



SPACE, CONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT URBAN CONDITION OF SURROUNDINGS IN POST-SOCIALIST CITIES IN THE SEE REGION

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Abstract:

Urban residents worldwide express a desire for contact with nature and each other, attractive environments, places in which to recreate and play, privacy, a more active role in the design of their community, and a sense of place identity. However, the spatial and urban planning system does not provide conditions for a such way of urban development. It is often completely opposite, so cities are going developing without meeting the needs of their citizens and neglecting so much needed relation between spatial resources, system of planning and process of construction. The roots of this problem arise in the period after World War II, so the work represents a theoretical critique of modernist city and physical planning. Since 25 years after the fall of socialism and the transition period, there has not yet been established a system of planning that would correspond to the needs of the contemporary context of a new urban age, this analysis calls for re-thinking of spatial and urban planning, considering the relationship between the context, the planning and construction process. The focus of consideration are space as the basic potential and resource, and the role of planner as of the main actor of process.

Keywords: spatial and urban planning, urban conditions, SEE region

Građani širom svijeta izražavaju želju za kontaktom sa prirodom, jedni sa drugima, atraktivnim okruženjima, mjestima za igru i rekreaciju, za privatnost, aktivniju ulogu u oblikovanju njihove zajednice i osjećaj identiteta zajednice. Međutim, sistem prostornog i urbanističkog planiranja ne pruža uslove za takav način urbanog razvoja. Često je sasvim suprotno, tako da se gradovi razvijaju bez zadovoljavanja osnovnih potreba svojih građana i zanemaruju toliko potreban odnos između prostornih resursa, planiranja i izgradnje. Korijeni ovog problema sežu u period poslije drugog svjetskog rata, tako da rad predstavlja teoretsku kritiku modernističkom gradu i fizičkom načinu planiranja. S obzirom da ni tokom 25 godina perioda tranzicije, još nije uspostavljen sistem planiranja koji bi odgovarao potrebama savremenog konteksta novog urbanog doba, ovaj rad poziva na ponovno promišljanje prostornog i urbanističkog planiranja, preispitujući odnos između konteksta, procesa planiranja i procesa izgradnje. U fokusu razmatranja su prostor kao osnovni potencijal i resurs, te uloga planera kao glavnog aktera procesa.

Ključne riječi: prostorno i urbanističko planiranje, kontekstualni uslovi, Region Jugoistočne Evrope

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-socialist cities in the SEE region are facing the problems of the decline of traditional industries, unemployment, the spreading of marginal urban zones, the decline of downtowns, social exclusion, a high level of contamination and an overall destruction of the environment. Rural areas, although often in advantage due to the better quality of the environment, are facing economic pressure, often associated with the loss of basic services and access to them as well as shrinking hinterlands. These trends in cities and rural areas are additionally threatened by globalization [1] and an even increasing cultural homogenization [2]. This leads to further development pressure and the loss of a local identity [3], [4].

On the other hand, the spatial and urban planning system does not provide conditions for an urban development which meets the needs of citizens and pointing so much needed relation between spatial resources, system of planning and process of construction. Plans, often distant from people's needs, do not cope with all aspects of reality; and in most cases, never reach to be completely implemented into the real urban space. They are often much more close to abstraction in the conditions of contemporary world [5].

Thus we may say that our cities are facing serious challenges, the resolving of which requires a better integration of the activities of the authorities and communities and of business interests. Nevertheless, to face this, firstly the system of spatial and urban planning should be re-considered in order to improve relationship between the context, the planning and construction process.

2. METHODOLOGY

The analysis is based on theoretical framework [6] a long-life professional experience as well as on the method of a long-term observation, which permits studying city life in the native environment in order to understand "things" experientially and from the real-life perspective.

The paper examines the current condition for spatial setting (surroundings). The issue is seen through the lense of three main spatial properties: (1) space as the basis of urbanization including demographic and functional component, (2) space as a requirment in contruction and (3) space as an object of councious human activities. The aim is to understand problems of contemporary urban and spatial planning process as the constant process of change in cities [7] as well as to propose future main tasks and strategic principles of planning. It should demonstrate the importance of professional expert-oriented approach supported by researches, experimental projects, innovative methods and techniques that are subject of constant reviewes and rethinking cities in relation to the entire territory.

