Saša POLJAK ISTENIČ
Valentina GULIN ZRNIĆ

Visions of cities' futures: A comparative analysis of strategic urban planning in Slovenian and Croatian cities

Due to overpopulation, pollution, noise, and other ecological and social problems, cities face a worsening quality of urban life, which requires effective planning of their futures. Urban visions as an aspect of strategic planning can be a starting point for a radical transformation of how towns develop into cities of the future that successfully address current challenges. This article, deriving from the anthropology of the future and planning, analyses how cities imagine their futures and how they narrate it. It compares the visions of eight Slovenian and Croatian cities – Ljubljana, Zagreb, Koper, Rijeka, Maribor, Kutina, Nova Gorica, and Hvar – and assesses how they understand the concept of sustainable development and take into account its principles (economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability). Discourse analysis reveals that visions often remain on paper only, with undefined elements of sustainability and values. They repeatedly instrumentalize urban realities – that is, natural and cultural resources – for their goals. To achieve better cooperation of residents in helping create cities of the future, visions should be more long-term and imaginative.

Keywords: anthropology of the future, urban planning, cities' visions, Slovenia, Croatia

1 Introduction

Since 2010, more people have lived in urban centres than in the countryside; in 2020, the urban population stood at 56.2% (Buchholz, 2020). Increasing population negatively impacts cities; they face overpopulation, pollution, noise, and other ecological and social problems. This requires strategic planning of development, management, and the city's future at multiple levels, from global to local. Thus, in the last decade, the United Nations and the European Union have adopted agendas for a better urban future; among the current ones are the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2017) and *The Future of Cities* (European Commission, 2019), which are based on the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015). The European Union also affects the planning of individual development of European cities; this is evident from the common emphasis of development strategies and their relatively equal duration (mainly addressing the seven-year period of financial frameworks of the European Union).

The term *planning* indicates different practices in different parts of the world and refers to several levels. Each act of planning is strategic but can also result in concrete "maps" and spatial, social, cultural, and other development projects. In the most common sense of imagining the future and preparing for it in advance, planning entails "a broad set of tactics, technologies, and institutions to try to control the passage into the future, including practices and ideas that have spread across private and public organizations" (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a: 2). It can also be understood as "an assemblage of activities, instruments, ideologies, models, and regulations aimed at ordering society through a set of social and spatial techniques" (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a: 3).

Although anthropology, from which this article derives, has often dealt with (abstract) concepts that are crucial for (strategic) planning, such as *country*, *policy*, *development*, and *agency*, or with the concrete practices of colonial and postcolonial (and very rarely democratic) governing of space and residents (cf. Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013b), this activity has only received greater research attention in the last decade (the opposite is true of applied anthropology, which has intensively dealt with planning in practice). One of the reasons for the assertion of planning as an anthropological subject of research is definitely the need for increased participation of residents (cf. Poljak Istenič, 2019a, 2019b; Svirčić Gotovac et al., 2021) because ethnography can very successfully explain frequent conflicting views on what people want and what they think is possible. The second reason is theoretical because anthropology, which was established as a synchronic/diachronic discipline, has finally faced its "tempocentrism" (Textor, 2005; cf. Munn, 1992)

and has begun to deal with the future, which, according to some urban theorists, is unique for the identity of (spatial) planning (cf. Myers & Kitsuse, 2000: 221). Urban planning is thus defined by some authors as "storytelling about the future" (cf. Throgmorton, 1992). They emphasize that reading urban planning as one of the styles of storytelling about the future of cities helps highlight a particular type of discourse and narrative strategies that urban planning uses to make sense of its role in society and urban development (Collie, 2011: 425). Accordingly, this article is based on a discourse analysis of the visions of selected Slovenian and Croatian cities. It stems from the project Urban Futures: Imagining and Activating Possibilities in Unsettled Times, and its aim is to present how cities imagine their future and how they narrate it according to the concept of sustainable development, which was crucial in the European Union at the time when Slovenian and Croatian urban strategies were being outlined. In this way, the article follows the enhanced anthropological interest in the studies of imagining the future (Appadurai, 2013; Salazar et al., 2017; Petrović-Šteger, 2018a; Bryant & Knight, 2019; Gulin Zrnić & Poljak Istenič, 2022).

