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NGO Association for Urban Regeneration Belgrade, Serbia

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abstract: The urban renewal process is affected today, whether in Europe or in Serbia, by a whirlpool of sociological, ecological, economical and other changes, due to the period of recession in the last decade of the 20th century. In Serbia, the situation was even worse, during the period of a civil war.

Banks and sponsors together with citizens and city authorities participate in financing such acceptable form of accommodation or furthermore, are launched into the global regeneration of the city.

The **Association for Urban Regeneration (URA)** is formed in 2004 as a Non Governmental Organization and is focused on the collaboration between the City Hall, the University with its experts in the field and the investors or sponsors. It is founded after the European model which includes well focused and expert team, ready to provide the process.

The Association (URA) is a flexible small organization in which the post graduated experts in the fields and the visiting experts take part for each particular topic which they resolve. URA is the promoter and an initializing factor of the processes of urban regeneration. It invites possible investors and Organizations to help in financing the renewal of particular parts of the city of Belgrade.

This paper explains the main problems concerning the implementation of NGO principles in the country in transition.



NGO Association for Urban Regeneration Belgrade, Serbia

1. 0. Introduction

General priorities of United Nations today concern the effective fight against the poorness and unemployment, together with the protection of natural resources (particularly water). The principles of **sustainable development**¹ include the **urban renewal** as one of the potential guidelines in order to achieve the huge problem of poorness, unemployment and homeless people.

European social Fund works today on restructuring of employment trying to maintain the existing jobs. The social model include better health and social care, safeties of employees, equality of male and female, involvement the handicapped in the social life and improvement of new qualifications for unemployed people.²

With better organization of the whole process of urban renewal we, as a society, might begin to resolve huge problem of poorness trying to create new jobs through the method of gentrification³.

The possibilities of the "Knowledge Society", as one of the guidelines of the principle of sustainable development, have as a consequence a new model of town structure. Creating the centers where socially threatened persons could improve their knowledge and try to find a new job need some new architectural and urban design.

The loss of the ordinary Family structure (mother, father and 2 children) needs the new organization of housing. People live more and more alone, or share the apartment between friends of homosexual partners. That needs individual units,

¹ International Journal of Innovation & Sustainable Development, Geneva, 2006.

² Social rights, European Committee for social cohesion, Strasburg, 2002.

³ Gentrification means improvement, better standard



multiplied and fulfilled with the social spare room where individuals could meet or learn or eat together. Everything has changed in the New Millennium.

The **urban renewal** as a method of the principle of sustainable development is seen today through the prism of definitely new and unusual characteristics of the turn of the century. Twenty years since the first global reconstructions of parts of major cities is a long period and many working methods have changed. According to the experience, the influence of so called "**active protection** of cultural heritage" is crucial. This includes the building in heritage to fit in the life or regenerated city. The change of function and interpolation in the old tissue of the city, mighty and prominent architecture meant to draw capital in neglected parts of the city – all these principles proved desirable and justified. The regeneration of the city includes rehabilitation of old industrial zones and changing it to the residential/mixed use zones with attractive architecture or to social housing.

2.0. Serbia / General Situation

The **urban renewal** process is affected today, whether in Europe or in Serbia, by a whirlpool of sociological, ecological, economical and other changes, due to the period of recession in the last decade of the 20th century.

In Serbia, the situation was even worse, during the period of a civil war. The period of Milosevic's government opened the Pandora's box. So called "grey buildings"⁴ became the issues for thousands of war refugees but also for those who saw the opportunities to make profit in building, rebuilding or reconstructing in that "out of legislatives" period.

The social frame of Serbia today present a consequence of four main reasons:

⁴ "Grey" building means building without urbanistic permission and out of regulation law



- The effect of totalitarian regime / robbery and financial malversations of the state,
- Civil wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia,
- Transition period,
- Economical recession.

After the hyperinflation in 1993 in Serbia, when the situation was indeed devastating, nowadays the monthly salary is approximately **212 Euros**. Private sector (companies) is augmented for 7 times (from the 1990), but it is not enough to cover massive dismissing from the state sector (all companies were the properties of state during the socialist period). The dismissing was over 100 % during the period of 10 years. The people of Serbia have to work at least two jobs to provide themselves existence. Many of them are so called "dark jobs" including trading and re-trading (for example the Chinese merchandise on several huge Flee Markets in the country).

