

HAPPINESS AS INDICATOR AND PLANNING OBJECTIVE FOR THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The spatial planning process consists basically of two phases – analysis and synthesis. In the analysis phase various indicators are used to estimate the state of development in a country or in a region. The synthesis phase corresponds to spatial development policy which is shaped following certain planning objectives. The use of happiness as an indicator and as a planning objective is an original approach. From the European perspective this approach is innovative and interesting for the comparative analysis of spatial development policies, having in mind that in the contemporary world cooperation and relations among different countries, cultures and practices are increasing.

INTRODUCTION

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY FROM ITS APPEARANCE TO THE PARADIGME OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The need for planning appeared first in towns, so the urbanism was the activity which preceded the spatial planning with its components of urban and regional planning. The term planning refers to future having in mind medium or long term development. Regional planning takes into account surroundings and urban-rural relationship. Spatial planning should take into account development from local to global level in short to long term perspective. The development of urbanism with elements of urban planning can be observed since the antic times, through middle ages, until today. Some towns that were organised following certain planning conceptions (Dubrovnik, Barcelona, Paris) still witness the efforts of urban planning in the old times. The regional planning appears especially in the fourth decade of the twentieth century with the economic crisis and need for planning and control of development. Documents like Athens Charter in 1933 [1] or meeting of planning experts like the one in Chateau d’Ardennes, Belgium in 1937 [2] show the intention to develop the research and the practice of spatial development planning. After the Second world war the need for reconstruction, intensification of development pace and further organisation of space

started in the previous decade led to the multiplication of activities in the field of spatial development. In that second half of the twentieth century, with decolonisation the world gets its shape similar to the one that it has today. Nation-states are getting consolidated as main actors on the international scene and the inner shaping of national policies is taking place. Spatial development policies are getting their forms in that period with various models. The internationalisation of development finally occurs at threshold of the centuries in the last decade of the previous and the first decade of the present century. That internationalisation is accompanied by the wider acceptance of the sustainable development as new development paradigm, especially on the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Spatial development policy is strategic activity what means that it is a process which has objectives to be implemented and monitored. The objectives are in accordance with the vision of development which corresponds to the desired future for the population which is living on the territory for which development plan is being elaborated. The vision should be created in a participatory way. This is the process common for every kind of development planning. The particularity of spatial development planning is the risk of treating land-use issue alone, what is often called physical planning, not caring enough for the content of the space and activities which are taking place in that space. The tools like geographic information systems [3] can contribute to the organisation of spatial data in tables and graphic layers. The data are gathered in the analytical phase of the spatial planning process and used through the spatial development policy formulation and for further development in the monitoring activity. The implementation phase of the strategic planning process is very often the risky one – even without unexpected development the realisation of the plan can be skipped and the plan stays just a paper without results on the ground. This risk can be overcome if the planning is realistic enough and if there are no unexpected happenings on the territory of the plan (like natural hazards or wars).

The concept of the sustainable development was confirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The concept can be characterised as paradigm because it has been widely accepted and actions on local, regional, national and international levels are present all over the world. The concept of happiness as a planning objective is in accordance with the concept of sustainable development. The concept of happiness can be easily compared to the sustainable development concept which serves as a main goal of the European spatial development policies. For better understanding of the comparison the European spatial development policies are going to be presented in the following chapter.

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL POLICIES IN EUROPE

Spatial development policy in Europe at the continental level is being realised in the framework of two institutions: Council of Europe (CoE) which exists since 1949 and European Union (EU) which exists under that name since 1992, previously under the name of European Community since 1957. In the end of 2007 the Council of Europe counts 46

members and European Union 27 members. Some important dates for the spatial development policy in Europe at international level are:

- 1957 – creation of Standing conference of local and regional authorities of Europe which changed its name in 1994 to the Congress of local and regional authorities of Europe (CoE)
- 1970 – the first meeting of the European conference of Ministers responsible for spatial planning (CEMAT) in Bonn which is taking place regularly since, the fourteenth conference took place in Portugal in autumn 2006, and the fifteenth will take place in Russia in 2009 [4] (CoE)
- 1975 – creation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the countries of EU
- 1983 – Charter on spatial planning from the sixth CEMAT in Torremolinos in Spain which defines it as spatial expression of social, economic, environmental and cultural policy
- 1994 – creation of Committee of regions as a consultative organ of EU [5]
- 1999 – adoption of the European Spatial Development Perspectives (ESDP) by EU member countries in Potsdam, Germany [6]
- 2000 – adoption of Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development of the European Continent by CoE member countries in Hanover, Germany [7] on the occasion of the twelfth CEMAT

