

## Stakeholders in the local service centre: who should be involved in the planning process? Insights from Poland, Czech Republic and Denmark

Łukasz Damurski<sup>1CDMR</sup>, Jacek Pluta<sup>2CDMR</sup>, Karel Maier<sup>3DMR</sup>, Hans Thor Andersen<sup>4DMR</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Chair of Urban Planning & Design and Settlement Processes, Faculty of Architecture, tel. +48713206240, e-mail: [lukasz.damurski@pwr.edu.pl](mailto:lukasz.damurski@pwr.edu.pl) (corresponding author); <sup>2</sup> University of Wrocław, Institute of Sociology, <sup>3</sup> České Vysoké Učení Technické v Praze, Fakulta Architektury, Czech Republic, <sup>4</sup> Universitet København, Statens Byggeforskningsinstitut (SBI), Aalborg Denmark

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**Abstract.** Local service centres play a vital role in shaping the quality of life in urban neighbourhoods. They offer access to essential everyday services (shops, education, healthcare, personal services) and to public spaces. If they are properly planned and managed, they can bring particular added values to a local community, such as social integration and territorial identification. The history of urban planning has produced several patterns of local service centres (ancient agora, mediaeval market square, neighbourhood unit, modern agora) but today a question arises: how can a local service centre be successfully planned and organised in post-modern political practice? How can its potential be realised and the ever-changing needs, expectations and preferences of local communities be met? Who should be involved in those processes? To answer those questions in this paper we refer to citizen participation and public communication concepts, where selecting the appropriate stakeholders emerges as a necessary starting point for effective urban governance. We present the results of in-depth interviews with local actors (local authorities, municipality officials, town planners, non-governmental organisations, local leaders) in Poland (Wrocław, Siechnice, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Warszawa and Zabierzów), Czech Republic (Prague) and Denmark (Copenhagen). Depending on the specific local context, various stakeholders are perceived as essential to the decision-making process. The power relations and problems encountered in implementing public policy in particular locations have been summarised in three sections: relationships between stakeholders, leadership, and good practices. The paper concludes with a list of typical actors who should be involved in planning, building and managing a local service centre in an urbanised neighbourhood.

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**Contents:**

1. Introduction .....	92
2. Local service centre: origins of the concept .....	92
3. Local service centre: gaps in current knowledge and the research questions.....	93
4. Stakeholders in urban planning: who are they in post-modernist times?.....	94
5. The seven case studies .....	95
6. Materials and methods.....	97
7. Research results .....	98
7.1. List of potential stakeholders .....	98
7.2. Typical relationships between stakeholders .....	99
7.3. Leadership .....	100
7.4. Citizen participation and public communication.....	101
7.5. Selected good practices and planning perspectives .....	102
7.6. Poland versus abroad, suburbs versus cities.....	102
8. Limitations of the study.....	103
9. Conclusions .....	103
Acknowledgements.....	104
References .....	104

**1. Introduction**

The contemporary planning paradigm promotes public communication and citizen participation as indispensable elements of the public decision-making process. “Planning is (...) no longer about plans. It is, and must increasingly be, about people,” (Narang and Reutersward 2008, p. 8). But when it comes to practice, these ideals raise several questions about who actually should be involved.

This paper can be situated at the intersection of a spatial (geographical) approach to urban development (where the distribution of particular functions plays a vital role) and political practice (where the involvement of particular stakeholders determines the feasibility of the decision-making process). It starts with an outline of the concept of the local service centre, including its historical background and current considerations. A critical literature review shows the shortages in the state-of-the-art, followed by general and detailed research questions. Then we describe our methodological approach (in-depth interviews with selected actors in the planning process) and provide essential information on seven case studies (five in Poland and two abroad). The research results are divided into several sections reflecting the main types of content emerging from

the interviews: relationships between stakeholders (with special attention to their bridging capital), leadership, and good practices. We conclude by presenting practical implications for urban planning and by listing the core stakeholders in the process of building and managing a local service centre.

**2. Local service centre: origins of the concept**

The origins of the idea of an urban service centre stem back to the ancient Greek polis (e.g. Athens) with its agora as a place gathering and cumulating social activities, citizen power and variety of facilities (such as a library, stoas, temples, arsenal, etc.). Then, in mediaeval times, despite the different social, religious, political and economic context, a small city with a well-organised market square performed similar functions. Continuing through the subsequent epochs, when cities got bigger, the centres grew and became hierarchically ordered and more specialised. But the smaller units retained their local character, with multi-functional public spaces (a square or a street) providing a particular range of services (retail, administration, finance, religion, culture, leisure, etc.).

Only the industrial age, with its mass-scale urban development, lost the original value of the neighbourhood as a concentration of various everyday functions for residents. Trying to address this problem, the modernists introduced a comprehensive approach in planning urban areas. A core concept of those times was the “neighbourhood unit” proposed in the 1920s by C. Perry for designing functional, self-contained and desirable neighbourhoods. Its characteristic feature was a school placed in the centre of the residential area so that a child’s walk to school was only about one-quarter of a mile and could be achieved without crossing major arterial streets. The neighbourhood was sized between 5,000 and 9,000 residents and also provided some local shopping areas near the main entrance to the unit (Perry, 1998).

