Participatory Action Research as Support in Public Space Design

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This doctoral dissertation addresses integrating participatory strategies rooted in action research with architectural practice focused on the design of public spaces in Poland.

Contemporary cities struggle with a democratic deficit manifested by a decline in citizen engagement in public life, increasing distrust towards institutions, and the state's encroachment of areas of citizen activity. This crisis is further exacerbated by the weakening of community bonds and the loss of local identity. Participatory tools, which effectively enhance citizens' influence over decision-making processes shaping their environment, can serve as a response to these challenges.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze participatory methods based on design-research activities conducted in Brussels and Wrocław, and to develop a system supporting the implementation of participatory approaches in public space design.

The key strategy applied in this work was participatory action research, which combines active engagement with the process of knowledge generation. Furthermore, the dissertation is written within the framework of metadesign, understood as the design of design processes. This approach enables the flexible adaptation of actions to changing conditions and facilitates community involvement in projects.

The described strategies were implemented by the Author in collaboration with an interdisciplinary team during the temporary public space project – Maelbeek Vallée Verte in Brussels in 2023. Additionally, the research examined two Brussels-based projects — Jacques Franck Square and Marie Janson Square — with a particular focus on participatory aspects in the design process. Participatory practices in Wrocław were also analyzed, identifying existing tools and their potential for further development.

Based on the experiences, the dissertation formulates principles of authentic participation, as well as attitudes and tools that support both the design process of public spaces and the engagement of local communities. These findings are documented in a publication that includes a glossary and a manifesto for public space designers.

The dissertation also presents recommendations for adapting the analyzed tools to Polish realities, with particular emphasis on the context of Wrocław. The research and design process is summarized in the form of an infographic attached to the dissertation. The research findings were used to develop a prototype of a proprietary tool – the Impuls digital platform. This portal, functioning as a social networking site, is designed to support residents, organizations, and institutions in implementing initiatives and enacting changes in public spaces in a participatory manner.

This dissertation is practical in nature and can inspire designers, municipal decision-makers, community councils, Local Activity Centers, and local leaders to shape urban public spaces with a focus on authentic participation.

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1.
Introduction

1.1. Motivation and Positioning

For over a decade, I have been exploring the broadly understood issues of urban spaces, beginning with architectural studies at Wrocław University of Science and Technology and later focusing on urban interior design as a part of the Interior Architecture program at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. My first attempt at public space research occurred during a year-long stay in Brussels during the 2018/2019 academic year. Beyond mere observation, I actively participated in debates concerning Jacques Franck Square, located in one of Brussels' central municipalities. I witnessed numerous challenges associated with the unsuccessful attempt at its revitalization. Five years later, I returned to Brussels to assess whether any changes have been introduced to theJacques Franck Square.

My perspective on urban architecture has been strongly influenced by the avant-garde architectural movement of the 1960s, represented by the Archigram group, which included individuals such as Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, and Ron Herron. Unlike modernists, who appear to share more conservative approach, Archigram members advocated for freedom in shaping urban spaces, criticizing the prevailing order, and designing solutions that reflected dynamic social changes. Their concepts were based on the idea that the city should be a flexible structure adapting to the needs of its inhabitants, allowing them to take an active role in shaping their surroundings. This adaptable form of the city was envisioned as a response to evolving community needs, with the democratization of urban space[1] symbolized by enabling everyone to act as designers. The creative, experimental attitude of these pioneers, characterized by playful freedom and humor, inspired me to adopt a more holistic view of the city, extending beyond the technical frameworks of architecture. Archigram's innovative approach significantly shaped my thinking about public space design. It encouraged me to delve into the subject of games, which will be explored further in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

My work was also inspired by Henri Lefebvre's philosophy, particularly his development of the *Right to the City concept*. Lefebvre criticized the modernist approach to architecture, which, in his view, fostered alienation and restricted the potential for social life based on diversity. He sought to redefine urban space as one free from exclusively capitalist interests, where residents could fully realize their sense of community, desires, and social relationships. The *Right to the City* thus refers to the vision of a life based on equality, democracy, and unrestrained expression, forming the foundation for an inclusive and dynamic urban model[2].

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[1] Sadler S., Archigram : architecture without architecture. Mass.: MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005.
[2] Trzeja P., Prawo do miasta–utopijna idea, rodzące się prawo człowieka czy wzniosłe hasło jednoczące mieszkańców? Polityka i Społeczeństwo, 17(01), 2019, pp. 23-42.

Lefebvre also argued against traditional understandings of space, introducing **the concept of space as both socially produced and socially productive[3]**, as articulated in his article "La production de l'espace"[4]. Examining space in a broader context—from the rhythms of daily life to global urbanization processes—he defined many social practices contributing to "*space production*, encompassing material practices of transformation, representational practices, and experiences of and adaptation to space[5]".

Lefebvre's ideas have been further developed in the contemporary analyses and proposals of David Harvey, a social theorist, and geographer, who addressed urban transformation in his book Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. Harvey argues that the right to the city "is the right to change and reinvent the city according to our desires. It is also a more collective than individual right, as reinventing the city inevitably depends upon exerting collective power over urbanization processes"[6].

In Harvey's view, the right to the city stands for the active creation of an urban environment by its residents to improve their quality of life. His approach emphasizes democratic control over urban development, proposing continuously reimagined solutions that can be implemented, practiced, and subsequently redefined, highlighting the dynamic and communal nature of space production[7].

Although Harvey does not use terms like self-governance or participation directly, his concepts point to the importance of democratic oversight of urban space. Harvey's belief that urban space should result from collective action, constantly evaluated and adapted to changing resident needs, is more relevant than ever in the view of contemporary urban and social challenges.

Researchers' and activists' efforts to realize the people's right to the city continue to resonate until this day and are reflected in urban movements, grassroots initiatives, and the growing interest in urban participation.

In Poland, David Harvey's ideas can be found in the activities of the Congress of Urban Movements (Polish: Kongres Ruchów Miejskich - KRM), which unites urban activists to promote green, democratically managed, and just cities. KRM's mission is to "advocate for a good life in the city" and promote values associated with residents' non-negotiable right to co-create urban spaces, which underpins the activities of its members[8].

While collaborating with the SOC TECH LAB Foundation (formerly operating under the name of the Local Development Research and Development Institute Foundation), as a KRM member, I had the opportunity to discover various aspects of urban activism in Wrocław and other Polish cities. I acquired practical experience in implementing the

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[3] Stanek Ł., Architektura znowu jako przestrzeń? Uwagi na temat zwrotu przestrzennego., Autoportret, 2 (41), 2013,https://www.autoportret.pl/artykuly/architektura-znowu-jako-przestrzen-uwagi-na-temat-zwrotu-przes trzennego, [accessed: 16.11.2024].
[4] Lefebvre H., La production de l'espace. L'Homme et la société, 31(1), 1974.
[5] Stanek Ł., Architektura…, op. cit.
[6] Harvey D., Bunt miast. Prawo do miasta i miejska rewolucja, Wyd. Bęc zmiana, Warsaw, 2013, p.22.
[7] Piskozub P., Davida Harveya koncepcja prawa do miasta. Pomiędzy odzyskiwaniem a przebudową wielkich aglomeracji. Metropolizacja: realne problemy–potencjalne rozwiązania, Uniwersytet Wrocławski. Wydział, Prawa, Administracji i Ekonomii, Wrocław, 9, 2013, www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/dlibra/publication/51928, accessed: 12.11.2024].
[8] https://kongresruchowmiejskich.pl/o-kongresie, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

Urban Theses[9]. Interacting with participation practitioners[10] allowed me to deeper understand the challenges and potential of participation in Poland.

In the context of this dissertation, I define participation as an individual's proactive involvement in a larger group's activities or decision-making processes that concern them. Two main types of participation are distinguished: **social** and **civic**. Both of these categories form crucial elements of this analysis and guide the direction of my discussion. These forms are discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

My interest in the sociological aspects of the city prompted me to reflect on contemporary design practice in Poland, particularly regarding the design of urban public spaces. Designers play a crucial role in shaping the appearance of cities, and their actions directly affect residents' quality of life. By contrasting traditional architectural practice with an activist approach, I was able —thanks to my artistic education—to focus on the subjective dimension of architecture, beyond the technical, regulation-driven aspects.

The activist worldview[11], grounded in social responsibility, emphasizes linking scientific research with urban policy. Researchers working in this perspective become personally engaged to exert a tangible impact on the analyzed area. They conduct research collaboratively with participants, treating them not as subjects but as equal co-creators of the process. Such an approach promotes education and emancipation among participants directly affected by the research[12].

Adopting an activist perspective allowed me to distance myself from both my own work and the actions of other designers. This perspective, which is an essential tool for analysis and self-evaluation, also became the foundation of my research.

This dissertation's methodological framework is Action Research. Action Research is "a participatory democratic process focused on developing practical knowledge to achieve goals important to humanity. It combines reflection and action, theory and practice, through collaboration with others to address pressing issues and support the development of individuals and whole communities[13]".

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[9] Urban Theses of the Congress of Urban Movements, https://kongresruchowmiejskich.pl/o-kongresie, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[10] Practitioners of participation are individuals who are actively involved in the implementation and facilitation of various participatory processes. They plan, organize, and conduct public consultations, moderate discussions, and workshops, and assist residents in utilizing tools such as participatory budgeting, local initiatives, and similar mechanisms. Many of these practitioners work in non-governmental organizations, often as educators, cultural animators, or employees of local activity centers. Participation practitioners also operate in public administration offices, informal groups, and, less frequently, in academia and the business sector. The term gained broader recognition through the annual Forum of Participation Practitioners https://stocznia.org.pl/publikacje/praktycy-partycypacji-kim-sa-i-co-mysla/, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

[11] A worldview, according to the definition provided by Guba E. G. in *The Paradigm Dialog*, SAGE Publications, 1990, is "a set of basic beliefs that guide action." J. Creswell identified four categories of worldviews, including the activist worldview.

[12] Creswell J. W., Gilewicz J., Projektowanie badań naukowych: metody jakościowe, ilościowe i mieszane, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow, 2013, pp. 34-45.

[13] Majchrzak K., O edukacyjnych badaniach w działaniu w teorii i praktyce, Studia Dydaktyczne, 2014, 26, pp. 213-224.

1.2. Objective and Scope of Work

The aim of this dissertation is to introduce mechanisms present during the process of implementing authentic participatory approaches in design practice focused on public space, including art-related design, and to develop a system that supports the application of such an approach in the Polish context.

Specific Objectives:

1. Analysis of the participatory tools used in the design process based on conducted research activities and an evaluation of the tested participatory tools within my own design practice;

2. Study of the participatory processes in public space design and assessment of their impact on the final spatial outcomes;

3. Presentation of the research process results in the form of design solutions that enhance social engagement in urban matters.

Scope of the Study:

a. Subject Matter

The research focuses on participatory processes in the context of shaping urban public spaces. The research includes literature reviews, qualitative analyses, and case studies that enabled the identification of the diverse roles designers may assume in participatory processes. Additionally, an analysis was conducted on the methods for actively engaging local communities in public space design..

b. Subject Scope

The research covered the analysis of the implementation of participatory and design processes, work methods used during their execution, and the level of involvement of stakeholders and local actors[14]. Among the analyzed projects was the co-authored Maelbeek Vallée Verte, implemented within an interdisciplinary team, as well as two non-authored projects – Jacques Franck Square and Marie Janson Square in Brussels.

c. Time Frame

The analysis includes toolkits and reports created between 2013 and 2024. The study includes projects and participatory processes implemented between 2018 and 2024, including a co-authored project implemented in 2023. The design documentation and diagnostics date from 2015 to 2023.

d. Spatial Scope

The literature review addresses research and experiences related to social participation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. The selected case studies involve participatory initiatives carried out in Belgium and Poland. The experimental and design phase was conducted in Brussels, while the proposed solutions apply to Wrocław.

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[14] Local or urban actors are defined as organizations, institutions, and individuals who actively operate within a given area, influencing its development, its users or residents, and shaping urban policy.

1.3. Thesis Statement and Research Questions

Thesis Statement:

Integrating *participatory action research* strategies into design practice positively impacts both the public space creation process and the level of engagement of local communities.

General and Specific Research Questions:

1. How can authentic participation[15] be effectively integrated into design practices?

    a. What roles can designers take in participatory processes related to the design of urban public spaces?
    b. What innovative ideas and tools can support authentic participation in shaping public spaces in Polish cities?

2. What directions for the development of participatory practices in Wrocław would make them fully authentic?

    a. What local resources can be utilized for successful participatory activities?

3. How can social engagement in shaping cities be effectively enhanced?
    a. What factors promote active community engagement in shaping public spaces?
    b. What tools and methods are effective in engaging communities in participatory activities?

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[15] See page 31.

1.4. Research Procedures

Research in action - research that helps practitioners.

K. Lewin

The working procedures that constitute a crucial aspect of the conducted research and the doctoral project shall be described in the following chapter. The aforesaid procedures are based on action-oriented research strategies, that combine knowledge acquisition with direct social change[16]. These methodologies include Action Research (AR), also known as the traditional (pragmatic) approach, and its extension—Participatory Action Research (PAR), referred to as the critical or emancipatory approach[17]. The term "AR" used in this dissertation refers to both methodologies' overarching principles and shared characteristics.

In the title of my dissertation, I use the term **participatory action research** to emphasize the participatory nature of design practice, which I explore in my research.

The second concept present throughout my whole doctoral project is metadesign (or meta-design). It represents the idea of designing the very processes of design. This approach allowed me to combine research aspects with design aspects while maintaining the flexibility and continuity of the process as well as its inclusive and emancipatory nature.

1.4.1. Action Research

The AR strategy is used to solve social problems and prompts continuous reflection on the process, paired with implementation of changes. Direct interactions among researchers, practitioners, and the community collaborating within the research process allows this strategy to work. Such an approach is notably well-developed in the field of educational sciences[18] and has gained significant popularity in Western countries, especially in organizational auditing practices, since the mid-1990s. However, AR is relatively rarely used in the context of spatial problem-solving and urban management[19].

The prevailing approach in the broadly defined field of architecture research is research by design, also known as practice-based research. Nevertheless, my choice of AR allowed me to highlight the educational and social dimensions of my doctoral project, stretching beyond the tangible architectural form and stressing the transformational nature of the process.

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[16] Yoland W., What is participatory action research?, Action Research International Paper, 2, 1998, pp. 3-14.
[17] Góral A., Jałocha B., Mazurkiewicz G., Zawadzki M., Badania w działaniu: Książka dla kształcących się w naukach społecznych. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow, 2019. p. 45.
[18] Surdyk A., Metodologia action research i techniki komunikacyjne w glottodydaktyce, 2006. https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/items/f22260c0-5aca-4b2e-8fe8-940abfeb4498 [accessed: 8.11.2024]
[19] Bąkowska E. , Partycypacyjne systemy informacji geograficznej (PPGIS) w gospodarce przestrzennej – doświadczenia z aglomeracji poznańskiej, Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Poznań, 2021, p. 27.

The design-research activities I conducted are positioned at the connection point between Action Research (AR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies (Table 1.1)[20]. Being aware of the limitations of human and time resources, I flexibly adapted elements of both approaches, depending on the nature of the work: conducting activities directly with the community or analyzing design practice based on those activities. I performed the following roles in the project: researcher, moderator[21], designer, and activist. This allowed me to utilize diverse skills depending on the context and enabled an in-depth exploration of the potential for collaboration with the community.

The aim of the design process conducted was to raise awareness among community members and local stakeholders that took part in the project. This process involved both identifying the essence of the problems to be addressed and seeking solutions—architectural, spatial, and interdisciplinary alike. My role involved co-learning with the community, drawing on local knowledge and experiences. Understanding in the context of AR occurs through action and thorough observation of events unfolding within the studied context, which are then analyzed and interpreted, allowing to assign specific meanings to these experiences[22].

My main focus was to explore the potential for grassroots engagement that develops organically without imposing actions or solutions from the top down. Participation in activities and decisions about their scope was intended to stem from the participants' own will and evolving awareness. This approach was supported by the researcher-moderator's facilitation, a role I undertook in the project. Depending on the community's level of engagement at a given moment, I either led meetings and activities or simply accompanied and supported the group. Another significant aspect was the examination of the community's dynamics and how certain activities could influence it.

The key principle of the PAR approach, which I sought to implement in my project, is the concept of *conscientization* (Portuguese: conscientização), understood as "awareness-raising through the provision of educational conditions necessary for emancipation."[23]. This approach is based on a notion of creating an environment where all participants in the process can engage in critical reflection, democratic dialogue can be facilitated without the influence or imposition of the designer-researcher's vision. This process allows the community to learn through practical action and gradually take responsibility for introducing changes.

A key element of my approach was also communication with decision-makers. The design-research process was supposed to serve a mediatory-negotiation function, facilitating consensus-reaching among involved parties. In the AR strategy, conflict and

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[20] Division based on the study: Góral A. i in., Badania w działaniu…, op. cit.
[21] **A facilitator** is a person who supports a group of people in achieving shared goals by enabling open exchange of views and experiences. The facilitator is not responsible for the substantive content of the meeting or workshop but rather for creating a conducive atmosphere and allowing participants to collaborate effectively toward their common objective.
A moderator is a person who facilitates a discussion or meeting, ensuring order is maintained and rules are followed. Their role is to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to express their opinions and that the conversation proceeds smoothly and constructively. Depending on the context, a moderator may also act as a mediator in conflict situations, striving to achieve a compromise between the parties involved.
[22] Góral A. et al., Badania w działaniu…, op.cit., p. 17.
[23] Ibidem, p. 35, from: Stańczyk P., Krótka historia terminu conscientização i o tym, jak Paulo Freire je porzucił, Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja, 21(1), 2018.

dilemmas are treated as essential factors for growth, evoke reflection and serving as an impulse for social change and group development. For this reason, it should not be omitted[24].

I conducted so-called individual action research from a first-person perspective[25]. This allowed me to draw conclusions about my work and improve it. This process also expanded my theoretical knowledge in the area of design practices.

The need to refine my own design actions stemmed from the realization that urban design, for which architects bear significant responsibility, often diverges from the actual needs of its residents. This issue shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. My goal was to acquire competencies and knowledge during close collaboration with the community, local actors, designers, artists and activists. This allowed me to facilitate participatory processes in public space design better.

Engaging in collaboration and dialogue throughout the research allowed me to learn via taking action, including problem identification and gathering facts and opinions from residents and local actors. What is more, I have also gained knowledge from meetings and in-depth interviews with architects that specialize in participatory design, who shared their perspectives with me.

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[24] Ibidem, p. 17.
[25] Ibidem, pp. 46-50.

Table 1.1. The application of elements from the AR and PAR strategies in project and research activities.

Criterion	Pragmatic Orientation - AR	Critical Orientation - PAR
Aim	Improving skills and practice	Critical reflection on one's design practice and the overall condition of participatory design in Poland Raising awareness within the local community during the design process.
Direction of Action	Cooperation and dialogue between the designer-researcher and the local community.	Development of critical awareness for both the designer-researcher in their practice and the community regarding democratic engagement in neighborhood matters.
Role of the Designer—Researcher	Moderator assisting members of various interest groups.	Critical facilitator empowering the local community.
Mode of Learning	Designer-researcher and community learning through action. Designer-researcher learning through action (including design experiments).	Increasing community and local actors' engagement through democratic dialogue. Designer-researcher and participants learning together about context, problem-solving methods, and effective forms of engagement. Enhancing the reflective knowledge of the designer about their own practice.
Type of Dialogue	Cooperative dialogue focused on action.	Democratic communication (when possible) — including governing groups — as a means of reaching solutions A design-research project serving as a mediating function, negotiating interests among all of the involved parties.
Type of Knowledge	Practical tools for solving social problems	Knowledge serving the purpose of critical reflection that enables social change

1.4.2. Metadesign

Metadesign, or meta-design, is a conceptual framework which is based on the idea that the design process designs itself. The prefix *meta-* signifies *beyond, together, between*, and is also used to imply a comprehensive, insightful understanding of a given issue. When used as a prefix, it specifically denotes self-reference.

Metadesign revolves around the assumption that future applications and problems cannot be fully anticipated during the design and development stages. To enable effective implementation of changes over time, the design system must exhibit flexibility and adaptability to new conditions. Furthermore, it should be inclusive and operate within a non-hierarchical or holarchical structure.

Metadesign is an approach that allows for a wide participation by creating technical and social conditions conducive to conscious user engagement. During this process, stakeholders become co-creators and co-designers, as they are provided with appropriate tools and frameworks that allow them to actively influence the system and adapt it to their unique needs. In meta-design, designing the process itself is of the same level of importance, and is often even more critical, than creating the final artifact[26]— an object or content that results from the design process.

The main goal of metadesign is to enable the emergence of solutions and combinations that were not taken into account during the design phase. Metadesign supports the development of new forms of social bonds and creativity. It also promotes innovation. This concept is inspired by the functioning of living organisms and aims to improve the quality of life by integrating various elements of reality. "Metadesign works to align political, ecological, economic, socio-cultural, sensory, and emotional life patterns to create less fragmented and more sustainable cities, services, organizations, etc."[27].

One of the concepts characterizing the idea of metadesign is **emergence**[28], which stands for a lack of complete control and openness to unintended and unforeseen results. In the view of urban design, emergence assumes development based on processes of social self-organization, collective intelligence, and distributed control, replacing traditional top-down planning. This concept suggests that the complexity of urban structures can naturally result from the collaboration of residents, creating dynamic public spaces that evolve in response to community needs[29].

Through emergence, evolution, and adaptation—fundamental to the co-creation process in the idea of metadesign[30]—the design process can lead to more sustainable and adequate solutions, which are better suited to addressing the complexity of contemporary architectural and social challenges.

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[26] Fischer G., Meta-design: Beyond user-centered and participatory design, Proceedings of HCI international, 4, 2003.

[27] Tham M., Jones H., Metadesign tools: Designing the seeds for shared processes of change, Allemandi Conference Press, 2008, p. 8.

[28] Maziarka T, Idea emergencji – zarys ogólny, Zagadnienia Filozoficzne w Nauce 52, 2013, pp. 131-177.

[29] Wantuch-Matla D., Przestrzeń publiczna 2.0: miasto u progu XXI wieku. Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy Michał Koliński, 2016, pp. 164-165.

[30] Giaccardi E., Metadesign as an Emergent Design Culture, Leonardo, 38 (4), 2005, pp. 342-349.

1.5. Dissertation Structure

This doctoral dissertation presents research and design experiences in the context of public spaces in Wrocław and Brussels, focusing on the potential application of participatory tools in a design process. The work is structured to logically and systematically introduce the reader to key concepts, theoretical frameworks, analyses, and empirical findings.

The first chapter portrays the context and motivations behind the topic choice, explaining the adopted worldview and research strategies. The purpose of this introduction is to define the main direction of the analysis, as well as the framework for further issues.

The second chapter presents the analysis of the challenges surrounding urban public spaces in modern cities. It begins by examining these challenges' physical and social dimensions, including their physical condition and social issues. The chapter introduces participation as a promising strategy to mitigate the consequences of these urban dilemmas, particularly those linked to democratic deficits in decision-making processes. By defining the core principles of participatory design, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of its potential to foster more inclusive and resilient public spaces. Furthermore, it contextualizes these principles within the Polish legal and organizational framework and participatory tools in use. This chapter also addresses the integration of art into participatory practices as a tool for social engagement, which positively contributes to place identity building.

The third chapter is dedicated to the literature review and case studies of the evolution and application of participatory approaches in community design centers and community-based architecture in Western Europe and the United States. This chapter traces the historical lineage of participatory practices, which form the basis for the contemporary participatory methods and have shaped the current form of social involvement in the development of urban spaces.This chapter also addresses the integration of art into participatory practices as a tool for social engagement, which positively contributes to place identity building.

The fourth chapter focuses on the Wrocław context of participatory processes. It analyzes tools used within the Wrocław Participatory Budget framework, emphasizing their strengths and limitations. This chapter describes the role of Local Activity Centers (Polish: CAL – Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej), exemplified by CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the presentation of the author's direct involvement in the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project and a qualitative and autoethnographic analysis of the process. These insights offer valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities relevant to further design practice. It also examines participatory processes accompanying the design of public spaces in Brussels, such as Marie Janson Square, Jacques Franck Square. Each case has been thoroughly examined in the view of site-specific characteristics, the roles played by the designers, as well as the spatial and social transformations achieved through participatory methods.

Chapter six presents conclusions regarding integrating participatory processes in the designer's work. It identifies key factors determining authenticity and engagement in the design process. Additionally, the chapter contains an analysis of the possibilities for adapting identified best practices and participatory ideas in the context of Wrocław.

The dissertation concludes with a summary of the research. It also proposes an original digital platform tool to implement the discussed concepts in practice, customized to the local conditions of Wrocław.

The dissertation includes annexed materials presenting the results of the design research process.

2.

Urban Public Space

Space is a reflection of all the most important phenomena and processes occurring in society, it is its expression and "crystallized time."

M. Dymnicka

Space is one of the fundamental concepts in both the exact sciences and the humanities. It can be understood as an abstract mathematical idea, a physical property, an area of perception, or a product of culture or community[31]. This multiplicity of perspectives indicates the diversity of its meanings and connotations, which vary depending on the context. Space serves many functions—it is a locus of interaction and presence, capable of shaping reality while being subject to change. It can unify and divide, connect, and constrain[32].

The model of public space formulated by Krzysztof Bierwiaczonek defines its five main characteristics: "the possibility of expressing one's intentions and views to others, accessibility, public control of space, the public interest realized within it, and its organization"[33].

Both theoretical definitions and everyday experiences confirm that people and space are in a close, reciprocal relationship. The connections between them are ambiguous and complex. The physical environment creates the living conditions for individuals and groups, defining the framework for individual and collective actions, while also serving as the backdrop for human activity.

Space, understood as a social product, refers to the outcome of the activities of an individual, group, or human collective (social or cultural)[34]. The nature and specificity of such space arise from the bonds and relationships between an individual (or community) and the place where they function. Social space thus becomes a metaphor for the very experience of social life. In architectural or urban design, it is discussed in the context of architectural interiors, urban layouts, or their complexes, whose function is tied to community life[35].

This chapter outlines the issues of public space, taking into account its social and physical condition, as well as the challenges it faces in contemporary cities. The analysis focuses primarily on metropolises and large urban centers. Different types of cities encounter distinct challenges due to their scale, resources, and the needs of their inhabitants[36]. Smaller cities are also subject to similar legal regulations and regional policy instruments, though not all of the discussed issues apply to them.

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[31] Jałowiecki B., Szczepański M. S., Miasto i przestrzeń w perspektywie socjologicznej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw, 2002, p. 301.
[32] Majer A., Socjologia i przestrzeń miejska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw, 2010, p. 18.
[33] Bierwiaczonek K., Społeczne znaczenie miejskich przestrzeni publicznych, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice, 2016, p. 20.
[34] Zasuń A., Kuś M., Psychospołeczne mechanizmy funkcjonowania przestrzeni publicznej. Wybrane problemy, Akademia im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, 2015, p. 109.
[35] https://ade.niaiu.pl/archipediapl/przestrzen-spoleczna [accessed: 21.10.2024]
[36] Sepioł J., Quo vadis, miasta?, p.11, in: Szomburg J., Wandałowski M., Szomburg J., Leśniewicz A., (Ed.), Miasta wobec wyzwań przyszłości, Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową, Gdańsk, 2020.

2.1. Social Condition of Space

Hannah Arendt, one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, perceived public space as a realm enabling active participation in social life and the transmission of generational experiences. This space is shaped daily by our actions and relationships, but it also influences us, forming social bonds and identity. For Arendt, shared space allows individuals to feel their presence in time, linking the past with the future[37].

As society transforms, the public space evolves too. Richard Sennett described the decline of the public sphere in favor of the growing dominance of privacy as the *fall of the public man*[38]. These changes are particularly visible in today's urban spaces, where traditional forms of human interaction give way to virtual contacts. However, sociologist Manuel Castells warns against demonizing the role of the internet, as it offers new forms of interaction based on conscious choice rather than belonging to a specific community[39].

The contemporary weakening of communal bonds also stems from the increasing individualization of experiences. The focus on the individual, rather than collective experience and traditions once cultivated in public spaces, leads to a gradual loss of place identity. This process causes people to become more distrustful and distant from one another due to a lack of shared context and unknown mutual motivations.

Simultaneously, attitudes toward culture change. Instead of active participation in its creation and experience, passive consumption dominates, emphasizing individual sensations and the promise of pleasure[40].

When interacting with space, humans act as active agents, capable of adapting by modifying behavior patterns and adjusting their physical aspects—introducing new elements and give up on old ones to meet current technical, legal, and functional requirements[41].

Humans and their environment are in close interdependence, stemming from humanity's role as the creator of social space. Behaviorists argue that every human action is causal, as it introduces changes to the environment. This means that the world we live in is almost entirely shaped by us. This is evident in the physical environment—including roads, buildings, tools, clothing, communication means, media, and food—and the social environment, consisting of language, habits, and behavioral patterns.

However, they emphasize that "the influence of the environment on behavior is more fundamental than the impact of human actions on the environment." The environment

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[37] Naseri K., Public space in perspective of Hannah Arendt, https://www.academia.edu/34515736/ [accessed: 25.10.2024].

[38] Szpunar M., Kultura cyfrowego narcyzmu, Wydawnictwo AGH, Cracow, 2016, p. 74. https://www.magdalenaszpunar.com/_pliki/Magdalena_Szpunar_kultura_cyfrowego_narcyzmu-srodek.pdf [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[39] Wantuch-Matla D., Przestrzeń publiczna 2.0, op.cit., p. 62, from: Castells M., Galaktyka internetu. Refleksje nad Internetem, biznesem i społeczeństwem, wyd. Rebis, Poznań, 2003.

[40] Czyż P., Problemy kształtowania przestrzeni publicznej w świetle współczesnych koncepcji filozoficznych, p. 50, in: Lorens P., Martyniuk-Pęczek J., (Ed.), Problemy kształtowania przestrzeni publicznych, Wydawnictwo Urbanista, Gdańsk, 2010.

[41] Zasuń A., Kuś M., Psychospołeczne mechanizmy…, op.cit., p. 108.

actively influences humans, who respond to external stimuli. This perspective leads to viewing the individual as being controlled by the external world[42].

Even subtle features of the environment significantly influence our behavior, which changes minute by minute. This influence extends not only to immediate reactions but also to our values and beliefs, that operate at a subconscious level[43].

2.2. Physical Aspects of Public Space

Modern cities are filled with overlapping and interpenetrating spatial layers. Full of contrasts and contradictions, they create a heterogeneous and constantly expanding area. The growth of urban populations, the rise of a consumerist lifestyle, the decentralization of cities, the transformation of monocentric centers into polycentric ones, globalization, and technological progress—all these processes are reflected in the evolution of urban space on a global scale.

Public space, closely intertwined with the urban fabric and existing solely in its context, constitutes an integral part of the complex relationships and interdependencies that define a city's existence and functioning. Consequently, public space also undergoes transformations, with its traditional role as a meeting place and a point that confronts diversity is gradually diminishing[44].

Current urban challenge is based on maintaining balance and harmony—between built-up areas and open spaces, between impermeable surfaces and biologically active areas, and between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Space's monofunctionality or orientation solely towards rapid transit limits user activity and discourages the full utilization of its potential.

The large-scale privatization of urban space and its commercialization is one of the most concerning phenomena observed in the contemporary landscape. The emphasis on individualism, the primacy of private interests and ownership, and the diminished role of the state and communities initiated in the 1980s were intended to stimulate economic development[45]. However, these trends have led to restricted access to public spaces and the creation of quasi-public places accessible only to a select group of privileged consumers[46]. This process is often justified by enhancing user safety and improving space quality. However, it simultaneously removes undesirable or unsightly elements from public view, creating an illusion of exclusivity through selective access.

The limited accessibility for certain users is problematic, implemented through physical control systems (e.g., monitoring, security, small architectural features) and intangible measures (e.g., wealth criteria, social group affiliation)[47]. This disrupts the natural

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[42] Skinner B. F., Poza wolnością i godnością, tłum. W. Szelenberger, Warsaw, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978, in: Zasuń A., Kuś M., Psychospołeczne mechanizmy…, op.cit., p. 109.
[43] Bernheimer L., Potęga przestrzeni wokół nas. Jak codzienne środowisko kształtuje nasze życie, zachowanie i dobrostan, i co o nas mówi, Amber, Warsaw, 2018, p.47.
[44] D. Wantuch-Matla, Przestrzeń…, op.cit., pp. 41-61.
[45] Kochanowska D., Kochanowski M., W stronę miasta, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Ekologii i Zarządzania, Warsaw, 2012, p.60.
[46] D. Wantuch-Matla, Przestrzeń…, op.cit., pp. 64-67.
[47] Ibidem, p. 67.

development of cities, where the original urban fabric is interrupted by private plots, fences, and gates, leading to the creation of closed enclaves[48].

The intensive commercialization of urban areas, in addition to their privatization, also negatively influences urban development. Although trade in public spaces has always existed, the contemporary dominance of commercial functions over other aspects of urban life presents a significant challenge. The modern spatial economy, based on free-market principles, often fails to address the long-term needs of cities, prioritizing short-term profits[49]. One manifestation of this commercialization is the symbolic appropriation of space through the omnipresence of advertisements—banners, signs, and billboards. Building facades, street walls, and public plazas increasingly serve as advertising platforms, exacerbating spatial chaos.

This is a global issue, and each country takes measures to combat it by introducing appropriate regulations. In Poland, they are being gradually addressed, for instance, through the 2015 Landscape Act, which provided municipalities with tools to combat excessive advertising and organize space. Nevertheless, many areas still require work to restore their visual and functional harmony[50].

Under the influence of the aforementioned factors, the public sphere is gradually degrading and, consequently, beginning to disappear. We observe its transformation into a pseudo-space of interactions, where authentic actions based on beliefs, values, or desires are lost. Instead, individuals primarily function as economic entities or consumers, reduced to passive participants in urban life[51].

2.3. Public Space in the Context of Poland

In Polish law, **public space** is defined as "an area of particular importance for meeting residents' needs, improving their quality of life, and fostering social interactions due to its location and functional-spatial features"[52]. This Act outlines the principles for shaping spatial policy by appointed local government units and state administrative bodies. It outlines the scope and methods of spatial management, emphasizing spatial order and sustainable development as the foundation for these actions.

This Act defines **spatial order** as "a spatial arrangement that forms a harmonious whole and considers all functional, socio-economic, environmental, cultural, and compositional-aesthetic conditions and requirements in an organized manner"[53]. Thus, it refers to this fundamental, physical category defining space. Despite the emphasis that its final form is also influenced by soft aspects—socio-cultural ones—the disorder in Polish spaces is attributed to a lack of standardization in design. There is a belief that

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[48] Ibidem, p. 75.
[49] Kochanowska D., Kochanowski M., W stronę miasta, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Ekologii i Zarządzania, Warsaw, 2012, p. 62.
[50] D. Wantuch-Matla, Przestrzeń…, op.cit., pp. 67-70.
[51] Dymnicka M., Przestrzeń publiczna a przemiany miasta, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw, 2013, p. 60.
[52] Act of March 27, 2003 on spatial planning and development, chapter 1, Journal of Laws of June 12, 2012, item 717.
[53] Ibidem.

standards, preferably defined in local laws, should determine the quality of public space[54].

Although conceptual and legal planning tools and appropriate local regulations are available, public spaces are still not shaped or protected coherently and sustainably. Instead, actions in this area are taken ad hoc, arbitrarily, and often disconnected from broader spatial concepts. While many of these decisions can be considered beneficial in local urban planning, economics, or social development, it is difficult to speak of consistent public space planning and introducing order in its domain. In practice, public space functions as an undefined concept, limited to areas of communication (streets, squares) and recreational spaces (green spaces), which impoverishes its significance and suppresses its potential to play a broader role in the urban structure.

In the report "The Living Space of Poles" (Polish: Przestrzeń życia Polaków), Sepioł points out that "Polish space is sick" and requires systematic, long-term efforts to restore its order and harmony[55]. The poor condition of public space in Poland largely stems from historical factors: the weak emancipation of the citizens of cities before 1939 and the regression of urban culture caused by the war, limited adaptation of modernist and postmodernist ideas (also linked to avant-garde social movements), as well as low technical and social standards. Additionally, an underdeveloped cooperation culture, a lack of social trust, research underfunding, and insufficient education in urban planning and architecture hinder spatial development. A problematic approach to law also exists—public space is commonly treated solely through the lens of ownership, often combined with administrative rigidity and a low legal culture[56].

Legislative actions are a crucial element in the process of revitalizing public space. Including it in legal regulations is necessary for our cities to be functional and aesthetic. However, public space rarely appears in analyses of conditions, spatial development directions, and local plans. Yet, regulations—and consequently new spatial solutions—are insufficient and cannot independently solve the social and climatic challenges increasingly faced by Polish cities. Therefore, the art of city-building should be accompanied by the ability to create social bonds, promote local traditions, and preserve a given community's cultural and historical heritage.

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[54] Gadomska B. (Ed.), Sepioł J., Przestrzeń…, op. cit., p. 111.
[55] Ibidem, p. 201.
[56] Ibidem, p. 114.

2.4. Participation as a Response to Urban Crises

How can we effectively strive for harmonious, healthy, forward-looking urban development and public spaces? A starting point for this discussion can be the elaboration of one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[57]. Goal 11 states: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable." Among its objectives is to "enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and participatory, integrated, and sustainable planning and management of human settlements""[58]. At the heart of this objective lies indicator 11.3.2, which measures "the proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates constantly and democratically." The foundation of a functioning civil society is the principle of caring for the common good and shared responsibility[59].

Maintaining indicator 11.3.2 is crucial for several reasons. It supports the active involvement of all stakeholders in the sustainable development of urban living spaces, considering the needs of vulnerable groups. Additionally, it promotes civic education and human rights awareness, encouraging residents to understand their roles in the urban environment better. This indicator also aims to ensure equal and non-discriminatory participation of marginalized groups[60].

Participation is therefore, an important aspect that supports the creation of active, inclusive, and equitable societies. It builds a sense of ownership and responsibility within communities, motivating them to engage in implementing and overseeing development initiatives. Participation is also considered a potential solution for rebuilding eroded public trust and governance, especially in European countries[61].

From the perspective of local authorities, participation can bring measurable benefits by building credibility and legitimizing actions. It also improves the quality of decision-making while reducing costs and delays in project implementation[62]. Participatory mechanisms increase social acceptance and the effectiveness of decisions by relying on dialogue and active citizen involvement at every level of governance. As Długosz and Wygnański[63] point out, most of the good ideas for addressing public problems originate outside the administration or at its lower levels, where knowledge of problem sources and program functioning is most comprehensive. Involving individuals outside the administration in planning actions also helps to avoid many mistakes.

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[57] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015. Their purpose is to support socio-economic development and combat inequalities worldwide by the year 2030.

[58] Indicator 11.3.2; https://sdg.data.gov/11/, [accessed: 27.10.2014]

[59] Więckiewicz R, Zasada dobra wspólnego jako podstawa społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w Polsce, Przegląd Prawa Konstytucyjnego 1 (77), 2024, pp. 83-94.

[60] https://ourcityplans.org/news/why-sdg-indicator-1132-more-important-you-think, [accessed: 7.10.2024].

[61] Speer J., Participatory Governance Reform: A Good Strategy for Increasing Government Responsiveness and Improving Public Services?, World Development, 40 (12): 2012, pp. 2379–2398.

[62] Collective work. A. Dobosz-Mucha et al., Zespół autorski Krajowego Instytutu Polityki Przestrzennej i Mieszkalnictwa, Przestrzeń do dialogu. Praktyczny podręcznik o tym, jak prowadzić partycypację społeczną w planowaniu przestrzennym. Ministerstwo Inwestycji i Rozwoju, Departament Polityki Przestrzennej, 2018, p. 16, from: Creighton J.L,The Public Participation Handbook, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2005.

[63] Długosz D., Wygnański J.J., Obywatele współdecydują. Przewodnik po partycypacji społecznej, Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Forum Inicjatyw Pozarządowych, 2005, in: Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja publiczna w zarządzaniu rozwojem lokalnym, Atut, Wrocław, 2014, p. 87.

Jerzy Hausner identifies five key arguments why local governments should engage in social participation: legal obligations, improved efficiency in planning and problem-solving, facilitating social consensus through increased acceptance of decisions, strengthening democratic culture by building partnerships between authorities and society and educating residents[64].

2.4.1. Participation - Basic Concepts

Participation (from the Latin adjective *particeps* – taking part, participating) is "a form of direct involvement of citizens in social, public, and political life"[65]. It encompasses a broad and diverse range of actions, expressing readiness to act for the community and undertake self-organizing initiatives. Participation enables co-involvement in democratic decision-making processes, considering the needs and interests of different groups[66].

The idea of participation emerged in Western Europe in the 1960s[67]. Since the 1990s, public participation has developed within the European Union as an integral part of public sphere management. Its goal is to resolve conflicts of interest not only through administrative decisions or market mechanisms, but also through negotiation and agreement[68].

The understanding of participation in the public sphere is not clear. Terms such as *social participation, civic participation,* or *public participation* are often used interchangeably, though their meanings can vary depending on the context[69]. In this study, *participation* refers to all its forms unless explicitly specified as social or public.

Kaźmierczak[70] distinguishes two primary meanings of participation. The first is **social participation**, also known as *social engagement* or *horizontal participation*, which pertains to actions undertaken by individuals within their communities. Examples include involvement in local civic groups, non-governmental organizations, or volunteer work. This type of participation relates to the idea of civil society, promoting collaboration for the benefit of the community.

The second type is **public participation**, also called *civic* or *vertical participation*, which involves the engagement of individuals in socio-political matters and shaping a democratic state. It denotes a reciprocal relationship between local authorities and the citizenry. Actions within public participation include organizing or participating in elections, public consultations, and other means of conveying community expectations

[64] Hajduk S., Partycypacja społeczna w zarządzaniu przestrzennym w kontekście planistycznym. Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Białostockiej, 2021, p. 13, from: J. Hausner (Ed.), Komunikacja i partycypacja społeczna, Wyd. Małopolska Szkoła Administracji Publicznej, Cracow 1999, p. 41.
[65] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 57.
[66] Ibidem.
[67] Quick K. S., Bryson J. M., Theories of public participation in governance. In: Handbook of Theories of Governance, Torbing J., Ansell C, Edward Elgar Press, 2016, p. 2.
[68] Gadomska B. (Ed.), Sepioł J., Przestrzeń życia Polaków, Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich SARP, Warsaw, 2015, p. 124.
https://obserwatorium.miasta.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/przestrzen_zycia_polakow_0.pdf.
[69] I use the terms "social participation," "civic participation," and "public participation" interchangeably, except in the section dedicated to discussing the concept.
[70] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., pp. 58-59, from: Kaźmierczak T., Partycypacja publiczna: pojęcie, ramy teoretyczne, Olech A. (Ed.), Partycypacja publiczna. O uczestnictwie obywateli w życiu lokalnej wspólnoty politycznej, Warsaw, 2011.

to public authorities or initiating public activities. Furthermore, it involves engaging in processes to shape and improve public policies and decisions concerning common affairs[71].

Participation can also be categorized as formal or informal. Formal participation is regulated by law that defines its scope, target group, timeline, and implementation methods. Rigid procedures characterize it. Though less bureaucratic, informal participation also requires basic procedural rules to be effective in public matters.

In its classic form, the public participation model, created by Sherry Arnstein, is often depicted as a ladder[72]. It identifies three main levels of citizen engagement: non-participation, token participation, and full participation.

The first level, encompassing **manipulation** and **therapy**, does not give citizens real influence over decisions – authorities unilaterally shape policies, leaving a passive society without the means to act.

The second level, tokenism, includes the stages of **informing**, **consultation**, and **placation**, where authorities inform citizens and may consider their opinions but are not fully committed to implementing their demands. This level is characterized by two-way communication: it involves exchanging and providing feedback from citizens to public authorities, who still act as the primary source of information about decisions made.

At the highest level of authentic participation, including **partnership**, **delegated power**, and **citizen control**, society gains significant influence or complete control over the decision-making process. This stage is also referred to as *active participation* or *citizen power*, as society becomes an equal partner[73].

Sarah White[74] presents a typology of participation based on an analysis of the interests and engagement of the participating parties. She distinguishes four forms: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative, which differ in the degree of participants' influence.

Nominal participation primarily serves a performative function and legitimizes governmental actions. While it ostensibly enables participation, it provides only an illusion of community involvement in the decision-making process, acting as a facade of genuine influence.

Instrumental participation involves engaging the community to improve the efficiency of government actions. In this approach, the community becomes the executor of specific tasks, with their involvement treated more as a cost they must bear rather than a value in itself.

Representative participation allows people to express their opinions and influence decisions. This type of participation supports sustainable and thoughtful development, considering the community's needs.

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[71] Ibidem.
[72] Arnstein S.R.,A ladder of citizen participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), 1969.
[73] Hajduk S., Partycypacja społeczna…, op. cit., p. 15.
[74] White S.C., Depoliticising development: The uses and abuses of participation, Development in Practice, 6 (1), 1996, pp. 6-15.

Transformative participation represents the highest level of engagement, granting the community actual power and agency. In this approach, engagement becomes both a goal and a means to effect real change in the environment and how it is perceived by residents. Transformative participation is characterized by grassroots initiatives and requires ongoing commitment, enabling the community to maintain authentic control over the process and its outcomes[75].

In both White's typology and Arnstein's ladder of participation, the highest levels represent **authentic participation**—where citizens make real choices (decisions) that are implemented[76].

This kind of functioning, representing the overall democratization of social life, is referred to as **participatory** or **deliberative democracy**. Here, the scale of participation, which is most effective at the local level in small groups, plays a crucial role. Participatory democracy is based on the assumption that citizens engage in public policy creation at every stage – from planning to development to implementation[77]. This requires mature and conscious participation in the process, often involving the adoption of additional roles.

Participatory democracy assumes that a sense of responsibility for the common good unites local community members. The effective functioning of such a community relies on mutual trust, inclusivity that strengthens agency, and the ability to reach compromises, resolve inevitable conflicts, and reconcile conflicting interests. Participatory democracy fosters the development of responsible citizens capable of cooperation and self-organization. This is particularly important because the outcomes of political decisions directly depend on civic skills, which are developed only through active participation in public life. Such an attitude builds a **civil society** in which people demonstrate voluntary action, treating it as a tool for social change[78].

In this context, community members are the owners of public resources, possessing the best knowledge of the real needs and problems in their vicinity. A fundamental element of the participatory democracy model is communication between citizens and authorities, as the decision-making process is based on community involvement[79]. Here, participation is spontaneous and active, excluding the need for mobilization or inclusion without the will of the individuals involved[80].

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[75] Ibidem.
[76] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 73.
[77] http://encyklopediaap.uw.edu.pl/index.php/Demokracja_partycypacyjna, [accessed: 12.11.2024].
[78] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., pp. 64-75.
[79] http://encyklopediaap.uw.edu.pl/index.php/Demokracja_partycypacyjna, [accessed: 12.11.2024].
[80] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 74, from: Sartori, G., Amsterdamski, P., Grinberg, D., Teoria demokracji, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994.

2.4.2. Participation Tools

Examples from literature and real world allow the identification of a broad spectrum of participatory tools used in urban design processes. These tools can be divided into two main types: **methods and techniques for working with participants** and **tools understood as legal solutions.**

The first group includes tools chosen by practitioners to support the decision-making process with the participation of various groups—residents, space users, designers, decision-makers, business representatives, and others. Each tool varies in terms of its mechanism of operation, duration, number of participants, and the nature of participation. These tools enable various forms of engagement at every stage of the process, including planning actions, conducting research, creating visions, designing, experimenting, implementing, and evaluating[81] .

Polish participatory practice toolkits often list the following methods:

- **Street surveys, consultation points, research walks, questionnaires, interviews, and geo-surveys**—they help identify the needs and opinions of users;
- **Open meetings** and various forms of **debates** and **information exchanges**—they facilitate idea sharing and presentation of solutions;
- **Citizen labs** and **Charette workshops**—they provide intensive group work formats focused on specific projects;
- **Urban prototyping** and various types of **workshops**, including diagnostic, prioritization, design, and field workshops—they allow for practical and interactive development of solutions.

Popular proprietary techniques include Planning for Real[82], World Café[83], Future City Game[84], and PlayDecide[85], which are more complex, yet more attractive in their format.

The second type consists of legal tools. The Polish system includes mechanisms that introduce participation in city management and public life, such as citizen legislative initiatives, local initiatives, public consultations, reports on the municipality's state, and citizen budgets. These solutions are presented in the Stefan Batory Foundation's report titled "Local Participation Tools in Poland in 2023" (Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w 2023 roku)[86], which analyzes the degree of citizen involvement in local affairs. The report indicates that implementing more advanced participatory mechanisms, particularly those allowing co-decision-making, poses a significant challenge.

The capacity for participation significantly decrease along the successive rungs of Arnstein's ladder. Despite existing regulations requiring municipalities to apply participatory mechanisms, not all local governments fully implement them. While

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[81] Widzisz-Pronobis S., Analiza narzędzi włączających społeczności do projektowania rozwiązań urbanistyczno-architektonicznych wynikających ze zmian klimatu, w tym narzędzi opartych na technologii, Doctoral dissertation, Politechnika Śląska], 2024, pp. 163-170.
[82] https://www.planningforreal.org.uk/, [accessed: 6.11.2024].
[83] http://www.theworldcafe.com, [accessed: 6.11.2024].
[84] https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/LW104-Future-City.pdf, [accessed: 6.11.2024].
[85] https://playdecide.eu/, [accessed: 6.11.2024].
[86] Dąbrowska A., Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w 2023 roku, Warsaw, 2023, https://www.batory.org.pl/publikacja/narzedzia-partycypacji-lokalnej-w-polsce-w-2023-roku/, [accessed: 1.10.2024].

municipalities generally fulfill the obligation to inform residents, they provide less real opportunities to influence local matters through co-decision-making mechanisms[87].

According to Sarah White's typology, nominal and instrumental participation dominate in Poland. In practice, this means that residents are typically informed about actions being taken, and their views may be represented to a limited extent. However, their real influence on final decisions remains restricted. Representative participation appears sporadically and is more ad hoc rather than systemic. The lack of co-decision mechanisms prevents deeper citizen engagement, creating a barrier to transformative forms of participation. Such an approach limits residents' ability to shape urban spaces and constrains the potential for societal transformation through genuine participation and shared responsibility for city functioning.

Achieving authentic participation requires tools and mechanisms that enable residents to engage in design processes and create educational spaces in this area. Participants in co-decision processes—residents, local actors, and municipal representatives—often lack sufficient knowledge about their potential influence, encounter difficulties in clearly expressing their needs and opinions, and engage in dialogue insufficiently.

Education for participation, both theoretical and practical, plays an important role in building and supporting civil society and shaping conscious and responsible participants in decision-making processes. For participation to become authentic citizen engagement rather than mere formality, a multifaceted approach is essential: integrating educational elements into participatory activities—both planned and spontaneously emerging.

[87] Ibidem.

2.5. Art and Participation

Art and design in the context of participation play a crucial role of a medium that enables active community engagement in creative processes. They can serve both as tools for working with the community and elements of artistic and design practice that naturally enter into dialogue with the community and public space. This approach makes art and design not only expressions of creativity, but also enhancements of social bonds and an impact to the environment.

In public space, art can serve as a multifaceted narrative about the world and its people and a form of artistic intervention. In contemporary cities, art responds to various social needs of residents, particularly the need for visual revitalization and for giving public spaces an aesthetic dimension. By enhancing the attractiveness of a place, art contributes to improving public space quality. It also enables commemorating key historical figures and events and the symbolic dedication of space to often marginalized or invisible social groups. Through its symbolic layer, art supports residents' identification with specific places, contributing to constructing their identity. In dynamically evolving cities, cultural identity—encompassing history and tradition—becomes a crucial element of artistic and cultural heritage.

The role of art in public space is also significant from an economic and promotional perspective. Artistic works can become icons of a place, attracting tourists and supporting its recognition and branding[88].

In this context, the concept of community art is worth mentioning. Community art is a grassroots form of artistic activity focused on collaboration with local communities and their active participation in the creative process. This type of art allows participants to express their needs, aspirations, inspirations, identity, and sense of belonging. Notably, community art often directly connects with public space—the works created through collective effort frequently serve as public art installed in specific locations[89].

Community art is closely linked to participatory art, a form of artistic expression that enables communities to share responsibility for decision-making in the creative process. In this context, the audience transitions from being mere recipients to co-creators. Such practices often aim to generate dialogue, foster social activation, and mobilize communities. Participatory art thus offers an innovative medium for social and public engagement[90].

Research by François Matarasso[91] reveals numerous benefits of broad participation in art, including:

- ⊞ Personal development, increased self-confidence, the development of skills and educational competencies, and improved social relationships, leading to better employment opportunities.

[88] https://sztukapubliczna.pl/pl/sztuka-w-przestrzeni-publicznej/sztuka, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

[89] Szmelter I. (eds.) Urban art i co dalej? : zagadnienia ochrony sztuki współczesnej, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych (Warszawa) Wydawca, Warsaw, 2021, https://polona.pl/preview/ed8a93e0-1d77-4550-bec0-5d68f2e6c2a4, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

[90] Lockowandt M., Inclusion through art: An organisational guideline to using the participatory arts with young refugees and asylum seekers. London: Refugee Support Network and Royal Holloway, University of London, Londyn, 2013, p. 8.

[91] Matarasso F., Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts, Comedia, 1997

- Strengthening social cohesion, by expanding social networks, fostering understanding, and supporting local organizational capabilities and autonomy.
- Practical benefits in areas such as space revitalization, health promotion, and the introduction of creative solutions in organizational planning.
- Driving social change, by generating observable, measurable, and well-planned transformations.
- Being an adaptable and cost-efficient component of community development strategies.

