The Diminished Importance of Cultural Sustainability in Spatial Planning: The Case of Slovenia

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Abstract: Formal spatial planning procedures tend to neglect the importance of socio-cultural elements that are inherently present as part of 'soft infrastructure' and are constituted from traditions, lifestyles, wishes, and the routines of individuals that form a local community. In contrast, the concept of *cultural sustainability* is closely linked with the socio-cultural heterogeneity of a local community. The inability of the formal spatial planning system in Slovenia to adequately engage with the social wishes and resistances of residents is highlighted in situations involving problematic confrontations between the members of the dominant 'common culture' and marginal groups. Two cases from Ljubljana are presented: the stigmatization of the Fužine neighbourhood and the problematic of mosque construction. The cases illustrate that the 'majority' of residents tend to perceive many subcultural representations in space as foreign, non-indigenous elements that could disrupt the everyday routine in a local community. They show how the deficiencies of the current spatial planning system in Slovenia are unable to address challenges posed by contemporary society's cultural, social, and economic transformations and can work quite the opposite way – by increasing the complexity (and level of difficulty) for possible implementation of measures supporting cultural heterogeneity in planning practice.

Keywords: Cultural sustainability, spatial planning, common culture, social exclusion, cost-benefit analysis, NIMBY

Résumé : Les procédures de planification formelles tendent à négliger l'importance des facteurs socio-culturels que l'on considère présents en tant que matériaux culturels de type « soft infrastructure » et qui comprennent les traditions, les modes de vie, les aspirations sociales, et les routines individuelles qui participent à la formation du tissu communautaire local. Par contraste, le concept de développement culturel durable est plus à même de renfermer le caractère hétérogène des pratiques culturelles locales. En Slovénie, les procédures de planification locale ne prennent pas suffisamment en compte ces aspects ethnoculturels et par conséquent, les stratégies de planification formelle occultent les aspirations sociales de la population. De plus, elle laisse place à une vision monolithique de la culture, telle que partagée et véhiculée par les membres du groupe culturel dominant. Afin d'illustrer cette dynamique sociale, deux études de cas issues de la ville de Ljubljana sont présentés : la stigmatisation du

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quartier Fužine d'une part et la problématique de la construction de la mosquée d'autre part. Les cas illustrent notamment que les résident appartenant à la majorité tendent à percevoir des dimensions de la ville comme étant étrangère, non-indigène et qui perturbent la ville et les activités quotidiennes. Ces cas illustrent les difficultés engendrées par le processus de planification spatiale.

Mots clé : durabilité culturelle, planification spatiale, culture en commun, exclusion sociale, analyse coûts-bénéfices, NIMBY

Introduction: Sustainability, culture and spatial planning

Spatial planning is too often understood as a 'values free' or even 'technical' exercise based on precise instruments, skills, and mechanisms that support decisions for interventions in space. In doing so, it is assumed that spatial planning follows accurately defined procedures and selected goals, which will limit harmful and favour spatial processes that operate for the good of the whole community. In this context, planning is perceived as a form of governance of urban transformations intended to regulate the interests of different (cultural, class, ethnic) groups that are present in the locality. However, even if formalized and institutionalized management systems allow for the implementation of complex spatial intervention, actual, *realized* spatial changes reflect much wider processes in the management of physical space and the various socio-cultural factors that are present.

Many spatial changes that influence the quality of life in a community are the product of a series of socio-cultural elements found within categories and sub-systems that are separate from formal and institutionalized system of spatial planning. The formal spatial planning system may perceive these intangible elements as irrelevant and redundant. Measures that fall solely within the framework of a formalized and institutionalized system of spatial planning have a 'limited scope'. They may solve *physical* problems but at the same time create other *socio-cultural* problems, which then require further consideration and additional efforts to solve. Only in extremely rare situations can spatial issues be resolved with simple, formalized measures. What is more and more evident is the need to include a range of cultural analyses into spatial policies and planning practices, which give a more 'informed' decision regarding any spatial interventions.

A truly sustainable form of urban planning should consist of an integrated approach that includes both 'hard' (physical) spatial planning variables and 'soft' (cultural) elements that represent the foundation on which the formal system of spatial planning rests. In this way, culture would be considered alongside environmental, economic, and social dimensions and actively integrated as the fourth pillar of sustainability, an idea which, in earlier conceptions of urban sustainability, was given little attention or emphasis (see, for example, the *Brundtland Report* [WCED 1987]; Rio Declaration 1992). When analyzing the role of culture in urban sustainability concepts, the majority of past approaches tended to focus on 'cultural production' schemes, where culture was regarded as an important supportive element that adds to the functioning of society and economy. Bianchini (1999) described such use of culture in urban policies as the "age of city marketing" where culture is "increasingly seen as a valuable tool to diversify the local economic base and to compensate for jobs lost in traditional industrial and services sectors" (p. 38). In

contrast, newer approaches (e.g., UNESCO's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014); Agenda 21 for Culture, 2004, 2008) tend to perceive and include culture as a constitutive element of the basic decision-making process that permeates the whole structure of a spatial planning mechanism. In the context of urban planning, cultural sustainability should be based on the principle of inclusivity and strive to give voice to all possible groups in the population. Bianchini (1999) describes cultural planning strategies oriented toward urban sustainability as a tool that helps to "synthesize – to see the connections between natural, social, cultural, political and economic environments" (p. 43). Consequently, the final product of such 'urban cultural sustainability' policies should be:

> 1) the development of 'open minded' public spaces for social interaction and of 'permeable borders' between different neighbourhoods; 2) encouragement of multiculturalism and intercultural exchange and 3) recognition of potential of participatory cultural projects within sustainable urban development strategies. (p. 45)

The problematic of spatial planning and coordinated development in Slovenia is partly a consequence of the eliminated tradition of spatial planning that existed during the period of socialism. Despite specific adverse effects of socialist spatial planning, such as restrictions on the property market and limited growth of urbanization in major urban areas, socialist planning ensured the existence of certain rules and governing mechanisms which could help in the construction of a culturally more sustainable form of spatial development. Instead, in the absence of clear spatial planning procedures, 'urban managers' (Pahl 1977) became key players of 'pseudo-planning', that is, incrementalist interventions in space that originate primarily within economic interests.

In circumstances of small-step incrementalist planning, physical, spatial interventions become more important and less attention is paid to socio-cultural factors of spatial planning. The biggest problem of pseudo-planning derives from its restrictive stance which focuses on physical transformations without looking for links with the community, cultural systems, and wider society. Managerial pseudo-planning interventions concentrate on particular, minor areas of cities, which bring great benefits to individuals and members of the dominant cultural sphere, while the problems linked to cultural minorities accumulate, which could gradually influence the urban system of Slovenia.

This article critically discusses the missing links between formal spatial planning processes and the concept of *cultural sustainability* in urban environments. Deficiencies of the formal spatial planning system in Slovenia are analyzed from a 'bottom-up' approach, that is, by analyzing the perception and influence of individuals and various population groups on the top-down decisions made by formal spatial planning system. *Culture* is considered as an unfairly 'neglected' element of spatial planning with important long-term effects on the well-being of a community. The article also tries to show that the principle of cultural sustainability, in the short-term, cannot be simply inserted (i.e., formally accepted and implemented in praxis) but needs careful planning and the significant support of a range of institutions, actors, and political structures at all levels.

The social construction of space and culturally sustainable urban planning

The attitude people take in relation to decisions and spatial changes made by the spatial planning system is largely dependent upon the information that they gather through various information

networks furnished by media, experts, and other reference groups. In addition, the individual's own experience and knowledge represent an equally important mechanism that helps to process changes from the environment. In fact, when assessing formal, that is, legal, interventions in space, people construct and follow their own scale of priorities, which combines both external (mediated) and internal (personal) evaluations. This system of individual evaluation or subjective cost-benefit analysis gradually eliminates or 'tapers' the most negative elements and tries to favour the most appropriate options. Based on perceived benefits and costs, people decide whether to circumvent, sabotage, or openly oppose spatial interventions they feel would bring too much interference or unnecessary costs. During the process of evaluation, a person rigorously assesses all costs, including not only the economic cost of the spatial transformation but also other hard-to-measure costs such as the duration of spatial intervention, the level of mental or emotional effort they invest, the degree of compliance, or their assessment of the manner in which the system of spatial planning includes or respects the elements of local culture, habits, traditions, and so on. Each of these elements can represent, for a particular user, a significant cost while, for another user, the same element may be of marginal importance and does not significantly affect their quality of life.

Figure 1 shows how as costs (measured by time, effort, money, or inclusion of local culture) increase, the usefulness of spatial interventions diminishes. This scenario occurs when the formal system of spatial planning excludes important social and cultural aspects present in local communities. As perceived costs rise, the lower is the utility and greater is the chance that a person will somehow react to negative trends that may affect their quality of life. When the costs exceed the equilibrium point, that is, the cost-benefit tolerance margin, the individual arrives at the moment of *disenchantment*, realizes that alternative, lower-cost options exist, and refuses to fully cooperate. From that moment on, in terms of an individual's subjective analysis, any further investment would result in pointless costs, such as loss of energy, effort, time, or money. After passing the equilibrium point, the costs begin to outweigh the income or benefit and the individual chooses a different mode of action, either negotiation, sabotage, or open opposition to decisions made by a formal system of spatial planning.

