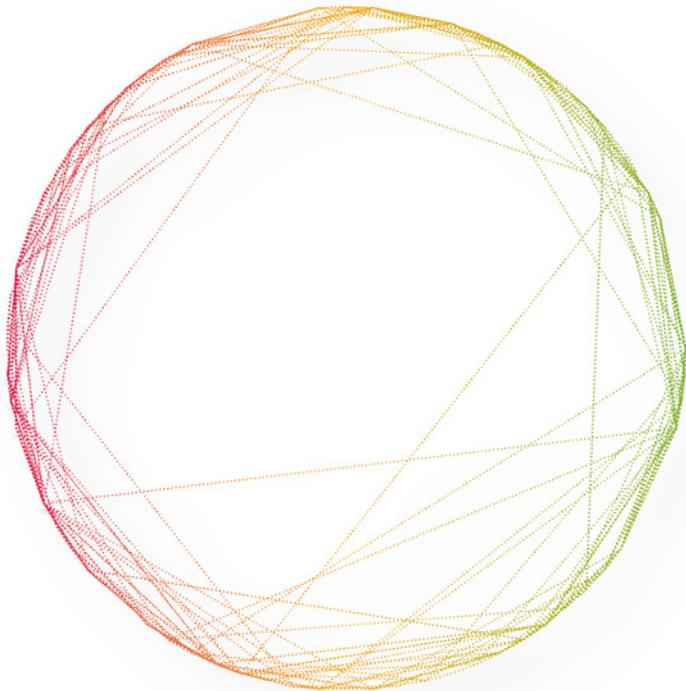


Global Dwelling

Intertwining Research,
Community Participation
and Pedagogy



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Public Participation in the Regeneration of Large-Scale Housing Estates

Sandra Treija, Uģis Bratuškins, Edgars Bondars

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the participation of residents has become an indispensable instrument to facilitate a sustainable bottom-up implementation of housing regeneration initiatives. Participatory processes are expected to contribute to identifying the needs of the people, empowering local groups, integrating local knowledge systems in the design and planning, reinforcing a variform 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 possible to determine the type of participatory process and the people involved (Sanoff, 2005).

Participatory actions in the regeneration of residential areas are of special importance because they strengthen community spirit and consequently intensify the sense of place. The engagement of inhabitants can significantly enhance 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 housing regeneration (Laws, Scholz, Shiroyama, Susskind, Suzuki, & Weber, 2004).

After the Second World War, large-scale housing estates were built in many countries in Europe. Small-size apartments were integrated into large-scale blocks surrounded by vast green areas. A large part of the population lives in these housing estates which constitutes up to 40 or 50 percent out of the total housing in some of the former communist countries. However, this kind of habitation has become unattractive among residents. Besides, the attitude towards “saving-of-energy-resources” has changed. Nowadays, the challenge is to improve the spatial attractiveness of these areas through urban regeneration programmes which usually have two goals: Firstly, to improve the conditions of buildings; secondly, to increase the quality of the surrounding space.

In post-communist 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, NGO-led actions, as well as pedagogic activities can bring together the different actors involved in housing regeneration processes. Several case studies collected in this chapter exemplify a variety of collaboration models for participatory planning, design and implementation.

HOUSING REGENERATION AS INTEGRAL PART OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Urban regeneration is typically carried out in urban areas undergoing economic development, deindustrialisation, demographic changes,

underinvestment, structural or cyclical employment, political disenfranchisement, racial or social tensions and physical deterioration (Czischke, Moloney, & Turcu, 2015). As part of a sustainable urban development programme, housing regeneration is a complex system of actions embracing spatial and economic development, social and physical improvements, environmental plans, as well as training and education programmes. Since a major issue of sustainable development is the purposeful use of resources, urban and housing regeneration through the reorganization and upgrading existing places is an alternative to planning new urbanisations (Coach & Dennemann, 2000; Turcu, 2012; Balaban & Puppim de Oliveira, 2013).

