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Оригинални научни рад / Original scientific paper

## About the Development of Small Apartment Typology in Belgrade Interwar Architecture\*\*

**ABSTRACT:** During the Interwar period, the development of small apartment typology flourished throughout Europe. This was due to the fact that the First World War had left many people homeless, and there was therefore a great need for social housing. In addition, the living conditions of the middle and working classes, as well as those in poverty, were often below basic hygienic standards. The campaigns for housing improvement in other European countries led to the development of a movement with similar aims in Belgrade, headed by intellectuals and experts such as Branko Maksimović and Slobodan Vidaković. The aim of this article is to present several significant cases of well-planned designs of small-but-functional and hygienic apartments during the 1930s. The purpose of this research is to contribute to the better understanding of one of the understudied phenomena of this period in Belgrade's architectural history.

**KEYWORDS:** small apartment, typology, residential architecture, Interwar period.

The question of small and hygienic apartments was one of the most important issues of Interwar Europe. The housing and planning movement was mostly democratic-socialist in philosophy, and therefore welcomed innovations in design as a symbolic break with the past (BAUER WURSTER 1965: 48). In 1930, the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) published *Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*<sup>1</sup> (BAUER WURSTER 1965: 49), by which it contributed significantly to an increased awareness for the development of small apartment typology. Designing functional small apartments was also among the key social problems in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 363). During the Interwar period, many significant experts from different fields expressed a desire to increase the number of small apartments (ГЛАВИНИЋ 1932: 497). In general, apartments designed during the 1920s and 1930s were of large square meterage. This situation was first addressed at the beginning of 1930s, as it became

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\*\* This article was the result of research within the project of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development No. 177013 called *Serbian Art of the 20th Century: National and Europe* (Српска уметносћ 20. века: национално и Европа)

<sup>1</sup> An apartment for the minimum of existence

apparent that large apartments did not meet the real needs and financial status of the citizens (ХЕРЕНДА 1933: 405). These needs were reflected in the Law on Civil Engineering from 1931. In paragraph no. 46 tax reliefs were afforded for the construction of small, affordable and hygienic apartments (ОБРАДОВИЋ 1933: 12). However, this paragraph defined a small apartment as being up to 100 m<sup>2</sup> in buildings with up to one floor and a mansard. In comparison, Austrian law defined a small apartment as being from 48 to 60 m<sup>2</sup> (МАКСИМОВИЋ 1933: 469); in France, the lower limit was 33 m<sup>2</sup>, not including bathroom and restroom (ПОПОВИЋ 1933: 480). By 1933, France had 653 stock companies and 547 collectives for affordable apartments (Француска подиже у масама јевтине станове 1937: 699). This atmosphere led to the construction of a number of highly progressive mass housing projects, such as the Cité de la Muette (1930–1934) by architects Eugène Beaudouin (1898–1893) and Marcel Lods (1891–1978) (WEDDLE 2001; COHEN 2012: 243).

The rise of the Modern Movement's popularity amongst Belgrade's architects was often connected to the pure stylistic morphology, to the exclusion of the equally important scientific approach to social needs of the modern society (БАЈАЛОВИЋ 1932: 767; ПОПОВИЋ 1932: 788; BAUER WURSTER 1965: 48). In 1930, an article was published in *The Belgrade Municipality Journal*<sup>2</sup> on an exhibition of hygienic apartments in Prague. A group of architects led by Pavel Janák (1881–1956) designed a suburban development called *Osada Baba* with the idea of developing contemporary apartment dwellings (COHEN 2012: 258). In addition to Janák, other significant Czech architects of the time also participated in designing this settlement, such as Otakar Novotný (1880–1959) and Josef Gočár (1880–1945) (ПЕТРОВИЋ 1930: 422). The inspiration for this settlement was the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart, dating to 1927, where numerous distinguished architects connected to the Modern Movement offered their solutions for contemporary housing (BAUER WURSTER 1965: 48; COHEN 2012: 191). The journalist wrote that the villas were designed to resemble the Californian bungalow, as an ideal example of an affordable, comfortable and hygienic apartment. A typical apartment in *Osada Baba* consisted of a spacious American-type living room or sun-parlor, a small dining room, a room for a servant and a kitchen with the newest appliances for washing dishes. The article also emphasized the advantage of large windows, as well as a garage (ПЕТРОВИЋ 1930: 422).

