

The Power of Civic Ecosystems

How community spaces and their networks make our cities more cooperative, fair and resilient

Edited by Levente Polyák, Sophie Bod and Luca Sára Bródy

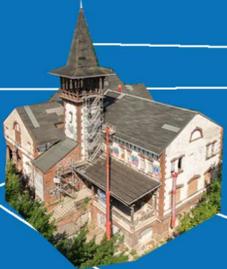


Learning from the ACTIVE NGOs URBACT network

Market



Housing



Social Centre



Work Space



Sports Hall



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our cities more cooperative, fair and resilient**

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The Power of Civic Ecosystems is an attempt to bring together a variety of practices, policies and methodologies within a common framework: **the concept of civic ecosystems**. Some of the stories that constitute this collection might seem to be very distant from each other, but they share an ambition. This ambition is to build better cooperation between public administrations and local civic societies, and weave stronger civic tissues from the threads of individual organisations and initiatives where they can **mutually support** each other, based on their reciprocal knowledge and understanding of their local civic scenes.

While this book is based primarily on the experience of the URBACT Transfer Network ACTIVE NGOs⁽¹⁾, it actually builds on a variety of experiences stretching out to almost a decade. The work in the Budapest-based **KÉK–Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre**⁽²⁾, and particularly the project *Lakatlan*⁽³⁾ conducted between 2012–2016, operated with the notion of building synergies between a variety of local initiatives, when planning the reuse of vacant properties in Budapest. This effort gave birth to the books *Vacant City*⁽⁴⁾ and *Civil Város*⁽⁵⁾ (Civic City). At a more international level, with the organisation **Eutropian**⁽⁶⁾, we have been working across Europe to help citizen initiatives and support public–civic cooperation, exploring

1 <https://urbact.eu/active-ngos>

2 <http://kek.org.hu/en/>

3 <http://lakatlan.kek.org.hu/>

4 <https://cooperativecity.org/product/vacant-city/>

5 <https://cooperativecity.org/product/civil-varos/>

6 <https://eutropian.org/>



Funding the Cooperative City workshop in Rome, 2016.

Photo (cc) Eutropian



many initiatives that, with or without public support, are committed to build stronger local networks. Recognising the importance of these initiatives, we have been engaged in sharing their stories through the online magazine *Cooperative City*⁽⁷⁾.

In the past years, the **notion of civic ecosystems has been omnipresent** in Eutropian's work. In the research project *Funding the Cooperative City*⁽⁸⁾ conducted between 2014 and 2017 and the book⁽⁹⁾ of the same title, we explored how mobilising community resources and reorienting local economic flows through building local networks can help in creating and strengthening community spaces. In the URBACT network *Interactive Cities*⁽¹⁰⁾, between 2016–2018, we worked together with various European cities to enhance their digital communication with the private and civil sectors as well as knowledge institutions. This process included streamlining communication channels and building stronger cooperation within the respective cities' digital ecosystems⁽¹¹⁾.

In 2019, based on years of events research of the challenges of food markets, we published the book *Il rilancio dei mercati*⁽¹²⁾ (Relaunching markets) that has placed food markets in the broader context of food ecosystems, including short chain

distribution models and circular waste management mechanisms. Since 2018, in the framework of the H2020 project *Open Heritage*⁽¹³⁾, together with an international consortium of universities, research institutions, developers, ethical financiers and participation organisations, we have been exploring innovative adaptive heritage reuse models and the role local partnerships⁽¹⁴⁾ play in constructing them.

Besides our own research and strategic design work, we learned a lot from the many initiatives we encountered throughout the years. Since 2013, we have been cooperating with SEMAEST⁽¹⁵⁾, a public company of the Paris Municipality, responsible for supporting and developing local commerce. In order to help individual shops compete with larger chains, SEMAEST and its project COSTO⁽¹⁶⁾ did not only support shopkeepers to improve their digital skills and visibility, but also helped them join forces in order to share storage space, build a common online shop, or organise a joint delivery system. This approach marked us as a common-sense way to help individual organisations **share their resources and build networks** in order to become more resilient and competitive both individually and collectively.

And while there was a lot of talk about **urban innovation ecosystems** where different companies build value chains based on as much collaboration as competition, the civil society and social economy equivalent of such networks of cooperation did not receive the same attention, despite having a significant impact on broader social groups' access to a variety of community services and spaces. Step by step, we realised that the ambition to bring together civic initiatives, NGOs, social economy organisations and other sectors into networks that can not only represent better their constituting members but can also strengthen them with the help of synergies and a better use of shared resources, that is, to build civic ecosystems, is ubiquitous in Europe.

In many European cities, we began to see a clear connection between strongly interconnected civil societies and social innovation that **builds on untapped**

- 7 <https://cooperativecity.org/>
- 8 <https://eutropan.org/funding-the-cooperative-city/>
- 9 <https://cooperativecity.org/funding-the-cooperative-city/>
- 10 <https://urbact.eu/interactive-cities>
- 11 <https://cooperativecity.org/product/roadmap-to-digital-urban-governance/>
- 12 <https://cooperativecity.org/product/il-rilancio-dei-mercati-spazio-pubblico-servizi-comunitari-ed-economia-circolare/>
- 13 <https://openheritage.eu/>
- 14 <https://openheritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Policy-Brief-2.pdf>
- 15 <https://www.semaest.fr/>
- 16 <https://www.semaest.fr/la-semaest/nos-realisations/realisation/project/costo-connected-stores/>



ACTIVE NGOs meeting in Dubrovnik in 2019. Photo (cc) Eutropan <<



⤴ *Workshop at the Metronio market in Rome, 2015. Photo (cc) Eutropian*

resources liberated through unconventional encounters between initiatives, organisations or social groups that are normally not in touch with each other. When in 2014 we began to cooperate with the Madrid-based organisation *Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas*⁽¹⁷⁾, we were impressed by the meticulous research in which VIC mapped citizen initiatives across Madrid and the ingenious methodology to connect these initiatives around specific themes that led to the Urban Innovative Actions-funded project *Mares Madrid*⁽¹⁸⁾. In Athens, we saw the foundation of *synAthina*⁽¹⁹⁾, a platform to map and connect citizens groups engaged in the improvement of the city's quality of life. In Italy, we witnessed how the community-based mapping of initiatives, spaces and natural resources⁽²⁰⁾ has offered a helpful perspective for stronger cooperation in Rome, and we joined Milan's Super

Festival⁽²¹⁾ that not only explored initiatives in different peripheries of the city but also connected them through a continuous, traveling event.

Similar logics of network building seemed to operate **not only in civil society but also in local economy and culture**. It was in the same period when we first visited the *Afrikaanderwijk Cooperative* in Rotterdam that, building on artistic research about skills and know-how in a neighbourhood, developed a system of cooperatives to help marginalised individuals and first-time entrepreneurs by lowering their costs and the threshold for their entrance to the

17 <https://vicvivero.net/>

18 <https://maresmadrid.es/>

19 <https://www.synathina.gr/en/>

20 <https://www.reter.info/>

21 <https://iosonosuper.com/>

market. In the field of culture, we found well-developed mechanisms to help organisations gain capacity, visibility and a stronger self-representation through networking: building on a decade of self-organisation within the Croatian independent cultural scenes, the Zagreb-based Kultura Nova Foundation⁽²²⁾ has developed a strong policy framework to support the participatory governance of cultural resources across Croatian cities.

Throughout the past years, recognising the ability of civic initiatives and organisations to form networks that would strengthen them both individually and as an ensemble, we also acknowledged the potential of these experiences to inform municipal or civil society actors in other cities. After noticing the parallel yet **disconnected evolution of network-building tools, methods and policies** in many European cities, we raised the question: how can we collect these experiences, structure the ideas they inspired and bring them together into a methodology of civic ecosystem-building?

The **URBACT project ACTIVE NGOs** seemed like a perfect occasion to develop further these ideas. URBACT⁽²³⁾ is one of the most innovative EU programmes, not only because it is promoting the exchange of knowledge between cities located in various countries across the continent but also because it requires municipalities and public companies to formally institute local stakeholder groups that would work together towards jointly defined goals. URBACT Transfer Networks are based on a good practice – in this case Riga’s NGO House – that is “transferred” to selected other cities that face similar challenges.

The **NGO House in Riga** was created to act as an interface between the municipality and civil society, by offering space to NGOs for their events, connecting them through networking activities and helping them improve their capacities with the help of trainings. It serves as a node in the city’s

22 <https://kulturanova.hr/english>

23 <https://urbact.eu/>



*Workshop at
Open Jazdow, in
Warsaw, 2019.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian
◀◀*

local civic ecosystem. The ambition to create such nodes was shared by a number of cities that joined the ACTIVE NGOs network. The city of Santa Pola in Southeast Spain was looking to include new buildings into its network of spaces accessible for citizen activities. Dubrovnik in Croatia was in the process of building a new governance structure for its former quarantine complex, linking it to other spaces across the city. Syracuse in Sicily was about to relaunch its Citizens House and Youth Centre and link them in a network with the freshly opened Urban Center. Espoo in Finland was looking for ways to improve the capacity of NGOs working with migrants and refugees, while Brighton and Hove in the Southwest of the UK was seeking to create more straight links between municipal services and civil organisations.

“Transferring” a good practice does not mean a straightforward, copy-past action. The Riga NGO House is a specific model that is strongly rooted in its own administrative, policy, economic and social environment. It was clear at the beginning of this process that there could be no 1:1 copies of the NGO House in the partner cities. Each city has its own particular history, driving forces and inertia in public-civic cooperation. Furthermore, in contrast with Riga’s fully municipality-financed and managed NGO House, many cities were looking for a more horizontal governance model with more responsibility on the side of the NGOs.

ACTIVE NGOs meeting in Syracuse in 2018. Photo (cc) Eutropian 



In the same time, learning from Riga's NGO House and the local experiences of other partner cities could bring specific, custom-made knowledge to each municipality and local stakeholder group. Therefore, in order to be able to create NGO Houses or civic nodes that are integrated in their respective territories, we identified a number of elements or building blocks that constitute these spaces and their relationships with citizen initiatives, civil society organisations and municipalities.

Mapping civic initiatives and organisations is a key step to better understand the activities, needs and ambitions in a city or neighbourhood. Exploring their possible links and building incentives that help them grow synergies and cooperate leads to stronger **local civic ecosystems**. Space is always a crucial component to an ecosystem: designing mechanisms that help initiatives **access and share public or private spaces** for their activities is a great contribution to the sector's wellbeing. Innovative **economic models** that help pooling resources from a community and channel economic flows into citizen initiatives can provide civic spaces with relative autonomy and resilience. New, inclusive and participatory **governance structures** allow the shared management of spaces and resources, connecting a variety of different organisations, institutions and venues across the cities. **Capacity building** programmes help NGOs and social economy initiatives to further develop their work, improve their profiles and potentially scale up or multiply their activities.

In a series of transnational meetings and continuous local work, the ACTIVE NGOs network explored these building blocks by following a pre-designed **learning trajectory**. This trajectory was defined according to a structure that allows partners a continuous, gradual construction of interventions, programmes and policy tools, focusing on the partner cities' needs and their abilities to adapt some of the NGO House features in their specific context.

The project ACTIVE NGOs was meant to last from the summer of 2018 until the end of 2020 and was prolonged until the summer of 2021 because of delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. While in 2020 most local work and transactional exchange had to move online, it did not mean that the year was lost for public-civic cooperation. On the contrary: all across Europe citizen initiatives, NGOs and social economy projects turned out to be **essential actors in sustaining welfare networks** and guaranteeing access to basic services for people in financial distress or more vulnerable to the virus. Self-organised solidarity networks, often coordinated with municipalities, the private sector and philanthropy organisations have demonstrated that today, more than ever, we need strong, interconnected civic ecosystems that can react quickly to emerging challenges, help our societies adapt to changing circumstances and make our cities more cooperative, fair and resilient.



Artist's impression of the ACTIVE NGos Syracuse meeting. Image (c) Salvo Antoci 

The Power of Civic Ecosystems is based on the testimonies of the participating cities Brighton and Hove, Dubrovnik, Espoo, Riga, Santa Pola and Syracuse, telling their learning and exchange experiences as well as stories from their local stakeholder networks. In order to put this work in a broader context, the book also collects **inspiring practices** from other cities, ranging from municipal policies to citizen initiatives and professional methodologies, exploring mechanisms of stakeholder mapping and ecosystem-building, frameworks to access to public and private spaces, models of economic resilience, structures of participatory governance, and processes of capacity building.

This book is the result of years of research and many serendipitous encounters channelled into the daily work of ACTIVE NGOs and other connected projects. It would not have been possible to assemble this material and produce this book without the support of the URBACT programme and the open-mindedness of Irina Vasiljeva and the Riga Municipality's Department of Education, Culture and Sports that gave us a carte blanche for this publication.

Our partners in the cities of Brighton and Hove, Dubrovnik, Espoo, Riga, Santa Pola and Syracuse were a source of constant motivation and their curiosity prompted us to dig deeper in the issues we were exploring together. The experts invited to share their experiences with the partners brought an assuring presence to our events: the inputs of Miguel Jaenicke, Christian Iaione, Daniela Patti, Liat Rogel and Simone d'Antonio inspired many initiatives within the project. This journey would have been a much less colourful and diverse experience without the support of our friends, colleagues and interviewees who contributed to this book with their time, texts, thoughts, observations and critiques. Most importantly, this book would not exist without the diligent work of the Eutropean team: the editorial work of Sophie Bod, Luca Sára Bródy, Eleonora Rugiero and Andrea Giuliano, the design and layout of Jorge Mosquera, and the support of Daniela Patti, Bahanur Nasya, Yilmaz Vurucu, Stefano Patti, Giovanni Pagano, Clara Habte, David Schermann and Lukács Hayes are all integral components of this book.







Introduction



Introduction

The Power of Civic Ecosystems



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Public-civic cooperation has never been as important for European cities as today. Fading trust between public administrations and civil society, rising authoritarianism and deteriorating services all make urban life more burdensome, especially for the most vulnerable social groups. NGOs and civic initiatives constitute one of the most important pillars of European democracies. They not only act as critical observers of the evolution of our societies but also fill the gaps left behind by public services, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. While in the past decade, NGOs in Europe had a crucial role in advocating for the most vulnerable groups of their cities or towns by building a parallel welfare net for them, many of them were labelled as foreign agents by their governments, for example, in Hungary, Poland or Turkey.

Many commentators have described this process as a **shrinking civic space** in Europe. Political pressure and recentralisation efforts by governments combined with significant budget cuts in the fields of culture, education, social affairs and healthcare placed many civil society actors in a difficult situation. The loss of connection with national politics prompted many organisations to look for **new partnerships**, stronger ties with their local and international civic counterparts, as well as with their municipalities.

Civil society refers to a great variety of actors that include informal groups, civic initiatives, volunteer associations, neighbourhood structures, community organisations and professional NGOs. They all have a role in a **well-functioning civic ecosystem** that, in turn, supports the public, private and knowledge spheres with its capacities, skills and expertise. Such an ecosystem is



ACTIVE NGOs meeting in Syracuse. Photo (cc) Eutropian 

based on connections and collaborations: the more the constituting organisations and initiatives of local civil societies are strongly interconnected and work in a complementary way, the better they can respond to new challenges, by distributing or pooling their resources when needed.

Comparably to civil society actors, many local governments across Europe also suffer from a loss of autonomy and deflating budgets as a result of political recentralisation. While this makes municipalities natural allies of local civil societies, most of them have no capacities or resources to develop **real instruments for public-civic collaboration** and participatory modes of governance between public authorities and civil society organisations.

Despite recognising the importance of NGOs, civic initiatives and social economy organisations in the social and cultural life of cities, most local municipalities do

not dispose of the necessary skills, tools and methods to better engage their local stakeholders. Similarly, in many cities, civil society initiatives acting locally have very limited knowledge of each other, and even less about local actors from the private or institutional sectors.

The limited mutual understanding among civil society organisations, local businesses, service providers, institutions and the municipality results in a lack of trust between them, in limited networking opportunities and **incomplete local ecosystems**. In these incomplete ecosystems, where local organisations' activities are not sufficiently transparent to each other and where they compete with each other for funding, spaces and other resources, the possibility for exchanging knowledge, organising cooperation and sharing resources, needs and decisions among them is rather restrained. Therefore, in the absence of incentives or procedures

of cooperation, those who shape these cities, districts or neighbourhoods have no mechanisms nor interests in working together towards shared goals: such as for better public spaces, coordinated health or climate response, stronger local commerce, more accessible public services or more resilient cultural activities, for instance.

There are many ways to counter this logic of indifference, distrust and competition with the notions of connection, complementarity and collaboration. Based on a better understanding of the resources and needs of individual organisations and initiatives, we can build stronger and more resilient networks where these organisations and initiatives can rely on and cooperate with each other. The first step towards this is to map local civil actors. From the database of Riga's NGO House, through the CIVICS method developed in Madrid by Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas and KCity's mapping of Ravenna's Darsena, to the Super Festival in Milan or Lisbon's BIP/ZIP maps, this book offers an overview of a variety of approaches and methods.

The importance of civic ecosystems

Once the composition of a local civil society and its public and private partnerships are known, the question is how to help its members build ties with each other. The notion of **innovation ecosystems**, borrowed by the business and technology fields from ecology, can help us to better understand how these civic networks function. Ecosystems are more than an accumulation of actors: they are also made up by "enabling policies and regulations, accessibility of finance, informed human capital, supportive markets, energy, transport and communications infrastructure, a

culture supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship, and networking assets, which together support productive relationships between different actors and other parts of the ecosystem."⁽¹⁾

Following the logic of natural and innovation ecosystems, we can conceive of **civic ecosystems** that – similarly to natural or business ecosystems – "not only foster interactions but facilitate symbiotic relationships among the various initiatives launched within its environment" as well as "optimise the flow of talent and knowledge if they share a geographical proximity."⁽²⁾ By developing a certain collective intelligence, such ecosystems move "from a collection of elements to a more structured community."⁽³⁾

There are, however, important differences between (business) innovation ecosystems and civic ecosystems. Business ecosystems are principally growth-oriented and are based on a combination of complementary and substitute relations.⁽⁴⁾ Well-functioning civic ecosystems are, by nature, **more cooperative than competitive** and instead

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- 1 IDEA (International Development Innovation Alliance) <https://www.idiainnovation.org/ecosystem>
 - 2 Seuillet, Eric and Lima, Marcus (2019) 7 conseils pour développer des écosystèmes innovants et vivants. <https://www.7x7.press/7-conseils-pour-developper-des-ecosystemes-innovants-et-vivants>, 20 May 2019
 - 3 Moore, James F. (1993) Predators and Prey: A New Ecology of Competition. Harvard Business Review, 1993/May-June
 - 4 Granstrand, Ove and Holgersson, Marcus (2019) Innovation ecosystems: A conceptual review and a new definition. In: Technovation, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2019.102098>

of growth, they aim to build systemic resilience, encourage mutual support and enable both individual organisations and the ecosystem as a whole to respond to future challenges.

By joining forces and **sharing resources** in the process of developing their activities, individual initiatives can use services with a lower threshold. For instance, if different initiatives in a neighbourhood share a space, equipment or a storage room, develop an online commerce platform to sell their products or jointly organise home delivery, it represents a lower financial and organisational burden for all parties. By following the principles of circular economy, initiatives in the same neighbourhood can use each other's material resources, at low transportation costs. Or an organisation that renovates its office can share its residue materials with other organisations, or community gardens can use the organic waste in their food businesses in order to develop their soil by composting, to mention

just a few examples. Such connections are possible when local actors know each other's activities, needs and resources. In order to amplify cooperative relationships, it is important to counterbalance competitive elements within the civic sphere, generated by traditional funding schemes that set all organisations against each other when competing for resources.

Such interconnectivity shall **not be limited to the civic sphere**, for it is not isolated from the public and private spheres, the worlds of local commerce, research & development organisations or knowledge institutions, for instance. In many processes, civic initiatives or NGOs are situated in longer value chains, at specific stages of value aggregation, which links them to actors from other fields. Knowing better the position of civic actors in these broader collaboration ecosystems is crucial to "understand the gaps, inefficiencies, over-representations or opportunities offered by an environment."⁽⁵⁾

5 Troyas, Ricardo Antón and Gómez de la Iglesia, Roberto (2017) Kultursistema. Matrix for interpreting and mapping cultural and creative ecosystems, p.15

*Event hall
in Lazareti,
Dubrovnik. Photo
(cc) Eutropian
>>*



*ACTive NGOs
meeting in
Brighton. Photo (cc)
Eutropian
>>*



Cities across Europe have been experimenting with a variety of methods and mechanisms to help civic actors collaborate with each other. As explored in this book, Riga's cooperation framework and neighbourhood platform provide connections between individual organisations and initiatives of the city. Community hubs like Madrid's Medialab Prado help in the creation of an ecosystem of participation and innovation around them, and inclusive participatory action research processes help in building such hubs, like in the case of the Valletta Design Cluster. Umbrella organisations like Espoo's EJY or ECOS in Barcelona develop programmes to build synergies among their members, while specifically designed capacity-building and funding programmes in, e.g., Brighton or Croatia help turn local cultural scenes into more collaborative environments.

Spaces for civil society actors

Collaboration within the civic sphere is not isolated from other sectors, and it does not take place in a vacuum either. It does, instead, unfold in discussions, on online platforms, and most importantly, in physical spaces. Spaces that enable "local, face-to-face interactions – at the school, the playground, and the corner diner – are the building blocks of all public life"⁽⁶⁾ and they determine whether social capital develops in a neighbourhood or a city. These spaces are the backdrop, where "social cohesion develops through repeated human interaction and joint participation in shared projects."⁽⁷⁾

Such repeated human interactions often occur unintentionally. Playgrounds become the site of new friendships and local shops become part of a neighbourhood-scale welfare net that keeps an eye on the wellbeing of regular customers. Community spaces, on the other hand, have the capacity to **generate cooperation on purpose**. When the restaurant of a civic centre is open only for one hour at lunchtime, it will encourage the users of the space to meet each other over a meal and share their thoughts and plans. When freelancers in a co-working space bump into each other around the coffee machine, they might take a moment and update each other about their projects. It is often in these limiting physical settings, that new collaborations are born.

The power of community spaces might grow beyond their walls: taking the role of organising forces in a neighbourhood or beyond, they can become the incubators of new connections and collaborations. Whether they're owned by a municipality or run by an association, civic venues like the NGO House in Riga, Whitehawk Inn in East Brighton, Lazareti in Dubrovnik, Metallo in Espoo, La Senia in Santa Pola or the Casa dei Cittadini in Syracuse act as meeting points, as centres of sociability. Once these spaces, "capable of anchoring processes of empowerment and political capabilities as well as social activation,"⁽⁶⁾ take a position in the development of their neighbourhood or

city, begin to act on their surroundings and embark on "rewiring" the society around them, they become "trigger spaces (...)" that collect social energy and at the same time become co-design laboratories and spaces for the production of collective services."⁽⁹⁾

Community spaces play an important role in their ecosystem: by mobilising resources to meet the needs of their surroundings, by confronting new ideas to spark innovation, and by generating new economic flows with the participation of many local partners, they can become important **nodes in their ecosystems** that stand at the centre of connections and collaborations. Such nodes have a key responsibility in fostering social cohesion and inclusion: by creating encounters between people and groups that rarely meet outside their walls, community spaces enable the "reconstruction of social relations and forms of coexistence through physical spaces."⁽¹⁰⁾

There are many ways to build spaces for civil society actors. While Riga's NGO House is a municipality-financed public structure, in cities lacking designated public venues, civic actors mobilise themselves to develop mechanisms to access unused or underused public or private properties. Free Riga, Vienna's Packhaus, Espoo's "Facilities as a service" platform and Hamburg's Schaltzentrale all act as aggregators of civic energies, by opening spaces for a

6 Klinenberg, Eric (2018) Palaces for the People. New York: Penguin Random House, p.11

7 Klinenberg, i.e.

8 Ostanel, Elena (2017) SSpazi fuori dal Comune: Rigenerare, includere, innovare. Franco Angeli, p.11.

9 Ostanel, i.e., p.42.

10 Cellamare, Carlo (2020) Abitare le periferie. Roma: Bordeaux, p.29.

variety of organisations and helping them in establishing stronger links with each other and their neighbourhoods. In Dubrovnik, citizen initiatives occupied the Lazareti complex to later legalise their presence and turn it into a veritable community hub. In Syracuse and Bologna, local associations got access to publicly owned buildings through different municipal programmes.

The quest for autonomy

Community spaces that constitute nodes in their civic ecosystems, are also deeply **embedded in their local economic contexts**. The building that an initiative uses for its activities, the funds it uses to finance its programmes and to pay the work of its members, are all exposed to local economic flows. Community spaces vary in the ways they are run, financed or maintained. There are, of course, many cultural or civic centres that operate according to a straightforward top-down logic, fully financed by public authorities, local or national governments. In order to be able to resist coercion and bring about social change, however, community hubs need a certain degree of autonomy.

Such autonomy can be obtained through **financial independence** or forms of shared governance where civic actors are protected from political or economic pressures of various nature. In contexts where local development is hijacked by flagship projects of national governments, cooperation between local administrations and civic initiatives need to focus on existing resources that can be mobilised by opening up municipal spaces for civic use or by channelling local economic flows into civic spaces.

While alternative funding opportunities usually do not propose a systemic change of local public finances, they can help in **pooling existing resources** scattered around in a neighbourhood or a city, and connect civic spaces with broader communities. New financial mechanisms, enabled by ethical actors, can help to overcome obstacles that prioritise short-term political interests, the fragmentation of local bureaucratic systems or the lack of willingness to innovate in public service provision, by showing alternative solutions to local governments. Funding opportunities based on community



ACTive NGOs meeting in Dubrovnik's Youth Centre. Photo (cc) Eutropian



contributions may give an insight into more efficient expenditures, and also provide feedback for local governments on which areas to focus on.

For over a decade, civic initiatives across Europe have been working on **securing their venues** through shared ownership or long-term lease contracts.⁽¹¹⁾ In this process, the rediscovery of models based on shared ownership and non-speculative real estate development in the field of collaborative housing has been a source of constant inspiration for community spaces. Besides policy innovation enabling citizens to buy assets of community value before any private bidders are allowed to enter, ethical finance foundations and social banks have been leading the way to help civic initiatives establish a long-term presence in the buildings they use.

Enabled by such financial organisations, a variety of mechanisms have been deployed to pool resources from community members or use the revenues of a building's activities to pay back loans, like in the cases of FRIEDA 23 and Peter-Weiss-Haus in Rostock or Nova Cvernovka in Bratislava. In contexts without such financial infrastructure, initiatives like Gólya in Budapest have developed their own peer-to-peer lending systems. Besides securing spaces, another mechanism to stabilise community spaces is to **use the resources of a broader community**, whether in crowdfunding for the Orlando Youth Association in Dubrovnik or in the form of a community foundation in Syracuse. Creating close connections between a community, a venue and its local economy initiatives can strengthen the venue's **economic resilience** by enabling the sharing and pooling of resources within the local ecosystem. Impact assessment

tools, like Barcelona's Community Balance, in turn, help civic initiatives demonstrate the social value of their work and enable municipalities to better integrate them in their welfare service provider networks, but also to provide a more stable funding of their services.

From participation to co-governance

There is a great variety of relationships between the public and civil sectors. This diversity is at the core of the debate about public-civic cooperation across Europe: different constellations to run spaces, deliver services and build communities represent **different ideas about the role of the public and civil sectors**, as well as about the ways resources and responsibilities need to be shared. While citizen participation has been on the agenda of European cities for a while now, according to many observers, participatory processes should go beyond the classic ambitions defined by Arnstein's Ladder of Participation.⁽¹²⁾ There is a principal difference between participation and co-governance. As Annibale d'Elia explains in a podcast about Milan's new "neighbourhood schools," participation is a desire without responsibility. Instead of 'what would you like someone else to do for you?' the real question is 'what do you want to do?'"⁽¹³⁾

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- 11 Patti, Daniela, Polyak Levente. (2017) Funding the Cooperative City. Cooperative City Books, Vienna
 - 12 Iaione, Christian (2019) Legal Infrastructure and Urban Networks for Just and Democratic Smart Cities. Italian Journal of Public Law, Vol. 11, Issue 2, p.768
 - 13 <http://www.innovazione2020.it/annibale-delia-la-scuola-dei-quartieri-comune-di-milano-gdb-2019/>

Concepts for the shared management of spaces in services are not equally widespread in all parts of Europe. The ambition of opening spaces for NGOs and civic initiatives, where public institutions and civil society organisations can better cooperate, presents itself in a different way in every city. The conditions and resources available in some cities to run public structures and related networking events, funding programmes and capacity-building activities, as well as to develop more complex governance models and cooperation frameworks are far from being available everywhere. Cities in different parts of Europe all represent different welfare state models, with **different possibilities of sharing resources and responsibilities** with their local civil society as well as different capacities on the side of NGOs and social economy organisations.

For reasons of political history, bureaucratic procedures, budgetary deficits or the socio-economic context, each city has to adapt their models for community venues to their own local circumstances. If in some cities public-civic cooperation can be considered as a fairly top-down model, in which most responsibilities and decisions are held and resources are distributed by the municipality, other cities have different possibilities to strengthen public-civic cooperation and open spaces for NGOs. In some contexts, strong public welfare structures enable municipalities to maintain a great variety of public facilities as well as spaces for NGOs. In other policy contexts, entrepreneurialism has been promoted among civic organisations through capacity building, active commissioning, asset transfer and other policy mechanisms. Some community venues build on decades of activism and a strong position that local

NGOs established for themselves in the city's discourse on culture and communities. Others, benefiting from their respective progressive political moments, aim at developing new instruments of governance to facilitate the sharing or responsibilities between the municipality and civil actors.

The modalities of public-civic cooperation also **depend on the histories** that shape the space that their municipalities and NGOs have for manoeuvring. Large infrastructure development projects, badly targeted investments that did not reach the desired impact or discontinued experiences eliminate the trust in public interventions. Spatial fragmentation makes communication and cooperation difficult among civic actors. Tourism and real estate pressure reduce the scope of spaces available for civil society initiatives and organisations.

Therefore, there are no recipes for the public-civic co-management of community venues. In the case of Italian cities like Naples and Syracuse or Croatian cities like Dubrovnik, the realisation of structures for the participatory governance of common spaces is an achievement based on years of experimentation. Forms of shared management offer many advantages to both NGOs and municipalities: by "developing 'policies for self-organisation', or enhancing the social energies and latent engagements" of civic initiatives, progressive local governments favour "an alliance between institutions and social forces as well as the enhancement of social energies in a context in which institutions are no longer able to bear the burden of managing public services and equipment."⁽¹⁴⁾ More importantly, sharing resources and giving up power on the side of municipalities is also an investment in the **empowerment**



ACTive NGOs meeting in Santa Pola in 2019. Photo (cc) Eutropian



of **civic actors** “to foster bottom-up self-organisation towards the creation of unprecedented public-private partnerships capable of responding to changes in social needs.”⁽¹⁵⁾

Empowering civil society

When a municipality or an umbrella organisation aims to strengthen its civic ecosystem through the skills, knowledge and capacities of NGOs, it needs to develop and carry out a variety of **capacity-building activities** to improve community outreach, communication abilities, management know-how or economic sustainability of civic actors. Through their civic ecosystems, local governments can act as agents of emancipation, helping initiatives extend the scope of their work through the acquisition of new skills, the better use of shared resources, professionalisation or enhanced volunteer involvement.

In order to support the work of NGOs and civic initiatives, many municipalities employ **intermediaries** who act as liaisons towards civil society: Brighton’s Community Engagement Officer or Espoo’s Civil Society Coordinator both play the role of translating community needs to the municipality and the other way around. Besides establishing regular contact between initiatives in a neighbourhood or a field and municipal offices, such assistance also helps organisations to establish themselves and apply to funding opportunities or other types of support more successfully. The competences of NGOs and civic initiatives are further strengthened by **specific programmes** like the Neighbourhood Mothers programme in Espoo, that, supported by public resources, help the birth of new initiatives, or the Culture in Centre programme in Croatia, helping organisations to work closer together and develop formalised collaboration structures.

14 Cellamare, i.e. p.66.

15 Ostanel, i.e., p.48.

In many contexts, this capacity building is connected to the ambition to help NGOs, social enterprises and other civic actors shift their activities **from volunteering to professional service provision**. Institutionalising the activities of civil society organisations is often considered a necessary step to nurture collaboration among municipal-civic actors, on the one hand, and help the emancipation of NGOs, on the other. This shift is also supported by the changing legislative environment, for example, in the case of the “Third sector reform” in Italy.

The professionalisation of NGOs often means that they become capable of delivering various services for the public sector, ranging from social and healthcare through inclusion to education and culture. To enable civic organisations to respond to public (and private) needs and deliver locally embedded services, municipalities also need to develop **active procurement** or targeted commissioning principles that help channelling public spending to

activities that create local jobs or create other positive social impacts. Challenges are particularly present when it comes to smaller, more informal NGOs, seeking ways to open new revenue streams by developing new services. Unlike large professional organisations operating on a national-level that can secure resources more easily, small organisations are struggling to find a balance between local embeddedness and self-reliance or financial autonomy. Commissioning NGOs to deliver services requires public accompaniment and active procurement to maximise impact and develop jobs in the local communities; the role of local governments is essential for NGOs to reach these goals.

It is not that community spaces by accommodating civic initiatives that fill the gaps of public services with their own amenities become bare service providers. Instead, they serve as “civic centers, (...) centers of services and activities at the service of their neighborhoods,”⁽⁶⁾ or nodes in their civic ecosystems. Civic centres,



*ACTive NGOs meeting in Santa Pola.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



often run as commons, like the Ex OPG in Naples, manage social and cultural activities like “language schools for foreigners, local nurseries and playrooms, cinema forums, employment agencies, study rooms, or services such as those related to sports activities, dance schools, theater schools, (...) and play the role of a local entrepreneurship hub.”¹⁶) By connecting such a diversity of services that the public sector is unable to provide and by opening their doors to a variety of social groups and activities, these civic centres also change the nature of these services.

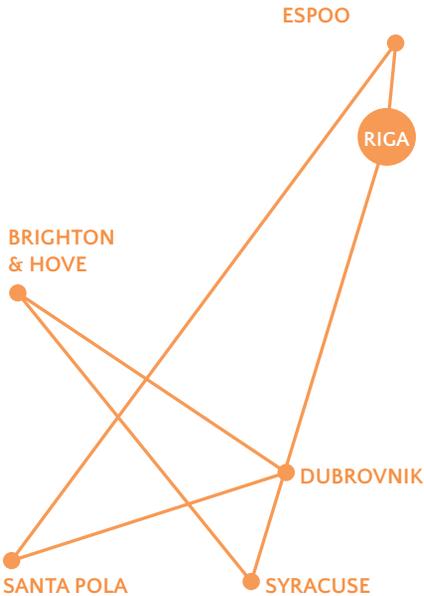
Community spaces and the civic ecosystems built around them are fundamental components of a well-functioning – cooperative, fair and resilient – city. They bring together individuals in neighbourhoods to form groups and engage with the common good. They connect people with similar interests and help them articulate their needs and organise better access to services. They fill the gaps left by the welfare state and help vulnerable groups fight for their rights. In fact, sharing resources and responsibilities between municipalities and civil society actors has helped cities not only in generating enhanced participation in urban development issues but also in co-producing urban space and co-creating urban services. Spaces for NGOs and civic initiatives like the NGO House in Riga are crucial for citizens and civil organisations to meet each other. They act as platforms for public-civic cooperation: by being at the heart of local civil societies, they offer venues for encounters, events and exchanges, becoming veritable nodes of their local civic ecosystems.

