Roundtable 3: The Future of the Neighbourhood

SIAULIAI, 18 SEP 2009, 11:00-12:30h

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Summary

The round table discussions with four focus groups were used to explore PP experiences on the basic questions in relation to the neighbourhoods. The topics were addressed with a help of some keywords. Furthermore, we have based our discussion of the future of the neighbourhood in relation mainly to the present situation, management (what is already happening) and the main problems to be solved with a help of proposed the possible theoretical strategies.

KEYWORDS:	Open public spaces; Parking Lots; Streets; Commercial/social; Etc.
QUESTIONS:	Priorities; Strategies; Organisation; Involvement; Responsibility

Out of four short discussions with PP, the main ideas evolved, which are shown below.

MAIN IDEAS

1.   PRIORITIES
Bad condition of the pathways - municipalities do not invest in repair works;
Bad condition of the public spaces;
Parking situation - no places
Traffic jams
Car accidents
Bad conditions for bicycles – roads, routes, parking
Ownership – development
Access roads – ownership?
Development of retail – centre structure
Isolation or integration of "negative" individuals
Awareness about the neighbourhood (Where are the borders? Who is responsible?)
Importance of the structure of the city – morphology and scale of blocks;

2.   STRATEGIES
The creation of infrastructure for the development of interpersonal relations;
Citizens initiative to come first – to improve the availability of public spaces and buildings for disabled and old people;
Integrated development plan to reduce the dangers;
Neighbourhood in terms of relationships (EU supported!)
Medium term. Integrated development project;
Awareness campaign to explain and raise understanding about special areas;
Availability of information such as signs;
Creation of a social identity for the region;
Monitoring of energy end use for competitions/ Contest between Home owner

associations (HOAs), where the first step could be the elaboration of the Energy
Performance Certificate (EPC);

3.   ORG. OF THE PLANNING PROCESS
Local authorities;
Politicians;
Citizens;
Shared responsibility between municipality and local community;
An organisation/institution responsible for the development of a neighbourhood
consisting local level authority and the local community and/or private sector

INTRODUCTION

Despite a variety of emerged interpretations or images of any given neighbourhoods, which are central to the
Project, there are some general points in common to all. First of all, the physical layout containing mostly medium/
high rise apartment blocks with large green public spaces seem to predominate. The development of the
neighbourhoods that are at the centre of our interest was influenced by economic and social conditions that no
longer apply in the contemporary world. The conditions that are causing a big amount of problems could be named
as: the separation of functions, scale of the apartment blocks, and the simple type of architecture, which, at that
time, was considered to be spacious as well as affordable.

PRIORITIES

To summarise this, the six key antecedences elaborated within the round-table discussion could be placed into
three different groups of priorities:

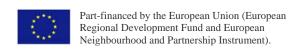|	
Physical	The grid of accessibility
	Public spaces
Political/	Structure of the central uses (where should they be placed at?)
organisational	Importance of the structure of the whole city in relation to the neighbourhood;
Social	The definition of the neighbourhood (are they identified by people?)
	Negative individuals: integration or isolation

At present, many neighbourhoods show clear signs of the decay and sometimes the long list of problems could be
enumerated. In Central East European countries large numbers of the housing stock has been extensively
privatised at the beginning of 90's the state or the local government authority still owns the public spaces, and has
general responsibility for the services. Nevertheless the authority's role in the neighbourhood areas has visibly
become passive, routine-driven, and bureaucratised. For this reason the present situation on the neighbourhoods
of our interest to some extent is the consequence of broader processes in the city/or the country as a whole. They
therefore need more concerted, more complex actions as they deteriorate. Physical problems of the old housing
sock include: problems with heat insulation, defects in the heating systems, leaking roofs, aged water and sewage
systems, unsafe balconies, poorly functioning lightning systems, etc. Several physical, economic, social, etc.
problems related to the whole quarters of multi-family buildings originated, as well. The problems include: physical
decay of the public spaces, the increasing concentration of workless and low income households, social and racial
tension between residents; high turnover leading to the erosion of social cohesion; and the deterioration of local
private and public services. Neighbourhoods do experience problems with liveability and safety: the separation of
functions within blocks of apartment buildings leaded to unsafe places and conflicts about the maintenance of

public spaces. Safety problems are related to drug abuse, the lack of meeting places for youngsters, and the anti-social behaviour of some groups of people.

When talking about accessibility question within neighbourhoods, it should be mentioned that whatever the function of the connections within neighbourhood is, they need to be thought as an inherent part of the whole urban structures. Connections should provide the maximum number of choices for inhabitants on how to make their way around, with a presumption in favour of walking, cycling or using public transportation. The maximised opportunities to choose the means of movement means that there is a need to form the routes all of which are felt to be safe.