The concept of *individual cost-benefit analysis* is an important mechanism that can explain the person's apparently irrational behavior, that is, why individuals oppose decisions made by a formal spatial planning system. In fact, it shows that physical space always functions as a social category and that the effectiveness of spatial planning is, at its very base, dependant upon the 'social construction of reality' (Berger & Luckmann 1988), which is the result of a complex intermingling of physical circumstances and social interests, needs, and wishes. For the spatial planning system, an individual or group response to formal interventions in space may be irrational but, according to the subjective scheme of costs and benefits, is completely rational and justified. The individual is always embedded in a specific local context that forms a 'structural constraint' (Giddens 1984), best described as a system of 'soft sanctions' (see Table 1). Sanctions are usually visible only when the individual is not sufficiently synchronized with the local context and some sort of designated transgression from dominant norms and habits occurs or is perceived as likely to occur.

Figure 1. Scenario of subjective evaluation of costs arising from a formal system of spatial planning

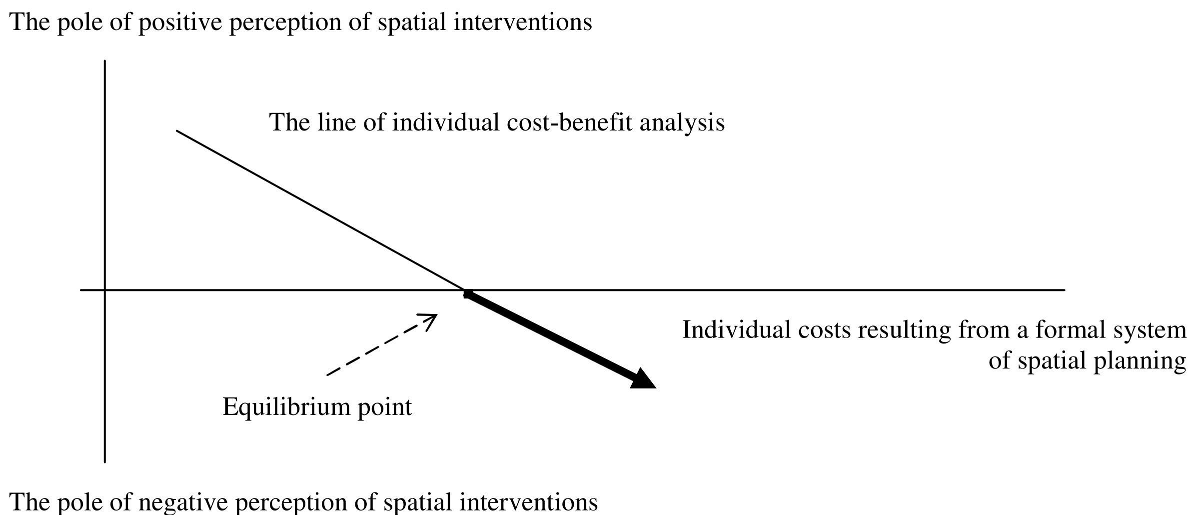


Table 1. Forms of constraint

Material constraint	(Negative) constraint	Structural constraint
Constraint deriving from the character of the material world and from the physical qualities of the body	Constraint deriving from punitive responses on the part of some agents toward others	Constraint deriving from the contextuality of action, that is, from the 'given' character of structural properties vis-à-vis situated actors

Source: Giddens (1984)

Spatial planning based on the top-down principle sometimes excludes the local context, that is, the social and cultural aspects of local communities, which function accordingly to their own habits, rules, and daily routines. When a system of spatial planning overlooks the local context, locally unique "spatial practices," "representations of space," and "spaces of representation" (Lefebvre 1974/1991, p. 245) – that is, collective experiences of space – will over time "produce a new space" which escapes simple, standardized, precise planning definitions. Thus, spatial planning never operates in "absolute space" but rather in "abstract space" (p. 229), which effectively escapes disciplinary borders.

The mechanism of individual calculation of costs and benefits is not just an attempt that tries to illustrate how different groups of people react to formal spatial planning, but also points to the complexity and importance of the system of social construction of space. The process of social construction of space is inseparable from cultural resources that are present on a specific locality in

the form of natural and built environment, local products, heritage, habits, rules, and so forth. Consequently, in order to achieve a greater degree of cultural sustainability in spatial planning, the process of social construction of space must be taken into consideration as it is a basic mechanism that helps explain the local context. Policymakers in spatial planning should "not be simply making an instrumental use of cultural resources as tools for achieving non-cultural goals, but should let their own mindsets and assumptions be transformed by contact with the soft infrastructures, which make up local culture" (Bianchini 1999, p. 43). In this sense, spatial planning processes should sufficiently encompass the interests of different (ethnic, social, cultural) groups. An unequal representation can result in an incorrect allocation of costs among members of the community, leading to conflict or opposition to spatial interventions.

