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## ID 1725 | PARTICIPATORY PLANNING: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD REGENERATION IN RIGA

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last decades urban regeneration has become an important part of urban policy. Availability of financial opportunities were the engine of change in the approach to the revitalization of many urban sites. At the same time even if the number of projects concerning development of new infrastructure, both social and technical, increased, they didn't always lead to the improvement of the quality of life. The participatory approach involves the wide range of stakeholders in the common process of planning. One of the ways of cooperation at the level of neighborhoods, is a work with active neighborhood residents, not only regularly informing them about the ongoing projects, but also to enable them to express their views and vision. Neighbourhood organizations are the mobilized section of a human group (the neighbourhood) which is underpinned by a local support network. The nature of these bonds of solidarity is a factor that determines the potential of local organizations for action and for their inclusion in any kind of democratic process. Riga, the capital of Latvia, has 58 neighborhoods, and more than ten of them have their own neighborhood associations and activist groups in social sites that are actively and constructively defend their neighborhood citizens. The paper examines the main fields of public activity and identifies the main challenges in cooperation process between different stakeholders involved in urban regeneration.

## 1 PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN URBAN REGENERATION

Urban regeneration is a way to reorganise and upgrade existing places rather than planning new urbanisation (Puppim de Oliveira and Balaban, 2013). Factors underlying the adoption of urban regeneration policies and projects include pressures from major short- or long-term economic problems, deindustrialisation, demographic changes, underinvestment, infrastructural obsolescence, structural or cyclical employment issues, political disenfranchisement, ethnic or social tensions, physical deterioration, and physical changes to urban areas. Typically, urban regeneration actions involve economic, social and physical/ environmental improvement measures in the areas under intervention. Urban regeneration at its most basic contributes towards the implementation of sustainable development through the 'recycling' of land and buildings, reducing demolition waste and new construction materials, as well as reducing demand for peripheral urban growth and facilitating intensification and compactness of existing urban areas (Turcu, 2012).

Over the years, the participation of residents has become an indispensable instrument to facilitate a sustainable "bottom-up" implementation of neighbourhood regeneration initiatives. Participatory processes are expected to contribute to identifying the needs of the people, to empowering local groups, integrating local knowledge systems in the design and planning, reinforcing a learning process and to ensuring political support. The list of possible objectives to achieve with these participatory processes (such as generating ideas, identifying attitudes, disseminating information, reviewing and implementing design proposals) can differ at every place and time. Once the objectives of community participation are stated, it then becomes clear that participation is perceived according to the type of issue and the people involved (Sanoff, 2005).

In Eastern Europe, participatory planning is mandatory and it is regulated by the planning legislation. However, due to the relatively little experience in participatory planning, its implementation has become a major challenge. Community-driven initiatives and NGO-led actions can bring together the different actors involved in urban regeneration processes. These activities include problems of practical implementation of public participation and access to justice pillars. The pressure by short term political and economic interests could leave out public participation and reduce transparency. Public participation is often perceived more just as an additional procedure and not as an opportunity. Quality of communication between the various interested persons in the urban regeneration projects is a crucial issue since the people involved need to understand the importance of each stage of development, in a way that they can easily recognise. Thus, a developer, planner or any other specialist coordinating the public participation process should be a communicator, and communicate in a manner which not is only professional, but also readable and understandable to the recipient. Communication should be diversified and with this said can occur in various forms, for example, the modelling of the development versions.

## 2 LOCAL COMMUNITIES FOR BETTER NEIGHBOURHOODS

Participatory actions in the neighbourhood regeneration are of special importance because they strengthen community spirit and consequently intensify community-driven initiatives. The engagement of inhabitants can significantly increase the efficiency of planning proposals and facilitate other viewpoints that are normally not considered in a formal planning process. If sustainable development is a main objective, then it should include participatory processes to organise and manage the continued demand for effective solutions to neighbourhood regeneration (Laws et al., 2004).

