

POST-SOCIALIST URBAN DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND PARTICIPATION – THE CASE STUDY OF BRATISLAVA CITY CENTRE

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1 Introduction

Bratislava is perceived as a success story of post-socialist transformation in Slovakia. The lowest level of unemployment and the highest average salaries compared to the rest of Slovakia, as well as GDP per capita close to the European Union average confirm its vitality under the new conditions. Local transformation processes reflect general national influences, as well as very specific local features. Sets of central state-driven reforms and initiatives of local governments have had considerable influences on urban development and the level of investment in Bratislava. The city has turned into a suitable place for various kinds of business activities and started to attract foreign investors searching for investment opportunities. This process has generated an increased demand for office space, wholesale, logistics, production facilities, and new housing in Bratislava. Despite the indisputable progress and modernisation in many fields, conflicts have also emerged concerning various aspects of urban development. These conflicts have been concentrated specifically in the most sensitive area, the city centre.

This insight into the development processes of the city centre in Bratislava takes into consideration the specific post-socialist conditions. Within this context I would like to focus on a few interrelated research hypotheses. The first hypothesis addresses a general approach to urban development policy. The urban development policy of the transition seems to be liberal, pro-development, with a preference to private initiatives and a very flexible approach to any development initiative. However, it is questionable to what extent such development approach aiming for quick renewal, modernisation and attracting investors is in conflict with the criteria of sustainable development, including its social and cultural aspects. The second hypothesis is that Bratislava has not been prepared enough for high development dynamics by a suitable regulatory framework. The absence of well-elaborated planning documents covering many sensitive locations has caused disputes and left many actors in the city in an uncertain posi-

tion, under the pressure of time, with undetermined development outcomes, often finally unsatisfied or jaded. Thirdly, I suppose that urban development is dominated by local government politicians, planning professionals and developers, with less participation and an undervalued role of other partners (citizens, NGOs etc.). In this paper I attempt to verify these research hypotheses by discussing concrete urban development projects.

The research goals of this paper have been inspired by selected themes included in social sustainability concepts (e.g. *Borja–Castells*, 1997; *Koning*, 2001; *MacKenzie*, 2004). Two main aspects are considered within the framework of this contribution: ‘place’ and ‘participation’. I take into account debates on terms like ‘sense of place’, ‘sense of continuity’, ‘local sensitivity’, or ‘genius loci’. The paper addresses the development of historical structures, including physical and social structures, intervening into local cultural traditions, monument preservation, traditional ways of local life and the cityscape. Such debates are strongly related to the issue of participation in urban development. The outcome of development processes should be the result of the participation of various actors, including citizens, NGOs, CBOs, professional groups, as well as local politicians and developers. Participation should be balanced between various perspectives and perceptions, with an important role given to those of local citizens.

The central district of Bratislava called Staré Mesto (i.e. Old Town) has been investigated by several authors (e.g. *Buček–Pitoňák*, 1997; *Ondoš*, 2003). In this study first a brief summary of the main features of the development of the city centre of Bratislava is presented. Then recent development processes and the related conflicts are documented by two case studies – one in the prime location of *Podhradie* (the area below Bratislava Castle, close to the historical core and the Danube waterfront), while the second, *Šancová Street Skyscraper* addresses the development context in an attractive location in the wider city centre. These case studies are chosen from the narrow city centre as it was identified by *Ira* (2003), or *Ondoš and Korec* (2004) – comprising the historical core and the densely built-up inner city (which is in fact east to the Staré Mesto district). They sufficiently document the development environment in Bratislava and the position of various partners in urban development processes. The final section of the paper outlines conclusions and recommendations to improve activities in the field of urban development in Bratislava.

2 Basic features of the development of Staré Mesto (Old Town)

The socialist period left the city centre of Bratislava in a poor state. The physical structure was obsolete, many buildings were devastated, and the service function was underdeveloped. During the last decade of the 20th century, city-centre development focused on the rehabilitation of the existing building stock. The rehabilitation was successfully completed, especially in the historical core. Projects were usually individual ones, limited in size and costs, construction works often progressed in stages, larger development zones were lacking. This trend has changed since the turn of the present century. A new pro-reform central government, the perspective of and later accession to the EU and NATO, and a positive macro- and local economic development jointly improved the image and investment attractiveness of the city. A series of larger projects have emerged, accompanied by numerous individual projects in the centre of Bratislava, and a further expansion is expected for the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. The development projects and other investment opportunities are regularly presented by the city government, as well as by developers at international real estate fairs (e.g. MIPIM Cannes).

