

The Enforcement of Local Identity through the Renewal of Public Spaces in Timisoara and its Role in the Facilitation of Urban Governance

Elisabeth G. Cosoroaba-Stanciu, Radu Radoslav

Abstract—The paper analyzes the system of impact of the renewal of public spaces in integrated urban regeneration and sustainable development through the facilitation of decentralized urban governance. In the context of the return of the principles of traditional urban structure to the city and the importance given to polycentrism and community regeneration in European cohesion policy, emerges the definition of communities with 7.000-10.000 residents in the city of Timisoara, which are better suited to coordinate local development than districts boundaries. To strengthen local identity in these communities, the renewal of public spaces is chosen as an instrument. After presenting the results of a multiple criteria based study of the network of local public spaces in Timisoara and of one of its communities, the interpretations, the concept of public space implies, are examined and its role in the urban context and citizen participation are analyzed. Furthermore a synthesis of criteria for a quality design of urban public space are outlined and illustrated.

Keywords—Local identity, polycentrism, public space, renewal, urban regeneration.

I. THE INSTRUMENTS OF COHESION POLICY ON A LOCAL LEVEL

A. The Concept of Polycentrism at the Scale of the City

The contemporary city critically reconsiders the ideas shaped by the Athens Charter and returns to the principles, which characterize traditional urban structure: physical cohesion, formal coherence and hierarchic complexity [1]. The implementation of the principles of modernist urban planning, formulated at the CIAM conference in Athens in 1933 [2], generated – though well intended – a series of problems within the city. The segregation of the main functions of the city – dwelling, work, leisure and transportation – brought along an increased flux of traffic between the new function-based zones such as dormitory suburbs and contributed to the desolation of inner cities. The rigid geometry and the idea, that open space should be evenly distributed among buildings, conduced towards the domination of isolated buildings over urban space, which became residual space. In its new form, the city was gradually loosing its history, identity and vitality. Furthermore due to the measure of prevention of densification suggested within these principles, the cities became less sustainable.

The instruments of European cohesion policy support the

return to traditional urban principles, considered to be more sustainable, by enforcing integrated urban development policies, which are involving urban governance on different levels [3]. The new spatial structure generated by this development implements the concept of polycentrism at the scale of the city and induces a popularity of the local, while applying the rules of organic growth, which ensure vitality, formulated by Chr. Alexander [4]. His theory highlights the importance of creating an hierarchic network of centers in order to form a meaningful whole. Thus, the city of short distances, local centers and communities become the subject of contemporary urban strategies.

B. Community Regeneration in Europe

Social community regeneration is a major issue of European urban regeneration policy [5]. In countries like Great Britain („New Deal for the Communities“, „Single Regeneration Budget“), the Netherlands (“Großstadtpolitik“, “stedelijk beheer”) and France („contrats de ville“, „Développement Social des Quartiers“) integrative programmes of actions for the revitalisation of underprivileged neighborhoods ar implemented since the late 1970ies.

At an European level the initiatives Urban I (1994) and Urban II (2000) set standards for integrative community programs. Urban II has as objectives the promotion of the design and implementation of highly innovative strategies of economic and social regeneration in small and medium-sized towns and declining areas in major conurbations and the reinforcement and sharing of knowledge and experience on regeneration and sustainable urban development in the European Union[6] Since the onset of the European initiatives, in most of the European countries programs for integrative community regeneration or individual interventions for the revitalization of urban neighborhoods have been started.

The need for such programs in different countries in generated by comparable factors. A series of complex causes and clearly discernible political, social, economic or societal phenomena, taking similar forms in most of urban neighborhoods in European cities [5] are transforming them and are becoming visible through socio-economic and socio-spatial structural changes. Generally accepted indicators of these changes are [5]: deficits in town planning, high unemployment rate, concentration of underprivileged segments of populations, low income, deficits in the build

and social infrastructure, high environmental load, deficient open space balance and desolate public spaces, social tensions, concentrations of migrants and the lack of chances for education and qualification.

