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Introducing Participatory Planning in Rural Albania: A Case Study in Stajka, Shkoder

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ABSTRACT

In post-communist Albania, municipalities are trying to encourage public involvement in land use planning but have limited experience in this field. Our project designed and implemented a participatory planning process to encourage residents of Stajka, a village in northern Albania, to develop ideas to revitalize a park in the center of the village. By building relationships with community members, and putting on events to animate the park, we helped catalyze community interest in redesigning the park.



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All members of this project contributed equally to writing, editing, and formatting for this report. Chapters were split up by section for individuals to write and then edited collaboratively. Interviews were conducted by the entire team or in pairs. When conducting interviews, members contributed to both asking questions and taking notes. Keith and Tim were primarily responsible for taking photos and videos of interviews and activities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Public spaces, such as parks, can improve the health and mental status for nearby residents and can foster a sense of connection within a community (Boone-Heinonen, 2010; Weber, 2010). Participatory planning is a valuable tool for creating effective public space. This type of planning generates open communication between stakeholders, planning organizations, and the government (Özer-Kemppainen, 2010). With stakeholders voicing their opinions and concerns, a public space can be designed that fits the needs of all community members. Different methods used during participatory planning include surveys, interviews, oral stories, discussions, brainstorming, interactive planning, and role playing activities (Bowns, 2011; Collie, 2011; Shaftoe; Stewart, 2015). There are certain challenges involved with participatory planning. These include ambiguity when defining stakeholders and allowing all stakeholder opinions of to be heard.

In Albania, participatory planning is a new and undeveloped method. Since the communist regime fell in 1990, some observers claim that many Albanian citizens feel that revitalizing public space has been neglected or ignored (Pojani, 2015) and that parks and other public spaces are often neglected and poorly managed (PPV Municipality of Vau-Dejës, 2017). Some researchers attribute this phenomenon to the legacy of the communist era when public spaces were seen as the embodiment of the state and thus of little value (Pojani, 2015). Participatory planning is a largely underutilized concept

(Chatterjee, 2017). Our project was conducted in Stajka, a rural community in northern Albania, located about ten miles from Shkodra in the municipality of Vau i Dejës, Albania. Stajka is primarily an agricultural community, with a few small businesses and cafes. The village's 2,750 residents are mostly Catholic. The Vau i Dejës municipality has partnered with regional NGOs to work on the development plans to improve the infrastructure, enhance water sanitation, and redevelop centers in villages.

GO2 Albania, our sponsor, is an NGO that focuses on rural tourism and sustainability and is

interested in Stajka in part as an opportunity to explore new forms of public participation in planning around a small, infrequently used park. The park is in the center of the village, and borders a the church, the local school, a health center, and small flour mill, with the village's main road located at the eastern end of the park. The park has a concrete walkway, with grassy patches and dead



trees on both sides, six benches that are in poor condition, and a concrete wall separating the health center and houses from the park. Aside from the physical aspects of the park, it is frequently used by young men who smoke and litter in the park. GO2 would like to use Games for Cities, a program run by Play the City involving participatory planning activities, which use gaming as a way to engage stakeholders in the decision making process. In order to cover their costs, including the fee charged by Play the City, GO2 received a grant from the United States embassy.



Our Approach

The goal of our project was to design and implement a participatory planning process to encourage residents of Stajka, to develop ideas to revitalize a park in the center of the village. To achieve our goal, we identified the following objectives: assess community assets and attitudes in relation to the park, introduce participatory planning in Stajka, and create interactive events in the park to animate the space. Along with our sponsor, GO2 Albania, we conducted forty-one interviews with community members and stakeholders of Stajka. As our fieldwork progressed, we adapted our interview questions to attain more relevant information. Based on our interviews, we designed three different participatory planning events in order to animate the space. We held two days of activities in the park and two focus groups with adults. Our first day consisted of a variety of arts and crafts with the children in the park. The children painted a mural, created dioramas, and colored pictures, demonstrating alternative uses for the park and bringing color to the space. The second day was centered around various children's games in the park, which were intended to further inspire a new concept of how the space can be used. For the adults, we held two focus groups. This activity was intended to inspire the people to think about the park in new ways and to empower them to share their ideas. Through our fieldwork, we were able to foster strong relationships with people from the community and elicit ideas about community preferences toward the reuse and design of the park.

Findings

From our fieldwork in Stajka it was clear to us that participatory planning remains a new and untested process. Fostering citizen engagement in public space planning is likely to be challenging for a number of reasons.

Older villagers have vivid memories of communist Stajka. They recounted the evolution of the park, informing us of past uses. They reflected on resentment and distrust related to the harsh political climate, but also cohesion brought on by community sporting events. The negative associations remaining from communism present a challenge to cooperation among and between community and government; the strong relationship that the community has with the church was revealed during numerous interviews. This influence has the potential to be an asset during the planning process, but the priest expressed skepticism about revitalizing the park and the young men who currently use it. His plan to build a playground on the church property, designed to be more attractive to women and children, has reduced his interest in the park. Without his cooperation, it may be difficult to leverage the church in the planning process.

There is a complex relationship between men and women in Stajka. Public places, such as the park, are mainly frequented by men. By contrast, many women revealed their discomfort of coming to the park due to their fear of being watched by men and becoming the subject of gossip. These tensions between men and women pose a challenge to developing an inclusive planning process.

Private and public space are treated differently in Stajka after communism. From our observations, it was evident that people do not treat the park with the same respect as their homes and gardens. The park was filled with litter and was poorly maintained, while private homes were well-designed and well-maintained with flowers and vegetation. This passion that people have for improving their homes may be translated into passion for developing the park during the redesigning process, if people viewed the park as a valuable community asset.

We achieved our goal of enlivening and promoting the reuse of the space with our activities in the park for the children. The park proved to have the potential to be an active area for kids to play. It also allowed the older community members to appreciate seeing the kids enjoy themselves. The various activities in the park created an atmosphere of play and excitement, allowing the kids to see the park in a new way. These events helped catalyze ideas about the potential for the park and started the discussion about design possibilities for the space.

Through our two focus groups, we created a platform to start the conversation amongst the villagers about the redesigning of the park. By holding separate activities for men and women, we enabled both groups to speak freely about their desires and concerns, demonstrating how they are already involved in the process. The two groups were effectively engaged in a participatory setting, through a fun, interactive game. We were able to introduce the idea of working collaboratively for redesigning the park.





