

CHALLENGES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE (POST-SOCIALIST) TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY: EXPERIENCES FROM WATERFRONT URBAN AREAS MEZAPARK IN RIGA AND KALARAND IN TALLINN

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Abstract. Current case studies examine the shortcomings of civic engagement strategies during the design process and ratification of detailed plans for urban areas of strategic importance – Mezapark in Riga and Kalarand in Tallinn. Detailed plans caused public outcries and led to long-lasting and distressful negotiations between local communities, developers, designers and municipalities over the future development and use of these areas. The debates about detailed plans raised an increasing public interest in planning related issues and growing demands for greater civic engagement in decisions shaping the city. At the same time, the debates demonstrated the inability of local planning frameworks to meet public expectations. There appears a salient need for changing the planning culture. This paper studies the shortcomings of civic engagement strategies and the desirable changes through a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved and the analysis of planning related documentation.

Keywords: civic engagement, conflict, Kalarand, Mezapark, planning, public space.

Introduction to the problem and theoretical considerations

It was only at the end of the 1990s when Latvian and Estonian legislations introduced the principle of democratic planning practice by the requirement for public display and involvement of citizens into discussions of urban plans. The actual activities, however, emerged towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s when two plans of public waterfront redevelopment were launched, respectively for Mezapark in Riga (2010–2013) and Kalarand in Tallinn (2003–2016). Both attracted public attention and were followed by protests from the part of the residents of adjacent neighborhoods. The debates about detailed plans demonstrated an increasing public interest in planning related issues, growing awareness of civil rights and a wish to be engaged in decisions shaping the city. The residents' voice highlighted deficiencies in the newly formed local planning frameworks and local engagement strategies, which left but limited space for consensus building. There appeared a salient need for a change in the planning tradition which, undoubtedly, is a long-term process assuming advancement of skills of all parties involved.

The discussion about the importance of civic involvement in planning can be traced back to the 1960s in clas-

sical essays of Davidoff (1965), Arnstein (1969) and Friedmann (1973). Davidoff and Friedmann advocated the need for co-planning with citizens, as the citizens provide experiential knowledge of places under planning and are the end users of places (re)created along the plans implemented. Arnstein, in turn, classified citizen engagement into levels by the degree of citizen influence on decision-making. Since the 1960s, participatory planning thought has been extensively discussed and further advanced (Forester, 1987; Healey, 1996; Innes, 1998; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Hoch, 2007; Sager, 2012). The concept of “communicative turn” introduced to planning discourse (Healey, 1996) has gained support among civic leaders and firmly established itself in the planning practice (Faehnle & Tyrvaïnen, 2013; Shipley & Utz, 2012). As asserted, civic engagement legitimates planning decisions and promotes public support of plans, thus, facilitating plan ratification and implementation (Sager, 2012; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). According to Irvin and Stansbury (2004, p. 56), the question of whether or not to involve the public is outdated and replaced by a new question about the best strategy for this purpose.

Civic engagement in the planning process is, however, a subject for continuous debates. The advocates claim that participation leads to balanced (and hence better) policy

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solutions, encourages mutual learning, trust and consensus building, promotes civic empowerment (cf Hoch, 2007; Faehnle & Tyrvaïnen, 2013; Innes, 1998; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). The adversaries' critique is directed towards the practices of participation management, which with limited representation of certain group interests and inefficient resource expenditure lead to conflicts and frustration (cf Connely, 2006; Doorne, 1998; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Both parties acknowledge that participation is to be conceptualized context-wise and sensitively regarding to implementation (Connely, 2006). A relevant point for the current research is made by Hoyle (2000) who argues that an engagement strategy which is efficient in the society with established communities and long tradition of public involvement in municipal policy-making might be inadequate for the society with emerging communities and no experience of co-planning. The same concerns an observation that a well-intentioned participation strategy might fail if implemented poorly or partially (McGovern, 2013).

The experiences from Kalarand and Mezapark demonstrate that it is important to be specific in the analysis concerning the societal and urban contexts at discussions of the implementation strategies applied in civic engagement practice. The initiatives of waterfront redevelopment that have produced the highest resonance in the planning fields of both cities need to be understood within the recent 28-year history of Latvian and Estonian sovereignty. The fundamentally transformed political, economic and social circumstances, and especially the property reform having left the city but with insignificant share of land ownership (e.g. in Riga and Tallinn), continuously complicates the planning activities by putting the cities into marginal position between controversial stakeholder interests (Paadam & Ojamäe, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a heightened social demand for a cultural change in the field and, in particular, for participatory planning practices (*ibid.*).

This paper, drawing on the evidence from the case studies, intends to show how the advantages of participation acknowledged by increasingly institutionalizing communities can be counteracted by cities' poor participation strategies at engaging citizens into negotiations on urban redevelopment plans. Mere top-down approach of informing the public on planning intentions hardly qualifies as participatory practice or means to forestall conflict as to show the extended fierce debates between communities, developers and planners in Kalarand and Mezapark. Having eventually reached a compromise rather than full consensus, the experience of the parties demonstrates the very nature of a learning process under unfamiliar circumstances of communicating and negotiating different interests.

