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Strategic development goals of the metropolitan area of Belgrade in the context of European physical development

1. Introductory remarks

The specific condition at the close of the 20th century, in which Serbia was seriously lagging behind in development, also affected its capital city Belgrade. Not forgetting the relative importance and size of this city in the wider European framework, we can establish that this condition was in fact grounded in the political constellation. After all, most major ideas and strategic actions are as a rule generated from the dominant centre of power. Stimulated by the Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia (adopted in 1996), the city of Belgrade, in conjunction with the Republic of Serbia, triggered preparation of a Regional spatial plan for the city of Belgrade, whose main goals were:

- To stop drastic economic stagnation,
- To diminish pronounced social problems caused by uncontrolled settlement of immigrants and displaced persons from the territories of former Yugoslavia,
- To clear the seriously threatened economic integrity of settled and vacant spaces in the city of Belgrade, which covers 3224 km², with 1.618.000 inhabitants living in 7 urban centres and more than 130 rural settlements.

The regional spatial plan of Belgrade (adopted in 2004) outlined the basic directions of physical development and with respect for the ongoing priorities, which included:

- Protection and quality upgrading of registered development resources and values;
- Management of the entire area of Belgrade from the legal, economic and physical aspect;
- Sustainable spatial development of key functions and communications.

The physical development strategy's character was obviously forward looking, meaning above all consolidation of the system's key levers, which should be followed by expansion into the wider regional hinterland. Thus basic planning solutions were sought for intra-regionally (in interdependence with municipalities in the hinterland) and trans-regionally, meaning by functions and interests that connect the city of Belgrade as a region with other regions in Europe. The fact stands that during the 90s of the 20th century Belgrade lost its role of European metropolis. It was excluded from European cooperation and integration and at the same time became the administrative centre of the new nation and republic, while losing a large part of its economic power and urban identity. Such conditions led the designers of the new planning concept to a basic goal: organised activation of regional spatial potentials, which could increase its attractiveness and sustain conditions for achieving the standards of a European metropolis by 2011. Deliberation on the position, role and place of Belgrade in the wider European context was therefore of excep-

tional importance in formulation of strategies and planning solutions in the given regional plan. Definition of strategic goals for the metropolitan territory of Belgrade was therefore conditioned by real circumstances, as well as possibilities and potentials of the area in the general context of European, macro-regional and regional development trends.

2. Primary strategic starting points

Today the Belgrade metropolitan area and wider macro-region (as defined in the Spatial plan of Serbia, adopted in 1996), after many years of discontinuity of development, are confronted with numerous problems. We are witnessing deterioration and degradation of all vital urban systems, dilapidation of the built stock and infrastructure systems, as well as serious undermining of economic, social, natural and cultural substances of the entire macro-region. Furthermore, because of unregulated property-legal relations and some absurd legal stipulations inherited from the socialist period, it is still impossible to establish real market-based land policies, which is in its own capacity, one of the essential regulatory instruments for urban economics and management. The consequence of former lack of adequate management and control mechanisms caused unplanned and illegal development, sporadic in the inner and intensive and »organised« in the wider urban area. The main problem however was the lack of vision about the metropolitan area's development, but also the lack of, at least, a skeleton strategy, especially from the aspect of thought out planning answers to massive changes caused by demographic and social restructuring, which befell the nation in the last century's last decade. Finally, the inadequate consciousness of political decision makers about importance of coordinated development and maintenance of generally accepted systems of norms and values, forces us to boldly tackle former mistakes and deficiencies.

It was therefore necessary to define several primary strategic goals and long-term decisions concerning development of the Belgrade metropolitan area, within the framework of Europe's development dimensions. These goals are:

- Redefinition and positioning the Belgrade metropolitan area in relation to its European, macro-regional and regional setting, i.e. the position and role/function in the context of Europe and the Balkans;
- Establishment of efficient and sustainable transport infrastructure and corresponding integration in the European transport network (TENs and TINA);
- De-concentrated concentration-restructuring, upgrading and distribution of economic structures to ensure increased economic competitiveness of the metropolitan region;
- Protecting and improving the natural basis, cultural specificity and strengthening the metropolitan region's identity;
- Profiling the Belgrade metropolitan region with specialised economic activities and especially services important for southeastern Europe.

