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Transformation of the urban environment into mini-public multifunctional spaces by organising an innovative architectural form – parklets

Abstract. The search for alternative solutions to the problem of organising public space, without the implementation of large-scale projects or substantial capital investment under the constraints of dense urban development, is a pressing issue. The purpose of the study was to assess the condition of existing public spaces through a population survey and formulate recommendations for the design and integration of parklets within architectural and urban planning infrastructures. Based on the findings, the design principles, main components, formal design approaches, fundamental requirements, and usage scenarios of parklets in the urban environment were defined within the framework of the “parklets – public space – citizens” system. Methodological recommendations necessary for the construction of parklets that considered residents’ interests and aligned with contemporary urban development trends were outlined. A survey demonstrated that the vector of development, planning, and operation of public space ought to be revised according to residents’ needs. 53% of respondents indicated a shortage of public spaces for urban recreation, highlighting the necessity of alternative solutions to address this issue. 42% of participants observed a low standard in the quality of organisation of existing public spaces, suggesting a requirement not merely for reconstruction, but for redesign. 91% of respondents supported the creation of additional public mini-spaces in the form of parklets to address the shortage of recreational zones. 38% of respondents expressed willingness to take an active role in enhancing the quality of public spaces, from idea generation through to project implementation, indicating a readiness among citizens to collaboratively address issues of urban improvement. The findings may be utilised by designers and architects in the development of public space projects, and by local governments during implementation

Keywords: components of parklets; parklet use scenarios; parklets design principles; structure of parklets; effectiveness of parklets; requirements for parklets

INTRODUCTION

Public spaces increasingly play a central role in the lives of urban residents and can serve as the primary catalyst for urban transformation and renewal, enhancing quality of life, fostering local entrepreneurship and, consequently, facilitating the integrated development of urban infrastructure. The creation of a comfortable and safe urban environment constitutes the principal focus in the design of public spaces.

Parks and other public spaces confer evident health benefits on citizens and communities, and financial value on cities. K. Herman & M. Rodgers (2020) stated that many cities experience difficulty in providing adequate levels of open space for residents, particularly in densely built-up neighbourhoods. In this context, many settlements found it challenging for architects, designers, and municipal authorities to create a comfortable, social and safe urban

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environment that was resident-oriented and adapted to local needs, without resorting to large-scale projects and substantial capital investments amidst the constraints of dense urban development. Simultaneously, uncontrolled parking of vehicles frequently occurred on pavements, streets, plazas, and vacant yard areas. Specialists recognised the need for novel approaches to the creation of public spaces, such as squares, streets, and other publicly accessible areas, since public space was an integral component of urban infrastructure.

H.M. Shokry (2020) noted that public space development should incorporate the latest technological advancements to ensure citizen well-being and comfort. As populations grow and urban development density intensified, existing open spaces were diminishing; hence, the establishment of parklets (miniature public spaces) may offer a viable solution to public space deficits. A parklet was a small public recreational area, a miniature public space or mini-square, comprising a specially designed structure with seating and landscaping. It extended from the pavement to offer additional space and convenience for individuals to meet, socialise, and relax. As A. Holovatiuk (2022) indicated, historical analyses of public space development demonstrated that parklets represented a recent instrument for addressing the challenges of organising recreational areas in contemporary cities.

Parklets aimed to increase space and convenience for people to relax, meet, and socialise by extending the pavement, as explained by K. Zhykhareva & S. Rogovsky (2021). Parklets simultaneously help to reduce unauthorised vehicle parking on pavements and in squares, while also organising new recreational areas for citizens. Parklets were publicly accessible and open to all. J.L. Muller (2021) emphasised that architects and designers had a critical role in shaping the image of future public spaces and integrating them into the overall urban fabric. E. Korkmaz (2024) noted that parklet structures, which can be installed modularly in one or more parking spaces, were employed to regulate traffic, ensure pedestrian safety and create public spaces. G.F.Y. Caymaz & M.A. Zerriouh (2022) indicated that the parklet concept was initially introduced in San Francisco (USA), a city overloaded with car parks, and that the idea of creating parklets was now spreading widely, enjoying popularity in many countries as a means to address the lack of recreational areas in cities.

