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Urban Planning System in Albania, need for Strategic Approaches

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Professionals and authorities realize that there is need for a change in order to cope with the urban life problems that have emerged. The first block attempt basically to answer to the question “Why strategic planning was not used in Albania before?”, while in the second block a description of the situation after 1990, is done. In the summary of both periods, the attempt is to come with some relevant findings on “What are the main weak points of the planning system, and what does not work?”, while “Why strategic planning is needed in the actual planning system?” ... This is understandable as far the overall aim of the authors is in fact is to generate the discussion “whether we need or not to introduce new approaches in our planning system” and the paper helps them in giving some systematic arguments in regards. The central regions within the triangle Durrësi-Tirana-Fush Kruja, at that time resulted with the lions share of social-economic potentials of the country, becoming in this way very attractive for the population of rural areas and small provincial towns with increasing needs for infrastructure and services. The plans are physical development based reflecting the ‘allocative’ approach, which means that plans are expected only to allocate space and infrastructure for a number of population already strictly defined. As far as the land and building ownership issues are concerned, should be emphasized that until 1990 there has taken place several changes, which has had obviously implications in the urban planning system in Albania. The sector of infrastructure provision as all other sectors was strictly under the state control, which means that the state was responsible for the provision of all kind of infrastructure (and no other sector was neither in place, nor allowed) in the entire chain; projection, investment, supplying and maintenance. Despite this fact should be emphasized that structure of entities providing infrastructure was very centralized, which means that the budget was designed centrally, while local structures were in charge to only execute, which means that the level of decision making was minimal. Due to the fact that (i) only one sector was providing the entire infrastructure, (ii) everything was centralized, and (iii) Albania was promoted as a country where the citizens do not pay taxes, one can easily realized that efficiency, effectiveness and marketing needs were not in the basis of the system. After 1990, in the Albanian urban reality it is very easy to realize that while private investors are interested to use (not necessary to develop) each square meter of the plot, while the public, citizens and community require more living space for a human dimension city, green areas, playgrounds etc. It is also very easy to realize that in the last tend years also a phenomenon of switching from a “state responsible for everything” situation, into a “non responsible” (or sometimes irresponsible) state

has taken place. One of the most relevant problems identified in the urban planning system is the fact that our system does miss the “strategic” element, behavior and way of thinking in designing the urban function and making the appropriate decisions to influence the livability of the urban areas. Indeed, there is no tradition in formulating flexible strategies to deal with a diverse environment and furthermore there is no yet professional debate about the problems that the system encounters and possible solutions. Also in the last ten years, other problems emerged as part of the new reality of our country related also to the political and social dynamics that faced the Albanian society. Obviously, in order to expect urban planning system to cope with the\ problematique of the new urban reality of Albania it is believed that should start a process of reforming the entire system aiming the integration of the strategic concepts in the process of planning. In this respect together with the private sector, local governments are expected to address the need for new approaches to the planning entities and to the central government. The switch from a situation where ‘state does everything’ into an environment where the government is expected ‘to enable development’ should be accompanied with strategic way of thinking, flexible plans that leave room for a say from different actors and factors and do not provide ‘blue print’ solutions. One of the main questions that should be addressed is related to the way to introduce a new element, way of thinking and approach in the urban planning system. Indeed “strategic planning” deal with three dimensions; it is an element in terms of legal framework and institutions, it deals with the methodology when considered an approach and, last but not least, deals with the mentality of the professionals when considered way of thinking. Therefore, there would be needed to start a process of professional debate on the reforming the entire system (partial solution would not work) aiming at the integration of the strategic planning approach in our spatial planning methodology.

Key words: Urban Planning, Governance, Housing, Land, Infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

The urban planning system in Albania faces important challenges in the new urban reality of the last ten years. Professionals and authorities realize that there is need for a change in order to cope with the urban life problems that have emerged. Strategic Urban Planning involves new concepts, methodologies and approaches for the Albanian urban planners. We believe that the time has arrived to introduce new ways of thinking in our professional environment. A wide, serious and participatory discussion process should start in order to make a change in the urban governance of our cities.

