

# EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

## project UrbSpace

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## SUMMARY OF URBSPACE PILOT PROJECT EVALUATIONS

### I. Evaluation process

Nineteen pilot projects focusing on public space improvements that ran from November 2009 to March 2011 were assessed through an evaluation questionnaire. By March 2011 all of the projects had undergone a participatory planning phase and 11 had completed an investment phase. The evaluation examined the structure, successes and bottlenecks of the planning and investment phases, the ways in which the five aspects outlined in the Joint Strategy (WP 3) were considered in each project, the outcomes and impacts of each project and the transferability of the methodology used.

### II. Basic project data

#### Project leaders

Of the 19 projects, approximately **one-third (7) were led by municipalities and another almost one-third (6) by non-governmental, non-profit organisations (NGOs)**. The remaining 6 projects were led by a varied spectrum of organisations: local development agencies, a university institute, a church, a school and an informal group of residents.

#### Key stakeholders

The predominance of municipalities and NGOs in project leadership was mirrored in the array of stakeholders. In those projects *not* led by a municipality, the municipality was listed as the most important stakeholder and/or partner (14 projects). Likewise, local NGOs were listed as key stakeholders in the majority of projects (14), regardless of whether the project partner was a NGO or municipality. In several cases the project was led jointly by the municipality and a local NGO, but even without formal joint leadership **close municipal/NGO co-operation was the general rule across the pool of projects** (with two notable exceptions). This close co-operation brought benefits as well as complications, as we will see in the next section.



Schools – preschools, elementary and high schools – constituted another important stakeholder group in 6 projects and were actually regarded as the catalyst in two of those projects. Churches were involved as stakeholders in 3 of the projects, where they were often the driving force (and work force). In 4 projects, local businesses acting as donors were listed as stakeholders and occasionally the business owners served on the project team. In addition to these frequently cited stakeholder groups, there was a diverse collection of public, private and volunteer groupings of individuals that appeared as stakeholders in one or more projects: a working group, a property owner, hospital, city transportation agency, local police force and a university institute.

The breadth of different organisational types in project leadership and stakeholder positions was important in that different viewpoints and issues were brought to the table for debate and resolution. However, the evaluation indicates that whether the project leader was a municipality, NGO or other organisation did not have a crucial impact on project success: rather we may surmise that what was more essential was the composition of each project team, meaning the individuals that came together, their skills and their willingness to work together.

### Community size

The projects were carried out in communities of varying size: the smallest has only 300 inhabitants and the largest over 200,000. Despite this wide range **over half (11) took place in communities with a population of 3,000 or less**. Of the remaining communities, 3 ranged from 10,000 to 15,000 pop., 2 had populations around 40,000 and another 3 were in the 100,000 - 200,000 range. Differences in community size were reflected in public participation levels (with lower levels more often reported in larger communities) along with participatory methods used (see Section III).

### Size of project site

The size of the sites also span a considerable range, from 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> to 600 ha (i.e. 5,997,441 m<sup>2</sup>). However, **over half (11) are the typical size of a local park or centrally located open space (1,200 - 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>)**. Aside from this group of local/central sites, there is a group of 3 sites whose size corresponds to a park of citywide importance (40,000 m<sup>2</sup> - 140,000 m<sup>2</sup>). From there, there is another considerable jump in size to 740,000 m<sup>2</sup>, which corresponds to a typical regional park. The two largest sites were defined as areas with radii of several kilometres: a city centre equalling roughly 2 million m<sup>2</sup> and a 600 ha park serving and located



between 5 municipalities. One project includes smaller 6 sites within a 17-ha city centre.

### Site location within community

Comparing the location of each site within the given community, we see that **over half (12) are located in the centre of the town, village or city**. Another 4 projects are situated on the edge of the community (e.g. the Harangod recreational area at the city outskirts) or between several communities (e.g. 5 Municipalities Park). Three others are located in housing estates within a large city; e.g. Pink Park in Banska Bystrica is located in a housing estate with a population of 18,000 while the city as a whole has a population of 80,000.

