Public Participation in City Design – Summary of paper
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Today close to two thirds of world population live in cities or suburbanized areas. There, they are faced with numerous problems, such as overpopulation, lack of green areas, excessive and unsustainable use of cars, inadequate public transport… Furthermore, they are fighting global challenges as economic crisis and climate change – to solve these challenges, cities will have to come out with better energy efficiency and effective transport solutions through the intelligent use of modern information and telecommunication technologies (ICT).

All of this can be achieved with better planning and active involvement of stakeholders in the process of decision-making and urban management. The use of contemporary ICT tools can improve participation in the city making process. That could help create sustainable, user-friendly cities, which are based on mixed land use, walkable cities and smart and well organized public transport.

First of all, we need to clarify, what is public participation. Public participation is a democratic process of engaging people in thinking, deciding, planning, and playing an active part in the development and operation of services that affect their lives. Citizens can participate or can be included in decision making process on several levels.

A Ladder of Citizen Participation.

Participation	Example	Cluster
Citizen control	Self govenrment, community makes the decision.	Degrees of citizen power
Delegated power	Government ultimately runs the decision – making process and funds it.	
Partnership	Joint projects – community has considerable influence on the decision making process but the government still takes responsibility.	
Placation	Community is asked for advice and token changes are made.	Degrees of citizen tokenism
Consultation	Community is given infromation about the project or issue and asked to comment, but their view may not be reflected in the final decision.	
Informing	Community is told aboout the project and may be asked, but their opinion may not be taken into account.	
Therapy	Community is informed about the project and its benefits, but there is no opportunity to express their concerns.	
Manipulation	Community is selectively told about the projet, its imput is only used to further this existing agenda.	Non - participation

Source: Sherry Arnstein **,** The Journal of the American Planning Vol. 35. No.4, July 1969**.** A Ladder of Citizen Participation.

We will analyze several different web tools for gathering public opinion on certain topics e.g. urban design such as e-democracy, apps for mobile devices, forums… and chose the most appropriate for use in our case study. Our choice for web based tools was based on principles of major accessibility, simplicity, user friendliness and versitality.

We are aware that certain groups of population do not know how to use these tools or they simply do not want to because of lack of trust. However, we believe that the major part of population which has interests in participating does have the knowledge and skills to use web based tools. Since the e-literacy is important part of everyday life and people tend to learn new skills every day (via workshops, seminars, brochures, lectures…), we can expect, that the number of people who will not be able to express their opinion or suggestions will decrease.

Slovenia has population just over 2 million. Population is not concentrated in large cities, but is scattered all over the country. Overall, the population density is approximately 100 inhabitants/km^2. Relatively small number of citizens, results in formation of smaller cities or towns, rather than just one or two major cities. Therefore our study focuses on smaller cities (By definition in Slovenian strategy of spatial development, large cities have approx. 100.000 citizens, medium cities at least 10.000, and smaller cities less than 10.000, but more than 3.000 citizens).

Because of the trend of small and medium sized cities and their spatial distribution, daily migration represents a big part of everyday life for most of Slovenians. Therefore, formation of energy efficient cities is very difficult, since citizens rarely live and work in the same city. We believe, that the most efficient way of reaching energy efficient cities is by improving public transport to decrease the use of cars to reach destination of work, and by designing walkable cities, which destimulate the use of cars and offer basic needs and activities in close proximity to persons home. Alternative to walkable cities is the improvement of public transport, which will diminish the need for owning a car.

We believe, that in current way of spatial planning in Slovenia, people are not included in the decision making process early enough. Most of the times, the planners make all the major decisions, prepare the spatial plan and then release it to the public and collect public opinion. Consequences of late inclusion of citizens in spatial planning results in reluctance to new solutions. These reluctances could be avoided by including public opinion and suggestions in early stages of decision making processes and planning. If we ensure that public suggestions will be included in planning, people will not feel reluctant to changes, but will embrace them.

Currently we are arranging cooperation with one of Slovenian municipality (Slovenske Konjice), which is by definition a small city (approx. 5000 citizens). Its city center was recently renovated, but there is still a lot of work to be done. With the chosen web based tool we will try to gather public suggestions on a specific topic, which is not yet defined, but we are currently discussing it with the local municipality.