

Research paper

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF THE NEW BELGRADE URBAN LANDSCAPE (BELGRADE, SERBIA)

Jovana Petrović¹, Marija Pešikan², Nenad Stavretović³

Abstract

Intensive urbanization often threatens the spatial identity of cities and the value of existing urban landscapes. The development of gray infrastructure is usually not accompanied by the improvement and increase of the city's green spaces, which negatively impacts the aesthetics of urban areas and the perception of the urban landscape by the urban population. Factors such as natural landscape elements, visual harmony, building proportions, and spatial identity have a significant impact on the emotional response of the population and their daily interaction with space.

This paper analyzes the public participation in assessing the quality of New Belgrade's urban landscape, with the goal of determining its recognizability, understanding the emotional response of the inhabitants to urban vistas, and examining citizens' attitudes regarding the improvement of the current situation. A survey among 60 visitors via random sampling was conducted in the Bežanijska Kosa park, where a viewpoint offers a vista of New Belgrade's urban landscape. The results show that a significant number of respondents (40.48%) visit the park because of the urban vista, which is aesthetically acceptable for most respondents, but they recognize the need for improvement. The dominance of gray infrastructure was identified by 71.67% of respondents, who believe it diminishes the quality of the urban landscape, and improvements should focus on increasing the amount of greenery on and around buildings (91.67%). The reconstruction of existing green spaces and their better maintenance were cited as key factors in improving the characteristics of New Belgrade's urban landscape. The results highlight the importance of green spaces in urban environments, with users recognizing their value, which can serve as guidelines and recommendations for managing urban spaces and landscapes. Respondents emphasized the importance of preserving New Belgrade's identity as an urban entity that balances contemporary needs with cultural and natural heritage.

Key words: *urban landscape, New Belgrade, visual quality, public perception, spatial identity*

¹ PhD, Associate professor, Faculty of Forestry – University of Belgrade, Department of landscape architecture, jovana.petrovic@sfb.bg.ac.rs, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6606-3897>

² MSc, Researcher, Faculty of Forestry – University of Belgrade, Department of landscape architecture, marija.pesikan@sfb.bg.ac.rs

³ PhD, Full-time professor, Faculty of Forestry – University of Belgrade, Department of landscape architecture, nenad.stavretovic@sfb.bg.ac.rs, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8870-6777>

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization and the rapid development of cities pose challenges in preserving the value of existing urban landscapes, as well as in visually integrating newly constructed buildings into the inherited elements of the landscape. The visual harmony of the landscape can be disrupted by unplanned construction, poorly maintained facades, and the excessive display of advertisements on buildings or their facades, and contribute to visual pollution, directly impacting the mental health of the population by causing stress and anxiety [1]. Not only transformation of urban landscapes but also contemporary city lifestyles contribute to the deterioration of human health and well-being, creating conditions for diseases of society such as stress, depression, insomnia, and others. The World Health Organization [2] has reported an alarming increase in the number of people in the cities suffering from stress and burnout syndrome. Urban greenery has a significant role not only as a part of urban landscapes making them more soft by creating of visual “pauses” within the urban scenery, but also in improving the well-being of residents. Urban greenery enhances the city's environment and helps reduce stress, offering opportunities for the recovery of cognitive and physiological processes [3-7]. Greenery as part of the urban landscape has the highest value in large cities, where even a simple view through the window can improve one's mood [8]. Therefore it is clear why integrating green spaces into urban areas as a part of landscape identity must be part of sustainable development of contemporary cities. On the other hand, the historical identity of urban areas is equally important, allowing residents to feel and understand their history through space. In the context of urban heritage protection, landscapes should be understood as spaces of everyday life, socio-cultural constructs, and mental and subjective representations of the environment that change over time [9]. As an inseparable part of landscape people should be include in the process of understanding and improving it. So it is crucial to consider public opinion and perspectives regarding to the emotional responses of residents and their everyday interaction with space and urban landscapes. Engaging the public in assessing the impacts of various landscape changes can serve as a starting point for evaluating future changes and making decisions related to the management of urban landscapes, and as a foundation for the development of future city strategies and urban infrastructure regulations [10, 11].