Although we may expect lower participation in “edge” site projects – as public use of and thus attachment to edge sites tends to be lower than to central sites – the distinction was not so clear in this pool of 19 projects. Both Harangod and the 5 Municipalities Park evoked broad public interest and perhaps only in the case of Novy Liskovec may we consider whether edge location was one of the factors behind low public participation.

### Site accessibility

In line with the predominance of centrally located sites in small communities, **a high level of site accessibility by multiple modes was common to almost all of the projects**. Most of the sites are accessible by foot (18) and bicycle (16). Car was listed as a mode in 10 cases, and public transportation in 7. Two sites were described as wheelchair accessible. One site is accessible only through a building (as the backyard garden of a hall used by NGOs) and another site is closed at night.

## III. Planning process

### Planning method

All of the projects employed multiple participatory planning techniques. **Most often processes incorporated one or more information provision tools (e.g. distribution of leaflets about the project, articles in the local press), one or more public input**



tools (e.g. survey, public meeting) and a public assessment tool (e.g. public meeting, voting).

A closer look shows that **public meetings were the most frequently cited method** (17). Two public meetings were the norm, with the first as a brainstorming forum to gather public input and the second as a design review and comment session. In some projects the public input meeting was preceded by a group site visit to analyse problems and valued areas. This scope of 2-3 meetings served well in the smaller and mid-sized projects, whereas for the very largest site, 5 Municipalities Park, Legambiente Lombardia used a process comprised of 7 thematic meetings. At each meeting residents, other stakeholders and experts jointly analysed a different Joint Strategy aspect, starting with urban design (i.e. defining park borders) to environmental (identifying threats and valued areas), accessibility (discussing in particular bike accessibility and park entrances), gender and security (indicating perceptions of risk and dangerous areas).

Another commonly used public input tool was a **survey among site users** (13). Most often the survey was community-wide although in some cases it focused on a key user group, e.g. students in Pisnicka, to provide information on specific needs and wishes for site improvements. Five of the projects used children's art contests as a way to gather ideas and draw residents into the project, often followed by an exhibit of the artwork at the first public meeting. A less common but perhaps inspiring method involved residents in gathering historical photos or recalling their memories of the site and past activities there, as in the case of Novy Liskovec, where the park had been a popular recreation area in the past and then fallen into disrepair.

A SWOT analysis was used in the Erfurt accessibility plan in regard to different user needs.

### Involvement of stakeholders<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At this point it is useful to distinguish between two terms: “stakeholder involvement” and “public participation”. Although the terms may be viewed as interchangeable in some contexts, for the purposes herein we will define “stakeholder involvement” as a more intense level of involvement of representatives of key organisations in a project team and/or through meetings, and “public participation” as less frequent or intense involvement of the broader public through the planning



Each project had some type of **project coordination team headed by the project leader and including stakeholder representatives**, most often from NGOs and municipal bodies. In Erfurt, this team took the form of working group of stakeholders and municipal representatives that met regularly throughout the project. The Erfurt group functioned very well due to its long history; members were used to working together and had long-established ways of communicating. Importantly for the project, the group was “taken seriously by the communal decision makers (and was thus) an important part of the process”.

Elsewhere a project team was set up specifically for the project at hand, meaning that the team’s success depended in part on how well they were able to learn to work together in the relatively short pilot project period and whether they were granted – or earned – the respect of partners in the community.

Outside of team meetings, project leaders frequently met with key stakeholders to coordinate the process and discuss specific design or implementation issues. These meetings, though less structured and less visible than public meetings, were equally important to ensuring that planning and design processes ran smoothly. In Sopot e.g. “The project design was consulted at every step with employees responsible for architecture, style and colour in the city”.

