

Informal Development in Serbia. Building Back Better in the Post-Covid 19 Era

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SUMMARY

The world today faces many complex challenges, including the adaptation and mitigation of climate change; rapid urbanization; increased demand for natural resources; growing food, water and energy insecurity; resolution of violent conflicts, increased natural disasters and the recent covid-19 pandemic.

The use of spatial data is a key element for addressing these challenges. Investments in geospatial technologies can address various activities, including sustainability programs around land, water, food, natural resources as well as other aspects including National Security, Disaster Response and Resiliency, Infrastructure development and was critical in the response to the global covid-19 pandemic. E-governance in spatial data management (Geospatial Governance or gGovernance) leverages the latest advances in geospatial technologies to map and monitor the resources of an entire nation, allowing for the quantitative documentation of policy implementations on the ground.

The global covid-19 crisis showed that the policies and laws should go in parallel with the increased use of technologies, which could provide information when and where most needed and provide evidence for monitoring the effects of the human interventions, providing the opportunities to model the possible risk zones and to help decision makers to take preventive measures, both in the areas of health, social protection and deciding on the possible support to economy, including agriculture, food production and supply of goods for first aid.

Also, land administration system within a country is a reflection of conditions within that country. In the past couple of decades, Serbia transitioned through a very difficult period marked by great economic, political and social crises, which reflected upon on the land administration system itself. Until recently, land administration system was a generator of great problems, but also a fitting scapegoat for various malversations within the Republic of Serbia. Due to a sagging practice, it was

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very difficult to realize infrastructural projects, to develop state administration system, and even to guarantee property ownership. It is enough to emphasize that, until just recently, there were more than 4.5 million unregistered objects which can't be sold or do any legal business and present "dead capital" worth more than 28 billion euros and loss from unpaid taxes more than 127 million euros per year! Serbia has been trying to solve the issue of illegal properties for more than 30 years without success. Regulating this state of affairs and legalization of properties allows for economic development of the country, legal certainty and attractive investment environment.

The Republic of Serbia is one of the countries supported by the FAO, World Bank, UNECE and other development partners to improve the use of available geospatial data and technology and to strengthen government capacity to make best use of available data and technology. This provides tools and framework for solving the issues inherited from past by taking wide strides, digitalizing data within business processes and introducing innovative solutions and technologies in order to make up for the time lost, in order for us to be the powerhouse of economic development of the Republic of Serbia. Formalization in Serbia, based on the recent activities from UNECE and concrete Technical Guidelines and Recovery Action Plan, finally seems to be realistic and well prepared.

In Serbia, the Republic Geodetic Authority (RGA) is a national Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) coordinator and the INSPIRE National Contact Point. The RGA is a special governmental organization, which performs state survey, maintenance of real estate cadastre and management of geospatial data at the national level. The RGA plays an important role in making the available geospatial information and services accessible to all by creating various innovative solutions, to support the government and municipal authorities as well as the general public and businesses to make better use of the available data and technologies, including information provision to respond to the covid-19 pandemic in order to plan the necessary social, health and economic measures.

In 2020, when the covid-19 pandemic started, the government of the Republic of Serbia established two groups to manage, coordinate and support the responses to the covid-19 pandemic:

Group 1, dealing with health and social issues, under the Prime Minister supervision;

Group 2, dealing with the economic issues, under the supervision of the President of the Republic of Serbia.

The use of geospatial information and services by both working groups assisted in making better and more informative decisions, to monitor the fast changing situation and decide what measures to be put on place and where most support is needed.

COVID 19 Recovery Action Plan COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan is perfectly tailored and fit

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with real needs and other documents, studies and recommendations and should be linked with Socio-economic study – it is confirmed in Serbia!

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