HIGH-QUALITY HOUSING POLICY: THE FUNCTIONAL LOCAL COMMUNITY IN VILNIUS AND KAUNAS

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Abstract

This paper explores the relation between housing policy and a functional local community. Firstly it presents the housing policy concept itself (a functional local community is one of its components). Then the problem is posed: whether it's possible to carry out a high-quality housing policy without the functional local community. According to the discussed theoretical model, high-quality housing policy contains these criteria: performance objectives, forms of participation, and public and private partnership. The study of 28 in-depth interviews with Vilnius and Kaunas community leaders was carried out in order to find out if a functioning of local community organizations contribute to the quality of housing policy.

Keywords: housing policy, performance objectives, participation, partnership, functional local community.

Introduction

Before starting discussion on matters relating to housing, it is first necessary to define the term "housing policy" and its systemic elements. Obviously, when we discuss housing policy as a system with a certain quality, it is not enough to mention housing maintenance alone. Therefore, the systematic elements of housing policy are disposed. The **aim** of this article is to show that the functional local community, as one of the systematic elements, has an important role in forming and carrying out housing policy. Thus, the research **problem** is as follows: a high-quality housing policy can be assured only by the involvement of a functional local community. The importance of this problem can be illustrated by current events and historical material. Later reveals of how significant public organizations are: in the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the Vilnius City Board planned to demolish Gediminas castle hill and construct a water reservoir instead, but thanks to informal actions of the Lithuanian Science Society, led by J. Basanavičius, these plans were changed. Nowadays public (local community)

involvement in housing policy is especially relevant since there are both the opportunities and the need to change the urban infrastructure and management of the housing sector.

Examining the problem of high-quality housing policy, the **object** which interests us is a functional local community within the housing policy. Housing policy quality will depend on whether the resident is taking care of his ownership individually, not supporting any external links with local community, or he sees himself and his property as an integral part of it. It is obvious that functional local community is not the only actor to ensure the high-quality housing policy; nevertheless, it is the goal of this study to reveal the importance of this element. The study is based on two kinds of research **methods:** first, the theoretical one (an analysis of scientific resources and documents defines the concept of housing policy and housing policy-local community relation in foreign countries); second, the empirical one (a qualitative research was carried out in Vilnius and Kaunas, conducting 28 semi-structured interviews with local communities' leaders). The study material is published for the first time; moreover, the problem we are discussing is not yet analyzed in Lithuanian scientific discourse.

Housing policy concept and its relevance

In the last decade, housing was the subject of many Lithuanian researchers. The analysis of their articles gives a wide range of terminology: concepts of *urban architecture* and *urban areas* are given by J. Jakaitis (2005); *urban* and *urban system* by P. Juškevičius and P. Valeika (2005, 2007); *housing* by N. Bratčikovienė (2005) and D. Jurevičienė (2007); *housing renovation* by D. Biekša (2011); *urbanization* by V.Leonavičius and A. Žilys (2009). J. Nagas (2003, 2012) uses terms of *urban area*, *housing* and *urbanization*, D. Bardauskienė and M. Pakalnis (2012) use terms *urbanized area*, *housing development and planning*,

and N. Lepkova (2012) uses the term *housing maintenance*. The term *housing policy* is introduced in A. Lipnevič's (2012) work, but there is a lack of a broader justification, i.e., how this concept could be structured and what the elements of housing policy system are. As we can see from above, the concept of housing policy is quite new in Lithuania's social science discourse. That is because the above-mentioned authors do not have a systematic view of housing, but rather take individual elements of the system. R. Stačiokas (1994) was one of the first researchers after independence who invoked a systems theory for analyzing various topics. According to him, in examining cities self-governing problems, the system is understood "as a set of elements which are linked with each other by the corresponding relations and communications, and in this way forms a certain unity and integrity. Or as a combination of objects (with their qualities and relations) with adjustable dependency links, which provide new qualitative and quantitative characteristics to this pattern. The system is seen to be a coherence of different phenomena, which are distinguished from the environment as a solid, relatively independent combination. The classification of the system depends on the study objectives and aspects", (Stačiokas, 1994, p. 6-10). It would be difficult to argue the fact that "housing is a set of elements which are linked to each other by corresponding relations and communications", but it is difficult as well to prove that those elements form "a certain integrity or system". A defined link between these elements and the term of housing policy is found in J. Aidukaitė's (2013) article, in which she argues that "housing policy - it's not just housing development, distribution and maintenance". On the basis of Western scientists P. Balchin (1996), J. Doherty (2004), S. Ruoppila (2005), D. Clapham (2006), S. Arbaci (2007), S. Tsenkova (2009), and Lund (2011), she indicates the following housing policy systemic elements: regulation of the housing sector and its market (demand and supply); rental, purchasing and construction of housing; fiscal policy; tenant rights or setting the rights for rented housing; subsidies to consumers and producers; the development of infrastructure (roads and school construction and maintenance); support for establishment and practice of communities and house owners' organizations; social housing supply, distribution and management; support for housing renovation and maintenance; neighborhood safety and social capital augmentation thanks to local communities; and the decrease of social exclusion thanks to housing-related measures (Aidukaitė, 2013, p.2).

