INVOLVING PUBLIC SPACE USERS TO DESIGN CHANGES BASED ON THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SQUARE IN GORZÓW WIELKOPOLSKI (POLAND). CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The case study of the reconstruction of the Unknown Soldier Square (in Polish: Plac Nieznanego Żołnierza) is aimed at examining the investment process with a participatory component, with an analysis of the real impact of Gorzów Wielkopolski residents on the entire investment process. The essence of the study is to identify the missing activities improving social communication and emerging design solutions that are in fact responsive to users' needs. The study is based on activities carried out by the design company Pronobis Studio together with the City Hall of Gorzów Wielkopolski. The analyzed process showed the potential of urban residents as co-creators of the reconstruction project, and at the same time emphasized the lack of coherence between the expectations of the participants of the process and the investment possibilities of the municipality. The socialized reconstruction process primarily influenced the increase of architectural and urban awareness, improved the sense of influence on the urban space, and stimulated interest in public space among people who didn't take part in events organized to design changes. The analysis of the participatory process in Gorzów Wielkopolski showed deficiencies associated with the organization of potential animation methods involving urban residents to actively co-design public space, enabling interest in urban investments, as well as deficiencies in stimulating control activities during the investment implementation phase and involving evaluation of accepted solutions after the changed space has been made available to users.

Keywords: Social participation; Public investments; Social investment model; Architecture; Public space; Participatory design.

1. INTRODUCTION

The social investment model in the author's terminology is the public investment process concerning public space and public facilities, in which current and future users are involved in the decision-making process at all its stages. An optimal model would be engaging urban residents to participate in each of implementation stages for which the investments are carried out with public funds. The model was constructed in opposition to the traditional public investment model. [cf. Fig. 1]

In connection with the financial perspective of the European Union for 2014–2020, many Polish cities launched socialized processes with the so-called participation through implementation of public consultations of municipal documents, including architectural designs. At the same time, elements of social inclusion are also present in spatial planning, giving the possibility of public participation in the design of local plans. Formalization of participatory activities resulted in weakening the communication between the participants of the consultations and the organizers, resulting in mutual disappointment and inefficiency of such meetings. In most cases, this was due to a lack of mutual understanding, or even more due to the attempts to force solutions for one's own vested interests.
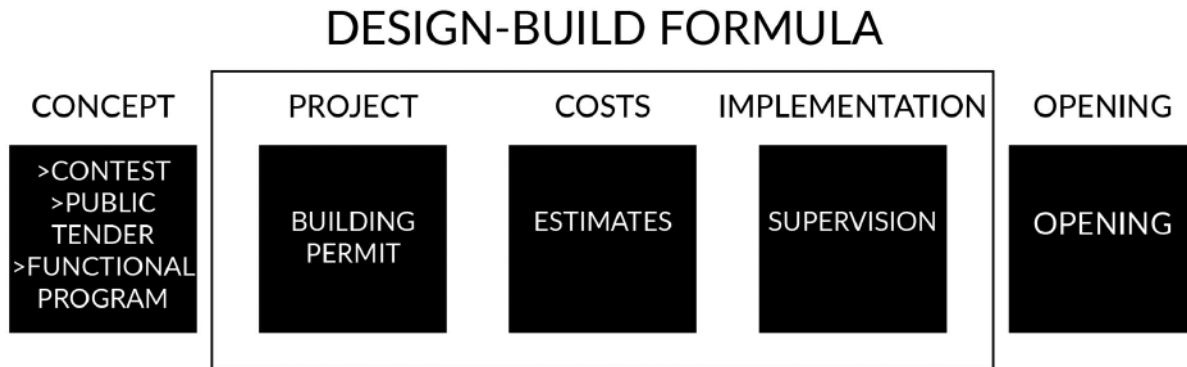
DESIGN-BUILD FORMULA

CONCEPT	PROJECT	COSTS	IMPLEMENTATION	OPENING
>CONTEST >PUBLIC TENDER >FUNCTIONAL PROGRAM	BUILDING PERMIT	ESTIMATES	SUPERVISION	OPENING

