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Perspectives on participatory planning: A SWOT-based synthesis

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Research Paper

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Perspectives on participatory planning: A SWOT-based synthesis

This study aims to lay the groundwork for a more successful approach to community-based participatory design that incorporates changing dynamics. In this context, a literature review of community-based participatory design was conducted, and eight community-based participatory public space design studies from different regions worldwide were analysed. Eight cases were examined in terms of different aspects, and a SWOT analysis was conducted for each case. The data obtained from the SWOT analysis were compared with that from the literature, and recommendations were developed to increase the success of community-based participatory design applications.

Key words:

participatory design, public participation, citizen engagement, community participation

Prethodno priopćenje

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Perspektive participativnog planiranja: SWOT sinteza

Cilj je ovog istraživanja postaviti temelje za uspješniji pristup participativnome planiranju utemeljenome na zajednici koji uključuje promjenjivu dinamiku. U tome kontekstu proveden je pregled literature o participativnome projektiranju utemeljenome na zajednici te je analizirano osam radova o participativnome projektiranju javnih prostora utemeljenome na zajednici iz različitih regija diljem svijeta. Osam slučajeva ispitano je s različitih aspekata, a za svaki je slučaj provedena SWOT analiza. Podaci dobiveni SWOT analizom uspoređeni su s podacima iz literature te su razvijene preporuke za povećanje uspješnosti primjena participativnog projektiranja utemeljenog na zajednici.

Ključne riječi:

participativno projektiranje, sudjelovanje javnosti, angažman građana, sudjelovanje zajednice

1. Introduction

Public participation in planning has become integral to democratic urban governance. Arnstein defined citizen participation as 'a sharing of power that allows citizens who are currently excluded from political and economic processes to be included in these processes', emphasising that participation is essentially based on the transfer of power [1]. Public participation is an important tool for generating creative solutions for urban problems [2]. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and New Urban Agenda documents emphasise the significance of inclusive and collaborative governance in spatial planning processes [3]. Fiorino offered at least three arguments against a technocratic approach to participation: substantive, normative, and instrumental. These arguments represent the intended outcomes of participation. The instrumental goal of participation is not merely a 'democratic necessity'; it is a design goal that increases the public acceptability of decisions and the chance of producing better results in practice. Fiorino argues that systemic differences can exist between technical expertise and societal values/perceptions; therefore, participation can reduce the likelihood of policy errors by incorporating broader value sets as a contextual goal. As a normative goal, he considers participation a constitutive part of democratic citizenship; participation processes should be designed to produce decisions, civic skills, and system legitimacy. Fiorino lists four criteria proposed by 'participation theory' for evaluating participation mechanisms as democratic processes. Fiorino aims to design institutions that enable direct involvement through the capacity of 'citizens/amateurs', going beyond participation being solely conducted through elected representatives, appointed administrators, interest group professionals, or technical experts. Citizens should reach a level of power-sharing and, in some cases, co-determination in decision-making processes. It is not merely about information transfer or one-off feedback; it is a process architecture that allows for transforming conflict through face-to-face interaction over time, persuasion, and the creation of common ground through mutual dialogue. Fiorino argues that opportunities for participation should be created based on equality between administrative authorities and technical experts [4]. Participatory planning can be implemented using various methods and tools. The process can be applied in numerous ways, from face-to-face interaction tools, such as information meetings, workshops and joint design workshops, to gathering opinions through surveys and online platforms [5–7]. Participatory governance increases the accountability of administrators by creating an environment for information sharing and joint discussion and strengthens public trust in authorities by making processes more transparent. Additionally, it facilitates public acceptance of the resulting plans by improving communication between different actors. Working together instils a sense of belonging and responsibility in community members, increasing social cohesion and capital [8]. In conclusion, participatory planning is considered a means of ensuring democratic participation and a critical tool for more sustainable and inclusive urban development [9].

This study aims to shift from haphazard, piecemeal settlement practices in societies to environmentally and human-sensitive, sustainable settlement practices. Every society's cultural values are important. Cultural riches from the past are an integral part of these societies, and ignoring them has negative consequences for the implementation of new methods. Therefore, eight societies were selected for this study. In each example, methods involving institutions, organisations, and financial resources were examined. Moreover, the stakeholders involved in the process and their roles are analysed, revealing the step-by-step functioning of decision-making mechanisms and the forms of interaction between actors. The findings are evaluated using the SWOT analysis method to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each case and the opportunities and threats involved. Although this study does not present a global perspective, it compares eight cases from different contexts.

Within the scope and purpose of this study, we hypothesise that a community-based participatory design is successful in ensuring social welfare and continuity of use. Projects involving citizens are long-lasting and remain actively used spaces for years.

2. Literature review

Public participation in urban planning and design processes is becoming increasingly important in line with the goals of sustainable urbanisation and democratic governance [10, 11]. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals envisage the development of inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and increased participatory planning capacity in all countries by 2030 [12]. The Habitat III New Urban Agenda and similar international frameworks emphasise participation, inclusiveness, and stakeholder collaboration in urban planning and design [3]. Integrating public participation into planning processes can lead to more equitable, effective, and sustainable outcomes [13, 14]. Participatory planning embraces the recognition of social diversity, the establishment of a dialogue environment aimed at understanding different perspectives, and the principle that no individual or group should be excluded from decision-making processes. Thus, it aims for a more inclusive and democratic urban transformation based on local knowledge and experience [15, 16]. The concept of participatory planning was developed in the 1960s in response to traditional top-down planning approaches. Arnstein explains the levels of citizen participation using a 'ladder of participation' model. Arnstein's ladder of participation comprises eight steps: Manipulation and Therapy at the 'non-participation' level are the lowest steps and refer to tokenistic practices aimed at 'disciplining' the public rather than actually involving them in planning processes. The third and fourth rungs, Information and Consultation, fall under the category of 'tokenism'; at these levels, citizens are heard and express their opinions, but they have no real influence on the decision. Similarly, the fifth rung, Placation, is a limited level of participation in which the public can offer advice, but the final decision remains with powerful actors. At the top of the ladder are the participation levels where citizens hold power. Partnership (6th Step) refers to collaborative processes in which

citizens can negotiate on equal terms with the local government, while the Delegation of Authority (7th Step) and Citizen Control (8th Step) describe ideal participation situations in which the public holds the majority or all decision-making authority [1]. This theoretical framework criticises the 'pretend consultation' often seen in planning practices and emphasises that the extent to which participation influences decision-making processes is critical for real success.

