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NEW TRENDS IN PLANNING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SERBIA

Introductory remarks

The absence of a state founded on the rule of law, the involvement in numerous regional conflicts, several hundred thousands of refugees and the ultimate NATO campaign resulted in substantial erosion or even collapse of the economic, social and overall societal development of Serbia. Consequently, the long isolation of the country and the non-existence of the legitimate and articulated questioning of pivotal regional problems placed us to the rear in respect to the transition process and hence the process of European integration. Thus the statement of Perisic and Bojovic (1997) "the country is not in a process of transition but rather in a state of deep crisis" notwithstanding the changes in the last four years, echoes ominously within the planners' community. Especially the demand for "more governance, than government", which in the recent period has influenced the engagement of the public authorities at all planning and governance tiers in the European Union - the supranational, the national and the sub-national - went down unnoticed in Serbia (Vujosevic, 2004). According to Cavric, B. (2002.), two diverging processes are discernible in the formation of a new planning system today. On the one hand, the forces of the previous administrative and political apparatus continue to obstruct the transitional changes as powerfully as they can. On the other, the newly formed administrative machinery lacks the human and financial resources essential to realise fast and efficient changes and embark seriously and systematically upon the transition process. There is yet a deficit of a system legislature which would set the legal and institutional framework on a sound basis for a more advanced and efficient approach to planning. This refers especially to the still lacking regional tier and uncertain levers of regional development, the complex problem of denationalisation and land property rights. Such legal deficiencies largely influence the investment eagerness of domestic and foreign investors hampering the rather slow development.

Development planning theory approaches and contingent constraints in its application

In Serbia, the recent planning theory revolves around several crucial issues such as:

- The introduction of the strategic approach-strategic planning and strategic management-, at formal and informal levels;
- The possible models of regional planning and governance transformation;
- The formulation of a new methodology framework for the integrative approach to planning;

It goes without saying that a substantial part of the research concentrates upon the embedment of the sustainability principles into the planning and subsequent implementation, which, for the shortage of space, will be dealt here only in the chapter elucidating the new theory approaches to community development planning and the integrative planning model.

Strategic approaches to planning and governance

The research debate, which stresses the importance of the strategic dimension to development planning, faces a strong reluctance from the side of those professionals who adhere to the traditional physical planning approach and hang on to the dominance of the higher scientific rationality and the so long practiced planners' centrality. However, most of the theorists fail to agree with this technocratic and deterministic view and maintain that the strategic dimension and the action plan orientation have to be incorporated into the planning process on all planning-administrative tiers, as well as new forms of participative planning which are better suited for market economies. Three strategic approaches with idiosyncratic synoptic models, dominating the planning theory discourse in the European Union (Salet&Faludi, 2000) have been debated in Serbia too. This relates to the interactive, communicative/discourse and the institutional dimension.

As it is known, the interactive model has been dominating the planning practice in Europe since the 1980s and has developed as a reaction to unsatisfactory results of one-sided/centralised "top-down" planning approaches practiced by numerous governments. The premises for such an approach, however, imply well organised network structures within which the interactions of multifarious societal actors, both governmental and non-governmental



might progress. It also implies efficient horizontal links between ministries and agencies as responsible carriers of spatial development planning. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Serbia, where the network society is merely emerging and hierarchical structures still prevail. Consequently, the articulation of different, especially local and regional public interests has still not found adequate and practicable channels/modalities to lobby for them. Therefore, it is indispensable to raise the public awareness and explore possibilities to widen the arena of various stake- and shareholders in the planning process and thus meet the changing societal expectations. The first step in doing so is the creation of effective and permanently updated information pools accessible to all interested parties in the planning process. Thus, the spatial development planning might get better chances to achieve consensus and respond to complex demands of public and private subjects including them into the initial planning phases.

