

Case study ID

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ZBRASLAV

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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ZBRASLAV

Case Study at a Glance

This case study shows the development, successes, and problems in the participation of residents in the discussion of changes in public areas. For the study, we selected the Prague-Zbraslav district. Thus, it is attractive for residents because of its relatively short commuting distance to the center of Prague and, on the other hand, its relatively close nature.

The study shows the communication aspects between the actors, the knowledge of the planning processes, but also the partial interests of the actors involved. The study thus brings insight into the complex and complicated aspects of public space planning and the social aspects involved.

This report was prepared by the team of the Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) at the University of Basel within the UPRUN project. The team of CEPS is responsible for the content and the accuracy of the statements presented in this report.

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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 shows the development, successes, and problems in the participation of residents in the discussion of changes in public areas. This study is set in the Czech Republic, where, three decades ago, public participation was not a very common practice and participative processes had to be developed (contrary to the west European countries, especially Switzerland). For the study, we selected the Prague-Zbraslav district. Thus, it is attractive for residents because of its relatively short commuting distance to the center of Prague and, on the other hand, its relatively close nature.

The study shows the communication aspects between the actors, the knowledge of the planning processes, but also the partial interests of the actors involved. The study thus brings insight into the complex and complicated aspects of public space planning and the social aspects involved.

As part of the case study, we conducted a total of three interviews:

- » **One interview with an architect** to discuss the urban planning perspective of the district, especially a few selected places, where the change increased the esthetical value of the places, including their environmental value for the local inhabitants.
- » **One interview with a representative of the city district Prague - Zbraslav**, who introduced the perspective of the local public administration role in finding places to improve in collaboration with other local stakeholders.
- » **One interview with an inhabitant of the city district Prague – Zbraslav**. This interview provided interesting insights into how residents perceive urban planning issues in different parts of the city, where only some of these issues directly affect them. The possibilities and limitations of resident participation in the planning of public spaces were also discussed.

Compendious summary

Introduction

This case study deals with urban planning in the city district Prague-Zbraslav in the Czech Republic. This municipality is located on the southern edge of Prague. It covers an area of 9.85 km², of which about 42% are forests, fields, meadows, and gardens (CZSO, 2025). Nevertheless, the built-up residential area is in the center of this area. Prague - Zbraslav has approximately 10,000 inhabitants. Thus, it is a quite densely built-up area, surrounded by agricultural areas.

It is also surrounded by major roads on the northern, western and eastern sides, and by a quarry on the southern side. Moreover, there is the river Vltava on the eastern border of the municipality.

From this perspective, there is not an easy way for inhabitants to visit the surrounding nature. If they want to visit the surrounding parts on foot from Zbraslav, the only way is via two underpasses under the road or via a bridge over the Vltava River. Access is, therefore, quite limited.

Nevertheless, within the municipality itself, there are also green areas that provide opportunities for planning leisure space. However, these areas were unused for a long time and did not have a form that would be attractive to come and spend time there.

In 2002, Zbraslav was hit by a natural disaster. It was such an intense flood, which repeats statistically once in a thousand years.

About ten percent of the built-up area was under water (not counting the green areas outside the built-up area, which were also under water). This event triggered building modifications in flood protection, primarily in the area adjacent to the Vltava River, where an anti-flood wall had been built to protect the municipality. The system was completed in 2005, although it protects Zbraslav against smaller floods than originally intended.

