

Kaunas University of Technology
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture

Public Spaces Activation Through Inclusive Urban Design Principles

Master's Final Degree Project

Project author

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Kaunas, 2026



Kaunas University of Technology
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture

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Architecture (6011PX003)

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Prof. Dr. Jūratė Kamičaitytė

Kaunas, 2026



Kaunas University of Technology
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Public Spaces Activation Through Inclusive Urban Design Principles

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Topic (theme) of the Master Final Degree Project
Public Spaces Activation Through Inclusive Urban Design Principles

Theme of the Master Final Degree Project approved by the Dean's Order
Public Spaces Activation Through Inclusive Urban Design Principles

Master studies **Final Degree Project** (study module M000M100)

T A S K

Aim of the work:

With the solutions of the final (experimental) project, to verify the conceptual architecture, landscape architecture or urban planning model created and detailed during the research project.

Tasks of the work:

To collect the necessary data for the project preparation, to prepare the architectural project of the selected object, to highlight the solutions determined by the concept formulated in the conclusions of the research project, to present the evaluation of the results of the experimental project.

Structure of the work:

Extended summary. An extended summary is a textual part of the final project, summarizing the essence of the entire work and reflecting the main parts of the project. An extended summary consists of: title page (indicating the faculty, study programs, title of the work, student's name, surname, supervisor, dates, etc.); title page; declaration of academic integrity; final project assignment; summary in English; table of contents; introduction (justifying the relevance, novelty and originality of the topic, describing the research problem, its level of investigation, object, goal and objectives, research methodology, if the project is interdisciplinary - revealing the connections between scientific fields); theoretical part (presenting an overview of the theoretical analysis, based on reliable and new sources, defining the main concepts and notions, presenting and describing a hypothetical model - a theoretical basis for solving an architectural/urban planning problem); empirical research part (presents the purpose, object, methods and course of the empirical research, presents the obtained data and their analysis, discusses reliability and validity, discusses research limitations, ethics, obtained insights, presents and describes a conceptual model – an innovative principle for solving an architectural problem); experimental project part (describes how the results of theoretical and empirical research are applied in the design part, presents the project concept, solutions and evaluates the results of the experimental project, their significance for the final conclusions); conclusions (concrete, substantiated statements that correspond to the problem, goal and objectives of the work; presents theoretical and practical insights, recommendations and possible proposals for the continuation of the research; conclusions must comply with the principles of sustainable development); bibliography (compiled using the APA citation style, only sources cited or used in the text must be included).

The extended summary is prepared using the template approved by the KTU Vice-Rector for Studies Decree No. 2026-01-20. PP-8. Volume – 0.5 – 1 author's arc, i.e. about 10–25 pages of text (A4 format, Arial, 12 pt, spacing 1.15). The specified volume does not include appendices, figures or tables, if they are presented after the text. The extended summary is prepared in Lithuanian, with a summary in English (up to 1 page), if the MBP is prepared in Lithuanian, or in English, with a summary in Lithuanian (up to 1 page), if the MBP is prepared in English. Plagiarism is prohibited.

Graphic part. Graphic part must form a unified whole and reflect the most important results of theoretical and empirical research (*hypothetical model, conceptual model highlighting the statements implemented in the experimental project*), and results of experimental design (*the scheme of the situation of the designed object, the scheme of the analysis of the current condition; project idea/strategy; detailed solutions: building - site arrangement proposals, plans, facades/elevations, specific sections, fragments of interior/exterior spaces, construction details, etc. (if necessary); urban complex - communication system, building typology, public spaces, green infrastructure (natural framework), social infrastructure, proposals for the formation of cityscape identity, master plan of a quarter/city part, etc.; public spaces (or their systems) - functional diagram and spatial formation zones, connections between them, path system, landscaping system, water bodies, pavements, small architectural elements, lighting, etc.; general visualisation of the designed object with the contextual environment, visualisations of separate visual spaces if necessary.*) as well as scheme of changes of conceptual model (if needed).

It is necessary to discard non-essential information and highlight the most important ideas for solving architectural problems. The most expressive part of the exposition should be an experimental project that illustrates the conceptual provisions for solving problems. The posters should be attractive aesthetically: a unified graphic expression, colours, fonts and a balanced composition.

The volume of the graphic part is **8 posters** of 70 x 100 cm size (vertically oriented); the posters must be printed on the 2-3 mm thick cardboard.

The description of the results of theoretical and empirical research must consist of **up to 1/2** of the main text, and in the graphic part they should be represented in **1-2 posters**.

Portfolio reveals the progress, content and results of the student's project preparation, starting with theoretical and empirical research and ending with an experimental project. It consistently, clearly and aesthetically presents all the project material: text (structure and composition as in the extended summary), graphic diagrams, illustrations, drawings of the designed object (site analysis, design program, functional zoning of the plot (plots) (management idea) and communication scheme, idea of the relationship of spatial formation with the context, functional zoning of the building (building complexes, public spaces) (idea), idea of the volumetric-spatial solution of the designed building/block/public space (sketches), evaluation of alternative variants of the solution idea according to the established criteria, detailing of the spatial formation of the plot/block/public space), perspectives, axonometries, spatial models, evaluation of the results of the experimental project and their significance for the development of the conceptual model. The portfolio is prepared throughout the entire period of preparation of the final project and is presented during the interim reviews, final review and public defence alongside the graphic part. The portfolio format is A4, horizontal orientation. Volume – **not less than 60 pages**.

Model is recommended.

A printed copy of the final project **portfolio** and **graphic part** is prepared.

Timetable of tasks performance:

1. Discussion of the task and the principles of experimental design	2026 02 04
2. Selection of the location of the designed object according to the criteria established on the basis of the conceptual model, analysis of the location based on secondary sources, creation of the design program	2026 02 11
3. On-site research of the designed object, identification of the problems and potential of the designed object, preparation of the first alternative of the project idea	2026 02 18
4. Review and evaluation of the results of the analytical work and the conceptual sketches of the project (Alternative I)	2026 02 25
5. Search for a solution strategy/idea, preparation of the second alternative and evaluation of alternative options according to the established criteria	2026 02 25 – 2026 03 18
6. Review and evaluation of the solution ideas (Alternative II)	2026 03 18
7. Development of the chosen alternative: detailing of the solutions	2026 03 18 – 2026 05 06
8. Consultative review	2026 04 01
9. Consultative review	2026 05 22
10. Review of the detailed solutions	2026 05 06
11. Completion of the text and portfolio	2026 05 14
12. Defending the final project in the commission of supervisors	2026 05 20
13. Public defence of the Final Degree Project	2026 06 01 - 2026 06 05

Consultation time with supervisor

Week day	Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Room 307, Zoom or other distance learning platform	Workplace
	Time and duration *	Time and duration *
Monday	10:00-11:00 (1 hour)	
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

* - 2 hours per week

Supervisor of the final degree project _____ Rūta Marija Slavinskaitė (confirmed electronically)
(name, surname, signature)

Student _____ Ieva Stulpinaitė (confirmed electronically)
(name, surname, signature)

February 2026

Stulpinaitė, Ieva. Public Spaces Activation Through Inclusive Urban Design Principles. Master's Final Degree Project / supervisor assoc. prof. pract. Rūta Marija Slavinskaitė; Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Kaunas University of Technology.

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Keywords: Persons with disabilities, public spaces, activation, inclusive urban design.

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Summary

The master's thesis analyses ways to activate public spaces by using inclusive urban design principles. Currently, designers are increasingly seeking for suitable ways to enhance and provide equal accessibility of public spaces in built environment. However, existing guidelines are too broad and difficult to implement in different contexts, cultures, locations effectively. This is why the topic requires complex research of existing literature, theory concepts and case studies to not only improve the aesthetic quality of spaces and open them for all, but also to revitalize territories with long-term impact for local communities, place identity and culture. The work aims to explore inclusive urban design principles adaptation possibilities in order to find the most suitable development strategy for the experimental project in pilgrimage site, Taizé village, France.

The theoretical research focuses on four key topics: public spaces activation methodologies, understanding disabilities through the six functional domains, as defined by Washington Group on Disability Statistics, analysis of four most commonly used inclusive urban design principles today and a religious domain approach to the accessibility topic.

A qualitative and quantitative empirical research was made including GIS data analysis, a public survey (completed by 151 Taizé visitors) and 13 interviews were conducted with experts (urban planners, architects, local community members, physiotherapists) and visitors of the project site with special needs. The results provided key insights and directions for the development of the conceptual model. The conceptual model was applied in the design development phase for activating public spaces of the ecumenical community, Taizé village in France. The project not only proposed activation methodologies for chosen territory, but also has the potential to become a framework for spiritual public spaces, demonstrating possible directions for accessibility improvements for persons with disabilities.

Stulpinaitė, Ieva. Viešųjų erdvių aktyvavimas taikant įtraukiojo urbanistinio dizaino principus. Magistro baigiamasis projektas / projektui vadovavo doc. prakt. Rūta Marija Slavinskaitė; Kauno technologijos universitetas, Statybos ir architektūros fakultetas.

Studijų kryptis ir studijų kryptių grupė: Architektūra (menai).

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Žmonės su negalia, viešosios erdvės, aktyvavimas, įtraukusis urbanistinis dizainas.

Kaunas, 2026. 27 psl.

Santrauka

Magistro baigiamajame darbe analizuojami būdai, padėsiantys aktyvuoti viešąsias erdves, taikant įtraukiojo urbanistinio dizaino principus. Šiuo metu projektuotojai vis dažniau ieško tinkamų sprendimų, kurie pagerintų ir užtikrintų lygiavertį viešųjų erdvių prieinamumą urbanizuotoje aplinkoje. Deja, egzistuojančios gairės yra per daug standartizuotos ir sunkiai kokybiškai pritaikomos skirtingose šalyse, kultūriniuose kontekstuose. Dėl šių priežasčių magistro darbas reikalauja išsamių literatūros, teorijos ir atvejų analizės tyrimų, siekiant ne tik sukurti gražesnes erdves, padaryti jas prieinamas visiems, tačiau ir atgaivinti teritorijas, kurti ilgalaikį, praturtinantį poveikį vietos bendruomenėms, identitetui ir kultūrai. Darbo tikslas – ištirti įtraukiojo urbanistinio dizaino principų pritaikymo galimybes konkrečioms teritorijoms, siekiant rasti tinkamiausią eksperimentinio projekto vystymo strategiją piligriminėje vietoje – Taizė kaimelyje, Prancūzijoje.

Teorinėje tyrimo dalyje yra orientuojamasi į keturias pagrindines temas: viešųjų erdvių aktyvavimo metodologijas, požiūrį į negalias per šešias funkcinės sritis, sukurtas Vašingtono negalių statistikos grupės. Taip pat analizuojami keturi, dažniausiai naudojami pasauliniu mastu, įtraukiojo dizaino principai. Tyrimo pabaigoje ieškoma sąsajų sąsajų tarp religijos ir žmonių su specialiaisiais poreikiais sąlyčio taškų.

Atlikti kiekybiniai ir kokybiniai empiriniai tyrimai apima GIS duomenų analizę, viešą apklausą (ją užpildė 151 Taizė lankytojas), 13 interviu su ekspertais (urbanistais, architektais, vietos bendruomenės nariais, kineziterapeutais) ir žmonėmis, kurie lankėsi Taizė bei atitinka bent vieną iš nustatytų šešių funkcinių sričių. Tyrimo rezultatai suteikė svarbių įžvalgų konceptualaus modelio kūrimui. Darbe pateikiamas konceptualusis modelis buvo tiesiogiai pritaikytas ir naudojamas projektavimo etape, siekiant aktyvuoti ekumeninės Taizė bendruomenės viešąsias erdves Prancūzijoje. Projektas ne tik siūlo pasirinktos teritorijos aktyvavimo metodologijas, tačiau suteikia galimybę tas pačias metodologijas pritaikyti ir kituose, panašaus pobūdžio urbanistiniuose projektuose siekiant gerinti viešųjų erdvių prieinamumą visiems.