The Staré Mesto district is one of Bratislava's 17 self-governmental city districts (*Figure 1*). It covers the central area of the city, with a territory of 9.6 sq. kms (the total area of Bratislava is 367.6 sq. kms). Population was decreasing during the post-socialist period from 49,018 in 1991 to 43,367 in 2003 (the total population of Bratislava was 425,533 in 2003). The district is located on the left bank of the Danube and includes the most valuable historical core of the city, as well as the castle area (*Figure 2*).

The western part of the district contains the most elegant and expensive residential area of Bratislava on the slopes of the Little Carpathian Mountains. The rest of the district is of mixed functional use. In their detailed research focusing on the development of the physical environment, Ondoš and Korec (2004) also analysed the functions of buildings in the city centre and stressed the strong domination of administrative activities. Retailing, restaurants, cafes and hotels, cultural, educational and health facilities are accompanied by administrative functions of all kinds (governmental, diplomatic, headquarters of companies). Larger industrial and transport functions are located on the edge of Staré Mesto – railway transport area in the north-east and remnants of river transport and industrial facilities on the south-eastern edge of the district.

Staré Mesto is under the influence of both its own district local government and the city government, in accordance with the two-tier local government system applied in Bratislava. The leading role in shaping urban development processes is played by the city government, although building licence power is delegated to the district level. On the other hand, the city government is responsible

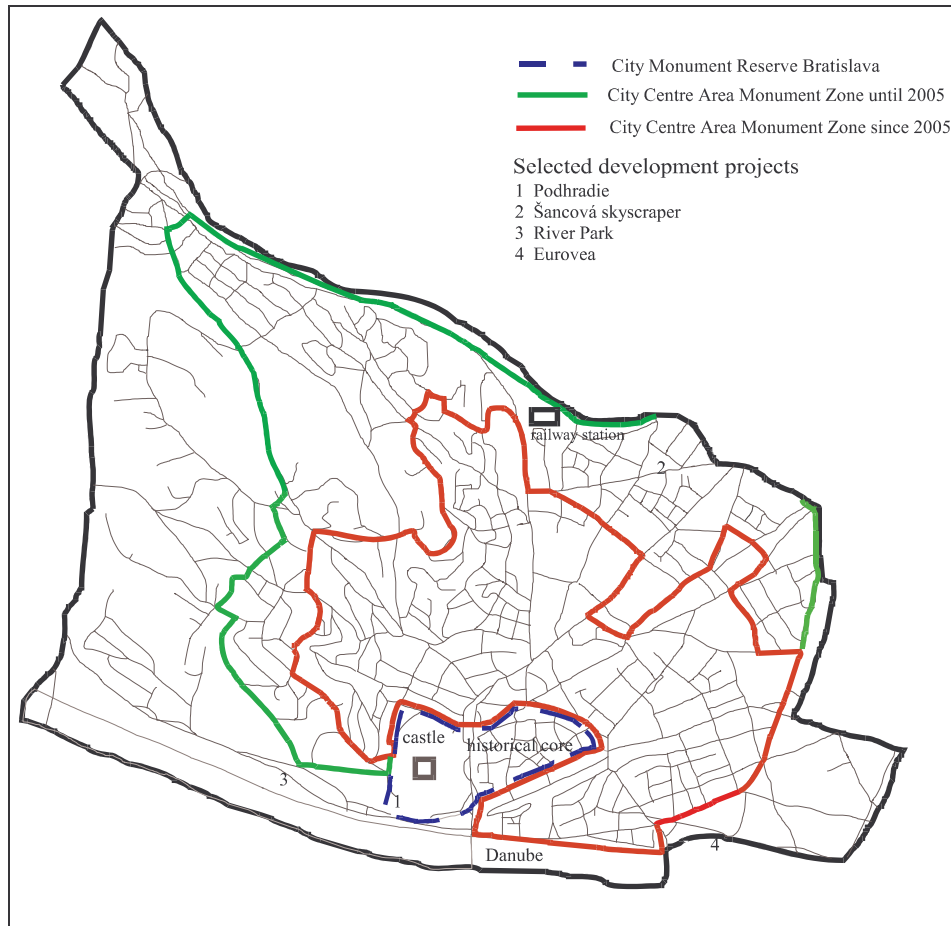
for all planning procedures. The most important regulatory document is the Master Plan ('Územný Plán' – UPN – in Slovak). The replacement of the outdated Master Plan started in 1998 and the new one is expected to be accepted by the City Council in 2006. It has to be adapted to the new development processes and it has to respect the needs of citizens, as well as of investors. The Master Plan is to be supplemented by a large number of more detailed planning documents, e.g. the plans of zones. It is important to note in connection with the regulation of urban development that large areas of Staré Mesto belong to monument protection areas. The historical core and the castle area is strictly protected as City Monument Reserve, and the wider territory of Staré Mesto is designated as City Centre Monument Zone, with a weaker regime of monument preservation.

