

A METHOD FOR CASE SELECTION IN STRATEGIC URBAN PLANNING

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Višnja Sretović Brković

Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract. *Strategic planning application is frequent in urban practices. In order to understand this type of planning in a better way, urban researches use and take over good examples of practices from other countries. Selecting examples is most often made without considering their context and the specifics of the urban planning process. In practice, it results in the strategies which are not implemented and the plans which are not realized. The aim of the conducted research is to simplify the urban planners and researchers' choice of compatible good practice cases from different types of environment. This is achieved by creation of an evaluation model, whose role is to help select examples from different environments compatible with the environment where the research is conducted.*

Key words: *strategic urban planning, research methodology, model, case selection*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban planning is an applicable discipline, and therefore the study of practice examples stands for an important part of various researches in this area. It often happens that in such a case the experiences of good urban planning practice from other areas are used with the aim of better understanding the practice in that particular environment. The critical element in research design is the choice of representative and appropriate examples. An example should be chosen in a way that inconsistency between the case environment and the research subject environment is as small as possible, because every generalization in such a case is more valid. (Bracken, 1981).

The method of case selection which will be used in the research is crucial for a qualitative research, such as urban studies (Nielsen, 2016). In practice, the case selection is often made without a detailed analysis of the processes and the context in which the case is located (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Usually an attempt is made to apply

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Corresponding author: Višnja Sretović Brković

Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Kralj Aleksandar Blvd. 73/II, 11120 Belgrade, Serbia

E-mail: visnja_sretovic@yahoo.com

worldwide experiences and methodologies without taking into account the differences of local political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. The fact that in urban research the connection between the investigated phenomenon and the context is usually blurred and somewhat vague, makes the selection process even more difficult (Campbell, 2003).

The significance and impact of the context have often been explored in the area of strategic management and planning (Poulis et al., 2013). Strategic planning, that is, strategic goals and resources are linked with the social context so it is necessary to have the knowledge of the local economy as well as the social and political structure of the community from the start. Misunderstanding the context or failing to take it into account in strategic planning results in a series of problems: strategies are not implemented, or the processes are not organized in such a way so as to be conducted, they are not consistent with the local problems and conditions but they represent a mere copy of the examples from other environments.

For this practice to be avoided, it is very important to understand the constraints, as well as the potentials of using examples from different environments in urban planning related to strategic planning. The process of strategic planning and the context must be viewed as a whole. When selecting an example, it is very important to use examples that are firmly integrated into the environment, i.e. research, based on the knowledge that is not only theoretical but also applied, context-related (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Sources of data should be multiple (Yin, 2012), so their availability and reliability are important. Because of the firm relationship with the context, the selection of the appropriate example goes much further than the importance of one case, because the case represents a larger group of examples in a similar environment (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

In order to simplify the selection process of examples from different environments, a study was conducted, which examined the factors that influence the selection of cases. The results of the study will be used to create a model for evaluating various cases from other environments. The first part of the research is completed and will be shown in this article. The aim of this part of the research is to understand the factors influencing the choice of the strategic planning examples from various environments, parameter and data source identification to enable easier choice of the suitable example.

2. METHODOLOGY

According to Seawright and Gerring, there are seven general strategies of case selection depending on the type of case: typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, most similar, and most different (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Considering the importance of generalization in urban research, and the fact that a generalization is more valid when there is less difference between the cases, this research will be based on a strategy of selecting the most similar case, which is often used in a qualitative research. The most similar case selection strategy consists of several steps: 1) determining the scope of the case – the relevant groups of cases that will be the subject of the research, 2) identifying the parameters which need to match, or have a high degree of similarity, 3) identifying the parameters that need to be fully or to a certain extent different, and 4) selecting one or several appropriate cases most closely related to the research subject. According to this strategy, the examples are similar when their contexts largely coincide (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Even when exceptional cases appear in the research – as are often examples of successful practices: innovative, creative, and different from common

practice (Campbell, 2003) – this strategy is the most applicable because of the importance of the context, which can be used to compare them (Campbell, 2003).

