

## “Ugly Truth” about Social Participation on the Example of First Woonerf in Poland

Krzysztof Wibig

(Arch. M.Sc. Krzysztof Wibig, Technical University of Lodz, 6 Politechnika St., 90-001 Lodz, kwibig@gmail.com)

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Following article serves the purpose of executing a specialized analysis and evaluation of an urban project from theory of citizens participation point of view. It is a field of science, balancing between sociology, urbanism, economy and even politics. Urban project I chose as an example has been conducted within borders of Łódź, third biggest city in Poland. In June 2014 municipal council office on a single block of 6th Sierpnia street has finished first *woonerf* in Poland creating an unprecedented kind of public space in the country.

Original word *woonerven* comes from a dutch language and it has been adapted by english language and became a *woonerf*. Polish language does not allow to translate it easily and the English version is officialy in use, but also commonly used is a non formal transcription, urban courtyard.

According to definition from an Oxford Living Dictionary *woonerf* is „*a road in which devices for reducing or slowing the flow of traffic have been installed*”. Quoted definition explains only technically what a *woonerf* is, but for full picture we need to identify the question *woonerf* is trying to answer.

In the begining of XIXth century, street was a different space than we can see nowadays according to Charles Montgomery in his recent book titled „Happy city: Transforming our lives through urban design”. He recalled a memory of the street from before age of cars, *Through most of history, cities streets were available for everyone. Road was equally a marketplace, a playground, a park and yes also a thoroughfare, but without street lights, lanes painted on the ground or designated pedestrian crossings. Till 1903 no city even had a traffic code. Street was open for everyone, so everyone was using it. Street was quite a chaotic environment, covered with horse manure and cutted from time to time by speeding carriages, but as it goes with disorder, reigned on her some sort of liberty and freedom.* I would like to add this feeling to the definition, the idea to bring the street back to basics and return this lost space in the hands of citizens. *Woonerf* creates a new form of urban space in which everyone, cars, pedestrians, trams and cyclists move together in harmony. With priority for walking users, before forced to slow down motorized ones. *Woonerf* is the final product of reinventing small streets in downtowns all over the western World. The idea to take the street to the origins, when it was a space for citizens and for the city, and Technical Oxford Living Dictionary definition just states a tools to create it.

Case of the Polish *woonerf* became good experimental ground for different models of citizen participation. This article confronts participants of described process with each other in selective relations on all phases of the creation, allowing us to see advantages and disadvantages in all of the relations. As a basis for analysis I chose models from two existing publications, Sherry R. Armstein paper titled „A Ladder of Citizen Participation” from 1969 and „Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century” by Judith E. Innes and David E. Booher from Institute of Urban and regional Development UC Berkeley published in 2000.

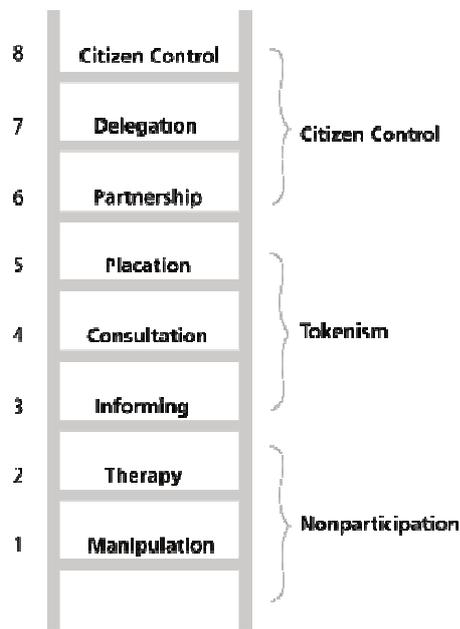
Process of rebuilding the 6th Sierpnia street started almost two years before the actual construction work began. Many stakeholders have been involved in the proces, as they have their rights and duties as well as goals and priorities. Each investment in changing public space using public funds requires conducting, defined by acts of law, tenders or consultations. This required order was revised in the analized example, in our case study consultation with citizens were not obligatory at this stage of the process. The need of organizing them ocure when initiators realized how strong might be the argument of support of the closest inhabitants in negotiations with Municipal Office. At the end many participants were involved in the proces of creation of the first *woonerf* in Lodz. By studying the relations between stakeholders we can gather the knowledge about science of social participation, communication planning, in the regional and local startegy of development planning processes.

