

## Belgrade Planning in a new cycle of Transition

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### 1. Intro - The Transitional Context

City of Belgrade is the capital of Serbia, located on an excellent geographic position on the river Danube. The settlement has been there for 7000 years but, thanks to historic, geo-politic and economic conditions, the wider SEE region, the state, and the city itself have been in the constant state (process) of change, or more precisely “transition” during the last twenty years. The term „transition“ is related to societies and economies changing from a centrally planned economy to a free market (Feige, 1994), and usually connected to China, Russia, East European former socialist block, or some of the developing countries of Latin America or Africa (IMF, 2000, EBRD, 1994). More often the term has been used for trend in societies, even developed, where a serious change of basic elements is needed for accepting a new global paradigm. In the Webster Dictionary the word is explained as a „passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another, a change; a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another”. Being one, although not a typical East European capital city, Belgrade has commonly evolved from the centrally planned economy and spatial development to a market oriented city, changing also planning practice and legislations in aim to become a competitive SE European city.

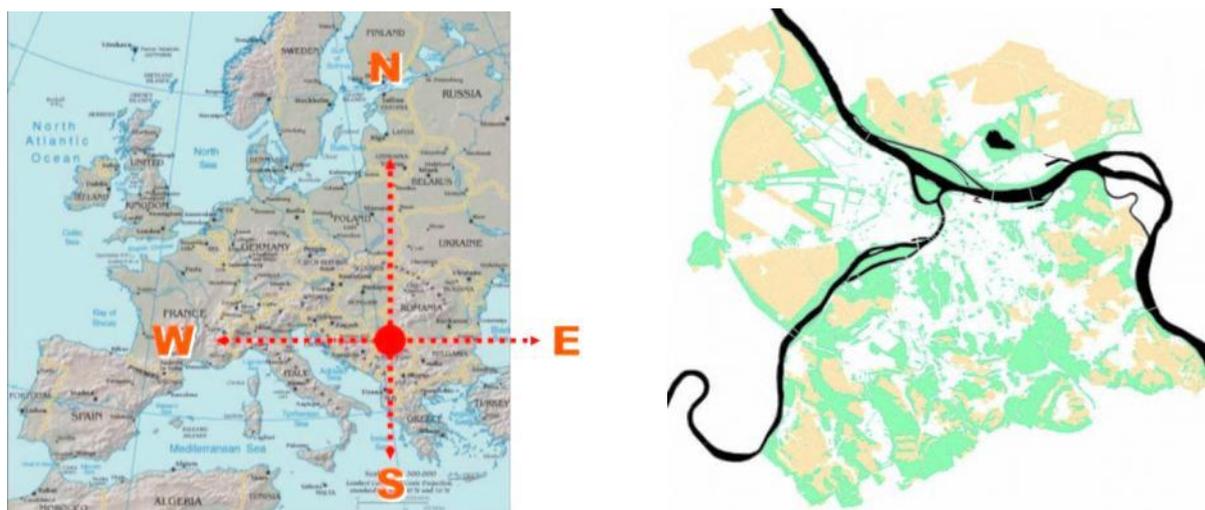


Fig. 1. Belgrade position in Europe; Fig.2. The area of the General Plan of Belgrade 2021 (Urban Planning Institute, UPI 2009)

The specific political environment, fall of the former Yugoslavia in the nineties, and the war in the close neighborhood resulted in unexpected changes: city's uncontrolled growth, change in population, fading economy and inappropriate urban appearance. These changes happened fast, challenging authorities as well as planners in efforts to understand, act, and anticipate the future development of the city.

Recent global changes have become faster, significant and relevant for all, demanding immediate reaction in social behavior, city management, and planning. Environmental changes in the first place, like extreme climate conditions, pollution, energy issues, and needs in drinking water, etc.; also global economic crisis, political reorganization, including European reconsiderations, all shape Belgrade wider environment. Planners have been facing different planning patterns, different development goals, and a need for urgent action. Belgrade urban planners gathered vast experience in the previous period of political and

economic transition that can be usefully applied and shared in a new cycle of adaptation to global changes, and for the sustainable future development of cities.

