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Urbanisation as a tool for economic growth – Novi Sad the developmental city

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Abstract:
Current research and documents on urban development emphasise the links between economic growth and planning strategies, making urban space an asset of the contemporary market economy. The analysis of development trends in post-transitional cities shows numerous similarities to the Asian concept of developmental cities. This study examines current urban development strategies in the city of Novi Sad (Serbia), particularly focusing on trends in housing projects, which are the major contributors to the production of urban space. The housing policy in the city, spanning from urban reconstruction after WWII until the present, is comprehended through statistical data on construction activity, taken as an indicator of change in urban politics and the general concept of city development. The major change in this concept is the weakening of the connection between city population growth and apartment building production. As a result, human needs are no longer the primary motive for apartment construction. The comparison, analysis, and conclusions based on the interpretation of the indicators highlight the necessity for rethinking present urban practises in order to combat the continual process of degrading the quality of life in the city.

Keywords:
urban development; developmental city; post-transitional city; construction industry; Novi Sad

1 Introduction

According to the conclusion remarks of the section "Emerging Approaches to Urban Governance and Politics" of the UN-Habitat report on Cities in a Globalizing World, "cities are strategic sites and will become even more so – sites for global interests seeking to maximize profit" [1]. On the other hand, the importance of urban stakeholders—local grassroots and civil society—is stressed, since they are in a position to "develop new claims and assert their rights to liveable urban places". As a result, such a situation calls for a new type of politics, one that has to engage globally in the localised site, that is, the city, while balancing the competing goals of economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Rarely do declarations in global forums define the situation on the ground so precisely and provide a clear genealogy of the problems of today's cities on a global scale. This quote from the 2001 UN Habitat report accurately points out two key motives for contemporary urbanisation: the need for urban settlements and the development of the economy through construction activities and the market economy in the process of urbanisation. One of the significant conclusions of this report is that the physical environment of the city is legitimately used as an economic asset, consequently transforming physical objects historically created for human needs, such as houses or dwellings, into subjects of economic interest. Harvey explained this through the transformation of urban governance from managerial to entrepreneurial [2].

This model of development can be tied to the process of globalisation and the liberal market economy that relies on it. Its root lies in the industrial city, which replaces natural scenery and imposes homogeneity in the name of reason, law, authority, technology, the state, and the class that holds hegemonic power, as Lefebvre puts it [3]. Furthermore, Lefebvre explains, the logic of such development subordinates all the elements in place “to legitimise and establish a general order that follows the logic of commodities, the “world” of commodities realised on a global scale by capitalism and the bourgeoisie.” A global market that transcends the legal frameworks of individual countries, creating a positive environment for economic development, is also suitable for the relocation of capital from zones less attractive for investments to those that are more attractive for profit-making. “The speculative qualities of urban investments simply derive from the inability to predict exactly which package will succeed and which will not, in a world of considerable economic instability and volatility” [2]. As a result, developing nations that need to attract capital for their own economic growth seek to establish a favourable investment climate for foreign investors, especially if they lack the internal capacity for fast growth. This tendency creates competition among developing countries to attract foreign investors while providing various regulatory solutions fit for international investments. Since these are strategic orientations and key political narratives in developing countries, all legal and social solutions follow this framework.

All of this applies equally to cities. Referring to Singapore, Castells defines the developmental city-state as driven by a specific developmental approach. This strategic model of state or city governance "establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by development the combination of steady high rates of economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy" [4]. Analysing cities in China within this framework, Lee notes that through a political narrative of economic rationality employed by the Chinese state to attract foreign investment in its cities, "local governments began adopting the methods of global-oriented production, thereby turning urbanisation into a tool for economic growth” [5]. Within this framework, urban planning becomes a challenge that needs serious rethinking as "the most instrumental approach towards urban development", providing efficient use of space to satisfy the demands of the city and the citizen [6]. Furthermore, Korff suggests that “if it is assumed that the market is the best means for the allocation of resources, then administrative plans and regulations should be irrelevant." This summarises the major difficulties of present urban development, which necessitate a reconsideration of both the core engines of urban growth and their basic tools.