Figure 1.
Traditional investment model (scheme by Sylwia Widzisz-Pronobis)

Case studies based on many examples of public participation in spatial planning e.g. during the international conference "The role of social participation in shaping the city' under the patronage of the TUP and the Architecture Department of Warsaw University of Technology, held on 24 June 2017, gave the impression that stakeholders are lacking the competence to allow constructive discussion on topics touching them directly. In addition, municipalities are reluctant to participate in activities such as public events, arguing that their organization and the extension of participatory processes is an additional, often unnecessary factor increasing the cost of the entire investment. The reluctance to consultations deepens the rift between the results of decision taken without social consultations (taken at higher levels of power) and those taking into account social standings (developed with participatory processes) [1].

1.1. The range of activities involving residents in different cities using different tools

For some, participation was a disappointing process, while for others it gave hope for a partnership approach to the problems of cities [2]. Among the advocates of cooperation were both: the employees of municipal offices acting as the city residents who wanted to bring a new quality to their work; and the city authorities wanting to get closer to the residents. The launch of Citizenship Budgets (BO- Budżet obywatelski) has had a major impact on the development of public participation in cities. Looking closer at various models of public participation [3], the study conducted by Martela B. have shown that Polish editions of the civic budget are based mainly on popular voting, rather than on organizing public meetings and discussions open to the public.

However, over time, there are more and more examples of cities where the budget becomes the beginning of a broad debate about the city and the needs of its inhabitants. These cities include Dąbrowa Górnicza and Gorzów Wielkopolski. However, there are also such cities where the local government still does not understand the essence of the civic budget and therefore is using it to achieve its own goals for instance for the election campaign. Lack of strategy, information and civic education, which are crucial for the success of tools such as the Citizenship Budget, for example, in Bytom (169 902 residents in 2015) resulted in the submission of only 19 positively verified projects in the second edition of BO 2015 [4]. In many municipalities, participatory tools served to build mutual trust between residents and officials [5]. The effects were and continue to be different. Meanwhile, in 2016, a tender was organized in Gorzów Wielkopolski for a project to reconstruct the Unknown Soldier Square with a participatory component. The public procurement had additional requirements including an experience in the implementation of activities involving residents in architectural design.

The only offer made was by Pronobis Studio, a company run by Grzegorz Pronobis and by the author of this paper – Sylwia Widzisz-Pronobis. Both for many years worked socially as culture animators, using animation and workshop methods to design urban space in cooperation with general public. At that time, very few architects treated such methods seriously, as valuable tools for building/designing the future of Polish cities.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

2.1. Participatory design

Stangel M. with Szóstek A. [6] carried out a broad analysis of the current research on participatory design described in paper from 2015. The researchers recalled the beginnings of participation referring to great figures such as Jane Jacobs (1970) [7], Alexander Ch. (1977) [8] and Cullen G. (1995) [9], who saw the value of social cooperation in urban planning. Stangel M. and Szóstek A. also recalled the beginnings of participatory design in the 1980s in Scandinavia, where democratization in design was very important. There the future users, with variety of tools and techniques, could influence the final shape and design solutions. The studies are important in the context of project activities in Gorzów Wielkopolski, especially regarding research through design and the role of prototyping in the participatory process. Earlier in 2014, Włodarczyk A. [10] described the design process with the inhabitants of the Opole region regarding public spaces in rural areas. Włodarczyk referred to the German and Swiss experiences of participatory design in 2013. She described the process of participation as a method of building a positive reception of rural areas and raising the quality of life by creating public spaces. All that integrated local communities and increased the sense of identity with the place.

2.2. Research methods

In the context of sociological sciences, qualitative research used in the participatory process was based on new trends in Grounded theory, analyzed by Gorzko M. [11] comparing the basic version presented by Glaser B. and Strauss A. in 1967 [12] with the trends presented by Charmaz K. in 2000–2009 [13, 14, 15, 16], Clarke A. E. in 2005 [17] and Corbin J. in 2008, 2009 [18, 19]. The evolution of the theory stimulates every reflection on the subject of the research and the goal we want to achieve by cooperating with the participants of the study. The applied research methods are based on Lewin's output, according to which the respondents become active participants in the change process. Application of Participatory Action Research methods, resulting from the Action Research theory, brings greater dynamics to the research, and also increases the sense of influence on planned changes.