Contemporary audience participation in artistic activities has acquired new dimensions. Increasingly, this process extends beyond intuitive involvement in creating works of art, taking the form of conscious and even activist engagement in the creative process.

2.5.1. Examples of Participatory Art

A spectacular example of the potential of collective action is the project by Belgian artist Francis Alÿs titled *When Faith Moves Mountains*, carried out in 2002 on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. For this project, Alÿs and a group of 500 volunteers moved a 500-meter-wide dune by 10 centimeters[92].

Although the physical change was imperceptible to the naked eye, its impact on the participants was profound. **The experience of community, synchronized actions, and self-organization became an unforgettable event etched in the participants' memories, transforming into a universal story passed down through oral tradition.**

This project became a powerful allegory of human will, a symbol of belief in the seemingly impossible, and a metaphor for the ability to enact change through collective effort. Moving the dune instilled a sense of hope in participants and the conviction that together, even the most ambitious goals can be achieved[93].

Photo 2.1. *Francis Alÿs, »When Faith Moves Mountains«.*
Source: www.muhka.be[94]

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92 Public Delivery, Alÿs F. (prod.) : When Faith Moves Mountains (making of), [video], 10.8.2018,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkhXsAtDLZ0, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
93 https://www.fernandomota.art/francis-alys, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
94 https://www.muhka.be/collections/artworks/w/item/3787-when-faith-moves-mountains-lima-peru-april-11- 2002, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

Significant examples in Polish history that illustrate the capacity of art in public spaces to engage society include the works of **Joanna Rajkowska**. One of her most recognizable projects is the famous installation entitled *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*, realized in 2002. As an artificial palm tree, the installation was placed at a central point in Warsaw, at the Charles de Gaulle roundabout. The artist's inspiration stemmed from her travels to Israel.

2.2.

Rajkowska initially envisioned a row of palm trees, but the final installation featured a single tree. The palm tree was intended to evoke the forgotten origins of the name of one of Warsaw's main thoroughfares—Jerusalem Avenue—referring to Nowa Jerozolima (New Jerusalem), a settlement established in the 18th century for Jewish merchants and artisans. Today, the street's name takes on a symbolic meaning, referencing not only the no-longer-existing New Jerusalem but also the absence of Warsaw's Jewish community, whose history was tragically interrupted[95].

Warsaw residents quickly embraced the palm tree, becoming an urban phenomenon. In a 2003 public opinion survey, 75% of city inhabitants expressed support for its preservation, leading to the creation of the Palm Tree Protection Committee (*Komitet Ochrony Palmy*, KOP). Over the years, the installation has been appropriated during various social, activist, and artistic events. In 2007, during a protest by nurses, the palm tree was adorned with nurses' caps. On another occasion, it was decorated with a banner reading "Bread Instead of Circuses," protesting the impacts of hosting Euro 2012[96].

2.2. »The Killing« of the Palm Tree.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org[97]

[95] https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/joanna-rajkowska-pozdrowienia-z-alej-jerozolimskich, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[96] Wojtczuk M., Palma odarta z liści "na złość". Rajkowska przesadziła?, Wyborcza, 2012, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,11912152,palma-odarta-z-lisci-na-zlosc-rajkowska-przesad zila.html, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[97] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sztuczna_palma_w_Warszawie_2021.jpg, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

In 2019, the palm tree was symbolically "killed" for World Environment Day by temporarily replacing its artificial green leaves with dried, real ones[98]. In 2023, a performance organized by the installation's author took place beneath the palm tree, protesting Israel's violence during a military operation in the Gaza Strip.

In 2022, the *Polityka* weekly magazine recognized the installation as one of the most significant art of the past thirty years. Beyond being an artistic symbol and icon of Warsaw, the palm tree has also become a tool for initiating social dialogue and **raising public awareness of issues related to history, identity, and current political events.**

The second analyzed example of Joanna Rajkowska's artistic endeavors is the project *Dotleniacz* (*Oxygenator*), realized in July 2007 in Warsaw's public space at Grzybowski Square. The project, conducted in collaboration with the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art[99], was situated in an exceptionally historically and culturally complex context. Grzybowski Square has a multilayered architectural environment, including a synagogue, the All Saints Church, corporate office buildings, and small local shops. Thousands of residents live in the nearby monotonous, gray housing blocks. At the time of the project's creation, the square was in a state of significant disrepair, and the surrounding office buildings and financial centers deepened the visual and social contrasts within the urban landscape[100].

Rajkowska adopted a working method that blended art with sociology[101]. When residing in the area for some time, she conversed with residents and created a list of local issues based on their input. These discussions formed the foundation for the artistic project. She installed a pond at the heart of the square, resembling a minor backyard water feature, surrounded by vegetation, decorative shrubs, and water lilies. The pond was equipped with devices to ozonate the air and generate mist and colorful seating arrangements placed around it for visitors[102].

The transformative function of art manifested itself here both in the spatial and social dimensions. *Dotleniacz* had a profound emotional impact on the residents' relationship with the square. The project drew the attention of the local community, who began to use the space more frequently. A previously abandoned and unwelcoming location became animated, transforming into a space for integration and dialogue. Rajkowska envisioned the further evolution of the installation—designed as temporary—being shaped by the community's needs.

Dotleniacz was dismantled in late autumn 2007 due to the approaching winter, and city authorities announced a competition to redevelop Grzybowski Square. Despite residents' appeals, the artist was not invited to participate in the project's next phase. The final arrangement of the square only partially reflected the original intentions of the installation[103].

[98] Kowalik M., Wiemy, dlaczego słynna palma na rondzie de Gaulle'a straciła zielone liście. "Łysieje jak drzewo życia". Rozmowa z Joanną Rajkowską, autorką instalacji na rondzie de Gaulle'a, Wyborcza, 2019, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,24855634,wiemy-dlaczego-palma-stracila-zielone-liscie-ly sieje-jak.html , [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[99] https://www.rajkowska.com/dotleniacz-2/, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[100] Bożek S., Społeczny i estetyczny aspekt działań artystycznych w przestrzeni publicznej w Polsce i Europie Zachodniej. Studia de Arte et Educatione, 12(243), 2017, pp. 17-28.
[101] Ibidem.
[102] https://www.rajkowska.com/dotleniacz-2/, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[103] https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/joanna-rajkowska-dotleniacz, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

Despite the lack of continuity in its original form, the project became a valued example of the influence of art on public space and its users[104]. This example is unique because the traditionally understood artistic quality was neither the primary motive nor the driving force behind the project's creation. *Dotleniacz* became the essence of the residents' involvement in a sociological and psychological process conducted by the artist. In Rajkowska's vision, **aesthetics and artistic values were reduced to a *therapeutic* tool**, **functioning as a remedy for the traumatic legacy** of a place marked by a tragic history[105].

Photo 2.3. *Community gathered around »Oxygenator«.*
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org[106]

Another renowned socially engaged artist is **Paweł Althamer**, a Polish sculptor and performer whose work blends art with sensitivity to socio-political issues. He creates his projects in the context of urban spaces, collaborating with local communities. His art is grounded in the idea of collective action and the building of human connections[107].

Althamer frequently works with marginalized and excluded groups, such as youth, residents of housing estates, and homeless people. For over 30 years, he has also been an active member of *Grupa Nowolipie*. This initiative initially served as a rehabilitative program for individuals with multiple sclerosis, using art as a tool for therapy and support. Over time, *Grupa Nowolipie* evolved into an artistic collective that remains active and vibrant.

Paweł Althamer's socially engaged artistic activities extend far beyond *Grupa Nowolipie*. One of the most significant examples of his participatory work is the series of projects in Bródno, a Warsaw housing estate where the artist has lived for years.

One of his earliest and most spectacular undertakings was the *Bródno 2000* project. The initiative involved engaging residents of 176 apartments in a building on Krasnobrodzka Street to switch their lights on and off according to a prearranged schedule. Supported by local scouts, Althamer visited the residents, established direct contact and encouraged them to participate in the action.

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[104] Dotleniacz won the 2007 Event of the Year poll.

[105] Bożek S., Społeczny..., op. cit., p. 22.

[106] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dotleniacz_plac_Grzybowski_2007.jpg, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

[107] https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/11-najwazniejszych-prac-pawla-althamera, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

This collective effort resulted in a massive illuminated "2000" sign that appeared on the building's facade. The event became one of the most memorable artistic interventions in Warsaw's public space. **The project evolved into a local celebration** - featuring musical performances and a fireworks display - **fostering community integration**. This initiative exemplified a ***communal participatory performance,*** Althamer referred to the participating residents as artists[108].

Another significant artistic project led by Paweł Althamer in collaboration with Bródno residents is the *Bródno Sculpture Park,* for which the artist serves as the primary coordinator. The initiative launched in 2009 stands out for its origins—it was born from a grassroots effort by the local district authorities[109]. This long-term project has involved the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and numerous Polish and international artists.

The first installation in the Sculpture Park was *Raj* (*Paradise*), a project by Althamer. This garden sculpture was inspired by drawings made by children from a local primary school, which served as a creative foundation for both the artist and the collaborating landscape architect. Another significant work by Althamer in the park is the bronze fountain *Sylwia,* created as the outcome of workshops conducted with Grupa Nowolipie[110].

Over the years, the Sculpture Park has also hosted works by renowned artists, including Olafur Eliasson, Monika Sosnowska, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, enriching the park with various artistic expressions.

Photo 2.4. *»Sylwia« Fountain created by Paweł Althamer with the Nowolipie Group*
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org[111]

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[108] Jałowik D., Participative Art: Delegated Performance versus Communal Engaged Performance Using the Example of Artistic Activities by Krzysztof Wodiczko and Paweł Althamer. Art Inquiry, (20), 2018, pp. 159-171.
[109] Bożek S., Społeczny…, op. cit., p. 26.
[110] Jałowik D., Participative Art: Delegated Performance versus Communal Engaged Performance Using the Example of Artistic Activities by Krzysztof Wodiczko and Paweł Althamer. *Art Inquiry*, (20), 2018, p.168.
[111] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Park_rze%C5%BAby_na_br%C3%B3dnie_anio%C5%82_4.jpg, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

2.5.

The absence of clearly defined boundaries between the artworks and their surrounding space makes the project comprehensible and inviting in reception, even for those who do not regularly engage with contemporary art. The Sculpture Park was quickly embraced by residents, who began to identify with it. **Thanks to a sense of shared responsibility for the space, the local community actively participates in its maintenance and care**, further highlighting the success of the project's participatory nature[112].

2.6.

Photos 2.5-6. Katarzyna Przezwańska's painting interventions in the Bródno Sculpture Park

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org[113]

The final example of participatory initiatives in public space is the work of the Paris-based collective called **Exyzt**, established in 2002. The group comprised architects, artists, engineers and technicians, and their activity spanned over a decade[114]. Exyzt's working methodology was rooted in theater and performance, with their architectural production taking the form of temporary, reversible spatial structures. Their projects were typically carried out on abandoned lots or in unused urban buildings, which—upon the owner's consent—were transformed using simple, mobile units with a DIY aesthetic. These structures were both cost-effective and easy to construct.

Exyzt described their approach as *open source*, emphasizing collaboration and accessibility. All spatial interventions were executed closely with local communities, designing spaces that could be appropriated and used in accordance with their needs. The collective viewed participatory design as a process of spatial transformation driven by the active engagement of its users[115].

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[112] Bożek S., Społeczny…, op. cit., p. 26.

[113] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Katarzyna_Przezwa%C5%84ska_-_Bez_tytu%C5%82u_%28Interwencje_malarskie%29_%282010%2908.jpg, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Katarzyna_Przezwa%C5%84ska_-_Bez_tytu%C5%82u_%28Interwencje_malarskie%29_%282010%2910.jpg, [accessed: 10.11.2024].

[114] https://www.spatialagency.net/database/where/organisational%20structures/exyzt, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

[115] https://currystonefoundation.org/practice/exyzt/, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

One of Exyzt's most emblematic projects was the *Métavilla* installation, presented at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2006. This installation served not only as an exhibition but also as a living and experimental space. Built on a scaffold framework, the structure housed a kitchen, hotel, reading room, workspace, sauna, swimming pool, and a botanical garden designed by Liliana Motta. Located on the roof, the garden offered a panoramic view of the Venetian lagoon.

Exyzt perceived public space as a dynamic laboratory, where every participant could become an active co-creator. In their practice, architecture was experienced through use and co-creation, with space emerging through collaboration, creativity, and shared reflection[116].

2.7.

Rejecting conventional architectural practices tied to the construction industry, Exyzt focused on creating frameworks that fostered direct human interaction. By pushing the boundaries between public and private space and between the temporary and the permanent, the collective challenged traditional notions of how social spaces are used. Their work inspired creative thinking about spatial design and promoted new social behaviors and the building of communities rooted in collaboration and active participation.

Photo 2.7. *Hotel's structure in the »Métavilla« installation.*
Source: https://flickr.com[117]

[116] http://construire-architectes.over-blog.com/la-metavilla, [accessed: 11.11.2024].
[117] https://www.flickr.com/photos/fergadi/291563619/, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

2.6. Conclusions from the State of Research

For the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in participation and collaboration within horizontal structures, accompanied by a shift away from traditional, hierarchical relationships between the state and socio-economic institutions. On the one hand, this change addresses a democratic deficit manifested by a decline in citizen engagement in public life, increasing distrust of institutions, and the state's encroachment of areas of citizen activity. Urban crises are further exacerbated by social issues, such as the weakening of community bonds and the polarization of urban centers due to their polarization.

On the other hand, mass media and technological revolutions play an increasingly significant role in influencing socio-economic processes at the local level. Growing individual civic and consumer awareness enhances the need for citizen participation in governance at all levels. However, there is a concurrent trend toward individualization, focusing on personal experiences rather than the collective community that traditionally cultivated public space. At the same time, locality—at the scale of cities or metropolitan areas—emerges as a key factor in creating added value and driving economic, social, and cultural development. Globalization, which intensifies these changes further, shifts the focus of development from national to global levels while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of regional and local initiatives[118].

In response to these challenges and the limitations of public governance, participatory tools, and participatory democracy are recognized as remedies, enabling real citizen's influence on decision-making processes[119].

Participatory democracy, as a system directly involving citizens in decision-making, represents an ambitious yet essential goal for fostering an informed and engaged society. While fully implementing this model in Poland may be challenging or unattainable, integrating its key elements can yield measurable benefits for the quality of democracy. Even partial implementation of participatory democracy principles educates citizens on responsibility, strengthens local identity, and fosters social bonds, laying the groundwork for more active engagement. By employing participatory tools, it is possible not only to develop the foundations of future participatory democracy but also to improve the current representative democracy, making it more mature and receptive to grassroots initiatives.

Quality improvement of democracy and urban policies at both national and local levels supports the development of effective, cohesive, sustainable, and resilient cities[120]. **Urban resilience** enables cities to respond effectively to crises, such as natural disasters or pandemics, minimizing losses and restoring normal functioning[121]. The Rockefeller Foundation[122] report identifies seven characteristics of urban resilience: integrity, inclusiveness, reflectiveness, resourcefulness, robustness, redundancy, and flexibility.

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[118] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 7.
[119] Ibidem, p. 88.
[120]https://repozytorium.biblos.pk.edu.pl/redo/resources/44614/file/resourceFiles/HetmanczykP_ProcesyPartycypacyjne.pdf, s. 8.
[121] https://www.eco-miasto.pl/pl/hub/rezyliencja-miejska-nowy-paradygmat-rozwoju, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[122] https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/100-resilient-cities/, [accessed: 12.11.2024].

Society is crucial in building urban resilience—self-organization and mutual support are key during crises. Therefore, building trust, creating support networks, and engaging in activities that enhance community preparedness for challenges is essential[123]. All these factors, combined with shared identity, norms, and values, form **social capital**.

Social capital, social networks, and local memory form a societal source of resilience, enabling more effective resource management based on local knowledge and experience[124]. It also supports democracy by influencing political processes and fostering active civic attitudes.

Supporting the development of social capital and civic engagement is also achieved through artistic and design activities. In this context, art and design can play a significant role by strengthening a sense of identity, provoking interaction and dialogue, and fostering community bonds. Introducing artistic activities into public space, particularly within participatory initiatives, contributes to the development of civil society by supporting social integration processes and activating residents. The power of art in public space lies in its universal accessibility and language, which enables the expression of emotions, experiences, and perspectives of local communities, transforming the space into a platform for collective reflection and action.

Analyzed examples indicate that contemporary artistic and design practices increasingly prioritize the process of engagement over aesthetic value. In this approach, the artist-designer assumes the role of a catalyst for social change, and their creative work acquires an activist dimension. These activities support collective efforts toward building a more open and conscious society while initiating positive transformations in the social and spatial environment.

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[123] Widzisz-Pronobis S., Analiza narzędzi…, op. cit., p. 61.
[124] Ibidem., p. 62.

3.
Participatory Urban Design

3.1. Community Design Centers

In the 1960s, alongside the emergence of the idea of participatory democracy which was a result of civil rights movements, a growing interest in involving citizens in solving social issues became evident. This trend sparked a wave of grassroots initiatives, including architecture and urban planning efforts, to broaden access to decision-making processes in these fields. As a result, Community Design Centers (CDCs) were established—spaces bringing together professionals who offered free technical and design assistance to communities unable to afford commercial architectural services[125]. The political atmosphere of the time led urban planners, architects, and designers to see themselves as advocates for marginalized communities excluded from design processes. Design became a political act rather than merely a technical or bureaucratic one. This shift was also influenced by Paul Davidoff's concept of **advocacy planning**[126], which was developed in the 1960s.

By the 1970s, the United States had developed an entire network of Community Design Centers, built locally by neighborhood groups and funded through public resources. This period is called the idealistic phase[127] of community design, from 1963 to 1975. During this time, CDCs focused on broad social issues, aligning with the ideals of the civil rights movement. However, as the economic situation in the U.S. deteriorated and public funding programs were withdrawn, many CDCs transitioned into nonprofit organizations. Operating on a volunteer basis[128] or adopting fee-for-service models, they moved away from activism-based strategies. This era, lasting from 1976 to 1993, is known as the pragmatic phase.

The academic phase began after 1993 and continues to this day. It is characterized by the integration of community design centers into academic institutions. This model has regained popularity among younger generations, who increasingly value this type of project work and its contributions to social change.

The Neighborhood Renewal Corps, established in Philadelphia in 1961 by Karl Linn, a landscape architect and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, is believed to be the first CDC. The organization implemented the *design-build* concept, where university students collaborated with local residents to design and develop vacant lots[129].

Subsequently, many other centers were established, including the Architects Renewal Committee of Harlem (ARCH), brought into being in New York in 1964 by architect Richard Hatcher, urban planner John Bailey, and Max Bond. ARCH was created to oppose the construction of a highway through northern Manhattan and to promote revitalization and the preservation of Harlem's historic buildings and architectural heritage, which were

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[125] Lubelska M., Idea społecznościowego centrum projektowego, Środowisko Mieszkaniowe, 10, 2012, pp. 49–53.

[126] This is a pluralistic and inclusive theory of spatial planning, in which designers strive to represent the interests of various social groups, acting as their advocates in disputes with wealthy and influential actors. See: Davidoff P., Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning, The City Reader, 1965.

[127] The history of CDC has been divided into three periods: idealistic, pragmatic, and academic. The first two periods were described by architect Mary Comerio in her 1984 article "Community Design Idealism." The academic period was described by Sheri Blake in "Redefining Community Design" and by Donovan Finn and Jason Brody in "The State of Community Design: An Analysis of Community Design Center Services." https://communitydevelopmentarchive.org, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[128] https://www.spatialagency.net/database/community.design.centres.cdcs, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[129] https://communitydevelopmentarchive.org/neighborhood-renewal-corps/ [accessed: 8.11.2024].

under threat due to neglect and underfunding. ARCH also provided design services, technical support, training, and informational activities. Its work was closely tied to the Black Power movement, with a significant focus on combating poverty in urban ghettos[130].

Another type of Community Design Center operated in partnership with universities. Notable examples include the Yale Building Project at Yale University, the Pratt Center for Community Development at Pratt Institute, the Community Development Group at North Carolina State University, and the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit-Mercy. These organizations combined student education with actions benefiting the wider community. In this context, the pedagogical process held greater significance than the final outcomes, emphasizing practical experience for students while addressing local community needs[131].

3.1.1. Associations for Community Design

The peak of the development of Community Design Centers occurred in 1977 with the establishment of the Association for Community Design (ACD), an organization that continues its work to this day. ACD serves as a network of individuals, organizations, and institutions supporting designers and planners in effectively serving local communities. Its mission and values aim to empower practitioners, educators, and organizations involved in architecture and urbanism oriented toward community needs[132].

ACD defines community design practice through seven core values:

- ⊞ **Equity and Justice** – Advocating for those whose voices is not heard in public life.
- ⊞ **Diversity** – Promoting social equity through a discourse that reflects a broad spectrum of social values and identities.
- ⊞ **Participatory Decision-Making** – Building inclusive structures by engaging stakeholders and enabling communities to make collective decisions.
- ⊞ **Quality of Life** – Ensuring everyone has the right to live in economically stable, environmentally friendly communities.
- ⊞ **Integrative Approach** – Developing strategies that go beyond the design of individual buildings.
- ⊞ **Place-Based Design** – Generating ideas from a specific location and leveraging local potential.
- ⊞ **Design Excellence** – Promoting the highest quality standards in designing and creating living spaces[133].

ACD collects membership fees, which fund its annual conference, webinars, program development, and other services. It employs a small number of full-time staff as well as part-time volunteers, including architects, designers, planners, engineers, students, and other skilled individuals who help address urban challenges.

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[130] https://communitydevelopmentarchive.org, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[131] https://www.spatialagency.net/database/community.design.centres.cdcs, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[132] https://www.communitydesign.org/about, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[133] Finn D., Brody J., The state of community design: An analysis of community design center services. Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, 31 (3), 2014, pp. 181-200. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44114603 [accessed: 21.05.2024].

Pro bono design services are offered to low-income communities, this helps them address their most pressing issues. ACD facilitates collaboration between residents and design professionals at every project stage. Its participatory approach to design and construction ensures that social potential and local knowledge are integral to the design solution[134].

In the contemporary context, CDCs operate through various work and funding models. Many urban planners and designers from the private sector collaborate with marginalized communities, either offering discounted rates or pro bono services. Others work within advocacy organizations, social service providers, or community development corporations. Academic staff also provides courses where students develop plans or conceptual designs, often implemented at low costs.

Many of these centers exist specifically to provide affordable design and planning expertise to communities[135]. Their services include:

- Creating conceptual and construction projects,
- Budgeting for projects,
- Renovating buildings and revitalizing neglected public spaces,
- Preparing planning studies,
- Planning neighborhood revitalization.

According to the official website of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB)[136]—the equivalent of Poland's Chamber of Architects—there are 90 registered Community Design Centers or affiliated organizations in the United States[137]. Some of these, particularly those associated with academic institutions, participate in the Freedom by Design program. In collaboration with NCARB and architecture students, these centers develop simple design and construction solutions to improve the quality of life in their communities. Applications for project support and grants can be submitted throughout the year.

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[134] https://www.communitydesign.org/about, [accessed: 20.11.2024].
[135] Finn D., Brody J., The state…, op. cit.
[136] https://www.ncarb.org/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[137] Ibidem.

3.2. Community Solutions in the United Kingdom

3.2.1. Community Architecture

Counterparts to the American Community Design Centers began to develop in Europe during a similar period. In the United Kingdom, this movement was known by terms such as **community architecture**, *community planning, community design, community development*, or *community technical aid*. Nick Wates and Charles Knevitt describe the history of this movement in their book "Community Architecture: How People Are Creating Their Own Environment".

One of the pioneering initiatives in community-based revitalization processes was the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP)[138], launched in 1969 in Liverpool. As a part of this initiative, architects established an office within the neighborhood and worked directly with residents to foster community development.

In the same year, architect Ralph Erskine, commissioned by local authorities in Newcastle, set up an office in a former funeral parlor in the Byker district and involved slum residents in designing new public housing.

Photo 3.1. *Ralph Erskine with neighborhood children in his office in the Byker district.*
Source: digitaltmuseum.org

Two years later, the North Kensington Amenity Trust was established in West London, representing a partnership between volunteer associations and local authorities. Their partnership led to a multi-million-pound, multifunctional space revitalization beneath the Westway motorway.

In 1969, two of the first independent environmental agencies dedicated to working with active communities were founded in London: *Free Form Arts Trust* and *Interaction*. These organizations introduced a new type of entity aimed at engaging people in efforts to improve their environment. Interaction later created *NUBS* (Neighbourhood Use of Building and Space), offering the first free architectural services for neighborhood groups in England. In 1972, *Planning Aid* was established in London, providing free planning assistance. Meanwhile, in Liverpool, *Neighbourhood Housing Services* was founded in 1973 as a cooperative support organization, offering technical aid to the growing housing cooperative movement.

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[138] Jenkins P, Milner J, Sharpe T, A brief historical review of community technical aid and community architecture, In Architecture, Participation and Society. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009.

In 1983, the Association of Community Technical Aid Centres (ACTAC) was formed. Unlike previous organizations, ACTAC brought together not only architects but also individuals and organizations from various fields, including urban planners, landscape architects, engineers, surveyors, ecologists, environmental educators, financial planners, managers, administrators, and graphic designers. The founders believed that combining such a diverse approach was essential for creating and developing communities. They were inspired by the SNAP model, which integrated the collaboration of architects and social workers[139]. ACTAC grew rapidly, and by 1985, it included 50 member organizations employing over 310 full-time and 562 part-time professionals.

The list of organizations established during this period is extensive, and the concept of designing with local communities became part of public policy. The term *community architecture* entered official use thanks to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the UK equivalent of the Chamber of Architects in Poland, incorporating it into its initiatives. Rod Hackney was a key promoter of this idea, who gained recognition as the architect of the award-winning self-help housing project in Black Road, Macclesfield. In 1987, Hackney was elected president of RIBA and also served as an advisor to the Prince of Wales. This marked a political breakthrough for the community architecture movement. From grassroots activities carried out under challenging conditions with the support of local communities, Hackney eventually became an official representative of the UK's most significant professional organization in the field[140].

In the 1990s, a new wave of community development emerged, driven by the concept of **social capital**[141], which was seen as a key factor in achieving success. Sociologist Robert popularized this concept through works such as "Making Democracy Work"[142] and Putnam "Bowling Alone"[143].

By the late 1990s, housing and public space revitalization initiatives were implemented in the most disadvantaged areas of the United Kingdom as part of the New Deal for Communities (NDC), a social regeneration program. A key component of NDC was the active participation of local communities in the planning and executing projects. In many, areas the program contributed to an improved quality of life for residents[144].

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[139] https://spatialagency.net/database/community.technical.aid.centres, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[140] Sanoff H., Community architecture: How people are creating their own environment: N. Waters and C. Krevitt, Penguin, London, 1987.
[141] See page 43.
[142] Putnam R.D., Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy, Princeton University Press, 1993.
[143] Putnam R.D., Bowling alone. The collapse and revival of American community. Simon & Schuster, 2000.
[144] Jadach-Sepioło A., Projekty flagowe i kontekstowe w obszarach rewitalizacji–doświadczenia zagraniczne a polska praktyka, Rocznik lubuski, 2019, 45(2), pp. 11-20.

3.2.2. Contemporary British Initiatives

In contemporary times, the British government continues to support initiatives to foster community development. In 2011, the Localism Act was introduced as part of efforts to promote decentralization of power in England. The Act was based on four principles:

- ⊡ Local authorities were granted new powers, and mayors were to be elected directly;

- ⊡ Local communities and individual residents were given new rights, including the right to protect and bid on assets of community value, as well as the ability to approve or reject excessive increases in local taxes;

- ⊡ A neighbourhood planning system was established, granting communities the right to plan and implement construction projects independently;

- ⊡ Greater control over housing, including social housing and rental policies, was provided to local authorities.

The Localism Act served as a significant impulse for local governance, providing communities with new tools and opportunities to revitalize and improve their environments. However, the 2018 Future of Localism report noted that "supporting localism is a marathon, not a sprint." The government's austerity program meant that adequate financial resources were not available to fully achieve the Act's intended outcomes. Consequently, the Localism Act did not deliver the expected long-term results[145].

The most successful initiative under the Act was the introduction of **neighbourhood planning**. It allowed members of local communities—residents, workers, and even businesses—to engage in dialogue through their local parish council[146] or a neighbourhood forum. Together, they can decide where new homes, businesses, shops, or playgrounds should be built and how they should look. Neighbourhood development plans must comply with national planning policies, the strategic vision for the broader area as determined by local authorities, and other legal requirements. Such a plan may be subjected to a referendum. Once approved by a majority of voters, it is implemented by local authorities[147]. By 2021, over a thousand neighbourhood plans had been successfully approved through referendums[148].

Another successful contemporary initiative is the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF)[149], which is the largest supporter of community-driven projects in the UK, annually benefitting around 5.2 million individuals. As David Boyle noted in his work "A History of Community Development"[150], it is currently relatively easy to secure funding for locally-driven initiatives. However, securing funding for proven, longstanding projects

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[145] https://www.nalc.gov.uk/nalc-blog/entry/1917-the-localism-act-ten-years-on, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[146] Parish and town councils represent the lowest level of local government in England. Parishes are civil administrative units and are separate from ecclesiastical bodies.

[147] Department for Communities and Local Government, A plain English guide to the Localism Act, 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79a0b740f0b642860d98a2/1896534.pdf, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[148] https://www.nalc.gov.uk/nalc-blog/entry/1917-the-localism-act-ten-years-on, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[149] https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[150] https://longreads.localtrust.org.uk/2021/05/01/a-history-of-community-development/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

remains challenging, as these projects often lose their perceived novelty despite their success and sustainability.

This raises an important question: what does Boyle define a *small sum*? The fact remains that the Community Fund's logo can be found on the documentation of numerous community-driven projects across England. One such initiative is the Big Local program, which encompasses 150 areas that had previously received no funding from NLCF or public funds. This lack of funding was attributed to inadequate organization and the absence of individuals with the knowledge, skills, and networks necessary to secure such support. Each area was allocated £1 million, which could be spent at any pace and for any purpose. The sole condition was that residents themselves organize, plan the use of funds, and manage them, ensuring the decision-making process engaged the entire community[151].

3.2.3. Every One Every Day

Another notable project funded by the Community Fund is Every One Every Day, led by the Participatory City Foundation. This highly successful and innovative implementation-research project operated for five years in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham, located in East London. According to the authors of the "Places to Practice"[152] report, it was the first full-scale practical participation system in the world, drawing insights from various international models of sustainable urban neighbourhood development.

The primary objective of Every One Every Day was to develop and test the impact and potential of large-scale active participation. The project evaluation was conducted continuously through a developmental approach. This approach significantly supported the initiative's progress, allowing the project to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances and to meet the needs of residents and participants.

The success of Every One Every Day can be attributed, among other factors, to its inclusive and integrative approach, which actively engaged local residents in various activities. These included cooking, crafting, sewing, ceramics, gardening, creating a local newspaper, handcrafting, and more. Residents were invited to participate and encouraged to co-create the program, lead activities, test and implement their ideas, oversee spaces, and share local knowledge. Four principles guided all activities:

- Welcoming spaces,
- Neighbourhood mapping,
- Inclusive co-design,
- Co-implementation of activities.

This was the first branch of the system created under Every One Every Day, referred to as the *participation ecosystem*. It focused on openness not only to residents but also to local

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[151] https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/the-big-local-story/ [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[152] Participatory City, Places to Practice, 2023, https://issuu.com/participatorycity/docs/places_to_practise_y5_report?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=www.participatorycity.org, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

businesses, enabling the creation of a network of collaboration. The second branch of the system was the *participation support platform*, which provided access to a skilled team, tools, and resources.

The platform's infrastructure included development incubators, known as *shops*. Each shop featured a workshop and a retail space where products created by residents were sold. Over the five years of the program, six such locations were opened, and numerous business models were tested and subsequently documented in detail.

However, the most intriguing observation, from this study's perspective, concerns the participants' motivation to engage in Every One Every Day activities. The key drivers included an interest in the themes of the activities and events held in these spaces and their proximity to participants' homes. The primary motivators were the opportunity to learn new skills, create collaboratively, meet new people, and improve social life. An additional factor encouraging participation was the chance to learn about business operations through work in the workshops.

The main benefits reported by participants included meeting new people, increased satisfaction, self-confidence, and creativity. Experiencing a sense of belonging and mutual trust strengthened social bonds and enhanced group cohesion.

The Every One Every Day project ended in 2023, with the end of its funding. Currently[153], there is no information regarding the potential continuation of its activities in the borough or the form they might take. There is a risk that the social capital built during the project may be lost. This situation underscores the observation made by David Boyle, who noted that effectively functioning projects often face challenges in securing continued funding, which can lead to their discontinuation despite their prior success.

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[153] June 2024.

4.
Participatory Practices

in Wrocław
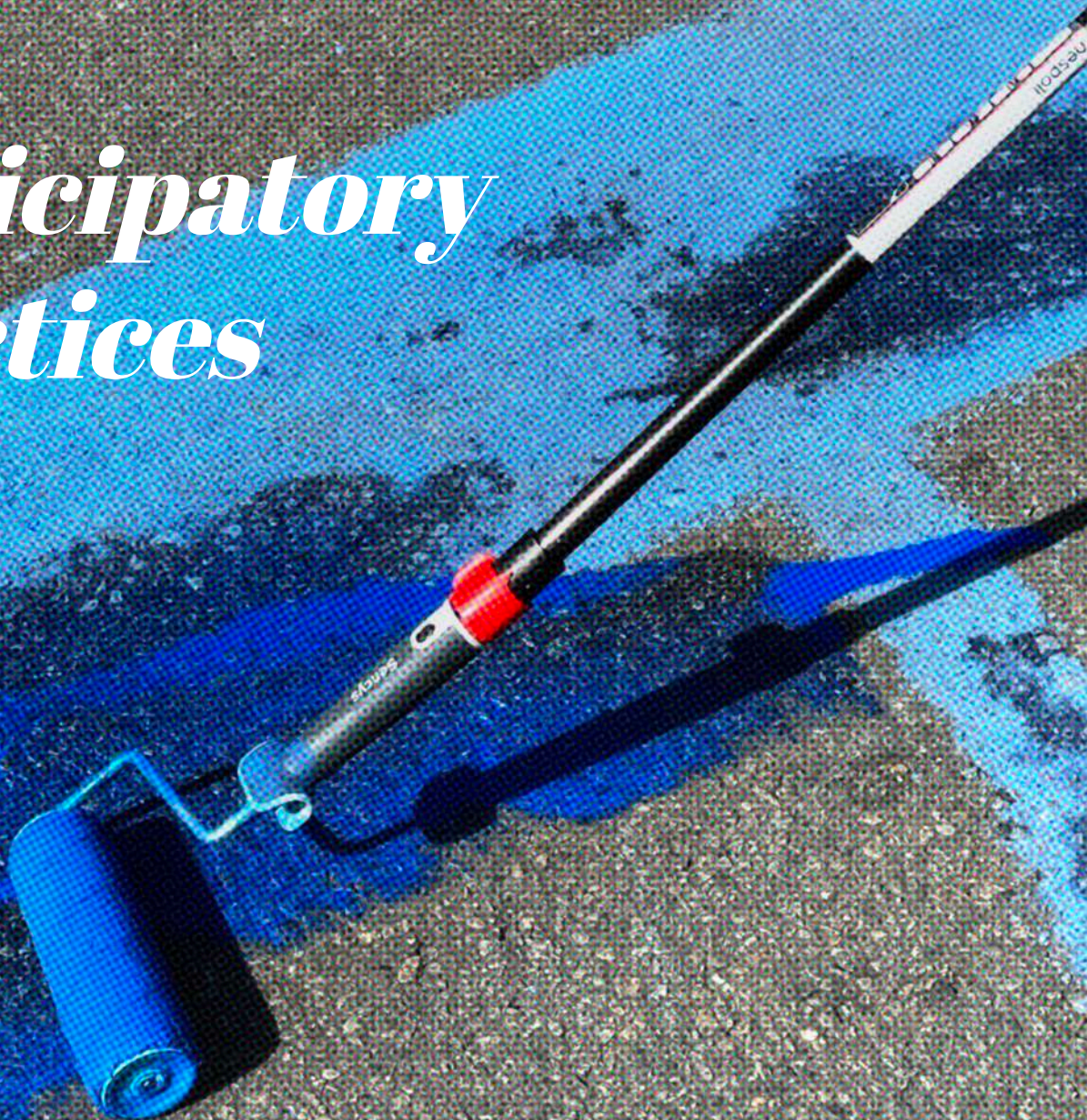
4.1. Introduction

Polish community traditions lack direct equivalents of the British or American models of community design centers. However, the pre- and interwar history of Poland reveals early examples of patriotic social self-organization. During this time, *social houses* played a significant role in educational, cultural, and social policy. In the postwar years, when community-driven urban revitalization was taking place in the West under the guidance of community architects, social activism in Poland—shaped by the directives of the socialist regime (PRL)—was intertwined with political activities.

Cultural centers, which most closely resemble the concept of community design centers, served as tools of government propaganda. Socialist ideology viewed access to cultural resources as a means of achieving ideals like equality and widespread education. While the primary purpose of cultural centers in the early postwar years was to promote socialism, they became more citizen-focused with the political thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In subsequent decades, despite the propagandist aims of many institutions, cultural centers played a key role in promoting literacy, education, and artistic values, evolving into community spaces for local and neighborhood interactions[154].

The renewal of grassroots social movements began in the 1990s, marked by a rise in civic associations working toward the socio-economic development of regions[155].

In 1998, the **National Forum for Local Activity** (Polish: Ogólnopolskie Forum Aktywności Lokalnej) was established, providing a platform for practitioners and theorists to exchange experiences. Two years later, the Association for Local Activity Centers (Polish: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej) was founded, launching and implementing educational programs to support community development and activation. This association continues to operate to this day, partnering with regional and local governmental institutions and NGOs to create the **CAL Network** (Sieć CAL)[156].

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[154] http://www.zoomnadomykultury.pl/historia/ [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[155] Naumiuk A., Edukacja–partycypacja–zmiana. W doświadczeniach i wyobrażeniach działaczy lokalnych (animatorów społecznych). Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014, pp. 96-98.

[156] https://web.archive.org/web/20081005230029/http://www.sieci.cal.org.pl/?id_artykul=209 [accessed: 8.11.2024].

4.2. Local Activity Centers (CAL)

The **Local Activity Center** (Polish: Centrum Aktywności Lokalnej – **CAL**) model spread rapidly across Poland, thanks to extensive promotion by the Support Office for the Movement of Social Initiatives (BORIS) and the CAL Association. By 2007, over 200 organizations and institutions had adopted the model.

CAL initiatives have always focused on developing strong, integrated local communities. Through environmental education and social animation, these centers aim to enhance local solidarity, strengthen self-help capacities, and neighborly bonds[157].

These initiatives operate in many Polish cities, including Miejsca Aktywności Lokalnej[158] in Warsaw, Miejsca Aktywności Mieszkańców[159] in Kraków, and Centrum Inicjatyw Lokalnych[160] in Poznań.

In Wrocław, the first two CALs were established in 2018 as part of the Strong Local Communities (Polish: Silne Społeczności Lokalne) program. The leader of the newly created SCAL (Wrocław CAL Network) sector group was Żółty Parasol (now Żółty Parasol i Przyjaciele). As of 2024, the SCAL network includes 21 organizations and locations[161].

These centers operate under the Public Benefit and Volunteer Work Act[162] , funded by the city and managed by Wrocław NGOs. They are described as places that "create conditions for the development of civil society, neighborhood communities, informal groups, and initiatives, significantly impacting the quality of life for Wrocław residents and their activity within their neighborhoods"[163]. Each center maintains its unique character and autonomy in developing programs that are tailored to residents' needs and co-created with them. In addition to social initiatives, most CALs also engage in cultural and artistic activities. Furthermore, their role includes "strengthening networking processes among local stakeholders, including neighborhood entrepreneurs, municipal units (e.g., social welfare centers and city guards), neighborhood councils, educational institutions, cultural organizations, independent initiatives, and individuals"[164].

The CAL model can be seen as a **tool for mapping social potentials within neighborhoods**, adapting flexibly to local conditions and the specific social fabric. Its structure is sufficiently broad to integrate a demographically diverse community and support collaboration among various NGOs.

[157] Lewenstein B., Toward civic visions of local communities, Polish sociological review, 150 (2), pp. 103-121, 2005.

[158] https://um.warszawa.pl/waw/sasiedzka/-/miejsca-aktywnosci-lokalnej-mal-1, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[159] https://mam.bis-krakow.pl/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[160] https://www.poznan.pl/mim/main/program-cil,p,52642,52643.html?wo_id=444, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[161] https://scalwroclaw.org/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

[162] Dz. U. 2003 Nr 96 poz. 873 Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie.

[163] Bulicz A., Model działania Centrów Aktywności Lokalnej we Wrocławiu, Wrocław, 2021, p. 2, https://www.wroclaw.pl/beta2/files/Model-dzialania-Centrow-Aktywnosci-Lokalnej-we-Wroclawiu_pazdziernik-2021.pdf, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

[164] Kopciowska A., Pasierski E. (Ed.), Diagnoza samorządowego pola wrocławskiej kultury za lata 2019–2023+, Wrocław, 2023, s. 97, https://instytutkultury.pl/publikacje-raporty/raport-diagnoza/, [accessed: 11.11.2024].

The model is based on two development scenarios. The first involves a group of residents gradually professionalizing their activities—starting with micro-grants or local initiatives and eventually forming and registering their organization with accumulated experience and formal support. The second scenario assumes the presence of an organization that extends its activities to the neighborhood, driven not only by a need for social engagement but also by a deep connection with the area. Such an organization builds lasting relationships with the local community, adapts to its needs, and becomes an integral part of neighborhood life.

4.2.1. CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED

I conducted the analysis of Wrocław's CALs based on CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED (Polish: Plac Grunwaldzki OD NOWA), established in 2021 by the Ładne Historie Foundation[165]. The founders, Krzysztof Bielaszka and Maria Zięba, had been involced in the neighborhood actions even before the center's formal opening, drawing on their experience in cultural and animation work, including with children. These efforts provided a solid foundation for the center's future initiatives. With financial support from the city, the foundation secured a venue in the Grunwaldzki Square neighborhood. In addition to managing the center, the foundation coordinates an annual program supporting children and youth, including a community center that helps young individuals navigate daily challenges and develop their talents.

The following description is based on desk research and an interview with Krzysztof Bielaszka, coordinator of CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED.

4.2.1.1. Activities

The center's primary goal is to strengthen social capital within the neighborhood, contributing to urban resilience, i.e. communities' ability to adapt to change. The foundation's activities are based on intergenerational initiatives and networking, which foster lasting relationships and cooperation among residents. CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED has initiated and nurtured a wide network of local partnerships, ensuring their vitality and preserving *institutional memory*. Partners include entities such as social welfare centers, schools, universities, NGOs, art galleries, cultural institutions, libraries, churches, and residents' committees. The network also involves local service providers like yoga studios, cafes, restaurants, and produce markets. This approach helps retain resources within the local economy during neighborhood events by using local businesses.

CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED is gaining increasing recognition within the neighborhood by both organizations and residents, gradually boosting their engagement. Residents are more willing to take the initiative and assume responsibility for organizing local activities. While its potential is growing, it still requires support. The center's staff and volunteers play a crucial role in sustaining and even initiating activities to ensure the community's energy continues to develop.

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[165] https://ladnehistorie.pl/, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

The center also assists residents in their interactions with municipal institutions, whether by facilitating contact with decision-makers or organizing meetings with officials. This is particularly helpful in resolving local issues and mediating neighborly conflicts. Residents who visit include seniors with specific needs and younger families seeking ways to organize leisure activities for their children. Integration has also become an increasing priority, supported through social events and providing spaces for regular meetings.

The Ładne Historie Foundation employs various tools to support its work with the local community. Among these, thematic workshops—on participation, ecology, neighborhood mapping, and outdoor activities—play a key role. Funded by municipal, state, and EU resources, these workshops address diverse resident needs through methods such as memory mapping, social archiving, and research walks. CAL serves as a crucial tool in empowering residents to take initiatives and organize themselves. Recognizing that not all needs can be met, the center's animators strive to inspire the community to take action and create active spaces. Examples of such activities range from intergenerational St. Nicholas Day to senior photo sessions, handicraft workshops, and board game groups.

4.2.1.2. Civic Studio

One of the most significant initiatives of the Ładne Historie Foundation was the Civic studio – Green Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED[166], supported by grants from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway. This funding enabled the foundation to expand its scope beyond local community animation. The workshop facilitated comprehensive research and diagnosis of local needs, forming the basis for two projects—one neighborhood-focused and one citywide—submitted to the Wrocław Civic Budget (WBO) in 2023. This initiative was significant in fostering local identity and civic engagement, especially given the neighborhood's historically low participation in WBO projects and voting compared to other parts of the city.

The primary goal of the Civic studio was to support initiatives addressing climate challenges and to develop skills essential for engagement in local projects. The workshop focused on training local leaders and integrating the student community, including students from the Academy of Fine Arts, the Faculty of Architecture at Wrocław University of Science and Technology, the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences, and the Faculty of Ethnology at the University of Wrocław. A prerequisite for student participation was their connection to the Grunwaldzki Square neighborhood, whether through residence, work, or an emotional bond with its spaces.

The Civic studio conducted multifaceted field studies including meetings and consultations with residents, exploratory walks, and collaborative workgroups. Additionally, they offered mentorship for students, provided by architects from Prolog and Menthol Architects. These efforts resulted in a local diagnosis and the development of resident and user profiles (so-called *personas*), traffic flow analysis, and interviews, which were made available on the project's website. The involvement of local practitioners, academics, city officials, and experts from various fields allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the neighborhood and its residents' needs.

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[166] https://placgrunwaldzki.com/pracownie, [accessed: 13.11.2024].

The workshop's designers focused on creating a proposal for the Wrocław Civic Budget (WBO) that aimed to gain local community approval and meet its real needs. Although the project did not secure funding under the WBO, the entire process was deemed a success. The workshop established an essential link between the Local Activity Center and the large group of residents and users of the area, particularly students. Moreover, the developed guidelines were compiled and documented in reports submitted to the municipal office.

Photo 4.1. *One of the meetings with residents as part of the civic workshop, by M. Szczygieł*
Source: Archiwum CAL Plac Grunwaldzki OD NOWA

Photo 4.2. *Consultations with residents.*
Source: placgrunwaldzki.com[167]

[167]https://placgrunwaldzki.com/pracownie/pracownia-obywatelska-zielony-plac-grunwaldzki-od-nowa-zakonczona, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

4.3. Participatory Budget

The Participatory Budget, also referred to as the **Civic Budget**, is a tool of direct democracy that allows residents to influence the shaping of urban spaces by submitting and selecting projects funded from municipal resources. Its functioning has been widely discussed in literature, both in the Polish and international contexts. The Urban Policy Observatory of the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR) publishes annually the "Civic Budget Barometer"[168] report, which provides detailed analyses of this tool in Poland, serving as a rich source of knowledge for those interested in its impact and evolution. Additionally, each city maintains its own website or section dedicated to the civic budget, presenting current regulations and program objectives.

The participatory budget concept was first implemented in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. By the year 2000, only a few European cities had adopted it. The popularity of this form of civic engagement gradually increased, with significant expansion occurring after 2010. Within the following decade, nearly half of all participatory budgets worldwide were implemented in Europe.

Like other Central and Eastern European countries, Poland introduced the participatory budget later than most Western nations[169]. A participatory budget is a process in which all eligible citizens set guidelines to achieve public finance policies' main goals and directions and/or their allocation[170].

According to the World Bank's definition, civic participation in this context includes three aspects of managing public expenditure about its costs:

1. Budget Creation and Analysis – The participatory budget enables citizens to engage in decision-making processes related to resource allocation and setting priorities.

2. Monitoring Public Expenditures – The participatory budget facilitates citizens' oversight of public spending processes.

3. Supervising Public Service Delivery – It supports citizens in monitoring the quantity and quality of public services relative to their costs[171].

Universal elements that define the standards of a participatory budget have been described by Wiktorska-Święcka and Kozak in their publication "Partycypacja publiczna w zarządzaniu rozwojem lokalnym"[172] :

- ▣ Projects Format and Funds Allocation: Residents determine the form of projects and allocated funds through discussions and debates. At this stage, the action plan is determined solely by citizens.

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[168] Martela B., Janik L., Mróz K., Barometr Budżetu Obywatelskiego, Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warsaw-Cracow, 2023, https://obserwatorium.miasta.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Martela-B.-Janik-L.-Mroz-K.-2023-Barometr -BO.-Edycja-2022.pdf [accessed: 1.10.2024].

[169] https://www.jstor.org/stable/27116724, [accessed: 1.11.2024].

[170] Mączka K. i wsp., Models of Participatory Budgeting. Analysis of Participatory Budgeting Procedures in Poland, Polish Sociological Review , 216 (4), 2021, p. 475.

[171] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 104.

[172] Ibidem.

- ☐ Regularity of Actions: Regularity and a clear schedule are essential to ensure the process's transparency for all participants.

- ☐ Scale of the Program: It should encompass the entire city or municipality.

- ☐ Clearly Defined Budget: The allocated amount should be substantial enough to ensure that decisions made within the program have a meaningful impact.

It is worth noting that the term *civic budget* dominates current local government communication by the Act on Municipal Government, which does not mention *participation* even once[173]. In academic literature, the term *civic budget* often replaces *participatory budget*, reflecting the specificity of the Polish adaptation of this mechanism. Alongside public consultations, it remains the most recognizable participatory instrument in the country.

The civic budget functions in Polish cities since 2011. Initially, local governments had the freedom to shape its framework, which was regulated only by local resolutions and social agreements between authorities and residents. Gradually, more cities joined the initiative, and their representatives inspired one another to develop their models. This process eventually led to a standardized Polish version of the civic budget. In 2018, it was officially regulated by law, defining it as a *special form of consultation*[174].

The Wrocław Participatory Budget is a relatively well-developed instrument. In the following sections, I will discuss the tools available within this framework and point out the program's local specifics. I will address both the positive aspects and the challenges faced by residents and organizers of participatory processes in Wrocław.

4.3.1. Wrocław Civic Budget

The Wrocław Civic Budget (Polish: WBO – Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski) was launched as a pilot program in 2013. Initially, it was deemed a low-quality participatory process with superficial evaluation. Despite numerous resident suggestions, the rules for subsequent editions had already been pre-determined. In later years, the municipality incorporated feedback and began opening the WBO process to greater involvement of local stakeholders, allowing consultations with officials and experts. The evaluation process was also improved, with debates and public opinion surveys conducted before setting the rules for subsequent editions[175].

In parallel with evaluative activities carried out, the city established the Civic Budget Council in 2015, composed of ten members, including councilors, leaders of winning projects, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Council's primary task was to create WBO strategies. Members actively participated in evaluations, reviewed the rules for upcoming years, and recommended projects before they were submitted as resolutions to the Wrocław City Council[176]. This intense collaboration led 2015 to be labeled the *Year of Wrocław's Participation*. The Civic Budget Council operated

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[173] https://lexlege.pl/ustawa-o-samorzadzie-gminnym/art-5a/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[174] Martela B., Janik L., Mróz K., Barometr… , op. cit.,p. 9.
[175] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit., p. 168.
[176] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/laboratoria-obywatelskie [accessed: 8.11.2024].

for two years before its evaluation responsibilities were transferred to the Department of Social Participation, which now also oversees WBO organization.

In subsequent years, the municipal office introduced several changes to the program. One of the most controversial decisions was the abolition of project areas, which faced widespread criticism from local leaders and NGOs[177]. The district-based division had previously guaranteed specific funds for each city area, increasing the chances of implementing projects from smaller neighborhoods. Under the current system, less populous communities must compete with larger ones, often leading to failure and lower resident engagement.

Another major challenge is the growing professionalization of the program. Without professional campaigns, including graphic design and paid promotion on social media, it is difficult to gather enough votes[178]. In practice, the same leaders dominate year after year, with projects typically originating from the same neighborhoods. As a result, the WBO is often criticized as a popularity contest.

The program's schedule does not favor new leaders. The three-month window provided by the WBO for reorganizing efforts and resubmitting projects is insufficient for individuals working within informal or less organized groups.

Furthermore, the *beyond-district* project category often merely supports the needs of specific neighborhoods. Coalitions tend to focus on securing more votes rather than fostering genuine collaboration or implementing city-scale investments.

Currently, the WBO lacks space for truly grassroots initiatives[179], social movements, and small projects, which were initially very popular. New leaders, smaller groups, and neighborhoods struggle to navigate the complex competition mechanisms and established inter-neighborhood dynamics.

For example, in 2022, Karolina Wąsowicz submitted a project to renovate a courtyard in Ołbin. She demonstrated great commitment, promoting the initiative among neighbors through conversations and posters. The project had a personal dimension for her, tied to her grandparents' history with the courtyard. Despite receiving 200 votes—indicating strong local motivation—the project's social potential was not harnessed further. The leader did not pursue other funding options, leading to a loss of momentum and community engagement[180].

A similar issue arose with a 2023 project by CAL Grunwaldzki Square RENEWED. Despite two years of preparation and promotional efforts, the project failed to gain enough of support in the voting process. This outcome negatively impacted the motivation of both those directly involved in project creation and the neighborhood residents who had high hopes for a favorable outcome[181].

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[177] https://www.tuwroclaw.com/wiadomosci,napisali-list-do-sutryka-prosza-o-naprawe-wbo-i-spotkanie,wia5-3266-46874.html

[178] Chrzan J., Jak zmienia się WBO? (No 1), [audio podcast], in: Opinia uwzględniona, 2024, https://open.spotify.com/episode/4XT4TWtMyhKpNdSxx4kAgj?si=c0749119fe774dbd, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[179] 12 out of 17 winning projects in 2023 were either supported by the neighborhood council or submitted by one of its members, source of information: https://www.wroclaw.pl/wbo/projekty-2023, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[180] Based on an interview conducted with Karolina Wąsowicz – own source.