The concept of neighbourhood units became standard for mass housing projects all over the world, especially after the Second World War. For example, in Czechoslovakia, all housing projects from the mid-1950s until the end of the 1980s were planned with standardised sets of facilities and services in typified service centre buildings. Basic facilities and services were strictly required to be within walking distance for all multi-family housing development projects. However, the quality of these service centres was often quite low. Subsequent poor maintenance and mismanagement meant that some later suffered from gradual decay or even became brownfields.

In the 1980s the concept of the local service centre was revived as a means of strengthening social relations in post-modern neighbourhoods. When a city is described as a “constellation” of self-contained, enclosed urban entities, we must agree that local public spaces play an important psychological and social role in social integration. Thus the local service centre forms a primary sphere of everyday existence, where the space–time relationships are most natural to the users because they can get around on foot (see Jałowicki & Szczepański, 2002).

Within this approach the ancient agora was reconceptualised, adapted to the neighbourhood scale and renamed “contemporary agora”, an idea promoted by F.V. Klinger (Kowicki, 2004). According to this concept the local service centre should be a place of integration, enabling knowl-

edge and cultural exchange, acceptance and tolerance, and cultivating a variety of activities and interests. Its structure should be flexible and allow the implementation of various initiatives by functional adaptation on a daily, weekly or annual basis.

Local service centres should also offer well-designed public spaces. As noted by J. Gehl (2009), streets and squares have been the key elements organising urban space throughout the entire history of human settlement, reflecting natural perception and penetration opportunities. Therefore, local service centres should be surrounded by many different daily functions and events, with facades divided by narrow passages, with many doors and views that provide insights into the most interesting activities. What’s more, public spaces should be available from one level and should ensure the integration of different groups of people – only then will they be attractive to users (Gehl, 2009).

### 3. Local service centre: gaps in current knowledge and the research questions

Bearing in mind all those considerations we may introduce a simple definition of a local service centre. A local service centre (LSC) is a specific urban structure including multi-functional public space and surrounding buildings providing access to essential everyday services, fostering social integration. A typical LSC is located in a neighbourhood or between neighbourhoods and connected with public transport networks. It should be distinguishable from the surrounding areas by different land-use and/or unique spatial form (Damurski et al., 2017).

The concept of the LSC is particularly important to the current planning discourse in Poland, where a significant shift in urban policy in the last 15 years can be observed. After the period of system transformation, adaptation to free market rules and revitalisation of the main representative public spaces in the core urban areas, the focus is now on districts and neighbourhoods and the challenges they face (see, for example, *Studium...*, 2018).

However, particular gaps in the current knowledge on local service centres emerge. They may be

summarised in three general questions: 1) How can an LSC be successfully planned, organised and managed in post-modern political practice? 2) How can the ever-changing needs, expectations and preferences of local communities be met? 3) Who should be involved in those processes and what should be the relationships between public, private and other actors (in particular regarding the ownership of the public spaces and of the service premises)?

This paper aims to study the stakeholders who take part in designing, building and managing local service centres in various locations. We are looking for some general solutions that may be adopted in urban planning and public decision-making with respect to specific conditions in various European urban areas, which is particularly important from the perspective of the EU territorial cohesion policy (*Territorial...*, 2011). Our priority is to prepare a list of people and organisations that should be involved in an LSC and to define the relationships that should characterise them. In the long run, the paper is expected to contribute to a comprehensive planning model for LSC development.

#### 4. Stakeholders in urban planning: who are they in post-modernist times?

Stakeholders in urban development are individuals or organisations that can affect or be affected by a decision, activity or achievement of a project (Yang 2014). Analysing stakeholders is an indispensable process for urban development, and aims to identify stakeholders and their interests, prioritise these stakeholders and, subsequently, make appropriate decisions. And of course, stakeholders have the right to express their opinion and to participate in a particular issue, but do not have to.

K. Pawłowska (2008) proposed a generalised list of typical stakeholders in urban planning: 1) citizens and users of space, 2) public authorities, 3) property owners, 4) investors and developers, 5) planners and designers. Other scholars classify stakeholders in various ways (e.g. planning authorities, community members, developers and key agencies – see *The Planning ...*, 2013; government departments, agencies and organisations, commu-

nities and residents – see Yang, 2014), but in this research we will adopt Pawłowska's approach as a reference point due to its comprehensiveness, simplicity and adaptability to the Polish spatial planning context.

The powers of the particular interest groups extend from legal enforcement of statutory planning, through economic power of investors, to the political power of civic society. The relationships between them may be described with the concept of social capital, including its bonding, bridging and linking characteristics. Bonding social capital means the relationships between members of a network who are similar in some form (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital refers to relationships between people who are demonstrably dissimilar, such as in age, socio-economic status, ethnicity or education (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). And linking social capital is the extent to which individuals build relationships with institutions and individuals who have relative power over them (e.g. to provide access to services, jobs or resources) (Hawkins, Maurer, 2010).

Each of the groups of stakeholders has its own interests and values, which may differ and may even be controversial (Carmona et al., 2010). Theoretically, public interest should be prioritised by planning and urban management: according to the “communicative planning theory” (Healey, 1992) the role of planning is to seek consensus that would be compatible with the interest of the local community and sustainable in the long run. However, in the neoliberal “new public management” concept, the market is the main driver of spatial change (cf. Sager, 2009). For example, a “Neighbourhood Improvement Districts” programme implemented in Germany says that the public and private sector will have to take on new functions in urban development: the public sector will evolve a more enabling and controlling function, and the private sector will have to be more active and responsible (Kreutz, 2007).