Figure 1: Prague - Zbraslav on the map of the Czech Republic

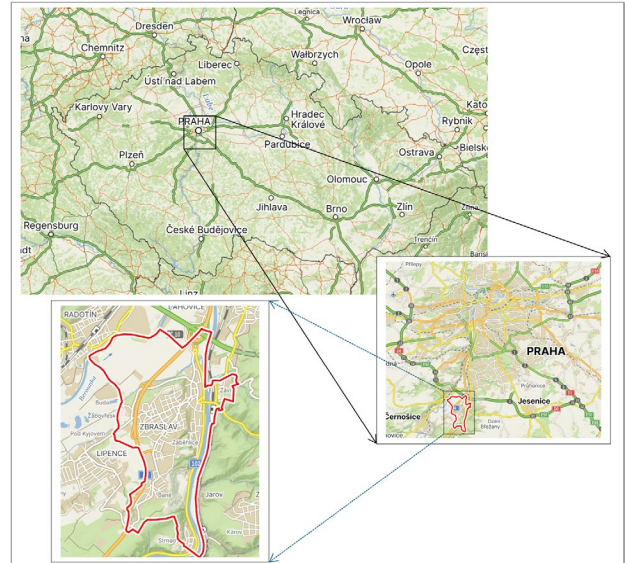


Figure 2: Floods in 2002



Source: Municipality of Zbraslav

Figure 3: Floods in 2013

Source: Vkapitanova

This case study focuses on the last two decades of urban planning in Zbraslav. As in other Czech municipalities, also here the basic civic infrastructure had to be renewed, which had been done during the 1990s. It is clear from the location of the municipality - within about 40-minute commuting distance from the center of Prague – that it is an attractive commuting distance for people to move to Zbraslav. Thus, there is pressure to build blocks of flats and houses. It causes the intertwined interests of residents, developers, and political representatives of the municipality. The significance of this case study lies in the forms in which people are involved in urban planning and the difficulties this process can encounter.

In order to triangulate the information and methods for the preparation of the case study, we work not only with interviews with residents of the municipality and its political leadership but also with architects. In addition, we did desk research on relevant sources, whether books or the Internet. Together, these sources of information provide a comprehensive view of urban planning in our selected municipality.

Neighborhood challenge

In a country that experienced 40 years of communist rule, when participation was not possible, participatory methods in spatial planning were difficult to start. On the other hand, it has been 35 years since the Velvet Revolution. Since that time, a new generation that grew up in a democratic system is now in the best years. Nevertheless, there are still some problems and issues that even democracy has difficulties to solve.

Understanding the urban planning processes and effective participation

In many projects where co-production and participation of inhabitants in urban planning is expected, a low level of knowledge and skill among the inhabitants is encountered. Not all people have the knowledge and expertise to intervene effectively, and they expect that the public sector solves everything for them. Second, a low knowledge of architecture and urban planning procedures can also cause misunderstandings and false expectations from stakeholders. The process is also administratively complex - Processing proposals and securing funding for projects can be bureaucratically challenging even for the municipality.

When another flood came a decade later, in 2013, Zbraslav was prepared to withstand the event (see Figure 3). However, the intensity of rain was not as intense as a decade ago.

Nevertheless, flooding remains a concern despite protective barriers installed in lower Zbraslav. For example, a recent flood danger in September 2024 triggered a high-level warning in Zbraslav, raising concerns about preparedness among the people and also the public authorities in Zbraslav.

For example, in any construction procedure, the parties to the construction procedure are the builders (the persons who want to build). Other parties to the proceedings may be: (i) The owner of the land on which the project is to be carried out. This is not always the same person as the builder. (ii) Owners of neighboring properties (land and buildings) and those who have an easement over them if they may be directly affected by the construction project. According to case law, the properties need not be directly adjacent, i.e. have the same border with the land where the building is planned. What is important is that they will be directly affected by the project. They may be properties "across the road", but also more distant properties. It depends on the nature and potential impacts of the new building. The assessment is up to the authority or, subsequently, the court of justice.

Low knowledge about and interest in urban planning in the neighborhoods

Many residents of Zbraslav are not registered for permanent residence. This fact brings a lower level of interest in the topics discussed and willingness to participate in the discussion. These people simply commute to work, and as they live in rented real estate, they expect that they might move to another city if circumstances require it or allow it. Moreover, for the municipality, it means that these people also do not pay the income taxes in Zbraslav but in another municipality somewhere in Czechia (where are they actually registered for long-term stay). Thus, the motivation of these people concerning local issues is quite low.

Moreover, even if registered in Zbraslav, many residents are unaware of public consultations or workshops related to urban planning. Announcements about plans for new buildings are not widely distributed via newspapers or flyers, requiring individuals to actively seek out information. It relates to the point above – if people are not a directly involved party in a construction project – they probably do not know about new plans. As also the local inhabitant and the architect mentioned during the interviews, participation in discussions on urban development was limited due to lack of direct communication. Thus, living only about 300 meters away can cause people to be unaware of the changing situation.