In Ukraine, the idea of transforming parts of parking areas into mini-oases (parklets) started relatively recently, in 2015, in Ivano-Frankivsk. N. Sosnova (2021) emphasised that this initiative could serve as one potential solution to contemporary urban planning challenges in Ukraine. Parklets represented a form of artistic expression in public spaces and contributed to shaping the image of the architectural and urban environment from the perspective of artistic design (Praslova, 2021).

Since their inception, the concept of mini-parks (parklets) has evolved into a global experiment aimed at

revitalising and reshaping urban spaces for social interaction, recreation, and artistic expression. N. Jarman & E. Stratford (2023) observed that a global movement in urban design and planning, encompassing small experimental parklets, held promise as a strategy for addressing the organisational challenges of contemporary cities. Modern trends in urban planning and policy suggested an increasing focus on sustainable urban mobility and improved living conditions for urban residents (Comi *et al.*, 2022). According to Q. Stevens & M. Morley (2024), the innovativeness and creativity evident in the design and components of parklets served as key criteria in evaluating the quality of street-level urban spaces, features that were consistently appreciated by the public. Based on the analysis of various sources, including theoretical literature and practical case studies, the creation of comfortable and inclusive public spaces was as a pressing priority for urban environments. The purpose of this study was to identify innovative solutions to the challenges of public space organisation and to address related social issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological framework of the study was:

- Literature review and conceptual analysis. Papers, abstracts, and monographs were analysed to explore the research subject. This approach enabled the systematisation of existing theoretical knowledge and the integration of new information.
- Interviewing and data collection. Practical data collection was conducted via oral and written surveys to evaluate the quality of existing public spaces.
- Monitoring. Observation of the condition of existing objects of public spaces allowed systematising the facts and giving an assessment of their qualitative and quantitative condition.
- Systematisation and generalisation. The diverse data obtained were systematised and generalised into a coherent scientific framework, forming the basis for the conclusions of the study.

This study was conducted in 2024 to assess the condition of public spaces in Ukrainian cities. Observations and surveys were conducted among residents and visitors of Cherkasy (Ukraine). Semi-structured surveys were conducted among 488 respondents. Two groups of people were selected for the surveys – citizens and visitors of the city. 351 citizens and 137 visitors took part in the survey, among them were 54 teachers, 144 students, 45 civil servants, 119 business employees, 126 representatives of other professions (Table 1). Respondents, both male and female, ranged in age from 16 to 70 years and voluntarily disclosed their occupation and age. The geographical scope of the respondents included Cherkasy, Kyiv, and Kharkiv oblasts, represented through students and guests of Cherkasy city. Moreover, students of Cherkasy State Technological University participated in the survey. The survey was conducted in organisations among employees and on the streets of the city.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by occupation

Respondents	Educators	Students	Government employees	Business employees	Others	Total
Residents	45	112	34	91	69	351
City visitors	9	32	11	28	57	137
Total	54	144	45	119	126	488

Source: developed by author

The criterion for selecting respondents among those working in organisations and local public bodies was targeted, while on the streets of the city, it was random. This approach allowed for the inclusion of opinions from professionals and the general public. In line with the objectives of the study, respondents were asked to answer six open-ended

questions (Table 2). Respondents were informed about the aim of the survey and of the study in general. The ethical aspects of the study adhered to the principles of The Declaration of Helsinki (2013). Following the completion of the primary analysis of the survey results, statistical processing and summarisation of the obtained data were conducted.

