

9. Collective Housing Complexes of Socialist Yugoslavia: The Development of Living Standards and the Strengthening of Communities

Violeta Stefanović

Architecture as the Setting for the Creation of Communities

Human existence cannot be separated from the space in which it occurs. Places in which we experience segments of our lives remain connected to those events—to our emotions, memories, and impressions. These spatial frames have the ability to shape the type of activities that can be realized within them, along with the type of interactions their users and inhabitants have. By forming the physical conditions under which events and activities are realized, they have the ability to influence the way people communicate, further influencing the type of relationship they are able to form. Undeniably, architecture has a great impact on the formation of peoples' everyday lives. Architecture, on the other hand, is unquestionably connected to the economic, political, social, and cultural conditions and circumstances that are present at the time of its creation. These tight connections create a complex system that enables changes in the way the building environment is formed, depending on the current sociopolitical system. When it comes to housing, which represents an architectural sphere that has the most direct relation with the everyday lives of the users of its spaces, its physical frame, apart from generating the primary settings for its residents and their existence in the narrowest sense, also influences the circumstances for the creation and development of communities and interpersonal relations. Martin Heidegger's thought that housing is the primary principle of existence (1951) highlights the significance that residential space has in the lives of human beings. By building people's

most personal, primary existential space, the architects of dwelling units and housing complexes directly influence the forming of the preconditions for the development of our everyday lives. The residential architecture of socialist Yugoslavia is of particular interest in this regard because, as a newly formed state, it brought with it complex aspirations, generating an extremely specific atmosphere and preconditions for the realization of a new architecture. This led to exhaustive changes in the lives of its citizens, who were being placed in new collective housing conditions and were therefore experiencing a new way of living and sharing their immediate physical surroundings, making way for new interpersonal relations and the creation of new communities. These housing solutions were continually developed as the state progressed, enabling the improvement of living standards and therefore further generating various opportunities for its residents to conduct the processes of their everyday lives.

The urban architectural context in which people live, as well as the living standards realized by it, has a significant impact on the way these people live, the way they conduct themselves on a daily basis, and how they interact with other people who occupy the same living space as well as the way interpersonal relations are formed. If communities are defined as aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern (i.e., interest in the personalities and life events of one another) (Brint 2001) and a city community rests and survives on territorialized social relations which are mediated by urban interventions in space (Pajvančić-Cizelj and Knežević 2017), the link between the shared residential area and the resulting community is undeniable. Brint's classification of communities makes it clear that a neighborhood is a community where the elementary basis for forging relations (the first criterion for its classification) is spatial closeness—which, in this sense, contains an element of inevitability. The primary reason for interaction (the second criterion) in these communities is based on collective activities, and the frequency of this interaction (the third criterion) must be relatively high (Petrović 2007).

Referring to the three criteria crucial for forging communities, the aim of this paper is to analyze two residential blocks located in Novi Sad (Serbia), both of which were built in socialist Yugoslavia but during different time periods: a block in Liman I (built before 1960) and a block in Liman IV (built in the 1970s), so as to research whether the improvement of the living standard, which encompassed the way communal spaces were being articulated and shaped, could

have also directly influenced the strength of the communities being created in those spatial frames. Looking specifically for elements that could have influenced spatial closeness, collective activities, and the frequency of interaction that were created through the formation of these collective housing blocks could give us an insight into the way communities were able to be forged, inevitably impacting the way social bonds, common ground, and collective consciousness were established in the socialist period.

Collective Housing Complexes of Socialist Yugoslavia and the Development of Living Standards

Soon after the forming of socialist Yugoslavia after the Second World War, with rapid industrialization and the ensuing housing crisis, residential architecture and housing became, perhaps, the most daring project of the newly created state. Socialist Yugoslavia was characterized by rapid economic and technological development that underwent continual improvement from the beginning of postwar renewal until the 1980s, which were characterized by economic crisis along with political conflicts that eventually resulted in the disintegration of the federation. A mass migration of people from rural to urban environments arose as a consequence of the rapid progress, which created pressure and a great need to find a new solution for the housing crisis. This necessity, as well as the conditions created in the newly formed socialist state, enabled and encouraged the architects active in that period to deliberate and envision residential space. Guided by two ideologies—socialist and modernist—architects were given the opportunity to create new forms of housing. On the one hand, the socialist ideology, with its paradigms of social equality and its need to portray the future prosperity of the state as well as the importance of the unification of the republics, created an environment in which housing was not only an architectural but also a political matter. On the other hand, the purely architectural modernist ideology, which was extremely present in the architectural discourse at that time, was based on progress in all possible senses, and was assisted by the development of technology, represented the aspiration for opening a new chapter in the creation of cities, and consequently, city life. This architectural and urban expression served as a means of transferring the newly formed state's idea of progress and prosperity, and of enabling mass construction. These large-scale collective housing complexes were a reasonable answer to the huge influx of citizens who were moving from rural to urban