2.1 Redefinition and positioning the metropolitan area of Belgrade in relation to its European, macro-regional and regional setting

The city and its role/function in the context of Europe and the Balkans

National borders are increasingly lesser obstacles and limitations, especially from the aspect of physical planning. Moreover, national monopolies in infrastructure, education,

culture and social societal provision are being increasingly narrowed down to favour public-private arrangements and partnerships, which will undoubtedly also affect the Belgrade metropolitan area. The globalisation process of economic, but also comprehensive social activities that will soon and in significant form enter the Belgrade macro-region, will influence tougher location competitiveness in the region, but will also pull the metropolitan area into tough competition with metropolitan areas in neighbouring countries. We can expect a gradual formation of a so called service-industrial cluster in south-eastern Europe, probably of a lower order than in north-western Europe, with almost indistinct separation of services and industries, which will mutually stimulate each other, especially if a regional network is established. During the last decades Belgrade unfortunately lost much of its importance, influence and economic attractiveness in this part of Europe. Maps of the European Union from 1991 show Belgrade as one of the major links in the chain of the European urban network.^[1] Sure enough, at the time Belgrade was the metropolis of former Yugoslavia, a country of more than 20 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product exceeding 3.000 USD per capita.

Our present starting point is significantly different; the economic, social and cultural basis at our disposal is devastated and the comprehensive image disfigured.

Nevertheless, already in 1993 the German ministry for physical planning, building and urban development, after obviously misguided council and inadequate estimates about the strategic importance of Belgrade in the Balkans, quickly responded to the changed political circumstances and granted Belgrade the status of national urban region with important European functions within the framework of spatial policies in the European context.^[2] This classification however includes many superior positions:

- Global urban regions (London and Paris),
- Possible global urban regions (Moscow),
- International urban regions (Sankt Peterburg, Rome, Vienna, Randstad Holland, and the Rhine-Ruhr cities),
- Possible international urban regions (Budapest, Prague, Brussels),
- European city regions (Lisbon, Barcelona, Marseilles, Lyon, Zurich, Milan, Munich, Hamburg, Manchester and Birmingham, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gdansk, Warsaw, Krakow, Bucharest, Athens),
- Possible European city regions (Stuttgart, Luxembourg, Oslo, Sofia).

In this constellation of European urban regions the Belgrade metropolitan region was granted a rank much lower than Vienna and Budapest, Bucharest and Sofia, and a rank corresponding to Ljubljana, Zagreb, Skopje and Thessalonica.

Undoubtedly this study doesn't bear *a priori* relevance, but is more a reflection of political relations and ambitions of the time. Since Belgrade was so severely degraded in just two years between 1991 and 1993 and marginalised on European maps, we can also expect its repositioning on the European level, bearing in mind the changed political relations, strategic position and true character. Nevertheless even for partial rehabilitation of the Belgrade metropolitan

region's role within the context of south-eastern Europe it is necessary to spatially define its real influential sphere and with radical reforms upgrade those potentials and functions, which bear European and macro-regional significance.

The development of Belgrade cannot occur independently, nor limit itself to the core area of the city. Urbanisation, as the dominant social trend, affects the entire network of cities and settlements in the national and European context and its comprehensive regional dynamics. This means that future development processes will occur within the range and framework of directed long-term and harmonised development of European regions, whereby the Belgrade region has to find its real place, followed by enforcement of strategic development of the city itself and its hinterland.

One of the primary tasks in such accomplishment is the regionalisation of Serbia. The Belgrade metropolitan region could perform and profile itself as a region only by establishment of a cooperative and flexible regional authority with corresponding planning responsibilities, which would on key issues of further development tightly cooperate and negotiate development and protection activities with neighbouring regions. For this purpose it would be advisable to establish a certain common coordinating inter-regional planning body, which could integrate all relevant regional and local actors.

Reforms that have to be undertaken in this regard imply harmonisation of regional and urban policies and planning with corresponding European ones. Success in such enterprise needs establishment of new and direct forms of cooperation, from which common benefits would emerge and whose goal would be minimising conflicts of interest. This means constructive, interest-based partnerships with neighbouring and other cities and urban regions throughout Europe, as well as permanent research of their experiences and best practices in overcoming new and old issues. Therefore, new consultation mechanisms have to be devised concerning European regional and urban development, which will be reflected in definitions of development, legal and technical measures.

