization.

Due to the socio-economic circumstances (financial limitations, rapid urban growth), Zrenjanin implemented only minor interventions, including four buildings (Fig. 3), while the majority of the central area, its inherited image and identity were preserved. Meanwhile, in Pančevo, the lack of investment prevented the implementation of this idea and only a few new high rises were constructed according to the plan (Fig. 3).

The period of growth and economic reforms influenced the first post-war General/Master plan of Kikinda, created in 1967. In line with the changed circumstances, the plan did not insist on a radical change of the historic core and the main street, but it directed the replacement of rural housing with an urban model, increasing a degree of

Fig. 2 Radical reconstruction of street matrix by the Directive plan of Sremska Mitrovica from 1953. (Source: Pušić 1987)

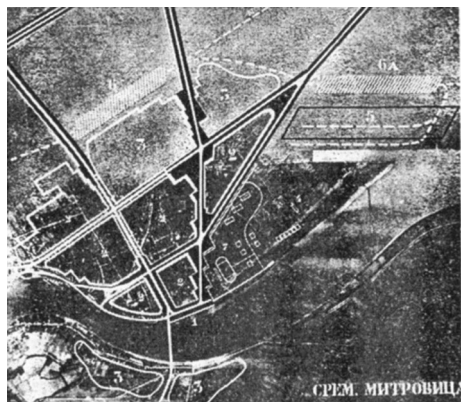




Fig. 3 High rises—the “socialist imprint” in the historic urban tissue of Zrenjanin and Pančevo. (Source: A. Djukić)

plot utilization. The plan was implemented in significant percentage in the following decades by forming several new “urban” blocks with multi-family housing around an inner core. Hence, the central part of Kikinda was widened and decently “urbanized” during the period of late socialism.

A year later, in 1968, the citizens of Zrenjanin protested against the previous plan and its treatment of the historic urban centre, which resulted in a new General/Master plan adopted in 1973. The plan promoted the idea of a “city within the city”, suggesting the special treatment and protection of the historic core, almost simultaneously with the promotion of the first generation of related international documents: the Venice Charter (1964) and the first Resolution of ICOMOS (1966). Therefore, this can be seen as the grassroots of citizen awareness regarding the value of historic core and the sensitivity of proposed interventions. This new “energy” left an impact on the urban planning of the cities in Vojvodina.

Then, the General/Master plans of Pančevo (1976), Zrenjanin (1980), Kikinda (1980) and Sremska Mitrovica (1982) were created during the era of self-management. Comprising the ideas of the second generation of relevant international resolutions and agendas from the 1970s, which elaborated and regionally customized the main elements of the protection of historic urban areas, they proposed the reconstruction of the historic centres, driven by specific local needs. For example, the main aim in Pančevo was the increase in density, while the existing promenade was to be transformed into a boulevard, following the general progress of the city. The General/Master plan of Zrenjanin proposed the concept of moderate growth and minimal interventions within the historic centre, while Kikinda proposed the relocation of single-family housing from the city centre, the introduction of additional (service) activities in the historic core, as well as the increase in their intensity—as an attempt to raise the attractiveness of the declining patterns and its centre. The outcomes of these plans were modest. Some new buildings were erected in the centre of Pančevo, but the street has kept its recognizable image. Major urban interventions omitted the historic core of Zrenjanin. Kikinda got five new buildings in the historic centre with the most imposing “Narvik” hotel, the highest structure in the whole district (Fig. 4), while the reconstruction of the main street and the main square represents its major success. It was fully implemented at the end of the 1980s, enabling better accessibility and flow within the area, without compromising the inherited image and identity of the city core (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4 The “socialist imprint” in the historic urban tissue of Kikinda. (Source: A. Djukić)



Fig. 5 Urban design of the main street in the historic centre of Kikinda, implemented in 1989. (Source: A. Djukić)

Similarly to Kikinda, the modernist interventions from late socialism in Sremska Mitrovica respected historic core, added new value to the existing urban fabric (Antonić and Djukić 2016). The introduction of only a few new buildings and one new square mainly recognized the already confirmed volumes and dimensions of the existing historic ambience (Fig. 6). Additionally, the newest square in the city from 1970s to 1980s (Fig. 6) fulfilled the last gap between two existing centres, separated from the Habsburg periods.

