

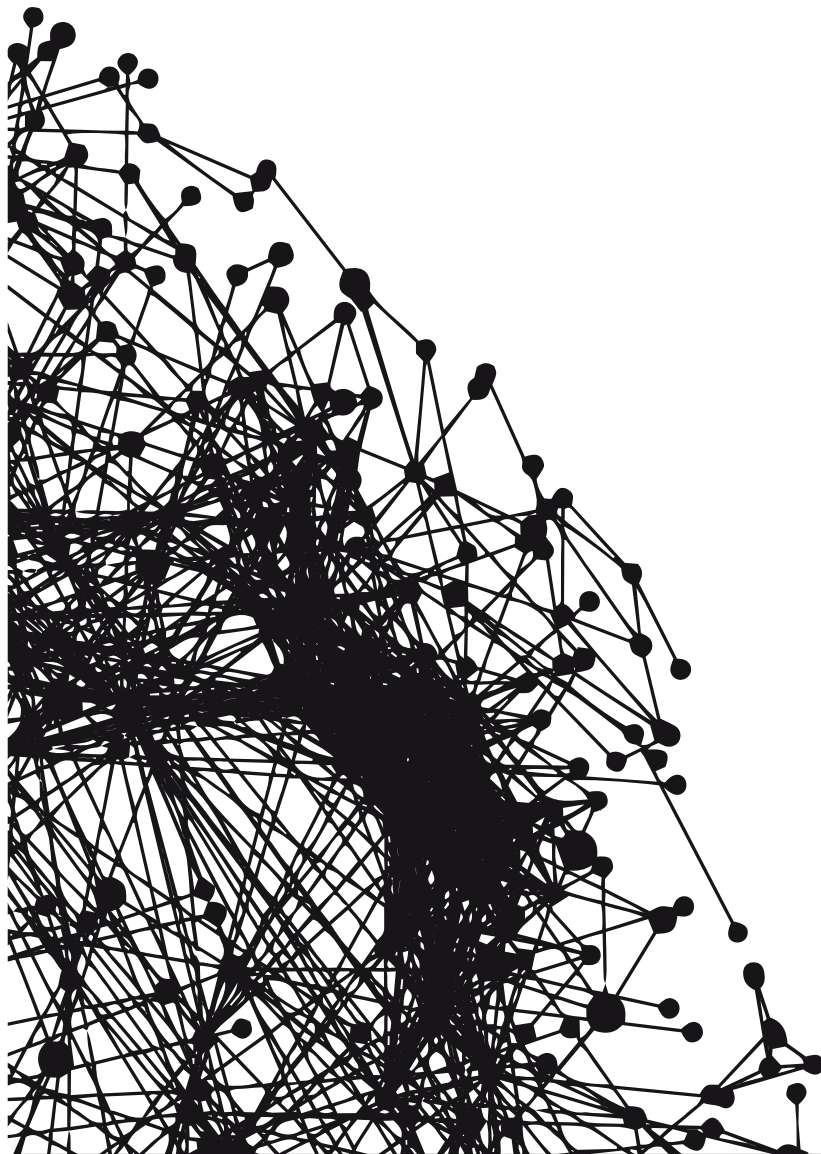
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PLACES AND TECHNOLOGIES 2014

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editors:

Eva Vaništa Lazarević, Aleksandra Đukić,  
Aleksandra Krstić - Furundžić, Milena Vukmirović

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# PLACES AND TECHNOLOGIES 2014

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# CONTENTS

## PART I: URBANISM

### **Urban planning and technologies**

#### **OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO GROWTH**

Stephen Platt 16

#### **URBAN CHALLENGES OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CONTEXT-SENSITIVE PLANNING APPROACHES IN BULGARIA**

Elena Dimitrova 25

#### **NEW URBAN PROTOCOLS FOR FRAGMENTED TERRITORIES \_ THE EXAMPLE OF WESTERN THESSALONIKI**

Styliani Rossikopoulou-Pappa, Valia Fragkia 33

#### **A FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A TECHNOLOGICAL PARK IN FALCONARA MARITTIMA AN, ITALY**

Giovanni Sergi 41

#### **SAVING URBAN PLANNING FROM ANOTHER UTOPIAN MODEL**

Danijela Milojkić, Marija Maruna 48

#### **THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON THE PERCEPTION OF CENTRALITY**

Mihai Alexandru, Cătălina Ioniță 56

#### **TECHNOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE: REDUCE, REUSE AND RECYCLE THE MINING DROSSCAPES**

Nicola Martinelli, Francesco Marocco, Alessandro Reina, Maristella Loi, Federica Greco 63

#### **THE ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS IN BELGRADE VS. TAMING CITY GROWTH: CASE STUDY OF BELGRADE**

Biserka Mitrović, Miodrag Ralević, Branislav Antonić 71

#### **IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN URBAN PLANNING**

Tamara Tošić 78

#### **CONCEPT OF URBAN VILLAGE: THE APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT AS A FOUNDATION FOR NEW TYPOLOGY OF URBAN VILLAGES**

Branislav Antonić 85

#### **RESILIENCE AND VULNERABILITY OF URBAN SYSTEMS. A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR SEISMIC RISK MITIGATION**

