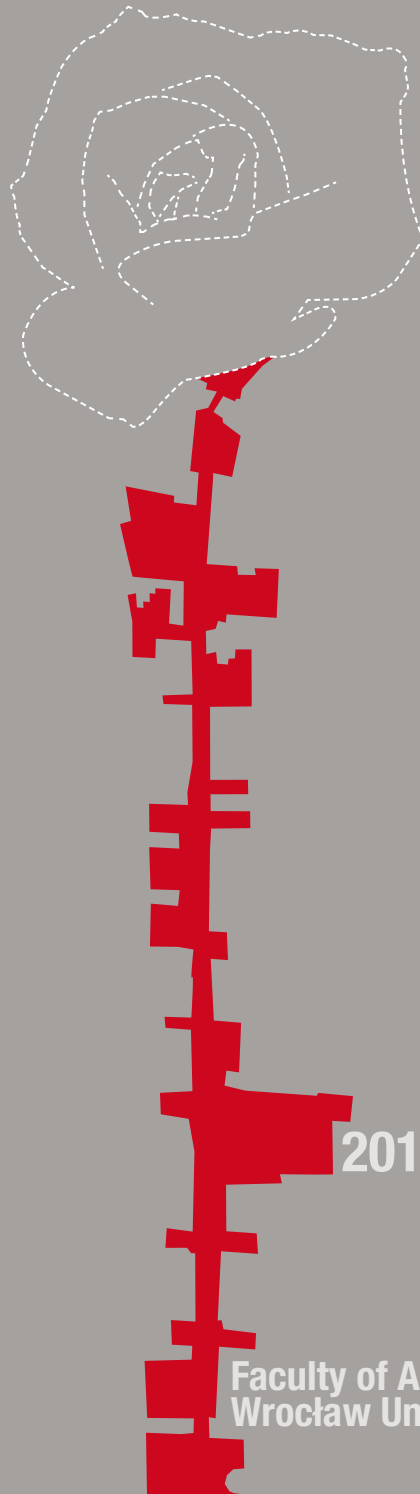


# GARDENS OF ART

URBAN RENEWAL  
OF SZEWSKA STREET  
IN WROCLAW

INTERNATIONAL  
URBAN  
WORKSHOP

EDITED BY  
IZABELA MIRONOWICZ  
and ANTHONY CLERICI



2010

Faculty of Architecture  
Wrocław University of Technology



**RYNEK**

**NOWY  
TARG**

**GALERIA  
DOMINIKANSKA**

**----- SPACE OF SZEWSKA STREET**  
**———— SIGNIFICANT PLACES & BUILDINGS**  
**———— STREET SPACE**  
**———— Odra RIVER**

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Faculty of Architecture

# act out

## Have you heard the one about a man and his cactus?...

SUSAN MOORE

BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Who would have thought that a man and his cactus could spark a lively debate about citizen engagement and the planner-designer's role in facilitating the development of spaces that support a range of public experiences without alienating others? The simple act of a lone man 'donating' his cactus plant to the students who were busy transforming the courtyard immediately below his dwelling into a Garden of Paradise – complete with new grass, lush plants, and comfy chairs – was seen by most as a contribution to the garden effort; a spontaneous act of participation. But being the cynic that I am, I saw this from another perspective.

So I asked the students: Was this an act of participation or was it a form of marking out one's territory? Or more generously, was it a bit of both? Why was this man one of the only local residents who came down to engage with the students (either by supporting their efforts or telling them to get lost)? And, why was the drab, dirty, hidden courtyard a hundred metres down the street attracting more people than our beautiful garden of art? Whilst these were the questions posed to the students in my presentation I had personally also contemplated how the cactus was perhaps a metaphor for the current state of the courtyards and the levels of interest expressed by local residents for participating in the transformation of their courtyards. The cactus, like the yards, is not particularly 'pretty', but with very little effort on the part of its caretakers it survives. Basically, the cactus (like the courtyard) exists but doesn't thrive. Likewise, the local inhabitants and the municipal authority (its potential and official caretakers, respectively) have left the courtyard to its own devices for survival.

This simple story of the 'cactus man' and our musings about him, demonstrated the vagaries of design when we are dealing with an existing place with existing people who will be affected by whatever change, no matter how big or small. The Gardens of Art project, with its emphasis on the street and its multiple courtyards presented myriad challenges for the students, as they were faced with negotiating design solutions amidst the complex arrangements of public and private rights, motivations, and cultural norms.

