

## Is Junik unique? Devising planning policy documents “in-house”

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### 1 ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

Preparation of a Municipal Development Plan (MDP)<sup>2</sup> is a statutory requirement for Kosovo municipalities. General practice for producing planning policy documents is through outsourcing this task to private consultancy companies. This implies substantive costs and in many cases a low level of ownership of the plan, which consequently has limited prospects for implementation. An alternative approach is being applied in drafting an MDP for Junik municipality. This is a municipality initiative assisted by the Municipal Spatial Planning Support Programme (MuSPP)<sup>3</sup>, Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB)<sup>4</sup> and ISP<sup>5</sup>. The process of drafting MDP was initiated by a visioning workshop in 2008. At this time, the Municipality was completing its Urban Development Plan (UDP) and it was logical that the next step could successfully follow. Although the UDP was done by a consulting company, the municipal staff had confidence that if assisted by MuSPP and CHwB, it would be able to draft MDP through internal mobilisation of human resources. The previous successful cooperation between the municipality, CHwB and UN-HABITAT, a UN development agency mandated for the promotion of sustainable human settlements, resulted in the decision of starting the MDP drafting process in June 2009. This is done by a joint team composed of representatives of the parties who work together in managing the ‘in-house’ planning process and using ‘learning by doing’ method of capacity building. By presenting the Junik approach, this paper aims to demonstrate the advantages and drawbacks of this approach to drafting local development plans. The paper will seek to define the value of the alternative approaches to strategic planning which can improve implementation prospects, whilst stressing the importance of engagement of municipal staff and elected officials for developing the sense of ownership and prospects of the implementation of the Plan.

### 2 BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Strategic spatial planning- a new planning approach set in Kosovo

In the last few decades Kosovo has undergone multiple transformation processes from socialistic society, managed by state institutions, which were the ‘owners’ and the only investor in communities, to a market economy being accompanied with challenges of building new institutional and legislative framework. This fundamental socio-economic and political change has had an impact to the planning system too, requiring new ways of managing current spatial developments and challenges: unplanned and uncontrolled developments, environmental degradation, poor management of resources as well as lack of new investments targeting economic development resulting in high rate of unemployment and poverty.

In the light of an urgent need to manage these challenges, the new approach of strategic spatial planning has been introduced by UN-HABITAT programmes in Kosovo. Planning as per this approach is more flexible and responsive to the current developments taking into consideration priorities of different sectors, especially with the purpose to direct investments and oriented towards a more inclusive and participatory approach. The new strategic planning practises pay an especial attention to the promoting of principles of sustainable development and integrated planning approach including elements of mobility, economic development, social, environmental and other strategic policies for the municipality. In addition, application of the good urban governance norms to the planning process, such as effective involvement of civil society and other stakeholders in the planning process, transparency and decision making, inclusiveness and wide public

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of the original Abstract

<sup>2</sup> MDP - Municipal Development Plan is a multi-sectoral plan that determines the long term goals of economic, social and spatial development and deals with the issues of environmental sustainability.

<sup>3</sup> MuSPP - Municipal Spatial Planning Support Programme implemented by UN-HABITAT and funded by Sida

<sup>4</sup> Cultural Heritage without Borders is a Swedish Foundation mainly financed by Sida which is active in the Balkan Region, including Kosovo

<sup>5</sup> ISP – Institute of Spatial Planning, Kosovo

participation and taking into account the equality aspects: minorities, women, children, the elderly, disabled persons (addressing needs of such groups through public participation).

Setting up a new inclusive and strategic planning approach in Kosovo required working at central and local level of governance, engagement of civil society organizations and community, development of new planning legislation (i.e. the new spatial planning laws), intervention in organisational structure and establishment of the Institute for Spatial Planning and applying new planning practices and tools.

