

## **Belgrade - European Metropolis, Transformations through Space and Time**

### **Introduction**

Belgrade was the leading city of former Yugoslavia and an important multinational and multifunctional metropolis. Nowadays, being the capital of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade is the largest industrial, trade, tourist, cultural, educational, health, sports and political centre. Belgrade is located on the tangent line of Middle Europe and the Balkans, actually half-way between West and Southeast Europe, wherefrom the city has had a lot of benefits, but it has also been struck by a great deal of calamities due to such a location. Comparing to period before 1991, Belgrade lost a part of its significance in the European context, primarily because of modified political criteria.

Geographical location of Belgrade is unique in Europe. It has been built at the borderline of two large geographical areas: the bottom and perimeter of Panonia lowlands, and the north outlines of the mountainous Balkan Peninsula. The location of Belgrade, however, has not always had the same significance in various historical periods.



**Figure 1: Aerophoto view of Belgrade, 2003**  
(Town Planning Institute of Belgrade: Centre for Documentation)

A very favourable geographical position and natural conditions attracted peoples to found a settlement on the reef above the confluence of the Danube and the Sava rivers, the existence of which can be followed from the Neolithic down to the present days. In about 5250 B.C. there was a large settlement in the area of extant Vinca, as the metropolis of one of the most splendid cultures in European pre-history. The Neolithic culture on Belgrade's territory has been named **the Vinča Culture**.

Located at the crossroads between the East and the West, caught in a place through which the various political, ethical and cultural currents of our continent flow, Belgrade is among the oldest and most frequently destroyed towns in Europe. All the major events in European history have unfolded at this very place. Several dozen consecutive Belgrades, after blazes and fires and being razed to the ground, have risen up in the same or almost the same place. The town has always been situated at the confluence of two rivers, the Sava and the Danube. In view of the fact that the rivers have different names, it is a customary metaphor that **"Belgrade was born in the embrace of two rivers"**, which represents an ancient understanding of the urban genesis of Belgrade.

The name of the city appeared from the first time in a letter written by Roman Pope John VIII to Bulgarian Prince Boris, dated April, 16, 878. Later from 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Belgrade was mentioned in various texts and according to the language in which they were written, it was named as Alba Graeca, Alba Bulgarica, Nandor Alba, Griechisch Weissenburg, Castelbianco etc.