[181] Based on an interview conducted with Krzysztof Bielaszka - own source.

Based on public consultations, evaluations of the WBO from 2019[182] and 2022[183] underline the need for program reform. Recommendations include reinstating the district-based division of the budget to ensure a balanced distribution of investments across the city. Another proposal is to introduce a category for smaller projects to encourage residents to share their ideas and increase the diversity of initiatives. Additionally, it is noted that an allocation of a more significant portion of the municipal budget to residents shall be made, as the current allocation constitutes less than 0.5% of total city funds.

The form of implementation of selected projects also raises concerns. Prolonged timelines often frustrate residents, discouraging further participation. Moreover, the tender-based realization system limits residents' influence over the final project results. While consultations with leaders and residents are conducted, any potential changes are typically cosmetic, often failing to meet community expectations.

All these factors contribute to a decline in the number of submitted projects and votes cast in subsequent WBO editions[184]. According to a definition frequently cited by the Wrocław Department of Social Participation, the WBO was primarily created as a tool to engage residents[185]. However, to preserve this character, a revision of its current formula is essential—a need long emphasized by local activists and social organizations.

Year	Number of votes	Number of submitted projects
2013	51 708	242
2014	153 366	483
2015	168 278	817
2016	104 884	791
2017	97 043	740
2018	68 670	611
2019	86 484	448
2020	95 206	413
2021	89 933	368
2022	86 750	362
2023	83 754	317
2024	69 850	286
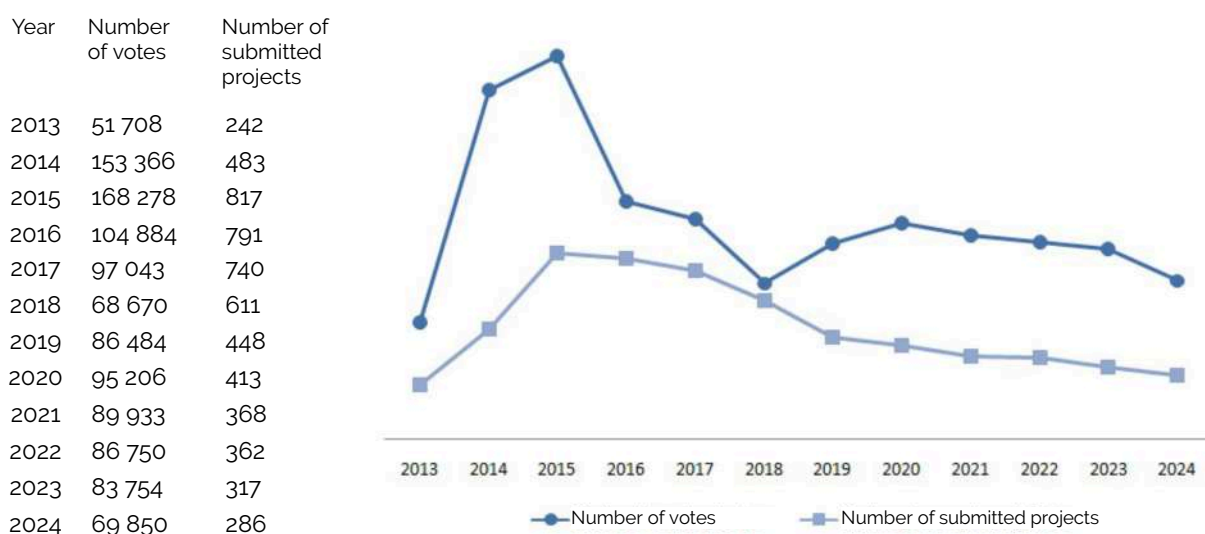
Figure 4.1. *Own elaboration based on statistics from the official WBO website [186].*

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[182] Wrocław Rozmawia, WBO'19. Ewaluacja. Konsultacje edycji 2019 Wrocławskiego Budżetu Obywatelskiego, Wrocław, 2020, https://www.wroclaw.pl/beta2/files/dokumenty/63381/WBO-19-ewaluacja-RAPORT.pdf, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[183] Wydział Partycypacji Społecznej UM Wrocławia, Raport. Konsultacje społeczne. Powiedz nam jak rozwijać Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski, Wrocław, 2023, https://www.wroclaw.pl/beta2/files/dokumenty/363850/WBO_raport.pdf, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[184] Based on statistics from: https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[185] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski-definicja, [accessed: 16.11.2024].

[186] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

4.3.2. Civic Laboratories

The **Civic Laboratories** (Polish: Laboratoria Obywatelskie – **LO**) project was a significant event in the history of participatory processes in Wrocław. Introduced for the first time in 2015 as a pilot program, it was implemented in five neighborhoods: Szczepin, Oporów, Brochów, Borek, and the combined district of Sępolno-Biskupin-Dąbie-Bartoszowice. LO workshops were an integral part of the initial stage of the WBO, a phase during which local leaders submitted their project proposals. The workshops were based on the British **Planning for Real (P4R)** method, designed to support residents in identifying and articulating their ideas within the context of spatial planning processes. Various entities were involved in organizing the meetings, including community councils, non-governmental organizations, the Wrocław Contemporary Museum, and local activists. The Wrocław branch of the Polish Society of City Planners and the Institute for Territorial Development coordinated and supported these efforts[187].

4.3.2.1. Planning for Real Method in Wrocław

The P4R method is characterized by several key elements: the creation of three-dimensional models representing the analyzed area, the organization of meetings where residents could share their ideas, and the initiation of discussions fostering dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

The application of the P4R method in Wrocław's Civic Laboratories aimed to engage a broader group of residents and better identification of local needs at the neighborhood level. This enabled local leaders to submit WBO proposals that were more tailored and compelling[188].

Workshops were led by trained facilitators, assisted by volunteers, mostly from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. These trained mediators acted as intermediaries between the city, residents, experts, and investors, a role critical to the workshops' success. Volunteers supported facilitators, and both groups primarily consisted of urban planners, academic staff from the Faculty of Architecture, and spatial planning students.

Each neighborhood hosted three meetings. The first meeting aimed to identify areas of primary importance to residents, identify significant locations in the neighborhood and outline key problems. While not a standard element of the P4R methodology, this stage was essential for setting the direction of further actions.

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[187] Świerczewski B., Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski. Teraźniejszość i przyszłość. Miasto. Pamięć i Przyszłość, 1, 2016, pp. 104-126.
[188] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/laboratoria-obywatelskie, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

During the second meeting, residents were invited to mark problematic areas on the model using problem and suggestion cards divided into eight categories

- Traffic and transport,
- Crime and safety,
- Local environment,
- Leisure and recreation,
- Social activity,
- Health,
- Housing management,
- Employment and education

At the third meeting, based on the problems identified earlier, participants prioritized key issues for the neighborhood and the remaining topics were prioritized. They also estimated the time required to implement solutions. Experts were present to assist residents in identifying solutions for selected problems[189].

A three-dimensional model prepared by children from local schools played a significant role in the P4R method. It helped residents navigate themselves within the neighborhood, enabling them to locate their homes, local shops, or schools. Its purpose was also to engage parents and other family members, thus broadening the participant base[190]. In Wrocław, the model served its purpose exceptionally well—it became a starting point for discussions with residents, making them feel more confident and informed during the process. The model also acted as a tool for expressing emotions and voicing concerns or needs that residents brought to the meetings.

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[189] Bartyna-Zielińska M. i wsp., Raport dotyczący projektu "Laboratoria Obywatelskie", Towarzystwo Urbanistów Polskich, Wrocław, 2015, pp. 5-7.
[190] Ibidem, p. 4

Photo 4.3. *Model of one of the discussed areas with »problems and suggestions« cards.*
Source: Raport »Laboratoria Obywatelskie« [191]

The Civic Laboratories were deemed a success[192,193]. Attendance rate at the meetings varied, though final reports indicated an overall satisfactory evaluation. For instance, as many as 50 participants attended the workshops in Biskupin, which is considered an excellent result in the context of Wrocław. Notably, the meetings were conducted without conflict, which is often challenging during consultations. This was largely due to the methodology itself, which eliminated confrontational factors and reduced the risk of disputes.

Despite the success, the P4R method cannot be considered a suitable tool for supporting the WBO. During the Civic Laboratories, it was not possible to implement all stages of the P4R method or use its full range of tools, primarily due to time constraints. The standard P4R procedure involves more meetings with residents and takes longer than the WBO schedule allows. Even the shortened process concluded only a few days before the final deadline for submitting proposals, leaving local leaders little time to prepare projects based on the drawn up conclusions. Time and budget limitations also necessitated focusing on selected, relatively small areas within neighborhoods. These restrictions worked to the disadvantage of other areas and their local leaders[194].

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[191] Ibidem.

[192] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/podsumowali-laboratoria-obywatelskie-zdjecia , [accessed: 20.11.2024].

[193] Świerczewski B., Wrocławski Budżet…, op. cit., p. 119.

[194] Based on a conversation with Małgorzata Bartyna-Zielińska from the Wrocław City Office, representing the Wrocław Branch of the Polish Town Planners Society during the LO.

It is difficult to definitively determine the impact of the Civic Laboratories on increasing resident engagement in the WBO, though the number of submitted proposals did rise in 2015 compared to the previous year. However, a similar increase was observed in neighborhoods not included in the Laboratories program[195]. After the first edition, both the Participatory Budget Council and the WBO coordinator at the time, Bartłomiej Świerczewski, recommended continuing the program in 20 neighborhoods the following year. Unofficial reports suggested that the P4R method could be helpful in organizing neighborhood priorities and reducing the submission of unnecessary or criticized projects.

In 2016, the WBO operated without the Civic Laboratories, which were reinstated only in the following year. Instead, a simulation tool, **Game for the Budget**, developed by the Center for Systems Solutions Association, was tested in 2016. Two editions of the game were organized: one citywide and another at the local level. These sessions aimed to stimulate discussion and explore scenarios in which residents reach consensus on selecting WBO projects for implementation. Project leaders, activists, and residents of Wrocław were invited to participate. Despite promotional efforts by the Office of Social Participation (Polish: Biuro Partycypacji Społecznej), the event did not attract a large number of participants[196,197].

The Civic Laboratories returned in 2017 in a modified and more intimate form[198]. They were conducted in five neighborhoods: Kleczków, Ołbin, Psie Pole, Muchobór Mały, and Jerzmanowo/Jarnołtów[199]. The organization was managed by the Office of Social Participation at the Wrocław City Hall in cooperation with the Peace House Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju).

4.3.3. Microgrants

Microgrants is a program supporting grassroots local initiatives, enabling residents, informal groups, and local NGOs to implement their ideas for social activities in Wrocław. The program was initiated in 2014 as part of preparations for Wrocław's designation as the European Capital of Culture (Polish: ESK – Europejska Stolica Kultury) 2016.

In its current format, it has been operating since 2018 as a combination of the microGRANTS ESK[200], the Wrocław Small Initiatives Fund, and the Youth Participatory Budget, which were previously run by the Umbrella Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Umbrella).

Microgrants support projects that engage residents in collaborative activities in animation, recreation, social activation, education, and culture. Their goal is to build the skills necessary for active participation in city life, promote grassroots initiatives within

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[195] Bartyna-Zielińska M. i wsp., Raport…, op. cit., p. 74.
[196] Świerczewski B., Wrocławski Budżet…, op. cit., p. 122.
[197] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/gra-o-wbo-1, [accessed: 13.11.2024].
[198] The office was formed as a result of the integration of the Office for Cooperation with Organizations and the WBO Team.
[199] https://www.wroclaw.pl/dla-mieszkanca/nowe-biuro-ds-partycypacji-wbo-powstaje-w-urzedzie, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[200] ESK - Emocje-Sport-Kultura.

local communities, and encourage the creative exchange of ideas and dialogue that includes social diversity.

The program offers three pathways, enabling project submissions by individuals and informal groups, youth, and NGOs. Funding for project implementation comes from the municipal budget, with each group allocated a specific financial pool[201].

This program is implemented in various cities, and due to the lack of a uniform legal definition, its structure can vary significantly—in terms of both available funding and applicable rules. In Wrocław, the allocated funds cannot be used to finance fixed assets or infrastructure-related activities. The guidelines specify that projects of this nature can be submitted under the WBO. However, previous analyses indicate that the current format of the WBO is not conducive to implementing such initiatives. This raises the question of how to support small-scale public space projects that fall outside the scope of the WBO.

National research conducted in 2021 as part of the Center for Social Analysis and Models (Polish: *Centrum Analiz i Modeli Społecznych)* project examined the impact of microgrants on local activity development[202]. The findings present a positive image of this mechanism. Participants included NGO representatives and informal groups participating in microgrant competitions between 2018 and 2020.

The research aimed to gather feedback from participants on the competitions and assess the impact of microgrants on their further activities, group development, community engagement, and motivation to participate in the program

For the vast majority of respondents (over 70%), the primary motivation for applying for microgrants was the desire to implement projects they considered important for their local communities. Another significant reason was the aim to involve residents and foster their integration.

A user-friendly and straightforward application procedure proved to be a strong motivating factor for participation. Participants also appreciated the support provided by program advisors.

According to most respondents, success in the competition significantly increased their motivation to undertake further initiatives. More than half of the respondents stated that implementing their project allowed them to test their capabilities and boosted their confidence, facilitating the planning of future projects. The experience gained not only made it easier to create subsequent initiatives but also brought new inspiration and ideas for action.

The implementation of microgrant projects also revealed numerous positive effects for local communities. Notably, there was an increase in resident integration and engagement in community-oriented activities. This, in turn, sparked further initiatives and strengthened collaboration among diverse entities within the community.

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[201] https://instytutkultury.pl/mikrogranty/, [accessed: 7.11.2024].
[202] Centrum OPUS, Wpływ mikrograntów na rozwój aktywności lokalnej – perspektywa udziału grup nieformalnych, b.m.w., 2021, 1.
https://opus.org.pl/raport-z-badan-wplyw-mikrograntow-na-rozwoj-aktywnosci-lokalnej--perspektywa-udzialu-grup-nieformalnych-28766, [accessed: 21.05.2024]

The findings suggest that **microgrants have a positive impact on social activation.** Securing funding by residents initiated a snowball effect: community involvement in project implementation promoted bonding, while integration and cooperation strengthened a sense of responsibility for shared spaces. Consequently, new resident-led initiatives emerged, supporting the sustained development of civic activity. As a result, more collaborations with businesses, local government representatives, and community organizations were also established.

The program contributed to strengthening and developing informal groups, which gradually transformed into organized structures, reflecting growing commitment and professionalization of activities.

Such initiatives can, therefore, serve as a solution for restoring the grassroots and community-building character of participatory budget tools.

4.3.4. Community Fund

The Community Fund is an essential tool for supporting community councils in Wrocław, which enables the implementation of investments aimed at improving residents' quality of life. Introduced in response to recommendations from the "New Constitution for Communities"[203] report, the fund grants community councils greater autonomy and agency by providing financial resources for local projects**.** The Fund is designed to incorporate participatory methods, allowing residents to submit ideas and express opinions during consultations, which is a prerequisite for applying for funds[204].

Consultations adopt various forms: surveys (both paper and electronic), consultation meetings, walks, and council member office hours. However, resident engagement in these consultations varies significantly depending on the characteristics of the community—the number of responses ranged from a few to as many as 400 in more engaged communities[205].

Although the Fund receives very positive feedback, its implementation also generates frustration. Verifying and implementing applications is time-consuming, delaying the point at which residents can see the results of their involvement. Furthermore, the Fund's future remains uncertain due to budget constraints, posing challenges to the continuity and effectiveness of community council initiatives[206].

[203] Fundacja na Rzecz Studiów Europejskich i inni, Nowa Konstytucja Osiedli. Raport dotyczący rekomendacji zmian wrocławskiego ustroju osiedlowego, Wrocław, 2018, https://feps.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/raport-Nowa-Konstytucja-Osiedli-rekomendacje.pdf, [accessed: 13.11.2024].

[204] https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/fundusz-osiedlowy-we-wroclawiu, [accessed: 13.11.2024].

[205] Ibidem.

[206] Mierzwiak K., Rady osiedli wściekłe na Jacka Sutryka. Obiecał pieniądze, dostali guzik z pętelką, 2024, https://www.tuwroclaw.com/wiadomosci,rady-osiedli-wsciekle-na-jacka-sutryka-obiecal-pieniadze-dostali-guzik-z-petelka,wia5-3312-73769.html, [accessed: 13.11.2024].

4.4. Summary

Chapter four presented participatory opportunities in Wrocław through the example of the CAL model and participatory budgeting, along with its three programs—the Wrocław Civic Budget (WBO), the Community Fund, and Microgrants.

The WBO demonstrated the highest recognition and activation potential during its initial editions. Unfortunately, its original capacity to engage residents significantly weakened over time, and the program has become the subject of numerous criticisms. A unique, though one-time, participatory initiative was the introduction of the Planning for Real method during the first edition of the Civic Laboratories. However, while innovative in the Polish context, this tool proved to be too costly and overly complex for local capacities and resources[207].

The Microgrants program stands out as one of the most effective tools for grassroots action. It enables the implementation of social initiatives through as many as three competition cycles per year. However, its main limitations include the inability to fund infrastructural projects and a limited budget. The Community Fund, which could support district council activities, lacks continuity and prolonged procedures. This makes it an unstable tool.

In contrast, the CAL model demonstrates significant potential in supporting the development of civil society. Despite its limited resources, its structure and tasks provide a solid foundation for further development of social activities.

In conclusion, participatory budgeting in Wrocław possesses considerable potential for involving residents in decision-making processes concerning the city. However, numerous organizational and financial constraints significantly undermine its participatory character. Further improvements to these mechanisms are essential to fully harness their potential and increase citizen engagement in the city's life.

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[207] According to the study Hajduk S., Partycypacja..., op. cit., P4R is a method specifically designed for larger groups, ranging from 100 to 1,000 participants, with the process potentially extending over several months.

5.
Design Practice and Research in Brussels

5.1.

Gray Street

5.1.1. Introduction

Between May and December 2023, I participated in the **Maelbeek Vallée Verte** project. The project was developed in collaboration with the Brussels-based architectural collective **Latitude Platform** and was part of the **Bruxelles en Vacances** program, organized by the administrative unit **Bruxelles Mobilité**. This program supports grassroots initiatives, which aim at testing concepts for a quieter city during the summer period. The activities seek to raise public awareness about the principles of the **Good Move** strategy at a local level. This strategy is an ambitious plan for urban transformation, designed to create a city environment more conducive to pedestrians and cyclists, with implementation planned for 2030.

Tab. 5.1. *Parties involved in the project with responsibilities division*

Partners	Key Contributions
Latitude Platform	
- Davide Auciello - Architect and urban planner, member of the collective	- Project initiator, co-coordinator, responsible for design and communication with administration
- Octavio Piñeiro Aramburu - Architect	- Provided support for coordination during the initial phase of the project
- Ombeline Hinfray - Intern	- Assisted in organizing and conducting the September workshops
- Marta Siemińska	- Project co-coordinator, responsible for: designing the project process, creating project documentation, communication with residents and administration, co-responsible for the design of small architectural elements and the painted intervention on the road, organizer and facilitator of workshops.
EGEB	
- Dominique Nalpas - Founder and coordinator of the association	- Established initial contacts with local stakeholders, provided expert support
- Michel Bastin - Researcher, member of the association, and plant expert	- Contributed to the workshops and greening project as well as engaging with local actors
- Odile Zaït - Landscape architect	- Designed the greening of planters and substantive support during workshops
- Alan Trap	- Offered technical and logistical assistance
LOOP Studio	- Designed graphic materials for communication, printed leaflets and posters
Collectif Dallas	- Delivered technical solutions for small architectural installations and their construction

External contractors
DALLAS
Loop

Latitiude platform
EGEB

Project neighbors from Gray
and Kerckx streets
Residents of the neighborhood
Participants in activities at La
Serre
Participants of Cafe Solidaire

Délier les Fils de l'Eau

Fairville project's participants
Academic community
La Cambre

project group

workshops and
participatory
meetings

expertise

Administrative authorities
Police
Bruxelles Mobilité
Ixelles Municipality Office
    Department of Environment and Climate
    Department of Control and Inspection
Sibelga
SIAMU

Maelbeek Vallée
Verte project

Members of the Moinneaux
community garden
Members of the Gray-Couronne
community garden
Volunteers from La Vélothèque

Figure 5.1.1. Scheme representing actors involved in Maelbeek Vallée Verte project.
Own elaboration.
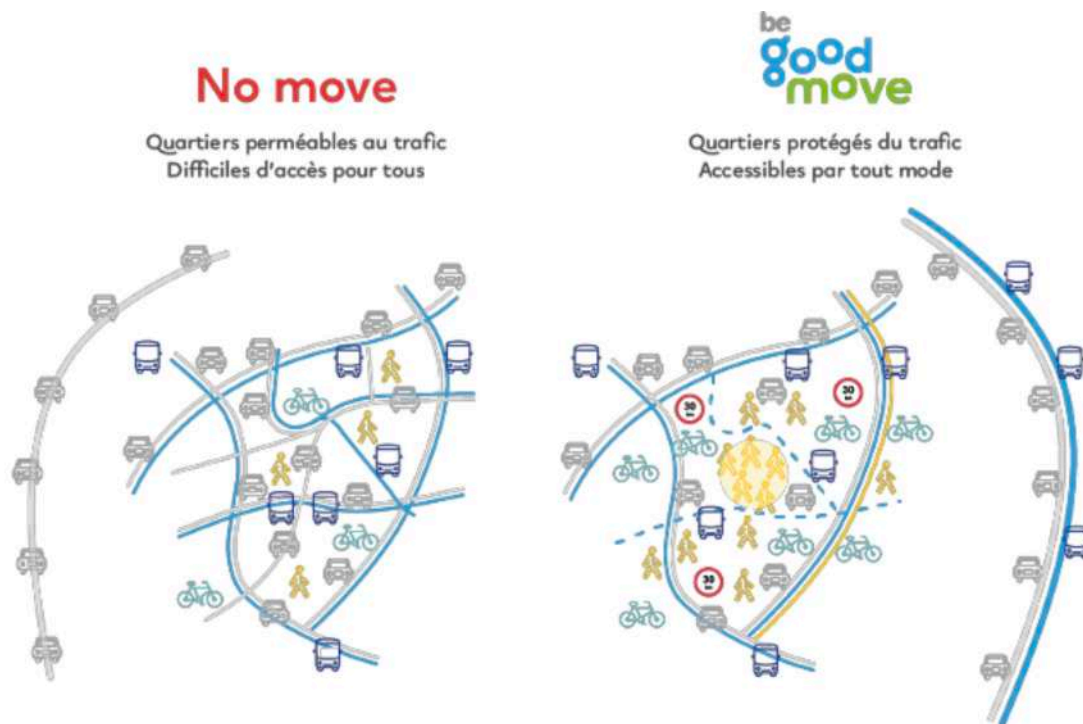
Figure 5.1.2. *Scheme representing Good Move program objectives.*
Source: mobilite-mobiliteit.brussels[208]

The Bruxelles en Vacances program is temporary and site-specific. It raised controversy due to the planned reorganisation of car traffic and limited parking spaces. The program addresses various public concerns surrounding the planned reorganization of car traffic and restrictions on parking availability. This approach is intended to help residents understand the strategy's assumptions, support their adaptation to the changes, and foster social integration[209].

The Latitude Platform collective, with experience in urban water management projects such as *Wet Cities* (2017) and *Brusseau Bis* (2020–2023), selected Gray Street as the site for the 2023 project. This decision aligned with the collective's prior experience and collaboration with EGEB, which contributed significantly to identifying water-related issues in urban spaces.

The project's foundations were anchored in strategic documents of the Brussels-Capital Region, including:

- ◨ Good Move – a plan for urban space transformation

- ◨ PRDD (French: Le Plan Régional de Développement Durable – Regional Sustainable Development Plan)

- ◨ GiEP (French: La Gestion intégrée des Eaux Pluviales – Integrated Stormwater Management Plan)

The project's primary goals were established on the basis of the guidelines outlined in these documents and insights from previous fieldwork.

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[208] https://mobilite-mobiliteit.brussels/en/good-move/good-neighbourhood, [accessed: 12.11.2024].
[209] https://mobilite-mobiliteit.brussels/fr/news/les-subventions-offertes-par-bruxelles-mobilite, [accessed: 12.11.2024].

5.1.2. Context

Gray Street, located in the valley of the Maelbeek River (now buried in concrete pipes), leads to Flagey Square, one of Brussels' iconic landmarks. The street forms a boundary between this area and the higher, more prestigious neighborhoods in the Ixelles municipality. Historically, below Avenue de la Couronne, were located houses for servants and workers, as well as stables, in contrast to the mansions of the Brussels bourgeoisie located above.

In the 20th century, Gray Street experienced frequent flooding, prompting authorities to invest in a retention and flood control reservoir beneath Flagey Square. However, the construction, completed in 2007, was widely criticized. Residents lost access to an essential part of public space for five years, and the project was perceived by many as excessively costly and poorly planned. While large-scale flooding has improved, basement flooding, backflow of stormwater and sewage, and persistent dampness remain unresolved.

A grassroots movement opposing the construction of the flood control reservoir at Flagey Square led to the creation of **EGEB** (French: *Les Etats Généraux de l'Eau de Bruxelles)*. The organization advocated for more natural water management methods and sought alternative approaches to urban water governance. Today, EGEB stands out in Brussels for its efforts to recognize water as a public good. The association connects local initiatives with research and reflection on sustainable water management, promoting comprehensive solutions aligned with natural water cycles[210].

Photo 5.1.1. Postcard from the early 20th century..
Source: monument.heritage. brussels[212]

Photo 5.1.2. Flooding during the 1970s, Gray Street.
Source: curieuses-balades.be[211]

5.1.1.

5.1.2.

[210] https://www.acqu.be/Les-Etats-Generaux-de-l-Eau-de, [accessed: 12.11.2024].
[211] https://curieuses-balades.be/, [accessed: 23.11.2024].
[212] https://monument.heritage. brussels/fr/ buildings/20085, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

EGEB co-created the platform **Délier les Fils de l'Eau** (Unraveling the Threads of Water), while collaborating with other organizations such as La Serre, Brusseau, FSSB, CSSBSE, and Habitat et Rénovation. Through this initiative, numerous projects were implemented, including a portrait exhibition of Gray Street residents, educational walks, and creative workshops.

In 2014, EGEB organized exploratory walks in the area to identify key elements such as biodiversity, terrain features, urban typology, historical artifacts, and landmarks. Based on the collected data, 14 information panels were created to highlight significant aspects of the district and its history[213].

Administrative efforts began only in 2021 after residents of Gray Street reported basement flooding to EGEB following intense rainfall. In February 2022, a meeting was held between residents and representatives of *VIVAQUA* (the municipal water and sewage company). Residents shared their experiences of recurring floods, sewage backflow, and health issues caused by damp conditions and poor building maintenance.

Potential causes of these issues were identified. One hypothesis pointed to structural, problems, the collector and sewer networks are positioned too high relative to residents' basements. Another suggested cause is the historical canalization of the Maelbeek River and the excessive paving of permeable surfaces, hindering natural rainwater infiltration and drainage.

In early 2023, EGEB sent an official letter to the district authorities and water resource operators, VIVAQUA and Hydria, outlining the issues on Gray Street and prior findings. Unfortunately, these efforts yielded no tangible results, and left residents feeling helpless and isolated[214].

Despite these challenges, the involvement of multiple stakeholders ensured the issue remained in focus. In 2023, preparations began for the **Bruxelles en Vacances** project. They were initiated and coordinated by **Latitude Platform**. The project brought hope for renewed efforts to address residents' problems and improve the situation on Gray Street.

Photo 5.1.3. Flooding of Gray Street view of La Serre, summer 2024
Source: egeb-sgwb.be[215]

[213] https://curieuses-balades.be/la-curieuse-balade-du-maelbeek/, [accessed: 12.11.2024].
[214] Based on the information gathered during the work on the project and drawing on the text by Dominique from EGEB - https://www.egeb-sgwb.be/article384.html, [accessed: 16.11.2024].
[215] https://www.egeb-sgwb.be/IMG/pdf/dfe_inondations_gray_2024_images_light.pdf, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

Forte dei Marmi

Jardin collectif
Gray-Moineaux

Groupe scolaire
Sans Souci - Les
Petits Moineaux

Avenue de la Couronne

RUE APAISÉE

Rue Kerckx

Potager collectif Gray-Couronne

CC néerlandophone

CC La Serre - Communa asbl

Rue Gray

Flagey
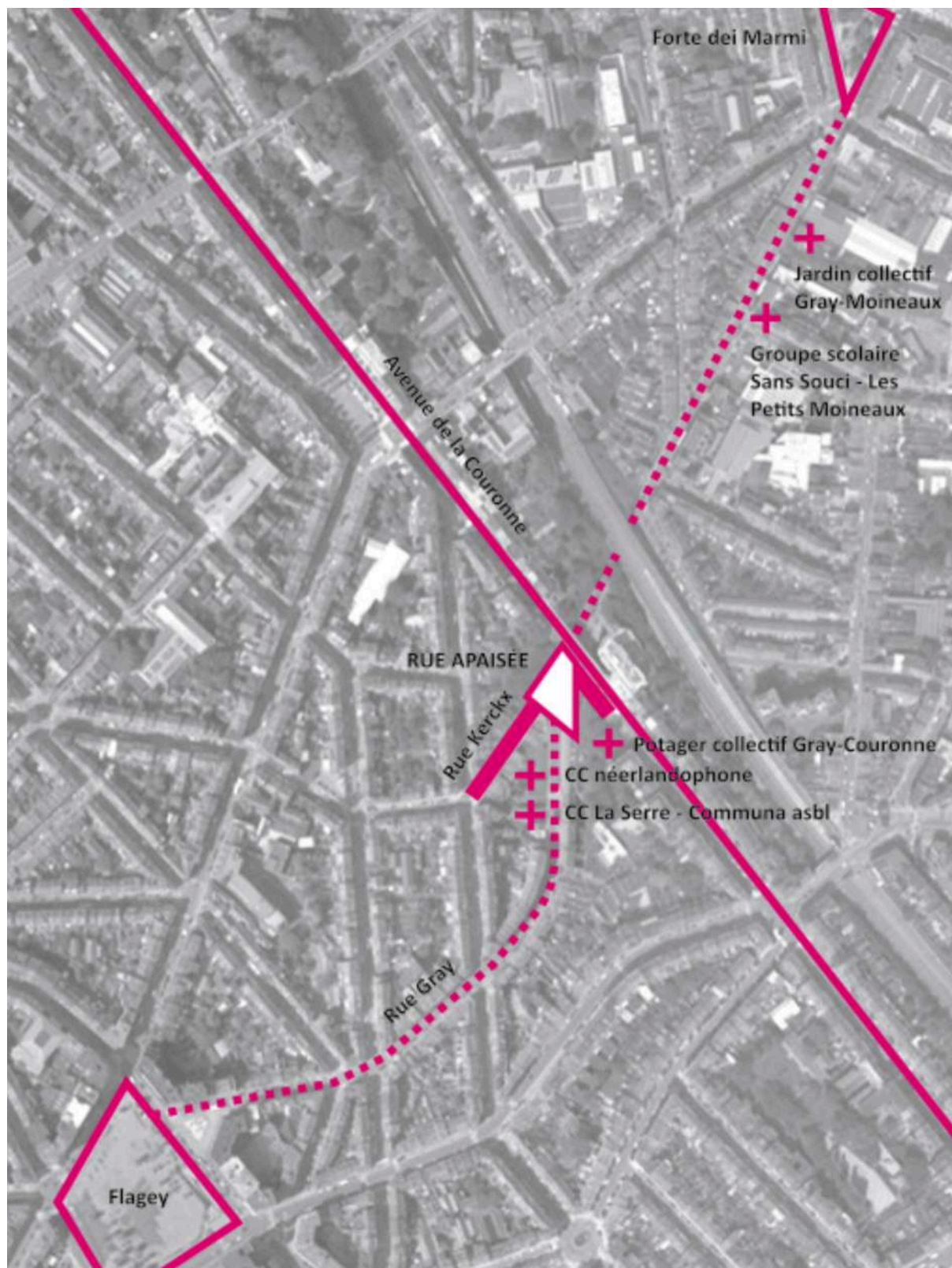
Figure 5.1.3. *Project location and analysis of the local stakeholders*

Photo 5.1.4. *Stairs connecting the Maelbeek Valley with the wealthier part of the district - Avenue de la Couronne , by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.5. *Social housing on Gray Street. The ground floor remains abandoned, by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.6. *View of Gray Street from the Gray-Couronne Bridge by M. Siemińska* ❯

5.1.4.

5.1.5.

May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December

Plan and meeting topics preparation

Working on documentation

Getting permits for activities in public spaces

Meeting: Environment Department

Meeting: Municipal Councillor + Environment Department

Documents presentation Ixelles Municipal Coucil

Internal meeting of the design group

Participatory design

Meetings

Meetings with local actors

Meetings with local actors and residents

Information meeting July 13

Project introduction Sept 2

Co-design workshop + research walk Sept 9

Co-design workshops + residents' testimonials

Activities

Works in public space Collaborative painting + installation of urban furnitures

Fairville meeting

Car-free day + Community works Sept 17

Inauguration of the space + joint planting of plants

Exploratory walk *Mysteries at the Bottom of the Valley Maelbeek* 7 Nov

Raising awarness

Posters and email communication

Distribution of leaflets

Distribution of leaflets

Installation of the information panel

Online evaluation questionnaire

Rys.5.1.4. Action Plan Schedule. Own elaboration.

5.1.3. Additional Context

Subsidized Social Housing

In 1915, workers' housing was constructed in this area, which underwent thorough and costly reconstruction in 2005. The project preserved only the facade of the original buildings, while the complex was transformed into a social housing and commercial premises on the ground floor. The building is situated at the lowest point of the Maelbeek River valley, which makes it particularly vulnerable to issues related to dampness and flooding. The failure to address these issues has left the building's residents most affected by the resulting inconveniences. Permanent dampness, especially in ground-floor commercial units, prevents long-term use of the spaces, leaving them vacant for years.

La Vélothèque[216] is an initiative carried out as part of the nationwide Fietsbieb project, supported by the Flemish Community. It aims to provide children with access to bicycles through a rental system. For a small registration fee (€20), one can obtain an annual subscription to use a bike, with the option to exchange it for a larger model as the child grows.

The bike library is located on the ground floor of the social housing building on Gray Street, which is the only active commercial space in this building — all other storefronts have remained empty for years. The place was opened in early 2023 following thorough renovations funded with the support of the municipality of Ixelles. Unfortunately, just a few months after opening, signs of dampness appeared in the space, such as bubbles on the resin floor and peeling paint from the walls. This makes it impossible to use this place for longer periods.

In 2017, as part of the *Neighborhood Sustainable Development Agreement*[217] and the Gray Street revitalization project, the non-profit organization Communa was entrusted with fostering the area's social dynamics. The organization took over an empty hangar and adjacent buildings to create a community space – **La Serre**. This project was implemented thanks to the involvement of volunteers, who independently carried out most of the renovation and furnishing work. Many local actors joined the project — collectives, NGOs, and residents who wanted to improve their neighborhood's quality of life.

La Serre served as a local hub for social and cultural activities. It housed four apartments, an artist's studio, and a shared space with a bar and kitchen. Social events (e.g., integration activities for immigrants, senior activation programs, meetings with the district council), cultural events (concerts, performances, street festivals), and social economy initiatives (repair workshops, food processing and sales activities) were organized there[218].

La Serre was initially designed as a temporary space, with its activities planned to conclude in July 2024. In 2023, the building was sold to the **Community Land Trust**

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[216] https://fietsbieb.be/fr/, [accessed: 22.11.2024].
[217] "Contrat de quartier durable" – Sustainable District Development Agreement is an action plan agreed upon between the Brussels-Capital Region, the Municipality of Brussels, and the residents of one of its neighborhoods. This urban renewal policy is set to be implemented over a period of four years and aims to carry out a program designed to improve the quality of life for local residents, defined in a participatory manner.
[218] https://communa.be, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

Brussels (CLTB) fund, a long-term partner of the Communa organization. CLTB focuses on increasing access to affordable homeownership by separating land purchase costs from the cost of building ownership (so-called "bricks"), allowing low-income individuals to buy property.

A new building will replace the site of La Serre with ten apartments and a social space accessible to both residents and neighbors. This project will continue the temporary nature of the space developed over the years through Communa's activities. This concept follows the logic of so-called *transitional urbanism* — a process where temporary solutions inspire permanent urban forms.

Although Communa officially considers this a success, this solution raises concerns among Gray Street residents and La Serre users.There is a risk that many activities that have taken place in this open and inclusive space may not find their place in the new, partially private format. This raises the question of how to preserve the energy and inclusive nature of the existing space, as well as what will happen to the community that has developed around *La Serre* over the years[219].

La Maison de la Récup' is located in a former single-family house situated across from La Serre. Due to numerous dampness-related issues, the building could not be used as residential space. It was transformed into a temporary headquarters for creators working within the circular economy framework. This business model minimizes resource use and waste generation.

Artist Laurent operates a workshop on the ground floor where he crafts staircase components from wooden waste. The upper floors house **La Fabrique des HEART'istes**, a sewing workshop run by Ms. Fatima, offering sewing courses that utilize recycled materials and promote sustainability.

Car-Free Day is the central event of **Sustainable Transport Week**, which is celebrated particularly pompously in Brussels. It takes place on the Sunday before September 22, the official date of World Car-Free Day. On this day, motorized vehicle traffic across the entire Brussels region is completely halted from 9:30 AM to 7:00 PM. Exceptions are made for taxis, public transport (free on this day), coaches, emergency services, law enforcement, and individuals with special permits. This day, even authorized vehicles must adhere to a speed limit of 30 km/h[220].

This event has a social and joyful character, as it transforms urban space into a place for integration and activity. Streets fill with cyclists, rollerbladers, scooter users, and even horse riders. Children play on the roads, and adults are more inclined to engage in neighborly interactions. This day is filled with events, such as neighborhood festivals, flea markets, street concerts, and theatrical performances.

Car-Free Day is also celebrated in Wrocław, although on a much smaller scale. On this day, public transportation is free, and users of city bikes can ride for the first hour at no cost. However, street closures are mainly limited to areas around the market square. Although workshops, games, and meetings are organized, they lack the grassroots character that gives the event greater dynamism and authenticity.

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[222] https://www.facebook.com/LaSerreCommuna, [accessed: 20.11.2024].
[220] https://www.bruxelles.be/semaine-de-la-mobilite-et-dimanche-sans-voiture-2023, [accessed: 22.11.2024].

Comparing these two approaches highlights the potential of Car-Free Day as a celebration of community and urban space, which could be better utilized in Polish cities.

Fairville is a research project, which operates under the Horizon Europe program and focuses on urban co-production. It analyzes the challenges to democracy arising from inequalities in urban areas. The project emphasizes interventions in low-income neighborhoods, where residents often distance themselves from institutions and processes of representative democracy.

Fairville's objective is to develop a new strategy for achieving spatial justice through co-production of knowledge and participatory democracy. It also analyzes the long-term impacts of various forms of inequality on democratic attitudes.

Researchers and activists involved in the project assume that urban policy should not be created solely *for people* but rather *with them*. This approach has the potential to drive social transformation and empower individuals.

FairvilleLabs is an initiative that integrates eight pilot projects implemented in cities across Europe and Africa. Its mission is "to face inequalities and democratic challenges through co-production in cities"[221]. The projects focus on examining how researchers, local communities, and government representatives can collaborate with public benefit organizations, organized resident groups, and space users to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods jointly. This initiative prioritizes increasing residents' participation in both new and existing democratic processes.

The pilot projects are grouped around three main themes: environmental inequalities, inequalities related to housing and spatial planning, inequalities associated with climate risks.

These projects adopt an action research methodology, which includes joint problem diagnosis, action planning, and implementation. The scope of the projects consists of monitoring, collecting experiences, and conducting joint evaluations. A key component of this process is the mutual exchange of knowledge and learning from one another[222].

The **FairvilleLab** project in Brussels, located on Gray Street, aims to rebuild trust between residents and political bodies. It also creates conditions conducive to a wider understanding of the causes of flooding and to identify necessary actions to mitigate its effects.

Although some residents of flood-affected neighborhoods believe their role as victims excludes them from supporting the diagnostic process, participants in FairvilleLab emphasize the possibility of being both a victim and an active participant. Such a perspective aligns with the idea of citizen science[223], which is an integral part of action research.

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[221] https://www.fairville-eu.org/, [accessed: 20.11.2024].
[222] https://www.egeb-sgwb.be/article429.html, [accessed: 20.11.2024].
[223]Citizen science is a form of research carried out with the participation of the general public, including both amateur and professional researchers. It is used in many fields, such as ecology, biology, conservation, medical and health research, astronomy, media and communications, and computer science.

From November 7 to 10, 2023, a Fairville meeting was held in Brussels[224]. I participated as a representative of Latitude Platform, a researcher of participatory processes, and a doctoral student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. The event was hosted by the Faculty of Architecture at ULB La Cambre Horta, in partnership with EGEB.

The event primarily brought together researchers and professionals, but during the first two days, it was also open to residents of Ixelles municipality and representatives of public administration. The forum aimed to initiate dialogue among all participants, focusing on key urban challenges, such as the degradation of residential buildings, urban revitalization, and ecological and climate-related issues concerning water management and waste disposal.

As a part of the event, a public discussion was held regarding the problems faced by Gray Street and its residents, seeking collectively actionable steps toward resolving them. This topic is further discussed in section 5.1.8.

5.1.4. General Project Objectives

The priority for this part of the district is to ensure safe conditions for pedestrians and users of so-called *soft mobility*, such as bicycles, strollers, scooters, rollerblades, or skateboards. The project prioritizes addressing the needs of children, youth, the elderly, and individuals with limited mobility. A key challenge is to develop spatial solutions that enable the harmonious coexistence of diverse forms of mobility, with a focus on the safety and comfort of all users.

According to PRDD, Gray Street is a priority area for urban greening, which should be continuously integrated with neighboring projects. Nearby, other greening initiatives are being implemented, such as activities at Place Flagey, the project at Rue des Deux Ponts, and the collective garden Gray Moineaux. These projects aim to mitigate urban heat islands and reduce air pollution. Increasing biologically active surfaces through de-paving is also viewed as a way to address water management challenges in this part of the district.

Currently, Gray Street is characterized by a low quality of public space. It is a transit street with heavy and continuous car traffic, leaving little room for pedestrians to rest or engage in social interactions. The Gray-Kerckx intersection poses a particular barrier dominated by the imposing structure of the Couronne bridge. Additionally, the staircase connecting Gray Street to Avenue de la Couronne is steep, neglected, and poorly visible. All these factors negatively affect the sense of safety.

The project's goal is to transform Gray Street's public space to improve accessibility and visibility while enabling its use as a transportation corridor and as a place that fosters social integration and relaxation.

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[224] https://www.fairville-eu.org/post/open-citizen-meeting-in-brussels, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

5.1.5. Action Plan

With clearly defined project objectives, it was possible to outline the direction of activities, which received positive feedback from the Ixelles Municipal Council (*collège communal*)[225].

Based on this, a preliminary action plan was developed, divided into three main phases:

1. **Co-design**: Collaborative planning of interventions.
2. **Co-production**: Joint implementation of spatial interventions[226].
3. **Awareness-building**: Increasing public knowledge about the interventions and the issues they address.

Later, during project implementation, it became clear that the planned phases did not fully reflect the specificities and realities of working on Gray Street.

Before initiating activities in the space, identifying local partners was a key step. While a preliminary list of potential local actors existed during the project proposal stage and initial contacts had been made with some of them, at this stage, there were no established Relationships, nor full engagement.

The first step in the project's implementation was creating a visual identity to support communication with residents about the activities undertaken as part of the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project. The LOOP graphic studio prepared a set of promotional materials, including leaflets distributed among the local community and posters displayed on Gray Street.

[225] In Belgium, as in Poland, the municipality (commune) is the basic unit of local government. The Brussels-Capital Region, which is an urban agglomeration, is divided into 19 municipalities, which in terms of urban planning can be compared to the districts in Poland. Each municipality has its own Executive Council, consisting of a mayor and councilors.

[226] Spatial interventions are a term that encompasses unique, contextual, and site-specific actions carried out in the evolving urban environment. According to the definition in the Polish Dictionary, the verb „to intervene" refers to taking actions aimed at intervening in a specific matter, mediating, or speaking on someone's behalf. In relation to urban space, these interventions combine elements of activism, expert knowledge (including architecture and urban planning), artistic practices, and political strategies. They aim to address the needs and expectations of local communities, often engaging diverse disciplines and forms of expression. Implementing such actions requires both local knowledge and an experimental approach.

5.1.8.

5.1.9.

5.1.10.

Photos 5.1.7-10*. Posters on a showcase on Gray Street on the ground level, hung on information panels, on bulletin board of the nearby university and leaflets on the gate to the community garden, by M. Siemińska*

The experiences related to the design and participatory process have been documented in the form of a journal. Each entry includes details such as the date of the event, the topic, the participants involved, as well as the creative and substantive contributions, along with the outcomes of the design activities. Each element is marked with a corresponding icon, with a legend provided below.

Legend

🔍 Knowledge gained during the process

⊕ Ideas and needs raised by residents and users of the space

⊘ Problems and comments raised by residents and users of the space

✓ Activities performed

📋 Comments on design practice and organization

5.1.6. Co-design

Project introduction

📍 Gray-Couronne Staircase,
Gray Street

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide)
+ EGEB (Dominique, Michel)

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

🔍 Characteristics of Gray Street;

⊕ Introduction of additional visual elements to remind drivers about speed limit;

❗ Reporting issues with dampness in homes, negatively affecting quality of life;

Noise and vibrations caused by passing buses;

📋 Low visibility of the meeting point.

The first phase of the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project focused on co-design. However, before moving on to this stage, it was necessary to establish relationships with residents and present the objectives of our activities. An important aspect of this process was also gathering information about the needs and issues of space users.

To this end, on July 13, 2023, we organized the first meeting at the Gray Couronne stairs, which we identified as a distinctive location on Gray Street. Due to poor attendance, the meeting was primarily informational. Nevertheless, we collected valuable feedback from local residents regarding the space. Additionally, we have established connections with representatives of the La Vélothèque organization and the Moineaux Community Garden—Peggy and Julie.

Photo 5.1.11. *The first meeting regarding the project by M. Siemińska*

Figure 5.1.5. *A drawing created during the meeting, which presents the current state of the spaces and local actors*
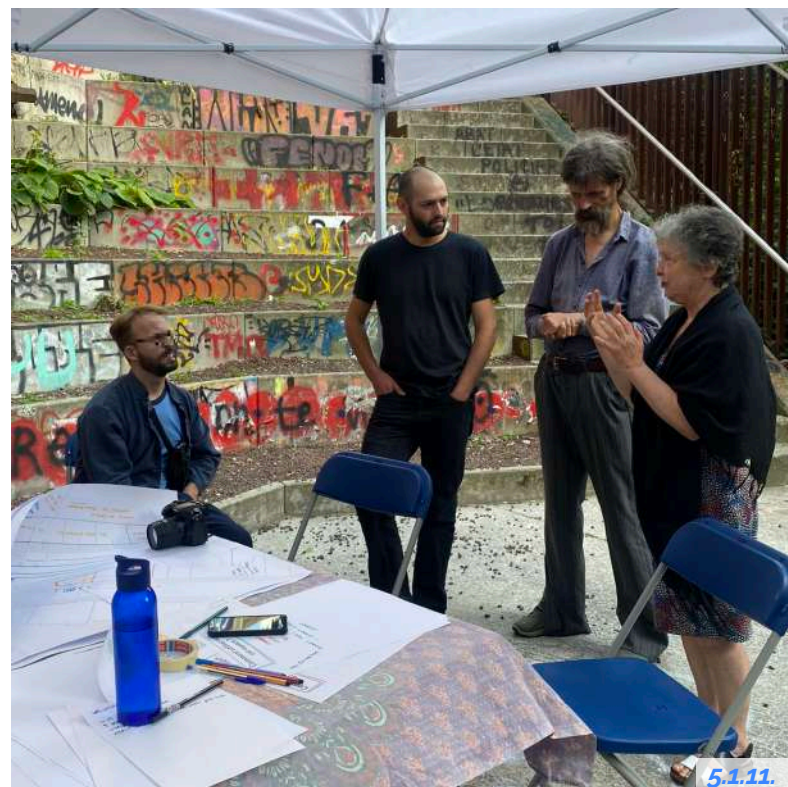
How do you feel in this space?

○ The road is narrow, and there is considerable car and bus traffic, although it is less than before (author's note: a year earlier, traffic had been restricted to one-way for cars in part of the street beyond the Gray-Kerckx intersection).

○ People drive fast and impatiently, disregarding speed limits.

○ The speed limit should be reinforced with road signs.

○ There are no longer traffic jams; the situation has improved thanks to traffic lights.

○ The stairs are rarely used and feel unpleasant at night.

○ There is no lighting.

○ It's awful.

○ There are no divisions within the space (author's note: no visual or spatial separation of the thoroughfare; the road is designed for flow, with no areas to stop for conversation or rest).

○ The blank wall next to La Serre is a sad sight.

○ The sidewalk is too narrow.

○ There is no vibrancy.

○ It feels cold.

○ There is a mix of populations.

○ Pedestrian movement is directed toward La Serre.

I had a conversation with Glen Sanders, a Brussels-based artist living in a corner building at the intersection of Gray and Kerckx streets after the meeting.

Glen told me about his reasons for buying an apartment with a studio in this location, pointing to its lower price compared to other places. However, he highlighted the challenges posed by cthe living onditions, including persistent dampness and noise caused by vibrations in the building during bus passages. He also pointed out a spot where water consistently accumulates, even during the hottest periods of the year.

Figure 5.1.6. Meeting documentation.

Photo 5.1.12. One of the lowest points in the Maelbeek River Valley. Water stands there all year round.
by M. Siemińska

96

Meeting with volunteer Peggy

La Vélothèque
(library for bicycles)

Latitude (Marta)

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

Observation of the Use of the Space

Despite the recent renovation of the space, it's technical condition raises concerns: the flooring is cracking, paint is peeling off the walls, and there is a noticeable musty smell.

Introduction of a no-parking zone in the section in front of the commercial space;

Installation of urban furniture to demarcate a space for bike testing and create a meeting area;

Limited space available for bike testing;

Proximity to the street poses a potential risk for children;

Lack of visibility of the commercial space due to cars parked in front.

On July 15, 2023, during the meeting at the Gray-Couronne steps, I was invited by Peggy to visit La Velothèque during her volunteer shift. This visit allowed me to observe how the bike library operates and to speak with users about their needs.

La Velothèque opens once a month, during which several to a dozen bicycles are rented out. The commercial space features a spacious interior that allows for comfortable viewing of the available bicycles. However, there is no dedicated space for testing them—children who want to try out a bike must ride onto the narrow sidewalk in front of the building.

Another issue is the poor visibility of the commercial space from the street, as parked cars block the view along its entire frontage.

5.1.13.

Photos 5.1.13-15. Photographic documentation of the situation in front of La Velothèque by M. Siemińska

5.1.14.

5.1.15.

Meeting with gardeners from the Community Garden

Gray-Couronne Community Garden

Latitude (Davide)

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

🔍 Observation of the location;

Initial development of a concept for a rainwater collection system;

⊕ Rainwater storage tank;

⚠ Issues with drought.

On August 1, 2023, Davide from Latitude Platform met with gardeners, Elena and Jan, who gave him a tour of the garden and described the challenges they face when collecting rainwater for watering plants. The gardeners showed him the cisterns, which currently lack any system for collecting and channeling rainwater. The team proposed placing one of the cisterns on the platform of the Gray-Couronne stairs and connect it to the gutter of the social housing building.

5.1.16.

Photo 5.1.16. *View of the Couronne Bridge from the Gray-Couronne Garden*
Source: jardingraycouronne.wixsite.com[227]

[227] https://jardingraycouronne.wixsite.com/jardin-gray-couronne, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

Meeting Fatima from La Fabrique des HEART'istes

📍 online

👥 Latitude (Marta) + Fatima

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

⊕ Green façade of the Maison de la Récup' building;

Garland hung across the street

⚠ Moisture in the basement

Lack of studio visibility.

During our conversation on August 9, 2023, Fatima from the tailoring workshop discussed issues related to humidity in the building. Fortunately, the level of humidity is not severe enough to damage her materials. Nevertheless, the staff needs to ventilate the rooms frequently. Additionally, Fatima mentioned poor visibility of her business from the street side. We also discussed the potential greening of a section of the sidewalk in front of the building. Fatima was open to this idea.

Photo 5.1.17. Maison de la Récup', where the La Fabrique des HEART'istes workshop is located, by M. Siemińska

5.1.17.

August - September : Announcement of planned activities

Between August and September, the planned activities were announced through multiple channels to reach the widest possible audience. The key promotional methods included:

- **Social media of partner organizations:** Posts and updates shared by collaborating institutions;

- **Official Ixelles municipal channels:** Information about the activities included in the municipality's official event calendar;

- **Direct outreach:** Email invitations sent to mailing list contacts, including residents and representatives of local institutions;

- **Public promotional materials:** Distribution of leaflets and posters placed in strategic locations across the district.

Figure 5.1.7. *Announcement on the municipal website*

Photo 5.1.18. *Advertising materials in public spaces, by M. Siemińska*

Documentation submission to the Ixelles Municipal Council

📍 online

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide)

Approval procedure for activities in the public space of Brussels

All activities affecting public spaces in Brussels require approval from the Municipal Council and notification to the appropriate departments of the Municipal Office. Applicants are required to submit relevant documents at least one month before the planned work. For this reason, despite the ongoing participatory process, we submitted a general, extended project proposal on August 14, 2023. This ensured the possibility of implementing a variety of intervention options.

