



# THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: A CASE STUDY OF CITIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Venera Goxha 

College UBT, University for Business and Technology  
Lagja Kalabria, 10000 Prishtina: Kosovo  
[goxhavenera@gmail.com](mailto:goxhavenera@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Urbanisation processes in post-conflict territories of the Western Balkans require the development of effective instruments for engaging the population in planning processes to ensure sustainable urban development. Participatory planning in post-conflict urban governance is examined with particular attention to how public participation influences the effectiveness of urban development projects in the Western Balkans. The aim of the article is to develop and apply a conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of participatory planning and to identify adaptive participation models in different institutional contexts. A mixed-methods comparative case study design was employed, combining conceptual modelling, comparative legal analysis, and case-based analysis of participatory practices across six Western Balkan countries over the period 1990-2025. The effectiveness of participation was assessed through a multidimensional evaluation system integrating procedural, outcome-based, and systemic criteria adapted to post-conflict conditions. The analysis indicates considerable variation in participatory effectiveness across national contexts and participation models. Higher effectiveness was associated with institutionalised consultation procedures, financial commitments to participatory programmes, and multi-level governance coordination, whereas weak implementation of legal provisions and the circumvention of consultation procedures were associated with reduced planning legitimacy and increased public resistance. Digital tools, multi-sectoral dialogue, and academic mediation were found to contribute to more effective participation when supported by stable institutional frameworks.

**Keywords:** post-conflict territories, spatial planning, decentralisation, participation models, social legitimacy.

## Introduction

The Western Balkans region has undergone intensive transformational processes driven by post-conflict reconstruction and European integration. Urbanisation trends, coupled with the need to modernise urban governance, have raised the issue of public participation in planning and implementing urban development projects as a critical factor in achieving sustainability and effectiveness in urban transformations.

Participatory processes in urban governance are increasingly mediated by digital technologies, giving rise to the concept of e-participation, which refers to the use of electronic platforms and digital communication tools to involve citizens in public decision-making (Xhafka et al., 2015;

Karasheva et al., 2023). In European planning practice, e-participation has become an important component of democratic governance, enabling broader access to consultation procedures, facilitating transparency, and strengthening interaction between institutions and communities. Comparative studies of European regions indicate that digital participation tools can expand opportunities for civic engagement, particularly in transitional and post-conflict contexts where traditional participation mechanisms may remain limited or unevenly developed (Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2022; Iuliano et al., 2025). At the same time, the effectiveness of e-participation depends on institutional capacity, technological accessibility, and the integration of digital tools into formal planning procedures. These considerations provide a relevant conceptual framework for analysing the digitalisation of participatory planning in the Western Balkans and for assessing its impact on the effectiveness of urban development projects.

Research on participatory planning in Serbia was conducted by Čolić et al. (2023) through an analysis of practices in ten municipalities across the country. The scholars established a link between the creation of conditions for experimentation in urban planning and the implementation of participatory processes. They also identified the need to adapt governance models to align with European planning standards. The study demonstrated the interdependence between institutional change and the effectiveness of public participation in urban development processes.

Large-scale urban development megaprojects were examined by Peric and D'hondt (2022) using the examples of Belgrade Waterfront in Belgrade and the Hellinikon complex in Athens. The researchers identified patterns of interaction between governance levels and stakeholders in the implementation of such large-scale urban development projects. The findings recorded the conditions for establishing democratic procedures in the context of urban transformations. The study identified a correlation between the application of participatory mechanisms and the effectiveness of megaprojects at the planning stage.

Institutional transformations of planning systems in the region were examined by Berisha et al. (2024) in six Balkan states. The researchers documented the stages of forming administrative and legal frameworks for planning activity, tracing developments from the socialist period to European integration in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The study highlighted differing paces of institutional reform in spatial planning across countries and demonstrated the influence of international organisations and European directives on the evolution of planning practices in the region.

Panel regression was applied by Feruni et al. (2020) to analyse the relationships between institutional factors and economic indicators in the Western Balkans and the EU 27 over the period 2009–2018. The researchers identified the negative impact of corruption and the positive effects of economic freedom and urbanisation on economic processes in both groups of states. The results showed that corruption had a more destructive effect in the Western Balkans compared with EU countries. The modelling also indicated that the region benefited more from economic freedom and urbanisation in relation to European standards. A survey of representatives of urban administrations in seven cities was conducted by Ostojić et al. (2022) to investigate smart city concepts in the region. The study found the highest awareness of digital transformation projects among representatives in Belgrade, Trebinje, and Herceg Novi, while the lowest levels of awareness were observed among representatives in Podgorica. The analysis revealed numerous challenges in implementing smart city strategies despite positive progress in certain urban centres.

Mathematical modelling of urbanisation processes based on Urban Atlas data was conducted by Živanović et al. (2024) for the period 2012–2018. The calculations confirmed urban sprawl in the region without demographic growth as its driving force. The researchers recorded the phys-

ical expansion of urban fabric into surrounding areas, leading to the transformation of land resources. Statistical analysis demonstrated variations in the intensity of sprawl between cities, without common characteristics across all settlements. In the post-pandemic context, the tourism potential of five regional economies was examined by Knežević et al. (2024) as a factor of sustainable development. The researchers identified the need to achieve competitive advantages for stronger positioning in the tourism market. The results highlighted the necessity of high-quality planning for the reconstruction of tourist destinations after crises. The analysis confirmed the potential of the region's countries for tourism development, provided that a strategic approach to resource utilisation is adopted.

A comparative analysis of national tourism strategies in the region was carried out by Porfido (2020), focusing on objectives, products, and investment priorities. The study revealed similarities in tourism policy approaches, which generated competition over identical market segments. The results recorded the risk of intra-regional rivalry among neighbouring countries for the same tourist audiences. The author concluded that developing a joint tourism policy would be expedient, enabling the pooling of efforts and enhancing global competitiveness.

The review of scientific literature demonstrated growing attention to the issue of public participation in urban development in the Western Balkans. Previous studies focused mainly on specific aspects of public engagement or the experience of individual countries, leaving the systemic impact of participatory mechanisms on the effectiveness of urban projects insufficiently explored. The absence of generalised approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of participatory processes in post-conflict conditions limited the ability to formulate evidence-based recommendations for urban planning practice.