2 Methodology and the structure of the article

The research analyses discourse from a cultural point of view (cf. Foucault 1972). We were interested in the "authorized discourse" (Smith 2006) of urban policy: the manner of writing visions, a vision as a collection of content knowledge, and visions as a procedure for appropriate communication and use of knowledge. The subject of the analysis is visions that are part of the current urban development strategies of eight Slovenian and Croatian cities. If they have not yet published documents for the current European Union financial framework period (2021–2027) on their webpages, we took into account the strategies for the previous period (2014–2020); some of them were extended until 2030. We analysed the following documents: *Trajnostna urbana strategija Mestne občine Ljubljana 2014–2030 / Sustainable Urban Strategy of the City of Ljubljana 2014–2030* (hereinafter: TUS MOL), *Razvojna strategija Grada Zagreba za razdoblje do 2020. godine / Development Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the Period until 2020* (hereinafter: RS Zagreb), *Trajnostna urbana strategija mesta Koper 2030 / 2030 Sustainable Urban Strategy of the City of Koper* (hereinafter: TUS Koper), *Plan razvoja grada Rijeke 2021.–2027. / 2021–2027 Plan for the Development of the City of Rijeka* (hereinafter: PR Rijeka), *Maribor ima priložnosti: Trajnostna urbana strategija Mestne občine Maribor / Maribor Has Opportunities: Sustainable Urban Strategy of the City of Maribor* (hereinafter: TUS MOM), *Strategija razvoja Grada Kutine za programsko razdoblje 2014.–2020. /*

Development Strategy of the City of Kutina for the 2014–2020 Programming Period (hereinafter: SR Kutina), *Mlado in zeleno središče ustvarjalnih energij: Trajnostna urbana strategija Nova Gorica 2020 / Young and Green Centre of Creative Energies: Nova Gorica 2020 Sustainable Urban Strategy* (hereinafter: TUS Nova Gorica), and *Strategija razvoja Grada Hvara do 2020. godine / Strategy for Developing the City of Hvar by 2020* (hereinafter: SR Hvar). To contextualize the visions (when necessary), we also analysed the strategic goals and priorities published in these documents.

The cities whose visions we analyse were selected based on similarities that allow a comparison. Ljubljana and Zagreb are the capital cities in the two countries and the most important political, economic, educational, health, administrative, and cultural centres; as such, they are also the most attractive urban locations for national and international immigration and investment, but they differ from each other in their positioning at the European or global level. Considering only the titles conferred by UNESCO and the European Commission, Ljubljana has been the World Book Capital (2010), the UNESCO City of Literature (since 2015), the Green Capital of Europe (2016), and a candidate for the 2025 European Capital of Culture (losing to Nova Gorica in the second round); Zagreb does not yet have such titles. Koper and Rijeka are the leading national ports as well as multiethnic and multicultural cities. Maribor and Kutina are inland cities, regional centres, and industrial cities that flourished during the socialist period and faced a transition crisis due to unemployment and urban restructuring after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Hvar and Nova Gorica are geographically peripheral cities with very different urban characters. The first is an island city whose urban character comes from antiquity; it was a historically important Mediterranean port and is now an attractive tourist destination. The second was built according to the garden city concept and modernist principles; it arose after the Second World War due to the loss of access to Gorizia (in Italy) as an administrative, economic, and cultural centre.

The analysis follows the approach of the anthropology of public policy, which Janine R. Wedel and Gregory Feldman (2005: 2) call "studying through"; that is, the "process of following the source of a policy – its discourses, prescriptions, and programmes – through to those affected by the policies." We thus analysed how the European Union, through its programmes and requirements in different national frameworks, influences the planning of cities' futures in accordance with sustainable development. Sustainable development is most explicitly defined in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which sets seventeen general objectives and 169 concrete objectives for this kind of development. Among these, the eleventh general objective is specially dedicated to urban development (to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable); however, it had not yet been adopted at the time when the strategies of the previous period were being developed. Therefore, the article refers to the concept of sustainable development, which was endorsed at that time – especially in academic circles related to the study of culture – and was also the basis for the aforementioned agenda (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). It is based on four pillars: the economy, the environment, society, and culture. In the visions, we analysed whether cities take these pillars into account, in what terms they address them, what role the individual pillars play in a vision, and what cities emphasize as worthy of developing in a specific pillar (e.g., entrepreneurship, tourism, mobility, energy, green spaces, participation, creativity, heritage, etc.). We traced contexts in which a particular idea (or an element of sustainable development) appears, compared them, looked for similarities and differences, and sought to show the diversity of understandings in selected cities. We read the visions as narratives of the possible understanding of this concept that direct political discussions toward selected elements of sustainability, influence the way political problems are recognized, and legitimize or marginalize certain political solutions. In doing so, we set the basis for future ethnographic research on how policies expressed on paper are translated into practice.

The article first outlines the theoretical framework from which the analysis derives and then presents the visions of the selected places. We scrutinize the process of the visions' creation and pay particular attention to the analysis of how the cities understand and use the concept of sustainable development in the visions. Finally, we summarize how visionary the urban visions are.

