

# A NEW STREET IN ŠANČIAI

## CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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# A NEW STREET IN ŠANČIAI

## Case Study at a Glance

Kaunas City Municipality has been planning a new street in Žemieji Šančiai, along the Nemunas riverbank, for several years. The project has sparked significant controversy, with divided opinions among the municipality, urban planners, and local residents.

The initial proposal, introduced in 2019, was part of a beach development project that included street construction. However, it faced strong opposition from the local community, which expressed concerns over its potential impact on the natural landscape. In 2024, the fourth revision of the project was presented, incorporating previous feedback. Despite adjustments, local residents remained opposed to any asphaltting or modifications to the riverbank's surface, prioritizing the preservation of natural and recreational spaces.

The municipality, however, maintains that the new street is not intended for heavy traffic but will primarily serve pedestrians and cyclists, enhancing urban mobility and accessibility.

Since 2019, residents have organized multiple protests, arguing that the project threatens natural ecosystems and reduces public recreational areas. Šančiai community, in collaboration with other partners, launched the "Genius Loci: Urbanization and Civic Community" project.

While the municipality project is currently in the coordination phase, the ongoing conflict between urban development and environmental preservation remains a key challenge in achieving a mutually acceptable solution.

*This report was prepared by the team of Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) within the UPRUN project. The team of KTU 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

The case study focuses on the long-standing conflict around the planned construction of a new street along the Nemunas riverbank in Žemieji Šančiai, Kaunas. The initiative emerged in response to municipal plans first presented in 2019, which were strongly opposed by local residents due to concerns about the loss of natural riverbank areas, recreational space, and the distinctive local identity of the neighborhood. In reaction to these pressures, the Šančiai community and its partners developed the project “Genius Loci: Urbanization and Civic Community”, which aimed to strengthen community-based spatial planning, civic engagement, and neighborhood resilience.

For the preparation of this case study, empirical material was collected from community and beneficiary perspectives. The case study includes an interview with a representative of the Association of Žemųjų Šančių bendruomenė, who acted as an initiator and provided insights into the motivations, participatory methods, challenges, and long-term effects of the initiative. The interview highlighted the role of community mapping, workshops, public meetings, lectures, tactical activities, and voting processes as key tools for involving residents in shaping an alternative vision for the neighborhood.

In addition, an interview was conducted with a beneficiary and researcher connected to the Šančiai community, Laura Jankauskaitė-Jurevičienė, who participated in the “Genius Loci” project through research, public engagement, spatial analysis, and scenario development. This interview provided important reflections on the project’s social impact, especially its contribution to stronger community ties, increased awareness of urban development issues, and greater willingness among residents to participate in planning processes. However, it also revealed the limitations of the initiative, particularly the lack of tangible physical improvements and the limited integration of community proposals into formal municipal planning.

The project team also attempted to involve the governmental perspective by contacting representatives of Kaunas City Municipality. However, no municipal officials agreed to participate in an interview. Therefore, the governmental perspective was reconstructed through publicly available information, including media articles and project-related sources. These materials were used to describe the municipality’s position, the development timeline, the public controversy surrounding the project, and the current coordination status.

Overall, the empirical basis of the case study combines interview material, public sources, and project documentation. This material allows the case to be analyzed as an example of community-led urban resilience, where civic engagement strengthened social cohesion and local awareness, but where the influence on formal planning decisions remained limited. The structure follows the attached example by explaining the case background, the types of actors interviewed, the absence of a governmental interview, and the use of supplementary empirical material.

## Compendious summary

### Part 1. INITIATOR

#### 1. Introduction

The project initiator played a leadership role in conceptualizing and driving the initiative. As one of the primary idea generators, they were instrumental in shaping the vision and guiding the project's direction from inception.

The motivation for launching this neighborhood resilience project stemmed from concerns over *aggressive urbanism* in a historically rich neighborhood. The area had a strong identity and character, but rapid and unchecked urban transformation altered its appearance and disrupted the established way of life. A critical issue was that urban planning decisions were being made without input from local residents, leading to misalignment with their needs. This created a sense of urgency to intervene and advocate for a more community-driven approach to urban development.

