

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN METHOD FOR IMPROVEMENT OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES – CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the preconditions and informal method of forming public space by a group of residents at the local level and the compliance of these actions with the goals of sustainable development. Examples and own experience of organizing and implementing a public space change project in Hadiach, Poltava region (Ukraine) are given and the use of participatory planning methods to strengthen ties of local communities as well as a way of reducing migration from less attractive settlements is presented. The article describes the advantages of the participatory planning method as helping to equip urban space with facilities corresponding to the needs of users and increases their responsibility for maintaining public space, which is especially valuable with limited financial resources, allotted both for the creation of urban space and for care of it.

Key words: participation design, public space, tactical urbanism, urban planning

INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of instability of financial provision for creation of high-quality public space, it is suggested to involve local city communities for reproduction and creation of renewed public places. This is particularly important in the conditions of post-war reconstruction, e.g. in Ukraine (Vodicka & Rishbeth, 2022), which demands considerable financial expenses, first of all, for restoration of critical city infrastructure.

Public space in the cities and especially in small settlements deserve special attention because they form the comfort of being in a particular environment (Kosmala, 2021). According to the analysis of residential areas, particularly large and small cities of the Poltava region (Ukraine), most planning solutions do not satisfy the needs of residents which had not been

considered in the formal design. In Ukraine, there are many public space, the improvement of which is carried out without a preliminary project, as modern design standards in Ukraine do not require it. At the same time, each element of the public space (Hillier & Hanson, 1984) deserves special attention from architects and planners, as well as representatives of local administration. The attractiveness and friendliness of the city, village or settlement depend on the quality of urban design (Gehl, 1987; Yeang, 2000). In aim that the newly created improvement of public places best meet the needs of residents, it is essential to research these needs as well as to involve residents (users of place) in the initial stage of planning. To do this, the architect (or another person working on the public space design concept) must be able to work not only with projects but also with people – users of these

places – in aim to design their urban space along with them (Nevens, Frantzeskaki, Gorissen & Loorbach, 2013). To do this, we propose to use the method of participatory public space design (Nisha & Nelson, 2012; Mezentsev, Provotar and Palchuk, 2020; Cuartas & Valencia, 2021).

Care for public spaces is becoming increasingly important. Many international institutions develop and promote common policies in the public space, call for coordination, dissemination of knowledge and direct assistance to cities in civic initiatives. Such activities are closely related to the Sustainable Development Goals (11.3: Inclusive and sustainable urbanization, 11.7: Provide access to safe and inclusive green and public spaces). According to the United Nations Resolution (2015), by 2030, humanity must be provided with open principles of sustainable planning of settlements and their management, general and safe access of all segments of the population to open spaces of cities.

An example of participatory activities that activates the public is the Skver Nebesnoyi Sotni (Heavenly Hundred Square) project implemented in the center of Kyiv in 2014 – the first implemented project of the Misto-Sad (City-Garden) team. The closed and neglected space of the yard was literally “won” by the residents and a public place was created together, which still serves not only to the residents of nearby houses but also all those who want to relax in a cozy park in the center of Kyiv (Misto-sad, 2014). The online communities based on the local affiliation of the participants also serve to activate the residents. For example, the creation of an online community on the Facebook page of Kyiv residents of Podil, filling it with description of local interests and their own example of interfering in public space led to a gathering of residents and creating their own independent projects, the most famous of which is “Samosad” (2015), created by activists, children and their parents. It is a place of rest, equipped with its own mini-stage for singing youth and creative children’s curiosities, made of ordinary household items that had not been disposed (Samosad.Kyiv, 2022). **And while the community of large cities is interconnected by strong network links, as demonstrated by a study by the CEDOS think-tank (Podonos & Hryshchenko, 2017), the com-**

munities of small towns and communities suffer from a certain isolation.

At the same time, small towns and villages suffer from low initiative and activity of residents as well as a low involvement in the process of renewal of public places, what leads to a devaluation of the city in its residents’ eyes as well as a lack of sense of belonging to a particular area and accelerates global urbanization.

If you want creativity, cut one zero from the budget – said the mayor of Curitiba, architect Jaime Lerner (Adler, 2016). This is also confirmed by an example of the Ukrainian cities. In Hadiach (Poltava region, Ukraine), the residents have been engaged in the urban design of many green areas (Nowysz & Trocka-Leszczynska, 2021; Fig. 1). Due to the limited budget for landscaping, the main funds are spent on cleaning and care of lawns. Democracy of the city authorities in relation to self-care of adjacent territories motivates residents to green their adjacent territories and places that need additional care.

