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Participatory urban interventions in a post-communist context

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Post-communist dynamics of change and participatory processes in urban planning

The 1990s brought about new spatial dynamics for Eastern European countries, freshly emerging from communism (Munteanu, Servillo, 2013). Part of the Eastern Bloc, Romania experienced a period of weak legal enforcement and widespread corruption that led to increased spatial disparities, mass privatization, de-industrialization, informality in housing and business, marginalization of vulnerable groups (e.g. Rroma) as well as property disputes (Ianos, Pascariu, 2012). In this context of early transition, ideological attitudes and opportunistic powerful interests (Munteanu, Servillo, 2013) stigmatized planning as a left-wing attitude, a leftover tool of the communist regime, undermining its legitimacy.

In his article, "Overview of Romanian planning evolution," Pescariu (2012) defines four main periods crucial to the planning system: "the predecessors" (before 1900), "the basics" (1900–1950), "the totalitarian age" (the communist decades up to 1989) and "the transition" (the post-communist decades). He depicts the "transition period" as "a consistent and continuous process" that led to "setting up a new planning system, a specific higher planning education and in defining the objectives and professional standards for the profession of urban planner in Romania" (Pascariu, 2012: 1).

Ceausescu's planning law (1974) enabled aggressive top-down schemes to reshape the national settlement network to an unprecedentedly radical degree for Eastern Europe (Turnock, 1987) through mass urbanization. This was perceived as a political tool "responsible for the destruction of a large part of the built heritage of towns and villages and for the brutal reshaping of the urban environment" (Pascariu, 2012). This law was revoked following the 1989 events and the field rebranded as *urban and territorial planning*. Starting in 2000, in a context of persistent systemic

corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2009) and under the governance of the Social Democratic party, spatial patterns and reforms were adopted during a period of growth, but also of increased social inequality (Smith, 2006; Turnock, 2007; Crowther, 2010). A new exemption-driven planning approach flourished at local level (Pascariu, 2012) as practices rooted in the communist planning tradition of a perverted adaptation to the rules continued (Bubulete, 2010; Munteanu, Servillo, 2013). Fueled by the outsourcing of planning activities to the private sphere, practitioners were forced to meet primarily the requirements of their immediate clients (Maier, 2012). Consequently, the public interest was left with few advocates and even the new participation rules enforced by national law were often minimized (Parau, Bains, 2008).

Starting 2004, the civil society, empowered by the process of Europeanization, was importing practical knowledge through transnational networking (Parau, 2009). NGOs (e.g. Pro Patrimonio) started challenging the illegal practices of the authorities granting approval to large-scale projects (e.g. mining), despite lacking basic permits that followed the planning regulations. Non-governmental organizations (e.g. environmental, architecture) concerned with participatory processes in urban planning started to appear beginning 2006. Both practitioners and civil society started to adapt to the administrative context by generating strategies and developing an ability to respond effectively to problems that hitherto impeded the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes related to various topics (e.g. public space). By 2008, the spatial planning system experienced a partial refurbishment that strengthened land-use control, a process supported by reformists absorbed in the spatial-planning ministerial department (Munteanu, Servillo, 2013).

Romania is undergoing changes to its participatory planning policy from both top-down and bottom-up directions. The 2000s changes in the Romanian spatial planning system "implemented some preconditions for a more substantial public participation and multi-level cooperation" (Munteanu, Servillo, 2013), followed by a set of legal tools for further control and pressure in respecting plans (participation rules, limiting discretionary planning practices). These changes point to a possible shift of the system towards "planning with the support and participation of the community" (Pascariu, 2012). However, the conditional and opportunistic top-down communist planning legacy resulted in a general resentment of any symbolic representation of the state (e.g. public space) and a lack of culture for engaging in communal self-organization. During half a century, the Romanian communist political regime alienated community associations, repressed relations based on trust and nurtured feelings of helplessness, ignorance, and frustration that citizens have over public space.