Recommendations

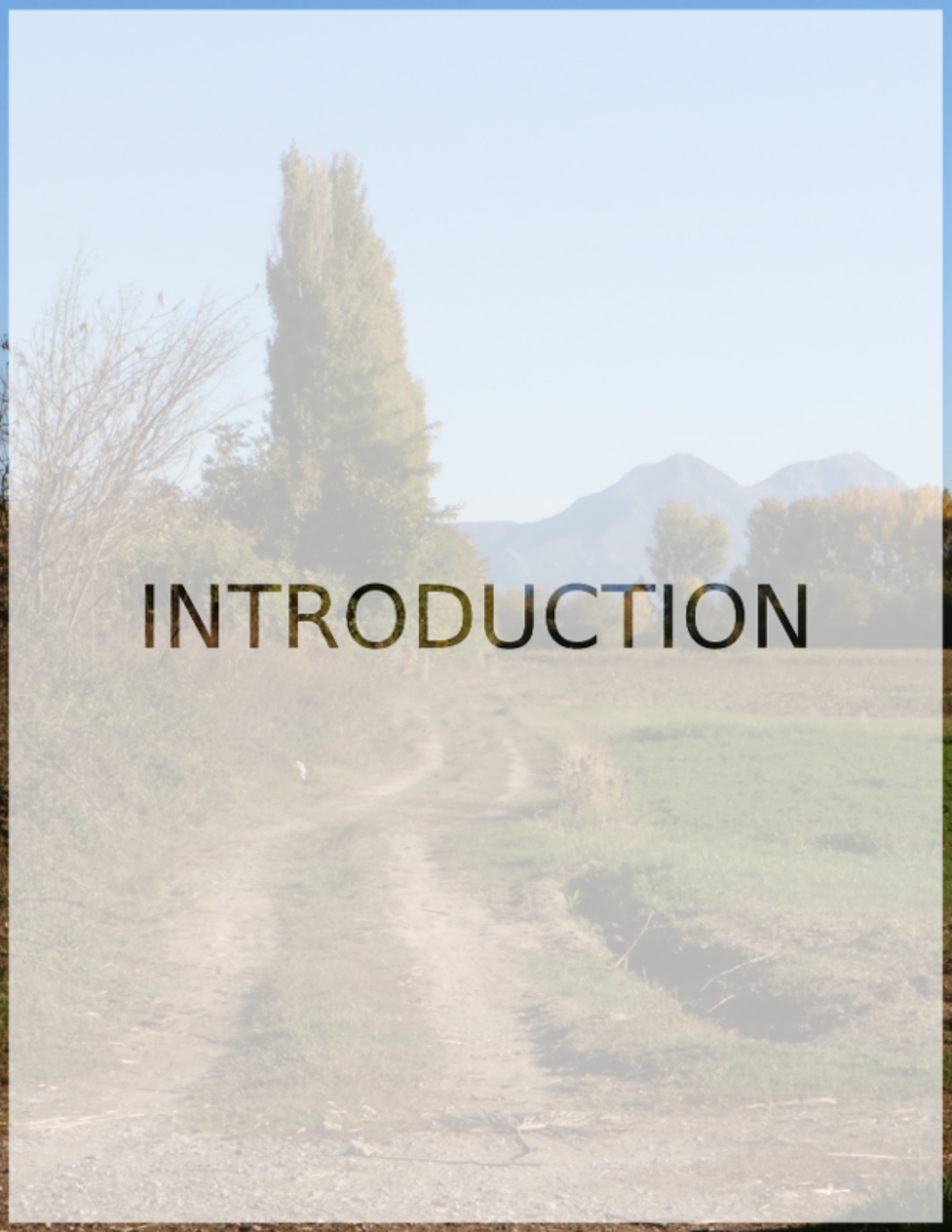
In order to create transparency and strong involvement between GO2 and the Stajka villagers in the redevelopment of the park, we recommend forming a planning committee with an equal number of male and female representatives from a variety of age groups, excluding children. The committee will aid GO2 in distributing information about the project to the community throughout the entire process. They can help advertise dates and opportunities for possible community discussions, workshops, and interactive designing activities that generate conversation within the village. They will be able to reach out to the community to find people to participate in these events as well. The committee's close relationships with Stajka will be invaluable in attracting women to participate. GO2 and the committee will be able to collaborate in designing these activities, so that the committee may recommend locations for events, dates for the events, and any other recommendations that would make them more effective in the context of Stajka. The committee will also help GO2 form close relationships with valuable stakeholders in Stajka.

In Games for Cities, we recommend the following for the structure of the event. There should be an equal number of men and women of a variety of ages, including children. This can be ensured by utilizing the outreach of the planning committee. It is important that the events include representatives from every demographic to insure that there are a variety of ideas and every opinion is recognized. We also suggest having two smaller Game for City events before the larger one. This would allow men and women to familiarize themselves with the activity and formulate their opinions. Then, the focus groups can be combined to inform the other of their perspectives. A facilitator in Game of City will also allow equal opportunity to share one's perspectives during the bigger group and create an open floor for effective discussion.

Our final recommendation would be to hold more interactive activities, aside from Game for City, rather than purely discussion based ones. We found that these activities create better collaboration and are more captivating for the participants. These activities could include but are not exclusive to: painting murals, designing community park models, role playing, friendly competitions, clay modeling, or idea wall.

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A scenic landscape photograph featuring a dirt road that curves through a green field. On the left side of the road stands a tall, slender cypress tree. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a clear blue sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey filter.

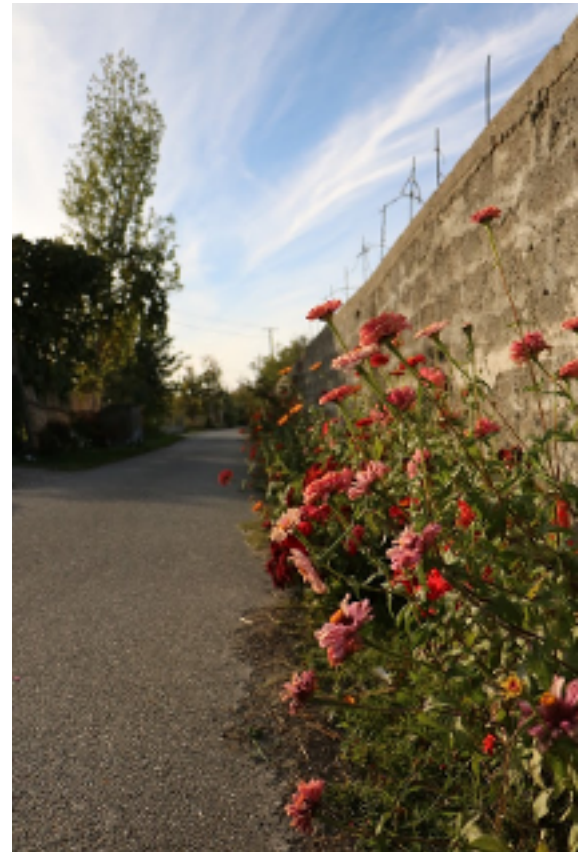
INTRODUCTION

Public spaces, such as parks, can improve the health and wellbeing of nearby residents and foster a sense of connection within a community (Boone-Heinonen, 2010; Weber, 2010). In many communities in Albania, however, public parks are often neglected and poorly managed (PPV Municipality of Vau-Dejës, 2017). Some researchers attribute this to the legacy of the communist era when public spaces were seen as the embodiment of the state, thus of little value (Pojani, 2015). Local residents typically have not been involved in planning efforts to improve public space, such as parks (Chatterjee, 2017). However, with new policies from the central government that require municipalities to plan for future development, public participation is encouraged to allow for collaborative ideas of community members.

Our project was conducted in Stajka, a rural community in northern Albania, located about ten miles from Shkodra in the municipality of Vau i Dejës, Albania. Stajka is primarily an agricultural community, with a few small businesses and cafes. There are 2750 people, and they are mostly a homogeneous Catholic community. The Vau i Dejës municipality has been working on the Territorial Development Plan to improve the infrastructure, enhance water sanitation, and redevelop city centers in municipal villages. The municipality has been partnering with NGOs for these particular projects.

GO2 Albania is an NGO that focuses on sustainable growth and is interested in Stajka due to a small infrequently used park in the community. The park is in the center of the village, surrounded by the church, school, health center, and mill, with a main road on one end of the park. There is a walkway, with grassy patches and dead trees on both sides, six benches that are falling apart, and a concrete wall separating the health center and houses from the park. Aside from the physical aspects of the park, it is frequently used by young males who smoke and litter in the park.

Our goal was to demonstrate the possibility of transforming the park into a valued community asset by utilizing participatory planning mechanisms to reimagine the space. Along with our sponsor, GO2 Albania, we conducted forty-one interviews with community members and stakeholders of Stajka. Through our fieldwork, we were able to foster strong relationships with people from the community and elicit ideas about community preferences toward the reuse and design of the park. To encourage participation and to demonstrate how to animate the park, we created two children's events and male and female focus groups that can be used by our sponsor to encourage more collective action of residents for reuse of the park.



The background is a soft-focus photograph of a garden path. On the left, there are dense flower beds with pink and white blossoms. A paved path leads from the foreground into the distance, flanked by greenery and trees. The overall lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day.

BACKGROUND

Public Space



All communities consist of some combination of public space and private space. Private spaces only need to serve individuals or small groups of people, but effective public spaces must meet the needs of many. Poorly designed spaces can quickly fall into disorder and become unattractive. When a space has certain characteristics that make it inviting and enjoyable to use, it provides a variety of benefits to the surrounding community.

Benefits of Public Space

Effective public spaces have a variety of positive effects on surrounding communities and inhabitants. These include health, social, environmental, and economic benefits.

Numerous studies have shown a connection between public parks and health, both physical and psychological. There is a growing consensus that environmental factors have an effect on physical activity level. Public parks provide the opportunity for physical activity. Even small parks encourage physical activity when people walk to them to engage in social or sedentary activity. Children and adolescents benefit from

improved physical condition and attention which they may gain through parks that promote physical activity (Boone-Heinonen, 2010). Among adults, physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, and cancer. In addition to the role physical condition plays in psychological health, green space has a general positive impact on mental wellbeing (Weber, 2010). Simply seeing a more natural environment had a positive effect on psychological and emotional health in a variety of studies (Bedimo-Rung, 2004).

