

Klaus Kunzmann's five challenges for spatial planning and development – first formulated in 1997 – have been challenged in many ways over the past two decades. In fact, it seems that we have moved “from theory to practice” in this case as these concepts are now at the centre of attention of local governments, city planners and urban activists all around Europe. When formulated in 1997, these concepts were also entirely new for the “new Europe”. At the same time these were not perceived as applicable by planning professionals and representatives of local governments originating from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In fact, at that time their attention was focused more on securing urban growth and introducing a liberal approach to urban development than providing a holistic approach to city planning and development processes. There is much evidence of this phenomenon, accompanied by critical evaluation of its consequences for urban structures. Most of this is of a negative nature, which is why second thoughts on the most desired model of development arose a few years ago. It is not so surprising to see that these issues are in line with Kunzmann's thoughts from the late 1990s. Therefore, it might be advisable to look closer at how these concepts have been employed by urbanists in central and eastern parts of Europe, where the original works of west-European planning theoreticians (unfortunately, including works of Klaus Kunzmann) are still not widely known, researched or employed in practice. On top of this, one can state that in the case of the “new Europe”, planning concepts are also perceived as weak and not viable in reality, as what really matters are consumers' and the development industry's needs and desires. Despite this, the emergence of new development phenomena – in a surprise to planners themselves – is in line with the concepts stated at the beginning of the 1990s. Therefore, one can provocatively state, that – as discussed within this short paper – in the case of CEE countries the ideas and concepts stated by Kunzmann were not only understood and implemented by planning theoreticians and practitioners, but – first of all – verified by free market forces. I would suggest that this may be regarded as the “ultimate proof” of validity of these concepts. These concepts relate more strongly to physical planning, which – as I would argue – is of the utmost importance to the future of European cities and to the future of CEE cities and regions especially.

The first of Kunzmann's concepts was associated with “conceptualisation, promotion and implementation of sustainable urban development”, which was often translated into the needs behind actions such as the reduction of unnecessary energy and land consumption associated with mobility. In the realities of CEE cities and towns, where a desire to “build as much and as cheaply as possible” has emerged along with liberalisation of planning policies following the 1989 political and economic transformation, these “sustainable urban development principles” were not so taken into account to the same extent. On the contrary, rapid urban decay of central areas as well as new suburban estates emerged. In many cases this was accelerated by “planning inertia” securing opportunities for large-scale suburban growth processes. As one may expect, such a policy appeared to be devastating to cities in the “new Europe”: their (already) underdeveloped centres have fallen into decay and distress in many cases due to rapid and uncontrolled suburbanisation processes. But it seems that this process has led towards the “reversed reaction” of the “end users” of these spaces, namely new residents of the suburban estates as well as the employees of the companies locating their offices and facilities outside cities. Growing transportation costs and difficulties, underdevelopment of the transportation and technical infrastructure as well as a lack of proper social amenities has resulted in growing interest in “returning to the city” and in development of low-energy-consuming modes of living and moving around. One of the best examples of this is the increased reurbanisation process in Gdańsk (Poland), which has led to an increase in population in centrally located areas and rationalisation of transportation infrastructure.

The second of Kunzmann's concepts dealt with the management of space within the realities of increasingly fragmented and polarised urban regions. This challenge can be discussed in two possible ways – at the regional scale (where cities and municipalities constituting the metropolitan region compete for development factors, tax payers and new allocations of work places) and at the local scale (where there are particular stakeholders – including institutional bodies and groups of citizens representing particular group interests).

When looking at the regional scale, one can (sadly) state that this issue is still on the agenda –

as the regional policy in Central and Eastern Europe is particularly weak and ineffective. The general understanding is that it is only the presence of the EU accession and cohesion funds (which are usually dealt with by regional authorities) that makes the existence of these structures justified. Unfortunately, from the planning or development point of view, regional policies are still perceived to be very weak and – as a result – not really implementable. Therefore, even if this policy is accompanied by substantial new plans for regional transportation or other types of infrastructure, these investments are not part of the common regional plan. Common in this case means negotiated, understood and agreed by all players on the stage, various levels of regional and local government (such as regional and municipal authorities), and then comprehensively implemented afterwards. The best example of such a case is the Pomeranian Metropolitan Railway system in Gdańsk, developed with substantial co-funding from EU funds in 2015. In theory, it is supposed to constitute the new infrastructure corridor for the western part of the Tri-City Metropolitan Area. The problem is, however, that this was developed on the basis of regional plans only, which – until recently – have not been coordinated with local planning policies. Therefore, it will take years (if not decades) to reorganise local development policies and (more importantly) processes in order to make effective use of this substantial investment. This line is now in use and is (luckily) serving as the regional connection to the Gdańsk airport as well as to other regional centres. Unfortunately, a still substantial part of its carrying potential (meaning: serving the urban development corridor stretching from Gdańsk westwards) is used only to a small extent. But what is more interesting is that the developers understood the potential of this line and started to look at the opportunities arising. Therefore, one can state that it is not regional or local policy that matters, but “hard investments” that have created new opportunities and unlocked alternative development patterns.

One can argue that the divides Kunzmann was discussing are of a different nature at the local level, where one can identify a number of stakeholders willing to win the development conflicts. In this case – since the democratic society has already had a chance to grow and develop its formal and informal representations (including various groups of so-called urban activists – as discussed by D. Harvey in his recent works). This spontaneous process has led to the situation in which local municipal leaders along

with local physical planners have had to learn what public participation means and how to negotiate planning and development (as well as redevelopment) policies with key stakeholders. There are many examples of success stories in regard to this issue, but there is still a lot more to develop and embed in the planning system. In this case some of the Polish cities can provide examples of best practices that could be replicated in other CEE countries.

As it was argued, at least two of Kunzmann’s challenges are “on the agenda” in CEE cities and regions. Some aspects of these are already being “self implemented” while others (especially related to regional-local policy interlinking) still need some work. This also proves another thesis: that Kunzmann’s challenges have become the “self-implementable solutions”, within which a key role is played by free-market forces.

This observation leads us to the final question that must be asked: What are the challenges in the field of urban planning and development that Europe will have to face over the next ten to twenty years? Bearing in mind the situation presented in this paper, I would argue that there are three:

1. Partnering with various stakeholders (with a special focus on private developers/key investors) in the process of making and implementing effective urban policy. This comes from the conclusion that market forces – if incorporated properly – can substantially help in fulfilling the objectives of public local/regional development policies.
2. Shaping the mechanisms of regional cooperation leading towards the creation of “competitive” regions (or city regions) within which working partnerships between stronger and weaker players are made. These can be associated with various transfers and joint activities, but as a result should lead to a situation within which the disparities between metropolitan centres and suburban or regional centres are mitigated.
3. Reinventing urban design as an important issue for local and regional development policies, which should lead towards “bridging the gap” between policy makers and urban designers. As a result, the physical quality of space should be of the utmost importance for future development of the above-mentioned competitive regions.

All of the points mentioned above relate to physical planning, which – as argued – should play a leading role in shaping Europe’s spatial future. Therefore, one can state that we need first of all to reinvent planning as the profession allowing comprehensive discussion on Europe’s urban future.

