

# SPATIAL AND URBAN PLANNING IN SERBIA: A LOOK THROUGH THE LENS OF DELIBERATIVE APPROACH

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**In planning, the deliberative process is most commonly present in the form of a structured public discussion. The main idea behind such an approach is to improve communication among different participants by informing them about a local problem before any stakeholders' preference is adopted, agreement reached and, finally, the problem solved. With the help of a mediator, an independent third party, the participants are considered equal, rational and free to give their opinion. Such a deliberative approach is an integral part of most planning procedures in developed countries. However, the enhancement of the planning process in the post-socialist context is delayed due to institutional rigidities, public mistrust towards the initiators of spatial development, and the lack of mediation procedures in the planning process. Previous features are also specific to Serbia, as a transitional state, which, nevertheless, experienced a somewhat different social context in comparison to other Eastern Bloc countries during the second half of the previous century. To understand the contemporary situation better, the paper provides an overview of spatial and urban planning in Serbia since the Second World War, observed from the deliberative stand, in an attempt to define the basic guidelines for the transformation of the planning approach in Serbia.**

**Key words:** deliberative democracy, deliberation, rationality, spatial and urban planning, Serbia.

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary trends in the domain of urban governance largely consider the nature of planning process, but not necessarily its final outcome. More precisely, understanding the planning not only as physical planning aimed at making plans as a final planning product, but placing an emphasis on the planning process itself, elucidates various aspects: consensus-building (Healey, 1997; Barrett and Fudge, 1981; De Roo, 2007), redefining the roles of participants and their relationships (Sager, 1994; Rydin, 2007), as well as the achievement of stakeholders' equality and institutional transparency (Healey, 2007; Innes, 1996). Considering the above mentioned aspects and their interrelations strongly affected the communicative turn in both the planning theory and practice.

The main features of the collaborative planning can be illustratively explained through its comparison to the rational planning, which stood for a dominant model of

spatial development governance through the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Briefly put, the comprehensive rational urban planning model is based on the strong role of the state, i.e. representative democracy, a realization of the optimal urban form based on the professional expertise (instrumental rationality), and a definition of the public interest and a tendency towards its fulfillment (Faludi, 1973; McLoughlin, 1969; Ennis, 1997; Taylor, 1999). In contrast to this, the collaborative planning corresponds to the context of deliberative democracy, thus focusing on the collaborative rationality: cooperation among numerous stakeholders, exchange of information and different types of knowledge – expert and experiential, and harmonization of various interests hence achieving the so-called collective interest (Forester 1989, 1999; Healey, 1992, 1995; Innes, 1995; Sandercock, 1998; Booher and Innes, 2002).

However, from the theoretical point of view, there are several criticisms of the collaborative planning model: it is said to be dominant in relation to other theoretical discourses; there is a lack of argumentative justification of the model itself; and, its theoretical base is rather ambiguous (Allmendinger,

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2002). In the practice of the collaborative planning, not all the stakeholders are equal in their opportunities, rights, and time for debate, while some participants are not able to understand the attitudes and viewpoints of others (Sandercock, 1998). Since planning practice is deeply embedded into certain context, the debate elucidates the stakeholders with real power (be this particular expertise, public authority position, financial resources, etc.), which then affects the understanding and defining the various types of rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Finally, the professional competence of planners as stakeholders equal to others in the processes that highly endanger the public interest is deeply contested (Baxamusa, 2008).

From the previous, it seems that current planning approaches are not capable of facing the non-linear nature of messy policy problems. Therefore, some scholars place an emphasis on deliberation (Dryzek, 1990; Sager, 2002; Hirt, 2005; Laurian, 2007). Deliberation as a method should have an effect on the selection of a course of action after careful consideration and dialogue among involved parties, supported by arguments (Goodin, 2008). To some extent, this kind of approach is similar to the collaborative approach. Nevertheless, through deliberation the participants are to be encouraged not only to overcome the idea of consensus building, but also to face the mutual problem solving (Fischer and Gottweis, 2012). Moreover, deliberation is aimed at creating acceptable plan for the optimal organization of the participants' activities, which, respectively, affect and modify the participants' needs in order for the goals and interests to be reconciled (Forester, 1993). Such a 'scheme of behaving' (Rawls, 1999) in a deliberative process corresponds to a certain extent to the highly structured premises of the rational planning model. Nevertheless, the instrumental rationality of experts does not prevail in the deliberative approach: the planners aim at compensating the imbalance of power in society through making the public discussions on the urban development issues transparent, constructive, and respectful of differences (Fishler, 2012). Emphasizing the role of planners as mediators (and not the stakeholders equal to others) in the participatory planning and decision-making processes is another specificity of the deliberative approach, particularly when compared to the collaborative one (Forester, 1999).

