

# CONTINUOUS URBAN PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

Vesna Teofilović<sup>1</sup> , Belgrade, Serbia

The paper is dedicated to exploring the applicability of continuous urban planning as an existing instrument of urban planning to contemporary authoritarian-neoliberal tendencies. The aim is to illuminate, through a scientific and methodological approach, the extent to which urban planning is capable of adequately managing the changes manifested in the socio-spatial matrix of authoritarian neoliberalism using its decades-long developed instrument. The research focuses on identifying and analyzing aspects of continuous urban planning and authoritarian neoliberalism, based on relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical analysis within the context of Belgrade, which interpret the role and position of continuous urban planning in the challenges of the contemporary context of authoritarian neoliberalism. The research results show how the illuminated authoritarian neoliberal mechanisms, principles and tendencies in urban development reshape the role and position of contemporary urban planning instruments, with potential directions for their improvement aimed at increasing the resilience of urban planning to contemporary societal challenges.

**Key words:** continuous urban planning (CUP), instrument, authoritarian, neoliberalism, challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

The complex and dynamic nature of contemporary social changes presents a significant potential for transforming the established societal role and legitimacy of modern urban planning. Understanding the nature of these changes, the mechanisms, and the principles of their impact on urban planning, and the ability of urban planning to manage these changes while preserving strategic values and goals as part of its integrity, has become a priority in urban development. Based on theoretical insights, Continuous Urban Planning (CUP) is interpreted in this study as a traditional instrument of urban planning used to manage urban development under conditions of uncertainty and dynamic changes – such as processes, phenomena, states, and/or events – in the social environment and in urban planning itself, which are unknown at the time planning policies are created. The concept of CUP emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the post-war reconstruction of cities on a global scale, where cities were seen as dynamic organisms whose new urbanization required abandoning pre-war static master planning in favor of process-oriented, continuous urban

planning (Branch, 1981; Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020; Macura *et al.*, 2020). Its crucial goal is to increase certainty within the urban community in conditions of an uncertain future for urban development (Branch, 1975; Branch, 1981; Abbott, 2005; Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020; Macura *et al.*, 2020). CUP represents a system of permanent planning, applicable at all levels of planning, in which the plan is understood as a tool for regulating urban development, rather than being its goal or a static entity (Stojkov, 1972; Švabić, 1972; Stojkov, 1992; Macura *et al.*, 2020). The intention is to achieve flexibility in urban planning in order to ensure stable urban development. This is made possible through a planning framework – including governance, institutional, legal, and planning elements – that enables the plan to follow urban development, adapt to its needs, and remain aligned with strategic commitments and value frameworks. CUP also exhibits certain weaknesses that need to be mitigated, such as being the prerequisite for a high level of competence and a holistic approach to planning by authorities, the administration, and professionals, the oversaturation of actors in the planning process due to frequent revisions, its vulnerability to authoritarian societal tendencies, and voluntarism (Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020).

Neoliberalism represents the contemporary global context of social relations and processes, which, according to

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<sup>1</sup> 22. nova 1, Zuce, Belgrade, Serbia  
vesna.teofilovic.phd@edu.arh.bg.ac.rs

numerous studies and authors, has exhibited authoritarian characteristics and the strengthening of anti-democratic tendencies following the global crisis of 2007. As a result, it is conceptualized as authoritarian neoliberalism (AN) (Bruff, 2014; Bruff and Tansel, 2019; Laub, 2021; Piletić, 2022). This crisis highlights the unprecedented dynamics and complexity of current changes, bringing to the forefront the astonishing interconnection between economic, financial, monetary, and social development, which presents a challenge for contemporary planning systems regardless of the social order (De Roo *et al.*, 2020a). The theoretical debate about a unified definition of AN is still ongoing within the academic community. Based on existing theoretical insights, this paper adopts the interpretation of AN as being characterized by the dominance of capital over the state, with regimes serving as instruments for implementing policies in line with this, regardless of the degree of democracy in society. Theoretical research on AN so far indicates that one of the key social areas undergoing transformation is urban space, primarily through a hegemonic discourse in the creation of urban policies, urban planning, and planning systems, which become subject to reconceptualization and redefinition in the interest of economic capital (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Laub, 2021; Piletić, 2022).