Table 2. List of survey questions

No.	Questions	Response options
1	In your opinion, is there a deficit of public spaces for citizens' recreation in the city (district, neighbourhood)?	A. Enough B. Not enough C. I would like more
2	How do you assess the quality of public spaces in the city?	A. Excellent B. Good C. Satisfactory D. Poor
3	How do you feel about the idea of creating additional mini-public spaces in the city?	A. Positively B. Negatively C. Difficult to answer
4	What would you suggest to increase the number of recreational areas in the city?	A. Demolish some structures B. Eliminate unauthorised parking spaces C. Utilise vacant land D. Difficult to answer
5	Which type of public space is more realistic in a cramped urban environment?	A. Parks B. Squares C. Parklets D. Difficult to answer
6	Would you participate in programmes to improve public recreational areas in the city (from idea to implementation)?	A. Yes B. No C. It's a concern of the city government

Source: developed by author

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A parklet is a stylish and practical element of the urban landscape, which is a cosy place for relaxation and is distinguished by its functionality. The main purpose of organising parklets is to increase available space and create a zone for relaxation for both citizens and visitors, offering a place to rest, meet, and engage in social interaction, while observing city life.

Typologically, parklets may be classified as small architectural forms, structures used to organise mini-public spaces that complement the architectural, urban planning, garden, and park composition of the city (Jain, 2019). Parklets were often installed in place of one or more authorised

or unauthorised car parking spaces along streets, in alleys, squares, or near cafés and shopping centres. Their purpose was to demonstrate, how many people can simultaneously use the space occupied by a single parking spot (Jarman & Stratford, 2023). Parklets created mini-functional public spaces. In addition to garden benches and landscaping elements, they may include chairs, tables, bicycle parking racks, exercise equipment, and modern amenities. The design of parklets represented a new approach that responds to the needs of the present and anticipated future challenges. Parklets served as catalysts for the transformation of the urban environment. Their design must consider the needs of a diverse range of users,

such as holidaymakers, pedestrians, drivers, cyclists, and public transport passengers, within a limited urban space. M. Husiev (2024) noted that the successful implementation of parklets contributed to business and service development and enhanced the quality of recreational spaces. The basic principles of parklet design were:

- Compositional unity of the object-spatial environment.
- Creation of connections between places and people by widening pavements and adding seating areas.
- Optimisation of the carriageway and increased safety.
- Improved accessibility by installing additional elements such as benches, bins, flowerbeds, lighting features, and green spaces.
- Enhancement of public spaces by increasing recreational areas.

The following parklet components should be included in the design to better organise the seating area (Fig. 1).

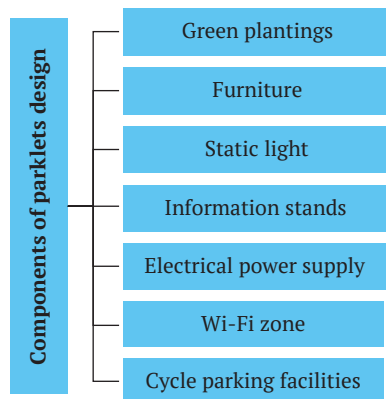


Figure 1. Object-spatial components of parklets

Source: developed by author

The components of parklets may include natural and artificial materials that were environmentally sustainable. Design elements that reflected the historical context and modern trends were advantageous, when creating parklets. The incorporation of innovative content allowed for improved organisation of recreational areas and contributed to the development of the urban environment. The inclusion of an information stand and a Wi-Fi zone within the parklet enhanced convenience for users.

Parklets contributed to inclusive green infrastructure, enhancing the urban environment and raising ecological standards. They symbolised a healthy, pleasant, and vibrant public environment. Parklets improved quality of life, expand recreational areas, eliminate unauthorised parking, addressed the lack of rest areas for residents, enhanced the aesthetic appeal of streets, increased landscaping, and mitigated traffic imbalances in urban areas (Baster & Pohranychna, 2024). The implementation of parklets in contemporary cities was an effective and rational approach to addressing numerous challenges associated with shaping public spaces in modern metropolises. Among the primary issues addressed through the use of parklets were the following (Fig. 2).

