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188-199 **KAJA POGAČAR**

'URBAN ACTIVATOR' – PARTICIPATORY
AND BOTTOM-UP TOOL OF URBAN
CHANGE

DEFINITION AND SELECTED EXAMPLES

SUBJECT REVIEW
UDC 711.4-163:711.61

'URBANI AKTIVATOR' – PARTICIPATIVNI
BOTTOM-UP ALAT ZA URBANE
PROMJENE

DEFINICIJA I IZABRANI PRIMJERI

PREGLEDNI ZNANSTVENI ČLANAK
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FIG. 1. PARTICIPATORY URBAN INTERVENTION ON DEVASTATED AREA IN MARSEILLES FOR THE NEEDS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 'YES WE CAMP MARSEILLES 2013'.
SL. 1. PARTICIPATIVNA URBANA INTERVENCIJA U DEVASTIRANOME PODRUČJU MARSEILLEA ZA POTREBE EUROSKE PRIJESTOLNICE KULTURE 'YES WE CAMP MARSEILLES 2013'.

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‘URBAN ACTIVATOR’ – PARTICIPATORY AND BOTTOM-UP TOOL OF URBAN CHANGE DEFINITION AND SELECTED EXAMPLES

‘URBANI AKTIVATOR’ – PARTICIPATIVNI *BOTTOM-UP* ALAT ZA URBANE PROMJENE DEFINICIJA I IZABRANI PRIMJERI

BOTTOM-UP INTERVENTIONS
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
REVITALISATION
URBAN ACTIVATOR
VACANT SPACES

BOTTOM-UP INTERVENCIJE
SUDJELOVANJE JAVNOSTI
REVITALIZACIJA
URBANI AKTIVATOR
PRAZNI PROSTORI

The paper investigates participatory and bottom-up supported interventions for the revitalisation of degraded and abandoned urban areas with the help of the tool called *urban activator*. Based on selected examples, the approaches, actors and impacts of small architectural interventions in the process of activating and regenerating urban space will be presented.

Rad istražuje participativne *bottom-up* intervencije usmjerene revitalizaciji degradiranih i napuštenih urbanih područja pomoću alata nazvanog *urban activator* (*urbani aktivator*). Na temelju odabranih primjera prikazat će se pristupi, sudionici i utjecaji manjih arhitektonskih intervencija u procesu aktiviranja i obnove urbanog prostora.

INTRODUCTION

UVOD

The paper examines the characteristics of the current, predominantly informal approach to spatial revitalisation and redevelopment, focusing on degraded and abandoned urban areas with the help of the tool called the *urban activator*. This approach is fundamentally different from the practices used in previous decades, which typically employed top-down principles to deciding upon and planning spatial interventions, on a notably large scale and without particular involvement and participation of the interested public. In contrast, bottom-up¹ urban interventions and the participation² of the interested public are emerging as a new type of local projects in times of the economic crisis, as contemporary, creative and efficient approaches to solving social, economic and related spatial issues are urgently needed.

In this respect, urban activators are regarded as smaller bottom-up architectural urban interventions that attempt to instigate a long-term process at a generally low cost and with smart, even provocative³ solutions, thus activating and revitalising degraded and abandoned urban spaces. Nowadays, urban environments are characterised by many underused spatial resources⁴ – abandoned industrial, commercial and residential buildings, urban vacant lots, unbridled courtyards and public facilities without financial support, which can be redeveloped into attractive, functional and lively spaces primarily through local ini-

tiatives and committed individuals. Space is, as quoted in the New Charter of Athens, "a critical natural resource, limited in supply, but with growing demands upon it".⁵ Contextually, the usefulness and functionality of underused and already built areas within cities should be increased, while their social capacity should also be enhanced and strengthened by transforming these passive infrastructures into public assets.⁶

Based on these premises, we postulate that the *urban activator* can be understood as a tool that can address the restructuring of space in a softer, more accessible manner, especially in harsh economic and social conditions. It is founded on small urban interventions with the help of public participation "providing citizens with opportunities to take part in decision or planning process".⁷ The paper poses the thesis that the urban activator could become a general tool for examining the relevance and merits of spatial interventions even in times of prosperity.

DEFINITION

DEFINICIJA

The urban activator can be defined as a small physical manifestation in the urban space, i.e. an architectural intervention in the urban space, which stimulates development and is accompanied by the maximum possible social impact in terms of connecting people, enhancing the social fabric and appropriating the space. The process itself is aimed at participation⁸, includes a wide scope of interested actors, promotes the articulation of problems and opportunities, monitors responses and acts cohesively and responsibly towards space and society. In most cases, the urban activator is not a ready-made structure but is created within

¹ The term 'bottom-up' first appeared in relation to its opposite 'top-down' in 1942 in a journal of economics. In an urban context, this approach has two key, complementary directions: first, a trend that encourages social, cooperative models of city organisation; second, a growing interest from government officials, academia, and the professional sector in resorting to digital, open-sourced data and models as key resources for understanding urban interactions. [<http://www.bmwguggenheimlab.org/10our-bantrends>, 25.3.2014]

² According to Glass (1979), participation can be defined as "providing citizens with opportunities to take part in decision or planning process". According to LAURIAN, 2004, it is suggested that "desirable participation is one that enables citizens to shape planning decisions and outcomes while increasing their level of social and political empowerment". [MOHAMMADI, 2010: 5]

