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Compact development – vulnerability of the urban?

Spatial planning professions should establish and formalise inter-disciplinary balanced models for evaluation and planning spatial development with common directions and goals. In the opposite case, urban development in Slovenia will still be evaluated from a defensive position and remain subordinate (norms of urban planning are outdated and undefined, incoherent between sectors, the role and significance of urban space and indirectly high quality urban places are subordinate to certain other professions dealing with space). It would be beneficial to research, how and to what extent, do departmental and disconnected dealings with space affect the concept of compact city and the possibility for protecting natural and cultural landscapes! Urbanists should focus on two aspects: how to act if the interdisciplinary sustainable model will not be developed, or not at all, and to what extent to improve efficiency? The solution probably lies in the answer, why don't urban planners have the right to manage complex built-up space. Probably because they're operative tools are almost completely useless in the new social condition.

1. The role and significance of complex urban development

Vulnerability of natural and urban environments is becoming increasingly dependent on the majority, populist and *a priori* evaluation of urbanism and contemporary architecture, while the urban planning profession is silent and precariously hiding behind the moon. Despite numerous material forms of urbanism it seems that there are none available for establishing high quality urban places and settlements. What will happen to settlements and what will the share of high quality places be, when introverted urban development will be legally enforced? Can the process of transformation of Slovenian settlements be established without adequate urban planning norms and instruments? Will these new global guidelines for development really increase the quantity of high quality places? Will sub-urbanisation invade even urban areas, thus demanding discussion on the vulnerability of the urban? Evading public responsibility and the NIMBY effect are leading to »hard core« sub-urbanisation – quick and permanent loss of high quality natural and historical built environments. The excessively uncaring attitude for urban space, and the increasingly conscious care for the natural space (in the context of health care and healthy environment, and less healthy spirit) – a paradox pointed out by Jane Jacobs forty years ago – have diminished the role and significance of urban development in Slovenia to the edge of common awareness. Practically this means that any complex spatial planning and compact urban development are disabled!

Urbanisation is everywhere. It has been abandoning the traditional »medieval« built urban edge for more than a century! The variety of forms of urban development and their spatial distribution demand the modernisation of attitudes and norms of complex spatial planning.

During the nineties of the last century Europe redefined the role of urbanists into experts on space, who by timely crea-

tion of development aspects on needs of contemporary planning develop »concepts for balanced spatial development of settlements«, thus supporting complex transformation of existing settlements. Goals of these transformations exceed the protection of existing natural and built heritage, but primarily initiate care for continuous execution of complex urban development. Since all spatial interventions affect urban development, whatever their duration (short- or long-term), function or position, complex development exceeds historical centres or degraded areas, but deals with all places! The quality of transformation is thus primarily conditioned by capability, direction and daring in executing complex urban development, which is nevertheless dependent on raising the final quantity of urban places and their mutual connectedness.

Initiation and direction of development processes in urban transformation are needed to increase the quality of life in settlements and the heterogeneity of the environment. Both can be achieved by: protection and rehabilitation of natural and built heritage, development of urban infrastructure, raising the share of high quality places and residences, raising public interest and promoting active public participation, noting urban development needs (public places, housing, offices etc.) creating an urban development programme, noting high quality and degraded urban areas, producing a map of sites (building plots), preparing tenders for restructuring degraded areas, preparing proposals for the rehabilitation of particular areas (if we want to preserve as much as possible, then we have to find new economical uses for the existing stock), raise the share of typologies, obtain public municipal funds for renewal etc.

2. Why strive for balanced spatial development?

The role and significance of planning spatial development of Slovenian settlements has for far too long been based on the priority of preserving and establishing the »classical« culture of built environments, which enables the denial of needs for intensive and brave solving of complex spatial development! During the nineties of the last century, when the European planning profession was researching the causes for the global city planning crisis, a conclusion was reached, that in many aspects it was caused by urban planning methods derived from the modernist doctrines – Slovenian urbanism also still normatively relies on the doctrines of the modernist city.

