

# Analysis of the Participatory Planning for Resilient Urban Environment Through Case Study Municipalities of Cair, Butel and Karposh in Skopje

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<https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sace.39.1.41913>

The aim of this study is to understand the implementation of participatory planning in the urban planning system in North Macedonia. The urban planning system in North Macedonia, a country which has transitioned from socialist system to democracy, is mainly based on top-down approach in decision-making processes. The regulatory framework of urban planning supports the bottom-up approach at certain stages of the process. Public surveys and presentations are mandatory before the adoption of new urban plans. Forming of a participatory body which beside the civil servants must include other groups based on volunteering initiative is another step required to enhance the participatory planning.

This study focuses particularly on the participatory planning in the process of preparation and adoption of Detailed Urban Plans (DUPs), a plan governed by the municipality. The DUP is prepared at district scale and should be aligned with the conditions provided in the upper tier plan, the General Urban Plan (GUP). The capital city of North Macedonia Skopje consists of 10 municipalities. As representative examples were selected the municipalities of Cair, Butel and Karposh to understand the actual status of participatory planning and the level of awareness about the concept of resilient urban environment.

The study is based on a qualitative methodology where data and information were collected through interviews with various stakeholders, by analysing the urban planning legislation and the municipality websites. In the interviewing process three categories of representatives were interviewed: representatives of municipality urban planning sector and urban community center, as well as urban planners from the private sector who prepare the DUP documentation.

The findings of the study point out that the urban planning legislation supports the bottom-up approach, but there is need for improving the participatory planning. The digital tools for participatory planning should be integrated in the process of urban planning. There is need for establishment of urban community centers in municipalities. Urban community centers can help increase the sense of neighbourhood community at the citizens and develop the responsibility for shared spaces.

There is need for increasing the awareness about the concept of resilience at decision-making authorities, urban planners and the general population to be able to create resilient urban environments.

**Keywords:** bottom-up approach; participatory planning; resilient urban environment; sustainable urban development.

JSACE 1/39

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Received  
2025/06/15

Accepted after  
revision  
2025/12/16

## Abstract



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## Introduction

The main purpose of sustainable development is achieving higher quality of life in the urban environment. According to the concept of sustainable development it is important to fulfill the requirements of the present generations while having considerations for the needs of the future generations. This implies that natural resources should be used carefully, and the living environment should be protected from pollution and hazards (United Nations, 1987). The 11<sup>th</sup> goal for Sustainable Development emphasizes the importance of creating cities and human settlements which are resilient to disasters (United Nations, 2015).

Resilience as a term can refer to a system, infrastructure, built environment, community and it means the ability to overcome an adverse event, the capacity to get back to normal or initial state. Ecologists define resilience as the ability to continue functioning also at times when stress is applied to the ecosystem (Menoni, 2020). If getting back to neutral state, initial state before the adverse event, happens fast enough then it means that there is a high level of resilience. Achieving resilience at community level is a complex process since a community has different aspects, such as built and natural environment as well as social-economic aspects. It is also important to achieve the sense of community, to have the feeling of bonding and belonging of a group of people belonging to a certain geography with common interests (Norris et al., 2008).

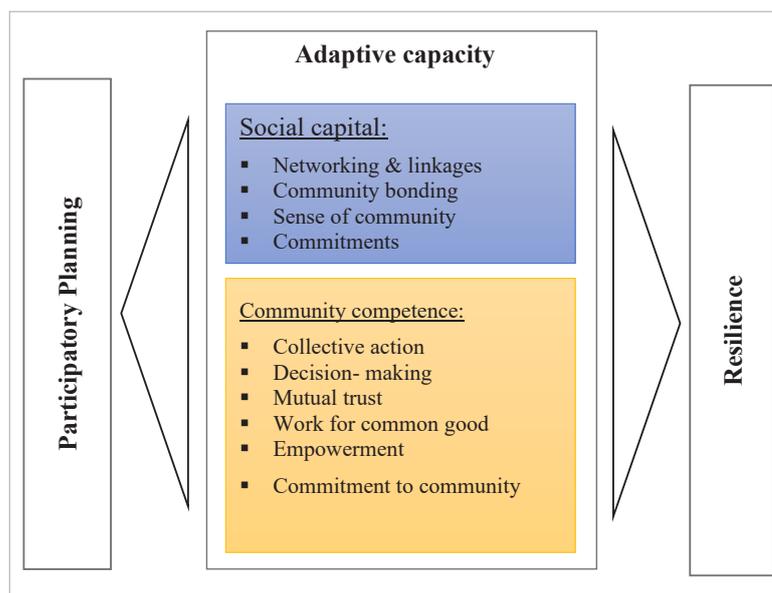
Resilience traditionally has been associated with disaster response and recovery. However, the recent studies suggest that resilience should also refer to the ability of transformation to meet the everyday challenges of the community. The level of community resilience highly depends on the social capital. The assets for coping with stress as well as the governance and management structure within a community constitute its social capital (Kirby, 2025).

