

Polish planners' attitudes towards citizen participation

Polscy urbaniści wobec partycypacji społecznej

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Abstract

In the Polish spatial-planning system, planners are situated between the citizens, developers, local authorities and non-governmental organizations. Such a unique position gives them an opportunity to promote and stimulate the cooperation between the most important local players in order to reach constant and sustainable development of a given territorial unit. A question arises here: how does citizen participation look in practice? This paper looks for the answer by presenting selected findings of a survey conducted with Polish planners in 2010. The results suggest that planners are aware of the need for public involvement in the planning process though they have some doubts about the real effects of such involvement. The planning practice proves that citizens first of all require satisfaction of their private interests, local authorities care mainly about the current political advantages and the planners lack the power and appropriate knowledge to conduct the public consultation process. The survey points to the need for improvement of the quality of the citizen participation in Poland.

Key words: planning, planners, citizen participation, Poland

Streszczenie

Szczególna pozycja urbanistów daje im możliwość bezpośredniego kontaktu z najważniejszymi uczestnikami procesu projektowego: mieszkańcami, inwestorami, władzami samorządowymi i organizacjami pozarządowymi. Mając na względzie potrzeby trwałego i zrównoważonego rozwoju danej jednostki samorządu terytorialnego, planiści winni promować i stymulować współpracę między różnymi podmiotami polityki samorządowej w dążeniu do zaspokojenia potrzeb i aspiracji społeczności lokalnej. Czy jednak tak się dzieje? Jak w praktyce wygląda proces partycypacji społecznej? Poszukując odpowiedzi na te pytania w artykule przedstawiono wybrane wyniki badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych wśród polskich urbanistów w 2010 r. Wskazują one, że planiści dostrzegają potrzebę angażowania społeczności lokalnych w proces projektowy, chociaż mają wątpliwości co do rzeczywistych efektów partycypacji społecznej. Zdaniem urbanistów mieszkańcy oczekują przede wszystkim realizacji swoich prywatnych interesów, władze samorządowe kierują się potrzebą realizacji bieżącej polityki lokalnej, a samym urbanistom brakuje *siły przebicia* i odpowiednich umiejętności do właściwego prowadzenia konsultacji społecznych. Z badania wyłania się potrzeba jakościowej zmiany procesu partycypacji społecznej w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: urbanista, planista, partycypacja społeczna, Polska

1. Introduction

The cardinal rule, which governs shaping of the spatial policy in Poland, is preserving spatial order and striving for sustainable development (Act, 2003). In this instance, one should comprehend the spatial order as the formation of space, which makes harmonious whole, and in orderly relations fulfils all functional, social, economic, environmental, cultural as well as compositional and aesthe-

tic conditions and requirements. In turn, the definition of the sustainable development, among other things, indicates the need of integrating political, economic and social undertakings while preserving natural balance and durability of the fundamental natural processes (Act, 2001). The paradigm of spatial planning, comprehended in this way, imposes significant obligations upon the urban planners related to ensuring constant development of the country and makes them responsible for the broadly

defined human habitat. Therefore, planners became the subject of this paper – after all, their attitudes and opinions largely influence creation of spatial order and implementation of the sustainable development assumptions.

2. Citizen participation as a condition of the sustainable development

The notion of sustainable development is related to numerous challenges encountered in the natural environment, society and economy. Environmental sustainability aims at maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the capability of ecosystems' constant renewal, social sustainability reflects the relationship between the activity of individuals and social norms (given type of activity may be considered sustainable if it does not go beyond social norms in a given local community), whereas, economic sustainability requires that the value of the benefits to the society in question exceed the costs incurred and the worked out capital to be handed down from one generation to the next (Bass et al., 1995). Sustainable development programs, projects and strategies carried out all over the world, both in the developed and developing countries, indicate clearly that participatory approach is necessary in all areas mentioned: without it, permanent consensus between the needs of the environment, society and economy, is not possible¹ (Hague, 2004).

The relationship between the sustainable development and democracy is also the subject of deliberations presented in *Problems of Sustainable Development*. For example, H. Ciążela, who analyzes fundamentals of sustainable development from the philosophical perspective, pays attention to positive dimension of democracy, which means taking responsibility for the community life (Ciążela, 2009). This responsibility covers both community existence in the present form and ensuring appropriate life conditions to future generations and – provided it is treated seriously by the politicians – it may have tangible results.