16 Cellamare, i.e. p.69

17 Cellamare, i.e. p.69

This book is about these civic ecosystems. Building on the experiences of the URBACT network ACTIVE NGOs, the following pages assemble a selection of interviews, analyses, reports, maps and photographs from dozens of European cities, in order to explore how methods of collaboration can help weave a tissue out of the individual threads of initiatives. This collection benefits from a pan-European perspective to look beyond the individual initiatives and organisations, and understand their potential in their connections with other actors. It also offers an overview of a diversity of approaches, mechanisms and methods of connecting different components of local civil society to achieve more together than the sum of their individual accomplishments.

Methods of ecosystem-building



The ACTIVE NGOs network accompanied its participating cities, Brighton and Hove, Dubrovnik, Espoo, Riga, Santa Popla and Syracuse through a three-year long learning trajectory. This trajectory was built on some features of Riga's NGOs House and many other good practices, constituting a **set of tools and methods** that help build a stronger cooperation between public administrations and local civil society. What follows below is a selection of these tools and methods that can be adjusted, re-designed and implemented locally, according to specific needs.

1 Mapping

Mapping local initiatives and organisations is an inevitable first step for a municipality to get to know the local actors (civil society organisations, institutions, service providers, local businesses) active in its territory and understanding their ambitions and needs.

1a) Networking events: Events that bring together various NGOs or civic initiatives are a great occasion to help them understand each other's work and explore possibilities for cooperation. Such events also help in identifying the main themes and challenges of an area.

1b) Inventory: Creating a regularly updated inventory of NGOs, citizen initiatives or related organisations operating in the city or in a specific area, can help understand the main needs and challenges in that given area.

1c) Asset mapping: Creating an inventory of the resources (space, tools, materials, knowledge, skills, etc.) available in a territory can help understand how to best match demand with supply in terms of these resources.

2 Ecosystem building

Connecting organisations and initiatives to each other, based on a complementary logic.

2a) Umbrella organisations: Sometimes individual organisations or initiatives have a high threshold to access their audience, a market or certain services. Organisations that can unite various initiatives can create a critical mass and thus lower the threshold of access for its member organisations.

2b) Clusters: Mapping is also a tool to understand potential cooperation between different organisations or initiatives that can exchange their knowledge or join forces towards a common goal. Clustering like-minded or complementary organisations in a building, on a site or in a support programme can help develop synergies between them.

2c) Sharing resources: Sharing resources, such as a space for events, equipment, storage room, communication channels to disseminate ideas or increase visibility, can be both an important help to individual organisations and an incentive for different initiatives to collaborate.

2d) Joint services: Civic initiatives and particularly local businesses can gain a lot from sharing storage space, package pick-up points, online shopping platforms or home delivery services. Such services help the competitiveness of local businesses and the stronger economic sustainability of civic initiatives within the social economy field.

2e) Collaborative funding: Collaborative commissioning and participatory grantmaking both shift the logic of the public funding of civil society initiatives from competition to collaboration.

2f) Solidarity funds: Solidarity funds help in channeling the revenues of one initiative towards investments into another. This mechanism allows a number of initiatives to cooperate and help weather financial difficulties together.

3 Organising access to spaces

Space for events, meetings or storage is a crucial factor for both civil society organisations and local businesses. Specific policies and designated mechanisms can reduce the burden of individual initiatives in finding and accessing spaces.

3a) Temporary use: The interim use of unused spaces allows experimentation with different functions and target groups, before establishing a program for a planned development.

3b) Incentives to private owners: Ranging from taxes to tax breaks, well-targeted public policies can engage private owners to open their properties to civic initiatives.

3c) Matchmaking: With the help of platforms or intermediary services, the demand for space and available properties can be connected.

4 Economic resilience

Pooling resources from partners and broader communities can help civil society organisations stabilise their economies and respond better to new challenges.

4a) Seed funding: Seed funding helps in the launching of new activities: with well-targeted funding, the investment can multiply its impact and can generate structures with long-term sustainability.

4b) Match funding: Match funding allows funders to combine different resources (space, grants, loans) in order to support an initiative.

4c) Crowdfunding: Crowdfunding is a tool that allows initiatives to collect funds from their broader community.

4d) Community shares: Community shares are a form of investment in a community facility. Community shares are often offered for a fixed price and their return on investment can be conceived as in-kind (cultural events, etc.) or as monetary (in form of an interest).

4e) Ethical financial institutions: Social banks and anti-speculation foundations can support civic initiatives with affordable loans and ownership structures that enhance community profit.

4f) Gradual rent: The gradual introduction of rent can help an organisation test its strengths and learn to develop a sustainable economic model without being put in difficulties with the first months' rent.

4g) Rent to investment / investment to rent: Investment into premises can represent a huge burden on the economies of associations. However, if investment into a building can be reduced from the rent, it can create a significant incentive for the renovation of buildings in bad shape.

4h) Local funds: Local funds like community foundations help in channeling contributions from individuals, local businesses and public institutions in funds that enable the creation of joint services or improvements in the environment that benefit the contributors and their broader community.

4i) Local economic circuits: A variety of incentives can help in keeping resources in local communities. With the help of tools that range from vouchers to pay for voluntary work to local currencies, individuals can be encouraged to spend locally and organisations to source their materials or supply locally.

5 Governance structures

A set of rules, roles and mechanisms to structure the participation of various local actors (civil society organisations, institutions, service providers, local businesses).

5a) Participatory events: Events conceived with a particular design (citizen roundtable, civil society council, participatory council, neighbourhood council, etc.) to help coordination and cooperation.

5b) Local organisational bodies: participatory organisational forms such as a community board or neighbourhood committee to help citizens stay involved in decision-making.

5c) Protocols: Protocols to manage resources like spaces or visibility can be co-designed with all stakeholders.

5d) Communication and decision-making tools: online (or offline) platforms can facilitate interactive communication and shared decision-making between a municipality and citizens (or different stakeholder groups).

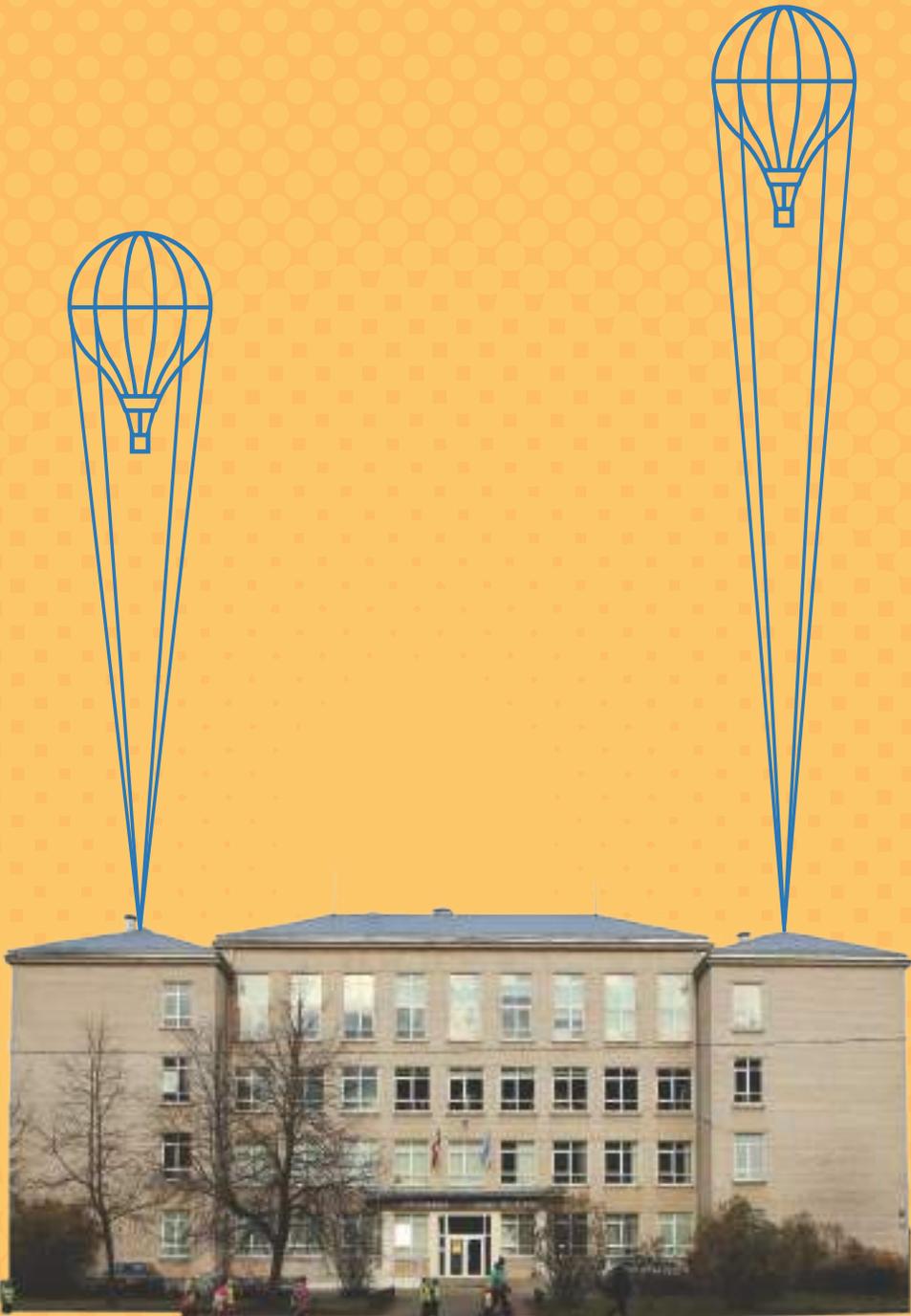
6 Capacity building

Improving the skills of NGOs and civic initiatives can enhance their impact on the territory.

6a) Intermediary structures: Spaces or roles that act as interfaces between municipalities can help translate between public requirements and civic needs.

6b) Professionalisation support: Policies that enable NGOs to develop new revenue streams help them strengthen their economic resilience and connect better with the local ecosystem through new services.

6c) Active procurement: Public administrations can use their leverage to buy services from locally rooted providers, thus ensuring that the profits generated are not extracted but reinvested in the neighbourhood or city.



The NGO House in Riga



ZINTA
GUGANE

project coordinator,
NGO House

The idea of the NGO House was born in 2010, at Riga's first **Citizens Forum** where one of the working groups analysed the communication problems between NGOs and the municipality and tried to find solutions for better synergies in the future. Looking for possible cooperation models between citizens, NGOs and the Riga municipality, the Forum identified that NGOs suffer from the **lack of space for meetings and activities**. The lack of available space for citizen initiatives had been haunting the sector for a long time while many privately owned buildings were standing empty due to the city's demographic shifts and the economic difficulties related to renovating deteriorated buildings.

The path from the idea to the implementation took three years. The Department of Education, Culture and Sports was looking for available premises and identified one of its properties, an **unused school building** in the city's Teika neighbourhood to become Riga's first **NGO House**, sharing the building with a cultural organisation. The renovation was financed by the municipality, and the NGO House was inaugurated in September 2013 by members of the Riga City Council and municipal officers as the manifestation of a broader will to strengthen the city's civil sector. The inauguration was followed by **smaller renovations** in the next years, for example the sound and light system was upgraded, the big hall on the 4th floor was renovated and a mobile stage was installed, making it suitable for rehearsals, concerts and large public events. An elevator was installed in the NGO House and it is in operation since 2020 to ensure the accessibility of the entire building.

The NGO House offers a wide **variety of spaces** for civic activities. It was designed to suit its users needs: making use of its ten different premises including a large event



^ *Kick-off meeting of ACTIVE NGOs in May 2018. Photo (cc) Eutropian*

space for over 200 people, several offices, seminar rooms, workshops and a computer room, the House organises consultations, conferences, trainings, seminars and networking events for its users and the wider community.

The House is **open to visitors** from Monday to Saturday, from 8 am to 9 pm: to organise activities in some of the building's specific spaces, organisations have to **reserve** the given room in advance if there is availability in the calendar. Each week, approximately 27 different NGOs use the premises of the NGO House and the **occupancy rate is continuously increasing**, the House receives applications from new organisations every week. Especially on Fridays and Saturdays the House is overcrowded, all facilities are fully booked and activities follow one

another. Besides free space, to support all these activities, the NGO House can also provide free **technical equipment**. These services are available for all officially registered organisations that operate in Riga or their activities are devoted to the inhabitants of Riga.

Managed as a **platform of public-civic cooperation** by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, the NGO House focuses on various forms and processes of **social integration**: many of the events organised by NGO House promote inclusion of people with special needs, health problems or socially disadvantaged children, different nationalities and social groups. The building's **users and community** include a great variety of NGOs dealing with culture and recreation (music, dance,

theatre, visual arts, folk art and heritage, ethnic minority culture), education, health, social support, development and housing supply, civil and human rights, sports, senior and youth activities. NGOs are invited to use the building to **organise events**, discussions, seminars, conferences, trainings, meetings, as well as cultural activities, exhibitions, concerts, performances, rehearsals; to take part in events organised by NGO House and to launch new initiatives for civic engagement and cooperation. While the NGO House is a perfect location for **activities based in the Teika neighbourhood**, and while its seminars are often attended by residents from distant neighbourhoods as well, it is in general less accessible for initiatives coming from other areas of the city. This recognition gave birth to the idea of opening new NGO Houses in other Riga neighbourhoods.

The House does not only offer space for the daily activities and events of NGOs but also helps them **develop their activities within the premises** of the House. As empowering NGOs through **capacity building** is one of the institution's most important objectives, the House offers educational and informative seminars every week, focusing on themes like project management, proposal writing, fundraising, accounting, contracts and legal issues, legislative changes and public relations. The House gives advice to NGOs about different issues and can help finding specialists with competences corresponding to the NGOs needs.

The Riga Municipality runs a diversity of **funding programmes** for NGOs and the NGO House works in close cooperation with these specific funding programmes. The Society Integration Project Competition, implemented yearly since 2010, has

supported with up to €7000 over 300 societal integration projects promoting educational activities, citizen participation, support to people with special needs, volunteering, the integration of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities. In another funding stream, the Neighbourhood Initiatives Project Competition, established in 2015 from the support of small neighbourhood forums and then broader initiatives of the inhabitants on local level and organised 3–4 times a year, has provided up to €2500 per project (the amount has increased till €3500 since 2020) support to 116 neighbourhood projects including local forums, history tours, educational activities and self-organisation initiatives, with a strong focus on a given neighbourhood: NGOs can use the services of the NGO House in the implementation of these projects to reduce costs.

The NGO House aims at playing a central role in **connecting different civic actors** in Riga and across the country. Therefore to promote **networking events** is an essential task for the House: these events range from meetings between NGOs and municipal representatives, to twinning events or discussions about cooperation networks and platforms. The NGO House has an **overview about the NGOs operating in the city** through its regularly updated database.

Communicating the events and themes of the NGO House and its community also happens on a weekly basis in emails and various social media channels. The NGO House has good cooperation with the municipality's press office and other organisations responsible for communication. Therefore, the NGO House benefits from various social media channels of the municipality. The social media

accounts of the NGO House also serve as communication platforms.

The NGO House sends its **newsletters** to about 1000 addresses every month, summarising the topicalities of NGOs and the NGO House: this allows the House to become the place where different NGOs can exchange information. Each newsletter includes an interview with an NGO, information about future seminars, project competitions and other activities where NGOs can engage. Organisations can contribute to the newsletter with their own information to be distributed among the NGO House community. For public events in the NGO House events, posters are distributed to municipality institutions and cooperation partners.

The **budget of the NGO House** is fully financed by the municipality. The House has three employees, a director and two project coordinators, employed by the municipality. The task of the employees is to supervise the projects and communication activities of the House as well as NGO activities. **Spaces and all activities are available free of charge**, NGOs simply have to fill an online request form and find an available time slot in order to use one or more rooms or halls for their activities. The NGO House is based on free services: this is both the ideological position of the municipality and a practical choice: most NGOs have no budget available to pay for the premises and generating income from the NGO House would imply complicated bureaucratic procedures. The principle of the NGO House and the type of support for organisations are well described by the saying: “give a fishing rod, but not the fish itself.” The NGO House has an annual budget amounting to 20,000 euros for the implementation of activities (financed by

the municipality), in addition to the salaries and the running costs covered by various departments.

In this context, **free of charge services** are also expected from the NGOs using the facilities of the NGO House: the groups using spaces in the House cannot charge participation fee to their public, but they can earn revenues from their activities outside the NGO House or annual subscription fees. As the **social economy scene in Latvia is not very developed** (the development of social entrepreneurship is at the very beginning), most civic organisations are operating based on **volunteering**, with very little perspective for professionalising their services. The NGO House is a perfect institution for these organisations, while more professional NGOs with employees use the NGO House as an incubator in the early stages of their activity, and tend to frequent the NGO House mostly for seminars and other educational activities later when they grow in scale.

In its seven and a half years of existence, the NGO House has become a **key institution in Riga’s civic ecosystem**. The numbers of the NGO House are impressive: since 2013, over 190,000 people from over 550 organisations have visited events in the building and 255 NGOs organised more than 13000 events and activities in NGO House. The House hosted over 200 informative and educational seminars, over 30 NGO networking events and 50 exhibitions in this period. To help NGOs individually, more than 4000 consultations were organised with NGO representatives about specific questions, meaning more than 700 annual consultations. In 2019 only, there were almost 2150 events organised by the community of the House, including over 170

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
Number of visitors to the NGO House	9000	12000	26550	33730	38925	40600	160 775
Number of events organised by NGOs	400	830	1906	2600	3000	2142	10 662
Number of NGOs participating in events at the NGO House	350	470	500	500	550	550	
Number of NGOs organising events	77	110	141	191	225	254	

capacity building events. The frequentation of the NGO House is growing: on 27 February 2020, 19 activities were organised in the NGO House, including a network event, an NGO House seminar, 10 creative workshops and 4 meetings, with approximately 1500 participants altogether.

These numbers speak for themselves: the NGO House responded successfully to the need for civic space articulated by citizens and it became a **reference for citizen initiatives** in need of support. Moreover, through its twinning and networking programmes, the NGO House also gave its contribution to a denser, more interconnected civil sphere in Riga.

❏ *Kick-off meeting of ACTIVE NGOs in May 2018. Photo (cc) Eutropian*



SPACE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Despite attempts by the NGO House staff to broaden the building's audience, the institution has not yet managed to reach the whole spectrum of NGOs in Riga. There are many ways to improve the Good Practice of Riga's NGO House and extend its outreach.

Currently, the NGO House is most useful for a specific segment of civil society. While its spaces can be reserved a year in advance of use, they are only available for specific activities and not for permanent use. Partly because of this, the NGO House currently has less appeal to more established NGOs that are cornerstones of the city's civil society and which have their own spaces and organise their own trainings. Expanding the activities and possibilities offered by the NGO House could also better reach out to this more established segment of Riga's civil society.

At the occasion of the first meeting of Riga's ULG within the ACTive NGOs project, participating stakeholders expressed a need to amplify the existing services of the NGO House, by extending its target group, diversifying its public, and increasing the number of NGOs reached, the number of public events and the number of visitors.

NGO House employees often give voice to their impression that many of the NGOs using the House are rather passive receivers of services but not proactive enough to help develop new services or improve existing ones. Giving organisations more ownership of the spaces they use and encouraging their participation and cooperation among each other can help them engage more in shaping together the NGO House. To reach this goal, working together with other initiatives operating community venues in the city like Free Riga could help diversifying the NGO House model.

The NGO House created a precedent in Latvia that many other municipalities within the country and outside are interested in following. The ACTIVE NGOs partnership is an occasion to transfer the practice to other European cities but similar exchange activities at the national level are also needed.

Extracts from the Good Practice's Improvement Plan



Towards NGO Houses

Approaches to the traditional people's house model

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The URBACT network ACTIVE NGOs proposes a practice developed by the municipality of Riga called the NGO House, a centre promoting the active participation of non-governmental organisations and citizens. The NGO House includes a physical space offered by the municipality and the social space co-created by third sector entities offering culture, educational and social services to residents. URBACT has awarded this case the label of “good practice,” to be transferred to other European cities through the network ACTIVE NGOs.

Social centres, mirroring the Riga NGO House, have a long history with roots in solidarity-based and cooperative forms of social organisation: from guilds to charitable societies, women organisations, cooperatives. Mutual support organisations of citizens have had self-organised community spaces in a continuum over the centuries, changing and adapting to contextual demands. The nineteenth century has seen the proliferation of socialist-inspired houses of the people. One of the early example was the Russian “National House” (Narodnyj dom), which hosted cultural and artistic initiatives, inspiring the later formation of the Workers’ Clubs (Rabochiy Klub) after the revolution, promoting the culture of proletariat Proletkult activities.¹ This modern concept of recreational social houses was variably adopted in other European countries called people’s house, folkets hus, casa del pueblo, maison du peuple (e.g. Bruxelles, Clichy, Nancy), the Belgian Cooperative Vooruit (e.g. Ghent), the German Volkshaus and the Italian network of Case del popolo.

1 Bokov, A., 2017. Soviet workers’ clubs: lessons from the social condensers. *The Journal of Architecture*, 22(3), pp.403–436.



*Porto Fluviale
Occupato, Rome.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian
<<*

These represented rooted branches of the political parties e.g. the Casa del Pueblo for the Spanish Socialist Party PSOE or the Casa del Popolo in Italy for the communist parties. They also functioned as headquarters for trade and labour unions, providing cultural and educational activities for adults workers. These “Houses” have flourished all over Europe throughout the twentieth century hosting multifunctional community activities such as public readings, political debates, libraries, theatres and more. All in all, these functioned as public sphere for economic and social emancipatory claims challenging the hegemonic power of the State.

With a leap in time – at the end of the last century – Europe witnessed the transformation of this established infrastructure into a market-oriented functions. Some of the historic premises of people’s houses have been turned into restaurants, bars and recreational centres with a “light” function of socialisation for local residents. While there are distinctions among the types of reuse and transformation of these former people’s houses, the common trait lays on the revision of their socio-political ethos. The Post-Fordist, neo-liberal society of the last decades of twentieth century brought

the precarisation of the workers, the dismantlement of welfare and a dominant ethic of individualism. Old political parties have been unable to counteract these trends, consequently losing popular legitimacy. This – here oversimplified but complex – socio-economic shift contributed to empty the political spirit that once led to the creation of the people’s houses model. On one side, this shift manifests itself with a loss of the established physical and capillary presence of public spaces dedicated to self-organisation and democratic participation capable to influence urban planning and decision-making. On the other, this crisis of liberal democracy brought to life contestative movements, thus opening up new social experimentations of the organised civic life in neighbourhoods.

We can consider three main approaches in the evolution of the traditional people’s house model which may help to frame the NGO House experience of cities in this URBACT network: the institutional top-down, the antagonistic and the contractual approach. The first approach concerns practices resulting from the state-led expansion of technocratic participatory governance. Examples of the first approach might be Quartier Management (QM) offices,

part of the National programme Soziale Stadt in Germany. QM are institutionally managed neighbourhood centres created to foster place-based direct democracy, inclusive social interaction and integration of local policies especially in neighbourhoods labelled as deprived. The approach which has lights and shadows not examined here, represents one of the most sophisticated articulation of consensus-based civic participation at micro-urban level, in premises centrally located in neighbourhood and distributed evenly in critical urban areas of the city. These neighbourhood centres effectively function as people's houses and social condensers but being state-managed devices their activities may suffer from institutional bureaucratisation, with issues in managing hybrid forms of governance⁽²⁾ or rather as social control pacifying potential protest and counter politics.⁽³⁾

The second approach concerns spaces of contestative activism, reclaiming through squatting the use of abandoned premises⁽⁴⁾ for social, collective and commoning purposes. This approach gained momentum in Europe during the nineties of the last century, in relation to countercultures and anti-capitalist anarchist, autonomist social movements.⁽⁵⁾ These self-organised, self-managed and self-financed squats provide socio-cultural and inclusive activities for a wider public. The self-managed "centro sociale" experiences in Italy function as cultural aggregators; vindicating the struggle against normalised relations of dominance and institutionalisation, they are also service-providers compensating the gaps in the public welfare system. The autonomous centre Lâbas of Bologna, for instance, covers health support to the undocumented migrants who are not entitled to fully access the public health

support.⁽⁶⁾ At the same time, the provision of services means mobilising political forces. The self-managed healthcare provision does not only help single individuals but to the whole collectivity because campaigning to push national legislation towards "healthcare for all" is an integral part of the process. In this sense, these organisational innovations are soliciting a renaissance of the former people's house model as potential places for direct and democratic counter-politics towards the State. There are many variations on the theme of self-managed social centres. The main differences across contexts concern legalisation schemes, governance and funding structures. The schemes and their definition often entail conflicting and long-lasting processes of negotiation, e.g. the history of the social centre of Rog factory in Ljubljana.⁽⁷⁾

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- 2 Karsten, N., Colombo, C.M. and Schaap, L., 2020. The Effectiveness, Legitimacy and Robustness of Hybrid Livability Governance: The Case of Quartiersmanagement in Berlin. In *Partnerships for livable cities* (pp. 271-290). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-40060-6_14
 - 3 Silver, H., 2006. Social Integration in the "New" Berlin. *German Politics and Society*, 24(4), pp.1-48.
 - 4 see <https://urbact.eu/Refill>
 - 5 Lopez, M.A.M. and Cattaneo, C., 2014. The squatters' movement in Europe: commons and autonomy as alternatives to capitalism. Pluto Press. Piazza, G., 2012. Il movimento delle occupazioni di squat e centri sociali in Europa: Una Introduzione. Il movimento delle occupazioni di squat e centri sociali in Europa: una introduzione, pp.5-18.
 - 6 <https://www.laboratoriosalutepopolare.it/>
 - 7 Tosics, I. 2019. Squatting-cultural-use-toward-commons-case-rog-factory-ljubljana ; URBACT website <https://urbact.eu/squatting-cultural-use-toward-commons-case-rog-factory-ljubljana>



*Rog, Ljubljana.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian
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The third approach is a co-evolution of the previous ones, being a collaborative form of public-private governance, willing to overcome the duality of the bottom-up versus the top-down approach. Resulting from civic initiatives of self-organisation and aggregation, the third approach calls for collaboration between civil society, the private and the public sectors. Social contractual agreements regulate the co-governance of those experimentations.⁽⁸⁾ Naples, with the spaces enabled by its regulation of the commons – a good practice at URBACT – leading the URBACT network Civic eState, transfers to other cities the practice of creating “public-community or public-civic partnerships” (PCPs). PCPs are aimed at transforming city assets into sustainable social infrastructures⁽⁹⁾ that produce public value and social impact through social and solidarity, cultural and creative, collaborative, digital and circular economy initiatives.”⁽¹⁰⁾

The organisational practices leading to these three different approaches are often present in the same urban context, they can develop in distinct political and historic moments, and their characteristics change over time. The NGO House of Riga (and its adaptations in other countries through the Transfer Network ACTIVE NGOs) is a hybrid interpretation of the old idea of the people’s house. Yet, the concept of NGO Houses might be misinterpreted as a depoliticised

social formation, namely a consensualist solution for disciplining social movements. Promoting participatory governance through professionalised civil society, NGOs might assume the role of assistance providers without mobilising force in politics towards systemic change.⁽¹¹⁾ On the other hand, the goal of the NGO Houses (as in the URBACT Transfer Network) is also to pragmatically and collectively rethink physical spaces for social purposes, which went unused or under-used. The goal is to build, starting from the physical space, a transversal solidarity network, based on a coalition of several actors creating an ecosystem for civic participation across communities. Once established NGO houses, it is the collaboration of the stakeholders who will design (and reclaim) their functions, structures and management. This book presents a variety of local interpretations of people’s house concept – experimentations and variations on the theme of the NGO House.

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- 8 Iaione, C., 2016. The CO-city: Sharing, collaborating, cooperating, and commoning in the city. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 75(2), pp.415-455.
 - 9 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/dp074_en.pdf
 - 10 <https://urbact.eu/civic-estate>
 - 11 Schierup, C.U., Alund, A. and Kellecioglu, I., 2020. Reinventing the people’s house: time, space and activism in multiethnic Stockholm. *Critical Sociology*, p.0896920520957066.



chapter 1

Mapping civic initiatives



Citizen innovation maps

Visualising relevant communities as a tool to link us with our natural allies

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www.vicvivero.net
www.civics.cc

When we undertake any type of project, of whatever nature, it is more necessary than ever to be able to count on **natural allies** for its development, so that their contribution allows us to give relevance and pertinence to our practice. In the case of projects with a clearly open and shared vocation, in which **citizen participation** takes on a central role, it is essential to know which agents we can link up with and how they are organised, so that we can mitigate, as far as possible, the dysfunctions typical of citizen participation (lack of operability, increase in times, lack of hierarchy, etc...)

Therefore, it is necessary to start any project with a broad and diverse look around us. Detect which is the **ecosystem** in which we are inserted, and which will be crossed by our planned action. This contextualisation is necessary to avoid the phenomena of “parachuting” – lack of connection with the territory and its inhabitants –, excessive self-absorption or solipsism. This first look seeks to find people and groups affected by – and affecting – our proposals. It is likely that we are not the first to come up with completely new ideas, or totally original approaches to the territory. It is also probable that many agents are already developing complementary, similar, pioneering or inspiring activities that can contribute to making our proposal more far-reaching and have a multiplying effect on its impact.

It is therefore a question of seeking out our existing natural allies to support us – and them – for **positive transformation**. The underlying thesis involves assuming that not only the so-called experts have specific knowledge of certain issues that affect an entire community and territory, but that it is that community that has specific knowledge about the issues that affect



Mapping Workshop. Photo (c) VIC



them, and how they affect them. From this distributed perspective – learning communities⁽⁷⁾ –, we can say that all people are experts in something, from a specific point of view within their position in the value chain of an action: as decision makers, managers, operators, facilitators, beneficiaries, clients, users, victims, stakeholders... All of them, therefore, can contribute to giving greater significance to the practices being developed.

The proposed view is translated into a map that allows a holistic and attractive visualization of each of the **relevant agents in the territory** – points –, geolocated in a specific space – territorial framework –, on specific themes – sectors – and with their internal relations – lines –. Each of the initiatives, due to their own condition, are usually very much linked to the daily action “in the trenches”, so they do not have the time or capacity to carry out communication, connection and hybridization tasks with other entities through shared tools.

The map, therefore, works like any other map we usually use, providing quality, ordered and related information on a territory. Usually maps have two main variables: the **territorial framework**, which determines the mapped content within a previously defined space, and/or the **sectorial framework**, which circumscribes

the information contained to a certain pre-selected topic or sector. In this way we can combine both variables to map: our project will have specific attributes based on the space it is in and the main issues it raises, and therefore that space and that sector will be the ones of interest for the mapping.

In order to construct this map as a working tool we must therefore gradually incorporate those agents and communities existing in the territory which have a direct or potential relationship with the project we are developing. This incorporation is nothing more than positioning the relevant known agents in the selected territorial framework, and providing these points with a colour code, or icon, which allows us to discern their areas and work spaces, their sectors of activity or the type of agent supporting these actions. This activity is very simple if this knowledge is given directly and clearly, and therefore the translation of these data to the map is simply procedural.

But in most cases this information is far from clear and accessible. We may find ourselves in a situation where we have to map a territory that we do not know previously, and therefore need access to this knowledge in order to be able to construct the map. To do this, it is necessary to carry out exhaustive field work that allows us to detect which relevant agents exist, or to

link up with key agents that are capable of quickly connecting us with communities. Even in our own cities, it is often very difficult for us to access this knowledge, which gives rise to the paradox of “not knowing what your neighbour is doing”, when that same neighbour can be an asset of value to our practice.

And this is because much of this knowledge is tacit, distributed among small communities of interest that do not manage to share their values. Many communication channels are not interested in such alternative or minority practices and do not offer them spaces for generalist dissemination. Also, the precariousness and precarity of these practices does not allow them to build and provide their communication and dissemination channels with powerful tools to position their groups and projects in situations of influence. There may even be an explicit refusal to link up with other organisations and entities such as administrations, universities or other more institutionalised bodies.

The existing urban maps in most cities are tourist maps, which refer to a sclerotised city, made up of architectural pieces from the past, monuments, historical and artistic sites, football fields and shopping centres. These are the tourist maps that we can request at any tourist office, train station or airport in any city in the world. But beyond these maps, which tell us about a certain type of city – visible, consumable... – there are other urban values and assets, which can be translated into alternative and complementary maps that show us living and active communities, creative and collaborative initiatives, spaces for experimentation and innovation and public administrations committed to the urban

transition towards resilient, healthy cities and facing the challenges of the future.

The challenge, then, is to generate a map that contains the information that is most difficult to access, collecting those practices and communities that are most invisible, local and peripheral. To generate a complementary map which helps to understand another type of city, which allows a close connection with local communities and urban practices. A map that puts people, groups and their practices at the centre. These practices are, in turn, the most precarious, insecure and fragile, but at the same time the most innovative, courageous and transformative initiatives. Many of these initiatives face the challenges of the future and aim at the transition of our cities, as they are in niches of opportunity that will later be opened to the general public. And it is not only the contents of their daily practices that point to future trends (whats) – but also the way in which they do so, through their own values such as the recovery of sovereignty, networking, participation and collaboration, equity, transparency (hows).

The visibility of all these initiatives on maps that are open and shared with the rest of the citizens contributes to positioning these practices as first-rate urban assets, which allow communities to **coproduce cities** through their own collective tools, and citizens to be empowered through urban education, which keep the social fabric united and cohesive, and which cover gaps and social needs where administrations do not reach. They allow us to glimpse which urban areas have more initiatives, even with over-represented symbolic centres, and which urban areas lack citizen initiatives of local support. They also tell us what

that allow you to take advantage of windows of opportunity for new projects and proposals. The map allows for the generation of a database of relevant agents for the communication of activities, programmes, calls, workshops...it allows for visits, exchanges and residences between similar or complementary initiatives... it allows for the construction of alliances, partnerships and consortiums...it allows for the prototyping of solutions through citizen laboratories or experimental spaces...it allows for the transformation and implementation of public policies through their knowledge and learning.

The creation of an innovative ecosystem inevitably involves a map of resources and communities in the emerging and informal city. A social innovation map of the city. And this has been understood by countless initiatives and local groups, that have mapped their territories by situating inspiring and innovative experiences, making visible a layer of information that was previously tacit and inbred. And in the same way this was a need that began in Madrid from a small

group of groups that decided to offer a new image of a living, innovative and proactive city. Shifting “from protest to proposal” through the public display of cultural and social associations, neighbourhood platforms, spaces for creation and citizen participation, the reactivation of disused or abandoned public spaces, the experimentation of other economies based on social currencies, time banks, barter or chains of favours, sustainable mobility, urban agriculture and an endless number of urban practices representing alternatives to the hegemonic urban dynamics.