One of the key components that foster community resilience is participation. In the context of urban planning, participatory planning contributes to building community resilience by encouraging collective action, self-organization and creativity (Kirby, 2025). Participatory planning strengthens community cohesion and engagement, thereby directly contributing to community resilience. Community-based social networks and bonds, community commitment, leadership and collective decision-making are some of the aspects that play important role in building community resilience (Othengrafen et al., 2024).

Norris et al. (2008) describe community resilience as a combination of four interrelated sets of adaptive capacities: economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence. Adaptive capacity, closely related to the concept of resilience, refers to the ability to adapt to the newly developed situation after an adverse event and continue functioning to improve the circumstances (Norris et al., 2008). In Fig. 1, the diagram illustrating the relationship between participatory planning and resilience, is primarily based on Norris et al. (2008), incorporating those components that are related to participatory planning.

Participatory planning can contribute to the creation of sustainable and resilient urban environments (United Nations, 2019). According to the strategies of Sustainable Urban Development, land use governance should be democratic and inclusive. The governance should be at multiple levels (for example: national, regional, local), all relevant stakeholders should be included, and the bottom-up approaches should be encouraged (Van Heerden, 2020). The involvement of the citizens in the decision-making processes is a democratic act and can positively influence the quality of citizens' lives. Public and community participation should provide the opportunity to individual citizens and communities to become involved in the planning process and influence the decisions that affect their living environment. This idea has led to the concept of participatory planning where all the stakeholders will have equity in expressing their opinions to reduce the potential conflicts which may arise due to different interests (Maricic et al., 2018). The participatory planning, also called communicative planning, is based on well-established dialogue between the different stakeholders who have equal rights in expressing their ideas related to urban planning (Kivits & Sawang, 2021)

The different roles of participants in public participation process are defined as leaders, planners, policymakers and the public. Leaders can initiate public participation while the planners can establish the common ground for genuine dialogue and make strategies. The policymakers should have in depth knowledge about the local communities



**Fig. 1**

Illustration of the link between participatory planning and resilience

and support the participation of diverse and conflicting communities. In public participation the planners and policymakers are responsible for embracing the conflict and balancing the powers (Foroughi et al., 2023).

Informing the citizens about the urban plan is considered as passive form of participation. On the other hand, the active forms of participation are considered when citizens are consulted, involved in, collaborative in the planning process and empowered to make decisions (Hilbert et al., 2025). Public participation usually takes place in form of consultations at various stages of public participation where the citizens give information to the planners and decision-makers. Meetings, workshops and interviews are the most applied methods which foster the public participation (Foroughi et al., 2023). Additionally, involving the citizens in the urban planning decision-making process will give the citizens feeling of ownership which will increase the motivation for further participation (Kivits & Sawang, 2021).

Over the past two decades, the use of digital tools for community participation has increased significantly (Shin et al., 2024). Social media and Information Communications Technology systems - such as Building Information Modeling, cloud-based Virtual Reality Platforms, and more recently, artificial intelligence - are some of the innovative technologies used for public participation (Foroughi et al., 2023). Besides social media, Google Meet and Zoom, a recent study by Shin et al. (2024) identified a total of 116 digital tools specifically designed to enable electronic citizen participation. The Geographic Information System (GIS), online surveys and open suggestions digital tools are the most widely used ones. The digital tools facilitate two-way communication between the citizens and urban planning authorities. However, it is a challenge to select the tools and use the technology to motivate citizen/community participation at decision-making stages (Shin et al., 2024).

