

SPATIAL URBAN PLANS AS A BASIS FOR AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Mirjana Čizmović¹ & Milica Kovačević²

¹University Mediterranean – Montenegro Business School, Montenegro
e-mail: mirjana.cizmovic@unimediterran.net

²University Mediterranean – Montenegro Business School, Montenegro
e-mail: milica.kovacevic@unimediterran.net

Abstract: The main goals of the spatial development of rural areas are to protect and prevent degradation of agricultural land, forests and protected areas, as well as to encourage (more) balanced territorial development. Given that the quality and development of agriculture largely depend on the level of consciousness and awareness of the population in rural areas as to the opportunities and benefits of their involvement in the adoption and approval of planning solutions, the aim of this paper is to define a communication strategy to help raise the awareness of the focus groups (landowners, farmers and investors) of the importance of and link between spatial planning and development of agribusiness and rural areas, exploring different techniques and methods of using various communication channels. The methods which will be used in the paper include secondary research, SWOT analysis, and trend and historical analysis.

The research results show that it is essential from the very beginning to take the views of various stakeholders into account through frequent thematic dialogues, in order to incorporate a consensus which has been reached together with the expert team of the developer, into planning decisions. Only such an approach can lead to sustainable and enforceable plans as prerequisites for the realisation of realistically planned investment in rural areas. Furthermore, it is very important to legally standardise such an approach so that public participation, as a mandatory legal procedure, can be defined through precisely defined steps and established performance indicators from the very beginning of the process of adopting planning documents.

Key words: agribusiness, spatial planning, communication strategy

1. Introduction

A large number of countries, including Montenegro, lack a tradition of public debate, transparency and accountability, these having become essential to the western model of democratic decision-making. Spatial urban plans are developed mainly according to the bureaucratic-technocratic approach, which suggests including the public only during the stage of public debate when a planning document is finished.

In developing the spatial urban plans of the local government, reaching a consensus among stakeholders on key common issues and relevant policy choices at frequent and comprehensive public consultations is of great importance to the business sector in general and, due to the territorial limits of the rural areas and socio-cultural dispersion of the key stakeholders, to the agribusiness sector.

A well-designed communication strategy and a systematic methodology which is conducted by a well-integrated team made up of the representatives of the local government, the developer of the plan, the non-governmental sector and focus groups interested in the development of agribusiness, would significantly raise public awareness and understanding of the benefits of public participation in the plan development process and development of the agribusiness sector. In addition, plans

created using the “bottom-up” principle, and involving public participation from the earliest stages of their development through to their adoption would be “common property” and their reality, sustainability and enforceability would be guaranteed, which has not been the case in Montenegro until now.

2. Methodology used for the development of the scientific paper

In order to deal with the topic in the best possible way, a number of different methods and techniques were used in writing the paper.

All the relevant documents regarding the area of spatial-urban planning, with special reference to Montenegro, were collected using the method of secondary research. The studies that dealt with the issue of the inclusion of target groups in decision making processes were also analysed. A special emphasis was placed on the application of participatory approach. Historical and trend analysis indicated the main developmental processes in spatial planning and its importance in agribusiness development.

The method of compilation of different pieces of relevant research conducted among the target groups was also used in the paper.

Lastly, SWOT analysis was used to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of using spatial planning as a basis for agribusiness development. This analysis included the involvement of target groups of the public in this process.

3. The importance of spatial-urban planning for agribusiness development

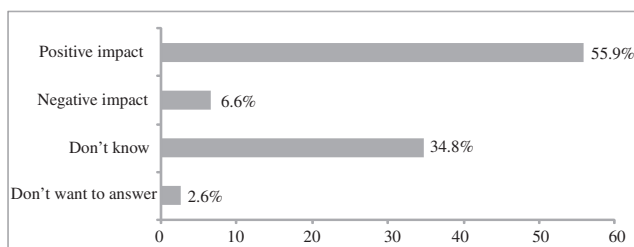
The two most important general issues and strategic goals that the developers of the Spatial-urban plan for rural areas are faced with, are 1) to protect and prevent the degradation of agricultural land, forests and protected areas, and 2) the restoration and development of devastated and empty villages and a wider rural area, encouraging farmers to return to the countryside and recommence their involvement in the production. This, of course, would involve a prior planning solution, and the subsequent implementation and resolving of infrastructural problems, planning prerequisites for the construction of housing facilities and commercial buildings related to agribusiness and tourism, as preconditions for the return and residence of an agriculturally-oriented population and for the attraction of potential investors into the area. The permanent reduction of the number of active agricultural population and therefore the reduction of the labour force is obvious, due to the migration of young and competent people and their employment in other industries. Villages and agriculture have remained in the hands of the elders, and the demographic picture is quite unfavourable. Of the total number of persons who have changed their place of residence, nearly all (98.4 per cent) or 4,322 people have moved to urban settlements, while only 1.6 per cent or 72 people moved to other settlements (Monstat 2013, p. 6).

