

BATHORE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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BATHORE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Case Study at a Glance

The Bathore Neighbourhood Development Agenda (2003) is a case study on participatory urban planning in Bathore, a rapidly developed informal settlement near Tirana, Albania. Following mass internal migration in the 1990s, Bathore grew without formal planning or infrastructure. In response, Co-PLAN collaborated with local residents and authorities to create a development agenda focused on legalizing property, improving infrastructure and public services, and integrating the area into the broader urban fabric.

The case highlights the importance of community involvement in transforming informal settlements into sustainable urban neighborhoods.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☐ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☒ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☐ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☒ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☐ Block scale
- ☐ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☐ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☒ social & cultural resilience
- ☒ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☒ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☐ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☐ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☒ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☒ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☐ Private sector
- ☒ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☒ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☒ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☒ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☒ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☐ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☐ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☐ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☒ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☒ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☒ Empowerment
- ☐ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

This case study examines participatory urban planning processes in Bathore, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Tirana that experienced rapid urbanization following large-scale internal migration during the 1990s. The empirical basis of the study is grounded in participatory planning activities, community consultations, pilot interventions, and collaborative initiatives involving residents, local authorities, NGOs, and academic institutions. The methodological approach combines qualitative analysis, participatory design workshops, stakeholder collaboration, and spatial planning assessment to investigate how community involvement contributed to the legalization, infrastructural improvement, and long-term transformation of the neighborhood into a more resilient and integrated urban area.

As part of the case study, interviews were conducted with representatives from POLIS University and actors involved in the participatory development processes implemented in Bathore. The interviews explored the evolution of community-led planning initiatives, the role of civic participation in addressing informal urbanization challenges, and the mechanisms used to facilitate cooperation between residents, local authorities, and planning institutions. Special attention was given to the long-term impacts of participatory governance approaches on neighborhood resilience, infrastructure improvement, and social integration.

Compendious summary

This case study examines the Bathore neighborhood on the northern outskirts of Tirana, Albania, and analyzes how civil engagement has shaped spatial planning and improved neighborhood resilience. Bathore's rapid, informal urbanization in the 1990s created significant infrastructural and environmental challenges. Through participatory planning, community consultations, design workshops, and pilot interventions, residents played a central role in transforming the neighborhood's spatial layout, infrastructure, and public spaces. The study highlights the mechanisms, successes, and limitations of community-led spatial planning and offers insights for replicable models of participatory urban resilience.

Phase 01	Participatory Design Workshops	The participatory design workshops in Bathore marked the initial step of actively involving residents in shaping their neighborhood's spatial development. Facilitated by Co-PLAN and a team of urban experts, these workshops brought together residents, informal community leaders, NGOs, planners, and technical specialists to co-develop solutions for public spaces, street layouts, drainage systems, and service locations. Through these sessions, residents had a tangible influence on the neighborhood's spatial interventions, shaping over 65% of proposals, including street hierarchy, public space allocation, and flood mitigation strategies. The workshops fostered a sense of ownership among participants, strengthened trust between the community and planners, and generated practical, context-sensitive solutions that responded directly to Bathore's unique challenges.
Phase 02	Community Consultation and On-site Engagement	Building on the co-design efforts, the community consultation and on-site engagement phase expanded the participatory process across Bathore. Regular forums, neighborhood assemblies, surveys, and interviews were conducted with residents, community-based organizations, municipal officials, and NGO facilitators. Approximately 70% of households actively participated, offering insights into critical infrastructure gaps, informal land use patterns, and priorities for flood mitigation and public spaces. This phase emphasized transparency and inclusivity, ensuring that informal residents' voices were integrated into the official planning agenda. It also reinforced social cohesion, creating a collaborative environment where the community and local authorities could negotiate shared priorities for neighborhood improvement.
Phase 03	Designing process	The designing process combined community knowledge with technical planning to develop actionable solutions. Collaborative mapping exercises and design charrettes were conducted alongside an analysis of legal frameworks and

		planning policies. Residents contributed to hand-drawn and digital maps, visual diagrams, aerial imagery interpretation, and on-site observations. This approach identified flood-prone areas, gaps in infrastructure, and opportunities for creating public spaces. Integrating local knowledge with professional planning ensured that the resulting designs were both technically sound and socially acceptable, respecting Bathore's informal settlement patterns while enhancing resilience and functionality.
Phase 04	Pilot Interventions	Pilot interventions translated the collaborative planning into tangible improvements within the neighborhood. These actions included participatory road restructuring, construction of drainage channels, creation of small public squares, and formalization of selected plots. Implemented across low-lying flood-prone areas, main and secondary streets, and vacant plots in Bathore (~5.18 km ²), these interventions improved mobility, mitigated flooding, and created multifunctional public spaces. The pilot projects demonstrated that incremental, community-driven efforts could achieve measurable improvements in spatial resilience, even in resource-constrained informal settlements.
Phase 05	Reflexive Monitoring and Documentation	The final phase focused on monitoring and documenting the outcomes of the participatory process and pilot interventions. On-site observations, photography, aerial imagery, and follow-up feedback sessions with residents provided continuous evaluation of the implemented measures. Visual records, participatory maps, progress reports, and agenda documentation preserved knowledge and facilitated assessment. Community involvement in monitoring reinforced ownership, allowed for iterative improvements, and ensured that lessons learned were captured for future planning. Reflexive documentation also provided a strong evidence base to support policy advocacy and strengthen participatory urban planning practices in Bathore.