FIGURE 1
City quarter Staré Mesto (Old Town) within administrative division of Bratislava



Source: Author's design.

FIGURE 2
Monument protected areas and selected development sites in Bratislava



Source: Author's design.

Bratislava city centre, and especially its historical core, suffered from a series of heavy destruction throughout the socialist period. The most painful were those that affected large sections of the historical core and the surrounding castle area (especially the construction of a new bridge over the Danube). Almost the whole historical core of the city was undervalued, functionally outdated and partially devastated by the end of the socialist period. The rest of the city centre was characterised by a mixed urban environment. Solitaire buildings and new street structures were combined with older elements of the physical environment

in the post-war development until the 1980s. Many plots were cleaned and not developed for long years.

Ira (2003), focusing on the changing internal pattern of Bratislava as a result of post-socialist transformation, considers revitalisation and commercialisation as the most important processes that have changed the historical core of the city. The first positive consequences of post-socialist development can be observed above all in the almost complete rehabilitation of the historical core. Large private investments and accompanying public ones have resulted in an urban environment of much higher quality than before. Most of the previously devastated historical buildings were decently and authentically reconstructed and now they serve mostly commercial purposes. Public spaces in the most attractive historical core and the adjacent streets were completely renewed, thanks to the efforts of the local government. The main streets of Staré Mesto close to the historical core attracted investments from the financial sector first (*Buček–Pitoňák, 1997*), which was followed by other investors converting the previously neglected city centre into a typical representative inner-city of a capital. Despite the intensive filling-up of existing empty plots and the completion of block structures, the wider city centre is still far from being fully compact. According to Ondoš (2003), renewal is mostly island-like and linear; the farther from the core, the less compact the location pattern is. The most attractive parts of Staré Mesto, especially in the western residential area, has faced an intensive housing development of higher standards since the mid-1990s (*Korec–Smatanová, 2000*).

The first decade of the 21st century is most likely going to be the period of the largest construction development of the city centre in the history of Bratislava. Riverfront development will be the principal feature of this stage of urban development, due to its scale and attractive location. Two main areas under development are located in Staré Mesto – the West Riverfront below Bratislava Castle, and the East Riverfront area of the former river harbour, a storage and industrial area (next to the Ružinov district). According to the plans, the East Riverfront will be changed into an area of mixed functions, with prevailing administrative, housing and cultural ones (the new building of the Slovak National Theatre will be completed here in 2006). The West Riverfront will be reconstructed by administrative, shopping, hotel and housing projects.

Commercial developers are transforming both of these areas. The multinational *Ballymore Properties Co.* (of Irish origin) is the main developer in the East Riverfront area, communicating its project under the name of *Eurovea*. In the case of the West Riverfront, the leading developer is the Slovakian *J&T* (with important activities in the Czech Republic as well), and the major project is known as *River Park*. A smaller but more sensitive segment south of Bratislava Castle and in direct contact with the historical core will be managed by another Slovakian company called *Avant*, already known from the earlier devel-

opment of the northern surroundings of Bratislava Castle. In both areas, the developers have already cleared out minor sections of older buildings that limited their activities. Many other projects under construction or planning are scattered throughout the wider city centre.

3 Urban development debates in the city centre of Bratislava

The city centre of Bratislava is a source of conflict among proponents of heritage protection, rent maximising developers and advocates of traditional local life and local interests. There are large sections and building plots still available for new development and rehabilitation, but the scale and character of certain projects have generated intensive disputes over future developments. Two case studies presented below highlight the contradictory aspects of development in different urban environments. The first area is *Podhradie* ('under the castle' area), next to Bratislava Castle, which is one of the most attractive locations in Bratislava. It is situated below Bratislava Castle and it has direct connection with the historical core of the city. The second case study focuses on *Šancová Street Skyscraper*, which is located on the edge of the city centre. While the first case focuses mostly on disputes arising during the planning phase of development, the second case study documents contradictions related not only to the planning but the realisation phase of the project.