All this work gave rise to the Atlas of Neighbourhood Initiatives, which was called Los Madriles⁽²²⁾ (co-led by VIC among other collectives) and resulted in a city map which was later extended to other maps which included the mapping work in different districts of the city. In addition to the districts, specific maps were made of strategic sectors and issues for the city, such as the map of Madrid’s urban gardens, the map of childhood and child-rearing spaces and the map of urban violence. All

✂ *The CIVICS map of Montevideo. Image © CIVICS*





^ Ceramic tiles with the CIVICS iconography. Photo (c) VIC

these maps were collected on a website which brought together all the maps that were generated, both with the territorial variable and with different themes, in what came to be known as a “atlas of maps”⁽³⁾. All the maps produced were printed on paper and distributed in cultural centres and tourist offices throughout the city of Madrid, including posters at bus stops, public presentations and workshops open to the public. Institutional support was key to the dissemination of the project and the citizen-based ecosystem included in the map. As a result of the existence of the initiative many other paper maps have been designed, including cities such as Zaragoza, Valencia, Vitoria or Guadalajara in Mexico.

In parallel to the paper maps, a digital cartography was developed that could include all the initiatives detected, including all the existing themes in a global territory. The aim was to avoid the restrictions of paper maps – physical space, selection of territories and themes... – by combining all the information in a meta-map or “map of maps.” This tool made it possible to include any type of innovative initiative by classifying it through a series of filters that allowed the information to be organised in a clear and easily accessible way. The map was designed to be constructed from the initiatives themselves, seeking from the

outset clear returns that could be of interest to those same communities, looking for a meaning and significance to the tool that would allow it to be nurtured from within the existing ecosystem itself based on a clear benefit and not as an external project to them.

The map slowly emerged through various workshops held in different locations. In these workshops, the local community defined their practices on the basis of their own categorisations and groups of issues, as well as the type of venue in which they carried out their activities, the operator nature that could be provided or the relevant information that would be interesting to include on the map. In this way, CIVICS⁽⁴⁾, the open and interactive digital cartography was born, which uses open and freely licensed tools to map, through collective intelligence, citizen initiatives of any kind of sector and subject on a global scale.

CIVICS currently has more than 5,500 registered innovative initiatives in more than 50 cities in 17 countries in the Ibero-American region. The platform is structured through a series of filters that make up the

2 <https://losmadriles.org/>

3 <https://losmadriles.org/mapas/>

4 <https://civics.cc/>

icon that appears on the map: the colour refers to the initiative theme (free culture, urban art, alternative economy, expanded education, sustainable mobility...), the inner icon is linked to the type of space in which the initiative is developed (garden, popular school, creative space, digital space, ephemeral space...) and finally the upper wig defines the type of driving agent (government, university, social enterprise, citizen initiatives...). This combination of the three variables allows us to generate three input filters for information and visualisation which, together with the selected city, allows us to access the information we are looking for very quickly.

All the information self-generated on the map is open and downloadable, as it could not be otherwise coming from the local collective intelligence. All the data used is public and no personal or sensitive data is handled, protected by legislation on the other hand. The cartographic base uses OpenStreetmap (open software) and all the programming of the page is in a Github repository so it can be customised or replicated. The way to collect the information is through collective and participative workshops in each of the cities, where, through an open call in a reference space, local initiatives are made visible through a distributed knowledge exchange space. Even initiatives which are no longer operational become part of a digital archive, or innovation repository, which can serve to inspire new proposals or fix the knowledge of ephemeral projects in other past scenarios.

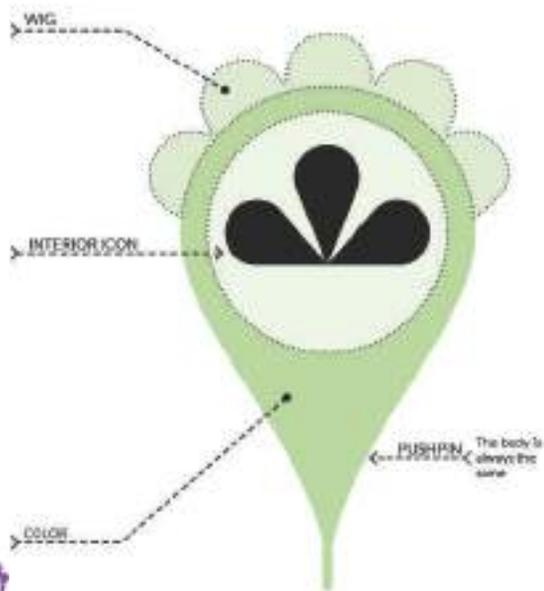
The mapping methodology deployed by VIC includes a "city package" based on the selection of cities to be mapped during a week-long trip. These trips usually combine

major capitals with secondary cities. Each city should have a local partner in charge of providing communication services, space facilities, logistics and local knowledge. Local partners could be state government (federal), local administrations (council), cultural areas, cultural centres, coworking spaces, grassroots communities or a combination between them. A call to join the workshop is usually promoted by the institution or cultural centre where the workshop will take place.

Mapping workshops are developed in a central or peripheral but well-connected facility. Preferably in a social/ cultural centre with a good prestige among grassroots initiatives. Around 20-30 people share their own experience, show the local initiatives, learn how to use the digital platform and attend a mapping lecture. Once the workshops are over we do collect analogic data (provided by the communities in the workshops) in order to transfer it to the digital tool CIVICs. For that purpose, analogic data has to be uploaded onto CIVICs, adding media (pictures, videos...).

Finally all the information is uploaded on CIVICs. Once the city is "completed", the visualisation is sent to the community. They can also download the database of the local ecosystem. Prior to publishing final results to social media and other channels, workshop participants are encouraged to check all the information in order to share correct information about their activities. Moreover, if an organisation is not willing to appear on CIVICs, it is removed from the database.

In the last year, the dimension of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been incorporated in the maps. The thesis for this is that the SDG



Map icons. Image (c) VIC

have been designed by and for public policies between the different levels of local, regional, national and supranational administration – where civil society has not been incorporated as a relevant agent due to its lack of capacity to measure and evaluate the impacts and indicators of the agreed goals. But **civil society contributes decisively at the local level to the achievement of these SDGs**, and therefore it is necessary to have instruments and tools that allow us to see the contributions that local communities make to social, economic, urban and environmental transformation. Civil society and local communities are a clear vector of transformation and therefore it is essential that their practice is linked to the SDG. The inclusion of such diverse initiatives in such distant places through a homogeneous code of filters and the SDG allow for comparative analysis and the measurement of impacts on

the urban agendas of each city. The maps have been combined with other related actions such as the manufacture of urban innovation signage through the collective construction of hydraulic tiles to be installed in spaces and communities in the city – installed on pavements and buildings – as well as the linking of the maps with other digital and face-to-face participation devices, such as participatory budgets and local forums. This creates an ecosystem of physical and digital actions that always combine the same iconography and codes of representation, and which are the starting points for other more ambitious actions such as citizens' laboratories to prototype urban solutions, participation processes for plans for the use of opportunity spaces, or demonstration projects for the just transition towards resilient and healthy cities.



Learning from CIVICS

Mapping NGOs in Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik has a very strong, but fragmented civil society. Thus, here is a need for a more unified stance on the civil scene of Dubrovnik especially when advocating policy changes, negotiating about spaces and funds with the local administration, strengthening their capacities and engaging a broader public in their programs. Therefore, the mapping of the NGOs in Dubrovnik became a very interesting theme to be explored and pursued because it would better their communication, networking, and resource sharing. At the same time, it would help the City administration to better understand the ecosystem of the civil society in their local community and as a result, help them in bringing more suitable policies and models. At the same time, the information about their activities and services would be more available to the local community.

To start the mapping process, an action plan was constructed with a strategic aim to establish an online map of NGOs in Dubrovnik. The action plan was divided into **four specific aims**. **The first one** was dealing with the **preparation of the mapping process** meaning establishing the team, identifying resources, methodology, and detecting the databases. It included the following activities: ULG preparation meeting, analysis of similar mapping cases, analysis of the strategic local documents, development of the online questionnaire,

and consultation with the mapping expert. **The second was data gathering and triangulation** with the following activities: withdrawing data from the State Registry of NGOs, contacting the Department of Education, Department of Culture, and Department of Urban Development to send in their data, withdrawing data from strategic documents and analysing and triangulating gathered data.

During the triangulation, two main criteria were used to consider an NGO active: their Statutes being in line with the changes in the Law on associations from 2013 and having an active presidency. During this first phase of analysis, three important conclusions were made. First, despite the State Registry showing around 500 “active” organisations in Dubrovnik, by applying the two criteria, the number has fallen to around 300. Secondly, the categories of the main fields of activity offered by the Registry (and copied in the data from the Departments) were too broad to have a coherent categorization system. Thirdly, going through the data and comparing it to the urban plans as well as visiting some of the sites, it was concluded that a significant number of them lack their own spaces, meaning that the registered headquarters were located at privately owned real estates or other locations which were not open to the public.



*Dubrovnik's civic map.
Image (c)
Platform for Lazareti*

The answer to these potential problems in mapping came from the “CIVICS project” introduced by the URBACT ad-hoc expert Miguel Jaenicke during the first international meeting of the “Active NGOs” project in Santa Pola in March of 2019. The project helped Dubrovnik mapping process in how to represent the NGOs on an online platform, which categories to use while summarising their main fields of activity and how to construct a useful online questionnaire to gather the data for the platform. The categorization of the fields of activity made after allowed us to get to the basic data which was not visible at first. So, it was concluded that the highest number of active NGOs in Dubrovnik belong to the three categories: sports, culture and arts and social and humanitarian efforts. Knowledge about how to construct an online questionnaire turned out to be a very important part of the mapping process since it was discovered that the large number of NGOs lack their own (publicly available) spaces. Because of that it wouldn't be possible to put the data onto any public map without consulting with them first.

The knowledge allowed us to continue to the third aim, and that is **gathering data** from the NGOs using an online questionnaire. The

questionnaire included questions similar to the one by the CIVIC project (address, contact information, short description, social media, and webpage, the main field of activity, and subfields). Concerning the discoveries made, it also included the ones which would help to describe the spatial resource they have. Those questions explored spatial and audience capacity, equipment and technical support in case they are willing to open their spaces for other NGOs under certain criteria and via certain contact information. The questionnaire was then sent to the members of the Platform for Lazareti to test it and reach other NGOs by using the snowball method. **The fourth** and final specific aim is to **upload data and finish the online NGO map** which will be finalized alongside the mapping process of public spaces and spaces of cultural institutions which could be used for organising various activities. These mapping efforts should help in solving the issue of spatial scarcity for the NGOs and their activities.

author:

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NGOs Dubrovnik and member
of Platform for Lazareti



How to develop a user-friendly Service Map of NGOs in Espoo?

On a sunny day in February 2019, we arrived at Santa Pola from the Espoo Municipality as members of the ACTive NGOs project. Instead of the cold and rainy weather in Finland, we immediately noticed the stunning scenery and the blue beach in Santa Pola. The Santa Pola members of ACTive NGOs projects were extremely friendly, helpful and pleasant.

We attended meetings and workshops to discuss about transfer plans at the local level. It was a crucial and valuable opportunity for us to learn from other cities in developing and improving cooperation models between NGOs and municipalities.

“The idea of co-development has been strengthened. These actively involved organisations and departments have realised the importance of learning by doing together” – says **Maria Tiilikkala**, NGO cooperation coordinator, City of Espoo.

A Transnational Meeting to address the challenges and find creative initiatives

In the Santa Pola workshop, we were impressed by the experiences and good practices among our partners across Europe – Riga (LV), Syracuse (IT), Santa Pola (ES), Dubrovnik (HR), Brighton and Hove (UK) and our city, Espoo (FI). Under the leadership of the lead expert – Levente Polyak, many

issues of NGO activities were addressed and discussed to find the solutions.

In Espoo, we had challenges in mapping, network building, communication between municipality and the NGOs. Although almost all NGOs and municipal workers are very active and play a key role in the civil society, there is lack of information on NGOs in Espoo. Among around 3000 NGOs, many organisations do not advertise their activities or get involved with the municipality. Many NGOs with immigrant background are often small, unofficial and voluntary-based. They are often disconnected from each other and the municipality that makes it complicated to build trust between different stakeholders. Due to the spatial fragmentation of the city's urban fabric, more knowledge of the whole local NGO scene is needed.

Therefore, the maps of the Los Madriles⁽¹⁾ project that was presented in Santa Pola made a great impression on us. The message of Los Madriles was amplified by Santa Pola, home to an active civil society that provided a great backdrop to discussing mapping methodologies. It was a wonderful idea to combine the physical map with a digital one: the graphic features of the map and its digital accessibility make Los Madriles very user-friendly.

1 See: <https://losmadriles.org/>



*Espoo ULG meeting
about the service
map.*

*Photo (c) Espoo
Municipality*

“In the modern setting of rapidly changing needs it is important to adjust to the society. NGOs have to exist in constant development and be engaged and connected with their target groups. From the Transnational Meeting in Santa Pola, I find the idea of having digital and physical communication balanced very reasonable and current. The Los Madriles project inspired both Santa Pola and Espoo. It is pleasing to see how strategy is merged into a physical manifestation” – says **Artem Kousti**, ULG member, representative of the Finnish Association of Russian Speaking Organisations (FARO).

How to bring city-to-city learning from across Europe?

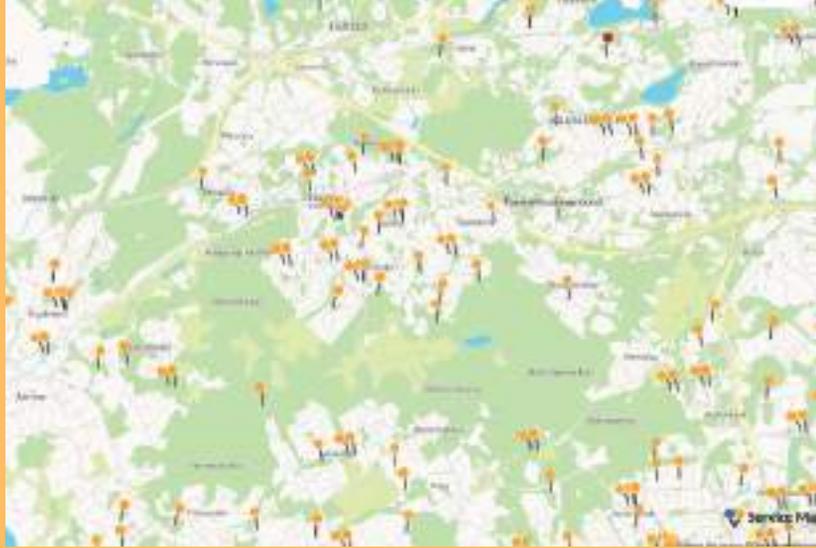
Learning new ideas based on an URBACT Good Practice is the starting point to improve the Espoo Municipality’s capacities within the ACTIVE NGOs project. The valuable idea of developing a map of NGO services was discussed in the Espoo URBACT Local Group (ULG) meeting, in March 2019. “Currently, the City of Espoo announces and promotes its services mainly through the Internet and magazines that

are sent to homes. Using an online map similar to Los Madriles could help us in implementing the good practice of Riga. The map would allow the residents in Espoo to have a better idea of what is happening in their own hometown. ACTIVE NGOs will help to push this idea forward,” says **Terhi Pippuri**, Senior Planning Officer in the Espoo Municipality.

“In the ULG meeting, we also realized that we are already collecting similar information about the work of associations digitally on Uusimaalaiset.fi, but without the map form. In the capital region of Finland, we already have a digital map of public services. It is called Service Map (Palvelukartta.fi). Therefore, at the ULG meeting we started discussing if it was possible to bring information about NGOs from Uusimaalaiset.fi to the Service Map through automatization between two different technical systems. In other words, would it be possible that when associations publish their information in Uusimaalaiset.fi, it would be automatically published also in the map service?” remembers **Ulla-Kaisa Pihlaja**, Planning Officer of Civic Action, EJY Ry.



*Espoo ULG meeting about
the service map.
Photo (c) Espoo
Municipality*



The strengths and challenges of the new Service Map development in Espoo

According to the sustainable development strategy of the Espoo Municipality, the city was looking for new initiatives to promote the development of different digital tools. Therefore, the City of Espoo offered funding to create the new Service Map as part of these new digital initiatives. A meeting between the City of Espoo, EJY and the City of Helsinki – the maintainer of the Service Map – was held to discuss the implementation of the digital map of NGOs in Espoo.

The purpose of the new Service Map is to create a user-friendly map of Espoo-based organisations. Based on a resident- and customer-oriented approach, the idea of the Service Map is to collect data and information from NGOs, the Uusimaalaiset.fi web service and turn them into visualisations on online platforms. The physical map is linked to the digital Service Map and the visualisation process is based on collaboration between different stakeholders such as citizens, NGOs and several municipal offices.

Nevertheless, the new digital Service Map of NGOs in Espoo has faced many challenges during its implementation. “The NGOs, both professional and volunteer-based, are very busy with their daily activities and all extra communications-related work needs to be explained well. Why is it useful for your association to publish information in some web portal? NGOs have also various skills in using different digital platforms, so user support needs to be available. Furthermore, the technical professionals and the NGO workers do not always speak the “same language”: technical solutions need to be explained in practice to the NGO members, but also the needs of the associations have to be communicated properly to technical developers,” explains Ulla-Kaisa Pihlaja.

In order to solve the problems of the new Service Map development, URBACT supported the learning journey of Espoo through a series of meetings and discussions. Based on their expertise and experience, the Lead Partner and the Lead Expert offered specific advice with the custom-made help to Espoo and the local stakeholder group.

Based on these advices, workshops about service design and digital experimentation were held in Espoo to achieve the goals of the Service Map. In the workshops, participants were part of a co-creative solution-finding exercise to test the new Service Map. With the intention of building on the many practical solutions proposed by the participants, the map service has been significantly improved. The synergies and cooperation between NGOs, municipalities, authorities and educational institutions has been highly valuable for the development of the Service Map.

After one year of development, the new Service Map of NGOs was announced at the ULG meeting in Espoo, in February 2020. The new online map <https://palvelukartta.hel.fi/en/> offers an easy way to find NGO activities, facilitate communication and increase the visibility of civic activities in Espoo. The digital platform is continuously improving its user interface and user experience to be more attractive, user-friendly, screen-responsive and privacy-secured.

“The new digital initiative of bringing information about NGOs into a map platform is piloting in 2020 in the Leppävaara area of Espoo. If the pilot is successful, it can be deployed in the whole of Espoo. Besides developing the technical solutions during the initiative, associations are also trained to publish their information on Uusimaalaiset.fi and user feedback about the Service Map is being gathered,” says Ulla-Kaisa Pihlaja.

Collaboration is the key of the transfer journey

Collaboration is the key to success for all organisations, especially for NGOs. Throughout a two-year journey, the collaboration of cities of the URBACT Transfer Network stretches over large distances and boundaries from across Europe. The Transferability Study is a crucial and valuable asset of the ACTIVE NGOs project that is inspired by the civic ecosystem model of Riga. With the help of exchanging knowledge and experience, the Good Practice serves as a great tool and solution for Espoo to engage its citizens and the non-governmental sector, and to support NGOs, social communities and movements for the development of the city.

Based on an idea born at the Transnational Meeting in Santa Pola, the Service Map of NGOs in Espoo is in operation. In the future, promoting the Map is an important step towards making the platform even better known among NGOs, city officials and citizens. The Service Map is built on synergies and cooperation between NGOs, municipalities and the broader URBACT Transfer Network. The elements of community involvement and capacity development of NGOs are valuable in our efforts towards an inclusive and collaborative future for Espoo.

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RIGA'S NGO DATABASE

The Riga NGO House aims at playing a central role in connecting different civic actors in Riga and across the country. Therefore, the NGO House organises networking events, which range from meetings between NGOs and municipal representatives to twinning events or discussions about cooperation networks and platforms.

In order to promote networking, the Riga NGO House needs an overview about the NGOs operating in the city. It has developed an NGO database that is being regularly updated. This database is used to distribute the Riga NGO House monthly newsletters to about 1000 addresses every month, summarising the topicalities of NGOs and the NGO House. The work on the NGO database started in September 2013, when the NGO House was opened. It was one of the crucial tasks of the newly established institution – to systematically collect information on those NGOs that would like to take part in the NGO House activities, to use its premises, to attend seminars at the NGO House and to receive information from the NGO House.

The NGO database contains the following information: name of the NGO, email address, phone number, the name of the legal representative or other contact person and additional notes, e.g. the website or other relevant information. It is being regularly updated in cooperation with the NGOs. The database is a spreadsheet (an Excel file).

However, there are a few problems. There are cases when the members of NGOs provide incorrect data; some people use their professional contact information, but forget to update their contact information, when they change jobs; some email addresses become inactive. In addition, the enrichment of the database with a geographical overview would help in making visible the neighbourhoods with the most active NGOs registered and operating. Adding information about the fields/thematic areas in which NGOs are working would also be a useful feature of the database.

Action Plan for an ecosystem mapping process

In the Improvement Plan of the Good Practice, Riga has planned several activities that will contribute to the ecosystem mapping process. Three activities of the strategic direction No 4 "Improvement of communication and promotion of NGO House" have a direct connection to the ecosystem mapping:

- 4.6. Organising an informative campaign to facilitate an exchange of information among NGOs and to update the NGO contact information;
- 4.2. Identification of NGO needs, topicalities and services provided by the NGOs; gathering feedback by conducting regular surveys and encouraging NGOs to provide suggestions.
- 4.5. Involvement of neighbourhood NGOs in the circulation of information, especially regarding the neighbourhood NGOs of Teika and Purvciems. Identification of NGOs and volunteers, who are interested in cooperation. Choosing the most appropriate communication channels and methods.

By implementing these activities the Riga NGO House updated the contact information of active NGOs and gained a deeper insight into their needs, topicalities, thematic areas and services provided by the NGOs. It also allowed receiving suggestions from the NGOs in order to improve the services of the NGO House. Moreover, new potential cooperation partners (NGOs and volunteers) in the neighbourhood were identified to expand the circulation of information.

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Learning from RIGA

Santa Pola's Database of Associations and NGOs

Santa Pola is a Mediterranean city located on the south-west coast of Spain. With more than 32,000 inhabitants, the municipality has a very active associative network, that has grown extremely fast in recent years, made up of approximately 200 organisations from all kinds of sectors and activities. Its plurality and extension reflect the participatory nature of citizens and their commitment to the challenges that the city is facing.

Despite this growth, a very large part of the municipality associations is unfortunately not active or do not have a significant impact on the community. Many of these inactive associations were formed years ago for a specific purpose or event, and once this activity carried out they remain registered in the database although they do not maintain any activity. A good example of this is the Moors and Christians Associations, that have a significant number of members but only meet once a year.

Another characteristic aspect of the associative ecosystem of Santa is that many associations are made up of just two or three people, with an elderly population profile, and without generating synergies with other associations with similar characteristics and purposes. These facts have made it difficult to define fluid and effective communication mechanisms between local administration and associations.

In recent years, the Santa Pola city council and the Local Development Agency have carried out multiple actions to strengthen existing NGOs, providing them with services and spaces to maximize their social impact. One of the most important stems precisely from the transfer and learning process of Active NGOs. In particular: the design and development of an updated association database to identify active associations.

This database constitutes a key element in the development of local policies to support associations. Without this updated and truthful information of the currently active stakeholders, it is not possible to establish an effective and fair policy, nor to define a fluid communication with them. At the same time, it is not possible to actively involve associations in local administration policies without previously knowing which ones are active and which do not have the capacity to operate in the community. Knowing the local reality of the Santa Pola associative network constitutes a challenge for the local administration that must undoubtedly be solved through the creation of this updated database.

Santa Pola's participation in the ActiveNGOs project has led to many learnings related to the management of associative spaces and the strengthening of local associations. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant has been the transfer process aimed at



^ La Senia in Santa Pola. Photo (cc) Eutropian

establishing an effective system to identify the active associations of Santa Pola. In the different transnational meetings, the professionals of the city council and the Local Development Agency have been able to observe how other cities established registration mechanisms for associations and stable communication instruments with them. This is the case of the Riga NGO House, the good practice of the Active NGO project.

The Riga NGO House has a database of active city associations, with up-to-date information on their activities, goals and contact details. This database constitutes a key element of association management and one of the most important sources for establishing an effective communication strategy between local administration and associations.

The Riga NGO database started in September 2013, when the Riga's NGO House was opened. It was one of the crucial tasks of the newly established institution to systematically collect information on those NGOs that would like to take part in the NGO House activities. The database is created on a voluntary basis including more than 1000 contacts.

In this regard, the main lessons learned from the Riga experience are:

- **Database structure** with the following information: name of the NGO, email address, phone number, the name of the legal representative or other contact person and additional notes, e.g. the website or other relevant information. The database is structured around an Excel file.



^ *Associative Network Meeting in Santa Pola (cc) Eutropian*

- **Communication use of the Database:** Distribution of the Riga NGO House news about upcoming events, actual information in the NGO sector, NGO House monthly newsletters, project proposals, etc.
- **Updating methodology:** the database is being regularly updated in cooperation with the NGOs via emails and direct contacts. Within the framework of the ACTive NGOs project, Riga started a more ambitious process of updating and supplementing the database. They ask the NGOs to fill in a questionnaire, specifying the contact details, the responsible officials and, in addition, the area or areas in which the organisation operates.

From Santa Pola's point of view, the main learning does not lie in the technical details of the database or in the mechanisms that the city of Riga has established to obtain updated information from the associations. Santa Pola's learning focuses on the process of awareness, on the recognition that it is not possible to articulate an effective strategy

to support associations without having a reliable overview of the association's reality. In this sense, the ActiveNGOs project has been key to promoting the development of this updated database and register system in Santa Pola.

Beyond this aspect, another of Santa Pola's main challenges is to keep the database updated (email, telephone, contact person) and to have a standardized methodology to carry out this process. This lack of updated information is an important barrier to maintaining fluid communication between our NGO Houses and entities, in particular to inform them of activities, training, etc.

But how this policy has been transferred and adapted from Riga to Santa Pola? The first step was the convening of an internal coordination meeting between the City Council, the professionals of the Local Development Agency and the representatives of the main NGO Houses of Santa Pola (Centro Civico and La Senia). This meeting was essential to highlight the importance of the project, define the

methodology to be implemented and to join efforts from all parties to get it started. After the initial meeting, the interest in carrying out the update of active associations was transferred to the URBACT Local Group and the work methodology was explained.

The work methodology has focused on five main steps.

In first place, a technical check of the current database has been carried out. The main stakeholders who work every day with the associations and in the NGO Houses have analyzed the existing registers and carried out a first filtering of which are active, and which are not. Subsequently, this information has been contrasted with information from the public records of the province of Alicante.

Once this done, the structure and basic content of the new database have been defined. This structure contains basic information on associations as name, address, e-mail and phone number.

Third, two large face-to-face events have been scheduled for all the associations currently in the registry. The objective of these events is to explain the project to NGOs, to identify new potentially active associations, and to present an online questionnaire to be sent to each association to update its information. The associations that answer this questionnaire will be considered active.

Once the Database updated, another key pilot activity will be carried out that will allow us to fulfill the objectives and purposes of the ACTive NGOs project in Santa Pola. A meeting will be held to publicize the phase of "Accreditation of

Active Associations" in recognition of the Santa Pola City Council to all local NGOs and Associations in the municipality that meet a series of minimum requirements, such as: having updated and sent the data form to the City Council, demonstrate in a brief memory the latest actions carried out and the number of people participating, their objectives, etc.

Finally, after the submission of the applications by the associations, we will deliver the accreditations on the day of the Final Event of the Project. This event will take place in an emblematic place such as the Castillo-Fortaleza de Santa Pola, and all the associations participating in the ACTiveNGOs project will be summoned. These associations accredited with the seal of "Active Associations" will have preference in the municipal subsidies and grants that are approved, as well as in the reserve of Public Municipal Spaces

To conclude, this transfer process that has started in Santa Pola could not have been carried out without the active participation of the city in the Active NGO project and, in particular, without the support and inspiring example of the city of Riga and the rest of the partners. The Active NGO has represented for the local administration of Santa Pola a trigger for change and an undeniable impulse to develop new public policies that respond to the urban challenges of the Santa Pola association network.

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Mapping the Darsena

In search of visions, lost and found

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Many urban regeneration schemes focus on architectural interventions or masterplans that aim to transform the social fabric of an area through shaping its built environment. However, if physical sustainability lies in the reuse of existing buildings, social sustainability builds on the ideas, visions and narratives that are already in place. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the hopes, efforts and imagination related to the transformation of an area. This is why the Urban Innovative Actions-funded project DARE⁽¹⁾, aiming at the regeneration of Ravenna's Darsena area with the help of a co-created digital environment, begins with a careful exploration of practices, projects and policies that exist in the territory. This exploration helps in identifying the main themes, ideas and concerns that the Ravennati have projected onto the Darsena, and that serve as a basis for the area's urban regeneration. In this article to accompany the project, UIA expert Levente Polyak takes a close look at the mapping process designed by the organisation KCity and its partners and examines how this operation can constitute the basis of further development.

The transformation of Ravenna's Darsena area has been on the city's agenda for decades. However, most efforts to regenerate the neighbourhoods along the Candiano Canal, the waterway leading from the city centre to the Adriatic sea, have been focusing on improving the architectural aspects of this district through architectural competitions and grandiose development plans. While most of these schemes failed to bring about the desired impact on the territory, the project DARE started from very different assumptions.



Storytelling event at Darsena Pop Up.
Photo (cc) Eutropian



The most important riches of a territory, before its economic assets, urbanistic features and architectural values, are its people: residents who inhabit an area or those who work, spend their leisure time and bring their ideas there. For a development project to cater for the inhabitants and users of an area, it is not enough to match their expectations but to build on the ideas, visions, narratives that are already there.

If physical sustainability lies in the reuse of existing buildings, spaces and materials by reformulating them to create a continuity in the urban form, social sustainability builds on a convergence of hopes, efforts and imagination related to the transformation of an area. This is why DARE begins with a careful exploration of practices, projects and policies that exist in the territory and that help identify the main themes, ideas and concerns that the Ravennati have projected onto the Darsena, and that serve as a basis for the urban regeneration of the area. This information adds to the data collection process that is at the core of DARE: by building a new knowledge infrastructure and digital environment around the Darsena, the project will explore features and trends in the district's evolution and will share them among decision-makers, local businesses, residents and active communities around

the Darsena. *"Data can have plenty of formats and sources and their collection is not just a digital matter,"* reminds me Emanuela Medeghini, project manager of DARE.

The task of mapping initiatives in the Darsena is carried out by Multilab, a temporary association of enterprises led by KCity⁽²⁾ and composed by Nomisma⁽³⁾, Labsus⁽⁴⁾ and Politecnica.⁽⁵⁾ KCity is a Milan-based company with a decade-long history in managing and designing urban regeneration processes. It has been working on regeneration projects across Italy, mainly with public administrations and third sector entities, but with an increasing interest by private property owners. The organisation tends to deal with urban voids, meaning *"spaces, be they abandoned, disused or underused, with chances to be reused if we can build reuse strategies or imagine for them new forms of uses,"* explained to me KCity's project manager Dario Domante during an online interview organised to discuss the methodology behind the mapping process.

1 <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/ravenna>

2 <https://www.kcity.it/en/>

3 <https://www.nomisma.it/>

4 <https://www.labsus.org/>

5 <https://www.politecnica.it/>

Map of practices.
Image (c) MultiLab



The analysis conducted by MultiLab in this first phase of the DARE project is based on a methodology developed by KCity through a series of experiences in other territorial contexts and is rooted in the concept of strategic incrementalism. This concept refers to an idea of urban transformation done gradually, with successive steps anchored to a long-term strategy that directs these steps while also being shaped by them. Strategic incrementalism goes beyond the concept of “temporary use” that has become very popular in European cities in the 2010s. *“We don’t really like to talk about temporariness, we rather talk about transience, imagining that the same activities that define the initial steps of a reuse process can also inform the long-term strategy,”* underlines Domante. According to this incremental approach, the contribution of local stakeholders is decisive and fundamental: the process begins with an analysis of the territory that helps in identifying development potentials and tries to leverage local resources and energies in order to set the first steps of the urban regeneration strategy.

The **mapping methodology** developed by KCity follows a process that includes a variety of research layers. Mapping begins with a **desk analysis**, an online consultation of websites, newspapers and other media, development plans of the local administrations and public-civic collaboration agreements in the area. The information collected from the desk analysis allows the consortium to frame the elements that characterize the territory. To complement the desktop analysis, researchers also look for informal practices that can only be collected by direct observation. Domante gives an example: *“we take a walk and explore the area to find informal activities like fishermen who habitually go to the Candiano Canal to fish.”* The analysis continues with **interviews**: researchers exchange with a series of people who are active in the area and carry out initiatives locally. *“We realised a mapping of actors who have, over time, presented projects for the Darsena,”* explains Ottavia Starace, another member of the KCity team

who works in DARE. Information based on the interviews enables the researchers to establish the broader cognitive framework in which to position the individual activities explored. The first step is to understand what happens in the area and what kind of relationships are established between these initiatives and the surrounding space. *“We try to understand what are the themes dealt with specifically by the initiatives, as the goal of mapping is to try and transform these practices into themes that can be useful for the design activity that will follow,”* clarifies Domante. The mapping of initiatives, past and present, includes the exploration of economic and human resources that enable these initiatives to be transformed into concrete actions.

The next step of the analysis is to **categorise** all the data in macro-themes: practices, projects and policies. In this categorisation, practices refer to concrete (formal and informal) uses and reuses (events, meetings, care actions, social animation activities and various forms of using the urban space) taking place in the area. Projects, in turn, are ideas and project proposals that have emerged over time for the reuse and enhancement of the district (e.g. action plans, theses, project proposals, etc..), not necessarily linked to formal development strategies defined for the neighbourhood by the competent bodies. Lastly, policies refer to strategies, sectoral regulations and development schemes included in the municipal plans or strategic guidelines adopted by the local administrations. The last step of this preliminary research is to look for the **commonalities** among the various activities mapped in the territory. *“Thanks to this mapping we have identified a number of recurring themes, including art and culture, work and economy, hospitality*

and living, sociability and proximity, sport and physical activities, environmental sustainability, water and infrastructure,” concludes Starace. This division in macro-themes also permits to associate stakeholders with each other in order to stimulate networking and partnership in the regeneration process of the area. Mapping the practices, projects and policies developed in and for the area allows the DARE consortium to detect the interests that the Darsena has attracted and the expectations that its protagonists have raised. This mapping goes beyond the present state of affairs in the area: extended to the past decades, the mapping process includes initiatives *“that are no longer current, but which at least lead us to questions to which some practices in the area have tried to construct answers,”* justifies Domante.

For a better overview of the findings, the practices, projects and policies identified during the research have been placed on a series of **maps**, together with their initiators and other key subjects in the area. Besides these maps, the practices, projects and policies identified throughout the analysis have also been visualised in a set of **diagrams**, helping to comprehend better the nature of these initiatives and recognise the connections between them. Such a perspective offers a comprehensive overview of the Darsena area: it allows users to see all the selected elements at their geographical locations, filtered through the different layers of categories and macro-themes, with the objective of *“understanding what the key issues of the area are and at the same time understanding what local actors are present,”* explains Domante. These findings were shared during a

workshop in November 2020 where partners of the DARE consortium were invited to reflect together on the results of the mapping process and add their own references to the map, indicating if some key practices, projects, policies or actors are missing from the collection. To help joint work, the practices, projects and policies identified during this research have also been georeferenced and simply placed onto Google's MyMaps platform with an information sheet linked to each of them, allowing other partners of the DARE consortium to work with this data and develop their own interpretations.