By examining CUP from the theoretical perspective of AN, this study problematizes the interrelation between the implementation of traditional urban planning instruments and disruptive capital-driven interventions in urban space, serving as a motivation for the theoretical and empirical examination of these concepts. It is to be expected that the CUP in the context of AN will demonstrate its decades-long developed ability to adequately manage changes and continuously ensure balanced urban development, which is noticeably lacking. The central argument is that a potentially useful traditional instrument of urban planning in managing urban development (CUP), under the influence of AN, becomes instrumentalized in the interest of capital rather than the proclaimed sustainable urban development, which consequently significantly alters urban planning itself. The specific aim is to, through theoretical and empirical insights into these concepts and their interrelation, examine the causes of this phenomenon and the role and position of CUP in the context of AN, with the aim of strengthening the planning capacity to address contemporary societal challenges. The study begins by analyzing CUP as a planning instrument for managing uncertainties and dynamic changes in urban development and planning from historical, theoretical, and planning perspectives. Following this, CUP is considered within the framework of AN, where, through theoretical recognition of the urban-spatial aspect and the illumination of the mechanisms and principles of this concept, its impacts on the transformation and rapid urbanization of cities are explored, as well as the ability of contemporary urban planning to adequately manage these changes with its currently developed mechanisms. Through an empirical analysis of the Belgrade context, the understanding of AN manifestations in the application of CUP in planning practice is concretized. The concluding considerations summarize the results of examining the role and position of CUP within the socio-spatial matrix of AN, with the aim of enhancing this urban planning instrument

and indirectly increasing urban resilience to the impending challenges of contemporary society.

## Methodology

The methodological approach is based on a systematic literature review and critical analysis of scientific texts in the domains of CUP and AN, and empirical analysis of the Belgrade context. Based on a relevant theoretical framework, aspects significant for understanding, interpreting, and drawing conclusions about the concepts examined in this study, their mutual influences, and their impacts on urban planning and urban development are identified and analyzed. This method involves examining CUP through an analysis of historical aspects, with a focus on the general urban plans of Belgrade and the legal foundation of CUP starting from 1972, as well as theoretical and planning aspects in the context of Belgrade. AN is analyzed by exploring its conceptualization and periodization, with a focus on differentiating it from neoliberalism, theoretically recognizing the urban-spatial aspects of AN, and examining the authoritarian neoliberal mechanisms and principles in urban development based on the literature. The empirical analysis focuses on the level of general urban planning in Belgrade during the period of post-socialist transition, aiming to examine AN tendencies in the application of CUP in planning practice, through a chronological review and the characteristics of changes in urban planning. The level of general urban planning in Belgrade, as the framework for establishing CUP within the national context, provides relevant insights into its application in planning practice. According to theoretical insights (Piletić, 2022), AN tendencies in urban development and planning emerged during the post-socialist transition period (Maruna *et al.*, 2023). The empirical analysis relies on the application of CUP at the level of general urban planning in Belgrade between 2003 and 2016, as presented by Macura and other authors (Macura *et al.*, 2020), but interprets CUP from the perspective of AN tendencies. The analysis by Macura *et al.* (2020) covers all adopted General Urban Plans (GUP) of Belgrade with amendments from 2003 to the present: (1) GP Belgrade 2021 (2003 GUP) (Službeni list grada Beograda, 27/2003, 25/2005, 34/2007, 63/2009, 70/2014); (2) the Special Purpose Spatial Plan from 2015 (2015 SPPP) (Službeni glasnik RS, 7/2015), which evolved from the amendments to the 2014 GUP; and (3) the GUP Belgrade from 2016 (2016 GUP) (Službeni list grada Beograda, 11/2016). As a supplement to the analysis by Macura *et al.* (2020), this study also considers the General Regulation Plan of Belgrade from 2016 (2016 GRP) (Službeni list grada Beograda, 20/2016), which is an integral part of the implementation of the 2016 GUP and, as such, can be indirectly considered part of CUP, with significant implications for urban development. This research then discusses and summarizes the key findings.

## CONTINUOUS URBAN PLANNING

### Historical background of continuous urban planning

CUP, as a system of permanent planning in contrast to the static nature of a single adopted document (Stojkov, 1972; Švabić, 1972; Macura *et al.*, 2020), has emerged as a recurring theme in the history of American and European

urban planning over the past fifty years, as well as in the development of the most recent strategic urban plans for Belgrade (Macura, 2018).

Although the concept of CUP originated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, linked to the post-war reconstruction of cities globally, it has undergone decades of modifications and transformations. Nowadays, the concept of CUP exists in many European countries, such as Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, England, and others, adapting to local specificities, including planning cultures, systems, and conditions (Branch, 1981; Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020; Macura *et al.*, 2020).