On the other hand, Z. Piątek, who responded to charges brought by the exponents of the liberal capitalism or traditional humanism against the supporters of the sustainable development (including in particular environmentalists and ecologists), which indicate the hazards to human freedom and democracy due to excessive concentration on the environmental issues, states that only reasonable man-

agement of the Earth, i.e. balance between the development of anthroposphere and biosphere may ensure accomplishment of our humanity (Piątek, 2011). Thus, treating Nature with respect does not pose any hazard to neither humanism, nor democracy, nor freedom.

L. Gawor goes a bit further in his deliberations and comments on the provisions of the *Johannesburg Declaration* (UN, 2002), he notices that just, democratic society is a warranty of achieving sustainable development, which is entirely in favour of the civil society (Gawor, 2010). Thus, planning and taking action in the environment should be characterized by the multilateralism – no one can be excluded from this process, and everyone should be required to act for the benefit of the future of the humankind. Finally, R. Janikowski states that sustainable development is a multi-level process, which means that improving quality of human life should take place due to creation of the social, economic, ecological, spatial as well as institutional and political order (Janikowski, 2009). This approach is close to spatial planning, which in fact, is an interdisciplinary field. Any action undertaken in the space has its consequences in the environment, economy and society, and it requires socializing of the decision-making processes.

In the town planning, the idea of sustainable cities is a response to the challenges of the sustainable development. Behind this idea, the cities must be once again set in their ecological and cultural context, and their dwellers should be actively involved in the process of municipal resources planning and management. These sustainable, and simultaneously, democratic municipal systems, are characterized by limited environmental impact and higher quality of life (URBACT, 2008).

However, several important conditions must be met for the urban governance to respond to the challenges of the modern times. Most of all, the key issue is the above-mentioned balance between the environmental, social and economic needs of the present citizens and the future generations. Moreover, good urban governance should be of subsidiary nature (it should allocate resources and competences possibly most closely to the recipients, which ensures effective handling of resources), it should guarantee equal access to resources, it should be efficient (in particular with regard to offered services), it should be transparent and corruption free, it should ensure safety of inhabitants and environment, finally, it should propagate civic attitudes and care for public interests by enabling participation in the decision-making processes to all citizens (UN-HABITAT, 2002).

Yet, what is citizen participation? It is a systematic process during which citizens, developers, various experts, clerks, officials and non-governmental organizations can share their experience, knowledge and opinions in order to prepare com-

¹ As is stated by D. W. Pearce, sustainable development is a process which spans entire society and each function we serve in it: as citizens, parents, children, students, clerks, teachers, entrepreneurs and employees; sustainable development is neither an automatic process, nor may it be forced by authoritarian government – it must be worked out by means of partnership and consultation between individual players functioning in a given space (Pearce, 1994).

mon plan of action (Jakubowski, 2001). In case of spatial development, such common plan of action is the land development plan, which – in accordance with the participatory urban governance and communicative planning (Healey, 1997) – must be prepared by way of public consultations, participated by all groups of citizens (including in particular the poor, marginalized or excluded), it must refer to the public vision of city development, and finally, it must emphasize the public interest. This approach is accurately described by S. Narang and L. Reutersward: *planning is thus no longer about plans. It is, and must increasingly be, about people* (Narang and Reutersward, 2006, p. 8).

3. Citizen participation in the Polish spatial planning system

The system transformation, taking place in Poland for the past 20 years, aims at (among other things) empowering local communities through continuous extending of the impact the citizens have on the local government policy. Starting from the *Local Government Act* dated 1990, through the *Constitution* dated 1990 and the administration reform of 1990, and finishing with *Act on Access to Environmental Information and its Protection, Public Participation in Environmental Protection and Environmental Impact Assessments* dated 2008, local communities gain increasing number of tools enabling their impact on the local government policy. Spatial planning is an extremely significant element of this policy, it also undergoes the process of gradual democratization. Recent amendments of the legal acts regulating spatial development, reinforce three basic forms of public involvement in the design process²: submission of requests, providing the public with the right of access (including public discussion, in force since 2003) and submission of remarks and reservations (until 2003 classified as protests and charges). This scope of public participation is assessed in different ways. Some researchers say, that it does not guarantee real cooperation between the citizens and the local authorities in shaping the spatial policy, that it only gives the appearance of the democratic procedures (Hirt and Stanilov, 2009). Some other say that the planning process involves the local communities sufficiently, however, we do miss good local government practices (Damurski 2010, Parysek, 2010). Nevertheless, all of them agree that regardless of the legal regulations in force, public participation in the decision-making process is low, and Poles lack citizen competences (Sulek, 2009).

