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## Urbanisation History of Slovenia in the Context of Eastern and South-Eastern European Countries

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### Abstract

Compared to industrially well-developed western European countries, which after the Second World War experienced intense growth of urban population, Slovenian urban system marked a distinctive form of polycentric development supported by specific political decisions. The diminishment of agricultural activities i.e. deagrarisation, was not followed by intense migration to urban areas and could be better described as moderate growth of urban population. After the change of political system in 1991 and introduction of free-market conditions, the socio-economic restrictions that directed urban development suddenly disappeared. The processes of urbanisation intensified and supported the fast economic development of Slovenia. The fast upgrade of the highway network triggered intensive automobilisation processes that fuelled urban sprawl and influenced various groups of people and economic activities to move from the previous locations in the city centres. Consequences of these processes are seen in the start of gentrification process, expansion of suburban consumption spaces and change in the role of city centres.

**Keywords:** urban sprawl, automobilisation, revitalisation, spatial values, consumption spaces

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### 1. Introduction

In the paper, we give an overview of the specifics of the Slovene urbanization process and provide comparisons with the experiences of other countries from Central, Eastern Europe and in Europe in general. Through a social analysis we attempt to make a cause-effect connection between Slovene socio-spatial dynamics and connect them to the general trends of population and economic suburbanization that influence the quality of life in cities.

Although socialist modernization after the Second World War brought relatively rapid industrialization to Slovenia, those processes had only few of the characteristic consequences on urbanization. The Slovene urban system never achieved a level of high urbanization; in fact, a short period of growth of the concentration of people and capital in urbanized areas was followed by a slowing of the growth of the urban population. The reasons originate in a specific lack i.e. incoherence between a relatively high level of economic development and a low level of urbanization. That is to say, Slovenia was the most developed of the Yugoslav republics and the most economically developed area in socialist central and Eastern Europe.

The standard of living during this period was the highest among all of the Yugoslav republics and also among all of the socialist countries of Europe. Nevertheless, this economic success was never 'translated' into higher level of urbanization, which proved to be one of the specific characteristics of Slovenia and influenced the already dispersed system of settlements.

The national register from 1991 (2004) shows that small settlements are prevalent in confront to densely populated areas (more than 50 % of settlements have less than 100 people, 10 % of settlements have more than 500 people and only 15 % more than 10.000 (in this areas lives more than one third of the population)). In the last 10 years the processes of dispersed suburbanization continued and evolved. The number of population in suburban areas that gravitate to bigger urban centres has increased. The analyses show that more than 62 % (1.230.000) of all Slovenian population lives inside the two-kilometer gravitation belt from the local urban center. Around 23 % of population lives in 2-5 kilometre gravitation belt and 15 % of Slovenian people live in an area, which is more than 5 kilometres distant from the local city center.

Due to the history of restrained i.e. unfinished urbanisation, the Slovenian urban system now faces intense suburbanisation process, which poses a challenge (or even threat) to the future development of cities and a sustainable urban structure. Slovenia, with its 20.256 km<sup>2</sup>, has more than 6000 settlements and small-inhabited areas. The process of dispersed suburbanisation continued during the 1990s. This can be observed in the increase in the number of dwellings in detached houses (especially in suburban areas of big cities) and, at the same time, as the number of multi-dwelling buildings (representing from the ecological point of view a more sustainable urban form), decreased in relative terms. The paper shows that the transition period affected the Slovenian urban system by simultaneously increasing the importance of specific transport infrastructure (automobilisation) and diminishing the role of city centres and the capacity to develop sustainable housing. Enhanced automobile accessibility of the extended Ljubljana periphery represents an attractive compromise between the benefits of urban (e.g. employment and urban services) and the benefits of rural areas (e.g. good natural amenities). The increasing number of people, who would like to live the urban way of life and have better access to natural areas could be a positive trend when carefully combined with strategic spatial planning based on development of the whole urban region. Otherwise, enhanced accessibility could act as a support to negative suburbanisation trend and help to increase the dispersion of small settlements across the country.