In urban regeneration, self-organization means that the urban actors are enabled to contribute to the shaping of their places by themselves; it is not simply to give them a voice, but to enable them to take responsibility and action for their places, by their own contributions, in bottom-up grassroots processes (Boonstra, 2011).

Nevertheless, the extent, the outcomes, and the methodologies with which urban self-organization can be managed are largely debated (Bond and Thompson-Fawcett, 2007; Innes and Booher, 2004.) In this context, the neighborhood level, which sits between the city and the building levels, appears to be particularly interesting in operational terms. It is well suited to experimenting with the specific practices aimed at improving the urban environment. This allows to look at the urban reality at a scale that is large enough to address themes that clearly exceed the scale of a single building, while remaining small

enough to examine concrete actions. By addressing targeted issues, this type of approach can result in innovative solutions through the application of certain technological developments as well as through the redefinition of the processes of governance and participation. The neighborhood is situated exactly at the crossroads between the art of constructing buildings and the art of managing a city, two areas of action in which the various stakeholders are proceeding independently from each other. While the neighborhood does not necessarily exist on a legal level, it is still an important operational meeting point between the public and private sectors.

The neighbourhood regeneration of individual small-scale projects, where inhabitants can participate not only in planning but also in the implementation process, contributes to the formation of a sense of belonging and identity, creating conditions for further participation of people in building management processes. In small-scale settings, people have a better perception of the problems and are more involved in their solution. Smaller projects require fewer resources and can be carried out in a shorter time-frame and the outcomes can be quickly perceived. Besides, these interventions can serve as a springboard for public participation in large-scale projects, and promote the confidence in the participation of urban regeneration processes. The barriers to effective participation of people from stressed communities in partnerships with government and business include: relative lack of capacity and resources; low levels of interest and risk of activist burn-out; worries about community 'representativeness'; need for long-term commitment; differences in organizational cultures (different modes of working and behavioural expectations).

### **3 INTRODUCING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONCEPT IN RIGA**

The capital city of Latvia, Riga, is currently facing a new challenge: how to prepare a new city development plan that would be sustainable, that would satisfy all the interested parties, and that would solve the most urgent urban design problems, that is, de-urbanization, polarized economic growth, increased pollution, conversion of brownfields into greenfields, maintenance of historical sites and buildings, insufficient funding for fulfillment of public needs, and so forth (Barvika et al., 2015).

City Development Department of Riga City Council describes the concept of neighbourhood as a residential environment of suitable size with its own service, identity and character, arising from the construction type, physical borders, landscape and togetherness of residents. One of the main reasons for the idea of neighbourhoods is efforts to improve the planning of city development and life quality of citizens. Currently data on each neighbourhood of the city – Bolderaja, Bierini, Mezaparks, Purvciems etc. are collected in total for 58 neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are not planned as administrative units, but the collected information on neighbourhoods will serve as a precondition for development of investment policy. The main topics are relating to urban planning, statistics and community engagement. The main goal of neighborhood development is to create the conditions for sustainable socio - economic and spatial policy in the Riga. This approach will contribute to the strengthening of the identity of residential neighborhoods, residents awareness of belonging to their neighborhood, support of territorial balance and improve the living environment.

In order to activate the neighborhood movements as one of the ways of inhabitant self-organization, a series of support tools have been created during the last decade in Riga. The main emphasis in idea competitions organized by the neighborhood associations is on the local community interests and inhabitant problem solving with mutual residents and municipality cooperation. Municipal co-financing is available for the organization of neighborhood forums, community integration activities, cultural activities, as well as for the surrounding environment improvement. A website [www.apkaimes.lv](http://www.apkaimes.lv) collects information on neighborhood development opportunities and activities in neighborhoods, public participation and involved opportunities to operate at the level of neighborhoods, as well as local authorities and non-governmental organizations in the process of strengthening neighborhoods.