The proposal included four types of spatial interventions:

- **Depaving and replacing with a green space,**
- **Depaving combined with street furnitures and green elements,**
- **Architectural installations,**
- **Asphalt art.**

The documentation included a site plan, detailed dimensioned layouts of areas designated for specific interventions and images served as either inspiration or examples of previous projects carried out by Latitude Platform. The materials also contained a description of the proposed technological solutions and a preliminary project schedule.

Similar documentation was submitted to the local police office to obtain permits for road closures and secure parking spaces earmarked for development as part of the project.

Photo 5.1.19. *Proposed actions on Gray Street. Material from documents submitted to the commune.*
Source: Archiwum Latitude Platform.

5.1.19.

Figure 5.1.8. *Proposal of Actions for Gray Street - submitted to the municipality. Own elaboration.*

5.1.20.

5.1.21.

5.1.22.

5.1.23.
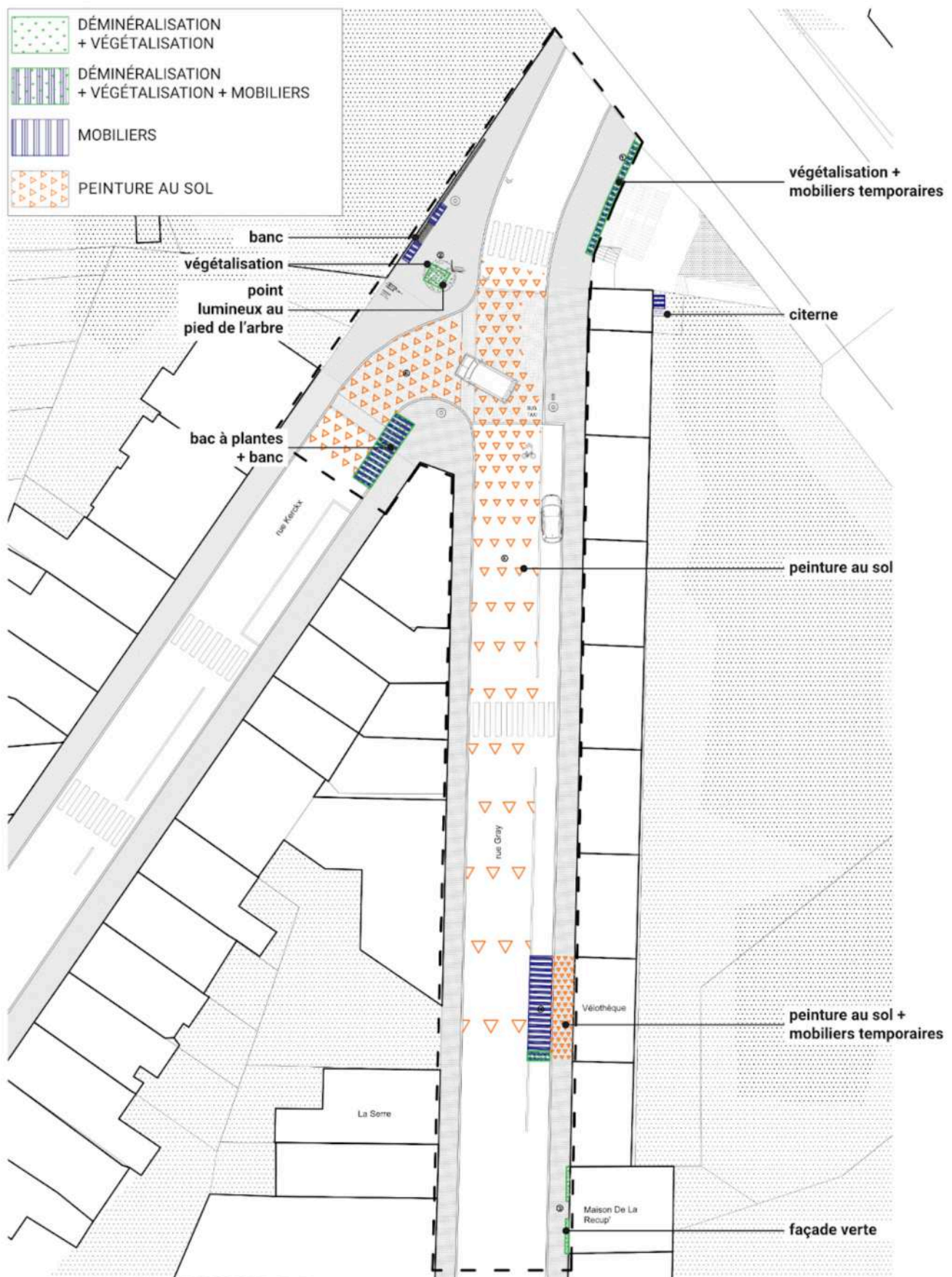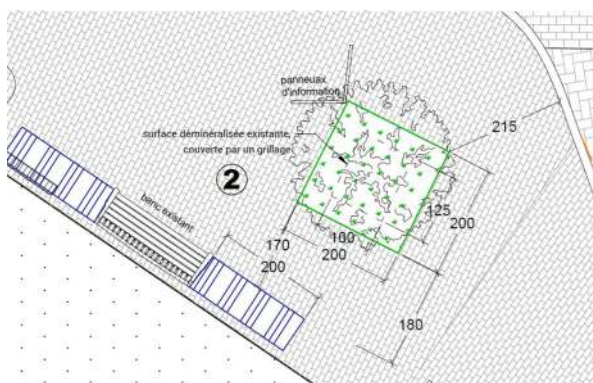
Photo 5.1.20. *Example of a green facade on Kerckx Street. by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.22. *An example of creating a green facade by removing sidewalk slabs.*
Source: Archiwum Latitude Platform

Figure 5.1.9. *Proposal for introducing greenery. Own elaboration.*
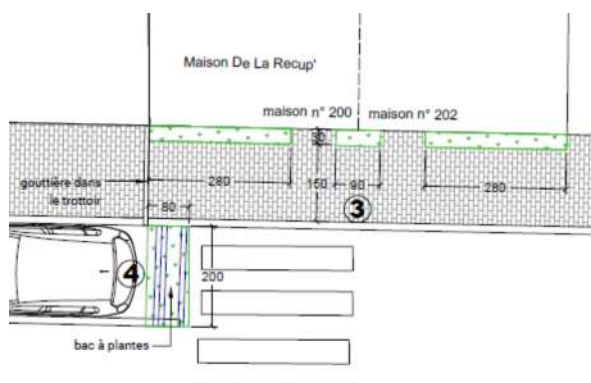
Photo 5.1.21. *Urban furniture on a parking space »parklet«.*
Source: wtop.com

Photo 5.1.23. *A planter that designates a parking area for bicycles.*
Source: cyclehoop.com

Figure 5.1.10. *Proposal for introducing greenery in the form of a green facade. Own elaboration.*

Informational meeting

Maison de Quartier Malibran

Latitude (Marta, Octavio, Ombeline) + EGEB (Michel)

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

Discussion of the proposed solutions and actions included in the project;

Expanding the network of contacts;

All activities related to the project must take place near the discussed area.

Unfortunately, attendance at the next meeting remained poor. This may have been caused by the delayed start of the informational campaign for the event or favorable weather encouraging outdoor leisure activities elsewhere.

Internal meetings of the design group

📍 online + office

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide, Ombeline) + EGEB (Michel, Dominique, Odile)

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

🔍 Development of self-irrigating planter technology.

At this stage of project development, it became clear that the implementation of some elements will not be feasible. These limitations stemmed from several factors: budget constraints, delays in decision-making processes regarding infrastructure interventions (e.g., sidewalk depaving), and a lack of active support from residents for certain ideas.

Additionally, we have not received a permission to place a water cistern in the public space, which forced us to abandon plans for greening along the stairwell wall. This resulted in the absence of a water source necessary for maintaining the vegetation.

At the same time, we gained a clearer picture of potential partnerships formed before September activities. Members of the Gray Moineaux Garden were engaged in seasonal activities. This has limited their capacity to support the project. In turn, volunteers from La Vélothèque actively participated in the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project and expressed interest in co-creating the space in front of their unit.
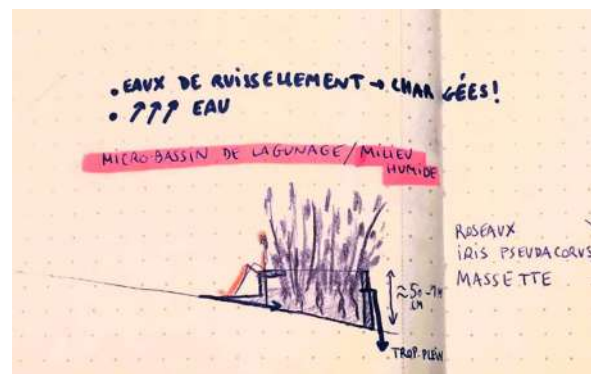
Figure 5.1.11. Diagrams illustrating how self-watering pot technology functions. Drawings by Odile

Space users' participation was a key aspect of the project. Therefore, we decided to exclude elements that lacked active resident support, despite their attractive design Instead, we focused on developing solutions for introducing greenery into the road area. Additionally, we anticipated that new ideas for subtle interventions would emerge during upcoming workshops and meetings, which could be incorporated into the project.

Furthermore, it was necessary to design an alternative solution for planters intended for greenery—one that would not require removing the concrete surface but would still provide relative water self-sufficiency. Odile and Michel worked on this issue, proposing, among other things, a hydroponic system known as the wicking bed.
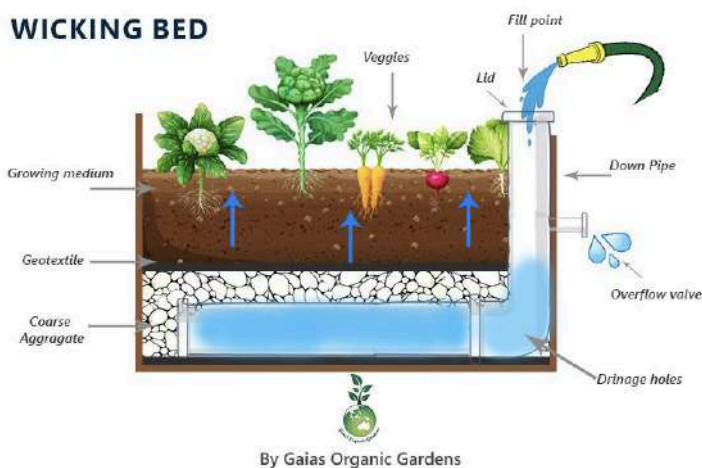
Figure 5.1.12. Diagram of a hydroponic wicking bed system.
Source: sbounmy.com [228]

Figure 5.1.13. Scheme of planter placement on Kerckx Street.
Own elaboration.
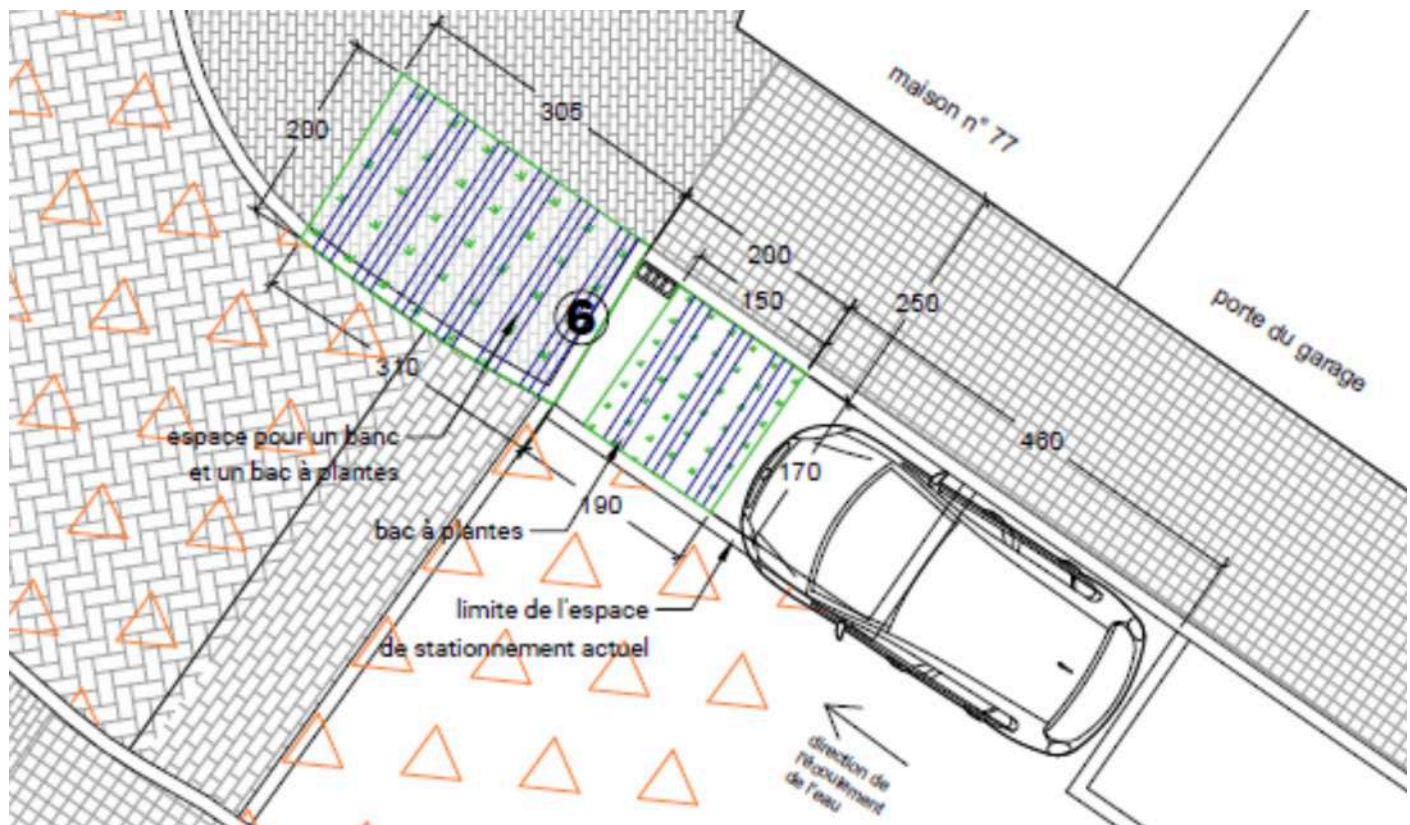
[228] https://sbounmy.com/permaculture-wicking-bed-for-60eu/, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

Design workshop and research walk

La Serre and Gray Street

Latitude (Marta, Ombeline) + EGEB (Michel, Odile)

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

Observation of biodiversity in the Gray Street area and surroundings.

Reflection on urban green space;

Empirical analysis of the space;

Planning a space sustaining community integration and social animation;

Hanging colorful garlands above the street;

Introducing green infrastructure;

Designing graphics symbolizing key features of Gray Street;

Positive impact of proximity to the discussed area on attendance;

Research walk as a valuable tool.

The workshop meeting on September 9, 2023 consisted of three parts and aimed to develop a graphic spatial composition and concept of artistic motifs to be painted in public spaces.

In the first part, participants were introduced to the proposed locations and scope of planned interventions. We presented the preliminary project submitted to the Municipal Council, along with inspirations for the street paintings. This segment of the meeting aimed to familiarize attendees with the subject matter and provide context for the activities.

The second part was a research walk led by landscape architect Odile Zaït. The walk took the form of a critical spatial analysis, encouraging participants to observe landscape elements that often go unnoticed in daily use. Observations revealed a rich biodiversity despite the dominance of mineral surfaces. Participants noted plants growing in unconventional spots—between paving stones, cracks in the concrete retaining wall, and even on rooftops. Various species of wild vegetation, still blooming in September, as well as the presence of insects, were identified.

Upon returning to the workshop space at La Serre, participants summarized their observations into two categories: *usage* and *nature*.

Participants highlighted the street's transit-oriented nature, the limited functionality of the stairs, and the monumentality of the bridge. While these elements were seen as problematic, they were also recognized as potential sources of creative solutions. The artistic qualities of graffiti and posters on these structures were particularly appreciated. Suggestions included introducing colorful garlands and sunshades to give the space a more welcoming, Mediterranean character.

In the nature category, the main focus was on weeds, referred to in French as *bad plants* (*mauvaises herbes*). One participant noted that this term is inappropriate, particularly in urban contexts where any form of vegetation improves the environment. It was agreed that terms like *wild* or *spontaneous* plants would be more suitable. Among the observed species were black locust, buddleia, ivy, kiwi, and grapevine, all of which contribute to the rich ecosystem of Gray Street and its surroundings.

Another critical aspect discussed in the context of nature was the presence of water in the public space. Participants pointed to phenomena such as frequent fog, puddles, and dampness retaining walls, suggesting the need to account for these conditions in the planned interventions.

5.1.24.

Photo 5.1.24. *A research walk, by O. Hinfray*

Photo 5.1.25. *Design Workshops, by O. Hinfray*

5.1.25.

Following the observation phase, participants were invited to engage in a practical activity aimed at graphically expressing their reflections and visions for Gray Street's public space. The task was to draw either an ideal vision of the space or highlighting key elements that had captured their attention during prior discussions.

The results included a variety of drawings that creatively illustrated both individual needs and shared visions for the potential of Gray Street. These graphical outputs provided valuable insight into participants' perspectives, emphasizing the aspects that should be prioritized in the ongoing design process.

Key Findings:

This meeting was particularly fruitful and inspiring. Participants not only shared their observations but also offered constructive feedback on the proposed solutions.
The workshop generated both inspiration and tangible ideas for usace of the Gray Street space. Individual visions enriched the overall concept, offering unique contributions that will inform subsequent stages of the design process.

The choice of venue and the inclusive format of the activities had a positive effect on the community engagement. The research walk attracted the interest of passersby, some of whom joined the group. The workshop was held in La Serre, a space directly adjacent to the discussed section of Gray Street, which further encouraged an open and inclusive atmosphere.

After the formal portion of the workshop concluded, participants stayed on-site, using the opportunity for informal discussions and networking. This highlighted the integrative aspect of the event, reinforcing its success in creating a collaborative and community-driven initiative.
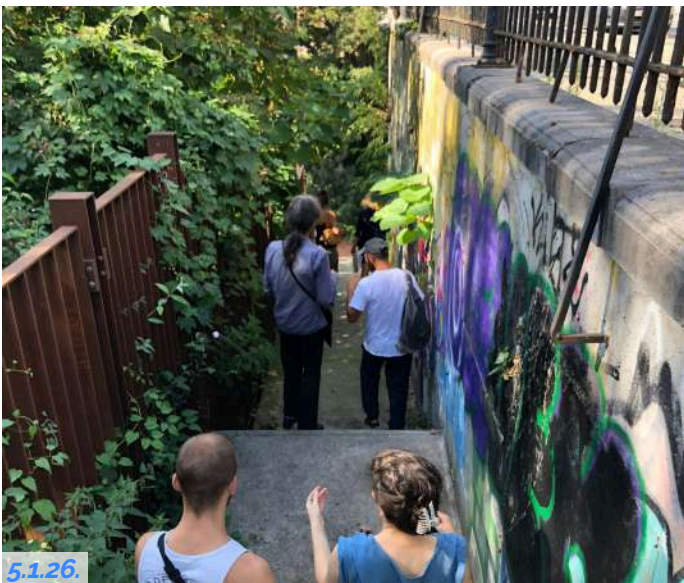
Photo 5.1.26. *Vegetation vs. Architecture: The Gray-Couronne Stairs, by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.27. *Vegetation on a vacant plot. by M. Siemińska*

5.1.28.

Photos 5.1.28-31.
Photographic Documentation -
Gray Street Biodiversity
by M. Siemińska

5.1.30.

5.1.29.
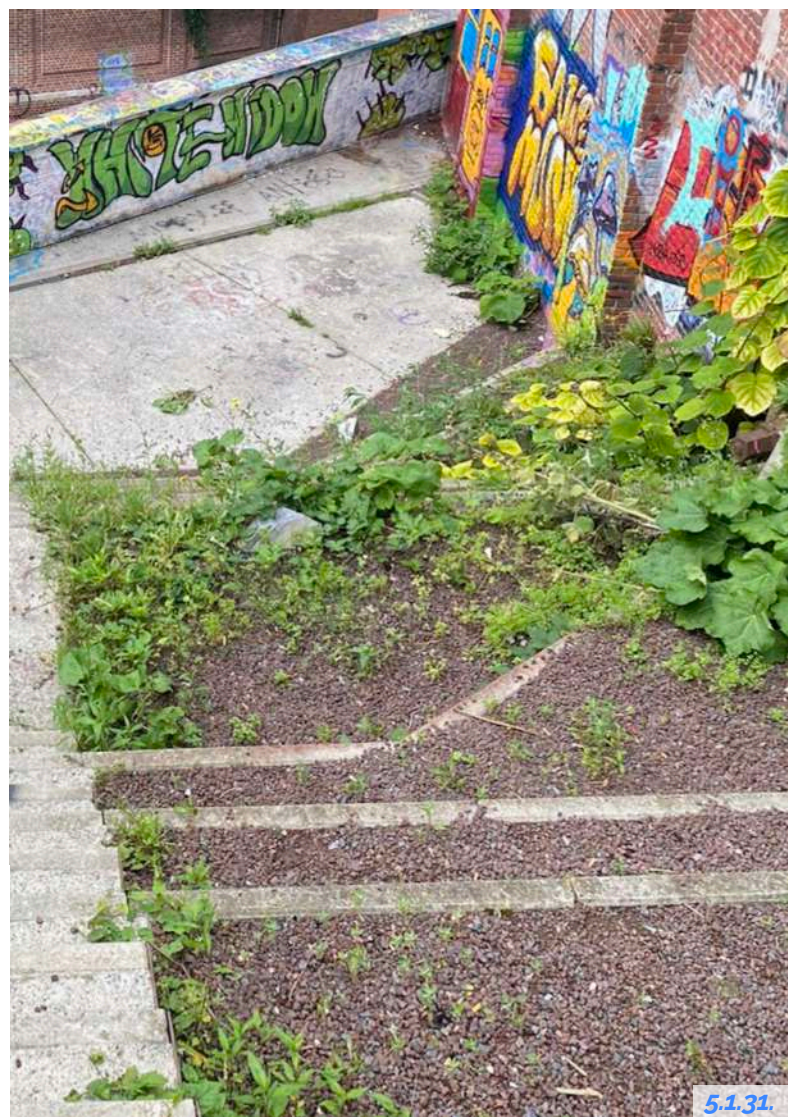
5.1.31.

Photos 5.1.32-33.
Workshop documentation
by M. Siemińska

Figure 5.1.14. Documentation
of drawings made by
workshop participants.

5.1.32.

5.1.33.
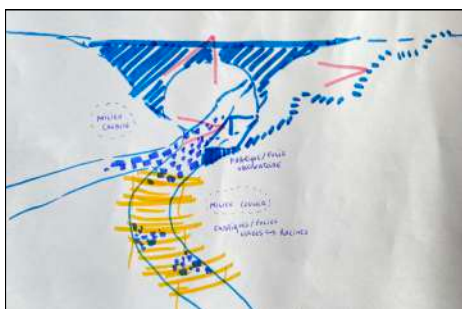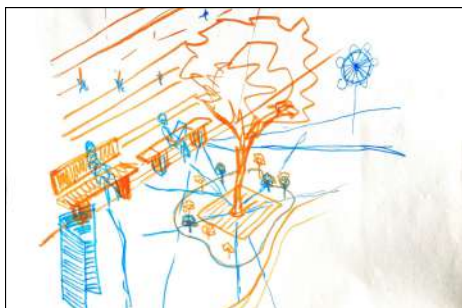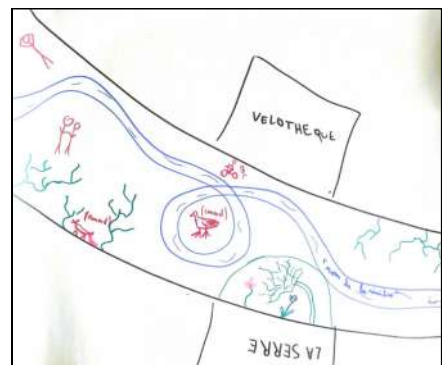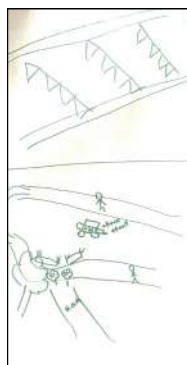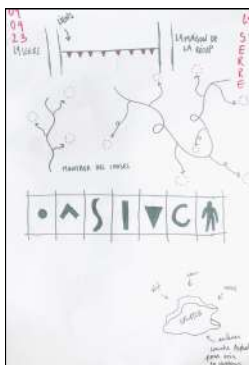
Usage

- Transit road
- Meeting
- Cultivation
- Sharing
- Delay
- Creativity (posters and graffiti)
- Activism
- Parking areas
- Shelter
- Greening plan
- Dead spots
- Lowest points in the valley
- Enchantment
- The street curves
- User-friendly
- At city scale
- Flags
- Colorful sunshades
- Mediterranean street
- Speed into safety
- Bicycle
- Steep stairs - sport, informal escape/outlet, new landscape
- Couronne Bridge - a one-of-a-kind view, feeling of coolness

Nature

- Spontaneous vegetation
- "Weeds"
- Black locust, butterfly bush, ivy, kiwi, clematis, grapevine
- Cat, fox
- "Nature is furious, so it emerges from cracks and crevices"
- Trees - shade, islands of respite for people
- Ponds
- Canyon
- Underground - roots
- Depaving, greening
- Natural corridor
- Water traces - on the street, underground water, embankment, on the wall, Maelbeek underground
- The nature of water - mist, puddles
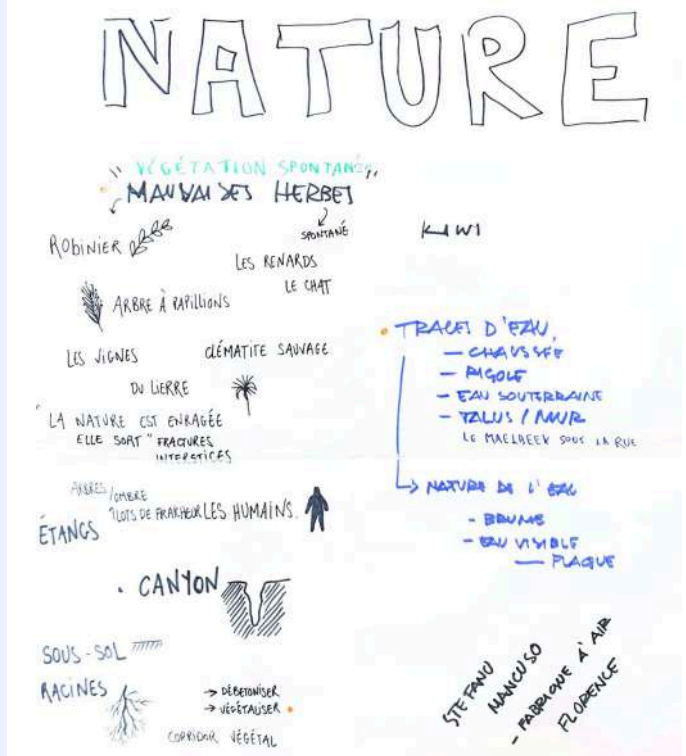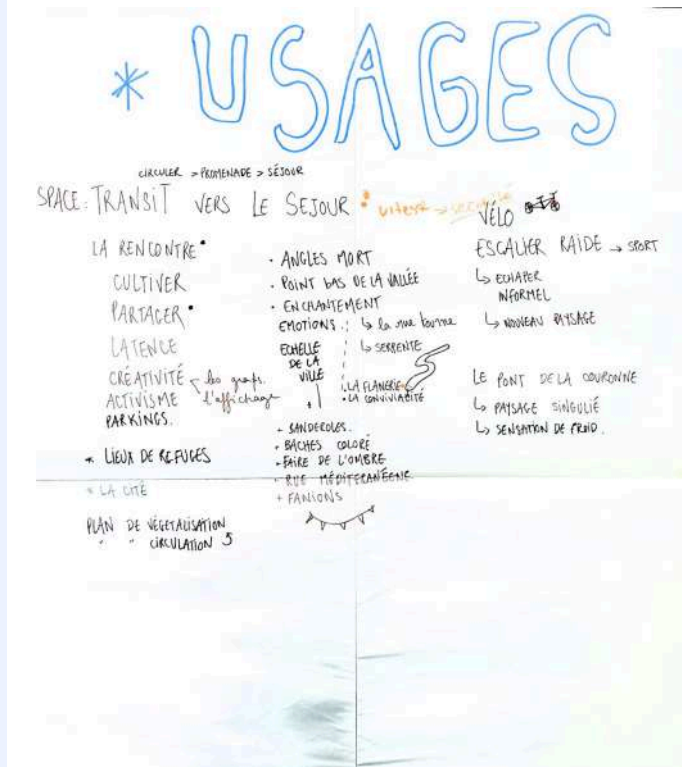
Design workshops and testimonials from residents

La Serre

Latitude (Marta, Ombeline)
+ Centre de Service Social (Aurélie)

Creative and Substantive Contribution to the Project

Characterizing Gray Street;

A colorful street;

Introducing more plants;

Flower partitions to slow down car traffic;

Proposals for urban furnitures and others;

Reporting issues with moisture in homes;

Sidewalks unsuitable for the needs of the elderly
and people with disabilities;

Great attendance and engagement by joining an active group.

The purpose of the meeting held on September 12, 2023, was to examine residents' attitudes toward the environment of Gray Street and its surroundings, as well as to gather proposals for a graphic representation of both the current state and the potential future of this public space.

One of the regular activities organized every Tuesday at La Serre is the *La Fourchette Solidaire* initiative, followed by *Café Solidaire.* During this event, a lunch, prepared from food products saved from waste, is served. The meal is available to all participants for a voluntary, symbolic fee. This is followed by coffee gatherings and afternoon activities, such as bingo. A diverse group of participants attends *La Fourchette Solidaire*, including those from outside the neighborhood. However, the afternoon activities primarily attract regular visitors, mainly older residents of the neighborhood. Therefore, this was an ideal environment to reach a group of people who are usually hard to access and often overlooked in participatory processes.

Before the workshops, we had a meeting with Aurélie Plasman – a social worker, the main coordinator, and supervisor of Tuesday activities. Aurélie was responsible for ensuring transparent communication for Café Solidaire participants, as many of them are elderly or immigrants. Additionally, she announced our presence during activities in the week leading up to the workshops, so participants knew what to expect.

The workshop was organized as a focused group interview enriched with elements of artistic activity. To ensure greater comfort for the participants, the event was referred to as an atelier (workshop). The meeting was warmly received, and the participants demonstrated both interest and openness toward the facilitators—myself and my assistant, Ombeline.

In the first part of the discussion, we explored the topic of how Gray Street's space is used and the feelings associated with it. Most people come to this area to participate in activities organized by La Serre. It serves as a place for neighborhood integration, which significantly contributes to positive associations with the area. Nevertheless, some residents complained about noise generated by parties held during evenings. Gray Street remains primarily a transit space – leading to the bus stop or shops. It lacks commercial spaces, plants, and pedestrian-friendly solutions, especially for the elderly and those with limited mobility. Narrow sidewalks and high curbs pose significant challenges for daily use.

5.1.34.

In the second part of the workshop, participants presented their ideas for improving the neighborhood space. Familiar proposals emerged, such as introducing greenery, creating pedestrian-friendly zones, reducing traffic speed, and addressing the dampness problem in buildings. However, for this group, adding color to the space was particularly important – through murals, decorations on buildings, or flowers. Participants also highlighted the need for benches with canopies, drinking fountains, and birdhouses in order to enhance the street's functionality and aesthetics. The meeting concluded with a collaborative drawing of elements that were key for the participants. Those who did not feel confident drawing shared their ideas with Aurélie, who created a map of a future, more user-friendly Gray Street based on their input.

Photo 5.1.34. Workshops during Café Solidaire, by M. Siemińska

During the collaborative work, many participants shared their stories, both personal and related to the well-known issue of dampness and flooding in apartments.

These stories were dominated by feelings of anger and frustration stemming from the long-standing lack of support and understanding from municipal authorities. Participants mentioned examples of moldy furniture, unpleasant smells from the sewage system, and hesitations about reporting inconveniences to the local council. This last issue arose from fears of being assigned even worse housing conditions, as had happened in the case of one neighbor.

Despite addressing difficult topics, the meeting took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of the community built in La Serre, which has become a space for integration and mutual support. It is highly valued and regarded as a place they are eager to return to. We also agreed on the format of future collaborative actions.
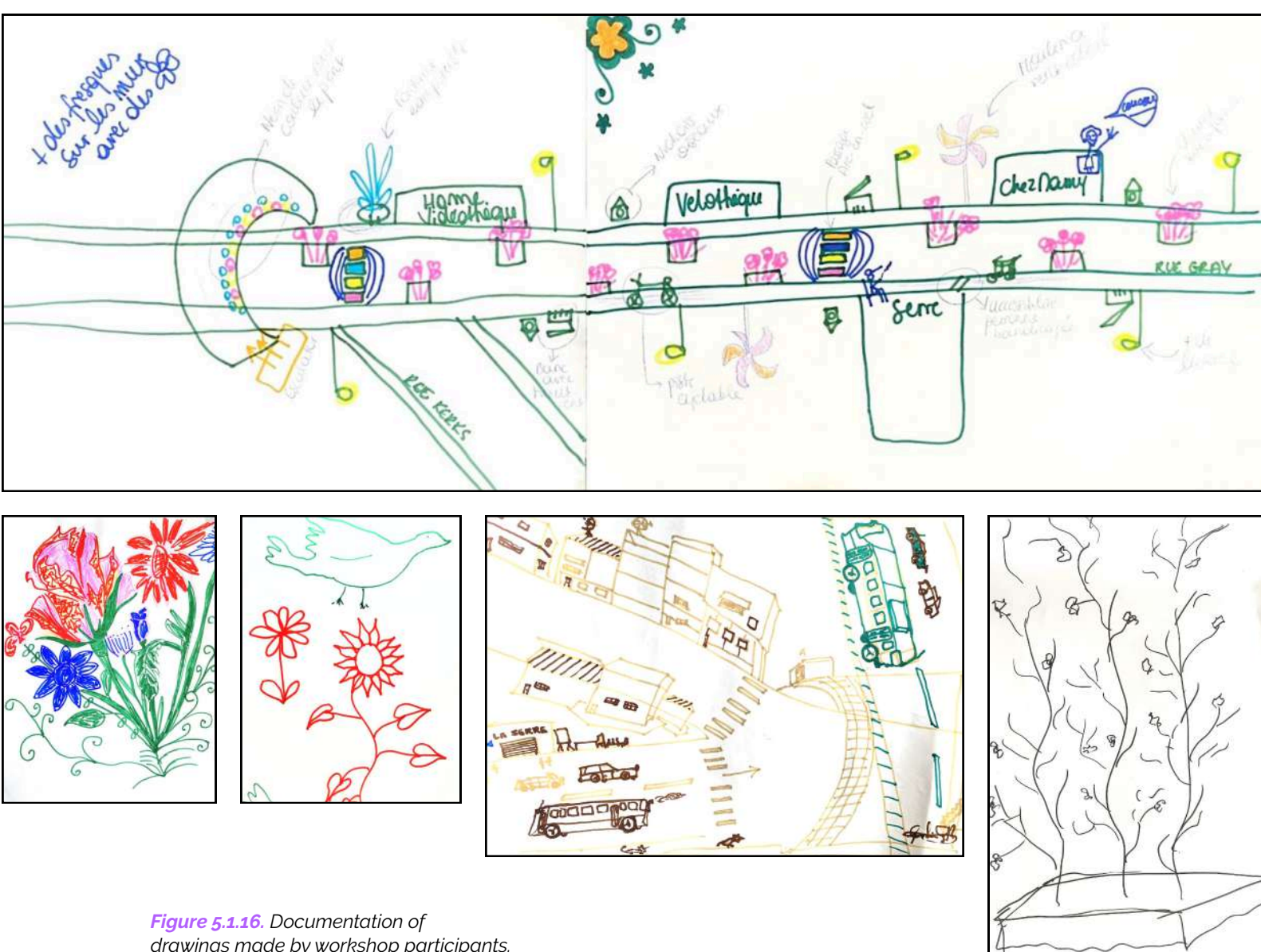
Figure 5.1.16. Documentation of drawings made by workshop participants.

Figure 5.1.17. *Documentation of workshop findings.*

How do you use this space?
(What do you do here?)

- For passing through (to another part of the district) – 3 votes
- To go shopping – 2 votes
- La Serre – 7 votes
- To get to the bus – 2 votes

How do you feel about this space?
(What do you think about this place?)

- Good, a friendly space
- Humidity
- Nice since the opening of La Serre
- Noise
- A losing battle
- Very bad
- Poorly connected with the rest of the district
- Low road safety
- No shops
- It would be good to plant greenery
- An old barrack unsuitable for habitation
- Neighbors complain during events at La Serre
- It's dirty
- The sidewalk is too narrow (not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities)
- Rats

What is your dream public space? How do you see this space in 10 years?

- Anti-pollution vegetation
- Flower partitions to slow down traffic
- Space resembling a riverbank
- A disco
- A drinking fountain
- A road only for pedestrians and buses
- A bicycle lane
- A lower sidewalk for easier access
- Resolved humidity issues
- Color
- Decorative house numbers
- A bench with a roof to smoke when it rains
- Theft-resistant elements
- A rainbow-colored pedestrian crossing
- Birdhouses

Internal meeting of the design group

◎ office

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide)
+ EGEB (Dominique, Michel, Odile)

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

🔍 Working on the technique of painting on the street - selection of materials, patterns and motifs;

Developing an action plan for Car Free Day.

The purpose of the meeting on September 13, 2023, was to develop simple graphic symbols to represent issues important to the residents of Gray Street. During the discussion, we summarized key topics raised in previous meetings. These included the problem of dampness and flooding, the need to slow down car traffic, improving conditions for soft mobility, introducing green infrastructure and color to the street, and highlighting spaces for social activities.
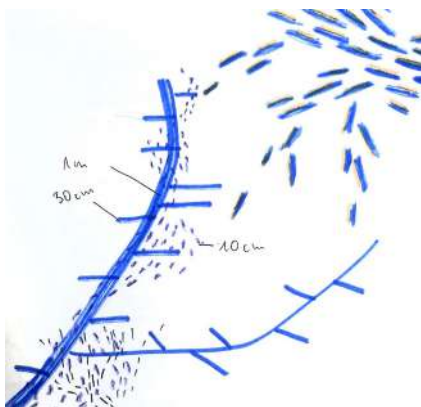
We decided to choose a symbolic representation of the Maelbeek River's flow, along with a visualization of rainwater runoff from houses on Gray Street.
The second element was a simple painting stencil in the shape of a rectangle, designed to highlight the presence of vegetation by depicting root systems. This stencil was also intended to emphasize the spaces in front of La Vélothèque and La Serre, enhancing their visibility and significance within the street's space.
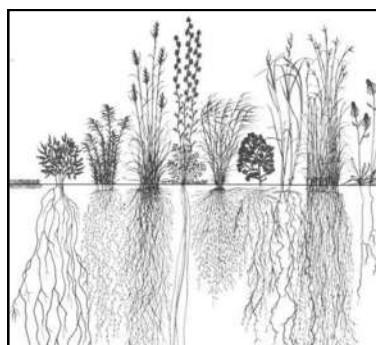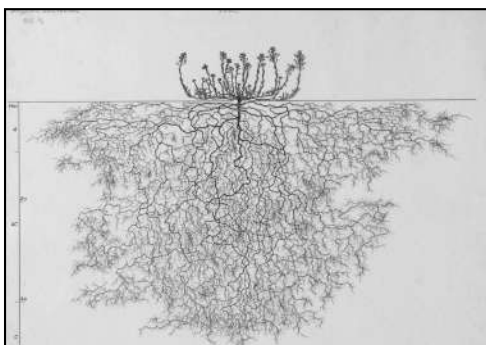
Figure 5.1.18. Scheme of painting interventions on the roadway.
Own elaboration

Figures 5.1.19-20
Inspiration of plant root systems.
Source: Wurzelatlas der Kulturpflanzen gemäßigter Gebiete mit Arten
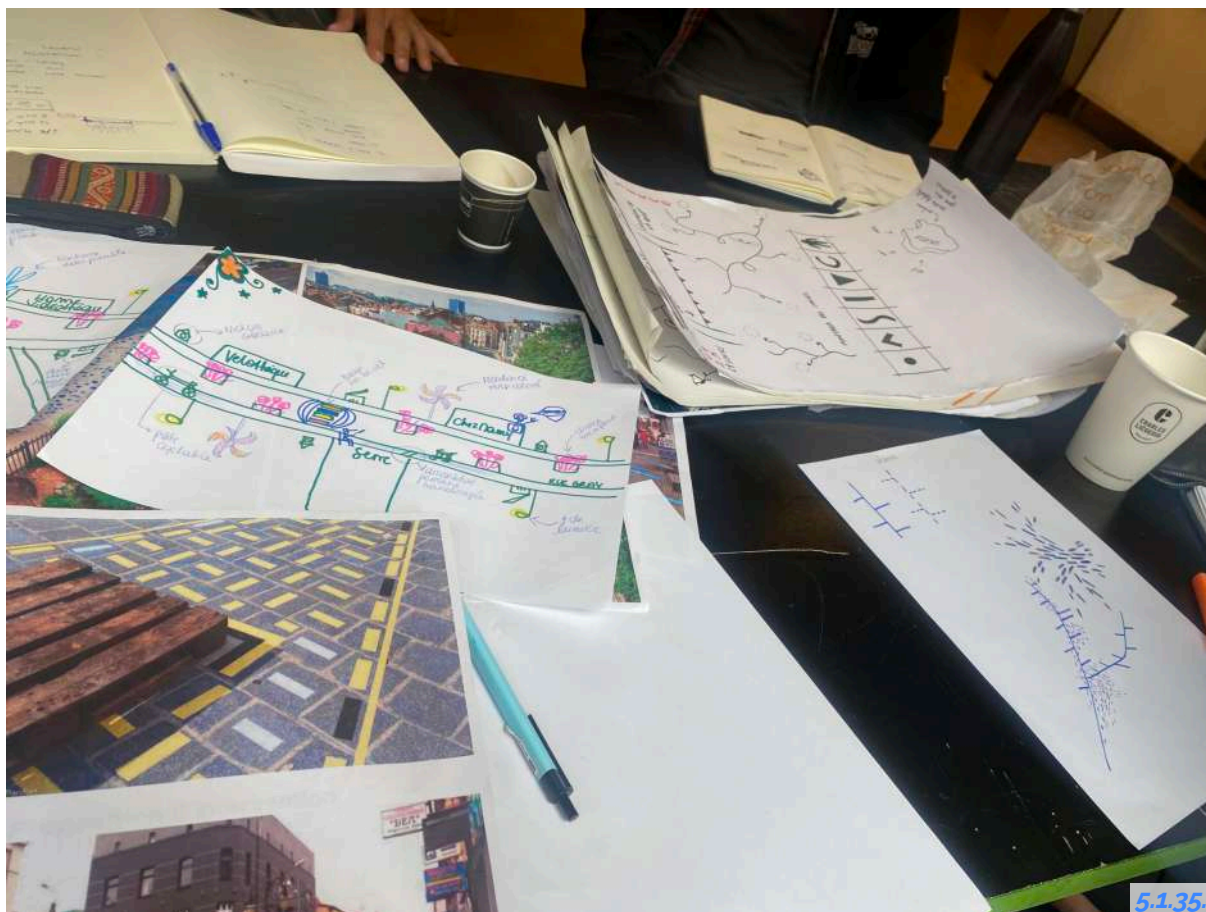
Fot.5.1.35. *Materials from the project group's internal workshop.*
by M. Siemińska

5.1.7. Co-production

Car-free day: start of community works on Gray Street

Gray Street   Latitude + EGEB

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

Preparation of the workspace in front of La Serre;

Demarcation of the work area: setting up barriers to mark the space for activities and minimize the impact of street traffic.

Artistic activities - collaborative painting on the street of a grafic representation of the Maelbeek River and its tributaries, as well as the roots of the vegetation growing along Gray Street.

Car-Free Day in Brussels is a unique socio-cultural event filled with various activities, many of which are organized as part of the *Bruxelles en vacances* program. The restriction of car traffic on this day fosters public space activities and strengthens community engagement, as residents are more likely to venture out onto the streets, and casual passersby often spontaneously join planned activities.

The Latitude Platform and EGEB teams decided to make the most of this special day, as they have initiated collective actions on Gray Street. Preparations began on Saturday evening, as the equipment was moved to La Serre and the arrangement of symbols and painting techniques were tested.

The early hours of Sunday morning were calm, with virtually no pedestrian traffic, so we started the painting process on our own. As the number of passersby increased, the involvement of both residents and casual participants gradually grew. Children, sometimes accompanied by their parents, showed particular enthusiasm and eagerly joined in the painting activities.

Passersby, intrigued by the project, stopped to engage in conversations. Many of them were unaware of the Maelbeek River hidden beneath the street. Participants also shared their experiences and observations about water and dampness-related issues in the neighborhood. Youth on bicycles spontaneously used the painted river design as a riding track, highlighting the interactive nature of the project.

The day was filled with numerous interactions with passersby. Our team tried to raise ecological awareness and draw attention to issues related to water management and Gray Street's biodiversity. We also explained the project's objectives and encouraged participation in upcoming activities planned for the following week.

5.1.36.

Photos 5.1.36-37. *Painting together, by M. Siemińska i O. Aramburu*

5.1.37.

5.1.38.

5.1.39.

5.1.40.

5.1.41.

Fot.5.1.38. Fatima hanging a garland, by M. Siemińska

Fot.5.1.39-40. Various ways of transportation during »Car-Free Day«, by M. Siemińska

Fot.5.1.41. Asphalt art - symbolic marking of the root system, by D. Nalpas

Fot.5.1.42. *Painting together,*
by O. Aramburu

Fot.5.1.43. *View of Gray Street*
by O. Zait >

5.1.43.

Collaborative painting on the road

📍 Gray Street in front of La Vélothèque

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide) + Centre de Service Social (Aurélie)

Results of Project Activities

🔍 Building relationships through teamwork;

✅ Designation of a car-free zone in front of the La Vélothèque building;

Collaborative painting activities with local residents;

📋 Participants had the freedom to choose activities while engaging in the organized actions in La Serre.

After the positive reception of the workshops during Café Solidaire, we planned another meeting with Aurelie, the group coordinator, for September 19, 2023. This session revolved around outdoor manual activities. We prepared the same paints and stencils previously used to depict plant root systems. We marked zones in front of La Vélothèque and the main entrance to La Serre with the use of different layout of the patterns.

Several participants actively took part in the painting process, while others, unable to participate directly, entertained us by sharing their stories.

Photos 5.1.44-46. Painting in front of La Vélothèque, by M. Siemińska

5.1.44.

5.1.45.

5.1.46.

Preparations for installation

📍 La Serre   👥 Latitude (Marta, Octavio)

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

🔍 Experiencing the nature of water in the Maelbeek River Valley.

During the preparation of materials for assembling urban furniture in La Serre, we encountered a situation frequently mentioned by residents of Gray Street. After just a few minutes of heavy rainfall, the manhole cover began to lift, releasing excess water from the overburdened storm drain system. As a result, a stream of water, formed by the convergence of several leaks, flowed across the entire ground floor of the building.
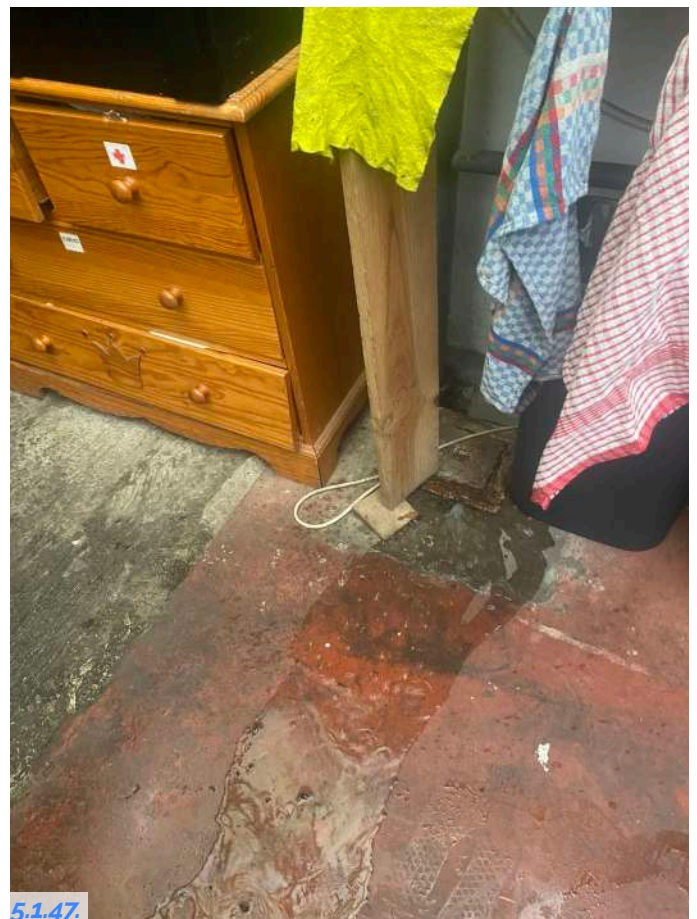
Photo 5.1.47. Water flowing out of the maintenance hole, by M. Siemińska

5.1.47.

Installation of urban furnitures

📍 Gray Street in front of La Vélothèque

👥 Latitude (Marta, Davide, Octavio) + DALLAS

Results of Project Activities

✓ Installation of a bench in front of the La Vélothèque building;

Installation of a planter;

Collaborative planting of native vegetation, such as grasses, perennials, and flowers, in the planter;

📋 Inauguration event – attended by residents (both observers and project participants), partners, and representatives of municipal services to summarize and celebrate the project's outcomes.

On September 22, 2023, together with the Dallas collective, we worked on creating small urban elements. The benches and planters were made from recycled materials, emphasizing the sustainable nature of the project. Additionally, we finished painting of the last elements on the roadway.

Peggy from La Vélothèque assisted with the organization and logistics, providing a space to store soil, plants, and tools. In the evening, we held an official meeting to inaugurate the newly transformed space on Gray Street. During this meeting, participants engaged in discussions about the quality of the space and the project's goals, as well as a collective planting activity, which underscored the community- driven nature of the initiative

Photo 5.1.48. *Planting plants together, by M. Siemińska*

Photos 5.1.49-50. *Details of the bench and the construction of the planter, by B. Dias Ventura*

Photo 5.1.51. *Planter assembly, by B. Dias Ventura*

Photo 5.1.52. *Painting the markings at the bench, by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.53. *Gray Street, by B. Dias Ventura* ❯

5.1.53.

Hanging the garland

📍 Gray Street

👥 Latitude (Marta, Octavio) + DALLAS

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

✓ Sewing and hanging a garland marking the entrance to the traffic calmed zone.

The garland was designed as a visual element to highlight the entrance to the traffic-calming zone. On September 24, 2023, it was hung between the ceramics workshop located on the upper floor of the La Serre building and the La Fabrique des HEART'istes studio. This created a distinct and aesthetic accent in the space.

5.1.54.

5.1.55.

Photos 5.1.54-55. *Urban furniture on Gray Street, by M. Siemińska*

Photo 5.1.56. *Garland marking the traffic calming zone by M. Siemińska* ❯
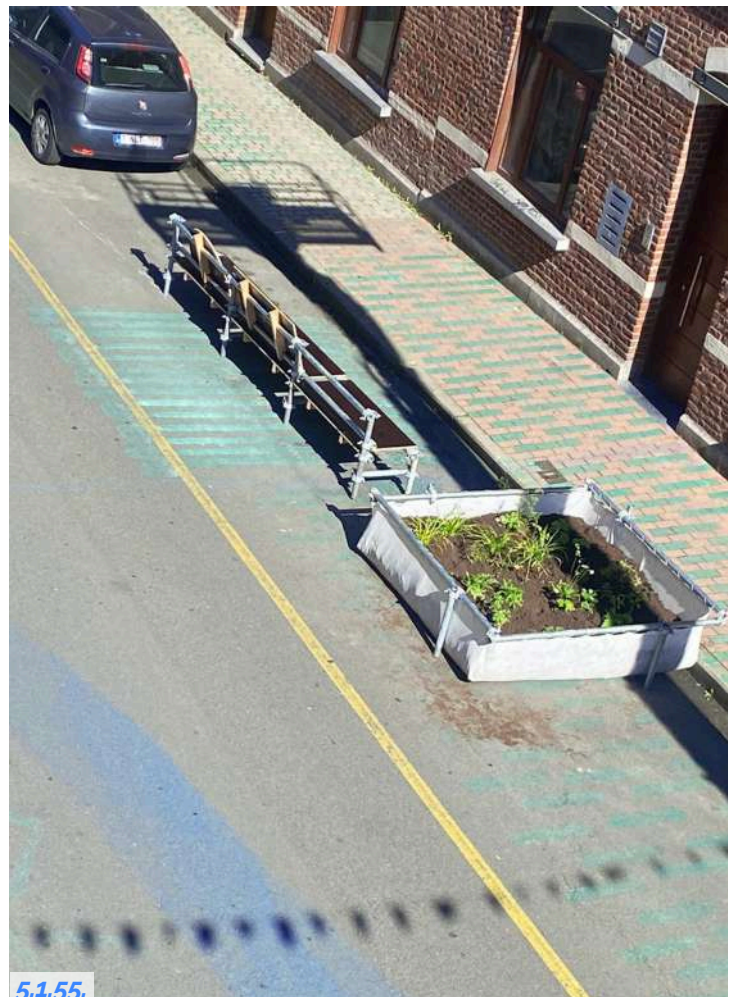
Installation of the second planter

Kerckx Street

Latitude (Davide)
+ EGEB (Michel) + DALLAS

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

Planter installation;

Planting vegetation.