This paper, we hope, gives a modest contribution in the process. Objective of the paper

The objectives of the paper are

- to analyze the performance of several sectors that influence and are influenced by the urban planning sector, in two different economic and political systems.
- to compare the Albanian urban planning system with other foreign experiences, aiming to identify also the difficulties that the Albanian system is facing in the last ten years
- to recommend different steps to be taken for the improvement of the urban planning system in Albania

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Basically, the paper address three main questions

- What is strategic planning
- Why strategic planning is needed in the urban planning system of Albania
- How could and should be introduced this element in the Albanian system

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper is based on a simple methodology of comparison between different periods of time and different experiences, trying to carry out some findings relevant for the objective of the paper. Focusing in the topic of strategic planning, the paper initially attempt modestly to introduce to the reader different definitions of the strategic planning given from several planners. Basically this part deal with the question "What is strategic planning?" Also a broad introduction to the main concepts and methods of strategic planning is done for a support for arguing the need for such approach. The reader can get in contact with such definitions and concepts sine the Introduction chapter of the paper. The analysis of the system in Albania is done in two blocks of periods; before and after 1990, year of the political and economical changes in Albania. This analysis goes through several sectors that interact with the way of planning. The first block attempt basically to answer to the question "Why strategic planning was not used in Albania before?", while in the second block a description of the situation after 1990, is done.

It is relevant for the paper the experience of other countries that have introduce strategic planning before as far as helps to understand "Why other countries have introduce strategic planning, and does it work?" In the summary of both periods, the attempt is to come with some relevant findings on "What are the main weak points of the planning system, and what does not work?", while "Why strategic planning is needed in the actual planning system?" has been the main question we have addressed to ourselves. The paper attempts more to address relevant question rather than speeding for some blue print answers. This is understandable as far the overall aim of the author is in fact is to generate the discussion "whether we need or not to introduce new approaches in our planning system" and the paper helps them in giving some systematic arguments in regards. Some steps on generating the discussion and taking the initiative of revising the Albanian planning system are foreseen attempting to shape "How the strategic planning could and should be introduced?"

Definitions

In order to facilitate the reading of this paper we should create a common understanding on the few terms used. As realized since in the title, the paper deals with the system of urban planning. Than one might naturally ask what do we mean by a "system". 'A "system" is "the patterning of social relations across time and space, understood as reproduced practices' (Motte 1997: 231) is the definition given by Giddens and cited by Alain Motte in the paper The institutional relations of plan-making. There is, however a dilemma on what should be considered a system; the legal framework? the methodology of designing plans? the mentality? In the concept of the author of this paper the system of the urban planning in Albania is

considered to be the set of rules, regulations and approaches as well as the process of defining the framework needed to shape the future patterns of the environment. Life is made of systems. Urban life has its own system. Systems produce planning also. Naturally it is needed to share our understanding on the "strategic planning" concept.

'The term "strategy" -as Heinz Wehrich, from University of San Francisco, describes in his paper in Dyson's book 'Strategic Planning-models and analytical techniques- derives from the 'Greek word 'strategos' that means 'general', and some writers refer to this word emphasizing the ending aspect of it expressed as purpose, mission, goal or objective.' (Dyson 1990: 18) Strategic Planning has been seen in several ways. However, the common element of these definitions is the fact that strategic planning is seen as a process.

'Strategic Planning process is a management process involving consultation, negotiation, and analysis which aimed at ensuring effective strategic decision making. Decisions in an organization can range on a spectrum from operational and tactical through strategic.' (Dyson 1990: 3)

'A key part of the strategic planning process is to ensure the generation and formulation of strategic options, and because a strategic option when implemented will have enduring and be difficult to reverse, the planning process must be concerned with evaluating options before action is taken and be concerned with the future impact of the proposed decisions.' (Dyson 1990: 3)

'Conceptually strategic planning is deceptively simple: analyze the current and expected future situation, determine the decision of the firm and develop means for achieving the mission. In reality, this is an extremely complex process which demands a systematic approach for identifying and analyzing factors external to the organization and matching them with the firm's capabilities.' (Dyson 1990: 17)

Strategic Planning has been introduced initially in the private sector, and can be used as an approach from different sectors, different fields but for, approximately, similar purposes. Therefore, strategic planning has been introduced during the '80 also in the urban planning system. Herewith, there is a different description of the strategic planning in the urban spatial context.

'Spatial planning is about setting frameworks and principles to guide the location of development and physical infrastructure. It consists of a set of governance practices for developing and implementing strategies, plans, policies and projects, and for regulating the location, timing and form of development.'