## 2. Changing – Facts

### 2.1. Population Trends

There was 1.73 mill persons living in Belgrade on 330 km<sup>2</sup> according to first results of the 2011 Census, and official population of the city is 1.639.121. Belgrade is one of the rare still growing cities in Serbia and it hosts 23% of the total Serbian population. It is also educational, health and cultural center, with 41% of population with higher and university degree. With its share of 35% in GDP of the state, 29% in total employees and with GDP index 164 in relation to the Serbian average (100), Belgrade is the most developed district in Serbia (Belgrade statistic yearbook 2006).

Average population growth index for Belgrade's 17 municipalities was 104 for last decade, contrary to trends in the previous century, and the highest was identified in the peripheral areas.<sup>1</sup> The positive migration trend was present in the whole XX century, where population doubled within the period 1953-2002. The increase of population was only migration based for the first time in Belgrade history in year 1992. The trend has not changed since then, caused by the economic, social, or safety reasons. There were 140.662 registered refugees in Belgrade according to official data from 1996. The estimation from the year 2000 shows that 230.000 persons moved to Serbia because of the war (and its significant part to Belgrade), and got the status of «displaced persons». Almost every 10<sup>th</sup> person was a refugee or displaced person, and most of them moved to peripheral municipalities (14.4% of Zemun municipality population).

During the same period, 106.000 predominantly young and educated Belgrade citizens permanently left the city.



Fig.3 - Natural and migration increase of population, 1961-2010, Statistical yearbook of Belgrade 2010, both City of Belgrade Institute for informatics and statistics

### 2.2 Planning Environment, Trends and Challenges of the XX Century

From the urban planning point of view, Belgrade metropolitan experienced serious changes in XX Century. From the small urban center of the agricultural Serbia, it became the capital of the newly established Yugoslavia Republic, after the II World War, and the successful case of regional capital city of the 20 mill population state, in the eighties. The controlled city development, not just growth, included also the construction of the New Belgrade, a new modern city that hosts population of 212.104 as a separate municipality today. It was

planned and built as a common “socialist city”. The first sketches of the city appeared in an architectural competition in 1922, but the actual city was built during the reconstruction of the Yugoslav Capital after the WW II.

Year	City	State	Urban population	<i>Sources and notes:</i> <i>Belgrade, History of Belgrade, www.znanje.org, “Treasures from Yugoslavia”, An Encyclopedic touring guide;</i> <i>Population data for the State are from Serbian Censuses 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2002, 2011;</i> <i>City of Belgrade Development Strategy, 2011,</i> <i>Regional Spatial Plan for Administrative Territory of Belgrade, 2004, and 2011;</i> <i>Statistic Annual Reports, Belgrade 1921,1931,1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2002, 2005 and 2006, 2010, Statistical Yearbook of Serbia 2000, 2005, and 2010</i> <i>Data in Census 1991 and 2002 is carried out only for the Central Serbia and Vojvodina, without Kosovo;</i> 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia – FIRST RESULTS;
1900	69.100			
1910	90.000			
1921		4.819.430		
1931		5.725.912		
1948	634.003	6.527.966		
1953	731.837	6.979.154		
1961	942190	7.642.227	612.732	
1971	1.209.361	8.446.591	807.664	
1981	1.470.073	9.313.676	995.858	
1991	1.602.226	7.576.837	1.089.996	
2000	1.618.166	7.516.346	1.174.860	
2002	1.576.124	7.498.001	1.061.727	
2005	1.600.000	7.440.769	1.160.000	
2006	1.613.000		1.168.000	
2011	1.639.121	7.120.666		

