

Experiences of an urban regeneration model

Participatory planning and implementation in district VIII., Magdolna quarter

The framework

Cities have been changing continuously as multiple systems. International examples show that long run and sustainable development can only be achieved through complex, integrated programs. It is especially true regarding splitting-off towns or quarters which are neither able to sustain nor able to develop themselves. Generally these urban areas need targeted regeneration tools so that the spatially concentrated three urban "spheres" - society, economy and environment - are considered by complementarily implemented subprograms. The subprograms have a number of interconnections among each other and their effects can be intensified conversely.

It has been recognized early enough, that the serious social disadvantages and increasing segregation of the local residents in Magdolna (District 8) can only be halted in the framework of such an integrated program with measures built upon each other. It has been also acknowledged that this is the only way how the accumulated and inherited disadvantages across generations in the families can be gradually decreased and how the inherited poverty can be prevented. Any lack of the harmonization of the subprograms can extinguish the benefits achieved through one program but not supported by the others. But, the harmonization of subprograms has got several conditions: appropriate political, professional, and institutional prerequisites have to be in place.

The paper elaborates a crucial cross cutting aspect that feeds into all three and at the same time grounds on them: public participation in planning, implementation and maintaining development projects.

District VIII - The organization

The City of Budapest and the Local Government of Jozsefvaros specifically established a company - *Rév8 Urban renewal and Development of Jozsefvaros Plc.* - to elaborate and manage different urban development projects in 1997. 30 people with different qualifications have been working on different urban development projects since 2000. The first large project undertaken and led by the organization was developing and managing the Corvin Promenade Project in the Central Jozsefvaros quarter through social but even more real estate development measures. In this project a part of the district virtually disappears and a new quarter emerges.¹

¹ 22 ha of land are affected, 1400 public dwellings and private dwellings are refurbished, 3000 new dwellings are constructed, 5000 parking places ground level, app. 50 thousand sqm of cultural and service area will be established. The complete public space will be redesigned by 2012. The budget

A completely different aim was articulated concerning an other area of the district, Magdolna Quarter, a quarter with app. 12.000 inhabitants. Here a program was developed by Rév8 as a long-term regeneration initiative for a 15-year-period. Because there have not been any similar urban regeneration programs in Hungary yet, a model in an experimental phase was set up between 2005 and 2008. The regeneration takes place based on the co-operation and co-financing of the Budapest City Council and the Local Government of Józsefváros. The total budget of the pilot phase is 3.1 million EUR.²

The general purpose of the model program is to introduce a new urban rehabilitation method in Hungary. Each program element is built upon *active public involvement*. This should serve as a catalyst for the public initiatives and thereby create an individually shaped and attractive part of the city by establishing new public and cultural spots and the renewal of the existing ones.

Co-operation and public participation in Magdolna

Co-operation and public participation are the keywords of the Magdolna project. Establishing the channels and collaboration forms as well as revitalizing the existing ones among the different stakeholders are the missions of the experimental period of the regeneration activities. The most important task is to make up the lack of dialogue among the sectors (municipality, civil organizations, institutes, citizens, enterprises, etc.) and administrative levels in order to set up new bridges among the different urban stakeholders and to enhance the confidence.

The multiple role of the renewal the Mátyás square (Matthias square) in the regeneration project

Renewed public areas that are enriched by quality green areas are the key to liveable urban areas. Therefore, attractive, multi-coloured and flexibly usable inner urban spaces are essential for neighbourhoods and their residents.

The first action area of the public area development within the Magdolna Quarter Program was the Mátyás square. The purpose of this program element was to develop a 'Place' for the community which contributes to the increase of the resident retention force of the neighbourhood and to the enhancement of the living standards; two key targets of the whole neighbourhood regeneration project.³

for the project is 500 million EURO plus 70 million EURO for public programs such as innovation and research facilities. See http://www.corvinsetany.hu/ujbelvaros_fejlesztzesfazisai.php

² This model thus adjusts to the challenges caused by the administrative and local governance model of Budapest where service delivery, finances etc. is shared between the decentralized local government and the Budapest level: it has been recognized that any action in the framework of the two-tier government system shall involve both levels of government. http://www.rev8.hu/csatolmanyok/proj_dokok/proj_dokok_5.pdf

³ The renewal of the Mátyás square is not solely action area of the Magdolna Quarter Program, at the same time, it is a pilot area of the INTERREG IIIB CADSES GreenKeys /Urban Green as a Key for Sustainable Cities/ Project - in partnership with Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian

Mátyás tér is situated in the geographical centre of the Józsefváros district and at the same time it is in the middle of one of the earliest built-up areas of Central-Józsefváros. This area belongs to the periphery of Budapest's inner-city, with a very high density of residential fabric. One of the most important parameters of this neighbourhood is its run-down architectural and physical characteristics. The square was partly renewed in 2002 but the regeneration process in 2002 did not affect the original functions of the area: e.g. earlier there was still a concentration of homeless people, and a high rate of prostitution. The small playground in a low quality vegetation milieu with some benches did not constitute a popular place to be, but the area has not offered any other recreational facilities. In 2005, the goals and actions have been revised.