An important part of community regeneration is “neighborhood-management” - the lowest level of urban governance. Lowering the level of decisions in cities is a strategic instrument for the implementation of all strategies of economic and social regeneration, which helps initiate actions, focus interventions and resources, coordinate development and arbitrate interests at different levels.

C. Local Communities and Centers

For Timisoara the levels of urban governance currently are the metropolitan area, the city and in an incipient stage, the districts. This is a major achievement, since under the communist regime only a single political level was permitted - the national level implemented through a centralized policy, devised by a single person. After 1989 the dissolution of this power took place. Steps have been gradually made from the central level towards the counties, reaching the municipal level in 2010. Nonetheless, local decentralization is behind schedule in Romania. Therefore our proposal is lowering the level of decisions towards the level of local communities.

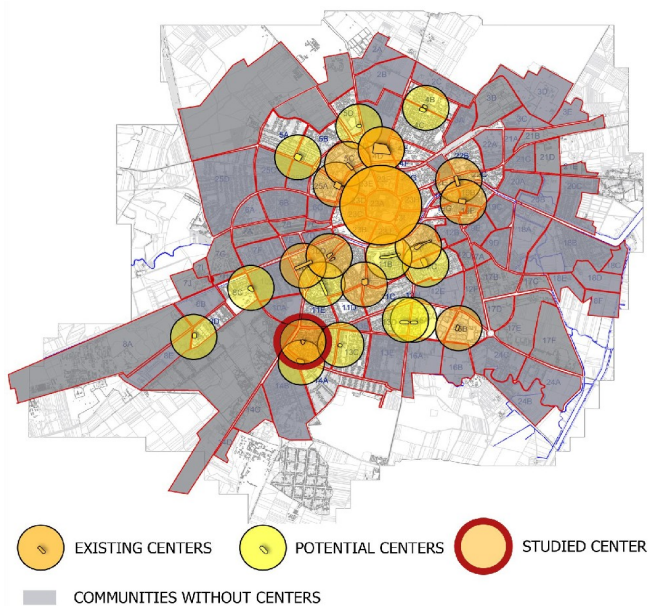


Fig. 1 Network of local centers in communities in Timisoara

This leads to the definition of communities of 7.000-10.000 residents in the city of Timisoara [7] (Fig.1), which are better suited to coordinate local development than districts boundaries, while resuming the historical development of the city. The historical development of Timisoara [8] was originally that of a polycentric city with a central core („Cetatea” -the former fortified city) and a series of independent nuclei. There was a strong sense of belonging and each of these communities originally had a center, in which the activities that unified the residents took

place – usually a public space [9].

During its evolution, the physical homogenization and the expansion of the city occurred, leading to a pronounced loss of local identity. The phenomenon of group identity loss related to public spaces has spread after 1965, due to the emergence of large districts of collective housing, like the one depicted below. Also structural and functional changes are influencing the gradual withdrawal from public spaces [10]. Also the phenomenon of suburbanization, which is understood as a pouring of urban functions into the surrounding area – more pronounced in post-communist countries during the last decade [11]- , has influenced this gradual withdrawal. Due to this progressive loss of identity and the gradual dismantling of the cities districts, leading to multiple group identities, different typologies of plots and dwellings, it is possible to detect a discrepancy between group interests and the actual spatial division into districts.

Thus the establishment of communities of 7.000-10.000 residents in Timisoara complies with the city’s social and spatial reality. These areas are well-defined by major traffic routes and have the potential of becoming vibrant local centers, which will play an important role in formulating future strategies for urban development. The suggested communities are distinguished by a uniform urban landscape, a consistent historic evolution in specific periods, a homogeneous population, uniform land-use patterns, a similar legal status, unitary zoning and density regulations.

The definition of communities follows a similar set of criteria in other European countries [5], taking into account social, economic and urban indicators, often comparing them with average values of the city as a whole used as reference values.

