

# Community Involvement in Place-Making: Present Map Methodology

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## Abstract

The aim this research was to develop and test the mapping methodology, that would be applicable in the process of community involvement into place-making process and would focus on functioning and usage of public spaces. The methodology is referred to a Present Map methodology and is structured as a one-day mapping workshop involving drawing from memory, fieldwork, identifying the locations in the geographical map, structuring of the collected information and entering data into interactive online Present Map. The application of the methodology in Sanciai historic district has demonstrated that this methodology allows both collecting the material about the people's experiences in public spaces of the locality necessary for research and planning, as well as connecting community with the place and empowering it by providing the working tools for exploration and understanding of the place and platform for expression in a form of interactive online Present Map.

## Introduction

*Relevance of research.* Top-down and bottom-up approaches in developing the built environments were present throughout human history. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces unprecedented situation in the field of urban development. From one point of view there are unprecedented possibilities and tools of democratization of urbanization: online tools, mobile applications, big data availability, social networks, etc. The citizens and communities are more and more keen to have their say in how their environment should look like and should be developed. The legal systems and planning processes become increasingly inclusive and public participation becomes a rule not an exception. However, this seeming unprecedented democratization of urbanization is accompanied by the challenges of market driven production of space [1]. Bureau Urbanisme has distinguished a series of challenges that contemporary cities are facing; cities are working against the environment and are sinks of global resources, the economic system is not serving people

and communities, democratic systems becoming weak, the connections with locality are increasingly broken, and globalization is creating local vulnerabilities [2]. It is evident that all these challenges are related either with the place or society or with both of them. Consequently, this research focuses on the concept of place and makes the differentiation between space and place [3]. Here space is seen as the concept of physical geography defining location as physical space; meanwhile, place is what gives a space meaning, “personality”, and a connection to a cultural or personal identity. It is the culturally ascribed meaning given to a space [4]. It is the “vibe” that you get from a certain space, and it exists for a reason. Decentralization, where central governments are giving more and more power to local governments, creates the situation where planning becomes a market-oriented business, where “government is not anymore steering urban development but merely facilitating initiatives of private real estate developers”. Such planning through projects requires even greater citizen involvement [2] and co-creation with community and users and understanding

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local identity and ecological vulnerabilities of the place. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many projects. One of the reasons of insufficient community involvement in place-making is the lack of appropriate methodologies and tools. In this research place-making is considered a collaborative process by which people can shape their public realm in order to maximize shared value. It is more than just promoting urban design of better quality; place-making can facilitate creative patterns of use, enhancing physical, cultural, and social identities of the place and support its continuity and evolution [5]. This research is centered around active community of Zemieji Sanciai (Žemieji Šančiai in Lithuanian) historic district in Kaunas (Lithuania) and its efforts and approaches of place-making.

*The case of Zemieji Sanciai Community.* The main goals of the Zemieji Sanciai Community are community representation and self-government, meeting the needs of the society through education and cultural activities and creating local culture and identity in the territory of the Zemieji Sanciai. From the establishment of the Zemieji Sanciai Community in 2014 until 2019, community activities were focused on the promotion of creativity and social communication of the residents of the neighbourhood in order to build a society, to promote the principles of cooperation, and to involve various groups of society in the creative process. According to L. Dovydaityte [6], such cultural activities and art projects are typical in the field of socially engaged art, which helps to involve people into the active participation in the creation of the identity of the neighbourhood. From 2019 the number of activities promoting citizenship through various actions, protests, and educations related to the urban issues of the district has increased in the Zemieji Sanciai Community. Such a change was determined by the proposed project by Kaunas Municipality to urbanize the bank of the Nemunas River by constructing a street in the territory of Zemieji Sanciai. In 2019–2021, in order to protect its living environment from undesirable infrastructural changes, the Zemieji Sanciai Community focused on activities that encouraged the participation of citizens in expressing their views on drastic urban change. According to V. Geluniene, the ongoing processes violate the principles of democracy and are seen as aggressive, top-down and violating the rights of the population [7]. As a result of all these events, the Zemieji Sanciai Community has consolidated and together with partners received funding from the European Economic Area and Norwegian financial mechanisms to involve citizens in Sanciai district planning by implementing the project Genius Loci: Urbanization and Civil Society. The aim of the project is to create a common urban vision, which would become a tool for further discussions on the urban development of the territory. The activities of the project involve: stimulation of interest in the history and ecology of the place of local inhabitants and integrating their personal experience; analyzing current activities and the functions

of public spaces and implementing the principles of place-making.

