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Community-based planning for drafting an urban regulatory plan

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ABSTRACT

The demand for community involvement during the planning process is growing. Kosovo, to be in step with global development trends in the field of planning, has developed various projects in the name of public participation. The pilot project for the Brekoci informal settlement in Gjakova is an example of community-based planning. The purpose of this paper is to show the way of community involvement through unique methods explicitly designed for this community, as the tool “Express”, “Mark” and “Vote” and how the data obtained from these tools through spatial systems as Geographical Information System and DepthMapX, have generated the community’s vision, which has resulted in the drafting of the urban regulatory plan. This plan represents a reflection of the local cultural context.

KEYWORDS

community involvement, tools, methods, data, spatial systems, urban regulatory plan

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based planning represents an approach that helps planners understand the locality’s innermost meaning and create a reliable pathway toward wealthy and sustainable environments. It is considered a sustainable concept in which community needs are mitigated by providing more sustainable and wealthy environments [1] and as an original place-making tool [2]. Although community involvement is often recognized as a challenging activity considering the complexity of urban phenomena, it is proven that it has various benefits. The benefits can be seen in many dimensions, starting from getting to know the surroundings where the choice to live is made, the neighbors, and the physical and natural features, to shaping of the built environment and raising the quality of life in the community [3].

Kosovo, since 1999, has been facing a complex transition in all spheres. Among them was a change in the planning system, which was and still is that development must be aligned with European development and global tendencies [4]. These changes also include the approach to planning by having the community in the process of drafting spatial plans. Community involvement in drafting the urban regulatory plan for the informal settlement of Brekoci was a pilot project whose purpose was to sensitize the community as an essential actor in this process.

Learning by involvement was considered the best method to integrate the community into the planning process and extract the neighborhood’s features from the community perspective. Applying this method, the community at the same time has been informed and has understood the process and built the language of communication and planning. While the process begins with understanding the importance of making the community part of the planning team, the language of the planning remains a fragile part. Learning to speak the language of planning through the community, finding inspiration, generating an understandable graphic language, and knowing how the planning process works, is premised on finding a language of communication. Creating and understanding graphics was especially

important since the inability to understand the graphic language, as reading maps and sketches, can lead to misunderstanding, which follows with an inappropriate plan [5]; in this case, the undesired development of the neighborhood.

This paper describes creating unique community involvement tools in the planning process by utilizing community and neighborhood features. The article also presents how the findings, because of community involvement through these tools, were visualized through spatial systems as Geographical Information System (GIS) and DepthMapX and were used as a premise for drafting the urban regulatory plan.

1.1. Methodology

The project's methodology was built based on the general principles for community involvement and different tools and methods of involvement. This methodology has helped simplify and structure the neighborhood's characteristics towards creating a place that promotes well-being and sustainability through community involvement. The methods have been adapted to the context of the settlement as well as to the characteristics of the community.

The community involvement strategy in the Brekoci case study is built from four components:

- Communication - adequate communication, finding the language of communication, approach, and method of explanation, informing the community about what is happening and what the project is trying to achieve;
- Information - informal conversations, design of posters, flyers, invitations, information through local radio and TV, as well as the community's involvement in the information process, as the distribution of invitations, etc.;
- Adaptability - being flexible, making flexible agendas, working flexibly, as an activity that ensures transparency in the process;
- Involvement tools - developing unique tools for involvement based on community characteristics.

Due to the features of the community, as a diverse community, not only in the context of ethnic belonging but also to educational advancement, various tools and methods for involvement have been designed, trying to be as attractive as possible but also understandable for the category of residents who do not have completed primary education.

Unique tools that have been created are the "Express" tool, which had the purpose of extracting the characteristics of the neighborhood and the residents from the perspective of the residents; the "Mark" tool, which had the purpose of identifying problems in the place, considering that some specific information is characteristic for a particular area; as well as the "Vote" tool, which was aimed at choosing urban priority issues. The data from these involvement tools is further visualized through space systems.

Considering the involvement strategy and the tools used, it is concluded that planners cannot always detect the characteristics of a particular place. Many urban phenomena

related to the social, cultural, and temporal aspects are difficult to identify and research for a certain period for which the plan is made. For this reason, the community's involvement in planning plays a vital role in "highlighting" different social, cultural, and temporal aspects and together with the planners, through spatial systems, can make their visualization.