The donations from relatives who are living abroad help 1/3 of Serbia's population. The others are helped by relatives living in the countryside producing their own food.

To prevent even worse situation the State of Serbia brought in 2003 the so-called "**Act and Strategy Against Poorness**"⁵ which includes:

- Helping the Family and Individual obtain the minimum of the social security by means of social policy,
- Helping the handicapped obtain a decent life and involvement to the social life,
- Helping elderly people,
- Helping the children without parents,
- Helping the population over 50, which is jobless,
- Fight against the violence in the family and help to the victims of violence.⁶

⁵ "The National Strategy Against Poorness", The Government of Republic of Serbia, 2003.

⁶ Declaration of Human Rights in European Union, Nice, 2000.



Several foreign associates also help and donate their financial sources. Between them, the biggest efforts until now have been obtained from UN HABITAT, Italian, Japanese and Norwegian Governments, Swiss Development Company, Swiss Disaster Relief, UNHCR and several NGOs. Unfortunately, like the other countries in transition in the region of East Europe, there are also more serious problems such as criminal, trafficking of people and prostitution due to the catastrophic social background.

2.1. The building situation in Serbia

For all these reasons, the sociological appearance of the city of today shows its dark and gloomy side. The consequences are reflected in the process of urban renewal and regeneration. The revitalization of a specific part of the city results in the change of the social structure of the population where the poorest end up in ghettos or even worse locations. The institution of social accommodation is even more present.

The difficult building situation in Serbia is affected by:⁷

- 600 000 refugees from former Yugoslavia territory,
- Economical crisis and low level of standard, bad maintenance of existing buildings,
- The result of NATO Bombing in 1999,
- Building processes in decreasing,
- Illegal (without urbanistic permission) building also in decreasing.

According to the statistics from 2004, 7000 refugees are still living in collective centers, waiting for better solution.

The issues could be:

- Building a new structure,
- Regenerating the old building structure.

⁷ Economic Commission for Europe, UN: "Country profiles of the Housing Sector", p.3



For both of them the big financial resources are needed. The **urban regeneration** is seen as a process friendly to nature protection because it uses the present building territory. That is why it represents one of the main guidelines of sustainable development, even though it is more expensive than the new building structure.

3.0. NGO for Urban Regeneration in Serbia

The Association for Urban Regeneration (URA) was formed in July 2004 in Belgrade, as a Non Governmental Organization and is focused on the collaboration between the City Hall, the University with its experts in the field and the investors or sponsors. It is organized following the European model (Britain, "English Partnerships" and French Agencies) which includes well focused and expert team, ready to provide the process.

The Association (URA) is a flexible small organization in which the post graduate experts⁸ in the field and the visiting experts take part for each particular topic which they resolve. The founder and the Director is the Author of this text, an expert in the field.⁹

The reason for founding such an Association is:

1. Its small size and flexible organization, trying to avoid a big and slow administrative structure,
2. Young and highly qualified people,
3. NG organization because its non-profitable character is essential for avoiding the corruption,
4. Well placed leading experts who take part in collaboration between all the subjects in the processes,

⁸ Sandra Vujovic, arch., Zoran Djelov, arch. and Milica Milasinovic, arch.

⁹ Eva Vanista Lazarevic, Professor of "Urban reconstruction and urban renewal" at the Faculty of Architecture University of Belgrade, the author of the two books in the Urban renewal field.



5. Strength of monitoring for all.

URA is the **promoter** and an initializing factor of the process of urban regeneration. Its experts are doing the planning job and are providing the projects for urban renewal. Their methods are formed after the good and well-proved case studies and models from Europe and abroad. They invite possible investors and Organizations to help in financing the renewal of particular parts of the city of Belgrade.

Banks and sponsors and foreign investors together with citizens and city authorities participate in financing such acceptable form of accommodation or furthermore, are launched into the global regeneration of the city.

URA has to work under the protection of the City Hall and his Main Architect/ State Government, Ministries and in direct collaboration with the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. URA is dealing with all of the City's urban Institutions.

1. The **main problems**:

- Generally devastated and ruined quarters of the city of Belgrade,
- Old infrastructure,
- Social problems,
- Traffic problems,
- Bad maintenance of the buildings.

2. The main **focus** is on:

- Regenerating business in the devastated territory,
- Improving the existing jobs,
- Affirmation of the small scaled business and facilities sector such as media, biotechnology, health, plug & go business,
- Improvement of communications,
- Tourist attraction.



