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URBAN PROTOTYPING AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

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Abstract. The main purpose of the article is to discuss the potential and justification of the crucial role that urban prototyping may play in participatory processes. Satisfaction of the needs of residents who create a self-governing community should be the primary axiological milestone and a goal to be pursued by local governments. Thus, effective and modern management tools should be identified and put in place. The idea that guides one of them, i.e. urban prototyping, is to offer residents an opportunity to resort to various variants of change of the public space before they are ultimately applied in the investment process. Dialogue with residents supported by research, analysis, and tests can help stakeholders realise the consequences of spatial changes around them and then, based on the feedback from residents, design guidelines should be created that best reflect their needs. Thus, residents, through real and multifaceted participatory process, should gain a real, decisive influence over transformation of public spaces.

Keywords: urban prototyping; territorial self-government; horizontal subsidiarity; participants; satisfaction of residents' needs

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The analysis devoted to using urban prototyping in the activity of local government units, and also in the assessment of the role that this tool has to play in civic participation, requires first and foremost that its methodological framework be presented. The area on which the research focuses is the operation of local government units associated with the performance of their basic task, that is public duties to satisfy needs of self-governing communities. The question of how to meet these needs optimally is incredibly complex. Finding the answer is even more difficult since the Polish legislator does not use any anthropologically normative model of needs, nor does it specify how they should be satisfied. What is more, the law-giver rarely points to needs that are to be satisfied, focusing on the characterization of public tasks in which these needs are encoded.

In a model approach to prototyping public services, one must first look into learning the real needs of recipients of such services and to using this

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knowledge to define the problem or barrier (barriers) that the public service beneficiary is dealing with. This is a starting point in generating solutions that are an answer to the problems diagnosed. We may then move to prototyping the best solutions, thus verifying effectiveness and feasibility of generated ideas. While the prototypes are being tested, the assumptions adopted are being verified through pilot actions. Hence, their validity may be checked before taking a final decision on implementing them [Gawłowski and Makowski 2022, 253-56].

Responsiveness of the synthetically described process above means that self-government administration receives direct feedback from residents about adequacy of the proposed solutions. Therefore, this process creates a possibility to order the designed measures according to their social rank, thus to prioritize them. However, what is most significant from the perspective of this article is participation as the foundation of this process. Residents that take an active part in prototyping, who participate in person and are truly engaged, co-create solutions that are best for them. By doing so they go beyond many typical and rather passive legal participatory procedures.

Therefore, we may look at participation as a mechanism of creating an adequate "substantive contribution" for correct implementation of a public task and thus a mechanism of better satisfaction of residents' needs. Such an approach fits within the principle of subsidiarity, its horizontal dimension to be more precise, which aims, as Izdebski writes, "to facilitate and improve the public good" [Izdebski 2011, 194].

Urban prototyping, which in short may be defined as an advanced consultation-research-drafting process, may be recognized as a specific and interesting area of application of prototyping in commune self-government [Wacinkiewicz 2020, 10234-10240]. An analysis of this tool will be the canvas for the research problem presented in this paper, namely the question of increasing public participation in activities (projects) implemented by local administration. The main research goal is to characterize the potential and to substantiate the role that urban prototyping, an innovative management tool, pay play in participatory processes.

1. WHY USE URBAN PROTOTYPING IN THE ACTIVITY OF TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT?

Let us analyse now to what extent may urban prototyping play a significant role in the activity of territorial self-government and what goals it may help achieve. Let us start by outlining the systemic, legal and axiological framework in which a local government may reach for modern management tools such as urban prototyping. Indeed, the foundations of the organization

and operation of local government units are laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. It is this basis that demonstrates direct participation of territorial corporations in exercising public power and the fact that the substantial part of public duties which local government is empowered to discharge is done in its own name and under its own responsibility (Article 16(2) of the Polish Constitution). This means that tasks carried out by local government units are public duties in the understanding expressed by the Constitutional Tribunal, that is they serve to satisfy collective needs of local communities.[1] The Polish Constitution calls such duties self-governments' direct responsibility (Article 166(1) of the Polish Constitution). Naturally, universal rules laid down in statutes which express (encode) specific human needs are the basis for creating these duties and for exercising them.

