

# SERBIA AND THE DANUBE AREA IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

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**A new global framework to guide urban development and housing policy in the next twenty years – *the New Urban Agenda* was adopted at the end of the Habitat III Conference held in Quito, Ecuador. This time, the Agenda was tailored and adopted to the requirements of the Sustainable Development Goals and particularly to the requirements of Goal 11 – Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, established in 2015. The paper outlines the basic facts indicating the complexity of Agenda-making and the entire Habitat III process. It also points to the first controversies that have arisen around and after the conference in Quito and examines the importance attached, and the one that the Agenda might have in the future in the Danube countries, especially in Serbia, taking into account demographic trends, diversity in the level of the existing quality of urban life and challenges to be met.**

**Key words:** NUA, Danube region, Serbia, sustainable urban development.

## INTRODUCTION

The third Habitat Conference held in Quito and a new global document dedicated to sustainable urban development which was adopted at that occasion show a still present ability of the Habitat initiative to identify new challenges and try to turn them into appropriate solutions or at least common objectives to be achieved in the next twenty years. Of the many ongoing processes, the one crucial for the Habitat initiative is the pace of urbanization, the share of urban population increasing from 37.9% at the time of the first conference in Vancouver (1976) to 45.1% at the time of the second conference in Istanbul (1996) and 54.5% at the time of the conference in Quito (2016). This is complemented by the following facts of equal importance: the cities that occupy only 2% of the total land mass generate 70% of GDP, but consume 60% of global energy and produce 70% of greenhouse gases as well as of the global waste (Habitat III, 2016d). Based on these benchmarks, and taking into account other global documents and commitments, the Habitat Program has produced *the New Urban Agenda* by using various forms of participation in a complex process, described in the first part. The other two chapters examine the influence and importance of the Agenda on two overlapping territories – the Danube macro-region and Serbia. Though small on the globe, these territories indicate the justifiability of the large number of topics included in

the Agenda, and that some might not immediately associate with the European continent.

## NEW URBAN AGENDA

The new global urban development framework – *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) was endorsed at the 68<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the UN, held on 23 December 2016 in New York. The process of the consolidation of the text started earlier that year, the Draft NUA being adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) gathering 30,000 participants from 167 countries around nearly 1,000 different events and held from 17 to 20 October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador.

The preparation of both NUA and Habitat III Conference was a simultaneous, multi-layered endeavour arising from two resolutions of the UN General Assembly – Resolution 66/207 and Resolution 67/216 providing that: “The conference will result in a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document, which shall reinvigorate the global commitment to and support for housing and sustainable urban development and the implementation of a *New Urban Agenda*”. Resolution 67/216 also called for taking into account the principles and achievements of other relevant UN documents including the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – *The future we want*. In its paragraphs 245 to 251, the latter anticipated the definition of sustainable development goals

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that would build on the previous Millennium Development Goals whose time limit expired in 2015. After a year-long negotiation process, 17 Sustainable Development Goals were agreed and the UN member states approved them by adopting a new agenda – *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11) being finally a decisive framework for the NUA.

In addition to the achievements of other UN initiatives, the whole Habitat III process was based on two fundamental facts: that today more than half the world's population lives in cities and that this urban population is expected to nearly double by 2050, posing “massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others” (NUA, par. 2). The above-mentioned facts are complemented by those highlighted by SDG 11, to number only few: “95 per cent of urban expansion in the next decades will take place in developing world”; “828 million people live in slums today and the number keeps rising”; “the world's cities occupy just 3 per cent of the Earth's land, but account for 60-80 per cent of energy consumption and 75 per cent of carbon emissions”... Besides processing such disturbing information, the NUA preparatory process was also grounded in 22 Habitat III Issue Papers that were prepared by 10 Policy Units in six different areas and in all six official UN languages plus Portuguese,<sup>2</sup> as well as in National Reports for Habitat III Conference that analysed achievements and challenges in urban development between last two Habitat conferences. National Reports were provided by 107 UN member states and Palestine as an observer, though some were delivered, like in the case of Serbia, just before the Conference. The structure of the National Reports, determined by the UN Habitat, included six key topics, thirty issues and twelve indicators.<sup>3</sup> The NUA preparatory process was also supported by seven thematic and regional meetings, several informal intergovernmental meetings and hearings, three sessions of the Preparatory Committee and an on-line debate/forum.

