

Assumptions of the Concept of Spatial Justice in the Theory and Practice of Urban Planning Processes

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Abstract

The topic of justice and equality in Lithuania has been studied mostly from the sociological point of view and the most commonly used concepts are segregation, differentiation, and polarization. The article analyzes the concept of spatial justice, its theoretical and practical assumptions discuss urban policy, how the public understands spatial justice and how it is taking part in the decision-making in Lithuanian city planning processes. For the case study, the examples of public participation in urban planning processes in Kaunas city are analyzed.

Introduction

In the history of urbanism, we can find various examples criticizing old or creating new visions of urban spaces. The aim of new urban concepts is usually to modernize the social and physical environment of society, solve not only physical but also social problems, and seek justice in the spatial environment. In Lithuania, the issue of spatial justice is extremely relevant today due to the rapid urban regeneration processes taking place in Lithuanian cities. Although urbanism theorists and practitioners are increasingly advocating public participation in urban planning processes considering its needs, it is noticeable that public participation remains rather formal and the public's expressed right to the spatial environment and its planning and creation are mostly ignored. In the article, urban planning processes are understood as the formation of urban planning policy, the development of a city development strategy, territorial planning, design, and spatial formation of the city.

The aim of the article is to discuss the concept of spatial justice and its theoretical and practical assumptions in urban planning processes.

The research methods used in the study are analysis of scientific literature and the case study. For the case study, the Žemieji Šančiai Community was chosen, which is well known as one of Kaunas city neighbourhood communities very actively participating in the urban planning processes.

In order to understand the perception of spatial justice of the Žemieji Šančiai Community of Kaunas city, a qualitative analysis of online press content and observation was carried out. The publications, published on online portals from 2013 until 19 December 2021, were analyzed.

The research object is public participation in urban planning processes in Kaunas city.

I. Spatial Justice in Theory

A. From the *Right to the City* to *Spatial Justice*

Until today, the theory of urban space planning has passed through several different stages – from the fragmentedly developed idea of utopian space planning to the theory of the separation of public space. In the 19th–20th century, the rapid urbanization of cities particularly encouraged the search for solutions in order to solve not only physical but also social and environmental problems and to develop new ideas in urban planning.

Since the 1970s, the ideas of public participation in the creation of the city through the right to the city appear in urban planning theories. However, the idea of the right to the city of leftist urban researchers is an effort to reduce influence (political, economic) in a certain territory, which requires not only the participation of residents but also the possible expropriation of space. Left-wing philosopher and

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sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1968) raised the issue of the individual's right to evaluate, know and use urban spaces in his book "The Right to the City" [1]. Using the concept of "right to the city", Lefebvre created a vision of the city in which the ideology of consumption is destroyed and all groups of society have the right to participate, create and manage the urban space [1]. The right to the city, according to Lefebvre, includes two rights: the right to participate and the right to appropriate the urban space. The right to participate is the right of the whole society but primarily of those who live in the city, because it is "earned" by living the daily routine in the urban space, it is like the right of a citizen (Lefebvre uses the term "citadin"), which has no connection with citizenship or nationality. Thus, urbanites, according to Lefebvre, play a central role in the creation of urban space, but the decision can be fostered by different agents, e.g. state (political decision), capital (investment/non-investment decision), multilateral institution (global trade decision) or any other entity that influences the creation of space in a particular city [2]. The modern city is governed by capitalist relations that divide urban space into segments, and the production of space is based on the needs of property owners. By purchasing a plot of land, a real estate developer acquires the right to shape that territory regardless of the views of the surrounding community. In this way, according to Lefebvre, acquired property is like an exclusionary factor, cutting off from the social network of the area. Therefore, having property rights to land promotes the alienation of urban space from residents [3]. Summarizing Lefebvre's thoughts, the right to participate means that the city's inhabitants would participate centrally and directly in decision-making and become the majority, hegemonic voice, while the right to appropriate the city space creates the conditions for the elimination of ownership in order to eliminate the feeling of alienation and to make the city space one's own.

