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Miha Dešman Introduction Tunnel vision in Ljubljana

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Ljubljana is a city that boasts an exceptional heritage of urbanism and architecture from the Middle Ages through Baroque, the 19th century, Modernism, and up to the Plečnik and Ravnikar eras. How to continue building the city in the 21st century? A wholly new paradigm is needed for managing the city. Prescribing the form has to give way to the steering of processes. This, however, is taking city planning out of the hands of architects and urban designers and placing it into the hands of politicians, developers, and the capital. The steering is going awry, the state and legislative regulation is becoming powerless and is loosening as a consequence. "The city is all we have," declared Rem Koolhaas over a decade ago in his seminal text "What Ever Happened to Urbanism?" . The laissez-faire situation is unsustainable as it leads to chaos. Being involved with any aspect of a contemporary city is an extremely complex undertaking, even in the case of Ljubljana. Whenever one takes the city on, one is destined to fail. It always turns out that things are more complicated, and, moreover, that they're definitely not black and white as they might've seemed at first glance. This is precisely the reason it's so hard to regulate urban development nowadays. There is a need for constant critical re-evaluation of one's own principles. There is certainly a need for a critical position, but different from the one we've lately become used to, i.e. the "uncritical" criticism of everything and everyone without a firm reference point. What is required is a critical understanding of the space of a city, yet this position hasn't been finding much favour lately be it with the public, the policy makers, or even the professionals; what is required is a frame of mind that never loses sight of the whole and that is able to accommodate as many layers of an irreparably imperfect whole that is every city, including Ljubljana. I believe that we, the architects of here and now, have to systematically and constantly concern ourselves with the city despite the "real" times of late capitalism, which, as mentioned above, ignores long-term planning. The harsh critique of the city as a process of production and alienation, propagated decades ago by Tafuri and Rossi, still applies. In this regard, the contact made between "profession and politics" seems to me like two sides of the Moebius strip - they're close to each other, they are the same, but they never actually meet. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, there is a "paralactic gap" between them. They seem to

overlap, but in reality, they share no common ground; in fact, they exclude each other. This way, the dimension of the architect's desire to control and create becomes anachronistic and often tragic as it has no real chance of being realised. The only defensible professional position is a position of constructive criticism, continuously looking for its own wide professional and ethical foundation. This is the role of independent experts, and - in our name - of various organisations within the civil society of professionals. It's upon us to recognise, encourage, and support any honest positive strivings for quality urbanism and urban architecture, and it's upon the policy-makers to include participation and a constant open dialogue with the civil society of professionals in each decision process. We have to act with long-term goals in mind, and the way it's done should be transparent, informed, and integrated. Such culture of consideration and dialogue is yet to be learnt, however. So far, there has been too much fear and resolve to evade any potential obstacles when it comes to political and administrative subjects, both on the state and municipal levels. As a result, attempts at civil society manipulation are the prevailing practice. It's solely upon the civil societies to make themselves heard and demand attention - and they aren't getting enough of it. On a conceptual level, their role is not being properly recognised, and they are not systematically sponsored. And if we consider that in the past, it was precisely the civil sphere that was often instrumentalised and is only slowly emancipating itself, its weak and at times underarticulated position is all the more understandable. Ljubljana's development has been mostly stagnant over the period of the past two decades. But when it began to resuscitate, it suddenly became clear that it no longer followed a long-term integral plan; instead, it is mostly a display of the power of capital. This situation is prone to colossal and irreparable mistakes, yet it definitely has great potential, too. Complications and stalemates in the planning segment are a transitional phase of the social development that will pass and is, in fact, passing already. The process of social maturation, along with the EU norms, will hopefully lead to a normal situation in the context of a regulated society where the rules of law and equal opportunities really work and are obeyed. Cities have to learn to integrate, as Winny Maas puts it, the techniques of development, which will help them manage the multitude of information at their disposal, as well as integrate the currently incompatible differences in findings and values. The attempts of the mayor's office and the municipal government to address the above challenges with an organised spatial policy - they began

with the unveiling of Vision 2025 and continue with the drafting of the municipal plan - is a major step in the right direction. Ljubljana is a city waking up from a long sleep like the Sleeping Beauty, and there are great expectations. Time will tell whether they're realistic, yet this is certainly a unique opportunity for a sea change in the city's spatial planning policy. Still, we cannot ignore certain inherent perils that are beginning to take shape on the future's horizon. The idea to attract domestic and foreign investors with various "Grand Projects" is increasingly taking root. The underlying logic is that these would serve as a catalyst for subsequent spontaneous development of other parts of the city. Unfortunately, this is a very risky proposition - the stronger the private investor, the weaker and more limited the influence of the general public, professionals, and even politics. An increasing "privatisation" of the city presents little opportunity for a balanced, fair, and lasting development. Operativity at all costs, favouring various short-term developers' projects, is not enough; the city needs public investment that raises the public standard and contributes to the city's permanence. There may be shortcuts, and maybe we have to take them, yet they always have to support the whole mentioned above. The new policy has to work towards integration, show creativity and vision, but not in breaking legal and ethical norms and regulations, but in their enforcement.

The area of and around the railway station and the related issue of cut-and-cover tunnelling may be the first true test of this new policy. In some ways, the location in question hints at an imbalance between the public in favour of the private. Both the city and the state that should be leading the way are being pushed to the side more and more and their role is becoming marginal. The idea of taking the tracks below street level is - as shown by the action "Visions II" - at least 3/4 century old, and every decision taken today immediately falls hostage to this historical context. The case of the railway tunnelling in Ljubljana is an example of spatial and temporal planning that failed in its execution several times in the past even though it received full justification from the experts. The history of this failed project and the gauging of possibilities for its realisation is the central theme of this issue, which also covers additional characteristics, problems, and opportunities related to spatial and urban planning in the city of Ljubljana, and in Slovenia at large. In the past few years, the situation has been getting positively explosive, and if I may look into the future, I anticipate a turbulent catharsis as its resolution - a catharsis, however, that has not yet begun.