In order to select the most appropriate case using the most similar case strategy, a model was designed for evaluating examples/cases from different environments. The process of creating the model for the evaluation of cases from different environments consists of three phases, which at the same time represent three phases of the research. The first phase represents the formation of a universal part of the model which is the same for all research in the field of strategic planning and represents the choice of parameters from the general methodology and the area of strategic planning: processes and contexts of planning. In the second phase, which depends on the specific urban research for which cases from other environments are selected, the model specialization is performed: the selection of parameters is carried out, determining which parameters need to be similar and which can differ, and based on that, the weight coefficients are assigned to each parameter. In the third phase, the cases are introduced, the values of the parameters are determined for each case; based on these results, the selection of examples is performed and the preliminary selection of parameters is verified through the iterative-incremental procedure. By introducing new case sets, in each iteration the existing list of parameters and data sources is being improved, and the model is being fine-tuned. (Fig.1)

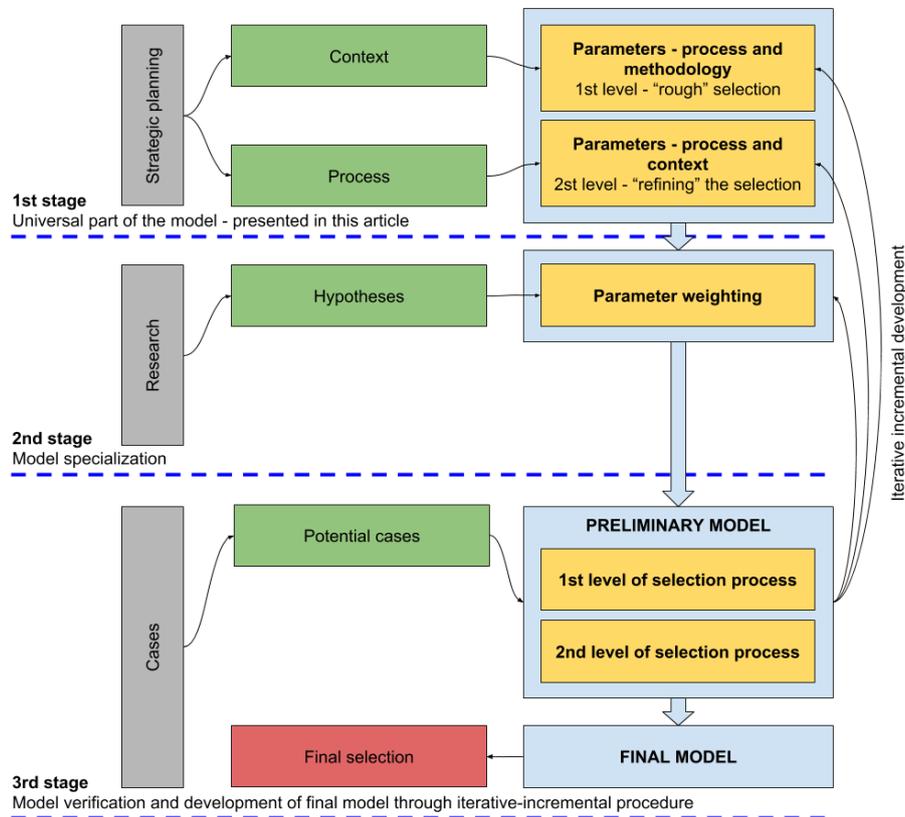


Fig. 1 Model formation procedure

This article presents the first phase of model formation – the formation of a universal part of the model. Through critical analysis of literature in the field of strategic planning and research methodology on case selection, parameters for the evaluation of cases from other environments were selected. Evaluation of the case is done through two steps of selection – "coarse" and "fine" selection, which is the usual procedure for selecting a case study case (Yin, 2012). Based on that, parameters are organized into two groups: parameters for coarse and parameters for fine selection.

