

multi-apartment housing and, on the extreme western rim by the forest, an area of detached single-family homes. (Čargo, E. In: Šašek Divjak, 2002).

#### 4. Conclusion

The balanced planned settlement and transport system (especially public transport) should ensure possibilities for sustainable mobility, which means:

- Better accessibility,
- Higher quality of life,
- Efficient environmental protection,
- Higher social equity concerning accessibility (even less affluent population without cars, school going youth and children, the elderly etc.).

Consequently the public transport system should, in conjunction with corresponding settlement (compact centres: new and expanded settlement near public transport stations), should accommodate achievement of the following goals:

- Diminishing negative effects of sub-urbanisation and their alleviation,
- Better economic development and regional social structure,
- Less negative effects on the environment,
- Rational land use,
- Higher economic efficiency.

Besides physical planning, various instruments of land policy (planning, taxation, market, financial and administrative) have to be devised, to reach such a rationalised settlement system. Similarly, balanced housing policy can positively influence regional economic development and employment. Concerning housing needs and in view of the National housing programme's goals, expansive suitable surfaces in cities and their suburbs will have to be provided very soon. Therefore recollection is needed about the position, form and scope of these new housing communities (new development, additions and rehabilitation) and how to tie them into a balanced urban system, especially with public transport.

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Aleš ŠAREC

## Slovenia of fifteen centres?

*Where are you, architects? Urban planners? Experts from fields of regional economics, social development and environment protection? Today, when the new physical plan of Slovenia, or to use the new phrase, Strategy of spatial development of Slovenia (SSDS) [1] is being decided upon, you are showing apathy, and can't be heard voicing your opinions. We are talking about the fundamental spatial document that will determine all other spatial plans for individual areas. This debate is about what our cities, settlements, and regional spatial development will look like in the future. Don't you care about our environs?[2]*

### 1. Prologue

The proposed acceptance of this document for spatial management is controversial from many perspectives and on all levels. Amongst other, it repeats the questionable doctrine/goal about polycentric development of a network of cities and settlements (the urban system) in Slovenia. This doctrine proposes fifteen different centres of »functional regions«. These are the so-called centres of national importance. It also talks about thirty-five other centres of regional and inter-municipal importance (which would partially also have the role of regional centres), which the SSDS proposes in a three-tier urban network of Slovenia. Altogether there would actually be fifty »regional centres«. The doctrine of polycentric urban development of Slovenia has mutated into a doctrine of a dispersed network of cities and settlements, which could compete with larger European cities as a metropolis of two million.

So many polycentric regional centres in a relatively small Slovenia definitely can't represent its polycentric urban system. Expert justification for such a dispersed network of development centres simply doesn't exist. On the contrary, at least six regional and national centres would on average pull in only 67.000 inhabitants, which doesn't constitute a large enough critical mass (number) of service users, supply, employment, management and other functions that should be located in these centres. It is unrealistic that beside »intermediate level« activities (not only »upper level«) [3], which will have to be positioned in regional centre of every region, the same functions and institutions should be placed in other »centres of regional importance« or in »inter-municipal centres« of the same region, only a few kilometres away from the main regional centre (for instance besides such institutions being in Celje, they would also be in Žalec and Šentjur). Among other problems of such a system, we can point out that these other centres can't guarantee sufficient accessibility with the public transport system, which will primarily focus on the main regional centres.

The decades old concept of »dispersed« polycentric development of Slovenia is a result of pressures, lobbying, and blackmailing by local communities, as well as liberal standpoints of those who prepare development documents on the national level (social plans, and now the SSDS). In light of public interest and benefits, this concept is harmful. Will the expert public really remain carefree of such conditions?



## 2. Polycentric development and regionalisation for real

Polycentric development of Slovenia with a smaller number of regional centres has been the goal of experts as far back as in the preparation of the Regional development plan (RDP) in 1975. But even then, given the foreseen transport accessibility of potential centres from their gravitational areas (see picture 2: Accessibility of inter-municipal centres, RDP 1975), and partially due to pressures of local interest and the »political reality« of those times, RDP defined six »more important inter-municipal centres« with interest spheres of the upper level of supply (Ljubljana, Maribor, Koper-Izola-Piran, Nova Gorica, Novo Mesto, Celje), and nine other so called »inter-municipal centres« (Kranj, Radovljica-Jesenice-Bled, Zagore-Trbovlje-Hrastnik-Ptuj, Dravograd-Slovenj Gradec-Ravne, Murska Sobota). In the national long-term plan for the time span 1986-2000 the number of centres with upper level supply and services, or the so-called »most important centres«, rose from six to eight, and the number of »other important centres« dropped to seven. All together Slovenia should now be developing fifteen regional centres.