Public space also benefits the social lives of community members. They provide a forum for social interaction outside of commercial establishments (Cohen, 2005). This makes them accessible to a greater portion of the community. Studies have found that elements which reflect nature increase the opportunity for social interaction (Bedimo-Rung, 2004). Among the elderly, a group particularly at risk of isolation, exposure to green space is correlated with increased social integration (Bedimo-Rung, 2004).

Parks and green spaces benefit the environment as well. Parks with trees, grass, and other plantings contribute to purifying the air, a worthwhile characteristic for city parks (Bedimo-Rung, 2004). Plantings also contribute to shade in public spaces which cools the environment.

Finally, parks can provide an economic benefit to a community. The increased physical and psychological health of those with access to parks lead to lower health care costs and increased productivity. Additionally, green spaces increase nearby property values thus improving the economic health of the community (Bedimo-Rung, 2004).



Elements of Effective Public Space

Not all public spaces achieve the potential benefit they can provide. The most effective spaces share certain qualities which allow them to serve the needs of a community. The Project

for Public Spaces found that successful public spaces share four qualities: accessible, active, comfortable, and sociable (Spaces, 2009).

A public space cannot serve a purpose in the community if it is difficult or dangerous to access. Effective public spaces are easy to get to through a variety of means. Walking to the space should not involve darting between cars, for example (Spaces, 2009). For people who bike to the space, there should be accommodations to store bicycles securely. The accessibility of a space also depends on how well it fits into the surrounding environment. A successful space relates well with adjacent uses (Characteristics, 2017).

Successful parks enable and encourage a variety of activities (Characteristics, 2017). If nobody uses a park, it is likely that something is wrong with it (Spaces, 2009). The space should be designed in a way that encourages activities for young and old people and men and women without causing conflicts or making any group feel uncomfortable or unsafe. (Spaces, 2009). Lastly, the space should be active throughout the day and accommodate the changing activities over time (Spaces, 2009).

The comfort of a space encompasses factors such as seating, safety, and aesthetic appeal (Spaces, 2009). Questions designers ask when creating a public space includes things such as how much seating there should be, as well more nuanced things such as how it should be arranged so that people will use it (Shaftoe, 2009; Spaces, 2009). Additional considerations regarding comfort include personal space. There must be enough room for people to spread out, but not so much that the space feels empty (Shaftoe, 2009).

Finally, effective public spaces provide the opportunity for social interaction. Not all users of the park have to be engaged in social activity, but interaction is important for a public space (Spaces, 2009). A variety of factors contribute to the ability of a park to create social interaction, but once it is achieved the space contributes to strengthening a sense of community (Spaces, 2009).

Public Participation in Designing Space

Participatory planning is a developmental process that is often used as a means for designing community public space. It is important to consider “who should participate, which methods should be employed, what type of knowledge will be produced, and how will that knowledge be integrated into the process” when implementing participatory strategies for community land design (Juarez and Brown, 2008). In a full participatory project, the stakeholders, including all community members, are involved in developing the concept and design, implementing the design, and maintaining the result (Özer-Kemppainen, 2010). This requires open communication between the government, planning organization, and stakeholders and can come from a variety of different types of media.

A variety of methods can be used to engage the community. These vary both in level of participation and relevance to various project phases. Each one enables the flow of information to or from interested groups in different ways (Özer-Kemppainen, 2010). Various stakeholder groups will also find different methods more accessible than others. For example, children may have more success with a visual method than with one requiring discussion. Some combination of methods should be used to ensure every stakeholder feels their position is understood and taken into consideration (Bowns, 2011).

We evaluated a number of case studies in participatory planning in order to determine effective participatory methods and their benefits. We identified the following methods: surveys, interviews, oral histories, discussions, brainstorming, interactive planning, and

role-playing activities (Bowns, 2011; Collie, 2011; Shaftoe; Stewart, 2015).

One approach of participatory planning that can include the methods mentioned in the table is the bottom-up approach and is often used in rural communities. The aim of this approach is to make the community more responsible for land design. This approach begins by learning about the culture of the people as context to determine the best participatory planning method for the community. Other stages include raising awareness for the issue, identify social dynamics and aspects of the community, and encouraging the community members to participate at all stages of the process (ELARD, 2017). Bottom-up allows for the community members to take control of the planning process and have a say in their community planning. Some difficulties of bottom-up approach include trying to convince the community to participate because some of them may feel like that they do not have time (Juarez and Brown, 2008).

Aside from challenges involved in bottom-up approach, there are multiple that come with participatory planning in general. These challenges can affect the quality and sustainability of the end result. One such difficulty is defining and reaching all of the stakeholders, who are essential to include in the planning process. It is important to make sure that no one is excluded so that all opinions can be heard. Another difficulty is gaining consensus among different stakeholder groups, each of which have different motivations and desires for the outcome. Even if all stakeholder groups are present, one group may be more persistent and have a greater influence than others (Alawadi et. al., 2016).

Surveys	Interviews	Oral Histories	Discussions	Brainstorming	Interactive Planning	Role-Playing Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•produces large amounts of demographic data•sentiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•produces more detailed data and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•provides depth of knowledge about history•provides relationships between people and space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•bidirectional•may produce more information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•produces many varied ideas•easy to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•provides inspiration•builds relationship with organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•increases empathy between groups•leads toward consensus



Challenges to Participatory Planning in Rural Albania

After World War II, Albania was governed by a repressive communist regime led by Enver Hoxha (Pojani, 2010). Under the regime, private property was transferred to the state: agricultural land and small farms were consolidated, church properties were expropriated and public participation in planning was discouraged. Since the communist regime fell in 1990, successive governments, from the Democratic Party to the Socialist Party, have not devolved sufficient political or financial power to the local municipalities to address land use issues around public space, even though there have been laws put in place for the transfer of land titles since the early 1990s (Pojani, 2010). Some observers claim that many Albanian citizens feel that revitalizing public space has been neglected or ignored and that the transformation from communism to a free market economy has been marked by a severe lack in public planning control, poor communication between the local government and citizens, and confusing land use laws (Pojani, 2015).

The lack of communication and organization in the government has caused the citizens to be less trusting of the government. One study has shown that people rated their accessibility to information about municipal projects, activities, and other services through government contacts, websites, and public media to be less than average. Without proper information, various commentators claim citizens are likely not to trust their government officials (Chatterjee, 2017). Civic engagement opportunities also are generally spontaneous and lack organization. This causes citizens to doubt the sustainability of these projects and the government's ability to carry out these projects until completion. This combination of poor communication and organization is compounded by the deep-rooted lack of trust in the government leftover from the communist regime (Vurmo, 2010). Without trust in their government, citizens who voice their concerns to their municipality feel they are ignored. This makes engaging the communities in participatory planning activities difficult.

Stajka, Albania



Stajka is a small agricultural village located in the Vau i Dejës municipality of the northern Albanian county of Shkodër. The settlement is located about 10 miles southeast from the main northern city of Shkodra.

Stajka is built on fertile soil created by the Drini River, which surrounds Stajka on the northern, southern, and eastern side. In the northern section is the Ashta Hydropower Plant which generates electricity for the village by utilizing the river. The main border of the city is the Pistull Hill, which separates Stajka from the bordering villages of Pistull and Pleshe.

Stajka's key landmarks include the Catholic Church of Naltimi i Kryqit, a health center, a school, and a few businesses. Stajka is home to about 2750 inhabitants and is roughly 50:50 male to female. The inhabitants are homogeneous and primarily Catholic (Migena Selçetaj, Personal Communication, September 25, 2017). There is a high number of students in Stajka, compared to other villages in the municipality (Mayor Zef Hila of Vau i Dejës, Personal Communication, November 3, 2017).



The park currently serves mainly as a walkway connecting the main street, businesses, and school to the church and residential areas. Additionally, there is a public parking lot that serves as a communal lot for the Church, health center, and surrounding businesses.

The space is surrounded by streets on three sides with one main road and two smaller ones. The space or park has several benches surrounded by dead trees and has become rundown. The park is generally neglected as a place for community to socialize. This park's central location in Stajka and proximity to the church, school, healthcare center, and other businesses makes it an important asset.



Our team worked with GO2 Albania to create community engagement for animating the park in Stajka. GO2 is an NGO that focuses on bringing sustainable transportation and public participation to communities. We worked with Migena Selçetaj, a psychologist, and Sonila Hasaj, for interview design and translations.