The use of digital tools in participatory planning is significantly more widespread in Western European countries compared to Eastern Europe (Gun et al., 2019). Poljak Istenic & Kozina (2020) reviewed the practice of participatory planning in municipalities across five post-socialist countries in Europe: Prague 9 in Czech Republic, Veljene in Slovenia, Székesfehérvár in Hungary, Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria, and Vaslui in Romania. The digital tools used for participatory planning are email-communication, online applications, web platforms, social media and surveys. However, the workshops and face-to-face meetings remain as most preferable methods of

communication in all the analyzed municipalities. In these municipalities participatory planning is often implemented primarily to fulfill the formal requirements, while decision-making remains with top-down approach. Motivating citizens to take part in the participatory planning as well as training the municipality representatives about participatory planning are the main challenges in implementing the participatory planning (Poljak Istenic & Kozina, 2020).

On the other hand, the post-socialist countries of the Baltic region, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, have made significant progress in participatory planning and have implemented a wide range of digital tools to establish communication between citizens and authorities. Municipal websites, social media platforms, online forums, polls and surveys, map-based web solutions, and mobile applications are commonly used for participatory planning in most of the municipalities in the Baltic states. However, increasing the level of trust in both technology and the participatory planning process remains as a challenge in societies with a socialist background (Akmentina, 2023).

In the Balkan region only in Tirana, Albania there is a participatory planning specific digital tool - "Tirana Ime" which serves for reporting problems related to urban areas (Gun et al., 2019). Another example of digital tool in participatory planning was the open access GIS application which served for observing and commenting on the plan in the municipality of Lezhe in Albania (Hoxha et al., 2021).

Digital tools for e-participation enhance citizen participation and promote inclusiveness particularly in the first three stages of policymaking: problem identification, development of objective and solution, and decision-making. To serve the democratic idea the use of the digital tools for e-participation should be regulated with legislation, network of organizations, leadership and culture (Shin et al., 2024).

While the information obtained from the citizens serves as valuable input information in the decision-making process, there is lack of transparency in the processing of the information by the authorities. As a result, people may become less willing to participate if they don't have insight into whether their input is valued (Shin et al., 2024). There is need to build trust in participatory planning from citizens' side and urban planners' side. Efficient and positive experiences of participatory planning can improve the level of trust (Astrom, 2020).

Participatory planning is practiced in developed countries, and it contributes to the sustainable development and better governance of the urban spaces (Papa et al., 2017). Public dialogue and fostering public participation in urban planning in Western countries have shown increasing trends in the last decades. Formal participation is defined by legislation, while informal participation can be applied with alternative methods, initiated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities and International Organizations, as well as with use of internet technologies for improved communication (Maricic et al., 2018).

On the other hand, the inclusion of the community in the decision-making process of urban planning is new in most of the developing countries where traditionally urban planning was governed solely by the authorities. There are different aspects which are related to non-participatory planning, such as: the urban planning laws, political culture, education and income levels of the community, urban planning institutions' framework as well as individual's willingness to participate in decision-making (Aldegheishem, 2023). In the Balkan region countries, the importance of involving community in planning process at the beginning stages of urban plans was recently introduced by the NGOs and universities (Papa et al., 2017).

In the following section the practice of public participation is briefly reviewed in several post-socialist countries: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Kosovo, Albania, and Hungary. In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) the practice of citizen inclusion in decision-making processes was applied at local level. However, as Yugoslavia fell apart the system of the newly formed republics didn't approve of the citizen participation. In modern time Serbia, citizen inclusion is encouraged

but with limitations as the citizens can contribute through public insights and discussions which are part of the legal obligations rather than real consideration of the citizens' opinions. The practice of citizen inclusion in the urban planning process began in 1970s and was supported by the legislation. However, changes introduced in 2003 abolished the practice of insight into the draft version of the plan and the expert debates were cancelled (Maricic et al., 2018).

Slovenia and Croatia, both former Yugoslav countries, became members of the European Union in 2004 and 2013, respectively. In Slovenia public participation is required to be effectively present at earlier stages of spatial planning while the authorities should encourage the citizens' participation. There is high inclusiveness in the process of preparation and adoption of the spatial planning documents. Additionally, the NGOs who are active in spatial planning and related fields have a special legal status. Although the legislation encourages the public participation, in practice there are some obstacles. At the public consultations the citizens give remarks about the plan which are rarely taken into consideration by the authorities. The NGOs take the responsibility of initiating bottom-up communication activities to increase the influence of the public participation (Sviric Gotovac et al., 2021).