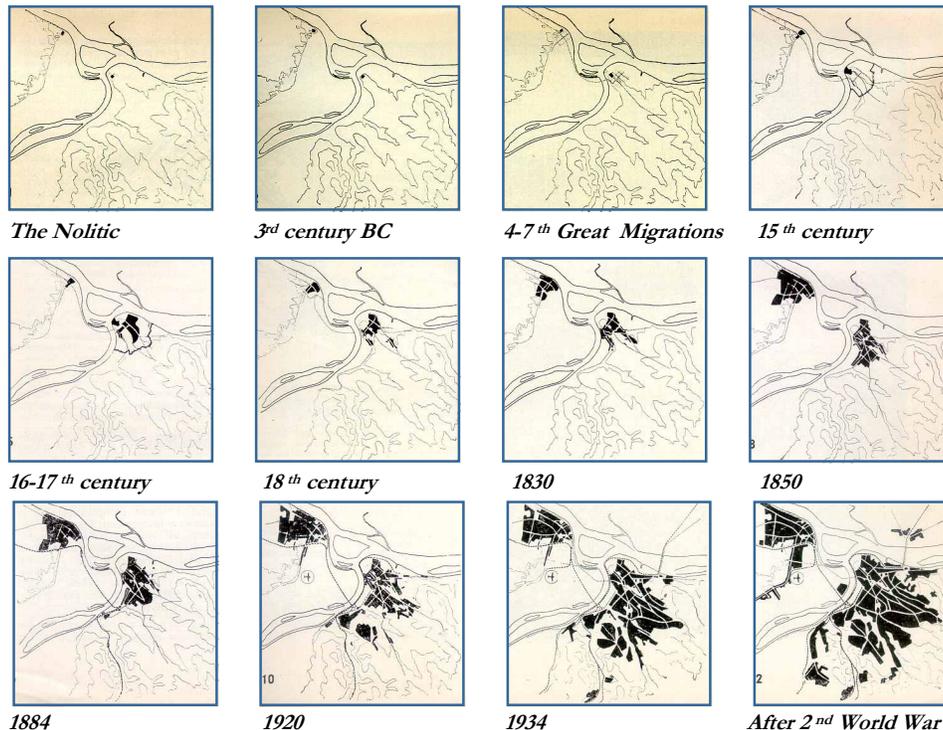


Figure 2: **Foundation and territorial development of Belgrade through the centuries**  
 (Jovanovic, D. (1951), "Foundation and Development of Belgrade", Belgrade: IONO of Belgrade, page 31)

Researching experiences and messages from the past, through the various cultural and temporal layers, we aspire to affirm **memory** and to establish **continuity** in the process of urban (town) planning. Respecting their importance and meaning, it is necessary to recognize, decompose and study the elements of the origin and evolution of settlements in order to estimate conditions and needs of today and to plan future development. The basic message with reference to urban planning is the necessity of **complex** and **contextual approach**.

## Continuity in the Process of Town Planning

**City form is an expression of the spiritual, social, historical, spatial and physical continuity.** If it is not exposed to physical destruction or devastation, it has a tendency of **growth** and **development** according to certain principles. In the **center** of this process is a **man** with his rational, emotional and creative nature.

**Continuity** is a crucial determining factor in the understanding of the evolution of every settlement. Familiarity with the past defines the limits of comparison and measures for the future.

The first educated Serbian urban planner was Emilijan Josimovic (1823-1897), Professor and Rector of the High School, who in 1867. offered the plan of "The Old Belgrade (part inside the trench) as it exists and as it is supposed to be regulated". He was the first who started to transform the old core of Belgrade into the modern European city (making plans for the reconstruction of the most surrounded inner city from an oriental to orthogonal urban matrix). But outside the trench, expectedly but without control, village roads became the streets and fields became the building blocks (sprawl).

Afterwards there were several plans for urban growth which were made by: Stevan Zaric (1878), Jovan Beslic (1893), Vasa Lazarevic (1910) and Alban Shambon, French architect of Belgian origin (1912). Although Belgrade is an old town for more than several thousands of years, period of 19<sup>th</sup> century mainly had influence to his present appearance, because all elder monuments were gone during its turbulent past. The only witness of its old age is the Belgrade Fortress.

**In the last century**, Belgrade had **four general plans**, which defined the concept for its spatial organization and development. These were:



Figures 3-6: **General plans of Belgrade in the 20<sup>th</sup> century** (1923, 1950, 1972, 1985)  
(Town Planning Institute of Belgrade: Centre for Documentation)

- **The General Plan of Belgrade** from **1923**, approved by the Ministry of Civil Engineering in 1924, which was drawn up under the leadership of the architect,

Djordje Kovalevski, after an international invitation to tender. After World War I, Belgrade became the capital of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and a field for active urban renewal and reconstruction.

- **The General Urban Plan of Belgrade from 1950**, which was drawn up under the leadership of the director of the Town Planning Institute, the architect, Miloš Somborski. After World War II, there were high demands for the restoration of the town, revitalization of the transport infrastructure as well as the preparations for the urban development (growth) of Belgrade. The concept of territorial expansion of the town for one million inhabitants was elaborated in this Plan, through the idea of building quite a new city, New Belgrade, on the left bank of the river Sava.
- **The General Urban Plan of Belgrade from 1972**, which was drawn up under the leadership of the director of the Town Planning Institute, the architect, Aleksandar Djordjević, and the architect Milutin Glavički, was based on several principles: honoring the values of the past development, more rational use of land and integration of city functions, equitable distribution of new infrastructure projects and related facilities, better transport connections among the parts of the city and the preservation of the quality of the environment; and
- **Modifications and Supplements to the General Urban Plan of Belgrade up to 2000**, from **1985**, which was drawn up under the leadership of Konstantin Kostić, MSc, was based on the same principles as the previous Plan. The differences between actual development and planning solutions from the Plan from 1972, caused more realistic solutions to be proposed.

