



BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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ISSUES OF HOUSING,
PLANNING, AND
RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF
THE TERRITORY

**Towards Euro-Mediterranean
Perspectives**

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Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

Albania, along with other Western Balkan countries, has undergone significant economic, social, and political changes in recent years. As a result, housing, planning, and the resilient management of territorial development have emerged as critical issues. This is because these regions face significant challenges in providing affordable housing, addressing the impact of urbanization on the environment, fostering evidence-based decision-making on the territory, and bringing forth the commitments towards climate neutrality.

The organizers use the term “multi-modality” to define complex situations (in matters of territorial planning, management, architecture, housing, public space, technology, etc.) that have historically encompassed Western Balkans and Mediterranean cities in a logic of coexistence and value co-creation. A combination of knowledge and heritage that throughout time and history have given life to civilization in this region of Europe. The active involvement of Albania in the existing network of the Mediterranean Basin and the EU, through a joint action plan with UN / UNECE, and the Albanian and regional authorities, including reputable scientific bodies such as the Academy of Sciences of Albania, makes this conference even more intriguing to explore fascinating areas of research. The conclusions, to be considered as a stage for open innovation, will include recommendations for further scientific and applied research, projects, and events.

The geographical focus of the conference covers three dimensions: i) Albania; ii) the Western Balkans; iii) Euro-Mediterranean countries. POLIS University aims to focus on the above-mentioned research areas that are of common interest to both Western Balkans and Mediterranean cities, including, but not limited to: housing policies, urban history and architecture typology, innovation and digitalization in urbanism, energy efficiency, resilience and environmental sustainability, governance and smart technologies for city management, education and gender aspects in urban planning research.

In this regard the main aim of this international conference is to bring together scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners to examine the pressing issues of housing, planning, and land development in these regions, in a context of transition fatigue, climate challenges and post-pandemic realities.

Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Aim

The main aim of this international conference is to bring together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to examine the urgent issues of housing, planning and land development in these regions, in a context of transition, climate challenges and post-pandemic realities.

Objective

- Consolidation of the cooperation network between Albanian and non-Albanian researchers, lecturers, managers, with the aim of participating in joint research projects at the regional and international level;
- Support of local authorities with contemporary data, on the state of housing issues, planning and sustainable urban and environmental management, as well as representatives of public and private institutions operating in this field.

The conference is organized by POLIS University (U_POLIS) in cooperation with the Academy of Science of Albania, and supported by other local and international partners.

In the framework of resilience, the main conference theme is devoted to Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory from a Euro-Mediterranean Perspective, including Albania, Western Balkans and the Mediterranean Basin. This event aims to bring together academics, policymakers, researchers, experts, practitioners, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to discuss and address critical challenges related to housing, urban planning, and the development of resilient territories.

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Human Agency, Knowledge and Space in Bratislava Socio-spatial analysis of innovation in a capital city

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Abstract

The effect of the time and space on people and the knowledge production is examined with various methods and approaches in different disciplines as economics, geography, development studies, planning and the like. From the socio-spatial perspective, regional development is related in one dimension of how the individual links to one's environment, both individually and within a community. This research is a part of a wider research project, called REGINNO 1 delves into the regional innovation capacity in Slovakia, specifically explores the interrelation of human agency and local development from the socio-spatial perspective specific to capital city of Bratislava. Human agency refers to the individuals' capacity and perspective to be involved in the creation of novel ideas and contribution to local knowledge. The socio-spatial perspective acknowledges the interplay between social structures and spatial arrangements, exploring the role of physical environments shape social relations and opportunities for the aforementioned individuals. Human capital capacity fosters a favourable setting for innovation by enabling the sharing of knowledge and resources, and facilitating the formation of networks and partnerships. Based on the findings of this research, there are a number of recommendations of this research for policymakers, and practitioners to foster environments, spaces and planning strategies that empower individuals, promote inclusion, and address socio-spatial diversities in local context.

Keywords

Human agency, regional development, innovation, capital city, Slovakia.

Introduction

The study presented in this research paper delves into the multifaceted dynamics of regional development, human agency, local knowledge, and socio-spatial innovation within the context of Bratislava, the capital city of the Slovak Republic. This introduction serves as a foreword to our work, providing an overview of the theoretical underpinnings that form the foundation of our research, as well as a brief introduction to the case study of Bratislava.

