


Zagreb for Me

Zagreb, Croatia 

Revitalization of Zagreb's public spaces using public participation as a tool

“Zagreb for Me” is an ambitious and comprehensive project launched in 2015 by the Zagreb Society of Architects in cooperation with the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Zagreb and the City of Zagreb. The goal of the project is to start a revitalization of public spaces through the realization of 17 urban interventions in the whole city area at the same time. This distributed approach will improve the general “image of the city” and raise the quality of urban life in segments of housing, recreation, leisure and social cohesion [1]. Although Zagreb has some significant historical parks and squares in its centre, as well as a few recreational zones, the rest of the city has plenty of neglected open spaces that have no specific function. This project aims to decentralize designed public spaces and draw attention to some forgotten city spots. At the same time, the project, created from a “bottom-up” initiative, establishes a new model of public participation as well as new forms of collaboration.

Country/ City Profile

	Country	City	
	Population (2013)	4.236 million [6]	
	Land area (km ²)	56,590 [7]	
	GDP per capita (2014, current international \$, at purchasing power parity)	21,210 [8]	
	Region	Middle / Southeast Europe	
		Population (2013)	790,000 (federal district) [9]
		Land area (km ²)	641 [10]
		GDP per capita (2011, US\$)	18,200
		Region	Inland

City's physical geography

Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bordered by Medvednica mountain and the Sava river (flooding risk, urban heat) ✓ Relatively low altitude (~125m)
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Oceanic continental climate near the humid continental climate (average temperature: 12.9 C°) with relatively warm summers (average summer temperature: 26°) and relatively cold winters ✓ Precipitation generally moderate throughout the year (average 880 mm/year)

Initiating context

The project, “Zagreb for Me”, arose from the “bottom-up” project called City Acupuncture. Five years ago, the Youth Section of the Zagreb Society of Architects began to organise interdisciplinary workshops with the aim to improve the quality of urban life by making small and precise spatial interventions in some neighbourhoods. In City Acupuncture, project members initially spent time in the chosen neighbourhood conducting spatial analysis along with interviewing inhabitants about their opinions. Afterwards, project members developed concepts and picked precise locations for project implementation. In the end, they held public presentations to discuss all the findings and proposals. As the work of this group very quickly became well accepted and widely recognized, they managed to build an international network together with similar initiatives and received funding from the European Union. Up to now, City Acupuncture has been implemented in five cities (Skopje, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Split) and has resulted with more than 230 proposals and around 20 implemented interventions [2]. The original methodology of City Acupuncture, which uses a participatory approach, has served as an inspiration to “raise the story to a higher level” and to start the revitalization of distributed public spaces in the whole city.

Project description

The project "Zagreb for Me" was launched at the beginning of 2015 by the Zagreb Society of Architects in cooperation with the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Architecture and Zagreb's City Office. For now, the implementation of at least 17 interventions in public space has been announced. The project fosters collaboration between city offices, citizens and institutions, encourages discussion and the exchange of opinions, improves existing processes and creates new jobs. As well, many interesting and innovative design solutions for the upgrade of public spaces are expected to be developed which will change both identities of neighbourhoods and the whole "city image". Interventions will range from small to medium scale and cost between 1.5 to 2.5 million Euros. Financing is meant to come from funds of the European Union and the city budget. The project is expected to last for 18 months and shall be implemented in 2015 and 2016 [1].

Implementation process

After the official project announcement, neighbourhood councils, civil society groups and experts were invited to state their opinions about the city's spatial problems and solutions. "Zagreb for Me" team-members conducted field surveys at several locations asking citizens what they think about Zagreb's public spaces and which locations they would like to have revitalized. A web platform has been established to share information about the project and to allow citizens to suggest locations online. In total 211 locations were identified, of which 51 were mentioned by numerous people. Simultaneously, a scientific team created by the Faculty of Architecture, examined potential locations in terms of the locations importance for the city and its reference in urban planning documents. In the end, both surveys were overlapped and 33 locations were presented and proposed for further selection by citizens. Soon, competitions for urban-architectural designs for 17 locations will start [5]. Citizens will be involved in choosing facilities for each location and the City Office will be responsible for the financing and the realization of the whole project [4]. Still, there is the possibility for some other forms of participation in further phases of the project.

In addition, two pilot subprojects are part of the process [1]. One is the Think Space program, which in 2015 organised a competition to seek out solutions for present-day public spaces on conceptual and theoretical levels. [3] The other subproject, Savica, will be the first competition to be held and realized in order to test the whole "Zagreb for Me" methodology [1].

Projects implementation details [1,5]

Process	The "Zagreb for Me" project was launched based on the successful City Acupuncture initiative. After choosing locations for urban revitalization through citizen participation, design competitions for architecture will be organized and the winning interventions will be realized.
Financing	The construction of new public spaces will be financed from EU funds and the city budget. The cost of each intervention is expected to amount from 1.5 to 2.5 million of Euro.
Leadership	Zagreb for Me has been launched by the Zagreb Society of Architects and the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Zagreb. Zagreb for Me is implemented in collaboration with the City Office responsible for spatial planning and construction.
Involved stakeholders	Operators <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Zagreb Society of Architects (implementing institution)✓ Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb (implementing institution)✓ City Office for Spatial Planning and Construction (implementing institution)✓ City Acupuncture team✓ Think Space team✓ Neighbourhood councils, various civils society groups, experts, institution Users <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ City residents✓ Tourists

Results

The City of Zagreb and its citizens will get contemporary public spaces similar to those we recognize and admire in all European and world metropolises. The image of the city will be changed on different levels. The benefits to the

city and citizens are multiple. Social development is achieved through participation in decision-making, cohesion, innovation and a professional approach. The acceptance of the city as “home” and improving citizens’ relation to public spaces as their personal ones are also an expected output of the project [1]. Additionally, environmental benefits may occur. The quality of open spaces may encourage people to walk or use bicycles. This in turn helps to reduce the number of vehicles within the city. Inserting small green areas in the city fabric may also improve biodiversity and decrease the urban heat island.

The project promotes the city and makes it more attractive for living, studying and work, visiting and doing business. Positive economic impacts are also seen at the level of small and medium enterprises. Altogether, the implementation of this project will bring a positive atmosphere back to the city and will promote to spend time on public spaces, which may result in turn in an increase of social interactions and health benefits (e.g. walking, recreation) [1].

Lessons learned

The Zagreb for Me project is not finished yet, but so far it has received a lot of praise. It definitely shows that citizens are very much interested in participating in city planning. In addition, it is an example of how much a small “bottom-up” initiative, City Acupuncture, can grow and instigate a serious city project.

References

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