

Participatory Planning in Post-socialist Cities: A Case Study of Riga

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Abstract – After three decades of socio-economic and political changes, participation in urban planning is still an emerging practice in post-socialist countries. Using Riga as a case study, the research aims to explore participatory planning practices in a post-socialist urban context since 1990. Employing meta-analysis as a methodological approach to combine information from various sources, the study identifies three phases of participatory planning in Riga characterized by changes in government-led participatory planning approaches, level of participation, outcomes as well as changes in the civic sector.

Keywords – participation, public engagement, urban planning.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in urban planning has gradually become a norm in almost all liberal democratic planning systems [1] since the 1960s. Ideally, participatory planning provides opportunities for citizens to engage in the planning and development processes and contribute to its results [2]. It is assumed that through participation the resulting planning documents should reflect the interests of all citizens or stakeholders. Overall, participation is perceived as *good in and of itself* [3]. The existing body of literature suggests multiple advantages of participatory planning: greater legitimacy, accountability, and transparency of the decision-making process [4], [5], social learning [5], trust-building, and knowledge sharing among stakeholders [6], improved content of the plans [7], and greater public support [4], [8] for the resulting policy or plan. However, there is a sufficient amount of critique of participation in planning outlining difficulties and challenges related to the process and efficacy of participatory planning [9]. Therefore, the debate on participation remains open and asks for more complex and diverse insights into participatory planning in various contexts.

In practice, the idea of participation in urban planning has persisted for over 50 years in the Western democratic countries. The approaches of participation were first conceptualized by Sherry R. Arnstein in her Ladder of Citizen Participation [10] with eight rungs of participation. More recent, but equally widely used is the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation [11] that encompasses five levels of participation: (1) inform, (2) consult, (3) involve, (4) collaborate, and (5) empower. The research shows that participation is more effective when it involves dialogue and interactions among stakeholders [4], but the reality of participatory planning often reveals that local authorities tend to prefer informing and consulting strategies with limited two-way communication. That is especially the case in developing countries and young democracies like post-socialist or transition countries.

The current level of research on participatory planning in post-socialist countries is rather limited. The research so far has

generally focused on urban development trajectories [12], urban or spatial planning practices [13]–[15] or urban regeneration [16] with few studies addressing participatory planning in the post-socialist context [17]–[20]. Generally, the main research focus has been on specific aspects or approaches of participation in urban planning and development [21]–[26]. Post-socialist or transition countries are still new and continuously developing European democracies [14], [21] that were faced with a challenge of forming and adjusting their planning systems to meet the requirements of a new market economy, political regime, societal and institutional frameworks in a comparatively short time [14], [15]. Although many Eastern and Central European countries looked to the Western democracies for practices and methods in urban planning, the direct transfer was rarely possible due to unique features of the post-socialist context [14]. Lack of individual initiative and personal responsibility, low level of participation in the public domain, tendency towards non-transparent decision-making, the culture of complaint, the climate of mistrust, increasing uncertainty and pessimism [13], [16] have had a continuous impact on participatory planning resulting in a citizen democracy that is still fragile and sensitive [21] but with emerging positive tendencies in the recent years. Against this background, this study aims to explore participatory planning practices in a post-socialist urban context since 1990 using Riga as a case study. With a focus on changes in formats and methods of stakeholder engagement, level of participation, outcomes, and changes in the civic sector, the study intends to provide a retrospective analysis of a post-socialist city that some have called exemplary [12].

I. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design is based on a single case study approach that allows carrying out an in-depth exploratory study within a specific context. Riga was deliberately chosen due to the early implementation of participatory planning practices in the 1990s and the continuous attempts to introduce new planning approaches. The list of the main comprehensive and strategic planning documents of Riga city is shown in Table 1. The author purposefully selected 4 main planning documents for this study to reduce the volume of the research: (1) Riga Development Plan 1995–2005 (RDP 1995–2005), (2) Riga Historic Centre and its Protection Zone Preservation and Development Plan (RHC PDP), (3) Riga Development Plan 2006–2018 (RDP 2006–2018), (4) Riga Spatial Plan until 2030 (RSP 2030). The research focuses on the period between the Riga City Council's (RCC) first decision to prepare a planning document and the decision to approve it excluding subsequent amendments. Furthermore, it was chosen not to include specific cases of preparing detailed or local plans to keep