Table.4 - Population of Belgrade 1900 to 2011

It was built on marshland on the left bank of the rivers Sava and Danube, for and by a new, young working class, enthusiastic about rebuilding not only the ruined city but a new socialist society as well (Blagojevic, 2007). The modernist plans for the new city were made between 1922 and 1962 in a Le Corbusier style, with multiple functions, from housing and green spaces to governmental complexes (Vale, 1992). On the other hand, it was a typically new capital city built for a growing working class. Physically separated from old Belgrade, the city structure was organized as a frame for the new political power, new political order, with its new urban concept: the Government Palace as an icon at the pole of the main green axis (Costonis,1989). The city as a whole, its 10, later 13 municipalities, and especially the new part was well organized, managed and maintained from the side of the public sector; in the most successful time of Yugoslav economic and social development. In the year 1989 Belgrade economy reached the highest level of economic and social welfare so far, and it was also the last year of continual economic growth after the Second World War before the crises began (Gligorijevic, 2004).

Another spatial phenomenon appeared and changed the city significantly in the period of late eighties and especially nineties, common for the whole developing Word and the South East European region: the phenomenon of informal construction (Fig.5). Among the new states formed from Former Yugoslavia, all being part of a Southern Eastern European Region nowadays, Serbia entered transitional period the last. The nineties in Serbia were marked by the serious crisis, started with politic and economic sanctions, followed by the collapse of the national economy, social system, and politic changes. According to some authors, the last few years of this period were “pre-transitional”, because the society has started a wide process of changes but without implementing real market or liberal economy. Unfortunately, the last phase of the pre-transitional period was marked by the war in Serbia itself, already impoverished, left without the most educated people, tired of long lasting autocracy, and finally, ruined by that war.

There were many causes for informal (illegal, unplanned) settlements and constructions, such as social, economic or just administrative weaknesses, but the main for Belgrade case was the overall migration as a result of restructuring former Yugoslavia. 90% of Belgrade newcomers settled in the peripheral areas of the city, providing the urgent place for their families to live in. They built their homes commonly on the agricultural land or in the low

density zones, contributing to already significant informal sector. According to the UNECE Profile study, Belgrade contributes significantly to the amount of up to 1 million informally constructed dwelling units of Serbia. The data from General plan of Belgrade 2021 shows that 43% of the housing land use, and 22% of all building land in area of 10 central Belgrade municipalities belong to informal settlements. The challenge for planners nowadays is to incorporate these areas into regulated urban zones, and the challenge for the city to provide necessary technical and social infrastructure for all its citizens, including informal.



*Fig.5 - Belgrade diversity: New Belgrade, 2007 (photo GZ), and the Belgrade biggest informal settlement, Kaludjerica (<http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Republika-Srpska/244804/Bez-popusta-za-legalizaciju> 2011)*

It is interesting to analyze another aspect, also related to planning, in aim to better understand urban processes: the aspect of urban and heritage revitalization. Cities and their urban heritage suffered from the same illnesses – they were impoverished, neglected, depleted, sometimes ruined, and their significance, historic, cultural or architectural values were vanishing together with their physical attributes (Gligorijevic, 2004). There were several reasons for this situation, without mentioning general poverty, weak economy and politic situation. First, the heritage protection institutions were helpless in their efforts to stop ruining of the important buildings or areas of the cities, not only because of the reduced public interest, or misuse by the powerful investors. The part of the problem lied in their rigid and mostly administrative approach to urban revitalization, without capability to adapt the system to fast changing environment, and resiliency to new demands, interest, and market. The second, for this research more important reason to emphasize, was the strict and inappropriate planning system, at that time already outdated, which was not following the changes in other segments of the society. The law either ignored the urban heritage as a value for preservation and revitalization, or if not, established such a set of rules that no investor or authority was capable to follow. There was a need for a new attitude, for non-standard models for the city's heritage maintenance and functional and physical transformation. Only one of a kind was introduced at that time in Belgrade, as a temporary

solution and encouragement for the new models, the Urban Recycling Strategy.<sup>ii</sup>