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List of abbreviations and terms

Abbreviations:

Assoc. prof. – associate professor;

PhD – doctor of philosophy;

IFC – International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health;

WGDS – Washington Group on Disability Statistics;

UN – Universal Design;

DfA – Design for All.

Terms:

Activation – policy, design, programming and management actions that increase use, vibrancy and safety. (UN-Habitat, 2016)

Inclusive urban design – design of environments that everyone can equally, confidently and independently use. (GOV.UK., 2024)

Persons with disabilities – those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments. (United Nations, 2007)

Pilgrimage site – a holy or sacred place to which people journey for religious motives. (Britannica, 2025)

Public spaces – all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. (UN-Habitat, 2016)

Taizé – ecumenical Christian monastic community in the village of Taizé, Burgundy, France. (Taizé, 2025)

Introduction

Relevance of the topic

Two years ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that around 16% of the global population are persons with various disabilities. (WHO, n.d.) Experts believe that such a percentage, and the importance of addressing the issue, will grow in the future. Sociologist Mike Oliver argues that the barriers experienced by people with different needs are often not caused by their impairments themselves, but rather by poorly designed environments that fail to consider the principles of diversity and accessibility. (Oliver, 1990)

Sociologist Ray Oldenberg coined the term “third place”, because according to him, nowadays there exist three places that each person needs in order to have a fulfilling life. First place is home, second - work and third - public spaces. Activation of them can help to maintain social connections and community identity. (Oldenberg, 1989)

Research problem and its level of investigation

Designer Sanyal claims that activation of public space can fail, if not all marginalized groups are taken into consideration, for such society “public spaces are often places of isolation, anxiety and possible violence”. (Sanyal, 2017) This issue highlights a gap in designers’ knowledge of how to activate public spaces for people with special needs.

Research object – public spaces activation and adaptation in Taizé village, France, for people with special needs.

Aim of the work – to prepare a long-term development plan for Taizé village, based on the results of theoretical and empirical research. Also, to suggest how religious public spaces can be enhanced using inclusive urban design principles nowadays.

Objectives of the work:

1. Conduct a literature review in order to find out contemporary approaches to public spaces activation, ways to improve the experience of individuals with diverse needs in improved public spaces, and strategies for making sensitive interventions in cultural religious sites;
2. Develop a hypothetical model based on the literature review and use it as the strategy for conducting empirical research in Taizé village;
3. Provide a conceptual model for the development of public spaces in Taizé village based on empirical research;
4. Develop experimental urban project in Taizé, applying and integrating knowledge from literature review, empirical research and conceptual model;
5. To summarize results of literature analysis, empirical research and experimental project as a framework for the contemporary public spaces activation, using inclusive urban design principles in cultural religious sites.

The workflow and methodology of the work:

Master’s final degree project consists of three main stages:

1. Theoretical research – analysis and collection of literature, documents and analogues material; the gathered information is filtered and structured into a hypothetical model;
2. Empirical research – formulation of working hypotheses, conducting a quantitative sociological survey and qualitative interviews with experts, Taizé visitors. Analysis and evaluation of environmental, social factors, barriers and needs identification of selected focus group in Taizé. Systematization of research results into a conceptual model;
3. Experimental project – in-depth analysis of the Taizé site, including its opportunities and weaknesses, creation of an urban design strategy, providing design proposals for the chosen territory in Taizé village.

The report was grammatically and stylistically corrected with the assistance of artificial intelligence (ChatGBT).

1. Literature analysis on the activation of public spaces in religious sites

Literature analysis focuses on four key aspects: public spaces activation, disabilities and their relation to the environment, different design principles on inclusivity and religious layer as the source of inspiration for pilot project in France.

1.1. Understanding public space and its activation

It is widely known nowadays that the quality of urban life is essential for cities to prosper and public spaces play a significant role in it. (UN-Habitat, 2016) One of the book titles by the famous Danish architect Jan Gehl defines that the public space is “the life between buildings”, book considers not only architecture and its visual looks as the important components, but also people, activities, created atmosphere and other aspects. According to UN-Habitat, public spaces are “all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive”. (Garau, 2016)

According to DC Office of Planning, each city has been shaped by its own unique context and environments with the culture and diversity it holds, and “public space activation is an opportunity to celebrate this” (District of Columbia, 2018). It is also important to highlight the difference between activation and enhancement, since these two words can seem similar. In fact, enhancement applies to “improving the aesthetic qualities of space”, whereas activation focuses on how to “improve quality of life and community awareness through dynamic engagement” (District of Columbia, 2018), which means that in order to activate the public space, not only do visual looks need to be taken into consideration, but also cultural, spatial and civic aspects.

Public space activation can make an influence on the area in different aspects: it helps to improve the quality of life for users (residents, workers and visitors), it increases health, safety and well-being, connects people together in new and different ways, contributes to the creation of identity, bring vitality and address issues of spatial and social equity. (District of Columbia, 2018)

1.2. Disabilities and relation to environment

Around 50 years ago, the approach to disability was completely different compared with nowadays. According to professor and philosopher Christopher Boorse, “illness” or “disease” were suitable words to address people with physical dysfunctions or psychological disorders. (Oldenberg, 1989) Society’s attitude to persons with disabilities transformed mostly after World War II, many soldiers were coming home injured and disabled for the rest of their lives. Accessibility and design in the built environment became extremely important in order to help big numbers of veterans come back into routine and life as soon as possible, (Sanyal, 2017) people started to see disabilities in a different way and approach. Today, the IFC agrees that persons with disabilities are affected by both factors - personal (self-esteem, motivation) and environmental (physical, social) (Boorse, 1982) such approach comes from a biopsychosocial model that was proposed by American psychiatrist George Libman Engel. (Engel, 1977)

While addressing accessibility issues in the built environment for people with special needs, some may think that architects should focus on the types of disabilities, such as physical, sensory, intellectual/developmental and psychosocial/mental. (WHO, 2011) But it is more

useful to concentrate on six core functional domains, which were developed by WGDS (see fig. 1). Domains are: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication, each domain is evaluated by severity level (none, some, a lot and cannot difficulty). (WGDS, 2022) Later in the work, only five domains are mentioned and analyzed, as the “self-care” domain overlaps with the other domains. Such classification is more valuable for architects and urbanists, as it helps methodologically to recognise not a diagnosis of disability itself, but rather what activities a person is able to do and what barriers he or she is facing.

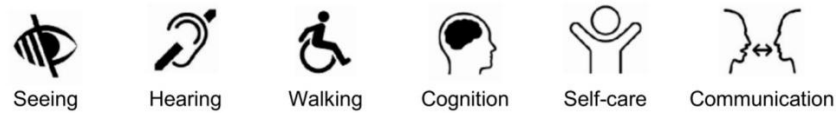


Fig. 1. Six functional domains of WGDS (Made by author, 2025)

1.3. Urban design with inclusion and accessibility

Disability Activist and Access professional Dr. Amy Kavanagh once said that “Disabled people are fantastic problem solvers”. Nowadays there exist many different design approaches, such as universal design, inclusive design, design for all and many more. Even though the names sound different, approaches share a similar goal - addressing the needs and inclusivity of the widest possible audience. (Sorial & Othman, 2016) Some critics call such a goal paradoxical, because even if different concepts try to take all “human differences” into consideration, it is impossible to “meet the needs of everyone”. (Sorial & Othman, 2016) Table (see Appendix 1) provides comparison of four main and mostly recognised design approaches today.

After analysing four different accessibility design concepts, it is clear that approaches have some overlapping or continuing ideas in different aspects. For example, UN focuses on all people, while DfA concentrates more precisely on disabled people and elderly ones. Barrier-free design focuses on the built environment as an application area, while other design approaches touch not only physical environment aspects for accessibility. Barrier-free design and UN design complements each other, because barrier-free focuses on removal of physical barriers, while UN expands this goal and creates design suitable for everyone. UN and DfA seems to be too broad and complex in order to be implemented, but barrier-free and inclusive design approaches are too narrow and have a high possibility of excluding some groups of society.

It should be kept in mind that different design standards intend to globalize the guidelines for international use, but it is important to understand that each continent and country has their own “historical, ethical, philosophical” aspects that cannot be ignored or fully standardized, which, in fact, only DfA approach addresses. (WGDS, 2022) So, when addressing public spaces improvements through inclusive urban design principles, it is clear that existing design approaches are not sufficient enough to use only one, it is necessary to take the best parts of each of them and apply according to the local context, culture and environment.

1.4. Pilgrimage sites

Lecturer Matthew Schuelka says that “religious roots of our societies <...> inform and guide us in myriad and unexpected ways”. Studies show that there is a great correlation between disability and religious, spiritual beliefs. (Cunningham, Mulvihill & Speck, 2009) Christianity visualises persons with disabilities as the equal and valuable part of God’s community. (WCC, 2003) At the beginning of the 21st century, ecumenical World Council of Churches issued a document addressing persons with disabilities, they state that “the Church is called to be an inclusive community, to tear down the walls”. (WCC, 2003) It means that everyone, including people with special needs, are “innately gifted” and have something “unique to contribute”, if a community is missing even one member, it is not a full and complete. (WCC, 2003)

Even if the Christianity approach towards persons with disabilities sounds welcoming, reality today is slightly different. Studies show that people with special needs “attend worship services considerably less often than people without disabilities” and it is not because disabled people do not want to, it is because of barriers (postures, architecture, sensory factors, sense of community) they are, unfortunately, facing. (Carter, Tuttle, Spann, Ling & Jones, 2024) Here important question arises: how to modernise places of worship without “altering the architectural integrity of the space”. (Sesame Access, 2025)

1.5. Hypothetical model and literature analysis conclusions

Hypothetical model (see fig. 2) summarizes the literature review. It is clear that while addressing the activation of religious public spaces, the first step is to examine personal and environmental factors of the place, then conduct interviews with experts and users of the area, selecting a focus group, identifying barriers and needs, and finally developing a design approach.

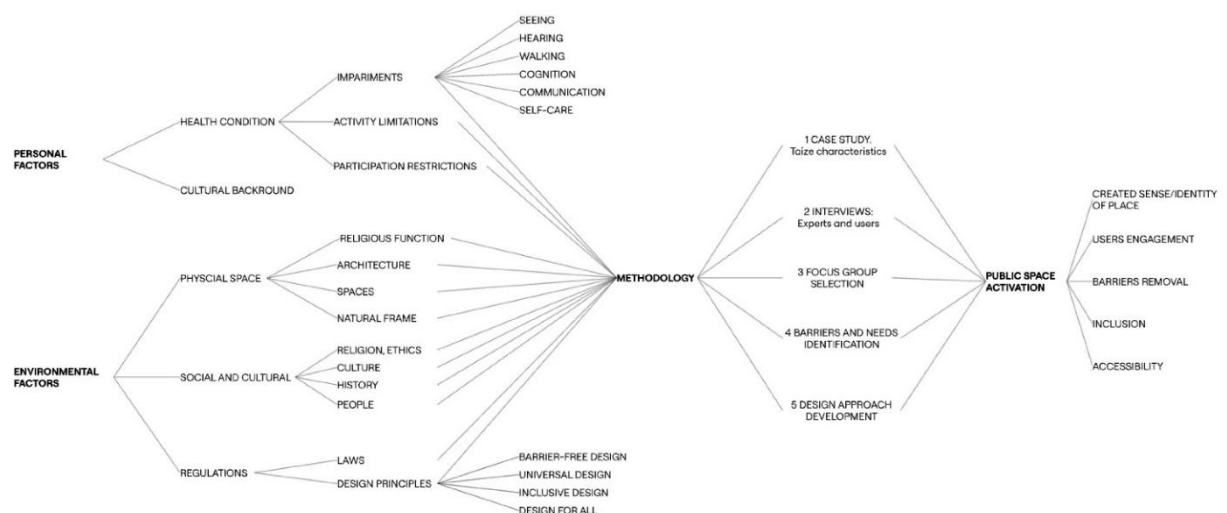


Fig. 2. Hypothetical model (Made by author, 2025)

Conclusions of literature analysis:

1. Public spaces can be activated through bottom-up and top-down approaches. Analyzed references show that most successful activation can be achieved by

involving culture, history, and the local community during all stages of the improvements process.