Tritter and McCallum critically evaluate Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' model in addressing user participation in healthcare, arguing that it is inadequate for current health policies. The authors state that Arnstein's definition of participation, solely through the lens of power distribution, overlooks diverse types of information, participation processes, and user diversity. They argue that user participation in healthcare systems is shaped by decision-making power, experience, knowledge sharing, the quality of processes, and the compatibility of different levels of participation. Therefore, instead of a hierarchical and static 'ladder' approach, they propose a multi-dimensional, dynamic 'mosaic' model based on the interaction of different actors. This model emphasises that users and healthcare professionals are actors who jointly produce knowledge and shape services [17].

Hurlbert and Gupta, who argue that public participation in environmental governance is not always necessary or beneficial, developed the 'divided participation ladder' model to explain under what conditions and at what level participation is effective. According to this model, policy problems are divided into structured, moderately structured, and unstructured (complex), each requiring a different level of participation and learning type (single-, double-, and triple-learning). While technical/expert-focused decisions are sufficient for simple, consensus-based problems, complex problems with high levels of uncertainty and value conflict require intensive participation, dialogue, and trust building. Tested with water management examples in Canada, Chile, and Argentina, the model shows that the correct level of participation depends on the nature of the problem and that participation can be ineffective or even harmful if not properly designed [18].

Chess addresses the fundamental methodological questions in evaluating public participation: Why should an evaluation be conducted, what and how should it be evaluated, and who should evaluate it? Three main types of evaluation (outcome-oriented, in-process improvement, and long-term impact assessment) are identified, emphasising the need to examine processes and outcomes together. Furthermore, the goals of participation are often unclear and conflicting among different actors. Therefore, using stakeholder-based and theoretical criteria in the evaluation is more appropriate. Instead of adhering to a single method, he advocates pluralistic approaches that use quantitative and qualitative methods [19].

Healey, using a communicative/collaborative planning approach, demonstrated that planning is a process in which different stakeholders develop local capacity through joint learning, negotiation, and compromise, rather than through technical

expertise activity [13]. Forester highlights that conflicts can be overcome through effective facilitation and inclusive dialogue during the planning process [20]. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Public Participation Spectrum is designed to help select the depth of participation that defines the role of the public in any public participation process. The spectrum is divided into five basic levels. The level of influence on the decision increases as you move up the levels. At the Inform level, balanced and objective information is presented to the public, helping them understand the issues, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions. At the Consult level, the public provides feedback on the analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions. At the Involve level, direct work is conducted with the public throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and wishes are consistently understood and considered. At the Collaborate level, a partnership is established with the public at every stage of the decision process, including developing alternatives and identifying the preferred solutions. At the Empower level, the final decision-making power is given to the public [2]. Processes in which citizens are truly empowered and involved in co-production are vital for finding innovative solutions to chronic urban problems and developing a collective consciousness [21]. However, there are critical perspectives on participatory planning. Cooke and Kothari argue that participation can be a 'new tyranny', drawing attention to the risk that participatory processes may serve to reinforce the existing order without changing power balances [22]. Similarly, Purcell emphasises that the contribution of local participation practices to democracy is sometimes exaggerated, highlighting the phenomenon he calls the 'localism trap', in which local participation remains small-scale and overlooks larger structural inequalities [23]. Such critical approaches remind us that participatory processes are not always fair and inclusive and emphasise the need for caution in the design of participatory practices, considering power dynamics [24].

Theoretically, involving stakeholders in the decision-making processes from the early stages increases the suitability of plans for local needs and conditions, strengthens their feasibility, and ensures social support [6]. The ideal participatory approach is for everyone affected by the intervention (including citizens, NGOs, experts, and decision-makers) to come together and engage in planning with equal voice [15]. No group or individual opinion should be considered superior to others because of their expertise or power [20]. True participation moves participants from a passive role of merely giving opinions to a position of being decision-makers, enabling them to take ownership of the plan. The sense of ownership that participation brings increases the success and sustainability of projects [25, 26]. When society plays a constructive role in planning an intervention, they see the project as 'their own creation', increasing the level of support, dedication, and follow-up during implementation [27].

Additionally, an inclusive participation process can improve the quality of a plan by enabling innovative ideas and information from a wide range of sectors to be brought to the table [28]. As long-time residents of the area know what has and has not worked

in the past, participatory processes help prevent past mistakes from being repeated. The participation of disadvantaged and often voiceless groups (e.g. low-income groups, ethnic/religious minorities, people with disabilities, women, young people) in planning is critical in terms of social justice and inclusiveness [29]. In summary, the advantages of participation include an increased sense of ownership, more inclusive and creative solutions, establishment of trust among stakeholders, and the strengthening of a participatory democracy culture.

However, there are various difficulties and limitations in the implementation of participatory planning. First, a multi-stakeholder and participatory process can slow down decision-making, and as inclusiveness increases, efficiency may decrease. Reaching a common decision among a large group with different views and interests takes longer than preparing a plan by a single team of experts preparing a plan [30]. Second, disagreements and conflicts are likely to arise during the participatory processes. The priorities of technical experts and local communities may not always align [31]. In such cases, establishing common ground requires patience and a compromised culture. Additionally, capacity-building efforts may be necessary to enable citizens to participate in the process and make meaningful contributions [32]. Providing training to participants who are unfamiliar with technical issues (e.g. map literacy and planning terminology) or providing comprehensive information about the project requires additional time and effort [33]. Similarly, the project team should understand the local community and culture and learn previously tried approaches in the area, which necessitates a two-way learning process [34]. Another practical problem is the difficulty of bringing all relevant stakeholders to the table. Some key actors may not participate for various reasons; past negative

experiences or mistrust may discourage certain groups from becoming involved in the process.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study includes a historical survey, document content analysis, and SWOT analysis. Eight example projects from eight countries with different socioeconomic and geographical contexts were examined using a purposive selection method. This study employed a purposeful maximum variation (MV) sampling strategy. The rationale behind this selection was to ensure structural diversity by capturing the broad range of geographic, political, and economic contexts necessary for a qualitative comparative analysis. Projects from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, and South America were selected to provide examples from different cultures (Figure 1).

The seven selected cases are functionally comparable, as they operate within a Community-Based Participatory Design (CBPD) framework. The aim in selecting the cases is not to analyse countries but to create project diversity in different socioeconomic contexts. The samples comprised successful and unsuccessful examples. The success criterion was the completion of a community-based participatory design project and ensuring continuous use of the project site.