The communicative/discourse approach with its symbolic interactions tries to acknowledge the driving forces and motives of social actions and respond to them in a gradual consensus building way. This approach, though, presupposes an enviable level of communication culture and an advanced ethics of social discourse to be found only in highly developed democratic societies. Since the democratisation process and the development of the civil society has not proceeded so as to achieve a substantial and stable quality in our country, the communicative approach has to be introduced in accord to the uncertain development of transparent democratic structures. Otherwise, especially in transition countries, most of the criticism which this model encounters might prove true. According to Vujosevic (2002) and based upon Yiftachel (1999), Flyvberg (1998), Campebell, Fainstein (1998) and Neuman (1998) the main criticism points to unrealistic assumptions upon which the communicative approach is founded.

These are:

- Sporadic conditions for the “unhampered and ideal communication;
- The power structures and relations are the decisive factors influencing the inequality of actors, resulting in the domination and control of the “powerful” in the planning;
- This misbalance is the main source in the misuse of knowledge and information in planning;
- The reality, in which the content of planning actions is often prevailing in respect to planning process itself is not accounted for;

In the last years in Europe, there has been an evident shift toward the institutional approach in strategic spatial planning where the redefinition of the significance of normative patterns is discernible. Here the institutions are interpreted as carriers of the continuously transient social order and the transforming matrix of normative expectations. In Serbia, however, the most obvious

obstacle in the transition reforms refers especially to the institution building inability thus far. Therefore, the new government sees it as the fundamental priority to progress with institution building, which, if successful, would certainly mark a clearer starting point for the planning practice.

Regional planning and governance transformation

In Stojkov, Vujosevic, Subotic (1998), a redefined model of regional governance and planning has been attempted, mainly in search of alternative institutional and organisational arrangements and correlations of new institutionalisation forms with key factors which might exert influence upon them. As for the possible directions of the regional governance five factor groups have been emphasised as essential. These are:

- The development of market institutions and mechanisms;
- The privatisation degree;
- The direction and the degree of the post-socialist state evolution;
- The purpose and general objectives, which the new system has to solve;
- The type and degree of regional organisation (referring to the dynamics in looking for new arrangements);

Unfortunately, even after the changes occurred in 2000, imbued with great expectations, we must acknowledge that the regional governance and organisation is equally undeveloped as in the 1990s, indicating to an extremely slow pace of the transition reforms. This mainly concerns the rudimentary shift in the development of market institutions, the prolonged absence of a new and modernized Constitution and the deficient privatisation progress regarding the public sector enterprises. Furthermore, the regional incentives are as yet dispersed and point to a very low organisation degree in spite of efforts of some leading planners (Stojkov, Tosic, 2003) to introduce the functional trans- and intraregional cooperation into the spatial plans (Spatial Regional Plan of the Administrative Area of Belgrade, Spatial plan of Smederevo).

Development governance, as a comprehensive concept, is a relatively new endeavour in the international practice. In particular, it implies the elected government's responsibility to achieve social community's progress, being endorsed with it by the governance mandate. Progress is interpreted here as an objective category, i.e. a category measurable with clearly defined indicators, demonstrating the extent of certain planned (or politically promised) goals' and targets' accomplishment. By their nature, these goals and targets are principally classified into three fundamental dimensions: (1) objectives and goals of the community's economic development improvement; (2) social development objectives and goals



optimising the community's social status and its basic demographic categories; and (3) objectives and goals of the environmental development as the prerequisite of a more successful economic and social development on all governmental tiers. Presently, the achievement of the objectives and undertaken tasks, measured by defined and transparent indicators, denotes the real performance criterion of the government responsibility and accomplishment replacing the common political paroles and empty promises.

Development governance of a particular territorial unit is carried out through modern, scientifically and empirically determined governance instruments or "levers". One of key instruments (levers) is planning the development, or methodologically more accurately, the integrative planning of community's development. However, planning is only one of numerous instruments, together with which it shapes the community's development governance system. Within the whole system, spatial planning is only one part of the integrative developmental planning subsystem, but certainly not the only one. Developmental planning is to be positioned within the institutional framework of community's development governance. Apart from it, there are also the frameworks of the administrative, technical and political aspects in development governance, which exceed the purpose of this paper.