areas as a consequence of rapid industrialization, but they also provided the opportunity to realize a new architecture for a new state. As a result of these complex factors, the citizens of socialist Yugoslavia suddenly underwent a profound change in their everyday lives, stemming from the extremely different living environment they were now inhabiting. Until then, traditionally built one-family houses in rural environments were predominant.

This shift in living conditions, in which people were all of the sudden sharing their immediate physical environment with other residents, inevitably influenced the forming of new communities in a way that had never been experienced before. By transferring from privately-owned, traditionally built single-family houses to large, state-owned (society-owned) multifamily buildings, by exchanging their private yards for common block areas, and by finding themselves in uncharted territory, the citizens of socialist Yugoslavia were now in a position where they were rebuilding the picture of their everyday lives in all possible ways. The sheer density of people now being housed together in one neighborhood was bound to change the way they form social relations, communal values, and communities as a whole.

However, as the federation progressed over time, the living standard rose as well, spawning new ways of creating and strengthening communities. The first two decades after the Second World War were marked by rapid construction on all fronts: infrastructural development, immense construction of residential units, and the erection of administrative and prestigious buildings and all other elements crucial for the state's primary existence. Having realized the minimum standards for the state's functioning, socialist Yugoslavia reached a condition of utter well-being during the 1970s. This period was characterized by strong enthusiasm and zest, which made way for more innovation regarding architecture and its programs: sports centers, university centers, and shopping malls were now being built, improving the citizens' quality of life. When it comes to residential architecture, the impact this development had on housing can be seen through the development of concepts for residential units, but also in the way more attention was being given to the wider programming of the blocks, allowing for the expansion of inhabitants' needs that could be met in their primary surroundings. These changes can be seen in the development of the communal areas within the blocks, allowing for more of the residents' leisure time to be spent in their immediate surroundings. Since the development of interpersonal relations, as well as the feeling of community among residents of the same residential block, requires social encounters—both accidental and planned—the hypothesis of this paper is that the rise of the housing

standards which resulted in the enrichment of the shared and public spaces of the residential areas also provided more opportunities for these encounters, therefore possibly enabling the strengthening of communities.

In the following section of this paper, two residential blocks built in socialist Yugoslavia will be presented and analyzed, aiming to observe the changes that the housing concepts underwent as living standards rose and to analyze the conditions for the interaction of residents in those neighborhoods and, consequently, their ability to form and maintain communities.

Liman—the First Modern Novi Sad Residential Neighborhood

The city of Novi Sad is located in Serbia, a former republic of socialist Yugoslavia, and is the capital of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The city went through numerous changes in the past, but its modernization is what characterizes it in a significant way even today. During the period between the two world wars, after Vojvodina joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with the city being proclaimed the capital of the Danube Banate, the beginning of Novi Sad's modernization was initiated. Even though more than one architectural style was present in Novi Sad during the period between the two world wars, "the rise of modernism in the region coincided with the establishment of new government units, the key factor in its development could be related to changes in the very process of design and construction. [...] Buildings with flat roofs in modernist, unornamented style became the norm" (Mitrović 2010). As for housing, the case of "Mali Liman" ("Small Liman") is specific since it can be considered the first modern residential area in Vojvodina and it includes family villas and residential multistory buildings. However, it is important to note that its modernity stems from the architecture of its buildings, and not from its urban concept, whilst the Liman neighborhood (built after the Second World War), which will be the focus of the next part of this paper, represents the first installment of residential modern urban planning in Novi Sad. Therefore, we can treat "Mali Liman" as the beginning of the introduction of the modernist language in residential areas. This area is located close to today's Mihajlo Pupin Boulevard, adjacent to the city center, and represents the beginning of the city's expansion toward the Danube River.