Particular interests of stakeholders

The social climate in Western democracies contributes to people being individualistic. They are primarily concerned with their own interests. Therefore, it is not surprising that Prague-Zbraslav is no exception, and people are primarily interested in what they are directly connected to their preferences. It also concerns the need to solve in the area where they live. The moment there are more people with similar interests, they start to engage together in a given issue (very often, the initial impulse is the fear of change and the feeling of threat). Thus, we also collected some information about the situation in our place in question

- The needs and habits differ in some parts of the city district. There are existing residents whose lifestyle is more rural, while new residents expect to have access to city services like cultural life. Another aspect of this clash of expectations is the technical requirements of planning and the technical feasibility of solutions.
- Parking is a significant issue, especially in upper Zbraslav near Lidl shopping mall. A local developer transferred ownership of some parking spaces to private individuals instead of the municipality. Recently, a private owner restricted access to previously free parking, requiring

residents to rent spaces. This has led to increased congestion, with cars parked in unauthorized areas, posing safety risks. Actually, this issue is also relevant to other parts of the city district (see, for example, the architectural study about Sluneční město, which is about one kilometer away from Lidl but suffers from similar problems).

- One of the interviewees stated that participatory meetings are rare, as most issues (e.g., park regeneration) are not controversial enough to provoke public opposition and a discussion. Local newspapers previously provided updates on urban developments but have not been distributed in recent years. Residents now rely on the municipal website for updates, but only those who actively search for information remain informed.
- Unlike other municipalities, Zbraslav has not seen mass grassroots movements in urban planning.

An example of the forest park Belveder

The discussion with the architect centered on the **revitalization of the Zbraslav forest park Belveder** as an example of state of the art in a participatory approach. The park was previously underutilized due to poor accessibility, safety concerns, and general neglect. Moreover, some residents had taken informal ownership, planted trees and modified the area to fit their personal preferences, leading to resistance to official development efforts.

Figure 4: Previous situation in the forest park Belveder in Prague - Zbraslav



Source: Projektil Architekti

This project has undergone multiple municipal administrations in various election periods. Initially, awareness and interest from the local

community were minimal, with many residents unaware of the park's existence or potential. Early project efforts faced several challenges, including an unsuccessful reconstruction attempt where funds were mismanaged, according to the interviewee.

Figure 5: Central position of the forest park Belveder in the middle of Prague - Zbraslav



Source: Projektil Architekti

The idea of revitalizing the park emerged as early as 2005, but the progress was very slow due to frequent leadership changes. Funding was primarily obtained through municipal grants and Prague city support, allowing the project to advance in multiple phases. While some community meetings took place, participation

remained mostly informal and limited to residents living near the park. There are many homeowners who showed little enthusiasm, as they preferred using their private gardens over shared public spaces.

The broader public showed little interest, likely due to skepticism about the impact of public consultations.

The project itself was implemented in two phases. The first one became real in 2011, after two years of preparation of the architectural project. The second phase followed four years later, in the year 2015. Altogether, the renewed area was 40,993 m². The funding was provided by the Capital City of Prague.

Now, the forest park Belveder is an attractive place, also thanks to the existence of a fast food stand, so people can use it for a pleasant stay, and it does not have to be a full-fledged trip to nature with complex preparation.

When finished, there were better pathways, seating areas, and small lakes added to make the space more inviting.

Once completed, the project received positive feedback from residents, many of whom were surprised how these improvements transformed the space.

Figure 6: Renewed part of the park



Source: City district Prague - Zbraslav

Response to the challenge and improvements

Prague-Zbraslav has tackled the problems associated with participation in urban development with some successes. For those interested, it is good to know the successful steps that can be copied in other environments, as well as the failures to avoid them.

Low knowledge of procedures in urban planning in inhabitants

In the case of Zbraslav, this problem is solved by inviting architects and other experts to the discussion. The interests of the population are taken into account through the workshops, discussions, and online comments on the proposals (usually in this order). It enables providing people to share their views, while the technical work is done by experts.

Effective participation

The process of participation includes three main areas where people can engage and bring new ideas to the municipality:

- **Citizen-Proposed Projects** – Residents submit project ideas, which are reviewed by municipal officials. Approved ideas are then put to a public vote.
- **Municipal-Initiated Projects** – The city itself proposes projects for public consideration.
- **School Projects** – Schools participate by submitting their own project ideas, encouraging youth involvement in decision-making.

For example, in a recent vote, citizens selected the reconstruction of a popular children's playground as a winning project. Another project idea involved installing new lighting in the Belveder forest park, but it was not selected. However, the municipality is exploring alternative ways to fund and implement it.

An advantage is the size of the city district Zbraslav. It is a small municipality. Thus, beyond formal public meetings, informal, everyday interactions play a significant role in shaping local policies. Personal relationships between residents and local officials allow for direct feedback and discussion of community needs.

Particular interests

Partial individual interests will exist in any system. However, collecting and assessing them centrally at the municipal level brings with it the possibility of combining them into larger units and working with them according to which ones are most pressing for a larger number of people.