A demand for building capacities at each of governance levels was high and is still an ongoing process. When evaluating the application of this approach in Kosovo institutions and especially for the municipalities, there are still mayor challenges ahead. A research<sup>6</sup> showed that municipalities don't have enough capacities to manage this planning approach with its requirements, recommending the need for continuation of working in three areas of capacity development: human resource, organisational and institutional development. In a given situation, supporting municipalities with on-the-job advice and professional expertise with applying the method of 'learning by doing' form a basis of an alternative approach to solving the issues mentioned above. This is an approach that UN-HABITAT in Kosovo is applying through its Municipal Spatial Planning Programme in secondary and some smaller, recently established municipalities of which Junik is one.

## 2.2 Spatial Planning system in Kosovo

The Spatial Planning system in Kosovo functions within a new planning legislative framework<sup>7</sup> according to which Kosovo has two levels of planning (see Fig 1):

- 1. Planning at Kosovo level including following policy documents (spatial plan for the whole territory of Kosovo and spatial plans for special areas, e.g. National Parks, industrial areas)
- 2. Planning for the territory of municipalities (municipal development plan and urban development plan and urban regulatory plans)

LSP entitles the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) to coordinate spatial planning activities on the whole Kosovo territory, proposing spatial development policies, reviewing and monitoring the planning documents; monitoring and harmonising planning activities on local level and ensuring compatibility of planning policies as well as offering advice and assistance to municipalities in drafting spatial, urban and regulatory plans. At the local level, municipalities are entitled to execute activities in spatial and urban planning and the land use within their territory. Hence, municipalities are required to draft the Municipal Development Plans, Urban Development Plans and Urban Regulatory Plans.

## 3 CURRENT TREND OF PLANNING POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned above municipalities are responsible for the spatial planning process in their territory including the provision of planning policy documents (in this case the MDP). According to the legislation, municipalities can outsource the drafting of these policy documents to different agencies or private organisations. And this was the practice applied in the last decade. The experience showed that not in all cases this method is the best one<sup>8</sup>. In cases when municipalities do not have enough capacity to manage the planning process of preparation of MDP, the applied method of outsourcing has shown to be a not so good approach. As a consequence of this the outsourced companies were in a position of not only being responsible for drafting the planning policy document but of being a manager of the planning process. Thus the result was a delivery of low quality product and none/or poor involvement of the main stakeholders in the process. The effect of this was difficulties in the implementation process, lack of municipal ownership of the document while generating large financial implications for municipal budget.

