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Urban Design Workshops: A Planning Tool

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The views how to use urban planning tools in the future differ widely among experts. One school of thought believes in the further separation of incompatible land-uses while the other relies more on an increase of mixed land-use, reducing the need for commuting (an argument why this seems possible is the ever increasing share of the service sector in modern urban economies, which is generally not a heavy polluter)

## 5. Outlook

The last part of the interviews conducted contained questions as to how the organisation as well as the co-ordination and measures in EP could be improved and to what extent the experts were satisfied with the achievements made so far. To end this paper some of the more common answers should be summarised here:

- The local level should have more power in EP than hitherto – this more important role should be accompanied by a better financial endowment, without which the policy tasks cannot be effectively tackled.
- The piecemeal approach often encountered today should be replaced by more systemic approaches from which consistent measures can be derived. Additionally the prevalent control and command approach needs to be reconsidered to open up more market and individual action based avenues to EP.
- Better enforcement of present regulations would already imply significant improvements in environmental quality.
- To foster public awareness and readiness to co-operate in EP programs more PR work in general but more participation of the citizens at all stages of policy making are warranted

There are, however with respect to the role of local authorities, considerable differences of opinion. Particularly in federal countries the complexity of the interplay of many tiers of government and the resulting confusion as well as parochial concepts and local egotism's are bemoaned and simpler and often more uniform (centralistic?) concepts and organisational schemes are postulated.

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For references (see page 39)

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## Urban Design Workshops: A Planning Tool

In 1996 the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Physical Planning (URSPP), Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning, prepared a public invitation for co-financing municipalities in the execution of urban design workshops and tenders. With this activity the URSPP wished to promote and stimulate finding solutions to important questions related to urban management in Slovenian towns and other urban settlements. Nine urban design workshops and a competition for an urban-architectural solution of a secondary town centre (centre Drava, municipality of Maribor) were parallelly taking place.

The preferential fields of URSPP's invitation were the following:

- renovation and re-urbanisation of towns, i.e. urban space under conditions of market economy,
- improvements of devalued or inappropriately used urban space, and its inclusion in a town's development potential,
- regulation of traffic and other infrastructure, and
- inclusion of natural resources and values in urban planning.

On the basis of the received applications the URSPP in 1996 selected and co-financed urban workshops in the following municipalities, grouped into four categories:

- strategies of long-term development as elements for amending plans (municipalities: Dravograd, Izola, Rogaška Slatina),
- possibilities of urban design solutions for further development of settlements as a whole, or of their particular areas (municipalities: Brda, Gornja Radgona, Novo mesto),
- re-urbanisation of a devalued industrial area and including it in a town's development potential (municipality: Jesenice),
- regulation of the influential area of a primary urban road (municipality: Nova Gorica).

Since it concerns a topical issue and an important subject we feel it is necessary to present some views on the general purpose, organisation, course and results of workshops. Primarily we would like to stress the importance of the urban design workshop as a stimulator of involving the economic sector and the broader public in the process of planning and designing settlements.

### 1. The General Purpose of Urban Design Workshops

An urban design workshop is defined as a period of discussion and practical work, in which a group of people share their knowledge and experience on a particular subject (Oxford/Webster Dictionary)<sup>1</sup>. In the process of planning it should be understood as an instrument, whose characteristics facilitate planning. Why?

The urban design workshop is an appropriate opportunity for active co-operation and education of different participants in the process of planning; this applies particularly to businessmen and the broader, lay public. It is important that in most cases in the course of workshops consensus is reached on design proposals that will later be included in concrete planning documents.

An urban design workshop may be organised for different purposes, for example: to define development potentials and limits of physical development of a particular entity (region, municipality, town, town sector), to present urban design projects/solutions to particular locations, to solve a particular, acute planning problem of an interdisciplinary nature, etc.

The method of work in an urban design workshop should stimulate the establishment of a rather informal and easy forwarding and exchange of ideas and information among the users and planners. The communication between the two could be much more active and lively in a workshop than in the usual public participation processes of urban design; to some extent communication between them is even improvised, although controlled. The possibility of easy communication stimulates participation of all those involved in planning processes (i.e. all those who should be involved in this process but usually are not), as well as activity of negotiations between the participants, irrespective of the different motives that guide them.