Reflections on the categorisation of practices, projects and policies raised the issue of transversality. As Medeghini pointed out, *“categorisation is a useful trick to seize complexity and conceive the big picture. But as our trajectory goes towards integration, multi-purpose projects and long-term processes based on cross-sectoral collaboration, we have to be careful not to be trapped in categories.”*

The insights of consortium partners led to an agreement that some of the themes initially identified as independent, like environment and sustainability or water and infrastructure, are actually transversal to the development strategies that are implemented in the area: *“most practices that focus on the themes of sociability or green spaces, environmental sustainability, do also integrate the themes of culture and arts, as well as the reuse of spaces to generate proximity services,”* concluded Medeghini.

Supported by a scenario analysis conducted by DARE partner Nomisma, based on demographic and economic data, the goal of this process is to **transform the mapping of the territory into planning perspectives** and turn the key issues into possible planning directions for the regeneration of the area. Based on the refined set of macro-themes (*art and culture, work and economy, hospitality and living, sociability and proximity, sport and physical activities*) and transversal themes (*environmental sustainability, water and connections*), KCity has developed **three design thrusts or guidelines** that Domante describes as *“guiding ideas for building the tactics for the urban regeneration of the neighbourhood.”* These speculative guidelines – *Darsena Laboratory* (for innovative solutions based on current trends), *Multifunctional Darsena* (for a functionally integrated neighbourhood around the Darsena) and *Adaptive Darsena* (for services responding to the Covid crisis) – serve as a basis for future-oriented critical reflections.

In the next phase of the project, these **guidelines are refined** during a co-planning operation with local actors, selected through a **second stakeholder mapping** process. This mapping process is based on a participatory methodology that aims to identify local stakeholders with whom to try and build a relationship aimed at defining collaborative projects. During this phase, a dialogue is organised with key local actors of the projects that have been mapped. The main goal of this phase is to define, based on all the themes previously identified, three tactics with an integrated value that could affect the territory and fit the community's needs while being, as Domante envisions, *“capable of maximising the contribution of the territory's resources.”*

The guidelines will be cross-checked with a variety of data and information collected from different sources and treated within the DARE digital platform; such data will also serve at a later stage to assess the impact of projects on the local environment. The DARE project has designed a road-map including the identification of more possible tactical approaches and themes and an open call for project ideas. Based on the reactions of the stakeholders and community members, such “themes” will become possible “tactics,” or sets of integrated projects. Citizens will be called to select their preferred tactic with the help of an e-democracy exercise. In these phases, the role of the municipality, supported by the consortium’s Process organiserS Team (POST), will be to guide and support organisations and citizens in developing collaborative projects. Later on, the “winning” tactic will be elaborated further, with the help of various expertise, towards its implementation.

In contrast with previous attempts to revitalise the Darsena, these initiatives will not necessarily translate into architectural forms. Despite its long duration and broad outreach, the results of this process are not carved in stone and its design lines are not immutable. As Medeghini reminds me during an online coordination meeting, the mapping operation and the development of proposals will “*progressively intersect with the data collection and sharing operation, and the themes will be further developed in the light of new data assembled also with the help of the future digital platform*” that DARE’s developing.

For this is the essence of the incremental model: reanimating the Darsena’s imagination, based on mapping practices, projects, policies, and bringing together local actors to develop proposals is but one of the several, mutually enriching threads of the DARE project. It is with a multitude of different actors and competences, that these threads are woven together in the project’s tissue, constituting a more complex vision of the Darsena, connected with the neighbourhood’s needs and aspirations through many strings.

*The waterfront
of the Candiano
Canal. Photo (cc)
Eutropian*



The logo for SUPER Festival in Milan features a stylized orange 'S' shape on the left, composed of two curved lines. To its right, the word 'SUPER' is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, followed by 'Festival in Milan' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.

SUPER Festival in Milan

Festival as exploration

author:

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“Super, the festival of peripheries” was started in Milan in 2015 by an interdisciplinary group of professionals. The event was initially conceived to create a more accurate, diverse and complex overview of the city’s outer neighbourhoods by reporting experiences of active citizens and entities, as well as stories about the daily life of those territories. Beyond this overview, Super also reimagined simple forms of action to initiate a process of communication, networking and cross-fertilization among civic initiatives that still keep on bringing innovation in the life of the Milan area.

Milan, April 2020. In full lockdown, in a city where you cannot leave your home unless risking to incur heavy fines, a webradio starts streaming eight episodes of a brand new broadcast reporting the life in public housing buildings during the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews, columns and activities tell about and address those who live in those neighbourhoods. A spotlight on their humanity, with stories and experiences of mutual help that have developed there during this period of emergency, far from the media attention. The transmission collects a growing number of contributions by inhabitants, artists, associations, bookshops and other organisations from all over the city. A month later, with the city getting slowly out of the quarantine, the city hosts “Milan takes a new tour,” a day of mobilisation to demand the local administration to do everything in its power to make Milano a bicycle-friendly city. 80 organisations, among them associations, cooperatives and other third sector entities, foundations and research agencies, bike kitchen, shops and citizens groups, join the rally.

These two initiatives listed above, albeit very different, have one thing in common: they have been both promoted by the group animating “Super, the Festival of peripheries.” This fact offers at first sight a hint of the festival’s particularity: from the beginning, Super has been working with different formats of initiatives and created unprecedented collaboration networks – in regard to the diversity of their components – in order to engage and sensitise the civil society at every level. But to understand Super better, it is necessary to go back to its starting point and trace back its origins.

1 <https://iosonosuper.com/>

Back in 2015: the “showcase” city

Super was first conceived in 2015, which was a very special year for Milan: on 1 May, the World EXPO Milano 2015 finally opened. Its preparation had taken long: seven years, marked out by huge delays, which motivated the entrustment of exceptional powers to EXPO managers by the central government, and led to arrests and denunciations due to alleged abuses of this authority. At the administrative level, Milan had been led since 2011 by Giuliano Pisapia and the first progressive, left-wing council after decades. Its government agenda though, once chose to confirm the EXPO, had to undergo a profound change. The municipal coffers had been left empty by the previous council, and all the funds made available by the central

and regional governments had to cover unpostponable expenses for the completion of infrastructures and major works for the long-awaited global event. The 11 million tourists who visited Milan for the year of the EXPO strolled in a new district set to shine, a huge showcase for the city that has been experiencing a tourist renaissance since 2015, becoming the second destination in Italy by number of visits.

Beyond this “showcase,” however, lied the real city: neighbourhoods that, to varying degrees, concentrated uneasy situations, and which increasingly suffered from lower investments of the administration’s resources. During the autumn and winter of 2014, mainstream media communication was presenting the Milanese suburbs as abandoned to drug dealing and crime,

Bicycle Flashmob. Photo (c) Filippo Romano ▼



Festival catalogue.
Photo (c) Super Festival
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taken hostage by immigrants and illegal occupations. The Italian archistar Renzo Piano, newly elected as a life senator of the Italian Republic, compared Italian suburbs to “deserts” and “dormitories,” and demanded a gigantic darning and mending operation which had to connect these territories to city centres. His words were cited by all the more important Italian newspapers and TVs, enhancing their distorted portrait of peripheries.

In this setting, a group of different professionals gathered around Federica Verona, the first initiator of the Super festival, and began to discuss and question this trend. They all shared an interest in the peripheries and agreed that local and national media were adopting a toxic narrative to describe them, which did not depict the reality that the suburban neighbourhoods truly lived. The group therefore decided to launch a collective, non-profit project to provide more faithful insights of these contexts. To do so, they agreed on two key objectives:

- to explore people and organisations whose resources and skills help activate original and innovative projects in these areas of the city, far from the centre and its stable / sedimented / institutionalized systems;

- to focus as much as possible on social processes, on personal stories and on organisations capable of awakening and activating the resources that generate these changes.

Knowledge requires time: the idea of a “slow” festival

This is the origin of Super, the Festival of Peripheries: its name comes from the combination of two simple preposition, “su” and “per” - which in Italian language correspond to *on* and *to* - which convey the idea of a thematic project (*on* peripheries) with a specific goal (*to* spread insights and reflections coming from the suburbs). The Super group was driven by intellectual curiosity and civil passion, which aimed at rousing the same interest of those who did not know these territories: a large part of the Milanese population. Super then adopted the “familiar” format of a festival, in order to be more appealing for the media and for Milanese people, and at the same time to be free and flexible to develop its actions, hosting events and projects accordingly with the evolving knowledge of peripheral *milieux*.

From the beginning, it has been evident that Super required dedication and time, as its essence laid on the construction of

personal bond among interviewers and the people telling their own experiences. Time was even more a key resource to the project: there was a big need for it, in order to be able to slow down and really listen, leaving behind all clichés and simplifications. The concept of the festival was, therefore, folded, and released from its commercial, fast-consumption imaginary.

Super was conceived as a “slow” festival – it was supposed to last a year, but went on and on. As a first step, a sequence of tours was planned in the various suburbs. More than just walks, the tours were most of all neighbourhood visits to meet with essential actors, people active in different groups animating that territory. These multiple interviews (6-7 for each tour) were always accompanied by photographic and video documentation of the territorial contexts. Each tour played the role of a narrative unit of the exploration of the suburbs: a montage of all the visual documentation and interviews fed into a collective diary, which was published periodically on the Super website and on its main communication channels. The communication of the tours followed three different lines:

- a real time narration, with images and short texts documenting the different encounters we had during each tour on our Facebook page⁽²⁾ and twitter;
- a more diffuse presentation of the specific context of each neighbourhood, which we committed ourselves to provide soon after each visit on our website⁽³⁾ by assembling extensive reports of the talk we had with local initiatives;
- a more-in-depth analysis, which took advantage of the audio and video recordings of every talk we had.

In this process, Super collected a very rich digital archive, which was the starting point for a number of different research projects, focusing on specific topics (urban production of food through gardening and agricultural projects, the relation of traditional and digital craftsmanship in the city, informal use of public space). We set up a database containing each initiatives' contact person, transcriptions of the interviews, images and videos. We were not truly aware of the amount of data we were about to collect, so as the research material was getting bigger and bigger, we decided to publish new tools to help orientate in this complexity: first, we released a public map⁽⁴⁾ of the citizen initiatives we met, that was meant to facilitate contacts among different actors of the city, and later Nicola Dattomo and Gianmaria Sforza developed an smartphone app, ATPER (ATlante PERiferico)⁽⁵⁾ which was conceived as an exploration tool for people crossing the city and willing to get in touch with the reality Super had mapped. The result integrated superficial glances and in-depth readings, provided by those who had lived and been active in these territories for years.

Life in hoods: variable geometries

From December 2015 to July 2017, Super carried out 24 tours in the outer neighbourhoods of Milan, contacting more than 250 local stakeholders to organise meetings and interviewing more than 160 of them. The spectrum of interviews was very broad: informal groups, associations,

2 <https://www.facebook.com/superilfestivaldelleperiferie>

3 <http://iosonosuper.com/tour>

4 <http://iosonosuper.com/super-map>

5 <https://www.atlanteperiferico.com/>

small enterprises, schools, cooperatives and other entities of the third sector involved in different fields (culture, social services, education, housing, entertainment). Some of them were selected for specific aspects of their activity: food production, redevelopment of spaces / activation of networks, ecology and sustainability, professions and new economies, managing social problems, offering culture and training. Others came into our scope indirectly: the contact with a local active group naturally brought suggestions, and it widened our gaze even further. In areas where associations were weaker, for instance, we were often shown shops and commercial activities as animators of the neighbourhood and social hubs to encounter. In other cases, the presence of neighbourhood networks and coordination allowed us to recognise important actors even in subjects that would otherwise have remained hidden.

The tours provided a particular and original image of each neighbourhood and its life, which were very far from the narratives that had been made of these areas up to that point. Super's first result was to offer fresh looks and unreleased points of view, enhancing experiences which often risked to be overlooked in a layered and complex city. The stories of the actors that we collected during the festival enriched us, revealing that proximity – to communities and territories – was a fundamental prerequisite to frame, prevent or respond to problems arising in the neighbourhoods themselves. The portraits Super provided for the twenty-four neighbourhoods cannot be estimated as exhaustive though: the interviews just covered a part of the active citizen initiatives in each area, selected according to indicators and our sensitivity,

and corresponding to an extremely precise period (2015–2017). The territories, communities and individuals who have inhabited them in the last three years have undoubtedly expressed new needs and desires; consequently, the overall picture has already changed. The experience of the pandemic and the lockdown, which has closed people in their homes for two months in Spring 2020, will certainly have accelerated some of these dynamics and will have given rise to others that we still cannot foresee.

Peripheries as civic innovation *milieux*

The emergence of extremely rich and diverse experiences has made it possible to recognise the peripheries – those of Milan as much as others in the world – as natural laboratories for innovation open to the future, a condition often ignored by local and national policies. In the case of Milan, this was partly due to the coexistence of more historical citizen initiatives born in the 1980s and 1990s, and a number of new ones set in motion by expectations of the EXPO and further supported by the rise of a centre-left administration. During the tours it appeared very clear that while in a few neighbourhoods there was some sort of coordination between old and new actors of civic engagement, in others there was little inclination for these initiatives to bond together, with almost no network activity at the city level.

Super had the chance to focus on this problem and take it as an opportunity to expand the movement of citizen initiatives: exploring the Milanese peripheries created the conditions to construct local networks of debate, collaboration and exchange among different actors, connected either

*Bike tour around the Milanese periphery.
Photo (c) Super Festival*



welcoming people from all over the city and raising awareness about the real life of the peripheries.

In the last three years, we have been pleased to observe the rise of innovative experimentations based on the involvement of civic initiatives and NGOs in inclusive platforms launched by the local administration and other public and private institutions. It is undoubtedly the effect of general trends in urban policies at the Italian and European levels, but we think that our initiative has also had a role in it. Some of these new platforms have played a fundamental role in organising support and solidarity toward thousands of families who, during the lockdown, experienced situations of extreme difficulty and, thanks to these networks, received food parcels or direct economic support. In most of the neighbourhoods, however, further forms of self-organisation and coordination responded to needs that the most institutional networks were unable to satisfy. This proves once again the centrality and generativity of the territories

in producing action for potential change and improvement of the conditions of the communities. This is the reason why Super's research mission has not lost its relevance, on the contrary: we generally register a higher sensitivity among public and private stakeholders toward local civic ecosystems. In two cases already, we have been invited to help, facilitate and enhance new processes of exchange, connection and matchmaking of needs and desires among important urban actors and the neighbourhoods they operate in. It is something we could not have even imagined during our first years of exploration, when our methodology and our interests in these small and peripheral civic actors were still completely unusual: nevertheless, it is something the city, its communities and its citizens will benefit from, and we are glad that we have played a role in this process.

Mapping Priority Areas

How mapping deprived neighbourhoods in Lisbon became an opportunity to identify priority intervention areas of the city

author:

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Network Com.Unity.Lab

Lisbon's BIP/ZIP⁽¹⁾ strategy aims to promote social and territorial cohesion, active citizenship, self-organisation and community participation. Mapping socio-economic conditions across the city is a key element of the strategy, allowing policymakers and social operators to identify priority neighbourhoods where additional attention and investment is needed. Based on the experience developed over the past ten years in Lisbon, the BIP/ZIP programme⁽²⁾ is currently at the basis of the URBACT Transfer Network Com.Unity.Lab⁽³⁾ that aims at sharing this knowledge with other cities across Europe.

1 <http://bipzip.cm-lisboa.pt/>

2 <https://cooperativecity.org/2017/05/07/bipzip/>

3 <https://urbact.eu/comunitylab>



*BIP/ZIP intervention area
in Lisbon.*

Photo (cc) Eutropian





BIP/ZIP mapping indicators (c) BIP/ZIP



The Portuguese capital counts approximately 500,000 inhabitants and was, up until the pandemic crisis, characterised by a growing economy, particularly in terms of IT sector and tourism, yet the economic resources have not been equally distributed amongst the population, especially after the socio-economic changes resulting from the economic crisis in 2007-2008.

At the time of the economic crisis, the municipal elections were won by a coalition led by the Socialist Party, which is still ruling today at its third mandate. Within such a political context, the Housing and Local Development Department of the City of Lisbon is led by a citizens' movement that initiated the so-called BIP/ZIP program to address urban poverty in priority neighbourhoods.

The area-based approach is the basis of the BIP/ZIP strategy also because the spatial dimension stands as the core mission of the department promoting the policy. The main building typologies identified within priority neighbourhoods are social housing, uncomplete cooperative housing built under the national program in the

1970s, and historical neighbourhoods. All these neighbourhoods present comparable aspects in terms of high unemployment rate, insecurity, urban hygiene, lack of services, poor accessibility. The BIP/ZIP strategy comprises four tools: a map of the priority neighbourhoods and areas, a grant system for local NGOs, the GABIP local task-forces to support co-governance during regeneration processes and a collaborative platform bringing local stakeholders together.

Hereby we focus on the use of the mapping process which was developed as a cognitive basis for the entire BIP/ZIP strategy.

Aside of identifying the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city of Lisbon, the map served as an opportunity to engage local citizens in thinking about the priorities in their neighbourhoods.

Ambitions of the mapping

This BIP/ZIP strategy aims to promote social and territorial cohesion, active citizenship, self-organisation and community participation. The city of Lisbon, as any city in the world, is not always in balance

throughout its territory, as there are fractures due to many issues. Therefore the main concept in 2010 was to identify areas, neighbourhoods that were lacking the minimal levels of cohesion in terms of urban, social economic, and environmental conditions, lacking connection between the voices of the local citizens and the local authorities.

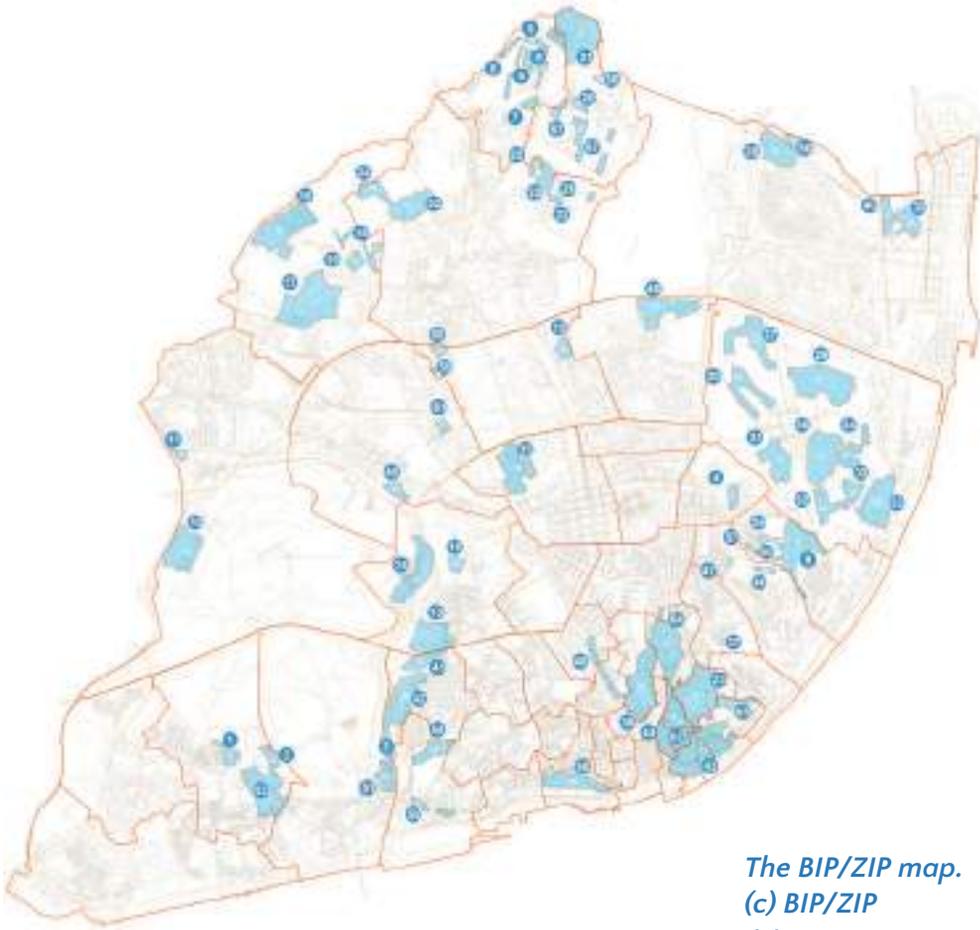
Statistical data

The map initially integrated data from different sources (such as census data as well as information from the social services and tax offices) that are very detailed, using the basic unit of a housing block.

The city collected statistical information about social, economic, urban and environmental factors to see which areas were the most deprived in the city and surveyed these areas; identified and mapped the city's social and territorial fractures. This kind of mapping was a first in the city and in the country: a truly innovative concept in 2009-2010, using a scientific and mathematical approach to identify the real problems of the city and its citizens. The mapping used national census data (that is generated once in every 10 years) and other municipal and government data that is more recent. The city crossed many datasets and maps in order to understand social and territorial dynamics.

∨ *BIP/ZIP Intervention Area in Lisbon. Photo (cc) Eutropian*





The BIP/ZIP map.
 (c) BIP/ZIP
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Participatory approach

The integration of the different datasets resulted in a map which was then enriched by qualitative data coming from inhabitants through a survey delivered with the support of local NGOs. Participation is another benchmark of this process: Housing and Local Development Department staff discussed these findings in a very intense public consultation with the participation of all kinds of stakeholders. Public officers worked closely with the selected areas and connected the people active there

to local authorities and organisations. Through public consulting and surveys, the department received feedback about the local perception of the social, economic and environmental issues they mapped: this helped them refine the programme's priorities. As they identified the BIP/ZIP areas, they gave the areas flexible definitions, because it is not easy to give a neighbourhood a boundary: a neighbourhood is a culturally, historically and administratively defined area, a dynamic concept.

Mapping results

The BIP/ZIP map is a municipal political instrument with 67 neighbourhoods all over the city, not only in the peripheral areas, but also in the historical centre. The City identified problems of cohesion and deprivation or issues of elderly people with limited mobility both in the hills, and in downtown areas. In terms of the whole city, if you add up all these areas, there is approximately a third of the city's population living in deprived or BIP/ZIP areas. There are in fact 150,000 inhabitants living in BIP/ZIP areas, covering 8% of the city's territory. This is a problem that generates an immense opportunity for the city, as the BIP/ZIP results in these past few years have demonstrated, so it is important to empower the stakeholders in the community and to reinforce partnerships, networks, informal connections that help these communities to have an active role in their city.

The map comprises a variety of sizes and typologies of areas and neighbourhoods. There are in fact illegal urban settlements, social housing and cooperative housing complexes as well as historical neighbourhoods in the map. Each typology presents some common characteristics but the BIP/ZIP map has an in depth analysis of the local needs of each specific BIP/ZIP area.

The map is included in the Urban Development Plan of the City of Lisbon, therefore supporting the decision-making process over the future of the city not only for the Department promoting it but for all the city administration. The map was developed with in-house human resources of the Municipality who gathered the data from the different public authorities, created the GIS map and ultimately

provided a technical analysis of the data. An important aspect was the semantics: by calling the neighbourhoods "priority" rather than "disadvantaged", there was more local and political support in getting the neighbourhoods mapped. The combination of these elements ultimately resulted in a strong participation of the BIP/ZIP map, even more than for consultations related to the masterplan.

Conclusions

The process of mapping obviously does not resolve the structural problems at the heart of the territorial inequalities in a city. Yet it is a way to put the focus, also from a political point of view, on an aspect which might not have been taken into consideration previously. Furthermore, it is a means to monitor poverty trends in the city, whether it is increasing or declining, to observe transforming areas of the city, and changes in the types of people affected. In fact, especially as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, it is expected that the poverty patterns in the city will change, with an important rise in the number of people under the poverty line. Before the BIP/ZIP map, poverty was more stigmatised in the city, but changing its narrative into calling poor neighbourhoods priority areas in which to intervene, changed completely the perception. This was possible because the mapping involved a participatory consultation of the targeted neighbourhoods, in order to include also qualitative data concerning the strengths and needs of the territory. If the mapping process is not only a technical exercise but a knowledge basis to take action upon, it can be a means of empowerment.





chapter 2

Cultivating civic ecosystems

RIGA's Cooperation Framework

The significant presence of NGOs in Riga has prompted the Municipality to engage civil organisations in a variety of ways. The URBACT Good Practice NGO House, giving the point of departure of the ACTIVE NGOs Network, is situated in a broader framework of public-civic cooperation with a specific focus on social integration. In the past decade, a variety of consultative bodies, advisory boards and working groups have been established within the Riga City Council, with an important role

in the development of specific policies and programmes for the municipality. The Advisory Board of NGOs for Persons with Disability was founded in 2007. The **Advisory Board on Society Integration Issues** has been operating since 2010, and includes representative deputies in Riga municipality, representatives of NGOs (selected for three years) and employees of different departments of Riga city council: through regular open meetings, they work on various issues around integration.

Citizens Forum in Riga 



In 2010, the Riga City Council established its Society Integration Division (within the Education, Culture and Sports Department) that gave a new momentum for policies of cooperation and citizen involvement. In November 2013, the Chairman of Riga City Council and Riga-based NGOs signed a renewed **Memorandum of Cooperation** between Riga City Municipality and civil society organisations in order to facilitate public-civic cooperation and to ensure the effective participation of NGOs in the decision-making process. The memorandum, signed by the mayor and 208 NGOs since its creation, aims at promoting citizen engagement and active participation in decision-making processes by developing a permanent partnership between local government and NGOs.

The municipality's memorandum of cooperation with NGOs signals the ambition on both sides to work together on certain issues. This memorandum also provides **guidelines to NGOs about which department to address** with specific issues: organisations working on environmental topics should connect to the Department of Environment, initiatives related to housing are referred to the Housing Department, while education and participation themes belong to the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. An electronic system allows the signatories of the memorandum to **access council decisions and related databases**: Active NGOs that are willing to engage with the life of the municipality can thus follow the council meetings, participate at them

upon prior application, and make proposals.

On January 20, 2021, the Riga City Council approved the Regulations of the Council for the Implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation between Riga City Municipality and civil society organisations. The Council has been created with the aim to achieve the goals of the Memorandum of Cooperation between Riga City Municipality and non-governmental organisations. The Council will consist of the Chairman of the Riga City Council, seven chairmen of the committees of the Riga City Council and nine representatives of the non-governmental organisations that have signed the Memorandum, who will be elected by competition in accordance with the regulations. NGO representatives will be elected for two years.

Another important institution of public-civic cooperation in Riga is the **Citizens Forum**, organised yearly since 2010 in cooperation with NGOs and other partners, with the aim of bringing to the surface the needs of NGOs and inhabitants of Riga, identify civic resources and proposing solutions for the needs of the municipality and civic actors. The Citizens Forums, focusing on a different topic every year (safety, youth, neighbourhoods, social integration) used to attract about 200 participants to get involved in the Riga Municipality's decision-making process. During the last years smaller and targeted Citizens Forums were conducted focused on a certain topic related to participation.

The logo consists of a stylized orange 'C' shape on the left, with three horizontal blue lines of varying lengths extending from its inner curve towards the right.

RIGA's Neighbourhood Platform

Spatially speaking, Riga is monocentric city, where the city historical centre is the most active and the most saturated place, concentrating inwardly the most important city functions. Riga has multi-functional neighbourhoods as the city centre, with almost 70,000 jobs and typical bedroom suburbs around it. Nevertheless, Riga does not start and end with the central part of the city. While the functions accomplished and the range of services offered in other city regions and residential neighbourhoods are incomparable, the functional and cultural history importance of these city territories is also very significant. The origins and genesis of each neighbourhood also determine the surrounding landscape. For example, in Bulļi or Vecdaugava you will still find an authentic fishermen's pier. Whereas Pļavnieki, Imanta, with their multi-apartment buildings and yards packed with cars, will remind you that you are in the largest city of the Baltic region.

Undoubtedly, Riga is a large metropolis in the dimension of Northern Europe. Riga occupies an area of 304,05 km² area with more than 620,000 inhabitants, but its agglomeration expands to over 7 000 km² with 1,1 million inhabitants, that is a half of the whole Latvian population. Such a large city cannot be seen merely as one entity, therefore various parts of Riga in different historical stages, and for historical, geographical, administrative and statistical reasons, have acquired their names,

boundaries and identity. Many of these territories were initially manors, hamlets or villages, which have later been added to Riga (Bolderāja, Bišumuiža and other areas). When Riga's boundaries were consolidated, and these small urban units became a part of the big city, their name and approximate boundaries were retained in different geographic maps. During the time of the first Latvian Republic, these boundaries have already served as statistical units. During the Soviet times, new districts were organised in housing estates, including residential buildings, cultural and social institutions. Using the optic of the district or neighbourhood is not only the question of city planning or building character. Looking at urban phenomena at the scale of neighbourhoods is also useful when discussing communities, ethnic and cultural features, safety, social stratification and marginalisation or the services offered and dwelling types. Furthermore, the neighbourhood framework can also help in bringing municipal services closer to residents.

In 2007, the Riga City Council's City Development Department undertook the work to research Riga's neighbourhoods and determine their boundaries. The City Council's specialists of different sectors have been involved in the concept, each with a specific view of the neighbourhoods' development. The



*Neighbourhood event.
Photo (c)
Sarkandaugava
Development
Association*



concept of “neighbourhood development” is integral to Riga’s development vision and it brings together the interests of specialists who emphasize the unique variety of Riga territories, which are constituted by geographic location, differences in cultural history heritage and diversity in social layers.

In its legislation the Riga City Council’s City Development Department defines the concept of neighbourhoods in the following way: **Residential area (neighbourhood) – a residential environment in suitable size, which has its own maintenance, identity and character that result from housing type, physical boundaries, landscape and sense of togetherness of inhabitants.**

In order to observe the transformation of the city’s neighbourhoods, the City Council introduced the publicly available www.apkaimes.lv portal, which contains detailed and regularly updated sets of data about the geographic situation, history, inhabitants and their occupation, social and business infrastructure, the activities of Riga City

Council and other important topicalities in each neighbourhood. From the perspective of planning, the purpose of this platform is, by defining neighbourhoods, to create pre-conditions for implementing a balanced social-economic and spatial policy within the administrative territory of the city of Riga.

Initially, the idea of a neighbourhood platform served for analytical purposes. Developing the neighbourhood idea further, the City Council decided to change its approach to focus more on communities. The City Development Department provides several promotional activities, such as neighbourhood forums, and as a result, many “geographical” or area-based NGOs were established in Riga. Many of these NGOs have become mediators between local citizens and the City Council. From the 58 neighbourhoods of Riga, more than 30 has area-based “neighbourhood NGOs.” Some of these organisations have joined the Riga Neighbourhood Alliance, which represents the interests

of more than 200,000 Rigans. The Riga Neighbourhood Alliance¹⁾ is a non-governmental organisation and was founded with a mission to strengthen the role of communities living in specific neighbourhoods and represented by the organised structures in the city development processes. The main achievement of the Neighbourhood Alliance is the introduction of participatory budgeting in Riga, which the municipality is implementing for the second year in a row by allocating 500,000 euros for neighbourhood-related projects.

The neighbourhood platform also serves as a tool to help inhabitants explore their areas and have a voice in shaping them. The Department of City Development has organised meetings in neighbourhoods about the new spatial plan of Riga. In this process, the department organised the so-called “neighbourhood guides” – walks through the neighbourhoods, guided by the local residents, in order to hear about the problems and agree on issues that needed to be solved. With the support of the Education, Culture and Sports Department, each year a competition of financing is held for organising neighbourhood forums. The year 2019 was also marked by the launching of participatory budgeting in Riga. As in the pilot year, several issues and problems emerged, however, more importantly, it raised great interest among the residents of neighbourhoods.

The Education, Culture and Sports Department of the Riga City Council has several support programmes both for the active neighbourhoods and the creative quarters, such as the Neighbourhood Initiatives Fund and the Creative Quarters

Support program. These support programmes help neighbourhoods develop community building, stakeholder involvement, and participatory planning processes, as well as organise cultural events and happenings (neighbourhood festivals) or prepare interventions in public space and facilities. These are very significant instruments, initiated by the municipality, but, of course, communities can organise themselves and look for supporters among their members. The main lines of activities are neighbourhood festivities, clean-up days, meetings, discussions of development ideas, etc.

Today the neighbourhood platform is used for a variety of purposes, such as urban planning, community development, culture and the arts, education and research, historical narratives, urban landscaping, real estate development and funding for neighbourhood related project ideas. The platform helps communities to evolve in Riga’s neighbourhoods, develop a dialogue with the City Council, other neighbourhoods and developers. “Educating” developers about the history and context of the place is also a task for neighbourhood-based communities. In this way, the new projects also will respect the identity of the place and will add in a harmonious way to the existing urban environment and landscape.

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1 see textbox >>

Riga's Neighbourhood Alliance

The Riga Neighbourhood Alliance (RNA) was founded with a mission to strengthen the role of communities living in neighbourhoods represented by neighbourhood associations in the city development processes. RNA was initially founded by 10 active neighbourhood NGOs, which acknowledged that they are often filling the gaps between the city and the citizens (direct and representative democracy) thus becoming an essential part of the urban management. Neighbourhood NGOs in Riga are also playing the role in the citizen integration processes, because nothing unites people the best as the care of the living environment, safety and infrastructure.

By forming an umbrella organisation and increasing the valuable cooperation between NGO leaders the RNA's agenda is to advance participation tools, which would engage more citizens to join the neighbourhood movement, improve the communication culture between the city administration in order to reach the **real participatory city planning**.

RNA has come quite straightforward regarding shortcomings in the city stakeholder collaboration and **missing tools** needed for the civil society in order to really be the valuable stakeholder in city development – not only the notion written in strategic development programs but also in day to day urban management providing various social services.

In 2019 RNA consulted and convinced Riga city to run the first **participatory budgeting project** following many European countries. RNA is opting to become a strategic partner to develop a long-term community work strategy in Riga, engage the city in a new type of social dialogue, to see the shift from a **city of service givers to the service enablers**. For that we have a strong need for a political debate to strengthen the role of the platform for cooperation and participation.

author:

**INESE
AUZINA**

Neighbourhood
activist, creative
neighbourhood
movement
“Rada Brasa”

We care deeply about the state of our neighbourhood and our city. It is important that our kids feel safe on the street, that they are surrounded by the friendly faces of people they know, that there are open air spaces for them to grow in and to meet each other. This is what started our movement “Rada Brasa” (Creative Brasa neighbourhood) and later led us to formalise it as a neighbourhood NGO. ⁽¹⁾ Our members are volunteers and activists, living in the Brasa area of Riga, northeast from the city’s centre.

We saw there was a need for us to take part in building our city, because the municipality could not always take care of everything and know the local situation in each area. We started running small infrastructure improvement projects, organising collective help to clean up the neighbourhood. We would review city infrastructure plans and participate in discussions with relevant authorities about the future of our area.

We saw other neighbourhoods in our vicinity going through similar issues as ourselves and decided it was time to grow together. Thus the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance⁽²⁾ was established in 2018. In 2021, it encompassed 23 neighbourhood NGOs. Its main goal is to work together with the Riga city administration to bring the city closer to the people who live here.

