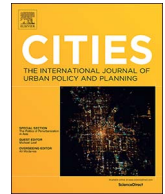


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The quality of integrated urban strategies in light of the Europe 2020 strategy: The case of Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

European Strategy 2020, a series of priorities and initiatives that will transform the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, with high rates of employment, productivity and social cohesion, recognized cities as units crucial for social, cultural and economic progress and sparked the development of new integrated urban strategies (IUSs) across the EU. By the end of 2016, 11 Slovenian cities had developed and ratified their own strategic plans in order to manage their urban development. We analyzed the content of the IUSs and supporting documents of Slovenian cities in order to evaluate the quality of IUSs in terms of empirical groundedness, logical consistency and structure and to assess the conformity of these documents with Europe 2020 strategy and national guidelines. Our results show that the IUSs of Slovenian cities are generally of low quality and that they conform to the Europe 2020 strategy poorly, but rather more to national guidelines defined by the Slovenian government. The implications of these findings for EU policy in the area of urban development are discussed.

1. Introduction

On March 3rd, 2010, the European Commission (EC) issued a document entitled *Europe 2020: a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (EC, 2020). The aim of the document was to reflect on major issues facing the European Union (EU) and to introduce a series of priorities that would eventually result in smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and prepare member states for challenges of the 21st century, in particular, those concerning economic progress, environmental protection and social cohesion (Martens, 2010). The document had a number of implications for all member states, for their role is to “/.../translate the strategy’s broad objectives into concrete policies that relate to their needs and capabilities” (Martens 2010: 1). In addition, European cities were conceptualized as a major vehicle of progress and future development (Martens, 2010; Drumaux and Ravet, 2016). For EU members, the document also presented an imperative and formal basis for cities to develop their own IUSs.

Many publications clearly show the importance of revision and analysis of existing urban strategies in both European (see Zovanyi, 1987; Savitch and Kantor, 2003; Erixon, 2010; Çolak and Ege, 2011; Drumaux and Ravet, 2016) and non-European contexts (see Pieterse, 2005; Lo 1987, 2013; Drumaux and Ravet, 2016) as a basis for complete understanding of planned actions and expected outcomes of these strategies. The importance of revision and analysis becomes even more

obvious if we take into account recognition of strategy as a theoretical and/or managerial framework with the potential (if not actual) capability to address the concerns of modern cities (Zukin, 2007; Kornberger, 2012; Drumaux and Ravet, 2016). Apart from affecting the management of the city itself, these strategies enhance local governmental influence, stimulate local democracies, and impact citizens on a micro level in many other ways, they also influence the relationships between cities, and therefore have the power to impact an entire state or region (Savitch and Kantor, 2003; Kornberger and Carter, 2010; Çolak and Ege, 2011).

This article will analyze IUSs and supporting documents, including annexes and analysis reports, for 11 Slovenian cities in order to assess the conformity of these documents with European Strategy 2020 and national guidelines and outline their impact on Slovenia urban development.

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2. From European strategy 2020 to IUSs

The *European Strategy 2020* (EC, 2010) is a core document for our analysis, for it presents a formal basis and basic frame of direction for and content of all IUSs developed and ratified by Slovenian cities between 2015 and 2016. As a basic strategic document, *European Strategy*

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2020 can be regarded as a series of priorities, initiatives and actions that will provide the EU with a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, with high rates of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The three main ingredients of the strategy are *smart growth*, based on economic development through knowledge and innovations, *sustainable growth*, based on efficient use of resources, and *inclusive growth*, based on high-employment, thus ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The strategy also encompasses the following goals of the EC (2010): 5–10):

- 75% employment rate (for population between 20 and 64),
- 3% of GDP invested into research and development,
- 20% reduction of green house gases, 20% renewable energy sources and 20% increase of efficiency in energy consumption,
- optimization of education,
- 25% drop in the EU population living below national poverty lines.

The intersections of these themes and issues are structured into 7 initiatives that bind member states to specific actions on a national level:

- Initiative 1 (segment Smart growth): *Innovation Union*, aims to “refocus R & D and innovation policy on the challenges facing our society, such as climate change, energy and resource efficiency, health and demographic change” (EC, 2010: 10). This initiative calls on EU members states to reform national/regional R & D and innovation systems, develop smart specialization, reinforce cooperation between universities, research and business and focus on cross-border co-operation across the EU territory. In addition, member states should modify their national education systems in order to assure a specialized cadre of trained workers and to prioritize knowledge expenditure in promoting private R & D investments.
- Initiative 2 (segment Smart growth): *Youth on the Move*, focuses on “the performance and international attractiveness of Europe’s higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity, by promoting student mobility and trainees’ mobility, and improve the employment situation of young people” (EC, 2010: 10). According to this initiative, member states should focus on efficient investment in national education and training systems, improve educational outcomes and support young people entering the labour market.
- Initiative 3 (segment Smart growth): *A Digital Agenda for Europe*, aims to deliver “sustainable economic and social benefits from a Digital Single Market based on fast and ultra fast internet and interoperable applications, with broadband access for all by 2013, access for all to much higher internet speeds (30 Mbps or above) by 2020, and 50% or more of European households subscribing to internet connections above 100 Mbps” (EC, 2010: 12). Member states are expected to form operational strategies and a legal framework for high speed internet and promote modern online services such as developing e-government.
- Initiative 4 (segment Sustainable growth): *Resource Efficient Europe*, aims to “support the shift towards a resource efficient and low-carbon economy that is efficient in the way it uses all resources” (EC, 2010: 12). Member states should develop smart, upgraded and interconnected systems, including infrastructure, transport, ICT and energy use, in order to raise energy and resource efficiency.
- Initiative 5 (segment Sustainable growth): *An industrial policy for the globalisation era*, focuses on the development of a “framework for a modern industrial policy, to support entrepreneurship, to guide and help industry to become fit to meet these challenges, to promote the competitiveness of Europe’s primary, manufacturing and service industries and help them seize the opportunities of globalisation and of the green economy” (EC, 2010: 15). Member states are required

to improve the business environment and conditions for enforcing intellectual property, improve business legislation, identify bottlenecks, all in order to put the EU into the lead in global sustainable development.

- Initiative 6 (segment Inclusive growth): *An Agenda for new skills and jobs*, aims to “create conditions for modernising labour markets with a view to raising employment levels and ensuring the sustainability of our social models” (EC, 2010: 16–17). Member states need to reduce labour market segmentation, reconcile work and family life, monitor the efficiency of tax and benefit systems, encourage self-employment, promote new forms of work-life balance and active ageing policies, increase gender equality, promote social dialogue and develop partnerships between education/training and work.
- Initiative 7 (segment Inclusive growth): *European Platform against Poverty*, aims to improve “economic, social and territorial cohesion, and build on the current European year for combating poverty and social exclusion so as to raise awareness and recognise the fundamental rights of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, enabling them to live in dignity and take an active part in society” (EC, 2010: 17). Member states need to promote collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion and “fully deploy their social security and pension systems to ensure adequate income support and access to health care” (2010: 18).

Of particular importance is the recognition of cities as units of social, cultural and economic development and crucial for furthering European Strategy 2020 and assuring achievement of a desired future (EC, 2015: 3; Matkó, 2016; Smernice za države članice o trajnostnem urbane razvoju, 2015: 3–4). To accommodate the desired outcomes on the city level, the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD) formed numerous programs such as INTERREG, with initiatives and regulations; for example, 5% of funds acquired from EGRD should be invested into integrate urban strategies. Within this context, integrated urban development is conceptualized as a core element of Article 7 and includes strategies to meet economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges. Although the development of IUSs remains the highly individualized endeavour of a city, these mechanisms prescribe several minimum requirements, including *focusing on at least two of the described thematic goals*. City strategies should also be based on an integrated approach, long term planning and multi-level governance, and should include “integrated, sustainable urban development strategies cutting through sectorial, territorial and governance boundaries” (Matko 2016: 3). IUSs therefore transcend sector, territorial, political and managerial frames and limitations, and strive to empower urban areas and local stakeholders. In particular, it is the cohesion policy’s aim to bring different European cities and regions together in a structural as well as cultural context. Nearly two thirds of Europeans live in cities, but these are diverse, are in different development stages, face different problems, and need different development assistance. While the EU has no formal jurisdiction on urban policy, cities are an increasingly important and explicit target of its policies, targeted mainly through cohesion programs (urban dimension of cohesion policy). EU cities and regions are also important for political integration in moving the focus away from national states towards supporting the executive power of municipalities and regions, and thus by-passing often rigid and inflexible state government policies in favour of EU expert driven initiatives and programs such as JESSICA programme and the URBACT programme.

European Strategy 2020 has a number of implications for Slovenia, including an imperative and formal basis for Slovenian cities to develop their own IUSs. In 2014, the Slovenian Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning (SMESP) issued a directive initiating the development of IUSs for 11 Slovenian cities. The Ministry also provided cities with a set of national guidelines (SMESP, 2016) outlining the content and structure of the strategic document, and including criteria for the evaluation of actions and operations emerging from the strategy and

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