Through the lens of historical development, the involvement of various stakeholders in the planning process and, thus, making their voices heard was not experienced equally in Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Namely, value assessment (except the values prescribed by the dominant ideology) was a strongly missing component in the social and political context of the so-called Eastern Bloc. In contrast to other communist countries behind the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia was considered a socialist state, thus allowing for some innovative, participatory instruments in the domain of spatial and urban planning. However, the circumstances of the Yugoslav fragmentation in the 1990s caused the centralization of decision-making, thus emphasizing the 'top-down' approach reflected in the planning field, too. Today, despite the tendency to follow and align with European standards, the undeveloped fundamental institutions of the democratic and market-oriented society cause the lack of the necessary rationality

in the planning approach (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). Hence, the paper analyzes spatial and urban planning in Serbia through outlining the basic features of the deliberative planning approach. More precisely, the paper seeks to identify the extent of deliberation in the decision-making processes observed through various periods of Serbian planning history, since the Second World War (SWW) up till now.

The paper is structured as follows. As spatial and urban planning is deeply dependent on a certain setting (be this social, political and/or economic), the democratic decision-making context, in particular deliberative democracy, is briefly presented. This is followed by elucidating the concept of deliberation and its relevance to the spatial planning field. The basic characteristics of the deliberative planning approach and its main normative aspects are described in short. The empirical part of the paper analyzes spatial and urban planning in Serbia through various stages, highlighting in particular the nature of the planning process. The discussion part is devoted to the critical assessment of planning in Serbia, observed from the deliberative stand, again looking at the normative aspects and their fulfillment in the concrete empirical case. The main guidelines towards the reform of the planning approach in Serbia are briefly provided in conclusion.

#### DEMOCRATIC APPROACHES TO DECISION-MAKING

Every social group exhibits a need to make decisions that are binding for all its members, and participation of various interest groups in decision-making today is an integral part of modern political and legal thought. The decision may also be made by an individual in the name of the whole group, which is understood as contemporary democracy – a form of governance contrary to all autocratic regimes. Namely, democracy is defined as a set of (primary and/or fundamental) rules that determine who is authorized to make collective decisions based on certain procedures (Bobio, 1990).

Contrary to other two ideal governance models (representative and pluralist democracy), deliberative democracy places an emphasis on the fair negotiation between various interest groups in order to possibly achieve common interest (Cohen, 2006; Rawls, 1999). Its basic principle refers to the stakeholders, which are required to justify attitudes that are collectively imposed (Štajner, 2015). Justifications are not only procedural or formal, but they also reflect the moral principles elucidating freedom of expression, too. Thus, stakeholders are motivated to find fair terms of cooperation, which are eligible for all (Gutmann and Thomson, 2000). The possibility of changing the decision about certain topic, based on previous discussion and reflection, is the essence of deliberative democracy. In sum, deliberative democracy implies the cooperation through the exchange of different moral values (Gutmann and Thomson, 2000), i.e., any individual or organization has the right to participate in public dialogue and presents its own views. Ultimately, the effect of the public dialogue is twofold: educational – providing mutual learning through the exchange of information, and integral – as an incentive for reconsidering the certain participants' attitudes and their integration with the views of others (Goodin, 2008).

## DELIBERATIVE PLANNING APPROACH

After an era of the rational planning model dominance, across the hybrid models that appeared as a reaction to this model, but also due to the changes in global society, the collaborative planning has been standing out for decades now (Forester 1989; Healey, 1992, 1995; Innes, 1995; Innes and Booher, 2010). Collaborative planning presumes the involvement of all relevant stakeholders so that they can contribute to informed communication based on the power of knowledge and arguments (Healey, 1997). Taking an argument as a key value in the decision-making is also important from the deliberative planning perspective (List, 2007). More precisely, Sager (2002) examines whether it is reasonable to treat the decision-making process through dialogue like merging arguments.