From the mid-nineties of the last century European urbanism is focused on transforming settlements, an important part of which is the distribution and design of high quality urban places. Transformation of Slovenian settlements in national guidelines is and will remain subject to processes of transforming existing structures, however there are still no adequate definitions or research on ways in which introverted urban development will proceed on the local level. Without simple, clear, urban planning guidelines and measures for conducting urban spatial development policies and under pressure by economic development interests, spatial solutions and forms of urban planning can be enforced, which are often contradictory to contemporary European trends.

If the goal is protection of the natural environment, the introverted, compact development of settlements will be guided by spatial defensively aligned policies of urban deve-

development, which the state sees as sufficient to initiate complex processes of compact urban development. I am afraid that those settlements, which won't possess adequately amended planning documents, in which the sharp limitations for expansive spatial interventions (often adopted out because of better economic viability of investments) will be formalised, many smaller municipalities and investors will not be stimulated to invest in their settlement, while many projects will even lower the quality of urban places, rather than improve them. This is coupled with the fact that the fate and quality of projects are largely affected by extremely poor ties between interdisciplinary professions, created and enabled by political, economic and professional-departmental distinctions when dealing with the role and significance of living spaces. Even on the legislative level, the practice of planning professions in Slovenia is un-harmonic, meaning that the process of complex urban transformation cannot be established, despite the increasing specialisation of all planning professions. Amongst the trends that these professions take onboard and the real conditions, spatial and within the professions, pragmatic answers to issues dealing with adequate measures and norms will have to be found, if we wish to establish a beneficial ratio of high quality urban places in our settlements.

3. How to attain balanced spatial development of settlements in Slovenia

During the last decade, from independence onwards, the urban planning profession hasn't managed to synthetically analyse the reasons for the diminishing respect and power of the urban planning profession (diminishing professional role of the urbanist, substantial lack of high quality urban places in all Slovenian towns) or grasped the fact that there has been a generation change coupled with changed professional outlooks (neighbourhood urbanism). From the assessment of conditions and possibilities for urban planning practise it could then modernise its goals, a precondition for developing balanced spatial development of settlements. We need a modern-interventionist urbanism, which can connect and mediate between urban transformation processes. The paradox is that until we formalise general – national guidelines, norms and instruments for contemporary urban interventions, urbanism will still be evaluated from non-urbanistic viewpoints, which can have damaging effects on future urban development of settlements and possibilities for establishing cultural landscapes.

Alongside the new manifestations of urbanisation, views on urban development by various professions dealing with spatial planning and management have specialised, but they are basically still disconnected from the global, modernised urbanistic rationale. Almost all the amended plans of Slovenian settlements produced during the nineties are more the result of a »combatant condition« between planners, urbanists and other professions, rather than spatial interdisciplinary development documents. They are a poor »revision« of obsolete spatial plans, whose goal was to eliminate visible and hidden »mistakes« of obsolete planning documents. Thus they only define design layouts and built and natural urban edges, but they don't even deal with other parameters of contemporary urban development and are insufficient for planned directing of urban processes of balanced spatial development of settlements.

4. Promoting complex, balanced development of urban space with a high quality urban surface

One of the main goals of contemporary transformation of settlements is, above all, sustainable increase in quality of life by establishing urban qualities of all places possible. Slovenian experts dealing with planning and assessing planned developments haven't as yet managed to devise and verify a national model for interdisciplinary balancing and directing spatial development of settlements, i.e. a model, which could raise the share and method of distributing high quality urban places, mainly those, which are functionally diverse or uniformly designed or completed.

Since the share of new high quality urban places is so incredibly low, almost invisible, consequentially their influence on structuring quality in settlements is too low. Thus one should ask oneself, how should one approach them, How to enforce the role and significance of high quality urban places as public places in a time when private property is venerated, what is the form of present high quality public places, how to begin directing urban development in Slovenia by promoting high quality urban places and what could their role and significance be in directing the development of whole settlements or larger, dispersed cities?