3. SPATIAL AND URBAN PLANNING IN LOCAL CONTEXT

The system of spatial and urban planning was for a long time suffering from the uncontrolled embracing of "models" imported from outside, which were not compatible

with either the needs or the capacities of the country in which they were being "implanted". The shortcomings of this system lied in the approach, i.e. in reliance on the old Athens Charter [8], which was characterized by rigid functionalism, instead of the promotion of a vision founded on integrated and connected towns and regions, i.e. territories [9], which are easily accessible for all who live and work there or who visit them.

Of all the mistakes made by city planners in the postwar era, the passion for highway construction has to be one of the most foolhardy. After the early success of systems like the freeways, cities everywhere were carved up to make way for giant roads, crashing through neighbourhoods and creating opportunities for "comprehensive redevelopment". This was considered progress, a necessary part of entering the modern world [10]. But some strange things happened – As time went on, communities began rejecting the plans and fighting back against the bulldozers, halting development in its tracks and kickstarting the modern conservation movement [11]. The main problem in the approach to planning was limited connectivity, not only in the physical sense, but also in the sense of the temporal connection between the multicultural roots that have formed our identity and the local features.

On the other hand, 25 years after the fall of socialism there has not yet been established a system of planning that would correspond to the needs of a new urban age. Since planning was undeveloped, it had no influence as professionally oriented in the period of socialism. During the turbulent and dynamic transition period, the system of urban planning functioned without the appropriate legal framework, retaining the socialist model of physical planning, which did not correspond to changes, so changes in urban area were often faster than planned ones [7].

One can see from the aforesaid that is necessary to change the approach to spatial and urban planning by relying on the vision of the New Athens Charter [12] according to which contemporary construction has its basis in integrated space [13]. In that context, one should bear in mind that, within the various activities forming the term of production of space, there are different approaches that a spatial planner needs to envisage in critical and analytical terms. Thus, the following types of approaches stand out in the explanation of the role of spatial settings.

The spatial settings of development can be envisaged in such a way that the form of a setting can be predetermined, which can be controlled by means of "codes" and regulations [14]. The opposite line of this thought claims that the path along which, for instance, a population forms groups, has been determined through a free choice of power and multiple interests and choices — so they can never be effectively conducted by means of any predetermined order. As a contrast to this, there is a free choice, or some kind of informality, but spatial planning supporters claim that such a thing is not easy to define, i.e. that the choice of space for constructors and freedom in that context are not so obvious. On the other hand, some scholars stress the importance of "the autonomous potential of self-organizing system" that is a "critical alternative" to the progressive globalization of neo liberal states [15].

Anyway, it is certain that space, as a kind of phenomenon, unites various activities within itself: those of constructors, architects, urban planners, spatial planners, landscape architects, local authorities, different stakeholders, etc, but also inhabitants, which are everyday more allowed to take public participation or to take other kind of responsibility of acting in urban space. In that context, we will focus on the three main properties of space which are, (1) space as the basis of urbanization including demographic and functional component, (2) space as a requirement and (3) space as an object of conscious human activities [16].

3.1. SPACE AS THE BASIS OF URBANIZATION

3.1.1. THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC COMPONENT ON THE FORMATION OF THE CHARACTER OF A SPATIAL SETTING

In general, an increase of a population leaves its mark on the urban growth, the structure and form of cities, and also, through trends of migration dynamics, on other elements forming part of space: redistribution of workforce, shortage of flats, etc. Thus, demographic trends can willingly or unwillingly cause changes, disturb previously established rhythms or establish new systems of physical relations within an area.

3.1.2. THE INFLUENCE OF A FUNCTIONAL COMPONENT OF URBANIZATION

Functional component of urbanization is a concrete social reality which has its own meanings, marks and events, and thus needs to be approached as such. Unfortunately, many countries, wishing to be more developed, attempt to imitate the programmes of rich postindustrial countries on the basis of Walt Rostow's thesis which reads as follows: "Development— historical imitation = westernization" [17].

Certainly, there are steps aimed at reaching means between affluence and a well-organized industrial and post-industrial system, but that connection is by no means a simple one. It is certain that, due to the existence of non-industrialized countries, many of those industries were able to commence their development in the first place. In addition to general factors, which point the importance of economic influence, there are also some elements which exert a direct influence on space, such as traffic, dwelling or commerce as basic urban facilities [18], [19].

