

IDENTIFICATION OF LOCAL TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES IN THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF VILNIUS CITY

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Abstract: The article “Identification of Local Territorial Communities in Urban Structure of Vilnius City” presents the analysis of the general principles of identification of local territorial communities in the urban structure of modern cities and presents a methodology for including the public initiative as a strong factor of urban planning. International perspective on the process reveals that Lithuania is lagging behind of many European countries in empowering urban communities to participate in solving major urban problems of recent days. Based on the example of Vilnius City the way of activating local resident’s groups is presented in the research with the basic focus on improvement of urban development strategies and local municipal policies as well as concrete development plans. The wide scope of interest that territorial communities have in the area of their habitat allow to plan development of the most diverse urban systems by getting primary initiatives, planning evaluations and post-occupant evaluation and maintenance of residences, social services, landscapes and the other elements of urban structure. By matching the informal areas of local territorial communities with the legal boundaries of local urban authorities residents would have greater opportunities to contribute to planning and development projects and by that increase the overall quality of urban architecture.

Keywords: territorial community (LUTC), public participation; identity, urban architecture, urban structure.

1. Introduction

The article aims to discover and promote wider and deeper analysing of the problem of stimulating expression of identity of local territorial communities by optimisation of their formal territorial network. As the intermediate report of a multi-layer research the article focuses on historical development and identification of local territorial communities as well as figuring out the lack of correspondence between informal setting and formal territorial subdivision of local territorial communities in Vilnius City (Jakaitis 2005). Local urban territorial community in this article is defined as a structural urban unit of a medium size that is composed of several neighbourhoods (group of houses), on one hand, and that makes the bigger urban structure – an urban district, on the other hand (Fig 1). The article also provides for the reader a list of methods on how to analyse and generate solutions for the outlined problem and to facilitate creating the network of local territorial communities that corresponds to their naturally formed territories. However, it can be effective only if community takes the responsibility for the consequences of people’s actions. The article is based on analysis of local territorial communities of Vilnius City and the surrounding area.

2. European and Lithuanian policies on urban communities

The problem of involving communities in sustainable development of urban architecture has been much discussed both on national and international scale. According to Council conclusions on architecture: culture's contribution to sustainable development (Council conclusions on architecture ...) the Council of the European Union considering that ‘*reflecting, through innovative approaches to architecture and urban planning, developments in population lifestyles, particularly issues of mobility and demographic change, as well as objectives of social cohesion, social mix, intercultural dialogue and civic involvement*’, which affirms that architecture is a fundamental feature of the culture and the fabric of life of each of our countries.

A resolution adopted by the Lithuanian Government “On approving a list of fields of architecture to be developed in Lithuania” emphasizes the significant role of architecture as a unique art in the country, implying that every citizen should actively participate in the process of architectural development. According to Bristol Accord (Conclusions 2005), the agreement adopted on the 6th of December, 2005 at the informal

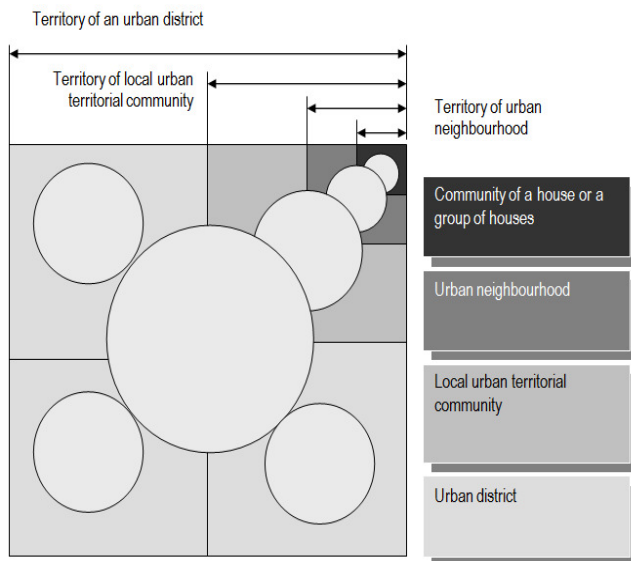


Fig 1. Model of urban territorial communities

meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs from 12 EU countries, the key indicators of sustainable community were defined with the emphasis on involvement of society into urban development of the border regions. The problem of informal participation of society in developing urban architecture in Lithuania was sporadically studied by urban researchers. Unfortunately, the involvement of local communities into the urban planning and design practices is very weak.