In the context of urban space and architecture, public discussion requires the use of various research methods and techniques involving future users or, more broadly, the urban community. In 2008, Bugno-Janik A. [20] carried out a study aimed at creating a functional program for the planned extension of the building of the Faculty of Architecture of the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice, including the users of the object in the study. Throughout the study, students became both researchers and respondents who relied on their experience of using the facility. In 2009, the team Niezabitowska E. D. [21] pointed out that at that time "cooperation of researchers focused solely on urban planning issues on a large scale and sociological research used in making planning decisions". With this in the framework of the PolSenior project, the researchers undertook a qualitative research used for design purposes, which allowed drawing conclusions for the social policy regarding senior housing. Researchers used various tools such as surveys, focus meetings and in-depth interviews with selected individuals. Overal, the interdisciplinary collaboration between sociologists and architects was of great value.

Bugno-Janik A. (2015) [22] within a few years of cooperation with Janik M. and together with the students of the Faculty of Architecture at the Silesian University of Technology, conducted research on proprietary research tools. She based her research techniques and tools on the theory of Action Research and concluded that in addition to obtaining information from residents, they would also allow them to creatively participate in the identification of problems and to dialogue with the researcher in the context. Additionally, Nawrocki T. (2017) [23] analyzed the possibilities of using mental maps for sociological research of the city. He presented the Kevin Lynch's method and its modification in the research of psychologists, social geographers and urban planners. Mental maps are a very useful tool, thanks to which we get data that may be otherwise easily overlooked. However, the map works well for open and creative participants and requires some level of experience from the researchers in order to properly analyze the collected material. The behavioral models of design processes described by Bańka A. in 2016 [24], including the Alexander's model, were based on the assumption that the way to solve the problem is as important as its solution, was an important element in the selection of research methods for this paper.

2.3. Participatory democracy

The term participatory democracy (2007) [25], in which citizens decide about the direction of activities, also appears in the discourse on social participation.

Łabędź Ł. [26] writes about it (2015), analyzing civic participation at the local level. He describes social consultations as an element of participatory democracy, pointing to problems resulting from simplified procedures without consultation meetings. Local governments usually carry out social consultations of documents, apart from direct actions, e.g. public discussions.

3. INFORMATION ABOUT THE SPACE OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER SQUARE

The Unknown Soldier Square is located in the center of Gorzów Wielkopolski, a provincial city in the Lubuskie voivodeship. The history of the square dates back to German times when Gorzów Wielkopolski was called Landsberg. During those times the square was enriched with an avenue of trees, which survived to this day despite the very intense urbanization of the 70's. Over the renovation, the square served as a public space for local residents, while the adjacent promenade of Chrobrego Street was an example of the degradation of public space for many years, caused by the proximity of several shopping centers. For the inhabitants of GW, the square was remembered from the times of splendor and treated with a great fondness. The central part in GW is the Old Market Square at Sikorskiego Street next to the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The urban layout of the city is conducive to the development of public spaces on the north-south axis, additionally conditioned by the growing need to revitalize the urban space, emphasizes the need to make it available for new centralized functions for the city's residents. According to the expectations of the city authorities, ongoing changes of the Square should preserve its historical and social values, and at the same time to be open to urban events for the residents of Gorzów Wielkopolski. The change in the aesthetics and function of the square is the beginning of changes in the public space in Gorzów Wielkopolski [27, 28].

4. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH

4.1. The planned and implemented participatory action plan

The renovation of the Unknown Soldier Square was meticulously planned by the clerks, taking into account the specification of the budget and time of

Figure 2.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2016, Research walks with users. (photo by Daniel Adamski)

Figure 3.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2016, design workshops (photo by Grzegorz Pronobis)

Figure 4.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2016, consultation at an outdoor point (photo by Grzegorz Pronobis)

completion. This resulted from the plan to perform the renovation with the use of EU funds. Submitting an application for co-financing is connected with spe-

Figure 5.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2016, rapid prototyping on Chrobrego Street (photo by Sylwia Widzisz-Pronobis)

cific rules, hence a rigid implementation plan is necessary. According to the directive, a project plan had to be subjected to traditional social consultations, so that residents could choose the version they liked best. However, on the initiative of architects, the formula of cooperation with residents has been modified. Walks [cf. Fig. 2], meetings, workshops [cf. Fig. 3] and prototyping [cf. Fig. 5] were carried out. Although, all this in just two weeks time due to the short delivery time. Despite the too short timeframe for collecting the reliable information, about 40 people took part in the meetings. The number was small to identify real needs, but among the participants there officials, councilors, teachers and representatives of non-governmental organizations that allowed for an analysis of various behaviors of users of urban space. Disputed or unclear issues were also clarified during outdoor meetings with random passers-by [cf. Fig. 4] to increase the chance of finding the right needs. At the end of the consultative part, cultural activities were planned. However, due to the lack of time for proper preparation, sponta-

neous and low-budget solutions were adopted. One of those was making use of chairs and tables from the nearby restaurant, to show the potential of the space that was about to change. In a short time the tables were filled with guests of the restaurant, who thought that the tables are a place where they can eat lunch [cf. Fig. 5]. This also showed the misguided thinking of everyone: officials, residents and restaurant owners, who during the discussion were piling up problems and talking about the need for large investments. Participants of the action noticed how little it takes for the space to start living without large financial expenditures. After the consultations, the process of designing and obtaining agreements took place. The time of creating project documentation, selection of the contractor and the implementation was the period when the participants were particularly impatient because they lacked information on the progress of work.

5. METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND RESEARCH TOOLS

The methods selected for the implementation of the process involving residents of Gorzów Wielkopolski to design the space of the Unknown Soldier Square commonly called the Square (term of geometric shape) were based primarily on qualitative methods that seemed to be adequate to obtain relevant information. The particularly important data concerned the local identity and the manner of use of the current public space. Methods selected for research needs also allowed wide animation of public discussion on urban space. They provoked the discussers to think about their surroundings, which often allowed them to return to discussions at the further stages of the investment process with new thoughts on the square and its future.

Table 1.
List of applied methods, tools and research techniques in the participatory process in Gorzów Wielkopolski

Qualitative methods	Research tools	Research techniques
Field research, Storytelling Observation of participants Workshop methods Analysis of semantic fields	Research walks with users [cf. Fig. 2], Designer research walks, Interviews, Consultation point [cf. Fig. 4], Public discussion, Rapid prototyping [cf. Fig. 5], Design workshops [cf. Fig. 3], Brainstorm, Analysis of texts in the local press and on the Internet	Mock-up of the designated area [cf. Fig. 6], Problem questions, Suspended question

Figure 6.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2016, Mock-up of the designated area (photo by Sylwia Widzisz-Pronobis)

The other research methods, going beyond the standard research package [29] were storytelling, semi-semantic analysis and animation tools (suspended question). Interviews with residents have highlighted poor local identity, and thus the problem with referring to the basic historical values of the local community. The weakness of local community was also shown by press articles and internet discussions in which the historical value of the square's space was emphasized, but there was no reference to the values of the local community itself. The semantic analysis showed how much the inhabitants are looking for their identity and how much they want to base it on known historical facts, often bleaching them. That was very important for the design decisions. It was necessary to develop solutions that would meet expectations and respond to the needs of public space users, but at the same time create a new quality and a new way of thinking about the city in a very subtle way.