Cultural aspects of individual cost-benefit analysis

Spatial planning is a product of factors that combine not only formal (legal procedures and adopted laws, acts, documents) but also informal aspects, which include socially and culturally defined characteristics of everyday life. Although formal procedures seem to have the primary role, their relative dominance is not absolutely clear; in praxis, the social processes shape and adapt the outcomes of formal procedures via structural constraint and individual cost-benefit analysis.

Individual cost-benefit analysis operates in two directions and can bring either positive or negative consequences to the wider community. On one hand, the individual is willing to incur reasonable costs if the wider community benefits from his performance. This form of activity is identified by Faulkner & Tideswell (1997) as 'altruistic surplus', when the individual sacrifices part of his benefits for the welfare of whole community. On the other hand, there are situations where people will be guided by selfish, individual interests and act in ways detrimental to other members of community, particularly in cases that require long-term implementation, where the effects of altruistic surplus cannot be immediately identified and recognized by the individual. In such cases, the community may experience the so-called 'people's tragedy' (Hardin 1968), a scenario of destructive competition between various interest groups trying to maintain their privileged status in a community.

Urban environments are in a state of continuous struggle and discourse between groups with different cultural backgrounds. These groups try to either defend or change the symbolic representations that are present in a specific locale. In particular, the members of the dominant socio-cultural structure or 'common culture' (Featherstone 2007) often put a lot of effort into differentiating themselves from 'cultural minorities' or subcultures, defined as groups of people with sets of behaviours and beliefs that differ from the larger community to which they belong.[1] Madanipour (2003) describes the main form of social exclusion in the cultural arena as "marginalisation from symbols, meanings, rituals and discourses of cultural minorities, whose

[1] The thesis of *common culture* found in sociology and anthropology assumes that a 'coherent culture, or dominant ideology, plays a crucial role in sustaining social order and integration' (Featherstone 2007, p. 127). Besides Featherstone, many other authors (e.g., Williams 1976; Parsons 1964) also discuss different forms of common, shared understanding of the 'normal' in a specific environment. In this article, common culture is understood in a more limited way, as a power balance between different groups that preserves existing or produces new symbolic materials in a specific locale.

language, race, religion and lifestyle are different from those of the larger society" (p. 78). Such destructive rivalry may suppress developmental potentials stemming from socio-cultural resources and result in diminished quality of life for the local community.

Tradition and locality remain important ingredients in the construction of identity and continue to play a crucial role in the everyday life of a community. A great number of localities try to reinforce the feeling of community and use different spatial techniques to attain this objective. Some of these spatial techniques are disputable as they tend to exclude new cultural elements. Within the dominant culture, new subcultural groups, symbols, practices, and artifacts are often considered foreign, non-indigenous, and important only for a minority that wants to differ from prevalent cultural norms and expectations. These 'non-standardized' groups in the city trigger a process of dialogue and negotiation between the dominant cultural sphere and new subcultural elements which is inherently linked to individual cost-benefit analysis. Each individual in the local community produces his/her own cost-benefit analysis regarding the new cultural elements that are being introduced into his/her local environment.

The system of common or dominant cultural elements forms the context in which the individual is embedded. It represents a lens through which the individual perceives what is considered to be a 'normal' environment. In some cases, the confrontation between subcultures and the dominating socio-cultural sphere is so tense that it produces negative effects, but on many occasions 'newcomers' seem to represent an important part of heterogeneity that stimulates the development of a community.[2]

Heterogeneity is a vital part of community and its socio-economic structure as it enables social interaction among a variety of people, which permits "heightened mobility of the individual," "brings him within the range of stimulation by a great number of diverse individuals," and "subjects him to fluctuating status in the differentiated social groups" (Wirth 1938/2000, pp. 98-100). Heterogeneity is also one of the main ingredients of *cultural sustainability* and represents the basis for the development of mechanisms of inclusivity and participation in a community. To attain a certain level of cultural sustainability in a community, its members must agree to accept the principle of heterogeneity and shared culture, which establishes common linkages among individuals and breaks down social barriers and barriers to sharing. How to permanently include heterogeneity as a dynamic, continuously changing category in the process of spatial planning is a challenge. Too often, in order to get quick results, spatial planners overlook soft infrastructure and diminish complexity by simplifying spatial planning procedures. Consequently, the spatial planning procedures are more and more vulnerable to the complexities of everyday life and often account only for the physical characteristics of a locality, while the intangible elements, linked to heterogeneity, cultural engagement, and social action, are taken under consideration only in cases

[2] For example, Jacobs (1961/1994) sees economic diversity as the key factor of a city's success. In a different way, Sassen (1994) studies 'global cities' (e.g., London, Paris, New York, Tokyo) and looks for their strategic role in the development of global economic activities. A key feature of these cities is the cultural diversity of their populations. Similarly, Bairoch (1998) sees cities and their diversity as the engine of economic growth. Florida (2002) argues that culturally diverse and tolerant cities are more likely to attract creative people and industries such as high tech and research.

when 'unexpected' events like civil protests of dissatisfied groups of the population shake the original development plans.