The last one is **The General Plan of Belgrade 2021**, adopted by Belgrade City Assembly in **2003**. It was drawn up under the leadership of Professor Vladimir Macura PhD, and Miodrag Ferenčak MSc. It defines the nature of the spatial organization and construction in Belgrade, in line with the requirements and demands of a society in 'transition', which is characterized by the introduction of a market economy and the process of privatization. Drawing on internationally recognized principles of sustainable urban development, **this plan affirms planning as a process** that insists on transparency, flexibility, better coordination among participants, as well as the efficient solving of the main problems of development.

Table 1: **Land use and areas according to the General Plan of Belgrade 2021**

Land use	Current 2001 (ha)	Planned increase 2001 - 2021 (ha)	Total planned 2021 (ha)
Housing	12,571.65	1,570.25	14,141.9
Economic activities and economic zones	1,595.22	1,929.35	3,524.57
Commercial zones and city centres	667.98	1,147.60	1,815.58
Public services, public facilities and complexes	1,123.10	275.04	1,398.14
Sports, sports facilities and complexes	685.87	502.01	1,187.88
Green areas	11,365.27	9,044.64	20,409.91
Agriculture areas and facilities	39,657.32	-16,463.32	23,194.00
Water surfaces	4,071.05	101.16	4,172.21
Graveyards	344.69	144.51	489.20
Transport and areas designated for traffic	4,424.15	1,503.56	5,927.71
Utility services and infrastructure areas	345.30	436.40	781.70
Undeveloped land	750.39	-750.39	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>77,602.00</b>		<b>77,602.00</b>

The planning solutions refer to the space covering the area of 77, 602 ha, which is almost the same area established by the previous Belgrade Plan from 1985. Also important is the fact that from 1948 to 2002 the total population of Belgrade increased 2.5 times, from 634,000 to 1,600,000 inhabitants.

Housing is predominant land use, followed by complementary facilities like child care facilities, schools, health care institutions, shops, various forms of crafts production, small enterprises etc. Traffic areas, streets, squares, support residential zones as well as utility service, infrastructure and greenery.

According to the above list, the greatest increase will be in the section of green areas amounting to about 9,000 ha. Housing will increase by about 1,600 ha. Industrial activities will increase significantly by about 1,900 ha and commercial zones and city centres will also increase by about 1,150 ha. The greatest decrease in land will occur in agriculture amounting to 16,400 ha, by conversion to forest land, and also including a significant part of the present agricultural land into the developed area.