According to Purcell, David Harvey [4] who also defended the right to the city developed and criticized Lefebvre's ideas, studied the city from an economic standpoint, and understood the urban space as the result of the capitalist production process [3]. Harvey argues that injustice is part of the capitalist system and that a just city is impossible in a capitalist world. Harvey uses the terms "spatial consciousness" or "geographical imagination". According to Harvey, using spatial consciousness, each individual realizes the role and place of urban space in his personal life and the impact of space on the relationships between the individual and the organization. The space forms connections with the neighborhood, with a certain territory, local (group) language, etc. According to Harvey, the right to the city is much more than the right to use the resources that the city provides. The right to the city is a collective rather than an individual right, as urban urban change depends on the exercise of collective power in urbanization processes [4]. According to Susan Fainstein,

Harvey's central research question is how power relations, determined by the interplay between state power, economic property, and urban residents, affect urban outcomes and, above all, how spatial relations reinforce injustice [5].

At the end of the 20th century, the term "spatial justice" began to be used by researchers in urban studies. Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" in urban studies is particularly developed by Edward Soja who uses the term "spatial justice" [6]. According to Edward Soja, spatial justice is an aspiration or right to the city, to its spatial resources, the advantages provided by the city, the right not only to use them but also to create and shape them and the right to develop by understanding social and spatial causality. The most important aspect of this concept is the granting of the right or its acquisition not to the authorities and not only at the academic level but to the wider society, public organizations and communities. Soja observes that most theoretical urban approached the analysis from historical or sociological perspectives, that is, the theories are focused on temporal rather than spatial analysis. According to Soja, it is important to examine the environment through time, through history, because this is how society, different cultures, politics and economies are created. Analysis of the environment from a historical point of view expresses and records the individual experience of everyone, transforms society, moves from tradition to modernity, and creates justice and injustice as social attributes [6]. However, social processes not only shape space but space also shapes social processes, i.e. spatiality, sociality and historicity form and complement each other. An individual participating in these processes can change or rearrange the space in order to increase or decrease the negative impact of the processes. However, politics, ideology and/or other forces can be reasons that reduce an individual's ability to act, become reasons for spatial injustice. Human activity in a territory, at any historical moment or social context can also cause social injustice or exclusion. According to Edward Soja, from the moment of birth, individuals are involved in the formation of their socialized spatiality, they create their environment, just as history is created. Theorizing spatial injustice, Soja argues that struggles for justice can be more effective if they are informed by a clear spatial consciousness [6]. Urban space is a social product with a social and cultural structure. Space is an essential element in order to understand the spatial phenomena that occur in time and in the social interaction of justice [7].

The issue of justice in urban processes was studied by various authors in the second half of the 20th century in order to understand and theorize the role of society and its right to urban space. If the previous various utopian ideas in urban planning sought to solve the issue of inequality, standardize urban space and create a spatial expression that would be correct in terms of urban functions and technical standards, then rapid urbanization raised the question of

public participation in urban planning processes because urban planning cannot be just someone's individual city vision, as it is related to individual experience and to the needs of society. Therefore, urban planning has become a social practice in which it is important whose experience and intentions will be represented, what values will be chosen at the initial stage or how the question of justice will be solved.

B. Urban Planning Models and Approaches

In the 20th century, urbanization processes intensified in the world, which hurt the poorest classes of society. This encouraged urban planning to turn to the public and talk about its participation as an aspiration to be represented or to represent its interests in these processes.

Different planning models have started to be applied in urban planning: *advocacy planning* and *negotiation planning* [8]. According to Cirtautas, new planning models were encouraged by social movements opposing the government's decisions. The planning of the city started to involve communities and/or their representative members in the processes of project preparation and implementation [8]. The goal of advocacy planning was to empower all groups of society, especially those representing low-income sections of society, to develop plans to combat poverty [9]. Paul Davidoff, a pioneer of the US advocacy planning theory, viewed planning as a process that promotes democratic pluralism in society by representing diverse groups in political debate and public policy. He argued that pluralism would be the factor that would lead to urban planning that would better inform the public about alternative choices and force planners to compete with other groups for political support [10].