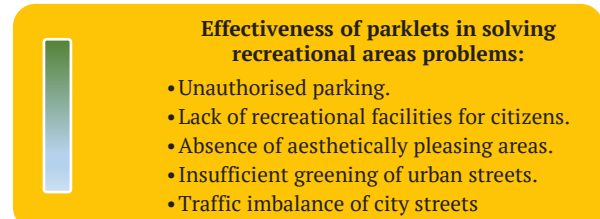


Figure 2. The role of parklets in mitigating challenges faced by recreational areas

Source: developed by author

Innovative solutions in the form of parklets provided increased space for pedestrians, improved the comfort and aesthetics of streets through targeted landscaping, contributed to air purification, and created comfortable conditions for short-term recreation. The development of such mini-parks within urban areas was a relevant and timely task. This approach represented a new and engaging urban experience for Ukraine. These public spaces offered an effective means of locally transforming the urban landscape, revitalising, and enhancing the built environment. Parklets were designed to highlight alternative uses of urban space, with potential usage scenarios including: public (freely accessible to all); commercial (repurposed for business activity); and public-commercial (a combination of public and commercial use). According to their structural design, parklets can be classified as follows (Fig. 3).

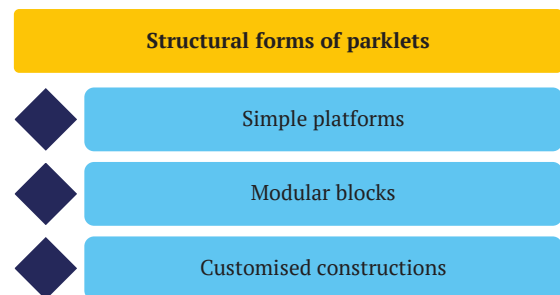


Figure 3. Constructional forms of parklets

Source: developed by author

The choice of constructional forms of parklets depended on the site of installation and the compositional resolution of the surrounding object-spatial context. Studies demonstrated that the installation of parklets brought numerous functional and emotional benefits to residents, in particular by helping to:

- Create additional dynamic public spaces and support social interaction.
- Ensure pavements remain accessible for pedestrians rather than being occupied by vehicles.
- Provide opportunities for effective advertising and increase footfall for local businesses.
- Mitigate the effects of pollution through landscaping.
- Establish new and vibrant public areas.
- Improve perceptions of the urban streetscape.
- Contribute to the city's distinctive character.

Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that the following requirements be considered, when designing and installing parklets in urban spaces (Fig. 4).

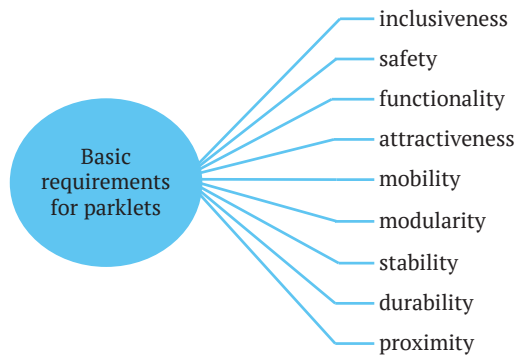


Figure 4. Basic requirements for parklets

Source: developed by author

Considering these recommended requirements, when designing and installing parklets enhanced their functional and aesthetic quality, along with their popularity and appeal among residents. The second stage of the study involved conducting surveys among residents and visitors of the city. The objective was to assess the condition and quality of existing public spaces. The following findings were obtained through a sociological study using a survey, which aimed to gauge public opinion regarding the availability of recreational public spaces in the urban environment. In response to the question, “In your opinion, is there a deficit of public spaces for citizens’ recreation in the city (district, neighbourhood)?”, responses were distributed as follows: “Enough” – 16%, “Not enough” – 53%, and “I would like more” – 31% (Fig. 5).

