

## REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

**Title:** *"Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design"*

**Candidate:** Marta Siemińska

**Candidate for the degree of:** PhD in the field of Arts, in the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation

**Institution:** The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, Doctoral School

**Place and Year of Submission:** Wrocław, Poland, 2024

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**Location and Date:** Hvanneyri, Iceland | May-June, 2025

### Introduction to the Review

The objective of this assessment is to examine the academic criteria, singularity, framework, structure, relevance, and contribution of Marta Siemińska's dissertation, as well as her creative output and professional practice in the field of design and fine arts. The following evaluation considers written and visual documents, as well as her contribution to current discourses in the field.

The doctoral work submitted by Marta Siemińska for the PhD in the field of Arts, in the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation, consists of the following integrated material:

1. The dissertation, *titled Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design*.
2. Mind map as thesis cartography: a document titled *Author's Proprietary Model of The Design-Research Process*, designed as a fold-out, presenting a visual mapping of the research process, content, and main concepts.
3. Curriculum vitae and portfolio of artistic-design projects and academic research.
4. Supplementary printed materials that include two items: the zine *Designing for Communities* and the *Impuls* tool, which features a fold-out brochure containing visual and written content of a conceptual prototype intended to support participatory approaches to urban management.

Each of these materials contributes in a particular and complementary way to the overall dissertation. This content will be examined in detail in specific sections.

## **ACADEMIC AND PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE OF THE CANDIDATE**

### **The Academic and Practice-Based Research of Marta Siemińska**

Marta Siemińska is a practicing designer with a grounded academic background in design and architecture. Her experience in participatory action and design of public spaces contributes to the framework of the doctoral dissertation, which combines academic research with practical engagement and reflective and critical analysis.

#### **Academic Background**

Marta holds a Master's degree in Interior Design from the Academy of Fine Arts (ASP) in Wrocław, Poland and a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. Her education has been enriched by participation in Erasmus programs in Brussels, Paris and Marseille, showing a broad and multicultural perspective on urban and social space. Her academic background and scholarly experiences have traced a coherent and consistent path that leads to the culmination of her doctoral thesis.

#### **Professional Practice**

Marta has engaged in various participatory research projects and has taken part in leading and co-leading initiatives focused on community engagement and social participation. Since 2021, Marta has been working as a specialist in participation and social research at *Soc Tech Lab Foundation* a nonprofit based in Wrocław, focuses on support the development of civic activity and non-governmental organizations by combining research, creativity, and technology to design. In parallel, since 2020, she has developed a professional practice involving exhibition design, interior design (both commercial and domestic), scenography, graphic design, and spatial narratives through collective and independent projects, demonstrating an interdisciplinary and broad-scope approach to spatial practice and contextual design.

#### **Research & Exhibitions**

Parallel to her professional work, Marta has actively participated in exhibitions, workshops and research activities related to her field. These activities have taken place in various cities, such as Wrocław, Brussels, Paris and Beirut, reflecting her engagement with diverse cultural and urban contexts. It is worth highlighting that her practical and research experiences contribute to the relevance and scope of her doctoral approach.

#### **Comments on the Practice-Based Research and Academic Practice of Marta**

From the above mentioned experiences in the academic and research fields, and professional practice, Marta demonstrates a wide experience in design field and in particular in the area in which her dissertation is situated. Along her academic and professional trajectory, Marta has well integrated theoretical research with practice. This approach reinforces her doctoral work, especially in the field of action research

and social participation in urban space, where in situ experience and applied knowledge are essential for critical exploration.

## **PORTFOLIO OF ARTISTIC PRACTICE REVIEW: COMMENTS AND INSIGHTS**

Marta introduces her academic-research and professional experience in her curriculum vitae, which is complemented by a well-structured portfolio of artistic practice and outcomes that includes six sections reflecting the range of her work and experiences in which she has participated or collaborated. The portfolio is organized into six sections:

1. Achievements in Design
2. Scientific and Knowledge-Sharing Achievements
3. Academic Activities
4. Courses and Conferences
5. Projects Prior to 2021
6. Commercial Projects

This organization provides a clear understanding of her development as a designer and researcher, as well as the scope of her professional engagement in different design fields.