That housing policy requires a systemic approach validates not only theory, but empirics as well.

An important document, the Lithuanian Housing Strategy already in 2004 gives some specific details for housing policy implementation. Meanwhile, in theoretical studies the term of housing policy does not even appear. According to the Strategy, "Though the main institution formulating the housing policy is the Ministry of Environment, it does not manage funds allocated to the housing programs and the housing policy implementation agencies", (clause 31). It also indicates, "To establish a permanently operating system of public awareness raising for the housing policy. A public awareness raising program covering various mass-media, the search for and promotion of success stories, and important housing policy objectives (promotion of the establishment of multi-apartment associations, energy saving in residential buildings, etc.) should be prepared", (clause 56, par. 1). Since the term housing policy is mentioned several times, that suggests its necessity and clearness for policy makers.

Therefore, according to Lithuanian and foreign researchers and Lithuanian Housing Strategy, the term housing policy can be defined as decisions taking place in cities, towns and villages, associated with the residents' ability to purchase or obtain housing by renting, buying or constructing; with residential housing administration, maintenance and renovating; with ongoing housing development funding and implementation by the state, municipal or private sectors and with the legal base, which regulates all the mentioned above. In addition, housing policy covers all that is related to housing: the infrastructure, landscape, citizens and government involvement in a safe neighborhood developing and social capital building.

Keeping in mind the problem of our paper - a high-quality housing policy can be assured only by the involvement of a functional local community - in the following paragraphs we will try to analyze the role of a functional local community (which is a social capital segment) in a housing policy system.

High-quality housing policy and local community functionality

The crucial point of this article is not housing policy *per se* but *high-quality* housing policy. As follows we should define the concept of quality itself. Since it is not the object of this article, we will not make an extensive systematic analysis, but the laconic theoretical justification will be made and the necessary quality criteria will be given.

In the public sector of western countries quality measurements are made on a regular basis, as a result, literature analysis introduce quality dimension of services performance. Researchers identify

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eight conventional quality indicators: performance, features, reliability, relevance, durability, practicality, aesthetics and visible quality (D. Garvain, 1984, p. 25-43). R. D. Behn (2003, p.588) distinguishes eight considerations (evaluation, monitoring, budgeting, motivation, advertising, public commemoration, learning and improvement) of why performance quality is measured. It is clear that evaluation and improvement are directly related to quality management, as public sector leaders seek to learn about public programs implementation and their companies' activity results, afterwards they seek to increase the efficiency of their businesses. Lithuanian public sector organizations meanwhile has made the first steps: the Lithuanian government adopted the Public Management Development Program for 2012 – 2020; however, the main subject of this document is institutions and enterprises held by the State or the Municipality as well as associations, corporations, joint-stock companies and private limited liability companies in which the State or the Municipality are stakeholders and has more than 50 percent of the voting shares. Both housing associations and the local communities do not fit in this category. Nevertheless, it fits into public sector interest range and its quality measurements can be applied. Scientists (Puškorius (2004), Gudelis (2007) and others) draw attention to the public sector performance measurement system developed by T. H. Poister (2003). This system implies a regular determination, monitoring and operation of objective indicators for organizations and programs performance. In this context, quality measurement is orientated to a specific activity or its results. The system features these criteria: a variety of objectives, the public interest, the relationship with the service customer and involvement opportunities. Although our research object, the local community, is not a typical organization, we consider Poister's performance measurement criteria the most reasonable for our case. Therefore, analyzing the quality of housing policy in the scope of this article we will use three of specified criteria: objectives, the public interest and participation.

Another important term that we have to define is a *functional local community*. We must specify the features which distinguish this type of community from others, despite the fact that some elements might overlap. First, it is a feeling of belonging to a certain community and second, is a feeling of dependence to a particular area (contrary to an imaginary community defined by B. Anderson (1999)). The third feature is the general interest. However, there are many local communities formed on a common sense, place and interests basis. The fourth and crucial feature for the functional local community is the specific role of its members or the actions that are performed. In this way, a functional local community can be defined as a group of people living in a particular territory, performing certain actions for the good of the local benefit, resulting in the common interests and the inner feeling that they belong to the same group. Functional local community through its specific actions (functions) develops various criteria and the link between a housing policy and a local community could be established using these ones:

- Is there a leader (-s)
- Is there at least one non-governmental organization
- Is there interaction in between individuals, neighbors, groups and organizations
- Is the social order being executed
- Are individuals confident in themselves and their neighbors

It should be noted that what we call a functional local community in western countries is called the civil community. R. Putnam (2001) states that it is characterized by citizens' participation in public affairs, also the relations between them are based on horizontal reciprocity and communication. Mutual respect and trust sustains even when views on crucial matters differs [169, p. 119-122]. Other authors, such as R. Durando [1996], uses the neighborhood concept and defines it as a territory where the population engages in certain living spaces, exploits common services and facilities, and may participate in the same activities: caring, striving to maintain and improve material possessions, spiritualizing community life and enriching the environment by setting commitments. Functionality criterion is reflected by the diverse neighborhood programs, such as *neighborhood watch*. It is a very popular form of neighborly movement in various countries also known as "Crime Stoppers" or "Block Parental Program". Neighbors who participate in these programs put the stickers on the door and windows informing about the existence of such a group in their houses or streets (in U.S., Canada and England the street signs are used). These safety measures serve to show that people who live here are not indifferent to what is happening in their surroundings. Members of neighborhood groups draw attention to the strangers in their stairway, observe teenagers outdoor activities and suspicious persons in a parking lot, and if needed the police is called. One of the very important ideas in this movement is general involvement, i.e., not only men and women can participate, children are also trusted to observe and inform elders if necessary. Observers are in contact with police officers and other neighborhood groups in order to share information, conduct environmental monitoring and ensure security measures.