Rigels Pirgu 94

## **Urban design and technologies**

<b>PUBLIC PLACES AND SPLIT DEVELOPMENT MODEL</b> Višnja Kukoč	103
<b>AGILE LANDSCAPES: REDESIGNING URBAN SPACE</b> Anastasios Tellios, Despoina Zavraka	110
<b>PLANNING AND DESIGNING SAFE AND SECURE OPEN PUBLIC SPACES IN SERBIA</b> Svetlana Stanarević, Aleksandra Djukic	118
<b>SPATIAL AND FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF BUSINESS AREAS UNDER THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES – CASE STUDY OF NIŠ ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT</b> Aleksandar Ristić, Petar Mitković	130
<b>THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON CITY ACUPUNCTURE METHODOLOGY AND INTERVENTIONS</b> Kristina Careva, Rene Lisac	138
<b>COMFORT OF OPEN PUBLIC SPACES: CASE STUDY NEW BELGRADE</b> Aleksandra Djukic, Nevena Novakovic	145
<b>005 PUBLIC ART IN BERLIN</b> Biljana Arandjelovic	151
<b>PROTECTION OF PERSON WHIT DISABILITIES: IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS</b> Dragana Vasiljevic Tomic, Radojko Obradović	160
<b>VERTICAL PUBLIC SPACE</b> Sorana Cornelia Radulescu, Roger Riewe	167
<b>READY-AVAILABLE HYBRID METHODOLOGIES FOR CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACE RESEARCH</b> Milena Ivkovic, Berit Piepgras, Robin van Emden	175
<b>RETAIL – NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND URBAN CENTRALITY</b> Martin Brabant	181
<b>TECHNOLOGY AND NEOLIBERAL URBAN PLACES</b> Marija Cvjetković	191
<b>NEURAL CITIES OR HOW CITIES TEACH US TO DESIGN THEM BETTER</b> Angelica Stan	198
<b>MORPHOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION OF GREEN STREET FORMS: MLADEN STOJANOVIC STREET IN BANJA LUKA</b> Tanja Trkulja	206

## **Urban regeneration and technology**

### **PROPERTY ISSUES IN THE TURKISH URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS**

Mehmet Çete, Yunus Konbul 215

### **URBAN ENERGY AND URBAN REGENERATION STRATEGIES: EVALUATION OF IZMIR-UZUNDERE URBAN REGENERATION PROJECT**

Yakup Egercioğlu, Çilem Türkmen 222

### **THE EMPTY URBAN SPACES AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CITY TO REINVENT ITSELF: THE CASE OF THE INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGICAL OBSOLETENESS**

Cătălina Ioniță, Mihai Alexandru 230

### **ENHANCEMENT OF URBAN LIFE QUALITY IN URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS: IZMIR-BAYRAKLI URBAN REGENERATION PROJECT**

Yakup Egercioğlu, Tuğçe Ertan 238

### **THE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS WHICH USED IN SAUDI ARABIA AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Wael Al-Buzz 246

### **AN OVERVIEW OF URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS IN TURKEY**

Yunus Konbul, Mehmet Çete 257

### **ART AND CULTURE AS INITIATORS OF ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN SAVAMALA**

Ksenija Pantović, Iva Čukić, Jasna Kavran 265

## **Smart cities/regions and network protocols**

### **SMART CITY GRAZ: FROM THE VISION TO THE ACTION**

Carlos Varela Martín, Ernst Rainer, Hans Schnitzer 276

### **RESIDENTS INTERACTION WITH HOME RESOURCES**

Cerasela Dinu, Constantin-Daniel Oancea 285

### **RENEWABLE AND DISTRIBUTED SOURCES WITHIN SMART ENERGY REGIONS**

Jovan Todorovic 293

### **THE SMART CITY FOR THE FUTURE. HOW A SPATIALLY ENABLED AFFECTED BY THE URBAN POPULATION?**

Shahryar Habibi 300

### **PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF ROUTING PROTOCOLS FOR AD-HOC NETWORKS**

Ledina Karteri, Valma Prifti 306



<b>SMART CITIES AND CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY</b>	
Rigels Pirgu	315
<b>A FUZZY BASED CALL CONTROL SYSTEM IN MOBILE NETWORKS, CONSIDERING PRIORITY COMMUNICATIONS</b>	
Valma Prifti, Ledina Karteri	323
<b>Historical centers, Building heritage and Technologies</b>	
<b>ICT AND VGI TO PROMOTE MINOR HISTORIC CENTRES AND THEIR LANDSCAPE</b>	
Pierangela Loconte, Francesco Rotondo	331
<b>THE SUSTAINABILITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT</b>	
Christian Kersten Hofbauer, Elham Madadi Kandjani, Jean Marie Corneille Meuwissen	339
<b>CONCEPTS OF FORMING OF URBAN SOLUTIONS IN HOUSING SETTLEMENTS IN BELGRADE BUILT IN PRECAST INDUSTRIALIZED SYSTEMS IN SECOND HALF OF XX CENTURY</b>	
Dragana Mekanov	346
<b>NEW ARCHITECTURE IN HISTORICAL CENTRES</b>	
Alessandro Bruccoleri	355
<b>INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF PLACES. THE ROME HISTORICAL CENTRE AS A CASE STUDY</b>	
Francesca Geremia	363
<b>CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS IN HISTORIC PLACES _ THE EXAMPLE OF THESSALONIKI METRO</b>	
Stavros Apotsos	372
<b>Image and Identity of place</b>	
<b>THE IMAGE OF TRIFKOVIĆ SQUARE (NOVI SAD, SERBIA) THEN AND NOW</b>	
Ivana Blagojević, Ksenija Hiel	380
<b>IDENTITY OF NEW MEDIA SPACES</b>	
Jelena Brajković, Lidija Đokić	388
<b>THESSALONIKI: A MULTICULTURAL ARCHITECTURAL DESTINATION</b>	
Niki Manou-Andreadis, Maria Milona	400
<b>ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY AND UNUSED POTENTIALS OF CENTRAL ZONE IN NOVI SAD</b>	
Milena Krklješ, Dijana Apostolović, Aleksandra Milinković	408

