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PARTICIPATORY URBANISM: CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Saša Poljak Istenič



SASA POLJAK ISTENIC

Participatory urbanism builds communities, contributes to sustainable development and boosts a creative city image.

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Participatory urbanism: creative interventions for sustainable development

ABSTRACT: The paper presents the concept of participatory urbanism and analyses its practical implications in the context of the City of Ljubljana. It assesses the potential of participatory methodology for physical and social interventions in public spaces through the case-studies of two creative spatial practices: urban community garden *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site* and community-led renovation of *Savska naselje* neighbourhood. It indicates how bottom-up initiatives can contribute to sustainable development of an urban area, especially to its environmental and social features. It concludes with the ideas of how cities might engage with bottom-up spatial practices to increase the effectiveness of urban spatial planning, management and administration, and to boost their green creative image.

KEY WORDS: participatory urbanism, grassroots creativity, spatial policy, creative city, European Green Capital, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Participativni urbanizem: ustvarjalni posegi za trajnostni razvoj

POVZETEK: Prispevek predstavi koncept participativnega urbanizma in analizira njegove praktične učinke v Mestni občini Ljubljana. Na primeru dveh ustvarjalnih prostorskih praks, urbanega skupnostnega vrta Onkraj gradbišča in skupnostne preнове Savskega naselja, avtorica vrednoti potencial participativne metodologije za fizične in družbene posege v javni prostor. Nakaže, kako lahko iniciative od spodaj navzgor prispevajo k vzdržnemu razvoju urbanega okolja, še posebej v okoljskem in družbenem smislu. Prispevek se sklene z idejami, kako lahko mesta upoštevajo prostorske prakse svojih prebivalcev, da bi povečala učinkovitost urbanega prostorskega načrtovanja, vodenja in upravljanja ter okrepila svojo zeleno ustvarjalno podobo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: participativni urbanizem, samonikla ustvarjalnost, prostorska politika, ustvarjalno mesto, Zelena prestolnica Evrope, Ljubljana, Slovenija

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1 Introduction

Green cities have become a norm, but also a trend. However, being green does not only denote providing green areas such as parks and gardens, planting trees, arranging green roofs and some other actions directly linked to nature. Green cities are also pursuing sustainable development bearing in mind not only environmental, but social, cultural and economic features as well (Nurse 2006). They can choose to brand themselves as a green destination or a green city (Poljak Istenič 2016), which positively affects their reputation and income from tourism, investments and other venues, as is proved by Ljubljana when gaining the *European Green Capital* award and being included among the top hundred sustainable destinations. And finally yet importantly, being green could as well mean having efficient urban management which strives to develop ecosystem services, include all citizens in decision-making and share responsibility for functioning of urban areas.

Academics and practitioners increasingly advocate participatory and inclusive practices in local planning, management and decision-making (Bond and Thompson-Fawcett 2007). Cities as well are becoming keener to embrace urban interventions »from below«, not only because they struggle with complex management and administration, excessive bureaucracy and the lack of funds for investing into and managing urban infrastructure, but also because such interventions, joined under the term participatory, do-it-yourself (DIY), tactical or any other urbanism (see below), have become »a brand in itself« and »the latest political vernacular of the Creative City« (Mould 2014, 529). Although many such practices are initiated by local activists, anarchist groups or some internet communities, one can indeed link most of them to the desires and struggles of the »creative class« (Florida 2002) to make a city and urban living more »tailored to the individual needs of its citizens« (Ljubljana European ... 2016, 51). In Slovenia, these new forms of collective urban engagement range from (collaborative) community practices, co-working, community-led renovations, temporary use of space and urban gardening to local economies, housing communities and co-mobility (Internet 1) – commonly in various combinations. Despite coming into public limelight only recently, media, policymakers and public administration increasingly recognize their potential and appropriate them for their own agendas.