*The aim of the research* was to develop and test the mapping methodology that would be applicable in the process of community involvement into place-making process and would focus on functioning and usage of public spaces. The active community of historic Sanciai district became a living laboratory for the development and application of this methodology.

*The structure of the research* is the following: first, the theories behind the methodology are presented in the theoretical section; in the methodology section the step-by-step sequence of the methodology and its application in mapping workshops in Sanciai community are presented; in the results section the application experience and potential are evaluated. The methods of research include literature review, analysis, comparison and systematization, methodology construction, workshops implementation, recording in photographs, graphical representation, and generalization of results.

## I. Theoretical Grounding

The city is a complex system that consists of various subsystems: social, economic, spatial, visual, aesthetic, ecological, etc., which change and determine each other's changes [8]. All these subsystems have influence on urban space, which is a social product with a social and cultural structure, communities and buildings, spaces. Locals and city visitors use and share spaces and buildings, adapt them to their needs and give them social meaning and value. In his book *The Right to the City*, H. Lefebvre asks: "What spaces are socially successful (and important)? How to identify them and what criteria to apply?" [9].

In order to answer this fundamental question, the research and the developed methodology is based on a couple of main theories and approaches: 1) sociotope method, 2) design thinking, 3) mental mapping, also known as psychogeography. A combination of all three methodologies was developed and practically used in this study. All these theories and approaches are important for community involvement in place-making because they focus on documenting authentic opinions and experiences to gather reliable and original data that can be relevant to the practical decision-making and urban design process.

*The sociotope method* was developed by Swedish scientists around 2000 and has been put into practice in the development of the Stockholm City Master Plan [10]. The sociotope methodology is based on the analysis of urban public spaces by identifying three components of public space (physical space, type of users, and activities) and monitoring of their real manifestations. This methodology allows us to clearly and specifically define the main components of urban public spaces and



the fieldwork, and the interactive online Present Map [15] for data collection. Human resources necessary for the workshops are workshop coordinator and moderators. One moderator can work with 4–5 groups of participants. The sequence of the workshop (Fig. 2) includes the following steps:

- *General information about the present map activities.* The workshop coordinator makes a presentation to all the participants of the workshop. The themes included in the presentation are: definition of public space; typology of public spaces; possible variety of activities in public spaces; types of potential users in public spaces. An online interactive map and the plan of the activities of the day are briefly presented as well. Results: information is provided about the workshop theme, the activities of the day and online interactive map.
- *Formation of working groups.* There can be 4–6 participants in one group. Various techniques and games can be used for group formation.
- *Group work – collective drawing of the map of locality from memory.* Participants work in groups and draw the map of the locality from memory. Before drawing, the typology of public spaces is presented by moderator in more detail in order to demonstrate the wide array of places that are considered as public: from the parks and streets to publicly accessible courtyards, cemetery, riverside. The question that can be asked by the moderator in order to initiate the drawing process: What public spaces and places do you know in the locality? A1 or larger sheet of paper should be used for collective drawing. The drawing may involve street networks, buildings, public spaces, green structures, water bodies. The participant should add comments to each drawn object – name or title, related recent memories, the mood of the place. The following questions may be asked by moderators while drawing: What is this place? What is characteristic to this place? What kind of people visit this place? What do people do in this place? Result: collective drawing of the map of the locality is drawn.
- *Group work – fieldwork in the locality.* The groups take an exploration walk in the locality for approximately one hour with the aim of identifying public spaces and tracing people, activities or signs of activities in the spaces. Each member of the group is provided with the sheet of paper with the map of the locality and the table for filling the information about the locality. The table has the spaces for listing and characterizing public spaces, their equipment, users, activities taking place there or signs of activities. The participants are encouraged to take photographs of places and objects. The boundaries of the exploration area are defined; however, each group can decide the walking route on their own. Result: information about the identified

