

## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Second World War, the city of Belgrade lay in ruins. Having been subjected to eleven separate Allied bombing raids, it incurred further destruction from the occupation forces as they retreated during the Belgrade offensive that ended with the liberation of the city. By November 1944, the fighting had completely destroyed the city's rail network, damaged 80 percent of its tramway network, wrecked nearly all of its trams and buses, and rendered 18 percent of its water supply and sewage lines unusable. Nearly half of its buildings—12,889 out of 30,000—were either damaged or destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

The new Partisan regime, led by Josip Broz Tito, immediately began to plan its reconstruction, appointing a modernist architect, Nikola Dobrović, to imagine a capital worthy of the new Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1950, on the sixth anniversary of the city's liberation, Belgrade's first socialist master plan was unveiled. Anticipating Nehru's choice for Chandigarh, the new capital of Indian Punjab, and Kubitschek's choice for Brasilia, Brazil's new capital, the urban planning team had decided to transform the city into the modernist ideal of a functionalist city. In order to achieve this, the center of gravity of the city would be shifted westward, across the Sava River. A new city center, built in the image of Le Corbusier's Radiant City, would be erected on what had, until then, been a floodplain.

In 1968, when Belgrade's planning office began to work on a new master

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plan, it left this functionalist blueprint behind in favor of computer modeling and continuous planning. By this time, few Yugoslav planners espoused the utopian vision of the modernist functionalist city, and they were not alone—across the world, modernist planning had come under attack as a failed model.

What brought about the rise of the modernist functionalist urban planning model, often attributed to Le Corbusier, in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the world, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s? Why was it eventually abandoned and replaced by other approaches? In our search for answers, we need to cast our net wider than just the architectural and planning profession. As Stanislaus Von Moos proposed in his seminal study of Le Corbusier's work, "the growth and form of cities is not determined by the will of architects, let alone that of one single architect, but by socio-economic forces and interests, institutional patterns, and a conception of progress and efficiency shared by the prevailing elites. Architects merely propose recipes that represent these forms and interests."<sup>2</sup>

The Yugoslav socialist regime endorsed modernist functionalist urbanism both because it was compatible with its values and its project for economic and social modernization and because it bolstered Yugoslavia's global image. A shift in the regime's modernization strategy ultimately combined with dissatisfaction with the model locally and its obsolescence internationally, leading the regime to abandon this approach and adopt new, cutting-edge methodologies.

Two excellent monograph-length studies and a number of journal articles have already begun to address the influence of modernism in socialist Yugoslavia. Architectural historian Ljiljana Blagojević's detailed study of modernist architecture and urban planning in Belgrade, *Novi Beograd: Osporeni Modernizam*, has documented in detail and critiqued the development of a new modernist settlement in the heart of the capital, Belgrade. In their beautifully illustrated volume *Modernism In-Between: The Mediator Architecture of Socialist Yugoslavia*, Vladimir Kulić and Maroje Mrduljaš have situated Yugoslav modernism in a broader context, arguing that Yugoslavia innovated a unique interpretation of modernism, blending socialism with a formal vocabulary developed in the West. Kulić has further explored Yugoslav modernism and its relationship to the state's unique geopolitical context in his dissertation and several articles. These are valuable contributions to the history of modernism as an architectural movement in Yugoslavia. This study seeks to build on this foundation by relating it to the political, economic, and social development of Belgrade and Yugoslavia more broadly. Historian Predrag Marković has

sought to capture the political, social, and cultural life of Yugoslavia's capital after the Second World War. Like Kulić and Mrduljaš, he frames his analysis in terms of Yugoslavia's "in-betweeness," balancing between an ideological model crafted in the Soviet Union and a diplomatic and cultural attraction to the West. While much of his analysis relates to the issues discussed in this study, he only briefly addresses architecture and urban planning. Thus, in a way, the present study seeks to engage these two different approaches in a productive dialogue and to examine the implications for Yugoslavia's built environment of a variety of factors: the economic priorities and policies adopted by its leaders, demographic pressures, the ways in which inhabitants experienced and reacted to this environment, the influence of cultural trends on their aspirations, and new trends in urban planning.