2 Methodology

Cities mostly rest, develop, and root their urban values on residential buildings, which represent the basic construction impetus and basic building tissue of the urban environment [7]. As a result, the analysis of urban growth in cities is heavily reliant on changes and trends in housing construction. To analyse housing in the city of Novi Sad, both contemporary trends and historical backgrounds had to be included. For this research, the period from World War II until the present is considered due to the most extensive construction activity in the field of housing and the availability of data.

Within this timeframe, two distinct periods were recognised. The first is the period of intensive urbanisation following World War II, which occurred in the political, economic, and social framework of socialist Yugoslavia. Although various subperiods within this era could be distinguished [8, 9], for example, those with distinct home types [10, 11], for the purposes of this study, the entire period is investigated as being one due to the overall similarities. The second is the beginning of the 21st century—the first two decades—which coincides with major changes in the urban development framework. Although the period between 1990 and 2001 represents the first phase of the transition from a socialist to a capitalist system, it will be analysed within the first period. This is because, in terms of construction activity, it neither has substantial quantitative output nor distinctive qualitative features, primarily because of the reduced economic power of FR Yugoslavia during this period.

By analysing these two periods, it is possible to make a comparison using two major parameters: population growth and the number of apartments built. These two parameters are not affected by the political, economic, and social systems of these two periods; they clearly reflect the trends and changes in the urban environment and are comparable in a quantitative sense, but are also analysed and evaluated in terms of their qualitative outcomes. In addition, these parameters represent the link between the population of the city and the construction of living spaces, which has historically been the main motive for housing construction. In this comparative model, we can also examine the development engines in different economic and social systems and determine whether changing the economic and social system changes the basic objective of housing construction. This represents a fundamental research issue in this study.

Data from the Republic Statistical Office (RSO) is used to create a comparative model, which is the most relevant source from which we could collect data on demographic trends and the number of apartments built. The mechanism used by the RSO to collect data hasn't changed much since WWII, making comparison and study more accurate. Since no data are available for 2021, quarterly data from the RSO and newspaper articles analysing construction activities were used.

3 Discussion of the results

3.1 Industrialization-based urbanization

The modern urban dimension of the city, its morphology, and modern principles of development based on industry and services are defined by its radical remodelling after the Second World War. During this period, the number of its inhabitants almost tripled, and its physiognomy changed to support future changes and growth [12]. In the first analysed period (1945-2000), the following demographic trends and housing construction can be summarized (Figure 1). Prior to WWII, Novi Sad had a population of 70.000 but witnessed a drop to 40.000 inhabitants by the time the war ended. In 1961, this number increased to 155.685. This demographic expansion is a result of the state's and Novi Sad's heavy industrialization and urbanisation. After 1961, the number of residents increased linearly and almost equally in the following decades; after the 1971 census, it amounted to 206.821, in 1981, it increased to 250.138, and in 1991, it was 265.464 [13]. According to the last official census in 2011, Novi Sad had a population of 341.228 inhabitants.