In the Czech Republic, planning strictly distinguishes stakeholders in public versus private investment. In the case of commercial services provided by private actors, the role of planning has been restricted to mere “enabling” i.e. providing private investors with the opportunity to establish and run services and facilities for shopping, restaurants, hotels, tourist services, etc. Collaboration between municipalities and private investors is left to local

initiatives and projects. For the facilities provided by the public sphere, plans consider their accessibility from housing developments and require appropriate land reserve for new facilities where necessary, with call option being applied to public educational, health and social facilities (Maier, Šindlerová, 2018).

It is also noteworthy that the five groups of stakeholders mentioned earlier are not definite: some people may belong to several groups (for example a citizen may be a land-owner and an investor at the same time). Moreover, they are uneven and internally diversified; particular groups include many sub-groups. (For example, public authorities include the local municipality and all other public institutions representing various levels of administration, often with conflicting interests.)

Therefore, the final list of stakeholders to be involved in a particular issue should be individually constructed for each project. And this is a difficult and challenging task, as the links between stakeholders and the planned area may be very different. Bourne (2005) and Mitchell et al. (1997) proposed three attributes that should be assessed to highlight a stakeholder's relative importance: power (is their power to influence the work or the outcomes of the project significant or relatively limited?), proximity (are they closely associated or relatively remote from the work of the project?) and urgency (are they prepared to go to any lengths to achieve their outcomes?). Putting aside the controversies around the prioritisation of stakeholders, we may agree that the main criteria for selection of involved parties should be the broadly defined public good (of current and future generations) and feasibility of planning procedures.

And here we reach the post-modernist approach to planning. Post-modernism was a reaction to the one-size-fits-all thinking of modernism; instead of looking for universal solutions to any challenges, it started recognising variations in agents and preferences; it opened up to more diversity and adaptation to local needs and preconditions. Thus, a typically post-modern situation is characterised by a lack of moral certainty and clear authority, the retreat of central authorities, the appearance of a multitude of new players and the rise of multiple voices (Stanilov, 2007).

“Post-modernist planning” tries to address the complexity of the contemporary city and its citi-

zens, where urban policy is challenged by uncertainty, fragmentation and globalisation, and where traditional, hierarchical top-down planning does not offer effective solutions for self-organising urban communities (Innes & Booher, 2010). The term “post-modernist planning” is often accompanied by the adjective “responsive”, which quite adequately describes its main endeavour to manage public affairs in a divided, pluralistic, multicultural society and the undermined authority of the state. The new rationality is focused on communication, looking for consensus, including the values and expectations of various social groups (Belof, 2013). All those trends result in widened citizen participation and require a redefinition of the set of stakeholders.

## 5. The seven case studies

In this study we focus on seven local service centres, five of which are located in Poland (Wrocław, Siechnice, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Warszawa, Zabierzów) and two abroad (Prague in Czech Republic and Copenhagen in Denmark – see **Fig. 1**). This research sample is supposed to represent various settlement contexts, starting from large capital cities (Warsaw, Prague, Copenhagen), through big and medium-sized cities (Wrocław, Ostrów Wielkopolski) down to suburban areas (Siechnice, Zabierzów).

It also reflects various planning cultures. Western European countries have a long and extensive experience in the development of local democracy – in Denmark the principle of citizen involvement has been present in the legislative system since the mid-1970s. Even if this pro-participatory approach was thereafter weakened by neoliberal, business-oriented policies (cf. Swyngedouw, 2010) the principle of citizen engagement has been constantly present in the planning culture.

Simultaneously, in the former “Eastern Block”, where system transition in the 1990s brought dynamic spatial, social and economic changes in urban areas, governments have introduced regulations strengthening public participation in decision making processes in the last 20 years. Nase and Ocak-