In many western European cities, housing regeneration takes place in large-scale housing estates, usually publically owned, which are perceived as degraded territories generally inhabited by deprived social groups. Such districts face a range of problems such as poverty and high-crime rates, among others. To avoid the complete degradation of those areas, the responsible authorities have to invest resources not only in the renovation of buildings, but also in the revitalisation of the public open space. In Eastern Europe, where large-scale housing accounts for the majority of the housing market, these large-scale housing states attract a more diverse population. In the communist era, these housing estates were built to differentiate the East from the West (MacArthur, 2001). While in western countries, centrally planned suburbs often began as welfare projects for low-income families, in the eastern countries large-scale housing was more egalitarian since it was also built for the middle-class and educated citizens. However, as these estates deteriorated and a new richer middle class emerged, wealthier families started to move away, subsequently starting the cycle of decline.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING: FROM TOP-DOWN TO BOTTOM-UP

Public participation has not always played a key role in urban planning as it does today. A broader discussion on public participation, both among the scientific community and the public began only in the second half of the twentieth century, becoming more intense at the end of the 1980s. Nowadays, planning implies the involvement of inhabitants at various stages, from early conception to the implementation of the measures (Treija, Bondars, & Bratuškins, 2014)

Two basic trends in the urban planning theory and practice of the second half of the twentieth century can be observed with regard to participatory planning (Healey, 1992). One of them advocated the centralised planning practice, entrusting all planning decisions to experts. A second one postulated a greater public participation in planning. These two mutually contrasting trends are characterised as top-down and bottom-up planning (Murray, Greer, Houston, McKay, & Murtagh, 2009).

Public participation in urban planning became more urgent in the second half of the twentieth century as a reaction to the rational planning theories that were prevalent in the late 1950s and 1960s. Rational planning was distinguished by functional and aesthetic uniformity, the application of a mono-functional zoning principle, and large-scale buildings laid out in an open grid that ignored existing urban structures. Planning decisions were based on scientific facts and comprehensive data analysis, thus excluding the participation of inhabitants. This top-down planning increasingly received criticism from professionals and organisations, as well as from the population at large. Critics of the rational comprehensive planning argued that the analytical methods used in the preparation of plans were based on incomplete information. One of the recommendations to deal with the lack of information was to involve diverse interest groups in the planning process. Arguments for the involvement of inhabitants in the urban development were formulated by several authors (Arnstein, 1969; Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1973). The impact of public participation on the planning process was reflected in Arnstein's seminal work, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, published in 1969. In this paper, she contended that there is a fundamental difference if participation happens as a formally organised routine procedure, or if it aims at transforming the planning process.

Communicative planning appeared in the 1980s and was influenced by the work of various theorists, mainly by Jürgen Habermas (1981). Communicative planning was comparable to the pluralistic urban planning concept that promoted the idea of the inclusion of various interest groups in planning (Davidoff, 1965). One of the participatory planning objectives is to understand the needs of the inhabitants. With this purpose, the authorities can invite representatives of the inhabitants to take part in a decision-making process. This public participation can bring new points of view that the authorities had not considered; it can facilitate equality and help to reach more effective decisions. Additionally, the discussion and advocacy can help to build trust among the players, which in turn helps to reach a consensus (Sakakibara & Genkai, 2005). Nowadays, public participation in housing and urban development is actively promoted by international agencies, as well as from a variety of state and local government authorities.

According to top-down planning practice, the planner is the person who provides a vision of the future built environment. In a bottom-up planning process, on the contrary, a planner is not the only one who plans and designs. The role of professionals in the bottom-up or participatory planning is to coordinate the overall process including the negotiation with residents (Innes, 1998). This requires a capacity to interact with the inhabitants and an ability to explain to them the strengths and weaknesses of a project (Forester, 1989).

Information on decisions related to community-oriented design must be presented to the public in an easily understandable and appealing way.

Therefore, efforts should be made to go beyond the traditional format of public meetings and to find alternative ways to promote inhabitants' involvement. Various activities and types of communication (open discussions, city games, arrangement of exhibitions, etc.) and the involvement of third parties (universities, NGOs etc.) can contribute to attracting the interest of citizens.

One of the possibilities is the involvement of university students in projects in some short-term or small-scale urban regeneration activities. In this way, architecture schools can contribute to the knowledge creation and sharing between all the parties involved. This offers a unique learning opportunity for students, who are given the chance to learn new skills which can be applied later when they, as qualified professionals, facilitate participatory processes.

In some cases, participatory processes can be performed for purely formal reasons only. For example, if the funding of a project is granted on the condition of the involvement of inhabitants, public participation tends to be implemented only formally (Burgers, 2004). Under certain conditions, residents might refuse to participate as they might think that their opinion will not be taken into account (Gustavsson & Elander, 2016).

