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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS:
abandoned industrial areas in the city of Skopje

Abstract

One of the biggest concerns of modern societies/cities is the alienation of citizens from participation in the decision-making processes. This is most evident in the future development of the abandoned industrial zones which once at the periphery now are part of the city urban area. To understand the importance of citizen participation and the involvement of locals, it is necessary to gain full insight into many connected aspects of the whole issue. Today there are many cases of transformation of the abandoned industrial areas, and the local residents are not the main beneficiaries of that transformed space, but the main customers become tourists or people from the city centre. Often, the locals get excluded and get no benefits and in many cases, they eventually have to move to other areas.

This is a very important point when we think about the transformative potential of abandoned industrial areas. It is crucial to look at the different levels of transformation, what the transformation brings/means to the city, but also what the transformation brings to the local communities? Because, usually the locals are functionally, locally symbolically much more connected with these areas. According to Irvin and Stansbury (2004), citizen participation can play a crucial role in building more inclusive and sustainable cities. The involvement of residents in decision making is recognized as an important instrument to improve the living environment in localities, as well as to strengthen local autonomy.

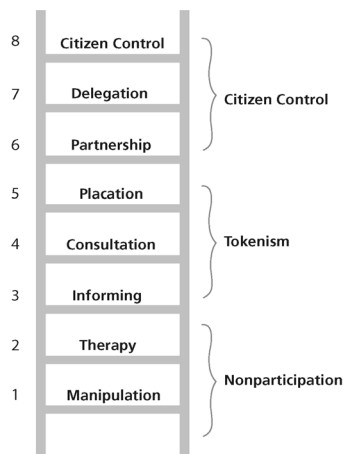
In this context, the participation of citizens is an important element of democratic processes and decision making. In the neighbourhoods where we can find abandoned industrial areas in Skopje, there is a very low level of public participation. The communication of local citizens with the city administration is poor and did not facilitate the participation process. Most often old abandoned industrial zones are classified as Degraded Areas, and in terms of rehabilitation of these areas, they should be an important priority of spatial development of cities/municipalities, because on the one hand, we can treat them as a financial burden for society, but also, on the other hand, they have huge development potential according

to the research article from Križnik et.al (2019) about the established relations between the state and civil society. The statement is that these relations are of essential importance. This points towards an ongoing restructuring of the state civil society relations, and to consequent transition from developmental urbanisation towards what could be seen as post-developmental urbanisation.

Keywords: Citizen participation, participation process, civil society initiatives, abandoned industrial areas/zones, Skopje

THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS AS PART OF THE URBAN PLANNING PROCESS THROUGH ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

As described in Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) public participation in urban planning can vary from the lowest level of participation (manipulation) to the highest (control). At the lowest levels (nonparticipation) and the first phase, not only do people have no influence on decision-making but they are manipulated into believing that everything is done in their best interest (see: figure 01). It assumes that the proposed plan is the best, and the task of participation is to achieve public support through public relations. In the second phase of passive participation (tokenism), they receive information about urban projects as they happen, without any possibility of intervening. Only placation allows members of the public to advise or plan ad infinitum, but it retains the right for power holders to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice. Under citizen control (partnership and delegation), power is redistributed through negotiation between the public and power holders. The highest level and the final phase of participation implies that residents can initiate urban projects and thus design their own living space with no intermediaries or source of funds. At this level, they can control urban policy and be an equal member of the entire planning process.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

Figure 01. Arnstein's Ladder (1969) Degrees of Citizen Participation

The ladder is a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made. It has survived for so long because people continue to confront processes that refuse to consider anything beyond the bottom rungs.

Here is how we can describe the 8 rungs of the ladder:

1 Manipulation and 2 Therapy. Both are non-participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best and the job of participation is to achieve public support through public relations. 3 Informing. The most important first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information. No channel for feedback. 4 Consultation. Again a legitimate step is attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. But Arnstein still feels this is just a window dressing ritual. 5 Placation. For example, co-option of hand-picked 'worthies' onto committees. It allows citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice. 6 Partnership. Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees. 7 Delegation. Citizens holding a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. The public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them. 8 Citizen Control. Have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy-making and managing a programme e.g. neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

Many authors later followed Arnstein's scheme. For example, Anokye (2013) also describes various paths to participation: the higher level is the transformative approach, and the lower one is the instrumental approach, and there is also a combination between the two of them. The transformative approach is equivalent to Arnstein's citizen control and the instrumental approach is the equivalent to her nonparticipation. Most participation systems are in the mixed model, implying that residents know about or have occasionally participated in some kind of consultations, and they are in a certain way informed about the decisions that city authorities will implement. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they have really participated in the process and that they will be empowered to change political decisions. This approach is therefore instrumental in a way, employing methods that involve top-down information flows and not strengthening the actors (Anokye 2013: 82). According to Hordijk et al. (2015), this approach is related to the diminished roles of the state and its citizens, referring to them as clients or consumers that cannot influence the process of making decisions but can only adhere to them because they are unchangeable. The transformative approach uses bottom-up communication and represents a higher level of participation, in which stronger public involvement can be expected.

EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF SKOPJE

In the former Yugoslavia, of which Skopje was part, spatial management was conditioned by the socio-political context, and it was largely based on planning and state control. Social, economic, and spatial development issues were addressed comprehensively within the social planning system. Unfortunately, the state's role in spatial management ceased to exist in the post-communist period of the city of Skopje. Even the Institute of Urbanism of the

City of Skopje was made redundant and was eventually closed. The focus shifted to the privatisation of space and real estate, land reuse and redevelopment, and redefinition of the roles of planning institutions.

Today Skopje's urban landscape is a kind of urban-architectural conglomerate, a system of overlapping historical and morphological layers which in their nature are contradictory among themselves. The city is faced with various circumstances and predicaments and has undergone several processes of evolution and change. Certainly, a great influence on the development of the city of Skopje plays the development of the industry. Exemplary is the development of the residential settlements around the Industrial enterprises most of which are today closed and abandoned. However, the market-oriented economy revealed a lack of common interest and vision in urban planning. Instead, a certain *laissez-faire* approach or economic liberalism was embraced in urban planning and public policies, which created (and continues to create) uneven urban development and economic inequality (Offe 1997; Jaakson 2000; Nikšič & Sezer 2017). As a result, attractive city locations have become large building sites, profits on various investments have soared, and less-attractive locations have stagnated (Nikšič 2014; Patti and Polyak 2017).

It is interesting that the Master Plan for Skopje has been modified for years depending on market needs. Public interest is declared to be important and valuable, but collaboration with the public is formal or lacking, and its proposals are not necessarily accepted. In the last few decades, city authorities have often started projects that were rejected by the public and have resulted in the shrinkage of public space. We are witnessing the uncontrolled expansion of the city to the east and west. If in the past there was a clear distinction between the functional zoning of the city quarters in Skopje, today we have a picture of the intertwining of those zones. In the situation in which the main activities of urban development have shifted from planned improvements across the city to economically driven interventions in certain favourable locations, the role of the public in the development process must be addressed.

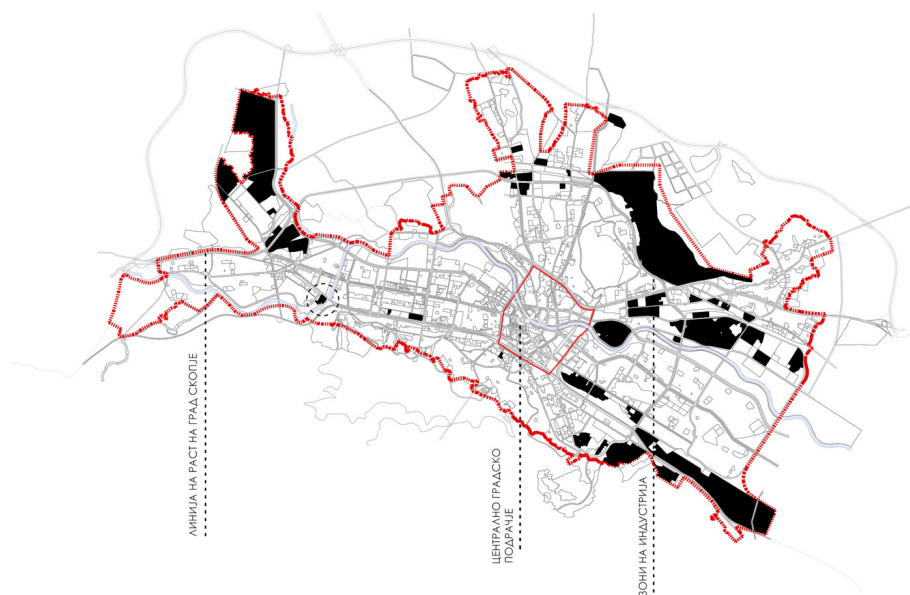


Figure 02. City of Skopje - Position of abandoned industrial zones in the context of the urban city area

The post-socialist transition of Skopje created amazing challenges in planning and creating the urban landscape of the city, setting completely new frameworks for its spatial development. By changing the urban planning system, i.e. the emergence of previously non-existent participants in this process (private land-owners, private investors, private planning companies, private construction industry, local government with responsibilities in the field of urban planning, etc.), completely new conditions for urban development of the city were created. As a result of these factors, in conjunction with economic and socio-political challenges related to the nation-building processes, the crucial decision of Skopje's transformation in the post-socialist period are the cruel forms of privatisation of the abandoned industrial areas such as the Kuprum factory, Treska factory, Staklara factory and many more in the City of Skopje (see: figure 02).