From the first Zero Draft released on 6 May 2016, the NUA evolved into an even more concise final document that starts with the *Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All* underlying, among other things, that the NUA reaffirms global commitment to sustainable urban development “as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner at the global, regional, national, sub-national and local levels, with the participation of all relevant actors” and that its implementation contributes “to the implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in an integrated manner”, and to the achievement of its goals and targets, including Goal 11. The shared vision of “cities for all”, strongly based on (fundamental) human rights, pictures cities that fulfil their social, economic, environmental

<sup>2</sup> The full list can be consulted at: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/issue-papers>

<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for the preparation of National Reports can be consulted at: <https://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Guidelines-and-Format-for-the-Preparation-of-National-Reports-On-Six-Key-Topics-Thirty-Issues-and-Twelve-Indicators.pdf>, the reports provided being available at: <https://habitat3.org/documents>



Figure 1. The New Urban Agenda, (Source: <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>)

and territorial functions taking into account different individual situations (especially of those in need) with the aim of fostering prosperity and quality of life. The essential commitment of the *Quito Declaration* consists of working towards an urban paradigm shift, including reviewing and changing the way of planning and management of cities in order to strengthen their sustainability in all aspects. In its *Call for action*, the Declaration states that “the New Urban Agenda is universal in scope, participatory and people-centred, protects the planet and has a long-term vision, setting out priorities and actions at the global, regional, national, sub-national and local levels that Governments and other relevant stakeholders in every country can adopt based on their needs”, paying particular attention to developing (including small island, landlocked and African states) and middle-income countries, as well as countries and territories in situations of (post-)conflict or under foreign occupation and countries affected by natural and human-made disasters.

The core part of the document is the *Quito implementation plan for the New Urban Agenda* that includes three chapters: *Transformative commitments* with interrelated commitments in three areas, *Effective implementation*, calling, among others, for the implementation of financial measures and the UN guidelines for decentralization and planning, stronger cooperation, establishment of legal and policy frameworks, coherence between sectoral goals and measures, stronger capacities, participation, long-term goals and flexibility in urban and territorial planning, inclusive housing policies, transport accessibility, transparency, etc. and the *Follow-up and review*. The *Plan* has already been put into practice, for the time being as a web platform to collect

voluntary commitments by various partners that “seek to be concrete actions, measurable and achievable, focused on implementation, and with great depth of information for future accountability and transparency”. Paragraph 128 of the NUA calls for an “evidence-based and practical guidance for the implementation of the NUA” to be developed by the UN Habitat programme. However, every UN member state should take into consideration commitments and obligations arising from the Agenda and adapt them to its own context with the help of *International Guidelines on Decentralization and Access to Basic Services for All*, *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning* and other relevant tools, not to forget the importance of the *SDG 11 Monitoring Framework – a guide to assist national and local governments to monitor and report on SDG 11 Indicators*, provided in February 2016.

Although quite a few (non-scientific) articles were circulated about the NUA so far, one can discern a few impressions. One is that the NUA and Habitat III address mainly the challenges facing developing cities, as stated by Richard Sennett, one of the authors of the *Quito Papers*<sup>4</sup> (Greenspan, 2016), and confirmed in the sentence: “While for some signing this Agenda may be a break-through, for some others this vision and principles are already considered as granted.” (URBACT, 2016). Whereas admiring the entire preparatory process and especially its participatory methods and achievements, URBACT further argues if the universality of the NUA could be its weakness “as the lack of unconventional and creative spirit, operational plan, targets, indicators, and way of working makes it more like a wish list rather than an innovative and transformative agenda of the future.” This, however, can be considered as a foregone conclusion firstly because it was difficult to reach the consensus on commitments although goals were unquestionably acceptable to all (Scruggs, 2016a), secondly, because indicators and the entire monitoring framework had already been developed for SDG 11 and thirdly because the implementation phase was at its very beginning, the review of the outcome of the Habitat III Conference and the implementation of the NUA being on the agenda of the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council of the UN Habitat Programme held from 8 to 12 May 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya. The latest was immediately followed by the Second International Conference on National Urban Policy entitled *National Urban Policies: Implementing the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda* held from 15 to 18 May 2017 in Paris.

### THE DANUBE REGION AND THE NUA

Out of 19 European countries that provided National Reports to the Habitat III Conference, eight came from countries under the auspices of the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), namely Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Moldova. Most of these documents were delivered just in time for the Quito conference, the exception being the timely prepared reports from Romania, Germany and the Czech Republic.