Finally, in 1990, Zrenjanin got its new General/Master plan which was adjusted to current global flows and prevailing local circumstances, influenced by the upcoming transition. It accepted and promoted the concept of sustainable development from Agenda 21 (Rio de Janeiro), dealing with an optimal relationship between indicators within city borders and proposing the measures for the regeneration of the historic centre (regarding ICOMOS recommendation from Prague and Bratislava, 1976) (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 The “socialist imprint” in the historic urban tissue of Sremska Mitrovica, from the late socialist era, as a qualitative interpolation in the historic core. (Source: B. Antonić)



Fig. 7 The overall commercialization of historic heritage and ambiance by advertisements in Pančevo. (Source: Regional institute for the protection of cultural monuments) and Kikinda (Author: Kristifor Kendjelac; Source: Wikipedia)

4.3 The post-socialist period

The period of “blocked transformation” (the 1990s), as described by Petrović (2005), brought only stagnation and decay to Serbia, including its urban centres. However, the private investments fuelled the limited transformations, often uncontrolled and damaging to urban space and historic centres. Therefore, at that time, the main challenge was represented by the outdated planning concept and its inefficient procedures, which created a significant gap between planned development and actual outcomes of the unregulated construction market. In this decade, our selected cities underwent changes mainly in the rise of the commercialization of the historic centres in the form of the inflow of small shops and services. Although this can be considered as a gain for the functional diversification of historic cores, related spatial consequences were negative—new private incentives did not respect the physical appearance of historic ambience.

However, the next decade, especially its second part, introduced some new concepts regarding the treatment of central historic areas. For example, the new General/Master plan of Zrenjanin, adopted in 2007, emphasized the role of open public spaces, parking places and pedestrian connections between the main street, square and river banks. Furthermore, during the previous years, the main changes in the city centre were related to the design of a pedestrian zone (2006) and the functional changes of the ground floors of buildings along the main street. The implementation of urban design of the main square and the main street started in 2006, and it has been in progress since then. Unfortunately, these interventions have influenced the character of the historic core and main street and squares, which were the most intensive places in the city. They left them with less activities and users, because the ground floors have been occupied by bank branch offices, business offices and shopping malls. Unlike other commercial activities such as cafes and shops, they are not transparent and do not “communicate” with outdoor space. Moreover, the redesign of the ground floor of the main square and the main street has influenced the comfort of the outdoor space. The existing trees were removed, and the whole area was paved with concrete blocks (Fig. 8) causing an extremely uncomfortable microclimate—very hot during summer and cold and windy during winter. The outdoor furniture has been changed, disturbing the urban ambience and the perception of the historic heritage. Consequently, the number of users has decreased due to the decreased attractiveness, liveability and the comfort of open public spaces.

Pančevo adopted the new General/Master plan in 2008, more than 3 decades after the previous one. In the meantime, funding was mostly oriented towards development and reconstruction of suburban areas, while the city centre stagnated. The level of retail trade in the city has not reached the same level as in Zrenjanin, due to the close proximity of Belgrade and its well-developed shopping areas and malls. The preservation and protection of historic heritage were also considered in this period, but the lack of resources and investment prevented any action. Therefore, the new Master plan underlines the poor condition of open public spaces and historic urban centre, proposing moderate changes of physical structure and focusing on the preservation of existing identity and city image. In fact, Pančevo is unique among studied cities because its recently formed pedestrian zone does not concur with the main street. This has produced noticeable obstacles in the urban development of the historic core—the pedestrian zone has attracted only bars and cafes, leaving the bulk of local shops in the main street. Consequently, the space of this street is still shared between cars and pedestrians, causing conflicting situations and the general



Fig. 8 The post-socialist interventions in historic core of Zrenjanin—the main square before and after reconstruction. (Source: A. Djukić)

suffering of pedestrians, as the more vulnerable actors in their competition for space (Djukić 2011).

The example of Sremska Mitrovica reveals another transition outcome. Actually, this period has brought new impulse for the historic centre, which witnessed emerging private incentive and retail expansion. The major urban transformation was the creation of new pedestrian zones in 2008 (Fig. 9) that again became a major place for socialization (Djukić 2011). It has also had a positive economic influence on the outer part of the centre, where heritage preservation and general regulation have not been very strict. Triggering the commercialization of the whole area, the historic core increased its value, although some negative sides should be noticed—the city image has not been appropriately represented by the design (e.g. the use of marine symbols in the pedestrian zone, even though the nearest sea is hundreds of kilometres away), while nearby streets have faced traffic congestion. Moreover, the problems with the deteriorated physical aspect of new retail and residential buildings have occurred (Antonić and Djukić 2016). One of the reasons for such a situation might be a postponed enactment and implementation of the new generation of urban plans, which did not include the adequate regulation of urban space. For example, the General/Master plan of Sremska Mitrovica was adopted in 2009, i.e. almost 2 decades after the beginning of transition. However, one of its aims was dedicated to the affirmation of urban ambience, historic heritage and city skyline, while the protection and the preservation of historic heritage were elaborated in a separate chapter (CSM 2009). The specific problem of Sremska Mitrovica has also been noticed in the last decades—the southern half of the historic core is under protection as an uncovered archaeological site, which means that every new intervention needs to fulfil strict rules of the responsible institution for the protection of cultural heritage. In practice, many new construction plots in this area have been “frozen” for several years due to this obstacle.