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN: PERSONALISATION OF SPACE

In contemporary planning practice, the fields of design and social studies are getting closer to each other. An important goal of the cooperation in development projects is to reach a common understanding of the role of each of the stakeholders in the overall process. The views held by urban planning professionals might differ from those of the residents. For example, the owners of a car might want to park as close as possible to their apartment block, a wish which in many cases is not shared by professionals. At the same time, professionals need to take into account the needs of local residents who know their living spaces much better than they do, and in this vein, they can help them to take better informed decisions. In addition, residents might contribute with their ideas and with their actions to endow their environment with a personal touch.

Cooperation among various stakeholders is particularly important for housing projects. Housing is the built expression of a civilisation, a way of being in the world; it is the manifestation of the relationship between people and their environment. People contribute to giving form to the built environment by constructing, decorating, furnishing, maintaining and restoring their homes. This way, they identify themselves with the places they inhabit. The identification is based on the desire to be the creators of their living space, to live in a personalised environment (Habraken, 1999). During the pre-industrial period, communities and individuals were actively participating in the processes to give form to their living spaces. However, their role has diminished in today's large-scale housing estates. After the Second World War, in most European countries, a significant part of the housing stock was

designed according to similar architectural, spatial and construction principles. The dwellings in these housing estates were once appreciated as modern, spacious, luxurious, and egalitarian. Nowadays, they are often seen as monotonous, uniform, dull, and small (Wassenberg, 2013). Because of this negative image, these districts have not become popular among residents (Dekker & Van Kempen, 2005; Van Kempen, Dekker, Hall, & Tosics, 2005).

Some renovation projects carried out in the former Eastern Germany have attempted to solve the problems caused by uniformity and repetition in these large housing estates, with the participation of inhabitants. Hellersdorf is one of the large estates in Berlin where cooperation with the residents played a key role in the regeneration strategy (Figures 1, 2). In order to meet the needs of the residents, public open space has been transformed into a controlled semi-public open space excluding car traffic. Residents have been involved in the design, development and construction of courtyard utilities. Moreover, on the initiative of residents, private open spaces were created in the ground level of housing blocks, as extensions of the apartments. These spaces improved the level of privacy and gave a personal touch to the homes. This kind of intervention strengthens the sense of belonging to the place, creating ties between members of the community, and protecting dwellings from intruders. In this way, a high-density housing estate was turned into a sustainable part of the viable city with satisfied people, who are actively involved in all stages of participatory design (Williams, 2009).

There are different types of public participation, at different stages and with different levels of involvement. Public participation is not limited to the planning and design phases. The public also have an opportunity to undertake responsibilities when the ideas are put into practice, and even afterwards, when they inhabit 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. In the future, we could envisage residents taking a more active role in the maintenance of their living spaces because they will devote more time and material resources to their development. This would lead to greater independence from the housing managers, increase their desire to get involved in the development of their housing and strengthen the ties among the neighbours.

PARTICIPATORY IMPLEMENTATION: REDEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Public open spaces are an essential component of a home (Madanipour, 2003; Belanger, 2007). In large housing estates, public spaces give inhabitants



FIGURES 1, 2.
Personalised open space in Hellersdorf, Berlin. Source: U. Bratuškins

an opportunity to expand their homes beyond the domestic realm, by carrying out some of their daily activities outdoors. However, in most of today's large-scale housing estates it is difficult to make public spaces part of the living space due to social and economic reasons (Treija, Bondars, & Bratuškins, 2012). It may generally be observed that in most of these estates public spaces have been poorly maintained. As a result, they are seen as unsafe places and have a negative image (Sendi, Aalbers, & Trigueiro, 2009). Different initiatives have been adopted to improve the quality of open spaces and thus enhance the image of neighbourhoods, such as involving inhabitants in the furnishing and greening of open public spaces.

Generally speaking, the implementation of housing regeneration projects is a multilateral process involving parties with differing or conflicting interests. For the participants the implementation process should create the confidence that the plans will be introduced since they have been involved in the decision-making process. This ultimately means that the participants are responsible for the decisions taken. During the implementation phase the efficiency and adequacy of solutions can be tested, something that is not possible at the design stage.

