

COMMUNITY PLANNING AS A SOLUTION FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

One of the weakness points of the Hungarian local development practice is that the participants of the development are not able to recognize the problems of the specific area, the objectives of the community. One of the methods of the regional development is to involve "external" experts, which has several disadvantages like the collected information are centralized in one hand and the decisions are made in that way, so not all of the local actors' expectations are realized in the final plan. The base of the community planning is the early participation of the local actors in planning process. Hereby the community interests and goals are able to integrate into the final plan. The advantage of this type of planning is that all participants agree on the process and is committed to its implementation. In our research we intended to lit up the advantages of the planning methods as well as the difficulties during their application. Based on the information accumulated, it seems that the community planning requires more energy but still, the development which can be achieved is more successful.

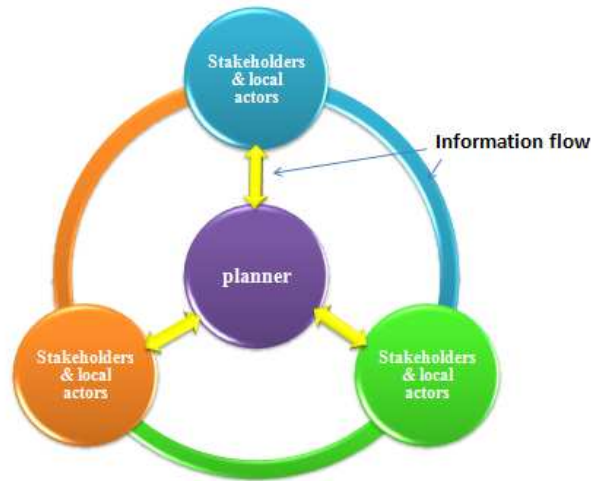
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INTRODUCTION

The spatial development practice of Hungary cannot really be considered as successful as that of Western-Europe (KÁPOSZTA ET AL., 2010). Although the players of spatial development involve municipalities, local businesses, civil organizations, even the development concepts set up by them do not guarantee the success. In many cases it happens that they cannot subscribe to the aims and values defined in the plans, and they do not take the aims into account that they set earlier by themselves. In general, the local population does not have the appropriate information about planning and investments, therefore they do not identify themselves with the investments and the developments do not become an essential part of the community. Thus they do not feel that they must protect and take care of the public good that has been created (TÓTH ET AL., 2006).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

One of the basic characteristics of spatial development is the planning by "external" experts, which has a lot of shortages and its results can be questioned as well. The origin of the problem is that the planner turns to the players of the society whom he/she considers important and the information provided by them is concentrated only in the hands of the planner. On the basis of such information the decision is made by the planner alone.



Source: own editing, 2012

Figure 1: The scheme of planning carried out by external experts

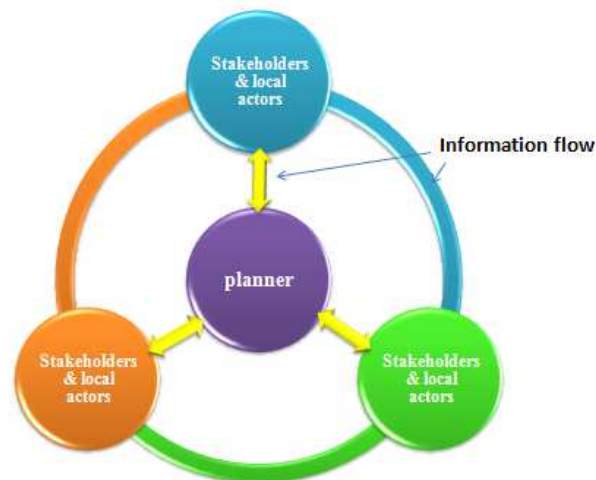
Those who questioned do not have the possibility to react on others' thoughts which would result in more various opinions. Although most of the information is from the people concerned, they do not contribute to the decision since they do not communicate with each other. Due to that, it might be more difficult to have the plan accepted by the society afterwards, since it is not sure at all that the developments planned meet the real needs of the community. If the society concerned does not accept the plan, it leads to conflict, which might mean serious difficulties for all the participants and have negative impact on the future developments (SZALÓ, 2010).

The "internal" or so called community planning is a planning process by experts meant in a broader sense. Its key elements are the activation of local players and the joint creation of future aims. During community planning, the players concerned play active role even at the beginning of the planning process. During the discovery of the situation they may get to know more each other, may share their ideas and the values they wish to achieve. It is a fact that the commitment of the players is much higher than in the planning process applying external experts and they take part in the work more actively. To have the joint plan accepted by the society is much easier, since it has been created based on a consensus with the community (SZALÓ, 2010).

RESULTS

While the goal of the planner in the expert-planning process is to get the necessary information to create a plan that can be accepted by the players concerned, the planner in the community planning intends to draw up a plan with generating local analysis meeting the needs of all the players. The two methods can also be distinguished based on the handling of the information: in the case of expert-planning all the information is concentrated in the hands of the planner, therefore it is the planner who draws up the plan documentation; in the case of community planning the information jointly collected is available for everyone and can be further used. As for the access to information, there is also a difference between the two methods. The information access is limited to those concerned during "external" planning, while in "internal" planning it is unlimited and

constant. The information flow has some phases and is not coherent during planning carried out by experts, while it is and linked to each other in the other case. The two planning processes use different planning tools (GÖRÖG ET AL., 2007).



