

## URBAN REVITALIZATION AND POSSIBILITIES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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**Abstract.** Urban revitalization is at present a very actual issue connected with the improvement of the environment and the problem of sustainable development. It relates directly to local inhabitants and it is useful to utilise the possibility of participation in submitting proposals and their approval.. The participation of citizens influences needs, values, the way of life and its quality. On the other hand, it is exposed to the pressure of consumption society, advertisement, economic powers and legal order.

**Key words:** urban revitalization, participation, inhabitants, sustainable development

### INTRODUCTION

Urban revitalization is nowadays very important. In the Czech Republic the improvement of the environment on the basis of the solution of the problem of sustainable development is being discussed above all. We built on habits and cultural traditions and at the same time we focus on comparison with the countries of EU.

Urban revitalization is an issue both for town-planners and architects and economists and sociologists. Each of experts has his own angle. The sociologists are interested above all in the social impact of revitalization on the public, the increase of employment and the improvement of the quality of life, influence on inhabitants and the cultural renewal of the environment. This is based upon the knowledge of urban changes, the development of urban and rural societies and their development. An important basic aspect consists in the characteristics of changes in the contemporary society and its social structure, especially the decrease of the numbers of people working in industry, the increase of members of the middle class and the continuous increase of the property of the limited number of members of the richest class. The characteristics of individual classes relate to their housing needs, depending both on their status and age. An important role is played by the knowledge of needs and behaviour of the above clas-

ses, their perception of space, communications, materials and colours that contribute to the better feeling of man in a space.

In the course of revitalization it is important to take account of the long-term existence of constructions in regard to both historical retrospective and the future. The continuity of the utilisation of urban space is very important for the changes relating to constructions, reconstructions and the new use of brownfields.

Urban revitalization is in progress both in towns, villages and cities. Public participation relates to all age groups. A very important role is played by upbringing and education aimed at participation at schools, i.e. in early youth, as well as the participation of the inhabitants in post-working age.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS – THE PARTICIPATION

The term of „participation“ is at present applied in Czech and other languages to several similar but not identical fields of human activity. It is always connected with democratic, participation-orientated and decentralised organisation structures. We can meet them above all in the field of business management where they take form of participation in the management of a working group with different degrees of responsibility. Participation in a group reflects an extend to which co-operators participate in decision-making on the goals and activities of a working group.

If we speak about participation, we always take account of a fact that the participation of people in any process increases their interest in an implemented project, on the assumption that they are ready to co-operate and dispose of necessary information, abilities, skills (social competencies) and expertise for the solution of respective problems. Participation increases quality, improves decision-making and aids in the identification of men, citizens (employees workers) with their business, locality and community, as well as initiates efforts to achieve better results. Participation is very important for satisfying the social needs of people, especially those of communication, respect etc.

Nowadays the solution of the problem of needs mostly leans on the hierarchic system elaborated by American psychologist A.H. Maslow who defines a need as a precondition for keeping physical and mental health. Mental needs represent the last (i.e. psychologically non-analisable) goals of human behaviour. That is why needs explain the behaviour of man. They are classified in a hierarchy according to their urgency with which they are felt as inner impulses to action. Maslow's hierarchic classification of needs from the lowest, „basic“ to the highest ones is as follows:

### A. Basic need:

- a) physiological needs (hunger, thirst, sex),
- b) needs of security (those in situations that cause the loss of security, in situations of danger or economic breakdown);

B. Psychological needs:

a) needs of appurtenance and love (need to be loved and accepted by the others and to pertain to somebody),

b) needs of respect (needs of performance, competency, respect, trust and approval);

C. Needs of self-actualisation (needs to apply one's abilities (i.e. one's „mental potential“ – „to be who one is able to be“ – and needs of individual development including cognitive and aesthetic ones – i.e. needs to discover, create and classify).

The higher needs do not become driving motives before the lower ones are not satisfied [Nakonečný 1995].

In the process of participation a man works in a group and takes on initiative, responsibility and idea that impels to activity. He knows the goal and final result of his activity and the others support him and pay attention to him.

In democratic societies an important role is played by the participation of inhabitants in various activities at the level of the community and the state. In my opinion such a participation is important for both parties – inhabitants and institutions on one hand and communities and the state as a whole on the other. Without participation and its support interest in public affairs decreases and on the contrary individualism increases evidently. The contemporary development of the society and its structure is accompanied with larger and larger space segregation of the inhabitants of a community. The higher, richer classes seclude themselves in their own space of life and work, and often (for the reason of security and crime-rate) in closed and controlled areas. The opposite pole of the social structure is represented by the poorest people, living in slums and devastated housing quarters. Because of their living conditions and crime-rate they also represent a closed society.

