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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

# THREE DECADES OF POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION



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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

# THREE DECADES OF POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION

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## **Strategic or strategic? Reaffirmation of socialist planning on the case of Belgrade**

**Abstract:** *This paper examines the understanding of the term ‘strategic’ in planning practice in the post-socialist country Serbia. This is a context, which is characterized by the EU integration processes, transition to a market economy, but also strong path dependency. The first part will present a historical overview of transition from traditional rational planning model to more strategic planning approaches considering the main European and international influences. The second part focuses on a case study of General Urban Plan of Belgrade from 1972 and explores its strategic procedural elements. Here we analyse the plan preparation methodology in which some elements of deliberation are rarely considered as a binding component of the rational approach to planning in its purest sense. Finally, this paper discusses the commonalities and differences within General Urban Plan from 1972, contemporary city-level general urban planning documents in Belgrade and novel strategies of integrated urban development. The main aim of this paper is to re-evaluate the socialist legacy in relation to the use of different procedural elements of strategic planning in contemporary conditions.*

**Keywords:** *legacy, strategic, transition, path dependency, participation.*

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### **Introduction**

First roots to strategic urban planning date back to 1930s in Australia. Later on, during 1960s and 1970s, strategic planning has evolved as an approach, tool and philosophy in the countries of Western Europe as well (Albrechts, 2004; Sumpor & Djokić, 2012). Almost 60 years later, a comprehensive unified definition of strategic planning is still difficult to determine, and it builds up on the extensive literature from the field of business planning. Thus, strategic urban planning has partly emerged as a response to a growing need for optimizing planning processes and outcomes, but also in the light of the communicative turn in planning theory and practice. During the 1970s, strategic planning was often equalized to a comprehensive and integrated approach, which aimed to tackle almost all aspects of development at different administrative levels (Albrechts, 2006). After the initial enthusiasm, scepticism was enhanced by the practical impossibility to achieve such ambitious goals in light of the emerging neoliberal regimes. Nevertheless, anew flourishing of strategic planning in 1980s and 1990s was followed by the emerging complex issues of cities which required a long-term plan. These circumstances were emanated through a growing necessity for boosting

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cities' competitiveness, and, at the same time, social fragmentation, growing interest in environmental issues and degradation of the natural environment, better horizontal and vertical collaboration between institutional and other bodies.

Numerous scholars have tackled the subject of evaluation of strategic planning practices in relation to capacities in adjusting global principles in approaching substantive contextual issues (Albrechts, 1999; Healey et al, 1997; Salet & Faludi, 2000). Still, there remains a continuous need for re-evaluation of both process and outcomes of planning in different local contexts, where the question of values and influences remains a pivotal point around which both practice and research should evolve. Although most planning literature considers post-socialist planning contexts as path dependent, top-down and based on principles of zoning, the practice which followed the strategic turn in Europe, was emanated in the local planning context of Serbia as well. In this paper we recognise two distinctive planning eras where some aspects of strategic urban planning were embraced - the socialist planning practice in late 1960s and 1970s, and contemporary practice from 2000s. The main aim of this paper is to offer an insight into an existing reservoir of knowledge and practice which dates from the socialist planning system and re-examine it in the light of the contemporary strategic and integrated urban development approach in a different socio-economic setting of markets and democracy.

## **Background and the context**

In the local planning context of the socialist Yugoslavia, the common-value, unitary and rational approach strongly influenced planning practice, and where the State was the main protagonist of investments and development (Petovar & Vujošević, 2008; Lazarević-Bajec, 2011). In this era, most planning decisions were presumably implemented top-down, rationalised and legitimised through a scientific, technical approach to planning and without the legal obligation for participation of public until 1960s (Čolić & Dželebdžić, 2018a). A number of authors have recognised the value in better understanding of the socialist legacy and its influence in order to comprehend their outcomes after almost 30 years of transition (Szelenyi, 1996; Enyedi, 1998; Nedović-Budić, 2001; Tosics, 2004; Vujošević & Nedović-Budić, 2006; Tsenkova & Nedović-Budić, 2006; Nedović-Budić et al., 2011). Some of this work represents a theoretical as well as practical base for establishment of an appropriate and context responsive strategic approach to the urban development in Serbia. However, an overall accepted criticism of the rational planning model has left little or no place for evaluation of the socialistic legacy and urban planning practice of former Yugoslavia in relation to the strategic approach to planning and development.