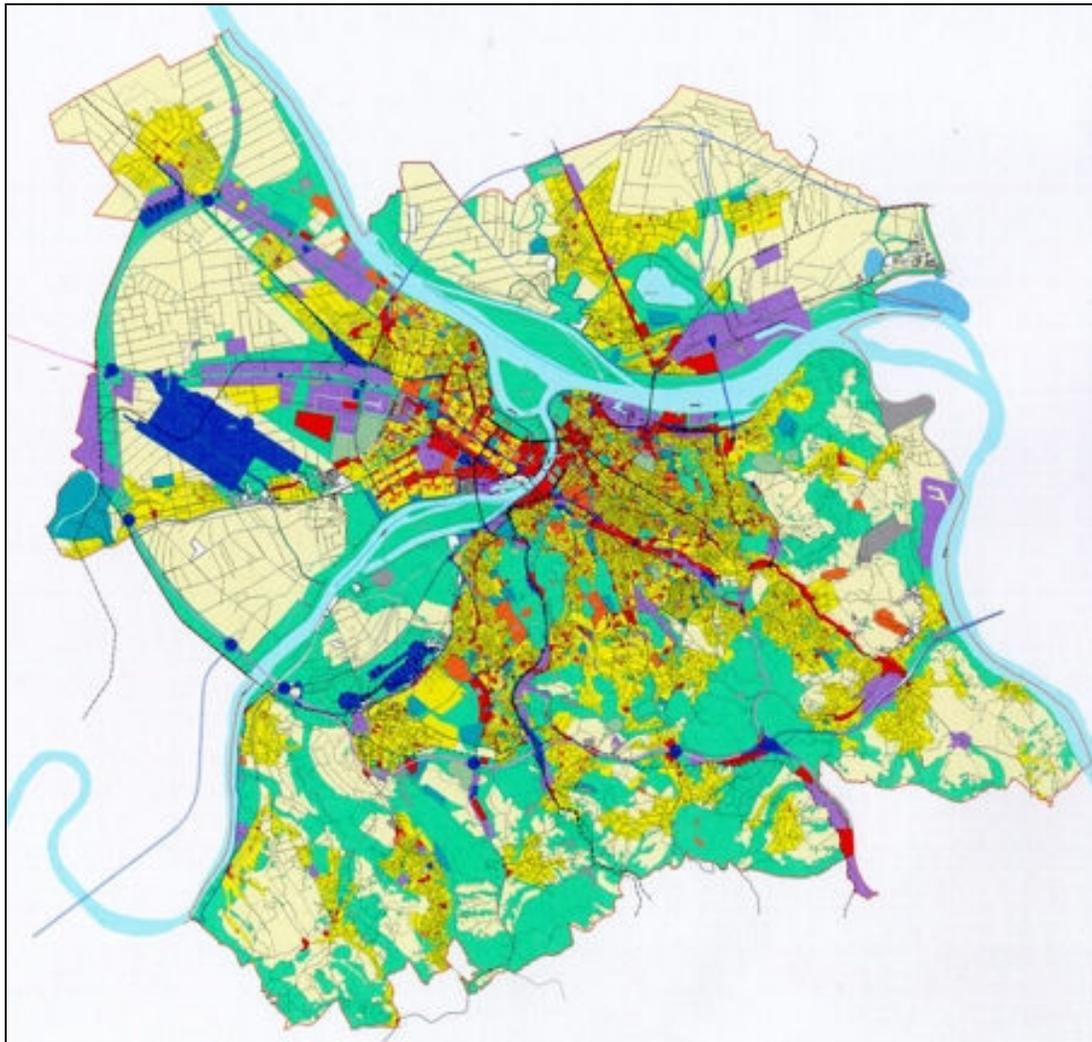


Figure 7: **The General Plan of Belgrade 2021**  
(Town Planning Institute of Belgrade: Centre for Documentation)

The above assertions show that urban development (growth) of Belgrade has been concerning sprawl during all the time of its existence.

**The main goals** that have to be achieved by the planned regeneration, reconstruction and development of the town are the following :

- upgrading of the built up area, the city area and ambient values
- adding to the attractiveness of Belgrade and giving it an identity of metropolis
- combined and harmonized application of planning and market instruments, especially the instruments of land development policy
- supporting heterogeneous new development from the aspects of typology land development standards and
- establishing financial modalities.

## **Some Contextual Conditions and Influences to the Future Development**

### ***Social background***

Post-socialistic transformation in Belgrade has turned out to be much slower than in other Central European societies and cities. Social system transition has been followed by marginalization of local economy in European context, and impoverishment of population and community as a whole.

Poverty gravely influenced urban population and middle classes, so that, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are 40% of poor inhabitants, another 40% are at the verge of poverty, only 15% belonging to middle classes, and 5% are rich, (0.5% very rich).

