

Public Participation Regarding Heritage Preservation in Former Communist Countries: The Case of Tobacco City in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

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Abstract—In times of rapid globalization, the significance of cultural and architectural heritage is rising, as it is a key element to define the identity of a place, a city, even a country. Its preservation, conservation, and revitalization are everyone's responsibility, and the public is growing more aware of that fact. The citizens are looking for a way to actively participate in the decision-making in projects regarding heritage sites. Public involvement in the planning process is not a new phenomenon, especially in Western countries. However, countries, such as the former communist states of Eastern Europe, have been less studied. Based on established theories, this paper analyses the level of citizens' inclusion in projects regarding heritage preservation, using the example of the Tobacco City in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. As this case is exemplary for Bulgaria, it illustrates the current condition of public participation country-wise. At the same time, considering the former communist states have had a similar socio-economic and political development in the past several decades, it is possible to apply the conclusions to most of these countries with only slight variations.

Keywords—Architectural heritage, Bulgaria, heritage preservation post-communist countries, public participation, Tobacco City, warehouses.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE topic of public participation has been researched, analysed and discussed for more than half a decade - methodologies have been developed as many theories have been tested and implemented. Most commonly, study cases are from Western countries, considered to be more advanced in their socio-economic and political development. However, it is worth taking a look at states thought-out as less developed, such as former communist countries in Eastern Europe - for example Bulgaria, as is the case of this paper. It is of interest to analyse the similarities and differences in approaching the involvement of the public in the planning and decision-making process, especially when regarding heritage buildings and sites.

The current research is based on the theories developed by Arnstein in "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" [2], and Innes and Booher in "Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century" [1], and consists of three main sections: 1) establishment of the research model, 2) analysis of the socio-economical and political prerequisites, especially when regarding heritage sites in Bulgaria (as former communist state), and 3) case study of the Tobacco City in

Plovdiv, Bulgaria. As the chosen case could be considered exemplary for Bulgaria, the hypothesis in this paper gives a somewhat objective evaluation of the current situation when it comes to citizens' involvement in regard to heritage preservation country-wise.

II. A LADDER OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

In order to better understand the nature of citizens' involvement in the planning process, a set of theories and definitions should be introduced. As mentioned above, the paper is based on [1] and [2], therefore so is the current research method.

A. A Ladder of Citizen Participation

In her paper, Arnstein introduces a classification of public 'participation' and 'non-participation', developing a typology consisting of eight levels in three major categories (Fig. 1). In the words of the author "the eight-rung ladder is a simplification, but it helps to illustrate the point that so many have missed - that there are significant gradations of citizen participation." [2]

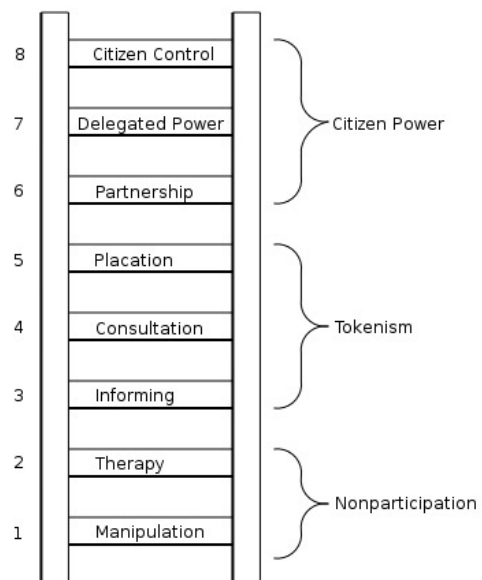


Fig. 1 Arnstein's Ladder of citizen participation [2]

Starting from the bottom, the first category is **Nonparticipation**, which includes two levels - *Manipulation* and *Therapy* - "contrived by some to substitute for genuine

participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to "educate" or "cure" the participants." [2].

- 1) *Manipulation* is defined by including a number of citizens in so-called 'advisory committees', in order to "educate" them on matters of the planning process when in reality participants are given the bare minimum of information by those in charge in order to secure their support for the execution of oftentimes controversial projects. At first, the community has a sense of involvement, but later on it becomes clear that the project holds more (if not only) benefits for the *powerholders* than for the locals.
- 2) *Therapy*, as defined by Arnstein, is a diversion from the main problem at hand by engaging the participants in planning activities, focused on less significant issues. The goal is "curing them of their 'pathology' rather than changing the [reasons] that create their 'pathologies'." [2].