Table 1. Overview of initiative's main phases

Key Urban Issues/Questions Analyzed (Spatial Resilience Challenges in the Neighborhood)

Key Spatial Issues:

- Participatory budgeting for infrastructure prioritization.
- Co-design workshops and design charrettes influencing street networks, public squares, and flood mitigation.

- Advocacy groups evolving into structured neighbourhood associations.
- Inclusivity measures targeting women, youth, and marginalized residents through visual tools, door-to-door mobilization, and neutral meeting spaces.
- Community-led initiatives: clean-ups, street lighting campaigns, civic education on land rights and zoning laws.
- Social and Environmental Implications:
 - Lack of basic infrastructure: sewage, water, paved streets, drainage.
 - Poor urban design & high-density informal housing (350 persons/hectare).
 - Absence of public/green spaces (<5% coverage).
 - Environmental vulnerabilities: recurrent flooding, soil contamination, informal waste dumping.

Mechanisms of Civil Engagement in Spatial Planning for Resilience

The Where Albania Walks initiative placed civic engagement at the core of its spatial planning process, using participatory tools and collaborative methods to explore how citizens could actively contribute to shaping more walkable and resilient neighborhoods in Tirana. The engagement strategy unfolded through a series of participatory design workshops, community mapping sessions, and collaborative planning activities that brought together residents, students, planners, and local authorities.

Through the participatory design workshops, participants collectively identified urban challenges related to pedestrian safety, accessibility, and the lack of inclusive public spaces. These workshops served as creative spaces where community members exchanged ideas, discussed mobility needs, and collaboratively developed pedestrian-oriented design proposals. The process encouraged a shared understanding of how small-scale spatial improvements—such as sidewalk widening, street reorganization, and pocket parks—could transform neighborhood quality of life.

Complementing this, community mapping exercises provided residents with tangible ways to express their lived experiences of urban space. Using printed maps, markers, and stickers, participants identified unsafe routes, physical barriers, and potential zones for improvement. This hands-on method enabled the generation of localized spatial knowledge that reflected everyday mobility patterns and revealed the specific needs of diverse user groups, from children to elderly pedestrians.

Building on the insights gathered, scenario development sessions invited participants to envision alternative futures for their neighborhoods. Together, they co-created pedestrian-friendly street layouts and public space designs aligned with community priorities. Although these scenarios remained conceptual, they represented important steps toward community-informed urban strategies that could guide future implementation.

Throughout the process, collaborative planning emerged as a key mechanism for integrating different perspectives and expertise. The partnership between academic institutions, municipal actors, and

community representatives fostered cross-disciplinary learning and mutual understanding, positioning the local community as an active co-creator rather than a passive recipient of planning outcomes.

In terms of the level of participation, the initiative advanced beyond traditional consultation, reaching the stages of involving and collaborating. Residents were not merely informed about the process but directly engaged in discussions, mapping activities, and design sessions. Institutions and communities worked jointly during the planning phase, sharing responsibility for identifying problems and developing proposals, though decision-making authority and implementation power largely remained within institutional structures.

Efforts were also made to ensure inclusivity in the engagement process. Workshops were designed to be accessible and interactive, employing visual materials and participatory tools that allowed participants with different backgrounds to contribute meaningfully, including youth and non-experts. Nonetheless, the project faced challenges in reaching more marginalized or less vocal groups, mainly due to limited outreach capacity and resource constraints. Despite these limitations, the participatory framework successfully fostered dialogue, trust, and a sense of shared ownership among those involved, laying the foundation for more inclusive and resilient spatial planning practices in the future.

Case study findings and lessons learned

- Significant influence on drainage, road hierarchy, and public spaces, improving functional and social resilience.
- Bureaucratic resistance, resource limitations, technical-community conflicts, underrepresentation of marginalized groups, shifting political priorities.
- Participatory road restructuring, community-designed public squares, drainage channels, and plot regularization.
- Transparent communication, empowering local leaders, localized engagement platforms, participatory mapping, co-design workshops, low-tech tools.
- Incremental infrastructure design, context-based layout regularization.
- Regulatory delays, funding shortages, technical knowledge gaps.
- Neighborhood-led mapping, hybrid forums with technical facilitation, incremental urbanism with legal integration.

Lessons Learned

- Active community participation fosters ownership, trust, and practical, context-sensitive solutions.
- Inclusive engagement enhances social cohesion and ensures diverse voices are considered in planning.
- Integrating local knowledge with technical expertise produces realistic and socially accepted interventions.

- Incremental, community-led interventions can achieve measurable improvements even in resource-constrained settings.
- Transparent communication, visual tools, and localized engagement platforms are key to effective participation.
- Reflexive monitoring and documentation reinforce ownership, support iterative improvements, and provide evidence for policy advocacy.

Conclusion

Civil engagement in Bathore transformed an informal settlement into a spatially resilient neighborhood. Participatory methods, mapping, co-design workshops, localized assemblies, enabled residents to influence road layouts, flood mitigation infrastructure, and multifunctional public spaces, improving both environmental and social resilience. The case demonstrates that civic participation is essential in urban planning, particularly in informal or underserved neighborhoods. Policies should institutionalize community involvement, support incremental urban interventions, adapt technical planning to local realities, and prioritize inclusivity to strengthen neighborhood resilience over the long term.

Attachments

Photos



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