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STEPGRAD СТЕПГРАД

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BETWEEN URBAN RESISTANCE AND PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF A CIVIL INITIATIVE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OPEN PUBLIC SPACE IN BANJALUKA

Abstract

This paper deals with the role of urban activism and civil initiatives in the process of urban transformation of post-socialist cities. The aim of the paper is to underline the transformative potential of civil initiatives and the importance of activism as an informal tool for involving citizens in the decision-making process in urban planning. The case of a civil initiative for the preservation of open public space in a residential area in the center of the city of Banja Luka is presented. The case indicates the importance of informal and formal forms of organizing citizens to preserve the interests of the community. Finally, the paper indicates the presence of the conflicting participatory planning model and the need for the development of new planning tools with the aim of achieving more effective participation of citizens and social goals of the sustainable development of Banjaluka.

Keywords: urban activism, civil initiatives, participation, urban transformation, Banjaluka

ИЗМЕЂУ УРБАНОГ ОТПОРА И ПАРТИЦИПАЦИЈЕ: СЛУЧАЈ ЦИВИЛНЕ ИНИЦИЈАТИВЕ ЗА ОЧУВАЊЕ ОТВОРЕНОГ ЈАВНОГ ПРОСТОРА У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ

Сажетак

Рад се бави улогом урбаног активизма и цивилних иницијатива у просесу урбане трансформације постсоцијалистичких градова. Циљ рада је да нагласи трансформативни потенцијал цивилних иницијатива и значај активизма као неформалног алата укључивања грађана у процес одлучивања у урбаном планирању. У раду је приказан случај цивилне иницијативе за очување отвореног јавног простора у стамбеном насељу у центру града Бањалука. Примјер указује на значај неформалних и формалних облика организовања грађана за очување интереса заједнице. Коначно, рад указује на заступљеност конфликтног партиципативног планског модела, те на потребу за развојем нових планских алата с циљем постизања ефикасније партиципације грађана и друштвених циљева одрживог развоја Бање Луке.

Кључне ријечи: урбани активизам, цивилне иницијативе, партиципација, урбана трансформација, Бањалука

1. INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal competitive forms of urban growth and development consist primarily of attempts of cities to enhance their locality in the international competition for investors, advanced services, and megaprojects [1]. In literature, neoliberal urban development is qualified as a "growth-oriented by means of liberalization, deregulation and privatization of public goods and space and the outsourcing of public services" [2, p. 97]. Furthermore, neoliberal urban politics reduces public governance and participatory options of the civil society, raises serious questions about democratic legitimacy, and usually increases social polarization [2, p. 97].

In such conditions, different actors with diverse interests and level of social and political power shape and direct the planning of urban development. Seeking for competitive business environment cities worldwide fail to menage urban development effectively and preserve social justice and sustainability. In such uneven balance of power, needs of citizens are not recognized or are completely ignored, even in urban planning systems of democratically more developed societies. On the other hand, active participation of the public in decision-making process is of greatest importance for creating public values, achieving socially sustainable solutions and better quality of life in cities, and avoiding the failure of top-down urban planning approach. Many researchers agree that meaningful participation and community engagement, which foster a positive relationship between a government and a public in decision-making process are the imperatives of contemporary democratic society [3], and solution for key global problems [4]. When local authorities fail to manage urban development through the active participation of citizens, the phenomenon of urban activism and movements emerges to challenge neoliberal urban policies and their consequences [5]. Urban movements are considered institutionalized and permanent form of urban grassroots activism and are defined as "diverse network of organizations and social groups involved in the process of spatial planning and urban policy making, often outside the formal institutional framework" [6, p. 188]. In developed civil societies urban movements are important actor in urban planning process. Urban civil society, which includes the private sector, community-based organizations, associations and non-governmental organizations, is willing to participate in urban planning and make interests of the *weak* and *strong* public more balanced.