As mentioned above specific stakeholder groups played a key role in some projects:

- **School staff and students** were important actors in Pisnicka, Jesenik and Borinka.
- **Church congregations** led the projects in Nove Mesto and Charvaty.
- **Seniors** led the effort in Volkovice and their example encouraged others to join in.
- **Roma** participated in both planning and construction in Hrusov.
- **Newcomers and old-timers** came together through projects in Borinka and Batovce.
- A **theatre NGO** was the project leader in Batovce.

The specific roles of these groups are examined in the sections on planning process successes and bottlenecks below.

### Role of designer

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methods mentioned above. This section focuses on the first, intense involvement of key organisations.



There were only 5 responses to this question, which make it difficult to draw any conclusions across the board. However it is worth mentioning that in two projects, the designer was perceived as part of the team and in another two s/he actively participated in public meetings. In Nove Mesto the designer provided pro bono services (as a result of his membership in the church leading the project). In respect to the issue of pro bono design services it is important to recognise that the participatory focus of these projects places greater demands on the designer. Unless the designer has a special relationship to the project in Nove Mesto, providing commensurate compensation for the time and energy invested may be critical to ensuring quality design work and commitment to the process.

### Planning process budget

Most respondents divided planning process budgets into 2 categories: participation process (e.g. costs of surveys, meetings, contests, etc.) and design work. **Process costs** were listed in 10 of the projects and most often ranged around **400 EUR**. Although this amount is small in relation to other project costs it is worth noting that even the process does carry its own expenses.

Eleven respondents listed the amount of **design fees, which ranged from 400 EUR to 40,000 EUR**. However in **8 projects design fees were under 1,000 EUR**. Two designs cost 1,200 EUR and another 3 ranged from 10,000 EUR to 40,000 EUR. The mean design fee was 6,238 EUR and the median was 800 EUR. As mentioned above one design was completed pro bono. In another project the designer was on the municipal staff and therefore paid through his regular salary.

The funding sources for the planning process included the UrbSpace project, Foundation grants, municipality co-financing and financial and material donations (this last category formed a small portion of total funding).

### Successes of planning phase

**The most frequently cited success of the planning phase – almost across the entire spectrum of projects – was public participation (14).** A number of respondents spoke about the benefits of enabling the public to have a say in the process: **“The participatory approach ensured constant input...” (Erfurt); “through participation residents developed a relationship to the space, which means less vandalism,” (Borinka).** Others saw success in overcoming problems in the participatory planning process: **“Before the project started we were worried whether the seniors (project**



initiators) would be sufficiently open to the needs of other groups. This turned out to be completely unjustified, as children and youth were involved in planning – at the public planning meeting teenagers created their own design, which was reflected in the final design. The seniors' serious approach to the planning process and the importance they attached to resolving site access, security, etc. were strong points of the project," (Volkovice).

In addition to appreciating participation of the general public, respondents often spoke of the **benefits of strong participation by specific groups**. In 7 cases **municipal representatives'** participation was viewed as a success. For example, in Erfurt "close cooperation with interested and engaged representatives of communal entities supported the realisation of important sub-activities for the pilot project." Another 6 respondents commented on **strong participation of local NGOS** and what it brought to the process: e.g. "Involvement of local communities and associations in empowering actions... (helped) get the citizens to understand the importance of right use of open spaces," (Presov). Four respondents regarded **participation of children/students** as a success. In Pisnicka e.g. not only teachers and students but also parents and even grandparents of students took part in planning, students planted a Tree of the School on the site and the Friends of the Pisnicka School NGO donated 2,400 EUR to the project.

Also viewed as successes were elements closely related to participation: cooperation between old-timers and new residents in the community, volunteer organisation of events and communication between the municipality and citizens.

In 3 projects the design and/or designer were cited as successful elements: "Our main success is finding a good project design for creating...public spaces for the city that can be continued in the next couple of years," (Sopot). In Nove Mesto the project partner praised the quality of the architect (while also lamenting how busy he was).

