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ROLE OF SPATIAL PLANNING IN MANAGING MOUNTAIN AREAS IN SERBIA AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

In comparison to densely populated coastal areas and lowlands, geomorphological configuration of mountain areas makes them specific in various aspects. However, not all European mountain countries recognize the specifics of their mountain areas in the same way, if at all, in spite of their exceptional value. A decade after the 2002 – International Year on Mountains, the focus has been shifted away from these areas. Therefore, this article brings back the topic of Serbian and other European mountain areas in the focus, by reviewing so far developed management tools whose future improvements could enforce their development, secure primary values and make them more competitive. The particular attention is given to spatial planning as a comprehensive development tool.

The article presents a short review of major European management paradigms that have been developed so far, with particular insight into the system developed in Serbia. The data analysed here originate from literature and interviews that have been conducted with representatives of ministries and local government in Serbia. Different paradigms are compared and discussed in light of theoretical stands on integrative approach, planning horizons, cooperation, participation and elements in a planning cycle. The aim was to embrace examples from largest European mountain massifs such as Alps, Pyrenees, Carpathians and Balkan Mountains.

As the result, here are indicated possibilities and need for specific tools in spatial planning and management of mountain areas. The advantages and differences in approaches are accentuated, thus creating a foundation for further learning and improvements of a management system and spatial planning for mountain areas as entities of special characteristics and special needs.

Key words: European mountain areas, spatial planning, mountain massifs, management

Introduction

European mountain areas are reservoirs of essential natural and unique cultural heritage that are used to different extent. Resources such as natural biodiversity, water and air quality are more secure if left to the processes independent of humans. On the other hand, traditional production, cultural patterns and biodiversity consisting of cultivated agricultural species can be preserved only with the presence of humans and their intervention. Therefore, the collision between conservation, preservation with subtle use of resources and uncontrolled use of resources is one of the key issues in managing mountain areas.

The managing preservation of natural resources is usually regulated through zoning. A strict protection regime, where only scientific and cultural-purpose use is allowed, has been established for some naturally valuable locations e.g. the Engadin National Park in Switzerland and the Hohe Tauern National Park in Austria (Maksin et al., 2011). Similarly, the Law on Natural Protection of the Republic of Serbia (2009) has established the status of different naturally protected areas where the strictest level of protection is appointed to the strict nature reserve. In such areas, the presence of man is acceptable only as a visitor and for scientific research; no settlement is included and no construction is allowed. The other types of naturally protected areas allow more flexible use, although under certain conditions that are legally regulated. In Serbia, the problem appears because of potential or actual conflict between the development of tourism and the protection of natural heritage or other land-use in mountain areas (Republic Agency for Spatial Planning of Republic of Serbia [RASP], 2010; Maksin et al., 2011).

When it comes to mountain area development, most of European countries strive to support tourism, but not always in a subtle manner. "Tourism development holds great opportunities, but illustrates the contradictions between economic viability and ecological preservation in mountain areas" (European Commission [EC], 2004, p. 211). In economically more developed mountain areas such as the Alps, tourism is a leading activity (Maksin et al., 2011), and it prevalingly rely on aesthetics of the natural scenery (Siegrist, Ketterer Bonnelame, 2017). The heritage of mountain areas has become endangered by economic activities and settlement infrastructure that jeopardize biodiversity, can cause soil erosion and diminish forest capacities with deforestation in many cases (Pantić, 2014). The spontaneous construction of roads and tourist facilities, summits occupied by civil and military relays, military bases surrounded with barb-wire, inaccessible for visitors, over-use of cars in protected areas and forest-fires are being caused by negligent visitors (Mitrović, 2002; Dželebdžić, Jokić, 2003; RASP, 2010). In addition, sectoral plans or their sectoral realisation harms the natural and traditional anthropogenic heritage of mountain areas as well.

Discussions on perspectives to overcome extremes such as strict conservation and use without considering repercussions have been going on since the Earth Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Such discussions have been taking place both in general and specifically for mountain areas, but mountain areas got particular attention at the beginning of the Millennium as the year 2002 was pronounced the International Year of Mountains. This led to a powerful influx of research and creation of policies specific to mountain areas, which lasted for a decade. Ten years later, mountain areas of the world, including Europe, have been put aside in spite of their unimpeachable significance. One of the reasons is the fact that they are not as densely populated as lowlands and urban areas, so they often need exogenous advocacy.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to bring back the topic of Serbian and other European mounting areas in the focus, by reviewing so far developed management tools whose future improvements could enforce their development, secure primary values and make them more competitive. The gap between conservation and development, which is stated to be one of the major challenges in mountain area planning, represents the backbone of this research. The following sections will present analysis of existing spatial planning paradigms in European mountain countries, with accentuation of some examples. Starting with the analysis of the context, continuing with discussion and concluding main reference to desirable future actions.