### 3. **Challenges of the New Century**

All the former Eastern European countries were deep in the process of transition or had already finished the process during nineties, while Serbian society was preparing for the upcoming reform period. The very important time in every sense for was the year 2000, as the year of profound political changes, followed by legal, political, social and economic reforms. From 2000 to 2008 a set of state and city legal documents have been established to regulate planning and building, organization and financing local governments, PPPs, Capital city law, anti-corruption procedures, etc. Belgrade economy performed the dynamic growth at that time, shown in all economic indicators.<sup>iii</sup> This was the period of serious investments from the public and also private sector, including foreign investments, seriously changing the shape and the character of the city. The authorities started promotion of the city as a new target for investments in East Europe. “Financial Times” and “fDi Magazine” have organized the contest European cities and regions of the future and Belgrade was awarded the name *City of the future in Southern Europe for 2006/07*. This award encouraged investors and local authorities, spurred a change in the city policy and naturally, in planning. Planners and city managers needed knowledge, skills and new set of optimistic plans for the changed investment climate and the new urban dynamics. General plans were revised usually once in 25 years, and Belgrade changed these planning documents twice between years 2000 and 2009. It was a result of the urgent need for new locations, and new zoning resiliency. The Urban planning Institute has been actually working on its third revision, thanks to the recent legislative change, the actual financial, not only national, economic crisis and therefore different priorities of spatial development (Fig7).

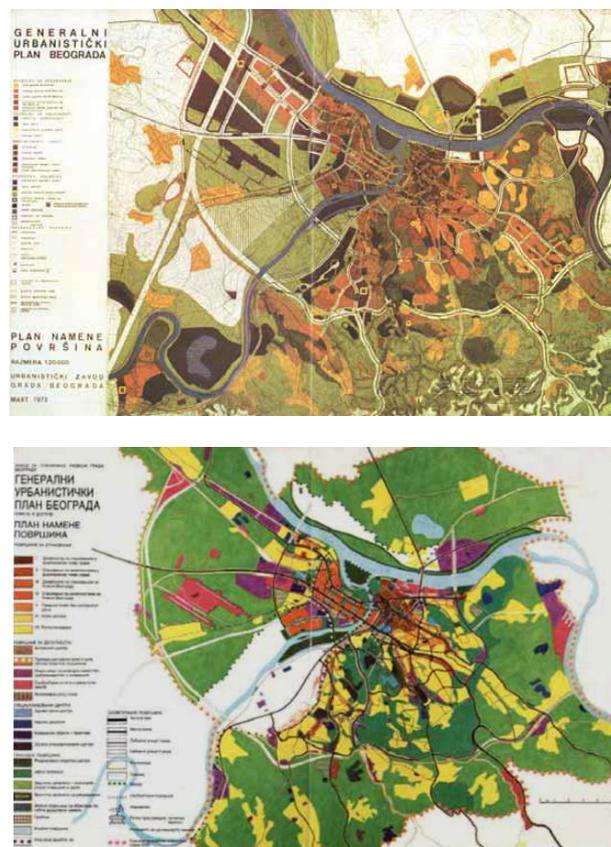
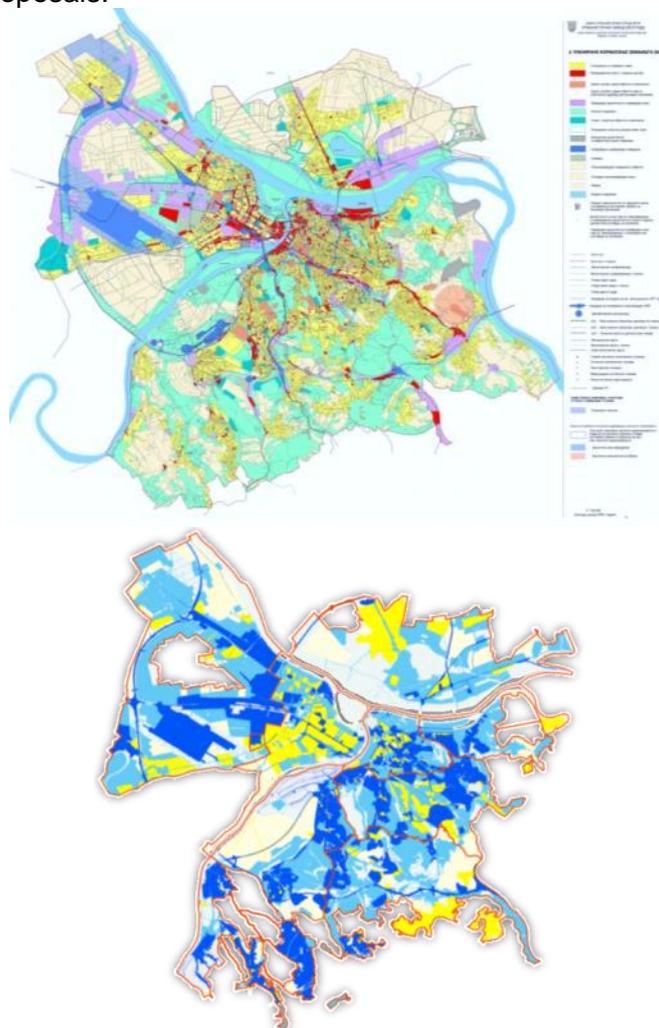