In Croatia the concept of public participation in urban planning is practiced through exhibiting the draft of spatial plans to the public for 15 days. The collaboration between the city authorities and the public is at insufficient level. However, in the last decade the NGOs have become leading actors for representing the voice of the public (Sviric Gotovac et al., 2021).

The modern Republic of Kosovo, established in 2008, is another country with socialist background and was formerly part of Yugoslavia. The spatial planning law of Kosovo adopted in 2013 emphasizes the importance of participatory planning. Namely, the public participation should be transparent, meetings with the public should be organized for the approval of the plans and the stakeholders should be given sufficient time to contribute to the process of participatory planning. There should be at least one public meeting for each plan type. The public is informed about these meetings by traditional means such as newspapers, television and social media. Besides encouraging the public participation, local authorities are responsible for preparing documentation of the participation process and attaching it to the plan documentation. However, although legally binding, in Prishtina, Peje, Gjakove, Prizren, Gjilan, Mitrovice, and Ferizaj the reports on the public participation process were missing (Hoxha et al., 2021). Supported by donations, the public participation was a success story in municipalities of Peja, Shtime and Mitrovice. Citizens and planners held workshops and in workshops organized for children, they expressed their visions about their hometowns through drawings. However, the overall rate of public participation in Kosovo remains low. To increase public participation in the planning process, local authorities should provide greater support and reach out to greater number of citizens by more effectively disseminating information about public meetings (Hoxha et al., 2021).

Participatory planning in the post-socialist political system in Republic of Albania has been introduced recently. The law for Territorial Planning and Development, adopted in 2014, implements the concept of participatory planning by requiring from local authorities to organize public hearings for planning documentation before their approval. There should be at least two public hearings, to consider the strategy and land-use plan that constitute the planning documentation and if required the public hearing can be repeated. The participatory planning process is also a requirement for the Strategic Environmental Assessment prepared for the General Local Territorial Plans. The public should have access to the planning documentation presented at the public hearing for a minimum of 30 days (Hoxha et al., 2021). Since 2015 public participation has been supported by the voluntarily functioning Forum for Local Counselling, which consists of different stakeholders. The tools used by the municipalities to facilitate public participation include dissemination of information through social media, television channels and newspapers. Also, questionnaires were

used to obtain information; however, a very small portion of the population answered the questionnaires (Hoxha et al., 2021).

In Hungary public participation in urban planning started to be practiced in 1990s, although during the socialist political system there were some elements of participatory planning but were very limited (Hilbert et al., 2025). As the country joined the European Union in 2004 and with the adoption of the planning document the *Integrated Urban Development Strategy* in 2007 the participatory planning significantly improved. At the beginnings of its implementation the participatory planning in Budapest included activities such as public surveys and forums for consultations with the citizens. Other forms of participation included mental mapping, interviews with focus groups and workshops which were less applied. During the last decade more active forms of participation such as involvement, collaboration and empowerment began to be applied. Workshops, brainstorming sessions, competitions for planning ideas as well as walk-through events were some of the activities organized by the local governments. In recent years the empowerment methods show significant rise. A public referendum conducted for a district in Budapest was categorized as an example of empowerment activity (Hilbert et al., 2025). Although participatory planning has shown great progress in Budapest, different forms of participatory planning are applied in different municipalities of the city. While in some local governments more active forms of participation can be seen, at others participation is limited to consultations only. The use of digital tools for public participation increased in the period of COVID-19 pandemics (Hilbert et al., 2025).

In North Macedonia the concept of participatory planning for the first time was introduced with the *Spatial and Urban Planning Act* adopted in 2005 according to which the first draft and the final version of the plan should be presented at public presentations. Also, for the urban plan a public survey should be conducted for collecting the remarks of the citizens and the survey should last for minimum of 10 days (Maricic et al., 2018).

After North Macedonia obtained its independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, the urban planning system was influenced by the socio-economic and political changes. In 1995 the municipalities were given the rights of local government. During the first decade of independence, between 1993–2004, identified as the destabilization phase, the territory of Skopje expanded with intensified construction activities which to some level consisted of illegal buildings also (Stefanovska & Kozelj, 2012).