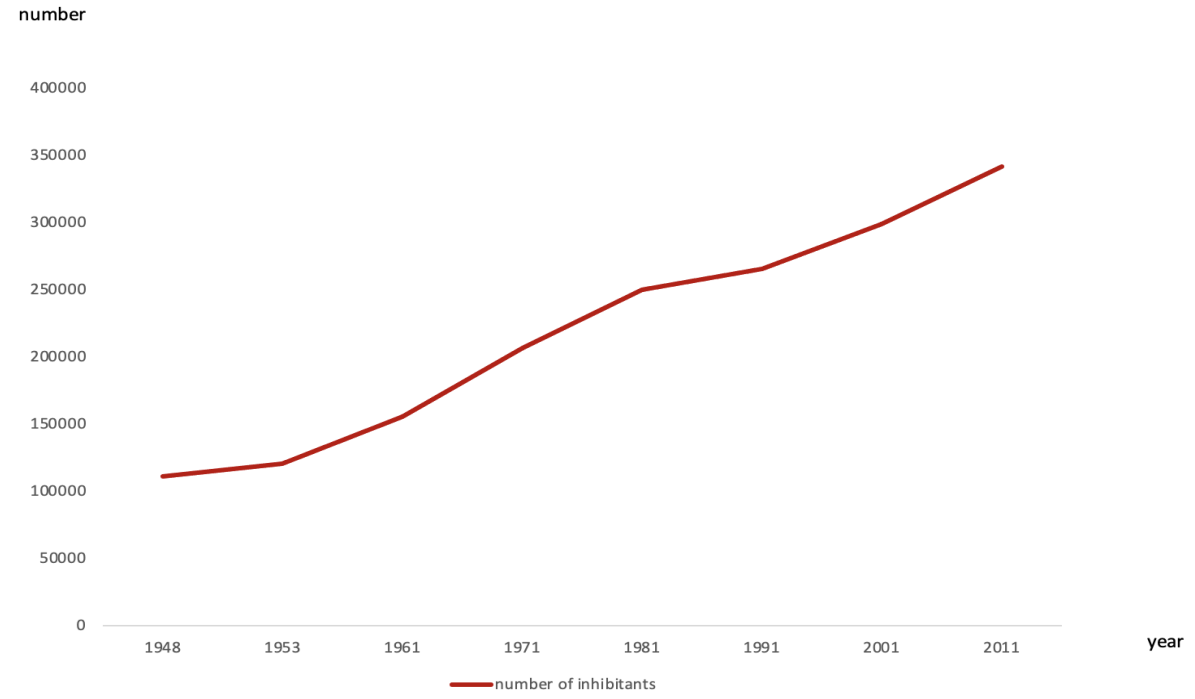

Figure 1. Population growth in Novi Sad for the period 1948-2011

Due to the very large population increase in the decade after the war, it was necessary to build enough housing units in a very short time. The implementation of the Master Plan in 1963 resulted in 11.019 apartments built on five macro sites: Liman (3.253 apartments), a residential area near the railway station (4.164 apartments), Detelinara (3.253 apartments), 1958-1 (2.180 apartments), Novo naselje on Futoška Road (772 apartments), and Belgrade Quay (650 apartments) [14]. Intensive housing construction continued until the end of the 1980s, when stagnation began. The data show that for the period 1949–2001, 116.651 apartments were built in Novi Sad. During the same time period, the population of Novi Sad increased by 249.294. By overlapping these data with the development of the industry and the growth of Novi Sad's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a strong link can be established between the industrialisation of the city, the increase in population, and housing construction activity. This trend evolved gradually in the decades following World War II (WWII). The years after the war represented a period of consolidation, during which Novi Sad was planned as “a medium-size industrial city" [15], with 10-15 % of the population employed in industry, but there was no

intense industrial activity in the city. This was accompanied by limited population growth over the same period. However, in the wake of post-war optimism in Yugoslavia, extensive industrialisation of the whole state began, Yugoslav economy grew at a 6.5% average growth rate between 1950-1960 [16]. This was mirrored in Novi Sad, which witnessed rapid industrial development. As early as the mid-1950s, industrial production accounted for the largest part of the GDP of Novi Sad, and in the period from 1957 to 1960, the number of employees in the Novi Sad economy sector increased by about 3.900 people annually, outpacing the growth of the working population [14]. The emerging architectural production was a "specific social phenomenon and the defining mark of an epoch of liberation and the blossoming of intellectual and cultural creativity" [17], along with the rise of the production base. All of this is reflected in the construction of apartments: 1.900 apartments were built in the period 1946-1956, and 18.500 from 1957 to the end of 1.968 [18]. It is very important to emphasise that since the apartments were state-owned and there was no real estate market, the construction of apartments was carried out solely for the purpose of solving the housing shortage. The apartments were built not only for the new residents of Novi Sad but also for the domicile population, which had to be relocated because of the significant reconstruction of the city's urban matrix, which included the demolition of the existing single-family housing. As a result, former residents of the neighbourhoods along the route of the Liberation Boulevard were relocated to the new apartment blocks in Liman and different parts of the Boulevard. The outcome of such extensive residential construction activity during this period is evident in the data, which shows that in 2001, the average number of household members per apartment in Novi Sad was 2,63 [19], which was already below the average in Serbia (2,97) and comparable to the current European average of 2,3 [20]. This means that by 2001, housing had been provided for the majority of Novi Sad residents.