Hence, the process of deliberation should be calm, reflective process of open communication that accepts a wide range of arguments and respects different views (Sager, 2002). According to List (2007), consensus building, and moreover problem solving, should comply with the following statements:

- Deliberation enables people to find a common issue, thus identifying the problem.
- Deliberation tends to lead to an agreement about the order of all the options and/or preferences concerning a problematic issue.
- Once the problem issue and interrelationship between different options are identified as relevant, deliberation enables each person to decide which option is the most preferred, forming the order of the remaining options in comparison to the most preferable one, and afterwards disseminating it with other participants.

However, planning processes are rarely straightforward, i.e. urban planning is an unsteady activity filled with renegotiated resolution of a number of contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions between urban planning as plan making for the community and urban planning as deliberation by the community (Fishler, 2012). If urban planning is the collective management, including also participants with less rhetorical abilities, civil sectors, non-expert parties (Fischer and Gottweis, 2012), the specificity of deliberative method is mainly seen in the role of a mediator and its specific nature (Fishler, 2012; Grossman, 2009). A mediator, being an individual or an organization, is a neutral entity that encourages the negotiation among various social groups, rather than their separate contact with various authorities (Baxamusa, 2008).

From the previous lines, it can be concluded that the deliberative approach contains various forms of rationality. Some of them are more similar to the instrumental rationality (order of preferences, course of actions, plan of the participants' activities), nevertheless, they do not highlight the experts' position nor impose their values on others, as prescribed by the rational planning model. Rather, it is about raising the awareness about certain issues among all the parties involved (Fischer and Gottweis, 2012; Fishler, 2012). On the other hand, the deliberative approach is highly

related to the collaborative rationality principles – diversity of interests, interdependence of participants, and authentic dialogue (Innes and Booher, 2010). However, deliberation introduces the clear role of a mediator as a third party – the one who unpretentiously molds the course of future actions for the benefit of all involved (Fishler, 2012; Grossman, 2009). Briefly put, the planners applying the deliberative approach are in between the expertise prescribed by both the rational and collaborative models: they do not impose their expert opinions, but they use mediating skills to run the communication better and thus effectively achieve the desired common goals.

Previous features of the deliberative processes serve as a background for defining the normative aspects necessary for the ideal process of deliberation to be conducted. Cohen (2006) defines these aspects as follows: freedom, reasoned thinking, equality, and rationally motivated consensus.

**Freedom** in the ideal process of deliberation exists if two requirements are satisfied: 1) the parties in deliberation are focused only on the problem solving and they are not guided by the pre-given personal standards, values and requirements, i.e. the consideration of a wide variety of interests is a necessary condition of a deliberative process (Innes and Booher, 2010), and 2) the parties consider the decision reached in the process of deliberation as a sufficient cause to comply with (Cohen, 2006).

**Reasoned thinking** in the process of deliberation is achieved if the participants in a discussion present the arguments to support their own or criticize some other proposals, under the ultimate goal of deliberation as a process striving to achieve agreement in accordance with better arguments and better reasons (Cohen, 2006). More precisely, better arguments are not pre-given, but appear as a result of interdependence of participants, who modify their preferences through the authentic dialogue (Innes and Booher, 2010). The force of the 'good argument' (Dryzek, 1990) avoids mechanical – selfish or irrational ways of choosing preferences by the participants in the process (Elster, 1998; List, 2007).

**Equality** among the participants in the deliberative process implies their formal and substantive equality. In a formal sense, equality is achieved when the rules for implementing deliberation do not exclude any individual. Ideally, everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and/or to vote at any level of a deliberative process. Substantively, equality is achieved in case the existing distribution of power and resources cannot influence the process of public deliberation (Cohen, 2006; Forester, 1999).

**Rationally motivated consensus** is understood as an implicit outcome of the deliberative process. Through information exchange and learning processes in the deliberative approach, participants trigger each other to reconsider certain preferences and their potential modifications, as well (Cohen, 2006; List, 2007; Innes and Booher, 2010). Moreover, the public interest is not necessarily pre-given – rather, there is a collective, common interest that should be constructed through the deliberation process (Dryzek, 1990).