One of the ways to engage residents in the transformation of open spaces is gardening. In urban garden projects, inhabitants can participate in different ways. It can be a small-scale garden such as a community kitchen to fill wasted spaces, or a rooftop to foster mutual communication and community education. Urban gardening facilitates the creation of emotional connections between people and their environment (Turner, Henryks, & Pearson, 2011). Community gardens bring residents together in common activities and can contribute to their environmental education (Comstock et al., 2010). For example, in Malmö, Sweden, community gardens facilitated the revitalisation of public open spaces (Figures 3, 4). Although urban gardening has enjoyed a long tradition in the city, community gardening is a recent trend. Malmö's experience confirms that urban gardening might have a positive impact in the revitalisation of residential areas through the promotion of social engagement and an intensification of the usages of open space (Koroļova, 2015).

FIGURES 3, 4.
Urban gardens
in open space of
the neighbour-
hood in Malmö.
Source: A.
Koroļova



PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT: BUILDING RENOVATION

In recent decades, housing policies in European countries have undergone significant changes with the purpose of facilitating the liberalisation of the housing market and the privatisation of the housing stock. Overall, these changes have given rise to a substantial increase of apartment owners. However, the property management system has failed to

respond to these rapid reforms. Therefore, housing privatisation has created new challenges for housing management (Gruis, Tsenkova, & Nieboer, 2009).

As a result of the privatisation of the apartments, residents are responsible for the building maintenance, and for getting the financial resources to undertake the reforms of their dwellings. In order to ensure an efficient management of the housing buildings and also to meet the quality standards required nowadays, local authorities need to find ways to have positive, clear and open dialogue with the apartment owners to encourage them to cooperate in the renovation of the buildings. This is not a task that can be done in a short time, but rather a long-term programme (Turkington, Van Kempen, & Wassenberg, 2004; Nieboer, Gruis, Van Hal, & Tsenkova, 2011).

To facilitate the renovation of the building stock, many countries have started to adapt their legal frameworks to the current socioeconomic conditions (Palacin & Shelburne, 2005). Therefore, some countries have abandoned their previous structures and created new ones, while in other countries the new institutional structures coexist alongside the previous ones. For example, in Riga, Latvia, the current property management system is unable to facilitate the necessary improvement in the quality of the living environment (Figures 5, 6). Most of the buildings consume large amounts of energy and have poor thermal insulation. Building renovation has become an urgent matter; otherwise, a considerable part of the housing stock is going to be at risk of degradation. One of the reasons for this situation is that the individual ownership structure hinders the adoption of measures to protect the common interests. State institutions have adopted a legislation aimed at promoting the renovation of buildings and the real estate management process improvement. With this purpose, the Ministry of Economy and other institutions have carried out awareness campaigns. In addition, there has been funding available for building renovation (Slava & Geipele, 2012). However, the number of renovated apartments is still very small. Despite all of the above, the engagement of apartment owners in the renovation processes remains low. Furthermore, they still do not understand their roles and responsibilities in those processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Public participation is an essential part of sustainable development, and it spans over the stages of planning, design, implementation, and also management. Participatory planning plays a fundamental role in the sustainable regeneration process of large-scale housing estates which needs to



FIGURES 5, 6.
Renovated
buildings in Riga.
Source: S. Treija

bring together multiple interests of a large number of involved parties. The extent to which the residents are aware of the importance of their participation affects the result of the regeneration process.

Quality of communication between the various actors involved in the urban regeneration projects is crucial to make participants aware of the value of their participation at each stage of development. A developer, a planner or any other specialist in charge of a public participation process should have the skills to communicate with the various groups of people involved in the process in a language understandable to them, particularly with those who do not know the technicalities used to describe projects.

The uniformity of the large-scale housing states does not promote a sense of belonging among residents. Thus, a housing regeneration process is easier to implement in smaller-scale urban structures like neighbourhoods or residential estates. The urban regeneration of small-scale areas, in which inhabitants can participate not only during the planning but also in the implementation phase, contributes to the formation of a sense of belonging and identity. In small-scale settings, people have a better perception of the problems and feel more motivated to participate in their solution. Smaller projects require fewer resources, they can be carried out in a shorter time and their outcomes can be quickly perceived. Besides, these small interventions can serve as a springboard to foster public involvement in large-scale projects, and to give value to participation in urban regeneration processes.

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