2. In many different fields, including architecture, disabilities are viewed as a condition, influenced by personal and environmental factors. The six main domains of disability are: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication.
3. Although inclusive urban design principles aim to establish standards and remove three types of barriers (environmental, attitudinal and institutional), each country has its own history, ethics, philosophy and therefore cannot be fully standardized.
4. Religious public spaces have additional dimensions, such as liturgy, gestures, theology, which should be considered. Well-developed religious environments help to reduce low self-esteem, social isolation and bring people closer to faith.

2. Empirical research results of Taizé environmental and personal factors

Empirical research was conducted to examine five developed hypotheses during the literature review phase (see Appendix 2). Two main factors were analyzed in Taizé village: environmental factors (physical, social, and cultural layers) and personal factors (experience of six functional domains in the village).

2.1. Results of environmental factors of Taizé

Location. Taizé is located in the Saône-et-Loire department, Bourgogne region. Even key cities of France, such as Paris, Lyon or Dijon are 100 - 300 km radius from the department and Taizé village itself (see fig. 3), it is still hard to reach the place easily. (Travel France Online, n.d.) This is why nowadays many youth groups and visitors come to Taizé by big busses and not by plane or train.

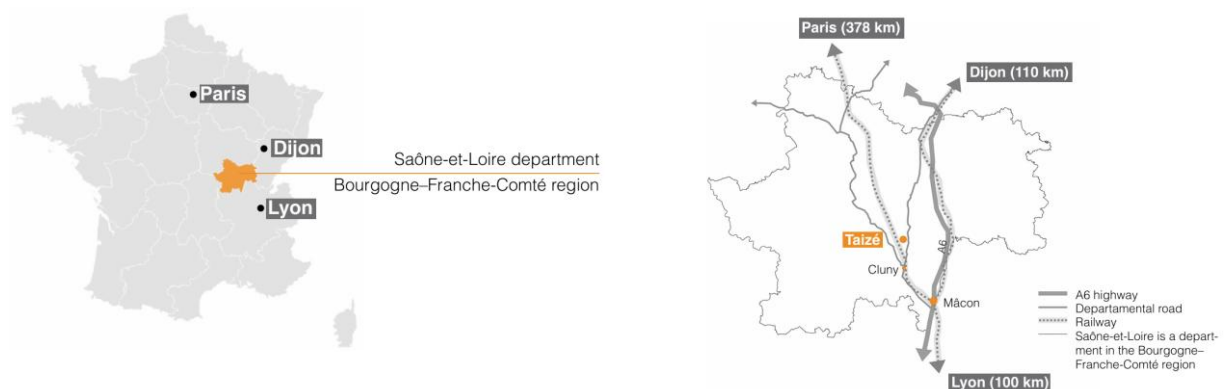


Fig. 3. Location and infrastructure scheme of Taizé (Made by author, 2025)

Typology. Even if community is considered a monastery, the difference from other monasteries in the world that existed in the past or today, is that here a large portion of the territory is opened for the public use (see Appendix 3). This reflects an open and welcoming spirit. Also, it should be kept in mind that no one made masterplans for the territory, so the typology and development of the village, was natural and gradually changing over the years.

History. Historically, Taizé as a village, was firstly and officially mentioned back in 1120. In the 19th century, the phylloxera epidemic devastated many soils and lands of vineyards in the region. This caused many people to move away from the village, as it was hard to survive on the land. (Spink, 2015) An Interesting historical situation occurs that even the region itself is well-known for the industry possibilities, Taizé never attracted new investors or residents to the place, making the stagnation for many years. During World War II, in 1940, brother Roger (Taizé community founder) arrived in the abandoned village, which he called “human desert”, bought a house, even if the property was evaluated as “worth nothing” and founded an ecumenical community. (Spink, 2015) 85 years later, during Pope John Paul II’s visit, developed Taizé community was described as the vivid and joyful human place, he said: “One passes through Taizé as one passes close to a spring of water”.

Public spaces. Currently, Taizé has different types of public spaces (see Appendix 4). The southern part of the village is used for social gatherings, while the northern part is used for accommodation. Existing public spaces are connected by the historic main road, which connects the entire village together, links it to surrounding villages and cities. A public survey

shows that people enjoy spending time in public spaces, but those spaces also have negative associations for some people.

Identity. After analysing functional, spatial, emotional, and symbolic identities of the village, all layers share the same aspect – duality (see fig. 4). This means that the same spaces, during the day, can provide peace and movement, silence and noise in both spatial and emotional dimensions. Such multifunctionality is significant strength and asset that should be embraced in the design phase.

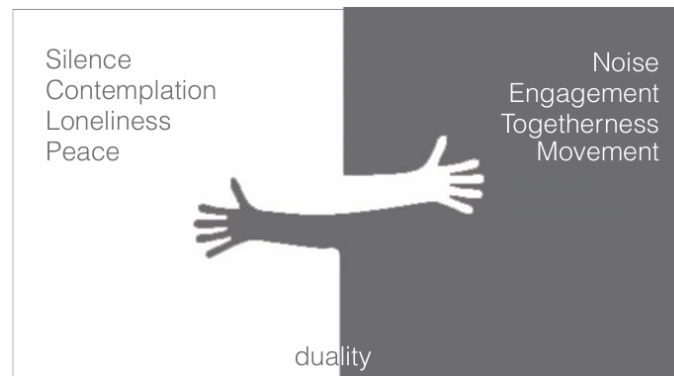


Fig. 4. Taizé identity - duality (Made by author, 2025)

Experts opinion. Chosen experts (see Appendix 5) agree that heritage and local identity are important aspects of future development. Architect Ingrida Lipnickytė-Povilaitienė states that “you need to respect what is already valuable, but you cannot copy and paste the history, the design should mark our time”. Expert Gitana Šukaitytė adds that “by using local materials and techniques, it is possible to maintain heritage and local identity without causing damage”.

Urban designer Justina Mulionytė highlights that while activating public spaces, it is important to focus not only on “beautiful details”, but rather on the creation of spaces that “generate activity” and create life. According to architect Per-Olof Hedwall, it is important to ask two questions when designing public spaces: who is not engaging in public spaces and what barriers prevent them from engaging.

Architect Mike Fritsch from Paris highlights that, in France, “technical accessibility solutions sometimes conflict with conservation regulations”. He also distinguishes two categories of public spaces: squares and parks, and streets and roads. It is important to know that streets and roads have less strict regulations, while squares and parks – more strict, however, it is possible to integrate accessibility elements into the existing topography.

2.2. Results of personal factors in Taizé

The main roads and paths of Taizé were examined according to the criteria of the five functional domains, mentioned previously (see fig. 5). Each route was classified into three categories: easy, difficult and dangerous. This means that an easy route is fully adapted to the individual needs, a difficult route presents certain challenges while moving and engaging with the environment, but users can remain partially independent. A dangerous route means that it is not only hard to move or engage with the environment, but may also be harm to persons with disabilities. For example for visually impaired individuals, without proper street markings, there is a risk of an accident near active street.



Fig. 5. Routes classification of five functional domains (Made by author, 2025)

Following the analysis, public survey, and individual interviews with persons with disabilities, it is clear that the site currently has four main barriers, experienced by visitors. These barriers are: inadequate pavement, poor lighting, heat islands or lack of shading, and confusing or absent signage (see fig. 6).

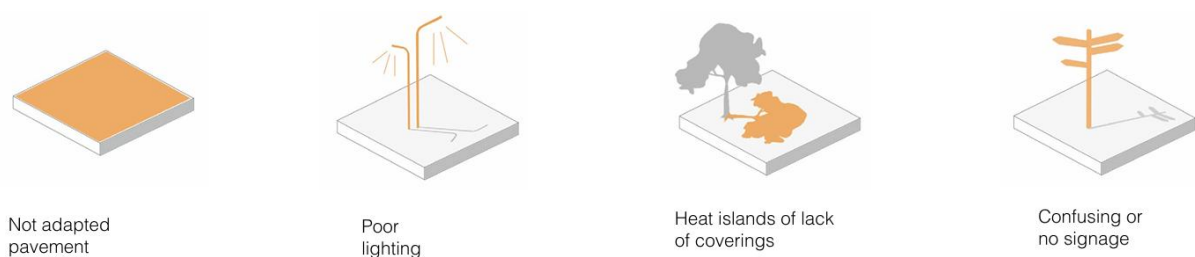


Fig. 6. Main barriers in Taizé (Made by author, 2025)

Experts opinion. Visual identity, according to architect Ingrida Lipnickytė-Povilaitienė, is a very important aspect to focus on, as people come from all around the world to the village and visual coding may be more effective in this context. Architect Per-Olof Hedwall highlights the importance of sign design, they should communicate the function of a place, rather than indicating who is allowed or expected to use it. Urban designer Justina suggests to use the rule for calming zones: you do not have to have anyone behind your back in such zones, otherwise, the space may feel unsafe.

2.3. Conceptual model and empirical research conclusions

The conceptual model (see fig. 7) differs from and improves upon the hypothetical model after the empirical research. The main strategy remains focused on two types of factors: personal and environmental. However, in the conceptual model, the first step is to understand the location, as the location determines the project stakeholders, the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and other users. Additionally, typology and architecture are closely connected to the site. The next step is scenarios development, because after many interviews with experts, it was identified as a crucial step in the design phase. Only after scenarios are developed, public spaces can be activated through the creation of a sense of place and identity, users engagement, barriers removal, inclusion, and accessibility.