According to List (2007), the use of deliberative method does not have identical effects in every society, and it is quite expected that the answers vary depending on the value system, history, demographics, ideological conditions and similar factors. The next section presents the features of spatial and urban planning in Serbia, observed through the main arguments and actions of the spatially relevant stakeholders.

## SPATIAL AND URBAN PLANNING IN SERBIA: A BRIEF REVIEW

The description provided in this section serves as a base for further identifying the deliberative approach in the practice of Serbian spatial and urban planning, observed through various periods (in Section 5). Serbia seems to be a particularly intriguing example in this sense. In the post-SWW period, the workers' community had a strong role in political decision-making despite the centralized power seen in the national government. However, in the 1990s, Yugoslavia faced the civil war on its territory, the secession of its republics that had constituted a federal state, and the nationalistic tendencies consequently followed by dictatorship. In other words, just after the year 2000, Serbia started to develop a new social and economic system, thus trying to catch up with other post-socialist states, which were adapting their social and political context towards democracy and market demands as the main characteristics of a contemporary global society.

By briefly explaining the context (social and political) and the relationships among the key stakeholders responsible for spatial development, this section focuses on the description of the planning process in Serbia through three periods, defined on the basis of the main social and political changes that occurred: 1) the phase of socialist planning (1945–1989), started after SWW, 2) the post-socialist phase (1989–2000), which started with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and finished with the election of the first democratic government in newer Serbian history, and, finally, 3) the stasis phase (2000–present), which, despite the shift in the political setting, is still considered the post-socialist period, like the previous one.

### Socialist planning (1945–1989)

The end of the SWW designated one of the greatest milestones in political, social and economic systems in Yugoslavia. Briefly put, immediately after the war, the Yugoslav constitutional monarchy was replaced by the communist regime (1945–1950), being followed with the socialist one, while the poorly developed agrarian economy shifted towards the centralized planned economy. In the period when collective interests gained power, most of the spatial resources were announced to be the state property. From a spatial planning perspective, it was the 'golden era' of Yugoslav spatial development, characterized by transparent and participative way of planning, which at the beginning was only introduced through the legal framework, to be extensively practised later on.

In the first decades after the war, the nature of the planning process was focused on the notion of interdisciplinarity. All kinds of various planning documents were prepared in

a multidisciplinary environment, composed of architects, geographers, economists, sociologists, traffic engineers, etc., who paved the way for the newly recognized profession of 'urban and regional planner' or 'physical planner'. The result of such interdisciplinary collaboration was the so-called integrated planning, with the aim of putting together all relevant sectors when dealing with spatial issues (Nedović-Budić and Cavrić, 2006). Later on, during the 1970s and 1980s, together with understanding the planning as a social practice, the decision-making process included not only experts, but also representatives of local politics and, more importantly, the civil sector. Such a 'bottom-up' approach in decision-making introduced through the democratic instrument of public participation was a result of the socialist planning approach supported by the self-government system (Perić, 2016a). More precisely, although the citizens' involvement in the planning process was prescribed by the planning legislation as far back as 1949, it started to be regularly executed in the planning practice two decades later. Some authors even note that the principle of 'cross-acceptance' was used in Yugoslavia before it was implemented in Western countries (Vujošević, 2010; Nedović-Budić and Cavrić, 2006). Nevertheless, it should be stressed that all kinds of associations and organizations (be these professional or composed of civil sector representatives) were controlled by strongly hierarchical political structures. That meant that hardly any decision could have been made without the previous consent of the central and local government (Nedović-Budić *et al.*, 2012). However, it seems that achieving the public interest was one of the main goals of socialist spatial and urban planning greatly supported not only by the self-government systems, but also by the instrument of social agreements (Vujošević and Nedović-Budić, 2006). Finally, all actors involved had a high level of responsibility and skills in doing their specific tasks under given circumstances, thus jointly contributing to spatial development.

### Post-socialist planning (1989–2000)

The second turning point that deeply affected the social and economic system of the Eastern Bloc countries was the fall of the Berlin Wall. They were faced with the fast transformation of political system into a pluralist democracy, while the economic system change was directed towards the liberal, i.e. market-based economy. In addition, Yugoslavia suffered from the disintegration of its territory. The state faced the need of transforming its economy and institutions, however, politics took precedence over all the attempts to do it in a civilized manner (Nedović-Budić *et al.*, 2012).