In the case of the Slovenian population, the individual cost-benefit analysis is still closely linked to the elements of tradition, heritage, and prevalent common culture. Individuals in the dominant culture tend to perceive new cultural elements in their locality according to characteristics synonymous with less densely populated, suburban, and more exclusive, gated areas. Not surprisingly, the consequences of these processes can be observed in numerous NIMBY cases connected to introduction of new cultural elements in larger Slovenian cities. The problematic of social exclusion is, in the case of Slovenia, 'upgraded' by a formal spatial planning system, based on a top-down approach, which separates itself from communities and cultural resources that are present in the locality. The overall effect of the missing link between locally embedded individual cost-benefit analysis and formal (top-down) spatial planning procedures results in the diminished importance of cultural sustainability in Slovenian spatial planning.

Diminished importance of cultural sustainability in Slovenian spatial planning

Slovenian communities tend not to be very open or permeable in relation to new cultural elements being introduced into their space. In this sense, they tend to be more reserved and minimize the influences of new symbolic materials. The introduction of new cultural elements is accepted only up to a certain point that suits the interests of specific groups trying to retain a privileged status or develop specific economic services in tourism or the leisure industry, but are less permeable for other elements of cultural heterogeneity that fracture the 'status quo.'

The research project Re-Urban Mobil (2004)[3], which analyzed the structure of the population living in Ljubljana, showed a very strong presence of the NIMBY[4] syndrome towards the members of second-generation immigrant communities. Although the total number of immigrants and other foreign groups is not very high[5], some city districts with a higher number of non-Slovenian ethnic communities are highly stigmatized and subtly marginalized. In this context, the case of the Fužine neighbourhood is insightful.[6] Fužine is an estate with a particularly heterogeneous ethnic population

[3] The Re-Urban Mobil research project was funded as part of the 5th European Framework (FP5). A public opinion survey was carried out in July 2004 by the Centre for Spatial Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, as a random sample of 602 adult residents of Ljubljana. The sample was evenly distributed according to gender, age structure, household's types, ethnic composition, socio-economic stratification, and location of residence.

[4] NIMBY, 'Not in my Backyard', is generally used to describe social resistance to (undesired) change in one's immediate surroundings or neighbourhood.

[5] In general, the overall ethnic structure in Slovenia is very homogeneous. In the 2002 population census, 83% of Slovenia's population declared themselves to be Slovenians. Compared to other capital cities in Europe, the heterogeneity of the population in Ljubljana is rather low. Larger communities of immigrants are found at the outskirts of the city, where the most numerous groups include both first- and second-generation immigrants that originate from ex-Yugoslavia.

[6] The development plan for the Fužine neighbourhood was drawn up for approximately 4,500 dwellings with accompanying services for approximately 15,000 inhabitants. The construction of the housing complex was started in 1977 and was completed in 1981.

structure in contrast with other estates in Ljubljana and is, to a large extent, stigmatized and marginalized. The data in Table 2 illustrate how other residents of Ljubljana perceive the estate of Fužine.

Table 2. Stigmatization of the Fužine neighbourhood

If you could choose freely, in which residential area in Ljubljana or the surroundings would you prefer to live?	
	Total
Vic	3,8%
Bezigrad	3,0%
Rudnik	0,9%
Siska	1,9%
Center	*46,8%*
Murgle	2,8%
Rozna dolina	*10,9%*
Kodeljevo	1,1%
Moste	0,6%
Trnovo	*10,5%*
okolica Tivolija	0,6%
Krakovo	0,9%
okolica Lj	4,7%
Prule	7,1%
Polje	0,2%
Tacen	0,2%
Grad	0,2%
Podutik	0,9%
Koseze	1,1%
Crnuce	0,6%
Barje	0,6%
Sostro	0,2%
Vrhovci	0,4%

And which area would be at the bottom of your list?	
	Total
Vic	2,2%
Bezigrad	2,7%
Rudnik	0,8%
Siska	5,7%
Center	6,7%
Murgle	0,3%
Stepanjsko naselje	8,1%
Kodeljevo	0,5%
Moste	*18,9%*
Fužine	*41,0%*
Trnovo	1,1%
okolica Lj	3,5%
Rakova Jelsa	1,6%
Polje	0,5%
Nove Jarse	1,9%
Zalog	1,6%
Koseze	0,3%
Crnuce	1,1%
Barje	0,8%
Sostro	0,5%
Tomacevo	0,3%

Source: Re-Urban Mobil (2004)