The resilience challenges were identified through direct observations of the neighborhood's transformation. The primary concerns included:

- **Environmental issues.** The impact of urban development on green spaces and natural elements.
- **Social disruptions.** The loss of cultural identity and the fragmentation of community ties due to planning decisions that did not consider local lifestyles.
- **Health and safety risks.** Changes in urban form potentially compromised a safe and healthy living environment.

The overarching challenge was ensuring that urban development respected and reinforced the neighborhood's existing social and environmental strengths rather than undermining them. The project emerged as a response to these threats, aiming to create a vision that balanced sustainable growth with community needs.

#### 2. Project Design and Approach

The project was structured around *active community participation*, ensuring that residents played a meaningful role in shaping the neighborhood's spatial planning. Rather than imposing a predetermined vision, the initiative prioritized *bottom-up engagement*, allowing residents to express their concerns, ideas, and aspirations. Information was gathered through various participatory methods, and the final project outcomes were developed and selected through community voting.

A range of participatory tools and activities were implemented to maximize community involvement:

- **Tactical activities.** Residents collaborated to collect information about the neighborhood's historical, natural, and social spaces.
- **Mapping exercises.** Conducted in partnership with various organizations, mapping allowed large numbers of residents to engage in identifying key locations and challenges.
- **Workshops & public meetings.** Specialists led these in-person gatherings to facilitate discussions and co-creation.
- **Lectures & training sessions.** Educational events provided residents with knowledge about urban planning and resilience.

- **Online engagement.** Virtual tools were used to reach a broader audience, though maintaining long-term engagement in online platforms was challenging.

The most successful approaches were *interactive and place-based*, ensuring residents could directly contribute to decision-making:

- **Community mapping.** A highly effective tool for visualizing local concerns and prioritizing interventions.
- **Voting on final outcomes.** Giving residents the power to choose among three developed solutions strengthened ownership and support.
- **Direct outreach.** Traditional methods, such as physical invitations to meetings, proved crucial in engaging residents beyond digital platforms.

Residents identified specific locations that needed transformation, with particular attention to:

- **Public spaces.** Underutilized areas were highlighted as opportunities for community-focused redevelopment.
- **Streets & infrastructure.** Concerns about urban interventions affecting daily mobility and safety were central to discussions.
- **Cultural & social spaces.** Efforts were made to preserve the neighborhood's identity and common traditions within the new urban framework.

The participatory design approach gathered valuable insights and empowered residents, reinforcing the principle that urban spaces should be co-created with those who live in them.

### 3. Participation and Actions

The project was supported by a diverse group of partners, including:

- **Baltic Environmental Forum.** Providing expertise in sustainability and environmental issues.
- **Academic institutions.** Including KTU Vaižgantas Progymnasium, Šančiai VDU School, and KTU Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, which contributed research and educational engagement.
- **Social and community organizations.** Korys Disability Center and Valakupiai Center, ensured inclusivity.
- **International and municipal support.** The Norwegian Community Association and the Municipality of Bodø played a role in broader urban planning perspectives.

This multi-stakeholder approach ensured that various expertise, perspectives, and resources were integrated into the project.

The project stemmed from *strong local opposition* to the Nemunas Street Embankment project, which initially helped gather community interest. However, sustaining long-term engagement over *three years* proved challenging. The most significant difficulty was ensuring consistent participation, particularly when using digital tools, as not all residents were comfortable with virtual platforms.

Despite these challenges, engagement was generally sufficient, with key moments of participation influencing decision-making.

Forms of residents participation:

- **Workshops and public meetings.** Facilitated discussions and co-creation of neighborhood interventions.
- **Mapping and data collection.** Residents helped identify problem areas and potential improvements.
- **Voting on final outcomes.** The community had a direct say in selecting the final project proposals.

These activities ensured a hands-on role for residents, making them co-creators rather than passive stakeholders.

One key event that triggered early engagement was the **opposition to Nemunas Street Embankment project**, which sparked widespread concern. This collective resistance became a foundational moment demonstrating community action's power.