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<sup>6</sup> Gashi, L. 2005

<sup>7</sup> Law on Spatial Planning (LSP), adopted in 2003

<sup>8</sup> Gashi, L. 2006

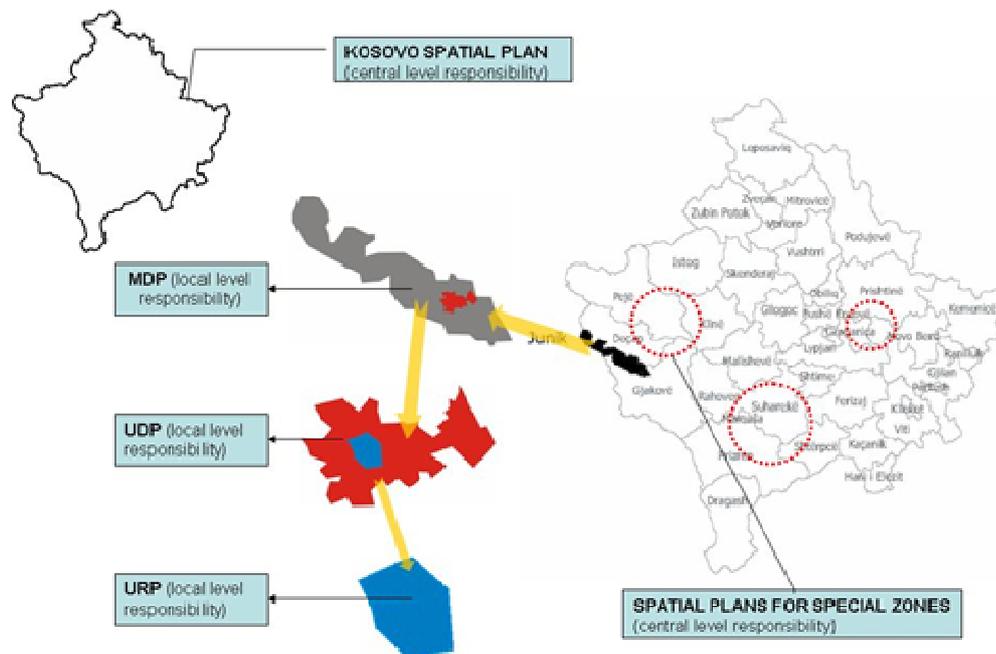


Fig. 1: Plan making hierarchy according to LSP

### 3.1 Junik approach

Junik is a recently established municipality; it functioned as a pilot new municipality from 2006-2008 and then became a fully recognised municipality on 13 August 2008. Its territory covers an area of 77.77 km<sup>2</sup> and it has great natural and cultural potential for development. However, it manages a very limited investment and operational budget. Drafting of the Municipal Development Plan as legally binding document is crucial to ensuring sustainable development based on efficient use of resources, infrastructure development, cultural and natural heritage preservation and promotion. This implies costs and human resources. The directorate of planning and urbanism in Junik operates with one architect only, a civil engineer and two cadastre officers. The professional planners are scarce and the existing capacity within municipality to produce spatial plan is very limited. In addition, planning directorate staff is expected to carry their day-to-day business of serving community needs and therefore they have a very limited time to allocate to policy making activities.

In an attempt to be in line with legal requirements at one hand and bringing proper planning policies on the other, in a response to actual developments and challenges such as protecting and promoting the natural and cultural heritage values, dealing with environmental issues, reducing unemployment rate and stop migration of youth abroad, Junik applied an alternative approach which can improve implementation prospects and subsequently have impact on increasing quality of life of its citizens. By doing so, Junik is the first municipality making the MDP IN-HOUSE, with the support from the MuSPP, CHwB and ISP.

#### 3.1.1 Phases of plan-making and the process of involvement

The plan-making process started with the decision from Municipal Assembly on 27 March 2009 which followed by establishment of Junik team (JT) composed of Municipal Working Group (MWG) which is comprised of municipal staff working in different departments, MuSPP/UN-HABITAT professional staff cooperating with the municipal staff on a daily basis, CHwB and ISP representatives. The JT began researching and coordinating tasks amongst each other to produce the required pool of information for drafting the MDP. The following is the contents required for the preparation of a Municipal Development Plan (MDP) are Profile and analysis of existing situation (Chapter I), Vision, principles and aims of municipal development (Chapter II), Spatial development framework which establishes the desired spatial situation (Chapter III), Strategy and actions for implementation (Chapter IV), Provisions for implementation (Chapter V). Although still an ongoing process, (Chapter IV currently being developed), advantages and disadvantages and some lessons learnt can be drawn from this process.

## 3.2 Advantages of Junik approach

### 3.2.1 Human resource aspect

The process of doing planning policy “in-house” using the methodology of learning by doing provides opportunities for contribution to the quality of the product and the process itself.

The main attribution of “in-house” approach is the ownership of the policy document and of managing the planning process by municipal staff and leadership. It has been witnessed through having municipality in leading role to this process, and by being supported by MuSPP and CHwB team as a facilitator and mediator. Another feature is an increased understanding of strategic spatial planning approach by applying it in practice. Undertaking an inclusive and participatory planning process through public participation and consultation meetings, trainings, thematic workshops and the use of different tools ( e.g. brainstorming sessions, SWOT analysis, visioning, setting goals and objectives and scenario building exercises), the impact leading to strengthening organisational skills and project management of the project staff involved and of project managers exclusively was noticed.

### 3.2.2 Organisational aspect

By this we make reflections on whether the “in-house approach” contributed to some organisational issues that needed to be influenced. For example, the organisational culture and the structure of planning directorates, level of pay scale, level of communication between different directorates etc.

Firstly, we have noticed improvements on organisational culture and increased coordination and communication between different directorates. Representatives of different directorates participate and contribute with inputs of the area/service their directorate covers. Board of directors gets involved in important stages of the process.