This research is guided by an overarching question: *How do we make sure that genuine and most pressing desires for public space are actually brought to the fore?* The research objective is to understand the challenges

that specific urban interventions have to overcome as to better serve a participatory process and facilitate public space appropriation in a post-communist context. *Fabricăm* is developed in order to address the afore-mentioned objectives and foster community empowerment over public space.

Therefore, the following section presents the local context, a medium sized city in the west of Romania, with a lost culture of participation and a general lack of knowledge over the appropriation of public space and its regeneration. The methodological approach of *Fabricăm* – a participatory project to facilitate the revival of public spaces – follows. In general, participatory processes involve a diversity of actors, with different levels of knowledge and experience on the topic at hand, with different agendas, different skills, etc. (Constantinescu et al., 2017). In order to address this diversity, the methodology consists of organizing a series of (spatial) inter-ventions on a number of public spaces in the city of Timişoara, Romania. The third section presents these interventions and discusses the challenges of their implementation, while the reflections offer a set of premises confronting participatory design projects for public space in the dynamics of a post-communist context.

Public space in Timişoara, between despise and recklessness

Timişoara – a medium-sized city (320,000 inhabitants) located in the west of Romania – is the first Romanian city to be declared free of Communism in 1989. The Revolution made people's urges legal and provoked an explosion of chaotic privatization. Having this particular background, and without a clear urban model and a stable political regime, the local admin-istration became the single owner of what primarily belonged to the citizens. Any feeling of care and responsibility over "the state's property" became inconceivable. Streets and squares were seen as the representation of a despised and feared power, while there was a constant struggle between the individual's urges to illicitly privatize and the strict administrative regulations. Western planning practices have been present in the local administrative discourse ever since 1716, when the city came under Habsburg rule. Timişoara has always kept strong connections (cultural, economic, political) with the western world due to its geographical position and multicultural character – having the biggest minority groups in the country (e.g. Italians, Serbians, Hungarians). Translated into the local planning policies that are constantly aligned with the planning trends of the West (Radoslav, 2010), the first elements of legislation and institutional framework governing participation and public consultation were set in motion at national level in early 2000. The local administration set up participation policies drafted after international examples – the Local Administration Law (2001): "local councils are obliged to hold regular meetings with citizens and bring to their attention the facts that concern them."

In 2003, the Local Council Decision 195 on the establishment of neighborhood advisory councils (CCCs) was passed. The CCCs aimed at making public services more efficient, strengthening the public administration by consulting the community, attracting citizens to decision-making process and improving public services through quality management. Decisional power is redistributed to communities, allowing each voice to be heard. By creating CCCs, the municipality wanted to increase the level of information at neighborhood level. Citizens would be up-to-date on the works to be executed in their area of interest a/o proximity. Citizens' proposals regarding different projects (e.g. street refurbishment) were gathered by city representatives who tried to correlate them with the municipality plans. Nevertheless, this legislation was not sufficient to kick off participation: the structure of CCCs is ignored by the new administration. Additionally, the economic crisis led to limited budget of the local administration, suggesting a single possible approach – the reduction of public initiatives.

The seemingly limited capacity on the level of current local government to make profound transitions towards a more citizen-led urban regeneration on the neighborhood, the strong mental link people made between public spaces and a dreaded regime, makes for a confusing understanding over public space responsibility among citizens. This is one of the few challenges related to public space in this post-communist context. Adding to this, an acute need for, and deprivation of public facilities and, a lack of awareness over the unused public spaces. As such, the *Fabricăm* project was thought of as an experiment to overcome the aforementioned challenges.

Fabricăm – testing urban interventions

Developed over the course of eight months, *Fabricăm* is a participatory project designed to foster community empowerment over public space by implementing, adapting and testing urban interventions. It started by evaluating the perception residents have over public space and the quality of life in the Fabric neighborhood of Timişoara. It assessed the involvement of people in (re)configuring public spaces and studied the structures of dialogue between inhabitants and local administration (e.g. CCC Fabric). The project is carried out by *În comunitate*, a NGO that aims to stimulate public interest in local urban conditions, promote citizens' rights over public space and activate the power of action of communities. The NGO was founded in 2014 by eight student architects (Constanţa, Loredana, Alexandra, Luiza, Ana, Lidia, Arina, Adrian).

