

# Different Aspects of Slum Improvement Problems

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of “The Slum Upgrading at Deponija Gypsy Enclave” project is to improve living conditions for the people situated in a devastated surrounding, through instigation of environmental, social and economic programs. The inhabitants of the studied settlement are the Gypsies (Rroma), part of the ethnic minority which in most cases falls within the poor and socially vulnerable categories of population. Up to 80% of the Rroma population lives in poor enclaves, such as slums and unsanitary settlements, often with no basic infrastructure or utilities and in improvised homes<sup>1</sup>.

Efforts in finding solution to the actual problem involved different stakeholders and at the same time raised many questions which are left unanswered and open (lack of social housing policies, inadequate legislation, lack of social housing standards and norms, lack of precise figures for socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups). The search for solutions was conducted step by step, with gradual introduction of the stakeholders, all in purpose of finding the most flexible solutions to fit within the present legal framework.

The fact remains that the social housing issue in Serbia was given almost no significance in the last decade. In circumstances of drastic pauperization and deprivation, where over 50% of population is categorized as poor, this issue expands to a larger scale<sup>2</sup>.

This specific project was one of the first to adopt the integrated approach to the solving of social problems. It allows interdisciplinary and sectarian cooperation, urgent problem solving and improvement of life conditions. In recent months this issue has been approached from different levels (regional social cohesion of the Southeast European countries, national housing policy<sup>3</sup>, social housing policy, national strategy for permanent integration of the

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<sup>1</sup> (K.Petovar, Belgrade Consultation on "Making Cities Inclusive", 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Presently in Yugoslavia there is a number of socially disadvantaged groups with flimsy prospects of providing themselves a decent housing. Within the risk groups are mainly: young persons, young families on low income, families with more children, refugees, internally displaced persons, Gypsies, single mothers, physically and mentally handicapped, old people and other socially vulnerable categories.

<sup>3</sup> In present terms of drastic impoverishment of citizens, the housing policy that will primarily and solely have a social component can't be efficient more just. Housing policy and housing program support need to put emphasis on development. It includes endorsing regional development and weakening of the pressure of immigrants on the big cities where living costs are much higher, and support or even favoring of housing programs for young and educated, as bearers of development programs

refugees<sup>4</sup>, harmonization of the regulations, strengthening of institutions, capacity building on national and local levels, attaining mechanisms and financial framework). Various international organizations are currently present in Yugoslavia offering their expert assistance in this field through donors.

This project represents one of the possible ways of consideration of social housing issues as well as an example of good project management.

## **2. THE “DEPONIJA“ PROJECT**

“Slum Upgrading Project at “Deponija” Gypsy Enclave: Legalisation, Education, Economy, Housing, Environment, Women Program, Local Community” has been initiated in October 2000, with financial assistance of the European Commission, NOVIB and UNICEF. The Project is being implemented by the Society for the Improvement of Local Roma Communities (SILRC) together with partner organizations: Humanitarian Association “Roma Heart” and Roma Women’s Center “Bibija”. The project also involved other institutions and companies as participants: The City Assembly, local municipality, City public and communal companies, schools and health institutions.

The main objective of this project is to help the Gypsies, dwellers of the illegal slum called Deponija (characteristic for it’s depressing appearance and hopeless development prospects), create an enclave which would enable them to satisfy their basic needs in a modest and dignified way. The goal is to raise the quality of these people’s lives, clarify their legal status, and help them integrate into the urban system and structure. It is all about making an effort in order to provide these people with certainty of achieving their basic human and civil rights.

### **2.1 The “Deponija“ settlement and its problems**

The Deponija is comprised of five or six settlements that emerged on the banks of the Danube River in 1970s on the site for one of Belgrade’s garbage dumps. Today it is part of the industrial zone in which construction factories and gravel storage are located. The Roma settlement grew simultaneously with the development of the industrial and public utility area on the land allotted to the Port Authority and the Customs Free Zone and expanded with the sudden arrival of Gypsy refugees from Kosovo in recent years. The living conditions can be described as in the worst of slums: no running water, no basic infrastructure, extremely unhygienic conditions, flimsy houses made of anything that came in handy. Families live in cramped hovels mixed with refuse, most of them without electricity.

The legal position of these people is not quite clear, their settlement is scheduled to be torn down but no one knows when this will happen. Deponija is one of the harshest slums and one of the worst of the 150 Roma settlements located in Belgrade. The Project focuses on giving these people and their settlement adequate treatment.