<sup>4</sup> *Quito Papers* is a new urban concept that emerged from a critical review of the Athens Charter and the observations of the composition of cities in developing countries that call for flexible solutions. The concept was developed by Joan Clos, Saskia Sassen, Richard Sennett and Ricky Burdett in parallel to the Habitat III process.

In addition to differences in national priorities, needs and attitudes toward global guidelines and commitments, one of the reasons for the incoherent approach to a new global urban development framework among fourteen EUSDR countries certainly lies in a number of European initiatives that emerged and drew the attention of the European states, especially EU member states after the Habitat II Conference (URBACT, 2016). Yet, this history is shorter than the Habitat initiative, especially when taking into account different stages of the EU construction and enlargement as well as still insufficiently clear perspective of presently five non-EU Danube countries that are ineligible for many EU funded programmes including URBACT. Besides, occasional turning back to global frameworks should be considered as fruitful exercise aimed at reassessing previously set goals both in the national and in the wider regional context. The contribution of the eight Danube countries has firmly shown such determination.

Heterogeneous in many respects (Đorđević and Živanović, 2011), the Danube Region is certainly not one of those parts of Europe where the NUA “vision and principles are already considered as granted”. This allegation is supported by the official representatives of the Danube countries in their speeches at the conference in Quito, by submitted National Reports as well as by the EUSDR itself. In this regard, it is clear that the objectives of the NUA have been already largely attained in the old EU member states of the Danube Region, and that these countries are now focusing on further improvement of the achieved quality of life as well as on addressing other (global) issues such as integration of immigrants/migrants, security, climate change and disaster risk reduction. On the other hand, the newer and non-EU member states are, generally speaking, still struggling with the provision of new and improvement of existing utilities and other infrastructure networks, implementation of polycentric development, housing quality and affordability and even poverty.

Provided National Reports present a particularly rich source of information based on which, with due respect for the dangers and shortcomings of generalization, it is possible to perform more than a few important conclusions. Firstly, while the level of the quality of life obviously decreases going from west to east, the awareness of the need to raise living standards through a critical review of the results achieved so far knows no direction. Secondly, the pressure of urbanization in the Danube countries is far less pronounced than in some other parts of the world, especially as, with the exception of Austria, all countries are faced with a lasting population decrease. The problem of aging is, however, omnipresent. In this context, the challenges of urbanization are typical only for the capital and several other big cities, while smaller cities and towns need support for the sustention of the existing services. Thirdly, while all Danube countries call for stronger decentralization, coordination, cooperation and public involvement and pay significant attention to land consumption, urban-rural linkages, elderly care, excessive share of car and road traffic in general, climate change and natural disasters as well as the use of renewable energy sources, these common features must, however, be put in different political and consequently



Figure 2. The Danube Region,  
(Source: <http://www.danube-region.eu/about/the-danube-region>)

economic contexts as the situation in each individual Danube country is strongly influenced by the status towards and the level of achievement of the European Union objectives. Of importance to the Habitat process and the NUA in this regard is the fact that several Danube states are also post-conflict countries that, in addition to the political transition, have to overcome both physical and demographic consequences of armed conflicts, some of the latter having been spilled over into other Danube states. Fourthly, all countries except Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic report significant out-migration movements (including *brain drain* phenomenon) that reflect unfavourable working and living conditions in general, disturbing additionally the adverse demographic and consequently economic and social structure of their country of origin. The phenomenon is also strongly linked to the provision of adequate housing – the issue that makes a strong divide between Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic on one side, and the remaining countries on the other, where an often sudden privatization of state/publicly-owned housing stock during the 1990s raised private ownership to over 90% without providing adequate measures for proper maintenance and access to housing for all, including young professionals, but also different disadvantaged groups. Although Danube countries deny the existence of slums, they point to a specific sub-standard conditions and settlements in which Roma population lives. Last but not least, while the two most developed countries – Germany and Austria, also point to urban sprawl, this issue is much more pronounced in other Danube countries, with extreme examples of illegal and/or excessive construction in Croatia and Serbia. As a special curiosity which is not subject, at least not explicitly, to generalization, it is worth mentioning the courageous observation of the Czech Republic that the “dependence

of the fundamental concepts of territorial development on political and other pressures” compromises their long-term sustainability!