The first of its kind in Timişoara, *Fabricăm* went through multiple revisions, having clear design goals: introduce people to the topic of public space and stimulate brainstorming and action. Specifically, the design goals revolved around identifying people's needs over the usability of public spaces, fostering social cohesion, collective action and balancing individual and collective interests over public space. Some limitations guided the

design process from the beginning: the demanding post-communist social-built city fabric and the lack of culture for engaging in communal self-organization. Due to its scale and its novelty in the local context, *Fabricăm* attracted a diversified spectrum of stakeholders: people with different backgrounds (Rroma minority, low/medium/high working class representatives, unemployed community members), CCC Fabric, Municipality Environment Department, neighborhood high schools, NGOs, Romanian Order of Architects, Transformatori Association (Bulgaria), architecture offices, media agencies. The research phase was developed in collaboration with The Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism Timişoara and The West University (Sociology and Human Geography Departments).

The project had four main stages of implementation: multilayered research (urban, social, legislative, urban policies), preparatory phase (project applications, fund-raising, expanding the network of stakeholders, public debates, traditional and new media promotion and communication), four urban interventions – community design phase (community meetings in each of the four spaces, proposals debates, municipality negotiations and authorization), participative building (camp installation, tools crowd-sourcing, availability timetables, actual building), ending with a site-specific inauguration event.

Data was collected via questionnaires, interviews and interview notes. This improved the quantitative information with qualitative data, allowing for data gathering on: frequency in using public spaces and elements that increase their usage, local communities and the elements that influence community formation, the involvement in improving public space. The one-on-one communication enabled residents to gain trust over the initiative and their initiator (*În comunitate*). Community meetings, accompanied by informative graphic materials, constantly assessed peoples' engagement in different project stages.

The questionnaire was allocated proportionally by age and gender, being applied to more than 380 inhabitants of the Fabric neighborhood. People gave information on which were their favorite public spaces and how they were using them, and on their background in participatory processes, by answering various questions: *Which do you consider to be the most pleasant public space in the neighborhood? If you have a favorite route through the neighborhood, can you describe it? Have you ever contributed actively to improve your immediate public space? How?*

The data was clustered in a map, revealing key public spaces in the neighborhood with either critical urgencies (e.g. low levels of satisfaction over the nearby green areas, insecurity, dissatisfaction over the waste disposal system) or high scores of community engagement (e.g. trust between neighbors, openness over communal action, willingness to mobilize others). The preliminary research had a foundation role in the process in "accessing" the community. In addition to the social study, an urban study was conducted – in situ data was collected (e.g. accessibility, transport,

Figure 12.1 The four areas identified for participatory interventions

physical/mental limits, historic monuments, protected areas, abandoned buildings/green spaces, parking, public/private space, housing typologies). By analyzing, interpreting and overlapping the urban opportunities over the social potential of the neighborhood, four areas were identified (Figure 12.1) – where participatory interventions are not only suitable, but necessary, offering a quick response to existing problems and becoming a first step in a potential long-term transformation of the areas.

This section presents the four urban interventions – referred to as *The Playspace*, *The Pavilion*, *The Playground* and *The Amphitheater* – their findings, the thought process behind the design and the reasons for changes in approach and implementation.

Intervention 1: The Playspace

Design goals and methodology

The first intervention of *Fabricăm* was carried out in the eastern residential area of the Fabric neighborhood, on a green triangle surrounded by individual housing, a large roadway and neglected parking lots. Like most unmaintained medium-scale green spaces from the neighborhood, the site

had been fenced by the authorities in order to limit the access of animals and illicit waste disposal.

Following the multi-layered research and with the identification, during the research, of a very responsive group living in the immediate vicinity of the triangle, this area was determined to be a proper medium for responding to participatory processes. It revealed an increased potential for social interaction, offset by the absence of public facilities. Precisely, the only public facility within the reach of the inhabitants was a playground, located next to the triangle.

