

## “Belgrade” Department stores: setbacks, challenges and new perspectives on an old commercial Model

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**I grandi magazzini “Belgrado”:  
decadenza, sfide e nuove prospettive  
di un vecchio modello commerciale**

**Keywords:** department store model, Yugoslavia, morphogenesis

### Abstract

Set within the broader context of consumerism culture coming from the West in the 1960s, “Belgrade” department stores model is perceived as partly autonomous creation, a result of a socialist regime of Yugoslavia. This model brings with itself specific morphological characteristics regarding allocation, organization, and design and as such has left a radical and lasting impact on urban space that is the most evident in the transformation of central city areas in small and medium towns across Serbia.

The research reflects on those common characteristics and conducts a more detailed analysis of contextual circumstances and challenges that arose in a singular case. Finally, new perspectives were analyzed through actions and projects that are established to find a solution, shed new light and bring back old significance to the department store that they had for society and the city. The results of this paper come in the form of providing an appropriate perspective on creating a different approach to the old commercial model observed and present in a contemporary context.

### Introduzione

Il modello del grande magazzino “Belgrade” è stato un prodotto esemplare della cultura commerciale sviluppata in Jugoslavia negli anni ‘60, subito dopo l’istituzione del socialismo e dopo la riforma economica del 1964 che aprì il mercato interno alle nuove forme di scambio legate ad un’idea occidentale di consumismo. L’impresa commerciale del “Belgrade” è stata fondata nel 1966 ispirandosi ai grandi magazzini tedeschi “Kaufhof” e svedesi “Turiz” (Anđelić, 2003), fondendo insieme le preesistenti società “Belgrade”, “Nama”, “Gramag” e “Fashion house”, che vendevano prodotti di base. Gli edifici della catena “Belgrade” Department Stores (DS “Belgrade”) vengono costruiti sulle piazze principali causando la demolizione di numerosi edifici e producendo cambiamenti radicali nelle città storiche (Đokić, Đorđević e Zorić, 2018). Con la loro architettura, la loro identità visiva e strategia di localizzazione, divengono un simbolo di modernità che esprime il desiderio di una società aggiornata.

### Introduction

“Belgrade” Department store was a model, developed in Yugoslavia in the 1960s as a product of the consumerism culture emerged closely after the establishment of socialism and 1964 Economic reform that opened up the market to new concepts of trade and the ideas of consumerism coming from the West. This enterprise was founded in 1966 following the business model of department stores “Kaufhof” from Germany and “Turiz” from Sweden (Anđelić, 2003). It was developed by joining companies “Belgrade”, “Nama”, “Gramag” and “Fashion house” that used to provide the differentiability of basic goods. Department Stores “Belgrade” (DS “Belgrade”) were by the rule built on main city squares causing the demolition of numerous buildings and thus producing the radical changes in historical cities (Đokić, Đorđević and Zorić, 2018). With its design, visual character and locational strategy, they were a manifestation of modernity, a desire for modern society and prosperity, a tendency of freedom of access and use. Concrete façade and brand name served as carriers of modern identity and were used as a symbol of the prosperity of the state and the ruling regime.

In the 1990s, a successful model was faced with the inflation, sanction and breakup of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century that had a major effect on the business. Pre-bankruptcy was announced in 1995, while the bankruptcy was declared in 2002 (Arhivska građa Udruženja akcionara Robnih kuća “Beograd”, 2007). Department stores “Belgrade” were sold in 2007 in a public auction to the local company “Verano Motors” (Ekapija, 2007). Partial reconstruction was conducted in 2009, mainly through the refurbishment of the building interiors and through adding new façade panels to the existing building envelope. New commercial activities are oriented to higher retailers and brands providing a very limited offer. Some of the department stores haven’t been reconstructed at all and they remain in the central areas, but with marginalized functions.

In line with a premise that economic model is the same, we aim to research the particular case of one city in Serbia to understand the setbacks, challenges and new perspectives that old commercial model is faced in a new shopping environment. This research of department stores aims to contribute to creating a different approach in a contemporary context, and enabling examination of the possibilities of transformation that will return them an old significance that they had for society and the city.

In this paper, we have selected the department store in Kragujevac for our case study since it was planned and built on a main axial route, one of the most important parts of the city during the socialism time, a so-called green *breakthrough* that was intended to connect the County National Board building and the Square by the Cross. Looking from today’s perspective, Kragujevac is faced with some new political and ideological demands such as the neoliberal ones. New shopping malls are rising at the city periphery, moving