Which classes can be engaged in participation in the solution of communal and public problems and the process of urban revitalization? A part of the lower class and the whole middle one. It can be presupposed that the higher classes are not interested in it. Even further to the process of globalisation they lose their appurtenance to the environment in which they live because they are both movable and potentially isolated.

In democratic societies the biggest part in participation process falls to professional organisations that create atmosphere and preconditions for the participation of citizens. Since the fall of authoritative regimes the interest of citizens in it has decreased transitorily (according to monitoring the development in Czech Republic this process has been lasting 15 years). It is likely that it is a new generation that will gradually return to „natural“ interest in public affairs. Nevertheless, both communities and citizens start to look for an opportunity to participate in them just now. Interest is the strongest practical connecting link for individuals, groups and the society as a whole. In our case it is connected with satisfying the needs of individuals and a part of community. It is not still possi-

ble to speak about the whole society, in spite of the fact that civil initiatives can influence in the long run the improvement of the environment in the large part of the state. From this point of view we can speculate even on its universal impact.

## RESULTS – THE REVITALIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The revitalization of the environment is nowadays a necessary process for its keeping sustainable or – in the best case – for its improvement. This process is connected directly with the actual problem of sustainable development (UNESCO declared the decade of sustainable development for the period between 2005 and 2014).

The term of „sustainable development“ refers to such an economic, socially and technologically feasible development during which every contemporary generation satisfies its needs in such a way that does not limit the possibilities of next generations to satisfy their ones [Act on the Assessment of Impacts on the Environment]. I. Rynda extends this definition as follows: „*(Permanently) sustainable development is a complex of strategies that enable by means of economic instruments and technologies to satisfy human material, cultural and spiritual needs, respecting environmental limits. If it is to be possible in the contemporary global world, it is necessary to re-define socio-political institutions and professions at local, regional and global levels.*“ [Rynda 2003].

Sustainable development means above all the balance of three basic fields of our life – economic, social and environmental (ecological). Urban revitalization results in the social, economic and ecological improvement of the environment. That is why it is – in my opinion – connected directly with its sustainability.

Urban revitalization impacts directly on inhabitants. Therefore it is more and more necessary to engage the public in the process of submitting proposals, decision-making and approval. The participation of the public relates to all age groups. A very important role is played by upbringing and education aimed at participation at schools, i.e. in early youth, as well as the participation of inhabitants in post-working age. The engagement and activity of the public is connected with the values, way and quality of life. On the other hand, it is exposed to the pressure of consumption society, advertisement, economic powers and legal order.

Revitalization can be divided according to its impact on inhabitants into following items:

1. minor, lowly capital-intensive improvements – modifications, repairs, complements (benches, paints, materials etc.);
2. major improvements – completions, reconstructions etc.);
3. brownfields – the revitalization of used premises (factories, plants etc.);
4. the revitalization of housing quarters (new jobs, the better quality of housing, social services for inhabitants etc.).



Phot. 1, 2. Paardubice, Czech Republic, reconstruction of the centre, foto author

Fot. 1, 2. Paardubice, Czechy, rekonstrukcja śródmieścia, fot. autorka



Phot. 3, 4. Town Lazne Bohdanec, Czech Republic, revitalization of centre of town, foto author

Fot. 3, 4. Lazne Bohdanec, Czechy, rewitalizacja centrum miasta, fot. autorka



Phot 5. Town Lazne Bohdanec, Czech Republic, revitalization of building houses, foto author

Fot 5. Lazne Bohdanec, Czechy, rewitalizacja budynków mieszkalnych, fot. autorka

### DISCUSSION – IN WHICH AREAS THE REVITALIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF INHABITANTS IS POSSIBLE?

The most frequent and also the easiest form of participation is that of inhabitants in the minor improvements of the environment in their nearest surroundings, such as modifications, repairs or complements (benches, paints, materials etc.) which are lowly capital-intensive for a community. There are many opportunities to engage citizens and enlist their help. In many cases the activity of citizens is initiated and supported by the representatives of community councils. They meet with citizens, discuss possible changes with them and engage them in relief works. If there are good relations within a community, the spheres of interest can be discussed in common. Now also the pupils are being engaged – they usually draw the environment in which they live and add their ideas about its improvement. Some communities take advantage of the initiative of some citizens in post-working age who know their environment well and are interested in its improvement.

