

Miłosz Zieliński (mzielinski@pk.edu.pl)

Institute of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University
of Technology

ON THE CREATION OF A SOCIAL CONCEPTUAL DESIGN OF A PUBLIC PARK
– NOTES ON A DESIGN EMPLOYING THE WORKSHOP METHOD BASED
ON THE CASE OF REDUTA PARK IN KRAKOW

TWORZENIU SPOŁECZNEJ KONCEPCJI PARKU PUBLICZNEGO – UWAGI
O PROJEKTOWANIU METODĄ WARSZTATOWĄ NA PRZYKŁADZIE PARKU
REDUTA W KRAKOWIE

Abstract

The paper, in the form of a descriptive analysis, presents the method of designing a public park through the use of workshops. The structure of the entirety of the design, as well as important elements that a tutor – a specialist responsible for the animation of a group of members of the local community – should focus on, are presented in the work.

Keywords: city park, participation, a social conceptual design of a park, tutor, workshops

Streszczenie

Artykuł w formie analizy opisowej prezentuje metodę warsztatowego projektowania parku publicznego. Wskazano konstrukcję całości projektu oraz istotne elementy, na które powinien zwracać uwagę tutor – specjalista odpowiedzialny za animowanie grupy przedstawicieli społeczności lokalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: park miejski, partycypacja, społeczna koncepcja parku, tutor, warsztaty

1. Introduction

Increasing the level of knowledge and improving practical skills in the field of the cooperation between a specialist and non-specialist in the field of the shaping and design of public spaces is an element that is needed regardless of the ongoing scientific discussions on the subject of the validity of incorporating the idea of public participation into the practice of shaping public spaces. As cases of several locations in the world – with Poland included – have shown, the number of situations in which the local administration makes the decision to adopt a variant that allows residents to participate in making decisions regarding the image of the space in which they live, and which they use, increases. The various causes of this state of affairs and the arguments both for and against this type of participation of residents in decision-making aside, the analysis of projects that have already been carried out appears to be undoubtedly beneficial and valid. Pointing out both positive and negative elements of these processes allows us to draw appropriate conclusions and to perfect the methods and techniques that are employed to this end. This is why this work has the character of applied research, aimed at perfecting the professional toolkit of design in the field of the cooperation between professionals and non-professionals.

The goals of the work are:

- ▶ the presentation of a design structure that employs participation tools in the development of a conceptual design of a public space (a city park), (chapter 2),
- ▶ the performance of an analysis of the manner of cooperation between experts and persons who do not possess the factual knowledge and skills of architectural and landscape design and, by doing so, pointing to key elements of conducting work in a workshop group (chapter 3),
- ▶ pointing out the role and tasks of a specialist who animates a workshop group (chapter 3).

The method:

The work is based on the descriptive method with the use of techniques such as participatory observation and interviews, expanded through a study of the literature.

In terms of subject literature, the leading work is a two-volume publication under the editorship of Krystyna Pawłowska. Volume A [7, p. 172] is a source of knowledge that is more theoretical in nature, while volume B [8, p. 180] is a practical handbook dedicated to those who aim to implement the idea of public participation in order to protect and shape the landscape. Another fundamental work is the handbook under the editorship of Jerzy Hausner [6, p. 198]. It is one of the first works on the subject of the practical implementation of the participation of citizens in public life, but one that is directed more towards matters of public consultation than “active” participation that has been described as one of the upper levels of the “participation ladder” devised by Shery Arnestein [1, p. 216–224; 2, p. 12–39]. The subject of public participation is discussed in numerous works and this narrow choice does not block us from a wider range of publications, it is but a reference to works that broaden the subject matter [3, p. 26–44; 4, p. 312; 5, p. 181–188].

The work is composed of two main parts. The first is devoted to the description of the organisation and carrying out of the project, which had been devised as a participatory process

with a structure based on design workshops, in which the local community was to take an active part. The second part constitutes a descriptive analysis of the cooperation of specialists educated in the field of architectural and urban, as well as architectural and landscape design, with a group of residents who are not experts in any field of design.

Current studies have shown that there is potential in the activity of local communities, which can be excellently put to use in order to create new positive values. At the same time, one needs to be aware of the dangers that the idea of participation entails, particularly that of manipulation [11, p. 183–195].

An increase in employing various forms of public participation in the process of making decisions regarding public matters has been observed for some time. These tendencies are also visible in Kraków. Some of the earliest experiences in this regard can be read about in the author's publications [12, p. 199–216].