Keywords: woonerf, city street, small public space, spcial participation, transport planning

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Model 1

Short essay was published in 1969 entitled „A Ladder of Citizen Participation” in Journal of the American Institute of Planners (JAIP). This essay was written to broaden the conciousness of politicians, architects, town planners and others. about opportunities in usage of a social participation. The article can be used as a guidance to distinguish forms of participation, represented by metaphorical rungs of the title „ladder of participation“. Article was an answer to rising need of involveing american society of the sixties, in local planning and decision processes related to their neighbourhood. Title „ladder“ was a way of graphic description of consecutive forms of the social participation and arranging them in order, according to amount of power in citizens hands. PArticipation forms have been divided into eight rungs in three groups. Group number one „nonparticipation” involves manipulation and therapy, group number two „tokenism” with informing, consultation and placation included, and group number three „citizen control”, containing rungs of partnership, delegation and citizen control. I will assign those categories to individual cases. To define on which rung of the ladder are particular relations between the stakeholders the *woonerf* case, from city administration side and from citizen and nongovernmental organization side.



**Arnstein's Ladder (1969)**  
Degrees of Citizen Participation

Fig. 1: Eight rungs of ladder of social participation.

#### 2.1.1 Manipulation

Participation in illusory form, citizens are not sufficiently informed and have no possibilities to influence development proces. Strategic decisions are not being made according to citizens feedback.

#### 2.1.2 Theraphy

Participation in use as a remedy, focused on healing the symptoms of social pathologies rather than repairing whats causes the pathologies first.

#### 2.1.3 Informing

One way transfer of information about plans and strategies from powerholders to citizens. Basic first step for citizen participation in planning the development strategies. Lowest positive rung on proposed ladder.

#### 2.1.4 Consultation

Form of participation allowing citizens to express their opinions, with no guarantee of influence on final decisions. In Poland it is defined as obligatory engagement of citizens in development process of acts of local plans and strategies.

#### 2.1.5 Placation

In this form citizens actually participate in the process, as consultants and future users. They do not have guaranteed leverage in final decision making, however powerholders are more likely to listen and with proper technical support citizens can have real impact.

#### 2.1.6 Partnership

More sophisticated form of placation, participants have the guaranteed impact on final decisions. Arrangement possible to achieve only if non-governmental organizations are strong enough.

#### 2.1.7 Delegation

Powerholders have less power in decision making process than citizens and starts with lower negotiation position while deciding about strategic movements.

#### 2.1.8 Citizen Control

Higher, utopian form of participation. Society makes most of the decision during process leaving powerholders with less power in negotiations.

### 2.2 Model 2

In 2000 on an annual conference of Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning the paper by Judith E. Innes and David E. Booher has been presented. It was an attempt to summarize current means of social participation and an attempt to set development directions for XXI century. Article presents different approaches to participation in planning, based on case studies of cities in North America. Authors created their own model of evaluation for analysis and classification of executing social participation in real life. Model called „Four Models of Planning and Policy Making” can be unified and easily applied for our case evaluation. Table distinguishes four possible approaches to planning processes depending on diversity of participants interests and on interdependency of those interests.

		<u>Diversity</u>	
		low	high
<u>Interdependence of Interests</u>	low	Technical Bureaucratic  <i>Convincing</i>	Political Influence  <i>Co-opting</i>
	high	Social Movement  <i>Converting</i>	Collaborative  <i>Co-evolving</i>

Fig. 2: Four Models of Planning and Policy Making.