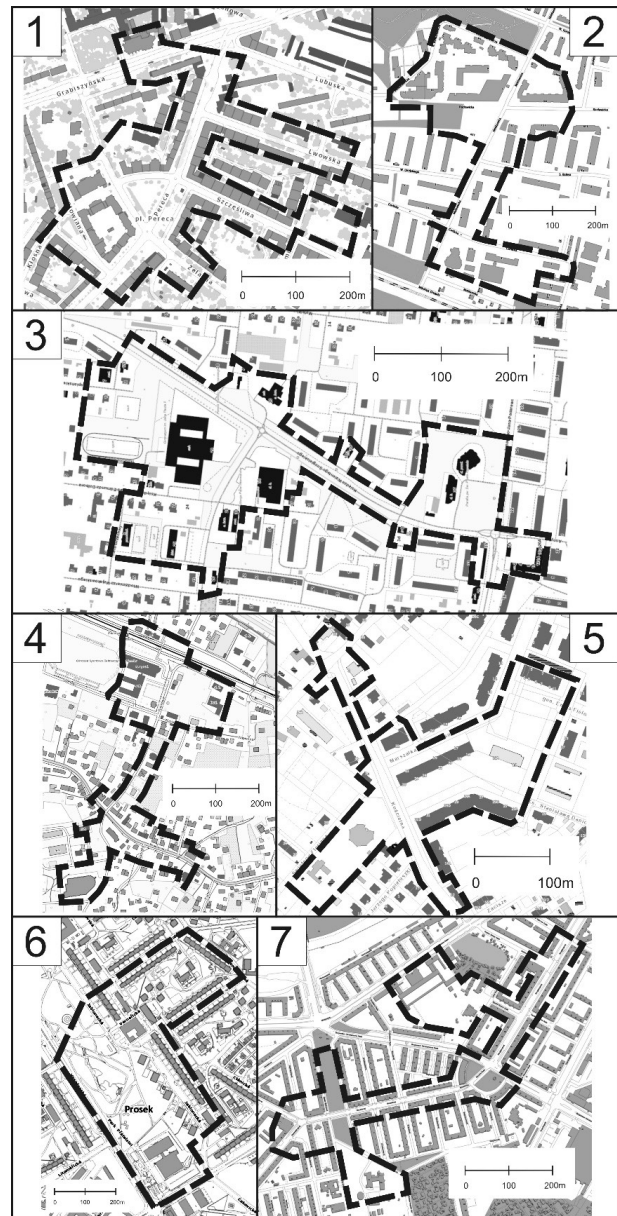
ci (2010) proposed a graduated scale showing the typical patterns in urban development from capitalist models (regulated or unregulated) to the third-world model. According to this approach Poland and Czech Republic have been situated in a group of post-socialist origin, developing a capitalist model in an unregulated manner. In both countries the local political culture remains authoritarian and citizens are rarely able to impact decision-making (Hirt, Stanilov, 2009).

The proposed research sample consisting of seven LSCs is not representative in statistical terms of course, but offers good insight into different locations and is expected to give a comprehensive picture of LSCs' condition. Such an approach appeals to B. Flyvbjerg's idea of "phronetic research", which means that the researched problems are not only academic (theoretical) but are considered real problems by the rest of society and that the results will feed back to the political, administrative, and social environment (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

The first case study is Pereca square in Wrocław (area: ca 12 hectares), a well-established LSC in a typically urban pre-war neighbourhood with various services (including a discount supermarket, schools, a post office, a pharmacy, a café, a bank, a library and a church), with very good access to public transport. Public spaces are of relatively good quality, but dominated by car traffic. The buildings form a mix of old residential quarters, post-socialist blocks of flats and some investments of the last 25 years.

The second case study is a newly built (2014–2017) market square in Siechnice with the municipality office situated in the middle, surrounded by blocks of flats with some services in the ground floor (area: ca 5 hectares). There is mainly single family housing around the LSC. Inside the area there is a service sector that is poor or in its infancy (including a street market open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, a bakery, a 7–23 convenience shop, a bank, a café, a kindergarten, a church), with limited access to public transport but a very clear system of public pedestrian spaces.

The third example is a well-established cluster of various services in a neighbourhood of 40-year-old blocks of flats situated around Waryńskiego, Śmigielskiego and Paderewskiego streets in Ostrów Wielkopolski (area: ca 12 hectares). The service sec-



**Fig. 1.** The local service centres selected for the study: (1) Pereca Square in Wrocław, (2) Mołdawska street in Warsaw, (3) Waryńskiego, Śmigielskiego and Paderewskiego streets in Ostrów Wielkopolski, (4) Kolejowa and Krakowska streets in Zabierzów, (5) Rynek in Siechnice, (6) the Prosek neighbourhood in Prague and (7) the Sydhavn district in Copenhagen. Source: authors' own research. Sources of background maps: <https://www.geoportal.wroclaw.pl/>, <https://serwis.wrosip.pl/imap/>, <http://www.mapa.um.warszawa.pl>, <http://mapy.geoportal.gov.pl/>, <http://www.geoportalpraha.cz>, <http://kbhkort.kk.dk/spatialmap?>

tor includes a petrol station, a discount market, a restaurant, a pharmacy, small shops, a school and a church. Public spaces are fragmented and dominated by cars.

The fourth local service centre is located in Ochota district in Warsaw (area: ca 11 hectares). It is a street market with a long tradition, located in a mixed neighbourhood (some 50-year-old blocks of flats and some apartments from the last 10 years), accompanied by many services (two discount markets, banks, a school, a restaurant, a library, a pharmacy, a church, etc.). It has limited access to public transport and a poor public space system, but there are many well-refurbished semi-public courtyards.

The last example from Poland is a newly built (2014–2018) market square in Zabierzów (area: ca 11 hectares) with a municipal office building. Surrounding buildings are still lacking but many various services are offered nearby (a supermarket, a temporary street market on Saturdays, a bank, a bakery, a café, a church, a school, a sports centre, a post office, etc.). There is a lack of clear pedestrian connections between them. This case study is characterised by having mainly single-family (suburban) housing around and a large national road crossing the area in the southern part.

The neighbourhood of Prosek-North in Prague (Czech Republic) is part of the Northern Town project built between the end of the 1960s and the 1980s. The Prosek estate consists of multi-family blocks of flats built in the 1970s (area: ca 13 hectares) with a large strip of mostly green open space situated between the northern and southern neighbourhoods, underground stations and many facilities for services meeting everyday needs, including schools, discount shops and restaurants. A well-furnished public space is overwhelmed by tall buildings. While the 1970s part of the housing estate was planned to make the facilities accessible within walking distance from residences, a new multi-family housing development emerged on the fringe of the area in the 2000s, without public facilities and with only limited commercial services. The absence of facilities there negatively affects the residential quality and increases traffic load on local roads in the surrounding area.