The paper aims to contribute into the discussion of evolving participatory practices by elucidating the nature of drawbacks in engagement strategies, in particular, upon the planning cultures in transition. It attempts at sketching

the possible solutions to reoccurring complicated situations encountered at negotiations between different interested parties during the process of design and ratification of the detailed plans. The paper first introduces the problem areas of Mezapark and Kalarand, respectively in Riga and Tallinn, followed by an overview of the current planning legislation in Latvia and Estonia within the frame of conflict situations occurring in relation to participatory practices. The methodological considerations underlying the case study research are presented prior the findings and final comments.

1. Cases Kalarand and Mezapark

1.1. Mezapark and Kalarand – the urban areas in focus

Mezapark (Forest park, Figure 1, left) is a ~420 ha culture and recreational park located ~8 km by the Lake Kisezers. The park area was included in the city area in 1904. Forest areas, which constitute 80 percent of the park area, were shaped between 1920 and 1940, cultural and sports infrastructure was built in 1950–1965 and 2008–2011 (Grupa93, 2013; Latvian Riga Forests, 2017). Currently, Mezapark houses the zoo, Song and Dance Festival open air theatre, BMX track, obstacle park for children and adults, playgrounds for children, a beach, a small boat harbor, and multiple cafes.

The park is a municipal property area managed by the governmental institution Rigas Mezi (Riga Forests). In 2010, Rigas Mezi commissioned the plan of the area to the planning office Grupa93. Due to legislation changes, the plan had two public displays, in 2012 and 2013. It was approved in 2013 with minor modifications. Initially, key elements of the plan were: (1) division into four functional areas – for passive recreation, active recreation, waterfront activities and cultural activities; (2) traffic organization – separation of motor transport, pedestrians, cyclists, skaters and skiers, allocation of parking lots; (3) allocation of public utilities, including an amusement park; (4) a solid public waterfront promenade (Grupa93, 2013). In the debate about the plan, there were three points the citizens protested against: (1) the construction of an amusement park; (2) forest transformation for allocation of public amenities; (3) the construction of a solid public waterfront suitable for motor vehicle traffic (*ibid.*).

Kalarand (Figure 1, right) is a ~7 ha brownfield area located between the Northern edge of the Old Town and the sea. In the Soviet time, the area was a shipyard for the Union of Fishermen, inaccessible to the public (Pro Kapital, 2016), as was the rest of the central waterfront area with mostly military industries, port and severely controlled passenger harbor. After 1991, when the area was liberated from its previous functions and privatized with partly demolished or deteriorated industrial buildings, the waterfront of Kalarand became physically accessible to the public. Currently, the area houses a small yacht harbor, a fish market and an informal pop-up beach.



Figure 1. Top left: location of Mezapark in Riga; right: location of Kalarand in Tallinn (source: authors). Middle left: map of Mezapark; right: map of Kalarand (source: Open Street Map, 2017). Bottom left: Mezapark waterfront; right: Kalarand waterfront (source: authors)

The area is a private property and belongs to the Developer¹, which bought the land in 2001, demolished the fence around the area and the industrial buildings. In 2003, the Developer commissioned the plan of the area to an architecture office Nord Projekt. Due to public protests, the plan had four public displays, in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2015. It was approved in 2015 with major modifications. Initially, key elements of the plan were: (1) a residential quarter with an underground parking accessible from the seaside; (2) an extended yacht harbor; (3) a public waterfront promenade as part of the city's vision. In the discussion about the plan there were three main conflict points: (1) the design of the apartment blocks; (2) the access to the seaside; (3) the elimination of the pop-up sandy beach with a swimming place initiated by the local residents².

Plan for Mezapark and plan for Kalarand have a number of similarities and differences. Both plans redesign a strategic space in the city. The size, history and function of the space are different. Both plans deal with waterfront design and accessibility issues. In case of Mezapark, the de facto private space was designated for public use, and in case of Kalarand, the de facto public space was threatened to become inaccessible. Both were subjected to a substantial public critique, followed by subsequent changes in plans. In Mezapark, these changes were minor compared to substantial changes in Kalarand. The participatory process, however, was similar and caused dissatisfaction among all stakeholders (Key characteristics of the cases Mezapark and Kalarand are summarized in Appendix 1).

1.2. Planning legislation

Following international practices, planning legislation in Latvia and Estonia requires public consultation prior to adopting binding urban plans. Until 1991, Latvia and Estonia were parts of the Soviet Union; therefore, the built environment was planned and developed by governmental institutions in the framework of planned economy and rational planning (Paadam, 2009). Since 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Latvia and Estonia transferred to a democratic governance model paving the way to market economy and, hence, market driven urban development. The transition was impetuous, thus, planning legislation was initially adopted from other European countries and later modified to fit local conditions. Currently, urban development is regulated by relatively fresh documents: "Spatial development planning law" (Latvian Parliament, 2011) and regulation No 628 "Regulations about municipal spatial development planning documents" (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers, 2014) in Latvia and "Planning Act" (Estonian Parliament, 2015) in Estonia.