Since development of the Belgrade metropolitan region is of primary importance for comprehensive development of Serbia and its rehabilitation in the international framework, implementation of strategic development goals will demand coordinated cooperation on the national and local level, as well as the republic, between political decision makers, economic actors and all other interested non-governmental factors. Thus with synergetic efforts they could devise innovative policies and implementation instruments for fundamental rehabilitation of the city and its hinterland. This can imply a specific contract between the capital city Belgrade, with bodies servicing the federation and republic, whereby special funds from the budget could be purposely directed into achievement of primary development goals. Such arrangement is apparently rather important if we consider the need for quick economic and social changes, increased dynamics and especially the establishment of transport and communication systems, which can meet European standards. Only resolute political will, clearly defined strategic priorities and concrete implementation programmes can help the Belgrade metropolitan region to withstand the many years of marginalisation and promote it as the most relevant and perspective city in south-eastern Europe.

2.2 Establishment of efficient and sustainable transport infrastructure and suitable integration in the European transport network (TEN and TINA)

The harmonised and upgraded transport network is the backbone of development in contemporary Europe. Owing to its beneficial geographical position, Belgrade could in the long run become one of the crossroads nodes (Gate city), which could significantly affect the metropolitan region's economic location quality. Simultaneously networking could benefit many necessary logistics services, thus also the creation of high quality jobs. The key terms in discussing transport potentials of the Belgrade metropolitan region and their optimisation are intermodality/multimodality or upgrading of possibilities of choice between mutually harmonised modes of transport (road, railroad, river transport) and interoperability concerning easier unhindered transport flows between countries in the wider macro-region (harmonised railway systems, common norms and adequate quality of transport offer, simplified and speedy procedures at border crossings etc.). The establishment of a trading union between countries in the Balkans would significantly bring this goal closer. This would demand real definition of spatial-relations, both in the relation to national/inter-city, macro-regional and European, as well as intra-urban space.

Production of a prognosis scenario of these relations, which would be based on real and possible ground for upgrading given structures (road, rail, boats, network of optical cables, cable network etc.), would significantly define the future development of the Belgrade metropolitan area, but has to find its place in the physical and general plan of Belgrade. In such upgrading of the extant, but also in planning and designing the new transport infrastructure, principles of sustainability have to be observed, which means rejection of redundant structures or their functional specialisation (ports Belgrade, Pančevo, Smederevo), promoting rail and river transport of goods and minimising consequences of harmful emissions when resolving bottlenecks.

On a certain general level, the European Council [3] granted south-eastern Europe the function of passage to member states lying further East (Russia, Black Sea countries, Turkey and Greece) and to Asia (middle and far East). This area is therefore becoming a central zone for organisation and cooperation between Europe and Asia, especially when it comes to the energy transfer network. In this context special roles are played by trans-European and pan-European transport networks (TENs and TINA), from which one can understand the European Union's interests concerning our country's linkage with its neighbours. This mainly applies to corridors VII and X, which cross near Belgrade.

Corridor VII or the Danube corridor is specific because it is the only river corridor in Europe, whereby the Danube the main artery in the CADSES space and joins numerous Central European metropolitan areas to Belgrade. In the macro-regional and regional dimension this corridor is very important, especially in the direction of Smederevo, Veliko Gradište and Golubac, all the way to the national park Djerdap. We can hardly state that all the potentials, offered by the Danube, have been utilised, not only concerning intensified river transport and port development, but also in the tourist-recreation and cultural sense. Corridor X, with its two routes (northwards to Budapest and Vienna and westwards to Zagreb, Ljubljana and Trieste), and exchange near Niš, running towards Thessalonica or Sofia, is probably the closest, most

logical and cheapest road thoroughfare between western, northern and central Europe and the middle and far East.

2.3 De-concentrated concentration-restructuring and improvements of economic structure to increase economic competitiveness of the metropolitan region

One of the essential goals of the development strategy for the Belgrade metropolitan area is the proposed successive establishment of network structures, especially functional, information, tele-communication and infrastructure networks, which will ensure better, more direct connections between Belgrade and its hinterland and vice versa. Thus qualitative upgrading of site competitiveness of the entire space would be possible. By establishing and promoting a stronger better-connected and harmonised regional market, also the comprehensive economic power of the Belgrade metropolitan area would increase. Primarily this implies creation of new and strengthening extant copulative effects to ensure an effective system of intertwined production and service chains. The Belgrade metropolitan area with its population potential, which makes it the largest national market, both for consumer goods and a wide palette of service functions, should begin to profit from effects of a large market and have more significant gains even in the supranational context.