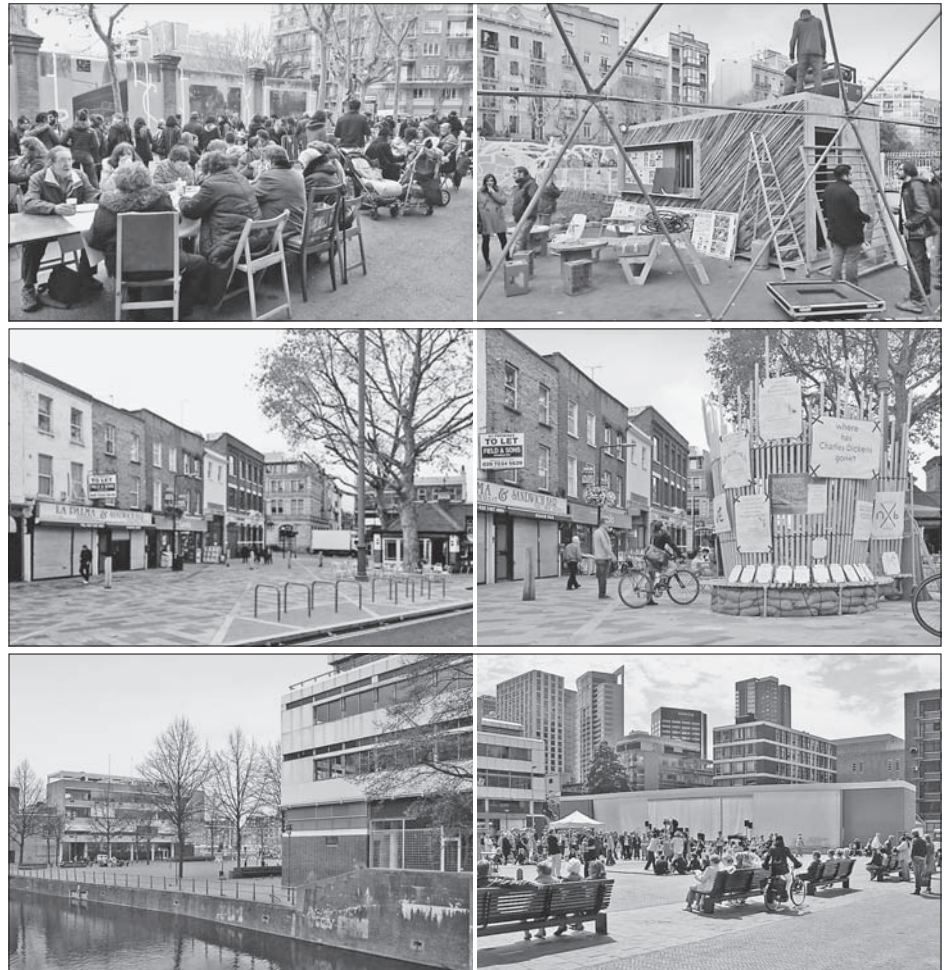
³ HARVEY, 2012

⁴ It is estimated that there are ca. 11 million empty properties in Europe, 3.4 m in Spain and a considerable 175,000 in Slovenia. [<http://www.stat.si> / <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/23/europe-11m-empty-properties-enough-house-homeless-continent-twice> / 25.2.2014]

⁵ NEW CHARTER OF ATHENS, 2003: 1

the community; the creative and participatory approach before, during and after its development is essential.⁹ This forms the identity¹⁰, affiliation and responsibility toward space and the community. In this way, urban space can be revitalised in terms of sustainability, since it establishes a two-way connection with its users. This social ecosystem is thus characterised by architectural interventions into space that generally carry little economic value, but have a much higher social value due to the process of participation and connecting actors based on their own engagement (Fig. 3). As argued by Huybrechts, participation as such is primarily about people but also about objects, since objects mediate communication between people.¹¹ Therefore, what is crucial in the case of the urban activator besides the process itself is that a minimum physical intervention is applied as a significant element of the initiation, as a mediating element, as a facilitator of further change.

The *urban activator* as a technical or professional term is not generally established in the fields of architecture and urbanism but occasionally appears within these contexts. In illustration, the term was used in the description of the spatial intervention on the Grotekerkplein square in Rotterdam¹², displaying the example of the discussed concept (Fig. 4). In the analysed phrase, the word 'activator' could be replaced by several synonyms, such as the mediator, the motivator, the initiator. The 'urban catalyst' carries similar meaning in the sense of catalysing urban change; it was used to name the 'Urban Catalyst'¹³ office established in Berlin, which has implemented many projects and published publications on temporary spatial interventions with an emphasis on degraded and marginal urban sites. Moreover, parallel con-



cepts are presented in *The Temporary City*¹⁴ and other publications (*Temporary urban spaces: concepts for the use of city space, 2006; Urban Pioneers: Temporary use and urban developments in Berlin, 2007; Hand-made urbanism: from community initiatives to participatory models, 2013*)¹⁵, which highlight the significance of simple, bottom-up and temporary spatial design concepts as the most effective and fastest responses to changes and needs in today's times in contrast to the glorification of permanence in urbanism. As argued by Bishop and Williams, "Instead some are beginning to experiment with looser planning and design frameworks, linked to phased packages of smaller, often temporary initiatives, designed to unlock the potentials of sites now, rather than in 10 years' time".¹⁶ Furthermore, they expose the new circumstances that are favourable to small participatory temporary projects such as a) *political and economic uncertainty*, b) *vacancy* (i.e. having a multitude of underused areas), c) *the revolution in work* (i.e. working at home), d) *intensity in the use of space* (i.e.

FIG. 2. THE ECLECTIS PROJECT IS AN EXPERIMENT WITH PARTICIPATION PROCESSES AND ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS IN THE URBAN SPACE

SL. 2. THE ECLECTIS PROJECT JE EKSPERIMENTALNI PROJEKT PARTICIPATIVNIH PROCESA I UMJETNIČKIH INTERVENCIJA U URBANOME PROSTORU

FIG. 3. UNION PRESS LOCATED ON FLAT IRON SQUARE IN LONDON IS A PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT, COMMISSIONED BY A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION CALLED BANKSIDE URBAN FOREST

SL. 3. UNION PRESS (NA TRGU FLAT IRON) U LONDONU JE PROJEKT JAVNIH RADOVA KOJE NARUČUJE NEPROFITNA ORGANIZACIJA BANKSIDE URBAN FOREST

FIG. 4. GROTEKERKPLEIN IN ROTTERDAM BEFORE AND AFTER THE 'URBAN ACTIVATOR' (SMALL THEATRE PODIUM) WAS INSTALLED

SL. 4. GROTEKERKPLEIN U ROTTERDAMU PRIJE I POSLIJE INSTALIRANJA URBANOG AKTIVATORA (MALI PODIJ ZA JAVNA DOGAĐANJA)

6 FERNANDEZ, 2013

7 MOHAMMADI, 2010: 5, orig.: GLASS, 1979

8 MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011

9 FRANCK, HOWARD, 2010

10 The meanings of space facilitate the emergence of strong connections between the place, the person and the world. These cognitions include memories, ideas, emotions, views, values, meanings, concepts, behaviours and experience related to the everyday environment. [CARR, et al., 1992]

11 HUYBRECHTS, 2014

12 In 2004, the programme revitalisation of the area of the Grotekerkplein Square was prompted by a private unprofitable organisation, which launched the process of participation with local residents and the city council. The element of reactivating life on the square was established by setting up a smaller multi-purpose theatre podium.

13 Also a book with the same title by: OSWALDT, OVERMEYER, MISSELWITZ, 2013

14 BISHOP, WILLIAMS, 2012

15 HAYDN, TEMEL, 2006; OVERMEYER, 2007; ROSA, WEILAND, ed., 2013

16 BISHOP, WILLIAMS, 2012: 3



FIG. 5. UNION STREET URBAN ORCHARD – AFTER THE LONDON FESTIVAL OF ARCHITECTURE IN 2010 THE 100 UNION STREET SITE WAS TRANSFORMED INTO AN URBAN ORCHARD AND COMMUNITY GARDEN

SL. 5. UNION STREET URBAN ORCHARD – NAKON LONDONSKOGA FESTIVALA ARHITEKTURE 2010. LOKACIJA UNION STREET 100 PREUREĐENA JE U URBANI VOJNKAJ I ZAJEDNIČKI VRT

contemporary multi-use of space), *e) counterculture and activism* (i.e. inadequate supply of activities by the private real estate market), *f) new technologies* (i.e. use of smart phones, internet, GPS, etc.) and *g) creative milieus* (i.e. the creative sector is most susceptible to using and occupying marginal areas or vacant buildings).¹⁷

In the recent decade, the described circumstances have facilitated a significant rise in smaller bottom-up supported initiatives and related projects, which have established a much more spontaneous and democratic (partly even illegal) relationship towards spatial planning and use than was known until recently. Many of them have already proven their impact on contemporary urban development, such as *raumlaborberlin* (Germany), *CityBee* (Denmark), *Social Spaces* (Belgium), *muf architecture/art* (England), *STEALTH, Platforma 9.81* (Croatia), *ProstoRož* (Slovenia), *Urban Catalyst* (Germany), etc. (Fig. 5).¹⁸

The following section will present the theoretical background of the urban activator – the origins of the bottom-up model and participation practices in the planning literature.