### **The Artistic Portfolio Structured Aligns with the Doctoral Research**

One significant observation is that the majority of the project-related research achievements presented in the artistic portfolio corresponds to the period of her doctoral research (2021-2024), which are directly linked to the topics explored in her dissertation. In this sense, the portfolio clearly demonstrates the integration between her academic research and field-oriented practice. Especially significant are projects that are discussed in detail in the dissertation as case studies, such as the *Temporary Public Space Development Project* and *Participatory Activities* within *Maelbeek Vallée Verte* (Brussels, 2023), in which Marta, alongside a multidisciplinary team, was co-responsible for the design, and facilitation of the participatory process.

### **Portfolio Key Approach: Facilitating Design through Collaborative Action, Co-designing Processes and Co-creation**

One aspect to be mentioned is that the portfolio highlights a broad and inclusive understanding of the design discipline, where the emphasis is not only focused on physical spaces or objects, but on participatory actions and processes. Most of the projects and actions are documented through visual materials and photographs that reflect these collective dynamics, evidencing the active involvement of multiple individuals and communities. This reinforces one of the key lines of her thesis, based on the idea that the designer is not a singular author, but also a facilitator of collective processes, expanding the traditional understanding of the conventional role of the designer.

### **Note to improve portfolio readability**

The portfolio might be further enriched by the inclusion of a project index at the beginning, which would allow readers to identify easily the different artworks presented.

## **Comments on the Mind Map as Thesis Cartography**

In the final part of the printed thesis volume, a relevant mind map document is included: *Author's Proprietary Model of The Design-Research Process*, which synthesizes and explains graphically the central concept and the entire process followed by the author towards the elaboration of the thesis. I consider this document of vital importance, on the one hand for its ability to graphically synthesize the complex procedure that was carried out during that period of research, and on the other hand, for its inscription in the idea raised by the author, referring to the design discipline's contribution by designing the process itself, and clearly this document reflects and synthesizes this concept. The visual mind map unfolds, branches out and displays in a structured a comprehensive mapping of the dissertation process. This conceptual and graphic tool presents the various stages, contents, site-locations, themes, timelines through relational diagrams and charts. The mind map includes the author's involvement, key moments of development, as well as the geographical and contextual frameworks. It serves as a visual synthesis of the project's evolution and concept's internal logic, offering a summarized and visual overview of the entire process.

## **ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **Framing the Scope and Focus of the Research**

The thesis, *Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design*, provides a well-defined approach to public space design and participatory methodologies, with special emphasis on the urban context of Belgium and Poland. Throughout the process, Marta provides an overview of the research topic, identifying key concerns and challenges, including historical and present aspects, in order to engage, understand and implement specific projects and actions in the local and international context. With particular focus on the Brussels scenario, the author implements participatory action research and explains how these action research experiences are interpolated, translated, articulated and implemented in the local context of Wrocław; therefore, to achieve a well-oriented approach to the current challenges in this specific field.

The thesis approach is relevant due to its framework as it relates to the following context: considering that over the past decades, our public spaces have been increasingly affected by social, economic and environmental issues. In most cases, design models developed by the public or private sphere in relation to urban spaces are often driven by self-interest and determined by short-term political or electoral agendas. At the same time, city planning and urban design outlines are developed by entities or planning departments, without questioning or assuming the task of going out into the street — asking, listening, identifying, sharing, mapping, committing, proposing and co-creating together with the inhabitants; ignoring the importance of opening citizen action and collaborative design processes where the residents can express themselves and participate based on their own experiences and civic life experiences. In this sense, recognizing participatory action becomes a

crucial aspect and opportunity to understand collectively the existing conditions of inhabited community spaces in order to jointly generate appropriate questions and responses.