The second planter for vegetation, crafted by the Dallas collective, was installed on Kerckx Street on September 28, 2023. This location, characterized by a significant slope, is situated at the intersection with Gray Street—the lowest point in the Maelbeek valley. The planter was designed in accordance with the area's topography, allowing rainwater to flow through its structure. By incorporating layers of soil and gravel, the planter was intended to partially retain water, alleviating the stormwater drain located behind it. This solution combined aesthetic and functional aspects, supporting rainwater management in the space.

5.1.57.

5.1.58.

Photos 5.1.57-58.
The planter on Kerckx Street.
by D. Cauciello

Fot.5.1.59. *Planter detail.*
by B. Dias Ventura

5.1.8. Raising Awareness and Sensitivity

Negotiating the space

📍 Gray Street

👥 Latitude (Davide)
\+ EGEB (Dominique)

Results of Project Activities

✓ Disassembly of the planter;

Relocation of the bench;

Installation of the information panel;

⊘ Noise from people sitting on the bench;

📋 The planter must be made of more durable materials.

Two weeks after the installation of the planter, it was destroyed in an act of vandalism. The causes of this incident remain unknown—it was unclear whether it was the act of a random individual or a deliberate protest by a resident opposing the occupation of a parking space. We made the decision to dismantle the planter, due to a lack of resources for reconstruction and additional security measure

The plants and soil were distributed among local community members, including Gray Moineaux Garden gardeners and La Vélothèque volunteers. However, the planter's structure was left in place and additionally equipped with an information panel. This panel outlined the project's scope and purpose and explained the planter's fate. Through this symbolic gesture, we expressed our determination to continue efforts toward a greener, pedestrian-friendly city despite the challenges encountered.

We hoped that the individual responsible for the vandalism or dissatisfied residents would share their opinions by leaving comments on the panel provided. This form of communication would have facilitated the initiation of dialogue with them, which was a priority for us in building relationships with the local community. However, no feedback was received, and the panel remained blank.

That same day, a resident of the social housing building approached us, expressing dissatisfaction with the noise caused by people using the bench outside her apartment. We organized a neighborhood meeting to discuss the matter in response to this concern. Several nearby residents attended the meeting. Following the discussion, it was agreed that the area between the two bridges would be a more appropriate location for the bench. Thanks to the joint efforts of the neighbors, the bench was relocated to a new location.

This experience confirmed that people are more inclined to mobilize against specific actions than engage in collaborative efforts to create new solutions.

Photo 5.1.60. *The damaged planter on Gray Street, by D. Cauciello*

Photo 5.1.61. *Information panel by D. Cauciello*

Photo 5.1.62. *The bench in a new place, by D. Cauciello*

Exploratory walk »Mystères du fond la vallée du Maelbeek«

From Flagey Square
to Moineaux Community Garden

Latitude (Marta, Davide)
+ EGEB + Fairville
+ local actors + residents

Progress within the Scope of the Stage

Research walk;

A summary of activities in the district to date done with the Fairville group

Testimonials from Gray Street residents.

On November 7, 2023, as part of the Fairville program meeting, hosted by EGEB and Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), organizers went on a discovery walk titled "Mysteries at the Bottom of the Maelbeek Valley". The planning for this initiative began in September during the implementation of the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project, with members of Latitude Platform participating in the initial organizational meetings. Our role also included sharing contacts and knowledge gained during the project mentioned above.

The primary goal of the walk was to systematize knowledge about the current state of the Maelbeek Valley and share it with researchers and activists involved in the Fairville program. The route included key locations in the valley, such as Place Flagey, Gray Street, both bridges and the Moineaux Garden. This allowed participants to explore the area's history and the everyday experiences of its residents. They also delved into the social context of this part of the district and learned about the challenges faced by its inhabitants.

Together with Davide, we presented the goals and outcomes of the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project.

The walk concluded at La Serre, where participants had the opportunity to listen to the stories of Stella, Pierre, and Agnès, longtime residents of Gray Street. They shared their thoughts and experiences related to life in the area. The meeting ended with a summary of the walk and the creation of notes in the form of boards. These materials were used the following day as a starting point for discussions and the exchange of experiences among the participants of the Fairville program. The entire process was enriched with a collective reflection on potential strategies for addressing the challenges faced by the residents of the valley.

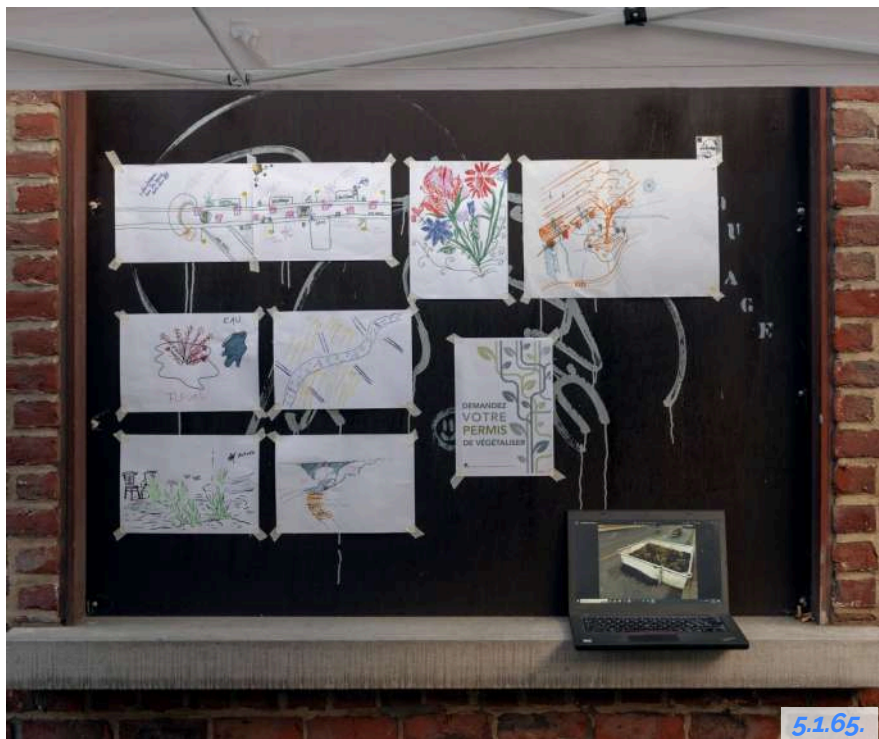The appendix to this subsection includes a record of their statements.

5.1.63.

5.1.64.

5.1.65.

Photo 5.1.63. *An exploratory walk, by B. Dias Ventura*

Photo 5.1.64.
Presentation of the project in a public space, by B. Dias Ventura

Photo 5.1.65.
Showcasing artwork created by residents, by B. Dias Ventura
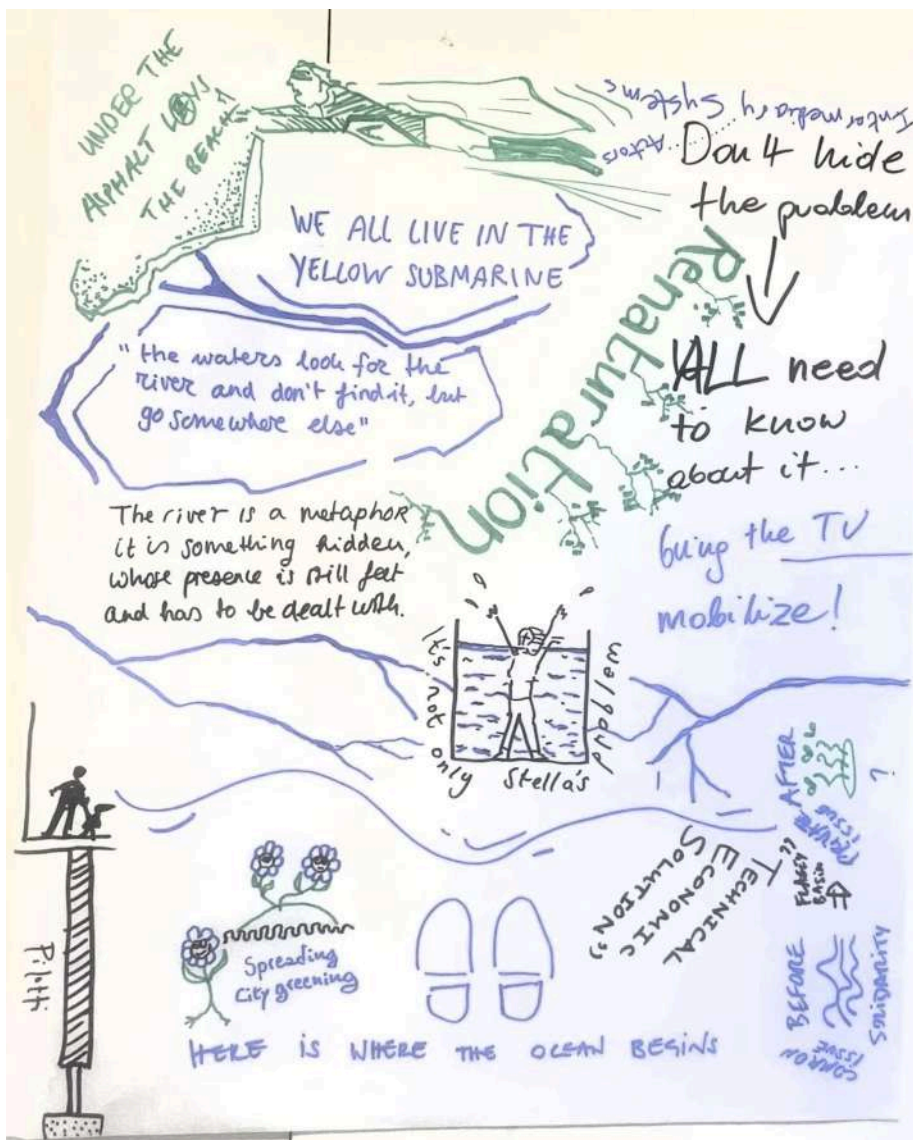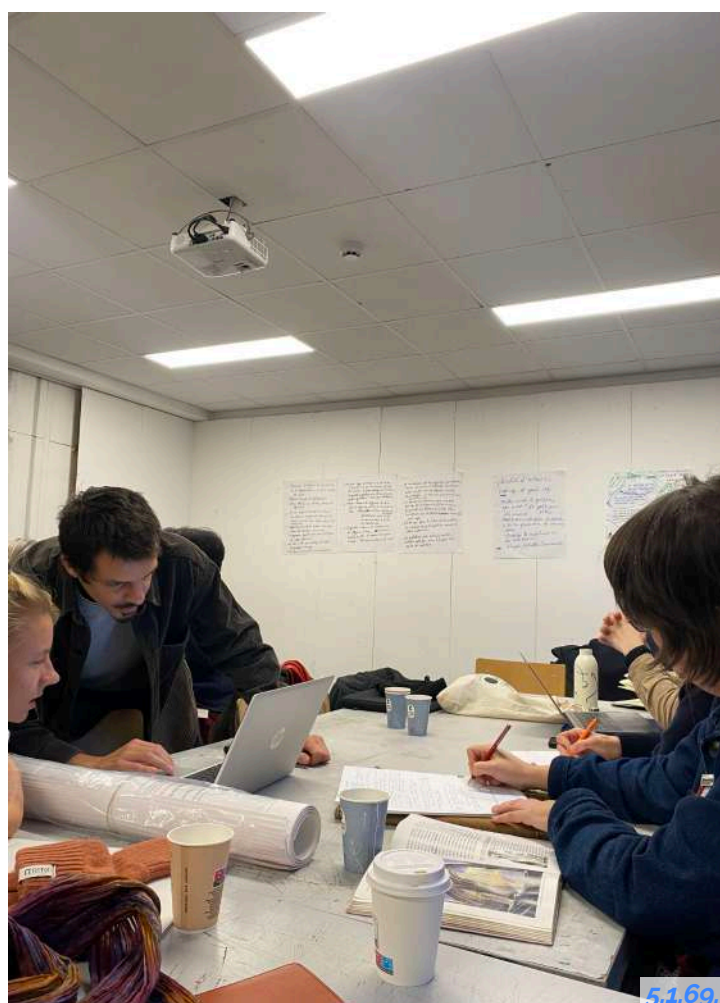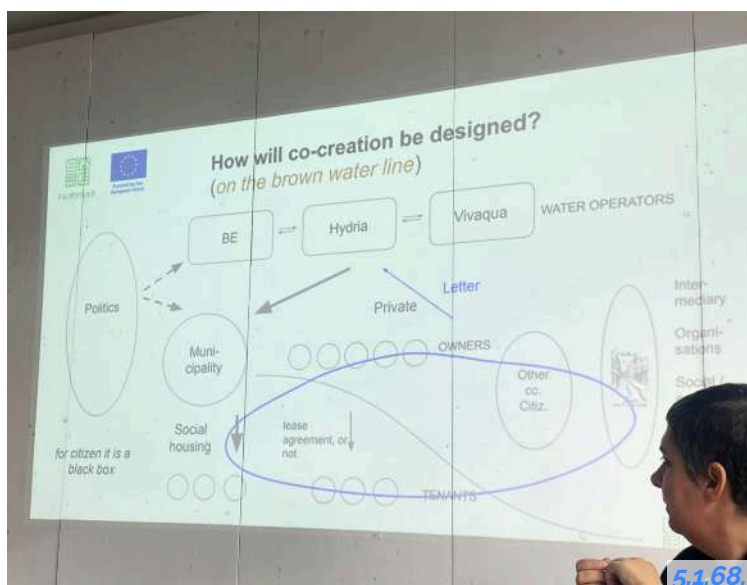
Figure 5.1.21. Notes from the summary of actions

Photo 5.1.66. Testimonies of the residents of the Maelbeek Valley. by M. Siemińska

Photo 5.1.67. Group discussion, exchange of experiences, summary of the walk, by M. Siemińska

5.1.66.

5.1.67.

5.1.68.

5.1.69.

Fot.5.1.68. *Exchange of experience during the Fairville meeting, by M. Siemińska*

Fot.5.1.69. *Joint reflection on potential strategies for action in the Maelbeek river valley, by M. Siemińska*

13 December 2023

Anonymous online survey on the project

Gray Street neighborhood

Latitude (Marta)
+ local actors + residents

The *Bruxelles en Vacance* program is required to conduct and present an evaluation based on quantitative parameters and numerical data. However, the specificity of the implemented project significantly complicates meeting these expectations. Challenges such as residents' mistrust, the diverse goals and needs of participants, and the heterogeneous and dynamically changing group of participants made reliable quantitative research impossible. It is worth noting that each meeting attracted different individuals, with only a few attending more than one activity.

We sent an anonymous online survey about the project via email to all participants to whom we had contact information. Unfortunately, the survey results confirmed our concerns, which received minimal responses.

Given the difficulties in conducting quantitative research, the project's evaluation was expanded to include qualitative analysis. This description is based on conversations, informal interviews conducted during the project, participant observation, and responses gathered through surveys.

1. **Participant Satisfaction and Expectations of the Project**
   Participants in the organized activities expressed general satisfaction, emphasizing the relevance of the topics addressed. They frequently shared problems related to life in the Maelbeek Valley, such as flooding, dampness in buildings, heavy vehicular traffic, lack of greenery, unwelcoming public spaces, and a shortage of areas conducive to social interactions. However, the high expectations for the project led to some disappointment due to its symbolic approach to the issues raised.

   ⇨ Conclusion

Communicating the project's scope and objectives clearly from the outset is crucial to avoid misunderstandings. Simultaneously,managing expectations is essential in the context of limited resources, which are insufficient for the scale of the challenges.

2. **Communication and Project Visibility**
   Participants pointed out delays in disseminating information about activities and a need for more clarity in the communication. Initially, the recognition of the Latitude team and the project was low due to time constraints and the broad scope of organizational responsibilities. As the project progressed, recognition improved, translating into higher attendance during the final cycle of workshops and meetings.

   ⇨ Conclusion

Collaboration with local partners and well-established organizations can significantly shorten the time required to reach residents and increase activity participation.

3. **Location of the First Workshop**
   The platform on the Gray-Couronne stairs was considered an unfavorable location due to its poor visibility from street level.

   ⇨ Conclusion

The choice of locations for activities should consider their visibility, accessibility, and the ability to accommodate individuals with mobility limitations.

4. **Aesthetics of Temporary Urban Elements**
   The use of simple materials for constructing urban elements received mixed reactions. Some participants preferred more standardized solutions, while road paintings were positively received, bringing joy and color to the public space.

   ⇨ Conclusion

Future projects should involve residents in the personalization of small architectural elements, for example, through collaborative painting of urban furniture. Such activities could increase community acceptance of the designed solutions and strengthen the sense of shared responsibility and belonging in the neighborhood created by residents.

5. **Controversies Over Parking Spaces**
   Installing planters and a bench in former parking spaces elicited mixed reactions. Some residents appreciated the ecological and social benefits of reclaiming the street for pedestrians. In contrast, others opposed the loss of parking spaces, as evidenced by discussions, an act of vandalism, and the need to relocate the bench.

   ⇨ Conclusion

Projects of this type should incorporate extensive educational activities explaining the benefits of the proposed changes. Avoiding radical actions can help mitigate negative reactions, particularly among underprivileged individuals. Additionally, ensuring the durability of materials used is essential so that prototypes can better withstand the challenging conditions of urban environments.

5.1.9.1. Internal Evaluation

Together with the Latitude Platform team and EGEB, we conducted an internal evaluation of the activities, analyzing achievements and identifying areas for improvement.
We divided the results into two main categories, comparing initial objectives with outcomes and conclusions.

OBJECTIVE 01 - Collective Construction

A. **Traffic calming**

- Installation of speed bumps and visual marking of the intersection and parts of Rue Gray.
- Marking the entrance to the traffic calming zone using planters placed alongside the sidewalk.

B. **Symbolic greening**

- Greening of facades and placement of planters with vegetation in parking spaces.
- Promoting socio-environmental values: supporting urban biodiversity, easing the burden on the drainage system, reducing heat islands, and improving the living environment in the neighborhood.

C. **Public space development**

- Construction of urban furniture through a participatory process with residents.

D. **Depaving**

- Remove paving stones to allow rainwater to infiltrate the ground.
- Installation of self-sustaining planters equipped with a system to collect and store rainwater.

⇨ **Results and Conclusions to Objective 01**

A. **Traffic calming**
- Authorities did not grant a permission to modify the road surface, preventing the implementation of speed bumps and depaving. However, speed bumps deserve further testing as they could also support water retention.
- Road and sidewalk murals may have contributed to slowing down vehicular traffic[229].
- A colorful garland was hung between buildings. It symbolically marked the traffic calming zone.

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[229] According to the Asphalt Art Safety Study report by Sam Schwartz, "Asphalt art showed a strong positive correlation with improved safety in the aggregate and in most of the studied locations," and "Road user behavior clearly improved in the observed study sites(...)."
https://assets.bbhub.io/dotorg/sites/43/2022/04/Asphalt-Art-Safety-Study.pdf, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

B. Symbolic greening

- Due to lengthy administrative procedures, facade greening was not possible. A walking tour focused on local greenery highlighted the richness of local flora, serving an educational purpose.
- Workshops and meetings provided opportunities to promote the value of urban green infrastructure.
- The Maelbeek Vallée Verte project was a small step toward systemic solutions for green spaces and water management. Further improvements in quality of life require comprehensive changes.

C. Public space development

- A bench made from reclaimed materials was created, initially placed in front of La Vélothèque and now serving a nearby location.
- The bench's design was based on inexpensive, easily accessible, or recycled materials, making the project environmentally friendly.
- Volunteers' involvement and road paintings in front of La Vélothèque raised residents' awareness about the space

D. Depaving:

- Due to the limitations of the Bruxelles en Vacances program, depaving was not feasible. Instead, the focus was on prototypes of self-watering planters that collect rainwater.
- This solution has potential for future implementation, especially when altering the surface is impossible.

Despite administrative constraints, the activities positively influenced perceptions of the space and demonstrated the potential of participatory approaches to shaping public areas.

Although the scale of impact was limited, the outlined directions should be pursued and developed in future initiatives, particularly in vegetation, water management, and environmentally friendly urban furniture solutions.

OBJECTIVE 02 - Raising Social Awareness

The aim of the activities was to:

    A. Create a platform for dialogue with residents and local stakeholders, enabling collective reflection on the future of Rue Gray in the Maelbeek Valley.

    B. Raise social awareness about green and blue spaces[230]

    C. Promote soft and sustainable mobility[231] in residential areas.

    D. Sensitize the community to the role of green spaces in mitigating urban heat islands, managing rainwater, and improving the aesthetics of public spaces.

Results and Conclusions to Objective 02:

    A. The realization of this objective encountered initial difficulties in engaging residents, stemming from Rue Gray's transient nature and the distance and mistrust of the local community.

        Collaboration with La Serre proved to be crucial. As a well-known and appreciated space by the community, it served as a point of contact with residents and a mediator in building relationships. Thanks to access to this venue, the team was able to build trust gradually.

        We have established partnerships with numerous local organizations and institutions such as La Vélothèque, Les HEART'istes, Café Solidaire, community gardens of de la Couronne, and Gray Moineaux.We also explored individual stories of Rue Gray residents and their surroundings, providing a broader context for life and work in the area. These insights were reflected in discussions with the Ixelles municipal administration and within the Fairville research program.

    ⇨ Conclusion

A regular on-site presence could have more effectively contributed to building trust among residents and improved outreach to the local community. In the future, securing a space in the immediate neighbourhood of the project would be beneficial, allowing simultaneous work and visibility for residents.

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[230] In Poland, the concept of green spaces/urban areas has been in use for years, referring to areas with vegetation, such as parks or squares. In this context, blue spaces refer to areas designed with water in mind within the city. Examples include rain gardens, retention reservoirs, or various types of water channels.
[231] Sustainable mobility, meaning rational travel, involves choosing alternative means of transportation to the car as often as possible, especially for short distances that dominate urban travel. https://ztp.krakow.pl/wszystkie-aktualnosci/urzad/zrownowazona-mobilnosc-co-to-jest-i-czemu-sluzy.htm, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

B. We have covered topics related to green and blue spaces. Collaborative activities, such as asphalt art, raised street users' awareness about the underground presence of the Maelbeek River and its riparian vegetation.

⇨ Conclusion

Creative activities in the form of drawing during workshops or co-creating street artworks served well to engage residents and support educational opportunities. Future projects should develop such activities.

C. Formal and informal meetings addressed sustainable mobility and adapting urban spaces to climate change. These conversations highlighted the complexity of these topics.

⇨ Conclusion

Discussions revealed that mobility issues require greater attention and a sensitive communication approach, as they often evoke strong emotions. Dialogue and understanding of the local community's needs, concerns, and specific experiences with urban space are essential.

D. We also made an effort to emphasize the role of public spaces in responding to private emergencies, such as basement flooding. Members of the *Fairville* project continue to address this topic.

⇨ Conclusion

The knowledge gathered should be systematically shared with both the local community and other interested groups. This will help build awareness and support further initiatives.

5.1.10. Summary

The experience gained from the temporary project on Gray Street demonstrated that spatial and social aspects are closely interconnected. Despite the ultimately symbolic and modest nature of the solutions, stemming from numerous limitations and challenges, the project as a whole can be considered a success. In this case, evaluation criteria were expanded to include intangible aspects, such as the knowledge gained by participants and designers, a sense of agency, building trust, and establishing new relationships.

During the co-design and co-production process of Maelbeek Vallée Verte, the debate on the condition of Gray Street's public space was revitalized. This condition directly affects residents' private spaces, including issues such as flooding and dampness in buildings, road safety, and the lack of spaces for neighborhood interactions.

By creating a network of contacts and gathering local knowledge, we were able to support the Délier les Fils de l'Eau Platform in their efforts to formalize initiatives. The Latitude Platform team discussed some aspects, such as the utilization of vacant ground-floor spaces in the social housing building, with the Ixelles municipal office. This provides hope that more of these spaces will be made available to public benefit organizations or associations in the future.

The described mechanisms illustrate the interconnections between residents' daily lives and design activities. Designers' actions should adopt a holistic approach that considers community needs rather than focusing solely on realizing the designers' vision.

The project's specific nature required flexibility and an experimental design approach. This allowed us to develop soft skills and test a prototype of a self-sufficient planter, which we plan to refine.

As part of participatory action research, the team achieved several objectives:

- Public space activities, combined with educational initiatives, contributed to raising local community awareness of ecological issues as well as legal and organizational solutions;

- Significant information was collected in the form of local knowledge, such as contacts that were utilized in later stages of the Fairville project, as well as residents' testimonies regarding their situations and needs;

- Participant observation played a key role in the research, enabling a better understanding of the social and spatial context;

- The research process was based on learning through experimentation, which allowed for real-time testing and adjustments to the approach, as well as the development of a prototype for future improvement;

- Collaborative learning with research participants facilitated a deeper understanding of the local challenges, problem-solving methods, and more effective forms of community engagement in participatory activities.

5.1.11. Appendix to the Subchapter »Gray Street«

Below are statements made by residents recorded during a meeting at La Serre, summarizing the research walk "Mystères du fond la vallée du Maelbeek".

The statements have been translated from French with attention to preserving their character and tone.

Pierre:

Currently, if you want to buy a house, you get a whole package of information from the administrative authorities. But when I bought my house in 2008, I didn't get any information about the condition of the building. Honestly, I think they even built a fake wall—it looked that perfect back then. And for what purpose?

I really like this area, but the problems with the house are severe. The entire building structure is damp. You can't even clean the walls. It's ridiculous because you clean the wall, and it immediately gets damp again. And that's just harmful to health. I think it's also harmful to mental health because it's quite depressing.

I don't know how to solve this problem. The stormwater basin helps a little because, looking at old photos, I've often seen the street flooded and windows of buildings secured against the water. We don't experience that anymore, but the river is still there. You can hear it, especially at night when it's quiet.

Agnès:

I live right next to La Serre. My house was built at the beginning of the 20th century as a place to store carriages, and La Serre was a stable. The people who lived on Avenue de la Couronne[232] were part of the upper class—they were wealthy. That's why their houses were built far from the river. Down here, the poorer people who served the upper class lived in the lower area. This area was full of auxiliary buildings.

I've lived on Gray Street for 35 years. I remember this street from when it was in a completely different state—rotten, broken down, and abandoned, with many vacant properties.

Many others moved in around the same time I did, in the 1980s. I needed a studio, a workspace, but I didn't have much money. This area was better than industrial zones because, despite everything, we're still in an urban area.

Flooding problems were on a completely different scale back then, and people developed a system of warning each other about the risks. Neighbors living in lower parts of the valley would warn those further up. They'd knock on doors and tell people to move their cars uphill. We only had time to put on shoes because the water on the street was already at the curb level. You had to quickly alert more neighbors and move your car because, within 20 minutes, the water would already be waist-high.

Once, I didn't make it downstairs in time, and the water level was so high that I couldn't even open the car door.

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[232] Avenue de la Couronne overlooks Gray Street.

For those who haven't experienced it, it's hard to believe that a river can appear and disappear in such a short time. Sometimes it only took an hour. Someone might say it was just our imagination.

Because we were all affected by the floods and lived under the river's influence, there was great solidarity among us. Everyone knew each other, helped one another, and worked together to clean up after a flood.

There were far fewer residents in this area at that time. The ownership structure was also different. Most people owned their homes, whereas now most belong to the municipality of Ixelles. I don't want the floods to return, but the atmosphere was different back then. There was a sense of community. Now, people don't know each other as well or at all.

Another issue is that people forgot it existed after the Maelbeek River was closed off in an underground pipe. It was downplayed, and it's no longer considered. But this river still exists in the memory of the people living in this district. It flows through all of Brussels and joins the Senne. Everyone talks about restoring the natural course of the Senne[233] because it's more prominent and could have boulevards built along it. But very few talk about restoring the Maelbeek.

After the stormwater collector was built, visible floods no longer occur, but we can't say the problem has been solved. The very concept of putting a river in a pipe is strange. Water always flows to the lowest point, which wasn't considered. There's one pipe for the river, a whole stormwater drainage system, and water flowing from higher grounds. And it has no way to join the river because it's encased in concrete. So, it accumulates in the soil.

Pierre:

There used to be undeveloped areas that could absorb this water. Now they've been built over, which actually worsens the problem.

Agnès:

The idea that we can confine water somewhere doesn't make sense. Water will always find its way.

People don't realize this. But when there are storms, and a lot of rain falls quickly, the river can lift manhole covers up to 50 cm off the ground! Another signal that a flood is coming is the distinctive ringing of pipes. Then you know the water level has risen. This shows the power of the river.

I'm one of those people who moved here long ago and knew what I was getting into. We'll hear from Stella, who has had a different experience because she lives in social housing. Unlike me, she didn't make a conscious decision to move here and didn't sign up for these kinds of issues in her apartment.

Stella:

What Agnes said is true. Everything in the apartment is damp. It's not just dampness in in the air but also in the walls and furniture. And there's a horrible smell you can't get rid of. On top of that, there's a sewage issue. Dirty water backs up into the apartment. This is caused by poor drainage and pressure that pushes it up.

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[233] The Senne River was diverted underground at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Agnès:

The building I live in was built by people who knew what they were doing—they were people of the land. They understood that if a river flows here, you should build buildings far from it and on higher ground.

Dominique:

The reality is that, for now, we don't—speaking on behalf of the residents—have precise technical knowledge about the causes of the current situation. And until we have that, we'll keep saying things that will be illusory solutions.

Once we have precise technical knowledge, perhaps we'll be able to collectively find solutions to this problem. That's why we're calling on the operators of stormwater, wastewater, and stormwater collector systems to present us with precise, implemented solutions.

Agnès:

Regarding the renovation of the social housing building, where now all ground-floor units are empty, I'm telling you—it's pointless. When they wanted to construct a new building on the plot right by the bridges, it turned out the ground wasn't stable. The work started in 2014. Soil tests showed they could dig 12 meters deep before hitting groundwater.

In my place, water is at 60 cm.

I have photos of their construction site flooded with water. It was unbelievable. They didn't want to admit it was groundwater—they claimed it was due to rain. I don't know how they got a building permit. They battled the water for two years.

When they were building the nursery[234], I warned the general contractor and the site manager. Previous construction had caused the entire street to shift, and our houses cracked. We didn't want the same problem to happen again. So, I went to speak with the person responsible for the construction and told him about the problem. He brushed me off, saying they knew what they were doing.

Two months later, they realized their plan didn't work. They called in Germans who used piling techniques and sand filling. But that building still has problems with dampness. Will they ever take the river and its related issues into account?

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[234] The nursery was built in close proximity to la Serre.

5.2.
Marie Janson Square

This case study is based on:

- desk research analysis,
- participants' observations conducted at Marie Janson Square in 2019 and 2023,
- information obtained during semi-structured interviews with Bernardo Robles Hidalgo and Nicolas Willemet.

Bernardo Robles Hidalgo is an architect and manager of Marie Janson Square, representing the organization Toestand[235]. Nicolas Willemet, from Studio VVV[236], is one of the architects in charge of the final design and implementation of the new arrangement of the square.

5.2.1. The Context of Saint-Gilles Municipality

Saint-Gilles (St-Gilles) is a small municipality in central Brussels, characterized by an exceptionally high population density. In 2023, its population was just over 49,000 residents, which accounts for nearly 20,000 people per square kilometer. St-Gilles stands out not only for having the highest percentage of foreign nationals (accounting for nearly half of its population) but also for its exceptional national diversity – approximately 140 national groups reside there, including people of Moroccan, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, and Greek origin.

The municipality of St-Gilles is distinctly divided into upper and lower parts, which is reflected in its topography and socio-economic structure. In the lower part of the municipality, the average income of residents is significantly lower than in the upper part, which results from a higher number of elderly individuals with lower incomes and immigrant communities. This area also attracts students and young adults, leading to the creation of a new social mix.

St-Gilles is notable for its young population, with an average age of 36. Young adults, particularly in the 25-35 age group, constitute a significant portion of its residents. Many of them are economic migrants struggling with unemployment[237]. Notably, there is a higher proportion of men than women in the lower part of St-Gilles.

The municipality also faces challenges related to dense urban development and a need for sufficient green and recreational areas. Public space in this area mainly consists of transportation routes and squares largely covered in concrete. Since the mid-1990s, local authorities have been conducting an extensive revitalization program, encompassing public spaces (Parvis de Saint-Gilles and Place Bethléem) and private buildings[238].

Marie Janson Square, located in the municipality's center, was created in 1979 following the demolition of the mint building. In 2004, it was officially named after Marie Janson, commemorating the first woman in the Belgian parliament. However, the square is often colloquially referred to as *carré de Moscou* among the local community.

[235] https://toestand.be/, [accessed: 06.10.2024].
[236] http://vvvarchitectes.be/, [accessed: 06.10.2024].
[237] https://stgilles.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CBP-2019-FR-HR-crops.pdf, [accessed: 6.10.2024]
[238] https://ibsa.brussels/sites/default/files/publication/documents/Saint-Gilles_FR_cor.pdf, [accessed: 6.10.2024].

The square is adjacent to the pedestrian area of Parvis de St-Gilles, which underwent revitalization in 2017-2018, becoming one of the municipality's most vibrant and trendy spots. There are numerous bars, shops, and a food market in the pedestrian area. This space contrasts with the more densely populated southern streets, such as Rue du Fort, where more modest shops prevail. For many years, Marie Janson Square hosted a market that attracted customers with lower purchasing power. The market primarily offered clothing, cleaning supplies, and everyday accessories.

The square's revitalization was carried out as part of the *Contrat de Quartier Durable* (Sustainable Neighborhood Contract). This program addressed the development of public spaces and the creation of a better connection between the upper and lower parts of the municipality. The contract involved two stages: a diagnostic phase and a design phase.

- **Stage 1:** Temporary occupation, arranging, and planning of the site are aimed at initiating the process of regeneration and bringing the square back to life. The activities were open to all people, organized at low cost, and supported by local actors. This was a phase of spatial experimentation leading to the final layout of the square, referred to as the *Marie Moskou* project.

- **Stage 2:** Designing the final project by a multidisciplinary team (architects, urban planners, landscape architects), taking into account everything that was developed during the first stage.

Due to the long-standing uncertainty regarding the square's future, the municipality decided to *reclaim the public space* gradually. Unlike a traditional project, where the program is developed *ex nihilo*—meaning from scratch—this project was designed to evolve progressively. It involved extensive collaboration with a diverse range of local stakeholders, ensuring that the final outcome met the actual needs of the community[239].
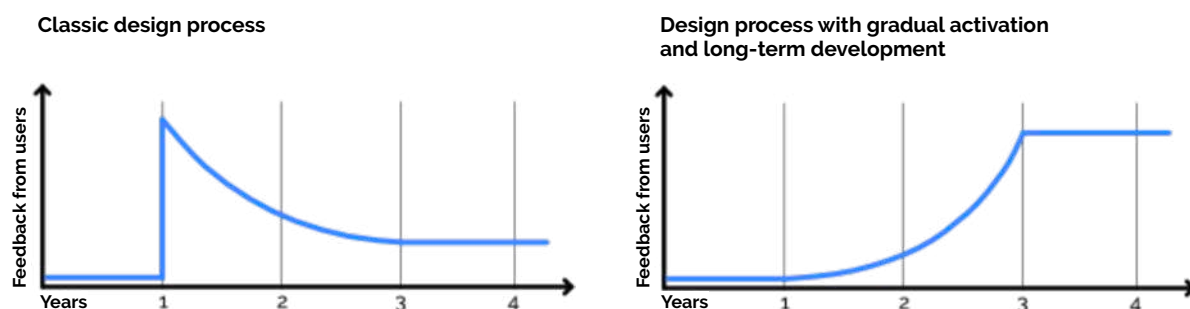
Figure 5.2.1. *Diagrams showing user involvement in the design process.*
Based on: contratsdequartiers1060.wordpress.com[240]

[239]https://contratsdequartiers1060.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/programme-cq-parvis-mo richar-fr.pdf, s.56, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

Photo 5.2.1. *Marie Janson Square before revitalization.*
Source: contratsdequartiers1060.wordpress.com[241]

5.2.2. Context and Project Objectives

The Toestand collective implemented the first stage of CDQ project, which was selected through a public competition. Toestand is a non-governmental organization founded in 2012. Its mission is "the temporary use of vacant urban spaces through the development of inclusive social and cultural dynamics based on dialogue, autonomy, action, and creation[242]".

The association brings together specialists from various fields, including architects, enabling a holistic approach to solving social and spatial problems. Each project is implemented in close cooperation with residents and local partners, allowing space to be transformed through the dynamics created in the process.

Studio Paola Viganò (SPV) and VVV carried out the second stage of works related to the revitalization of Marie Janson Square. SPV focuses on the ecological and social transformation of cities, landscapes, and territories and creates public spaces across Europe. VVV undertakes projects in architecture, urban planning, public space, teaching, and research.

Three regular staff members managed the Marie Moskou project, including two architects: Bernardo Robles Hidalgo, the primary executor and supervisor, and Tim Rotiers, responsible for logistics and technical aspects. Since 2017, Cécile Caffier has served as the project coordinator. About twenty active volunteers provided additional support, participating in the construction and arrangement of facilities and contributing new ideas and diverse perspectives that enriched the project's execution.

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[240] Ibidem.
[241] Ibidem.
[242] https://toestand.be/, [accessed: 6.11.2024].

The project was carried out over four years, from 2016 to 2019. Its primary goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of the site's specificities and gather local knowledge. Toestand's role was to provide this information to the final project team. Based on this data, the team was to develop the final design of the square, considering the needs and expectations of residents.

Initially, the plan outlined four stages of activity:

- Stage 1 (March 2016 - March 2017): Observation of various user groups and activities on the square; establishing connections with residents and local organizations; identifying areas in need of intervention.

- Stage 2 (April 2017 - March 2018): Continuation of activities from the first stage and joint transformation of the space; defining target interventions approved by the municipality; selection of the final project team and transfer of analysis results and conclusions by Toestand.

- Stage 3 (April 2018 - March 2019): Further activities on the square; evaluation of existing user interventions; collaboration with the final project team on the square's ultimate design.

- Stage 4 (April 2019 - December 2019): Finalization of cooperation with the project team, implementation of final interventions, and preparation of a concluding report summarizing the period of temporary occupation of the square[243].

5.2.3. Beginnings of Presence on the Square

The municipality portrayed Marie Janson Square in an exceptionally negative light—as a chaotic space devoid of function and disconnected from its surroundings. Over many years, a lack of investment and development plans led to the square's neglect. This was evident in the damaged benches and traces of their removal. The square was perceived as a space occupied by social groups considered problematic: homeless people, individuals with addictions, or youth exhibiting challenging behavior. The municipality even considered removing the last remaining benches to reduce the scale of the issue.

Bernardo Robles Hidalgo from Toestand observed the daily life of the square from a different perspective. Rather than focusing on the problems, he saw untapped potential, particularly in terms of space. However, he noticed a lack of diversity among users and the need to create a space they could call their own. According to his observations, residents primarily felt abandoned, as evidenced by the square's neglect. The negative image of the square existed more in their minds than in reality, which did not reflect the difficulties they described.

The first step was symbolic: placing plant pots on the square. Through this action, Toestand referred to a simple and familiar context everyone could understand. However, residents did not believe in the success of this initiative. Skeptical, they assumed that these elements would not last even a few days, fearing they would be destroyed or

243 Colombo C., Espace public : appropriation citoyenne et occupation temporaire, [Master's Thesis, Université de Mons], 2018, p. 84, https://issuu.com/chloecolombo/docs/m_moire_avec_couverture, [accessed: 20.11.2024].

stolen. Initially, some plants disappeared, and some pots were overturned or damaged. Despite this, Bernardo persistently restored everything to its original state each morning, ensuring the area looked like no disruptions had occurred. Over time, the degree of vandalism decreased, and residents became increasingly astonished at the intervention's resilience.

The intention behind this action was to challenge the stereotype of the square as an *unfriendly* and *aggressive* space. The premise was simple—if delicate objects like plant pots could survive in this area, it would mean that there is a need to reassess the existing image of this space. Over time, individuals previously perceived as potential vandals began to treat the square as their own, actively caring for the plants and maintaining order. They became caretakers of the space, watching over its condition and safety. This marked a breakthrough moment that initiated a process of changing perceptions of the place and integrating residents with its space.

Toestand's initial actions aimed to question negative beliefs about Marie Janson Square and emphasize that this space belonged to all its users. The primary assumption was to recognize the partnership of those present in the space. Developing a sense of agency and responsibility for the square, leading to its *adoption*[244] by users, was essential to ensure the sustainability of the new implementation and avoid the risk of further deterioration.

Relatively quickly, Toestand began gaining recognition in the area, even though the initial interventions and activities were not publicized. The team's operational space was limited to a container where items were stored overnight. Nevertheless, they managed to establish their method of working on the square. Step by step, they introduced elements of equipment and designed simple activities. Representatives of the association were present on the square five days a week, which allowed them to reach its daily users.

After the initial actions with plants, Toestand introduced chairs to Marie Janson Square to strengthen users' relationship with the space. These could be moved freely, encouraging spontaneous and unrestricted use of the square. Interestingly, some chairs found their way outside the square, revealing a broader issue of a lack of seating in the area. Rugs were also introduced, attracting young people and creating an informal meeting space.

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[244] In the conversation, the verb *s'approprier* was used, which in direct translation means to claim the right to something or to appropriate. However, in a spatial context, it is often used in a positive sense, meaning to make something one's own or to do something in one's own way, which suggests a more adopting attitude toward the object or space.

5.2.4. Spatial Interventions

During its activities on Marie Janson Square, Toestand initiated and coordinated a variety of actions that transformed the space's character. Initial, small-scale interventions—such as paintings on the pavement, graffiti with the square's name, planting greenery in place of removed pavement, and tree decorations—aimed to create a welcoming atmosphere. In agreement with municipal services, permission was also granted to allow grass growing between the cobblestones to remain unmown, giving the square a more natural, *meadow-like* appearance[245].

As part of Toestand's efforts, new elements of small architecture were introduced, such as bench-like overlays on walls, a central stage, and a wooden pavilion. The stage became popular among residents as a venue for birthday parties, picnics, and dancing. After being relocated near the sports field, it served as seating for football spectators. Local youth frequently used the sports field, and its fence was repaired through a joint effort by residents. Nearby, exercise equipment was installed, and a train decorated with their artwork and a sandbox—which also served as a pétanque court—were added for younger children.

At the beginning of 2017, in response to the market's relocation from Parvis de St-Gilles, Toestand began constructing a pavilion on the outskirts of the square. This was necessary to free up the central part of the square[246]. The pavilion, decorated by residents, featured space for an outdoor kitchen and gatherings. Most organized events and activities took place in its vicinity.

5.2.2.

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[245] Toestand, Key Elements. Marie Moskou, Bruksela, 2018,
https://toestand.be/assets/pdf/key-elements---fr.pdf [dostęp 10.10.2024]
[246] Ibidem.

Photos 5.2.2-5.2.5 *Initial activities of Toestand.*
Source zdjęć 5.2.2-5.2.22: facebook.com[247]

Photo 5.2.6. *Graffiti at the entrance to the square and murals on the pavement.*

Photo 5.2.7. *Decorations on the square.*

Photo 5.2.8. *Murals on the square and uncut grass.*

Photo 5.2.9. *Decorations on the square.*

5.2.3.

5.2.4.

5.2.5.

5.2.6.

5.2.7.

5.2.8.

5.2.9.

[247] https://www.facebook.com/MarieMoskou, [dostęp: 25.11.2024].
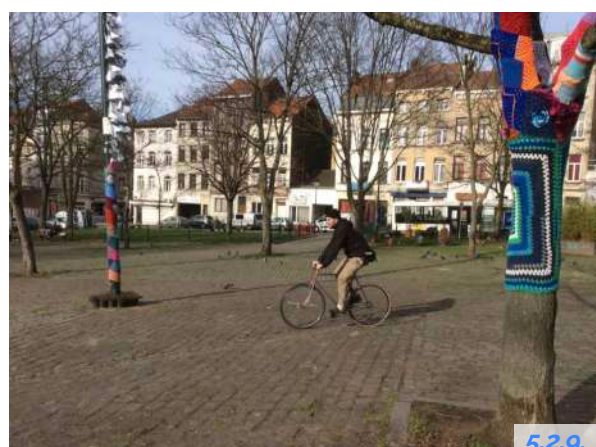
5.2.10.

Photo 5.2.10. The interior of the pavilion had a kitchen and meeting area.
Photo 5.2.11. Table prototype.

5.2.11.

Photo 5.2.12. Children's play area.
Photo 5.2.13. Outdoor gym.
Photo 5.2.14. Boules court or sandbox.

5.2.15.
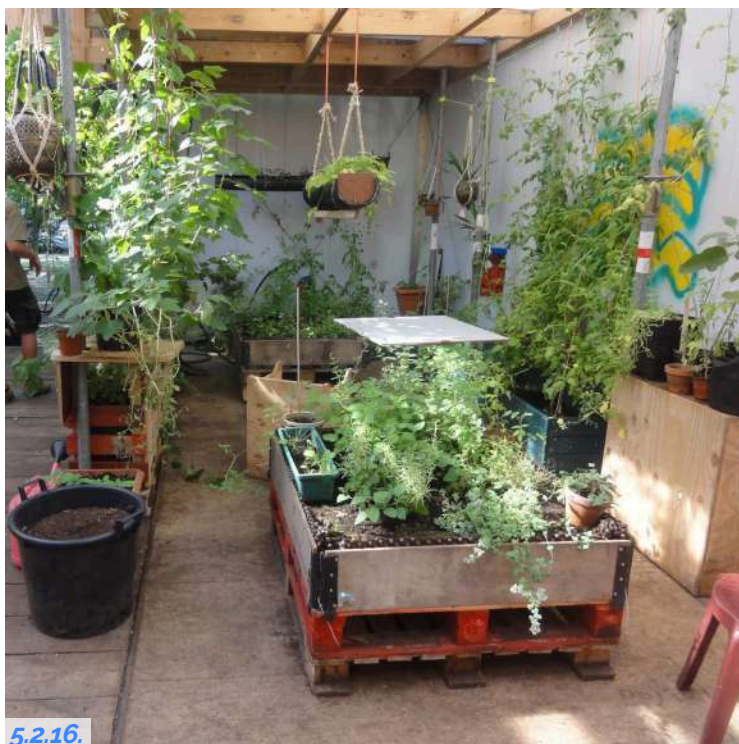
5.2.16.

Photo 5.2.15. Activities around the pavilion.
Photo 5.2.16. Vegetable garden.

Photo 5.2.17. Residents decorating the pavilion.
Photo 5.2.18. Temporary gallery pavilion.

5.2.5. Residents' Initiatives

Toestand supported grassroots civic initiatives that engaged the community in public space activities. The most recognizable project was Radio Moskou—an outdoor radio studio that gained popularity through live broadcasts. Passersby often sat in front of the studio to listen to the broadcasts, with some returning weekly to contribute their music, reports, or topic suggestions. Radio Moskou became a platform for promoting local events and artists.

Residents, organized around the association, created a public composting station in the square, while others ran weekly bicycle repair workshops and reading sessions for children. They also organized communication workshops and gatherings centered around communal cooking[248].

5.2.19.

Photo 5.2.19. Outdoor gallery.
Photo 5.2.20. Children's workshops.
Photo 5.2.21. Communal feasting on the square.

5.2.20.

5.2.21.

[248] Report published on 13.05.2018 by Bruzz portal
https://www.bruzz.be/videoreeks/zaterdag-12-en-zondag-13-mei-2018/video-marie-moskou-buurtbewoners-moeten-plein-opnieuw, [accessed: 14.10.2024].

Photo 5.2.22. *Radio Moskou.*
Source: facebook.com

5.2.6. Final Report[249]

The activities carried out by Toestand on the square were primarily project-based, although the team also actively acted as the role of social animators. Theirpresence on the square allowed them to familiarize themselves with the localcommunity, understand its needs, and observe how people used the space. This became the foundation for creating design proposals for a new square tailored to those needs. After over two years of work, in August 2018, Toestand released a report outlining the key elements that should be incorporated into the future Marie Janson Square.

The report addressed several crucial aspects. One priority was integrating the square with its surroundings, which was to be achieved by ensuring continuity of the terrain, eliminating architectural barriers, reducing the number of parking spaces, and limiting car traffic around the square. It placed significant emphasis on providing spaces for various user groups. Based on prior observations, Toestand proposed installing various types of seating to meet the needs of diverse square users.

The report also included the area's specific characteristics and how the space was utilized. The proposed designs for urban furniture and the choice of materials aimed to ensure durability against vandalism and heavy usage. The selection of vegetation was limited to trees, with grass and shrubs excluded as they did not align with the way the square was used.

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[249] Toestand, *Key…*, op.cit.
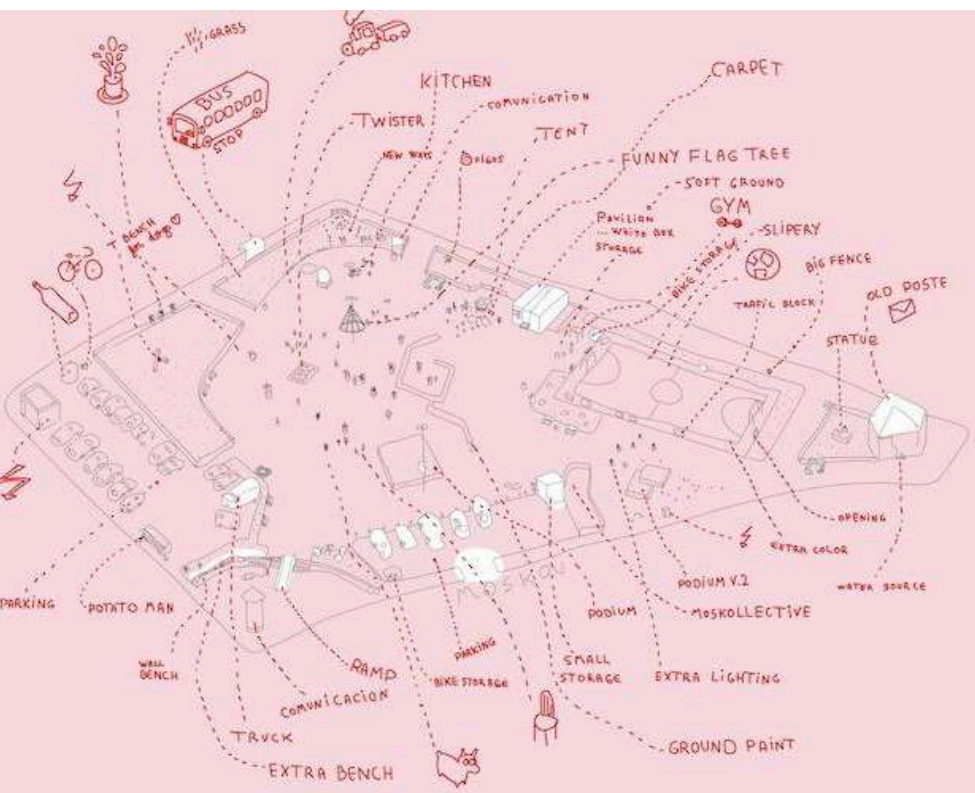
Figure 5.2.2. *Proposed layout of the square*
Source: Toestand, »Key Elements.«[252]

Photo 5.2.23. *Discussing the report with residents.*
Source: facebook.com[251]

5.2.23.

A key element of the project was engaging children and youth in public space. This approach made them full-fledged members of the space and fostered a sense of responsibility for the square—they *adopted* it as their own[250]. Instead of creating a closed-off play zone, Toestand proposed scattered play elements that allowed children to move freely between different activities. Integrating children's areas with other functions of the square, such as market shopping or dining, was intended to attract a broader range of users. The needs of teenagers were also addressed by enhancing the presence of the sports field and providing additional sports equipment around the square.

The report also included recommendations for other user groups, such as dog owners and local associations, which would require facilities to organize events for residents in the future.

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[250] See page 159.
[251] https://www.facebook.com/MarieMoskou,[accessed: 25.11.2024].
[252] Toestand, Key…, op.cit.

5.2.7. Innovative Aspects of Toestand's Work

Toestand is a pioneer of grassroots architectural activity in Brussels, a fact that has contributed to both its growing recognition and controversies surrounding its activities.

One of the innovative aspects of Toestand's work was its effort to deeply understand the latent needs and motivations of the square's users. Relying solely on direct feedback from users—whether through surveys or structured meetings—was not sufficient to fully understand the issues.

This deeper understanding arose from the realization that users' statements could be influenced by an incomplete understanding of the broader context, personal aesthetic preferences, interpersonal conflicts, or fear of judgment. Toestand operated under the assumption that designers working with communities must comprehend the authentic causes behind statements and actions. Instead of directly asking questions about specific issues, such as the placement of benches or the type of tables, it is more effective to focus on discussions around peripheral topics. Analyzing the broader context and observing behaviors enable a more accurate alignment of solutions with users' needs.

According to the team, the critical stage of a new space or structure's life cycle is when users adapt to it in the first few weeks or months after its introduction. Reactions to such changes can vary widely—from excitement and curiosity to confusion, irritation, or even vandalism. Consequently, Toestand emphasized the importance of closely monitoring the space during this period and restoring it to its original condition, if such a need arises. This phase is vital for the future functioning of the space as users engage with it, develop new Habits, and internalize its rules. New activities are also being created.

If the space's condition can be maintained during this period, users will gradually start to perceive it as an integral part of their environment. Simultaneously, the project itself adapts to its users and surroundings. Observations during this phase can prove valuable, as it can guide adjustments to the space, on the condition of a sufficient budget. This approach to the early operational phase can reduce future maintenance costs and prolong the space's durability.

The same principle applies to aesthetics, whether for temporary interventions or finalized designs. It takes time for people to recognize the functional value of such solutions, as their initial reactions often focus on appearance. This was particularly evident when materials were reused, or when the space consisted of donated items, as was typical for Toestand projects. Despite initial skepticism, their experience showed that users eventually appreciated the functionality and amenities these solutions offered.