6. THE COURSE OF RESEARCH

6.1. Involving residents to cooperate in designing

According to the directive, the architects were obliged to organize the entire information campaign connected, among others, with the recruitment of participants for workshop meetings. When planning informational activities, the architects had to use the knowledge of officials about social attitudes and groups potentially interested in cooperation. It was very important due to the fact that the designers were not from Gorzów Wielkopolski. During the meetings, it turned out that the role of the outsider was crucial for architects, because it was possible to discuss difficult and some-

times uncomfortable topics for local activists and designers. However, the information campaign itself required time that was missing, hence the participants of the consultation events were mainly representatives of municipal institutions and people interested in municipal investments [30]. A small number of participants imposed the need to involve random passers-by. To a large extent, the data obtained from the participants of the meetings coincided with the data obtained from the random individuals, and that confirmed the credibility of the workshop group. The press articles related to the renovation of the Square sprung a high social activity around the subject – involving the comments and discussions going on different internet platforms such as: social networks and forums. However, the knowledge obtained from the internet was varied. It could be divided into substantive issues and emotional issues. In terms of substantive issues, historical materials appeared: historical maps of Gorzów Wielkopolski, photographs from the times when the Unknown Soldier Square was created, press articles from the 70's. Acquiring this type of data was the basis for preparing scenarios for workshop meetings and defining tactics for interviews with residents. Obtained information has shown that the inhabitants of Gorzów Wielkopolski are having difficulties in determining the building elements of the city's identity.

When residents were asked what could be the symbol of Gorzów Wielkopolski, most of them were not able to deliver explicit answer. This was possibly an issue related to the fact that large majority of the local community has borderland origin. For designers it was a signal that "Square" has the potential to become a determinant of the future identity of the city. Emotional issues appearing on the Internet were mostly skepticism related to the starting a municipal investment, as well as undermining the competence of residents in organizing social consultations. With time, it turned out that the participants had a direct impact on the decisions made in the project, the criticism of the participatory process weakened, and the expectation that participative processes increased. Civic activities increased. It is important that those public consultations regarding repair investments were the first such activity in Gorzów Wielkopolski. With subsequent investments the activity of residents is gradually increasing, and now the substantive contribution of residents is becoming more and more valuable (next activities in Gorzów Wielkopolski: Parks, Bulwar Kłodawki, Mistowizja).

7. SUMMARY AND RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH WORKS

7.1. The meaning of mediation in participation in disputable situations

The Gorzów Wielkopolski investment concerning the Unknown Soldier Square was the first one, where the officials responsible for the investment welcomed the input and feedback from the residents and listened to their expectations. The city authorities allowed for a flexible approach to social animation and testing of various forms of involvement of city users. The whole process served as a pilot study for all participants in the process: officials, architects and the residents. Everyone learned to talk to each other and look for compromises. However, the experiment outgrew the organizers when topics that required difficult decisions appeared. One of such issues was the location of the monument of the Polish Army, which was situated on the Square and according to the preliminary guidelines was to be transferred to another Gorzów Wielkopolski square.

During the design workshops, the participants decided that due to the transfer of the monument the square would obtain additional space for municipal events. The situation was complicated by the fact that the probe on the monument organized on the street, showed that the majority did not know the history of the square, let alone the history of the monument. Therefore, the monument could not be distinctive element emphasized at in its current location. A conflict arose which required a strong response from the city authorities. However, nobody wanted to take on the burden of responsibility, so they were dumped on a designer who had to reconcile different sides of the conflict looking for a different location in the same square. It was a kind of space game [31, 32] between the participants of the meetings and people fighting for the traces of the alleged local identity. As a result, the monument remained at its old localization and that decision resulted in reduction of the amount of recreational greenery within the square. Analyzing this situation, it seems that it would be necessary to organize several meetings, during which the project would be presented as the product of the public consultation phase.

7.2. The meaning of communication at the stage of project implementation

The residents became acquainted with the design of the reconstruction of the square via the boards with visualizations of the square. Those boards were displayed at the construction site [cf. Fig. 7]. This form of communication with the inhabitants was planned and required by directive [cf. Fig. 8] so that pedestrians could observe the changing space and compare changes with visualizations. The communication method itself seems to be efficient. However, the choice of this form does not take into account possible changes in the design that take place during construction, and result from unforeseen situations at the design stage. During the reconstruction of the square, as on each construction site, various surprises appeared including finding underground corridors built during the Second World War. The find stopped the construction works, but also caused considerable confusion due to changes that had to be made in the project. Additional designer was involved in the project to secure entrances to the corridors, which resulted in the introduction of new aesthetic forms that were not adjusted to the planned final effect. This discrepancy was noticed by the observer and caused a series of questions and doubts related to the final effect of the investment. Due to the considerable interest, the officials had to respond to residents' questions. At this stage, the designers were required to answer any doubts arising, in addition to the supervision of ongoing works. Doubts aroused mainly in the context of greenery, in particular of "historic trees". Residents feared the loss of trees, which they treated as a historical and spatial value. In this situation, the key was to refer to project meetings with residents and the decisions made on them, including the removal of some trees (but only hazardous ones).