#### 2.2.1 Technical Bureaucratic – Convincing

In top left with low diversity and low interdependency of interests we have got model called „Technical Bureaucratic – convincing” in which powerholders rely on countable and classifiable data. In this model decisions are made based on charts of predictions, growth or income. There is not much room left for citizens point of view. Consulting plans and strategies with citizens forces to gather and process significant amount of data which requires financial contribution and human resources. Underpaid and ordinary local

groups and organisations do not have enough resources in dispose of. Participation is reduced to simple informing and placate conflicts of intrests post factum.

### 2.2.2 Political Influence – Co-opting

In top right window with high diversity and low interdependancy of intrests is properly located model of „Political Influence – co-opting”, introduced originaly by Banfield in 1961. Approach in which planning and strategies are not a result emerged after consultations and analysis but are an outcome of backstage politically controled decisions. Conventional social participation is undesirable or even become a threat.

### 2.2.3 Social Movement – Converting

In bottom left window with low diversity and high interdependance of intrests we can find model of „Social Movement – Converting”, when thriving and well managed non-governmental organization are able to affect powerholders. Organizations are focused on their targets and attract people with corresponding ideology, which is desirable, otherwise with too high diveristy of intrests/ideologies this model could not work. However actions based on strong ideology are not susceptible to arguments off other participants points of view. In this model there is a high risk of confrontation between sides making compromise harder to accomplish.

### 2.2.4 Collaborative – Co-evolving

In last, bottom right part window with high diversity and interdependance of intrests arrises model titled „Collaborative – co-evolving”. Approach highly utopian, with dialog as most important element. Uninterrupted dialog between all participants, every participants intrests to be taken into consideration, all sides to be equally informed and only when all participants gain democratic consensus, dialog ends, these are elements which have to occur according to J. Innes and D. Booher to achive a full collaboration. Collaborative model is most desired one, with possibility to fullfill a variety of demands and most important needs of citizens. Co-working of many people with interdependant goals allows to gain more than working independant.

I eill use presented and described two models of classification, to analize the process of creating the first Lodz woonerf. First allowed me to define the degree of quality and conditions of social participation and secondly, the role of social participation in diverse approaches to planning processes relative to degree of diveristy and dependancy of intrests.

## 3 CASE STUDY

The idea was born in a head of a private citizen, not an employee of any kind of municipal department or non-governmental organization. He graduated from the Technical University of Łódź and „borrowed“ a western european *woonerf* solution, to apply into reality of Łódź city centre. He created a street rebuild proposal for the city centre, and presented it to city officials and street and transportation department representatives. Authorities had their hands tide up by Planning and Development Strategy for City of Łódź and transportation changes caused by an ongoing construction of Lodz New City Centre with new underground train and bus station. Arguments about superiority of the proposed *woonerf* solution was not supported by actually operating acts of law and accepted strategies. At this point *woonerf* originator supported by friends, small architect office and local non-attached organization, arranged a special meeting to consult undertaken project. Only citizens from closest neighbourhood has been invited and informed about this targeted consultation. But only documented and official support of interested tenants and inhabitants of 6 Sierpnia street could give basis for change the validated strategies for New City Center and change status of the street in transportation planing.

Outcome from consultation appeared beyond expectations. Concept for 6th Sieprnia street met full support from gathered citizens and local businesses owners. Report from this meeting was presented again to Municipal Office and transprtation departments representatives. Despite the positive results, officials could not change the budget for the current year. Thanks to a coincidence, year 2013, was the first year of new governmental programme, called civic budget. Specially reserved amount of public funds were to be designated on social and urban projects, which could be submitted and voted by all City inhabitants. Project for application has been made with cooperation with transportation department to make sure that all parts were going to be positively considered be authorities during projects evaluation phase. Final project was

submitted to civic budget program. At this stage local media started to be interested in *woonerf* idea for Łódź downtown. Also concept of new 6 Sierpnia street hit the first pages on social media websites and become highly recognizable while going through long process of acceptance and compatibility with city strategies by sequent city departments. All departments have given green light to *woonerf*, with the exception of City Architect Office, which was not in favour of it. 6 Sierpnia street in his plans was going to become one of major inner city center streets leading to new central train station Łódź Fabryczna. Changing it to pedestrian area with reduced traffic flow, was not in City Architect plan for Łódź communication. Social media gone wired, Łódź activists and non-governmental organizations who were for this change took a lot of effort to create an open discussion about City Architect Office plans and to keep citizens informed.