This study aimed to develop a conceptual system for assessing the effectiveness of participatory planning in post-conflict contexts and to identify adaptive mechanisms of public participation for urban development in the Western Balkans. The objectives of the research included: a theoretical and methodological analysis of participatory planning concepts and mechanisms for evaluating their effectiveness in post-conflict territories, based on theories of multi-level governance and social capital; an empirical study of the transformation of urban planning systems and urbanisation processes in Western Balkan cities, using statistical data from Kosovo for the period 1990–2025 and an analysis of the evolution of legislative frameworks for urban planning; the typologisation of public participation models in urban development projects; and the design of adaptive participatory mechanisms suited to diverse political and socioeconomic contexts of the region.

## **Materials and methods**

A mixed empirical-theoretical study was conducted from June to August 2025, covering the full evolution of planning systems from 1931 to 2025, with a focus on institutional transformations during the post-conflict period of 1990–2025. The timeframe reflects the complete cycle of transformation from the Yugoslav centralised model, through the legal vacuum of the 1990s, to the modern European standards of participatory planning.

The Western Balkans region in this study includes six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The legal documents analysed comprised three key legislative acts of Kosovo: Law No. 2003/14 'On Spatial Planning' (2003), Law No. 2004/15 'On Construction' (2004), and Law No. 04/L-174 'On Spatial Planning' (2013). Kosovo was selected as the main subject of detailed legal analysis due to the completeness of its documented evolution of planning systems, from the Yugoslav period to modern European standards, making it

a representative case of post-conflict transformation in the region. The statistical and demographic data covered official population censuses of Kosovo (1990, 2011, 2024), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1999), United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UN-DESA) (UN-DESA, 2018), and economic indicators from *Macrotrends* (2023). Project documentation included official materials on six cases: the digital model of Kosovo (Open Government Partnership, 2025), the consultative model of Montenegro (Open Government Partnership, 2024), the experimental model of Albania (Jano et al., 2020), the democratic model of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Rask et al., 2023), the bypass model of Serbia (Vancic, 2018, June 27), and the imposed model of North Macedonia (Staletović & Pollozhani, 2022).

A systematic literature review was conducted to identify the main approaches and knowledge gaps regarding participatory planning in the region. Conceptual analysis was applied to develop a three-dimensional evaluation model across procedural, performance, and systemic dimensions, with an emphasis on their mutually reinforcing effects. Theoretical synthesis combined the concepts of multi-level governance and social capital, adapted to the post-conflict context. The criterion-based analysis established a system of evaluation criteria adapted to ethnically segmented societies.

The chronological analysis systematised the evolution of Kosovo's legislation into three periods according to institutional transformations:

- 1931-1990 – the Yugoslav planning system;
- 1990-1999 – the legal vacuum of the conflict period;
- 1999-2025 – the post-conflict reconstruction of the legal system.

Comparative legal analysis contrasted the legislation of the six Western Balkan countries in terms of core laws, consultation periods, sanctions, and rights of appeal. Descriptive statistical analysis processed Kosovo's demographic data over a thirty-five-year period, calculating urbanisation rates, population growth indicators, and comparing demographic trends with stages of institutional development.

Case-based descriptive analysis examined urban development projects selected to provide a comprehensive geographical representation of all Western Balkan countries and to demonstrate contrasting approaches to public participation. The selection criteria included: the diversity of participation mechanisms, ranging from full engagement to complete exclusion of the public; the availability of documented information on consultation processes; and the temporal relevance of projects (2010–2025). The projects studied were in Pristina (Kosovo), Bar (Montenegro), Tirana (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Belgrade (Serbia), and Skopje (North Macedonia). Figure 1 presents the geographical distribution of the selected case study cities across the Western Balkans.

Typological analysis classified participation models according to participation mechanisms and public response. The comparative case study methodology aligned cases with the criteria of the conceptual framework to identify correlations between legal frameworks and participation outcomes.

The final selection of six case studies was guided by a comparative research logic aimed at capturing the diversity of participatory planning practices across the Western Balkans. The selected cases represent different institutional configurations, levels of European integration, and approaches to public participation, ranging from institutionalised consultation mechanisms to situations of limited or bypassed engagement. This selection strategy enabled cross-case comparison under varying geopolitical and governance conditions and ensured the analytical relevance of the cases for examining the effectiveness of participatory planning in post-conflict contexts.



**Figure 1.** Location of case study cities in the Western Balkans  
Source: compiled by the author.

## Results

### Conceptual foundations for evaluating the effectiveness of participatory planning

The effectiveness of public participation in urban planning was examined through three interrelated dimensions that together formed an integrated conceptual model for assessing consultative processes. The procedural dimension encompassed the quality of organising and conducting consultations, regardless of their influence on final decisions. The outcome dimension referred to the extent to which public proposals were taken into account and to participants' satisfaction with the mechanisms of engagement. Systemic change reflected long-term transformations in urban governance through the establishment of new institutional procedures for interaction between different levels of government and the public (Berisha & Cotella, 2021; Niyazbekova et al., 2023). The interplay of these three dimensions generated a mutually reinforcing effect within systems of public participation. Procedural effectiveness influenced citizens' willingness to engage, which in turn shaped outcome indicators. Positive participation experiences strengthened trust in institutions and fostered motivation for continued involvement in urban planning. Systemic change, meanwhile, created conditions for improving the procedural aspects of subsequent initiatives through institutional learning and the adaptation of management practices. In post-conflict societies, this interrelationship assumed a distinctive character that required additional theoretical elaboration.

The theoretical justification for the three-dimensional model was grounded in concepts of multi-level governance. This framework was well-suited to the specific context of post-conflict territories, where international organisations played an active role in shaping local policies and where traditional governance arrangements had been disrupted by conflict. Vertical coordination encompassed relations between supranational, national, and local authorities through both formal and informal channels of communication (Trkulja & Dabović, 2021; Karasheva et al., 2023). Horizontal cooperation encompasses interaction between the public, private, and civic sectors at the same territorial level, creating opportunities for cross-sectoral partnerships.

The balance between formal procedures and mechanisms of informal interaction determined the functionality of governance systems. Excessive formalisation led to bureaucratisation and a slower pace of decision-making, while the predominance of informal ties created risks of non-transparency and unequal access to participation mechanisms. Post-conflict societies were characterised by processes of recentralisation as a response to the challenges of initial decentralisation: fragmentation of authority, the lack of institutional capacity in small self-governing bodies, corruption risks, and bureaucratic obstacles.