3   Imagining the future in planning

Planning combines two key concepts that have occupied researchers from different disciplines since the beginning: time and space. "Planning is a form of conceptualizing space and time, and the possibilities that time offers space" (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a: 2). However, even though it was explicitly defined by imagining the future, at the end of the last century urban theorists warned that the vision of life in the twenty-first century outlined in spatial planning is relatively unchanging. It was based solely on traditional projection and modelling methods, which are ineffective techniques for predicting rapid, qualitative, and nonlinear changes (Warren et al., 1998: 49; cf. Myers & Kitsuse, 2000). Under the pressure of budget cuts and other (neoliberal) circumstances, planners have ceased to be visionaries and idealists, and so it is imperative that planning "reassert its unique claim to the future, and accept again the responsibility of being a source of ideas, knowledge, and inspi-

ration about what might be and what ought to be" (Isserman, 1984: 219). There have been calls for the use of imagination, including literary approaches (Warren et al., 1998; Collie, 2011; Sjöberg, 2017), especially in scenario writing (Ratcliffe & Krawczyk, 2011; Stojanović et al., 2014; Textor, 1995). Under the influence of these calls, three techniques proved to be productive for an effective (i.e., inspiring and mobilizing) representation of the future: visioning, scenario writing, and storytelling. They are intended to serve as heuristic or rhetorical guidelines for action – to encourage discussion of desired futures, prepare planners to address the future with authority, and persuade others to adopt a particular plan for the future (Myers & Kitsuse, 2000: 227).

Storytelling is a technique that is mainly established in folklore (see MacDonald, 1999; Marković, 2015; Kropej Telban, 2021), whereas in planning it is used to prepare the audience for the future and persuade people to accept what the narrator thinks the best course of action or performance is (cf. Throgmorton, 1992). Scenario writing was promoted as early as the 1970s by the American anthropologist Robert Textor (1995) as a method to explore the future, whereas urban planners understand scenarios as narratives of potential events that could influence planning decisions (see Myers & Kitsuse, 2000). However, because the analysis shows that these two techniques are not established in Slovenian and Croatian (urban) planning, this article focuses only on visioning. Visions are a mandatory element of (sustainable) urban strategies required by national legislation and a condition for applying for European cohesion funds. Although we build on the experience of some Slovenian anthropologists that have dealt with visioning or visionaries and questioned what they can achieve with their ideas about the future (Gregorič Bon, 2018; Kozorog, 2018; Petrović-Šteger, 2018b, 2020; Vodopivec, 2018), we do not deal with people that create visions, but with cities using them to influence their residents. Visions have proven to be a starting point for a radical transformation of how towns evolve into cities of the future, addressing current challenges and promoting the long-term prosperity of society and the planet. Based on experience from abroad, the most successful visions are created by political authorities through strong participatory processes. The imaginaries they build typically define major urban functions and support all urban projects and policies in the short and long term (Ortegon-Sanchez & Tyler, 2016: 6). The creation of urban visions was stimulated precisely by the requirements for participatory planning; the vision has proven to be a good tool for motivating residents to participate and for clarifying the community's essential concerns and interests. As noted by Myers and Kitsuse, a vision is not a fantasy but an optimistic image of what could be achieved in a city (municipality, region, etc.) in terms of available capacity and resources. Visions that balance the creative and collaborative

aspects of the visioning process with feasibility projections and soundness in action scenarios have proved the most effective. When visions are not followed by strategies for achieving goals and the authority to reach them is absent, they can degenerate into "inconsequential and expensive wish lists for the future" (Myers & Kitsuse, 2000: 227–228). Ideally, visions are the first step by which cities plan their futures. They use them to define the cities' fundamental values and perceived competitive advantages. The vision is followed by a strategy (in addition to the general urban one, it can also be a sectoral strategy, e.g., cultural, tourist, welfare, etc.), which determines how and in what order the goals outlined in the vision should be realized. Spatial plans then define where and how development should be actualized in space. The last step is development projects, through which plans become implemented (Šumi, 2007: 4).

4   Visions of the selected cities

After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Slovenia and Croatia had different experiences with the transition to post-socialism / capitalism and consequent entry into the EU. Today, both countries are characterized by very uneven urban development. Slovenia is subject to suburbanization, which is most pronounced in the Ljubljana and Maribor urban regions, with high population density and employment. According to data from 2020 (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, 2021), 14% of Slovenia's population lives in Ljubljana, which is also the economically strongest city; Maribor is the only other settlement in the country that Eurostat recognizes as a city. On the other hand, the National Statistical Office recognizes 156 urban settlements in Slovenia based on population, surplus jobs, and/or the town's role in a certain area; nine are considered medium-sized towns (Ministrstvo za okolje in prostor, 2016). Except for Koper with its port, none are internationally important. All face demographic stagnation, and as many as five depend on state subsidies (Ministrstvo za okolje in prostor, 2020), which calls into question the ability of these cities to independently plan their development. In Croatia, 20% of the population lives in Zagreb, which generates almost 35% of the national gross domestic product (data for 2019; cf. Gradski ured za gospodarstvo, ekološku održivost i strategijsko planiranje, 2022). The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration lists 127 towns (Ministarstvo pravosuđa i uprave, n. d.); twenty-five of them have the status of a large town, either because of the population (more than 35,000) or because of being the regional administrative centre (Škunca, 2015). Apart from the capital and three regional urban centres (Rijeka, Split, and Osijek), Croatian towns are unevenly developed and even face urban shrinkage because many cannot attract and retain their population. According to demographers, this is one of the reasons for the current rapid depopulation of some regions and

international migration (Wertheimer-Baletić & Akrap, 2014; cf. the 2021 census, gl. Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, n. d.). In both countries, economic, political, social, and cultural urban trends emerge, such as deindustrialization of cities, post-Fordism, strengthening the creative economy and tourism, neoliberal governance and deregulation, declining public services and social security, insecurity, and an aging society, which strongly influence the cities' spatial, social, and imaginary dimensions. Each city faces its own challenges, which affect the planning of the urban future. We show this through the examples of Ljubljana, Maribor, Koper, Nova Gorica, Zagreb, Kutina, Rijeka, and Hvar.