Who can participate in the spatial planning process? In accordance with the *Land Planning and Development Act* dated 27 March 2003, (Journal of Laws

/Dz. U./ No 80, item 717 as amended), which is currently in force, everyone may submit a request or remark to the prepared land use plan or the local land development plan. In order to systematize the wide range of participants involved in the space decision-making process, for the purposes of this paper, they have been divided into four groups, related to their interests. These are the local authorities, citizens, developers and non-governmental organizations³. Each of them has a bit different view on the issue of local development, they have different knowledge and manner of assessing reality, thus, it is impossible to specify one social vision of development for a given place (Bass et al., 1995).

The conditions of the spatial policy presented here lead to a conclusion that urban planners play a special role in the citizen participation process. Their positioning between the authorities, citizens, developers and other local space players, allows for direct observation of the relationships on the local level, whereas, their legal empowerment enables application of the democratic procedures while making spatial decisions. In addition, it is worth remembering, that among the tasks assigned to the modern planners by the *New Charter of Athens* 2003, there is, among other things, the role of a mediator and political adviser (ECTP, 2003). Thus, if the Polish urban governance is to deserve to be called *good* and *sustainable*, planners should be personally involved in the preparation and implementation of the citizen participation process, they should strive for involvement of numerous and various groups into the planning process.

This is the source of inspiration for the research work presented here. Its purpose is giving answers to the following questions: how do the planners assess condition of the citizen participation in Poland? are they well prepared to conduct public consultations? can they accomplish the tasks imposed by the *New Charter of Athens* 2003? Observation of the public discussions and brief analysis of the planning documents show that the condition of the citizen participation in the space decision making process is bad, and the planners lack knowledge and tools to effectively cooperate with various entities of the local government policy. Nevertheless, this thesis needs to be verified and it is the objective of this paper.

² Refers to both planning documents prepared at the local level: land use plan and the local land development plan.

³ This division is not a clear-cut (which separates groups), it means that individual participants of the design process may belong to several groups simultaneously. However, as is shown by the planning practice, persons who participate in the meetings or submit requests or remarks, concentrate on the interests of only one of the categories specified.

4. Materials and methods

The circle of Polish planners is highly diversified, with regard to both education and type of job done. This circle encompasses persons holding diploma in architecture and town-planning and graduates of numerous other studies (geography, geodesy, cartography, landscape architecture) who graduated from postgraduate studies in spatial development. Planners are employed in commercial design studios and local government institutions dealing with spatial planning. What is more, it is difficult to determine the total number of active planners, because not all persons working for the spatial development, are members of the Chamber of Planners⁴. All these factors result in the fact, that it is difficult to gain reliable opinion of this professional circle about participation of various entities in the space decision making process.

Thus, in order to present possibly most comprehensive picture of phenomena accompanying local spatial policy, an Internet survey was carried out. This invaluable research tool is more comfortable and cheaper in application than research conducted by means of traditional methods (such as an interview). The Internet survey may have much wider scope with simultaneous reduction of data collection time. Moreover, digital form of results enables faster analysis and interpretation of studied phenomena. Also, from the perspective of the research subjects, this tool offers specific benefits: lack of direct *fact-to-face* interaction gives the feeling of anonymity, thanks to that the respondents are more relaxed and do not censure their responses, moreover, they have more time to give their answers⁵.

Obviously, apart from the advantages listed here, the Internet survey has considerable disadvantages. The most important one is the fact that the Internet users differ from the entire studied population (in particular they are younger, better educated, live in bigger cities), this considerably hinders the drawing of the representative sample. What is more, a characteristic feature of research conducted on volunteers (and this is the way of conducting majority of the Internet surveys) is non-random character of the sample, which considerably hinders generalization of findings. On the whole, volunteers give different answers than persons who are not prone to participate in the surveys. Thus, one needs to remember that even though the Internet survey offers specific benefits, at the same time, it requires prudence while generalizing the results on the entire population.