#### Planning process bottlenecks

Despite the high number of respondents citing participation as the major success of the planning process, a total of 5 respondents listed the **lack of participation as a key problem**. This illustrates participation's position as the foremost process concern and it is worth noting the causes of low participation. In some cases (Novy Liskovec and Banska Bystrica) low participation was seen as a natural phenomenon of the **city, where people are less likely to participate than in smaller communities** often owing to the anonymity of the environment and more competing demands on time. In other cases – and this is more relevant as a lesson for future projects – **low participation was seen as a result of public perception of the site as "belonging" to a particular group**. In Nove Mesto, for example, project leaders believe that participation was largely limited to the church group leading the project because the site was publicly perceived as the belonging to the church, not the community. Viewing responsibility and rights for the park as outside of their realm, most residents outside of the congregation did not participate in the process. This demonstrates the **importance of choosing a site that is relevant to a broad public audience rather than a**



**narrow group.** A similar situation occurred in Batovce, where the site was adjacent to the cultural hall and the project was initiated by a theatre group. Reflecting on residents' passive approach to the project and their reluctance to take part in decision making, the project leaders conclude that **"initiative for similar projects should probably always come from local residents, who are aligned with the main idea of the project and believe in its realisation.** In our case the initiative came from the theatre group, and therefore many local residents did not perceive the idea as their own. It seemed like they did not view their position as equal to ours," (Batovce).

Alongside low participation, respondents were troubled by **long and/or complicated approval processes and/or complicated negotiations with authorities that delayed the planning phase.** In Novy Liskovec project leaders were frustrated by the difficulty of reaching a compromise between social (human use of the site) and environmental factors (preservation of vegetation and habitat). In Pisnicka lengthy debates over removal of an old statue were a setback. Long waits for building permits or EIA approval prolong the planning process, which means longer gaps between planning and implementation phases, which in turn often leads to declining public interest as people forget the project or feel it will never come to fruition.

**Relationships with the municipality were also a source of problems,** such as lack of involvement, interest or support for the main project idea on the part of the municipality, or a change in the project manager midway through the process.

#### IV. Investment phase

##### Type of improvements

Eleven of the 19 projects have been built. Another 3 are currently under construction and 5 await future implementation.

In almost all of the projects, **investments focused on a complex of park improvements such as new plantings, maintenance of existing vegetation and addition of amenities such as seating, play equipment and paths.** Taken together these improvements often resulted in a major transformation of the space. Some of the more unusual improvements included permaculture plantings and willow branch structures in Vlasim, a sculpture/theatre prop/play structure in Batovce and an atypical podium in Hrusov.

Just two projects did not fit the single park pattern: the citywide accessibility plan in Erfurt and the Sopot urban path project. Implementation in these two large scale projects will take place gradually and long-term.

##### Investment budget

Among the 14 responses to the investment budget question, the investment **budget ranged from 8,000 to 125,000 EUR.** This large span is not surprising given varying project size and scope and varying costs by country. Nonetheless **almost half of the investment budgets (8)**



were between **8,000 and 15,000 EUR** (all Czech and Slovak projects). The mean investment budget was 38,246 EUR and the median was 17,290.

#### Working plan feasibility

Of the 14 respondents who answered the question on whether the local working plan set up at the beginning of pilot project implementation was feasible, 5 stated that there had been no major changes from plan to implementation. Delays in the implementation process were more frequently cited (7), and in fact are so common in public space improvement projects that one project leader regarded completion of implementation by the deadline as a major success.

Another 3 respondents noted the working plan's compatibility with local development strategies. The Harangod plan is in line with the Nagykallo Integrated Town Development Strategy and the local concept of urban spaces, which is currently under development. Likewise in Sopot the pilot project fits into the city's plan of spatial development and resulted in a plan for 6 sites that will serve as a guide for gradual investment.

#### Involvement of stakeholders in investment phase

Were local stakeholders involved in the investment phase and if so, how?