This study focuses on public participation in the evaluation of the value of the urban landscape of New Belgrade (Belgrade, Serbia), aiming to determine its significance for the residents of the area and the city as a whole, to assess its recognizability, and to understand the emotional responses of residents towards urban vistas. It also examines citizens' opinions and attitudes regarding the enhancement of the current urban landscape condition from the perspective of landscape architecture.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The research was conducted in a park on Bežanijska Kosa (Figure 1, Figure 2), which territorially belongs to the municipality of New Belgrade. This municipality is located on the left bank of the Sava River and is the most populous municipality in Belgrade, characterized by a specific identity and visual features.

The urban planning concept of New Belgrade represents an applied example of the Functional City concept developed by Le Corbusier and reflects European modernism [12]. The basic characteristics of the Functional City are defined through 95 points of the Athens Charter (1943), emphasizing functionality and the construction of tall buildings while providing ample space for greenery. Special importance is given to factors such as light and air, natural landscape elements (i.e., various types of green spaces), and the relationships between natural and built landscape elements [12,13,14].

Bežanijska Kosa park (N 44°49.135' E 020°23.631') is located on a hill overlooking the landscape of New Belgrade and parts of blocks 37, 38, 40, and 65 can be perceived from it. The type of view from the park toward the urban landscape was determined based on the General Regulation Plan for the Green Areas System [15], while the types of biotopes in the study area were defined using the GIS Biotope Database (2013). Land use patterns were examined through the Urban Atlas (UA) database.

To define the spatial scope of the view, including the directions and width of the field of vision from the viewpoint in Bežanijska Kosa Park toward the New Belgrade landscape, an analysis of viewpoint photography (Figure 3) was conducted, taking into account the observer's orientation, the camera's field of view width, and recognizable landmarks in the landscape. This process resulted in a triangular depiction that defines the boundaries and direction of the field of view toward New Belgrade.

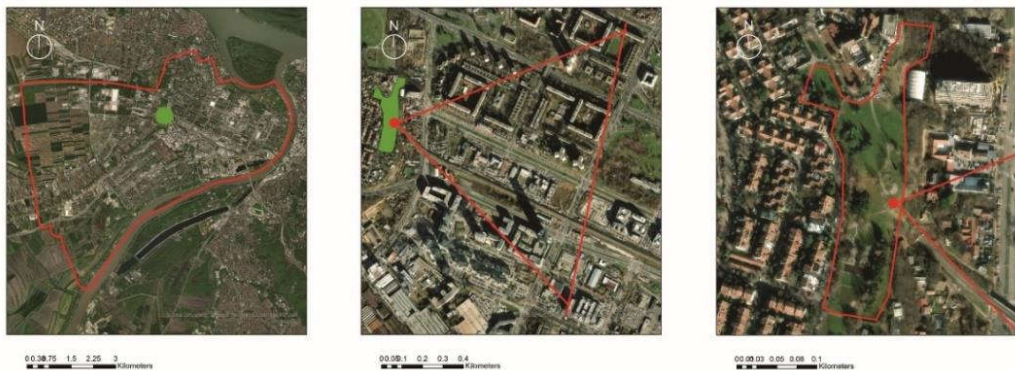
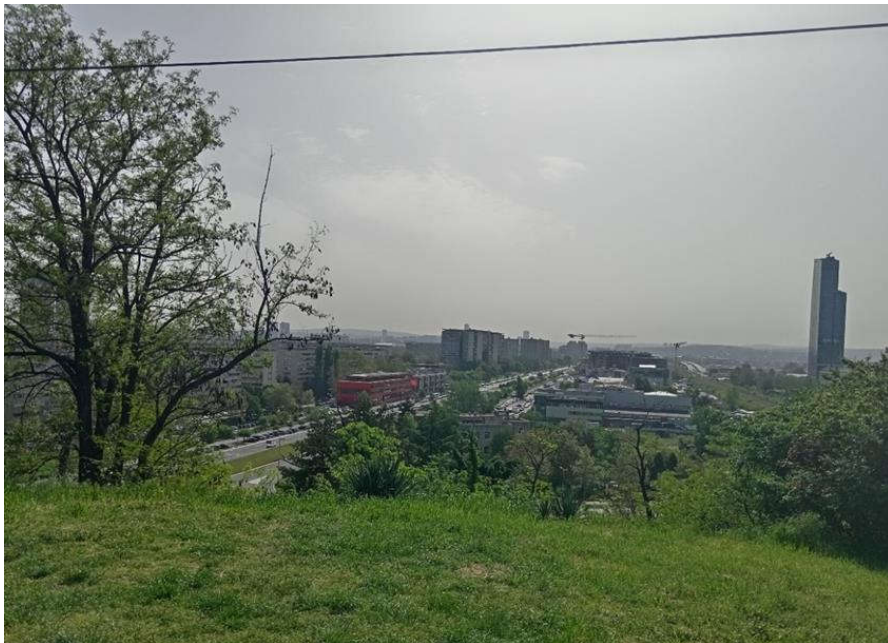