## 2. Short history of Slovenian urbanisation

While industrialization was crucial to the intensive urbanization in other European countries and the USA at the end of the 19th century, in Slovenia, at that time a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it proceeded much less intensively. The slow growth of industry was also reflected in the slow growth of the urban population. The level of urbanization in Slovenia in 1869 was only 13.6 percent, in 1880 about 15 percent, in 1890 about 15.6 percent and at the turn of the century in 1900 only 17.5 percent (Klemenčič, 2001: 10).

The slow growth of the urban population was also influenced by the poor “urban foundation” (small number of towns<sup>1</sup> and low level of urbanization before the beginning of industrialization), which obstructed better harmonization of the processes of industrialization with those of urbanization, as was characteristic of other economically developed countries in Europe. The smaller number of towns and small urban population also meant a lower critical mass of entrepreneurs, tradesmen and other economic sectors which could cooperate in the accumulation of capital and the preparations for industrial urbanization. Even during the first wave of industrialism after the First World War, major growth of the urban population never occurred in Slovenia due to delays in the preparation of the conditions for industrialization.<sup>2</sup>

Novak (1991) explains that Slovenia in the period up to the Second World War formed its own important industrial capacities, but only as one of the typical early latecomers to industrialization. Owing to its peripheral role within the Habsburg Empire, Slovenia was late in forming the conditions which would have allowed faster economic growth and urbanization. The process of the gradual forming of the conditions for the first wave of industrialization, which occurred during the period between the two world wars, began relatively late with the land reforms of 1848, when Slovene farmers gained the right to hold title to their own land. The acquiring of the partial self-sufficiency of the inhabitants and the acquisition of the land enabled the independent provision of the basic living conditions. This was also supposed to gradually make possible the concentration of capital and investment in various branches of industry. However, the processes of formation of the preconditions for industrialization were not arrived at through the accumulation of Slovene capital, but through the investment of foreign capital, which was invested only in particularly profitable branches. This led to the development of individual areas, or so-called “enclave industrialization” (Novak, 1991: 132), while Slovenia as a whole lagged behind.

The slow development of the national economy had a significant effect on the processes of industrialization and the spatial development of Slovenia. The low level of urbanization and the relatively slow development of industry in comparison with other European countries partially affected the need to form specific development policies in the period after the Second World War. Normative socialist policies were intended to stimulate the development of industry and accelerate the spatial development of the country.

**Table 1.** Percent of urban population in some countries of Eastern Europe in 1992 and urban change since 1930s (pre-war)

State	Pre-war	c.1992	Rank
Albania	15,4 (1938)	35,0	12
Bulgaria	21,4 (1934)	66,0	3
Czechoslovakia (old)	38,9 (1930)	72,2	
Czech Republic		75,2	1
Slovakia		69,2	2
Hungary	33,2 (1930)	59,0	5
Poland	37,3 (1939)	60,9	4

<sup>1</sup> Only 31 towns were recognized by the authorities during the period between the wars (Lah, 1999: 14).

<sup>2</sup> The level of the urban population in 1931 was 22.7 percent.

Romania	21,4 (1930)	54,4	6
Yugoslavia (old)	13,2 (1931)	47,5	
Bosnia/Herzegovina		34,2	13
Croatia		50,8	8
Macedonia		53,9	7
Slovenia	22,7 (1931)	48,9	10
Montenegro		50,7	9
Serbia		46,5	11

Sources: United Centre for Human Settlements (1996) *An urbanising world*, Oxford, Oxford University Press;  
Paccione M. (2001) *Urban Geography*, London, Routledge.

Socialist countries partially succeeded in stimulating the growth of the urban population through the application of specific spatial policies, but in the majority of cases it never reached the level of western countries. This is also shown in a comparison of the differences between the levels of urbanization among various socialist countries and countries with market economies, where a noticeable gap in urbanization appeared between the western capitalist societies and the post-socialist societies (Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 2.** Percentage of urban population in some countries of Western (c.1990) and Eastern Europe (c.1992)

State	c. 1990, 1992
Belgium	96,5
France	72,7
Germany	85,3
The Netherlands	88,7
Switzerland	59,5
Austria	55,4
Italy	66,7
United Kingdom	89,1
Bulgaria	66,0
Czech Republic	75,2
Slovakia	69,2
Hungary	59,0
Poland	60,9
Romania	54,4
Croatia	50,8
Macedonia	53,9
Montenegro	50,7
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>48,9</b>

Sources: United Centre for Human Settlements (1996) *An urbanising world*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Paccione, M. (2001) *Urban Geography*, London, Routledge.