Consequently, this monograph engages both with the history of socialist Yugoslavia and with the global history of planning and modernist architecture. It reveals an unknown chapter of modernism, whose history in connection to socialist states is only starting to be written. While many case studies of modernism in different national contexts have been published, few have focused on urban planning in the postwar European socialist states.<sup>3</sup>

This study demonstrates that, in this case, modernist functionalist planning was not abandoned because it produced "inhuman" or "unlivable" neighborhoods, an interpretation that gained currency among scholars and practitioners in the late 1960s and 1970s and has never been seriously challenged, but because it lost the support of decision makers. Unlike in Western Europe, where this loss of support condemned modernist settlements to decline, however, the dynamics of housing provision in Yugoslavia ensured that these neighborhoods would remain popular and vibrant.

This study also aims at enriching our understanding of the social history of Yugoslavia by investigating how this idiosyncratic socialist regime functioned in practice. Specifically, it shows how decisions were made and implemented by state authorities, and it demonstrates the surprising degree of leverage that ordinary citizens had to challenge these decisions. It also explores the practical implications of Yugoslavia's "in-between" political economy—specifically, the economic reforms undertaken in the mid-1960s for the Yugoslav socialist project, in which a collectivist state-led political and economic model was replaced by one that was more individualistic and consumer driven. Finally, it describes the various spaces and places brought into being by the socialist system, both intentionally and unintentionally.

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It approaches these questions through the analysis of a variety of primary sources. Archival materials proved a particularly invaluable and relatively untapped resource, providing not only the state's perspective on Yugoslavia's problems and needs, through the numerous reports and meeting minutes of decision-making bodies, but also people's grievances and requests, through the minutes of neighborhood meetings and requests for housing. The Belgrade municipal archives and archival materials kept by Belgrade's Town Planning Institute were particularly useful. Studies and conference materials from consultative bodies and research institutes, such as the Standing Commission of Yugoslav Cities and the Yugoslav Institute for Urbanism and Housing, provide telling data and a window on the concerns of practitioners and social scientists in Yugoslavia. Newspapers reported on both the successes and the failures in urban planning and construction, as well as popular opinion of these efforts. Professional journals documented the architects' and planners' evolving understanding of planning and were a rich source of information on particular projects. And finally, interviews with planners provided personal testimony of what it was like to participate in the great modernist project in Belgrade.

### **DEFINING MODERNIST URBAN PLANNING**

The modernist project in Belgrade was a local interpretation of a much broader urban planning trend. The vision embodied in the city's first socialist master plan, in 1950, reflected a general consensus about urban planning that had crystallized in the European community of modernist architects by the early 1930s. A significant contingent of European architects embracing a modernist aesthetic and approach to architecture had come together in 1928 to form the International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) to tackle major social problems by changing the built environment. After first focusing on how to provide affordable and humane housing to workers by designing a "minimal existence dwelling," they turned their attention to the problems of overcrowding and disorganization in European cities.<sup>4</sup> The first years of CIAM had been marked by a conflict between those who believed that the organization should take an explicitly political stance, following the lead of the Soviet Union, and those who believed it would be most effective if it remained apolitical. By 1933 events seemed to vindicate the latter, as the Soviet Union adopted an increasingly ambivalent stance toward modernism, and Italian modernist architects had begun to work for Mussolini's fascist state. Consequently, at its

fourth congress in 1933, CIAM sought solutions to urban problems that could be deployed by any state, regardless of its political orientation.

During a cruise from Marseilles to Athens and back again held in 1933, contingents from eighteen different countries, including Yugoslavia, which was represented by Croatian architect Ernest Weissmann, debated the optimal organization of space in cities in the modern age. While there was some disagreement on certain aspects—with some participants advocating a concentrated, high-rise urban form and others looking to low- and medium-rise satellite cities—and while not all of the congress participants believed that sufficient analysis had been done to warrant the formulation of principles, a general consensus did emerge from the meetings. The participants agreed on the importance of separating different urban functions, conceptualized as dwelling, working, leisure, and circulation. They also endorsed the separation of different types of traffic and its banishment from residential areas, as well as the provision of collective services to housing districts. Several groups also saw high-rise construction as an effective way to bring greenery into the city, although this particular conclusion was contested by some. Private ownership of buildings and land speculation were identified as obstacles to good planning.<sup>5</sup> In spite of general agreement on these issues, there were sufficient differences of opinion that participants were not able to agree on concrete resolutions at the end of the congress. While the areas of agreement were distilled by a team of CIAM members into a series of affirmations (*constatations*), an official statement of the CIAM's position on the functional city was never published.<sup>6</sup>

These affirmations (*constatations*) were taken up by Le Corbusier, expanded upon, and published as the Athens Charter in 1943. While Le Corbusier undeniably added some of his own personal views, which were not necessarily representative of the modernist movement as a whole, this document still provides a useful summary of the principal preoccupations and prescriptions of pre-Second World War modernist urbanism, which was so influential in shaping Belgrade's first postwar master plan.