In addition, **tactical activities and pop-up events** served as entry points for participation, allowing residents to visualize potential changes and see immediate impacts. Temporary initiatives, such as interactive street interventions and community workshops, attracted early attention and fostered a sense of shared responsibility.

#### 4. Challenges and Support

The project faced several significant challenges:

- **Conflict with Urban planning authorities.** The primary obstacle was the project's core objective: creating a vision for neighborhood resilience that aligned with community needs. However, integrating these ideas into the *Kaunas City Master Plan* required municipal approval, which ultimately did not happen.
- **Sustaining community engagement.** While initial participation was strong, maintaining long-term involvement over three years was difficult, particularly in digital platforms.
- **Technical and logistical limitations.** Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders required appropriate tools and methods, especially for participatory mapping and community outreach.
- **Funding constraints.** While the project secured financial backing, aligning resources with long-term goals remained a challenge.

The project required collaboration with various governmental and institutional bodies, including the **Kaunas City Municipality**. However, receptiveness was limited—despite efforts to integrate the project's vision into official planning documents, it was ultimately not incorporated into the city's master plan.

To enhance legitimacy and impact, the project partnered with:

- **European and Norwegian funding programs.** These financial resources were crucial in sustaining operations and forming cross-border partnerships.
- **Academic institutions.** Universities played a key role in methodological development and public engagement.
- **Local schools and community centers.** These institutions helped expand outreach and diversify participation.

Key resources that facilitated project implementation included:

- **Financial support.** European and Norwegian funds provided essential funding, allowing the project to operate at a larger scale.
- **Community-based knowledge.** The use of participatory mapping and local expertise helped create a more accurate and relevant vision.
- **Institutional partnerships** – Collaborations with NGOs, research institutions, and international partners strengthened credibility and provided technical expertise.

While direct government support was limited, regulatory structures and financial backing from international programs shaped the project's development. The lack of integration into the *Kaunas City Master Plan* highlighted the difficulty of aligning grassroots initiatives with formal urban planning policies. However, the project still demonstrated the effectiveness of **community-led spatial planning**, reinforcing the need for stronger institutional frameworks that include citizen participation in decision-making processes.

## 5. Results and Reflections

The project's most significant impact was its role in *strengthening social networks and community resilience*. By engaging residents in the planning process, the initiative ensured that neighborhood transformation was driven by local values rather than external urban pressures. The project:

- **Preserved the neighborhood's identity and values.** Prevented unchecked urban development from eroding the community's cultural and historical character.
- **Encouraged collective participation.** Residents became more proactive in shaping their environment, reinforcing a culture of civic responsibility.
- **Promoted sustainable urban development.** The project demonstrated that urban transformation could be community-led, fostering resilience through participatory planning.

The project was successful in meeting both *spatial and social* objectives. Although the vision was not incorporated into the *Kaunas City Master Plan*, the project still influenced local urban discussions, demonstrating an alternative approach to neighborhood resilience. The initiative had a lasting effect on community engagement, strengthening bonds between residents and encouraging a collective sense of ownership over public spaces.

The project's success was further validated by winning the **Bauhaus Award**, confirming its effectiveness as an innovative and scalable approach to urban planning.

The project significantly altered how residents engaged with their neighborhood. Key outcomes included:

- **Increased collective action.** Residents became more involved in discussions about urban planning, reinforcing a participatory culture.
- **Strengthened social networks.** Community-led initiatives fostered stronger relationships, ensuring that local voices remained influential in future developments.
- **Greater awareness of civic rights.** The project empowered residents to actively participate in shaping their environment rather than passively accepting top-down decisions.

Looking back, the project initiator indicated that no major changes would be made to its approach. However, key takeaways include:

- **The need for stronger institutional buy-in.** Future projects could seek earlier and more strategic collaboration with municipal authorities to increase the chances of formal integration into planning documents.
- **Expanding the approach to other areas.** The project demonstrated that participatory urban planning can be successfully applied beyond a single neighborhood, suggesting citywide implementation needs.
- **Enhancing digital participation tools.** While digital platforms were used, ensuring broader accessibility and engagement could be improved in future projects.