The ideas of communicative planning can foster greater public involvement into the planning processes and by this can enrich physical design processes (Walters 2007:57). Planning regulations in different countries set the legal basis for public involvement into urban planning process. The new mandatory regulation in UK “Local Development Framework LDF” (Local 2010) requires that every planning authority establishes social contacts to allow for the wide public participation in designing and evaluating spatial, economical and environmental strategies for the planned development. Famous British community architect Rod Hackney in his famous architecture book “The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. Cities in Crisis” (Hackney 1990) describes great social unrest arising as the result of dissatisfaction with governmental construction policies in UK in early 80’s. In the European research programs urban scientists have been focusing on importance of local public involvement in solving of different urban problems, recreation in particular. The research (Stauskis 2009) figured out that involving local citizen’s groups into planning the network of sustainable urban and peri-urban recreation is a successful practice that is being gradually implemented in Vilnius City.

In Lithuania the regulation on involvement of society into the planning process (Visuomenės 2004) put the emphasis on the formal procedures content of which is very poorly revealed and therefore public involvement in the urban planning processes is very formal. Therefore it does not contribute neither to quality of planning works

nor to higher social satisfaction of residents concerning these planning programs. The decade-long practice of a number of social dissatisfaction actions of Vilnius citizens by the occasion of different construction projects fully confirm this statement.

3. Types of urban territorial communities in the city structure

There are different territorial levels of urban communities that could be identified in urban area. Two trends of analysis are possible and the research will follow both of them. Starting with a big side and going to a small, community of a complete city could be identified in the region. In Vilnius City case the city community is represented by a group of approximately 550k of urban residents supplemented by almost 80k of suburban residents - people that associate their life strongly with Vilnius City. Normally municipal governance is installed for this scope of residents and the territory. Urban policies and programs of a general type as housing, city economy, basic infrastructure nets, waste disposal and some others are efficient on this level. City General plan is formed on that level. Still closer look on the needs of local residents is gloomy and needs a closer look.

The next level down is stratus of urban residents in the big parts of the city, or so called city districts. These areas are formed historically in the long range of development of Vilnius City. Areas as The Old Town, The New Town, Užupis, Rasos, Šnipiškės, Žverynas and the others could be listed as a case. These areas are still big in their territories (The Old Town (450ha), Rasos (1270ha), Šnipiškės (312ha), New Town (480ha) Žverynas (270 ha)) and in the number of their residents (The Old Town (21k), The New Town (29k), Rasos (13k), Šnipiškės (20k), Žverynas (12.2k)). Territories of these city districts are mainly identified by similar environmental typology that is formed in Vilnius city. In this case urban cultural landscape pays a crucial role in appearance, existence and development of these communities. Certain forms of collective identity exist in these districts and more detailed urban programs could be planned and installed for them. On the other hand they are still quite big to create real territorial contacts between the residents. The crucial factor in this case is possibility to maintain direct neighbourhood contacts between the recognised local residents and the high number of people limit this possibility.

The third level down for urban community is attributed to local territorial communities. In these areas the environmental factors are strongly impacting on identifying the size and the boundaries of the territory that community is interested in. On this level the number of residents is relatively smaller as is the territory and therefore stronger social contacts are developed between the residents. On this level municipal programs get the most accurate and detailed implementation. Opinions and preferences of local residents could be collected with the highest efficiency; also life quality monitoring programs

could be applied. In the research these areas are named Local Urban Territorial Communities (LUTC).

The next level towards the smaller type of community could be attributed to local neighbourhoods and the smallest one is the family level. Local neighbourhoods identify themselves as a part of LUTC with even smaller number of residents concentrated in a small territory, mainly one or several small urban structures or houses. This might be a residential street, a housing block or even a single multi-apartment building.

Local territorial urban communities are expressed in Vilnius city informally by identification of real neighbourhood contacts in the territory of residing and formally by establishing local authorities for managing some municipal programs by city government.

In Lithuania the formal way to determine whether individuals belong to public or private sectors is by juridical activity and civics relationships. Also, the territories that are influenced by those individuals are described by formal and administrative boundaries (Fig 2a). "Historically a city is usually compared to a municipality (*commune, municipio, gemeente, comune*) as an individual territorial unit which is made of citizens that nurture certain interests, populated centers with the organized construction, social services and its own authority (Fig 2b). However, formal administration boundaries usually do not agree with real and informal boundaries in which incentives and interests are expressed the strongest by communities.

American scientist (Cook 1975) notes: '<...> *the participation of citizens can help to implement programs, solutions to planning documents and organize actions pursuing for a leadership. Volunteerism decreases costs which help to achieve personal skills. Many great projects would have never been implemented without the help of communities*'.