The general criteria used to select the parameters of "coarse" and "fine" selection are: 1) the correspondence of the parameters with the principles of the research methodology, 2) compliance with the concept of strategic planning, 3) the representation of parameters explaining the practical possibilities for carrying out the research (for example, access to data, time or money) (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), 4) the optimal quantity of parameters which is not too low to make a selection or too high to disable comparisons and finding of matching examples (Nielsen, 2016), 5) the compliance of parameters with the requirements of a successful generalization of conclusions in the selected cases (Campbell, 2003) and 6) measurability of parameters.

Within the fine selection, the parameters are organized into two subgroups: parameters related to the planning process and those which define the context. Parameters which determine the strategic planning process are key elements of the planning process and are chosen based on the following criteria: 1) to encourage strategic thinking, 2) to influence the achievement of set objectives in strategic planning, 3) to be relevant to action plans later and 4) to influence the implementation (Malekpour, et al., 2015). Within the context of strategic planning – a complex network of social, economic and political activities – parameters which influence the key elements of the planning process and are significant for achieving the goals of strategic planning and implementation have been selected. When selecting parameters, all related disciplines that form the context of strategic planning are taken into account: the parameters of the political, economic, legal and socio-cultural contexts. By introducing a context into the research, related disciplines become significant variables for strategic planning (Campbell, 2003).

The parameters given in this article, obtained by a critical analysis of theoretical sources cannot be considered the final selection of the parameters for the model. By applying the model and introducing real examples and research, and obtaining information derived from practical experiences in a particular context, the list of parameters can be improved.

3. STRATEGIC PLANNING TIME AND LOCAL CONDITIONS

In the course of conducting the research in strategic planning area, it is very important to understand what influences the differences in strategic planning process depending on the environment where it is implemented.

Strategic planning is one of the modern forms of management in the public field. It was created due to the dynamic changes in the society: the changes in economic conditions, the changes in values, technological development, intensified competition, increasingly complex legislation (Lazarevic Bajec, 2009) and impossibility of the existing forms of planning to respond to the problem accordingly.

Strategic planning is most frequently presented as an ideal concept for all conditions. There is a large number of researches that emphasize the qualities of this planning type

such as visionary concept, selectivity, realism, creativity and action orientation. They do not present strategic planning as the reaction to the external influences but the force and driving energy by itself (Newman, 2008). Such approaches often lead to the wrong conclusions, that the strategic planning can be a solution to all the problems of development in different social environments. The idea that strategic planning will solve the problems in the developing countries only because it works in the developed ones is completely wrong (UN HABITAT, 2009). That is why it is important to study actual forms of strategic planning that appear in different types of social and political structures.

Complex environment of decision making and network of relations influences the basic characteristics of the planning process. Goals must be formed within a specific context (economic, cultural, social, political), time, place and level, in accordance with specific topics of interest (Albrechts, 2006).

Thus, we should study both the context in which the planning process is happening as well as the external influences that are shaping the planning process.

3.1. Strategic planning context

John Bryson presents two types of strategic planning with their advantages and disadvantages. The first type is more rational, and it gives advantage to the arranged process; the other one is politics-oriented and depends on the context (Bryson, 2004). He favours the second type which is considered more successful and refers to the importance of the context in strategic planning. Strategic goals and resources are connected to the social context, so it is necessary to carefully balance control and flexibility, formal and informal planning and management, as well as existing and new activities (Lazarevic Bajec, 2009).

The strategies are always made in a specific place at a specific moment (Van den Broeck, 2008). The context is dynamic and therefore it is very important to analyse all the changes that occur during the strategic planning process. It means that the planners in different national, regional and local contexts have different starting points (Newman, 2008).

No strategy can be explained and analysed effectively without considering the context it started from and where it would be realized. According to Jan Bracken, the context can be examined through three components: political, legal and professional (Bracken, 1981). In addition to these, there is an important influence of economic, social and cultural components (Healey, 1997). Because the professional component could be considered a part of the social and cultural components, in this research we studied and used political, legal, economic, social and cultural components of the context in the choice of the parameters.

