

## URBAN ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR REALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS IN POST-SOCIALIST BELGRADE

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### Abstract

*The paper emphasizes the specific role of urban architectural competition as an instrument of social housing planning and design practice in Belgrade, in the post-socialistic context of Serbia. The social housing projects which are realized through design competitions represent a result of competitive and equal participation of the broadest professional public and application of clearly defined and transparent program requirements and evaluation criteria. The importance of public urban architectural competition has been recognized already in the initial stage of establishing the national social housing system from the beginning of the 21st century, while its obligatory application in the social housing development projects has been regulated through the established legislative framework in the period from 2009 to 2016. Based on the example of completed and uncompleted competition projects in Belgrade, the research discusses the significance and the potential contribution of this instrument for promoting the sustainability of design solutions in the social housing sector, as well as the restrictions in their previous application due to the lack of appropriate technical regulations, formally established criteria and guidelines, and underdeveloped body of relevant expert research. The authors recognize that the exclusion of urban architectural competition from the social housing programs prevents the further promotion of social housing design issues within the professional public in Serbia, which may limit the improvement in knowledge on specific spatial and functional requirements, contemporary design challenges and innovative methodological approaches in this field.*

**Key words:** social housing, urban architectural competition, post-socialist Belgrade, Serbia.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a housing sector that enjoys government support, social housing in Serbia belongs to the domain of urban functions of direct public interest, where the engagement of the broadest professional public through urban architectural competition is of crucial importance in terms of planning and design.<sup>3</sup> This paper will look at the urban architectural competition as an instrument for the realization of social housing programs in post-socialist Serbia, while the experiences and results of its application will be discussed through representative examples of housing ideas that have and those that have not been realized in practice in Belgrade.

In the existing modest pool of social housing in Serbia, which, according to the 2011 Population Census, accounts for less than 1% of the total number of apartments,<sup>4</sup> a significant share of new buildings was constructed based on none other than these awarded design solutions in urban architectural competitions. These public competitions were carried out in the initial stage of development of the social housing system in Serbia after 2000, which preceded the adoption of the first Law on Social Housing (2009) and other relevant acts, as well as regulations that govern planning and design in this area. At the same time, competitions called in this period were a pioneer attempt and a test field for examining and collecting design ideas, as well as for testing the acceptability of preliminary technical standards and guidelines for this housing category. Excluding the competitions for non-profitable housing and alternative housing solutions, since 2000 onwards there have been 12 conceptual design competitions for apartment buildings and housing complexes in Serbia intended for public renting, under the umbrella of several programs. Of these, seven competitions that have been implemented were organized within the SIRP program,<sup>5</sup> while the remaining five were organized by the City of Belgrade through various programs and projects.

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<sup>3</sup> The Rulebook on the Manner and Procedure for Calling and Implementing an Urban Architectural Public Competition ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 31/2015) defines the urban architectural competition as a "procedure to prepare and announce the call, as well as to collect and evaluate the authors' solutions to a given topic in the area of urbanism, architecture, landscaping and other associated areas" (Article 2).

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2011 Population Census, 98.3% of inhabited apartments in Serbia are private-owned, only 0.9% are in the state-owned category, while 0.8% are in the other ownership categories (SORS, 2011). It should be borne in mind that according to the census methodology, the state-owned category of apartments mostly includes apartments that were not purchased during the privatization period and which are largely used under indefinite lease contracts.

<sup>5</sup> The Settlement and Integration of Refugees Programme – SIRP is the first important social housing program in Serbia, implemented in seven towns and municipalities between 2005 and 2008 with donations from the Italian government, in cooperation with the UN Habitat, local self-government units and relevant government authorities. SIRP was a pioneer program in the process to introduce

Of the five urban architectural competitions for social housing in Belgrade, only one has been realized in practice, however, several competitions that did not see the light of day were of extreme importance as they offered valuable design solutions and program and methodological instructions for future practice in the area of housing support in Serbia.

## 2. SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE POST-SOCIALIST CONTEXT OF SERBIA AND BELGRADE

The term social housing was not formally introduced in Serbia until after 2000, and according to the definition in the 2009 Law on Social Housing (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 72/2009) it implies “housing of an appropriate standard ensured with the government support to households which, due to social, economic or other reasons, are unable to acquire an apartment under market conditions”. An incentive for the introduction of the social housing concept in Serbia, based on the Western European model, was the increasing problem of refugees<sup>6</sup> and unresolved housing needs, for which the government in the 1990s did not have an adequate systemic solution<sup>7</sup>.