5.2.8. Project Controversy

Toestand's innovative approach to architectural interventions in urban spaces sparked controversies, particularly with municipal authorities. The primary criticism revolved around a perceived lack of professionalism, manifesting in their failure to meet all regulations concerning public space order, safety, and accessibility. Some installations also lacked formal approval from relevant offices, resulting in their removal by local authorities.

The Toestand team explained that formal constraints would limit their effectiveness. Their goal was to experiment, which, given limited resources, necessitated compromises. They acknowledged that their actions often fell outside conventional frameworks, leading to misunderstandings with administrators adhering to rigid rules.

For designers engaged in participatory processes, social conflicts over space usage are standard and not necessarily negative. Similar issues arose during the Marie Moskou project, where critical opinions and complaints emerged. While the municipality viewed these as indicators that the space did not fully meet residents' expectations, Toestand considered them an inherent part of the creative process.

Both sides believed there was a lack of willingness to communicate and reach mutual understanding.

5.2.9. New Design for the Square

Toestand completed its work in October 2019, and the architectural competition for the detailed design and realization of the new square was resolved later that year. According to the initial timeline, the competition was supposed to take place a year earlier, during the first half of Toestand's on-site activity. This would have enabled a seamless transfer of knowledge and greater involvement of both groups in the design process. Unfortunately, this plan was not fully implemented, leaving only a short period for collaboration between Toestand and the architects from VVV. Both teams expressed regret that their relationship had not been closer—Toestand could have had more confidence in the continuity of its work, while VVV might have gained a deeper understanding of the implemented changes and the spirit of the place.

Nonetheless, the VVV studio demonstrated great diligence in incorporating the guidelines outlined in Toestand's report, which had been discussed during joint consultations. The architects made an effort to integrate these recommendations fully into the new design, and the results are clearly visible. All key elements that mattered to residents and were included in the report were realized, meeting the local community's expectations.

Residents felt they had a genuine influence on shaping the square, which encouraged active participation in discussions about it. Meetings were positive in tone, and participants provided constructive feedback, showing an understanding of the design principles—even regarding the reduction of parking spaces, which typically faces resistance. However, in the case of the Marie Moskou project, this issue was met with acceptance .

The first workshops focused on the market's operation and nearby shops in the context of the new square. Architects reached out to shopkeepers and vendors to discuss the project. Subsequent workshops targeted residents, who worked in small groups on various aspects of the design. Their feedback was incorporated into the final design.

The VVV team also organized a walk to present the project's main concepts. Additionally, they spent two days at the square to personally present the design to anyone interested. Although this was a brief presence, it allowed them to engage with senior citizens who had not participated in earlier workshops.

The new design, in addition to addressing social aspects identified by Toestand, was created with climate change adaptation and urban resilience in mind. The implementation included extensive greenery and permeable surfaces to support natural water management. The square's striped layout, with zones running across the slope, helps retain rainwater, creating a green buffer. The square also intersects a drainage system to aid water infiltration. Furthermore, existing trees were harmoniously integrated into the new layout, granting them a prominent role in the revitalized space.

Construction of the new design lasted nearly two years, and the square officially opened on July 1, 2023. Since then, it has gained significant popularity and become a hub of various activities. A year into its use, the space remains in excellent condition.
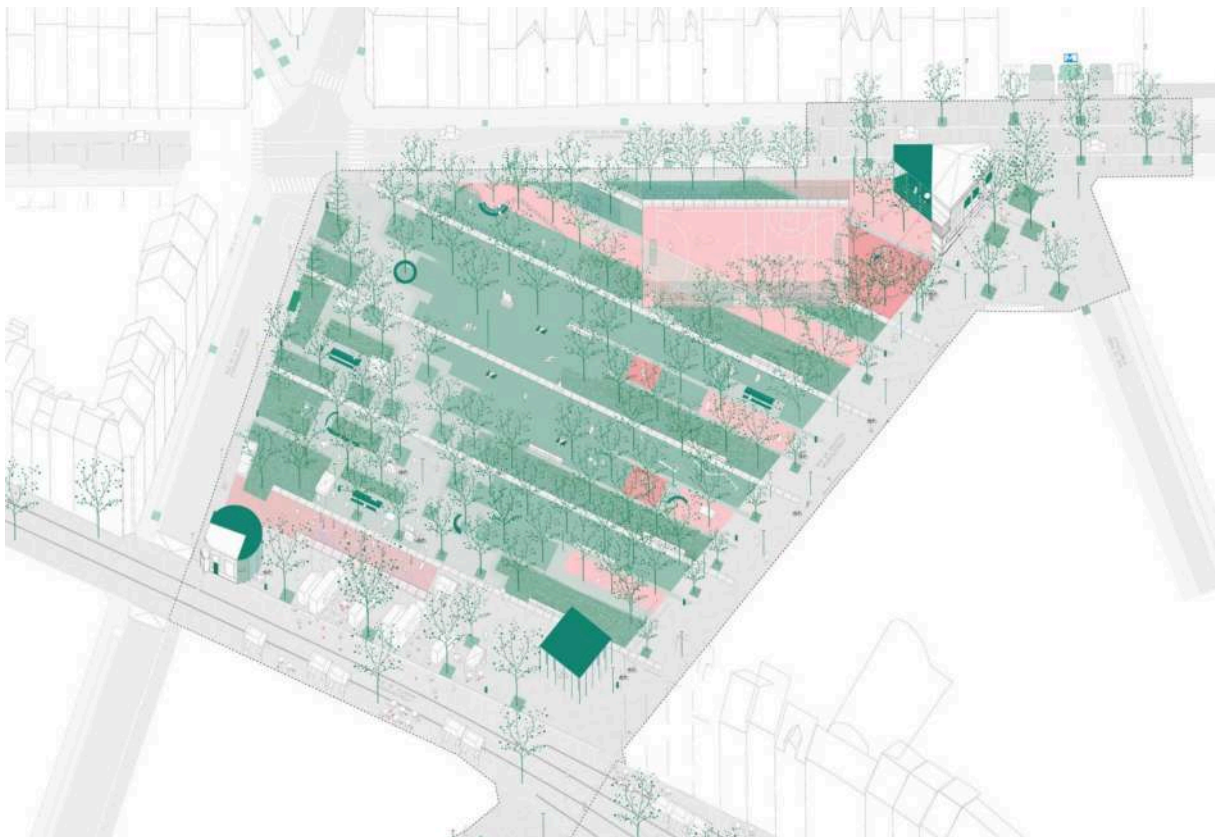
Figure 5.2.3. New design of Marie Janson Square
Source: vvvarchitectes.be[253]

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[253] https://vvvarchitectes.be/plaine-Marie-Janson. [accessed: 25.11.2024].

5.2.24.

5.2.25.

5.2.26.

5.2.27.

Photo 5.2.24. Boules court,
July 2023, by M. Siemińska ❮

Photo 5.2.25. Different pavements
to provide a variety of uses,
July 2023, by M. Siemińska ❮

Photo 5.2.26. Children's installations
integrated with the square design,
July 2023, by M. Siemińska ❮

Photo 5.2.27. A passage crossing
the square, July 2023, by M. Siemińska ❮

Photo 5.2.28. Dedicated space for
a food market, July 2023,
by M. Siemińska

Photo 5.2.29. Variety of ways to use
the square, July 2023, by M. Siemińska

5.2.28.

5.2.29.

5.2.10. Summary

The initial activities in the square raised some doubts about their legitimacy. The municipality did not promote the Toestand team's work, leading to questions about the actual level of support the local administration provided for the project. Additionally, resident engagement remained low during the first year of their operations, only gradually increasing over time. In retrospect, one can state that the longer startup period proved essential and yielded positive results. Unfortunately, the elements of the square developed with residents were removed to make space for a relocated market. This limited the possibility of thoroughly testing those elements. However, their brief implementation period was sufficient to evaluate their usefulness. This analysis was published by Toestand in the form of a report, which served as a foundation for competition design proposals, enabling more detailed and resident-oriented solutions.

The winning project, designed by VVV and Paola Vigano, most effectively incorporated the insights developed by Toestand. Their collaboration with the square's users focused on refining the project's details. It is worth noting, however, that the group of residents involved in these consultations was not representative—a fact acknowledged by VVV architects—and the time allocated for participatory activities was limited. Nevertheless, without Toestand's prior work, the participatory process might have been significantly more superficial.

This project also stands out for its high quality, as measured by placemaking[254] principles. The space began to attract more users, including women and children, who previously avoided the area due to a lack of suitable functions and a feeling of insecurity. The introduction of lighting and an open path intersecting the square improved safety, allowing residents to use the space even after dark. The square also alleviated the pressure on the nearby Parvis de St-Gilles, especially on market days, which contributed to activating another part of the neighborhood. Ultimately, the project also positively influenced the image of the St-Gilles municipality, enhancing its promotion among other Brussels municipalities.

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[254] Placemaking is an approach to urban planning and public space management, based on the potential of the local community. Its goal is to create places that support the vitality of cities and the well-being of users. It combines urban design principles with a focus on the identity of the place, while also having a social and political dimension.

The Marie Moscou project is an excellent example of implementing a process in the spirit of participatory action research, even though its creators did not formally define it as such. The Toestand team undertook numerous actions to support the development of the local community and promote sustainable solutions:

- They fostered the community's capacity to independently solve problems by engaging residents and uniting them around shared goals.

- They promoted social equity by implementing an inclusive process open to the needs of all social groups.

- They treated local knowledge as key to understanding problems and designing effective spatial interventions, making it the basis of the final design.

- They conducted participant observations, which formed the foundation for their research on the square's space.

- They explored the space primarily through action, experimentation, and resident collaboration.

- They introduced ecological solutions, promoting urban vegetation and using recycled materials[255].

[255] Based on the study by: Jan N. Hughes, Commentary: Participatory Action Research Leads to Sustainable School and Community Improvement, School Psychology Review, 32(1), 2003, p. 39, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242278841_Commentary_Participatory_Action_Research_Leads_to_Sustainable_School_and_Community_Improvement#fullTextFileContent, [accessed: 22.11.2024].

5.3.

Jacques Franck Square

This case study is based on:

- desk research analysis,
- documentation from the private archive of New South architects,
- participant observations conducted at the square in 2018, 2019, and 2023,
- analysis of residents' statements in the Saint-Gilles MIDI / SOUTH / ZUID Facebook group[256],
- information obtained through semi-structured interviews with the architects responsible for coordinating the project, Alice Larsimont and Chloé De Salins,
- unstructured interviews and conversations with residents and local activists conducted, among others, during observations.

Among the individuals I interviewed were:

- Frédérique Versaen, an activist and later a councilor for the St-Gilles municipality,
- Béatrice Afonso, a resident of Jacques Franck Square, who pursued legal actions to change its design.

Alice Larsimont is an architect and coordinator of the *Sustainable Development Agreement for the Midi district (CQD Midi)* on behalf of the St-Gilles municipality. Chloé De Salins, an architect from the New South office, was responsible for the new design and the participatory process at Jacques Franck Square.

5.3.1. The Fontainas District Context

The urban challenges of the St-Gilles municipality, particularly its lower part, were discussed in detail in subsection 5.2.1. The Fontainas district[257], where Jacques Franck Square is located, stands out in the neighborhood due to its unique urban character. In the 1970s, the dense historical development was stopped, due to the construction of two Foyer du Sud residential towers, each with 18 floors and 107 apartments. A semi-underground parking lot with sports fields was built on its roof. However, the third element of the complex—a facility intended to serve as a nursery and senior center—was never completed. While the project faced criticism, it had one significant advantage: it created one of the few open public spaces in this part of the district.

In the 1980s, a third residential block was built, and significant changes occurred in the area surrounding the towers in subsequent years. In 1991, the buildings were modernized, during which the originally designed balconies and loggias were removed. Furthermore, the size of a parking lot was reduced, and the sports fields were replaced by row houses. Over time, the area surrounding the towers transformed into a parking lot, displacing green spaces and pedestrian pathways.

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[256] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595151270779689, [accessed: 25.11.2024].
[257] The municipalities in Brussels are divided into districts, which in turn are subdivided into constituencies.

The quality of the space significantly deteriorated. Issues with the surface and uneven terrain made pedestrian movement difficult. During rainfall, the entire square turned into a muddy area. Insufficient lighting contributed to the gathering of undesirable groups, increasing the sense of insecurity at night. Residents began to avoid the area, particularly after dark. Additionally, basic infrastructure, such as benches and spaces dedicated to children, was lacking, limiting the square's usability[258].

Figure 5.3.1. *Satellite photo of Jacques Franck square*
Source: bruciel.brussels

5.3.2. Unsuccessful Participation

The square's renovation was included in the Sustainable Development Agreement for the Fontainas district, which lasted from 2007 to 2011. In addition to the work on Jacques Franck Square, the agreement covered the renovation of all adjacent spaces, including Vlogaert Street, Fontainas Street, and Place des Héros. The project was carried out, supervised, and funded by a single third party: Beliris[259].

The public consultation process began in 2011 and lasted three years. During this time, residents had the opportunity to submit opinions and ideas to the municipal office, at neighborhood meetings, or through social workers. The square was intended to become more open and welcoming to residents[260]. The main guidelines for the development plan included:

- ☑ transforming traffic flow to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists,
- ☑ greening the space and creating a large sports area,
- ☑ ensuring connectivity between Jacques Franck Square and other parts of the district,
- ☑ installing adequate lighting and infrastructure, such as benches and children's equipment,
- ☑ adapting the area to meet the needs of people with limited mobility.

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[258] Based on conversations with residents.
[259] Beliris is a political agreement of cooperation between the Belgian federal government and the Brussels-Capital Region, which makes Beliris a partner of the regional administration of Brussels, playing a key role in the development of the Brussels region, particularly in the areas of spatial planning and mobility.
[260] https://www.beliris.be/presse/le-quartier-fontainas-a-saint-gilles-fait-peau-neuve.html, [accessed: 16.10.2024].

The square's redevelopment plan was published in 2014, but it met significant dissatisfaction from residents, who spent the following years trying to influence its final design. Removing many beautiful trees, which provided a respite in this densely built-up area, was particularly controversial. Despite numerous resident interventions, which gained media attention, over 50 trees were cut down at the end of 2017[261].

Another major disappointment was the lack of new, eagerly awaited infrastructure (aside from seating). To make matters worse, the size of the sports field, which is so important to local youth, was to be reduced. Residents repeatedly wrote to municipal representatives and even submitted an official petition to the main Council, calling for changes to the project. Local architects supported this appeal[262]. However, none of the calls were incorporated into the plan.
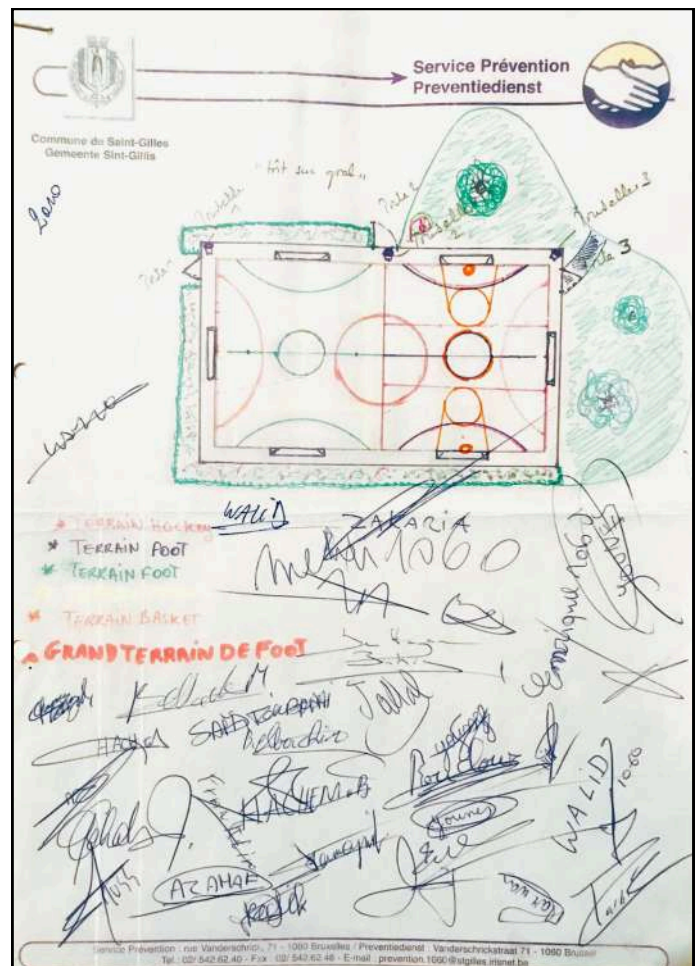
Figure 5.3.2. Drawing created in 2013 by local youth, attached to correspondence with municipal authorities
Own source.
Figure 5.3.3. Project plan published in 2017
Source: contratsdequartiers1060.wordpress.com [263]

[261] Based on comments from the Facebook group Saint-Gilles MIDI / SOUTH / ZUID.
[262] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595151270779689/posts/1738560946438720/, [accessed: 16.10.2024].
[263] https://contratsdequartiers1060.wordpress.com/2017/09/04/cq-fontainas-le-nouveau-square-jacques-franck-seance-info/, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

5.3.1.

Photo 5.3.1. Residents' protest meeting against tree cutting
Source: facebook.com[265]

The renovation of Jacques Franck Square was completed in the second half of 2018. When residents were presented with a paved-over space lacking satisfactory infrastructure, their outrage grew even more substantial. Criticism, in addition to the excessive use of concrete on the surface of the square, was directed toward the stone seating blocks without backrests, which residents likened to tombstones[264]. To address this, local activists and the youth constructed temporary wooden benches, deck chairs, and covers for the stone benches. These proved to be more comfortable and frequently used alternatives. Flower pots created by the residents also turned out to be a significant success, becoming objects of their daily care. These pots were placed across the square, adding life and color to the space.

The only attractions for children were games painted on the floor and wooden posts. The sports field also failed to serve its purpose—it was small and lacked seating chairs. The. poorly selected surface also failed to absorb sound, causing every shot at the metal goal to echo loudly. Combined with the limited greenery, sports activities were a nuisance for nearby residents. The visual design of the field was also criticized, with youth comparing playing there to being in prison or swimming in an aquarium[266]. Efforts to improve its visual appeal included a mural created in 2022 by a Belgian artist in collaboration with local youth.

Further problems included poorly chosen lighting, which was glaring, and pavement that, although theoretically designed for individuals with limited mobility, had uneven levels.

[264] Based on statements from the Facebook group Saint-Gilles MIDI / SOUTH / ZUID and conversations with residents.
[265] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595151270779689/, [accessed: 16.10.2024].
[266] Based on statements from the Facebook groupSaint-Gilles MIDI / SOUTH / ZUID.

Photo 5.3.2. Concrete plaza with »prison-like« playground, stone benches and wooden seats built by youth, February 2019 by M. Siemińska

Residents and activists from local social organizations had hoped for the square's revitalization, which had been planned for over a decade. They expected it to improve their quality of life and create a welcoming space for leisure activities. However, when their needs and efforts were ignored, they felt betrayed by the investor. The participatory measures were only superficial, as all conclusions drawn from consultations and workshops were ultimately dismissed. After the project presentation, none of the proposed changes were implemented, and protests and appeals were left unaddressed.

Despite such a turn of events, residents did not give up on efforts to improve the square's quality. These efforts were significant to younger individuals associated with youth organizations. As the examples mentioned earlier demonstrated, residents actively created a more functional and welcoming space by independently organizing alternative solutions that met their needs and fostered social integration.

5.3.3.

5.3.4.
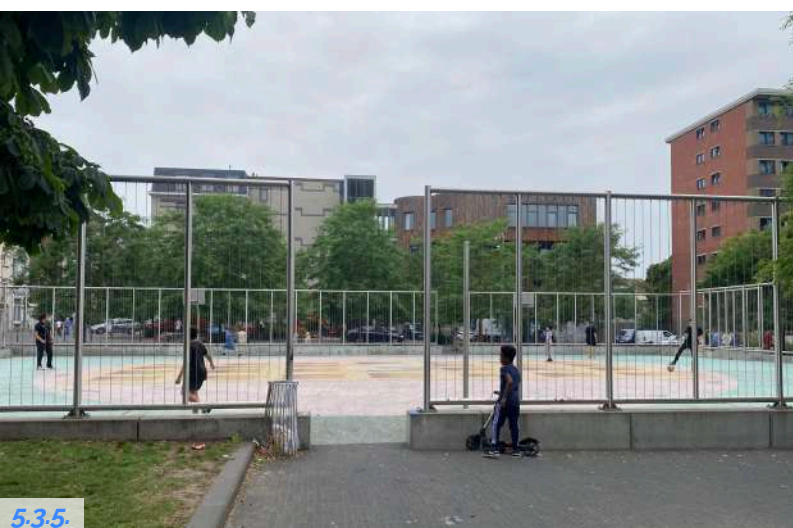
5.3.5.

Photo 5.3.3. *Plant boxes built by residents*
July 2023, by M. Siemińska
lipiec 2023,

Photo 5.3.4. *Residents prefer to spend*
time on wooden benches, July 2023
by M. Siemińska

Photo 5.3.5. *A court with a waffle painted*
on the surface, June 2023
by M. Siemińska

5.3.3. Grassroots Resident Activities

Strong social mobilization and activism for creating a welcoming public space are evident in the lower district of St-Gilles. Residents eagerly participate in various initiatives supporting the local community. Numerous organizations operate in the area, uniting youth, supporting children, promoting an ecological lifestyle, and launching neighborhood initiatives. Additionally, several groups of educators, social mediators, and *peacekeepers*—a civic service maintaining order—are active. Social workers from the local CPAS[267] unit play a vital role in ensuring childcare and organizing leisure activities. They also animate senior groups and support immigrants in their adaptation process. By working closely with residents, they understand the local community's needs and offer assistance in addressing daily challenges.

The district of St-Gilles is also home to the *Comité d'Habitants*, or the *Informal Residents' Committee*, which brings together individuals engaged in to the neighborhood and community development. Members share information, propose new initiatives, discuss events, and collectively solve local issues. The committee includes small business owners, educators, and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

Events for residents, such as neighborhood festivals, community picnics, and garage sales, are also organized in and around Jacques Franck Square. Activities for children and youth are abundant, often focusing on beautifying and greening public spaces, which helps strengthen the sense of community.

Photo 5.3.6. Arrangement of the square in front of one of the towers, June 2023 by M. Siemińska

5.3.6.

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[267] Centre Public d'Action Sociale (CPAS) - The Public Centre for Social Welfare

5.3.7.

5.3.8.

Photo 5.3.7. *»Pôze Midi« - district celebration, April 2022*
Source: facebook. com[268]

Photo 5.3.8. *Community feast, J. Franck Square, June 2024*
Source: facebook. com[269]

[268] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595151270779689/, [accessed: 16.10.2024].
[269] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009554632981&locale=pl_PL, [accessed: 16.10.2024].

5.3.9.

Photo 5.3.9. *A bulodrome and a bench built by residents as part of neighborhood celebration, June 2023*
Source: facebook. com[270]

Photo 5.3.10. *Depaving of the street next to the square to plant vegetation. These activities were carried out together with children from a local school, September 2022*
Source: facebook. com[271]

Photo 5.3.11. *Decorations on the square's fence.*
Source: facebook. com[272]

5.3.10.

5.3.11.

[270] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1595151270779689/, [accessed: 16.10.2024].
[271] Ibidem.
[272] Ibidem.

5.3.4. A New Participatory Process

Redeveloping Jacques Franck Square has been a frequent subject of public debate. Dissatisfaction with the project's current form was also voiced during the district diagnosis conducted by CityTools[273]. In response to these concerns, the municipality allocated part of its budget for the square's revitalization and announced a public competition for an adaptation project. The architectural firm New South won the competition in collaboration with Lokus, a landscape architecture studio.

5.3.12.

The winning proposal stood out for its comprehensive participatory approach, which emphasized the active involvement of the local community in the design process. The architects maintained a strong on-site presence for four months as part of this approach. A strategy of *open-door* meetings was implemented, consisting of weekly architectural consultations held on the ground floor of a building near the square. These sessions allowed residents to meet the designers, share their ideas, and discuss project progress over coffee.

On days without consultations, the architects observed, met, or conversed with the square's users. This consistent on-site presence allowed them to better understand the space's daily dynamics and users' needs. It also ensured transparency and facilitated direct contact with the residents.

Photo 5.3.12. Temporary murals on the sidewalk created by children, July 2020
Source: facebook. com [274]

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[273] CityTools, Contrat de quartier durable Midi. Diagnostic, Brussels, 2021, https://quartiers1060.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/02%E2%80%94MIDI%E2%80%94PRIORITES%E2%80%94FR.pdf, [accessed: 17.10.2024].
[274]https://mjfcjmp.wordpress.com/2020/07/23/mj-le-bazar-street-art-ephemere-sur-le-square-jacques-franck/, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

An integral component of the project were thematic meetings and walks aimed at specific user groups. The objective was to engage individuals who had previously used the square less frequently. Local associations played a key role in reaching out to groups such as mothers, young girls, and seniors. Meetings were also organized with parents of children attending the local daycare and with youth groups.

A diverse group of residents was gathered as part of the co-creation workshops held directly at Jacques Franck Square. The success of this meeting was largely attributed to a change in location. Initially planned in a formal setting in a venue further from the square, the architects moved it to the central part of the square, given favorable weather conditions. This proved to be the right decision. A small initial group of participants quickly expanded as passersby, recognizing familiar faces or drawn by curiosity about the model, stopped to join the meeting. Among the participants were mothers taking care of their children playing in the square and young people, particularly boys, who might have been less inclined to attend a formal event. The informal atmosphere of the meeting allowed these individuals to express their opinions and listen to others before returning to their peer groups. This diverse assembly juxtaposed various visions and expectations for the square's redevelopment.

Simultaneously, meetings were held with local representatives and decision-makers. Originally organized indoors, these gatherings were often moved to the square, enabling direct observation and analysis of the space. The culmination of the process was a summary event, initially planned as a neighborhood celebration. However, it was eventually integrated into the district's festivities. During this event, the architects presented the outcomes of several months of work and the final design, summarizing the participatory process.

Photo 5.3.13. Research walk with local youth, April 2023
Source: facebook. com [275]

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[275] https://www.facebook.com/mj.lebazar.5, [accessed: 23.11.2024].

5.3.14.

5.3.15.

Additionally, a survey was distributed to receive residents' opinions on the new square's layout. However, the response was limited, and this method of collecting feedback was deemed ineffective[276].

The municipality's website and social media platforms communicated project-related information to residents. This was supplemented by posters, leaflets, and email invitations to reach the broadest possible audience.

Collaboration with the municipality was a key element of the project for the architects. They established a temporary office in the municipal office space, enabling regular meetings with residents and local stakeholders. The municipality's support also provided access to a vast network of contacts, significantly facilitating connections with local associations. Without the municipality's mediation, reaching many organizations would have been considerably more challenging. This collaboration also enabled engagement with groups typically less visible in public spaces.

Photo 5.3.14. *Meeting around the model at the headquarters of one of the youth organizations, October 2023.*
Source: facebook. com [277]

Photo 5.3.15. *Meeting in the Jacques Franck square, October 2023*
Source: instagram. com [278]

[276] Based on an interview with Chloé De Salins.
[277] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009554632981, [accessed: 23.11.2024].
[278] https://www.instagram.com/lokus_landscape/ [accessed: 23.11.2024].

Figure 5.3.4. *The new plan of the square, presented during the meetings*
Own source.

Figure 5.3.5. *One of the boards with ideas submitted by the residents.*
Own source.

Adaptation of Jacques Franck square

- *benches - seats and backs made of wood*
- *remove the fence on Cesar de Paepe + sidewalks to facilitate pedestrian communication*
- *rearrange the benches on Plaza de Heros*
- *enlarge the edging around the trees*
- *take into account pedestrian routes*
- *more greenery and landscaping for children*
- *bicycle parking is misplaced*
- *green space for eating meals*
- *games for children*
- *place basketball baskets outside the field*
- *add more street work-out equipment*
- *see railings around the space for small children*
- *picnic table*
- *interest in supervising a community garden*
- *vegetation*
- *fencing to prevent spills in the Fontanais area*
- *remove parking spaces behind the residential tower*
- *take into account the movement of pedestrians*
- *picnic table*
- *create an enclosure for dogs*
- *ping-pong table*
- *greenery*
- *street work-out*
- *J. Franck square - it is often very intense here*
- *strengthen the position Fontanais square - add benches, lawn for picnics*
- *wooden benches*
- *it is important to respect and incorporate initiatives residents (e.g., plant boxes)*
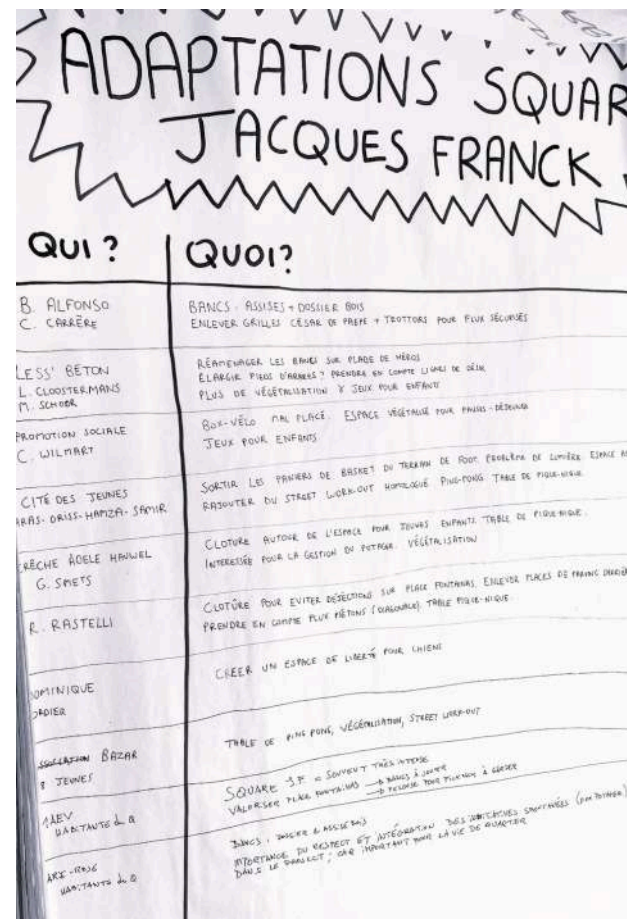
5.3.5. Summary

An essential aspect of the design process for Jacques Franck Square was the engagement of residents, which was planned as early as the competition proposal stage. The prolonged presence in the area and diverse participatory methods were crucial for a detailed analysis of the needs and expectations of different user groups. This approach also allowed the architects to address the existing spatial constraints directly.

While the architects considered this experience valuable, it was also particularly challenging. Balancing the preparation of project documentation with intensive meetings involving residents, decision-makers, and local activists posed a significant challenge. However, this approach helped prevent an escalation of socio-political crises and spatial conflicts surrounding the square. Acting as mediators, the architects were able to establish compromises between various stakeholder groups, which often strongly emphasized their individual needs.

The architects' observations confirmed the strong connection between residents and the square, which served as a vital space for daily life and social interactions and a symbol of community identity. This bond was evident in the minor, self-initiated improvements made by residents to make the space more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. The community's involvement reached far beyond spatial initiatives to political actions, without which another participatory process, resulting in improvements to the square's design, likely would not have taken place.

The architects from New South and Lokus faced the challenge of rebuilding the community's trust in municipal authorities. This responsibility placed significant pressure on them to ensure that the new project met residents' expectations.

Jacques Franck Square is characterized by a complex and often conflicting array of interests. This required the designers to be flexible and capable of reconciling diverse visions and user needs while considering budgetary constraints. Although the project's implementation has only just begun, the architects committed to preserving elements created by residents, such as plant containers, as a testament to the enduring collaboration and respect for the local community's contributions.

6.

Conclusions: Cognitive and Applicatory

According to Foucault[279], critique functions as a creative tool that transforms ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting. Critiquing the theoretical assumptions underpinning our actions opens new paths for reflection.

In architectural and design practice, critical reflection requires moving away from standard, learned design patterns, where urban space is primarily treated as creating aesthetically pleasing buildings and spaces, adhering to design and construction standards. Critical design practice, emerging from action research, seeks new pathways to generate knowledge and ideas beyond the traditional focus on form, product, infrastructure, and context[280]. The emphasis shifts to the learning process—both for the designer and the community they collaborate with. While this research strategy prioritizes action over theorizing, reflecting on one's practice leads to generalizing experiences. This enables the production of knowledge that bridges practice and theory, making it applicable for others.

I also address how to effectively build social engagement in the design process by analyzing how designers can engage in authentic participation beyond merely meeting formal requirements. Drawing on my experiences and research into innovative design practices in Brussels, I relate these reflections to the context of Wrocław, as presented below.

6.1. Designers and Participation

The Polish publishing market offers works on the broadly understood public or social participation, including spatial planning, various toolkits, and analyses of participatory tools. Below, those publications that address urban development in the spatial context are chronologically presented. Many of these are published by non-governmental organizations, such as:

- "Wzmocnienie udziału mieszkańców i mieszkanek w kształtowaniu lokalnych polityk publicznych" (*Reinforcing the participation of residents in shaping local public policies*) by the Foundation for Local Democracy Development[281],

- "Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w 2023 roku" (*Tools for Local Participation in Poland in 2023*) by the Batory Foundation[282],

- "Przepis na plan. Narzędziownik" (*Recipe for a Plan. Toolbox*) by the Sustainable Development Laboratory and Shipyard Foundation[283],

[279] Foucault M., Est-il donc important de penser?, conversation through Eribon D., Libération, 31.05.1981, in: Berger M., Van Hollebeke S. (Ed.), Designing Transdisciplinarity in Urban Research, Brussels, Metrolab Series, 2024, p. 93.

[280] Miessen M., Koszmar partycypacji+ Niezależna praktyka, Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana, Warsaw, 2016, p. 119.

[281] Choroś P., Chromniak E., Ciesielski M., Cyran-Juraszek K., Drygała P., Dudkiewicz M., Frączak P., Jaskulska M., Kłosowski W., Petroff-Skiba A. (i in.), Warsaw, 2024, https://frdl.org.pl/static/upload/store/frdl/PODRECZNIKI/FRDL_Postulaty.pdf [accessed: 1.10.2024].

[282] Dąbrowska A., Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w 2023 roku, Warsaw, 2023, https://www.batory.org.pl/publikacja/narzedzia-partycypacji-lokalnej-w-polsce-w-2023-roku/ [accessed: 1.10.2024].

[283] Karłowska A., Suchomska J., Przepis na plan. Narzędziownik, Fundacja Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych Stocznia, 2018, https://stocznia.org.pl/publikacje/przepis-na-plan-narzedziownik/, [accessed: 1.10.2024].

- ☑ "Narzędziownik partycypacji" (*Participatory Toolbox)* by the Foundation for European Studies[284],

- ☑ "Plan na plan. Partycypacja w planowaniu miejscowym" (*Plan for a Plan. Participation in Local Planning*) by the Odblokuj Association[285],

- ☑ "Anty-Bezradnik przestrzenny: prawo do miasta w działaniu" (*Anti-helpless Manual: the right to the city in action*) by the MY-POZNANIACY Association[286],

A public institution serving as a knowledge center in Polish cities is the Urban Policy Observatory (OPMR), which operates under the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR). Their reports are particularly valuable in the context of participation:

- ☑ "Partycypacja publiczna. Raport o stanie polskich miast" (*Public Participation: A Report on the State of Polish Cities*)[287],

- ☑ "Barometr Budżetu Obywatelskiego" (*Civic Budget Barometer*), editions 2020–2022[288].

Other publications funded by EU funds or published through universities include:

- ☑ "Partycypacja publiczna w zarządzaniu rozwojem lokalnym" (*Public Participation in Local Development Management*)[289] by Kozak and Wiktorska-Święcka,

- ☑ "Partycypacja społeczna w zarządzaniu przestrzennym w kontekście planistycznym" (*Community participation in spatial management in a planning context*)[290] by Hajduk,

- ☑ "Przestrzeń do dialogu" (*Space for dialogue*)[291] by Dobosz-Mucha et al.

These publications are issued mainly by non-governmental organizations. In this context, it is worth noting a document by the Polish Association of Architects (SARP) titled "Przestrzeń życia Polaków" (*Poles' living spaces*)[292]. This report is significant because it is the only one drawn up by the architectural community and directed toward architects that comprehensively addresses issues related to Poland's spatial challenges. This document contains not only analyses of various aspects of Poland's spatial development, but also a range of recommendations. These include proposals for implementing

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[284] Mróz K., Nowak K., Whitten D., Zabokrzycka M., Narzędziownik partycypacji, Wrocław, 2017,
https://feps.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/narzedziownik-partycypacyjny.pdf, [accessed: 1.10.2024].
[285] Żylski T. (Ed.), Plan na plan. Partycypacja w planowaniu miejscowym, Stowarzyszenie "Odblokuj", Warsaw, 2016,
http://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/sites/konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/files/plan_na_plan_internetowy.pdf [accessed: 1.10.2024].
[286] Mergler L., Pobłocki K., Wudars M., Anty-Bezradnik przestrzenny: prawo do miasta w działaniu, Biblioteka Res Publiki Nowej, Warsaw, 2013,
https://partycypacjaobywatelska.pl/strefa-wiedzy/biblioteka/publikacje/anty-bezradnik-przestrzenny-prawo-do-miasta-w-dzialaniu/, [accessed: 1.10.2024].
[287] Pistelok P., Martela B. (Ed.), Partycypacja publiczna. Raport o stanie polskich miast, Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warsaw – Cracow, 2019,
https://obserwatorium.miasta.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Partycypacja-publiczna_raport-o-stanie-polskich-miast-Martela-Pistelok_Obserwatorium-Polityki-Miejskiej-irmir.pdf, [accessed: 1.10.2024].
[288] Martela B., Janik L., Mróz K., Barometr…, op.cit.
[289] Kozak K., Wiktorska-Święcka A., Partycypacja…, op. cit.
[290] Hajduk S., Partycypacja społeczna…, op. cit.
[291] Dobosz-Mucha A., Przestrzeń do dialogu…, op. cit.
[292] Gadomska (Ed.), Sepioł J., Przestrzeń…, op. cit.,

integrated development planning at regional and local levels, improving architectural quality, and shaping public spaces. The report also emphasizes the need for effective mechanisms to protect cultural heritage and landscapes. Despite a decade having passed since its publication, its insights and conclusions remain highly relevant, highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by architects and decision-makers in Poland.

The report includes diagnoses of various aspects of Poland's spatial development and provides numerous recommendations, such as:

- Introducing integrated development planning at regional and local levels,
- Improving architectural quality and public space design,
- Implementing effective mechanisms for protecting cultural heritage and the landscape.

Although a decade has passed since the report's publication, its opinions and conclusions remain largely relevant. They highlight the challenges designers and policymakers in Poland still face.

The report frequently addresses participation, presenting it in the following contexts:

- Participation in municipal development processes,
- Introducing the *Coalition of Institutions* model as a tool to support the design of high-quality public spaces,
- The active involvement of residents in spatial management.

The most detailed discussion pertains to the latter aspect, which directly relates to the subject of this study. This segment is divided into several key areas, including[293]:

- Local spatial development plans,
- Legal changes related to public spaces,
- Formal and legal changes regarding the inclusion of residents in decision-making processes,
- Increasing knowledge about cities and improving access to information,
- Civic budget tools.

The recommendations primarily emphasize the need for legislative changes at the local government level and suggest general best practices. The idea of participatory design is mentioned only marginally. Unfortunately, just a few of the listed proposals have been fully implemented.

Participation, as described in "Przestrzeń życia Polaków" and other aforementioned publications, is presented as a practice carried out by urban activists and non-governmental organizations. In theory, it should be implemented by local governments—both in response to legal obligations and the efforts of activists and academic communities promoting more effective participation.

It is often limited to preparing urban planning documents, implementing civic budgets, or organizing public consultations. The best practices suggested in these publications include tools to facilitate participatory processes. However, they are usually focused solely on spatial planning and encourage residents to participate in creating local

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[293] Ibidem., pp. 191-194.

development plans. Although these recommendations appropriately extend the legal obligation for consultations, they significantly oversimplify the issue of public spaces.

The actual design scale of spaces used daily by residents often remains outside the scope of most of these studies. However, the aspects closest to residents are the functionality, friendliness, or aesthetics of streets we pass on the way to the store, forgotten squares that could serve as meeting places, or neglected courtyards with the potential to become community gardens.

The cited publications also fail to address the design practice itself— the influence that designers, including architects, have on shaping space, the responsibility this entails, and the scope of work necessary to ensure that design serves people. In the context of participation, the image of a designer that emerges from these works is reduced to just a few roles they can play.

The first role is that of a consultant who provides expert opinions and conducts analyses, such as those related to spatial layouts or changes in spatial development studies. In this role, the designer delivers advisory views to decision-makers.

The second role of the designer is that of a translator, who interprets technical and often hermetic language into a form comprehensible to a broader audience. Participating in workshops or consultation meetings, the architect is an expert who clarifies users' concerns and translates the complexities of technical drawings and design concepts.

The designer's final and most crucial task is incorporating consultation recommendations into the final design. These consultations can occur either in the early stages of the design process or toward its conclusion. In early-stage consultations, the architect determines how the collected user feedback will be interpreted, to what extent, and in what form it will be incorporated. Unfortunately, the lack of public oversight in the Polish design process means that any discrepancies can only be contested at later stages of implementation, which rarely ensures a positive outcome. On the other hand, consultations conducted at the end of the project often appear superficial. In such scenarios, the community may choose among proposed solutions or provide feedback on an already-developed design. Any changes introduced at this stage are usually limited to cosmetic adjustments, giving only an illusion of influence over the outcome.

In such situations, the designer assumes the role of a specialist, aligning more closely with decision-makers than the people for whom the space is created. The architect must adhere to regulations, and the solutions presented to users stem from a position of authority rather than collaborative creation.

Such detachment often arises from the perception that participation in the design process is merely an obstacle. Sawicki diagnoses this issue in the chapter titled "How to Reach Architects and Urban Planners with Know-How on Participation?" from the publication "Plan na plan. Partycypacja w planowaniu miejscowym" (*A Plan for the Plan: Participation in Local Planning*)[294]. Sawicki argues that practicing architects fear their creative freedom will be constrained and that projects resulting from the inclusion of non-professionals will be of lower quality. Faced daily with challenges such as negotiating with officials, investors, consultants, and contractors and navigating

regulations, designers - including architects - often view participatory activities as problematic. They interact with residents, but usually only in the context of escalating conflicts, which does not foster mutual understanding or trust.

In Polish reality, architects frequently remain in an abstract realm of vision and geometry, designing for communities without active collaboration with their members. They stay in this realm because it is where they are trained.

"The architect who draws and the urbanist who composes a block plan look down on their *objects*, buildings and neighborhoods from above and afar. These designers and drafters move within a space of paper and ink... They've (architects and urbanists) shifted from lived experience to the abstract, projecting this abstraction back onto lived experience"[295].

The concepts of **concrete space** and **abstract space** were introduced in the 1970s by Lefebvre. Yanki Lee later expanded on this idea in her work "Design Participation Tactics: Redefining User Participation in Design"[296]. In Lee's concept, a third intermediary space emerges at the intersection of concrete and abstract spaces—a **realm of collaboration**. This shared area is called *design participation*. It involves both users and designers, who can engage to varying degrees. Steering the process toward one space or another creates collaboration or emancipation opportunities. Communities contribute local knowledge and articulate their needs, while designers provide innovative solutions and professional expertise.
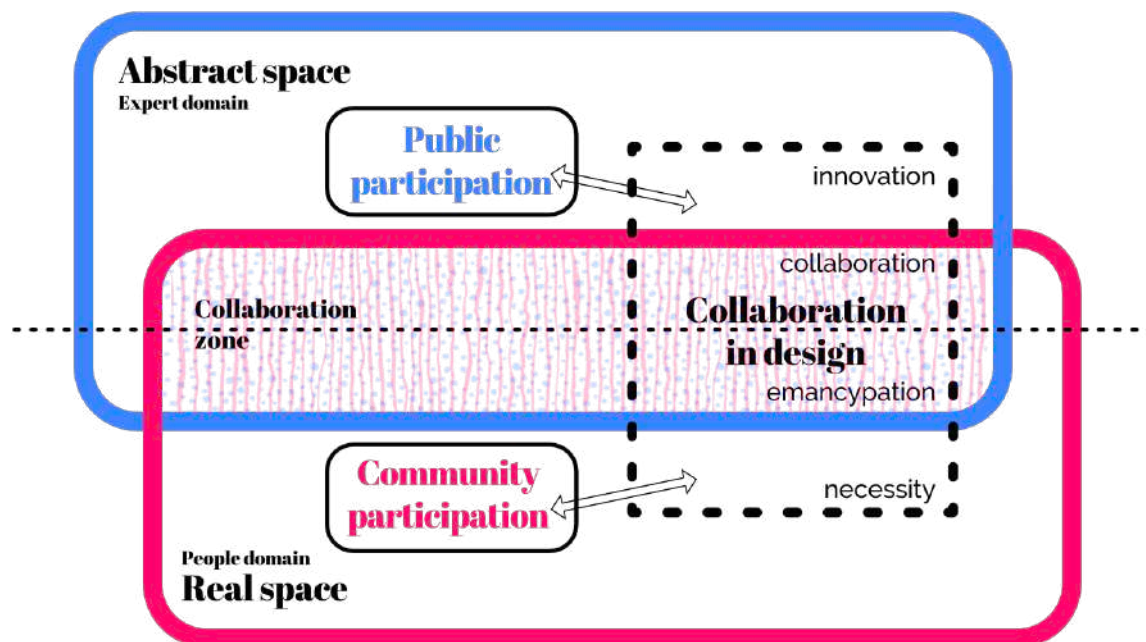
Figure 6.1. Interpenetration of Spaces - based on Lee, »Design...«[297].

[294] Sawicki P., Jak docierać do architektów i urbanistów z know-how dotyczącym partycypacji?, p. 68, in: Żylski T. (Ed.), Plan na plan., op. cit.

[295] Lefebvre H., The Urban Revolution, The University of Minnesota Press, 1970, p .183, in: Lee Y., Design Participation Tactics: Redefining User Participation in Design, 2006, p. 5.

[296] Lee Y., Design..., op.cit.

[297] Ibidem.

This model also applies to social and public participation concepts[298], expanding their meaning to include design-related aspects. Social participation focuses on activities that support community development, targeting *concrete space*. By adapting to the specific needs of a given group, it aims to address their real-life issues. In contrast, public participation relies on top-down initiatives introduced by decision-makers, who invite people to participate in the decision-making process by expressing their opinions. These processes involve many experts working within the more *abstract* realm of decision-making[299].

The person initiating the process serves as the primary criterion for classifying the type of participation. Activities falling under social participation become part of the collaborative zone—design participation—when they include significant design elements or when designers take the initiative. When public participation activities incorporate design, particularly in public spaces, they overlap with collaboration.

6.1.1. Designers as Participation Practitioners

In the Polish city design discourse, designers are rarely seen as facilitators of participatory activities, even though issues related to participation often arise in the context of architecture and public spaces. People assume that representatives from NGOs, cultural institutions, social organizations, or public officials are the ones to carry out such activities. In the traditional model of their work, designers provide paid design services focused on the client and their expectations. Their priority is client satisfaction while maintaining the designer's creative expression. Like artists, they devote a huge amount of focus to aesthetics, making each project reflect their style[300].

An analysis of examples from Western Europe, where civic engagement is higher, shows that architects can successfully lead participatory activities, resulting in improved quality of cities and their public spaces. Depending on the project's scale and the process's duration, architects can assume various roles when working with local communities. The following subsections discuss three key aspects of working as a designer who collaborates *with people* rather than solely designing *for them*, based on the projects of Maelbeek Vallée Verte, Marie Moskou on Marie Janson Square, and Jacques Franck Square.

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[298] See chapter 2.4.1 for more details.

[299] Lee Y., Design…, op.cit., pp. 5-10.

[300] Lubelska M., Architektura humanitarna–wybrane zagadnienia, [PhD dissertation, Politechnika Krakowska], Cracow, 2015, p. 342

6.1.1.1. Project scale and participatory processes

All three Brussels projects discussed in this work were of a similar spatial scale. They involved public spaces requiring the work of architects and landscape architects rather than urban planners. The distinction is essential, as participation in such projects is not mandatory under Polish law.

The scale of a project, both in terms of duration and scope, plays a significant role in the participatory process, affecting the outcome and the level of participant satisfaction. The most extended process was the revitalization of Jacques Franck Square, which lasted 12 years. This period was estimated from the first public consultations to the completion of participatory activities conducted as part of a corrective project by Lokus and New South groups[301]. The activities were not continuous, they included breaks for implementing the first phase of revitalization and grassroots initiatives. The lengthy duration negatively impacted the process's coherence and effectiveness, leading to resident frustration, loss of trust in decision-makers and designers, and significant withdrawal from decision-making processes. When new designers appeared to undertake further participatory activities at the beginning of 2023, they faced the challenge of rebuilding community trust and engagement.

The Marie Moskou project demonstrated the best process duration ratio to the resulting project's quality[302] The initial community engagement phase lasted four years and consisted of soft activities to develop recommendations for the square. Another advantage of such a prolonged presence was forming a community around the space, unlocking its potential.

Maelbeek Vallée Verte, a project in which I actively participated, was the smallest undertaking in terms of space and scope, focusing on temporary solutions. Its duration was the shortest, which affected the final implementation. Regardless of project scale, administrative procedures take a similar amount of time, meaning not all necessary approvals were obtained on time. Additionally, the local community was not highly mobilized, requiring reliance on support from already active local actors.

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[301] See page 186 for more details.
[302] See page 157 for more details.

6.1.1.2. The Role of a Designer

Participatory design requires architects and designers to *truly* possess the necessary expertise and be open to engaging with the community. The challenge lies in combining specialized knowledge with soft skills and research capabilities to create environmentally and socially responsible projects that consider residents' needs and capacities.

The success of such activities depends on the designer's attitude, including effective communication, openness to diverse opinions, and a willingness to implement innovative solutions. Equally important are organizational and mediation skills, which enable finding compromises among various stakeholders.

Regardless of the scale of the undertaken actions, the designer should adopt a long-term perspective that extends beyond individual projects and immediate needs, considering the future consequences of their decisions. Additionally, based on their comprehensive understanding of urban functions and characteristics, designers can represent the needs and interests of the community while contributing to the creation of urban knowledge and supporting the sustainable development of urban spaces.

An analysis of the Brussels projects highlights several roles designers and architects can simultaneously fulfill, serving the community and the environment alongside their traditional responsibilities as designers and operators.

1.   Initiator – Meta-designer – Caretaker

In Brussels, the requirement to include participation and its scope are specified in competition briefs, obligating architects to propose participation methods already at the project submission stage. This makes them **initiators of participatory practices, managing the process by selecting tools, supervising activities, establishing connections with local actors, and involving experts in the collaboration**. They thus take on the role of meta-designers on a micro scale, as seen in the case of the Toestand team. Residents perceived their actions as taking on the role of **caretaker—managing the space, setting rules, maintaining order, building networks, and animating activities.**

On a larger scale, the role of the meta-designer may involve coordinating participatory activities encompassing not only single neighborhoods but also multiple districts or cities. Such actions require not only direct management of community processes but also the use of advanced data analysis and the development of strategic documents that ensure coherence and consider the diverse needs of different areas and their residents.

2.   Recipient of Recommendations

The VVV office and the Lokus and New South groups began their design work by analyzing existing guidelines and diagnoses related to the designed areas. The Maelbeek Vallée Verte project was located at the lowest point of Gray Street, where people documented numerous issues and prior initiatives. Comprehensive familiarity with the documentation of a given area is a crucial **stage, helping to avoid disregarding the contributions of others in the process**, as occurred during Beliris's initial design of Jacques Franck Square, which caused significant dissatisfaction among residents.

A thorough analysis also facilitates the **selection of tools suited to the specific context and dynamics of the local community.**

3.   Moderator

When a participatory process is too short to allow for additional activities supporting planned point meetings or workshops, the architect assumes the role of an expert moderator. Their task is to **steer discussions, ensuring the active involvement of all stakeholders, which maintains the substantive quality of the meeting and keeps the conversation focused on the determined topic.**

In conflict situations, the **moderator may act as a mediator, striving to reach a consensus**. Their skills can be **expanded to include facilitation or animation** when the situation requires it.

In the initial stages of designing Marie Janson Square, members of the Latitude Platform team and architects from VVV took the role of moderators, as they inititated the participatory process. Meanwhile, architects from New South and Lokus acted as moderators during co-design workshops, mediating between residents with differing expectations for the square's use. Due to the strong attachment of each group to their concepts and the spatial and financial constraints of the project, reaching a compromise was necessary for the continued implementation of the activities.

4.   Between the Roles of Facilitator and Animator

Both functions are closely related to supporting a group in **terms of achieving its goals through collaboration**. The difference lies in their stance toward the group members. A **facilitator helps a community define a problem so that they can solve it independently.** Their role is not to provide solutions but to **guide the group through the process as an impartial leader**. A designer becomes a facilitator when the community is organized and motivated to act or when the time to work with the group is limited.

On the other hand, the primary task of an animator is to **create, mobilize, and shape the community to leverage its potential to pursue positive change**. This role directly **influences the group by fostering bonds while being at its center.** Thus, the work of a designer-animator is more demanding and requires the most significant social skills.

However, the analysis of actions of Toestand's team during their work at Marie Janson Square shows that this role **yields the most significant social and design benefits.** Initially, Toestand focused on animating the neighborhood, initiating all public space activities. After creating adequate infrastructure and gathering social potential, some initiatives emerged and were driven from the bottom up. In such cases, Toestand's role was primarily to support and facilitate the new groups' activities. Some, like Radio Moskou, eventually became independent and continued their work after the Marie Moskou project ended.