**But what is public and what is private?** The simple way of defining 'public' and 'private' is the opposition of one to the other. That is to say, it is impossible to conceive of public without an understanding of what is private. In this sense, private spaces are usually demarcated and protected in some way by state-regulated rules of private property (i.e. legal ownership and entitlement); public spaces on the other hand

are conceived as open to greater participation, not subject to exclusive proprietary right of use and exchange. This rather vague definition of one being the anti-thesis of the other is an oversimplification of the myriad differentiations that can be drawn out according to conditions of **ACCESS** (i.e. whether a space is open 24/7, closed, or restricted to general entry), **CONTROL** (i.e. how entry is dictated and managed), **BEHAVIOUR** (individual and collective ways of acting in specific spaces), and **USE** (the informal and codified rules of what is accepted, promoted or prohibited).

In this light, **THE STREET** becomes more than a linear representation on the abstract plan; it becomes **a complex network of daily negotiation points across public-private domains**. The sidewalks, entrance ways, squares, tram stops and the tracks themselves, all demand a personal and collective assessment of the expectations and norms of how to use and behave in/on/through the street. But these expectations are not fixed – they can change in a moment's notice.

The street is an opportunity space for a range of public experiences, upon which the smallest addition, removal or modification to the current assembly of material and social relations can have an astonishing effect. Take for example, the effect the student's activities in the street in August initiated. In the course of two days, the students' presence on the street temporarily altered the norms of expectation and routine, it challenged the taken-for-granted movements of people through Szewska and the local area – it challenged residents, visitors, and businesses to contemplate alternative arrangements and potentialities of experience on Szewska. **The public consultation events demonstrated how without any structural alteration to the form(s) of the street and the local built environment, the public experience could be radically** altered through the mere manipulation of the small scale physical features of the street – the addition of tables, signboards, play toys, grass, planters and ornamental items like balloons and bubbles. The effect was that Szewska (or at least significant segments of it) **changed from a dead street into a festive activity space** – which in an instant was transformed back to bland landscape when the activities and props were removed.

If, following the UK think-tank DEMOS' definition, a successful public space provides a platform for the creation of different types of experiences by different people, it is therefore crucial to understand how different spaces along the street support or limit expectations of behaviour and motivations for use. This brings us to THE YARDS.



What motivates someone to use these spaces is perhaps very different than what motivates them to walk along Szewska en-route to an appointment to see the bank manager or to meet a friend for dinner at 'The Mexican' restaurant. Each courtyard has different characteristics. Some are quite hidden from the eyes-on-the-street and shrouded from the view of the residents overhead by trees. Within these spaces we observed several types of users and uses – some people were using the courtyard as a quiet place to sit and chat or keep a watchful on eye on a small child; others used it as the dog's lavatory; some people used the space as somewhere to sit and drink alcohol. It is not immediately obvious what type of space this is and whose space it is – is it an amenity zone for residents and occupants of the surrounding buildings?; is it a zone of refuge, relaxation and shade from the openness and fast-pace of the street or the Rynek nearby?; is it a play zone for children and animals?; or is it an ideal site for otherwise anti-social behaviour like drinking and drug taking? It seems it may be all of the above. But spaces like this do not necessarily motivate all of these uses and users at once. Rather as Jane Jacobs reminds us, there exists a dynamic 'place ballet' wherein spaces like the courtyards are shared across time by different people; and people find use of spaces by structuring the timing of their activities to avoid conflicts with others (or sometimes to encourage them!). Use of the courtyard spaces are thus constantly re-negotiated and improvised throughout the day and night according user expectations and motivations. So the fact that more people were using the drab, barren and hidden courtyard next to the made-over Art Gallery 'Design' courtyard is an indication perhaps that the original attempt to germinate a leisure garden in this space may not support the variety of public experiences expected or anticipated by its current range of users and its creation temporarily altered their motivations to use this space. But it also implies that other potential users who have previously not been motivated to use this space would eventually be attracted to its new incarnation.

Through the consultation, planning and design stages of the Gardens of Art project, students were therefore confronted with some very difficult challenges:

- To engage with user-based rather than place-based conceptions of public and private spaces,
- To address how successfully the street and yards do, can and will support a range of public experiences (including amenity, belonging, companionship, risk-taking and adventure, reflection, solitude, learning etc.),
- To design spaces that meet multiple motivations for use without alienating other uses and users.

Whilst personally I am not a design expert with a repertoire of projects to provide ingenious design solutions to address the above challenges, I can leave the students with three insights from the theorisation of public space, which I believe resonate well with the Gardens of Art process and the potential success of the design outcomes. **First**, people must believe in the freedom of public space to be able to act on it through use; **secondly**, individual behaviour is constrained by culturally-inflected beliefs and expectations of what is deemed appropriate, admissible or possible. **And finally then**, as planners and designers, if we prioritise one kind of need, one set of expectations and aspirations in a space, then those who are not motivated by these values will not be inclined to use it.



BEFORE



AFTER