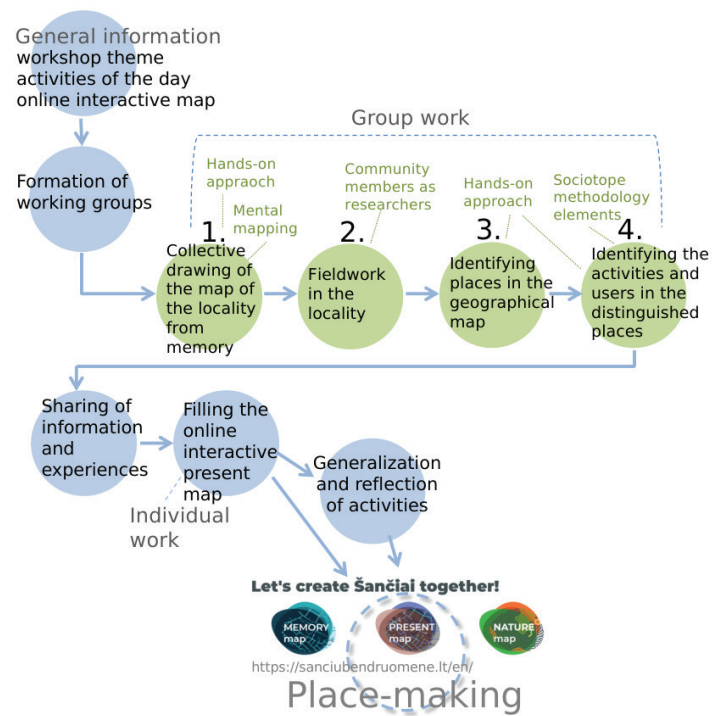


Fig. 2. Sequence of the workshop activities [scheme developed by the authors].

places, their users, and activities or signs of activities in them are collected by each group member.

- *Group work – identifying places in the geographical map of the locality.* Group members identify and mark the objects and places from their collective drawing and the places identified during the fieldwork on the actual geographical map of the locality and add comments about the features of the places and objects. This is the first layer of the map – places. The following questions may be asked by moderators: What is this place? What is characteristic to this place? Result: the places identified by the group in the map of the locality are supplemented by the comments of the group members.
- *Group work – identifying the activities and users in the distinguished places in the geographical map of the locality.* The second layer of the map is identified as activities and users. The group members identify in the map the activities and the types of users that they remember or have spotted during the fieldwork in the public spaces. Before mapping the activities and users the participants are given specific information on the types of activities and users. The typology of activities is developed based on sociotope methodology. All the activities are subdivided into four groups: active, passive, events, others (Fig. 2). For example, active activities include swimming, ball games, boating, games and sports, etc.; passive activities are relaxation in nature, flower observation, sitting, etc.; events include various occasionally organized happenings, such as folklore events, celebrations, etc. Other activities are

the ones spotted by observers or reported by public space users themselves that are not listed in the previous three categories. The typology of users can be the following: adults, seniors, youngsters, adolescents, school age children, preschool children, parents or other caregivers with children, people with special needs, tourists, uniformed officials. Participants write the type of activities on sticky notes and attach them to the places identified earlier on the map. Different colours of sticky notes can be used for different types of activities – active, passive, events. The types of users are identified by using pictogram stickers, which are glued on the map in combination with sticky notes identifying activities. The following questions may be asked by moderators: What people visit this place? What do people do in this place? Results: geographical map of the locality is created with identified public spaces and the users and activities of these spaces.

- *Sharing of information and experiences, comparison of results between the groups of participants.* Each group presents their work – collective drawing and geographical map – to other workshop participants. The following questions may be asked by moderators during the presentation: What places were identified? What people visit them and what are they doing there? Why the identified places are exceptional? Which places were

identified first and why? What mood is created in the places by the activities taking place there? What are the “blank spots” of the locality and why? Where are people and activities concentrated and why? Result: exchange of information, comparison of results, discussion.

- *Individual work – filling the online interactive Present Map.* The workshop moderator presents the interactive online Present Map [15] (Fig. 3) and shows its functionalities for the workshop participants. Each participant of the workshop enters the selected experience from the map into interactive map using computer or mobile device. Moderator helps the participants if any challenges occur while using the online map. Results: information is entered in the online interactive Present Map. The Present Map is designed to subjectively identify the social goals and meanings of the city’s public spaces based on people’s experiences and to interpret them objectively to create visions of the city. The map is a platform where the individual experience of the population is accumulated, thus collecting information about the activities, feelings, use and social values of public spaces in Sanciai district and using the obtained data to create a territorial identity and promote a space of empathy. The Map helps constructively involve urban community in the planning process, thus creating a reflection of people’s social needs. The Present Map gives the opportunity to every participant to become the present history creator, to connect with the territory and become a part of the community. The digital map gives information for the researcher about spaces, users and activities and the possibility to see the territory with the eyes of the locals.
- *Generalization and reflection of activities.* The workshop is finalized with the generalizing discussion. The pattern of usage of public spaces of the locality showing the most frequently occurring activities and users involved can be created using the materials of the workshop – pictogram stickers and sticky notes. The following questions may be asked by moderators during the discussion: What has happened here? What fact or place do you remember the most from this workshop? Why is it important? Result: discussion of participants and a created collage of the pattern of public spaces usage of locality.