In their essence, planning legislations of Latvia and Estonia are similar. Municipality manages its own spatial

development by means of comprehensive (territorial) and detailed (local)³ plans. Comprehensive plan applies to the whole area of municipality, whereas detailed plan is concerned with a particular land plot or a group of land plots, and accordingly, in greater detail. Both plan types are binding⁴ and consist of graphic (maps) and textual (regulations) parts. The requirement of public display with subsequent public discussion of a plan before sending it for approval to a municipal council is enacted. Public display is a time span of one month when any citizen can familiarize oneself with a plan and submit an opinion or a proposal about the plan. Public discussion is a meeting where citizen opinions and proposals are presented, evaluated, accepted or rejected. If an opinion or proposal is accepted, the plan is modified accordingly. If an opinion or a proposal is rejected, the legislation requires a rationale. In both countries, the final decision on acceptance or rejection is taken by the City Council⁵.

As planning legislation is valid for all municipalities, from small settlements (~1 thousand residents per ~185 km², Baltinavas novads, Latvia (Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 2016); ~60 residents per 12 km², Ruhnu Vald, Estonia (Estonian Ruhnu Municipality, 2017)) to big cities (~700 thousand residents per ~304 km², Riga, Latvia (Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 2016); ~445 thousand residents per ~159 km², Tallinn, Estonia (Estonian City of Tallinn, 2017)), it sets minimum requirements for public involvement. Judging upon the comments received from Riga and Tallinn municipality officers, the legislation allows flexible strategies in response to the diverse local circumstances (Tallinn) and encourages proactive strategies towards public involvement given that there is the necessary institutional willingness (Riga).

The aim of the law is not to be very precise just because there are so many different possibilities and so many different municipalities with their own resources (representative of Planning Department, Tallinn)

I think the municipalities should apply the practice [of additional civic engagement activities, which

¹ The name of the real estate company, which owns and develops the site, is anonymized.

² The information is derived from the interviews with planners, who represent Tallinn Urban Planning Department.

³ In Latvia and Estonia, the planning documents of the same type are named differently, and appear under different names also in scientific publications. A city master plan in Latvia is named "territorial plan" and in Estonia "comprehensive plan", and a plan for a plot of land or a group of plots of land in Latvia is named "local plan" and respectively "detailed plan" in Estonia.

⁴ In Estonia comprehensive plans are binding for a local authority and not binding for land owners. Detailed plans, which must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan, are binding for both a local authority and land owners.

⁵ In Estonia detailed plans that are in accordance with a comprehensive plan are ratified by City Administration, which consists of a Mayor and Deputy Mayors (non-elected body). Detailed plans that introduce changes into a comprehensive plan are ratified by a City Council (elected body).

are complementing those, required by law], but at their own initiative (representative of Planning Department, Riga)

Apparently, the legislation, while stipulating civic engagement to be part of the planning process, leaves space for interpretations. Therefore, the question of how institutional actors such as municipalities apply these regulations in practice remains to be answered in each space-time specific context, either as unavoidable formal procedures or meaningful negotiations between all the stakeholders. How municipalities act towards citizens' initiatives or protests or, specifically, neighborhood associations, will be discussed on the experiences of Kalarand and Mezapark in this paper. (The similarities and differences between Latvian and Estonian planning frameworks, as well as between the cities of Riga and Tallinn, are summarized in Appendix 2).

2. Methodological considerations

Inspired by indications of complicated participatory processes in Mezapark and Kalarand, our aim was to find out how the planning systems in Latvia and Estonia could be modified to meet the growing demand for community engagement in planning. For an advanced in-depth inquiry of the public engagement practice in particular, the cases were revisited upon the following research questions: (1) How and under which circumstances did the stakeholders become dissatisfied with the civic engagement process in cases of Mezapark and Kalarand? (2) In what ways do the stakeholders prefer the civic engagement process to be changed in future? The broader aim of the research was to develop a holistic understanding of the issues hampering civic engagement in transforming societies with, in particular, the planning systems continuously in transition.

2.1. Research strategy

The explored problem-driven experiences of public engagement practices from Mezapark and Kalarand are set in real-life contexts of two cities at similar circumstances of societal transformation, yet sensitized towards their specific nature. Therefore, an approach of a multiple case study with embedded units was adopted to enable a comparative analysis of multiple sources of evidence attained by exertion of various methods and additional inquiries arising during the analysis process (Yin, 1994, 2018). It is asserted along with Creswell (2013, p. 101, 102) that the study limited to fewer cases, two in the current research, within defined scope and boundaries of time ensures deeper insight into the phenomenon under observation. To capture the depth of different views on the experience in question, and thus of multiple realities, the social constructivist perspective rooted in interpretivism (King & Horrocks, 2011) was adopted to conduct a qualitative study. As an attempt to construct a holistic understanding of civic engagement, this in-depth research builds on argumentations drawn on interpretations of generated data

(Mason, 2007; Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2013) of both the subjective and structural nature.

2.2. Selection of cases and data generation

The principal challenges in the civic engagement process studies are the availability and accessibility of information (cf Creswell, 2007, 2013) as well as the assumed informative quality of data (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). As such, the cases of Mezapark and Kalarand were purposefully selected with some awareness of the problem issues encountered in the practice of applying participatory approach in urban planning, the regulations of which had been only recently introduced in the legislations of Latvia and Estonia. The selected cases are explicit representations of the complexity of participatory planning, which with a number of stakeholders pursuing their interests in the areas under redevelopment, were considered a promising source for new knowledge production on ample and multifaceted information.