Traffic stems from the human need for communication due to spatial separation between various activities. Thus, trends in traffic or transport of an activity from one location to another is important for an urban area also because of the creation of an impression that such trends are indispensable, or maybe undesirable. Dwelling does not result only from the influence of a demographic and spatial component — it also represents a phenomenon itself — through an expression of the satisfaction of needs. On the basis of its inherited fund, dwelling acts as a determining factor of the spatial organization of a city. Industry and commercial facilities which later replaced it, in its own way, exerts an influence on the urban structure through its location-related requirements.

3.2. SPACE AS A REQUIREMENT IN CONSTRUCTION

Viewed in these terms, space affects life, the way of living and production of power with all its elements. Thus, the land, as a collection of all the forms of the using of space, has drawn the attention of scholars, above all from the aspect of its value, which contributes to the establishment of a balance between the available areas and the effective population size [20]. However, the land acts at the same time as a limiting factor for population density. When viewed, however, through the prism of urban needs, the suitability of land in terms of technical requirements has a certain value and role, whereas, on the other hand, it is expected to meet the needs of housing and recreation zones as well. It is also the basis for the accommodation and distribution of various activities and, as such, it plays a significant role in the "harmonization" of the natural and created environment.

Wherever insufficient importance is attached to such harmonization, it is the soil that influences, with its price, the choice of a location for construction. It is climate as well that has to be taken into account in the conceptualization of a project as a whole and in each of its elements: the base and orientation of buildings, the formation and character of a structure, the spatial scope and the areas between buildings. Space is also a setting for maintaining links for traffic and the establishment of contacts.

3.3. SPACE AS AN OBJECT OF A CONSCIOUS HUMAN ACTION

The development of human consciousness has led, throughout history, to new ideas according to which one may influence the formation of a setting. This is an expressive or artistic space. From the aspect of spatial development, in order that an idea should become a concept, all the aspects of overall orientation need to be understood: its production conditions and relations, its social context, its area with its meanings — all united through a person — constructor / house builder. However, in order to be understood, all these aspects of overall orientation, which manage human relations, need to be experienced through the specific elements of spatial situations, which, on the same conceptual principles, is to produce various models of urban settings.

Thus, before anything else, the differences in the conditions and way of living, in relations between the "common" and the "personal" and in the types of their concretization are to provide information about an environment. That confirms that it is the human act transforming the environment on the basis of the given conditions that is in the focus of "events" in any case. Thus construction does not imply built areas only, but also a system of life, i.e. a broader term signifying the creation of a wide range of space producers

4. FUTURE MAIN TASKS AND STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES OF PLANNING

Spatial and urban planning is a practical expression of the concepts that offer an equal opportunity to citizens and other urban actors alike for using their respective potentials in the best possible manner, no matter where they are situated. Due to its integrative nature, spatial planning has a potential to coordinate strategic actions by taking into account the needs of local communities. It is founded on numerous principles of harmonious, balanced, efficacious and sustainable territorial development. Spatial planning promotes economic and social cohesion as it translates the principles of balanced and sustainable development into practical activities for individual towns and regions.

During the assessment of tasks and establishment of policies, spatial integration demands an integrative, proactive and participative approach to design, communication and monitoring. The aforesaid principles apply whether spatial planning refers to the spreading of a town, urban development, new expansions, new infrastructure, urban regeneration, restoration, local initiatives or individual projects. Activities and interventions refer to all the types of areas: residential areas, historic centres, downtowns, business centres, industrial areas, ports, tourist locations, green zones, rural areas, suburbs, etc.

The role of a planner is to react and respond to events in society and to the laws and policies in the field of planning. Whether that will be the role of a visionary, a technocrat manager, an advisor, supervisor or instructor, depends on the various political and social frameworks of a context in which they act. However, an urban and spatial planner in new conditions have to find new, innovative ways and to experiment with more flexible environmental standards and regulations. In comparison to other disciplines, spatial planning stands out due to its basic focus on the interests of society, settlements and regions as a whole and long-term future. In that context, spatial planners are committed to serving the general interest. Spatial planners analyze, compose, implement and monitor development strategies, policies, programmes and key projects. They also contribute to professional advancement and research in order that education should continuously follow the demands of present and future times.

In this context the planning practice, culture and paradigm should change towards critical thinking of the city, innovations, transdisciplinarity, reinventing planning as a part of good urban governance, as well as to flexible planning strategies etc. Integrated urban planning and design should be seen as a mechanism for creating and achieving sustainable and resilient settlements having finally in mind that continuous plan development process itself should be seen as a methodology for contemporary urban planning.

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