To address these concerns and challenges, numerous strategies, approaches, frameworks, investigations have emerged from diverse perspectives and from multiple actors and communities, including academia, organizations, bodies, collectives, researchers and practitioners. In relation to design disciplines and their approach to public space, they have become aware that an essential perspective is not merely to design the final spaces or objects within inhabited environments, but to take a step forward, based on on-site experiences towards engagement, prototyping, co-creation and the development of participatory design processes that can be accessible and relevant to stakeholders and the general public.

In this context, the dissertation *Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design* addresses these issues and raises key challenges at the community level, taking into account concerns such as the democratic deficit, insufficient citizen participation and the erosion of local identity, addressing them through inclusive, open and action-based methods at the city level.

It should be noted that Marta introduces these reflections, providing insights from her personal, academic and professional experience, supported by a theoretical and critical framework, and through a series of case studies, while actively engaging in various in-situ experiences across diverse contexts and geographies.

To examine these themes, Marta raises key questions about integrating genuine participation into design practices, focusing on the role and commitment of designers by offering creative responses that engage communities and foster participatory practices, including the use of local resources and socially driven methods for engaging with public space. The thesis addresses these questions by exploring *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) as a methodological and practical tool, and applying the *meta-design* framework, understood “as the design of design processes” in order to guide responsive and collaborative design practices.

A key contribution of the research work is how the dissertation proposes action-based research, which implies that, on the basis of a theoretical and contextual framework, a set of strategies, actions and processes are developed through the active participation. This approach is tested in practice by Marta, who is actively involved in community projects to shape urban environments.

## **STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, CONTENT, AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

To develop these ideas further, the thesis follows a coherent structure, starting with an introduction that outlines the main objective of the research and raises the key questions. Thereafter, the main questions are developed by tracing a path from theory to practice, and from reflection to implementation and articulation, culminating in critical conclusions developed throughout the chapters. The thesis is articulated in a consistent and coherent structure, organized into the following seven chapters:

### **Introduction and Contextualization**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The introduction provides the thesis overview and the outline of the research, presenting both the methodological approach and the content of the chapters. It presents the central thesis and research questions, framed around collectivity and inclusive processes. The introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the thesis by presenting the motivation for the research and situating it within current discourses on participatory urbanism and co-creation of public space. It also highlights a methodology that incorporates *Participatory Action Research* and *Meta-design* as key tools for facilitating participation and reflective design. The introduction also refers to key influences, such as Archigram's speculative approach and Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City*, extended through David Harvey's critical perspective on spatial justice.

What is noteworthy in this introductory stage, is that these concepts are further grounded by the author's participation in the in the *Polish KRM* congresses, where through her collaboration with local stakeholders she enriched her expertise in participatory and action-based methods. Therefore, the inclusion of an overview of the thesis structure positively contributes to the clarity and coherence of this introductory chapter.

Another aspect that I consider significant in this introductory chapter concerns the moment when the author presents the initial motivation that would eventually lead her to become interested in public space processes. This motivation begins with a seminal case study in Brussels, where Marta's attachment to Place Jacques Franck, during a previous academic stay in 2018/2019, initiated an ongoing line of design, research and field involvement in participatory actions in Brussels that will be articulated and culminate in her thesis work.

### **Building up the Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

#### **Chapter 2: Urban Public Space**

On the second chapter Marta elaborates on theoretical aspects related to urban public space and offers a reflective exploration of the current challenges facing urban public spaces in contemporary cities. By addressing both the physical deterioration of urban public spaces and the complex social dynamics, the chapter provides a broad overview of the multiplicity of issues associated with public space today. An interesting contribution of this chapter is based on participation as a means to respond to these challenges, taking into account the absence of democratic engagement in urban decision making. In this way, the chapter raises the argument

on participatory design as a conceptual and practical orientation, based on its key principles and its capacity to foster inclusiveness and resilience in the configuration of public environments.

A positive aspect of this chapter lies in contextualizing these principles in the Polish legal and institutional framework. This particular framework increases the relevance of the chapter, and evidences the author's consideration of local specificities. Furthermore, the introduction of the levels of participation and participatory tools proposed in the chapter brings conceptual insight and supports the understanding of which are the useful tools to address socio-political challenges through design processes.