Implementing the concept of polycentrism at the scale of the city simultaneously rises the problem of centers and network of centers [12]. A city of 60,000 inhabitants needs a main center and probably six secondary ones for the pertaining communities. Cities of 60,000 to 350,000 inhabitants need a network of centers, of which one is probably centrally located, six neighborhood centers and 36 community ones for support. Cities of more than 350,000 inhabitants need at least two main centers and a network of secondary and community ones which all support the main one. As studied by the the Research Group for Sustainable Development, Architecture Faculty, “Politehnica” University of Timisoara [12] the number of public spaces serving as such centers in the city of Timisoara has not increased since 1890, making the proposal for the renewal of local public spaces and the reinforcement of potential local centers through the establishment of new public spaces a priority for the city, in order to achieve a sustainable development.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. STRATEGIES OF IMPROVEMENT.

A. The city level

For a better focus upon the areas with the most problems, a series of multiple criteria based studies have been up. The

purpose of these studies has been to establish the drawn fields of action for future intervention and to outline of possible solutions for the improvement of social qualities, environmental qualities, economic status, the objective and subjective security and the living quality in general.

One conclusion of the series of studies [7], which are at the basis of this analysis, is the existence of major disparities between these communities regarding their local facilities such as schools and preschools, sports grounds and

potential centers. This policy is based on a two-level intervention: local and global. The first level – isolated interventions - is represented by the redesigning of the individual centers, according to the principles in the present paper. The second level is represented by the enforcement of the network as a whole, by the creation of pedestrian links between the individual public spaces, the implementation of a consistent image and the process of unveiling the subordination of smaller centers to center they support to

