

A MAP INSTEAD OF A YELLOW FENCE

Investors interested in starting or expanding their activities in Serbia are often faced with strange ambiguities. The labor force is highly skilled and motivated, yet inexpensive, the available construction land has excellent features, infrastructure has improved significantly since 2000. On the other hand, some basics are lacking, such as information on the availability and characteristics of the construction land, including clear and time-saving procedures for obtaining licenses and permits, due to a scattered data collection system. Experience tells us that things like stability and clear procedures are high on the list of necessary preconditions for any business person considering Serbia as investment location.

The first thing an investor needs is accurate and timely information with as many details as possible. The information has to contain all the characteristics of a location, its advantages and disadvantages. It is clear that data should integrate information from cadastre plans, urban development plans, infrastructure and capital investment plans. It used to take more than two weeks to obtain this information.

Support to the implementation of the GIS project in Indjija was provided by USAID's *Municipal Economic Growth Activity*. Besides providing the software licenses, the Program conducted several trainings for municipal IT staff in how to use the software. The application of the GIS in Indjija already started to produce visible results. "Baverhin" which produces car seat heaters, made an investment valued at EUR two million. The company currently employs 220 workers, and it is expected to hire another 100 workers soon. Furthermore, negotiations are underway regarding a EUR 10 million prospective investment by the German company "Interfrukt". The company plans to build warehouses, cold-storage plants and a small production facility on 6,000 m² of land.

When a Geographical Information System (GIS), a tool which clearly presents data from numerous sources in one location was introduced in the Municipality of Indjija, a prospective investor was provided with the desired information in 1/10th the time it took prior to the deployment of the system. GIS enables much easier and more efficient planning, reduces unforeseen costs associated with lack of information during project design development, diminishes the operating costs of municipal departments and shortens the time necessary for the presentation of available locations to potential investors. Another important characteristic of a GIS is that it improves the work of the Department for Urbanism and Planning, where without the application of a GIS, 3-5 days were needed to obtain a building permit, while with the GIS this would take only about 60 minutes.

Dragan Jankovic, Head of the Department of Economy in the Municipality of Indjija says that the positive effects of the GIS project are already visible. *"Instead of taking the investor to the field and making him look around at all 4 sides of the world, saying, oh, look, your lot is right beside that tree with an umbrella-like crown, and on the other side, look, look, can you see the yellow fence... we are now able to present him with a map where everything is very neatly and precisely presented at the first meeting, and an investor can consult the GIS using the municipal Web portal",* explains Jankovic.

There is no doubt that the GIS, as a tool which demonstrates professionalism and client-oriented approach, and facilitates project planning and overall efficiency, has an important role in attracting investors. Further implementation of the project is seen as a way to enable a more business friendly environment in Indjija, which will lead to new investments and more jobs.