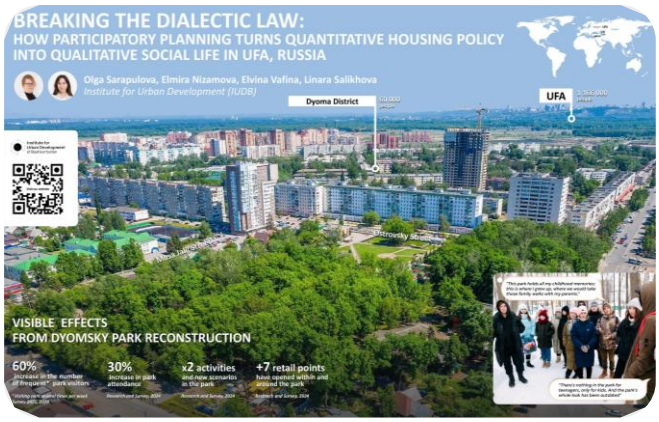
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# *Breaking the Law of Dialectics: Park Renovation for Rethinking Local Identity*

**Submitted By:** NGO «Institute for Urban Development of Bashkortostan»




## Organization Profile

**Organization Name:** NGO «Institute for Urban Development of Bashkortostan»

**Organization Type:** Civil society

**Website:** https://irgrb.ru//eng

## Practice Details

**Country(ies):** Russia

**City(ies):** Ufa

**Start Year:** 2013

**Ongoing:** No

**End Year:** 2024

**Main Adequate Housing Components:**




**Housing Thematic Areas:**

Housing, Land & Spatial Planning

Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

**Relevant SDGs:**



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## Problem & Context

In modern Russia, the main housing policy is shaped by the National Project "Housing and Urban Environment," which prioritizes quantitative targets—such as the total square meters built each year—over housing quality. This approach results in rapid, large-scale residential construction with little integration into the existing urban fabric.

The example of the Dyoma district in Ufa, Russia, clearly demonstrates these consequences: over the past decade, the population of this underprivileged area has tripled, and the influx of new residents has caused tension around identity, belonging, and safety, dividing the community.

The situation is worsened by delays in social infrastructure development—notably, severe shortages of schools, leading to overcrowded classes and multiple shifts. This critical gap means children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to alienation, loss of community cohesion, and mental health challenges.

## Solution Developed

This housing practice is a community-driven initiative in the Dyoma district of Ufa, led by the NGO Institute for Urban Development. The process includes four key stages:

1. Development of the "Vision Dyoma-2030" district strategy
2. Creation of a flagship project—a “third place” for community communication and fundraising for park reconstruction
3. Park construction
4. Post-implementation evaluation of social effects

The practice addressed the critical challenge of social fragmentation in the rapidly growing, underprivileged Dyoma district by engaging residents in all project stages. The main beneficiaries were vulnerable groups—particularly children and adolescents—who were most exposed to alienation and weakened community ties due to rapid urbanization and a lack of inclusive spaces.

Objectives included fostering a new shared identity, increasing cohesion between newcomers and locals, improving social infrastructure, and providing safe, accessible public spaces using participatory and psychosocial methods.

The uniqueness of the methodology lies in collecting and analyzing qualitative data (mental maps, surveys, interviews) through a systems-psychodynamic lens.

## Implementation

Since 2015, the NGO comitted research on neighborhood demands and strategy development:

1 STAGE

- 2014: Launch of the "Neighborhood days" dedicated to public discussions on the disctrict issues and perspectives, start of "Vision Dyoma-2030"
- 2015: "Vision Dyoma-2030" is approved by municipality

2 STAGE

- 2020: Park redevelopment design and citizen participation campaign
- 2021: Fundraising campaign

3 STAGE

- 2022: Reonstruction of the park

4 STAGE

- 2023: Social impact research
- 2024: Development of methodology for assessing effects on vulnerable groups

NGO Institute for Urban Development – coordinator and initiator of the housing practice, primary moderator of resident discussions, and client for the park reconstruction project.

The city authority – facilitated resident discussions, served as a partner in attracting funding, acted as client for the park reconstruction, and is responsible for the park's ongoing management.

Local schools – assisted with conducting surveys and workshops with adolescents.

Architects – developed the park reconstruction project.

Local community – the primary beneficiaries of the urban intervention.

The cost of reconstruction: around 2,5 million US dollars from Federal Program budget.

The cost of coordination and research: 3000 US dollars from NGO

## Enablers & Obstacles

Key enablers included strong community participation driven by NGO Institute for urban development, municipal support prioritizing socially sensitive urban renewal, and innovative qualitative research methods.

A decisive factor was the implementation of the state program "Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment," which provided essential funding for the park's reconstruction.

Challenges included bridging cultural gaps between locals and newcomers, managing diverse interests (developers, authorities, small businesses) and skepticism toward non-physical impacts of urban intervention.

Obstacles were addressed through open dialogue, transparent communication, youth engagement, and sustained leadership from the NGO, with research tools adapted to young people's ways of expression.

## Results & Impact

The park reconstruction practice in the Dyoma district has generated notable qualitative and social benefits for an underprivileged community, including a 30% increase in park attendance—especially among youth—and a doubling of available activities. Renovating the central public space enhanced not only its physical features but also fostered a new local identity. For adolescents from low-income families, the park has become a vital place for self-identification, socializing, and personal development. Their mental maps reveal tensions between long-term residents and newcomers, alongside emerging opportunities for connection and shared belonging.

This project demonstrated that inclusive public spaces can strengthen social cohesion in marginalized neighborhoods. Residents voiced the need for a "third place" to help navigate rapid changes, a role the renewed park successfully fulfills. Functioning as a safe, accessible transitional object, the park helps reduce anxiety, build resilience, and symbolize community renewal.

Importantly, the reconstruction marked the first concrete step toward bridging gaps between locals and newcomers. It shifted perceptions of Dyoma from a fragmented collection of communities to a integrated district, creating shared ground for dialogue and collaboration. Over time, this practice exemplifies how public space interventions can nurture sustainable identity formation and promote inclusive urban development amid swift demographic and social shifts.

## Replication & Scale Up

This practice is replicable in fast-changing urban areas, especially where rapid housing growth overshadows quality of life. Key factors are active facilitation, participatory qualitative methods, and alignment with local cultural and psychological contexts. The flexible toolkit—including strategic visioning, youth engagement, and psychosocial assessment—enables adaptation to local needs and conditions, making it suitable for diverse communities.

Scaling relies on integration into municipal planning, building NGO and practitioner capacity, and leveraging state programs for funding. Partnerships with planning authorities and embedding psychosocial impact assessments into standard housing policies are crucial. This approach

supports sustainable, inclusive public space projects and enables long-term social monitoring across multiple urban districts.

## Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

This housing practice introduces the innovative use of system psychodynamic methods to interpret qualitative data, addressing the hidden psychological impacts of urban transformation on vulnerable youth. It is recommended to embed this approach by updating urban planning guidelines to include psychosocial evaluation of redevelopment projects.

This approach is now applied by the Institute in its projects across Russian cities, influencing strategies for community engagement and identity-building through participatory and psychosocial methods in urban redevelopment projects.

## Lessons & Takeaways

A key lesson is that, during the project development phase, it was essential to design and implement a comprehensive management model for the public space, including clear financial planning for the park's ongoing operations. The lack of this led to excess retail and few resident-requested ammusement park attractions after completion. This misalignment underscores the need for urban planners to act not only as designers but also as long-term mediators and observers, establishing governance that aligns commercial, social, and psychological needs throughout the park's lifecycle.