3.2 Novi Sad—The Developmental City

The post-2001 period brought about a change in the social and economic framework and a transition to a market economy, which automatically affected housing construction. By establishing an active real estate market, construction activities have become the subject of redistribution and capital turnover. Housing construction has intensified since 2001, and until the 2011 census, it averaged 1.670 apartments annually. In this period, there was increased housing density in certain parts of the city as a result of single-family houses being intensively replaced with multi-family housing (Figure 2). The so-called "reconstruction" of parts of Grbavica, Nova Detelinare, Podbara, Rotkvarija, and similar parts of the city created new zones of multi-family housing with population densities higher than those planned during the second half of the 20th century [21]. The effects of the "reconstruction" model are also evident in the relationship between the number of apartments built and demolished [13]. Between the two censuses, Novi Sad's population increased by 41.934 inhabitants, or an average of 4.193 inhabitants per year. In public and media discourse, this period is represented by radical urban changes in certain neighbourhoods of Novi Sad, with negative effects such as the lack of parking lots, reduced green spaces, and insufficient planning of communal and public buildings. However, the data show a similar relationship between housing construction and population growth as in the period up to 2001, which leads to the conclusion that the negative consequences of the transformation of these urban zones were not just the result of the increased number of apartments built but also of the changed concept of urban planning. By the 1990s, new multifamily housing zones were largely created in new locations on public, city-owned land. The development of the real estate market changed this practice: buildings were planned on private parcels, which are smaller in size, and the construction activity was driven by maximising the return on investment. This has led to the reduction of all non-market asset spaces, both architecturally at the level of the building (corridors, staircases, communal spaces, etc.) and at the level of urban space (green areas, parking lots, sidewalks, public areas, etc.). It may be argued that the area of residential structures, which was previously valued qualitatively since it improved housing conditions, started to be assessed quantitatively due to its market price.

Figure 2. Spatial distribution of residential neighbourhoods in Novi Sad

This construction concept peaked in 2010, when a total of 2.413 apartments were built. Over the next few years, construction activities and housing construction were marked by a decline, primarily due to the aftermath of the global economic crisis. After 2015, the construction sector began to activate again, and as early as 2017, the production change was evident, reaching 2.440 housing units built after 2010. Following the year 2018, there has been a linear growth of residential construction units, and by 2021, the number of apartments built annually has increased by 1.000, a significant increase compared to the previous period. Statistical data show that there has been a sharp increase in housing construction over the past three years, far exceeding any preceding data. This progression is represented by the index of apartments built per 1.000 inhabitants in Figure 3.

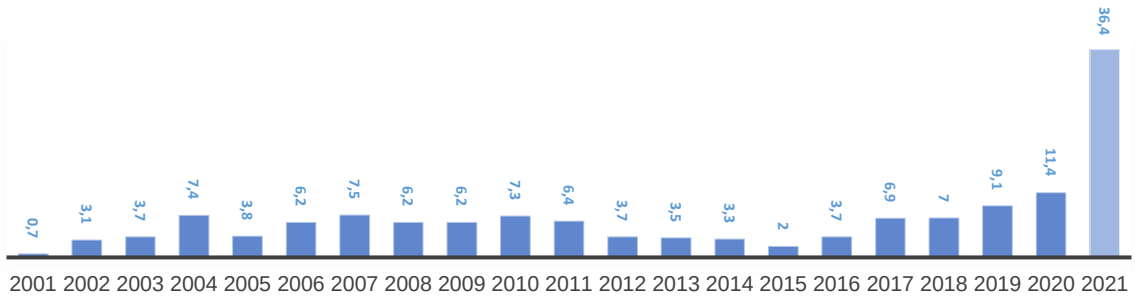

Figure 3. Index of the number of built apartments per 1.000 inhabitants

Note that the data for 2021 in this graph are still unofficial, as the Statistical Yearbook for Municipalities and Regions for 2021 will be available at the end of 2022. However, available

