

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC INSIGHT IN URBAN PLANNING PROCESS: INCREASING EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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Public interest (citizens, investors, interest groups, NGOs, media and similar) in the urban planning process and proposed planning solutions, certainly is not negligible, however, according to the opinion of the professional public, it has often been wrongly directed and conducted. The legal basis, which in rudimentary outlines prescribes the procedure of the public insight/hearing, i.e. the presentation of the planning document, does not provide sufficient input, however, also does not prevent organization of more qualitative and productive communication with the interested individuals, not only at the very finalization of plan development, but also at the initial phases of the initiative for decision making or forming the conceptual solution. In order to better comprehend the real needs of the citizens, urban planners should much earlier than the public insight i.e. presentation of already formed solutions, get in touch with citizens, interview them, organize workshops, insights and meetings on specific topics, trying to explain the planning procedures, standards and norms, as well as to present all that which is required in order to raise the quality of life in the neighborhood and provide some level of public interest and good, and thus increase the value of real estate. On the other hand, the citizens knowing their living environment the best should participate more actively in its creation, by indicating to the problems and needs, reacting to certain topics and thus assisting the professionals in shaping and committing their planning solutions. To that respect this paper provides certain recommendations, based on international experience, by implementation of which the satisfactory level of democracy (more transparency, inclusivity and effectiveness) of the procedure should be provided in Serbia as well.

Key words: community planning, participation, collaboration, public insight/hearing, implementation.

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY INTEREST

Inclusion of the Public in the Process

Planning of space and its overall development is absolutely necessary, with all demands that are sharing an idea of public interest, which only in democratic and republican culture can be provided (Mazza, 2010). The gap between theory and practice is still great, but could be erased or at least narrowed and reconciled by positive measures of involving public and good will to dedicate more funding for this kind of action (Greed, 1996). The residents/stakeholders are opinion-interest group, with the power of vote on the local elections, so their attitude (positive - supportive, in favor of plan, or negative - rejecting and opportunist) is very important as a lead to decision makers and the government (Mayerson, Banfield, 1969). The

basis of the urban development comprises direct participation of the citizens within the local communities which in their own rights should enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and fiscal independence, and if for some reasons the cities function poorly and there is no transparency, then there exists the danger that also the human rights would in some way be affected (Stojkov, Janić, 1996). Some other important issues should be mentioned too, like raising awareness about social, political, economical technology and environmental changes, different regional integrations, etc. Basic indicators for the evaluation of public planning process based on democracy principles are: the appropriate representative of the public stakeholders, the transparency of planning procedure and decision making, availability of plan proposals (for example on internet), the publicity of the meetings, protecting the rights and inclusion of special groups in the public. Participation of citizens is useful in devising new vision for future of a city or region, for regeneration strategies specially

for declining industrial or inner city areas, in developing strategies for sustainable development in the light of global warming, in consideration of traffic solutions - resolving congestion in historic town centre or exploring new transport options, devising and testing developing proposals for sites or buildings, exploring design options for historic or new buildings, exploring the best way of building major new settlements or integrating new development with old (Wates, 2008). Also, it is possible to involve the public in the early stages of preparing statutory development plans.

Participation techniques

As a clearly defined planning technique, the community planning events were pioneered over 40 years ago in USA, and from the mid 1980s this approach was adapted to the different social and cultural conditions and fused with planning process in UK and Europe. The initiative for organizing events has come mostly from professional institutions and practitioners keen

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to explore more creative methods. Others, developers, community organizations, NGOs and local authorities have become willing supporters as they seized the opportunity to work positively with the other parties involved and saw the economic and social benefit that can result. An extraordinary phenomenon is the way that people who have experienced such event and encouraged to be involved in developing and exploring ideas and options, become convinced of its value.

