

Civic engagement in the process of land use planning: Case study of small municipalities in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: *Civic participation within the implementation of changes in the territory is a valuable tool for ensuring social sustainability and overall sustainable development; at the same time, it provides valuable feedback for politicians and experts who implement land use planning in practice. The main objective of the article is to identify in what way civic engagement is carried out in the area of land use planning, in what segments and under what circumstances citizens enter the planning process, and how often they use their legal options to influence it. The research was focused on small municipalities in the Ústí nad Labem Region with a population of 350 to 449. The field research was carried out in the form of discussions with individual mayors of the municipalities. In the Czech Republic, participation of citizens in land use planning does take place, but only to a limited extent. Citizens usually enter the process of land use planning if they are pursuing a particular interest or trying to influence an intention which may affect the entire life of the municipality. In the long term, it is appropriate to motivate inhabitants towards participation through the local government presenting the actual results achieved by the use of data and information from citizens. The article provides a comprehensive view of the issues of civic participation and its practice in small municipalities of the Czech Republic, from the viewpoint and perception of their mayors.*

Keywords: *civic engagement, land use planning, land use plan, small municipalities*

Introduction

In the Czech Republic, land use planning is one of two subsystems of spatial planning, whereas strategic planning is the second (complementary) subsystem. Both types of planning are strategic tools for the administration and development of the territory (Půček 2009). From the practical point of view, land use planning comprises a complex search and setting of compromises in the territory within the interest of individual participants, when the opinions of individual actors can even be contradictory (Wokoun 2008). Within spatial planning, the spatial aspects of changes of individual activities in the territory are analysed and interact mutually. At the same time, interaction and creation of compromises are also enabled among the state administration, local self-governments and individual actors in local development, such as enterprises, communities and also individuals (Haughton et al. 2010). A very significant element of planning is also the determination of stages, which sets the time sequence of partial intentions to enable the achievement and fulfilment of set objectives (Hall and Tewder-Jones 2011). Overall, the process of spatial planning provides an opportunity and opens up the space for various subjects to initiate changes in the use of individual territories (Morphet 2011). The evaluation of the process of land use planning is often neglected by direct actors (experts, planners, officials and politicians), but this fact can also be connected with the difficult quantification of results (Grădinaru et al. 2017). That is why it is important to communicate with the inhabitants who are daily users of a given territory and to thoroughly and clearly get to know the problems and needs of the territory. This makes it possible to organise land use planning appropriately, both in relation to time development and to local conditions (Watson 2016).

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A key tool of land use planning in the Czech Republic is a land use plan on the communal level, which, from the viewpoint of the territory, contributes to the efficient management of the municipality and development of the territory in a desired direction (Act No. 128/2000 Coll.). Interventions in the use of individual pieces of land should primarily serve as a tool for improving the quality of life in the respective territory (van Oosten, Witte and Hartmann 2018). Municipalities in the Czech Republic have to decide, on the basis of the Building Act, on the acquisition of a land use plan and also issue the land use plan in the form of provisions of a general character (Act No. 183/2006 Coll.), while the municipality always carries out the process of land use planning in delegated competence (MICR 2008). There are two possibilities for the municipality to obtain a land use plan. The first variant is to deal with obtaining the land use plan through an application at the respective Land Use Planning Department (office of the municipality with extended competence, in whose administrative district the municipality falls.) This variant is enabled explicitly for the municipality by the Building Act. The second option is to carry out the entire process in the municipality through self-help, whereby the municipality directly hires an external contractor to take care of the land use plan.

The settlement structure of the Czech Republic is specific, in terms of the high diversification of municipalities according to population size and their fragmentation in the space. In the Czech Republic, as of 1 January 2017, there were 6 258 self-governing municipalities, of which 3 440 (54.97%) belonged in the size category up to 499 inhabitants. In terms of the total population of the state, 7.87% of the population resided there (CZSO 2017b). Low-population municipalities face specific problems in various areas, compared to larger towns and cities (Kopáček 2018, Slavíková, Raška and Kopáček 2018). This is why the research subject is the partial aspect of the land use planning in municipalities of this type, i.e. participation of citizens in the entire process. Moreover, participation within the implementation of changes in the territory is on a lower level in the Czech Republic compared to other countries. In addition, there is a deficit in the Czech space in the theoretical processing and anchoring of participation (Maier 2012).

The main objective of this article is to identify in what way civic engagement is executed in low-population municipalities in the area of land use planning, in what segments and under what circumstances citizens enter the planning process, and how often they use their legal options to influence it.

Civic engagement and land use planning

Participation means a redistribution of power, allowing citizens to enter into processes that affect the future, while at the same time allowing citizens and processes to deliberately influence them (Arnstein 2019). Working participation is a valuable source of information for planning experts, as it highlights and promotes issues that citizens perceive as a problem (Haklay, Jankowski and Zwoliński 2018). However, at the same time, the problems identified must be part of a context that is generally open to political change (Koontz 2005). For each project, it is always advisable to assess in advance whether participation is relevant and beneficial to the respective intention (Nyseth, Ringholm and Agger 2019). If this condition is met, participatory planning becomes the main tool for promoting and protecting the interests of citizens (Mohammadi 2010).