The theoretical basis of participatory planning in 1973 was described by R. W. Smith. Participatory planning is based on plans and programs that are endorsed, supported and developed by users [11]. The essence of participatory planning is the representation of the needs formulated by the society itself or its individual groups, where the organizer is responsible for hearing and representing various interests. The final planning result becomes a combination and agreement of the interests of various groups [8]. The weakness of participatory planning, according to Smith, is the bias of process participants and the effort to eliminate future participants from present processes. Also, the planning decisions made can eliminate opportunities and limit societal processes in the future [11]. Rational and consensus-based planning should be integrated into the participatory planning process in order to eliminate limitations. The aspect of rationality in participatory planning is related to the close local connections between individuals and local groups, which allow environmental changes to be assessed and information to be brought quickly to the planning process.

The essence of the consensus is that individuals or public groups should participate in determining planning processes and measures, but an important aspect is that from the city's point of view, all public groups have the right to participate in the processes not only those related to a specific place, i.e. defined territorially. In this way, the integration of communities and the government would be promoted, a more democratic society would be created, and local and community identity would be created [11]. Participatory planning raises the question of authority: how to harmonize official processes, legislation, directives with needs, attitudes, directives arising from citizens or groups of citizens [11]. Comparing public participation and participatory planning, it should be noted that the latter method would allow an individual to become part of the environment, create local identity, and contribute to the creation and development of oneself and society.

J. Jakaitis in his monograph published in 2013, analyzed the methods of design dialogue, participatory planning and participatory democracy as public participation in the spatial formation of the city [12]. According to M. A. Moote, when applying the method of participatory democracy, various interests are represented, and participants are integrated into planning processes from initiation to implementation and monitoring of decisions. During the collective learning process, all participants acquire and share information and take responsibility for political decisions. A collaborative process promotes education for all participants and helps implement decision-making by resolving conflicts that arise during the planning process. In this way, there is no delay in the implementation of plans and court complaints are reduced [13]. Moote and other authors argue that five criteria characterize the method of participatory democracy: effectiveness, representation and access, information exchange and learning, continuity of participation, and decision-making power. When these criteria are met, it can be said that the interests of all participants in urban spatial planning are met and represented [13].

Summarizing urban planning models and approaches, it can be said that the rapid urbanization of the 20th century in the world raised the ideas of public representation in the theory of urban planning. The processes caused by urbanization led to the perception of urban space as a social product and, at the same time, a market field where the urban area became a space for market-oriented economic growth and elite consumption. Such practices change the political-economic environment in which public plans and projects are implemented [14]. Therefore, public participation in urban spatial planning processes has become important and interpreted in various ways. It is also important to highlight the fact that the right to the city included not only the satisfaction of the needs without which individuals cannot exist but also the strengthening of the influence of the city society (organizations) and

the increased desire to gather and shape the new quality and possibilities of the city. Public participation has become valuable in itself as a political goal, as it has not only increased the social capital of citizens but has also given politicians more opportunities and become their tool, especially when they need stronger public support in decision-making.

II. Spatial Justice in Practice

C. Urban Policy in Lithuania

When studying the public's attitude to spatial justice, it is important to analyze what legal acts provide for public participation, information in the spatial formation of the city, what procedures are established and what is the role of society in urban planning processes. The right of society to have its own beliefs and express them freely is guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which establishes the nation's aspiration to create an open, just and harmonious civil society [15]. In Lithuania, in order to ensure public participation in the implementation processes of city planning, there is a legal obligation to make public all prepared documents of territorial planning, publically important buildings and parts of buildings. Territorial Planning Law of the Republic of Lithuania [16], Construction Law of the Republic of Lithuania [17], and The Regulations on Public Information, Consultation and Participation in Decision-making on Territorial Planning define public participation in urban planning processes [18].