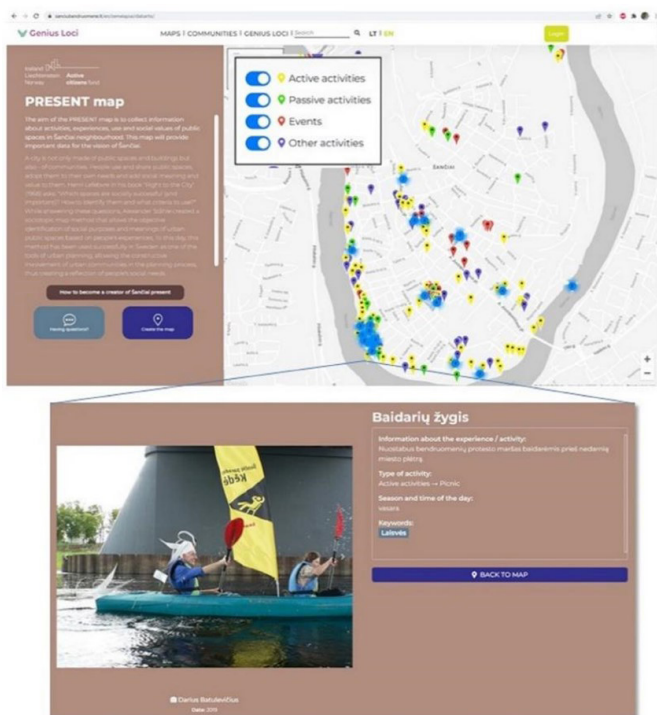


Fig. 3. Interactive Sanciai Present Map [15]. The data about the places and activities – location in the map, activity type (active, passive, events, other), the season of the year when the activity took place, short activity description, photos – are collected and displayed in the map [images from Interactive Sanciai Present Map [15]].

### III. Results and Discussion

The Present Map methodology was applied in Sanciai historic district in 4 creative mapping workshops with 3 different age groups: in 2 workshops for school children from 11 to 13 years old and youth from 14 to 16 years old (Fig. 5) and in 2 workshops for adults (Fig. 4). One workshop for the adults was implemented with people with special needs and their helpers in the centre for people with special needs “Korys” located in Sanciai.

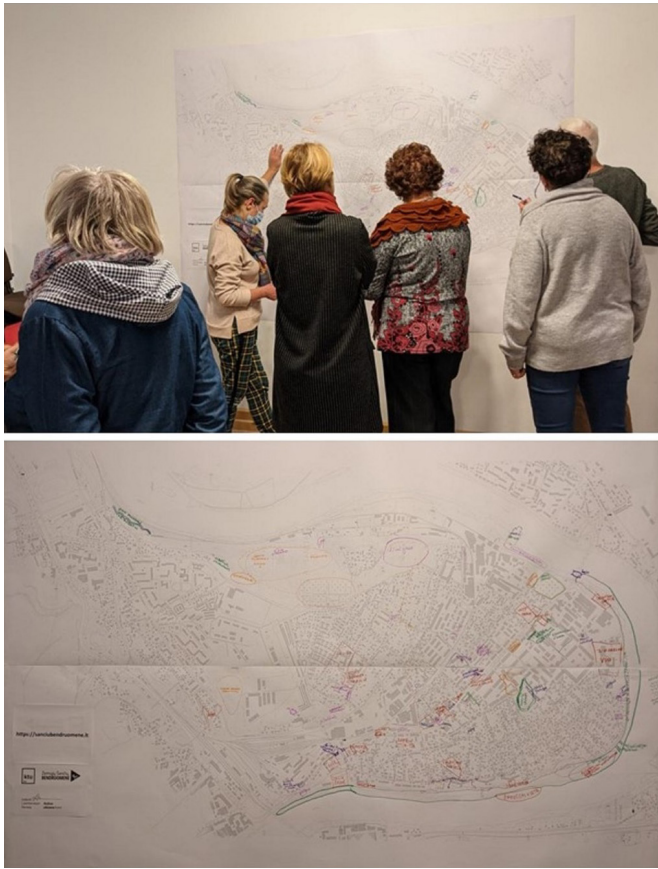


Fig. 4. Group work in the creative workshops with Sanciai community members. Participants had to identify public spaces relevant to them in the geographical map of the locality [images from the archive of the authors].

During these creative workshops, we found out that participants from different age and social groups understand and interpret space differently. For example, people with reduced mobility pay close attention to the transport system, transport stops, and the accessibility of public spaces, while children and young people are more oriented towards their immediate environment – the school environment.