INFORMAL BOTTOM-UP PARTICIPATION, THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

NEFORMALNA BOTTOM-UP PARTICIPACIJA, TEORIJSKA PODLOGA

The concept of the urban activator substantiates the approach of informal bottom-up activities through stakeholder participation; in a wider context, it paved its way as a new spatial planning trend in two waves, the first one commencing in the 1960s and the second one in the 1990s.¹⁹ In contrast to that, the conviction that public space affairs can only be solved formally by planning carried out exclusively by specialists, who possess expertise and experience, was still deeply rooted in the early 20th century. According to Tugwell, it was believed that ordinary minds are not capable of dealing with such complex issues and therefore cannot be involved in decision-making processes. "Planning therefore came to be seen as scientific endeavour where planners in their collective wisdom produced comprehensive plans and budgets, laid out as 'rational' design, and safeguarded from the self-serving meddling of the politicians".²⁰ Within two decades after the WW2, the reaction towards industrial capitalism, injustice, exploitation, poverty, repression of minorities, etc., facilitated political movements in terms of "democratisation and co-determination"²¹ and what Friedman²² calls "social mobilisation"²³; these movements contributed to establishing new ethical principles such as sustainable development, rapid growth of

democracy and human rights, development concepts of civil society and present cultural reactions. Amongst other, they triggered a critical situation in urban planning, which was forced to change its approach "from the *imperative and technocratic to participatory and democratic one*".²⁴

At the time, Jane Jacobs was also in search of alternative development and was among those who were criticising the expansions and construction of the modernist-based cities, arguing that large urban interventions, in particular the urban renewal, did not respect the needs of most city dwellers. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), a number of sociological concepts such as the 'eyes of the street' and the term 'social capital' were introduced. Though without using the term 'bottom-up', she advocated the very approach, namely the importance and role of active citizens for providing live and genuine urban spaces.²⁵

Since the 1960s, according to Pal, planners began to listen more attentively to the voice of the people and public participation was given an official blessing in urban renewal and other public planning programmes as well as in legislation.²⁶ The series of internationally important documents within the context of sustainability were among the forerunners that started including public participation in legislation, beginning with the *National Environmental Policy Act* [NEPA] adopted in 1969.²⁷ The concept of sustainable development became inaugurated with *Agenda 21* (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992), which was crucial for addressing the importance of local authorities as the level closest to the people.²⁸ The *Aalborg Charter* (The Charter of European Sustainable Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability, adopted in 1994) referred to participation as a cornerstone of the sustainability strategy; last but

¹⁷ BISHOP, WILLIAMS, 2014: 21-35

¹⁸ <http://citybee.dk>; <http://www.socialspaces.be>; <http://www.muf.co.uk>; <http://www.stealth.ultd.net>; <http://raumlabor.net>; <http://www.platforma981.hr>; <http://www.prostoroz.org>; <http://www.urbancatalyst.net>

¹⁹ PAL, 2008; MOHAMMADI, 2010; MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011

²⁰ PAL, 2008: 14, orig.: TUGWELL, 1939

²¹ MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011: 6

²² In his work *Planning in the Public Domain* (1987), John Friedman set the theoretical foundation to developing an understanding of the relationship between planners (seen as experts), the state (constituted of elective representatives of the people) and citizens themselves.

²³ PAL, 2008: 15, orig.: FRIEDMAN, 1987

²⁴ MOHAMMADI, 2010: 2

²⁵ JACOBS, 1961

²⁶ PAL, 2008: 15

²⁷ While the National Environmental Policy Act is the environmental law of the United States, it is referred to as the modern day "environmental magna charta".

not least, the *Aarhus Convention* (adopted in 1998 and entering into force in 2001) exposed the importance of the access to information as well as the importance of public participation in decision-making processes. The above-mentioned agreements have established new standards regarding public participation in decision-making processes; above all, they have set a strong impulse for spreading the participatory approach also into not strictly environmental but spatial matters with the goal of 'meeting the needs of all human beings' and leading to better outcomes, when a broader spectrum of people concerned is included in the planning processes. In practice, the introduction of public participation in spatial planning processes still varies considerably; in some areas, it remains in its infancy (primarily southern and eastern European countries, including Slovenia and Croatia), while the practice of public participation is already well-established elsewhere (e.g. mid- and northern European countries, particularly Denmark, Switzerland, Austria).

In general, the participation itself can be differentiated between formal (constituted) and informal (unconstituted), whereas the latter can also be viewed as "a laboratory for participation, where new approaches and methods are often implemented".²⁹ On the other hand, participation can also be distinguished through the direction in which it is initiated, approached, offered or demanded – that is from the 'top down' or from the 'bottom up'. Differences between these two are presented in Table I, whereas the subject of research, the urban activator, represents the bottom-up approach.

The theoretical backbone of the 'bottom-up' approach is based on 'The theory of communicative action' (1984) by the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas. The theory referred to as 'collaborative planning'

was developed as a response to imposing planning from the experts from top to down and has directly affected the change of the paradigm.³⁰ The focus of planning had been oriented towards the 'process' and not towards the 'outcome' as typical for the top-down model dominant in the planning practice until the 1990s. The process is based on the "consensus with stakeholders and interest groups in planning through debate, negotiation and discourse", whereas the role of the planner changed to "mostly mediating among stakeholders".³¹ The Habermas *Theory of communicative action* emphasises the importance of the dialogue – which underlies the very essence of our humanity – the need to share, to communicate, to reach other human beings and touch them deeply.³² Although it is clear that hierarchical decision making by itself is no longer sufficient to resolve urban problems, it is important to understand that both approaches (top-down and bottom-up) have their own potentials and limits.³³