The local level of governance played a central role in consultative planning owing to several characteristics. Participants possessed detailed knowledge of territorial specificities, including historical features, social networks, and cultural traditions of the community. The pragmatic nature of local politics allowed for faster responses to changing societal needs compared with centralised structures. Proximity to residents' everyday problems necessitated the search for solutions through consultative approaches.

The practical application of multi-level governance principles at the local level was realised through two types of interaction among urban planning stakeholders. Cross-sectoral cooperation brought together representatives of government, business, and civil society organisations to address urban development tasks. Interdisciplinary interaction facilitated the integration of expertise from urban studies, architecture, sociology, and economics. Planning professionals acted as mediators, creating conditions for communication among groups with diverse interests (Hoxha et al., 2021). The effectiveness of these types of interaction depended on the presence of trust-based relationships and shared values among participants, which formed the basis for analysing social capital.

The examination of consultative practices considered social capital as a resource for success. For the purposes of this study, social capital is defined as a multidimensional resource shaping the effectiveness of participatory planning through interpersonal, institutional, and systemic relationships among stakeholders. Interpersonal social capital refers to trust-based relations and communication among participants in planning processes; institutional social capital concerns the level of trust in public institutions and formal consultation mechanisms; and systemic social capital reflects the stability of governance arrangements and the capacity of planning systems to sustain cooperative interaction over time. Within this framework, the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital are interpreted as analytically interconnected components through which interpersonal, institutional, and systemic forms of trust and cooperation are expressed in participatory planning. The concept encompassed structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions. The structural dimension was characterised by the density of network ties and the frequency of interaction among urban planning stakeholders. The relational dimension was grounded in three levels of trust: interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. The cognitive dimension reflected shared goals and visions of the city's future across different participant groups. Applying the concept of social capital to post-conflict settings revealed the limitations of traditional approaches. The structural dimension did not account for negative ties between groups that hindered coop-

eration. The relational dimension did not explain the mechanisms for restoring trust after its systemic breakdown during conflict. The cognitive dimension overlooked the possibility of mutually exclusive visions of the city's future held by different ethnic groups. Research in Pristina indicated that residents of detached houses maintained closer relationships with their neighbours than residents of multi-storey buildings, demonstrating the impact of the physical environment on the formation of social ties (Aliu, 2024).

The identified limitations of theoretical concepts necessitated the development of an adapted system of evaluation criteria. The integration of theoretical perspectives enabled the design of a conceptual framework of evaluative criteria for the analysis of consultative planning. The procedural characteristics were based on such components as inclusiveness of different population groups, representativeness of participants, transparency of procedures, accessibility of participation mechanisms, and the quality of dialogue among stakeholders. Outcome characteristics were structured around the consideration of public proposals in planning documents, participants' subjective satisfaction, the stability of decisions over time, the social legitimacy of procedures, and the effectiveness of plan implementation (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Conceptual framework of criteria for evaluating consultative planning

Criterion	Conceptual basis	Adaptation to post-conflict context
<b>Procedural criteria</b>		
Population coverage	Structural dimension of social capital through network ties	Consideration of the city's ethnic geography and spatial segregation
Social representativeness	Principles of descriptive representation in governance	Ethnically balanced representation and inclusion of marginalised groups
Procedural transparency	Requirements of democratic accountability in governance theory	Multilingual and culturally adapted informational materials
Inclusive accessibility	Principle of universal access to the public sphere	Safety and neutrality of spaces, accounting for traumatic experiences
Quality of discussion	Theory of deliberative democracy and public discourse	Management of interethnic tensions through professional mediation
<b>Outcome criteria</b>		
Consideration of proposals	Measurement of the real impact of participation on political outcomes	Fair balance between groups and prevention of dominance
Subjective satisfaction	Relational dimension of social capital through trust in institutions	Accounting for changes in interethnic attitudes and overcoming stereotypes
Stability over time	Indicator of institutional strength and political resilience	Protection against ethnic politicisation through cross-party consensus
Social legitimacy	Cognitive dimension of social capital through shared values	Formation of a common urban identity beyond ethnic divisions
Implementation effectiveness	Vertical coordination and executive capacity	Transparent use of resources and creation of equal economic opportunities

Source: compiled by the author based on Berisha and Cotella (2021); Hoxha et al. (2021); Trkulja and Dabović (2021); Aliu (2024).

In this study, the criterion 'stability over time' refers to the institutional and policy continuity of planning decisions and participatory procedures rather than to the physical durability of individual urban projects. It reflects the capacity of governance systems to maintain consistent participatory mechanisms, ensure the long-term relevance of adopted planning decisions, and prevent their revision due to short-term political or administrative changes. This interpretation enables the assessment of planning effectiveness in post-conflict contexts where institutional resilience and continuity of governance are critical for sustaining public trust and participation.

The adaptation of the conceptual framework to the Western Balkans took into account the empirical characteristics of consultative processes in post-conflict societies. Social interactions within communities were primarily shaped by spontaneous contacts among residents. Ethnocultural diversity presented challenges for ensuring inclusivity, due to language barriers and interethnic tensions (Mizin & Petrov, 2021; Al Azzam et al., 2023). The weakness of democratic institutions was evident in low levels of trust in local governance, with only a quarter of the population expressing satisfaction with municipal services.

Economic characteristics of the region also influenced consultative processes. The structure of the economy, in which 99% of enterprises were small and medium-sized with low competitiveness, limited the resource base for private sector participation (Cotella & Toto, 2022). The emigration of skilled labour to EU countries reduced the human capital available for public engagement. Processes of Europeanisation, through the transposition of EU directives in areas such as water management, waste management, and environmental protection, shaped the institutional framework for consultative planning. These empirical characteristics provided the foundation for the development of the conceptual framework for the study. The conceptual framework outlined above established a theoretical basis for analysing public participation in urban development in post-conflict territories. The integration of multi-level governance and social capital concepts, adapted to the specific context of ethnically segmented societies, created a framework for the empirical examination of consultative practices in cities across the Western Balkans.

