

Placemaking Workshops: Application of the PPS Method



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Abstract This article describes three cases of placemaking workshops conducted by the author in three different countries: Ukraine, Tunisia, and Poland, and against different cultural and political backgrounds. In each case, the application of placemaking methods encouraged public participation, showed the potential to facilitate the decision-making process, and helped resolve potential or existing conflicts while building confidence in democratic procedures and institutions. This research highlights the importance of the PPS method which helped to build a team of stakeholders sharing similar views, ones convinced that a positive change is possible and are ready to cooperate. Such attitudes are especially valuable in places where local democracy and participatory urban management is undeveloped.

Keywords Participation · Placemaking · PPS · Public space · Workshop

1 Introduction

Public space is a priceless environment for human communication, interaction, and local economies. It is a space for culture and a medium for symbolic content. A good public space is fundamental for a sense of community and thus an indispensable component of sustainable urban structures.

Democratization of space remains a challenge for many municipalities. Spatial quality and public functions may no longer be imposed top-down upon a place, but it is possible to improve the quality of a public space by using adequate methods of participatory planning and design workshops. Even if the first attempt at such actions do not bring spectacular results at once, it is necessary to continue refining the methods of participation, for which there is no effective alternative in a democratic system. To develop a culture of participation, one needs to raise the standards of debate on space, respect the diversity of stakeholders, and stay

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open-minded while looking for a consensus. The municipal administration may find valuable partners to work hand in hand on the above issues in non-governmental organizations, which do the educational work in the field of space culture, and prepare the public for wider participation.

2 Methods

2.1 *Participation Through Workshops*

The roles of the planner and the architect are shifting from the positions of leaders and artists who impose their concepts, to the roles of advisers and experts who offer their services to space users. Workshop methods are a means of this shift. The flow of knowledge on the nature, identity, and problems of particular places (and the clash of diverse opinions, behaviors and motivations that occur during a workshop), change the urbanist's perspective from subjective, external, and aesthetic to one that is more objective and sensitive to the local traditions and complex historical, social, cultural, and psychological contexts of the place [3].

The work of the architect and urban planner has always required decisions of a psychological and social nature [7]. The development of workshop design methods is a practical consequence of a large interest in various trends of environmental psychology and the appreciation of surveys (especially qualitative ones). These methods are intended to help work out a consensus or at least a compromise in conflict situations. A fundamental problem is the efficient organization of the dialogue environment and selection of representative partners, as well as establishing effective communication channels between professionals and the community [9]. What helps in that approach are local grassroots initiatives, led by NGOs, based, to a considerable degree, on a voluntary work. In addition to space quality and economic vitality improvement, the purpose of workshops is to activate and integrate local communities.

2.2 *Placemaking*

The word *placemaking* means a certain type of creation of characteristic places, ones that are particularly valuable and focus on the key functions of a public space, primarily for local communities. Such a process of creation may only take place with the involvement of various stakeholders, crystallizing the sense of community while it happens. Walljasper [12] argues that even the most struggling communities can be revived, not by top-down actions and infusions of money, but by the people who live there. The challenges which might be addressed include crime, comfort and safety, traffic control, image, and economic vitality. Real-life examples prove

the effectiveness of placemaking processes in which active individuals—sometimes supported by urban planners, architects, developers, and policymakers—change their environments in a sustainable manner, taking small steps while motivating others to make change.

Placemaking should be a continuous process with the ensuing feedback: a common vision attracts partners, financial resources, and new initiatives. Solutions are dynamic and implemented in stages; they are based on previous, initially small successes. More daring experiments are introduced judiciously and with caution. The introduction of potential formal novelties should be accompanied by the careful monitoring of the place users' response. Changes are based on constant appraisal and improvements. Involvement increases alongside the feeling of public control and ownership.

One of the most important Polish organizations that disseminates placemaking and public space design and management workshop methods is the Foundation of Active People and Places (MiLA).¹ Three selected projects carried out by this organization in 2013 will be discussed further in this paper. The methodology used in MiLA's projects is based mostly on the abundant experience of the organization, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a non-profit established in 1975 which endeavored to assist local communities in reclaiming spaces that were socially degraded or car-dominated, and to create or strengthen the more traditional characteristics of public places [11].

PPS's activities are based on the methods of observation and evaluation of space dynamics described by Jacobs [2], Whyte [13] and Gehl [1]. PPS combined theory with dozens of years of practical experience and developed an alternative approach to complex public space problems: a set of patterns and effective evaluation methods were hammered out to assist in the understanding of urban space functioning and potential place value. The PPS method helps various stakeholders define and express their aspirations, needs, and priorities. Participation appears at the stage of developing initial visions. Experts play a supporting role. Solutions result from an in-depth knowledge of local reality and multi-aspect place evaluation. A common vision attracts partners, resources, and new initiatives. Actions become dynamic and are built on previous small successes [4].

The fast and affordable improvement of poorly functioning public spaces releases social energy that is indispensable for continuous and productive space operation. Placemaking methodology consists of the creation of local partnerships that are responsible for day-to-day management, facility improvement, and maintenance of public space. Local governments and administrations obtain support from private entities interested in high space standards in their surroundings.