**Spatial consequences** of such social trends were numerous, multiply negative. They included illegal adding of superstructure on the existing buildings (sometimes couple of floors), enlargements, through mass placing of stands in every possible location in the city streets or other public spaces, to illegal building of the residential and other objects, including construction of the entirely new city blocks and sometimes the whole settlements without any plan and very often on the land which didn't belong to the constructors. Obviously, in that period (and even now) the State didn't (doesn't) work its job. It was (is) a bad time (war, economic sanctions, poverty) when social peace has been bought with no action.

### ***Economy***

Economic stagnation and regression in the decade from 1990 to 2000 was induced by the same factors affecting the trends and the situation in the whole country. The causes of the phenomena are external and internal.

External are:

- Reduced size of the state and market space,
- Economic sanctions imposed by the EU and UN Security Council,
- Transitional crisis
- Closing of the markets in developed countries caused by globalisation, stagnation of the world economy and intensifying of the debt crisis.

Internal are:

- Lack of consistency and completeness in the economic environment, followed by frequent changes of institutional regulations concerning business,
- Lack of stability in economic conditions – exchange rate and prices;
- War, large inflow of refugees and outflow of young highly-educated professional staff with modern technology related skills.

### ***Sustainability***

*The General Plan of Belgrade 2021*, was done according to all international charters and documents and it has been affirming the principles of sustainable development which is the main in the process of governing and continually arrangement of our cities. Sustainability in this context is a creative process of establishing a balance between the natural resources and urban functions of the city in partnership of all stakeholders in the city.

### ***Implementation of the General Plan of Belgrade 2021***

Declaratory, *The General Plan of Belgrade 2021*, is the strategic base of its spatial development. It was done according to the Serbian Law of Planning and Building from 2003.

The process of implementation began in October, 2003. Mostly, Plans of Regulation are the further step in planning procedure, which consist of more detailed regulation, precise rules and suggestions for architectural design for a particular parcel or site, necessarily in accordance with the construction rules and marginal values given in the General Plan.

The great challenging goal of this Plan was to enable simple and direct implementation, in order to increase urban planning efficiency (shorten procedures, controls of design and constructing processes for private developers and sites, public spaces and city as a whole). Although, the approach is desirable, this Plan doesn't consist of all elements which are, according to the Law, necessary for direct implementation, such as regulation of streets, parcelization, systems of infrastructure etc. By fragment implementation which doesn't provide public interests, instead of regulated lines, we usually have on the city map, many unconnected points which lead us to deregulation and chaos.

### **Perspectives of the Future Development**

Belgrade is the biggest Serbian city. Its leadership based on its magnitude and often on quality, ought to be carefully transformed towards different forms of support to the other cities of our country.

Belgrade should use advantages of its favourable geographical position and also vicinity of the important European corridors to reaffirm its role as a European metropolis. It will be done by developing of functions and activities adequate to such a status: services, tourism, commerce, scientific and educational centers, river transport, transit transport and by improving quality of physical structures and environment, also through identification, consolidation and affirmation of all the unique elements creating its identity.

Danube is one of the two most important traffic corridors (Corridor VII) leading through Belgrade, which connects Belgrade in many different ways with Germany, Austria and Hungary and also with the other Danubian countries. This resource was scarcely used so far. Knowing present shortcomings, the awareness of its multi-level importance brought the idea of building new bridges as a priority in the years to come. "Coming down to the rivers" is the most important for future development and city identity.

The uncontrolled growth of the city and backwardness of its economic basis, had for result gradual loss of green areas, from the smallest squares to parks and whole forests. Renewal of nature in the city will be reflected through:

- affirmation and better exploitation of the existing river islands
- creating new green oasis in the city blocks
- protecting and guarding different sorts of biotypes: woods, bog lands etc.

Speaking of sustainability, future construction of Belgrade is primarily directed towards existing structure, tending to complete infrastructure equipment of residential, business and industrial zones, following by a limited linear spreading. As much as it is possible, one of the tasks is to improve living conditions in the houses, buildings, blocks and parts of the city being a product of illegal building in the past and to integrate such district, if possible, in the city structure. Also it is important to improve living conditions in the parts of the city where poor people live, by determining special conditions for rehabilitation and transformation of such districts.