It is notable in this chapter the contribution of artistic practices as case studies in participatory processes, which emphasizes as a contribution beyond aesthetics; it is placed as a particular approach to stimulate social commitment and strengthen community identity. This approach enriches the chapter and opens the way to creative forms of community participation. Considering the above, the chapter achieves a theoretical and practical background for the dissertation's central arguments, by combining analytical clarity with a well-founded sense of purpose.

### **Chapter 3: Participatory Urban Design**

Drawing on a literature review and case studies, the chapter focuses on providing both a historical and contemporary view of participatory urban design, tracing the evolution of participatory methods that have emerged in various community design centers. Marta focuses on showcasing relevant examples internationally, both in the United States and in other European countries. In particular, this chapter examines examples of community design centers in the United Kingdom. The contribution of this chapter lies in the way these examples illustrate the evolutionary process of how present social participation has evolved into shaping the current design process and how tools and strategies facilitate community inclusion in the design process. In this way, the chapter explores insights into active participation in the creation of public spaces, discussing the importance of urban public spaces in contemporary cities.

### **Case study Analysis within its local context**

### **Chapter 4: Participatory Practices in Wrocław**

Building on the previous chapter, which presents international case studies, this chapter is particularly illustrative as it focuses on mapping and analyzing specific case studies of participatory practices in the local context of Poland and, in particular, in the context of Wrocław, where Marta presents particular examples of urban interventions where participatory design has been applied in conjunction with community centers and participatory budgeting projects. Through these local examples, she shows how the previously discussed theoretical principles are implemented in the specific context, and also examines local programs including the *Local Activity Centers* (CAL model) and its programs: *Wrocław Civil Budget* (WBO), *Community Found* and *Microgrants*.

This chapter is notable for its local cartography and demonstrates Marta's deep understanding and concern for the local context in which she operates. It draws attention to the existing instances and initiatives in the city. As a final reflection of this

chapter, Marta evaluates the strengths and limitations of local initiatives, highlighting that while there are a number of local initiatives, programs or institutions oriented to citizen participation, some of these initiatives have originally emerged as high impact, and over time have diminished their engagement and active civic involvement. She suggests strengthening these initiatives in order to involve citizens in the process of shaping their city.

## **From Theory to Action Practice Research**

### **Chapter 5: Design Practice and Research in Brussels**

The fifth chapter is the central contribution of the thesis, as it presents the *Maalbeek Valle Vertte* project, primarily conducted on *Gray Street*, Brussels. This example represents a relevant case study in which Marta actively co-participates by implementing participatory action research and critical design practice through a series of design initiatives in which she is closely involved in the conception and stages of the process. She collaborated on-site with local residents in conjunction with the Brussels-based architecture collective *Lattitude Platform* as well as a wide network of local contributors. As she introduces, the project was developed between May and December 2023 and was organized by the administrative unit *Bruxelles Mobilité*, as part of the *Bruxelles en Vacances Program*, whose objective focuses on the *Good Move* strategy, aimed at urban transformation to create a pedestrian-friendly urban environment and soft and pedestrian mobility.

It is worth noting that Marta was actively engaged in various phases and activities of the project, including coordination, designing the project process, documentation, communication, co-designing site actions, installations and spaces, as well as organizing and facilitating workshops. It is also worth noting the manner in which the project is presented, as it is well organized and carefully documented by considering and explaining in detail the historical and social aspects, the spatial, locational, and territorial conditions of the site, as well as the challenges, objectives, stakeholders, processes, methodologies, strategies, obstacles overcome, and outcomes. The process and stages are clearly illustrated chronologically, and enriched by visual and graphic documentation consisting of a series of plans, sketches, diagrams, mind maps, sketches, collective drawings, as well as timelines and historical photographs of the site, along with images documenting the process and outcomes of the project. As for the project's introduction, it clearly illustrates the intervention area -*Gray Street*-, explaining its context and focusing on the specific urban issues it faces. It also raises a major issue with respect to the predominance of vehicles in the neighborhood, one of the major concerns affecting today's cities, including heavy traffic, parking and the lack of pedestrian or bicycle areas. With this in mind, the proposed interventions would aim to sensitize residents to the possibilities of rethinking and generating guidelines towards more pedestrian and soft-mobility neighborhoods. In parallel, this introductory context, raises the uniqueness of *Gray Street* in relation to its close connection with water and the hydrological system, being located in the valley of the Maelbeek River. The following explains how, over the years, various piping and lining works have had negative impacts, causing flooding or reducing the bond between people and this natural water trace. In this context, the site's approach and the actions undertaken in this project address these challenges by sensitizing residents to issues related to accessibility, low mobility, naturalization, social integration, living environment and sustainable water management, illustrating that action-based methods do not apply a single or homogeneous model, but rather