REACTIVATING UNDERUSED URBAN SPACES

PONOVNO AKTIVIRANJE NEISKORIŠTENIH URBANIH PROSTORA

The main starting point of the urban activator presents detecting underused, downgraded and dysfunctional places in cities. In '*Loose space*'³⁴, the authors expose the multitude of public spaces that can be appropriated to meet their own needs and desires, as well as different possibilities for uses that were originally not intended for those locations. The list of public places where the concept can be applied is long, from leftover spaces within the cities such as unused grounds next to the rivers or areas next to infrastructural objects, to plots of closed-down factories, public places without content or distinct character, empty courtyards within housing units or even atypical places such as 'Between-spaces'³⁵ that can be found around the canals of Amsterdam. Not only sociological issues but also economical aspects are forcing us to re-use and rearrange this surprisingly large scope of unused spaces³⁶ in urban areas. As cited in one of the first books on temporary urbanism *Urban Pioneer*, "an empty property poses an economical dilemma to its owner; without constant maintenance the property no longer meets the market standards, while unpopulated it is exposed to vandalism and squatting. An empty property projects poor image on its surrounding, contributing to a general decline in market value in its area".³⁷ On the other hand, activating citizens and transforming them from passive consumers and transforming them from passive consumers into active participants in decision-making processes and co-creators of urban space is

TABLE I. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACH
TABL. I. RAZLIKE IZMEDU TZV. TOP-DOWN PRISTUPA I BOTTOM-UP PRISTUPA

	Top down	Bottom up
Initiative	Begins with administration/policy; often involves issues which should be solved efficiently and broadly supported	Begins with civil society organisations or committed individuals
Target group	Defined by the topic Potential interest is a prerequisite	Forms and organises itself
Topic	Set through policy planning or programmes	Evolves from everyday life
Concernment	Must be developed based on the topic	Exists and is the main motive
Awareness	Must be developed with relevant information and awareness campaigns	Developed by experience and by working on the topic or issue
Motivation	More efficiency, less opposition, better legitimacy	Social contacts and wishes for change
Direction of impact	Seeks activity and engagement from the 'top'	Seeks to achieve changes in policy and administration ('top') from the bottom
Forms of activity	Planned by administration; often with external moderation	Originates from the process; often by applying well-known methods

28 MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011: 6

29 MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011: 7

30 HARRIS, 2002: 21

31 MOHAMMADI, 2010: 2

32 FRIEDMAN, 1987: 74

33 MOHAMMADI, 2010: 2

34 FRANK, STEVENS, 2005

35 The project called 'Tussen-ruimte' or 'Between-space' initiated by several Dutch architectural offices mapped 'between-spaces' as open alleys, hidden courtyards and other unused spaces in the Amsterdam canal area as the first stage of their project. The project aimed at promotion and revitalisation of these unused and unusual places in collaboration with artists and architects. [<http://tussenruimte.com/2.5.2014/>]

36 A considerable share of underused areas can be found in post-industrial cities, in cities in transition and those affected by the economic crisis.

37 OVERMEYER [ed.], 2007: 6

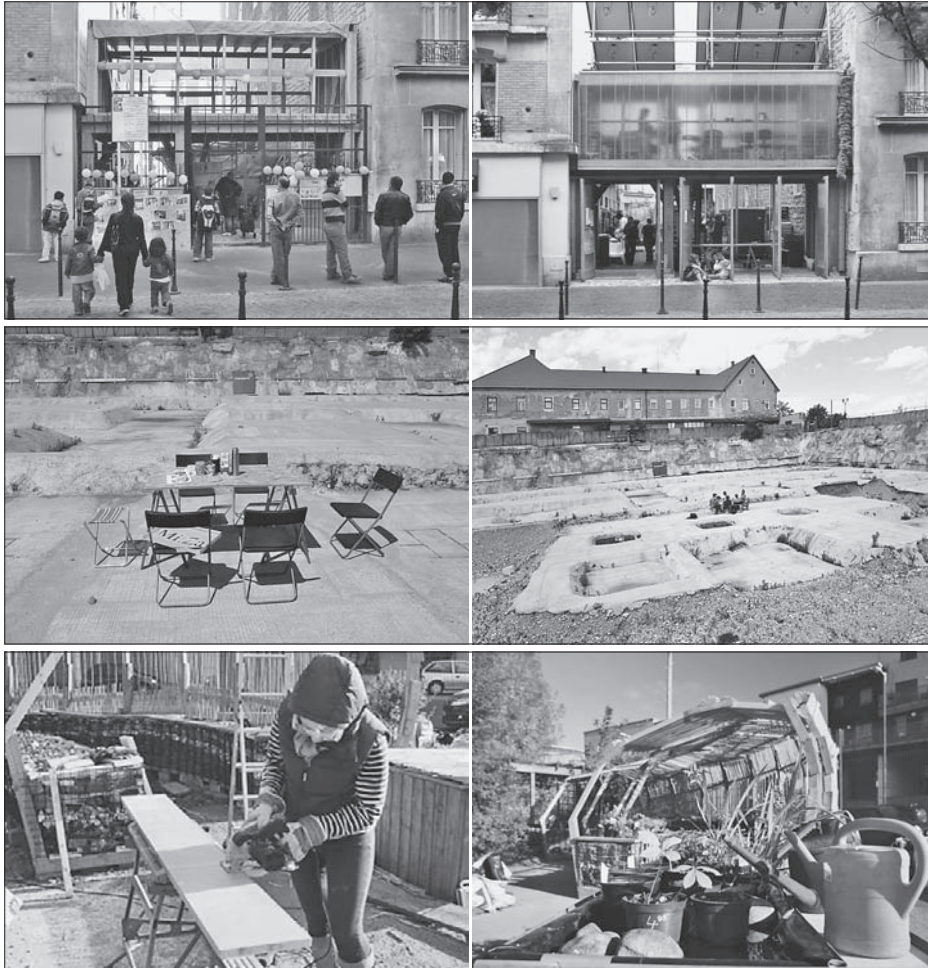


FIG. 6. A DISUSED SITE AT THE RUE SAINT BLAISE IN PARIS WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A COMMUNITY CENTRE CALLED 'PASSAGE 56' – 'ESPACE CULTUREL ÉCOLOGIQUE' THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATION

SL. 6. NEISKORIŠTENJA I NAPUŠTENA LOKACIJA U ULICI SAINT BLAISE U PARIZU PRENAMIJENJENA JE U CENTAR NAZVAN *PASSAGE 56* – 'ESPACE CULTUREL ÉCOLOGIQUE' ('EKOLOŠKI KULTURNI PROSTOR') KROZ PROCES PARTICIPACIJE

FIG. 7. 'MI:ZA MAKES COFFEE' AT THE BUILDING SITE OF A DROPPED INVESTMENT FOR THE MAKS CULTURAL CENTRE IN MARIBOR

SL. 7. *MI:ZA MAKES COFFEE* NA GRADILISTU MARIBORSKOGA KULTURNOG CENTRA MAKS (PROJEKT KOJI SE POKAZAO PROPALOM INVESTICIJOM)

FIG. 8. 'THE SHADE HOUSE' IS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT FOR THE HULME COMMUNITY GARDEN CENTRE, A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION AND THE LIVE PROJECT TEAM, WHO DESIGNED AND BUILT IT IN 5 WEEKS WITH THE HELP OF VOLUNTEERS. THE PROJECT IS THE FIRST STAGE OF A LARGE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE NEIGHBOURING CAR PARK, WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY DOUBLE THE GARDEN CENTRE'S SITE.