Today, the concept of sustainable development represents the contemporary global context in which CUP operates. It serves as a decades-long strategic and value framework for balanced urban development, with principles and goals proclaimed in global and national development documents that are legally binding in urban planning (Teofilović, 2024). Theoretically, sustainable development is conceptualized through the balance of three widely accepted dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion, and ecological balance, which also encompass the key critiques of this concept as a paradox of continuous economic growth and balanced development (Redclift, 2005). According to Teofilović (2024), the concept of sustainability is a fragile value framework for urban development, subject to various interpretations, meanings, translations, and interests over time, and dependent on political influences and contexts. Urban planning, with its instruments for managing urban development within such a value framework, has often blurred goals and outcomes, making it susceptible to being instrumentalized by more structured concepts, most commonly neoliberal ones in the contemporary context.

In the context of Belgrade, the idea of CUP as a form of permanent spatial development planning first appeared in the General Urban Plan of Belgrade from 1972 (1972 GUP) (Službeni list grada Beograda, 17/1972) (Stojkov, 1972). In the 2003 GUP, the term “continuous planning” was introduced instead of CUP. Conceptually, it did not significantly differ from the previous one, except in the methodological approach, which was adapted to the planning system of that time and had brief legal backing between 2004 and 2009 (Macura, 2018). In the 2016 GUP, the plan’s implementation included a specific measure prescribing the evaluation and revision of the plan within a defined timeframe to ensure the vertical and horizontal alignment of planning documents. However, the concept of and the term CUP were omitted. Nevertheless, the Law on the Planning System of the RS (Službeni glasnik RS, 30/2018) introduced the principle of continuity in planning, which contains elements of CUP, thereby leaving legal space for further development and implementation of this concept.

The results of insights into the historical background indicate that the idea of CUP as a planning instrument has been continuously present in Belgrade’s urban planning. The concept has never been fully implemented through planning documents or the legal framework. There is a persistent lack of (a) conceptual consistency in the planning

framework and legislation, (b) continuous legal grounding, (c) a unified methodological approach, and (d) resilience against being instrumentalized for particular interests. The periodic legal and continuous planning presence of ideas related to CUP highlights the significant need for such or similar instruments in modern planning systems and the necessity for its comprehensive development and refinement, especially in response to contemporary societal trends, by addressing the recognized weaknesses.

### **Theoretical aspect of continuous urban planning**

Initially designed as a more complex and flexible approach compared to static strategic planning, CUP enables a more effective response to changes, aiming to exert a certain level of control over urban growth and development (Stojkov, 1972). In the face of increasing global and local changes and uncertainties, recent discourses are shifting urban planning from being a process of guiding and controlling based on decisions, to one of monitoring and responding (De Roo *et al.*, 2020b).

One interpretation of CUP is continuous spatial development planning that includes processes of permanence, cyclicity, and the interdependence of different levels of planning, as conceptualized in the 1972 GUP (Stojkov, 1972; Stojkov, 1992). With each cycle, CUP becomes enriched and advanced with new knowledge and experience (Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020). From the perspective of planning practice, the conceptualization of CUP is as a determined spiral of planning processes, where the Planning Law is central, surrounded by other elements of CUP, and as a flexible, legally grounded process of revising strategy and long-term planning within relatively short political mandates and budgetary intervals. This becomes clearer when examined through the examples of Stavanger in Norway and Belgrade in Serbia (Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020). CUP is further grounded in the context of managing uncertainties that inevitably arise from the social context of planning, the environment, and the planning process itself (Abbott, 2005). From a legal perspective, CUP can also be seen as a means of preventing plan entropy by maintaining the plan’s freshness and relevance through a process of constant amendments and updates within a specific timeframe, as illustrated by the Belgrade context (Macura *et al.*, 2020). The latest theoretical frameworks related to CUP are found in the fields of adaptive planning and urban adaptability. However, advocates also acknowledge that connecting adaptability with issues such as legal certainty, reliability, and sustainability still characteristic of traditional planning is challenging and requires further systematic research (De Roo *et al.*, 2020a; De Roo *et al.*, 2020b). This trajectory aligns with contemporary theoretical insights on urban resilience, which is viewed as the capacity of an urban system to absorb initial shocks, minimize the impact of disruptions, adapt to system changes that limit adaptive capacity, and return to a balanced state (Ribeiro and Gonçalves, 2019). The paradox of CUP lies in the need to reconcile the contradictory concepts of permanence and simultaneous change over time and space (Stojkov, 1972), to balance stability and change in long-term planning (Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020), and to navigate between certainty and uncertainty in the social environment (Branch, 1975; Abbott, 2005). When

uncertainty and unpredictability are viewed through the lens of urban plans, long-term planning is often associated with greater uncertainty compared to short-term plans, which are characterized by a high level of predictability (Abbott, 2005).