The political context shapes the institutions and governance. The countries in the world differ a lot, first of all in size, then in the division of territories and different levels of governance. There are clear distinctions in the political systems around the world and their attitude to urban planning (Bracken, 1981). Political system stability is very important for strategy implementation. Strategic planning is said to be an innovation with the chances of survival because it is based on political decisions and it is compatible with them (Bryson, 2004). The government has the greatest responsibility for strategy formulation, monitoring and implementation process management (Lazarevic Bajec, 2009). Strategy implementation quality and efficiency depend on its flexibility. Its flexibility is frequently reflected in horizontal inter-sector cooperation.

The economic context is accompanied by the political context, and it is often considered decisive and dominant compared to the social context, which is one of the criticisms of this type of planning (UN HABITAT, 2009). Market economy favours strategic planning development, while it presents a challenge in the societies with undeveloped market economy.

Legal context refers to the regulatory and legislative framework, and it tries to resolve the conflict between personal and public interest. Finally, social and cultural contexts refer to the capacity of the actors involved in the process, their education, professionalism, cultural attitudes, as well as all the relations and connections between them. Multiculturalism makes harmonizing diverse social capacities challenging, but on a global level it makes different social contexts more similar.

The most important factors that influence the strategic planning process are chosen within each of these categories: 1) political context: government level, political system stability, management flexibility, horizontal and vertical coordination; 2) economic context: market influence; 3) legal context: the existing legislative and regulations; 4) social and cultural context: individual capacities, formal and informal relationships. Hereinafter, it will be explained why each of these criteria are important for selection of cases.

3.2. Strategic planning process

As it has already been mentioned, the dynamic context constantly influences urban planning and management process. Even when the implementation process itself is finished, strategies keep on existing in space and they should always be monitored, changed and adjusted (Bracken, 1981). In order to succeed in responding to all the frequent changes – continuous new decision influx, strategic planning process is conceived as flexible and adaptable.

Thus, one of the first strategic planning definitions describes this planning type as a set of concepts, procedures and tools to help the managers and planners implement their goals more efficiently and increase the planning efficiency. During the planning process, external forces shape the behaviour and relationships among the participants who in turn develop through mutual learning. Consequently, the participants begin to introduce innovation and change into the social environment. Strategic planning process is simultaneously the process of learning, thinking and acting. The final product of the process is not determined at the very beginning, but it represents the result of the effect of the conflicting forces in the context, various types of knowledge, needs, interests, visions and actor ambitions (Bryson, 2004).

In addition to flexibility and adaptability, the characteristic of strategic planning is a continuous iterative process. All the participants return to the beginning several times and check the decisions they have made. Strategic planning is action oriented, but its path is not a straight one. The implementation frequently starts before the planning is finished (Bryson, 2004). Sometimes the implementation starts at the very beginning of planning, following vision and goals definition.

Due to the constant mutual effects between environment factors and adaptation, no strategic planning process can be the same. Each is unique and requires specific modification and harmonization according to the local conditions. There is no determined format for this process. This nature of the strategic planning process additionally complicates the choice of

important parameters. What is common to these processes is that each process is based on the goals and it strives to work harmoniously in order to achieve them.

Five key elements are chosen within a strategic planning process. The elements chosen are the ones that mostly influence the process implementation and success, present in almost every process but varying from one environment to another: actor participation, consensus achievement, finances, division of jurisdiction and formality of the process.

4. CHOOSING THE PARAMETERS FOR THE CASE SELECTION MODEL

4.2 Parameters for the first level of selection

For the first level of the selection process – the "coarse" selection – a set of parameters which are the basic indicators of the adequacy of the selected case should be used. This group contains parameters that show the main characteristics of the strategic planning, the parameters related to the practicality of the research, and the general methodological problem of case selection. If during the evaluation process it turns out that any of the selected cases are not appropriate, those cases must be eliminated from the selection.