From the connection of the selected green space with the playground, an area with mixed facilities can be outlined, a buffer space that can facilitate communication among existing communities, able to meet shortages of quality public spaces, specific to the peripheries of urban agglomerations.

Community design

The first meeting with the local community was organized on site. *În comunitate* presented some observations (that emerged from the research) related to the shortcomings of the area and the potential of the green triangle in solving some of them. Possible interventions were mentioned in order to start a dialogue about what can be done (e.g. meeting space, bus stop shelter, shading structure). Other possible actions proposed by the community (e.g. sports ground, picnic area) completed the list. Each participant voted for three proposed interventions, which he/she considered to be most appropriate and at whose realization he/she wanted to take part.

Based on the votes and observations, *În comunitate* prepared three proposals to be discussed in the next meeting. Out of the three – each presented on a poster containing drawings, realistic representations, diagrams – the community selected the one that grouped a ping-pong table, a picnic area and a board games area.

The next step of the implementation was the legal procedure of approval for temporary public space interventions with the Environment Department of the Municipality, which lasted one week.

This step ended at the same time with the fundraising phase, started a month before, both of them being crucial for the building process.

Participative building

Participants of all ages were involved in the building process: community members, NGOs (*În comunitate*, ASOP – West Territorial Branch), volunteers, architecture students, high school students, authorities representatives. It lasted three days and started with the assembly of the ping-pong table (designed by *În comunitate*, produced and sponsored by a local construction company that wanted to contribute to the project). The work was well divided between the participants – some were engaged in

assembling the ping-pong table, others cut the grass, prepared the wood for the picnic and board games area (joints and protection), marking and preparing the foundations (temporary wood pillars) for the two zones.

Participation was diverse during the workshop: from actual physical labor, to providing additional work tools in order to facilitate the building process, providing electricity for electric tools, storage for materials and tools. At the end of the third day, when the building process was over, the intervention was celebrated in the local community with a guitar concert, games with local children and a ping-pong championship.

Conclusions

The Playspace was further taken care of and improved by the community through small maintenance actions (cutting the grass, wood preservation for the urban furniture). As a result of the familiar scale of the setting, the supervision of the space was assumed by several nearby residents, ensuring its sustainability.

Intervention 2: The Pavilion

Design goals and methodology

As opposed to the low-scale urban network of *The Playspace*, the second intervention came in response to the state of abandonment of a large green area of 5,000 square meters, surrounded by over twenty socialist blocks of flats. The area had no functionality and the administration had no intention to invest, due to its somehow nebulous legal status. Nevertheless, the local community is shaped around this space and for some residents it has a central spot in their mental map. The high number of residents in the area and the lack of other public spaces or facilities in the proximity made this location one of the key pressure points of the district. It had the need and the opportunity to start its transformation through small-scale urban interventions.

Residents were interviewed on their perception over the use of nearby public spaces and the possibility of personal involvement in urban design processes. The one-on-one interviewing technique nurtured a direct contact with the inhabitants and resulted in a collection of personal stories. This led to a quality understanding of the social context. The answers to questions regarding involvement in communal activities, level of trust between neighbors and the feeling of belonging, recorded high scores of community, which motivated residents to engage. Moreover, *În comunitate* participated in the neighborhood's council meetings for a better understanding of the social dynamics and to identify active citizens capable of becoming participation catalysts (a group of people had already mobilized and gathered signatures against the building of a church on one side of the land).

Community design

This phase kicked off with a meeting with residents from the area. Invitations were sent via email (to questionnaire respondents) and through traditional marketing techniques (flyers, posters). During the first meeting, residents voiced their needs/desires in regard to using the abandoned green area (e.g. playgrounds, a sports field, socializing places). The proposed functions were discussed on site and the gathered data was voted through post-it method: each participant had three post-its and was asked to choose three projects from a list of ten possible ones. Participants could propose their own project via the 'blank' card. The most wanted interventions were: a playground, sitting places and a shading pavilion.

