

Places and Technologies 2015

KEEPING UP WITH TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE HEALTHY PLACES

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BOOK OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

A healthy city is one that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential.
Health Promotion Glossary (1998)

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Places and Technologies 2015

**KEEPING UP WITH
TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE HEALTHY PLACES**

BOOK OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Editors:

Alenka Fikfak, Eva Vaništa Lazarević,
Nataša Fikfak, Milena Vukmirović, Peter Gabrijelčič

Nova Gorica, Slovenia



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THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT OF HEALTHY CITY IN ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS IN SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

The importance of healthy life has become important issue in cotemporary settlements in last decades. Thereby the meaning of “health” has been transformed from strictly sectorial view to a wider interpretation, being used in the context of local community and city development. This broader prospect has resulted in the creation of healthy city concept as a recognisable theoretical concept, based on the striving for healthy environment and good quality of life.

Globally, communities face pressing health challenges related to the built environment, so the awareness about the need to make the link between human health and development has grown, as well as the urge of establishing the concept for a healthy city. While the framework and general goals are being recognised internationally, the local adjustments and characteristics, related to the national and regional context, have not yet been made.

Further, special challenge is how to approach to less developed communities and areas in developing countries in transition, such as Serbia. Even bigger challenge is to examine and test the possibilities of the application of the healthy city concept for the illegal settlements in Serbia. In such settlements, which lack basic infrastructure, amenities and services, the need for improving the quality of life is even bigger. This paper aims to contribute to the advance of practice and policy for healthy places and cities, by defining a local sensitive approach for the informal areas in Serbia.²

Keywords: *healthy places, quality of life, illegal settlements, application.*

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of healthy city is one of known hybrid theoretical concepts in urbanism, which connects this discipline with public health. Thereby, the meaning of public health is becoming wider today, far away from initial coverage. Cotemporary definition includes also the feature of the dependency of the health of population from the conditions and commodity of communal life and environment (WHO, 2012). This relation between public health and space has been crucial for the creation of the concept. Therefore, the concept strives to develop healthy cities, where both healthy environment and good quality of life would be significant (Edwards & Tsouros, 2008, p. 3).

The importance of the formation of healthy cities is especially visible in developed part of the World. Current conditions of life here enable mentioned “extension” of the focus to urban issues which are related to public health. Europe is good example among global regions. The implementation of the measures, proposed by the concept, is one of main pillars of World Health Organization³ in Europe.

But, Europe isn’t a “monolith”, so there are many local variations. Hence, it is special challenge how to introduce and implement the concept of healthy city in less developed communities and areas in European countries in transition, such as Serbia. Transition has especially shaken up the most vulnerable communities in country, such as illegal settlements around major cities in Serbia (Tsenkova, 2012). Inherited lack of basic infrastructure, amenities and services in these settlements has been even increased by transitional conditions. In accordance to this, the need for improving the quality of life and public health is quite noticeable in these places.

Considering previous, illegal settlements in Serbia are very suitable “polygon” for the possibilities of the implementation of the concept of healthy city “in situ”. Huge illegal settlements around Belgrade are certainly the most triggering areas in Serbia for such analysis. Their main characteristics will be analysed by the concept propositions in this paper. The aspiration of the paper is the contribution to the advance of practice and policy for healthy places and cities. The paper should be also understood as a one step in the development of theoretical framework for the upgrading of illegal settlements in Serbia.

THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPT OF HEALTHY CITY

The concept of healthy city was mentioned first time in 1986 (Awofeso, 2003). So, it is relatively modern concept. As well as many modern theoretical concepts, it isn’t easy to define the concept of healthy city, because its hybridness makes it more complex. The most obvious - the concept is certainly related to general

³ Hereinafter: WHO.



improvement of public health⁴ as a constant process, including essential functions and services (WHO, 1999, p. v). This is probably main reason why WHO accents than the concept is more familiar with process than outcome. Therefore, some experts compare the meaning of healthy city with a city with vivid life or active city (Edwards and Tsouros, 2008, pp. 1-6). Further, this means that healthy city is (WHO Europe, 2010):

- Healthy city is not one that has achieved a particular health status;
- It is conscious of health and striving to improve it. Thus any city can be a healthy city, regardless of its current health status;
- The requirements are: a commitment to health and a process and structure to achieve it;
- A healthy city is one that continually creates and improves its physical and social environments and expands the community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential.

But, widely-organized “definition” is certainly inappropriate for concrete implementations. Thus, regional offices of WHO works on locally-based policies of healthy cities, as well as closer concepts and themes. For example, WHO Europe recommends a basic model for a healthy city in related region, which based on “strong movement for public health at the local level” (WHO Europe, 2010). Fundamental spatial-oriented elements of the model are included in three main urban themes: caring and supportive environments, healthy living and healthy urban design (WHO Europe, 2009, pp. 1-3). They can be elaborated through following principles (WHO Europe, 2010):

1. High-qualitative, secure and stable physical environment;
2. The accessibility of basic needs (food, water, shelter, income, safety and work) for all the people in community;
3. A diverse, vital and innovative economy;
4. Connectedness with the past - cultural and biological heritage of place;
5. An optimum level of appropriate public health and sickness care services, accessible to all.