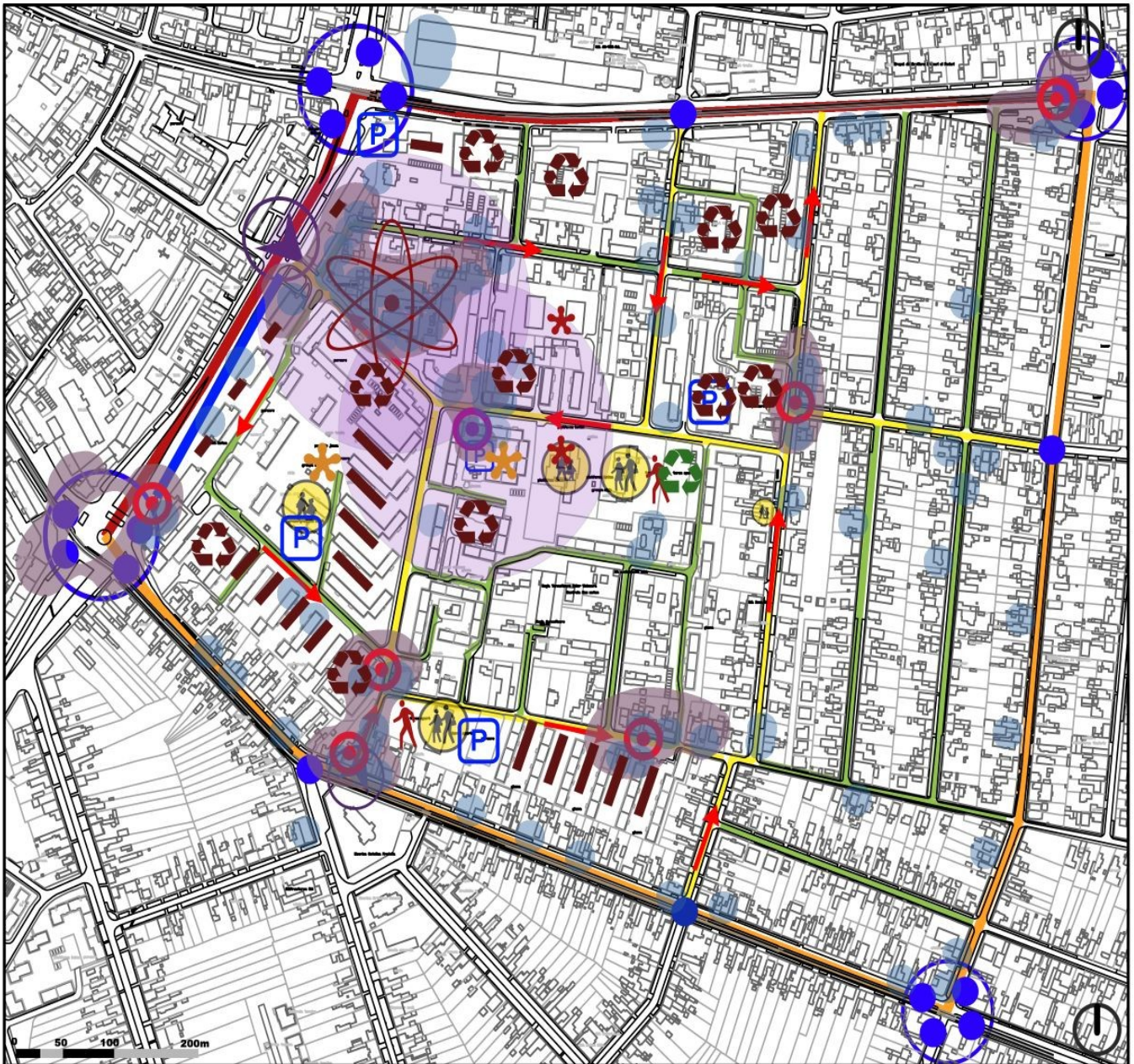


Fig. 2 Analysis of current situation in “Calea Sagului” community

gymnasias, playgrounds or green spaces -some communities being overfurnished, others underendowed.

Another conclusion is the establishment of a network of existing (but mainly dysfunctional) and potential local centers. This leads to the imperative of drafting and pursuing and adaptive strategy to enforce these existing and

create a coherent network.

B. The community level

Out of the 28 elaborated studies we present the community in Calea Sagului. The multiple criteria based urban analysis (Fig. 2) has been guided by the rules on sustainable urban development postulated by Chr. Alexander [13], approaching a series of issues included is the patterns

defined by this theory covering criteria from traffic and public transport to playgrounds and service clusters.

The studied community [14], located in the south of Timisoara, is defined by major traffic routes and is an area where two different types of urban fabric collide, both representative of the city – the dominant fabric of collective housing build in the 1960's according to the principles of the Athens Charter and the borderline fabric with rural reminiscences, due to the incorporation into the city of rural settlements during the expansion in the 20th century.

Regarding traffic, accessibility and parking, the studied community is well endowed with public transport and is rather accessible, but suffers under overloaded streets, a poor hierarchy of streets and traffic noise.

A major issue is the lack of parking spaces: less than 17% of the housing units are equipped with proper parking spaces. The study recommends the creation of a coherent hierarchy of streets - allowing to create traffic-calmed and shared streets and leading towards reduction of traffic jams - the adaptation of road cross-sections and the providing of more parking spaces and the creation of safe pedestrian walks increasing the walk-ability of the community street pattern.

The balancing of the car-pedestrian land use ratio and the promotion of alternative transport modes are a major component of sustainable development. Also the major streets are subjected to functional adaptation on ground floors to reduce the number of housing units exposed to extreme traffic noise.

The educational network is comprehensive (regarding the formalized educational facilities like preschools and schools), but sports facilities and informal learning centers are lacking. Thus the study proposes the creation of small sports grounds and points out a suitable location for a community learning center with afterschool classes, adult education classes, arts classes and so on, which will also serve as coagulating force for the community.

Furthermore the study establishes a possible location for a local park, since the lack of usable green spaces is another major deficiency of the community, although existent residual green spaces contribute to the environmental balance. The suggested park has a potential surface of more than 3.000 square meters and has to include a water feature, because in the studied community, public access to water as a recreational feature is lacking. Water is present only as a functional element through drinking fountains.

Also the public and semi-public residual space between dwellings must be subjected to a land recycling, for a better use, because in its actual state – partially planted, partially occupied by parking vehicles, partially in the state of gray spaces – it isn't reaching its full potential.

