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## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE OBJECTS

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### ZAAANGAŻOWANIE SPOŁECZNE W PROCESIE PROJEKTOWANIA OBIEKTÓW ARCHITEKTURY KRAJOBRAZU

#### **Abstract**

Although the issues of social involvement in the landscaping design process are essential for creating a people-friendly environment, in Poland, it is still insufficiently identified. The purpose of the article is to present selected examples of various levels and methods of public involvement in the landscaping design process in comparison to the theoretical principles of public participation in the architectural design. The analysed examples were selected in terms of differences in public participation levels, social dialogue tools used and communication with the designer, as well as due to a different functional program. Social involvement should not end at the stage of pre-design consultations. It is necessary to aim at its maintenance and strengthening also at the design stage, and, above all, during implementation and further use of the space.

**Keywords:** public engagement, public space, landscape architecture

#### **Streszczenie**

Problematyka zaangażowania społecznego w procesie projektowania obiektów architektury krajobrazu, choć kluczowa dla kreacji środowiska przyjaznego dla człowieka, w realiach polskich jest jeszcze niedostatecznie rozpoznana. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie na wybranych przykładach różnego stopnia i sposobu zaangażowania społecznego w proces projektowania obiektów architektury krajobrazu na tle teoretycznych zasad partycypacji społecznej w projektowaniu. Analizowane przykłady zostały dobrane zarówno pod kątem różnic w poziomach partycypacji społecznej, wykorzystywanych narzędzi dialogu społecznego i komunikacji z projektantem, jak i ze względu na różny program funkcjonalny projektowanych obiektów. Zaangażowanie społeczne nie powinno kończyć się na etapie konsultacji przedprojektowych. Dążyć należy do jego podtrzymania również na etapie projektowania, a także realizacji i dalszego użytkowania przestrzeni.

**Słowa kluczowe:** partycypacja społeczna, przestrzeń publiczna, architektura krajobrazu

## 1. Introduction

The issues of public engagement in the design process for landscape architecture objects, even if crucial for the creation of a human-friendly environment, in Polish reality, are still insufficiently researched. In the effect, the accomplishment of theoretical public participation rules encounters large practical difficulties. What seems problematic is not only the choice of type of participation, but also tools connected therewith. All too often the public participation is understood and accomplished in form of informing the community about planned actions, but without granting it a possibility to shape the final decision. Still, public participation in architecture can concern both the active participation in decision making and an active participation in the realisation of space. Properly used tools, which are adjusted to the scale of action and its place, prove extremely important for effective design and investment processes.

## 2. Aim and methods

The aim of the paper is to present, with use of selected examples, the different degree and ways for social engagement in the process of designing objects of landscape architecture confronted with public participation in theory. The analysis was based on examples of designs by the Department of Landscape Design of the West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, concerning areas located in the city of Szczecin.

The analysed examples were chosen both because of their differences in levels of social participation, and in the tools utilised for social dialogue and communication with the designer, and also because of their different functional programs. The examples were chosen due to the fact that they were all small objects of landscape architecture that strongly focus the local communities around them. Designs of integrative spaces for local communities utilise both environmental and educational themes, and also references to the identity of the place that the inhabitants identify themselves with.

The analysis included:

- ▶ the course of the design process in the decision-making process,
- ▶ the mode in which the local community was engaged,
- ▶ elements utilised in the design that enhance the degree of social involvement.

## 3. Public participation in theory

The notion of public participation denotes the participation of citizens in managing public issues of their respective communities. Engagement in the issues of the community is made possible after meeting some conditions, which include: identification of the most substantial problems, learning the inhabitants' preferences regarding the way they should be solved and their will to participate, selecting leaders, explaining ways for their solution and gaining acceptance of the inhabitants for the adopted solutions, inclusion of the inhabitants in the

action [5, p. 41]. There are 5 classic tools for public participation: elections, referenda, social consultations, administrative proceedings and direct action.