Methodology

The ambition of this paper is to make a review of major European management paradigms that have been developed so far, with particular insight into the system developed in Serbia. The objective is to present existing models of management, especially related to spatial planning, and project their strengths and weaknesses onto the future of mountain area development. A theoretical notion of insufficiencies of the existing systems, directions of their improvement and their practical role in spatial planning are discussed after the presentation of the paradigms. By stressing successful examples and accentuating problems and challenges, the review forms a clear picture of the aspects that need necessary improvement in the future.

Since that majority of consistent international projects and research on mountain areas were conducted after the proclamation of the year 2002 the International Year of Mountains, this review significantly relies on this comprehensive synthesis of case studies produced just after the proclamation, but also brings original insights in the case of Serbia where data were collected by interviewing representatives of ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Economy, the Social Integration and Poverty Reduction Team of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Agency of Spatial Planning of Serbia), local government (City of Užice, Knjaževac, Crna Trava and Kuršumljija municipalities) conducted in 2009, and more recent but also more seldom literature that explicitly addresses mountain areas.

Mountain area management challenges

General Approaches to Mountain Area Management

The future course of mountain development might be substantially influenced by national issues like the centralised government model, size and jurisdictions of basic administrative units, transparency of decision-making, non-synchronized institutional work, etc. Those are the issues going beyond spatial planning system but on which the system is fundamentally dependant on.

Unitary countries and their centralised governmental model result in significant dependency of local governance on national government. Regions and municipalities that are not devolved jurisdiction of decision-making, including legislative power and financial management, are very limited to respond to problems and needs occurring on their territory. This issue is beyond mountain areas themselves, but since mountain massifs have the character of regions and mountain municipalities are part of the overall political-administrative structure of a state, they depend on it.

There are basically two groups of European countries. In the first group belong countries with a three tier systems where decision-making power is shared between national, regional and local levels. Representatives of this group are Alpine countries: Austria and Germany as federal countries (Statoids, 2013; European Election Database [EED], 2019; Gemeindeverzeichnis, 2019) and Switzerland which is a co-federation with a guaranteed high level of freedom in decision making and governing at a regional (cantonal) level, as well as active involvement of the local population (Federal Chancellery FCh, 2019). In the other group are Carpathian and Balkan mountain countries: Bulgaria, Romania Serbia and Ukraine (Caste-

lein et al., 2006; Romanian Statistical Office, 2019; EED, 2019); as well as France which stands out from the group of Alpine countries (EED, 2019).

However, mountain regions in France are honoured with special status which devolves certain decision-making powers to them and also involves various stakeholders in the process (Castelein et al., 2006). Similarly, mountain regions and provinces in Italy have certain legislative and financial power in spite of the fact that Italy is a unitary country (Castelein et al., 2006; EED, 2019). By the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia there are two autonomous regions and Central Serbia which is guided by central government so far. This indicates that if decisions and financial management are not devolved to the local community and local government, they are directly dependent on decisions by central government, in a two-tier system. Besides this simplification of the decision-making model in Serbia, the municipal budget is highly dependent on decisions made by central Government; therefore, local governments have difficulties in planning annual actions due to the constant budget uncertainty (Levitas, 2008).

Immediacy between citizens on the one hand and decision-making with financing on the other hand is reflected in the size of the local (smallest) governmental unit. Bulgaria is the only country that can be compared with Serbia with regard to this matter because they both comprise municipalities with more than 400 square kilometres on average while other so far mentioned countries have even 30 times smaller areas. Such a significant difference indicates considerably different conditions for the creation and execution of potential responses in Serbia compared to other European mountain countries (Pantić, 2014). Large municipalities consist of several dozen settlements and the local government is situated in the centre of a municipality; thus, mostly reflecting the needs of the urban population, which leads to negligence on the rural population in a large number of villages.