### **Institutional-legal evolution and urbanisation dynamics**

Mechanisms of public participation in spatial planning in Kosovo evolved across three periods, each characterised by its own approach to involving the population in decision-making. The 1931 Civil-Building Code of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia established a centralised approach to urban planning without any consultative procedures (Veliu Rexhepi et al., 2022). Planning decisions were made exclusively by state authorities, with no engagement of local communities. The socialist model introduced a fundamentally different approach through a system of self-management and the involvement of workers' councils in planning processes. This transition from authoritarian to participatory planning was enabled by an ideology of collective decision-making, first practically implemented in the General Plan Regulation of 1949. The inclusion of labour collectives in the development of urban planning decisions gradually expanded, particularly after the professional conference of urban planners in Arandjelovac in 1957, which emphasised the necessity of regional planning with the involvement of civic organisations (Veliu Rexhepi et al., 2022).

The 1965 Law on Spatial Planning codified public participation by requiring plans to be approved in consultation with local self-government committees. These trends were further reinforced by the 1974 Constitutional amendments, which expanded Kosovo's planning competencies as an autonomous province, granting greater authority in public consultations and creating the foundations for a decentralised approach to planning (Berisha & Cotella, 2021; Veliu Rexhepi et al., 2022). However, this system of participation proved vulnerable to the political upheavals of the following decade. The disintegration of the Yugoslav federation led to the suspension of all engagement mechanisms between 1990 and 1999. Ethnic conflict and military operations ultimately destroyed planning structures and associated public participation measures, creating a legal vacuum in the field of urban development. These destructive processes necessitated the reconstruction of a participatory system from scratch after 1999 under international supervision (Boussauw, 2012).

The rebuilding of the planning system began with the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in June 1999, initially without any public participation mechanisms. International administrators focused on restoring basic infrastructure and security, leaving public consultation as a secondary concern. The first step towards reintroducing participatory measures was taken by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), which launched the Urban Planning and Management Programme in 2002 with support from the Netherlands. This initiative laid the foundations for the modern legal framework for participation and created the conditions for systematic legislative regulation (Boussauw, 2012; Hoxha et al., 2021).

Contemporary legislative regulation of public participation developed gradually through the adoption of five key legal acts between 2003 and 2018. The process began with the Law ‘On Spatial Planning’ (Law of the Republic of Kosovo, 2003), which established a two-tier planning system and introduced public consultations with project disclosures in the media. The law was enacted in October 2003. In parallel with the adoption of the primary law, the Spatial Planning Institute developed methodological guidelines for municipal authorities on organising public consultations, providing a practical foundation for the implementation of legislative norms.

The next stage in the development of the legal framework was the Law ‘On Construction’ (Law of the Republic of Kosovo, 2004), which complemented existing mechanisms by granting public organisations the right to challenge violations of planning decisions, thus creating an additional instrument of public oversight. The culmination of this evolutionary process was the current Law ‘On Spatial Planning’ (Law of the Republic of Kosovo, 2013), which modernised participation measures through digital technologies. It replaced traditional urban development plans with online-accessible zoning maps that allowed electronic submission of comments, aligning with contemporary trends in the digitalisation of public administration. To understand the specifics of this Kosovan model of participation, it is necessary to consider it within the context of regional approaches to public engagement. Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of public participation mechanisms in spatial planning across the Western Balkans.

**Table 2.** Legislative mechanisms for public participation in Western Balkan countries

Country	Primary law	Minimum consultation period	Sanctions for violations	Right of public appeal
Kosovo	Spatial Planning (2013)	30 days	Plan annulment	Administrative courts
Serbia	Planning and Construction (2014)	30 days	Plan annulment	Administrative courts
Montenegro	Spatial Planning (2017)	45 days	Up to 50,000 EUR	Administrative courts + referendum
Albania	Territorial Planning (2016)	21 days	Up to 20,000 EUR	Administrative courts
North Macedonia	Spatial Planning (2014)	30 days	Up to 10,000 EUR	Administrative courts
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Variable by entity	15-60 days	Varies	Entity courts

Source: compiled by the author based on Law of the Republic of Kosovo (2013), Law of Albania (2014), Planning and Building Act of Serbia (2014), Law of Montenegro (2017) and Law of the Republic of Macedonia (2018).

The analysis of regional approaches revealed significant differences in national strategies for institutionalising public participation. Montenegro adopted the most comprehensive approach, reflecting the adaptation of European standards within the framework of the EU integration process, whereas Albania established minimal requirements, indicative of its limited administrative

capacity. Kosovo and Serbia displayed similar approaches to legislative regulation of participation, reflecting a shared legal tradition and the influence of international donors.

These legal frameworks operated amid significant demographic and urbanisation changes, which not only created the socio-spatial context for the evolution of public participation systems but also directly influenced the effectiveness and practical application of legislative norms. Demographic changes determined the number of potential participants in consultation processes; urbanisation trends shaped the geography of civic activity; and migration flows created new challenges for engaging different categories of residents. Understanding these interconnections requires a systematic analysis of demographic dynamics in relation to institutional changes, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Demographic and urbanisation dynamics of Kosovo, 1990–2025

Period	Total population	Urban population	Urbanisation (%)	Largest cities (thousands of people)	Institutional changes	Consultation mechanisms
1990	1,862,000	745,000	40.0	Pristina – 155, Prizren – 92	Yugoslav autonomy	Self-government committees
1999	1,762,000	760,000	43.0	Population decline	UNMIK established	None
2003	1,703,000	810,000	47.0	Stabilisation	Spatial Planning Institute	Public hearings
2011	1,739,825	882,313	50.7	Pristina – 199, Prizren – 178	Spatial plan	Consultations + reports
2024	1,602,515	803,077	50.2	Pristina – 230, Prizren – 190	Digitalisation	Digitalisation

Note: figures for 1999 and 2003 are based on reconstructions by the United Nations and the World Urbanization Prospects, as official censuses were unavailable due to the war.

Source: compiled by the author based on [MSF \(1999\)](#), [UNHCR \(1999\)](#), [UN-DESA \(2018\)](#), [Gollopeni \(2020\)](#), [Isufi \(2024\)](#) and [Statista \(2025\)](#).

The connection between demographic stabilisation and institutional development becomes evident when analysing chronological data. The stabilisation of the population after 2003 coincided with the development of participation mechanisms, emphasising the role of social stability in the establishment of consultation practices. In contrast, the period of demographic decline between 1990 and 1999 was marked by a complete absence of participatory measures due to the war and political instability ([Isufi, 2024](#)). Urbanisation reached approximately 50% and has remained at this level over the past decade, providing a stable social foundation for urban participatory forms without additional demographic pressure.