data reveal that work on 3.100 housing units began in 2021, while more than 6.500 apartments from the previous construction season are being completed. Including extensions to the existing building, it can be concluded that 10.000 apartments are being built in Novi Sad [22]. This is also in line with the following data on the number of construction permits issued for apartments in 2019 (4.835 apartments), 2020 (4.562 apartments), and 2021 (4.389 apartments) [13], which indicates that construction of approximately 10.000 apartments would be completed in 2021. This shows that we are in a period of dramatic urbanisation in the city.
On the other hand, the analysis of demographic parameters shows no dramatic changes in trends, which are primarily on a downward trajectory (Figure 5), compared to the period 1946-2001 (Figure 4); for years, records have shown smaller growth in the number of residents in Novi Sad. If we disregard unofficial data from 2021, 20.142 apartments were built between 2011 and 2020. During the same period, the city population grew by 21.447 inhabitants, which equates to approximately one apartment being built for each new resident in Novi Sad. Thus, by comparing these two parameters, the number of built apartments and the rate of population growth, we can conclude that we are witnessing a paradoxical situation in which the urbanisation process does not correspond to the number of residents (Figure 5), raising a logical question: Whom are the apartments being built for?

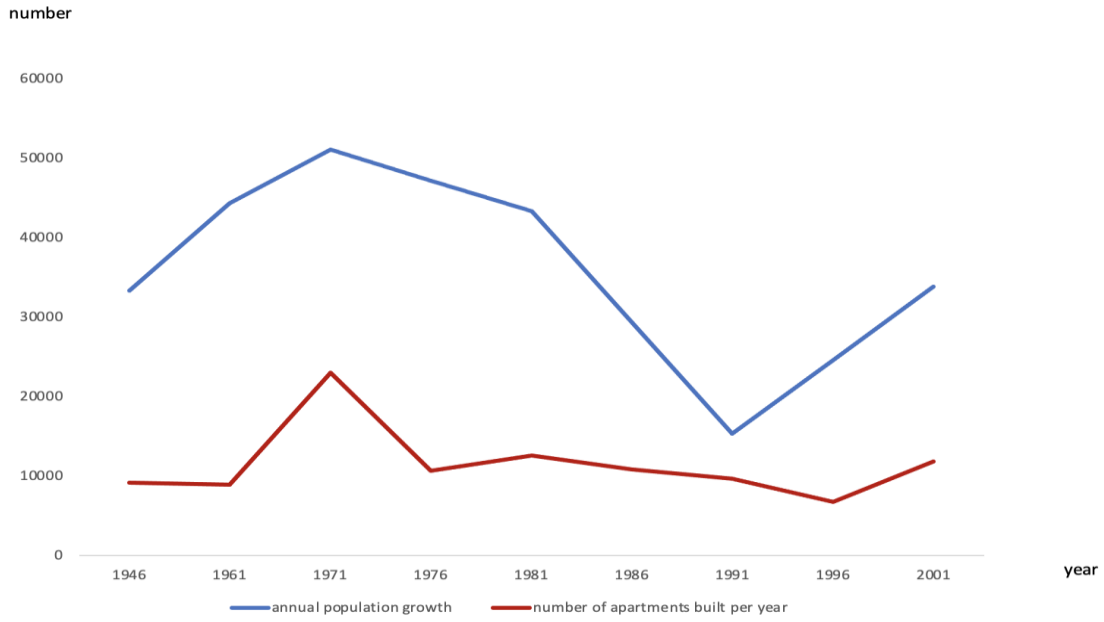

Figure 4. The ratio of annual population growth and the number of apartments built in period 1946-2001