These constitutional regulations alone clearly demonstrate the goal of public duties performed by local government units (so-called satisfaction of the needs of a self-government community expressed in public duties) and the responsibility to implement it. Therefore, we may say with certainty (as the Constitutional Tribunal strongly emphasizes) that the essence of public activity (activity for the benefit of the municipality) of territorial self-government is to satisfy residents' needs.[2] This opinion is representative for the science of administrative law where it is emphasized that satisfying society's needs is the basic public goal (public value) and local government units are obliged to materialize them through their public duties [Szydło 2008, 42]. Thus, the category of needs (human or public) is associated with the basic axiological value that territorial self-government should exercise.

There is no doubt that in the coming decades local governments will have to function in a dynamically changing environment and will be left with limited resources to solve problems of civilization placed before them. This means a departure from existing development axioms and forcing changes to now-applied solutions. This all will have a direct impact on constructing functional and spatial models of self-governments, urban living conditions, and sustainable development in the environmental, social, communication and infrastructure dimension.

These factors alone prompt territorial self-governments to look for effective and modern management solutions that will facilitate best possible satisfaction of residents' needs.

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[1] Resolution of the Constitutional Tribunal of 27 September 1994, ref. no. W 10/93, Journal of Laws No. 113, item 550.

[2] Ibid.

2. ESSENCE OF URBAN PROTOTYPING

A synthetic characterization of urban prototyping based on Jaworski's methodology – urban planner and philosopher, author of a number of such projects implemented in Poland – demonstrates a three-phase structure of this process [Jaworski 2017].

It begins with creating the fullest possible resume on the area to be prototyped. Therefore, we need an inventory of the existing state of affairs of the public space. The more extensive and multidimensional the investigation is, the closer it is to a correct diagnosis. To do that, three majors actions must be carried out. First, the local government must specify the planning status (resulting from spatial planning documents or lack of thereof). Then, it needs to examine formal and legal requirements (is the area in question located in a zone undergoing regeneration?; is it subject to restrictions under conservation and restoration laws?; and, especially important, are there any cultural property facilities located there that enjoy a special protection status?). Lastly, economic requirements must be checked (how well are production and services doing in this area?; what is the economic capital of this area?). Environmental and transport issues will play key roles here. The local government will have to look into the status of green areas in a given area, technical and formal determinants of its development and legal restrictions for the former, and it will have to think about designing a temporary traffic organization and an analysis of transport behaviours of users of this space for the latter.

One more essential element must be emphasized. Activities that precede establishing the prototype as a rule provide for most far-reaching involvement of residents in its preparation. This may take various forms, depending on the specific characteristics of a given prototyping process. Still, it must be highlighted that diagnostic and design workshops with the participation of residents play the most crucial role. Conducting the design process in such a way may yield an additional result of creating elements of the prototype with the participation of the public, for example joint building of elements of small architecture that will be used in the prototype (e.g. making municipal furniture). Another emphasis-worthy element of prototyping is holding dialogue with various stakeholders of the public space. Meetings, talks, public debates and smaller and more personal sessions encourage interaction with important participants of the process, such as local business operators or NGOs that work in the area.

The total information and feedback received so from relevant stakeholders, especially residents, is the basis for creating a prototype of changes in public space. And thus, we are moving on to the second, fundamental, stage of the process, namely determining the prototype.

It is the stage when the prototype is being tested. The prototype itself should, as a rule, incorporate a few variants to make sure that residents are provided a real opportunity to see each of them. Testing the model means that locals are given the chance to physically use the public space to be transformed. We thus enable a process of gradual introduction of changes and of familiarizing space users with these changes before they become irreversible. What is more, the proposed variants may be constantly corrected thanks to the project's iterative structure. It is because local governments may respond to residents' needs flexibly by improving or modifying the prototype at the testing stage. Highly importantly, it also allows the authorities to detect errors during the implementation of the project, not at its end after a great deal of resources has been invested.

At the same time, residents have the opportunity to assess and to see for themselves how valid and effective individual variants are. In particular, through personal experience, public acceptance for the proposed options is built and the best one from the user's perspective is selected.

Another benefit of such implementation of a project is testing the readiness of public space users for its modification, most importantly, on the basis of their real involvement rather than declared approval or disapproval. Inclusion of residents at this stage of project implementation mainly means that they may share their opinions about the prototype. Selected issues (significant form the point of view of the assumptions adopted) are being examined at the same time. These include traffic and movement in the area subject to prototyping, how temporary facilities are being used, traffic intensity or use of parking spaces.