TABLE I
THE MAIN COMPREHENSIVE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENTS OF RIGA CITY SINCE 1990 [AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE]

Planning document(s)	RCC first decision to start preparing the document(s)	RCC decision to approve the document(s)
Riga Development Plan 1995–2005	May 14, 1993	Dec. 12, 1995
Riga Historic Centre and its Protection Zone Preservation and Development Plan	Sept. 26, 2000	Feb. 7, 2006
Riga Development Plan 2006–2018 including:		
Riga Spatial Plan 2006–2018	Jun. 4, 2002	Dec. 20, 2005
Riga Long-term Strategy until 2025	Jun. 4, 2002	Nov. 15, 2005
Riga Development Program 2006–2012 (later amended and approved as Riga Development Program 2010–2013)	Jun. 4, 2002	Nov. 15, 2005
Riga Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030	Jul. 5, 2011	May 27, 2014
Riga Development Program 2014–2020	Jul. 5, 2011	May 27, 2014
Riga Spatial Plan until 2030	Jul. 3, 2012	Ongoing
Riga Development Program 2021–2027	Nov. 21, 2018	Ongoing
Riga Historic Centre and its Protection Zone Thematic Plans	Dec. 15, 2017	Ongoing

the research manageable and comparable across the decades or of public engagement in the development and building projects that have been researched before [26].

The preliminary search for data and materials revealed a considerable lack of information on the planning processes in the 1990s leading to choosing meta-analysis as a primary research method. Meta-analysis allowed using different published secondary data and information sources in one research project and employing content analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic [27, 111–112]. The types of published materials that were analyzed in this study included newspaper articles, online media articles, local authority's reports and documents, research reports, research articles, and planning documents. The newspaper articles were extracted from the online database of Latvian National Digital Library (*periodika.lv*), the online media articles were extracted from several popular news portals (*Delfi.lv*, *Tvnet.lv*, *Diena.lv*) and the website of Latvia's leading public policy think tank *PROVIDUS* (*providus.lv*), and the reports and documents were obtained from the RCC's City Development Department, Archive, and website. In total, the subsequent content analysis was carried out on more than 300 documents. Full list of the newspaper and online media articles is provided as a data file, other documents are referenced in the text.

The content analysis focused on identifying government-led participatory activities (type, form, venue, timing, level of participation, and outcome) in preparation of the selected planning documents and changes in the civic sector (forms of participation, level of organization, etc.). Additionally, the analysis provided insights into dominating views and opinions on the existing planning practices and participatory processes. The lack of available information from the 1990s created an imbalance for the analysis but it still allowed to provide basic insight into the participatory planning processes. Furthermore, the participatory

activities were categorized based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation [11], and, when possible, the available data were compared to illustrate the changes over time.

II. RESEARCH CONTEXT: URBAN PLANNING IN RIGA

Post-socialist countries underwent an economic transition, social transition, and transition in governance in a relatively short time [12], and it had a strong impact on urban development and planning practice. Latvia and other countries had to develop and adjust their planning systems to the new market economy [15]. In Latvia, the responsibility to carry out urban planning was delegated to municipalities in 1991. In 1994, there were first local elections followed by the adoption of the first regulations specifically addressing territorial (spatial) planning on national, regional, municipal, and local levels (Cab. Reg. No. 194 Territorial Planning Regulations). In the following years, the legislation defining the spatial planning process changed with a regular frequency until 2009 when the government adopted the Development Planning System Law after the administrative-territorial reform. The current planning system and style in Latvia can be characterized as a decentralized, integrated, and comprehensive spatial planning with a tendency of centralization for recognizing the priorities of national and regional scales [13].

Regardless of frequent changes in the legislation on spatial planning, the review of laws and regulations over the three decades show little changes in the requirements for public engagement in urban planning. The regulations aim at defining minimum procedures that must be followed for preparation of the planning documents, which mostly encompass public display of the planning documents, public discussion (hearing), and information dissemination and availability that has seen an introduction of online platforms since 2004. The existing regulations

facilitate episodic involvement of the general public at specific stages of the plan-making process and allow the local authorities to choose the level and methods of public engagement as long as the minimum statutory requirements of public participation have been met. Moreover, there are currently no regulations or guidelines defining criteria for the evaluation of public opinions or even an obligation to incorporate public views into the planning documents; therefore, the process is still relatively transparent.

