



Participatory Practices and Local Development in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Case Study: The Initiative La Terenuri [At the Playgrounds] – Common Space in Mănăştur Neighbourhood

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ABSTRACT

Marginalisation is present all over the world in different forms. “La Terenuri” [At the Playgrounds] initiative in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, can be considered a good practice example of how urban marginalisation can be diminished through grassroots initiatives. In the heart of a green plateau, where urban planning was not performed, Colectiv A Association, an NGO, started to reshape the area, involving local communities and groups. The research material includes interviews, articles from newspapers, posts on social media and documents created by the Municipality of Cluj-Napoca. Results showed that Colectiv A Association had co-created diverse activities and events to involve the inhabitants of Mănăştur neighbourhood into the regeneration of the public space: workshops, gardening activities, debates, cleaning actions, festivals, Mănăştur’s Days, petitions, etc. The lessons learnt and the experiences of “La Terenuri” argue for more adaptive urban planning, which identifies solutions to residents’ needs, aspirations, and desires.

Keywords: post-socialism, bottom-up initiatives, urban regeneration, civic involvement

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INTRODUCTION

Marginality is a relative concept referring not only to the physical location of places and people, but also to their social position (Bernt & Colini, 2013; Chappate, 2015; Pelc, 2017, 2018; Pelc & Nel, 2020). In the context of *urban marginality*, the position at the edges of the settlement

defines the relation of the people with the city centre, which can take on various forms that are conditioned by spatial, economic, political, and social marginalisation processes (Aceska, Heer, & Kaiser-Grolimund, 2019, pp. 1-11). Thus, the complex concept of *marginality* is defined as “an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems, that prevent them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty” (v. Braun & Gatzweiler, 2014, p. 3).

Generally, municipalities pay significant attention to the flagship sites of a city and concentrate investments for refurbishment, greening or modernisation of different infrastructure and aesthetic improvement in the city centres and old towns, whereas the other parts of the settlements, mainly the periphery, are rather neglected by such urban regeneration measures. Planning professions are mostly either indifferent towards the margins or not capable to fathom their potential (Korobar, 2017). However, urban margins can become the key part of an urban area where alternative development opportunities appear, which would otherwise be impossible in the city core area (Nasution, 2014; Medeșan & Panait, 2016; Korobar, 2017). Moreover, the limited intensity of the state’ presence and control facilitate conditions for an informal use of the public space, as “cuts and frictions constituting urban margins do not only limit urban dwellers’ capacities, but also provide space for agency and creativity” (Aceska, Heer, & Kaiser-Grolimund, 2019, p. 9). Suburbs can also be incubators of creativity, innovative and complex, but all too often underappreciated and regarded as cultural wastelands (Bain, 2013; Nasution, 2014). Still, marginalised groups and communities are neither negligible, nor passive in the face of rather unfavourable locational and societal circumstances, but can actively engage in various processes, negotiate or contest margins–centre relations in order to make their city liveable (Aceska, Heer, & Kaiser-Grolimund, 2019).

These aspects are valid for East-European public space in peripheral neighbourhoods planned during communism, where beyond the limit of personal properties, public space becomes abandoned, neglected and, although it is used, this creates a feeling of non-belonging (Medeșan, 2016; Medeșan, 2020). However, certain agents of change recognise the value of these unexploited places and initiate actions to reappropriate these areas and to co-create them according to the communities’ needs and for their benefit.

The focus of our study is an initiative which aimed to engage local communities to claim and take charge of the landscape they lived in, a marginal unexploited place characterised by chaotic development. La Terenuri [At the Playgrounds] area is an open green space at the periphery of the largest neighbourhood in Cluj-Napoca, Mănăștur. This place was the communal meadow of Mănăștur village, teared down to make place for what is now the densest housing district in Cluj-Napoca, built in the 1970s-1980s (Panait & Medeșan, 2013; Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015). The area is named La Terenuri [At the Playgrounds] due to the sports fields set here. It is a hybrid space at the joint of rows of tower blocks of flats P+10 with an unbuilt field, unmaintained but with a rich topography: a stream, a plateau, and woods. Basically, it is a vacant area on the city margins, used by various groups of residents for different purposes in informal ways: as a playground, walking area, sports field, or for urban gardening, leisure, and picnic (Panait & Medeșan, 2013; Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015).