Klemenčič, V. (2001) "Processes of Deagrarization and urbanization of Slovene Rural Areas", in Klemenčič, M. (ed.) *Rural Areas at the Millennium Shift: Challenges and Problems*, pp. 7-17.

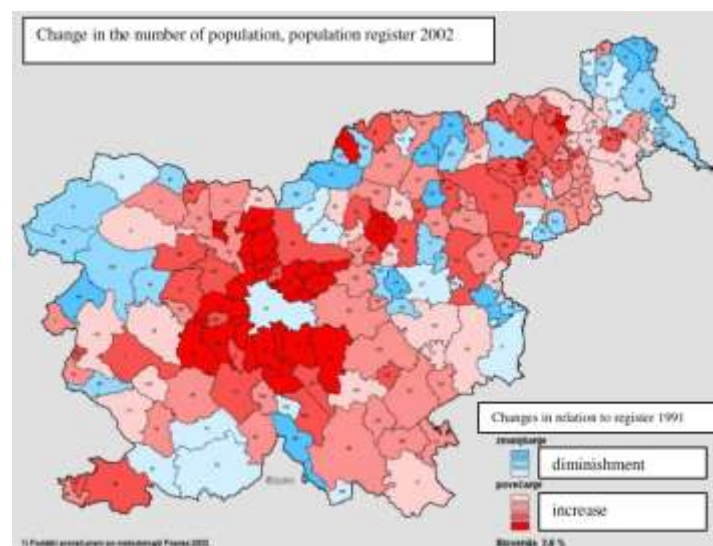
Despite the processes of 'socialistic modernisation' (e.g. big urban plans, construction of large areas with blocks of flats) the Slovenian urban system never reached the level of high urbanisation (characteristic for western countries), but what happened was that after a short period of moderate increase in concentration of people and capital in urban areas followed a processes of deurbanisation and migration of people and capital out of big urban areas. Because of interference, intentional obstruction of processes

of 'spontaneous urbanisation'<sup>3</sup> in the sixties and seventies, the Slovenian urban system developed without i.e. by missing the phase of intense urbanisation. After the exchange of political systems (proclamation of Slovenian independency in 1991) and transition to market economy, the processes of spontaneous, uncontrolled (sub)urbanisation resuscitated. These processes are because of the missing phase in the development of Slovenian urban system especially vivid and powerful in the last decade and are directing the urban system into a new hierarchical structure.

### 3. Transformation of Slovenian Urban System after 1991

Despite the relatively low rate of growth of the urban population, during the socialist era Slovenia managed to maintain a relatively high level of economic development, but after the changing of the political system and the transition to a market economy the first negative consequences began to appear, which were the result of the specific type of spatial development. These are mainly processes of dispersed suburbanization and the transfer of economic activities outside of large town centers. With the rapid construction of new infrastructure networks (motorways, telecommunications etc.) the Slovene authorities are attempting to compensate for deficiencies which are the results of the negative effects of the particularities of the spatial development.

The modernization of the infrastructure systems in Slovenia has led to major discrepancies between aspirations towards the fast economic development of the country and the practical consequences of their actual implementation. The accelerated construction of the motorway infrastructure, which in addition to reducing the travelling time between Slovene towns also accelerates the process of dispersed suburbanization, provides a suitable illustration of these discrepancies (picture 1).



