

Participatory planning on urban abandoned spaces



Brief description of the activity

Participatory planning to recover public abandoned spaces is an activity aimed at promoting intercultural spaces, used by different cultures, outside the youth centre.

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Topics, objective and methodology:

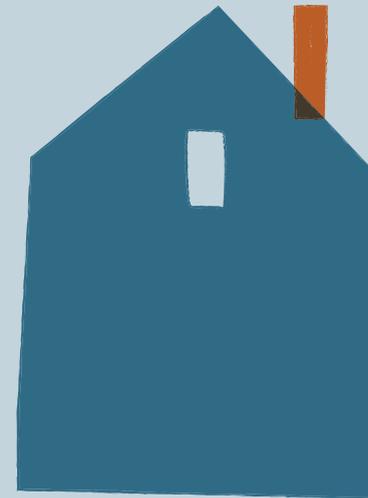
The objective of this activity is not simply to clean a public abandoned space, but to reorganize it together with participants in order to use it in a different way.

Taking care of urban spaces, especially if abandoned, to give them new life and a new use, is fundamental in the process of integration and to develop a greater sense of belonging towards the territory.

Therefore the methodology used is to create a non-formal context in which participants from different countries can express their ideas in order to start a process of changing in some spaces in the city.

The activity consists of four main moments:

- Preparation
- Actors involved
- Analysis of degradation and potential
- Proposal



Preparation: This phase is prerogative of the youth centre. It consists in identifying the public abandoned place to renew, taking into account several factors, such as location, attendance, the urban context in which it is located, the different people who inhabit it, and how this space could interest the group of participants from different cultures involved in the activity.

The choice should consider also the fact that this place could be used autonomously by participants, even at the end of the activity.

Actors involved: The objective of this phase is to involve participants in an analysis of the place, so to have a picture of its current state. In this part, it should be taken into account all the possible stakeholders that use, or simply pass through the identified place. Urban spaces are connected to a community, this community could be interested in the process of renewing the public space together with participants.

Analysis of degradation and potential: This is the part in which participatory planning is involved, as all the community (related to the abandoned public space to reuse) is com-

mitted in sharing opinions and ideas about their perception of degradation, and unexpressed potential of the space.

This phase should be guided in order that every opinion is considered, as the public space is common good, and the possible solutions should fit for every stakeholder involved.

For the conduction of the discussion, these methodological aspects should be taken into account:

Ask the group open questions: encourage participants to expand on their answers, in order to explain their opinions. Questions therefore must give the chance to participants to explain concepts, stimulate creativity and broaden the individual's point of view, so as to make all the members of the group reflect.

Do not judge: no answer is right or wrong, the facilitator must bring out what people have perceived, not universal truths.

Listen: do not give answers, but stimulate the right questions. Instead, it is up to the participants to give the answers,

which will be different according to their experience and personality.

Proposal: In the final elaboration of the proposal, to submit to institutions, consider all the different aspects emerged in the previous discussions. Remember that the place should be a common good, so every stakeholder should feel represented in the instance to propose. If participants know that their ideas have been inserted in the proposal, they will be more involved in taking care of the place itself.



Duration:

The activity should take place early in the morning, preferably on Sunday or another non-working day.

Location:

The location for this activity is crucial, as it is connected with the purpose of the activity itself.

Some phases can take place in the youth center. However, it is crucial that the phase called “Analysis of degradation and potential” is carried out in the identifies public space.

This way, the discussion about the perception of degradation, and the unexpressed potential, will involve not only the participants, but also the actual actors involved who live or simply pass through the public place.

This is the key to have a complete picture of the current state of the place, and to have different ideas of renewing based on the needs of the community related to the place itself.

Materials:

- Tables
- Chairs
- Flipchart
- Pens
- Markers
- Paper

Participants involved:

This activity does not fit for a monocultural group of participants. Because of its features, it is advisable to have a group with at least three nationalities, of course the variety of the group is proportional to the success of the activity.

Steps:

Before

The preparation of the activity is crucial because it consists in identifying the abandoned public space to be recovered and reused.

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The redevelopment aims to give back to citizens a liveable urban space, tailored for the citizens' needs, so the choice of the space should take into account the possibility to rebuild an area located in a neighbourhood characterised by several social problems and challenges, among which the urban decay.

Choose the place also according to the possibility that your target group of participants could be interested in using it autonomously, even after the conclusion of the activity.

During

Actors involved

Once identified the public abandoned place, recruit the group of participants, and start with them an analysis of the actors involved in the place.

This context analysis is crucial because it allows to have a picture of the current state of the public space, of the people who pass through it, the neighbourhood, possible structures around, shops, restaurants, bars etc...

Try to identify all the possible stakeholders, considering all the hours the place is used. (i.e. the morning is used by the owners of the shops, by the neighbourhood; the afternoon is used by children or elders; the evening is used by young people skating etc..)

Analysis of degradation and potential

This activity should take place in the chosen public abandoned place.

In a public participatory planning, ask the participants to analyse their perception of the degradation linked to that place, and its unexpressed potential.

It is advisable to collect different points of view from different people and different cultures, so make sure that everyone has the possibility to express their perceptions or their ideas freely, in a non-judgemental environment.

Facilitate the discussion, asking some targeted questions:

- Do you use this place?
- What do you like about this place?
- What do you dislike?
- Why do you think this place is abandoned?
- What could change in order to improve this place?
- Would you use this place if there were any improve-

ments/changes?

- What would you like to do in this place that you do not do now?

Note that different people from different ages (or different cultures) could have different ideas of what is connected with degradation. It could be possible that some of them (i.e. young people that use the place simply to gather in the evening) do not have any particular needs or things they would like to change.

Elicit that the purpose of the activity is to emphasize that the common good is a right of all, and that space can be shared and respond to the needs of different communities, if the communities themselves take care of it.

After

Proposal

Once collected the common ideas on different perception of decay, and its unexpressed potential, it is possi-

ble to design together a proposal on how to renew the space, in a way that it can be more responding to the needs of the community.

This proposal can be addressed to the institutions, as a collective instance that starts from the bottom, which considers the different needs of the community to reclaim an abandoned space, and redesign it according to the needs of the people who live there.

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This phase is crucial in order to legitimize a community which takes into account the complexity of the actors involved, considering different age range, and different cultures together.

Do's and don'ts

It could be possible that different people from different ages (or different cultures) could have different ideas of what is connected with degradation and potential.

Make sure to express the importance of diversity, and create an environment in which different ideas can co-exist and that represent the added value of a place.

It could be possible that some participants (i.e. young people that use the place simply to gather in the evening) do not have any particular needs or things they would like to change.

Don't push them, but invite everyone to listen and consider the ideas of the group as resources to improve the space.

Elicit that the purpose of the activity is to emphasize that the common good is a right of all, and that space can be shared and respond to the needs of different communities, if the communities themselves take care of it.

Innovative aspects for the promotion of interculture

Participatory planning to recover public abandoned spaces is innovative because it consists in reorganizing a public space starting from the ideas and the needs of the participants.

This methodology allows participants to interact with the territory in an active way, using the public spaces not only as users, but redesigning the features so that they can feel responsible and this way more involved with the local community.

Participatory planning to recover public abandoned space promotes interculture because it creates spaces outside the youth centre where people from different cultures can meet and plan activities.