While the early socialist planning era is mostly characterised by the state domination in decision making, centralised administrative planning and economic growth objectives (Vujošević & Nedović-Budić, 2006: 278), the following period of late 1950s was marked with regional and comprehensive plans and focusing on the physical aspects of the urban growth. According to a number of scholars, the most significant period for the development of the Serbian planning practice was between 1965 until the late 1980s. In this period, planning practice was characterised by a cross-sectoral coordination within different levels of government, wide participatory procedures and a strong role of the sub-municipalities, which held legislative power to guide the decision-making process (Enyedi, 1996; Vujošević & Nedović-Budić, 2006: 272). The sub-municipality level of decision-making was especially

important for redistribution of power and establishment of a system in which the significant autonomy at the local level was possible to achieve. The legacy of sub-municipalities (in Serbian 'mesne zajednice') remains in some transformed shape even today, without legislative power and mostly related to their territorial dimension. Their ability to influence the decision-making process has been notably weakened by their unclear and inconvenient definition in the law (Vujadinović, 2010). After the break of Yugoslavia in 1990s, political and planning system underwent through re-centralisation of the power and adaptation to market-based approach. The crisis in this period halted the process of transition, while the democratic reforms started in 2000s (Nedović-Budić et al., 2011).

Since 2000s, the planning system is characterised by transition to market-oriented planning and EU integration process, with a strong influence of international agencies to the local planning practice. These challenges are followed by deregulation, uncontrolled urbanisation, informal construction and usurpation of a state-owned land, societal fragmentation, poverty, and more (Čolić, 2015). The shift to markets was too rapid and dramatic and resulted in incomplete bottom-up approaches with the emergence of so called 'entrepreneurial' approaches where the development is subordinated to investors' needs (Vujošević & Nedović-Budić, 2006, Tasan-Kok, 2004). At the same time, the EU integration process enabled international cooperation, which resulted in introduction of the new instruments for integrated urban development through integrated urban development strategies.

### **Procedural aspects of developing strategies**

Since 2007, local integrated urban development strategies were developed in the city of Niš, Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Užice. In 2018, the process of developing Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2030 (SIUDSRS 2030) was carried out as well. The main task of the national strategy is to: '...establish collaboration between different sectors and define priorities by coordinating the needs and interests of different actors' (SIUDSRS 2030, 2018). The strategy represents a coherent set of decisions, reached through the process of cooperation with various actors in formulating a common vision and common goals, which are used to direct long-term transformative urban development. The strategy represents a mean for governing urban development, and contains a strategic (long-term) pillars and a series of flexible elements as a support to sustainable urban development decision-makers. It is important to mention that strategy is a complementary instrument to the traditional urban and spatial plans.

Several procedural elements of the process of developing strategy are crucial in order to enable integration of not only different aspects of development, but also different sources of funding. One of the main prerequisites for preparation of a strategy is participatory and integrated approach, as well as identification of the *spatial dimension* for integrated urban development. Spatial dimension provides an opportunity for the application of appropriate set of analytical instruments for identifying both issues and potentials, as well as measures to resolve these issues. It also allows for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of complex contextual conditions and factors determining economic, environmental and social aspects of urban development. Participation at various stages of the process of developing a strategy aims to achieve public dialogue and interdisciplinary cooperation of a broad range of stakeholders from various sectors, professional domains and levels of government. Strategy should clearly point to the way the citizens, the civil society and other actors are included in

the strategy implementation. According to a Guide for developing Integrated Urban Development strategy for Cities and Municipalities (2018), strategy preparation should be a collective effort, since the method of joint work increases the probability for successful and long-term implementation. The existing integrated urban development strategies at national and local level in Serbia were prepared through a number of meetings, consultation and focus groups with the members of a different ministries, representatives of local cities and municipalities, public planning departments and enterprises, private sector, NGO and international consultancy sector, university representatives, citizen associations and general public.

A brief overview of some of the procedural characteristics of an integrated strategy development in Serbia after 2000s aimed to point out at some of the 'steps forward' which include wide and substantive participatory mechanisms and integration of different aspects of development with the spatial dimension: governance, economy, social welfare, environment and culture. The following section analyses the GUP 2000 (1972) and GUP 2021 (2003) in order to re-examine if some of these procedural steps were incorporated in the practice of general urban planning in socialist and contemporary planning eras.

