

BIBBIDI-BOBBIDI-BOO: The Reinvented Magic of Urban Shopping?

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1 ABSTRACT1

Built on the principles of the Athens charter and Modern movement, New Belgrade was a spatial representative of a new state and the post-war Yugoslav society. However, at the turn of the 21st century the processes of transition, globalization and EU-integration started, shaping New Belgrade into a polygon of another experiment, initiated by a number of local and foreign greenfield investments. The intensification of commercial, business and administrative activities has created a new identity of this urban entity, imposing new rules and elements into the rigid modernist concept. The shifts of consumption patterns and contemporary life style have imposed new shopping demands which reflected in a new typology of shopping nodes/centers dispersed throughout the territory.

The paper will focus on the period of the 1990s and 2000s analyzing the application of ‘global rules’ to shopping nodes and their network. The new layer of consumerism will be related to large/small scale spatial and social changes of New Belgrade, which have generated new urban energy while boosting further development and increasing the value of existing structures. The emphasis of the analysis will be on large shopping malls which announced another phase of New Belgrade’s development offering elements of traditional ‘inner city’ atmosphere implanted into the modernist grid.

2 INTRODUCTION: THE JOY OF CONSUMERISM

The contemporary way of life has generated a number of problems which are directly or indirectly caused by our patterns of consumption and their effects on environment. Saturated by increasing consumerism, modern cities face difficulties related to production technologies, distribution, transportation and – consequently - pollution, while the gap between low-income and high-income social groups becomes more visible then ever. However, it is difficult to step out of the vicious circle of shopping addiction and to return to a simple fulfillment of basic needs.

The ‘art of shopping’ has become a well-elaborated subject for architects, urban planners, psychologist and sociologists, while its importance for urban development has been frequently underlined. Sometimes, shopping represents a necessity, everyday routine or even a nuisance. On another level, it could be glorified as an activator of total urban regeneration or it could be labeled as an instrument of personal catharsis for over-stressed consumers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the relation between shopping and urban morphing becomes very strong, which reflects in a number of types that evolved during the last few decades. Hugh Pearman (2002) identifies seven main categories/types of shopping centers – open mall, ‘black box’ enclosed mall, daylight covered mall, mega-mall, ‘speciality center’, village-like ‘factory shopping center’ and ‘intersection city’. Most of these types could be considered as the latest development/transformation phase of a traditional shopping street, while the seventh type represents a mega-manifestation of commerce and its globalized character and performance. Pearman also emphasizes the revival of big department stores, which actually represent a social and architectural innovation of the 19th century (although the first one appeared even earlier in the UK, during the 18th century).

The position of new shopping nodes indicates recent changes and trends in urban development, demonstrating all the turbulence which occurred in the city of the 20th and early 21st century. The decline of the inner city, the expansion of town edges, urban growth and regional re-grouping, each one of these phases has affected different modes of shopping - their scale, architectural appearance, theme and attractions, favored atmosphere and relations to the city. However, the selected type of shopping could also define a preferred urban image, channeling its future nature and form (Sudjic, 1993).

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Consumerism usually overlaps with ideology, enabling a bifocal view to a society and its spatial manifestations. Therefore, this paper will give an insight into the urban transformations of New Belgrade analyzing the changes which occurred in shopping patterns during the last two decades. Representing a unique testimony of an epoch, New Belgrade has become the best example of recent social changes, revealing a striking image of transition - from socialism to capitalism (Fig. 1).

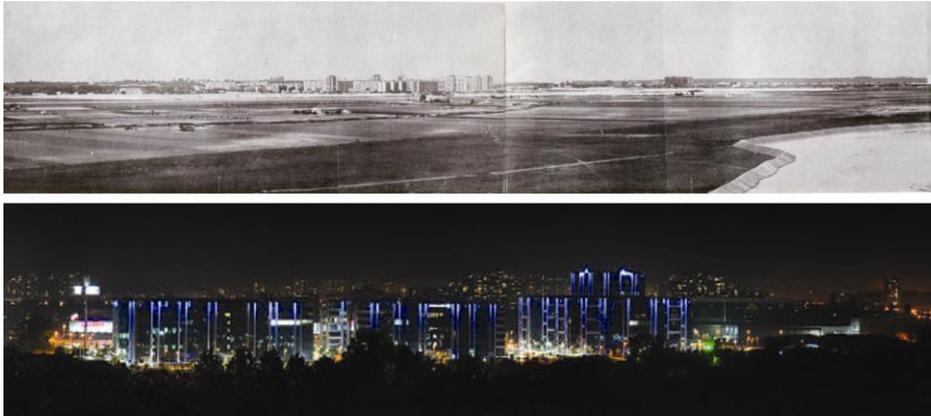


Figure 1: The image(s) of New Belgrade – snapshots of history and urban transformations (1950s and 2000s).

