

## Co-operation with local stakeholders: a crucial element of urban design

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, the authors endeavour to illustrate the evolution of the role of local stakeholder in teaching urban planning by example of selected experiences in the Faculty of Architecture at Gdańsk University of Technology (FA-GUT), Gdańsk, Poland. The timeframe covers the period from the political breakthrough in 1989 to the present. The background is composed of the social, economic and legal changes that have taken place over the years in Poland. The authors also attempt to identify the present local stakeholders; the value of co-operation for the education process; and the added value each can bring.

### INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift of perceiving the city and its problems took place in Europe about 40 years ago. However, in Poland, this process developed with some delay. Modernist assumptions of sustained growth finally collapsed in the face of the 1980s crisis (the challenge to Soviet Union control), but changes in the planning system occurred only with systemic transformation. It should be emphasised that legal requirements have often lagged the trends - local governments, private investors and scientific centres - in the approach to shaping urban structures and adaptation to its dynamic changes.

The first formal requirements regarding public participation were proclaimed in the Planning Act of 1984. However, the political atmosphere shortly after the abolition of martial law resulted in the possibility of submitting comments by the *local representation of residents* and *physical persons* which never developed into a real discussion about the shape and directions of the development of a city. The political breakthrough of 1989 brought many changes in Poland. Systemic transformation, consisting of democratisation, building a free market, as well as creating a civil society took place in almost all areas of social and economic life; these changes also concerned spatial development.

In 1990, the state was decentralised, of which local governments were subjected part. Local territorial units (communes and municipalities) were equipped with budget and property (including real estate) and there were a wide range of areas with self-determination. That was supposed to be a basis for the management of the city as a community of residents. The Spatial Development Act passed in 1994 brought significant changes aimed at adapting the spatial planning process to the newly emerging socio-economic conditions, as well as the governance model in Poland. The main differences in spatial planning included:

- cancellation of general and specific plans;
- transfer to local governments of decision-making power in the field of spatial planning;
- narrowing of the role of the state in formulating conditions and premises for spatial development policy [1].

The present Act of 2003 on spatial planning and development has extended the issues. Thanks to this new act, the commune as the lowest level of government (after introducing counties (powiaty) and regions in 1999) was declared a direct decision-making instrument in development and use of the territory covered. Spatial planning has become a sequence of consultations and social negotiations and is not an act of spatial management, so far. The scope, form and course of citizens' involvement in the process of participation in spatial planning has been recorded in Polish legislation. As a result the state, commune and citizens have become equal partners in the planning process, which is to involve continuous negotiations and consultations [1].

However, changes to local spatial planning laws attracted little interest among ordinary people. Interest increased gradually as two conditions developed: the maturing of civil society and the development of methods and techniques to present development processes in a non-specialised way.

It should be mentioned that this is not the only legal act evoking a participatory approach to urban development. Despite the work carried out since the 1990s, the Revitalisation Act was adopted only in 2015. As such, it is an essential formal document regulating the interdisciplinary nature of urban planning. Due to the possibility of obtaining EU funds and the related requirements, a large part of local governments already had instituted elements of the interdisciplinary approach since 2000.

## URBAN PLANNING: CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

In the Polish higher education system, urban planning was assigned primarily to architecture faculties at technical universities. The employers in this area almost exclusively were public entities, designed for the needs of the modernist vision of the country's development implemented by a centralised administration. The courses prepared students to work in organisations focused on creating bold spatial strategies.

A democratic breakthrough in 1989 brought many systemic changes that fundamentally transformed the approach to urban planning. The most important of these was decentralisation of the state including planning authority and the introduction of private capital. The process resulted in changes in the approach to the teaching of urban planning, adapting the graduate to the expectations of the job's market. Apart from competence in the field of technical knowledge and shaping compositional values, the urban planner started to require extensive social abilities, in particular mediation skills between various groups of stakeholders. However, these changes took place over a longer time, given the difference in socio-economic conditions in spatial management.

The first challenges of urban planning under these new circumstances were those resulting from ownership transformations and the entry of private capital. Large, unprofitable factories, on land and with facilities developed during 19th-century industrialisation, underwent restructuring. Well-positioned plots became of interest to private investors. Following the world trend, the search had begun for opportunities to develop the city inward and transform post-industrial spaces into multifunctional downtown districts.

In the 1990s, the two main groups of stakeholder taking active part in the design process were local (municipal) authorities and investors: both groups were learning financial and spatial governance. At that time, in the early stage of civil society development, public opinion was not yet involved in the decisions about the shape of space. Municipal authorities are now more willing to join with universities looking for opportunities for students to find alternatives to solutions applied so far, as well as to raise interest in issues of spatial planning of residents, and to show the potential of districts requiring intervention. Student projects often are visually more attractive and, most of all, simpler than formal local spatial development plans.