Accruing from the rationale behind this qualitative case study, a number of methods and techniques were applied for data generation. To set the stage, literature research on relevant publications was first conducted. The document analysis of two categories included planning laws and regulations for Latvia and Estonia, and detailed plans for Mezapark and Kalarand, mostly accessible online. Some plan related documents for Kalarand were sourced from the designer and developer. The original cover text for Mezapark plan with building regulations for the planned area, citizen proposals with designer's comments was available. The cover text for the Kalarand plan was accessed from the task of the architectural competition for a housing project in the area, with a brief historical background of the area, future vision and architectural assignment developed in accordance with the detailed plan. Additionally, the report describing the sequence of events during the planning process for Kalarand was examined. The information on the cases was available to a different degree, with Mezapark having documented the process and outcomes in greater detail.

The experiential accounts on the documented planning process and perceptions of the actual process, as well as preferences for prospective participatory planning were generated on semi-structured interviews with three distinct stakeholder groups: representatives of neighborhood associations, property development companies and cities' planning departments. Eighteen interviews, nine on both cases, were conducted in March–June 2016, September–November 2016 and additionally in December 2018, following the qualitative logic of reflexivity as concerns being open to the emerging new questions/dimensions during the analysis conducted in parallel with interviewing, and the respective adjustment of the research questions (cf Mason, 2007; King & Horrocks, 2011).

2.3. Data processing

Resulting from a thematic analysis of different integrated data sources (Bazeley, 2013; King & Horrocks, 2011)

Table 1. Matrix of data sources and emerging themes (source: authors)

Theme	Source	Interviews	Documents	Scientific publications
Quality of contributions into the planning process		Opinions about residents' capacity to contribute into the planning process	Documented residents' opinions and proposals with designers' responses	Reflections on residents' capacity to contribute into the planning process
Perceptions of the other		Attitudes towards different stakeholders	–	Interpretations of attitudes towards different stakeholders
Mode of engagement (When? How?)		Opinions about current engagement procedures	Legal requirements for engagement	Analysis of real-life and ideal engagement procedures
Representativeness		Evidence on participants and the degree of their engagement	Number and affiliation of residents engaged	Evidence on the number and profile of participants
Roles of planning departments (referred to as "local government")		Opinions about the attitude and actions of the planning department	–	Recommendations for planners
Outcomes of negotiations		Perceptions of final outcomes	Changes in final plans compared to initial plans	–

evolving from upon the procedures of initial coding of interviews towards comparable code categories on, also, the planning documents and relevant publications, building consistent interrelationships within the overall aim of this research, the analysis arrived on an advanced level of comprehensive themes enabling answering the research questions. Table 1 presents the matrix of the themes that emerged in the analysis of the related data sources. The detailed presentation of different stakeholders' perceptions along with the interrelated themes from literature and as such against the planning documents will be discussed in section 4 Findings. Following the code of ethics, all quotations are anonymized.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Quality of contributions

The analysis of interviews allows asserting that the plan design and adoption process for Kalarand and Mezapark were hampered by mutually biased mistrust between developers, designers and planners representing a "pro development professional" group, and the citizenry in general and neighborhood associations, in particular, a "counter development laymen" group. While designers abstained from expressing direct judgements, the developers and planning department officers were skeptical about the competences of the residents and their ability to provide meaningful contributions. "The public... pays attention to visual details not... entering into real topics", says a developer from Tallinn. "Usually the opinions of the citizens are subjective", adds a municipality officer from Riga.

The analysis of documents on planning procedures proved the biased attitudes to be unreasonable. Firstly, neighborhood associations had professionals among their members, lawyers (both), architects (Kalarand), and spatial planners (Mezapark). Secondly, citizen feedback about

the plans was precise and constructive. The designer of the Mezapark plan received and documented 21 comments on 55 A4 pages. Three of these comments were letters from neighborhood associations, containing 13, 18 and 19 points each. Four of these comments were letters from private persons containing 4, 6, 10 and 48 points each. Residents' well-structured comments were supported by a community-wide survey about the values of Mezapark. Moreover, some comments pointed out mistakes and inaccuracies in the planning documents, which were later corrected by the designer. For the Kalarand plan, a similar document providing information about the resident comments was not available. However, judging upon interviews with community representatives, the residents studied the plan thoroughly, highlighting controversial points. Furthermore, the community hired a professional consultancy to evaluate the plan, which revealed the deficiencies, including the mismatches between the plan and higher-level planning documents (Lindmae, 2014).

The review of co-planning cases shows that the quality of citizen input is a common concern due to the lack of relevant education and access to the relevant information (Doorne, 1998; McGovern, 2013; Vayona, 2011). However, the experience from Kalarand and Mezapark proves that these concerns should be treated contextually. In both cases, the representatives of neighborhood associations were professionals in the planning field, and socially and politically active citizens. There is a positive trend in the quality of public input, as a planner from Tallinn admits, "[citizens] know more about... urban planning... and... [the share] of constructive criticism... is getting higher".