### **Case study - GUP of Belgrade 2000 and GUP of Belgrade 2021**

The general urban plan (hereafter GUP) is traditionally seen as the basic strategic and zoning plan in the local planning legislation and practice in the country. The first post-war, authentic GUP of Belgrade was adopted in 1950, and today represents an important historical document<sup>4</sup>. Second generation of GUP Belgrade 2000 was adopted in 1972. This document is often considered as a representative of a 'golden age' of urban planning in the former Yugoslavia, due to the integrated approach to its preparation and adoption process. Finally, the latest General Plan of Belgrade until 2021 (2003) was drafted in line with the changed economic and demographic conditions in a post-socialist Serbia. Later amendments, variations and harmonisation with the changed legal planning framework (ending in 2016), and the adoption of the General Regulatory Plan of Belgrade which contains elements of detailed regulation, led to the situation where this key planning document (GUP) became 'excessive'. Its new role was limited to an indirect link between the Regional Spatial Plan of the metropolis and other more detailed regulatory urban plans.

The first generation of GUP was characterised by the top-down approach to planning and development, interdisciplinary decision-making processes and deterministic orientation, while the second generation of GUP (1972) was developed under the specific socio-economic conditions which allowed for international collaboration, extensive studies prior to its preparation as well as wide participatory processes (Cullingworth, 1997 in Nedović-Budić et al., 2011). During the introductory public presentation<sup>5</sup> of the GUP 2000 (1972), the director of the Urban Planning Institute, architect Aleksandar Djordjević explained the methodological approach to drafting the plan:

*"First, we have established cooperation with some scientific institutions and specialised professional organisations, where we (according to a predetermined*

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<sup>4</sup> Presented at the exhibition "Toward a Concrete Utopia Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980", The Museum of Modern Art - MoMA, July 15, 2018–January 13, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Published speech at the Public Assembly of Belgrade for adoption of GUP on of 23.03.1972.

*program) have ordered the production of certain significant studies or documentation elaborates. Secondly, we have opened up to all users of space, main developers that we called for cooperation, and of course towards the public that we have timely informed and whose participation we wanted and provided. Well...we created a strong team of experts. They have been working on documentation, analyses, forecasts and synthesis for the new GUP in interdisciplinary cooperation. A total of 150 documentary projects were produced. The draft plan is the ultimate product of a long-term process of researching and evaluating alternatives, with increasing numbers of data circulating, until we have obtained a solution that we consider to be optimal. The public discussion of the pre-draft was also one of the kinds. It was an evaluation which influenced the final solution" (Djordjević, 1973).*

When comparing methodologies and approaches, as well as key themes in developing general urban plans from the period of 1972 and in 2003, one can make a distinction of similarities and differences in the processes and planning doctrines. While the GUP 2000 was prepared during the period of socialism, the GUP 2021 evolved in a transitional and neoliberal environment. It should be emphasised that in 1972 Belgrade was the capital of a state of 22 million inhabitants, halfway between West and East, with an accelerated growth of living standards. Hence, it was in the interest of the highest state summit on how the city will look and work<sup>6</sup>. The most obvious differences between two plans are recognised in the concept of city development. After the period of accelerated reconstruction of war sufferings (GUP from 1950), the settlements of Belgrade were spreading to the other side of the Sava River and concentrically towards the periphery, following the regular routes. At the time, development followed the appropriate traffic matrix, and enhanced the formation of industrial and work zones, took care of standards of housing and quality of life in general, and envisaged the needs of preserving the environment. The revision of the GUP (1950) represented a natural and inevitable process which allowed for continuity and longitudinal approach to tackling the issues and responding to the changing needs. While the development of GUP in 1950 was based on an "intuitive" approach as it was the first generation of plans, the GUP 2000 (1972) is more often considered as a scientific-based plan<sup>7</sup>.

The case of GUP 2000 (1972) shows that the processual dimensions of the plan included interdisciplinary team work, forming documentary base, developing a number of expert studies and analysis and grasping the participatory process. In addition, the study of the quality of life of citizens of Belgrade was performed by the Slovenian sociologist Jezi-Gore Gorsevski and OECD team for the whole area of the city of Belgrade. The findings obtained from this study were incorporated into the draft planning solution. It may be argued that the system of planning at the time already stemmed towards adopting some of the principles of integrated and strategic approach which relate to interdisciplinarity, research and wide horizontal and vertical collaboration. In addition, both documents contain strategic goals, and more concrete measures to achieve such goals. Finally, both documents contain the all-important spatial dimension which allows for consideration of appropriate set of analytical instruments for achieving balanced urban development. In consideration of the outcomes of the

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<sup>6</sup> Visit of President Josip Broz Tito to the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, TREZOR, archives of RTS.

<sup>7</sup> Gligorijević, Ž., Graovac, A. (2018) *70 godina Urbanističkog zavoda Beograda, knjiga 1: Istorijat*. Urbanistički zavod Beograda.