Regarding the network of shops and other local facilities, the study identifies the existence of a cluster – known as “Doina” market, a small local center and market built simultaneously with the collective housing – and a splatter, created through reconvertng ground floor living units into commerce. The shop cluster at „Doina” market forms an

„excentric nucleus” [13] for the community and the other shops and facilities form potential activity nodes within the community. The existing units – according to the ideal of the city of short distances – need to be protected and the cluster strengthened. For the reinforcement of a polycentric structure at a community level, the existing activity nodes have to be linked with a transversal pedestrian walkway along the key places of the community (Fig.3), which will be sustained by service units, commercial activities, public spaces and green spaces.

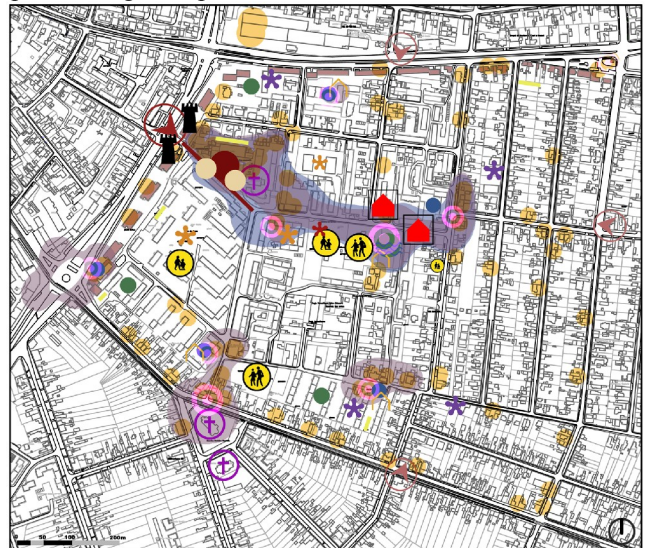


Fig. 3 Proposal for local center and transversal pedestrian walkway

The transversal pedestrian walkway becomes a promenade at a local scale, serving for transit but also for social interaction – becoming a public space itself. This transversal pedestrian walkway plays an important role in providing the community street pattern with walk-ability [15] - including an appropriate mix of activities and land use, showing connectivity and an appropriate scale and using specific elements of site furnishing.

Through all the interventions it will be possible to improve quality of life in the studied area and to initiate urban regeneration. A major part of this strategy is represented by the redesign and reinforcement of the main local public space, placed by the multiple criteria analysis at “Doina” market.

III. THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC SPACE AND ITS ROLE IN URBAN REGENERATION, THE FORMING OF LOCAL IDENTITY AND URBAN GOVERNANCE

A. The Role of Public Space Renewal in Urban Regeneration

For the promotion of sustainable urban development of Timisoara by reinforcing local centers, it is necessary to first strengthen the community identity of the inhabitants of the city. The attempt on forming new local identities in its communities raises the idea of the renewal of local public spaces in Timisoara as an impulse for urban regeneration at a local scale.

The re-design of a square as local center or a promenade, as recommended in the Leipzig Charter [16] becomes a powerful instrument in urban regeneration and sustainable urban development because the shape and character of public spaces and the life they generate are putting their mark on the image of the city [10]. The design, the spatial character and the quality of public spaces and urban anthropogenic landscapes play a decisive role in ensuring the quality of life in cities and towns, because in addition to their contribution to traffic, economy and leisure, public spaces are places of social communication [10]. They serve as orientation points, representative spaces, elements of identification and - as a place where different social groups meet - as spaces for integration. Through these qualities, public spaces have the role of carrying identity.

To understand the role of public spaces in urban regeneration, but also in the strengthening of local centers, it is necessary to formulate the conceptual framework, which examines the interpretations implied by the concept of public space, but also the role of public space in the urban context.

B. The Concept of Public Space

Public space, with its various instances - from a real place destined for the general public to the realm of public debate as found in an agora or even the internet - is subject to the studies of numerous authors from Camillo Sitte to Jürgen Habermas from a variety of research areas from urban planning to social fields. The term "public space" requires a systematic differentiation to describe its nuances. One can distinguish urban public space, virtual public space, administrative public space but also other acceptations [1,9]. The unifying element of the different conceptual variations is its unlimited accessibility [1,9,17].