“La Terenuri – Common Space in Mănăștur” initiative has started at the beginning of 2013 as a local actor of an international project with European funding: “Landscape Choreography” and continued as a series of municipal, cultural or private funded projects. Cluj-Napoca was represented by the Colectiv A Association, an NGO interested in the impact of art on the social level (Medeșan, 2016; Medeșan, 2020). The initiative focused on reactivating and enhancing

local urban cultural practices, to enable interaction among various groups which used the area and to advance a methodology so that residents could reappropriate in depth their places in order to use and defend those places together (Panait & Medeșan, 2013; Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeșan, 2020).

This study aims to discuss the methods and instruments applied at La Terenuri to recognise, promote and enhance the resources present at the local level. In addition, we consider the socio-political and environmental impact the initiative had on local and regional level, in the framework of the urban regeneration and participation literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON URBAN REGENERATION IN POST-SOCIALISM

In different regions, there are marginalised urban neighbourhoods. However, not all marginal urban areas have the same features. Therefore, when analysing urban marginality, we should pay attention to the relations between space and inhabitants at the margins. In the case of post-socialist cities, one main cause of marginalisation is represented by the difference made by authorities between centre and marginal places of the city in what urban planning, urban regeneration, and in general social, cultural, and economic activities and development are concerned.

When defining development, one must consider its multidimensional nature. It includes economic, personal, and wider societal freedoms that can ensure satisfying basic needs such as life sustenance and self-esteem (Goulet, 1971; Sen, 1999). In post-socialist European states, *urban development* can be defined as a “complex outcome of closely interwoven processes of fundamental institutional reforms, economic transformations, far-reaching social changes and urban spatial transformations” (Taraba, Forgaci, & Romein, 2022, p. 161). Also, *post-socialism* was defined as “a socio-political context of transformation”, characterised by the appearance of new regulations and identities in a societal environment characterised by uncertainty and harsh fiscal control (Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 2).

However, irrespective of the societal context, *regeneration* is defined as “a process of helping degraded areas break out of the crisis, conducted in a comprehensive way, through the integrated, territorially-oriented actions for the local community, space and economy, taken by regeneration stakeholders on the basis of the commune regeneration programme” (Ciesiółka, 2018, p. 112). *Urban regeneration* is characterised as “the process of social and investment character carried out in degraded urban space which is implemented concertedly by the territorial self-government, the local community and other participants” (Ślebocka, 2022, p. 763). In addition, *urban regeneration* is considered also an “umbrella term for urban restructuring, and more specifically as a process of reinstating development prosperity and returning useful purpose to areas that are characterised by urban, structural, functional, and sociological deterioration” (Radeljak Kaufmann et al., 2020, p. 345).

Considering the definitions of the above-mentioned concepts, *regeneration areas* are more and more understood as “spaces of plural publics, contested claims, and irreconcilable understandings of the good life” (Amin, 2005, pp. 626-627). Thus, *revitalisation* should involve all local stakeholders: “the territorial self-government, different public services as well as business and civic organisations, and finally the inhabitants themselves” (Ślebocka, 2022, p. 768).

In this process, participatory processes, based on social capital, are crucial. *Social capital* is defined as formal and informal networks of sociability (Putnam, 1993, 1995; Hall, 1999; Havadi-Nagy et al., 2017), and therefore, social capital is not ahistorical. Thus, it was recently underlined that the present advocated for “consensus-based but ‘thin’ form of social capital stands in fundamental contradiction with communities’ own ‘good sense’ construction, built out of shared space, history, and experience” (Watkins, 2017, p. 2148). Nevertheless, concerning the existence of trust and networks of sociability in the post-socialist space, it should be pointed out the communist heritage translated in disrupted patterns of social behaviour, in weak social capital and civil society (Howard, 2003; Benkő, Balla, & Hory, 2018).

In addition, the post-socialist city has certain physiognomic features, proof of the impact of the political paradigm of communism which shaped specific economic and sociocultural approaches to urban development. These characteristics are the following: the compactness of the built urban area, large scale building projects, and focus on industrial uses at the expense of commercial uses (cf. Szelenyi, 1996). Thus, we can see that neo-liberalism is just one among the many factors that influence urban development projects in post-socialist European states. Other significant contextual features of ‘urban democracy’ are the legacies of socialist dictatorships and post-socialist transformations (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, pp. 230-231).