3.1 Case study in a prime city centre location – *Podhradie*

This is a well-identifiable part of the historical centre. The historical core used to be surrounded by the city walls, therefore any disputable development disturbing its built environment was avoided in the past. A much larger pressure for new development could be observed on the edge of the district. Throughout history this territory surrounding the castle hill was densely inhabited. The architectural value of the buildings was lower, with social strata that could not prevent its devastation. A large-scale clearance of the area was issued and new development is now almost complete with the exception of the southern part. Developments already completed in the northern and planned in the southern parts have been significant issues in long-term discussions. The southern part is considered as an exclusive development site, due to its unique location. This very attractive and valuable territory has currently been found almost freely available for new development. The sale of the site to private developers and the 'modernist' results of the first architectural competition mobilised the opponents of the develop-

ment. Their critiques were partially respected in the preparation of the detailed regulation documents. Nevertheless, the potential for further disputes will be quite high after the final development projects of this area are presented to the public. Disputes over the development of such an attractive location, or even controversial final results, probably cannot be avoided.

The western part of the area surrounding Bratislava Castle was already rebuilt during the socialist period in the course of the construction of the new building of the Slovak National Council (the 'Slovak Parliament' during the Czechoslovak Federation). The location, scale and architecture of the building is considered doubtful. It is too visible in comparison to Bratislava Castle, although Bratislava Castle still clearly dominates the view from most angles. Anyhow, this building was completed and began to serve as the Slovak Parliament in the mid-1990s. Currently the presence of the Slovak Parliament there is accepted, but parliamentary work has required further changes in the area. The capacity of the building had been designed only for a few annual sessions of the 'socialist parliament', which became insufficient after 1990. The requirements of a regularly working, institutionally complete and active Parliament required much more office space. As a result, an entirely new replica of the former military building was erected within Bratislava Castle, to serve as office space for members of the parliament and the staff. The rest of the western part of the Castle area has a residential character, considered as one of the most perfect residential locations in Bratislava.

The physical structure of the eastern slopes of Bratislava Castle Hill, opposite the historical core, was almost completely destroyed. It was the construction of the *New Bridge* that led to the destruction of the valuable historical structures, including the Jewish quarter. The bridge also formed a barrier between the city core and the castle area by one of the main and very busy roads connecting the right bank (the *Petržalka* district) with the city centre. The remaining architecture is a mixture of very valuable historical buildings and new or reconstructed buildings. Previously available empty building plots have been developed recently. They combine office and residential functions, supplemented by services catering mostly to tourists.

The main axis of the northern part of Podhradie is Zámocká Street, linking the city centre and Castle/Parliament area. This historical street was destroyed in the 1970s (at the beginning of the 20th century it was a street with small houses of more or less rural character). Bratislava City Council decided and started its long-term redevelopment as one street unit in the mid-1990s. The city government established a joint stock company (*Zámocká spoločnosť, a.s.*) that was to serve as an instrument for this concrete development project. Afterwards, a tender was launched for selling the majority of the shares of this company to a strategic investor that could support the development of the whole area accord-

ing to the regulations defined by the city. The company *Huma 90, s.r.o.* bought 90 percent of its shares (10 percent is owned by the city government). The completion of the whole area was planned for 1999. However, *Zámocká spoločnosť* (in fact its chief private partner) had not been able to mobilise the financial resources needed to finish construction works. After the completion of certain basic works, *Huma 90* sold its shares to the company *Garden, s.r.o.* in 1999 (belonging to the multi-sectoral group *Avant a.s.*), which took over all duties to complete the development of the whole territory. This company successfully finished the construction works in the area by 2004. The city government decided to sell its portion in *Zámocká spoločnosť, a.s.* after the completion of the project in 2004.

The newly built *Zámocká Street* has mixed functions, combining housing, administrative, hotel, small services and retail functions. The architectural style of this street was supposed to be historical (though a full return to original structures was not possible), respecting previous architectural studies and regulation negotiated with the local governments. The resulting physical environment is regarded as confusing, non-inspiring and a matter of perpetual discussion. *Lalková and Vodrážka (2003)* comment this development as a “curious situation”. Taking into account the philosophy of the final concept, the architectural composition, the construction solutions, materials etc., they consider the final physical environment as neither historical, nor modern.