GO2's plans for Stajka involves three phases. The first of which is collecting data, the second of which is designing with public participation, and the third of which is completing the design of the park. Their project, titled Game for City, has received funding from both the municipality and the Embassy of the United States of America in Tirana, Albania. The embassy gives small grants to companies who are constructing projects that are involved in fields such as anti-corruption, good governance, investigative journalism, human/minority rights, empowerment of women and youth, and environmental awareness. GO2's project falls under the good governance category because of their participatory approach to planning (Democracy Commission Small Grants, 2017).



With the help of the embassy and GO2, we created three objectives to achieve our goal of introducing participatory planning in Stajka for redesign the public space. Through various interviews, observations, and events, we were able to facilitate and initiate participatory planning in Stajka.

A group of four people, two women and two men, are walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a forest. The scene is backlit by a bright sun, creating a strong lens flare and casting long, dark shadows of the people onto the path. The trees are dense with green foliage, and the overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

OUR APPROACH



The goal of our project was to understand the perceptions of the park, identify the attitudes about participatory strategies, and demonstrate the possibilities of making the park into a valued community asset. To achieve our goal, we identified the following objectives:

1. Assess community assets and attitudes in relation to the park
2. Introduce participatory planning in Stajka
3. Create interactive events in the park to animate the space

Our project was based on a mixed-methods approach combining semi-structured interviews, life story interviews, and assessment of community assets.



Understanding Local Perspectives of the Park

Throughout many observations and interviews, we were able to determine the key community assets of Stajka. We conducted forty-one semi-structured interviews in Stajka ranging in depth and length; twenty-one were with females and twenty were with males. We interviewed villager leaders, such as Mayor Zef Hila of Vau i Dejës, priest Father Dedë, and the school director to learn more about community assets, future development plans, and the social dynamic in the Stajka. We conducted numerous interviews with local business owners who are also residents of Stajka, such as those who owned the cafés and bars, convenience store, Fast Food restaurant, hardware store, etc to learn more about their personal interests and perceptions of Stajka and the park. We also conducted multiple interviews with community members of different ages, gender, and location in Stajka, in order to obtain a range of different perspectives. In every interview, we collected the person's name, age, and birthplace. In interviews with community members, we focused on questions regarding their personal interests, attitude toward Stajka and the park, and their ideas for future uses of the park. In our more in-depth interviews with residents who were born and lived in Stajka during the communist era, we asked questions focused on how the park and village have evolved over time. Our interview protocols can be found in Appendix A-C.

Since many women and girls in Stajka did not use the park and tended to stay at home, local resident, Lazzerin Gjeçaj, volunteered to help us find opportunities to interview women in their homes. In these interviews with women, we wanted to learn more about women's use of the park. We asked questions such as:

1. "Could you explain the current social dynamic between men and women in Stajka?"
2. "Why do you believe women do not frequent the park?"
3. "If the space is improved, do you think you would visit it more?"

Local residents were very willing to talk to us in part because we were from America and



something of a novelty in this small village. By going to Stajka, our team generated a lot of talk in the village and our genuine interest in learning about their lives made them more open to talk to us. It was helpful having two males and two females in our group since we would break up into two groups with one boy and one girl. This helped during interviews; if we talked to a women, the female in the group would lead the interview and vice versa.

Introducing Participatory Planning in Stajka

In addition to interviews, we conducted two adult focus groups: one with five men and one with three women. The male focus group was conducted in the building used for ping pong, pool, and other socializing activities in Stajka. This building is dominated strictly by males. While we were initially surrounded by many males, five of them were actively participating for the entire activity. The five were comprised of two twenty year olds, one eighteen year old, and two sixteen year olds. The female focus group was conducted in the park. The female focus group was composed of five different women initially but only three were actively involved. The group's ages ranged between twenty to sixty-one years old.



The focus group was structured around a game that allowed participants to “reimagine” the park and express their ideas. Cardboard and green paper was used as a representation of the space. Images representing different categories—benches, picnic tables, movie theaters, stages, art, trees and flowers, trash facilities, and swing sets—were printed, laminated, and provided as pieces that the people could choose. The categories of items were chosen based on responses to “How would you improve the park?” asked during previous interviews. We also gave a wide range of pictures in order to generate more conversation topics. The first step of our game was use the current setup of the park to to discuss their current opinions of the space. We then asked the focus group participants to rearrange the space using the current benches, dumpsters, and walkways.

The second part of our game provided them with the pictures of objects that could be potentially added to change the design and use of the park. The pictures were not strictly used for the designing process but more to generate discussion to explore ideas. Some of the issues we discussed during the focus group were: how to make the park inclusive for men and women, park maintenance, and activities in the park. The questions and protocols can be found Appendix D.

Creating Interactive Events in the Park

Based on our interview data, we planned activities focused around children. These events were made to animate the park to show its potential. The first event was held on November 23rd and was an arts and crafts day. The second event was a game day held on November 24th after the schools cleaned up in the park.

To prepare for the events, we went into Stajka two days before the event to set up advertisements. We placed eight posters in different locations in the center that said “This is your park!” in Albanian, with location and time details. We also created a large banner to hang in the park using paint with the same advertising. The main purpose of the banner was to bring color to the park and to inspire the children and community to do the same. The day before the event, we collected materials for the arts and crafts, such as paper, clay, markers, crayons, and glitter for the children make dioramas, pictures, and paintings. All diorama structures were made prior to the event. For the children to paint a mural, we bought a sheet, paint, and brushes.

We arrived in Stajka an hour before the crafts event to set up. We were joined by two Stajka locals, Lazzerin Gječaj and Aristid Huba. A cardboard surface made of cardboard was created for the children to paint on. Two stations for the dioramas and pictures were set up on benches and some example dioramas were made. When school was dismissed at 12:30, Lazzerin and Sonila Hasaj, our translator, went to the school to gather the children to the park. Sonila Hasaj, Lazzerin Gječaj and Aristid Huba helped us translate in order to explain the activities to the children. After the event, we hung the mural the children made in the park.

The second day we arrived in Stajka at 9am for the clean up and game day. We hung up three different strings between the dead trees of the park to display the children’s work from the previous day. We also set up games such as Twister, an enlarged game GO2 made in context of the park, red light- green light, giant and dwarf, and chalk. Migena Selçetaj, Lazzerin Gječaj, and Aristid Huba helped explain and ran the games with the children.



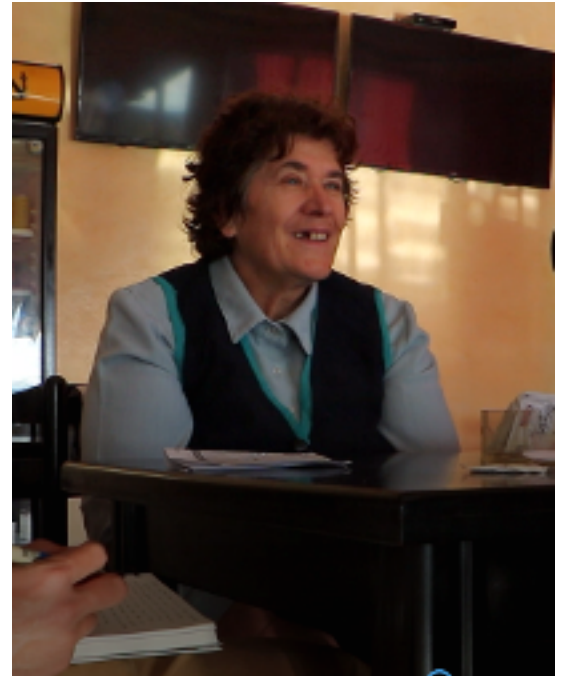
A photograph of a person's hand reaching out to touch the head of a brown goat through a chain-link fence. The goat is looking towards the camera. The background is a grassy field. The text "CASE STUDY" is overlaid in the center.

CASE STUDY

How Memories Can Influence the Use of the Park

The Legacy of the Communist Era

The history of Stajka can be told in many ways. One resident, Roza Gječaj, who has lived in Stajka for 41 years and now owns one of the most popular local bar cafés, Bar Kafe R. Gječaj, described Stajka during the communist period and how it has changed. Villagers, she said, worked in agricultural cooperatives from early morning to late afternoon, with little time to rest. The village focused on growing corn and fodder for the animals. The cooperatives were comprised of ten communes (sections), one for each neighborhood, each with forty people. She explained how the village would organize competitions among the cooperatives which included jumping, running, volleyball, and other sporting activities. She said that Stajka had talented teams compared to the other villages and was well known for sports. She noted that this kind of organized community activity no longer exists since the fall of communism. The community does not currently have a functional public place to hold large activities, and Roza Gječaj and other villagers expressed an interest in having a place to hold these types of gatherings again. Numerous people have explained how the church and schoolyard are closed to the public during most hours of the day, limiting the residents of places to congregate.