2. THE URBAN PROFILE OF BREKOCI

Brekoci is a settlement in the southwestern part of Gjakova in an area of 17 ha (Fig. 1). It is a settlement that belongs to the category of informal settlements. Informal settlements are human settlements with a lower standard of living. The living quality includes poor housing and the lack of technical and social infrastructure. Brekoci is a suburban city settlement with a diverse community: Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians (75%), and Albanians (25%). There are about 100 houses with about 650 inhabitants. More than 50% of the population is aged 18–65. Based on the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning [6] data, only 25% of the population is employed. Although it is planned as a local community, Brekoci does not provide jobs, content and culture, health, etc. Therefore, the settlement of Brekoci is defined as a settlement dependent on the city in terms of education, employment, health services, and trade. The destination is primarily a residential area, where most houses are of poor quality. Settle down supplies of electricity while sewage is in the implementation phase. There is a lack of social infrastructure [6].

3. THE STRATEGY OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Since the community approach is not the same for all communities, adaptations, and adjustments to methods and the whole strategy must be made. The process involves identifying and selecting the general principles and tools of involvement.

3.1. General principles as a composition of the involvement strategy

The principles used in the case of Brekoci are as follows.

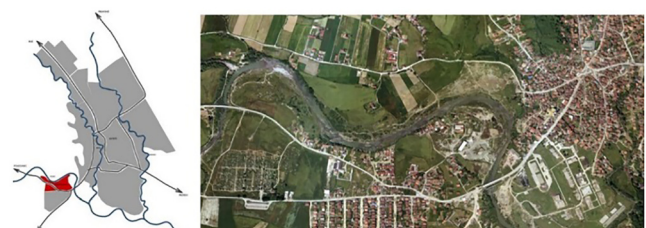


Fig. 1. The Brekoci neighborhood in the context of the city and the aerial photo (Source: Author)

3.1.1. Usage of local references. Since not everyone can orient themselves in space or can read a map or plan, a suitable way of orientation must be found. In the case of Brekoci, local references were used, allowing the residents to show where they live or where a particular activity takes place. The area of neighborhood was divided into seven distinct areas named by the residents, like as the billiards area “D”, the chief’s area (representative of the community) “G,” the flooding area “F,” the social housing area “C”, the bridge area “E”, the “Te Bujari” area “B” (a famous person in the neighborhood) and cemetery area “A” (Fig. 2). This spatial division of the neighborhood also served as a reference for meeting with groups of residents.

3.1.2. Respecting local knowledge and cultural context. All people, whether of different ages and professional structures or poor and rich, all have specific knowledge about the environment where they live. In this context, the residents provided much information about the neighborhood’s function during seasons’ specific hours and negative phenomena related to security issues. In the cultural context considering local attitudes related to gender, everyday life, social groups, etc., the social pattern of the neighborhood

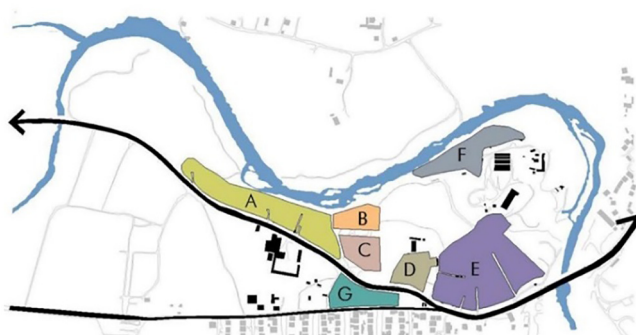


Fig. 2. Map built from local references (Source: Author)

was identified, which then was used in the generation of the neighborhood’s vision.

3.1.3. Involvement of all community groups. Without the involvement of all community groups, the project cannot be realized [7]. People of different ages, different genders, and different profiles have different perspectives. This variety is sometimes more important than the higher number of participants. After the involvement of all ages, as a result, the requests and needs of the children came out, who, through drawings and stories, showed how they saw their neighborhood in the future. These ideas were used in developing the area’s vision, and defining its functions, in this case, the planning and construction of a community center, including the involvement of all community groups during public meetings (Fig. 3).

3.1.4. Communication. The informal way of communication, the non-use of professional language, being friendly with people, the informal discussions in the courtyards of the houses, the provision of information, and the information through the local radio all have influenced the finding of a common language of communication which has resulted in a gradual increase in participation in public meetings. From the 20 participants who participated in the first meeting, the number of participants gradually increased to 40, 60, and 100.