The southern part of the ‘under the castle’ area is in fact the riverfront of the Danube, with direct connection (across *New Bridge*) to the historical core. Part of the area has a very rich history, but most of the historically built environment was destroyed and only a few buildings were preserved. The majority of the western part is the result of the socialist development of the 20th century, with less value (three high-rise apartment blocks and a former exhibition and leisure area). An important part of *Podhradie* fulfils transport functions – a riverfront road with tramline, and road connections to *New Bridge*. The unique eastern section of southern *Podhradie* (known as the *Vydrica – Zuckermandel* area) faces intensive interest as one of the main future highlights of the Bratislava cityscape. Many business groups, community organisations and associations expressed their interest in this area after the City Council presented plans to redevelop this area. The discussions within the planning processes caused delay, and construction works will optimally start only in 2006, more than five years after the land for development was sold.

The City Council had decided to have this area developed by private investors, and soon the whole area was sold in two sections to two developers. *Avant* bought the most sensitive area *Vydrica-Zuckermandel* (the price was about 320 EUR per square meter). Surprisingly, the area was sold without a detailed planning documentation and binding regulations, although this area is part of the

City Monument Reserve, so development is subject to strong monument regulation. It has to follow the dominance of Bratislava Castle, the silhouette of the historical building environment, traditional materials, traditional street development etc. The developer was obliged to organise a conceptually oriented architectural competition focusing on the area, which was staged in 2002. The jury finally selected from 14 proposals submitted by teams of Slovak architects. The message provided by participating architects was clear – this area needs specific solutions, with preference to the highest urbanity (*Projekt*, 2002). The outcomes of this competition should serve as inspiration for investors, as well as for planning regulation formulas. The preparation of a binding planning document (Plan of Zone) started in 2004, and was submitted for public discussion in October 2005. The Plan included a specific guarantee of commitment to Bratislava castle, green areas, street lines, respect for protected monuments, specific roofs' environment etc. Buildings cannot be higher than three storeys in the above-mentioned sensitive area of Vydrica – Zuckerman del. Long term debates concerning the development of this area have led to regulation more or less acceptable to most involved actors, which prevents extremely modernist development and does not force developers into fully historical structures. A new round of debates will probably start when the final layout of this area and the architecture of concrete buildings is presented. It will be followed by its final completion and adoption during 2006, which will allow the development of this area. The approach of the city government to this area, as was expressed by Mayor A. Ďurkovský (in *Handzo*, 2005), is to create a zone that will respect attributes of modern housing, administration and free time activities. At the same time, it should evoke historical streets that were there in the past.

A strong supervision over the development of this area was organised by non-governmental organisations. Major disputes started after the architectural competition of 2002 and the presentation of architects' proposals to the public. In this process the citizens' initiative *Obnovme Podhradie* ('Renewal under the castle area'), existing since October 2002, has been especially active and is also supported by other initiatives and associations, like the *Free Association of Bratislava Environmental Protection* and *Citizens' Organisations*. Its main activity was the particularly well-attended public hearing on Podhradie with the city and city quarter Staré Mesto mayors (April 2003) in one of the theatres of Bratislava. These groups, as well as participating citizens, preferred the historical form of Podhradie and refused modernist architects and urbanist proposals (in fact, the architectural community is also divided with regard to the development of this area). Their requirements have been even stronger than monument regulations (e.g. call for the reconstruction of the original physical environment, although not of all buildings). Citizen activists submitted numerous comments to the City Hall, an open letter to the City Mayor, and a petition for the renewal of Podhra-

die in its historical structure, signed by 2,500 people in 2004. The mobilisation of the activities of NGOs was followed by the preparation and adoption of the framework for a zone-plan by the City Council (*Zadanie územného plánu*, in Slovak). It was adopted in June 2004, disregarding many activists' comments, who were not invited for a closer co-operation, despite their long-term interest in the future development of Podhradie.