The data show that the majority of interviewers chose Fužine and Moste (a neighborhood in the vicinity of Fužine) as places where they would prefer not to live. Although the overall quality of life and access to services in those neighborhoods are not low, they appear to be stigmatized on the basis of cultural diversity, especially the neighborhood Fužine, where the housing standard is fairly high but the prices of apartments never achieve the housing market price average in Ljubljana. It seems that the actual quality of life in this neighborhood is not proportionally reflected in the prices of the apartments due to the negative image of the neighborhood. In general, we hypothesize that most of the problems mentioned by the stakeholders on the estate relate to its stigmatization. Negative perceptions of 'foreign' cultural elements, which may not be congruent with the lifestyles of the dominant population groups, is even more evident in NIMBY cases linked to specific urban locations. In some cases, the spatial planning system can be subverted by local inhabitants and groups which openly or covertly oppose the installation of socially, culturally, or physically significant infrastructure (e.g., social centres, concert halls) of marginal groups such as immigrants, people with special needs, or art subcultures. One of the most famous NIMBY cases related to minorities in Slovenia is that of mosque construction in Ljubljana.

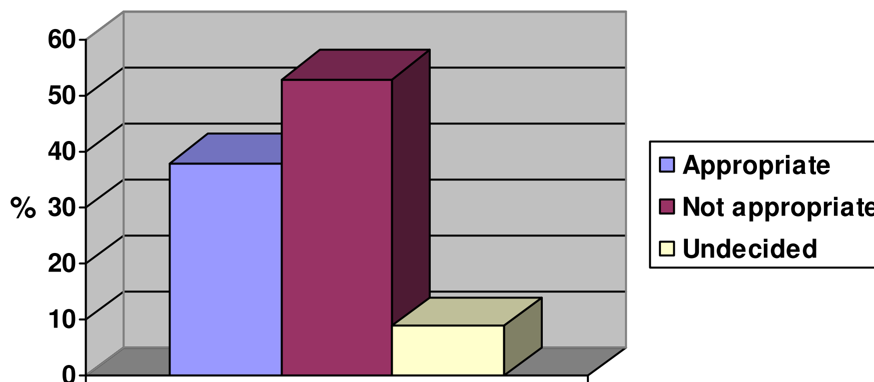
According to the 2002 national population census, 47,488 residents of Slovenia declared themselves to be Muslim and belonging to the Islam religious community. This group, after Catholicism, is the second largest religious group and represents 2.4% of the total population in Slovenia. The Islamic religious community has, for decades, been trying to build a religious-cultural centre but so far has been unsuccessful in this endeavor. A permit for the construction of the Islamic Religious-Cultural Centre, colloquially known as the Ljubljana mosque, was first requested in 1969, but was not granted. Efforts to get the permit were revived during the 1990s. The proposal produced a national backlash, with considerable public opposition to the mosque. In 2003, the city council attempted to call a municipal referendum to prohibit the construction of the mosque. The referendum was rejected by the Constitutional Court in 2004. In 2008, one of the city councillors began gathering signatures for a second referendum to reduce the height of the mosque's minaret. This time, the Constitutional Court approved the signature-gathering process. The mayor, however, vowed to continue to fight it. Due to the strong opposition of the local population, the location of the mosque constantly changed. The first location selected for the mosque was on the Cesta dveh cesarjev Road, a site bought by the city government to be made available for purchase by the Islamic Community of Slovenia. By late 2008, the location had changed to Kurilniška and then to Parmova Street. The design of the centre was also changed several times and caused numerous debates regarding the maximum size and height of the construction.

Public opinion in Slovenia is prevalently still negative toward the possibility of mosque construction in Ljubljana. In the public opinion survey Politbarometer[7] (2004), performed by CJMMK – Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Center, residents of Slovenia were asked questions about the construction of a mosque, that is, an Islamic religious-cultural centre, in Ljubljana (see Figure 2). The majority of respondents replied that the construction of an Islamic religious-centre in Ljubljana is not appropriate. Slovenian citizens who are Muslims, according to

[7] The public opinion survey Politbarometer is part of a longitudinal research project led by CJMMK. The survey was performed on a sample of 940 adult residents of Slovenia in January 2004. The sample was constructed from a sampling base of 2,051 persons and performed by 28 trained interviewers.

these results, are not 'entitled' to a common space where they can practice their religion. In the case of the mosque construction, the discrepancy between the plans of authorities, that is, the formal spatial planning system, and the wishes of local communities in Ljubljana is extremely high and illustrates how difficult it is to integrate the social construction of space, i.e., perceptions of the local population into actual spatial plans. Regardless of constitutional law, which permits religious minorities to construct religious buildings in Slovenia, after many years the authorities still have not completed all the formal spatial planning requirements needed to begin construction of the mosque.