The aim of the article is to introduce the concept of participatory urbanism, to present local people's visions and interpretations of top-down (authoritarian) as well as bottom-up (participatory) urbanism, and analyse practical implications of the latter in the context of the City of Ljubljana. Ljubljana is the capital city of the Republic of Slovenia, situated on a crossroads of Central Europe, the Mediterranean, Balkan Peninsula and the Pannonian Plain (Ciglič and Perko 2013). It is the political, administrative, cultural and

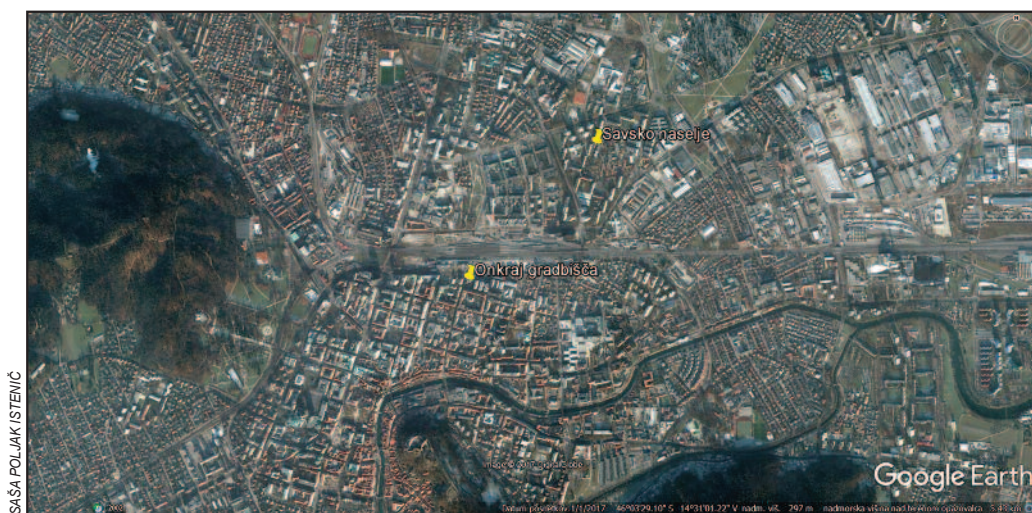


Figure 1: A map with marked locations of analysed practices of participatory urbanism, *Onkraj gradbišča* / *Beyond the construction site* community garden and *Savsko naselje* neighbourhood.

economic centre of the country while it also hosts many international institutions and organizations. Giving the name to the Ljubljana urban region, by far the most developed region in the country, it mainly relies on its service sector. It covers 275 square kilometres and has a population of 288.919 (SURS 2017). In my ethnographic argumentation, I will focus on two case studies of creative (i.e. artistic or cultural) spatial practices on the brinks of the Ljubljana's core city centre, on the south and north-east of the central train station. Both were initiated by NGOs, which have successfully implemented participatory methodology when intervening in public spaces and have been acknowledged by the city.

The first case is a community gardening project in *Tabor*, a former industrial and working-class neighbourhood in the inner-city district of Ljubljana, located between the town hall, the main railway and bus station and the University Medical Centre Ljubljana. The neighbourhood comprises different residential and other buildings as a heritage of the past (e.g. old power plant, railway station, former military barracks) and places of present activities (i.e. a retirement home, students hall of residence, church, schools, offices, shops, museums, cinemas, mixed-use housing, etc.). Until 2009, it was under pressure of property market development and experienced a loss of residential and social life as well as a degradation of public spaces, especially a lack of green areas and non-commercial public spaces (Pichler-Milanović 2012). Due to its residency in the former construction pit, the analysed garden, named *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site*, materialized in the framework of the cultural festival *Mladi levi / Young Lions* in summer 2010 and was initially financed from the *Interreg* project *Sostenuto* (Internet 2), dedicated to the revitalization of the *Tabor* neighbourhood. In the seven years of operating, the community has changed several times from the initial one, but regularly around one hundred persons take care of forty plots of land in the garden and participate in numerous public and community-based events that take place there or in other public spaces of the local community. The initiator and supervisor of the garden is cultural association *Obrat*, and the city supports the practice by giving the annual permission for the temporary use of land and occasionally financing minor interventions (when the association successfully applies for funds).