'We understand this (the strategic plan making)¹ as a social process through which a range of people in diverse institutional relations and positions come together to design plan-making processes and develop contents and strategies for the management of spatial change. This process generates not merely formal outputs in terms of policy and project

1 The note within brackets it is not a genuine part of the original article but it is from the authors of the paper

proposals, but a decision framework that may influence relevant parties in their future investment and regulatory activities.' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 4)

Steiner Affirm

'Strategic planning is a process. It is a process that begins with the setting of organizational aims, defines strategies and policies to achieve them, and develops detailed plans to make sure that the strategies are implemented so as to achieve the ends sought.' (Steiner 1979: 14)

However, Strategic Planning has been seen not only as a process, but also as a structure or a philosophy, attitude:

'Strategic planning is an attitude, a way of life' (Steiner 1979: 14)

'Strategic planning is the systematic and more or less formalized effort of a company to establish basic company purposes, objectives, policies, and strategies and to develop detailed plans to implement policies and strategies to achieve objectives and basic company purposes' (Steiner 1979: 15)

But, in order to address strategic planning importance, one should also look at what strategic planning is not:

'Strategic planning does not attempt to make future decisions. Decision can be made only in the present.' (Steiner 1979: 15)
 'Strategic planning is not an attempt to blue print the future.' (Steiner 1979: 16)

On the other side

Spatial planning practices are not just a contingent response to wider forces. They are active forces in these changes. Investment decisions, principles for regulating land-use change, and ideas about spatial organization generate constraints and opportunities. These help to shape urban region dynamics. The objective of many of the spatial planning.....is deliberately to "frame" the dynamics of urban region change by shaping the decisions of all the many agents whose activities constitute and carry these dynamics. (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 4)

Where does the Strategic Planning differs from the Statuary planning approach?

Comparison Strategic with Master plan characteristics

Strategic Plan	Master Plan
Integral plan with some territoriazable objectives.	Ordering of urban space
Accords priority to projects but does not necessarily locate them in space	Determines land uses as a whole and locates with precision the general systems and broad public works
Based on consensus and participation in all phases	Design is responsibility of government, with 'a posteriori' participation
Utilization of qualitative analyses and critical factors	Utilization of territorial and physical-medium studies
Plan of commitment and agreements between agents for immediate or short term action	Regulatory plan to regulate potential future private action
An action plan	A plan to regulate action

(Borja, Castells 1997: 156)

Social Economic Background

By the end of '80s Albania was also influenced by "the wind of changes" that cooled Eastern Europe. Political and economic transition in the country started disorderly and actually is still undergoing through tremendous shocks and social unrest. The collapse of the former regime brought in surface many problems that were accumulated during several decades. Dramatic changes during last years have been keenly recognized by the western world, but they have also created new problems. Such mixture of backwardness of the past, as well as the new "problematique" of nowadays, has promoted a kind "wild-west" situation that is still alive to the rest of world, through the image of Albanians leaving country by boats, and dramatic scenes of March 1997 when country went at the brink of civil war.

The urbanization rate of Albania has historically been at the lowest European rate. In 1990, only 35% of the Albanian population was living in urban areas, mainly concentrated in the western districts. This percentage was far lower than the European rates, and even lower than the average of developing countries (37%). The central regions within the triangle Durrësi-Tirana-Fush Kruja, at that time resulted with the lions share of social-economic potentials of the country, becoming in this way very attractive for the population of rural areas and small provincial towns with increasing needs for infrastructure and services. The political and economic changes of early '90s brought in scene new conditions: (i) changes on the form of ownership over land (ii) diversification of the sectors of the economy (iii) and free movement of population. Since 1991, the population of Tirana -Fush Kruja region has grown at an alarming average rate of 7% per annum (2% natural growth and 5% migration growth). Every year, at least 200 new hectares are built mainly without the necessary permissions.

Situation before 1990

In order to understand properly the transitional period of Albania, we should go a little bit back in time, looking how different sectors function in the socialist regime.

Governance system

The main feature of the governing socialist system is the centrally based of all economical political and social sectors. Decision making process was a "top-down" process. Furthermore, the local levels were executable entities, rather than decision-making ones. Therefore, according to the system, local authorities were appointed by the central ones, and not elected, which means that they were not expected to reflect the local needs, but instead, to transmit and guaranty the decision made centrally were implemented locally.

Urban planning system

Before 1990, the urban planning system in Albania reflected the commanded planning concepts of the existing political and economical system. The plans are physical development based reflecting the 'allocative' approach, which means that plans are expected only to allocate space and infrastructure for a number of population already strictly defined.

The government after decided how many residents will be allocated and where will they employed, ask very technical plans to accommodate physical needs of the citizens. There are no social and economical relevant factors to take in consideration in these plans. Therefore one can not talk about different sectors participation in designing plans.

Land and building Ownership

As far as the land and building ownership issues are concerned, should be emphasized that until 1990 there has taken place several changes, which has had obviously implications in the urban planning system in Albania.