3.2 Case study in the wider city centre – Šancová Street Skyscraper

Šancová Street is one of the main roads in the eastern part of the city centre, leading to the main railway station. It belongs to the locations of strong interest to property developers. One of them – *Istroreal* – has attempted to maximise its profit from its investment located in this street by erecting an extremely high 'tower' in comparison to the built environment of the neighbourhood, disregarding the interests of local citizens and the public of Bratislava. This negative case documents a deficiency in managing urban development – mainly in the unclarity of planning and monument protection, and shows a serious limitation of citizens' participation and the weight of their opinions. This case can serve as an example for other developers attempting to maximise their interests. On the other hand, this conflict also caused progress in building a more transparent and understandable developmental environment, but without strengthening the possibilities of public participation. The final decision is more in favour of the developer and has only partially satisfied the opponents. Main national and local media (e.g. *SME*, *Hospodárske Noviny*, *Bratislavské Noviny*) extensively and systematically covered this project.

The private developer *Istroreal* obtained building permission for the construction of a building with eight storeys. Shortly after construction works had started, the company asked for a modification of permission (April 2004), with the intention to build a 34-storey (105 m) high skyscraper. As it was later confirmed by the State Construction Inspection, the construction structures were built for a 34-storey high building from the beginning. No objection was raised by the city government to the construction of such a building. It has to be mentioned that there are already two high-rise buildings at a distance of a few hundred metres – the buildings of the Slovak Technical University (76-meter high) and the National Bank of Slovakia (111-meter high). The erection of a 34-storey building was rejected by representatives of the Regional Monument Office (*Krajský pamiatkový úrad*, in Slovak), as well as by groups of citizens. Later the developer asked for permission for a 22-storey high building as a compromise achieved with the Regional Monument Office (February 2005). However, the Central Monument Office of the Slovak Republic refused this proposal as well,

acting on the protest of citizens. A subsequent protest of the developer addressed to the Ministry of Culture (as the supreme body in this field) was refused and the earlier decision was confirmed. During the summer of 2005, the developer stopped the construction on the level of the eighth storey, fighting on for the permission to construct a higher building in various ways (prosecution, courts). Istroreal was successful in protesting against the process of decision-making. The Regional Court of Bratislava cancelled previous decisions due to formal failures. The new decision in October 2005, which allowed a maximum of 10 storeys to be built, was not accepted by the developer again (*Bratislavské Noviny*, 20 October 2005). More significant for this project, as well as for monuments' preservation in Bratislava in general, was the decision of the Ministry of Culture on the substantial reduction of the monument protection zone in the central area of Bratislava (Ministry of Culture, 2005). It was the result of a long-term process of monument preservation evaluation according to new legislation (Act 49/2002). According to this change, Šancová Street remained outside the new protected zone, so the influence of monument protection institutions concerning this street have been seriously reduced. The developer Istroreal obtained permission to build a 22-storey high building in December 2005 (*Bratislavské Noviny*, 2005).

It is clear from the previous paragraph that this project was a source of a rather sharp conflict of interests. Local citizens and activists mobilised themselves after the intention to build a 34-storey building was announced. They established a citizens' initiative and organised a protest petition (July 2004, about 700 signatures). The fact that the construction site is part of the area under monument preservation was used with intention for efficient protest. They appealed to the Ministry of Culture with their objections, as well as to the Central Monument Office of the Slovak Republic and the city quarter Staré Mesto local government. They argued that such a building on the edge of the historical centre is not comfortable, violates urbanist and architectural values of this area, and will worsen the quality of living conditions in the surrounding area (Hodál, 2004). It is specific of this initiative that O. Dostál, a councillor of the city quarter Staré Mesto was among its leaders. The ability of the initiative to fight was limited by its voluntary base and lack of resources for necessary professional expertise (e.g. funds for specific studies and analyses). It was also a problem that similar skyscrapers had already been granted permission to be constructed in the wider city centre area. There was no opposition in these cases, or they were not successful (the building of the National Bank of Slovakia was completed only a few years before). In this case they were partially successful, due to the similar opinion of the Central Monument Office of the Slovak Republic. It must be noted that a counter-initiative 'Give Šancová a chance', which supported the building of the skyscraper and collected about 800 signatures, was also estab-

lished (SME, 2005b). It also advocated new high-rise development, the reduction of heritage protection area, and attacked the activities of previous initiatives (it is not easy to estimate to what extent it was supported by the developer). After the shift in the main line of the argumentation (monument reduction) the chance to effectively prevent the development of the Šancová Street Skyscraper substantially diminished.