respond to the particularities, local knowledge and specific conditions of their environment.

Then, it is presented one of the most significant contributions of this chapter, as it explains the development of the project through a chronological structure that articulates the evolution of collaborative action practices in three main moments: **co-design, co-production** and **awareness-raising**. Each of these phases brings together stakeholders, places and specific actions, such as meetings, workshops, urban interventions or community activities, which respond to different objectives, and are organized according to their date of realization. This structure visualizes the evolution of the project over time, carried out from July 13 to December 13, 2023, and highlights the dynamics, progression and level of participation of the different phases.

Throughout this chapter, the complexity of the project is noted. It also highlights its inter-connection with the different levels involved and how it brings together institutions, programs, organizations and stakeholders, and, above all, how the project provides the creative and appropriate conditions for community engagement. All of this, considering that public space is a highly complex scenario to develop cohesive ideas and common objectives. It highlights how the low-cost actions and site-interventions developed in the project are not intended to just overcome the particular problem itself, but to generate reflections, ephemeral actions and practical contributions to rethink the urban space, as well as to highlight that the engagement and participation of the community within the process plays an important role in how the city imagines its future.

The fifth chapter then examines in depth two projects related to public spaces in Brussels, providing another relevant aspect of the chapter by situating the previous case study on *Gray Street*, not as an isolated example, but from the perspective of complementary experiences: *Marie Janson Square* and *Jacques Franck Square*, both in the Brussels municipality of Saint Gilles (the last case is especially meaningful to the author, due to her prior knowledge, desing proposal and engagement with the site from years before the doctoral research). These cases in conjunction with *Maalbbek Valle Vertte*, jointly illustrate the notion of integrated ecosystem, which belongs to a constellation of analogous projects arising from similar contexts and premises. These case studies are well explained and documented in detail, describing the processes, methodologies, strategies and results, and are enriched by interviews with the main authors.

It is remarkable how Marta, by presenting and analyzing such cases, enables us to understand how public projects do not arise in isolation, but are the result of shared experiences that mutually enrich each other, and how the sum of micro-actions form a collaborative way of understanding and shaping the city.

### **Key Suggestion and Consideration**

As a final recommendation in this chapter, it could be meaningful to explore what strategies or tools might be integrated into the research to enable residents to carry the project forward on their own. Since the process has unfolded positively and considering that community-based projects and long-term initiatives require extended timeframes, it may be valuable to envision ways for the project to evolve beyond the authors' continued direct involvement.

## **Grounded Reflections: Where Theory and Research Practice Converge**

### **Chapter 6: Conclusions: Cognitive and Applicatory**

In the concluding chapter, Marta presents a coherent position in which she inteconnects, on the one hand, her findings and reflections along the theoretical framework, and on the other hand, her direct research experience in participatory processes, especially in the urban context of Brussels - as she herself points out: “drawing on my experiences and research into innovative design practices in Brussels, I relate these reflections to the context of Wrocław” -, which significantly enriches her reflections, conclusions and positions. This dual perspective allows her to build a critical and positioned discourse on the role of designers in participatory processes, especially as she brings her conclusions to the Polish context, where she clearly establishes the framework and relevance. One of the strengths of this chapter, is the way in which she achieves to intertwine both theory and practice: on the one hand, through an analysis of issues, discourses, contexts, local and international cases, and participatory methodologies; and on the other hand, by implementing and learning through her active involvement in real projects, from which she acquires the knowledge to formulate relevant questions and conclusions. This integrated approach structures the thesis approach and represents one of its main contributions.