The analysis of mentioned western countries samples shows that all three of the chosen quality criteria (objectives, the public interest and participation) are satisfied. First, the activities carried out in local communities are targeted to a certain outcome (such as safe housing environment). Then, we can clearly see a public interest, as activities include residential houses, streets, neighborhoods and even cities. Finally, the base to carry on activities is the participation and organization of local residents. Simultaneously examining local communities' situation in Lithuania, we see that over the last decade the situation has slightly changed - a range of initiatives have been implemented. However, as local community leaders express themselves, higher activity and as a consequence higher functionality of the local communities were detected in rural areas rather than urban ones. Nevertheless, we are interested in urban communities' performance and determination as it has grown from the smaller segments – local communities. The vision of community is to see the city as a group of people with different accomplishments who are bound by the certain area and are trying to improve the social life of its members. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of studying urban life and what kind of influence citizens are making on the city. According to Berger (1978), in the definition of community Albert Reiss highlights an organized group which is determined by the place, meanwhile, Roland Warren emphasizes the organization as a social unit and a system that is responsible for the residence associated functions. McNamara (2009) states that community is a place where people live, work and play, and that the city community is the largest one. The density in cities is bigger than in other communities, as a result, they can develop partnership and joint activities. Urban communities cooperate with the government and businesses in order to create a better living standard and to increase the housing supply and quality. All in all, it can be claimed that urban community is a non-profit organization which invests its profits back into the community. It requires the maintainance of inhabitants' groups with similar features within the city limits, and on a smaller scale - neighborhoods and local communities. In this way, we see the city as a large-scale community compiled from smaller communities.

Keeping in mind the problem of this article, a conceptually important contribution in Lithuanian science discourse was made by academic J. Jakaitis (2005). He distinguished two groups of factors for informal action. Firstly, the *objective* one resulting from the continuously operating circumstances, indicating the presence and value, and existing independently of anyone's will. This group contains informal action's static factors such as locality identity signs: nature, urban structure, the old town buildings and society. Secondly, the *subjective* group expresses a dynamic gesture, event or the public (civil) activity degree, as well as the significance of certain values. Its informal action's factors are dynamic: public actions related to urban architecture formation, urban planning, implementation of plans, construction, etc. (Jakaitis, 2005, p. 197). This specific group fits in our interest zone as the author marks "the identity of a city is understood through and primary related to its population, territorial community, habitat architecture and public participation in its formulation, i.e., the identity is treated as a special subject, occurring during the process of urban planning, as a result of interaction between architecture-society and society-city system".

As Jakaitis indicates the relationship between housing quality and a functional local community, he emphasizes two of our selected quality criteria - the objectives and participation. The question is "does society as an actor in planning processes affect an urban development" (Jakaitis, 2005, p. 192). Afterwards, the evaluation of communities and citizens' civic behavior is done in order to determine whether society is capable of hearing other actors of the urban planning process. Then, is it willing and able to take a part in the decision-making process and does it implement its constitutional right by influencing these decisions? A fruitful dialog between documents' originators and the active society is seen as a problem in Lithuania, yet it might be a problem in other countries as well. According to Jakaitis, the principle of cooperation supports the participation criterion and indicates that in the planning process it is necessary to collaborate with inhabitants, entrepreneurs, academics, informal-governmental organizations (NGOs), international partners, the central government, neighboring municipalities and other groups of interest. The aim of this collaboration (*public private partnership* principle, PPP) is to develop realistic plans and to find as many resources as possible to fulfill the plans (Jakaitis, 2005, p. 195). Jakaitis is extremely optimistic about forming a good living environment (it shares many common points with our identified high-quality housing policy), and argues that it is an outcome of common performance, which does not come automatically. Besides, a good (high-quality) environment if wanted and strived for can be achieved by the territorial community as a result collective action and individual effort. Therefore, everything depends on the choices that are made: whether to start acting and which project to choose afterwards. In addition, Jakaitis claims that public participation in a process of urban architecture planning has a number of advantages: a higher probability of projects' success, increased confidence in local government, and a better, more honest relationship between interest groups and territorial communities.