Urban public space is the universally accessible, confined spatial entity in which public social phenomena are taking place [1]. The legibility of its geometric characteristics allow conscious apprehension of exterior space as urban space, but due to its position as immaterial medium of collective consciousness, the component elements of the behavioral topos of a public space [9] include both dimensions - physical space and human beings. The perception of the public nature of these spaces, but also of the other spatial tenors - semi-public, private - is heavily influenced by culture, especially the culture of build form. Urban public space hence pays a large tribute to European culture.

The general notion of urban public space describes a series of highly differentiated realities and spatial qualities, sharing unlimited accessibility and public usability with all possibilities of public communication for all residents and visitors of the city. The term urban public space implies a variety of spatial layouts, shapes, functions, sizes and structures, forming a coherent system within the city. The perception of public spaces as a system is crucial. Connecting individual public spaces to form a superior

entity is of major importance for the perception, legibility and use of the city as a whole. From an urban and social point of view the nodes in this network are represented by places with a high density of activities and the connections between them are characterized by flux. This defines two basic categories of public spaces as building blocks of urban structure - squares and streets. Urban public space includes mineral surfaces, green areas, planted areas, canals and even partially built spaces - train stations, shopping malls.

Public space is being used in multiple ways, often unconsciously: for movement and traffic, for commerce, for communication, for recreation. This reveals one of the main characteristics of public space - multifunctionality. The multiple meanings of public space can be assigned to one of five aspects: cultural, social, environmental, political and economic [18]. Public spaces are the backbone and the structuring element of urban space and assure its legibility. The life, they generate, mark the image of the city and the quality of public spaces is an unit of measure for the quality of life in a city [1]. Public spaces play a major role in defining urban culture, in shaping the city's image and in forming the identity of its inhabitants.

C. Public Space and Participation

One of the major functions absorbed by urban public spaces is being the scene for a large number of social processes - taking possession, communication, socialization etc. Public spaces serve a series of social functions: learning, the development of social competence, the exchange of information, the facilitation of social dialogue, the fostering of social awareness, the enhancement of social integrative functions and the encouragement of ethical conduct (Crowhurst-Lennard and Lennard)[19].

As stated by Stephen Carr public spaces are "the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds" [20]. Thus, dynamic public spaces are an essential component for the social interactions of the urban population [21]. Because of this, urban morphology and the exterior spaces, it is characterized by, - spaces where people can encounter each other - can have a significant effect on how people perceive and interact with their community, on creating a sense of place and enhancing the neighborhood character in residential areas [15].

Facilitating social dialogue, improving the interaction of citizens with their community and creating a sense of belonging to a community through reinforced local identity will improve one on the main elements of local urban governance - citizen participation.

According to S.R. Arnstein's „Ladder of Citizen Participation" [22] there are eight levels of citizen participation. The bottom rungs of this scale are levels of "non-participation", substituting genuine participation - Manipulation (1) and Therapy (2). Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to "educate" or "cure" them. Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" that allow the citizen

to hear and to have a voice ((3) Informing and (4) Consultation). In this stages, citizens may hear and be heard, but they lack the power to insure that their views will be taken into consideration by decision-makers. Nevertheless, powerholders often consider this stages as the total extent of participation. Rung (5) Placation is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow citizens to advise, but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide. Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power .

Public spaces as a carrier of identity, as a binding agent of a community, as an enabler of communication has the role of facilitating the evolution of citizen participation form a level „nonparticipation” or „tokenism” to real citizen participation, because identification with a community and its urban habitat leads to the need for participation in local decision-making processes and the demand for changes in the decisional system. This actual want is a necessary but not sufficient condition, as also the power-holders have to make steps towards delegating decision-making to local structures.