However, this overall urbanisation rate masked significant regional disparities, which posed diverse challenges for the public participation system. Uneven urban growth across the country directly affected the development of urban planning mechanisms and created differing needs for consultation measures. The concentration of residents in the capital region necessitated the expansion and complexity of citizen engagement practices. Southern cities experienced rapid growth due to tourism and cross-border trade, while distinct trends in northern municipalities complicated the implementation of uniform consultation approaches.

Transformations in settlement patterns occurred as a result of substantial population redistribution from mountainous areas to lowland urban centres, significantly altering the geography of public participation. These changes were particularly pronounced in mountainous municipalities, which experienced considerable population decline between 2000 and 2020 due

to limited economic opportunities and difficult accessibility (Isufi, 2024). At the same time, this outflow of residents was offset by their concentration in urban municipalities, whose growth necessitated the adaptation and expansion of participation mechanisms to meet the new demographic realities of rapidly developing centres. The ethnic composition of residents created distinct conditions for the functioning of public participation systems, where cultural traditions directly influenced the effectiveness of consultation measures. The predominance of the Albanian community fostered favourable conditions for participatory planning, as the tradition of community assemblies naturally integrated with official engagement mechanisms. In contrast, northern municipalities, where the Serbian minority was concentrated, developed separate consultation structures that operated alongside official practices, complicating the achievement of consensus on spatial development issues in ethnically mixed areas.

Population movements in the post-war period significantly altered the spatial organisation of participation mechanisms. The mass evacuation of ethnic Albanians in 1999, when the UNHCR (1999) estimated over 650,000 refugees had left Kosovo by April of that year, followed by their subsequent return, led to a concentration of residents in safer central regions, requiring the adaptation of engagement measures to the changed demographic realities. This situation was further complicated by the fact that a significant number of individuals remained internally displaced for extended periods, primarily in urban areas, creating additional challenges for participatory practices as the needs of temporary residents had to be considered alongside those of the permanent population.

In response to these demographic and migration challenges, the formation of the institutional planning architecture was undertaken through the establishment of a three-tier governance structure following the restoration of statehood. At the central level, the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure led the coordination of nationwide participation policies; the technical level was represented by the Spatial Planning Institute, responsible for methodological support; and the local level comprised municipal planning departments, which directly organised consultations with communities. The administrative reform of 2008–2013 complemented this structure by increasing the number of municipalities from 30 to 38, bringing planning activities closer to local communities and expanding the network of engagement mechanisms (Berisha & Cotella, 2021).

The housing sector became a complex focus for planning decisions and public consultations due to substantial disparities between legal and unauthorised construction. Official 2011 statistics recorded a stark contrast, with nearly half of the housing stock consisting of illegal structures (Hoxha et al., 2022; Mukayev et al., 2022). Attempts to regulate this situation through the 2014 and 2018 laws on unauthorised constructions created a legalisation system that required continuous, detailed discussions with residents of informal settlements, often complicated by legal uncertainty and social conflicts (Law of the Republic of Kosovo, 2018).

These structural challenges within the planning system were reflected in international assessments of its effectiveness. Expert evaluations indicated limited compliance with global participation standards. The study by Pallaska et al. (2018), which analysed Kosovo's legislation against 63 indicators from the United Nations' New Urban Agenda and the European Union Urban Programme, found only 3% compliance at the legislative level and 10% compliance in national planning documents. The evaluation methodology used a three-tier scale: detailed specification, partial specification, and limited specification. Major gaps were identified in the lack of integration of municipalities into the full range of planning activities and the limited scope of consultations, which focused primarily on flood risk and waste management issues.

At the same time, the country's economic recovery provided material conditions for addressing these systemic shortcomings and modernising participation mechanisms. Gross domestic product (GDP) reached approximately USD 10.5 billion in 2023, while GDP per capita approached USD 6,000, contributing to the financial capacity of civil society organisations to participate in consultations and expanding the budgetary base of municipal planning bodies for organising public hearings and implementing digital engagement platforms (Macrotrends, 2023).

An analysis of Kosovo's institutional-legal evolution and urbanisation dynamics from 1990 to 2025 revealed the interconnections between demographic processes, legal transformations, and the development of public participation mechanisms in spatial planning. The transition from a centralised Yugoslav model through the legal vacuum of the 1990s to a modern, digitalised consultation system occurred alongside demographic stabilisation, uneven urbanisation, and gradual economic recovery (Velju Rexhepi et al., 2022). Regional comparisons highlighted the distinctiveness of the Kosovo approach, which combined a shared legal tradition with Serbia and the influence of international donors. At the same time, the low level of compliance with international standards and structural disparities between legislative norms and their practical implementation revealed key gaps in the system, necessitating a detailed examination of specific participation models and their effectiveness in different municipal contexts.

### **Typological analysis of public participation practices and adaptive mechanisms**

The study identified contrasting approaches to public participation across six urban development cases in the Western Balkans, which correlated with the legal frameworks discussed in the previous section. Countries with well-developed legal guarantees established systematic participation models, whereas states with limited procedural mechanisms – or with systematic violations thereof – relied on more authoritarian planning practices. Applying the criteria of representativeness, timeliness, decisionmaking influence, and procedural transparency from the first section of the study to practical cases allowed the formation of a typology of public participation models based on geography and the identification of adaptive mechanisms for different institutional contexts in the region.

Kosovo's digital participatory model relied on electronic tools and financial guarantees. Under this approach, the Action Plan allocated 1% of the municipal budget to projects selected by citizens (Open Government Partnership, 2025). To implement this mechanism, a mobile application enabled citizens to report issues using GPS geolocation and offered a multilingual interface, reducing response times from 30 to 7 days. Complementing the digital tools, local councils were established in 26 of the 42 districts, accompanied by educational programmes for students in grades 6-9. Within the analytical framework of this study, educational programmes are interpreted as facilitative participatory instruments performing a dual function. On the one hand, they act as preparatory mechanisms that enhance citizens' awareness of planning processes and strengthen their capacity for informed engagement. On the other hand, they constitute a form of participation in themselves by creating structured spaces for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaborative problem-solving between authorities and local communities. This dual role supports both the inclusiveness and the effectiveness of participatory planning in post-conflict contexts. This technological integration provided a foundation for the development of similar systems in neighbouring countries within the region.