The seventh case study is the Sydhavn district in Copenhagen (Denmark). Originally, it was a working class district developed in the early 1900s

with multi-family buildings of varying quality (the area selected for the case study covers ca 14 hectares). Long streets and squares with services in the ground floor are the typical structures forming the public spaces in Sydhavn, thereby offering good access to essential everyday facilities, including shops, cafes, schools, a railway station, etc. Due to its bad image (many residents living on social welfare) the district is currently undergoing an integrated renewal programme.

## 6. Materials and methods

The general methodological approach of this paper is embedded in the social sciences. No single method for stakeholder analysis is perfect, but one of the typical empirical tools used for identification of actors is interviews (see Yang, 2014). In our research we applied in-depth interviews (IDIs) with various actors representing three levels of the local social and political environment in each of the selected neighbourhoods: municipal officials, urban planners and local leaders (NGOs, traditional communities, informal groups, university representatives). Respondents were recruited using the “snowball” method, starting in most cases with municipality officials.

Fifteen interviews were conducted from May 2017 till June 2018, each lasting about one hour (for the list of interviewees, see Table 1). The semi-structured interview scenario covered the following issues: attributes of public space and the role of public spaces in shaping the quality of life in residential areas, the importance of the services sector in public spaces in the residential area, the hierarchy of service nodes in a city (examples), the definition of a local service centre, the actors and stakeholders involved in shaping the services sector and building public spaces and patterns of spatial decision-making (planning, administrative procedures, good practices).

The conversations were recorded and transcribed (with several exceptions where interviews were conducted by phone or email). The results were analysed using content analysis (keyword search) and text processing tools (annotation). In the following sections we present selected results of this analysis.

**Table 1.** List of interviewed persons in selected local service centres. Source: authors' own research

Local service centre	Interviewees
Wrocław (Poland) – Pereca square	1) town planner, former director of the development office at the municipality 2) town planner, municipal development office 3) neighbourhood council deputy
Siechnice (Poland) – Rynek	1) town planner, municipality office
Ostrów Wielkopolski (Poland) – Waryńskiego, Śmigiełskiego and Paderewskiego streets	1) urban planning administrator, municipal office with investments department official, municipality office 2) head of urban development department, municipality office 3) head of housing administration in one of the neighbourhoods
Warsaw (Poland) – Mołdawska street	1) spokesman in district office with promotion and European funds department official, district office 2) association of architects representative 3) local shopkeepers association representatives
Zabierzów (Poland) – Kolejowa and Krakowska streets	1) head of department of spatial planning, geodesy and property administration, and two urban planners
Prague (Czech Republic) – Prosek neighbourhood	1) district councillor 2) former district councillor, urban planner and local leader
Copenhagen (Denmark) – Sydhavn district	1) district manager 2) urban geographer, university

## 7. Research results

### 7.1. List of potential stakeholders

The interviewees in selected locations named the following stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the planning and managing of LSCs:

Wrocław: NGOs, residents, local community, developers, municipality, urban planners, public housing agencies, parish, neighbourhood council, deputy, market manager, shopkeepers, services providers and clients.

Siechnice: residents, services providers and local market manager.

Ostrów Wielkopolski: neighbourhood/district council, developers, land owners, entrepreneurs,

investors, public housing agencies, shopping networks, merchants, shopkeepers, clients, city council members, municipality, housing administration, architects, local community, residents and bike lobby.

Warsaw: architects, NGOs, district office, neighbourhood administration, urban planners, municipality, land owners, residents, merchants, shopkeepers, regional administration, district council, market managers/administrators, clients and visitors.

Zabierzów: entrepreneurs, residents, local communities, authorities, architects, mayor, land owners, deputies, circle of village housewives, municipality officials, town planning commission, designers, investors, developers, local leaders, firefighters, Church, village mayors, planners and street vendors

Prague: municipality, citizens and services providers.



Copenhagen: investors, land owners, shop owners, service providers, administration and local municipal government.

Following the obtained IDI results, the list of five typical stakeholders involved in public planning proposed by K. Pawłowska (2008) should be adopted to the local service centre context. This requires distinguishing two additional groups: entrepreneurs and non-profit organisations. Previously they were incorporated in “investors and developers” and “citizens and users of space” but due to the local service sector characteristics they deserve separate treatment. Therefore, the final list of stakeholders named by the interviewees includes:

1. Citizens and users of space: local communities, citizens, residents, visitors, tourists, customers, clients, and citizen groups,
2. Non-profit organisations: non-governmental organisations, churches, parishes, firefighters and circles of village housewives,
3. Public authorities: self-government, decision-makers, neighbourhood administration, neighbourhood councils, municipality office, district office officials and district managers
4. Property owners: commercial and public, individual and institutional, landlords, etc.),
5. Investors and developers (private and public),
6. Planners and designers: town planners, urban designers, architects and experts,
7. Entrepreneurs: services providers, local businesses, sellers, shop managers, shopkeepers, merchants, delivery companies and street vendors.