In Poland, the PPS placemaking method was originally disseminated by the Polish Environmental Partnership in cooperation with the International Centre of

¹The foundation with its seat in Kraków, deals with development based on natural and cultural values of places, as well as civic activity and co-responsibility in communities (<http://www.mila.org.pl/>). In placemaking projects, it collaborates on a permanent basis with the International Centre of Education of the Cracow University of Technology, and INTBAU Poland.

Education of the Cracow University of Technology (ICE CUT). After the first European PPS conference in Kraków, the Polish version of the fundamental PPS manual, *How to Turn a Place Around* [10], was prepared and published. It was supplemented with a description of several case studies from CEE countries. The book [6] describes basic rules and tools for observation, analysis, dialogue, evaluation of places, and the organisation of placemaking processes.² Additionally, a series of lectures and workshops were given to a number of communities across Poland in 2009. The method became better known in the country and sought after in numerous places as an element of municipal governance.

The place-oriented approach to spatial management has revealed substantial potential for public involvement, collaborative decision making, and community building. It appeared to be an effective instrument for participatory democracy enhancement. Today, the experiences from the programme carried out in 2009 help to further disseminate placemaking methodology in Poland and abroad.

3 Results

3.1 Case Study: *Industrial Heritage of Krivyi Rih and the Saksagan River: Cooperation–Dialogue–Democracy*

Place: Krivyi Rih, Ukraine

Project Leader: MiLA Foundation of Active People and Places

Project Partners:

- The Krivyi Rih Society for Defending the Rule of Law (Ukraine)
- Główny Instytut Górnictwa (GIG) Katowice, Poland

Project value: 206,900 PLN

Source of financing:

- Development Cooperation Programme of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Democracy Support Programme, Solidarity Fund PL.

Project Description

The project, addressed to local non-governmental organizations and all active residents of the city, is a continuation of the Polish-Ukrainian programme initiated in 2012, which resulted in the creation of an intersectoral partnership in Krivyi Rih for the revitalization of the Saksagan River. The main objective of the project was

²Its publication was accompanied by a conference, *Turning Great Ideas into Great Public Spaces* (Kraków, 1–2.10.2009), co-organized by PPS, Environmental Partnership, and Cracow University of Technology.

the development of local democracy (and in particular strengthening the position of non-governmental organizations as partners in social dialogue with local authorities through integration and partnership development), as well as the genuine involvement of city inhabitants in the decision-making process concerning local matters.

Social dialogue was initiated within the framework of the project and concerned the following three topics:

- Revitalization of a selected section of the Saksagan River (with the application of the participatory method of public spatial planning),
- Development of the municipal park based on the designs selected by the Krivyi Rih residents,
- Commencement of the local industrial heritage conservation and promotion (with the application of the heritage interpretation methodology named eco-museum).

The project included meetings with the partners, workshops, field trips, and a study visit in Poland. Moreover, extensive consultations were organized with the residents of Krivyi Rih concerning the design plans for developing the Saksagan River banks and the municipal park. The first elements of the development have already been put in place (e.g. small items of street and park furniture, information boards, etc.).

The work on the riverfront recreational park began at the end of 2013. The park's concept, as well as its most basic functions, were defined in the placemaking workshop, which took place in July 2013. During the two-day workshop, its participants had a chance to learn about the theoretical foundations of sustainable urban design and the benefits that are to be drawn from respecting the tradition of a place and encouraging local stakeholders' participation. The relevant experience *inter alia* of the PPS and INTBAU organizations was presented. In the second, practical part of the workshop, the Place Game formula was implemented, with the use of evaluation forms developed and used by the PPS. The Place Game is an organized way of brainstorming potential improvements to public spaces in a dialogue between the people who use them. The result was a prioritized list of ideas and postulates forming a consistent programme for the new riverfront park.

The results of the workshop were subsequently shared with the Krivyi Rih residents (more than 300 questionnaires were collected), which formed the foundations of the civic design plan for the development of this area. In autumn 2013, the city district authorities issued the necessary permit, thus the implementation of the civic design began. The time schedule of the construction of particular elements of the park reflects the priority list developed during the workshop and subsequent consultations [8].

3.2 Case Study: Young Leaders of the Local Communities of Sousse and Its Surroundings (*Jeunes Leaders de La Communauté Locale de Sousse et Environs*)

Place: Monastir, Tunisia

Project Leader: MiLA Foundation of Active People and Places

Project Partners:

- L'Association des Jeunes Méditerranéens pour les Echanges Culturels (AJMEC)
- Association 'Eureka'
- Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Sousse

Project value: 278,455 PLN

Source of financing:

- Development Cooperation Programme of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Democracy Support Programme, Solidarity Fund PL.

Project Description

The main objective of the project was the civic education of the young people of Sousse and its neighboring towns: Kalaa Kebira, Hammam Sousse, Monastir, and M'saken, who were to learn and apply in practice the innovative methods of participatory planning and active approach.