In 2004 the Law on the Territorial Organization of the Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia increased the independence of the municipalities. The destabilization period was followed by service-driven phase which started in 2004. The Urban planning was defined according to new investments and the individuals' interests were prioritized. The transition phase is continuing as the urban planning system still needs to achieve the criteria of democratic and transparent planning, placing the public's interest in first place (Stefanovska & Kozelj, 2012).

This study analyses to what extent participatory planning is practiced in Skopje, the capital city of Republic of North Macedonia. As the case studies three municipalities from Skopje were selected: Cair, Butel and Karposh (Fig. 2). The selection of the case study municipalities was based on the diversity of urban form, density of population and accessibility of information.

The oldest urban core of the city together with the old bazaar belong to the municipality of Cair. There is no rural area in the municipality of Cair. It is surrounded by other municipalities, Center, Karposh, Butel and Gazi Baba (SPA, 2011). As the consequence of the high urbanization there is high density of population, 17.780 people/km<sup>2</sup> while the surface area of the municipality is 3.52 km<sup>2</sup> (Municipality of Cair, 2025; Makstat database, 2022).

Municipality of Butel was formed in 2005. Previously the territory of Butel belonged to the municipality of Cair. Butel has large surface area, in total 54.71 km<sup>2</sup>, consisting of both urban and rural

areas, while the population density is very low, there are 693 people/km<sup>2</sup> (Municipality of Butel, 2025; Makstat database, 2022).

The municipality of Karposh is one of the four largest municipalities in Skopje. Besides the urbanized areas it covers also rural areas and the total surface area is 35 km<sup>2</sup> (Municipality of Karposh, 2025). The density of population in Karposh is 1.822

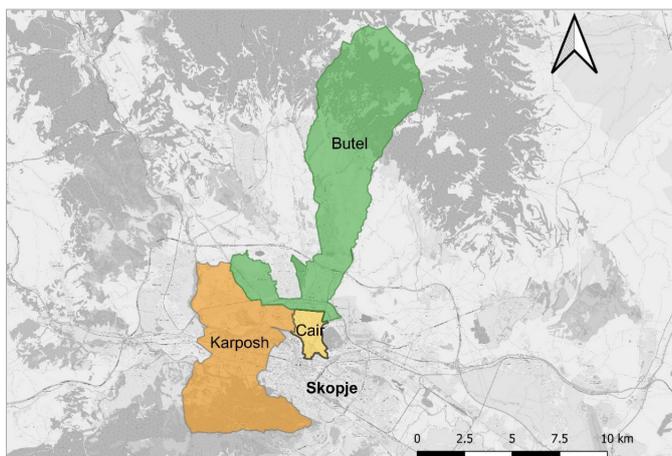
people/km<sup>2</sup> (Makstat database, 2022). Although parts of Karposh municipality existed for long time, the largest part was subjected to urban development after the 1963 Skopje earthquake (Mariotti & Baldwin Hess, 2021; United Nations, 1970).

The number of populations in the case study municipalities was obtained from the statistics office of North Macedonia according to the census data of 2021 (Makstat database, 2022), while the surface area of the municipalities is based on the information available on the websites of the municipalities (Municipality of Cair, 2025; Municipality of Butel, 2025; Municipality of Karposh, 2025). The land-use typology in the case study municipalities is mainly housing land-use, with smaller presence of other types of land-use, such as education, healthcare, commercial and business (SPA, 2011).

Land-use in North Macedonia is governed by spatial and urban plans, which are managed by two ministries: the Ministry of Living Environment and Spatial Planning and the Ministry for Transportation and Communications, respectively (Ivanisevic et al., 2021). The urban plans are prepared according to the planning conditions defined within the spatial plans (Official Gazette of North Macedonia, nr. 32/2020). There are five types of urban plans: the General Urban Plan (GUP), the Detailed Urban Plan (DUP), Urban Plan for Village, Urban Plan for Rural Area and Urban Plan for Province and Buildings of National Importance. The GUP is prepared at city level, and it has plan period of 10 years. The DUP is prepared at municipality level, and it must be in line with the guidelines of GUP. The plan period of DUP is 5 years (Official Gazette of North Macedonia, nr. 32/2020).

