

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

SUBURBIA, CREATIVE AREAS, PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

DDR STATEMENT

CREATIVE SUBURBIA

I see suburbia as an endless growing carpet of mono - programmatic structures, spreading on the “fuel” of economic growth, precarious work and dream of a better life closer to the nature. It is more a way of life than composition of physical structures. Sometimes I describe it as a hibernation state of individual units – houses or dwellings - unaware of each other, connected by invisible network of infrastructure and internet. There are very few random contacts between people in those places and very little of any kind of program diversity.

Today, as we are going towards extremely planned and (over)controlled urbanism, we seem to forget even more, that most interesting parts of the cities are the ones between controlled and chaotic. Or how architect Kengo Kuma describes it, places where city can ferment. Creative areas seems to have exactly that effect. This are places, where ideas and people can grow in an informal way, yet, they still have to follow some plan or framework in order to be successful. Balance between control and freedom is what interests me the most.

My research is about implementation of an informal growth of creativity into very strict and formal networks of suburbia. How to start dialogue, start fermentation of ideas and to be involved as a spatial designer in a creative process, that is the driving force of my research.

Barutana gunpowder factory project presented in this article, is just the place, where I experiment with this urban fermentation.

ABSTRACT

Main purpose of this article is to explain the process suburbanisation in the case of Kamnik and present the research and methods of design behind emerging creative area in the city – Creative neighbourhood Barutana. During the year of 2020, prototype of how creative area could look like was initiated by the local team of students, architects and artists. During the early starts of modelling of prototype, design team was constantly calibrating the prototype, according to the needs, local specifics and user requirements.

Process of suburbanisation in the last few decades in city of Kamnik has been slow, but very steady. It is mostly recognized in decreasing diversification of public programs in the central area of the town and large dispersion of newly build buildings. Our research showed that only one apartment block and more than 50 single-family houses were built in our research area in last 5 years.

Through the research by design approach we have concluded, that the emergence of creative area Barutana has caused positive effects on the unsustainable formation of suburbia in Kamnik and on the local economy. We have also concluded that constant adaptation of process and design is crucial to understand and reply to constantly changing need of local stakeholders. Presentation will further describe those effects and elaborate possible scenarios how to upgrade them in the future.

Introduction

Suburbia, with its many sustainability issues, is possibly the next biggest frontier of extensive pro-sustainability measures and developments in Slovenia. The same applies to focused area presented in this presentation, which is suburban municipality town of Kamnik. City is deeply inter-connected with some of the neighbouring towns of Domžale, Mengeš and Trzin and together, they form a typical suburban area, that we could describe as emerging suburbia north of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Process of suburbanisation in the last few decades (incl. wider area with previously mentioned neighbouring towns) has been slow, but very steady. It is mostly recognized in decreasing diversification of public programs in the central area of the town and large dispersion of newly build buildings. Our research showed that only one apartment block and more than 50 single-family houses were built in our research area in last 5 years.

Main purpose of this presentation is to explain the process suburbanisation in the case of Kamnik and present the research and methods of design behind emerging creative area in the city – Creative neighbourhood Barutana. Duign the year of 2020, prototype of how creative area could look like was initiated by the local team of students, architects and artists. During the early starts of modelling of prototype, design team was constantly calibrating the prototype, according to the needs, local specifics and user requirements.

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Methods and design driven research

Suburbia is a complex constantly redeveloping phenomenon, with several negative effects on the environment. To solve them, there is no one single possible final solution. Therefore, to investigate and answer to constantly changing situation, my PhD research is mostly using design driven research method. Trial and error phases within research itself offer better - real time understanding of complex site conditions and therefore enables constant adaptation of process. Presented Borutana prototype was "bottom – up" tactical urbanism project, which used design as research method and to build unfinished spatial situation.

There is no single, accepted formulation of these problems. Also, the answers are often defined in "more-or-less" terms in which planners and managers at best can find reasonable, but shifting balances among competing interests and values. The correct formulation of the problem cannot be known until a solution is accepted. (1).