Creative and Social Activities

Brasa neighbourhood NGO is also the main propagator of culture in this area. We organise creative culture activities in our neighbourhood: a yearly street festival, handicraft classes, sing-along evenings, seasonal holiday celebrations, tours of the area and its historical monuments, even an open-air theatre play. During the Covid-19 pandemic we



Photo (c)
Rada Brasa
<<

have switched to online events, such as team quizzes about our local history and famous personalities. Also, by creating local scavenger hunt tracks, we encourage people to go outside individually, staying safe but also healthy! We try to introduce neighbours to each other and shine a spotlight on specific local talents.

Our initiative applies for financing to city, country, or EU level funding. We manage the received funds on project basis as well as on yearly basis. We report back to the initial financier about the spending and project results. We invest in the management costs (volunteer workload) and also collect donations from our members and local businesses.

For indoor activities, we have privately acquired a workshop space, a property of 60 m² with three rooms. We like to offer it to the public, as a civic space, without asking for rent. Still our main issues are –how to manage this space? Finances are needed for paying utility bills. Also, as owners have full-time jobs and family obligations, someone must manage the space (let in people, clean up, close up, etc.)

To communicate with our direct audience (locals of the Brasa neighbourhood), we use a variety of methods. Our closed Facebook group⁽³⁾ reaches some 3500 individuals (30% of locals). We use different Facebook groups and pages for weekly workshop activities⁽⁴⁾, for the yearly festival⁽⁵⁾ and for the open-air play opportunities⁽⁶⁾ as well as our public page to share events that are public and where the entire city is invited. We use word of mouth to reach neighbours on the street. We make direct use of various social networks (WhatsApp, e-mail, FB Messenger) to send members of our community messages about the planned activities and invite them to participate. We distribute printouts for specific events by fixing them on information boards, shop portals, house doors, bus stops, in schools and childcare centres. We often appear in the media, speak on radio, give interviews on TV and send press releases to magazines.

1 www.facebook.com/brasabiedriba

2 www.facebook.com/apkaimjualiense

3 www.facebook.com/groups/brasasapkaime

4 www.facebook.com/radabrasa

5 www.facebook.com/hospitalusvetki

6 www.facebook.com/BrasaPumpursSpeks

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Planner, Developer &
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EJY ry is a community for associations operating in Espoo. EJY aims to promote health and overall well-being of the residents of Espoo by enabling influential work carried out by other associations, offering people opportunities to volunteer and to get individual support in difficult life situations. Besides managing a House of NGOs, EJY is also coordinating Espoo's voluntary work network, a cooperation network for associations working in the field of integration; a voluntary service and NGO presence in hospitals, the Uusimaalaiset.fi is online service and website as well as voluntary care work of the elderly citizens.

EJY focuses broadly on the themes of well-being and health: care of the elderly, integration, voluntary work (including peer support), employment, prevention of homelessness, and personal financial problems. EJY's objectives for local civic ecosystems are:

- to support operating conditions for associations (skills, networking, civic participation etc).
- to promote the visibility of the work of associations and their volunteer work.
- to enable cooperation between the third sector and other organisations (e.g. City of Espoo, educational institutions).

Finnish social and health care system is going through a significant change. All Regions in Finland have a representator of associations in this change. EJY participates in this by representing and coordinating associations operating in the Uusimaa Region in Southern Finland. EJY's and other representators main goal is to secure the future role of the associations in safeguarding inclusion, health and well-being in Finland after the social and health care reform together with public operators.



Photo (c)
EJY ry
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EJY's "The House of NGOs"

In our current Civil Action Centre, named "The House of NGOs", we

- rent office rooms for 11 NGOs (rent includes security, free use of meeting rooms and spaces)
- offer facilities for meetings and social functions for reasonable prices (free for office room tenants), approx. 1800 happenings and 25,000 visitors per year
- offer mailing, printing, and scanning services for reasonable prices
- maintain "a hostel" where small NGOs can rent a locker for folders and other articles for a small fee
- run a cafeteria and an art gallery. The cafeteria also offers meeting services (tea, coffee, a variety of snacks) and a daily lunch for reasonable prices

We also rent office space for our own employees (approx. 20 persons in office rooms or at pop-up desks). This part of the rent is funded mainly by STEA (Funding Centre of Social Welfare and Health Organisations). The building where our premises are located in is owned by the Municipality of Espoo. Espoo is also one of our funders, allowing us to rent this space a little cheaper than the average. We do not make any profit from our operations. This concept is now in its seventeenth year. Now is the perfect time to renew our concept to match the current needs of NGOs and other actors. In 2021 we want

to develop a completely new concept of offering (working, meeting, collaboration) premises and service for organisations. We will begin by carrying out a thorough survey to find out the needs of different organisations and other operators (fourth sector, municipality workers, parish) in this field. Our tentative ideas are to locate premises and spaces not only in one building or a single area but in different districts in Espoo, and to develop up-to-date services not too heavy to maintain with limited resources.

In this survey, we want to hear about well-functioning up-to-date concepts of how to:

- collaborate with different space-offering operators,
- share and connect spaces,
- fund the spaces and
- what kind of systems there are for managing the bookings.

Espoon vapaaehtoisverkosto (EVV) Espoo volunteer work network (EVV) brings together more than 130 non-profit organisations involved in volunteer work or coordinating volunteers. The main goals of EVV are shared knowledge about volunteer work and the production of events together with the NGOs. One of EVV's principal tasks is to increase the visibility of voluntary work and its achievements in Espoo and offer people opportunities to participate. The network enables the production of knowledge and activities

for various needs and situations, e.g. by bringing NGOs together to present their work to municipal workers. EVV is also part of a larger ecosystem of a non-profit organisation network in Espoo. It co-operates and collaborates with City of Espoo, local institutes, and other non-profit organisations.

Kumppanuushautomo

Kumppanuushautomo is a cooperation network for associations and other operators working in the field of integration in Espoo. It brings together professionals and active citizens to discuss and develop ideas and cooperation. Kumppanuushautomo promotes the visibility of the associations and helps them work together with the City and other major institutions. The aim is to together develop the services of different sectors and the paths between various sectors. The role of Kumppanuushautomo is to support the capacity building processes of small associations. This concerns especially immigrant organisations with less experience of operating in Finland. In practice, Kumppanuushautomo aims at familiarising immigrant associations with their operational environment e.g. by instructing and assisting them in questions concerning funding, systematically developing activities and processes, and finding new NGO partners in Espoo. Kumppanuushautomo also maps the current events, activities, and phenomena of the immigrant NGOs. Awareness of the activities, target groups, operational areas, and languages of immigrant NGOs enables the spreading of the word of their good work, and to better answer their needs. Immigrant associations are also encouraged to participate in the cooperation between the City and the third sector alongside other NGOs.

OLKA - coordinated voluntary service and NGOs in hospitals

OLKA coordinates the activities of associations and volunteer workers in the Helsinki University Hospitals (HUS) and manages the national OLKA network jointly with HUS. OLKA links the expertise of patient organisations to the comprehensive bundle of services offered to patients. OLKA's mission is to offer unhurried encounters, listening, appreciation, and collaboration for the patients. OLKA also provides facts about NGOs and their services both in clinics and virtually in Vertaistalo.fi. OLKA provides training, orientation, and supervision for volunteers. In hospitals volunteers can serve in various ways, e.g. by offering peer support, instructing patients, and reading to them, and playing with children. Volunteers meet patients and their loved ones in inpatient and outpatient clinics. OLKA network has around 150 volunteers in the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa – a joint authority called HUS. The national OLKA network consists of 12 districts.

Uusimaalaiset.fi

Uusimaalaiset.fi is an online service and website collecting information on non-profit civic action, activities, events, and volunteering opportunities in the Uusimaa Region in Southern Finland. The content published on Uusimaalaiset.fi website particularly focuses on activities related to well-being. As an online service Uusimaalaiset.fi performs a double function. Regional non-profit operators can use it as a free-of-charge low-threshold platform to announce their civic actions promoting people's well-being. Citizens, authorities and others can use it to find information about regional civic activities. The service acts as a



Photo (c)
EJY ry
◀◀

regional online marketplace where the civic ecosystem of Uusimaa can present itself.

Besides being an open communicational platform for hundreds of non-profit operators, Uusimaalaiset.fi also embodies a collaborative development network currently consisting of six regional NGOs with their representative specialists. Each member in the network represents a sub-regional co-operation partner for local NGOs. Uusimaalaiset.fi is a part of this network cooperation. Besides managing the sub-regional maintenance, helpdesk and marketing related to the online service, each Uusimaalaiset.fi network member participates in the active development of the service. Besides the official work, Uusimaalaiset.fi development network is consolidated as a platform for informal learning and knowledge-sharing related to NGO work. As part of this entirety, all information given out in the regional services is stored in a national database. This implies larger-scale possibilities and solutions, especially in the digitalization of the society.

VESA - coordinated and integrated volunteer work

VESA activities coordinate volunteer care work of the elderly citizens in Espoo, either at home or in senior centres. The activities are carried out in cooperation between EJY and the City of Espoo Social and Health Services and Culture and Sports Services. Target groups are the elderly citizens of Espoo and the volunteers working with

them. The aim is that among elderly citizens (over 65) and volunteer workers

- activity and resources increase through encounters
- loneliness decreases
- life management and coping will be maintained and participants gain increased substance in life
- functional and mental capacities remain sufficient, are preserved and strengthened

VESA activities combine the methods of compiling statistics on coordination and activities of volunteers working within the City of Espoo services for elderly citizens and realise equal opportunities for support and recreation for all. VESA is aimed at elderly people and volunteers working with them. VESA is done in collaboration with the City of Espoo in different fields of services for the elderly, e.g. sports and culture. The main VESA objective is to systematically coordinate voluntary services for the elderly. Volunteers work in the fields of proactive services and home care for the elderly, as well as in rest homes and hospitals. EJY ry offers its expertise in citizen activities and brings in various organisations for the elderly for collaboration with the City of Espoo public services. Project VESA offers high-quality coordination of volunteering in the City of Espoo services for the elderly. It offers everyone equal possibilities for volunteering and a model including the following modules: recruitment, training, ERP/statistics and support/recreation.



Collaborative commissioning in Brighton and Hove

*interview
with:*

**JOHN READING,
DONNA EDMEAD**

Third Sector Manager
at the Brighton & Hove
Council,
and Contracts and
Monitoring Officer at the
Brighton & Hove Council

Commissioning models by which the public sector externalises the provision of public services often favour large companies, excluding smaller providers. In an attempt to set up a legislative framework through which communities' needs can be better targeted and addressed, the UK government has since 2018 supported the model of "collaborative commissioning."¹ This means that local authorities are encouraged to involve local, smaller stakeholders from the voluntary and community sector in commissioning, initiating a collaboration for the co-design of services.

Collaborative commissioning is an approach that highlights the importance of collaboration and co-design in granting third sector organisations with funding for their activities. Instead of setting applicants against each other, collaborative commissioning supports applications in partnerships, especially the collaboration between more established organisations and more informal, bottom-up initiatives, prompting organisations to find mutual overlaps of interests.

The Brighton & Hove City Council introduced collaborative commissioning in 2017, based on 18 months of preparatory work. After two funding cycles, the model is still ongoing and the Council is keen to innovate and move forward. In this interview, John Reading, Third Sector Manager and Donna Edmead, Contracts and Monitoring Officer at the Brighton & Hove City Council explain the process and challenges of collaborative commissioning.

1 See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone/5-the-public-sector-ensuring-collaborative-commissioning>

What is the role of Collaborative Commissioning in the Brighton & Hove Collaboration Framework?

JR: There are two aspects to collaboration in the commissioning that we're doing. One is the **collaboration between the Council and the local community and voluntary sector, the "third sector."** In the program we don't fund private organisations, nor do we fund public organisations. We only fund organisations that are registered charities. Through this process, third sector organisations get to develop their ideas through consultation, establishing the priority of needs, looking at the barriers that may exist by the client groups they represent and by accessing funding.

From the local community and voluntary sector point of view, the core requirement to access the Third Sector Commissioning Prospectus, a three years funding program of just under £2million a year, is that **all of the bids have to be partnership bids**, so to say a collaboration between two or more

organisations. That requires organisations within the sector to be able to identify an organisation or organisations where there is **mutual overlap of interests** for their clientele in terms of developing a project proposal. A simple example of that is a collaboration we've been running between an older people's charity and a sports organisation, taking up the opportunity of developing sports activities through the skill set of the sports organisation but working with older people. The particular success group they've worked with over the last 18 months was with people who had dementia and their carers, bringing them together to play football. When you bring those two actors together you create a project that is much stronger, much more innovative and creative than it would have been if the older people's organisation had done it on its own. That requires organisations to also want to collaborate together. Some organisations might be more inward looking and can be quite defensive about what they do, there may be more than one organisation working with the same clientele and therefore



The Manor Road Gym in East Brighton. Photo (cc) Eutropian



becoming precious about their particular organisation and their way of working.

The observation I have both in terms of overseeing the Prospectus project and having worked with charities for the last 20 years is that **some organisations find it easy to work with others and looking for added value for their clientele, some organisations find that very difficult.**

DE: The partnership working might be running ahead but was a challenging concept for organisations. **In the past the organisations struggled initially to move forward in their thinking to working partnerships, it was a journey we had to take them on.** But in the end our working

feedback was that it was a good change for them. Organisations have also reported that they have gone forward as partnerships to apply for other funding beyond this program.

Partnership bids seem to be quite a novelty in the legislative framework for access to public funding. How has the third sector reacted to it?

JR: This year the decision to continue the program was partly based on the results of an evaluation report we've conducted after the first year of the previous three years funding round. That has identified significant added value from the partnership arrangements. In the consultation events we had with about 185 third sector organisations

✚ *Bristol Estate Community Room in East Brighton. Photo (cc) Eutropan*



attending in the period February to June 2019, despite getting some resistance from organisations who do not want to get involved in partnership but rather go back to single organisation grants, the bulk of organisations do see the added value of collaborations. So, **the role of the public authority as we would describe it here is to negotiate through consultation what is the best way forward in terms of setting the priorities to be tackled by the funding program.** This is a negotiation process that is held both internally with some officers and politicians in the Council and externally with organisations. Negotiations can be very challenging in a large local Council such as Brighton & Hove, including a wide range of perspectives and experiences of the community and voluntary sector. Eventually, this process of negotiation leads to a majority view and to the definition of priorities, criteria and requirements for accessing the collaborative commissioning funding program. This is of course part of the setting of a political agenda, but the politicians talk to the community and there are also linkages through some consultation processes, so I would say there isn't a disjoin entirely. However, what is true is that the Council eventually holds the power to allocate funding. This means that once the priorities and requirements for the program are set, some organisations who were initially reluctant eventually change their minds and commit to partnerships in order to access the funding. However, there are still organisations who do not bid, for a variety of reasons, such as ineligibility or disinterest.

Has the council done anything to broaden up the spectrum of organisations that get involved in partnerships?

JR: Yes. One of the challenges that was thrown at me by a couple of the executive directors of the Council last year was to broaden the range. Most of the investment in the previous program went to health and social care organisations. So, one of my tasks was to reach out to arts and culture organisations, organisations that work in the green and sustainability agenda. A lot of those organisations are quite different from health and social care organisations. They are often newer, mostly much smaller. So **we set up an objective last year to market the program.** We brought in a lot of organisations particularly from the arts and culture sectors, but also organisations that work around the green agenda, food, sustainability and so on. We made sure that we had a broader spectrum. In the city there are something like 2.300 community and voluntary organisations. They range from multi-million pound organisations, the biggest one turning over £5 million a year as a charity, to smaller once, the smallest turning some £100/200 per year. There is a huge spectrum representing a whole range of communities, interests, geographical places, identities and so on. However, the number of organisations we got to attend our events was only about 185 out of 2.300. It's a pinprick, only a 5-7% of the total amount of charities present in the area. Probably half of the investment was committed to 3 big structural projects that we wanted to invest in, so actually there is £872.000 to invest on a broader spectrum and you do it through marketing. However, my experience in the sector is that as soon as there is money being offered, you start thinking of what you can do to get it. There

is an interest in the sector to get additional money to work better, to help and support the people your organisation is targeting. So, I think in this sense we could say that there isn't a real problem in getting the sector to apply for the program, because at the end of the day, it's money.

DE: The other thing that is special about this funding is that our commission enables organisations to apply for their core funding, their day to day running costs, which can be quite difficult for them to find elsewhere which makes it even more attractive I think.

What is the relationship of the third sector initiatives you support with the social economy sector?

JR: From a conservative party perspective, Big Society volunteering is something they encourage, but here locally in Brighton we don't have a conservative Council but a Labour administration led by the Momentum Group that has to work particularly with the Green Party. So here the concept of civil society is very different from the concept of civil society suggested by the conservative party. There is a view in our administration that the bigger charities are not very different from the private sector. There was an instance a few months ago where a big contract was awarded to a locally based charity that is also a national charity, turning over £500,000 a year. The newspaper story was that they were a private sector organisation. They are very big, very corporate, they employ a lot of people and they very much have the structure of a private organisation. They happen to be based in Brighton, hence the access to our funding program. However, our local administration is actually very interested in ground level upwards. They are interested

in looking at grassroots local organisations that are community based and how to support them. What we are interested in is not larger organisations coming to us for funding. It's small grassroots community organisations that are not constituted. The challenge for us would be in terms of the marketing for those organisations to know about it and also encourage organisations that are not structured to work with bigger organisations to put their application in. Our local politicians would like to see us support more of these local organisations and small local community groups that haven't yet evolved sufficiently. One of the concepts they use is community wealth building, meaning the public administration aims at **bringing together large third sector organisations working in a specific area and supporting each other**, trying to generate work and recirculate money within the city, but the Council's aim is also to bring together the local community as small groups that develop on a neighbourhood scale.

Can you rely on small, unstructured initiatives to deliver results at the same scale as large, established third sector organisations?

JR: There is an interesting conversation going on right now and the challenge that both Donna and I are facing is to make sure that organisations are structured, sufficiently robust for us to be able to fund them as a local authority, for we have accountability as we're using taxpayers' money. In order to be eligible for funding there are all sorts of requirements we are asking for. The basic information we are asking for are a project name bank account, a management committee, a set of rules whichever organisation they are (charity, community interest company...), relevant policies and



The Bevy Community Pub in East Brighton. Photo (cc) Eutropian 

they need to show when they apply. There is quite a list of documents they have to submit. This is not at all the case for many small community based organisations. For instance, we are launching a specific program for black and ethnic minority communities and we got a small pot of money (£25,000) that we want to use to support organisations that work with the black and ethnic minority community across the city. The challenge there is whether there might be a small organisation that doesn't have a formal structure, doesn't have a constitution nor its bank account but actually does really valuable work. How do we support them whilst also meeting a set

of public finance and requirements? We can probably do this, but there is a challenge in there. The reason is making sure we're putting money in an organisation with some accountability that has a constitution setting out on paper how they are supposed to operate. Sometimes they tip from being a group of people trying to do something good and may have to go on a journey reaching a certain point from which we can fund them. There needs to be some security net, some accountability on which we can justify the award. Because we're public money, we're asked questions and all that process needs to be described and follow a standard set. Donna and I are constantly working

on ensuring that we don't exclude good work but at the same time that we meet our standard set. Collaboration between partners can also ensure the inclusion of smaller organisations in partnership with bigger organisations that fulfil our accountability requirements.

DE: I can give you an example of this. It has happened that we've funded partnerships between more established organisations working with a specific cohort of their community that was going on a journey towards getting a more solid and accountable structure so that they could also meet the requirements for funding as an independent entity. It eventually happened that they then managed to establish themselves as a constituted separate organisation. That was a journey the commission helped out.

What is the position of arts and culture organisation within a broader civic ecosystem dominated by the health and social care sector?

JR: The health and social care sector generally is quite dominant among the ones that get funded because perhaps it is easier to describe a related need. Talking about arts organisations, Brighton has a very strong arts and cultural community and some of those are individual artists who work on their own but some come together to form an organisation seeing the benefits of it. Some of those arts organisations have been on a journey being able to describe the benefits provided by their services. What we tried to do was to bring more of these organisations on the journey. The social value these organisations can bring definitely is about interaction with people, and not

always or only through performance. All organisations struggle for funding, so there again, access to funding is an incentive for these organisations to collaborate and commence their journey to be recognized as an established structure.

How challenging has it been for the local community and voluntary sector organisations to get used to this new mechanism? Has this involved any kind of training?

JR: As far as the third sector is concerned, I can give you an example. In the application process that was completed last year around Christmas time, we set a question about equal opportunities (equality and diversity). It was a pass or fail question. We had one particular organisation that succeeded in giving excellent answers to all the other questions but failed in passing this specific question. The whole bid failed. We said this out very clearly that it wasn't a very difficult question cause we had written the answer virtually for them. So after this experience I thought it is extremely needed to set up a training around this particular area to support the organisations. We have to take people on a journey and see where the weaknesses are. However, I also think there is a limit to what the council can do because we should not hold their hands. You have to give the responsibility back to the organisations.

DE: Regarding that specific example John described, we had given a presentation of the prospectus to the sector and went through the questions showing what we were proposing so they had some warning and had the opportunity to think about it. In a way I feel like we gave them all the instruments. Moreover, when organisations

are not successful in securing funding they get feedback on their applications. So, organisations have one forward in their learning seeing where they haven't been successful and bringing that learning forward into other applications. It's giving them something to take away.

What are the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that you have implemented to follow up on the results of the funded organisations and their projects?

DE: There are three things we do every year. We ask funded organisations to complete the half year report in October to give us an update on their outcomes and tell us what they will deliver. Our monitoring may include a visit where they present their project and show us the state of things. So we can see the activities and then at the end of the financial year they submit an annual report and we will look at what they said they would deliver and what the results are and the reasons.

Any lessons learnt?

JR: the irony is that if it weren't for Covid-19 we would have had a "lessons learnt" exercise completed by the end of May. We wanted to understand what made it far from a perfect process. It is something I hope we will be able to achieve later this year, to apply it to future funding programs. Of course, understanding the impact of the Covid-19 emergency will be essential in the upcoming months for us to be able to adapt to new needs such as a digital shift.

Collaborative Commissioning

What is collaborative commissioning? Collaborative commissioning would mean that the commissioners from across sectors and organisations – including public, private and the third sector – would work not only with each other, but also understand the process and benefits of having an open dialogue between commissioners and providers, with an emphasis on creativity, social value and managing demand. This collaboration would support commissioners to understand and value engagement with all stakeholder voices, including those of residents and communities. This will create more responsive and refined commissioning models, providing both cost-effective and responsive services.

Key features of collaborative commissioning are:

Involvement of all stakeholders – respecting and valuing their expertise

Ensuring commissioners and stakeholders work together to define shared issues

Defining and develop outcomes with all relevant communities and residents

Having a clear and inclusive process of co-production and co-design

Sharing decision making responsibilities and accountability

Holding joint reviews, performance management and evaluation

What are the benefits?

Successful, collaborative commissioning will result in residents, communities and service users having access to integrated services which are responsive to individuals' needs. Commissioners will benefit from a better perspective on the performance of a provider and there will be greater opportunities to develop services that support residents, communities and service users. For providers, collaborative commissioning will mean the opportunity to have positive conversations about provided services, with greater clarity on what commissioners expect – particularly where there may be competing priorities. Providers will also benefit from increased understanding of the commissioning cycle and associated pressures.

How can we know if commissioning is collaborative?

1. Review the benefits of the commissioning processes and the commissioned services. This will need to be completed with providers, all relevant service users or communities and residents.
2. Capture the occurrence of providers, service users, communities and/or residents involved in the commissioning of services including how and when they provide feedback about their involvement; considering groups that have been missed
3. Identify improvements made by the collaborative commissioning process; review the functioning of the collaborative arrangements; identify further areas for improvement and share learning and good practice with other organisations across all sectors.

What needs to be in place?

Training for commissioners in public sector organisations to ensure a clear understanding of collaborative commissioning processes

Maintain infrastructure organisations to support third sector providers to develop skills, knowledge and expertise in collaborative commissioning

Shared learning approaches to support commissioned providers to understand and be able to demonstrate their impact and social value

Maintain community development and engagement to support diverse service users, communities and residents to understand and be involved in collaborative commissioning processes

Commissioning organisations to support the development of collaborative commissioning arrangements, to include relevant tools, guidance, skills and behaviours

Finally we will commit to... Collaborating with service users, providers (current and potential), service users/beneficiaries and other commissioners through each commissioning phase

(Excerpt from the Brighton and Hove Collaboration Framework⁽¹⁾)

1 See: <https://phantom.brighton-hove.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx-?ID=110694#:-:text=Collaborative%20commissioning%20would%20mean%20that,providers%2C%20with%20an%20emphasis%20on>



What's on in BN2 Five

a summer of activity, collaboration & Mediterranean sun

It has been a busy summer in Brighton's BN2 Five, the focus neighbourhood of the ACTIVE NGOs project. Local stakeholders held a wide range of activities, ranging from pottery classes at the Bristol Estate Artist Studios to Street Cricket at Crew Club, making for a packed summer schedule. These activities met the needs of new born children to those in their 100s. One resident in BN2 Five is due to celebrate her 105th birthday!

The origins of the What's On Guide

The real work began well before the summer, from one of the community assets and key ULG members: The Manor Gym. The Manor raised the need for stronger communication of activities and events as an issue that not only affected them but all local community assets.

'Nothing ever happens locally'

is a frequently mentioned in East Brighton, but not reflective of the numerous activities and events taking place. Better communication has long been called within the BN2 Five community and the ACTIVE NGOs ULG meetings have prompted collaborative action. From The Manor's initial idea, a summer pilot was proposed amongst ULG members, What's On in BN2 Five.

"Developing a communication strategy that does not work in competition with individual communications channels but works to best publicise the local offer and opportunity to engage, create and build new activities, services in East Brighton" – ACTIVE NGOs Brighton Transfer Plan – Key Challenge

ULG members quickly formed a communications group and came up with priorities:

- A 'one stop shop' for all activities and events taking place in the local area
- Branding that is not linked with any existing community organisation nor is seen as led or forced upon by the municipality
- Creating an online presence that promoted local activities and events

The process of making What's On in BN2 Five a reality

Utilizing the design of the East Brighton Neighbourhood Action Plan,

- Input from numerous ULG members, prompting the emergence of new and return of less active ULG members

- Promotion being key: 1200 leaflets given the school children within three local schools, publicity on the local bus route and posters placed amongst 20 community assets
- A burgeoning What's On in BN2 Five Facebook Group has been set up

Feedback

- Feedback has been strong –nearing 200 members, but more importantly that community members are interacting on the Facebook Page and ULG members are regularly posting events on the page
- The group decided against formally evaluating the impact of the first What's On guide but instead collected anecdotal feedback from residents attending summer events and ULG members who held events and ran activities
- Community Assets saw an increase in first time users at their activities and the events

"Promotion was good, next year it would be good to get the physical promotional material out earlier. The online promotion was beneficial to our aspects of the programme" East Brighton Youth Workers (Trust for Developing Communities)

Next Steps

- Promotion should continue to be both in digital and physical form
- Building upon the success of the summer pilot and promoting events throughout the year under the What's On in BN2 Five branding

- Maintain regular posting on the Facebook page and increase visibility of ACTIVE NGOs through this product of the project

ULG members are looking to build upon the success of the summer pilot of What's On in BN2 Five to looks likely to be a key legacy of the ACTIVE NGOs Project locally.

author:

Tom Goodridge

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What's On in BN2 Five. ✓
Image (c) BN2 Five ✓



interview
with:

**BERNARDO
GUTIÉRREZ
GONZÁLEZ**

journalist, media
consultant, writer, art
researcher and former
communication officer
of the Medialab's
Laboratories of Citizen
Innovation

Medialab Prado⁽¹⁾ is a citizen laboratory that functions as a meeting place for the production of open cultural projects. It is a cultural space and citizen lab in Madrid (Spain). It was created by the Madrid City Council in 2000, growing since then into a leading centre for citizen innovation. The Medialab's activities are structured in working groups, open calls for the production of projects, collaborative research and learning communities around very diverse topics. After the 2019 local elections, the centre's relationship with the municipality became more distant. In 2021, the municipality did not renew the contract of the Medialab's director and announced that it would move the institution to a new location, prompting protests⁽²⁾ among civil society as well as the artistic and scientific communities of Madrid. In this interview, former communication officer of the Laboratories of Citizen Innovation Bernardo Gutierrez shares his experiences in the organisation.

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- 1 See: <https://www.medialab-prado.es/en>
 - 2 See: <https://wearethelab.org/>

*Open workspace in
Medialab Prado.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



Can you describe Medialab Prado?

Since 2002, Medialab Prado has been a public cultural centre interested in citizen innovation, commons and connecting citizens in space. It is also an open space for digital hacker culture, where citizens can develop projects and activities with a free software approach. In the last seven years, since moving to its new building in central Madrid, it has become a key institution in Madrid's cultural landscape. Medialab Prado is one of the places where commoners, squatters, institutions and citizens meet to think about how to organise themselves and innovate the city. Many projects of the city of Madrid were created in Medialab and not in the City Hall. To understand the origins of Medialab Prado, it is important to know that the hacker culture and the copyleft movement in Spain are quite strong, even the traditional cooperative movements have engaged with the creative commons and copyleft principles. Medialab Prado was born from this movement.

How has the network around Medialab Prado evolved during the years?

The history of Medialab goes back to 2002 and is quite long. The initial community was made of pro-commons, hackers and activists from social centres and the right to the city working on urban issues. After 2011 and the Indignados movement, Medialab grew a lot and got a big building in the centre of Madrid. About 30% of the building was open to all people, unlike most public institutions. Medialab is like an incubator of communities where anyone is welcome and can speak about anything.

In the period from 2011 to 2015, a lot of civic organisations, NGOs, institutions and academics met there. The pre-municipalist

situation, I think, was more interesting than the municipalist period of Medialab, as it attracted a larger variety of actors. After 2015, since the start of the collaboration with the City of Madrid, the communities changed. You would see more institutions, foundations, governmental actors, people working on citizen innovation frameworks and open government. A lot of social movements, who were present before, moved to social centres, thus Medialab lost the initial community. However, despite around 80% of its funding coming from the City of Madrid, Medialab always had the ambition to keep a certain level of autonomy.

There is a continuity of actors, of course. Moreover, Medialab Prado has also evolved into an international actor in the movement of citizen innovation labs. It has a partnership with the SEGIP, the Ibero-American General Secretariat, but also with 23 different countries such as Spain, Portugal and many others in Latin America. Medialab Prado is the key player in the citizen innovation labs of these 23 countries. They go to Columbia, Brazil, Mexico and many other countries to do citizen hackathons and build innovation labs.

How did the work of Medialab change through the collaboration with the City Hall?

When the collaboration with the City Hall started back in 2015, Medialab Prado's team grew bigger to include a total of 20 people working together on issues mainly related to Open Government and participation. The seven new additions to the team were responsible for six new citizens' labs (laboratorios ciudadanos)³. Initially the idea was to only create three new labs: the

3 See: <https://www.medialab-prado.es/laboratorios>

Citizen Innovation Lab, the DataLab and the ParticipaLab. The main budget went to the ParticipaLab, as 50% of it came from the participation secretariat of the City Hall. I can say that most of the things we did during that period were through ParticipaLab and Decide Madrid. The relationship of this lab with the municipal secretary of participation was kind of privileged, for the main interest for the City Hall was to create a participation lab. In fact, the main reason why Medialab was chosen as a partner is for its incredible work on issues related to transparency and open data, something that the local government was really interested in at the time. However, Medialab finally succeeded in creating six labs in total, in order for the collaborative actions to be more aligned to its philosophy. The additional three labs were the AvLan (more linked to arts and digital culture a l), the CiCi Lab (a kind of Citizen Science Lab) and the PrototipaLab linked to the Fab Lab.

The difference of working inside or outside public administrations is very important. Through a direct collaboration with the City Hall, we realized that we could improve and change things, like introducing mapping, big data, new events to the municipal agenda and invite people to make unique proposals. In many instances, projects that were conceived within events and workshops organised by Medialab have been considered for public policy. This is true not only in Madrid, but in many other cities in Spain and abroad. La Escalera, for example, is an amazing project.⁽⁴⁾ Some users of Medialab thought they did not know their neighbours and did not speak with anyone in their building – they prototyped

some stickers to glue on the stairs of their building. Stickers had sentences like ‘life is a problem that we have in common. Why don’t we solve it as a community?’ Or, ‘I share my wifi’, ‘I can water your plants’, ‘I can shop for you’; there are now more than 20 buildings of the city working with such initiatives, testing, speaking with neighbours on how to transform the whole building into a community as it was 100 years ago. The previous local government did what we call ‘virtuous public procurement,’ buying services from an independent provider because it’s for the common good. They supported this project and sent the stickers by mail to all the citizens of Madrid. It was kind of a revolution.

What was the working methodology of the labs?

The labs worked through prototyping workshops (talleres de prototipado). These were international workshops and when I worked in Medialab there have been five of them, one for each Lab. Actually, the Prototipa Lab and Citizens Science Lab organised one common workshop. The other workshops were Active Intelligence for Democracy with ParticipaLab, Experimenta Distrito with InCiLab and Interactivos.

The methodology of the workshops is simple. It all starts with an open call for projects, putting a projectual frame for each workshop. We received around 150 projects for each lab and then only around eight projects were chosen to participate. Four or five mentors would always be there to evaluate the projects. When a project is selected, the applicant takes the role of project coordinator inside the workshop. I think almost 70% of the projects came from Spain, the rest mainly from Europe, Latin

4 <https://www.medialab-prado.es/videos/la-escalera>



*Event at the Medialab.
Photo (c) Medialab Prado*



America and Africa. Once the selection process is completed, the international workshops take place over two weeks and the scope is to put a diversity of people together to create project prototypes. The philosophy of Medialab is to bring together people from different backgrounds creating a multidisciplinary and diverse working group. Informal knowledge is also valued in this sense. In each working group of 8-10 people, there are usually 1-2 people that are comfortable with technology and innovation, like hackers, developers and designers. Medialab does not pay participants but provides food and accommodation in Madrid. The only people who get paid are mentors.

Prototyping projects are difficult to implement but the methodology we implemented for the collective intelligence for democracy workshop came out as a success. From each prototyping workshop there are about 50-60 projects that emerge. But most of them, I would say 50% die shortly after the workshop. It is very difficult

to start a project and find the resources. I've seen a lot of projects taking shape in workshops but then they might easily not succeed or go ahead. Such kinds of events were common during the years of collaboration with the City Hall. We had more money, mentors and mediators. The availability of funding allowed us to organise bigger workshops with more guests.

How did you reach communities farther from Medialab's central location?

Medialab Prado is in the centre. However, in order to reach a vaster population, we began to experiment in a diversity of districts for collaborative projects. Experimenta Distrito and Madrid Escucha have to do with territories, neighbourhoods that are not in the centre of the city. Medialab Prado is in touch with these areas through about 90-100 neighbourhood cultural centres, mostly small ones. In fact, these areas often have a different approach to citizen participation and it's interesting to see how the same concept evolves and is appropriated by the population in different areas.



^ *Event at the Medialab.*
^ *Photo (c) Medialab Prado*

How did the interaction between social innovators and public servants work?