Fig 6 –Development visions for the 2000 in General plans of Belgrade (Đorđević, Glavički, 1972, and Kostic, 1985), from the archives of the Urban Planning Institute, Belgrade

### 3.1 Chances for Joined Developments

During the last years of '90s and after the political change in 2000 a new, educated group of investors appeared willing to negotiate with governments and authorities, and to contribute not only to their own profit and welfare. Since governments financed all the interventions in the previous period and the transitional change in the economy had just begun, there was neither the knowledge nor skills for negotiations and joined, public-private developments.

After more than ten years of political and economic changes, there was still not enough strength or will from authorities to offer or accept private partnerships, except for constructing and maintenance of infrastructure projects. Also there has not been enough trust from developers' side to invest in joined projects, especially in revitalization and redevelopments of existing structures or complexes. The real estate market in Belgrade became more opened but not safer, investment-wise, for the new developments. Some of the existing buildings and structures with historic, architectural or just contextual values have been extremely interesting for developers, but legally and technically too complicated for the reasonable investment turnover. Such locations, mostly purchased in previous period as a result of the privatization, are still waiting for the better business climate, better zoning possibilities, better offer from the local authorities, either through taxation, zoning or design incentives or PPP proposals.<sup>iv</sup>



*Fig 7 - General plan of Belgrade 2021, (Ferencak, Macura, 2003, revision Ferencak, Gligorijevic, 2009), General plan and Plan of general Regulation, in progress since 2010, (Joksic, Radovanovic, Djordjevic), Urban Planning Institute, Belgrade*

In analyses published during the preparation of the Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, from 2005 to 2008, there were at least four groups of problems

identified by official planning sector for joined PP developments: rigid legislations, unclear ownership, lack of trust in local governance, and lack of resourceful and innovative thinking by authorities (Gligorijević, 2007). There should be rationales for both public and private sectors to participate in some form of joined developments in cities, and planners tried to find the ground for such partnership in the Serbian legal and fiscal environment. First on the list of rationales has been the obvious need for local governments to find a development partner, to overcome financial and organizational weaknesses and some of the known European and U.S. models can be useful as experience and modified for specific location and project, not only in Belgrade.