This research is a part of a wider research project, named REGINNO delves into the regional innovation capacity in Slovakia, specifically explores the interrelation of human agency and local development from the socio-spatial perspective specific to capital city of Bratislava. This research proposes the development of regional innovation policies primarily in Slovakia with the help of the spatial and statistical analysis of local dynamics. These analyses are assumed to be based on the forms of production in the regions, the technology, knowledge, and R&D intensities of the sectors and people.

In this discussion, specifically, we explore the relationship between innovation and socio-spatiality, examining it from the perspectives of inequality and sustainable transitions. We investigate how innovation can both exacerbate and alleviate inequalities, as well as how it can drive sustainable transitions. Through local examples and general theoretical frameworks, we aim to understand what type of role innovation can have for change in socio-spatial dynamics.

Theoretical background

This part is the theoretical groundwork for our research. Here are the various concepts of regional development and the scope of our project, explaining the importance of regional development and transformation within the broader framework of socio-economic change. While discussing these concepts we also focus on human agency, examining the role of individuals and communities in shaping the development trajectory of regions, and how their actions contribute to or impede innovation and progress. We underline the significance of local knowledge as a driving force behind regional development, emphasizing its role in fostering unique solutions and approaches that cater to the specific needs and challenges of a region.

Regional development and scope of the project

Regional development can be understood and influenced from the perspectives of human agency and local knowledge, which play pivotal roles in shaping the trajectory of regions. A spatial unit of any kind and anywhere is not the sole responsible for producing innovation activities when measuring the innovation performance of a region. Regional innovation performance is the responsibility of the actors in the region (Brenner and Broekel, 2011). Therefore, the focus of this research is to analyze the relation between innovation and human at regional level. Human agency literature (Karnøe and Garud, 2012; Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2020; Grillitsch et al., 2021; Blažek and Květoň, 2022; Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2023) refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and organizations to act purposefully and make decisions that impact and change their environment. In the context of regional development, human agency plays a significant role in several ways:

- Individuals and entrepreneurs within a region can drive economic growth and development by starting businesses, creating innovative products or services, and generating employment opportunities as change agents (Roebke et al. 2022; Wirth et al., 2023). Their initiatives can lead to the emergence of new industries and the revitalization of existing ones.
- Local leaders, government officials, and community organizers have agency in shaping regional

development policies and strategies. Effective governance can create an environment conducive to investment, infrastructure development, and social progress.

- Communities (Magis, 2010) themselves can actively participate in shaping their regions. Through community-based initiatives, citizens can improve infrastructure, promote cultural preservation, and enhance the overall quality of life within their areas.

- Investing in education and skills development at the local level can boost human capital (Capello, 2019; Lenzi and Perucca, 2020). A well-educated and skilled workforce can attract businesses and industries seeking a qualified labour force, thus fostering regional development.

Local knowledge refers to the unique insights, traditions, and expertise possessed by residents and communities within a region. This type of knowledge is often rooted in the historical, cultural, and environmental contexts of a specific area. In the context of regional development, local knowledge plays a vital role in several ways:

- To promote environmental sustainability
- To contribute to regional identity and development
- To offer unique solutions to region-specific challenges
- To become more resilient in the face of environmental or economic challenge

In essence, human agency and local knowledge are interconnected drivers of regional development. Individuals and communities with agency can leverage their local knowledge to make informed decisions, implement innovative solutions, and create sustainable development pathways that align with the unique characteristics and aspirations of their regions. These perspectives highlight the importance of recognizing and harnessing the capabilities and wisdom of people and communities in the pursuit of regional progress.

Socio-spatial perspective on innovation

The characteristics and level of national economic growth are often correlated with the nature of urbanization and the associated urban formations. The requirement to accommodate growth while retaining the quality of the urban environment is likely to dominate urban systems and challenges in nations with strong economies that are at the forefront of economic development. For example, Yoo & Lee (2016) imply that spatial and non-spatial elements at the neighborhood level can influence the establishment of social capital, which affects social sustainability.

