

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PRAGUE

Milan TURBA

1. CHANGING CITY

Six month ago, it was exactly ten years since the Velvet Revolution started in Prague with Police brutal action against peacefully marching students. That was the commencement of a process of essential political and social changes in former Czechoslovakia. Since the time when hundreds of thousands of Prague citizens on the Wenceslas Square tolled the end of communist regime by ringing keys in their lifted hands, many things have changed in the world around us and in Prague itself.

The global political and economic order has changed and after the break up of the communist block, a number of new democratic countries with market economies were established in Europe. The internationalisation of economic activities took place, new technologies were developed and the access to information has been improved with an unprecedented speed. In view of the continuing devastation of nature and the depletion of resources, an internationally shared necessity has been established to increase the responsibility of our generation to preserve the natural resources and the environment for future generations and it is expressed in the principles of sustainable development.

In the Czech Republic and its capital Prague, the political system, the administration of the state and city and the local government have completely changed, as well as ownership relations. The market economy has emerged, modifying the social structure and lifestyle of Prague's population. Under the influence of these changes, the picture of the city is changing quickly. At attractive locations, new office and commercial buildings, hotels and shopping centres are growing; old shops and restaurants reappeared in the downtown, plenty of new were opened. The world has rediscovered Prague after a half-century of isolation and the city is flooded with a wave of tourists admiring Prague's historical monuments and its unique atmosphere. Prague has a good rating, a very low level of unemployment and attracts not only businessmen and investors but also dynamic young people from East and West alike. It is an interesting partner for all who wish to develop their activities in a city of extraordinary beauty, capable and educated population and new opportunities.

On the other hand, Prague keeps suffering more and more from rapidly growing car traffic, obsolete infrastructure, street crime, rigid and still relatively inefficient administration. The city does not always effectively manage its assets and lacks finance for main infrastructural projects. The historical core of Prague resists commercial pressure and the rush of tourists and cars.

2. STRATEGY FOR 21ST CENTURY - VISION, AIMS AND POLICIES

Rebirth of democracy and transition from central planning to a free market economy has also demanded a new approach in planning and management of development of the city. Similar to other European cities, Prague also needs, besides a newly conceived land-use plan (adopted by Municipal Assembly in September 1999), a long-term programme document forming comprehensive, yet real conception of its future economic, social and spatial development under the new conditions - strategic plan. During last five years, the city was preparing a document of such type with considerable support of the British Know How Fund.

Prague Strategic Plan is an intercepting point of various views and interests. It arises out of dialogue of politicians, experts and the public and has a good chance to become an important instrument of city management, which formulates the aims of development of the city, determines policies in individual fields of its life and stipulates priorities and development programmes, necessary for its implementation.

Prague Strategic Plan is based upon the city's strengths, especially its unique character, spiritual, intellectual and cultural tradition, quite exceptional natural and urban values, its economic and human potential, advantageous position in the heart of Europe, its good reputation and attraction it has for foreign visitors.

The vision of future Prague is a successful, prosperous and internationally recognised city, creative, friendly and safe, a city of equal opportunities and active citizens, a city of harmonious natural and urban environment, and a functioning city in view of having good quality and reliable transport and technical infrastructure as well as having efficient and helpful management of the city.

The strategic plan for Prague therefore focuses on five main topic areas - The city's economy, The quality of life, The quality of the environment, Transport and technical infrastructure and Management and administration - containing a system of mutually linked strategic directions, aims and policies.