While Roza Gječaj focused on the activities that brought people together in Stajka, Kol Aliya had a dramatically different view of the village during the communist period, one that suggests how past injustices can lead to mistrust. He described how he and others suffered under the regime, and described it as “a very dark time.” Kol Aliya worked in the cooperatives as a farm laborer and he dug the routes for the village’s water canals. He claimed he was unjustly arrested two different times during the regime. The first time was when he was accused of helping his friend escape across the border into Montenegro. Despite having no knowledge of his friend’s plans, Kol Aliya was interrogated for five months before being released due to a lack of evidence. A few years later, he was jailed for eight months for talking hostile towards an authority figure in the community. He explained how he was not the only one from the region; thousands of other ordinary people were jailed for acts like his. It is possible that he and others have lingering resentment toward the government or authority figures. These feelings could be an obstacle to participation in events involving government officials.



The Evolution of the Park



The physical layout of Stajka, including the park, has changed significantly through the years. From our interviews, we learned that there used to be a bakery, built by two Italian priests, on the square in the center. An older female resident explained that the bakery was destroyed in 2007 due to disputes over land ownership. The land was then preserved as public space by the church, which claimed ownership of the park. The loss of the shop altered the function of the park. Instead of being a commercial area, it now serves solely as a walkway and seating area.

Additionally, we learned that three years ago, the space was redesigned as part of an election campaign by adding the benches and then redesigned again one year ago by adding the trees, resulting in its current state. This demonstrates that even though the park has been remodeled previously, it is still not functional for the community. Using participatory planning in Stajka will be an important tool for revitalizing the park again because it will allow the community members to express how they would like the see the park in the future.

Lack of Access to Public Spaces

The School Courtyard



During our interview with the School Director, Violeta Malaj, we learned that schools in Albania are typically community centers and serve as places for children to play in the afternoon, but that this has yet to be established in Stajka. She explained that since the school was just built in the last year, it does not yet have a program to make the school a community center. The school is locked after school hours, 1 pm, due to budget and staffing constraints. Therefore, the children do not have a good place to run around and play. Surrounding the old building, the director said, there used to be fields and botanical gardens that the students could use in the afternoon. The school staff has plans to rebuild these fields at the school with the help of the NGO World Vision, but nothing has been finalized. Due to the nature of NGO processes however, this project faces an uncertain future. Further complicating the situation, one young man contradicted Violeta Malaj by stating that most schools in Albania close during the afternoon. The students and teachers have expressed a desire to be involved in the planning process since the children do not currently have a place to play. The uncertain future of the school as an accessible space to play emphasizes the need to involve children in the planning process.



The Churchyard

Although the community has great respect and admiration for the church, one thing that struck us was how the church was gated and locked during the day. The grounds are well maintained and would provide an excellent place for community members to relax and socialize. When trying to schedule an interview with the priest, Father Dedë, we learned that he does not spend much time in Stajka. During our interview, he explained that the church gate must be locked in order to preserve the area since it is sacred ground and he is not there to monitor it. This eliminates another potential gathering space for the community. Since the church is closed for most of the week, the park has the most potential as an inclusive gathering space for the community.



The Soccer Field

The soccer field is the only place in Stajka currently meant to serve as a place for children and adolescents to play, but it is surrounded by a tall barbed wire fence and requires a significant fee to use. Additionally, the field is not safe for games since the turf is ripping and exposing the concrete beneath. Even if it were safe to use, the residents have told us that the field is often closed because nobody is there to manage it. The only current alternative is a field in a neighboring village. Many young men have expressed an interest in exercise equipment, suggesting they do not have a good way to work out. The park provides a potential location for the young men to work out, a use that the rest of the community should consider during the planning process.

Commitment to Stajka

Migration Orientation Hinders Planning Efforts Among the Youth

Many young people feel that there are not enough jobs in Stajka and that the few available do not pay enough. They talked often about their desire to leave to bigger cities in Albania, such as Tirana, or to go to other countries primarily Germany, Greece, and Italy.

One of the first people we spoke to in Stajka, a man in his mid-twenties, told us about how he wants to leave Albania because he cannot find a job. We asked him to show us his favorite part of Stajka or a place he enjoyed and he replied that “there are no nice places in Stajka”. When we talked to him further about whether he would like to be involved in the redesigning of the park, he said he could not “because [he] is leaving soon”. His unwillingness to partake part in a planning process about the future of the park is quite common among young men, who also anticipate they will leave Stajka for opportunities elsewhere.

Other young men and women expressed similar opinions to us. Since many people wish to leave Stajka, it will potentially be challenging to convince them to participate in a community project.



Young People's Intention to Stay

While many young people feel discontent in Stajka, whether they are employed or not, some are happy and intend to stay. A young man working at the gas station at the edge of Stajka has lived in the village for 27 years. He thinks many of the young people in Stajka lack motivation to leave or find jobs. Indeed, the unemployed young men we spoke to did not share what they were doing to find local jobs, although we did not ask directly. Even some young people who are not yet employed are content to remain in the village. One young woman has lived in Stajka for all 24 years of her life. Though she does not feel like her personality is suited to the rural setting, she does not want to leave. Since these young people choose to stay in Stajka for commitment or for a lack of motivation, they will be more likely to participate in activities for planning the park.



Elder Residents as a Resource for Planning



The majority of older people in Stajka have been there most of their lives and do not intend to leave. Many cite the quiet beauty of Stajka as their favorite aspect of the community. Some of these people own businesses and support themselves, while others are supported by spouses or children who work in Stajka or abroad. Many older residents stated that they would like more flowers and greenery in the space. Since many of them do not work, they would benefit from a quiet, relaxing place to sit and socialize. Many of these residents have many connections in the community and would be useful being involved in the planning process as well.



Perspectives of Returned Emigrants

People who have left and returned to Stajka bring new ideas about public space from other countries and have shown a strong connection to living in the village, an orientation that would be of value to public participation planning. Several interviewees who returned from abroad by choice said they did so because they feel more support from the people in Stajka. They are eager to give back to the community, and therefore will be very willing and dedicated participants in the planning process. They also bring a wealth of ideas and inspiration from public spaces in other countries, including ones with different gender dynamics. They will potentially have insight into creating a non-gendered space, and generally effective spaces.

Uneasy Neighbors: The Church and the Park



Since the end of communism, the church has remained an important institution to many of the people in Stajka and an important stakeholder in any discussion of the design of the park. Many families walked through the park to go to mass and afterward, the community flooded out of the church through the park. Though many people left immediately, others lingered to socialize in the churchyard, the parking lot, and in local businesses such as the cafe and shops.

Father Dedë and the Community

The strong relationship that the community has with the church was revealed during numerous interviews. This connection can be explained from the long history the church has had in the village. We learned that the church was rebuilt by hand after it was destroyed in a flood in the 1950s. When religious expression was banned in 1967, the church was preserved as a cultural center rather than being destroyed. In addition to the importance of physical structure of the church, the priest has a significant amount of influence in the community. Before and after our interview, we observed many villagers waiting to talk to him. They have formed a bond with him and seek out his guidance regularly. This bond should be recognized when carrying out community engagement in the village.





The current priest, Father Dedë, wants to install a playground within the churchyard, instead of the park because he would be able to control the hours that the playground is open. He also feels that a playground in the church, compared to the park, is safer and more family friendly. The priest was concerned that the younger males, in his view, have damaged the park and he does not want the same to happen at a new playground. The priest was concerned that if the playground was in the public park that women and children would not want to use it because the young males would still dominate the area. His plan to build a playground on the church property has reduced his interest in the park. Without his cooperation, it will be difficult to leverage the church in the planning process.

When asked how he would improve the park, Father Dedë said he does not think it can be improved. He is skeptical that a redesign would change the current problems with the

space, citing the fact that previous attempts have had no positive effect. Instead, he suggested expanding the parking lot into the current green space. He explained that every family that owns a car wants to drive it to church on Sundays, but there is not enough parking for all of them. This is supported by our observations; on Sunday morning the parking lot filled to capacity and cars began parking along nearby streets. Given his influence in the community, Father Dedë's strong opinion about the park poses a threat to the participatory process. Rather than a space which is functional for everyone throughout the entire week, he may steer the community toward a plan which only serves the church on a single day of the week. He also expressed a distrust of the young men in community. If he were involved in a planning activity, it is likely he would discount their ideas and desires. This would again weaken the collaborative planning effort and negatively influence the outcome.

