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## **REVITALIZATION PATHS OF URBAN CENTERS: TENTATIVE OBSERVATIONAL COMPARISON OF TWO CITIES – LJUBLJANA AND ZAGREB**

### ABSTRACT

*In this paper, a comparison is made between two post-socialist countries (Slovenia and Croatia), namely, their capital cities (Ljubljana and Zagreb). The research aims to establish the main principles and difficulties of revitalisation in each city and how successfully they have moved from socialist to democratic urban planning. The research hypothesis is that Ljubljana has been comprehensively revitalised according to relevant revitalisation guidelines, whereas in Zagreb the revitalisation has been partial and largely affected by the interests of investors and their political partners. The study uses semi-structured interviews conducted with various spatial planning experts and pertinent documentation. It confirms the hypothesis, examines successes and failures experienced in both cities' transition process, and reflects on general problems of urban planning and revitalisation in post-socialist countries.*

**KEY WORDS:** urban revitalisation, urban planning, post-socialist countries, Zagreb, Ljubljana

### **Poti revitalizacije mestnih središč: Preliminarni zaključki na podlagi primerjalnega opazovanja dveh mest – Ljubljane in Zagreba**

### IZVLEČEK

*Članek primerja dve postsocialistični državi (Hrvaško in Slovenijo) oziroma njuni glavni mesti (Zagreb in Ljubljano). Raziskava je namenjena pojasnjevanju glavnih determinant in težav urbane prenove oziroma revitalizacije v določenem mestu*

*ter uspešen in manj uspešen prehod iz sistema socialističnega načrtovanja v demokratičnega. Hipoteza raziskave je, da se urbana revitalizacija v Ljubljani izvaja celovito, ob upoštevanju vseh bistvenih elementov revitalizacije mesta, medtem ko je urbana revitalizacija v Zagrebu le delna ter osredotočena na interese posameznih vlagateljev in politikov. Raziskava je bila izvedena s polstrukturiranimi intervjuji z različnimi strokovnjaki, ki se ukvarjajo s prostorskimi vprašanji, in analiziranjem ustrezne dokumentacije. Analiza potrjuje postavljeno hipotezo ter povzema sklepe o ključnih determinantah urbane revitalizacije v dveh mestih in težave pri urbanističnem načrtovanju v postsocialističnih državah.*

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** *urbana revitalizacija, urbanizem, postsocialistične države, tranzicija, Zagreb, Ljubljana*

## 1 Introduction

Urban regeneration<sup>1</sup> has become the ultimate urban policy in Europe since the 1990s. Gibson and Kocabaş (2001: 3) state urban regeneration “as a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach that embraces the three E’s – Economy, Equity and Environment.” According to Giddens (2007) it comprises various processes which change the physical form of the city (reconstruction) but also its social character. For the successful renewal of urban space it is vital to determine the cause of its physical and social degradation and engage all political, economic, professional and civil actors to come up with solutions in their respective fields of expertise. “Revitalized” space is created by a number of complicating economic, social and political interventions put together. Long-term strategic planning which takes into account citizens’ suggestions and needs is the only proper way towards achieving this goal.

The social structure of the city is often changed in the process of urban revitalization. Gentrification is a spatial and social process that results in the transformation of a working-class area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use area. It is a serious issue of urban revitalization because of the influx of more affluent residents into renovated central parts of the city. “Historic districts tend to represent and symbolize a diverse set of ideals of the city’s

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1. Both terms urban regeneration or revitalization along with urban reconstruction are encompassed by a broader term-urban renewal. Whereas urban reconstruction only refers to the changes in the physical form of the city, its places and objects, urban regeneration/revitalization focuses on the complexity of both physical and social degradation of the city fabric and develops appropriate revitalization programs (Čaldarović and Šarinić 2009).

identity, including its history and culture on the one hand and its local economic viability on the other" (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011: 2). Historical and cultural values along with the city identity often fail to be preserved in the revitalization process and thus remain its constant challenge.

Post-socialist countries<sup>2</sup> have encountered a number of urban planning problems during the transition period while abandoning old practices and adopting the new ones.<sup>3</sup> New forms of planning have been introduced which can no longer be considered socialist planning practices but neither are they highly legitimate, democratic or participatory planning processes. The capital cities of the post-socialist states have experienced the most noticeable social change and the fastest economic growth. In the post-socialist countries (Svirčić Gotovac 2010: 201) private investors' projects and poor urban planning have gained the upper hand over a careful and methodical process of urban revitalization and caused serious damage to public space. Structural changes have also taken place. Small stores have disappeared and national chains, supermarkets and shopping centers have arrived instead (Zukin et al. 2009). Commercial gentrification of urban areas is overwhelming. Zukin et al. (2009: 48) state "that this type of gentrification involves complex issues of social class and cultural capital". Such consequences of the post-socialist cities' revitalization are visible in numerous places (Zagreb, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Banja Luka, Budapest etc.).