The policy of allocating apartments according to the housing needs criterion<sup>8</sup> and the economic sustainability of the subsidy system, in the sense of the return on investment, were among the key determinants for the definition and understanding of the concept of social housing in post-socialist Serbia. According to Hegedüs (Hegedüs, 2013:6-7), former socialist countries did not have a sector that could be labelled as “social housing”, given that in the formal housing market

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and institutionalize social housing in Serbia and develop a new housing policy at the state and local levels in the period following the year 2000. Through this program, a new housing fund in municipal ownership was set up, first municipal housing agencies were established, local housing strategies were adopted and the proposed Law on Social Housing was defined in 2004. Three main components of the program were the following: 1) housing, 2) support to municipalities and 3) socio-economic and civil integration of vulnerable groups. In the process of implementing social housing pilot projects, public urban architectural competition was recognized as a means to obtain better housing solutions based on innovative design approaches and experiences of good European practice (see Ramirez *et al.*, 2008; UN-HABITAT, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Adoption of the National Strategy for Resolving Problems of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in 2002, whose drafting process was coordinated by the Commissariat for Refugees with the participation of the UNHCR, UNDP and OCHA, represented a return of government intervention in the housing area and the start of the future social housing system in Serbia.

<sup>7</sup> Leaving apartments to market mechanisms in the 1990s led to an increase in the volume of illegal construction as an informal form of independent resolution of housing needs of a large share of the population, including refugees and internally displaced persons (see Bajić *et al.*, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> According to R. Robinson’s definition (Robinson, 1979:55-56), the “housing need” implies “the quantity of housing that is required to provide accommodation of an agreed minimum standard and above for a population given its size, household composition, age distribution, etc. *without* taking into account the individual household’s ability to pay for the housing assigned to it”.

there was no need to offer housing assistance (due to large subsidies), while the informal market was not officially recognized. Instead of social housing, the author points out to the existence of the so-called “public rental” sector as a comprehensive category which included different types of public housing.<sup>9</sup> The principles of the socialist housing policy in the former Yugoslavia associated the resolution of housing needs with the employment criterion, and not the housing needs criterion (Petovar, 2003; Petrović, 2004). According to Petovar (2003:183), bearing in mind the meaning of the term “social housing” in developed democratic countries, the public housing sector in Serbia was not the same as social housing, neither before nor after the purchase of apartments.

According to Mojović (2015), there were three important periods in the development of the institutional framework for the new social housing policy in Serbia since 1990:

- *The first period, from 1990 until 2000*, was marked by the transition “from the state of social bliss to a liberal economy”;
- *The second period, from 2000 until 2009*, was a period of “democratization, decentralization and the beginning of housing reforms”; while
- *In the third period, after 2009*, a “new framework of public intervention was established – the social housing system”.

These three stages of the two and a half decades of post-socialist development housing support institutions in Serbia were also marked by the establishment of a new, basic legislative framework in the area of social housing, as well as the adoption of other relevant strategic and design documents which, to a lesser or greater extent, directly or indirectly, dealt with the problems of social integration and accommodation of vulnerable groups. The 2021 Belgrade General Plan from 2003 (GP) (“Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade”, No. 27/03) played a pioneer role in introducing and defining the concept of social housing in Serbia, in the sense of housing intended for socially vulnerable groups that need assistance in resolving their housing issue. This urban development plan defined the socially vulnerable categories, and provided certain guidelines for design and construction standards, as well as the criteria for the selection of sites for social housing in the territory of the GP. The GP documents included a list of 58 sites with a total of 228.6 ha, designated for this purpose and located primarily in inner and outer suburbs (Fig. 1).

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<sup>9</sup> As three special types of “public rental housing”, the following are listed: enterprise housing (in the Soviet Union, Poland and Slovakia), council housing (in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, etc.) and the rental stock under the shared control of the councils and the enterprises (in the former Yugoslavia).