The parameters for the first level of selection are:

1. *Data availability and relevance*. This represents one of the most critical aspects for the case selection. Data about other environments frequently originate from secondary sources that cannot be asserted as unbiased and are often subjective. If the planning process has been transparent, the paperwork accompanying the process is easily available, such as the initial agreements, stakeholder analysis, reports, etc. In order to conduct the valid research, it is desirable to have access to the primary sources: official and unofficial documents, a chance to observe the process, conduct a series of interviews in order to confirm the data accuracy etc. (Yin, 2012).

Data sources: documents created in the process or the interviews

2. *The sector where strategic planning is situated*. There is a big difference between strategic planning in private and public sectors. Public authorities do not have the flexibility of private enterprises (Lazarevic Bajec, 2009). However, it frequently happens that models are transferred from private into public field leading to unfeasible plans. The public-private partnerships blurred the boundaries between private, public and non-profit sectors (Bryson, 2004). Private sector has become a part of public affairs. Although the boundaries between the sectors can be blurred, when selecting an example, it is important to identify which sector is the strategic planning a part of, because this has a major impact on the planning process.

Data sources: basic data on strategic planning process

3. *Strategic planning goals*. The goals are shaping the planning process. They are evolving and are added during the whole process when it is necessary to 'push' it in the desired direction (Bryson, 2004). There are several levels of the goals: from general to operative, from long-term to short-term goals, and they all have to be mutually compatible and function together. The goals can be oriented toward the final product or the process. It is important to choose the goals that are coherent and similarly oriented in the case selection process.

Data sources: strategies and action plans

4. *The presence of strategic planning stages.* Every strategic planning process has to contain the elements of strategic thinking, learning and acting. In the first part of the planning process – strategy creation, they are often not that clear and apparent, but they are very prominent in the implementation phase. Therefore the process must be considered in full. Planning and management are connected and cannot function without one another (Bryson, 2004).
Data sources: the initial agreement (presenting the process draft) and reports (about the stages achieved)

4.3 Selected parameters for the second level of selection:

Parameters for the second level of selection – the "fine" selection – are organized into two subgroups: parameters relating to the planning process and context of strategic planning. Depending on the weight, which will be assigned to them in the second phase of the research, they can have varying influence on the selection or elimination of the cases.

The parameters for the second level of selection regarding the elements of strategic planning process are:

1. *Active involvement of all the interested actors.* The involvement of the actors makes the strategic planning process a very complex one. It is necessary to involve the local government representatives, private investors, experts and local community. It is also important that all the actors are involved throughout the process, from the agreement on goals to the implementation. In cases when new actors are introduced into the implementation process, we can say that the implementation becomes a 'moving target' (Bryson, 2004). It is sometimes useful to involve new actors in the implementation in order to be able to perform strategy evaluation, but it is not a good idea in case of the complex process of strategic planning involving a large number of actors. Studying the involvement of actors is very important for the case selection because not all interested parties are involved in some environments, or they are only ostensibly involved, or there is no involvement from the beginning of the process etc.
Data sources: participation plan, stakeholder analysis, actor information data
2. *Provision of consensus among all relevant actors on the goals, that is, actions within the action plans.* Consensus achievement does not simultaneously mean fulfilment of wishes for all the actors. In order to fully or at least partially fulfil the interest of all actors involved, the process of consensus achievement should be conducted in such a way that all the actors are well-informed, actively engaged, interested, that creative thinking and knowledge exchange is fully developed, all the necessary information exist and that the goal are practical (Innes & Booher, 1999). In some cases consensus is not necessary as an indicator of the process success. (Bryson, 2004). It is important for the case selection whether the consensus is achieved because it affects the accomplishment of the plan.
Data sources: the actors' written agreement on the goals and the interviews with the participants in the process.
3. *Financing.* Budget allocation is of crucial importance for strategy implementation. The budget represents the most important document made in the course of strategic planning. The difficulties in budget creation arise from the political context. Short-

