

# Multilevel governance and interdisciplinary placemaking initiatives

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**ABSTRACT:** Interdisciplinary co-operation is one of the biggest challenges, but has great potential for architectural education; public space design can only benefit from such an approach. There needs to be an awareness of the role of public spaces in shaping liveable towns and active societies. Cross-sectoral co-operation focused on territorially oriented solutions can improve spatial order in the municipalities. In this article, the author has described research conducted as an educational programme under the title: Pomeranian Academy of Public Space Design. This educational platform brought together young spatial planners, architects and designers, with planning professionals, activists, residents, and local and regional officials. The aim was to build multilevel governance based on a territorial approach. The author argues that such placemaking initiatives can strengthen the awareness of the importance of liveability for shaping the spatial development of both municipalities and regions.

## INTRODUCTION

Regions in Poland, as recipients of EU funds, have a vital role to play in supporting the development of municipalities [1]. However, there is a lack of sufficient tools for shaping sustainable urban structures [2]. There is a need to strengthen multilevel co-operation to support the sustainable and territorially oriented development of towns and regions [3]. Such an approach requires education, not only within academia but also of local authorities, planning professionals and residents [4][5]. One of the responses to this need is the educational programme, Pomeranian Academy of Public Space Design. The focus here is on placemaking initiatives to shape the awareness of the role of liveable spaces for sustainable development of municipalities and regions [6].

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Multilevel Governance and the Territorial Approach

The cohesion policy of the European Union is aimed at achieving sustainable development and introduces the need for both vertical and horizontal co-operation between authorities across all levels of government and with various non-state actors. A vital success factor is the establishment of a system of multilevel governance [7-10].

To achieve the goals of liveable cities and well-served regions, it promotes multilevel and participative modes of governance by enforcing the partnership principle [3]. Implementing urban projects involving EU funds requires close co-operation between the European Commission, member state authorities at the national, regional and local levels, and non-state policy stakeholders during all stages of the structural funds implementation cycle [3]. However, the EU policies emphasising the role of multilevel governance are not fully implemented [1]; therefore, there is a need for tools to strengthen the process. The same situation pertains to the territorial approach introduced by the cohesion policy, which, even though a vital aspect for successful development [11-13], requires enhancement. The aim is to support integrated urban investments that strengthen the development of municipalities and, as a result, regions [1].

### Importance of Placemaking

For years urban designers have sought an answer to the question of what makes a public space successful. What are the elements of shared spaces that determine a high quality urban environment, bringing societies together to achieve liveable space? Urbanists try to define the elements of urban structure that determine the performance of city spaces and urban perception. Starting from traditional theories, MIT researchers delved into the sense of place, human cognitive processes and the perception of the built environment [14]. This gave a base for understanding the importance of placemaking [6][15][16]. Over the years, the theory that is a basis for this research developed and these days placemaking

is understood as people-centred planning [6], while urban design is focused on ...*the creation of useful, attractive, safe, environmentally sustainable, economically successful and socially equitable places* and is aimed at *pursuing local identity and sense of place* [17]. This recognises aspects such as sociability, uses/activities, access/linkages, and comfort/image [18]. For this research the findings by Kevin Lynch, in his work entitled, *Managing the Sense of a Region* are crucial, as he argues that the quality of urban space locally makes regional development successful [19].

## AIMS

The regions in Poland are, in most cases, responsible for the implementation of EU policies, and so, there is a need to strengthen co-operation between municipalities and regional authorities. However, Poland is facing difficulties related to shaping spatial order and the implementation of policies for sustainable development. Such problems can affect not only the quality of life at the local level, but also the development of well-served and connected regions. There is a need to build partnerships to promote the spatial education of societies that shape neighbourhoods. Such initiatives have started at the regional level involving stakeholders and are aimed at educating future architectural professionals and residents of the Pomeranian region.

The focus of the educational programme is on enhancing multilevel governance to design territorially oriented solutions on the basis of placemaking initiatives. However, as it is a new programme, it was vital to verify the functionality of it, as well as the ability to achieve the goals set. The shape of the programme arose out of research and evaluation of a testbed, which is described further in this article. The aims of the programme were to:

- Establish a platform for building partnerships to pursue territorially oriented solutions.
- Building a partnership for strengthening multilevel governance, while introducing placemaking initiatives.
- Test the workshop through selected case studies.