⁴ In October 2010, 1350 persons in total were members of the Chamber of Planners (divided into four district chambers), even though, obviously much more planners work in Poland.

⁵ Internet survey has already been the subject of numerous deliberations – both in terms of theory and application – in particular Batorski and Olcoń-Kubicka, 2006.

The survey presented in this article, entitled *Space at stake, planners vs. citizens* was conducted between 28.10.2010 and 30.11.2010. The survey, which is a part of the research project entitled *Role of the urban planner in the process of citizen participation*, was aimed at planners working in Poland and regarded selected aspects of citizen participation in the spatial planning process. In order to obtain possibly greatest participation in the survey, the information about the research was placed on the websites of all district chambers of planners (District Chamber of Planners in Wrocław, District Chamber of Planners with registered office in Gdańsk, District Chamber of Planners with registered office in Warsaw and District Chamber of Planners with registered office in Katowice) and the National Chamber of Planners in Warsaw⁶.

The survey was participated by 83 planners working in all 16 provinces of Poland. The respondents have relatively long length of service: 73.5% (61 subjects) have worked as planners for at least 5 years. Majority of respondents – 67.5% (56 subjects) – are members of the Polish Chamber of Planners, which makes 61,5% of all members of this professional self-government. Unfortunately, it is impossible to define the degree of sample representativeness, due to above-mentioned lack of data about the number of planners in total, the structure of their gender, age, education and length of service. However, it should be noted that obtained results correspond perfectly with the observations of the planning practice, and therefore, the survey entitled *Space at stake, planners vs. citizens* was considered an invaluable and reliable source of knowledge about the planners' attitudes towards citizen participation.

The survey comprised 16 questions, including 9 subject-matter questions, 6 *personal details* questions and 1 question regarding respondents' will to receive information about survey findings. Further part of this article concentrates on the following issues: *Is citizen participation in the spatial planning process necessary?, Why?, To what degree, the legal regulations in force at present (end of 2010), ensure citizen participation in the spatial planning process?, What is most frequently expected from the planners by the citizens? Please describe shortly typical relationship between the citizens and planners, What is most frequently expected from the planners by the local authorities (councillors, heads of municipalities, mayors and presidents of cities)? Please describe shortly typical relationship between the authorities and planners, What (statutory and non-statutory) forms of citizen involvement did you encounter in your planning practice?, and What forms of citizen involvement are most effective from the perspective of the plan-*

⁶ Detailed description of the applied research method is presented in a separate report (Damurski, 2011).

ning process? as well as *Do the studies you graduated from provide good preparation of planners for conducting public discussion and other forms of citizen cooperation?*

5. Planners' attitude to citizen participation

The first two questions of the survey concerned planners' attitudes towards citizen participation as a method of making public decisions. Overwhelming majority of respondents (89.2%, 74 subjects) think that citizen participation in the spatial planning process is necessary (Fig. 1); only one subject (1.2%) thinks that it is not necessary to involve citizens. The share of planners who are not able to voice their opinion on this issue is relatively high (9.6%, 8 subjects chose the answer *Difficult to say*).

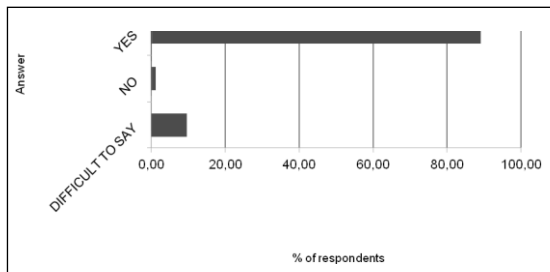


Figure 1. Answers to the question: *Is citizen participation in the spatial planning process necessary?*

To substantiate their responses, most of all, the exponents of the citizen participation emphasize the practical aspects: citizens are users of the planned space (40.5% respondents in this group, 30 responses), they know the space they live in better than the planners do (21.6%, 16 responses), they know best what they need (18.9%, 14 responses). Moreover, the respondents pay attention to planners' duties, that they should listen to the local community (20.3%, 15 responses) and treat it subjectively (21.6%, 16 responses).