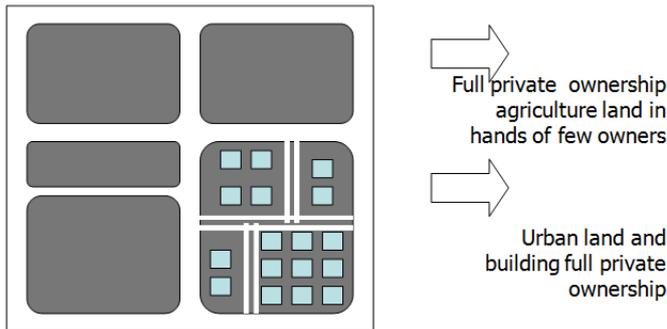


Illustration of the situation prior to 1945

In the first years after the World War II, although a socialist system was introduced, the land and building ownership still continued to be private. Therefore a land market was in place and functioning. In 1946 an Agricultural reform took place. Consequently, the agricultural land was distributed after confiscated from the previous owners. However, a virtual private ownership status over the agricultural land was kept. What is interesting is that because the “new owners” could not buy and sell the piece of the land they benefited, there was not anymore a market for agricultural land. Weaker effects are shown in this period on the urban land. However the government had the right to nationalize urban land also, for ‘public’/’state’ needs/purposes, without compensation. Only the building was compensated in case of nationalization.

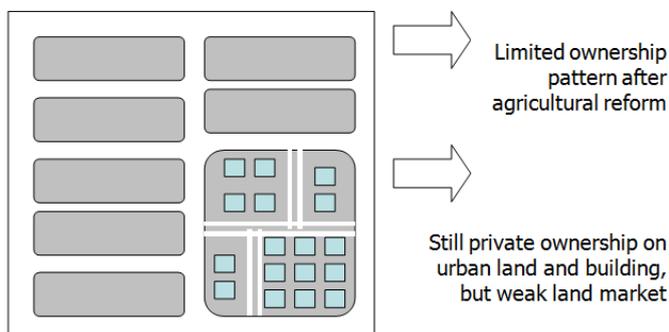


Illustration of nationalization of land 1975

Later during 1957-1967 till the '90 the agricultural land was totally nationalized, therefore there was existing no market at all on the agricultural land. Officially, the situation on the urban land was remaining the same, but one should take in consideration that in meanwhile the government had nationalized a part of the urban land also, building apartments block providing rental housing for residents. There were

existing no mechanisms to have a land market in place. The process of ‘collectivism’ aimed in creating a society based in public properties resulted based in ‘nobody property’, therefore the land lost the value, and typically enough for socialist countries, there was abundant land available.

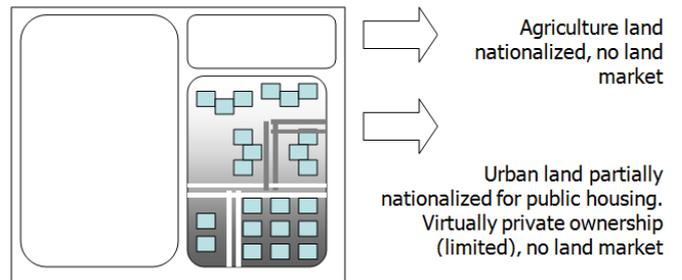


Illustration of the Agrarian Reform 1945

Housing

Until 1990 the government was the only sector that provided housing. This sector was strictly centralized in the entire chain from policy making till implementation and monitoring. The system was based in the 5 years plans of the central government, which had the authority to decide the population flow/migration than the need for housing and in the end construction, maintenance and distribution of the apartments. The central government was deciding sometimes to build ‘out of the blue’ completely new cities in the attempt to have the working force nearer to the raw materials centers. For some years one of the way of providing housing was the voluntary build apartments’, which means that in a very collective way people were offering their extra time for free labor, reducing in this way the costs of the buildings. However, the process was in all steps led from the governmental sector. It is understandable that, because the social economy was in a constant decline, the quality of the housing was poor. Usually the apartment buildings are until six floors. Planning standards designated 4-6 square meters to each resident, while the Eastern Europe planned standard was 19 square meters per resident. Only in rural areas housing relied to the individual way of provision, which in essence was private way of securing shelter. However, in general should be emphasized that there was existing almost no market in housing, while the state strategy was to supply housing through physical housing supply.

Infrastructure

The sector of infrastructure provision as all other sectors was strictly under the state control, which means that the state was responsible for the provision of all kind of infrastructure (and no other sector was neither in place, nor allowed) in the entire chain; projection, investment, supplying and maintenance. Despite this fact should be emphasized that structure of entities providing infrastructure was very centralized, which means that the budget was designed centrally, while local structures were in charge to only execute, which means that the level of decision making was minimal. Another interesting fact in this respect was that the system was based in user fees. Albania was promoted as a country without taxes and virtually the infrastructure was subsidized. Amongst other effect, this system influenced pretty much the mentality of ‘state is

responsible for everything'. In the same way of supplying, the demand was also strictly controlled. Albania had historically a very modest network of infrastructure. Due to the fact that (i) only one sector was providing the entire infrastructure, (ii) everything was centralized, and (iii) Albania was promoted as a country where the citizens do not pay taxes, one can easily realize that efficiency, effectiveness and marketing needs were not in the basis of the system. Therefore no strategy was needed to develop in order to meet certain objectives.