In the expert guidelines for the new Slovene physical plan i.e. SSDS, which will replace the spatial elements of the Long-term plan of the Republic of Slovenia for the period 1986-2000, the larger part of experts from the field of regional spatial development and economics, defended the polycentric urban network with eight or six regional centres (for instance M. Ravbar, A. Gulič, the Ministry of Interior's project group for regionalisation and others). Experts preparing the draft of the SSDS also defended the new idea of the polycentric urban system, but the »political reality« prevailed again. This meant that alongside a long list of »other centres«, fifteen regional centres (so-called centres of national importance) should continue to be developed.

The other major problem of the proposed national strategy of settlement development is the fact that it isn't harmonised with the proposal for the new Law on harmonised regional development (ZSRRS, accepted by the Government of Slovenia, first hearing 2004). The Law (for now) foresees one region less than the SSDS, i.e. 14 development regions, with slightly different gravitational areas (the kočevska area should be within the Dolenjska development region with a centre in Novo Mesto).

Apparently the creation of development regions is one of the main goals of regionalisation of Slovenia – regions where their regional development agencies (RDA) will prepare RDPs. Parallel to those, regional strategies for spatial development will also be prepared and accepted. It would be logical that these documents are harmonised, and that they would focus on the same areas. Furthermore they should focus on the areas of development regions with a regional centre that will be defined in the SSDS in the framework of the polycentric development concept of Slovenia. Such fundamental and necessary harmonising elements are not yet included in either document.

Last, but not least, of the shortcomings of both proposals, is the fact that gravitational (functional) areas of regional centres, or the areas of development regions are not defined on the basis of accessibility of these centres with public transport services (bus-lines, and railway system). Along

the lines of accepted European guidelines [4], which will also have to be integrated in Slovene transport policy, thirty-minute accessibility of services and supply in the upper and intermediate level has to be guaranteed for all citizens in the region/country. This also includes public transport and not only personal vehicles, which enable accessibility to only half the population. This criteria and basis for defining gravitational areas was not included in either proposal. Public transport catchment areas must become the key element of spatial planning on all levels of development.

## 3. Slovenia of eight centres

Given the fact that in the future, alongside EU guidelines, fundamentally improved transport infrastructure will enable wider and faster territorial accessibility to regional centres from their gravitational areas and that the centres of development regions with their activities/functions will service bigger territories than they do today, implies that the development regions and »functional« regions should be larger and their number smaller than the current proposals of both documents. Moreover every development and functional region should, as a rule, have only one centre [5]; therefore the number of centres mentioned in both documents should be sufficiently reduced.

Expert findings of different possibilities for reducing the number of poly-centres in development regions show that from the viewpoint of functioning of transport regions (but also other reasons), as well as national and regional economy, formation of eight development regions in Slovenia would be optimal. With respect to the principle that one region should have one centre (only exceptionally, if viability of public transport calls for a conglomerate of two or three cities) that would mean eight regional centres. So we aren't talking about a network of fifteen, but eight-centres. Of course the whole urban system of Slovenia must also encompass/include the functions of other cities, and settlements on the lower – local – level of services, supply, employment, public management and other local needs.

Transport systems should enable the majority of the population in the development region to access regional centres with the public transport system within 30 minutes.

**Table 1:** Number of inhabitants and active population in eight regions (2004)

Region	Regional centre	Population	Active population (%)
Osrednje-slovenska	Ljubljana	584.248	30,7
Primorska	Koper	138.773	7,1
Gorenjska	Kranj	197.102	9,8
Goriška	Nova gorica	120.222	6,1
Savinjska	Celje	256.976	12,9
Dolenjska	Novo mesto	176.710	9,0
Pomurska	Murska sobota	124.081	6,0
Podravska	Maribor	393.923	18,4
SLOVENIA		1.992.035	100,0

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Project group for regionalisation, 2003



In expert circles, the proposed division of Slovenia into eight regions has so far been given most support. The project group for regionalisation is also in favour of such a concept. Analyses of possible alternatives (6, 8, 12 or 14 regions) showed that results of earlier regionalisations and expected development trends in Slovenia suggest division into eight regions as the optimal solution. Such a strategy would, amongst other, have the following advantages: division into eight regions follows the basic goal of having strong regions. We would acquire economically stronger and better service-equipped centres causing cheaper services and supply; cheaper public transport; smaller consumption of space, better environment protection. According to their size and economical strength the eight regions would be internally more homogenous, thus disallowing a superior position of some regions (the Ljubljana region for instance). This can't be guaranteed if regionalisation will create smaller regions. Centres of the eight regions should be defined as the main points of development in state development programmes, and as a suitable answer to expected pressures from stronger centres in neighbouring countries. It would be easier to resolve spatial, infrastructure, and ecological problems; regions would be quite similar to management areas of public administration. In bigger management-territorial units more reasonable and efficient strategic management of social, economical, spatial, and environmental development would be possible.