1. In your opinion, is there a deficit of public spaces for citizens’ recreation in the city (district, neighbourhood)?

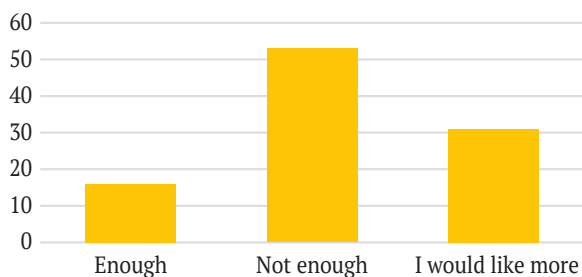


Figure 5. Assessment of sufficiency of public spaces in the city, %

Source: developed by author

The survey results indicated that residents experience a shortage of small-scale recreational spaces near their homes and workplaces. This suggested that urban development has not adequately addressed the needs of citizens and other users. The creation of additional public spaces in the form of parklets should address these real and

pressing demands. When assessing the quality of public spaces in the city, the distribution of responses was as follows: “Excellent” – 7%, “Good” – 21%, “Satisfactory” – 30%, and “Poor” – 42% (Fig. 6). Survey participants highlighted the generally low quality of the organisation of existing public spaces, noting that these areas require not only reconstruction but also comprehensive redesign.

2. How do you assess the quality of public spaces in the city?

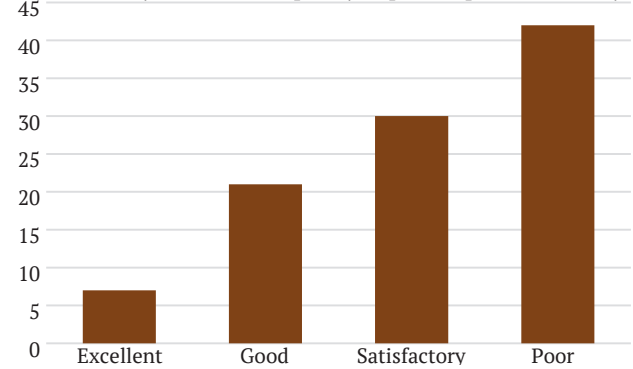


Figure 6. Assessment of the quality of public spaces in the city, %

Source: developed by author

The survey and the territorial analysis demonstrated that many public spaces in urban areas suffered from inadequate spatial organisation and required comprehensive improvement. This issue necessitated the development and implementation of an overarching concept and an innovative design approach that aligned with contemporary quality standards for public space design. When respondents were asked about the potential creation of additional public mini-spaces in the city, their answers were as follows: “Positively” – 91%, “Negatively” – 2%, and “Difficult to answer” – 7% (Fig. 7). The overwhelming support (91%) for the creation of additional mini public spaces in the form of parklets highlighted a strong public demand. This should be addressed through the development of more small-scale public spaces within urban areas.

3. How do you feel about the idea of creating additional mini-public spaces in the city?

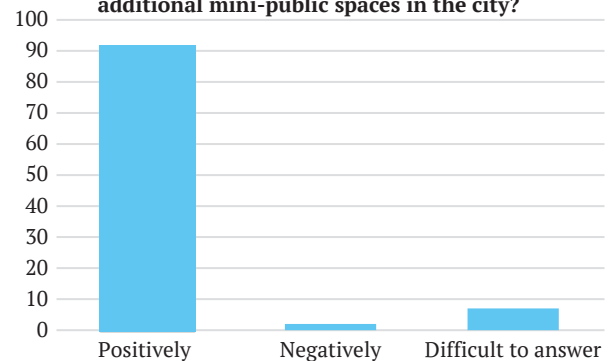


Figure 7. Public support for the creation of mini public spaces, %

Source: developed by author

The study showed that the urban population welcomes the expansion of recreational space in the city; moreover, there was a considerable need for the creation of additional public mini-spaces in various areas. Two-thirds of respondents supported the development of new public mini-spaces. When selecting locations for the creation of additional recreational areas in the city, the respondents' suggestions were distributed as follows: "Demolish some structures" – 18%, "Eliminate unauthorised parking spaces" – 53%, "Utilise vacant land" – 26%, and "Difficult to answer" – 3% (Fig. 8). The findings indicated that unauthorised parking spaces were a source of irritation for many urban residents. Cities should prioritise increasing the number of compact public spaces integrated into the existing urban fabric to address this strong community demand.