The interpretation of CUP from various theoretical perspectives indicates the beauty of contemporary theories that provide a foundation for this concept. Given the dynamic nature of urban development and growth processes, the planning process itself, along with the plans that are its products, must possess characteristics that render them purposeful. This implies that the analysis of the system cannot be limited only to its constituent parts, and it is necessary to understand that the parts of the system, the system as a whole, and the context in which the system exists continuously establish and rearrange their interrelations (De Roo *et al.*, 2020a).

Understanding the complexity of these changes is a prerequisite for developing adequate urban planning instruments capable of managing such changes.

### Planning aspect of continuous urban planning

According to Vuksanović-Macura *et al.* (2020) the key characteristics of CUP are: **legislation** that represents a safety factor towards safe and quality urban development, legitimate use of political power, transparency of methodologies and processes, with defined responsibility for outcomes; **participativeness** – by including all actors in the planning process, the legitimacy of planning is ensured through consensual decision-making on the directions of future urban development and the improvement of communication tools; **uncertainty and flexibility** – modern society is exposed to numerous uncertainties and crises, which is why it is necessary to ensure the stability of urban development through flexible tools with the sequence of phases: monitoring-uncertainty-flexible response-certainty; **changeability and protectiveness** – achieving a balance between the need for change and the need for an unchanged state of the various actors in urban planning; and **security**, as a form of uncertainty management, a response to humanity's needs for a more certain life in an urban environment, which strengthens public trust in the planning process and reduces tensions between public and private interests in planning.

In the context of planning systems, the essence of the CUP process is a strategic urban plan that determines the long-term strategic vision, framework and goals of urban development, which is subject to medium-term revisions that are supported by short-term updates in order to link the budget, annual action plans and the continuity of their implementation (Stojkov, 1972; Švabić, 1972; Branch, 1981; Macura *et al.*, 2020). This type of traditional planning is suitable when managing predictable changes, but far less effective when it comes to unpredictable changes in the future, primarily because it is based on procedures and decisions that are expected to ensure the desired future, which is largely absent, rarely taking into account that the very processes of research, creation, decision-making and implementation of ideas, the actors involved and their interrelationships in planning can be variable and

changeable (De Roo *et al.*, 2020b). By conceptualizing CUP as an urban planning instrument in the management of urban development that is separate from the vision represented, it leaves the possibility of using CUP for very different goals, not necessarily based on the principles of sustainable development (Macura *et al.*, 2020).

In Serbia, the Law on the Planning System (Službeni glasnik RS, 30/2018) made it possible to integrate broader development policies into one urban document for the first time. The GUP is the only urban document that appears both in the Law on Planning and Construction and in the Law on the Planning System, which positions it as a link between strategies and detailed urban planning, i.e. leaves the possibility for the implementation of development policies in urban plans (Graovac *et al.*, 2021). At the same time, the GUP is considered the initial urban planning document of CUP, while the legal regulation of this process is interpreted as a form of multi-layered security in development processes and the legitimate use of political power (Stojkov, 1972; Macura, 2018; Vuksanović-Macura *et al.*, 2020).

The results of insights into the planning framework indicate the existence of theoretical assumptions about the characteristics of CUP and its positioning within the planning system, but its effectiveness is questionable due to complex procedures and decision-making, and its detachment from the vision of urban development. In stable democracies, CUP has a clear methodology, processes, time intervals, and goals aligned with local specificities, whereas in countries with transitional contexts undergoing social transformations, this process is hindered and inconsistent due to the instability of the social system (Macura *et al.*, 2020). In the local context, despite efforts in different socio-economic systems to methodologically and legally design planning systems in line with the CUP concept, there has consistently remained the possibility for voluntarism and random changes driven by particular interests (Macura *et al.*, 2020), which undermines the credibility of the planning instrument itself.

## AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM

### Conceptualization and periodization of authoritarian neoliberalism

The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism is linked to the period of the global economic crisis after 2007 (Bruff, 2014; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2021). The continuity of crises over the last two decades has led states and institutions to implement intensified repressive measures to protect capital and social relations (Juego, 2018). For a general conceptual understanding of the essential aspects of AN, it is considered crucial to differentiate it from neoliberalism. It is situated beyond the simplistic view of neoliberalism as a free market and is instead explored in the domain of supporting and protecting capital accumulation in the name of the free market, leading to the growth of unequal social relations (Bruff, 2014; Bruff and Tansel, 2019). The novel, currently relevant, and simultaneously evolving character of AN raises important questions about understanding this novelty and the historicity of practices associated with it. At the same time, it is suggested that the questions of

conceptualization and periodization should remain open, as strictly scientific determination could be counterproductive in creating broader scientific perspectives for understanding this concept (Bruff and Tansel, 2019).

The most widely accepted interpretation of AN is that it is a concept on the rise, referring to the investigation of processes occurring simultaneously (without any historical distance), and it is rooted in the reconfiguration of the state into a less democratic entity that seeks to be insulated from social and political conflicts through constitutional and legal changes to protect capital (Bruff, 2014; Bruff and Tansel; Laub, 2021; Piletić, 2022). A somewhat broader interpretation is that AN should be viewed not only as an organizational entity like the state but also as a form of social relations, or a specific form of capitalist social regime in which the relations between the political and economic spheres are organically connected (Juego, 2018; Piletić, 2022). The term is also used to denote regimes that use authoritarian political leadership to further neoliberalize the market, which can be understood more clearly through the examples of Serbia, Hungary, and Poland (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2021; Piletić, 2022).

However, in addition to this understanding of the intertwining of authoritarian statism and neoliberal reforms, other theoretical trajectories are also present, such as: the frequent invocation of the lack of material resources as a justification for the state's inability to halt and reverse processes like growing social inequality, based on the example of London, UK (Bruff, 2014; Laub, 2021); the intensification of state control and the restriction of rights and freedoms as illustrated by the examples of the cities of Gdańsk, Poland and London, UK (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Laub, 2021); and/or the questioning of the welfare state in light of social polarization and the new divisions it generates in light of the examples of Hungary and Poland (Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2021). In summary, these theoretical trajectories tend to overlap, and the conceptualization of AN should be sought along their trajectories and at their intersection points. AN also exhibits certain weaknesses inherent to the concept itself, which are primarily reflected in the challenges of resolving conflicts between competing elements of capital that require mediation mechanisms and the assumption of responsibility in the relationship between the market and the state, something that is foreign and unacceptable to most authoritarian regimes (Juego, 2018). In the context of these interpretations, AN can also be seen as a set of mutually contradictory practices that, due to crises, simultaneously strive for domination but also constantly generate resistance, which means that AN cannot be considered a final state of existence but rather a process that aims for constant self-preservation (Bruff and Tansel, 2019).

Although the rise of AN is linked to the global crisis after 2007, it is not denied that neoliberalism exhibited authoritarian characteristics even before this historical moment, which became clearly illuminated and dominant after the crisis. What is now in focus is how today's practices differ from established logics of capitalist governance and why capitalism is prone to producing authoritarian governance (Bruff and Tansel, 2019).

The mechanisms characteristic of this concept have historical parallels in the political philosophies and systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, AN is primarily understood as a more aggressive form of neoliberalism, marked by the further development of specific mechanisms of coercion, repression, social inequality, and the reconfiguration of social systems and relations to protect the unimpeded flow of capital and the interests of privileged social strata. In all social spheres, particular interests dominate public ones, secured through constant institutional and regulatory restructuring until the ultimate goal – capital accumulation – is achieved. The state is subordinated to the interests of capital, while marginalized social groups and social policies are lightly assigned the role of bearing the burden of socio-economic crises, which capital itself is highly prone to creating. The state has always tended to protect capital, but capital was once created in a more static social environment compared to the dynamics of contemporary changes and the general uncertainty they produce.

### Urban spatial aspect of authoritarian neoliberalism

Theoretical considerations of AN in urban planning so far increasingly acknowledge the coercive and authoritarian transformation of cities, but urban redesign and spaces are more often viewed through the prism of capital, with less direct connection to the state itself (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Laub, 2021; Piletić, 2022). In the context of ongoing debates on the predominantly political and economic conceptualization of AN, it is noted that one of the key social areas undergoing transformation is the urban space, with particular emphasis on understanding the struggle around the concept of "public," whether it refers to public services, public spaces, or public goods (Bruff and Tansel, 2019). Urban policies and planning systems are particularly exposed to the reconceptualization and redefinition of both the role and purpose of public space and the role of land through institutional mechanisms for amending legal and planning regulations, as illustrated by the examples of the cities of Gdańsk in Poland, London in the UK, and Belgrade in Serbia (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Laub, 2021; Piletić, 2022). The examples of these cities suggest that neoliberal urbanism can be viewed from the perspective of cities recognized as important economic, political, cultural, and social actors in global capital flows and international policies. In summary, neoliberal projects as spatial manifestations of AN can be seen as a key channel for establishing an authoritarian regime through the introduction of new flows of international capital and the reformulation of the city's relationship with national structures through legal, urban-planning, and administrative restructuring (Borén *et al.*, 2021; Lendvai-Bainton and Szelewa, 2021; Piletić, 2022; Maruna *et al.*, 2023).