## 7.2. Typical relationships between stakeholders

The interviews also provided insight into the power relations between particular stakeholders. Even if this question was not directly expressed in the questionnaire, the problem of so called “silent voices” was raised by two interviewees:

*The municipality has a problem defining the real opinions of people. The main issue here is the “silent majority”, whose opinions are unknown. Without this knowledge the participatory decision-making is very difficult.*

(district councillor, Prague)

*We do have NGOs, but it is a thin layer; it is a group of activists, so called urban movements; those are organisations that include only a couple of people. And they are very good partners, but they are also amateur experts, emotional experts (...). But still we cannot get the concrete, I mean that there is a risk of alienation of local authorities and local community because the local community is an enigma.*

(town planner, former director of the development office at the municipality, Wrocław)

Observations focus on the relationship between local authorities and local communities; however, the problem of cooperation and collaboration can be presented in a wider perspective, embracing all the stakeholders, for example shopkeepers, developers and entrepreneurs. Some of the examples are positive, but others are negative:

*The merchants (shopkeepers) wanted to keep their opinion, I would say, while residents wanted a “total Europe” [...]. In this dialogue a concept was produced [...]. They probably really understood, the merchants confronted with citizens in this dialogue, that they will be pushed out by the discount shops, that they will become out-of-date if they do not have such an added value. And this added value is this little market, this local centre.*

(spokesman in district office, Warsaw and promotion and European funds department official, district office, Warsaw)

*We try to support the entrepreneurs in such initiatives. This year an initiative was launched that we will exempt from property tax in the city centre those owners who renovate their buildings so that the look is preserved, so that the shopkeepers also want to invest in their buildings and so that they see that the municipality acknowledges their endeavours [...]. Thus it will look nicer and more people will want to come to the city centre (downtown) and spend their time and money there.*

(head of urban development department, municipality office, Ostrów Wielkopolski)

*We notice that this is a better project [...] there public spaces are somehow designed [...] But in most cases we have a situation in which developers do not get engaged at all. I mean the financial support of developers in public services. Everywhere in the world this support is huge in this public sphere, whereas in Poland the duties of the developer are minuscule.*

(town planner, former director of the development office at the municipality, Wrocław)

Consideration of the local social context might emerge as a crucial principle in designing an LSC. This was clearly presented in a deduction by one of the interviewees:

*Indeed [...] in Ostrów, where single-family housing dominates, people have their own gardens, their bowers, places where they can meet their family and have a BBQ, etc. They sit somewhere on their tiny plots and there they function, and those who live in blocks of flats, they have an allotment house somewhere or they don't ... And maybe soon [...] such a need will evolve that it would be good to have a place [a local service centre] to go, to sit, to walk ...*

(urban planning administrator, municipality office Ostrów Wielkopolski)

Collectively, those observations clearly refer to the concept of social capital, including its bonding, bridging and linking characteristics. Local social and political environments in the studied areas experience a significant deficit in bridging and linking social capital. This observation is not new in Polish social research. As the authors of "Social Diagnosis 2015" note, Poles have relatively little experience in active involvement in organisations or bottom-up initiatives, meetings and volunteer work (Czapiński, 2015). Consequently, they have limited opportunity to learn collective action and gain the skills necessary in social life. "They do not know how to act because they do not take action, and they do not take action because they do not know how to do it – this is the vicious circle of acting for community," (Czapiński 2015, p. 348).

Similarly, in the case of the city of Prague, the lack of communication between interest groups, particularly the municipality, citizen groups and developers, put the process of plan-making in stalemate (Maier K., 2018). In Prague's housing estates, civic groups are active at some places. Some have even had some success in forming associations and joining local elections to counter some undesirable development projects; but they typically fail to establish a sound positive political programme.

Generally, in medium-sized and small towns, the cooperation between stakeholders is relatively good, mainly due to the direct contact with the authorities:

*[...] if residents want to change the bus route – it is no problem, I can call ZK (Zakład Komunikacji) and together with the chairman we decide that we need to do something about it. Generally we have a good cooperation with the municipality. I cannot complain.*

(head of housing administration in one of the neighbourhoods, Ostrów Wielkopolski)

In large cities the relationships are more complex, mainly due to indirect contacts (via specialised institutions) and the dominant position of powerful developers, who have a role to play.

### 7.3. Leadership

The lack of social capital can be partly overcome by introducing effective leadership. Some interviewees present their valuable observations on the role of local leaders in neighbourhoods, in particular the neighbourhood councils:

*Neighbourhood councils are quite active. They organise Child's Day, Mother's Day, Grandpa's Day, Grandma's Day, events for seniors, neighbourhood parties; and there emerged such a place, mainly for the neighbourhood needs. And we also have a second common-room in another neighbourhood [...] but the neighbourhood is so big that there is also a place where residents can meet.*

(head of urban development department, municipality office, Ostrów Wielkopolski)

Other respondents point quite precisely to the need for a local leader who might be responsible for both planning, building and managing an LSC. They also suggest that the position of the leader may be transitive:

*There was a process of passing the function of leader between various groups. And it was very good. Citizens are the main stakeholders on the local level. But on the other hand they obtain support from people close to the municipality or experts [...] But being a leader means a particular programme. Because for example in the Mołdawska centre there were leaders from self-government, from the association of architects, and eventually it seems to me that it would be ok to have leaders from the community [...] And even if the centre does not need a leader in the future [...] there will come a moment when there will be a person who will simply manage this.*