The Athens Charter was a manifesto for modernizing the traditional European city. It advocated a holistic approach toward urban planning, envisioning the city as a complex mechanism that had to be dealt with as a totality. The charter started from the premise that the European city was mortally diseased as a result of two pathologies—private interest and the machine age. In order for the city to become healthy again, the first evil had to be contained or even eliminated. In contrast, the second evil—the machine age—had to be

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accepted. It was the city itself that had to change to adapt to it and harness its potential to better serve mankind.<sup>7</sup>

Architects, working with a strong public authority, were proclaimed to be the agents capable of rescuing the city from speculation for private gain and from the degradation wrought by industrialization and the automobile invasion. The Athens Charter was at its core a technocratic program for realizing social order and social justice through the judicious deployment of science and technology. It aimed to eliminate disorder and inefficiency, such as time wasted commuting to work and home again, badly allocated resources, and maladapted transportation systems. The solution, it proclaimed, was planning based on scientific analysis. It also called for the adoption of the latest building technologies to realize the ideal city. These aspects of the charter support sociologist Mauro F. Guillén's argument that modernism was an attempt to incorporate Taylorism—that is, scientific management—into architecture.

In the charter, the social good was primarily conceived of in terms of public health. In order to remain physically and morally healthy, people needed to have access to clean air, sunshine, and ample space. In the existing European city, the wealthy enjoyed these amenities, while the underclass lived in squalid conditions, a situation to which Engels had drawn attention in *The Condition of the Working Class*. The charter called for the redistribution of space in order that all might enjoy public health. It provided a series of prescriptions for realizing this new social order, based on the notion that cities were best understood as the site of four types of human activity: dwelling, working, leisure, and circulation. The optimal way to organize the first three functions in the machine city was to separate them from one another, while optimizing circulation in order to facilitate movement between them. The traditional city block would be abandoned in favor of apartment buildings freely disposed in green space. Leisure and services, such as nurseries and sporting facilities, would also be embedded in parks. Industrial zones would be located in proximity to residential areas, which would be protected from them by a green belt. Optimizing circulation, in turn, involved separating different kinds of traffic and adapting roadways to the automobile.

The Athens Charter reflected the sense of generalized social and political crisis that pervaded the 1930s. However, the vision of urbanism it promoted did not manage to inspire widespread change until the postwar era. As Europe cleared the debris of the Second World War, and modernist architects succeeded in obtaining key positions in reconstruction efforts across Europe,

the precepts of interwar modernist urbanism acquired a new resonance as essential ingredients for national regeneration, thanks to their call for sweeping away the corrupt vestiges of the past in favor of a clean slate in urbanism, their focus on creating an orderly and egalitarian society, their emphasis on the rational use of space and materials, and their promise to meet housing needs in a cost-effective manner.<sup>8</sup> This technocratic utopian program also captured the imagination of some non-European states, particularly those gaining their independence or embarking on a modernization project. Because “Athens Charter” urbanism proclaimed itself beyond politics, it was available to any state that fulfilled its requirement of a strong central authority and shared its vision of modernity. At the same time, the Soviet Union’s condemnation of modernism as “bourgeois formalism” precluded its adoption by the Eastern European people’s republics.

This study investigates what made the urban planning approach promoted by the modernist movement in the mid-1930s appealing to the new communist regime in Yugoslavia and how the regime applied these ideas in the concrete case of Belgrade. It also examines the extent to which the city that evolved reflected the modernist master plan and what explains the divergences. Finally, it seeks to understand when and why the Belgrade Town Planning Office changed its approach to urban planning.

The first chapter examines some of the existing literature that has sought to explain the rise and fall of modernist urban planning, either globally or in particular national or local contexts. It calls into question commonly held beliefs about the failure of the “Athens Charter” model of urban planning and situates the Yugoslav case in a broader global context. Chapters 2 through 4 deal with the Yugoslav state’s adoption, appropriation, and adaptation of the modernist functional city model for its capital city, Belgrade. Chapters 5 through 7 then explore the various reasons for the waning of the Athens Charter as an urban planning model.

