

To the City Assembly of Zagreb,

We are a group of international scholars and experts on urban development and planning, visiting the city of Zagreb for our 29th annual conference. We have expertise on waterfront developments in London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Barcelona, Boston, New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Hong Kong, Belgrade, Sydney and Melbourne. During our visit we were alarmed to hear that Zagreb is at risk of following the example of cities which have privatized and subsequently destroyed their waterfronts through re-development projects not unlike the so-called 'Zagreb Manhattan' project.

If the changes to the Masterplan allowing the development of 'Zagreb Manhattan' are to be approved, Zagreb would be at severe risk. It has been demonstrated around the world that land handed over to international investors, without the clearest democratic brief and conditions, tends to generate development of buildings which extract value out of the city, not contributing to the city's needs. Such projects are always planned and built to cater to the needs of a global, mobile elite and have little or no concern for the needs of local population. They are programmed in such a way to disconnect from the city and have a very narrow view of urban life and culture. They have minimal commitment, if any, to public interest and are solely oriented to making profit for the investor. We have witnessed many of those things in other cities of the world where the city administration, having sacrificed its land assets, gains little or no fiscal benefit because investors are adept at exploiting tax breaks and creative accounting.

There are no studies that prove that such projects in other cities have brought about positive economic or social change. We do not have to look far; only 400km down the same river we can see how a similar project in Belgrade has not brought economic development. It has not attracted quality jobs to the city and has already been detrimental to the health and living standards of people living in the city.

What is especially worrying in the case of modifications of the Masterplan of Zagreb is the total disrespect for the citizens and many professional organizations who have voiced their opposition to the breach of formal and democratic procedures, such as the need to organize a public debate. Also alarming is the fact that 'Zagreb Manhattan' is being arranged behind closed doors with no information available to the public about the project details, or the signed co-operation agreement with the investor, and with a cynical timeframe of only 18 days for a

public call to investors to demonstrate interest in the realization of a project of over a million square meters.

Despite the careful planning of this area for over 60 years, including the recent study by the Faculty of Architecture on the International Fairground commissioned by the City of Zagreb, the most important decisions about its future would be determined in such haste and with the only certainty being that it would be a transfer of a large amount of public to private property.

On the other hand, many cities would envy what you have - Zagreb's unique riverside linear public green space through the city centre. This is an asset which will become ever more precious as cities have to adapt to the mounting risks that climate change brings. The green area around the river Sava already provides a countermeasure against urban heat island effects because trees and other vegetation cool the city and contribute to bio-diversity. Also, as public green space, these areas have benefits for physical and mental health of all citizens who use it. Its effectiveness as recreation space, as biological and environmental asset can be further enriched, but only if the city retains ownership and control.

At the same time, we are impressed by the rich institutions and civil society developed in Zagreb - truly quite an unusual and distinctive feature of the city - and accordingly we urge the City Assembly to acknowledge the existing civil participation and concerns voiced by the people, notably the more than 14 000 signatures which have been collected so far against the destruction of a sports and recreational area and the realization of this project.

With this letter, we the researchers, experts and professors coming from the Universities in London, Toronto, Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Athens, Zurich, Melbourne and many other cities, urge the councilors to reject the proposed changes to the Masterplan enabling the realization of the so-called 'Zagreb Manhattan' project if only because, by allowing this to happen, you as democratically elected representatives of all the citizens of Zagreb will lose the possibility to plan and develop the city. This would turn your city over to global investors who are not accountable to any form of democracy.

We urge you to allow the citizens, and in turn yourselves, to discuss in which way this civic space can continue to serve the whole city and to do so before making commitments to any investor.

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