Only a decade ago, illegal building was scarce and present only in the suburban parts of the city, though now it is widely spread, including the central city areas. There are numerous grave consequences of such trends: spreading of architectural bad taste and constructional ignorance, illegal constructing, disrespect of legal issues, neighbours, urban tradition, misuse and usurpation of streets and public places for different unauthorized purposes, etc.

Belgrade should rely again on city planning and urban design: unquestionably the best way to regulate the city space. New method of urban planning should have to simplify the content of the plan and the procedure, also it should be more explicit, transparent, flexible, to establish continuity, better coordination among all the participants and to be selective and efficient in solving the main problems of development. The rational use of land as the rare and limited recourse, is one of the aims of planning. But, in practice those aims are not fully implemented, because of the real imperfections of urban legislation and regulation and personal weaknesses some of the participants in the process of planning and building, which sometimes, unfortunately, cause bad urban design and functions.

It is necessary to activate production potentials of Belgrade and complete existing working zones, in accordance with socio-economic development strategy of Belgrade and spatial and urban-technical framework for prospective economic activities.

Transport system of Belgrade should be renewed in a way to achieve harmonized relation between land use and transportation demands and capacities. The problem could be solved only by introducing stronger systems of public transportation, followed by reconstruction, completion and further development of the city streets network. In order to solve the problem of parking in the city, it is firstly necessary to free the pavements and roads of parked vehicles constructing public multi-storey car parks.

The respect for urban memory of Belgrade and affirmation of diversified cultural-historical matrix, consisting of three specific spatial entities: Belgrade between two rivers, the Sava and the Danube, Zemun along the left bank of the Danube and New Belgrade on the left bank of the Sava river, with their distinctive central zones, is one of the fundamental frameworks for urban renewal and reconstruction.

Different projects activate crucial sites and programs: "Sava amphitheatre", "The Centre of New Belgrade", "The areas beside and on the Rivers Sava and Danube", "The Third Belgrade on the left bank of the Danube" etc. The new identity of Belgrade will be created under the aesthetic of globalization because the global real estate market forcing it. But it is necessary for city management to stimulate the growth in harmony with existing environment and inherited values.

Learning from the past and looking towards the future, Belgrade should be, as it used to be, the European metropolis where anyone could find one's "place in the sun", regardless origin, race, religion, sex, age, education, convictions or material status.

"The new identity of Belgrade should be multilevel, including the national, the regional and the local. Belgrade's regional identity is founded on its re-establishment as an important international, Central-European and Balkan centre. Belgrade's significant identity is to be maintained by general social integration, in cooperation with other cities having the symbolic or historical characteristics of metropolises."

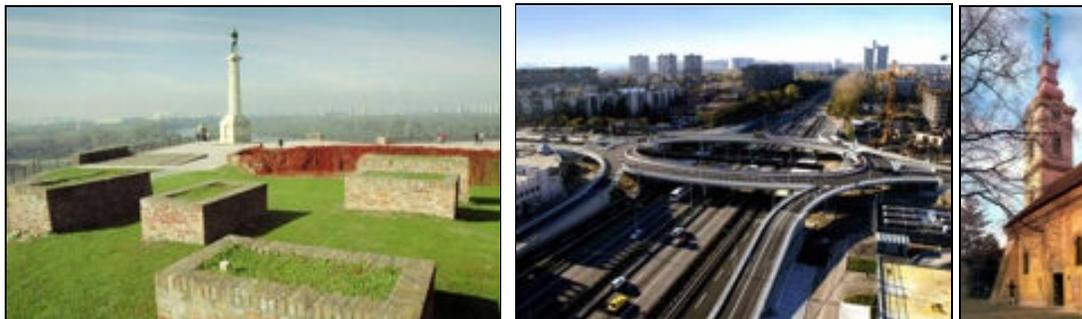


Figure 8-10: Belgrade City scenes (identity, structure, significance)

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