

## URBAN PROJECTS SHOULD BE PUBLIC

### Interview with OLEKSANDR KOROTKYKH

*Oleksandr is a former chief architect of Vinnytsia. Modern landmark buildings for Vinnytsia were built according to his projects (in particular, Feride Plaza, Cloud, Smile City, etc.). He is a co-founder of the well known Vinnytsia community of architects - ArchiClub and heads the Spatial Development Agency, takes care of many interesting and socially significant urban projects in the city.*

**We find it increasingly interesting that publicity is an integral part of any project. It is designed to prevent possible conflicts around the project or its rejection. How can we ensure publicity?**

Any changes in the urban environment, even positive ones, can potentially be the subject of conflict. Most often, this is due to the redistribution of street space, compaction of housing, use of park areas for the construction, interference in historic buildings. The most resonant urban conflicts are those associated with changes in places to which there is an emotional attachment of citizens.

My experience of participation in the project process is related to the Spatial Development Agency created by the city council in 2017. The focus on informal design and publicity of urban projects is the main feature of our activities. Urban projects are those financed from the city budget: spatial development projects, infrastructure projects, local facilities, including public buildings and public spaces. We have developed an algorithm according to which the eight stages of the project should include six public events aimed at public participation in determining the relevance of the project, building a tree of goals, identifying experts, defining project indicators, determining project consequences, and evaluating results.

The first object on which we tested the algorithm of ensuring the project publicity is the reconstruction of Zamostianska Street. The conflict flared up there as a reaction to the new parameters of the street and the felling of trees. The reconstruction work has already begun. We developed a new spatial vision of the street and set out this vision and our reconstruction goals on one paper. It is this material, which is clear to all, along with several other schematics began to be discussed among expert activists rather than volumes of working papers. There were made radical changes to the project. A year after the completion of the street we ordered a poll on the perception of the new street by citizens. In my opinion, such surveys are also an integral part of ensuring the publicity of the project – it is very important to analyze and evaluate the results, whether we achieved the project goals, what results are unexpected, whether there is a need for additional interventions.

**Who is responsible for the publicity of projects? Is public discussion an effective tool for participation today?**

The development of strategic projects, projects of public spaces, and objects that change or shape them should be carried out publicly at the earliest stages, namely prior to the issuance of the technical assignment. At this stage, all stakeholders are identified and involved. Taking stakeholder influence into account reduces the risk of creating urban conflicts.

Today, the project documentation, which has already been developed in full details, is being considered at public discussions, and the funding has already been completed. It is technically very difficult to make changes to ready-to-implement projects. There is simply no time for that.

**In view of this situation, what do you think the ideal planning process should look like? How should it be managed?**

We can rather speak not about an “ideal”, but an “appropriate” planning process. Today the city is actively transforming. Population mobility has increased, a denser living environment is emerging, which in turn requires creation of new public spaces, new social activities, changes in employment, industrial parks and former industrial areas in need of change. The biggest challenge for spatial planning is the new scale of interconnected settlements formed by the newly created territorial communities.

In 2016, Vinnytsia became a participant in the Integrated Urban Development of Ukraine project implemented by the German government company GIZ. In three years, a large number of experts, NGOs, active residents, heads and representatives of city council departments developed the Concept of Integrated Urban Development 2030 with the support of international experts. One of the five visions of the Concept is about spatial development. At the beginning of this year, the city council approved

Strategy 3.0 which covers the entire Vinnytsia territorial community. The concept and the strategy are further formalized in the plans of socio-economic development and are the basis for the development of urban planning documentation. The availability of strategic documents directs the urban planning process to the vision of the city, not as an ideal one that meets the planning standards, but the city which adapts and transforms to modern challenges of climate change, innovation, and identity. The Agency has developed for these documents a vision of both individual strategic projects and a vision of the spatial development of the entire community. I am sure that strategic plans which were discussed in detail in the community will further affect the sustainability of long-term projects.