Lastly comes the third stage of the project, that is removing the prototype. It is an extremely important moment of the summing-up of the existing experience with the prototype variants and forming opinions following an interactive process. This is why it is paramount that the authorities maintain users' interests in the project itself and encourage them to actively continue to participate in meetings and workshops to get as much feedback as possible. This will be used to draft a final report and to present it publicly.

Material obtained this way will form additional "input" for architectural design. We may say in this context that urban prototyping helps reveal new information-related elements from the level of space users that allow the local self-government to avoid the risk of conflict associated with re-building or installing inadequate solutions. Therefore, prototyping is a way to solve difficulties inscribed in the traditional model of designing public space, based on an expert approach. Substantive discussions carried out in this angle yield strategic studies and planning regulations used to design and implement investment in the public space.

3. VALUES OF URBAN PROTOTYPING IN THE CONTEXT OF BOOSTING CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Let us now look at the potential and role that urban prototyping may play in participatory processes. This indeed is the main research aim of this analysis.

Under axiological assumptions of the Polish territorial self-government, increasing civic participation in projects implemented by the local governments is an end in itself. The potential of residents' interest in public matters means that local authorities must look for such participatory formulas and such management tools, which will actively join residents in processes intended to satisfy their needs and thus in optimal exercise of public duties. Such an approach from municipal organs is axiologically justified in the principle of subsidiarity, namely in its horizontal dimension (horizontal subsidiarity). It emphasizes that public duties should be implemented by civil society institutions as much as possible [Izdebski 2015, 172-73], creating space for non-actors, such as businesses, NGOs and other interested participants [Colombo 2004, 39] and perceiving the value of complexity of society with its unique coordination mechanisms [van de Donk 2019, 4]. Active engagement of various stakeholders and cooperative networking between them play a key role in this conglomerate of interactions of various entities.

Assuming the perspective of horizontal subsidiarity, urban prototyping, with its specific characteristics, structure and methodology, seems to be a tool that might play an important role in increasing residents' engagement in processes that take place in their territorial community. Let us take a synthetic look at two most important factors that have an impact on such a state of affairs.

First off, transparency of the process. On-going dissemination of information about all elements of the process in an immanent element of the process of urban prototyping. Residents are informed from the start about the project's assumptions, its components and schedule. Then, after establishing the prototype and while testing it, they are informed about the course of its implementation. Informative (and consultation) actions bind all stages of the process.

Second thing on the agenda, making knowledge public. A sine qua non precondition of the effectiveness of the process is equipping stakeholders with an adequate scope of knowledge on the space that is to be prototyped. When the first stage of prototyping was being characterized, we highlighted the gravity of a comprehensive inventory of the existing condition of public space – in the legal, planning, environmental, conservation, restoration,

economic, and other aspects. Knowledge systematized like this must then be adapted to the needs of "recipients – non-professionals", taking on a communicative and approachable form. By doing so, we may attempt to "debunk the myth" of its exclusiveness in areas such as law, architecture, urban planning or environmental protection. This is how "knowledge gets public", giving stakeholders a better foundation for fuller participation in the act of creating the prototype. The importance of this factor cannot be stressed enough. It is because residents often fail to engage in public matters thinking that it requires specialist, if not expert, competences. Let us also add that apart from adequate preparation of knowledge for the needs of process participants, institutions and measures based on experience are also an element that facilitates participation. These are measures applied in the urban prototyping method whose interpretation does not require special competences.

Let us now determine implications of these two factors for participatory processes that take place in territorial self-government and their quality.

We shall begin by saying that thanks to equipping stakeholders adequately with information and knowledge, one of the barriers to access to participatory processes is removed. By doing so it is easier to see the causes and consequences of the solutions introduced (prototypes to be tested) and the related threats and opportunities. Therefore, a basis for a holistic understanding of changes planned for the public space is created. This encourages responsible attitudes in place of insistent approaches and demands not justified by needs. Such stakeholders' awareness will have an incredibly important impact on the quality of public debate.