In the same vein, one revealing discussion referred to the scales of urban democracy and how these intersect and impact each other, emphasising that the perception of the local as the most democratic scale for development could be more of a bias than a reality:

“The suggestion to simply turn towards the urban scale for more democratic, progressive and just policies and social practices ignores the embeddedness of urban questions into broader social and power relations. Urban democracy cannot be alienated from other scales, especially the national scale of legislation, judicial practice and exercise of political power” (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, p. 228).

In fact, relevant to how urban democracy is performed, the literature so far identified two paradigms that compete in *the regeneration of urban space*. The first one argues that urban space is complex and diverse and both researchers and urban planners should focus on inhabitants’ experiences and their rights (Jacobs, 1961; De Carlo, 1968/2007; Lefebvre, 1968/2009; Arnstein, 1969). The other paradigm points out that one should simplify and organise urban space, and concerning neighbourhoods one should demolish them if the urban public administration considered that a solution, irrespective of the locals’ wishes. The latter is the approach of many functionalists (cf. Seve, Redondo, & Segá, 2022, p. 589). In this study, we base our argumentation on the first paradigm, thus emphasizing that urban space is a common good and a space that should be governed by everyone.

Concerning the regeneration of socialist neighbourhoods, two paradigms are useful to characterise the participatory processes in urban regeneration in the post-socialist space: (a) “*a governance paradigm* that supports public participation, public–private partnerships, urban–regional co-operation” and (b) “*a planning paradigm* that promotes a holistic approach to urban development” (Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 5).

These competing paradigms impact on urban quality of life. As such, in post-socialist cities, quality of life improvement should enhance the following features: a focus on the advantages brought about by cultural and social events, improvement of the areas between buildings, and increased involvement of local communities in their neighbourhoods’ social life (Hlaváček, Raška, & Balej, 2016, p. 4).

However, path-dependency and hybrid structures are supported by the continuities of socialism in post-socialist urban regeneration. These continuities can be identified in the following fields: politics and public administration, cultural milieu, financial issues, and civil society. Out of these, the continuities of socialism in post-socialist urban regeneration, as reflected by *politics and public administration*, include overspending and corruption, discretionary bureaucratic decisions (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, p. 233, p. 238), the still holding of power by most of the former elite and thus autocratic decision-making practices and structures are maintained, extreme politicisation of policy issues (Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 5, p. 7) and, therefore, economic plans and bureaucratic processes are often erased by political decisions (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, p. 228). All this have led to a crisis of political legitimacy (Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 11).

Secondly, the continuities of socialism in post-socialist urban regeneration related to the *cultural milieu* refer to the fact that urban regeneration is “a process of learning, as the culture of collaboration and negotiation is not particularly well developed” (Taraba, Forgaci, & Romein, 2022, p. 177). In addition, the cultural milieu is characterised by “lack of individual initiative and personal responsibility, low level of participation in public domain, miscommunication, passivity, indifference, scepticism, unwillingness to listen and inability to formulate questions and opinions” (Grazuleviciute-Vileniske & Urbonas, 2014, p. 1). Even when participating, people do not have the public good as their focus, but their interests. In addition, there is a “tendency towards non-transparent decision making, culture of complaint, climate of mistrust, increasing uncertainty and pessimism” (Grazuleviciute-Vileniske & Urbonas, 2014, p. 4).

Thirdly, the continuities of socialism in post-socialist urban regeneration concerning the *financial issues* consist of the following: lack of resources at the local level (Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 5), privileging other interests than those of the locals (based on private sector interests and market-driven policies for urban area development), insignificant communication between local public administration and community stakeholders (Taraba, Forgaci, & Romein, 2022, p. 161; Keresztély & Scott, 2012, p. 11), orientation towards short-term economic benefits (Grazuleviciute-Vileniske & Urbonas, 2014, p. 7), projects tailored to available financial resources and not the local communities’ needs (Masierek, 2021, p. 240), progressing slowly and usually top-down-oriented (Grabkowska, 2015, p. 214), lack of a vision or sound strategy of urban development, and the non-systematic treatment of urban spaces (Radeljak Kaufmann et al., 2020, p. 356).

Finally, the continuities of socialism in post-socialist urban regeneration in what the *civil society* is concerned are connected to the fact that during the communist period of Romania participation was not possible. These continuities are common to many of the European post-socialist states: weak civil society, no real culture of participatory place-making and missing large scale thinking (Benkő, Balla, & Hory, 2018, p. 223, p. 239), deliberative consensus is ignored, marginalised or limited to lesser impact decisions (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, p. 243), and lack of experience (Klusacek et al., 2018, p. 33). Moreover, the factors influencing people’s low attendance are the “lack of appropriate publicity concerning consultations, narrow circle of invited communities, too short a time between the announcement of consultations and their implementation” (Czupich, 2018, p. 95).

