Public Participation in the Management of Urban Regions
Case Study "1000 Gaps in NRW, Germany"

Introduction

The development of the urban region, characterized by the continued use of land for new settlement and transportation needs, requires a sustainable utilization of resources. A major goal of sustainable land use management is to decrease the development of areas outside of cities by developing the potential of inner cities instead. The strategy of inner development versus urban growth and suburbanization is the crucial task in current German urban planning practice. In order to implement the strategy of inner development, management of urban regions have to identify potential, reactivate and recycle urban areas and promote urban infill. The methods of realizing inner development in Germany are: re-use and restoration of existing buildings, annex extensions (adding new parts to existing residential buildings, as far as is permitted by the development plan), closing vacant lots (gaps) in build-up areas, use of brownfields and railway areas and use of former military areas and barracks for residential or commercial purpose.

Sustainable development in urban regions is possible only if there is active participation of the public. "The key issue today is the mobility of information, which is the crucial factor in the world of international competition. A new generation of information and communication technologies creates a new opportunity for this process. The global electronic network supports mobility in space and time, and such is relevant for any planning or development actions, be it at local, national or international levels (M. Bajic Brkovic, 2003)." The Internet with its own characteristics of transparency, efficiency and economy opens new horizons for spatial planning.

This paper will investigate how the Internet was used to present planning information and support public participation in the management of urban regions NRW.

The case study: "1000 Gaps in NRW, Germany"

1. Background

1.1. The subject matter:

The case study"1000 Gaps in NRW"("1000 Baulücken in NRW") deals with a project to solve the problem of ugly vacant lots (gaps) towards public participation and discussion between citizens, owners of the lots and representatives of municipalities. For this strategy of the Internet is used. The Internet content is discussed not only from the ordinary perspective of the Internet usability for public participation in management in urban region, but also as tool to facilitate it.

1.2. Participation actors

"1000 Gaps in NRW"is the project of Architectural Association (Chamber) North Rhine Westphalia (Architektenkammer Nordrhein-Westfalens AKNW). The project is a one of the master projects Lands initiative "StadtBauKultur NRW". Project cooperation partners are: Department of Urban Development and Housing, Culture and Sport of Land North Rheine Westphalia (Ministerium für Städtebau und Wohnen, Kultur und Sport), Europien Haus of urban culture (Europäisches Haus der Stadtkultur), architectural associations, municipalities, owners of the lots.

1.3. Components of the project:

- Information platform
- Photo documentation
- Design competition "Per City – Versus Gap – 1001 Chances for our City"

All components of the project are presented in the Internet and showing a good example of a supporting tool in spatial planning towards collaborative exploration of planning process, public participation and information, communication and coordination in the planning process and visualization of plans and plans alternatives.

1.4. The time frame

"1000 Gaps in NRW "was officially started on the 1 July 2003. The official end of the project was on the 1 May 2004. The project period was divided into three phases. The first phase was information about project, collecting and establishing photo documentation (data base) on the Internet. The second phase was the period of Design competition from 1.10.2003 to 16.01.2004. The third phase was implementation phase and developing the strategy through the selection of the best design projects.

However, AKNW leads the project further with the idea to organized in five competitions cities political and open public discussion, and again to be faced with the question how by closing gaps and with other methods of inner development to achieve sustainable urban development and more attractive cities.

2. Characteristic of the situation

North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) as a one of the densely populated region in central Europe has reached its limits of growth. The urban growth of NRW was initiated by developing the industry sectors during the 1950s and 1960s, what has lead NRW to become one of the German major industrial regional center. Consequently, the demand on the labor force increased rapidly the number of inhabitants and led to an intensive increase of urban growth. The rapid urban growth since the 1950s resulted in the demand on residential, industrial, services, roads and infrastructure. Since the 1960s big cities in NRW started to lose inhabitants, people wanted to live outside of the cities and the negative consequences of the urban growth in the form of urban sprawl took place to a large extent, on green fields on the outskirts of the cities leading to more demand on private vehicles and resulted in more pressure on the road network.

According to the forecast of the Regional office for data processing and statistics of NRW (Landes amt für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik NRW, LDS NRW), NRW will face in the future the problem of a negative demographic development and the number of inhabitants will start to decrease during the next years and shrink in the following decades. The number of inhabitants in the year 2002 was 18052092 and by the year 2020 is forecasting to be 17950268.