Czech architects were among the leading experts in Europe with regard to the development of small functional apartments. In 1935, Prague hosted an international congress for apartments and city reconstruction (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 363). During the campaign for social housing, the Prague municipality even financed the construction of apartments which consisted solely of one room accessed from common galleries. Slobodan Vidaković adequately labeled these *dwelling-kitchens*.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Czech architects also designed small functional apartments which consisted of an anteroom, a bedroom (28 m<sup>2</sup>), a kitchen (7.5 m<sup>2</sup>), a bathroom and a toilet (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 367).

Other countries were also highly active with regard to the development of small apartment typologies during the Interwar period. While working as the city architect of Rotterdam in the 1920s, Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890–1963) made significant contributions to public housing (BAUER WURSTER 1965: 48). Furthermore, Belgium had its own National Society for

<sup>2</sup> Београдске општинске новине

<sup>3</sup> Кухиње за становање

Small Apartments (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 371). However, the municipality of Vienna made the greatest contribution with its social housing policies during the rule of the Social Democratic Party (1923–1934) (SONNE 2010: 127). The Viennese municipality used 22.7% of its funds to construct around 30,000 apartments (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 364). These apartments were between 38 and 48 m<sup>2</sup>, with each apartment being fitted with electric lighting, gas, water and a bathroom. Common areas were developed, including laundries, conference halls, health centers, libraries, gardens, swimming pools and playgrounds. The municipality also had its own housing service called *Gesiba*, and all the necessary construction material was acquired from its own quarries, lime pits, factories and workshops (ВИДАКОВИЋ 1935: 364–366).

Under European influence, Serbian architects began to speak and write about the necessity of apartments that would meet all hygienic standards, be functional and affordable, and also be of small square meterage. From the newspapers and journals of the time it can be concluded that both the professional and general public were well-acquainted with the emerging principles of Modern architecture in housing production. Architect Branko Maksimović (1900–1988) was one of the most prominent proponents of small apartments. From 1930 he proposed that Belgrade municipality should construct entire housing blocks and settlements of affordable housing. He opposed the most common pragmatic solution in Belgrade residential architecture – a house for rent built by a private investor with expensive, unnecessarily large and irrationally designed apartments. Maksimović thought small functional apartments would eliminate the popularity of cheap unhygienic dwellings used by the underprivileged. He also worked on the development of a prototype for a functional spatial apartment of up to 70 m<sup>2</sup>. He thought the current standard ceiling height of over 3 meters was irrational, and proposed a radical new standard of around 2.5 meters, which was never considered as an option, even in the decades that followed the Second World War. Maksimović also highlighted the significance of large windows, roof terraces, and also multifunctional rooms with sofa beds or similar solutions (1930: 487–488, 490).

In 1929, Branko Maksimović designed 40 apartments for the Belgrade municipality in Ulica Svetog Nikole<sup>4</sup> (Раднички станови, набавке из Чехословачке и водовод 1928: 7; МАКСИМОВИЋ 1983: 48; VUKSANović MACURA 2012: 97). The apartments consisted of a room, a kitchen, a bathroom and a pantry. Each pavilion had a kindergarten.<sup>5</sup> However, these apartments quickly became criticized by experts due to the lack of hygienic qualities (ПОПОВИЋ 1931: 1387). Maksimović further developed his solution to the problem of small apartment design for municipality buildings in Humska ulica (1929–1930) (VUKSANović MACURA 2012: 100). He placed 40 apartments in five pavilions. Each apartment had around 40 m<sup>2</sup> of space, with an anteroom, one room (18 m<sup>2</sup>), a kitchen (16 m<sup>2</sup>), a pantry and a toilet (Fig. 1). Each building had a cellar and a communal laundry room.<sup>6</sup> The rent was 400 dinars per month (МАКСИМОВИЋ 1930: 18), which was lower than average rent of 470 dinars for a single-room apartment (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1930: 199). Unfortunately, one decade later these apartments were actually being used as grammar school classrooms (Жеље и потребе осталих крајева Београда 1940: 703).