In over half of the projects (10) **residents worked as volunteers on construction, planting and other park improvements**. In Hrusov for example volunteers were an important part of the construction phase: "Residents' previous, positive experience with projects supported by foundations was a positive factor. That is to say, they were willing to take part in volunteer work brigades and understood that a lot of work had to be done without financial compensation because the grant received was a type of "starter package". Volunteer work in construction was seen consistently in the Czech and Slovak pilot projects and indeed in these countries residents are accustomed to helping in community work brigades. The extent of volunteer work in other countries was less clear from the evaluation process.

Assuming municipal property ownership in the vast majority of cases and approval processes, municipal involvement in investment was a matter of course. In some cases **municipal representatives were actively involved in project organisation as well as fundraising**: "Municipal and school representatives were the prime movers in terms of organisation, planning and funding," (Pisnicka). In other cases municipal involvement was more formal and limited but often included an appearance by the mayor at the park's grand opening (e.g. Volkovice, Hrusov).

**Elsewhere stakeholder involvement in the investment phase was limited to a specific group**, such as a church or the lead NGO. In Batovce women associated in a NGO built a play structure through an on-site artist symposium. Business owners also took part in some projects through material and financial donations or donated



work: “Small local business owners participated directly in implementation, as did members of local associations (volunteer fire-fighters, hunters),” (Batovce). As discussed earlier children were particularly active in several projects (typically through school-led planting activities, e.g. Pisnicka).

**In several cases respondents stated that stakeholder involvement in this phase was low** and that this in fact posed a problem: “Only a small number of residents took part in volunteer work brigades and they then naturally were exhausted,” (Borinka). This was also true in Banska Bystrica, where the situation was attributed to the city environment (echoing the low participation in the planning phase described earlier): “In the final stage of implementation the initiating group lacked significant support from other residents. In smaller communities local residents more readily participate in volunteer work brigades but it is different in cities – urban residents have less time and rely more on help from “outside”...Much of the work done by sponsors or paid firms in Banska Bystrice was done e.g. in Hrusov by volunteers,” (Banska Bystrica). In yet another project lack of resident involvement in construction was seen as the consequence of “weak motivation and lack of identification with the need to improve the site,” (Batovce).

#### Investment phase successes

The emphasis on volunteer work above was also reflected in this section, where the **most frequently cited investment phase success was volunteer work** (7). Five project partners listed **material donations** as a success in this phase while others mentioned **financial contributions and municipal co-financing**. The very fact that the project was implemented was recognized as a success in one case, project completion of the project by a tight deadline was viewed as a success in another and in a third case it was specific improvements such as lighting. The only “soft” success mentioned here was public interest in the revitalised site.

#### Investment phase bottlenecks

The prevalent theme of community involvement arose in relation to investment phase bottlenecks as well, where 3 respondents **lamented insufficient volunteer participation as a key problem** (see above). Other problems cited included **delays in construction, complicated negotiations with agencies, insufficient funding to complete the project**, lack of a construction coordinator, insufficient communication about volunteer work brigades and technical difficulties such as infrastructure hindering tree planting and maintenance woes owing to a site’s vast size.



## V. Application of WP 3 Joint Strategy aspects

The evaluation examined each project's consideration of the 6 aspects outlined in the WP 3 Joint Strategy – environment, public participation, gender, security/social, accessibility and urban design – as critical factors in planning of open space improvements.

### Environmental aspect

The joint strategy pinpointed the following 4 environmental factors as essential to open space planning:

- Climatic amelioration
- Noise screening
- Influencing the hydrological cycle – storm water management
- Providing habitats for wild plants and animals

How did each project respond to these factors, and to environmental concerns in general?

Given that the projects focused on open space, environment was naturally an important aspect almost everywhere. In Banska Bystrica for example the environmental aspect was considered very important as the "green space between the housing blocks was naturally perceived as an 'island' but trees had not been maintained and formed thickets, there were dark corners...". In the planning phase of most projects, stakeholders and local communities identified threats to the environment and most valued zones. **Many projects strove to minimise various environmental impacts by designing in greater accessibility (to limit car use), permeable paths, protection of the local water supply, use of existing, locally available materials, etc.**

When considering the specific ways environmental concerns played out in their projects, respondents **most frequently spoke of improvements to vegetation**, which included maintenance, additions to and removal of vegetation and which are critical to climatic amelioration. Permaculture was a dominant theme in one project and use of local species/removal of non-natives was encompassed in another 3.