The first Riga city plan was already in preparation before the adoption of the regulations addressing spatial planning in Latvia. The plan was developed in times of many uncertainties including changing governance structures, institutional settings, and land reform. It was difficult to make any type of predictions or forecasts in the existing context due to the lack of data and national or regional plans [28]. The preparation of the RDP 1995–2005 has largely been personified with the planning team led by architect and urban planner Andris Roze [29]. It is safe to assume that his experience from the USA and Canada determined the approaches used in the planning process and the resulting format and content of the plan, which has been characterized by some as too general and not in line with the existing legal framework [29]. Additionally, the government of Canada ensured funding for the exchange of experience and support in the preparation of the development plans that facilitated the adoption of Western-style planning practices early on. Many news items of the 1990s refer to the preparatory process as the first time the Riga city plan has been prepared in a democratic way involving a variety of experts and the general public.

The 2000s were marked with the preparation and adoption of two major planning documents – the RHC PDP and the RDP 2006–2018 that consisted of three documents. Both documents were prepared by a new team of planners in times of considerable economic growth, changing political forces in the RCC, and growing interest of investors in prime development locations in Riga. The resulting spatial plan was very different from the RDP 1995–2005 and has been characterized as fragmented, with an inadequate degree of detailed elaboration, and catering to the private interests of investors [30], [31].

Some authors talk about the qualitative improvement of planning practice in Latvia since the 2010s [13]. In Riga, this period has seen the preparation and amendments of several planning documents. The most noteworthy, however, is the preparation process of the RSP 2030 that is still ongoing. It is based on a new methodology incorporating the initial development of 11 thematic plans and the continuous involvement of the general public and various stakeholders [29]. The planning process has taken a considerably longer time than initially expected but it has also become more research-driven, as the local authority is funding different studies.

III. GOVERNMENT-LED PARTICIPATORY PLANNING APPROACHES

Since the 1990s, the RCC department responsible for urban planning has employed participatory approaches and methods to

engage citizens in urban planning. The overall process of preparation of the selected planning documents is represented in Fig. 1.

In the 1990s, the main emphasis of the participatory planning was on public display or exhibition of planning materials and public discussions or seminars – the approaches that were defined as minimum requirements for public participation in 1994. The public displays of materials usually took place at specific periods in various locations in Riga. Visitors were encouraged to fill out questionnaires to express their opinions on problems and preferable future outlook for the city. Additionally, the draft version of the plan was published and disseminated as a special edition newspaper. Throughout this process, the planning challenges and prospects of Riga were discussed in the news media, including extensive publications outlining the focal ideas of the new city plan. In some cases, the media was also used as a platform to initiate dialogue between the public and planners. In other cases, the media was an outlet for various opinions including the legitimacy and impact of the participatory processes. Although positioned as the first democratic and participatory planning process in Riga and Latvia, the approaches employed during this period are characteristic of informing and consulting forms of participation with greater emphasis on information dissemination.

In the 2000s, the statutory approaches of public participation (public display and discussion) proved to be insufficient to engage citizens; therefore, the local authority sought other approaches and methods for obtaining citizen input and employed public engagement experts to assist with the process. The approaches used for engagement of a larger number of citizens included citizen surveys (in 2001 and 2002) in the case of the RHC PDP and extensive marketing and public engagement campaign “Es daru Rīgu!” (*I do Riga!*) in the case of the RDP 2006–2018. The objective of the campaign was to activate citizens providing different opportunities to express ideas in a convenient and often informal way. The campaign allowed to send SMS to the Mayor of Riga, fill out questionnaires, send in pre-paid post-cards, leave messages, send emails, participate in discussions, clean-ups, and other activities. The campaign also used incentives to draw in a larger number of participants – prizes for the best ideas.

An additional novelty was the use of online tools – specially designed websites where anyone could find the latest information and relevant documents on the respective planning process as well as engage in discussions. However, considering that internet access was still fairly limited in the early 2000s, it is likely that online public engagement was quite low. Nevertheless, using forum-like features on a website to foster discussions can be considered a progressive approach at the time.