Figure 1. The location of the park on Bežanijska Kosa, the viewpoint, and the extent of visibility.



Figure 2. The park and the access routes on Bežanijska Kosa.



*Figure 3. Viewpoint toward New Belgrade in the park on Bežanijska Kosa,
Photo: M. Pešikan*

2.2. Primary Data

The research involved the collection of primary data through a survey conducted with 60 visitors of Bežanijska Kosa park, where a viewpoint offers a vista toward the urban landscape of New Belgrade. Respondents were selected using a random sampling method, and the survey included a combination of different types of questions. The use of various question types aimed to explore different dimensions of respondents' attitudes and, in particular, to obtain accurate information [16].

The survey consisted of 15 questions, which can be classified into four groups.

The first group included questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, occupation, and education).

The second group comprised questions related to the frequency of park visits, reasons for visiting, and the way the area is used.

The third group of questions focused on evaluating the aesthetic quality of the vista — that is, the aesthetic characteristics of the urban landscape of New Belgrade. These questions used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1-very poor, 2-poor, 3-acceptable, 4-very good, 5-excellent).

The final group of questions related to users' opinions on improving the quality of the urban landscape, their participation in activities aimed at maintaining this or other green areas, and their views on the need for more green spaces.

The survey was conducted in October 2024 and February 2025, over a total period of 4 days (2 weekdays and 2 weekend days). Data processing was performed using Microsoft Office Excel 2007, and the results are presented in the form of tables and charts.

3. RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

The vista from the park at Bežanijska Kosa toward the urban landscape of New Belgrade belongs to the panoramic type and illustrates the connection between gray and green infrastructure.

The vegetation characterizing the access area of Bežanijska Kosa Park, according to biotope types, falls into the category of urban wastelands, while the spatial scope of the vista is characterized by urban wastelands, dumps, and elements of green infrastructure (Figure 4).

Regarding land use, the study area belongs to the category of continuous urban fabric and industrial facilities (Figure 5).