## 6. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The project provided several valuable insights into successful neighborhood resilience initiatives:

- **Community engagement is essential but requires sustained effort.** Initial enthusiasm is common, but long-term participation requires ongoing motivation and structured engagement strategies.
- **Mapping as an effective tool.** The participatory mapping approach proved to be a powerful method for identifying key issues, visualizing solutions, and making the planning process more inclusive.
- **Collaboration with academia strengthens methodological accuracy.** Universities played a crucial role in ensuring that the project was methodical, structured, and replicable.
- **Institutional resistance can be a barrier.** Gaining formal recognition from municipal authorities remains a challenge. Early and continuous dialogue with policymakers is crucial for integration into official planning frameworks.
- **Every neighborhood is unique.** While core methodologies can be replicated, each community has distinct needs and dynamics that must be respected.

The project has set a foundation for ongoing community-led urban resilience, but future challenges remain:

- **Tensions between residents and Municipal Planning will persist.** The differences in vision between communities and urban authorities are unlikely to disappear and may even intensify.
- **There is a need for a counterbalance to large-scale development.** Without strong community advocacy, there is a risk that future urban transformations could override local interests.
- **Continued collective action is necessary.** The project has empowered residents, but sustaining this force will require further civic initiatives and engagement efforts.

The success of the initiative demonstrates its potential for replication in other areas:

- **Applicable to both rural and urban areas.** The methodology can be adapted for different community contexts, making it a versatile model for participatory planning.
- **Potential for citywide implementation.** Expanding the approach beyond a single neighborhood could lead to a more integrated and resilient urban fabric.
- **Global relevance.** The project's methods could be applied internationally, particularly in cities facing similar issues of aggressive urbanization and lack of community input in planning.

For those looking to initiate similar projects, the following recommendations emerge:

1. **Start with a core group of committed individuals.** A strong, motivated team is essential for driving the initiative forward.
2. **Build strategic partnerships.** Collaboration with academia, municipalities, and other stakeholders enhances credibility and impact.
3. **Respect the unique identity of each community.** Successful projects must align with local values and lifestyles rather than imposing external models.
4. **Be proactive in addressing injustices.** Community-led planning should challenge inequities and advocate for residents' rights to shape their environment.
5. **Promote civic responsibility.** Encourage active participation in urban decision-making, ensuring that community voices remain a critical part of the planning process.

This project has proven that cities and neighborhoods are most resilient when co-created by those *who live in them*. While challenges remain, the initiative has laid a strong foundation for future participatory urban planning, demonstrating that **community-driven spatial design is not just an alternative approach but an essential one**.

## Part 2. GOVERNMENTAL BODY

The project team attempted to contact multiple representatives of the **Kaunas City Municipality**; however, no officials agreed to participate in an interview. The following section provides a general overview of the topic, while the References section includes links to various relevant articles.

For several years, Kaunas City Municipality has been planning the construction of a new street in Žemieji Šančiai, along the Nemunas riverbank. These plans have elicited diverse reactions from the local community and the broader public.

### Presentation of project proposals

**April 30, 2019** – Kaunas City Municipality introduced a beach development project for the Nemunas riverbank in Žemieji Šančiai, which incorporated plans for a new street. This proposal provoked strong opposition from certain segments of the local population.

**August 28, 2024** – Kaunas Regional Architecture Council reviewed the fourth iteration of the reconstruction proposal for the Nemunas riverbank street and bicycle path. Although modifications had been made to address prior concerns, the local community opposed any asphaltting or alterations to the existing street surface, emphasizing the importance of preserving the natural riverbank landscape.

### Municipality's position

Despite sustained opposition from residents, Kaunas City Municipality continues to advance its plans for the street construction project. Municipal representatives contend that the new street is designed primarily for pedestrians and cyclists rather than motor vehicles to establish a more accessible and inclusive urban space.

## Community Responses

Since 2019, residents of Šančiai have organized multiple protests to articulate their objections to the proposed street development along the Nemunas riverbank. They argue that such infrastructure projects could lead to the degradation of the natural environment and a reduction in available recreational areas.