Starting with the year 2014, we can increasingly often observe a strong focus on the voice of the public in matters regarding spatial development, especially that of public spaces and urban greenery, declared in public statements made by representatives of both the highest municipal authorities of Kraków as well as local administrative officials of various ranks, including members of the city council. The much publicised “Superścieżka” project, which has been implemented in 2015, was advertised as the first placemaking project in Krakow [13, p. 317–329]. Another project that has been carried out with the cooperation of the representatives of the municipality, non-government organisations, specialists, as well as residents and users, was the establishment of a public park in a zone that is intensely becoming denser with residential buildings, at the border of the districts of Prądnik Czerwony and Mistrzejowice.

2. Reduta Park in Krakow

The genesis of the entire project is based on a grass-roots initiative. The district's residents communicated the need to find a location for a park to their representative on the City Council. The idea has gained the acceptance of the members of the council, who passed the appropriate proclamation.

By doing so, they have established Reduta Park. This decision had a factual justification. The analysis of the area clearly indicated the need to for a public space with the formalised character of a city park to be created, one that would constitute a place of recreation and rest for a significant group of users. Although the nearby housing estates border on green areas located along the Sudół Dominikański creek (which can be treated as a wild linear park), due to its undeveloped character, it does not meet the requirements of a park accessible to a wide range of users. The wider area also includes Park Tysiąclecia, which stretches over an area of around 11 ha, in the district of Mistrzejowice (located a distance of around 1000 m in a straight line to the east of the Reduta park area). It was established in the 1970's as the recreational area for the residential estate of the same name that was being built at the same time. Nevertheless, both of the aforementioned urban open spaces do not provide an adequate area necessary for recreation in the wider area.

2.1. The Site

The fact that the entire area belongs to the municipality has been a highly comfortable situation from the point of view of managing the project. The area borders the Sudół Dominikański River from the north – which is one of the small rivers that criss-cross the area of Kraków. The river is surrounded by a belt of greenery with varying degrees of thickness, which is why it constitutes a natural ecological corridor and is a potential site for the establishment of a river park¹. There is a relic of *architectura militaris* at the site, an Austrian military shelter that belonged to the system of the Kraków Fortress². One characteristic quality of the area is its terrain: a delicate evening out from the south, a large slope in the northern direction and a delicate evening out further north near the creek.



Fig. 1. The site of the planned Reduta Park in the Prądnik Czerwony district of Krakow, with its immediate urban surroundings. The park's surroundings are composed of high intensity developments and areas assigned for these types of developments. Source: Original work based on an orthophotomap from www.googlemaps.com



Fig. 2. Plot of the future Park Reduta. Source: author's photo

¹ The idea of “River parks” proposed by Aleksander Böhm, despite being included in the regulations of the SDCaDS of Kraków did not take on visible form. This situation is slowly changing. Both the municipal administration and the residents have come to see the potential of the areas along Krakow’s waterways.

² The nearby street and the newly designed park are named after it – Redute (Redoubt in Polish – transl. note).

The area is surrounded by intense residential developments from the 1990's and the 2000's, as well as very recent multi-family residential structures which are being built simultaneously with the park. The estimated amount of residents that will constitute the potential users of the park oscillates around 20 000. It includes the current residents of the surrounding housing estates, as well as the future residents of the residential complexes that are under construction.

2.2. The Idea

After the establishment of the new park by the means of a proclamation by the city council, a decision has been made under the influence of growing interest in public participation, regarding the implementation of this idea in the development of the park's conceptual design. However, before the workshop took place, the directions in which the workshop groups were to operate towards were established. These directions were outlined by the term: park of the cultures of the region, as well as by three thematic fields: nature, architecture, culture. The name pointed in the direction of thinking of the future park as a place where one would be able to experience the cultures of the region, both in the classical sense (experiencing the cultures of the region on a wider scale, without the necessity of travelling outside the city), but also in the sense of „very” local culture, that which would be created by this place and its users. The three terms: nature, architecture and culture pointed to the necessity of making the new park stand out from traditional ones by giving it an educational function, featuring an offer of a broad programme of workshops, meetings and activities that would encourage the residents to be active. The outlined direction provided the general framework for the ideas of which this vision was to be composed of. This, in turn, became the foundation for the development of a detailed conceptual design of the park – this time on the designer's „drawing board”.

2.3. The structure of the project – a synthesis

Five basic stages can be pointed to within the structure of the project:

1. Preparation, 2. Participatory workshop, 3. A presentation of the designs and a vote (selection), 4. The development of design documentation. 5. Construction.

