

# THE BEAUTY OR THE BEAST?

CAN ILLEGAL HOUSING TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL HOUSING?

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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

## PROBLEMS >>

### WORLDWIDE, especially developing countries>>

- **Incoherent urban and regional development**, tackling the urban growth;
- and deficit of integrated urban strategies.

### SERBIA >>

- A need for integration of special **socio-economic groups**, such as low income citizens, refugees etc.; **lack of adequate affordable housing** (types, capacity, etc.);
- **Transition process** and economic crisis slow down housing policy reforms and restrain growth of the affordable housing (as a part of public sector);
- Actual **Serbian political framework** is encouraging legalization process, thus letting the urban sprawls & illegal settlements grow.

### BELGRADE >>

- **Demographic pressure**, creating pressure to previously agriculture areas at the fringes of the city and making them **illegal settlements**



## SO WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Is it realistic to **treat** such big issues of urban development **separately**?

Or maybe it is possible to change the prospective and try use problems in the way they partly **solve each other**?

This paper will enlighten the problem of illegal housing in **unconventional way** – by trying to understand the illegal settlements as areas of social/affordable housing and **social integration**.

It will also discuss the possibilities of **urban upgrading and regeneration of illegal settlements** making them liveable places and areas which can be integrated into the Belgrade development.



**Beauty...**



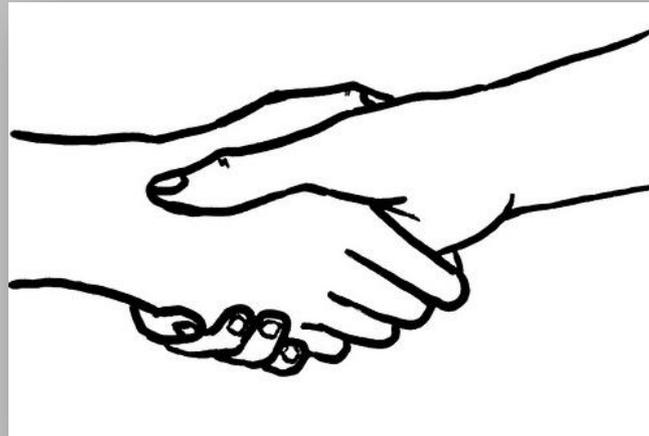
**SOCIAL  
HOUSING**



**Beast...**



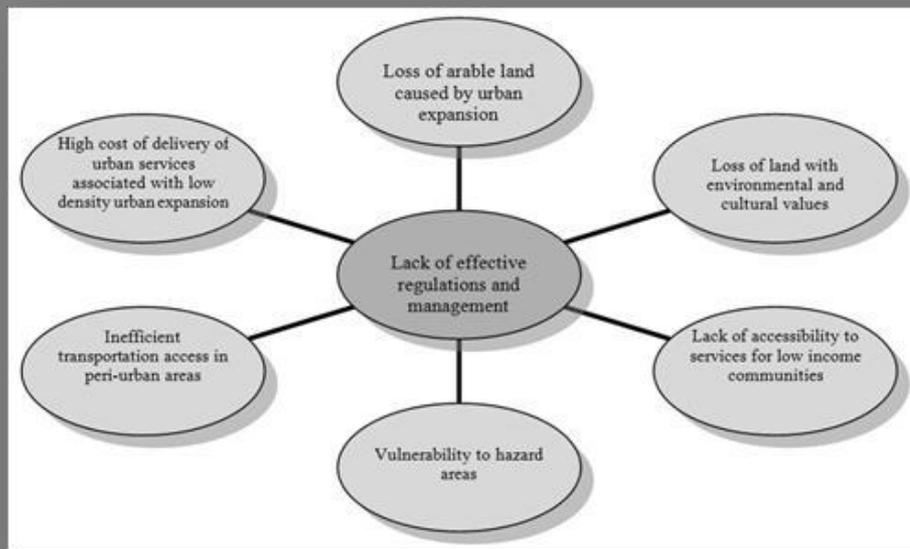
**ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS  
& CITY SPRAWL**



# Beast ... ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS & CITY SPRAWL

## PROBLEM OF URBAN SPRAWL AND ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS/ GENERAL FRAMEWORK >>

- **Causes /genesis** differ, but generally, in many cities spatial forms are largely driven by the efforts of low income households to secure affordable land, in location that is reasonably close to the places of work, often in peri-urban slums and informal settlements.
- Depending on the mix of land use and infrastructure quality, these areas can often be squatter settlements, informal land subdivisions, not complied with building codes and constructed on the inappropriate land (such as landslides, flood plains etc.).
- **Types and forms** vary, such as >> contiguous, leapfrogging, 'necklace' corridors, continuous corridors,...
- **Effects >>**