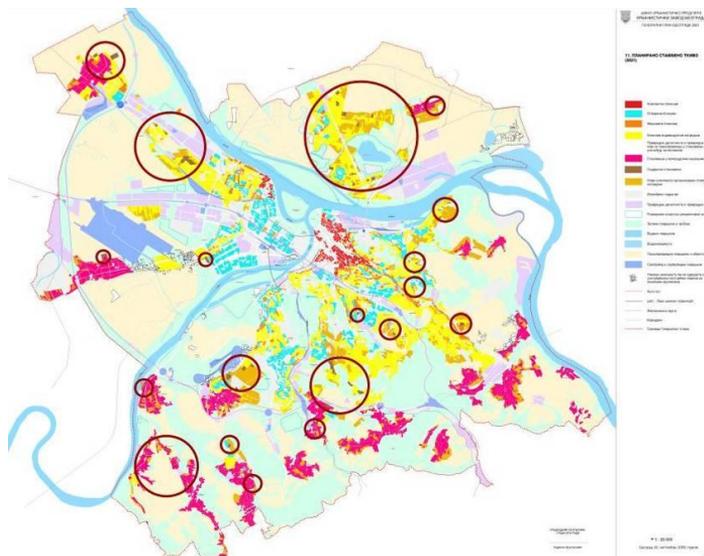


Figure 1. Diagram of sites designated for social housing construction in Belgrade (according to: 2021 Belgrade GP)

In 2003, parallel with the drafting of this plan, the Belgrade Urban Planning Bureau was working on the establishment of special technical standards in social housing planning and design in the territory of the City of Belgrade, but this rulebook was never adopted because of the pending adoption of the Law on Social Housing (Damjanović & Gligorijević, 2010).

The Law on Social Housing adopted in 2009 recognized the need to ensure conditions for the sustainable development of social housing in Serbia, including the prescription of standards and norms for planning, design, construction and maintenance of social housing units. The Decree on Standards and Norms for Planning, Design, Construction and Conditions for Use and Maintenance of Social Housing Apartments (hereinafter: Decree), adopted in 2013, is the only official legal act passed to date which defines the basic criteria, guidelines and standards of planning and design of housing units, buildings and apartments in the new system of social housing in Serbia. Before this document was adopted, projects for social housing construction in Serbia were implemented without appropriate technical regulations or formally established directives on urban planning and architecture.

Despite the lack of a rounded social housing system, in the period from 1990 until today, a large number of government construction programs were carried out in Serbia. One group of programs focused on providing apartments in private ownership, under subsidized conditions, the second group aimed at constructing apartments in public ownership for leasing purposes, while the third group

comprises alternative housing programs (Mojović *et al.*, 2009). An overview and descriptive analyses of these programs, implemented in Serbia and Belgrade, were presented in various scientific and expert studies (*see* Mojović *et al.*, 2009; Belgrade Urban Planning Bureau, 2009; Damjanović & Gligorijević, 2010; Nikolić, 2011; Čolić Damjanović, 2015), however, empirical research into the results remains rather modest.

The current model for providing social housing in Serbia is characterized by residues from the past that are still notable, considering the negligible share of social apartments in the total housing fund, the limited financing and construction volume, and the focus on providing for the socially most vulnerable beneficiaries. According to Petrović (2013:250), social housing in Serbia is provided through the patchwork system, given that “the links between different social housing programs are frail and accidental, the accountability for the sector is dispersed across stakeholders and institutions, and there is a lack of capacity and resources.” Among the main problems, Petrović also lists the lack of the required legislation, obsolescence of or inadequate coordination between laws, the lack of available apartments and issues related to public acceptance of social housing in designated neighborhoods (*ibid*).

### **3. ROLE OF THE URBAN ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION IN PROVIDING SOCIAL HOUSING IN SERBIA**

#### **3.1 Legislative aspect**

The importance of the urban architectural competition, as an instrument in the realization of programs and projects of social housing construction, was recognized in Serbia as early as the initial stage of establishing the social housing system following the year 2000. The Proposed Technical Rulebook for Planning and Design of Social Housing Complexes and Apartments from 2003, which was never adopted (Belgrade Urban Planning Bureau, 2003), noted that “the introduction of urban architectural competition for planning and design of the most cost-effective and at the same time aesthetically and functionally satisfactory models for social housing” or, alternatively, “the formation of a group that would be tasked with this subject matter on a continuous basis” can contribute to the cost-effectiveness of social housing construction.

The obligation to hold urban architectural competitions as a precondition for social housing construction was regulated in the established legislative framework for social housing following 2009, which was done directly through the Decree adopted in 2013 as secondary legislation to the Law on Social Housing (2009). The Decree envisaged the obligation to hold urban architectural

competitions within social housing programs “in order to obtain optimal spatial, urban and architectural solutions”, “except in cases where a decision on issuing a building permit has already been issued for a certain site which is proposed for the program and which meets other conditions of the program” (Article 6). This obligation is associated with the provision on “encouraging innovative urban planning and design solutions” (Article 6, paragraph 1), the importance of which has been recognized in the National Social Housing Strategy from 2012.