Owing to the intensive course of the main part of the workshop and short, but complete review of information during the workshop, the participants may make assessments on their successful participation, i.e. adequacy of proposed ideas, visions, etc., directly upon its completion. It really means using the "trial and error" method; solutions and proposals for managing certain areas are the direct result of workshops. That is why they can be assessed as successful or unsuccessful immediately, i.e. at the end of the workshop, and accordingly be discarded or worked on later on.

The process of long-term planning becomes somewhat simplified with the aid of workshops, and because it is time-limited it is also clearer and manageable. Controllability of the process provokes the interest of investors, local community, etc., who are given the opportunity to carry out short or long-term interests, thus also the possibility of making a short-term profit, as well as the projects' economic effect – investments in a longer period of time. It is here that verification, i.e. enforcement of the economic component and design may be most expressed.

Illustrating the results is of key importance in the work of a workshop. Contemporary computer methods should be utilised as a form and process of presenting results.

During the course of a workshop, investors' and the local communities constantly changing desires (related to changing economic and social conditions) are constantly been up-dated; at the same time results of simultaneously occurring researches and projects in a particular area, that would otherwise not be confronted, are also recorded. In the framework of an urban design workshop performers of these researches and projects have the possibility of verifying the results of their individual achievements and of gaining new knowledge on the possible applications of results.

Particular attention should be given to including schools of architecture and young researchers (exp. the Ministry for Science and Technology scholarship holders). Workshops could be a quality addition to the regular curriculum. The advantages of enforcing programmes of urban design workshops is that the professional subject changes every year depending on the current events taking place in the surroundings and the profession, and is, in comparison to the compulsory curriculum, that dynamic component of studying that links students and practise. What applies to all participants of urban work-

shops applies to students as well: during the course of the workshop they have to concentrate their thoughts, work and results in a short period of time. This enables them to contemplate about current events, but also to make an assessment of both their individual capabilities and knowledge gained through regular studies.

The workshop's aim is to improve the process of planning and to bring it closer to the actual users of surroundings. The consensus reached during a workshop on physical planning solutions is an essential precondition for their practical application.

The organisation and course of an urban design workshop are usually adapted to the programme and its aims, as well as to the participants in the workshop. In the continuation we will give the programme framework of particular urban design workshops co-financed by the URSPP in 1996, and present in detail a possible form of organisation, course and results of a workshop with the example of the urban design workshop that took place in Izola.

## 2. Framework of Urban Design Workshops in 1996<sup>2</sup>

The presentation of concrete purposes, organisation, course and results of urban design workshops, grouped into four categories is the following:

### 2.1 Strategies of urban design workshops as elements for amending plans.

#### 2.1.1

Municipality of Dravograd: Defining the most important elements of amending the long-term and social plan of the municipality of Dravograd.

- Topic, purpose: searching for possible solutions to Dravograd's urban development and solving key problems of town management; participation of broader and professional public,
- Organisation: interdisciplinary work (architects, town planners, an economist, a landscape architect, a traffic engineer),
- Course: individual work with consultations (meetings of participants),
- Results: professional foundations for preparing urban documentation.

#### 2.1.2

Municipality of Izola: Areas of transition; dilemmas and strategies in Izola.

- Topic, purpose: forming physical development strategies; preserving an archaeological monument of national importance and its inclusion in the urban environment,
- Organisation: a group of invited specialists, design team, businessmen from the Izola area, organisational group for carrying out the workshop; interdisciplinary work (architects, town planners, two landscape architects, an archaeologist and a biologist), international participation,
- Course: in three parts, five-day workshop on the location itself;
- Results: professional foundations for preparing the town plan and concrete physical development documents i.e. changes and amendments to them.