The biggest changes were made in the city after the Second World War, when the building activity was extremely high. The city went through several radical changes that were carried out by means of official urban planning doc-

uments. These changes shaped and defined the city, creating the urban morphology and identity it has today. As for housing, the immense growth of the population required new residential spaces. Therefore, the marshes along the Danube River were drained so as to allow for the city's expansion. This previously largely uninhabited land, now prepared for development, enabled the exact realization of planned neighborhoods. Influenced by the discourse of modernism, as well as the famous Athens Charter, the Liman neighborhood was envisioned through the principles of modernist architecture and urban planning. The Liman neighborhood is actually comprised of four segments—Liman I, II, III and IV, with its names correlating with the sequence of their realization (fig. 1).

Figure 1: Disposition of the segments of the Liman neighborhood.



Source of original orthophoto image: <https://a3.geosrbija.rs/>.

Therefore, this paper will analyze one block from the Liman I area and one block from the Liman IV area—seeing as they were, respectively, the first and last installments of this large spatial development—in order to gain insight into the development of the conceptualization of the housing complexes, which went hand in hand with the rise of living standards, as well as their possible impact on the strengthening of communities formed in those neighborhoods. Apart from the spatial conception of the housing complexes, the elements that will be the focus of the examination of these localities were presented in the first section of this paper and have been derived from the criteria for the classification of communities. Hence, the focus of these analyses will be directed toward elements that could influence spatial closeness, the possibilities for collective activities, and the frequency of interaction, all of which serve as important factors for the establishment of interpersonal relations among residents and their communities.

Figure 2: Disposition of the two residential blocks under analysis within Liman I (far right) and Liman IV (far left).



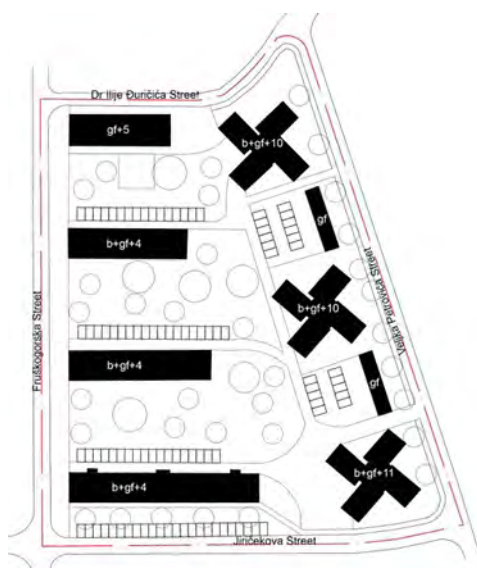
Source of original orthophoto image: <https://a3.geosrbija.rs/>.

Analysis of the Residential Block in Liman I (Built before 1960)

Liman I marks the beginning of the establishment of the entire Liman area, which was the first residential area in Novi Sad to be conceptualized through the principles of modern urban planning and thus represented a new chapter in the development of urban planning in Novi Sad. According to Novi Sad's official records from 2012, the Liman I area, which spreads over a surface area of 12.9 hectares, is home to 4,527 inhabitants in 1,942 apartments (City of Novi Sad 2012). The block that will be analyzed in this section was built before 1960 and can therefore give us insight into the primary concept of the housing areas of Liman.

Figure 3: Morphology of residential the block under analysis in Liman I (b – basement; gf – ground floor).

Figure 4: Inner area of the block under analysis in Liman I.



Source: Violeta Stefanović.

Source: Author's archive, June 2019.

The residential block in question features buildings that were built when the original block was realized and a few structures that were added at a later date: the longitudinal building alongside Dr Ilije Đuričića Street and small single-story structures (parking garages). Even though these buildings are of a later date, the original spatial concept of the block has remained intact.

Spatial closeness represents the elementary basis for forging relations in neighborhoods and therefore acts as a prerequisite for generating communities. The juxtapositions of the buildings that comprise the urban area in question were planned: the orderly positioning of the individual buildings was intended to allow sufficient space for adequate light, ventilation, and privacy conditions, and was implemented in accordance with the height, length, and width of each structure. However, the entire shared open area of the block is covered with greenery and rows of parking spaces, leaving little or no space for public gatherings other than the grassed areas and paved paths designed for fast access to and from the vehicles and the dwellings (fig. 4).