The absence of transparency in decision-making processes favours private over public interests and excludes the local – particularly rural – population from this process. The Swiss Alps are an opposite example where local communities were first asked to express their opinion on the accession of a protected natural area to a UNESCO list, and only after they accepted it did the state take further steps (Wallner, Wiesmann, 2009). This practice is in contrast to the unsatisfying estimation of transparency in the work of institutions and plan/strategy development in the Czech Carpathians, as stated by the SARD-M report (Hajduchova, 2007). Similarly, the procedure of decision-making in Serbia does not include the local population, except in the preparation of spatial and urban plans. Namely, the voluntary practice of spatial planners in the process of plan creation is to have direct contact with representatives from local communities and sometimes with local residents themselves. The official act of local population participation is a public discussion organised after the first draft of a plan is completed, but unfortunately, limited information flow is a barrier to rural inhabitants. Innovations in management of a protected natural area in the Ukrainian Carpathians include involvement of public and private stakeholders, but the process meets certain difficulties in communication and cooperation between the parties (Geyer, Hamor, Ibisch, 2009). Participation of the local population has actually been a foundation in the endogenous development concept practised in Austria since the 1970s (Dax, 2001), in contrast to difficulties in Serbia, which is one of the most corrupt European societies (Transparency International, 2019) and public interest are significantly jeopardised.

A problem for mountain areas in countries such as Serbia is not being institutionalised and the lack of specific responses and measures. For example, four main types of agricultural

areas were differentiated in the Draft for Rural Development Strategy 2009-2013 (Pantić, 2014). Even though hilly and mountainous areas are defined as one of the main types, they were assigned the same recommendations and measures as other types of areas. The national plan of regional development, a document announced in 2013 as the successor of the Regional Development Strategy adopted in 2005, has not been created yet; even after the creation, the explicit notion of mountain areas, as they were addressed in the document from 2005, is uncertain. But considering that trend where successor documents “erase” explicit measures on mountain areas (Pantić, Milijić, 2019), the certainty that they will be also omitted in this document is high. Some of the traces of recognition of mountain areas in strategic planning is the Program for Changes and Additions in IPARD Program for the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2014-2020 (2019), where users in mountain areas are assigned 20 instead of 10 points in the evaluation for financial support.

There is no law in Serbia that explicitly deals with mountain areas, as is the case in France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Greece (Castelein et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the Law on Planning and Construction (2009) has the most direct role in the management of mountain areas in Serbia, which declares the creation of a spatial plan for areas of special use. Those plans are being made for areas of special interest for the state: areas of natural, cultural and historical value, hydro-energy exploitation, mining sites and tourism development, which are particular advantages of Serbian mountain areas.

Finally, speaking generally about Balkan countries, there is a lack of provision of competent experts for integral development (Balkan Foundation for Sustainable Development, 2008). For example, evaluation of achieved results, targeted by local strategies, showed the absence of staff to be in charge of management strategy implementation (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). As there are no institutions explicitly dealing with mountain areas, responses and research on them are inconsistent and incomplete. In contrast to most Alpine and some Carpathian countries, Serbia has not developed legislation on mountain issues and existing acts tend to be unspecific and broad in defining responses to problems. Even measures that are specific and relevant, being announced by spatial plans for areas of special use, are omitted with nobody taking responsibility for their implementation (Pantić, 2014).

Tendencies to adopt European practices and methodologies lag in good results due to many aspects (market, legislation and decentralisation) in Serbia which are different than in other European countries and not yet stabilised (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). A problem is time synchronisation of plans in Serbia, where the adoption of urban and local plans precedes adoption of regional and national plans. Legislative documents are not coordinated (Stojkov, 2009), neither have local governances established cooperation with each other (Maksin et al., 2014). Similar processes in other Carpathian countries, which have changed previously existing and further established new institutions, have influenced the quality of cooperation between ministries, communication and cooperation between different levels of governance, developing common interests and exchanging experiences with neighbouring countries (European Academy of Bolzano, 2008).

This means that each expert in a spatial planning team brings up an individual perspective of their own field, regardless of other fields of expertise. In some cases, this results in dismantling demographic processes while planning economic development – projecting economic perspectives beyond population capacities, aging, depopulation, emigration, etc. There is a general problem in the implementation of spatial plans, strategies and policies in Serbia

also due to the changes of parties with political power, where the current party usually omits documents adopted and ratified by the previous party (Perić, Miljuš, 2017).