Among the themes highlighted in her final conclusions, she reframes an initial hypothesis: she initially assumed that the lack or complexity of tools was a main limitation to participation in Poland. However, she concludes that the existing tools are sufficient; a key problem lies in how they are addressed and implemented. This finding shifts the focus from technical aspects to institutional capacities, methods and frameworks that enable the activation of effective and accessible participatory processes, which consider both mediators and facilitators in real contexts. This is an important contribution that invites to critically review the management of these processes from the operational, communicative and relational points of view.

Another key contribution lies in the reconfiguration of the role of the designer in participatory processes, especially in contexts such as Poland, where historically, participation has been limited. In *The Role of a Designer*, Marta proposes a broad framework of possible professional roles -from the more technical, such as consultant or translator of complex languages, to social and political functions, such as facilitator, mediator, activist or community connector- that enables designers to intervene with greater strategic and ethical awareness in collective dynamics. This approach, based on theoretical background and practical experience in Brussels, offers valuable conceptual insights to rethink the role of the designer in diverse contexts, where participation requires sensitivity, adaptability and real commitment to the collective.

In her conclusions, Marta states that participation cannot be limited to predefined methodologies, but must be built from a constant presence in the territory, the deep recognition of local dynamics and an affective involvement that allows capturing the sensitive and everyday. Through ephemeral interventions, informal practices or playful formats, she demonstrates how design can activate public space and strengthen community relations. In this sense, art emerges as an essential resource to encourage critical participation and new forms of social relations. This vision is

fundamental to understand participation as a living process, adaptable and beyond rigid protocols.

In addition, the author emphasizes the importance of an integrated collaboration between theoreticians, designers and community agents for participatory practice in order for genuine participation. She emphasizes that integrating diverse perspectives enriches the understanding of problems and facilitates the creation of spaces that empower residents, promoting their social and civic participation. It highlights the need for designers to value local knowledge and recognize residents as key actors for democratic and sustainable urban development. It proposes a flexible and evolving role for the designer, where multidisciplinary collaboration is essential to strengthen teams adapted to each project and level of community involvement. This approach contributes to redefine design as a socially engaged and adaptive practice, essential for effective and contextualized participatory processes.

To conclude this chapter, Marta presents the zine *Designing for Communities*, an educational tool that facilitates reflection on the design of public space and promotes social participation. It includes a glossary adapted to the Polish context and proposes new competencies for participatory designers. Its key approach *Manifesto of Public Space Designers*, which proposes inclusive design guidelines for equitable and sustainable urban spaces. This material contributes to connecting theory and practice, fostering an engaged and critical design culture.

As a final contribution, I would like to highlight a very valuable aspect she raises in her concluding findings, highlighting the emphasis on **education**, especially on participatory and action-based methods in the Polish public space. Marta offers a critical view that encompasses programs, institutions, professionals and citizens involved in collaborative processes. She emphasizes education as a key means of sensitizing and empowering professionals and citizens, strengthening their involvement and understanding. It points out that academic training and professional development are crucial to understanding the principles of participatory design, emphasizing that it is not just a question of accumulating technical knowledge, but of developing a critical awareness that promotes engaged and situated practice. This theme is especially important, as her research and experience originate from the educational space. And it is from this place - of knowledge creation and exchange - that she is able to initiate seeds for future growth and development.

## **Expanding and Bridging Research into Interaction: Designing a Participatory Digital Platform**

### **Chapter 7 Proprietary Tool: The Digital Portal “Impuls”**

From her active engagement in public space projects involving co-design and participatory action, Marta takes a further step by designing a participatory digital platform that integrates her research findings and practical experience to enhance community involvement. This reinforces the multi-faceted approach of her thesis, as she transitions from active co-participation to focusing on the design of the platform as a complementary and integral part of her role as a designer. It is noteworthy that in this prototype, Marta synthesizes her research experience—including key concerns, findings and methods—intended to reach a wider audience.