### **2.2 Housing Area / Construction Activities**

Given all the facts, the slum improvement model which incorporates it’s legalization and complete sanitation could not be successfully implemented at this point. The term *legalization*

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and quality changes in social, economic and cultural progress in countries in transition.(K.Petovar, Belgrade Consultation on "Making Cities Inclusive", 2002)

<sup>4</sup> According to the last census there is 700.000 exiled, war stricken and displaced persons (around 10% of the domicile population of Serbia), who fled to Yugoslavia due to wars, exodus and discrimination. (National Strategy for resolving issues of exiled, expelled and displaced persons, The Government of the Republic of Serbia, UNCHR, Institute for Economy, 2002)

was used here as a framework for improvement of the legal status of the inhabitants and initiating the process of attaining the permanent status of the enclave.



*Roma settlement Deponija is a part of the Danube industrial zone. Settlement grew in between construction factories, and today some 170 families live in it.*

Various social activities (registration of the dwellers, employment, education) are followed by a set of environmental programs: cleaning of the homesteads and common grounds, remodeling of the enclave, construction of a hygienic unit and communal multipurpose space.

The problem of building on someone else's land was overcome by a special Protocol between the City and SILRC. It required houses to be made of light / detachable parts or units, on provisional foundations, so that it can all be eventually moved and relocated to a permanent location.

During the design and the building phases, two different methods have been used: one applied to family homes and another to houses intended for public / common use. Present homes don't meet the minimum standards and conditions for living, so their partial sanitation is not technically possible. The project plans for construction of three houses for the families that need them most. Those are groundfloor, simply constructed houses, built of ecological and cheap material, with their function adapted to the Gypsy way of life. The area of 50 square meters should accommodate 6 to 7 family members, with possibilities of further "house developing" and phased construction. This would of course depend on a financial capacity of the users. Each house is equipped with basic utilities (water, sewage, electricity). The building of the houses would also represent a form of training for the enclave members, who will take part along with professional craftsmen.

As for the multipurpose building, it was approached from a completely different direction. It is intended for gathering of people (especially children) and different activities and community programs. Even though this is an extremely poor settlement, the idea was to build a future central building (nucleus) of the enclave, provided with the best possible features. In terms of architecture, construction and materials and equipment used, it meets high modern standards.

### **3. THE POSSIBILITIES OF LEGALIZATION**

All analysis made within the Project (analysis of the Deponija environment, analysis of the existing urban planning documents, architectural assessment, analysis of the needs and intentions of other stakeholders interested in the Deponija location) point out that the

legalization of the settlement is hardly feasible. This called for the search of alternative solutions within the present legal framework.

Alternative ways of legalization:

- I. Request to legalize a facility – the illegal construction is not in accordance with the planned use. There are little chances that a building permit will be issued upon such a request. No data are available as to whether the Commission (municipal) has made an inventory of facilities and noted whether conditions are fulfilled for a building permit or usage permit to be issued,
- II. Request to issue a temporary permit – the arguments for approving a request to issue a building permit to house socially handicapped persons are: to temporarily provide hygienic conditions for housing, to improve the conditions under which the space is used; the manner and scope of work will not be an obstacle when the space is used for its planned purpose,
- III. Request for housing for socially handicapped and displaced persons from Kosovo – since a number of families in Deponija (around 60) are displaced from Kosovo, it is possible to try the procedure of building apartments/houses (or some other form of individual or collective housing) on a new location(s) in order to provide them permanent housing,
- IV. Request to build apartments/houses to accommodate socially handicapped individuals – solidarity housing or housing for socially handicapped individuals, if there is a Solidarity Fund with resources to provide for the construction of these apartments, establish priorities, etc.

Here we would propose the best procedure as being the one already initiated which is not to legalize<sup>5</sup> in the formal sense but to receive permits for the temporary use of the facilities, until the land is used for its planned purpose, and pursue the provisions of the Law on Planning and Developing Space and Settlements, the Building Law, and the Land Use Law. Work can also be undertaken on proposals III and IV parallel with this procedure.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Social housing issues are becoming one of the priorities of the overall social policy. The “Deponija“ case study came to the following conclusions:

##### **There is a need for:**

- National Housing Policy and legal reform,
- Further institutional reform within the housing sector which strenghtens housing finance and subsidy regimes, so that affordable and adequate housing is available to all vulnerable groups,
- Developping strategies to make land available for development and growth,
- Strengthening urban planning and financing mechanisms to be more responsive, efficient and effective in order to realize social housing programs,
- Institutional reform (new types of social housing organizations which provide affordable housing, improving strategies for targeting service programs and housing for social groups),

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of legalization is used in the sense of elaborating and obtaining proper documentation in order to receive a building permit for a temporary building

- Building a shared body of knowledge and training methodologies (refined technical tools, revision of existing norms, standards and recommendations in respect of specific social, environmental and financial needs and possibilities),
- Developing mechanisms and institutions for housing financing, including micro-finance, especially for poor and vulnerable groups,
- Giving priority to building of the low cost, standard, “developing“ houses in accordance with the needs and aspirations of users,
- Developing means for incorporating users’ initiative and direct work participation in building their own homes.

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