Design driven research proved to be successful in this socio – spatial prototype. Changes and adaptations were introduced daily. Through different communication methods, we were constantly involving local stakeholders in order to influence never-final design.

Additional method used for better understanding of creative area Borutana behaviour is comparison method. Through questionnaires on site and statistical data, we were able to better understand the context and behaviour of users.



● **Program
organized by:
cultural society
Priden Možic**

Research

My first research was about Suburbia. It has showed that 68% of people in Slovenia lives in one family houses, 6% in row houses, 22% in apartment blocks only 4% on a farm. This is very strong indicator of how widespread the suburbia in Slovenia is. Another set of data shows, that 24% of inhabitants are aware of living in suburbia and 41% say that they live in rural area. Since rural and suburban is very difficult to distinct – many inhabitants in “so-called” rural areas are living a suburban life – I am assuming and will later also argue, that suburbia is much more present as it indicates. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation will be to establish a framework and definition of suburbia in Kamnik.

Another set of my research showed that less than 37% of inhabitants in Kamnik are working close to their home (sistat 2020) and have 1.6 car per household. This can lead us to the preliminary conclusion, that most of the inhabitants drive to their work by car and therefore they live typical non-sustainable suburban life. They use city space as “peer-to-peer”, which means, they are no longer focused to a single urban centre, but to several of them. All this research was made by analysing official available statistical data and through on-site observations and surveys.

On the other side, when I started with the design driven research about creative areas, there was very little data available, except experiences from previous professional practice projects. In this case (Barutana) I was put in a unique position as an initiator, co-designer, mentor and researcher. The various roles followed each other chronologically as: 1.) initiation – Introducing the idea of prototype creative area to a local creative community; 2.) mentoring and co-designing – process of design with local students in a trial-and-error manner; 3.) research - observation of users - visitors and performers.

Through that research by design process, I can distinguish four different types of actors – stakeholders, which are crucial for this type of area to be successful. Decisionmakers (politicians and municipality employees), creatives and artist (stakeholders with expectations to do creative work – non-monetary motivation), entrepreneurs (stakeholders with financial motivation) and general public. Each of them has their own motivation to participate, but all together they form an ecosystem that can start new ideas. Individually they could never achieve same result.

After interviewing visitors, where we can already see positive trend. Data we gathered in creative area of Barutana showed, that 73% of the visitors are still locals or from local municipality. This information is particularly important for our understanding that suburban renewal through creative areas must and will primarily rely on the local population.

Further research on these topics will include interviews with property owners, NGOs and local businesses in the area. That is how microeconomic environment will be better understood, and this knowledge will be used to design better methods for development of those types of creative centres.



Comics
exhibition by:
**Ivan
Mitrevski**

Entrance
designed by:
**Štajn
architects**

Implications

As described before, one of the possible measures, how to revive suburbia is through establishing and supporting creative areas – areas with stronger concentration of creative industries and diversification of different public programs (and people). The aim of this initial phase of research and this presentation is to elaborate possibilities, how to design and support those areas and why some of them are succeeding, others not. Presentation will describe it on the case of emerging area in Kamnik, Slovenia.

Discussion will focus on “bottom-up” elements that were used in the case of Barutana and compare it with similar practices from local and regional level. Within the presentation, we will offer better understanding of where in suburbia creative clusters are appearing and why. Another positive outcome of the research will be the insight, how creative areas can affect local circular (also creative) economy and local sustainable development.

In the conclusion I will discuss possibilities of a development model, that enables us to shift from existing suburbia into more sustainable one, with the help of creative areas. Model will be based on the idea, where we can constantly adapt the input and therefore outcome of the design process – we create the adapting model, based on real time data analyses. This theoretical model will be later in this year (2021) used on the same location, for a second prototype test. Guidelines and action plan will be proposed, to better understand and research this second prototype.

● **Building bought by municipality after successful prototype project**

● **Art installation by: Nina Koželj**

● **Exposed artefacts by: local visitors**

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