In 2016, an initiative group was established, which later became a non-governmental organization “Hadiach friendly” (Hadiach druzhnii). Young people began to plan and implement urban public space development projects together with the residents (Hadiach druzhnii, 2016b), **involving not only the municipality but also commercial organizations of the city.** The first projects of the team were those that change public place – mostly by the method of so-called tactical urbanism (Lydon & Garcia, 2015), meaning introduction of small changes that later led to significant improvements in the quality of the urban environment. “Unnoticed” urban areas, such as the viewpoint on the Zamkova Hora (Castle Hill) in Hadiach (Fig. 2), were introduced on the list of tourist points of the city. This case study is described in this article.

The main goal of the activity of the NGO “Hadiach friendly” is to activate and support the initiatives of individual residents which help to qualitatively change the urban spaces and activate the youth activity of the community. The results of the implementation of such initiatives should demonstrate that every ordinary resident can significantly improve his own city, even if he/she does not have the appropriate skills and competencies for this.



Fig. 1. Locations created by residents in Hadiach city, Poltava region, Ukraine (photos by P. Vietrova)



Fig. 2. Process of participatory urban design: creating of the viewpoint on the Zamkova Hora in Hadiach, Poltava region, Ukraine (photos by P. Vietrova, V. Zdoyma, M. Denysenko)

The activities of this organization, and, especially, the wide distribution of information about the implementation of initiatives in the local press, led to duplication and increase in the number of similar activities among the local community, which is observed to this day (Strashko, 2019).

Project planning and implementation is a detailed but the simplest possible scheme which can be modified (adapted) depending on the specifics of the project. The purpose of the process was to demonstrate

the effectiveness of involving residents in the process of changing the space, to reveal the potential of the territory and to unite the local community.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A case study consists of formulation of objectives, collection of data, analysis and interpretation.

The purpose of the case study was to investigate the effectiveness of the developed methodology of

participatory planning and its impact on the formation of active communities associated with the improvement of existing public spaces and the creation of new places.

The concept of the methodology is that each initiative resident can implement his own idea without the need to use other tools of direct democracy, such as a participatory budget (Innes & Booher, 2004).

The project implementation scheme was presented even before the authors proposed their initiative to improve the urban public space. It serves as an instruction for developing and implementing an idea (Fig. 3).

The author’s project presentation for local community should contain the purpose of the project, characteristics of the place, its potential and visualization (examples of similar, already implemented projects). The idea should be visually understandable and developed at the first stage. The idea must be approved by a predetermined number of interested residents (at least three people). It is expected that in this case the author will receive sufficient support and it is attractive enough to attract more participants for its implementation. During the first meeting, it is important to outline a general strategy and tentative action plan. In

this case, the working group leaves the meeting place with confidence in the possibility of implementing the proposed idea and, as it is expected, will continue to participate in its implementation.

The tentative action plan includes elements of a SWOT analysis (Silva, 2005), but is described in more accessible terms, as it is designed for people without experience in similar activities. It consists of:

1. Advantages and disadvantages of implementing the idea.
2. Risks of the process of realization and functioning of place.
3. Individuals and organizations potentially interested in the project (search for partners and sponsors).
4. The sequence of implementation.

The next meeting is to be attended by a team of implementers and those who would be responsible for the care of the created place. It is important to invite locals who feel a sense of belonging and responsibility for this place. The new team then creates together the specific implementation plan and compiles a list of necessary resources and materials (for example, ordering a garbage truck, materials for fencing, etc.). The next step is the direct organizational process



Fig. 3. Instruction for implementation of idea, NGO “Hadiach friendly”

of establishing contacts with potential partners and responsible representatives of municipality, as well as search for resources.

The author of the idea is obliged to be the initiator and coordinator of all processes, other participants can help with their competences or knowledge. If the author of the idea does not initiate further activities by himself/herself, the synergy of the process is lost and the idea is not implemented, or is implemented in a distorted way.

The project must contain the following components:

1. The purpose of the project, characteristics of the place, its potential (including the cultural one).
2. Visualization (two or three examples of similar, already implemented projects).
3. Project objectives (what functions will the place perform if the idea is implemented).
4. Proposed ways of implementing the idea and materials.
5. Examples of products from the proposed materials.
6. Sequence of realization of ideas and tasks for the team.
7. Action plan.
8. Conclusions – what will change if the project is implemented.

The next stage is directly the event of construction. Depending on the complexity of the project, there may be one or more events. It is recommended to conduct no more than two of them because the work as a volunteer is based only on a personal motivation. Teamwork should obtain an immediately visible result.