Engagement in relation to territory in the general meaning of the word means active participation in the creation of a plan by active users of the territory. This assists in the efficient setting and elaboration of the plan, corresponding to the actual needs of the inhabitants of the respective territory (Maier 2012). Engagement is also one of the essential aspects to ensure social sustainability (Rashidfarokhi et al. 2018). In the sphere of land use planning, civic engagement fulfils two main functions: economic rationalisation and political legitimisation (Chabot and Duhaime 1998). Overall, it is appropriate not to perceive participation only as

a component of land use planning, but as a tool which actually influences the development of the territory in a future direction, as well as political decision-making (Boyer 2016). Civic participation can be carried out with use of “hard instruments” that are usually set and defined by legislation (Chabot and Duhaime 1998), such as e.g., public debate (Kytä et al. 2016) and the possibility of commenting and objecting, as well as “soft instruments” that can even have an informal character, such as public surveys or participatory workshops (Golobič and Marušič 2007). If participatory tools are to be effective, local governments should also focus on organising individual options of participation, while avoiding general and unaddressed invitations to public meetings and discussions (Brody, Godschalk and Burby 2003, Nyseth, Ringholm and Agger 2019).

Within the individual countries of the world, but also at the level of the cities in one state, approaches to participation can vary widely, while the culture and customs of the place in question play an important role (Haklay, Jankowski and Zwoliński 2018). Tab. 1 summarises the generally defined partial aspects of participation, from the perspective of selected authors (Monno and Khakee 2011, Plummer and Taylor 2004, Mohammadi 2010). A common feature of all three studies is that participatory planning allows communication among individual actors and the mutual sharing of information within the planning process. At the same time, it makes these intentions accessible and empowers citizens to influence the intended projects, enabling them to shape these intentions and thus to better identify with them. Last but not least, participation and participatory planning reinforce the skills needed for the functioning of civil society in the respective municipalities and communities.

Tab. 1. Identification of partial aspects of participation in land use planning – selected approaches

Monno and Khakee (2011)	Plummer and Taylor (2004)	Mohammadi (2010)
to have an impact on an individual matter that includes personal interest of the participating person	sustainability – both of individual projects and generally in terms of improving living conditions	communicative function – to a great extent, to enable communication among involved parties, individual actors involved in planning and the general public
to influence development in general - the participant seeks to gain power or other resources that will enable him to influence the development	to grant power – all citizens have the same opportunities to participate in the participation and decision-making process itself	
to obtain the knowledge and information to better understand what is currently in question	responsibility – the active involvement of community members leads to greater accountability of local officials and planning experts and overall transparency	normative function – an element of direct and active democracy, where citizens are listened to; at the same time, participation is essential for the legitimacy of the decision-making process
to improve personal competences - ability to participate in public dialogue and prevent potential future problems	efficiency – by engaging the public, project implementation is streamlined, and development initiatives as well as their funding improved	
to form social relationships with other citizens, in order to influence local representatives and other actors	conflict resolution – participation can address conflict among interest groups	institutional functions – citizens have the ability to influence decision making transparently, enabling inclusion of private insights, which should increase public support and improve planning results
	strengthening of civil society – active participation of the community in the development and definition of objectives strengthens its skills and organisational abilities	

Source: Monno and Khakee (2011), Plummer and Taylor (2004), Mohammadi (2010)

To make planning effective and legitimate, it is necessary always to secure a mandate for the local authorities and also to actively draw in individual local actors to the entire process as fully as possible, e.g., residents and landowners (Bjärstig et al. 2018). It is important for these actors to provide feedback on planning, even in areas in which they are not proficient (Holden 2011). In this way, they verify the functionality of each proposed project in terms of its practical feasibility in a particular location (Morphet 2011). However, it is always important and necessary to process these non-expert opinions within the context of expert findings on the territory (Golobič and Marušič 2007).

In general, it is important that local actors take the set land use plan as their own, which their local community itself defines, and therefore do not have the feeling that it was somehow imposed on them from the outside, or at superior planning levels (De Wit and Verheye 2009). Nevertheless, it is possible to understand a municipality as a complex rural social system, where the main and fundamental role is played by the local community which administers the territory in question (Mierzejewska 2017). All citizens should always have the right and real opportunity to participate in the process of land use planning, in all its different phases (Henț and Popoviciu 2015). Feedback from local residents and in general from all local actors on individual planned intentions is very important and beneficial (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). This is because individual decisions that are valid and functional elsewhere, might not be usable in the currently planned location (Shaker and Sirodoev 2016). It is quite unrealistic to transfer with the same success and impact even the most successful and effective solution, because it has been implemented within a different geographic space, under different conditions (Mierzejewska 2017). Thus set planning supports the locally-oriented approach, which takes into account knowledge from local actors who have the best information on the needs of the relevant location (Kotzebue 2016).