<sup>4</sup> Note on street names: The original names of streets are used in this article. Common translations into English would be Ulica > Street; Bulevar > Boulevard

<sup>5</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XXIII-7-1930

<sup>6</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XXIII-7-1930

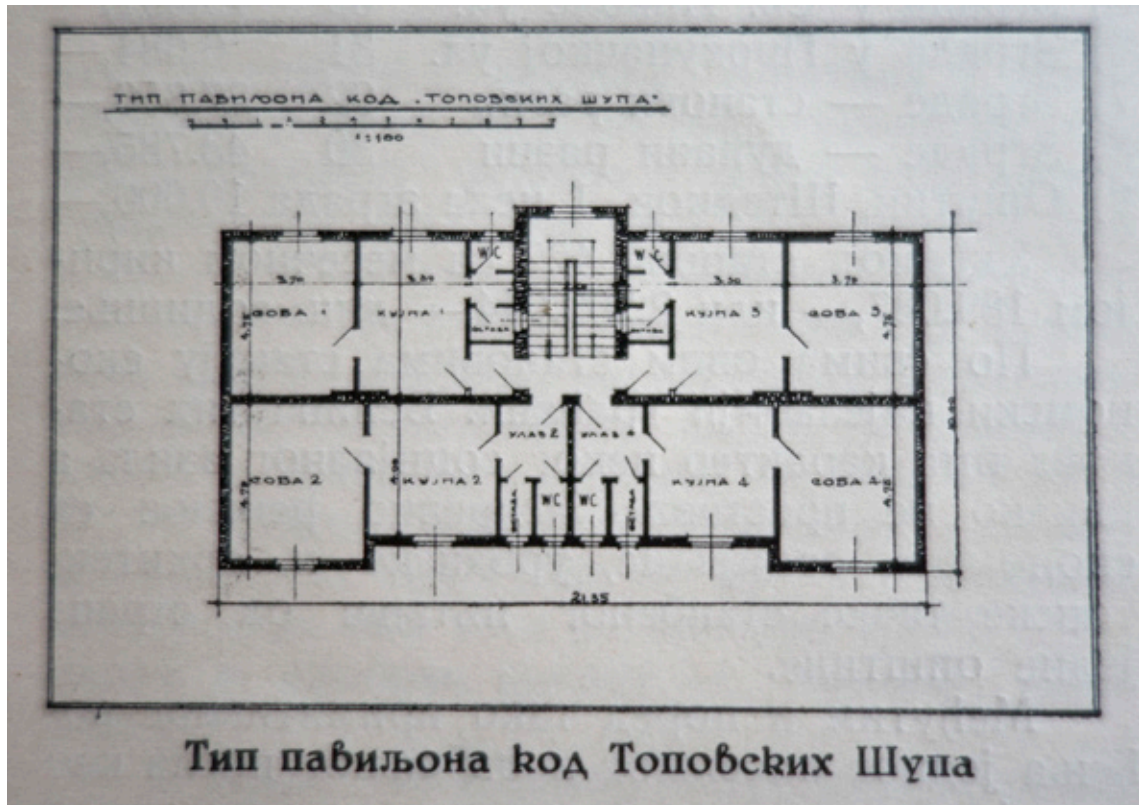


Fig. 1. Branko Maksimović, municipality buildings in Humka ulica, 1930 (*Београдске општинске новине*)

Journalist Slobodan Vidaković (1905–1983) also actively advocated for social issues in Belgrade and other cities within the country. He was the editor of *The Belgrade Municipality Journal* from 1930 to 1936 (VUKSANOVIĆ MACURA 2012: 273–275), the period when the journal was most active regarding social issues, among which was the question of social housing in Belgrade. He believed that, due to the economic situation, a small apartment should not be smaller than 40 m<sup>2</sup>, with a bedroom (16 m<sup>2</sup>), a living room (12 m<sup>2</sup>), a kitchen (6 m<sup>2</sup>), a bathroom and a closet (6 m<sup>2</sup>). He also emphasized good lighting and ventilation, proposing the windows should compose 1/10 of the apartment's wall surface. Vidaković suggested the large and luxurious apartments should be taxed, and the income received only used for the erection of small state- or municipality-owned apartments (1935: 543).