The second community meeting built on the outcomes of the first one. *În comunitate* proposed three different designs for the interventions previously voted. As before, each participant had three post-its of three different colours, representing degrees of preference – least, medium and most favorite, while being asked to vote according to their needs. For each proposal, residents brought suggestions of improvement. As a result, a mix of the three was chosen as the most suitable. At this time, participants were encouraged to note their possibility of involvement during the building stage (e.g. volunteering, tools, building materials, donations).

At the end of the design process, the legal procedure of approval for temporary public space interventions was initiated. After negotiations over safety measures (e.g. accessible heights), the administration gave the permit of implementation. In parallel, *În comunitate* applied for local public funds in partnership with one of the neighborhood's high schools, in order to increase participation in civic actions among young residents.

Participative building

The construction lasted one week and involved sixty people. The workshop was divided between low risk activities (painting, polishing wood, assisting others, etc.) for children and elders and medium risk activities (lifting and joining pillars/beams, working at heights). Participants outside the community included high school pupils, professionals and architects. The support from the local community was diverse: a family was the electrical power supplier during the workshop, an elderly man provided his professional tool box, one family cooked for the participants during the 1st of May celebrations (Labor day), one resident offered his storage space, while the vast majority put effort into the actual construction.

> I tried to help them with what I could. What happens if we do not get involved? They have tried to prove that you can do things otherwise than only by appealing to the city hall, waiting for them to resolve your problems.
>
> (Teofil, 65)

The NGO coordinated the building workshop through a design guide that explained each phase of the construction. The resulted urban furniture reflects the community's basic needs: a shaded relaxing space, a sandbox for children and some board games, which were celebrated through a lively community event.

> A week ago we had a lot of grass here, not even a playground, nor a place to rest in the open air and in the sun. Now we have a colorful, cheerful and beautiful pavilion, that we see also from our windows and brings smile on our faces, and that we can use and enjoy.
>
> (Irina, 46)

Conclusions

The Pavilion was the intervention with the highest score of participation, both in the design phase and building workshop (115 residents, throughout three months), with a generous outcome in each phase. The two main motives for this level of involvement were: (1) the social network – a high-density area populated mostly by families with children, (2) the deep desire to use the available space. However, external factors altered the expected evolution: after several months of usage, the pavilion had been taken over at nighttime by a scandalous group that started to vandalize it, which gradually pushed residents away. The damaged pavilion was then surrounded by the old rooted feeling of disappointment and distrust in "the other". After two years it is still used, but its damaged state does not nourish the same vitality.

Intervention 3: The Playground

Design goals and methodology

The third intervention was carried out near the neighborhood's historic center, on a small green triangle flanked on one side by parking lots and surrounded by roadways. The location was chosen due to its problematic aspects both in terms of human and urban dimensions: safety, unmaintained/abandoned spaces, ethnic conflicts.

Under the communist regime, due to the new nationalist ideology, the main ethnic communities that populated this area (Germans, Serbians, Hungarians, Jews) were gradually losing their position and belongings, being forced to leave the country. This situation led to a massive depopulation, being treated by the state with new social integration policies, resulting in relocating the Rroma population. This decision had dramatic consequences on both the built environment and the relocated population that encountered difficulties in adapting, especially those who have recently made the transition from nomadic to sedentary lifestyle. The current situation of the Rroma community living in the proximity of the site is very

specific: ethnic segregation has favored the creation of a ghetto, preventing sustainable development despite the punctual interventions of rehabilitating the neighborhood. Most of the families are living in collective buildings that lack utilities, while the majority of adults are unemployed. Although the community is well outlined, its members are strongly differentiated by status, financial situation, personality. When it comes to children, the differences seem to vanish: they all play together, those who attend an educational institution with those who have never been institutionalized, those who come from families that "do better" with those from modest families.

The specific situation of the small green space (used unanimously as a playground by all children in the area) was carefully treated in the design process. Also, the contact with the community was established through children: a small workshop with non-formal educational activities allowed *În comunitate* to engage with different individuals and groups from the area, identify the community leaders and further discuss their needs and wishes.