The period of transition was mostly spontaneous, which occurred as a result of a sudden inclination of the local authorities without premeditation, plan and existence of a general strategic framework for the development of the city. The city's transitional forms of densifying are chaotic. The remains of the abandoned industrial areas are often subject to extinction and oblivion. According to Goran Janev (2017), the appropriation of space is connected with the neoliberal capitalist appropriation of space. As he demonstrates, the

neglect of socialist monuments, but not only those sites in the city, as I will show below as with the abandoned industrial sites, is indicative of grey-zoning, a governmentality technique that allows neoliberal practices to flourish unhindered by any productive public debate.

In the urban context of the City of Skopje, the abandoned industrial areas are being rudimentary, privatised and commercialised on a daily basis, it is crucial to find a way so they can be socially and economically reintegrated through different strategies. Also, very often these spaces are “occupied” or “appropriated” by local residents and emerging communities and expand the notion of social and economic integration to symbolic integration too. In some cases, the usage of abandoned industrial sites by the local people can have a positive effect and improve the image of the neighbourhood as well as the space itself, but in other cases, abandoned industrial sites in Skopje can bring negative value due to vandalism or uncontrolled appropriation by people.

Case Study - Kuprum factory



Figure 03. Kuprum Factory – Author photography, 2021.

This abandoned industrial area is strongly connected with the city centre, and at the same time, it has a strategic position for the future development of the municipality of Gjorche Petrov. Historically, this area was a peripheral settlement of agricultural character before 1963, and in the last decades the expansion of the city this area became part of it, but as a degraded abandoned zone (see: figure 03).

The crisis of traditional industries in the early 1990s resulted in rapid de-industrialization. Kuprum factory has had to face dramatic changes that finally resulted with abandoned degraded industrial space in the middle of the city urban area. Particular importance for the city of Skopje is the architectural approach to urban development towards these abandoned industrial places, that today occupy a large part of the urban identity of Skopje. They help us to define the character of our society, they also play an important role as an integral part of the city's collective memory. They have huge potential to grow into something that would make a huge contribution to our cities, from the cultural, social, and architectural aspect.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The main focus of this paper is the question and importance of citizen participation could have in the decision-making process for the future development of abandoned industrial areas. What is crucial fact is that these settlements are actually created around industrial facilities, in the past the main connection of the surrounding inhabitants was with industry as their existence point as a place where the entire neighbourhood was employed and a place where the daily life of the local people took place. Through the years many things have changed, but the connection of the inhabitants with these areas certainly exists (see: figure 04). It is visible, both strong and unbreakable.

In the post-communist city, market demands and private interests are much more relevant than planning as a process. Even public investments are focused on the sectors and projects that can improve the attractiveness of the city for profit rather than improve the general quality of life for its residents (Stanilov 2007; Sykora 2007; Patti and Polyak 2017). The urban planning transition from communism to post-communism has been marked by the neglect of the social dimension of urban living and housing and strategic and long-term urban planning.



Figure 04. Local residents on-site _ Abandoned industrial zone Kuprum. Author photography, 2021.

The market economy characteristics present since the 1990s (privatization, reduction of public space, and the global financial system) influence the relations among the stakeholders in the urban planning processes; specifically, their roles and powers. Western countries use terms such as high levels of citizen participation, high legal standards, and successful public-private partnerships. In urban planning, the countries of the former Yugoslavia are struggling with limitations in the legal system and insufficient public participation in the decision-making processes. However, the reasons for the rather slow transition in most parts of the former Yugoslavia certainly lie in the conflict of the 1990s and the break with and isolation from European and global trends (Beyea et al. 2009).

In the case of Kuprum all these problems are becoming apparent. One of the basic problems for greater citizen participation is the lack of knowledge of the process of public participation in decision-making, i.e., lack of knowledge of the legislation and responsibilities that every citizen has, including civil society organizations. I conducted a number of interviews with local residents in order to elicit data about whether locals are informed about the possibilities of the process of decision making and the findings are very disappointing (see: figure 05, figure 06).