During the Habitat III Conference, a document entitled *Macro-regional strategies in changing times - EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSALP and EUSAIR headed towards the future together* was presented, a brief overview of the accomplishments of the EU Danube Strategy being given under two chapters: *Multi-level governance as part of a macro-regional strategy: the EUSDR civil society experience* and *Achievements in cooperation with the EU enlargement and neighbourhood countries*. While the first points to the vulnerable social situation of Roma community and highlights the success of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), the second emphasizes the importance of the EU macro-regional strategies for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) for allowing “participating enlargement and neighbourhood countries to take – and implement – decisions on an equal footing as the EU Member States” while pointing at the same time to the lack of capacity of certain non-EU countries in this regard. However, while pillars and priority areas of the EUSDR are fully in line with the issues considered under the NUA, the focus of this strategy is not on urban areas, urban issues being mainly observed through the prism of other realities of the Danube macro-region. The importance of cities is emphasized only in Priority Area 10 of the EUSDR Action plan *To Step Up Institutional Capacity and Cooperation*, the notion of “urban” in other Priority Areas being sporadically tackled in the context of negative impacts on the environment and landscape, then in relation to mobility, water quality and waste water treatment, climate change, competitiveness of rural areas, migration flows and demographic change, urban

revitalization, urban technologies as well as in the context of governance. The matter of housing is also not among the priorities of the EUSDR and its Action plan, the issue being challenged under the scope of energy efficiency, climate change, Roma communities, demographic and migration challenges, information flow and innovations. This situation, however, does not prevent the Danube countries to propose projects that would more directly address urban development and housing challenges, which were, among others, defined during the preparation of National Reports for the Habitat III Conference. The basic framework for proposing and implementing projects is, in the first place, the Danube Transnational Program with its four priority axes and 10 specific objectives, the examples of projects selected under the 1st Call being 3Smart, AgriGo4Cities, CHESTNUT, CityWalk, eGUTS, etc.

The EU has adopted the *Urban Agenda for the EU – Pact of Amsterdam* in May 2016. Its link to Habitat III is expressed in paragraph 8 saying that: “The Urban Agenda for the EU will contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably Goal 11 ‘Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ and the global ‘New Urban Agenda’ as part of the Habitat III process.” The Agenda defines 12 Priority Themes whereas its implementation is principally foreseen through Thematic Partnerships. This Agenda, however, directly concerns only EU member states and its institutions leaving in this way five Danube countries aside. Yet, this might be seen as a good motive for these countries to stick more firmly to the implementation of the NUA, the needs and objectives addressed by this global framework usually better corresponding to their realities than the highly set objectives of the EU. In any case, it is about complementary processes that share the same final goal – dignified urban life of each and every citizen based on the respect of fundamental human rights.

### SERBIA AND THE NUA

Bearing in mind its political status as well as its social and economic circumstances, Serbia should be equally interested in both the NUA and the relevant European frameworks, especially those concerning the Danube macro-region. When, however, we look at dynamics and track record in the process of accession to the European Union on the one hand, and presently insufficient interest of the state administration for the Habitat III initiative on the other, it becomes clear that the commitments arising from the European and global frameworks in the field of housing and urban development have to be taken more seriously.

Preparations for the Habitat III Conference were initiated during the Second Workshop of the project “Strengthening national capacities for sustainable housing in countries with economies in transition” – an UNDA-financed project implemented by the UNECE in partnership with the UN-Habitat from 2014 to 2017 in Armenia, Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan, the workshop being held in November 2015 in Belgrade. The initiative was headed by the presentations on the Habitat III process and the Guidelines for the preparation of the National Report, while the main conclusions included proposals to establish a National Committee for the preparation of the report with the

participation of all relevant stakeholders at both national and local level (through the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities – SCTM) and to consequently translate the achievements of this endeavour into the *National Urban Development Policy*. By reason of political circumstances, the National Committee was not set up, the Report being prepared at the last moment for its completion before the conference in Quito by the newly established Department for housing and architectural policies, public utilities and energy efficiency of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure. The Department also participated in the preparation of the NUA through contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Habitat III as well as with individuals who took part in the Second Workshop of the UNDA financed project. Both activities, especially the preparation of the Report were supported by the experts of the SCTM. Such report is certainly neither a product of consensus among different interested parties, nor a result of a profound independent research. Still, its content is based on a number of laws, national strategic and other documents, statistics as well as other relevant sources, the Report being modelled on the example of other national contributions and in accordance with the Guidelines. The Report was first presented to the public during the Third Workshop of the UNDA project held from 31 January till 2 February 2017 in Belgrade. As for the Quito conference, Serbia did not have an official delegation at the event. Still, such delegation has been nominated for the Governing Council in Nairobi.