The protection of the ambience of the historic core is also an objective of the new General/Master plan of Kikinda (2014). As a result, a set of urban codes for reconstruction and preservation was proposed—preservation of existing regulations and building lines; preservation of existing land subdivisions; preservation of compact blocks; citing the existing facilities which are retained; preservation of the heritage of great value and harmonization between protected and new buildings; preservation of the vertical regulation of the protected environment in the urban core. The strong emphasis on physical regulation is not surprising—there have not been any changes of design or any new buildings within the



Fig. 9 The post-socialist interventions in the historic core of Sremska Mitrovica—the main square before and after reconstruction. (Source: B. AntoniĆ)

historic core since the 1980s. However, during the last 25 years, the main street and the main square have changed the ground-floor activities, as in the case of Zrenjanin. The business offices and shopping malls have replaced small-scale commercial and service activities, but the outcome is slightly different—even though there are fewer users in the main street, the main square still attracts their attention (Djukic 2011).

5 Conclusions

The study presented in this article was focused on the treatment of historic cores influenced by the socialist and post-socialist urban policies and planning practice. The analysis of four selected cities in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina reveals an unorthodox mixture of external influences and internal conditions defined by the specific position and character of ex-Yugoslavia, a non-aligned state which merged socialist/planned and capitalist/market-driven economy. The amalgamation of western and eastern cultural and professional influences, upgraded with comprehensive decentralization policies, additionally affected cities, reinvigorating their local traditions and legacy. In the cities with inherited local self-government awareness and preserved historic core (e.g. four selected cases), this combination has left noticeable impact through the unprecedented establishment of locally adjusted policies and planning standards and norms. With minor disruptions, this situation has been preserved through the problematic post-socialist period.

The analysed historic urban cores represent excellent spatial polygons for the study of the relationship between urban transformations and dominant urban policies due to their continuous development during the last 100 years. The post-war years (the late 1940s and 1950s) certainly represented the greatest challenge which brought aspirations towards radical urban transformation in policy agenda; however, specific political conditions in ex-Yugoslavia redirected these intentions. Total planning, as a panacea included in urban policies of most socialist countries, was not applied in ex-Yugoslav cities. Therefore, they did not witness extremes in urban planning typical for socialist cities (e.g. total destruction/replacement of old urban centres with modernist structures or their total preservation as a historic décor).

The presented study elaborates several reasons for this unique urban development. Differently from strict centralism and weak local government in most communist/socialist countries (Elander 1997), decentralization policy in ex-Yugoslavia allowed local awareness and the development of local approaches in urban planning. Historic centres mirrored these tendencies. Furthermore, better professional and cultural exchange with western countries introduced the contemporary trends of preservation and use of urban heritage. The adoption and implementation of several relevant international declarations, conventions and resolutions in the 1970s and the 1980s additionally upgraded this process.

Thus, historic centres clearly confirm that urban policies applied in the cities of ex-Yugoslavia during socialism were not rigid and centralized. The country was open for their constant modification and evolution, while recent trends were gradually embraced and implemented by both local authorities and citizens. For example, the protests of the citizens of Zrenjanin in 1968, demanding the preservation of the historic core, clearly show this attitude. Additionally, the relatively fast production of master/general plans, as major urban-policy documents, confirmed the readiness of local political and professional elites to be up-to-date and to introduce novelties.

The innovative urban policies, created and adopted in the socialist Yugoslavia, are also visible in urban space, where local environment was carefully considered by divergent planning practices. For example, four selected cities locally adjusted international documents and contemporary knowledge, embedding them in their urban matrix. In Kikinda, housing densification in the inner centre was a method to increase the urbanity of city core; in Pančevo, several high-rise buildings were the only remnants of modernist aspirations; in Sremska Mitrovica, new buildings were carefully customized to historic volumes and sizes in order to preserve historic setting.

These divergent approaches have also been prolonged during the post-socialist period. Analysed cities have applied different approaches in order to position themselves in the emerging market economy and respond to the intensive commercialization of urban space. However, the transition to market economy already started during the late socialism and was included in the main policy documents (e.g. Master/General plan of Zrenjanin from 1990), bridging the gap between two opposing planning paradigms and their urban policies which occurred in other socialist countries. Consequently, the transition between socialist and post-socialist framework represented a long-lasting process in the case of ex-Yugoslav cities.

The higher level of continual urban development, noticeable in cities through different political and economic systems, was the result of the unique Yugoslav position during the Cold War and its comprehensive decentralization efforts. This practice, especially on the level of urban issues, created diverse innovative approaches to local problems and led into a permanent transformation of planning paradigm. As a result, the planning theory and practice supported local self-awareness and the continuity of local traditions, providing a different interpretation of urban development, untypical for a socialist/communist mainstream. The traditional centres, as the most sensitive and historically challenging areas of every socialist city, benefited from these decentralized, locally specific urban policies conducted ex-Yugoslavia, ensuring the various levels of urban continuity, uncharacteristic for the Eastern bloc.

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