The second example of participatory urbanism I analyse is a community-led renovation in *Savsko naselje*, Ljubljana's oldest post-second-world-war neighbourhood lying on the opposite side of Ljubljana's central railway station than *Tabor* neighbourhood, away from the centre towards the north. The first apartments were built in 1946–1947 and the housing stock had been increasing until the 1970s when they built several skyscrapers. Consequently, the neighbourhood experienced a sudden influx of socially and ethnically diverse populations and soon became notorious for a gang of youngsters, which fought with groups from other neighbourhoods (Mehle 2017). The delinquents later became associated with drug users, and, at least according to the conversations with more recent inhabitants, the settlement became one of the most disreputable in Ljubljana, especially so due to relatively old and deteriorating housing stock. A decade ago, people seeking accommodation were therefore advised not to move there, let alone buy a flat (see, e.g., Internet 3), and the neighbouring school was, in the words of one of the parents, »on the brinks of closure« (Interviewee 1) due to decrease of younger population and children switching schools due to the neighbourhood's low reputation. The first push-up for a change came from a famous musician who has lived there from his birth. In 2010, when releasing a rap album dedicated to the neighbourhood, he organized a promotional event in the local schoolyard (Cerar 2010). Later this so-called *Blok-party* developed into the main annual neighbourhood gathering. According to my interviewees, this was the start of the revival of social life in the community, and in a few years, several cultural and social associations and interest groups started positively interfering with local life, what had not gone unnoticed by the City. Since the neighbourhood – currently counting around 8.000 people – is on a prime location, the city decided to fund a minor project of community-led urban renewal in 2013 and engaged cultural association *Prostorož* to coordinate the activities. The association – previously also active in the *Tabor* neighbourhood – needed to combine funds from different sources to make more profound changes in the neighbourhood, and today the area can boast with renovated playgrounds, tidy green spaces, managed community place and improved minor infrastructure.

Through described case studies, I will test the hypothesis that participatory urbanism fruitfully complements top-down spatial interventions, especially in contributing to the pillars of sustainable development that are often overlooked by urban planners, i.e. its social and cultural dimension. In conclusion, I will also provide some ideas on how cities might engage with such practices to increase the effectiveness of their spatial planning, management and administration as well as boost its image of a green creative city.

2 Methods

The article is derived from a research on creativity as an interactive social process that reflects the livelihood strategies of various individuals and communities mostly active in the field of (urban) culture, who challenge the prevailing notions of importance of financial in favour of human (social, cultural, symbolic) capital. In this way, it complements recent research on creativity in Slovenia, which understands it in more economic terms (Bole 2008; Kozina 2016; Uršič 2016; Kozina and Bole 2017a, 2017b; Kozina 2018; for critical qualitative assessment of creativity's economic dimension see Bajič 2015, 2017; Poljak Istenič 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Uršič 2017; Vodopivec 2017). During my two and a half year long fieldwork, I followed cultural initiatives in Ljubljana that significantly contribute to the perceived »creativity« of the city, but have not been always recognized as creative (at least not in the sense of the creative economy). This paper interprets their practices in the theoretical framework of participatory urbanism, focusing on described case studies.

To be able to grasp the phenomena of participatory urbanism in practice, I used qualitative methods of research. I engaged in a participant observation of community gardening and took an informal tour around *Savsko naselje*, guided by one of its inhabitants. I carried out conversations with passers-by, local inhabitants, participants as well as initiators of both presented cases of participatory urbanism. Additionally, I conducted thorough narrative interviews with two representatives of the mentioned initiatives. Finally, I contextualised the data with information gained through previously done interviews with people active in Ljubljana's public places and with employees of the local and state administrations. I recorded the majority of interviews (29 altogether) and transcribed most of them as well as wrote down the key comments from coincidental talks. The article is based on my interlocutors' visions and interpretations of top-down as well as bottom-up urbanism, and presents the views gained through conversations. However, as I was not observing described actions consistently and did not aim to gather a representative sample of informants for analysis, the article only has a modest ambition to disclose the multiplicity of views on participatory urbanism and to offer such insights into practices in Ljubljana that are often overlooked by more representative, quantitatively oriented studies.