We did a kind of juridical Innovation lab in 2016 in which we put public servants together to think how to hack laws, how to be faster, how to find the path. But it was an initial project, we definitely need more action in that sense. Another interesting project implemented by Medialab Prado and including public servants was Madrid Escucha.⁽⁵⁾ It was an open call to put together public servants and citizens without the mediation of politicians. The workshop was meant to produce prototypes of projects to be implemented. More or less 30% of the projects came from the public servants, 70% came from citizens. In total, we had 10 projects. Madrid Escucha was a very interesting project investigating how to be proactive and apply a faster problem solving approach inside public institutions, which is very difficult. However, it seems like public institutions are made to be dysfunctional. It seems like the trend is still to invest money in big companies and not in cooperatives. The previous councillor for economy, Carlos Sánchez Mato, tried to hack the City Hall's contracting laws, to put the social economy and the common

good as a central concern. During the previous administration we got to the point where the social impact of projects was more important than it being the cheapest proposal. However, this is not the case anymore under the new administration.

Could you tell us a bit more about some of the projects you followed in Medialab?

I was mainly responsible for the communication of the Citizen Innovation Lab. Personally, I worked with projects related to storytelling, the website and the graphic identity of Medialab from within the Citizen Innovation Lab. Reframing the graphical and storytelling identity of Medialab was something they had never done before and we did it together for 3 years. I would say it definitely helped Medialab become an international innovation hub with hundreds of other cities approaching us to help create new labs all around the world and especially in Latin America.

As my main interest at the time was to try to bridge a gap between storytelling and participatory platforms, one of the main projects I was responsible for is the storytelling work of La CoctELLera.⁽⁶⁾ It is a fun and different way of doing proposals. You don't need to be alone in your house doing a proposal, you can come and meet people, you have designers, storytellers, activists, a lot of people thinking together how to do nice proposals and doing campaigns together. The objective was to work on the symbolic value of citizens participation and create communication material through a transmedia approach.

5 <http://madridescucha.medialab-prado.es/>

6 <http://www.storycracia.cc/la-coctellera/>

How has the end of its collaboration with the City Hall impacted the work of Medialab?

Having worked with them for three years, I think I can state that Medialab Prado is aware of the fact that the nature of its action leads to a constant interaction with political ideologies and politicians. Despite it being a more leftist organisation, it has dealt and continues to do so with centre, liberal, centre-right parties. The four years of collaboration with the City of Madrid between 2015–2019, was hence a time of experimentation and it was clear that it would have come to an end. Medialab was not only expecting it but it was also ready for it.

Madrid is a big capital city and you have many levels of power. You have the autonomous social centres and independent spaces, you have the city hall level, the Region of Madrid, the central government, international and European institutions, Ibero-american institutions, cultural centres, etc. It is thus not easy to govern Madrid, and we can say that no one controls it and that is good. The space of Medialab is more than a city-level actor, it is an international-level actor. Its team had a very important international influence and also received international support. There are many labs created in Latin America that were inspired by Medialab. So the place of Medialab goes beyond the municipality. Today, more or less 20% of the institution's total budget comes from the EU and other international foundations. Even with the change of City Hall and with a secretary of culture as an adversary of the Medialab, it would still be difficult to end all of Medialab's activities. The resilience of Medialab favoured its resistance to any change at the political

level. Of course there has been one important change inside Medialab Prado as seven people who were working as part of the team (including me) had to step out after the three years contract with the City Hall. Today, for Medialab, the fact of being again a smaller team is helping them going back to their initial activities of prototyping, open calls, etc.

How has Medialab been doing in the last months?

In the years following the start of the collaboration with the City Hall, 80% of the things that have been done in Medialab were through the new labs and the extra 6 people who came to join the team funded by the participatory secretariat. With these funds no longer available, Medialab had to go back to smaller events. In the same time, I could have never imagined the events of the past months: the new City Hall, with strong right wing convictions, is trying to kill and dismantle Medialab Prado. This operation against Medialab is situated in a broader strategy to eliminate all Madrid citizen hubs that promote participation. The local government even tried to evict Medialab Prado from its current headquarters, despite this putting at risk Madrid's candidacy of the Prado area as a UNESCO World Heritage site. There has been a strong reaction from the side of the broader public and the campaign #WeAreTheLab seems to have stopped the plan of moving Medialab Prado to a smaller and more peripheral venue. Nevertheless, all international support to help our case is welcome.



The Local Operators' Platform

Strengthening local cultural scenes

*interview
with:*

**SZILVIA
NAGY**

co-founder of
Local Operators' Platform

Local Operators' Platform (LOCOP) is an independent initiative and research lab specialised in cultural research. LOCOP's aim is to critically assess cultural policies and transnational funding programmes according to their real-life effects for local cultural operators and sustainability. It offers in-depth experience in practical cultural management both in independent and institutional frameworks, as well as specified research tools for the evaluation of cultural processes based social sciences and policy studies. One of its main research focuses is the European Capital of Culture programme (ECOC). LOCOP aims to highlight the importance of local community involvement as a bridge between the ECOC's top down management strategy and the local organisations' bottom-up approach. While the programme is successful mainly in its effect on the economy, cultural heritage, urban planning and tourism, the participating cities' long-term cultural and social development has been overlooked. LOCOP is an educational, capacity-building and empowering platform for both ECC stakeholders and also for the local scene. In this interview, co-founder Szilvia Nagy explains the platform's aims and objectives through its flagship project, the Valletta Design Cluster.

Why was LOCOP established?

The idea came in 2014 when I met lots of local cultural operators from different European Capitals of Culture programmes (ECOC). They were activists, artists, organisers and what they shared was a common disappointment about how their local scene was benefiting from the ECOC experience. People were facing the same issues but they didn't have a shared platform or output to share and discuss problems or to act upon them. They felt their experience was personal and separate from other cities'. LOCOP tried to offer a platform to these actors based on the shared notion of their experience.

The LOCOP project came into existence because of this inconsistency between the vision of the European Capitals of Culture brand and how local operators felt, how they experienced this process. I would not contest the European Capitals of Culture idea as an idea. But in its implementation, it didn't work that successfully on the local

level. There is an inconsistency because the envisioned participatory nature of the programme was not really fulfilled. There was no room for the kind of participation that many local operators or civil society organisations would have liked to see.

By uniting these local operators, we managed to take the issue to a different level. We believed that we could change the structure by naming it. What LOCOP does is a mediation process between government officials or programme managers and local operators. It offers a participatory action research framework, where we try to involve these different stakeholders to find collaborative solutions to the issues.

You work a lot with secondary cities – cities that applied but didn't win. Instead of feeling an inevitable disappointment, what is the best way to transform this energy into something sustainable?

The cities have high hopes, as they engage in a long process to prepare their bidbook



*Social Innovation
Focus Group Session.
Photo (c) Valletta
Design Cluster*



(the application material for the title). As it is a long and transformative engagement, but also a competitive project, it is very disappointing when they don't win. However it is useful for the cities to see that there are cities that are transforming on their own initiative after their bid, in a bottom-up way. The strength of 'secondary cities' is when they don't give up on cultural transformation and community projects, but try to re-scale their programme to a smaller scale and still carry on with the community-building and participatory civil society approaches. They don't have as much involvement with politics and usually have the more sustainable examples with more transformative power.

What happens with the European Capitals of Culture is that when the title is won, usually the political stakeholders take over. Until that point it is usually working as a bottom-up cultural initiative, with local and municipal support. When the title is won and the programmes are starting, it requires a bigger infrastructure and organisational capacity. These new offices and infrastructures stay at place until the ECOC is over. Then there are the next years when only some follow-up programmes happening. In comparison to this, when we focus on something smaller it can be more sustainable and it can have a more transformative power. We can see it as a comparison between a top-down and a bottom-up strategy.

Do you have an example to give us?

One of the most recent examples is our collaboration with the Valletta Design Cluster which is a community space for cultural and creative practice situated in the renovated Old Abattoir building in Valletta, Malta. We collaborated with the research department

of the Valletta 2018 Foundation, the Valletta Design Cluster and various organisations through different workshops, focus groups sessions and activities to establish and map the needs of civil society in relation to the planning of a new institution, the Valletta Design Cluster. It was an amazing learning process for all participants, and it lasted for two years. The Valletta Design Cluster could learn about the inhabitants living around the institution, about what their needs were, how they would envision this place; and also about the needs of the artists and local operators and how they can find their role in this new institution.

How did you get involved with Valletta as European Capital of Culture?

In 2015 we had a symposium with LOCOP in Budapest and we invited people from different cities who worked with the local scene, upcoming or current European Capital of Culture cities. Valletta was an upcoming Capital of Culture, we invited the Research Coordinator for Valletta 2018 Foundation, Graziella Vella, who at the time focused on local involvement and research aspects of the European Capital of Culture year in Valletta. She liked our approach which is based on research and collaboration, and thought it could be something interesting for Valletta. She invited us to their next conference and while we were there I met with the representatives of the Valletta Design Cluster and our collaboration started.

How did you design this several years-long process?

When we started working on it, it was already the year of the European Capital of Culture in Valletta. They had an interesting

The action research cycle.
Photo (c) LOCOP



situation where the Valletta Design Cluster was the planned flagship project. Albeit it was planned to be ready for the ECOC year, the renovation and planning process was delayed. This gave an excellent opportunity to not only involve the local civil society in the planning process, but also to reflect on the shortcomings and pitfalls of the local operators' involvement in the ECOC year. Therefore, the European Capital of Culture year gave a good opportunity to start working together, in a collaborative way with civil society to establish this cluster. It gave funding and programming opportunities to develop a long-term collaborative vision and helped us to think through the whole operation as a collaborative process. This was based on participatory action research. We proceeded in stages, by identifying programmes and research schemes, initiating actions and prompting feedback to inform the next steps. In this collaboration, the Valletta Design Cluster was open to this process without a visible end point. Throughout this collaborative process we could not only involve the civil society, but also reach a deeper involvement

in the planning process. It led to actual programmes and spaces that people were requesting.

Who participated in this process?

We had a different group of participants for each phase of the process. In the beginning, we launched an open invitation to cultural operators and civil society activists. We ended up with a very mixed group, mainly local cultural operators, people who are primarily affected by local cultural programmes and therefore are interested and active in the cultural field. This was our starting core group. Later, throughout the process, we additionally tried to involve local habitants and civil society in general. When participants joined a session, they were directly invited to the following ones, which were open also for newcomers. This resulted in a core group with eventually returning participants for every couple of meetings.

What were the different phases of this process?

The first phase of the involvement consisted of a series of focus group sessions where we used the method of "issue mapping" to identify different problems in Valletta. We had different groups working on urbanism, issues related to artists and artworkers, some issues related to the liveability of the city such as walkability. The issues were identified by the groups themselves and they could start working on the most urgent problems with our help. The focus group sessions allowed us to specify a number of specific themes to work on and also to identify broader ideas like that people would like to have access to workshops with tools in the Valletta Design Cluster.



⤴ *Valletta's Community Engagement Process. Image (c) LOCOP*

In the second phase, after the focus group sessions, we had larger events that were combinations of a presentations and a civil consultation, held in a school and joined by people who couldn't attend the focus group sessions. These open sessions were organised to discuss further the outcomes of the first phase, including more viewpoints.

In the third phase, we brought together the micro-level of the focus group sessions of the first phase and the macro level of the open sessions of the second phase. Here we worked with a different kind of strategy and asked people if they had any knowledge, skills or tools to offer or share with others, organised around the themes identified earlier: Maker Culture (with an emphasis on woodworking), Social Innovation, Food, Education and Placemaking. We also asked about participants' needs, what is it they would like to learn from others, or offer to them, be they language exchange, food or cooking classes. We started to organise action-oriented events focusing on these interests, under the title Hatchery Initiatives. When we had the demand and the offer both popping up we just tried to match them so people can sufficiently organise themselves later on without our help. The

Hatchery Initiatives were just the first spark to situate these offers and needs and to bring people together around topics that they already identified they are interested in and willing to develop further.

Once you have the topics and the match between demand and supply, how does it all feed back into a broader cultural ecosystem?

It all fed into a set of collaborations around the future Valletta Design Cluster. For example, the food related hatchery was not just about the know-how or about cooking something together. It also served as an education platform about what are the locally available fruits and vegetables, about local fish cultures, community gardens, the intangible heritage of the place and all the venues connected to this heritage. We identified many simple issues where we tried to bring in aspects of sustainability and locality.

The food topic will also be followed up in the Valletta Design Cluster where the original plan was to have a catering place, which later transformed into the idea of a community kitchen where people can

prepare food together. One idea was developed further to have community breakfast on of the open bridges in Malta by a very devoted team, where the main focus was different kinds of communities and subcultures coming together and bringing together something for brunch. It was based on cultural exchange, also involving refugees. All these themes contributed to shaping the new institution, the Valletta Design Cluster.

How could this process contribute to empowering local operators and their communities?

When we talk about empowerment, we are aiming for self-empowerment, to give a situational reflexivity to people about how community building can enrich their lives and make them visible. The idea is not to have intermediaries to empower people but for people to self-organise themselves around topics to see the power of self-representation. Such a process could be, for instance, connected to the power of unions, labour associations where people can self-represent their interests at the city level or even internationally.

What was the policy outcome of this process?

Participatory action research is not aiming at a final policy outcome but is an ongoing process. People continue to work on their position in relation to the whole cultural field and in the Valletta Design Cluster but on the other hand we also formulated recommendations to inspire policy makers and local representatives could take. These recommendations focus on community involvement and entrance points to empowerment platforms, networking and

collaboration, access to information and public assets, non-formal education and knowledge exchange, alternative economic models, cultural sustainability, participatory decision-making and evaluation.

How did the project continue after you left?

The legacy is up to the people. Some continue and some don't stick. But the Valletta Design Cluster is there, the building's construction has been completed. The plan was to open it at the end of 2020 but unfortunately, it was delayed with the pandemic. When it will be possible to work in communities, these different groups will come alive again. The legacy is also in terms of the people who participated in this knowledge production. They see how it works, how participatory democracy processes work, they recognise a power of unity and collaboration among each other.



Supporting Social and Solidarity Economy in Barcelona

*interview
with:*

**ROGER SANCHEZ
ESTEBAN,
GUERNICA FACUNDO,
SANDRA BARRERA
NAVARRI**

ECOS Cooperative

Grup ECOS¹⁾ (Cooperative of Education, Cooperation and Development) is a network of cooperatives that consists of different companies working in the field of the social and solidarity economy. The network's aim is to support the growth of single cooperatives and to promote inter-cooperative projects in Barcelona. ECOS was set up in 2011 with the goal of providing mutual support for cooperatives through collective investment, and offering joint services that follow principles of social and environmental responsibility. In this interview, ECOS members Roger Sánchez Esteban, Guernica Facundo and Sandra Barrera Navarri tell about the organisation's structure and how it encourages cooperation among its members.

1 <https://grupecos.coop/>

*Entrance to the ECOS
offices. Photo (c) ECOS*



What are the origins of ECOS?

ECOS is a cooperative of cooperatives, a second-degree cooperative. We started developing this project in 2009, at the beginning of the economic crisis. At that time, we were all small cooperatives and each of us was providing services – such as communications services, insurance, messaging, etc. We decided to create an umbrella for all our activities while preserving our own activities. In ECOS, we don't share our economic activity, each of us has its own, but we work collectively to achieve common goals. We want to work together to increase our visibility as service providers and as social and solidarity economy providers. We also share resources, and the first resource we share is the location. Each of us used to work in private offices, but by creating ECOS, we decided to share a big co-working space. We manage two spaces, one smaller and one bigger, in five minutes walking distance from each other. Four of our eighteen members work in external spaces, but we also rent office space for associations that are not ECOS members.

Today, eighteen cooperatives are part of Ecos, and Ecos hired two people who only work in the second-level cooperative. Our cooperatives work in a very diverse field and for now, we never encounter competition. We always need to reflect on the possibility of having new cooperatives to join, especially when they might be direct competitors of cooperatives who are already part of our group. We want to support each other, and for this reason, whenever we need a provider, we try to collaborate internally, and as Ecos, we prefer to hire internal cooperatives when we are in need

of a service provider. In the long term, we want to share the development of new projects.

What kind of organisations can join ECOS?

We officially opened Ecos in 2011, after two years of planning. During the planning phase we discussed our single cooperative situations at the time and our future expectations, we shared ideas and principles, and we agreed upon a set of commitments:

To be a member of the group you have to be part of the Catalan network of social and solidarity economy, called XES.⁽²⁾ This network is made up of individuals, cooperatives, associations: all people who share and are engaged in an alternative form of economy. We think that the social and solidarity economy is not just a list of different legal forms but the view of the economy, work, financing and commercial relations, consumptions and of managing the commons that takes into considerations the methods and reasons of work.

- You need to work with an ethical financial entity. In Catalonia, we have two main references, Coop57,⁽³⁾ a service cooperative providing financial services to their members and FIARE,⁽⁴⁾ an Italian cooperative bank that has a branch also here in Spain.
- We all agreed on regularly undergoing a social balance evaluation. Every year we personally collect data, we put the data in a platform and create a social

2 <https://xes.cat/>

3 <https://www.coop57.coop/>

4 <https://www.fiarebancaetica.coop/>

report based on over 50 categories that measure our social impact by considering aspects such as the quality of work, the service, the environmental engagement, the attention to gender politics. This social balance is provided by XES.

- We all agreed to be transparent. Every year we present an overview of our budget, our work plan, and our strategies and we expect this transparency from the new members as well.
- We are all expected to engage in the community. We dedicate time to specific committees that we are part of as volunteers.

How do you support cooperation between your members?

We created ECOS to share projects in common and to create new projects together. We are interested in inter-cooperative cooperation both structurally but also by supporting each other, to exchange knowledge and skills and interlink our projects. Since we have begun our work, we have opened various new cooperatives: for instance, LabCoop promotes social and cooperative entrepreneurship; Quèviure distributes ecological non-fresh food; Fem Escala manages rental building and co-properties; Opcions is a magazine specialised in responsible consumption; Perviure helps groups with legal, economic and financial tools to access buildings for co-housing projects.

We have also been working on strengthening the link between our members by more knowledge exchange, shared projects and mechanisms of mutual support.

We have been working on the identification and subsequent use of free and open shared technological tools, in order to work for the commons and for a better control of data. We have defined a communication plan that has allowed us to improve the visibility and communicative action of the ECOS group by sharing our activities towards the outside world with the help of newsletters and more presence of social networks and in physical display spaces.

We have been streamlining our finances with a shared offer of services and by optimising the co-working space designed for projects that are in development or that do not need a permanent or fixed space. We have collected needs from members of the Group in order to design a training plan that will help ECOS to develop our own governance model. In the past years, we have also worked with particular attention to care in order to contribute to the well-being of the people who make up the Group and the entities close to it. For example, we had a great impact on sexist aggression in all areas of life.

How do public administrations support your work?

Thanks to the recent big social mobilisation which took place here in Barcelona, we have experienced a change in the local and regional government and that is beneficial for us. In Catalonia, there is a network of municipalities engaging with social and solidarity, led by the city of Barcelona. The region promotes cooperative economy with European funds, which aims to create new employment opportunities and the opening of new cooperatives. Nowadays, many social and solidarity organisations receive support to promote the growth of new cooperatives and the transformation to

cooperatives of already existing businesses.

Moreover, in Spain, there are new regulations that support social economy. The Barcelona City Council includes social and solidarity enterprises in its operations and examines the actual implementation of this economic model. In Barcelona, today we have social, solidarity and cooperative economy policies that support our work. The support received from the local government is a form of soft help, which consists of spaces, training, assessment programs, public procurement. The city council never gives money directly to the cooperatives but it gives funds to the cooperative workers: when one becomes a cooperative worker and invests capital in a cooperative share, the regional government helps the individual with a small percentage of direct money invested.

The Barcelona City Council also defines housing as a public service: when it comes to cooperative housing, city councils increasingly give cooperatives land or buildings for long-term use, sometimes for the construction of a new building or the reconstruction of an old one.

What are the long-term perspectives of social and solidarity in Catalunya?

Good legislation helps us and is very positive for our work, but these are long-term changes and we need time to consolidate new economic structures. The social and solidarity economy is a slow process that requires people's commitment. For this reason, we try to be as independent as possible and to create our own financial resources because we don't want to rely on the political sphere.

Our goal is to spread the mentality of social and solidarity economy and to motivate common citizens into changing their consumption and production strategies, regardless of the institutional support. We need public support now but we try to create our own resources and financial tools. We would also like to create stronger relations between the local traditional economy entities present in our cities and social and solidarity economy organisations. We always say that the real economy is the local economy and our challenge is to build a network with local companies that can counter bigger speculative conglomerates.



*ECOS office.
Photo (c) ECOS*



*interview
with:*

**DEA
VIDOVIC**

Director of
Kultura Nova Foundation

Kultura Nova is a public foundation promoting civil society organisations in the field of contemporary arts and culture. The foundation was established in 2011, when the Croatian parliament adopted the Law on Kultura Nova Foundation. The idea of this new institution was born among non-governmental associations that work in the fields of arts and culture in Croatia. Kultura Nova provides financial support to civil society organisations. Its work is strongly focused on improving the working conditions and framework for functioning and development of civil actors in a specific cultural niche of contemporary arts and culture. In this interview, Dea Vidovic, the foundation's director explains the principles of the organisation and the notion of participatory governance that inspired its work.



*Dom mladih in Split.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



How would you describe Kultura Nova?

Kultura Nova Foundation⁽¹⁾ was founded with the idea of creating bridges in the cultural system in order to help NGOs that have become important players in the last 20 years. The Croatian cultural system is still based on a model that was established during socialist times, although many things have changed in the last 30 years. Being aware of the fact that any serious changes of the cultural system takes time, civil society organisations came up with the idea of establishing a separate foundation.

The foundation is the result of a very successful bottom-up initiative that started in 2004. In the end, after seven years, the law on Kultura Nova Foundation has been created. The main financial sources of Foundation are the lottery funds, and we increased our budget several times in the last few years; we started with €400,000 and in 2020 our budget was €1.7 million. We work as a grantmaking and operating foundation. The support has been secured through various grant schemes for arts productions and distributions, independent cultural spaces (cinemas, theatres, galleries, cultural centres, etc.), preparation of new projects and selection of new programs, artistic researches, development of program and advocacy collaborative platforms on local, national, and European levels, audience development, artistic and organisational memory, and professionals' development. As an operating foundation, Kultura Nova within its Research & Development Department conducts researches, organises capacity building educational programmes, and participates in cultural policy framing. It could be said

that it's an institution complementary to the needs of the actors, it is dedicated to and contributes to improving the framework within which they are working.

From the moment of conceiving the foundation, Kultura Nova puts a great emphasis on network building in the civic and cultural spheres? Why is it important to focus on networks?

We are all aware that we live in the era of networks. Some of them are the products of neoliberal capitalism. But also, it's the result of the development of different technologies – informational and communication technologies – which influence our society, and also our society influences this kind of development. The new circumstances in which we live in the last 15-20 years created lots of possibilities for networking and interconnectivities.

So, what is a network? An umbrella of organisations or individuals, depending on the context based on a common need of the members who come together and work towards certain objectives. The members have a real benefit for being part of a network. It can be sharing information or knowledge, it can be creating new, joined projects, new possibilities and also it is a good base for advocacy and lobbying, to increase the visibility of actors who join forces to work together. In the field of culture, if we look at the past 30-40 years, we see different types of networks. The first ones worked mostly as representative, informative networks, so being part of a network legitimised your work and you could use it as a member, as a proof that you are working. Throughout the years, networks also became operative or collaborative networks; they started to produce new

1 <https://kulturanova.hr/>

knowledge and share this knowledge among each other, and advocate members interests and needs within the relevant cultural policy framework on European, national, regional or local levels in order to improve the ecosystem within which they operate.

Networks are non-bureaucratic, horizontal, flexible structures. The decentralised nature is another characteristic of networks: they are really adaptable to very unpredictable demands. Most networks in the cultural field have legal constitutions and democratic decision-making processes, and all decisions are passed by an assembly. This active participation in the creation of the network is crucial. It depends on the local context and the country. Each network needs a coordination office or secretariat.

When we started to think about our grant scheme for collaborative platforms, we were inspired by the Clubture⁽²⁾ network. With Kultura Nova, building on the logic of Clubture, we wanted to create a framework to encourage other organisations to come together and collaborate, by giving them better condition to work together.

Where do you see the influence of Clubture on the Croatian cultural scene?

Clubture is a programme platform, a network of NGOs in the cultural field, established in 2002 with a focus on culture as a process of exchange. The fundamental idea of Clubture is programme sharing and exchange. The goal is the decentralisation of cultural production and distribution in Croatia, which is predominantly very centralised and mostly happens in Zagreb. So Clubture came out with an idea to create

a model for programme exchanging and sharing among members but also non-members. They raised money and invited all members – but made it possible to apply also for other NGOs that are not members yet – to submit some joined projects and programmes of exchange and collaboration. The defined model is based on involvement of a minimum of three organisations from a minimum of three different cities and organising cultural activities in at least three different cities.

Defining the criteria of becoming a member of Clubture is part of the network's activities, including deciding about which projects should be financed and who should implement them. This is the model of participatory grantmaking. It means peer to peer review, where all members of the assembly and all NGOs that proposed projects come together and evaluate all the proposals. This model really motivated many NGOs to join and work together ever since 2002. Clubture also initiated and designed other projects in the area of education and in advocacy. It was the main network that was involved in the advocacy process that led to the creation of Kultura Nova Foundation. Together with other cultural organisations and networks in Zagreb, Clubture established one of the most important initiatives, Right to the City, which carried out a perennial campaign pointing out the fact that the city government favoured the interests of a private investor instead of public interest within the project of conversion of a building block in the city centre, and initiated many other campaigns to protect the devastation of the public spaces in the Zagreb.

A lot of changes came from the civil society organisations in culture, influencing the

2 <https://www.clubture.org/>

Concert at the Filodrammatica in Rijeka.

Photo (cc) Eutropian
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cultural policy framework on national or local levels. Why? Because a lot of organisations and a lot of people come together, encourage and empower each other to work together based on their common interest and need. At some point, the independent cultural scene became aware that they are a political fact. This awareness emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, when representatives of NGOs in culture in Zagreb came together and created a Policy forum, a fluid platform that organised meetings around different topics, discussed various cultural policy issues, and explored how to influence and change the cultural policy system. Step by step the organisations became stronger and some changes in the institutional framework did happen that influenced and strengthened civil society as a whole and in the cultural field.

How does this legacy live on in Kultura Nova?

Changing position influences the way you work. In Kultura Nova, we have decision-making bodies, which means that it is a hierarchical institution. We try to create Kultura Nova as a much more transparent

institution, a very progressive public institution in the Croatian context.

During the whole process of institution-building, it was crucial for us to listen to what is happening on the ground. To find a balance between the top-down and bottom-up approach is definitely the most important thing. Through the “Participatory Governance in Culture”⁽³⁾ project that we developed between 2016 and 2018, we took on the role of a matchmaker in order to help different stakeholders from the public and civil sector to come and work together around the participatory governance model. Through a series of activities, we tried to help them to build trust between each of them, because mistrust is still one of the biggest problems in the Croatian context.

How did Kultura Nova get involved in participatory governance?

We recognised that most of the sub-national advocacy platforms that we support through our grant programme, focus on social and cultural centres based on the model of participatory governance and some kind

3 <https://participatory-governance-in-culture.net/>



*Dom mladih in Split.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian*



of public-civic partnership. They started to use former abandoned buildings, public infrastructure such as military facilities and factories, that are used by different beneficiaries while trying to establish a partnership with the public authority based on the participatory governance concept. Thanks to our constant dialogue with them and their demands for structural and professional support, we recognised that they need much more than financial support. So, we started to work on the participatory governance as a valid model to improve the quality of democratic institutions, to rethink the role and mandate of public cultural institutions and democratise them, improve dialogue and level of cooperation among involved stakeholders, raise their mutual trust, increase their governance capacities, improve the ways of citizens' participation in decision-making, distribute public resources in a much more appropriate way, etc.

What are the basic principles of participatory governance for Kultura Nova?

The idea and concept of participatory governance is rooted in the third wave of democratisation. The deficiencies of

democratic institutions (crime, corruption, political elites) prompted various activists, theorists, politicians to come up with the idea of participatory governance to address these problems.

The concept of participatory governance is used to establish new public institutions which are based on shared responsibility and government between different stakeholders, including the public authority, public institutions, civil society organisations, different NGOs, formal and informal groups, citizens, artists, etc. The variety of stakeholders and level of their involvement depends on the local context, but also on interests, needs and motivation of each involved actors. The main idea for participatory governance is the redistribution of power, it is the process of authoritative devolution, the empowerment of citizens where the community makes the decision.

Among a great number of principles, the following four play a very important role during implementation of participatory governance models: legitimacy and transparency, responsibility, equity and openness. All of them are fundamental

for creating perspectives for the democratization of the cultural system as well as establishment and maintenance of new governance models based on sharing responsibilities among various actors who often do not have high level of trust between each other.

What are the elements of establishing a participatory governance model?

In 2015, we published a book titled “Workbook for Social Centres”⁽⁴⁾, it is available online but only in Croatian. This publication contains a series of recommendations and issues for establishing a specific participatory governance model in practice. Based on our research and work to give support to cultural initiatives in Croatia, we identified three basic elements that are key to developing different participatory governance models: constituting, strategic and operative elements. Inspired by the concept of governing the commons while sharing limited resources, we created a list of questions to address within each of the three elements. We explored these issues with networks supported by Kultura Nova in their establishment and maintenance of a specific participatory governance model.

The constituting elements help us to create a governance structure. As a group, we have to ask ourselves many questions: Who are the stakeholders involved, who is sitting at the table? What are the governing bodies? How to create the decision-making process? Who is authorised to make decisions?

The strategic elements help us to create policies. The crucial questions here are: Who

are the beneficiaries of our model that we are trying to establish? What are the users’ rights? What are the procedures of the model, the terms and conditions, the ways of engaging the local community, how to secure the sustainability of the model?

The operative elements are related to daily issues, referring to the work of people who coordinate an initiative or a network on a daily basis. The questions emerging here are: What are the ways of monitoring at different timescales? Who oversees the implementation and who do they respond or report to? What are the conflict resolving mechanisms? What are the sanctions for the users, beneficiaries and stakeholders who do not follow the rules that we agreed upon together?

As a foundation, what are your ways to bring together different cultural actors and encourage them to cooperate?

We believe collaboration is crucial, it strengthens organisations on the local or national level. This kind of connection with others, with peers, exchanging information and producing new knowledge encourages initiatives not only to work together but also to persist and survive. We support and encourage the establishment of different collaborative platforms. One is related to programme exchange on the national level. This kind of structural program collaboration can help and be really useful for the decentralisation of cultural production and distribution. The second type of collaborative platform that we support is advocacy platforms on the subnational level. We think that organisations should also take on responsibilities for changing and improving the environment and policy framework in which they work in order to

4 https://kulturanova.hr/file/ckeDocument/files/Radna_biljeznica.pdf

create better conditions for themselves in their ecosystem or cultural landscape. Kultura Nova also provide grants for collaborative platforms on the European level for their program sharing and exchanging or various advocacy activities relevant to their members. With these grant schemes we created the framework to fund initiatives to collaborate and work together along their wishes, needs and interests.

As Kultura Nova, we do not organise participatory grantmaking processes, but several platforms we support, like Clulture and Kooperativa, use the participatory grantmaking approach. They use peer to peer review and decide together which projects will be implemented with the help of funds they receive from Kultura Nova or other funders. When they apply for our funds, they apply with models and ideas that will be financed in the next years through their platforms. We give our grantees opportunities to share responsibilities, both for the programming and for budgeting.

How do you implement participatory governance schemes with already existing initiatives?

As I explained earlier, by listening and evaluating our grantees, we recognised challenges that they faced within their participatory governance practices, and developed our project on participatory governance, trying to help them as a matchmaker, building the capacities of all involved stakeholders and support them to increase the level of trust among each other. We included seven social-cultural centres based on civil-public partnership that emerged across Croatia, and organised a series of workshops and meetings for them and all relevant actors involved in their

practices. Within the project we presented the participatory governance concept and discussed relevant issues at the international conference⁽⁵⁾, and also conducted a research whose results we published in the “Do It Together”⁽⁶⁾ publication. Since we wanted to avoid any top-down approach, each activity was based on the stakeholders’ needs: we decided together with them how to structure each milestone.

I will give you one of the examples of participatory governance practices that we included in the project. It is the social centre Rojc⁽⁷⁾ in Pula, Istria, that is located in the biggest building of Pula, a publicly owned former military complex of over 16,000 m², now used by more than a hundred civil society organisations. They established some kind of public-civic partnership with the City of Pula, the owner of the building, trying to improve their practices and their model of cooperation, but in that long period of time with many misunderstandings and conflicts among the involved stakeholders. Namely, the initiatives occupied and squatted the building in 2001, and since then they are working hard to establish and then to improve the public-civil partnership.

In the period when we implemented our project, Rojc wanted to improve its relation with the local communities in the neighbourhood. Parallel to this, Rojc wanted to open an urban garden and a new café within the centre. Since our project also developed a strand for the sensibilization of the local community to the concept of participatory governance, we decided

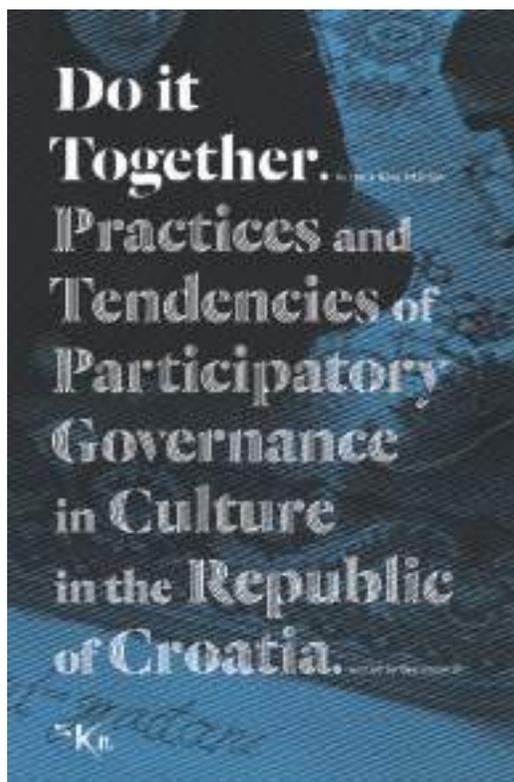
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- 5 <http://conference.participatory-governance-in-culture.net/>
 - 6 https://participatory-governance-in-culture.net/uploads/biljeske_EN_web.pdf
 - 7 <http://rojcnet.pula.org/>

together with Rojč's representatives not to organise a classical workshop for the neighbourhood, rather to invite them to come and get involved in building of the urban garden and crafting and decorating furniture for the café. That way members of the local community spent the day in Rojč, talked about their interests, got details on participatory governance, and how to be involved in the decision-making process.

What is the role of co-managing spaces in these mechanisms of participatory governance?