At the same time, Montenegro adopted an integrated consultative model, emphasising continuous intersectoral dialogue (Open Government Partnership, 2024). The central element of this approach was the 'Bar for Bar' forum, consisting of 31 members, with a predominance of civil

society representatives, including 21 from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The practical implementation of this approach involved the joint development of an Action Plan, encompassing eight working groups and 20 public meetings, addressing five key areas: anti-corruption, public policy, the environment, gender equality, and digitalisation. An additional guarantee of effectiveness was provided by independent monitoring conducted by the organisation UZOR (*Udruženje za odgovoran i održivi razvoj* [Association for Responsible and Sustainable Development]). This model demonstrated the potential to establish sustainable partnerships across different sectors of society.

Albania, by contrast, applied a fundamentally different methodological approach through an experimental grassroots model that combined academic research with practical citizen participation in the Urban Pockets Design project (Jano et al., 2020; Xhafka et al., 2024). This approach was founded on a partnership between universities, the Co-PLAN institute, and the municipality, which studied five locations and selected three for implementation. The effectiveness of this model was confirmed by a survey of 273 participants, which indicated a 97% willingness to engage, broken down as follows: 72% ready to volunteer, 21% willing to provide financial contributions, and 7% willing to supply materials. An innovative element was the use of gamification through card games, which enabled interactive modelling of development scenarios. This experience highlighted the potential of academic institutions to act as mediators between authorities and communities.

A similar role for academic institutions, combined with international support, was demonstrated by Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratic planning model through the UNDP programme 'Re-imagine: My Street, My Imagination' in the reconstruction of Hastahana Park (Rask et al., 2023). The success of this approach was underpinned by a partnership between the municipality, international organisations, and the Faculty of Architecture, ensuring professional expertise. By combining an urban laboratory with online surveys, the approach engaged diverse population groups, resulting in the collection of 400 votes on renewal options, which then formed the basis for an international competition with transparent evaluation criteria. This hybrid approach proved particularly effective in the context of the complex institutional structure of a post-conflict society.

By contrast, models that excluded public participation produced adverse outcomes, exemplified by Serbia's bypass model (Vancic, 2018, June 27). Systematic procedural violations characterised operations conducted through private-state agreements that avoided consultative processes, as seen in the Belgrade Waterfront project. Documented breaches reported by the *Ne Da(vi) mo Beograd* movement included amendments to the general plan without consultation, designation of areas as of 'national importance' to bypass expert review, and the dismissal of over 2,000 complaints without consideration. The situation culminated in the nocturnal demolition of the Savamala district on 24 April 2016, during which police ignored residents' appeals, prompting protests involving up to 20,000 people. The project was accompanied by vague financial promises from investors ranging from EUR 2 billion to EUR 3.5 billion, without a detailed economic justification. This case illustrates the consequences of disregarding participatory principles, even in the presence of formally adequate legislation.

A more radical example was North Macedonia's coercive model, where public exclusion was total during the architectural transformation of the city centre under the Skopje 2014 project (Staletović & Pollozhani, 2022). Notably, the urban planning was conducted by a group of unidentified specialists authorised by the government, without public consultation. The chaotic nature of the process was evident in nine modifications to the plan between 2007 and 2012, which altered project parameters without explanation, resulting in only 22.6% public support in sociological surveys, alongside 45% negative evaluations. Responses to this exclusion took

the form of spontaneous participatory actions: the First Architectural War in 2009, the Colour Revolution in 2016, and a referendum on the Gradski Trgovski Centar (GTC), in which 95.4% voted for preservation. These events demonstrated that excluding the public from official processes can generate alternative forms of political mobilisation.

Comparative analysis of the models described revealed clear correlations between the legal frameworks outlined in the previous section and the practical outcomes of inclusion. Montenegro, with sanctions of up to EUR 50,000, and Kosovo, with 30-day consultation periods, established stable participation systems supported by concrete financial obligations. By contrast, Serbia, despite having legally identical provisions to Kosovo, demonstrated the complete ineffectiveness of legislative instruments due to political practices that circumvented them. Intermediate results indicated that Albania, with 21-day consultation periods, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with variable approaches across entities, achieved success only when supported by additional factors such as academic involvement or international intervention.

Systematisation of effectiveness using the criteria from the first section of the study revealed a clear distinction between successful and unsuccessful participation models based on quantitative indicators. Positive outcomes were associated with concrete financial commitments, high levels of public willingness to participate, and the absence of organised opposition. Conversely, negative outcomes featured organised protests exceeding 10,000 participants, dismissal of public complaints without consideration, low levels of social support, and the emergence of political opposition movements against the projects. Mixed outcomes occupied an intermediate position, dependent on local implementation factors and showing variable effectiveness within a single project. Specifically, procedural criteria – such as population coverage, representativeness, transparency, accessibility, and quality of discussion – achieved high values in projects employing multi-level instruments. In contrast, results-oriented criteria – such as consideration of proposals, satisfaction, stability, legitimacy, and implementation effectiveness – performed better in projects with concrete financial commitments. A summary of the criteria-based analysis is presented in the typological matrix (Table 4), which classifies participation models by key characteristics without repeating details from the previous analysis.

The matrix highlights the polarisation between positive models characterised by systematic engagement and negative models that disregard participatory principles. Intermediate outcomes depended on the local specifics of project implementation. The synthesis of observed patterns allowed the identification of adaptive approaches for different institutional contexts. Developed legal procedures, with 45-day consultation periods and significant sanctions, as seen in Kosovo and Montenegro, facilitated the use of electronic budgeting tools combined with educational components. Bosnia and Herzegovina's multi-level institutional structure, with variable legal approaches across entities, created conditions for multi-sectoral forums supported by international partners. In contrast, the circumvention of democratic procedures in Serbia and North Macedonia led to the development of alternative participation tools through civic movements outside official channels. Albania's ethnically homogeneous context demonstrated locally adaptive processes, with outcomes varying according to the level of community organisation.

**Table 4.** Typology of public participation models in urban planning in the Western Balkans

Country	Participation model	Legal status of participation	Mechanisms	Public response
Kosovo	Digital	Legally mandated with additional digital participation tools	Electronic platforms, educational programmes	Constructive participation
Montenegro	Consultative	Legally mandated and institutionally supported	Multi-sectoral forums, monitoring	Active support
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Democratic	Legally required with extended participatory practices	Urban laboratory, international competition	Mass participation
Albania	Experimental	Voluntary and project-based participatory initiatives	Gamification, co-financing	High willingness
Serbia	Circumvention	Legally required but procedurally bypassed	Procedural bypass	Mass protests
North Macedonia	Coercive	Formally required but effectively excluded	Exclusion of the public	Spontaneous resistance

Note: the classification of models was developed based on a comparative analysis of case studies using the effectiveness criteria for participatory planning outlined in the section ‘Conceptual foundations for evaluating the effectiveness of participatory planning’.