4.1 Creating the visions

The first among them to create its vision was Ljubljana in 2007. The vision claims to have the "character of a resolution that obliges the city administration to realize it in the long run." It is intended to be "up-to-date as an instrument of monitoring and testing the efficiency of the city's development policy" for the next two and a half decades (Oddelek za urbanizem Mestne občine Ljubljana in Šumi, 2007: 9). Its purpose is to encourage "establishing the self-image of the city, which shows what the city means to the residents and what the actual expectations are about its future. A positive image of a city, which comes from its history, cultural traditions, and spatial features, thus has a major impact on life in the city and is also a powerful factor for its economic and social development. It helps in discovering the benefits and new opportunities of development and is especially important for making basic strategic decisions that change the city" (TUS MOL, 2015: 24). Maribor was the only city besides Ljubljana to create its vision before 2014 (2012 for 2030). Visions are intended to form the basis for further urban strategic documents. All Slovenian cities included them in development strategies by 2020; they were a mandatory element of sustainable urban strategies, which were the prerequisite for obtaining European cohesion funds for 2014–2020. The visions are, as a rule, stated after the analysis of the situation and of the benefits, weaknesses, opportunities, and dangers (SWOT), and they are followed by a description of goals, priorities, and measures. These strategies were created by the beginning of 2016 with a vision until 2020, and in Nova Gorica to 2020+; Ljubljana and Koper later extended them to 2030 with minor adjustments.

Creating development strategies with integrated visions in Croatia has been similar to Slovenia's process. Zagreb started preparing its strategy in 2009 and adopted it in 2012 with a development plan until the end of 2013. Later, it was expanded, revised, and adopted in the fall of 2017 as a development strategy until 2020; its validity was extended until 2021. The vision of Zagreb, defined in the first document, remained the

same in all later versions of the development strategy. The development plan for 2021–2027 is currently in the making. Kutina prepared a development strategy until 2020 in 2015. The same applies to Hvar, which has not published a new one yet. Rijeka adopted its 2014–2020 strategy and is currently the only Croatian city in our analysis that has already published a development plan for 2021–2027, which includes the 2030 vision of Rijeka.

To sum up, the vision statements in the Slovenian and Croatian cities studied are generally part of a broader document (i.e., a development strategy), which includes an evaluation of the current state of affairs (a SWOT analysis) as well as strategic goals and action plans. Although development plans are published on municipal websites (however, the links are not always easily accessible), visions are not highlighted or singled out. We can thus conclude that the cities do not consider them crucial for communication with residents. Below, we summarize them with keywords or sentences explicitly marked or underlined as a vision.

- "Ljubljana will be an all-Slovenian metropolis, a natural and ideal city." (TUS MOL, 2015: 24–25; Mestna občina Ljubljana, n. d.).
- "The City of Zagreb – an urban incubator of sustainable concepts, entrepreneurship, and new values" (RS Zagreb, 2017: 111).
- "Koper – a city tailored to man, a city of the sea, sun, and greenery, a city of tradition, modernity, and the future" (TUS Koper, 2020: 70).
- "Rijeka 2030 – a smart, open, and resilient city" (PR Rijeka, 2021: 81; Grad Rijeka, n. d.).
- "Maribor will be a self-sufficient city of satisfied residents who will participate in creating dynamic spatial development, a socially embedded economy, and a fair social environment" (TUS MOM, 2015: 61–62).
- "The city of Kutina is an attractive and vital global city with an economy based on an innovative approach to sustainable development, with a recognized identity based on natural and cultural resources, with a high quality of life for residents based on community and a feeling of home" (SR Kutina, n. d.: 85).
- "Nova Gorica 2020+ – a young and green centre of creative energies" (TUS Nova Gorica, 2016: 20–21).
- "The vision of the city of Hvar is tourism prominence and attraction because of its natural beauty, historical values, and contemporary trends" (SR Hvar, 2016: 176).