The regulation of building outside of urban areas is not obligatory by law, and in the case of some municipalities in Serbia each request must be individually considered instead of commonly being regulated under a plan. For this reason, Prolom Banja, a spa settlement in Kuršumlija municipality, has been densely built up with no previous permit from the side of the authorities. On the other hand, a demand for conversion of agricultural land into building land has increased in spite of the existence of brownfield areas that nobody uses. This indicates that land resources in urban areas are not properly used and that this aspect should not be neglected in future spatial plans (Pantić, 2014).

Strategic and Spatial Planning on Mountain Areas

Addressing specific characteristics and problems in mountain areas has already been a concern of European international focus for a while. Documents such as the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent (CEMAT, 2000) and Spatial Planning and Regional Development in the Alpine Region (EC, 2000) are examples of international cooperation on mountain areas. The first one, the Guiding Principles is a document concerned with not only mountains but overall European space. Anyhow, this document refers specifically to mountain areas in one of its chapters, thus stressing relevance in their particular treatment. The Spatial Planning and Regional Development in the Alpine Region is a result of cooperation between Alpine Convention member countries and a document also based on a recommendatory and international approach, but in addition focusing specifically on mountain areas.

At a national level, the experiences of European mountain countries such as Germany, Austria and Serbia are rather different. While the spatial development concept in Germany is not specifically oriented towards mountain issues, it still defines the distribution of necessary facilities in settlements at a very local level, taking particular care of inhabitants in small settlements, which is the case of most mountain villages. This is the concept of decentralised concentration (Domhardt, Troeger-Weiß, 2009). In Austria, mountain area development has been significantly led by programmes. Founded by the Austrian national government, at the beginning of the 1970s, the Mountain Farmers' Special Programme was established to support mountain farming (Hovorka, 2014). The focus of this programme was not only to support agricultural activity and production, but also to improve the social situation in households and enforce their role in the regional context (Ibid.). Besides this, the national government was aiming to improve mountain activities – agriculture, grazing, forestry, tourism – and, at the same time, to ensure overall environmental stability (Hovorka, 2001; Lebensministerium AT, 2008). Later on, the Austrian national government also developed the Programme for Rural Development and Agro-Environmental Programme (Hovorka, 2001; Lebensministerium, 2008) which constitute the highest allowances for mountain areas (Hovorka, 2014), therefore playing an important role in their development.

In comparison to the programmes in Austria, which are explicitly focused on mountain areas and are precise on expenditures and how those expenditures are dispersed throughout a four year period, programs on rural development in Serbia tackle its mountain areas implicitly and in addition they are prepared on an annual basis where one year of implementation is

not long enough for evaluation of results. Thus, each following programme cannot improve according to the gaps left by the previous one (Pantić, 2014; Pantić, Milijić, 2019).

Spatial planning in Serbia represents a comprehensive platform, dealing not solely with land-use issues but also integrating all relevant aspects of development: nature, culture, environment, population, settlements, economy, infrastructure, etc. It is about long-term planning (10-20-year time horizon), although spatial plans also include mid-term programmes for the first phase of their implementation. Starting from a visionary view of the future, spatial plans concretise actions, linking them to locations and finally operationalizing the actions of highest priority. In comparison to a former spatial plan from 1996, a separate chapter on high-mountain areas in the Spatial Plan from 2010 represents a significant step forward in planning for their development. In that particular chapter as well as throughout the document, mountain areas are emphasised as areas with a higher extent of problems and as leading areas in terms of their natural value and potential. However, by limiting the particular chapter to high mountain areas (above 1000 m), pertinent issues are those of nature protection and ski tourism destinations rather than permanently inhabited settlements which spread predominantly at lower altitudes.

Based on existing national programmes and the overall endogenous mountain policy of the Austrian government (Initiative for Endogenous Regional Development in 1985) (Dax, Hovorka, 2000; Dax 2001), it was considerably important to develop corresponding programmes at a provincial (regional) and local level (Hovorka, 2001). Namely, federal structure demands responses at a regional level and bottom-up based endogenous development requires active participation of the local authorities and local population in order to provide responses and actions on a “small geographical scale” (Dax, 2001). With regard to this, the provinces have developed their own programmes and campaigns and local communities have become experienced in developing local development strategies. For example, the province of Upper Austria has been developing and updating the principles of village renewal strategies and sustainable strategies within the framework of Local Agenda 21 since the 1990s (Havadi Nagy, 2017). Both require awareness of the local population on the capacities and future vision of their villages, as well as a high level of cooperation between various stakeholders – horizontal and vertical.