Economy and employment

Until 1990 the state was responsible and the only available sector to provide employment as far as was the only sector in place investing in the economy. Albania was promoted as the fewest country with almost no unemployment. This was because of the fact that the employment offered from the state was compulsory, which means there was existing no market of employment, no choice for employment. This makes easy the control over the unemployment. What is interesting in relation to the planning system is that the urban development plans were not expected to develop strategies to provide employment and to attract investments, but instead, only reflected the infrastructure and housing needs of residents.

Situation after 1990

Economy and employment

The situation changed quite rapidly after the economical and political changes of 1990. One of the most important changes in the economical aspect was the introducing of the free market and, as part of it, of the private sector. The state could no longer guarantee employment for citizens, therefore relied to the private sector as well as on the self-employment. The government is continuously withdrawing from investing in economical sectors where the private sector is involved. Furthermore, the strategy of the government is moving constantly towards privatization of different sectors, but strategic ones. Therefore, the government is not directly involved in providing employment, but it is expected that through secondary means to stimulate economic development and to reduce (by no means of force) the unemployment. This new pattern of the system direct new questions toward urban development plans. In difference to the situation before 1990, the urban development plans are expected to offer ways to stimulate economic development and to attract investments.

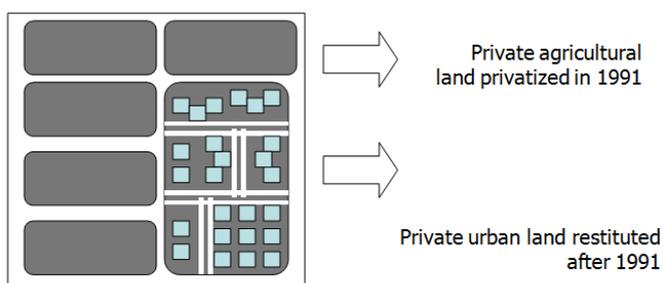


Illustration of privatization 1991

Land and building Ownership

The major events, as far as land and buildings ownership patterns are concerned, can be summarized in the process of

privatization. In 1991, the agricultural land was privatized. Actually, that was an agricultural reform that, however, changed the patterns of the ownership of the agriculture land. In the cities, the situation was a little bit different. The property system went mainly through the process of restitution resulting, however, in the same patterns in terms of ownership. As a result the major part of the immovable property is nowadays private. Due to the urbanization process, the dynamics in the cities and also stimulated from the new patterns of ownership, the immovable property market is built in short time. Actually, the land it is mainly privately developed, and government is reacting very little towards the process. However, the government is expected to guarantee public interests, which sometimes conflicts with private interests. The lack of a vision and strategic elements in dealing with these issues, has resulted sometimes in 'wild' and uncontrolled developments.

Housing

The main event related to the housing was the privatization process that took place in 1993. Albania becomes a very peculiar case of a fast and not sustainable case of privatization. In the other side, the sectors providing housing diversified. Nowadays the governmental sector is of one of the smallest suppliers, while the private sector is very much involved in the process. However, a large amount of housing is self-provided. Should be emphasized that one of the widest housing suppliers is the 'informal' sector, which generated in a situation when the state missed a strategic behavior in providing housing for groups in huge need but in the other side, not able to afford housing provided from the private sector (providing mostly for the medium and high-income groups).

Infrastructure

One of the sectors in which the state did maintain a strong role is the infrastructure, although there is an involvement of the private sector. In some cases some sectors of infrastructure are either privatized, or 100% shares state companies are created but operating as private. Infrastructure is becoming an element in the hands of the government to stimulate development and to invite the private sector in meeting their own interest without harming the public interests. However, a strategic thinking, in this respect, is needed in order to use appropriately the infrastructure as a tool. In the other side, the government faces continuously difficulties in financing the increasing demands and costs of infrastructure. Therefore, it faces the need to be more efficient and more responsive in order to have citizens paying taxes and fees. In order to find creative ways to invest in long term infrastructure the government should develop strategic ways to deal with the issue.