Due to the social and economic changes, the methodological approach to spatial and urban planning was transformed, too. Firstly, integrated planning – widely used in a socialist regime, was hindered due to the re-centralization process. This was particularly seen at the regional level – most of the regional issues were not addressed systematically and there was no cooperation with neighboring countries related to border-area problems (Nedović-Budić and Cavrić, 2006). The horizontal collaboration against the centralized system persevered, and in some cases it even transcended the expertise towards the political domain, e.g. the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (1996) was the first democratic

national spatial plan supported by all opposition parties in the parliament (Vujošević, 2010). However, the vertical cooperation (among local authorities, regional agencies and national ministries) reached its lowest point, due to omission of the local spatial plans from the planning law (Vujošević, 2003). In other words, the key spatial planning documents were the products of a 'top-down' planning approach. The second important characteristic of socialist planning experienced in previous decades – citizens' participation in the planning process – was tremendously endangered, since the land development process had become almost exclusively driven by private investment (Nedović-Budić *et al.*, 2012). Due to corruption, non-transparent decision-making procedures and unregulated economic measures, the highest governance level green-lighted the private investors for possible development (Zeković *et al.*, 2015; Vujošević *et al.*, 2012; Vujović and Petrović, 2007). Satisfying only the interest of few actors resulted in the neglect of the social goals and also strongly diminished the role of the expert community and citizens, as well (Perić, 2016b). More precisely, contrary to the prestigious 'image' the planners succeeded to create during the previous decades, in the 1990s all their proposals, scenarios and spatial visions were confronted with the strong and decisive role of national government, i.e. the responsible ministries.

### Stasis (2000–present)

The third milestone in the recent history of Serbia began at the end of 2000, when the authoritarian regime was replaced by the democratically elected government, hence opening the era of pluralist political culture, the one that was forbidden in Serbia for more than half a century. This was followed by the re-decentralization of political and administrative power to the local level (Nedović-Budić and Cavrić, 2006). However, such a transformation is considered a 'proto-democracy' (Vujošević, 2010). Namely, in terms of economic orientation, the tendency to implement the principles of the neo-liberal paradigm have never been stronger, which, together with the lack of institutional capacity, makes Serbia a transitional society even in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As previously mentioned, 'proto-democracy' is a context that still does not recognize the legitimacy of a plurality of interests. Hence, the professional planning remains much the same as in the socialist time. Professional expertise is rooted in the comprehensive planning model with no respect for the open market demands in the spatial development domain (Vujošević and Nedović-Budić, 2006), and there is still a neglect of the collaborative planning, despite its introduction through informal strategic planning engaging large (foreign) funds (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). According to the comprehensive planning model, the planners' activities are directed towards achieving public interest in a close cooperation with the governing structures. Nevertheless, in a transitional society moving towards the market-based economic system, planners are left unable to understand the complexity of the altered socio-economic framework (Maruna, 2015). They lack knowledge of the humanities, reckoning instead only on purely technical disciplines and engineering skills. Observed from the planning practice perspective, modern planners need to accept that they do

not have the monopolistic position in plan making, strongly ingrained in their narrow professional expertise, anymore. On the contrary, they must be aware that other stakeholders (be these from the private or civil sector) also have legitimate interests (Perić and Maruna, 2012). The close cooperation between the governmental bodies and the private sector still flourishes in the spatial planning domain – in the first years after the democratic elections the politicians built the strong relationships with the domestic tycoons, while the current regime is close to foreign investors. Nevertheless, all the principles of fuzzy collaboration stay the same: satisfying only partial interest leads to deformed spatial development (Lazarević Bajec, 2009; Perić, 2016a). The public initiatives go through their renaissance phase, mainly through strengthening the creative cluster, but also supported by the recent change of the legal framework (2014). Nevertheless, they are still considered rather unstructured and spontaneous: public voices are not heard enough, citizens are mainly passive recipients of information, and civil sector is usually omitted from the urban decision-making process (Perić and Maruna, 2012; Cvetinović *et al.*, 2017).