In view of the present planning laws, unsurvivable fragmentarity and lack of ties between professions dealing with any form of spatial planning, the process of developing high quality urban places is also hindered by the lack of devised, simple urban planning instruments and methods for directing small spatial changes on the local level. Therefore before further elaboration, one should find answers to the question: is it possible to even begin directing complex, balanced urban development with the intentional increase and rational distribution urban places and city-building connections between them, without legal backing of necessary urbanistic instruments, supporting such goals?

From this viewpoint it is easy to ascertain whether during the last decade, despite contemporary professional findings about the significance and role of planning the built urban edge, the attitude towards it or its quality have changed – measured by the built-up space and designed nature. The edge can be a permanent or temporary tie between the built landscape and natural landscape, but establishing the development potential of the area is very important. In Slovenian planning practise the urban edge has gained in role and significance, but it is still not seen as an urbanistic element, which should be given adequate importance by planners, especially in medium and large settlements. In these design of the urban edge is conditioned by numerous direct and indirect factors that affect urban development. The urban edge is not a permanent, compact form, which could be developed singularly by protective measures, i.e. permanent design, preservation. They are in fact only rare segments that are created and preserved because of historical and cultural legacy of the settlement or their position adjacent to important protected natural environments. Other segments of the urban edge are often left without development measures for assessing urban potentials. With regret we have to observe that the share of high quality designed urban edges of Slovenian settlements is diminishing and not expanding, only proving that urban development of settlements is still inadequate and that development instruments are not sufficiently complex.

In the context of creating urban edges, numerous Slovenian theoreticians of urban development, as well as landscape architects and other experts, advocate the creation of green belts. The urban green belt is today probably the most monumental form of urban planning practise, but in my opinion, Slovenian settlements are still far too immature to support them. Planners don't possess suitable differentiations of land use, use of agricultural lands is not supported by legal evaluation (relationship private property-public domain), priorities and domains of professions are contradictory (agriculture, landscape architecture, urbanism etc.) etc. Can one really expect that urban green belts will remain in planning documents?

5. The necessity of modernising urbanistic guidelines and norms

Arguments about, who has the right to design the green belt prove that there is still a phantasm hovering above Slovenian urbanism implying that urbanists, in the best of cases, are allowed to judge only the »beauty« of built urban places and that there is a definite need for modernising urbanistic guidelines and norms. However enforcement of demands for the establishment of complex transformation processes of settlements, will be a difficult task, since introverted development of settlements demands a complex process, further implying that the profession is in a dangerous noose, if it doesn't take an active stance in abolishing legal, financially demanding and inefficient long-term processes for legalising urban development! Furthermore, certain issues of Slovenian urbanistic planning will have to be addressed, namely:

- **Enforcement of planned directions of suburban growth:** compact development of settlements conditions the development of urban structures inwards and outwards, therefore it is necessary to evaluate the significance of planning of suburbs alongside major changes to planning legislature. A decade ago the planning profession started to distinguish between urban and suburban space. Formerly all smaller settlements within the reach of larger cities were dealt with as »housing« segments of the latter, relieved of central or other functions, while the in-between space was consumed by agricultural land, forests, rivers and other uses. Not only because of the planning profession, but also because of new administrative boundaries between new municipalities, in the mid-nineties some planners pointed out the need for planning areas, which the cities »lost«. The debate about who has the »right« to plan suburban areas so far hasn't even started, therefore it would be necessary to restart the discussion immediately and offer solutions. Only with simultaneous directing of suburban growth and it's settlements will it be possible to establish suitable conditions for stimulating and developing processes of urban transformation – sustainable urban development is a dialectical process, the city should develop inwards and outwards in harmony.
- **Enforcement of conceptual guidelines for spatial development of settlements:** if we accurately review voluminous analyses, done by the Slovenian planning practitioners from the mid-nineties till the millennium (amendments and supplements to spatial plans, master plans, urban design workshops, urban design competitions), we can ascertain that almost all already contained guidelines for urban transformation, but these were never implemented or seen as feasible. The reasons for such negligence can be found in the, until recently valid planning legislature, which proscribed the production of over-detailed planning documentation. Thus the clear distinction of