Nowadays most of the population of NRW lives in cities, however some of cities are faced with the problem of the modern world arising from new technologies and resulting in the closure of factories, loss of working places and population migration to big cities. This lead to the formation of large abandoned or underused sites and with large coverage, these sites are located inside cities. Besides of this type of sites very often in cities are present for year's ugly vacant lots (gaps) or temporally built up object between two existing buildings from the economic, legal, personal or technical reasons. Gaps are in most cities of NRW obvious example of urban deficits, but on the other side they are immense potential of inner development.

According to these facts, the project "1000 Gaps in NRW" is promoting inner development using the methods of closing gaps in urban area with active public participation as a strategy for sustainable urban development. The goal is not only identifying gaps, than open discussion and participation of citizens to solve the problem with owns idea and proposals.

3. Information platform

Regarding above-mentioned circumstances and the goal of the project, the information platform is proposed as the origin of the emergence in the management of urban regions (NRW), by facilitating the creation of an overview about main issues about gaps in NRW cities and keeping this overview up to date, as well as communication between public participants, AKNW, owners of the lots and representatives of municipalities.

The information platform "1000 Gaps in NRW" is developed as:
-        decentralized – to the supply of information and to the access to the platform
-        opened – to the other information sources
-        dynamic – updating available information and integrating new issues and subject
-        to consider modular structure – exploring the information in different contexts and to administrate the user access right in more flexible manner
-        the platform where is the access scheme very well defined in respect of the responsibilities and the rights of the information that is included in its, taking into consideration the large number of participant
-        the platform that can efficient support specific standards formats for importing and exporting information with other information systems
-        the platform that could be extend during the time

Main components of "1000 Gaps in NRW" information platform

3.1. The information space

In attempting to describe the information structure that is needed to be understandable and clear for participating actors, as well as to share information about ugly vacant lots (gaps) it was used a common language. The information platform"1000 Gaps in NRW"supported information processes of communication, coordination, decision making and argumentation.

It was necessary to structure the information in this planning process in an explorative process that takes several cycles of development and evaluation in an iterative process.
-   The first step was creating this information structure. This is concerned with the definition of gap, photo documentation in form of the gap database, explanation about the project goals and promoting public participation in order to find in their cities an empty lot (gap) and inform AKNRW.
-   The second step was creating information about the design competition "Per City – Versus Gap – 1001 Chances for our City". All information concerning the design competition in five cities of NRW on five selected sites (gaps) were available.
-   The third step was information about the design competition results in form of a database.

The important aspects of proposed information structure "1000 Gaps in NRW" are:
-        The intention of the project was to collect only basic information about gaps, that means the location and the photo of the gap
-        Unstructured information in form of articles (press information)
-        Structured information in form of databases. For these proposals two databases were created as indicated below:
1. Photo documentation of gaps in 125 NRW cities sorted in alphabetic order with the basic information (fig.1)
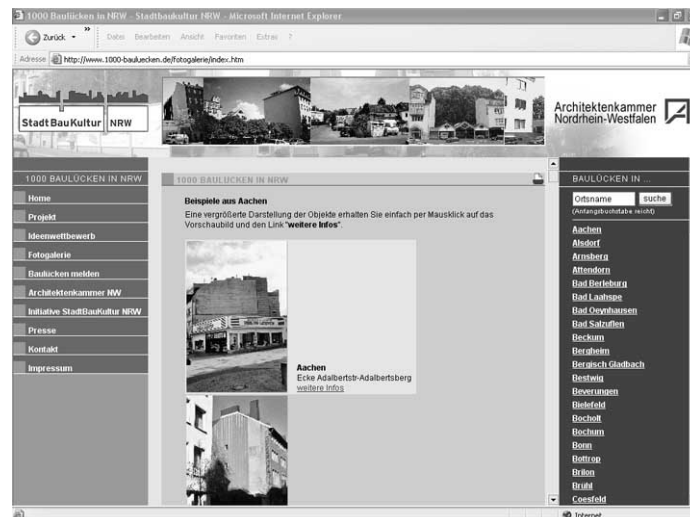
3

Figure 1: Database of gaps
Source: http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/fotogalerie/index.htm

2. Database for all participant of design competition, with possibilities to browse according to different criteria (fig.2)