The main goal of the revised renewal activity has been the creation of high quality and well-maintained urban green space with new public functions.

The renewal project launched in 2005 formulated the following aims:

- Redevelopment of the run-down area;
- Provision of good quality green space that matches local identity;
- Promoting green space integration within a 'special' social environment and its acceptance by the public;
- Using green space to improve the social character of the area;
- Improving public security.

The preparation and the implementation phases of the pilot project have been achieved from 2005 until March 2008, including the public discussions on demands and expectations of local residents. The preparation phase was a lengthy period, with parallel initiatives that at the end augmented the implementation.

The initial communication activities of Rév8 were launched in October 2005 by distributing colourful leaflets and organizing a "kick-off" meeting for the residents. Two further meetings with the public were held a few months later in February and March 2006, all had been announced in the local newspaper. Besides these conversations about the local needs what to establish and how to renew the square, a survey was carried out in the months at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006. One of the Institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences cooperated in carrying out the survey. One of the most important messages both from the consultations and the survey was that 80% of the affected public would happily participate in the implementation and the maintenance phase, too.

March 2006 was the next milestone in the renewal process: an agreement about the cooperation between the Corvinus University and the District was signed on the planning and implementation of the project. During this month, based on the comments and demands of the local inhabitants, three different concepts were developed that were presented in the meeting held mid-March, where both the professionals and the public participated. Planning was carried out in evidence -students came around, carried out research on the role and history of Mátyás square, made interviews with local inhabitants.

At the end, based on the comments received in March, one final plan was developed and presented to the public in May. The presentation was organized in the framework of an

open-air gathering, demo and communication materials were widely applied. The inhabitants could e.g. also vote for the materials that would be built in the square.

After the discussions on the planning were closed in the 3rd quarter of the year 2006, the District has prepared the implementation plans and changed the master plan accordingly. The final plans were presented to the public in September in the framework of the "Health-day", a very popular occasion in the district.

The implementation activity was divided into two parts. The first stage which was financed by the GreenKeys was commenced in December 2006 by creating so-called sitting-hills for the square as an alternative to benches. Pupils of one of the schools in Magdolna District, local NGOs and students of the Corvinus University participated in this action. By mid April, 2007, the new structure (pathways, main green spot, etc.) were established. The new pavement was constructed according to the previously explored demands. Replanting was organized and placing the sitting-hills was carried out with public participation in two days during spring 2007.

The second phase of the implementation comprised establishing a new playground and fences, new public lighting and security service, new green plants were placed on the square by residents, politicians and NGO's during two days of voluntary work in autumn 2007.

In a later phase of the Magdolna Rehabilitation Project, the surrounding streets will get a changed function - thus, the project affecting Mátyás square will go on and the square will be strengthened in its function as axis of the development processes.

In total, there have been 5-6 financial sources: EU funding - GreenKeys and ASTUTE, Hungarian Management Authority, City Council of Budapest (80% of the budget), and of course the district. This type of multi-source financing is not typical in Hungary. In addition, a non-calculated added value was achieved by public participation in the implementation phase: The planting of the area by the public in app. 6 hours. The total budget of the green space development was 200.000 EUR.

Challenges and benefits of participatory planning, implementation and maintenance

The two tier governance system and thus fragmented ownership structure of public space results in a manifold ownership structure, which hinders effective planning, implementation and of course maintenance. This can be exacerbated by low political support and lack of interest, effects that are very decisively felt by the local inhabitants. Long procurement procedures also tend to diminish the trust of the local inhabitants in projects. Despite of the efforts taken by the Rév8 team, a declining participation of local residents could be detected, on the other hand, the involvement of local residents was more successful in the implementation than in the preparatory phase of the project. Participation is costly on the short-term, because awareness building and enabling are the basis for real participation, and they presuppose knowledge and information - these are elements that vulnerable groups typically lack, and which require a lot of time to achieve.

But regarding the long-term maintenance the additional cost of participation will most probably “return”.

After the implementation, however, it seems to be even more important how the maintenance of the square is going to be organized: the financing of park keepers and the social workers will be involved in the next period of Magdolna Regeneration Program financed by the EU. Some tasks already belong to the local Neighbourhood Council and the local institutes (Community House, Elementary and Secondary School, Young Help Service), thus, a harmonization of tasks and resources has to take place and stay continuous.

The benefits of the program are clear: as opposed to any other projects, there is very intensive public participation which has a legitimization effect and gives a valuable input into the planning. It has been approved that there are numerous tools that serve this latter goal: discussions, surveys, local forums (workshops and events), giving access to information through printed media and leaflets. The involvement of partners, professionals and NGO's is not only a prerequisite as it is set up by law, but it is a real tool to enhance community building, confidence building and shaping the identity of local residents and the target residential area. Involvement in the implementation and maintenance transfers real responsibilities to inhabitants which serves the sustainability of projects of this kind.

Such an approach, on the other hand, needs a suitable continuous institutional framework for regional and local development. The threat is now in Hungary that the amplification of the “planning” regime of the running regional development funding (EU and national co-financing) requires technical documentations and implementation plans that allow for too little flexibility, time and participation in planning and thus implementation. This will most probably affect the Magdolna Program's next phase's success, too.

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