City Architect Office could not ignore growing support for this street re-construction from majority of citizens. Not only for new appearance of future 6th Sierpnia street, but mainly because idea for this change met complete understanding. After few weeks of dialogue, Architect Office gave up and project was accepted for voting. Project ended up on a podium, another indirect signal of full support for a new kind of public space from citizens. After two years of struggling reconstruction was finished and new 6th Sierpnia as a *woonerf* was opened for public.

## 4 METHODOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 Originator – City Council Office relation:

#### 4.1.1 Model 1

Through actions and determination of originator in dialog with authorities we can place this relation on the sixth rung of participation ladder „partnership”. Private person, not attached, propose a project, and its assumptions were not changed but only fitted for legislations and technical restrictions during final phase. We witness mature form of cooperation between open and friendly city office and well educated and informed, in other words, properly prepared private citizen.

#### 4.1.1 Model 2

Same relations in second model we can assign as a special case of „social movement – converting”. Special, because originator was working alone, at least at the beginning. Not as an established and well-funded organization, and still he managed to introduce this initiative, and negotiate it to an end, in almost original and unchanged form.

His relations with Transport Department was a bit different, we can describe them by bottom right part of „four models of planning”, collaboration – co-evolving. In contradiction to City Architect Office, no one had to change priorities or goals and interdependence of interests was very high. Only through dialog as equals, careful listening everyone’s arguments, compromise can be reached.

### 4.2 Originator – citizens relation

#### 4.2.1 Model 1

Despite honest and rightful reasons for citizen consultation that has taken place during described process we can easily find symptoms of lowest rung from our ladder „manipulation”. Consultation were not obligatory from legal point of view. Understanding people needs and idea of how they imagine their street was not the purpose of these consultations. Consultations were only needed for their power as an argument with authorities. Original project have not erected on the basis of consultation, nor has it been changed after them. The only goal of this meeting was to introduce to citizens and tenants finished solution and convince them to give approval. I would like to mention at this point, I am not saying *woonerf* is something, citizens do not need, after three years since first *woonerf* was opened without a doubt we can be sure it is needed and desired. Despite altruistic and positive reasons, consultations process ended up as a manipulation. Honest two way discussion was lost, because the important part was only final score, having citizens for or against the change.

Another peculiar decision was how representatives of Łódź citizens were chosen for the consult, who at the end decided of how reconstructed street will look like. For unknown reasons inhabitants and tenants invited and welcomed, were only those directly related to 6 Sierpnia street at that time. Decision was made, all Łódź

citizens have been represented by few closest ones, without considering the fact that not only them will be users of created space. Rest of Łódź was ignored, until *woonerf* needed support in social media and voters in civic budget. We were witnessing tokenism in social participation. Tokenism with informative character followed by manipulative consultation when part of the society was given special decisive rights only by their accommodation address.

### 4.3 Non-attached organization – City Council Office relation

#### 4.3.1 Model 2

While executive project after voting was emerging, transport department had full control over decisions about final shape of 6 Sierpnia street. At this point they realized the original concept has to be changed. During earlier stage of negotiations there were no obligations for modifying its shape, but eventually mechanisms of technical bureaucracy – convincing from top left part of second model had taken over. Department goal was to make sure that project would not cost more than estimated in budget and simultaneously ensure for all users undisturbed access and transit. Number of parking spaces overestimated on conceptual stage turned out to be impossible to achieve. Ideological aspirations of involved organization had to be suppressed. Street has not become car free, Piotrkowska street, Łódź central and commercial passage road nearby, required delivery connection. Original project met reality and has to be trimmed, but on this stage no additional consultation has taken place to make sure of the support from citizens.