The second category - *Tokenism*, is divided in three levels - *Informing*, *Consultation*, and *Placation*. This section of the ladder is characterised with more possibilities for the citizens to obtain information and voice an opinion, but with little-to-none power to influence the decision-making process. [2]

- 1) *Informing* is when officials let the people know of the projects, but do not seek their opinion or provide a possibility for feedback. Usually the citizens have little opportunity to react as in most cases the information is made available at a very late stage;
- 2) *Consultation* is inviting the citizens to express their opinion, most frequently achieved by surveys or any form of public meeting/hearing. The result for the community is that it "*participated in participation*", and for the authorities in power that they went through the procedure of acquiring the public's opinion;
- 3) *Placation* is the involvement of a few hand-picked members of the public/community in advisory boards or decision-making bodies. The citizens have a partial influence, but the tokenism is still quite present, due to the fact that the majority of votes is still in the hands of the *powerholders*.

The third category is *Citizen Power*. It consists of three levels, describing different grade of true citizens' involvement in the decision-making process in planning - *Partnership*, *Delegated Power*, and *Citizen Control*. At these levels, the community is in a position to enter into negotiations, or even have the majority or the full power to make decisions.

- 1) *Partnership* - a cooperation between the public and the officials, sharing responsibilities and the decision-making power, usually through joint policy boards or variety of committees, based on ground rules established in the beginning via rounds of negotiation to achieve a compromise beneficial for both parties. In this case, the ratio of power held by citizens/powerholders is divided 49/51 respectively;
- 2) *Delegated Power* is characterised as the citizens having the majority of the control in the decision-making process, but are still accountable to the *authorities*. In this case, the ratio is a minimum of 51/49 in favour of the citizens;

- 3) *Citizen Control* is when (almost) full control of management is given to the community with very little interference from the official administration.

Arnstein has developed a simplified model for easier recognition of the degree a community/citizens is involved in the planning and decision-making process. We would go further to speculate that these levels are more often than not equal to the stage of development of the communities, government and even state - the more developed a country, the higher step of the ladder public participation is.

B. Four Models of Planning and Policy Making

The second theory used in the development of the current research model is based on the paper "Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century" by Innes and Booher [1]. The starting point of their theory is rejecting the efficiency of the traditional methods of public participation, such as *consultations* and *citizens' placation*, in order to search for alternative ones. The purpose of the public participation is established - on one side to gather information about the public's opinion, and on another to actually utilise the citizens' knowledge and experience for a more efficient decision-making process. Furthermore, the involvement of the public raises the level of democracy, as well as gives legitimacy to public decisions [1].

The theory proposed by Innes and Booher consists of **Four Models of Planning and Policy Making**, based on levels of *diversity* and *interdependence of interests* (Fig. 2).

| | | <u>Diversity</u> | |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|---|
| | | low | high |
| <u>Interdependence of Interests</u> | low | Technical Bureaucratic <i>Convincing</i> | Political Influence <i>Co-opting</i> |
| | high | Social Movement <i>Converting</i> | Collaborative <i>Co-evolving</i> |

Fig. 2 Four Models of Planning and Policy Making [1]

- 1) The *technical bureaucratic* model works on the basis of comparative analysis and projections in order to develop and assess alternatives to achieve an initially set goal. It involves the public at the early stages of the planning process in order to determine the goals, and at the very end to help choose the final strategy or plan often among only slightly different choices. In between, the technical planners prefer to work independent of public influence, as they consider it might lower the integrity and objectivity of their analysis [1].
- 2) The model of *political influence* planning (also known as *the pork barrel approach*) is a non-transparent way for politically important power-players to execute their projects. Innes and Booher describe the public involvement as "undesirable, if not actually a threat to the

whole system.” [1]. The citizens’ participation in this case happens (if at all) post-factum when all the details of the project have been decided on and very little can be done to influence any change. It is possible for this model to work, but only when there is a high diversity of interests, but their interdependence is really low, as agreements are reached with each individual power player and their mutual interests are not taken into account. In general, the authors consider this model to be “the biggest obstacle to genuine public participation in decisions”. [1]