The above considerations in a way correspond with important documents that need implementation. The most significant one is the Lithuanian Housing Strategy, in which the promotion of organizations is emphasized "To encourage local initiatives to rehabilitate housing and the living environment. Local governments have to encourage NGOs, multi-apartment home owners and their associations, committees and boards of communities, and individuals to actively participate in the preparation and implementation of plans of renovation and cleaning-up of residential areas, and also social development plans", (clause 54, par. 3). It is also said, "To establish non-governmental housing management institutions and to increase the efficiency of their activities. It is necessary to establish capable institutions of developers, housing owners and users (associations, confederations) to ensure duly management of the ownership, maintenance, protection of interests of housing owners and users", (clause 55, par. 3). The Housing Strategy was adopted in 2004 and since then the monitoring was carried out only once in 2006. Whereas, a new strategy has not been developed, a question arises - whether the housing policy of Lithuania is carried out in a systematic and responsible manner. Almost a decade has past, still the objectives set in clauses 54.3 and 55.3 have not been seriously addressed. This suggests that in Lithuania the relationship between the local communities' functioning and housing policy is weak, so the quality of this housing policy aspect is only declarative.
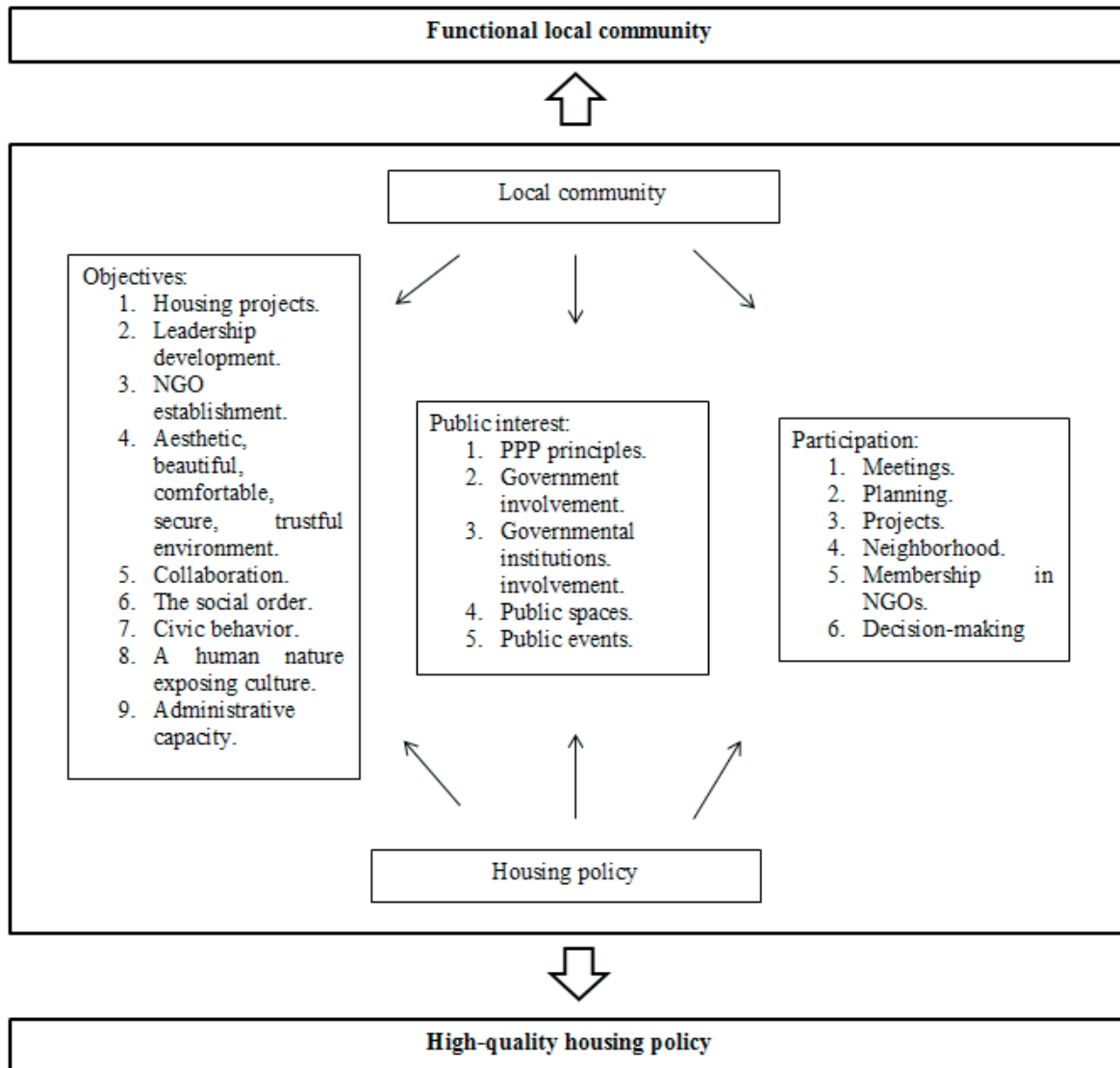
On the basis of the analysis we have made, a high-quality housing and functional local community development theoretical model is provided (*Fig. 1*). The standards of functionality and quality standards are developed through the interaction of the local community and housing policy. Three criteria are used to valuate this interaction, i.e., participation, objectives and public interest. The local community should raise these objectives: the implementation of successful housing projects; fostering the future leaders; creating conditions for the NGOs establishment (in this particular case, it is essential to support the housing self-management and local community organizations); seeking aesthetics, beauty, comfort, security and confidence when improving the environment; collaborating; seeking social order; developing civic behavior; forming a human nature exposing culture, and developing the administrative capacity. When the goals of a local community meet the goals of the housing policy, a favorable environment is formed for putting these objectives into a practice. The compatibility of public and private objectives can be achieved only by ensuring the public interest maintenance, which is seen through: implementation of PPP principles; relations with the government and the governmental