In the context of shaping space, public participation plays the role of a dialogue between the architect and user, but also of the integrative element for the local community. “Planning spaces are this area, in which the presence of direct democracy (e.g. social consultations) is particularly justified as setting zoning regulations concerns vital interests of both the whole local community and its respective member” [10, p. 43]. In fact, it seems that public participation can be accomplished with different methods and with different degrees of engagement of the community. Participation of inhabitants in the spatial planning process is linked with the mental or social need to participate in the creation of one’s own environment and need for active stance towards it. If this need cannot be satisfied, it becomes the source of socially negative feelings, such as indifference and frustration [1, pp. 5–50] that can be further deepened.

Carole Pateman indicates three main types of participation that differ in the degree they engage the participants: the pseudo-participation (only individuals with whom the actions are consulted are engaged), partial participation (the community engages in the decision-making process but only small portion thereof influences its final shape) and full participation (every member of the community has equal influence on the outcome of decision making) [6]. Jules Pretty quotes a more specific typology, listing as many as eight types of participation [10]. These are:

- ▶ manipulative participation – an apparent action that only engages representatives of the community who have no actual influence on the decisions made;
- ▶ passive manipulation – the people are informed about planned action, but their opinion is not taken into account;
- ▶ participation for information sharing – exchange of information depends on professionals, participation in decision making takes place by answering questions (e.g. in surveys) without the possibility to influence the course of the decision-making process;
- ▶ participation through asking questions – engagement takes the form of participation in a survey prepared by the external company that is used to define the problems and solutions, with the possibility of altering the solutions in the light of answers received. The opinions gathered must be included in the decision-making process;
- ▶ participation by material benefits – participation is linked with particular benefits, e.g. the inhabitant engage in works in exchange for food;
- ▶ functional participation – participation in the framework of a group formed to set the goals for action;
- ▶ interactive participation – participation includes plan analysis and formation of new ideas, frequently with the use of interdisciplinary work methods, and the group formed has an influence on the final decisions;
- ▶ self-mobilisation – participation in order to trigger change, in form of independent initiative of inhabitants acting collectively.

The methods used within public participation include mostly different types of workshops that engage local communities, sometimes taking the form of a series of events, during



Table 1. Selected social dialogue tools [13]

Dialogue tools	Disadvantages of the tool	Advantages of the tool
<b>Drawing workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– no possibility to acquire ready solutions (children are unable to design that space)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– group integration, engagement of children,</li> <li>– building emotional relations with space, feeling of being its host,</li> <li>– designer engagement</li> </ul> <p>the feeling of the purposefulness of the task acquired by the designer</p>
<b>Direct interview with teachers and management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– repetition of well-known schemes and functional solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– discussion possibility</li> <li>choice of optimal solution through negotiation, development of the joint concept,</li> <li>– increase of designer's awareness of user needs</li> </ul>
<b>Survey based on open-ended questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of possibility to develop the common concept through negotiations,</li> <li>– the threat of omission or simplification of information already at survey preparation stage and later in data processing,</li> <li>– suggesting answers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– acquiring information about user needs,</li> <li>– increase of designer's awareness of user needs</li> </ul>
<b>Direct conversations with residents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of possibility to develop common concept through negotiations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– possibility to add details to data acquired in the survey,</li> <li>– increase of designer's awareness of user needs,</li> <li>– getting to know the future users of space better</li> </ul>
<b>Survey based on close-ended questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of possibility to develop the common concept through negotiations,</li> <li>– threat of omission or simplification of information already at survey preparation stage and later in data processing,</li> <li>– suggesting ready answers,</li> <li>– limited possibility of leaning future users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– increase of designer's awareness of user needs</li> </ul>

which the inhabitants are familiarised with the design criteria. Forming group unity is also an important element of workshops [9]. “The choice of an appropriate dialogue tool still requires the knowledge of its advantages and limitations” (Tab. 1.) [13].