### Authoritarian-neoliberal mechanisms and principles in urban development

In the context of urban-spatial analysis of AN based on the literature analyzed, specific mechanisms and principles of its operation in urban development have been identified. These are: (a) reshaping of the city structure in the process of forming cultural and creative urban policies through multiscale connections – the example Gdansk, Poland

(Borén *et al.*, 2021); (b) spatial transformations supported by state reconfiguration in the interest of capital and the social elite – the example of London, UK (Laub, 2021); and (c) the implementation of AN urban projects through, related to the first mechanism, the process of regulatory rescaling and reconfiguration of relations within the state – the example Belgrade, Serbia (Piletić, 2022).

Analyzing the three identified mechanisms of the urban-spatial aspect of AN, their common principles are observed: (a) socio-political relations surrounding the implementation of neoliberal projects, rather than their spatial or territorial interpretation and impacts; (b) neoliberal projects represent a key method for capital accumulation, which drives significant pressure to restructure institutional and legal frameworks at all levels to ensure the uninterrupted flow of capital and particular interests; and (c) viewed in this way, urban space becomes the physical embodiment of AN social relations and the protection of capital and powerful interests. The specificity of the mechanisms is manifested through a wide range of social spheres that are subject to the influences of AN.

#### **Authoritarian-neoliberal tendencies in the application of CUP at the level of general urban planning in Belgrade during post-socialist transition**

The empirical analysis, thoroughly explained in the methodology section, enabled conclusions regarding the manifestation of AN tendencies in the application of CUP in Belgrade's planning practice:

- Trend of frequent changes within a short time period – over 13 years, eight planning documents were adopted, with four of them issued in the last two years;
- Trend of increasing complexity of changes over time – from minor but significant changes regarding the transformation of planned uses and the increase in construction capacity at specific locations (2005, 2007, 2009), the process culminates in major systemic changes in urban planning between 2014 and 2016. On the legislative level, these changes are reflected in the disruption of the established hierarchy of plans (with the adoption of the 2015 SPPP suspending the GUP on part of its central territory; the introduction of the 2016 PGR formalizes the GUP) (Graovac *et al.*, 2021; Piletić, 2022), while on the planning level, they are expressed through the relativization of overall planning solutions (2016 GRP) (Maruna *et al.*, 2023). The absence of changes or a new GUP since 2016, despite the previous dynamic planning activity, suggests that under the influence of AN tendencies, the focus has shifted to lower levels of planning;
- Trend of decision making within political and governance structures – since 2009, new study foundations and annual monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the planning document, as required by the 2003 GUP, have been absent (Macura *et al.*, 2020). This indicates a trend of marginalization of the professionals and academics in the planning process, the disregard of prescribed procedures, and the neglect of social and ecological effects of planned changes, calling into question the justification of

planning decisions; and

- Trend of revision of the legislative framework – this begins with enabling phased implementation of changes to the 2003 GUP (2007, 2009) and culminates in legislative changes allowing the implementation of the neoliberal project on the central territory of the GUP through the 2015 SPPP (Piletić, 2022). This reduces the potential for legitimate use of political power and the transparency of the planning process, and it redefines the very practice of planning (Piletić, 2022).

The results of the empirical analysis indicate that although the neoliberal character of changes is present throughout the entire period analyzed, they exhibit a cumulative effect over time, culminating in significant systemic changes in urban planning during the later stages of CUP application. According to Piletić (2022), this temporal and conceptual alignment coincides with the rise of AN tendencies at the local level. The open and flexible approach to CUP in relation to capital gradually transforms it into an instrument, under the influence of AN tendencies, that can manipulate the established planning system at legislative, hierarchical, managerial, and procedural levels. The initial focus on transforming individual locations in the process of applying CUP gradually shifted towards establishing an AN planning principle (Službeni list grada Beograda, br. 11/2016), in which changes in urban space are no longer conditioned by alterations to the planning basis. This principle facilitates the flow of capital, independent of specific locations in space, through simpler procedures at lower planning levels. The high efficiency of the established principle, the formalization of the role of the GUP, and the marginalization of strategic planning are evident in the absence of changes or new GUPs since 2016. The trends suggest that the effects of these changes are neither short-term nor limited to specific neoliberal projects, but rather exhibit an evolutionary character over time, with long-term systemic consequences for urban planning. These insights are consistent with the third identified theoretical mechanism of AN.