### DISCUSSION

Previous elucidating of the positions, roles and interests of the main stakeholders (government, private investors, citizens, and experts) relevant for the spatial planning issues serves as a ground for making an informed assessment of deliberative planning practices in Serbia through various periods. Briefly put, it seems that Serbia experienced greater deliberation in the period of a strongly state-controlled socialist spatial and urban planning, while nowadays there is a significant lack of skills and knowledge of how to collaborate within the transitional and fuzzy governance apparatus. Table 1 summarizes the main parameters relevant for scrutinizing the deliberative approach, followed by a systemic overview of different periods in Serbian spatial planning history, considering the main normative aspects of deliberation as previously described.

**Freedom** as the basic normative aspect of deliberation was practiced to various extent through different phases of Serbian spatial and urban planning practice. During socialism, all the participants involved in the planning process were focused on achieving the public interest, as social goals were considered the main value (Nedović-Budić, 2006). Self-government was a powerful instrument of the socialist state to promote individual needs and interests, which gained their final shape in the form of collective interest through the process of public participation. Such an interest was a sufficient reason to be respected further in the process of its implementation. Nevertheless, freedom was not absolute – the basic norms of the social model were mainly perceived through the ideology of the ruling political party and its values. During the 1990s freedom profoundly collapsed, i.e. it was strongly suppressed by the authoritarian regime, which forced the 'top-down' approach to decision-making, thus disabling the voices of citizens to be heard, while the role of experts was also diminished in the context of political, social and spatial degradation. In a contemporary 'proto-democracy', freedom is manifested only 'on paper' – the voice of stakeholders other than the

Table 1. Overview of the planning process and its deliberative characteristics in different periods of spatial and urban planning in Serbia.

Period	Planning process	Freedom	Reasoned thinking	Equality	Rationally motivated consensus	Features of the deliberative approach
Socialist planning (1945–1989)	- Integrated planning - Public participation - Public interest	+/-	+	+/-	+	In addition to making the citizens' voices heard, there is a certain level of independence, however, within the overall state framework. Participatory equality and rational consensus are the basics of the spatial decision-making in the self-government manner.
Post-socialist planning (1989–2000)	- Top-down approach - Absence of strategic planning - Private interests	-	-	-	+/-	Unilateral decision-making and exclusion of non-governmental participants (roughly depriving the right of freedom and expressing opinions) affect the inequality in the spatial decision-making process. Motivated consensus is achieved only through a horizontal coordination, but there is no cooperation between different governmental spatial planning bodies.
Stasis (2000–present)	- Non-transparent procedures - Lack of public participation - Lack of expert skills and knowledge	+/-	-	-	-	Although there are mechanisms for expert and citizen participation in spatially relevant issues at some local levels, the equality between representatives of social action is missing. Rationally motivated consensus is not considered the main goal, while the interests of the ruling political structures, contrary to the expert communities, are still prevalent.

(Source: Authors)

ruling government bodies can be expressed, but reaction to it is constantly missing (Maruna, 2015; Cvetinović *et al.*, 2017).

**Reasoned thinking** as part of the deliberative process also varied considerably throughout different periods. During socialism, two instruments affected reasoned thinking. Firstly, self-governance influenced the strong interaction and interdependence among the parties involved. Nevertheless, since it was the political instrument, public participation served as a tool for legitimizing the planning decisions which could be, but were not necessarily directed towards the public interest (Nedović-Budić *et al.*, 2012). Secondly, integrated planning that involved a wide range of various experts in the fields close to spatial and urban planning was a way to proceed with spatial challenges. In other words, instrumental rationality had a great effect on the agreements based on better arguments and better reasons. This greatly changed in the next period. Planners who, due to their professional expertise, had a state support during socialism lost such an exclusive position overnight – on the one hand, the private investors colored the argumentation of the transitional political regime, while, on the other, the professional postulates had to be ignored in order to preserve basic social stability, e.g. in case of illegal settlements (Vujošević, 2010). Nowadays, the spatial development governance is mainly conducted without considering the arguments of experts and/or citizens. This is not only due to the re-rise of the state-controlled planning, but more owing to the absence of the collaborative

rationality among the most affected parties – professional community and civil sector (Maruna, 2015).