By engaging with the local community as animators, Toestand's team gained a deeper understanding of the hidden or subtle motivations and behaviors of the square's users. Combined with their architectural expertise, this allowed for exceptionally accurate diagnoses of space and its use. These diagnoses provided recommendations to improve the space's design, functionality, and integration with the surrounding district. Most of these recommendations were acknowledged and implemented by the architects responsible for the redevelopment.

Groups like New South and Lokus acted as facilitators and are working on revitalizing Jacques Franck Square. This constitutes a unique case, which highlights the residents' determination despite numerous long-standing challenges. Though marred by many negative impacts, the prolonged participatory process allowed diverse resident groups to clearly define their needs and positions concerning the project. This was possible due to the high level of determination among residents and the support of local leaders, who maintained group activity and organization throughout the project.

The complexity of the Jacques Franck Square project was further enriched by the involvement of many local organizations, which facilitated communication between architects and Square users. In this context, the designers' role extended beyond moderating dialogue to reconciling differing viewpoints and leading discussions toward compromise. This process led some participants to temper their initial expectations, resulting in a consensus that significantly contributed to the project's shared success.

While working on the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project, I undertook some responsibilities as a community animator. However, the limited time for animation efforts produced only a fraction of the outcomes achieved by Toestand. During this time, together with the Latitude Platform team, we supported the emergence of initial activities, particularly those related to flood prevention.

A designer acting as an animator or facilitator can create experimental **spatial situations**[303] during a project. These scenarios provoke users to interact with objects and each other while testing the space's functionality. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the community. Being present and active, the designer becomes a recognizable figure trusted by the residents. This trust makes it easier to guide the community toward self-organization and naturally developing a program for space usage. Moreover, the architect gains better access to marginalized or invisible groups, considering their needs in the project. If appropriately grounded, the identified or refined potential can endure through the construction phase and revitalize the completed space, creating an authentic and functional place.

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[303] See chapter 6.1.2.1. for more details.

5. Liaison of Communities and Local Stakeholders

When starting work in a new location, seeking partners is a natural and necessary step. These partners might include local leaders, active residents, local governments, neighborhood councils, local organizations, institutions, or other on-site stakeholders. Designers can join an existing contacts network, gain access to valuable local information, or initiate its creation when stakeholders are dispersed and lack influence.

Partnerships enable architects to reach residents more effectively, especially those organized around local leaders who act as intermediaries between the community and the designer, reducing distance and building trust in the design process. This is especially crucial when the time allocated for the initial project stage is limited, and participatory actions must be implemented quickly. **Leaders' support and existing local networks significantly accelerate audience engagement in such cases**. Additionally, the leaders' authority legitimizes the designer's actions, which the community might otherwise view with skepticism.

As a connector, the designer **manages the interests of various groups.** Representing the **residents, they defend their interests and explain the requirements and limitations imposed by officials or investors.** They help clarify the project's specifics and direct residents to appropriate institutions to resolve particular issues. Furthermore, they **build relationships among stakeholders, encouraging cooperation and joint efforts**.

All three analyzed projects reflect this role. Both the team working on Marie Janson Square and the Latitude Platform team had to build contact networks with local stakeholders, focusing on spatial issues while leveraging support from embedded community leaders. In the Jacques Franck Square project, architects joined an already functioning network of active residents and organizations, representing their interests before decision-making institutions.

6. Member of Inter-, Multi-, and Transdisciplinary[304] Teams

Being both a scientific and practical field, broadly understood architecture is inherently interdisciplinary, as it combines aspects of urban planning, spatial planning, construction, design and fine arts. Contemporary design increasingly requires multidisciplinarity and often transdisciplinarity—a collaboration that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Social issues, vegetation, noise, underground infrastructure, transportation, property aspects, maintenance, neighborhood safety, and spatial accessibility influence public spaces' shape and function, even though they are not directly tied to architectural design. The complexity of urban space issues necessitates collaboration among specialists from

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[304] Interdisciplinarity refers to activities within related fields. Multidisciplinarity involves combining different, often distant fields, such as architecture, sociology, or economics. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, refers to the integration of science with practice, where architectural and urban planning issues are addressed both at the scientific and practical levels, in close collaboration with industry and public administration.

various fields, as mastery of all areas is impossible. Therefore, **fostering cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration is crucial for addressing challenges as comprehensively as possible.**

All analyzed projects involved collaboration with landscape architects responsible for vegetation selection and blue-green infrastructure. In the Jacques Franck Square project, an anthropologist, who prepared a social analysis, was a part of the team, facilitating an understanding of local dynamics and resident needs in the district. For the Fairville project, including Maelbeek Vallée Verte, Plateforme Délier les Fils de l'Eau representatives collaborated with a nearby hospital to obtain a medical diagnosis of the health impacts of flooding on Gray Street, which was later included in the report.

The most diverse team was Toestand's, with each member having a flexible range of responsibilities. In addition to architectural work, team members also handled administration, graphic design, communication, project coordination, and technical tasks. Given the team's small size, multitasking was a necessity.

7.   Researcher

Both contemporary architecture and broadly understood design face numerous challenges, including climate change, social transformations, and globalization. These issues extend beyond traditional scope of disciplinary knowledge and require multidisciplinary approaches to design, innovative thinking, and unconventional actions. However, the culture of formal research in design, especially outside academia—in private, public, and non-governmental sectors—remains underdeveloped[305] and is not always treated equally with academic research.

To effectively address contemporary challenges, practical research should be prioritized as a continuation of foundational research, aiming to apply acquired knowledge. Such research can be **developmental**, exploring potential applications; **applied**, developing specific implementation concepts, such as prototypes; or **implementation-based**, applying previously developed models and patterns in practice[306].

In architecture, research strategies range from theoretical studies to qualitative research and action research focused on creating practical solutions[307]. Theoretical research provides conceptual frameworks, but **practice-oriented research effectively integrates this knowledge into the design reality**. In practical research, knowledge production follows two tracks: designers critically reflect on their work, and knowledge is directly acquired from local communities, space users, and other key stakeholders.

Designers conducting research can significantly contribute to creating local knowledge resources, forming the basis for spatial and social diagnoses, and supporting urban research laboratories.

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[305] Niedziela-Wawrzyniak, S., Wawrzyniak, C., Architektura-badania poprzez projektowanie, Builder, 25(8), 2021, p. 37.
[306] Niezabitowska E., Metody i techniki badawcze w architekturze, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice, 2014, pp. 152-153.
[307] Ibidem., p. 51.

All projects analyzed in this work involved **gathering and disseminating local knowledge**. This was achieved thanks to the work of designers-researchers, who primarily used qualitative tools such as interviews, observations, and exploratory walks. The gathered information provided a strong argumentative basis for decision-making by local government units.

At Marie Janson Square and Gray Street, applied research was conducted by testing the space through prototypes. The Latitude team also comprehensively evaluated actions, allowing the collected knowledge to benefit our future projects and the Bruxelles en Vacances program organizers in subsequent editions. Meanwhile, Toestand documented their knowledge as recommendations, which guided the VVV architects in creating the final design.

8.   Educator

A designer often acts as an educator, helping residents better understand urban planning processes, design phases, or procurement procedures. By explaining subsequent stages of work and the specifics of these activities, the designer can clarify why not all ideas can be implemented, or why their implementation requires time. When a project addresses sensitive issues, the designer strives to substantiate the necessity of certain decisions in a factual manner. This is especially relevant when it comes to shifting perspectives on urban living and functioning in the context of the climate crisis.

During work on Gray Street, we encountered such a situation, where a conflict involving reducing road concrete surfaces and preserving existing parking spaces occurred. Our task was not only to raise awareness among the community about the necessity of implementing such solutions in light of climate change, but also to consider the residents' needs. **Through a balanced approach, an educator helps illuminate the broader context of design choices, often leading to greater acceptance of the introduced changes.**

9.   Activist or Representative

Activism refers to actions aimed at "promoting, impeding, directing or intervening in social, political, economic or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society toward a perceived common good"[308]. Conversely, representativeness involves efforts to influence decisions made within political, economic, and social institutions. It encompasses activities and publications shaping public policies, legal regulations, and budgets. Through public appearances, research dissemination, or media campaigns, advocates seek to educate decision-makers and the public[309].

Both these functions can be performed by designers who, **acting on behalf of the community, may address decision-makers to seek actions, advocate for changes in regulations, or investments critical to the community.**

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[308] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activism, [accessed: 9.11.2024].
[309] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advocacy, [accessed: 9.11.2024].

An example of such an approach was the work of the Latitude team. In this project, we assumed the role of advocates for the Maelbeek River Valley community, addressing local authorities on issues such as flood risks and the need to reduce car traffic. Together with the EGEB organization, we created a network of community representatives who presented their experiences and difficulties, framing them as testimonies during an official call for action by public institutions responsible for water management.

A dessigner should also **represent the interests of those stakeholders who lack a voice—both from the past and the future. This includes future generations, the natural environment, and cultural heritage**. In this context, architecture transcends design practice and becomes a responsible endeavor to protect the natural and cultural resources that form the foundation of a community's identity and future.

This also entails **representing excluded or marginalized individuals often regarded as problematic** (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, alcohol dependency, youth, and children) **before decision-makers and the broader community**. In such cases, the designer's task is to design spaces that allow all user groups to coexist and function without excluding any of them.

Toestand exemplified this approach by treating the problematic regular users of the square as partners in co-deciding the project's form. Instead of excluding them, they created conditions for all groups to use the square safely and comfortably.

10.   Artistic Activity Coordinator / Artist

Art constitutes an integral part of public space, manifesting in playful forms, such as graffiti and street posters, and professional works, including sculptures, installations, and façade decorations. Equally crucial to the urban landscape is performative art, which becomes part of residents' everyday experiences. As a vital component of community life, **art plays a significant role in participatory processes, serving integrative, educational, and transformative functions. It can support place identity formation and strengthen residents' emotional bonds with their surroundings.**

Thus, incorporating art into participatory activities is essential. Designers can achieve this by organizing and coordinating artistic activities involving the community or through their creative work, shaping the character of space and influencing how residents perceive it. Art's use in research and design processes has the potential to stimulate reflection and empathy in both audiences and designers.

An example of such initiatives is the project in the Saint-Gilles district, where residents actively transformed Place Marie Janson by decorating and personalizing the space with painted interventions, graffiti on the entrance wall, and crocheted decorations hung on trees. The opportunity to personalize the pavilion further supported the creation ofplace identity. The Toestand team, working closely with the local community, turned a hostile and empty space into a welcoming environment, stimulating spontaneous creativity and resident initiative. Bernardo's activity - placing plants, chairs, and carpets in the square, can also be perceived as a performance art form. This act recreated images associated with domestic warmth and safety, altering the emotional perception of the space.

Similar actions took place at Jacques Franck Square, where artistic interventions aimed to make the space friendlier and more aesthetically pleasing. A Belgian artist created large-scale murals on the pedestrian walkway with children and on the sports field, introducing color and dynamism that enlivened the square's monotonous character. Additionally, spatial elements such as seating and planters, crafted and decorated by residents, became carriers of local identity.

Artistic activities in the project implemented on Gray Street primarily took on an educational character. These actions provoked conversations about neighborhood issues and sensitized residents to the presence of the concealed riverbed. Moreover, these efforts served as a tool for expressing the needs and expectations of the local community, supporting the space design process.

Table 6.1. *Designers's roles and functions during public space design.*

Role	Function	Application
Initiator	- Introduces participatory processes into the design project.	- At any project stage, but early implementation yields the most significant benefits.
Metadesigner	- Manages the participatory design process by selecting tools, supervising activities, connecting with local actors, and involving experts.	- Throughout the entire process.
Caretaker	- Acts as an informal manager of the space. - Sets usage rules, ensures order maintenance. - Builds networks among stakeholders, serving as a coordination hub for local initiatives.	- During project implementation, space and organizational support for activities are provided.
Recipient of Recommendations	- Supports the design process as a technician or expert, implementing recommendations or selecting appropriate participatory tools.	- Crucial at project initiation when incorporating pre-developed recommendations is essential.
Moderator / Mediator	- Leads discussions, ensuring active stakeholder involvement. - Assists communities in reaching consensus during conflicts.	- In situations requiring targeted support, particularly during stakeholder discussions or mediations.
Facilitator	- Aids in community self-organization, fosters stakeholder collaboration and serves as an objective guide in the process. - Defines problems and ensures smooth interactions between stakeholders and decision-makers.	- When the community is organized and motivated, or time constraints require a streamlined approach.
Animator	- Mobilizes or shapes the community, fostering its capacity for action and initiating activities. - Stimulates relationships, understands hidden motivations, and supports communities in finding drive.	- When the community needs organizational support or motivation, especially when resources allow for long-term commitment and relationship building.

Liaison of Communities and Local Stakeholders	- Manages relations between the community and decision-makers. - Represents community interests and explains the limitations faced by officials or investors. - Guides the community through processes and directs them to appropriate institutions.	- When conflicts arise between the community and decision-makers or community problems are of political background. .
Inter-, Multi-, and Transdisciplinary Team Member	- Collaborates with experts across various disciplines (landscape architects, anthropologists, sociologists, engineers) to tackle complex problems or create innovations.	- When issues demand a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach.
Researcher	- Analyzes processes, spaces, community needs, and dynamics to provide data supporting design decisions and generate local diagnoses. - Expands local knowledge resources and disseminates research findings.	- At every project stage, but particularly during the diagnostic phase.
Educator	- Educates communities about urban planning processes, design, and city adaptation to climate change. - Explains procurement processes and spatial planning principles.	- Before making decisions to mitigate or prevent conflicts.
Activist / Representative	- Represents the community to achieve systemic changes, legislation updates, or investments. - Advocates for marginalized or absent groups' interests. - Takes strategic action beyond the project, guided by the idea of the common good.	- When the issue requires systemic solutions and strategic decisions beyond the project's scope.
Coordinator of artistic activities / artist	- Organizes and coordinates artistic activities involving the community or through personal creative work. - Builds a sense of place and strengthens emotional bonds between residents and their surroundings. - Through artistic activities, fosters reflection and empathy among both participants and designers.	- At every stage of the process, aims to emotionally engage the community.

6.1.1.3. Designer and Community Dynamics

Every project has its unique character, shaped by various factors such as the neighborhood's history, demographic profile, residents' familiarity, the presence of local organizations and institutions, and the surrounding architecture. These variables affect the time required to identify and strengthen social potential, the level of residents' engagement in design activities, the relationship with the architect, and the potential for collaboration with local stakeholders.

Initially, communities may be distrustful towards designers, often associating them with decision-makers who disregard their needs. This phenomenon manifested itself in the case of Marie Janson Square, where residents were skeptical of the Toestand team's efforts, predicting their failure. Building trust took considerable time, but perseverance enabled the team to gain acceptance and a respected position within the community. Starting with informal activities rooted in familiar and universally understood contexts, Toestand reached a broad audience of Square users who spontaneously began engaging in initiatives. Over time, these activities evolved into more structured formats, opening up to a wider public.

The social capital developed during this phase became the foundation for architects from VVV to organize more formal design consultations. These meetings drew high attendance and generated significant interest, although they involved a narrower audience than Toestand's grassroots initiatives. However, such community engagement was sufficient at this stage of the process.

A similar challenge arose with the audience visiting the temporary office at Jacques Franck Square, which was predominantly composed of individuals with higher education levels, who were familiar with urban planning issues. To reach a broader audience, designers had to dedicate additional time to fieldwork and direct interactions with local groups in their everyday environments. This effort yielded the desired results—once the groups were reached, their members were already inclined to participate in the engagement process, enriching the project's dynamics. At the same time, architects observed a lack of response from residents to a distributed survey, indicating the ineffectiveness of this tool in community work.

In the Maelbeek Vallée Verte project, the initial low level of community engagement and our limited recognition necessitated investing time in building cooperation with local stakeholders. Initially, the overly formal approach to the process resulted in little response from residents. Ultimately, changing the approach and targeting specific audience groups led to establishing relationships with them.

Analysis of these experiences suggests that an **effective strategy in participatory processes is to focus on collaboration with active social groups or local leaders already operating in the area, even if their engagement pertains to other fields.** The activity of these entities provides a solid foundation for developing subsequent actions supporting the participatory process. Thanks to their rootedness in the local community, these individuals also have a natural ability to involve additional participants, increasing the likelihood of a positive response to participatory initiatives. **This targeted approach proves more effective than dispersed communications, which are often impersonal and less successful in reaching audiences.** This is particularly important in time constraints, where prioritizing effectiveness becomes crucial.

A key aspect of long-term success in participatory projects is maintaining the social dynamics achieved during the process, which requires local leaders to take the initiative. The Marie Moskou project portrays this challenge: a four-year gap between the conclusion of animation activities led by Toestand and the opening of the new square resulted in some groups actively animating the space, not returning to use it. Similar concerns are expressed by architects from New South and Lokus, who anticipate that a one-year hiatus might cause residents to lose sight of the importance of decisions made during earlier stages of the participatory process, potentially leading to misunderstandings during the project's submission phase.

6.1.2. Designer's Tools for Practicing Participation

The subject literature[310] contains researchers' opinions that active participant engagement is pivotal in participatory processes rather than the specific tools used. However, **well-selected tools that consider the project's temporal and spatial scale and the community's specifics and dynamics significantly influence the effectiveness of these processes. The essential factor is not the choice of a specific tool but its appropriate nature and adaptation to the conditions where the participatory process will be realized.**

For small, less organized, or insular communities, initiating activities through direct contact and presence in the space is recommended, as it fosters the trust necessary for residents to be open to the project. A helpful approach may combine formal aspects of the participatory process with informal activities, such as a neighborhood festival, which naturally engages the community. In time-constrained situations, designers should adopt the role of social animators, supporting the local community at every project stage. This approach minimizes the risk of implementing tools with low levels of resident engagement.

For longer-term projects, larger intervention areas, or when the community is active and well-organized, it becomes easier to find participants for workshops or working groups. If resources are sufficient, **diverse participatory tools should be employed to reach a wide range of audiences. Some individuals may respond to an online survey, while others** prefer a direct conversation in public. **Diversity can also be introduced within a single tool—an exploratory walk or weekday afternoon consultation will attract different** participants than one held on a Saturday morning.

Similarly, the choice of location affects attendance at participatory events—parents are more likely to attend when their children are provided with activities, and young people are more engaged in casual activities conducted in familiar environments. **Meetings held in public spaces, where participants may stumble upon them by chance, have a more significant potential to attract residents than those held in closed rooms, distant from the intervention area.**

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[310] Widzisz-Pronobis S., Analiza narzędzi…, op. cit., p. 233, from: Komorowska, O. Napiontek, J. Piwko, and A. Petroff-skiba, "Partycypacja na falach. Fale partycypacji," 2023.

6.1.2.1. Spatial Situations

The study of projects discussed in Chapter Four indicates that creating so-called spatial situations effectively engages local communities and incidental users of public spaces. **By arranging a location or implementing a spatial intervention that encourages spontaneous participation, users begin to interact with the space and one another.** Such practices can change the perception of a place and behavior, prompting passersby to view urban spaces differently.

This method can complement other participatory tools. The main goal here is not to directly test the space's functionality but to attract users' attention and encourage them to interact with the location and the designer-animator present and coordinate the activity. Moreover, **if spatial activities are repetitive and become a regular practice, they can foster a sense of belonging to the place among users.**

Photo 6.1. Dominique from EGEB talking about the project during »Car Free Day«, by M. Siemińska

Photo 6.2. Meeting around the model in Jacques Franck square.
Source: quartiers1060.brussels[311]

[311] https://quartiers1060.brussels/chantier/amenagements-ponctuels-du-square-jacques-franck/, [accessed: 26.11.2024].

Examples such as the Marie Moskou project by the Toestand team illustrate the idea of spatial situations by implementing minimal, yet effective interventions: placing planters, setting up chairs or seating areas for children, and designating an activity zone on a square using carpets. Similarly, in the case of the project on Jacques Franck Square, a meeting space was created in the central part of the square—a circle around a model near a playground and children's play areas. This arrangement attracted residents, enabling architects to conduct workshops and discussions. On Gray Street, painting a representation of the Maelbeek River served as such a spatial activity. The symbolism of water encouraged passersby to delve into the topic of the river and the challenges faced by the residents of the Maelbeek Valley.

Spatial interventions, acting as catalysts for social interaction, allowed users to explore their surroundings in ways that promoted social integration and participation in the collaborative design process.

Photos 6.3-4. *Spatial situations on Marie Janson Square*
Source: facebook.com[312]

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[312] https://www.facebook.com/MarieMoskou, [accessed: 26.11.2024].

6.1.2.2. Architectural Presence[313]

Architects played a crucial role in the analyzed projects, alongside spatial situations that organized meetings and attracted residents. They facilitated meetings, animated the community, and conducted spatial studies. The key idea of this approach is the **architectural presence** [314]**—the prolonged presence of the designer on-site during the project's implementation.** Practices observed in Brussels show that it can constitute a natural element of designing public spaces, residential areas, or housing buildings. The duration of presence varies depending on the project and its specifics, ranging from several days to several years. However, the goal is always the same: a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and resources in the area and establishing bonds with the community.

Architectural presence is significant as it **builds trust in both the designers themselves and the development process the residents will eventually undergo. This enables architects and designers to better understand the environment and its residents by relying on observations and experiencing the space like its users.** This developing experience provides far more relevant and detailed information than limited opinions gathered through surveys or conversations with passersby or formal meetings[315].

Participants in consultations or workshops may not fully reflect the entire community, often belonging to the most dissatisfied groups, convinced of the validity of their vision, or tied to activist circles with appropriate communication resources. They may also come from specific socio-economic groups, limiting the perspective of the entire participatory process. **To reach more excluded or less active residents and better understand or uncover the root of the problem, designers must go beyond formal meetings. Initiating activities that allow for long-term relationship — building rather than limiting interactions to one-off events is essential.**

Designers can deeply understand the local context by experiencing the space as its users do. This also enables them to experience conflicts from multiple perspectives and recognize users whose needs may have previously been invisible or ignored. Such proximity to the site and its residents fosters more insightful observations, leading to better design decisions based on a fuller understanding of a given location's social and spatial realities.

Regarding architectural presence, the key factor is the designer's time spent on-site rather than the form of idea presentation. While a professionally crafted model or a distinctive pavilion set up in a square can be an attractive addition, a model created by pupils from a nearby school[316] can be equally valuable in content. Similarly, a consultation point does not have to be a spectacular space—a collapsible tent or a local venue can be just as effective.

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[313] *La permanence architecturale* - architectural presence.

[314] https://lecoleduterrain.fr/maniere-de-faire/la-permanence-architecturale/, [accessed: 3.10.2024].

[315] See pages 158-159, 186-188.

[316] See pages 65.

Among the analyzed projects, the one implemented on Marie Janson Square demonstrated the most developed architectural presence. In this case, architects went a step further, in addition to standard tasks related to participatory design and spatial research. They created **spatial situations** that prompted users of the square to interact with objects and one another. This approach aimed to enhance community engagement and deepen their sense of belonging to the place. Additionally, it fostered mutual interactions that helped build a sense of community.

6.5.

6.6.

Photo 6.5. *Temporary pavilion built with the help of the local community on the square Marie Janson.*
Source: facebook.com[317]

Photo 6.6. *Project presentation at the Department of Urban Revitalization's unit, serving as the temporary headquarters for the architects from the New South group.*
Source: quartiers1060.brussels[318]

Photo 6.7. *Public consultation point at Jacques Franck square*
Source: quartiers1060.brussels[319]

6.7.

[317] https://www.facebook.com/MarieMoskou, [accessed: 26.11.2024].
[318] https://quartiers1060.brussels/chantier/amenagements-ponctuels-du-square-jacques-franck/, [accessed: 26.11.2024].
[319] Ibidem.

Photo 6.8. *The consultation tent of the Latitude Platform, used for maintaining an architectural presence, Place van meen, Brussels, 2020*
Source: latitude-platform.eu[321]

Architectural presence refers to a profound shift in the approach to professions involved in creating urban spaces, project management, and collaboration with public officials. It encompasses not only intellectual but also practical and technical aspects. This concept has its roots in the participatory design movements of the 1960s[320]. However, architectural presence represents an updated approach adapted to contemporary design and economic realities.

Patrick Bouchain is the most recognized figure in architectural presence. He is a French architect who has been active since the early 2000s. Bouchain has taken on various roles throughout his career, including being a developer, a political advisor, a construction manager, a fundraiser, and even a performer. His approach is distinguished by creating a network of stakeholders, encompassing collaborators, residents, local officials, neighborhood groups, and other entities[321].

Bouchain's design process begins with the **social activation of a space**, often through the opening of a small venue that serves as a restaurant, construction office, and consultation zone. In this space, passersby and interested individuals can obtain project information, share their opinions, or participate in various events, such as film screenings. This initial phase fosters relationships between architects, contractors, and the local community and creates scenarios for the future use of the space before permanent construction begins. It also facilitates **space adoption**[322], fostering a sense of ownership and the opportunity to influence its development.

Thanks to this approach, Bouchain's projects are characterized by genuine sustainability, as the final construction aligns with the needs of the specific location and effectively uses available resources[323].

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[320] See Chapter Three.

[321] https://latitude-platform.eu/works/, [accessed: 22.09.2023].

[322] https://www.spatialagency.net/database/where/organisational%20structures/bouchain, [accessed: 19.11.2024].

[323] See section 5.2.3.

[324] https://www.spatialagency.net/database/where/organisational%20structures/bouchain, [accessed: 3.10.2024].

6.1.2.3. Examples from Poland

The publication "Plan na plan", discussed earlier in this chapter, highlights the mobile pavilion known as the *White House*[325]. A project utilizing this pavilion was carried out in Warsaw districts such as Targówek Mieszkaniowy, Sadyba, and Ursynów. This pavilion is an example of a concept most closely related to architectural presence in urban space Created as part of the project *Warsaw Local Development Plans: Searching for a Participatory Model*, it was a small, wooden structure that could be easily transported on a standard trailer and assembled using an HDS crane.

The *White House* featured fold-out walls covered with graphics, while its interior displayed models, drawings, diagrams, and descriptions. Around the pavilion, elements designed to capture children's attention were set up. On-site, animators, designers, and experts engaged in discussions, interviews, and surveys with residents. In the Targówek district, the pavilion operated for three days, ten hours daily, while in Sadyba, it was available for nine days[326]. Although the mobile pavilion proved to be an effective and impactful tool for engaging residents, it was not reused due to the high production and operational costs.

6.9.

6.10.

Photo 6.9. *Public consultation at the "White House" on MPZM Sadybianka.*
Source: facebook.com[327]

Photo 6.10. *Transport of the pavilion.*
Source: facebook.com[328]

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[325] Żylski T. (Ed.), Plan…, op. cit., p. 17.
[326] Ibidem, p. 24.
[327] www.facebook.com/Odblokuj, [accessed: 20.09.2024].
[328] Ibidem.

A similar tool in its concept, but different in scale, is the *Echo* consultation cart[329], which has been successfully used in various Polish cities, including Warsaw, Poznań, Cracow, Wrocław, and Jastrzębie-Zdrój. The cart was designed by the design studio Miejskie Materie in collaboration with the Warsaw Center for Social Communication.

This cart offers mobile and versatile use, making it a practical solution for organizing consultations. While its compact size and simplicity increase functionality, they limit the possibilities for interaction between residents and consultation facilitators. Moreover, the cart's brief presence in public spaces significantly reduces its potential impact on the community and the environment, thereby limiting participation in the sense of its influence on surroundings and participants.

6.11.

Photo 6.11. *Consultation carried out with the help of Echo cart.*
Source: wroclaw.pl[330]

329 Bochenek W., "Echo", czyli nowy sposób na konsultacje społeczne!, 2022, https://www.architekturaibiznes.pl/echo-czyli-nowy-sposob-na-konsultacje-spoleczne,12163.html?srsltid=AfmBOorG92uOpfDonqVl9f8lp-o5AlB6-4Vfcc-Y8-181yyKTiK51XRl, [accessed: 15.11.2024].
330 https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/galeria/spotkania-plenerowe-jak-nas-znalezc,p,6, [accessed: 25.11.2024].

6.1.3. Summary of Cognitive Conclusion

For participatory practice to be authentic, **theorists, designers, and individuals committed to supporting the development of local communities must collaborate within an integrated system.**

Fusing various fields, methods, and perspectives while maintaining independence allows for a broader understanding of problems. It also facilitates the creation of spaces that support residents and provide them with tools for greater emancipation and fuller civic and social engagement. Designers, and particularly architects, must recognize the value of local knowledge and acknowledge the engagement of space users in its design as a foundation for sustainable and democratic urban development. As Giancarlo De Carlo noted, "**Architecture has become too important to leave it solely to architects**"[331]. Generally, this idea suggests that the process of shaping cities is an issue of such fundamental significance that it should not be confined exclusively to the domain of professional designers.

Consequently, there is also a need to **expand the scope of architects' and designers' activities, particularly in the design of public spaces.** Acknowledging a designer's impact on the urban environment entails responsibility for the outcomes of these actions. The analysis of case studies demonstrates that designers can assume various roles in shaping public spaces, depending on external factors and individual predispositions. These roles are determined by environmental conditions, such as the degree of community involvement and existing partnerships, and by organizational factors, including the scale of the project, its specificity, and subject matter.

Considering the space users' needs and capabilities, the designer's role should evolve alongside the project's development. The expansion of participatory and activist approaches among designers depends on their competencies and preferences. Promoting design practices that engage the community in the spatial shaping process in the broadest but most flexible way possible is essential.

Collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach play crucial roles in project activities. A designer should contribute their knowledge and experience and support representatives of other disciplines, becoming an integral part of a system composed of engaged individuals and actions. In participatory practices, art already holds an established position as a tool for social engagement. It should inspire designers to incorporate it into their activities, mainly when the goal is to foster interaction with the local community.

The power of art in public space lies in its universal accessibility and language, enabling the expression of residents' emotions, experiences, and memories. The context of the place, the topics addressed, and their relevance to the local community are significant. As demonstrated in the examples discussed in section 6.1.3, art in public space can inspire, provoke reflection on the surroundings, and encourage actions aimed at their improvement.

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[331] De Carlo G., Architecture's Public. The Revolt and the Frustration of the School of Architecture, 1970, pp. 88-96, in: Mikielewicz R., Postawa twórcza: zaangażowanie społeczne. Architektura wobec wyzwań nowego stulecia. Środowisko Mieszkaniowe, (30), 2020, p.61.

6.1.4. The Visual Outcome of the Design and Research Process

The established conclusions were synthetically presented in the form of a zine —an original publication titled "**Designing for Communities**." This zine serves as an educational tool to support reflection on the processes of shaping public spaces and to promote the idea of social participation in design.

The publication includes a **glossary of key terms**, introducing terminology into the Polish discourse that reflects the current challenges and directions of public space design, inspired by international practices and theories.

It also provides an **overview of the expanded competencies required by designers** engaged in participatory processes. An integral part of the publication is the "**Manifesto of Public Space Designers**," which outlines guidelines promoting a more open, inclusive, and socially sensitive design process. This manifesto serves a dual purpose. It is a practical tool for enabling reflection on design methods; on the contrary, it encourages designers to work towards creating spaces that are more equitable, accessible, and sustainable.

"Designing for Communities" is primarily aimed at designers, architects, artists, and individuals actively involved in creating public spaces. It may also serve as an inspiration for municipal institutions and non-governmental organizations seeking new models of collaboration tailored to the specifics of the Polish context.

An **infographic illustrating the author's proprietary model of the design and research process** complements the dissertation. This visualization presents the key research stages, actions undertaken, and emerging conclusions, emphasizing the practical dimension of the methods applied and their significance in developing a prototype tool in the form of the **Impuls portal.**

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[332] Zin is an independent, original publication created outside of the mainstream publishing circuit, often in small print runs. It combines text, illustrations and collages in an experimental form, serving as a tool for expression, education and activism.

6.2. Recommendations for Wrocław

In the architectural and municipal discourse, a question often arises on how to effectively encourage residents to participate in participatory processes and increase their engagement. At the beginning of this doctoral thesis, I hypothesized that the main issue limiting participation in Poland is the lack of appropriate tools and their shortcomings, such as overly complex language, structure, or form that may discourage potential participants. However, the research indicates that the nature of the problem lies not so much in the tools themselves but in their implementation and the approach to their practical application.

The analysis of case studies allowed me to formulate recommendations that can be adapted to the specific context of Polish urban design processes. Taking into account cultural and economic differences, my proposals are tailored to the reality of participatory efforts in Wrocław, discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

6.2.1. Education

Polish debates often emphasize the importance of educating society about participation, architecture, and spatial issues. This pertains to formal education in schools and initiatives targeted at adults, promoting pro-democratic attitudes and fostering reflection on spatial order and the identity of one's place of residence[333,334]. However, it is equally essential not to overlook the participatory education of architects themselves. Academic education and subsequent professional development are crucial for understanding participatory design principles. It is not just the amount of specialized knowledge conveyed but also the content included in the teaching process that matters.

According to the American designer Victor Papanek[335], the contemporary system of architectural education requires a fundamental overhaul. Contemporary education system focuses heavily on design, paying too little attention to the ecological, social, economic, and political contexts in which architecture operates. Papanek argues that no discipline, especially closely tied to human needs, should be taught in isolation from its broader context[336]. A similar view is expressed by Sawicki[337], who notes that despite changes, architectural education still places excessive emphasis on the perfection of form while neglecting the needs of future users.

In his book "Design for the Real World"[338], Papanek also highlights that architecture should not be treated as a standalone discipline, as design is a multilayered process that overlaps many other fields. In his opinion, contemporary universities fail to prepare designers for such an integrated approach. Curricula should be less specialized and

[333] Gadomska B. (Ed.), Sepioł J., Przestrzeń…, op. cit., pp. 94-98.
[334] Pistelok, P., Martela, B. (2019). Partycypacja publiczna. Raport o stanie polskich miast. Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warsaw–Cracow, p. 24.
[335] Victor Papanek (1923-1998) – designer and educator, known for his advocacy of socially and environmentally responsible design. His influential book *Design for the Real World*, first published in 1971, has had a lasting impact on successive generations of designers.
[336] Lubelska M., Architektura…, op.cit., p. 128
[337] Sawicki P., Jak docierać…, op. cit., p. 68, in: Żylski T. (Ed.), Plan na plan., op. cit.
[338] Papanek V., Holzman J., Dizajn dla realnego świata: środowisko człowieka i zmiana społeczna, Recto Verso, Łódź, 2012.

encompass a broad range of disciplines whose connections to design are often overlooked[339]. Above all, social aspects must be included, as understanding them is essential for creating human-centered projects. Soft skills such as conversations with project stakeholders, facilitation, and mediation should also be paid attention.

Following the example of the CAL project Plac Grunwaldzki RENEWED[340], students should be involved as often as possible in designing for real people, as discussed in Chapter Four. This comes with challenges like student turnover, time pressure tied to semester schedules, or a lack of awareness of project realities. However, I believe this model, combined with practice, can be refined, enabling students, with the help of mentors, to quickly develop sensitivity to others' needs and acquire the necessary skills.

6.2.2. Organizational and Financial Solutions

6.2.2.1. Local Initiatives

In addition to the participatory tools highlighted in Chapter Four, such as the Wrocław Civic Budget (WBO), Microgrants, and the Neighborhood Fund, as well as supplementary initiatives promoting resident engagement (e.g., *Odlot. Strefa Partycypacji[341]*), there is another form of financing initiatives directly from the city budget. This is the local initiatives program, a partnership between local governments and residents, particularly those organized in informal groups. They can propose ideas for activities in their immediate surroundings, committing to their implementation through material contributions, funding, or community work. Projects under this program can include investment and infrastructure initiatives and activities related to education, sports, environmental protection, cultural heritage, social integration, and aid for those in need[342].

This program operates independently of the participatory budget and can run concurrently. Its advantages include the absence of rigid schedules or deadlines for submitting projects, enabling a continuous application process[343].

In Wrocław, the local initiatives program operates in a highly limited form – between 2021 and 2024, it received only 13 applications[344]. It seems, therefore, that the Wrocław City Office has yet to leverage the full potential of this participatory tool. Introducing the local initiatives program as an equal counterpart to WBO and Microgrants could significantly expand the possibilities for implementing projects in collaboration with residents. The promotion of the program and encouragement to submit initiatives should be carried out with the city's involvement.

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[339] Lubelska M., Architektura…, op.cit., p. 128
[340] See page 47 for more details.
[341] Odlot is a space for social activity and engagement, as well as broad cooperation across multiple sectors. It is also a place for meetings, discussions about the city, and public consultations involving residents of Wrocław. For more information, https://feps.pl/odlot-strefa-partycypacji/, [accessed: 26.11.2024].
[342] Dz. U. 2003 Nr 96 poz. 873 Ustawa…, op. cit.
[343] https://www.maszglos.pl/inicjatywa-lokalna-8/, [accessed: 3.10.2024].
[344] Based on the request for access to public information, which I submitted to the Wrocław City Hall.

6.2.2.2. Wrocław Participatory Budget

Public dissatisfaction with the direction of the Wrocław Civic Budget (WBO) continues to grow. As mentioned in Chapter Four, WBO is gradually losing its participatory character, with its plebiscitary nature and increasing professionalization becoming primary concerns[344]

One possible solution to restore WBO's grassroots and local nature is introducing changes to the program's regulations. Akcja Miasto[345] [346] activists and residents during public consultations[347] have suggested the following improvements: the reintroduction of regional divisions, increased available funding, and creating a category for small projects. Such measures could significantly enhance the chances of implementing projects initiated by smaller neighborhoods, newly engaged community leaders, or minor local initiatives.

Within the framework of current regulations, an alternative approach is strengthening the role and position of neighborhood councils and CALs (Local Activity Centers). These organizations, serving as local catalysts, play a crucial role in submitting and implementing projects. Their understanding of community problems and needs and an awareness of broader contexts at the neighborhood or community level allow for effectively aligning projects with local development strategies. This approach minimizes the risk of fragmented actions disconnected from the actual needs of residents.

However, it is essential to emphasize that the excessive administrative burden and limited time for preparing and submitting projects in subsequent WBO editions present significant barriers to the quality of initiatives and residents' satisfaction with the process. One potential solution is to improve mechanisms for continuously collecting information about local community needs. Such an approach would enable the integration of participation at the early stages of decision-making regarding projects and support the development of a cohesive vision for public space development in specific areas.

Chapter Seven provides a detailed proposal for creating a digital platform-based support system. This tool would identify key neighborhood needs and topics, supporting residents and decision-makers in effectively planning and implementing initiatives that address local priorities. Such a solution would also facilitate the development of a coherent and long-term vision for the growth of public spaces in a given area.

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[344] See chapter 4.3.1. for more details.

[345] https://www.akcjamiasto.org/liderzy-wbo-pisza-do-prezydenta/, [accessed: 3.10.2024].

[346] https://www.akcjamiasto.org/chcielibysmy-aby-wbo-2020/, [accessed: 3.10.2024].

[347] Consultation Report "How to Develop the Wrocław Civic Budget" organized by the Department of Social Participation of the Wrocław City Hall; report prepared by: I. Nowak, M. Rudnicka-Myślicka, H. Achremowicz, Wrocław, 2023, https://www.wroclaw.pl/beta2/files/dokumenty/363850/WBO_raport.pdf, [accessed: 3.10.2024].

6.2.3. A Collaborative Ecosystem based on Local Activity Centers (CAL)

Integrating theorists, practitioners, designers, and decision-makers in the aforementioned collaborative ecosystem is crucial for creating an environment conducive to participatory practices. Spaces that meet community needs can be created only through multilateral cooperation involving individuals with appropriate expertise and experience. This ecosystem provides residents with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for active engagement.

An example of an effective collaborative ecosystem is the Fairville project in Brussels, where academic communities, designers, activists, and local government officials work together to improve the quality of life for residents of the Maelbeek Valley. An essential aspect of the project is international cooperation, which fosters urban democracy by enabling the exchange of experiences among teams from different countries.

A similar model was employed in the Every One Every Day project, where the collaborative ecosystem was based on a supporting platform consisting of a network of spaces, a qualified team, and resources. This model enabled residents to participate in various activities and develop their ideas while minimizing personal risks. A significant aspect of this project was the autonomy of its users, who, through self-directed learning or support from others, could actively participate in various initiatives. Consequently, a broad network of engaged individuals emerged. Notably, people utilizing the spaces were required to contribute to their daily operations, by cleaning, assisting other users, or providing childcare.

Through a system focused on participant empowerment[349], many individuals involved in Every One Every Day were able to enhance their skills and join the ranks of professionals, working alongside the staff on project implementation.

In Wrocław, Local Activity Centers (CALs) hold substantial potential for developing such collaboration, serving as **neighborhood social activators**. These are recognized spaces that enjoy the trust of local communities and have an established position in the city's structure. The city systematically addresses the ongoing need to create new centers in additional districts. CALs can serve as a convenient starting point for developing a collaborative ecosystem.

6.2.3.1. Site

The foundation of an effectively functioning space as a participatory platform lies in building relationships with the local community and earning its trust through a continuous presence in the area. Wrocław's Local Activity Centers already fulfill the first critical requirement by having a physical location. These spaces should be easily accessible near residents' homes or workplaces. Therefore, it is essential to eliminate architectural barriers and continue expanding the network of these facilities to ensure coverage within a 15-minute walking distance.

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[349] *Empowerment* can also be translated as authorization or strengthening. It refers to the process of transferring, reinforcing, and increasing power, strength, rights, or capabilities, especially in contexts where they are insufficient or entirely absent

A significant, motivating factor for engagement is the freedom to use the space according to one's needs while respecting other users. To prevent the commercialization of these spaces, accessibility of CALs should include not only the absence of physical barriers but also minimal or no fees for offered activities, which, unfortunately, is sometimes observed.

Another crucial aspect is the welcomeness of these places—they should be designed to ensure that residents feel encouraged rather than intimidated to use them freely. The furnishings should be modular and multifunctional to accommodate various uses tailored to users' needs. A successful example of such spaces includes the La Serre[350] project and the Every One Every Day locations, where visual openness—through open gates, glazed facades, decorative graphics, and diverse furnishings like sofas, armchairs, and tables—created a welcoming environment for multiple forms of activity.

When elements of the equipment extend beyond the building to occupy shared spaces, such as sidewalks or yards in front of entrances, they gain additional potential for creating **spatial situations** that capture passersby's attention and encourage them to enter.

Photo 6.19. *Visual openness and spatial situations created in front of the building; Rose Lane shop - Every One Every Day*
Source: »Places to practice«[351]

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350 See page 84 for more details.
351 Participatory City, Places…, op. cit.

6.20.

Photo 6.20. *Urban furniture in front of La Serre, which serves as an extension of the indoor activity area*
Source: facebook.com[352]

Photo 6.21. *Interior of La Serre - furnished through the work of volunteers and contributions from residents*
Source: facebook.com[353]

6.21.

[352] https://www.facebook.com/LaSerreCommuna, [accessed: 10.11.2024].
[353] Ibidem.

In Wrocław, cultural pavilions, also known as ESK containers, have been successfully operating for years as part of the Parks ESK Emotions-Sports-Culture project. Their activities are limited to the season spanning late spring to early autumn and focus on integrating local communities, initiating joint activities among residents, and promoting the use of green areas. Found in eleven parks and squares across Wrocław, these pavilions are converted shipping containers serving as outdoor stages. Equipped with sound systems and sports and recreational equipment, they provide open spaces for various events[354].

Each pavilion is coordinated by a non-governmental organization, which often operates a Local Activity Center (CAL) in the same neighborhood. The programs offered in these pavilions primarily include cultural (concerts and performances), sports, and educational events.

However, the ESK containers possess potential beyond seasonal recreation. Incorporating them into participatory processes could transform them into appealing venues for collaboration between residents, designers, or decision-makers, fostering deeper community involvement in activities related to their surroundings.

6.22.

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354 https://www.wroclaw.pl/dla-mieszkanca/pawilony-kultury-stanely-w-11-wroclawskich-parkach, [accessed: 8.10.2024].

Photo 6.22-24. *ESK containers in various parks of Wrocław.*
Source: facebook.com[355]

6.2.3.2. New Model of Collaboration

According to the report "Model of Local Activity Centers in Wrocław"[356] CALs' core objectives include strengthening interpersonal relationships, fostering the potential of local communities, building local identity, and combating social exclusion. These responsibilities are fulfilled by identifying residents' needs, organizing local activities, developing public space initiatives, and collaborating with local stakeholders. These efforts mainly focus on social and cultural aspects. However, their potential could be expanded, for instance, by creating a model resembling an Urban Lab[357] or Community Design Center[358].

CALs operate based on a network of connections built on two pillars. The first is the SCAL platform, which brings together all entities managing such centers, facilitating the exchange of experiences and knowledge. The second pillar is local partnerships, a fundamental networking tool for local stakeholders, including neighborhood councils, NGOs, the Municipal Social Assistance Center, schools, cultural institutions, local entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Well-organized partnerships ensure access to essential social capital within a given area, which can contribute to further neighborhood or district development.

Given this potential, it would be reasonable to expand CALs' scope of activities to influence interpersonal relationships and engagement and the shaping of public spaces. Following the example of Community Design Centers or initiatives like Every One Every Day, CALs could establish long-term collaborations with designers and universities, forming multi- and transdisciplinary design teams.

An example of such collaboration is the initiative CAL Plac Grunwaldzki RENEWED, where a civic studio[359] was organized in cooperation with design studios and Wrocław

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[355] https://www.facebook.com/ParkiESK?locale=pl_PL, [accessed: 22.11.2024].
[356] Bulicz A., Model działania..., op. cit.
[357] Urban Lab is an instrument for collaboration between the city, businesses, scientific entities, and NGOs, aimed at improving the quality of life for residents through innovative solutions to identified problems and generating additional value by utilizing urban resources.
[358] See chapter 3.1. for more details.
[359] See page 58 for more details.

universities. Although this collaboration was educational, based on student activities and architect mentoring, it demonstrated the possibilities of integrating the academic community into work supporting local communities.

Another example of successful cross-sector collaboration is the Fairville project, where a partnership was established between academic researchers and the community center La Serre. La Serre provided its spaces to local social care institution representatives, who organized weekly integration meetings for residents. This approach allowed researchers to reach parts of the local community that traditional research methods would not have reached.

The proposed model assumes sustained collaboration between designers and researchers with CALs as part of participatory processes focused on specific neighborhoods. This model's primary application area should be designing public spaces within the context of municipal revitalization programs, the Wrocław Civic Budget—particularly the Neighborhood Fund—and private development projects. The local knowledge resources accumulated by CALs through their often long-standing presence in communities could serve as valuable substantive and practical support for implementing design processes.

Collaboration with CALs could significantly enhance the effectiveness of urban consultations by expanding their audience. Instead of undertaking time-consuming efforts to reach new groups of residents, the city council or another unit conducting consultations could leverage the existing networks and community engagement fostered by CALs. Additionally, CALs can act as a source of local knowledge gathered through their previous activities, supporting the process by providing information related to the topic under consultation.

Moreover, ongoing collaboration with the academic community, modeled after the Freedom by Design[360] program, could yield mutual benefits. On one hand, students and researchers would gain inspiration to develop innovative solutions; on the other, local communities could benefit from novel, experimental concepts addressing real urban issues.

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[360] See page 47 for more details.

7.

Proprietary Tool: The Digital Portal »Impuls«

Activity in the virtual world directly impacts the course of events in the real world.
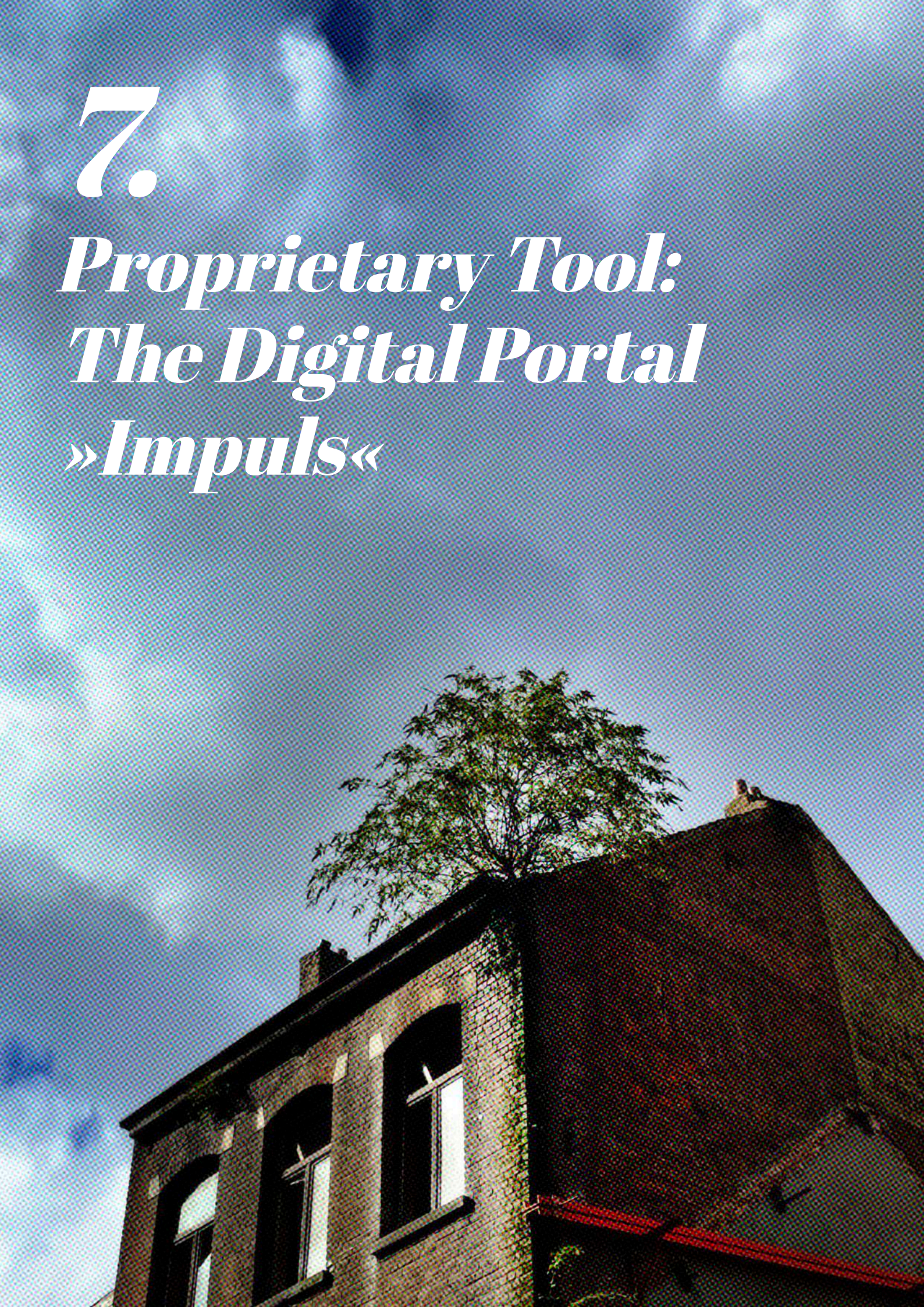
E. Benedykt

At the beginning of my work, after formulating the research problem, I assumed that one one of the main factors limiting community engagement was the insufficient development of participatory tools. However, my research discovered various innovative methods for working with residents tailored to diverse challenges. Each of these strategies serves a specific purpose, yet they do not automatically translate into a general increase in community engagement.

Successful residents' involvement in organized activities requires social activation cultivated well before the participatory process begins or the implementation of dedicated tools. As concluded in the previous chapter, selecting appropriate methods based on the level of community engagement is essential for the success of participatory efforts. Nevertheless, the problem with engagement does not lie solely in the tools themselves but, among other things, in their improper adaptation to the potential capabilities and needs of the community.

In search of more effective solutions to support engagement, civic education, and interest in participation, I turned my attention to game-based tools. Their mobilizing and educational potential made them a promising solution to explore. In theory, games encourage participants to collaborate and make decisions, facilitate compromise-building, and serve as mechanisms for conveying or gathering information. Their universal nature allows the inclusion of diverse social groups, while their abstract and playful elements enable the presentation of complex processes in an accessible way for non-experts.

Given these factors, I conducted an analysis to examine how games could shape social and democratic attitudes and enhance residents' engagement levels. As part of the study, I reviewed games[361] available on the Polish market related to spatial planning and civic activation. These included educational games and one simulation game based on workshop activities with a moderator.

The analysis revealed that most of the games reviewed were either overly complex, requiring the involvement of a skilled moderator, or lacked sufficient appeal. Some games were training-oriented and provided valuable tools for supporting lesson plans on democratic topics, making them excellent examples in the context of civic education. However, they were unsuitable for broader use with more diverse audiences. Simulation workshops had integrative value, but their elaborate structure was disproportionate to the conveyed knowledge.

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[361] Parcycipolis – a board game released by Cyber Kids on Real in 2015, Planista – a board game released as part of the Operational Program Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020, GRA w zmianę – a card game released by the Facilitator Emergency Service in 2019, (Po)Fantazjuj – a simulation game created by the Systemic Solutions Center in 2023.

To summarize, the available games and simulations proved insufficient as activation tools, particularly for individuals not connected to the field of architecture or those socially inactive. They also fail to foster lasting interest in urban planning processes or democratic engagement.

Given these limitations, I shifted my focus to digital participatory tools. This was guided by a ranking[362] prepared by People Powered, an organization supporting participatory democracy. However, my analysis revealed that many of these tools center on GIS data[363] presentation or spatial planning. Some have adopted a commercial model, partially losing their community-focused nature.

An intriguing example in this context is the Go Vocal platform, that aims to promote civic engagement and is based on open-source software. While Go Vocal has gained popularity in over 20 countries across Europe and the United States, in Poland, only the city of Wasilków has implemented this solutions. These statistics highlight challenges in adapting such tools to local contexts.