Chapter 2 examines the process of conceiving Belgrade’s first socialist master plan after the Second World War and explores the ways in which its authors appropriated and implemented modernist functionalist planning. Modernist architect Nikola Dobrović was likely chosen to head the planning efforts because of his demonstrated commitment to the Partisan cause, but the regime ultimately decided to rebuild Belgrade according to the modernist functionalist model because its emphasis on the efficient use of resources was highly compatible with the regime’s plans for economic modernization. The interpre-

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tation of the Athens Charter embodied in the master plan reflected not only the priorities and ambitions of a socialist state and a critique of the previous capitalist order but also the constraints posed first by reconstruction and then by the Tito-Stalin split.

Chapter 3 focuses on the first efforts to build new housing settlements and actual reconstruction in a period of economic austerity and identity crisis, from the end of the Second World War until the mid-1950s. While architects and urban planners had struggled to impose some order on the reconstruction of Belgrade in the years following the Second World War, the Tito-Stalin split and the ensuing ideological redefinition seemed to offer an opportunity to reassert their vision for a modernist Belgrade. Nonetheless, their hands remained tied due to economic austerity until the mid-1950s, when the state decided to invest in the standard of living. Urban planners also harnessed the language of self-management, Yugoslavia's reinterpretation of socialism, in their efforts to reassert a leadership role and put the Athens Charter into practice.

Chapter 4 analyzes how the improving economic situation, the introduction of self-management, and the evolution of economic policy influenced the concept of New Belgrade, the centerpiece of the 1950 master plan. In keeping with decentralization and the new emphasis on raising the standard of living, the symbolic function of New Belgrade changed from the monumental capital of Yugoslavia to a model settlement catering to the diverse needs of the workingman. It did not live up to its promise, however, because the need for housing took priority over all other considerations. This egalitarian model was further threatened when, in the 1960s, the Yugoslav state adopted market socialism as its new modernization strategy. According to this model, consumers would play a role in driving the Yugoslav economy, encouraging competition and therefore productivity through their choices. The state applied this logic to the costly housing economy, including the possibility of building luxury housing in New Belgrade. The concept for New Belgrade thus transitioned from being an egalitarian workers' paradise to being a consumers' paradise.

The following three chapters examine the gradual erosion of support for the Athens Charter in Belgrade and its eventual replacement by other urban planning ideas. Chapter 5 examines the impact of market reforms on housing policy and the resulting erosion of the state's commitment to the modernist functional city ideal. In spite of market reforms in the housing sector, the housing shortage persisted, and increasing numbers of inhabitants took matters into



their own hands, building their homes illegally, often on land reserved for other purposes. This was clearly a problem from a planning perspective, but the Yugoslav state approved of the fact that these citizens were meeting their housing needs with their own savings. Ignoring the warnings of urban planners, who believed the answer to the housing shortage was to commit sufficient resources to implementing the Athens Charter, the state attempted to channel self-builders into legal settlements. This policy shift signaled a weakening of its support for the modernist functional city.

Chapter 6 looks at the emergence of critiques of the Athens Charter both by practitioners within the modernist movement and outside of it and by social scientists. By the late 1960s, urban planners had a chance to survey the results of a decade of rapid urban development. Looking at these first realizations, they recognized certain shortcomings, in particular the absence of what they referred to as *ambijent*—ambiance or atmosphere. Architects also began to look on strictly functionalist architecture with a critical eye, seeking inspiration in older architectural forms. Simultaneously, social scientists, and sociologists in particular, began to scrutinize the new settlements, questioning their ability to create vibrant communities and even holding them responsible for health problems.

Chapter 7 examines the development of Belgrade's second socialist master plan, between 1968 and 1972. While urban planners had resisted the erosion of the state's support for the functional city and had defended their work in the face of criticism from architects and social scientists, the planning profession was changing. Just as the Yugoslav state and its architect-planners had been attracted to the Athens Charter at the end of the Second World War because it embodied modernity at that time, the new generation sought to learn and use the latest urban planning tools. Turning away from Europe and toward the United States, the Belgrade Town Planning Institute hired consultants from Wayne State University to train its personnel in computer modeling. While the Athens Charter was relegated to the dustbin of history, planners continued to see themselves as scientific authorities with the power to bring progress to and impose order on a city prone to disorder.