Overall, the 2000s showed a diversification of the participatory activities, especially for obtaining feedback and input from the citizens. However, the approaches used during this period were still employing informing and consulting participatory strategies with the main objective to increase the number of citizen input as an indicator of a successful participatory process. In preparing the RDP 2006–2018, there was an attempt at establishing a working group with different stakeholders for solving a conflicting issue, but the results indicate that the objective was to placate

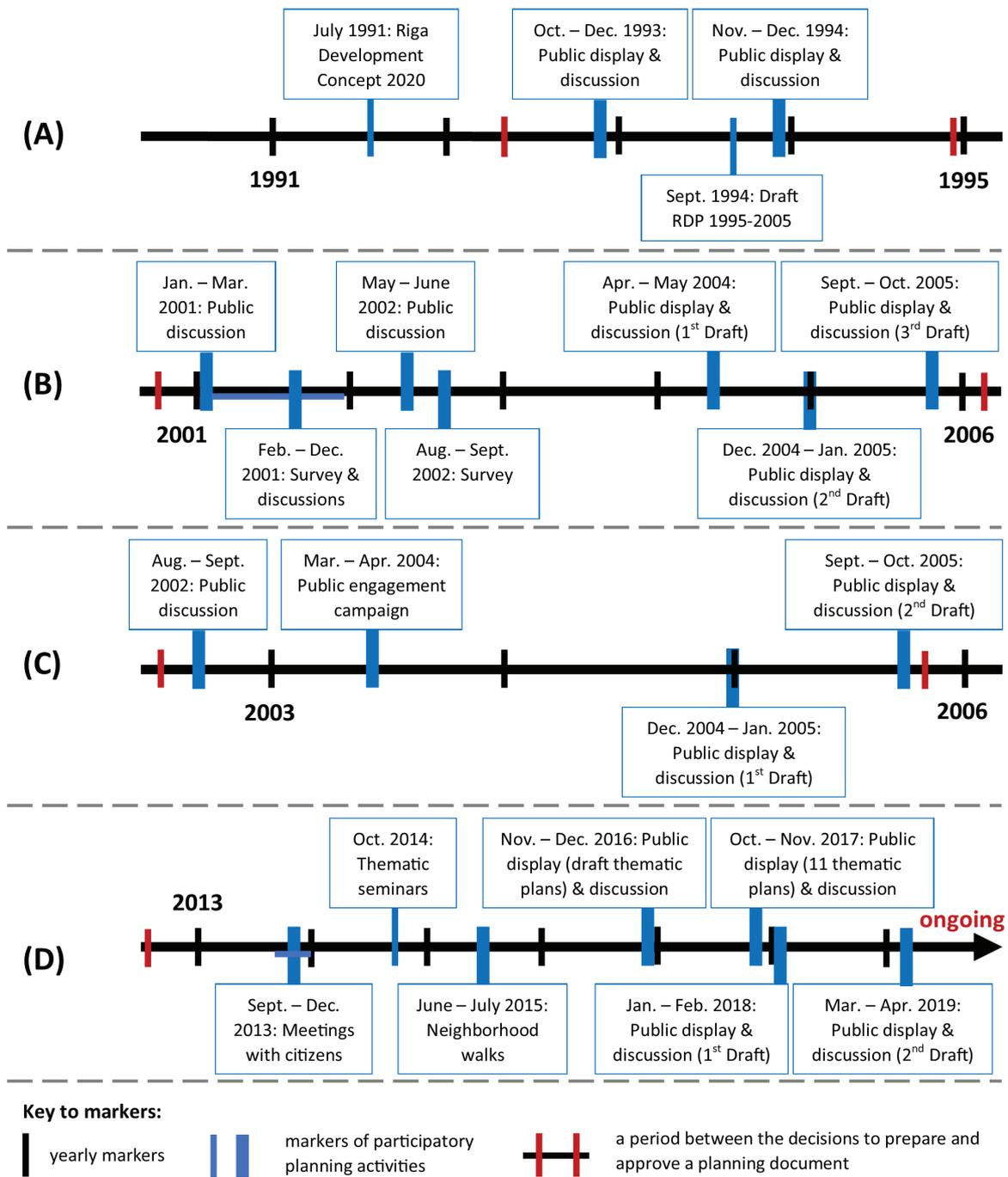


Fig. 1. Timelines of participatory activities in preparation of (A) Riga Development Plan 1995–2005, (B) Riga Historic Center and its Protection Zone Preservation and Development Plan, (C) Riga Development Plan 2006–2018, (D) Riga Spatial Plan until 2030 (author’s illustration).

the opposing citizens instead of engaging in a meaningful dialogue and deliberation process.