institutions; and formation of public spaces and public events organization. The more the criteria are met, the more a sustainable dialogue between the citizens and the political authorities is carried on. In this way the analysis of needs and opportunities is made while receiving a persistent feedback. Therefore, it is urgent for the local community to express public interest and for housing policy-makers to take it into account while making decisions. Undoubtedly, the public interest can be defended solely by the strong local community with active members. The participation forms are: organizing meetings and hearings; carrying out the planning process; developing projects; promoting an active neighborhood; involving into NGO's activities and making decisions. Housing policy should encourage and develop these participation forms. All in all, the more the criteria will be met, the stronger the liaison between the local community and housing policy will be established and this liaison influences the quality of the housing policy and the functionality of a local community. It can be assumed that the problem of our study - a high-quality housing policy can be assured only by the involvement of a functional local community - is right when the local community meets the majority of the given criteria and becomes a functional local community. To examine at which level this theoretical model is fulfilled in practice, empirical research was conduted in Vilnius and Kaunas.

Implementation of High-quality Housing Policy in Vilnius and Kaunas Involving Local Communities.

The aim was to determine whether the local community organizations systematically contribute to the formation of a high-quality housing policy in Vilnius and Kaunas.

The method was an expert interview. Conducted interviews are qualified as systematizing expert interviews according to A. Bogner and W. Menz (2009). Thus, 28 semi-structured interviews with Vilnius and Kaunas community leaders were performed in 2013 from May to August. The number of experts does not complicate the formation of consensus and receiving optimal results. In a framework of established theoretical model, housing policy implementation empirical elements were chosen to create a questionnaire. Interview material went through all qualitative research analytical stages: transcription, paraphrasing, coding, thematic comparison, conceptualization and theoretical generalization (Meuser, Nagel 2009). The reliability of the study was determined through the standard requirements: the professionalism of an investigator and respondents, the validity of questions formulation and the object of a study (Tidikis, 2003). The

Functional local community

Local community

Objectives:
1. Housing projects.
2. Leadership development.
3. NGO establishment.
4. Aesthetic, beautiful, comfortable, secure, trustful environment.
5. Collaboration.
6. The social order.
7. Civic behavior.
8. A human nature exposing culture.
9. Administrative capacity.

Public interest:
1. PPP principles.
2. Government involvement.
3. Governmental institutions. involvement.
4. Public spaces.
5. Public events.

Participation:
1. Meetings.
2. Planning.
3. Projects.
4. Neighborhood.
5. Membership in NGOs.
6. Decision-making

Housing policy

High-quality housing policy

Fig 1. High-quality housing and functional local community development theoretical model

competences of the experts were recognized on the basis of their leading experience and carried activities in local community centers. Based on the aim of the research the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1 – Community center activities are targeted to implement the specific elements of housing policy.

H2 – The representatives of community organizations are more often initiating cultural activities, meanwhile, public interest in particular public spaces management do not draw their attention.

The first hypothesis (H1) has been fully confirmed as experts have pointed out that a large number of their objectives are directly related to housing policy. Community leaders stated objectives such as neighborhood development, infrastructure improvement (quality of streets and sidewalks,

lighting), active lifestyle (various events in the neighborhood), participation in decision-making, resistance to the illegal constructions, as well as a clean, secure and aesthetic environment.

All in all, objectives which led to community organization establishment we could divide into several groups. The first group - *targeting infrastructure* (street lighting, paved streets, fixed sidewalks, solved problems in residential housing). This kind of reason to emerge was stated by 6 experts (E1, E7, E18, E21, E26 and E28)[1]. According to expert E1, "Our aim is welfare management that it would be a clean, good and healthy life, and streets were fixed and lighted for the safety of the children going to school". Expert E28 claims, "In our city half of the streets are unpaved, half of the housing has no plumbing or sewerage. It is

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[1] Experts were given codes starting from the first one – E1 and continuing as follows E2, E3, etc.

called a city! And now, show me any village which is a little bit more active and does not have its own water supply or paved sidewalk. We almost do not have any sidewalk". These objectives are quite pragmatic and have a significant impact on the quality of life which is a part of the housing environment. However, their achievement requires significant financial resources, which quite often do not depend on how active the local community is (e.g., there are no funds to apply for city communities), but on the municipality budgeting.

The second group of objectives can be called *neighborly relations* (communication) *and civic relations*. The latter depend on the functionality of the local community, and varies from neighborly interaction to infrastructure project (such as renovation) realization. There are six experts as well who fit into this category (E1, E4, E10, E 19, E21 and E26). According to expert E10, "Our community's main goal and work is related to the communication of people that they would gather together".

In the third cluster we find communities which are partly dependent on functional local community, and partly on the municipal subordinated institutions (libraries, schools, social centers, etc.). They could be called *social-cultural* targeting ones (representing leaders are E21, E22, E27 and E28). According to expert E21, "If we are talking about the community, firstly we have to talk about the well-being of local people. Not only social and psychological, we are concerned about all here and now needs". In addition, expert E28 claims, "We might say that our interest is everything that appears in the community territory. It should be a multipurpose and multifunctional activity, including cultural events, sports and health related events, education and environmental action".

