

## **CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION STRATEGIES: URBAN PLANNING IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION COUNTRIES IN BETWEEN VALUES AND INTERESTS**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years climate change has been put to the fore of policy makers' agendas and could not be bypassed in framing of development documents. Professional and academic circles share a common view that climate change will negatively affect human health and economy in the first place, as well as all other sectors: water management, agriculture and forestry, ecosystems, biodiversity, energy, tourism, infrastructure and coastal areas (IPCC, 2007; IPCC, 2012).

Given the significance of climate change, problems need to be tackled primarily by political measures, which enhances the government's role on all levels of governance and requires long-term and strategic planning typical for centralised governance. However, some authors deem that climate change issues can hardly be addressed within democratic societies because interests of individual groups are too strong to allow taking measures of such weight and scope that could influence far-reaching social and economic reforms. It is considered that the combination of capital market, individual interests and government bureaucracy results in absolute powerlessness of state in matters of ecology. In such societies, change in the value system gains special importance. Namely, freedom must become just one in a set of values, while much more importance must be attached to the survival of the mankind. Such change in the viewpoint inevitably alters the relations between the government, market and civil society. The success in addressing climate change problems will largely depend on the government and its apparatus, provided that the wide political support of citizens is ensured in the process of exercise of democratic rights and freedoms (Giddens, 2010).

### **2. URBAN PLANNING AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES**

Strategies addressing climate change-induced problems gravitate more and more toward adaptation policies. The key of adaptation is diagnosis and securing of sensitive spots which pose a risk to activities, the way of life or resources. Adaptation can be considered as precautionary principle because it is taken in advance – an action to prevent or mitigate future risks (Giddens, 2010). Climate change adaptation rests primarily on government

activities, including legislative framework, regulations and incentives for making changes to the socio-economic system with a view to reducing sensitivity to climate change (Burton et al, 2002).

Adaptation is closely linked to planning, as both require systematic thinking in advance. Namely, when one bears in mind that climate changes take place regardless of our current or future actions, adaptation policies become far more important than mitigation. This assumes acting in accordance with risk assessments and in a timely fashion to protect vulnerable areas. Therefore, spatial and urban plans present an efficient way of operationalisation of general adaptation policies.

Climate change adaptation requires decision making at different spatial levels and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, from individuals, companies and civil society to public administration and government bodies at all levels of governance. However, it is very important to understand that adaptation policies cannot be operationalised if there is no clearly defined framework at the highest level and institutions defining all aspects of activity implementation in a given society. The degree of success depends on adaptation capacity and its distribution (Adger et al, 2005).

Rather than altering the core planning process, adaptation to climate change is integrated into it, adding more weight to planning (IAIA, 2005; EEA, 2012). Emergency actions in changing circumstances particularly underscore two planning dimensions: deeper understanding of underlying causes and projecting future trends. Planning in an uncertain environment requires involvement of new stakeholders able to make urgent decisions in risk situations and adoption of innovative measures that tackle the problems most efficiently (Lazarevic Bajec, 2011). In such circumstances, an important phase of urban planning is collection of information about the anticipated vulnerability of the area in question, and the bulk of responsibility rests on the local government, as an active player in spatial development control.

Climate change adaptation strategies largely rely on subsidiarity principle applicable in the European Union, i.e. assume that decisions are made and applied at the lowest level possible and closest to citizens (Giddens, 2010). The key is in the transfer of competences to the local level, as the most effective solution. The brunt of responsibility for the decision making process therefore lies on the local government and its governing capacities. Good local governance relies on several key principles: autonomy of local government, sound regulatory framework which includes both regulations and control, openness for cooperation and assistance, ensuring services and useful information, partnership with the local community (Bulkeley, 2010).

### 3. URBAN PLANNING IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION

#### 3.1. Local decision making

Although climate change poses threat to the mankind's survival, in a situation where decision makers are pressed by the demands to pursue classical development goals of economic policy, the issue of public intervention hovers between interest and value domains (Todić, 2012). This is particularly pronounced in post-socialist transition countries which underwent radical changes in strategic decision-making. Namely, the shift to the free market and democracy triggered substantial changes in local level governance. Changes primarily affected the level of decision-making, i.e. delegation of responsibilities from the central to local level. The shift from institutions of the socialist economic and social system to those of the market economy and democratic society introduced a qualitatively different pattern of behaviour, i.e. in broader terms, a totally new mindset and system of values. First of all, instead of a passive executor of decisions made on higher levels, an individual has become a free and responsible decision-making agent (Stojanović, 2002).