## Current Status

The project remains in the coordination phase, with the municipality engaging in an ongoing dialogue with the local community to explore mutually acceptable solutions.

## Part 3. BENEFICIARY

### 1. Introduction and Involvement

The interviewee became involved in the **Šančiai community** when the **municipality planned a new street**, triggering **protests, artistic actions, and legal measures** by the local residents. Initially, their engagement was limited to following discussions in a **Facebook group**, but they later joined the community as an active member.

The involvement deepened in 2019, when the Šančiai community, in collaboration with other partners, launched the "Genius Loci: Urbanization and Civic Community" project, which successfully secured funding. One of the key project partners was KTU Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, and the interviewee participated as a researcher. The role primarily focused on developing a vision for the neighborhood, applying various methodologies, engaging the public, and analyzing existing conditions and residents' needs.

The interviewee first learned about the project through **community-organized informational events on Facebook**. Their participation was voluntary, and they do not recall the exact time of their first engagement. Public meetings, flyers, or direct outreach were not explicitly mentioned as their initial point of contact; the online community served as the primary platform for information dissemination.

The rapid **urbanization of Šančiai**, particularly the surge of **high-density housing and parking areas**, was a major concern for the interviewee. She viewed the municipality's development approach as **disruptive to the natural and cultural character of the area**, leading them to actively seek ways to resist uncontrolled expansion and advocate for more **sustainable and community-driven planning**.

### 2. Participation

The interviewee actively participated in the **Šančiai community-led project, "Genius Loci: Urbanization and Civic Community."** The role was primarily as a **researcher**, where she contributed to developing a vision for the neighborhood, applying scientific methodologies, and engaging the public in the decision-making process. Instead of focusing on small-scale activities like clean-ups, their contributions were more strategic, emphasizing spatial planning, public engagement, and data analysis.

The participation involved:

- **Engaging the public** by organizing discussions and gathering residents' input.
- **Analyzing public spaces** and assessing how they met the needs of different community members.
- **Developing alternative scenarios** for neighborhood planning, focusing on sustainable development, local identity, and preservation of natural areas.

The project was a **collective effort**, involving diverse participants such as **children, youth, adults, and individuals with special needs**. Together, they worked on mapping the neighborhood and pinpointing **critical areas requiring attention**. The selection process was driven by:

- **Community needs.** Identifying spaces that were at risk of losing their cultural or ecological value.
- **Threats from urban expansion.** Prioritizing areas where **real estate development and infrastructure projects** posed risks to existing public spaces.
- **Social inclusion.** Ensure that planning initiatives consider the needs of all community members, not just select groups.

Despite their efforts, the **implementation of proposed solutions remained a challenge**. While the project successfully gathered **public opinion and generated alternative planning ideas**, the final decision-making power rested with **municipal authorities**, who showed **limited willingness** to integrate community-led recommendations into the official urban planning framework.

### 3. Understanding Resilience and Participation

The interviewee defines **resilience** in their neighborhood as **a form of sustainable urban development** that balances multiple needs while preserving the area's **natural and cultural identity**. For her, resilience is about **managing growth responsibly**, ensuring that urban expansion does not **erase the historical character or ecological balance** of Šančiai.

Before the project, the interviewee did not perceive Šančiai as facing immediate resilience threats, as there was little external pressure from developers or the municipality. However, over time, uncontrolled urban expansion became a critical issue, described as spreading like an oil spill—high-density apartment buildings and parking spaces encroaching on the low-rise residential area.

The primary concerns included:

- **Loss of local identity** due to rapid real estate development.
- **Increased population density** leading to traffic congestion.
- **Encroachment on natural areas**, particularly the **Nemunas riverside**, which threatened biodiversity and community access to green spaces.
- **Limited public participation in planning**, with the municipality conducting **top-down decision-making** rather than including residents.

The **Genius Loci** project successfully engaged the community and raised awareness about these resilience challenges. The initiative provided a **platform for public dialogue**, collected data on residents' needs, and generated alternative spatial planning solutions. However, the **main challenge** was translating these ideas into **actionable changes** within the municipality's planning framework.