(association of architects representative, Warsaw)

Another aspect of leadership is the bottom-up processes. According to the interviewees a local service centre should be a product of multi-partner cooperation:

*[...] building a bottom-up hierarchy, people have their leaders, then those leaders have their representatives [...] And finally there is the committee taking the decision [...] Of course there were also the municipality officials [...] It greatly depends on those people who work [in the office], they need to be inspired [...] A municipality worker has to be engaged as a creator [...] starting bottom-up processes.*

(head of department of spatial planning, geodesy and property administration, Zabierzów)

The variety of leadership forms in the studied neighbourhoods proves that local political practice requires a flexible management framework that respects local traditions of cooperation and fosters mutual learning. Those observations can be compared to the results of the “Mandie” project of 2011. According to its authors, district centre management is a cross-cutting task that places many demands on the manager’s competencies. The person in charge should be familiar with the fields of urban planning, economic development and social affairs, he/she should be able to coordinate and integrate all relevant partners and provide straightforward delivery of practical solutions (City of Stuttgart, 2011). The presented observations from the seven locations do not necessarily comply with this theoretical model, but they do offer potential for further enhancement in particular local settings.

#### 7.4. Citizen participation and public communication

Effective communication is essential to keep stakeholders well informed, motivated and keen to participate (Yang, 2014). Some interviewees express their opinions on public participation in urban planning and some support their views by presenting good practices in stakeholder involvement. Below we selected the most interesting statements by respondents.

First, most interviewees are aware that urban renewal is not a merely spatial (physical) process but

also requires social change. This is visible in various contexts:

*[...] this project that was recently prepared by the municipality dealt with revitalisation, understood not in the town-planning sense, but as a social revitalisation*

(head of department of spatial planning, geodesy and property administration, Zabierzów)

*[...] it is the question of revitalising not only the space but also the people who live there. Involving them in some way in the project*

(investments department official, municipality office Ostrów Wielkopolski)

Citizen participation may take various forms. Some are conducted personally by the local authorities, others are based on public hearings, and some take the shape of open competitions. All of them have an important influence on the course of planning projects and can clearly contribute to the concept of the LSC:

*[...] we have such a solution that Ms President makes a tour around the neighbourhoods every year or every two years and goes to the neighbourhoods and talks to those residents [...] and all the information is collected and thoroughly noted [...]*

(head of urban development department, municipality office, Ostrów Wielkopolski)

*Citizens who took part in those consultations did not complain about the assortment on this market, because it was what they liked; there were apples, potatoes, in winter sour cabbage for “bigos” [...] But it was very clearly expressed that there is the lack of a bar, that in the morning I go to an elegant café, where I enter in the morning for [...] and a coffee [...] or for a lunch*

(spokesman in district office, Warsaw)

*We organised a competition, but before we organised it, we arranged meetings. We established a committee for building the market square and involved social groups. [...] Our assumption was to collect ideas, there were [...] around 50 works submitted.*

(head of department of spatial planning, geodesy and property administration, Zabierzów)

Interesting observations on citizen participation come from the interviews with urban planners. Some of them point to the limited role of public consultations and state that expert knowledge is more powerful. Others want to include the

people's needs, preferences and fashions in the decision-making processes.

### 7.5. Selected good practices and planning perspectives

Citizen participation brings real enhancements in some areas. One of the interviewees notes:

*Currently there is a second, final stage, which finishes the so called modernisation of Śmigielskiego street. There has been the introduction of a bike lane, greenery and bus stops. And now new needs were revealed for urban furniture such as benches, that there are elderly people who could sit near the pharmacy shop, near the bus stop; there is a need to enhance the equipment.*

(head of urban development department, municipality office, Ostrów Wielkopolski)

Usually, urban renewal initiated by public authorities is expected to attract the private sector and thus enhance the quality of life in particular areas. The respondents confirm that this theoretical assumption really works in their districts:

*If you want people inside the shop, you need people outside the shop. Services should contribute to the urban life in the street (interaction with real humans, observation) by mixed uses. [...] But it is the municipality that is the "steward" of public space.*

(district manager, Copenhagen)

*Municipal investments [revitalisation of one of the city squares] are followed by services development, i.e. entrepreneurs, florist's, ice creams...*

(investments department official, municipality office Ostrów Wielkopolski)

All the observations presented in this section seem to prove that urban planning in LSCs is necessary, but that it can be effectively conducted only in close cooperation with local communities and local markets.

### 7.6. Poland versus abroad, suburbs versus cities

There are particular differences in results from Poland and from abroad, but due to the narrow research sample these are hardly interpretable. For

example the interviewees from Denmark pointed firstly at the private sector role (land owners, shop owners, service providers, investors), positioning the municipality in a secondary place. Conversely, the Czech respondents emphasised the role of public authorities and citizens, followed by (and sometimes conflicting with) commercial market activities. In Poland the need for public-private cooperation has been stressed, accompanied by a list of obstacles, but also by examples of good practices.

Simultaneously, there are visible differences in the range of stakeholders involved in suburbs and in bigger urban areas. The number of potential actors is usually much higher in large and medium-sized cities, whereas in suburbs it includes only a few groups. Also, in suburban and medium-sized cases the relationships between stakeholders seem to be much stronger than in bigger cities (Siechnice, a newly established suburban neighbourhood, may be an exception here). In local contexts, existing and well-established social ties stimulated by various public administration initiatives enable cooperation in solving particular problems and effective managing of public affairs. In more complex urban environments, the revealed conflicting interests require trust to be built from the very beginning, and reaching consensus appears to be a very difficult task.