SL. 8. *THE SHADE HOUSE* JE ZAJEDNIČKI PROJEKT ZA VRTNI CENTAR *HULME COMMUNITY GARDEN CENTRE* NEPROFITNE ORGANIZACIJE I GRUPE *LIVE PROJECT*, KOJE SU ČLANOVI PROJEKTIRALI I IZGRADILI CENTAR U ROKU OD 5 TJEDANA UZ POMOĆ VOLONTERA. PROJEKT JE PRVA ETAPA OPŠERNE OBNOVE SUSJEDNOG PARKIRALIŠTA, KOJE ĆE NA KRAJU UDVOSTRUČITI POVRŠINU VRTNOGA CENTRA.

also significant. As noted by Zotes, "the aim is to activate urban public space by setting in motion certain aspects of the public, social, political, cultural, and economic spheres of the city, in order to generate or accelerate particular reactions in the users". Furthermore, Zotes notes that there is an urgent need to find new ways to reclaim public spaces and urban structures in order to challenge the limited and outdated uses for which they were originally intended, since cities are increasingly becoming more restrictive and exclusionary, not only in physical terms but also in terms of self-autonomy and spontaneous social manifestation.³⁸

A good example of such activation is an intervention on a disused urban vacant lot between two residential buildings located in a densely populated part of Paris³⁹, which has been facing pressing social issues. The urban intervention was developed as a model example of cross-sectoral cooperation between residents (as initiators), local organisations, experts in urban planning⁴⁰ and the city authorities. Based on consultation and identify-

ing wishes and needs through participatory events, workshops and temporary 'installations', an informal space aimed at activities and participation of the local community was created. The example of developing the courtyard and the structure separating the public space from the semi-public space shows that spaces with a rich identity, content and vitality can be created with a relatively low budget and high social engagement (Fig. 6). The *Passage 56* project supports the idea that public space is not created merely as a result of the designed physical construction but is unceasingly developed as social, cultural and political production.⁴¹

It is essential to realise that in the future municipalities (and states) will have less resources for public programmes and thus also for the revitalisation of spaces, and that it will be necessary to engage various, not only formal actors so as to ensure positive changes in the urban space. We must be aware of the fact that in times of prosperity, economic growth and affluence the relationship towards space and spatial interventions is often different, generally more ambitious⁴² and wasteful both in terms of investments and the spatial scope (Fig. 9). On the contrary, approaches including a certain extent of activism, social engagement, etc., inevitably emerge and are developed in times of austerity and economic and social instability.⁴³ They are based on solutions that should be closer to the actual needs and wishes of people, but also more affordable for individuals and society.

In previous decades, the bottom up approach of urban interventions was frequently despi-

³⁸ ZOTES, 2012 [http://www.eme3.org/?p=684 /20.2.2013/]

³⁹ http://www.publicspace.org [25.2.2014]

⁴⁰ The architecture atelier 'aaa', studio for self-managed architecture from Paris, played an important role in the project. The atelier acts through the so-called urban tactics used to promote public participation and self-management of urban areas so as to overcome deep-rooted stereotypes about urban planning. It proposes nomad, reversible projects and initiates neglected practices, thus examining the potential of the contemporary city with respect to population, mobility and temporality. They argue that "it is by micro-political acting that we want to participate in making the city more ecological and more democratic, to make the space of proximity less dependent on top-down processes and more accessible to its users". [http://www.urbantactics.org /22.3.2014/]

⁴¹ BORDAS, 2011

⁴² Due to harsh economic and social conditions, some European countries have even been faced with resistance to ambitious urban planning interventions typical for times of prosperity. The Spanish city of Burgos can be highlighted as an example where mass protests occurred at the beginning of 2014 during the presentation of an ambitious urban development plan for regenerating the avenue in the working district of Gamonal. People protested against the substantial investment of 8 million EUR for what they saw as a mostly cosmetic renovation of the area despite a high level of unemployment (officially 26%), large indebtedness of the city council and cuts in healthcare and education. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25775122 /20.2.2014/]

⁴³ FERNANDEZ, 2103

sed and looked down upon as marginal and without any true value, primarily due to its economic marginality, and was therefore often labelled with derogatory terms related to urban squats or gardening and shantytowns. Nowadays, many such forms of community and hence space organisation are slowly becoming more legitimate, mostly due to their role of enhancing social cohesion, for instance in projects such as 'Yes we camp' in Marseille⁴⁴ (Fig. 1), the Holzmarkt Initiative in Berlin, Urban gardens by CAAP in Maribor, etc.

BOTTOM-UP ACTORS

BOTTOM-UP SUDIONICI

As argued in *Handmade Urbanism*, "people across the globe are engaging in improving the urban environments they live in. Community-based initiatives indicate the ability of citizens to present solutions to challenges posed by everyday life, and use creativity to transform and multiply existing resources."⁴⁵ Bottom-up planning pays special attention to the local communities as the main actors operating on a local level and fulfilling micro-agendas through direct action.⁴⁶

In general, various actors can initiate and be involved in the process of bottom-up urban activation (Table II) – from groups of residents, users of space, who join efforts in order to reach their common goal, to various associations, primarily from the field of culture, as well as wider civic initiatives, NGOs, residential cooperatives, progressive city district boards, etc. Different expert groups of-



FIG. 9. LEFT: PROTESTS IN THE GAMONAL DISTRICT IN THE SPANISH CITY OF BURGOS WHEN AN AMBITIOUS URBAN REGENERATION PLAN WAS ANNOUNCED. RIGHT: PROPOSAL FOR REDEVELOPING THE BOULEVARD IN THE GAMONAL DISTRICT.

SL. 9. LIJEVO: PROSVJEDI U ČETVRTI GAMONAL U ŠPANSJOLSKOME GRADU BURGOSU, GDJE JE NAJAVLJEN AMBICIOZAN PLAN URBANE OBNOVE. DESNO: PRIJEDLOG ZA OBNOVU BULEVARA U ČETVRTI GAMONAL.

ten act as initiators, especially those who are professionally more directly involved with space-related issues – e.g. various experimental architectural groups and associations, spatial sociologists, traffic planners (Fig. 7)⁴⁷ as well as scientists from different academic institutions. Among those often taking a proactive role are also schools of architecture with their workshops (Fig. 8) and practical interventions into space (i.e. Life Projects⁴⁸). The latter form an important group of future experts who will obtain a different view on spatial planning with life experience and participation. In general, informal participation is participation that enables the contribution of groups that usually cannot formally take part in decision-making processes (such as migrants) or are not yet able to (such as children and teenagers; Fig. 10) and other interested groups or persons concerned (depending on the issue or problem).⁴⁹ (Fig. 11)

FIG. 10. CHILDREN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CITY OF BURGOS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN URBAN MODEL.