Water issues were central to a number of projects, most often in relation to **managing stormwater and improving permeability** through use of appropriate



paving materials. One project proposed a biotope, while another considered stream restoration.

**Noise screening** was encompassed in two projects. At the Harangod park, minimisation of noise in the natural environment was one main reason behind replacement of a proposed fixed stage with a mobile version. In Hrusov after community discussions the designer recommended turning the proposed stage/podium in a different direction so that noise would carry away from nearby houses.

Animal habitats and biodiversity were vital in a number of cases, e.g.: **“In the heavily developed area, the site had to be viewed as a place for animals, which would not have any other chance to survive in the area,”** (Banska Bystrica). Elsewhere efforts were made to choose insect-friendly plant species: **“Along with domestic species of wooden plants there have been proposed also species bringing aromas and colours (lavender, salvia) and providing the nutrition functions for insects and butterflies,”** (Presov).

In two projects, maintaining the rural character of the community was associated with environmental concerns and reflected in use of local materials such as wood and stone.

### Public participation aspect

The Joint Strategy speaks directly to public participation: **“Direct involvement of the relevant stakeholder groups in the planning process is one of the best ways of ensuring that their needs will be met. The main actors in the planning process should include: the client; the funding body or bodies; representatives of the local community; relevant interest groups and NGOs; the municipal authority; other responsible authorities; the planner/designer; other outside specialists.”** (WP 3 pg. 22)

The strategy states that a process should involve the public through two key avenues:

- “Proper information of the public at an early stage
- Active public participation (public input on needs, consultations with key planners etc.)” (WP 3 pg. 36)

As discussed in Section III above, the pilot projects used various participatory planning methods to inform the public, gather public input and consult; indeed



public participation was at the very core of most of the projects. According to respondents, **participation enabled identification of needs and solutions, resolution of strong, often conflicting demands and the reaching of compromises between diverse groups.** In two communities, the project was residents' first experience with a participatory approach. In two others participation was seen as a platform for old-timers and newcomers in the community to meet, work together and recognise each other as partners with valid opinions.

The projects in which participation concentrated around a specific group (church, school, seniors, NGO members, etc.) underscore the **need for similar projects to reach out to all groups within a community** and the **importance of choosing a project or site that is important for a broad constituency.**

### Gender aspect

In the majority of the projects, **gender was addressed through consideration of specific needs of diverse user groups during the planning/design phase.** Sites were thus designed for use by all groups ("design for all"). In some projects this approach extended to involvement of all age and gender groups in the planning process.

**Gender was typically closely linked to accessibility and security,** a connection supported by the Joint Strategy: "...two important (gender) issues specific to urban process should be taken into consideration: one related to the problem of safety which involves women, children, the disabled and the elderly, and the other one concerning the accessibility of all public spaces." (WP 3 pg. 27). Most often this played out through **security-related design requirements such as visual control, safe paths, reduction of potential crime, accidents and other risks.** These issues were typically resolved through **design solutions included new lighting, new seating options (especially for seniors) and removal of thick vegetation.**

### Security/social aspect

The Joint Strategy explains the role of security in open space planning processes as follows: "Design to minimise, not just the potential for crime, but also to maximise the sense of safety and security for all users of open spaces is a key issue here," (WP 3 pg. 6).