Considering this theoretical background, our case study can be included as an example of European urban regeneration process in post-socialism, within a context of spatial and social marginalisation.

METHODOLOGY

Our qualitative research is based, on one hand, on secondary data analysis from various sources, completed by discussions conducted with the two main coordinators of the “La Terenuri - Spațiu Comun în Mănăştur” [“At the Playgrounds - Common Space in Mănăştur”] initiative, an urban anthropologist, and an architect.

The Facebook page of the initiative has been a considerable source of information, as it presents the events and actions that took place since 2013 (La Terenuri Facebook). The coordinators of the initiative summarised their experience as community facilitators and project managers in several publications, we accessed online (Medeşan, 2016; Panait & Medeşan, 2013; Panait, Medeşan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeşan, 2020). Further insight we gained from interviews published on the YouTube channel. The videos are testimonies of the onsite activities, where various actors express their opinions, but also interviews with the coordinators in the frame of television programmes of national and regional television broadcasts.

We also had access to the research report of a sociological survey conducted by students from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Chiş & Mironica, 2018). The survey took place in 2018 and it had various objectives. Firstly, it aimed to identify the needs of the local people and the challenges they faced daily in their neighbourhood, pointing out the deficiencies considering public utilities, green spaces, parking lots or overcrowded streets. Secondly, it investigated the significance of La Terenuri area for the people of the vicinity and their opinions concerning efficient use of the site according to their needs and desires. In this context, the survey aimed also to assess the impact of “La Terenuri - Spațiu Comun în Mănăştur” [“At the Playgrounds - Common Space in Mănăştur”] initiative on the neighbourhood, after six years of active presence in the area. The data collection was conducted face to face and online through a questionnaire survey with about 1,100 completed forms. The researchers targeted mainly people living in the focus areas of the initiative, namely La Terenuri, Calvaria creek, and Dacia Cinema area. From the 60 questions included in the questionnaire, we selected those relevant for our research topic. Due to the balanced gender and age group distribution of the respondents, as well as the various length of time living in the vicinity, the results can be considered relevant. Further on, about 70% of the respondents are users of La Terenuri site, whereas over 50% are at least once a week in the area (Chiş & Mironica, 2018). Thus, we consider that these data enable an insight into the dynamics of the local people and the initiative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Location of the case study

La Terenuri [At the Playgrounds] represents a green space located in Mănăştur district, in the southwest of Cluj-Napoca, at the edge of one of the largest socialist neighbourhoods in Romania. This area is characterised by a complex history, with a major rupture between 1965-1985, as the rural settlement and its area with gardens and farmlands was converted into a residential area of blocks of flats. The main cause for this change has been the massive expansion of industry and the need for workforce, which was mainly sourced from rural settlements around Cluj-Napoca, highlighting a forced urbanisation. The place called La Terenuri is located at the edge of the woods and is composed of sport fields, a green area, as well as a creek and a series of private gardens in the proximity. Like other areas, for decades, La Terenuri experienced an unclear

situation of legal incertitude about properties and claims, which, on one hand led to the neglect of the area by the authorities, but on the other hand it enabled informal use by different groups for various purposes: playground for children, walking area for dog owners, leisure, and sports activities for the people from the neighbourhood. According to the survey, the respondents conduct these activities together with their family (40.3%), friends (33.7%) or neighbours (8.5%), but also alone (Chiş & Mironica, 2018). The incertitude of the legal status of the area is confirmed also by the participants at the social study conducted in 2018, where 14% of the respondents considered the area was private property and almost 70% thought it was municipal property (Chiş & Mironica, 2018).

Among the most important problems of the neighbourhood, the participants at the survey mentioned the overcrowded roads, the sidewalks occupied by cars, the lack of parking space, but also the scarcity and deficient quality of green public spaces and urban furniture (Chiş & Mironica, 2018). This is why this intensely used space could be turned into a public park and mitigate the scarcity of maintained urban green spaces.