Men vs Women in the Park: Challenges to a More Inclusive Vision



Photo Credit: Robert Hersh

On our first day in Stajka, we were greeted by eleven young men in the park. From our interviews and observations, we found that those young men are the most frequent users of the park. The majority of the men use the park to lounge on the park benches, often smoking and chatting with each other and locals who pass through the park. They explained to us that they did not have jobs and that there was very little for them to do in Stajka, so they use the park as place of gathering in order to pass time.



We began to notice that women were not around in public places, including the park. Aristid Huba said that women “only go out for church and to shop, but mostly stay in the home.” A local business owner told us said that the greatest problem in redesigning the park is that men are the ones who frequent the park, while women are expected to home. He said “it is a mentality that they will not be seen in public.” He said that women see each other by going from home to home. This posed a challenge for us when finding women to interview during our fieldwork, and will be a challenge for engaging women in planning in the future.

Women's Attitudes Towards the Park

One woman, who came to Stajka twelve years ago to be married, claims she does not have a favorite place since there are no good places to go in Stajka. She expressed that there is nothing to do in the park and that she does not feel comfortable there because of the nearby coffee bar where men sit on the balcony of the bar overlooking the square. She suggested incorporating a sort of barrier between the park and the bar, such as large trees. She believes that if women felt more comfortable and safe there, then more women would go to the park.



Other women expressed that they are more comfortable going into Shkodra or each others houses compared to the center of Stajka or the park. Women told us that if the park was improved they may frequent it, although many of their answers were still cautious, alluding to cultural norms about women. Some women were hesitant to use the park, because if they are seen out in public in Stajka, especially with a boy, the village would gossip. This view was shared by another woman in the village who said sarcastically that “Stajka is best for gossip.” Due to the fact that the men stare down at the park and there is gossip amongst the village, it makes it difficult for women to want to go to the park to participate in events.



Women's Attitudes Towards the Park

Older women in Stajka remember when women were considered more equal to men under the communist regime, when “there wasn’t this current mentality” about men dominating public spaces and women remaining in their homes. Under cooperatives, men and women were in similar working positions and participated equally in community activities. One resident noted that women’s absence from public space became greater when families began to build walls around their properties. Since women feel more comfortable in their gated properties, it will be challenging to encourage them to spend time in a space that is not theirs.



Photo Credit: Roza Gjeçaj

While some women are easy to express that there is a “mentality”, others are more critical of it. Lena Palushaj, an older village woman, described herself as a “free spirit”. She believed that if women in the community were not as self-conscious then they would be able to use the park and other public spaces, such as the coffee bars, more often. She talked about how she felt more connected to the community during the communist era because she was a nurse for twenty-five years in Stajka, whereas now she is retired and a housewife. As a nurse,



she was able to see and interact with people every day. When we asked her what were some of the major changes in Stajka since the communist period, she said “there were too many to list.” She stated that women have more rights now and are able to get a higher education and own businesses. She recommended one way to get women out of their homes and into the park more would be to make it greener, with trees, flowers, and a playground, as well as a coffee place. Furthermore, making the park more inviting for women will be one of the greatest challenges for revamping the park.

Devalued Public Space



Treatment of Private Space

An interesting aspect of Stajka is how many homes and courtyard are well maintained in contrast to the dilapidated park in the center of the village. Properties are covered in well cultivated flowers, beautifully placed grape vines covering pergolas, organized pens for animals, and a variety of trees and shrubs for privacy. The houses are painted in vibrant colors and are adorned with wooden shutters, pleasant balconies, and terracotta roofs.

When asked about how Stajka has changed over the years, Kol Aliya explained how the more impressive houses in Stajka were built at the end of communism. During the communist regime, people were not allowed to change or alter their homes, so they were built to be bigger and colorful. Kol Aliya showed us how his white, one story small house has not been altered much since the communist era, unlike his son's which was also built on the property. His son's house is bright orange with white design trims. In his free time, Kol Aliya also likes to take care of his property.

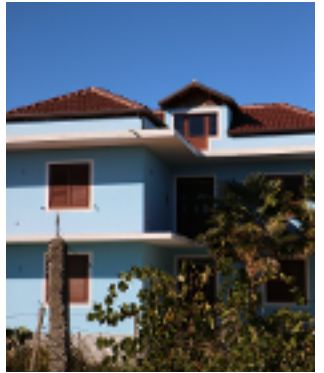
Many property owners in Stajka surrounded their homes and gardens with walls that demarcate the boundaries of their property for protection and privacy. The homes were surrounded by different types of walls; some created by grapevines, trees, or shrubs, while others had wire, gates, bricks, or rock walls that prevented people from seeing in. One long

standing resident noted that people built the walls after the communist regime since people wanted to be able to define their own property and protect their space.

This passion that people bring to improving their homes may be translated into passion for developing the park during the redesigning process. If the people viewed the park as a valuable community asset, then they may be able to effectively reimagine the park.







Current State of the Park



In contrast to the care they lavished on their homes and gardens, local residents do not treat the park as they would for their own homes. The park itself is covered in trash. We observed the children littering and kicking glass bottles for amusement in the space. When finishing a snack, they would drop or throw the wrapper aside. Older youth would drop the remains of what they ate on the ground near the bench they were sitting on. When we were eating in the park with them, they would gesture to us to throw our trash on the ground as well.

This attitude from the residents can be attributed to different problems people are facing in the community. This destruction of the park can be partially attributed to boredom in the community. The youth lack activities in Stajka. The soccer field is private and requires payment to use. The school does not offer any after school lessons or activities. The church no longer has as much activities for the kids as it used to. Youth in this community end up hanging out in the park and since there is nothing to do in the park or village they destroy it out of boredom, hence the little kids smashing bottles and tugging on trees. The destruction of the park might also be

attributed to frustration youth face in their community. The youth wish to leave the community for the lack of opportunities. The lack of jobs may make them feel that the community has failed them. The destruction of the park could be a manifestation of their dissatisfaction.

The youth should be heavily engaged during the participatory planning process. Their views on the future of the park will give them a chance to create an area in Stajka that they may enjoy more responsibly. Many people have said that the new park will still be treated poorly by the youth. This may affect how much they are willing to participate. This group's opinions are imperative to reach too as stakeholders.





Responsibility for Maintaining the Park

Most people do not believe it is their job to take care of the park, rather it is the municipality that should be responsible. Some residents noted that someone should be hired to clean up the park each evening, as is done in the churchyard. Who would pay for this service was not clear. Some residents said they would take part in cleaning up the park if others did so; the local miller once tried to remove litter and clean the park because he works by the park and sits on one of the benches quite often. The school also organizes a cleaning day with the students. We observed this as the kids were brought to the space with protective gloves and trash bags as they cleaned the space leaving little trash behind. These cleaning days are infrequent, however, which is evident from how much trash has piled up before the event took place.

Even with the school having the children cleaning up the park, they do not take good care of the park still. The teachers were concerned with how little the children's parents teach them about littering. They said that for the children to change their habits both the teachers and parents must give to the youth an understanding of maintaining public space.



Listening to Each Other's Ideas about the Park

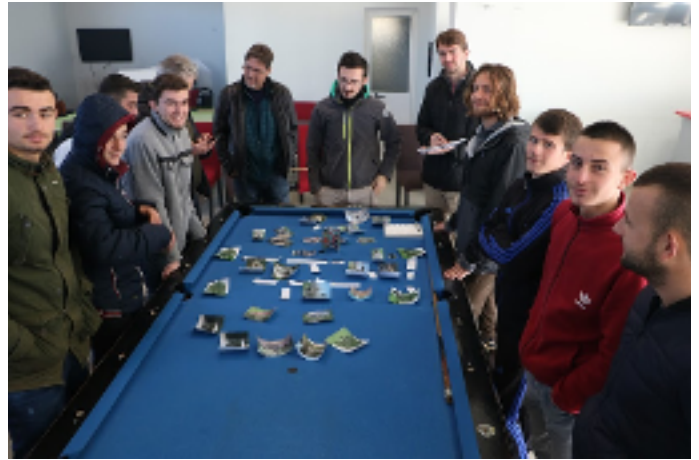
Young Men at the Pool Hall

The activity in the pool hall was meant to promote interactive games and group collaboration between the males in order to begin the idea of participatory planning. Due to the relatively small size of the focus group, the participants were able to express their opinions and discuss them with the group.