3 SETTING THE STAGE: MORPHOLOGY VS. IDEOLOGY

Conceived as a new administrative economic and cultural node of the post-war Yugoslavia and its society, New Belgrade played an important representative and symbolical role, which essentially distinguished its character, appearance and quality from other modern(ist) settlements and satellite towns with similar design pattern. As such, a new node of the Yugoslav capital had a necessary economic and ideological backup to implement a number of modernist ideals. Conceived as a functional city, it was composed according to an orthogonal grid of mega-blocks and mono-functional zoning. Consequently, it should have provided a variety of activities adjusted to the accepted concept and recognizable image of residential blocks with free standing buildings, greenery and large open spaces for social interactions. However, the changes of socio-political and economic conditions reduced the original idea transforming New Belgrade into a predominantly residential city. Nowadays, global trends and continuous debates about city development have underlined the importance of this area, bringing the question of its functional (re)structuring and activation into the limelight.



Figure 2: The local center in residential block no. 1 intended to serve the community cultural and daily needs.

3.1 The image of progress

New Belgrade, planned and designed as a modern, functional city, materialized some of the ideas launched by CIAM and Le Corbusier's Athens Charter. Beside its foreseen important position of a new administrative, economic and cultural hub of the capital, it also had the crucial impact on the integration of historical centers of Zemun and Belgrade into a greater metropolitan region. Thus, it does not represent a peripheral satellite settlement, but a unique central territory planned for further growth and concentration. Although conceived as a complex spatial structure with a number of functions, it was only partially realized. For many years, it has been dominated by residential modernist blocks. The mix of activities existed only on a community level, as a local center in each orthogonal mega-block, and it represented a state property (Fig. 2). The main role of every local center was to act as a meeting point, local supplier and a focus of cultural activities for the residents.

3.2 The critic of Modern

The critic of the applied modern concept marked the 1980's architectural scene, together with the impacts arising from the changed socio-political context. The concept was re-questioned, a number of problems was detected and some ideas about a renewal of this area appeared. This situation caused a shift of the original paradigm, transforming the open plan of New Belgrade and adjusting it to new users and needs. These changes could be decoded through two interesting events related to two different spatial levels. The first was The international competition for the future of New Belgrade, where majority of authors proposed fragmentation of over-scaled urban elements/blocks and suggested a return to traditional urban values. The second one was visible through the reinvention of residential scenery i.e. the construction of semi-open shopping centers which represented extensions of existing local centers.

The concept of these shopping centers was more traditional than modern, since their form and function resembled features and the atmosphere of old urban cores. Mostly composed of one or two longitudinal buildings, these nodes of shopping usually occupied only ground floor level. The space was divided into separate functional units – small shops which could only be accessed from outside. The variety of mixed contents included fashion stores, bakeries, cafes, bookstores, home appliances, etc. The land was state-owned, but each store was in private ownership. However, having in mind their small spatial capacity and structure and the fact that they were constructed only in a few mega-blocks, their role was mainly identified on a local level (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: First shopping centers built in New Belgrade - a/ the position in the block; b/ and c/ the built structure.

3.3 The period of transition

After 1989 and the beginning of European integration, Yugoslavia disintegrated. During the 1990s, the political, economic and social situation in Serbia was additionally complicated by the influence of international embargo, civil wars in ex-Yugoslavia and a continuous flow of refugees from ex-Yugoslav republics. Belgrade, as a capital, again became a stage for social turbulence, while New Belgrade, once conceived as an administrative and residential paradise of a socialist society, lost its prominent label. Reflecting a gloomy reality and limitations imposed by the economic isolation of the country, its urban tissue became a setting for new social transformation and architectural experiments.

The new postmodern streams that already emerged in the profession set off an imperative of 'thickening' the urban structure of New Belgrade. The guidelines were clear – to recreate a human scale of streets, to provide better accessibility for pedestrians, to reconsider scale of mega-blocks, superpose traditional urban patterns and, finally, to stimulate mixed-use by introducing new activities - culture, commerce, business, etc. (Milakovic and Vukmirovic, 2011). Consequently, the changed socio-economic circumstances and preferred spatial concepts reflected in the typology of shopping centers/nodes and this period generated three new types.