- 3) The *social movements* is the third model described. It happens when there’s a high interdependence of interests, but with a low diversity. Usually these are groups of individuals united by a cause, and their strength is in their numbers, as they are not part of the power structure and have no political influence. Social movements rely on volunteers, who work for the cause in their spare time. Often professionals are part of such movements and provide the needed credibility for challenging the projects proposed by the officials;
- 4) Innes and Booher [1] believe the *collaborative planning* model to be the future of public participation in planning. They consider it the only one out of the four to be able to incorporate both the high diversity and interdependence of interests. It is characterised by equal involvement of all the parties interested in the outcome, the so-called stakeholders.

When integrated together, the theories of [2] and [1] create a rather complete model depicting the various degrees of citizens’ involvement in the planning process, as well as the levels of influence they hold as stakeholders. Even though the research is based on examples from the American reality, it has universal application, especially in today’s globalised world.

III. CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN REGARD TO HERITAGE SITES: THE CASE OF BULGARIA

There is no doubt that public participation is a key element for a democracy [1]-[3]. Bulgaria, being a former communist country, has had a rough transition towards democracy since 1989, even to this day, which in its own way means a lot of new lessons to be learnt and many mistakes to be made in order to catch up with countries that have been striving to achieve a true democracy for the better part of the last century. It is rather curious how the 2010s Bulgaria corresponds to Arnstein’s 1960s America.

Concurrently, cultural and architectural heritage plays an important role in shaping a cultured, educated society; hence everyone should be a stakeholder in the fate of such sites, especially when they are considered to have national or international value. A development in that area has been noticed in the recent decade, but to get a full grasp of the current reality it is necessary to consider the aspects of 1) legislation and administrative framework regarding citizens’ involvement in planning in Bulgaria, and 2) changes in the heritage preservation laws during and post-communist regime.

A. Public Participation in Planning - Legislation and Administrative Framework

The level of citizens’ involvement in Bulgaria’s democracy has been noticed to be low compared to the average in the European Union [4]. Analysing the regulatory framework for planning on its inclusion of public participation, the general observation is that several operational programs, guided by EU-set principles, have incorporated measures to encourage the citizens’ engagement [3].

According to [3], the main laws in Bulgaria for urban and regional development date back to the early 2000s, and provide blurry guidelines for the necessity of the public being informed in “an appropriate matter” about actions, concerning the laws, which according to Arnstein’s ladder, levels with the step of “Informing”. When it comes to safeguarding citizens’ rights, the laws are based on practices from the socialist times, and only protect those whose properties are directly affected by the future plans. A step toward more transparency was taken after the introduction of the Access to Public Information Act and the Public Procurement Act, which require all strategy and planning documents be published online on governments’ and municipalities’ websites [3]. Lately, the requirements for more public hearings and discussions have been incorporated into the regulatory framework, but according to observations so far, they are rather ineffective as the final decision-making functions are still left in the hands of the authorities and they are not formally required to oblige with the community’s wishes. As for any straightforward public participation in the planning process (Arnstein’s Placation and Partnership steps), as mentioned above, the laws are concerned with and involve only those private owners directly affected. According to [3], neither good practices of community-authorities partnerships nor any public-managed projects have been observed in Bulgaria. At the same time, it is essential to mention the impact of the framework, provided by the EU funded projects and programs - municipalities are trying to ensure the public’s involvement in order to produce more competitive projects for European funding [3]. In reality, it is an example of Innes and Booher’s technical bureaucratic model.

B. Heritage Preservation Laws - before and after 1989

It is worth to note that in regard to immovable cultural heritage monuments, Bulgaria comes third in Europe in numbers and variety, right after Greece and Italy. With more than 40 000 registered sites (according to National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage (NIICH) [17]), most of which dating back millennia, the struggles to preserve them have always been huge and quite challenging [5].