The main directions of urban policy and recommendations for their implementation were defined by the Minister of the Environment of the Republic of Lithuania on August 13, 2019 by order No. D1-485 [19]. Lithuanian urban policy defines sustainable development goals for urbanized and urbanizing territories and is an important component of the planning and development policy of the entire state territory. The approved document foresees four directions of Lithuanian urban policy: mitigating the effects of climate change, creating and strengthening connections between urbanized and non-urbanized territories, reducing social exclusion, and sustainable development of territories. Urban policy distinguishes five interest groups that participate in urban processes: state institutions, municipal institutions, civil society, professionals, and the academic community. Urban policy is implemented by decisions of the general plan of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, strategic urban development plans, legal acts and other documents. The general plan of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania determines the directions of spatial development, ensures the spatial integrity of the country's strategies, and aims to harmonize various activities and areas carried out in the

country. The general plan and other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania determine the rights and responsibilities of various interest groups in participating in urban planning processes and shaping the spatial expression of cities. *The main directions of urban policy and their implementation recommendations* define the following functions of civil society in urban planning processes: to participate, submit proposals, consult in territorial planning processes, monitor the implementation of decisions in planning documents, contribute to the concentration of residents and represent them in public consultations, help ensure the continuity of the long-term goals of planning documents in the event of political changes or obstacles, and to provide information related to the implementation of sustainable development goals. In order to implement the urban policy, an inclusion and communication strategy has been defined in which the participation of different interest groups in the development of processes and decision-making is distinguished as one of the measures [19].

Public participation in the city's urban planning processes is defined by different Lithuanian legal acts or ratified international documents. *New Leipzig Charter* was adopted in 2020 by the Council of the European Union, which was signed in 2007 as the Leipzig Charter of Sustainable European Cities. The Charter updated the EU's principles of sustainable European urban development and defined the forms of a transforming city – a just, green and productive city. One of the forms "The just city" creates the conditions to provide everyone with equal opportunities and justice in the field of environmental protection. In order to implement these forms, it is necessary to implement the principles of good governance, one of which is related to public participation and co-creation. This principle states that all citizens and actors of the city must be included in the processes that affect their daily life, thus strengthening local democracy, new forms of participation must be encouraged, including co-creation and design in collaboration with various institutions, communities and organizations. Public participation is a pivotal factor in creating a high-quality environment [20].

Urban policy directions are implemented in the General Plan of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania and various legal documents, where the regulation of public participation in urban planning processes plays an important role. In the recommendations of the urban planning policy, for its implementation, it is proposed to create partnerships based on a voluntary basis, in which representatives of different interest groups would participate. Within the framework of partnerships, various topics related to the improvement of urban environment are proposed, but when analyzing the documents, it was observed that the urban policy through various legal acts mainly defines only the formal involvement of the public through information or through the submission of proposals but not by initiating a dialogue or by involving

local communities of the city spaces leading to the formation of partnerships the aim of which would be to respond to the challenges of urbanized territories, share experience, initiate pilot projects, propose recommendations or adjust legislation. Thus, participatory planning, although in theory it can be initiated by any group in society, is in practice limited by formal planning rules.

According to Cirtautas, today's city planning models involving the public in the processes of spatial formation of the city are formal "public participation" and "participatory planning" [8]. Today's city planning still takes place centrally and according to the traditional principle of public participation, where the public is given the right to get acquainted with documents and express an opinion when the final product is presented, i.e. planners decide, announce, and defend their project [8]. It can be observed that following such a planning principle, a more negative attitude towards the results of urban planning is received from the public. Critics of traditional public participation argue that statutory participation does not solve public problems because it does not adequately represent public needs and interests, polarizes society in favour of other interests, and does not facilitate information exchange [13]. According to Jakaitis, in order to create a favourable environment for the dialogue between the public and the government (designers, investors), it is necessary to include various measures and differentiate public participation in a hierarchical manner during the entire period of document preparation [12].