term budgets most frequently appear in practice due to political uncertainty, instead of the long-term, comprehensive, innovative, proactive, as well as goal and priority oriented budgets. The problem lies in the fact that planning is completely separated from implementation. In order to overcome that, it is necessary to make the plan before the budget allocation, and that the planned action is timely marked in the annual calendar of each individual actor. There are several modern financing models identified in strategy implementation: performance budgeting, value based budgeting, rolling budget and forecast, zero-based budgeting, activity based budgeting and entrepreneurial budgeting. It is very important that the financing is time-adjusted, according to the activities defined in the action plans.

Data sources: budget, public companies' plans and programs

4. *Division of jurisdiction.* The system of jurisdiction division is in close relation to budget. It is necessary to establish a management structure that will use the resources available in the best way (Lazarevic Bajec, 2009). The responsibilities of each actor in the process are clearly defined through action plans and explicit duties of each unit, team or individual in charge of implementation. It is very important that there is a clear understanding by those implementing the plan about what should be done, when and who should do it (Bryson, 2004) in order to implement the strategy successfully.

Data sources: action plan and reports

5. *The relations between the formal and informal system.* As we have already mentioned in this article, strategic planning originated as a set of concepts and procedures which can be helpful for managers in the management process (Bryson, 2004). Strategic planning was a completely informal process at the very beginning. In certain environments parts of the process were formalized i.e. linked to the formal systems. In others, they remain informal so the link to the formal system is often unclear. Henry Mintzberg discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the strategic planning formalization. He makes a clear distinction between strategic planning and the strategic thinking. The strategies cannot be made as a part of the planning process; instead they are created through creative and intuitive processes. They have to arise from informal communication among people at different levels. If they became a part of the formal process, they would lose the creativity and intuitiveness. On the other hand, formalized processes are very good in acquiring the necessary information for effective strategy formulation. This type of process guarantees discipline and commitment to effective strategy implementation. Whether the process belongs to the formal or informal type can be an indicator of the process flexibility and adaptability, as well as the quality indicator of those managing the process (Mintzberg, 1994).

Data sources: laws, secondary sources describing the planning system and reports in the course of the planning process.

Parameters within the planning context that influence the second stage of case selection from other environments (political, economic, social and cultural):

1. *Level of government.* The countries of the world differ a lot, primarily in size, territorial division and different levels of government. There are large differences between regional levels, for example, in Russia and Serbia. When selecting the case, it is necessary to check whether the levels in which the strategic planning is

happening are compatible. Management structure in planning institutions is a very important factor that influences the process. Hierarchical organization accepts strategic planning process flexibility with a lot of difficulties, while a centralized system most often prevents the implementation of strategic planning.

Data sources: laws and secondary sources describing authority organization levels

2. *Political system stability.* Implementation of strategies mostly depends on the stability of the political system. Frequent changes in the government and unstable political mandates make it impossible to implement strategies, finance agreements, etc. In the event of a change in the government, the implementation of strategies is often interrupted, because it can be interpreted as giving credibility for opposition parties (UN HABITAT, 2009). Political system instability reflects on the budget and long-term financing inability.

Data sources: information on ruling coalitions and their mandates

3. *The existing laws regulating the planning process.* When we speak of the legal framework, it is very difficult to make comparisons because the countries' systems differ a lot. The most important are the laws dealing with government structure, planning, construction, land, and therefore they should be considered in the case selection.

Data sources: the laws dealing with the government structure, planning, construction, land

4. *Flexibility within the administration.* The administration has the greatest responsibility in process management, strategy formulation, monitoring and implementation. It is expected to secure the implementation of strategies, establish instruments and make decisions to help strategy implementation. It often happens, in developing countries and countries in transition, that the authorities still do not understand their new role of business management so they only provide services (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). Flexibility of administration depends on management team capacities, but it can also be reflected in realized innovations or quality of horizontal cooperation. Strategic planning can be conducted with more creativity in flexible authorities.

