

# Abstract

The paper is focused on the issue of citizens' involvement in the events affecting their neighborhood. So called "Civil Project" is characterized as a proposal for a change in their neighborhood; the changes (such as reconstruction of benches, planting flowers, painting fences etc.) are proposed directly by the citizens. The estimated costs of these projects are within the range of thousands of Czech Crowns. If the proposal is accepted and approved by the city management, it is the citizens who will voluntarily (without any compensation) implement the project while the costs concerning the project will be refunded by the city. The current situation indicates a low participation of residents in the process of improvement their environment and innovation of their places to live. The low participation is the result of absence of functioning simple system through which citizens would offer their ideas and simultaneously would not burden the city management. On top of that, benefits of establishing such a project can undoubtedly reduce city's expenses.

Our civil project concerns the city districts of Brno, because the entire statutory city is too big and impersonal entity to cooperate directly with individual citizens. Moreover, the city district represents a place where its residents spend most of their free time and family life. For this reason, it is important for them to feel comfortable and pleasantly there. This goal can be achieved by increasing participation of citizens in the current events and by their willingness to change their environment.

The paper is divided into two parts: the analytical part describes the process of citizens' participation in changing of their environment. The second part contains our own specific proposals of improvements of Brno city districts' environment with involvement of its citizens. During the creation of the paper, we drew inspiration from the functioning and inspirational projects both in the Czech Republic and the foreign countries and we also focused on the citizens' opinions, because their role is the most important part of the whole civil project. We also tried to find an alternative way to refund citizens' expenses and to make the project sustainable; thus we would like to involve various sponsors to cover these expenses instead of the city district.

## The analytical part

The first part is called "Vaše Brno 2014" ("Your Brno 2014") because we want to express and emphasize the important role of citizens in the possible changes of their hometown Brno. We propose a simple colorful-boxes system as a way to implement such a

civil project. The boxes will be located in the public places, e.g. in the administrative buildings of the city district and they will be divided by their purpose:

- green box for city greenery
- blue box for traffic
- red box for public places
- yellow box for animals
- white box for other proposals.

Citizens who want to make a change in their city district will fill in a form available both online and in public. The form must be filled according to certain requirements without which the form will not be accepted (such as name, contact, specific proposal and required amount of money), and then the citizens put the form in the right colorful box. These requirements are designed to prevent abusing of the boxes and the whole system is designed not to burden the city management too much. One of these simple forms was created by our team to give an example.

The city management will classify the forms and choose the best proposals. This step will guarantee that useless proposals will not be taken into account. But we also want to keep the idea that citizens' participation is the most important factor. Therefore, citizens should choose the final project through the process of simple voting. All the proposals chosen by the city management will be published on city district's website for a period of three days and every voting citizen will be able to give 10 points to his/her favorite proposals. These points could be divided only between 3 of the proposals, and people will be able to vote just one time from one unique IP address. The city district should find out the way to vote for citizens without an access to the Internet such as to offer them using computers in public libraries.

The elected project will be voluntarily implemented by its author. If the agreed requirements (such as to finish the project on time) are met, the expenses will be refunded to the citizens after finishing their projects. If the citizens do not finish their projects in defined time, they will be challenged to finish the project; otherwise the claim to any financial compensation will not be accepted. The successful implemented projects will be published on the city district's website as an inspiration for other citizens.

We also define a time schedule; the whole process (prior the realization of the specific proposal) will last one month. One month may be seen as a short period, but we think this is the longest possible period that can sustain citizens' attention, willingness and activity. It is

undoubtedly necessary to inform the citizens about such a civil project and about their possible participation that is why we have chosen some kinds of advertising (e.g. community message board, website, and newsletter of city districts or posters located in public) as a way to make the civil project more popular. This type of advertising requires a certain amount of money, and for this reason, we propose to apply for a grant of European Union.

The goal of civil project is not to reward the citizens for their work financially. On the other hand, we would like to appreciate citizens' efforts, so we propose to reward them at least symbolically by installation a board with a name of the author on the implemented projects.

## The proposal part

The second part of the paper comprises our own specific proposals to involve citizens of Brno's city districts in improvements of their environment. There are three specific proposals: citizens' involvement in creating children's playgrounds, painting of pedestrian underpasses and reconstruction of dogs' playground. The projects are proposed for specific areas in Brno, because our main aim is to make all of these projects as realizable as possible and hereby to contribute to the welfare of society.

The aim of the first proposal, named "Kdo si hraje, nezlobí" ("Who plays does not bother") is to involve the citizens of city district Židenice in creation of children's playground. This project aims on pupils of elementary schools and their parents. To make the playground look accordingly to children's needs and hopes, it will be the children and parents who will propose (in the form of drawings) how the ideal playground should look like. Final design of the playground will be done by specialists but children's proposals will be taken into an account as much as possible. The final proposal will be realized by the children, their parents and other volunteers. We realize that every playground has to fulfill many security conditions and for this reason, most of the projects must be realized by specialists. The children might be involved in other work that does not require specialization (such as painting of benches, making bird houses etc.). The supervising person will be present during children's work to organize and help them with the work. There are many advantages of creating the playground this way, e.g. children (but not only them) will learn to take care of their environment, the city district will save the costs, it also makes better social life in community, and the most importantly, children and their parents will gain the feeling that it is "their" playground and there are real expectations, that they will be less tempted to vandalize it.

The second proposal named “Natřeme to podchodům” (“To Wallop the Walls”) aims to involve people in painting of pedestrian underpass in city district Komárov. This project also targets on pupils of elementary school, but in comparison with creating playground, there will be no need to involve so many adults in the project. Children will paint the underpass only with the help of their school teachers. This project will involve a contest of designs between classes and between schools prior to physical realization. The classes will propose how the newly painted underpass should look like. The class with best proposal will win the chance to paint the underpass. Advantages of this project are the low financial costs for city, due to the possibility of gaining the material from parents, schools etc. (e.g. paints, brushes, ladders etc.) and other advantage is that children will learn to take care of environment and lesser possibility to vandalize it.

Our last proposal, named “Spokojený pes = spokojený pán” (“Happy dog = happy owner”) has much in common with the proposal of creating children’s playground. In this case we aim at dog owners to make their own public dogs’ playground. The project is located in the city district Nový Lískovec. The existing playground is very old and its visitors are not satisfied with it (we gained this information by talking to them) and have their own ideas, how the ideal dogs’ playground for their pets should look like. The city management and the specialists will choose from their proposals and the citizens will build the playground by themselves (of course with the help of the city and the specialists). Creating the dogs’ playground this way is mutually beneficial for dog owners and also for the city of Brno. City will save the costs for work and dogs’ owners will get the chance to decide, how the playground for their dogs will look like.

## Conclusion

At last, we would like to say that even the best organization and planning are not enough to guarantee success of the projects. For this reason, field testing and elimination deficiencies are very important processes. The citizens’ participation and cooperation with the city management is necessary, but we need their willingness and enthusiasm. We find the possibility to live in better conditions and environment as their main motivation and, on top of that, if citizens will participate in the projects, they will consider these projects as “theirs” and we suppose it will help to decrease vandalism. Moreover, it is a big opportunity to make relationship between citizens and city management better.