The case studies in Copenhagen and Prague can also be used as "mirrors" or "references" for Polish locations, showing relevant good and bad practices in shaping LSCs. For example a "high street" model adopted in Sydhavn, equipped with public, private and non-governmental services, accessible by public transport, and built and managed with support from the municipality within an urban renewal programme, may be used as a framework for future planning solutions. In the case of the Prosek neighbourhood, the focus on accessibility and availability of services seems to be a central approach that should be followed in all LSCs projects; however, the original concept from the 1970s has been abandoned more recently. As the poor accessibility of services and facilities became a matter of criticism in many recent residential developments all over the country, the Ministry of Regional Development issued guidelines that request that planning of housing development be avoided in places where there

is no basic civic infrastructure within walking distance (MMR, 2016).

## 8. Limitations of the study

The presented research findings offer an interesting insight into perceptions of local service centre from the perspective of citizen participation. However, when interpreting the results of the interviews we need to be aware of the weaknesses of this method.

First, the research sample is not representative of all settlement contexts. It does not include villages or small cities; however, the selected locations are supposed to reflect the main trends in current urban development in Europe, focusing on big cities and suburban areas.

Second, the interviewees do not represent all the actors involved in the local development processes but only selected groups influencing the public decision-making. Moreover, qualitative research methods always bear the risk of researcher subjectivity and open the way to alternative interpretations. Despite those doubts, we believe that this research contributes to current planning debates on citizen participation and urban development patterns, offering a good starting point for further discussion.

## 9. Conclusions

The concept of a local service centre presented in this paper says that a properly planned and managed LSC can bring particular advantages to the local community: it may raise the quality of life by offering easy access to essential (everyday) services; it may provide appropriate public space for social integration; its competitive local market may stimulate entrepreneurial attitudes among citizens; it may make the living environment more attractive by promoting diverse land use; it may shape the local (territorial) identity by presenting the history of the neighbourhood, its traditions and values.

In this paper we raised several questions about the process of planning and managing LSCs, about meeting the needs of local communities and involving particular stakeholders. Those issues are notably

important for post-modernist disputes in planning, where complexity, uncertainty and fragmentation challenge traditional, hierarchical top-down administrative procedures and appeal for widened citizen participation and for redefining the set of stakeholders. They also re-raise the issue of the role of planners, who often stand between citizens, developers and officials, but these stakeholders no longer constitute clearly defined interest groups (cf. Allmendinger, 2002). Unlike the modern planning theory, they cannot operate in “the public interest” and use the privilege of its representatives (Sandercock, 1998).

In order to address these questions we conducted several in-depth interviews with various groups of actors in seven locations across Europe. We wanted to study the stakeholders who take part in designing, building and managing local service centres and to find some general planning and policy solutions for the LSC. The interviewees’ reflections gave significant insight into the practical implementation of the LSC concept. Below we synthesise the most important issues revealed in our research.

1) The local service centre should be an open and participatory enterprise (which is not really big news). The thing is that an LSC is a focal point at the neighbourhood/district level, satisfying the essential needs of citizens and enabling the comprehensive development of local communities; therefore, it requires special attention in setting the list of stakeholders. Bottom-up initiatives involving local actors are crucial in this process. An appropriate, economically sustainable mix of activities and services being offered by an LSC is a precondition for the viability and sustainability of the LSC, especially where there is competition with large shopping and amusement centres outside the neighbourhood.

2) The most important stakeholders that should be involved in planning, designing, building and managing LSCs are: the municipality, neighbourhood/district councils, shopkeepers, services providers, developers, residents and land owners. This list should be adapted to particular spatial and social contexts. For example, different stakeholders act in the cases of new development (developers and public planners playing the main role) than in revitalisations of existing neighbourhoods (where citizens, the municipality and, possibly, shopkeepers have the opportunity to take on leading roles).

3) The relationships between stakeholders vary from positive to negative. A key challenge is to generate bridging and linking social capital within local communities to enable cooperation. At the same time, the commercial part of the LSC would need a guarantee from the municipality that no big commercial facility will threaten the local market of small businesses.

4) An important role is played by the leader of the local service centre. This role can be played by various actors, depending on the stage of development of the neighbourhood. Flexible management that follows local traditions of cooperation and fosters mutual learning seems to be a crucial factor in local political practice.

5) Respecting the local social and political context is a central task. In some areas there will be many actors with conflicting interests, whereas in others a smaller number of stakeholders will present strong social ties and will be able to cooperate.

6) The forms and stages of public involvement should vary depending on the stakeholders selected for the planning process, and their capacity, qualifications and expectations. In line with the territorial approach to development (see Heffner and Gibas, 2013), each participation programme should take into account local resources, traditions, political culture and social context, adopting both formal and informal communication channels (see Damurski, 2015).

A conceptual framework or a model for LSC development might be a useful tool for effective selection and involvement of the key stakeholders. This study introducing hands-on knowledge of the local political environment is one of the building bricks for such a model. However, all the recommendations presented in this paper should ultimately be verified in planning practice.

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