The population on the neighbourhoods includes elderly long-term residents, younger, often temporary residents, and sometimes ethnic minorities. Some inhabitants already know that they will live only temporarily on the estates and, as a result, display little interest in it and see no need to participate in activities that aim to improve the environment or the dwellings. It has long been acknowledged that different housing neighbourhoods acquire different social identities; however, there is no clear understanding of who constitutes the neighbourhood. Due to this, efforts to engage with the community are often limited.

STRATEGIES

1. **Integrated development: plans, programmes**

One of the round-table suggestions was to create the Integrated Development Plan for the neighbourhoods. The plan should outline key areas where there is a need to intervene and focus the resources in order to achieve the goals and should be dedicated to the local authority to organise particular measures to solve the rising problems. It is a plan to help set budget priorities and should be agreed between local government and residents of the city neighbourhoods. As a major limitation of neighbourhood management that could be named is the lack of strategies for implementing it beyond a series of experiments. For this reason the support of the pilot areas in developing neighbourhoods could find some solutions.

2. **Citizen initiatives and involvement/ municipalities initiatives to start strategy planning and to include citizens**

Developments in neighbourhoods are influenced by economic, demographic, socio-cultural and political developments on the urban, regional, and national scales. Every neighbourhood is located in (or close to) a city, within a region for this reason influenced by a particular combination of the wider developments. However, there is a strong need to involve the inhabitants to participate when planning their neighbourhoods. Current methods of involving the neighbourhood inhabitants, and those involved in the planning process are often limited and are often determined by the organisational structures within local authorities. The process in not the type of experience which a member of the '*general'* public feels particularly comfortable with and is not the best process for dealing with large numbers of objectors across a range of topics.

One of the possible solutions is for the local authorities to make more models of participation such as public meetings, focus groups and consultation documents (maps, brochures, information leaflets, questionnaires, etc.). There should be stands providing information in public buildings, such as libraries, community centres, etc. and employees could be able to support the community with help on using the range of available information. A commitment to deliver a whole range of services to the citizens on-line should be made by the local authorities as well. On-line public consultation exercises could be used as a mean to augment more traditional methods of participation such as public meetings. It has been shown that E-participation can have practical benefits for participation and offers some means of wider public involvement in particular planning problems. It can remove some barriers to participation by providing 24/7 access and it can foster a non-confrontational environment.

In the respect of inhabitants within neighbourhoods, it should be taken into account, that a neighbourhood dominated by owner occupation might be better able to attract participation than public – tenancy dominated estates, while the domination of private rental housing might create least incentive of residents to participate. There is a need for measures to form a solid community, willing to participate within the planning processes. This might be a case of raising the neighbourhood identity issues.

   3. **Awareness campaigns: explanation and raise of understanding about neighbourhoods: availability of information, creation of social identity, the monitoring of the energy use and use of competitions within entities**

The creation of place or neighbourhood identities is a complex and dynamic socio-cultural process. The development and maintenance of a particular identity for a specific neighbourhood can be the result of a complex weaving of internal and external interactions and forces. Community was constructed through familiar, everyday social interactions within various localised settings, which were often enough to give people a powerful sense of attachment and belonging. In each neighbourhood, notions of community were declining in response to ever-increasing individualism. For this reason there is a need for joint activities or the events for the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods. Methods to raise the perception of the neighbourhood include the organisation of a specific awareness campaigns, as well as the community information/or support centre, even maps distinguishing different neighbourhoods with specific sighs for the neighbourhood.

ORGANISATION (involvement and responsibilities):

   1. Local authorities, politicians;
   2. Citizens/inhabitants;
   3. Shared responsibilities;
   4. Organisations that promote and are responsible for the development;

Neighbourhood planning organisation (or in other words it could be named as management) cannot operate in a vacuum. It requires leadership, political clout, dedicated funds and above all the creation of a neighbourhood level vehicle in every neighbourhood where it is needed. So far it has usually been created in response to extreme problems and has not been adopted more widely. This is because it requires the combination of many elements which are not within the direct control of a single body. For this reason several types of initiatives, such as local housing companies, community based housing associations, tenant management organisations, local authority initiatives, independent companies, other partnerships funded by different schemes could be joint to operate the proper delivery of neighbourhood development.

The notion of place making implies a more proactive mobilisation of possible stakeholders in support of a long term, holistic vision to improve the quality of life and the life changes of urban dwellers. Ideally, an integrated and collaborative (multi-agency) approach to policy making is called for, the exploitation of local knowledge (professional and resident), and the building up of relational resources to facilitate the above.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrated urban development strategies need to have long-tem visions for the neighbourhoods; projects and resources need to be based on a longer term strategies, with greater flexibilities to join up with other initiatives to create holistic approach to urban development. The identification of the neighbourhood community and the development of meaningful engagement with all members is vital and it is of a big importance that all involved share an understanding of the problems and solutions with residents.