In terms of sustainability, civic engagement is important, because the needs of people together with long-term ecological aspects create a counterbalance to economic intentions of both a short- as well as long-term character (Tudor et al. 2014). Moreover, in the future, sufficient civic participation can prevent the protests of citizens against the implementation of planned intentions of the municipality (Eshuis, Klijn and Braun 2014). In the area of participative planning, the significance and use of tools using IT technologies is increasing, e.g., PPGIS - public participation GIS (Brown and Raymond 2014, Kytä et al. 2016, Kahila-Tani et al. 2015). These make it possible to determine the very similar preferences of users in the territory, e.g., in the form of creating emotional maps (Pánek and Pászto 2016) that can also reflect the psychological (emotional) aspects of its residents in individual parts of the territory. This participative mapping helps to solve conflicts regarding the use of land, by verifying the compatibility, or conflict, of individual intentions (Brown, Sanders and Reed 2018). Very often, land use planning neglects the evaluation of its impacts, with the possible solution to define an evaluating framework covering four main areas of land use planning. These are specifically the evaluation of: efficiency of newly developed areas, preservation of agricultural soil, changes and the level of damage to the character of the landscape, and the perception of changes by inhabitants of the respective territory (Grădinaru et al. 2017).

Citizens in the Czech Republic can enter the process of land use planning within the boundaries defined by the Building Act. They may take part in public discussions of the land use plan in its individual phases (concept, design), where they will receive information about the planned intentions. Subsequently, they may make comments and, if any planned intent directly affects their property rights, also objections (Act No. 183/2006 Coll.). In addition to the Building Act, also the Act on Municipalities enables citizens to influence the process of land use planning. The local Municipal Council is the only body in the Czech Republic that has the power to decide on the creation of a land use plan within the independent functions of the municipality. Citizens of the municipality and natural persons who own property on the terri-

tory of the municipality have the possibility to express their opinion on the matters under discussion at a meeting of the Municipal Council, in accordance with the Act on Municipalities. They may thereby also comment on the issue of land use planning if it is currently under discussion by the Municipal Council (Act No. 128/2000 Coll.).

Research methodology

The research was geographically focused on one of the higher territorial self-governing units of the Czech Republic, specifically on the Ústí nad Labem Region, which corresponds to the NUTS3 level. The first criterion for the selection of analysed municipalities was the population size ranging from 350 to 449 inhabitants (as at 31 December 2016). This range was set for the purpose of the greater likelihood of a full-time mayor and elaborated land use plan. Municipalities of smaller population size are less likely to have a full-time mayor and an elaborated land use plan, which might be replaced, for example, just by the definition of built-up land, for which a municipality can apply at the authorised office for land use planning. The second selection criterion was that only municipalities addressing land use planning in the current mandate of the representatives (2014 - 2018), either at the level of the acquisition of a brand new land use plan, or by updating the existing one, which would guarantee the mayor's experience with the process of land use planning during the current term of his office. A total of 16 municipalities met the criteria set (Tab. 2, Fig. 1).

Tab. 2. Municipalities of Ústí nad Labem Region forming a research sample of municipalities according to the set methodology criteria

LAU2 code	name of municipality	number of inhabitants as on 31 December 2016	territory size (ha) as on 31 December 2016	valid land use plan	
				year of creation	update
530620	Přestanov	403	204.1	2017	-
542407	Trnovany	384	304.1	2015	-
542580	Obora	424	529.0	2016	-
562343	Arnoltice	402	553.5	2017	-
564729	Děčany	364	1 236.7	2008	2016
564753	Doksany	381	312.2	2015	-
564818	Dušníky	422	428.1	2008	2018
565237	Lukavec	358	335.3	2016	-
565393	Ploskovice	435	842.1	2015	-
565954	Židovice	380	1 475.9	2015	-
565997	Bitozeves	431	2 096.2	2015	-
566195	Hříškov	395	1 025.9	2015	-
566501	Nepomyšl	389	2 822.6	2016	-
567019	Žiželice	400	356.5	2016	-
567345	Patokryje	446	262.9	2015	-
567469	Bořislav	391	751.4	2008	2016

Source: CZSO (2017a), land use plans of municipalities, own processing

The local survey was conducted in the form of interviews with the mayors of individual municipalities. The interviews were semi-structured, individually varying in length from 20 to 40 minutes. All interviews were conducted in all municipalities by the same interviewer, in order to ensure continuity and uniformity of interviewing. All respondents were promised the anonymity of their statements and the information provided. For this reason, after completing

the field research, individual interviews were encoded before their subsequent processing and assessment. Out of the total number of municipalities, interviews could be carried out in 11 of them (Fig. 1), which is 68.75% in relative terms. From the point of view of the territorial diversification of the Ústí nad Labem Region according to the affiliation of individual municipalities to districts, a total of 6 out of 7 districts were covered within the research. The district of Litoměřice with 5 municipalities was the most represented district in the research. It also comprises the most municipalities out of all the districts of the Ústí nad Labem Region. Two municipalities were in the Louny district, while the districts of Ústí nad Labem, Teplice, Most and Děčín had one municipality each in the research sample. The only district in which no municipality met the set criteria, was the district of Chomutov.