The countries selected for this study varied significantly in terms of population size, per-capita income, higher education graduation rates, and local government capacity for participatory design (Table 1). For each case, data were compiled from case studies published in the Web of Science and SCOPUS using the keywords participatory design, community engagement, and



Figure 1. A map showing selected countries from each continent [35]

Table 1. Socio-economic situation of the countries selected for the study [36-44]

Project No	Country	Population (million)	Annual income per capita (USD)	Higher education graduate rate [%]
1.	Germany	84	50.000	~40
2.	Slovakia	5.5	28.000	~31
3.	Turkey	85	18.000	~35
4.	Brazil	217	10.000	~21
5.	USA	336	60.000	~42
6.	Egypt	116	4000	~20
7.	Thailand	70	8000	~17
8.	Australia	27.5	66.000	~51

Table 2. Coding rubric for contextual and procedural variables

Variable	1 – Low	2 – Middle	3 – High
A - Contextual Inputs			
Economic Capacity	Deprived Area	Middle-Income	High-Status
Social organisation capacity	Passive participants	Organised participants	Proactive participants
Political/authoritarian barrier	Active sabotage	Bureaucratic Resistance	Supportive
B - Process			
Financial resources	External dependency	Hybrid model	Local funding
Participant diversity	Limited	Moderate	Inclusive
Methodological Variety	Single Method	Dual Approach	Multi-modal
C - Outcome			
IAP2 participation Depth	Inform/Consult	Involve	Collaborate/empower

public participation, as well as from official sources (such as the websites of the relevant countries' ministries and project offices). For each project, official documents and photographs were examined as primary sources, whereas international articles and news were examined as secondary sources. Eight community-based participatory design projects were analysed with document content analysis method, each focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities/threats of participatory processes, resulting in a synthesis of different case studies. To ensure a systematic comparative analysis of the eight cases, qualitative narratives from the SWOT analyses and case reports were converted into semi-quantitative data using a Qualitative Coding Rubric (Table 2). Each variable was scored on a 3-point ordinal scale (1–3) based on empirical evidence. This approach allows for a structured evaluation of how Contextual Inputs (A) and Process (B) collectively dictate the Outcome (C). Qualitative coding and semi-quantitative scoring were performed by the authors. A multi-step consistency validation protocol was followed to ensure scientific traceability and reduce subjective bias. Coding was validated by cross-referencing data from formal project reports and academic literature. All evaluations were performed according to a precisely defined set of criteria to ensure that each case was assessed from the same analytical perspective.

To ensure structural validity, the selection of variables for the comparative matrix was grounded in established urban planning and social theories. The variables obtained from the literature were grouped into Contextual Inputs (A), Process (B), and Output (C). Contextual Inputs (A) comprise economic capacity, social organisational capacity, and political/authoritarian barriers related to the project area and country. Social organizational capacity is based on the concept of 'social capital' by Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), which measures the capacity of people to organize and resist [45, 46]. Political/Authoritarian Barriers are based on Flyvbjerg's (1998) work, which argues that planning is not a technical process but a power struggle [24]. Regarding the project process variables, studies have suggested that local funding, greater participant diversity, and a wide variety of participation methods increase project success. Financial Resources were based on Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) resource dependency framework [47]. To evaluate the technical and social breadth of the processes, methodological variety was categorised according to Rowe and Frewer's (2005) typology of public engagement mechanisms, and participant diversity was appraised based on the principles of 'inclusive representation' as defined by Innes and Booher (2010) and Young (2000) [14, 48, 49]. Regarding project output, the literature assumes that the higher the depth of participation, the more successful a project will be. The participation processes for the selected cases were

coded using the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. This internationally recognised framework categorises the level of public impact on decision making into five distinct stages: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower [2].

To translate qualitative case narratives into a comparable dataset, a 3-point ordinal scale was employed, following the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) logic established by Rihoux and Ragin (2009) [50]. This 'qualitative-to-quantitative' transformation follows the systematic coding procedures suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), where empirical evidence from SWOT analyses, such as the presence of legal petitions, gender-based exclusion, or the use of hybrid engagement tools, serves as the basis for assigning low (1), medium (2), or high (3) values [51]. This ensured a transparent and replicable scoring process that moved beyond subjective estimation.

The comparative case study methodology adopted in this research aligns with established cross-cultural and multi-case studies in urban governance, which emphasise the necessity of structured comparisons to move beyond descriptive narratives and identify broader patterns of participatory success [52, 53].

4. Research outcomes

The projects were selected from countries with diverse socioeconomic contexts. Germany is one such country in Europe. Slovakia differs from other European countries because of its Slavic cultural influence and population. Turkey acts as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. Brazil is one of the most influential countries in South America, and the USA is one of the most influential countries in North America. Egypt is an example of Africa, Thailand, Asia, and Australia from Oceania.

4.1. Project 1: Germany

In the south-east of Berlin, in the district of Treptow-Köpenick, Oberschöneweide is an industrial area (Figure 2). Following the gradual transformation of the area, manufacturing companies closed down, and most of the workers living in the

neighbourhood moved away, leaving behind an unused industrial area and numerous vacant dwellings. Over the years, the area deteriorated, and between 1995 and 2010, it was designated an 'redevelopment area'. In 2009, the area was defined as an industrial heritage site and was protected. Protected areas comprise buildings, interconnected streets, squares, green open spaces, and areas along a river [54].

At the beginning of the planning process, the citizens were informed via mail and press releases. Public opinion surveys were conducted during the early planning stages. The community requested public access to the river (Figure 3). Citizens appointed representatives to contact official decision makers. The Socio-Spatial Planning Coordination Office was established to create a link between district administrations and citizens. Citizen meetings were held to gather community feedback. A Regional Governing Body was established that brought together representatives from various stakeholders, citizens, businesspeople, and municipal officials. In this program, the neighbourhood council decides how project funding will be spent. The funds were overseen by the Socio-spatial Planning Coordination Office. The project was funded by the German Research Foundation [54, 55].

The participants involved in the project were SenStadtUm (Berlin State Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment), the Treptow-Köpenick District Administration, Quartiersmanagement Schöneweide (Neighbourhood Management Programme), and two NGOs, Industriesalon Schöneweide and Berlin-Südost [54, 55].



Figure 3. Suggested project for industrial area [55]

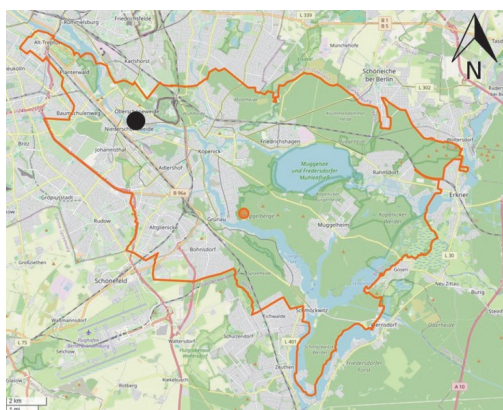
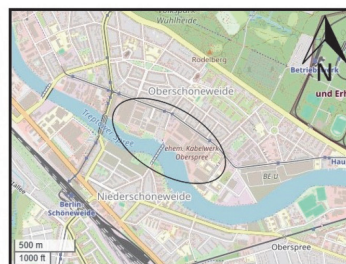


Figure 2. Maps of Treptow-Köpenick and Oberchöneweide [57]



Buildings of historical value were preserved. The fundamental elements of architectural heritage have been preserved through modifications to meet contemporary needs. The new neighbourhood was designed as a heterogeneous urban structure that benefited from public permeability. For many years, citizens had no access to riverbanks because of their industrial use. In the new neighbourhood, in line with public demand, new recreational areas, public paths, and walkways along the

riverbank were provided [55]. Even years after the project was implemented, citizens had access to riverbanks (Figure 4). The fact that the project area is actively used demonstrates the project's continuity and success in a community-based participatory design.