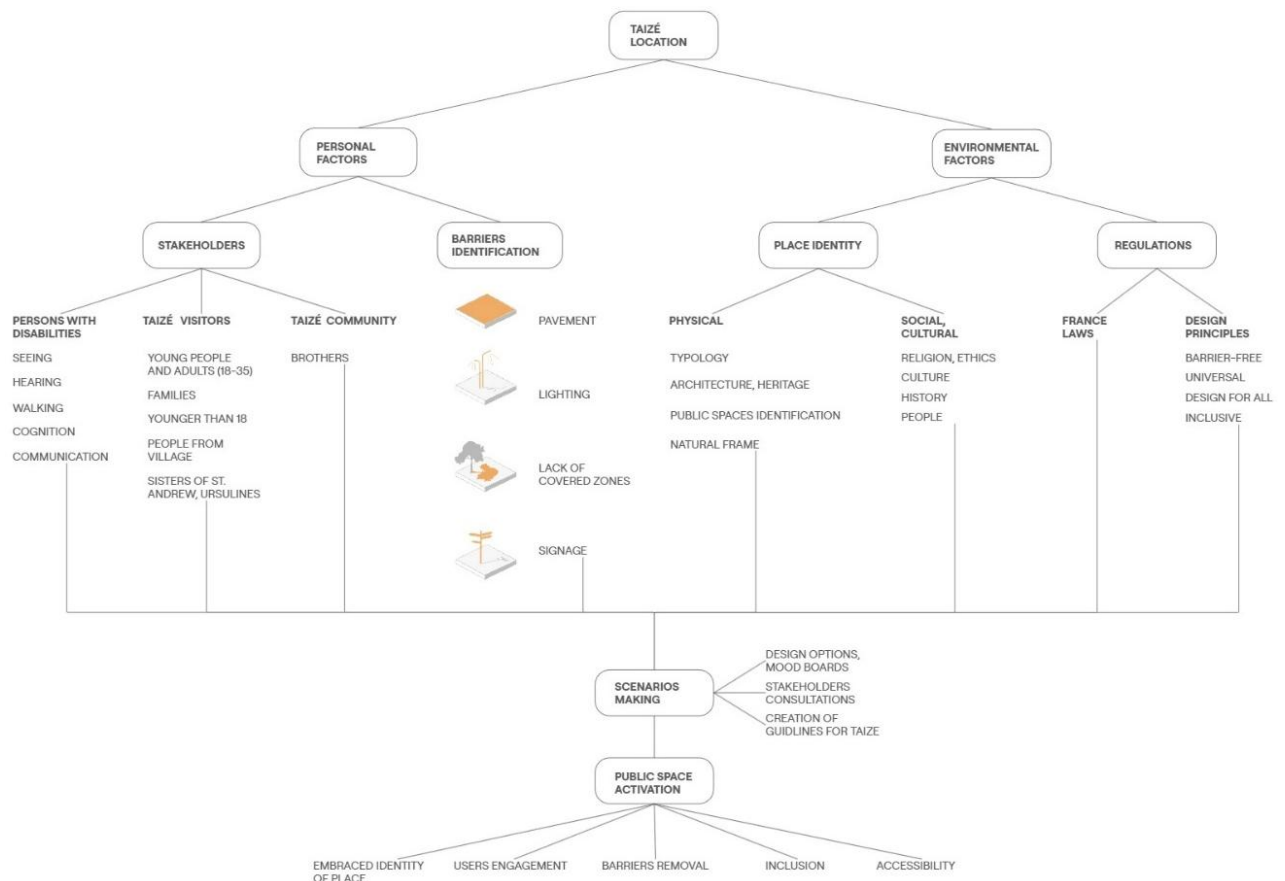


Fig. 7. Conceptual model (Made by author, 2025)

Conclusions of empirical research:

1. Taizé requires a complex methodology, including interviews, surveys, GIS data analysis, and the identification of place history and identity, in order to activate public spaces both for persons with disabilities and other visitors. This provides a stronger foundation for the guidelines of the design phase implementation;
2. The research found that there are two ways to improve accessibility in cultural and religious sites. One approach is to combine local materials and construction techniques, in this way combining the past and the future. Another approach is to develop and program different spatial scenarios of the place in order to find the most suitable option both for Taizé visitors and people with diverse needs;
3. The analysis identified four main barriers in Taizé. Firstly, poor pavement, or inconsistent pavement transitions within the same area. Second, insufficient lighting, which is mostly felt during night time. Third, confusing signage, this means that at some parts signage has one coding behind, in other parts – another. This confuses people and is not accessible, for example, for persons with visual impairments. Fourth, not enough shading to reduce heat islands, especially it can be felt during the hot days of summer both for visitors and persons with individual needs;
4. The design stage should focus on analysing the relationship between building functions and public spaces, highlighting priority zones, connecting fragmented parts of Taizé, to reduce visitors confusion. As the village is a big open area, this helps identify which aspects can be improved step by step with the long-term vision;

5. Taizé's strongest identity is duality, which means that spaces should continue to provide opportunities for flexibility and adaptations according to the needs. This concept should be applied in material selection, spatial programming, functions of the space organization and most importantly, improvements of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

3. Experimental urban project on public spaces activation in Taizé village, France

The goal of the experimental urban project in France village is to apply and integrate key findings from the literature analysis, empirical research and the conceptual model design program, in order to propose a long-term vision for the site's future development.

3.1. Additional research for the experimental urban project

Following additional research including flows, functions analysis, opportunities and constraints mapping (see Appendix 6), it is clear that the biggest weakness of the site is the main road, which divides the village into two parts and which is uncommon in typical French villages. Also, the central area of the site is currently unwelcoming, not fully used, fragmented, however, it has significant potential to become an attractive centre of village life, due to surrounding functions, views, and key locations. The additional research concludes with a SWOT analysis (see Appendix 7), the findings are structured into the project programme.

Program of the urban project in Taizé:

1. Taizé public spaces are activated through the use of local materials, techniques, and scenario-based programming;
2. Public spaces must ensure inclusivity and accessibility by addressing the needs of five functional domains needs: hearing, walking, seeing, cognition, communication;
3. Design proposal in Taizé should aim to reduce the four identified barriers as much as possible: pavement, lighting, lack of covered zones and signage;
4. Project should focus on connections between building functions and public spaces, by establishing a clear spatial hierarchy;
5. The design should provide guidelines for the gradual development of public spaces in Taizé village.

3.2. Experimental urban project design proposals

3.2.1. Concept of the urban project

Firstly, future development guidelines (see fig. 8) are created in accordance with French traditions, the culture of the Bourgogne region, the values of the Taizé community and the project's research findings.

Secondly, scenarios at the scale of the entire village are developed, addressing the weekly programme in Taizé (see Appendix 8). Main scenarios are: arrival, meal time, prayer time, Bible study/workshop time (for larger groups), small group sharing time, free time and emergency scenarios.

Thirdly, based on these scenarios, a special plan for the village is developed (see Appendix 9) and a detailed intervention area is selected. The selected area is not chosen randomly, as the research showed that the village centre today is not using full potential, it is strategic to initiate changes in this area, as public spaces activation there, gives the greatest impact not only for people with diverse needs, but for everyone.

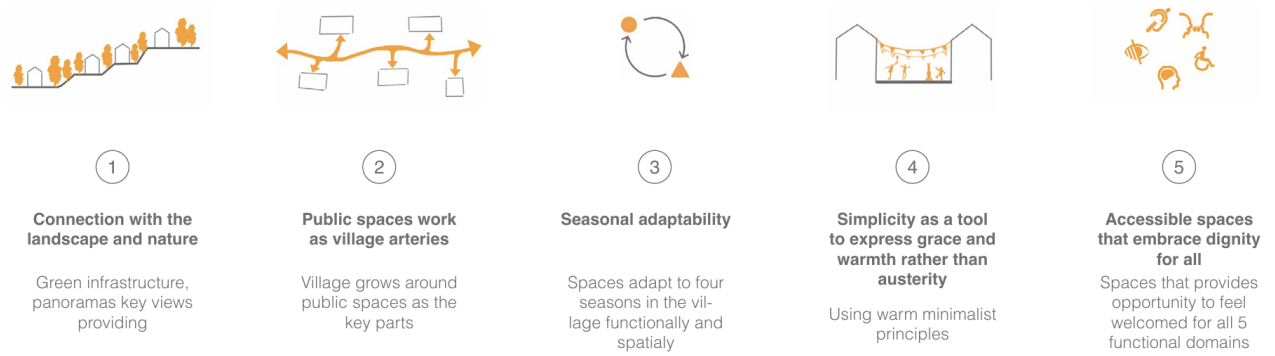


Fig. 8. Guidelines for Taizé future development (Made by author, 2025)

Fourthly, a detailed concept for the selected area is developed (see fig. 9). The goal is to recognize and improve the existing spatial functions in the centre of the village (see fig. 10). Today, the left side of the road is dedicated for buses parking, but, unfortunately, these buses remain parked for only few hours to drop off groups. This causes underuse of the space throughout the week. The right side of the road is occupied by the church, but next to it, the highest levels of noise and activity occur. In fact, after prayer, this creates a challenge, because people leaving the church often do not want to go straight into the action, they need a transition space. This is why concept proposal is to relocate active functions to the underused left side of the road and leave right side road for calmer, more sacral spaces, opportunities for contemplation.

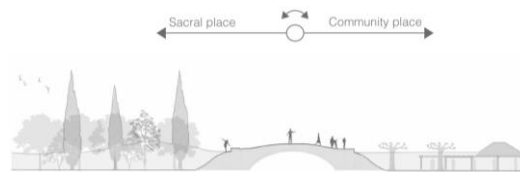


Fig. 9. Concept of detailed area, Taizé village centre (Made by author, 2025)



Fig. 10. Functional concept of detailed area (Made by author, 2025)

3.2.2. Detailed design of Taizé village centre

The detailed area consists of approximately 46,000 m² and includes multiple aspects developed within the design (see fig. 11). It is important to highlight that spatial hierarchy is expressed through not only spatial functions, but also through form. The spiritual and calm area is characterized by more organic forms, new sacral park is as a reference to garden of

Eden. The park consist of more natural, intentionally arranged trees in a seemingly random pattern. The active area is defined by more structured and linear forms, as a reference to humans. In an active area new functions are introduced: market square (people come to meet, eat and experience community life), sports area (as the former bus parking place was used for illegal sports happening) and pavilions hub (all needed functions, mentioned in scenarios before, are held under light pavilions structure as the tactile diversity). The design also requires to demolish few buildings, in order to create spatial connectivity between two sides of the road, demolished buildings are compensated in the same territory, but in more proper places as a space anchors. Based on empirical research findings, functions of the buildings in the design proposal are closely connected to public spaces around them.

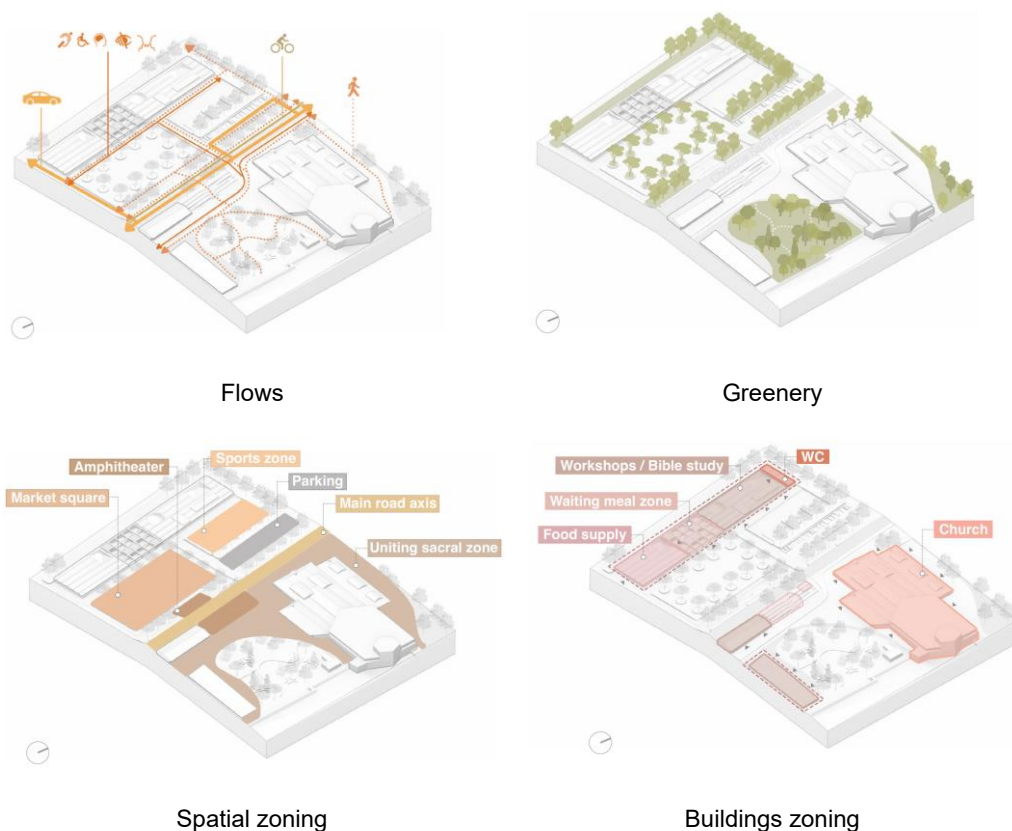


Fig. 11. Schemes of detailed design area (Made by author, 2025)

Four barriers, identified previously, are addressed through different design strategies. Pavement issues are fixed through a priority route, which connects key points of the area and is adapted to all five functional domains. Also, other zones feature differentiated pavement based on clear spatial zoning. Heat islands are mitigated through tree planting, trees are intentionally arranged to create shaded areas, lightweight structures, pavilions intervened into the area, help to hide from sun, rain, wind and other circumstances. Confusing signage is addressed through intuitive design principles. Variations in pavement and building forms, clearly defined and highlighted entrances reduce the need of signs in the territory. Poor lighting is improved through the priority route, which incorporates integrated lighting and helps prevent unsafe, poorly lit areas.