In this respect, Serbia evidently lags behind most of the European countries, also those immersed into the transition process. In Serbia, there is no clearly defined governance system of the overall Republic's development, and even less so, or as a result, there is none for governing the territorial units on lesser tiers (municipalities). Among the governing system elements, in Serbia, there is only the system of spatial plans, which by itself cannot function without other subsystem's elements of developmental planning and without the correlation (interaction) with other subsystems. Therefore, Serbia still points upon the spatial plan as the key of the community's success and has or soon will have a hyper production of strategic spatial plans, together with general plans of urban settlements, with hardly any results in view of the overall development.

How might we understand and explain this?

Deficiencies of the present system

The local or state government has the essential task to provide the framework for the prosperous development of the settlement, municipality or the state. According to the currently practicing system in Serbia, the government grounds this upon the spatial plan of the municipality, region or the strategy of the Republic's spatial development. The government actually defines the location of planned systems and the arrangement of the activities in space. Accordingly to the current Planning and Building Act, these plans determine the starting point, the spatial development objectives and land use, organisation and

protection rules of the planning area. Thereby, the spatial plans are backed up by poorly professed economic and social needs development analyses, so that they once again come down to the physical/geographic definition of the planning objectives, solutions and propositions.

This seems to us as the fundamental reason for the failure of the spatial planning, not in terms of its quantity (they are produced more than ever), but their *raison d'être* and quality. Hence the chief indifference of the authorities to elaborate such plans let alone be guided by them. The idea to provide spatial plans for each municipality, being the legacy of an obsolete system of territorial-administrative organisation in Serbia, will certainly accommodate the quantitative development of the planning profession, but will hardly contribute to its quality improvement or more importantly to a prosperous development of municipalities or the Republic. In theory, the 189 spatial plans, equally matched with general plans for municipal centres, both sorts having strategic developmental aspirations, will be designed pressured by the Law and the profession itself, but without the real *raison d'être*. Carrying out these plans in the accustomed manner and within such a normative framework means designing a chair with only one leg. Whoever tires to sit on it will fall down, and a more prudent person will certainly discard it right away. Such a system of spatial and strategic planning is characterised as:

- More or less developed spatial-geographical environmental system of criteria, i.e. a way of thinking on the spatial conditions for locating networks and development; Certain crucial mistakes of planners, which we encounter from time to time still do not discredit this planning dimension;
- Utterly undeveloped and inadequately established assessment and evaluation system of the financial-economic feasibility of planned solutions and an even more serious problem of the complete lack of an passable economic development strategy, without which the spatial plan is placed in an unreal economic space and time;
- Not of lesser significance is the social system development out of which should derive the idea on the needs, values and goals of a social community for which we make plans. This system, as yet, has been subjected to a mere improvisation in plans (urbanisation, housing, renewal, public services, special assets);
- The legal-institutional framework in the practice of spatial planning is formally developed but seriously implicated with: (1) complete dissonance of the Act, (2) unclear defined role of the institutions, (3) utterly formalized democratic approach without the real role of democratic institutions and potentials when determining the objectives and strategic guidelines, etc.



However, especially in the last few years, the theory and the practice witness the loom of the planning method grounded upon the integrative approach. This method encompasses the equal role of three developmental dimensions of a community: natural-environmental, economic and social. This goes hand in hand with the idea on the legal-institutional framework as the fourth dimension stressing the necessity of an increased government responsibility for the overall community's development.