The clearest visions are expressed in keywords (with a slogan), such as those for Ljubljana, Zagreb, Rijeka, Koper, and Nova Gorica. They are usually followed by a more detailed explanation of what the place should look like in the future. However, some cities fail to articulate clear visions from which residents

can imagine how their city will develop. They remain unclear because of too many emphases (many keywords, lengthy and dense descriptions), generality (the same vision could refer to several cities), or technocratic language (visions or their explanations conceptually and terminologically follow the key emphases of European strategies), or because they do not clearly link the text of the vision to the slogan (or with the individual goals of development they list later on). An example of the last is the Maribor vision, which is supposed to be summarized by the slogan "Maribor: a self-sufficient inclusive city"; however, the slogan of the city's sustainable strategy reads "Maribor has an opportunity." At the same time, when explaining the concept of sustainability, which is the basis of the strategy, the emphasis is on "Maribor will be a circular city." These different points impede a clear, unambiguous understanding of the vision and weaken its message about what kind of city the residents should strive for and act toward. Some visions remain only on paper; for example, Zagreb predicts new values that the city of the future will be built on. However, it is difficult to identify with them because they are not clearly defined. On the other hand, Hvar does not plan its future tailored to its residents, but predominantly tourists. The visions therefore differ in affective notions because with the very choice of words or discourse some cities fail to encourage residents to identify with the city or accept the vision of future urban life. Other cities are more successful in doing so and address the residents with positive ideas for living in a "city tailored to man" (Koper) or in "the centre of creative energies" (Nova Gorica). Maribor even directly addresses residents to participate in the creation of the future city: "The city has the opportunity to succeed and at the same time offers its residents the opportunity to share the vision and hope with it. Let's become part of the solution to the problem" (TUS MOM, 2015: 61). It is also informative that only one vision explicitly envisages the "city of the future" (Koper) and that only two visions are written in the future tense; that is, they quote what the city is going to become (Ljubljana and Maribor); in two cases (Nova Gorica and Rijeka), the future is symbolized by the year (written in numerals).

As we have already pointed out, visions are the most successful when created through residents' participation. Slovenian and Croatian cities were also obliged to involve the public (residents, city organizations, and various departments of city administration) in preparing strategies. Each strategy thus explains public participation procedures, either in the document itself or in special annexes. Except for Hvar, which entrusted the task to the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb (which is also reflected in the strategic discourse), the preparation of strategies was led by urban services or local organizations (e.g., development agencies). They set up strategic councils or working groups for individual areas. They conducted various workshops

(e.g., with focus groups or organizations, meetings with experts and residents, surveys, etc.). However, participation differed from city to city. Some cities made an effort to communicate with the residents face-to-face, whereas others accepted only written initiatives, corresponding to the lowest levels on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969).

4.2 How sustainable will the urban future be?

When the majority of strategies were created, the European cohesion policy emphasized the importance of sustainable development for its implementation, and so all strategies are at least based on this concept on paper. Although it is rooted in concern for nature, without exception it relates to an economy that is understood as the main force of development. Critics thus point to the economic logic of the concept; nature (and in recent times also culture) is treated as a source of development and not as a value in itself. A development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 16) was initially conceptualized as three pillars; however, after the adoption of *Agenda 21 for Culture* in 2002, it is based on four pillars: economy, environment, and society linked to culture as the central pillar (cf. Nurse, 2006; Labadi & Gould, 2015; Poljak Istenič, 2016; Fakin Bajec, 2020). However, as the Slovenian sociologist Drago Kos (2004: 332) warned almost two decades ago, simplifying the understanding of sustainable development raises doubts about the seriousness of approaches and discussions, "which, despite the declared end of history [cf. Fukuyama] still deal with the future." This has been proved by John et al. (2015), who analysed sustainable visions of nine cities of the global North. They ascertained that the visions do not include the concept of sustainability comprehensively and consistently, but focus on improving individual aspects of urban life; for example, the built environment, ecosystem services, the economy, management, and so on.

4.2.1 Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability is a crucial pillar of sustainable development, which has also been substantiated by other terms or concepts in the last decade such as green growth (Jänicke, 2012), degrowth (D'Alisa et al., 2014), and the circular economy (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). Sustainability in the economy usually implies that the economy does not harm the environment and exploit people or destroy natural, social, and human capital (Spangenberg, 2005: 49). The 2025 vision of Ljubljana was the first to anticipate a more sustainable urban future. This was intended to be an influential factor in the economic (and social) development of the city, although the economy has a more or less marginal role in the vision itself and is also

ambiguously conceived. On the one hand, it implies growth and development of the area (the vision of a metropolis for all Slovenians). On the other hand, the city is expected to "harmonize the interests of the market with social benefits" (the vision of the ideal city) and, in the context of a natural city, to exploit (rather than primarily protect) natural potentials; for example, for energy (TUS MOL, 2015: 25). The vision of Koper sets the economy in a similar context: "the sea and the seashore, the sunny sub-Mediterranean climate, and green areas . . . are important carriers of specialized economic activities of Koper's urban area" (TUS Koper, 2020: 70). Economic sustainability is therefore (also) based on the exploitation of nature, although nature is supposed to be protected precisely by the transformation of the economy. Meanwhile, Rijeka defines sustainability as "smart management of its own resources and capacities" but does not limit the resources to nature (PR Rijeka, 2021: 81).

