

# SUBOTICA MUNICIPALITY AS A LEARNING REGION

*Marijana Pantić*

*Some differences in territorial organization between Serbian and EU countries are obvious. The level of centralization and tradition in systems for implementation of ideas are differently back-grounded. However, these are the most important facts for the opportunity to realize Learning Region as a concept of the European future.*

*There is no part of space that should be considered as unchangeable and the way to a better position and Learning Region concept implementation of each region in Serbia in practice should lead towards few necessary steps and further. The starting point is awareness of the facts on the creation of Subotica region as it is at present. The healthy future of each region is provided by looking back in the past and learning from the history. The other important thing is bench marking- learning on the positive and successful experiences of other regions, and finally, making its own concept of Learning Region adapted to local surrounding and true need of local people.*

*Some experiences, suggestions and comparisons will be made in this case study, in relation to one of the Serbian municipalities nearest to EU neighboring countries in a territorial way.*

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## COMPARISONS BETWEEN SUBOTICA MUNICIPALITY AND EU MUNICIPALITIES

When speaking about Learning Region there is a need to define a term "Region". The historical background, all political differences and Iron Curtain distances between Balkan countries and Central Europe made distinctions in territorial organizations as well. For example: Only one Austrian state Burgenland (area of about 4 km<sup>2</sup>) has 171 municipality within itself which is almost the same number of municipalities as the whole Serbia with 189 (area of about 88.000 km<sup>2</sup>). While the Austrian smallest administrative unit is a municipality which consists of one city, town or village and territory that belongs to it, the Serbian municipality gathers 15, 20 or even 100 settlements. In the case of Subotica Municipality number of settlements is 19: one town and 18 villages. Difference is obvious and relevant to an issue of Learning Region organization.

The area of a territorial unit as the basic one is important because the level for implementation of Learning Region tools is different. That

means that approach has to vary if expected results should become visible at the level of different number of villages. Of course, the results will be more obvious and all actions will have better support if governance has a task to implement ideas at the level of one village, for a smaller number of people and a smaller area. This is not only a question of spatial efficiency but it is also a question of administrative and political organization of municipalities. In other words it is a question of responsibilities local governance can get and realize in a proper way within municipality.

The other difference between Subotica and EU municipalities is the financial standing point for all actions. While in the EU municipalities this local administrative unit has its own budget and the right to decide how to use the budget for implementation of the projects, at the other side, Subotica Municipality is part of the centralized state system where each project has to be justified by the state headquarter. It is hard to get financial support from someone who has to split it between so many demanding actors.

Going back to the beginning, historical situation, different cultures, tradition and

mentality of the people make another distinction between Serbia and EU countries. Looking back into the recent history, for the most of EU countries last 15 years were period of stable development, cooperation and inclusion of new members at the unique European market. At the other side those 15 years in Serbia were a period of slow decadency of belief in a better future where people lost the wish to follow neither ethical nor legal standards.

Conclusion is that most of the differences between Subotica Municipality and EU Municipalities are cases in which Subotica and Serbia in a whole should follow the best practices; change its own structure and approaches but taking necessary care about the ethical situation, specifics of mentality and true needs of local people. Decentralization and establishment of new levels for governing is a future space that leads towards ethical changes.

## THE STATE OF SOIL

Subotica Municipality is located on the very North of Serbia, at the border with Hungary, in a middle of the Panonian lowlands. These

kinds of terrains are extremely convenient for agricultural activities especially because the natural geomorphology of the place is enriched by highly fertile soils.

One of the soil types in Subotica Municipality is among the most fertile in Europe and it has crucial role in wheat, maize, sunflower and other plants production. These soils are recognized by very dark brown color, almost black. The reason for this is richness of humus in the soil.

The other kind of soil widely spread in this area is salty soil. This is the soil with higher percentage of sand than usual. Origin of the sand in the soil is Southeastern part of Vojvodina from where winds brought it during a long geological period. Sandy soil is convenient for grape and fruit growing and some parts of Municipality are also well known as vine and fruit producers, not only as part of tradition, but for industrial need too.



Fig. 1: Agricultural Landscape

Although Subotica Municipality is one of the most developed regions in Serbia, this area is primarily agricultural. Agricultural production is main activity for the most of people that live there and from the close correlation between soil and agriculture; the conclusion is that contribution of the Learning Region concept has to improve awareness on treatment of the agricultural land and soil. Natural potentials of highly fertile soils and tradition in agricultural production breaded for centuries has to find the way for realization and Learning Region is one project that can lead activities in a right course.

Besides awareness of good things and potentials, local people have to be aware of influences and ways to manage them. In

Subotica Municipality these problems are high level of ground water and wind erosion. Lowland is good for agriculture but at the other side, especially in combination with big European streams Tisa and Danube, it could bring a trouble with ground water, just as it is the case in this region. Besides jeopardizing agricultural activities, it is also a big problem for water supply of people in the villages. In combination with industrial production and production on the agricultural land where fertilizers are used more and more, water is contaminated. Knowing that ground water is consistent part of the soil it means that soil is contaminated in the same way.

Wind erosion is a process that was more intensive in the previous periods. Now, there is a set of measures that could be used in the course of preventing new consequences on a soil. Again, flat terrains are good for the majority of activities; other kinds of erosion are the ones that influence hilly and mountainous terrains are almost impossible to control such as the strength of wind which leaves repercussions on the soil quality. Buffer zones, plant and trees zones or other kinds of walls are some of the ways to deal with wind erosion. The Learning Region has a task to learn, show and educate locals how to make, use and maintain it.