Switzerland is another example where the local communities and local population have taken part in creating strategies together. Projects on building a local ski resort and museum of local traditions have been created by local community initiatives, but further realized by private and individual groups in order to obtain optimal financial support (Mühlinghaus, Wälty, 2001). Another example is France or Norway where projects are also developed in cooperation between several municipalities, based on their common interests (Späth, Scolobig, 2017).

The other possibility is potentially available to all EU members as well some accession countries. In fact, programs such as INTERREG support local community initiatives and projects by focusing on trans-regional and trans-national cooperation (EC, 2019). Those initiatives have been applied in many mountain areas of Austria (Hovorka, 2001), supporting cooperation and networking, raising the awareness of the local population, diversification and strengthening of regions, protection of natural and cultural heritage. Regional and local development in Serbia is embedded in regional spatial plans and spatial plans of areas for special use. As is the case with the national spatial plan, regional spatial plans are also integral documents. However, they do not address mountain areas or mountains in a separate

chapter, although mountains are referred to in the text mainly related to tourism or agriculture.

Strategic planning for mountain areas in Serbia is not yet in existence either at a national or local level. However, initiating steps towards a more systematised approach can be recognised in the Rural Development Strategy (2009) and Tourism Development Strategy (2005). In the former case, based on a cluster analysis of 40 indicators, the Strategy distinguished four types of rural regions in Serbia: regions of high-productive agriculture and integrated economy; regions where the economy is typical for smaller urban areas and agriculture where the work force is used intensively; regions where the economy is based on natural resources – prevalingly mountain areas; and regions with large tourism capacities and bad agricultural structure. Clearly, one of the regions is characterised as mainly mountainous, nevertheless, the last three listed regions also include mountain areas. This shows sectoral treatment of mountain areas where responses are not created distinguishing them from other areas. Moreover, a document successor of the Strategy – the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia 2014-2024 (2014) – does not continue the same approach neither develops more specific measures for mountain areas. As a part of the Tourism Development Strategy (2005) it is suggested that separate strategies should be developed for different tourist destinations, clusters or products, which remained the idea in the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 (2016).

Planning at a local level or at the level of a mountain exists in Serbia in the form of spatial plans for areas of special use. The plans cover only mountains or mountain protected areas which the government considers of special interest to develop; thus, not covering complete mountain areas and again excluding mountain populations that do not inhabit areas seen as a priority in development. Mid-term programmes and implementation plans are components of the spatial plans, where priority actions are defined together with institutions responsible for the implementation and estimation of the budget needed for it. Nevertheless, spatial plans can be adopted before all responsible parties sign the agreement which practically diminishes the value of the responses and measures taken in response to its recommendations.

Finally, it is relevant to address the Alpine and the Carpathian Conventions as international documents at inter-rational level. The Alpine countries were the first group of countries that prepare a spatial plan for the inter-regional area, thus defining development priorities and rising awareness on common problems and critical obstacles.

Discussion

The role of strategic documents, whether comprehensive or sectoral, is to set a framework and a vision (Sartorio, 2012), in this case for mountain policy. It is also an instrument for setting long-term goals and principles. The role of spatial planning is to bring the strategic framework in relation to a territory and land-use by balancing between development and protection (Pantić et al., 2019a). Next to the long-term horizon, the spatial planning might include creation of mid-term programmes with more specific measures and time frame. Starting from a visionary view of the future, spatial plans concretise actions, linking them to locations and finally operationalizing the highest priority actions with regard to the mid-term horizon. Therefore, the role of spatial planning in managing mountain areas represents a crucial link between general and specific, abstract and spatial allocated, particularly in the coun-

ties such as Serbia that do not have developed other management tools such as legislative, explicate programs and policies or significant participatory approach such as in Switzerland.

The other aspect that should be improved is sectorally prepared short-term(annual) programmes. Actually, short-term programmes are a problem for their users (mountain population) who cannot adapt to annual changes of subsidies in production and economic activity and where one year of implementation is not long enough for the evaluation of results. This is not only a notion of local government representatives, but logical conclusion: if the nature of spatial planning are mid-term and long-term measures, shifts and changes made in less than a year cannot bring positive results or benefits. In addition, monitoring and evaluation of a measure cannot be reliable if estimated in a large system after short time (Lohner, Dixon, 2013).