Unlike the cities mentioned above, Zagreb, Maribor, Kutina, Nova Gorica, and Hvar place the economy at the centre of their visions. The economy's sustainability is most explicitly defined in Maribor's vision of the circular city: the economic pillar of sustainable development is based on the introduction of a circular economy. The city understands the circular systems of action as those "which use the inner spatial potentials, try to include all population strata, and encourage economic cycles that will evenly distribute the welfare" (TUS MOM, 2015: 61). The special feature of Maribor as a post-industrial city is that the former industrial economy still has significant symbolic value for its future; the city grounds the (visual) scheme of the "self-sufficient inclusive city" vision in the logo of the former TAM automobile factory, which "acted as one of the basic drivers of economic, social, and cultural life in the city" and without which "it is impossible to conceive of the city" (TUS MOM, 2015: 62).

Whereas Maribor's vision is based on a specific understanding of the economy as sustainable, Zagreb – based on the terms *incubator*, *entrepreneurship*, *entrepreneurial approach*, and *creative process* – narrates it in a distinctly neoliberal sense. The economy's competitiveness is cited as the first strategic goal; developing a stimulating entrepreneurial environment and an economy based on knowledge, innovations, and quality products and services seems necessary for the future of Zagreb. Sustainability is explicitly linked only to agriculture and forestry, which, however, are not mentioned in the goal's explanation or in the impact indicators. The vision of Zagreb as an "urban incubator of sustainable concepts" (RS Zagreb, 2017: 111) thus remains merely on paper and even more elusive for residents, who are expected to become inspired to participate in creating the future city.

The visions of Nova Gorica and Kutina also address entrepreneurship as a key to their future. Nova Gorica wants to establish itself as an innovative economic centre and "an excellent business location for propulsive companies from the wider border area" (TUS Nova Gorica, 2016: 20). As a university city, it connects entrepreneurship with knowledge and research; the idea is close to the notion of a creative city (Landry & Bianchini, 1995), which relies on creative industries (i.e., economic activities focused on creating and using knowledge and information). This kind of city is also promoted as a brand by UNESCO and its creative cities network (cf. Poljak Istenič 2017). Such an understanding of cities is also reflected in the visions or strategic goals of Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Rijeka, which are also university centres. However, Nova Gorica does not mention the activities characteristic of this sector – with the possible exception of tourism, information and communication technologies, and gambling – which weakens the vision of a "green centre of creative energies." Nova Gorica's vision also does not define sustainability or the green economy; except for activating degraded areas, it is not clear how such an environment or the industries could sustainably develop (TUS Nova Gorica, 2016: 20). In contrast, Kutina, places its hopes on competitive entrepreneurship. However, in contrast to Nova Gorica, the city would also develop this in non-urban sectors of the economy; it understands the sustainability of the economic pillar in linking it to both the environment and society; that is, as "holistic concern for the environment while promoting and enhancing socially responsible business" (SR Kutina: 87). The vision of Kutina is, at least for the economy, otherwise distinctly non-urban; the city sees its future in the development of ecological agriculture, sustainable rural tourism based on preserved heritage, and social entrepreneurship.

Hvar's vision is the most specific in economic terms. It focuses on developing tourism – however, not explicitly sustainable tourism, but "adventurous, health, and cultural" tourism (SR Hvar, 2016: 176). Sustainability is a fundamental development principle, but it is not the identity of economic activities.

4.2.2 Environmental sustainability

The concept of sustainable development, which emerged from concern for nature or the environment, is paradoxical. By interfering with nature and exhausting natural resources in the name of development, people change the environment (Jabareen, 2008: 181). Therefore, some have understood the environment as a major obstacle to human progress (Goodland, 1995: 2). Although two approaches have developed to understanding environmental sustainability – the first implies the dominance of nature (i.e., the environmental dimension of the sustainability of social institutions and practices), and the

second advocates for nature's rights (i.e., the sustainability of the natural environment; cf. Meadowcroft, 1999: 14) – today the emphasis is on the first approach. We do not strive to protect nature itself, but to meet human needs so that they do not endanger the health of ecosystems (cf. Morelli, 2011).

Cities are not ambitious in planning an environmentally sustainable future, although this plays a relatively important role in their visions. Slovenian cities mainly identify with this dimension; on paper, they will become a "natural city" (Ljubljana), a "green low-carbon city" (Nova Gorica), "grounded Maribor" (Maribor), and "the city of sea, sun, and greenery" (Koper). Croatian cities define care for the environment and sustainable handling of natural resources mainly in strategic goals. The most affective is Rijeka's vision, which calls to "[p]reserve Rijeka 2030: a smart, green, and clean city adapted to the needs of all residents" (PR Rijeka, 2021: 82). Zagreb emphasizes the importance of protecting the environment and managing natural resources and energy, Hvar the development of infrastructure and protecting nature and the environment, and Kutina the recognition and preservation of cultural and natural heritage, development of the quality of life, and protection of the environment.