Figure 2. Is it appropriate or not that those Slovenian citizens who belong to the Muslim faith build a religious-cultural centre for their purposes?



Source: Politbarometer 1/2004 (2004)

In light of these results, it is important to ask ourselves: Why are people less and less willing to accept (legitimize) the decisions of formal systems despite the legal base that allows the system to take such decisions? To understand this issue, it is of crucial importance to determine the difference between the categories of *legality* and *legitimacy* that are often confused or even fused into a single formal system of spatial planning. Kos (2002) explains that "in modern societies legality represents a formally necessary, but not always sufficient condition for the acceptance and especially implementation of democratic decisions" (p. 21). If *legality*, that is, normative argumentation, represents a sufficient base to implement a democratic decision, then all conflicts, obstructions, and delays connected to the realization of spatial plans would be avoided. Reactions and oppositions of different groups to interventions in their local space lead us to conclude that many otherwise legal decisions cannot be implemented due to a low level of legitimacy, that is, a lack of support and open or hidden opposition from relevant actors in specific localities. Most often, the differences between legality and legitimacy can be observed in NIMBY syndrome cases, where the appearance of new social, economic, and cultural activities in one area triggers strong opposition from local communities. In some cases, like the mosque construction in Ljubljana, the 'civil sphere' prevents the implementation of decisions made by the formal spatial planning system that has legal support, but not necessarily sufficient legitimacy, to implement the change.

On the surface, NIMBYisms are justified as spatial problems that have roots in objective reasons. Often, however, under the surface of those 'arguments' lie stereotypes, values, beliefs, and images about minorities living near a majority group. NIMBYism has its origin in identification with one's personal surroundings. As Kiefer (2008) suggests, 'a sense of place' is basically not a bad thing, but it "spawns a deep-seated resistance to changes to those physical surroundings" (p. 3). The resistance to change is sometimes so strong that the majority feels compelled to protect their territory, even if this excludes the rights of others: "People not only place their own needs above the public interest but come close to reframing the public interest as a social organization that vindicates their personal needs. No individual wants to accept the incremental burden of meeting a broader societal need" (p. 3).

The overall high level of stigmatization of foreign cultural elements coincides with rather numerous NIMBY cases in Slovenian society. According to the data from a longitudinal research project, Slovenian Public Opinion (2000, 2004),[8] the residents of Slovenia are highly intolerant in relation to various ethnic and cultural groups. The question 'Who would you prefer not to be your neighbour?' revealed that the majority of respondents would prefer not to have any neighbour with characteristics that differ from dominating cultural standards (see Table 3).

Table 3. Who would you prefer not to be your neighbour?

Categories of people	2000	2004
Roma people	48.3 %	57.7%
Muslims	29.0 %	35.4%
Immigrants, foreign workers	28.8 %	28.8%
Jews	22.1 %	29.6%
People of other races	20.1 %	21.4%

Source: SJM (2000, 2004)

These data show that among subcultures, the highest rank on the list of unwanted neighbours is occupied by the category of Roma people (48.3 and 57.7%), followed by the Muslim group (29.0 and 35.4%) and the 'immigrants, foreign workers' group (28.8 %). What is particularly interesting is the high percentage of negative perception towards Jewish people, which do not represent even 0.01% of the total population in Slovenia. Also notable is the rejection of people of other races that in 2004 reached 21.4%.

Whether forced, subtle, or internalized, social exclusion of specific marginalized groups is often explained by cultural differences, which are usually reformulated as more acceptable arguments and presumably based on an objective position. For example, cultural differences are translated into health-related arguments (where members of marginalized groups are perceived as

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[8] The longitudinal research project Slovenian Public Opinion is part of the European Social Survey. The survey was performed by CJMMK – Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, on a sample of 1,097 adult residents of Slovenia. The sample was constructed in two steps: first, the sample was distributed according to clusters of enumeration areas (CEA) and, secondly, the persons were selected randomly in each of the defined areas.

less hygienic or less healthy) or aesthetic arguments, based on an assumption that there exists some sense of universal aesthetics that applies to all humanity beyond culture. These very subtle forms of discrimination or marginalization of ‘non-appropriate’ cultural elements result in social exclusion of less empowered groups from supposedly inclusive public spaces and can, in the worse cases, lead to enclavization, reification, and sometimes also ghettoization of subcultural communities.

If we further elaborate the cases presented from Ljubljana, we may say that the NIMBY syndrome does not cancel non-legitimacy nor reduce the legality of interventions in space, but only prevents the adoption or implementation of certain spatial decisions that are contrary to the ‘standards’ of prevalent, common culture. As already mentioned, it may happen that some decisions of the formal spatial planning system might not be wrong and would help to increase the level of heterogeneity or implement culturally more sustainable spatial development in an area. However, the implementation of such decisions is often prevented by a dominant informal socio-cultural system that is not ready to change the stable, routinized life patterns of the majority of community members. In such an environment, any minor change is perceived as an illegitimate step or potential threat that leads to unpredictable consequences for the local community.