In the planning phase, participants indicated perceptions of risk and identified danger zones and types of risks, often in relation to specific groups of users. **Key issues included visual control (related to vegetation, paths, play equipment),**



**children's safety (parking, traffic), disabled access, lighting, police monitoring, avoidance of dark corners, information boards with site rules and safe entry points.**

Visual control issues were among the most frequently mentioned security problems. In Banska Bystrica for example "one of the big problems was identified as weak controllability of the site owing to thick vegetation of unmaintained evergreen trees, and a site conflict between drivers parking cars and parents with children. People consequently wanted to create several zones with safe entry points and visual control. Through new lighting the architect improved residents' visual control, which also had a positive effect on curbing vandalism. To separate children from cars, a fence was installed between the busiest street and the site," (Banska Bystrica).

### Accessibility aspect

Accessibility was most thoroughly addressed in Erfurt of course, where the process included definition of standards, analysis of tourist accessibility, retail, open spaces and recreation facilities, development of checklists and a focus on wheelchair access to trams.

But elsewhere accessibility also played an important role, with analysis of accessibility issues during participatory planning followed by research on accessibility improvements for target groups. In Borinka for example accessibility was deemed "very important. Good physical accessibility was required for both mothers with strollers (and kids) and older and less mobile citizens," (Borinka). **Key accessibility issues across the projects included disabled, bicycle and pedestrian access, entrances, parking and traffic, lighting and seating, paths for all users, terrain limitations and elevation changes.** Typical accessibility improvements included grading rough terrain, creating paths to facilitate use by less mobile users (seniors, bikes, people pushing strollers, wheelchair users, etc.), improving lighting and introducing diverse seating options.

In several projects the issue of balancing accessibility with environmental protection was reflected in specific improvements (e.g. paths needed to be firm enough for easy walking for all but permeable enough to allow stormwater absorption).

### Urban design aspect



**Urban design was projected in a diverse spectrum of areas such as definition of park borders, accessibility, choice of materials, the need to use low cost and easily implementable improvements, etc.** In more than one project residents had specific requirements on design character: “This part of the village has a pronounced rural character, which local residents wanted to emphasise through the design of elements. The architect proposed wooden site furniture without coloured surface treatment,” (Borinka). **Urban design also incorporated requirements for improving site sustainability (permaculture, natural materials, choice of equipment, path materials enabling permeability) and obviously focused on site layout and functions** (e.g. balancing public and semi-public areas of a park, or at another site articulating 4 zones, each with different design character).

Only one respondent viewed urban design as rather unimportant to the given project, as the site (a housing estate) wasn't very attractive to begin with. The design approach there was to avoid adding any more disruptive elements, bringing subtle enhancements to the area instead.

## VI. Post-investment evaluation

### Overall impression of improved site

The 8 responses to this question varied widely. Some noted the significance of the project: “the project fulfilled a longstanding need/gap,” (Harangod) and “there was a major transformation of the site,” (Vlasim). Others noted that the site looks orderly, attractive, attracts the attention of visitors or is used even in winter. Others appreciated the greater range of functions enabled by the improvements, noting a site's many new features, how it encourages various uses through e.g. seating and playing options or the articulation of specific zones.

A number of potential issues requiring attention were also noted. These included a problem in one park with seasonal seating where benches are removed in winter, leaving users with no rest options in cold weather; areas still lacking grass/surface treatment in another park, and a third site that became crowded with elements by the post-project addition of a donated trampoline.

### Maintenance



Out of the 9 responses to this question, 8 stated that the municipality will maintain the site. In one case the lead NGO will maintain as it has a 30-year lease on the site. Five respondents noted that the site was free of garbage and clean during the site visit.

### Number of users

There was little usable data on users simply because very few users were seen during the site visits, which occurred in winter and shortly after the investment phase. Further user observation in spring, summer and fall will be needed to present a balanced picture of site use. However discussions with project leaders indicated that site use had increased overall and in some cases there was a sense that site improvements had raised the quality of use (e.g. sitting/playing rather than simply walking through the site).

### User groups and perceptions

The key user groups mentioned in the 8 responses to this question included children (with their parents), youth, seniors and members of NGOs involved in the project. User perceptions were recorded in 3 cases and were all positive, with users appreciating the addition of a new, safe play area (Volkovice): “Finally we have a safe place for kids!” One senior actually commented positively on the process, not just on the physical improvements.