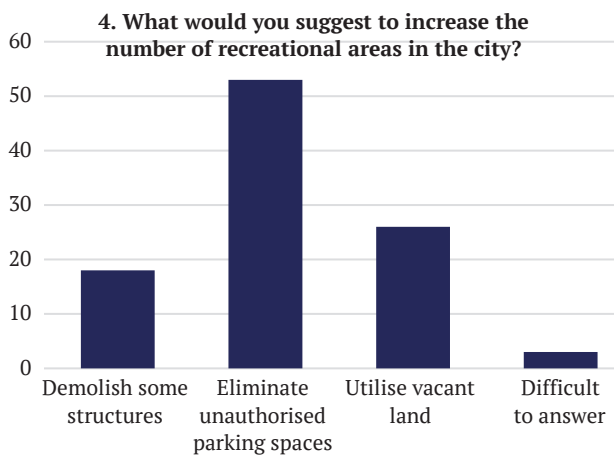


Figure 8. Options for increasing the number of public spaces in the city, %

Source: developed by author

The survey showed that a majority (53%) of respondents proposed creating public mini-spaces (parklets) by removing unauthorised parking areas. Observations of urban environments also confirmed the widespread presence of such parking practices. In response to the question, "Which type of public space is more realistic in a cramped urban environment?", the distribution of answers was as follows: "Parks" – 14%, "Squares" – 30%, "Parklets" – 54%, and "Difficult to answer" – 2% (Fig. 9). The results demonstrated that city residents recognised the creation of mini-public spaces in the form of parklets as the most realistic solution in the context of spatially constrained urban areas. According to 54% of respondents, this approach could be the most effective in addressing the need for recreational zones for residents and visitors. Moreover, 30% of respondents expressed support for more conventional solutions, such as the development of recreational zones in the form of public gardens. Residents acknowledged that urban space was constrained by existing buildings and therefore proposed more feasible solutions, favouring the creation of parklets. This illustrated the growing popularity of parklets as a means of establishing open, comfortable, and innovative environments within compact urban settings. These

spaces served as hubs for gathering, recreation, socialising, and community activity. Regarding participation in programmes aimed at improving public recreational areas in the city, respondents answered as follows: "Yes" – 38%, "No" – 20%, and "It's a concern of the city government" – 42% (Fig. 10). Among those surveyed, 42% considered the development and organisation of public spaces to be the exclusive responsibility of municipal authorities. This finding highlighted a lack of public awareness and guidance concerning the role of citizens in shaping public spaces. No considerable effort was made to engage citizens in discussions about the challenges of public space development or possible solutions. If city authorities were to conduct explanatory and participatory initiatives, this misconception could be effectively addressed.