Regions are the crucial elements of innovation, where diverse actors interact, networks form, and knowledge is generated, diffused, and exploited. At the heart of these intricate processes are the economic agents that underpin the very fabric of regional ecosystems. Actors, ranging from firms and entrepreneurs to universities and research institutions, play pivotal roles as catalysts of innovation and drivers of competitiveness within their respective domains

Case study of Bratislava

This section brings us to the heart of our investigation – the case study of Bratislava. Here is a brief historical overview of the Slovak Republic, shedding light on the historical context that has shaped the nation and its regions. Bratislava, the capital city, has its pivotal role as an urban hub that not only reflects but also influences the broader regional development landscape.

Short history on Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic, often simply referred to as Slovakia, is a landlocked country located in Cen-

tral Europe. Its history is rich and complex, with influences from various cultures and empires throughout the centuries.

In Early History, Slavic tribes settled in the area, laying the foundation for the modern Slovak culture and language. During the Middle Ages, Slovakia was part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the larger Austro-Hungarian Empire. It remained under Hungarian rule for nearly a thousand years, with significant cultural and political ties to Hungary. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Habsburg Monarchy, which ruled over a vast part of Central Europe, including Hungary, held sway over Slovakia. This period saw significant socio-political changes and religious conflicts. After World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, leading to the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Slovakia became one of its constituent parts, coexisting with the Czech lands. This union lasted until 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded and established a separate state for Slovakia. After World War II, Czechoslovakia was reestablished, and it came under communist rule in 1948. For over four decades, Slovakia was a part of the Eastern Bloc under the influence of the Soviet Union. In 1989, the Velvet Revolution marked the end of communism in Czechoslovakia. The country transitioned to democracy, and in 1993, it peacefully split into two separate nations, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

After gaining independence, Slovakia underwent significant political and economic reforms. It became a member of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and adopted the euro as its currency in 2009. The country has since experienced economic growth and modernization. In recent years, Slovakia has continued to develop its economy and strengthen its ties with Western Europe. It has played a role in regional stability and has become an active member of various international organizations, including NATO.

Today, the Slovak Republic is known for its picturesque landscapes, historic towns, and a unique blend of cultural influences, making it a fascinating and diverse country with a rich history that has shaped its identity in the heart of Europe.

Bratislava as a capital city

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which marked the end of communism, Bratislava became the capital of an independent Slovakia in 1993 when the country peacefully split from the Czech Republic. Since gaining independence, Bratislava has experienced economic growth and urban development. It has become a political, cultural, and economic centre of Slovakia and is known for its historical landmarks, vibrant cultural scene, and its location along the banks of the Danube River. Today, Bratislava stands as the capital and largest city of Slovakia, playing a pivotal role in the nation's political and cultural life.

When considering the development transformations and development dilemmas of Bratislava, it is necessary to reflect some broader contexts of social processes (their political, economic, cultural or otherwise defined aspects), in which the city functions as a system. A new phenomenon of the growth of Bratislava (as well as other post-communist cities), initiated by transformational changes, are the transformations of their centers and the creation of new centers with the specifics of their users. Old, historically established centers are strengthening their service, symbolic and leisure-knowledge functions. At the same time, luxury stores are entering here, and especially in the 1990s, financial institutions, as well as newly emerging diplomatic missions in connection with the establishment of the Slovak Republic, entered significantly. The residential function is shrinking on the one hand and undergoing a significant revitalization on the other hand. This leads to an increase in the standard, but at the same time it is connected with gentrification processes, when there is a change of the existing population in favor of the more solvent one (Faltan, 2009).

With high growth dynamics, there is a new distribution of functions in the urban space. Some of the administrative and service functions are being moved to new urban areas. Both the financial sphere and the headquarters of important foreign or multinational companies are concentrated in them. Large shopping centers are growing in the outskirts of cities. In connection with Bratislava, it should be said that with the development of socio-cultural, restaurant-café, leisure and business-service functions in Petržalka, especially in its waterfront part, it is gradually possible to talk about the city “on the Danube” more fully. The mentioned new distribution of functions in the city space also conditions changes in the movement of user groups within the city. The fact that Bratislava has “run away” from the rest of Slovakia in terms of development dynamics, that the economic shocks from the transformation processes of the 1990s, but also from the global crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, do not affect it to the same extent as other regions of Slovakia, create aversion to the city (Faltan, 2009).