Despite the fact that many intellectuals advocated an increase in small hygienic apartment production, a large percentage of small apartments during the Interwar period were unhygienic. The research of Srbislav Đonić, a doctor in the Epidemiology Service of Belgrade, showed that the number of those with diseases in apartments of below 100 m<sup>2</sup> in size was alarmingly high; 9:1. The most problematic were the apartments consisting of only a single room and a kitchen, which rarely exceeded 40 m<sup>2</sup>. These apartments were occupied by 4.5 inhabitants

on average, meaning each person had less than 10 m<sup>3</sup> of air, far below the minimally recommended 20 m<sup>3</sup> (ЂОНИЋ 1935: 167). Doctor Borivoje Ђorđević, head of the Anti-Tuberculosis Dispensary of Belgrade, gave clear propositions regarding the hygienic standards for small apartments. He believed that the square meterage should not be below 40 m<sup>2</sup>, that the ceiling height should be at least 2.6 m, and that every apartment must have a bathroom and a restroom. He also highlighted the significance of the apartment's lighting (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1933: 454). Doctor Voja Kujundžić underlined that a small apartment should consist of dry rooms, a central well-lit area, an anteroom a kitchen and a pantry, while the toilet could be communal (1933: 467). On the other hand, Jovan Dravić claimed that the central room should be around 20 m<sup>2</sup>, the kitchen around 10 m<sup>2</sup>, and the other rooms combined around 10 m<sup>2</sup> (ДРАВИЋ 1933: 488). Srblislav Ђonić suggested that municipality apartments could save space by introducing showers instead of bathtubs (1935: 169).

In 1937, Belgrade municipality once again initiated the construction of a larger experimental housing complex on Severni bulevar. The municipality announced a competition in order to choose the best solution. Architect Mihailo Mijatović won the first prize. The municipality planned to erect 118 small apartments in buildings surrounded by gardens, out of which 82 were constructed in 1937 and only 20 in 1941 (VUKSANOVIĆ MACURA 2012: 101–102). Apart from Mijatović's project, the *Bata* settlement for the workers in Borovo (1931–1939) designed by architect František Lydie Gahura (1891–1958) (VUKANOVIĆ 2014: 121–122) and German examples were also used for typological variations. Four types of buildings were developed: with two, four, six and eight apartments. The buildings designed by Mihailo Mijatović had a two-sloped roof, while the other types had flat roofing. Mijatović's apartment consisted of an entrée, a room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The other apartment types were duplexes, with a kitchen, a living room and a bathroom on the first level, and with two bedrooms on the second. According to the article from *Politika*, the construction of one apartment should cost 26,160 dinars, while the budget for the entire complex was 4,000,000 dinars (Београдска општина започела је радове на подизању 118 малих радничких станова 1937: 10).

Another good example of small and affordable apartments for the underprivileged was the building financed by philanthropist Persida Milenković and handed over to the Belgrade municipality for management. The building was erected in Tabanovačka ulica in 1940, and was designed by architect Milan Sekulić (1895–1970). It consisted of a ground and two upper floors, with 16 apartments. Each apartment had an anteroom, a room, a kitchen, a pantry and its own cellar room, while the laundry room was communal (Нови станови за престоничку сиротињу 1940: 611; VUKSANOVIĆ MACURA 2012: 110–113).<sup>7</sup>

However, one of the most significant contributions to the development of small apartment typology was the project of architect Jan Dubový (1892–1969) for the building of the industrial businessman Milutin Mesarović from 1934 at Svetogorska 43. Earlier in his career, Dubový designed some prototypes of small apartments from 36 to 38 m<sup>2</sup> (VUKSANOVIĆ MACURA 2012: 238). However, this project represents a rare example of small apartment typology for a private investor. The complex was supposed to consist of two buildings connected by staircase with an elevator. Both buildings would have two apartments per floor. Each apartment consisted of

