Chapter 2
ICT Instruments as Possible Support for the Equal Distribution of Population

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ABSTRACT

Unequal city development, namely the faster development of large centers and concentration of power, globalization and local specificities in certain locations, have caused a lack of balance between large city centers and smaller settlements and villages. In Serbia, there are major differences in the level of development, as well as in cultural features of settlements. There are significant economic differences between settlements in the north, the east, and the south of the country, since settlements developed in valleys and hence had better traffic communication, and could therefore be competitive and stay abreast of transformations. Smaller settlements and villages (especially those along the borders, in National parks and in difficult to access rural regions), are marginalized, and face many problems, most often caused by lack of infrastructure, decrease of the number of inhabitants, the dissolution of the secondary and tertiary sector. Today, a quarter of the total population lives in the capital city of Belgrade, while a considerable number of settlements are completely shutting down. These settlements once had their identity and a harmonious balance of all elements constituting the life of the community and the individual. A distinctive social aspect contributed to a rich cultural heritage, but over time this was gradually lost and begins to disappear. The question is if any of the processes (globalization, technological revolution), which contribute to the demographic and economic decline of rural regions, could form a basis for renewal. A classical planner's approach would imply the networking of settlements and providing equal population distribution by investing in infrastructure and providing conditions for settlements through

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the development of central functions, requiring considerable investments. The other possibility relies on the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), which could provide for many necessities: access to and exchange of information, paying bills and ordering products from a distance, working from home, meetings via Internet conferences, etc. The use of Internet technologies in order to develop settlements, by converting traditional into "net" technologies, can make up for disadvantages of life in smaller settlements and enable their revitalization, by networking them into a global net of settlements, without geographical borders and limits.

INTRODUCTION

Technologies of the industrial, super industrial and postindustrial society, or the ''third wave'' have caused and are still causing simultaneous opposing assumptions for the future. Technologies that we are developing are both a tool for progress and a disintegrator for the foundations of living and of values that have until now formed the human community.

Utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT), especially the Internet, is becoming an ever more important factor for the development of cities and regions. This development and utilization is a global phenomenon, which surpasses and neutralizes many cultural, regional and economic differences between geographically distant areas. It contributes to bring closer spatially distant areas, to a change of spatial formulas, and to generating new forms of settlements. Accepted and adopted notions about the nature of space, time, distances and lifestyles are questioned – subjected to our revision (Graham, Marvin, 1999).

Processes of globalization are changing economies, the organization of the society, and the life of each and every individual. People are losing their jobs, and becoming asocial. However, new and numerous possibilities for work and different social relationships are also opening up for them.

During the last 20 - 30 years, which have generated rapid development of important new scientific theories and insights about life on our planet and our own life, from consciousness about the impact on the environment and theories of sustainability, to the discovery of links between our emotions and neurobiological processes, attempts to scientifically foresee the future development of economy, settlements and the society have become almost indispensable.

According to certain theoreticians (Mitchel, 1996; Castels, 1997; Grapham, 1996; Batty, 1996), development and creation of ICT infrastructures is regarded as the basic means to support the community in order to upgrade its social and economic development. According to Mitchel, (1996), today, the overall success of cities can be measured by the refinement and spread of implementation of state of the art ICT means, while in modern business many strategies and business decisions are preconditioned by new technologies and the need to be integrated into a global information society. ICT implementation may permit a higher level of democratization and citizen participation, but will also influence perception and a mixture of the real and the simulated, the public and the private (Grapham and Marvin, 1996). Virillio (2000) interprets changes pessimistically, claiming that humanity is facing a "housebound paranoid culture".

Relevant to global trends, present everywhere to different degrees, local changes have also encompassed the social system, economic and demographic development, which requires a com-