### **4 NGO ACTIVITIES IN RIGA NEIGHBOURHOODS**

About 1/3 of the neighbourhoods in Riga have created their neighbourhood associations -NGOs. Observing the neighbourhood character and activity, a link can be found between the scale and activity-

although most of inhabitants of Riga (60%) live in large-scale residential areas, the cooperation of residents in these neighbourhoods is weak, almost nowhere any neighbourhood associations and other activity movements have been established. Conversely, in small, often marginalized neighbourhoods with a historical identity people are much more interested in neighbourhood regeneration and development. Summarizing the data from the sources who finance the neighbourhood initiatives, the different websites and other sources of information we can conclude the main fields of activities.

<b>FIELDS OF ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS</b>
Strengthening affiliation to community	Čiekurkalns, Grīziņkalns, Sarkandaugava, Maskavas forštate, Trīsciems, Vecāķi, Bolderāja
Preservation of cultural heritage	Čiekurkalns, Mežaparks, Vecāķi, Āgenskalns, Bolderāja
Improving quality and accessibility of education	Mežaparks
Social integration of community	Grīziņkalns, Sarkandaugava, Maskavas forštate, Bolderāja
Environmental protection	Sarkandaugava, Mežaparks, Trīsciems, Bolderāja, Mangalsala
Strengthening of local identity	Čiekurkalns, Grīziņkalns, Vecāķi, Bolderāja, Miera iela
Activation of local enterprises	Čiekurkalns, Miera iela
Participation in urban planning process	Mežaparks, Dārziņi, Āgenskalns, Mežaparks, Bolderāja, Mangalsala
Regeneration of public space	Čiekurkalns, Grīziņkalns, Sarkandaugava, Mežaparks, Maskavas forštate, Vecāķi, Āgenskalns, Bolderāja, Mangalsala

Table.1 Fields of activities in Riga neighborhoods

Activities of neighborhood associations are specified by several factors: the neighborhoods location: for the neighborhoods near the River Daugava or lakes the main objective is environmental protection; the neighborhoods history: historical neighborhoods strengthen community identity with protection of cultural heritage etc. Specific problems such as school closures will serve as strong promoter for public participation. Activities regarding the urban planning are the leading causes of many communities' initiatives. Rail Baltica, relocation of sea port terminals and other major development which could bring any risk to quality of life in the neighborhoods, have been important motivators for consolidation of the population. However, the most common field for every neighborhood is regeneration of public space.

## 5 PUBLIC SPACE: A PLATFORM FOR CO-CREATION

A readily accessible public open space is a centre of public activities which may affect the everyday life of people and development of the entire neighbourhood (Rapoport 1985). The public open space is beyond the control of individuals, it is an element linking the private living spaces of inhabitants and it is used for different functional and symbolic purposes (Madanipour 2003). Public open space in the residential environment is the main platform for socialisation as well as an essential component of a dwelling, "an extension" of the personal living space into outer world (Belanger 2007). The quality of public space, in terms of respect for rights of assembly and expression, is the most important long-run parameter shaping civil society organization, strength and capacity to act. In this dimension there is a striking variation of conditions across the post-communist space as well as significant changes over time. Once residents begin to think of themselves as content and platform co-creators and as active players who can not only react to design proposals and planning initiatives, but also devise their own, it becomes possible to develop tactical approaches based on small scale local interventions where weak constituencies can even take a leadership role, and which can spark catalytic processes at a large scale, as in the urban acupuncture approach (Iaconesi & Persico, 2014; Landry, 2005). The public dimension of such space is another key resource to harness the full potential of inclusive participation, in that it gives visibility and social salience to

practices that, however relevant and transformational, could be overlooked or even misunderstood by some constituencies (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005). It is, quite differently, turning public space into a co-creation arena where the very fact of being a resident sets the conditions to become part of the design process. In practice, co-design approaches vary greatly from being close to consultation and information gathering to facilitating people in generating their own ideas and solutions.