### **3.2 A Need for More Resilient Planning System**

The planning system itself was mentioned as one of the obstacles for joined and projects in general, and has been considered rigid, not negotiable for developments in cities. The system was common for the long time in most Eastern but also some Western European states, based on German traditional type of planning: with strict land use, urban parameters but even designed physical structures. Rezoning procedures in aim to meet particular development goals were long and complicated and the Serbian government adopted the new Planning and Building Law in the year 2003. Greater powers were given to local governments to organize procedures according to their needs, in rather opened system for implementation. The law regulated the list of reduced obligatory planning documentation, content of spatial and urban plans, with more general uses on the level of the city block, maximum FAR, maximum plot coverage related to specific land use, as well as less strict design guidelines. Local governments only had to implement the new law in their local development plans and adjust their, sometimes very conservative, practice to new conditions.

Another revision of the law happened after only 6 years of implementation, in the year 2009. There were several reasons for this legal improvement, aside of the intention of the national government to make the law closer to EU regulations (for example, by introducing energy efficiency in planning). The first was the need for stronger centralization and standardization of the plans, in aim to make design and construction rules clear, transparent and comprehensive for all, including general public. That way the government also tried to contribute to anticorruption process in the field of planning. On the other hand, standardization and simplification of zoning and design rules were the goals for easier understanding and shortening further procedures of issuing building permits. The third, this time significant change, was the inclusion of land ownership issues into the planning and building law.

This topic was much more complicated and demanding, since that was an obligatory part of the transition process, and has to be solved on the state level. The most attractive sites for developers have been usually in the centers of Serbian cities, and still governmentally owned. The new regulations introduced a new instrument, “conversion of land”, in aim to control and manage publicly owned, agricultural or previously privatized land. The serious intention of national government to return the land to previous owners, in cases when it was not built up, and to shift responsibility for land management to local governments was finally shown in two laws: Law on Restitution and Planning and building law. The implementation of these legal documents has been in progress for just a short time for overall evaluation, having in mind the dimension of the problem and hopefully to be successfully implemented providing a legal basis for new or joined developments.

A common situation in last few years was that buildings and the land suitable for development were not only governmentally owned, but also not properly dated in cadastres, therefore legally unclear and thus complicated for any action. As the privatization and denationalization of the land have been the goals of all republic governments since the nineties, and the Law on Restitution was adopted in 2011, we could assume that these processes are going to be continued. The digital land cadastre has been established by the

Republic Geodetic Institute of Serbia in previous period, through the project financed by the World Bank since 2004. The objective of the Real Estate Cadastre and Registration Project for Serbia was “to increase confidence and lower transaction costs by building a more efficient property registration and cadastre system, with the purpose of contributing to the development of effective real property markets”.

Without going into details, it is worth mentioning that another set of rules appeared in the new planning law from 2009, related to the process of (another) legalization of informally build structures. Although the previous 2003 law already provided incentives for legalization, it seems that the persons executing constructions without the valid building permits were not interested enough in obtaining legal documents, if it is going to be another expense. On the other hand, planners became obliged to behave according to one set of rules in planning, and the opposite ones in process of legalization, both contained within the same legal document.

In addition, Economic Commission for Europe – OUN, suggested non-standard models of human settlements’ renovation and modernization instead of the old, long, and complicated administrative processes of support transition in all SEE states in nineties. To illustrate, for the renovation of a blighted urban block in Belgrade it would be necessary to pass a long path: to prepare a regulatory redevelopment plan, to make financial analyses of available public resources, preparation of all the architectural designs, purchasing the building permit before the actual construction on site. This procedure, according to Law and Belgrade practice, might take approximately a year, comparing to three to four years with all necessary permits in previous period. Still, local governments have various legal instruments and possibilities, if enterprising and forward-looking, to establish the healthy partnership and attract investors to participate in developments. Comparing to U.S. or Viennese experience, no big difference can be noticed in ability of governments to spur developments, including PPDs for inner cities.