As civic society developed, representatives of local communities moved from the position of opinion-giving (most often protesting) on new development plans to actively seeking proposals for improving the quality of space and enhancing the environment of residences.

This evolution of attitudes and the position of stakeholders had an impact on the organisation of urban planning courses. This issue is discussed in this article by example of urban design and planning courses in the Faculty of Architecture at Gdańsk University of Technology (FA-GUT), Gdańsk, Poland.

## SHAPING THE NEW APPROACH

In 1994, in the FA-GUT, the City Development Department was established. The unit functioned alongside the Department of Urban Planning, which continued to offer an urban planning course based on the modernist paradigm. Actively co-operating with foreign universities, the City Development Department team offered a course for a small group of students of late semesters. The project topics concerned the field of re-urbanisation and development of post-industrial areas.

The first co-operation between the City Development Department and local stakeholders concerned the development of the historic areas of the Gdańsk Shipyard, where the strike under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa is considered a breakthrough in the fight against communism. Students had the opportunity to take part in international workshops with the participation of Sasaki Associates (the company practises in urban design).

Then, a design vision competition was announced. This iconic area has featured many times for Master's projects. The investment in this area is gaining momentum, but the co-operation between the University, private investor and the city had an impact on the thinking about this part of the city, and this co-operation increased the involvement of local stakeholders [2].



However, the most common group of stakeholders interested in exploiting the potential of students are local self-governments advancing topics that require a new vision, though the educational involvement was optional. Students participated in workshops or specially organised competitions. These formulas for co-operation remain popular in faculties of architecture at various Polish technical universities [3][4].

A significant change of approach to urban design courses at Gdańsk University of Technology took place in the years 2003 to 2005. The beginning of this period was the establishment of the Department of Urban Design and Regional Planning when the programme for all students of the Faculty of Architecture was expanded to include themes related to the reorganisation of the existing urban fabric.

In 2005, as a part of the Bologna Process, acquiring social competencies was also included in the programme of the course. Thus, co-operation with specific local governments and verification of student work in the form of public discussion about their concepts have become common practice. In the case of the FA-GUT, these primarily were territorial communities of the Gdańsk agglomeration, including major cities, such as Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot, but also smaller centres that remain in the commuting zone of the metropolitan area, such as Kartuszy or Rumia.

Table 1: A comparison of the programme of urban design and planning in the FA-GUT before and after introducing the Bologna Process.

Semester	Before introducing the Bologna Process	After introducing the Bologna Process
III	-	Urban composition: introduction to design (composing, urban indicators, basis for space analysis, designing a small assumption in a highly defined composition area)
IV	A small housing complex	A small building complex (housing function with services) as a complement to the existing urban fabric
V	Neighbourhood unit	Downtown areas
VI	A small city for the planned number of inhabitants (scenario of growth: since 1980s rather theoretical)	A small city or a district of a big city (scenario of urban renewal: common co-operation with local stakeholders)
VII	Downtown area	-
VIII/I	Complexed urban district	Complexed urban district/problem areas (common co-operation on crucial investments, e.g. new railway station)
IX/II	Diploma project (different topics)	Diploma project (different topics: often in co-operation with local stakeholders)
X/III	Continuing a diploma project	

Another breakthrough happened after 2011. In the spring of that year, the first congress of city movements took place [5]. In Gdańsk, the activists managed to enforce the liberalisation of provisions regarding the appointment of auxiliary units (district councils), which resulted in a significant increase in their numbers [6]. Moreover, in Poland, the translations to the Polish language of the iconic publications devoted to shaping the public space began to appear, such as J. Gehl's *Life between buildings* [7]; K. Lynch's *The image of the city* [8]; and G. Cullen's *The concise townscape* [9]. Residents of local communities were more willing to talk about their ideas on how to develop and enhance the quality of their place of living, which gained support in academia.

An example of such co-operation was the scientific-research-implementation project developed between 2014 and 2015 as a part of the programme *Citizens for democracy, Quo vadis Gdańsk? Residents plan their city*. The co-operating entities were the university, the city, non-governmental organisations and (as an active participant in the process) representatives of auxiliary units. The team of the Department of Urban Design and Regional Planning under the supervision of Gabriela Rembarz, architect and urban designer, realised within this multifaceted project, scientific-implementation research correlated with educational practice included in the model programme of the Social Planning Academy.

The most important results of the project include the development of a participatory planning technique based on the urban mentoring model. Thanks to the development and implementation of a new planning tool in four different districts, the micro-strategies for the development of public space now include four individual planning documents supporting the urban planning process. As a part of the project, classes were conducted in the fifth semester, as well as serving four Master's diplomas [10].

In 2018, the authors began co-operation aimed at revitalising Steffens' Park (Park Steffensa) in Gdańsk (see Figures 1 and Figure 2 below). This area is located between downtown districts (Śródmieście and Wrzeszcz), but separated from the spatial structure of the city by a busy traffic artery and a railway line. On the opposite side of the street Gdańsk Medical University is located.