3 Participatory urbanism

In 2015, 54% of the world's population lived in urban areas, and urban population is continuing to grow with unfathomable speed (Internet 4). This makes cities hard to manage and govern, and one of the greatest challenges that urban administrations face today is motivating people to participate in their governance – i.e. in urban planning, design and management – and in this way share responsibility for the quality of urban living (Silver, Scott and Kazepov 2010). On the other hand, some cities avoid participation, either due to the conflicting interests of the communities and city administration, or because the experiments with participatory planning have »turned out to be an opportunity for loud and dissatisfied citizens to communicate with the municipal representatives face-to-face [where] the debates quickly escalated into non-topic related mess« (Kozina et al. 2017, 73).

If the late 1990s and early 2000s have been characterized by the »creative turn« (see, e.g., Landry 2000; Florida 2002) and the cities that had used culture have been »celebrated and looked to as successful proponents not only of culture-led regeneration, but also of urban regeneration generally« (Evans 2002, 213; for Ljubljana see Žaucer et al. 2012), then the last decade was identified with the »participatory turn« – first within the fine arts, then also in urban planning, urban design and architecture (Krivý and Kaminer 2013). Informal, grassroots initiatives in public spaces, cultural as well as physical – embodying what Kurt Iveson (2013) calls »micro-spatial urban practices« – have been labelled with numerous and diverse (not always or completely synonymous) terms, such as guerrilla, hacktivism, acupuncture, subversive, minor, wiki, open-source, insurgent, pop-up, DIY, hands-on, tactical, bottom-up, grassroots, participatory (and probably some else) urbanism, even the New Urbanism (when referring to the movement in the USA) (Courage 2013; Wortham-Galvin 2013; Finn 2014a). Although Emily Talen (2012) traces such movements (particularly DIY urbanism) to the mid-to-late 1800s (when municipal arts and civic improvement actions had swept the USA), direct historical connection is usually made to user-centric visions for architecture in 1960s, in which the ideal was empowering the user to act in space by means of physical engagement without the

mediation of the architect (Chernyakova et al. 2012). The first more thorough ethnographic as well as theoretical accounts on participation also originate in this decade (e.g. Gans 1962; Arnstein 1969; Reynolds 1969). In Slovenia, however, participation as a concept was defined in the 1970s (Mlinar 1973). The majority of authors conceptually exploring participation differentiate between formal (structural, legally defined) and informal (grassroots) participation and/or vertical (link between institutions and participants) and horizontal participation (relationship among communities, individuals and groups), whereas ladder-based approaches define it as an evolution from manipulation to citizen control (for more on this topic see Cerar 2015).

Membership of ex-socialist countries in the European Union has opened up new perspectives for their urban policies that demand citizen participation in initiatives for the improvement of urban issues (Keresztély and Scott 2012). Participatory planning – at least in Western Europe – has been long integrated into planning policies »in diluted forms« (Krivý and Kaminer 2013, 1), such as public consultations and similar practices of public cooperation; it is increasingly so also in Slovenia (see Mežnarič, Rep and Mizori Zupan 2008). However, these practices tend to be more individual-centred, while participatory urbanism relies on the idea of community – be it that it can generate a sense of community through specific design principles or through residents' involvement in the whole development process. Urbanism becomes participatory only when it is understood as flexible, temporal, in a state of evolution and equated with the community on individual as well as collective level (Chernyakova et al. 2012). It tends to be grassroots and bottom-up, most of the time with anti-authoritarian characteristics and aiming to enhance urban living experience through incremental strategies of urban fabric improvement (Courage 2013). Broadly defined, it can be any action taken by citizens that impacts urban space, by the rule without government involvement or even in opposition to government policies and regulations (Finn 2014b). It can be also understood as »a specific mode of informal space production« (Jabareen 2014, 414) or »tactics in which groups of citizens and architects/designers/activists appropriate and transform private or public space into temporary urban commons« (Bradley 2015, 91). In this sense, the initiatives are often seen as the »right to the city« movements (Lefebvre 1996), as resistance practices against neoliberal interventions into a city (Poljak Istenič 2018).