3.2. Perceptions of the other

Another recurring argument from the developers and planners was about the resistance of the community to any change – "I don't like it" attitude. "[The community's]...

wish was just to prolong the process and to maintain the status quo”, claims a developer from Tallinn. “The residents don’t want any development”, echoes a planner officer from Riga. Community representatives clearly stated in the interviews that the residents approve the idea of developing the area, but resist the proposed design solutions. Instead, in Mezapark, the community suggested a balanced neighborhood development plan drawn on self-initiated resident survey. In Kalarand, the residents fought for maintaining a small beach area with self-made street furniture as commented by a community representative, “... it has been about... the use of sea-side... the access to the sea-side... never...against the development”. These examples showcase the critique against inconsiderate top-down planning and a clear demand for bottom-up approach.

The communities expressed mistrust in the developers and designers, and, at the same time, were skeptical about the ability of municipalities to protect their interests. The citizens were struggling rigorously for precise wordings in the building regulations to avoid any later misinterpretation. They feared that any kind of ambiguity would be interpreted in favor of the developer, allowing developers “tricks” as it was expressed with reference to developer’s potential intentions.

In professional language [the designer] can put it in a way that no one pays attention...and it gets through... (a community representative, Riga)

[The developer and the city] haven’t agreed that... this [area] is in public use. Legal... agreements behind it... the contracts... everything was missing (a community representative, Tallinn)

The mismatches in the plans and plan complexity only contributed to the residents’ concerns. In case of Mezapark, the designer prepared infographics summarizing the main features of the plan. Original documents, building regulations, maps, street sections, cover text, etc., were available at the municipality’s website. However, the residents claimed that the infographics provided limited information and, thus, were misleading.

The construction of an amusement park is not reflected in the infographics, thus residents get a corrupted impression of the essence of the plan (a community representative, Riga)

In Kalarand, on the contrary, the residents blamed the developer and designer for the absence of infographics as the original plans were unreadable.

The detailed plan is like absurdly complex... in public display the drawing of the plan was... I don’t know... 10 meters long ...And they expect that on computer screen you will understand everything! (a community representative, Tallinn)

Developers and designers, in turn, were disappointed by mistrust from the part of the community, arguing that landowners’ dispositions have changed over the past ten to fifteen years and they are interested in producing quality.

... the profit comes if the property is good and if the surroundings are good, if the public spaces are good, if the accessibility is good... (a developer, Tallinn)

Developers and designers unanimously agree upon the difficulty of overcoming the mistrust and proving the plans to have been designed according to the planning legislation and there is no hidden agenda.

[There were] cases where... there was something in the project, which no one paid attention to... and when the project was realized... it didn’t meet the expectations...but it happened unintentionally (a designer, Tallinn)

Examining the public display process, it becomes obvious that “there was a discussion, but there was no dialogue”, as a designer in Riga admitted. Conflicting parties took defensive positions and, thus, were unwilling to accept the other’s concerns and arguments. Mistrust in opponents’ abilities and intentions exacerbating tensions is a “common disease” of many co-planning initiatives (cf. Inness & Booher, 1999) and the only way to achieve success is to build trust by respecting the other’s position.

3.3. Mode of engagement

A crucial issue rarely discussed is the timing and nature of resident involvement, in other words, when to involve citizens in the planning process and what questions to ask. Usually, the residents are invited to comment on the final plan. There is neither a co-design phase, nor an opportunity to refuse the initiation of a plan (Casini, 2017). Residents may either approve final solutions proposed by a plan, or criticize them. As an expert from Tallinn admits, “it’s kind of...too late”.

Nevertheless, a working group with limited public access was founded in Mezapark, to discuss solutions proposed by the plan as it progressed. In Kalarand, a few mediation meetings were held between the stakeholders to address the protests of individual local residents and neighborhood association and seek consensus about solutions proposed by the plan. Neither a working group nor mediation meetings are required by the legislation.

Planners, developers and community representatives agree that the planning approach should be modified to encourage early engagement. The representative of a Tallinn neighborhood association suggests that it should start from “mapping the values of a neighborhood or the city”. Although not required by legislation, early engagement was recommended at the time when plans were under development, as indicated by a planner in Tallinn, “We encourage planners and land owners... to start with... the involvement of community before it’s legally necessary...”.

Planners from Riga and Tallinn consider the current planning procedures as redundant and resource consuming, in particular, the detailed plans, similar to construction projects and mostly on one land plot at a time, developed by private planning or architecture offices. Planners’

suggestion is to merge the two to save the resources and to introduce the residents in due time to a planning proposal, and a design proposal, which follows the plan. As a planner from Riga remarks, “the residents could see /.../ how this wonder will look like, and what they have to expect”.

A common concern among planning scholars is managed participation, which creates the appearance of engagement activity without real intention to include residents’ opinions into plans (Connelly, 2006; Johnson et al., 2017), the more the late engagement, allowing no significant changes to the schemes already negotiated with key players (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 2). The reasons for that are often of technical nature, i.e. the timing of engagement or the nature of data collected. As Johnson et al. (2017) report, decision-makers prefer quantitative data over qualitative, and it is unclear how to translate qualitative data generated in discussions into evidence that is meaningful for decision makers.