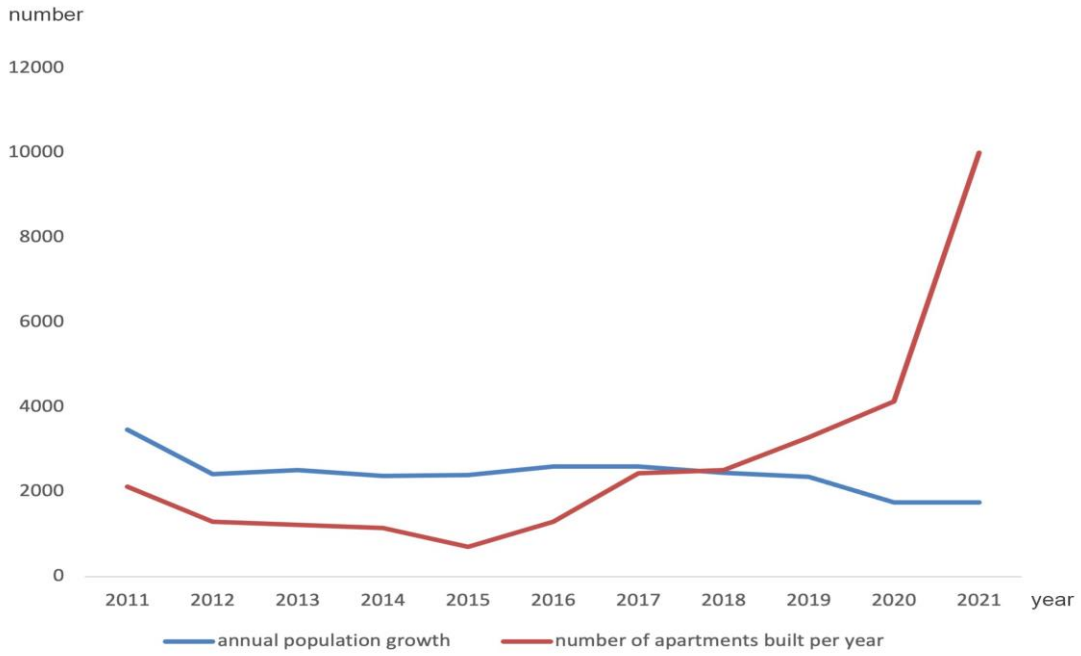

Figure 5. The ratio of annual population growth and the number of apartments built in period 2011-2021

The concept of urban planning needs to be altered in order to accommodate such a large number of flats with the available urban space. Large residential and mixed-use complexes are being built as a result of this transition, signifying a high investment value for such projects while also offering a favourable location for their realisation. Although this kind of development initiative has been around for a while in Serbia, its intensive implementation began after 2014. Such projects are envisioned for the regeneration of abandoned or neglected urban areas as well as for the development of new ones, thus contributing to the overall sustainable development of the city. However, in practice, their focus is on generating as much profit as possible through the sale of apartments and office space, mainly with financial support from public funds and benevolent assistance from the administration, who also provide planning background and amend the legal framework. Large mixed residential and commercial complexes have appeared in various parts of Novi Sad as a realisation of the development sites envisioned in the Master plan, under the title "universal city centres" [21]. This is despite the fact that Novi Sad did not have such a clearly concentrated project prior to the announcement of the project known in the public as "Novi Sad Waterfront" [23]. The implementation of these types of developments can be tracked in the relationship between the number of building permits issued for residential buildings and the number of these buildings. (Figure 6). The comparative representation of these two data lines clearly shows their separation at a point that coincides with the beginning of the linear growth (2015). This separation reflects the ratio of the number of objects to their total surface in square metres. This means that the number of residential buildings for which the building permit was issued continued to grow linearly compared to the previous period, but the total surface area expressed in square metres increased significantly compared to the earlier period.