The first one – the flea/open market, represented a direct consequence of social stratification. In order to support socially vulnerable groups and meet their needs limited by low-income, this type was generated from informal sales near official markets and along streets. In time, this mode of shopping was relocated to a new, legal(ized) site, utilizing a large wired plot in which metal counters were set in rows. The market is totally open-air, with some characteristics of oriental bazaars (Fig. 4). The plot is still city-owned but each counter is private. Although its main role is to sell a wide range of products, there are some complementary activities, such as cafes and restaurants. The gravitation area of the largest New Belgrade open-market has also changed along with the change of its informal character. Nowadays, its importance on a city level is additionally supported by the proximity of a metro/tram station and a large parking lot.



Figure 4: The flea/open market - a/ the position in the block; b/ the entrance to the market, and c/ the daily atmosphere.

The second type appeared in a form of semi-closed malls along the main boulevards in just one area of New Belgrade and there are two examples of this concept. The spatial organization is based on a longitudinal building parallel to the main street, with two levels – ground floor and first floor. There are two types of galleries – closed, oriented toward the inner space, and opened, oriented toward the street. Both galleries actually represent a special kind of pedestrian ‘street’, providing access to all stores (Fig. 5). The longitudinal form is divided into three sections and two central atria are designed to be meeting points. Activities range from simple fashion stores to kindergartens and private medical offices. The buildings are still owned by the city, while individual stores are private. Parking lots exist, but their capacity in both cases is limited and inadequate – for ex. for more than 500 stores in one of the malls there are only 96 available parking places.

Although with similar spatial and functional structure, two representatives of this type have generated different importance and impact. The one which was built first remained locally oriented, attracting mostly residents of the nearby blocks. The structure of users has been changed in the second mall, becoming the biggest Chinese shopping center in the city and evolving into a shopping node of regional importance. This trend also influenced some changes in social diversity, replacing the inherited consistent structure of residents (originally mostly middle-income state officials) with a more multicultural (and globalized) milieu, composed of newcomers attracted by specific economic circumstances.



Figure 5: The semi-closed mall in Block 70: a/ the position in the block; b/ the system of open and closed galleries; c/ the daily atmosphere.



Figure 6: The transition type: from the semi-closed mall to the enclosed mall.

The third type actually represents a transition mode of the enclosed mall. Its semi-closed scheme consists of satellite standalone buildings located on the same lot/block. Visually, the central facility (the shopping center) and the surrounding satellite buildings are perceived as a single ‘unit’, although the outlying buildings are not physically connected (Fig. 6). At first, its importance was recognized on a city level, but nowadays its activities are mostly limited to the local area. Since it is not a typical representative of its kind, this paper will not consider further details.

4 MIRRORING THE GLOBAL FASHION

4.1 Shopping (in) the City

At the turn of centuries, the political and economical conditions in the country became more or less stable and a transition towards democracy influenced significant changes in planning practice. Stimulated by international trends, the area of New Belgrade has commenced its new life cycle and its disadvantages turned out to be potentials: the low index of built areas has indicated a number of possibilities for large development projects, while infrastructure and connectivity have provided a good backup. Open public spaces in this area have embraced some elements of traditional design and the process of reorganization and upgrading has started – responding both to an internal pressure (to transform the spatial structure) and respecting the global trends. The privatization of some public spaces has become a reality, imposing a business interest over the public one. The commercial facilities have been considered as positive markers of neighborhoods, while the penetration of private sector and the increased commercialization of public spaces have been accepted and promoted as an appropriate answer to the problems of mono-functional zoning and an opportunity to intensify activities, their quality and diversity (Fig. 7).