We are well aware that even the best programming document would turn into an empty gesture if it were not implemented. This is why the New City Council of Prague has chosen the concept of Prague's Strategic Plan as the basis of their Programme Declaration for the electoral term from 1998 to 2002. In June 1999, Prague Municipal Assembly adopted the proposal of Prague's strategic priorities, programs and projects for the years 1999 to 2006, charging all city authorities with further development and step-by-step implementation of the programme.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

These are Prague's key strategic priorities:

- A reliable transport friendly to municipal environment
- Expedient and sustainable management of energy, water supply and other resources
- Prague - the centre of innovation and skilled labour
- Promotion of housing market and easy access to housing
- Transition from monocentric to a polycentric city
- Improved quality of city administration
- Integration of Prague into the European structures

Transport itself, especially individual car transport, is one of the most serious and complicated problems Prague has been facing. In the situation when there is a radical increase in passenger cars in Prague (1993 - 1994 by 29 %) and thus also in the areas polluted by private transport it is necessary to mobilise all the means to support the mass transport. It is necessary to develop an attractive integrated transport system, based especially on the Metro and tram network, including regional rail. On the other hand, Prague requires the progressive restriction of individual car transport in the direction toward the centre, combined with the offer of two - city and express - rings, and with the „park and ride“ system. There is, however, a negative influence of the fact that most Prague inhabitants own a car and want to use it but no city part cares for the construction of Prague express ring without which the overburdened City Centre cannot be relieved. (According to the slogan "Not in my backyard".)

Transport and **technical infrastructure** is the basis for a 'reliably functioning city', which has a significant influence on the achievement of other strategic aims, e.g. 'clean and healthy city' or 'safe' or 'prosperous city'. Prague in the majority of cases is dependent on the regional, national as well as European infrastructure sources and systems. There is a growing demand to complete and modernise the infrastructure in commercially attractive locations. Concerning Prague's technical infrastructure, most of its systems have become obsolete. Mainly the area of drainage – despite the existing improvement efforts – corresponds neither to the Czech Republic legislation, nor to that of the European Union. That is why Prague has launched the implementation of a programme called „Reconstruction and Development of Water Supply and Sewage Networks“. Thus, extreme losses of produced drinking water (almost 40%!) will be substantially diminished. Reconstruction of the old and construction of a new central sewage treatment plant is under preparation. This will lead to an improved quality of water in the Vltava and Elbe rivers, and, in fact contribute to a cleaner North Sea. Emissions in the air in Prague should be reduced thanks to the programme of reduced solid fuel consumption and transition to higher quality fuel including so-called alternative resources. Introducing panel housing thermal insulation can further reduce high level of energy consumption in the city.

Human resources development and support of non-material factors of competitiveness constitute third Prague's priority. Prague has an opportunity to economically exploit its „human capital“ - the educated, qualified, flexible, and relatively cheap work force - as well as the outstanding value of the city setting. To be competitive with other cities it has to create favourable conditions for the development of desirable investments, simplify and speed up the process of decision-making, and to build the system of guarantees. The City of Prague is going to support the development of small and medium-sized businesses, creating of integrated

scientific and technological workplaces, stimulation of lifelong educational programmes, provisions for retraining and return to society for those threatened by social exclusion.

In the Czech Republic, **housing** sector is the last component of the national economy in which market principles have not yet been fully applied. Neither the restitution of apartment buildings nor the privatisation of the former state and co-operative housing stock has been finished. Moreover, apartments or family houses became practically inaccessible for the majority of population. All of this manifested itself in the radical decrease in the housing construction in the city. Housing policy in Prague, therefore, emphasised deregulation of rent, while preserving necessary social security as an essential precondition for the development of the functional housing market. Simultaneously, it is necessary to create such legislative and economic conditions (loans, mortgages and further fiscal innovations) to make the satisfying of the housing needs available for the wide spectrum of inhabitants, not only for the narrow layer with the highest incomes. To provide for the housing needs, which will not be satisfied even by the free market, primarily for those for social housing, at least one fifth of the whole housing stock in Prague remains under the control of the city administration.

The outcome of Prague's past development has been, among other things, a monocentric **structure of the city**, characterised by high concentration of all activities in Prague's historical core, and by the ring of mainly housing estates without possibilities of employment at its outskirts. The exceptionally valuable historical core of Prague (under UNESCO protection since 1992) is the main tourist attraction of the city. It fulfils all functionalities of a city centre. One third of all jobs available in Prague are concentrated here, especially in the sphere of administration, commerce and services. Majority of Prague's department stores, cultural institutions and universities are seated here. An enormous pressure of investors challenges this territory and plots available for construction are rare. A number of serious problems ensue from Prague's monocentric structure, mainly in the area of transport. This is why the transition from monocentric to polycentric Prague has been one of Prague's strategic priorities. A number of programmes have been designed for this purpose and implementation of some has already begun. It is the objective of these programmes to reduce the burden of current city centre, to more evenly utilise the overall city area, and to offer to citizens of various parts of Prague and regional hinterland comparable benefits from public investment, especially the accessibility of the centres, public amenities and quality of the environment.