The alignment of interests, stakeholder collaboration and efficacy of public participation are particularly challenging in urban planning system of post-socialist non-EU countries with less developed civil society. In these countries democratic principles are more slowly adopted and the transition to a democratized open-market society is still ongoing due to war in 1990's and isolation on the global scene. Post-socialist urban planning has been influenced by a slow transition from protected and highly directed economies to systems based on competition, international trade, and free markets [7]. Also, local governments have acquired wider administrative responsibilities and a new political importance due to decentralization, what has reinforced the political power of new political elites and business interests [7, p. 2]. The reduced role of the state in the economic system, the established capitalist principles of private ownership and market-lead economy have significantly influenced changes in the management of urban development, which is mainly driven by short-term goals and private interests. The main development directions are defined by partial area plans, which are "easily modified without extensive legal wrangling to suit the aspirations of any private developer" [8, p. 76]. The emerging practice of developers is based on strict profit principles that are usually opposed to proclaimed public interests and "usually do not take care of social justice requirements, subject to which all citizens are entitled to have an access to basic urban services and resources and to enjoy a good quality urban environment" [9, p. 49]. In these conditions, top-down approach to citizens' participation, regulated by law, is applied in urban planning. This approach lacks mechanisms that provide greater citizens engagement and give equal chances to all citizens. Besides, decision-makers are neither motivated to accept participation as method for better governance nor skilled enough to implement it [4]. Involved citizens are just mere passive participants without being able to affect any planning decision. This often results in the emergence of urban activism and urban movements against imposed planning solutions. In post-socialist context urban movements are not developed as mass scale actions engaged in protests or mobilized around political or social issues, but small-scale actions that tend to directly influence changes in urban development and improve the quality of the urban environment. Also, informal forms of activism are the most common in implementation of policies of urban development. However, over the years of social, political and economic transition various forms of movements emerged such as: organizations from former socialist regime, non-governmental organizations, local grassroots activism and mobilization through the social network [10]. Some actions initiated as local

neighborhood activities over the time develop into a formal organization dealing with local problems. Majority of actions are developed as reactive, but this trend has changed in last decade and urban movements are becoming more proactive gaining important role in formal urban planning. Despite many different forms of urban activism emerging in post-socialist cities, the phenomena of civil society, urban activism and movements have not been significantly researched in literature, and especially in one that refers to non-EU cities. The focus of previous research is on social, political and cultural aspect of urban activism and its role in dynamics of civil society [1], [5], while the role of in(formal) activism in dynamics of urban development and transformation remains neglected. This paper deals with the transformative potential of civil initiatives in the process of urban planning and transformation of post-socialist cities. The aim of the paper is to provide new understanding of the role of civil initiatives in urban development projects based on their attributes and effectiveness of their actions.

The paper is structured as follows. First, theoretical framework for studying civil society, urban activism and movements and participation in urban planning process is presented. Then, based on these theories new theoretical model of understanding the phenomenon of civil initiative and its role in urban planning process is developed. Further, contemporary trends and tendencies in urban planning of Banjaluka are analyzed, including formalized practices of participation and emerging urban resistance movements. This is followed by the case study of civil initiative for preservation and transformation of open public space in Banjaluka. The qualitative analysis was backed by the collection of data on activities of civil initiative and proposed visions of development. This includes data from the civil initiative websites, social media posts and blogs, articles in local newspapers in addition to data obtained directly from members of social movements during the meetings. This initiative is an example of successful self-organization of citizens which has transformative potential in the process of urban development and thus becomes new informal partner of city authorities in urban planning of Banjaluka.

2. URBAN ACTIVISM IN POST-SOCIALIST URBAN DEVELOPMENT

 Much research advocates the idea that urban activism has played an important role in the development of civil society in post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe. The rise of urban activism in post-socialist cities has been related to the restructuring of civil society and empowerment of citizens in process of transition towards democracy. Various formal and informal groups, urban movements and organizations are organized to preform collective actions to promote quality of urban environment and sustainable urban development in neoliberal economy.

Dealing with the role of urban activism in shaping urban governance Bitušíková [11] focuses on relations among different local civil society actors, such as urban activist and local non-profit organizations that act as important catalyst of citizen engagement in the cities. The same author concludes that urban activism and urban movements in Central and Eastern Europe have been undergoing development with diversity of forms of actions and improved interaction and collaboration among actors, which results in increased citizen interest and participation in urban initiatives contributing to the changes of urban governance [11, p. 220].