Given the importance of rural areas, agricultural production and agribusiness in the Spatial-urban plan, it is evident that the creation and adoption of high-quality, sustainable and enforceable planning solutions require landowners, farmers and potential investors in agribusiness to participate significantly in the planning process.

Unfortunately, the past experience of public participation in the development of spatial and urban plans and other strategic documents as well as other public policies of importance to the local government, is not encouraging. Public debates, which the Montenegrin legislation treats as a way of public consultation, are generally introduced very late in the planning process when the planning decisions have already been formed, and are seen as a legal formality, and not as an integral part of the planning process.

The research (Social Survey 2012, Project LAMP - MSDT / WB), which treated the topic of public participation in consultations on the adoption of spatial-urban plans and other strategic documents, was conducted on a sample of 806 households, or about 2,763 individuals - household members

in 21 municipalities in Montenegro. 91% of natural persons said they had never attended a public debate concerning spatial and urban planning. Also, only 55.9% of all respondents believe that public debates have a positive effect on the quality of planning solutions.



Graph 1: The effect of public discussions in the creation of a good quality urban plan (natural person).

Source: Social Survey 2012, Project LAMP - MSDT / WB

Considering the division into Urban / Rural, 58.4% of the respondents from urban areas consider public discussions relevant to the adoption of quality spatial-urban plans, and 50.4% of the respondents from rural areas believe the same.

It is obvious that good communication channels between local government and representatives of the business community have not yet been established, as indicated by the great interest and small participation of this focus group in public consultations.

It can be seen from the research results that it is necessary to raise public awareness of the importance of participation by citizens and other focus groups, users of the space, in the process of developing the spatial planning documents.

The involvement of different target groups in the process of the creation of spatial urban plans has both positive and negative sides. It is presented by using the methodology of SWOT analysis:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Montenegro has great agricultural potential and it is a strategic priority – Montenegro has great agricultural potential and it is a strategic priority to develop this area by improving the agribusiness. One of the prerequisites is to develop spatial plans. – The existing documentation which regulates spatial planning is a good basis for its improvement. – In Montenegro, there are different stakeholders that can be involved in the whole process of spatial planning nad so make it better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Awareness of the importance of spatial planning has not been developed in Montenegro so far, nor has the possibility of involvement of different target groups in the process. – There is a lack of professional staff in Montenegro at all levels, especially the local that would lead the spatial planning process, which would include a participatory approach. – More and more people, especially young people, leave rural areas, and thus are not interested in joining in agribusiness.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The process of accession to the European Union involves regulation issues in the field of spatial planning. These processes recommend a multidisciplinary approach, which include more target groups involved in the issue. - Application of participatory approaches in the planning process will enable better spatial planning and development of agribusiness, through the involvement of various stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The financial crisis caused poor financial situation, which can slow down the process of spatial planning and development of agribusiness. - If responsible and interested parties are not committed to this process, then this may cause a reduction in its quality. - Involvement of different stakeholders can lead to conflicts of their interest and their goals, which can slow down this process. - Legal – property issues are not resolved everywhere, which may hinder the planning process.

4. Proposals for public involvement in the development of spatial plans

In order to introduce the integral and participatory planning of agribusiness development, in parallel with the decision to produce the Spatial and urban plan, the first step for the local government is to initiate the establishment of the Citizens' Forum, which includes representatives of different types of space users and different social groups: the Citizens' Forum is a body that should provide and ensure public participation through different models and methods. One of the main tasks of the Forum is to participate in the development and verification of the Plan and Strategy for public participation, and to establish and coordinate specific working groups, such as for infrastructure, the economy, social activities and environmental protection issues.