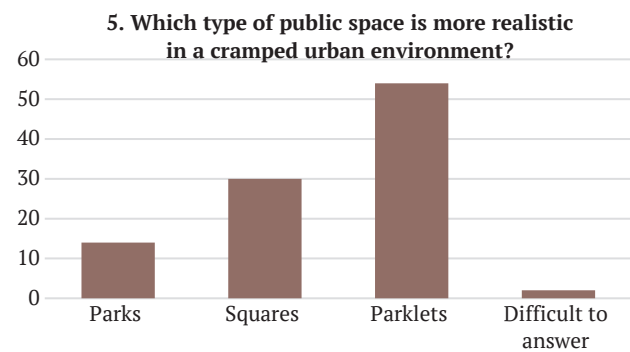


Figure 9. Types of public space, %

Source: developed by author

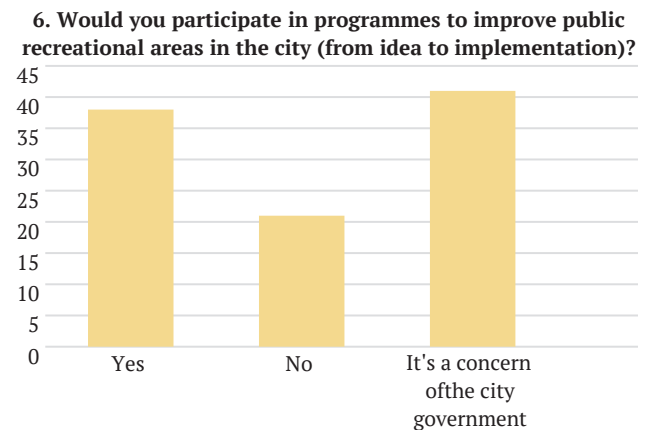


Figure 10. Willingness to participate in public space improvement programmes, %

Source: developed by author

The survey showed that more than a third of respondents were willing to take an active role in improving public recreational areas in the city, from generating ideas to implementing projects. This figure could increase, if city authorities were to undertake promotional and organisational initiatives. Such efforts would also provide citizens with opportunities to participate, allowing each individual to propose their own solutions to urban development challenges. A. Wojnarowska (2016) emphasised that the model for assessing the quality of public spaces and the

landscape organisation of recreational areas should reflect the contemporary needs of the population. These criteria were confirmed in this study through population survey results. According to O. Oliynyk (2021), elements of open urban space, as part of the city's cultural heritage, should reflect public life. The author noted that the components of parklets should not only follow contemporary trends, but also respect the cultural and historical characteristics of the local community. Recommendations by C. Neugebauer (2021) regarding the planning and renewal of the urban environment in German cities may prove valuable for Ukrainian cities. As a solution to the issue of organising public spaces, this study proposed the creation of mini-public spaces in the form of parklets.

Researchers J.G. Vargas-Hernández & J.A. Zdunek-Wielgołaska (2019) summarised modern trends in urban planning and their practical applications. Despite general trends and shared developmental areas, this study demonstrated that it was essential to consider the unique cultural context of each society, necessitating an individualised approach. The conventional approach to the landscape organisation of public spaces, as a method of urban adaptation proposed by I. Ustinova & A. Matsokha (2024), may be suitable, where there was no shortage of free space. However, in densely built-up urban environments, the use of parklets was preferable. M. Diomin & O. Oliynyk (2022) proposed the principle of functional recombination in the organisation of the urban environment. This study built on their work by introducing the principle of parklet polyfunctionality, which enhanced their aesthetic qualities, popularity, and attractiveness among citizens. N. Voiko & O. Dobrovolskaya (2019) outlined a typology of urban public open spaces. Based on the results of this study, the inclusion of parklets as a distinct type of public space was found to be both feasible and beneficial. C. Garau & V.M. Pavan (2018) argued that the quality of urban life depends on numerous objective and subjective indicators, including: accessibility, flexibility and functionality, minimum services available, emotional well-being, quality of life, social well-being, environmental characteristics, built environment features, the efficiency of primary services, soil pollution, security systems, smart crime prevention, and the risk of natural disasters. The combined values of these indicators formed, what they termed the Indicator of Smart Urban Quality (ISUQ). The authors emphasised that the index of urban environmental quality can be calculated as the average of the summed ratings of each sub-indicator. As urban populations grow and building density increases, existing public spaces were becoming increasingly limited. Therefore, as this study confirmed, the development of parklets (mini-public spaces) represents a viable solution to this issue.

CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrated that parklets may serve as an innovative solution to the challenge of developing municipal

public spaces within densely built urban areas. The vast majority of respondents (91%) recognised the need to create additional public mini-spaces in cities. In addition, the majority of respondents (53%) stated that there was an insufficient number of public spaces available for citizens to relax within the urban environment. 54% of respondents supported the creation of mini-public spaces in the form of parklets as a more realistic option to address the need for more recreational areas in conditions of limited urban development. Furthermore, 42% of respondents reported the poor quality of existing public spaces in cities, which required immediate intervention to improve their condition.

The study recommended considering the fundamental principles of parklet design in urban spaces, namely: multifunctionality, inclusiveness, and barrier-free accessibility. The survey showed that the majority of respondents believed that unauthorised car parking hinders residents' ability to enjoy urban spaces. Moreover, they advocated for the removal of unorganised parking areas and the creation of additional mini-public spaces for recreation in their place. With regard to participation in programmes aimed at improving the quality of recreational areas in the city, 38% of respondents expressed a desire to be involved. However, analysis of the survey results indicated that 41% of residents were reluctant to participate in such programmes, believing that responsibility for improving and maintaining the urban environment lay solely with the city authorities. This demonstrated a lack of public awareness and ineffective communication channels for involving citizens in the development of recreational spaces.

This study confirmed that innovative thematic elements in the design of parklets enhance the attractiveness of public spaces. The integration of smart technologies into parklets provided additional convenience for city residents. The design of parklets must account for the needs of various users, including holidaymakers, pedestrians, drivers, cyclists, and public transport passengers, particularly in areas with limited space. The task of designers and architects in creating parklet projects should be to harmonise and optimise the compositional unity of the spatial environment. The development of parklets in Ukrainian cities may offer an optimal solution to the challenges of organising public spaces in conditions of constrained urban density. Narrative detailing, the infill components of parklets, and a tailored approach for each city, considering local history and community traditions, represent a promising area for further exploration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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**Трансформація міського середовища
у мініпублічні багатофункціональні простори
шляхом організації інноваційної архітектурної форми – парклета**

Анотація. Пошук альтернативних рішень проблеми організації громадського простору без реалізації масштабних проектів або значних капіталовкладень в умовах щільної міської забудови є актуальним завданням. Метою дослідження стала оцінка стану наявних громадських просторів шляхом анкетування населення та формулювання рекомендацій щодо проектування та інтеграції парклета в архітектурно-містобудівні структури. На основі отриманих результатів визначено принципи проектування, основні компоненти, підходи до формального вирішення, базові вимоги та сценарії використання парклета в міському середовищі в межах системи «парклет – громадський простір – мешканці». Сформульовано методичні рекомендації, необхідні для створення парклета з урахуванням інтересів мешканців відповідно до сучасних тенденцій розвитку міського середовища. Результати опитування засвідчили про необхідність перегляду вектору розвитку, планування та експлуатації громадського простору з орієнтацією на потреби мешканців. Зокрема, 53 % респондентів вказали на нестачу громадських просторів для міського відпочинку, що підкреслило актуальність пошуку альтернативних рішень. 42 % учасників опитування відзначили низький рівень якості організації наявних просторів, що вимагало не просто реконструкції, а перепроєктування. 91 % опитаних підтримали створення додаткових громадських мініпросторів у формі парклета для подолання дефіциту рекреаційних зон. При цьому 38 % респондентів виявили готовність брати активну участь у процесі покращення якості громадських просторів – від формування ідеї до реалізації проекту, що свідчило про наявність потенціалу до спільного вирішення питань міського благоустрою. Отримані результати можуть бути використані проєктувальниками та архітекторами при розробці громадських просторів, а також органами місцевого самоврядування під час реалізації відповідних проектів

Ключові слова: компоненти парклета; сценарії використання парклета; принципи проектування парклета; структура парклета; ефективність парклета; вимоги до парклета