This study focuses on the process of adopting a new DUP from the perspective of public participation while implementing a qualitative methodology. The status of participatory planning was analysed within the urban planning legislation of North Macedonia. Information about the implementation of participatory planning in practice was gathered through interviews with various stakeholders involved in the planning process, including representatives from municipal urban planning sectors, urban community centers and urban planners from the private sector.

The interviews with the municipal urban planning sector representatives were conducted over a three day period in February 2025. The first interview took place on 6th of February 2025 with a Junior Officer from the Sector for Urbanism – Department of Spatial and Urban planning of Karposh Municipality. Second, on 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2025 was interviewed a Junior Officer from the Sector for Urbanism, Communal Works, Protection of the Living Environment and Local Economic Development from Butel Municipality. On 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2025 as a representative from Cair Municipality, a Senior Officer from the Sector for Urbanism, Managing of Building Plot, Communal Works and Protection of Living Environment was interviewed.



**Fig. 2**

The case study municipalities: Cair, Butel and Karposh mapped in QGIS.

## Methods

The urban community center representatives were the second group of interviewees. However, among the case studies urban community centers are present only in municipality of Karposh and there are in total 12 such centers. The head of the urban community centers was interviewed on 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2025, while one of the centers was visited on 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2025 where three civil servants were interviewed in form of a group discussion.

The third group consisted of urban planners from the private sector responsible for preparing DUPs for the municipalities. On 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2025 a private company in Skopje with long time experience in urban planning was visited where two Senior-level urban planners were interviewed about their views on participatory planning practice according to their experience.

The selection of the interviewees was based on their availability and willingness to take part in the interviews. In total there were six interviews and nine people were interviewed. It is important to note that all the interviewees requested to remain anonymous. The data collected through the interviews was analyzed and presented based on themes discussed with the interviewees. The municipality websites served as additional source of information and they were reviewed about the availability of information related to public participation activities.

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## Results and Discussion

The urban planning legislation in North Macedonia supports the participatory planning through various activities. First, each municipality is required to form a participatory body that follows the urban planning process of a new plan from its start to the adopting of the plan. The municipality opens a public call for forming a participatory body and it consists of civil servants from the municipality as well as voluntary members such as urban planning experts, representatives from urban community centers and NGOs. The committee for urban planning within the municipality is responsible for controlling the work of the participatory body (Official Gazette, nr. 32/2020).

Second, public presentations and surveys must be conducted. To approach the citizens who will be affected by the new plan, the municipality is obliged to organize a public presentation and survey before adopting a new DUP. At the public presentation the citizens are acknowledged about the new urban plan. The draft of the urban plan is exhibited for public review and public survey for at least 30 days which in case of areas with greater population density, complexity or greater importance the time of public survey can be extended up to 90 days. There must be at least one public presentation of the plan during the time of exhibiting the urban plan (Official Gazette or North Macedonia, nr. 32/2020). Once the public survey is finished, the municipality forms a professional committee which evaluates the remarks made by the citizens and decides if the remarks can be applied or not into the plan. The professional committee of the municipality prepares a report for the conducted public presentation and survey. Also, this report should contain explanation about the accepted and rejected remarks of the citizens, and it becomes part of the urban plan documentation (Official Gazette or North Macedonia, nr. 32/2020).

Based on the interviews with the urban planning sector representatives from the case study municipalities, the process of adopting a new DUP and public participation activities strictly follow the urban planning law. Every municipality has its own website and there is a section which is dedicated to urban planning which contains information about DUPs, the adopted ones as well as information related to electronic building permit. The DUP files in all municipalities' websites are in pdf format as single page containing graphical information and table with numerical values representing the urban parameters. Municipalities publish the information for public presentations and surveys on their website as well as on daily newspapers.

The public surveys are conducted with filling out printed forms, while the use of digital tools is not yet implemented. The citizens write down their remarks on these printed forms and submit them to the municipality representatives. In the survey citizens are required to provide their name,

surname, address and phone number as well as indicate the address, the cadastre parcel number or description of the location for which they make remarks. The survey typically focuses on building level, owned by an individual or group of citizens. The citizens' remarks are mainly about a building's surface area or height, and if there are discrepancies between the DUP and cadastre parcels. In Table 1 the participatory planning practice of public presentations and surveys is compared between the case study municipalities.

