

In Use. Negotiating Urban Legacies in New Belgrade

Caterina Barioglio¹, Mariolina Affatato¹, Dalia Dukanac²

¹Politecnico di Torino, Department of Architecture and Design

²University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture

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What if heritage were something continuously kept in play?

Across the large housing landscapes of post-socialist Europe, continuity takes shape as a dispersed field of ordinary, largely independent actions - repairs, appropriations, minor adjustments, acts of resistance - which renegotiate urban forms over time. In New Belgrade's Blocks 61–64, the afterlife of modernism unfolds as a condition of stratification, in which fragments of the past persist through processes of selection and reinterpretation, oscillating between memory and erasure.

New Belgrade challenges linear descriptions of time. The case reveals a multiplicity of overlapping temporalities embedded in the material and social fabric. Built forms carry traces of past intentions, often left open, alongside latent futures. Everyday practices rework these inheritances, shaping an unstable interplay between persistence and transformation. A quiet form of transformation advances through micro-practices: a café inhabiting a residual ground-floor space; a basketball court sustained through maintenance; a pre-school expansion across buildings; a green corridor preserved from densification through collective care. These micro-transformations operate as situated forms of resistance, often enacted by residents and local communities in tension with the extractive logics of large-scale development. Through them, use, governance, and spatial form converge in a field of continuous adjustment. To trace these processes, a broader investigative approach is required, combining field observation, situated testimonies, and archival exploration, to understand how temporal layers, inherited structures, and forms of agency intertwine within ongoing transformations.

Within this perspective, heritage emerges as an operative field, shaped through practices of maintenance, adaptation, and selective transmission. In this context, small transformations remain dispersed, difficult to trace and unfold through actors and practices that often resist stabilisation into codified forms. “Fitting” operates as a situated, partial, and uncoordinated mode of regulation, opening a critical ground for rethinking how heritage could be negotiated and defended. Heritage happens in use.