#### **CONTINUOUS URBAN PLANNING IN AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM**

Based on the analysis, AN represents the current context in which urban development takes place. It emerges as a novelty resulting from socio-economic crises and can be seen as an unexpected shift from established social conditions or, from the perspective of previous urban planning, as an uncertainty faced unplanned. In this sense, AN can be viewed as a fitting test for the concept of CUP, illuminating its fundamental scope and weaknesses, as well as roles and positions in social reality.

The analyses indicate that within the context of AN, CUP retains its role as a traditional urban planning instrument, but its position has shifted from the principle of achieving balanced and sustainable urban development to primarily serving the interests of capital. With this shift, CUP becomes susceptible to instrumentalization in the implementation of AN tendencies in urban space, thereby contributing to the imbalance of urban development, which contradicts its fundamental conceptual foundations. Therefore, it can be concluded that while the current conception of

CUP is generally applicable in urban planning practice, the outcomes of its application in AN contexts raise ethical dilemmas, making it unsuitable as an effective urban planning instrument in specific AN circumstances. Preserving the initial conceptual position of CUP, which entails acting upon dynamic contexts rather than adapting its position to the prevailing context, would enable the CUP to manage changes more effectively, regardless of contextual specificities. The implementation of CUP in accordance with the principles of sustainable development is an indicator of the resilience of urban planning to AN tendencies. The causes of the CUP's sensitivity to the AN context, which prevent it from being considered an adequate planning instrument in this specific environment, while also serving as guidelines for its improvement, lie both in the complexity of AN and in the conceptual framework and application of CUP itself. These factors are summarized below.

Firstly, the identified mechanisms of the urban-spatial aspect of AN, in line with the findings of authors Boren *et al.* (2021), Laub (2021), and Piletić (2022), indicate its aggressive impact on urban development through the transformation and reshaping of all aspects of urban planning. This includes urban policies, planning systems, urban spaces, planning and decision-making processes and levels, and the exclusion of subordinate social groups and their interests. Analysis of the Belgrade context indicates that the changes occur rapidly and within a short time, leaving no room for the consolidation of planning practices. In terms of CUP, this requires demonstrating the practical ability of urban planning to manage multi-layered uncertainties within the planning system, acting at the moment of change, and the local and global context. The complexity of the AN context, as highlighted by authors Bruff (2014), Bruff and Tansel (2019), Laub (2021), and Piletić (2022), reveals the weakness of CUP's capacity to maintain its position under such circumstances. Instead of managing complex economic, social, and environmental changes, it becomes a tool for implementing capital-driven disruptive changes in urban space. This transformation of CUP's position influenced by AN tendencies contributes to a shift in the very nature of urban planning, steering it toward deregulation, formalization, and catering to the interests of capital. The placement of capital in urban space, accompanied by the consistent application of sustainability principles, would significantly reduce these negative effects.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis highlights CUP's inability to preserve the integrity of its conceptual framework under AN influences. Instead, it demonstrates susceptibility to interest-driven selective application of its fundamental elements. AN exploits this weakness of CUP in order to retain and exploit beneficial elements, such as principles of flexibility, formal procedures, and constant plan revisions, while discarding elements of CUP that restrict capital flow and accumulation. These discarded elements include strategic policies, values, and goals related to sustainable and balanced urban development, protection of the public interest, and the participation of subordinate social groups in decision-making. As a result, planning loses its important role as a corrective factor for the free market (Graovac *et al.*, 2021). In terms of legislation,

the AN restructuring of institutional, legal, and planning frameworks, as presented by Piletić (2022), has intensified legal uncertainty and unpredictability within the social and planning systems. It has strengthened political influence in planning while bypassing the formal legal procedures of CUP. Additionally, regarding the management of uncertainty and flexible planning approaches, there is a lack of systematic and methodological monitoring of the implementation of adopted strategic directions – an essential part of CUP. Instead, goals are achieved through coercive, random, and discontinuous solutions driven by particular interests.