The concept "participatory" means activities in which people take part. The involvement of participatory concept to the governance, implies that authority and management should be shared with the citizens to whom the public cultural resources belong. The case studies within our project follow the path of institutional innovation in the domain of participatory governance whereby the citizens are directly involved through CSOs

in the deliberative policy discussion on the modes and purposes of public cultural resources. These examples are not about finding an attractive or politically correct purpose in deindustrialised, post-transitional cities with the aim of reconstructing economic and social fabric. It is more about rethinking the role, position and mandate of what cultural institutions are or should be and how it affects the sustainability of the entire cultural domain in the respective local and national communities. It is also about sharing the responsibility for the sustainability of cultural resources – from infrastructure to programming and access, and it is about being vigilant and responsive to the shifts and socio-cultural needs of communities, especially in the context of social inclusivity and equality. But, implementing participatory governance, especially in relation to sustainability, requires wide motivation in managing and taking responsibility for common resources and committing to the defined rules of collective action.



*Do it together - book cover.
Image (c) Kultura Nova*







chapter 3

Organising access to spaces



FREE RIGA

A platform for temporary use

author:

**MĀRCIS
RUBENIS**

co-founder of Free Riga

Free Riga ⁴³ is an organisation promoting the temporary use of vacant and underused buildings across the city of Riga. Founded in 2013, Free Riga gained visibility through a highly successful campaign to make visible the hundreds of empty buildings that resulted from decades of neglect and the 2008 economic crisis. Since then, the organisation operates as a platform to help the owners of vacant properties by opening their buildings to potential users, thus bringing cultural life in different parts of Riga.

Riga has the spirit of a Baltic metropolis coming from the role of the industrial powerhouse of the Czarist Russian Empire. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the city witnessed the construction of a plethora of Art Nouveau, eclectic and wooden buildings (some of them still well preserved) and industrial architecture pearls side by side in the city centre. However, since the fall of Soviet Union and reinstitution of democracy, Riga has been a shrinking city. Between 1990 and 2020, the city lost nearly 30% of its population due to urban sprawl and emigration, now counting around 700,000 inhabitants within the city borders and 1,15 million in the agglomeration.

Shortly before 2008, Riga was economically the fastest growing capital of the European Union with a booming property market. Ever-optimistic large-scale development plans were envisaged for the many old industrial, harbour and inner city areas in an economy that was still undergoing a structural transformation from Soviet planned to free market economy. Much of this growth was fuelled by real estate speculation and easy access to credit. Hundreds of often shabby-looking buildings were sold for ever increasing prices, and were waiting for their reconstruction. The crisis of 2008 halted much of the



*The garden of D27 in Riga.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



crediting and made many development projects unviable. Subsequently, many hundreds of buildings with their outdated development visions had been left empty, without heating and not properly looked after.

Free Riga first emerged in 2013 as an artistic initiative coming out from this outfall. Some cultural organisations had started some successful ad-hoc temporary use projects already in 2005. However, these successes had been local and not implementing temporary use by intention and with awareness of how to operate this model. The paradox of many initiatives looking for space in parallel with the presence of a visibly growing number of vacant buildings was making the culture sector more and more frustrated, especially as Riga was preparing to become European Capital of Culture in 2014. “How is it possible that nearly every 5th building in the city centre is vacant or abandoned, and yet there is no space for the many cultural, arts and social initiatives?” – this was the questions formulated by 10-12 well-known arts, culture and city organisers who had dealt with vacancy – among them the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Arts, arts centre “Totaldobže”, Kanepes Culture centre, coworking space “DarbaVieta” and other activists. That was the birth moment of Free Riga.

The founding action of Free Riga as a movement was to print 5000 yellow “OCCUPY ME” stickers as part of the annual contemporary arts festival “SURVIVAL KIT”, which often utilizes abandoned properties, and launch a campaign inviting people to stick them on all the vacant properties in Riga, to give visibility to the phenomenon of vacancy. As this campaign gained unexpected visibility and resonance, initiators of this action started organising follow-up activities under the name Free Riga as an ever-growing but loose network of cultural actors and activists. An online map and database of vacant properties in Riga was produced, as well as an application form to survey initiatives that would be interested in working in the empty buildings with following workshops, expeditions and other activities. The first spontaneously organised activities were crystallised by the discovery of the “temporary use” model. At the turn of 2013 and 2014 the initiators of Free Riga found out about the NGO “HausHalten” and their “Guardian Houses” initiative in Leipzig⁽²⁾. This NGO was formed by architects in the early 2000s when Leipzig was facing a huge property market crisis and depopulation, not unlike Riga. This discovery introduced the group behind Free Riga to the concept of temporary use as a

1 <https://freeriga.lv/>

2 <http://www.haushalten.org/>

viable service for private property owners. According to this model, the owner benefits from the preservation and revitalisation of the building, while cultural workers or activists gain access to space for their creative activities, offering the maintenance of the building as a payment. Inspired by this example, the first three temporary use projects in Riga were set up in 2014–2015.

Free Riga has adapted the model of “temporary use”, which has emerged in the 1980s, based on the work of a few generations of organisations in Europe, as well as in the USA. Temporary use projects brokered a type of limited-time or “till-further-notice” agreements that entail less user rights and in comparison with more rigid rent agreement are more appropriate for often short or even undefined time spans. Temporary use agreements thus are more attractive for the owners and allow easier access to properties “in transition” that have lost their use and are waiting for new development, sale or renovation. From the users’ perspective, temporary use spaces offer considerably lower costs even for properties in central locations and access to often interesting and atypical properties. Therefore temporary use is mostly attractive as residential, event or workshop space for artists, culture and start-up initiatives that are willing to tolerate the relative lack of rent protection to have cheaper and more exciting spaces with a community of like-minded people as an additional benefit. In the recent decade, benefiting from experiences of front-runner cities like Amsterdam, Berlin and others, temporary use has gained recognition within city councils and even at the level of the European Commission as an instrument for municipalities that are seeking to strengthen the social economy. Temporary use allows to put to use the “creative surpluses” of

cultural and social initiatives that cannot afford commercial spaces, especially in context of rising rents and gentrification. In the same time, they boost self-employment, support new citizen-led social services and neighbourhood initiatives that respond to the needs of citizens faster than most municipalities can plan for them. Finally, temporary use helps optimising urban planning by allowing for a phase of testing and participatory planning.

Another boost to the development of Free Riga was a newly established cooperation with the Municipality of Riga and the discovery of the fact that municipal law offers 90% property tax reduction for owners who lease their vacant property to NGOs with a public benefit status. This helped to formulate a clear value proposition to the owners: open your vacant property for public benefit activities and get a property tax reduction, as well as maintenance and a light renovation of the building (that helps avoiding additional property taxes charged to derelict buildings). As fixing the property takes time and effort and is a precondition for the property to be used and to gain tax reductions, Free Riga now calculates and asks owners for some minimum contract duration to assure that the investment is worthwhile.

Free Riga now

Free Riga is now an NGO with public benefit status opening vacant and abandoned buildings for creative and social temporary use in Riga, Latvia. Free Riga operates as a social temporary use platform based on a social business model. Firstly, Free Riga offers vacant property management services to private owners and uses empty buildings for a limited time period in exchange for the services of looking after and maintaining

the building and bringing cultural life to its surroundings. Secondly, it curates and supports a mix of cultural and social initiatives and residents in these spaces that pay an affordable membership fee to co-finance administrative and coordination costs of the space and the organisation, as well as participate in reanimating the location with their time and effort. In some locations we also invite commercial or semi-commercial activities that bring in extra revenue to support social activities, as well as contribute to the city-making aspect of the location (like bars, street-food, co-working spaces, etc). Free Riga was founded and is run by culture organisers and its mission is to support creators of the new urban culture in self-realisation and city-making.

In the past years, after being invited to re-animate larger vacant spaces and developing creative quarters, Free Riga has started to look for ways to extend the community-oriented, co-creative and self-generative qualities of the spaces beyond the typical temporary use period; in order to tackle the negative effects of gentrification and neo-liberal city planning policies in general. One approach is to refine our role as co-developers and curators of user investment into repurposing abandoned spaces and thus becoming longer term partners for the owners of vacant properties. Another approach is to access ethical financing to acquire these properties. As these aspirations and challenges are similar to an entire generation of similar organisations, in 2019 Free Riga became one of the founding members of STUN – Social Temporary Use Network⁽³⁷⁾. STUN unites European social temporary use platform organisations and multiple other participants for annual gatherings to help partners in building and launching new spaces. These

meetings also serve to help participants exchange their practices and formulate common goals and strategies.

As of the beginning of 2020, before the Covid-19 outbreak, Free Riga was running social temporary use projects in 4 locations of Riga, totalling 8500m2 in 23 buildings, as well as 2ha in outdoor space. Starting as a movement in 2013 and transitioning to a NGO in 2015, Free Riga has already completed another 3 projects, becoming one of Riga's main hubs for young people's engagement and impact on their surroundings. Previously unused buildings with the energy of hundreds of residents of the Free Riga spaces have become hubs for the creation of community based projects, hosting hundreds of concerts, exhibitions, performances, workshops, lectures, conferences, meetings, free shops, sharing and upcycling initiatives, parties and other activities. Currently Free Riga has 5 full-time and 4 part-time employees, 70 residents (individuals and collectives) totalling at least 500 individuals directly engaged in Free Riga spaces, reaching many thousands of citizens with their activities.



*In the Tallinas ielas kvartāls.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*





Facilitating temporary use

The regulation of vacancy in Riga

Public buildings for civic use: channels and regulations of the Riga Municipality

One of the most important challenges and current issues of Riga are empty and degraded buildings or territories. Riga City Council's Property Department is the managing authority of the municipality of Riga, which, in accordance with the law and other regulatory enactments, administers and ensures the rational and efficient use of real estate owned and in the possession of the Riga City Council. Besides the NGO House in Riga, there are other public and private properties that had been granted for civic use.

Reusing a vacant school building for NGOs

Due to a school reorganisation process in 2017, Riga's 24th primary school was integrated into another school nearby. As a result of this fusion, an empty school building with a floor area of approximately 2500 m² was left empty. It was used for a while to accommodate different municipal institutions during the renovation of their official premises, but this need was exhausted after a period of time. The Council decided that they should use this property rationally and try to rent out this property. According to the assessment of the market, rental fee was determined by a certified real estate valuator, the notional rental fee of the auction for the school building was €1.00 per m² per month and €0.30 per m² per

month for the garage. In total, the monthly rent would amount to €2529 without value added tax.

After the publication of the Council's call, there was no interest from anyone to rent this property from the Council. As it is quite expensive for the Council to maintain empty buildings, additional steps were taken. In the meanwhile, many associations address their need for premises and buildings to the Council. This was the situation where the cooperation with the Association of Senior Communities of Latvia and Riga City Council started: the first initiative to use this property came from the Association.

On 15 October 2018, deputies of the Riga City Council decided that they will give this whole building to the Association of Senior Communities in unremunerated use. This model of cooperation means that the Association does not pay any rent to the Council, but is obliged to cover maintenance costs for the building and pay land rent to the owner of the land (some part of the land, on which the school building is located, is owned by a private party) and also maintain their status of public benefit organisation.

The Association of Senior Communities is made of 22 smaller NGOs, representing several thousand seniors. The Association plans to organise further educational and language courses, computer training, creative workshops, think tanks, mind-



*A tour of empty properties in Riga.
Photo (cc)
Eutopian*



growing and health-enhancing lessons for seniors. Through voluntary assistance, the Association promises to provide legal advice, create an IT centre, participate in international projects, create a travelling club, and provide counselling and barber services. They also intend to create a recreational area where the elderly from other regions could spend time before or after their official appointments in Riga.

In the case of the Association of Senior Communities, the empty school building was granted to civic use due to the initiative of the Association and the Council's agreement. However, there is no specific mechanism which could help NGOs access public spaces.

Mapping available spaces

At the moment, Riga has no specific database of spaces that could be used by NGOs. Spaces can be regularly found in the lease proposals published by the City Council. Another – indirectly helpful – database is the Riga City Council's Property Department database of degraded buildings in Riga⁽¹⁾. This database can effectively serve as a potential tool to find spaces for

NGOs, because most of the buildings listed in that public database are recognised as “environmentally degrading,” which means that most of the times these buildings are empty and unused. The potential cooperation model could be that, for example, the association sees that there is an empty and unused building, and with the help of the Council, gets in contact with the owner of the building and finds some kind of cooperation, which could mutually benefit one another.

Riga's property tax regulation

There is a regulation⁽²⁾ in the Council which determines that if the owner of a building gives the premises to a public benefit organisations (with or without remuneration), then (s)he is entitled to a 90% discount for the annual property tax. This property tax discount could be a good base for creating cooperation between associations and private property owners.. The association Free Riga is one of the best examples how this tax discount could be used as a benefit to the house owner and

1 <https://grausti.riga.lv>

2 See textbox on page 137 for more details

the associations (tax discount to the owner, free of charge or minimal payment of the use of the building).

Helping access to spaces

The association Free Riga actively focuses on empty and unused buildings⁽³⁾. The association uses the argument of the real estate tax reduction to address property owners with its “house guardian” service and creates spaces for civic activities, including NGOs. Lately, Free Riga used this mechanism to gain access to a building in the heart of Riga’s old town. The owner of the building granted his building’s use to Free Riga for two years. Based on the real estate tax reduction scheme, the owner is entitled to 90% property tax discount for these two years and Free Riga as a public benefit organisation can use the building during this period, organising art galleries on the building’s first floor, events on the second floor, and offer space for artists on the third floor. Most of the services provided in this house by Free Riga are free of charge and open to any interested person or organisation.

Renovating spaces

Building owners in Riga are entitled to participate in the City Council’s co-financing program for renovation of the facades up to €20.000.⁽⁴⁾ This is a way for property owners to join forces with NGOs and access funding for renovation. City Council-owned buildings can be renovated with their own initiative to the Council. For example, Riga’s

NGO House was renovated by the Riga City Council’s Property Department on request by the NGO House administration.

Structuring municipal policies for the reuse of vacant properties

For the last years, the City Council has been actively seeking for responses to the challenge of vacant and underused buildings. Participating in the URBACT network Refill resulted in a temporary use plan for the city. Based on this experience, the Municipality also joined the URBACT network ALT/BAU with the objective of finding a way to create an agency that could deal with empty buildings and could potentially be a partner to expanding the scope and impact of Riga’s NGO House.

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3 See our article on page 140

4 <https://atjauno.riga.lv>

Riga's Vacant Property Tax

Tax increase for degraded buildings

Established in 2014, the Commission for the Inspection of Degraded Buildings classifies degraded buildings based on pictures taken by the property department who monitors buildings in Riga or via the website *grausti.riga.lv*, in which *citizens* can report degraded buildings. A building can be classified as degraded in three categories:

- A: high risk to public safety (buildings that have totally or partly collapsed or are in a bad technical state endangering people);
- B: potential risk to public safety (buildings that are a potential threat to the public safety because of their bad technical state);
- C: no danger to public safety (buildings that are degrading the image of the city).

The Commission takes the decision if a 3 % property tax increase is to be applied to stimulate the owner to conduct refurbishment works. The owner is informed via an official letter about the decision requesting them to become active and demonstrating potential support. This tax increase comes on top of the existing real estate tax, calculated as 0,2–0,6% of the cadastral value of residential buildings, and 1,5% for commercial buildings. Since 2014, 239 buildings were classified as representing a high risk to public safety (A), 412 buildings as representing potential risk to public safety (B) and 75 buildings as safe (C). From this building stock, 42% have been demolished and 58% have been renovated, with over €10 million collected as extra real estate tax.

Tax reduction for accessing buildings to NGOs

The city of Riga grants a property tax reduction of up to 90 % for owners whose buildings are permanently and solely used by public benefit organisations. This measure is designed to support NGOs. The tax reduction is granted for buildings and land. In order to use the tax benefit, the owner has to submit to the Municipal Revenue Board an application together with documents proving that the property is used by a public benefit organisation. The tax reduction is valid as long as the requirements of the tax reduction are met.



The Lazareti Heritage Complex

Establishing a social-cultural centre

How a long-term contract can help in establishing a social-cultural centre

In the year 2000, the Art Workshop Lazareti, one of the most significant Croatian organisations in the field of contemporary arts and culture, signed a long-term contract with the City of Dubrovnik. This contract, with a duration of 25 years, allowed the organisation to use three of the ten buildings of the Lazareti heritage complex located some 300 meters from the Old Town of Dubrovnik. As such, it was the first example of a long-term lease contract made between the public administration and an NGO in Croatia. It was also a significant push to Art Workshop Lazareti's organisational development and further plans to transform the complex into a social-cultural centre. The Lazareti heritage complex was built in the 17th century as a quarantine station and it consists of ten interconnected buildings. During the 19th and 20th centuries, it also served various purposes (warehouse, market, military barracks, etc.). Because of its proximity to the Old Town of Dubrovnik, since the 1930s onwards it was also in the focus of heated discussions expressing ideas ranging from different visions of renovation for tourism purposes to ideas of demolition to build a new hotel in its place. However, from the 1980s till today its function is primarily that of a cultural centre.

The genesis of Lazareti as a space for arts and culture can be traced back to 1989 when the Art Workshop Lazareti started transforming it into an independent cultural centre (Žuvela 2018: 104). The intention was formalized in 2000 when the Art Workshop Lazareti presented the project "Independent cultural centre Quarantine" to the City of Dubrovnik. The project envisioned Lazareti as a cultural, social, educational, and artistic centre used by various NGOs, cultural institutions, and a local art school. Srdjana Cvijetic, from the Art Workshop Lazareti, notes:

"The Quarantine project was an integral part of the contract which the Art Workshop Lazareti signed with the City of Dubrovnik. To sign the contract, it was necessary to develop or visualise how the spaces would be used sustainably. Lazareti was envisioned as a public space, socio-cultural and educational centre and the users of the space, NGOs were defined as equal partners and actors. Through this vision and idea of the Quarantine project, the entire complex would gain a stronger social component in connecting with the local community. It should be noted that the project planned in detail the programs in the spaces entrusted to AWL by the contract, and the idea of the Lazareti as a social and artistic centre was a developmental vision for the whole complex."



Event at Lazareti. Photo (c) Art Workshop Lazareti



After presenting the project, the City of Dubrovnik signed the long-term contract with the Art Workshop Lazareti which enabled them to apply for the World Monuments Fund's open call to renovate endangered heritage sites. At that point, the Lazareti buildings were heavily affected by both the consequences of the Homeland War happening at the beginning of the 1990s and by decades of disinvestment. Art Workshop Lazareti received the funds in 2002 and they were used to renovate the roofs as well as a part of the interior.¹⁾

However, the initial success of the first renovation has been overshadowed by the strong emphasis on commodification and commercialization of the public spaces and heritage sites in Dubrovnik, due to the growing monoculture of tourism which started in the early 2000s. Even to this day, the concept remains the same: culture is thought mostly through the frame of heritage and heritage is considered as a vessel for profit. The persistence of this concept regularly revived the heated debates coming from the City of Dubrovnik whether such a valuable site should be given to non-profit organisations.

1 <https://www.wmf.org/project/maritime-quarantine-lazareti>

For the NGOs residing in Lazareti, this increasing pressure from the municipality and the tourism market served as an incentive to start their joint advocacy efforts in 2012, just before the City of Dubrovnik began the second renovation of the site. Srdjana Cvijetić recalls:

“The Platform for Lazareti started collaborating in 2012 when scaffolding was placed on our doors without any prior notice and we were denied access to the premises. Through our efforts, a presentation of this newest project of Lazareti renovation was organised and it was clear that the NGOs need to be included in the future renovated spaces. The Platform, therefore, was not created in ‘peacetime’ conditions to integrate programs or organisational capacities, but at a time when we had to work together to ensure that our contract was honoured and that we could stay in Lazareti.”

Even though their start as a platform was rough, member organisations of the Platform for Lazareti have successfully continued their collaboration since 2013. Today they are an unofficial advocacy association consisting of five NGOs residing and/or working in Lazareti (NGO Deša, Student Theatre Lero, Audiovisual Center Dubrovnik, NGO Luža and Art Workshop Lazareti), dedicated to developing the idea of Lazareti as a horizontally integrated social-cultural centre open to the local community. They have continued influencing local and national cultural policies and working on strengthening the civil scene in Dubrovnik. Their vision of the Lazareti as a social-cultural centre has been implemented in local policy documents such as the “Management Plan for the Lazareti Monument Complex 2016-2020” and “Dubrovnik Culture Strategy 2015-2025”.



*Courtyard in the
Lazareti complex.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian
<<*

In 2018, the Platform for Lazareti, in collaboration with the City of Dubrovnik and Dubrovnik Summer Festival, applied for the “Culture in Centre” programme co-funded by the European Social Funds. The granted proposal envisioned to continue developing Lazareti as a social-cultural centre based on public-civil partnership and participatory governance. The project includes not only capacity-building workshops to strengthen the knowledge of platform members on the topics of participatory governance but are also seeking to find a suitable collaboration model for all of the actors residing in Lazareti. The same effort is also supported by the knowledge obtained during the “ACTive NGOs” project. These projects are especially important because in 2019 the City of Dubrovnik signed a contract with the public company “Dubrovnik Heritage” for the governance of the Lazareti complex and programme development for the buildings not included in the contract with the Art Workshop Lazareti. Therefore, the aforementioned projects and the knowledge as well as conclusions derived from them will be especially important in consolidating the relationship between this new actor in the complex and the rest of the users. All of this will help in advancing the idea shared by all the actors residing in the complex: to transform Lazareti into a social-cultural centre through collaborative effort and future collaborative projects.

The long-term lease contract signed by the Art Workshop Lazareti with the City of Dubrovnik in 2000 helped the organisation to stabilise its work as an NGO and helped in developing further its vision of Lazareti as a cultural and social centre as well as to bring it into the discourse on a local and national policy level. It was a good basis not only for establishing the unofficial advocacy

Platform for Lazareti but also to be a part of a new generation of social-cultural centres, emerging across Croatia, based on public-civil partnerships. The spaces included in the contract were also proven to be significant support for different initiatives in Dubrovnik and NGOs thus further strengthening the civil scene.

As a conclusion, Srdjana Cvijetic notes:

“We have always considered the contract as a form of trust given to us – we were entrusted to govern and create a valuable space. This is something that we have considered to be the first step towards civil-public partnership and collaborative governance. However, it also needs to be noted that for a long time we had distrust and dilemmas coming from both sides (the City of Dubrovnik and the NGOs), and this is something that needs to be worked with and worked on. However, through mutual projects and collaborations with the representatives from the “Dubrovnik Heritage”, our relationship is much different, more real, and more humane. This enabled all of us to start envisioning how the future collaboration model should look like. It will be a long way, but we are on the right track.”

author:

Petra Marčinko,

ULG coordinator of ACTive
NGOs Dubrovnik and
member of Platform for
Lazareti



Casa dei Cittadini in Syracuse

The community-led conception of a new space

The Casa dei Cittadini (House of Citizens) was conceived as a place dedicated to citizens of all ages, a space for hospitality, care services; a venue to bring together people, produce culture, organise workshops and co-create activities to improve the quality of life in the Mazzarona district. The result of a community-led process to address challenges in Syracuse, the Casa dei Cittadini proved to be a unique, co-managed space in a neighbourhood in need of regeneration.

Event in front of the Casa dei Cittadini. Photo (c) Salvo Antoci



In a general context characterized by the scarcity of resources, the distance between politicians and the needs of the citizens, and the economic crisis, the city of Syracuse decided to join the GeniUS! Urbact Transfer Network in 2013, in order to transfer the GeniUS model based on open innovation principles. Syracuse worked in a creative, collaborative, innovative and open way in order to find new and better solutions to problems within the city. The model has been transferred also to the cities of San Sebastian (ES) and Tallin (ET).

The model ideated in York (UK) allows city officials to look for ideas and solutions outside the traditional organisational boundaries of the City Council. In doing so, residents, businesses, community groups and universities in York have all become involved in the process of defining and solving particular challenges faced by the city and its communities. The aim of Syracuse was to trial GeniUS! as a method of developing more open, inclusive and participatory governance, that would unlock the potential existing within the city. In doing so, the administration followed the model compromising five main stages:

1. Define: Problem areas ('challenges');
2. Discover: the online open innovation platform;
3. Design: A physical open innovation event;
4. Develop: uses a "pilot and scale" approach to rolling out these new potential solutions;
5. Define.

Participatory process

It was clear since the beginning that organising this process on an online platform was not sufficient, because of the different local contexts: people from Syracuse are not like people from York... they are not

always connected! It was found instead that the community and individuals were more comfortable to contribute through real-life, "face to face" opportunity and events.

A participatory process was co-designed, and it included:

- a series of workshops, engaging with the local community. This engagement was helped further by active political support;
- meetings with residents, supported by local associations and organisations such as churches, schools and libraries
- participatory events like bike tours, neighborhood walks, etc.

The process led to the decision to start with the renovation of a neglected and poor area: La Mazzarrona, a community with many challenges, including high levels of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. The challenge was also to act surgically and prototype on a few areas but avoiding the risk of disappointing the community again: finding a way to realize relevant, concrete, innovative and efficient projects with few money.

All the ideas for action, collected using online and offline tools, were reshaped during an Open Innovation event, leading to four pilot projects. The event itself brought together around 50 stakeholders, including community leaders, entrepreneurs, politicians and school children. It was very successful and it was evident in the transformation of the stakeholders' attitudes from "sceptical" to "highly engaged and positive."

The four pilot projects from the event were brought under the umbrella of the "**House of Citizens**," a place that could be realized during the implementation of the

Urbact Transfer Network, as a permanent, participatory organisation, helping create a new relationship between residents and City council aimed at developing activities and projects with and for residents, towards the renovation of La Mazzaronna.

In March 2015, an agreement to formalize the rules and the uses of the 'House' was signed between 24 associations and the Municipality, including the mothers' association 'La Forza delle Donne' ("The Force of Women"); while the House, with its services, opened at the second floor of an underused school building.

The other three pilot projects were identified in the cultural, mobility, economic and social areas, which became part of a project recently funded by a national programme (Piano Periferie).

Syracuse continued using the Genius method also during the second Urbact Project, 'TechTown', lead by the city of Barnsley, and aimed at finding ways to improve local economies through the Digital Revolution and also reinforce collaboration between citizens and the public administration in a digital way.

The importance of reinforcing a collaborative governance, including NGOs as crucial actors in supporting the city's welfare services and in improving the life of citizens, continue to be a priority for Syracuse. Recent austerity measures imposed on Syracuse's administration including budget cuts resulted, in fact, in the inefficiency of some social services. Therefore the involvement of NGOs and voluntary organisations is key in health, education and other social services and the social inclusion of vulnerable social groups is a priority of municipal policies.

To this aim Syracuse is an enthusiastic partner of the Urbact '**ACTive NGOs**' Urbact Transfer network aimed at adopting Riga's Good Practice, the 'House of Associations', strengthening the collaboration between Municipality and the Third Sector and among associations themselves, capitalizing on previous experiences.

The Municipality is setting up a network composed, for the moment, of three different Houses of NGOs and Volunteers. Among those, the **House of Citizens** in La Mazzaronna. Unfortunately it discontinued its activities in 2017 because of weak security and growing conflicts in the community, and it has been recently vandalized. But thanks to the significant political support, the renovation is included in a comprehensive project funded by regional and national funds. The challenge of ACTive NGOs is to re-launch the space, reestablish a sense of community, get local initiatives back on board and set up a sustainable operational model for the space. Processes that will take a long time but that are ongoing. Public works for restoration, supposed to start at the beginning of 2020, will begin as soon as the circumstances of Covid-19 allows.

author:
Caterina Timpinaro
Project Manager at
City of Syracuse



Facilities as a Service

New approaches to managing premises and sharing spaces

The City of Espoo is actively taking actions to promote innovation, urban vitality, sustainability, and participation. One of the methods used is co-creation and experimenting together with companies and residents.

The Facilities as a Service experiment came into being in February 2020 when the City of Espoo opened a bidding competition for companies offering new solutions for smart and flexible management and usage of facilities. In the invitation to tenders the City of Espoo had listed challenges concerning space sharing and the companies were encouraged to demonstrate how their solution would help the city and its partners to overcome these obstacles. The challenges were i.a.:

- Scattered information, no united customer path (many booking systems and websites, the customer needs to know exactly where and who to ask)
- Many services not digitalized and therefore inefficient (key handling, telephone or e-mail bookings, guards giving guidance and opening doors for tenants)
- Safety concerns (How to make sure the tenants find the right space in the building and leave everything in good order)
- Lack of resources (Who replies on questions about the facilities especially in the evenings)

We received many good and interesting offers which demonstrated that there are many innovative solutions on the market. Finally, three companies Steerpath Oy, Pindora Oy and Aava Solutions Oy were elected.

These companies had very different solutions but already at the very beginning the idea was to build one Facilities as a Service experiment where the different solutions could complement each other and provide one customer-oriented, digital solution to rent and use facilities in Espoo. This entity would include an interactive indoor map provided by Steerpath Oy, Pindora's smart locks and Aava Solutions' modular facility management platform. By combining these solutions together, we could overcome many of the obstacles listed above. Most importantly we wanted to significantly improve both customer experience and the facility managers' willingness to permit access to facilities for residents and other possible tenants.

Beside the digital layer, the experiment also had an innovative operational layer. A local NGO EJY ry was interested to serve as an operator for the different spaces shared and rented on the digital platform. This would mean that the personnel of EJY ry could for example reply on customer feedback regarding facilities that were under the ownership of the City of Espoo.

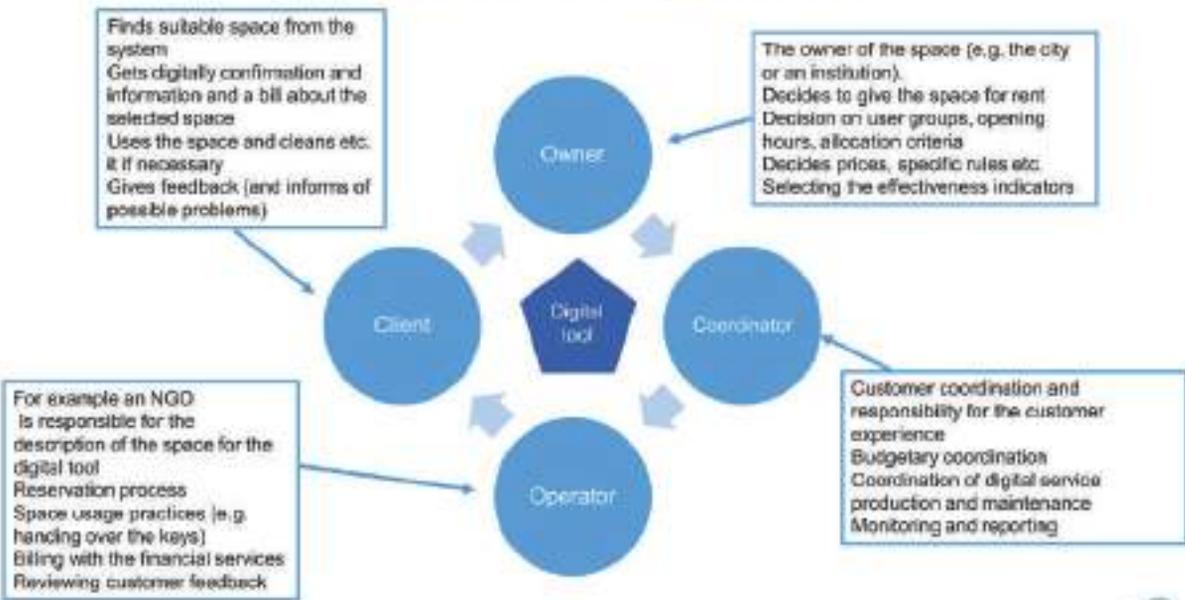
This new operation model was a result of service design conducted earlier in the project. The core idea was that different stakeholders could have their own roles in making the space sharing network function. These roles were the (facility) owner, the coordinator, the operator, and the client. The innovative angle in this operation model is that as facility owners usually lack the resources needed to rent out their facilities for residents some other stakeholder could provide this resource to the network and act as an operator. For example, an NGO like EJY, which is a co-operation body of social, health and welfare organisations, has a motivation to stimulate the market and provide available facilities for its members. Simultaneously, municipalities have the interest to increase participation, find users in their empty facilities and help small businesses and organisations. At best, the new operation model could enable stakeholders to achieve win-win-win situations.

When COVID-19 hit, we decided to postpone the experiments to the fall of 2020. Unfortunately, the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in September led us to the conclusion that it is impossible to carry out a space sharing experiment under the pandemic. Luckily, all our partners were willing to continue and adjust the implementation to the prevailing situation. The complexity and ambitiousness of the experiments was diminished, and two of the three solutions were experimented only virtually with no real customers involved. These solutions were presented, discussed,

and evaluated in virtual Facilities as a Service demo event. In the event Aava Solutions Oy and Steerpath Oy demonstrated how their solutions would have functioned if the experiment was implemented “in reality”. Both the event and the solutions got positive feedback from the participants which consisted of various stakeholders (facility managers, R&D specialists, project managers, participation manager).

Our partner EJY ry demonstrated real resilience and flexibility and carried out an experiment in their facilities with Pindora Oy and Asio-Data Oy. In this small experiment Pindora smart locks were installed on two doors in the building and an online booking calendar provided by Asio Data was integrated with them. This solution enabled the tenants, which were EJY ry employees and members, to access the facilities without a time-consuming key pick up/drop off. According to the customer feedback the tenants were very satisfied with the solution. Especially Pindora smart lock achieved high remarks. Opening the lock was very easy. Only a click on a link on the booking confirmation SMS and then a knock on the door and it opened, securely and reliably.

We, the City of Espoo, were satisfied with the outcomes of the Facilities as a Service experiments. The city discovered new solutions and achieved new experiences on arranging virtual experiments. The city took a whole new role in EJY ry’s experiment and acted as an enabler that only provided financial support and expertise to the project.



⤴ *Facilities as a service, governance model. Image (c) Espoo Municipality*

However, the preparation and implementation of the experiments also revealed major internal issues in the city organisation, especially regarding division of costs. These issues need to be further processed before the city organisation is ready to significantly increase space sharing in its facilities.

author:
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 Project Manager of Facilities as a Service and City as My Data, in the Services Department of the Mayor's Office of Espoo

The experiment was a part of larger City as a Service by means of Innovative procurement (InnoCaaS) project and co-creation and co-operation had been the core values in it. The City as a Service concept is based on the idea that the raison d'être of cities is to serve residents, companies and communities. Urban development is based on service, flexibility, and accessibility as well as networked sharing and utilization of resources. The first object for application were facilities.



Confiscated spaces as a common resource

NGOs accessing space in assets formerly serving illegal activities in Italy

author:

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“confisca” s. f. [der. confiscare]. - 1. a. misura di sicurezza patrimoniale consistente nella espropriazione, in favore dello stato, di una cosa che è servita per commettere un reato o che ne costituisce il profitto; o anche di una cosa pericolosa, obiettivamente o soggettivamente.¹⁾

1 <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/confisca/>

I - Confiscation

Confiscation is an asset security measure consisting in the expropriation, in favour of the State, of something which has been used to commit an offence or which constitutes its profit; or even of something dangerous, objectively or subjectively. This measure is a legislative tool for the Italian State to fight the power of the Mafia, while strengthening the civic economy and third sector activities. Furthermore, confiscation is seen as a means to prevent the Mafia from becoming even richer in a delicate time like the COVID-19 crisis by acquiring activities that are forced to close.