Planning for Real (PFR) was developed in the late 1970s by Tony Gibson at Nottingham University's Education for Neighborhood Change Unit (Gibson, 1979) and has been in widespread use since then, usually in conjunction with Neighborhood Initiatives Foundation, (<http://www.planningforreal.org.uk/>, <http://www.myplacesupport.co.uk/>, <http://www.communityplanning.net/>). Unlike Healey's and Forester's guidelines (Healey, 2007, Forester, 1999), PFR does have a framework to be followed through it does not prescribe a process. As such it does run the risk of becoming dominating (Allmendinger, 2001). However, PFR gives opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience, by maps and/or simple 3D models, so local people can put forward suggestions by using pictorial option cards, colored pins and flags (Gibson, 1998). Suggestions are then prioritized by the same process and a clear picture emerges of what needs to be done. Although PFR has been used for issues such as traffic, community safety, housing and environmental improvements, it has also been used for plan strategy formulations, local plan participation and development briefs for specific sites (probably the most well-known PFR exercise was in the Brecon Beacons National Park, where 39 meetings were held over a 6 month period in 1993 (Tewdwr-Jones, Tomas, 1995)). In terms of the 'ideal' set out (Healey, 1993), where will discussion take place, in what style, how will issues be sorted, etc., the PFR process falls far short of what communicative rationalist would wish for (Allmendinger, 2001). The process was already set, the venues chosen, the maps and issues decided and the discussions directed by planners. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects which are clearly recognizable in the discussion on communicative processes, the "open discussions", the identification and "framing" of problems and issues were partly left to the public and the priorities put upon these. The interest shown by the public also backs up the general view that the people are interested if given an opportunity (Sewell, Coppock, 1977) and the whole experience could be truly innovative and collaborative. It has been

observed that using "flags" or labels on the maps/models helps people overcome their shyness, starts open discussion without feeling that they need to make a speech and turns traditional and limited process to participative and orientated toward the collective problems and public interest. It is unlikely that the average citizen will ever be interested in all the decisions made at national levels as (s)he would be nearer to home.

The technique of community planning events is still evolving, mostly from practical experiences, with a common goal to invite citizens (all those affected, known as "stakeholders") to actively participate in the creation and management of their built environment and in order to enable developers and planners to use the knowledge of local people to create better places. The underlying philosophy of community planning is interdisciplinary, collaborative and community-based, and the important steps in process of participation are: information, dialogue, education, knowledge, campaigning, deciding, managing, owning and developing (Wates, 2008).

Typical outcomes are identification of issues and opportunities, agreed objectivities and achievable targets, visions for an area's future, agendas for action plans, the proposals for a particular site, suggestions for organizational changes (Denhardt, 2010) and local coalitions and leadership. The community planning events 'work' because the process combines a

unique mix of ingredients which respond the complexity of today's development issues: open community involvement, creative working methods, dynamism, local expertise and context, fresh thinking, visual approach (drawing and model making) and realism (Wates, 2008).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANS IMPLEMENTATION

Having in view that plans implementation is a continuous process running parallel with plans development and directly dependent on the types and methods of planning (Stefanović, 2011), it is also necessary that plans implementation is rendered into corresponding connection with the aspect of public involvement in the planning process. One of general-technical definitions of implementation whereby it is directly associated with public participation in the planning process, is provided by Stewart and Underwood by their standpoint that implementation is a process of negotiations and reaching a compromise (which may progress parallel with the plan development), schematized as the relationship of action-reaction and response, which is the interpretation of the behavioral view of planning (Stewart, Underwood, 1983).

Traditional planning in the first generation plans attempted offering the best expertly solution, leaving implementation to the politicians, government or administration, which, one must admit, is the result of both the young planning discipline and also the socio-political relationships and the system of ownership and decisions making (Taylor, 2004). However, the new role of planning requires also active participation of the planners and the public in resolving conflicts and reaching agreements which would enable space developing and use. That is an activity which differs much from the initial traditional role of planning as the technique for space use determining (Đorđević, 2004). In accordance with that, the planners must master a series of new skills of collaboration and public inclusion which will enable dealing with the controversies of the new approach, i.e. shaping different interests, developing negotiation skills (Carrell, Heavrin, 2006), mediation and similar, on the basis of which it would be possible to perceive the planning solutions and orient plans implementation in the desired direction.