The possibility to define the obligation to hold a competition through urban (general and detailed regulation) plans in order to find solutions for locations which are of importance to the local self-government unit is set out in Article 64 of the Law on Planning and Construction (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 72/2009), while the competition as a public procurement procedure is defined in the Law on Public Procurement (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 124/2012, 14/2015 and 68/2015), under “design contest” (Article 38). A separate legal act which governs the procedure for the urban architectural competition in more detail is the Rulebook on the Manner and Procedure for Calling and Implementing an Urban Architectural Public Competition (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 31/2015).

Although the Law on Social Housing envisaged the obligation to announce an urban architectural competition within the social housing construction program, the provisions of the Law on Public Procurement do not apply to those procurements, that is, design competitions, “which the contracting authority is under obligation to conduct in accordance with the procedure established based on a contract under an international obligation, act on a donation or by foreign international organizations, when they are entirely financed from such international sources” (Article 7). In case of procurements and design competitions financed largely by an international organization or an international financial institution, this Law envisages that the parties should agree on the procurement procedure to be applied. Considering that international sources and donations are among the key sources for financing social housing construction in Serbia, the obligation to hold the urban architectural competition for this purpose has been narrowed, in the legal sense, to that smaller portion of programs financed from the budget.

The newly-adopted Law on Housing and Building Maintenance from 2016 (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 104/2016) does not delve into procedures for the implementation of housing support programs and projects directly, but this issue is expected to be defined through appropriate secondary legislation, in accordance with the earlier practice of regulating aspects of planning and design in this field.

### 3.2 Design aspect

There is a view that announcing public competitions in the area of affordable housing is a particularly justified and desired practice, as noted by American architect Michael Pyatok:

Housing competitions can play an important role in advocating the cause of those who need and have a right to well-designed, affordable housing. In this respect, a competition is most effective if the project gets built or if the ideas generated get wide distribution. (Pyatok, 1993:148).

Pyatok also points out the cost-effectiveness of these competitions, given that with minimum financial investments it is possible to obtain numerous and quality architectural solutions, however, he also emphasizes their importance for the promotion of this housing issue through self-education of experts (*ibid*). The promotion of social housing through practice is particularly important in Serbia bearing in mind the limited contemporary experience, as well as scientific and expert research studies on this new housing model which differs greatly from the socially-owned housing of the socialist era.

The exclusion of the public architectural competition narrows the room for coming up with innovative, conceptually different and optimal housing solutions, which can reflect on the very quality of their realization. Speaking about the public architectural competition as “a contest of ideas” and the best manner for implementing public procurements, architect Ivan Rašković underlined that other procedures entail the issue of uncertain quality of the final project “because they are done without competition from others, as a safe job, and the only condition they should meet are technical norms and legal conditions, which, on their own, cannot create good architecture” (Rašković, 2012). According to Rašković, the possibility to select an optimal solution, in accordance with the defined assessment criteria, is the key advantage of the public competition, while its other features are the *broadness of the call, the issue of essence, the issue of quality and democracy*. Within the terms of a competition for a design solution, according to the architect, it is possible to achieve the “architectural value” as the main element of good architecture which, on the other hand, is not an obstacle for the criteria of cost-effectiveness, engineering rationality and energy stability (*ibid*). Competition projects are created as a product of competitive, equal participation of the broadest professional public and the application of clearly defined and transparent program requirements and assessment criteria (*see Manić et al.*). As they are directly connected with public interest, and encourage innovation and creative expression, public urban architectural competitions require the highest level of professional and social responsibility.

If the urban architectural competition is to encourage the self-education of experts and provide architectural solutions of good quality, the program fundamentals and design requests defined in the call have to provide appropriate guidelines to participants, in accordance with the specific issue and task. This element of the tender procedure has to be carefully drafted and based on appropriate expertise and experience, especially in cases of areas for which there are no specified national guidelines or regulations in terms of urban and architectural design, as was the case with social housing in Serbia for a prolonged period of time. International guidelines for housing policy and practice (UNECE, 2006; UNECE, 2015) and scientific and expert papers (e.g. Milić, 2002, 2006; Reeves, 2005; Čolić Damjanović, 2015; Bajić, 2017; Bajić & Pantović, 2011) indicate that in order to improve the quality of social housing there has to be an integral recognition of social, environmental and economic principles of sustainability in the domain of urban planning and design. In that context, the specific criteria for assessing competition designs<sup>10</sup> have to be defined on these bases, and their consistent implementation ensured in the judging process.

Research into the results of urban architectural competitions is of particular importance for the assessment of the overall quality of recent social housing construction in Serbia, as it provides a clear insight into the procedure for the realization of the solution, from program fundamentals to the selection of the construction project. It is a fact, however, that there are few published research studies<sup>11</sup> about competition-related experiences although these competitions have given a significant contribution to the initial development of social housing in Serbia.