The active participation from local society and particular target groups which are inhabiting the area could contribute to the process of making important solutions and future decisions or developments for the abandoned industrial areas, not only on this site.

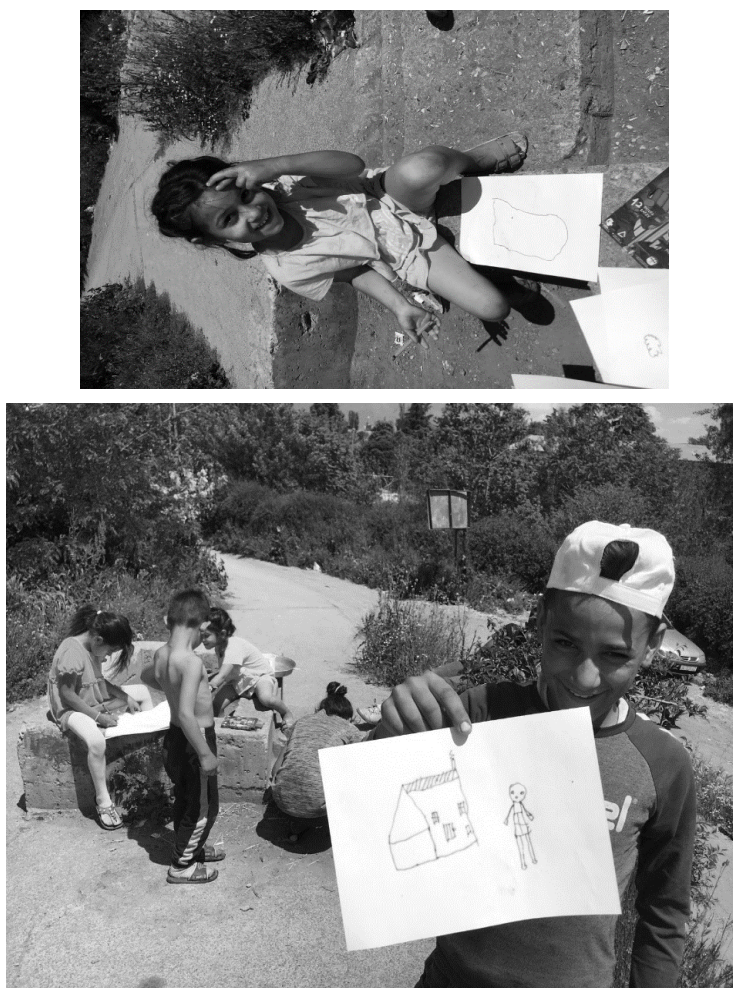


Figure 05. Local residents on-site _ Abandoned industrial zone. Author photography, 2021.

It would be advisable to develop a set of objectives to allow for increased civic participation by the local community, or communities, as in the case in Skopje where the abandoned industrial sites are significantly present. The overall goal would be reaching to increase the involvement of civil society organizations in the environmental decision-making process at the local level. They could initiate and facilitate the achieving of a more specific objective of improved cooperation of the civil society sector and the local self-government in the field of decision making. This will certainly result in increased involvement of citizens in the decision-making process and joint problem solving, networking in order to successfully make decisions in the field of abandoned industrial zones, and raising awareness in civil society in order to promote social change.



Figure 06. Local residents on-site _ Abandoned industrial zone. Author photography,2021.

CONCLUSION

Public participation in urban planning and the renewal and protection of public space still remains relatively low, as can be seen from the Example of the City of Skopje. The public has very little influence on changes in spatial plans, and ultimately on the conversion of space, most often public space. Following the example of Arnstein's Ladder and comparing the situation in which the city of Skopje is, we can see that in fact, the level of participation is very low. Actually, the nonparticipation is evident, and not only do people have no influence on decision-making but they are manipulated into believing that everything is done in their best interest.

Public interest is declared to be important and valuable, but collaboration with the public is lacking. Realizing the real context of the Skopje situation through the examples of the abandoned factory Kuprum, the situation in which the currently abandoned factory Treska is, the abandoned factory Alumina is a concrete example of disrespect and without implementation of public participation in making important decisions in urban planning and protection of public space.

The importance of the involvement of the local residents on-site that live around the abandoned industrial zones in Skopje in the decision-making processes is of great importance, but also of great value, both for the citizens themselves and for the decision-makers, i.e. the authorities at a national and local level. With this approach, on the one hand, the city of Skopje will be closer to its citizens, while the citizens will express a desire for them to contribute with their ideas and participate in creating their environment. Their awareness of protecting the city will increase which is strongly connected with the future development of the city.

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