SL. 10. AKTIVNO SUDJELOVANJE DJECE U IZGRADNJI URBANOGA MODELA U GRADU BURGOSU

⁴⁴ The spatial intervention 'Yes We Camp' in Marseille for the needs of the 2013 European Capital of Culture activated urban space for 'camping' on abandoned or underused areas in the former industrial district. "More than enlarging the accommodation offer, the Camping 2013 concept may be understood as a platform for different actors to meet and innovate. The project is a collective work in which anyone, from neighbours to urban professionals, can make propositions to enrich the campsite or give a hand in its realisation. This approach could be identified as collaborative crowdsourcing, volunteers putting their skills and ideas in common to make the project evolve." [http://www.ifhp.org/ifhp-blog/yes-we-camp-marseille-2013#_U2jYjeaSwk9/22.2.2014/]

⁴⁵ ROSA, WEILAND, 2013: 18

⁴⁶ ROSA, WEILAND, 2013

⁴⁷ 'Mi:ZA' – The association 'Mariborsko interesno združenje arhitektov' is an example of an urban development actor. They focus on soft activism with events called 'Miza makes coffee', thus sparking off debates on development and interventions in the urban space on problematic urban planning locations. At the same time, they operate as an activator in the discipline of architecture [http://mi-za.si/15.1.2014/]

⁴⁸ Live Projects is a pioneering educational initiative run by the University of Sheffield School of Architecture in Great Britain, where students implement concrete projects in space in real time and with real budgets as workshop formats that give them a hands-on experience in the local community while at the same time the community can benefit from the ideas and actions of the students [http://www.liveprojects.org/15.2.2014/]

⁴⁹ MÜLLER, STOTTEN, 2011: 7

⁵⁰ HUYBRECHTS, 2014

TABLE II. VARIOUS GROUPS OF BOTTOM-UP ACTORS AND THEIR FIELDS OF ACT

TABL. II. RAZLIČITE GRUPE BOTTOM-UP SUDIONIKA I NJIHOVA PODRUČJA DJELOVANJA

Bottom up actors	Connection	Field of action
LOCAL GROUPS – individuals, local residents, city district boards	Location-bound	Identifying issues and needs, establishing wishes, participating in the implementation/active involvement of locals through different socio-spatial interactions
INTEREST GROUPS – different fields of interest, associations, NGOs, city district boards, users	Interest-bound	Identifying issues and needs, establishing wishes, participating, support, lobbying
PROFESSIONAL GROUPS – architecture and urban design studios, schools, art groups, etc.	Profession-bound	Professional initiatives and support, identifying issues, expert designs Workshops for students, pupils, children



FIG. 11. THE AIM OF THE 'CANTIERE BARCA' WORKSHOP WITH RAUMLABORBERLIN – A COMMUNITY PROJECT IN MODERN SUBURBS OF TORINO – WAS TO ESTABLISH A SPACE OF COMMUNICATION, ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE LOCALS

SL. 11. CILJ RADIONICE CANTIERE BARCA, ZAJEDNO S RAUMLABORBERLIN GRUPOM, U PROJEKTU ZA MODERNA PREDGRADA TORINA BIO JE USPOSTAVITI PROSTOR KOMUNIKACIJE, AKTIVNOSTI I DISKUSIJE IZMEĐU LOKALNIH STANOVNIKA

FIG. 12. LIVING COURTYARDS INITIATIVE: REVIVING THE COURTYARD AND HALLWAY WITH INHABITANTS AND STUDENTS OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE GOSPOSKA STREET IN MARIBOR

SL. 12. LIVING COURTYARDS INITIATIVE – OŽIVLJAVANJE DVORIŠTA I UNUTARNJIH PROLAZA U GOSPOSKOJ ULICI U MARIBORU UZ POMOĆ STANOVNIKA I STUDENATA ARHITEKTURE

citizen control.⁵¹ The highest level is represented by self-organised communities and related local initiatives included in concepts such as DIY Urbanism, Tactical Urbanism, Hands-on Urbanism, Lighter-Quicker-Cheaper, Transition Towns, Sharing Cities.⁵² Participation is actually the key element of the described approach since through involvement, cooperation and decision making of different actors, be it residents, experts, etc., the social fabric can be built simultaneously with the construction of the actual physical structure. This point of view is very important and, as argued by Lefebvre, "space is a product of social (inter)action".⁵³ (Fig. 12)

Dialogue between different actors is also considered to be an important skill in the process of revival of disused urban space, as noted by the cityBEE platform, which mainly uses soft tools for reorganising and reviving abandoned urban areas. In an article about the *Eclectis* project, the idea that listening should be our most important skill was proposed.⁵⁴ With regard to the above-mentioned bottom-up actors, it is becoming increasingly important to include a spectrum of different user groups that is as wide as necessary or possible to ensure efficient interventions. Cross-sectoral cooperation and interdisciplinarity in bottom-up initiatives have also been pointed out in a project called *Actors of Urban Change*⁵⁵ conducted by the Robert Bosch Foundation (Berlin), which highlights the significance of participation between various sectors – the municipal, private and cultural – with the aim of sustainable bottom-up revitalisation of urban spaces.

Finally, Pal poses the question whether people can free themselves from the tutelage of the state and corporate power and become autonomous again as active citizens in households, local communities, and regions. "Industrial capitalism has answered these questions in the negative. It has placed its trust in men of wealth and power, the formally educated, and the experts. The contemporary literature on planning theory, however, has come to recognise almost universally that the scientific mind – or the planner-as-expert, applied to practical affairs, cannot be trusted to itself. 'By serving corporate capital, it is caught up in the vortex of unlimited economic expansion. By serving the state, it works for the economy of destruction. Only by serving people directly, when people are organised to act collectively on their own behalf, will it contribute toward the project of an alternative development'".⁵⁶ (Fig. 13)

CONCLUSION

ZAKLJUČAK

The discussed approach of addressing and solving spatial issues was not a subject of in-depth interest of architects and urban planners until recently, since it used to be deemed unprofessional or even marginal, but it has become increasingly relevant in times of tightening belts, as we have illustrated with the presentation of various examples of such spatial interventions and initiatives in Europe. However, the economic crisis was not the only reason for the appearance of such approach. In addition to the economic downturn, the ever growing dynamic changes in our environment in recent decades led to spatial planning and/or spatial development that could not solve problems and access people's needs anymore.

The approach presented in the paper and defined as the urban activator reveals many differences in comparison to traditional practices of urban development. The new approach is almost diametrically opposite in all relevant aspects when compared to the established top-down model of planning. It addresses a wide range of actors, is mostly bottom up initiated, but it also tries to connect across sectors. It is important in social terms as it attempts to activate and connect people, it embodies ecological principles, it promotes the hands-on approach to active involvement, it supports decision making by participants or users, it promotes flexible, creative,

⁵¹ ARNSTEIN, 1969

⁵² PETERLIN, 2014

⁵³ ELDEN, 2009: 186

temporary solutions, it focuses more on the process than the outcome and could be explained as a tool for rediscovering spatial and social potential. One of the differences that also have to be stressed is the new role of the architect or the urban planner, which were involved in almost every case presented in the paper. They are still regarded as important advocates of space, but they transformed themselves from the established position of design-related authoritarian figures to the activators, mediators or operators of the process of spatial intervention. The new role of users/citizens is similarly important, as they had to transform themselves from passive observers into active co-creators. At the same time, cities should change the focus from the search for the perfect, terminal plan or solution to a rather open process as presented by the logic of the urban activator. The strength of these small, bottom up initiatives actually lies in the process, being the process of communication, as defined by Habermas. After all, these small examples could teach us how the city could be organised or even self-organised in order to better serve the needs of the people.