The absence of other infrastructure, paved areas, and other types of urban elements required for spending quality time in public shared spaces minimizes the opportunities for collective activities. The frequency of interaction is of a similar nature, although the strictly divided pathways that lead to the parking areas do facilitate communications that are convenient for accidental encounters of the residents. These encounters are important, since they enable the residents to get acquainted with one another, and they serve as a place for spontaneous conversations that are usually conducted while on the way from one's home to other parts of the city and vice versa.

The importance of the residents being able to bond over shared activities is undeniable when it comes to the strength of those communities. In the case of this residential block, the residents probably sensed the lack of the opportunities for collective activities, resulting in a spatial intervention executed much after the block was originated. A children's playground was set up on a part of the block's green area, making a focal point toward which children, as well as their family members, gravitate to (fig. 5). However, since this type of public area is limited to users of a certain social group, as well as seeing that there is no other type of gathering spot in the block, the collective activities that are based on it are also limited.

Figure 5: Children's playground in the shared open block space.



Source: Author's archive, June 2019.

Analysis of the Residential Block in Liman IV (Built in the 1970s)

In socialist Yugoslavia, housing concepts were continually developed since the Second World War ended. Numerous realizations and the forming of entirely new city areas were also accompanied by theoretical and other research in the fields of habitology (Alfirević and Simonović Alfirević 2018). During the 1970s, significant results were achieved in the fields of science and practice. As the federation progressed, housing conceptualizations (from residential units, buildings, and blocks to entire settlements) were also advancing. Liman IV represents the final installment of the entire Liman spatial endeavor, which was carried out continuously, leaving behind layers that reveal the development process of the first socialist modernist residential area in Novi Sad. The

block in the Liman IV neighborhood that will be analyzed was built during the 1970s, showcasing the changes that were made in the urban planning concepts. According to Novi Sad's official records from 2012, the Liman IV area covers a surface area of 29.2 hectares and has 3,388 apartments that are home to 9,287 inhabitants (City of Novi Sad 2012).

Figure 6: Morphology of the residential block under analysis in Liman IV (b – basement; gf – ground floor).

Figure 7: Inner open space of the block under analysis in Liman IV.



Source: Violeta Stefanović.

Source: Author's archive, June 2019.

Compared to the previously analyzed block, a distinctly different approach to the positioning of the individual buildings can be observed. As it was the case with the block in Liman I, juxtapositions were made here so as to allow sufficient space for adequate light, ventilation, and privacy conditions, which was implemented in accordance with the height, length, and width of each structure. Spatial closeness is guaranteed, of course, as it is in most neighborhoods.

The placement of the parking areas on the corners and ends of the block, as well as the varying dimensions of the spaces between the buildings, allow for different places to be defined and organized within the locality's open public spaces. The block is not lacking in green areas, but they are dispersed throughout the space so as to allow for the creation of paved pathways and areas that serve as gathering points (fig. 7). Urban furniture is also dispersed through-

out the block; some takes the form of benches, while others represent an integral part of the design of the entire residential area and are built of concrete in forms and patterns that coincide with the spatial and architectural concept as a whole.

Figure 8: A basketball and futsal court in Liman IV.



Source: Author's archive, June 2019.

Apart from these areas that have no a specific program but allow multifunctional use, this residential block also features a specifically designed space intended for sporting activities: a basketball and futsal court (fig. 8). These types of public spaces enable social gathering as well as collective activities. Even though the courts are fit for a certain range of sports activities and events, they also allow for spontaneous reprogramming done by the residents themselves, such as bike riding, chalk drawing, and socializing. The existence of these public areas and their varying sizes, dispositions, and equipment enable numerous

residents of different ages and social groups to take part in various shared activities and experiences, consequently allowing for more interaction between members of the same community, which inevitably leads to the strengthening of their interpersonal relations. Apart from these socializing opportunities, the frequency of interaction is at a high level, since not only is there infrastructure that acts as a precondition for the realization of communal activities, but also pathways that connect larger paved areas throughout the open space, allowing for numerous accidental encounters and also allowing passers-by to observe and even participate in the activities taking place.