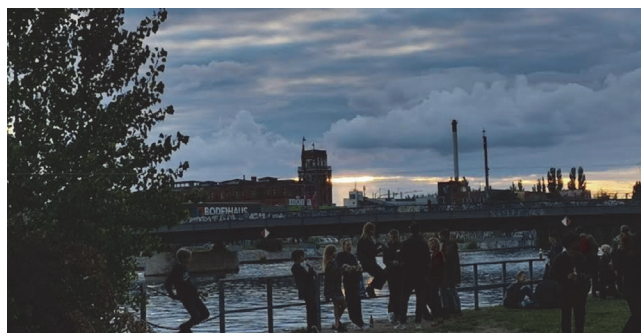


Figure 4. A photograph from 2021 showing active use of the riverbank [56]

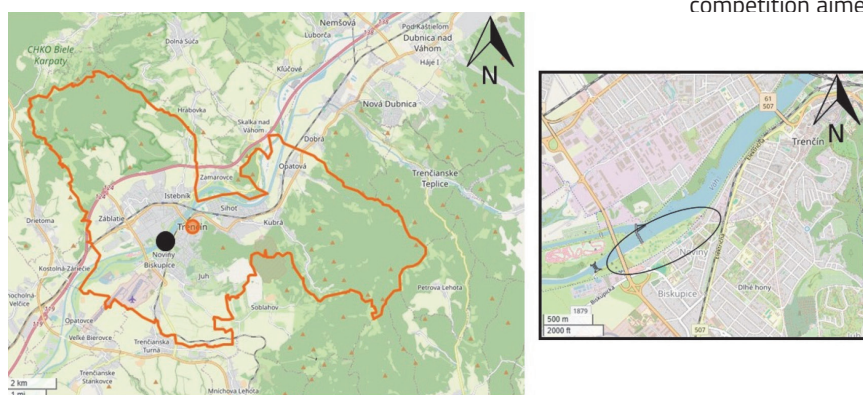


Figure 5. Maps of Trenčín [57]



Figure 6. Suggested project for the use of riverbank [58]



Figure 7. A photograph from 2025 showing active use of the riverbank [59]

4.2. Project 2: Slovakia

Trenčín, located in northwestern Slovakia, is a region with an industrial heritage, having once been the country's industrial centre with numerous factories. The most critical problem in the city's urban fabric is the roads separating the Vah River bank from the city centre, making it difficult for residents to access the river bank (Figure 5) [28].

With an initiative called 'Trenčín is You', the aim was to ensure active public participation in the design of the area for the banks of the Vah River in the city of Trenčín and to establish dialogue with the public by improving communication. The first discussion on the connection between the railway area and the city centre was held in 2012 with the participation of approximately 200 citizens. Public participation was ensured through workshops, city walks, focus group studies, and professional discussion forums. An urban planning competition was held in 2014. The competition aimed to obtain ideas and approaches rather than

detailed design proposals. Following the design ideas, the project teams prepared and implemented the projects. This project was funded by private investments. Participants of the project are local government, architects and urban planners, citizens and private investors [28, 58]. The following is an example of a project that received a special award (Figure 6).

A photograph of the area captured in 2025 shows that citizens' interactions with the riverbank will continue (Figure 7). The fact that the project area is actively used demonstrates the project's continuity and success in a community-based participatory design.

4.3. Project 3: Turkey

Kadıköy, beyond being one of the oldest settlements on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, is now a centre with a high level of education and socioeconomic development. The Hasanpaşa district, in particular, is one of the areas within Kadıköy where historical industrial heritage intersects with modern urban life, and where the social impacts of urban transformation can be observed [60] (Figure 8).

The Hasanpaşa Gasworks in Kadıköy, Istanbul, ceased production in 1993 and was closed down. After the gasworks closed, plans were made to build supermarkets, houses, hospitals, and



Figure 8. Maps of Kadıköy and Hasanpaşa [57]



Figure 9. Hasanpaşa Gasworks before (left) and after (right) the restoration [62]

car parks on the site. However, city residents and the Kadıköy Municipality began working to draw attention to the cultural heritage of this area and ensure that it is preserved and used for the benefit of the public. In 1994, local residents established an NGO called the Gasworks Environmental Volunteer. The NGO organised local residents, conducted surveys and panels, and launched petition campaigns. In 1996, the Hasanpaşa Gasworks was placed under protection. In 2001, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality approved a preliminary project prepared for gasworks by faculty members of the Architecture Department at Istanbul Technical University. We decided to repurpose the gasworks area as a sociocultural space. This project was funded by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality [61]. A participatory management model was developed in collaboration with NGOs, neighbourhood residents, WALD representatives, Kadıköy Municipality representatives, and the architectural project team. NGO have conducted activities in this field. The architectural project team gave presentations to neighbourhood residents during the design and implementation processes. The Gasworks Environmental Volunteers worked to keep the area alive with sociocultural events for the use of neighbourhood residents until the area was transformed. The project and tender work officially began in 2012. However, the restoration work began in 2017. The participants of the project were the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Kadıköy Municipality, Istanbul Technical

University, World Academy of Local Government (WALD), Gasworks Environmental Volunteers (NGO), and neighbourhood residents [62]. Figure 9 shows the area before and after restoration.

The Hasanpaşa Gasworks was transformed into a culture, art and science-focused living space called the Gazhane Museum in 2021. The Gazhane Museum, where events on various topics are held, is now heavily used by residents of Istanbul. The museum, exhibition halls, and events in the area are free of charge, and the cafés and restaurants are run by municipal institutions on a nonprofit basis. The Gasworks Environmental Volunteers continue their activities as an active NGO in the area, organising walks and various events to explain the Hasanpaşa Gasworks and its transformation. The following photo shows the site after the transformation as well as one of the events [62] (Figure 10). The fact that the project area is actively used demonstrates the project's continuity and success in a community-based participatory design.



