

1. STARTING POINT

Several years ago, a popular, high density residential area in Frankfurt on the Main boasted a newly built square (the “Friedberger Platz”), which was however very rarely used. The square in essence lay abandoned in the city center. In order to revive the square, local politicians, together with residents, championed the establishment of a weekly market on Fridays. The market was initially received only hesitantly, but then increasingly established itself as a meeting point for residents. The achievement of the desired revival pleased everyone. Word about the market’s success spread, and the market attracted increasing numbers of visitors. Visitors and residents began staying longer in the square, even after the market’s closing time itself at 8 pm, and to spend their evenings there. Between 2009 and 2011 the number of visitors to these impromptu “gatherings” increased from a few hundred to about 2’500 people, who also brought their own food and drink and some stayed until far in the night. These large gatherings left behind huge amounts of trash, bottles and broken glass, as well as urine in house entryways and other areas due to lack of toilets. Even though people talked peacefully, they generated a lot of noise. There were never any incidents or fights in the square, but discontent grew.

Some residents began to lodge complaints with the authorities. In particular, they demanded that curfew and cleanliness on the square be ensured. Local residents were told that the city was very restricted in its options for action and that the square could not be vacated. It was not an "event" (for which regulations could be imposed) and moreover no one had ever been harmed. One resident sued the city and demanded the clearance of the square to ensure curfew. She lost in the first instance. This created a feeling of powerlessness among residents.

The then (political) Town Councilor of the city of Frankfurt on the Main decided on May 2011, without a hearing, to reschedule the market from Fridays to Wednesdays due to the residents’ complaints. Though this satisfied those residents with complaints, the other stakeholders (market stall owners, the Local Council, visitors and the restaurateurs) were all the more dissatisfied. When a new Town Councilor took up office two months later, he decided to convene a ‘Friedberger Market Roundtable’ upon request of the Local Council.

We were immediately afterwards contacted by the city of Frankfurt, which asked us to prepare and accompany the already convened roundtable. At this point in time, the Town Councilor had already conducted preliminary discussions with some of the groups invited to the roundtable.

2. OUR ROLE (THE DIALOG MODEL)

In our role of neutral facilitators, we took on the following tasks:

- Development of an intervention concept
- Planning and preparation
- Facilitation and support
- Debriefing and follow-up

Our dialog model builds on:

- Strengthening the individual groups and their spokespersons;
- Creating a 'protected work atmosphere' (i.e. a method of cooperation where mutually agreed-on ground rules are respected);
- Investing sufficient time in preparation in order to establish efficient cooperation;
- Consistently adapting our intervention concept and instruments to each individual situation and to adjust these with the participants;
- Choosing spacious meeting rooms with sufficient free space for movement – which promotes creativity;
- Bringing the groups together in different constellations so that the necessary intra-group coordination can take place in a suitable framework;
- Creating transparency.

In facilitating discussions, we often conduct "interviews". In the case outlined here for example, we regularly interviewed the "patron" of the event (i.e. the Town Councilor) and/or the spokespersons at beginning and end of the roundtables. We asked them questions about their status and expectations, among other things. We thereby ensured transparency and the possession of the same level of knowledge amongst all participants at all times.

3. PROCESS

3.1 Preparation / Introduction

3.1.1 Preliminary discussion

We first met the Town Councilor and started by asking him many questions in order to be able to fully and assess the situation:

- How many participants are expected? (30-50)
- Is it possible to divide the participants into groups that are each represented by a "spokesperson", in order to structure the "internal" preparation? (Yes, but the spokespersons first had to be found and prepared.)
- Is it possible to support the preparation of each individual group in the short time frame (about 2 weeks until begin of the roundtable)? (Yes, in consultation with the groups themselves and due to the holidays only on very short notice).

- Do we have a neutral room for roundtable and other rooms for preparatory group discussions? (Yes; facilities and equipment however were adapted according to circumstances and needs).
- Is there a prior determination of contents respectively results? (No)

This preliminary discussion with the "client" allowed us in a first and perhaps most important step to realistically assess what could be expected from our intervention and support. We could later on therefore prevent the groups we still had to contact from having false expectations.

The meeting with the Town Councilor took place in the presence of his office manager. This person always supported us effectively afterwards.