3.2. Tools and methods

Tool 1: “Express” - the tool aims to extract the characteristics of the neighborhood and the residents from the resident’s perspective. The goal was for the tool to be understandable and structured. Residents were instructed to complete the following sentences:

- My neighborhood is ..., (how do residents describe their neighborhood);
- My neighborhood has good things ..., (what are the potentials of the neighborhood for the residents);



Fig. 3. The engagement of children, men and women of different ages (Photo: Author)

- My neighborhood needs ... (what are the challenges faced by residents in the neighborhood);
- For my neighborhood, I can ... (contribute);
- I can work/I know how to ... (to identify the residents' skills so that the planning for jobs, i.e., can respond to their requirements or skills).

Tool 2: “Mark” - considering that much information is characteristic only for a specific area within a location, this tool has tried to identify or mark the problems in an exact place. The critical points were identified, including flooding areas and other technical infrastructure problems. For this tool, aerial photography has been used, and residents have marked and explained the issues faced.

Tool 3: “Vote” - this tool was aimed at choosing the urban priority issue. The issues were listed based on the assessment of the existing situation. Additional space has been left to complete the list of new problems that may emerge from discussions with residents. Because the residents did not know how to read and write, urban issues were illustrated through symbols so that the tool would be as inclusive as possible. All

12 urban matters were voted on through sticky notes, and three priority issues were chosen. His tool was considered suitable for prioritizing the main urban problems. The means of involvement after the community intervention showed the importance of tools (Fig. 4).

4. INTERPRETING THE COMMUNITY DATA THROUGH SPATIAL SYSTEMS

An integral part of community involvement in the planning phase was interpreting data using the involvement tools' results. The data was processed using spatial systems as GIS as a tool for modeling and analyzing complex data [8] and DepthMapX. This software platform helped perform spatial analyses in the context of social processes within the built environment [9]. Through GIS, maps corresponding to the functional, morphological, and social dimensions have been visualized, while through DepthMapX, the legibility of the settlement is in the context of accessibility and integration of

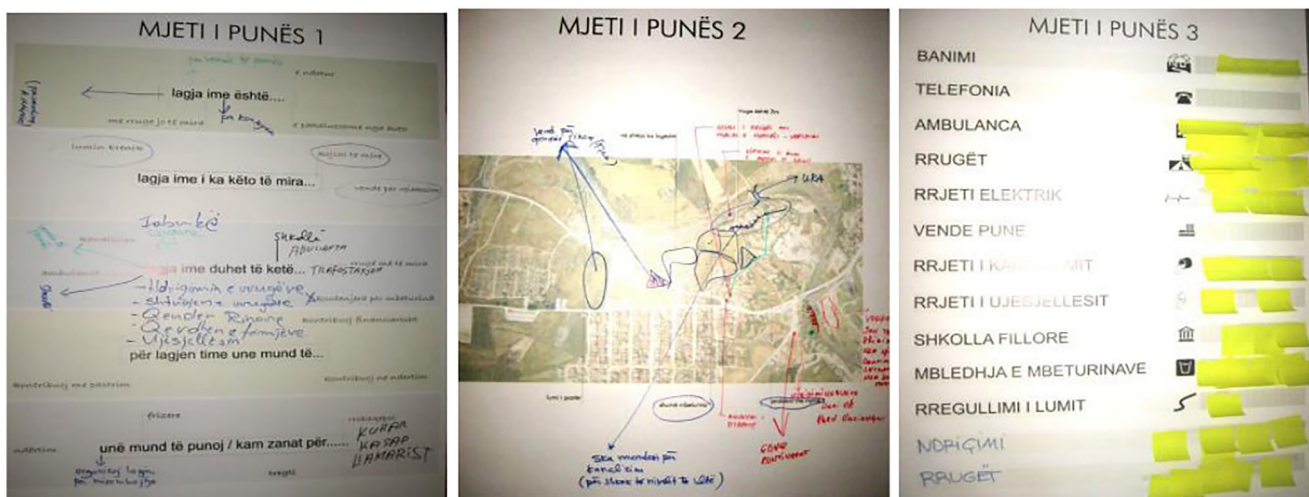


Fig. 4. Involvement tools: “Express”, “Mark” and “Vote” (Photo: Author)