Theoretical approaches in contemporary debate about post-socialist civil society refer to either the new opportunities of the post-socialist present or the remaining effects of the communist past on the transition towards democracy. Much research mainly focuses on formal and non-governmental organizations rather than informal activism and grassroots organizations. However, civil society is defined as weak, meaning that it lacks power to promote and improve citizen engagement and mobilization in public affair as well as at the grassroots level [11]. Similarly, Howard [12] argues that post-communist civil society is distinctively weak, characterized by low level of organizational membership and participation by ordinary citizens. Making research on collective pattern of (non)participation in voluntary organizations throughout post-communist Europe, Howard infers that variations in weakness among countries are relatively small. The same author discusses three main causal factors which back his main assumption about weakness of civil society in post-communist countries. The first one refers to mistrust of citizens in organizations even when participation is voluntary. Second, many people find private and informal networks, that developed under communism and persist today in new institutional environment, discouraging to join formal organizations. Finally, the disappointment of post-communist citizens with the new political and economic system, which has not lived up to their hopes and ideals, caused them to withdraw from public activities. All three factors involve experiential reinterpretations of people's past experiences within newly constituted institutions and have a negative effect on membership and participation in

voluntary organizations [12, p. 10]. Besides, a state and economic system are the main elements of communist experience and its lasting effects. The main hypothesis is that a strong, active, and supportive state encourages the development of civil society. Considering many political turmoil and widespread corruption in branches of government in post-communist context, it is evident that state has not provided the necessary resources and support for civil society. Another prerequisite of strong civil society is a stable and functioning economic system, which enhances the material well-being of citizens. It implies that economic uncertainty and chaos, that have even increased since the collapse of communism, influence the weakness of civil society of post-communist countries [12].

On the other hand, the weakness of civil society has been challenged by other researchers arguing that organizational membership is not the only aspect of citizen engagement in post socialist cities [13]. Petrowa and Tarrow [13] indicate the significance of the level and frequency of citizen participation and the type of engagement in public politics. Besides, Císař [14] clarifies the main rationale behind the phenomenon of low level of civic participation asserting that collective actions remained associated with communist system since previous regime relied strongly on political mobilization. Also, political freedom, as the main paradigm of post-communist society, is not understood as an opportunity to express social needs and participate in politics, but as an idea of freedom from politics [14].

Besides participatory activism that might be qualified as weak, other types of activism are present in post-socialist context literature: transactional activism (advocacy-based activism focused on inter-organizational networking), radicalism (extra-institutional activism) and civic self-organization (organization- independent and episodic) [15, p. 199]. Similarly, Bitušíková recognizes two main categories of urban activism: "a) formal organizations and movement, or organized or semi-organized groups, organizations and movements with proactive strategies aimed at strengthening social capital by supporting citizen participation in various areas of urban development; and b) informal and ad hoc movements and initiatives, or protests and pressure groups and initiatives that mobilize citizens in the city's public spaces against neoliberal politics, mainly through opposition to new construction and development projects with the aim of protecting urban heritage" [11, p. 226]. Arguing that with the emergence of urban activism a stronger civil society is developed, Císař [16] notes that civic self-organization, as a way of citizen mobilization without formal organizations, is considered the most common type of activism in post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe. The informal and spontaneous self-organized urban grassroots activism arises in response to urban policy measures and manifests itself in proactive or reactive community initiatives, protest and petitions to protect public spaces, green areas or heritage sites [11, p. 222]. Collective mobilizations around the resistance activities and movement are organized by dedicated individuals. Mobilizations tend to be numerous and small with protests and non-violent demonstrations as main actions. These informal movements challenge the city authorities' non- transparent decision making in the sale of public property to private investors and aim to stop new development that would jeopardize public space and interests.

3. THE WEAKNESS OF PARTICIPATION IN POST-SOCIALIST URBAN PLANNING

Meaningful and efficient participation and civil engagement in decision-making process which protect public interests are important imperatives of contemporary democratic society [17] Participation is considered a cornerstone of democracy and a fundamental way to empower citizens. Public participation in urban planning refers to the direct involvement of citizens in compiling plans and shaping urban environment that might affect them [3, p. 3]. Very similar term mentioned in literature is community participation described as a means for creating opportunities that unable people in a community to influence and shape development processes [18].