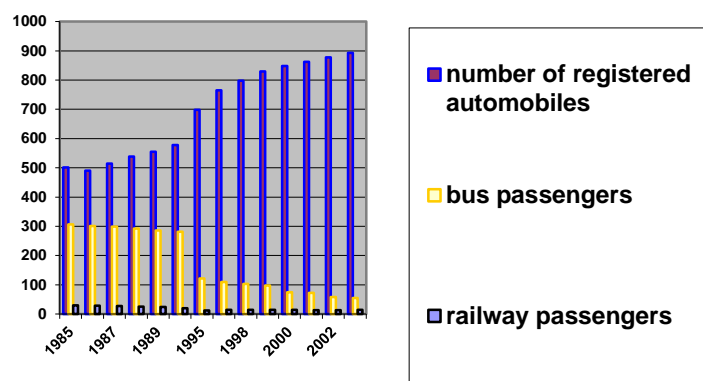
Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2003) *2002 Population Census*, Ljubljana, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

**Figure 1.**

The changes in the number of population comparing national population registers from 2002 and 1991

<sup>3</sup> Spontaneous urbanisation in the sense of spontaneous flow of goods, people, capital into cities, until it reaches the level of satiety, satiation and the available space cannot support any new pressure.

We can see that the number of population in the central area of Ljubljana is in decrease comparing to surrounding suburban areas. Process of suburbanization was in the period after 1991 mainly fuelled by the construction of automobile infrastructure systems i.e. highways and roads. In order to ensure support for faster economic development, Slovenia has been obliged to upgrade its traffic network as other post-socialistic countries. Due to various reasons (e.g. the morphologic structure of the Slovenian territory, dispersed settlements, limited economic resources), the development of highway infrastructure appeared to be the fastest, cheapest and easiest way to assure a relatively good traffic network. For this reasons, the majority of the state funds were directed towards the modernisation of road infrastructure while the other transport infrastructures received considerably lower economic support. The formation of such a traffic network enabled economic growth but also encouraged private transport, although a relatively small proportion of public transport users remained (graph 1). The improvement of road infrastructure favoured the use of motorized transport and stimulated urban sprawl, affected the environment and influenced the degradation of particular areas in the spatial system. It seems that "automobility" (Urry, 1991: 1) i.e. patterns of socio-cultural behaviour dependent on car transport nowadays in Slovenia represent one of the most common elements of social action, and contrary to all spatial plans, most profoundly influence the spatial development.



Source: (2003). Statistical yearbook of Slovenia 2003. Ljubljana, Statistical Institute of Slovenia.

**Graph 1.**

Number of registered automobiles, bus and railway passengers (in thousands)

In this context, the development of individual transport system based on automobiles also proved to be an indispensable element for the quick development of suburban consumption areas in Ljubljana. Such transport scheme gave priority to individual, automobile transport compared to public transport (see data in Graph 1) and supported the rise of consumption areas on the edges of Ljubljana. In this sense, Kalbermatten notes the extreme importance of urban services in transition countries: "In the absence of effective regulation (a real risk in most developing countries), privatisation is likely to result in efficiency gains and better service for those who already have service or who can afford to get connected to the existing system." (1999: 15).

With the liberalization of economy and by giving priority to individual transport system, the state plans were based mainly on short-term economic development goals. Instead of a more holistic approach which includes the promotion of long-term socio-economic developmental goals, the negative effects of the short-term economic logic in urban planning can be already noticed in the intense transformation of urban

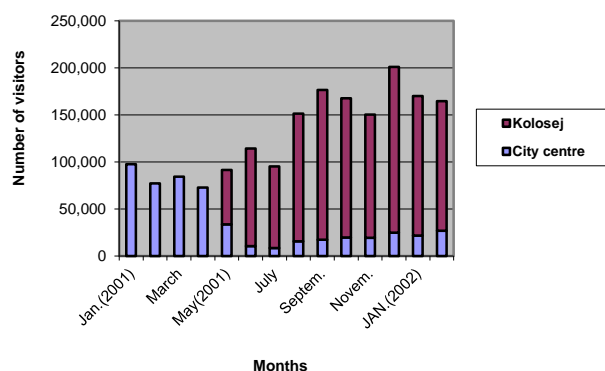


areas, which are not suitable for automobile transport (e.g. historic city centres with condensed urban structure) and prospering of peripheral areas that are well adapted to the new highway system.