## METHOD

The research stages are presented in Figure 1. The structure of the article reflects the order of these stages. The methods employed for this research were as follows:

- The goal was the enhancement of multilevel governance and a territorial approach. These are requirements of EU policies for regions across Europe. Before introducing the programme, a literature review was necessary. Definitions have been introduced and aims of policies were translated into local (Polish) requirements and needs.
- The educational programme has been introduced as an enabler for the strengthening of EU policy goals implemented by regions to shape the sustainable development of Pomeranian municipalities. The programme has the following elements:
  - Tools focused on shaping the platform for architectural education of the residents of Pomerania; for multidisciplinary co-operation promoting sustainable development; and for building a multidisciplinary approach for the design of public spaces, which requires experts from different disciplines.
  - Stakeholders and their roles were defined to help conduct the process efficiently.

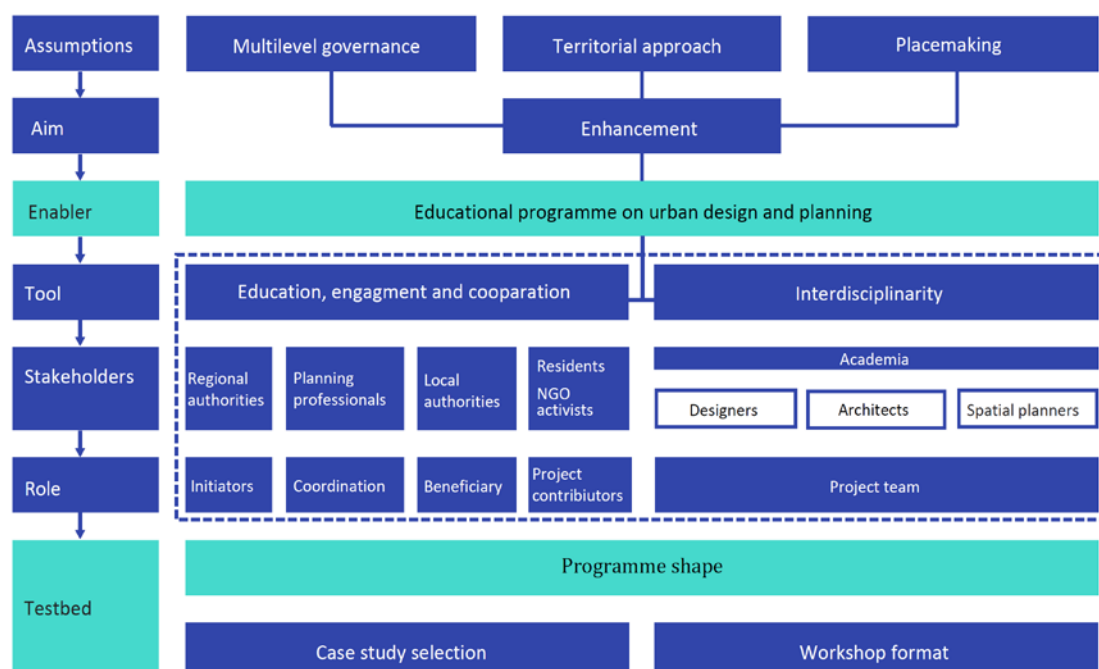


Figure 1: Research concept (Source: Author).

The main part of the research was a testbed for the programme. It consisted of:

- 1) defining criteria for case study selection;
- 2) conducting research through all the stages.

The method used at this stage was:

- action research and research by design;
- evaluation based on a survey of the project team (Figure 1).

## EMPIRICAL STUDIES

### Scheme for Co-operation

As part of the research, a partnership of regional and local government, academia, planning professionals and residents was established. The roles assigned to stakeholders included:

- Regional authorities who initiated the partnership to build a platform for co-operation to educate on sustainable development.
- Planning professionals responsible for the co-ordination within a partnership and project, establishing principles of co-operation, project aims, teaching methods and training.
- Local authorities interested in public space design, engaging local stakeholders, including town officials, residents and activists sharing local knowledge.
- Local governors, residents, activists and representatives of local institutions (e.g. museums) identifying local needs and matters to be resolved by the urban project.
- Academia, including tutors and students building the project team, involving:
  - spatial planners: responsible for the strategic part of the project, defining vision, setting the process for implementation;
  - architects: responsible for the design of public space responding to the diagnosis introduced by the municipality, as well as for co-ordination of the project;
  - designers: responsible for the visual output of the project, reflecting the strategy and vision.

Within such partnerships under the umbrella of planning professionals and academia all contributors enrich their knowledge of sustainable development and the participatory approach to planning.

### Case study for the testbed

The group was established to design public spaces. A case study was selected by an open call to municipalities in the Pomeranian Region. The applicants needed to respond to criteria based on the diagnosis and aims under the Spatial Development Plan for the Pomeranian Region 2030. Proposals had the potential to shape public spaces of regional importance, respecting the cultural and natural heritage of the Pomeranian Region, areas to be dedicated both for residents and visitors. The team from the Pomeranian Office for Regional Planning chose the Czersk Municipality for the testbed. The area to be designed consisted of archaeological monuments – stone circles located in the biosphere area – to be transformed in the future into an heritage park.