Insightful opinions surfaced through the males' discussion. When prompted to alter the park to make it better suited for girls, they suggested using the swingsets or gazebo. They also suggested better lighting. When prompted with the idea that the girls expressed interest in the stage, they agreed to include it. They also said, though, that the girls would not use it in front of the boys. This demonstrates empathy and a willingness to compromise, which will be important characteristics during the planning process.

Analyzing the male focus group, we feel that it effectively engaged them in a participatory setting. Though some participated more than others, all of the men seemed to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions. For example, one of the young men used a pool cue to demonstrate where he would place lights in the park since we did not provide pictures of lighting. This demonstrates their willingness to share their own ideas independent of our suggestions.

We created a platform to start the conversation between the men about the process, and gave a sense of having something to contribute. This activity promoted feedback and group collaboration in order to facilitate ideas for a better outcome for the park. The men expressed to us that the community takes great pride in their village, which leads us to believe that if the community becomes invested in the participatory activities then the park will be greatly enhanced and the public may begin to maintain the space.



Women in the Park

The group created two different park setups, the first with a fountain and seating area centered in the park with numerous trees and activities for children to play around it. The second park they designed was separated into different sections, with each area designed for a different demographic. Both the younger and older generation collaborated together, debating about aspects they disagreed on or adding to each others ideas. They expressed a great interest in having different sections of the park tailored for different groups. This idea reflects the current social dynamic, where women and males have separate places they frequent. They believe the areas should be tailored for different groups, with an area in the middle to combine the sections, such as tables with shade.

One of the most prominent things discovered was not necessarily during the focus group activity, but when we were trying to gather one. In the days leading up to the event in Stajka, numerous women were asked if they would be interested in being part of a focus group. However, the majority of them either declined the invitation or did not respond to our messages. On the day of the activity, it was very difficult to get women to participate. Many of them said they had to go back to their homes or did not have the time. This reflected the difficulties we faced trying to interview women during our field work. The women who participated in the focus group were with women we had previously fostered a relationship. It will be difficult to gather a sufficiently large group of women for future planning activities.

By holding separate activities for men and women, we enabled both groups to speak freely about their desires and concerns, demonstrating how they are already involved in the process. Through a fun, interactive game, we were able to begin the idea of working collaboratively for redesigning the park.



A photograph of a park with a paved path, benches, and colorful chalk drawings on the ground. The path is made of grey rectangular stones and is covered with various colorful chalk drawings, including hearts, stars, and abstract shapes. On the left side of the path, there are several blue wooden benches. In the background, there are some buildings, trees, and a few people walking. The sky is overcast.

ANIMATING THE PARK



In order to begin participatory planning in Stajka, we had to determine the best way to animate the space. This includes gathering people to the park and showing that park has potential as a shared space for recreation and leisure. Many people we interviewed suggested that they would like the new design to incorporate elements for children. We believed that the best way to animate the space was to gather all the children to show them the possibilities of how the park can be used. Even for parents and other adults, experiencing the park in a new way is a more effective way to inspire thoughts about the park than a survey or questionnaire.

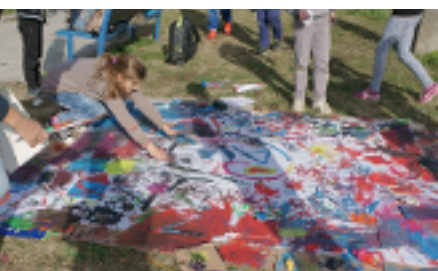
We held two days of activities in the park and two focus groups with adults. The activities were advertised in the days leading up to the event with posters placed strategically to gain the attention of children. Our first day consisted of a variety of arts and crafts with the children in the park. The children painted a mural, created dioramas, and colored pictures, demonstrating alternative uses for the park and bringing color to the space. The result was a mural and a collection of art to be hung in the space as inspiration during the event the next day. The second day was centered around various children's games in the park. For the adults, we held two focus groups. This activity was intended to inspire the people to think about the park in new ways and to empower them to share their ideas.





The first day focused on arts and crafts in order to bring color to the park and make it an exciting space for children. We supplied the children with paint, markers, crayons, glitter, and clay. The children had the choice of painting a banner, crafting triangular dioramas, or drawing pictures. The children were energized and the excitement of the day radiated throughout the park. In the beginning of the event, many of the children were hesitant to join and asked if they had to pay. Once they discovered that they did not, they were incredibly involved. This demonstrates that money is a barrier to use of semi-public spaces such as the soccer field, and further emphasizes the need for a free space for children to play. Lazzerin Gječaj explained to us that the children do not have these types of events in school or outside, so “they really needed this.” We did not gather direct thoughts about how the children felt about the event, but from the attitude and responses of the children, we determined that they enjoyed the event.







The purpose of the second day was to get the kids involved in various activities as well as showcase all the lively artwork they crafted the day before. Twister, Red Light-Green Light, an enlarged board game with enlarged dice and park pieces, and chalk were set up in the park for the children to play with. The park was successfully animated again as a result of the games and artwork. By showcasing the children's artwork, villagers saw firsthand the beautifying effects of art and color there. The games in the park created an atmosphere of play and excitement, allowing the kids to be preoccupied in the park with something other than their usual habits. The event brought joy to the older generation from seeing the children of their village active, which many adults expressed in their interview that they would like to see in the park. It also showed the spirit of competition the teachers described the children of having.

We achieved our goal of enlivening and promoting the reuse of the space. The park proved to have the potential to be an active area for kids to play. It also allowed the older community members to appreciate seeing the kids enjoy themselves.





A group of students with backpacks walking away from the camera on a paved path during sunset. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, with long shadows cast on the path. Benches are visible on either side of the path, and trees and buildings are in the background.

CONCLUSIONS



The goal of this project was to create a space for community discussion and demonstrate the possibilities of transforming the park into a valued community asset. By gaining the trust of the residents of Stajka, learning about the different perspectives of the community toward the village and the park, and creating interactive village events, our project helped catalyze ideas about the potential for the park and started the discussion about design possibilities for the space.

The park is at the very center of the village and how people use it has evolved. In the communist era, people would go to the park each day to buy bread after having worked in one of the many cooperatives that organized life in the village. Now most people in the village, particularly women, prefer to stay in their own homes, within their walled gardens. The park is used primarily by young men, who are unemployed for the most

part and who hope to leave Stajka to find work abroad or in Tirana. It has become in many ways a space for men. Few people, if any, have a strong attachment to the park or feel responsible for maintaining it. No attempt has been made by the municipality in the past to include local residents in plans to upgrade the park. Like many public spaces in post-Communist Albania, the park is seen to have little value (Pojani, 2010). We found, at least initially, people were not used to being consulted about planning in their community and were skeptical about what impact their voices could have on decisions to redesign the park.

And while people in the village remain skeptical to some degree about the influence they can exert in the planning process, the project demonstrated that local people have many ideas about how they would like to transform the park.



Recommendations

In order to create transparency and strong involvement between GO2 and the Stajka villagers in the redevelopment of the park, we recommend forming a planning committee with an equal number of male and female representatives from a variety of age groups, excluding children. The committee will aid GO2 in distributing information about the project to the community throughout the entire process. They can help advertise dates and opportunities for possible community discussions, workshops, and interactive designing activities that generate conversation within the village. They will be able to reach out to the community to find people to participate in these events as well. The committee's close relationships with Stajka will be invaluable in attracting women to participate. GO2 and the committee will be able to collaborate in designing these activities, so that the committee may recommend locations for events, dates for the events, and any other recommendations that would make them more effective in the context of Stajka. The committee will also help GO2 form close relationships with valuable stakeholders in Stajka.

In Games for Cities, we recommend the following for the structure of the event. There

should be an equal number of men and women of a variety of ages, including children. This can be ensured by utilizing the outreach of the planning committee. It is important that the events include representatives from every demographic to insure that there are a variety of ideas and every opinion is recognized. We also suggest having two smaller Game for City events before the larger one. This would allow men and women to familiarize themselves with the activity and formulate their opinions. Then, the focus groups can be combined to inform the other of their perspectives. A facilitator in Game of City will also allow equal opportunity to share one's perspectives during the bigger group and create an open floor for effective discussion.