Sections (see fig. 12) and the masterplan (see fig. 13) show the transformation of the formerly separating road into a unifying axis. The design proposes to connect zones through amphitheatres on both sides, acting as connectors between the two parts.

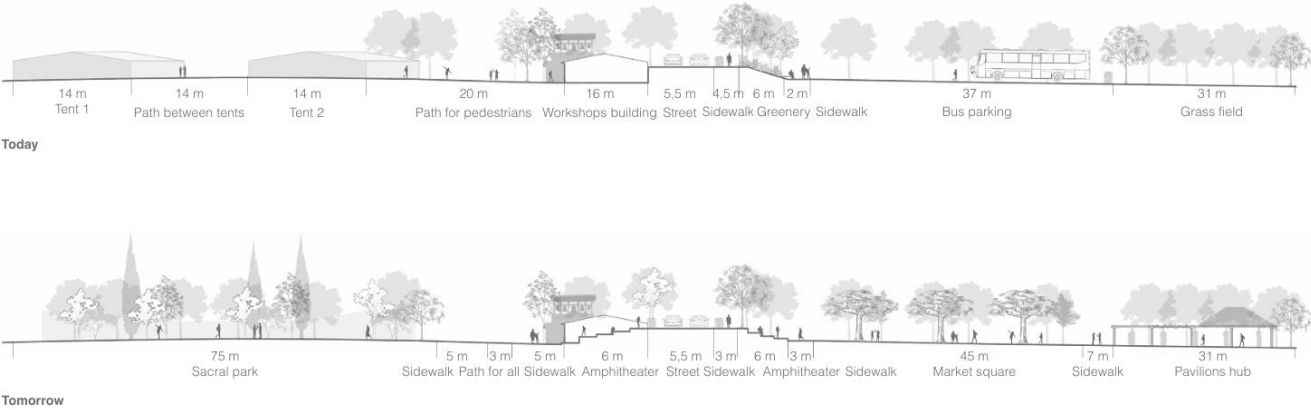


Fig. 12. Section of the detailed territory design proposal (Made by author, 2025)



Fig. 13. Masterplan plan of detalization area (Made by author, 2025)

3.2.3. Strategy for the design implementation

As the village and Taizé community have an attitude not to receive funding from sponsors, it is crucial to consider how the village could implement the design proposals gradually, according to available resources. The strategy proposes three main phases that slowly improve and activate public spaces in Taizé (see fig. 14). The first phase connects key points through a main path, adapted to all five functional domains, prioritizing key entrances accessible for all, beginning to transform the road into a unifying element by cleaning bushes between trees. The second phase introduces amphitheatres along the main road, compensates demolished buildings and needed functions by introducing new volumes for required functions. Finally, the third phase is completed with pavilions construction, the creation of a bus parking area on the other side of the village (explained in scenarios programming) and the creation of public spaces at the central part of Taizé.

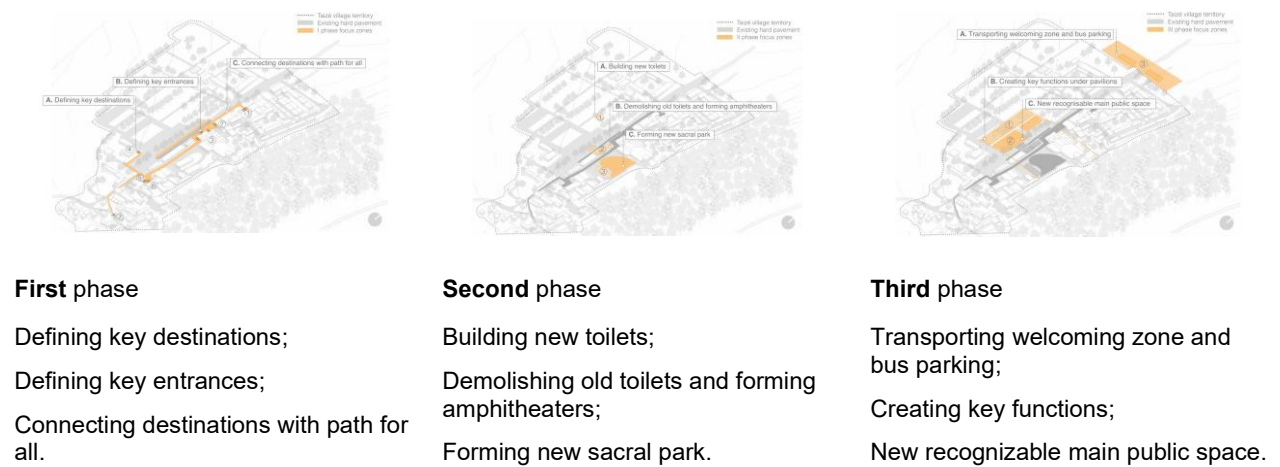


Fig. 14. Phases of design implementation strategy (Made by author, 2025)



Fig. 15. Visualizations of the detalization area (Made by author, 2025)

3.2.4. Evaluation of designing and activating public spaces in Taizé village

The experimental project was an uncommon and rare case study, which has almost no direct analogues worldwide. The uniqueness of the project lies in the fact that the place already attracts many people, even though the spaces are not fully visually or spatially welcoming. Nevertheless, it was possible to adapt and apply literature analysis, empirical research, findings from conceptual model to the design phase in unexpected ways. The gathered information about public space activation in different urban contexts, using inclusive urban design principles, worked as a driving force for solving the arising issues and weaknesses of the current situation in Taizé.

The limitation of this project is its spiritual dimension. As the case study focused on religious public spaces, all key solutions and design proposals are suitable to be applied only to the activation of sacral public space projects.

Conclusions of experimental urban design project:

1. Scenarios creation for the design phase is a crucial and highly effective tool as it serves as the foundation for the well-reasoned and thoughtful design strategies. The Taizé case showed that sacral public spaces scenarios should be based on key activities that the religious site is offering for visitors;
2. The proposed design strategy shows what is needed in contemporary religious public spaces: sacral zone for prayer, calmer zone for contemplation and active zone for shared community experience. It is important to note that sacral and active zones cannot be next to each other, as it causes too big emotional conflict for all people. The best solution is to use a calmer area between the two of them, as it works like a buffer zone;
3. As it is impossible to provide full accessibility of public spaces for all needs, the solution in the design phase was to define key attraction points in the territory, connecting them with one path, adapted to five functional domains and prioritizing entrances, accessible to all. Such approach creates clarity and hierarchy of spaces;
4. The barriers, identified in empirical research, in the design are addressed with a variety of options. Not adapted pavement and poor lighting are addressed through the prioritization zones and key connecting paths that serve the needs 24/7. Heat islands through trees, greenery, lightweight shading structures. Finally, confusing orientation is addressed through clear hierarchy of spaces and intuitive design as a consequence;
5. Guidelines and the strategy for urban design project implementation were based on local traditions, culture and identity. As the main identity of Taizé is duality, it was important to divide the development vision into three stages. Each stage was designed to already provide improvements and multi-functionality without requiring all phases to be completed at once;
6. The proposal for experimental urban design in Taizé is unique and does not have direct analogues both in Lithuania and abroad.

Conclusions

1. The activation process of public spaces begins with involving people in the project from the earliest stages. The master's thesis demonstrated that such an approach is an effective method leading to more well-grounded and context-sensitive design solutions.
2. The literature analysis showed that inclusive urban design principles are not a new or state-of-the-art topic in itself, but the application of these principles in real-life cases is often not fully successful. This is because guidelines are standardized globally and usually do not address local context, culture, communities, etc.
3. The results of the theoretical research (hypothetical model) suggest three main stages for more efficient public spaces activation. The first stage analyzes two factors: personal (analyzing impairments, barriers, needs of persons with disabilities with six functional domains) and environmental (understanding surrounding environment in chosen territory, acknowledging physical space, social and cultural aspects, looking at local regulations). The second stage focuses on project, choosing focus group, developing a suitable design approach for the place. The third stage seeks to activate public spaces through created place identity, user engagement, barriers removal, inclusion and accessibility.
4. Empirical research results were systematized and structured into the conceptual model as an improvement of the hypothetical one. The model provides more detailed guidelines on the second stage, as mentioned previously. Suitable design approach for public spaces activation can be reached by analyzing different possible scenarios of the place, identifying case study barriers and collaborating closely with local community, visitors, persons with special needs of five functional domains, experts in physiotherapy, urban planners, architects and cultural heritage professionals.
5. During the experimental design process, a framework for activating religious public spaces was developed. The logic is first of all to make unique and place-oriented guidelines for a development strategy, then proposing a programme for large-scale urban logic. Third, defining the area in smaller scale, that has the biggest potential to improve quality of life for the whole site and finally, examining in detail, what could be improved (barriers removal ideas, design elements, visual identity, priority aspects) on the chosen site.
6. Even though the Taizé village is already gathering many people from all around the world, the place still does not offer full accessibility for persons with disabilities. The design proposals aim to provide equal opportunities for everyone, however, this project is not a case where persons with individual needs would come solely because the environment is adapted to them. Also, the project does not create a new identity for the place, but rather reveals the potential that has always existed, yet remained unnoticed.

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Appendices

1 Appendix

Comparison of different design approaches

	Target people	Application area	Goals	Drawbacks
Barrier-free (U.S.A)	◦ Disabled people (physical, sensory, cognitive)	◦ Built environment ◦ Transport	◦ Remove physical barriers	◦ Too narrow
Universal design (U.S.A)	◦ Disabled people ◦ All people	◦ Products ◦ Environments ◦ Transport	◦ Remove barriers ◦ Create design suitable for everyone	◦ Too complicated ◦ Abstract even for specialists
Design for all (Europe)	◦ Physical disabled ◦ Able-bodied elderly	◦ Built environment ◦ Information ◦ Every day services ◦ Culture	◦ End-users involvement in all design stages ◦ Design with sustainability values	◦ No single solution for all ◦ Practically hard to adapt
Inclusive design (U.K.)	◦ Reasonable possible all people (not all disabled if hard to implement)	◦ Built environment ◦ Services ◦ Products	◦ Reasonably possible solutions for as much as possible people	◦ Possibility of exclusion of different marginalized groups

Working hypotheses and methodologies of empirical research

Working hypothesis	Objects	Methods	Tools
Activating public spaces by combining top-down and bottom-up approaches through inclusive participatory practises, can foster persons with disabilities inclusion and involvement	Experts opinion; Taizé village; Focus group opinion.	Interview with focus group and experts; Interview with Taizé community.	Interview plan; Questionnaire form.
Proper identification, evaluation and removal of barriers for persons with disabilities can enhance public spaces accessibility and reduce social inequality	Experts opinion; Persons with disabilities opinion; Taizé village; Taizé community opinion.	Interview with Taizé visitors; Analysis of personal, persons with disabilities, factors; (impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions); Taizé worship places accessibility examining.	Interview plan; Lynch mental mapping.
Understanding environment's context, culture and diversity can increase interaction of public space and public life	Taizé village; Taizé community opinion; Analogues.	Space analysis of Taizé (physical, social and cultural characteristics); Analogues analysis.	GIS; Lynch mental mapping; Gehl space analysis.
Grouping the overlapping needs, instead of disabilities, can lead to better public spaces activation methodologies	Experts opinion; Focus group opinion.	Structured survey of persons with disabilities; Interview with focus group and experts.	Interview plan; Questionnaire form; Criteria system.
Religious communities can help and guide in making religious public spaces more welcoming for persons with disabilities	Taizé community opinion; Analogues.	Interview with Taizé community; Analysis of analogues.	GIS; Interview plan.