“At the Playgrounds – Common Space in Mănăştur”

Transforming this left-over space into a public park with citizen’s participation become one major goal of the initial “La Terenuri – Common Space in Mănăştur” initiative. It started at the beginning of 2012 as a local actor of a project with European funding: “Landscape Choreography: From Wasted to Shared Land” (Performing Heritage, 2016; Medeşan, 2020). The project, funded with the support from EU Culture Programme, encouraged “collective practices of urban gardening” and supported “an innovative European culture of common spaces through an interdisciplinary approach” that merged “public art, landscape architecture, performing art, and socio-anthropological analysis” (Performing Heritage, 2016; Medeşan, 2020). The project was to raise awareness among citizens about their power to improve their city through involvement, innovation, and responsibility, empower them to take actively part in the co-creation, co-design and management of a green space at the periphery of Mănăştur neighbourhood (Medeşan, 2016; Prima Sport, 2016, Medeşan, 2020). Working with the community should create opportunities to socialise, to interact and to learn about practices of active citizenship (Arhiforum, 2013).

Despite the degraded state of the area and the way of usage done by disjunctive groups that seemed not to be aware of the value of this space in their daily routine, the collective of people launching “La Terenuri” initiative understood its vital role in the neighbourhood and started working in this context (Medeşan, 2016; Medeşan, 2020). Thus, Asociația Colectiv A [Colectiv A Association] saw the opportunity of a shared space as a new working platform for a participatory urbanism approach, a bottom-up practice of co-creating and co-producing public space, to experiment instruments and methods to produce urban space as common space of residents and users (Medeşan, 2016; Prima Sport, 2016).

Their goals were to raise dwellers’ social responsibility, to empower the citizens to get involved into the participatory creation and management of urban green spaces, to regenerate the neglected, but valuable green area (Erdélyi Figyelő, 2018). Another objective was to raise the awareness of the authorities regarding the needs of peripheral urban areas, to invite them to productive interactions and concrete measures for the rehabilitation of the marginalised neighbourhood (Medeşan, 2016; Prima Sport, 2016; Medeşan, 2020).

The key questions of the initiative were: How to make real the rapprochement of the disparate groups met there? and What instruments must be used to produce common space? The collective resorted to two main categories of activities: (1) through participatory urbanism workshops, they facilitated the interaction with and among the users of the space and stirred debates about diverse issues the neighbourhood coped with, as well as discovered potential local actors inclined to assume the identified issues (Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Erdélyi Figyelő, 2018; Medeșan, 2020), and (2) cultural events, performative arts, educational workshops, edutainment actions, concerts aiming to assemble groups which used the area and to offer them the prospect to interact and co-produce numerous events with and for the neighbourhood (Panait & Medeșan, 2013; Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeșan, 2020). Through these actions they applied and tested various ways of progressively building urban common spaces for the vicinity.

A significant concern of the coordinators was not to be event providers for the neighbourhood, but to co-produce the activities with and for the community. The cultural production was of major significance with outreaching empowerment impact, as in the process of co-creating and co-producing the activities, the workshops, the cultural and art events and the urban furniture, the residents turned into active participants, not passive receivers (Medeșan, 2016, 2020). It is not only a way of defying conventions that limit access to art and culture, but it goes beyond and empowers people to overcome their condition and intervene in their own lives (Medeșan, 2016, 2020). Integrating artistic methods in the reality of the vicinity aimed to change the way residents related to public space. Co-producing the events which took place at La Terenuri, the residents were empowered to create their own urbanism through concrete actions. This way, the former public with no initiative became the creative alliance and produced the common space (Medeșan, 2016, 2020).

The actions took place throughout the year, connected also to seasonal activities, and holidays (e.g., Halloween, International Children's Day) or local festivals. Activities which supported identity building and place-attachment played a major role for the community of Mănăștur. The events had also popular guests, but they favoured the promotion of the local culture (i.e., local musicians, actors, DJs and thematic clubs from the local schools). For instance, in 2015, a new event was introduced in the neighbourhood, the "Manhattanshtur", the first neighbourhood festival designed by teenagers. As a result of these situations and opportunities to perform and get involved, new groups and associations interested in the activation of the area appeared, who themselves could turn into activators of new bottom-up projects and situations (Medeșan, 2016, 2020). Gradually, the site gained a certain profile on city level and was included in larger events, like the city days (Zilele Clujului) or even in the Transylvanian International Film Festival.

In 2016, the life in the neighbourhood was in the spotlight of a photo exhibition by Traian Andreiu called *Vedere de Cartier* [Neighbourhood View]. On top of everything, it can be mentioned the launch of the neighbourhood's newspaper: *Buletin de Mănăștur* [Newsletter of Mănăștur]. Worth mentioning is also the citizens' involvement in fund raising actions for their activities, like the swimathon of 2015 or the marathon of 2016 (La Terenuri Facebook).