Unfortunately, in the context of spatial planning, social participates frequently take the form of participation of the community in making decisions about the space through information only. When it is lead in different ranges and scales of architecture [12], it can still concern active participation in decisions and execution. In this context, social participation becomes one of the ways the idea of homeliness can be accomplished [7, 8] and also positive



change – both in a special and in a social context, enhancing the identification of users with space and influencing the individualisation of architecture [5].

#### **4. Social participation in Poland**

In Polish law, the regulations pertaining to a social participation in the processes of shaping public spaces are included in the Act of 27 March 2003 on spatial planning and management of space [14]. These procedures concern most of all:

- ▶ formal applications for zoning studies and development directions of the municipality and local zoning regulations at the beginning of the procedure for making its draft (or draft of its changes) by an executive authority of the municipality (art. 11 p. 1 of the aforesaid Act – in the case of study, art. 17 p. 1 in the case of Local Zoning Regulations) and their consideration by those authorities (art. 11 p. 3 – study, art. 17 p. 3 Local Zoning Regulations [LZR]);
- ▶ communicating the new LZR study, after design, consideration and agreements to the local community by making it accessible and opening public discussion on the solutions adopted in the draft municipal study or draft LZR (art. 11 p. 10 of the aforesaid Act in the case of study & art. 17 p. 10 in the case of LZR);
- ▶ making notes on the draft study and LZR (art. 11 p. 11 of the aforesaid Act in the case of a study and art. 17 p. 11 – LZR) and their consideration by municipal authority in the final stage of planning procedure (art. 11 p. 12 for the study and art. 17. P. 12 for the LZR).

Thus, the residents have the possibility to participate in area planning of the community by submitting notes and participating in public discussions on different stages of preparation of Local Zoning and the Study of Conditions and Directions for Zoning Management. Still, as Katarzyna Kikosicka observes, it is worth to consider that the law does not state how the results of public discussion are to influence the zoning design, and the main problems connected with the participation of a community in zoning development include a lack of sufficient information about start of work on local zoning, and the form of planning documentation that is difficult to understand for citizens [3].

The quite precise formulation, in Polish law, of principles of social consultations at the level of zoning regulations of the community, is not continued on the level of designing individual public spaces, including landscape architecture objects. Social consultations depend on the good will of the investor (most frequently the commune, less frequently a private investor) and are currently rather rare. Unfortunately, in Poland, we still observe significant aversion and scepticism towards the participation of the society in design processes, which frequently is the consequence of the concept of limitation of designer's freedoms [8].

Among the examples of good practices that engage the local community in the decision-making process pertaining to space, we can list actions by Pracownia Przestrzeni Publicznej – Institute of Design Kielce during their work on City Salon in the Kielce Market Square. In 2013, the Institute of Design organised meetings with Kielce residents, asking them to choose functions that should appear in this place during the so-called “civic game” that utilised – to



some extent – the “Planning for real” consultation method<sup>1</sup>. As one of the designers, Michał Gdak, states: “They could participate in three different ways. First of all, we placed a mock-up of the market square with empty spaces that the residents could fill with pictograms representing the respective functions and we then analysed which of them were most frequently repeating. Then, we gave them the possibility to arrange the space on their own, with use of wooden pawns that represented the respective functions and activities. Thirdly, the residents could also cast cards with the desired function in a collection box installed in the centre of the town. We also gave them the possibility of designing their own functions and activities that they wish to use in the market square. Thanks to that information acquired from the inhabitants, we formed project assumptions that included one main theme in form of re-introduction of greenery in the Market space, but also activities such as: sitting, sipping, surfing, reading, playing, talking, walking, meeting” [After: 15]. The tool applied in this case for participation through asking was given an attractive form of a city game, with its results included in the design stage, and today, we can already confirm that it enabled the “taming” of the public space that was, to that date, dehumanised, and now, the inhabitants are keen to spend their time in it.