At the end of the 2000s, the RCC City Development Department introduced a neighborhood concept dividing Riga into 58 neighborhoods. The initial idea was to use it as a platform for data collection and planning purposes but it became a basis also for participatory activities on the local level in the subsequent

plan-making processes. Coupled with a new method for preparation of the RSP 2030, the 2010s show new tendencies in the participatory planning in Riga. The general approach defined by the local authority suggests three levels of public participation: informing, consulting, and involving [29]. The involvement has been ensured by engaging with citizens, non-governmental organizations, professional organizations, and other stakeholders

TABLE II
THE SPECTRUM OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING APPROACHES IN PREPARATION OF THE SELECTED PLANNING DOCUMENTS
(HIGHLIGHTED TEXT IN BLUE INDICATES STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION) [AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE]

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE
RDP 1995–2005	Public display/exhibition <u>Announcements</u> and publications in <u>news media</u> Publication of draft plan as a special edition newspaper	Public discussions/seminars Questionnaires	
RHC PDP	Public display <u>Announcements</u> and publications in <u>news media</u> Publication of documents online Website	Public discussions Questionnaires Citizen surveys Stakeholder discussions Website (discussion section), email	
RDP 2006–2018	Public display <u>Announcements</u> and publications in <u>news media and municipal websites</u> Publication of documents online Website	Public discussions Questionnaires SMS, pre-paid post-cards, dedicated phone number, email, etc.	<i>Working group meetings</i>
RSP 2030	Public display <u>Announcements</u> and publications in <u>news media, social media, and municipal websites</u> Publication of documents online	Public discussions Online solutions for submission of suggestions (email, geoportal, etc.) Citizen surveys Meetings and seminars Neighborhood walks	Meetings & discussions with various organizations and institutions (enlarged working groups)

in numerous thematic or place-based meetings and discussions as well as establishing working groups with various stakeholders. The consultation process also employed new approaches like neighborhood walks and increased use of online solutions for collecting citizen feedback and input. Creating opportunities for involvement, however, has substantially extended the plan-making process but it was done to reduce political risks and citizen protests [29] that were a serious obstacle in the 2000s.

To summarize, the methods and approaches of participatory planning in Riga have gradually diversified to provide more opportunities for participation and to keep up with the modern-day tendencies. However, the chosen participatory approaches have generally remained at the informing and consulting level of the participation spectrum (see Table II). It might be explained with the necessary learning curve for both the local authority and the society, differing perceptions of meaningful participation among actors, the need for control on the part of local government as well as the availability of resources. Only in the 2010s, it is possible to observe more consistent and direct work with the public and other stakeholders, characteristic of involvement level of participation. The outcome and endurance of this approach are, however, still unclear as the plan-making process is ongoing.

IV. LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES

The analysis also provided insights into the level of participation and outcomes of the participatory processes, especially for the 2000s and 2010s. Unfortunately, there is little available quantifiable data from the 1990s. The news media have

only made a couple of references to the level of participation, e.g., the public display of the draft RDP 1995–2005 had drawn 5500 visitors but it is unknown how many suggestions or comments the visitors made. Overall, the level of citizen interest and activity in the 1990s has been characterized as both very high and very low giving a contradictory impression. However, the planners have stated in the news media that not all of the suggestions received during the plan-making process were included in the final version of the document, as some of them could not be solved within the scope of the plan.

The available information on the level of participation in the preparation of the RHC PDP is incomplete. There were 5 rounds of public discussions with various levels of success. The public discussion held in 2002 resulted in no suggestions or comments from the general public. This outcome was often referred to as the reason for changing public engagement strategy and putting greater emphasis on promoting public participation opportunities. In comparison, the public discussion in Spring 2004 resulted in 166 submissions of suggestions and comments. The reasons for a comparatively low level of participation could be related to the specific focus of the planning document, but the criticism expressed in the news media referred to the timing of the participatory activities. Since 2004, the participatory activities for the RHC PDP and the RDP 2006–2018 ran parallel potentially causing confusion and giving more attention to the main city planning documents.