Deregulation or pronounced market orientation are in close connection with pending structural changes and will have direct spatial implications, meaning that they will decisively affect spatial-functional relations between the city and its regional hinterland. To ensure that the Belgrade metropolitan region will take the course of concentrated de-concentration, certain functions, and possibly certain institutions, will necessarily have to be transferred to sub-regional and nearby regional centres. This applies to the redefined character of Belgrade's port, which could maintain the role of consumer goods transport, while the positions of the ports in Pančevo and Smederevo should be strengthened. Available potentials in Grocka and Mladenovac directly condition the formation of uniform food industry zones, while Sopot can strategically develop into an important suburban tourism-nature oriented zone.

In the context of strengthening the competitive position, a special role is played by new technological fields, mainly information and communication technologies, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, microelectronics and technologies of new materials; in short, the entire innovative atmosphere. To help Belgrade substitute missed opportunities in its direct international/Balkan surroundings, special programmes and financial arrangements are necessary, which would stimulate centres of higher learning and institutes. These would help in creating a knowledge and innovative basis and stimulate, as well as support restructuring of regional economy, but also increase general attractiveness of the locality. Some of these institutions can be placed adjacent to production zones.

2.4 Preservation and improvement of the metropolitan area's natural qualities, cultural specificity and strengthening identity

The Belgrade metropolitan region is a complex system of ecological, social, economic and cultural needs. Since market mechanisms generally favour interests that are contrary to spatial ecological values, expressed political will is ne-

cessary, but also adequate control mechanisms, whereby eventual contradicting land uses would be negotiated and harmonised and sustainable development ensured.

Modest long-sightedness however could help in predicting that ecologically healthy urban environments with a corresponding political platform could benefit precisely those framework conditions, which would enable concentration of economic biotopes and respective research activities.

The intensive and irrational use of land in the past, but also inadequate maintenance and inefficient protection regimes coupled with poor consciousness and irresponsible actions by users, have confronted the Belgrade metropolitan area with serious degradation of natural spaces and areas. To stop such undesirable development and to favour synthesized goals of the compact city, legal preconditions have to be devised, which would ensure that agents of environmental endangerment would bear the cost of their revitalisation. Generally speaking, the city with its demand for building land and comprehensive dynamic activities most acutely endangers the natural space. It is therefore sensible to follow European practise, follow the course of internalising ecological costs and enable such financial arrangements, which can guarantee adequate funds for clearing and maintenance of natural spaces in the city and its hinterland. Beforehand it is necessary to estimate the present state of the living environment of the Belgrade metropolitan region, while bearing in mind the sum of all damaging effects.

If Belgrade is to exploit its available natural potentials and in a corresponding scale activate all deserted green and open spaces, a myriad of important elements have to be considered. Above all this implies protection and upgrading of the Sava and Danube riverbanks, creation of attractive cycling and pedestrian paths, recreation spaces, parks, playgrounds, protective green zones and public spaces, as well as revitalisation and better connectedness with suburban opportunities for tourism.

In the overview of Belgrade's real potentials that can make it attractive and competitive in the wider European context, an important part will be played by promotion and upgrading of cultural heritage, cultural contents and international cultural manifestations, by which Belgrade could draw attention to itself.

A suitable cultural image of Belgrade will be founded on quality in urban offer – urban, public places, urban recreational places, street scenography and well-kept specific valuable spaces. Belgrade doesn't necessarily have enviable built values when compared to other large European cities, but even what it has isn't properly protected or maintained. Undoubtedly there are potentials for upgrading various and lively spatial ensembles, which would, with responsive citizen participation and financial support granted by interested donors, be included in pilot projects and harmonised with general strategies of urban rehabilitation. Such projects and described approach that would include coordinated selective interventions in public-private arrangements focusing at rehabilitation, will be possible only if institutions functioning as protectors of cultural heritage revise their attitudes and adopt active and flexible protection methods.