The conservation and preservation practices implemented during the communist regime had been very much influenced by the Soviet model at the time. The government was the sole entity holding the power and responsibility when it came to heritage sites and their protection and management. The process of massive nationalisation of real estate gave the basis for justifying such actions [6]. After the introduction of the Monuments of Culture and Museums Act in 1969, the

government took monopoly over funding the restoration works of even private properties. In short summary - the law exempted owners from paying a real estate tax, but provided many restrictions, which made difficult the maintenance and disposal of such property [6]. This law, with few amendments, was active even after 1989, until the enactment of the new Cultural Heritage Preservation Law in 2009. The main prerequisite for the new law was, of course, the diametrical change of the political and socio-economic reality after the fall of the communist regime. The new democratic regime began an act of restitution of the previously nationalised property in order to attract private investments in the sector, which, good idea at the time, nowadays creates a mayhem in identifying the current owner of some heritage buildings and sites. Overall, the introduced changes provided solutions for some problems, but raised completely new ones. First, the new law is still rather restrictive, especially when it concerns heritage of national importance - could not be demolished, could not be majorly altered. Second, it is not at all encouraging to the owners of already-enlisted heritage buildings to take any actions in order to retain their value, and in the rare times there is an initiative, the administrative procedures are quite cumbersome (due to lack of human resources, as the NIICH is the sole agency providing professional opinion, support and supervision) and lead to discouragement. And third, curiously enough, the law allows any owner of such buildings to request its removal from the registries, thus stripping off the monument status and its law protection, providing the possibility for any actions, even demolition, with no actual consequences [5]. Furthermore, up until recent years, there were no penalty measures taken towards owners who completely neglect such properties, leaving them to become ruins, or hazardous the least. Such was the faith of Zaharna fabrika (in English: Sugar Factory) in Sofia - a monument of National importance, which due to lack of proper regulations and irresponsible owners has been lost for the future generations (Figs. 3 (a) and (b)).



Fig. 3 (a) Sugar Factory (Zaharna Fabrika) in 2002 [9]



Fig. 3 (b) Sugar Factory (Zaharna Fabrika) in 2018 [10]

Even though such properties are privately owned, their status as national heritage monuments makes them of importance to the public, hence why citizens' involvement in such projects is acceptable, and even essential. It is worth mentioning that the negligence towards heritage sites is not due to lack of public interest, especially in the past decade. In the era of globalisation and technology, the society is getting more informed and active on such topics. Social movements are on the rise, but their influence comes as far as to be able to put a stop to damaging projects created via the Political Influence model, which is currently the prevailing one in regards to public participation, especially when heritage sites are involved. It is possible that in the near future, the Social Movements model would gain the upper hand, but there is still some way to go until then. The Tobacco city in Plovdiv presents a good example of this tendency.

IV. TOBACCO CITY IN PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

Plovdiv, currently the second largest city in Bulgaria, has a rich historical past, and for millennia has been an important cultural centre. The last statement was confirmed with the announcement in September 2014 of its election as the European Capital of Culture in 2019. The candidacy of the city had four major platforms - Fuse, Revive, Relax, and Transform. The project of uniform revitalisation of the Tobacco City was included under the Transform platform, as part of a cluster called "Urban Dreams", and it "seeks to use art to attract attention to the challenge of preserving the industrial and architectural heritage of the unique tobacco warehouses and factories, which still carry their onetime charm and the scent of tobacco in the heart of the city." [7].

The district developed in the beginning of the 20th century by local entrepreneurs. By 1923 it had 32 buildings designated for processing and storing tobacco products, 20 of which were designed specifically for that purpose [8]. Since May 2000, the quarter where the tobacco warehouses are located is enlisted as a group heritage site. The Tobacco city lays on the direct path between the city center and the main train station, which gives it a significant role in the urban texture, as well as strategic position for potential interest from investors. Unfortunately, as the records show, in the majority of cases, the heritage value of the building is of little-to-no concern to them, as it could be seen from the site plan of the current status of the neighborhood (Fig. 4) - only about half of the buildings have in reality undergone any type of intervention and are functioning (in pink and orange), and out of them,

only a third went through revitalisation (in pink) - the rest involved demolition of the original structure (orange). The other half has been left completely unattended (in red) or fully destroyed (in yellow). At this point, it is essential to note that four of the buildings have the status of individual monuments of national value since 1985 (Fig. 5 - #1, #3, #5 and #6). From

those only one has been recently preserved and renovated, and it has served as the headquarters of Plovdiv European Capital of Culture 2019 (#3 on Fig. 5) with future unknown afterwards. The other three are the subject of the current study case, as they actually represent the evolving role of public participation in the heritage preservation.