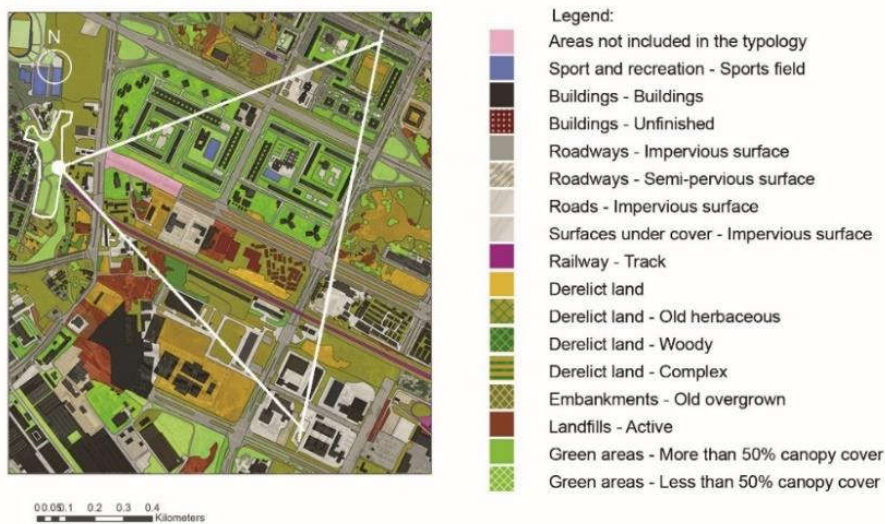


Figure 4. Biotopes of the study area (GIS Biotope Database, 2013)

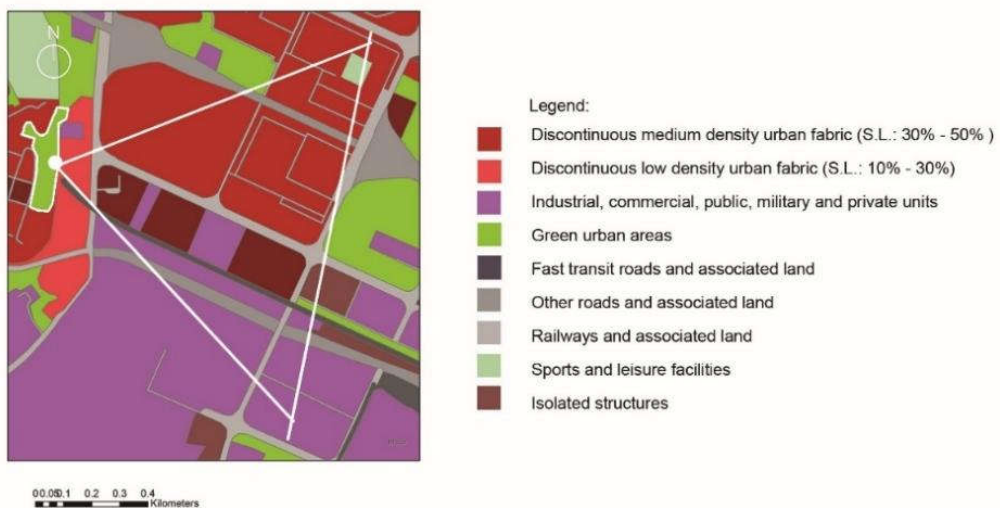


Figure 5. Land use of the study area (Urban Atlas, 2019)

3.1. Socio-Demographic Structure of Visitors

In the conducted research, a total of 60 users of the park at Bežanijska Kosa were surveyed. Of the total number of respondents, 28 were male and 32 were female.

Among the surveyed park visitors, those belonging to the 18–25 and 26–45 age groups were equally represented, together accounting for more than half of the respondents (73.34%).

The largest group of users were employed individuals (26), followed by students (16), while the number of unemployed respondents was the smallest (Table 1).

Regarding education, the majority of respondents had completed secondary education (21), while a similar number had completed higher vocational education (12) or university education (10). The fewest respondents had completed only primary education (7).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of park visitors at Bežanijska Kosa

Age(y.)	Number	Portion (%)	Occupation	Number	Portion (%)
<18 y.	1	1,66	student	7	11,67
18-25 y.	22	36,67	University student	16	26,67
26-45 y.	22	36,67	employed	26	43,33
46-65 y.	8	13,33	unemployed	3	5,00
65+ y.	7	11,67	retired	8	13,33
Σ	60	100	Σ	60	100

More than half of the surveyed users live in the immediate vicinity of the park (55%), but a significant share of visitors also come to the park intentionally (45%).