On the other hand, municipal initiatives like Berlin's consultation portal mein.berlin.de have proven effective. The mentioned platform provides an extensive system for digital public consultations, allowing residents to share opinions on planned projects and submit feedback on urban spaces, such as areas with high noise levels. Similarly, in Poland, Gdynia offers a comparable tool integrated with its website gdynia.pl. This platform enables public consultations and allows residents to report issues in the urban environment. By facilitating interaction between residents and authorities, these tools can support the development of civic activity and increase public participation in urban planning processes.

During the analysis of digital tools, I have also examined those leveraging **gamification mechanisms**[364]. Gamification involves incorporating elements inspired by games to influence real-world behavior. It primarily focuses on boosting engagement or improving efficiency. A notable example of a gamified platform is Habitica, which has achieved significant global success. The platform aims to support personal development and enhance productivity, by rewarding users with points and prizes for completed tasks and fostering collaboration through shared missions, Habitica builds community and strengthens user motivation.

Drawing on the Habitica platform analysis and Go Vocal insights, I developed the framework for a tool tailored to local conditions and potential in civic activity and participation[365].

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[362] https://www.peoplepowered.org/platform-ratings, [accessed: 8.11.2024].
[363] A geographic information system (GIS) is a platform for collecting, managing and analyzing data.
[364] See page 236 for more details.
[365] https://www.helloleads.io/blog/stats-facts/20-amazing-habitica-stats-and-facts/, [accessed: 8.11.2024].

7.1. General Assumptions

I placed the concept of meta-design, which is related to creating design structures and based on the theory of emergence[366], at the intersection of action research and its iterative nature with design processes. According to this theory, a complex unit exhibits properties or behaviors that its components do not display independently. These properties emerge only due to mutual interactions within a broader context.

Based on this, I developed a framework for a tool that supports participatory actions in creating, shaping, and experiencing public spaces. This model assumes that cooperation with locally active entities such as non-governmental organizations, public institutions, local leaders, and residents already engaged in developing their communities is key to successful outcome.

The combination of dispersed, and thus weakened, social capital can create a force capable of influencing public space and implementing grassroots initiatives while naturally strengthening democratic engagement.

The model I propose is an open-access digital platform with a social network service, spatial information system elements, and a forum. Its functionality was developed with the focus on Wrocław context. However, its universal character can also be implemented in other cities, adapting to local conditions.

The portal supports residents, organizations, and institutions in carrying out initiatives and implementing changes in public spaces in a participatory manner. Its goal is to encourage cooperation with others, create partnerships, and share resources and skills to create a whole system of engaged entities—a Network of Active Communities. The portal is dedicated to individuals and entities motivated to take action for the community and need direction, strengthening of their position, or help from others.

The main objectives of the portal are using gamification mechanisms, facilitating the establishment of contacts, and creating a space for collaboration. These assumptions allow residents to integrate with local initiatives and support them in effectively carrying out social projects. The platform creates a space for submitting new ideas and collaborating on existing projects, enabling more efficient management of social activists' energy and the local community's potential.

The first step towards collaboration with others, especially building a project team, is often a challenge. Carrying out a project on one's own or even by a single organization is extremely difficult, or even impossible, especially when the initiative requires various skills and involves individuals responsible for its implementation, management, or later supervision. This applies to both technical, organizational, and social skills.

As public space is a common good, it should be shaped with the community's participation to ensure that projects carried out within it have broad support. When the community actively participates in the implementation of a project, it is more likely to feel responsible for it and care about its sustainability.

People are more likely to engage in activities led by recognizable groups with a certain degree of legitimacy. These groups inspire greater trust and become more credible. The

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[366] Maziarka T, Idea…, op.cit.

platform enables the building of such recognition without the need to formalize activities or scale them up, and it supports smaller, informal groups in carrying out their initiatives.

Thanks to the tools available on the platform, stakeholders and potential partners can be easily identified. The interactive map highlights institutions working for the community, local NGOs, and active residents. Additionally, the platform helps recognize and develop neighborhood social capital. The portal is intended for individuals, institutions, and organized groups. Users can express their willingness to help, share skills and knowledge, and offer resources for joint use.

In addition to supporting networking, the platform also has educational value. Research conducted by OPUS[367] shows that residents face more difficulties related to the logistics of project implementation and proper accounting than with filling out grant applications. Therefore, the portal can serve an important supporting role, assisting residents in effectively managing projects—from the planning and implementation phase to final accounting.

The portal integrates dispersed grant programs offered by the city, region, and private entities to help users find the appropriate forms of support. Additionally, gathering information about local potential can direct users toward the most suitable forms of action. This last task is crucial as it can prevent the inefficient use of energy and resources, which often leads to discouragement and loss of motivation.

The portal promotes a regional approach of thinking about the city, regardless of whether users focus on a district, neighborhood, block, or street. It informs about initiatives in their chosen area, such as:

- EU-funded projects,
- public consultations organized by the city or neighborhood council,
- projects within the citizen budget,
- activities run by CALs, schools, or neighborhood initiatives.

Users can access information about current events in their area through the platform without browsing different websites or profiles.

Another possible platform use is coordinating work for NGOs or housing communities. Organizational representatives can easily communicate with volunteers or residents involved in the project and organize joint work without needing to integrate them into the internal system. Tenement or apartment block residents can share ideas for improvements and planned work via the platform and effectively coordinate the implementation of ongoing projects. This connection fosters decision-making, which can be approved at meetings with the building manager.

An additional advantage of the platform is its use by municipal decision-makers, such as the Social Participation Department, Spatial Planning Department, or neighborhood councils. The platform streamlines participatory processes by giving residents easy access to information about local activities, such as public consultations. This access is crucial given the short deadlines for these actions, which may be missed even by the most engaged citizens in the flood of information. The portal collects all key initiatives related to the user's area in one place. The platform can also support municipal units, such as neighborhood councils or CALs, in line with the recommendations in the report

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[367] Centrum OPUS, Wpływ …, op. cit.

on changes to the Wrocław neighborhood structure[368]. The portal provides the necessary knowledge for efficient budgeting and neighborhood development policy planning by facilitating the flow of information on current and planned investments.

Furthermore, quick identification of active leaders, organizations, and initiatives allows decision-makers to support or incorporate them into municipal programs, saving time and resources. Projects supported or initiated by residents contribute to increased satisfaction and improved quality of life.

Community councils can also efficiently identify problems or ideas most widely supported by residents, enabling them to submit appropriate projects for the citizen budget or Neighborhood Fund.

The portal was developed in the spirit of the concept of meta-design and simultaneously as a working tool. It offers many opportunities for development and engagement, flexibility, inclusiveness, and community integration. It allows users to take on different roles—initiator, executor, supervisor, partner, sponsor, participant, or observer—regardless of their involvement. It also enables initiating processes from the grassroots level and including stakeholders in processes created by decision-makers.

As a tool offering various types of support, it helps users start their activism journey toward emancipation and maturity as conscious citizens. For those already experienced in democracy, it provides a new perspective on project processes and encourages entrepreneurship. The portal user learns empowerment by taking on the designer role of the initiative's implementation process or its physical form.

The analog method of reaching users was developed as a **brochure**, a prototype of which is included in the appendix to the dissertation. The brochure takes the form of a foldable information booklet designed to clearly explain how the platform works and to encourage active participation. On the back of the brochure, a poster illustrates two success stories—examples of public space initiatives that were implemented thanks to the Impuls platform.

When fully unfolded, the brochure can serve as a poster and be displayed on bulletin boards or stairwells, increasing its reach. The design aesthetics were adapted to the needs of potential users to ensure accessibility and visual appeal.

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[368] Fundacja na Rzecz Studiów Europejskich i inni, Nowa …, op. cit., p. 11.

7.2. Gamification Mechanism on the Portal

The key element distinguishing the discussed portal from other websites used for participatory projects is **gamification**.

Gamification involves applying game design elements and principles, such as dynamics, aesthetics, or mechanics, to contexts unrelated to games. The key difference between games and gamification lies in their objectives. While games are created mainly for entertainment purposes, gamification uses elements of play as a tool to achieve specific, predefined goals[369].

The goal of gamification is to increase user engagement, improve process or organizational efficiency, and support learning and information collection from participants. These mechanisms can be applied across a wide range — from developing psychomotor and cognitive skills to influencing attitudes and solving complex problems. A well-designed gamification system enables significant results, often on a large scale.

Furthermore, gamification can support democratic social engagement by encouraging collaboration, participation in decision-making processes, and the development of compromises[370]. When presented in an attractive form, it can motivate users to take on even difficult or tedious tasks and generate interest in issues that might otherwise be ignored.

Studies confirm the positive impact of gamification on individuals. Properly implemented techniques based on game principles can effectively engage, inform, educate, and support problem-solving processes[371]. Due to its potential, gamification is becoming an increasingly common tool in various fields, from education and management to participatory actions.

The gamification system created on the portal includes activity points, badges, rankings, and levels. Gamification supports and directs users toward collaboration and effective project management. In the context of the portal, it serves the following functions:

1. **Creating a network of support:** The gamification system fosters the integration of residents around common goals. Residents are rewarded for connecting with neighbors and forming partnerships with institutions or NGOs.

2. **Collaboration**: During initiative implementation, sharing responsibilities is rewarded with additional points and badges. The goal is to encourage the involvement of as many people as possible in the project's tasks, which builds community and a sense of responsibility for the initiative.

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[369] Siadkowki J., Grywalizacja : zrób to sam! : poradnik., Warsaw, Fundacja Orange, 2014.
[370]https://cooperativecity.org/2021/03/12/gamification-and-new-scenarios-for-digital-participation-tools-and-methods/, [accessed: 10.07.2024].
[371] Hamari J., Koivisto J., Sarsa H., Does Gamification Work? — A Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Gamification., In: proceedings of the 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, IEEE, Hawaii, 2014.

3. **Setting goals**: It's easy to identify individuals or organizations willing to collaborate with the point, level, and badge system, help with specific actions, or provide advice. It also becomes easier to encourage one-time help for an initiative when its scope is clearly defined, and the engaged person builds their profile on the portal.

4. **Building credibility:** Earning more points and badges or creating an extensive network of contacts builds a user's credibility and trust, which can help them acquire necessary resources or gain more support for their initiative.

5. **Improving project quality:** The system rewards collaboration and professional project management, contributing to higher-quality outcomes. This includes using the portal's tools for creating schedules, budgets, and effective communication.

Key gamification mechanisms on the portal:

1. **Point and Level System:** Every user who engages in activities on the portal, earns points by completing tasks within initiatives, sharing resources, or establishing new collaborations.The number of points reflects the user's experience and involvement. The more points a person accumulates, the higher their level, unlocking additional features on the platform, such as the ability to organize their initiatives or post on forums. Points also help build credibility and recognition, particularly valuable for small non-profits, informal groups, or individual residents.

2. **Badges:** The badge system, an integral part of the portal, serves both motivational and identificational purposes, allowing users to showcase their achievements visually. Users can award badges for specific actions benefiting the community, and their selection and display next to a user's avatar allow individuals to highlight the qualities or activities they want to be associated with.

   - **Basic badges** are granted for activities supporting community-building, initiative implementation, and organizational assistance and are available to all users.
   - **Exclusive badges** are awarded for exceptional accomplishments or significant contributions to specific activities. Their exclusivity, stemming from limited availability, gives them a prestigious status, enhancing competition and motivating users to pursue ambitious goals.

   Badges displayed on user profiles symbolize their commitment to improving urban life, emphasizing their contributions to social initiatives and active platform participation.

3. **Leaderboards and Challenges:** Users compete in various challenges, such as completing a set number of projects, recruiting a specific number of participants, or achieving other portal-related goals. Leaderboards encourage continuous improvement and the pursuit of new challenges. Top users may receive rewards, including access to workshops, webinars, or training sessions on urban-related topics, mentorship from experts, or partnerships with local organizations.

4. **Support and Collaboration System**: Gamification extends beyond competition—it also emphasizes collaboration. Users can join forces to accomplish larger projects together. Cooperation is rewarded with additional points or badges, encouraging team-based efforts.

In conclusion, the portal serves as a modern tool that fosters the development of local communities and supports the creation of collaborations and partnerships through grassroots initiatives. By gathering information about local resources and integrating gamification into its system, the platform facilitates the implementation of diverse initiatives that improve living conditions and build stronger social bonds.

7.3. Features of the Portal and Point Collection System

A service or system is a collection of features, user actions, and data that interact with one another. The system's value results from these interactions and represents the set of objectives it can achieve.

7.3.1. Users and their needs

The portal also provides resources accessible to various user groups:

- Non-governmental organizations or public institutions can implement their initiatives, report needs, or offer support and resources.
- Representatives of Neighborhood Councils or City Offices can gather information about local needs and issues, aiding social consultation processes or serving as a knowledge base for submitting projects, such as those within the Wrocław Civic Budget or Neighborhood Fund.
- The portal offers insight into planned and ongoing initiatives, including those coordinated by other administrative units, enabling Neighborhood Councils or local leaders to plan their activities more effectively.
- Residents can share their resources, offer support, or participate in events without needing to organize their initiatives.

7.3.2. Portal Functionalities

Below is an overview of the portal functionalities designed for residents who wish to realize their initiatives.

1. **Registration and User Account**

   1.1. **Create an Account**: Access the **Impuls** platform, complete the registration form, and create a free account.

   1.2. **Log In**: After creating an account, you can log in from any supported device and browser.

   1.3. **Reset Password**: If you forget your password, you can set a new one. System will send a password reset link to your registered email address, provided it exists in our database.

   1.4. **Account Deletion and Data Erasure**: The portal allows you to delete your account if needed. Additionally, in compliance with GDPR, you can request a report or the deletion of all data collected about you.

2. Initiatives Overview

2.1. **Explore Inspirations**: Initiatives that have been completed or are underway are available in a gallery format.

2.2. **Search for Inspiring Projects**

2.2.1. **Sort Results**: Status (*in progress/ upcoming/ completed*), Initiative type (*place/ event*), Scope (*courtyard/ street/ neighborhood/ district/ city/ region/ nationa*l), Key stakeholders (*parents with children, seniors, neighbors, youth, etc.)*, Topics (*revitalization/ repair/ clean-up/ greenery/ safety/ community/ culture/ others)*.

2.2.2. **Set Location**: Select your location to view projects from your area or other districts.

2.2.3. **Use Filters**: Filter projects by popularity, date added, number of participants, or earned badges.

2.3. **View Initiative Details**

2.3.1. **Click on an Initiative**: Open the details of a selected project to view its description, photos, location, dates, and other relevant information.

2.3.2. **Read Descriptions**: Pay attention to the description of the initial situation, project goals, action plans, and outcomes.

2.3.3. **Check Contributors**: Look for individuals or organizations with badges, as they can be helpful if you decide to carry out your initiative.

2.4. **Follow Trends, Save Inspirations, Add to Favorites**

2.4.1. **View *Trending Projects***: Check which projects attract the most interest and engagement to understand which initiatives gather active communities.

2.4.2. **Browse New Projects**: Stay updated on new initiatives in your area and engage in upcoming endeavors.

2.4.3. **Save Interesting Initiatives**: Add selected projects to your Favorites to revisit them later, track their progress, or receive notifications about upcoming events related to the initiative.

2.5. **Contact Initiative Creators**: If you have questions or need more information about a specific project, contact its creators. Use the "Send Message" option to gain additional insights, seek advice, or invite creators to collaborate on future initiatives.

2.6. **Create or Join New Projects**: After exploring the initiatives, you can pursue your idea or join an existing project.

3. Expand Your Profile

3.1. **Add Resources to Share**: Expand your profile by declaring items you are willing to share with other users for their projects. Assign them to one of the categories (*tools/events/electrical and electronics/transport/others*). Briefly describe what you are sharing, in what quantity, for how long, or under what conditions.

3.2. **Offer Help**: If you want to support others' projects actively, specify how you can assist. This might include clean-up work, planting, putting up posters, or event organization. This way, other users will know whom to count on for their initiatives.

3.3. **Add Expertise and Skills**: Enrich your profile with information about your skills and expertise, such as selecting suitable plants, project management, electrical work, furniture design knowledge, or any other talents that could help realize public space projects. This allows different users to invite you to contribute to specific tasks.

3.4. **Expand Your Network**: The platform allows you to add other users to your network of contacts. This makes it easier to follow their projects, invite them to collaborate, and share ideas. Growing your network increases your opportunities to act for the local community.

3.4.1. **Invite Neighbors**: Create a community group for your housing estate or courtyard. These people are the easiest to reach personally or by posting flyers encouraging them to join the portal.

4. Starting Your Own Project

4.1. **Launching an Initiative**: Once you earn a sufficient number of points, you can unlock the option to create your project. The primary element is defining the goal you want to achieve, such as planting flowers in the courtyard, refurbishing a bench, organizing a street concert, or a flea market.

Remember that your initiative must benefit the community, not serve commercial purposes, and respect others' rights.

4.2. **Project Categories**: Specify the type of initiative (*place/event*), range (*courtyard/street/neighborhood/district/city/region/national*), key stakeholders (*parents with children, seniors, neighbors, etc.*), and topic (*revitalization/ repair/ clean-up/ greenery/ safety/community/ culture/ others*).

4.3. **Title**: Name your initiative creatively and concisely, e.g., "Our Green Courtyard" or "Musical Pokoju Street– Raising Funds for New Swings."

4.4. **Location**: Mark your initiative's proposed location on the map and define its scope by drawing its shape. Initiatives within this scope will have more weight in displaying relevant options.

4.5. **Timeline**: Specify the initiative's form (one-time event/cyclical/project), duration, or start and end dates. Plan related events and the initiative's progress. Details can be added later.

4.6. **Initiative Description**: Include the purpose and motivation behind your activity. You can describe who you are inviting and why it is worth joining.

4.7. **Use Tools**: The platform offers tools to support planning, such as a preliminary cost calculator, a list of necessary materials, and a project timeline.

4.8. **Publish**: Once your project is ready, it will be published on the website to attract the interest of other residents.

5. Inviting to Collaborate

5.1. **Communicate with Others:** Use the platform's internal messaging system to invite individuals and organizations in your network to collaborate on your initiative. If they are not yet on the portal, you can send an email invitation or share your project via social media.

5.2. **Make a Request:** When creating a profile for your initiative, specify the support you need. Indicate the number of volunteers, types of services, or expertise required to make it easier for others to respond to your invitation. This also applies to material resources or venue needs. Even one-time, less formal contributions can help achieve your goals.

5.3. **Invite Collaborators:** Search for people with the skills you are looking for or those eager to help, as well as organizations and institutions aligned with your area of action. Use filters based on location, availability, or profession. Reach out to entities declaring the resources you need. Writing to them directly can expedite the process of achieving your goals.

5.4. **Seek Support Among Acquaintances:** Consider whether you belong to neighborhood or city-level groups that could assist your initiative. This might include a senior club, sports club, art enthusiasts' group, informal motorcycle club, or theater group.

5.5. **Form Project Groups:** Create a dedicated group for your project to facilitate communication with its members. Within this group, you can collaboratively plan next steps, discuss ideas, and divide tasks. Each group has access to a shared calendar, communication tools, and file storage.

6. Gamification Elements

6.1. **Earn Points for Engagement:**

6.1.1. Every action related to project implementation earns you points.

6.1.2. Notifications will inform you of the points awarded for recent activities and suggest actions to reach the next level.

6.1.3. In the character panel, you can track your current level, progress, and how many points are needed to advance. You will receive points for each project implementation activity.

6.1.4. **You Can Earn Points for:**

- joining an existing initiative or creating a new one,
- sharing resources or skills with others,
- inviting new users to the portal or existing members to collaborate,
- planning and managing an initiative,
- taking steps to move the initiative forward and completing tasks and stages of the project,
- sharing updates—photos, videos, or notes—on the progress of your initiative.

6.2. **Unlock Badges:** As your project progresses, unlock achievement badges. Each badge represents a specific skill or accomplishment, e.g., *Neighborhood Right Hand* for joining 15 initiatives, *Golden Hand* for adding 5 skills to your profile, or *Diamond Pen* for being the first to write 50 forum posts. Select one badge to display next to your profile photo, defining how you want others to identify you. Collecting badges also builds your credibility and recognition as an *Active Resident.*

Examples of badges and the actions required to earn them are listed on page236.

6.3. **Compete in the Community Ranking:** Points and badges earned by you and your initiative contribute to the overall community ranking. See how you compare to other users and projects, and compete for the title of *most engaged resident* or *best-executed initiative.* The ranking is updated in real time, and top users and projects are highlighted on the main page.

6.4. **Promote your Initiative:** Generate a token—a sticker that symbolizes affiliation with the Active Community Network when displayed in a visible location.

6.5. **Celebrate Successes with Others:** After completing a project, the community can celebrate the shared achievements. Your project will be featured in the *Community Successes* section, and you and your team will receive public recognition for your efforts. Additionally, you can share your success story on your initiative's profile to inspire others to take action.

6.6. **Gather Feedback:** Receive comments from other users involved in the initiative to improve your organizational skills and better plan future activities.

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7. Project Plan

7.1. **Define General Goals:** What do you want to achieve through the project?

For instance, if your goal is to revitalize a courtyard, the general objective could be *"Creating a friendly and aesthetic space for residents."*

7.2. **Define Specific Goals:** Break the general objective into smaller, more detailed tasks that lead to its achievement. For example:

- "Establish cooperation with a local partner."
- "Secure funding for purchasing paint to renovate benches."
- "Engage at least five neighbors to plant flowers together."
- "Organize a courtyard cleaning day with at least 10 participants."
- "Install trash bins in strategic locations."

7.3. **Divide the Initiative into Stages and Assign Tasks**: Plan the steps needed to implement your initiative. For example:

a. Planning: Assemble a team, prepare a list of required materials and tools, contact local partners, and promote the initiative.

b. Preparation: Collaborate with local partners, obtain necessary permits (if required), purchase materials, and organize informational meetings for residents.

c. Implementation: Conduct on-site activities, including cleaning, planting greenery, and renovating small architectural elements.

d. Finale: Complete the work and organize a summary event like a neighborhood gathering.

7.4. **Set an Initial Schedule:** Define time frame for each project stage and anticipate potential delays. If applying for funding from grassroots support programs, include submission deadlines.

7.5. **Create a Minimal Plan:** Consider what you can do if not everything would go as planned. For example:

- "If I cannot gather enough people for the entire project, I will focus on the most important task—cleaning the courtyard."
- "If we cannot find the necessary equipment for an outdoor concert, we will look for a venue to host a smaller indoor performance."
- "If funding is not obtained for larger courtyard work, we will organize a neighborhood fundraiser and carry out the work ourselves."

7.6. **Modify the Plan:** Plans may change, mainly when relying on others. Stay open to adjustments and revisit this stage as often as needed.

8.   Implementation of the Initiative

8.1. **Promote the initiative and assemble a team.**

8.1.1. **Share the Initiative Profile:** Use social media platforms like thematic groups to reach new audiences.

8.1.2. **Create Posters and Fyers:** Design posters, flyers, or social media posts directly on the platform. These materials will include a QR code linking to the initiative profile.

8.1.3. **Promote Using Tokens: Generate one of three types of tokens:**

Personal token: Designed for a specific residential unit or house; Neighborhood token: Intended for housing groups, such as apartment buildings, blocks, or adjacent houses; Local actor token: Aimed at organizations, associations, entrepreneurs, service providers, or organized groups.

- The token is a sign of presence in the *Active Community Network*. You can stick it in a conspicuous place - in the window, on the front door, bulletin board or at the reception counter.
- You can also create tokens for individuals without the option to display them. This fosters a sense of community inclusion.

8.2. **Preparation for Implementation:** Present a preliminary action plan once the team is assembled (even partially). Discuss the details with the team and delegate tasks—someone might help with transportation while others select suitable plants for planting. This can be done online using tools available on the platform, such as the event calendar, group messaging system, or project board. However, in-person meetings are vital for building a community around the initiative.

8.3. **Resource Management:** Determine the materials and tools needed for the project. Create a list of required resources, then consider how to acquire them. You can seek support from established partnerships, purchase items individually, obtain sponsorships, or organize a collection among residents. The platform also offers a feature for submitting requests for professional advice, specific items, or services from the local community and organizations.

8.4. **Funding the Initiative:** Review the list of available programs that provide funding for social projects.

8.5. **Review Legal Frameworks:** You may need to inform the managing entity of the selected area/building or apply for permission.
Check the following:

- ☐ Who owns the land/building?
- ☐ Who manages the building?
- ☐ If your initiative occurs in a public green space, such as a park or boulevard, you might need approval from the Municipal Greenery Authority (Polish: Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej – ZZM).

8.6. **Local Partnerships:** Visit a Local Activity Center, District Council, or another active community space.

- ☐ Check duty hours or schedule a meeting with the coordinating/animating person.
- ☐ Prepare a poster and/or flyers about your initiative to leave at the information point.
- ☐ Use a provided template and review available tools and programs for social projects when preparing for the meeting.
- ☐ Ask about current activities and initiatives, available resources (tools, materials, rooms, etc.), and existing collaborations.
- ☐ Ask about possible formal, logistical, or financial support.
- ☐ You can directly input the gathered information into the Initiative Panel or on a printed form.

8.7. **Find Support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** In Wrocław, many NGOs, formal groups, or associations are active.

8.7.1. **Join Others:**
Consider whether your initiative can be integrated into an existing project. By joining others, you can expand their scope with your ideas or support a more extensive project with your time and skills.

8.7.2. **Organizations in the Area:**
Search for organizations in your neighborhood that support your initiative. This could include expertise, outreach assistance, or resource sharing. You might find volunteers or contacts for other friendly places nearby.

8.7.3. **Organizations with a Similar Focus:** Identify and mark on a map the most relevant and/or nearest NGOs or associations that align with your initiative's topic. These organizations can provide valuable knowledge and insights from their experiences.

Example: When creating a community garden or pocket park, search in categories like ecology or local development. Explore sports, tourism, recreation, or education categories if organizing physical activities for seniors.

8.8. **Find Potential Partners Nearby:**

8.8.1. Don't limit yourself to pre-defined areas of activity for potential partner organizations. An institution that might not seem relevant at first glance could become an ally. Look for necessary resources or engaged individuals in these places. They might offer meeting spaces, expertise, participation through lectures, or contributions for a charity auction. Draw inspiration from your surroundings, as they may reveal unexpected opportunities for collaboration.

Consider the following locations for potential involvement:

- ⊞ Neighborhood clubs, senior clubs.
- ⊞ Allotment gardens.
- ⊞ Schools, preschools.
- ⊞ Universities.
- ⊞ Municipal library branches.
- ⊞ Cultural centers, music/art hubs.
- ⊞ Art, dance, or language schools.
- ⊞ Sports clubs.
- ⊞ Artists, craftsmen, graphic designers.
- ⊞ Architectural, landscape design, urban planning, or conservation offices.
- ⊞ Others..

8.9. **Coordination with the Team and Partners:** Assign tasks to team members based on their skills, availability, or preferred support form. Use project management tools, such as task boards or schedules, to track progress and ensure everything stays on track. Maintain regular communication with involved individuals.

8.10. **Monitoring Progress:** Review progress regularly during the initiative and adjust the action plan as needed. Ensure that all tasks are completed on schedule and address any issues promptly.

8.11. **Documenting the Process:** Document every project stage through photos, videos, or notes. These materials will be invaluable for summarizing the project and promoting future initiatives.

8.12. **Implementation Phase:** You and your team decide what constitutes the implementation phase. It could be submitting a grant application, a weekend of courtyard cleanup, or the first performance of your theater group. Ensure all participants have the necessary materials and are aware of their tasks. If needed, remind them of safety protocols and good teamwork practices.

8.13. **Continuation of Activities:** Determine if your project requires ongoing maintenance or monitoring. If so, create a schedule for maintenance or repairs. Encourage others in the community to take responsibility for the improved public space.

9. Summary and Recognition

9.1. **Recognition:** Celebrate the achievements and thank everyone for their help. This fosters a positive atmosphere and motivates further action.

9.2. **Share the Results:** Post photos and descriptions of the project to inspire others. Your initiative will be featured in the gallery of *Completed Initiatives*, where it can be nominated for awards like *Project of the Month*. Publicizing the work and gathering likes on the initiative profile can motivate participants to continue their efforts.

9.3. **Summary:** Upon the project's completion, the system automatically awards badges and additional points to all participants who contributed to its realization.

9.4. **Stay in Touch:** Keep in contact with the people who assisted and consider future initiatives and collaborations.

7.3.3. System of Scoring Points Based on the Example of Initiatives Implementation

Below, I present the steps a resident must take to implement their initiative. Each stage includes a detailed description of the actions users can undertake to advance to the next level and the number of experience points (XP) awarded for completing specific tasks. The values assigned to individual tasks reflect their importance in the process. Users cannot progress to a higher level without earning the required points, restricting access to further actions (Fig. 7.1).

This mechanism serves two essential purposes: it maintains user motivation and shapes behavior. Each stage has a clearly defined goal, which supports the user's development on the platform, facilitates the initiative's implementation, or strengthens community-building efforts.

A: Registration

Data Completion

- Name or nickname / 2XP
- Avatar or photo / 1XP
- Area of activity (on the map) / 1XP
- Who are you? (e.g., senior, youth, parent) / 1XP
- What skills do you have? (e.g., teacher, electrician, graphic designer, plant specialist) / 1XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Introducing oneself to the community.

B: Identity Confirmation

- Inviting at least three people or organizations to contacts (condition: must be accepted) / 5XP
- Browsing the section with inspirations and completed projects / 2XP
- Logging in once / 1XP
- Daily login for 5 days (streak) / 3XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Establishing initial connections that confirm identity and understanding the purpose of the platform.

C: Preparation for Leadership Role

- Users can join initiatives created by others / 45XP
  They can do this through two paths:
  1) Clicking "Join" – After selecting this option, a window appears where the user must write a message to the initiative leader explaining how they can contribute to the project. The leader can accept or reject the application. 2) Responding to a call for experts, skills, or resources – Users can reply by filling out a note in the provided window. As with the first option, approval from the initiative leader is required.
- Adding resources for sharing (e.g., five chairs, projector, garden tools) / 3XP each
- Adding willingness to help (e.g., cleaning, planting flowers, hanging posters) / 3XP

- Adding expertise and skills (e.g., electrical work, plant selection, singing, project management) / 3XP
- Generating a token / 2XP
- Inviting neighbors, places, or organizations to contacts / 1XP each
- Inviting new people, places, or organizations to the portal and contacts / 2XP each
- Inviting an organization, place, or leader of a completed initiative to form a partnership (condition: must be accepted) / 25XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Expanding the contact base and being open to helping others can prepare the user for the role of a leader. To create their initiative, the user needs the support of an organization, place, or leader of an already completed initiative to assist them in implementation. Alternatively, they can join an existing initiative and gain the necessary experience by engaging in its realization.

Users can also remain at this stage, offering continuous or occasional assistance depending on their capabilities.

D: Submission of the Initiative

- Completing the initiative submission
    - ◇ Category / 3XP
    - ◇ Title / 3XP
    - ◇ Place / 3XP
    - ◇ Date / 3XP
    - ◇ Description / 3XP
    - ◇ Photo / 2XP
- Adding an event related to the initiative or its progress / 2XP (one-time)
- Adding at least one person as an assistant or an organization/place as a partner (this condition helps prevent initiatives without substance) / 15XP (one-time)
- Posting a call for volunteers or resources / 5XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Creating and describing their initiative in an approachable way. The condition is creation of an initiative with another person, organization, or place. Awareness is key, and its realization should be based on collaboration and community-building. At the end of this stage, the user has a prepared outline of the initiative.

E: Publicizing the Initiative

- Publishing the initiative / 30XP
- Developing an action plan:
    - ◇ General Goals / 5XP
    - ◇ Specific Goals / 15XP
    - ◇ Initiative Stages / 5XP
    - ◇ Preliminary Schedule / 5XP
    - ◇ Minimal Plan / 15XP
- Monitoring activity on the initiative profile / 3XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Publicizing the initiative idea and creating an action plan that facilitates task division and project oversight. This stage also encourages reflection on the project's feasibility.

F: Initiative Implementation

- Developing the action plan / 5XP per point of the plan
- Adding new members to the project group (condition: acceptance of invitation) / 15XP per person
- Assigning tasks to initiative stages / 5XP per stage
- Assigning project group members to tasks / 3XP per task
- Assigning completion dates to stages or tasks / 1XP per date
- Completing tasks / 7XP per task
- Completing stages / 20XP per stage
- Organizing project group meetings (marking in the calendar) / 10XP per event
- Creating the first thread on the project board / 5XP
- Creating additional threads on the project board / 2XP each
- Creating a list of required resources / 2XP
- Reviewing sections: Social Project Funding Programs / 5XP
- Reviewing sections: Legal Framework for Projects / 5XP
- Using the search option for NGOs / 15XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Building a community around the project is a key element at this stage. The project board allows the leader and later other participants to share ideas, post photos and files, and conduct discussions. Meetings, both online and in-person, are rewarded.

Transition to the next level occurs after completing half the planned stages or tasks.

G: Initiative Realization

- Adding new members to the project group (condition: acceptance of invitation) / 15XP per person
- Completing tasks / 5XP per task
- Completing stages / 20XP per stage
- Creating additional threads on the project board / 2XP each
- Organizing project group meetings (marking in the calendar) / 5XP per event
- Developing a maintenance or repair plan (available only for place-based initiatives) / 30XP
- Assigning people to maintenance or repair actions / 20XP (one-time)
- Sharing photos of initiative implementation / 10XP
- Sharing a description of project implementation / 15XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Completing the initiative and reflecting on the place's future (if relevant). Sharing project outcomes and experiences is encouraged.

H: Caring for the created space

- Carrying out maintenance or repair actions / 30XP
- Publishing photos of the initiative's life / 2XP

⇨ **User Goal**

Encouraging care for the completed initiative.

E

LVL4

Allows also:
+ Sending personalized invitations,
+ Posting on forums without restrictions, creating your own threads,
+ Sharing your project on social media,
+ Creating working groups.

80XP

D

LVL3

Allows also:
+ Starting the process of submitting your own initiative.
+ Adding supporting members to the initiative,
+ Adding initiative partners,
+ Submitting resource requirements,
+ Recruitment of participants,
+ Using tools that support planning.

45XP

C

LVL2

Allows also:
+ Adding:
  + Available resources,
  + Skills and expertise,
  + Willingness to help,
+ Creating your own initiative,
+ Joining an initiative,
+ Inviting new individuals/organizations to join the platform,
+ Inviting organizations/locations to form a partnership,
+ Generating a personal token,
+ Sending private messages to other users,
+ Replying to forum threads,
+ Sharing existing projects on social media.

13XP

B

LVL 1

Allows also:
+ Inviting others to connect,
+ Browsing inspiration sections and completed projects,
+ Following trends and saving inspirations,
+ Exploring Trending Projects and News,
+ Saving interesting initiatives,
+ Contacting initiative leaders.

5XP

A

start

Allows:
+ Registration,
+ Filling-in profile's details
+ Browsing inspiration sections and completed projects.

0XP

F

LVL5

150XP

Allows also:
+ **Generating posters and flyers,**
+ **Using the event calendar or project board,**
+ **Creating threads on the project board,**
+ **Creating a list of required resources,**
+ **Assigning tasks to other people involved in the initiative,**

+ **Reviewing the sections:**
  + *Programs funding social projects,*
  + *Legal frameworks for projects,*
+ **Using the option to search for non-governmental organizations.**

G

LVL6

230XP

Allows also:
+ **Creating a plan for maintenance or repair actions,**
+ **Assigning people to maintenance or repair tasks,**

+ **Sharing photos of the project's execution,**
+ **Sharing a description of the project's execution.**

H

LVL7

330XP

Allows also:
+ **Sharing photos from the life of the initiative**
+ **Initiating more projects,**

+ **Publishing a "success story" on the portal sharing the experience.**

LVL8

Figure 7.1. System of scoring points. Own elaboration

Table 7.1. Examples of badges users can earn and the conditions for obtaining them.

Action Goal	Badge Name	Condition to Fulfill	Experience Points
Adding new contacts	Śmiałek	5 contacts	+5XP
	Gaduła	25 contacts	+50XP
	Ekstrawertyk	100 contacts	+300XP
Inviting new People /organizations to the portal	Rekruter	5 people	+10XP
	Ambasador Społeczności	25 people	+30XP
	Łącznik Społeczny	50 people	+70XP
	Mistrz Sieciowania	100 people	+150XP
Submitting ideas for initiatives	Inicjator	1 idea	+50XP
	Pomysłodawca	3 ideas	+100XP
	Wizjoner	10 ideas	+300XP
Completing projects	Realizator	1 project	+100XP
	Budowniczy Wspólnoty	3 projects	+250XP
	Mistrz Projektów	7 projects	+450XP
	Strateg Lokalnej Zmiany	15 projects	+1000XP
Joining others' initiatives	Pomocna Dłoń	1 initiative	+10XP
	Uczestnik Zmian	5 initiatives	+50XP
	Sąsiedzka Prawa Ręka	15 initiatives	+350XP
	Mistrz Lokalnej Zmiany	25 initiatives	+500XP
Forming partnerships	Sojusznik	3 partnerships	+ 15XP
	Budowniczy Relacji	7 partnerships	+30XP
	Partner Strategiczny	15 partnerships	+50XP
Sharing skills	Złota Rączka	5 skills	+5XP
	Skarbnica Umiejętności	10 skills	+15XP
Sharing initiative progress (photos or notes)	Świadek	1 post/photo	+5XP
	Kronikarz	10 posts/photos	+25XP
	Reporter Społeczny	30 posts/photos	+70XP
Activity on forums (commenting and discussions)	Uczestnik	10 posts	+10XP
	Dyskutant	50 posts	+35XP
	Mentor	150 posts	+80XP
For the first 10 users to create initiatives focused on greenery	Zielony Pionier	First 10 users	+50XP
For the first leader to complete an initiative	Złoty Order Aktywności	First leader	+75XP

7.3.4. Examples of website page overview
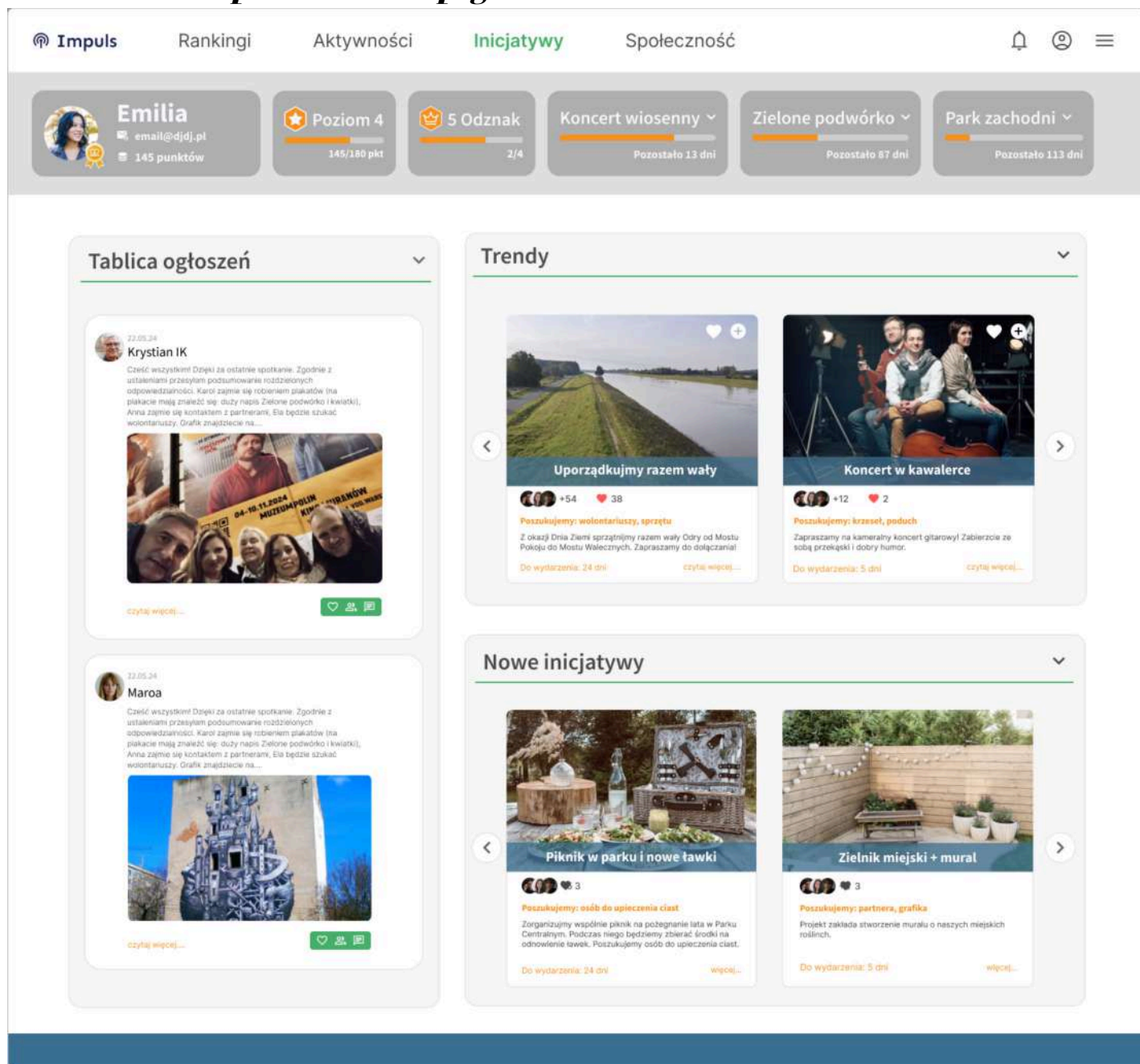
Figure 7.2. *»Explore Initiatives« view that allows to explore trends and latest projects.*

❤ Polub   ⊕ Dołącz   < Udostępnij   ✉ Napisz wiadomość

Zielone podwórko

`Zieleń` `Renowacja`

Opis inicjatywy

Zielone Podwórko to inicjatywa mająca na celu przekształcenie podwórka przy ulicy Jaracza w przyjazną, zieloną przestrzeń. Chcemy stworzyć miejsce, które nie tylko będzie oazą spokoju i zieleni, ale również pomoże w praktycznym wykorzystaniu wody deszczowej. W ramach projektu planujemy:

🌱 Posadzenie roślin – kwiatów, krzewów, a może nawet małych drzew, które uczynią przestrzeń bardziej estetyczną i przyjazną dla mieszkańców oraz lokalnej fauny.

💧 Instalację cysterny na wodę deszczową – woda ta będzie wykorzystywana do podlewania roślin, co jest zarówno ekologiczne, jak i oszczędne.

Projekt ma na celu integrację sąsiadów wokół wspólnego celu, a także promowanie praktyk przyjaznych środowisku.

Kogo szukamy?

👩‍🌾👨‍🌾🧑‍🌾 Ludzi z pasją do ogrodnictwa – jeśli kochasz rośliny i chcesz podzielić się swoją wiedzą, jesteś idealnym kandydatem!

👨‍👩‍👧‍👦 Mieszkańców, którzy chcą działać dla swojego sąsiedztwa – niezależnie od doświadczenia, liczą się chęci i otwartość na współpracę.

💡 Osób z pomysłami – twoje propozycje mogą uczynić nasz projekt jeszcze lepszym.

🔧 Majsterkowiczów – potrzebujemy wsparcia przy instalacji cysterny i drobnych pracach technicznych.

Dołącz do nas, by wspólnie tworzyć zieleń na naszym podwórku i budować zaangażowaną społeczność! Zgłoś się już dziś – każde wsparcie ma znaczenie! 🌿

Zespół

👤	**Lider**	Barbara Nowak
👤	**Główny partner**	CAL Grunwald

O inicjatywie

❤ 38 polubień

📅 2 wydarzenia

⟩ początek 1.04   koniec 30.09

⇅ 4 etapy

📍 miejsce   ul. Jaracza 205, Wrocław

Etapy

Etap 1 → **Etap 2** → Etap 3 → Etap 4

Etap 2

1 kwietnia - 15 lipca

Szykujemy się do prac! Na tym etapie należy pozyskać wszystkie zgody na zasadzenie oraz znaleźć partnera, który wesprze nas w sfinansowaniu zakupu roślin. Poniżej szczegółowy harmonogram prac

Potrzebne wsparcie

🗄 Narzędzia ogrodnicze

🌿 Znawca roślin

🍃 Cebulki kwiatów

Komunikacja
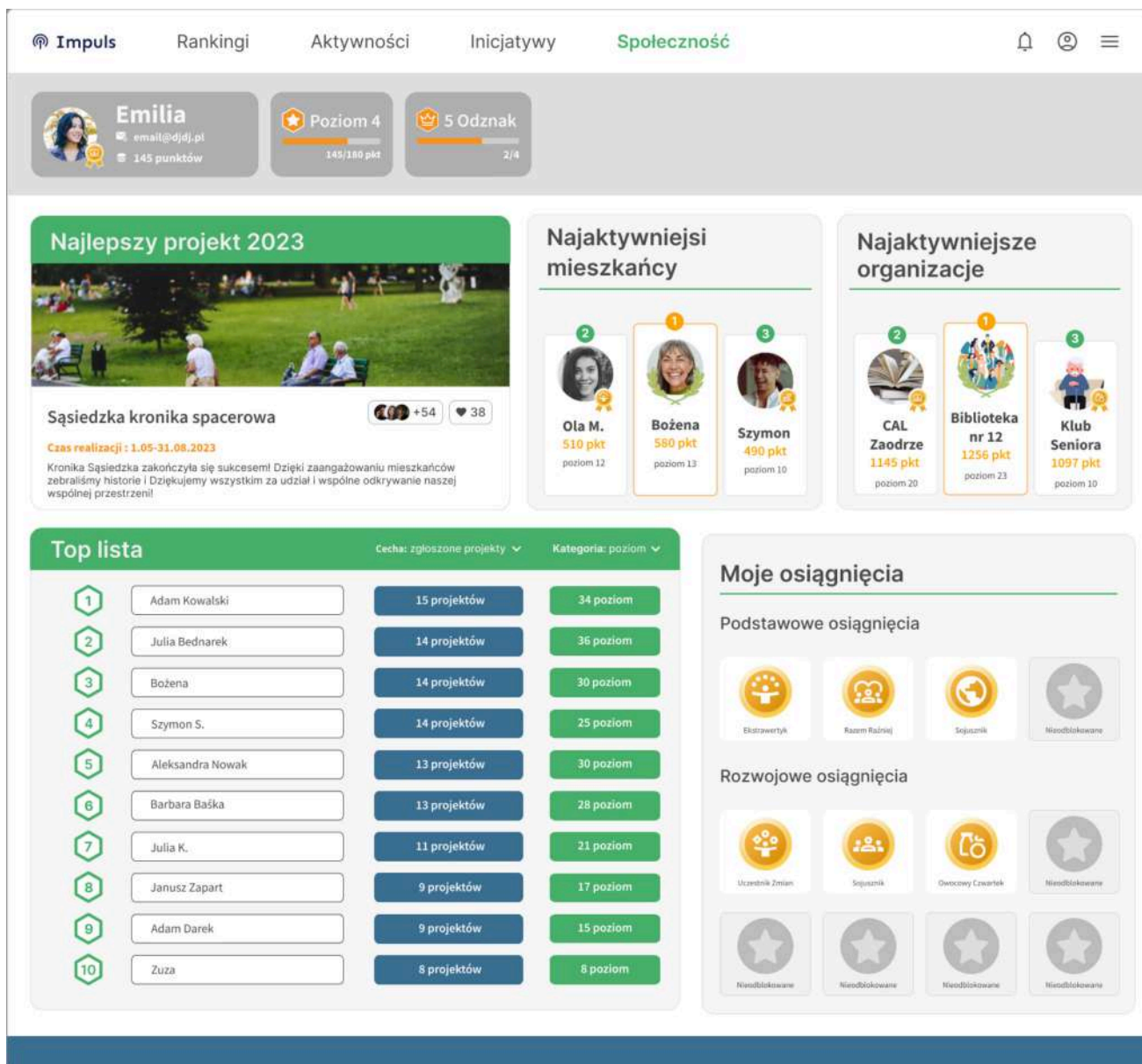
<   >

Figure 7.3. »Initiative Detail« view. ❮

Figure 7.4. »Edit Initiative« view.

Figure 7.5. *»Rankings« view.*

8.
Summary

This dissertation focuses on the research problem associated with the participatory approach in the broadly understood design practice, oriented toward designing public spaces. The aim of the study was not only to identify and describe this complex issue, but also to explore innovative solutions in both theoretical and practical dimensions.

The thesis posits: *"Incorporating participatory action research strategies into design practice positively impacts both the process of designing public spaces and the level of engagement of local communities."*

To verify this thesis, an analysis of two case studies illustrating participatory design processes and a co-authored public space project in Brussels was conducted. These examples provided rich research material and enabled an understanding of the complex mechanisms shaping urban spaces. The case studies identified the benefits, challenges, and key aspects associated with planning and implementing participatory projects and the processes linked to them. Additionally, the author's own design practice allowed for an empirical evaluation of participatory tools and their effectiveness.

The importance of transdisciplinary competencies and a socially conscious approach in design work was emphasized, pointing out that the evolution of the design profession is intrinsically linked to their development. Furthermore, the dissertation explored concepts related to social participation in the design context, which, although not yet widely adopted in Poland, play a crucial role in international debates on co-creating spaces. This terminology, rooted in the practices of countries with a strong culture of civic engagement, can serve as an inspiration for implementing new models of collaboration in the Polish context

The study examined the role of creating spatial situations and the significance of architectural presence in participatory processes. Effective methods promoting active resident engagement in design processes were presented, emphasizing the importance of co-creating urban public spaces not only by professionals—architects and designers—but also by residents. Furthermore, examples of participatory art were presented, showcasing its potential impact on creating and experiencing public spaces.

The dissertation references Wrocław's context and existing participatory tools, with a detailed analysis of local initiative programs, the Wrocław Participatory Budget, and the Local Activity Centers model. Drawing on research conducted in Brussels and the author's experiences, innovative participatory practices were proposed for potential implementation in this context. Solutions were suggested to support active citizen participation in identifying needs, designing, and managing public spaces, implemented in close collaboration with architects and designers and based on existing organizational structures.

One of the key outcomes of the work is the prototype of the custom-designed tool—the digital **Impuls** platform—aimed at active residents, organizations, public institutions, and city authorities. This platform seeks to support the implementation of initiatives and changes in public spaces through a participatory approach. With its user-friendly interface and functional flexibility, the tool enables the engagement of individuals with varying levels of technical skills.

The platform's features include encouraging collaboration and partnerships, resource sharing, and social activity promotion. Gamification elements, such as a point system, badges, and rewards, enhance user motivation by emotionally engaging them in their

activities. The platform supports collaboration among residents and enables decision-makers to share information about planned and ongoing projects, fostering better coordination at the local level.

The **Impuls** platform was designed to support the development of civil society and strengthen urban resilience while also serving as a tool for authentic participation. Its universal nature allows it to be used in initiatives unrelated to public space design. The platform facilitates self-organization processes, builds social capital, and reinforces interpersonal bonds, becoming a vital element of contemporary authentic participatory practices.

The dissertation includes an annex featuring the following materials:

- An informational brochure for residents presenting the **Impuls** platform's principles.
- The zine "**Designing for Communities**", which contains a glossary of key terms related to social participation and the **Manifesto of Public Space Designers**.
- An infographic illustrating the **author's proprietary model of the design-research process**.

8.1. Limitations of the Study

The research during my doctoral studies significantly influenced my development, enhancing my design skills and engagement as a citizen. I honed my research competencies, particularly in qualitative techniques, and gained valuable experience working with people—as an animator, facilitator, and mediator. Each of these roles broadened my perspective on public space and its role in the lives of local communities. This experience deepened my understanding of the design process and the interpersonal dynamics that accompany it.

However, with the benefit of hindsight and reflection on the doctoral process, I can recognize three key areas for improvement that could have helped the project better achieve its full potential.

1. The absence of an additional research cycle.

My engagement in activities for local communities was filled with passion and enthusiasm. The work I carried out brought me great satisfaction, not only because of the new connections and numerous conversations held but also due to the co-creation of spaces established on collaboration and mutual inspiration. Through this project, I discovered the potential to approach public space development in a way that integrates a broader perspective of the city as a socio-spatial system.

The design analyses conducted during my stay in Brussels, as well as numerous interviews and observations, allowed me to deeply understand architects' work and space users' experiences.

Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of my doctoral research, it was not possible for me to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of design processes over an extended timespan or to test the Impuls platform.

Although the experiences and insights gathered could serve as a foundation for future projects, their practical implementation and evaluation were beyond the scope of the doctoral study.

2. A broader analysis of Local Activity Centers and the Wrocław Participatory Budget.

As part of the data collection, I analyzed the participatory context in Wrocław, focusing on selected examples of Local Activity Centers (CALs) and participatory tools such as the Wrocław Participatory Budget (WBO). This analysis provided a foundation for comparing conclusions drawn from the Brussels context with that of Wrocław. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of participatory processes on a city-wide scale, it would be valuable to expand the study to include additional CALs and to analyze the WBO using quantitative techniques. Such an extended analysis could offer valuable insights into the diversity of approaches depending on the neighborhood and enable a more objective evaluation of submitted projects and their social impact.

3. The original portal model was not tested.

The custom-designed digital portal is a theoretical solution to enhance citizen engagement and streamline participatory processes in Wrocław. The next step should involve developing a prototype and conducting pilot tests, which would allow the identification of potential technological and functional constraints in scaling the portal up. However, this surpasses the time frame and organizational scope of the doctoral work.

9.

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Dominique Nalpas is the author of the photograph on page 8.

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Marta Siemińska is the author of the photographs on pages 22, 44, 74, 176, 192, 230, and 260.

Toestand is the author of the photograph on page 154.
Source: https://www.facebook.com/MarieMoskou, [accessed: 10.11.2024].