The participation of the public in urban planning is mainly rooted in the concept of constructive dialogue and consensus building [19]. Due to the involvement of many actors with diverse interests, such as citizens, profit and non-profit organizations, planners, public administrators and private entities, the conflict is inevitable part of the urban planning process [20] [21]. On the other side, participatory planning approach makes use of its stakeholders' knowledge, resources, and commitment [4]. The most common mechanisms and tools of participation in planning are different activities such as civil debate and communication, consultations, activities division, partnership, esc. The level of citizen participation in urban planning and extent of citizens' power in determining the plan have been thoroughly explained by Arnstein's [22] concept of eight-rung ladder which distinguishes gradations of citizen participation. At the nonparticipation level (manipulation and

therapy rungs), people have no influence in decision-making process and are "cured" and "educated" by powerholders. The medium level of participation refers to the informing and consultation in which people are allowed to hear and to be heard, but again without any possibility of intervening, and placation in which members of the public are allowed to advice, but the powerholders retain the continued right to decide. At the highest level of participation citizens are awarded different degrees of power which is distributed through the collaboration between public and powerholders. Citizens can either enter a partnership with powerholders that enable them to negotiate or obtain the most of or full managerial power. Similarly, Anokye [23] defines different participative approaches to planning such as: a) transformative approach in which bottom-up strategies for information flow are used and public is allowed to be significantly and powerfully involved; b) instrumental approach which advocates for the top-down communication with no effort for consensus building; and c) mix of the two previous approaches. However, which approach is to be applied in planning system depends on socio-cultural, economic, situational, and developmental factors [23], whereby socio-cultural factors are considered the most important in affecting an individual's willingness to participate.

The theory and practice of participation in urban planning of post-socialist countries have gained attention mainly in the framework of EU accession process and urban planning requirements imposed by the EU funds. The great legacy of post-socialist countries is the lack of participation and top-down planning approach. Besides, some authors claim that weak participation or non-participation is positively corelated with economic development which is lower in post-socialist countries [24]. Given this, the question of participation becomes more challenging in non-EU countries with less developed democracy and economies. The position of citizens is weak in triangle of business, authorities and politicians, and citizens [25]. Citizens are formally involved in planning process but are essentially passive participants who only provide data and information and have no influence on decision-making. The reason for this tokenism level of participation lies in strong legacy of socialism in which social equality, collectivism and economic prosperity were main paradigm of development, while political freedom was not advocated. Unfamiliarity with democracy is the socio-cultural factor that mostly affects the civil engagement and participation in development projects. Nevertheless, results of the studies conducted in post-socialist countries indicate that the extend of the weak participation has started to change gradually and that more interest groups have been represented in planning process [25, p. 716]. In Arnstein's terminology this is understood as climbing the ladders. Participation is present at the level of non-government organizations and civil initiative activities [26]. According to Maier, the process of strengthening the participatory planning is two-dimensional. The first dimension refers to gaining recognition of "weaker" participants, while the other refers to the changing of the power relations. The same author concludes that the effective participatory approach is learning prosses for all interest groups, and it implies combination of bottom-up and top-down initiative [25, p. 716]. In situations when weaker participants are not recognized as important urban actors, urban movements as form of resistance against imposed plans are emerging.

4. THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL INITIATIVES IN URBAN PLANNING AND TRANSFORMATION

Based on the theoretical framework of urban activism and participation in post-socialist urban planning and development the new theoretical model of understanding the phenomenon of civil initiative and its role in urban planning is developed. The model is based on defined attributes of civil initiative that could affect goals of its actions and results of urban planning process. The initiatives with more success have transformative potential, while the ones with less success may have partial or zero potential. Relating the attributes of the initiative with its results gives the possibility of identifying the key attributes which contribute to its transformative potential. The attributes of civil initiatives are explained in the text that follows.

Structure of actors and their collaboration. There is a great diversity of actors which makes the organization of civil initiative complex. Actors can be individuals, citizens, communities, non-governmental organizations, educational organizations, private sector organizations, etc., and are guided by some rules of internal coordination in formal and informal structures. For the initiative to be effective, members should be consistent and cohesive, and share the same aims and support each other in the group. Fixed organizational structure provides clear communication channels and reduces fears of losing independence and transparency. However, the challenge that initiatives often face is constant changing of active members over time because of the long-time dimension of

initiatives and not receiving financial benefit for the engagement. Besides, very often none of the members is expert in urban planning and management field which makes it difficult to manage the activities of the initiative.

Structure of organization. The way citizens are mobilized affects the structure of organization of civil initiative. Self-organization, as a way of citizen mobilization, is considered the most common type of activism in post-socialist cities in which local actors, confronted with local government decisions, make a collective action against imposed planning solutions. The autonomy of self-organized initiative is based on the free self-rule of the society. That is the reason why self-organized initiatives attract more members and have a lower risk of co-optation by decision makers. The other way of citizen mobilization is implemented through formal organizations and movements or organized or semi-organized groups. Eventually, as it grows over time self-organized initiative might develop into a formal form of action.

