

Good Practice Summary

Research walks and sentimental maps – building dialogue and engaging citizens into participation and decision making processes in Gdynia

Gdynia is relatively young city (gained municipal rights in 1926) with 240.00 inhabitants and almost 25% are citizens over 60 years old with specific profile – the majority took part in developing the city from the beginning, building and working in the port and the shipyard.

Gdynia actively develops its mission to build the society and the environment open for diversity, promote the activity in social life for all groups of citizens with respect of different needs and priorities. Gdynia has the great interest for running and promoting innovative projects for the benefit of Gdynia citizens aiming at increasing their level and quality of life. Particular consideration is given to seniors and people with disabilities. We run diverse initiatives to create social services, activating offer and promote the city image and architecture both more attractive and more accessible for people with barriers. Our mission is to connect and promote social innovation solutions based on the needs of inhabitants and the best practices from other cities and communities.

Diverse initiatives create substantial effects for Gdynia municipality and what is the most important build up the real dialogue with Gdynia citizens.

The urban space is among the key issues of the city to create the friendly and safe environment for seniors taking their needs and expectations into consideration.

Participation processes to create adjusted, safe and friendly public space in the city can be divided as the initiative has been developed:

- 1. Research walks for disabled people to point barriers in the urban space and to show good practices of creating appropriate and friendly environment for all**
- 2. Research walks for seniors dedicated to analyse the availability of the municipal infrastructure**
- 3. Sentimental walks and maps to initiate the dialogue with inhabitants of districts that revitalization process has been initiated.**

The initiatives have begun in 2012 as **research walks for seniors dedicated to analyse the availability of the municipal infrastructure in the centre of Gdynia for elderly people and simultaneously research walks for disabled people to point barriers in the urban space and to show good practices of creating appropriate and friendly environment for all.**

The project purpose has intended to identify the opinion regarding specific public space, in terms of characters, functionality, obstacles. The crucial issue is that seniors, people with diverse disabilities, young parents can play the important role as experts and practitioners. Feedback collected during the process is important for the future urban planning, reconstructions and investments.

Research walks for seniors have started to be the part of municipal policy, the aim of which is to enhance the participation of citizens in shaping urban space and to extend the city offer towards seniors. A priority for local government is thinking about Gdynia as the place best adapted to the

needs of elderly people, people with special needs, shaped in response to their actual needs. From 2015 Gdynia belongs to the WHO Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Network and from 2016 to the European Covenant on Demographic Changes. Seniors are particularly important for the city because make up about 25% of the population of Gdynia. Unfortunately their voice is not always adequately taken into account because of lower activity and minor impact on decision making process.

The direct result of the project is the catalogue of investments aimed at better comfort and safety of the city (both streets and buildings). The catalogue has evaluated into the virtual map “Fix it” with good and bad practices and is supposed to be used by municipal departments (Investment Unit, Administration Unit, cooperation with business and ngos).

From 2015 the research walks have been adapted as tools to increase the participation of inhabitants and dialogue about the revitalization processes. The main purpose of the project is to individually meet with inhabitants of particular district (such as Chylonia, Oksywie, Witomino, etc.), recall their memories and reflections about the places that are important and memorable in the neighbourhood (because of individual stories, historical events, relations). Sentimental walks and maps are the new approach, the new shape, in which seniors together with other inhabitants of particular districts are asked to point the places, buildings, signs that are important in terms of their life in local society, memories, the sense of identity and responsibility for the neighbourhood. Officers from Laboratory of Social Innovation Unit, NGO partners and volunteers have begun the meetings in the area most frequently used by inhabitants – like shop, supermarket, local neighbours’ center, senior’s club, library. These meetings have initiated talks, memories’ exchange and pointed on the map the places, buildings, areas together with sentimental description important to responders (inhabitants). Workshops dedicated to prepare infographics for the maps according to the descriptions have been the next step of the process. Seniors together with young participants have worked together and these were elements that have strengthened the intergenerational integration very much. Elderly people have been perceived as experts, valuable parts of the society in the eyes of younger participants but also youngsters created their positive image of being active and interested in the life and history of the place they live.

Both walks and workshops of creating the infographics for maps have initialized the new intergenerational links between neighbours (also seniors with youngsters) and the starting point to discuss about the necessary changes regarding the revitalization processes and better life in particular districts for all. Simultaneously the consultations and walks were conducted in particular districts (Witomino) with young inhabitants so they could point places important in the local society (from the young side point of view). The crucial aspect is to implement solutions that are close to

people and local society and respect their needs. The process in general should suit to local environment, mentality and recognition of local potentials.

Gdynia has been awarded for the initiative with the entry to The Gold Book of Good Practises for Social Participation of Seniors - Polish Ombudsman Award in 2014 and 2016.