Typology of Taizé



Old part of the village
Separated smaller scale buildings
Medieval age urban structure



New part of the village
Continuous bigger scale buildings
Compact block urban pattern



Public spaces in Taizé analysis



Public spaces explication:

1 Oyak place

2 Welcoming place

3 Eating, learning, gathering main place

4 Calm, contemplation place

5 Calm, gathering place

6 Private meetings with brothers place

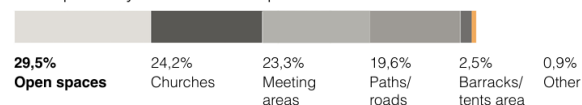
7 Volunteer girls private place

Public survey results on public spaces

Do you enjoy spending time in Taizé public spaces?



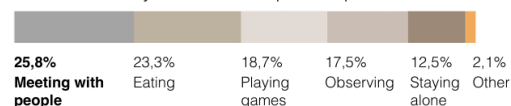
What places you consider as public in Taizé?



Other:

Oyak, green areas, the wall with the view of sunset, Exposition

What activities you do in Taizé public spaces?



Other:

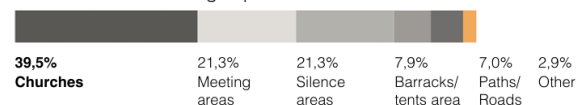
Praying, reading, writing, taking photos, walking

Public survey results on place identity

How connected you feel to Taizé?



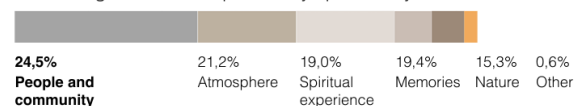
What are most meaningful places in Taizé?



Other:

Oyak, fields around, volunteer houses, benches under the roofs of rooms 10-14, trees between church and eating area

What things make Taizé personally special to you?



Other:

Personal growth, music, songs, it feels like home

Chosen experts for the empirical research

Expert		Country	Expertise
Brother Ettiene		France	Responsible Taizé community brother for any on-site repairs and new constructions.
Mike Fritsch		France	Architect, civil engineer, works in l'AUC office in Paris.
Anna Neber		Germany	Physiotherapist from Germany, working with different types of disabilities, lived in Taizé more than 1 month.
Justina Mulionytė		Lithuania	Urbanist, partner of PUPA office in Vilnius, expert in public spaces design.
Gitana Šukaitytė		Lithuania	Architect, member of global Focolare group, specialises in religious architecture and adaptation to disabilities.
Ingrida Lipnickytė-Povilaitienė		Lithuania	Architect, PhD doctor, worked with territorial planning of Kaunas city.

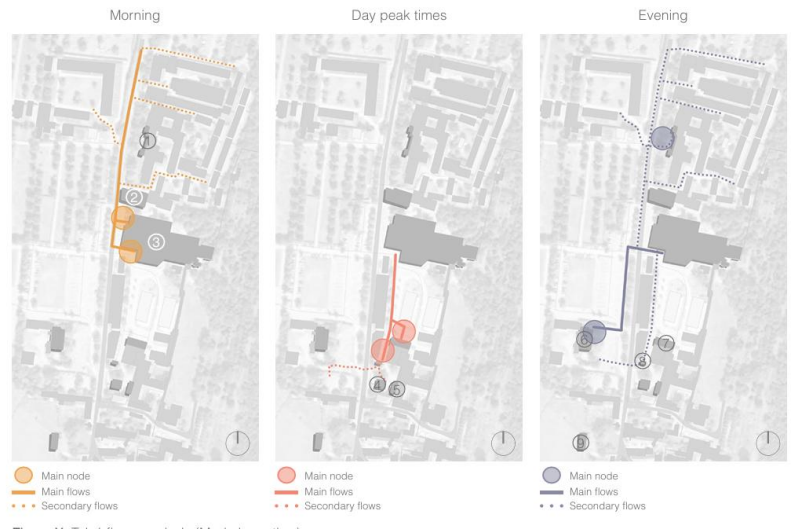
Additional analysis of chosen experimental project

Flows analysis

As the flows are not similar during all times of the day, it was important to make three most intense periods of the day flows analysis. Morning flow shows that biggest jams appear on the road from barracks zones going to the church, because every day starts with the Taizé prayer. Secondly, during day day, biggest flows are concentrated in a different place, it is the linkage from the church, going to the eating place, La Morada and Casa. Finally, evening flows are different, because after the evening prayer, most people are going to Oyak that is on another part of the main road. This shows that flows are dynamic during the day.

Explication:

- ① El Abiodh (first aid)
- ② Exposition (shop)
- ③ Church of Reconciliation
- ④ Casa (welcoming info center)
- ⑤ La Morada (urgent messages, lost&found)
- ⑥ Oyak (shop, food)
- ⑦ Food distribution
- ⑧ Bells (landmark)
- ⑨ Wanagi Tacanku (art place)



Functions analysis

After making analysis of the buildings function, it is clear that most public, mixed use buildings are located in the middle of the village and more private buildings, such as storages, barracks are located further. The land use analysis proves that already public buildings have formed publically used spaces around. This shows that buildings function and land use are in the synergy and works together well, but not all spaces are fully accessible even if it is around public buildings.



Opportunities, constraints

Currently, Taizé has weak, not fully characterized zones which makes it harder to orientate. Also the existing main road works as separating tool, instead of connecting. Heat island are being created from parking lots and poorly designed public spaces. On the other hand, it is possible to create the link of two sides of the village with the existing main road, highlighting key spots that should be clearly linked, creating distinctive characters of each zone, creating the hierarchy of the public spaces and opening key panoramic views for the visitors.



SWOT analysis results

S STRENGTHS	W WEAKNESSES	O OPPORTUNITIES	T THREATS
1. Strong uniting identity - duality Multifunctionality is coded behind the community attitude and created spaces. 2. Inclusive community's philosophy Community has an attitude not to exclude anyone, even church vitrage was removed in order to welcome youth. 3. Existing active public life Spaces are already socially successful and used for many. Spaces are used for community bonding (meeting people, eating, being together).	1. Not well understood urban structure The village is very wide and it is not easy to navigate due to the lack of spatial hierarchy, monotonous spaces. 2. Fast changing climate It gives great influence for the pavement and surfaces, because materials need to adapt to fast changes of the climate not during the year, but also during the day. 3. Insufficient resting and calm zones Not enough shaded areas, heat islands due to lack of shading. Calm zones are not enough distinguished. 4. Poor accessibility infrastructure At some parts pavement and surfaces are not adapted for persons with disabilities. Poor lighting at some parts make unsafety. Confusing signage or no signage at all in certain parts.	1. Transforming main road from traffic corridor into pedestrian-priority social spine The historical street can become not only as crossing place, but also as the connector of the village. 2. Functional zoning highlighting It is possible to reinforce existing functional zoning (south part - for gatherings, north part - for accommodation) by using spatial design and wayfinding strategies. 3. Improvements of calm green zones Opportunity to embrace peace, reduce heat islands, reduce problem of overstimulation during peak times. 4. Connecting buildings function with public spaces Confusion can be reduced by highlighting priority zones, joining separated Taize parts into one working unity.	1. The place can become big infrastructure point If all improvements for persons with disabilities are being implemented, it can drastically change the atmosphere of the place. Also clash with heritage protection. 2. Dependence on visitor flows If youth coming drops at some point, all system and settlement is underused. 3. Fines for not adapting public spaces for persons with disabilities With the years, France rules are becoming more strict, not fixed problems in Taize might cause financial problems. 4. Loss of tranquility If the spaces will be activated too much, it can damage spiritual identity, loss of contemplative character.

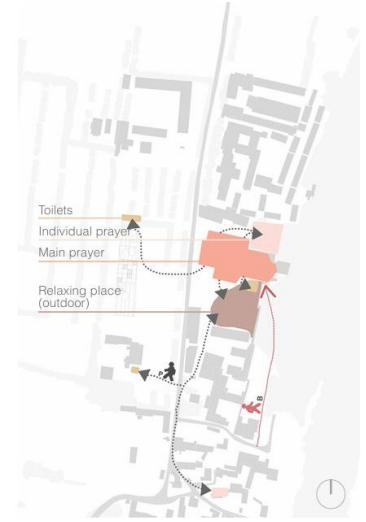
Scenarios programming for the village scale



Arrival scenario



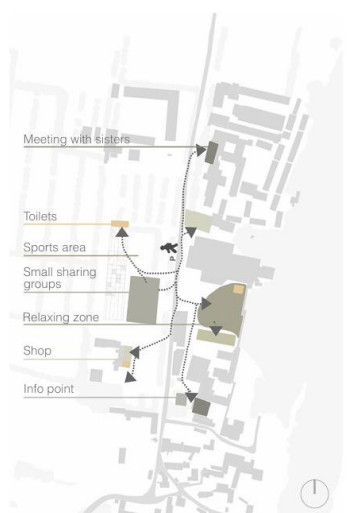
Meal time scenario



Prayer scenario



Bible study scenario



Leisure time scenario



Emergency scenario

Conceptual village development plan



Explication:

Symbols

- Priority entrances for all
- ① Old Church
- ② La Morada (info center)
- ③ Oyak (shop)
- ④ Pavilions hub (meeting)
- ⑤ Church of Reconciliation
- ⑥ Exposition (shop)
- ⑦ El Abiodh (first aid)

Zones

- Existing greenery
- Planned new greenery
- Parking zones
- Main public square

Roads

- Main road (30 km/h)
- Path adapted to all

Public survey questions

I am:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ I prefer not to say

My age:

- ☐ Younger than 18
- ☐ 18-35
- ☐ Older than 35

I am from:

- ☐ Europe
- ☐ Asia
- ☐ North America
- ☐ South America
- ☐ Australia

When I visited Taizé, I was:

- ☐ Participant
- ☐ Volunteer
- ☐ Brother of Taizé community or Sister of St. Andrew/Ursulines
- ☐ Both participant and volunteer

I was in Taizé:

- ☐ One time
- ☐ More than 2 times
- ☐ More than 5 times
- ☐ More than 10 times

Do you enjoy spending time in public spaces in Taizé?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Choose those places that you consider as public spaces in Taizé:

- ☐ Paths/roads
- ☐ Meeting areas/rooms in Taizé
- ☐ Open spaces
- ☐ Churches (Silent church and Church of Reconciliation)
- ☐ Barracks/tents places
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

What activities you usually do in public spaces?

- ☐ Meeting with people
- ☐ Playing games
- ☐ Observing
- ☐ Staying alone
- ☐ Eating
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

How connected you feel to Taizé?

- ☐ Strongly
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ I don't feel any connection

What places are most meaningful to you in Taizé?

- ☐ Paths/roads
- ☐ Meeting areas
- ☐ Churches (Silent church and Church of Reconciliation)
- ☐ Barracks/tents places
- ☐ Silence areas/fields
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

What things make Taizé personally special to you?

- ☐ Atmosphere
- ☐ People and community
- ☐ Spiritual experience
- ☐ Nature and its surroundings
- ☐ Memories
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

How easy it is to move between different parts of Taizé (sleeping, praying, eating areas, etc.)

- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Usually easy
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Usually hard
- ☐ Very difficult and hard

Which places in Taizé, in your opinion, are least accessible?

- ☐ Church area
- ☐ Barracks/tents area
- ☐ Dining/meeting places
- ☐ Paths/roads
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

Do you think accessibility is important in Taizé public spaces (for you, for people with special needs)?

- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Not important
- ☐ I don't care

Are there places in Taizé, where is too much noise or crowds that makes you feel hard to reflect and engage?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

How easy it is to find places in Taizé?

- ☐ Very easy
- ☐ Usually easy
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Usually hard
- ☐ Very hard and difficult

Which elements help you orientate yourself best:

- ☐ Symbols/signs
- ☐ Landmarks
- ☐ People's guidance
- ☐ Memory/familiarity
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

Tell in three words how you see Taizé public spaces today:

What aspects of Taizé should be preserved for the future?

- ☐ Accessibility
- ☐ Simplicity
- ☐ Silence and peace
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Landscape, nature
- ☐ Heritage
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

Do you have special needs/impairments?



- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Interviews with experts

Justina Mulionytė (urban planner).

Could you briefly introduce your professional background? What type of projects do you work on and for how long have you been involved in public space design?

I'm architect, urbanist, founder of urbanist studio PUPA and my experience with public spaces is that it is my major field where I work, also teach in university about public spaces.

What do you consider the core principles of a well-designed public space today?

For me it's more important not the design, but how public spaces stimulate activities of people. For example, public spaces can encourage people to meet, stay longer. Spaces meet needs of various residents, like kids, teenagers, elderly, families, youngsters. So, if public space meets all those requirements, if it is lively, then I think design is good, but beautiful details are important, they matter. But not beautiful details create life in public spaces.

How can a space evolve and improve without losing its original identity and essence?

That is the major task, when you design a public space that you not lose identity, but even strengthen it. How to achieve is the task of the design.

First of all you need to understand the identity of the place and most often when you are designer, you need to go there, be there, observe a lot, see how people act and interact. It is also very important to talk with users of the public space through interviews, workshops. During those investigations, helps to keep the identity, genius loci of the space.

But also for identity is important the past, how it was built, what was the history, because on the previous past, you can build narrative of the identity continuation.

How to balance simplicity, functionality, and emotional experience when designing public spaces?

There is the danger that the place can become a big infrastructure point. Balancing all three aspects is hard task. As far as I remember Taizé, I was very young at that time, but it's a bit wild, for me it was this feeling that it is outdoor camp, so it means the paving is not always flat, many turns...

When you design, you try options and then you talk with all stakeholders. For example people with disabilities, because you want to know which way is better for them, but also you talk with other people who use the space. But it is important to highlight, who needs the priority. Prioritizing persons with disabilities might change the vibe of the visitors.

Solution is talking with people and trying to figure out, how all aspects could be joined together.

How can signage, markers, and wayfinding be integrated so they feel natural and not imposed on the environment?

Signage can be as a separate field of expertise, for our project, we were even hiring a company, who were doing only the signs. So in my opinion doing that easy guiding of people is really important, And to make it good, you need to do it at same time visible and non-visible. So you can recognize it (letters, icons, signs), but they should not overload, or distract somehow. So it is the task to try different options and see what suits the best. Is it materials that are visible in the area, colors who relate with the buildings or with the paving. Everything is about creativity. Benches, paving rooting can generate activities, but signs, they actually help to move around.

When we did project in Ukraine, we made specialized map for visitors with simple icons, big texts, black and white, no overload of information.

How to create calming zones in big flows territories?

As I remember Taizé is a wide territory. In Ukraine therapeutic park, we also had to create small spaces that group therapy classes could happen. It was important task to that people, who are passing by, won't see who are sitting in the class, but also that those who are in therapeutic group, they could see other people.

For such places task is that they would be a bit further from the crowd, but still they have to see that there are some people somewhere. So maybe it would be good to think about some natural background behind person, who is in the calm zone, but the person can see action happening. Because it is important that in calming zones you don't have anyone behind your back, because if you are sitting and people are walking behind you, it doesn't feel safe.

You can try to reach it with plants, shadows, textiles, I'm not sure if fences or buildings would be nice option. Also calming zones are about controlling the space, so movable furniture should also be considered.

How should public spaces be designed to be inclusive for people with different needs (mobility, visual, cognitive)?

Lets say in our therapeutical park, the goal was to provide relaxing and resting opportunities. In order to reach it, we wanted to stimulate all the five senses. So you see bright colors, different colors during the year, choosing plants that in winter looks like one, but in summer like other. For hearing, that you could hear some bees or insects, moving sculptures because of the wind, or water dropping. Tasking we made vegetable garden. Smelling there are flowers and grasses with different aroma. And touching was doing the garden, touching natural materials.

The project was not about inclusivity, but stimulating good feeling in the space, because if all our senses are stimulated, then we feel great, become happier and calm.

In my opinion, for you to design everything that is very inclusive is not that easy, but you can design, consult, adjust, design once again and find the solution.

How to choose surfaces and materials for large outdoor spaces to balance durability, comfort and aesthetics?

That is a challenge, because in Taize case, when you need to choose solutions that are not too expensive. Maybe for you its an opportunity to adopt recycled materials, of course using local materials, because the landscape there is very unique, like stones, wood is always good idea and they are durable. It exploring journey, I don't have and answer what is the best option.

What in my work I like to do is doing varying options, mood boards or sketches. What if in Taize I would everything recycled, what if I do just stones, what if I do just wood. And then when you see them three and you see which one is working the best, but it is always easy to say no, if you tried something. This is my way of approach that could work for you as well.

Ingrida Povilaitienė-Lipnickytė (urban planner).

Could you briefly introduce your professional background? What type of projects do you work on and for how long have you been involved in public space design?

I have my PhD degree where I focused in cityscape identity and assessment, so to some extend it is also related to public spaces, because cityscape identity in general is how we use the city and how we understand the city. My professional background I was working in Research Institute in department of territorial planning, so we were working on masterplan of Kaunas city and also of smaller towns. So when you are preparing master plans, you also need to think about public spaces, how they could be used not only for regular people, but how they could be used for all.

What do you consider the core principles of a well-designed public space today?

Of course, today we are talking about inclusivity, it means it needs to be adapted to everyone. It is a very hard task, because we sometimes joke that what suits to everyone, works for no one. So it is a great challenge, how to create public spaces, which would be suitable both to youngsters, all age groups and also for the people, who might have different understanding, neurodiverse people.

When we talk about people with special needs, it is not only persons in a wheelchair or blind, but there can also be people, who understand environment differently. Some people might be overstimulated in public spaces, some people might find the difficulty to find the way, orientate themselves.

One of solution could be, in the same space thinking about different scenarios, so the same space could be used differently: calmer corner, place where older people can meet and chat, so it has to contain different scenarios.

How to balance simplicity, functionality, and emotional experience when designing public spaces?

I would say simplicity is the hardest thing to achieve, but also when you create really good design, it is usually simple. So we need to find out, how not to confuse people and when you are talking about Taizé, it is a religious meeting point, so here we should make places of different scenarios. Maybe some places are for smaller groups to meet, maybe some places has to be more for individual spots. It is good to create spaces where person feels good, no matter if he is alone or with a group of people.

When talking about the simplicity, the signage has to be quite simple, but still not confusing that everybody would understand. Visual identity is very important, because people are coming from different countries, so all signs must to contain visual code behind it.

How can signage, markers, and wayfinding be integrated so they feel natural and not imposed on the environment?

Firstly, you need to find the roots of organization itself, what kind of identity they already contain. Also, you should avoid very bright colors, but still it has to be readable, so probably using the contrast, maybe using their color codes. Even if the idea is simplicity, you still need to know where to go, it cannot be too abstract.

It is the way of trying and testing, I would suggest making test models or designs and show them to different types of people with special needs. Asking them: what do you see here, what do you understand? What is clear for you? What is missing?

How can a space evolve and improve without losing its original identity and essence?

When we are talking about spaces, people are getting used to them. For example youth are changing very fast due to technologies and people find hard to pay the attention. It is difficult to say, how we can solve it, but what is the best way to to present the information that people with special needs would still be able to use the spaces, repetition helps. If you repeat information several times, if people have possibility to see the same information in different ways (not only hear, but also see). In general, design should be more intuitive.

How to create calming zones in big flows territories?

You need to create specific environment, which would absorb noise. So the greenery, softer surfaces, introducing water elements (running water), colors there must to be natural. Another idea is installing speaker, which would have calming natural sounds of the birds, those places could be used not only for people with special needs, but in general, sometimes you want to be alone, or you want to meditate.

But also, chapels, churches works also as a calming places, so it is important to mark the connections with the function of the buildings as well. What is going inside of the buildings. Considering connection between outdoor and indoor spaces.

How to choose surfaces and materials for large outdoor spaces to balance durability, comfort and aesthetics?

Natural materials are the answer in general. Everything we create today in architecture, we need to think about durability, sustainability. So good choices are wood, natural stone (but natural stone cannot absorb the sounds very well), so limestone is better choice. And greenery, plants has to be local.

Also idea is to create retaining walls and create some sort of partition, or use bushes to divide the space, options are limitless, it only depend what kind of design you choose.

Also, it is good to use permeable surfaces, so in big open spaces, it can be mix between the grass and piles. When you have big crowds in open spaces, you don't want to create visibility obstacles, but when we talk that many people are coming to those empty spaces, if it's hot, we have huge overheat. So at least some kind of trees around the space could also help. Because if there are people, who are very sensitive to heat, it is good to have covered places with shade.

Having only grass is not a solution, but it is good to choose materials that are permeable, that the water could go down.

What are the most common mistakes when modernising sensitive heritage sites?

When we are talking about cultural heritage, sometimes we want to preserve everything as it was. It is not the best solution, because we want that each period in history, would have its own mark, so we can respect what is culturally important, valuable, but still it still has to have its own mark of a time. You need to respect what is already valuable, but you cannot copy and paste the history, the design should mark our time.

Gitana Šukaitytė (architect).

Could you briefly introduce your professional background? What type of projects do you work on and for how long have you been involved in public space design?

Architect, organized trips to Taizé, did many religious buildings architecture adaptation to persons with disabilities and public needs. Member of global Focolare group.

How can established religious spaces be adapted without losing the identity or heritage of the place?

Try to not distinguish disabled people, choose to give them spaces so they can be the part of action. Try to look at different situations and adapt to the needs of people. Using natural elements to create smooth paths, handrails, tactile surfaces.

It is important to make spaces multifunctional, so that the space could be used by different scenarios and people.

Choose the paths, that are most important and accessibility needed, then choose the materials that are most neutral to be used for improving it and adapt places.

How can signage, markers, and wayfinding be integrated so they feel natural and not imposed on the environment?

First of all, it is important to look at the local materials. Maybe brothers work with ceramics and could integrate signs with relief from ceramics for persons with visual impairments. Integrate ground, walls, surfaces to make accessibility for persons with disabilities. Focus on lighting, maybe signs can shine during the night.

You don't need to put plastic or PVC, concrete or metal, Taizé has shale. Shale can be used for lines making, tactile surfaces.

How to choose surfaces and materials for large outdoor spaces to balance durability, comfort and aesthetics?

Look what is around, what materials are common and used in the past, locally. It is important that materials would be weather resistant and adapted. Using old materials and reuse them into new function.

There is one design solution of stone carpet, when crushed stone is filled with special liquid and it makes the surface smooth, yet it absorbs water.

How would you recommend designing and improving religious public spaces when the available budget is limited?