<sup>7</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XXXIII-24-1939

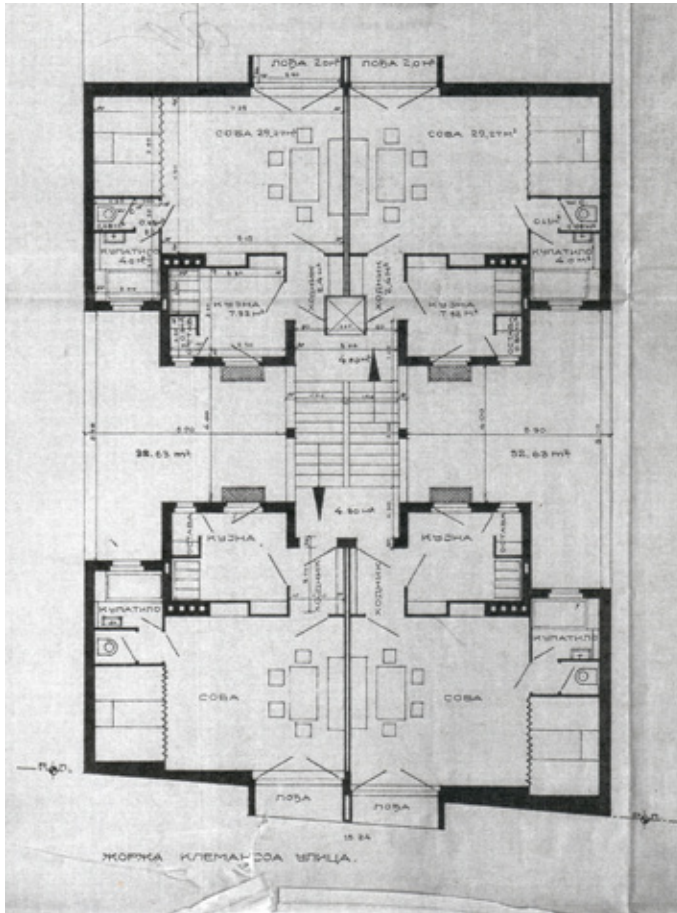


Fig. 2. Jan Dubový, the building of Milutin Mesarović, Svetogorska 43, 1934, floor plan (Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade municipality Technical Direction, f-XXXIV-14-1932)

an anteroom with a built-in (2.4 m<sup>2</sup>), a kitchen (7.32 m<sup>2</sup>) and a pantry (0.84 m<sup>2</sup>), with a small balcony. The living room and the bedroom were placed together in one larger area of 29.27 m<sup>2</sup> which was divided by folding doors. The living room also had an access to a loggia (2 m<sup>2</sup>). A small area of 0.63 m<sup>2</sup> divided the restroom (1.8 m<sup>2</sup>) from the bathroom (4 m<sup>2</sup>). The entire apartment space totaled 48.26 m<sup>2</sup>. The kitchens faced the large ventilation shafts of 32.63 m<sup>2</sup>, while the living rooms faced either the street or a large courtyard (76.5 m<sup>2</sup>) (Fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> This was one of the earliest examples where the concept of the *Belgrade apartment* type was completely abandoned and replaced by a fresh and innovative approach toward spatial organization similar to architect Alexander Klein's (1879–1960) development of improved unit floor plans from 1928 (BAUER WURSTER 1965: 50; BEVILACQUA 2011; KOCH 2016: 69). This type of solution would later be present after the Second World War in the *Belgrade school of housing*.<sup>9</sup> Even though this project was never constructed, it represents

significant evidence of the creativity and potential for innovation that architects in Belgrade had during the Interwar period.