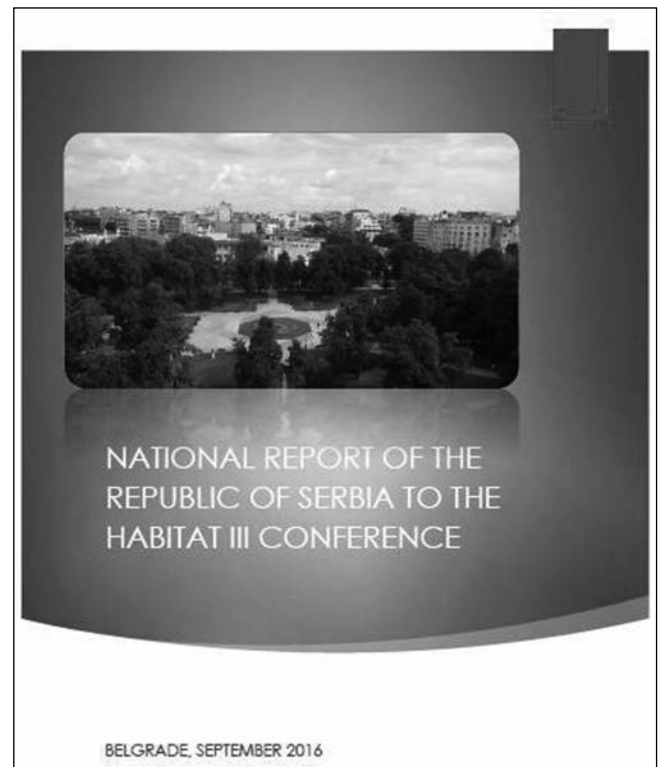


Figure 3. National Report of Serbia,  
(Source: <https://habitat3.org/documents>)

What would be the most important conclusions that could be derived from the National Report of Serbia? According to the Census 2011, the share of urban population is 59.44% while the main demographic and social challenges

are depopulation, aging (further connected to poverty, lack of institutional support and health care as well as housing vulnerability), unemployment and migration (including internal rural-urban migrations, refugees and internally-displaced persons, *brain drain* and asylum seekers) resulting in spatial and functional imbalances and illegal construction. There are also special challenges in this respect such as poverty (especially in rural areas and affecting older population), poor prospects of the younger population (unemployment rate – NEET of those aged 15–24 being 19.7%, *brain drain*, residential dependence, risky behaviour), gender equality (a large number of institutions but poor performance, unequal access to education and employment, parenting issues, violence, particularly unfavourable position of women from vulnerable social groups) and the improvement of the quality of life in suburban areas. As for planning, Serbia is fully covered by spatial plans at all territorial levels (national, regional and local) but urban plans are still missing, the Central Registry of planning documents being recently established. The principles defined by the Law are mainly declarative, and there is a need for their additional concretization at the level of urban planning. Sustainable urban development (including urban regeneration and activation of *brownfields*) is often confronted with the usurpation of agricultural land, illegal construction and *greenfield* investments. Concerning land management, the problem of illegal construction requires further consolidation of planning and land management through restitution, completion of cadastre and creation of geo-databases (in accordance with the EU Directive INSPIRE). On the other hand, the steps for the authorization of building permits have been unified and the permits are now electronic. As far as food production is concerned, sub-urban farming is recognized as a special form of agriculture. While organic farming is regulated by law, there is no such framework for integrated farming, urban farming/gardening being in an initial phase. Domination of bus transport is among the biggest urban mobility challenges. Cycling is seen as a mean of public transportation only in the northern part of the country, while pedestrians face many barriers everywhere. As for technical capacities, the institutional framework is in place, but problems arise in terms of personnel structure, ICT, law enforcement, unenviable financial and statutory position of public enterprises, short deadlines for the development and adoption of planning documents and transition from CAD to GIS technology. According to the 2015 progress report of the European Commission, Serbia is in an early stage of adjusting to environmental standards. Legal and institutional frameworks for risk management are in place but there is a need for better coordination between different services. The road network is the most developed transport network while the railroads are in poor condition, reconstruction and modernization projects taking place gradually. By reason of lacking bypasses, cities are the main bottlenecks. Air quality monitoring is uneven, industrial cities/agglomerations being the most polluted. Legal framework for planning brought many changes since 2003, however, it is in permanent reform, the same applying to laws on legalization. The decentralization process is slow. After several reforms of public finances, local governments