Emphasized green topics are primarily sustainable mobility (developing public transport infrastructure, especially for strengthening public transport and cycling), energy efficiency (reducing energy consumption, use of renewable resources), improving access to green spaces, connecting with the city's outskirts, and protecting natural heritage. Environmental issues in the visions are often linked to the concept of a smart city, which implies smart and efficient energy management and "the most modern urban supply" (TUS Nova Gorica, 2016: 21), or optimization of actions, minimization of environmental effects, and providing the highest quality of living (TUS Koper, 2020: 70). On the other hand, Rijeka, which explicitly narrates the vision of development into a smart city, understands this concept much more broadly: as the use of modern technologies in all fields to improve its residents' quality of life (PR Rijeka, 2021: 81).

4.2.3 Social sustainability

The social pillar of sustainable development is not only often a neglected aspect of this concept (Vallance et al., 2011; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Poljak Istenič et al., in press); it is also not clear which processes, phenomena, or measures it addresses (Murphy, 2012). Böstrom (2012: 7) thus lists a wide range of quality-of-life indicators that define this pillar, such as social security, social justice, social cohesion, cultural diversity, democratic rights, gender and other equalities, labour rights,

and broad participation, as well as the development of social capital and individual abilities.

The vision of Maribor most explicitly explains how the city understands the social pillar of sustainable development – it envisages introducing "the principles of the circular system of social integration, and the residents' involvement in the processes of the city's operation" (TUS MOM, 2015: 61). This is emphasized in the term *inclusive city*, which constitutes the vision's slogan. Some other cities also summarize social sustainability with engaging phrases such as "ideal city" (Ljubljana), "open city" (Rijeka), "city tailored to man" (Koper), "the city of the joy of life for all generations" (Nova Gorica), or the city of "high quality of life for residents based on community and a feeling of home" (Kutina). In social terms, the visions of Zagreb and Hvar are the least inspiring. The former addresses the social pillar in the strategic objective "improving the quality of life" and defines its priorities as improving the quality of housing, social integration of local communities, safety, quality leisure time, and improving social infrastructure (RS Zagreb, 2017: 117). However, the indicators (quality public schools and the number of health staff with a higher education) do not relate to the first two priorities. Using technocratic language, Zagreb's strategy does not offer a vision of social sustainability, which is meant to be an essential component of the quality of urban life. Hvar does not relate to this aspect of sustainability in its vision, but it addresses it in the mission. By 2020, it expects to develop a city brand of a "place of a pleasant and happy life that offers high quality of life for residents" (SR Hvar, 2016: 177).

One of the most critical elements of social sustainability is the participation of residents in the decision-making process. Rijeka explicitly highlights its vision to "take care of all its inhabitants and promote their involvement and civil activity in all spheres of life." In 2030, it will be "a city open to all, a city that proactively includes and seeks the cooperation of residents, and a city that plans its development with its residents and for its residents" (PR Rijeka, 2021: 81). The visions of Koper and Maribor are similar but more modest. Zagreb and Kutina would develop residents' participation through societies and other civic associations. However, this aspect does not seem to be crucial for the future of Nova Gorica and Hvar. Ljubljana is a particular case because the cooperation of the residents (self-organization of civil society for managing public affairs, participatory urban governance, and inclusion of NGOs in solving the problems of city governance) is highlighted as crucial for developing into the ideal city in the vision published on the municipal website; however, there is no trace of these accents in the current vision published in TUS MOL.

4.2.4 Culture: the central pillar of sustainable development

In the twenty-first century, critiques of the three sustainable development pillars have become more prominent. Researchers have pointed out that the concept, conceived in such a way, was in crisis because it failed to integrate a key component: cultural aspects of society. Culture was not recognized as a critical factor in development. The concept also overlooked the influence of culture as a way of life for how people understand the term *development* or perceive the world around them (Duxbury et al., 2012: 73). Researchers that mainly focused on developing countries thus proposed a different concept of sustainable development, in which culture has a central position. They established a new model in which the pillars of social justice, ecological balance, and economic self-sufficiency are linked to cultural identity. In addition to cultural identity, the cultural pillar also consists of tangible and intangible heritage, cultural industries, cultural pluralism, and geoculture (Nurse, 2006: 40).

Based on the visions analysed in the article, we can point to three emphases of the cultural pillar crucial for cities' futures: culture as a way of life, cultural heritage, and creativity (also as a component of the cultural and creative sectors, which are more likely to relate to the economy). Developing or making an urban lifestyle possible is understood as vital for some of the cities' futures. In 2025, Ljubljana sees itself as "the space of the realized ideals of modern urban life and residing" (TUS MOL, 2015: 25), and Koper understands the "everyday life of people [as] a guarantee for the vibrancy of the city; and the cosiness of urban space and the variety of content [as an assurance] for strengthening the city's Mediterranean urban culture" (TUS Koper, 2020: 70). Other cities speak of their identity, which is considered essential for their future; Hvar is poised to become a "place of recognizable cultural identity [and] urban-cosmopolitan orientation" (SR Hvar, 2016: 177), Kutina aims to be a city of "recognized identity based on natural and cultural resources, with a high quality of life for residents based on community and a feeling of home" (SR Kutina: 85), and Nova Gorica is counting on multiculturalism as a factor in the development of urban culture, which is intended to be the "cornerstone of the city's identity" (TUS Nova Gorica, 2016: 21). These specific visions of urban life also build on the range of cultural activities available or cultural conditions, which correlates with the other two emphases of the cultural pillar.