3.4. Representativeness

Citizens involved in the discussion of plans were limited to local communities. Mezapark residents were represented by a neighborhood association Mezapark and Pavu Street community – a total of 51 participants (counted by contributions). Kalarand residents were initially represented by individuals. Since 2012, the case was overtaken by a neighborhood association Telliskivi Selts – a total of ca 2400 participants (counted by signatures). Despite the significance of both areas for the cities, residents from the neighborhoods not bordering the areas of detailed plan were not involved in negotiations.

The designer and the developer of the Mezapark plan assert that the association and the community involved in negotiations are non-representative of the local residents with differentiated preferences, which they relate to their specific housing conditions. While the involved residents live in the detached houses bordering the area of the detailed plan, the non-involved residents live in nearby blocks of flats at Ostas Street as well as in other parts of the city, and come to Mezapark on sunny days after visiting the Zoo. Their critique concerns the residents of detached housing, opposing the development with an intention to maintain a sense of their private property on an extended spatial scale, while the area could offer enjoyable conditions also for the families residing in flats in tight spatial conditions or people from other neighborhoods.

They want playgrounds for children, sport infrastructure for children. The opportunity to visit events. /.../ the place where they could enjoy nature. /.../ for many Riga residents [infrastructure is important]. In Riga there are few places /.../ to have a walk in the forest, with paths, lighting, catering and recreational places (a developer, Riga)

A designer from Riga asserts that there is no unified public opinion about the projects of strategic importance. There is often a share of citizenry who supports a project,

and who criticizes it. It is essential to balance divergent public interests.

Living in the city we all have certain duties and responsibilities /.../ It happened that those who live further are satisfied with the project, but those, who live closer, say, we do not like it (a designer, Riga)

In Kalarand, there were no comments from the part of interviewees about the deficiency in representativeness as the community bordering the area of the detailed plan was well represented by the Telliskivi Selts. Additionally, the Tallinn Planning Department commissioned a qualitative study on preferences for waterfront development, which was conducted from the perspectives of a wide range of potential users, involving, also, citizens of other neighborhoods as well as neighborhood associations. With the exception of only a few business actors, the interviewees of various social standing were explicit in their support for public access to the waterfront and the local residents’ intentions to save Kalarand and the beach (Paadam & Ojamäe, 2012).

Strategies for involving passive (or underrepresented) residents’ groups are widely discussed among participatory planning researchers (cf, Brown & Kyttä, 2014; Thiel & Frohlich, 2017). Donders et al. (2014) argue that the “usual” participants are often non-representative of local communities. Nienhuis et al. (2011) confirm the argument on the study on Netherlands, which shows the overrepresentation of the unemployed, housewives/househusbands or the retired among the “usual” participants, while other residents’ groups remain underrepresented. Thus, instead of balancing stakeholder interests, participation merely reshuffles them (Nienhuis et al., 2011, p. 107). The case of Mezapark illustrated the deficiencies of partial representativeness. Although planning department officers, designer and developer mentioned the need to involve “the silent majority”, there were no efforts made to inform or involve them beyond the minimum legal requirements.

3.5. Roles of planning departments

Planners and designers recurrently argued that the active minority who participates in public displays and discussions often follows their vested interests. “I often encounter the cases, where [the residents] think about their own benefits rather than about public interest”, says a planner from Riga. “/.../ often it is not in the interest of a wider audience, but in the interest of someone in the community”, adds a planning officer from Tallinn. The designer from Riga supports the opinion of planning officers, stating that “there should not be any NIMBY groups hiding among the participants”. Their accounts on interactions with negotiating parties are fairly consistent with realities encountered in their daily professional activities as well as their main task to be seeking for balanced solutions for various “selfish” interests of resident groups, land owners, developers or entrepreneurs etc. Their task, however, assumes listening and considering equally the voices of all

different stakeholder groups.

Public interest consists of various interests... at the end of the day the city has to decide... what stays on the table /... / But it... depends on what do you want to get... do you want to get more cars or do you want to get more pedestrians?... I'm talking about... the end result philosophically... (an expert, Tallinn)

Furthermore, the task of municipality is to ensure that these various interests are represented in the discussion. The more interests are present, the closer is the common understanding of the shared “public interest”.

The stakeholders are though critical of the municipalities having taken passive positions and showing no initiative in mediating the conflicts.

[The municipality] could have helped us with in the planning process... let's meet...let's... find out a solution... do something extra, than what is required by the planning law. But they didn't show any initiative (a community representative, Tallinn)

The interviewed residents, for example, repeatedly expressed the concern about the municipality not exercising its “legal rights”, the “legal power” to steer the development of the city towards sustainability with balanced stakeholder interests.

The task of the municipality to design a sustainable city, where the interests of [residents and developers] are aligned... Developers and residents need good environment. The developer can request to build a nuclear plant... And the city should say why there can't be a nuclear plant next to the kindergarten (a community representative, Riga)

The developers, in turn, urged the city to define the priorities and take the decisions fast, as the circumstances for development change rapidly together with economic situation. According to a developer representative from Tallinn, “the City... should have taken clearer decisions faster...than they took”.