On the other hand, the often-problematic aesthetics of hybrid settlement complexes and suburban settlements that define the metropolitan region will demand strategies that

will speed up and favour linkages, additions and interpolation of structures with mixed use. Only in this way can urban spirit and urban culture be generated, while promoting various urban contents, which will in no sense, either design-wise or in functional characteristics of satisfying daily needs, significantly differ from those in central urban areas.

2.5 Profiling the Belgrade metropolitan region by specialised economic activities, especially services

Since Belgrade is entering the European urban race with a considerable delay, the race in which all cities within their regional, national and international settings are fighting for position and influence, it is necessary to examine all feasible possibilities and identify those development niches, which in south-eastern Europe haven't been fully taken. Some battles Belgrade has unfortunately already lost, especially those concerning head offices of larger multi-national firms, corporations and European organisations in this part of Europe. Prague, Warsaw and especially Budapest, which is the largest neighbouring rival, have already profiled themselves in this direction. Thus the Belgrade metropolitan area has to have clear differentiation or hierarchy in development of offer of economic activities, especially service oriented ones. Only goal-driven and well thought out specialisation of given functions, which are important to Europe/the Balkans, can Belgrade develop a European identity.

In the short-term projection, such strategic definition demands resorting to all extant structures and potentials, as well as tying into those functions that Belgrade successfully promoted during the period of its prosperity. Above all this means congresses and fairs, which could bring impetus for transfer of technology and innovative production programmes, as well as economic alliances in this part of Europe.

Belgrade is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and fertile cultural environments in the Balkans, which in the domains of its cultural and creative expression significantly enriches Europe's cultural diversity. Investments in culture and upgrading of high quality cultural offer has to be both a short- and long-term strategic goal that will help the Belgrade metropolitan region in properly articulating itself in the urban network of south-eastern Europe. The global media representation of Belgrade has in a decade managed to create a specific, in many ways perverted, image of the city. Nevertheless, the fact stands that Belgrade catches the interest of Europeans and is also already offered as a destination in European urban tourism. In view of its potentials, but also very specific informal dynamics of this city, it is essential to invest in the enrichment of tourist offer, both in the centre and suburban natural and geographic entities, thus upgrading the comprehensive attractiveness of the Belgrade metropolitan region.

3. Selection of real operative proposals for increasing competitiveness of the Belgrade metropolitan region

Quality of local administration and governance mechanisms are gaining in importance in regional competition. Thus, the quality of public administration has to be radically improved. This means increasing efficiency of administrative procedu-

res and upgrading the service character of the public sector. Simultaneously procedures for goal-oriented and active public participation including all interest groups have to be devised, both in the planning process and planning implementation. If a bond between planners, citizens, politicians and the economy is not achieved, success in the upgrading of the weakest link in recent planning: the implementation of planning proposals, will not be possible.

In the long run, sustainable development in the Belgrade metropolitan area will depend on harmonizing, compromise and a conscious attitude, not only among planning professionals, but also amongst all the actors in general social activities, as well as individual behaviour that should be based on new values and norms. Only in such a framework the often repeated motto can and should be described: think globally – work locally.

To ensure adequate coordination and treatment of various demands concerning planning business investments, Belgrade should, similarly to some other European cities (e.g. Vienna), publish a so called »marketable business site package«, meaning a package of business locations containing a comprehensive list of attractive development sites for various purposes and covering the entire metropolitan area. This package of sites would have to provide an estimate for each particular site, based on uniformly set criteria. A quality site estimate would have to contain information about accessibility, possible phases of construction, available infrastructure and review/estimate of investment effects in relation to urban economics. Parallel to this enterprise a suitable tool box for controlling sites with business developments, should be created.

Finally, if we hypothesise that there is general consensus about strategic goals, which relate to increased competitiveness of the Belgrade metropolitan region and clear profiling of its urban identity, we have to consider a series of deliberate actions, which would support an activity widely practiced in most European and global metropolis, namely, »city marketing«.

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Notes

- [1] Spatial Perspectives in Europe, National Spatial Agency-RPD, p. 144.
- [2] Spatial Perspectives in Europe, City Regions of European Importance, p. 28.
- [3] Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent (CEMAT, Sept. 1999.).

Illustrations:

Figure 1: *The European urban network according to RPD from 1991*

Figure 2: *City regions with European significance*

Figure 3: *Formation of a network of cities in the Danube basin and countries in the Western Balkans*

For sources and literature turn to page 24.