**Equality** of the participants was always difficult to achieve in Serbian social and spatial planning context. In the time of self-government and decentralization, formally all the participants in the decision-making were equal (Nedović-Budić, 2006). Nevertheless, public assessment was substantively conditioned by the political framework. This became more obvious during the 1990s, through the strong political repression of individual values, and the tight connection between the national government and private investors, observed in the spatial planning domain, too. Today, instead with domestic tycoons, there is a close relationship of the highest government bodies with foreign investors. Only experts close to governance structures have a say in the planning process (Perić, 2016a). Their influence on decision-making is, however, limited. Civil sector and non-governmental organizations try to advocate the public interest; when it comes to great spatial development challenges, they are mainly not capable of such activity (Cvetinović *et al.*, 2017).

**Rationally motivated consensus** was achieved to various extent throughout the planning history of Serbia. Integrated socialist planning and the public assessment of the planning solutions were considered the tools for informed decision-making. Later on, consensus was not a priority within the monopolistic political setting, highly reducing the information flow, discussion and, thus, transparency. Today,

consensus in the planning of relevant issues is also difficult to achieve – market-based planning neglecting broader social goals is a dominant mode of the current planning practice, thus leaving little room for collaboration (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). In order for consensus to be reached, Serbian planners nowadays must firstly find the way to become equal players in a society – by keeping the confidence in their technical expertise, but necessarily adapting their skills and knowledge to the current tendencies, they could be recognized by the governance as the stakeholders with a say in the decision-making process (Maruna, 2015; Perić, 2016a). Civil sector is also to follow this pattern.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper provides the key issues on the spatial and urban planning practice in Serbia observed from the deliberative stand. With a focus on the current period, the following conclusions are made. Still facing the transitional challenges in the planning domain, Serbian government struggles to become a motivating framework for the developmental initiatives, usually at the expense of various social groups and their legitimate interests. Private sector has a clear strategy on how to accomplish own interests and within the society where neither the public nor civil sector possess adequate negotiation skills, (foreign) investors consider Serbia a fruitful ground. From a planning professional perspective, such decisions clearly lead to the deformed spatial development. However, planners are still not strong enough in pointing to the shortcomings of the planning procedure – the one that only declaratively prescribes the public involvement (e.g. through the instrument of public inquiry).

Taking previous claims into account, but also considering that Serbia strives to become a full member of the European Union, there is a clear need for upgrading the democratic setting first. Effective institutions and transparent procedures are the basis for the increase in participation and deliberative planning approaches (Hirt, 2005; Lazarević Bajec, 2009; Perić, 2013). Hence, some presumptions for the functioning of the deliberative planning approach in Serbia in order for it to become resilient to numerous challenges are as follows:

- Encourage the planning experts and civil society, as direct representatives of the public interest, to take an active role in the spatial decision-making, thus raising *freedom* as a deliberative value.
- Consider both the expert skills and knowledge as well as the experiential (e.g. knowledge/skills of local community in an issue relevant to planning ) expertise as the relevant *arguments* affecting the outcome of the deliberative planning process.
- Ensure that the voices of all relevant stakeholders are heard in the spatial decision-making process (i.e. through introducing the mediator role), no matter which indicators affect the *equality* (e.g. expertise and local knowledge vs. financial and institutional power).
- Involve either mediators or planners with deliberative skills (facilitation, mediation, negotiation) to guide the participants through the deliberative process in order

to achieve *consensus* as the key deliberative aim leading to problem solving.

Placing the mentioned guidelines against the features of spatial and urban planning in Serbia through various periods, the transformation of the planning approach should be based on the combination of various types of rationality. More precisely, planning patterns inherited from the socialist planning with a strong dimension of the instrumental rationality (through integrated and multidisciplinary planning) should, however, be further followed with a necessary adjustment to the needs of a contemporary society based on the plurality of interests, i.e., the implementation of the collaborative rationality would enable the recognition and respect of the powers influencing planning the collaborative rationality enables the recognition and respect of the powers influencing planning. To achieve this, the participation of structured stakeholders and mediated consensus building as deliberative features should be considered the supportive tool for providing legitimacy in taking decisions.

However, analysts go astray as they imagine planners or planning responsible for relations of social mistrust and cynical detachment. The planning can provide an important testimony to the kind of purposeful deliberation that may anticipate and avoid the social and economic damage of urban developments that willfully ignore future consequences for others. Nevertheless, bureaucratic indifference and patronage, along with political favoritism and corruption, cannot be remedied by planning. Changing these conditions requires a host of social, political and economic changes that extend well beyond what spatial and urban planning can do.

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