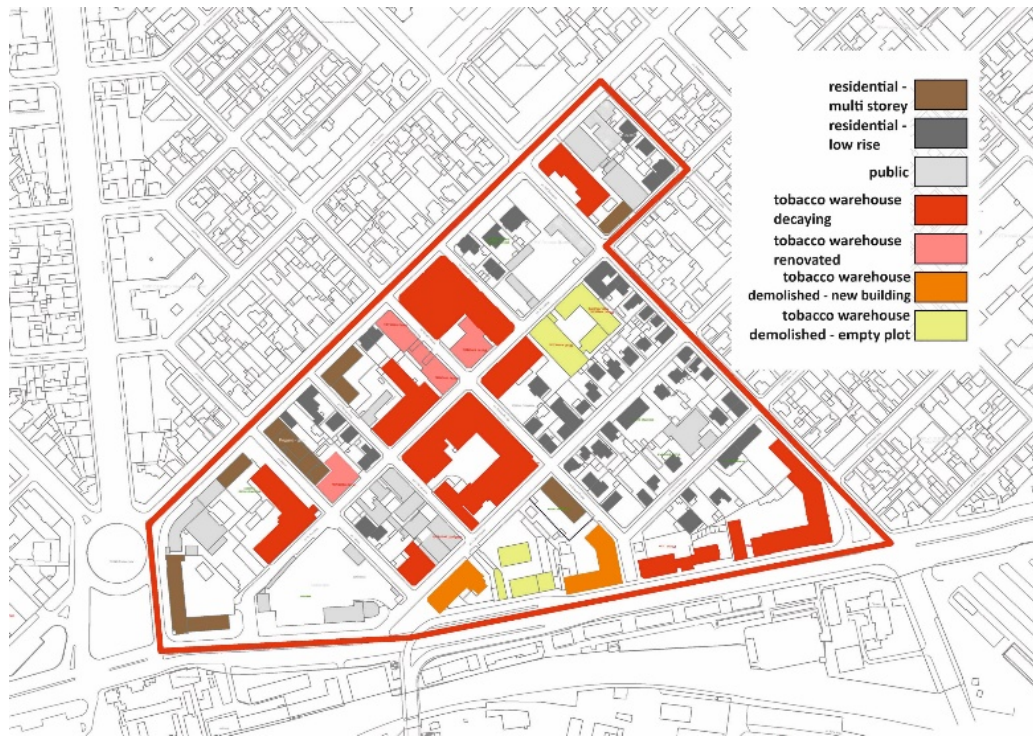


Fig. 4 Tobacco City - Site plan [11]



Fig. 5 The remaining tobacco warehouses [12]

In the mid-2010s, as the project for the overall revitalisation of the Tobacco City was being developed, the main model of public participation was Political Influence (as of Inees and Booher's theory), and the level of citizens' involvement was as high as them being informed about projects (as of Arnheim's theory), usually at the very last minute. In March 2016, the people of Plovdiv got to know that one of their beloved tobacco warehouses (#1 on Fig. 5) was scheduled to be demolished due to an investment project for a major-chain

hotel. In a matter of hours, mainly through social media, they managed to gather around the building, form a live chain, and demand the ceasing of the demolition, which had already begun (Figs. 6 and 7). When further investigation was launched, the investors were claiming they envision a partial reconstruction of the original structure, but when the project was finally publicly released, only after executing the partial demolition on the building, it was obvious that was not the case. Furthermore, another major issue was uncovered - a clearly forged document from NIICH claiming the site had no heritage status. There is an active lawsuit against the owners, but no responsibility was claimed, even to this day - almost four years later. The only real actions are the emergency reinforcement of the structure, funded by the municipality. The investors seem no longer interested and disengaged, even though the public pressure is still rather solid. This event could have been yet another forgotten case of negligence. However, another incident involving two other buildings in the *Tobacco City* happened only a few months later. In August 2016, a premeditated arson burst in two of the warehouses (#5 and #6 on Fig. 5) and burnt down the roofs and interior structures, leaving only the facade envelopes (Figs. 8 and 9). The social reaction was again quite swift, demanding authorities take appropriate actions. The event sparked several protests against

the government's negligence towards the management of cultural heritage and inspired the establishment of a social movement fighting for the reconstruction and revitalisation of the damaged storage houses and the identity of the whole district. An architectural competition for the area followed in September 2016, as well as collective experts' statements and recommendations regarding the future development of the district for its successful preservation and revitalisation. Since then the burnt down remains have been reinforced against further destruction, but nothing has happened. As the whole quarter itself had a major role in Plovdiv European Capital of Culture 2019, many events were organised in there, such as city games, exhibitions, workshops, even public meetings about the future of the district, most of them taking part in the refurbished warehouse, serving as headquarters to the management of Plovdiv ECC 2019, which became known as #SKLAD (in English #WAREHOUSE).