However, »[i]n many cases [the phrase] seems to mean just the right to a more 'human' life in the context of the capitalist city and on the basis of a ('reformed') representative 'democracy'« (de Souza 2010, 315). The same applies to Ljubljana's initiatives, which strive to »take back public spaces we forgot about« (Interviewee 2), as expressed by one of the initiatives' spokesperson. They usually act in the belief that change is possible and offer (or try to develop) alternatives for the use of space or urban living in general. Giving a social commentary to urban neoliberal policies in an artistic (or cultural) form, they »propose alternative lifestyles, reinvent our daily lives, and reoccupy urban space with new uses« (Zardini 2008, 16). Gathering people together to work for a common cause, such initiatives often refer to the nostalgic feelings of community, authentic experience and going »back to basics« (Forkert 2016, 11). As pointed out by Boris Buden (in Krivý and Kaminer 2013), a concern for »community« and »culture« has replaced »society« as the horizon of contemporary politics. However, establishing a link between physical design of cities and social goals like »sense of community«, »social equity« and »common good« proved to be difficult, and attaching normative town planning to these social goals very problematic (Talen 2002). Participatory urbanism, with its focus on common good, informality and temporality, thus often fills this gap, inefficiently (or unsuccessfully) addressed by the »top-down« urban administration – and in this way contributes to the »least popular pillars« of sustainable development, social and (when involving artists and cultural producers and/or implying a specific identity formation) also cultural.

The spread of such practices is especially noticeable after the 2008 crisis, which caused diminishing of many mechanisms for funding and managing urban infrastructure and public spaces. As pointed out by Karin Bradley (2015; see also Forkert 2016), urban interventions »from below« in a way actually legitimize public withdrawal, which is the opposite of what these spatial practices try to achieve. As a reaction to under-efficient public spatial management – its rigid formality, unsuccessful regulation of private and individual interests, non-transparent funding – they strive to develop alternative production, management and economic models which would (and already are) successfully solve(-ing) some of the less pleasant matters of living in a city. These models show that »changes in space for the better are possible and within reach, which often estranged and long-lasting processes of spatial planning do not enable« (Skupnostne prakse 2014) – i.e. that it is possible to make a positive change only with minor interventions and low funds, especially when relying on (whichever) community participation in all phases: planning, implementation and management.

On the other hand, such practices have also been increasingly embraced by the cities and appropriated for city branding or other promotional strategies (Poljak Istenič 2016), as is the case of *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site* garden. As a role model of community urban garden, it has been promoted on some of the city's websites, and although it could be argued that the city has promotionally supported the garden, one cannot deny this has (also) benefited the city, as Ljubljana heavily promotes its green and creative orientation (and was specifically advertising its *European Green Capital* award in 2016).

In the last three years, the phenomenon of »bottom-up« initiatives transformed from marginal spatial practices into more and more obvious »mainstream« mode of spatial action, in Slovenia and globally (Peterlin 2015). However, as a »mainstream« practice (increasingly – although unsystematically – funded by local authorities, as they recognize them as improving the quality of urban life and the city's image), the initiatives lack decisive oppositional or explicitly political aspects. Thus they have not been able to achieve any profound change in spatial policy, »proposed« to the cities in the form of alternative models or/and modes of spatial interventions, as I will show below.

4 Ljubljana – a green creative city

In the last decade, Ljubljana's promotion mainly revolves around two global brands: »the city of culture« or »the creative city« and »green« or »sustainable« city (cf. Internet 5). It was recently listed among the *Global Top 100 Sustainable Destinations 2014, 2016 and 2017* (Internet 6) and won the *European Green Capital 2016* award in 2014 (Internet 7) as well as the *UNESCO City of Literature* title in 2015, which granted the city an inclusion into the *Creative Cities Network* (Internet 8). In its promotional and development strategies, culture (also as an element of a creative economy) is seen as an integral part of environmental design (Trajnostna ... 2015). Ljubljana thus often supports (at least on paper) grassroots creativity – especially such that addresses as wide participation of diverse inhabitants as possible and leaves visible traces in space – to show the diversity of its urban culture. In this way, however, it also tries to fill in the gaps in cultural production, caused by austerity measures as well as the shrinking of cultural and spatial budgets. Additionally, it occasionally promotes it to gain a competitive advantage in the interurban rivalry or to appeal to the European Union's demands and trends (Poljak Istenič 2016; 2018). Although there are numerous green creative initiatives in Ljubljana, I will point out two examples of distinctively spatial practices that have been acknowledged and – financially, morally and/or promotionally – supported by the city.