Among the total number of users living near the park, the majority can be classified as long-term residents (78.79%), as they have lived in the neighborhood for more than 10 years.

The results show that factors such as residents' attachment to the location, as well as accessibility, are crucial for the visitation and use of a specific green area or urban space.

Proximity and accessibility are often cited in research as key factors influencing the visitation of certain urban green spaces [17-22].

In addition, the results showed a significant share of users who visit the park even though it is not located near their homes, indicating the importance of factors such as significance, attractiveness, and recognizability of the location, which become decisive when choosing a specific green area or urban space to visit.

3.2. Frequency of Visits and Reasons for Visiting

The largest number of respondents visit the park 2–3 times a month (40%), followed by those who come 2–3 times a week (26.67%).

More than half of the respondents (55%) visit both on weekdays and weekends, while the distribution of users who visit exclusively on weekdays or exclusively on weekends is quite similar (Table 2).

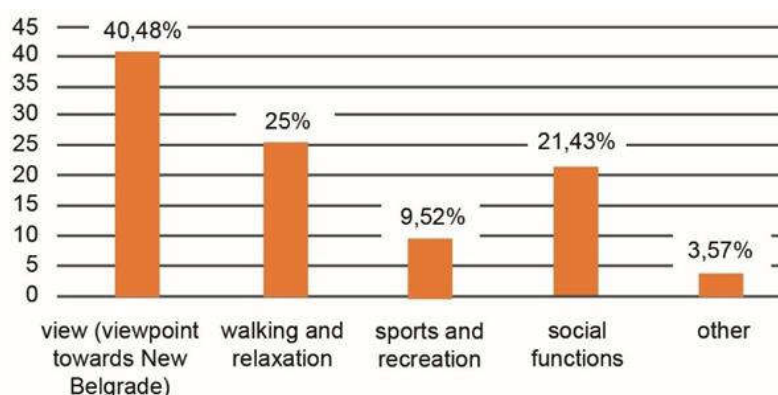
The analysis of the duration of stay in the park shows that the dominant period is 1–3 hours (38%), but a significant share of users (33.33%) stay somewhat shorter, around 1 hour.

Table 2. Temporal dynamics of park visits

Frequency of visits	Number	Portion (%)	Time of arrival	Number	Portion (%)	Duration of stay	Number	Portion (%)
Every day	9	15	Workday	13	21,67	Half an hour	2	3,33
2-3 times a week	16	26,67	Weekend	14	23,33	1 hour	20	33,33
2-3 times a month	24	40	Not specified	33	55	1-3 hours	38	63,34
The first time	11	18,33				Longer than 3 hours		

The main reason visitors come to the park at Bežanijska Kosa is the view — specifically, the vista toward the urban landscape of New Belgrade (40.48%). The obtained results show that the vista toward New Belgrade's urban landscape constitutes a key element of the identity and recognizability of this green space (Graph 1). The motivation for visiting is a factor that determines the reason for choosing a specific area [23]. Walking and relaxation in the green space are cited as the second most common reasons for visiting the park (25%).

Graph 1. Reasons for visiting the park at Bežanijska Kosa



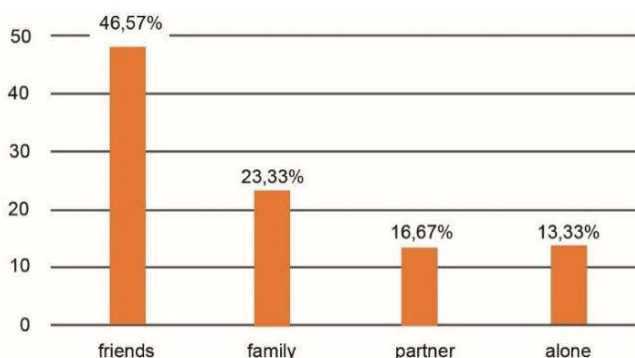
These two activities are frequently mentioned as typical uses of urban green spaces [24,25] and highlight the important psychological function greenery provides in urban environments.