<b>BELGRADE SKYLINE: CONTINUITY, PARADOXES &amp; DESIRES</b> Vladimir Milenković, Snežana Vesnić, Tatjana Stratimirović	416
<b>CITY OF THE MIND - INVISIBLE IN THE MAP</b> Jelena Stankovic, Milenko Stankovic	424
<b>WHAT MAKES A PLACE?</b> Saskia I. de Wit, Denise Piccinini	432
<b>SUSTAINABILITY, IDENTITY AND ROLE OF TRADITIONAL MATERIALS</b> Olivera Ilić Martinović, Mirjana Miletić	441
<b>IDENTITY OF URBAN SPACES; ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION</b> Elham Madadi-Kandjani, Christian Kersten Hofbauer, Jean Marie Corneille Meuwissen	448
<b>IMAGE OF SUSTAINABLE PLACES</b> Vladimir Parežanin, Miloš Mihajlović	456
<b>PRESERVATION OF IDENTITY OF SPACE WITHIN RAPID ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE EXAMPLE OD JIJOCA DE JERICOACOARA IN BRAZIL</b> Maja Momirov	469
 <b>PART II: ARCHITECTURE AND TECHNOLOGIES</b>	
<b>Sustainability, Sustainable buidings and technologies</b>	
<b>SUSTAINABLE RETROFITTING OF EXISTING AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS</b> Marina Traykova, Tanya Chardakova	477
<b>OSMOTIC LANDSCAPES - RECOVERED IDENTITIES</b> Venetia Tsakalidou, Anastasia Papadopoulou	485
<b>DESIGN SCENARIOS FOR AN OFFICE BUILDING – ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS</b> Aleksandra Krstic-Furundzic, Tatjana Kosic	493
<b>TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF RAPID HOUSING CONSTRUCTION</b> Nikola Macut, Bojana Stanković, Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović	507
<b>ENERGY ANALYSIS AND REFURBISHMENT STRATEGY FOR ZAGREB UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS: FORMER FACULTY OF TECHNOLOGY IN ZAGREB BY ALFRED ALBINI</b> Stanka Ostojić, Zoran Veršić, Iva Muraj	515

<b>SUSTAINABLE REUSE OF OLD STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE CANAL DANUBE-TISA-DANUBE</b> Mirjana Jočić, Nataša Kuburović	523
<b>PLACE ATTACHMENT AS POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN SERBIA</b> Anđelka Mirkov	533
<b>LOW ENERGY BUILDINGS: CONCEPT OF ENERGY PERFORMANCE OPTIMIZATION OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES</b> Katarina Slavković	540
<b>TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTIVE PROCESS: MINING REJECTIONS FROM WASTE TO SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE</b> Vincenzo Paolo Bagnato, Giovanna Mangialardi, Silvana Milella, Michele Mundo	549
<b>ADAPTATION OF AN INDUSTRIAL BUILDING INTO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH IMPROVED ENERGY PERFORMANCE</b> Branko Slavković, Komnen Žižić, Danilo Dragović	557
<b>FUNCTION OF A DESOLATE SPACE</b> Aleksandra Pešterac, Daniela Dimitrovska	565
<b>ENVIRONMENT CERTIFICATION OF REHABILITATION DESIGN PROJECTS: PUT AND SHU BUILDINGS AS CASE STUDY</b> Florian Nepravishhta, Gerta Veliu, Ramadan Alushaj	570
<b>Green strategies and technologies</b>	
<b>GREEN URBAN STRATEGIES IN THESSALONIKI IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS</b> Evangelia Athanassiou	580
<b>GEOSCIENTIFIC EDUCATIVE CENTRE AS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES BUILDING MODEL – POSITIVE COOPERATION EXAMPLE OF LIKA-SENJ COUNTY (CROATIA) AND UNA-SANA COUNTY (BIH)</b> Ivan Brlić, Anita Bušljeta-Tonković, Katarina Milković	587
<b>THE OCCUPANTS' PERSPECTIVE AS CATALYST FOR LESS ENERGY INTENSIVE BUILDINGS</b> Lucia Martincigh, Marina Di Guida, Giovanni Perrucci	597
<b>THE COLLECTIVE SELF ORGANIZED HOUSING EXPERIENCE IN ITALY</b> Silvia Brunoro, Giacomo Bizzarri	605