Conclusion: Deficiences of current spatial planning procedures

Postmodern approaches to spatial planning advocate for the convergence of ‘soft’, socio-cultural factors and the formal system of spatial planning. Mere physical redesign of space is insufficient and does not remove hidden socio-cultural effects, which inevitably appear from time to time. Conflicts are a characteristic of any urban system and should be considered not only as a disruptive force but also as an important agent of change or a mechanism of (possible) adaptation for formal spatial planning systems, which are incapable of self-regulation in today’s hyper-complex world. In this context, lifestyles of local community members, reflected in a multitude of banal daily activities, will sooner or later have to be addressed by the formal system of spatial planning if it does not want to risk potentially harmful conflicts and excessive costs.

The Slovenian formal system of spatial planning, due to its relative ‘immaturity’, is very sensitive to changes in social functions and dynamics. This sensibility often results in frequent small (micro) conflicts on the level of individuals’ daily lives. Following the change of political systems and the transition to a market economy in the 1990s, the system of spatial planning underwent huge transformations. The abandonment of former spatial planning requirements and the rapid empowerment of a new spatial planning system together with an unconsolidated law structure led to situations in which each side constructed its own interpretations regarding permitted activities in space. This process of interpretation of laws at the local level has led to the disregard of public interests at the national level and, consequently, to the dissolution of principles of cultural heterogeneity and culturally sustainable communities. In an analysis of public and private interests in spatial policies, Kos (1998) states that Slovenian spatial planning is characterized by “non-consolidated institutional structure” and “cross-level ambiguities and deficiencies” (p. 28). The spatial development of Slovenia is hampered by “an informal political and legal culture,” which is reflected in incrementalist and often illegal land development. Particularly at the local level, spatial development is still based on “instinctive opposition toward the state, i.e. formal interventions in space, which are based on long and demanding legalization procedures” (p. 30).

In order to diminish the number of barriers that obstruct the construction of a more sustainable form of spatial development, the existing structure of spatial planning should be upgraded and adapted according to the needs of culturally diverse individuals and groups. In doing so, the spatial planning system should rely to a greater degree on strategies of inclusivity and try to cooperate with local communities before and during the implementation of spatial changes.

The range of participatory strategies in Slovenia has not changed a lot in recent years. Participatory strategies rely on conventional methods, which principally involve disseminating information to the public, rather than direct involvement of users (from the bottom-up) in the spatial planning process. Conventional participatory strategies include, for example, exhibitions, public tribunes, various media reports, presentations of statistical data analysis and, in some cases, consultative referendums and public investigations. Approaches that would allow greater degrees of user involvement in spatial planning procedures are, at the moment, still in early stages and do not have much significance currently. So, how can the relatively low level of public participation in spatial development be increased?

Two interesting approaches, which could be applied to raise the level of public participation in the near future, involve increasing the “user's learning ability” as well as the “learning ability of the institutional spatial planning systems” (Gantar 1993, p. 81). The first approach tries to solve the problem of lack of public participation by improving the relationship of the user with the spatial planning system, that is, it helps the user to better understand the complex planning process. The basic idea is to implement a strategy of ‘problem recognition and response’, to teach local leaders in such way that they should be able to recognize and understand the complexity of problems that arise in a local community. Simultaneously, local leaders, with specialized training, should be able to organize or prepare the local community to quickly and efficiently react and adapt to problems that arise. The second approach tries to solve the problem of lack of public participation from another point of view – by improving and stimulating the formal planning system to come closer to the user. This approach is based on a mechanism that tries to establish a formal spatial planning system that can rapidly react and is able to constantly increase its ‘self-learning’ capabilities. In other words, the system has the ability to ‘store’ experiences and use them to identify patterns of risk and unpredictable consequences of social action at the first signs of potential problems.

The integration of new cultural elements and the wishes of individuals and local communities into a common spatial planning system is undoubtedly a complex task. When establishing appropriate spatial policies, it is necessary to consider various tangible and intangible aspects that are linked to the location of spatial intervention. Therefore, the essential question of spatial planning is not whether the implementation of formal, institutional spatial measures will be successful but if the implementation of measures is achieved through a consensus between various interest groups in the locality and legal authorities. In this context, the proper inclusion of analysis of the social construction of a space (which shows how people see, understand, and feel the space) in spatial planning processes is of crucial importance. Planning that is designed from the ‘bottom-up’ can provide an important, alternative approach to preventing the types of conflicts typically arising from the quick implementation of measures generated in a formal system of spatial planning based on ‘top-down’ approaches.

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