### 3.1 Transformation of consumption spaces in Ljubljana after 1991

As majority of the European cities, Ljubljana has its old, historic city centre and a relatively new part of the city, which in great deal developed during the post-war period. The main characteristic of the city centre is its historic built structure protected not only by the law, but also by the public opinion of the majority of Ljubljana citizens<sup>4</sup>. Because of its unique ambiental structure, the city centre was especially attractive for commerce in the old days. However, the city centre is nowadays surrounded by the new, spread part of the city, which majority of residents define as a historically less important part of the city and thus enjoys lower level of legal and public protection. This part of the city in the physical sense experienced the largest transformation of its environment in the last period. The uncontrolled development of consumption spaces in Slovenia and particularly in Ljubljana has caused big structural changes in both central and peripheral urban areas. Similarly, to the United States in the 1960s and Western Europe in 1970s and 1980s, the spontaneous emergence and construction of larger consumption centres, i.e. shopping malls on the edges of the city, influenced the vulnerable social fabric of Ljubljana.

Large consumption areas emerged on spaces, which were once utilized by other services and industries that during the transition period experienced strong decline in activities. These brown fields and abandoned industrial spaces were soon occupied by other economic activities, including shopping, which proved to be one of the most propulsive economic fields. New shopping malls were extremely successful even due to the fact that they emerged on spaces that lacked ambiental or architectural quality and were not planned for such type of activities.



Source: (2002) Cinema Ticket office – Report, Ljubljana, Ljubljana Cinemas d.d. and Kolosej Cinemas d.o.o.

**Graph 2.**

The gap in the number of cinema visitors per month; comparison of Ljubljana city centre and multiplex cinema Kolosej in BTC (period from January 2001 to February 2002)

<sup>4</sup> For example, public opinion research carried out in 1993 by Pavle Gantar and Drago Kos showed that strong majority of respondents in the city centre expressed negative opinion about putting a new, modernistic fountain in the old part of the city.

The surface of commercial areas extended from 0.39 square meter per inhabitant in 1986 to 1.21 square meter in 2000 and even to 1.3 square meter in 2001<sup>5</sup>. This increase, surpassing 200 %, did not result in the higher number of diversified small shops in the city centre but was the result of emergent new consumption areas on the edges of the city. New spaces of consumption have in this period succeeded to extend not only the offer of their shopping facilities but also the offer of free time activities. Shopping malls in this sense transformed into multifunctional commercial areas that began to take over functions which were once characteristics of the city centre. This situation is evident from the data that show a decrease in the number of cinema visitors in cities like Kranj<sup>6</sup> (approximately 20 km from Ljubljana) and Ljubljana city centre after the opening of multiplex cinema complex Kolosej (opened in May 2001), which is located in BTC (Graph 2).

Graph 2 shows that before the opening of Kolosej multiplex the number of cinema visitors in the city centre of Ljubljana was relatively high (between 80,000 to 100,000 visitors per month). After the opening of multiplex the number of cinema visitors in the city centre suddenly dropped. The data show that after the opening of Kolosej, more than 90 % of cinema visitors moved to the biggest Slovenian commercial centre BTC located at the edges of the city. This situation can be mainly explained by poor utilisation of traffic (ineffective public transport) infrastructure and inadequate city centre revitalisation strategy which was not suited for the circumstances of free-market economy. The Ljubljana city centre in this period lacked appropriate strategic development programme. In circumstances of spontaneous market competitiveness, the revitalisation of Ljubljana city centre should have been based on a more integrative revitalisation strategy which does not exclude economically less profitable but socially important consumption spaces, local establishments and public services that constitute the 'urbanity' in the city.

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the most important services in the city centre represents an effective public transport, which provides good accessibility for potential consumers. Contrary to this idea, by improving only specific transport infrastructure (highways and roads) in the post-socialist period, the authorities are now faced with a problem of growing number of automobile users.