In summary, it should be noted that the laws of the Republic of Lithuania create conditions for spatial justice, but depending on the interests of the prevailing groups, the prevailing attitude of the institutions responsible for planning, or the initiative of the society itself, those conditions are more or less satisfied. Public involvement in urban planning processes is usually limited to traditional public involvement, rather than creating conditions for the public to represent their interests, participate in all planning stages, or even initiate planning processes themselves. However, the power, as observed by the researchers who studied the urban planning policy, which is foreseen in the planning processes, seems to enable the public to participate in the city planning processes, thus achieving spatial justice in relation to the territory, residents and other interested persons, usually manifests itself in the demonstration of the power of official institutions, public frustration, and a sense of spatial injustice in the community.

D. Kaunas City Case Study

In order to understand spatial justice in practice, the Žemieji Šančiai Community of the city of Kaunas was chosen for the case study. For the case study, qualitative analysis of online press content and observation methods

were chosen, which led to the choice of the research object – the community of the Žemieji Šančiai Community – well known as being very active in the urban planning processes and, therefore, well seen in online press.

Kaunas is the second largest city in Lithuania, with a population of about 300 000 inhabitants. Kaunas territory is divided into 11 elderships. The Žemieji Šančiai Community operates in the territory of the Šančiai eldership, which consists of the *Aukštieji* (Upper) and *Žemieji* (Lower) Šančiai. Šančiai eldership is located between *Tunelis* Street and the bend of the Nemunas River. About 22 thousand inhabitants live in that territory, which is ~6.9 % of the total population of the city of Kaunas [21]. The area of the eldership is 7.41 km². The eldership is located in an ideal natural location: in *Aukštieji* Šančiai, a large area is occupied by the *Aukštieji* Šančiai Oak park with a mound; *Žemieji* Šančiai is located on the lower terrace of the river, southeast of the railway station, most of the area is surrounded by the Nemunas River, and the Nemunas coast is oriented to the south. The territory is connected to *Panemunė* eldership in the southeast by the *Panemunė* bridge, and to *Aleksotas* eldership by the *M. K. Čiurlionis* bridge in the northwest. *A. Juozapavičius* Avenue is the main transport artery of the territory, which connects the Šančiai eldership with Kaunas Centre eldership (New Town and Old Town) and *Panemunė* eldership and forms a convenient connection of the territory with the most important places of the city of Kaunas.

During the case study, a qualitative analysis of the online press was carried out, during which the publications published on online portals since 2013 until 19 December 2021 were analyzed. The initial search was performed using the compound "Žemieji Šančiai Community" (Lithuanian: *Žemųjų Šančių bendruomenė*). Later, when analyzing the publications, the search was expanded by entering new keywords into the search, thus aiming to understand and discover a more complete profile of the activities of the Žemieji Šančiai Community. The following keywords were used in the search: "Šančiai street" (Lithuanian: *Šančių gatvė*), "Nemunas waterfront street" (Lithuanian: *Nemuno krantinės gatvė*), "Nemunas way" (Lithuanian: *Nemuno kelias*), "Urbanistics Award for the Šančiai community" (Lithuanian: *Urbanistikos Apdovanojimas Šančių bendruomenei*), "Šančiai community" (Lithuanian: *Šančių bendruomenė*), "Nemunas waterfront" (Lithuanian: *Nemuno krantinė*), "Nemunas waterfront project" (Lithuanian: *Nemuno krantinės projektas*), "Cabbage field" (Lithuanian: *Kopūstų laukas*), "Šančiai", "Tactical Urbanism" (Lithuanian: *Taktinis urbanizmas*), "Žemieji Šančiai", "Friendly Zone" (Lithuanian: *Draugiška zona*). References of 174 publications were collected: in 2013 – 3; 2014 – 4; 2015 – 4; 2016 – 13; 2017 – 6; 2018 – 7; 2019 – 50; 2020 – 13; 2021 – 74. It should be noted that the list of publications is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient in order to be acquainted with the cultural and social context of the

establishment of the Žemieji Šančiai Community and the activities carried out by the association since its foundation and reveals the position of the community on urban planning issues, as well as how the community is received and communicated to the public, what reasons motivated the community to actively participate in urban planning processes, and to form assumptions how community understand the concept of spatial justice.