The necessity of public inclusion in the planning process was also pointed out by Lewis and Flynn (1979). They state that the implementation success will depend on that to which extent the planning institution has managed to identify the



Figure 1. PFR gives opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience, by maps and/or simple 3D models (Queenborough and Rushenden master plan model, Swale Borough Council and PFR)

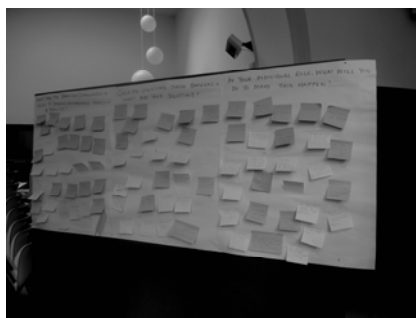


Figure 2. Giving suggestions by using pictorial option cards, colored pins and flags (Project Gallery, PFR)

real spatial interest of the inhabitants, companies and other subjects. Providing adequate public participation in the planning process should also assist in plans implementation. The success of implementation at all planning levels will to a great extent depend on the ability of the government and planners to reconcile the public and private interests in space in an efficient manner. When it concerns the public participation in the planning process and plans implementation orientation, the proposal by Elmor (Elmor, 1980) on backward planning (mapping) is quite interesting. Instead of conventional forward planning, where first the goals are determined, and then the steps to be taken defined in order to achieve the goals, in the above mentioned approach first the possibility of realization of goals and planning decisions implementation is evaluated, on the basis of the insight into the possibilities and funds available by the potential implementation stakeholders, namely the public, and only thereafter the goals and planning concept construction is tackled (Kelly, 2009).

However, this approach has not become a reality and opportunism emerged as side effect, since it lacked a general strategic framework according to which one could be governed in defining the goals and planning decisions (Faludi, 2003). It is exactly for that reason that certain European institutions (European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), Alpine Adriatic Working Community, 2002) emphasize the necessity of using the *visionary principle* which comprises provision of common visions and concepts for territories, whereby the participation of greater number of persons and public insights would be encouraged. Some of suggested principles are: on-site observation leading to perception of changes in societal values from an outsider's point of view, even though there is resistance keep trying to establish relationship full of respect and trust, create an innovative system to provide feedback from results, with a new approach to human capabilities and improvement activities. The process of creation of such visions and concepts through participation of citizens and transparent engagement of personal interests could be the most interesting novelty in the planning process in the past ten years.

RELEVANCE OF THE MODELS IN THE CONTEXT OF SERBIAN SOCIETY

In Serbia public consultation is marginalized both as a legal requirement, and even more so during the planning, development and

implementation of spatial and urban planning documents (Petovar, Jokić, 2011) and the civil society is still poorly developed with weak influence in planning matters (Vujošević, 2010). The public insight, mostly is the first and only opportunity when interested citizens and urban planners meet each other, but at that moment it is too late for establishing any decent and productive dialog, because it takes place ex-post, when almost all basic propositions and planning solutions have been defined.

The Law on Planning and Construction (Official Gazette RS, 72/2009), prescribes the procedure of plan presentation and forming of report with decisions passed as per all objections submitted (Article 50).² After the professional verification has been completed, the urban plan is forwarded for public presentation in duration of one month and during that period all interested subjects may have the insight into the textual, graphic and documentation part of the plan and deliver their objections in writing together with the reasoning. These objections will be considered at the public meeting, which is open for attendance of the citizens and where procedurally it is possible to provide the supplemental items to and clarification of the objections submitted, as well as to hear the proposed reply of the professional individuals who have managed the development of the plan. The final conclusions will be passed at the closed meeting, which is not open to

² The Law on Planning and Construction (Official Gazette RS, 72/2009, 81/2009, 64/2010, 24/2011, 121/2012)

16.5. Public insight

Article 50.

Presentation of the planning document for public insight is carried out after the professional verification has been completed. Presentation of the planning document for public insight is advertised in the daily local newspapers and lasts for 30 days from the date of advertising. The presentation of the planning document for public insight is taken care of by the Republic Spatial Planning Agency, namely the body of the local government unit competent for spatial and urban planning affairs. On the completed public insight of the planning document, the competent body, namely the Planning Committee prepares the report comprising the data on the public insight carried out, with all objections and decisions as per each objection. The report from paragraph 2. of this article is delivered to the planning document development holder, who, within 30 days, is obliged to act as per the decisions contained in paragraph 2 of this Article.

Article 51.

In case that after the public insight of the draft planning documents the competent body, namely the Planning Committee determines that the adopted objections substantially alter the planning document, the decisions is passed whereby the holder of document preparation is ordered to develop a new draft or concept of the planning document, within the term which may not be longer than 60 days from the date of decision passing.

public presence, and the citizens who have submitted their objections are subsequently notified on the conclusions passed, in writing.