Governance system

The political and economical changes resulted in new patterns of the governance system. The most relevant event in the system of governance is the decentralization process. Since 1992, the local level of governance is elected by citizens. Since 2000, the process of decentralization is taking place, and local governments are expected to take more responsibilities in dealing with issues like; infrastructure, local economic development and taxation. These new patterns are expected to

have implications in the planning system as well. The need for strategies from the local levels is emerging, instead of top down approaches and no community involvement.

Urban planning system

The changes in all over mentioned sectors have implication in the performance of the urban planning system. The change in the land ownership patterns has the most relevant influence in the way urban plans are formulated. As expected, the introducing of the private sector in the major part of the economic sectors has also a strong influence. In the other side existing urban planning approaches do not meet yet the requests presented by the urban dynamics of the last ten years. The system is based on physical development plans, which show what should be built where, sometimes even in details. These plans basically are supposed to 'control' development and generally serve as basis for issuing building permissions. However, the plans do not answers to questions like; who should build what? How public investment should be covered? Further more, the vision presented by physical plans are strictly architectural oriented, lacking in most of the cases the social and the economic component of the urban life. In most of the cases urban physical development plans represent a 'status' of a city in a certain period of time, missing almost at all the strategic way of thinking. Usually these plans do not go through a participative process, but only few professionals are gathered to design it. In the urban reality of Albania, most of these plans never managed to be implemented due to their rigidity towards the processes and the urban life with all its components.

Planning System in other countries

While designing this paper a constant question remained in place; is Albania a unique case, therefore should Albania develop a unique approach to deal with the problems emerged in the transition periods? In this moment, it becomes relevant to have a look at other environments and experiences.

Experience from Western Europe

Four professors from University of Newcastle, Umea, Aix-Marseille and Nijmegen, respectively Petsy Healey, Abdul Khakee, Alain Motte and Barrie Needham offer a wealth of case studies from ten major European Countries in order to review contemporary developments in strategic spatial planning in their book Making Strategic Spatial Plans – Innovation in Europe.

Although in a different social, political and economical context the approach of shaping the urban life was similar.

'In the original post-war planning systems, the dominant belief was the possibility of reforming the society by reorganizing physical space. Allocative planning was the solution through which to compensate for the inequalities of market functioning. It was also a way for the public sphere to consider the location requirements of all social groups and to coordinate public policies. This concept led to a profound planning crisis when the state was not able to give coherent or legitimate solutions to the conflicts among the social groups with stakes in these spaces.' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 241)

Therefore, the problems that this approach presents started to increase;

'The limits of public policy integration through physical space emerged. The development of structural unemployment in many European countries during the 1980s and 1990s were another indication of the need to change policy priorities.' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 241)

Of course the existing system was supported by an overestimation of one of the components of planning; the technical one.

'In the post – war systems, the models of plan elaboration and implementation were dominated by the implicit idea that a "good" plan will necessarily be followed by action in line with the plan. Indeed was the application of an optimal design.' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 240)

The underestimation of social and economic factors leads to incapability of dealing with real daily problems of the urban life.

'The underlying belief was that social problems would be resolved by technical progress...However, the conception of an automatic passage from the designed plan to the applied plan was progressively questioned by the implementation processes of plans. Indeed many plans were very difficult or even impossible to apply.' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 240)

Although the difference in the context, aren't there similarities with the Albanian urban planning context? Indeed, Albania it is not a very peculiar case in this respect, but it is facing a transitional period that other countries have faced before, too.

'There is in particular an evolution from "allocative" planning to "developmental" planning. The development of the new system is not mechanical. It depends on the institutions of each social system and could be slowed down by the institutional arrangements elaborated within the previous system. Within what frame of reference may these systems and their evolution be interpreted?' (Healey, Khakee, Motte, Needham 1997: 234)

Therefore, Albania has the opportunities to learn from other experiences in facing similar challenges.

Experience from Latin America

Four authors; ACCIOLY Claudio Jr., HERCOG André, SANDINO Eduardo and ANDRADE Victor Henry, describe in their research on 'the challenges in linking short-term actions and long-term strategic planning' two, very innovative, cases of introducing creative approaches in order to deal with urban governance problems, in Latin America context.

'The Municipality has acknowledged that the city master plan enacted in 1995 is an inadequate instrument that is not used for managing the city. It has become obsolete and is currently under revision'. (Accioly, Herzog, Sandino, Andrade 2002: 71) Isn't it this reality commonly met in the Albanian context also?

'Apparently there is a paradox. A municipal government that is not utilizing a legally enforced instrument to plan and manage the city'. (Accioly, Herzog, Sandino, Andrade 2002: 71)

Indeed, are some rigid instruments enough in order to cope with the common problems like; unemployment, deprivation of urban life and economic underdevelopment?