The aim was achieved by:

- providing training for a group of 25 youth leaders to strengthen the mechanisms of local democracy and the participatory approach to planning and implementation of local development (training and a travelling workshop)
- the formation and support of Youth Councils in five towns
- the implementation of five youth initiatives selected by way of a contest
- starting and maintaining a youth portal and newspaper
- presenting good practices in involving young people in the development of local communities in the Małopolska region in Poland.

A practical guidebook on developing sustainable communities, one addressed to local the administration and non-governmental organizations, was also prepared within the framework of the project.

As a result, young people not only were able to improve their knowledge and skills, but also to get involved in some specific actions, thus becoming partners in the dialogue with local the administration on matters they considered important [8].

The key component of the training programme was the five-day travelling workshop³ for the Youth Councils' leaders from Sousse and four neighboring

³The workshops were run by: Barbara Kazior, Małgorzata Łuszczek, and Anna Jarzębska from the MiLA Foundation of Active People and Places, Tomasz Jeleński from ICE CUT and INTBAU Poland, and Justin Hyatt, the Tunisian coordinator of the project.

towns. The aim was to present them with various methods of working with local communities, the joint planning of changes, and carrying on the dialogue. Each town was the host of one workshop session:

- M’saken—24th July 2013—Future City Game
- Kalaa Kebira—25th July 2013—Civic Journalism
- Sousse—26th July 2013—Environmental Protection Projects
- Monastir—27th July 2013—Placemaking
- Hammam Sousse—28th July 2013—Oxford-Style Debate and Art of Dialogue.

The subject of the placemaking workshop was part of the harbour in the historic town of Monastir. Contrary to the town centre (*the medina*), where the traditional development has been preserved, the prevailing architecture of the harbor area is of modern, suburban character and contains the dominant transportation infrastructure and hotel function. The beach and dunes have been cut off from the town by the road called the Route de la Falaise and cater almost exclusively to the needs of tourists; most of the time they remain deserted. Access from the town centre is difficult, unattractive, and dangerous at places.

The Monastir Youth Council chose the harbor as the site of the placemaking workshop so that they could work out some options to make the place more attractive, give it a more distinctive character, and tie it back to the town. The workshop was preceded by two presentations:

- *Why places are important to cities and towns*—prepared specially for the local context, i.e. taking into account the tradition of creating public spaces in an Arab historic town (*the medina*);
- *PPS and Placemaking*: an alternative approach to planning and design, which presented *inter alia* the rules of the Place Game—the tool for place performance evaluation used by the PPS.

After the break came the practical part of the workshop, in which the Place Game formula was used. The group was divided into four teams, which went to the harbor with the task of completing the evaluation forms on site. Each team had to fill in one evaluation form. In order to do so, they had to negotiate all the answers within the team. After returning to the town hall, representatives of each team presented the results of their work. The suggestions they put forward were written down and a vote was taken to determine the priority list. During the final discussion that completed the process, participants expressed their positive surprise at the fact that tools for activating communities around places were so friendly, and that such activity did not necessarily require specialist knowledge.

At the end of the workshop a working team was formed, which was to be responsible for further actions leading to the implementation of the jointly created vision.

3.3 Case Study: *Let's Talk About Mariacka*

Place: Katowice, Poland

Project Leader: MiLA Foundation of Active People and Places

Project Partner: International Centre of Education, Cracow University of Technology (ICE CUT)

Project value: 44,000 PLN

Source of financing: The Katowice City Hall.

Project Description

In 2012, a group of Katowice city councilors, responding to the conflict growing around Mariacka Street, approached the author of this paper asking about the possibility of organizing an urban planning workshop focusing on the place and implementing the methods described in the Polish version of the textbook, *How to Turn a Place Around* [6].

Workshop preparation, preceded by an information campaign and a field study, started at the beginning of 2013. The project was under the umbrella of the MiLA Foundation of Active People and Places, which specialises in the activation of local communities.

The main objective of the project was to analyse the conflicts and work out a programme of necessary changes in the functioning of the Mariacka Street area in Katowice. A few years before, the street underwent a serious transformation: together with a larger area of the city centre, it was pedestrianized and renovated. The street surface was replaced, new street furniture was installed, and most importantly, a new programme of incentives for gastronomic business investors was created to encourage them to open restaurants, bars, and clubs in the area. The street was to become a vibrant promenade lined with pavement cafés, eateries, and music clubs. Residents who did not accept the new character of the street were offered places in other locations. This idea pertained especially to the council flats' tenants and others who rent their premises from the city.

The plan to liven up the street was successfully completed within two years. The city organized a number of open-air concerts and music festivals, as well as literary and visual arts events. The place soon attracted private cultural events animators, and new clubs won regular patrons and clientele interested in entertainment and artistic activities.