The criticism on participatory practices of municipality is common for local contexts, whereas the current discussion on the topic tends to be rare. Speaking of the role of the planner, Forester (1987) emphasizes that the planners often have to manage conflicting situations between various parties; therefore, negotiation and mediation skills are essential. Shipley and Utz (2012) support the argument by stating that the task of the planner (or the administrator) is to balance different interests and ensure the fairness of the process and outcomes for all stakeholders. Thus, planners are in a difficult position, as their tasks are to navigate through conflicting interests and, furthermore, to address political agenda of elected representativeness. Local municipalities in Tallinn and Riga are just entering the field of communicative planning and, thus, have little experience managing such complex situations. As a designer from Riga asserts, “we cannot /.../ jump over certain development stages [of a civic society]”.

3.6. Outcomes of negotiations

3.6.1. Mezapark

After protests and negotiations, the citizens managed to achieve certain changes in the plans to meet their preferences. The idea about the construction of an amusement park was withdrawn and the design of the waterfront was subjected to a competition. The waterfront was a contradictory issue as there was no unified opinion among the citizen groups. The interviewees asserted that some residents wanted a solid waterfront accessible for motor transport, while others were advocating for a soft, natural waterfront, vulnerable to water fluctuations. The competition allows another round of debates on the waterfront design.

If we had a promenade, [Pavu Street residents] could use it [to access their properties]. They wouldn't need to go through the park. Cafe suppliers could, also... avoid entering the park (a developer, Riga)

Greece is an excellent example where due to solid waterfronts the link to the water doesn't exist... How many places there are in Riga where is it possible to walk with the kids along the natural water edge? From the sustainability perspective... We won't be able to get a natural waterfront after building an artificial one! (a community representative, Riga)

Despite some accomplishments, the community representatives consider Mezapark plan “a lost case”, as two of three conflict issues, forest transformation and waterfront redevelopment, remained in the plan. The developer, in turn, regrets that the amusement park construction was rejected.

3.6.2. Kalarand

In Kalarand, the expansion of the harbor and the construction of the waterfront road were dismissed. The citizens also secured a 20 m wide traffic-free seaside promenade and a beach with a swimming place, resulting in 40 percent of the private area being in public use and managed by the municipality. The design of the buildings on the site was subjected to a design competition.

...from our territory... over forty percent will be given to the public use... from the six hectares we can cover only twelve thousand three hundred square meters... twenty percent of the total area (a developer, Tallinn)

Both conflicting parties, the developer and the community, were to a certain extent satisfied with the outcomes, and the plan was ratified. The developer was satisfied with the opportunity to start developing the area, as larger and better public spaces could potentially raise the future housing value.

We came to the decision that [the conditions of the detailed plan] are acceptable for us... Because... the

public areas... will increase... the value of the area (a developer, Tallinn)

The community, in turn, assured the public waterfront and the beach with a swimming place it was worth fighting for. “We had a... long and painful cooperation... and we... reached quite a good outcome for the public seaside...”, says a community representative from Tallinn.

Civic participation is often criticized for its managed nature and the lack of public influence on actual decisions (cf McGovern, 2013; Connely, 2006). Indeed, according to Latvian and Estonian legislation, the final decision is taken by municipality. Municipal decision can override any proposal from any stakeholder and can be argued against only in the court. The experiences of Kalarand and Mezapark cannot, however, be considered redundant (cf Faehnle & Tyrvaenen, 2013). The reason is that the collective efforts, especially those of the residents, managed to improve the quality of plans and preserve local values.

Conclusions

General observations from the study of Kalarand and Mezapark allow concluding that the debates surrounding the development plans of the areas in focus reveal that the change of planning culture is a long-term process and takes more than the changes in the respective legislation. It is asserted that the compromise on the area development was eventually reached due to the gradually growing recognition of the value of civic engagement in urban planning, involving representatives of municipalities, developer companies and institutionalized resident communities represented by neighborhood associations.

However, these case studies on urban waterfront sites need to be considered contextually, also, against their specific position in the patchwork of urban districts in Tallinn and Riga, offering a development potential for stakeholders of different profile and having therefore become the sites of struggles. With planning of public space at the core, it is asserted that the interest of citizens and residents of adjacent prestigious neighborhoods were to a smaller or greater degree met primarily due to high concentration of cultural capital in these areas, i.e. the presence of highly educated active residents, often professionals in the fields of urban planning, architecture, law etc. As different from a “usual” community member (cf Nienhuis et al., 2011), these residents pertain the capacity to pursue their interests and produce alternative vision for urban development.

The evidence from the research shows, however, that moving towards efficient civic engagement does not proceed without complications. Mutual prejudice and mistrust, which can be related to the slowly disappearing legacy of the previous social system as well as the early 1990s practices, hamper negotiations. There is continuously space for the cities’ planning offices to take a professional position of an “enlightened” mediator between the equally respected stakeholders and pave a way towards democratic participation culture.