Creativity (as cultural production in the broadest sense) became important in the 1990s with the need to restructure the industrial economy in the global North, when the field of culture began to be credited with the potential to create

wealth and increase economic efficiency (Poljak Istenič, 2017). Creative people have also become the foundation of sustainable development. This is evident in the vision of Ljubljana as a "historic city of creative people," in which creative culture is intended to help create the character of a European capital (TUS MOL, 2015: 25). Other visions mention cultural content, services, or resources. However, they link creativity, if mentioned at all, primarily to entrepreneurial initiatives and therefore include it in the economic (and not cultural) pillar of sustainable development.

Heritage is the most significant cultural resource for urban identity and tourism development. This is most emphasized by Koper: "The cultural heritage of the historic city centre is the cornerstone of the revived city" (TUS Koper, 2020: 70). Kutina's vision, which mentions cultural resources (and not culture), makes recognizing and preserving cultural and natural heritage one of its strategic goals; the same applies to Hvar. In other visions, culture does not play an important role, although some cities emphasize its importance for spatial development, tourism, or the development of local communities when describing priorities, goals, and measures.

5   Conclusion

Although efforts for a better future are not tied to specific locations, they are most noticeable in cities as the central foci of power that determine the state of the modern world. Due to the increasing urban population and the economic dependence of the rural environment on cities, cities become increasingly exposed to climate change, economic crises, and social turmoil. They are thus in need of "future-proofing" (Girardet, 2008). On the other hand, they try to convince their residents, visitors, and investors with branding (cf. Poljak Istenič, 2016, 2018) and visions that tell of a beautiful, better future. Based on the analysis of the visions of eight Slovenian and Croatian cities, this article presents how they imagine their futures and how they narrate these in official development strategies.

When most visions analysed in the article were created, Europe placed key strategic emphasis on sustainable development, generally conceptualized by four pillars: economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability. Visions are intended to be a powerful factor for economic development, but not all cities imagine it sustainably; Maribor's vision, which envisages a circular economy, stands out in a positive sense, in striking contrast to the cities that base their future on the development of entrepreneurship, following neoliberal development trends. Most cities also associate the economy with exploiting natural resources and thus instrumentalize nature for sustainable development, which is a peculiar but well-known paradox of

this concept in the theoretical literature. Cities are also relatively unambitious in planning an environmentally sustainable future; visions of sustainable, green, or low-carbon cities remain more ideas on paper than affective concepts. Thus, they have low potential to motivate residents to participate in creating the city of the future. In this sense, visions of social sustainability are somewhat more inspiring; they are reflected in slogans such as an inclusive and ideal city, a city tailored to man, a city of the joy of life for all generations, or a city of high quality of life for residents based on community and a feeling of home. An essential emphasis of the social pillar of sustainable development is also residents' participation in decision-making processes, which is most advocated by Rijeka in its vision of an open city. As the basis of cultural sustainability, the cities emphasize the urban lifestyle and cultural heritage, which are crucial for the city's identity and residents. In doing so, Nova Gorica places its hope in multiculturalism, but not Rijeka, which utilized it (along with the slogan "port of diversity") to build its candidacy and programme for the 2020 European Capital of Culture. Therefore, visions are not always aligned with urban projects and programmes, which is not necessarily negative.

Why is this so? By linking strategic urban planning to investments already approved (or projects and programmes), it becomes mundane, instrumentalized, and reduced to the process of using government methodologies based on rather abstract political imperatives (Abram, 2017) instead of being inspiring and assuming an optimistic (if not utopian) urban life in the future. According to anthropologists and urban planners, people respond better to planning the future that leaves them more opportunities for (self-)interpretation. Therefore, when designing suitable visions, the most visionary cities use various techniques, such as scenario writing (pessimistic, optimistic, and realistic) and storytelling, thus better engaging their inhabitants in the (shared) creation of the urban future. On the other hand, it is also essential for residents' motivation that visions not be short-term. In contrast to most cases analysed, they should exceed the span of strategies framed by the seven-year financial framework of the European Union. In this sense, urban masterplans from the socialist era (e.g., Ljubljana's from 1966 and Zagreb's from 1971) were much more visionary. They included all development segments (spatial, social, and environmental) and imagined the future until 2000. Long-term visions of the future, which do not define all projects and interventions, leave urban residents more space to use imagination and create their own ideas about the future, which can significantly contribute to the brighter future of cities.

Saša Poljak Istenič, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Ljubljana, Slovenia
E-mail: sasa.poljak@zrc-sazu.si

Valentina Gulin Zrnić, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: gulin@ief.hr

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