## **5. Course of the design processes with different social engagement levels on selected examples**

### **5.1. School garden at the Public Primary School in Głębokie in Szczecin**

In the case of objects with a strictly defined and limited number of users, good communication between the designer and future users is possible, and can be based on information gathered and their needs, and inducing the will to participate in the construction of design and cooperation.

The Public Primary School in Głębokie was launched in 1948. First, it was located in a residential building. But it was not long that the Ministry of Education granted funds from its experimental schools fund to construct a building to house the school. The school was designed by architect Janowski, and patterned on the model of Swedish schools, constructed as a single level building adjusted in its scale to the detached homes forming its surrounding. The new building, completed and launched in 1960, was quite a sensation with its pavilion design. Each of the classrooms was built as a pavilion housing a classroom, dressing room and classroom garden (Fig. 1). Both its location (villa residential area, the proximity of a forest) and architectural solutions made it possible for the school to uniquely accomplish the idea of integrating school that is accessible to everyone and promotes ecological knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> „Planning for real” is a method for social consultations that utilizes meetings during which participants, provided with appropriate materials, prepare large, 3D spatial models of given area. Participants use the ready model to put cards that present local problems that require solving (e.g. the accessible infrastructure, healthcare, public transport, etc.) on it. When putting their cards on the model the inhabitants should at the same time state a suggestion concerning the solutions connected with the respective place. Then, in small groups, priority actions are chosen and on their basis, the plans of action are drawn [After: 14].



Fig. 1. The Public Primary School in Głębokie, Szczecin (photo by M. Czałczyńska-Podolska)

The area surrounding the school and the class gardens became probing grounds for development of the concept of development of garden space that would best fit the aims of the school: integration and ecological education. Local, communal character of school allowed for pre-design consultations with teachers, meetings with parents and observations of children, linked with drawing workshops. Drawing workshops, during which the children have drawn works concerning the school grounds enabled gathering information about the development elements that were important for children, with plants, especially the species that were known and liked by children due to their ludic properties, proving the most important ones. Preparation of own visions became a major activating factor for children, encouraging them to cooperate in the completion of class gardens and works in the schoolyard. Meeting with parents, which was used to present the variants for development of class gardens, supported with information about the children's vision, formed the basis to include parents in organisational end execution works. Awareness of purpose of work (class gardens are formed for a set group of children who will use them for several years) increased the chances of success of the investment.

What was formed were integrating gardens that differed in form and character, used didactic elements, mainly from the field of ecology and development and were formed with the close participation of children, forming the pride of classes and the whole school community and an element that builds and integrates the school community (Fig. 2). Engagement of children and parents in decision-making and execution also contributed to the development of class communities (Fig. 3). The gardens make the school stand out from others, forming an important aspect of its identity, and the edible plants used in them additionally enhance the effect of homeliness of space.



Fig. 2. Concept for development of class gardens at the Public Primary School in Głębokie – project completed by students of landscape architecture under the supervision of M. Czalczyńska-Podolska



Fig. 3. Gardening works in one of class gardens (photo by M. Czałczyńska-Podolska)

## 5.2. The Wojtek Bear Square in Szczecin

In the case of larger communities that include whole housing estates, the design-development process is linked with a selection of clear leaders of the enterprise, most frequently its inventors. The design-development process requires both working with the group of mostly interested people, and use of such methods of dialogue that will enable participation and engagement of the broader community.

Representatives of Estate Board of the Krzekowo-Bezrzecze Estate came with the initiative of new development for a square located near the crossing of ulica Żołnierska and ulica Żyzna, inspired by Wojtek the Bear, who served with soldiers of the gen. Anders army all the way from Iran, through the battle of Monte Cassino, up to Scotland. The tradition of the place was the source of the idea. The square is close to ul. Żołnierska [“Soldiers St.”] and ul. Gen. Sosabowskiego, and the NATO Corps is also based nearby. Thus, the statue of the bear was to become the characteristic element of development and the military themes were used both as elements of small architecture, playground devices and details. On the basis of several consultation meetings, a development concept for the square was developed in form of type of military playground – an educational play area with an integrative character that was to fulfil recreational functions for the whole community of the estate. The prepared design variations were made available on the webpage of estate board, thus making it possible to conduct a plebiscite among the residents. The chosen concept was developed in detail and subjected to further consultations. Among the development details proposed were, among others, an educational path with the statue of Wojtek the Bear, and a field for construction and movement plays, sprinklers,



grass-covered hills resembling trenches, a family meeting ground under an openwork structure and a flower meadow that introducing garden character in the space, also grants its homeliness (Fig. 4.). The whole was in a form that resembles military style (Fig. 5.).