Number of actors. Number of actors involved in an initiative depends on the level of contested place and aims of the initiative. Due to the weakness of civil society in post-socialist cities urban activism is characterized by small-scale civil initiatives. Unfamiliarity with democracy is the socio-cultural factor that mostly affects the low civil engagement in development projects. Larg-scale civil initiatives appear when self-organized groups are supported by formal organizations so that their demands and proposals could be heard more loudly or when the aims of the initiatives are for the benefit of all city residents.

Scope and aims of actions. Accurate, clear, and not too broad goals of the civil initiative actions addressed to the authorities and decision makers are a prerequisite for their achievement and overall success. While some civil society organizations may ask for basic conditions that are no longer met by improving the quality of neighbourhoods, others may aim at more broad goals such as changing unsustainable political, social, ecological, economic, and cultural patterns. In post-socialist cities the most common goal of civil society initiatives is to promote social justice and quality of urban environment. They strive to ensure that "the right to the city" of each individual is respected. With that goal and through collective efforts civil initiatives advocate for policies change, postponement of the plan's implementation, etc. On the other hand, they work on fostering collaboration with city authorities, building self-capacity and empowering communities.

Scale of actions: The scale of civil initiative actions directly depends on the aims and scope of the initiative. In post-socialist cities civil initiatives are not developed as mass scale actions mobilized around border political or social issues, but small-scale actions that are aimed at changes in urban development and improvement of the quality of the urban environment. In order to achieve broader social and political issues, several organizations join together in common activities and address common requests to the authorities. On the other hand, the neighbourhood-scale initiatives are more effective in preforming common actions because of the pre-existing social ties within community and mutual trust between members of the initiative.

Types of actions. Civil society is powerful actor in the conception and implementation of urban planning and management. There is a range of actions through which actors involved in civil initiative impact urban planning and outcome of that process. The type of activities depends on the main goal of the initiative, values that are contested (use value, land value, real estate, heritage value, economic value, etc.) and the phase of urban planning process. Regarding this, some actions might be part of formal participatory process such as drafting demands and making proposals for development, filing objections to the plan proposals, etc., while others are performed anytime as part of informal participatory process such as: protests, petitions, group meetings for exchange of information, site visits, place making activities, art festivals, cultural events, etc. Some initiatives are even able to conceive, develop and implement their own alternative solutions and plans. Therefore, all these actions, either proactive or reactive, might be central to a potentially new co-design planning culture.

Strategies and modes of action. Two models of strategies of urban activism are present in post-socialist cities. The dominant model is reactive strategy of civil initiatives that mobilize citizens against neoliberal urban politics, mainly through opposition to new construction, development projects and plan implementation, with the aim of protecting city's public spaces. The other model, proactive strategy aims at strengthening social capital by supporting citizen participation in various areas of urban development. Dynamic civil society initiatives which ought to open the planning process and initiate the urban development projects rarely take place in post-socialist civil societies.

Continuity. Persistence and frequency of the activities are two crucial elements of continuity of initiatives and accomplishments of goals. The disappointment of post-socialist citizens with values of collectively which have not persisted, causes them to withdraw from public activities. Therefore,

short-term mobilization of citizens is the most common form of civil society practice in post-socialist cities. Nevertheless, long-term mobilization of citizens gains more credibility in negotiations with city officials. At the same time, it is challenged by the ability of members to develop "political culture" in terms of horizontal self-management practice.

Inception of actions. Civil initiatives can take part in different phases of urban planning process, from initiation to plan implementation and monitoring. Accordingly, different formal and informal participatory tools are used, and actions performed. They range from institutional tactics and official participative schemes (public insight and hearing) of negotiating with the city authorities to very diverse non-institutional "direct actions". Performing diverse actions within the same civil initiative gives a greater possibility of achieving better results. The time when official activities of civil initiatives begin within the planning process is of great importance for their success. Civil initiatives which open the planning process and commence improvements in urban environment are more likely to have more significant position in negotiation with decision makers and city officials. Timeliness of the actions is especially important if they are undertaken as a part of institutionalized (formal) participation in urban planning. Missing the deadline for filing objections to the proposed plan may result in loosing opportunity to make changes.