The intensive automobilisation of the Slovenian population produced the effect of »automobile consumers«, which use their automobile for all kinds of everyday activities. Any possible development of urbanity and spaces of consumption in the centre of Ljubljana is momentarily blocked by high dependency upon personal vehicles. Due to the reason that Ljubljana does not have any efficient alternative means of public transport, a large number of people decided to change the routine of their everyday activities. They adapted to new circumstances that stimulated the usage of individual means of transport. The consumers adjusted their spatio-temporal paths in order to avoid the traffic congestions, problems with parking places, smaller offer and other problems, connected with the transport of purchased goods in the city centre. Existent traffic conditions generated a context in which consumers acted rationally and responded to unregulated traffic conditions with a shift in location of consumption. The success of new consumption areas in Ljubljana represents a typical example of consumers' reaction to disordered traffic conditions. The

<sup>5</sup> Daily Newspaper (Dnevnik), date: 2.2.2001. Available on <http://www.dnevnik.si/iskanje.asp> (25.3.2002).

<sup>6</sup> The numbers show that after the opening of multicinema complex Kolosej (May 2001), the number of cinema visitors in Kranj decreased for 13.4 % (Source: Commercial Report 2001 (Poslovno poročilo za leto 2001 - komercialni del) Kranj, Kinopodjetje Kranj d.o.o.). Kranj used to have the third largest cinema audience in the country (after Ljubljana and Maribor) but in 2002 fell to the fourth place due to the diminishment of cinema audience in 2001 (Ursic, 2003).



multifunctional consumption centre BTC offered contextual facilities to the traffic problems that appeared in the city centre. By taking advantage of problems in the city centre, suburban consumption spaces diverted the flows of consumers out from the city centre to areas where larger number of free parking places, easy access to highways, large shopping and amusement spaces were available for the costumers.

The case of cinema visitors implies that people found new ways to satisfy their needs for shopping, amusement, relaxation and have organized their everyday time-space geographies around the usage of automobile transport. In this context automobility indeed provides individuals with a relative sense of freedom with personal transport always being at their disposal. On the other hand automobility actually diminishes accessibility to specific spaces in the city. In fact, automobility supports “time-space distancing” (Giddens, 1984: 171) that enables separation of social interactions from material, physical presence and simultaneously increases distances between particular nodes in the spatial system. For the automobile users the distances between the places of work and residence. Simultaneously, general accessibility to urban services, such as hospitals, kinder-gardens, schools and spaces of consumption considerably diminish.

The increasing number of automobile consumers in consumption areas at the edges of the city raises a question whether the shift in location of consumption really affects the urban functioning in a negative way or only represents the addition that enriches the urban structure of a post-socialist city. The embededness of individual transport system in Ljubljana has had large effects on the functioning of the city centre, which in the last period importantly transformed its structure of economic activities. On the short-term basis, the intensification of automobile flows indeed increased the level of economic capital in the city but at the same time the city gradually lost its long-term advantages that would be brought by the development of an efficient public transport system. Besides the diminishment of offer in the city centre, other long-term negative effects of automobilisation also include ecological damage from excessive automobile usage and urban sprawl. Another problem represents the degradation of small towns, local urban centres that lie in the proximity of peripheral consumption centres. The case of multiplex cinema complex Kolosej, which is located in consumption centre BTC shows that the new “edge cities” (Garreau, 1991) attract and redirect the flows of consumers not only out from the city centre of Ljubljana but also from the nearby cities like Kranj.

To conclude, the processes that lead toward the increasing in of suburban consumption areas, edge cities and a number of small settlements, residential areas in the vicinities of larger cities cannot be preliminarily defined as a negative aspect as long as they supports the urban structure of the territory. The increasing number of people, who would like to live the suburban way of life and at the same time have good access to shopping, cinema, excellent natural conditions, could be a positive trend when carefully combined and followed by a strategic spatial development activity that is based on the development of the whole region. In other case, it could act as a supporter of negative suburbanisation trend and increase the dispersion of small settlements across the whole region. In this sense, suburbanisation trends would be described as a negative trend, which has extremely unfavourable effects on the spatial development of the region and causes big damage to environment and numerous city centres in the urban region.

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