At the same time, a conflict between the new users and the old tenants and residents grew. Not all of them were interested in moving to other locations. Local media trumpeted controversies around some loud music events and the behavior of people abusing alcohol. Complaints about noise, dirt, deficient sanitary infrastructure, hampered access to houses, or even about security issues were becoming increasingly more resonant. City authorities responded nervously and introduced various restrictions on events, which were in turn received rather badly by entrepreneurs and regulars, who had already got used to the intense night life of the street.

The initiative of the group of councilors who suggested dialogue based on the placemaking method was approved by the city mayor. The project called *Let's Talk about Mariacka* was commissioned and financed by the Katowice City Hall, which also provided logistic support, considerably reducing the cost of the field study and workshop. The project was carried out in the period between May and October 2013 by the MiLA and ICE CUT team.

The implementation of the project

The subject of the study was the area of Mariacka Street in Katowice, alongside a few streets directly adjacent to it (in particular Stanisława Street and Mieleckiego Street, which are of similar character). The users of this area were invited to take part in surveys, carried out in the period between 17 June and 30 August 2013 (preliminary survey); and between 3 and 24 September 2013 (the post-workshop survey).

The survey questionnaires were distributed through several channels:

- given out at the information session on 17 June 2013 to meeting participants and passers-by
- delivered to flats and shops at Mariacka, Stanisława, and Mieleckiego Streets—with the support of the Katowice City Hall Press Office
- in municipal institutions (the City of Gardens Gallery and others), where printed questionnaires were laid out for distribution
- on the Internet: both online questionnaires were put up at the www.mariacka-ankieta.mila.org.pl website.

Additionally, information on the ongoing survey was displayed inter alia:

- at the Katowice City Hall website (www.katowice.eu)
- at the MiLA Foundation website (www.mila.org.pl)
- on Facebook, on the profile dedicated to the project (www.facebook.com/events/1402162120004692/)
- at www.Mariacka.eu and www.gazeta.pl portals and in other media.

The preliminary questionnaire was completed by 418 respondents, and the post-workshop questionnaire by 307. The vast majority of them used the online version.

The next stage in the pre-workshop survey was the focus group interviews with three groups of stakeholders: the residents, the entrepreneurs, and the regulars.

The aim of the pre-workshop survey was to collect information on problems, potential conflicts, and needs related to the functioning of Mariacka Street and its environs. The survey was of ancillary character and was not done on a statistically representative sample. Nevertheless, it allowed one to formulate preliminary hypotheses and to spot the most important tendencies, problems, and needs.

The preliminary questionnaire

The survey provided a systematic way of collecting information on how Mariacka Street was perceived by various groups of users: 1. residents 2. owners and

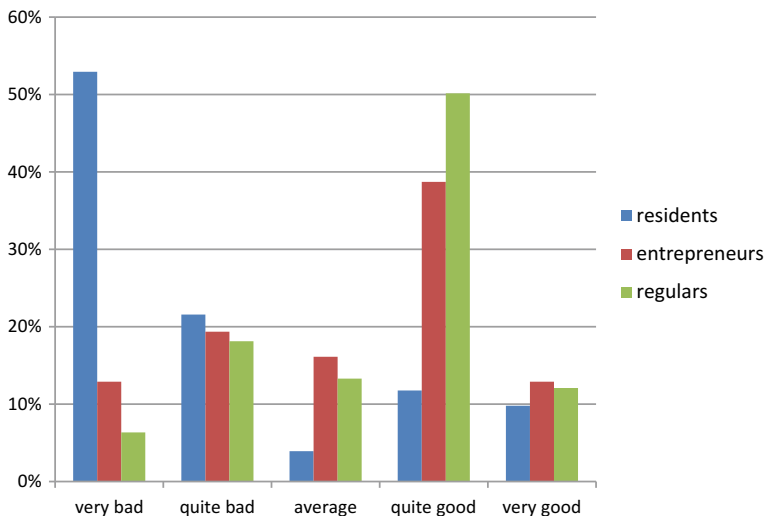


Fig. 1 How do you assess Mariacka Street? (Stakeholder responses)

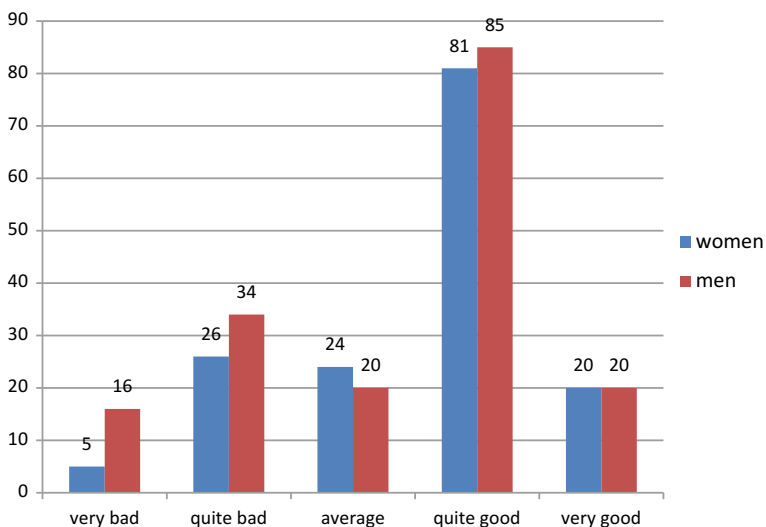


Fig. 2 How do you assess Mariacka Street? (Gender-based responses)

employees of businesses located in the neighborhood and 3. regulars (customers of the restaurants, bars, clubs, shops etc.) (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) [5].