More consistent and systematic information on the level of participation is available for the RDP 2006–2018 and the RSP 2030, which illustrates the tendencies in the 2000s and the 2010s (see Table III).

TABLE III
OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES OF THE SELECTED PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES FOR THE RIGA DEVELOPMENT
PLAN 2006–2018 AND THE RIGA SPATIAL PLAN UNTIL 2030 [32]–[35]

Riga Development Plan 2006–2018				
Participatory activity	Public discussion	Public engagement campaign	Public display & discussion (1 st Draft)	Public display & discussion (2 nd Draft)
Duration	Aug. 2, 2002 – Sept. 27, 2002	Mar. 30, 2004 – Apr. 17, 2004	Dec. 7, 2004 – Feb. 1, 2005	Sept. 6, 2005 – Oct. 18, 2005
Number of submissions	6	10 649	4877	1642 (≈800 concrete suggestions)
Outcomes (public discussions of 1 st Draft & 2 nd Draft)				
		Individuals	Legal entities	Civic organizations
Accepted		47 %	44 %	43 %
Rejected		41 %	44 %	50 %
Not relevant		12 %	12 %	7 %
Riga Spatial Plan until 2030				
Participatory activity	Public display & discussion (1 st Draft)		Public display & discussion (2 nd Draft)	
Duration	Jan. 9, 2018 – Feb. 8, 2018		Mar. 13, 2019 – Apr. 10, 2019	
Number of submissions	769		875	
...via <i>geolatvija.lv</i>	476 (62 %)		580 (66 %)	
Number of suggestions	≈1500		1151	
Outcomes				
Not relevant	≈23 %		4 %	
Given explanation/taken into consideration	n/a		80 %	
Rejected	n/a		13 %	
Other	n/a		3 %	

The participatory activities for the RDP 2006–2018 show an inconsistent level of participation with the initial public discussion in 2002 receiving less than 10 submissions and the public engagement campaign in Spring 2004 resulting in more than 10 000 received information units. It shows that when providing diverse and convenient forms of participation and ensuring widespread promotion, the level of participation substantially increases. The subsequent public discussion showed another trend – self-organization of citizens against specific solutions proposed in the planning documents. For example, from the nearly 5000 submissions during the public discussion of the 1st Draft of the RDP 2006–2018, more than 3600 were against three specific development solutions. It demonstrates a form of protest within the statutory limits of the public discussion and partially explains the relatively high rejection rate of the submissions.

The level of participation in the public discussion for the RSP 2030 shows a fairly consistent number of submissions and suggestions both in 2018 and 2019. Interestingly, the participants show a preference for using the national geospatial website (*geolatvija.lv*) for submission of their suggestions or comments as opposed to sending or submitting them directly to the RCC's City Development Department via mail, email, or in person. The data

from 2019, also reveal a considerable drop in the number of submissions that are not relevant for the planning document and a comparatively low rejection rate.

Finally, the participatory processes in planning have received much criticism over the years. Special scrutiny has been paid to the process of evaluating the citizen input received during public discussions. Citizens and non-governmental organizations have repeatedly pointed out the lack of transparency on deciding to accept or reject these suggestions as well as lack of follow-up discussions. The reports on participatory activities from the 2000s reveal little or no insights into the decision-making process, although the rejection rate was comparatively high. Reports from the 2010s, however, show the criteria for analyzing citizens' input: legitimacy, compliance with other planning documents, equilibrium, relevance, and validity, but lack a more in-depth explanation of their meaning or application. Overall, the continuous and persistent criticism shows the wish to move beyond the “inform & consult” approach dominating the participatory processes and employ strategies based on meaningful involvement and collaboration that seem to be slowly emerging in the recent years. It could also help to move on from the perceived formal character of participation that was especially dominant in the 2000s.