Data sources: city budget, other reports on local government work

5. *Connection between strategies on horizontal and vertical levels.* The coordination between strategies in terms of timeframes and topics is important. Strategies on the same level from different fields should be coordinated. Similarly, the strategies on different levels should be coordinated, as well as strategies between private and public sectors. Also, it is important that general strategies are made before partial ones. It is necessary to analyse the strategy position in case selection because it sometimes happens that the same problems are treated in several strategies, and/or there are areas developed in more details in other strategy (Lazarević Bajec, 2009).

Data sources: strategies at various levels and in different sectors

6. *Capacities of individuals taking part in the process.* There are great differences in capacities of individuals from different environments. First of all, local government representatives, experts, local community and private investors all take or should part in the planning process. Concerning the local community, in democratic societies, the citizens are familiar with the way the market works, the costs, benefits, competencies and responsibilities of actors (Lazarević Bajec, 2009). Such knowledge, necessary for strategic planning process, is not established in underdeveloped market economies. Likewise, the planner education is very different from one country to another. The

qualification of management team is also very important as it is required from the management to have a good overall view of the planning process and direct the planning process. Flexibility, innovation and creativity depend on it (Mintzberg, 1994).

Data sources: attitude and behaviour evaluation studies, interviews with participants in the process

7. *Institutional capacities* – the qualities of formal and informal connections. The process of thinking, acting and therefore learning is a component of strategic planning. One of the factors of successful implementation is the quality of networks established among the participants in the process (Bryson, 2004). There are clearly built relations and networks in the environments where strategic planning is a frequent practice. There is a greater possibility for strategic planning to be successful in such environments because the institutional capacities are improved through a permanent iterative process.

Data sources: attitude and behaviour evaluation studies, interviews with participants in the process

5. CONCLUSION

The key problem when selecting the cases is the availability of data from other environments. In order to conduct a detailed analysis, it is necessary to use a large number of documents. That requires access to written documents created in the process of strategic planning, holding interviews with participants, and adequate capacity to monitor and observe the selection process. This is the right way to conduct a valid research. An extensive volume of information together with a large number of sources that they are derived from, and the variety of parameters from different fields which have to be considered, all indicate how complex the problem of a case selection from different environments can be, even though this is often not fully realized.

An important issue that demands further investigation is the verification of the case selection model. The model is improved through constant iterations and addition of new cases. However, the question arises: at what point does the model reach the necessary level of quality? It is necessary to conduct further investigation on the assessment procedure of the proposed model.

The contribution of this research is methodological in nature and helps researchers in choosing an appropriate case/example for their research. In addition to informing them of the complexity of the problem, the planned model will enable them to reach more accurate results. If proper, compatible examples were always used for urban research, new findings would provide more practical guidelines for the practice.

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METOD ZA IZBOR PRIMERA USPEŠNE PRAKSE U STRATEŠKOM URBANISTIČKOM PLANIRANJU

Primena strateškog planiranja je česta u urbanističkoj praksi. Radi boljeg razumevanja ovog oblika planiranja u urbanističkim istraživanjima se koriste i preuzimaju inostrani primeri uspešne prakse. Najčešće se izbor vrši bez razmatranja konteksta iz kog su primeri preuzeti i karakteristika procesa planiranja. To u praksi rezultira strategijama koje se ne implementiraju i planovima koji se ne sprovode. Cilj sprovedenog istraživanja je bio da se urbanim planerima i istraživačima pojednostavi izbor odgovarajućih primera dobre prakse iz različitih sredina. To se postiže formiranjem modela za evaluaciju, čija je uloga da izoluje primere iz različitih sredina koji će biti kompatibilni sa konkretnim slučajem iz sredine u kojoj se vrši istraživanje.

Ključne reči: strateško urbanističko planiranje, metodologija istraživanja, model, primeri uspešne prakse