Fig. 6 The chain of citizens, trying to prevent the further demolition of the former warehouse [13]



Fig. 7 The partially demolished tobacco warehouse [14]

On 11th of January Plovdiv passed on the title of ECC, and the results of the project *Tobacco City* could not be physically seen, but the level of visibility, the concept for the district's revitalisation are more advanced than they would have ever been. In 2018 it was included in the European Route of Industrial Heritage [7], which is already attracting the attention of foreign potential investors. Judging by recent local news, the works on the district would continue, mostly because of the public pressure. It is expected that the people behind the project for Plovdiv - ECC 2019 would continue as a separate initiative in order to ensure the legitimacy of the future investments and ensuring more transparency in the planning process, as well as the engagement of the community. Considering that the people of Plovdiv are quite chauvinistic about their city, it is of no surprise that the first

significant signs of change in the status-quo are coming from there.



Fig. 8 The burning tobacco warehouse [15]



Fig. 9 The aftermath of the fire [16]

“In most cases where power has come to be shared, it was taken by the citizens, not given by the city” [2].

Bulgaria might still be quite low on Arnstein's ladder, but its development is clearly visible - from the absolute nonparticipation during the socialist regime, to various forms of tokenism during the transition to democracy, and now slowly trying to find its way toward active participation and involvement of the public in the planning process, especially when heritage sites are involved. There is still a long way ahead, but the citizens are visibly unsatisfied with the ruling model of political influence and are working towards a change in the current statute. More and more social movements - NGO's, non-profits, etc., are being established in almost each city, some of them even cooperating to ensure a higher-quality urban environment.

Interestingly, a number of scandals involving a negligent attitude towards heritage buildings made the masses realise the significance of the architectural heritage and the need for its preservation, as well as the importance of their role as stakeholders. More and more public organisations promoting the cultural heritage of Bulgaria are being established and are gaining recognition across the country. As they are non-profit and government-independent, and are cooperating directly with locals and owners with the main purpose of popularising the heritage, they are the first step to achieve effective citizens' participation in the field of monuments' preservation. Additionally, the EU operative programmes are having a big influence on the changing status-quo, as they advocate already established good practices of public inclusion from other more experienced in the matter countries. Such projects provide the needed help to fully activate the citizens' role so that their

opinion is heard and accounted for, as they transition from passive observers to active participants.

V. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the study case, and given the nature of the communist regime, it could be concluded that similar examples and conditions could be observed and exist in countries with analogue socio-economic and political past. For decades, the role of public participation in planning had been completely neglected in any aspect of the urban planning process, but especially when it came to the fate of heritage sites, which were under government care at the time, regardless of their ownership - public or private. Poetically speaking, it could be said the people then “had lost their voice”, and only after the political changes in 1989 are “finding it” once again.

The transition to democracy has brought new possibilities, and as the public participation is a vital part of achieving true democratic state, its role is increasing. In addition, the rapid globalization, together with the development of information technologies, make the access to news and data and its exchange almost effortless. People are becoming more aware of their surroundings and are beginning to comprehend that their involvement in the decision-making is not only possible, but in fact rather necessary. This is confirmed by the rising voter turnout during local and national elections in the past decade. The officials in most of these countries are still reluctant to share the power with the citizens, let alone fully give it up. However, a change in the attitude is observed, especially in member countries of the European Union, as they should follow norms and regulations set by states more experienced in the matters of public participation.

The significance of cultural heritage is rising, and people are becoming aware that all of them are responsible for its preservation, not only the power-holders. As the citizens are seeking involvement in cases regarding monuments, they are gaining the confidence to be more proactive in other planning projects as well. In the future, this might prove to have been the catalyst for the achievement of proper collaboration between public and officials.

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