Ad. 1. The stage of preparations is crucial and a lot depends on it. This period was devoted to the development of a plan of action among experts. The main programme of the project and functional and programmatic directions were developed as well. The list of specialists, tutors and all those involved on the side that organised the project was closed. It is very important to identify stakeholders and find a channel through which they can be reached. After the work on the plan and the making of technical decisions had been finished, an information campaign was carried out, which had a continuous character and made use of both traditional and social media. The so-called „word of mouth” – informal channels of reaching the target audience through acquaintances, neighbours and their contacts – was also of significant importance.

Ad. 2. Design workshop – the key and most intensive stage. Despite making pre-made plans, it can develop in unforeseen directions. It is expected to be a form of gathering the fullest

amount of information on the site and kickstart creative thinking in search of ideas for the main concept, around which the conceptual design of a park can be built. Each of the workshop meetings began with a starting presentation, showing good examples or elements that would otherwise stimulate work. In this case, the interested participants were divided into six work groups, supported by two tutors. Each of the groups developed its own proposal. The role of tutors is immensely important. They are members of a group and can file their own proposals and ideas, but at the same time must enforce the rules of cooperation, animate the activity of the group members and, should the need arise, ease any tensions or distribute tasks. They are also the „hands” of a group – they draw, visualise and help in the preparation of presentations. The difficulty of their task is based on the simultaneous fulfilling of multiple roles.

Ad. 3. The presentation of the works in a concise form; easily accessible and equitably presenting each of the propositions. In the case that is being discussed, traditional architectural visualisations were abandoned in favour of textual descriptions and schemes in the form of map drawings, with the latter being enriched by reference images. The abandonment of the use of visualisations was to avoid voting for „pictures” – the elimination of the factor dependent on the preferences in taste regarding the form of elements and focusing on the basic objectives of the functioning of the park and its functional and spatial programme. The voting was performed in the form of an Internet-based opinion poll. The conclusion of the vote ended with a public exhibition of the results with an original presentation of the winning proposal.

Ad. 4. The vision of the park that had been selected through the voting process became the basis for the development of a detailed conceptual design, prepared by a professional design team. Afterwards, the conceptual design was publically presented, which provided an opportunity to gather additional feedback and opinions. The administrative process, during which technical documentation is developed and all formalities associated with obtaining a construction permit are taken care of, begins after the aforementioned elements are implemented.

Ad. 5. The construction of the park and its furnishing begins after obtaining a construction permit.

It is crucial that an information campaign be conducted in parallel to all the stages of the project, providing constant access to up-to-date news on the state of the work.

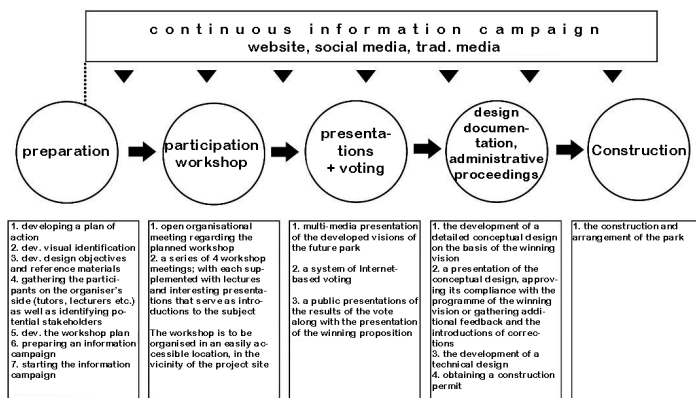


Fig. 3. A scheme of the structure of the participation project. Source: original work

3. Experiences

The advantages of the workshop method have been described in the publication under the editorship of Krystyna Pawłowska [8, p. 96–101], which also includes examples of how workshops can be conducted. The example that is discussed here differs from the one presented in the aforementioned work. The main difference is the division into workshop groups that work on the same theme, the vision of the entire park, instead of developing separate fragments of the whole park by each team. The element of competition between groups who wanted the vision developed by their members to be selected in the Internet poll was introduced (not in a completely deliberate manner, but rather as a result of the convention of conducting the work). This rivalry resulted in a positive effect in the form of the involvement of group members in the performing of tasks and driving the members to strive to develop the principles of the functioning of the park that was being designed in the best possible manner. Additional elements that were to inspire increased interest and convince others of the superiority of the vision that was being presented over the other ones were also added to the presentations of all participants on the workshop forum. The presentations were also enhanced by assigning specific roles to group members, providing musical illustration or elements of choreography.

Every designer that deals with working with groups of people who are not professionally involved in design work must be aware of certain situations that can arise during this type of work. The most important of these have been presented below. In addition, ways of reacting to them and means of solving difficult situations have been provided.