Working with different age groups of the community had revealed the necessity of different approaches in the step of the workshop where the participants had to identify local users and the activities that can be performed at each location. For example, when working with adults, we found that they already knew a large part of the study area and could recognize each local activity or user. However, when working with youth or children, we encountered the specifics that they do not know the area well, even if the biggest part of the workshop participants lives in Sanciai. Youth and children often do not identify or do not pay attention to the territory, thus to participate in the workshop, they need to know the environment better by doing fieldwork before identifying users and activities. During the fieldwork children and youth can explore the territory, find more public spaces and understand the users and activities of the area. Therefore, children and youth had a short field work – a trip to surroundings with the task of doing photo fixation of the public places and their users (Fig. 5). This stage of the workshop gives an opportunity to get acquainted with point of view of different age groups about the territory and their perception about it. Besides that, fieldwork broadens the participants' knowledge about the territory, its users, and their needs and allows adding reliable information in the Present Map.



Fig. 5. Creative workshops with Sanciai community members – school children: photographs taken during the fieldwork; hands-on approach in the mapping workshop; geographical map of the locality with public spaces, activities, and users identified by the workshop participants [images from the archive of the authors].

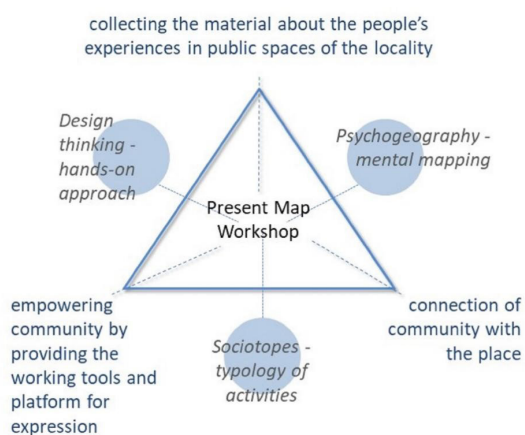


Fig. 6. The main benefits of the Present Map workshops [developed by the authors].

The application experience of the Present Map methodology allowed distinguishing several general benefits related to data collection for place management and planning purposes and community development (Fig. 6). The methodology allows achieving new quality through the synergy of well-known methods, such as design thinking, mental mapping and sociotope method. Moreover, the novelty here is that the elements of the sociotope methodology are introduced to the members of community, which allows collecting the information about the experiences in public spaces that would not otherwise be available and, for example, would not be collected by observation of researchers. The following community development benefits could be distinguished: connection of the people with the place through researching, walking, observations, drawing, mapping; fostering creativity and self-expression by using hands-on approach in mapping; community building by common activities and empowerment by providing tools and understanding related to public spaces and presenting a platform for expression in the form of interactive online map.

## Conclusions

The proposed project by Kaunas Municipality to urbanize the bank of the Nemunas River by constructing the street in the territory of Zemiejai Sanciai raised disagreement and protests of the community against the unsustainable urbanization. The willingness of the members of community to be involved in urban planning and in place-making in a wider sense transformed Sanciai community into a living urban laboratory, where community participation approaches and techniques were developed and tested. The Present Map methodology is one of these approaches oriented towards the community involvement into place-making process and is focused on functioning and usage of public spaces.

The Present Map methodology is based on the mental mapping approach and involves the elements of design thinking and sociotope methods. The originality and functionality of the methodology is determined by the synergy of these well-known tools: the techniques of drawing from memory and working with actual geographical maps characteristic to mental mapping are complemented with the typology of activities and the concept of the public space as a “biotope”, where life of the locality unfolds, from sociotope methodology and design thinking approach that provided the idea of using hands-on techniques and involving drawing, colouring, cutting, and gluing activities that require presence in the moment, concentration and foster creativity.

The main structural components of the Present Map methodology include collective drawing of the map of locality from memory, fieldwork in the locality identifying public spaces and tracing people, activities or signs of activities in them, identifying places in the geographical map of the locality, identifying the activities and users in the distinguished places in the geographical map of the locality, filling the online interactive Present Map. The main activities are complemented by presentations, sharing of information, and discussions.

The Present Map methodology was applied in 4 workshops with 3 different age groups: 2 workshops for children aged 11 to 13 and youth aged 14 to 16 and 2 workshops for adults (one workshop was done with people with special needs and their helpers). The implementation of the workshops confirmed the functionality of the methodology as well as allowed determining some potential workshop structure variations depending on the age and the social group of the participants. For example, for children and youth the fieldwork element of the workshop appears to be very important. General benefits of the methodology include: possibility to collect the material about people’s experiences in public spaces of the locality and people’s preferences towards public spaces, connecting community with the place, empowering community by providing the working tools and platform for expression.

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