long-term development interests was lost (municipal plans and master plans) or the lower priority of development guidelines wasn't included in municipal plans. Over-detailed, bulky and departmental contents of planning maps completely hazed the conceptual guidelines concerning spatial development of settlements. When enforcing the process of urban transformation it will be necessary to distinguish directives and goals from normative regulation, thus facilitating enforcement and protection of long-term development interests and conceptual guidelines concerning spatial development of settlements.

- **The carrot and the stick:** if the legal-regulatory system won't be flexible enough, urban transformation could negate the complexity of the urban transformation process. In this sense it will be necessary to prevent or even supersede single-minded legislative regulatory measures. The implementation of spatial development policies with single-minded prevention of sub-urbanisation and continuity of settlement growth demands complex solutions, which could help formulate legal and economic measures and a strategy for comprehensive transformation of urban structures. Thus we have to immediately establish guidelines and mechanisms, which will define processes, methods and measures for transforming Slovenian settlements, both on the general and local level, inwards oriented and outwards. Transformation of cities should enable the establishment of urban development processes in both directions, whatever the size of the settlement.
- **Evaluation of recent urban contents that are generated by social development itself:** Slovenian urbanists are traditionally not really inclined to or overzealous about innovation in spatial planning. In both aspects the profession approaches new phenomena of contemporary cities single-mindedly. For example, one of these phenomena is the restructuring process of former warehouses in Ljubljana. The area, named BTC, is constantly subject to extremely negative criticism, i.e. in the scale of the city it is a completely inadequate formation, albeit that it's scale was inadequately designed, implying that the planning profession is discussing a generic urban space on an academic, almost self-promotional professional level. Besides self-promotion, the introduction of novelties should aim at raising the complexity of settlements, which are weak in function, programme or built structures.

6. Vulnerability of urban space

Until urban planning will be devoid of adequate instruments for performing complex spatial development, high quality urban places will emerge spontaneously, on more or less speculatively chosen sites, while the vulnerability of built and natural environments will increase tremendously. In view of the national strategy of compact settlement development, the effect of spatial impact assessment will be minor.

The process of complex, balanced development of urban space could be enforced by purposeful development of high quality urban places. Why? With such newly acquired and created places (renewal, clearing, restructuring, additions, redesign) increasing their quantity, distribution and inter-connectedness, we could in fact direct urban development in a contemporary fashion on the general, as well as local level. The complexity of urban space usually also includes natural environments – because natural environments enable the formation of symbolic-functional relations on all levels, even in the context of functional ties or formal definition of spatial

relations between settlements. Therefore a high quality living space (urban place) essentially needs adequate and balanced evaluation of built and natural elements, thus also conditioning the inevitable need for professional integration of urban and natural spaces! Since urban and natural spaces complement each other in complex planning of settlements (in a harmonic and contrasting relationship), the quality of new urban planning on the general level depends on establishing high quality urban spaces, which are balanced with existing built or natural environments.

High quality, small urban segments can be conceived as partial, spatially distinct areas – autonomous spatial units, which are easily and often established anywhere, without the need or necessity of connections, but to the urbanist signify »measure units«, with which one composes a network of high quality places, a spatial and symbolic distinct urban structure. There are many methods for connecting fragments of high quality urban places and they could be further elaborated if new urban spaces were established.

Grand, monumental, political author-based urbanism is gone. The urbanist has many problems in asserting oneself as the connecting link – tie between all spatial planning professions, because there is no »modular unit«, which could be used in the context of complex spatial development, i.e. the unit of »high quality urban place«! All, even the smallest established comprehensive layout of an urban place, directly affect the quality of urban transformation and offer good possibilities for protecting and establishing cultural landscapes.