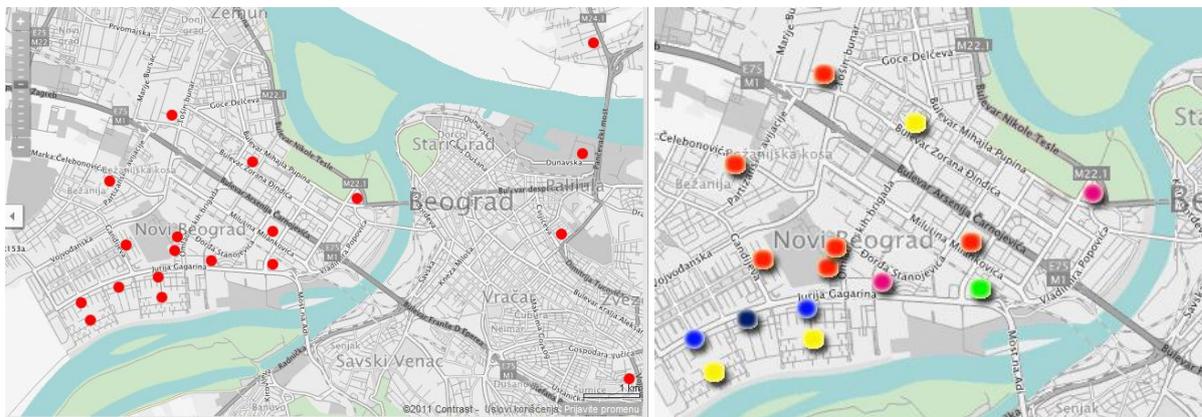


Figure 7: a/ Concentration of shopping malls in Belgrade; b/ Distribution of shopping mall types in New Belgrade (yellow – semi-open; blue – semi-closed; red – ‘big-box’ mall; pink – enclosed mall; green – open shopping center).

The first enclosed malls in New Belgrade were positioned at strategic locations, attached to important traffic arteries. Occupying large plots they represented large retails, i.e. parts of different chains that operate a store. Their physical structure could be classified as the ‘big-box’, a free-standing two story building, with a totally closed compact space (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. The first types of enclosed (big-box) malls in New Belgrade.

However, the typical representatives of the enclosed type appeared in New Belgrade few years ago. Since then, their number has increased, as well as a level and number of their activities and facilities. The design is introverted/inward-facing and its internal organization is based on theories which ‘control’ customers’ behavior (for example, the Gruen transfer - the moment when consumers respond to "scripted disorientation" cues in the environment; the effect of the transfer is marked by a slower walking pace). Like in many other cases, the mall is designed as a regional shopping hub and its building represents only a part of a larger superstructure, which also includes offices and/or residential space. The mall is up to three stories high, designed around two central atria, with a wide selection of stores, as well as with a number of entertainment facilities, fast-food outlets, restaurants and public areas (Fig. 9). The mall has its own social and functional dynamic, oriented towards the consumer. The shopping area is combined with a system of enclosed

walkways for pedestrians, which represents a modern version of the traditional marketplace. A convenient parking area is situated in an underground garage. One of the advantages of this type is certainly a permanent control of micro-climate.



Figure 9. An example/the biggest enclosed shopping mall (Uisce): a/ the position in the block; b/ the connection to the historical core (via one of the major streets); c/ the internal atmosphere.

Obviously, the identified types (Table 1) are well positioned in the contemporary consumption pattern(s), but depending on their spatial and functional concept (which is the result of all inherited/imposed ideological stimuli) their attractiveness varies, as well as the level of their adjustment to current needs. Therefore, some of these shopping structures seem to be outdated or even abandoned, but the general image represents New Belgrade as a new shopping paradise. From approx. 0,5m² of retail space per inhabitant (during the 1970s), the municipality of New Belgrade has nowadays around 1,6m² of retail space/inhabitant, which is the highest ratio in Belgrade.

The established urban magnetism has certainly brought a significant financial benefits, but some other levels – mostly social and ecological, have to be reconsidered and thoroughly evaluated in the next phase of urban development and growth.

4.2 Shopping and environment

The current situation in New Belgrade has caused a number of environmental problems and dilemmas. Some of them are related to old/inherited types of shopping centers, their structure and performances, while others represent results of the recent urban intensification triggered by the construction of new shopping malls. The concerns about energy efficiency and environmental protection have opened a new perspective of the future urban transformation, focusing a professional and public attention to accumulated problems of pollution, waste recycling and thermal control.

The main challenges, identified after the introduction of new, ‘globalized’ patterns of consumption, could be divided in three groups which are mutually dependent:

- traffic – increased intensity, points of congestion, critical routs, car-friendly vs. pedestrian-friendly concept, parking capacity;
- environment – air pollution, waste recycling, climate, carbon intensive vs. carbon-free consumption;
- energy – heating/cooling, renewable sources, thermal insulation, natural systems vs high technology.

In New Belgrade, the crucial impacts could be decoded in the increased intensity of traffic and the appearance of new points of congestion. This problem is mostly related to the shopping malls of regional importance, which are positioned along strategic routes of the city, in a close proximity to the access points to New Belgrade. Since these shopping malls represent car-friendly structures, they cause major traffic congestion and obstruct expected mobility. The consequences could be also detected in air pollution and changes of micro-climate. The other types of shopping centers in New Belgrade have more pedestrian-friendly concept. However, in comparison to them, parking capacities in enclosed malls are well calculated and designed.

	physical		Functional		social		environmental				
characteristics/ representatives	surface and height	openness or closure	internal organization/c concept	activities/struc ture	quality of activities	services	structure of users	special significance	included by project or not	microclimate	indirect impacts on the environment