### 2.1.3

Municipality of Roga'ka Slatina: Elements of town plan of Rogaška Slatina

- Topic, purpose: the influence of change of urban structures on the existing concept of town development from the aspect of the town's renovation and continued transition from rural to urban.
- Organisation: organisation committee, working group for preparing materials, project teams – architects, international participation,
- Course: in four parts, the two central ones as a five-day and a four-day workshop on the location itself,
- Results: methodology for the preparation of a town plan with a possible solution; preparing special professional foundations of planning documents for discussion and verification by the municipal council of Roga'ka Slatina.

## 2.2 Urban design solutions for further development of settlements as a whole, or their particular parts

### 2.2.1

Municipality of Brda: Possible image of Dobrovo centre

- Topic, purpose: to give design and functional solutions for Brda centre as a means of connecting four currently divided areas into a whole, to stimulate the population's interest in occurrences in the area,
- Organisation: students of architecture (participation of three different faculties), international participation,
- Course: eight-day workshop on the location itself,
- Results: possible solutions – professional foundations for physical development documentation.

### 2.2.2

Municipality of Gornja Radgona: Urban design workshop for the town of Gornja Radgona

- Topic, purpose: physical guidelines for a town plan,
- Organisation: interdisciplinary participation (architects, landscape architects, town planners, an art historian, artists, sculptors, sociologists, an ecologist), international participation,
- Results: professional foundations for preparing a town plan.

### 2.2.3

Municipality of Novo mesto: Urban design workshop for the eastern part of Novo mesto

- Topic, purpose: to solve key problems, identified in the preparation of projects concerning the highway and urban plan of Novo mesto, to design the future spatial image of Novo mesto,
  - Organisation: organising committee, working group for preparing the materials, planning teams, interdisciplinary work: architects, international participation, town planners, landscape architects, a traffic engineer, a sociologist, including societies, institutions, companies, inhabitants,
  - Course: individual work with group meetings, and a joint final two-day presentation of results,
- Results: professional foundation and supplements i.e. checking of solutions proposed by the urban plan, professional foundation for locational documentation for the highway and subsequently preparing physical development documents.

### 2.2.4

Municipality of Pesnica: Development vision for Pesnica, settlement near Maribor – possible solutions

- Topic, purpose: physical development of the settlement,

- Organisation: three professional groups,
- Course: individual work in groups
- Results: possible solutions for preparing the urban master plan.

## 2.3 Re-urbanisation of a devalued industrial area and including it in the town's development potential

### 2.3.1

Municipality of Jesenice: Town development and restructuring the ironworks in Jesenice,

- Topic, purpose: to present possibilities of management and new use of degraded urban areas in the context of town development; to animate, inform and educate the inhabitants and potential investors,
- Organisation: three project groups – architects,
- Course: the workshop was planned as an invited urban design competition, two-day workshop on the location itself,
- Results: forming a policy for management of degraded urban areas; more detailed physical professional foundations for individual areas of management.

## 2.4 Regulation of the influential area of a primary urban road

### 2.4.1

Municipality of Nova Gorica: Influential area of the primary urban road as the main urban feature in Nova Gorica

- Topic, purpose: programme and design solutions for regulating the area of the primary urban road
- Organisation: seven groups of architects, international participation,
- Course: individual work with working meetings,
- Results: possible solutions to the main urban road area; programme and design solutions of the street level.

## 3. Urban Design Workshop: The case of Izola<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 The Organisation of the Workshop

We planned the urban design workshop as an active link between three participating and one organisation group.

The first group was an interdisciplinary group of invited specialists: architects, town planners, a landscape architect, an archaeologist and a biologist. It presented:

- results of individual projects and researches that were separately taking place on the location in question that also clarified the causes and consequences of different phenomena and problems, that are characteristic of the Izola area.;
- different methodologies with the aid of which it is possible to structure and systematise elements of particular problems and facilitate their more effective solution (ex. quality and quantity designed models for analysis, assessment and stimulation of first class designing and economic effectiveness of planned solutions).

An extensive and chosen flow of information should be guaranteed as a basis for continued work during a workshop, as well as for achieving good results.