Our final recommendation would be to hold more interactive and visual activities, aside from Game for City, rather than purely discussion based ones. We found that these activities create better collaboration and are more captivating for the participants. These activities could include but are not exclusive to: painting murals, designing community park models, role playing, friendly competitions, clay modeling, or idea wall.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

One of our greatest limitations was the language barrier between the Stajka locals and us. Although our Albanian colleagues worked hard to translate our interviews, we lost important detail in the conversations and could not follow up as we had wished.



Another difficulty we faced was trying to involve women in our fieldwork. It was a challenge trying to interview and find women for focus groups because they prefer to stay in their homes and do not wish to deviate from their routines.

We had a limited time in the field and would have liked to do more follow-up interviews to address questions that arose when reviewing notes from our initial interviews. However, due to the large number of stakeholders we wanted to reach, we did not have the time to do many follow up interviews. We also missed a couple of key stakeholder interviews, such as the village elder, because of late scheduling. The village elder may have been able to provide more historical context of Stajka and the park and his connections within the community would have been invaluable to our fieldwork.

In concern to ethical considerations, our project may have caused new frustrations within the community, such as giving them false hope for the redesigning of the park. By having so many extensive interviews and interactive activities with the community, we may have raised their expectations of the final design of the park.



Along similar lines, we may have created tensions around gender issues, by purposively trying to include women in the planning process. During interviews, we gathered perspectives of how the community perceived social dynamics. We asked questions about their opinions on their “cultural mentality”, which may have prompted uncomfortable conversations for the interviewees. This could have created further discussion within the community about gender dynamics they may not have been consciously aware of previously. By doing so, we may have overstepped boundaries by addressing this societal norm in Stajka. Additionally, community members may have thought that we believed our lifestyle and culture was better than theirs when we pondered ideas about how improving the park could incorporate women.



Final Thoughts

Our time in Stajka was very rewarding for all of us. At points during our extended time in Albania we encountered feelings of homesickness. Even though we were far away from home we all felt a sense of belonging in Stajka. The hospitality the village showed us was incredible and we encountered the “sense of community” that many interviewees described to us. Their openness and willingness to meet us was infectious. We became invested in their stories not just for the stake of our project but for our genuine interest in their lives. After interviewing them we were touched to see that they wished to learn more about us as they asked us questions. We are grateful to have immersed ourselves into the culture of rural Albania. We were able to escape the frantic action of Tirana and instead find ourselves in the peaceful welcoming community of Stajka.



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Appendix A: General Interview Opener and Questions

Hello, we are a group of American students studying at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in America. We are working with a team from GO2 Albania in Shkoder to help redesign the public space here. We would like to encourage participation from you and the rest of the community, so we have a few questions we would like to ask you.

Përshëndetje, ne jemi një grup studentësh Amerikanë që studiojmë në Institutin Politeknik Worcester në Amerikë. Ne jemi duke punuar me një ekip nga GO2 Albania në Shkodër për të ndihmuar në ridizenjimin e hapësirës publike këtu. Ne dëshirojmë të inkurajojmë pjesëmarrjen nga ju dhe pjesa tjetër e komunitetit, prandaj ne kemi disa pyetje që do të dëshironim t'ju pyesnim.

Questions:

1. How long have you been in Stajka?
2. What do you do for work?
3. What do you do in your free time?
 - A. What are your skills?
 - B. What are your talents?
4. What have you done in your life that you are most proud of?
5. What is your favorite memory from this village?
6. What do you consider the most valuable part of this community?
7. What are some of the businesses in this community?
8. What is your favorite place in this community?
9. Where is your favorite place to hangout?
10. Do you use the public space?
11. How often do you use the public space?
12. Is there anything you would like to change about the public space?
13. Do you feel safe in the public space?
14. When were you born?

Pyetjet:

1. Sa kohë keni qenë në Stajkë?
2. Çfarë bëni për punë?
3. Çfarë ben ne kohen tende te lire?
 - A. Cilat janë aftësitë tuaja?
 - B. Cilat janë talentet tuaja?
4. Çfarë keni bërë në jetën tuaj me të cilën jeni më krenarë?
5. Cila është kujtesa juaj e preferuar nga ky fshat?
6. Çfarë konsideroni pjesa më e vlefshme e këtij komuniteti?
7. Cilat janë disa prej bizneseve në këtë komunitet?
8. Cili është vendi juaj i preferuar në këtë komunitet?
9. Ku është vendi juaj i preferuar për të takuar?
10. A përdorni hapësirën publike?
11. Sa shpesh përdorni hapësirën publike?
12. A ka ndonjë gjë që do të donit të ndryshonit për hapësirën publike?
13. A ndiheni të sigurt në hapësirën publike?
14. Kur keni lindur?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Priest

1. What are your thoughts about the current site?
2. Do you have any concerns about the public space right now? If so, what are they?
3. How do you wish to see the public space used?
4. How does the church use the public space? How can you see the church using it in the future?
5. How do you see the community dynamic currently? Between each other and the church?
6. Do you believe the people have a better relationship with the church than the municipality?
 - A. Is there good communication between the church and the municipality?
 - B. Do you collaborate on projects?
7. What do you do for the community compared to the municipality?
8. How can you see Stajka benefitting from remodeling the space?
9. If a playground is put into the church ground, will the children have access to the space at all times or only select times?
10. What benefits does the church provide to the community?
11. What do you do for the community compared to the municipality?
12. Do you have any pictures of the village to show us?

Albanian translation of above questions:

1. Cilat janë mendimet tuaja përfaqen aktuale?
2. A keni ndonjë shqetësim në lidhje me hapësirën publike tani? Nëse po, cilat janë ato?
3. Si do të dëshironit të shikonin përdoruesit e hapësirës publike?
4. Si e përdor kisha hapësirën publike? Si mund ta shihni kishën duke e përdorur atë në të ardhmen?
5. Si e shihni aktualisht dinamikën e komunitetit? Midis njëri-tjetrit dhe kishës?
6. A besoni se njerëzit kanë një marrëdhënie më të mirë me kishën sesa bashkia?
7. A ka komunikim të mirë mes kishës dhe komunës?
8. A bashkëpunoni në projekte?
9. Çfarë bëni për komunitetin në krahasim me komunën?
10. Si mund ta shihni Stajka të përfitojë nga rimodelimi i hapësirës?
11. Nëse një shesh lojrash vihet në terren të kishës, a do të kenë fëmijët në hapësirë në çdo kohë apo vetëm kohë të zgjedhura?
12. Çfarë përfiton kisha për komunitetin?
13. Çfarë bëni për komunitetin në krahasim me komunën?
14. A keni ndonjë fotografi të qytetit për të na treguar?

Appendix C: Life Story Questions

Roza Gjeçj:

1. What one or two stories do you remember most clearly from your childhood?
2. What is your earliest memory of Stajka?
3. When were you married?
4. What was your job during communism?
5. Has the dynamic between men and women changed throughout the decades?
6. What do you think of the current dynamic between men and women.
7. What have you learned in your lifetime that you would share with the younger generations?

Kol Aliya:

1. What one or two stories do you remember most clearly from your childhood?
2. What is your earliest memory of Stajka?
3. Elaborate more on how Stajka has changed during your life?
4. Talk about your experience in prison if you are comfortable with it.
5. Can you talk about Stajka more during the communist time, and his job in the cooperative
6. What have you learned in your lifetime that you would share with the younger generations?

Lena Palushaj:

1. What one or two stories do you remember most clearly from your childhood?
2. What is your earliest memory of Stajka?
3. What was your job during the communist period?
4. How has Stajka changed since the transition from communism to free market?
5. Do you have any recommendations of how to get women to use the park?

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocols

December 7, 2017

Before the activity began we set up the park as it currently is on the model

We asked the following questions:

- A. What are your thoughts on the current layout of the park?
- B. What time of year do people use the space the most?
- C. How would you rearrange the current park? Why?
- D. What do you see people doing in this park?
- E. How can this space be rearranged to incorporate women?

Rearranging the Space with Pieces:

- Different categories of pieces are presented: benches, picnic tables, movie/stages, art, trees, flowers, trash, swing sets
- Questions to ask:
 - A. Why did you set it up this way?
 - B. Who do you think would use this space the most?
 - C. Why did you not choose specific features?
 - D. Is there anything that you wish you could have seen that was not here?