LUTC activities and territories are usually informal so it is required to put effort to create laws in order to positively affect development of autonomous community structures that seek for a common benefits. That is why strengthening of local territorial community is very important for better architecture and improvement of life quality in urban area.

4. Identification of emerging local urban territorial communities in Vilnius City

The past and present situation (old city stimulates community life, soviet planning models neglect local community, in past 20 years conflicts over the installed development programs has clearly stimulated appearance of more intense public contacts in these areas), existing legislation (construction law and technical regulations),

poor planning practices with low public participation, monitoring system, illegal construction, aggressive urbanization (Jakaitis *et al.* 2009).

Territory and its services are consolidating element for local urban community. Initiatives of local urban territorial communities arise.

Model of soviet period new residential districts with 20k, 25k or even 30k of residents was selected for identification and legal establishment of local territorial communities and their authority. In the new residential districts identification of territorial communities is a very complicated issue as the existing urban structure does not facilitate formation of local neighbourhoods and development of stronger social contacts for this big number of residents. In some soft means this structure could and should be articulated to reach more local territorial identity for different parts of these areas. One of the basic available tools would be application of some appropriate methods of landscape architecture to create smaller residential spaces identified as residential neighbourhoods in these urban areas (Fig 2b).

The very same doubtful method applied for the new residential areas identified as residential districts was applied for the other parts of Vilnius city where urban communities have been settling and developing their local environment for a much longer period of time.

In these historically existing territories of Vilnius city (The Old Town, the New Town, Kalvariju, Rasos, Užupis, Žvėrynas and the other districts) social interests of residents of these local territorial communities are much more clearly expressed in urban territory as common identity for the types of housing, landscape and recreation resources, networks of social services, available types of mobility, employment traditions, etc.

Local urban territorial communities are powerful social organisms that are, on one hand, formed under the influence of the territory where they are settled and, on the other hand, are influencing or are able to influence and impact on the actual territory of their settlement.

Avoiding appearance of *gated communities* and isolated neighbourhoods is another danger to avoid. Urban ghettos as districts for "the businessmen", residences for the immigrants or for certain ethnical groups might be another margin of the process of creating a balanced urban community.

Local urban territorial communities have a great interest in the area of their residence. These interests are expressed by activating the actions of their residents in very different forms ranging from passive forms of follow-up to active participation and protest actions.

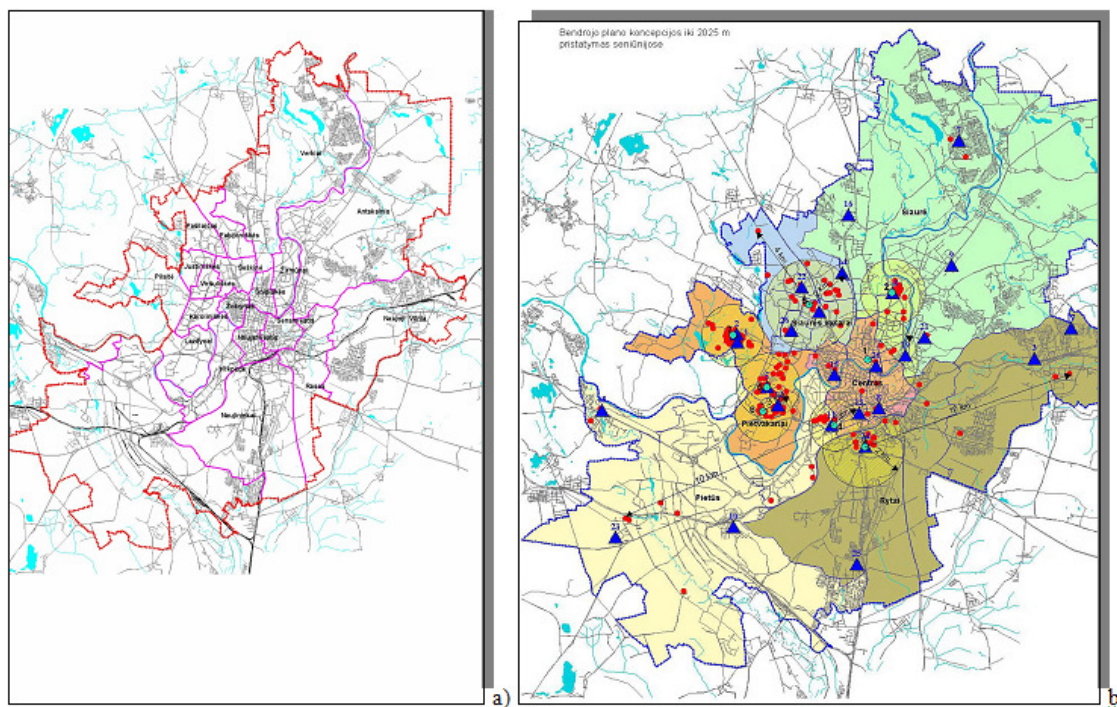


Fig 2. Legal boundaries of local authorities in Vilnius City (a); Informal network of local urban territorial communities in different districts of Vilnius City (b)