Some of the questions were open; i.e. they allowed the respondent to formulate their own answers freely (e.g. on their associations with Mariacka Street, its

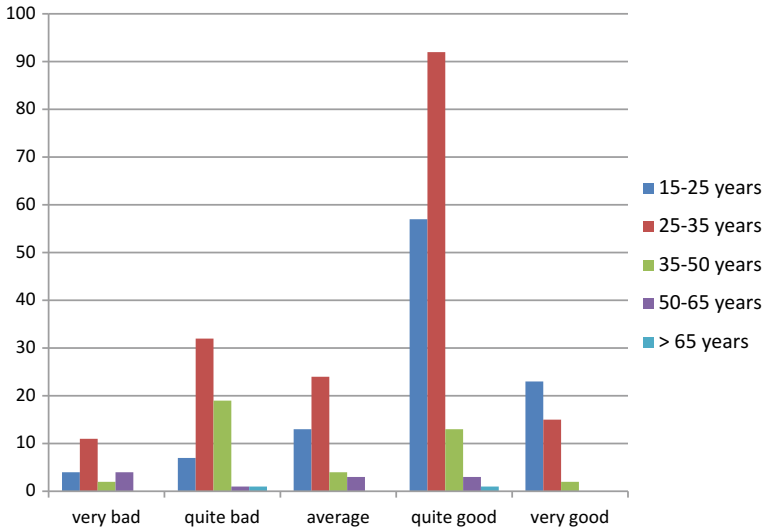


Fig. 3 How do you assess Mariacka Street? (Age-based responses)

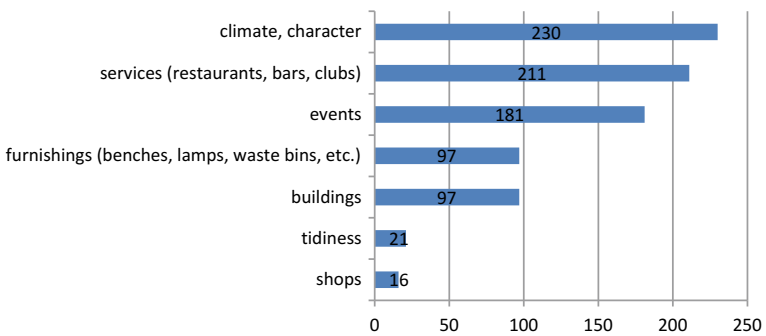


Fig. 4 What do you like about the place?

characteristic elements, source of problems, or their own ideas for developing the space).

Although answering an open question requires certain effort, more than a half of the respondents presented their own suggestions for changes. In order to facilitate the analysis, they were subsequently grouped into three categories: diversification of the programme, changes in the space, and changes concerning the organization or management of the place.

The second part of the questionnaire was in the form of closed questions, yet each one of them offered the possibility of adding a comment or suggestion other than the ones provided on the list. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents had

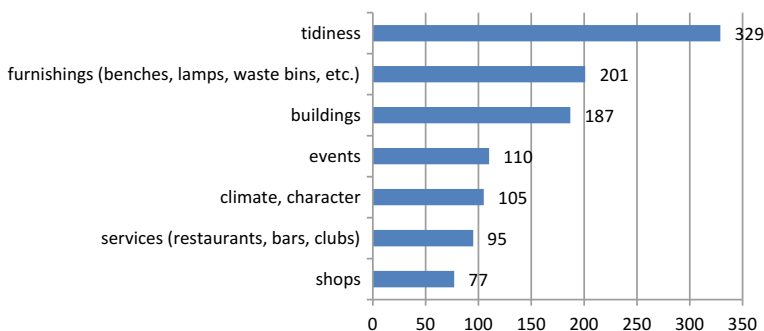


Fig. 5 What would you like to be improved?

to answer some questions about themselves, which allowed one to analyse answers in the context of the respondent's age, gender, and education level.

The answers exhibited a considerable similarity of opinions in certain aspects, particularly with regard to cleanliness, security, and what the street has to offer. Of particular significance to the survey results is the fact that the two groups that were most conflicted with each other—the residents and the entrepreneurs—put forward very similar suggestions.

Group interviews

There were several objectives to achieve by carrying out the interviews: first, to obtain opinions on Mariacka Street (both positive and negative features) with particular emphasis on the deficiencies of the place; secondly, to identify the conflict areas—define the relations between the different groups of users; thirdly, to identify the restrictions and factors hindering the amelioration of the situation; and finally, to work out acceptable proposals for the alleviation or elimination of the conflicts.