The fact is that the land use zoning and normative rules embedded into the plan have not facilitated the flexible approach to planning.' (Accioly, Herzog, Sandino, Andrade 2002: 71)

It is very clear that governance is a process that require discussions, involvement and participation, responsibility and commitment. The challenge is to secure the appropriate tools to enable such process to take place.

'The strategic Planning process is nurtured through a general call to the city population to participate in developing a city vision and in assessing the city main weaknesses and strengthens as well as the external opportunities and threats to its developments' (Accioly, Herzog, Sandino, Andrade 2002: 52)

In Latin America context, participation is one of the main sensitive issues. However, many similarities can be found in the Albanian context when considering the social exclusion of community and, especially, low-income groups from the urban planning process.

(Cidade Futuro-Future City Project)² *'It evolved from three major city conferences and the worked developed through 9 (nine) fundamental streams e.g. (1) economic development (2) urban development (3) environment quality (4) social inclusion (5) education (6) cultural identity (7) state reform (8) health and (9) combat to urban violence.'* (Accioly, Herzog, Sandino, Andrade 2002: 54)

A very strong argument it is built over the fact that a process takes in consideration different aspects of the urban life, which is not the case of the statutory plans. Of course, technical plans are needed, but when it comes the issue of facing such complex processes, innovative approaches are needed to be embraced.

Comparisons and main findings

In order to answer adequately to this very important and actual question one should look to the problems that the existing system is encountering. In the amount of problems addressed some of them are more frequently met, while some others are in fact causing these effects, being as well very important to take in consideration. A process of analysis of the entire set of the problems helps to identify a more specific problem around which other problems are developed. This "Core Problem" should be as specifically identified as possible in order to be possible to deal with. Therefore it is built a "Tree of Problems" in order to analyze the entire situation of the urban

planning system in Albania. In the Albanian urban reality it is very easy to realize that while private investors are interested to use (not necessary to develop) each square meter of the plot, while the public, citizens and community require more living space for a human dimension city, green areas, playgrounds etc. In a normal situation, those interests do not necessarily go against each other. However, the system as it is, is not able to regulate such interests, therefore there is a conflicting situation.

It is also very easy to realize that in the last tend years also a phenomenon of switching from a "state responsible for everything" situation, into a "non responsible" (or sometimes irresponsible) state has taken place. Due to the lack of a clear vision for development, Albanian cities are experiencing an urban chaos. The obvious (legal or illegal) occupation of public space has taken place and now is genuine part of the urban chaos. This chaos has invited a very spread informal sector taking initiative in providing what is needed for the urban life of the cities. In the transitional period, also the behavior of the local and central government is expected to change. It is still very difficult to switch from a government "providing" in "enabling" governance. One of the most relevant problems identified in the urban planning system is the fact that our system does miss the "strategic" element, behavior and way of thinking in designing the urban function and making the appropriate decisions to influence the livability of the urban areas. The main cause of such a problem is of course the fact that the planning system is still suffering the reminiscences of the old commanded system. Indeed, there is no tradition in formulating flexible strategies to deal with a diverse environment and furthermore there is no yet professional debate about the problems that the system encounters and possible solutions. Also in the last ten years, other problems emerged as part of the new reality of our country related also to the political and social dynamics that faced the Albanian society.

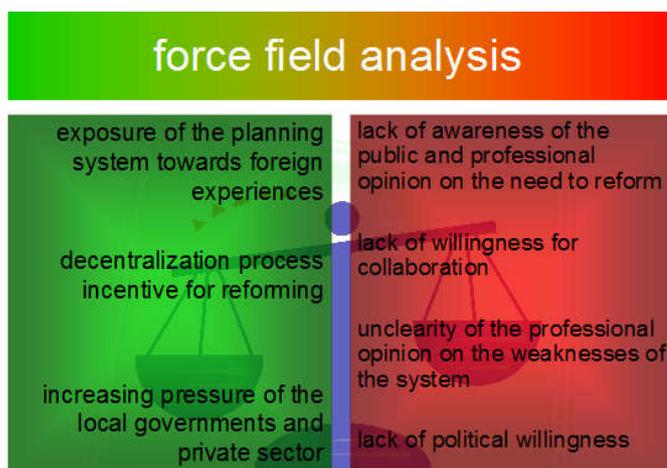


The tree of problems analysis

Obviously, in order to expect urban planning system to cope with the problematique of the new urban reality of Albania it is believed that should start a process of reforming the entire system aiming the integration of the strategic concepts in the process of planning. This is neither more nor less than the basic argument of this paper work. However, an analysis would be uncompleted without taking in consideration the surrounding environment. Therefore, one should consider whether professionals as well as the entire public opinion, are aware that there is a need to reform. Indeed, there is a lot of complaints on the actual problems encountered in the process