The initiators of "La Terenuri" and many of the external partners of the actions and events were young professionals. In 2018, young researchers conducted also impact research of "La Terenuri" initiative, addressing on one hand the needs and necessities of the citizens regarding the neighbourhood they lived in and, on the other hand, assessing people' awareness of the activities conducted at La Terenuri.

As we can see from the timeline of events and activities (Table 1), the responsible persons stayed in the area also after the completion of the 1.5 years long international project, becoming an initiative. They enlarged the spectrum of the events and activities, as well as the target groups. Being aware that a substantial attitude and behaviour change is a long-lasting process, they continued creating situations for building and protecting the common space (Medeşan, 2020). This participatory intervention enabled the rediscovery of the area, the possibility of learning together with the locals and finding solutions for local concerns, and, at the same time, having extensive social and political consequences.

Table 1. Events and activities organised at La Terenuri by the Colectiv A Association

Year	Event/Action	Type/Topic	Target group
2012-2014	Landscape Choreography	European project	general
2013	Urban gardening workshop	environmental, urban gardening, debates	general
	Hip-hop and Balkan music night	Music	general
	Choreographic Speech by Balletto Civile	performance	general
2014	Clean Day	education, environmental	general
	Children's Day	Education	children
	The Summer Evenings	festival	general
	Halloween	Education	children
	Play Mănăştur	urban furniture	adults
2015	Manhattanshtur	Festival	youth
	Swimathon	fundraising competition	general
	Autumn Show	workshop, roundtable discussion	general
2016	Flashmob	Dance	general
	Photo exhibition	Education	general
	Recycle action	environmental	general
	Halloween	Education	children
	Christmas decorations	Education	children
2017	Mănăştur got talent	Festival	general
	Halloween	Education	children
2018	Construction debates	roundtable discussion	adults
	Bridge on Calvaria Creek	Workshop	general
2013-2018	Mănăştur's Days	festival organised by Colectiv A	general
2019	Mănăştur's Days	festival organised by the initiative group of inhabitants	general

Source: authors, based on La Terenuri Facebook, 2021 & Prima Sport, 2016

The relation with public authorities and their involvement

Even if probably primarily not intended, the initiative coordinators took up the role of community facilitators and spokespersons for the neighbourhood in their relations with the local administration. The local authorities had to be involved in "La Terenuri" project, basically also because of the need of permits for the execution of activities and events. Furthermore, as the

initiative aimed for a long-lasting major change in the area and in the community, they needed the municipality to endorse their venture.

It is a fact that in a dynamically growing economic centre like Cluj-Napoca, there is great pressure on land. La Terenuri area is no exception, as several contradictory interests and uses collide on this site as well: private real estate developers guided by profit maximisation, activists and people in the vicinity who wish to maintain the green space and the politics and agenda of the municipality (Erdélyi Figyelő, 2018).

Even though during the last decades the political power of Cluj-Napoca had several and manifold opportunities to join the emerging civil society, their desire and will to be involved in the life and development of the city, it still had difficulties to relate to active and concerned citizens, who have a critical attitude towards the political decision makers. Sadly, there were situations when they rather simulated participation and preferred to keep power distribution and authority force intact (Medeșan, 2016, 2020).

The uncertainty of the legal status of the area, the property issues, created on one hand a niche, where temporary uses, activities and events were tolerated. On the other hand, it served as an argument or excuse for the municipality to not take over and assume the transformation of the area into a public park. Attitude which changed a few years later, more or less at the same time as a real estate investment surfaced close to La Terenuri area in 2018. However, the community voiced its discontent (e.g., official petitions, presence in the local media, discussions with the authorities) with this real estate development, which would have smothered an already densely built area. For the moment (2021), the development is on hold. The construction of two car parks in the area, by the municipality, diminished the green space, however without solving the overwhelming need for parking space and the sidewalks occupied by parking vehicles. In addition, in 2016, the Cinema Dacia Cultural Centre was inaugurated. Although the remodelling of the previous cinema building into a cultural centre was the outcome of a neighbourhood participative budgeting project, the people of the neighbourhood were not included in the management of the institution and had no primacy in the use of the facilities. Despite negotiations and requests from the citizens' representatives, the management of the Cultural Centre did not fully apprehend the empowerment of the citizens and support the residents of the neighbourhood to produce a part of the activities of the cultural centre (Medeșan, 2020).