## EXISTING LIFELONG LEARNING TOOLS IN SUBOTICA MUNICIPALITY

Tools that can be used in Learning Region concept is a possible division to the existing and non existing, but to be developed and finally put in implementation. Tools that already exist can be distinguished between those already in use and others that are not in service for soil and Learning Region concept.

Different varieties of plans and planning: belong to the first group of existing tools from urban planning to spatial planning, from the plans made for the certain parts of space (naturally protected conservation area or so) to the spatial plans of municipality. Subotica Municipality has 4 Naturally Protected Conservation Areas (12% of the territory) under three levels of protection. One of them is Palić Natural Park which needs planning, mostly because of its closeness to the town of

Subotica and its tourist role. The existing activities of the lake Palić and whole Park cause a lot influences on the soil, water and environment and a special care within the future Learning Region concept in this Municipality is needed.

Some mistakes were made in the planning procedure: instead of making the plan for the whole Municipality first, the work on Master Plan of Subotica started before. Likewise, the same year the Spatial Plan started and the Master Plan was officially accepted by Municipality Parliament. With the wrong steps taken this existing tool was used in an inappropriate way with possible consequences. Instead of global planning and the one with more detailed parts of the space it was done opposite. Spatial Plan is still in a process of finalization and if there are going to be some discrepancies with a Master Plan it will be recognized in the future or during the public review of the plan.

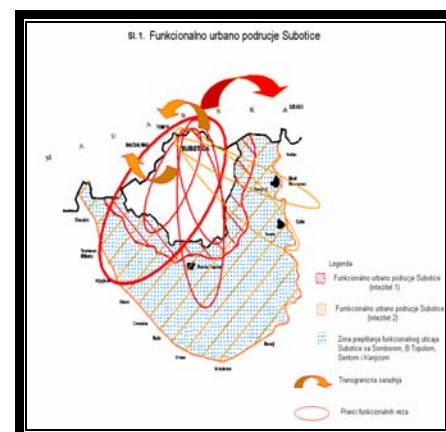


Fig. 2: Functional Area of Subotica Region

The other existing tool for implementing Learning Region and making it possible are NGOs. Non Governmental Organizations are established in these area and some of them are consequently devoted to the nature protection. In close cooperation with the governance responsible for control and plan realization of the Learning Region, NGOs could bring a relevant contribution.

All together, the existing and future tools are the most certain way in bringing up the concept of the Learning Region and making results in raising awareness of soil quality, state, importance and expected treatment. The

desired results could be realized only if the strength of synergy comes to the top: urban planning, spatial planning, NGOs, awareness on soil among local people, politicians and stakeholders.

## INTRODUCTION WITH NON-EXISTING INSTRUMENTS

Non-existing instruments are the ones very useful in establishing concept of Learning Region but still not realized or used in Subotica Municipality.

School education is not typical in this group because it would be wrong to say that there is no education, or education where soil and environment in a whole are not implemented or mentioned in some way. The thing is that it should be done in a different way, with new approach and more accents on this kind of topics. Separate subjects that concern only soil sustainability, endangered water cycles etc. could bring more serious echo within students and for the coming generations.

Further there is a possibility for studying these subjects at the higher level, not only at the specific faculties but at the faculties of social sciences too. If sociology and philosophy can be studied within the geographical sciences than, there is no reason why the environmental sciences cannot be studied at the Faculties of Economics or Law.

The second tool within this group is marketing. People usually need a lot of repetitions and visualizations to become aware of something. That is the reason for establishing separate marketing champagnes on soil, water, air protection and expected behavior of the citizens concerning those elements of environment. Commercials and billboards sponsored by local governance at all places, from playgrounds to highways.

Publicity of each action that is in relation with the environmental protection is a tool for the future as well. Public has its place in a process of planning but announcement of the dates when citizens have a chance to participate has to be more aggressive. A small part at the bottom of the page in local newspapers usually is not enough. Other medias have to be included in the process as well because

somebody who works in the field doesn't have a time to read newspapers every day or to do it in details. Radio, local televisions should be a part and co-operant in the process of implementing an idea of Learning Region.



Fig. 3: School in the Nature- Ludaš Lake

Another necessity is more responsibility and awareness in using the already existing tools. It is not enough to know how, but to really act, if we expect to prevent consequences of the eight main soil degradation processes. Planning hierarchy and NGOs are very important but if they have all the qualities that could enforce, not using just a half of their strength. Some processes repeated for years become a habit and that is a moment where sharpness and overview of new relevant details and surrounding changes disappear. So, if awareness has ever existed it should be refreshed.

## CONCLUSION

For the start, the future steps are exploring varieties that could be useful in a process of Learning Region implementation.

First there is the collection of best experiences and practices. There is no need to go from the very beginning. Developed countries have that opportunity to learn from mistakes and experiences of the others, not passing through the same situations. The way to improve could be shorter.

After collecting the experiences from the others, Subotica Municipality will get its own experience where process of learning on own mistakes is inevitable but with positive effects that should be used in a future.

Besides searching for the experience in the theory and practice collecting direct

suggestions from the partner countries or from the experts or even laic opinions in Serbia takes appropriate place in the future. Each suggestion doesn't have to be implemented and taken without consideration of consequences but can be an inspiration and a push to some new, good ideas which are seriously acceptable.



Fig. 4: Steps in the Future

Comparisons between good and bad examples, EU countries and Serbian Municipalities are also the part of the process.

After these basic and global steps more concrete and detailed steps are coming, that will be developed according to previous list of steps and real needs of local people.

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