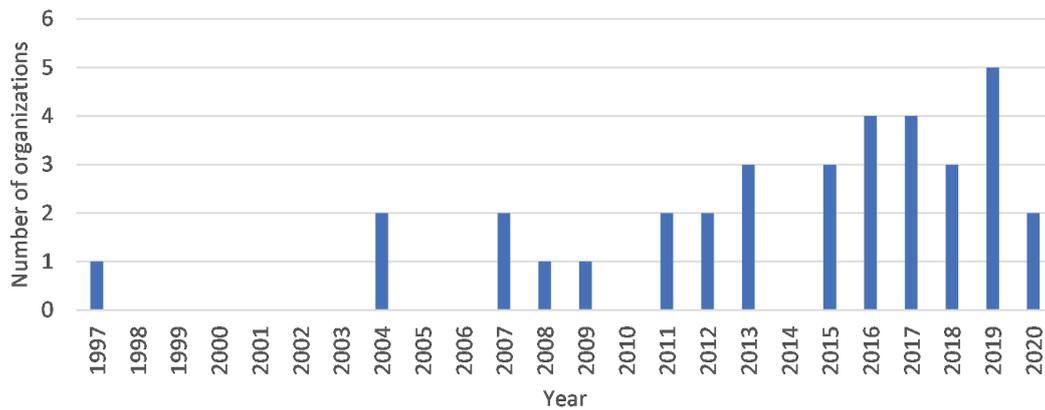


Fig. 2. The number of registered place-based non-governmental organizations (neighborhood associations) each year (data source: <https://www.lursoft.lv/>, August 2020).

V. CIVIC SECTOR AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Throughout the three decades, there have been changes not only in the government-led planning processes but also in the civic sector. Data collection revealed little information on the activities of the civic sector in urban planning in the 1990s. The reports of national trends show a growing number of non-governmental organizations since 1992 with the largest number registered in Riga [36] suggesting that the civic sector was developing during this period. However, from the news items of the 1990s, it can be concluded that the citizen activity in urban planning was comparatively low. Few references were made to the citizens' dissatisfaction with the development trends in some locations but the media did not report major civic sector activities. In this context, the author chooses to mark the beginning of civic activism in urban planning in Riga with the foundation of the first neighborhood association – *Mežaparka Attīstības biedrība* (*Mežaparks Development Association*) that took place in September 1997.

In the 2000s, the civic sector activities in urban planning were growing and expanding. Several civic organizations had become vocal and visible in the media expressing opinions on issues related to urban planning and development in Riga. The activities of civic organizations largely represented different forms of protesting throughout the 2000s. For example, *Vides aizsardzības klubs* (*VAK*; Environmental Protection Club) organized a petition to impose a ban on construction in the Riga Historic Center territory until the approval of the RHC PDP. The organization managed to collect 10 675 signatures and the petition was submitted to the RCC. Eventually, the ban was imposed to stop the uncoordinated development and construction projects in the area. *VAK* also petitioned to stop the approval of the RDP 2006–2018 but with less success. Another noteworthy example is the association's *Koalīcija dabas un kultūras mantojuma aizsardzībai* (*KDKMA*; Coalition for Protection of Nature and Culture Heritage) court case against the RCC. The *KDKMA* appealed against the approval of the RDP 2006–2018 on grounds of departure from the statutory procedure in preparing the document. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia recognized a part of the

RDP 2006–2008 related to the Riga Freeport area as not corresponding to the existing legislation and enforced the previous plan for this territory.

Besides petitioning and litigation, the analysis of news items of the period shows that the civic organizations used sanctioned and sometimes unsanctioned protests and organized a variety of events, including alternative public discussions. Collaboration of NGOs with the local authorities in the 2000s was weak and mostly initiated by local government [37]. The role of civic organizations was generally the one of opposition to the local authority. The data show repeated criticism of the organization of public discussions, transparency of the process, and availability of information. Moreover, often negative outcomes of the participatory processes largely contributed to the radical and sometimes emotional reactions of the civic actors, created obstacles for building trust and establishing a basis for collaboration and dialogue, and fueled the general attitude that participation in urban planning is only a formal process. It might explain the results of a survey from 2007 that show that only 8 % of respondents have participated in a public discussion of development projects in Riga [38].

