



THE CONUNDRUM OF A STATE SPATIAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: THE SPATIAL PLAN OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA (2010)

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Abstract

Political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, initiated with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), had immediate and strong impact in Serbia. However, economic and political reforms of post-socialist transition in Serbia, followed with the dissolution of Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1990s, have been going through a number of “ups and downs”. One of the causes lies in the fact that majority of those reforms have been imposed on the society at large by the political and economic elites, almost without any broader public dialogue undertaken about the main directions, content and implementation means of such reforms. The current socio-economic situation of Serbia is poor, mainly taking the form of a “growth without development”. While facing a number of difficulties, Serbia also fails in institutional and organizational adjustments, to cope with the predictable bleak future development prospects.

The former *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* from 1996 defined a very complex set of implementation measures and support, which was stipulated for further elaboration, via a particular implementation programme. However, this programme has never been worked out. For the newly adopted *Spatial Plan (2010)*, the *Programme for implementation in the period 2011-2015* has already been adopted, but there are still many obstacles in the current system and practice of spatial and environmental planning, which represent a mixture of old habits and substandard approaches, with only some adjustments to current EU legislation and good practice introduced. Therefore, the main worries remain – will it be possible, and how, to reverse the existing institutional and organizational solutions and practices, in order to implement at least the majority of strategic aims from this leading strategic document, on the one hand, and thereby to support the renewal of strategic research, thinking and governance in Serbia, on the other.

Key words: national spatial plan of Serbia, implementation, post-socialist transition, collapse of strategic thinking, research and governance

1. Introductory notes on post-socialist transition in Serbia

The collapse of communist/socialistic system in Central and Eastern European countries has induced different reactions from their political and economic elites. Success of the ways those governments and experts tried to solve these new challenges are still much reflected in today’s economic and geo-political position of their countries and wellbeing of their nations.

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For its specific socialistic/communist (self-governing socialism) and political heritage (a part of both the East and the West), Serbia holds the distinct position regarding the process of socio-political and economic transition. Since the 1950s, the Yugoslav version of a Bolshevik ideological paradigm, i.e. “self-managed socialism” has been developed as quasi-market and quasi-liberal, but at the same time it was also quite opened to the economic, political and cultural influences from the “West”, the so called “Third world nations” and the “Socialist block” (Vujošević et.al., 2010). This period was characterised by an enormous economic and overall development, but already experienced a crisis in the middle of 1970s and finally collapsed in the early 1990s after the fall of the Berlin wall.

The unstable political situation (civil wars for Yugoslav secession started in 1991) and deep economic crisis directed Serbia towards rather bleak development prospects. Therefore, the initial phase of transition period (1991-2000) or the so called “blocked transformation” (Lazić and Vuletić, 2009) has been devastating for Serbia. For the period of more than ten years the country was isolated from the mainstream trends of European integration and convergence.

Serbia’s comparative advantages and competitiveness have worsened in two key aspects: firstly, in terms of its structural qualities, and secondly, in terms of its territorial capital, whereby Serbia’s “endogenous capital” and competitiveness lost a large part of their previous value and potential. Especially has worsened the so-called “soft territorial capital”, together with the weakening capacity for strategic research, thinking and governance. (Vujošević et. al., 2012, and Vujošević et. al., 2010).

After the political changes in October 2000, substantial economic, material institutional and organizational progress has been accomplished in the subsequent period. Though, that wasn’t enough to satisfy the expectations of the overwhelming majority of the population. The economic recovery from 2000 onwards, while fairly dynamic (by the average annual GDP growth of almost 5%) has still been insufficient and more or less assumed the form of a “growth without development”, as well as a long unsustainable development. Although transition reforms in Serbia have progressed, their political legitimacy is rather poor, since veritable societal dialogue has not been established so far, nor has societal consensus been reached on the most important issues. The country is still among the least developed ones in Europe (a part of the “inner peripheries of Europe”, Göler, 2005) and faces a vast number of very complex developmental problems and also many challenges. Its development prospects, at least over a mid-term period, are not bright. The global and national economic crisis, as from 2008 onwards, has only worsened the existing conditions and future prospects.

