



No Place Like Home

Rallying Residents to Improve Their Neighbourhood



Poor urban design and a lack of public space can alienate local residents and discourage a sense of community.

BACKGROUND

Bosnia and Herzegovina has little experience with public participation in decision making. Local authorities do not customarily consult citizens before taking decisions that will affect the public. An urban planning process in Banja Luka clearly stood to benefit from public involvement.

OBJECTIVES

The main goals of this project were to:

- improve the long-term living conditions in the overcrowded residential zones of the Borik 1 neighborhood;
- develop and gain approval for a preliminary design for open spaces in Borik 1;
- facilitate communication and cooperation between local authorities and interested residents; and
- increase the level of awareness and public participation in the decision-making process.



Leading NGO
Eko Grad Grupa
(Eco City Group)

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METHODOLOGY

The project team pursued its goals by:

- enabling contacts with local authorities in order to introduce them to current problems;
- organising an information campaign about the urgency of creating a land-use plan for Borik 1;
- conducting opinion polls of residents to find out how they want to solve these problems;
- publicising the results of the questionnaire through the media;
- developing a proposal for public benches and other street furniture;
- engaging the public in the process of selecting the street furniture;
- developing a preliminary design for the entire community;
- distributing all results to the local authorities and media;
- conducting a media campaign based on the achievements of the project;
- holding public discussion on the possible solutions;
- presenting the proposed preliminary design to municipal authorities for approval; and
- improving living conditions in the neighbourhood by introducing the new street furniture.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Starting in September 2003, Eco City Group representatives facilitated written and then personal communication between the public and city authorities concerning the project idea and implementation. The city urban planning department was interested in implementing the project, and they agreed to hold occasional meetings on project activities.

An information campaign on the existing problem and planned project began in September 2003, and included distribution of posters and leaflets and a media campaign. Smaller leaflets about the problem were distributed in apartment blocks (in post boxes) and A4 posters were put up in the entryways of the buildings. A media campaign included a number of TV reports and newspaper articles.

Residents of Borik 1 voiced their opinions on solving the problems of pollution and deterioration of the community. The poll and its results were presented to the urban planning department.

The input from the polls of local residents was considered and incorporated into the future design.

The proposed urban plan was discussed by city authorities and professional designers, and revised in accordance with their recommendations.

All the activities carried out during the implementation period were announced in the media as frequently as possible. The final results were also announced. City Hall authorities promised to publish all the results of the projects on the official Banja Luka website.

Citizen participation proved indispensable to decision makers, as clearly stated in the Aarhus Convention.

As a final activity, project results were to be presented to interested members of the community and city administrators for their approval.

FOLLOW-UP

This is the first pilot project of this type in the country, and through region-wide publicity it could be made into a positive example. Other groups and bodies will be encouraged to take a similar approach in their activities.

The Eco City Group will continue working on this project and produce results that benefit citizens, and show them how they made a difference through their participation in public decision making.