The Czech Republic concentrates its efforts on the full **integration into the present international structures** (European Union, NATO and others). This relates to our endeavour to participate in the creation of a politically stable and economically integrated Europe, which will ensure the maximum free movement of people, capital, labour, goods and information. Prague, as the natural political, economic, administrative and social centre of the state, has an important role in this process. A contribution to meeting this strategic priority might be the programme called „Attractive Address Prague“, also a better presentation of the city abroad as well as co-operation and co-ordination of developmental plans with those of major cities of Central Europe, especially Berlin, Vienna, Budapest and Munich.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Prague's Strategic Plan is not just a political proclamation; it is gradually becoming an important instrument of municipal management. It has become the basis for the Regional Operational Programme, based on which Prague will strive to gain support of its projects from the European Union funds. Prague's strategic priorities were also considered in preparing of the city budget and capital investments for the year 2000.

Today, ten years after the „Velvet Revolution“, we do already know that the way from the strategic ideas toward their implementation is going to be far more difficult and time consuming than it might have seemed in the early nineties during the post-revolutionary euphoria. After half of a century of centrally planned economy, there is still suspicion felt toward anything that might be called a „plan“. Until today, many politicians prefer short-term effects to real strategic decision-making and efforts of long-term stability. A civil society is only slowly being born in the Czech Republic.

However, the Prague community is entering the third millennium with a programme, which has been jointly adopted, by the city political representation, experts, private businesses and citizens.

(Incl: Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation – 27 diagrams, schemes and pictures)

Contact:

*PhDr. Milan Turba
Director for Strategic Planning
City Development Authority Prague
Hradcanské nám. 8
118 54 Praha 1
Czech Republic
Tel. / Fax: + 420 2 2051 4642
E-mail: turba@urm.mepnet.cz*

Biographical Notes:

Sociologist, Director for Strategic Planning, City Development Authority, Prague

1942 - born in Bielsko-Biala, Poland

1964 - 1970 - editor in the Czechoslovak Radio in Brno

1973 - graduated from the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk's University in Brno

1983 - postgraduate in "Scientific and technical development and the management of investment processes", School of Economics in Prague

1983 - PhDr. in sociology, Masaryk's University in Brno

1993 - 62nd regular training course "Urban Land Development, Management and Finance", Land Reform Training Institute, Taoyuan, Taiwan R.O.C.

Since the seventies, he has been working in the former Office of the Chief Architect of Prague, first, in the team concerned with a conception of housing in the capital city, then, in the eighties as the head of the department co-ordinating specialists in sociology, demography, urban economics, ecology, and information science.

He participated in the preparation of three Prague master plans (1976, 1986, 1999) and in developing the urban prognosis of the city after 2000 (1989). At the end of the seventies he developed a comprehensive city housing stock evaluation method based on statistical data, and he applied it to census returns of 1970 and 1980. In the middle of the 80ties, he was in charge of the study on the social conditions and needs of Prague population and its various social groups. In 1993, in his research study "The physical, ecological, economic, demographic and social barriers to the future development and growth of Prague", he attempted to evaluate the changes taking place in the Czech society and the capital of Prague after 1989. He tried to identify barriers and desirable trends of further city development.

Since 1994, he has been the head of the team, which prepares the Strategic plan of Prague along with the top political representatives of the city, professionals, entrepreneurs, citizens and British Know How Fund experts.

He wrote a number of professional articles and popularisations, and gave a number of lectures promoting the idea of strategic planning in terms of a new approach to planning and management of the city and regions development in the Czech Republic.