#### **4. Regional Context and Metropolitan Cooperation Perspective**

In a more competitive climate than ever, with total foreign direct investment in Europe falling by more than 7% in 2011, London has maintained its title as “fDi Magazine” European City of the Future 2012/13. The leading investment region in the East Europe was Romania in 2011 but Ukraine is overtaking its place for the next season, together with the 2 Tier cities of South England, Portugal, and Sweden. European regional dimension influenced Belgrade planning profession during nineties and became a part of its official policy in the recent strategic and master plans, from 2003 and 2009. This shift from the classic, conservative planning vocabulary and planning oriented towards international instead the national and local users, shows the European orientation of the city government, and awareness of the only sustainable development paradigm in the actual environment: the regional networking and cooperation.

City of Belgrade Development Strategy and the Regional Spatial plan for the Administrative territory of the City were the first strategic documents where the City claimed the vision of further development in context of wider EU region. The first one was the consent between all the sectors of the City and the general public, prepared in 2007, discussed, renewed and adopted by the City Assembly in 2011. The goals of development are: increasing the rank of Belgrade among the metropolitan cities and capitals of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, according to the criteria of a sustainable economy, advanced technology, greater territorial cohesion, and higher level of accessibility, decentralization and polycentricism. The second is also a plan of new generation, using European guidelines and vocabulary, establishing cooperation as the base for further urban planning, by improving and sharpening its identity, saving free and agricultural land, paying attention to energy issues, climate changes, according to principles of sustainability, competitiveness and

accessibility. Both strategic documents established basis for cooperation along Danube, within micro, mezzo and macro regions and states.

Implementing these documents, Belgrade planners are following or gladly joining all feasible EU financed projects, promoting metropolitan cooperation. One of such was the Central European POLYCE project, where 8 partners and 5 stakeholder Cities from Central Europe region were trying to compare their metropolitan agendas and city profiles to match recommendations for the Smart Central European Metropolises. It was an opportunity for Belgrade planners to join, learn, study, compare, and anticipate possible extensions of the project and contribute to network of wider metropolitan area along Danube. City of Vienna, as a project main partner is promoting cities and regions cooperation within the Danube area, as the strongest political, economic and social power building Danube mega-region and providing cooperation instead of competition. The table below shows, based on the POLYCE project model, a simplified matrix of similar sized capital CE European cities, with available data, their main characteristics, visions and challenges in aim to understand differences and similarities, and compose common vision, basis for cooperation and propose metropolitan policy for the sustainable development of the Danube region cities.

	<b>Beograd</b>	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Prague</b>	<b>Wien</b>	<b>Bratislava</b>
Capital city	Serbia	Hungary	Czech Republic	Austria	Slovakia
Area of the city (km <sup>2</sup> )	359	525	496	414	367
Population	1.639.121	1.733.685	1.258.106	1.714.142	425,533
<b>GDP</b>	<b>E 11.938 (2010)</b> National statistics, estimation	E 24,900 (2006), national statistics, PPS method	E 42,800 (2007) Eurostat PPS method	E 40,600 (2007) Eurostat, PPS	E 39,900 (2007) Eurostat PPS method
Main characteristics and the economic structure	Service oriented. From the end of nineties trying to establish transportation hub on three EU corridors; City of leisure, tourism and sports	Service oriented. From the early nineties particularly boosted finance, consulting and retail. IT sector, and investments in building and construction, and also arts and education	Expansion the new city-wide Centre, International airport at Ruzyně, an important administrative and commercial center within Central Europe; Inner and the Outer Ring Roads	Very good supply of public services (public transport, water, social services, and healthcare). long tradition of social housing ; high quality of life.	Developments located near the main bus (Twin city), railway station and the North-Western area of Bory; A strong development along the Danube River
Vision	2020 EU Capital of Culture, Science oriented, Innovation and environment	Danube Region metropolis; Aiming a more balanced distribution of economic functions in the metropolitan area	'Knowledge' culture	Mixture securing European competitiveness and attractiveness for residents; Definition of the city within the Danube Region	Research and development clusters.
Challenges	The economic environment , EU relations and the political stability.  Decentralization, Polycentricism and sustainable and integrated development within the region	Changing the capital city's dominance in a mono-centric metropolitan area	Cooperation on a regional level; Overcoming inherited institutional barriers to cooperation; specifically between the city and the regional level.	Institutionally and transport-related integrated urban region; Allocation of metropolitan functions in the region.	The Danube region potential; Strengthen the metropolitan competitiveness; Permanent exchange of information.