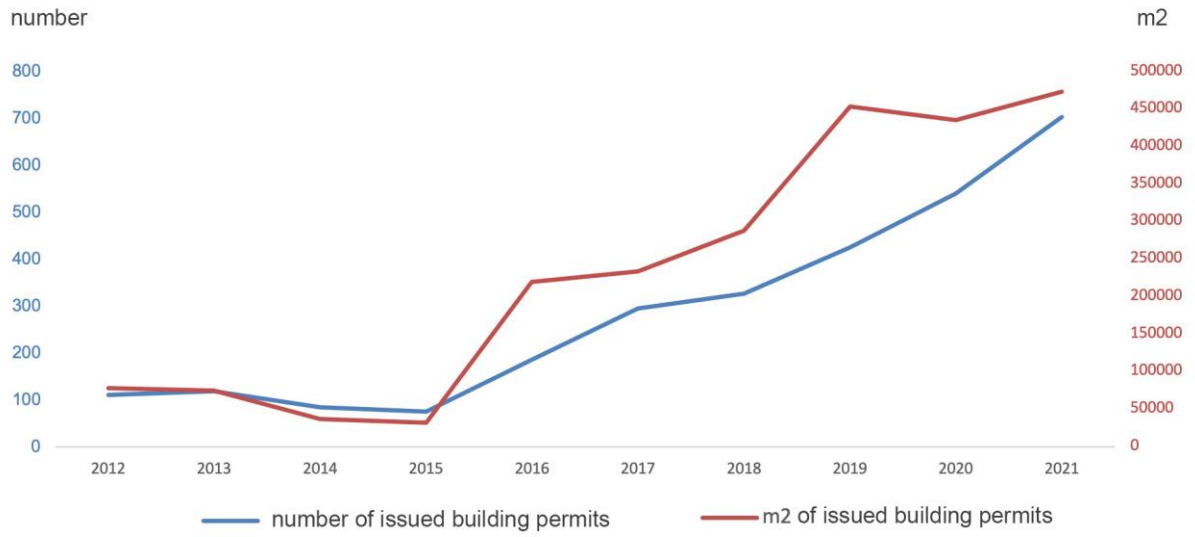

Figure 6. The ratio of number of issued building permits to the square meters for residential buildings in Novi Sad

It can be concluded that 2015 was the year of change in growth trends as well as the concept of housing construction. It is also possible to associate these changes with the growth in the value of investments in housing construction (Figure 7) and the participation of these investments in the GDP of the Republic of Serbia (Figure 8).

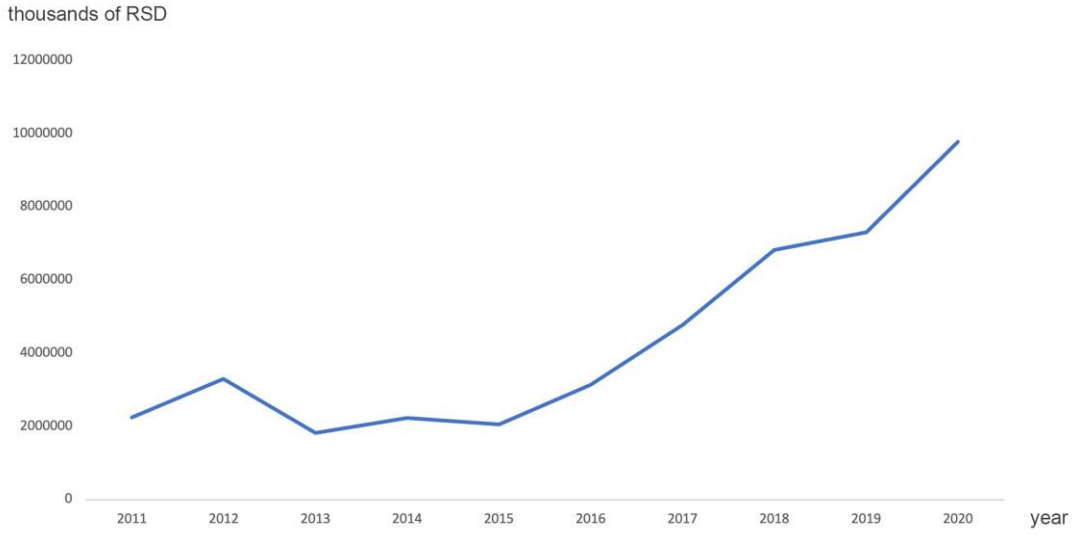

Figure 7. Value of constructed residential buildings - City of Novi Sad (in thousands of RSD)

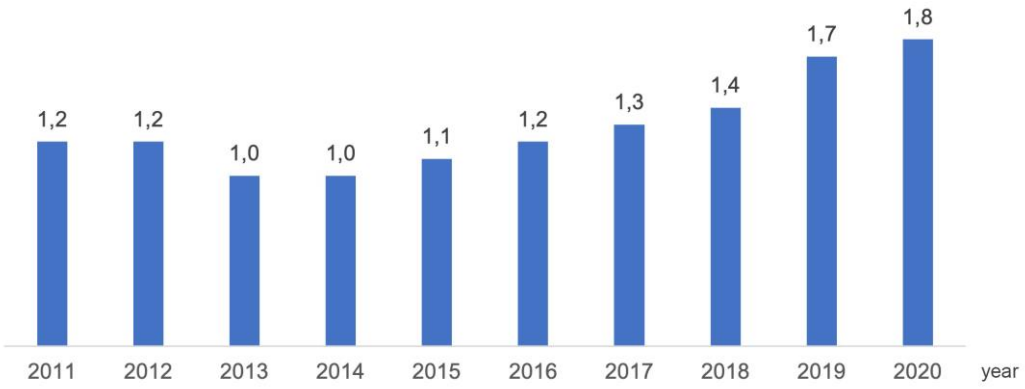

Figure 8. Participation of residential building investments in the GDP of the Republic of Serbia (in %)