<b>APPLICATION OF ROOF GARDENS IN THE DEFINING IMAGE OF THE CITY</b>	
Mirjana Sekulić, Bojana Stanković, Ljiljana Dosenović	613
<b>STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL DEFINITION OF NEARLY ZERO ENERGY BUILDINGS</b>	
Milica Jovanović Popović, Bojana Stanković, Jasna Kavran	621
<b>ENERGY OPTIMIZATION OF THE BUILDING ENVELOPE OF THE REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF THE EXISTING RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN BANJA LUKA</b>	
Darija Gajić, Aleksandra Krstić – Furundžić	629
<b>BLUE GREEN DREAM AND DAYLIGHT</b>	
Srdjan Stankovic, Cedo Maksimovic, Milenko Stankovic	637
<b>POSSIBILITIES FOR ENERGY REHABILITATION OF TYPICAL SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE IN BELGRADE – CASE STUDY</b>	
Bojana Stanković, Dušan Ignjatović, Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović	646
<b>BLUE-GREEN INTEGRATED MODELING SOLUTIONS IN URBAN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN</b>	
Miloš Mirosavić, Ivana Mirosavić, Srđan Stanković, Čedo Maksimović, Ranko Božović	654
<b>POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS FOR ENERGY REFURBISHMENT OF MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS BUILT IN BELGRADE BEFORE THE WORLD WAR ONE</b>	
Ljiljana Đukanović, Ana Radivojević, Aleksandar Rajčić	661
<b>FROM BUILDING INFORMATION MODELS TO SIMPLIFIED GEOMETRIES FOR ENERGY PERFORMANCE SIMULATION</b>	
Daniel Ladenhauf, René Berndt, Eva Eggeling, Torsten Ullrich, Kurt Battisti, Markus Gratzl-Michlmair	669
<b>ENERGY CITY GRAZ - REININGHAUS: FIRST RESULTS FROM AN ENERGY SELF-SUFFICIENT QUARTER</b>	
Heimo Staller, Ernst Rainer, Carlos Varela Martín	677
<b>ENERGY EFFICIENCY AS ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY FOR A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF DEPOPULATION OF RURAL AREAS IN SERBIA</b>	
Jovana Stanišić	684
<b>THE ENERGY EFFICIENT CITY</b>	
Ivan Dochev	692

**Innovative materials, systems and technology**

**INVESTIGATION OF FLY ASH INFLUENCE ON CEMENT MORTARS PROPERTIES**

Dragica Jevtić, Aleksandar Savić 701

**INFLUENCE OF GLASS COMPONENT JOINTS ON THE STRUCTURAL GLASS FACADE DESIGN**

Aleksandra Krstic-Furundzic, Tatjana Kosic, Jefto Terzovic 709

**QUANTIFYING THE THERMAL BRIDGING EFFECT WITH REGARD TO THE FAÇADE'S CONFIGURATION**

Katerina Tsikaloudaki, Theodore Theodosiou, Dimitris Aravantinos, Karolos Nicolaos Kontoleon, Dimitrios Bikas 720

**THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON MODERN CITY FACADES**

Jasna Čikić Tovarović, Jelena Ivanović Šekularac, Nenad Šekularac 728

**DYNAMIC APPEARANCE OF URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL SURFACES**

Tihana Hrastar, Tamara Marić, Bojana Bojanić 736

**TOWARDS GENERATIVE CONVERGENCE IN DESIGN OF ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES**

Jelena Milošević, Zoran Šobić, Miodrag Nestorović 744

**APPLICATION OF WOOD AS AN ELEMENT OF FACADE CLADDING IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE OF BELGRADE**