Year 2019 was a turning point in the destiny of La Terenuri: the local municipality took over the area and decided its refurbishment into a sport and leisure facility (Actual de Cluj, 2019; Silea, 2020), equipped for various in- and outdoor activities: playground, tennis courts, synthetic mini football pitch, volleyball courts, badminton court, footnet (combination between tennis and football), bicycles and running track, parkour, skatepark, and outdoor fitness (Primăria Cluj-Napoca, 2019).

The infrastructure execution is still ongoing, but observing the development plan of the area (Napotech Proiect SRL & Arhi Box SRL, 2019), we can notice some elements which might have been inspired by the ideas and temporary urban structures created and used by "La Terenuri" initiative and the citizens, such as the stage and the arena for vicinity forum. Further on, the plan contains also new pedestrian bridges to connect the banks of the creek. The design of the park does not comply totally with the desires of "La Terenuri" community, but it can be considered at least a partial success, as it will not be covered by new blocks of flats, it will be a public park administrated by the municipality, open for vicinity and for the larger public. Unfortunately, some of the informal gardens were cancelled. The initiative coordinators are aware that this

new development of the area is partially owing to their active and constant presence in the area, as well as to the activities and events co-created and co-produced with the local citizens.

IMPACT OF THE INITIATIVE AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The initial initiative “La Terenuri – Common Space in Mănăștur” and its follow up actions had complex outcomes on different levels (neighbourhood and city) and impacted various social, political, environmental, and urban planning aspects. The main coordinators of the initial endeavour; distinguish among three stakeholder groups affected by the initiative: (1) the residents and users of the area, (2) the professionals and their perspective upon the public space, and (3) local authorities and the way they relate to such initiatives (Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeșan, 2020).

First, the local communities and groups were the direct beneficiaries of the initiative activities not only as spectators, but mainly as co-producers of the events (Panait, Medeșan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeșan, 2020). These activities of co-creating a common space, and filling it with manifold content, facilitated situations of interaction and bonding among the participants, and demonstrated the advantages provided by commonly used green areas.

Regarding the on-site events, the survey conducted in 2018 gives a glimpse concerning public’s awareness and attendance. Over 1,000 respondents could name at least one event organised at La Terenuri, but on the other hand, only about half of the survey participants attended at least one of the activities. Thus, even though the community is familiar with the social and cultural opportunities in the neighbourhood, a smaller share seized the opportunity of engaging in those events.

This attitude manifested also in the desire to actively engage in the activities conducted on La Terenuri site, like events organisation, decision making processes, cleaning actions or initiate activities for determined target groups. Almost 1,000 respondents considered citizens’ involvement desirable. However, a share of the respondents saw the need for citizens’ involvement as a failure of the administration, and not necessary as a democratic process of citizen participation in the making of public spaces.

Despite the constant presence in the area, and the frequent and manifold activities and events Colectiv A initiated and co-produced with the citizens and further partners over six-seven years, a great share of the population (according to the survey around one third of the respondents) was not aware about their involvement and considered the municipality the main organiser of the events at La Terenuri. Others know about the association as event facilitator, without being aware of the share of neighbours involved in the co-production of activities and events. This could be linked to the prevalent attitude among the citizens, that the public administration is solely responsible for the public space, and that their participation was not required in the management of the space they used on a daily basis.

The “La Terenuri” team supported also the publication of a neighbourhood newspaper. Started in 2017, it had several printed editions, but lately limited to being an online paper and to its pressure on social media platforms. The survey of 2018 showed that only about one third of the respondents knew about the neighbourhood publication. As source for neighbourhood related communication, the publication could be better promoted, to gain in relevance and audience.

The long year activity and presence of the activists raised awareness among the citizens about their possibilities and power to get involved in the co-production of public spaces (Havadi-Nagy, 2017). As significant outcome of the activities of “La Terenuri” was the empowerment of the neighbourhood and the creation of an Initiative Group composed of citizens from Mănăştur neighbourhood who had the goal to organise and coordinate events and actions for the inhabitants of Mănăştur (Actual de Cluj, 2019). Moreover, the Initiative Group represented the first group like this in Cluj-Napoca. Sadly, after the successful organisation of the 7th edition of Mănăştur’s Days in 2019, the social distancing regulations of the last couple of years, because of the pandemic, limited the action possibilities of this group.