#### **4. PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE WITH COMPETITIONS IN SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS IN BELGRADE AFTER 2000**

This chapter will look at several social housing programs and projects initiated in Belgrade in the period from 2000 to date via public urban architectural competitions, whose results can also be perceived as a representational indicator of the potential role, as well as of the actual scope of competitions in this area of housing in Serbia.

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<sup>10</sup> The assessment criteria, defined in the current Rulebook on the Manner and Procedure for Calling and Implementing an Urban Architectural Public Competition (Article 42), are classified in five groups: 1) *spatial criteria*; 2) *program criteria*; 3) *economic criteria*; 4) *aesthetic criteria*; and 5) *environmental criteria*.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to publications on competition results in the SIRP program (UN Habitat, 2008; Ramirez, L. *et al.*, 2008), several papers were published on social housing competitions in Belgrade and Serbia (see Bajić & Manić, 2013; Bajić *et al.*, 2014; Đokić *et al.*, 2015). Some social housing projects realized through urban architectural competition were also analysed in several more recent but unpublished doctoral theses (Vesić, 2015; Stojanović, 2015; Čolić Damjanović, 2015; Bajić, 2017).

The first urban architectural competition for social housing in Belgrade, as well as Serbia, was the *Competition for a conceptual architectural and urban solution for social housing units and groups in Belgrade*, published in 2003 within the *Program to construct 5,000 social apartments for Belgrade residents*. This housing program was prepared in June 2003 by the Belgrade City Assembly in order to remove “unsanitary residential areas” from the central city zone and construct 5,000 apartments for Belgrade residents living in the direst conditions, most notably for the Roma, but also for refugees and internally displaced persons. The aim of the housing program was to enable social affirmation and integration of the socially most vulnerable population, as well as to improve the overall housing quality in Belgrade. The idea behind the urban architectural competition implied the creation of models of housing assemblies and their groups within three types (individual, collective and for multiple families) on a 2–2.5 ha site, which could be applied to various locations in the city designated for social housing construction by the 2021 Belgrade General Plan. The housing group was to have 150 housing units with a more modest level of refinement and surface (5–15 m<sup>2</sup> per person), as well as the accompanying non-residential facilities and buildings for socio-economic, recreational and other activities of future residents, in accordance with their specific needs and lifestyle (sites for the collection of secondary materials for recycling, firewood sheds, laundry rooms, etc.). Apart from taking into account the socio-cultural and economic features of the target group of beneficiaries, the task of the competition provided a significant stimulus for creative research and innovation, and consequently resulted in a good quality of proposed urban and architectural assemblies. One that particularly stands out is the concept of the “new Belgrade *partaja*,”<sup>12</sup> by Vladimir Milić and Jasmina Đokić, which won the first prize in the category of individual and collective housing, and the concept of urban and architectural “module” of the second-ranked design for individual housing, whose authors are Darko and Milenija Marušić (see Bajić *et al.*, 2014) (Fig. 2).

In addition to the urban architectural competition, this housing program included research of locations for future housing construction, drafting of urban design projects for several locations, as well as the drafting of the first proposal for a technical rulebook on social housing<sup>13</sup> (Vuksanović-Macura & Macura, 2007).

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<sup>12</sup> A group of attached houses with common courtyard.

<sup>13</sup> In early 2003, when launching the *Program to construct 5,000 social apartments for Belgrade residents*, the Belgrade Urban Planning Bureau took up the obligation to propose a Technical Rulebook for Planning and Design of Social Housing Construction Complexes and Apartments, whose conceptual decisions were largely determined by the principles of the housing program. In accordance with the economic situation at the time, it was conceived that the Rulebook should define the minimum standards for designing social apartments and that it should be an annex to the then applicable Decision on the Conditions and Technical Norms for Designing Residential Buildings and Apartments from 1983.