Figure 10. Hasanpaşa Gasworks's active use after the restoration [62]

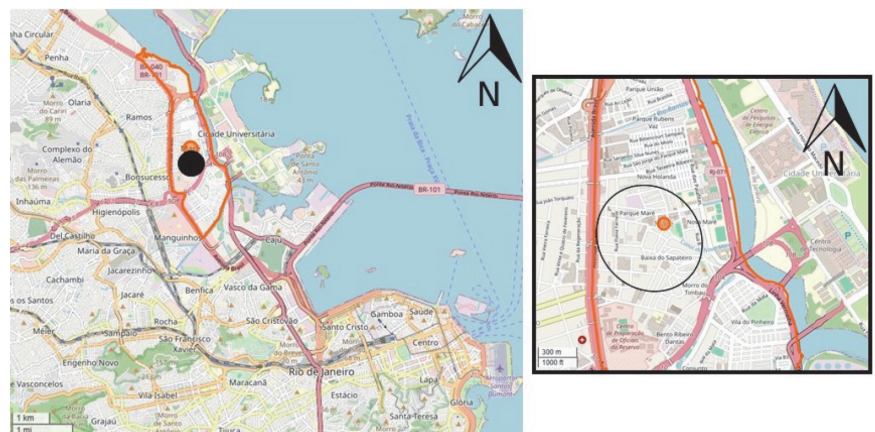


Figure 11. Maps of Complexo da Maré [57]



Figure 12. Participation initiatives in Complexo da Maré [30]

4.4. Project 4: Brazil

Complexo da Maré, located in the northern part of Rio de Janeiro, is the city's largest informal settlement, comprising 16 favelas and is home to approximately 140,000 people [63] (Figure 11). Slum neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro are characterised by social exclusion, a lack of basic public services, poverty, and high levels of violence and crime. Designers and researchers teamed with a local NGO to redesign a square in the area using participatory design strategies. Designers spent time observing neighbourhoods, participating in events, and engaging in conversations with residents to gain their trust. Conversations with the residents yielded data regarding their desires and needs. Designers and researchers developed strategies for participatory design processes through meetings with NGO. Public meetings were organised with the residents. This project was funded by an NGO and the researchers. The project participants were local NGO, designers, researchers, and neighbourhood residents. Criminal organisations interfered with the process, and attendance was considerably low. The project was cancelled as it failed to achieve its objectives [30, 64] (Figure 12).

4.5. Project 5: USA

Boston is one of the oldest and most densely urbanised cities in the United States. The post-industrial decline in the mid-20th century led to a shift towards development focused on

education, biotechnology, and finance. Since the 1990s, the region has become economically wealthier and ethnically more diverse [65] (Figure 13).

An eight-lane motorway was proposed for the suburban residents of southwestern Boston. Following land surveys for the motorway, the project received public backlash and was subsequently converted into a public transport and space project. The

neighbourhoods surrounding the highway project were included in the plans (Figure 13.a).

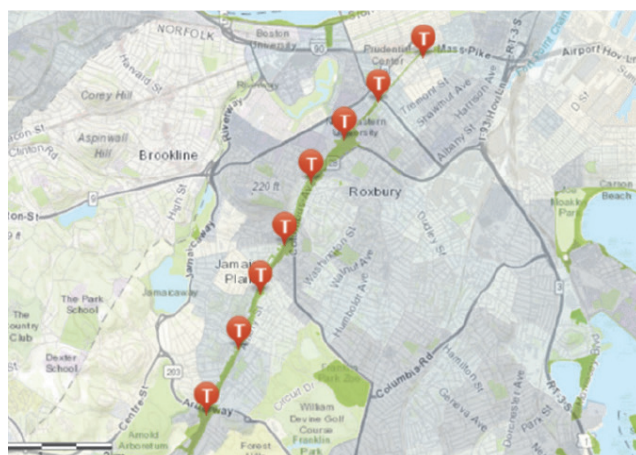


Figure 13.a Map of the project area [65]

Trained coordinators led meetings with designers, local governments, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) representatives, NGO representatives, and neighbourhood residents. The minutes of the meetings were distributed through a project newsletter. Neighbourhood residents were contacted through offices and telephone lines. The project was funded by the MBTA and local government in partnership with private investors. The project participants were the MBTA, Boston City Local Government, architects, landscape architects, NGOs and

neighbourhood residents. The project includes a five-line rail system, landscaped parkways and bike paths, eight new train stations, comprehensive recreational facilities, and a neighbourhood-focused economic development network around each station. Since its implementation, the area has been actively used under the name Boston Southwest Corridor Park, and community participation initiatives continue to this day [66, 67] (Figure 14). The fact that the project area is actively used demonstrates the project's continuity and success in a community-based participatory design.



Figure 13. Maps of Boston and project area [57]



Figure 14. Current use of the Boston Southwest Corridor Park [65]

4.6. Project 6: Egypt

El-Darb El-Ahmar is a neighbourhood in Cairo's historical centre, home to architectural monuments dating back to the 14th century. With a population of approximately 200,000, it is one of the most vibrant areas in Cairo's social and economic fabric [68] (Figure 15).

The history of Tablita Market in Cairo, Egypt, dates back to the 1940s and the 1950s. In 1989, at the request of the local government, vendors reinforced the columns in the market area, built a roof, and reorganised the architecture. At the request of the district authorities, the Market Sheikh (local leader) divided the land into small units and distributed them among vendors. Many vendors reside in buildings surrounding the market areas. Furthermore, vendors organise the market area and use it as a public space for celebrations of Mawlid al-Hussein, one of the most important religious festivals celebrated annually in Egypt [69].



Figure 15. Maps of Cairo and El-Darb El-Ahmar [57]



Figure 16. Photographs from 2021 showing the current situation of Tablita Market [71]

Following the 1992 earthquake, the protection and improvement of the area became a priority. In 1999, the improvement of the Tablita Market was proposed as a participatory project. The vendors were asked to participate in the design process and act as funders. Following surveys conducted with neighbourhood residents and vendors, design workshops were organised with vendors having sales units in the market. It is planned to be financed by sellers who have sales units in the Tablita Market. The project participants were the government, the Market Management Department, CDS and AKCS-E (project design and implementation agencies), Market Sheikh, male sellers, and male neighbourhood residents. The Market Sheikh acted as an authoritarian barrier to the accession process [70]. However, no data were found on the project designed after the participatory design process and its implementation. As shown in the photos below, the Tablita Market Area in 2021 was in need of renovation (Figure 16).

4.7. Project 7: Thailand

Sukhothai, located in northern Thailand, has a history of over 700 years as an administrative and religious centre. Economically, Sukhothai lags considerably behind Bangkok. This economic asymmetry has led Sukhothai to adopt a development model based on cultural heritage [72].