However, the practice of autonomous decision making at the local level, as an important mechanism for alignment of interests toward creating joint development policies has not taken root in post-socialist transition countries. This was the consequence of socialist heritage which left limited room for autonomous decision making and actually degraded local level to the passive executor of decisions made on higher levels. Local community and its institutions were some kind of a branch of the central government (Stojanović, 2002). Such practice put individuals in the local government in a totally passive position, ultimately depriving them of any sense of responsibility for local community development. This was conducive to strengthening of particularized interests and led to the creation of development policies without a wider consensus.

In systemic terms, one of the major weaknesses of the current local government in Serbia stems from the still poor coordination on the republic level. Republic bodies are poorly coordinated both between themselves and with the local government in the process of formulating new sectoral policies and strategies and amending the existing policies and regulations, especially when it comes to transfer of new responsibilities to local governments (Damjanović, et al., 2011). Another weakness is low quality and poor application of legislation, as well as underdevelopment of institutions and procedures. In such circumstances, decision-making flows are poorly organised, non-transparent and subject to different influences.

The analysis of regulations and institutional framework in Serbia points to the following problems: 1. Issues of relevance for the local government are not recognized as such in the procedure of adoption of regulations and strategies; 2. There is no government body in

charge of coordinating the procedure of adoption of laws and other documents; 3. There is no institutionalised modus of participation of local government representatives in the adoption of regulations and decisions at the central level that have a bearing on the local level (Damjanović et al., 2011).

### **3.2. Urban planning and decision-making flows**

The manner of decision making and reaching consensus on development policies is of essential importance for spatial development. Viewed as change management, urban planning is essentially a political process that seeks to strike a balance between different interests in order to resolve conflicts concerning use of space, i.e. distribution of resources. Political process therefore lies in the core of urban planning. Democratic societies have institutionalised conflict and cooperation as key drivers in policy creation (Lazarević Bajec, 2002).

Establishment of democratic planning in post-socialist transition has radically changed the view on justifiability of planned action. Public good which for decades served as a legitimate basis of planning has lost the status of a single undisputable higher cause that is never put into question (Vujošević and Petovar, 2006).

In post-socialist transition countries there is a tendency to neglect urban planning and bring ad hoc decisions at local government level which reject long-term strategic visions of urban development (Petrović, 2009). On the other hand, professionals do not cooperate with decision-makers on the strategic level. Typically, strategic documents on spatial development in Serbia do not correspond to the country's real development potentials on the one hand, and on the other, do not take into account institutional-organisational, IT, research and other arrangements that are prerequisite to steering development in a predominantly market-based system and political pluralism (Vujošević, 2012). While new strategic plans are based on the principles of participative democracy, the practice tends to favour the classical planning system dominated by technicism and opportunism of urban planning profession subjugated to politicians and investors' demands (Petrović, 2009).

Given the insufficiency and inadequacy of legislation and its poor application, the role of urban planners and other professionals who should have a say in shaping and ensuring the functionality of an urban system has been marginalised (Petrović, 2009). In spatial development processes goal setting has been dominated by a short-term instead of a long-term perspective and interests have taken precedence over values. This is also a consequence of underdevelopment of civic initiatives and associations as one of the most important stakeholders in defining the content and scope of public good, which leaves more and more room for increasingly aggressive capital interests (Petrović, 2009).

In such circumstances, power relations between interested stakeholders are the basis for decision making. Although local government has huge responsibility, its actual power to deliver what the public expects is rather limited. The power of implementation lies mainly in the hands of the private sector that is driven by market logic. This fact calls for on-going adjustments to planning and decision-making processes in terms of lesser confidence in professional judgement and strengthening collaborative decision making. At the same time, the local government's role has shifted from overseeing to managing development (Lazarević Bajec, 2004). The problem is much more complex when it comes to the so called "public goods" where market logic and principles cannot alone decide on optimum resource allocation (Stojanović, 2002). A new form of decision making emerging with the new type of urban regime proclaims more complex interlinking of different stakeholders and institutions, citizens' participation and support to social economy (Petrović, 2009). However, urban planning profession in Serbia has not yet set up a forum for dialogue or offered tools for reaching consensus.