In view of all the stated facts, the reality remains that long-term enforcement of complex and planned development of high quality urban places or building compact settlements, will be difficult. Obviously, planned distribution and design of such places demand urban planning guidelines and instruments. The government is in fact trying to devise adequate guidelines for urban development of Slovenian settlements, the goal being promotion of balanced sustainable development, which is based on preventing sub-urbanisation and raising the quality of life in settlements themselves (analytical planning phases clearly pointed out the quantity of vacant building land in the cities). However, after a decade of preparatory stages of the national development guidelines for Slovenian settlements, one can still raise the question, will the principles and guidelines from the general level be translated to the local level appropriately. The fact stands that definitions on the role and significance of spatial development of settlements within the national spatial strategy isn't a playground for spatial geographers and planners, but also experts who are directly involved with urban development. The latter pointed out two phenomena: the emergence of the generic city (dispersed urban development with »insufficient comprehensive directions for development«) and, what is even more important, the need for devising a simple, operative model of urban planning norms and instruments (with few exceptions), which could support complex spatial development of Slovenian settlements.

To prevent advocacy of urbanism only on the declarative level or to keep it on the theoretical level, pragmatic measures should be taken immediately. An old Slovenian saying is that from small things large ones grow, which could be applied to urbanism as well – from small high quality urban places grow high quality spaces!

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Illustrations:

- Picture 1:** Proposed concept of development areas along the new city access road (Special expert guidelines for the Eastern access road in Pobrežje, Maribor, 1999, U. Lobnik, A. Podlipnik)
- Picture 2:** Layout study for the development area along the new access road in Maribor (Special expert guidelines for area S 31, 1999, U. Lobnik, D. Čelig, A. Podlipnik) – raising building densities and variability of programmes – from a shopping centre to an urban neighbourhood centre
- Picture 3:** Urbanistic architectural workshop City edge, Maribor – Studenci 1997: the workshop topic was researching development potentials of the city edge with emphasis on housing, restructuring industrial estates and army barracks. The groups defined smaller development areas with various housing typologies – presented are six joined solutions (D. Jeraj, 1998)
- Picture 4:** Urbanistic architectural workshop Maribor – East, Maribor – Pobrežje 1999: the workshop dealt with research of development potentials in the Eastern part of the city with the newly built access road. The groups defined smaller development areas – the joined model shows all eight proposals (tutored by: P. Gabrijelečič, J. Koželj, S. Ostan, V. Ravnikar and M. Zorec, M. Dešman, U. Lobnik and B. Reichenberg)
- Picture 5:** Planning workshop Graz-Maribor: future spaces (2000), proposal by the group ACTAR (Barcelona) for the layout of the Southern built edge of Maribor with housing enclaves
- Picture 6:** Terrain Vogue – winning entry in the urbanistic competition for the Drava Centre in Maribor, 1997 (njirič+njirič, Zagreb); proposal for the restructuring of the area between the access road and railway, aimed at connecting all urban neighbourhoods on the right riverbank - in-between green spaces link urban enclaves of differing programmes and typology
- Picture 7:** Conceptual sketch of the layout for the South-east corner of the Drava centre, the Baumax shopping centre (njirič+njirič), urbanism integrated into architecture – the aim of the layout was a high quality urban surface, which can generate new urban development of the right riverbank
- Picture 8:** Drava terraces, B. Podrecca, J. Ačanski, T. Veber: housing enclave in a restructuring area in the immediate vicinity of Maribor's historical centre, completed 1999-2003
- Picture 9:** Housing complex behind the Radvanje castle - winning entry, invited competition, 1999 (U. Lobnik, A. Podlipnik): regeneration of a degraded urban surface, which has been obstructed by the local public for several years. They are demanding double pitched roofs instead of the proposed roof gardens. The local community established an Internet society for the protection of double pitched roofs
- Picture 10:** Residential neighbourhood Vinarje near Maribor (U. Lobnik, A. Podlipnik, 1998): proposal for a small residential settlement with a local centre in the suburban belt

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