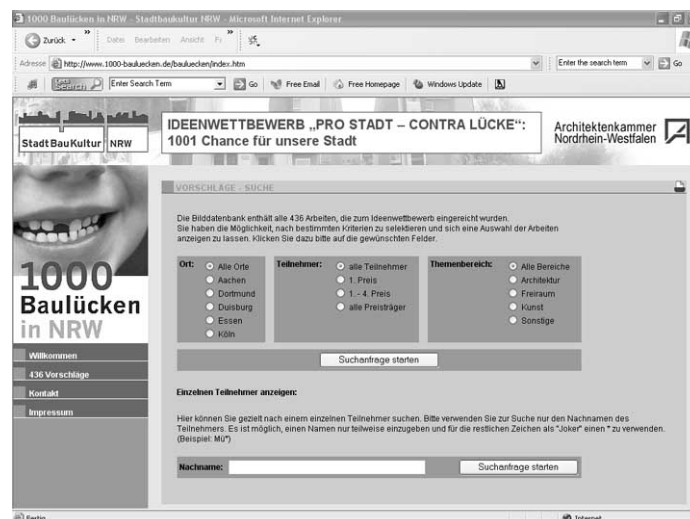Figure 2: Database of participants in "Per City – Versus Gap – 1001 Chances for our City"
Source: http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/bauluecken/index.htm

3.2. The function and tools

To deal with above-mentioned types of information, the function and tools in "1000 Gaps in NRW" are classified into three major groups:
-       Information handling function – input, edit, list, search, view and output of information
-       Media-management-function – upload (include tools for uploading documents of different media type), management (function for file management), list (available media file) and view
-       System–administrative-function – administration of the system, access rights and actualization
Each of this group is divided into smaller modules to allow administrating user access rights.

3.3. The rules scheme (Access spheres)

The users in "1000 Gaps in NRW" are grouped according to their access rights in two groups: authorized users and public users. With respect to information and the function each group of users there are different levels of access. The concept of the access scheme is shown in the following matrix (tab.1).

Criteria	Public user	Authorized user
Public info	√	√
Internal info	⊗	√
Display	√	√
Search	√	√
Input	⊗	√
Legend	√ Full access	⊗ No access

Table 1: Matrix of the access scheme

The need to identify users in this case study emerges from the number of users that are expected to participate. According to the AKNRW until the beginning of June 2004 about 10000 users participated in the system.

3.4. The user interface

The user interface is a web page "1000 Gaps in NRW" (fig.3) that includes only standard HTML code and need only the web browser without any special programs (plug-ins).

Figure 3: The user interface
http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/index.htm

The user interface is a gateway of the information system and with respect with its, giving a lot of opportunities with clear and easy information to attract citizens to participate in the managing of urban area.

4. Public participation in "1000 Gaps in NRW"

"If you want to know how the shoe fits, ask the person who is wearing it, not the one who made it." (Community Planning Handbook: About Community planning)

In Germany whenever a planning process is conducted, some sort of public participation is obligatory by law. (Märker und Pippek, 2000) However, this participation process was very often criticized as being selective from two aspects: first that the public administration makes a selective invitation and second that only some groups of individuals will benefit from it. Also the problem of complexity supplied the explanation that the level of participation is usually quite low.

From the above mentioned the goal of "1000 Gaps in NRW" is public participation supported by using the Internet. Implementing of information platform in this case, support innovative ways of communication that facilitate problem solving beyond the formal process-oriented communication. It is necessary to consider that information platform allow different types of communication:

Subject-matter domain (fig.4)

●
●

Figure 4: Form of gaps registration
http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/bauluecke_melden/index.htm
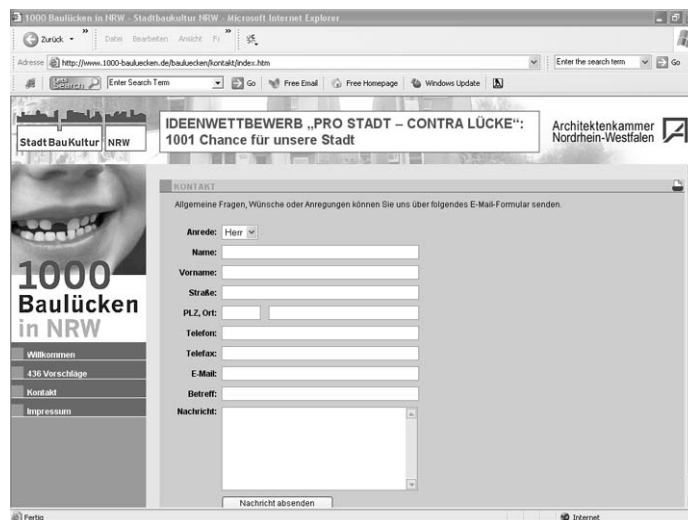
In process domain (fig. 5)