The public inclusion in the planning system, even in these regions, is not the creation of "our times" but existed even earlier in the period of the socialist and self-management order and it was deemed "one of the most significant forms of breaking-up of the old relationships in which the working man was to a great extent estranged from real decision making on common needs of his and his family (Kramer, Kirinčić, 1981)". At that time it was a common practice of presentation of planning solutions on the premises of the municipality or local community, which gives impression thus the results of these meetings with the citizens and their standpoints were taken as serious. However, mostly depending on the topic and significance of the project, sometimes it was only in declarative form, because decisions were already made on some other, higher level.

The continuous mutual complaints are made by the professionals that the citizens, i.e. the public has not been educated to understand that which is proposed, that they are guided by their narrow interests, not perceiving the wider context and the goal of planning solutions. On the other hand, citizens experience urban planners as an echo of the past times, the exponent of the state, who "snatch away" for someone else to benefit from. Thus, the defender of the public interests and the fighter for quality of life, the urban planner turns in the eyes of the citizens into a scapegoat for all life's inconsistencies, injustice and hardship. This occasional hostility is especially beneficial for politics, which, if everything works in harmony tends to appropriate the ideas of the profession as its own successes, whereas, if a problem occurs, regardless its key role in decision-making and financing, it is ready to flatter and "support" the citizens in their requirements (regardless whether they are justified or not) and blame it on the planners for the fiascos and failures (Daniilović Hristić, 2012). Citizens should be perceived as final space users, but also as "small" investors having their own interests and different perception of spatial characteristics and capacity. Collaboration with the public is not only marketing of own ideas, but a significant improvement of the final solution, investment in future relations and mutual understanding and assistance. Certainly, the question arises whether the wishes of the citizens expressed are always acceptable. The quality of the relationship established through urban planning process is of crucial importance, but within the environment characterized by instability and

changes, the formerly established and accepted norms and codes are often forgotten (Levy, 2012). Multidisciplinary characterizing urban planning as well as the complexity of the problems, interests and diverse requirements in urban environment development (Byrne, 2000), certainly make the work of a creative team interesting, but to some extent also difficult and burdened (Landry, 2006). Achieving consensus might also be the most difficult step in the overall process (Ascher, 2004), and often compromise becomes the synonym for poor solution. Collaboration with the citizens in searching for the best solution should have the same or similar results as the public-private partnership i.e. to serve the general welfare (Plummer, 2002).

The Greek word for city “polis” is at the same time in the core of the word politics—the process of management of complex interactions between people living in a community (Benevelo, 2004). Politics comprises the connotations of power and wealth, their acquisition, enforcement and use, but also abuse. Even in the societies boasting of a long tradition of democracy it is not unusual for public goods and public spaces to become the exponents of corporate capital or pre-election campaign (Petrović, 2009, Duque, 2001). In times of transition, the advisory role of urban planners, acquired on the basis of expert knowledge and experience, becomes increasingly more a role of government-political apparatus official. The fact is that urban planning is a form of “government intervention” and that it is inextricably linked to administration, but that does not give one the right to consider it as an instrument and cronies. Transitional practice has shown that policy regularly confuses and imposes its will within the field of planning, ranging from frequent changes of laws and regulations according to which the profession has to operate and be governed. Politics aims at ensuring re-election itself and extending the period of rule, which affects determination for the solutions proposed and decision making (Healey, 2007). In other words, those urban investments are favored that will be integrated in the term of the mandate or will have a greater positive effect on the electorate.

A logical question is posed, to which extent the objections submitted during the public presentation make the real reflection of the wishes and needs of the majority of inhabitants of a certain space. If there is no former or more direct contact with the citizens during planning, then there is no real feeling of the standpoints, wishes and needs of the majority, and the possibility of conflicts and disagreement certainly increases. The example is the tendency of the citizens to permit greater urban parameters and realize a significant scope of

building in a particular area, since this group has recognized the potential of space in the location value and interest of the investors. On the other hand, the majority is not interested in selling their possession for new building, but in preservation of the ambient value and lifestyle of neighborhood, without changing the type of construction, increased housing density, necessary change of regulations, etc. and since it supports plan solutions, it does not cope with the objections. In public insight procedure the objections of the minority are considered and supposedly adopted, whereby space character is substantially changed and the wish of the majority not respected.