Fig. 4. Development concept for Wojtek the Bear Square – military playground – project for Board of Krzekowo-Bezrzecze Estate in 2014, authors: M. Czałczyńska-Podolska, J. Lubarska, S. Mazurek



Fig. 5. Development concept for Wojtek the Bear Square – military playground – project for Board of Krzekowo-Bezrzecze Estate in 2014, authors: M. Czałczyńska-Podolska, J. Lubarska, S. Mazurek

The concept that appeared on the webpage of the Board, but also on wyborcza.pl News Portal was met mainly with supporting opinions. Unfortunately, one of the communities that neighbours the square directly was against its new development and the meeting of the Board and the protesting community did not end with conclusive decisions. The protesters supported their stand with fear of new users of the square and playground. In the effect, further works on the project were halted, but most probably they will be continued in future.

### 5.3. Gen. F. S. Sosabowski Square in Szczecin

The idea of the new development of Gen. Sosabowski Square in Szczecin is also an example of grassroots mobilisation, forming an independent initiative of residents active in the Board of Krzekowo-Bezrzecze Estate. For the last ten years, the Board of the Estate was actively pursuing actions that were to commemorate the person of general S. F. Sosabowski. The initiative started in 2007 with the “Honor Generała” [Honor of the General] movie by TVP Szczecin journalist and board member - Joanny Pieciukiewicz. The next action of the Board, commemorating the war hero came in 2008 with the Junior High School no. 27 and the newly built street, forming the extension of Gen. Taczaka, being named after general Sosabowski. There is a close relative of Sosabowski living in Szczecin - Wiesław Użarowski, who also engaged in the ceremonial opening of new street and proposed to commemorate the Polish hero with a monument in form of a rock with a plaque. The monument was placed in a square that to that date was run down, between Łukasińskiego, Bracka and Gen. Sosabowskiego streets.

In 2012 the board members initiated activities that aimed at the creation of a common recreational space for all residents of the estate. They turned to the Department of Landscape Design of ZUT in Szczecin for aid in designing several concepts for the development of that



Fig. 6. Development project for Gen. F.S. Sosabowski Square in Szczecin – project for Board of the Krzekowo-Bezrzecze Estate, 2013, authors: M. Rzeszotarska-Palka, M. Kościńska, J. Lubarska, S. Mazurek



square, which were to form the basis for further consultations with residents. Pursuant to suggestions of board members general Sosabowski was to form an inspiration for the creation of design concepts, and the commemorative rock one of the main compositional elements. Three development concepts were designed: one utilised the motive of a parachute in the design of flowerbeds on the lawn, another one the motive of general's epaulets in the surface engraving. These designs were then presented at a meeting of the Board of Krzekowo-Bezzecze Estate that was open for residents. Some 40 people participated, and after it was ended, the designs were presented on the Estate's official Facebook profile, on paper, and in the Szczecin edition of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, also in a radio broadcast and an article on the webpage of *Radio Szczecin*. Vote for the best design was conducted in three forms: on Facebook, on the webpage of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and by e-mails sent directly to the Board. On 9 April 2013 the vote was ended, with a total of 2840 votes cast (according to the register of residents of the Szczecin City Council there are some 4000 residents in the estate). After adding all votes, it turned out that concept no. 3 with a total of 1323 votes was most popular, with concept no. 2 gathering 1193 and 324 votes cast for concept no. 1. On the basis of results of residents votes for the development concept of one third of the total square area a technical design was developed, also subjected to multiple consultations with board members of the Krzekowo-Bezzecze estate board (Fig. 6).