In the sequel of this paper a short account of the different institutional, economic, social and environmental changes and adjustments is given. This is followed by a brief overview of planning and governance system and practice. The comparison of the latest (2010) and previous (1996) Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia and their implementation measures and support will also be presented. Finally, some conclusions regarding possible development prospects of Serbia, and renewal of strategic research, thinking and governance in Serbia are given.

2. Collapse of planning system and practice

Although more than two decades have passed since the process of transition from socialism to capitalism started in CEE countries, Serbia is still in a phase of post-socialist “proto-democracy”, where institutions of market economy, civil society and representative

democracy are only basically developed. While the “good” parts of the Yugoslav self-management system have been abandoned and almost forgotten, its bad parts, e.g., paternalism, manipulation, clientilism, etc. are still being kept.

Serbia has now found itself in a deep crisis, which is even more emphasized by the ongoing world economic crisis. The current economic development of Serbia is poor, mainly taking the form of a “growth without development”. The new dilemma that emerged in front of Serbian elites reads: “What would be a successful development path for the Serbian society today?” As only recently (in March 2012) it finally received a status of candidate member of European Union, Serbia has been trying for so long to “Europeanise outside the EU”, which has put forth additional challenges to its development. Today, after many years of reforms, with some ups and downs, a lot of people in Serbia are the objective losers due to an application of contemporary models. The main economic consequence of this period is a stunning redistribution of a social wealth, followed by a total destruction of the former economic system and formation of new interest-groups in this isolated semi-martial economy. Since 2000 there have been attempts to improve that new and unjust economic distribution by measures like a tax on extra profit, but they mainly remained unsuccessful due to absence of other measures of political transition, like reform of the security sector, reform of the tribunal and prosecution, restitution and denationalisation, etc.

From the beginning of the post-socialist transition, one of the most radical changes in Serbia was attempt to create a new balance in the state (power) – market – planning – privatization quadrangle. This “search for a new balance” has a great influence on development planning and governance system and practice. However, there has been a retrogression of strategic thinking, research and governance in last two decades or so. Planning system, and particularly planning practice have not been developed in accord with the “asymptotic ideal” of a democratic, participative and emancipatory-modernising model, but rather manipulation, clientelism and paternalism dominated in practice. After many years when an eminently anti-planning and anti-developing attitude dominated among the elites, a large number of development documents (strategies, plans, etc.) have been adopted in recent years at various governance levels (state/national, regional, and local), totalling many hundreds of the kind.

In terms of institutional and organizational arrangements in planning, in parallel two tendencies took the place: on the one hand, a number of old “institutional zombies” have been kept; on the other, “management agencies” and similar organizations have been introduced at large. The latter proved of almost no use to cope with the key development problems and challenges Serbia has been facing for a longer period now. In sum, the legitimacy of planning is relatively low, while planning practice represents a mixture of elements from different “models”: planning as crisis management; planning as a mechanism for support of “uncontrolled privatisation and wild marketisation” (with domination of big projects instead of strategic development programmes); and, the least practised but mostly needed, planning where institutional framework is accommodated to the needed social, economic, cultural and environmental transformation of Serbian society (see Vujošević et. al., 2010).

3. Old and new Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia

In the last 20 years there have been two attempts to redirect the existing, undesirable direction of development from the spatial and environmental perspective, and provide a common strategic framework for the coordination and integration of different and multi-levelled

development policies, viz., *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* from 1996, and *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2020* adopted in 2010.