Conclusions

When observing the two blocks that were the focus of this paper, we can say that both of them fulfill the goal of the state, which was the main investor in residential spaces in socialist Yugoslavia. The goal was to create a large number of housing units that provide users with humane living conditions: units that guarantee sunshine, ventilation, and overall functional organization. Apart from this, it was important to establish a new way of approaching the question of housing while using the language of modernism, which can be equally applied to all six republics. However, since the block in the Liman I area was built early on, under circumstances in the federation that required fast building execution and the construction of mass housing as well as other important infrastructure crucial to the functioning of the newly formed space, we could say that that block answered the requirements for the realization of housing set by the state at that time. It enabled humane, comfortable housing for its users, green areas, and parking spaces as well as functional housing units. The block in the Liman IV neighborhood, however, was conceptualized at a time when the federation had already established the primary conditions needed for its existence and had entered a state of well-being. This allowed the housing concepts to be expanded and further developed, based on the intensive work of architects that continually strived to improve housing conditions. Apart from meeting the same requirements that were set for the block in the Liman I neighborhood, the Liman IV block also made it possible to meet a broader set of its users' needs in their primary surroundings. The wider programming of this block allowed for the creation of various public spaces that serve as preconditions for the interaction of its residents.

If neighborhoods are not only a territorially defined area, but also a complex web of social relations (Petrović 2007), then it is of utmost importance to give the members of this community opportunities to create, develop, and nourish these interpersonal relations. The bonds formed among the residents of a neighborhood contribute to an individual's feeling of belonging to a certain group, which generates positive attitudes toward the members of that same group and results in the creation of a collective identity. The stronger this identity is, the stronger the community is, and the more trust there is between members of the community—which creates a sense of togetherness and safety that is crucial for fulfilling the social needs of individuals.

Therefore, if we take into account the importance of the possibilities for collective activities and the frequency of interaction, whereas both should be of a high level in order to initiate the forging of social relations and, consequently, communities, then we are able to note that the block that was realized later (in the Liman IV area) has a spatial infrastructure that can initiate collective activities and can create opportunities for frequent interaction. The progression and development of housing conceptualizations, which was a result of the architects' continuous theoretical and practical work, lead to complex architectural and urban solutions that peaked in the 1970s. These solutions encompassed residential buildings and their individual dwelling units, and also took into consideration the public spaces surrounding the residential blocks. By further developing these open spaces: by creating numerous gathering spaces with varied programming (i.e., diverse courts for sports activities, playgrounds, areas with urban furniture, etc.), the architects were able to provide the inhabitants of these places with common, shared spaces. It is precisely in these spaces that the main socialization of residents takes place, with different programs enabling various events and atmospheres. The fact that this infrastructure, which preconditions socialization, arose as a result of the federation's prosperity at the time indicates that there is a direct correlation between the rise of living standards and the possibilities for strengthening communities. The rise in the living standard, therefore, not only improved the general quality of life for residents, but it also gave them the opportunity to generate and build communities that contributed to the fulfillment of their social needs. The various possibilities for socialization also influenced the development of their collective identity through the formation of long-lasting social relations, which may, as a result, have had an impact on their personal lives as well.

Acknowledgment

This research (paper) has been supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation through project no. 451-03-47/2023-01/200156 "Innovative scientific and artistic research from the FTS (activity) domain".

References

- Alfirević, Đ., and Simonović Alfirević, S. (2018). "‘Socijalistički stan’ u Jugoslavii: obrazac ili tendencija?" ['Socialist apartment' in Yugoslavia: paradigm or tendency?]. *Spatium* 40:8–17.
- Brint, S. (2001). "Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept." *Sociological Theory* 19(1):1–23.
- City of Novi Sad (2012). *Službeni list grada Novog Sada* [Official Gazette of the City of Novi Sad], vol. 15/2012. Novi Sad: Grad Novi Sad, Gradska uprava za propise Grada Novog Sada.
- Heidegger, M. (1951). *Bauen Wohnen Denken: Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. The identically named essay was translated by Albert Hofstadter as "Building Dwelling Thinking" in Hofstadter, A. (trans.), *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
- Mitrović, V. (2010). *Arhitektura XX veka u Vojvodini* [Architecture of the 20th century in Vojvodina]. Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga.
- Pajvančić-Cizelj, A., and Knežević, J. (2017). "Socio-prostorna transformacija i susedski odnosi u Novom Sadu" [Socio-spatial transformation and neighborhood relations in Novi Sad]. *Annual Review of the Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad* XLII(2):441–455.
- Petrović, M. (2007). "Istraživanje socijalnih aspekata urbanog susedstva: Percepcija stručnjaka na Novom Beogradu" [Researching social aspects of urban neighborhood: reflections of professionals in New Belgrade]. *Sociologija* L(1):55–78.