The composition of the sample was intentional—the key criterion was the character of the respondent's relation to Mariacka street. In order to ensure the adequate diversity of respondents, they were put into three groups:

- A. Residents of Mariacka Street and persons residing in its direct vicinity
- B. Entrepreneurs running their businesses in the area of Mariacka Street
- C. Regulars—persons visiting Mariacka Street.

The method used was the *Focus Group Interview (FGI)*. The advantages of this technique are the mutual stimulation of the respondents, creation of certain discussion dynamics, and confrontation of opinions. It is also important that the interviewers learn the opinions of several people simultaneously and in a relatively short time.

The project team was of the opinion that the most valuable field studies—apart from their strictly informative values—also yield a certain interpretational concept or idea, which may lead to the crystallization of new ideas and positive suggestions.

In the *Let's Talk about Mariacka* project, one implemented the *action research* formula, in which the research was a stage in the preparation for the workshop rather than a piece of strictly academic work. The assumption was that the survey should not only provide an objective examination and the best possible qualitative analysis of the existing situation, but also, by the mere fact of being carried out, should introduce some change—for example, because the respondents participating in it begin to understand the problems better, they start to realise their own points of view and the ones of other stakeholders, they learn about applicable solutions, and finally create new suggestions in dialogue with other research participants.

The first day of the workshop (31 August 2013)

The most important element of the workshop's first-day programme was an extensive presentation of the preliminary survey results. Comparing the data from several hundred questionnaires and three focus groups revealed surprisingly numerous similarities of opinions, which created quite a stir among some of the participants. The tone of the discussion became more positive and more matter-of-fact.

The last point of the program's first day was a short introduction into the Place Game (PPS), used as a tool for public evaluation of a place performance, which was planned for the second day.

The second day of the workshop (1 September 2013)

After another, more detailed, explanation of the Place Game rules, the participants formed three teams (each team composed of representatives from different stakeholder groups), which, separately, went for a walk along Mariacka and the neighboring streets to fill in their questionnaires.

The essence of the Place Game is cooperation between a team's participants in the collective evaluation of the quality and potential of a given space. An important rule of the Place Game is that the answers to all the questions on the questionnaire should be developed collectively within each team, which requires negotiating and reaching an agreement on the fundamental issues between people who normally represent different interest groups.

After returning to the workshop room, representatives from the three teams reported on the results of their work, and the main postulates of all three teams were written down on the boards previously prepared for that purpose.

After a complete list of postulates had been compiled, voting was organised to establish priorities. All participants were given an equal number of voting points in the form of sticky dots. They could use them in any way they liked, staking all of them on one (in their opinion, the most important postulate), or distributing their vote among a larger number of postulates.

Summing up the workshop, the project team offered help in establishing an action group to monitor and supervise or animate further action for the improvement of the place quality. The workshop participants expressed their willingness to appoint an interim Mariacka Street Council.

The post-workshop survey

The post-workshop survey enabled the verification of opinions on the most urgent things to be done. The order in which suggestions were listed in the questionnaire resulted from the list of priorities selected by the workshop's participants. The results of the survey slightly revised the order of priorities (Figs. 6, 7, 8 and 9) [5].

The aim of the post-workshop survey was also to verify certain ideas and postulates in individual *In-Depth Interviews* (IDI) with experts known for their profound knowledge of the subject and place, representing stakeholder groups which had not been hitherto surveyed: administration officials, non-governmental organisations, and academics (from the fields of urban studies and anthropology). The transcript of the interviews was included in the final report.