When *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* was adopted in 1996, Serbia (at that time part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) was first among the post-socialist countries that have had a newly prepared and adopted national spatial plan. The *Plan* consisted of a large number of basic reference points, strategic commitments and general goals (English version, 1997:9-12), viz.:

- A higher degree of functional integration of Serbia's territory;
- Better communication and economic links between Serbia and its neighbouring and other European countries;
- More balanced regional development (decreasing regional disproportions);
- Improvement of life quality in macro and regional centres;
- Effective introduction of the principle of polycentric development;
- Developing rural areas as multifunctional production, social and cultural entities;
- Priority development of insufficiently developed border and mountain areas;
- Introduction of rigorous location, technical, techno-economic and environmental criteria in investment and decision-making procedures;
- Careful management, rational use and protection of natural resources, and protection of natural and cultural heritage;
- Priority protection for best-preserved and most valuable ecological areas, and those with best prospects for sustainable development;
- Providing the timely reservation of space in the corridors of technical infrastructure;
- Combating illegal construction and un-planned space utilisation; etc.

The intention was to produce a strategic document to be “more than a plan”, i.e., to instigate a number of legislative, normative, institutional, organisational and other changes in the planning system and practice. The *Plan* encompassed a very elaborate system of implementation measures and support. Those measures were stipulated to be elaborated in detail in the particular implementation programme, which, however, had never been made. It has turned out that one of the main problems lied in its implementation and coordination, or, as Anker (1998) had noticed: “there is a need for further coordination of the proposed concepts over the medium term with other policies and development measures”.

No systematic monitoring or *ex post* evaluation of the implementation of the *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia* (1996) has ever been carried out, but it could safely be concluded that the majority of its provisions have never been carried out. Apart from a number of some mostly exogenous factors (viz., international sanctions and isolation of the country, slow pace of transition reforms, NATO bombardment in 1999, etc.), a lack of effective political will played key role for its poor implementation. Only the preparation of spatial plans at lower planning levels was more successful, as well as an indirect implementation of some of its propositions via spatial and urban plans at sub-national planning levels. In sum, the realisation of a few elements of the *Plan* turned out to be erratic and accidental, more as an outcome of non-coordinated activities of some individual actors, than resulting from the organised and systematic efforts of key institutional actors (Vujošević, 2010).

Similarly, the new *Plan* (2010) has replicated the ambitions, approach and structure of the former *Plan* (1996). As its precursor, it has also demonstrated an ambition to be “more than a mere spatial plan” at the national level, apropos, it has introduced a number of measures and

instruments targeted at broader reform of systems, approaches and practices in the sphere of sustainable spatial planning and governance. Alike to the previous *Plan*, this new *Plan* also defined many different propositions (as a part of different categories), which will probably prove unmanageable due to the poorly developed planning culture and capacity, as it has happened with the strategic document from 1996. Even more than the former *Plan*, the new *Plan* insists on adequate implementation of key sustainable spatial development propositions, also by realising the Programme of implementation (2011) which has been elaborated and adopted one year after the *Plan* itself. Some other differences between these two strategic documents include:

- The new *Plan* devoted more space to novel categories from the European planning discourse (e.g. “territorial cohesion”, “social inclusion”, “territorial capital”, “urban-rural cooperation”, etc.);
- Not having been daunted by the existing poor development conditions, the authors of the new *Plan* envisaged the “long term vision of spatial development of Serbia” imbued with further “boosterism” like: “In the future Serbia should be territorially defined and regionally well balanced, competitive, socially coherent and stable with sustainable economic growth, proper infrastructure and good transport accessibility, preservation and protection of natural and cultural heritage, enhanced environment and functionally integrated with neighbouring countries and regions”. (*Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2014-2020*, Abridged version, 2010: 9);
- The new document has paid, at least nominally, more attention to spatial development scenarios. Two basic scenarios have been defined – “scenario of recessive growth with the elements of crisis management” (“predictably not to last more than 3-4 years”), and “scenario of sustainable spatial development”, to emulate the above defined vision and subsumed key strategic goals in the sectors comprised by the *Plan* (*Zakon o Prostornom planu Republike Srbije od 2010. do 2020. godine*, 2010:31-35);³
- For the monitoring and *ex post* evaluation of the key strategic propositions of the *Plan* an elaborate list of indicators has been defined and further elaborated in detail in the *Programme of Implementation of the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia from 2010 till 2020* (2011);
- The broader contextual factors that influence the implementation of the new *Plan* (2010) are in many respects different as compared to those pertaining to the implementation of the former *Plan* (1996). Regarding the effective manoeuvring space of the planning authorities at various governance levels, this has even narrowed in three key aspects: misbalances are worse, the macroeconomic situation is worse, and the foreign debt has reached a multi-ten billion of €, altogether crippling the effective capacity to introduce more redistributive policies, which are however an imperative vis-à-vis ever enlarging territorial misbalances and social differentiation and polarization; and