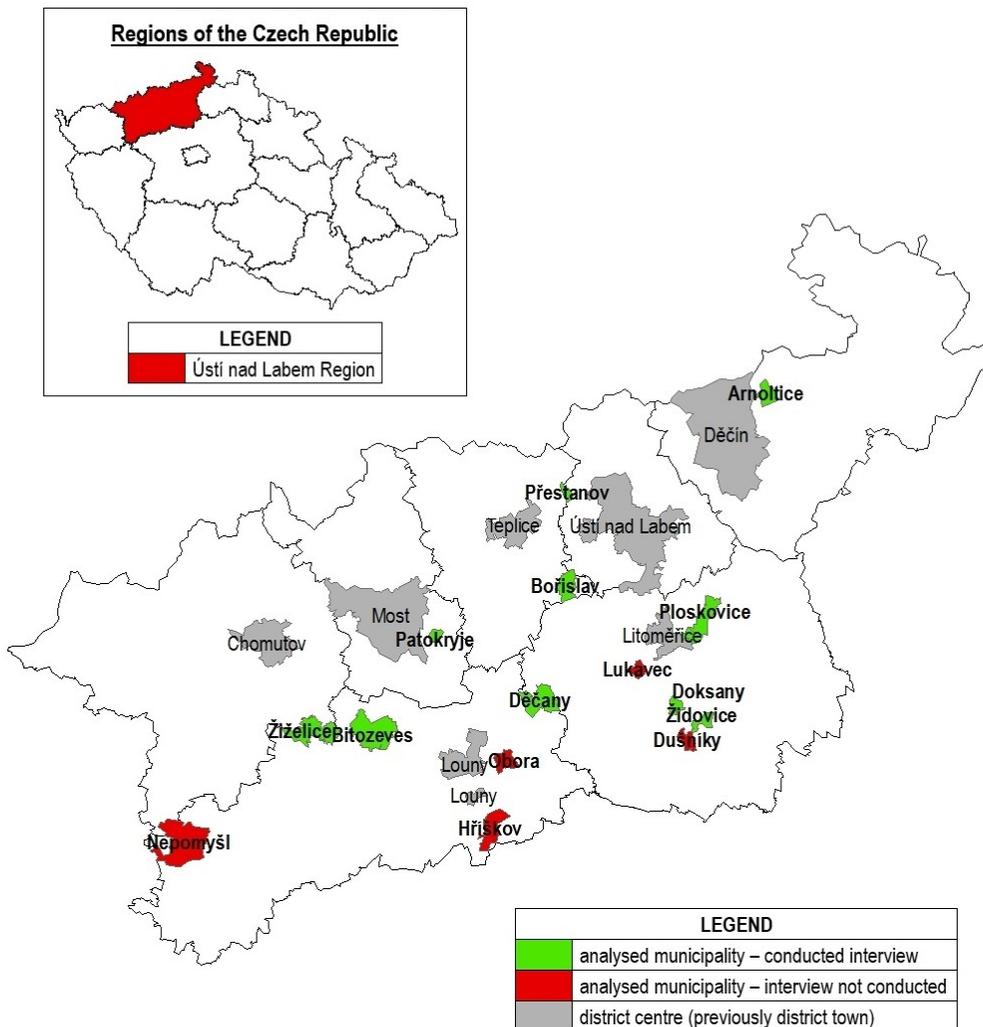


Fig. 1. Ústí nad Labem Region with the designation of municipalities included in the field research; Source: Own processing

The reason for not conducting an interview in 5 municipalities, in two cases was the direct refusal of an interview. In the first case, this was due to the immense workload of the municipality's mayor; in the second case, due to the feeling of incompetence regarding the relevant issue. The reason was that this particular mayor had not been in office from the beginning of the current mandate of the representatives (from 2014), but only for one year (from 2017), so he did not have any personal experience with the issues in question. In the remaining 3 municipalities, the interview was not conducted due to a failure to contact the mayors of those municipalities. Contacting mayors in the form of e-mails and subsequently telephonically proceeded at the beginning of 2018, specifically in January and February. The interviews were carried out in February and March. Personal information of the individual respondents is summarised in Tab. 3.

Tab. 3. *Mayors of municipalities – respondents with whom interviews were conducted*

LAU2 code	name of municipality	date of interview	Particulars of Mayor			
			age	gender	time in office	full-time
530620	Přestanov	9 February 2018	45 years	female	4 years	no
542407	Trnovany	27 February 2018	39 years	female	8 years	yes
562343	Arnoltice	1 March 2018	50 years	male	20 years	no
564729	Děčany	27 February 2018	66 years	male	12 years	yes
564753	Doksany	26 February 2018	42 years	male	4 years	no
565393	Ploskovice	7 February 2018	70 years	female	16 years	yes
565954	Židovice	26 February 2018	68 years	male	8 years	yes
565997	Bitoveves	20 February 2018	43 years	male	4 years	no
567019	Žiželice	23 February 2018	65 years	male	32 years	yes
567345	Patokryje	7 February 2018	58 years	male	8 years	yes
567469	Bořislav	5 March 2018	47 years	male	12 years	yes

Source: Interviews with mayors of municipalities, own processing

The structure of the interviews was focused on three main areas, the first one being the process of creating the land use plan, where the mayors were asked about the problems and barriers they encountered while working on the land use plan and about the complexity of the whole process in terms of administrative, human resources and financial aspects. In addition, they were asked about civic participation, for evaluation of the legislative instruments of participation and how they perceived the role of Mayor in the process of land use planning in their type of municipality. Questions within the second area concerned the municipality's land use plan: whether the currently valid land use plan was the first land use plan of the municipality, what the incentive for its acquisition was and why the municipality had in the past proceeded to update the land use plan. The mayors were also asked to look towards the future, whether they expected an imminent need to update the land use plan or thought that the current land use plan was adequate. The third and final area focused on the assessment of the land use plan as a tool for development. The questions concerned whether the mayors considered the land use plan as a key tool for development of the municipality, whether the fact that the very existence of a land use plan was an important factor for the further development of the municipality, how citizens understood this tool and how it could be utilised in practice. The interviews, including the individual questions, are included in this article in the form of Annex 1, while the findings of Questions 3, 4, 9 and 10 were important to achieve the objective of this study focused on civic participation.