In order to spread such initiatives, it is important to tell as much as possible about what has been done – to write an article, share it with journalists, take care of photography during the event, share a successful cases on social networks.

CASE STUDY

Project details:

- Design of the viewpoint on the Zamkova Hora (Castle Hill) in Hadiach.
- Initiator and coordinator: Larysa Maksymiv (Initiator).

- Mentoring support: Polina Vietrova.
- Participants (project team and volunteers): 21 people (11–65 years old), at least 4 of them moved to the city less than 5 years before the realization of the project.
- Project team: 5 people (21–30 years old), including the initiator and mentor.
- Volunteers on the site: 16 people, 8 of them young (20–32 years old), 3 residents of the surrounding streets (6–65 years old), 2 teachers (1 of them is an internally displaced person), 1 tour guide (a local cultural expert), 2 children (children of the mentor, 11 years old).
- Support: local government and forest district representatives (garbage transport, materials for construction).

Participants of the project were inhabitants of Hadiach, in particular young people and residents of the surrounding streets. Representatives of local government and forest district were involved to provide technical support (garbage transport, materials for construction).

Young people joined through invitations on social networks, other participants – by personal invitation of the project team, including local residents.

Project implementation

Idea, suggestion of the strategy and plan of the details (Stages I–III, Fig. 3). The purpose of the project is to create a viewpoint together with local residents, activists and the authorities.

The concept of the project included the use of exclusively natural materials (wood) in order to show by example how it is possible to arrange public space ecologically (Hewitt et al., 2016; Phillips & Matsuda, 2022).

The presentation was prepared in advance by Larisa Maksymiv according to the recommendations indicated above. As an example, she presented her own successful experience of working with similar natural materials (Fig. 4).

All 6 participants of the first meeting supported the proposed idea and expressed their desire to work on its implementation in the future. Together with the initiator, they made the tentative action plan. The presentation of the idea and action plan was



Fig. 4. Fragments of the presentation of Larisa Maksymiv's idea "Observation platform on Castle Hill": (a) photo of the territory; (b) screenshot from Google Maps; (c) photo of the result of the use of natural materials in the decoration of public space

recorded on video and distributed through social networks.

The initiator noted that, as a result of developing the idea, many problems were discovered that could impede the implementation of the idea, but due to the fact that the problems were reformulated in the task, it became clear how to solve them (Hadiach druzhnii, 2016a).

Finding resources and invitation of friends (Stages IV–V, Fig. 3). Representatives of local government and forest district were involved individually. The local waste management company promised to remove the garbage after thinning and clearing the green area, the local forest district – to bring materials for the work (flexible willow branches for the construction of the fence).

Volunteers to the "Field Work" were invited individually and via social media. The promotion of the event was presented as an attractive public event, with celebration and photo documentation of the process. Thus, the main attraction of the event was a meeting with friends and the opportunity to have a good weekend.

Organization of the event and celebration of the results (Stages VI–VII, Fig. 3). The work on the territory was divided into two activities. The first one was the cleaning of the territory, the second was the construction of the fence.

Thanks to the celebration, the participants of the process receive motivation to participate in future events, associating them not only with work but also with recreation among like-minded people.

Sharing of experience (Stage VIII, Fig. 3). The project and the new public space were described on

the website (Hadiach druzhnii, 2016c), social pages of the NGO "Hadiach friendly"; local newspapers and individual journalists of local groups wrote about the event as well.

In our time, public events for the arrangement of territories are a common thing, and at that time it was almost the first public event in the city, which was positioned as an interesting holiday. Thanks to the implementation of this initiative, a new, unique attraction has appeared in the city, which has become popular not only among residents, but also among guests of the city. And to this day, this place is looked after by local residents who were once involved in its creation. They mow the grass, clean up the garbage, plant flowers.

Thus, in conditions of limited resources, it is possible to create interesting public spaces that reveal the potential of the place, help to show the opportunities and the need for better landscaping which is to further attract funding to create longer-term constructions – a "post-participatory" project (Jørgensen, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of participatory public space planning, the spaces designed and created together with their users will best meet their expectations and needs, they will be unique and inimitable. At the same time, the feeling of belonging to one's place of residence and responsibility for its condition, the feeling of the possibility of influencing one's own environment and the intensification of social activity of residents will increase.

At the same time, the most difficult part of the participatory planning process is the need to delegate

participatory planning to residents, NGOs and local initiatives, which requires constant support and trust of the authorities to the community, to maintain a balance between management and delegation.