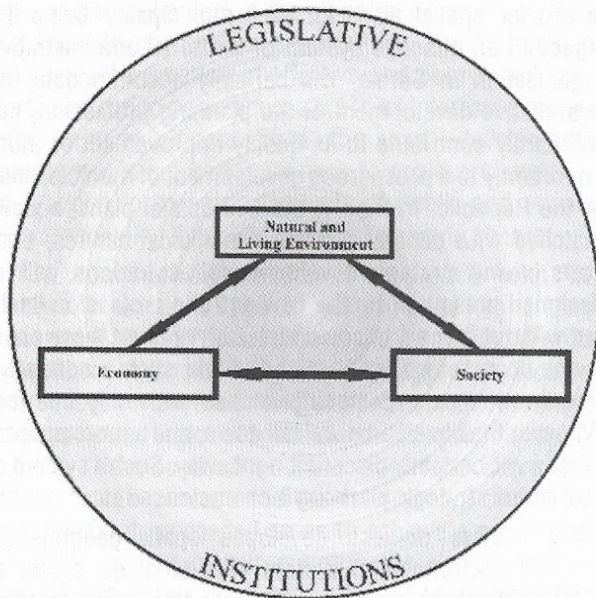


Illustration 1.

This methodological shift has been evident in the elaboration of the first strategies of spatial development (the case of Belgrade, municipalities of Smederevo and Kosjeric). The integrative method applied in the elaboration of these strategies points to a waking concern of the local government but also to an inadequate continuation of the planning, enfolding only the spatial planning segments due to an incongruous legal framework.

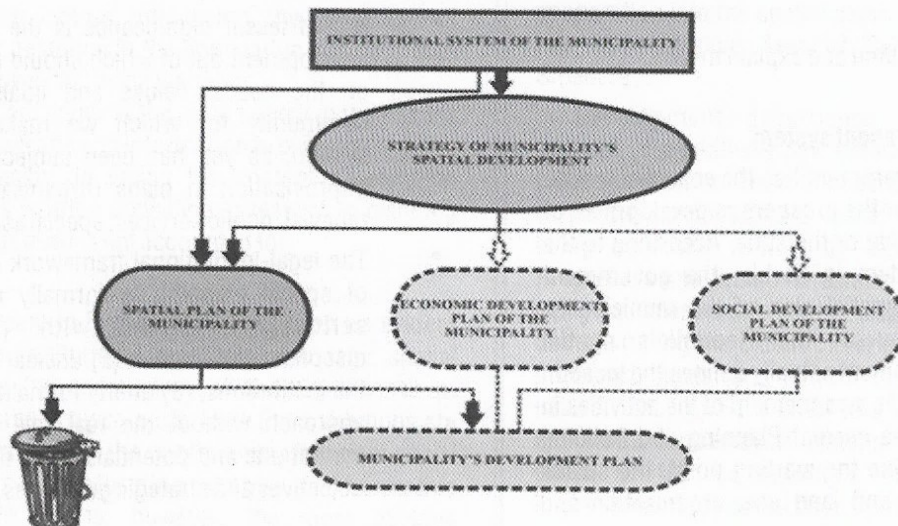
The absent economic and social foundation of spatial planning solutions misleads the government into an illusory planning optimism, which in the post-planning period becomes too costly for the social community. Moreover, the purpose of strategic spatial planning documents remains blurred and is subjected to distorted interpretations as is looking for particular interests or mere building regulations (which are the focus of some other plans).

We can easily imagine the social community's disappointment at unreal spatial plans. How might we overcome this?

Towards integrative development planning

A prosperous overall development of a social community on any given governmental tier (settlement, municipality, region, state) requests the use of all necessary governance instruments. Some will have restrictive (protective), some organisational and other stimulating (developmental) capacity. These instruments ought to be bundled into a unique and comprehensive system of development governance, supported by the latest techniques and information technology enabling: the system's use, information exchange, monitoring of the system's development and directing the system towards the desired ends. Of these instruments and system's governance levers, in this paper, only one is pondered upon, namely the development planning of the community (settlement), i.e. the territorial, administrative (municipality, or region if provided for as a territorial-administrative organisation form by the Constitution) or functional unit (municipal association or functional region).