3.1.2 Design and preparation of the Roundtable

We developed a basic concept for the roundtable based on this preliminary discussion.

In particular, we identified the following groups for involvement:

- Residents / contra (= contra Friday as market day)
- Residents / pro (= pro Friday as market day)
- Market stall owners and the association of market stall owners
- Local Council (local political representatives)
- City Council (with Department of Public Order, Parks Department, Road Traffic Department, Market Services, city police, ...)
- Political observers from the City Parliament
- Restaurateurs (forming a group together with the Pro residents)
- Some individuals (who could more or less be assigned to the Pro / Contra residents)

We contacted each of these groups after an "advance warning" by the city of Frankfurt. We presented our role and method of operation, discussed our basic concept and adapted it, taking into consideration individual needs, as well as offered our support for further preparation within the groups. We consistently emphasized that work in the individual groups would be difficult and time-consuming. Moreover, we always emphasized when talking with the spokespersons of each group how very important, but also how demanding, their role is. At the same time we also offered our assistance to the spokespersons. This offer was used regularly both during the preparation as also in the following process.

In the course of these discussions the following expectations and goals emerged:

- Resolution of the conflict
- Creation of a goal- and results-oriented atmosphere
- Not too costly and time-consuming
- Fast, concrete
- Fostering of a professional cooperation

3.2 Implementation

In total, four discussions were held from August to October 2011 at the roundtable (with up to 50 participants), as well as two workshops of a "steering committee" (with about 10-15 participants). Additionally, many talks and telephone conversations were held in different group constellations.

3.2.1 First Roundtable

At the first roundtable, the main focus was on transparently revealing everyone's expectations.

The general impression was initially quite negative: there could be no satisfactory solution for all parties!

Additionally, ground rules for cooperation were determined. The flipcharts with these ground rules were subsequently repeatedly displayed as a reminder.

Even though a general critical attitude predominated, a common goal for all groups was found very quickly: "Preserve the market as a meeting area in a pleasant atmosphere". In order to even enable the search for possible solutions in this respect, the discussion about a specific weekday for the market was postponed.

During this first meeting a work atmosphere was created that allowed to roughly plan the further course of action. Participants agreed on two points in order to preserve this "protected atmosphere":

- Further participants would only be allowed in exceptional cases.
- Participants would vote on what could be communicated to the public at the end of each meeting; information going beyond that would not be disseminated (in particular not to the press).

In closing, a next rendezvous was fixed and it was decided that we would develop an adapted concept and adjust it with each spokesperson in the meantime.

3.2.2 Second Roundtable

At the second roundtable the following aims were focused on: clarifying the underlying reasons for each positioning and collecting respectively discussing already developed ideas for possible solutions.

To that end, islands were created in the room, where groups could present their thoughts on the subject areas "curfew", "cleanliness and appearance", and "appropriate size". The discussions around the islands were very intensive, although it was difficult for all participants to exclude discussions on a "better" weekday for the market. Nonetheless, it finally became evident that the discussion about problems and possible solutions could be reduced to a few

central subjects. For that reason, spokespersons of each group were given the task to delimit these subject areas and to ground them with possible solutions for the next roundtable.

A "steering committee" was the result, made up of the about 10-15 spokespersons and their representatives (fewer people than in the roundtable). This committee gathered in "workshops", in order to better prepare further roundtables.

3.2.3 First Workshop

During the first workshop the subject areas were defined more clearly. Initial ideas for possible solutions, how they would function, and their cost-benefit calculations were discussed and pre-sorted.

During this process, it became evident that there was reasonably high agreement on the goals to be achieved. Differences of opinion were much more pronounced concerning the measures to be taken and support for those measures. For this reason, the workshop was used in particular to structure the discussion for the third roundtable in advance. This was intended to give the respective groups the possibility to prepare themselves further on content.

3.2.4 Third Roundtable

The expectations for the third roundtable were especially high: many were certain that the roundtable would find concrete results. And indeed, ideas for solutions that had been promising during the workshop were presented and then collectively discussed. Different possibilities and measures were considered, and concepts for their realization were developed. In addition, the necessity for steering mechanisms was elaborated.