3. The options/ **tools**:¹⁰

- A sustainable development urban form issue, in the context of urban renewal, including the street, neighborhood, district, city and city region,
- Land re-use and Brownfield development,
- Sustainable policy and policy assessments,
- Sustainable urban design including density, mix of uses, layouts and building types,
- Design guidance and master planning,
- Social inclusion and cohesion,
- Evaluation of the built environment,
- Culture and heritage led regeneration,
- Heritage management.

4. **Sustainable development guidelines:**

- Revitalize a capacity building program focused on priority through the usual channels of technical support,
- Exploring options for the integration of SDI¹¹ and national sustainable development strategies¹² mutually supportive,
- Aims to recognition and understanding of the meaning and importance of traditional architecture even if it is vernacular,
- Expertise in the physics and design of building energy assessment of refurbished buildings,
- Design of low energy buildings using passive, bioclimatic methods,
- Post occupancy evaluation of building energy audits,
- Adopt an evolutionary approach, focusing on annual or if real progress requires multi-year work programs, on a small set of maximum three to five indicators,
- Align indicators with MDGIs ¹³ linked with SDI.

¹⁰ (after the guidelines of Oxford Centre for Sustainable Development)

¹¹ Sustainable development index

¹² NSDS

¹³ MDGIs millennium development goals indicator



5. Business oriented processes concern **users**:
 - Local residents,
 - Visitors,
 - Local business,
 - Industry (light industry, information technology).

6. The **main goals** of URA strategies are:
 - The recognition of resources, potentials or defects of the territory
 - The recognition of ideal consuming and its need,
 - The promotion of the land which is dealt with.

7. The **12 main steps** during the processes:
 - The recognition of potentials of the territory,
 - "SWOT" analysis,
 - Obtaining the necessary permissions,
 - The project,
 - The preliminary financial plan,
 - Dealing with the investors,
 - Contract,
 - Building,
 - Marketing,
 - Management.

8. URA **Strategy** concerns:
 - Strategy of good image,
 - Flagship strategy,
 - New infrastructure strategy,
 - The revitalization strategy of protected cultural heritage.

9. The URA **experts**:
 - High qualified young people lead by elder experts, mostly University Professors,
 - Flexible organization,
 - Independent organization of the Team,



- Direct link and Patronizing of the authorities (City Hall, Government, Ministries)

After the good European models, URA is going to help real physical transformation of the devastated territory but also to obtain social and economical improvements. Creating the new jobs is one of the essential goals of the process in order to resolve some of the social problems.

4.0. Implementation Problems

Two years after the foundation of the NG Organization Association for Urban Regeneration there is still an obstruction against the successful implementation.

The author of this text and a Founder of NGO keeps on trying to find the best solution for Agency's real life. Although involved in the work of the City Hall Government and in State Ministry¹⁴, for the time being there are no positive answers from the top authorities to involve Agency in the processes in Serbia.

The project Association for Urban Regeneration is supported by Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. Despite that, the project was welcomed but not actually supported by the City Hall Government and other authorities. It seems that there is no good will at the moment to change obviously chaotic situation in urbanistic field in Serbia.

The general manager of the City, authorized for urbanism, the Main Architect of the City of Belgrade, the Mayor of the City were asked to support the NGO but they did not even answer. Also, the project Urban Regeneration Association was sent to a Ministry for Urbanism without result. Although the Agency is formed after the same model which is multiple proved in other countries, although it is obvious that it would improve the existing situation, it is evident that the

¹⁴ Eva V. Lazarevic was a member of the City Hall Government Commission (2000. – 2004.) and at the moment is working as an Expert and Main Architect at the Ministry for social care, Project for war disabled, Donation of Japan.



persons/experts who are involved at the moment in the processes, do not wish to change the usual old habits.