The model of public participation is based mostly on direct contact, i.e. the network of "formal and informal" thematic meetings of the members of the Forum and Working groups with citizens and focus groups, with the participation of a large number of people. The meetings discuss all open issues and potential development opportunities and options, goals and priorities. This is followed by an analysis by the developer of the Plan, which takes into account possible opposed interests of different focus groups and potential conflicts between economic goals and environmental protection. Also, performance indicators are predefined and monitored and indicators for different areas of the municipality are compared through the benchmarking system, in order to improve less successful areas based on the experience of more successful ones. Within the Working group for the economy, a special group for agribusiness should be formed. It will include owners of agricultural land, farmers and entrepreneurs in agribusiness, potential investors in the agribusiness sector, non-governmental organisations that are in any way involved in the planning process related to the rural area, and representatives of the local government. The main tasks of this working group are to

cooperate with municipalities in organising the participation of the public in various and innovative ways (workshops, Open House, visual research and so on), collect and present the views of local people involved in the agribusiness-group and, in collaboration with other working groups, describe required potential development opportunities, taking into consideration environmental factors and potential trade-offs between economic and environmental objectives.

The Agribusiness Group, in addition to the above general duties, participates actively in all phases of PUP development through specific tasks. In addition, in all phases of the plan development, the Group monitors and evaluates the transparency of the process and ensures that as great a number of people as possible is informed about all the activities related to the development of the Plan.

In order to effectively implement this process in practice, it is necessary to develop a Communication Strategy so that all stakeholders in the field of agribusiness can be informed adequately and on time about the process of PUP development and all focus groups encouraged to participate in this process from the earliest stages of the development of the Plan.

5. The strategy of communication with target groups of the public

The purpose of the Strategy is to cover the following strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Sources of information. Improving the quality and quantity of information disseminated by the Local government and Plan developer during the process of the Spatial-urban plan development;

Strategic Objective 2: Dissemination of information. Improving the mechanisms for information dissemination and communication channels that are used to inform the focus groups related to agribusiness about the opportunities to participate in the drafting process, and selection of the best solution.

Strategic Objective 3: Cooperation with other providers of information. Strengthening cooperation with institutions and organisations that are in any way involved in the planning process and can have an impact on the decision-making process related to agribusiness within the PUP

Target groups and levels of informing

The Campaign will be focused on the following target groups: (a) landowners, (b) farmers and entrepreneurs in agribusiness, (c) potential investors in the sector, (d) non-governmental organisations that are in any way involved in the planning process related to the rural area, and (e) media.

(a) Landowners

The role of this target group, representing the most numerous users of space, is to point out the problems in the functioning of the area of agribusiness, provide proposals and

suggestions on how to activate the agricultural land and other resources they own, make proposals and suggestions on the modes of cooperation and association with potential investors, and to define the conditions that have to be met in order for them to return to the countryside and to agriculture.

(b) Farmers and entrepreneurs in agribusiness

The role of this target group, representing the most important users of space, is to point out the problems in the functioning of the area of agribusiness, give their proposals for the solutions to these problems, and give suggestions for further development. In this sense, the messages that are created for this public should be written in simple and easily understandable language; they may require re-adjusting in order to reach specific sub-groups. The CS should explain, in a simple and clear way, the need to get the landowners engaged in the planning process, especially in target areas.

(c) Potential investors

The role of this target group is to provide proposals for business ideas and projects for the planning process, because private investment is one of the driving forces for the economy and agribusiness development of certain regions. The interest of this target group in the planning process is that their business ideas and needs should be incorporated in spatial urban plans in compliance with the development prospects for the region for which the plan is being developed. Also, the special interest of the private sector is appropriate land use zoning, according to their specific business needs. Bearing in mind that it is recognised that issuing permits is one of the biggest business barriers in Montenegro, the interest of this target group is the simplification of procedures and reduction of the processing time and documentation needed for obtaining the permits.

The CS will seek to raise awareness amongst this group about the reforms in spatial planning, the land use planning process, and in coordination with the CS, through special media broadcasts, web-pages for service users, round tables, workshops and publications.

(d) Non-governmental organisations

This target group has a mediatory, consultative, educational, and monitoring role in the land use and planning process. The true creative role of NGOs lie in creating networks of information, innovation and interaction which enables people to communicate, share and receive information, resulting in a positive change in the long run. The interest of NGOs in the planning process is to facilitate interaction with agribusiness communities and among different social groups within communities in order to achieve sustainable spatial urban development. Also, NGOs are committed to increasing transparency in the planning process and land use. Through media, workshops, round tables and publications, the CS should contribute to the achievement of a high level of awareness and knowledge improvement, by informing all types of NGOs about the importance of their 'interactive' roles.