The main aim of the regional policy of EU is eliminating disparities among regions. European regional policy [8] is one of the main fields of activity in the EU and it is being realised through the European Commission. The EU budget period of seven years is always a good moment for innovations and transformations what enables the necessary updates and flexibility. For the period from 2007 to 2013 a number of innovations are being carried out in the field of regional policy. Three main objectives of the regional policy for this new period are defined: convergence for less developed regions, competitiveness for other regions and cooperation which should continue interregional activities from previous periods. The cooperation objective will continue the activities on the cross-border and transnational level, as well as cooperation among regions which don't have common borders but there is a basis for their cooperation on spatial development issues. In the EU countries regional policy follows the principles from the Lisbon Agenda from the year 2000 – those principles are increase of employment and knowledge-based economy. Main principles of spatial development defined in the ESDP [6] from 1999 are polycentric development (similar to decentralisation), infrastructure development (with three fields – transport, energy and telecommunications) and management and protection of environment and cultural heritage. This document was updated in 2007 in Leipzig, Germany through the adoption of the Territorial Agenda document which represents a new phase in the realisation and implementation of the spatial development policy of EU. Another concept important for spatial development, which uses the GIS technology [3] is European Spatial Planning

Observatory Network (ESPON) [9] which can be used from the analytical phase of the spatial planning process until the monitoring. This network gathers and processes data and development indicators from 29 European countries. A number of quantitative indicators are being treated and created in the framework of this program. The gross national happiness might be one of them, it is for sure that some of its elements are present in the ESPON indicators.

Although the concept of sustainable development is constantly present in the policy of EU, the economic component is obviously dominant, culture is divided between the social and environmental component, the governance principles are slowly being introduced in the development policy especially through innovation policies and participation principles which are somewhere in between the economic and social component. The environmental component is getting stronger in various aspects, but it is mostly applied at local level with a weak awareness of its global implications. However, regional policy has a very strong economic component, but its efforts are oriented towards corrections of some market influences towards the welfare of population. [10, p.229]

HAPPINESS AS DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE FOR SPATIAL PLANNING POLICY IN BHUTAN

Gross national happiness concept resides in the belief that the key to happiness is to be found, once basic material needs have been met, in the satisfaction of non-material needs and in emotional and spiritual growth. [11, p.17] In the well-known report of Club of Rome under the name „Limits of Growth“ it is cited that human activities, if they are in accordance with principles of sustainability, might continue to grow without limitations. Those activities correspond to the satisfaction in the, above mentioned, non-material and emotional needs of the gross national happiness, those are - education, art, music, religion, basic scientific research, sport, social interactions. [12, p.7] The basic material needs that have to be met as condition for non-material and emotional needs are the following - food, shelter, clothing and medicine. [11, p.16] Therefore for time being as main constituents of gross national happiness, four main pillars have been defined: socio-economic development, cultural preservation and promotion, environmental preservation and promotion and good governance. Those principles are the guidelines for Bhutanese spatial development documents, examples of Thimphu Structural Plan for the period until 2027 and national development strategy Bhutan 2020 follow.

The first town plan for Thimphu was prepared in 1964 and it remained unimplemented. A structure plan was prepared in 1986, it was guiding the development of Thimphu through 1990s. [13] The present structure plan for Thimphu for the 25 years period until 2027 has the happiness of the capital's inhabitants for its objective and it is in accordance with principles of intelligent urbanism. [14] Ten main principles of intelligent urbanism can be recognised: balance with nature, balance with tradition, appropriate technology, balanced movement,

conviviality of places (for individual, friendship, households, neighbors, community), efficiency, human scale, opportunity matrix, regional integration and institutional integrity. Another development planning document with the elements of spatial and regional policy in Bhutan is the Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness – Bhutan 2020. This strategic document on the national level analysis past development and achievements and elaborates the strategy for the forthcoming period on the level of the country. In the title itself, together with peace and prosperity, happiness is explicitly cited as strategic planning objective. Internet contributed to the internationalisation of the idea of happiness as gross national happiness indicator and as a potential development and planning objective. The international, regional and national conferences are playing an important role in the creation of consciousness about this concept with the strong human dimension in the most positive sense. This original Bhutanese concept is evolving, the potential indicator of gross national happiness could be an indicator which would be used to measure an aspect of the overall development among other indicators like human development index, human poverty index, gross domestic product, ecological footprint, genuine progress indicator etc. An attempt has been already made with the happy planet index [15] which was calculated for most of the countries in the world with Vanuatu at the first place among the countries that the index was calculated for. The gross national happiness indicator would be very useful and it would contribute to have more adequate idea of the state of development in the world and direction for actions to be taken in the forthcoming period. Another point about this concept is that the happiness as development objective seems so obvious now after the accent that has been put by the Bhutanese state on it, but it is generally absent from existing development studies or well hidden behind differently defined objectives. In the hierarchy of aims in strategic development planning process the distinction can be made between – goals as the most general, objectives as concrete fields of activity and targets as most specific. Happiness can be treated as a goal, also as an objective and it might come to be a target in specific urban or regional development projects. An interesting example can be the project of the Arakawa ward in Tokyo, where many homeless live along the riverside, the mayor started a Gross Arakawa Happiness project to improve the living environment of the zone.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND HAPPINESS AS OBJECTIVES