Jelena Ivanović Šekularac, Jasna Čikić Tovarović, Nenad Šekularac 752

**COMPARISON OF INSULATION APPLIED ON SURFACES OF MODEL PLACED IN THE AREA OF SKOPJE**

Aleksandar Petrovski, Todorka Samardzioska, Ana Trombeva Gavriloska 758

**APPLICATION AND EFFECTS OF PHASE CHANGE MATERIALS IN A MODERN ARCHITECTURAL AESTHETICS**

Vladana Stanković, Goran Jovanović, Mirko Stanimirović 766

**INTEGRATED DESIGN OF STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS**

Aleksandra Nenadović 772

**NEW COMPOSITE SLAB SYSTEM – LIGHTWEIGHT CONCRETE, STEEL SHEETING AND REINFORCEMENT**

Zoran Šobić, Jelena Milošević, Miodrag Nestorović 780

**MODERN METHODS OF STRENGTHENING MASONRY WALLS**

Nenad Šekularac, Jasna Čikić Tovarović, Jelena Ivanović Šekularac 788

**NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR FERROCEMENT**

Ornela Lalaj, Yavuz Yardim, Salih Yilmaz 796

**Cultural patterns, Architecture and technologies**

<b>SPATIAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE ARSENAL TRANSFORMATION, MILITARY PORT IN TIVAT INTO NAUTICAL – TOURISM SETTLEMENT AND PORT „PORTO MONTENEGRO“</b> Goran Radović	805
<b>DIGITAL FABRICATION IN THE FIELD OF ARCHITECTURE</b> Roberto Vdović, Morana Pap	816
<b>THE IMPACT OF SMART HOME TECHNOLOGIES ON ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN</b> Goran Petrović, Marko Aleksendrić	822
<b>BETWEEN THE PLACE AND NON-PLACE: ARCHITECTURE AND TERRITORY ON THE EXAMPLE OF SKOPJE</b> Saša Tasić, Mitko Hadzi Pulja, Minas Bakalchev	830
<b>INTEGRATED ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEXITY - FROM ABSTRACTION TO TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALISATION</b> Rada Čahtarević, Dženana Bijedić, Amra Taso	838
<b>EVOLUTION DIGITIZED: ARCHITECTURE OF THE SUBLIME DREAM</b> Mihailo Popović, Vladimir Milenković	846
<b>MONOCHROMATIC IN THE ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE APPLICATION OF WHITE COLOUR</b> Dragana Vasiljevic Tomic, Rifat Alihodzic, Dragana Mojsilovic	853
<b>(RE)GENERATION &amp; REFLECTIONS OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE – BANJALUKA IN THE CENTURY OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS</b> Milenko Stanković, Una Umićević	864
<b>QUANTUM ARCHITECTURE, NON-PLACE AND ACCULTURATION</b> Dubravko Aleksić	873
<b>PLACES AND PRACTICES OF CONSUMPTION IN THE POST-SOCIALIST CONTEXT</b> Dejana Nedučin, Dušan Ristić, Vladimir Kubet	880
<b>INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LIGHT AND ARCHITECTURE: AN EXPERIMENT USING MODELS AND PHOTOGRAPHS</b> Anita Stoilkov-Koneski	888
<b>THE INTERPLAY OF MUSIC AND ARCHITECTURE: LAYERING OF SOUND AND SPACE</b> Anja Kostanjšak, Morana Pap	895
<b>CULTURAL PATTERNS AND SENSITIVITY TODAY: FROM THE PHILOSOPHY TO THE TECHNOLOGY IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN PROCESS</b>	

Małgorzata Kądziela, Anna Sachse-Rynkowska	904
<b>PART III: PLACES, TECHNOLOGIES AND RELATED FIELDS</b>	
<b>Big data, apps, social networks and microblogs in urban planning and design</b>	
<b>PLACE COMPETITIVENESS EXPRESSED THROUGH DIGITAL DATA. MEASURING THE PLACE ATTRACTIVENESS TRACKING THE GEOTAG DATA VISUALS</b>	
Milena Vukmirovic, Eva Vanista Lazarevic	914
<b>ROOM BOOK 2.0 – BRING BACK THE INFORMATION TO ITS PLACE</b>	
Christoph Breser, Stefan Zedlacher	926
<b>THE INTERCONNECTED OBJECT: ARE YOU AT HOME IN A NETWORK?</b>	
Kalina Ntampiza, Polina Zioga	936
<b>THE INTERACTION TIME IN A NETWORKED SOCIETY</b>	
Danijel Baturina	944
<b>GOOGLE EARTH AS A MICROWORLD</b>	
Milena Zindović	962
<b>TRANSPARENCY OF SCALE: GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION PROGRAM (GOOGLE EARTH) AND THE VIEW FROM BEYOND</b>	
Pavle Stamenović, Dunja Predić, Davor Ereš	970
<b>Geodesy and modern cartography</b>	
<b>ROBUST ESTIMATION APPLIED TO GEODETIC DATUM TRANSFORMATION USING A METAHEURISTIC ALGORITHM</b>	
Mevlut Yetkin	979
<b>THE STATE OF THE ART SURVEYING BY TECHNOLOGY OF THE TERRESTRIAL LASER SCANNING</b>	
Marko Pejić, Branko Božić, Verica Erić, Jelena Pandžić	987
<b>ROLE OF CARTOGRAPHY IN MAKING A “SMART CITY”: CASE STUDY OF INDIJA</b>	
Dragutin Protić, Ivan Vučetić, Ivan Nestorov	995
<b>MODERN CARTOGRAPHY IN PROJECT OF CENSUS</b>	
Maja Kalinić, Dragoljub Sekulović	1002

## **Mobility and technologies**

### **PERSONAL RAPID TRANSIT – A SUSTAINABLE URBAN TRANSPORT SYSTEM**

Ljupko Šimunović, Luka Novačko, Mario Ćosić 1011

### **FLIGHTPATH TO AN ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLY AIR TRANSPORT**

Ivana Čavka, Olja Čokorilo, Slobodan Gvozdenović 1020

### **PRESERVATION OF PLACE-IDENTITY THROUGH URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS BASED ON SUSTAINABLE FORMS OF TRANSPORT**

Miloš Kopic 1029

### **BELGRADE RIVERSIDE TRAFIC INTERCHANGES**

Ksenija Stevanović, Milena Stevanović 1037

### **SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY PLANS IN EUROPE**

Davor Brčić, Ljupko Šimunović, Marko Slavulj 1045

### **URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN BELGRADE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL TRENDS: CHANCES OF ILLEGAL HOUSING INTEGRATION**