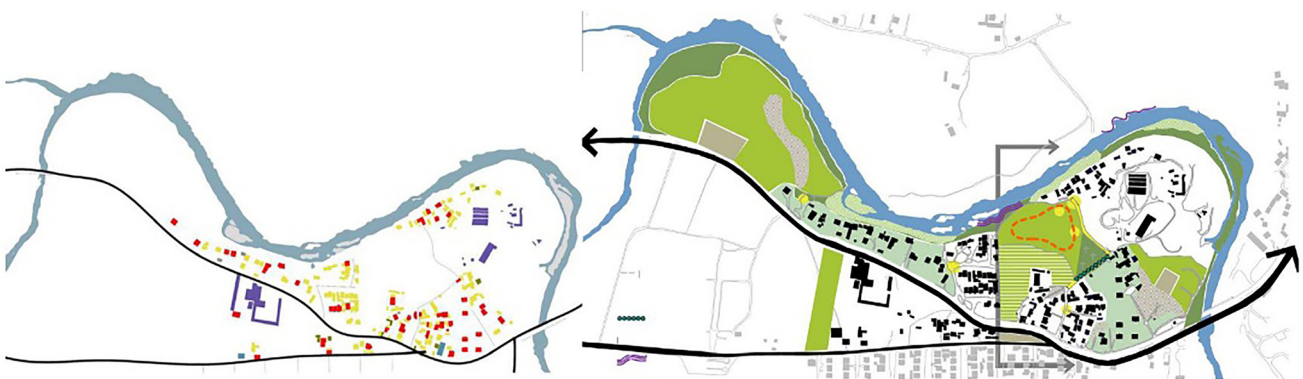


Fig. 5. The quality of residential buildings and identification of social spaces generated through GIS (Source: Author)

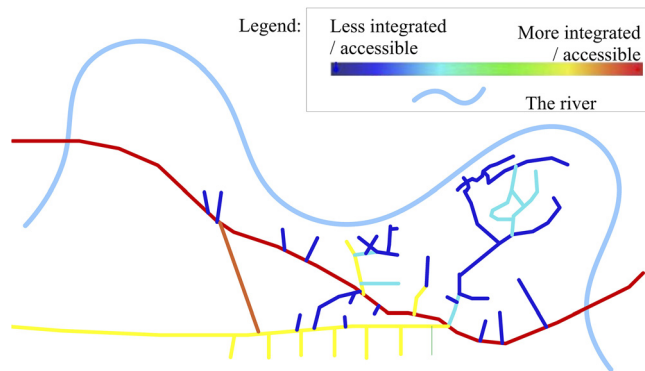


Fig. 6. Roads in terms of integration/accessibility, analyzed with DepthMapX (Source: Author)

the road network. The data processed with GIS, the quality of residential buildings, and the identification of social spaces in the drafting phase were used as a concept in the generation of the urban regulatory plan (Fig. 5).

The data was processed with DepthMapX, in which the accessibility and integration of the road network were analyzed through the “less” and “more” scale, which was used as a premise for creating a permeable road system (Fig. 6).

Other thematic fields, as the natural environment, social and economic infrastructure, technical infrastructure, etc., have been analyzed through these spatial systems, which further contributed to the urban regulatory plan (Fig. 7).

5. LESSONS LEARNED – RESULTS

The findings show that proper communication, flexibility, information, and involvement methods remain the main

components of community involvement strategies in the planning process. Depending on the characteristics of the community, these strategy components must be adapted, especially to the context. The findings confirm that community involvement in the planning process requires:

- Good communication - instructing residents what to do and how to get involved;
- Acceptance of different schedules - because people participate for different reasons;
- Flexibility-modification of the procedure depending on the observed circumstances;
- Encouraging cooperation - creating partnerships;
- Participation of all people of different ages, genders, and cultures;
- Clear rules for all groups, transparency - clear goals;
- Usage of different methods - because different people want to participate in different ways;
- Recreation - because it is easier to meet people through recreation;
- Finding the right time.

On the other hand, planners, using spatial systems, have visualized patterns that have become visible to the community. DepthMapX has analyzed the neighborhood in the context of its legibility and accessibility, while with GIS, the physical and social dimensions. The concept of Brekoci development presented through the Urban Regulatory Plan was generated from these graphic interpretations.

Based on the results, it is concluded that for adequate and meaningful involvement, it is necessary to work on-site (on location) and with the local community so that the planners can see many urban phenomena through the prism of the community and use it as a premise to develop sustainable spatial plans.



Fig. 7. Urban regulatory plan of Brekoc (Source: Author)

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Community-based planning represents an approach that helps planners understand the place's inner sense and create a safe path toward wealthy and sustainable environments;
- There are different ways of involving the community in the planning process. The tools and methods of involvement must be adapted to the cases as well as contextualized;
- The involvement tools must be understandable and attractive to ensure the involvement of all participants regardless of age, gender, or cultural perspectives;
- Good communication, accurate information, flexibility, and unique methods for each community are principles that help create an efficient involvement strategy;
- The usage of spatial systems helps visualize spatial data and generate concepts that result from community involvement in drafting spatial plans.

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