The fourth objective group is related to the *public interest* such as urban planning and green areas (leaders who represents this cluster are E3, E6, E7, E8, E9, E14 and E18). According to expert E3, "The city is planned from the 19ᵗʰ floor, e.g., the cabinet of a mayor or other high-level officials. And everything is made according to their will. People have a chance to react only to those decisions that are already made. We decided that debating is necessary at the planning stage. We decided not to wait until the officials arranged everything instead we have to start acting". The other interviewee declares, "The community was established in order to defend the interests of the people, because in our neighborhood a chaotic development was frightening inhabitants, one couldn't know if next morning there will be no constructions just in front of his window" (E6). Another expert pointed out a similar problem, "We live in a marvelous district, as a consequence, quite a number of illegal and other kind of constructions

are being executed. People manage to get a piece of land near the forest and then start building private houses" (E7). E8 clearly gives the main reason for community organization, "Our territory overlaps with a landscape reserve, we gathered together to put an end to littering in these surroundings". An even bigger concern was expressed: "According to the district's detailed plan a new school was supposed to be built in this piece of land; however, it was decided to parcel it. That is why we started to act. It is also necessary to create a safe and comfortable living environment" (E12). It must be said that there is no significant difference between Vilnius and Kaunas concerning the first hypothesis. Still, the leaders of Kaunas stand out in a second group of objectives by using terms *citizen* and *civic behavior* more often. It might be interpreted that Kaunas communities leaders are identifying neighborhood with citizenship, and the latter gives impulse to start the action. Meanwhile, Vilnius community organizations demonstrate their civic behavior when established on a public interest basis. Aidukaitė (2013) notices that in order to save the green zones and abolish illegal constructions, communities of Vilnius are successfully mobilized.

The second hypothesis (H2) has been only partly confirmed. In fact, illustrating community achievements, leaders usually named the cultural events they have organized meanwhile, territorial welfare at first was poorly exampled with communal work (bee). There are some communities whose activity is concentrated in the cultural bar, and the public interest is generally not relevant to them at all. Sometimes it is even deliberately avoided dealing with residential area's infrastructure problems: "We interfere very little with this social life thing. There are members of Parliament and district Municipality, so if you have a question or demand go and ask there. And that's it. We do not interfere in these matters, because if you do there is a big chance to be lost. Once you begin to take interest in matters like this you should leave your cultural activities, should leave your work, should go to retirement and establish a home owners' organization" (E22).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of experts afterwards indicate that they organize a lot of activities related to the public spaces management. We already named urban planning and the preservation of green areas as objectives for community organization establishment (group four – public interest). In fact, almost every second leader of the local community gives an example of when he was carrying out an activity connected to one of these type objectives. Therefore, an interest in public spaces management might be seen as urban communities' particularity. According to expert E1, "We have a very beautiful forest, which has been turned into a rubbish dump. To clean it up was a

decision which gave a start for our organization. The military provides us with transportation and a local school helps with students". Expert E3 gives several examples, "When they wanted to move Lukiškės prison into our neighborhood, we managed to collect 8 thousand signatures during one month"; "There were plans to use pyrolysis for burning tires at the factory, located in Neris Regional Park. We had to interrupt and stop it"; "They wanted to build a boiler-house fueled with coke, which is a terrible poison. We had to prevent it as well". Another interviewee had less success, "We wanted to build a multistory parking lot, because there is a land problem – we need to release those yards from the cars. Our attempts have failed so far" (E4). However, the other did succeed, "At that time the old town detailed plan considerations were proceeding. Not very honest affairs were done by the public authorities, so we tried to expose these things. In a meeting with Zuokas (*the mayor of Vilnius*) we raised the issue of green areas in the city. And now these green zones are good for all including ISM students who can go outside" (E5). Likewise expert E6 shows a great determination, "We have an old windmill in our territory. They wanted to obstruct it. This cultural heritage object could be shaded by two residential houses built instead of two little storehouses. We joined forces with environmentalists and turned to the courts. It was the first time that public organization protects the public interest in court. We have lost. Even so, some educated people didn't give up and translated European Convention into Lithuanian. It was proved that earlier translation was incorrect, thus applied in a wrong way. We have appealed to the European Commission, the European Congressmen and European Commission Steering Committee and it was indicated that Lithuania violated the European Convention. It was ordered to reconcile". There are more successful action examples: "They wanted to erect a seven-story building, which blocks the view to the park. So we raised the people, and I was writing to the Municipality that these constructions does not fit into the scheme of the district plan - the closer to the forest, the lower the house must be" (E8); "When it was decided to start constructions in the zone of water treatment plants, we wrote many letters declaring that people are against it. And it was blocked" and "Now *Vichi* is constructing an object nearby. They wanted to pave the way for maintenance just next to our houses. But we agreed not to do that benevolently" (E23); "They wanted to correct the status of Kaunas green areas to the worse side, i.e., Ąžuolynas woods would lose the status of the forest, and then it is much easier for someone to get this land. Our response was very rapid and firm - we raised the crowds, and we have proved that such things can't be done without a notice