The second group was composed of active urban planners from the local, broader and international surrounding. These

specialists, that we have called the planning group, have become skilful through everyday practise in physical planning. They brought their experiences to the workshop and with them different aspects of solving the same problems as well. Their task was to analyse all data that was forwarded during the workshop, to pick out the essential problems and to propose strategies or actions for their solution. The criterion for choosing these specialists was also defined as:

- specialists coming from the local surrounding: they are aware of the problems of the area in question, the rhythm of everyday life, the past work and conditions in the field of planning, ideas concerning the future, as well as local speculations concerning physical planning. They are tied to this specific area by experience and active participation in preparing physical development documents.
- Specialists coming from a broader surrounding: they know the broader situation, laws and legislation that concerns the broader and narrower surrounding, as well as the course of processes of planning in the broader area.
- Specialists on planning, that do not come from either the local or the broader surroundings, neither do they know them, but have ample experience in planning in different surroundings.

In the Izola case the groups of urban planners and their collaborators were coincidental, but they could also have been stable.

The third group comprised of businessmen from the Izola area, with whose assistance we wished to assess the influence of market economy on the future physical development of Izola. The response and co-operation of this group was appropriate. It was proved that economic associations always incorporate physical development visions in their development programmes. However, they lack the method or means by which planned programmes, their economic success and physical inclusion could be evaluated. The urban design workshop, broadly speaking, could become an institution that would fill this gap.

The purpose of the organisation group that had undertaken the complete realisation of the workshop was:

- professional and topical preparation of the workshop,
- managing the complete organisation, course and co-ordination of the workshop, informing the media, organising a round table and an exhibition,
- preparing the final report and guidelines for further work.

### 3.2 The Course of the Workshop

The workshop was conducted in three time phases of different duration.

The first phase concerned the period of preparing the workshop, when it was topically and organisationally set. In this phase the support and interest of the economic community was achieved, and also the acceptance of individual specialists to participate.

The second phase presents the very core of the urban design workshop. In our case it was a brief, very intensive five-day period of three participants and one organisation group working, socialising and living together. This second phase is also the opportunity to establish communication between participants in the process of physical planning. That is why it plays an es-

sential role in the urban design workshop. In this period the participants gained all the necessary information for their work: in the course of two days there were lectures joined with terrain surveys of Izola from land, sea and also within specific complexes. A round table was also organised to inform the public about the activities and substance in which representatives of all three groups participated. For the remaining part of the time three project groups prepared textual and graphic solutions.

The third phase was the period in which the presentation of results and report on the workshop were prepared. The results were presented at an exhibition in Izola's Insula Gallery. Here were also included presentations of particular topics of the invited participants. Presentations of participants from the economic sphere were deficient owing to the fact that these people have difficulty in formulating (textually and graphically) their wishes on future physical development. Although their physical development visions were taken into consideration in the project groups' solutions, these could not be presented as an independent material neither in the final report nor at the exhibition. However, since their participation is essential, the urban design workshop is also an opportunity for offering professional services to this group of participants, so that they may be included in the presentation part of the workshop with presentation-wise well worked out proposals.

### 3.3 The Results of the Workshop

It is expected that the results of the workshop will be applied in preparing the town plan of Izola, as well as in plans on designing particular locations, and also be used as a guideline for planning development programmes of particular economic activities.

The essential result of the workshop on a general level is the establishment of a new active type of communication between the participants in the process of physical planning.

Since the workshop is an appropriate opportunity for educating the lay public about the process of physical planning, its participation was ensured during the course of the workshop (exp. through attendance at lectures and work of the project group), at the round table and at the exhibition, i.e. at the presentation of the results of the workshop.

It is of primary importance to ensure that workshops will be able to be organised in the future as well.

In the case of Izola it would be most reasonable to continue the work in the following steps:

- to establish a working body that would meet in defined intervals and/or taking into consideration actual issues of physical development in Izola. This body should be composed in the same way as the workshop was (representatives of business enterprises, local administration, local, state and foreign urbanists, specialists for particular problem areas). The function of the working body would be to attempt to join different interests, update new conditions, ideas, visions, assess the requirements for preparing programmes on educating the public.
- to give effect to an annual workshop in Izola as an instrument that enables working meetings and active participation of different actors involved in the process of physical planning.