Through its subtle mechanisms, AN, by weakening the state and through institutional, economic, and legal reconceptualization as presented by Laub (2021) and Piletić (2022), increases social inequality, making subordinate social groups more vulnerable and disenfranchised on various grounds and rights, in order to enable and protect the uninterrupted flow of capital. It formalizes their involvement and eliminates the possibility of achieving broad social compromise and consensus.

The conceptual premise that CUP serves as an instrument for urban development management independent of the vision it represents, allows for the instrumentalization of the legitimate planning process for particular interests as presented by Macura *et al.* (2020). If sustainable urban development, based on adopted public policies, is the goal of urban planning, then CUP, as an instrument of urban planning, must aim towards the proclaimed goal or vision. Establishing a clear link between CUP and the vision of urban development strengthens CUP's position, enabling it to implement decisions based on sustainability principles and persistence towards established sustainable development goals, despite pressures from societal realities.

Ultimately, the potential neoliberal foundations of CUP manifest through advocating for openness and flexibility in urban planning toward investments, while respecting the public interest, as emphasized by Macura *et al.* (2020), which often remains neglected in planning practice exposed to AN tendencies. By focusing on economic interests amid legal, planning, and methodological shortcomings, CUP in planning practice – under the influence of AN – tolerates the neglect of the social and environmental impacts of such interventions. Thus, in accordance with Redclift's interpretation (2005), it fails to consider and manage the overall distribution of burdens created by these actions, which are most often borne by subordinate social groups. The insight that the CUP is potentially more inclined toward developmental rather than principles of urban development can be considered the root of the easy manipulation of AN tendencies with this urban planning instrument and its inadequacy, in its current form, as a framework for overcoming urban planning issues in AN contexts.

## CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

The traditional grounding in planning practice of many planning cultures makes CUP a respected and useful instrument in modern urban planning. In the context of AN, there is a pronounced tendency to use traditional planning tools to secure planning legitimacy for particular

interests, independent of the proclaimed values of urban development. For CUP to be an effective urban planning instrument, it requires a robust and structured value framework with precise goals to guide every decision-making process. The concept of sustainable development has so far failed to ensure this, and the context of AN has highlighted and exploited this failure. It has shown how changes can be intense, comprehensive, and devastating to urban spaces and modern urban planning, which exhibits significant fragility and servility towards political and economic interests instead of readiness to manage changes and, especially, defend strategic values and sustainable urban development goals. By intervening in management structures, legal regulations, and planning processes, AN ensures the dominance of continuous economic growth over other aspects of sustainable development, not only by neglecting them but also by intentionally suppressing and marginalizing them.

Strengthening the concept of CUP in response to contemporary social trends should focus on reinforcing and maintaining a consistent value framework for urban planning. At the same time, it should aim to reconceptualize the foundational principles of CUP as a value- and ethically-oriented approach, rather than merely an operational and developmental tool, to be consistently implemented in planning practice.

Positioning CUP as part of the planning system potentially provides a more comprehensive foundation through value-based, legal, and methodological determination. However, AN actions have highlighted significant shortcomings in the planning system, revealing its vulnerability to contemporary social changes that lead to unsustainable outcomes in urban development. This is evident not only in the system's inability to recognize and manage modern changes but also in how these changes develop mechanisms to adapt the system and its elements to their interests, leading to the eventual transformation or takeover of the system itself. A key mechanism in this process is reliance on political and administrative structures of the system while marginalizing the influence of other actors in decision-making about urban development. In such dynamics, interests overshadow values, and urban development tends towards imbalance.

Contemporary planning systems clearly need further development and refinement of planning instruments related to CUP. Theoretical, institutional, legal, planning, and methodological structuring of CUP as a planning instrument can be considered urgent in modern urban planning, given the changes it faces. Addressing the challenges that urban planning and its instruments encounter in the current context seems to lie in the trends of modifying traditional approaches in line with the principles of adaptive and resilient planning to enhance the resilience of urban planning against the pressures of societal realities.

Although AN appears to be a highly structured and resilient concept with potential for longevity, deepening social polarization is a primary source of resistance to this concept, with the capacity to both transform and undermine it in the future. Its continued rise seems contingent on the dynamics between societal pressures and resistance, with its strength

tending to wane as society moves toward more balanced urban development. Shifting the theoretical focus from an exclusive examination of AN through large neoliberal projects to contemporary trends and processes in urban planning could further illuminate the impact of this concept on urban transformation and rapid urbanization, thereby contributing to the refinement of planning instruments for a more balanced, sustainable, and predictable urban development.

#### ORCID

Vesna Teofilović  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1023-690X>

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