to society" and "It was talked that a trash-burning plant will be erected near Kaunas lagoon, and the money is already designated. Again we raised the masses" (E28). However, some communities are struggling to get a positive result: "Another road was blocked and we fought to get it back. However, we half won, half lost" (E7); "There are private cottages built in a Regional park near the Kaunas lagoon. The people from Regional park direction and some others were fighting against, we did write letters, but no one cares" and "We learnt that near the roadway of Ateitis it is planned to build a trash-burning plant since there is a fossil-fuel power station and all facilities are nearby. Since we were against the construction, we started the action: we wrote letters and held meetings and did everything to stop it" (E19). Expert E20 identifies the whole stack of problems associated with public spaces and much more. According to him, "Nowadays the most relevant problem is perhaps the plant and boiler reconstruction and construction in the Petrašiūnai neighborhood. Municipality is a share-holder of "Kaunas energy" and so it was easier to communicate with this company. They send all the documents we requested and are trying to collaborate. In contrary, entrepreneurs who are building the smaller plant lied to us and did not share the information. So our community organization together with local inhabitants sent writings and they were impelled to make an environmental impact examination" and "Another meeting was on the city general plan alterations. The strategy should be complemented, because there are some old rods and poles left of the old enterprises in our territory, they could be reconstructed, renovated and adapted. We are going to address universities for help to develop visualizations of how it would look like. Moreover, there is a great place nearby – by a monastery of Pažaislis, bicycle paths could be extended. Further, there is a polyester foam factory. Production of polyester releases chemicals that are poisonous. And again, we wrote letters and appealed to the Public Health Center, and an investigation was carried out".

To sum up, local community organizations can be divided in two groups: those whose main interests are culture activities, and those whose primary aim is to protect the public interest. Experts' statements show that local communities often seek to influence decisions of infrastructure development, spatial planning and environmental management. Nevertheless, we can see that not all of these attempts were successful: "we half won, half lost", "our attempts failed so far" "we have lost". This kind of negative experiences could stop community leaders from further action. It is a very challenging occupation and as a consequence active members are not always rewarded with positive emotions. An intimate and associative relationship

with the Municipality as an institution which protects the public interest would provide relief for local communities and, of course, would improve its results. Unfortunately, no researchers made qualitatively significant statements showing that the Municipality would be on the community's side when the public interest is protected. To a similar conclusion comes J. Aidukaitė (2013), who was analyzing interviews of Vilnius communities' leaders. In her study it wass stated that the local government does not support civic organizations (grassroots movements). Besides, Vilnius community organizations often face confrontations with the local government or feel its indifference.

Conclusion

1. Although the concept of housing policy in Lithuanian scientific discourse is not used, there are many related topics which are discussed. Such spheres as private and public housing, its management, maintenance, renovation, development and financing, legal framework formation, infrastructure development, landscape designing, and public private partnership in decision-making process, in order to obtain the best results must be addressed in a systematic way rather than episodically.

2. In today's organization management the quality of performance and service are emphasized; therefore, it cannot be forgotten when local community organizations are analyzed in the context of housing policy. The main criteria for the functional local community are: objectives of the performed activity and forms of participation and partnership principle, so it is assumed that a local community by satisfying these criteria contributes to a higher quality of housing policy.

3. After verifying the hypothesis it was revealed that the Vilnius and Kaunas local community centers' activities are targeted to implement the specific elements of housing policy, as many objectives are directly related to housing policy. The urban community organizations can be divided in two groups: those whose main interest are culture activities, and those whose primary aim is to protect the public interest. The striving to protect public interest might be seen as urban communities' particularity.

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Būsto politika: vietos bendruomenės funkcionavimas Vilniuje ir Kaune

Santrauka

Būsto politiką apibrėžiame kaip miestuose, miesteliuose ir kaimuose priimamus sprendimus, susijusius su gyventojų apsirūpinimu ir aprūpinimu būstu jį perkant, statant ar nuomojant; gyvenamųjų namų administravimu, priežiūra ir atnaujinimu; valstybės, savivaldybės ar privataus sektoriaus vykdomomis būsto plėtros finansavimo ir įgyvendinimo programomis ir teisine baze, kuria visa tai reglamentuojama. Būsto politika apima ir tai, kas susiję su būstu – infrastruktūrą, kraštovaizdį, gyventojų ir valdžios dalyvavimą kuriant saugią kaimynystę ir didinant socialinį kapitalą.