Municipality	Cair	Butel	Karposh
Population	62.586	37.968	63.760
Surface area km <sup>2</sup>	3.52 km <sup>2</sup>	54,71 km <sup>2</sup>	35 km <sup>2</sup>
Density of population	17.780 people/km <sup>2</sup>	693 people/km <sup>2</sup>	1.822 people/km <sup>2</sup>
Year of official establishment	1976	2005	1976
Urban community centers	None	None	12 urban community centers formed by the municipality
Methods of informing the public	Newspapers and web site	Newspapers, web site and social media (Facebook)	Newspapers, web site, social media and posters on visible places
Public presentation venue	Municipality building	Municipality building	Urban community centers and municipality building
Level of citizen's interest	Moderate level	Low level	High level
Survey type	Printed forms	Printed forms	Printed forms
Citizens' comments about the plan	Individual property related problems, height and area of the building. If there are discrepancies in parcel size between the DUP and cadastre.	Individual property related problems, height and area of the building. If there are discrepancies in parcel size between the DUP and cadastre.	Individual property related problems, height and area of the building. If there are discrepancies in parcel size between the DUP and cadastre.
Processing of citizens' feedback	Municipal committee evaluates the citizens' comments and makes decisions	Municipal committee evaluates the citizens' comments and makes decisions	Municipal committee evaluates the citizens' comments and makes decisions

**Table 1**

Comparison of the public presentation and survey practices in case study municipalities

The level of citizens participation depends significantly on being informed in timely manner about the public presentation and survey as well as being influenced by the new DUP. All three municipalities use similar methods for informing the citizens about the public presentations and surveys. The Senior Officer from Cair Municipality's Sector for Urbanism noted that while citizens prefer to visit the municipality in person to address their problems, they show moderate level of interest at public surveys and presentations. According to the interviewee from Butel Municipality the low level of interest by the citizens for public surveys and presentations is largely due to the lack of trust in the process of participatory planning. Having urban community centers enhances citizen participation in Karposh municipality compared to Cair and Butel. Since the participatory body should include representatives from urban community centers the lack of such centers raises the following question: who can represent the urban community center in a municipality where there is none? Forming of urban community centers is an important step in supporting the participatory planning.

In the municipality of Karposh the urban community centers were formed by the municipality itself, they function as its branches and there are civil servants employed by the municipality. The urban community center functions as a link between the citizens and the municipality. The civil servants of the community center conduct field observations and map the detected problems such as accumulated trash and poor hygiene in public spaces, dysfunctional light elements, and drills on the streets. Also, the citizens of the district visit the community center to report issues related to the built environment. Additionally, the urban community center functions as a gathering place for the citizens. Public presentations and surveys of the new DUPs are held at the community center. The community center occasionally organizes educational activities with topics related to generic education, first aid and health. The head of the community centers meets periodically with the representatives of each community center to discuss the problems that the citizens face.

Urban planners from a private company shared their views on the process of preparation of DUPs and the implementation of participatory planning in Skopje. The DUP can be initiated by a group of citizens, communities, organizations, legal entities, and governmental institutions. If the DUP is initiated by a group of citizens and/or legal entities, it should be also financed by them. On the other hand, when the DUP is initiated by a governmental institution, or the municipality, it is financed by the government. The selection of the urban planning company which will prepare the urban plan depends on the way of financing the urban plan. If the plan is financed by group of citizens and/or legal entities, they can choose the urban planning company. In case when the plan is financed by the government there should be a public call in line with the law for urban planning (Official Gazette, nr. 32/2020). One of the urban planners noted that in the past there were public enterprises specialized in urban planning, however, today all the urban planning companies are private. In case of expiration of the plan period of a DUP if there is no new DUP prepared, the existing DUP continues to be valid (Official Gazette, nr. 32/2020).

The urban planners pointed out that one of the main challenges that they face is obtaining up-to-date data about the site which is subject of the plan. Making field visits is not a usual practice for urban planners. Instead, they rely on the information provided by the geodetic engineers who do the onsite measurements and map the built environment. However, in some cases geodetic engineers rely on information from the cadastre, which is an online GIS platform.