Bearing in mind that salaries of public administration staff are generally low, different workshops and training opportunities were seen as non-monetary stimulation for keeping the high level of motivation among the municipal staff. It is also worth remembering that as Junik Municipality has been relatively recently established, its staff lack experience in fields of development control. In this way, MUSPP team has provided support and achieved to amend and improve the current practices of development control. Skills and knowledge of development control instrument and procedures has increased.

Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that the project has managed to convince the municipality on setting up a MWG which was developed under the direct request from the Junik Mayor. An issue that needs further input is the institutionalization of municipal planning unit considered as a discussion topic to be brought up in future with central level as well.

In terms of costs, the “in-house” approach implies less cost for the municipality (at least 4-5 times less than outsourcing) and makes the optimal use of professional expertise of donors’ staff and other partners involved in the planning process.

### 3.2.3 Institutional, legal aspect and cooperation

Addressing the need for political support, legislative and institutional coordination and support from central institutions and donor agencies are an important component of strategic spatial planning process. The “in-house” approach contributed to getting knowing better the planning legislation. However, there is a need for further support within lifetime of the project. Subsequently, getting the political support and contributing to raising awareness and up-lifting planning issues at political agenda is essential. Although, Junik MDP faces changes at political level due to local elections, that didn’t affect the planning process; the new leadership reaffirmed political support to the “in-house” planning approach. The project in Junik has contributed to strengthening cooperation between the municipality and MESP. As an outcome, the Institute for Spatial Planning joined the project to contribute with professional expertise. The consultation process on the MDP involved also other relevant governmental institutions as well as neighbour municipalities for getting the input to the document and harmonise it with their policies and projects. Furthermore, the consultation process seeks to involve also donors, private businesses and NGO’s in the phase of assessing the capacities for potential investments.

### 3.3 Shortcomings identified

In applying this methodology it is noted that amongst the key shortcomings is the time factor and the need for exact evaluation of human resources to carry out the process.

Timeline factor relates to the process of 'in-house' plan-making which tends to take longer when compared to alternative outsourcing approach. The logical reasoning behind is that when outsourced the winning consultant company has prepared human and financial resources to have a non-stop input into the plan-making process. While, the 'in-house' approach depends widely on the availability of the MWG members which quite often have other duties to perform. This is linked to the missing component of planning policy unit within the structure of urbanism directorate, mainly due to limitations imposed from central level government and deriving from recommendations of International Monetary Fund.

Another difficulty in applying Junik approach is that this approach is very demanding for organisations providing technical assistance and municipality. Thus, they all need to assess carefully the human resources, capacities, and experience of the municipality (especially Urban Planning Directorate) and organisations capacity in spatial planning process as MDP plan-making is a very demanding in professional and financial terms.

Moreover, stil remans a challenging factor the issue of salaries and grades at municipal level which are considered to be too low and too little to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff for the efficient operation of the MWG.

## 4 CONCLUSION & LESSONS LEARNED

Municipalities play an important role on leading their communities, creating wealth and enforcing the local identity. The society needs to have a strong leadership that brings together all relevant stakeholders, community and business representatives, civil society and international organisations which can contribute in developing a strategy based on an overall vision. This is one of the crucial activities that municipalities are expected to conduct. It is interesting to note that under current circumstances the role of international agencies (such as Un-HABITAT) is larger than expected due to donor grants, to a point that it is consider a stakeholder in the process. Nonetheless, as time passes and the municipalities show increased levels of professional and financial capacity, the role of international agencies will have to be reduced to only stimulate processes and projects. The experience in the past, pre-conflict planning (where most of assets where state owned) was that local government would facilitate and provide all these activities themselves. Whereas, contemporary strategic planning promotes the approach by which local government are expected to conduct most of its activities in partnership with private sector and international agencies, while consistently involving voices of community. In this respect, Junik approach to the MDP (although not yet completed process), is unique and despite some minor drawbacks, it pays off when devising policy document in-house.

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