The tendencies in the 2010s show a partial change in the role of the civic sector from opposition towards collaboration. There can be observed a considerable increase in the number of place-based (neighborhood) associations in Riga (see Fig. 2). According to the Enterprise Register of the Republic of Latvia, there should be 35 non-governmental organizations representing Riga neighborhoods with more than half established in the last 5 years. However, not all of them are active and functioning. The information published by *Rīgas Apkaimju alianse* (Riga Neighborhood Alliance – the umbrella organization for Riga neighborhood associations) in August 2020 suggests that 27 neighborhoods in Riga have a representing organization and 19 have joined the alliance. Moreover, several civic organizations are dedicating their activities to improving the urban environment in Riga and other Latvian cities, e.g., association *Pilsēta cilvēkiem* (City for People).

The existing research shows that neighborhood organizations have chosen several fields of activities, e.g., preservation of cul-

tural heritage, environmental protection, and participation in urban planning [25]. Moreover, these organizations play an important role in activating citizens and strengthening local identity through place-based activities and projects [25]. Although the number of civic organizations has grown, survey data show a surprisingly stable trend in the context of citizen involvement. The annual survey of Riga residents reveals that the rate of respondents involved in a non-governmental or other organization in their neighborhood between 2012 and 2019 has remained only slightly above 4 %, and of those who do not participate anywhere or believe that it is not relevant for them has remained around 85 % [39]. At the same time, the views on the opportunities to participate in the city development and decision-making processes and to express one's opinion have slightly changed for the better since 2007 [39], [40].

The activities of civic organizations have also undergone some changes. Although protesting against unwanted development projects or trends is still prevalent among civic sector actors, it is possible to identify the emergence of collaborative forms of participation. This trend can be partially attributed to the government-led activities creating platforms and instruments for collaboration and support of non-governmental organizations outside the statutory planning process. For example, Riga municipality organizes annual citizen forums since 2010 in collaboration with NGOs. These have become a platform for the exchange of experiences among NGOs and for discussions with the local authority. Furthermore, Riga has launched a funding program for neighborhood initiatives in 2016 and a participatory budgeting program in 2019 providing support for bottom-up, place-based projects [24]. Also, there has been a multitude of EU funded projects employing collaborative approaches for neighborhood initiatives facilitating citizen engagement. Additionally, civic sector organizations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and other online solutions for self-organization and promotion of their interests. However, this aspect requires further research to explore the impact of modern technologies on participatory planning.

Overall, the civic sector has evolved over the three decades through a phase of opposition towards a network of place-based neighborhood organizations interested in continuous involvement, dialogue, and collaboration characteristic of active citizenship. However, this status is still fragile requiring further trust-building and search for meaningful forms of participation. Moreover, it seems still early to talk about a growing number of citizens interested or engaging in local activities and urban planning.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of government-led participatory planning processes and civic sector activities since 1990, it is possible to distinguish three phases of participatory planning in Riga:

1. Expert-driven urban planning process dominated by the statutory participatory processes with a focus on

informing the citizens and limited civic sector activity (1990–1997).

2. Government-led participatory planning focused on informing and consulting strategies in preparation of the planning documents and growing civic activism as opposition to the local authority (1998–2009).
3. Government-led participatory planning shifting towards involvement and collaboration but still dominated by informing and consulting strategies; strengthening of place-based active citizenship and local initiatives (since 2010).

Overall, the results show a gradual transition towards diverse participatory planning approaches aimed at continuous involvement based on collaboration and strengthening of the civic sector. Learning and experimentation with different forms of participation have been a crucial aspect of adopting participatory planning practices, and this process is still ongoing. Similarly to other post-socialist countries [21], the relationship between local government and the civic sector is fragile and requires further learning and trust-building on both sides. Moreover, it is necessary to address the issues of transparency and legitimacy of the participatory planning processes on all planning levels to reduce conflicts and protests and to facilitate change in the societal attitude towards participation in urban planning. Further experimentation with dialogue-based and interactive public engagement approaches could strengthen the emerging collaborative practices and facilitate a shift away from episodic towards continuous participation.

The study also shows that planning based on dialogue and discussion demands more time and resources that not all local authorities (especially smaller ones) might be prepared to invest in the process. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct further research incorporating small and medium-sized towns of regional or national importance where the adoption of participatory planning practices might be lagging behind. It would allow counterbalancing the limitations caused by using an exemplary single case study and a lack of consistent data that prevents drawing more generalizable conclusions. Additionally, the findings show a growing role of online platforms in participation, especially for self-organization in the civic sector, which requires further research.

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