If the planner had the opportunity to present the plan on several occasions to the citizens on the terrain familiar to them, within the municipality, local community, on the very spot, and have a greater number of inhabitants be informed about all proposals of the plan, to provide their opinion and suggestions, the community interest might have been placed in the foreground. In that way also the firmer arguments for acceptance or rejection of the requests submitted would have been obtained. Does that mean that in the argumentation of the plan development and of the Committee as well, when it concerns acceptance or rejection certain objections, the statistical data regarding how many citizens lived on the territory covered by the plan should also be included, the number of interested who attended the public presentation, i.e. the percentage of the submitted objections, presuming that the remaining number of citizens were in agreement with the proposed solutions?

It is particularly important to educate the population on the requirement of planned settlement development, and to give them a real explanation what the consequences are and what the advantages of implementation of standards are, particularly when it concerns satisfying the needs of primary public use (traffic, accessibility, infrastructure equipment and furnishing, space reserved for health and social protection, education, culture, sport and recreation, etc.) but also the conditions which dictate the parameters of housing and commercial construction, numerous limitations in respect to the soil quality, fire-fighting regulations, parking and garaging conditions, environment protection and similar (Čolić, 2013).

OPINION POLL, WORKSHOP AND PLATFORMS ORGANIZATION

The application of the participative approach enables timely perceiving of the values, interests and potential conflicts and inclusion of stakeholders and planning activities accordingly.



Figures 3, 4 and 5. Neighborhood Action Plan for Park Wood, Training day, with prepared model for suggestions (Maidstone Council, PFR)

In parallel, by establishing communication, at various levels and through diverse forms, the knowledge of various perceptions and interest is promoted and better understanding and common judgment is achieved (Čolić, 2010). For mobilization and creation of proposals timely informing is necessary, a certain degree of clarification, instructions and education, and the key point is to develop the awareness and knowledge of the individuals on their role in the process. To inform and motivate the citizens is probably the most important initial step. The existing practice of informing citizens and the accessibility of information are at a very low point, not even appropriate for urban communities having a good educational structure and more efficient mutual communication modalities (Petovar, Jokić, 2011). For that reason it is rather essential at what moment and in which manner the gatherings for ideas presentations and exchange of opinions would be organized. Perhaps it is best at the beginning of planning document development, i.e. upon decision on its development, in collaboration with the local government to send written information to

home addresses of the citizens included by the boundary of plan development and post identical information in written and electronic mass media (municipal paper, internet presentation, bulletin board and similar). This is actually applicable in the cases when the plans comprise smaller area or smaller number of settlements and inhabitants (e.g. 50 ha or 15,000 inhabitants, whereby one has to have in view what the structure of the settlement is), whereas as regards the broader scope plans, for practical reason, this should be limited only to mass media. The information should include brief or identical explanation, same like for starting the initiative and decision making) first of all textual, but also with clear and adapted graphic presentation of planning document scope), and it would be rather useful to comprise also the general instruction on legally defined procedures and possibilities of citizens participation. For that reason it is necessary to prepare a detailed brochure about all relevant information on the planned activities (Petovar, Jokić, 2011).

An opinion poll can be forwarded together with such information which would help the citizens to express their needs and standpoints, and as a result it will provide the public input to the urban planners, together with compiling all other data necessary for plan development process, to perceive the real space condition, limitations and potentials, as well as the problems encountered by the citizens.

The manner of opinion polling which is most frequently proposed comprises a series of clearly formulated questions, for the answers to which it is required 20 minutes to the maximum, and the very opinion poll can be conducted via internet, by sending polling sheets to home addresses, at some well frequented public place (square, market and similar) or "from door to door". An overall demographic picture of the population should be taken into account, as well as for which purpose the opinion poll is conducted, i.e. whether the subject of research are general perceptions of the citizens on urban, as well as communal, ambient issues or the issues regarding environment protection associated with certain territory, or on concrete topics, initiatives and projects. The very structure of the opinion poll should first of all comprise the questions related to the interviewed person (even though it is anonymous) indicating his/her age, gender, level of education and similar. Then the data related to personal views and experiences are collected, as well as suggestions and perceptions. Questions have to be clear and precise, with offered scale of answers, if possible, for example, yes and no, or possible