### Post-project changes

In regard to planned post-project changes, 4 respondents mentioned additional improvements that are being planned as a result of the project and will be implemented either on the project site (e.g. trash bins) or at adjacent sites (e.g. restoration of a building). In another project, the respondent noted the potential need to rethink the spatial organisation created through the project and another project leader spoke of the need to organise more events on site to draw in the community.

## **VII. Project impacts**

### Evaluation of project by municipality/NGO



Reflecting on the project, respondents often spoke positively about the participatory process, e.g.: **“The project was highly appreciated by NGOs and municipalities for the involvement of many stakeholders, the participatory process and Action Plan.”** (5 Municipalities Park, Legambiente Lombardia). Others considered the project a good experience with public participation that “enabled clarification of disputes in the community with good co-operation between various partners and joint efforts to seek funding,” (Pisnicka) or appreciated volunteer work in the construction phase, which “resulted in a feeling of ownership and reduction of vandalism,” (Borinka).

In a few cases there was appreciation of participation by a particular group. In Volkovice, the Mayor expressed surprise at “how much seniors were able to do for the community.” In Hrusov, the project led residents' to **reassess their view of Roma fellow citizens:** “The active participation of Roma citizens in construction was very positively assessed. Before this project...people from this community had not participated in activities benefitting the entire village and the majority population was sceptical, or it never occurred to them that they would take part in volunteer work. Local residents...were pleasantly surprised that some Roma participated...**Now we are all equal. Here we don't divide citizens into Roma, Hungarian, or Slovakian but into who helps and who doesn't,**” (Hrusov).

Others commented that the municipality is simply glad that the site was renovated and that residents are proud of the site and town and appreciate the visible changes.

#### Project side-effects

According to respondents the **projects spurred new contacts and relationships, creating potential for stronger relationships between the municipality and local NGOs, new opportunities for cooperation and new avenues of communication.** In Brzeg Dolny, the new responsibility residents would feel for the site project was viewed as one step in a long-term community strengthening process.

The projects also encouraged participants toward **further community involvement.** In Banska Bystrica the informal group of residents that had spearheaded the project formed a NGO to systematically care for the local environment and participate in decision making about it. In another community 3 members of the lead NGO were elected to the town council. In Alba/Nizza Monferrato the project led to new municipal interest in EU and community projects.



The **physical improvement of the sites** was also noted as making areas more attractive for residents and tourists and more accessible and usable for all groups. Projects that had been only partially implemented, or await implementation, appreciated the creation of a **design or plan to guide implementation over the ensuing years**.

## VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion we may ask two questions: may the project methodology be transferred to other similar projects, and how may the evaluation be used by the project partners in ensuing years?

### Transferability of methodology

Several respondents **recommended using the participatory/action plan methodology in other projects**, and some plan to do so. Respondents pointed out **factors crucial to the success of such a transfer**:

- **A project team that works well together.** This comment came from Erfurt, where the team had worked together for some time...it is “difficult to find a similar group of experts, willing to work voluntarily and taken seriously,” (Erfurt).
- **Funding** for both planning and at least partial investment.
- **Good organisational preparation** of planning and investment phases.
- **A designer with public participation experience** who can communicate with the public.
- **A facilitator capable of dealing with conflicts** in the public realm.
- **The community must feel the project is needed and site is important.**
- This methodology must be **modified to local conditions.**

### Further evaluation

Revisiting the evaluation process in 1-2 years when all of the projects have been at least partially implemented would provide additional data and more lessons for other projects. Periodic evaluation every 1-2 years over a longer period of time (10-20 years) would afford a comprehensive look at the positive and negative aspects of the projects and their successes, shortcomings and impacts over the long-term. In this way the projects, both on an individual basis and as a whole, could be a well-source of information for other, similar efforts.