Under the influence of a strong pro-small-apartment campaign, both architects and investors began to introduce studios for rent in buildings during the 1930s (ХЕРЕНДА 1933: 405). Another reason for the increasing number of studios was a significant number of bachelors living and working in Belgrade (МИЛУТИНОВИЋ 1934: 446–448). Studios were small apartments which consisted solely of an anteroom, a room and a bathroom. It was presumed that a person living in a studio would eat out. Studios were often located in mansards. The building of Stevan and Olga Apro at Kneginje Zorke 56, designed by Valerij Staševski (1882–?) had two studios in

<sup>8</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XXXIV-14-1932

<sup>9</sup> *Beogradska škola stanovanja*

the mansard with a joined terrace from 1932.<sup>10</sup> Other solutions included positioning studios along the central vertical axis of the building, above the entrance. Such an example is the building of Filip Zarić at Ohridska 16 from 1939, by the engineer Dragomir Vladimirović.<sup>11</sup> Another variation regarding the position of the studio within the building was placing it upon the left or the right part of the front facade. The final type positioned the studio at the corner of the building. Such an example can be found in the building of architect Dragoljub Vukšić on the corner of Gavril Principa and Kraljevića Marka, dating from 1937.<sup>12</sup> The building of Milorad Radojčić at Carice Milice 7, designed by Velerij Staševski in 1937, had one large apartment and three studios per floor.<sup>13</sup> The project of the architect Vladeta Maksimović (1910–1994) for the building of Momčilo Veličković at Milutina Bojića 8 from 1941 reveals a rare example of a cross-section of the entrée and the bathroom of a studio.

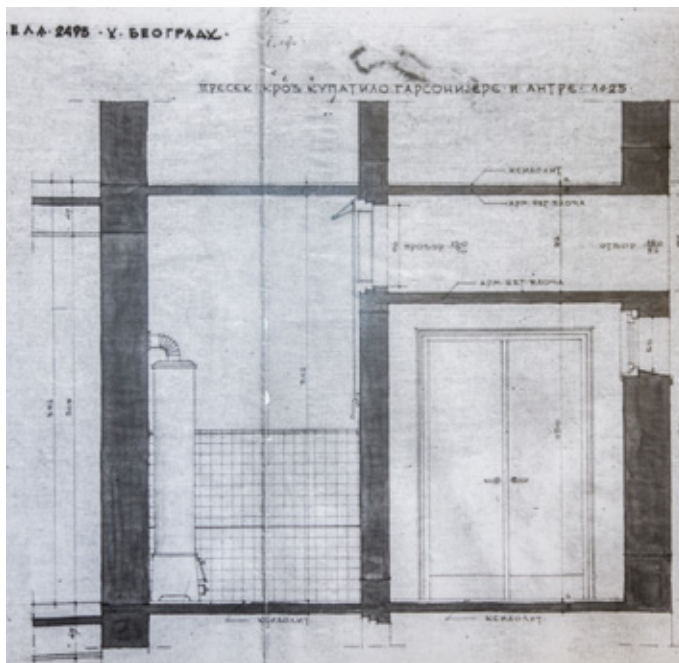


Fig. 3. Vladeta Maksimović, the building of Momčilo Veličković, Milutina Bojića 8, 1941, cross section of the entrée and the bathroom of a studio (Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade municipality Technical Direction, f-IX-30-1941)

for the building of Momčilo Veličković at Milutina Bojića 8 from 1941 reveals a rare example of a cross-section of the entrée and the bathroom of a studio. The cross-section was designed so that the new type of ventilation system could be seen (Fig. 3).<sup>14</sup> To date, architects had often used widows as a means of ventilation, even for bathrooms and pantries. This was the reason for many facades from the 1930s having oculi – the studios' bathrooms were placed facing the street. Small apartments were also often reserved on the ground floor for a building's superintendent. Examples of this solution are numerous, for example the building of Anastas Anastasijević at Kneza Danila 57a, designed by Bogdan Nestorović (1901–1975) in 1933 (Fig. 4). Other cities in Yugoslavia witnessed similar increases in the numbers of studios and smaller apartments during the second half of 1930s. For example, in Zagreb, 19% of apartments were studios, and one-room apartments accounted for 43% of the entire production, while three-room apartments accounted for just 6% (KAHLE 2003: 39–40).