³ Within the latter, a number of reform steps have been stipulated with regard to the following “frameworks”: legal and institutional; market, economic and development; macroeconomic; demographic; social; ecological; and spatial-urban. This scenario contemplates four specific sub-scenarios (“variants”), viz.: “negative economic growth and disintegrated spatial system” (1); “negative economic growth and integrated and partially regulated spatial system” (2); “positive economic growth and disintegrated and partially regulated spatial system” (3); and “positive economic growth and integrated spatial system” (4), all under different assumptions regarding the pace of intensity of the integration of Serbia into the European Union.

- The utmost limit to the *Plan's* implementation is stemming from a predominant compartmentalization of development policies in Serbia. The work of ministries is extremely competing and uncoordinated, as being mostly managed under the auspices of political parties as their “feuds”, under the circumstances of prevailing “partitocracy”, as the current state of political governance of Serbia is depicted by the majority of most authoritative commentators. Under such circumstances, it can be hardly expected that new *Plan* will act as strategic framework for integrating specific (sector) approaches and concepts, i.e., combining both spatio-ecological (environmental) proper, and broader economic and development concerns; etc.

4. Concluding remarks

Paralleling the collapse of strategic thinking, research and governance, lasting now for more than 20 years, there has been a lack of effective and implementable strategies in Serbia for resolution of its key developmental problems, and some necessary strategies are still missing as well. Despite the fact that in recent seven or eight years several hundred strategic development documents have been adopted (at various governance levels), an overall “exit strategy” is missing to cope with the prolonged crisis, for which reason some commentators have been pointing to a “developmental schizophrenia” (Vujošević, 2010). This also applies to the *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2014-2020*, which was adopted in 2010. Within the overall strategic framework, this document contains a number of various sector conceptions. The enclosed implementation means, however, have not been formulated so that they could effectively support the implementation of the respective sector concepts, vis-à-vis disposable financial and other resources. Similarly, existing institutional and organizational arrangements, which have recently been introduced, do not properly reflect the differences between various regional areas, especially vis-à-vis the concentration of activities and population in the metropolitan area of Belgrade and Novi Sad (“Serbian spatial banana”), and concomitant lagging behind of majority of other regions of Serbia. This could be improved via the *Plan's* implementation programme, which ought to be coordinated with other strategic frameworks, both overall and sector-wise. They should altogether focus on the key developmental problems of Serbia, always keeping in mind that the disposable resources are scarce vis-à-vis the predictably prolonged economic crisis (1) and, also predictable, “long and difficult Europeanization of Serbia outside the European Union and with its limited financial and other support” (2). Within the overall strategic framework, this document contains a number of various sector conceptions, also comprising those of balanced regional demographic development. However, for the effective implementation of overall and sector development concept, now a clear political will to define implementation means and mechanisms will have to be demonstrated. Particularly, new institutional and organisational arrangements are needed for the strategic governance in the Belgrade and Novi Sad metropolitan area. In addition to this, a new approach is also needed with regard to the utilization of territorial capital of Serbia, this being a relatively new thematic issue in European spatial planning, also addressed in Serbia only as from very recently. The *Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2014-2020* represented a first attempt of the kind, i.e., to address this theme in a strategic document at the state (national) level, paralleling few regional plans also comprising this issue in a more significant way. Apart from dealing with the geographical and traffic position of Serbia, some other aspects of overall territorial capital of Serbia have also been taken into account. However, the approach and defined concept have been applied rather rudimentary and insufficiently, especially vis-à-vis implementation of the

Plan and concomitant institutional and organisational support, either at the state (national) or at the regional governance levels.

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