



Introductory Report Workshop 2: A User's Tool

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Shaped by the globalization flows, new economic rules and changed social perception, the cities of the 21st century are searching for updated and advanced planning solutions. The fast development becomes the major issue of the global contest, while the accelerating technology (r)evolution influences a different type of complexity. Multileveled networking, higher efficiency, attractiveness and competitiveness are accepted as the key-words of future progress, being frequently misused in order to justify hasty political decisions and ad-hoc strategies. Obviously, the inherited planning codes, methodologies and tools seem to be insufficient and inadequate for the new dynamic of urban transformations, as well as for the contemporary comprehension of space and time relations.

Reflecting the socio-economic and political conditions of modern society, the planning system 'in transition' has included new imperatives (e.g. sustainable development) and various tools, simultaneously revealing all paradoxes, weaknesses and (un)expected strengths. However, the future of our cities strongly depends on this innovative process and its self-correcting iterations. Balancing between numerous needs of actors/users/participants, imposed institutional frameworks, international/national standards and bureaucratic drawbacks, the planning practice becomes more flexible and open. Rigid methods and tools are gradually substituted by more informal and indirect instruments, often supported by high technology which should facilitate all phases of the planning process. Unfortunately, the problem of implementation usually remains unsolved - overburdened with conflicts, inevitable political manipulations and overwhelming corporative power.

The papers selected for this workshop discuss a wide range of questions, providing a broad and interesting survey of international practice. At the same time, they present diverse approaches adjusted to the local conditions and global demands. Focusing on planning tools - their role, nature, origin, structure, efficiency and outcome - each of the contributions narrates a unique testimony about contemporary society and its urban environment. Accordingly, they highlight the various cultural, economic and technological backgrounds, as well as the level of ecological consciousness. Dealing with the macro (global, regional, national) and micro scale (city and its physical structure), authors emphasize the contemporary urban problems - global and local connectivity, activation and regeneration of neglected areas, sensitive and fragile natural environment, sustainability, energy efficiency and spatial quality, simultaneously defining, analyzing, (re)questioning and evaluating the importance and application of planning tools. Consequently, we could see examples from Australia, Asia, Europe and North America where new, non-traditional planning tools are used in order to:

- introduce new technologies for data collection and data management;
- develop new modes of strategic planning, interactive visioning and project development;

- integrate important information into urban planning and decision making;
- resolve possible conflicts between various actors, sectors and spatial/network layers;
- stimulate interaction between professionals and users;
- conduct successful process management;
- improve and support complex decision making;
- evaluate different visions of a city;
- increase the spatial quality of strategic projects;
- facilitate monitoring process;
- protect the environment;
- increase urban competitiveness.

Certainly, most of these tools are still combined with the top-down and/or bottom-up approach, creating the unique mixture of traditional planning documents, strategic plans and projects, old and new instruments and glamorous images that should be materialized. However, the link between planning and realization is still weak - after all, powerful softwares, advanced data-bases, computer analysis, simulations and comprehensive scenarios are not the guarantee of the successful implementation. Similarly, the inventive formal and informal initiatives and projects, in-depth inquiries and debates, as well as elaborated participation, negotiation and decision-making process, could become just a newfangled professional exercise, without the expected result. Therefore, the workshop is structured around five key-questions:

- how to bridge the gap between theory and practice, planning and realization?
- how to use new (and old) tools in the most efficient way?
- what are the main characteristics of the recently introduced tools?
- what is the real role and influence of non-traditional and informal instruments?
- how should we evaluate the outcome of their application?

Evidently, this workshop is just one of the steps on our way to the city of the future which should reinvent its own meaning. As always, planners will provide the guidelines for its development, mirroring the aspirations and expectations of society. However, in a fragmented society all parameters are multiplied and diversified, leaving the maze of instructions, rules and objectives which cannot be easily decoded and achieved. Therefore we should ask ourselves - where have we lost our User?

Let us search the labyrinth which we created.