In fact, at the end of the roundtable everyone agreed that a good approach for a solution had been identified. But it was in the end nonetheless decided to describe this approach in more detail, in order to present the realization and the steering of this transparently, in particular with regards to the public. Prior to the fourth roundtable, an assignment was given to the spokesperson.

3.2.5 Second Workshop

Prior to the second workshop, the concept for a solution was more clearly defined in the separate groups and supplemented with concrete "operation plans" and responsibilities.

The developed ideas, approaches and concepts were then discussed during the workshop. Common opinions, dissent and the still outstanding need for discussion were documented step by step. In addition, a concept for a steering mechanism was discussed.

The discussion was extremely intense. This was clearly due to the circumstance that the measures were becoming very tangible and concrete. In addition, it grew evident that all groups would have to contribute to realize these measures.

3.2.6 Fourth Roundtable

At the fourth roundtable it was still relatively easy to create agreement on the prepared ideas and measures. But as soon as it was clear that the final decision-making was approaching, the discussion turned markedly more heated. Towards the end, the discussion escalated momentarily and was aimed radically towards a solution: Discontinuation of the roundtable or “everyone has to follow the same way forward”.

This escalation caused some measures and the parameters used to evaluate their success to be described in more detail. In addition, an “emergency exit” was built into the concept for a steering mechanism.

In the end, all groups confirmed that they would follow the same way forward they had established together – and agreed to inform the press and the public accordingly.

4. RESULT

The agreement reached at the end of the fourth roundtable firstly committed the concerned parties to preserve the market as a meeting point in the city district, and that it should to that end be re-established to take place on Fridays. Secondly, the parties agreed on a broad concept of measures with the aim of effectively protecting the quality of life and in particular night-time peace and quiet for residents.

The intention of the motto “We leave at ten!” was to create rituals in order to ensure that the square was cleared of people and trash after 10 pm. In order to achieve that, the following measures were decided on and implemented:

- The proponents employed social media for sensibilisation.
- They organized pantomime acts to humorously draw attention to undesirable behavior.
- They organized signs, flyers and banners establishing the rules for the new market.
- The market was systematically closed at 8 pm. All market stall holders ensured strict adherence to this rule.
- Eating stalls obliged themselves to take back eating utensils only until 8.30 pm – i.e., they only refunded deposits until that time.
- The municipality installed open trashcans, which could not be used to set down glasses on them.
- The municipality installed mobile ashtrays.
- The municipality installed three mobile toilets, respectively nine during summer (depending on requirements).
- Proponents of the market were recognizable by their identical t-shirts – with the aim of being recognized as contact persons and of being consulted when necessary.
- Proponents of the market and the city police formed mixed patrols in order to approach market visitors about 30 minutes before closing and to encourage them to observe clos-

ing time (the time of patrols and number of people in these mixed patrols depends on volume of visitors).

- A happy hour was introduced in surrounding bars (not in outside areas!) from 9.30 pm to 10.30 pm.
- The municipality (Department Clean Frankfurt) deployed a suitably visible (but quiet!) cleaning team until 10 pm at the latest as an optic signal – with the same aim of sensitizing visitors and pointing out the end of the gathering.
- The market stall holders committed themselves to taking charge of follow-up cleanup in the following morning to supplement the basic cleanup from the night before.

Additionally, and following the intention of the above mentioned "emergency exit", the concerned parties agreed on the following:

- Limits on number of people after 10 pm and on noise level after 10 pm were set. The Department of Public Order measured noise levels in the apartment of an affected resident over the course of several (7) days, in order to establish a baseline. After the market was re-established on Fridays, noise levels were again measured in the apartment to determine the deviating value.
- The steering committee can be convened at short notice any time the situation changes for the worse. In case of escalation and when measures cannot be readjusted, everyone has the right to convene the roundtable.
- Should it become apparent that nuisances can no longer be controlled, the market will at short notice be pushed back to Wednesdays.

The first "new" Friedberger Market took place on 18. November 2011 under scrutiny of the press. Despite the late season around 1'500 visitors came to the square on the evening of the first "new" Friedberger Market. The planned measures were implemented – and achieved the hoped-for results: the square was cleared at around 10.15 pm.

Over the following months the rituals established themselves, so that the square was always cleared punctually even in springtime with rising temperatures and higher number of visitors (up to 2'500).