This article aims to analyze the similarities and differences between Ljubljana and Zagreb, both post-socialist cities, comparing the most important aspects of urban regeneration: systematic and comprehensive urban planning, concern for sustainable urban development and the participation of citizens.<sup>4</sup> These aspects and their presence or absence in the two cities are very good pointers to the main differences in urban revitalization between Ljubljana and Zagreb.

The article consists of seven sections starting with urban revitalization trends in West and East Europe. The next two sections analyze the transition decades in Ljubljana and Zagreb, urban revitalization processes, documents and policies. The methodology section explains the snowball sampling of semi-structured interviews. Section six deals with the results of semi-structured interviews that were conducted. The last section, Conclusions, sums up the research findings, hopefully contributing to better understanding of urban revitalization in these two cities.

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2. We refer to the cities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia.

3. A lot of authors have written about the transformations in post-socialist countries, see Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011; Filipovič Hrast and Dekker 2009; Kährlik et al. 2016; Petovar and Vujošević 2008; Šýkora 2005; Vujošević 2003 etc.

4. See: Giddens 2007; Jukić and Cvitanović 2011; Zlatar 2014 etc.

## 2 Socio-spatial trends of urban revitalization in West and East Europe

### 2.1 West European countries - planned and participatory revitalization

Some of the most important components of urban revitalization (Giddens, 2007) are: (1) *Improvement of urban environment*. Urban areas need to become more attractive, prompting the citizens to live, work and socialize there, feel safe and part of the community. Neighbourhoods have to be connected and people encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport. (2) *Recycling land and existing buildings*. New buildings should be put up on previously developed land rather than encroach on green areas. (3) *Maximum management of local areas*. Citizen participation in decision-making processes is crucial.

European, especially West European trends in urban revitalization largely mirror these ideas. Various urban actors are involved and work together (political, economic, civil and professional) thus not applying the top-down approach where the political actors have the main power in making decisions, but the bottom-up approach including the citizens' needs and ideas about the transformations of their environment. "Local awareness and ensuring public participation are important factors that contribute positively to the improvement and regeneration of any urban area" (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011: 9).

Sustainable urban development is another important issue. We can define sustainable areas as those created to support sustainable living, with a prime focus being placed on economic, social and environmental sustainability (McDonald et al. 2009: 53). Sustainable urban space is a key consideration for urban policy in most European countries. Urban space is often overused which results in environmental degradation. Cities, major factors of sustainable development, need special attention and care. Limited growth and maintained ecological balance are also important factors for them.

West European cities, such as Barcelona, Paris or Rotterdam but also Istanbul in South-East Europe are examples of successful urban revitalization. Barcelona is a city that has experienced successful processes of structural, community, institutional, urban and physical development and readjustment (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011). Public-private partnerships have been the driving force behind the city renewal. Strategic planning of the local authorities, civilian groups and private actors was present. Paris is yet another good example. Big new projects have been incorporated into the existing city fabric, green areas enlarged and the old quarters renovated with great respect for their historical context (Jukić and Cvitanović 2011). Rotterdam has been revitalized through eleven projects. They

included all the necessary plans and documents about demolition, construction and re-construction, all the activities closely observed and commented upon by the residents (Jukić and Cvitanović 2011). The Istanbul revitalization has preserved cultural-historical heritage as well as improved the ecological performance. The Golden Horn Culture Valley Project replaced heavy industries and squatter elements with recreational and tourist facilities plus twenty-two parks to improve the city's damaged green network (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011).

In all the above mentioned cities urban revitalization projects have produced positive effects and a number of economic, social and ecological benefits. It is equally evident that urban revitalization was highly participatory, bringing together community members through transparent, well-designed projects that contained clear-cut goals, preserved the city identity and at the same time offered an improved vision of the city.

## **2.2 Post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries – from public towards private interest**

Urban development in the socialist period of former socialist countries was characterized by planning, methodical approach and functional goals as well as joint efforts of various actors working together (urban planning experts played a very important role). Post-socialist urban planning in these countries, however, is very different since “the principal characteristics of the traditional urban planning methodology were its vertical hierarchy basis, professional expertise and state-initiated planning” (Novaković 2010: 231). It was present at all levels and subject to urban and spatial development regulations based on common interest of all citizens/residents.