Figure 7.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2017, project chart with visualizations on the construction site (photo by Grzegorz Pronobis)

Figure 8.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2017, project chart with visualizations (photo by Grzegorz Pronobis)

Figure 9.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2017, Christmas Eve organized by municipality on a fragment of the square. (photo by Łukasz Kulczyński)

Figure 10.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2018, the official opening of the Unknown Soldier Square for the residents. (photo by Bartłomiej Nowosielski)

7.3. Animation of the changed public space

Consultation meetings were held in a very positive and stimulating atmosphere appreciated by the participants and observers. Expectations for the developed changes were increasing in proportion to the duration of construction works. The first effects of restoration works were causing mixed feelings in the inhabitants. There were voices that there are too many benches, it is too build-up, the playground is inadequate to the needs, there is no place for picnics etc. At this point, the initiative of the social consultancy office was important, as officials began to animate the space of the Square. Events familiarizing the new space were organized. The first one was on Christmas Eve prepared on a fragment of the square [cf. Fig. 9]. Another event was the official opening of the Square for the residents, during which the action "Gorzów #stądjestem" was initiated [33] [cf. Fig. 10]. Particularly, the second action allowed residents to see how the new space will be functioning. According to the plans the redesigned space of the Square should be used for urban events and for recreation by local residents. Despite the criticism of the new version of the Square, the residents are now enjoying the new space and are looking forward to the future events held in the location. The next planned event will activate various user groups, including children and the elderly, to make use of the facilitations and attractions localized within the Square, e.g. chess tables.

7.4. The participation of local media and their role

The participation of local media broadcasting, numerous activities with residents, was the key for the entire social process. In the first stage of the investment, thanks to the published articles about consultations we noticed a substantial increase of attendance at meetings. Also, the involvement of residents on online portals translated into much greater opportunities to obtain the data on the technical, social and historical potential of the public space in Gorzów Wielkopolski. Later, especially at the implementation stage, the role of the media was extended as they started to inspire the residents to take interest and to be more initiative on the investment. Residents familiarized themselves with the ongoing construction works and shared their thoughts on the subject. At that point, the input from resident was often crucial for the success of the project. At the end of the investment, the media undertook the evalua-

Figure 11.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2018, photo after renovation (photo by Paweł Kosecki)

Figure 12.
Gorzów Wielkopolski 2018, photo after renovation by Gorzów Przystań (photo by Bartłomiej Nowosielski)

tion of initial investment evaluation and supported the designers in the post-project analysis [34, 35].

7.5. Profit of the social investment model

The social investment model is an original model for public investments in which residents have an impact on the investment at every stage of its implementation. The preliminary part is crucial for the success of the social process, for the rules of cooperation are set and the financial prospects of the municipality are explained. The planning stage allows many parties to define their expectations but also to build a thematic background necessary to perform analyses and to space research in terms of historical, technical and social items. In Gorzów Wielkopolski, thanks to the participatory process it was possible to get in touch with residents who had vital information or material concerning the Square. This had a key impact on design solutions, on the theme of the monument, ani-

mation opportunities in the space of the square, etc. Additionally, it is very important to maintain contact with residents, especially with those who participated in the initial phase of the process and are interested in further development of the investment. The benefits from the implementation of the social model coincides with the benefits of implementing participatory processes [31]. A particularly significant advantage, in addition to research, education and communication issues, is opportunity to counteract conflicts and to build social trust. However, the final results are depended on honesty and integrity of social process.

8. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion of the investment case study in Gorzów Wielkopolski was the lack of coherence between the expectations and the investment possibilities of the commune. Participatory activities have opened residents to cooperation with each other and the municipality. They also facilitated mutual listening to their needs, and additionally raised the residents about the technical and aesthetic possibilities of their surroundings. In the consultation process, participants analyzed various existing municipal investments, also examples of solutions from around the world, and as a result broadened their horizons. Conscious users could observe the construction and analyze the resulting changes by comparing them to the solutions developed together. The participants of the consultations put a lot of trust in the designers, hoping that they would take care of the proper implementation of the investment. Unfortunately, the role of the architect on the construction site was limited to acceptance or replacement solutions, and the contractor became the main executor of design changes. Most of the changes resulted from the restricted finances and the requirement of cheaper solutions. This led to the implementation of design that often was aesthetically inconsistent. Therefore, the social process should be used to make the residents aware of how the implementation stage looks like and to inform them about its role. However, it is more important that Polish municipalities begin to take responsibility for the quality of design and technical solutions.

A coherent investment process taking into account the social context should include a whole range of information, planning, social communication, social animation and evaluation activities. The social investment model is shown in the diagram [cf. Fig. 13]. The
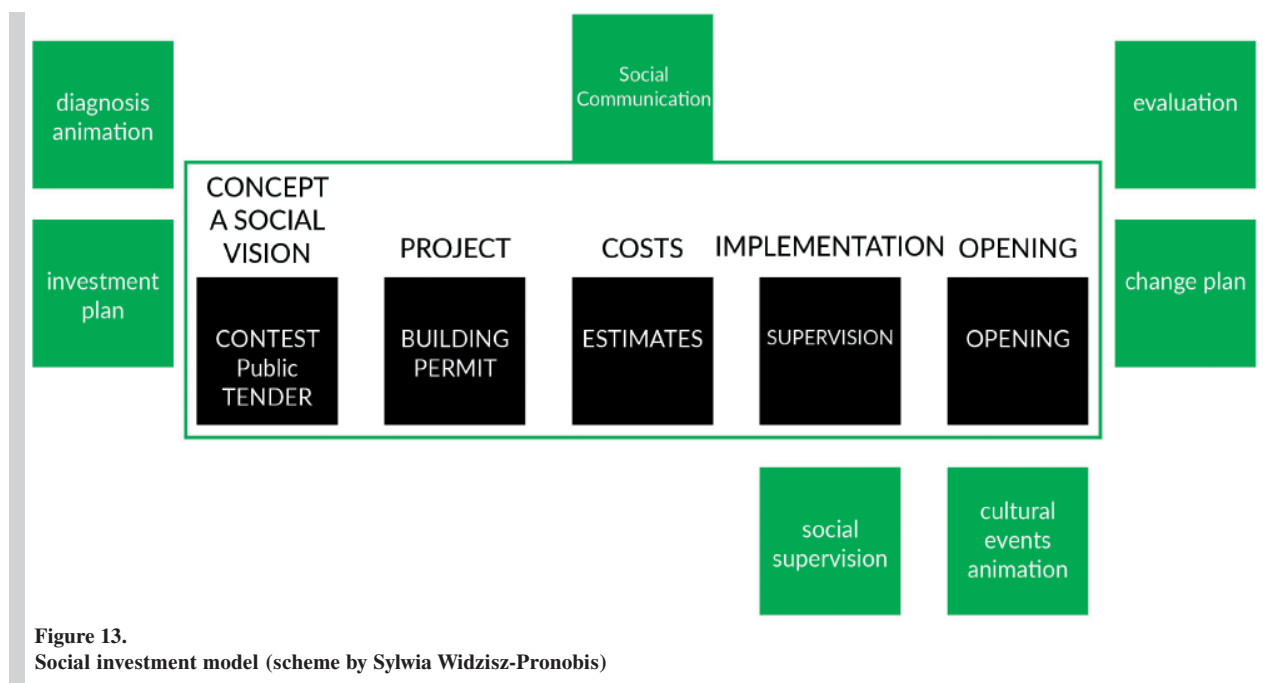
Figure 13.
Social investment model (scheme by Sylwia Widzisz-Pronobis)

basis of the model are the basic elements of the investment. Elements of the participatory process socialize the base.

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