The interviewee emphasized that the project helped mobilize residents but did not **result in tangible physical improvements**. The municipality continued its expansion projects, albeit with a slightly **greater emphasis on informing and consulting the public** in early planning stages.

The interviewee found participation **valuable and intellectually engaging**, especially through research activities and discussions. However, they noted that their contributions primarily remained in **scientific articles and community platforms**, with limited influence on **formal planning decisions**.

Reasons for limited impact:

- **Municipal reluctance to integrate community-led solutions** into official plans.
- **Top-down decision-making** persisting despite community protests.
- **Lack of institutional mechanisms** to ensure participatory planning is continuous rather than project-based.

The interviewee participated in **data collection, public engagement efforts, and scenario-building exercises** for future neighborhood planning. However, their experience in design sessions, surveys, and public meetings was mixed. While they valued the collaborative environment within the Genius Loci project, official municipal planning meetings were **ineffective**, as resident concerns were largely disregarded in decision-making.

#### 4. Perceived Benefits and Changes

Despite the successful implementation of the Genius Loci project, the interviewee did not observe any physical improvements in public spaces or infrastructure. The municipality and real estate developers continued their expansion projects, and the planned traffic-heavy street with extensive parking remained on course. However, there was a slight increase in efforts to inform and involve the public during early planning stages.

While the project did not lead to visible infrastructure changes, it had a **significant social impact**:

- The **Šančiai community became stronger** and more engaged.
- There was an **increase in public awareness** regarding urban development issues.
- More residents felt a **sense of social responsibility** and willingness to participate in planning discussions.
- The project **fostered connections between different groups**, including children, youth, adults, and people with special needs.

However, the lack of physical improvements meant that **daily life remained largely unchanged**—there were no newly developed or better-maintained public spaces as a direct result of the project.

The project contributed to **resilience in a social sense**, strengthening the community's ability to **organize, advocate, and resist top-down urban planning decisions**. However, in terms of **physical resilience** (e.g., protection of green spaces, improved infrastructure), **the neighborhood remains vulnerable** to ongoing urban expansion and real estate pressures.

Potential long-term resilience benefits include:

- A more informed and mobilized community which can better advocate for sustainable planning in future developments.
- A precedent for public participation in urban planning, even though municipal authorities remain resistant to bottom-up approaches.

However, without institutional support, these social resilience gains may not translate into lasting environmental or economic resilience for the neighborhood.

Since there were no newly renovated or improved public spaces, the interviewee did not report an increase in the use of urban areas. The Nemunas riverside and other natural spaces remained under threat from real estate development, limiting opportunities for enhanced public space engagement.

Although the project did not lead to physical changes, it significantly **impacted social cohesion**:

- **Stronger community ties** emerged as residents worked together to advocate for their neighborhood.
- The project provided a **platform for discussion** and collective action.
- Despite ongoing urban pressures, **more residents are now engaged in shaping the future of their community**.

## 5. Experience with the Process, Challenges and Concerns

The interviewee noted that participation was not always straightforward, as the community operates on a voluntary basis, relying heavily on individual initiative. There was no formal structure ensuring clear and systematic engagement, which sometimes made it challenging to navigate.

Key **factors affecting engagement**:

- The process required **a proactive leader and an organizational team** to ensure smooth operation.
- Information was mostly disseminated **through community networks** (e.g., Facebook), rather than formal invitations or structured outreach efforts.
- **No predefined roadmap** for how community input would be translated into actual urban planning decisions.

Despite these challenges, the interviewee successfully engaged in the project, particularly through research, public space analysis, and community discussions.

The **primary obstacles** faced by the interviewee included:

- **Time constraints.** Balancing participation with other commitments was difficult.
- **Lack of structured communication.** Since the project relied on community-driven efforts, not everyone was aware of the next steps or how to contribute effectively.
- **General apathy.** Many residents viewed urban planning as **something beyond their control or not directly relevant to their lives**, leading to lower engagement.