The first draft of the Development Strategy for Slovenia – challenges of the future [6], also favours a smaller number of bigger regions with stronger regional centres (»regions without clear functional centres don't have true conditions to grow into regions, therefore regional centres should be strengthened as a counter-measure to agglomeration centres in neighbouring countries and as a tool to enhance cross-border cooperation«). With entry to the EU it is even more important that the context of regional development policies promotes strengthening of regional centres, but must at the same time push towards the expansion of their functional hinterland. Such functional regions must represent the basis for development policy, because only at this level is it possible to develop a big enough critical mass.

Division of Slovenia into eight regions, definition of their size, areas, names, and centres on the intermediate territorial self-governmental level between the state and municipalities should be accepted with a law and in accordance with the anticipated amendments of the Constitution (articles 121, 140, and 143). That is similar to the process of obtaining prior opinions from local communities in all European countries where such regionalisations were accepted with laws, because common national benefits are at stake, and not only narrow local, or municipal interests.

#### 4. Epilogue

The profession is demanding a review of ongoing strategies of polycentric development and regionalisation of Slovenia. It should be seen from the perspective of national economy and rationalized concepts of physical, social and environmental development of settlements that are being affected by new transport corridors and accessibility to public transport. The network of fifteen regional centres and numerous urban centres in fourteen development regions must be re-

duced into a more sustainable division of Slovenia into eight development regions with eight centres. This is the direction that the newly born Strategy of Development of Slovenia should take. Furthermore, in accordance with this basic document the proposal of the Strategy of spatial development of Slovenia, Law on sustainable regional development, transport policy of Slovenia, and other departmental national development programmes should be changed, completed and harmonised.

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#### Notes

- [1] EPA 1112-III, Poročevalec DZ RS nr. 8, 4.2. 2004
- [2] Prostor mene briga, Maja Simoneti, Delo-SP. 13.9. 2003; Količko in kako je prostor del razvojne vizije Slovenije? Tatjana Rener; Trajekt, 7.11.2003.
- [3] Intermediate level activities, which should be located in centres of inter-municipal importance, with a hinterland of at least 10.000 inhabitants are: vocational high-schools and 2 and 3-year vocational programmes classical and professional high-schools, county court-houses, social-work centres, centres for safety at work, organisations and institutions for care of elderly people, employment centres, etc... In the centres of regional importance with a hinterland of at least 20.000 inhabitants there should also be general and specialist hospitals, regional health institutions, institutional care of groups with special needs, child and youth care, higher professional schools and student dormitories, public research organisations, and at least one entrepreneurial zone.
- [4] Sustainable transport policies, ECMT, OECD, Paris 2002; Environmentally Sustainable Transport, Guidelines, Futures, Strategies and Best Practices, OECD, Vienna 2000; Vienna Declaration and Programme of Joint Action, UN/ECE, Vienna 1997;
- [5] Public transport system should be rationally lead into one centre specially because of costs and the shortest possible amount of time needed for transport to the centre of development/functional region; if there are more centres in the region, these public transport and settlement structures must duplicate or triplicate.
- [6] Office for macroeconomic analysis, May 2004.

#### Illustrations

**Picture 1:** Two schemes of polycentric urban system

**Picture 2:** Accessibility of inter-municipal centres, RDP 1975

*The foreseen accessibility of 15 regional centres in the period to the year 2000 in the plan of urbanisation (polycentric development of Slovenia) in the »Origins and foundations for the policy of regional development« (Regional spatial plan of SR Slovenia – task, and work; Aleš Šarec, Milan Naprudnik, SRS Institute for regional spatial planning, Sinteza, No. 33, 34, 35, May 1975)*

**Picture 3:** Inter-municipal centres and their areas of influence, RDP 1975

**Picture 4:** The plan of urban network

**Picture 5:** The division of Slovenia into eight development regions with eight regional centres, their gravitational areas and transport communications (schematics)

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