**What are the formal and informal opportunities to influence the urban planning process? What forms of interaction or coalitions do you think determine the urban planning process the most?**

In 2015 there was approved the Comprehensive Strategy for Transport and Spatial Development in Vinnytsia developed by Swiss experts. By the way, this informal planning document justified the need to create a Spatial Development Agency. In contrast to the decisions of the city master plan, the comprehensive strategy provides spatial development of Vinnytsia as a compact city - efficient public transport, rational, dense and mixed-use of territories, taking into account the landscape, cultural and historical values. That is what is aimed at sustainable development and saving of territorial resources. The Vinnytsia 2020 strategy was developed in parallel. There is now a significant discrepancy between the city master plan and the strategic documents. This year the collection of baseline data for the adjustment of the master plan has begun. We plan to create an open platform for the collection of up-to-date data on the territory and objects. This will further ensure a rapid response to change through informal design.

The informal design provides an opportunity to expand the range of project participants from the very beginning. Such an experience was the study of ideas for the reconstruction of Kotsiubynsky Prospekt (Avenue). Now this project is called Vinnytsia Mile. The agency provided a process of designing and interacting with participants which consisted of the joint multi-stage work of four teams from Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv, together with local and international experts, city officials, NGO representatives and activists. After the completion of the study, the next stage was a public program that lasted three months and included participatory events organized by us through exhibitions, information, urban tours and surveys. These actions shaped the public interest in the implementation of the avenue reconstruction project.

**What should be changed in urban development planning?**

The city is in the process of design every day. There are projects of different scale and, accordingly, different levels of influence. Nowadays the most pressing challenge is the integration of projects. For us, such a project is the Zamostia Development Model. The project covers a historic area of the city with a population of 50 thousand people. Now active changes are taking place here. To ensure publicity, a website “Dii, Zamostia!” (lit. “Act, Zamostia!”) was created. It is still in test mode. The purpose of the website is to create an information platform for feedback from residents, administration and investors. We have developed six thematic profiles of Zamostia which are united within an investment map. Integrated visions of many local facilities allow formulating requirements for the qualities of each of them, taking into account the mutual impact and assessing the risks.

Another integrated project is “The 12.7 km Alley”. It is connected with the development of the coastal territories of the Southern Bug within Vinnytsia. The project aims to ensure the accessibility of the river banks, to influence the quality of stay and the development of activities on the water. With our participation and the participation of student volunteers, the Urban Curators NGO conducted pre-project studies which included photo-fixation of the territory, spatial research, walks-interviews with residents and work with stakeholders in the format of workshops. It was last year. The research allowed to create a vision of fast and long-term projects, which generated a vision of spatial change in the period up to 2030, and to estimate the amount of investment. This project affects the interests of all citizens. The project was presented in the hub of the public organizations “City of Contents” in the form of an exhibition. Due to quarantine restrictions, we have also created a virtual version of this exhibition. We are currently working on two adjacent sections of “The 12.7 km Alley”, which combine a municipal project to create a pedestrian crossing along the river near the Kyiv Bridge and a private initiative to build a location for sup boarding. These projects greatly reinforce each other and, through integration, become more meaningful.

Most projects can be more successful with an interdisciplinary approach and an integrated vision of urban development goals.

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**When a compromise at a certain stage still fails to find, what's next? What should be the mechanism for resolving urban conflicts?**

It seems that some urban conflicts are not resolved today. Construction of sidewalks with porches, stairs, terraces and pockets for parking; felling and crowning of trees; commercialization of recreation areas in parks and squares; construction of which pursues only the creation of commercial square meters – all this creates persistent dissatisfaction. But dialogue is the only way to overcome conflicts.

A typical situation is when citizens have a habit of a certain urban space. Its change is initially perceived negatively. Social networks allow activists to speak out immediately, and then the media. We had this situation last year due to the reorganization of traffic on Gagarin Square. The project aims to ensure conflict-free traffic at the intersection with the creation of new overland pedestrian crossings to the Arch of the entrance to Central Park. After the reconstruction, the Arch became an active public place, especially for young people. Pending the resonance of the intentions to change the established situation, a test mode of functioning of the new mode of organization of space was implemented. Now the monitoring of traffic, adjustment of phases of traffic lights, surveys in groups of motorists, surveys among drivers of public transport have been completed. The results are published. Testing is still ongoing, and a permanent solution will be implemented after analysis, reflection and public discussion of the results. We conducted a similar test of urban space on Victory Square, but for one day. That day, part of Vynnychenko Street was closed. About 20,000 people a day transit there. To hear the opinion of the citizens about the future reconstruction of the square, this event was held.

In general, the dynamics of urban change require closer interaction of change initiators with other stakeholders and users.

*2017 interview updated in 2021*