The last chapter presents *Impuls*, a prototype digital platform developed as part of the research. This platform is designed to facilitate participatory practices by supporting communication between residents, organizations and institutions involved in public space initiatives. The inclusion of this prototype reinforces the research focus on the integration of digital tools in the participatory process, ensuring that the proposed strategies are adaptable to the contemporary urban context. The work is aimed primarily at local communities, urban collectives and municipal authorities interested in strengthening the social fabric through digital tools that are sensitive to their social environment.

As a supporting background, the author suggests that the problem of low community participation lies not only in the lack of tools, but also in their inadequate adaptation to the social context and in the absence of prior activation. In this way her research proposes a model of participatory digital platform, developed in cooperation with active local actors, which integrates social networks, spatial systems to strengthen social capital and facilitate collaborative urban processes.

As a note remark, the author proposes the incorporation of game dynamics as a strategy to foster active participation and learning, proposing creative and participatory forms that generate interest, involvement and meaningful links with the contents and spaces. It is also advisable to consider a mechanism to ensure that the platform remains active, adaptable and open to updates over time. As a further suggestion, it might be valuable to outline how this ongoing platform could be continuously developing.

It is particularly interesting how Marta includes the design of a digital tool in which she explores alternative formats, understanding that nowadays information is condensed in a digital environment, impacting the current ways of working and sharing. This contribution can be valuable for the discipline of participatory urbanism, as it proposes an approach that combines civic education, digital design and territorial self-management practices, proposing contextualized outcomes.

## **FINAL REFLECTIONS**

Based on the analysis of the dissertation chapters, the following final reflections arise. The thesis, titled *Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design*, explores several questions and conceptual approaches that serve as a foundation for these reflections. Drawing on the author's approach developed throughout the dissertation, I would like to introduce the following thoughts aimed at fostering dialogue and exploring the key questions examined by the research.

It is a positive aspect for a reviewer to read a well-formulated, structured and carefully developed body of work that approaches the topic from multiple layers and perspectives. As Marta Siemińska states, her work has been carried out with passion and enthusiasm, which is clearly reflected in the depth and commitment demonstrated throughout the thesis. This dedication enriches the quality and impact of her research towards critical design practice.

The document demonstrates the author's personal involvement, her enthusiasm for co-learning, acquiring knowledge and bringing it into practice. There is a deep interest in understanding the background and core of the subject investigated, as well as in identifying the problems it raises. The author focuses on finding different ways to carry out the project, communicating it and actively participating in the design process.

Throughout the document, clarity, coherence and logical structure are emphasized, especially in the way in which the chapters and sections are organized and connected. The appropriate use of introductions, transitions and conclusions within the thesis further enhances reader comprehension and engagement.

In addition to the contributions made in each chapter, which have been previously examined in a particular way, I would like to highlight the following key points of the thesis:

**Weaving Analysis and Action Research Practice with Consistency:** The nature of the dissertation examines connections between theory and action research practice, which is reflected in a clear and constant progression throughout the document, reinforcing both the analysis and the practical application. It is noticeable how the author evolves through the theoretical and practical aspects, which constantly nurture and reinforce each other. The document's development from theoretical foundation to case study analysis and, finally, to practical is clearly noticeable. This integrated process is concluded with observations and findings that evidence a deep learning and development achieved by the author.

**Approaching Public Space as a Complex and Layered Fabric:** Another key aspect refers to the author's ability to address the complex notion of public space, being aware of its temporal dimension and its concept of human encounter space, a place where we communicate, recognize, identify, coexist, and circulate. Marta Siemińska engages with the public space, comprehending it not only as a physical entity but also as an intangible space, since it involves various social, cultural, economic, environmental, and historical dimensions. In this sense, Marta explores how public space interacts as a complex fabric formed by multiple layers, as well as by the diverse people who inhabit and transform it. This complexity, together with the diversity of its dimensions, is examined in the thesis as an invitation to generate new questions, opening ways to rethink and reimagine our public environments from complementary perspectives.