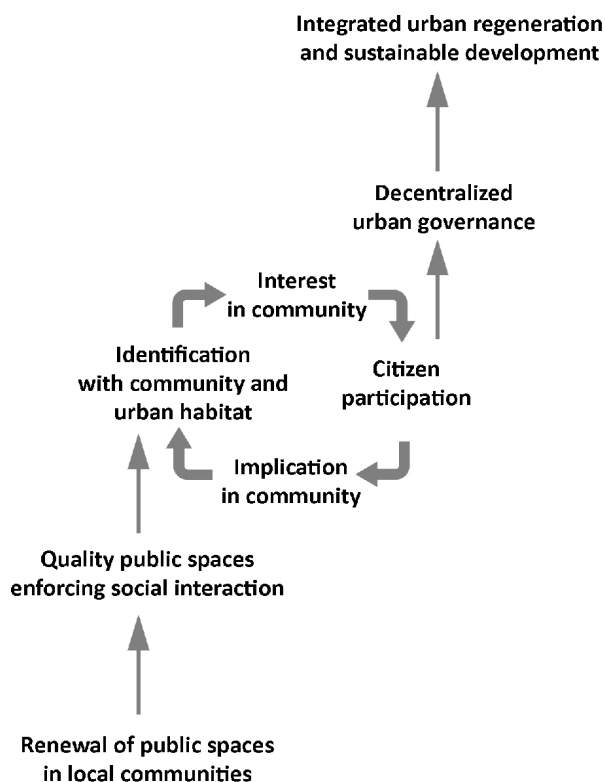


Fig. 4 The system of impact of the renewal of public spaces in integrated urban regeneration and sustainable development

The influences between identification with public spaces and participation in a community are intrical and mutual. Not only indentification through local identity and

specific urban morphology leads to participation in the communities decision-making processes, but also identification with a public space is encouraged by a participative design process of community centers [23]. Thus, for the reshaping and redesign of public spaces it is important to aim for increased participation of community residents. Local interests and needs unveil themselves through this process and allow for a more suitable design of the local public space.

IV. QUALITY CRITERIA FOR THE REGENERATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IMPLEMENTED IN THE PROPOSAL FOR THE RENEWAL OF A PUBLIC SPACE IN TIMISOARA

A. Characteristic Problems of Urban Public Space

Specialty research oscillates between the two poles of depletion of public space on one hand and the revival of public spaces on the other hand [10,20]. While some describe the loss of substance or centrality of city centers, the issue of exaggerated surveillance, festivalization, museification, privatization, virtualization or fictionalization, others note a trend towards improvement, recapture or reanimation. However, both sides agree on a series of generic problems the public spaces suffer from. To establish a set of criteria for the renewal of public spaces it is important to identify these characteristic problems and to take them into account.

The main negativ impact comes from a generic loss of function and substance, paired with rival use – the competition posed by motorized traffic and parking vehicles towards pedestrians – and aging. As a city ages, public spaces age with it, and certain circles of rehabilitation and modernisation are required (mainly for the public spaces created in the 1970'ies and 1980'ies, which are degraded and aren't meeting contemporary needs) [10]. This is aggravated by structural and functional changes in the city. Mostly the public spaces in residential neighbourhoods suffer under the decline of small neighbourhood shops and local facilities in favour of new shopping malls, because the weakening of local commerce is withdrawing the public spaces major functional support.

Regarding its use, public space is the scene of a series of generic conflicts[17]: festivalization against day-to-day usability, commercial against culture, vehicles against pedestrians, residents against tourists, temporary against permanent, quiet against activity. The series of opposing expectations belonging to different interest groups are an expresion of the growing heterogeneity of society.

Regarding its design and organisation, public space is also subjected to a series of opposing requirements [17]: an intricate design versus an design not limiting usability, a plain, strictly functional design of surfaces versus the claim for high quality of materials, large amounts of clear space for various uses versus the constant demand for seating, the loning for visual quality versus the need of comercial units

for representation and advertising.

