



Housing, New Belgrade

Re:a.c.t. reacts to a complex situation by embracing its heterogeneous and fragmented character.

 SERBIA — TEXT: VESNA VUČINIĆ, PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNA KOSTIĆ

New Belgrade, a major development project initiated in 1948 by the former communist state, comprises more than seventy 'basic units of urban organization' or 'Blocks' measuring 400 x 600

metres or more. Most citizens find their way around this often inhumane-seeming layout by Block numbers rather than by street names. Block 61 is famous for its distinctive, multi-storey apartment buildings situated near the

banks of the River Sava. At the foot of these mega-structures from the early 1970s, a non-profit housing project by architectural studio re:a.c.t. was recently realized as part of the ongoing densification of this vast urban grid.

However, there is one fundamental problem with this densification of New Belgrade: it is being carried out in the absence of a visible, comprehensive concept and, consequently, to the detriment of any remaining green space. If once it was the communist state that dictated the scope and thematic emphasis of urban development, nowadays it is the financial clout of individual investors, with barely any input from

urban planners or architects. In consequence, New Belgrade is undergoing a complete transformation. The green areas are being declared building land and divided into plots. It seems to be a case of 'first comes, first served' with new buildings springing up like mushrooms in the shadow of the mega-structures which have meanwhile become important landmarks of post-war modernism. Hence, the architects from re:a.c.t. faced a very complex situation.

The project is the result of an architecture competition held by the City of Belgrade in 2006, in which no first prize was awarded. The end client, the Secretariat for Finance →

↓ The new block is part of a densification programme within a 1970s district of mega-structures.





↑ In contrast to the dynamic street facade, the rear, facing the mega-structures, has a light and clean appearance.

(Housing, New Belgrade)

of the City of Belgrade, intervened and decided in favour of one of the two joint second prize winners, re:a.c.t studio. Changes to the original competition design preceded this decision. This is common practice, especially when it comes to architectural ideas competitions which are the only kind of architecture competitions held in Serbia. This means that there is no guarantee either that the design will be realized or that the original architects

will be involved if it is, regardless of whether the client is public or private. In this case the architects were lucky: although the client assigned elaboration of the design to a well-established design and consulting company, the architects were involved and consulted on both the design and the construction. The City Plan envisaged closing Block 61 and the adjoining block by building along the street frontage. This took the form of a U-

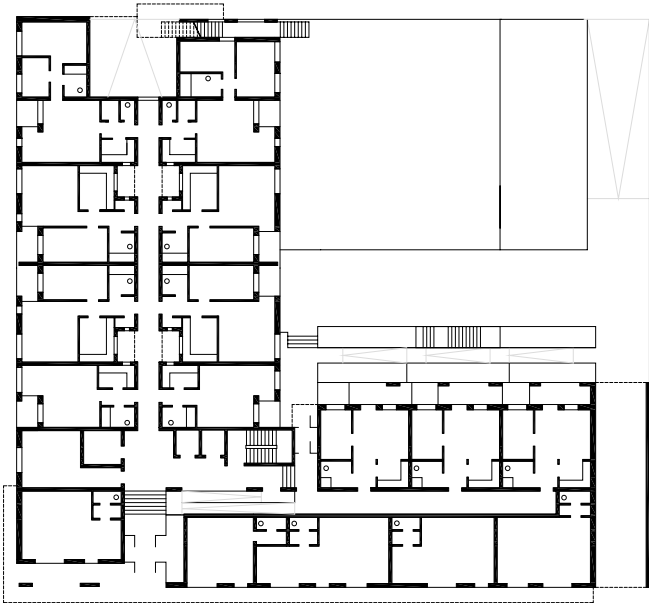
shaped volume at the southeastern edge of Block 61 and re:a.c.t's Grozdana Šišović and Dejan Milanović were given the opportunity to build one half of this volume, an L-shaped structure. And since heterogeneity and fragmentation seem to be the only visible motifs in the city nowadays (perhaps in reaction to the strong unifying effect of New Belgrade), the other part of the building will of course be designed by someone else.

Aware of the impossibility of a balanced, integrated solution, re:a.c.t came up with a dual response to suit the setting: on one side the dominating mega-structures, on the other side the desired closed street facade, which in reality is highly dissected. The architects have produced a building that engages in a dialogue with the contrasting surroundings, turning a dynamic face to the street and a serene, light face to the mega-structures. The main element, the street facade, refers to the vertically rotated urban grid of New Belgrade, in a continual interplay of bright and dark, light and shadow. Although the architects managed to prevail when it came to the street facade, they had to abandon the atrium in their original competition design. The building includes apartments which the client is selling at cost price, hence the request to maximize the living space at the expense of the circulation area. Inspired by this request, the architects minimized the corridors inside the flats too. Strict requirements with regard to internal layout did not allow much scope for experimenting. Nevertheless, wherever possible, the architects applied the flexibility principle and designed open-plan spaces that can be adapted to different lifestyles. Almost all of the 105 apartments have loggias, an important feature that brings the outside world closer to the inhabitants while simultaneously preserving their privacy. ←

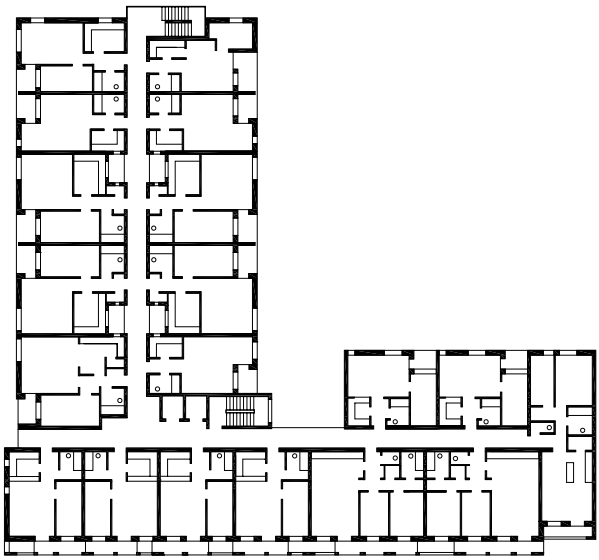
RESIDENTIAL BUILDING, 2007–2009

Architects: re:a.c.t studio (Grozdana Šišović and Dejan Milanović), with Mašinoprojekt Koprivnica a.d., architects (Gordana Duranović, Marija Milovanović, Marija Savković and Jelena Vuksanović)
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↓ Ground floor



↓ Typical floor plan



↓ Section