The Genius Loci project tackled several crucial neighborhood concerns, such as:

- **Preservation of local identity** in the face of rapid urbanization.

- **Protection of green spaces and natural areas**, particularly along the **Nemunas riverside**.
- **Community engagement in urban planning**, fostering local awareness and activism.

However, despite these efforts, the municipality's core urban development plans remained unchanged—they continued to prioritize high-density residential projects and traffic-heavy infrastructure. While the community successfully raised awareness and proposed alternatives, there was little institutional support to implement the proposed changes.

The interviewee acknowledged that while the project addressed **major urban resilience issues**, some **aspects could have been emphasized further**:

- **Stronger legal advocacy**. More structured legal action against environmentally harmful development could have been pursued.
- **Institutional engagement**. Efforts to integrate community findings into **official city planning** could have been more persistent.
- **Physical improvements**. While social engagement improved, no tangible upgrades to **public spaces, pedestrian areas, or green zones** were realized.

## 6. Long-Term Impact, Future Participation and Recommendations

The interviewee considers the **most significant impact** of the **Genius Loci** project to be the **strengthened community engagement and awareness** regarding urban resilience. The project demonstrated that **a self-organized community could mobilize, conduct research, and advocate for alternative urban planning solutions**.

However, the **long-term sustainability of these changes** remains uncertain due to **two key factors**:

1. **Lack of institutional support**. The municipality has shown limited willingness to integrate community-led initiatives into official planning frameworks.
2. **Absence of continued funding**. Without external financial support, replicating or expanding the project may be challenging.

Despite these limitations, the **project serves as a precedent** for future community-driven urban planning efforts and **could inspire similar initiatives** in other neighborhoods.

The interviewee anticipates that **urban development pressures will continue** to threaten the neighborhood's **natural and cultural identity**. Key resilience-related issues that need further attention include:

- **Protection of green spaces**, particularly **the Nemunas riverside**, from real estate expansion.
- **Traffic congestion management**, as increased development has led to rising vehicle use and reduced pedestrian-friendly areas.
- **Affordable housing concerns**, ensuring that new developments do not contribute to social exclusion.
- **Stronger participatory mechanisms** are needed so that residents can directly influence decision-making rather than just be consulted.

The interviewee is open to participating in **similar community-led initiatives** but emphasizes the need for:

- **More structured and inclusive participation mechanisms**, ensuring that diverse groups (e.g., elderly residents, working-class individuals, students) can engage effectively.
- **Greater institutional engagement** ensures citizen input is not merely documented but actively integrated into policy decisions.
- **Continuous rather than project-based engagement**, as resilience-building efforts should be long-term rather than temporary.

To enhance future **urban resilience projects**, the interviewee **suggests**:

1. **Stronger legal advocacy.** Incorporating legal strategies to challenge top-down urban planning decisions.
2. **Better integration with city planning institutions.** Ensuring that municipal authorities are held accountable for considering community-driven proposals.
3. **More inclusive participation.** Expanding outreach beyond social media to include workshops, direct community engagement, and multilingual resources.
4. **Follow-up mechanisms.** Establishing a framework to track whether proposed solutions are implemented over time.

To **increase resident engagement**, the interviewee recommends:

- **Institutional support.** City authorities should provide clear channels for resident input, rather than treating participation as a formality.
- **Education and awareness campaigns.** Workshops and informational sessions could help more residents understand the impact of urban planning decisions.
- **Decentralized decision-making.** Empowering local communities with **greater autonomy** over neighborhood-level planning.

For neighborhoods looking to improve their **resilience through spatial planning**, the interviewee **advises**:

1. **Build strong community networks.** A well-organized and motivated community can influence urban planning more effectively.
2. **Leverage partnerships.** Collaboration with **universities, NGOs, and legal experts** can provide credibility and resources.
3. **Push for policy change.** Beyond project-based engagement, communities should advocate for **structural reforms** that make participatory planning a standard practice.
4. **Stay persistent.** Urban development is a long-term process, and meaningful change requires **sustained activism and involvement**.

## Attachments

### References

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