Today, civic engagement is regulated by the national legal planning framework with no distinctions for small or big municipalities of various financial and professional capacities. This implies that the requirements for civic engagement procedures are limited to a public display with a subsequent public hearing. Despite having greater capacity, the big Riga and Tallinn municipalities fulfil only the basic legal requirements with redundant planning framework requiring public displays for each and every detailed plan, which might not altogether require public display. These resources could be redirected to introduce engagement procedures for plans of strategic importance, meeting public interest beyond the immediacy of detailed plans, the negotiations of which are often self-initiated by the local residents. Hence, the protection of residents’ interests relies with active individuals’ and neighborhood associations’ capacities. The reasons for this practice could also be found in the fragmented organization of the planning departments with divided responsibilities for lower level plans and higher level plans, which further complicates steering the development of the city and participation culture to be rooted in both cities.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Comparative case summary. Mezapark and Kalarand

	Mezapark	Kalarand
Location	Riga	Tallinn
Area	420 ha	7 ha
Current use	Culture and Recreation Park	Brownfield, yacht harbor, fish market, informal beach
Planned use	Culture and Recreation Park	Housing, yacht harbor
Client	Governmental institution "Rigas Mezi" ("Riga Forests")	Private Developer
Designer	Planning office "Grupa93"	Architecture office "Nord Projekt"
Start of planning activities	2010	2003
Plan ratification	2013	2016
Planning document	Detailed plan, local plan	Detailed plan
Purpose of the plan	Division into functional areas, traffic organization, allocation of public utilities, waterfront design	Allocation of housing, yacht harbor extension, waterfront design
Public engagement mode	public display, public meeting	
Number of public displays	2 (years)	3 (2008, 2012, 2015)
Additional public engagement activities	no	Research conducted by Urban and Residential Studies research group, Tallinn University of Technology, 2012, followed by an exhibition
Local community	Mežaparka attīstības biedrība (Mežapark neighbourhood association), since 1997	Telliskivi Selts (Telliskivi neighborhood association), since 2012
Key stakeholders involved	Urban Development Board (City), "Grupa93" (Designer), "Rigas Mezi" (Client), local community representatives, local residents individually	Chief City Architect (City), "Nord Projekt" (Designer), private Developer (Client), local community representatives, local residents individually
Number of residents involved (at different stages)	51 (counted by contributions)	~2400 (counted by signatures)
Key argument points	Construction of amusement park, forest transformation, solid waterfront	Housing design, access to the seaside, elimination of the beach

Appendix 2

Comparative summary of planning framework

	Riga, Latvia	Tallinn, Estonia
Legal framework		
National planning document(s)	"Spatial development planning law" (" <i>Teritorijas attīstības plānošanas likums</i> "); Regulations No 628 "Regulations about municipal spatial development planning documents" (" <i>Noteikumi par pašvaldību teritorijas attīstības plānošanas dokumentiem</i> ")	"Planning Act"
Author(s)	Latvian Parliament, Latvian Cabinet of Ministers	Estonian Parliament
Year(s)	2011, 2014	2015
English translation	no	yes

End of Table Appendix 2

	Riga, Latvia	Tallinn, Estonia
Requirement for public participation	upon the completion and prior to ratification of a plan	
		upon the initiation of a plan
City planning document(s)	“Riga territorial plan 2006-2018” (“ <i>Rīgas teritorijas plānojums 2006.-2018. gadam</i> ”); “Riga historic centre and its protection zone plan” (“ <i>Rīgas vēsturiskā centra un tā aizsardzības zonas teritorijas plānojums</i> ”); “Regulations about the use and development of Riga territory” (“ <i>Rīgas teritorijas izmantošanas un apbūves noteikumi</i> ”) Thematic plans	“Tallinn comprehensive plan” (“ <i>Tallinna üldplaneering</i> ”); “Neighbourhood comprehensive plans” (“ <i>Linnaosade üldplaneeringud</i> ”); Thematic plans
Author(s)	RDPAD, Riga City Council	TLPA
Year(s)	Territorial plan valid since 2006 to 2018; historic centre plan valid since 2006 onwards (revised in 2013)	City plan valid since 2001 onwards; 5 district plans developed in different years between 2006 and 2017 and valid onwards; 3 district plans are in development
English translation	no	
Requirement for public participation	no	
Organisational framework		
Department responsible for planning	City Development Department (<i>Pilsētas attīstības departaments</i>)	Urban Planning Department (<i>Linnaplaneerimise Amet</i>)
Number of positions (2016)	118	98.5
Unit responsible for planning of municipal area	Urban Development Board	Chief City Architect
Number of positions	30	35
Unit responsible for hard infrastructure (roads, utility networks)	Does not include; roads are developed by Transportation departments; utility networks – by governmental and private organizations	
City scale plan	Territorial plan, 2006–2018; historic center plan, since 2006	Comprehensive plan, since 2001; district plans, since 2006
Unit responsible for city scale plan(s)	Territorial Planning Unit; Historic Centre Planning Unit	no separate unit; district units
Neighborhood scale plans	Local plan	Detailed plan
Unit responsible for planning of neighborhood scale plan	Local Planning Unit	Detailed Planning Unit
Number of public engagement specialist positions	2	1
Mode of public engagement	Public display (time span) and public discussion (meeting) of a final plan	
Input expected from public	Opinions and proposals	
	If an opinion or a proposal is accepted, the plan is modified accordingly; if an opinion of a proposal is ignored, rationale is required	
Institution which ratifies a plan	City Council	City Council (comprehensive plans), City Government (detailed plans)