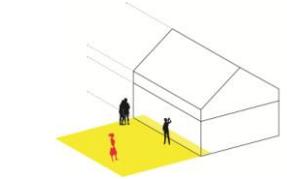
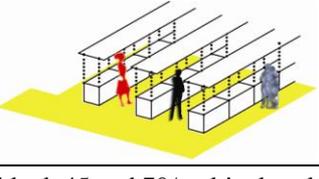
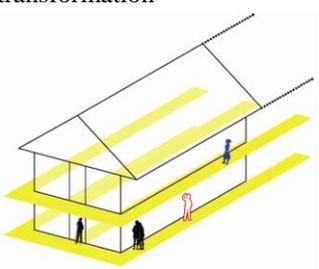
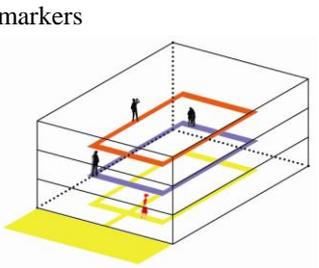
 <p>block 45 and 70/extensions</p>	1500 – 2000m ² /P	semi-open shopping centre	traditional open streets	mix-use/not satisfactory	not satisfactory	/	local level	only on local level/residents of a block	no	good/considering open/air concept	/
 <p>block 43/flea market</p>	23000 m ² /P	open shopping centre	characteristics of traditional bazaars	mix-use/not satisfactory	average	parking	city level	meeting point	no	good/considering open/air concept	increased traffic
 <p>block 45 and 70/multicultural transformation</p>	10000 – 15000 m ² /P+1	semi-closed shopping mall	traditional streets and squares	retail and wholesale	not satisfactory	parking/inadequately dimensioned	regional level	meeting point/symbol – element of new identity	no	bad	increased traffic
 <p>block 16 and 67/new city markers</p>	50000 – 85000 m ² /P+2	enclosed	traditional streets and squares	mix-use/satisfactory	good	parking, business, residential	city and regional level	meeting point, element of new identity	yes	good	increased traffic/air pollution

Table 1: Main types of commercial spaces in New Belgrade and their characteristics.

Regarding energy consumption, new enclosed malls are better designed than other types. The attention was mostly paid on thermal insulation. However, the latest standards of energy efficiency are not applied and there are still no attempts to orient/shift existing shopping centers to renewable sources of energy or (re)use of natural materials. The territory of New Belgrade is covered with remote heating system. However, all shopping centers use unsustainable systems of cooling.

The differences between identified types of shopping centers certainly direct future actions but the introduction of new environmental standards and their adjustment to local conditions should become an imperative for every process of renewal and/or transformation. The magnetism of consumption could also be used as an instrument of public promotion and education – suggesting and testing an environmentally conscious approach through various campaigns and activities.

5 CONCLUSION: FACING THE EFFECTS

The latest type of shopping malls, which is inserted into the urban tissue of New Belgrade, has become a landmark on several levels – local, city and regional. The changes in consumption patterns have also resulted in different urban morphology and functional structure, but in general, transformations could be decoded in several spheres:

- economy (higher rates of land and apartments in the surrounding area);
- society (new elements of multiculturalism/cosmopolitanism);
- space/activities (space attractiveness, intensification of pedestrian flows, articulation of meeting points, structure and quality of activities);
- environment (new standards and challenges).

Simultaneously, the contemporary urban needs, new inhabitants and recently improved attractiveness of New Belgrade have instigated some modifications of old types of shopping centers, as well as a new life of ex-community centers (initially with cultural activities). These new forms of shopping actually upgrade the previous content, providing a number of additional activities and public/communal facilities - such as libraries, theaters, banks, recreational units, pubs, groceries and even some civic initiatives (for ex. New Belgrade's Cultural Network), etc. As the trend grows, other facilities are usually developed around the existing centers increasing the significance of the center among local residents and other users on the city level (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. a/the local community center in block 45 - the public event 'New Belgrade – the city of the open heart'; b/reconstructed movie theater - multipurpose hall.

The shopping landscape of New Belgrade, currently composed of old and new types of commercial spaces, still needs to be thoroughly evaluated and subordinated to an integral vision of development. The physical, functional, social and environmental elements of each type provide a comprehensive image of a current situation and/or undertaken actions, while the synergy of global trends and local economy direct further guidelines. However, the magic of consumerism remains. Nowadays, it is in a glitzy package wrapped with mixed-use and new aesthetic, but the ultimate sensation and excitement are guaranteed.

You just have to pay for the spell.

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