² the note is not a genuine part of the article, but a reminder from the author of the paper

of urban development. However, there has not been any awareness campaign on the need for a serious reform. This is caused from the fact that never the concrete problems, roots of the problems and the core problems to deal with have never been spelled out by any professional institution. One should add also that the situation has deteriorated with a little help of the lack of the willingness to collaborate and support a serious reforming process. In order to have reforming processes working, there is need for clear political willingness to carry this reform. It might takes some risks, but political support it is indispensable in order to reform. In the other side, it is believed that there exist also some incentives that would work in the direction of bringing the discussion ahead. The fact that, differently from ten years ago, the planning system is very much exposed to foreign experiences will have an impact through experiences flow. However, the main incentive for reforming is within our on going processes. Indeed, local governments are becoming more oriented toward their "clients"-the citizens, and therefore they will search for efficient planning approaches in order to cope with the daily problems that wait for practical solutions. In this respect together with the private sector, local governments are expected to address the need for new approaches to the planning entities and to the central government.



Force Fields analysis

Summarizing what it is decrypted in the previous chapters should be emphasized that; before and after 1990

- a commanded economy system was in place which made almost impossible the need for city visions and local strategies for development. Only physical plans are developed. Cities are seen as just a set of buildings and infrastructure. Since 1990 the free market economy and, as part of it, a private sector, was introduced as well. Consequently, the aim of the plans that needs to be developed is to attract investment and to develop the local economy. Cities are seen as engines of development with a stronger social and economic than physical component.
- almost all the land (the urban land included) was public and no land market was in place, which implied that the land did not have a real value. The situation changed rapidly in the last ten years and now the government owns only 20% of the urban land. Therefore the government is not expected to directly develop (unless enters in partnership with the private sector) the land. A

strategic behavior should be performed in order to use the infrastructure as a mean to orient the development.

- the migration of the citizens was strictly controlled by the government, which resulted in urban planning system that 'force' development or lack of development. In the new reality where citizens are free to choose themselves the living place (as well as the working place), there is need for plans that 'guide' and 'orient' development. Therefore is important to involve in the entire process of designing urban development plans the communities aiming to reflect in the strategies carried out a common built vision for development.

Finally, new approaches in designing the urban plans should be explored. The switch from a situation where 'state does everything' into an environment where the government is expected 'to enable development' should be accompanied with strategic way of thinking, flexible plans that leave room for a say from different actors and factors and do not provide 'blue print' solutions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the main questions that should be addressed is related to the way to introduce a new element, way of thinking and approach in the urban planning system. Indeed "strategic planning" deal with three dimensions; it is an element in terms of legal framework and institutions, it deals with the methodology when considered an approach and, last but not least, deals with the mentality of the professionals when considered way of thinking. Therefore, there would be needed to start a process of professional debate on the reforming the entire system (partial solution would not work) aiming at the integration of the strategic planning approach in our spatial planning methodology.

Institutional implications

Obviously, being a serious and formal process, the legitimacy of the initiator institutions should be taken in consideration. It is important to look at "who has the mandate to initiate this process?" Therefore, some institutional steps should be taken to have a well-settled process of reforming. In terms of designing a governance national policy, the national government is the most justifiable entity to take the initially step. In the other side local governments are the most interested organizations to have a participative reforming process. Therefore, they should be invited since the initial phase in articulating this need.

Steps to be taken

Basically there are few preliminary steps to be taken in order to create the environment for a public awareness campaign on the process of reforming the urban planning system. These steps would be summarized as follows

- Preparation of a serious descriptive extract material on the urban planning system and problems encountered that should be distributed to the main local governments, central government, civic society representatives, professionals in order to create room for all institutions that might support the process.
- The Albanian Municipality Association is the most appropriate organization to carry a process of articulation

of the needs of the local governments in terms of system performance.

- After the information distributed it is absorbed, a wide representative conference should take place aiming at the carrying the concrete steps to be taken in order to set up a process of changing the framework (legal framework included). A Task Force with a commonly agreed mandate should be built to guaranty a professional, but participative process of reforms.
- The Task Force should design a program/process able to;
 - to change the framework, in terms of rules and regulations that would guaranty the continuity of the reforms
 - to provide the expertise needed (training included) especially for local government on new planning approaches, strategic decision making and building vision
 - to carry pilot examples, able to be replicated, of working strategic plans for different urban realities.

A briefed action plan is anticipated with the belief that a good willingness of professionals and authorities can make a change in the existing urban governance.

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