Two additional meetings of the "steering committee" took place some time later, where specifications of the measures were discussed. For example, the "Pfandpaternoster", a system to collect and store empty bottles in an orderly fashion (see www.pfandpaternoster.de; in German), was introduced to reduce littering and to make clean-up easier.

5. DEBRIEFING AND FOLLOW-UP

To assure quality control we contacted and personally interviewed all spokespersons and some other participants after conclusion of the talks and after the re-opening of the market. We thereby learned the following:

- When they initially heard of a "Roundtable", many expected a usual discussion meeting that would proceed unprepared and spontaneously. The support of and structuring by a neutral moderator was felt by all to be surprising, but also very positive, and indeed absolutely necessary.
- It was appreciated that the establishment of a "protected environment" for so many participants was achieved. It was this environment that allowed a real cooperation to begin with. The fact that the process was open and structured, and that the mutually established ground rules were mostly adhered to, was also positively highlighted.
- It was also appreciated that we first suggested a new, completely individualized concept for each separate meeting of the roundtable, which we then adapted in the context of the preparation; i.e. each roundtable (including the room) was set up differently. However, it was also stated clearly that some meetings were better than others.
- Neutrality and professionalism of the moderation itself were highlighted as bringing real added value. These characteristics were said to have contributed to the achievement of concrete and fair results. However, not all were convinced that all participants had discussed without prejudice as to results from start to finish.
- It was essential for the success of preparation and coordinated cooperation to strengthen the individual stakeholder groups, but also to oblige them to provide a spokesperson.
- Although the workshops were initially regarded critically, everyone confirmed that it would not have been possible to achieve results without them (with fewer participants). This in itself also showed the high importance of preparation.
- It was received very positively that the Town Councilor (i.e.: the politically responsible person) made himself available and also took over the coordination with the different departments of the City Council.
- The "silent" political observers from the City Parliament were highly valued, as this indicated broad (political) support from the start.
- It was highlighted that the communication between the different groups and persons was clearly enabled and improved despite all differences of opinion, some of which still exist, and opposing positions.
- Many noted that they could not imagine any other way in which a solution could have been achieved.

6. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

In our view, the Friedberger Platz case shows that the intervention of a neutral facilitator who takes care of preparing and structuring debates in a very transparent way makes the task of resolving a complex and difficult conflict considerably easier. However, challenges remain, also for future proceedings:

- It is difficult to focus on many subjects simultaneously. That is how on several occasions items that had apparently been solved were suddenly revisited again. This is certainly also due to the fact that not all participants had the same level of knowledge. On this point, participants largely helped themselves, by taking advantage of opportunities to communicate directly with each other even outside of the roundtables.
- Some participants criticized that even despite the initial decision to put on hold the discussion on which day of the week the market should be held, all discussed measures were implicitly connected to a reestablishment of the market on Fridays. It might have helped in this regard to have established clearer ground rules and to control observance of these rules more regularly.
- It was nearly impossible to gain control of time management. On the one hand, the dedication of the participants was impressive; on the other hand, it was too much of an imposition towards participants to let meetings run on until late at night. It would have helped here if we would have had more time at our disposal: we could then have held more meetings of a shorter duration. However, this would have delayed the decisions, which nobody wanted.
- Besides time management, we did not strictly observe some few other ground rules, or directly enforced them. Thus some "new" participants joined the roundtable even after the first one had taken place. This led to delays. However, this also showed our adaptability) and allowed participants to be represented when needed.
- Very regrettably, but probably unavoidably, a few participants "dropped out" of the continuing process of the roundtable. This was due to an ongoing court procedure and a measure which was impossible to realize. The group as a whole was not disturbed by these "exits", but was all the more convinced of the necessity of continuing along a common path.
- During the ongoing process the spokespersons changed within some groups. However, this was again well absorbed internally within the groups, and led to their increasing professionalization. Here it proved of value to inform the groups and the spokespersons from the start that the process would demand a lot of work.
- In this case, the Town Councilor was the contracting entity and patron. The Office of the Town Councilor acted as first point of contact and coordinator for all groups. This worked very well. Additionally, the possibility of discussing at any time the current status and the progress with the contracting entity was very valuable, and was what first enabled such an efficient process.

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