Biserka Mitrović, Miodrag Ralević, Branislav Antonic 1051

### **RE-THINKING INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT FOR THE METROPOLIS: LABORATORY GRANADA**

Juan Luis Rivas Navarro, Belén Bravo Rodríguez 1059

## **Public participation, e-governing and tehcnology**

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURES: A DELIBERATIVE EVALUATION METHOD**

Saverio Miccoli, Fabrizio Finucci, Rocco Murro 1067

### **RESULTS OF INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPATORY TOOLS IN URBAN PLANNING IN SERBIA – 7 CASE STUDIES**

Ratka Čolić, Harald Mueller 1075

### **WAYS TOWARDS A CITY OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

Miodrag Ralevic, Tatjana Mrdjenovic, Natasa Krstic, Djemila Beganovic 1083

### **PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN TOWN PLANNING PROCEDURES IN NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH FORMER REFUGEE AND DISPLACED POPULATION IN PRIJEDOR, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Rada Latinović 1090

### **THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN A VIRTUAL ORGANIZATION**

Jelena Lukić 1098



## EXPERTS' COMMENTS ON INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPATORY TOOLS IN URBAN PLANNING IN SERBIA

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### ABSTRACT

*New participation methods have been tested under the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH) Project "Strengthening of local land management in Serbia" within seven pilot projects in local communities during the year 2011/12. The main goal of the project was to introduce new market-oriented planning instruments. This paper presents initial results based on experiences from the project implementation and interviews with local planners engaged. Pilot projects are comprised of different scenarios of urban development planning. These were used to test involvement of stakeholders and citizen engagement in planning process of the new residential area, residential commercial zone, brownfield site development, new tourist area and urban renewal, inner city development and preparation of strategic environmental impact assessments (SEIA). They are concerned with both formal and informal planning procedures. One part of the project is focused on evaluation of expected results and positioning of early participation of citizens, public enterprises and institutions, investors and future users within the existing planning process. The expected result of the project is to propose the involvement of early participation and change of the legal framework. The examples from practice and statements of the participants (urban, spatial and environmental planners), suggest that the formal planning framework does not represent an obstacle for introduction of participation. Citizen participation and stakeholder involvement were applied to achieve more significant effects of urban planning and more certain implementation of plans, as well as to provide social legitimacy and better coordination of decisions.*

**Keywords:** *results of participation, experts' (perspective) interview, urban planning, local land management, Serbia*

### INTRODUCTION

New participation methods have been tested under the GIZ project "Strengthening of local land management in Serbia" within seven pilot local communities during the

year 2011/12. The goal of the project was to introduce new market-oriented planning instruments.

The task of GIZ project was to point out the possibilities for improving participation, and with that enhancing of urban planning quality in Serbia, based on the elaboration of more realistic and more feasible plans and accomplishment of greater social legitimacy of planning. Furthermore, the expected result was to incorporate early participation into the legal framework.

#### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Public participation contributes to the formation of an active citizen body, influences the development of personal skills and social awareness, and enhances to the establishment of new relationships and displacement of power and resources in governing local and urban development. Involvement of stakeholders enables recognizing interests and influences, creates an opportunity for a timely resolution of conflicts and contributes to a more realistic and effective planning.

Different scenarios of urban development planning were implemented under the project. They were used to test:

- 1) earlier involvement of stakeholders and citizen engagement in the formal urban development planning process of a new residential area, a residential commercial zone, a *brownfield* site, a new tourist area and urban renewal, as well as in the preparation of the strategic environmental impact assessment report (SEIA);
- 2) implementation of various active participation methods, consultation and information throughout the whole process of elaboration of integrated urban development strategies, which is a new planning instrument in Serbia.

Outlined participation methods have been implemented in 7 Serbian cities and municipalities during the year 2011/2012. A variety of methods has been included and adjusted to local conditions and needs, from informing and consultation to active participation. Among new information methods the following were tested: newsletters, internet advertising, panels, info point, and conference. The new consultation methods were the following: discussion groups, survey (with feedback), internet consultations, and choice catalogue. Finally, the most challenging were the active participation methods which included: workshop, design workshop, world café, visioning, ideas competition, round table and "speak out".

Besides citizens, other stakeholders were also involved in the planning process – local authority representatives, public enterprises and institutions, investors, nongovernmental and civic based organizations.

Special novelty in Serbian practice represents the introduction of the applied examples of methods of citizen participation in the early stages of urban planning process, and the examples of participation throughout the whole process of strategic urban development planning.