Developmental (state, region or municipality) planning ought to be grounded upon a clear development strategy defined by the actual government, prepared and supported by the experts and professionals, but also democratically attuned with citizens. This also means that any succeeding government must question the development strategy,





take a stand, accept, change or amend, or replace it with a new one for which it is going to be responsible. Since the strategy targets the distant future, the arguments for its change or replacement must be convincing in the long-term.

Development strategy must be defined integrally, encompassing: (1) a clear conception of the economic development based upon operative tasks and measurable criteria, (2) a clear conception of the social development also based upon measurable criteria, and (3) a clear conception of spatial development based upon operative tasks and measurable criteria. All operative tasks and criteria ought to aim towards the accomplishment of the democratically agreed upon general objective. The strategy must be defined within the real normative-institutional framework providing for a reasonable option, or even necessity of changing the framework, if the realisation of operative tasks and advancing towards the general objective is hampered.

The strategy ought to be dealt with by those who according to the Constitution and the respective Act are responsible for the development but with the appropriate agreement with citizens and professional institutions. A strategy thus adopted becomes the foundation for the elaboration of three types of plans:

- The plan of economic development, which should determine the direction and the guidelines of the country's, region's or municipality's economic development founded on sustainable development principles, with regard to economic principles and social demands, problems and propositions;
- The plan of social development, which should determine the guidelines and priorities of actions within the social framework, hence within the framework of societal expectations in all its segments, linking the context of norms and social values criteria, but also feasible economic and physical backgrounds;
- The spatial development plan, which should define criteria and indicators in relation to natural and living environment but also propose concrete solutions of spatial systems in correlation to economic and social parameters (settlements, infrastructure and communication, arrangement of activities, the relation towards natural and living environment and cultural and spiritual heritage, security, etc.);

These three plans (economic, social and spatial) ought to be carried out synchronised, directed towards the same objective and the same tasks. They ought to be straightforward, understandable and applicable, emphasizing priorities for the short-term, but envisaging the more distant future by being flexible and adaptable. The

plans should contain a profound package of instruments and measures for the first phase, i.e. for the achievement of priorities.

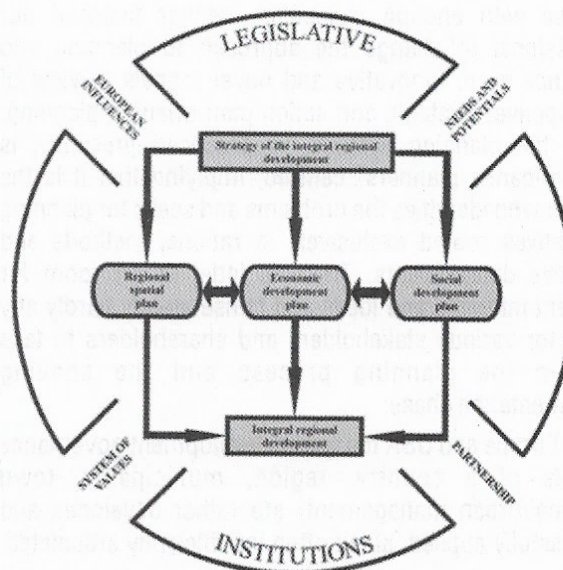
After the adoption of these three plans, a final document of synthetic (integral) character should follow. For the state this is the country's development plan. For the region this is the regional development plan, and for the municipality this is the development plan of the municipality. Each of these plans aims to provide equal development conditions for lesser territorial units so as to trace the path towards a balanced development of different territorial units.

It goes without saying that decision-making and development governance in a decentralised country will be decentralised but retaining certain levers centralised. Consequently, each governance tier will have the powers to resolve most of the problems, whereas those unable to solve will forward to the higher tier. Therefore, the development plans are adopted by the government or parliamentary assembly, which is responsible for a particular tier, but obtaining the approval from the higher tier.