### Testing

The testbed organised between February and October 2019 was divided into phases (see Figure 2).

Phase 0: this included identifying the case study area and project team members from three universities in the Pomeranian Region. All the municipalities were invited to submit suggested areas and contributors.

Phase1: the project work started with a study visit during which the team met local authorities, residents and activists who guided them through the case study area. During this phase the team was divided into five to design alternative solutions.

Phase 2: the one-day tour was enriched with data collection and spatial analysis. The groups worked individually to analyse findings based on photos, mental maps and maps of the case study area.

Phase 3: the most important part of the testbed was a three-day visit during which tutors and students worked on design concepts combining different perspectives reflecting their different professions. The team could meet residents, local activists and town officials (Figure 3).

Phase 4: the concepts evolved during the individual work of teams during the summer. Meetings with tutors and planning professionals were organised for consultation and to co-ordinate the design.

Phase 5: the final meeting with presentations was delivered in the town to a wider audience, including residents, town officials, activists and representatives of local institutions. The open discussion pointed out best ideas to be further developed.



Figure 2: Phases of the programme (Source: Pomeranian Office for Regional Planning).

## Outcomes

The teams delivered five different concepts related to the case study area. There were some similarities and all teams recognised the potential of the area, such as:

- archaeological monuments (stone circles) and local museum explaining the history of the place;
- mystery of the place: there are still many legends about the place;
- environmental sensitivity: the area is partially located within the borders of a biosphere reserve; the wealth of nature is unique in Poland;
- engaged society: many local activists contribute to storytelling, promoting local products, and so on.

However, the focus of work was slightly different in each case. Strategies prepared by the teams were more focused either on tourism promotion or serving the local community. All of them tackled the potential of the area:

- archaeological monuments: by using stone circles as a motif for visual identification, proposing kayaking, cycling or walking paths, designing local museums to promote history;
- environmental sensitivity: by proposing a wellness area, quiet places, sightseeing by senses;
- engaged society: by introducing neighbour housing, local markets and workshops opened for the use of residents.

Each team presented the work, based on five elements:

- 1) promoting the story of the project;
- 2) strategy for the case study area;
- 3) visual identification;
- 4) concept and masterplan;
- 5) detailed solutions for crucial elements of the concept.

The most important outcome of the work was that the municipality could apply, using these project proposals, for EU funding, to implement the project, as part of the Regional Operational Programme of the EU.

## EVALUATION AND LESSONS LEARNT

The testbed ended with a student survey, because they were the most important group in the programme. They were asked to evaluate the programme format including: organisation, work plan, project scope, work distribution within each group, accessibility of materials, support of the tutors and engagement of the local society. They evaluated each phase of the programme. Generally, they assessed the programme very well, e.g. the engagement of tutors and the local society was positively commented on.

There were also suggestions for improvement:

- More time could be spent in the case study area; students would rather work in Czersk than from home.
- Communication between co-ordinators and the team should be improved.
- Work inside the groups needed to be improved. For most participants, working in an interdisciplinary team was a new experience. There should be more time for exchanging knowledge and of the different approaches to work.
- Teams should be more balanced, e.g. in the experience level of designers, architects and spatial planners. This was highlighted by the final output of teamwork which reflected the experience of the group. This was reflected in strategy, visual identification and concepts being more advanced for the more experienced groups.



Figure 3: Logotypes of concepts prepared during the testbed (Source: Students).

## CONCLUSIONS

The programme format engaged various stakeholders, which resulted in a greater engagement of the students. There was a chance to work on solving real problems and to verify how society responds to suggested solutions; the survey showed this was most important for the project team. Such innovative work potentially could be a new educational tool supporting the practical knowledge of architecture students. Additionally, such a format of work can support multilevel governance, because the regional representatives connect to local society and regional planners connect with local conditions in municipalities.

The programme showed that local societies are quite often without architectural or planning support, and therefore find designing public spaces a challenge. The biggest problems relate to the lack of professional knowledge, lack of design ideas and limited access to financial resources. With such constraints the possibility of shaping spatial order is limited. The programme outlined in this article could potentially change this situation, but only if embedded in regional strategy. An interdisciplinary team should allow more advanced and more coherent projects resulting in an improved spatial order. However, the municipalities need a chance to implement such projects, and this requires funds.

The project concepts prepared by the interdisciplinary team can attract extra credits when applying for funds from the Regional Operational Programme. This approach can be a successful tool for strengthening multilevel governance and to shape spatial order on the basis of placemaking projects.

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