The activities and the situations of co-creating common spaces through art and cultural events started at La Terenuri extended towards further significant nodes in the neighbourhood (school, park, and cultural centre) (Medeşan, 2016, 2020; Prima Sport, 2016). These common spaces developed in processes that became independent from the initial activators of situations, self-generating a unitary urbanism as the situationists avanguardists put it (Medeşan, 2016, 2020). However, these initiatives are not limited to Mănăştur neighbourhood, but they triggered similar interventions of participatory shaping public spaces in other neighbourhoods of the city. Moreover, “La Terenuri” was a significant initiative for the entire city, because it showed the impact of decentralising cultural events which previously overloaded the old town, the central park and the central square (Medeşan & Panait, 2016). It fostered urban life in neighbourhoods, as well as the performance of local culture, co-created and performed by the communities themselves (e.g., local music bands or performers, DJs of various clubs from nearby schools), which was able to use and fill with life the neglected spaces located on the city margins. This way new spaces opened in the neighbourhood, enabling access to culture and education (Panait, Medeşan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015; Medeşan, 2020). Further on, “La Terenuri” initiative raised interest on an international level and got included in several international networks in order to exchange ideas and practices, such as “Actors of Urban Change” or “One Architecture Week” (Medeşan, 2016).

The empowerment of the residents to produce through artistic methods their own environment is a way by which cities can become better built, appropriated, and defended (Medeşan, 2016, 2020). By producing common spaces, the residents not only build their own city, but simultaneously develop new behaviours and make these newly created spaces evolve. At the same time, the designers of these spaces modify their practice: situation building leads not only to transformations in inhabitants’ behaviour, but also to a change of how designers, architects and urban planners work with the urban space (Medeşan, 2016, 2020). It is still a question how such ventures as “La Terenuri” initiative in Mănăştur can become starting points for urban policies that are closer to everyday realities and more flexible towards them (Medeşan, 2016, 2020).

Even though the relation with the authorities was not entirely frictionless, the local authorities had to be partners in the “La Terenuri” initiative because the involvement of the local decision-makers was required for a real change. In the several years of negotiating the common space in Mănăştur, the initiative coordinators noticed a change in the way the authorities perceived civil society and the organisation of actions and events in peripheral neighbourhoods, but not in assuming that in such marginal spaces culture could be a catalyst (Panait, Medeşan, & Colectiv A, Cluj, 2015). Without considering the municipalities’ agenda and motivations, eventually the area remained a public space and, despite all the delays, it is in process of reorganisation as a public park by the local administration (Actual de Cluj, 2019). Thus, a neglected green area, a left-over space is being transformed into a valuable site for the community (Havadi-Nagy, 2017).

The outstanding accomplishments of “La Terenuri - Common Space in Mănăștur Neighbourhood” initiative gained recognition from various institutions, in the shape of awards and acknowledgments: in 2017 the project called “Regeneration through Culture: 5 Years of Work in the Neighbourhood” won the first place at the category of “Cultural Projects / Initiatives / Experiments” awarded at the Architecture Bienala of Transylvania. The same year, “La Terenuri” received an award at the “Gala Premiilor Participării Publice din România” [“Awards Gala of Public Participation in Romania”] organised and conferred by the NGO Resource Center for Public Participation (La Terenuri Facebook).

The lessons learnt and the experiences of “La Terenuri” are at the basis of several publications that argue for a more adaptive urban planning, which gives solutions for residents’ needs, aspirations, and desires (Havadi-Nagy, 2017; Odobescu, 2017; Ilovan et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Their experience can serve as inspiration for other similar interventions.

Research so far also showed that solutions to the challenges of urban regeneration that could avoid aggressive and permanent interventions in space could be based on building trust and engaging the community (Klusacek et al., 2018, p. 24), a cooperative and pragmatic attitude towards those holding power (Olt & Lepeltier-Kutasi, 2018, p. 229), and on a bigger number social (i.e., “soft”) projects (Masieriek, 2021, p. 226).

In the same vein, future actions should include promoting public awareness raising activities, exercising participation, and educating all stakeholders and thus shaping their civic attitudes. This type of participatory, community design processes or grassroots initiatives could inspire a new type of post-socialist urbanism. Nevertheless, future research should approach the existing transition processes in post-communist cities. It should also identify the indicators to assess local communities’ involvement in such processes, good practice, as well as the success or failure of urban regeneration projects.

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