3.1. Breaking the ice

Beginnings always pose a certain problem. The circumstances of a new environment, a new situation, unknown people and the necessity of working with them can lead to awkwardness and embarrassment. It is the role of the tutors to establish a friendly atmosphere that is conducive to discussion and creative work. It is good when tutors start with introducing themselves both from the professional side, as well as the more private one. On the one hand, this builds an image of a competent and professional person, and on the other reduces barriers and shows the more „human” side of the specialist. The tutors should encourage the rest of the group to perform similar introductions, so that all the participants can get to know the rest of the group and get the opportunity to make their voice heard. A less formal and looser atmosphere is better for good cooperation.

3.2. Different goals and views among participants

A group can consist of persons with completely different views and ideas or it can include a tightly knit group of persons who know each other and that can attempt to use „lobbying” to enforce a previously decided-upon version. We can attempt to avoid the second situation during the registration of the participants, separating groups, families, etc., assigning their

members to different work groups. In the event that a group contains persons with completely different views or visions and who voice them from the start trying to impose their own point of view on others, they need to be reminded that the group has convened in order to achieve a specific goal: develop a common vision, and that there is a specified amount of time for it to be done. It is also good to present the rules of cooperation right at the start, describing the role played by the tutors within the group and reminding of the most important conditions that should be taken into account from the point of view of professionals. This last task should be directly combined with a request to present individual (from the point of view of a user, a resident of the area, and thus a person „in the know”) observations and conclusions on local conditions. This can be the first common task – making everyone participate in it, while also constituting an opportunity to update starting information on the site, its needs and potential. In the case that is being discussed, one of the participants had brought their own vision of the park drawn on paper to the first workshop meeting and proclaimed that the future park should look like this. By implementing the technique described above, the participant was convinced that the goal of the workshop is the development of a common conceptual design. In addition, the participant was assured that the concept the participant had delivered could always serve as a „last chance” drawing, to be used in the event that the entire group would not think of anything else.

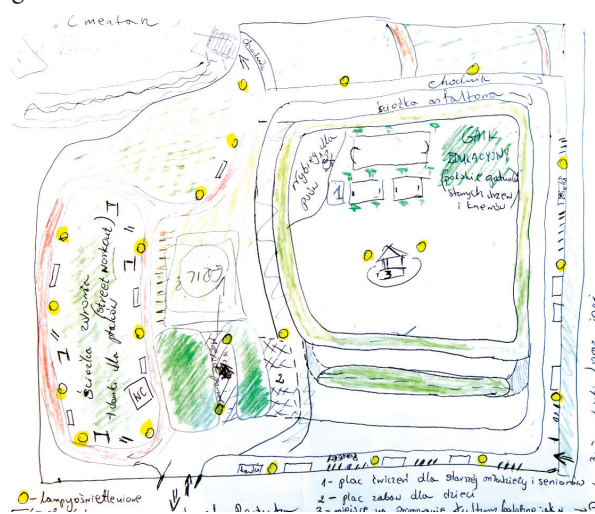


Fig. 4. A drawing depicting a conceptual design of the arrangement of the park that was brought by one of the workshop’s participants as a plan ready for implementation. Source: Original work

3.3. Stimulating non-stereotypical thinking

One of the basic arguments employed by opponents of public participation is the observation – which is, nevertheless, often confirmed by reality – that residents often have stereotypical ideas for the design of a park and simply propose the adding of benches, litter bins and lighting. One of the basic and at the same time important tasks of the tutors is to work out

a need for the inhabitants to view the park as a pretext for deeper intellectual pursuits. During work on this case, the tutors devoted the entirety of the pre-workshop meeting to implant the need to build an idea for the park instead of only deciding on the layout of the paths and the placement of each element. The tutors, by providing interesting examples (using images from the Internet, as well as their own experiences) convinced the group to search for cultural and historical references, which resulted in the issuing of homework to the participants and the preparation of valuable materials, from which „key content” was picked afterwards. Thus, by referring to historical figures living in the area (famous painters) a concept of a „painting” park was developed, featuring picturesque frames bringing to mind association with the work of Polish painters from the turn of the centuries.

3.4. Making the goal a common one

The simultaneous presence of different expectations among participants regarding the site is an important problem that nearly always occurs during such projects. In this situation, one needs to remind the participants about the goal that is to be achieved during the workshop. It is a common vision of a park, one which needs to be worked on together. In the event of a very intense conflict in a group, it is often good to use the technique of „defending the opponent’s position”. It is based on asking the most active participants, who defend their positions most vigorously, to find arguments that support the position of the opposing side. This may not necessarily lead to a sudden change of opinion, but it will send out a strong signal that others also have their needs and come here with similar demands. It can also help in searching for, if not compromise, then „third” solutions at least.