Collaboration with city authorities. Actors involved in civil initiative develop antagonistic attitude towards institutions due to their distrust in post-socialist institutions, whose activities are considered non-transparent. On the other hand, institutions see urban initiatives as a threat to their programmes. The examples are showing that the lack of communication and prejudice are the main obstacle of effective collaboration between these two parties. Cooperation is even hampered by low level of formal participation (tokenism level) in urban planning which increases the risk of developing the conflicts between the weak and the strong. Therefore, establishing communication channels, constructive dialog and finally partnership between civil initiative actors and institutions come across as the most promising cooperation. Eventually, taking great part in institutionalized channels of participation might be challenging for civil initiative organizations. In some cases, the more the city authorities are efficient in providing effective participatory channels the bigger is the risk of co-optation for civil initiatives.

5. URBAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN POST-SOCIALIST BANJALUKA

Banjaluka is the second largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina and political, financial, administrative, university and cultural center of one of the entities of the country- Republic of Srpska. As many other post-socialist cities Banjaluka is the place of dynamic socio-economic and spatial transition and transformation. In socialism, Banjaluka had a well-earned international reputation of the Yugoslav industrial and green city with a vast range of open spaces. Today, Banjaluka is a city of different administrative and political shifts that influence its urban development [27] . The increased role of local administration, capital principles of private ownership and marked-lead local economy have brought urban changes for the benefit of private capital or investors urbanism. The role of the private sector, seeking for the profit, becomes dominant in management of urban development, which is the reason why places of public interest are shrinking. This phenomenon is the cause of the increasing dissatisfaction of citizens of Banjaluka whose needs are neglected, and voices rarely heard. To better understanding the role of the citizens in formal planning process and the weakness of their position in relation to strong private capital, current trends and tendencies in public participation in Banjaluka are re-examined in the following text. The most important questions are in which phase of a planning or policy process stakeholders are invited, which role they are assigned, and what degree of participation is to be achieved [28].

Due to the lack of strategic planning document Urban plan of Banjaluka, urban development and transformation are commonly based on the preparation and implementation of spatial planning documents (preparing physical and urban planning documents as regulatory plans, urban planning and design and parceling out plans). The main legal act that regulates participation in formal urban planning in Republic of Srpska is Law on Spatial Planning and Construction [29] which implies that the public is informed through the public enquiry prior to preliminary draft preparation. The public has 15 days to express its attitude towards exposed documents. The exposed documents include a decision of the City Assembly with text that provides an explanation of initiative, an excerpt of strategic planning document and drawing of a pre-existing state. After the closing date of the informing the public without effective collaboration, the process of initial program setting is completed, and planners start with preparing the preliminary draft. During public insight into the

draft plan, the public is allowed to make objections to the plan proposal within the 30 days. After public insight is closed, the public is invited to a discussion about objections filed to the proposed plan. Planning practice dealing with implementing planning documents indicates that plan proposal prepared in accordance with initial program, shall not be substantially transformed in the final stage of the planning process regardless of public opinion. This means that the urban planning process in Banjaluka applies extremely top-down method of participation with the superior position of the local government. In addition, only two formal forms of public participation are public insight and public discussion on draft plan. To be even worse, alternative tools for motivating all stakeholders to get involved in compiling plans do not exist.

One more obstacle to meaningful participation is urban planners themselves and their "disinterest, mistrust, skepticism, animosity, arrogance and fear to connect with citizens and include their opinion, knowledge and wishes in plan making" [3, p. 9]. On the other hand, there is a lack of theoretical and methodological knowledge about formal and informal tools and techniques for involvement of citizens in urban planning process. In these circumstances, there is a great distrust in institutions and citizens perceive the process as non-transparent and often are not willing to participate.

Given the above, it can be argued that citizen participation in urban planning practice in Banjaluka is not efficient and meaningful. As a response to top-down planning approach various local civil initiatives with different aims and requests have emerged in last fifteen years. Civil initiatives, as a specific kind of civic engagement and activism, are common urban phenomenon in developing countries, due to weak state and governance structures, corruption, and scarce (financial) resources [28, p. 1690]. They arise from dissatisfaction of citizens with governmental politics and actions, or from "nonaction" of authorities due to the budget cuts. The growing consciousness of the residents of Banjaluka, that resulted in urban resistance movements and civil initiative, gradually changes the balance of power between all stakeholders. Local actors (society, stakeholder groups or NGOs), confronted with local government decisions, are self-organizing to make a collective action against imposed planning solutions. This bottom-up approach is gaining an extreme form of participation-organized, voluntary and independent. The most prominent civil initiatives in Banjaluka are i.e., "Park is ours!", "Građiš belongs to us!", "Recreational zone Banja Luka", "Civil society initiative BORIK", etc. One of the most successful self-organized initiatives in terms of achieved goals and improved position of the public in urban planning process was Civil initiative "Građiš".

