

Preparatory visit Novi Sad 15-17 November 2011.



First impressions

Arriving at the Beograd Airport the country of Serbia presents itself as a western oriented country with all the usual branded shops.

Driving to Novi Sad by taxi in at the end of the day it was remarkable that there were no serious traffic jams in the direction of Novi Sad but on the opposite side of the road (direction Beograd) the street was jammed. On our flight to Beograd we saw some highways under construction so the situation will be improving in the next years.

The kind and number of cars were limited. And showed no extreme differences. Despite the November period around 18.30 hours the city centre of Novi Sad the pedestrian area, had a lively and pleasant atmosphere, with a substantial number of young people enjoying the happy hours in bars and cafe's.



The historical centre is characterized by several medieval churches, and new contemporary architecture of a theatre and the high profiled design hotel Centar, where we stayed. The city centre has several human scale squares with renaissance and baroc style buildings. Which give it quite a European feel.



Some of the housing areas in the outskirts of the city, built at oversized boulevards and avenues, give the impression of being built under a high pressure, sometimes lacking a finishing touch. Isolated remnants of slums are still present. These areas also seem to have no high quality public areas or green spaces. Most of the courtyards - we were told - are sealed and without any green.



The area selected for the CUPA Implementation Lab is the Fisherman & Kamenica Island and the neighboring Chinese quarter. Development here has come to a stand still and despite the enormous potential of the waterfront at the River Danube, the cohesion of the present functions in the area does not match this potential.



Entrepreneurship gets lost in bureaucracy. And bureaucracy seems uncomfortable in having to deal with private initiative and entrepreneurship.



Especially on the two islands in the Danube many small buildings were built without building permission or technical infrastructure. This seems to be a problem all over Serbia. There seems to be little caring identification with the area. The upkeep of the public space shows signs of neglect. Low cost cleaning up activities would improve the quality of space substantially and would help to gain an atmosphere of identification with the area.



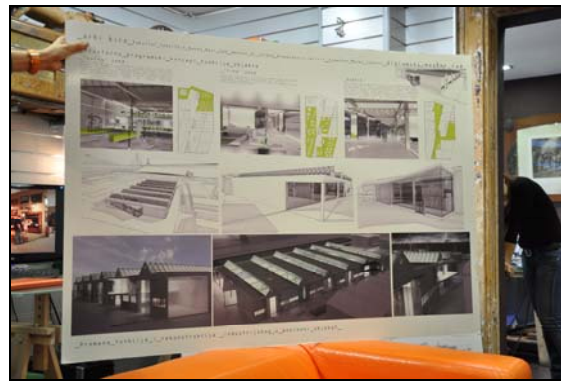
Only the newly build promenade between the Chinese quarter and the Danube with its cycling lanes, walking lanes, running lanes which normally are used in stadiums, dustbins and lights every 50 – 100 meters, seems to be very clean but somewhat oversized and expansive. However this could be a good value to build on during the workshop.



We were told, that the Novi Sad citizens have a tendency to be quite conservative. The nationalistic approach is not so much a problem within Serbia; it is more alive with people living in the Diaspora. For them Serbia is a special part of the world but most of them never will live in the country anymore. It is easier for them to be an 'outside nationalist' who sketches a picture which is not necessarily congruent with reality.

Proposals and recommendations from outside (other countries) are likely to be more accepted than from inside. In general, there is a kind of 'no future' mood. The people are more pessimistic than optimistic.

Despite the fact that there are entrepreneurs like the Leather factory, who are ambitious and willing to invest in the future of the country, there seems to be a lack of fantasy to deal with the crisis.



E.g. the fact that 'green industry' could be an option, the opinion is more "first we develop, than we think about environmental protection, smart cities and so on".

Biking to work, school, university etc. is popular in summer and winter.

During our meeting with the officials we were told that the development of the population in Novi Sad is increasing a little, but the city still has no need for new houses although extensive areas are reserved for housing.

Public transport in Novi Sad seems to function very well and the areas near the boulevards, are well connected. Mostly by busses, but there are plans to build several tramlines to improve the public transport system.

