

Annexe 3 Results Manifesta 16 Ruhr Citizen Consultations

25th of September, 2025
St. Josef Kirche, Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Since Manifesta 13 Marseille, the biennial has organised Citizen Consultations to research local needs in our Host City or Region. These in-depth conversations form the basis for our artistic programme, which responds to community needs and their relationship to their neighbourhoods. For Manifesta 16 Ruhr, these consultations took place in May and June 2025 with 111 participants from across the Ruhr Area. The methodology, participant details and key findings are summarised below.

Transformation of Churches and Neighbourhoods

The consultations aimed to invite local citizens to reflect upon their needs and the needs of the neighbourhood in regard to habitability and the role that the transformation of former church buildings can play. Three fundamental objectives guided the process: to gather feedback on existing church building transformations; to get an understanding of how we perceive the role of the neighbourhood; to reflect upon what the transformation of church buildings can bring to this idea of neighbourhood. A total of six workshops were organised, with four in indoor venues and two in public spaces to encourage spontaneous participation. The workshops were allocated across four cities: Bochum, Gelsenkirchen, Essen and Duisburg.

A total of 111 people participated. The age distribution was relatively balanced, though the youngest cohort (16–24 years) was significantly underrepresented with just nine participants (8.1% of the total). Religious affiliation was diverse: 50 participants (45%) identified as Christian, 47 (42.3%) as non-religious and 11 (9.9%) as Muslim. Demographic analysis suggests the participants broadly reflected the Ruhr Area's population in terms of age and gender.

A clear consensus emerged that church demolition is not an acceptable option. Participants, including non-religious individuals, considered church buildings to be special places of collective memory, valuable for their free accessibility, non-commercial nature and role as visible symbols of local identity.

The primary suggestion was for churches to become non-commercial meeting places for community interaction. Participants envisioned diverse spaces where people from different social, cultural and professional backgrounds could come together based on shared interests to pursue self-determined activities.

The consultations highlighted the neighbourhood's dual nature as both a public and private space. Empathy and dialogue were identified as crucial to meeting its diverse needs. Temporary projects like Manifesta 16 Ruhr were perceived

as valuable catalysts for development, capable of initiating learning processes, enabling new alliances, activating vacant properties and connecting civil society with economic and political actors.

Discussions on the urban environment revealed that neighbourhoods struggle with the legacy of automobile-friendly city planning and poor urban design, resulting in a recognised lack of green spaces and areas for gathering.

This response aligns not only with current needs for communal spaces but also with the historic function of churches, which have for centuries played a central role in the social fabric of neighbourhoods beyond their sacred purpose. Participants suggested that a church's special architecture makes it ideally suited for transformation that satisfy needs for identity, contemplation and spirituality.

Finally, the need to engage young people was a frequent theme. This indicates that churches should be conceived not only as spaces for neighbourhood encounters but also as central places for young people, offering them protection, opportunities for development and a sense of belonging.