### 4.4 City Architect Office – civic budget (citizens) relation

#### 4.4.1 Model 2

One of most important stakeholder in our process turned out to be only one in opposition to 6th Sierpnia street reconstruction. City Architect Office did not want to give up his plans of making transition street for new train station on other side of city centre. Even if this plan was almost impossible to achieve from other unlinked reasons. This argument followed by full support from citizens and local media, traditional and social, with acceptance by Municipal Office made them change their decision, and project got green light for voting. City Architect Office until this stage worked according to political influence – co-opting. City Architect Office with high diversity and low interdependence of interests with other participants still stubbornly kept his original decision despite the inability to achieve its assumptions. Decisions that has been made by politicians, as inside department planning process, without another consultation.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Summarizing, even if discussed process ended up with a positive outcome we can not ignore the fact, that showed methods of participation were not executed properly. By „properly“, I mean considering every aspects and all possible participants equally. There were few sides involved in this discussion, everyone had something to gain and lose. We could distinguish elements of productive partnership, deliberate manipulation and tokenism „dressed up“ in citizen consultation. Social movements with immense influence on political decisions and technical bureaucracy brought ideas back to reality. Process was partially inverted, in comparison with governmental, conducted strictly by acts of law, social consultation, because it was not an initiative started by public authority but by a non-attached citizen.

What can we deduce from analysed process for the future social participation development in planning? Firstly, social movement actions definitely increase the chance for citizens to induce reaction on powerholders. Effective scope of the impact of non-governmental organizations and their resources should be used in purpose of gathering as many followers as possible. Initiative of organization monitoring powerholders actions and supplying private individuals with knowledge and resources should be supported and encouraged by the local authorities. It is in their best interests to cooperate with them to keep decisive power.

Secondly well informed citizens are able to make preferable, for them and for the city, decisions. Analysis of *woonerf* programme also shows us how innovatively comprehended mobility of the individuals can change the small public space in the city, how common goal brings strangers together through modern social media networks, and finally how people can collectively work together, when they know, their voice is going to be



heard by openminded authorities. Small project of first *woonerf* helped citizens of Lodz feel united and make them a bit prouder of the city they live in.

Thirdly, civic budget proved to be an initiative worth keeping, where citizens can give their opinion about future trends and small contribution to appearance of their city. Furthermore process of creation of the first *woonerf* and medial storm around it, take place during the first year of the civic budget in Lodz and the first voting was properly popularized by it. Analyzed initiative gathered for the civic budget needed publicity which continues uninterrupted to this day, getting more and more public every year since, with number of submitted projects constantly increasing. Tool originally provided for citizens by powerholders to keep them ostensibly happy, ultimately went out of control and gave the people power to sufficiently satisfy their needs in local scale. Civic budget became a tool which transformed spectators into initiators of changes in the city. On one hand powerholders are getting continous feedback from citizens about their needs, and on the other hand everyone can make a difference, reshape the city parts, help local institution or organize event to connect people.

Fourthly informed and consulted citizens, even if their opinion would not change already made plans, are at least not surprised by incomprehensible decisions of powerholders. This comfort makes them feel partially involved and included in city social life.

Fifth and last, not all initiatives should comes from powerholders. Private citizens can accurately spot a need or an oportunity to create something usefull and valuable for the rest of us. Administration should listen closely and carefully their own electorate.

## 6 REFERENCES

MONTGOMERY, Charles: Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design. Cracow , 2015.

ARNSTEIN, Sherry R.: A ladder of Citizen Participation. In: Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Vol. 35, Issue 4, pp. 216-224, July 1969.

INNES, Juduth E., BOOHER, David E.: Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century. In: Paper prepared for the annual conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning., November 2-5. Berkeley, 2000.