The basic interests that local urban communities have in the surrounding territory could be specified as:

- Residential environment;
- Services, including social services;
- Employment and labor;
- Primary health care;
- Child care;
- Primary and secondary education;
- Recreation and leisure;
- Safety and security;
- Maintenance of the territories;
- Local mobility;
- Other specific types of interest.

By more clear identification of these interests and more focused introduction of them into the programs of urban planning and development the city can get the following benefits of getting information about the needs of local residents in a concentrated way. If programs of urban development are prepared based on that information there is almost a guaranty that local residents will approve these programs, they will also support their implementation and take care of urban facilities created in this way. By facilitating citizen's participation expressed by local territorial communities all municipal planning procedures become more efficient in time, resource and social support.

The second point lies in very realistic possibilities of providing instalment, supervision and maintenance rights and obligations of some urban areas and facilities to local territorial communities and so saving considerable municipal resources. As an example the existing landscapes could be outlined. Local residents are very sensitive on all urban transformations that require

modification of existing green spaces. Even though these green spaces are often poorly used by Vilnius residents, they are very clearly related to the possibilities of proximal urban recreation that could be developed in these landscape elements. One of the most efficient ways to shape them and to keep them intact is to provide these landscape elements as green spaces for the full disposal of local territorial communities that would be in the frame of existing legal legislation fully authorised to decide on the way of planning and utilisation of these territories. Certainly professional landscape architects and planners should provide their assistance for local territorial groups. In this way residents could decide in an active collective way about the types of services and activities that they and their families would like to be involved in these areas. It is also a very high credibility that these local territorial residential groups will take over full responsibility for protecting, maintenance and further development of these areas. In this way growth of citizen's communication and civic society will be facilitated and local municipal authorities will save time and resource and also get more resident's satisfaction by urban policies and concrete projects. According to investigations forming the attitude of the inhabitants to the development of their native town, the interaction of the *dynamic (people, communities) and static (people production, the results creation)* factors is of particular importance because their informal impact helps to reflect visual, emotional or functional meaning and informal territorial city form. Moreover, it allows the residents to see the values of the town and appreciate the participation of communities in its architectural development, which can help to transform its image and create individual architectural features characteristic to a particular age.

This is a potential area of activities for recently passive Vilnius citizens (*Table 1*), based on a survey conducted by the authors comprising about 55 % – 77 % of urban population, to participate in architectural development of their native towns – Vilnius. Well thought participation of citizens in urban development based on democratic principles is the only legal way for them to express their opinion.

The research will be sustained in a way drafted by this article and will be extended into practical testing phases involving as many local urban territorial communities as would be willing to participate. We see this process as a continuous and consequent program where the leaders will shape the pilots and pave the road for those who are still in the process of self-identification and will follow afterwards.

Table 1. Dynamics of number of informal territorial communities in Vilnius City 2003–2010

2003 – 2004	2007.12	2010.12	Increase 2003 – 2010 In number (%)
17	32	50	33 (+294%)

5. Conclusions

1. The problems of impact of urban communities on development of certain territories that is rised in the article is a basis for wider inter-disciplinary research of different sides of urban communities in order to promote sustainable urban development with involvement of local urban communities.
2. Social contacts and direct intercommunication is high in real informal territorial communities. All municipal policies and programs (mobility, social services, recreation, etc.) should be initiated, prepared and executed through local territorial communities.
3. Urban development plans (housing renovation, infrastructure, etc.) should be presented, discussed and approved by local territorial communities;
4. The existing urban policy towards local territorial communities is ineffective as the formal boundaries of their areas do not match with the areas of real informal territorial urban communities.
5. In order to make the municipal urban development more efficient and transparent local urban communities should be the main actors, and to facilitate this process the area limits of formal local

authorities should be created accordingly to the territories of existing and identified local territorial communities;

6. The goal of urban policy is to find the optimum balance between open city society and limited LUTC based mainly on life quality indicators and to avoid by this gated urban communities and urban ghettos.

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