

SUMMARY

Bottom-up urbanism: The nightmare of participation and the production of space

The so-called top-down approach, as it is now believed, is a rather non-effective way of implementing urban policy. Such paternalistic programs prove ineffective in responding to social needs, do not encourage social inclusion of economically excluded groups and are very capital-intensive. However, the opposite paradigm connected with the free market approach engendered similar criticism. By the same token, both policy types seem to be ineffective, especially after the global crisis of 2007–2008.

In order to solve such problems participatory techniques associated with the social production of urban space are recommended. This trend is also highly visible in Poland and manifests itself in the growing popularity of various forms of public consultations, participatory budgeting, the so-called tactical urbanism or even more advanced participatory techniques. *Bottom-up urbanism* (Polish *urbanistyka oddolna*) is also to be found here. It refers to organizing, adapting and designing urban areas through advanced social participation of local community representatives. This raises questions about what really motivates the use of participation techniques, how successful these solutions are and which users of urban areas are the real beneficiaries of these processes.

The book consists of two main parts. The first describes theoretical and methodological issues. Subsequently, the second one presents three case studies of urban transformations initiated by various grassroots actors. These are: Grzybow-ski Square in Warsaw, High Line Park in New York City, and Karanfilköy neighborhood in Istanbul. The first example illustrates the transformation of a specific inner city public area in Warsaw inspired by an artistic spatial intervention. The second presents altering usage patterns in case of the degraded space of a former industrial railway line in Manhattan that was transformed into a park as a result of an urban movement's actions. The third refers to the informal city form called 'gece-kondu' – a slum housing estate of the Turkish type.

One of the key conclusions resulting from this research is that bottom-up urbanism does not necessarily bring benefits to all of the users of urban areas. It often distorts its original idea and acts only on behalf of the most-privileged groups. In some cases, it rather evokes the so-called nightmare of participation, a phenomenon described by Markus Miessen. Such phenomena definitely require formal activities combined with the political will of the most influential actors in the process of the social production of space. It questions the accuracy of urban policy based on activation of local communities and the implementation of advanced participatory forms. Furthermore, sham meritocratic and evidence-oriented bottom-up urbanism is not free from ideological involvement with its constraints. It seems that in spite of its democratic character and flexibility that are the main advantages of such an approach, it is not possible to apply it in every possible urban context as a universally effective mechanism.