Sukhothai Historical Park contains the ruins of the city of Sukhothai, the capital of the Sukhothai Kingdom in the 13th and 14th centuries. In the 1960s, the government protected the ruins of historical cities. A UNESCO World Heritage Site

was declared in 1991. The historic town surrounding the historic park area, which currently serves as a residential area, has also been accepted as a World Heritage Site within the national park boundaries, and no work other than conservation or restoration is permitted in the area. The use of the monuments was strictly controlled. Local residents continue to use the roads, canals, dams, and embankments. Religious buildings in historical areas are respected and used for worship. Traditional festivals are also held there. The park welcomes thousands of visitors every year [73] (Figure 18). The park area is protected and managed by the Fine Arts Department (FAD) of the Thai Ministry of Culture. The area is protected under strict laws enforced by the FAD and relevant government agencies and municipalities. DASTA (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration) promote community collaboration by helping residents establish tourism clubs. It seeks to create a collaborative



Figure 17. Maps of Sukhothai and Historical Park [57]

environment in which strategies are shared to protect heritage sites that contribute to tourism sustainability. The project was funded by the local government in partnership with private investors. Participants in the project were FAS, DASTA, Government Agencies (TAT), Sukhothai Municipality, private investors, NGOs, and neighbourhood residents [74, 75].

The value of heritage is explained to residents through information and educational programs. Some residents are assigned roles, such as tour guides, in the area to ensure ownership and preservation of the heritage site. Community participation is encouraged through roles assigned to residents at festivals held in historic park areas. There was no participation in the spatial decision-making process because of political barriers [73].



Figure 18. A photo of residents working in Sukhothai Historical Park [76]

4.8. Project 8: Australia

Melbourne is one of the fastest-growing cities in the OECD over the last two decades. Kensington, located in the inner

west of Melbourne, is one of the areas where the city's industrial past, urban renewal strategies, and demographic gentrification are most clearly observed. It has a gentrified population structure comprising young, high-income, educated, and small households [77]. In 2018, a decision was made to renovate a children's park named JJ Holland Park in the Kensington area of Melbourne. In this context, community consultations were held and opinions were gathered online and in person. An



Figure 19. Maps of Kensington and JJ Holland Park [57]

online survey asked community members what they valued the park, how they currently use the playground, and how they wanted to use it in the future [78]. Children from the Kensington Community Children's Cooperative also contributed ideas by creating drawings and models, and depicting what they had envisioned for the new playground. Many of these ideas have been incorporated into the concept design. After the concept plan was prepared, it was presented virtually with 360-degree project images and interactive maps, and feedback calls were made. The concept plan was further developed based on the feedback (Figure 20). This project was funded by Melbourne. The participants included the Kensington Community Children's Cooperative, Kensington Neighbourhood House, and Unison Housing, as well as residents, children, and designers [79].



Figure 20. Suggested project for JJ Holland Park [78]



Figure 21. A photograph showing active use of the park [80]

The project implemented in 2021 included solutions, such as reusing and renovating existing furniture based on requests, adding larger barbecue areas, increasing the number of trees, connecting the existing basketball court to the playgrounds, and

practices; weaknesses by comparing common problems and limitations; opportunities by comparing the possibilities and potential of participatory design; and threats and risks within participatory processes (Table 3).

controlling dog access to the playground [78]. The fact that the project area is actively used demonstrates the project's continuity and success in a community-based participatory design (Figure 21).

5. Results

A SWOT analysis was conducted and tabulated using data from the research outcomes. In this context, each case's strengths were identified by comparing successful participatory planning

Table 3. SWOT analyses

Project	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
1. Germany	Neighbourhood residents and NGOs have been involved in the process. Public recreation areas have been created along the riverbank at the request of citizens. Project has been funded.	Owing to limited human resources, it has not been possible to communicate with citizens on an equal footing. There have been restrictions on functional changes due to legally restrictive protection rules.	Local initiatives have a high level of organisational capacity and experience. Abandoned settlements have been converted into potential production areas.	Citizens who believed that it would upset municipal officials were reluctant to participate. Owing to legal restrictions and insufficient funds, not all requests from citizens could be fulfilled.
2. Slovakia	Participatory design was initiated in the early planning stages, and the public was able to participate at an early stage. Citizens, students and professional designers have been involved in the process with different concepts. The project was financed through the private sector.	Although public participation was ensured during the planning stage, the public's influence diminished during the implementation of the designs. Citizens were only able to convey their ideas and suggestions through the competition projects of architects and urban planners.	New areas created along the riverbank have the potential to enhance social life and cultural activities.	The involvement of the private sector in project financing may give rise to conflicts of interest. When there is no existing model for public participation, the process can become difficult.
3. Turkey	Neighbourhood residents have been involved in the process through NGOs. The area has been made available free of charge at the request of citizens. The fact that the NGO continues to play an active role after the transformation contributes positively to the sustainability of the function.	Neighbourhood residents can only communicate with institutions through NGOs. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has not interacted with citizens. The lack of a participation policy hinders communication between institutions.	Neighbourhood residents can work collaboratively.	The lack of a current participation model complicates communication between citizens and institutions.
4. Brazil	The active role played by local NGOs contributes positively to reaching citizens.	The public's desire to participate in the project has been lower than expected. The control of public spaces by criminal groups in the city has reduced public confidence in the project. The lack of financial resources has negatively affected the project process. There has been no support from local authorities. Currently, there is no participation policy.	The involvement of more local organisations has the potential to support the participation process.	Short-term projects may be insufficient to bring about lasting change. Groups that try to hinder the participatory design process may intervene.