According to research, it can be concluded that there are three principal goals of urban activation – a) firstly, the minimum spatial intervention can promote the introduction of spatial conditions enabling the actual use of previously underused areas by stakeholders; b) secondly, the involvement and participation related to the spatial intervention (the co-creation of contents for the use of space as well as assistance in the physical redevelopment of the area) facilitate the consequently significant process of strengthening social ties of local and wider communities of interest; c) thirdly, the minimum spatial intervention can instigate the process of seeking and providing long-term solutions (Fig. 14.) to specific social as well as spatial issues by raising awareness, alerting, and establishing dialogue and communication between different stakeholders – in this respect, the urban activator functions as the mediator in the process. In the future it should also receive wider recognition especially in countries like Croatia and Slovenia.

By analysing and evaluating the presented approach, as well as having in mind the future perspective, several topics remained unelaborated, such as the success of such initiatives, the main challenges in implementing bottom-up participatory projects, and how



FIG. 13. PROSTOROŽ: THE AIM WAS TO ACTIVATE A DIFFERENT USE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION SQUARE IN LJUBLJANA, USUALLY PACKED WITH PARKED CARS
SL. 13. PROSTOROŽ: CILJ JE AKTIVIRATI RAZLIČITE NAČINE KORIŠTENJA TRGA FRANCUSKE REVOLUCIJE U LJUBLJANI, KOJI JE OBČNO ZAKRČEN PARKIRANIM AUTOMOBILIMA

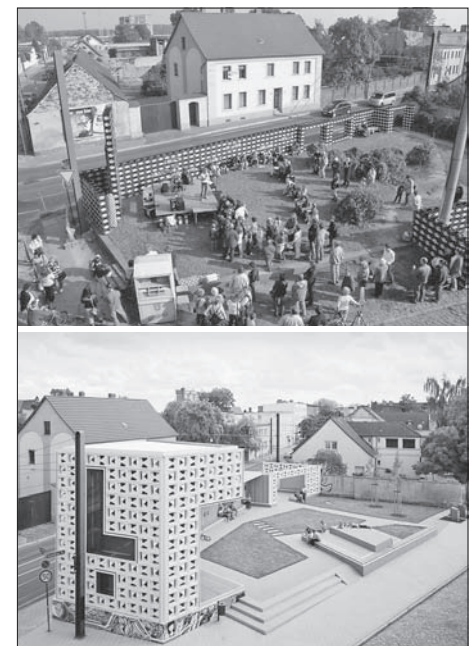
they can become legitimate in the frame of representative democracy. It would also be interesting to propose the typologies of urban activators as bottom-up practices, which could be discussed in depth according to various perspectives, such as who initiates them, the people involved (profiles, the number of participants), ownership of the property or land and their state of degradation, benefits to the community, impact on the built environment, scope of resources, size of the area in question, organisation of activities and the type of the approach (methods), and so on. Furthermore, based on the examples shortly presented in the paper, urban activators could also be structured in terms of self-organised communities without the support and participation of the public sector and self-organised communities with the support of the public sector.

In general, even nowadays, one would expect higher responsibility, professionalism, transparent actions, better understanding and provision of the public good, as well as better communication from the side of local authorities with regard to space-related issues. At the same time, one would expect that people would generally be more interested in the quality of their own living and working environment, more involved into active problem solving, more responsible as citizens. Therefore, the presented grassroots initiatives and examples of participatory cooperation set a positive impulse; however, the goal will be accomplished when both sides will responsibly act together.

The purpose of the paper was not to provide a detailed description of individual initiatives, but primary to highlight the importance of alternative approaches to creating better relations and conditions for the people living in the cities and using their (city's and personal) unused potentials. Finally, it is important to understand the benefits of bottom-up participatory projects and link them to the creation of opportunities and the activation of social life at a very low cost. Changing the perspective of interventions into space can easily lead to open-ended possibilities.

[Translated by MOJCA TRAMPUS, MA]

FIG. 14. 'OPEN AIR LIBRARY' IN MAGDEBURG WAS A TWO-STEP PROJECT WHERE RESIDENTS OF A SOCIALLY DEPRESSED NEIGHBORHOOD HAVE ORGANIZED THEMSELVES TO COLLECT AND SHARE BOOKS IN AN LIBRARY THAT THEY HAVE CONSTRUCTED, AFTER A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS
SL. 14. 'OPEN AIR LIBRARY' U MAGDEBURGU JE PROJEKT U DVIJE ETAPE: STANOVNICI DEPRESIVNIH ČETVRTI ORGANIZIRAJU SE KAKO BI PRIKUPILI I MEĐUSOBNO RAZMIJENILI KNJIGE U KNJIZNICI KOJU SU SAMI IZGRADILI NAKON PARTICIPATIVNOG PROCESA



54 VERMEULEN, 2014

55 <http://www.bosch-stiftung.de/content/language2/html/47964.asp> [15.9.2014]

56 PAL, 2008, orig.: FRIEDMANN, 1987: 11

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lower: http://www.danielrech.com/fileadmin/bilder/YesWeCamp_web.jpg
- FIG. 2. <http://waag.org/en/blog/should-listening-be-our-most-important-skill>
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SAŽETAK

SUMMARY

'URBANI AKTIVATOR' - PARTICIPATIVNI *BOTTOM-UP* ALAT ZA URBANE PROMJENE

DEFINICIJA I IZABRANI PRIMJERI

U članku je predstavljen pristup odnosno alat za rješavanje prostornih problema degradiranih i napuštenih urbanih područja. U gradovima, pogotovo u doba ekonomske krize, sve više dolazi do izražaja prevelik broj izgrađenih, ali neiskorištenih prostora – od praznih stanova, zatvorenih trgovina do zanemarenih dvorišta i zapuštenih industrijskih područja, koji bi se mogli aktivirati, oživiti i ponovno koristiti. Neiskorišteni prostor ne samo da predstavlja gospodarsku stetu nego on negativno utječe i na funkcioniranje širega urbanog tkiva, baca loše svjetlo na neposrednu okolicu, a nenaseljeni su izloženi i vandalizmu, propadanju i sl. U tome kontekstu, u radu prikazujemo pregled aktualnih urbanih problema i uvodimo pojam urbani aktivator koji je zapravo vrsta alata za aktivaciju napuštenih i neiskorištenih prostora. U tome se smislu urbani aktivator shvaća kao manja arhitekturna intervencija u okoliš koja nastoji – pomoću jednostavnih, ali kreativnih i katkad provokativnih rješenja, te s pretežitom niskim sredstvima (*low budget*) – potaknuti proces oživljavanja spomenutih zapuštenih i zanemarenih urbanih prostora. Pritom je važno da inicijativa za oživljavanje prostora proizlazi iz domene, npr. potencijalnih korisnika prostora, dakle da pobuda dolazi odozdo prema gore, a ne obrnuto. Sudjelovanje je ključan element ovoga pristupa jer se kroz uključenost, suradnju i sudjelovanje korisnika, stanovnika itd., pokraj toga prostora gradi i socijalno tkivo, tj. kako kaže Lefebvre, prostor je proizvod društvene (inter)akcije. Za takav je pristup stoga značajno da su arhitekturne intervencije u prostor uglavnom bez značajne gospodarske vrijednosti, ali imaju puno veću društvenu vrijednost, posebice zbog procesa sudjelovanja i integracije aktera na temelju vlastitog angazmana. Prostorna rješenja koja urbani aktivator pokrene mogu biti privremena kao rezultat potrebe za brzim promjenama, ali mogu također omogućiti i ponovno dugoročno korištenje prostora.