Source: compiled by the author based on own empirical research, Vancic (2018, June 27), Jano et al. (2020), Staletović and Pollozhani (2022), Rask et al. (2023) and Open Government Partnership (2025).

Based on a comparative analysis of participation models in the region, practical recommendations were formulated. The development of electronic civic engagement tools requires the legal allocation of a budget share to participatory projects, the creation of multilingual interfaces, and integration with youth education programmes, drawing on Kosovo’s experience. Establishing permanent multi-sectoral structures demands parity of representation for civil society, systematic funding of NGOs from municipal budgets, and the introduction of independent monitoring, following Montenegro’s model. Preventing authoritarian scenarios requires legislative guarantees against the circumvention of consultation procedures, mandatory referendums for projects exceeding €50 million, and the establishment of independent supervisory bodies with the authority to halt projects, in line with lessons from Serbia and North Macedonia. Supporting experimental approaches requires state funding for pilot initiatives, the creation of interdisciplinary laboratories within universities, and the development of a regional network for the exchange of best practices between municipalities, following the example of Albania. Accounting for post-conflict specificities necessitates dedicated measures to ensure ethnic representation, the provision of neutral spaces for consultations, and professional mediation of interethnic tensions in planning processes, in line with the experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Discussion

The study revealed a critical relationship between the quality of public participation mechanisms and the effectiveness of urban development projects in postconflict societies in the Western Balkans. Typological analysis of six national models highlighted a polarisation between systems with well-developed participatory procedures and those employing authoritarian planning approaches. The results support the hypothesis that the effectiveness of urban development correlates with institutional capacity to facilitate meaningful public participation through both formal and informal communication channels.

Collaborative planning methods, identified in this study as a key feature of successful participation models, are corroborated by the research of [Mitić-Radulović and Lalović \(2021\)](#). The creation of the Linear Park in Belgrade through the CLEVER Cities project demonstrated the effectiveness of a partnership-based approach, whereas the transformation of the Avala cinema complex faced resistance due to the exclusion of residents. The findings regarding the contrasting outcomes between Serbia's circumvention model and Kosovo's digital participatory model align with these conclusions on the impact of engagement levels on public response.

[Plaku \(2024\)](#) provided empirical support for Albania's experimental grassroots model through an analysis of the development of pocket parks in Tirana. Park development occurred with active resident participation in collaboration with NGOs via multi-channel communication. The study identified high levels of citizen willingness to engage (97%) and concrete forms of involvement – volunteering, financial contributions, and provision of materials – findings that are corroborated by practical experience in the Albanian capital through the identified combination of academic institutions with direct community engagement.

The decentralised approach through multisectoral forums, characteristic of Montenegro's consultative model, contrasts with the findings of [Chatzitheodoridis et al. \(2022\)](#) regarding Thessaloniki. The implementation of an Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy through centralised city authorities highlighted the need to balance coordination with decentralised participation. The study's results on the success of Montenegro's decentralised approach, featuring parity in civil society representation, stand in contrast to the Greek experience of centrally managed strategy.

The role of academic institutions as mediators between authorities and the community, documented in the study for Albania's experimental model, aligns with the findings of [Michali and Eleftherakis \(2022\)](#). Their analysis of seventeen European Commission projects demonstrated the establishment of human-centred processes through the integration of public needs into policy development. The effectiveness of academic mediation identified in the study is confirmed by the creation of mutually accountable relationships between research institutions and communities in European projects.

Interdisciplinary coordination in post-conflict contexts, identified in this study as essential for effective participation, aligns with the findings of [Hügel and Davies \(2020\)](#). Their systematic literature review on climate change adaptation highlighted a lack of shared understanding of public participation across disciplines, as well as the paradox of participation in governance transformation processes. The present study corroborates these findings by demonstrating the need to coordinate expertise in urban planning, architecture, sociology, and economics when addressing post-conflict territories. [Li et al. \(2020\)](#) identified variability in the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms through a comparative analysis of Chinese and international approaches to cultural heritage management. Chinese practice was characterised by minimal community involvement under government administration, whereas international approaches focused on enhancing the capacities of local communities. The polarisation between authoritarian and participatory models observed in the Western Balkans, as revealed in this study, is mirrored in the contrast between China's centralised approach and decentralised international practices, depending on the political context.

[Ferreira et al. \(2020\)](#) highlighted the potential of stakeholder participation in nature-based solutions through a systematic review of 142 articles. They identified two analytical dimensions of participation: citizens' perceptions and the participatory process, including associated challenges and opportunities. The findings of the present study, emphasising the necessity of a comprehensive approach to engaging diverse population groups via multi-level participatory instruments, are consistent with the demonstrated potential of multisectoral engagement in nature-based

solutions. The potential of digital tools to enhance public participation, identified in this study as the foundation of Kosovo's digital participatory model, is supported by the findings of [Masik et al. \(2021\)](#). Their analysis of Polish Smart City strategies revealed institutional changes in participatory governance through the digitalisation of services and the linking of social welfare programmes to urban development goals. The advantages of electronic budgeting with educational components, identified in this study, are corroborated by the Polish experience of gradually adapting digital technologies to support public participation.

The critical role of the institutional context in determining the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms, observed through the comparison of legislative frameworks and practical outcomes in this study, aligns with the conclusions of [Smolka and Amborski \(2022\)](#). Their comparative analysis of North and Latin America demonstrated that identical principles of land-value capture produced different outcomes depending on institutional frameworks. The gap identified in this study between legislative norms and their practical application reflects the discrepancy between policy intentions and outcomes observed in the American experience.

[Ezeudu and Ismail \(2023\)](#) confirmed the significance of local implementation factors through an evaluation of smart city initiatives in three Nigerian cities. They observed variations in effectiveness resulting from differences in local governance, funding, and citizen participation. The distinctions identified in this study between Kosovo's digital model and Montenegro's consultative model, as determinants of variability in participatory effectiveness, correlate with the contrast between Lagos, which exhibited high effectiveness due to investment, and Port Harcourt, which lagged behind owing to financial constraints.