**Rethinking Design as a Relational and Ethical Practice:** Another sensitive consideration that she raises consists of the idea of diluting the designer's discipline into a collaborative approach, which does not focus on individual authorship, but on joint creation. The author's approach inspires us to consider design not only as a technical or aesthetic instrument, but also as a relational and ethical practice. By recognizing the value of the everyday, the affective and the situational, she proposes a way of intervening that does not impose solutions, but facilitates collective processes based on respect, listening and real involvement. This perspective broadens the possibilities of design towards more sensitive and committed approaches to the territories and the communities that inhabit them.

**Design as a Dynamic and Collective Process:** The dissertation highlights the idea that design is not a linear process, but a continuous path that is constantly enriched through multiple visions, interaction between multiple individuals, actions and life events. This dynamic vision reflects an important conceptual approach, since the creative and design process is understood as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon, which requires openness and flexibility to adapt and grow from collective and contextual experiences. In this sense, Marta's contribution is significant and coherent throughout the investigation and action-praxis, as she engages as a designer in a dynamic process in which she co-weaves a fabric in which she becomes the main researcher-author, as well as a co-participant.

**From Individual to Collective: The Significance of the “Co-” in Design:** Another significant aspect of Marta's thesis is the emphasis on the prefix “co-”, in its meaning of “with”, “together” or “jointly”, and expressed in terms such as “co-create”, ‘collaborate’, “co-generate” or “co-design”. In this sense, it is significant that the focus of the thesis moves away from individual or top-down design in favor of collective, participatory or relational processes, and towards shared authorship or mutual participation.

**Contextual Sensitivity in Participatory Research and Co-Design:** The contextualized adaptation of participatory research and co-design methods is noteworthy. The research emphasizes local and site-specific cartographic concern, which demonstrates Marta's deep understanding and awareness of the local context in which she operates. The author's participatory approach carried out in Brussels, where these actions are implemented collectively and emerge from several parallel experiences within the city, is significant. One of her important contributions is to have identified, from these practices, the essential points that support these participatory processes. Subsequently, by studying the local context in Poland, she analyzes how these principles can be adapted to that specific environment, taking into account its particularities and without intending to impose established models. This contextualized approach, and sensitive to the specificities of the place, represents a key contribution, as it promotes participatory and action-based methods that respond to the needs and characteristics of each context, avoiding the simplistic application of pre-established formulas.

**Placing Education as a Pillar of Design Exploration:** Since action-based methods and participatory perspectives are still emerging within academic discourse in Poland, her proposal not only opens a window for designers to adopt these practices in the future, and for them to be engaged in professional education. By integrating theoretical analysis with in-situ case studies and fostering collaboration across disciplines and participants, innovative pedagogical models could be developed that might influence future generations of designers. From these perspectives, new paths and spaces can be opened, thus promoting the development and rethinking of artistic-designer education in this specific context. In that sense, it is especially appreciated that the author places education at the center, considering the educational environment as the necessary place to make this seed of transformation grow. Grounded in her exploration and thesis, her contribution to the discipline emerges from this educational environment, offering new perspectives and broadening the field's possibilities. For this reason, I aim to motivate Marta to share and expand the experience, knowledge, and expertise she has cultivated throughout this research in the educational field, sowing new seeds and opening new paths for further learning.

Considering all of the above, the research work of Marta Siemińska highlights key critical design contributions essential for collaborative, supportive, and meaningful — both for the field and especially within place-based and community-driven design contexts.

### **Evaluation Conclusion and Recommendation**

As a result of my examination of Marta Siemińska's dissertation, *Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design*, as well as her creative output and professional practice in the field of art, I highly recommend that she be awarded an academic Ph.D. title in the field of Art, in the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation.

Additionally, since her dissertation demonstrates a particularly high level of academic and research merit, I suggest that the request for the award of an honorable distinction be included in this recommendation.

Sincerely,



**Ivan Juarez**

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