During the transition period private interest has become the cornerstone of urban revitalization while at the same time there is a serious lack of transparent procedures to safeguard the public interest (Čaldarović and Šarinić 2009; Pichler Milanović and Zavodnik Lamovšek 2010; Seferagić 2007; Svirčić Gotovac 2010 etc.). The citizens' voice is not being articulate enough in the urban planning process and their participation is reduced to a mere formality –all abundant proof of the state of anomie in politics and its inability to run cities on democratic principles.

Political and cultural centers such as Belgrade are affected by revitalization driven by individual investors and the free market. Their central zones undergo the most intensive changes. “Towns are developing intensely by increasing the density of urban structure in their central zones; new urban structures, such as shopping malls are being opened in the spirit of globalization” (Milojević 2013: 248). Budapest, another post-socialist city, has experienced a similar change.

There has been a huge inflow of investment into the CBD of the city, bringing on the development of commercial spaces and outbidding housing from the area (Kovács 1998). Commercialization is also present in Zagreb's City, formerly a working class zone ("Workers' Road") turned into a business zone due to various interests of investors and convenient land prices. Such places greatly affect the city identity because they are the same all over the world. Some authors point out substantial physical and social transformations of cities in the Czech Republic and Estonia. A gradual rehabilitation of inner city housing stock and the replacement of lower status groups by middle and higher social status residents have been noticed (Kährlik et al. 2016). Negative effects of gentrification are present when the rich and complex city life essence is turned overnight into business and suchlike activities. "Gentrification is significantly changing both the physical and social face of selected areas in many post-socialist inner city neighbourhoods... its realization depends very much on local property market circumstances" (Sýkora 2005: 104).

Almost all post-socialist countries have the same problem and it affects their urban revitalization processes: there is no consistency between poorly designed reconstruction plans and actual reconstruction work done in the cities. "The main problem was to establish the connection between the work done on a particular building site and the reconstruction plans in relevant documentation" (Novaković 2010: 239). Strategic urban planning is thus obstructed by the absence of clear goals and vision for the cities. In the case of urban revitalization of Banja Luka, for example, the following is true:

*Although urban reconstruction of the city center is specified in the analyzed documents as an operative goal, in the Banja Luka City Development Strategy there is no single, all-inclusive project of reconstruction whose values and goals are defined by a single, autonomous plan. (Novaković 2010: 239)*

The same problem is present in other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: although public interest is formally acknowledged, the actual construction work done in urban space often disregards the best public interest. "A lot of housing estates with multi-storey buildings have been built with little or no attention paid to open green space" (Milojević 2013: 248). The growing grey economy in the construction sector is spreading beyond the city center in Novi Sad. It is driven by joined economic and political interests. Due to the weaknesses in strategic planning, political and economic actors come into power and illegal construction becomes common place and takes up a lot of city space. In Tirana, for example, after the 1990s and especially in 2000 a large number of illegal objects was built, in the true Wild West spirit (Požani 2010).

The ongoing processes clearly demonstrate the fact that the revitalization of cities is dominated by private rather than public interest and also point to the diminishing role of urbanism and urban planning. Vujošević (2003) believes that in urban planning “maximum market, minimum planning” is not an option because it would only be the very opposite of the socialist “maximum planning, minimum market” concept. Unfortunately, the first approach is still present in urban transformations in the post-socialist countries.

In spite of all the problems that we witness in strategic spatial planning in the CEE countries, a lot of effort is being made in these countries. “The strategic planning processes in the six cities – Riga, St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Sofia, Budapest and Prague have resulted in a shared vision for the future of the city as well as a framework for more effective policy and investment planning” (Tsenkova 2007: 467). Based on the creation of strategic partnerships between the central government, businesses and NGOs, goal-focused development priorities link economic, social, spatial, and financial objectives, making the strategic priorities explicit.

Nevertheless, the CEE countries are still lagging behind their West European counterparts and struggle with the absence of the city development strategy, commercialization, overbuilding, gentrification, illegal building, shrinkage of public space, disregard for their citizens’ true needs. The next two chapters will shed more light on our two chosen cities, Ljubljana and Zagreb.

### **3 Ljubljana – an example of successful revitalization**

The most developed of all former Yugoslav republics due to its geographical position and trade orientation towards Europe, not much affected by the brief war in 1991, Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. It seems to be one of the most successful Central and Eastern European countries in implementing political and economic reforms. Ljubljana has thus become one of the most competitive urban areas in Central Europe while at the same time preserving social cohesion, environment and the quality of life for local citizens (Pichler-Milanović and Tominc 2013: 3). Slovenia also quickly adopted spatial planning practices following the EU highest environmental standards. Ljubljana received the European Green Capital Award in 2016.