6. THE CASE OF A CIVIL INITIATIVE FOR PRESERVATION OF OPEN PUBLIC SPACE IN BANJALUKA

Open public space located on the roof of the underground bomb shelter in Sime Šolaje Street in centre of Banjaluka was an improvised children's playground for decades. This place, popularly named "Građiš" or "Građa", was paved with concrete with no greenery and equipment, but still was the only playground that kids from this residential neighborhood had (figure1).

The story about civil initiative for preservation of this public space started in 2011 when children's playground should have been converted into a parking with 74 parking spots, which was in accordance with the valid Regulation plan Centre adopted in 2007. In September 2011 everything was ready for the plan implementation and the excavators were already on the site. A group of children, who wanted to preserve and improve their playground, were seating in front of excavators during the day, shouting "We don't give up on Građiš!", and scattering building material at night. Soon after children received the support of their parents and other tenants, who joined them in a peaceful and almost everyday protests. Besides, they signed many petitions against these interventions and addressed them to the city authorities. With the help of some media that reported daily on the events on the playground and the Ombudsman for Children's Rights of the Republic of Srpska who met with city officials, this civil resistance paid off after a few months and the City Administration initially abandoned the idea of building a parking lot. At the same time, citizens were promised that the amendment of Regulation plan would be initiated, and new children's playground would be planed and built. This decision marked the beginning of more significant operation of the civil initiative actors.

Figure 1. "Građiš" as the roof of the underground bomb shelter.

Given that the promise was not kept the citizens did not give up their struggle. In the following years citizens organized many events and activities, with the support of formal civil society organizations from Banjaluka. In September 2015 an international public event PARKing Day was celebrated at Građiš place with music, poetry, frisbee throwing, drawing and playing social games. This is the action, organized by Centre for Environment, in which citizens, artists and activists together temporarily transform a public parking lot into a public space accessible to all citizens. The aim of celebrating PARKing Day at this site was to point out the growing need for open public spaces and to initiate a public discussion about how public spaces are created. The organizer wanted to show what Građiš place would look like if there was a park on it. Next year in December, Centre for the Environment in collaboration with a few more organizations coordinated a public forum "Citizens build the Building" aiming to present the results of the survey on the development and design proposal for this public space that civil initiative actors conducted themselves. The forum was also attended by representatives of the City Administration who (once more) came to hear the needs of the citizens of this neighborhood. During the seven-day survey 165 citizens were questioned, and the results have shown that only 6.1% of citizens are in favor of building a parking lot at this location, over 77.6% of them are in favor of a children's playground, and a large number also suggest occasional activities that might be held at Građiš, such as creative workshops, a flea market, clothing exchange, humanitarian actions and an organic food market. In Jully 2017 the same civil society organization invited all citizens to take part in transformation of this site into children's playground and a space for young people through art and floor paintings. This action named "Građani grade građevinu" ("Citizens are building the building") was organized within the framework of civil initiative "Naš prostor" ("Our space") which goal was to promote a greater citizen participation in the process of drafting and adopting spatial planning documents. Similarly, In Jully 2020 one-day Graffiti Jam event was organized by several organizations from Banjaluka seeking to raise awareness of the importance of preserving green areas and children's playgrounds. However, long after 2011 Građiš has not been reconstructed and converted into playground and green area. Very often it serves as an informal parking lot, which compels citizens to report it to the municipal inspection using citizen patrol application.

After almost 10 years of struggle and continued pressure on the administration, the Mayor of Banjaluka announced that the green roof with children's playground would be built in 2019. This roof should have been the largest green roof in BiH, but since the city was not able to finance the project, this proposal failed again. At the beginning of 2020 city officials and architects presented new design for park and playground which included 10 parking spots and was characterized as "compromised design". The citizens were explicit in refusing the parking and rejected the new design proposal. Since then, the new design hasn't been completed.