Table 8 – Data from the UPI research and the Executive summary of the project POLYCE Metropolitanisation and Polycentric Development in Central Europe, 2010-2012

## 5. Conclusions Based on Belgrade Experience

Planners for sure have no powers to change the environment of cities, but can contribute to their better adjustment to changing conditions. Here are several lessons Belgrade has been learning over time that can be useful for other cities and regions in the state of change.

Local governments need to be capable of innovative and creative thinking when overcoming transition, whether economic, social, politic or environmental. The old patterns in planning are no longer acceptable, neither appropriate, nor efficient for the further development. Cities like Belgrade, in constant change in the local, regional or global context, have to develop skills, practice models, and use instruments to adapt much faster to changes, for they were already lagging behind the main stream cities of the similar size.

There is a necessity for improved cooperation: between the internal administrative constituencies of the region (a), within “functional” region, with other Serbian cities on Danube (b), and finally, joined communication with the similar regions in the wider European mezzo and mega regions (c). The precondition for cooperation is communication, in time when European regions are trying to compare their metropolitan agendas and city profiles to match recommendations for the Smart Central European Metropolises.

It is also important for cities to maintain communication with private sector in planning policies and projects, using possibilities given through the European transitional regulations. Local governments have to share risk and benefits with private developers, and therefore to improve skills in legal, financial, real estate and urban development matters, to negotiate and make rational partnerships, for their cities’ resources and benefits.

One of the main European integration conditions is the *decentralization*, fiscal, governmental and particularly planning. Local authorities should get the chance and the power to make their own decisions on spatial and urban development, which was not the case for more than fifty years in Serbia. This capability is going to spur negotiation process with developers especially when the process of re-privatization of land is finished, hopefully in near future.

In such the ambiance, the local authorities may reach their redevelopment goals together with the will of developers to invest in real estate markets in cities. Domestic or foreign, investors should be stimulated to participate in redevelopment, and not only the local, but also national government should consider new strategies and programs that will spur public works and contribute to private projects with various subsidies. Loans and credits are welcome, but the self-sustainable set of programs should be established and adopted, and the existing EU, or US experience might be instructive.

One of the conditions, learned from international practice for any serious PPD in Serbian cities is a separation of political and executive powers. Only that enables conditions for effective and hopefully honest local leadership, providing long-term guaranties for private and joined projects. And finally, the important clue for successful city projects is the effort of local authorities, as well as the private and non - profit sector, to build organizational, financial and legislative skills to participate and articulate cooperation and healthy joined developments.

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Surcin, Grocka i Zvezdara, 108, 111, Stari grad,86;

<sup>ii</sup> Introduced in annual Urban Planning Conference “Communication”, CEP, Belgrade, 1996, later developed through the master thesis of the author, Belgrade School of Architecture, and adopted in some local authorities as a legitimate strategy in revitalization process (Kotor Municipality Spatial Plan, 1997.)

<sup>iii</sup> Belgrade achieved GDP total of euro 4,6 billion, 2800 per capita in year 2005, much more than in 2000, but still less than in 1989, the year of the highest level of development of the Belgrade economy so far, when GDP was E 6,2 billion and GDP per capita around E 4000.

<sup>iv</sup> BIGZ, the old printing office building and a part of the Belgrade architectural and industrial heritage, building of the former of the Yugoslav Ministry of internal affairs headquarter, etc.

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