#### **4. ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION COUNTRIES**

It is deemed that adaptation policies in developing countries should primarily aim at strengthening resilience (Giddens, 2010), i.e. reducing vulnerability of areas. In post-socialist transition countries, the greatest impediments to tackling climate change problems are related to human capacity and financial constraints. However, in the area of spatial development, substantial obstacles to reducing area vulnerability include the lack of regulations on land-use planning and poor institutional capacities for implementing climate change response policies (RCC, 2008).

One of the striking weaknesses is poor understanding among national policy makers about physical impacts of climate change. The *National Report for Rio+20* specifies that main preconditions for a sustainable future are stable, effective, professional and operating institutions and administrations that are not vulnerable to political turbulences. However, institutional organisation for sustainable development in Serbia has suffered from continuous weaknesses (UNDP/UNEP, 2012). In such circumstances it is difficult to expect the full implementation of prescribed procedures and vertical and horizontal harmonisation of spatial development policies which lie at the heart of traditional planning.

It is considered that traditional urban planning in Serbia must undergo fundamental changes. On the one hand, the emphasis should be placed on better definition of a problem in formulating land use goals, while on the other, planners and other stakeholders need to cooperate more closely in hazard probability assessment and selection of measures for pursuing these goals in accordance with the available resources (Lazarevic Bajec, 2011).

In recent years, climate change response policies and adaptation strategies have been developed within the South-Eastern Europe region. (ENVSEC, 2012; RCC, 2008; RS MEMSP, 2010; SEEFCCA, 2012; ENECE, 2007a; ENECE, 2007b). In addition to synthesis reports on the region's climate vulnerability, certain development priorities have been formulated and obstacles identified which may undermine the efficiency of adaptation strategies. Apart from the evident lack of appropriate institutional capacities, the main obstacle is also the limited body of legislation, regulations and standards in the areas of environment and planning. Particular importance has been attached to the issuance of regulations on prevention of area vulnerability.

Characteristic for Serbia is the absence of climate change adaptation topic in legal documents in the area of urban and spatial planning. Only in recent years have some laws recognized the topic of climate change, but mainly from the aspect of mitigation (LEP, 2009; LEIE, 2009; LSEIE, 2010). An important step forward was made by the *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* from 2010 and the *Program of Implementation of the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* which contain more detail provisions on realisation of strategic priorities in spatial development. As umbrella documents which lay down a strategic framework for the long-term policy of organisation and regulation of space and serve as a basis for lower-level spatial plans, these documents lay the groundwork for transformation of the planning system in Serbia. The key goal of these documents is the protection of space in Serbia as a public good, i.e. protection of public interests in space use (LSPRS, 2010; RASP, 2011). However, their implementation is put into question, given the fact that Serbia lacks methods and tools for vulnerability assessment, that there is no appropriate legislative and regulatory framework that would support local actions and that procedures for alignment of stakeholder interests, including those from the private sector, are underdeveloped (Lazarevic Bajec, 2011).

The key strategic documents in the area of spatial development – the Spatial Plan from 2010, as well as the Plan from 1996, are examples of political instrumentalisation of development documents which lack political backing for implementation. The Spatial Plan from 2010 suffers from an even greater gap between the degree of realism and certainty of realisation compared to the Plan from 1996. Rather than being grounded in a real economic and social situation, the new country's spatial plan resembles some kind of a wish list or a rosy vision of the future (Vujošević, 2012).

While climate change adaptation elements can be identified in national strategies in different sectors and in parts of some laws, they have not been further elaborated through secondary legislation. Also, the level of integration of climate change within sectoral and general development strategies, the level of knowledge, institutional and individual capacities, as well as the status of available technologies is far below what is needed for quick and efficient dealing with this problem (RSMEMSP, 2010). Therefore, although climate change issues are recognised as an important public interest and tackled at the level

of national strategic documents and laws in different sectors, there are no mechanisms for their true operationalisation at the local level.

## **5. CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AT THE LEVEL OF REGULATIONS**

Since laws applied at the local level frequently leave wide room for secondary legislation, rulebooks have special importance for the local government. Local government activities largely depend on the efficient adoption and contents of rulebooks. On the other hand, domestic regulations which govern the procedure of adoption of secondary legislation and strategic documents do not envisage a separate procedure for adoption of regulations or strategic documents that are relevant for the local government (Damjanović et al., 2011).