Termin urbani aktivator nije općepriznati pojam na području arhitekture i urbanizma, ali se u struci po-

javljuje u nekoliko različitih sinonima poput: urbani katalizator, inicijator, posrednik. Budući da je tema niskoproračunskih, uglavnom neautorskih i često čak 'amaterskih' prostornih intervencija, donedavno se smatrala marginalnom pa nije bila predmet intenzivnih istraživanja arhitekturne i urbanističke struke. Ipak, u posljednjih nekoliko godina pojedini tiskani objavljeni izvori – kao što su: Temporary City, Urban Catalyst itd., razne konferencije i obrazovanja u vezi s tom tematikom (npr. MAO Debate: Nova dinamika javnih prostora, RBF: Actors of urban Change) te niz arhitekturno i sociološki potkovanih inicijativa diljem Europe, kao što su npr. Raumlaborberlin, Platforma 9.81, CityBee, Inicijativa živih dvorišta itd. – dokazuju da tema, ipak, postaje vidljiva i važna.

Koncept urbanog aktivatora realizira pristup neformalne participacije, stimulirane od dolje prema gore, a u širem je kontekstu novi smjerokaz u prostornom planiranju, koji si je utirao put u dva vala, prvom tijekom 60-ih godina 20. stoljeća, a drugom od 1990-ih do danas. Prvi je val obuhvaćao demokratizaciju i mobilizaciju društva i traženje alternativa po načelu *top-down* prostornog planiranja. Drugi je val ustoličio princip održivog razvoja, a također i *bottom-up* pristup koji temelji na Habermasovoj teoriji „The theory of communicative action”, koja je promijenila paradigmu prostornog planiranja.

Akteri koji potiču proces urbane aktivacije mogu biti različite lokalne grupe, primjerice, stanovnici neke četvrti ili potencijalni korisnici toga prostora; interesne grupe iz različitih interesnih područja, društava, ali i profesionalne grupe, npr. umjetničke grupe; stručnjaci koji se bave prostorom – od prostornih sociologa do arhitekata, urbanista. Sa stajališta učinkovitosti intervencija, sve je važnije uključivanje što širega spektra različitih korisničkih grupa. Glavni ciljevi urbane aktivacije jesu: a) uspostava prostornih situacija pomoću minimalne prostorne intervencije, u kojima se nekoristeni prostori mogu početi koristiti od strane zainteresiranih strana; b) integracija, suradnja i umrežavanje aktera u vezi s prostornim interveniranjem, a time i jačanje društvene veze;

c) korištenjem minimalne prostorne intervencije pokrenuti proces pronalazenja i oblikovanja dugoročnih rješenja s obzirom na određenu društveno-prostornu problematiku na način podizanja svijesti, upozoravanja i stvaranja dijaloga.

U svijetu možemo u posljednjih nekoliko godina primijetiti sve veći broj urbanih intervencija koje se temelje na funkcioniranju lokalne zajednice, djeluju niskoproračunski i donekle aktivistički. Berlin se u tome kontekstu spominje kao važan epicentar takvog pristupa, ali se i inače u mnogim europskim gradovima javljaju nove prakse koje nastoje otključati intelektualni i kreativni potencijal za razvoj urbanih prostora. U radu smo prikazali nekoliko primjera takvih intervencija koji bi se mogli opisati kao urbani aktivatori. Predstavljamo primjer oživljavanja napuštenog i nezidanog prolaza u jednoj od pariških četvrti, gdje je došlo do uzorne međusektorske suradnje među stanovnicima, lokalnim organizacijama, stručnjacima iz područja prostornog planiranja, te općine. Projekt podupire ideju da javni prostor ne nastane kao rezultat jednostavno oblikovane fizičke strukture, nego se kontinuirano razvija kao socijalna, kulturna i politička produkcija, pri čemu se društveno tkivo susjedstva formira prije, za vrijeme i nakon zaključka gradnje prostora za druženje. Dobar je primjer i uređivanje zapuštene površine u Marseilleu, koja je pretvorena u prostor za urbano kampiranje. Predstavljamo rezultate oživljavanja dvorišta na području stare jezgre grada Maribora, gdje se putem revitalizacije i aktivacije pojedinih manjih dvorišta pokušava potaknuti širi urbani razvoj. Ukratko, urbani aktivator je alat kojim se u teškim ekonomskim i socijalnim uvjetima može rješavati preuređenje prostora na jednostavniji i pristupačniji način na temelju malih urbanih intervencija i uključivanja javnosti, s obzirom na mogućnosti izražavanja ideja i želja, kao i pomoći u realizaciji. Članak potvrđuje tezu da urbani aktivator može postati zajednički alat za provjeru relevantnosti i utemeljenosti prostornih intervencija, i to ne samo u razdoblju nedostatka financijskih sredstava za revitalizaciju područja nego i u doba prosperiteta.

KAJA POGAČAR

BIOGRAPHY

BIOGRAFIJA

KAJA POGAČAR, PhD, is lecturer at the Faculty of Civil Engineering, UM, and a practicing architect. She studied at the Faculty of Architecture at the TU Graz, where she also gained her PhD. She is an editor and co-author of several book (*Visual impressions / 2012, Maribor c(enter) / 2012, Renovating City Interiors / 2013*). Since 2010, she has been running workshops for revival of disused courtyards of the city of Maribor in the framework of the Living Courtyard Initiative.

Dr.sc. KAJA POGAČAR, dipl.ing.arh., predavačica na Građevinskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Mariboru. Studirala je na Arhitektonskom fakultetu Tehnološkog sveučilišta u Grazu, gdje je stekla doktorat znanosti. Urednica je i koautorica knjiga pod naslovom *Visual impressions (2012.)*, *Maribor c(enter) (2012.)* i *Renovating City Interiors (2013.)*. Od 2010. vodi radionice za obnovu i oživljavanje neiskorištenih i zapuštenih dvorišta u Mariboru u sklopu tzv. *Inicijative za živa dvorišta (Living Courtyard Initiative)*.