If essential initiative is manifested by the members of professional organisations or foundations (in the Czech Republic for example Foundation Partnership is full of initiative), the process of participation can start – for example – by the exhibition of the photographs of the environment seen by open-minded visitors and observers and go on by discussion with citizens. In case of more complex projects also a civil engineer, architect or urbanist are engaged.

In case of more essential interventions in an urban space (completions, reconstructions etc.) it is important to open discussion and assign importance to the opinion of citizens.

In larger towns the revitalization of housing quarters where about 30% of the inhabitants of the republic live is now very important. These housing quarters – like those in other countries – originated in the 1950s–1980s. In addition to the improvement of the appearance of buildings also job opportunities, social conditions and the prevention of pathological phenomena, especially the crime-rate of the youth, are very important in the process of the revitalization of housing quarters. The increase of unemployment causes in some localities the devastation of workers' quarters and impacts negatively on the members of the young generation – they feel depression and indifference to values and do not mind the devastation of the environment.

At the same time some housing quarters built in 1960–1990 are becoming „housing quarters of the poor“ marked by the characteristics of those of classes with a very low social status. This phenomenon contributes to deepening social and economic differences as well.

Of course, there are also many problems concerning the utilisation of possibilities of the participation of citizens in urban revitalization. The Czech Repub-

lic proceeds now to the education of the employees of state administration in the



Phot. 6. Czech Republic, Prague, Budejovicka square, initiative of Foundation Partnership with participation of inhabitants, before revitalization. 2003 Foto Sedlak

Fot. 6. Czechy, Praga, plac Budejovicka, inicjatywa Fundacji Partnerstwo z udziałem mieszkańców, przed rewitalizacją. 2003 Foto Sedlak



Phot. 7. Czech Republic, Prague, Budejovicka square, initiative of Foundation Partnership with participation of inhabitants, after revitalization. 2004 Foto Sedlak

Fot. 7. Czechy, Praga, plac Budejovicka, inicjatywa Fundacji Partnerstwo z udziałem mieszkańców, po rewitalizacji. 2004 Foto Sedlak

field of communication with the public. The issues of revitalization, sustainable development, environment laws and subsequent requirements are being discussed. Nevertheless, the systematic education of workers and elected representatives is still absent. The possibilities of the participation of the public are not known and respective laws are not still prepared. Especially in large towns participation meets with the lack of interest and it is more complicated than in small communities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The participation of the public or the citizens has a positive impact on the life of a community. The most important contribution consists in the stimulation of the interest and activity of citizens. The upbringing of the part of the population changes thought, approaches to the environment and the way and quality of life for the benefit of the sustainability of the society. Participation reflects positively in the opinion of people of the quality of life and influences the values among which individualism, lack of interest in public affairs, passivity, intolerance and indifference to development in the future prevail in the period of the transformation of the Czech society.

Urban revitalisation should not be implemented at present without the participation of local inhabitants. Although it is not possible to envisage the participation of the majority of citizens whether in small or larger communities, it is necessary for development in the future. It is a precondition for the development of a democratic society that is not capable to function well without the activity of citizens. In revitalization a lot of positive aspects are interconnected. They contribute to the improvement of the environment and the quality of life, as well as its ecological aspects that can facilitate mutual communication among people and increase employment and enterprise in a space concerned. In addition, it can increase its attractiveness and attendance rate.

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## REWITALIZACJA MIAST I MOŻLIWOŚCI PARTYCYPACJI SPOŁECZNEJ

**Streszczenie.** Rewitalizacja miast jest obecnie bardzo aktualnym zagadnieniem związanym z poprawą jakości środowiska i problemem zrównoważonego rozwoju. Bezpośrednio wiąże się z lokalną społecznością i jest przydatna w wykorzystaniu możliwości udziału społecznego w zgłaszaniu wniosków i ich zatwierdzaniu. Udział społeczny obywateli ma wpływ na potrzeby, wartości, styl życia i jego jakość. Z drugiej strony jest narażony na naciski ze strony społeczeństwa konsumpcyjnego, reklamy, podmiotów gospodarczych, aktów prawnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rewitalizacja miast, udział społeczny mieszkańców, zrównoważony rozwój

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