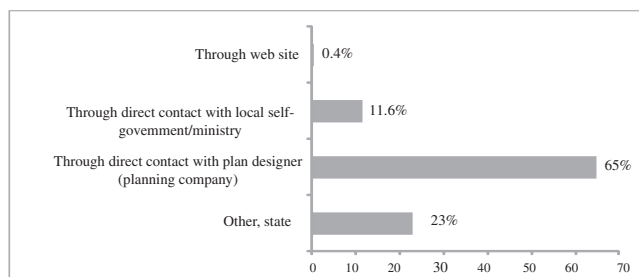
e) Media

This group represents a target group as well as a means to achieve the major objectives of the MS. The first phase of the MS should increase the media's knowledge about the process and benefits of spatial planning and importance of public participation in that process, especially in the area of agribusiness. After that, in the second phase, the role of the media should be to disseminate the correct information to the public, and thus mobilise other target groups for a more effective achievement of the plan objectives. Accordingly, through workshops, round tables, trainings, and informal meetings, the media (TV, radio and newspaper journalists) will be informed about the possibilities of including media in promotional activities and the role of the media to continually monitor the development of the process of public participation, especially in the area of agribusiness.

6. Communication channels with target groups of the public

The communicators must select channels of communication. There are two broad types of communication channels – personal and non-personal (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010: p. 436). The development and implementation of the methods of communication in the triangle (the public, the plan developer – and the local government) is of particular importance for the success of public participation in the development of the spatial urban plan.

In order to have a clearer picture of the planning solutions and the spatial planning documentation, the mentioned focus groups should have access to them. The survey results have shown (Social Survey 2012, Project LAMP - MSDT / WB) the best way to achieve that access, as the respondents primarily stressed the direct contact with the local self-government/ministry as a means of achieving insight into planning documentation and solutions.



Graph 2: The best way of achieving insight into spatial-planning documentation and planning solutions (natural person).

Source: Social Survey 2012, Project LAMP – MSDT / WB

72.2% of the respondents from rural areas also believed that direct contact with the local self-government/ministry was the best way of getting insight into planning documentation and solutions.

As for making proposals, suggestions and criticism on the completed phase of planning documents and achieving insight into the analysis and Plan developer's answers to the given proposals, the best method is direct contact with the local population and other focus groups at thematic workshops in local centres. This contact is achieved through a series of formal and informal meetings with the Plan developer and local government officials. This also involves great initiative and leadership of the local government through the Secretariat of local government responsible for planning, other secretariats and local communities.

While talking about participatory presence, with the participation of all types of public groups, the experience has shown that the burden of the drafting process falls to the Secretariat of the local government responsible for planning activities. It is necessary to ensure the maximum participation of all other secretariats, for example those for economy and finance, social services, utilities, etc.

Local communities and their employees are of great importance for the effective functioning of the participatory approach, especially in rural areas. This is reflected primarily in the timely informing of the residents of the local community (the local community centre and gravitating rural settlements) about the time, place, topic and importance of holding a meeting regarding the participation of local people. In addition, it is their obligation, in coordination with the local government and the Plan developer, to organise formal meetings, and also to collect common strategic orientations and goals that can be heard in informal meetings related to the development of the Plan and the subject of agribusiness in general.

7. Conclusion

Previous research has shown that Montenegrin practice is neither sufficiently focused on the participatory approach, nor on the inclusion of landowners, farmers, entrepreneurs and potential investors in the process of spatial urban planning. Bearing in mind the significant contribution of this approach to the quality of spatial-urban planning documents, particularly those relating to rural areas, it is essential to take into account the views of various stakeholders from the very beginning through frequent thematic dialogues, in order to incorporate a jointly-reached consensus into final planning decisions. Only such an approach can lead to sustainable and enforceable

plans, these being prerequisites for the successful realisation of realistically planned investment in rural areas.

Implementation of the participatory approach in practice requires a change of the attitude to the planning process, involving the identification of key stakeholders as focus groups which should be included and whose views should be taken into account.

On the other hand, given that there is a lot of mistrust among the population that their voice will not be heard and that their suggestions will not be taken into account, it is necessary to change the awareness among citizens in both rural and urban areas, through integrated communication strategies. Efforts should also be made to change the awareness of those employed in the local administration who believe that the public is not interested in key developmental issues and is reluctant to take part in socially responsible activities of adopting important strategic documents for the local community.

Besides the above mentioned points, it is very important to ensure that such an approach is legally standardised so that public participation, as a mandatory legal procedure, is defined from the very beginning of the process, progressing through precisely defined steps and established performance indicators.

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