
Participation in Sustainable Urban Planning: Levels, Categories, and Roles Across Planning Phases

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Abstract:

Public participation has become a central component of sustainable urban planning, ensuring that planning processes are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs. This paper examines the classification of participation methods, focusing on three key dimensions: levels of participation, categories of participatory methods, and their roles across different planning phases. Building on established participation frameworks, the study distinguishes between varying levels of engagement, ranging from information provision and consultation to active collaboration and citizen empowerment. It further categorises participation methods into distinct groups, such as digital tools, deliberative forums, co-design workshops, and survey-based approaches, highlighting their specific characteristics and applicability. This research has been developed within the MINIPART project supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (grant No. #7598). A core contribution of the paper lies in analysing how these categories function within different stages of the planning process, including problem identification, visioning, design, implementation, and evaluation. The findings suggest that no single method is universally effective; instead, the strategic combination of methods—aligned with both participation level and planning phase—enhances the quality and legitimacy of planning outcomes. By systematising participation methods and linking them to planning phases, this research provides a practical framework for planners and policymakers engaged in sustainable urban development. It ultimately supports more meaningful citizen involvement and more resilient, context-sensitive urban solutions.

Keywords:

Spatial planning, participation, categorisation, planning theory.