Atsižvelgiant į šio straipsnio problematiką, pagal kurią kokybiška būsto politika negalima be vietos bendruomenės funkcionavimo, analizuojama, kokį vaidmenį būsto politikos sistemoje gali suvaidinti ir vaidina funkcionali vietos bendruomenė – socialinio kapitalo segmentas. Straipsnio tikslas – parodyti, kad funkcionalios vietinės bendruomenės veikla yra svarbi būsto politikos sistemoje, prisideda prie kokybiškos būsto politikos vykdymo ir formavimo. Šios problemos aktualumą galima pagrįsti ne tik nūdienos aktualijomis, bet ir istorine medžiaga, kuri iliustruoja visuomeninių organizacijų svarbą: XIX a. pab.–XX a. pr. J. Basanavičiaus vadovaujamos Lietuvių mokslo draugijos neformaliais veiksmais pasiekta, kad Vilniaus gubernatorius uždraustų Vilniaus miesto valdybai ardyti Gedimino pilies kalną ir jame statyti vandens rezervuarą. Tad XXI a. pradžioje, atsiradus ir galimybėms, ir būtinybei keisti miestų infrastruktūrą ir būsto sektoriaus valdymą, visuomenės (vietos bendruomenės) dalyvavimas sprendžiant būsto politikos klausimus tapo neabejotinai aktualus. Metodai, kuriais remiamasi šiame straipsnyje, yra *teoriniai* (mokslinių šaltinių ir dokumentų analizė atskleidžia būsto politikos sampratą ir ryšį tarp būsto politikos ir vietos bendruomenių kitose šalyse) ir *empiriniai* (Vilniaus ir Kauno miestuose 2013 m. atliktas kokybinis tyrimas – apklausti su būsto politika tiesiogiai susiję vietos bendruomenių pirmininkai). Tyrimo medžiaga publikuojama pirmą sykį, o pati problematika Lietuvos mokslo diskurse iki šiol netyrinėta.

Pirmoji hipotezė H1 – bendruomenių centrų veikla vykdoma tikslingai, siekiant įgyvendinti tam tikrus būsto politikos elementus – visiškai pasitvirtino, nes ekspertai nurodė keliantys savo bendruomenėms daug tikslų, kurie tiesiogiai susiję su būsto politika. Ekspertai nurodė tikslus, kuriuose minimas kaimynystės plėtojimas, infrastruktūros sutvarkymas (gatvių ir šaligatvių kokybė, apšvietimas), aktyvi gyvensena (renginiai gyvenamojoje vietoje), dalyvavimas priimant sprendimus, pasipriešinimas nelegalioms statyboms, švari, saugi, estetiška aplinka. Šie tikslai yra gana pragmatiški ir turi didelę įtaką gyvenimo kokybei (būsto aplinkos dalis), bet norint juos pasiekti reikia didelių finansinių išteklių, o tai didele dalimi priklauso ne nuo vietos bendruomenės aktyvumo (pvz., nėra fondų, kuriems aktyvi vietos bendruomenė galėtų teikti paraišką ir gauti finansavimą), o nuo savivaldybės biudžeto galimybių. Antra hipotezė H2 – bendruomeninių organizacijų žmonės savo iniciatyvą daugiau skiria kultūrinio pobūdžio veiklai ir mažiau veiklai, kuri susijusi su viešuoju interesu, ypač viešųjų erdvių tvarkymu – pasitvirtino tik iš dalies. Didžiosios dalies ekspertų teiginiai rodo, kad daug jų organizuojamų renginių yra susiję su miesto viešųjų zonų tvarkymu. Tokio pobūdžio veiklą galima traktuoti kaip miesto bendruomenių veiklos savitumas. Grupuojant miesto vietos bendruomenių veiklos tikslus, tai yra mūsų įvardyta ketvirta tikslų grupė – susijusi su miesto planavimu ir žaliosiomis zonomis. Faktiškai kone kas antras vietos bendruomenės pirmininkas nurodo faktus, kai bendruomenė vykdė veiklą, susijusią su šio pobūdžio tikslų įgyvendinimu.

Padarytos išvados, kad būsto politikos samprata Lietuvos mokslo diskurse nenaudojama, bet klausimai, kurie įeina į būsto politikos sampratą – gyventojų apsirūpinimas ir aprūpinimas būstu, gyvenamųjų namų administravimas, priežiūra ir atnaujinimas, būsto plėtros finansavimas, teisinė bazė, infrastruktūra, kraštovaizdis, gyventojų ir valdžios dalyvavimas priimant sprendimus, susijusius su būsto klausimais, yra aktualūs, todėl, siekiant kuo geresnio rezultato, turi būti svarstomi ir sprendžiami sistemiškai, o ne epizodiškai.

Taip pat nustatytas kitas dalykas: kadangi šiuolaikiniame organizacijų valdyme daug dėmesio skiriama veiklos ir paslaugų kokybei, šis klausimas negali likti pamirštas ir analizuojant būsto politikos klausimus, susijusius su vietos bendruomeninėmis organizacijomis. Pagrindiniai būsto politikos kokybės kriterijai šiame tyrime pasirinkti tokie: veiklos tikslų kėlimas, dalyvavimo veikloje formos. Vilniuje ir Kaune vietos bendruomenių centrų veikla vykdoma tikslingai, siekiant įgyvendinti tam tikrus būsto politikos elementus, nes daug vietos bendruomenių tikslų tiesiogiai susiję su būsto politika. Šių miestų bendruomeninės organizacijos skyla į dvi grupes: daug dėmesio skiriančias veiklai, susijusiai su viešuoju interesu, ypač viešųjų erdvių tvarkymu (tai galėtų būti viena iš miestų vietos bendruomenių veiklos specifikų), ir daugiausia užsiimančias kultūrinės veiklos organizavimu.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: būsto politika, veiklos tikslai, dalyvavimas, partnerystė, funkcionali vietos bendruomenė.