Land Use Planning – Peri urban growth,  
Source: World Bank Institute (2012)

## Beast ... ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS & CITY SPRAWL

### BELGRADE TODAY >>

- Belgrade is defined as an organizational, administrative, service, educational, scientific and cultural centre with **22.5% (25%) of the country's population**, making an enormous pressure about employment and housing;
- **Regional development** of wider city area has never been actually balanced;
- City strategies and community/ regional/ master plans without substantial level of **integration and coherence**.

### General characteristics of Belgrade urban/illegal growth >>

- **Common ground with the expansion in cities in developing countries**, despite the different socio-economic path of Belgrade, such as city growth with huge illegal settlements;
- On the other hand, Belgrade's urban expansion **does not have much in common with neighbouring EU countries' cities** or even with ex-socialistic cities despite the geographical and historical link to them (with the exception of some Balkan cities);
- The problem of illegal settlements in Belgrade region is strongly related to the other problems of city development, sometimes being a cause, but more often being a **consequence of complexity of spatial, economic, social and political issues**.

The size of illegal housing in Belgrade - illegal settlement of Kaluđerica.

Source: Wikipedia



## Beast ... ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS & CITY SPRAWL

### Illegal settlements and housing in Belgrade, spatial features >>

Though city development policy is not oriented and is not officially supporting the informal housing and economy, it is estimated that **informal housing takes almost 44% of housing areas in Belgrade.**

**About 150.000 illegal housing units in Belgrade or more?**

**Spatial distribution** > North Eastern and southern Belgrade outskirts, left Danube river bank, other smaller settlements and scattered informal housing groups all over the city borders. **The *concentration* of buildings is the highest along the main traffic corridors.**

**Natural conditions** > **relatively convenient terrain** (exception of left Danube river bank); decent share of green areas;

**Land use** > **residential areas** (90%), with significant share of non-residential land use (retail, services and other commercial activities), mostly concentrated along the main traffic corridors; **lack of public spaces and services** as the effect of absence of regulatory plans.



Satellite view of Kaluđerica, “the biggest illegal settlement in the Balkans”. Source: Beodom

## Beast ... ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS & CITY SPRAWL

- **Traffic and infrastructure network** > is irregular and insufficient - narrow streets large slope, no sidewalks, low safety;
- **Urban structure** > is irregular and spontaneous, no firm urban matrix, irregular parcels , threatened privacy;
- **Architectural design** > simply designed, no characteristic of style. The interior organization also lacks good architectural design but housing units are functional in its simplest meaning;
- **Variety of social background**
- **Wider picture** > Since 1996. **regulatory framework** on planning and building in Serbia **encourages informal sector** (less than 1 % of total number of illegal buildings in Serbia have been demolished);  
As a consequence, many **regulatory plans** have been made with sole function **to legalize** the expanded informal settlements, instead of being the strategy for the future development.



The disbalance between urbanism and architecture  
(Personal archive)



The "occupation of new territories" - Jelezovac settlement  
(Personal archive)

## Beauty ... Social housing

Why is social/affordable housing the “**beauty**”?

Social housing is >>

- Social housing is **very visible and feasible measure** of social sustainability;
- Social housing as a concept proved to be adaptable to **different communities and social contexts**;
- The concept of social housing is **adopted worldwide**, with various local characteristics;
- Concept of social housing can easily create **synergy effect** > its appropriate development can improve the situation “in situ” in several ways.



Livable new development of social housing in Madrid. Source: Luis García at Wikipedia



# Beauty ... Social housing

Traditional meaning  
of social housing

Social housing is the affordability of decent and healthy homes.  
(UN, 1948, art. 25<sup>th</sup>).



Contemporary meaning  
of social housing

Social housing is more complex issue today, since it also includes the questions of transport and public facilities as intermediate social needs  
(UN habitat, 2012, p. 33).

FROM >>

- public building
- public ownership
- new building
- huge urban independent areas  
mass production
- nuclear families



TO >>

- public-private building corporations
- several different ownership models
- renewal and regeneration
- small integrated quarters
- individualization and place-making
- different types of occupants

## Beauty ... Social housing

### EU FRAMEWORK >>

- **best and rich practise;**
- New examples take care about **urban/spatial dimension;**
- **not just social aspect** > the importance of typology, different density of housing, the accessibility of services and transport, the inclusion of open public spaces, the making of identity.