Analyzing the content of the online press, it can be seen that information about cultural and social activities in the territory of the Žemieji Šančiai can be found since 2011. It is noticeable that the characters mentioned in the press are active members of today's Žemųjų Šančių Community. In 2011, V. Gelūnienė and E. Carroll gathered a group of people interested in city research, inviting them to find out what the Šančiai district is like and what people think about it. Later, other various artistic projects were carried out by the same artists, which included social and cultural studies of this territory and the experiences of the residents [22]. In 2014, V. Gelūnienė and E. Carroll started their artistic activities in an abandoned territory in Žemieji Šančiai (area of approximately 10 000 m²), now called "Cabbage field", with the aim of gathering and developing the community and creating a space for meetings and cultural cultivation. "Cabbage Field" had become a well-known place not only in Šančiai but also throughout the city as a place of interesting civic action. The "Cabbage Field" became a symbol and a place where, on the basis of creative partnership, it was aimed to develop the creativity of the individual and the community through the creation of the identity and well-being of Šančiai. This type of activity became a pretext for social innovations and the need to reform or change

established social models, to treat one's living environment and the context in a different way. As a result of all these events, the initiative group on December 18, 2014, registered an association – the Žemieji Šančiai Community. As can be seen from the online press, the artists' initiative and later the community's activities in Šančiai were covered and evaluated both locally and globally. In 2016, the public space project "Cabbage Field" was evaluated by *The World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)*, which as a global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan governments and their associations is committed to representing, defending and strengthening local and regional self-government [23]. In 2017 The *Faro Convention Network of the Council of Europe* has evaluated the "Cabbage field" initiative [24]. In 2019, during the 13th Lithuanian Urban Planning Forum, the association was awarded the award of the *Ministry of the Environment* for the best urban planning project and for the community's "concentration and active actions in defending the local spirit of Šančiai district, protecting the district's identity and uniqueness for future generations" [25]. In 2022, the community project "*Genius loci: digital mapping tool for ethical urbanization*" was announced a laureate of the competition for the prize of the New European Bauhaus 2022 in category "Regaining the sense of belonging" [26].

Analysis of the publications in online press showed that since April 2019, a reorientation of the activities of the Žemieji Šančiai Community from creative and educational to the promotion of citizenship and education related to the district's urban issues can be observed. Examining the press, it can be seen that this is strongly related to the ongoing urbanization in the territory of the Žemieji



Fig. 1. Artistic and protest actions of the Žemieji Šančiai Community [photos by author, 2019–2021].

Šančiai on the Nemunas bank. On 17 April 2019, the the municipality of Kaunas published information on its website about the *Nemunas krantinė* street reconstruction project [27]. A 1.7 km stretch of unpaved street on the Nemunas river bank, mainly used by local residents for walking or to access apartment buildings to informal parking lots, was planned to be reconstructed by constructing a street about 3.5 km long and 12.5 m wide. This municipal project encouraged a more versatile civic activity of the Žemieji Šančiai Community. In 2019–2021, in order to protect their living environment from socially undesirable infrastructural changes, the Žemieji Šančiai Community focused on activities that encouraged the participation of citizens in expressing their opinions on drastic urban changes: they collected almost 6 thousand signatures of residents against the street project; organized the “Nemunas way” (Lithuanian: *Nemuno kelias*) similar to the “Baltic way” of holding hands on the Nemunas bank; wrote petitions; invited Kaunas city municipality to discussions; organized various protest actions, etc. (Fig. 1).

The city government carried out all formal actions with the public required by law: information, public meetings presenting the *Nemunas krantinė* street project, etc., but the community’s aspiration to be an active participant in the urban development processes of the district and its proposals to preserve the unique urban infrastructure were ignored.