Socio-spatial analysis of Bratislava

The Danube river is a vital and integral part of Bratislava’s identity and urban landscape. The Danube River, which flows through the city, not only provides a picturesque backdrop but also plays a crucial role in shaping the city’s history, culture, and socioeconomic development. Its waterfront areas have been focal points for recreation, transportation, and urban planning, making it a defining feature of Bratislava’s socio-spatial fabric.

There are number of existing research on Bratislava from socio-spatial perspectives. These research give extremely valuable insights about the Bratislava and Slovak context.

Despite the Danube River’s significant political, economic, and symbolic importance for a large portion of Europe, and despite the size of its drainage basin, which spans 19 countries on both sides of the historical border separating Eastern and Western Europe, research has shown that residents of its Western part perceive the river’s course as being unknown, in contrast to students from Eastern Europe who more accurately recognize the river (Padlo et al., 2021).

The research by Šveda et al. (2016), aims to pinpoint the crucial elements influencing the emergence of specific suburban areas in Bratislava, thereby enhancing comprehension of the factors significantly moulding the socio-spatial structure of hinterlands in contemporary post-socialist urban environments. This research employs a methodological approach that examines Bratislava’s hinterland by analyzing aspects such as in-migration, housing development, property costs, and land utilization. It utilizes different types of analyses within the framework of factorial ecology, a method that helps identify and describe key components of socio-spatial structure. This analysis relies heavily on data input, including information from censuses, to generate meaningful insights into the hinterland’s characteristics. They conclude that their analysis for Bratislava validates the findings of prior studies conducted in the CEE region, which indicate that individuals with higher levels of education and belonging to more affluent social groups are typically the primary participants in suburbanization. The emergence of a well-educated and prosperous ‘suburban ring’ contributes to the clustering of socio-economic groups within suburban spaces. For Bratislava case, this research reaffirms the role of education level in influencing individuals’ choices regarding their socio-spatial locations.

In their research on “Behavioural mapping and online data as tools for socio-spatial analysis of public spaces – Bratislava, Slovakia waterfront case study”, Petrtýlová and Jašo (2022) provide valuable insights into the dynamics of public spaces in Bratislava, using innovative methods of analysis.

The exploration of Bratislava waterfront via the presented methodology shows the difference

between Bratislava left and right bank waterfronts. They remain distinctive places with (partly) separate historical, morphological as well as socio-cultural development. While the left bank is a “face of the city”, the primary place of the dialogue between the city and its inhabitants/visitors, the right bank has gone through a long transformation process especially during the last two decades. Once the mere borderline between land and river, it is becoming the place, the spot to go for nature, leisure time activities and culture. Its semiotics are dynamically evolving, enriching the city identity with new connotations. For many people, the left bank is a scenographic element of their everyday movement within the city (driving the car along the waterfront, walking through the old city) while right bank remains more of a “place to go”, agreeable spots of activities which are irregular or are bound to specific purpose (jogging, cycling).

Discussion

Through this exploration, we aim to shed light on the intricate interplay between human agency, local knowledge, and socio-spatial innovation in the context of regional development, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors driving regions like Bratislava.

Based on the findings of this research, there are a number of recommendations of this research for policymakers, and practitioners to foster environments, spaces and planning strategies that empower individuals, promote inclusion, and address socio-spatial diversities in local context.

Recommendations:

- Spatial analysis of social dynamics which have an impact on innovation
- Longitudinal research and data collection on chosen individuals or institutions
- More focus on understanding the socio-spatial dynamics impact on research, novel ideas and progress

The ongoing nature of this research underscores its continuous evolution and the anticipation of further steps in the journey to deepen our understanding of human innovation within urban spaces from a socio-spatial perspective both in Bratislava, Slovakia and CEE countries. As urban environments continue to transform and adapt, researchers remain committed to unraveling the intricate dynamics that drive innovation, inform urban policies, and enhance the quality of life for urban dwellers. Future investigations will undoubtedly uncover new insights, refine methodologies, and propose innovative solutions to address the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by our ever-changing urban landscapes.

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