*Ljubljana received the award because it made the most changes in the right direction over the shortest period of time: more than 12,000 people in the city administration, public companies and institutions are involved in the fast and sustainable progress in the city alongside Ljubljana’s citizens, many NGOs, other organizations and companies (Ljubljana EGC 2016: 11).*

The City of Ljubljana has sorted out multiple problems. It has successfully dealt with the challenge of public transport, traffic connections, air pollution and transformation of the city center into pedestrian-friendly public space (Ljubljana EGC 2016). Ljubljana also has a lot of green space. "Ljubljana has as much as 542 m<sup>2</sup> of public green areas per inhabitant and around 80 ha of these areas are newly landscaped while work to restore brownfield sites and transform them into green spaces is ongoing" (Ljubljana EGC 2016: 10).

Ljubljana has a population of approx. 280,000 people. In the 1990s Ljubljana experienced big political changes and became the site of a great many urban projects, similar to those in almost all post-socialist cities. They mostly comprised private enterprise typical for the post-socialist era.

*The most important urban land use projects in the 1990s were mainly related to new multi-dwelling private housing development on brownfields or on unused urban land (mainly reserved for industrial development in the 1980s), development of new shopping centers... residential and commercial sprawl on the periphery of the inner-city area or suburban municipalities etc. (Pichler-Milanović and Tominc 2013: 3-4).*

In 2002 the Urban Municipality of Ljubljana adopted two documents that determined further spatial development at a strategic level. *The strategy of sustainable development of Urban Municipality of Ljubljana* and the *Resolution on National Development Projects 2007–2023* established the framework for the future spatial development of Ljubljana as a national center which is to develop into an internationally competitive capital on contemporary principles of maintaining the quality of the environment and more reasonable management of the space.

After 2003 the European Union asked for a new strategic planning framework in Slovenia since urban development plans in use dated back to the 1980s. Ljubljana was also the beneficiary of various EU funds<sup>5</sup> which greatly contributed to its fast and successful urban development.

*Since the adoption of the Spatial Management and Planning Act (2002), the new Spatial Planning Act (2007) and the Spatial Development Strategy and Spatial Order of RS (2004), the City Municipality of Ljubljana has been preparing a new generation of local spatial development documents while updating and revising the existing land-use and site plans (Pichler Milanović and Zavodnik Lamovšek 2010: 822).*

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5. European Structural Funds (European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund), European Territorial Cooperation and European Regional Development Fund.

Urban revitalization in Ljubljana has been marked by successful implementation of innovative urban practices and reforms which influence and sustain the city growth. One of the main goals of the *Spatial Development Plan of the City Municipality of Ljubljana* is the smart city growth with a special emphasis put on “urban revitalization as the city of art, culture and knowledge, the safe and healthy city” (Pichler-Milanović and Tominc 2013: 4).

#### 4 Zagreb – urban planning as an ongoing challenge

The Croatian capital (population approx. 800,000) has also witnessed changes in urban planning and renewal over the last few decades (Seferagić 2007; Svirčić Gotovac 2010; Zlatar 2014 etc.). The biggest urban revitalization in Zagreb in the socialist period happened in 1987 during the University Games and before that in the 1960s when New Zagreb was built<sup>6</sup>. After 1990 and especially in 2000, the town entered the transition period. Just like in Ljubljana the emphasis was on new things: shopping malls, underground parking facilities, commercial construction. Urban development was connected with the appearance of new actors – entrepreneurs. The process of gentrification started as a result of unplanned and random building activities.

*The city of lively streets, squares and parks filled with people is gradually changing and the introduction of new patterns of urban development is advancing at an accelerated pace: the mushrooming of large shopping centers has been duly noted... lamenting the tendency of these places to become the new meeting, entertainment and cultural hubs of the city* (Cavrić and Nedović-Budić 2007: 406).

The research comparing urban revitalization in Podgorica and Zagreb<sup>7</sup> (Zlatar Gamberožić 2016), establishes 6 key aspects of urban revitalization in Zagreb since 2000: (1) unplanned, investment driven urbanism, (2) poor urban planning with frequent changes of plans, (3) disbalance of public and private space, prioritizing private space and neglecting public space, (4) overbuilding, (5) market-driven architecture and revitalization and (6) new urban actors/new distribution of power among actors. Most individual urban projects are only superficial embellishment rather than comprehensive urban revitalization. “The

6. New Zagreb is part of the city located on the southern bank of the Sava river. It was a carefully designed and well thought-out project which satisfied all aesthetic and functional requirements and focused on the quality of life of its residents and on open public space.