On the other hand, subjects who are against citizen participation in the spatial planning process or who have doubts whether such a participation is necessary, put forward the arguments that the citizens are not ready for participation in making public decisions (66.7% respondents in this group, 6 responses), that they care mainly about private interests (also 66.7%, 6 responses) and that their protests delay the planning procedure (44.4%, 4 responses). At the same time planners, who participated in the survey, appreciate the fact that this procedure enables the citizens to present their opinions and expectations (33.3%, 3 responses) and they call for gaining information from the local community at the beginning of the planning process, without later citizen involvement in the space decision making process (also 33.3%, 3 responses).

Moreover, the research findings reveal, that the position taken by the planners with regard to citizen

participation in the spatial planning process is largely dependent upon their individual features. What is characteristic, favourable treatment of citizen participation decreases with age and development of planners' professional carrier (Fig. 2). Most of all, the reasons for this situation should be looked for in wider (let us add – frequently negative) experience in public cooperation of the experienced designers.

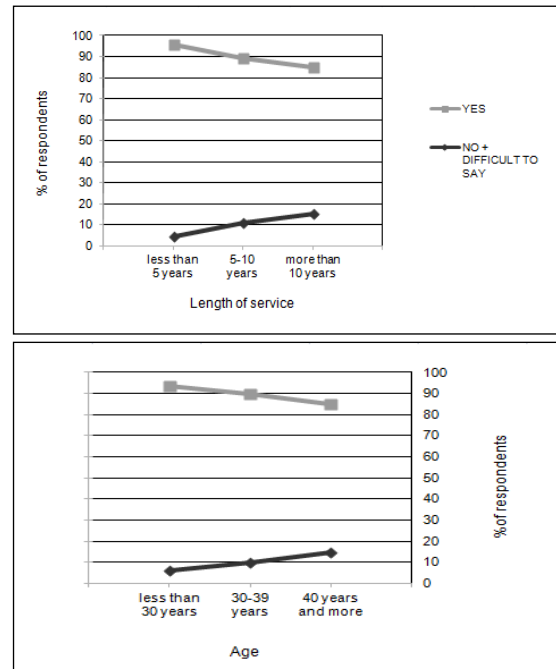


Figure 2. Answers to the question: *Is citizen participation in the spatial planning process necessary?* vs. age and length of service of the respondents

Legal status of spatial development in Poland, including in particular the status of legal regulations regarding citizen participation, is an enormously important issue, which requires commenting on by the planners. Therefore, the survey contained the following question: *To what degree, the legal regulations in force at present (end of 2010), ensure citizen participation in the spatial planning process?*. In the opinion of almost half of the subjects, Polish law guarantees the citizens sufficient influence on the planning process (45.8% of respondents, 38 persons). Over one fourth of planners participating in the survey (26.5% of respondents, 22 subjects) say that citizens have too little influence on the planning process, and consequently – the planning procedures in force require increased role of citizen participation (Fig. 3). This view is expressed more frequently by young planners than persons aged more than 40 (the response *The citizens have too little influence on planning* was chosen by 32.1% of subjects, up to 39 years old and by 14.8% of subjects, 40 years old and more), which may indicate that with age assessment of the legal status of the spatial planning gets softened.

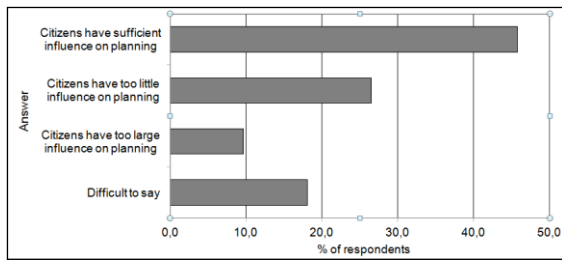


Figure 3. Answers to the question: *To what degree, the legal regulations in force at present (end of 2010), ensure citizen participation in the spatial planning?* Each respondent could choose 1 answer

It is curious that a large group of subjects cannot unambiguously assess the current legal status regarding citizen participation (18.1% of respondents, 15 persons). Most probably, this is related with social problems encountered in the spatial development (lack of civic attitudes among citizens, concentration on private interests) and the general condition of the local policy (lack of encouragement on the part of authorities to participate in the decision-making process, lack of good practices in citizen participation). All this, to some extent, is independent from the law and hinders its evaluation. Whereas, the opinion that the citizens have too large influence on planning should be treated as marginal – this standpoint is represented by 9.6% of respondents (8 persons).