Community design

By confronting the findings from the observation method carried out, during the workshop and through every discussion with community members, the need of an intervention that can accommodate activities for children was outlined. Added to this, the need of a temporary intervention, calibrated both to a given budget (made available by the NGO OSUT) and to the temporary state of the space itself (due to advanced state of degradation of nearby buildings), had to be taken into account. Therefore, *În comunitate*, *Transformatori* and a team of architecture and sociology students provided a solution during a four-day workshop, closely debated with the community and the Municipality Environment Department (as the intervention was located on a green space, with underground electrical installation).

Participative building

The five days construction period involved forty-five participants: NGOs, students, volunteers, children and other community members. The children were the most active group, involved in low risk actions (e.g. painting, wood polishing, assisting others). When the activities were too difficult for them to take part in, they were engaged in non-formal education activities carried out by *În comunitate*. The local community supported the initiators of the project by cutting the grass and preparing the site for the intervention, providing electricity for the electric tools and storage for construction materials. The involvement of the community in the construction was low – although they were present most of the time near the construction site,

they remained mostly observers. After completion, the intervention was celebrated through children's activities.

Conclusions

Even during implementation, the future of *The Playground* could be easily foreseen, since specific stringent needs were expressed by the residents. After six months, with the coming of the first winter, the intervention encountered new uses: the wood, used as primary construction material, was re-used for domestic heating, since a large number of collective houses from the proximity lack basic facilities, still not having been connected to the city's heating network. Even though an intervention that can accommodate activities for the children and facilitate non-formal education for the Rroma community was evident, more basic needs (the lack of utilities) made the intervention less relevant.

Intervention 4: The Amphitheater

Design goals and methodology

The fourth intervention happened in the historic center of the neighborhood – the Traian Square – which has the largest cluster of economic agents and public amenities in the district. Despite its notoriety, the square is perceived as neglected which has given rise to a negative perception of it due to the ethnic intolerance of the majority of the Rroma communities that had settled here. Besides social hostility, the square's urban setting adds to the feeling of austerity, inhibiting social interaction and limiting its potential vitality. The square, surrounded by historical compact multi-family buildings, is a predominantly mineral space, perceived as a crossing area, which also lacks urban furniture that might support recreational or cultural activities.

   In terms of the participatory process, the highly different characteristic of this fourth urban setting is its deeply "public character." A city scale square doesn't nourish the same feeling of ownership and responsibility from its nearby residents as a green familiar plot in the periphery. Having this particular context, the participatory approach was adapted by involving other interested stakeholders (architecture students, StudentFest Festival, NGOs, city hall), apart from the local residents.

Community design

Being the center of the neighborhood, the low factor of attractiveness of the square was stated by the majority of the people interviewed in the first phase of analysis. The second phase, after collating the multiple layers of research, consisted in asking passers-by how they would improve the spatial

quality of the square. The tools used in the public consultation – collaborative collages – facilitated an open dialogue with locals of all ages, genders and ethnicities. The greatest number of passers-by considered actions such as increasing the number of places to sit and vegetation, and adding other urban furniture that can facilitate cultural events.

Participative building

All the gathered data was synthesized in a brief for an idea competition addressed to architecture, design and arts students. The project selected by the jury (three renowned architects invited by *În comunitate*) was then discussed and adjusted through a multidisciplinary design workshop in which students, residents, children, sociologists, architects and members of *În comunitate* took part. The workshop was coordinated by two Romanian architects that had previous experience in urban projects with high social involvement. The participants' ideas converged to a final solution that explored the idea of an urban manifest by also respecting the residents' previous requests. The intervention was designed to eliminate the barrier between citizens and a large-scale sculpture that was initially intended to offer a space for interaction, but that was now surrounded by fences. *The Amphitheatre* gave access to the sculpture's stone platform, thus descending towards a wooden stage designed as an attractor for cultural events. It was celebrated through a public conference on site, bringing several professionals together (e.g. Timişoara's chief-architect, the president of the local branch of the Romanian Order of Architects, civil rights activists) who addressed the issue of supporting and adopting participatory urban interventions by the local administration.