The initiative was addressed to the Faculty of Architecture by the representatives of the Aniołki District Council. Local activists wanted to attract attention to the park which, due to separation from the residential part of the district, was rarely visited. Co-operation involved the students' scientific club *Hulaj Urban Squad*, the district council and the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA); a celebration of World Earth Day was organised. The event was a combination of family festivities, educational event and design workshop. Such a convention was conceived as a basis for discussion about the possibilities of activating this area.

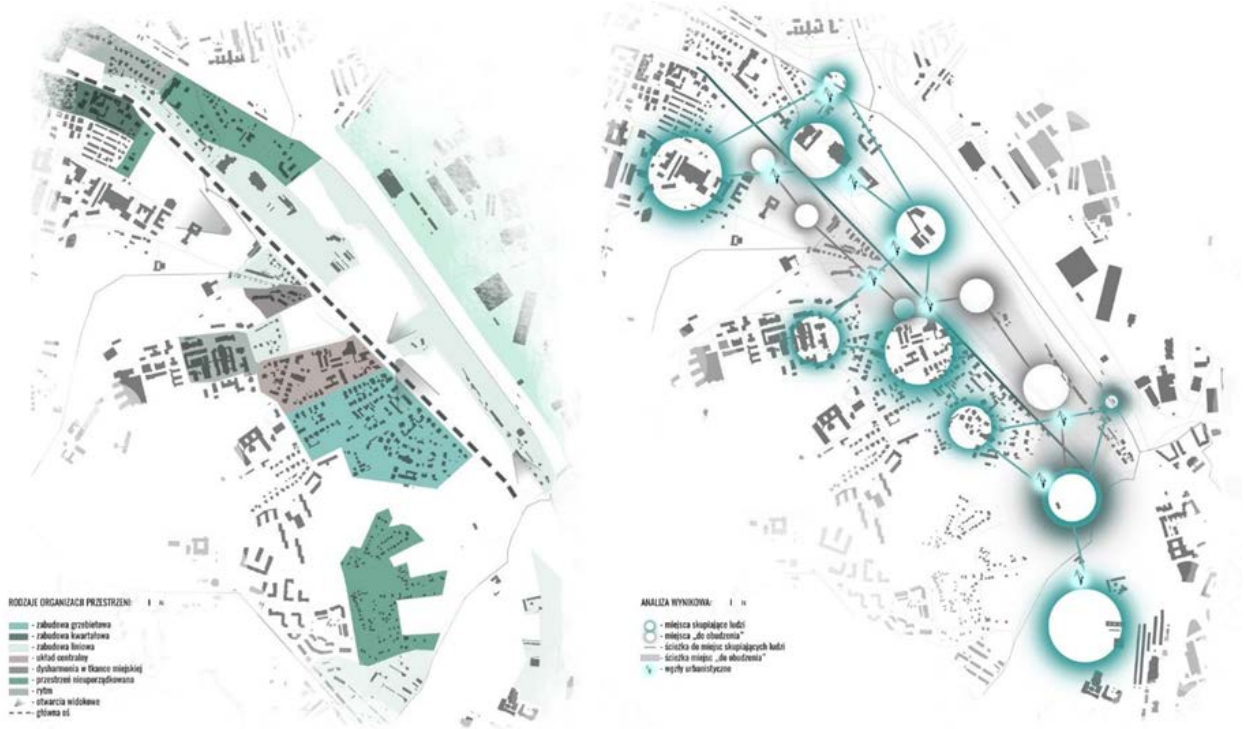


Figure 1: Student idea for activating Steffens Park and surroundings (1) (Authors: N. Wołoszyk and M. Zygadlińska).