Thus, in general, the planners who participated in the survey are aware of the needs related with citizen participation, they positively assess legal regulations governing it, at the same time, their professional experience does not instil optimism. In this context, it is worth looking closer at the planning practice and the social relations in it.

6. Citizen participation in practice

An essential element of the picture presenting citizen participation in Poland is the relationship between the most important players in the planning process: citizens, local authorities and planners. The survey entitled *Space at stake, planners vs. citizens* allows for defining this relationship from the perspective of the planners.

Thus, in the opinion of the planners who participated in the survey, most frequently, the citizens expect safeguarding of their private interests: taking their requests and remarks into consideration, regardless of the best interests of the public (51.8% of respondents gave this answer, 43 responses), provisions, which on the one hand will allow them having the real properties at their disposal and at their own discretion (44.6% of respondents, 37 responses) and on the other, provisions which will not allow location of new projects in the neighbourhood (20.5% of respondents, 17 responses). This discrepancy in citizens' attitudes is well described by the statement of one of the designers: *Building*

land is supposed to be everywhere, without roads and public green spaces.

This means, that among the planners, majority of them had bad experience of citizen cooperation. To these unfavourable opinions, one should add responses indicating lack of local communities' preparation to participation in the planning process and accusations brought against the planners. This critical depiction of the citizen participation is only slightly softened by less frequently given, positive categories of responses, saying that the citizens expect that they will be informed about the prepared project, that they will act as a mediator and they expect planned space to be made more attractive. However, good experience of this type, in relationships between the planners and citizens, has been enjoyed by less than 10% of the subjects.

In turn, the expectations of the local authorities most of all apply to implementation of the current local policy – even if it stands in contradiction to the good planning practice (this answer was given by 43.4% respondents, 36 responses). From this perspective, the planner becomes a tool in the hands of the municipality head, mayor or president, and his knowledge and competences are supposed to serve the purpose of quick completion of the planning procedures (33.7% of respondents, 28 responses) and avoidance of conflicts (24.1% of respondents, 20 responses). In the relationships between the planners and authorities, the need to satisfy the expectations of a specific developer appears very frequently as well as the pressure to delineate new investment areas in the municipality, which additionally confirms treatment of planners like a tool (not partner) by the local authorities. In order to present these relationships better, let us quote fragments of statements given by two respondents: *“At present, an average planner is only ‘a pencil’ in the hands of a municipality head or mayor. Most frequently, the municipal space is created pursuant to the following rule ‘I will favour this one, because he voted for me, but I will not favour that one, because it is an opposite political option’. A planner has not much to say. The only thing a planner may say, is whether a given project is in compliance with the Act or not. There is no chance of SPACE PLANNING from the planning perspective; (...) a lot depends on the power and skills of the planner. The trouble is that the prestige of this profession is low and the planner has no tools at his disposal to decidedly ‘get his own way’ (apart from resigning from the project).*

Only one answer is decidedly positive – in the opinion of 12.1% of respondents (10 responses), local authorities expect professionalism and competences and, following on from this, unambiguous designs easy to use in practice. Still, this aspect of relationship between the planners and local authorities remains marginal, as compared to the above-mentioned ones.

As far as the tools used for the purposes of citizen participation are concerned, the survey contained two questions regarding forms of citizen involvement: the first one asked to indicate tools of participation encountered by the respondents in their planning carrier, the second one asked to indicate most effective methods of conducting public consultations. List of answers to these two questions is presented in Tab. 1.