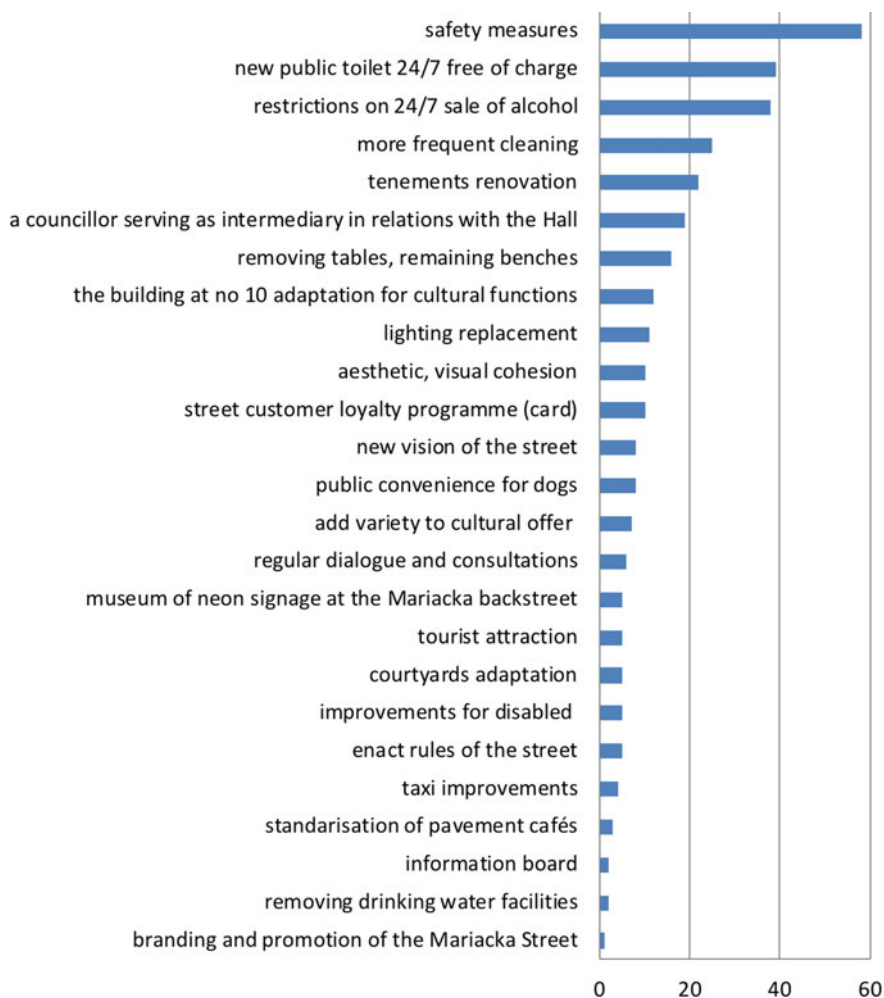


Fig. 6 Proposals—things to be done according to residents

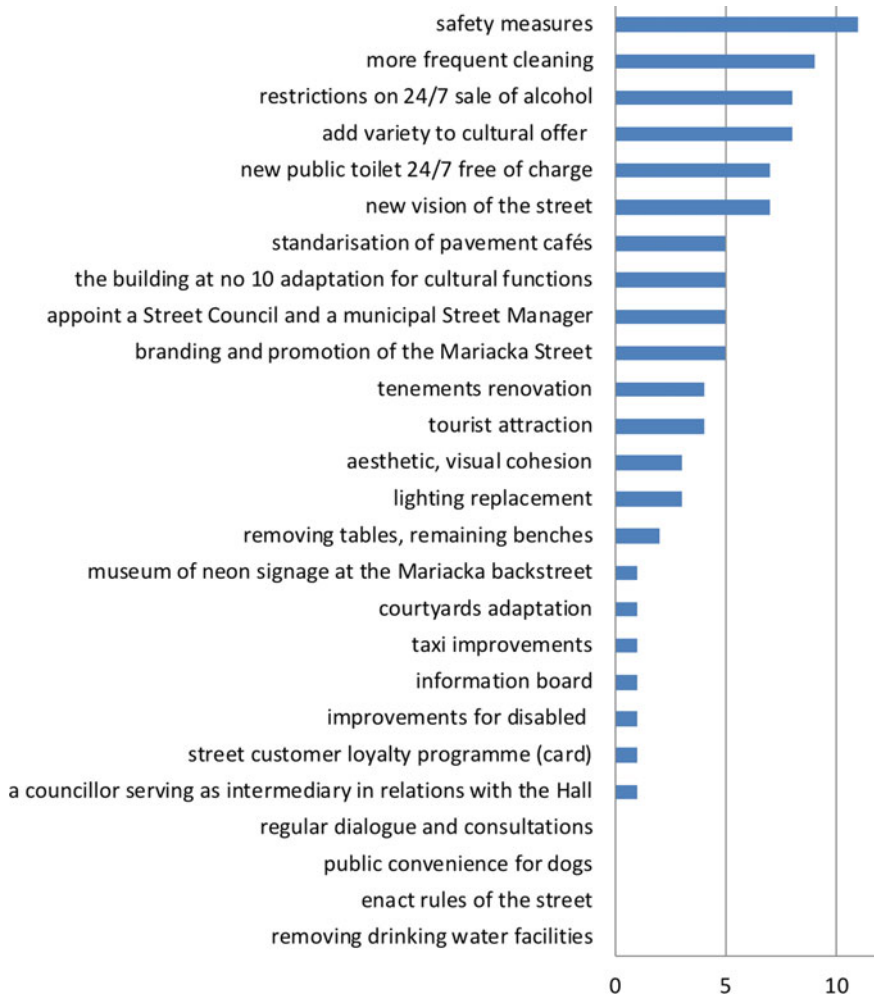


Fig. 7 Proposals—things to be done according to entrepreneurs

Summary of the project

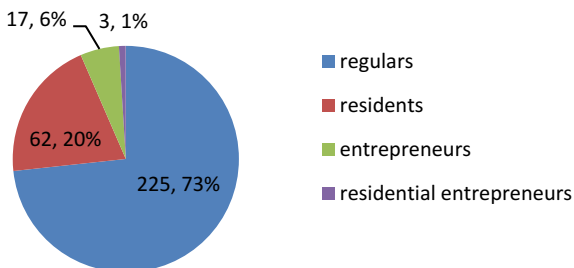
The project confirmed the effectiveness of the method promoted by the PPS. The project team supplemented it with the preceding and complementary qualitative studies in the form of action research. Preliminary questionnaire and focus group interviews not only yielded interesting and valuable research material, but also—which is perhaps even more important from the point of view of the project objectives—made the project more credible for the group of the most active stakeholders, who subsequently came and participated in the workshop.