4.1 Community garden *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site*

One of the most successful – proved by its long run – participatory spatial practice in Ljubljana is the community garden *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site*. Invited to the project for revitalization of the neighbourhood, the cultural and artistic association *Obrat* decided to experiment with gardening as a temporary use of space as well as one of the »alternative modes of action« (Interviewee 3). Its main motives were to make a compound and degraded place accessible to people and to redesign it into a community place, »i.e. place which would be planned, redesigned and managed by included individuals. We wanted to show what kind of charge and potential can community actions in space have, and simultaneously test where the practice of tactical urbanism, which can respond quicker to actual spatial and social needs than regular long-term planning, will take us« (Lovšin et al. 2015, 2). They succeeded to get an official permission from the city for a temporary use of land, and rearranged an abandoned construction site into a community urban garden, which is still thriving. During the years of operating, the garden has become the site for establishing informal contacts and exchanging information, services and goods. In this way, it »formed« a community, which the initiators understood as a prerequisite for a positive social change: »Let's look concretely at what that [garden] has brought about, what happened, did it really influence community cohesion, did it influence the safety of the neighbourhood, are the people more connected,« argued one of the association's founders (Interviewee 3). »It did a little, but I don't know if it had a great impact.«

Although association *Obrat* has been taking care of the legal issues (i.e. annual renewal of permission for the temporary use of land), it managed to transfer the management of the gardening activities to a self-organized coordination committee in 2015, as »this is sustainable. To make a project sustainable means that you provide people who will continue this [activity]« (Interviewee 3). In this way, they co-created a community

capable of self-organizing and collaborating despite different social, ethnic and educational backgrounds of its members; association only mediates in solving regular issues and coordinates community meetings if needed. The garden thus operates as a space for sensibilization to differences as well as for practicing active co-designing and sharing urban space. As such, it has been a popular location for various artistic and environmental projects, initiatives, events, for mass media coverage as well as for the local community. The City of Ljubljana also promotes it on its website dedicated to the *European Green Capital 2016* program.

NGOs are often the key link between the city and urban communities (Cernea 1988, cf. Abbott 1996), and the same applies to Ljubljana's cases. With a desire to gain public support, encourage people's participation and diversify socializing possibilities, the garden community – under the association's guidance – established various communication channels with the neighbourhood and city authorities as well. Besides updating a fanzine, notice board and website, they also organize public events and workshops to revive local public life. There is more interest to join a community than available plots of land, so the association maintains a waiting list of all who would like to participate. By proving that an increasing number of people want to have a more active role in the co-creation of the city, the garden therefore serves as a practical critique of the city's rigid, unifying policy of organizing and leasing small garden plots. It draws attention to the shortcomings of prevailing urban management of already scarce public spaces, which are also insufficiently supported by the proper mechanisms. By gaining local, academic and media support, the garden initiative has strived to convince the city to ensure more places in its area that are not earmarked for consumption and capital. But despite their efforts, the project still *»did not bring about what we wished for. First, the city did not loosen the rules for temporary use of places in such a way that people would have access to the land that is on hold. It is sick that we only have this project. I see this as bad, not as good. In fact, such projects should have developed all around Ljubljana,«* advocates the association's representative (Interviewee 3). The so-called *Network for Space*, a network of various NGOs under the umbrella of the Institute for Spatial Policies (non-governmental, consulting and research organization in the field of sustainable spatial and urban development), now continues association's efforts to loosen the rules for temporary use of land.