The present data raises the question of why urbanisation based on the housing market would be a negative circumstance for a city. Housing construction has a positive impact on several economic parameters. The first is the increase in the city's income through the tax on urban infrastructure (UIT), which is paid to the city's budget for each square metre of the space built. Looking at the overall budget of Novi Sad, these are significant revenues. According to the RSO data, 270.636 m^2 of apartment space was built in 2020. If we take the median value of the UIT for the first four city building zones, the total amount of tax paid to the city budget accounts for approximately 10 % of the total budget for the same year [24]. In addition to UIT, the city also earns revenue from property taxes on each existing apartment, which is the second-largest income in the city budget. Property taxes represented approximately 17 % of the total budget in 2020. One may come to the conclusion that construction, and particularly the construction of residential buildings, constitutes an extremely significant segment of the city budget, ensures financial sustainability, and likely accounts for more than 30 % of the total budget after taking into account the income from the absolute rights transfer tax and various taxes levied when buildings are being constructed. In addition to direct benefits, the city also benefits indirectly from capital flows within the construction industry and all related fields. Additionally, the construction industry is one of the key drivers of state GDP growth.

4 Conclusion

The examination of the data demonstrates that particular public-private partnerships, referred to as "a growth coalition" [25] (private capital, municipal administration, and the construction sector), are particularly interested in boosting development activity in the city. These three stakeholders operate in closed interconnected system of mutual interests, creating the environment and foundation of the *developmental city*.

The “transformation of the supply and demand of elements of the built environment” resulted in numerous changes [26]. This framework excludes the civil sector as well as the academic and professional groups, which prevents proper advocacy for the public interest, critical review of urban planning practise, and creative and professional input into city growth initiatives. Urban planning is reduced to the technical translation of placed capital into space, and thus becoming a key tool for legalising extra profits. This is where the negative consequences of this concept of urbanisation lie; if it is not based on human needs and demographic trends, urbanisation typically becomes a fundamental factor in the decline of the quality of life of city dwellers. The severing of the link between urbanisation and industrialisation, as well as the natural connection to demographic growth, completely alters its paradigm. Lefebvre defined industrialisation and urbanisation as two sides of urban development, characterised by their extreme complexity and conflict [3], where urban development is fuelled by property-led development rather than industrial surplus-driven growth [27]. We can conclude that

urbanisation has become an industry in itself. This industrialisation of urbanisation transforms the outcome of creating a living space into a market asset, largely alienating the city's inhabitants.

On one hand, we can criticise these negative outcomes; on the other hand, we need to comprehend this new reality to properly understand all its aspects. This means that the concept of urban planning for residential buildings needs to be changed, re-establishing the dialogue between (planning) authorities and citizens, and promoting transparent and participatory methods of planning, that result in "multifunctional urban environments created with minimal difficulties in terms of implementation and sustainability" [28].

These changes must be addressed in the planning methodology. First, this refers to urban planning practice, which still has an indifferent relationship to these changes. While continuity and consistency in urban planning are important, they must also be responsive to changes in housing construction. In current urban planning practice, demographic trends and housing based on the demand for a home are still the major planning parameters. The obvious disparity between the realities of the current city development and urban planning leads to the continuous deterioration of the quality of life of residents and the creation of social unrest in the public domain of Novi Sad, as has already occurred in Asian cities [29], the place of origin of this model of urban development. Second, new classifications and typologies of residential buildings must be introduced. Accepting the reality that not all apartments are built for permanent housing but also for long-term and short-term renting and even for capital relocation purposes only should be the first step towards a new urban planning methodology that balances public and private interests and introduces sensitive space management based on the principles of humanity, progress, and sustainable development.

Further research in the field could address the analysis and comparison of various post-socialist environments, both post-Yugoslav and South-east European, as well as the common and specific trends in these environments, which could help further define the developmental city profile in the European context. This kind of research could include not only quantitative aspects of urban development in terms of statistical trend comparison but also qualitative outcomes. These could be analysed within single cases/cities, emphasising the relationship between the cause and qualitative outcome, but also in terms of common influences that brought out qualitatively different results in various contexts.

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