Results

Participation in land use planning of citizens of small municipalities does occur. However, from the point of view of the mayors of individual municipalities, this is only to a limited extent. There is a small group of citizens in some municipalities who monitor public events in the villages. For that reason, they are also generally actively interested in land use plans and enter the process of land use planning with their observations. Nevertheless, usually only some individuals are thus motivated. Citizens enter the process of land use planning in a municipality to a greater extent at a time when a specific objective is under discussion, which they would like to achieve and usually have some personal benefit and profit from. In practice, this is usually the effort to change the purpose of plots of land from agricultural to building sites, as the value of the specific plots thereby increases. Further, equally actively, citizens enter the process if there is a plan announced in the municipality, e.g., a development project of a large extent or a business development with which citizens do not identify. Through participation in the process of land use planning, they try to influence the intended plan by their actions. In such cases, land use planning is understood as a tool which can prevent these objectives, or at least limit them to an acceptable appearance and form. The basic reasons for the participation and their individual motives are summarised in the scheme below (Fig. 2).

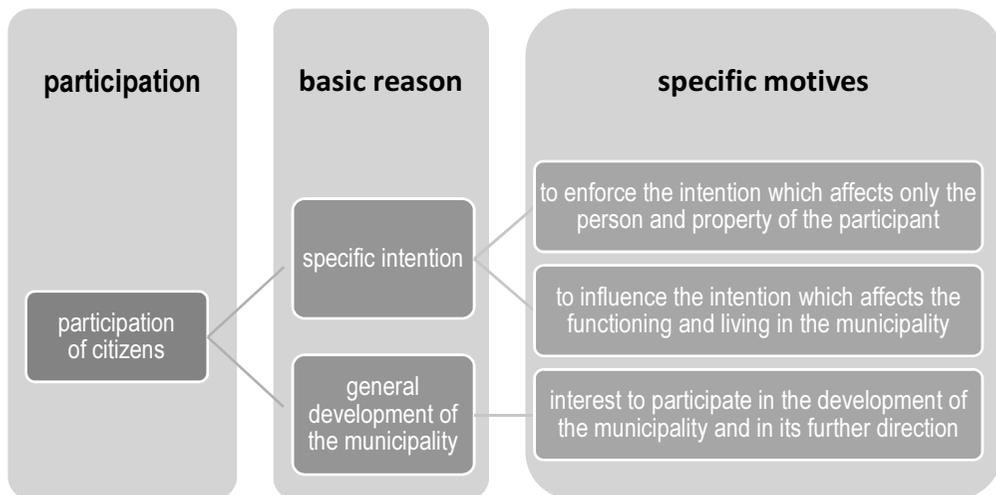


Fig. 2. Reasons and motives for the participation of citizens in land use planning in low-population municipalities; Source: Adjusted according to Holden (2011), own research and processing

From the point of view of the individual types of participation, the highest number (81.8%) was recorded in a specifically-personal type of participation, where an individual tried to influence or enforce his or her individual intention. The remaining two types of participation, specifically-municipal, where the individual seeks to influence or enforce an intention that is related to the functioning of the municipality, and the generally-universal, where the individual shows a general interest in the functioning of the municipality and actively participates in its development and further direction, are experienced only by a minority of mayors, specifically 36.4% and 27.3%. With regard to the overall participation assessment, almost three-quarters of the mayors interviewed stated that in their municipality citizens were mostly passive in terms of land use planning (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4. *Types of participation in land use planning and their quantity*

Type of participation	Frequency of participation by municipalities	Selected statements by mayors
specifically – personal	9 (81.8%)	<p>"On the side of the citizens, but mostly it was just that they wanted to include their land in the areas intended for construction ... so it was rather the financial interests of those people" (Interview 2).</p> <p>"There are no comments or objections of citizens to the land use plan if they are not specifically affected by any of the changes, if this is not about their land" (Interview 3).</p> <p>"If some citizens were directly affected, of course, there was a great deal of interest" (Interview 6).</p> <p>"Only a few people participated, who had an interest in it, who came with the wish that something was to be built on their land, but that's a small percentage" (Interview 10)..</p>
specifically – municipal	4 (36.4%)	<p>"There were two changes to the land use plan, within which there was also participation by citizens, so that nobody in the municipality would start business in an undesirable way" (Interview 2).</p> <p>"There is a corridor for a planned high-speed line leading across our territory... now we already know that the route will not lead through our municipality, but still people cannot build there, even if they had an interest in it" (Interview 2).</p> <p>"We have a road relocation inserted from the regional authority in the territory of our municipality, but to an entirely unfortunate location... we disagree with it, yet we must respect it in our land use plan ... people were very interested in it, but in the spirit that they did not want relocation there" (Interview 6).</p> <p>"When people want to build here and even already own a plot, some are interested in the proposed areas in the neighbourhood... apparently the land use plan for them means the certainty that we will not have something we don't want in the village" (Interview 7).</p>
generally – universal	3 (27.3%)	<p>"Some people took it that something was happening in the village and they were interested in it, so they tried to actively participate in the preparation of the land use plan" (interview 2)</p> <p>"We have individuals in the municipality who follow the website of the municipality and read all the documents we publish ... from my personal experience, I know that they have studied the land use plan, among other things, and are familiar with it" (Interview 6).</p> <p>"Interest in land use planning... there are some exceptions of citizens who are generally active and do everything in the village, but otherwise I think they are generally few in number" (Interview 11).</p>
mostly passive attitude of the population	8 (72.7%)	<p>"I estimate that 80% of people did not care about the preparations around the land use plan" (Interview 2).</p> <p>"I have the impression that almost none of the citizens is interested in the land use plan... The land use plan is of minimal interest" (Interview 3).</p> <p>"Of the citizens ... unless it is their land, nobody cares at all" (Interview 4).</p> <p>"Citizens have little interest in land use planning" (Interview 5).</p> <p>"If they are not directly concerned, they usually have minimal interest in the land use plan" (Interview 8).</p> <p>"Citizens did not pay much attention to this, which is a shame" (Interview 11).</p>