For planning with residents to be successful, it is important that planning participants believe that their work – ideas and proposals – will be realized, therefore the planning process itself should be treated with caution, paying more attention to the problems and priorities of a specific project area in the task and priorities – towards the development of the territory.

For residents to be effectively and regularly involved in planning public spaces, there must be an active urban community that not only welcomes invitations to participate in planning, but also initiates appropriate actions and activities.

This requires moderation from the authorities and the provision of automated support for civic initiatives, including access to information. For example, in order to plan any public space, it is necessary to know what measures are allowed, what the strategy for the development of public spaces and facilities is (if any) so that initiatives can work in the same direction with the local government.

What can we do to introduce participatory planning as a permanent practice? We can respond to these challenges:

- tactically – activating local communities and creating their own vision of each community of its public places, especially those that have preserved historical memory and have a cultural identity that should be preserved and reproduced;
- strategically – adding practical participatory planning programs to the curricula of pupils and students, in particular in architecture, or introducing appropriate classes as part of the state target program, which can significantly improve the existing state of the research and teaching staff.

An alternative to the introduction of an interdisciplinary approach is so-called science clubs at research institutes (Vasyliiev, 2021), which propose to introduce the practice of mastering the methodology of studying the needs of public places as an element of practice, so-called participatory planning – projects involving their existing or future users (Krivý & Kaminer, 2013). Promoting such views will have a strong impact on

the development of the future specialist, as it will provide an understanding of place as a single organism in which all small problems are interconnected and not solved individually. And most importantly, such problems should be tackled collectively and interdisciplinarily.

Education outside the program will provide an opportunity to: educate a student as a researcher; prepare students to solve practical problems in the process of individual and collective human-oriented research; involvement of students in a research work of their department; formation of understanding of the importance of sustainable development of cities and needs of the final consumer of their projects; development of creative thinking, cognitive activity, independence of judgments, needs and ability to enrich students' own knowledge, etc.

Particularly noteworthy is the need to teach a future specialist to work with related specialists, to identify and solve common problems. The most underestimated in the context of national design practice are sociological sciences that can clearly and reasonably present the existing advantages, opportunities, problems and threats of a design object, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the limited financial resources of local governments, as well as the unstable economic situation in the country as a whole, the key methods of planning and improvement of public places is the participation of residents. It forms an initial link in the formation of a system of public places. Planning and implementation of improvement of public places at the local level should be accompanied at all stages by active support of local governments, initiative groups of residents and already established public organizations (as an instrument of participation). At the same time, the method of tactical urbanism can influence the general public and local governments by local grassroots initiatives.

Abandoned places of our cities, towns and villages, the potential of which has been untapped, can play with new colors and even become key elements of identification of the settlement, because they will be unique, special and valuable not only in physical content but also in historical and cultural memory, will

increase the sense of belonging of residents to their own, local community and give faith that each of us can change the world around us. It is worth starting with small, local changes.

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization: Polina V. and Pavlo V.; methodology: Polina V.; validation: L.M. and Polina V.; formal analysis: Polina V. and Pavlo V.; investigation: Polina V.; resources: Polina V. and L.M.; data curation: Polina V. and Pavlo V.; writing – original draft preparation: Polina V. and P.V.; writing – review and editing: Polina V. and Pavlo V.; visualization: Polina V.; supervision: Polina V. and Pavlo V.; project administration: Polina V. and L.M.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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METODA PROJEKTOWANIA PARTYCYPACYJNEGO POPRAWY MIEJSKIEJ PRZESTRZENI PUBLICZNEJ – STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule rozważano przesłanki i nieformalne metody kształtowania przestrzeni publicznej przez grupę mieszkańców na poziomie lokalnym oraz zgodność tych działań z celami zrównoważonego rozwoju. Opisano przykłady i własne doświadczenia z organizacji i realizacji projektów zmiany przestrzeni publicznej w miasteczku Hadiacz w obwodzie połtawskim (Ukraina) oraz przedstawiono wykorzystanie metod planowania partycypacyjnego jako sposób na wzmocnienia więzi społeczności lokalnych i ograniczenie migracji z mniej atrakcyjnych miejscowości. Wyszczególniono zalety partycypacyjnego planowania w kontekście wyposażania przestrzeni miejskiej w odpowiednie udogodnienia dla jej użytkowników oraz zwiększania ich odpowiedzialności za tę przestrzeń, co jest szczególnie cenne przy ograniczonych zasobach finansowych przeznaczanych zarówno na tworzenie przestrzeni publicznej, jak i dbanie o nią.

Słowa kluczowe: projektowanie partycypacyjne, przestrzeń publiczna, urbanistyka taktyczna, urbanistyka