The research results also indicated a pronounced social function of green spaces (21.43% of users visit the park to engage in social activities), a conclusion also supported by the responses to the question about whom users spend time with while in the park (Graph 2).

The characteristics of the area itself influence how the space is used, primarily through the opportunities it provides for performing certain activities [18,26].

In addition to the pronounced ecological, aesthetic, and social functions of the park at Bežanijska Kosa — reflected in spending time there with friends or family — a significant share of users visit the park seeking solitude (13.33%). Considering with whom a user visits and uses an urban space represents one of the fundamental factors influencing its use [27].

Graph 2. Users' responses to the question: "With whom do you most often visit the park?"



3.3. Satisfaction With the Aesthetic Characteristics of the Urban Landscape of New Belgrade

More than half of the respondents rated the aesthetic characteristics of the urban landscape of New Belgrade, observed through the vista from the park at Bežanijska Kosa, as good (35%) or very good (33.33%). These results indicate that there is room for improvement.

When asked about the feelings evoked by the urban landscape of New Belgrade, users predominantly mentioned feelings of peace and tranquility, a sense of calmness, relaxation, and restfulness.

Respondents emphasized the need for a greater presence of greenery within the observed landscape, which they believe would have a positive effect on their emotions.

It is important to note that some users expressed negative feelings such as sadness, melancholy, anxiety, and nostalgia, which they attributed to the dominance of built structures in the landscape, excessive urbanization of New Belgrade, and similar factors.

The results of the evaluation of users' satisfaction with the characteristics of New Belgrade's urban landscape show that users recognize the great potential of the urban landscape, but also that it is not adequately utilized, which reflects on the aesthetic image of the landscape.

Contemporary challenges in the urban development of New Belgrade, such as privatization processes, commercialization of green spaces, and the expansion of the informal economy, lead to changes in the character of the area [28], resulting in problems such as insufficiently regulated urban growth, neglected residential blocks, and abandoned public spaces [29].

The opinions of users in this study confirm the findings of Marić et al. (2010) [29] that, instead of the planned unified urban fabric, the open urban and green spaces in New

Belgrade are under threat, with commercial interests often outweighing the needs of the wider public.

3.4. Improving the Characteristics of the Urban Landscape of New Belgrade

A large portion of users stated that the view toward the urban landscape of New Belgrade is dominated by built structures (71.67%), while 91.67% expressed the opinion that changes in the aesthetic characteristics of the landscape should primarily focus on increasing the presence of greenery.

Among the specific mechanisms proposed to improve the condition, users emphasized the importance of reconstructing existing green spaces around buildings and along roads (20.50%) and better maintenance of the existing green spaces that are part of New Belgrade's landscape (21.12%).

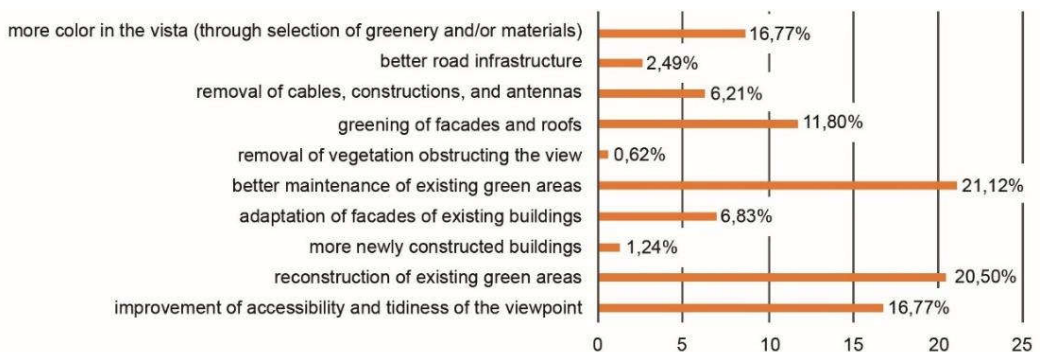
Accessibility and the arrangement of the viewpoint in the park were also highlighted (16.77%), along with greening roofs and facades of existing buildings (11.80%).