**Table 28: Pilot projects for testing stakeholder involvement and citizen participation**

<b>Pilot projects</b>	<b>Scenarios</b>	<b>Informal participation</b>
DRP for the new residential area "Resava", Despotovac	New residential area development	discussion groups, workshop, conference, info point, newsletters, choice catalogue
DRP <sup>270</sup> for development of the commercial residential zone "Jugovo", Kladovo	Development of a new commercial residential zone	discussion groups, workshop, conference, exhibition panels
GRP <sup>271</sup> "Industrial Zone – Sport Airfield", Kraljevo	<i>Brownfield</i> site development	discussion groups, workshop, conference, internet advertising
DRP for a new marina, Smederevo	Urban renewal and tourist attraction development	discussion groups, workshop, conference
DRP for development of the tourist area "Rajkovo", Majdanpek	Tourist area development and protection of natural resources	discussion groups, workshop, conference, internet advertising, newsletters, "speak out"
SEIA <sup>272</sup> for a new residential area, Despotovac; SEIA for a tourist area, Majdanpek	SEIA/ Strategic environmental impact assessment	discussion groups, workshop, round table, info point, choice catalogue
Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the inner city area, Kragujevac, Užice	Integrated urban development of an inner city area	discussion groups, workshop, design workshop, survey, ideas competition, visioning, world café, conference, internet consultations, exhibition panels

#### POSITIONING OF EARLY PARTICIPATION

One part of the project was focused on evaluation of expected results and positioning of early participation of citizens, public enterprises and institutions, investors and future users within the existing planning process. Pilot projects were used to test the use of early participation in several planning process steps: before Resolution on formulation of urban plan; after Resolution, and before the Pre-draft (Concept plan); and after Pre-draft (Concept plan), and before the Draft plan.

Among the requirements for democratization of the planning process, the project aimed to incorporate participation as early as possible in order to better recognize the problems, minimize the conflicts and get more realistic plan. International legal experiences have shown that early participation (public involvement) appears in the phase between concept and draft plan, but it can be included even before, according to the needs.

<sup>270</sup>DRP- Detailed Regulation Plan

<sup>271</sup>GRP- General Regulation Plan

<sup>272</sup>SEIA- Strategic Environment Impact Assessment.

### **Proposal for change of the legal framework**

When it comes to changes in legal framework, what are the expectations? In planning, there is a demand for the democratic principles that are represented in planning procedures, protection of the public interest, involvement of all stakeholders, and protection of the so-called third parties. In the field of participation, expected steps forward have been addressed as the following: more effective coordination of activities with cross-sectoral spatial dimension, as well as more effective participation of the local community and other stakeholders.

The Serbian planning legislation traditionally handles participation through defined mechanisms, methods and procedures. These procedures are mainly related to the legal procedure where participation primarily contributes to the legal certainty of the planning procedure and the involved parties.

Relying on the experience of current practice one of the interviewed urban planners comments the present situation where the *"legal framework does not actually recognize the need for participation of all stakeholders"*, even more involvement of stakeholders is considered as *"additional complication resulting in further extension of the already long procedures and therewith reduced to the level of the good will and professional approach of the urban planners in charge"*.

The innovation is that the participatory approach is now also oriented towards identification and involvement of all interested and influential parties, the problem overview and conflict minimization as well as verification and definition of planning proposals.

The goal of participation is not to dispute the technical norm but to ensure its verification and social legitimacy. With reference to the public inquiry into the Draft Plan, which takes place at the very end of the planning process, the position of participation in that way becomes multileveled.

Regarding the actual situation within practice and the possibilities linked to the introduction of early participation, one of the interviewed participants stresses the importance of imposing early participation through legal framework. Additionally, he notices that besides being proscribed in the law *"more active participation has to be nurtured, because it unquestionably leads to better results in urban planning"*.

The examples tested in practice pointed out the steps forward and the possibilities for improvement of the current formal procedure. During the development of the Draft Law on Planning and Construction in the year 2013 it was suggested that early participation should be introduced into the law. The legislator accepted the proposal and the regulations regarding early participation were introduced to the Draft Law. One of the reasons for accepting the novelties lies on the comments of experts who took part in participatory planning. In the next chapter we address their views and how they recognized their experience and commented the results of planning.

## EXPERTS' OPINION ON RESULTS OF PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

In 2012, after finished planning procedures, urban, spatial and environmental planners were interviewed. In addition to the interview questions, which were related to the manner in which the participation has been treated and implemented in practice, they expressed their opinion on the way how they see the results of the application of new methods of participation in the pilot test projects. Practical experience gained proved to be an impetus and encouragement for their views. Local planners recognized results as the following: better identification of problems, generating ideas and evaluation of the proposals, improvement in work with citizens, increase of legitimacy, establishing cooperation between organizations, activating commercial and non-profit sector, and a new perception of "alternative" way of planning.

### **Identification of problems, generating ideas and evaluation of proposals**

Involving stakeholders in a way to express their views and express them publicly through discussion and shared assessment provides open field for gaining knowledge. To develop ideas in a collaborative process enables the recognition, memory and learning about the problems and goals, as well as of the individual and common attitudes and values (Forester, 1999).

One of the interviewed planners, who took part in Integrated Urban Development Strategy elaboration, stressed the importance of participatory approach which enabled an *"emphasising of all existing problems and unveiling them additionally"*. After the visioning exercise in Uzice, local planner, obviously excited about the new experience, stated the following: *"I can honestly tell you, for us this was something completely innovative, completely different. So far urban planning has been, in a way, introverted and focused only on its own practice. For the first time we, professionals, are learning how to engage others in a fully active way, and how to jointly plan city development by accepting suggestions and comments."*

Based on experiences within the "speak out" method in Majdanpek, interviewed planner recognized that "the most of the new things he heard came from people who are organized, who belong to some groups, clubs, associations, those who have articulated wants and needs", and whose ideas and suggestions were "very clear and concrete". Another important notice he made on the "possibility to involve the interested parties during the ongoing process to verify the proposed solutions", while the verification should be organized in the "form of public inquiry, in order to prevent possible conflict".