Source: own editing, 2012

Figure 2: The scheme of internal community planning

In the case of "external" planning, it is the planner who chooses the methods to be applied. In the case of "internal" planning, the players concerned have a word while choosing the methods and they can learn how to use them. The most significant difference is, however, the attitude of local people.

The people concerned are indifferent, their attitude is dismissive or recipient during planning by experts, while their attitude is positive and cooperative in community planning. All these features greatly influence the success of planning.

CONCLUSIONS OR DISCUSSION

Community planning is not only one of the most efficient tools of spatial development, but it has positive impact on the present and future of the community. The rate of acceptance of the projects and plans by the society is much higher than during planning carried out by experts. In addition to the abovementioned advantages, its success is also due to the factors below:

- Commitment to common values: development based on issues and values that are important to the community and which can only be realized with the community involvement.
- Complex point of view: it is not enough to analyze the objective figures of statistics, but they need to be supplemented by subjective information from the community. Its essential part is to involve the community into the evaluation of the situation, which provides more various data on the relationship between the people concerned and the development planned.
- Innovative solutions: the planner is not able to discover the exact roots of the problems, therefore there is a need for conversations between the parties concerned in a joint planning process. After it, the solution schemes suggested by the planner and those of required by the community are both integrated into the planning.

- The necessity of the development: in many cases it happens that not the real needs are met in the development, thus it will not be successful. In order to avoid this, the community planning unveils the real demand and drives the development to success. The rest of the ideas can be realized with the help of other funds available.
- To prevent opposition, to achieve harmony and success: if the players concerned are involved even at the early stage of planning, a lot of conflicts can be avoided, thus time and money can be saved. The wish of the community needs to be taken into account because additional benefits can derive from it, not exclusively the success of the development itself.
- The commitment of the players concerned: it has great influence on the success of the development how much the local players are committed to the project. The more energy and time they spend on the planning and the implementation, the more they become committed. It is important and useful not only during the implementation, but later on it establishes the maintenance of the achievements as well.
- Win-win solutions: since the players concerned get to know each other's interests and point of views during community planning, they intend to bring them closer to each other. So it is easier to find solutions that are appropriate and suitable for everyone compared to plans elaborated by experts.

Community planning has several benefits for the community in long terms.

- The social capital and retention power of the community increase: the common thinking, getting to know each other create a new network within the community. Therefore the community can improve its relation to the project and the social capital can also be increased. The community members trust in each other more, they start to behave differently with each other. Stronger communities have higher retention power, providing suitable background for the community members to live their everyday life in their home village or town.
- Improved well-being and health condition: it is proven that if someone belongs to a community, it improves the individual well-being of the person and it has positive impact on his/her health as well. In settlements where the people trust in each other, they actively take part in the work of social organizations, the share of those who are religious is high, there is an active community life, the spread of self-destructing lifestyle is more rare, the people can handle stress better and the rate of mortality among middle-aged is low.
- The community becomes more active and has better ability to exercise their interest: the network of relationships strengthens the coherence of the community and the trust in each other. The joint achievements can give more energy to the community to implement additional developments, motivating them to take over the management tasks as well. In this way they can even become independent from the external factors. The plans jointly elaborated can give further go to the community. For example, they integrate the experience learned during the work into the next developments, the cooperation become stronger, allowing the strengthening of autonomy. The high rate of community involvement improves efficiency and the responsible members of the community do their jobs more consciously. Due to this, an active and efficient network of communities has at least as great significance as the to-be-investment or the tools applied. If we do not take this into account, the success of the investment can be questioned.
- Solid community, increasing equality of chances: too tight relations among the various social groups may cause negative effects as well, which is called negative

social capital. It continuously prevents the democracy, causing the widening of gap between the social groups. Therefore the creation of a network of various social groups is inevitable.

- Areal identity improves: it is determining concerning the future of the community. Local people can learn others' thoughts and values, thus they can draw up recommendations that are suitable for everyone. That is how the social capital increases and local people not to intend to leave that area (GÖRÖG ET AL., 2007).

The fields where community planning can be applied are as follows:

- Approval of and discussion on the content of spatial development plans: community planning is a perfect tool for it, since the aim is to have the plans approved by the community. If the community is involved in the planning from the beginning, the approval of the plans by the society will not be difficult.
- Self-development, the development of an area: using local resources is the basis of rural development. It cannot be achieved without the conscious self-development of the local players, the cooperation and activation of the community.
- Economic development: various techniques of community planning promote the creation of an economic community, where the local entrepreneurs are able to develop the local economy with appropriate training system, share of tasks, the use of local resources and the relation network of the community.
- The harm of community interest, community lobby: the essence of the community planning is to avoid the harm of interest of any parties. Moreover, it encourages decisions based on consensus. If a community feels that their interests are not represented in an investment, they step in to prevent it with the interference of civil organizations other communities. In case they manage to step in, they might be able to initiate a conversation with the developers, therefore they can reach a consensus. If there is no cooperation between the two parties, the community might start to protest, which is much more negative for the developers than the decision based on consensus.
- Handling the oppositions: sometimes the planner recognizes during the planning process that the interests of the parties are opposite, causing conflict. In such cases the oppositions need to be lifted to reach success. These oppositions usually do related to the concrete project plan, but accumulated from former unsuccessful developments. In such cases it is useful to have the parties known each other so that they could understand each other and to avoid prejudices. Common solutions have to be encouraged.

Community planning, as a tool of spatial development, provides solutions for several problems. Although its use is not always easy, its application greatly contributes to the success of planning. In addition to civil organizations, municipalities, local businesses, development experts, cooperation of micro-regions and planners form ministries can also apply it.

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