Another investment-promoting action was the action conducted by the Board together with Junior High School no. 27 in form of planting crocuses in shape of a parachute in the square. Between the end of 2013 and 2014, the obelisk commemorating gen. Sosabowski was



Fig. 7. Gen. F.S. Sosabowski Square in Szczecin, June 2017 (photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Palka)

moved, raised and lighted with the active participation of residents. The parachute ornament made of crocuses was already visible in March 2014 and the following years, up to 2016, when the Estate Board finally managed to gather financial resources (PLN 164 000) and the investment was completed by Zakład Usług Komunalnych in Szczecin (Fig. 7, 8).

The main idea of the completed project was to get a coherent public space, both as a symbol of identity of inhabitants and allowing the organisation of events addressed to all residents of Szczecin, and soldiers of the NATO Corps stationed in nearby barracks, through the introduction of function commemorating general Sosabowski. The investment included:

- ▶ relocation of the existing commemorative monument in a place that allowed its proper exhibition – on the axis of the whole development in the southern part of square, on a new pedestal,
- ▶ locating a paved square around the commemorative stone, as dominant element of development,
- ▶ introduction of the motive of general's epaulets in the square surface with use of concrete blocks and plants adjusted to movement of pedestrians (Irish moss),
- ▶ designing a new footpath along the axis of development – main alley running from the square with the commemorative rock to a small piazza with magnolia surrounded with a stone bank.



Fig. 8. Gen. F.S. Sosabowski Square in Szczecin, June 2017 (photo by M. Rzeszotarska-Palka)

## 6. Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the course of the design process, engagement mode for the local community in the decision-making process and use of design elements that enhance the degree of social engagement proved that:

- ▶ the social engagement in the design process is crucial for the success of the investment;
- ▶ a particularly beneficial situation takes place when the design processes are initiated by the local community, or the future users;
- ▶ the extent and degree of consolidation of the local community plays an important role in the whole consultation and design processes, influencing their final outcome;
- ▶ appropriate choice of development elements (including plants) may enhance the social engagement both in the design processes and during the subsequent stage of use of space.

Social engagement should not end on the pre-design consultations stage. Efforts should be made to support and enhance it also on the design stage, and most of all during its construction and further use of space. The environmentally friendly and educational elements used in the design for school gardens largely contributed to the strengthening of bonds of the school community with space and the feeling of belonging to it. Another factor that positively influences the engagement of local community is a clear definition of the identity of the place, as it was the case of both squares in the Krzekowo-Bezrzecze estate. The grassroots initiative of inhabitants, inspired by the eventful life of General Sosabowski and the figure of Wojtek the Bear contributed to the construction of projects selected by popular vote and thoroughly consulted with the board members.

In the case of works on the design of the Wojtek the Bear square, the recalling of the tradition of location, cooperation with representatives of local residents and consultations in the design of spatial concept proved insufficient to finalise and construct it. The Gen. Sosabowski square project had a different outcome. Determined and long-lasting actions of board members that promoted both the General and the idea of creating a common place for residents in the square named after the general succeeded. A space was thus created that both the residents of the estate and students of the Gen. Sosabowski High School can identify with. The square that was run down to the date became a meeting ground both during official celebrations commemorating the hero with participation of students and the soldiers stationed in the nearby NATO barracks, and also in actions organised by Estate Board such as: common crocus planting, care for seasonal plants in flowerbeds or installations of Christmas decorations.

The school gardens, realised on one part with the cooperation of children and parents, and on the other, utilising the educational and pro-environmental elements in the design, which produce strong bonds with space and between the members of school community, prove that both the decision-making and construction process and the narrative layer of the spatial concept (accomplished by themes that are understood and wanted by users, who identify with them) form an element that is crucial for a successful completion of the development.



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