Green roofs and green facades are recognized as solutions that can help mitigate the visual dominance of gray infrastructure elements and create a more pleasant urban environment.

Reconstruction and continuous maintenance of green spaces stand out as key activities for preserving and enhancing landscape quality, with a focus on their aesthetic and ecological functions.

Other proposed mechanisms for action were represented with a share of less than 10% (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Users' responses regarding mechanisms for improving the urban landscape of New Belgrade



Maintaining green urban spaces is crucial for preserving the identity of New Belgrade as well as for improving the quality of life of its residents. The General Regulation Plan for the Green Areas System [16] emphasizes the importance of preserving vistas from characteristic positions and viewpoints. This involves not only the physical conservation of space but also the preservation of its cultural and ecological significance. Therefore, urban planning and heritage management must be aligned with the needs for conserving original architectural and urban principles as well as green spaces.

The urban vision for New Belgrade was based on modernist principles that included healthy living in harmony with nature and functional space. Preserving these principles and

adapting them to contemporary conditions can be considered a challenge that requires an integrated approach and participatory urban heritage management [30].

Of the total number of surveyed users, more than half (65%) stated they would participate in activities aimed at improving this or other green spaces in the city. Additionally, 98.33% believe that there should be more well-maintained green areas in the city.

Based on the analyzed results, it can be concluded that users have a positive attitude towards green spaces, understand their necessity, importance, and significance.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that users' ecological awareness is well-developed and encouraging, although efforts should still be made to raise it further, particularly through education on the use and appreciation of such spaces.

4. CONCLUSION

As a result of unregulated urban development, New Belgrade is characterized by significant changes in the structure and character of space, affecting public goods as well as the residents of the area and the city as a whole.

The conducted research demonstrated that public opinion recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the aesthetic values of urban landscapes. The study showed that users frequently visit the park at Bežanijska Kosa, with many citing the observation of the vista toward New Belgrade's urban landscape as their primary motivation for visiting. The potential of New Belgrade's urban landscape is significant but not fully utilized, which impacts the overall landscape image — a fact recognized by the respondents.

Considering users' opinions, the aesthetic characteristics of New Belgrade's urban landscape are generally rated as good or very good, but there is evident room for improvement. Surveyed users recognized the importance and value of integrating greenery into the urban landscape and its positive emotional and psychological impact.

Users' opinions emphasize the need to preserve New Belgrade's identity as an urban unit that meets contemporary needs while respecting the principles that safeguard cultural and natural heritage. Therefore, preserving and enhancing the vista toward the urban landscape of New Belgrade is of exceptional importance, as well as reconstructing the viewpoint in the park at Bežanijska Kosa. Citizen participation in planning and decision-making related to public goods is extremely important, as it is based on the individual's motivation and desire to improve the quality of community life, protect the environment, participate in decisions that will affect users' lives, care for social conditions, and achieve satisfaction with the state of their surroundings.

Collecting data about users, their motivations, and ways of using urban green spaces should be a research priority, as many decisions regarding green space management are based on such data. Implementing the results obtained in this way into decision-making processes would contribute to achieving general user satisfaction with new spaces and vistas.

Moreover, strategies, plans, and individual projects related to the planning, design, and construction of urban spaces should aim for a multidisciplinary and integrated approach that considers existing natural and built elements and their relationships.

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