In order to correspond to its crucial role, the spatial planning as a managing tool could be further improved and empowered by actions that precede or come after. The quality of input data is relevant for the solutions and measures stated in a plan equality to the implementation of the plan and evaluation of its outcomes (Pantić, 2014; Segura, Pedregal, 2017). Therefore, all stages from research, over evidence-based decision-making, implementation, monitoring and finally evaluation of achieved results must be empowered and integrated as a standard procedure in spatial planning, particularly for mountain areas that are specific and require specific measures.

An integral approach is recommended, as well as interdisciplinary over multidisciplinary approach (Milojević, 2018). This means that each expert in a spatial planning team brings up perspectives related to their own topic (e.g. nature protection, demographic development, social services) regarding of other fields of expertise. Besides good communication within a team, it is relevant to establish cooperation between teams of planners as experts and government institutions as political decision-makers and executors. The interdisciplinary approach should also include recently stressed topics world-wide and in European mountain areas – climate change and landscape architecture and to prepare strategic and planning documents at all territorial levels equally – international, national, regional and local (Pantić, 2014).

Some countries, e.g. Serbia, has to deal with the problem that local population is not aware of exact concept of spatial planning or of coverage of the territory they inhabit by a spatial plan. Even those who have heard about the spatial plan did not know what was in the plan. Thus, spatial plans might bring change for politicians and local authorities, but a fruitful participation of citizens is diminished, in spite of a few cases of dwellers who have undertaken certain actions. The problem can be overcome by the active involvement of the local population in decision-making from the very beginning, where informing the local population is part of an official procedure. However, to turn this goal into reality, it is necessary to raise the awareness of strategic and spatial planning as an instrument and inform mountain populations as to what their input can be (Pantić, 2015).

Last, although preferably first, mountain areas should be defined and recognised as specific territorial entities within each mountainous country, holding particular status, in order to prevent them to be forgotten, addressed in a general manner and implicitly (Pantić, 2014; Pantić et al., 2019b).

Conclusions

The successful examples have shown the significance of completing the process of mountain area management – starting with research on state of the art, over evidence-based decision making, successful implementation, timely monitoring to evaluation of results that takes the process back to the research. What makes the process complete is the execution of each step in the circle. Some of the European mountain countries are more successful in fulfilling the task, while other lag behind due to the general and systematic problems such as absence of legislative, centralised government, unsecured participation of local population (Milijić et al., 2004) and last but not least – due to unrecognition of mountain areas as territorial entities that need entire management circle to be directed towards their specifics.

Due to this situation, action taken in the development of mountain areas has a high possibility of failure, as has already been seen in the case of spatial plans whose implementation, monitoring and evaluation were forgotten after their adoption. The genuine success depends on mutual correlations and reliance of one planning and implementation phase on another. Besides, it is relevant to split the steps between institutions, so that an institution is not in charge of e.g. both implementation and monitoring. Therefore, the parallel need for the linking of steps/tasks and institutional independence and integrity over the task confirms the significance of institutional cooperation and networking for the completion of the process.

The role of spatial planning in management on European mountain areas defer from one country to another, depending on the general system and regulation of spatial planning itself. In countries such as Switzerland or France, where mountain areas are clearly defined and assigned specific regulations by law, spatial planning has open hands to address problems and challenges more specifically. This does not finish with recognition of specific problems in mountain areas, such as in Serbia, but entire chain of planning and decision-making is explicitly directed towards mountain areas and their population. However, in the countries such as Serbia, spatial planning has significant role in tackling problems in the mountains. This comes from the fact that spatial plans, as instruments of spatial planning, can be assigned to some mountain areas, which means at least addressing specific mountain problems in part of the territory.

The spatial plans have the role of providing sustainable development solutions. As mountain areas preserve specific heritage, its real value will be maximised only after it is shared among local users and visitors. But the use needs to be controlled and balanced between the development and preservation that is exactly the role of the spatial planning. Unfortunately, performance or final results of the spatial plans do not depend on planners or planning themselves, but on willingness of government and other stakeholders to implement them. Therefore, the role of the spatial planning field is weakened by taking planning documents as a matter of formality without intention of implementing them in spite of the fact they are obligatory legal acts.

One of the reasons why this could easily occur in those countries that have weak participation system is the fact that the responsibilities and role of spatial planning and spatial plans are not familiar to the population. Therefore, in order to strengthen the role of the field of spatial planning and to be able to benefit from it, the fulfilment of the role of spatial planning, and dissemination of information about the role and significance of spatial planning should be considered and improved in the future.

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