After carrying out a qualitative analysis of the content of the online press, it is noticed that the opposition between the spatial justice perceived by the public and the perception of the political and administrative authorities is evident. It is noticeable that the fragmentation of the territory formed by the city government, the ignoring of the local identity and the needs of the local residents encourage the residents’ protests and resistance. However, the positive development of all events is that all these processes encouraged the Žemieji Šančiai Community “bottom-up” processes – the creation of an urban vision for the district. From 2020 to 2023, the community together with its partners started a project, the aim of which is to involve the citizens in the creation of the vision of the territory of the *Kaunas Šančiai* neighbourhood – “*Genius loci: urbanization and civic society*” [28]. The goal of the project is to identify cultural heritage values and to form a concept for the protection and development of Šančiai eldership.

Findings and Conclusions

The analysis of the theory of spatial justice revealed that the values of city shapers and users make assumptions about how the issue of spatial justice will be resolved. A city is a space that exists as an object that performs certain functions. At the same time, the city is subjectively

interpreted causes and consequences or a mediator for the course of social life. Since urban planning is related to subjective experiences, it is important whose experiences and intentions will be represented, what ideas will be based on decisions. The relationship between the space and its users is not defined and finite but depends on the characteristics of the space, the spatial experience of the users, and the role given to the space in the social and historical context. The authors of the theory of spatial justice defined that space is multifaceted and shaped by various factors and thus is a product of social relations, where the relationship between the space and the meanings given by the subject forms the sense of place identity.

Intensified processes of urbanization in the 20th century led to talk about local identity, the role of society, their needs and public participation in urban planning processes. Different planning models have started to be applied in urban planning: defensive planning, negotiated planning, public participation, participatory planning, participatory democracy, etc. The essence of all these planning models is to look at the city from the perspective of society and local communities, to more or less represent them, and to involve them in activities. However, as noted by most of the authors who have examined public participation in the processes of spatial formation of the city, public participation is insufficient, often only symbolic. Decision-making is on the side of “power”, while power is often created through the subjective interpretation of legal documents by local governments or business interests.

Summarizing the qualitative analysis of online press on the activity profile of the Žemieji Šančiai Community, it is noticeable that the activities carried out include a wide range of events. It can be said that the emergence of creative collective events could be influenced by several reasons: the desire of artists to gather like-minded people and thus realize their ideas; a motive to do something that would not otherwise occur (“who else but us”); the desire to draw the attention of society and government to the surrounding problems and to be responsible for the creation of the environment – local development. However, when examining the activities, a clear divide can be observed, where cultural activities become not only stimulating the creativity of residents but also activities of civic activism aimed at conjuring up, educating the public in the field of urban planning, and promoting civic responsibility of residents for the creation of their district. Therefore, I would divide the activities carried out by the Žemieji Šančiai Community into two periods: from the foundation until 2019 and after 2019. The *Nemunas krantinė* street reconstruction project announced by the Kaunas municipality had the greatest influence on the development of the spectrum of the association’s activities. This project became a starting point for the community to expand the profile of activities by creating projects to look for like-minded people not only among artists but also

among scientific institutions and foreign organizations, and for the residents – to join the events organized by the Žemieji Šančiai Community more actively. It should also be noted that the association's cultural activities have been evaluated on a global scale, thus the association has become visible and known at the local and international levels as a community that fights for the spatial and physical image of the microdistrict and seeks active participation in urban processes.

The artistic practices, personal initiatives of artists, and cultural projects had an impact on the formation of the image of the Žemieji Šančiai Community, the sense of identity, and the emergence of the status of “owner” of the territory. The historical, cultural, and natural context shaped the community's approach to spatial justice. From the qualitative analysis of online press about Žemieji Šančiai Community could be said, that time and history create social connections in the environment and the concept of spatial justice is understood as the right not only to use city resources (spaces) but also to create and shape them; that the Žemieji Šančiai Community concept of spatial justice is that city is a field of market-oriented economic growth and elite consumption and the local environment which is shaped by the individual local people's perception is under danger. Thus, different perceptions of space force conflicts between the authorities and the locals.

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