7. The study was called *Transitional changes in the two capital cities Zagreb and Podgorica* (2015-2016) and it was a bilateral project between Croatia and Montenegro.

formal acceptance of modern values is visible in all socio-political processes in Croatia which contributes to the market expansion and wild capitalism" (Zlatar Gamberožić 2016: 95).

Since the year 2000 a lot of unplanned and illegitimate building work has been done in Zagreb due to influential political actors and their frequent changes of the Master Plan. Flower Square in Zagreb<sup>8</sup> is an example of a problematic project which led to a conflict between citizens and experts who wanted to stop it and political and economic actors who were driven by their own interests and went through with it. Typically, all major urban development projects in Zagreb have mobilized both opponents and proponents of these interventions. NGOs have played a prominent role in questioning economically or politically suspect projects. "This situation has naturally led to intense public conflicts on numerous occasions" (Cavrić and Nedović-Budić 2007: 395).

The role of the public in formulating goals and submitting their input is crucial for the quality of urban planning but is still seriously limited. Citizens are usually allowed to express their ideas and comments at later stages of the planning process after the proposal has already been drafted or the document finished. In order for them to adopt a more active approach, they need more legal tools. They need to know their rights because political elites are not used to or interested in their empowerment. Urban planners are another key factor whose views need to be taken into account. Even the most politicized decisions need to consider the professional advice and be aware of the value and usefulness of the planners' input. In Zagreb, their limited involvement resulted in several projects which received a lot of negative criticism (underground garages in Zagreb, high-rise buildings – Hoto Business Tower, Zagrebtower, Eurotower, shopping centers in the heart of the city, commercial zone in Radnička Street etc.). Architects can take different stands: some act in the town's best interest and some act in the best interest of developers. Urban planners can only be effective if they recognize the political context in which they operate and adapt their strategies accordingly.

The brief analysis of urban revitalization in Ljubljana and Zagreb shows that Ljubljana has already adopted current West European urban revitalization trends: preservation of historical and cultural heritage of the city, development of economic and social infrastructure, improvement of living conditions and life quality, environment protection. Zagreb, however, has not yet embraced such

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8. Flower Square is the most obvious example of the invasion of public space: a part of the pedestrian zone in Varšavska Street was converted into the underground garage and two historic buildings were knocked down, architect Herman Bolle's house and poet Vladimir Vidrić's house.

renewal policies and still shows the negative trends present in most of the CEE countries.

## 5 Methodology

The method of semi-structured interviews was used. The interviews were carried out in Ljubljana and Zagreb with experts from different professions related to spatial planning (architects, traffic engineers, sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, lawyers, economists, art historians, geographers, demographers). They were all doctoral degree holders employed at university or various public research institutes (the Institute of Economics, the Faculty of Architecture, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences etc.) The research was conducted in Zagreb (April to October 2012 and in 2016, 35 interviews) and in Ljubljana (May and June 2017, 10 interviews). Its aim was to obtain professional views on urban revitalization in the two cities and provide a comprehensive picture of the changes in urban planning after 2000.<sup>9</sup> Convenience sampling technique was used with various spatial planning experts selected as respondents. They contacted others which led to the snowball sampling method. The chain referral sample was created among people who knew and recommended each other.

*The research hypothesis* was a significant difference between Ljubljana and Zagreb in terms of urban revitalization, Ljubljana being a role model in many aspects of successful revitalization and Zagreb still facing numerous challenges in urban planning.

Before the interviews, a theoretical framework was created and available documentation and literature on urban revitalization studied (the Zagreb and Ljubljana Master Plan, Ljubljana European Green Capital, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan etc.)

The interviews questioned the definition of urban revitalization and its realization in the two cities. They contained questions about the old and new types of urban actors, prominent examples of revitalization, urban plans, public interest, overbuilding, renovation of city squares, underground car parks, high-rise commercial buildings, the Mayor's role in decision-making etc. The questions were later organized into broader themes and the "thematic networks" analysis

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9. This article is the result of two studies. Firstly, the project *Urban revitalization of the city center, the case study of Ljubljana* (2017-2018), which was carried out at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and financed by the Ministry of Science and Education. Secondly, it is part of PhD research - the interviews that the author conducted in 2012 for the purpose of doctoral thesis.

technique for qualitative research (Attride-Stirling 2001: 386) was applied. The technique has three classes of themes. Basic themes are the lowest-order themes derived from the textual data; organizing themes organize the basic themes into clusters of similar issues; global themes are the highest-order themes which filter organizing themes into one insight that summarizes the comprehensive issue. Low order themes in the interviews were divided into the following groups: the political system change – socialism to neo-liberalism, public space challenges, ecological aspects (e.g. green urban areas), mobility (traffic solutions), power of urban actors, spatial planning institutions and the city development strategic vision. Both aspects of urban revitalization presented in the next section (Planned and systematic revitalization, Sustainable development and participation of citizens) and compared in the two cities, represent a global theme derived from lower-order themes.