#### 4. Some Assessments as a Conclusion

The characteristics of the Slovenian practise in preparing and carrying out urban design workshops, their general purpose, organisation, course and results, in comparison to their preparation and realisation abroad may be summed up in the following assessments:

- a) both here and abroad urban design workshops are organised for different purposes, mostly for gaining strategies of long-term development and possible urban design solutions for settlements,
- b) by analysing the organisation of the mentioned workshops we find that their deficiency is primarily inadequate participation of the economic sphere and still a low level of interdisciplinary character of participants. The applications do prove that these participants are mentioned in programmes of urban design workshops, however they do not get involved, or do so at a low level in the further phases of the workshops. This fact could be a result of non-existent and subsequently undeveloped communications. It should be mentioned that international participation was achieved in five out of the nine mentioned workshops.
- c) there are clear differences between workshops here and abroad as regards the characteristics of the course of workshops. Abroad it is as a rule a several-day intensive event occurring at the location itself and corresponds to the before mentioned dictionary definition. Even areas where workshops are taking place are in the most busy centres, thus being visually and functionally accessible to the broader public. We find that in Slovenia in most cases the workshop was carried out as a .....
- d) the analyses of the final product showed that the results of this year's urban design workshops are stimulating. Most of the results can be applied as a professional foundation for the preparation of physical plans. In some cases, (revision of plan documents), the results of the workshops contributed to a significant improvement of previous physical planning solutions.

We may conclude that the project of the URSPP on co-financing municipalities for the realisation of urban design workshops and competition in 1996 was successful. There are two questions that still remain open:

- will this year's project on co-financing the realisation of urban design workshops necessarily be continued, and in what form;
- are municipal town planning offices prepared to include urban design workshops as an indispensable tool of an everyday planning practise.

#### Footnotes

##### 1 Workshop

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1995, page 1377: a period of discussion and practical work on a particular subject, in which a group of people share their knowledge and experience. Webster's Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1989, page 1645: a seminar, discussion group, or the like, which emphasises exchange of ideas and the demonstration and application of techniques, skills, etc., a theatre workshop (work+shop).

- 2 The presentation was made on the basis of received applications for funding.
- 3 The urban design workshop in Izola was conducted under the auspices of the Planning, Urbanism, Housing and Building Authority of the municipality of Izola and the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana. The topic and the organisation of the urban design workshop was prepared and lead by architects Jana Gojanović Purger and Lučka Ažman Momirski.

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## The Regeneration of a Multi-Ethnic Mixed-Use Area: The Case of Robin Hood Chase

The St. Ann's area of Nottingham, in the British East Midlands was originally developed with dense terraced housing during the last half of the nineteenth century. The streets were arranged in a highly-connected grid, with homes in continuous terraces fronting onto the streets, with minimal private outdoor spaces at the back. Commercial facilities to serve the area were situated along St. Ann's Well Road: as one resident now remembers it, St. Ann's Well Road "was completely lined with shops all the way up on one side and all the way down on the other".

By the mid twentieth century much of the building stock was in poor repair, and the area underwent extensive redevelopment during the 1960's and 1970's. In the manner of that period, the original grid of streets developed with perimeter blocks was replaced with a layout based on courts and culs-de-sac, with little clear definition of "front" and "back"; and the commercial facilities were relocated at right angles to St. Ann's Well Road, in a new pedestrian precinct along Robin Hood Chase. Since St. Ann's Well Road remained the major link between the area and the rest of the city, this meant that the commercial facilities in the Robin Hood Chase precinct had a far less prominent location than had originally enjoyed; a factor made worse by their tenuous spatial integration into the nearby housing in St. Ann's itself. Not surprisingly, the shops have never done as well as had been hoped, and this relative decline has been worsened by Britain's recent and continuing economic recession.

The shift of the original perimeter block layout to the new cul-de-sac arrangement also had marked implications for the perceived vitality of the area. The new public spaces have far less surveillance from the housing, and the level of human contact in the new culs-de-sac is far less than that in the old streets, because of the markedly reduced spatial integration of the system as a whole. These reductions in surveillance and in the chances for informal human contact contribute to a widely-remarked sense of insecurity in the public spaces of the area as a whole, and in the Chase in particular.