The coefficient and percentage of building, the urban parameters defined in a higher tier plan, present another constraint for the urban planners. Urban planning needs multidisciplinary approach; however, the DUPs do not have enough input parameters. Using GIS platforms and software provide the opportunity to have insight into multiple data when planning. Although there has been an initiative for collecting all the urban plans in GIS format, it has not been completed. The urban planners in North Macedonia still work on AutoCAD, while the GIS platforms are not yet in use. The cadastre has GIS platform, and the DUPs are overlapped with cadastre data to avoid discrepancies between the DUP and cadastre regarding the parcel and building information.

The urban planners stated that the current policy for urban planning does not have conceptual approach to the aspects of resilience and vulnerability. This situation derives because of the lack of educational upgrades of the urban planners. After completing the official education for architecture at a university and obtaining the license for working as urban planner from the Chamber of Architects and Engineers, the urban planners are not asked for any other official upgrade of their knowledge. The planners suggest that establishing a link between the academia and the planning industry, such as professional journals, can be very beneficial to keep up with the trends of urban planning in the developed countries and learn from them.

Regarding the understanding of the term resilience, the only conceptually accurate explanation was obtained from the private sector urban planners. They defined the term resilience as the ability to recover and continue functioning. On the other hand, the interviewees from case study

municipalities lack a comprehensive understanding of the term. The urban community center servants from Karposh municipality also do not have a sufficient understanding of the term resilience. The urban planning law (Official Gazette of North Macedonia, nr. 32/2020) requires the urban plans to refer to potential catastrophes. The DUPs in their textual part contain general information about natural hazards. At the same time, according to the law for crisis management (Official Gazette of North Macedonia, nr. 29/2005) the municipalities should make assessment of the potential risks. In case of a disaster event, municipalities form a crisis office and request assistance from the Directorate for Protection and Rescue as well as Crisis Management Center.

In general, citizen inclusion in urban planning process is carried out to fulfil formal legal requirements. To improve the quality of citizen inclusion, it is significantly important to enhance motivation for participatory planning among both municipal administrations and citizens. This is possible by raising awareness about the beneficial outcomes of participatory planning, particularly its role in building more resilient and sustainable urban environments.

The participatory planning in North Macedonia is supported by the urban planning legislation. Based on the information obtained from the analysis of the case study municipalities, Cair, Butel and Karposh, it can be concluded that the municipalities also contribute to the participatory planning by using the tools defined in the regulations. The formation of participatory bodies, the public presentations and public surveys are the main methods used for inclusion of communities in the urban planning process.

However, the process of participatory planning needs further development. First, the digital tools, such as mobile applications and web platforms which allow two-way communication, should be implemented in the participatory planning. The municipal websites serve for sharing public information; however, they are not sufficient as there is only one-way communication while email communication is the only means of two-way communication between the citizens and municipality administration. By using digital tools larger audience can be informed about the new urban plans and the activities related to participatory planning.

The practice of conducting the public surveys with printed forms should switch to digital surveys as they provide greater flexibility to citizens to fill out the forms and processing of the collected data is much easier compared to handwritten surveys.

Currently, the format of the survey form as well as the citizens focus primarily on the interests of the individual, the buildings which are owned by an individual or group of individuals. However, there is need for increasing the awareness about the shared public spaces, such as streets, pedestrian paths, parking areas, parks, children's playgrounds.

Establishing urban community centers, formed by the citizens or the municipality, can strengthen the feeling of belonging to an urban community and make the citizens perceive their neighbourhood as a shared responsibility.

Beside integrating digital tools in the process of participatory planning organizing face-to-face meetings and workshops with the citizens at beginning stages of the urban plan can improve the participatory planning. The focus from individual's interests should be moved to public interest. The suggested activities should be supported by the legal framework as well.

The findings reveal a limited understanding of the term resilience, which point out to the need that the awareness about resilience should be improved at all stakeholders. Increasing the awareness about the concepts of sustainability and resilience is possible through the formal educational process as well as informal educational activities which can be conducted at urban community centers or at the municipality premises. To achieve resilient urban environment, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of resilience and improve the participatory planning.

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## Conclusions

## Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this paper whose comments and suggestions helped me in improving the quality of this research paper. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous interviewees who contributed to the development of this research work.

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