### **Improvements in working with citizens**

Public participation is not a novelty in planning practice in Serbia. But comparing the current practice and experiences gained in testing different methods of informing, consultation and active citizen engagement in evaluation of planning proposals under "choice catalogue" method, the local planner points out the weakness of current procedure - *"public inquiry does not provide the opportunity for the appropriate level of citizen participation because many actors are often uninformed*

*about this participatory event*". Having in mind practical experience in use of info point, flyer and direct discussions with citizens, he proposed "additional informing of citizens by letters" and their earlier involvement - *"all owners of properties covered by the planning document"*. It is important to mention that planner recognized the *"organization of a couple of meetings with citizens to discuss the basic ideas and development directions"*. On the same pilot exercise in Despotovac the interviewed ecologist "confirms" the necessity of *"involvement of the citizens at the early stages of the plan elaboration, and especially at the early stages of conducting SEIA"* since they are *"the ones using planned spaces"* and whose *"experience and knowledge can be invaluable"*.

### **Increase of legitimacy**

Planning considers the articulation of rules of behavior towards public and common values and goods, as well as the main principles of allocation of resources. In fact, it deals with the social acceptability of local community initiatives.

The significance of social acceptability was stressed by planner from Kragujevac who recognized the importance of both procedure, shaped with *"wide participation, transparency and clear political support"*, and plan itself which serves as *"strategic framework development document"*, as well as an *"instrument contributing to the establishment of better understanding between citizens and authorities"*.

In Majdanpek several methods of consultation and active participation were used – conference, internet advertising, newsletters, "speak out". That caused the important comments of the planner engaged. He pointed out that presented Feasibility Study and the Pre-draft of the Detailed Regulation Plan for Rajkovo Cave aroused the interest of the citizens in *"their own space"* and *"raised the abandoned hope that they can influence something"* since they expressed the interest to *"share their wishes and their needs regarding that space"*.

### **Establishing cooperation between organizations**

Creation of social networks and establishment of common values and norms, trust and understanding, enable and facilitate collaboration, as well as better coordination and cooperation.

Having in mind the practical experience in urban design in Kladovo, the planner stressed the importance of cooperation of local institutions, which enabled determining the future land use and construction possibilities. The local government played a key role in hosting and guiding *"a series of meetings and workshops at different planning stages"*. They were used to *"present and discuss development proposals and obtain comments and suggestions for future work"*. Such a process resulted in the adoption of the planning solution which provides the local authorities with a *"chance to start with phased project implementation in accordance with the real needs and possibilities"*.

### **Activating commercial and non-profit sector**

Planning process in Smederevo served as a field for understanding of the broad scale of different actors and different interests in planning.

The interviewed planner pointed out that "the mobilization of the city's spatial resources, the initiation of different activities by a number of commercial, industrial and non-profit organizations and their interest in the project implementation" represent an evident result of this initiative. He added, as well, that the plan adoption mainly depends on the "conciliation of these different interests".

### **"Alternative" way of planning**

As a significant result of exercising the new participatory events in Kraljevo and Despotovac the local planner recognized "*a changed perception of experts*" who participated in such a "*alternative planning process*", which enabled "*learning about the early stakeholder participation which always gave different results compared to purely technically oriented problem solving*". Additionally, he noticed the importance of this experience regarding the consideration of the whole extent of the planning problem, which extends in terms of a "*multidisciplinary approach to environmental care, social needs, and potential impacts on climate changes and so forth*".

While traditional planning bordered its range of so-called "physical" plan, long in the modern conditions are the current new urban issues (from the perspective of sustainability, the overlapping of economic, socio-cultural dimensions and environmental policy). The use of participatory methods has its purpose in the communication model, where the content of the plan comes through work, interaction and confrontation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The practice examples, statements of the participants - fellow urban, spatial and environmental planners, suggest that the lack of a formal framework does not represent an obstacle for the introduction of participation. Without any doubt, a regulated legal framework would make possible that these innovations become practice. The GIZ project submitted a proposal for that.

The reasons for use of planners' statements to present the results of participatory planning are several. The first reason is that this is not a new way of presenting the planners experience, and it has been used for research purposes. Another reason is that issue of participation is still under-represented in Serbian professional community, where still remains a widespread view on participation seen as a relict of socialist planning, and there is still a great profession animosity towards its implementation. And final, is related to approach of testing the innovations (adapted to the local context, the issue of participation and its purpose), and after their realization under pilot projects, the planners were interviewed about their experiences and opinion. These are small, not big steps forward - it was of more significance to "open" the topic and encourage understanding and different thinking,

because the introduction of innovations requires time for understanding and reflection.

The comments of interviewed planners show that besides “evident” result as agreement, there are some other important outcomes of participatory planning that can be achieved – planning process can influence the change of actors and activities, new interrelations, new practice and new ideas. Planners’ judgments are based on practical experience and, as such, might contribute better understanding of imposing of novelties in participation in urban planning in Serbia.

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