The positive co-creation and self-organization synergies result in a grassroots process of local information and knowledge, aimed at improving places and driven by actors' lived experiences. Co-creation methodologies aim to enable people, laypersons as well as experts, with a very broad range of knowledge and know-how to have a creative contribution to the design processes (Sanders, 2002). The European Design Leadership Board defines co-design as "a community centred methodology that designers use to enable people who will be served by a design outcome to participate in designing solutions to their problems" (Thomson et al, 2012). Co-creative processes are the outcome of a shift in urban design; they move from experts towards giving actors the capability to directly contribute their experience (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

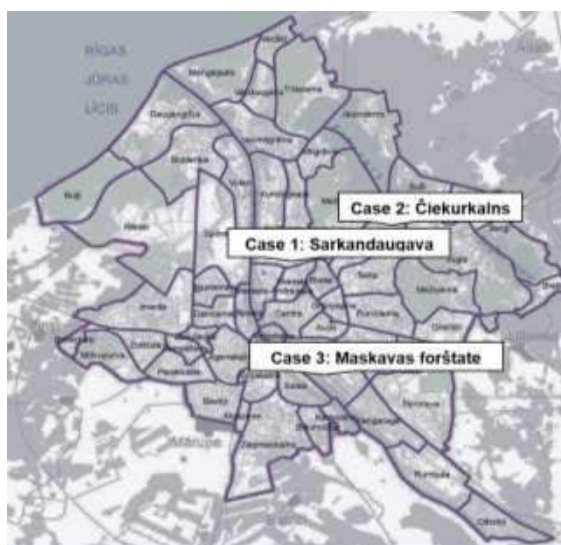


Figure 1. Case study neighbourhoods in Riga context

### CASE 1. REGENERATION OF A SQUARE IN SARKANDAUGAVA

Sarkandaugava is a historical industrial district, located in the northern part of Riga, with 18 095 inhabitants.

According to a survey conducted in 2013, 34 % of Sarkandaugava population would be willing to participate in the activities linked with courtyard or other public open space improvement, 26% would be willing to engage in their neighborhood clean-up. Answering the question "which territories should be targeted first in the cleanups" the respondents most often mentioned apartment house surroundings and courtyards (34%) and the railway surroundings (22%).

Sarkandaugava neighbourhood association has been active since 2013. Association aims to promote the development of the Sarkandaugava neighborhood and to improve inhabitant life quality. They are representing the interests of Sarkandaugava residents in Riga municipal institutions, also being a communication tool for the exchange of ideas between the active Sarkandaugava neighborhood residents as well as promoting neighborhood residents responsibility for their surrounding environment and encouraging mutual tolerance. The Association is one of the most active neighbourhood associations in Riga, with activities related to environmental issues - industrial pollution reduction, mitigation of negative impacts of the port and also different cultural activities.

One of the most successful projects in Sarkandaugava is Alekša Square regeneration. Till 2013 Alekša Square was abandoned, polluted and degraded place next to the district's main street. In 2012 an initiative "Labas vietas TALKA" created series of events, in which neighborhood residents together would create



ideas to improve a specific location in their district. Alekša square was chosen to be the location for improvement and development. The action started in 2014 with several clean-ups including different activities for shifting the square's visual appearance, functionality and liveability respecting the identity of the neighbourhood.

Figure 2. Regenerated Alekša square in Sarkandaugava neighborhood

### CASE 2. DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAYGROUND IN ČIEKURKALNS

Čiekurkalns is a historical industrial district with 7 794 inhabitants. According to a survey conducted in 2013, 40 % of Čiekurkalns population would be willing to participate in the activities linked with courtyard or other public open space improvement, 35% would be ready to participate in the restoration of the residential buildings visual appearance. Answering the question "which territories should be targeted first in the clean-ups" the respondents most often mentioned apartment house surroundings and courtyards (47%) and also the sidewalks and streets (22%). Čiekurkalns Neighbourhood Association is active since 2014. Association's mission is to target Čiekurkalns neighborhood development. The activities are mainly related to the revitalization of the neighborhood identity by organizing various events for the inhabitants. Significant activity was the TEC historic buildings protection.