Source: Interviews with mayors of municipalities, own processing

Within land use planning, low-population municipalities usually utilise “hard tools” for civic engagement as defined by legislation. Mayors of municipalities consider the mechanisms determined by legislation, through which citizens can enter the process of land use planning, i.e. public debate, or the submission of comments and objections, as valuable and important, because they come directly from users of the particular territory and thus provide valuable feedback for the proposed intentions. In some municipalities, the discussions on land usage are problematic. These concern the use of land which has its purpose decided from the principle of superiority at a higher planning level, i.e. Spatial Development Policy of the Czech Republic

or Regional Development Principles. These include, e.g., the resurfacing of roads in high-speed corridors which municipalities must implement in their land use plans, even if this objective does not suit the ideas of the locals on the further development of the municipality. Citizens accept these plans with some displeasure. Moreover, in some cases, only possible alternative solutions are concerned, while it is possible that the plans will never be implemented in the municipal territory.

The research confirmed that, within the framework of activities that municipalities can influence on their own, land use planning is a valuable tool, for example in setting barriers for potential (non-)implementation of undesirable business activities (Tab. 5). Three municipalities mentioned that, during the planning process, these issues were dealt with: Děčany dealt with the intention to build a pig farm in the municipality. Bořislav dealt with the intention of the investor to establish a waste dump and a rendering plant in the village. Přestanov dealt with the situation of possible production plants disturbing the immediate surroundings, which was preventatively forbidden by the land use plan. Citizens were involved in the matters, so participation contributed to the fact that the respective matters were discussed in the municipality, negotiated and finally resolved by the appropriate adjustment of the land use plan. A higher level of participation in municipalities is found in cases related to the definition of new areas for construction. As this is a process in which the assets of citizens appreciate, they are actively involved. Nevertheless, ultimately their proposals are not always accepted. Sometimes it is not possible to accept the proposals because of the protection of the landscape and Nature; sometimes it is not possible because of the potential changes for the municipality as a whole. In addition to avoiding unwanted business activities, the marking of areas for new construction intended for housing is also an important area where civic participation can significantly influence the proposals of the land use plan and practical adjustments to it.

Tab. 5. Intentions that were accompanied in municipalities by civic participation and their results

name of municipality	intention	results
Přestanov, Bořislav	high-speed line	is not in the competence of the municipality; the intention is based on the superior document of the State and Region (Spatial Development Policy of the Czech Republic and Regional Development Principles)
Trnovany	road relocation	is not in the competence of the municipality; the intention is based on the superior document of the Region (Regional Development Principles)
Přestanov, Děčany, Bořislav	undesirable entrepreneurial activity	current land use plans do not enable the implementation of undesirable intentions
Arnoltice, Žiželice, Židovice, Trnovany, Přestanov, Patokryje, Děčany, Bořislav	evaluation of own land	land use plans enable implementation where possible, but the intention justification is always taken into account, as well as the benefit to the municipality as a whole

Source: Interviews with mayors of municipalities, own processing

None of the analysed municipalities utilise tools that can be indicated as “soft”. Nevertheless, due to the small population size, most inhabitants in most municipalities know each other, as well as the mayor and individual representatives. Therefore, in the period of discussion of the land use plan, there are frequent informal and unofficial talks on the relevant issues, which provide valuable information to the political representation.

In general, citizens in small municipalities are aware of land use planning. Although in most municipalities access of citizens to land use planning is mainly passive, more than 90% of mayors reported personal experience with some formal (legislatively anchored) method of

participation, while more than half of the mayors stated that a number of discussions are taking place around land use planning on an informal level, such as personal talks between the Mayor and individual representatives of citizens of the municipality, etc. (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6. *Methods of participation in land use planning and their quantity*

method of participation	frequency of participation by municipalities	Selected statements by mayors
formal	10 (90.9%)	<i>"I consider written comments and objections as well as verbal suggestions in public discussions as a valuable tool for adjustments to the land use plan"</i> (Interview 1). <i>"Comments and objections were raised. We had to deal with them in some way"</i> (Interview 2). <i>"Citizens were actively interested in attending public hearings"</i> (Interview 7) <i>"Residents made some comments e.g., whether they wanted to change the character of the land"</i> (Interview 8).
informal	6 (54.5%)	<i>"People call me or come to the office and ask if it is possible or not"</i> (Interview 2). <i>"As we are a small municipality, I know everyone here personally and I talked to everyone who was interested about the overall preparation of the land use plan... and about the individual steps of the process"</i> (Interview 6). <i>"Citizens are aware of the land use plan, and if they need something concerning it, they come to the office and we are able to explain the Plan to them"</i> (Interview 9).