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Figure 2: Gardening in degraded areas, such as in *Onkraj gradbišča / Beyond the construction site garden*, offers an opportunity to grow one's own food, be in touch with nature and socialize.

4.2 Community-led renovation of *Savsko naselje*

When in 2013 the city decided to fund the first project of community-led urban renewal in its area, it engaged cultural association *Prostoroz*, which already had a decade of experience with revival and renewal of public space in Ljubljana, including the *Tabor* neighbourhood where presented community garden operates. The area chosen for a test bottom-up renewal was *Savsko naselje* neighbourhood, the oldest post-second-world-war settlement with a bad reputation and on a prime location within the city. The association invited three other non-profit organizations, active in the neighbourhood, to cooperate in a »renovation of the urban neighbourhood which considers the community as much as space« (Internet 9). Under the slogan »Who helps, (that) wins!«, they employed different participatory techniques to outline integral urban renovation program.

Associations managed to gain the initial attention of inhabitants with picnics between buildings. They asked a local musician to rap on the lawn under balconies, made pancakes and invited people to come by shouting through megaphones. At such informal gatherings, they chatted with participants over 3-D models of the neighbourhood and wrote down their aspirations for changes. They also sporadically interviewed coincidental inhabitants about the most burning local issues, which crystallized to be traffic arrangement, green places, street furniture and the lack of events. They organized the so-called *Assembly for Savsko naselje* and established a working group for each issue to discuss what to do, and then used local newsletters and local renewal office as well as announcement boards, social media and e-mails to further communicate with inhabitants about the progression of their proposed interventions and upcoming actions or events. Until 2016, when the project finished – besides the City of Ljubljana the funds also came from the *Creative Europe* project *Artizen* – they managed to propose a traffic strategy, renovated a local sports field and a children's playground, cleaned overgrown local hill and planted fruit trees.

A local inhabitant, who took me on a tour through the neighbourhood when asked to explain recent changes and his view of a place, pointed out marked paths to school, renovated school playgrounds, children's playground and sports field, fruit trees and cleaned hill, renovated city library and the *Knjižnica reči / Library of things*. The latter is a place established to encourage ethical sharing economy, as its members



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Figure 3: The renovated children's playground and freshly planted fruit trees, as seen from the cleaned local hill.

(and non-members for a symbolic fee) can borrow useful items, namely those that one uses only a few times a year because they are too expensive to buy or too big to store. My tour guide also pointed out recently renovated buildings and stressed that bottom-up interventions in space in his opinion also encouraged the residents of certain apartment buildings to finally start renovating their immediate dwelling surroundings, e.g. facades, entrances, common inner spaces, courtyards, or auxiliary facilities. Some residents now also organize regular picnics in front of their building to socialize with their neighbours and meet more often. Young families started moving back into the neighbourhood and the school currently has enough pupils as well as a good reputation.

When asked how the city reacted to their suggestions and actual spatial interventions, one of the project coordinators admitted the importance of initial financial support, but regretted that their proposals were insufficiently considered and the implementation of proposed interventions lacking: »*We pointed out too many things, we reported frankly to the city about everything the inhabitants wished, however, their initiatives fell into domains of more departments, not just the urbanistic one* [so the implementation should have been planned, financed and executed by several municipal offices, e.g. spatial, environmental, traffic, cultural]. *The urbanistic department didn't anticipate that we'll make a whole traffic strategy but only expected us to hang some nice street lights. That is why our cooperation then finished. We found it unfair to hang some lights around Savsko naselje if the problems are a thousand cars too many, empty spaces, many unemployed people, unmown grass, unremoved snow, unknown land ownership – why would we hang the lights then? [...]* *We categorized the problems and people's initiatives according to some criteria, and defined which of them are prioritized by the inhabitants and which could already be implemented by them alone. And we handed that over to the city as a final report. We did a lot more work than ordered, but there was no willingness to grab that and work further*« (Interviewee 4). Local inhabitants also admit that an enormous work has been done and that the neighbourhood is now much more pleasant to live in than before, but also fear that without further support by the city, and especially without a formal coordinator, nothing more will happen and infrastructure will be again left to decay. On the other hand, they also complained over some »*unsatisfied*« individuals who opposed the changes, claiming that they in a way drove the initiators away, as »*that kills you; in whose honour one would do it if the local community whacks you on the head?*« (Interviewee 1).