## **6 Results – comparison of urban revitalization in Ljubljana and Zagreb**

### **6.1 Planned and systematic revitalization**

This theme was derived from the following low order themes: the political system change- socialism to neo-liberalism, spatial planning institutions and the city development strategic vision.

With regard to the change of system, the transition process in Ljubljana has been rather smooth (in comparison with the rest of ex-YU countries) due to some initial advantages. Slovenia fought a brief war of independence, joined the EU relatively quickly and immediately adopted its urban planning programmes. Also the EU funding soon became available and provided for a number of urban projects, initiated and supported by political and administrative structures of the city.

*“The first advantage is the EU funding of infrastructural and other projects, where lots of funds have been transferred from the national projects to the local, municipal ones.”* (architect, Ljubljana)

Unlike Ljubljana, Zagreb has long remained in the process of unfinished transition. This is partly because the city authorities have often favoured investors and their initiatives at the expense of existing plans. *“Any conclusions reached at a meeting or after a debate are useless if the mayor ignores them; if he rejects the City Master Plan which contains the City Assembly conclusions, how likely is it that the city planners’ or NGOs’ voice will be heard?”* (traffic engineer, Zagreb) As for the spatial planning institutions, in the transition period there were no specific institutions dealing with spatial planning and urban revitalization in Ljubljana and Zagreb. *“In Slovenia the region’s municipalities and the Ministry*

of Spatial Planning are responsible for regional land use planning, as there is no regional-level administrative body for this purpose" (Száráz and Nastran 2015: 7). Therefore municipalities had to incorporate all regional spatial plans into their documents. Still, they managed to communicate well with both citizens and investors and create a successful public- private partnership model. *"The process of revitalization of residential areas and open public places was a long-term and interdisciplinary activity which required the skills and expertise of a wide range of professionals and active participation of the local community."* (architect, Ljubljana)

Most urban projects in Zagreb were results of private enterprise and political decisions where politics played into the hands of capital by frequently changing urban plans. Capital captured politics. The relationship between these two types of actors was symbiotic and it led to major changes of the Master Plan of Zagreb. *"In various projects private capital, government structures and some professionals simply team up to achieve the common goal."*(architect, Zagreb)

The Mayor's role in Ljubljana was also vital.

*"We regularly attend the annual exhibition held in the City Hall and all people who work there are very disciplined and eager to please the Mayor. They are very respectful of him and this respect is mutual."* (art historian, Ljubljana)

The long-serving Mayor of Zagreb (he is currently serving his sixth consecutive term) does not sufficiently cooperate with professional actors or citizens. His activities, instead of being beneficial for the city residents, are often highly problematic.

*"The Master Plan of Zagreb, for instance, contained regulations about the traffic and underground garages. The Mayor, however, worked on his own, meeting the interests of investors."* (architect, Zagreb)

The city development strategic vision was very clear in Ljubljana (especially regarding the revitalization of the city center).

*"The center has witnessed a successful revitalization and beautification which appeals to the locals and the tourists alike."* (architect, Ljubljana)

Zagreb, on the other hand, had no development strategy. The city center renewal had no specific plan, pattern or objective. The result of short-term planning and random construction can be seen in a number of non-strategic projects<sup>10</sup> which turned out to be highly problematic (Image 1).

*"This is not strategic revitalization planning. Instead of creating long-term value, projects are dictated by short-term benefits."* (sociologist, Zagreb)

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10. Such projects are, for example, underground garages, shopping malls, high-rise commercial buildings (inadequate infrastructure, traffic congestion etc.)

**Image 1. Zagreb 'City'. Part of the unplanned business zone in Zagreb.**  
Taken by the author.



## 6.2 Sustainable development and participation of citizens

This theme was derived from the following low order themes: green urban areas, mobility (traffic solutions), public space challenges and the power of urban actors.

A lot of public and private green areas make Ljubljana one of the greenest European towns. "More than 46% of the city area is covered by native forests, almost 75% by green areas of which over 20% are protected" (Ljubljana EGC 2016). The "green lungs" of Ljubljana are parks Tivoli, RoŹnik and Źišenski hrib. "Ljubljana has always been a green city. Yes, certain infrastructural decisions have been made by the mayor and the city government but all people increasingly expect their city to be green." (conservator- restorer, Ljubljana)

In Zagreb, green areas are not perceived as valuable. Green space is diminishing, lack of parks and playgrounds is noticeable as well as too many underground garages and the dominance of cars in the city center.