Source: Interviews with mayors of municipalities, own processing

Very often they come to the municipal office, or the relevant Land Use Planning Office, to consult about their intentions and compliance with the land use plan. These consultations are usually provided without any problem. Sometimes citizens react to the land use plan only after its publication, and request changes to it. In most cases, the changes are not implemented, because a change in the land use plan would need to be reimbursed, so if preferences do not change in the course of time, they postpone their individual requests until the preparation of a new land use plan or its update.

Discussion

On a general level, the number of citizens of the Czech Republic entering the process of land use planning is low (Maier 2012). A higher level of activity is apparent if citizens address a specific intention that affects them directly. The research also confirmed that citizens identify with the plan better if individual intentions are part of their own plan, based directly on the communal level (De Wit and Verheye 2009) and are not determined by the Principles of Rural Development for District or the Policy of Rural Development of the Czech Republic. Tools for participation of citizens defined by legislation, such as public debate (Chabot and Duhaime 1998, Kytta et al. 2016) are valuable to land use planning, because they support the locally oriented approach (Kotzebue 2016), which to a large extent uses the insights of local citizens who best know the territory of the relevant municipality from everyday life (Morphet 2011). Insights into the territory by users are also important, for the reason that they provide feedback to the proposals of experts who do not have a political mandate or overall responsibility for the process of planning in the municipality (van Zeijl-Rozema and Martens 2011). Nevertheless, it is necessary to evaluate the suggestions from the public in the context of expert knowledge (Golobic and Marusic 2007). At the same time, local residents provide feedback through participation, in that the intended plan corresponds to the ideas of local residents on the future development of the respective municipality and its territory (Dassen, Kunseler and van Kessenich 2012). That is why it is important for the effective processing of a land use plan that all inhabitants of the municipal territory have the possibility of entering the process

(Björstig et al. 2018, Haughton et al. 2010, Henț and Popoviciu 2015). Every municipality is unique and specific, and therefore measures that are effective in one municipality cannot be applied to a large extent and with the same effect in others (Mierzejewska 2017, Shaker and Sirodoev 2016).

The dynamics of participation have different degrees within various contexts (Brownill 2009). It is always important to analyse the essence of participation and the intended purpose of the effort of participants, to properly understand the incentives of the participation (Bryson et al. 2012). It is necessary for local representatives and planning experts to distinguish between different types of participatory incentives in order to create the right conditions for citizens living in the municipality, ideally according to the expectations of the inhabitants, but at the same time continuously to reflect the public interest. This guarantees the effective and sustainable development of the municipality as a whole. It is important to discuss all intentions thoroughly in the broadest possible context, and, through this interaction, to build and strengthen the social relationships and competences of individual actors in the municipality to participate in public debates (Monno and Khakee 2011, Plummer and Taylor 2004).

Overall, it is quite crucial for civic engagement in land use planning to discover whether the low level of participation is merely a symptom of generally low social engagement, or just an indicator and consequence of the fact that citizens in a given location are satisfied with the situation and so do not have the need to solve anything. The low level of engagement of inhabitants can also be evidence that the classic method of participation is not effective enough (Kahila-Tani et al. 2015). On the side of local management, civic participation should not be perceived as a necessary element of the process of land use planning, but as a real factor actually affecting the direction of the development of the municipality (Boyer 2016). It is important for the local administration to seek tools to effectively engage citizens in the participatory process. The municipality should not only adhere to obligatory elements set by legislation, but also seek less formal ways, e.g., in the form of creating emotional maps (Pánek and Pászto 2016). Specifically, in the case of emotional maps, the local authorities do not actually ask citizens about land use planning, but how they feel when they move in certain locations of the respective territory. Feelings thus mapped provide valuable feedback on a specific territory as well as for land use planning. A very positive phenomenon is the fact that, in municipalities where a certain intention was to be implemented that would affect the functioning of the municipality, citizens were able to mobilise and participate in the land use planning activity. The legislation sets up the land use planning process so as also to facilitate unwanted intentions in the municipality to be effectively suppressed according to general consensus. If citizens are not directly affected by the Plan, they usually do not participate in the land use planning process. In essence, this fact is not detrimental, because if citizens are not specifically affected by the intention, the information from their side might not be entirely relevant to the project (Nyseth, Ringholm and Agger 2019).