5 Conclusion: Implications for cities

The aim of the article was to present initiators' and local people's visions and interpretations of top-down (authoritarian) and bottom-up (participatory) urbanism as well as to analyse practical implications of the latter in the City of Ljubljana. Spontaneous, informal, bottom-up interventions into urban space – termed participatory (or any other) urbanism – may be a torn in a city's side, because they're unorthodox, avoid getting official permissions, they do not follow formal procedures for spatial interventions and disregard power relations embedded in urban policies. However, they can still achieve what cities are striving for, e.g. a wide participation of citizens, social inclusion and equity, public safety etc., and on top of it – as also shown in the article – with much less resources, in a shorter time and with longer-lasting effects than official, top-down spatial projects. We can assume that such expected results were the reason why the City of Ljubljana ensured some funds for the test bottom-up neighbourhood renewal in 2013, and some other Slovenian cities (e.g. Kranj, see Internet 10) are already following its example. Due to the popularity and effectiveness of participatory urbanism, and bearing in mind cities' diminishing budget, local authorities might start considering how to better utilize bottom-up participatory urbanism for more efficient urban spatial policies, i.e. planning and governance.

Despite its critical, sometimes even rebellious nature, participatory urbanism embodies many aspects central to the official spatial policies. It addresses burning spatial issues and makes efforts to resolve them, encourages private investments or establishes private-public partnerships for improvements of public infrastructure, strives to share responsibility for management of public space with local people, and makes development more sustainable, since it builds a community with strong local identity which helps to achieve the set goals. If people feel connected to a place and to their neighbours, they care about what happens in their area and are more willing or motivated to participate in solving spatial and environmental, economic as well as social problems. I can thus confirm my hypothesis that participatory urbanism fruitfully com-

plements top-down spatial interventions, especially in contributing to the pillars of sustainable development that are often overlooked by urban planners, i.e. social and cultural sustainability.

Network for Space recently prepared recommendations for municipalities on how to include bottom-up spatial practices into public spatial policies, as they also believe that such practices do not substitute spatial planning and other formal procedures, but only supplement them (Peterlin 2015). They make small, quick and low-cost changes in line with official regulations, but can on the other hand – as a testing ground for new models of spatial production, management and governance – also serve to illustrate how institutionalized planning could be reorganized. The municipalities shall thus actively support bottom-up spatial practices with funds, information and coordination; include them in development plans and use their participative methods in spatial interventions as well as support pilot projects in this domain; make information about municipal housing stock and land publicly available and transparent; and use economically the municipal property (Od skupnostnih praks ... 2015).

Participatory urbanism also discloses creativity – as well as an entrepreneurial potential – of certain individuals and groups that are crucial for keeping cities lively, evolving and interesting places to live and work in (Finn 2014a) – which are the features of a »creative city« image. The recent economic crisis has again aroused a growing interest in the creative economy as a means to revive economic development (Florida 2010; Indergaard, Pratt and Hutton 2013), and urban policies focusing on creativity have become one of the main strategies in solving economic and increasingly social issues in cities – in as much sustainable way as possible. As I tried to show, a contribution of creative individuals to urban spatial interventions and governance is not negligible, at least in Ljubljana. Furthermore, researchers from the global South, most severely hit by the austerity measures, pointed out that grassroots creativity as an alternative is worth pursuing »because of the opportunities offered for a way out of the crisis and into the development of a new and better society« (Leontidou 2015, 72). Despite the fact that the demise of economic crisis usually encourages new investments, which lead to less under- or unused urban spaces and thus endanger DIY practices, it is to be hoped that an increase of financial capital will motivate cities to take a step further and properly support creative participative initiatives. In such a way, cities could boost their green creative image, soothe citizens' dissatisfaction with slow, rigid and occasionally »misfired« spatial interventions, and maybe find a suitable model for more efficient urbanism and spatial policy as well as for urban sustainable development.

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