<sup>10</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XLII-21-1931

<sup>11</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-IX-17-1939

<sup>12</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-VI-1-1937

<sup>13</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-XIV-13-1937

<sup>14</sup> Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade Municipality Technical Direction, f-IX-30-1941

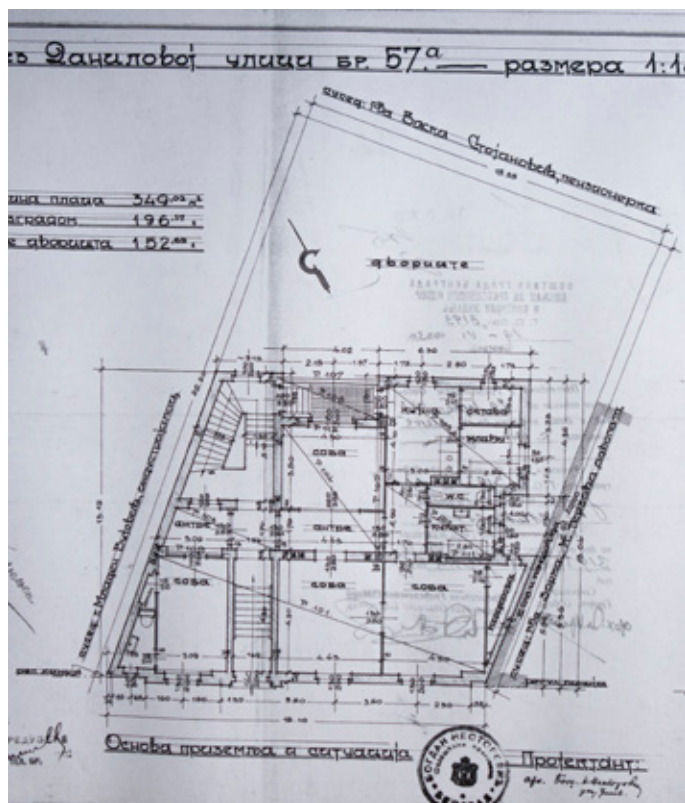


Fig. 4. Bogdan Nestorović, the building of Anastas Anastasijević, Kneza Danila 57a, 1933, ground floor (Historical Archives of Belgrade, Belgrade municipality Technical Direction, f-XI-11-1933)

Even though housing in Inter-war Belgrade primarily consisted of large luxurious apartments on the one hand and poorly constructed unhygienic slums on the other, many architects were predominately in favor of the development of a new type of a more affordable housing. A significant number of examples show the gradual increase in numbers of spatially well-oriented small apartments which anticipated the formation of the *Belgrade school of housing* after the Second World War. However, radical solutions heading towards a collective dwelling, such as the *Einküchenhaus*<sup>15</sup> of architects Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927) and Albert Gessner (1868–1953) in Germany in 1909 (COHEN 2012: 43), were never applied to the Belgrade housing system.

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<sup>15</sup> Apartment building with one communal kitchen

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## О РАЗВОЈУ ТИПОЛОГИЈЕ МАЛОГ СТАНА У БЕОГРАДУ ИЗМЕЂУ ДВА СВЕТСКА РАТА

### Резиме

Развој просторне организације малих станова доживео је свој процват током међуратног периода у Европи. Проблем недостатка малих а хигијенских станова постојао је и у европским градовима и у Београду. Програмска и активистичка димензија коју је модерна архитектура поседовала имала је одјека и на појединим запаженим београдским архитектама попут Бранка Максимовића и Јана Дубовија. Међутим, и интелектуалци попут новинара Слободана Видаковића залагали су се за побољшање услова становања у југословенској престоници. У раду су приказани пионирски покушаји развоја типологија станова мале квадратуре, који ће у послератном периоду имати значајну улогу у формирању београдске школе становања.

Кључне речи: мали стан, типологија, стамбена архитектура, међуратни период.

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\* Уредништво је примило рад 11. I 2019. и одобрило га за штампу 19. III 2019.