optional answers marked a, b, c... or 1, 2, 3... This guarantees grouping of answers in certain categories when opinion poll processing and making more concrete conclusions. Descriptive answers might be useful, however also diverse and difficult to compare. Processing and presentation of the data obtained should be clear and if possible, i.e. as required, comparable to the data obtained from competent services in order to form a clear image on subjective and objective perception of the matter on the terrain. Quantification has to be performed in accordance with the basic statistical principles, and it is desirable that it be presented graphically by means of tables and various types of graphs, particularly since it will be used both in plan documentation and also while organizing meetings and workshops with the citizens.

Public presentations of plan solutions are desirable at the moment when all data have been compiled and the standpoint of planners has been formed, but, however, before passing any final decisions (Dunn, 1977). The first presentation should be in the conceptual phase and by its form should be closer to workshop. In the introductory part the citizens should be informed on the actions carried out until that moment, and then invite them to take part in creation of the plan solution and in the manner and with the aid of prepared means, as shown on the basis of the international experience with PFR. The second contact and exchange of opinion can be carried out during the draft plan development, but also in its working phase, prior to finalization. For this occasion the form of platform and open debate is convenient, at which first the standpoint of the authorized urban planners would be presented, as well as in which way the solution incorporated formerly expressed requests and proposals of the citizens. When in this manner, and presuming to the mutual content, the collaboration with the direct space users has been carried out, some inevitability clarified or compromise solutions found, then the very legally prescribed public insight procedure (presentation of the plan and public meeting) acquires a completely different, relaxed course. Naturally, one must have in view that such approach comprises besides the skill in conducting the debates (hearing) also the extension of plan development term as well as some cost increase.

CONCLUSIONS

The urban planning and placemaking should be a process, accessible to anyone, that allows peoples' creativity to emerge. When it is open, transparent and inclusive, this process can be extraordinarily effective in making people feel attached to the places where they live. That, in



Figures 6 and 7. Neighborhood Action Plan for Park Wood, Training day, with prepared model for suggestions (Maidstone Council, PFR)



Figure 8. Micro-neighborhood development in Bordesley Green (PFR)

turn, makes people more likely to get involved and build shared wealth in their communities. In the same time, in a democratic and participative process, the role of planners as professional arbiters between different interests must be accepted. The planning and decision making process should be conducted and directed in order to deserve the trust of the citizens, as between different groups, as to the institutional representatives. The planners have significant role in developing and building of the social capital and cohesion of the local communities, what gives the key assumption for development of the adequate and in implementation successful plans. This aspect is significant for achieving consensus, with complete

appreciation of the professional expertise, but the creativity of amateur opinion, too.

It can be important to conduct a thoughtful public process in advance of any public insight or hearing. Hearings often occur late in the process and may leave citizens with the impression that local officials do not want to hear their ideas. Council or board chambers are formal and can be intimidating to citizens who are not accustomed to public speaking. The format of hearings often leaves little, if any, room for reasonable discussion, give or take, or response to prior testimony. However, these processes increase the potential to arrive at solutions that have strong support in the community (Rowe, Frewer, 2005). Some of basic recommendations are:

- involve citizens in the early stages of the policy development process, stimulate and motivate them,
- any size of group will work well with good organization and preparation and truly involving interested citizens (example, "Listening to the city" events in New York organized for 5000 participants who were asked to give their thoughts about six preliminary concepts for the Trade Center site of Port Authority of New York and New Jersey),
- make sure that there is plenty of opportunity for people to get answers to questions, because this usually does not happen at a formal public hearing,
- consider using a trained facilitator to facilitate discussion on really controversial issues,
- good public process can be time consuming and expensive.

Benefits of community planning events could be described as:

- creation of shared vision for community's future and identification of long-and short-term strategies for implementation,
- catalyst for action by realizing blockages in the development process,
- resolution of complex of problems or at least a clearer identification of issues and goals,
- revitalization of local networks,
- fostering of consensus building among different interest groups leading to better integration and partnership,
- promotion of urban design capability and improvement of environmental standards,
- heightened public awareness as a result of an open forum for debate,
- morale boost for all those involved as a result of experiencing team working.

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