Look at local materials, look at the beginning. For example, Germans when they build in Africa, they used plastic bottles, filled with gravel and bound with clay, in this way they create walls. It requires time, hands and elementary materials. Organize group of people, volunteers to make the work, create guidelines and after that show to those groups, so they can do it as the job. Consider adopting bamboo, because it grows fast, but can become local material.

Creating guidelines, schemes with dimensions and strict needs, can help to model and enable people from Taizé and community to improve public spaces together (during work times, workshops).

How to create calming zones in big flows territories?

One solution is plants, using acoustic walls that are covered with plants. Using those partial walls as not partitions, but also informative signages. Also bushes, vases and other tools. Maybe adopting bamboo, or other materials for openwork walls that gives safety from sound, rain, wind...

What are the most common mistakes when modernising sensitive heritage sites for persons with disabilities?

It is important to provide possibility to be independent for persons with disabilities. Try to avoid the situation, when disabled people, when going from car, still need to go through all parking lot to reach the objects.

Making signage without tactile possibility, nowadays we need to make those signs and directions with relief.

Mike Fritsch (urban planner)

What is your experience working on projects in France? (Have you been involved in urban/public space projects?)

I work not that much with public spaces projects, but I have some experience with it and regulations in France.

What legal or technical regulations are most important when designing public or open spaces in France?

Again, here in France, it is very important that the design complies with the regulations, that are very strict, some say too much. So, any design process is checked constantly for these matters. Most often, a specific technical office is appointed for these checks on the client side (they are called "Bureau de Contrôle", which does exactly this, control). Then, on the architect/urbanist side, we often also have a collaborating office that is specifically appointed for PMR-check (PMR meaning "personnes à mobilité réduite" - "person with restricted mobility"). They have in every design phase a series of documents to produce that analyse the design and are part of the process. Sometimes these offices do Accessibility and Fire Safety.

What are the main challenges when working with historical or culturally sensitive sites in France?

The main challenges, in France, with these sites is that they were made in different times on one side. This means that newer rules are hard to apply, which can badly influence the design process and produce bad projects (weird stair solutions, 50cm elevators, and so on). France tends to over-administrate and so over-do the regulation process which often clashes with realities and other rules. This means that sometimes, a technical solution for accessibility goes against conservation rules (given by the Historical Architects). In these cases, there can be, if well explained and argued, exemptions to the technical rules.

How is disability and accessibility approached in France from the perspective of architects and urban planners?

In France, inclusivity (in your sense, mobility and accessibility) is a great part of any design approval, buildings or public spaces, during the different design phases (submission of specific documents that describe the compliance to the code) or for municipal approval of any building permit (here again, with very specific documents that compose the approval files, we call them the 40, since it is the number they have in the standardized submissions).

In France, generally, these rules are viewed as too strict or not flexible enough, as just mentioned. But there is plenty of visions and different opinions on this, some know how to integrate them early enough of work with them, others "discover" too late that their vision doesn't comply, and then post-fix it, which is never really a success in terms of quality.

Last words and ideas

Lastly, public spaces in France have two sides, which might be important for your work, as I read through the attached document. One is the public space, squares and park for example, where you need to comply with a set of rules. The other one is streets and roads, or even sidewalks. Here the rules are lighter, since there is little to do with stairs on a sidewalk or a road, which is just a result to the topography of the place.

If you are going to work on the full town, the different accessibility elements would so be integrated in specific public space elements rather than trying to flatten down sidewalks and topographies.

Do you usually visit and spend time in public spaces?

Now, as a volunteer, I spend less time in public spaces, because we have volunteer spaces (Ntoumi, my room, Madras garden). I think as a participant, all spaces are public, so I think when I was participant, I spent mostly all day in public spaces here. Now maybe 60 percentage of the day. And I see many people with disabilities in public spaces in Taize.

What activities you do in public spaces?

I pray, speak with people, work with the participants and also walk around, eat. As a participant I spend more time with people, but as a volunteer it depends on week to week, what I want and what is my mood.

In your experience, how easy it is to move around public spaces here?

For me its easy, I can walk quite good, for me its easy to walk, navigate. But when people are new here, its quite a big space out there, so especially for persons with learning disabilities, that could be overload, too much info. Also, sometimes the paths (not smooth ground with stones, hard to go with wheelchair and others). I think the last weeks it was quite warm, really hot to be outside and I saw that in Taize those days were a lot of sun and not enough shadow. And for some people, they are really sensitive to sun.

Are there any physical obstacles that make it difficult to move?

Ground surface. Wheelchair access to church is quite hard. Also in church there is a lot of dust, for some allergic it can be very problematic. Also the church is really dark, so people with less good vision, finds it difficult. I saw one elderly, who used flashlight to see notes of the songs. Also I'm not sure if toilets for people with disabilities are big enough.

Also people with complex disabilities have struggles and they are very sensitive to not smooth path surfaces.

How do you describe wayfinding here?

I think its quite difficult for many people to find way here. Also, I think if you are blind, its really a big place and you don't have things to orientate with, so its really open. Also I think for example, Doula can be really hard to navigate. When you are there, the tent is for example on fourth, I think there is really hard wayfinding, its not easy to orientate there.

I think it would be nice to have more sign saying directions (even for people without special needs it would be helpful). So people who can read, could read and who don't – could understand the sign. Also maps with dots, saying you are here would be very helpful.

Do you think public spaces are welcoming to people with different needs?

I don't think so. I think Taize is place that grows in its own way, and its okay, but I would not say its very welcoming. Because its not a really beautiful place that welcomes. I think whats is needed so public spaces could be welcoming here. But I think that if you use a wheelchair, it can be considered as welcoming. But for person with complex disabilities, its not welcoming.

What Taize would need to be more welcoming?

Rooms where you can lay down, room that you can move up and down. Some spaces to be safe, be alone. When I think about Manaus area , if you want to eat, you cannot really be safe, there are many many people and its really loud its not really a safe place. In summer you can go in one of those rooms, but in winter, rooms are super qcoupied. Also, if you have disability, you cannot think that all dormitories can be mixed with disabled and not disabled, because for person in a wheelchair its too narrow spaces, not enough that it has ramp to access the room. Crowds and noises should be considered.

How comfortable you feel spending time in these spaces (noise, lighting, crowding)?

I think it depends on person on their own. Some people with ADHD or Autism love noises and crowds and they love playing Taize twister or spending time in Oyak, others hate it and try to avoid. And I think it would be cool to have in those crowded places that are safe and small.

Do you think there are places that people can feel isolated?

I think you can feel isolated on all places in Taize, when you have feeling you cannot be in contact. For example when you sit, see group of people and feel that I can't get in. Also in Oyak, when you cannot understand what's going on, can be really isolating. I think many games in Taize are movement oriented, so when you have some disabilities, you cannot be part of it.

If you could change one thing in Taize, what could it be?

I want to have a house or a room with to be safe in it, the room that you can use with several disabilities also with a bathroom you can lay down and use it with complex disabilities. There was an adventure park in Germany, they also have many things to do, but person with disabilities are also included. They have bathrooms that you can lay down, they have many plan you can see where you are, where you want to go. Maybe for Taize it would be great to have a special plan, symbols on it that say: here you can be silent, here are safe spaces, this place is really good to use by wheelchair and something like that. Maybe it also can be as a blind person that I met here, would be really great. In Germany there are cities that have plans that are 3d with little houses and then you can feel the river, streets. Also not only for blind people, but for many to see orientation.

Brother Etienne (community member).

Can you tell about the names of Taize locations and where they are from?

Brother: So El Abiot was the heritage of Charles de Foucault at the beginning of the 20th century, and there was a strong link between the little sisters of Jesus and the little brothers of Jesus and the community. This building was called in remembrance of Charles de Foucault. Madras is a city in India where there was a... first very big intercontinental meeting in 1984. Chittagong was the first location of the Fraternity of the Brothers in Bangladesh. Afterwards they moved, but the first years they were in Chittagong. Northern part of Bangladesh, I think. Olinda is the first place where the brothers have been present in Brazil, the first five years when they were in 67 at the invitation of Don Helder Camara, who was the bishop of Olinda at Recife.

Ieva: So they invited?

Brother: They were invited. Douala is a city in Cameroon in Africa where there was a celebration of opening of the Council of Youth in the 70s. What else? Manaus is a city in Brazil and I don't know why there is this name but it's a city in the north of Brazil. Oyak is in Cameroon also.

Ieva: For example, Casa and La Morada?

Brother: Casa, in fact, it's a home. This is a sense of the welcome of Fr. Roger. He wanted always that people feel welcome. It was very important they can feel a home. And casa in Portuguese is home, the house. And La Morada in Spanish is the same.

Ieva: So this place is mainly for welcome atmosphere.

Brother: Yeah, yeah.

What about Church of Reconciliation entrances letters?

Ieva: When I did work in church. S means south and N means north?

Brother: In fact, we started because for the names we had to be careful. It's because there are places which disappeared, but at the beginning we were identifying the place with a letter or with a number. In the dormitories it was number and the places of meeting it was letters. So we had point A, B, C, D, E, and what was three in 1990 was K. So we started with K because before it was used in 1990. And then afterwards, it was a bit evident, we did L. And afterwards we did M. And afterwards we did N. But then, in 1997, we said... It's very practical. And it's north, so we should say S. It's not that there was something in between.

Ieva: Everything is very logical actually here. Yes. And when new added parts was built in church, do you remember?

Brother: It was not at one time, it was like this. K was in 1990, L and M in 1991, N in 1992 and S in 1997. The last name that we gave was Neva for the house in the middle of the village.

As I understand brothers and the community tries to be more hospital and welcoming place. So does it mean that you want to welcome persons with disabilities more?

Brother: We want that all people, who want to come to Taize, would have possibility to come. But we don't want that they come to Taize, because accommodation was possible. But we want that all those, who wish to come to Taize, can come. We don't want to make a place for only disabled people, but we want to make possibility for them to come. In France we have some regulations, we also try to respect this. In public places you must to have a number of saved places for disabled people.

But its very difficult, because sometimes they make a rule that is general and not always completely adaptable and it limit us also. Because we need to do things which are not so important for disabled people. But we have to do it to satisfy the authorities, it cost a lot of money and we spend money on not necessary things. And then we can't do with these money other things to welcome disabled people that are here, because we use money for what we had to do. So this is a bit of problem. For example, we made parking for disabled people that were not the most important here.

I hear from one woman that in her point of view, Spaces in Taize invite you to not feel too comfortable. So it is like sending the message that you stop for a bit and then go. Is that true?

Brother: Its not the idea that we have here. There are two things. First – the place is very big, to maintain it we do maximum what we can and we are always in lack of financial possibilities to do more. If it takes more then 10 years to reform El Abiodh, its because of shortage of money.

Continuously we do something, but it is so wide and its not the only focus and priority. We also arrange place where we can welcome some migrants. Also the house Neva, we have three apartments of three families, who were refugees.

Our focus is dormitories for the people between 18-35. But we need more and more places, because with new legislations you can't mix minors and major, under 17 must be separated from older than 18. So we go slowly, but in all directions.

We did a lot a lot for disabled people these last years with the walk side of the street and also now disabled people can go into Oyak, because it was not possible.

What about numbers and percentages for disabled people?

Brother: Each building accessibility is considered individually, not in total. In each place, if you have 20 rooms, you need 1 for disabled people, for 50 rooms, you need 2 and so on. So, for example, in El Abiodh we have three rooms for disabled people that are exactly according to norms. For the dormitories we have 4 dormitories in Madras for disabled. In Ntoumi we have 6 dormitories for disabled. In Douala we have 10 dormitories for disabled.

Last thoughts of brother

Brother: Everything is built in Taize was developed in the way that now we can not change it. To change drastically something would be too expensive and we don't want that. What we intended is that going from church to North, there are accommodation and going to south form church – welcoming, except adults and families.

Project poster