One of the most striking projects has been Čiekurkalns playground creation. Before this project there was no place in the neighbourhood for children to spend their free time actively. In 2015 for this purpose a fundraising campaign was launched. In 2016 this initiative was noticed and implemented by the Riga City Council.

Figure 3. Development of a playground in Čiekurkalns

### CASE 3. REGENERATION OF A COURTYARD IN MASKAVAS FORŠTATE

Maskavas Forštate is a neighbourhood adjacent to the Riga city centre with 27 155 inhabitants (Census, 2011). An important factor in the development of the Maskavas Forštate has been the multiplicity of nationalities and religions of inhabitants that in the course of time populated this neighborhood. More than half of the inhabitants of Maskavas Forštate (59%) are willing to participate in activities linked with courtyard or other public open space improvement. Answering the question "which territories should be targeted first in the clean-ups" the respondents most often mentioned apartment house surroundings (35%), as well as streets, sidewalks and all courtyards (23%). The Maskavas Forštate neighbourhood association was founded in 2011 to unite the society and to activate the educational, social, health, cultural, integration and environmental spheres. The association actively participates in environmental management, social and cultural projects. In cooperation with the other active associations and movements project "Sun courtyard" was developed. During the "Big clean-up" children's playground was upgraded and improved, new greenery planted, new benches and different decorative installations installed. The project partners were the Riga Technical University students and professional landscape architects. The project was funded by Riga 2014 foundation.



Figure 4. Regenerated courtyard in Maskavas Forštate

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Public participation in neighborhood regeneration relates with a number of advantages: communities have a fresh perspective, and can be seen often issues new kinds; community involvement helps deliver programs that better target local needs; as a result, projects are acceptable to the local community. Still, there are plenty of challenges in cooperation process between different stakeholders involved in urban regeneration. On the one hand, there is considerable activity of the marginalized communities that require a hearing and respecting of their opinion in the development and planning processes. On the other hand, in many cases, public participation is a decorative and is accepted unless it does not interfere with financially significant development projects.

Public participation in neighbourhood level needs different types of public participation, at different stages and with different levels of involvement. The public also have an opportunity to exercise its responsibilities when the ideas are put into practice, and even afterwards, when they are inhabiting the spaces. An optimal participation process would be one which engages the people in the definition of the problem, seeking the solutions, and collaborating in the realisation of the proposals.

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## ID 1756 | LOCAL PLANNING INSTRUMENTS - IF ONLY WE KNEW HOW TO PLAY

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**ABSTRACT:** We know little about how the implementation of planning instruments are communicated to the members of the community by the planning profession in terms of complexity of language and process, power relationships and how this impacts upon an individual's ability to engage as an active citizen in the development assessment process. In order to create more value for community engagement in the development assessment process, we need to better understand how local planning instruments are perceived by members of a community in terms of ease of navigation, interpretation and application to development proposals. It is particularly in the role of community as submitters to a development application that these perceptions may be best explored as it is an opportunity for non-planners to interact with planning instruments perhaps for the first time. This paper will discuss the type and nature of submissions made by non-planners to development applications within two case studies and identify barriers to non-planners effectively participating in planning discussions and decision-making about development applications. The research will undertake data collection and content analysis of six (6) submissions from each case against development proposals within a regional city context. The content analysis will aim to match the de-identified public submissions with what the planning profession considers valid urban and regional planning grounds expressed in local statutory planning instruments. This will help to ascertain the submitters' effectiveness in understanding and applying the local planning instrument to the site specific issue that has ignited the active citizenship response. The paper will seek to answer questions about what is the engagement framework within which submitters can participate in planning, how are planning schemes navigated, applied and interpreted by non-planners lodging submissions to proposed development and what knowledge and skills do community members need to participate in the development assessment process as submitters ?

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In order to build trust many local governments and Local Government Acts are based on values and codes of conduct that include transparency and accountability. This is no less important for the planning profession if it is to be seen as legitimate, open, honest and fair in the way it communicates issues around development proposals and development assessment.