Figure 5: Form of contact – design competition
Source:http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/bauluecken/kontakt/index.htm

In the information domain (fig. 6)

Figure 6: Form of contact
http://www.1000-bauluecken.de/kontakt/index.htm
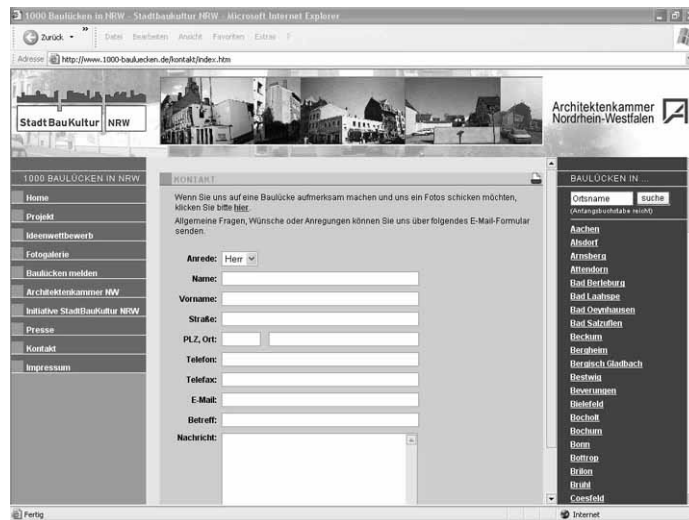

In order to attract citizens to participate in project the identified gaps as well as in design competition AKNW made an original advertisement (Fig.) with the message: "There are gaps, which do not disappear automatically as the gaps between the teeth of our children.
For several reasons some of them exist already for decades: the building gaps in our cities.
But now there is an initiative, which ensures that these gaps close up again: perhaps with kindergartens or beautiful houses. Perhaps with art or culture, with playgrounds or parks. Or dwelling for older people... in any case with much fantasy. Therefore first of all those who should take the most advantage of closing up those gaps are asked for ideas: the inhabitants of our cities."

Figure 7: "1000 Gaps in NRW"; Source: AKNW

Participation in this case is nonselective, due to implemented design competition "Per City – Versus Gap – 1001 Chances for our City". Half of 438 participants are not planners, than laymen, students, pupils, artists and they with their ideas how to close the gap in five NRW cities – Cologne (fig. 8), Aachen (fig.10) , Essen , Dortmund and Düsseldorf showing a good example of participation in planning process. The result of the design competition indicates that the planning practice should to respect the ideas of non-professionals, because the winners of the design competition in Aachen (fig. 12) and Cologne (fig.) are not planner.
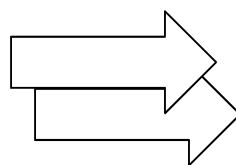

Figure 8: The Gap in Cologne

Figure 9: The winner of competition in Cologne: comp. scientist- Roger Kalden, Aachen
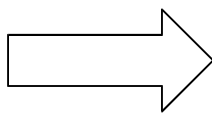
Figure 10: The Gap in Aachen
competition in Aachen

Figure 11&12: The winner of

pupil - Jonas Jasper

Source: www.1000-bauluecke.de

5. Conclusion

The study case "1000 Gaps in NRW" is good example from the planning practice of the use of the Internet in order to manage the urban area. The management of NRW cities through implementing this project got new possibilities for development in order to have active participation of citizens. Some of the NRW cities have for years the "cadastre of gaps" and proposed strategy of inner development, but only on the paper.

The Internet plays the main role in this study case, through implementing information platform made possible public participation in order to manage urban area. The role of information platform in this case is connecting different actors concerned - communication, creating overview about gaps in NRW cities, keeping the overview up-to-date and information.

The Internet can be in this case considered as a tool to facilitate the management of the urban area and the information platform can be considered as origin of the emergence for the management of urban area.

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