The district local government, despite having the authority of a construction bureau (e.g. issuing building permissions), had limited possibilities to obstruct the project. The district has to comply with legislation, and if all regulations are observed and requirements are fulfilled by the developer, it cannot stop the project. Much more important is the opinion of the city government declaring that the high-rise building suits this part of the city and will not worsen the quality of life and transport conditions (City Hall Press Department in SME, 2005a). The City Hall (represented by specialised departments) expressed no objection even to the proposed 34-storey building; it viewed this project as being consensual with valid planning documentation and had nothing against the principles of high-rise building locations in Bratislava.

This case also documents the surprisingly strong role of the monument protection administration. At least for a certain period, it had great power in decisions over urban development in large sections of Bratislava. Very extensively defined areas of the monument preservation zone meant a large area under its strong influence. There had not been a standard situation when these bodies had to cope with various pressures concerning urban development – from unsatisfied neighbours to aggressive developers. Decision-making power over Bratislava urban development has recently moved towards central state monument protection administration to an unexpected extent.

The risky idea of the developer Istroreal to exploit unclear or unfinished planning framework was not a cheap adventure (e.g. *Hospodárske Noviny*, 2005). The company has faced heavy waiting costs, losses due to time constraints, resources spent on project changes, costs related to submitting new projects. Istroreal also faced a loss of already fixed construction costs related to the risky intention to build a 34-storey high building without permission (e.g. a more expensive basement than for an 8-storey building), cancelled contracts, not to mention the reputation of the company. Its critique of the citizens' initiative turned into personal attacks at a certain point. The developer put a large information poster on the construction site presenting the personal interest of one of the leading petitioners – remarking that his window view will be damaged. It also stressed the potential misuse of this initiative for the political representation of one of the local politicians (Councillor O. Dostál). Istroreal was finally 'awarded' with a permission to build a 22-storey high building as a compromise, and this case was a catalyst in a substantial shift in urban development.

4 Conclusions

These stories about the development of the city centre of Bratislava highlight certain possibilities and limits of the current practice. They confirm the need to complete the system of development regulation frameworks (especially planning documents) covering Bratislava. Such solid and complete frameworks must be supplemented by a rigorous and transparent implementation. While previous improvements can be achieved within a better use of valid legal conditions, improvements in the field of citizens' participation will not be possible without changes in legislation. The conditions of citizens' participation need to be improved and enhanced in all stages of the urban development process. This should generate a more balanced power for all potential actors interested in urban development, including those with a preference for socially sustainable values.

Urban development strategy in Bratislava can be considered as development-oriented, very friendly to private initiatives, with local institutions having an entrepreneurial approach to new development. Crucial institutions, documents and politicians have presented a high level of understanding to any new development, manifesting the image of Bratislava as an investor-friendly city. In this respect, the city government has a leading role. Such a strategy has been partly caused by an unprepared regulatory and planning framework and a need for investment. Development expansion has preceded the formation of a regulatory framework. Under such conditions any development idea has been possible to carry out and prevention has not been easy. Nevertheless, it seems that a 'transitional' – more liberal, pro-business approach is now being replaced by a more elaborated and stable development framework and policy, offering a more transparent developmental environment. As it is confirmed by our case studies, the future character of the physical environment of Bratislava will probably balance between modernist and conservation-oriented approaches. This can be supported by the restitution of the praxis of a leading and respected City Chief Architect again, after fifteen years. Such an authority has been strongly missing, and it especially did so during the earlier transitional conditions. A selection process to find the right expert started in 2005.

The role of participation in planning and managing urban development in Bratislava reflects the situation of societies under democratic transition. Citizens and interest groups are demanding the right to effective objection or appeal if a policy is damaging their individual or group interests. Our case studies confirm that the position of non-statutory actors (their rights are mentioned by legislation) in participation is inadequate and undervalued. Planning is still managed as a rather elitist practice, with a leading role for professionals (especially architects, urbanists) and local politicians, often linked to commercial developers. Citizens' initiatives, NGOs, CBOs are considered to be rather passive than active

partners. Sometimes it has not been easy to achieve even a limited level of participation, characterised by informing, consultation, or public hearing. A more ambitious and equal direct partnership or advisory role of such actors in urban development is absent in Bratislava. Judging from the attempts to reach compromise solutions in both our case studies, there is a potential in Bratislava for more participatory planning practices. They prove the existence of a certain level of tolerance and sensitivity to 'sense of place' and sustainability values.

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