The preliminary survey brought quite surprising results. The initial impression—created on the basis of prior publications in the local media—that the fundamental



Fig. 8 Proposals – things to be done according to regulars

Fig. 9 Participants of the survey according to groups



problem of the Mariacka Street area was the conflict between the residents and entrepreneurs, proved inaccurate. On the basis of several hundred completed questionnaires and three group interviews, one was able to put forward a hypothesis that the perspectives of these two groups were convergent on many points.

The residents accept the specific role of Mariacka Street and generally understand the character of gastro-business as well as the accompanying events. However, they expect equal understanding and respect from the entrepreneurs and primarily from the city administration. They demanded that they be consulted regarding potential slight departures from the generally accepted rules of social co-existence, e.g. the ones concerning quiet hours.

The stakeholders confirmed that the complaints in the media about the forms and inconveniences of the new street furniture were justified. Nevertheless, they much more often pointed out problems concerning organization or management, seeing the street furniture quality as a secondary, easy-to-fix problem.

The next survey and workshop revealed that most of the frustration related to Mariacka Street stems from the inconsistency and incoherence of the city's policy on the area. On the other hand, stakeholders representing different interest groups expressed willingness to cooperate and show flexibility in the approach to the most controversial issues as long as all the other parties of the dialogue declared equal flexibility and a conciliatory approach.

Residents and entrepreneurs, no matter how conflicting their interests seemed at first, have in fact similar needs when it comes to cleanliness, security, and comfort in their street. However, there also appeared proposals of controversial actions, e.g. 'the creation of standardized winter pavement cafes' which would increase the entrepreneurs' profits, and possibly street aesthetics, but at the same time prolong the period in which Mariacka tends to be bothersome for its residents. Since the Mariacka area residents and entrepreneurs exceeded all expectations regarding their openness to dialogue, an initiative was raised to appoint a Council which would represent the whole community in its relations with City Hall. Following the preliminary agreement reached at the workshop, the Interim Council, representing the key groups of stakeholders, commenced its work in October 2013. The Council is soon to be transformed into a fully representative body, which would be a credible partner for City Hall.

Since the administrative competences are split between different units of the municipal administration, the organizational framework in which city officials work may still prove an obstacle in effective actions. So the project participants expressed their desire for the Hall to appoint a manager or a representative for the Mariacka Street area, a person or institution that would deal with all the problems of this key part of the city centre in an integrated way. Such person would be a partner for the Street Council (now in the process of being formed), and would engage in continuous dialogue with it, facilitating contact with individual specialized City Hall units and officials, as well as with other institutions, such as those responsible for security, cleanliness, or financing integrated revitalization programs [5].

4 Conclusions

The basic assumption of this study was that local stakeholders should have actual influence on the shape of their environment. Sustainable, useful, and beautiful places cannot be built by architects only; it is more of a task for all the residents. Workshop methods require the involvement of stakeholders in the determination of the idea, vision and action programmes at an early stage of the planning or design processes. In this way the sense of democratic control is promoted, which in turn helps build consensus around places and strengthens the community spirit.

Mutual trust is the key requirement for any participatory action to succeed. In order to win and reinforce it, one needs to be active in searching for common goals and cooperation possibilities. Special obligations rest on the local government and administration, who should see it as their duty to support residents and entrepreneurs in their initiatives to improve the quality of living in the city.

The role of architects and urbanists should be seen as of auxiliary character in relation to local communities. Experts, similar to administration and nongovernmental organizations, should try to facilitate dialogue and engage in the process of grassroots implementation, a bottom-up vision based on constant monitoring, responding to change, and agreement between different groups of place users. It means in most cases that architects, planners, local councilors, and officials should accept the change in their status in relation to the community—from a leading to supporting role.

In all three cases described above, the place evaluation game was performed. Each time the context, the goal, and the way the workshop proceeded were different, but the effects were similar: the ‘game’ helped to build a team of stakeholders who felt that they were sharing similar views and were much more convinced that a positive change is possible, and that change mainly depends on their willingness to cooperate. Such attitude is especially valuable in places where local democracy and participatory management style is undeveloped.

The residents’ participation in the planning process is often the starting point for the development of a genuine and mature community. People who see themselves as co-hosts value their environment and care for it more. A well developed and useful space, in turn, offers its users the possibility of daily encounters, thus strengthening community bonds.

Placemaking—the bottom-up ability to create valuable and popular places—requires a new, open, and more integrated approach to space development. In contrast to the traditional design or planning process, the approach resulting from focusing attention on individual features of a place, and on interrelated problems of its various users, is necessarily broader and more in-depth than the one which results from giving priority to individual aesthetics and typical functions. Due to the complex nature of the problems that need to be solved, creating a place is, to a much greater degree than just designing it, conditional on effective management. It requires the involvement of many different stakeholders on a regular basis.

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