B. Quality Criteria for the Regeneration of Public Space

Because the importance of public spaces as living spaces, as instrument in urban renewal in underprivileged neighborhoods and districts (in line with the policy of spatial cohesion), as integrative force, as location factor in the competition between cities or as economic stimulus is gradually recognized, the revival of public spaces as a tool in European urban development is gaining ground. Hence the outlining of a set of design rules for quality public spaces has become a primary concern of urban planning and urban design. For Kevin Lynch the quality of urban form lays in its vitality, legibility and fit [24]. A number of authors have analyzed the prerequisites for quality public spaces and the concern of many European cities is to establish quality criteria for the design or renewal of their urban spaces.

Therefore, one may identify a synthesis of criteria for a quality design of urban public spaces: Integration in the urban structure [17], Accessibility [17,24,25], Individuality, identity and purpose [17,24,25,26], Historical conservation [24], Functionality, efficiency [1,17], Suitability, adaptability and fit [1,18,23], Security, rest, vitality [1,17,24,25,26], Climatic comfort [1,26], Shape, definition and perception of space, legibility [1,17,24,26], Sustainability, environmental stability and conservation of nature [1,17,25] and naturally Quality of architectural and urban design [17,26] itself.



Fig. 5 Proposal for the redesign of "Doina" market

The proposal for the redesign of "Doina" market [14] (Fig. 5), the local public space in the analysed community aims to translate this quality criteria in order to generate a vibrant center for the community, which will be able to generate sustainable urban development through regeneration, to strengthen local identity and subsequently coagulate the community, making governance on an local level possible.

Through the rethinking of motorized and pedestrian traffic, closing the tangent street, redesigning the access and fluxes the proposal assures spatial coherence, good connectivity and unlimited access, as stipulated in the criteria integration in the urban structure and accessibility.

By taking into account existing buildings and enhancing them, by exploiting local character and by creating an individualizing design the featured redesign complies with the need of Individuality, identity and purpose and Historical conservation. The proposal also partially suggests new functions for adjoining buildings and defines six distinct functional areas of the new public space, assuring functionality and efficiency but also suitability, adaptability and fit through flexibility of use and the openness for all categories of users. By avoiding the conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, by creating stress- and noise-free areas, by elaborating a security concept and by ensuring adequate lighting the proposal satisfies the need for security, rest, vitality. By ensuring shelter from extreme weather conditions and creating access to sunlight and at the same time placing various isolated benches and grouped seating arrangements, including a landscape element with seating possibilities facing either a stage using an existing building as a screen or the proposed water feature, ensuring public access to water, the redesign of the public space offers climatic comfort and opportunities for lingering and socialization



Fig. 6 Current view from "Doina" market

The proposal is also preoccupied with the criteria of shape, definition and perception of space and its legibility, transforming an opaque façade placed directly in a visual axis (Fig.6) into arcades, defining auxiliary borders through vegetation, landscape element and a pergola without limiting permeability, heightening a building for an even cornice and more suitable proportion and changing visual proportions

through pavement design. A major concern of the proposal is sustainability, environmental stability and conservation of nature, achieved through the use of durable materials, local low-maintenance vegetation, near-natural landscape design, permeable pavements and rainwater design on one hand and the encouraging of pedestrian traffic and alternative means of traffic on the other hand.

All suggested measures try to create an appealing atmosphere, intended to transform a simple commercial node into a focal point of community life, initiate urban regeneration, uniting the community, and therefore making local governance possible.

V. CONCLUSION

The study presented a possible renewal of one of the four types of local centers in the city of Timisoara: an existing but dysfunctional center in a collective housing community. The other types - existing centers in historic communities, potential centers in collective housing community and potential centers in historic communities - are equally in need of a revival strategy.

Through the redesign or the formation of these public spaces it is possible to generate local unity through a new sense of identity, and subsequently to implement a local government structure in these communities, better suited for the coordination of local development. Public spaces in these local centers are a vital part of these strategies, because the participation and consultation of the local population, which is a major part of local government is based on a sense of belonging, which is linked to public spaces, due to their role in forming the city's image. Furthermore the dynamic initiated by these renewals aim to induce local urban regeneration.

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