Table 1. Answers to the questions: *What (statutory and non-statutory) forms of citizen involvement did you encounter in your planning practice?* and *What forms of citizen involvement are most effective from the perspective of the planning process?*. To the question: *What (statutory and non-statutory) forms of citizen involvement did you encounter in your planning practice?* the respondents could give unlimited number of answers. To the question: *What forms of citizen involvement are most effective from the perspective of the planning process?* the respondents could give 3 answers at the most

What (statutory and non-statutory) forms of citizen involvement did you encounter in your planning practice?			
No.	Answer	Number of responses	% of respondents
1	Public discussions in the office (statutory requirement)	79	95.2
2	Press release in the local newspapers (statutory requirement)	76	91.6
3	Written requests and remarks submitted to the office (statutory requirement)	55	66.3
4	Additional meetings in the office (apart from the public discussion which is the statutory requirement)	49	59.0
5	Information about the project in the local mass media (apart from press releases which are the statutory requirement)	33	39.8
6	Meetings between planners and citizens in the design studio	30	36.1
7	Information about the project in churches and other religious and cultural organizations	20	24.1
8	Opinion polls and surveys	16	19.3
9	Public consultations conducted with participation of the local media	10	12.1
10	Total	368	443.4

What forms of citizen involvement are most effective from the perspective of the planning process?			
No.	Answer	Number of responses	% of respondents
1	Public discussions in the office (statutory requirement)	46	55.4
2	Additional meetings in the office (apart from the public discussion which is the statutory requirement)	36	43.4
3	Written requests and remarks submitted to the office (statutory requirement)	32	38.6
4	Meetings between planners and citizens in the design studio	23	27.7
5	Opinion polls and surveys	22	26.5
6	Public consultations conducted with participation of the local media	21	25.3
7	Information about the project in the local mass media (apart from press releases which are the statutory requirement)	16	19.3
8	Information about the project in churches and other religious and cultural organizations	11	13.3
9	Press release in the local newspapers (statutory requirement)	5	6.0
10	Total	212	255.4

It is obvious that the most frequent forms of citizen involvement are the ones, which are the statutory requirement, meaning: public discussions in the office, press releases in the local newspapers as well as requests and remarks submitted under the planning procedure. Further on, there are additional meetings in the office (apart from the public discussion which is the statutory requirement), information about the project in the local mass media (apart from press releases which are the statutory requirement) and meetings between planners and citizens in the design studio. Taking into consideration the total number of responses – each respondent has given 4.4 answers on average – one may state that the range of forms for citizen involvement in the planning process is rather wide.

As appears from the table, the most effective methods of cooperation with the citizens in the spatial planning process comprise personal meetings: public discussions (statutory requirement) and addi-

tional meetings in the office and the design studio – they took appropriately 1, 2 and 4 position. In addition, written requests and remarks submitted to the office under the statutory requirement turn out to be effective together with opinion polls and surveys. Whereas, press releases in the local newspapers (statutory requirement) got decidedly negative opinions, and only slightly better opinions were given to – information about the project in churches and cultural organizations and the local mass media. Thus, this confirms the rule known for a long time, which says that informing local community about undertaken action is not real participation (Arnstein, 1969).

7. Planners' qualifications

As mentioned above, the circle of Polish planners is highly diversified with regard to their education. The survey conducted for the needs of this paper confirms this thesis: almost half of the respondents (47.0%, 39 subjects) has higher education and graduated from the following majors: spatial development or spatial planning. Almost every fourth respondent is an architect by education (24.1%, 20 subjects), every fifth respondent graduated from the postgraduate studies in spatial development (21.7%, 18 subjects). The education of the rest of them (7.2%, 6 subjects) is not directly related to spatial planning or they are not planners at all.

This poses a question, whether the studies they graduated from provided good preparation of the respondents for conducting public discussion and other forms of citizen participation. It turns out, that in most instances, the planners who participated in the survey negatively assess their education with regard to the citizen participation – majority of them (62.7% of respondents, 52 subjects) think that the studies they graduated from failed to prepare them to conduct public discussion and other forms of citizen cooperation. The remaining ones have doubts (20.5%, 17 subjects) or they positively assess their knowledge about citizen participation (16.9%, 14 subjects). Graduates of the following majors: architecture and city planning are most poorly prepared to conduct public discussions, whereas, graduates of spatial development – including postgraduate studies in spatial development – assess their preparation a bit better (Fig. 4).

At the same time, these are the urban planners who have most serious doubts about citizen participation – 14.0% of them (8 subjects) think that citizen participation in the spatial planning process is not an indispensable element of the planning process. On the other hand, graduates of architecture and city planning turn out to be keen supporters of the citizen participation (100.0% of them thinks that public participation is necessary), still it is them, who consider that they are poorly prepared to conduct public discussions.