Table 3. SWOT analyses- continuation

Project	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
5. USA	Regular meetings have ensured public participation. Funds have been allocated for the project and have been used effectively. The participatory process ensured long-term ownership of the project, which has been protected by the local community.	45 % of designers found the design quality to be poor. Citizens' indecision in some areas has slowed down the process. Workload has increased due to frequent meetings.	Thanks to participatory approaches, parks and public spaces have been protected from vandalism and other negative influences and have been actively used.	Rapid demographic change in neighbourhoods has led to decisions becoming outdated within a short period of time. The length of the participatory process and the large number of meetings held resulted in increased time and costs.
6. Egypt	Participatory design workshops were held to support sellers in developing their design ideas. Although participants were initially hesitant, the number of participants increased over time.	Women's participation is restricted. The views of powerful actors such as the Sheikh of the Market have overshadowed the opinions of other participants. Funds were insufficient because the project was to be financed by the vendors.	Participants gained knowledge about the design process and practised discussing environmental, economic and spatial needs. Tools such as three-dimensional models and photographs from other marketplaces have made it easier for individuals with low levels of education to express their ideas.	Participants initially did not welcome the participation process, believing that it was meaningless and that professionals would know better.
7. Thailand	Protection and restoration regulations are clearly defined and enforced. Neighbourhood residents play an active role in traditional events, becoming part of the community. Financial resources can be provided for the management of the area through tourism.	Participation generally remains at a symbolic level. There is no participation policy. Neighbourhood residents do not have sufficient information about the heritage value of the area and community participation.	Public knowledge and skills can be improved through education and awareness programmes. The active involvement of the private sector in this area creates potential for increased cooperation.	The excessive commercialisation of the historic park area poses a risk of damaging the area's authenticity.
8. Australia	Children who use the playground the most were also included in the process. Providing online and in-person participation opportunities increased inclusivity. The fact that it was a municipality-run project contributed to its success by preventing conflicts of interest.	Although the participation processes involved clear and short steps and the project area was small, the period from the announcement to the implementation of the project took a considerable amount of time.	The fact that most participants provided feedback online suggests that online platforms can be facilitating.	Lengthy registration processes can increase the financial burden and lead to a loss of motivation.

The individual SWOT analyses presented above provide a detailed understanding of the internal dynamics and external pressures specific to each case. However, analytical synthesis is necessary to identify the systematic patterns that determine the success or failure of community-based participatory design. Qualitative information and empirical evidence obtained from the SWOT profiles were converted into standardised scores within an evaluation matrix, creating a semi-quantitative framework. In the evaluation matrix presented in Table 4, the contextual inputs, procedures, and outputs of each project were scored according to the coding evaluation criteria listed in Table 2.

Projects 4 (Brazil), 6 (Egypt), and 7 (Thailand), which received low evaluation scores, were in countries where community-based participatory design projects were cancelled, not implemented, and lacked spatial participation. Analysis of the matrix revealed that these cases received low scores for economic capacity,

social organisation capacity, and political/authoritarian barriers. The failure of projects that scored low in the contextual inputs of economic capacity, social organisation capacity, and political/authoritarian barriers demonstrates that contextual factors are critically important in community-based participatory design projects. Projects 1 (Germany), 2 (Slovakia), 3 (Turkey), 5 (the USA), and 8 (Australia), which were successful and sustainable, received high scores in the evaluation matrix. The economic capacity differs in these cases. Social organisation capacity and political/authoritarian barriers were similar, except in Turkey. However, in Turkey, the proactive participation of social organisation capacity compensated for the political/authoritarian barrier. Regarding contextual factors, cases in which one of the three subcategories is low can be balanced by high scores in the other subcategories, whereas low scores in multiple subcategories lead to failure.

Table 4. Evaluation matrix.

Projects	Economic capacity	Social organization capacity	Political/authoritarian barriers	Financial resources	Participant diversity	Methodological variety	IAP2 participation depth	Score
1. Germany	High (3)	Middle (2)	High (3)	Low (1)	High (3)	Middle (2)	Middle (2)	16
2. Slovakia	Middle (2)	Middle (2)	High (3)	Low (1)	High (3)	High (3)	High (3)	17
3. Turkey	Middle (2)	High (3)	Middle (2)	High (3)	High (3)	Middle (2)	Middle (2)	17
4. Brazil	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	High (3)	Middle (2)	Low (1)	Low (1)	10
5. USA	High (3)	High (3)	High (3)	Middle (2)	High (3)	Low (1)	Middle (2)	17
6. Egypt	Low (1)	Middle (2)	Low (1)	High (3)	Low (1)	Middle (2)	Low (1)	11
7. Thailand	Low (1)	Low (1)	Middle (2)	Middle (2)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	9
8. Australia	High (3)	Middle (2)	High (3)	High (3)	High (3)	High (3)	High (3)	20

Projects 4, 6, and 7 in Table 3 have lower participant diversity compared to other projects, and their decision-making processes were limited to the 'Inform' and 'Consult' stages. Project 2 also has low participant diversity, but its decision-making processes are more comprehensive, encompassing 'Inform', 'Consult', 'Involve', and 'Collaborate'. Projects 1, 3, and 5 were more comprehensive in terms of participant diversity and decision-making processes. When successful and unsuccessful projects are evaluated together, participant diversity is an important criterion affecting success. However, there is no correlation between the success of community-based participatory design projects and whether the financial resources are external, internal, or mixed. While diversity in participation methods does not directly affect project success, depth of participation does. The evaluation matrix shows that, while the diversity of participation methods does not affect the success of community-based participatory design projects, the depth of participation directly affects it. While there are successful projects with a low diversity of participation methods, there are also unsuccessful projects with high diversity. However, projects with low participation depths failed.

6. Discussion

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the SWOT analysis and the results of the Evaluation Matrix will be synthesized. The community-based participatory design examples examined discuss the contributions of participatory design to its success, the problems and limitations encountered in the participation process, and the opportunities and threats presented by participatory design initiatives.

6..1. Successful participatory planning practices

As the SWOT analyses revealed, the common denominator of successful participatory planning in different geographical areas is inclusive and early participatory processes. In projects such as the Boston Southwest Corridor and Trencin, early public participation strengthens the psychological attachment

to spaces. As this sense of ownership grows, citizens become more willing and responsible for the protection, maintenance, and long-term use of these spaces [81].

Another critical element in successful examples is the training and awareness of participants. Participants' knowledge of planning terminology and the functioning of the process enabled them to participate more effectively in discussions [32, 82].

Financial sustainability is also a key factor in success. In the successful cases examined, projects were supported by sufficient budgetary resources that enabled participation in activities to continue without interruption. Without adequate funding, participation projects may be disrupted before they begin or lose continuity. A lack of funding limits educational opportunities, hinders project implementation, and prevents the provision of supportive infrastructure for participants (e.g. childcare for those who cannot attend meetings). Therefore, successful examples include those treating financial resource planning as an integral part of the participatory process [73]. Contrary to the resource dependency theories, this study reveals that the origin of funding (internal versus external) has a negligible impact on participation outcomes. This finding challenges the assumption that local funding is equal to local ownership. Contrary to the literature, we find no significant differences between financing and external dependency, hybrid models, or local funding. Successes and failures may occur in projects with the three different financing methods (Table 4).

As shown in Table 4, participant diversity directly affects project success. Where diversity scores were low (e.g. gender exclusion in traditional contexts), projects became vulnerable to being 'captured' by local power figures such as the 'Market Sheik'. Participant diversity is an ethical opportunity and a 'social insurance' that prevents the project from being manipulated by local power groups. In cases where diversity is high, the risk of sabotage decreases.