The **real problems** of the process of urban redevelopment in Belgrade are:

- The urban administration is huge, because it was founded for former Yugoslavia - 5 times bigger than Serbian territory nowadays,
- There is no unique action, from one place, for overall urban integrative regeneration,
- Urban problems are being resolved in partial way, often by so called "investor's urbanism"¹⁵,
- There is no one place where the potential future investors could explore the possibilities for investments, several institutions are involved; the chaotic situation is a polygon for all sorts of professional incompetence and possible corruption,
- "Institute for Land Use" works independently and is competitive against "Urbanistic Institute" and "Secretariat for Urbanism"; City hall Government has to monitor those institutions, but the administration is too big. The politicians (not professionals) are on the top of those institutions and they change too fast to do effective work,
- The so called "urbanistic mafia" is very powerful, the people who have opportunities to work in the urbanistic "chain" of those institutions often misuse their position, the corruption is present,
- Permissions for land use are very difficult to obtain, the process is complicate and long, so there is space for maltreatment of future investors,
- The urbanistic regulations are not respected, and everybody is greedy about square meters because it costs 2000 Euros vs. ordinary monthly salary of 200 Euros,

¹⁵ Investor's urbanism means that powerful investor can do anything, wherever he wants, just to spend enough money for it.



- When civil war ended, everyone who constructed a house (or similar) without any urbanistic permission was abolished, in order to achieve a social peace,
- For all these reasons, there is no will to change and to put in order the whole process, from investment to building and managing. Especially the people are afraid of monitoring the clear chain of obligations and responsibilities, they are used to work in clans and partnerships, to help each other and to avoid professional obligations,
- Due to the bad social situation and low salaries which lasts too long (15 years), the people don't care for the professional and ethic caudexes,
- Each urbanistic step has its price, so the "urbanistic mafia" is helped by so called "lawyers mafia" which present the "middle man" between investor and urbanistic authorities,
- The prices and taxes for land use are high on purpose, higher than in the neighborhood countries, so the square meter of an office space or housing are equal to those on Manhattan, or in Paris and London,
- That is why the investors are still very conscious about putting their money in Serbia,¹⁶
- Until now, mostly neighbors countries such as Slovenia or Greece (who know the mentality) have really entered to the competition of serious investors in Serbia,
- Still, there is a big interest to invest in Serbia, because other resources like East European countries or Russia are already explored and utilized.

¹⁶ Investors in Serbia are paying only 2/3 of the price, because they invest in the country still developing, 1/3 of investments is refundable by their own fiscal politics.



5.0. Conclusion

It is obvious that in such a situation in Belgrade, Serbia, is very opportune to try to improve situation by involving some urban renewal models already proved abroad.

Although it is difficult to make a step if there is no political will for it, there is an expert's strong wish to make things better. Still, urban renewal processes have to be launched from the top place in the hierarchy, and without that it is not possible to move on.

Often, the **Presidents or the Prime Ministries** are those to decide about entering the processes of urban renewal. The riversides are especially popular topic, because they show fast results. The big sports or cultural manifestations are occasions to regenerate and revitalize several quarters of the cities. Olympic Games or European Cities of culture are promoters for urban renewal. The drastic situations of such occasions are, for example, moving out of the city the homeless from Sidney, or moving out the wild dogs from Athens, Greece during the Olympic Games.

In **France**, the ex president Francois Mitterrand launched several big renewal projects like Opera in Bastille, Ministry of Finance, Grand Louvre or Arch of Defense.

Similar is the project for the renewal of the **riverside of Thames**, covered and supported from the top political positions.

Top political decision is needed in order to start the urban renewal process because it demands big financial support provided by a State or City government. Without the **political will**, it is not possible to change the processes of urban redeveloping.

When in 1999 Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force Report recommended the creation of **Urban Regeneration Companies** (URCs) to stimulate new investments into areas of economic decline and to co-ordinate plans for their regeneration, he had the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister behind him. The first three pilot projects in Liverpool, East Manchester and Sheffield showed numerous benefits.



The company “**English Partnerships**” offered practical support for all URCs and presented funding partner and board member of the majority. It includes:

- Helping the URCs to deliver their strategic priorities by participating in joint venture agreements, acting as a catalyst for regeneration projects and encouraging private sector investment,
- Providing the support for master planning, running costs and research to help them to deliver their strategic priorities and working with URCs to purchase and remediate land in need of environmental improvement.

Unfortunately, there is no such an Association in Serbia at the moment, which would take care of and support an NG Association for Urban Regeneration. There is no political will to establish the new concept of organization, which could simplify and clarify the processes of urban redevelopment. There are maybe some Donators which could help for some short term project, but this is not the point. The whole idea is that such an organization (like URA) has to be supported and welcomed by top urbanistic and political authorities as well as the Corporative organizations which might help in financial sense.

The aim of **URA** - Urban Regeneration Agency is to **deliver high-quality sustainable urban regeneration in areas experiencing economic restructuring.**

We hope that time will change and be on progressive side.



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