In order to motivate inhabitants to become engaged, feedback is important on the side of the local authorities, e.g., in the form of the presentation of results achieved, using data and information from inhabitants. Motivation of the population to participate in the future (Kyttä et al. 2016) is thus increased. It is equally important to evaluate continuously (and if possible also generally) the impacts of land use planning and reflect on the perception of changes by the population of the respective territory (Grădinaru et al. 2017). Moreover, the results of studies confirm that, in the context of solving specific tasks, residents are mostly capable of communicative rationality (Holden 2011). If people are engaged in the planning process, it contributes to social sustainability (Rashidfarokhi et al. 2018) and, at the same time, the smart development of the countryside can be mentioned (Naldi et al. 2015). Last but not least, in low-population municipalities that are the subject of this research, informal relations are also of great importance. Residents of the municipality know each other, and therefore can also discuss issues with politicians at informal occasions (Kopáček 2018). Informal relations and mutual personal familiarity of individual inhabitants support the development of participation in municipalities that are smaller in terms of population, while the very technicist nature of land use planning may deter part of the population from participation.

Conclusions

Based on the research, the basic reasons and specific motives were identified, as a consequence of which citizens of low-population municipalities become engaged in land use planning. These incentives are primarily intentions of a specific character with an impact on the person or property of a particular citizen, or on the overall functioning of the municipality which residents try to implement, alter or suppress entirely within their engagement. A small percentage of citizens enter the process of land use planning only because they want to participate generally in the development of the municipality. Nevertheless, there are a few such individuals in almost every municipality.

Overall, research has shown that mayors have personal experience of participation. Furthermore, it emerged that civic participation does not take place to a large extent during land use planning, but there is a general consensus that there is awareness of land use planning. If citizens do not have specific information about the issue, they are able to obtain it easily, e.g., by contacting the Mayor. Furthermore, municipal authorities as well as land use planning departments are ready to provide information and in practice very often provide information services to citizens. The fact that the apparatuses of municipalities are capable and willing to provide information is important for the support and development of participation and the mutual relevant communication among the actors.

Due to the fact that the participation in land use planning in the Czech Republic is on a lower level compared to other countries, and there is also a deficit in terms of theory and overall anchoring (Maier 2012), this research attempts to reduce the deficit by analysing the current state of participation in low-population municipalities, and to provide suggestions for improving the situation. The focus on small municipalities was chosen for the specificity of the Czech settlement system, which is characterised by the fact that it has a larger number of self-governing and low-population municipalities.

Civic participation is a valuable element of land use planning, because it is a feedback for experts and politicians (Golobič and Marušič 2007). However, in the planning practice, many incentives may delay the entire process. After analysing individual selected municipalities, it can be stated that the system of legislative (so-called 'hard') tools for civic participation is adequate, as none of the respondents mentioned any insufficiency of these tools or proposals for the implementation of other proposals to the legislation. Overall, it is appropriate and desirable that citizens express their opinion on the intentions that can directly influence them in the course of their implementation. This fact can be considered adequate for the effective and correct preparation of the land use plan. By expressing themselves, citizens simultaneously support the debate on the intended intentions. Given that this is happening in practice, it can be stated that participation in land use planning works, and that citizens are able to react and take advantage of how to influence the process.

Overall, it is appropriate also to seek, in addition to formal tools that might not be wholly effective (Kahila-Tani et al. 2015), informal tools that do not even at first sight primarily seem to be related to land use planning at all, but which provide feedback and information on the users of the territory. In order to keep citizens engaged continuously, it is always necessary on the part of local authorities to provide information and to emphasise the actual usability and usefulness of information already provided by citizens in the past (Kyttä et al. 2016). This research was focused exclusively on the perception of civic participation by mayors, and so it would certainly be beneficial to conduct a survey examining the motivation of individual citizens with regard to their engagement. It would also be appropriate to analyse the practice of civic participation and to compare it with larger-population municipalities and towns, and to identify in which aspects the participation of citizens differs, and in which aspects it is the same.

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Annex I: Structure of interview with mayors of municipalities

Part A – Process of creation of the land use plan

- 1) Are there any barriers that you have encountered in creating, acquiring or approving of a land use plan?
- 2) How difficult was it for a municipality of your population size to implement the preparation and approval of the land use plan?
 - a) How demanding was it from an administrative point of view?
 - b) How demanding was it in terms of human resources?
 - c) How demanding was it in terms of finances (municipal money)?
- 3) How would you evaluate the participation of citizens of your municipality in the process of preparing and approving the land use plan?
 - a) Have the comments and objections of citizens been a valuable tool for adjusting the land use plan?
- 4) In your opinion, how important is the position of Mayor in a municipality of your size for the process of land use planning?

Part B – Land use plan of the respective municipality

- 5) What do you think are the most important areas that the land use plan addresses? (2-3 specific areas)
- 6) Is the current land use plan also the first land use plan of your municipality?
 - a) If so, what was the main driver for your municipality to acquire the land use plan?
 - b) If not, what was the main driver to update the land use plan (obtain a new Plan) in your municipality?
- 7) Is the currently valid land use plan adequate (covering all the necessary areas for the functioning of the municipality)?
 - a) If so, when do you think it will be necessary to modify or update the land use plan?
 - b) If not, in which area(s) is an update required?

Part C – Evaluation of the land use plan as a tool of the municipality for Land Use development

- 8) Do you consider the land use plan as a key tool for the development of your municipality?
 - a) If so, in which main aspects?
 - b) If not, why not?
- 9) Is the fact of the very existence of the land use plan a positive factor for further development of the municipality?
 - a) In attracting new residents (e.g., construction of family houses)?
 - b) For the arrival of new investors and entrepreneurs?
- 10) Do the citizens of your municipality know about the land use plan? Do they know how to use it?