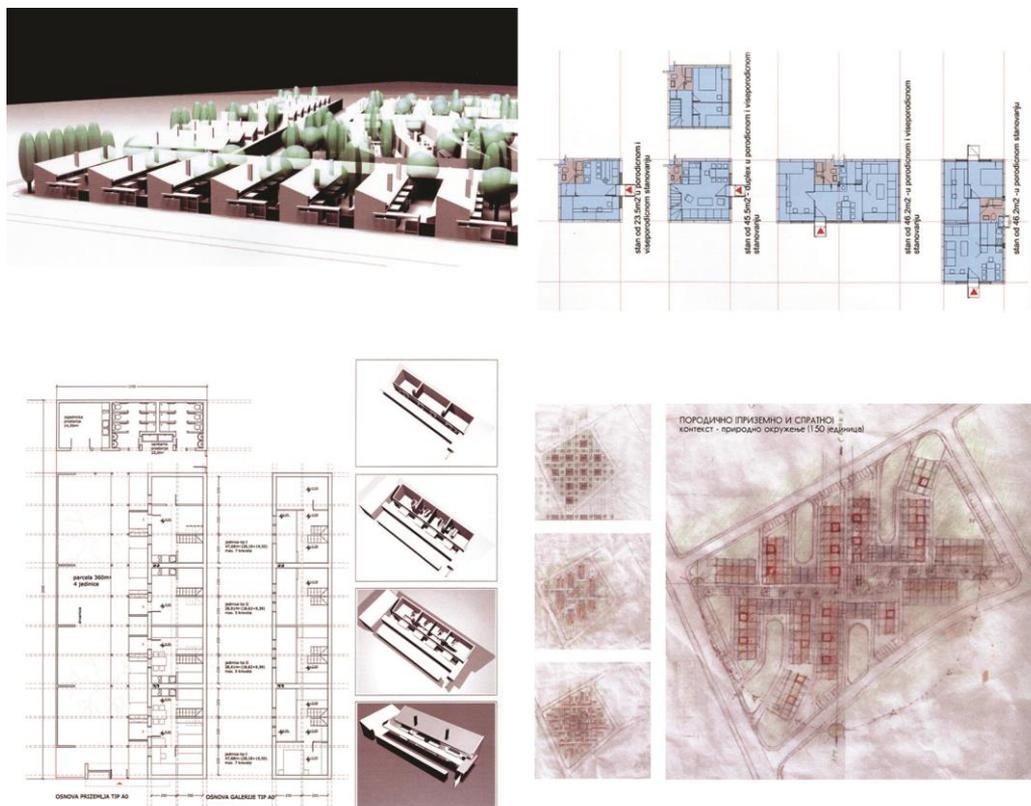


Figure 2. Individual and collective housing – 1<sup>st</sup> prize (authors: V. Milić and J. Đokić) (left) and individual housing – 2<sup>nd</sup> prize (authors: M. and D. Marušić) (right)

Source: DAB, 2003

The program was in force until mid-January 2004, but only a small number of apartments was constructed within the program (Amnesty International, 2011), and the solutions obtained at the competition were never applied in practice.

To continue the earlier initiatives on social housing planning and construction in Belgrade, the City of Belgrade announced the *Urban architectural survey competition for preliminary design for the IGM Trudbenik complex in Višnjička Banja, in Belgrade* in 2005, for the purpose of composing an urban design plan for this location. The program of the competition for the location spanning a total of around 45ha envisaged a low density residential area with market-based and social housing, as well as the accompanying public, commercial and recreational facilities, including the improvement of the current unsanitary housing and bringing order into this area. The planned share of social housing was 30%, with the option of designating it for multiple families or as individual housing, or a

combination of the two. This competition call, however, did not treat the issues of social housing as a specific task which should be resolved through special design criteria, but rather participants were expected to produce solutions that would mainly promote potential locations and offer a rational response to complex requirements or its inherent and attributed characteristics (see Bajić and Manić, 2013; Bajić *et al.*, 2014). According to the jury, the award-winning work by Darko Marušić, Milenija Marušić, Đorđe Alfirević and Ana Čarapić stood out with its exceptional level of professionalism, program consistency, tailoring of the residential area to the terrain and recognisability, while the solution was particularly praised for its proposal for the integration of the Roma residential area into the new residential area through gradual transformation, whereby the usual physical and social segregation of the minority and poor population would be reduced (DAB, 2005) (Fig. 3). This urban architectural competition, just like the earlier one from 2003, was never realized.



Figure 3. The 1<sup>st</sup> ranked work (authors: M. and D. Marušić, Đ. Alfirević, A. Čarapić)  
Source: DAB, 2005

In 2006, the City of Belgrade carried out the only urban architectural competition actually implemented in practice in Belgrade, which included the category of social housing intended for public renting. This was the *Competition for a conceptual urban architectural solution for the complex of social and non-profitable housing west of Dr Ivana Ribara Street in New Belgrade*, announced as part of the *Project to construct 2,000 socially non-profitable apartments in Belgrade* from 2005.<sup>14</sup> The site in question, spanning 7.8 ha, was envisaged for the construction