today dispose with four types of income but they should switch to program budgeting. Local economic development has become local governments' jurisdiction only in 2007 and there are now LER offices in most local governments. Generally speaking, the major challenge is the informal economy wherefore there is a need for stronger support to entrepreneurship and inspection. Substandard (illegal) settlements are mainly inhabited by Roma population and are being treated through special programmes, the same being applied for meeting housing needs of refugees and IDPs. Social housing has a relatively new framework. The supply of fresh drinking water is better than sanitation. However, the losses are significant and the quality control must be improved. Only 16.8% of waste water is processed, and most cities do not have treatment plants while 30% of solid waste ends up in illegal dumps. Serbia is relatively rich in renewables, which accounted for 16% of total production in 2013. As for indicators, by reason of the lack of available data only half of them could be completed.

Presented observations and figures reflect the transitional character of Serbian society, which has so far invested a lot of effort in, above all, the creation of necessary legal and policy frameworks, but which still lacks the synchronization of adopted measures, and especially the mechanisms for their implementation. Frequent changes of political course and discourse and their repercussions on professional performance further complicate the issue. That is why the NUA and the UN Habitat guidelines for planning and decentralization should be seen as useful tools for the consolidation of the country's own capabilities in providing truly sustainable and long-term solutions.

Serbia had an active role in the preparation of the EUSDR and is responsible for coordinating activities within two priority areas: the Priority Area 1)b – To improve mobility and multimodality – Rail, road and air transport (together with Slovenia) and the Priority Area 7) To develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies (together with Slovakia). In addition to the EU Danube Strategy, other European documents of importance for the development of the Danube corridor and the Danube area in Serbia have also been identified (Maksin *et al.*, 2014). Serbia also often makes reference to the *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* and is involved in reporting on its implementation. The country, however, belongs to those non-EU Danube countries with limited access to some European initiatives, including *the Urban Agenda for the EU*. At the crossroads of different initiatives and development benchmarks and opportunities, Serbia has every reason to be simultaneously guided by the European, Danube Region and global frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

The NUA is not the first global document of this kind, its predecessor – *the Habitat Agenda* being adopted at the time of the second Habitat conference held in Istanbul in 1996. While this was to some extent helpful, the circumstances in which the two documents were prepared significantly differed. Brought four years ahead of the Millennium Development Goals, *the Habitat Agenda* was a longer and less specific document, whereas *the New Urban Agenda* is

closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals agreed in 2015, and to SDG 11 in particular. Besides, in the period between the adoption of the two agendas the global urban population passed a historical threshold of 50%, whereas a new, and also historical agreement on climate change was reached in Paris, not to mention the other global processes that affected the quality of life in cities around the globe. This has all led to a key conclusion that “Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities”, as stressed by the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council and repeated many times at other occasions.

Although Europe is often a synonym for the high standard of living in global terms, both European continent and the European Union are characterized by numerous imbalances. This is particularly evident at the regional, as well as macro-regional level, which has occupied a special attention of the EU in recent years. The Danube Region is the biggest and the most heterogeneous of all macro-regions that have been subject to the EU integrated development strategies so far. It involves nine EU, two candidate, one potential candidate and two neighbouring countries. Though many EU urban development initiatives have taken place since the 1990s, even the most developed old EU member states have shown their interest in the Habitat III process. When coupled with the conclusions driven from the individual National Reports, it becomes clear that the NUA should play an important role, and that it can serve as a complementary framework for overcoming the differences in the achieved level of urban development between the Danube countries. This consequently concerns Serbia whose challenges, no matter how specific, can be recognized in the provisions of the NUA. In this respect, the NUA should be seen as an additional tool for the operationalization of the adopted legal and policy framework, but also for the definition and then implementation of the *National Urban Development Policy*, new Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia as well as other (spatial and urban) planning documents to be prepared and/or adopted after 2020.

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