In accordance with new development needs but also the interests of private capital, new Regulation plan of part of the central area of Banjaluka was adopted in 2018. The playground on the Građiš site

is finally planned by this implementation planning document, which was the main goal of community-based initiative. However, the plan also envisages the construction of a large high-rise residential complex on the neighboring plot, which, in the opinion of this community representatives would additionally impair the quality of life in this neighborhood. Due to the formal irregularities in the adoption of this plan and based on the initiative of the residents, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Srpska declared the Decision on the adoption of the plan unconstitutional. This means that the Regulation Plan from 2007 is still in force.

Eventually, the story about Građiš gets an epilogue in Jully 2022 when the roof of underground bomb shelter was designed and painted as the color park "Citrus Park" (figure 2). Inspired by vibrant colors and citrus fruits, the park is divided into three functional zones: sport zone, the children's zone and the free zone. Meanwhile, the city reached an agreement with a private investor and offered him alternative plot for high-rise residential complex. Waiting for new plan to be adopted, authorities decided to build a temporary park on the plot previously planned as residential. The work on project design is still in process, and the park has not been built yet.

Figure 2. "Građiš" as "Citrus Park".

Considering all the above, the case of Građiš is example of persistent community-based initiative which had power to preserve open public place and prevent it from becoming parking. Although the primary requirements of the community were not met in terms of creating a green oasis with an equipped playground, this compromised design was approved by the residents. This is the reason why this case is a symbol of the success of the activism initiated by children.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of the role of civil initiatives as co-creators in the process of urban development of post-socialist cities. Regarding this, new theoretical model of understanding of the phenomenon of civil initiative and its role in urban planning process is developed, based on the theoretical framework of urban activism and participation in post-socialist urban planning. The model is backed by ten identified attributes of civil initiative that could affect the achievement of its goals and results of urban planning process. In relation to achieved results and the role in urban planning, the initiatives might be characterized as those with transformative, partial and zero potential. The new model is applied as analytical tool for identification of attributes of civil initiatives that mostly influence their effectiveness in urban planning and development. In other words, application of the model and results of the analysis can improve transformative potential of civil society in urban development projects and social sustainability of transformation of post-socialist cities.

The case of the civil initiative "Građiš" for preservation of open public place in center of Banjaluka is presented in the paper. Initiative was raised in 2011 and finally got epilogue in 2022. This case is a symbol of persistent activism and urban resistance of informal group of people who over the time got a great support from formal city organizations. Members of the initiative were consistent, shared the same aims and supported each other in the group. Strong organizational capacity made communication channels with city authorities clear and transparent. This is the initiative in which citizens' self-organizational capacity improved over time and was gradually built through small-scale and place-making activities, which is the reason why this community was given more credibility in negotiations with city officials. Moreover, actors of initiative were skilled enough to make an alternative design proposal for contested place which indicated a transformation of the initiative's approach from reactive to proactive. Eventually, this case showed that pre-existing social ties within community were beneficial for common actions because there was already mutual trust between members of initiative. All these identified attributes contributed to the transformative potential of initiative in neighborhood development project. However, to prove the general link of transformative potential of the initiative with its attributes more case studies in Banjaluka need to be conducted.

The results of this research show that in the face of limited participation and deficiencies of the urban planning approach civil initiatives are alternative way to challenge development processes in post-socialist cities. Urban activism plays an important role in strengthening the civil society, changing urban planning approach and implementation of politics of urban development. Civil initiatives are becoming more important actors of urban change because they identify problems, challenge the decisions of the authorities, and become new informal partners in the urban planning process. It is recognized that citizen activism and urban movements have powerful transformative force in strengthening the bottom-up planning approach. The greatest ability of civil initiatives is their social capital such as: commitment to the project, local ties, networks, relationships, and particularly strong local knowledge. Regarding this, the improvement of the actual urban planning methodology in Republic of Srpska, regulated by the strict regulatory framework, is needed. Improvements are based on the making use of the social capital of the civil initiatives. Mixing local knowledge of civil society with technical knowledge of planners, decision makers and authorities may lead to the improvement of planning processes. To benefit from local knowledge, it is necessary to introduce new formal (besides public insight and hearing) and informal participatory tools in urban planning. The co-design in public realm based on the mixture of expert-driven and user-driven ideas is learning process for all interest groups which implies effective participatory approach and provides promising development pathways.

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