

Improving the Practices of Public Participation within the Spatial and Urban Planning Field in Serbia Relating to Environmental Matters (City of Belgrade)

Implemented by NGO Belgrade Town Planners' Association

Implementation period: Dec 2005-Nov 2006

Project background

Belgrade has a number of means by which both environmental and public concerns can be taken into consideration in the area of land use. The Planning and Construction Law sets the conditions for both the facilitation of public debates and requires planners to undertake Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments (SEIA). In practice, the fact is that, Belgrade's Master Plan is subject to "permanent planning," which allows authorities to change zones quickly, and results in situations when citizens discover the building site in their neighborhood only when investors start construction. Belgrade Town Planners aims to help citizens to understand their consultation rights according to local law and to encourage further public participation and provide positive publicity for the Aarhus Convention, an initiative which Serbia has yet to endorse and accede to it.

Activities implemented

- Information was collected with regard to the current situation of the SEAs produced for the different segments of Belgrade plan and disseminating via the launched web site.
- Roundtable discussion was held with key target groups involved in the decision-making procedure of spatial and urban planning in Belgrade.
- With the selection of the segment of project for SEA for Klisina (a certain territorial area of Belgrade), the NGO decided to monitor the planning procedure, collect information on the whole process and its participatory aspects.
- Round table was organized with participation of relevant authorities and NGOs, to discuss about the information and experience collected in relation of Klisina case which concluded with initiating improvements to implement already existing spatial and urban planning policies and participatory practices.
- Media campaign was started –leaflets in local newspaper, posters and flyers on SEA and public participation opportunities.
- In order that representatives of the urban planning of Belgrade, and local and national NGOs would better understand the public participation in connection of SEA and urban planning a capacity building seminar was organized in June. The Seminar gathered professionals of the planning domain and an expert from Slovenia was invited to share the SEA planning and related public participation experience.
- As product of the seminar completed by the further work of the project team some of the main obstacles with regard to SEA and urban planning were identified such as: hierarchy problem concerning SEA, need for improved methodology on developing

the SEA, clarification on criteria and indicators; low understanding, lack of knowledge and insufficient preparation for ensuring involvement of public, obstacles to which some solutions are to be considered.

- The findings and the proposals were finalized and was disseminated via the project webpage and was distributed among the diverse professional bodies involved into urban planning and SEA process.

Final result and outcomes

Given the complexity of an SEA process that is applied to an urban plan such as the one for Belgrade leaves little door for generating profound changes in the practice of public involvement. Nevertheless the NGO running the pilot succeeded to bring together several key stakeholders including authorities, professionals in SEA, professionals of urban planning, environmental NGOs that via the Klisina case have together assessed the difficulties and looked into future perspectives. Increased understanding of how public involvement could be planned and implemented during SEA was also achieved through the Slovenian case and expertise.