This fact sheds light on the importance of adoption of secondary legislation and setting up a firm regulatory framework as a mechanism for protection of public good, i.e. as a means for controlling direct influence of interests of political and other economic agents on spatial development. Furthermore, powerful private sector stakeholders are aware that regulations guarantee the safety of their investments (Petrović, 2009). Sound regulations help to overcome the problem of vague decision making flows through elaboration of values agreed upon at higher levels of governance. For example, unfavourable climate conditions in cities can be improved by appropriate planned measures applied in urban construction or reconstruction, focused on some concrete elements: density and height of construction, width of streets, building orientation, accommodation of materials, while air-conditioning largely depends on adequate use of glass (PHIB, 2002).

The key pieces of secondary legislation in the area of spatial development are the Rulebook on the Contents, Manner and Procedure of Development of Planning Documents (RCMPDPD) and the Rulebook on General Rules on Parcelling, Regulatory Parameters and Construction (RGRPRPC). While RCMPDPD (2011) is more focused on regulating the contents, manner and procedure of drafting of planning documents, RGRPRPC (2011) deals primarily with regulatory elements. However, none of these rulebooks takes into account climate factors as an important regulatory aspect in construction. This is particularly pronounced in RGRPRPC which is the basic document laying out rules and requirements on parcelling, regulatory parameters and construction. This rulebook defines detailed standards on determining the size, shape and surface of building lots, organisation of building lots, lot boundary and building lines, construction rules and rules for determining the position, height and external appearance of buildings.

The standards are prescribed for construction areas defined roughly, solely by population density criterion (weekend areas, rural areas, sparsely populated areas, general residential areas, mixed areas etc.) and concern morphological features of buildings. Large emphasis is placed on regulating roads and infrastructure as important technical systems. From the

environmental standpoint, the only reference is to regulations which deal with the effects buildings have on the environment and protection of natural goods. Construction and organisation of settlements are not at all considered from the standpoint of environmental impacts (RGRPRPC, 2011).

The greatest progress in addressing climate change issues was made by the Rulebook on Energy Efficiency of Buildings. The Rulebook defines standards for assessment of energy features of buildings and includes primarily climate change mitigation measures in building construction (REEB, 2011). However, this Rulebook also failed to incorporate climate change adaptation aspect.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In adaptation policies of post-socialist transition countries the level of regulations gains particular importance. Namely, horizontal and vertical coordination of development policies which are prerequisite to successful implementation of adaptation strategies cannot be expected in an underdeveloped institutional and procedural framework. In such an environment, the adopted national policies and the underlying set of values fail to be implemented, since the preconditions for their elaboration at lower levels of governance are not in place. Vague decision making flows characteristic of Serbia's governance system create room for domination of interests over values. Local government is immature and incapable of protecting public interest, while autonomous decision making is underfledged and the role of a responsible individual is missing. In such circumstances, decisions are made under pressure.

On the other hand, urban planning practice in Serbia is burdened with the socialist heritage of top-down decision making. Strategic goals are set on the top level without a clear idea on how they will be implemented on lower levels. Traditional practice of making decisions on spatial development without the participation of a wider range of stakeholders results in worthless documents that are not grounded in a real socio-economic situation. The lack of awareness among spatial development professionals on the change in the planning paradigm marginalises the role of planning and gives rise to ad hoc decision making.

In circumstances of an unregulated planning system and predominance of particularized interests, values can be protected at the level of regulations. Broad terms for setting the rules and requirements for construction must be defined based on the detailed criteria arising from the set of values agreed upon at the national level. This will help to overcome the problems in setting the broad value framework for defining strategic local development goals and protecting local government position.



## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was developed as part of the project "Studying climate change and its influence on the environment: impacts, adaptation and mitigation" (43007) financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia within the framework of integrated and interdisciplinary research for the period 2011-2014.

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## SUMMARY

While the existing planning framework in Serbia recognizes climate change issues in documents adopted at the top, national level, specific measures needed for implementation are still lacking. The reason for this is still a strong presence of the former socialist practice of top-down decisions implementation which prevents the replacement the position of a powerful decision maker with the position of a responsible individual. Local communities are still considered as a branch office of the central government, which produces passivation of individuals in local government and the lack of accountability for the state of development of the local community. In such circumstances, interests prevail over values and decisions are made under pressure.

Transitional circumstances in which Serbia is are slowing down the process of institutional transformation and the creation of a new procedural framework that would allow efficient operationalisation of national climate change response policies at the local level. It implies that in circumstances of an unregulated planning system and predominance of particularized interests, values can be protected at the level of regulations. Broad terms for setting the rules and requirements for construction must be defined based on the detailed criteria arising from the set of values agreed upon at the national level.