In order to strengthen the implementation of the concept in Europe, WHO/Europe has developed specific approach, known as HEALTH21 policy framework. This approach includes 21 targets (WHO, 1999, pp. 3-4). They are created in “idealistic form”⁵, so the achievement of them can be considered as a “permanent duty”. WHO/Europe has developed a variety of guidance documents as tools for the implementation of the concept.

⁴ Thereby, public health should be understood as a set of preventing actions of human-health protection by the promotion of healthy behaviours, communities and environments.

⁵ For example, one of the targets is: equity in health, or closing the health gap within countries.



THE APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT IN THE CASE OF ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

Recognising the fact that the concept of healthy city is strongly related to general improvement of public health, it can be concluded that it should be especially implemented in the places with obvious lack of it. In European context this is the situation with illegal settlements in South East Europe. Majority of illegal settlements is situated in peri-urban areas of main cities in SE Europe. This process is accelerated during transitional period of post-socialistic transformation (Tsenkova, 2010, pp. 6).

Illegal settlements around Serbian capital Belgrade are certainly good example for such research. Besides inherited “tradition” of illegal building from socialist period and harsh transitional circumstances, the growth of illegal settlements around Belgrade has been also significantly caused by wars and refugees’ influx (Mitrović, Ralević, Antić, 2014, p. 72-73). Although exact figures about illegal settlement are scarce, it is estimated that are more than 150.000 units, which occupy circa 44% of the total housing area in Belgrade (Simeuncevic Radulovic, Mitrovic, Ralevic, Djurovic, 2013). Hence, illegal settlements are so significant, that they cannot be skipped in any policy of Belgrade development.

Illegal settlements in Belgrade keep both general and specific characteristics of illegal and informal building in SE Europe. These characteristics are (TPIB, 2001-09):

Table 1: Main characteristics of illegal settlements of Belgrade, Serbia.

No	Characteristic - Crucial meaning and description
C1	POSITION - The largest informal settlements of Belgrade are situated at the North Eastern and Southern outskirts of Belgrade, as well as on the left Danube riverbank, expanding to the north
C2	DENSITY - Surprisingly, there is still a decent share of green areas. The concentration of buildings is the highest along the main traffic corridors
C3	“URBAN” FUNCTIONS - Dominant land use is for residential areas (approximately 90% are Single-family detached homes), but there is significant share of non-residential land use, concentrated along the main traffic corridors
C4	TRAFFIC NETWORK is irregular and insufficient. In the future, street regulation could be very difficult since it would cause massive demolishing of houses
C5	OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE - Except the electrical network the infrastructure mostly does not exist.
C6	URBAN STRUCTURE of such housing areas is irregular and spontaneous
C7	PUBLIC SERVICES - One of the main problems about informal settlements’ land use structure is lack of public spaces and services
C8	PUBLIC PERCEPTION - Informal housing areas in Belgrade are mostly perceived as impersonal and disharmonized residential area, being neither quite urban, nor rural settlements.



ANALYSIS

Table 2: The possibilities of the implementation of “European model” of healthy city in Europe in illegal settlements of Belgrade, Serbia.

The principles of the concept of healthy city	Targeted characteristics	Possibilities of implementation - Settlements' improvement
1. high-qualitative, secure and stable physical environment	C1, C2, C6, C7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable land and middle density enable physical security • The use of current greenery and new public services as focal points for high-qualitative and secure environment
2. the accessibility of basic needs (food, water, shelter, income, safety and work) for all the people in community	C1, C4, C5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regulation of traffic network and the introduction of other infrastructure can be led simultaneously • The position of the settlements is usually near to main traffic corridors, which simplify “home-work” transport connection
3. a diverse, vital and innovative economy	C3, C8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the part of settlements along the main corridors with commercial facilities as a “driving force” for local economy • The use of “urban-rural” facilities as a gain for local economy
4. connectedness with the past - cultural and biological heritage of place	C2, C8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preservation of greenery in order to keep natural heritage of place • The preservation of “urban-rural” element as a cultural uniqueness
5. an optimum level of appropriate public health and sickness care services, accessible to all	C2, C3, C4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current unbuilt land enables possible location of health services and other public facilities • The preservation of green areas as a prevention for good healthy conditions • The vicinity of main transport corridors as a possibility for fast sickness care service

CONCLUSION

This concise analysis tried to present the possibilities of the implementation of the concept of healthy city in unique context of illegal settlements in Belgrade, Serbia. The use of so-called “European model” of the healthy city narrows the analysis to specific themes for European cities. This approach enables the clear connection of the concept with main characteristics of illegal settlements. This can be seen by the analysis in the table, where every principle of the concept can be match with appropriate characteristics of illegal settlements in Belgrade.

Further, used method in the analysis also gives the opportunity to form the list of particular actions in space of illegal settlements as possibilities for the implementation of every observed principle of concept. Therefore, it enables simple relations from theoretical foundation to implementation in reality.



Finally, the analysis also points that the problems with public health in illegal settlements in Belgrade and, generally, in SE Europe are very visible. Thus, the forming of particular approach and related documents for such settlements should be important step for future implementation of the concept in Europe.

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