Improvements Introduced

Improvements relating primarily to the communication of projects causing changes in the public space can be seen as positive. In addition, it has been possible to gradually reconcile different, often conflicting, views on the shape of public spaces.

On the other hand, there are still some obstacles. For example, maintenance remains a challenge. The conversation of the forest park's steep terrain requires frequent upkeep, but funding for continued maintenance is scarce. It highlighted a common problem in Czech public urban planning: funding is easier to secure for initial construction than for long-term maintenance. Clearer maintenance strategies should be built into public projects to prevent long-term degradation.

Mechanisms of civic engagement

In general, the municipality of Zbraslav is open to communication with residents about what and how the public space will be used. This communication has existed for a long time and is not dependent on the specific composition of the local council and who formed the local government. This is evident from various data from the Internet about the projects implemented (forest park Belveder¹, club room², and now the project Nad Kamínkou³); many of them also won prizes for best architectural solutions.

Also, in Zbraslav, there is participatory budgeting, where the inhabitants of Zbraslav come up with their suggestions and proposals, often for relatively small adjustments and interventions. Nevertheless, they have their place because they allow residents to be more active in the public space.

¹ <https://www.mc-zbraslav.cz/lesopark-belveder/d-12412> or <https://www.projektil.cz/projekty/lesopark-belveder>

² <https://ceskacenazaarchitekturu.cz/rocniky/2021/klubovna-zbraslav> , <https://www.asb-portal.cz/architektura/obcanske-stavby/rozpadajici-se-ruinu-nebo-viceucelovou-klubovnu-zbraslav-ma-jasno> , and <https://www.mc-zbraslav.cz/rekonstrukce-byvale-pradelny/ds-1108#:~:text=Budova%20po%20rekonstrukci%20slou%C5%BE%C3%AD%20jako,kter%C3%A1%20je%20sou%C4%8D%C3%A1st%C3%AD%20historie%20Zbraslavi.>

³ <https://nadkaminkou.cz/aktuality/>

In some projects, it is evident that they affect only a certain part of the local community, while others are not directly affected. This is then reflected in the involvement of only that part of the population that geographically lives in the place of the potential projects' implementation or modifications.

An example of such an approach is the recent integrated strategy for the development of the Nad Kamínkou locality. It aims to create a development strategy for the area in cooperation with the private developer Metrostav Development, the Zbraslav municipality and with the participation of the local community. The aim of the strategy is to integrate the project into the urban structure of Zbraslav and, at the same time, to improve the accessibility and availability of public spaces around the Nad Kamínkou site.

The consultation process included several forms, from face-to-face meetings (50 people attended the first meeting) to an online questionnaire and online consultation of the plan. For example, the interviewee living in a nearby area pointed out that public workshops had been held, but participation had been low due to limited awareness.

Large-scale projects often begin with architectural competition or a transparent selection process. It enables people to provide their ideas to architects, who prepare the concept plans. Then, people comment on the plans. The municipality collaborates with private developers to finalize project execution. Urban planning discussions and public engagement events are organized by the municipality in coordination with contractors.

Zbraslav operates a participatory budgeting initiative, allowing residents to propose and vote on small-scale community projects. Citizens can submit and describe projects, which, if approved, receive funding for implementation. Over the years, this initiative has contributed to gradual neighborhood improvements.

Case study findings and lessons learned

- **Public participation exists** via participatory budgeting, but awareness of larger projects is limited and relates mainly to neighborhoods that see the particular issue as their interest.
- **Flood protection remains a concern** (and always will be), despite preventative measures. The help when people needed it the most shows that there is a resilience within the community.
- **Parking issues are arising** due to privatization of spaces and increased use of cars.
- **Municipal communication can be improved**, making public awareness and participation in urban projects less challenging.
- **Local organizations** could be valuable resources for further engagement.
- A positive development appeared during the last two decades: **Large-scale urban projects** are primarily managed through government-private sector collaboration with increasing direct resident inputs (though only those whose interests it touches).
- co-design workshops together with digital tools for urban planning seem to be the **effective methods** used for **involving the community** in urban planning to enhance resilience,

Conclusion

- **Maintenance remains a challenge**—the park's steep terrain requires frequent upkeep, but funding for continued maintenance is scarce.
- The conversation highlighted a common problem in Czech public projects: **funding is easier to secure for initial construction than for long-term maintenance. Clearer maintenance strategies** should be built into public projects to prevent long-term degradation.
- **Early and structured public engagement** could have **improved participation** and **reduced resistance**.

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