Low density social housing in the Netherlands. Source: Wikipedia



A variety of social housing in England. Source: Towerblocktom at en.wikipedia



Social housing "with identity" in Spain. Source: Flickr

## Beauty ... Social housing

### SERBIAN AND BELGRADE FRAMEWORK >>

- Serbian framework is different and **not yet developed** fully, but with positive development;
- lack of **urban/spatial dimension** and criteria, lack of diversity of social housing types;
- **Neighbourhood/community context** is not taken into account enough;
- Specific focus group of social housing > **refugees**;
- The situation is **more complex in Belgrade**, because of lack of space and strong population pressure.



Multi-storey social housing projects with many units are the dominant type of social housing in Belgrade.

Source: Građevinska direkcija Srbije



“Small projects” of social housing are rare in Belgrade and usually the consequence of lack of space.

Source: Housing Centar, Belgrade



## Beauty ... Social housing

### SERBIAN AND BELGRADE FRAMEWORK >>

1. HOUSING LAW (1992-2012)
2. THE STUDY OF HOUSING SECTOR OF SERBIA (2006)
3. PUBLICATION "FOUR STRATEGIC THEMES OF THE HOUSING POLICY IN SERBIA" (2006)
4. SOCIAL HOUSING LAW (2009)
5. NATIONAL STRATEGY OF SOCIAL HOUSING (2012)
6. ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY (2012)



Regulatory framework and policy of social housing in Serbia have **following characteristics**:

- **Very few actions of spatial-related elements** of social housing;
- Present actions are usually **focused to basic architectural elements**, without clear connection to "urban dimension".
- In some cases, they **seem "narrowed" and even contradictory** to rich contemporary EU practice.
- State institutions and bodies do **not define strictly** any model and/or building type of social housing as role-model for implementation "in situ";
- **Social Housing Law (2009)** is the most important legislative act in Serbia. The law is **adequate basis** for this sector, but it needs further elaboration through detailed regulations and guidances.



## Getting together ... The beauty and the beast

### Sectorial policies/regulatory framework/ international strategies >>

- fragmented & disintegrated,
- functioning on its own,
- failing to acknowledge the “bigger picture”.

### Questioning most of the CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES ?

- Since legal framework related to illegal building sector does not work and the old policies seem to have failed, maybe it is the time to **admit that changes in the attitude have to be made?**
- Instead of turning head off the fact that it is not possible to fully tame or prevent the illegal city growth, is not it better to **embrace it and fully integrate into the planning frame** and social housing policy and legislation?
- >> **Reviving of holistic approach** by observing the problems overlapped in spatial, social, financial, environmental and other context.



## Getting together ... The beauty and the beast

### FUTURE STEPS >>

- **The change in the perception** of informal settlements as of undesirable, non-appropriate form of housing;
- **The change in the social housing sector** and in the **planning** and building sector legislation in the way they become **more comprehensive and integrative**; both should be more open to the public and private sector partnerships, thus opening the way to include informal sector housing owners into the legal framework;
- **The change in social housing typology** leading to greater diversification of spatial and physical forms, including the transformed types of informal buildings;
- Acknowledging the **values and possible qualities of informal settlements** (good quality of applied building materials, size of the dwellings, greenery, etc.). It is necessary to undertake a comprehensive research and study about the informal settlements and provide a reliable information data;
- Redefining the **possibilities of upgrading the informal settlements** so that they achieve newly defined standards of social/affordable housing.



## Getting together ... The beauty and the beast

### OTHER STEPS AND RESEARCH >>

- **Institutional support** in the form of new body assigned to assist upgrading informal sector/settlements, providing adequate services, traffic and infrastructure network;
- **Legislative support** at local level and preferably at state level when possible (local government more willing to adjust in short time)/ for example - stimulations for houses and owners who meet social housing criteria, criteria of basic infrastructure equipment, energy efficiency, etc. The process should empower local tenant associations, neighborhood organizations, builders from the informal sector, third sector social service providers (health, education, social provision, etc.) to improve existing settlements;
- **Specific education process** ( e.g. short term courses) for local communities with the aim to train them to assist in implementation of this idea.

- **Bringing new ideas** about social housing and illegal settlements, Belgrade could become a pilot area for experimenting with alternative institutional arrangements and cooperative forms, supported by university research.

# Thank for Your attention!

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# Questions?