<sup>14</sup> In the period after 2000, this project was one of the key initiatives for the construction of social and non-profitable apartments in the capital, in addition to the *Program for the construction of solidarity apartments* from 2001 until 2005 and the *Project to construct 1,100 apartments in Belgrade* from 2003.

of 1,080 apartments within complexes of mixed housing ownership, with non-profitable housing (70% apartments) and social housing (30% apartments). The goal of the competition was to obtain “a rational and, in architectural terms, a housing complex of contemporary forms” that would represent a link between the developed and undeveloped areas and an introductory element into the typical New Belgrade matrix (DAB, 2006). In accordance with this goal, the defined criteria for the assessment of works submitted at the competition primarily promoted contextuality, the formative aspect and the rationality of the solution, while they insufficiently looked at the specific requirements in the domain of sustainable design of this type of housing. Also, the competition program did not designate social housing for a known structure of beneficiaries, but for a broad scope of different categories of socially vulnerable groups defined in the 2021 Belgrade GP.

With the 1<sup>st</sup> ranked solution, and with its subsequent construction, the share of social apartments increased relative to the initially envisaged 30%, hence as many as 399 housing units were designed for this purpose.<sup>15</sup> In addition, this type of housing with mixed ownership was planned in the competition conditions as a segregated model – the so-called “cluster model,” with strictly separated zones of social and non-profitable housing, which undoubtedly contributed to the pronounced social polarization of residents of the complex (Fig 4 – Fig 6).



Figure 4. Equally worthy 1<sup>st</sup> prize (the solution selected for construction)  
(authors Tamara Petrović-Komlenić and Miloš Komlenić)

Source: Komlenić, 2011:80

<sup>15</sup> To date, 266 social apartments have been constructed (of the planned 399) in buildings C2 and C3, with 731 non-profitable apartments in nine housing units that were completed in entirety.



Figure 5. The appearance and situation of the constructed housing complex, with the designated building for social housing C3  
Source: author's photo archive



Figure 6. Social housing buildings – C3 (right) and the newly constructed building C2 (left), photo from 2016  
Source: author's photo archive

Although the main architectural project greatly improved the spatial and functional standards of buildings and housing units relative to the solution submitted at the competition, problems detected as early as the programming and urban planning stage of this housing complex, and later their management as well, managed not only to considerably reduce the level of sustainability and quality of housing, but also affected its deprivation, ghettoization and stigmatization during the first few

years after the current residents moved in. The results of a poll conducted among the social housing tenants in building C3 at end-2016 indicated a lack of safety and the outbreak of crime in the neighborhood, which can be associated both with the aspects of inappropriate management of the composition of beneficiaries, which mostly consist of the Roma, and to the size of the project itself, i.e. the large concentration of social housing apartments (see Bajić, 2017).

Through the Investment and Housing Agency, the City of Belgrade announced in 2011 the *Competition for a conceptual urban architectural solution for a residential-office complex of social housing in the Belgrade residential area of Ovča*, which envisaged the design of a residential-office complex with a total of 1,400 apartments. Financing for the project with 1,200 social apartments was envisaged from donations secured from the European funds, while the construction of 200 solidarity apartments was planned as an anticipated conclusion of the *Program to construct solidarity apartments*, implemented through the FSSI in Belgrade from 1990 to 2010. The completion of the competition was accompanied by an elaboration of a synthesis “post-competition” urban architectural solution in which eight awarded teams participated (“TEAM 8”)<sup>16</sup> (Fig 7), however, despite announcements regarding the beginning of construction, the obtained solution has not yet been implemented. In terms of methodology, this is certainly an innovative model of competitions in Serbia where the cooperation of a number of authors enabled the creation of a housing complex which is diverse in terms of type and architecture. However, the use of this model in future competitions is recommended and justified only if it is defined as a condition during the announcement stage of the competition, which was not the case in the above example<sup>17</sup> (see Bajić *et al.*, 2014). Additional specificities of this competition concern the introduction of innovation in program requirements in terms of energy-efficient construction within social housing competitions, which, as far as this competition is concerned, “can be deemed an improvement compared to the usual practice” (Bajić & Manić, 2013).