"There is nobody to speak up for green urban space in Zagreb. There is only an ignorant mayor and his corrupt counsellors. Some representatives in the City Assembly occasionally raise their voice in protest but it is only a drop in the ocean." (architect, Zagreb)

As for traffic solutions and mobility, a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan has as its central goal improving accessibility of urban areas and providing high quality and sustainable mobility and transport to, through and within the urban area

(Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans 2013). The number of cars in city centers is being reduced in order to give priority to pedestrians. A lot of cities have developed pedestrian-friendly traffic solutions. Ljubljana has adopted good practices of other countries regarding public transportation and pedestrian zones.

*With many concrete measures based on the Transport and Mobility Policy of the City of Ljubljana (2012), Ljubljana is pursuing its main goal to change travel habits and improve the modal share in a way that one third of all journeys is made by public transport, one third by bicycle or on foot and one third by personal vehicles (City of Ljubljana 2019).*

*"It wasn't easy at the beginning. Until 2007 Ljubljana could not get rid of the old traffic paradigm. Outdated practices were used. So it was very useful when we looked at other countries and consulted their experts (for example, Danish architect Jan Gehl who visited Ljubljana in 2009)." (geographer, Ljubljana)*

It is important to understand that the residents have changed their behavior and replaced cars by other modes of transportation (cycling, walking). Rent-a bike system, park and ride facilities have definitely reduced motor-vehicle use in the city center.

*"The most important factor of sustainable urban living is the willingness of the citizens of Ljubljana to give up on the use of their cars and use bikes or walk instead." (conservator-restorer, Ljubljana)*

In Zagreb the most common traffic solution are underground garages. Their locations have not been carefully chosen by traffic experts and are generally seen as the Mayor's projects. Alternative traffic solutions (pedestrian and bicycle lanes as well as public transport) have never been given much serious consideration and are therefore not fully appreciated.

*"This level of professional incompetence is almost unimaginable: there is a public garage in the vicinity of the school building. A thousand children who attend it every day, inhale exhaust fumes and witness traffic congestion in the very historic core of the city." (sociologist, Zagreb)*

In Ljubljana projects aiming to improve the quality of living include the expansion of public space, waste separation<sup>11</sup>, revitalization of the area around the river Ljubljanica, new pedestrian bridges which connect the two banks, complete transformation of Slovenska Road. City squares are a good example of urban revitalization of public space. These projects have been inaugurated to revitalize the declining ancient city centers and old residential areas and diluted historical heritage sites of the cities (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011: 8).

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11. In the last ten years, the quantity of separately collected waste has increased from 16 to 145kg per resident (City of Ljubljana, 2019).

Prešeren Square (Image 2) and Town Square in Ljubljana have retained all crucial features of open public space due to good infrastructure and preservation of historic and cultural heritage. They are designed to welcome people and meet the requirements of open public space, at the same time preserving the old city core and its cultural and historical identity.

*"The renewal of public spaces (squares, streets) in the medieval center (Stara Ljubljana) are important for urban revitalization of the entire city."* (architect, Ljubljana)

**Image 2. Prešeren Square in Ljubljana.** Taken by the author.



In Zagreb, one of the main squares (Kvaternik Square, Image 3) is altogether dominated by traffic (underground garage, public transport), reduced in size, without history, culture or identity. "Public spaces are disappearing, becoming fluid and irrational, while particular architectural objects are simply disjointed artifacts... The final product can only be an autistic and dysfunctional space, while cities become Babylonian masses of disconnected pieces (Dimitrovska Andrews et al. 2007: 428). This is exactly true for Zagreb.

*"Everything has been mismanaged: the history and culture of the old city core ignored, democracy and citizens' rights neglected, tradition and old ecological corridors forgotten."* (sociologist, Zagreb)

**Image 3. Kvaternik Square in Zagreb.** Taken by the author.



Local awareness and ensuring public participation are important factors that contribute positively to the improvement and regeneration of any urban area (Elnokaly and Elseragy 2011: 8). Public participation is also vital for the sustainable development of cities. Central European countries in general have been more oriented towards economical and urban development than towards reinforcing the participation of citizens. The empowerment and participation of various actors have not yet been sufficiently recognized as official policy goals in Slovenia (Filipovič Hrast and Dekker 2009: 152).