Development plans are carried out within a codified and harmonised legislative framework in active cooperation with existent institutions onto which in the post-planning period, the responsibility for the realisation of planning propositions is passed on (for the first development phase).

In the post-planning period it is necessary to procure control and monitoring instruments together with a regular reporting system on the state of the art, the problems and development potentials, bearing in mind all three developmental aspects: the spatial, economic and social, as well as pertinent changes of the normative-institutional framework.

The whole planning system is proactively correlated with internationally defined policies, development principles, adopted declarations, agendas and other documents of importance for the development of Serbia and ratified by the highest organ (the republic's assembly).



Concluding remarks

In Serbia, there are obviously certain problems and constraints linked to the concept of regional and local development planning, especially concerning the application of new planning and governance trends rooted in recent theoretical research. To sum up, the concept of regional policies and measures has not been formulated as yet. This implies that incentives are carried out in an ad hoc, retroactive and non-coordinated manner. Such deficiencies are amendable only by introducing new legal acts and national policies which would enforce the overall system of governance and harmonize the work of ministries and other planning institutions at the national tier. According to Lazarevic-Bajec (2004), although the new Planning and Building Act (2003) anticipates the elaboration of such a document, there is yet no valid and updated long-term development strategy at the national level to steer the economic and overall societal development and offer a relevant framework for the regional and local policies. Therefore, a system of general strategic policies at the level of the Republic is needed, together with sector policies to mark bench the planning at the regional/local tier.

Regrettably, there are only a few concrete initiatives, and hardly ever the expression of the political will, which aim at creating a relevant framework for the preparation of the strategic regional/local plans. Regional policy, if there is one at all, consists of ad hoc measures expected to solve only urgent problems.

Another problem refers to the institutional responsibilities which are not defined precisely hampering the inter-ministerial coordination. Admittedly, the needed funds for this purpose are limited, or inaccessible. Moreover, most of the planning institutions adhere to a traditional rigid planning model, which is deterministic, inflexible, with fixed land use parameters and regulations. This calls for a decisive shift in the methodology which would enable the planning to respond quickly to changes occurring in all societal domains but foremost in the economic sphere. However, the local communities do not dispose with enough capacities, neither financial nor professional to change the approach to planning and introduce more innovative and novel models in view of participative, strategic and action plan oriented planning. Thus, the planning system, as practiced presently, is predominantly planners' centred, implying that it is the planner who identifies the problems and seeks for planning alternatives rooted exclusively in rational methods and objective determinants. There is little, or no room for different interests and ideas and consequently hardly any room for various stakeholders and shareholders to take part in the planning process and the ensuing implementation phase.

In Europe and USA today, the development governance models of a country, region, municipality, town (regional/urban management) are rather developed and successfully applied, albeit often insufficiently articulated.

The Charta of Athens II (1998), numerous international and European declarations, as well as the new generation of strategic plans underline the logic of the proposed model. A prosperous development cannot be grounded upon sector plans anymore, or as is the case in Serbia, exclusively upon unreal and thus illusory spatial plans with solutions lacking the economic-financial, social, and even sometimes spatial assessment. To ensure a more prosperous development it is necessary to:

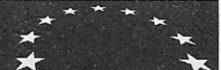
- Apply the integral planning method;
- Synchronise and coordinate the elaboration of spatial, economic and social plans;
- Define clear criteria and indicators to measure the achievements of spatial, economic and social plans;
- Enhance the responsibility of the government for the overall or regional development, which implies the prior governance and economic power decentralisation;
- Elaborate and put into operation the up-dated system of techniques and mechanisms which enable a more efficient and reliable development governance;
- Advance the relationship of the government, profession and the public (interests, investors, etc.);
- Develop the education and training system not only of professionals but also of governmental officials and citizens; Advance the normative-institutional framework,
- Avoid the ideological bias of plans.

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