It is for sure that a big number of issues can be debated around the issue of happiness and development what was the topic of the first international conference on gross national happiness. At global level it is generally accepted since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 that the development should be sustainable, but this objective of sustainability is not something that can be the dream or a wish, it is more a necessity. That necessity is generally recognized and it is obvious in this moment that the efforts have to be made. The concept of happiness as a planning objective is something that upgrades the concept of sustainability towards a

desired society. The idea of happiness can be considered as a discovery in a view of development theories. It is not contradictory to the idea of sustainability which can be seen as a stage of happiness. But the difference between the two concepts is not a big one as it can look at the first sight. The idea of happiness is not something completely new and when saying that it can be considered as a discovery, it is more in a sense of awareness or realization of something that already exists and not something new and strange. Happiness is common to all human beings regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, age or level of income. It is a potential existing in people that mostly appears and disappears nowadays. The big question is – can it be constant, what brings the happiness to its sustainability.

Disparities in space exist. Regional disparities are the subject of regional policy. European regional policy uses as principal indicator of development the gross domestic product. The less developed regions are determined as those with GDP under the 75% of the average GDP of the EU and they have financial subsidies from regional development funds. If the level of development was measured by gross national happiness as indicator, which regions would be less developed? Which actions could be undertaken to increase happiness? On the other side – for conceiving the regional policy, documents like ESDP and Guidelines for Sustainable Development are used. These documents are in accordance with principles of sustainable development which has a lot of common with the happiness as objective. Despite the similarities that exist, the differences should be taken into account as well. Europe is also using the slogan “Unity in diversity”. Different countries and regions have everyone specific development paths, although some common principals exist of course.

If we consider the gross national happiness as potential indicator, we can make difference between two stages of that indicator – the first one is conditions for happiness and the second one is the level of happiness. Conditions of happiness correspond to the sustainability. There is not yet an agreement to measure sustainability either, a number of indicators exist, but since the sustainability itself is complex, neither that “part of happiness” can be easily measured yet. It doesn’t mean that the second stage or part of happiness measuring its level should be left aside. The level of happiness can be seen as a qualitative indicator and combination from nine domains: psychological wellbeing, health, time use and balance, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, living standards – which are the topics of the third international conference on gross national happiness.

Among those nine domains, the good governance is the one that encompasses a good spatial development policy. The good governance respecting the principles of sustainable development and public participation satisfies two basic conditions for further development towards happiness – security and freedom. The land-use planning, when taking into account the limits of both natural resources and human activities, is a complex task that the spatial development policy has. The variety of spatial contexts and the diversity of territory, natural and cultural is a challenge for the spatial planning respecting same principles on one side and specificities of places and people on the other side. The relativity of happiness is another

issue, that can be debated, but the principle should be that the happiness of someone stops there where it disturbs the happiness of someone else. That is that unity in diversity that should be achieved for time being. If regional policy took the gross happiness as the measure of development instead of gross production which would be the action taken to deal with the regional disparities?

CONCLUSION

The happiness is a definitely a development objective. The organization and the use of space influence development and happiness as well. Sustainable development is a condition for the achievement of happiness. The risk of misunderstanding of happiness exists. Diversity on the Earth creates and implies different perceptions of happiness. The challenge of an indicator like gross national happiness should find a formula that could indicate how happy people in a certain space are. Still it should be as universal as possible to take into account different perceptions of happiness and to enable comparisons. But a happy person is a happy person wherever that human being is on the Earth and the state of happiness is definitely a desired one. “Sustainable happiness” sounds perfect, but it is difficult to imagine it right now. It can be a dream or a wish. Until then the society should grow and mature, and here, to finish this paper I would put a citation from one spatial planning document - the Thimphu Structural Plan 2002-2027, chapter - The Bhutanese Dream: “As the society grows and matures, as education spreads and the economy becomes more broad based, His Majesty’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) dream will become ever more relevant. That image, that dream of a society that promotes ‘happiness,’ will be most clearly reflected in the shape and in the form of Bhutan’s towns and cities.” [13, ch.2.5]

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