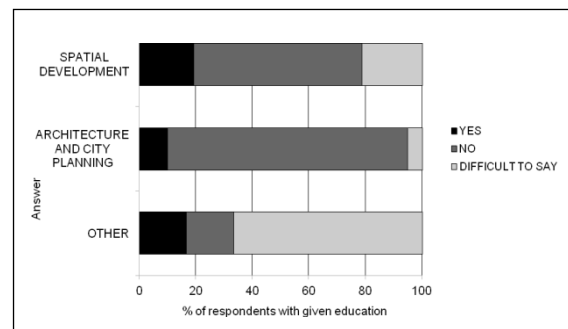


Fig. 4. List of answers to the questions: *How did you receive your education as a planner? Please specify the type of studies, major or specialisation and Do the studies you graduated from provide good preparation of planners for conducting public discussion and other forms of citizen cooperation?* The subjects who graduated from the full-time studies and/or postgraduate studies were included in the *spatial development* category

8. Conclusions

Urban planners are particularly responsible for shaping of the spatial order and creation of the sustainable development. It is them who – acting on commission of the local authorities of various levels – make decisions about space use and development, thereby influence living conditions of the present and future generations. Thus, their knowledge, attitude and opinions about the most important aspects of the sustainable development are of the utmost importance. One of these aspects is democratic, participatory management of the local development.

The survey carried out among the Polish planners in 2010, presented in this article, requires some caution. The sample of respondents in the study has non-random and most probably – non-representative character for the entire group of urban planners. Nevertheless, the responses given in the survey, correspond well enough with the phenomena observed in the planning practice, so for the purposes of this article they were considered valid and a good source of planners' opinions about the space decision making process.

An interesting picture of planners' attitude towards the citizen participation emerges from the carried out research. Majority of respondents who participated in the survey support citizen involvement, majority of them thinks that the current planning procedures ensure sufficient citizen influence on planning, still, most of them feel that they are poorly prepared to conduct public consultations; whereas, the best methods of participation are discussions and meetings.

This is the prevailing assessment of the citizen participation condition, as perceived by the planners; still, if the planners' responses are examined in more detail, it turns out that this picture is composite and multifaceted. Firstly, professional practice brings the feeling of disappointment with re-

gard to the possibility of citizen cooperation and makes the experienced planners more critical towards the issue of participation. Secondly, generally accepted legal regulations impose use of ineffective tools and this questions favourable assessment of the planning procedures in force. Thirdly, participants of the public consultations (citizens, politicians, developers) concentrate on gaining their own goals; this prevents working out of solutions, which are good for the entire community. Fourthly and finally, even though the graduates of the spatial development studies feel best prepared to conduct public consultations, they have most serious doubts about justness of citizen involvement in the planning process.

Then, how can one assess the condition of citizen participation in Poland? Does it meet the requirements of the sustainable development? For the time being, it seems that the situation is bad, and the urban planners only slightly contribute to balancing of the social, economic and environmental needs by way of partnership and cooperation with various players of the local government policy. They lack sufficient attitude and qualifications, they lack appropriate powers. In such a situation, it turns out necessary to redefine the role of the urban planners. In order to increase the prestige of the planner profession, and in the long-term perspective enable the planners to inspire and conduct effective public consultations, most of all, the curricula of spatial development studies should be amended and supplemented, so that they cover the issues of participation, negotiation and group process, etc. – owing to this, future planners will be better prepared to the role assigned to them by the modern local democracy. Moreover, it is necessary to incorporate more effective mechanisms of the citizen participation into the planning practice (and also to the legal regulations), which would enable active participation in the space decision making process to all representatives of the local government policy – this will contribute to creation of civic attitudes, increase the level of social capital and allow for taking care of widely understood best interests of the present and future space users. Finally, it is necessary to promote the image of a planner as a sustainable development expert, independent from the local authorities and citizens – such a position would enable presentation of benefits and costs related to satisfying the needs of various groups functioning in the local space. This last postulate is particularly difficult to carry out due to the existing financial and time-limit obligations between the planners and municipal offices, but it does not change the fact that it remains valid and up-to-date.

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