3.5. Silence and shyness, as well as chaotic exchange of ideas

One situation that is often encountered, especially at the start of working in a group, is the difficulty in initiating work and the exchange of ideas. There are many ways of encouraging people to work. However, there is a lot that depends on the tutors who animate a group. Their duty in this situation is to find a point from which to start, a sort of common ground with the members and to stimulate their activity. It is often good to recall one’s own memories with an area (or, in the case when the tutor has nothing in common with the site, memories of a similar place should be recalled).

A loose formula of cooperation and conducting the workshop in an attractive manner can lead to the free expression of ideas and observations by the participants. On the one hand, this is a desired situation, as every loose thought and seemingly irrational idea can, under the influence of group work, be turned into a valuable concept. On the other hand, it introduces chaos and disorder into work. This problem can be solved by making a plan of action and setting intermediate goals. Apart from this, the authors should vigilantly identify and write down „potential ideas” which can prove to be priceless in the future.

3.6. A hyperactive participant

Sometimes, a group can include a person that very strongly focuses the attention of others on their ideas or a person that occupies most of the time with secondary matters. Should attempting to convince such a person that a group is to work on a common conceptual design fail to work, two approaches can be used. In the first, one of the tutors „ties down” the hyperactive participant, by listening to them, meticulously writing down their demands and commenting on them, etc. This allows all the topics brought up by this participant to be exhausted. This should be done in a manner that does not disturb the rest of the group, which can perform work with the other, less-burdened tutor. The second approach is to give the hyperactive participant a specific task, for instance the writing down of their demands in the form of points and for them to propose the means of achieving them. Specific, personally dedicated tasks are also a good method of keeping hyperactive or „disruptive” participants under control.

3.7. Homework – fostering a group’s engagement

Workshop meetings are a time of very intense work. Sometimes it may happen that they do not provide enough time to reflect on an issue and perform its in-depth analysis. It is good when tutors manage to encourage the residents to work at home (finding something, talking about a problem with other residents, finding attractive solutions from other areas, etc. It is also an occasion to encourage the residents to invite their families, neighbours and acquaintances to work with them. Homework can provide a good context for fluidly starting another workshop meeting: the work performed at home can be presented after the previous meeting had been summarised.



Fig. 5. A presentation drawing of featuring the programme developed by Group 2. Tutors: Marcin Nowicki, Miłosz Zieliński. Prepared in the form of a map with a scheme describing spatial and programmatic dispositions. Source: Original work

4. Summary and conclusion

In the case that is being discussed, the groups developed their own visions, which were then subjected to a public vote. The question whether this is a better formula than developing a single, common concept of a future park can be considered valid. In essence, both formulas are good – they lead to the achievement of a goal, that goal being the activation of the residents, gaining valuable information, „allies” in successive stages of work, etc. The second option of conducting workshops is better suited for spaces that have a smaller scale, in the case of which the group of users is limited and will make use of the mutually developed conceptual design. The introduction of the element of competition is sensible especially in the case of larger projects (e.g. of a district-wide scope). The benefit of this approach is the natural desire to win in a competition, which in this case is being directed at the development of a vision of the park that the majority will be pleased with. This stimulates people to work harder and be more creative. The second advantage is that the circle of stakeholders expands. Thus, the workshop’s participants become „active” participants of a project, while the larger group of people who vote in the selection of a conceptual design also participate, but more „passively”. Another advantage of this form of workshops is illustrated by an opinion of one of its active participants, whose conceptual design came second in the vote. She pointed out that, apart from the obvious disappointment (everyone wants the conceptual design of their group to be implemented) she was happy with the conclusion and could not wait for the park to become open for use. This is evidence of the value that the workshop method has for society.

The analysis of the approach to designing a city park with the use of public participation based on the workshop method that has been presented in this article points to the important role that tutors – who are most often educated designers of architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture – play during similar endeavours. The role that they play during workshops is not limited to simply „drawing” – providing an image of the effects of the common work of an entire group. The activity and creativity of the workshop’s participants depends on their involvement and skills. Thus, we are led to the conclusion that, as the popularity of this method increases, we should ensure that specialists receive the proper theoretical and practical preparation for work with a group of „non-specialists” – reinforcing the competencies of specialists in this field.

We should also not forget about the weaknesses of this method. The lengthening of the entire process can be considered one of them. Even when all the stages are shortened to the minimum, workshops require time. Particular attention during the organisation of such projects should be paid to the manner of public voting in order to eliminate potential charges of vote manipulation, etc.

It would also be beneficial to ensure that the subsequent stages of a project (the conceptual design stage, construction, etc.) can be monitored by stakeholders.

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