Among the many participatory procedures exercised at the level of territorial self-government, urban prototyping has a distinctive character and scope when it comes to including residents. Many manifestations of local democracy (referendum or consultations) allow residents merely to choose between certain per-defined options (variants). Additionally, some persons directly show they do not want to take part in typical consultation because they believe this participatory path has marginal force. The urban prototyping process is something much deeper than a simple choice between ready-made-variants. As we have already said, residents are active participants of the entire procedure. They take part in diagnostic and design workshops, they co-create (as part of public action) prototype's elements (for example small architecture), they actively speak in debates, discussions and theme sessions, while arrangements made in such meetings form part of the prototype. After that, with all the feedback from residents, authorities incorporate design guidelines yielded by the participatory and research process to design public space and then to implement the investment physically. This is a particularly important element – a certain guarantee of agency that gives the entire prototyping process authority and reliability. From

the participatory perspective, this boosts the chances for active and greater engagement in public affairs by removing another potential barrier in access to such involvement.

However, let us look at urban prototyping mostly through the prism of the quality of public debate. This process uses dialogue with all stakeholders, supported with research, analysis and tests, to strive to fully realize the benefits that follow from changing the surrounding space and from improving its quality. Consultations, meetings, discussions, debates, workshops with specialists or study walks produce a specific pool of feedback from stakeholders. It is an incredibly valuable complementation of knowledge on real needs and also on qualitative expectations, formulated directly by space users. Still, this does not mean that this process is free from tension, conflicts and contrasting expectations.

A discussion on changes in the public space is where various arguments clash and where disputed issues, controversial matters and things that divide the community reveal themselves. It is perfectly clear in the problem of "privatization" of public space. Such areas may be seen by some, e.g. residents, as not only public space, but also "their own". On the one hand they may show approval for upgrading or etatism activities, while on the other they may have concerns whether this space will become more frequented, with all its consequences. It will start to change and become less of "their private corner" and more of an open, publicly available spot. Transportation issues trigger similar controversy, especially availability of public space for individual road transport or parking problems. Residents expect certain preferences for themselves since they live in a given area. On the other hand, local businesses signal their own needs (e.g. ensuring parking places for deliveries) and also the needs of their customers (ease of access). This all is topped with the problem of having to guarantee parking places for persons with disabilities, forcing parking rotation, ensuring traffic security to all traffic participants (especially pedestrians and cyclists), speed limits, closing certain zones to traffic and many other. These two examples alone demonstrate how difficult it is to move from a particular narrative to a compromise around a common good.

Urban prototyping, with its structure, transparency, access to information and equipping process participants with knowledge, increases the chances for an informed and responsible dialogue. Thanks to this "knowledge resource", process participants understand relatively early that this procedure does not boil down to simple convincing them to a certain single idea or even more so, to forcing it onto them. Its framework is not built from a "wish list" (by default rather diverse) of different participants of prototyping. It is built upon an objectivised design framework (legal, environmental or conservation – and restoration-related) and arrangements resulting from

investigating the prototype, with a layer of "a feasible matter" developed jointly through dialogue. Such "anchoring" of the process, supported with the guarantee of agency, allow urban prototyping to be perceived as a dialogue tool that is asked to develop a compromise regarding the public space to be transformed.

CONCLUSIONS

The research aim of this study was to characterize the potential and to substantiate the role that urban prototyping may play in participatory processes. This innovative management tool may be applied in transforming territorial self-governments (cities or municipalities) into institutions most friendly to their residents. The idea behind urban prototyping is to create a temporary opportunity for residents to use different variants of changes that may be introduced in public space (the prototype, or to be more precise a multivariate prototype) before they are ultimately implemented.

This is fully justified when it comes to designing space. Since such activities intend to better satisfy needs of residents (let us reiterate that they are the core purpose of the activity of local government units), then it is paramount that LGUs know residents' real needs and expectations and then incorporate such knowledge correctly to design adequate solutions.

The urban prototyping process uses dialogue with residents supported with research, analyses and tests to strive to make locals fully aware of the consequences of changes made to the surrounding public space and of the resulting benefits of improving the quality of this territory. Then, taking feedback from residents as a basis, design guidelines are drafted that best reflect their needs.

Thus, from the point of view of functioning of local government it is vital that residents have a real decision-making say in transforming public space. What is key here is to ensure that the making of the knowledge public, which is where the process starts, should translate onto making the decision-taking process public in its final stage.

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