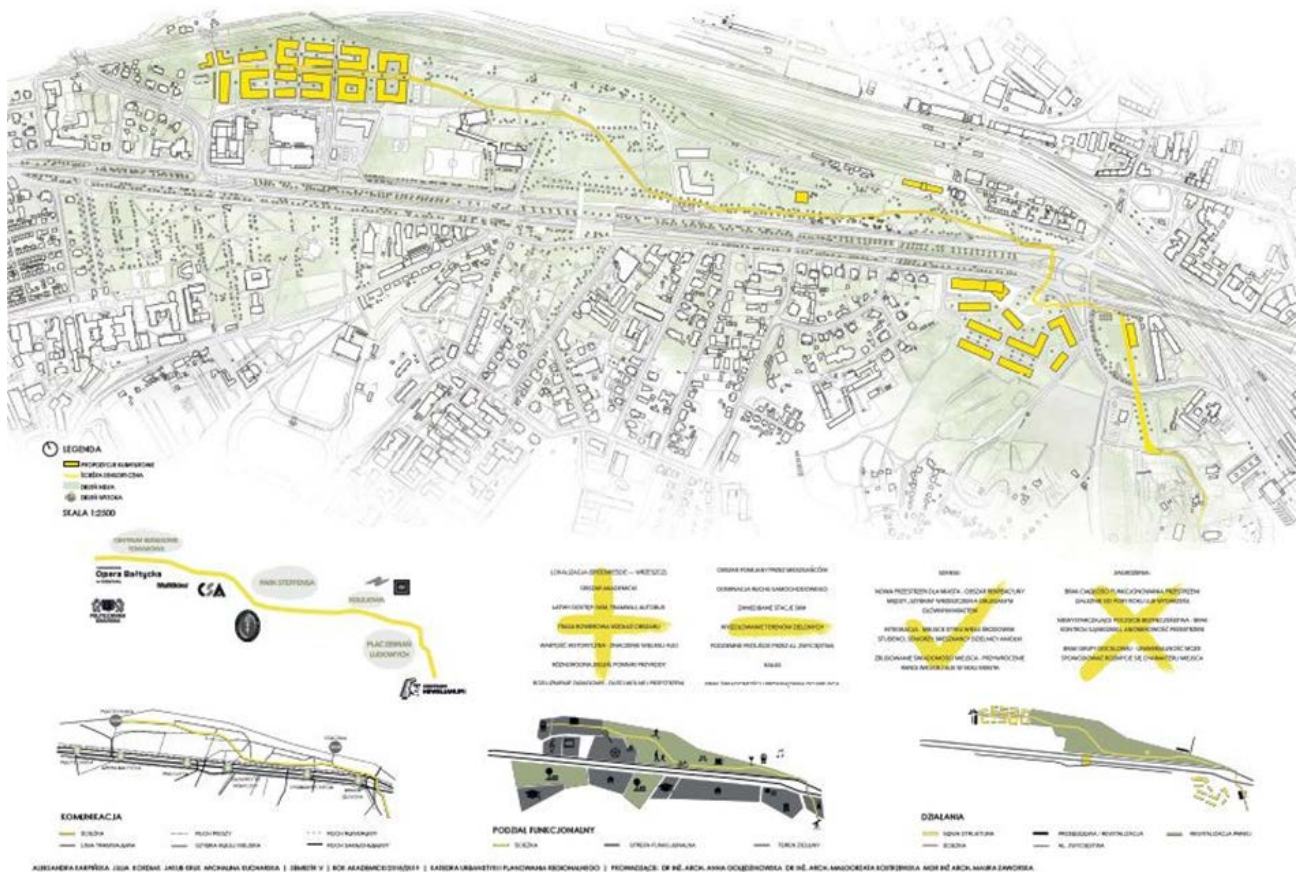


Figure 2: Student idea for activating Steffens Park and surroundings (2) (Authors: A. Karpieńska, J. Kruk, J. Kordiak and M. Kucharska).

The workshops turned out to be a great success with new opportunities for reviving the area. This can be seen in the involvement of public institutions of metropolitan importance, which are located in the park surroundings and from whom expressions of interest arose for co-operating on activation of the area. Among these institutions were the educational centre, *Hevelianum* (operating in the historic fortifications), The Baltic Opera, and the Academic Sports Centre of Gdańsk University of Technology. All these institutions have agreed that by opening to the park, a synergistic effect can be achieved in the scope of the leisure time offered. The municipal institutions, Gdańsk Road and Green Authority and Gdańsk Development Office, also were involved in the co-operation.

The Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Gdańsk University of Technology was asked to support the possibilities of an alternative traffic organisation. As a result, an exceptional course was created in terms of the number and character of the partners involved, as well as the arrangement of classes and co-operation within the University. Earlier, substantive co-operation of the students of both faculties took the form of workshops, but not regular courses.

The second innovation was that for the first time, during the fifth semester devoted to the downtown area, and the sixth dedicated to the design of the context of a small town or a district, the same subject was retried. Thanks to this, the students had the opportunity to verify how the solutions proposed by them during the previous semester would work in a broader functional context. Encouraged by these developments, local social workers reported the park to the participatory budget authorities, and the city authorities have just commissioned the preparation of professional project documentation.

## CONCLUSIONS

There exists a sense of locality and related awareness of the need to engage local partners for development as democratic civil society develops. Dissemination of knowledge about the principles of urban spaces and the emergence of new opportunities to implement changes (e.g. civic budgets) causes the involvement of social partners seeking help in developing local solutions.

The ability to co-operate with local partners becomes not only an advantage, but also is a required competence for future urban planners. The graduate of engineering studies should be not only an expert for a business or public partner, but also a coach for formalised and non-formalised social groups. This approach allows for the successful transformation of urban spaces containing areas of interest for local stakeholders representing all three sectors: public, private and social.

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