Conclusions

Due to the square's public status and rough notoriety, *The Amphitheatre* had the lowest rate of residents' participation. During the design phase, passers-by were hurriedly expressing their suggestions, while during the construction, only a couple of children were drawn by the hands-on activity. The intervention was designed and built by participants that already had a certain interest in public space regeneration. However, in spite of the low level of residents' commitment, the intervention actually changed the usual practice of the square, being used daily after completion. It created an attraction point that contrasts with the surroundings both in materiality (wood versus stone) and in shape (amphitheater versus flat square). The intervention marked a resting point in a transition area, which became the playground for children and parents. Besides its attractiveness and vitality (or maybe just because of that), it is the only intervention that has been maintained and repaired anonymously, during one and a half years.

Reflections

Fabricăm started as an experiment of participatory interventions in a challenging post-communist context. Over a period of eight months, the project had unexpectedly high public participation that defeated previous overall skepticism. The role of participation emerged as ambivalent, it brought about specific, real changes (participation mechanisms, new governance arrangements, learning/networking effects, civic empowerment, construction of spatial evidence), along with less positive practices (e.g. formalism in adopting new instruments). A well-thought out plan was needed to fully grasp the complexity of the situation and to have a common ground with different stakeholders. The interventions disrupted the status quo and proved that, by applying the right tools, citizens react positively to community actions regardless of the context or their previous experiences.

By monitoring the process, we observed a set of challenges that came with the urban interventions when they were used as a tool for participatory design of public space: identity issues (e.g. public space recognition/appropriation/maintenance), ownership, lack of community sense, negative stereotypes towards different groups, ethnic or social. Each of the four interventions had a specific type of interaction and participation from the residents and a distinctive urban fabric. Both the processes and the results were adjusted by the micro-local context and each community responded in a particular way on the small, medium or long term. The interventions were thought of as temporary urban facilities that addressed residents' needs and had the potential to generate future action in appropriating public space.

Investments in processes of collaborative learning and civic engagement are necessary to heal the scars of the past regime, translated into the lack of trust between citizens. Some crucial conditions for participatory process in this post-communist context stood out: (1) one must be aware that, as in the case of *The Playspace*, people are used either to large-scale top-down projects or with no action at all which creates big expectations in imagining public space interventions. Such expectations make them skeptical, even disappointed, in understanding the need and/or value of temporary, small-scale interventions. This in turn, limits their willingness to get involved. (2) The lack of cultivated community action leaves little understanding of a continuous need for intervention (e.g. *The Playground* and *The Amphitheater*). The complex societal background of mistrust and passivity is not always seen in the first attempt to take collective action, but in the lack of adaptability and perseverance in continuous involvement after encountering the first obstacles.

The lack of strong community ties denoted there were no commonly accepted leaders or influencers, hence *În comunitate* became the exterior leaders. Even though this position was favorable during the implementation phase (neutral management and private interests excluded), in the long-term, if the community hasn't reached the high level of self-organization

(Frandsen, 2014), the remaining gap cannot assure the impulse to maintain and further develop the public space intervention. A deeper participation during the design and building process did not necessarily mean a deeper feeling of care and responsibility in maintaining it and vice versa. The four interventions were a response to tangible needs and a (small) valuable phase in the long process of public space appropriation. Setting the right expectations at the beginning of the participatory process was crucial for all actors involved, avoiding the idealization of its role. The process involved big efforts and various techniques in attracting people and keeping their attention awake.

To conclude, *Fabricăm* is part (and effect) of the societal and political dynamics that are giving new configurations to participatory processes and civic action over public space in the post-communist context – subject to chaotic urban development in a top-down planning process heavily influenced by politics, local budgets and outplacement of responsibilities – constraints that limit democratic distribution of resources and the power of decision. The four interventions (Figure 12.2) were enthusiastically greeted; however, none of them is concluded. Further efforts are needed in achieving a coherent approach in reviving public space via a participatory project. In the future, participatory design for public space will follow some of the

Figure 12.2 The four areas after the participatory interventions

trajectories initiated in the last two decades. Factors such as socio-economic development and the future participatory agenda will be the subject of important challenges and driving forces for imminent changes.

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