*“Many neighbourhoods need drastic renewal with the participation of local residents expressing their immediate needs.”* (architect, Ljubljana)

The decision-making process in Ljubljana still seems to be mostly governed by political and economic actors and the top-down approach. The role of the local government in achieving a higher level of public participation in the decision-making process still remains to be worked out. The local community participation in urban planning is still not satisfactory. “Although there are projects in which local people are involved by answering specific questionnaires, most urban revitalization projects are still designed only at higher levels, by decision-makers and planners” (Hlaváček et al. 2016: 39).

The participation of citizens in Zagreb is minimal. Their influence on spatial planning in the city is only formal and the level of participation low, as described in Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1971). It explains the participation of citizens in urban planning from the lowest (manipulation) to the highest level of participation (control). In comparison with economic and political

actors, professionals and civil society actors are not sufficiently involved in the urban planning process.

*“When we look at the way the city is run, it is obvious there are no institutions through which the citizens’ voice could be heard. There are only some local committees inherited from socialism which function in a similar way.”*(sociologist, Zagreb)

Urban revitalization processes in the post-socialist cities should therefore ensure a much higher level of citizen participation. Without their involvement, urban space will not be successfully designed or the quality of life increased.

## 7 Conclusions

The City of Ljubljana authorities are responsible for the implementation of a large number of carefully and systematically planned urban projects. In comparison with Zagreb, Ljubljana has carried out urban revitalization more successfully (especially in the city center) taking into account the principles of sustainable urban development. Although the situation might not have been perfect from the start, positive project management propositions have prevailed. In the Croatian capital, revitalization has been and still is marked by random projects and the ‘anything goes’ approach, non-existent concern for the sustainable development or environmental issues. Therefore, the comparison of the most important aspects of revitalization in the two cities has confirmed the research hypothesis. The only element left to consider in both cities is the citizen participation. Even so, citizens’ needs are better recognized in Ljubljana than in Zagreb where the citizens’ voice is barely audible.

There are several good reasons why Ljubljana has proved more successful than Zagreb. The 1990s war in Croatia lasted much longer and had far more damaging consequences for the country. After a brief war of independence, Slovenia was the first former Yugoslav republic to join the EU in 2004 and benefit from the EU funding for various urban projects. The situation in Croatia was much more complex, the country was devastated by the war and urgently needed rebuilding. It joined the EU almost a full decade later and started complying with European requests and regulations much later, lagging behind its western neighbour. Furthermore, because of its favourable geographical position, Ljubljana has always been well connected with Europe, observing its socioeconomic changes (even before becoming one of the EU member states). Ljubljana’s urban development is the result of expert urban planning and a clear vision of what the city should look like in the future. Zagreb, on the other hand, still has no clear objectives that can deliver desirable results.

After the fall of socialism in the 1990s and in the new circumstances neither Zagreb nor Ljubljana had the necessary institutions to deal with spatial planning issues. However, a joint effort of numerous urban experts and the Mayor of Ljubljana yielded positive results in this city. In Zagreb the political actors (the Mayor of Zagreb in the first place) joined forces with the economic actors rather than the professionals. Instead of their insistence on urban planning and design expertise, the green light was given to a lot of unsustainable and destructive projects.

At all times urban planners in Ljubljana have given serious consideration to sustainable development but in Zagreb the concept has existed only formally. In Ljubljana which was given the title of the Green Capital of Europe in 2016, open green spaces are considered desirable and valuable, whereas in Zagreb a lot of public spaces have given way to new commercial zones full of high-rise buildings. Urban revitalization in the Slovenian capital has given public space (like city squares) new, positive connotations. In the Croatian capital two beautiful city squares (Kvaternik Square and Flower Square) are today characterized by traffic and commerce. Traffic solutions in Ljubljana have reduced the automobile use in the city center and increased the number of pedestrian zones and bicycle lanes, promoting walking and cycling as a healthier alternative. Meanwhile, Zagreb has accommodated numerous multistorey underground car parks thus bringing more and more vehicles into the center. This has proved problematic not only for traffic itself but also for the preservation of the urban core, its history, culture and tradition.

Although crucial for obtaining the necessary information about specific urban projects, the local community inclusion in urban development programmes is still a missing link in both cities. The city authorities in Ljubljana and Zagreb need to work on the improvement of communication between political actors and citizens. Leaving out the local people may have a negative impact on the city appearance. Therefore, in the future it is very important that citizens' participation begins at early stages of urban planning as they are the key players in all urban revitalization efforts.

In the end, we should mention that knowledge, but most of all implementation and consideration of strategic urban planning is still moderate in transition countries and there is no unique spatial planning model to follow. Therefore, further research into positive practices of urban revitalization projects is called for. Such studies could be used as guidelines for spatial development policies and processes of urban revitalization in other post-socialist towns.

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