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<sup>16</sup> Groups of authors within “TEAM 8” were the following: Borislav Petrović, Ivan Rašković, Aleksandar Tomić, Neda Jelić, Nikola Stojković, Luka Ostojić (TEAM 02); Darko Marušić, Milenija Marušić, Đorđe Alfirević, Branislava Kovačević (TEAM 06); Marija Mojsilović, Stefan Đorđević, Nevena Zelenika, Jelena Pucarević, Ana Cogoljević, Milica Pihler (TEAM 19); Dušan Stojanović, Pavle Stamenović, Marko Vuković (TEAM 26); Branislav Mitrović, Jelena Petrović, Jelena Kuzmanović, Ognjen Krašna, Biljana Apostolović, Siniša Tatalović (TEAM 32); Dragan Marinčić, Aleksandra Marinčić (TEAM 34); Ilja Mikitišin (TEAM 35); Petar Zaklanović, Zorica Savičić, Đorđe Đekelić, Milena Zaklanović, Dubravka Đekelić, Milica Miletić (TEAM 35).

<sup>17</sup> As regards the competition for social housing in Ovča, the problem lies in the fact that this model of post-competition development of the solution was subsequently imposed on the authors of awarded and purchased works, which is an example of the poor practice of a post festum alteration of competition conditions.



Figure 7. Graphic representation of the work methodology – ideas from eight competition works were implemented into the adopted urban design solution

Source: TIM 8, 2012

## 5. CONCLUSION

The urban architectural competition is an important yet still insufficiently influential instrument in the implementation of social housing construction projects in post-socialist Serbia. The role of the competition in encouraging cost-effective, innovative and aesthetically and functionally optimal housing solutions was recognized as early as the first stage of development of the social housing system after 2000, while the obligation to call the competition in this area was defined in 2013 in the adopted legislation. However, only few social housing construction projects have so far been realized in Serbia through competitions, and even then it was largely done within the SIRP program in the period 2005–2008. At the same time, these are pioneer examples of social rental housing in Serbia. The existing experience in Belgrade is still modest, but there is no doubt that it provided interesting design solutions, methodological approaches and knowledge that should be used as useful guidelines for the future practice in this area.

Research into preferred spatial and physical aspects of housing patterns with mixed forms of ownership (public renting and private ownership) is one of the important directions for future urban and architectural exploration of social housing in Serbia. The non-profitable and social housing complex west of Dr Ivana Ribara Street in New Belgrade turned out to be an insufficiently successful

example of the application of this pattern in practice at home. The detected issues of noise, poor sanitation and physical degradation in the social apartment unit demonstrate that factors such as the size of the project and the strict socio-spatial zoning, parallel with the inadequate choice of the composition of residents, can have a critical impact on additional ghettoization and deprivation of this complex during the next stages of construction and use. In terms of the preconditions for conducting the competition procedure and designing social housing, this example indicates the need for previous awareness of the dominant social structure of future beneficiaries, as this can play an essential role when selecting the right housing pattern, as well as in defining the function and form of the solution. The experience with the housing project in New Belgrade raises the question of success of other large-scale social housing complexes that have been planned in Belgrade, such as the one in Ovča, despite the diversified and modern architecture that has been accomplished.

The competition for urban architectural models of social housing that was not realized, as well as the example in New Belgrade, indicates that the resolution of the housing issue of the Roma in Serbia will have to take into account their specific demographic and social characteristics, cultural features and lifestyle. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that bringing this ethnic community together with the majority population in social housing projects should contribute to its social inclusion and cohesion, and not additionally increase its marginalization, ghettoization and stigmatization.

In future, the urban architectural competition can help improve the quality and innovation of the social housing practice: 1) if appropriate sustainability criteria have been complied with in urban design and planning preconditions in terms of location choice and planning; 2) if the program conditions and the task of the competition, including the applied technical regulations, have set forth requirements which contemplate, in an integral manner, the design criteria for sustainable social housing; and 3) if, during the procedure for implementing the competition, from the selection to the realization of the solution, there is no deviation from the requirements defined in the call. The importance of the public competition for the improvement of the quality of social housing construction and promotion of different sustainability aspects in this sector is also substantiated by the findings of scientific research studies and the evaluation of the practice in Belgrade and Serbia to date (Bajić & Manić, 2013; Bajić *et al.*, 2014; Stojanović, 2015; Čolić Damjanović, 2015; Bajić, 2017).

The knowledge of negative experiences should be taken into account by a future housing policy, the domain of urban planning and design, and particularly in the practice of defining the program and managing the housing fund and the

composition of beneficiaries. The exclusion of the urban architectural competition from the social housing program first and foremost prevents any significant promotion of the social housing design issues within the professional public in Serbia, thereby limiting the advancement of knowledge on specific spatial and functional requirements, design challenges and possible methodological approaches in the area of urban and architectural activity.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The paper is a result of research carried out within the scientific project Support to Process of Urban Development in Serbia (SPUDS) funded by the SCOPES program of the Swiss National Science Foundation, and the scientific project no.36036, financed by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development.

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