GUP 2000 (1972), the striking evidence is reflected in the incorporated norms and standards for development of public land use and public services, whereas for example affordable housing reached quantitative (square meters per inhabitant) and qualitative (materials, light, optimisation of heat) standards which are difficult to achieve in contemporary practice. Finally, it is important to mention that most planning and architectural solutions from the time were reached through international competitions, which were an obligatory part of the process.

The plan from 2003 had a challenging role to grasp the unplanned changes mostly emanated through informal development which first occurred during the 1980s, and later continued in a diversified form until today. Such development led to the expansion of construction land and usurpation of the land which was legally defined 'in the public interest', meaning intended for development of public land use and public services, important traffic and infrastructure corridors. Before the end of the plan preparation process, political structures imposed a new populist demand for the profession, whereas the plan was to be directly implemented on each plot, i.e. enabling the issuance of the construction permit in parts of the city that did not have detailed regulation plans. Thus, a plan which was supposed to propose strategic directions for the development of the city without any cadastre/plot position and number developed in the scale of 1:20000, was in the end interpreted as a planning base for enabling construction. Another issue was perceived in the lack of specialized studies and analysis in the plan preparation phase, as well as the lack of comprehensive top-down decisions in relation to some of the crucial projects such as zones of high level of hazard of the scientific institute in Vinča, airport in Surčin, or several water protection zones. These specific areas were left as 'white spots' in the plan, while their detailed land use was left to be defined after harmonization of the land use with specific legislation in this field.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Numerous initiatives are on-going in the field of integrated urban development, quality of life and better governance and in order to strengthen the economic position of cities in the European Union (EU). Frequent discussions on transforming institutions and procedures at all levels of government were encouraged by different objectives – from promoting competitive local economy to reducing the gap between citizens, businesses and the state. Debates in this field are often contradictory. They resulted with various forms of transformative initiatives at the local level. Urban governance is seen as a complex set of political entities, where participation, partnership establishment, coalitions, pacts, public dialogue and networks are conceived, in order to develop new policies and rules. Here, planning and urban governance are associated to through the development of strategic plans.

With democratic changes and transition to market economy, Serbia has adopted a new socio-economic framework that has fundamentally changed its relationship towards governance and development of public policies. A new concept for urban development, the so-called concept of good governance, is defined in some of the most important United Nations and EU documents. This concept implies a shift from government to governance, and focusing on the effectiveness of using different resources accessible in a given context, with the inclusion of non-state bodies in the process of shaping public policies (Petrović, 2012). The concept of governance was accepted in principle in Serbia, which has consequently brought forward the need for comprehensive structural reforms to ensure the 'rule of law', clear standards, transparent procedures, free market and high quality of services for citizens and businesses to

establish new relations between state institutions, economy and citizens (Maruna et al., 2018). Some steps towards embracing the concept of governance were recognized through the initiative towards developing integrated urban development strategies at national and local level in Serbia. In this sense, the strategy is seen as a comprehensive document which substantively grasps the main issues and potentials in urban development in relation to different aspects from the field of economy, social welfare, environment, locally specific values and culture. Strategy is also an instrument for governing urban development, and contains a strategic (long-term) pillars and a series of flexible elements as a support to sustainable urban development decision-makers.

The main task of an integrated urban development strategy is to establish coordination over different sectors and define priorities by coordinating the needs and interests of different actors. Although it is a complementary instrument to formal urban plans, this paper aimed to re-examine and compare some of their processual elements in order to provide better understanding of the term 'strategic', often used in relation to traditional planning instruments. The main findings relate to the notion that the socialist GUP 2000 (1972) contains more elements of strategic planning than some newly developed General plans for the city of Belgrade (for example, GUP 2021 developed in 2003). Participatory processes, prioritization based on in-depth research and analysis, international competitions and integration of various elements of development within the spatial dimension - contribute to the need for recognition of examples of 'good practice', even with the benefit of the hindsight. Thus, the analysis of some of the processual elements of the GUP 2000 (1972) suggests that future preparation of integrated urban development strategies should respectfully include the existing reservoir of practical knowledge which dates back to the socialist era but was rejected at the beginning of the transition process. However, in order to be reused effectively, this knowledge should be adapted in line with the new demands required by the democracy, markets and decentralised governance. In this way Serbian planning practice would have an opportunity to establish the planning system based on theoretical recommendations of the strategic approach, practical knowledge acquired throughout process of testing the new instruments of integrated urban development, and, knowledge inherited from the pre-transitional period which relates to the idea of the protection of the public interest through both normative and substantive, bottom-up dimensions. In this way the process of urban development could be modified and some steps of the global urbanisation model, hopefully the most complex and degrading ones, might be avoided (Tosics, 1997).

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