The necessity of a multi-criteria approach to evaluating the effectiveness of participatory processes, justified in this study through the development of a conceptual framework of criteria, finds partial alignment with the findings of [Bozkurt \(2023\)](#). The development of a decision-making model for urban transformation using multicriteria methods highlighted the critical importance of physical, economic, social, and institutional indicators. This study extends that approach by integrating procedural, outcome-based, and systemic dimensions in the assessment of participatory mechanisms. The influence of ethnic geography on mechanisms of public participation in post-conflict territories, identified here through the analysis of the Kosovo experience, is empirically supported by [Milosavljević et al. \(2023\)](#). Their demographic analysis for 1948–2022 documented the transformation from heterogeneous to homogeneous settlements due to political conflict and ethnic cleansing. The challenges to ensuring inclusivity amid inter-ethnic tensions identified in this study are reflected in the formation of ethnically homogeneous territories dominated by the Albanian population in Kosovo.

[Gollopenni \(2020\)](#) demonstrated a correlation between demographic stabilisation and institutional development through a study of urban life in Kosovo after 1999. The author recorded simultaneous growth in urban population and socio-urban challenges, arising from the absence of consolidated urban development institutions. The link established in this study between post-2003 population stabilisation and the development of mechanisms for public participation is corroborated by the observed correlation between urbanisation and the inadequacy of planning strategies during the post-conflict period.

In addition to formal procedural requirements, the presence and enforcement of sanctions constitute an important factor influencing the effectiveness of participatory planning. Comparative analysis of the cases indicates that legal provisions alone do not guarantee meaningful participation unless accompanied by enforceable sanctions and institutional accountability. In Montenegro, where financial penalties for procedural violations may reach EUR 50,000, participatory mechanisms

are supported by clearer institutional responsibility and more consistent implementation, contributing to stable consultation practices and lower levels of public contestation. By contrast, in Serbia, although similar legal provisions formally exist, the absence of effective enforcement and the frequent circumvention of consultation procedures have limited the practical impact of sanctions on planning outcomes, resulting in public protests and reduced institutional trust. These findings suggest that sanctions influence planning effectiveness not only through their formal presence in legislation but also through their practical enforceability and integration into governance systems.

Geopolitical factors also play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of participatory planning in post-conflict urban governance (Issayeva et al., 2024; Mukhtarova et al., 2024). The comparative analysis demonstrates that EU conditionality, donor priorities, and the influence of international organisations contribute to the institutionalisation of participatory procedures across the Western Balkans. In contexts where European integration processes are more advanced, participatory mechanisms tend to be more formalised and aligned with European governance standards, particularly through the transposition of EU directives and the implementation of externally funded development programmes. At the same time, donor-supported initiatives and international advisory frameworks have facilitated the diffusion of participatory practices, including digital consultation tools, multi-sectoral forums, and collaborative planning approaches. However, the impact of these geopolitical influences remains uneven and depends on domestic institutional capacity, political commitment, and the degree of integration of externally promoted participatory norms into national planning systems. These dynamics indicate that geopolitical factors function as mediating conditions shaping both the form and effectiveness of participatory planning in transitional urban contexts.

The synthesis of the comparative analysis highlighted a convergence of findings regarding the critical role of institutional frameworks in the effectiveness of participatory processes in urban planning. The research confirmed the interrelationship between the quality of democratic procedures and the outcomes of urban development across diverse geographical and political contexts. At the same time, identified divergences concerned the optimal degree of centralised governance and the role of international actors in shaping local participatory practices, outlining directions for further research on participatory planning in transitional societies.

## Conclusions

The study developed a conceptual framework for evaluating the effectiveness of participatory planning in post-conflict territories by integrating theories of multi-level governance and social capital. The framework encompassed procedural criteria, including population coverage, representativeness, transparency, accessibility, and quality of deliberation, complemented by outcome-based criteria such as consideration of proposals, satisfaction, stability, legitimacy, and implementation effectiveness. Adaptation to the post-conflict context required accounting for the city's ethnic geography and ensuring parity in ethnic representation, achieved through multilingual information materials, the provision of safe consultation spaces, and the application of professional mediation to manage inter-ethnic tensions in planning processes.

An analysis of Kosovo's institutional and legal evolution documented the transition from the Yugoslav system of self-governance through the legal vacuum of 1990–1999 to the contemporary legislative framework, anchored by five fundamental normative acts enacted between 2003

and 2018. Concurrently, demographic trends indicated population stabilisation at 1.6 million inhabitants, with 50.2% urbanisation and concentrations of 230,000 residents in Pristina and 190,000 in Prizren. Meanwhile, the administrative reform of 2008–2013 increased the number of municipalities from thirty to thirty-eight, bringing planning services closer to communities and creating the conditions for expanding participatory practices. Regional comparisons revealed the similarity of the Kosovo approach to Serbian legislation, particularly in terms of minimal consultation periods, while highlighting a contrast with the Montenegrin model, which featured the longest discussion procedures.

A typological analysis identified six models of public participation, clearly distinguishing between systems with well-developed participatory procedures and approaches that excluded the public. Among the positive approaches, Kosovo's digital participatory model was characterised by electronic platforms and educational programmes for young people, whereas Montenegro's consultative model relied on multi-sectoral forums with ongoing intersectoral dialogue. Albania's experimental model combined academic research with practical engagement through innovative methods, reflected in Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratic model via urban laboratories supported by international partners. In contrast, Serbia's bypass model was marked by systematic procedural violations through public-private agreements, and North Macedonia's imposed model involved the complete exclusion of the public from planning processes.

Practical recommendations include the development of digital tools with legally mandated allocations of municipal budgets to participatory projects, complemented by the creation of permanent intersectoral structures with parity-based representation and the introduction of independent monitoring of effectiveness. Preventive measures involve legislative safeguards against the circumvention of consultative procedures and the establishment of independent control bodies with the authority to halt projects, ensuring adherence to participatory principles. The study's limitations include a focus on national models without detailed analysis of municipal-level variations within individual countries and the absence of longitudinal observation of the long-term effectiveness of implemented mechanisms. Consequently, future research prospects encompass the development of quantitative indices for the effectiveness of participatory planning, enabling systematic comparisons of post-conflict societies across different regions.

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