The data show that the depth of engagement is a much stronger indicator of success than the variety of engagement methods used. A singular, high-depth engagement (e.g. Collaborate) produces more successful results than a low-depth approach that applies a wide variety of methods.

6.2. Common problems and limitations

The most common problem is superficial participation. In many cases, local governments appear to consult the public to comply with legal requirements. However, in reality, the public's influence on decisions remains minimal. As seen in the example of Rio de Janeiro, local governments' failure to communicate directly with the public and instead participate through intermediary institutions has created a similar ineffectiveness. Research shows that when citizen input is not reflected in practice, public confidence in participation processes is shaken, and the desire to participate diminishes. This situation can lead to participation fatigue in the long term; if people attend meetings repeatedly and invest effort but see no concrete change, their motivation will decline significantly.

Furthermore, the lack of an institutionalised participation model has been identified as a weakness in many cases. For example, in Egypt and Türkiye, there is a lack of legal frameworks or standardised methods to guide public participation within municipalities.

As seen in Table 4, projects that score low in the subcategories of economic capacity, social organisation capacity, and political/authoritarian barriers, which are the three variables belonging to the contextual factors category, fail even if they score high in other categories. Contextual factors can be considered limitations to the success of community-based participatory design projects.

6.3. Opportunities of participatory design

One of the most important findings of the evaluation matrix is the compensatory relationship between contextual variables. While existing literature generally posits economic capacity as a prerequisite for successful community-based participatory design projects, our analysis points to a more nuanced reality. Cases with moderate economic scores could only achieve resilience when Social Capital was high, and political and authoritarian barriers were high—community organisation acts as a structural counterbalance against financial scarcity. Therefore, the success of community-based participatory design projects is not a linear outcome of wealth but a result of Contextual Balancing, where social agency overcomes the limitations of a low-resource environment.

Participatory planning offers numerous opportunities. One of the most important aspects of this is the preservation and sustainable use of spaces through strong community connections. In projects shaped by the active participation of the public, local communities take greater ownership of the resulting products and problems such as vandalism and neglect are reduced. When community members perceive themselves as the co-owners of project outcomes, they volunteer to ensure the safety and maintenance of these spaces. This is consistent with findings in the literature that strong social ties increase the safety of public spaces [83, 84].

Another significant opportunity lies in the more effective use of public spaces and revitalisation of social life. As people contribute to the creation of spaces tailored to their needs and demands through participatory processes, the use of parks, squares, roads, and buildings has increased. This phenomenon is frequently emphasised in the planning literature as 'the secret of vibrant and liveable spaces is their adoption by their users' [27].

Another opportunity offered by participatory planning is the development of public participation in governance. Throughout the process, citizens gain valuable experience by attending meetings, engaging in discussions, and negotiating with decision-makers [85].

Finally, participatory design processes offer opportunities to improve quality by encouraging innovative tools and creative expression methods. Creative methods such as model-making, drawing workshops, and street-scale prototyping allow participants to express their ideas verbally and through concrete visual means. This makes the process fun and inclusive while also creating a common language between experts and the public.

6.4. Threats in participatory processes

As shown in Table 4, the biggest threat to participation is the challenge posed by contextual barriers (economic, social, and political/authoritarian). These factors can make the process fragile regardless of the depth of participation, potentially bringing the project to a standstill.

One threat that could undermine the development of participatory programming is the expansion of the process and an increase in its consumption. Ideally, participation is a time-consuming endeavour; holding repeated meetings with different stakeholders and gathering feedback at each stage can lengthen the project schedule. If this timeframe is not managed well and the project does not produce tangible results within a reasonable timeframe, costs increase and participant frustration can develop. Furthermore, prolonged processes create budgetary pressure on public institutions. Items such as meeting organisations, facilitation costs, and revisions of technical analyses increase costs. If private sector partners or investors are involved, lengthy processes can also test their patience and pose a risk of withdrawal from the project. Therefore, if time and cost management are not carefully considered in participatory processes, the process itself can be a threat. To prevent this, the literature suggests a well-planned participation schedule that balances long-term goals with short-term outcomes. For example, forming parallel working groups to address different topics simultaneously or collecting feedback via digital platforms can accelerate this process.

Another threat is the outdated nature of decisions owing to demographic and social changes. When a participatory plan is completed over a period of two to three years, the data and priorities initially collected may change. In particular, in areas

experiencing rapid urbanisation or changing demographics, local needs may change over time the project is implemented. This carries the risk that a plan developed with considerable effort will not have the expected effect once implemented. In this case, participatory outcomes must be updated dynamically. A related threat is the emergence of groups not represented in the participatory process. If the process is not inclusive at the outset or if new stakeholders (e.g. new residents and migrants) emerge over time, the decisions made may face legitimacy challenges. Therefore, participatory processes should be as flexible and adaptable as possible with mechanisms for retrospective review.

Conflicts of interest pose a serious risk to participatory processes. This risk should be minimised through transparency, accountability, and independent facilitation mechanisms [31].

The failure of participatory processes to produce tangible results poses a significant threat. If no tangible project materialises after countless meetings, exchanges, or efforts, then significant public distrust can arise. To counter this threat, participatory processes should, if possible, produce tangible outcomes, even small ones such as temporary pilot projects or small physical improvements undertaken jointly. This allowed participants to see the fruits of their labour and maintain their trust in the process. Furthermore, lessons learned from pilots can inform larger projects, allowing the early correction of errors [86].

7. Conclusion

This study contributes to community-based participatory design literature by shifting the focus from 'what methods are used' to 'how context filters these methods'. By integrating the SWOT analysis with an Evaluative Matrix, we demonstrate that:

- Context is not destiny: Middle economic capacity can be mitigated by high social organisation capacity.
- Quality over Quantity: Participation depth is structurally superior to various methods.
- Power Filter: Contextual barriers (traditional or social) can sabotage the most well-funded projects.

For practitioners, these findings suggest that before selecting a participation tool, a Contextual Readiness Assessment must be conducted. This study offers the following concrete guidance for practitioners and local governments:

- Contextual Analysis: The project area should be analysed for its physical aspects and social and political barriers.
- Assurance of Representation: Participant diversity is an ethical requirement and a safeguard against sabotage by local power centres.
- Depth-Oriented Design: In budget-constrained situations, planners should prioritise the extent to which existing method parameters are incorporated into decision-making processes (depth of participation), rather than merely increasing the number of methods.

Although this research is limited to eight cases, it offers a new perspective for identifying the vulnerability thresholds of community-based participatory design processes. Future studies could focus on how the contextual barriers identified in this study (particularly in areas where physical access is difficult or social instability exists) can be overcome using digital participation platforms. Whether or not hybrid models can overcome the constraints of traditional authority figures remains a critical area of research for future urban participation.

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