In Italy, institutional fight against organised crime has a great, albeit recent, history. The Italian law n.646/1982 introducing the offence of Mafia-type criminal conspiracy in the Italian Criminal Code, promoted by Virginio Rognoni, was inspired by the Draft Law written by Pio La Torre who was murdered by Cosa Nostra - the Sicilian Mafia - because of its legal commitment to fight against organised crime. The work of a generation of politicians, public officers, and magistrates (at that time, Rognoni was Minister of Internal Affairs while Pio La Torre was regional secretary of the PCI, the Italian Communist Party) set the base for Italian legislation to fight illegal activities and open up new scenarios for civic activities.

“It is necessary to break the link between the possessed asset and the mafia groups, affecting their economic power and marking the border between legal and illegal economy”. Pio La Torre

The intuition of Pio La Torre, who saw economic power in assets possessed by the Mafia, led to the introduction



Maddacinesca, Street art project in the old town of Genoa to promote regeneration of confiscated spaces. Image (c) Cantiere per la Legalità Responsabile



of confiscation of assets resulting from the illicit accumulation of wealth by the Mafia's criminal activities. Thanks to the work of La Torre and others of his generation, a subject condemned for Mafia association, can be now deprived of his/her movable and immovable goods, and properties accumulated illegally. Normally, a judicial administrator is appointed by the State to take care of seized assets for the entire trial until the sentence that can lead to definitive confiscation. This law was only the first step when fighting the power of organised crime for the common good.

Fourteen years later a second step was made. The 109/1996 Law of popular initiative promoted by "Libera. Associazione, nomi e numeri contro la mafia", that collected one million signatures, stipulated that confiscated assets have to be assigned to cooperatives, associations and third sector activities which promote a social purpose². The aim and the principle at the base of this law is clear: assets and properties that once belonged to a single private individual, and were used to enrich criminal organisations, must return to the hands, and for the good of civil society.

A third important legislative step to fight against the power of the Mafia was taken

² https://www.libera.it/schede-4-uso_sociale_dei_beni_confiscati

in 2010 with the establishment of the National Agency for the administration and destination of assets seized and confiscated from organised crime, hereinafter ANBSC. The Agency's aim is to centralise the management of confiscated assets and to verify that the persons who have been assigned the assets provide for their use in accordance with the purposes for which they were destined.

II - The Libera Network

However, the effort done since the law inspired by Pio La Torre has not been enough to produce the big change the civil society was expecting to fight the power of Mafias and promote the reassignment, and regeneration of confiscated assets that would strengthen third sector activities and social cooperatives. In particular, the last step of the three shown here constitutes a failure: the ANBSC Agency has not been sufficiently staffed and funded and for this reason has even risked closure. A large part of the properties seized and then confiscated are not assigned because of legal-administrative problems, others are abandoned to their state of deterioration, others are still used by the same Mafiosi or their families. In addition to economic damage, the bankruptcy management of confiscated assets causes social and image damage to the State.

Yet, despite the management and re-assignment of confiscated spaces being a problematic matter, many third sector associations have managed to access confiscated goods (real estate assets and agricultural fields) according to the law 109/96. Libera, the association that promoted the 109/96 law does not directly manage the assets confiscated from organised crime but plays an important role in the Italian third sector environment. Libera promotes training and participatory planning interventions useful to turn confiscated assets into resources capable of triggering local development processes and increasing social cohesion, thanks also to the work of a great number of volunteers, activists and enthusiasts. In 2016, twenty years after the approval of the law, Libera carried out research to know the actual state of reassigned assets.

At the date of the survey, in 2016, 777 different actors were involved in the management of real estate assets confiscated from organised crime, obtained under concession from local authorities, in no less than 17 out of 20 Italian regions. From the data collected through the territorial action of the Libera network, it emerged that just over half of the social realities are made up of associations of different types (408) while there are 25% of social cooperatives (189). Among the other third sector managers, there are 9 amateur sports associations, 27 temporary associations, 10 consortia of cooperatives, 48 associations in the religious world (dioceses, parishes and caritas), 21 foundations, 13 scouting groups and finally 13 schools of different orders and grades. The region with the highest number of social realities managing goods confiscated from the Mafia is Sicily with 204 organisations, followed by Lombardy with 151, and Campania with 124.⁽³⁾

In addition to this work, as most of the confiscated assets are agricultural fields in Southern Italy, Libera has also created a brand to promote and sell products coming from confiscated fields: Libera Terra is a brand that brings together various cooperatives that are members of the Libera association network operating in confiscated spaces.⁽⁴⁾

III - call to action 2020!

Despite the well-known difficulties of ANBSC, in the last year, perhaps as a result of the economic crisis due to the COVID emergency, the Italian State has decided to invest in the work of the Agency and in the reuse of confiscated assets. Confiscation is seen as an instrument to combat the Mafia that could become even richer during the COVID-19 crisis by acquiring activities that are forced to close. The confiscated assets are thus understood as common goods, as tools to strengthen the fundamental rights that are at the basis for the fight against the Mafia and illegal activities.

On 31 July 2020, ANBSC announced an important and innovative call for tenders for the reallocation of more than 1000 confiscated spaces across Italy.⁽⁵⁾ This “experimental” call for proposals aims to put into practice Article 48.3 letter C bis of the Italian Anti-Mafia Code and to implement what is described in the “Guidelines for the administration of seized and confiscated properties” that the Agency published last October. For the first time, the protagonists of a call for tenders are the third sector bodies, from the voluntary sector and cooperatives, to which the Agency can “directly” assign the confiscated properties without going through local authorities, municipalities and regions – the intermediation between ANBSC and Local

Maddacinesca workshop

“A confiscated asset is... space for ideas”.

Image (c) Cantiere per la Legalità Responsabile



Authorities is among the major problems with respect to the timing of reallocations.

The principles underlying the call for proposals are: COHESION; SOCIAL PROTECTION; ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY; ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY; (WORK) INCLUSION; COOPERATION

More precisely, the call for proposals concerns 1410 real estate properties that can be given as free land lease for a 10-year period (with the possibility of extending the lease to 10 more years) or for a 30-years (non-renewable) period of allocation if the proposal consists of the extraordinary maintenance of the asset. The call also establishes a preference clause for projects supported by public administrations that are willing to acquire the property of confiscated assets. The agency also commits to financially support some of the projects presented, thanks to the resources included in the Italian Budget Law (law no. 160\2019) which provides for a fund of €1million per year, for the three-year period 2020-2022; some of the selected projects, therefore, on the basis of the final rankings, will be able to count on a non-repayable contribution of a maximum of €50,000 for the starting up of social activities. The work areas envisioned by the call are: social inclusion, health and prevention, employment and research, culture, security and legality, Due to the great interest raised by this call, the deadline has been postponed from 31

October to 15 of December 2020. This call represents a big opportunity to strengthen the power of the third sector against the Mafia. Moreover, it is a unique opportunity for the third sector activities to access properties that help them deliver better services, strengthening civil society, and social cohesion. But to reassign properties is not enough, the provision of €1 million per year could still just be symbolic if we consider that it has to serve 1410 assets. Among others claiming for proper funding, Fondazione per il Sud has therefore proposed to endow the ANBSC Agency with €200 million, drawing on the Italian Justice Fund (“Fondo Unico di Giustizia” of the Italian Ministry of Justice), fuelled by cash and securities seized or confiscated from organised crime.⁶⁾

All of these are necessary efforts as good practices built up over the years all over Italy on the reuse of confiscated assets have often triggered social redemption processes in the territories, producing a healthy economy, and drawing attention to the importance of organising structured access to space for NGOs helping their activities to grow.

3 survey available at: osservatorioriuso.it/cgi-bin/documentazione/Benelitalia%20Libera%202016.pdf

4 <https://www.liberaterra.it/en/>

5 <https://www.avvisopubblico.it/home/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bando-ANBSC.pdf>

6 <https://www.fondazioneconilsud.it/news/beni-confiscati-nota-del-cda/>

MERCATO SONATO

A hub for music and arts in a former market hall

interview
with:

**MATTEO
PARMEGGIANI**

Vice President of
Orchestra Sensaspine
(No Plugs)

Mercato Sonato⁽¹⁾ is a project to requalify an unused market hall in Bologna. It was developed by an association of musicians in need of a rehearsal space for their orchestra, and it soon evolved into a multimodal hub for music and performative arts. Involving many associations whose work ranges from music to arts and crafts, Mercato Sonato now hosts a variety of music schools, choirs and crafts courses, besides its daily musical evenings.

“We realised that we could perform a wider range of activities if we had our own venue.”



1 <http://www.mercatosonato.com/>



*The building of Mercato
Sonato (cc) Eutropian*

How did your project develop?

You can better understand this place by knowing the history of the association that manages it. I am Matteo Parmeggiani, Vice President of Orchestra Senzaspine (No Plugs), an association founded in 2013 by my colleague Tommaso Ussardi, President and me. We are both music directors, and our aim was to create and lead a symphonic orchestra. We studied together at the Conservatory, and in 2013, we established this orchestra. We had just finished school, and we couldn't find a job or other opportunities. We were not the only ones in this situation: performing and showing their skills was hard for many instrumentalists, let alone working in their field. Many of us felt that our music knowledge wasn't of any use to society. School had been very hard, and we did not want to feel useless, so we founded an orchestra.

We were all young, most of us had just finished school and this turned out to be an advantage. We somehow caught the public attention and support thanks to our informal approach. Soon enough we were ready to found an association based on a manifesto outlining our aims. Our goal is to bring art and classical music closer to the people. We want to show that arts do not bite and people can get closer without getting hurt. We can help those who are not familiar with theatre and classical music, introducing them to this world and making them ask for more, as we would like these art forms to be accessible for everyone, and not just for the elite. The association grew bigger, and we started renting theatres and organised concerts. Our activities became viable and ticket numbers kept increasing also because at the beginning we were asking for low prices. During our first years, we mainly

focused on spreading the word about our initiative, reinvesting almost the whole income in advertisement.

How did you move into this space and regenerate it?

At one point we felt the need to have our own place where we could rehearse, but we eventually realised that we could perform a wider range of activities if we had our own venue. Because in the past we had mingled different arts during our shows – music, dance, visual performance – we were keen on bringing this artistic approach on a permanent term to Bologna. Being selected for the Incredibol fund⁽²⁾ by the Municipality of Bologna in 2015 allowed us to reach our aim and it even exceeded our expectations and many new ideas arose from the place. Those who win this grant do not receive money, but the municipality grants them a space to use and regenerate. At first, the municipality proposed us to regenerate an office building, and even though it was a nice idea, it did not satisfy our need of a space big enough to accommodate an orchestra which counts up to eighty members. Then, they showed us this marketplace, empty at that time, except for one stall that kept working until the end of 2017. The surrounding area was also going through a hard time, experiencing growing micro-criminality and drug abuse. This area is not structurally degraded, and it is close to the city centre. Such a big and peculiar space has also the potential for other activities than an orchestra.

2 <https://www.incredibol.net/en/>

What activities do you have in Mercato Sonato?

We launched a three-phase project, which we metaphorically called sowing, sprout, and bloom. We asked the district's residents for suggestions of what other activities to perform in this space, keeping in mind that every activity had to be viable. We arrived here in September 2015, and it took us about one year to re-organise it and to understand how to become cultural managers rather than only musicians. We started organising events already from the end of 2015. At first, we focused on classical music because this was our area of expertise and because we wanted to learn how our usual audience would react to this very unusual venue. We then opened towards other music styles and we encountered other audiences and targets such as university students, for example.

In September 2016 we inaugurated our first season with scheduled events from October to May. We realised that summer months are too hot and few people would come. We have also concluded that Mercato Sonato could become a huge container which could be filled with activities coming from all the associations and informal groups we are collaborating with. For our second season, we chose different genres for each day of the week. The most attended events are the ones happening at night, but we have also proposed daytime activities. We have events every night from Tuesday till Sunday: Tuesday nights are swing nights, on Wednesdays we have a classical music series called "Classica da Mercato," Thursday nights are for tango, Friday is „Istantanea" (contemporary, electronic music mixing pop, jazz and other influences), while Saturday nights are dedicated to live music. Sunday are days perfect for families: "Mercato di

tutti" (Market for Everyone) proposes several daytime workshops for children focused on music and arts, there is a second-hand and handicraft market – there are also puppeteers and a part of our orchestra is also always present, to allow children to get closer to music. We also have a bar and even a kitchen serving vegetarian food made from local products. We are closed to the public on Mondays, but we still work inside.

Starting from 2018, we launched a music school for kids. There are classes every afternoon from Tuesday till Friday and two Saturdays per month there is a rehearsal of the kids' orchestra for students of 6 to 13 years old. Unlike most other music schools, we have a lot of space at our disposal, so we can simultaneously have private or small classes and an orchestra rehearsal. All Mercato Sonato's spaces are shared, and this gives kids the chance to see grown-ups, including their teachers, rehearse: it is a great educational added value! We do not only teach kids: on early evenings during the week, we also teach music to grown-ups at all levels. We set up a choir called „Coro di Stonati" (Off-key Choir). It is a huge success, it now counts 150 members, and most of them are on the pitch, they just didn't know it.

Mercato Sonato is not only about music. We collaborate with LAC Scatola⁽³⁾, a handicraft association that uses some of our spaces to organise tailoring courses using second-hand fabrics, a silk-screen printing workshop, and a carpenter's workshop. They also design the costumes for our theatrical productions while another association uses a part of our basement for photography classes and darkroom. The aim of Orchestra Senzaspine is to bring music and arts closer to the people, and a marketplace is a perfect

*Rehearsal at Mercato Sonato.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



setting. We hope to bring back the people who once came here to do their shopping and re-experience the space. In time our community grew a lot: Orchestra Senzaspine now counts above 450 members scattered across the country, thanks to the several years of activity in different cities. After graduation, musicians struggle with finding a space to rehearse, so lots of local musicians come here to practice, and this keeps the place alive.

The venue is a property of the Municipality. What kind of agreement do you have with them, and how do you work together with the other associations with which you share the place?

We have a temporary renewable lease lasting for four years – our term is until the end of 2019. This lease allows us to rent space and to sustain our expenses. We are affiliated with ARCI⁽⁴⁾ (Italian Social and Cultural Clubs Association) and all participants to activities need a yearly ARCI subscription. ARCI affiliation is common in Bologna and is widespread throughout the whole country, so it doesn't limit our capacity of attracting and expanding

an audience. With bigger, structural improvements we can extend the lease in proportion with the investment we made. Although we are the only ones paying for eventual renovation/improvement and our expenses also include utilities, maintenance, and minor improvements, the municipality may still publish a new tender to use the building at the end of 2019.

How many people work here?

Over 25 people work here. Tommaso Ussardi and I are President and Vice President while Luca Cantelli is the general secretary, and he also manages applications for funding. Both the orchestra and the market area have two official representatives and one secretary who all report to one general administrator. A few people manage both the bar and the kitchen while others work for the associations that organise courses and activities. We also have a

3 <http://www.mercatosonato.com/tag/lac-scatola/>

4 <https://www.arci.it/>

5 <https://culturability.org/>

press agent and a person who manages relations with schools. Our music school has five teachers, we also have a sound technician who assists us before every event. In the following months, we will also work on fundraising and we will strengthen our relations with theatres to promote our shows.

What type of funds did you access to implement this project?

We won the Incredibol competition that granted us this venue and we have also applied for funding through the Culturability⁽⁵⁾ grant, a program focusing on urban regeneration. This program helped us develop a precise plan for the regeneration of this venue so that even before receiving the funds and starting the renovation we have already set many aspects and steps to follow. We were granted €40,000, it was a crucial investment we used to renovate and repair parts of the building.

How do other music institutions see you?

At first, we had no contact with the Municipal Theatre. We didn't feel like we could ever compete with them as we saw ourselves as a group of friends playing. But we later discovered that the Municipal Theatre was seeing us as a potential competitor and this made our relations cold at the beginning. As soon as we grew, we felt the need to talk with bigger institutions and to open the opportunity for cooperation. All went well, and we started collaborating. In the beginning, we involved the musicians – some of them play with us and some others are now teachers at our music school – later we contacted the institution itself, proposing opportunities that could be useful

for both. In November 2017, we developed a first official collaboration called “Elisir d'Amore”: they lent us lights and costumes, we featured singers studying at the Opera School and started a promotion granting ticket discounts for the Municipal Theatre. We also collaborate with the Conservatory and our orchestra became part of their didactics. Many of us were students at the Conservatory of Bologna, and we are happy to be now considered as their partners. The municipality has been supportive throughout the year and we collaborate with the city of Bologna on some big events every year.

How do you see the future of Orchestra Senzaspine?

We have big plans: we would love to repeat some of these projects somewhere else, and we are now searching for other places to regenerate or new projects we contribute to. We recently went to Milan and discussed the expansions of this project with an investment bank. Classical music can regenerate abandoned spaces and degraded areas, this is exactly what happened here! The Municipality of Bologna will soon start a bigger regeneration program called PON Metro⁽⁶⁾, and it has already allocated about €2 million for the renovation of Mercato Sonato. Works will begin during 2019 and by 2020 the whole structure will be upgraded.

6 <http://www.ponmetro.it/>

DAS PACKHAUS

A start-up community in a temporary-use project

interview
with:

**MARGOT
DEERENBERG**

co-founder of
Onorthodox, Paradocks
and Das Packhaus

Das Packhaus⁽¹⁾ is a project of Paradocks⁽²⁾, an international think- and do-tank for reuse of vacant buildings in Vienna. Since 2014, Das Packhaus has been demonstrating the potential for temporary use, by building a community of over 80 companies representing different fields. Das Packhaus offers a place where organisations can support each other and where the city can benefit from an original semi-public space.

“Das Packhaus wasn’t meant to be a homogeneous building, because in that case people wouldn’t learn from each other”



1 <http://www.daspackhaus.at/>

2 <http://www.paradocks.at/>

Das Packhaus.
Photo (c) Das Packhaus



How did you start working in temporary-use projects?

I come from the Netherlands, from Amsterdam, and during my studies I have already had some experience of temporary use even though at the time it was not called nor framed as “temporary use”. Having carried out many different internships for various companies using empty buildings for projects, it was considered a normal process. After my studies and moving to Vienna, I established an association called Onorthodox carrying out projects and exhibitions around Europe and our exhibitions always took place in empty buildings. We were already doing temporary-use projects but only for very short term.

Once we were called for the Soho in Ottakring Festival⁽³⁾, a festival of temporary-use project in the 16th district. Back then we were offered an empty space, but we decided to find another one by ourselves: this is how we found an empty snack bar⁽⁴⁾ with a lot of ground floor space. This space convinced us to stay on after the festival using it together with Soho and Feschmarkt. TRUST 111⁽⁵⁾ was also another important project for us: 700 square meter of a nice empty building, where we were working mostly with artists and architects. When TRUST 111 ended, I was looking for a larger space but didn't want an industrial building, because I wanted to deal with working spaces such as offices. Looking for a larger office building I ended up finding this one that now is Das Packhaus, and this is when Paradocks started.

3 <http://www.sohoinottakring.at/>

4 <http://www.paradocks.at/portfolio-item/gg68/>

5 <http://www.paradocks.at/portfolio-item/5124/>

How was the negotiating process for this building?

It took us six months of negotiation with the first owner of this building to start this project, sometimes it seemed that we could have the space immediately and sometimes it felt like we would never get it at all. Since the beginning, the potential of this building was totally clear to us, it fits perfectly to our idea to combine small offices into a larger ensemble. We also thought that if offices upstairs were needed, then it was necessary to have an open ground floor that could work as a semi-public space for the city. Having this kind of programme in mind was very important for us right from the beginning.

We knew that co-working was a big thing in many cities (at that time, four years ago it was booming) but the concept of having a space, where people can just sit together was not appealing to us. That was something we didn't want to focus on, because we saw that there were plenty places already working in that way.

There is a time when companies grow to gain their identity and their working tools that they then need to store, but still be able to provide affordable and flexible spaces where sharing, networking and meeting other people is available. We wanted to offer a space that could address these kinds of needs, because it was something still rare.

We presented our project to Alexander Van der Bellen, who is now president of Austria, but at that time was the Education and Research Councillor of Vienna as we wanted to involve Universities in our project. Finally we were called by CONWERT, the first owner of the building, who told us that we could actually have the building for basic surface cost.



*Ground floor space in
Das Packhaus.
Photo (cc) Eutropian.*



How did you build up the Packhaus community?

When we finally received the building, we knew what we wanted to do with it: it was not meant to be only for architects or artists, but we wanted to promote diversity, we wanted it to be really open, for associations, young entrepreneurs and different kinds of projects. We had a romantic idea of complexity: a city within a building, with different uses on different levels.

It was important for us to have companies encompassing different “ages”: having some well-established companies working next to some new ones so they could assist one another, because we wanted to support fresh entrepreneurs. Das Packhaus wasn’t meant to be a homogeneous building because in that case people wouldn’t learn from each other.

We made an open call for users that was luckily taken up by a lot of media. We opened our doors to everyone for two days so people could come and see the building, have a better idea of how to apply to our call in addition to giving us some feedback. A system of ambassadors – people from

different fields – helped us to decide who could come to the building. This happened in March 2014. One month later, lots of people started requesting some space. I have to say that it went way beyond our expectations: we were evaluating applications together with our ambassadors and it was very hard to choose who could come to Das Packhaus, of course we had to say no to a lot of people. It was a nice moment for our project. The ground floor was adapted with some second-hand furniture in order not to invest too much in the space and be ready to move if needed.

When we entered the space it was in fine condition, everything was functioning. We only work with buildings that are functioning: no works needed for electricity, heating, nor water should be needed. Once settled, we had only to install internet and make some adjustments of course, but our work was very little. We rented upstairs spaces with no furniture. We took care of the ground floor, but every user worked on its own space – this is why the cost was so low. It is very funny how nowadays (four years later) every office looks so different, I find it amazing.

We started the building with 2500 m², our previous projects were in smaller buildings, so it was a huge space for us as we were a small team of 4 people and we only had a contract for a year at the beginning. Very soon, once we had started, we learnt from the owner that we could stay longer and acquire more square meters. It started with a precarium contract: a kind of contract where you pay very little, but where you can also be kicked out at any month. It was not too risky as such large buildings aren't rented out easily nowadays. Soon we had a longer contract and more space. Since 2016 we have a proper rental contract, not a precarious one anymore, but we do also pay more.

Since 2017 we have new owners – the building was sold to new owners with us inside it – and we have a year's contract now up until June 2019. Although we had to raise the office-rental price again, our spaces are still cheaper than others in Vienna. Every time this occurs we undergo a lot of negotiations and therefore, whenever our rent is raised we have to consequently raise the rental on our offices. However, for us a border was crossed, because some people were happy to stay even though they had to pay more, but some others had to move out. It is still cheap! But, obviously not as it was in the beginning.

What is your economic model?

Every user pays for their office, but of course this is not enough for the whole building because we have to pay all the rest: hallways, kitchen and ground floor. All the extras are paid by renting out the ground floor. For us it was very important to have this kind of open ground floor: 650 square meter with spaces for movement (pilates,

yoga, meditation), a photo lab, meeting spaces, bike lab, the canteen and even a garden. We have a special area for events so we can host also markets and exhibitions, where every year a lot of these things take place.

Many institutions in Vienna are continually looking for informal space so when it comes to organising special events, Packhaus is a great location for them and we have hosted the Wirtschaftsagentur⁽⁶⁾ (Business Agency) and the Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft⁽⁷⁾ (Real Estate Agency) more than once.

Our work is to research those spaces that are empty and to create concepts for them. In our history we have received only two small subsidies for a research phase, but apart from these small subsidies, we were not funded by anybody. We started some applications and that cost us a lot of time but in the end we weren't able to get any: sometimes we were either too cultural or too artistic to be chosen. Now I think it is a good thing that we are not dependent on subsidies because this way we are completely safe and independent.

What did you learn from this project and what are its results?

At Paradocks, we have learnt a lot about how to set up a good contract and we had to do most of it by ourselves. We didn't need any subsidies but we would have liked to receive more legal support, because we were in a way naive and not being native German speakers made it even harder.

6 <https://wirtschaftsagentur.at/>

7 <https://www.big.at/>

Whilst discussing, everyone was scared about a precarium contract as it was considered to be taking a big risk. Now we have much greater knowledge about this kind of contract and we feel more confident, but it was totally different at the beginning. We had to learn everything because legal advice was far too expensive for us.

Legal support would have been appreciated also because the city does benefit from our project: we are lauded as a good Viennese example but the risks taken all fell on us. However, now thanks to Kreativeräume⁽⁶⁾ (Office for vacancy activation) we have some technical and friendly help. We should write a book with some guidelines especially for the legal aspects.

It is important to know that we are not profit-orientated, however of course we don't work for free, we do pay our team, but it is also important to keep prices low – this depends on the contracts we negotiate with the owners. In these four years we have supported 150 companies and this is what makes temporary use a great thing where people develop their abilities. The ground floor started with 60 square meter space and now we can boast 150 square meter of open space. There has been a real growth and it has always been very flexible and affordable to everyone.

At Das Packhaus we have 87 entrepreneurs, businesses that make us one of the largest, if not the largest, co-working space in Vienna – including a set of informal projects that is functioning well and shows us how many creative people thrive in this city. We also have a waiting list, and the total number of people actually working here is 250.

Have you seen some policy changes?

The city in general is more aware about temporary-use. Now we have Kreativeräume but it is still not easy for them – they are accepted but they can't do so much, they are not allowed to do many things. People from the administration, from other Austrian cities, from other countries come and are just amazed about this space. Things are moving of course but very slowly. Developers are also interested in what we do but I haven't seen any big changes yet.

Since we are large and well-known, now we do have more opportunities of finding spaces, but it would be nicer if there would be a change in policy that would push real estate owners to give more space to certain kinds of projects such as those with a strong social and/or economic impact. Obviously, they should in return benefit from tax relief.

*Das Packhaus.
Photo (c) Veronika Kovacsova*



How do you see the future of Paradocks beyond Das Packhaus?

We have seen already some other spaces – there are many empty buildings but the culture has changed a lot. Owners are more aware of what they can obtain in the long term. At the beginning it was easier to come by a space, now the owners want to get more profit from their unused buildings. With the owners of Das Packhaus, we renegotiate our contract every year, therefore we have been looking for other buildings for years. Paradocks is able to exist when there's a large-sized building and when, therefore, you can have space that is open to the local community. For instance, if we had a building of 400 square meter without a ground floor it wouldn't be half as interesting. Our aim is to work in many buildings simultaneously, so that if we lose one of them we are still present and established. We are looking for buildings larger than 1.000 square meter and if it doesn't happen we will just offer consultancy to people looking for spaces.

How has Das Packhaus coped with Covid-19?

The past 12 months and the still ongoing pandemic are posing different challenges but have also been a renewed proof of concept for us. Just after the first lockdown ended, we faced not only an outflux of members who had to leave our project due to their dire economic perspective, but also had to cope with a 10% raise from our landlord for the next prolongation (mid-2020 to mid-2021). It took until December 2020 that we managed to establish the required occupancy rate of 100%, something which is normally easy for us. Of course we also had to deal with lost revenues due to

currently banned events that cross-finance the project. However, it has been more the wait-and-see attitude than bankruptcy of businesses that caused the lower occupancy rate. Unfortunately, I fear most insolvencies will happen in the next months of the year.

The difficulties of the past year, on the other hand, highlighted the demand and the necessity for affordable workspaces in any urban setting. New members and tenants quite often regard our affordable all-inclusive packages as a safe haven during these challenging times. We again have a proper waiting list and see people searching for solutions for home office outside of home and so we are looking into new working models. We can certainly not complain, yet our empty space concept urgently needs to be rethought, too.

2020 was an election year in the City of Vienna and we were astonished that even in these times, publicly owned vacancies are not dealt with. With the publication of our book "Unseen Profit"⁽⁹⁾ in 2020 we hope to support public but as well private owners in their decisions to open up towards more approaches than only long-term rent: temporary use, pre-use, flexible contracts and so on. Meanwhile we as Paradocks have, as a result of multiple request from real estate owners for concepts, developed a side branch. Here we focus on branding, place making and space management concepts for real estate owners and developers in order to avoid the vacancy of commercial buildings and have a larger impact on the resource space.

8 <https://www.kreativeraumewien.at/>

9 https://issuu.com/wirtschaftsagentur_wien/docs/unseenprofit_wirtschaftsagenturwien



HALLO

Going beyond Real Estate Speculation to Create Community Spaces in Hamburg

*interview
with:*

**DOROTHEE
HALBROCK,
ALICE
BARKHAUSEN**

co-founders of HALLO

Interview by Levente Polyák on October 26, 2018. Edited in April 2021 by WERK-team members.

The HALLO⁰¹:collective aims to reactivate publicly inaccessible spaces in the city of Hamburg. The collective organises a yearly festival, HALLO: Festspiele, and it is developing a strategy to develop long-term concepts for unused space and raise funding to support its activities. Among their projects, Schaltzentrale, an experimental neighbourhood office, is specifically dedicated to giving space for art creation and sociality in Kraftwerk Bille, a former power station in a transforming neighbourhood defined by industry and businesses. The main goal behind all the activities is to manifest common good-oriented ways of space production, for example by securing a big part of the Kraftwerk as a common (WERK: House of New Work) or creating a commonly designed public park on a former recycling site next door (PARKS).



1 <https://hallohallohallo.org/de>



*Kraftwerk Bille.
Photo (c) Antje Sauer*

What is HALLO: collective and how was it formed?

We started in 2014 by inviting people to join an open group. A lot of the joining members were already working in the organisation of big festivals and we planned to use these skills to conquer unused space. In the beginning, we were organising small events moving across venues around the city and we called them Hallöchen (small Hallos). We started off by financing the first HALLO: Festspiele⁽²⁾ ourselves: we had a one-week festival which included building it up and tearing it down as part of the public program. For the following year's edition, we received 56.000 euros from the biggest fund for the independent scene in Hamburg. In organising the festival we maintained the same concept but we used the fund to invite many partner organisations that are also working in artistic space production like Plataforma Trafaria from Portugal, Yes We Camp from France and we focussed on experimental architecture that year.

Since the very beginning, we have been searching for a long-term venue for common use, but at first, we didn't have any money available. Meanwhile, we mainly tested out modes of organisation and communication and strategies of how to artistically open up spaces. In 2016, we accessed Schaltzentrale, a venue located in Kraftwerk Bille that was bought in 2015 by MIB, a real estate investment company that also owns property in Leipzig and in Nürnberg and uses subculture as a mean to activate old industrial sites and thus increase their property value. That's why the owner was willing to give us the space for free for temporary use, benefitting from our work to raise awareness about the site. We only pay utilities here but can

also get evicted every year. This allowed us to create a concept for this space and we established an experimental neighbourhood office. Since 2018, in order to counteract the speculative mechanisms and secure a big part of the Kraftwerk permanently as a common, we – together with old and new users – have organised ourselves as WERK: House of New Work to buy and run a part of the Kraftwerk as a cooperative. By creating these spaces with a network of people who live and work in the area, we want to redefine the meaning of work by adding cultural, associative and educational work to the classical definition of industrial and "regular" businesses. By emphasizing that it's a working neighbourhood that is also producing space, we don't just want to intervene in this specific building but to have an impact on the entire area by using this building to support the growth of a network around it. In 2020 the owners sold the whole building to profit-oriented investors. The new owners have different plans and our work on site is threatened even more than before.

What type of contract do you have for this building?

The former owner took time to decide on the exact building function and wanted to start a refurbishment only once the space has been rented. Now it apparently got too risky for them, so they sold it. All of these processes gave us time to establish our work. For our neighbourhood office, Schaltzentrale, we always have a one-year-long contract which can be terminated with six months' notice. The new owners informed us now that the building will most likely be demolished in 2022. Up until now we have been using the

² <http://hallo-festspiele.de/2019/en/>



*WERK process.
Illustration (c)
Franziska Dehm*



entire Kraftwerk Bille for temporary projects and made it accessible for other users as well. This type of use will also end when the renovation will start. All reasons to buy a big part of the building as a cooperative with working neighbours.

Who constitutes the neighbourhood office?

This is a group of culturally engaged people such as artists, composers or writers, but the group is growing and there are also members with diverse backgrounds and practical expertise which are essential here. For example, Tommy, one of the very few people still living in this neighbourhood, used to work in airplane construction but he also has experience as a chef and as a deejay. Another member of our team is the technical director of one of the biggest museums in Hamburg and yet another is an Arabic and English teacher.

Since we got access to this space in 2016, the team has been evolving because there is always the possibility of just coming by for lunch with the team, people come and work in the area, or in the house itself.

Many team members have a background in culture, and not in urban planning and this is why we have been mainly hosting artistic events for the past four years. In 2017 we received a big fund for Schaltzentrale to strengthen our collaboration with refugee shelters nearby (one of the only residents in this industrial area), which was cut down a lot the following years. We would wish for long term funds that understand the work of a transdisciplinary neighbourhood office for the common good and thus addresses all parts of the neighbourhood as equal.

How did you become a protagonist of the area?

In the past, this area used to be inhabited by about 70,000 people, but after the Second World War bombing, only a few residential apartments were left. The city's recent urban development program wants to implement more residential buildings in this area and to attract population here. This location is mentally perceived as very far from the city centre because it feels deserted, but we are just one train stop from the main station.

We started by coming here with an agenda – we wanted to host temporary events to start a long term opening of space – so we wanted to first understand the context and get to know people. To get in touch with local organisations and also for practical reasons, we started to collect a lot of material from the companies in the neighbourhood. There are many industries around and they are always happy to give away something. At a certain point, our association was established and we began to further explore the neighbourhood through events, by frequenting the local bar to meet people and going for long walks around. Some of us were already working or living here already by then.

From the beginning, we foresaw huge changes in this area, since a big urban masterplan is coming in effect right now, and we have already experienced some: for example, the rowing club is endangered and might be replaced. Many artists living in this area have been threatened by eviction as well. In 2018, together with HafenCity

University, we started to develop a mapping process to map the changes and potentials of the waterscape of the river Bille that is running through the whole area. Before, we were focusing more on building a network but now we are getting into the phase of concretely discussing what is happening in the area. It is an exciting change: we were tired of doing just pop-up festivals that are always likely to accelerate gentrification and wanted to develop a concept that is more connected to the place and which contributes to a common good-oriented development of the area.

What is your relationship with public administration and other institutions?

We got in touch with politicians for funding and to get permits. They progressively improved their opinion on us and this helps us in accessing public tenders. We thereby won a call for developing a park in an old recycling area right next to the Kraftwerk and to communicate a whole new green corridor connecting the three main

∨ *Kraftwerk Bille. Photo (c) Antje Sauer*



waterscapes in Hamburg. The recycling site is in transformation and the administration is planning to have 5–7 years of temporary use in between. As part of PARKS – a local group that is far bigger than HALLO: – we are now continuously working on redefining the site as a long-term project and secure it as a common. These projects help HALLO: grow out of Kraftwerk as a space and most importantly to grow as a neighbourhood network that is supporting its members that, in turn, support each other.

In 2017, we started an auditive exploration of the space with our festival HALLO: Festspiele. This auditive program consisted of installations, walks and concerts. Because this program was very specific, it received big financial support from the state and it helped us improving our reputation especially in the eyes of the city council and of our landlord. Since then, we connected with other artists who work in the many empty spaces spread in Hamburg, and we are now discussing how to take over one of the buildings as a cooperative.

In summer 2018, together with neighbours like the design studio blackSchwarz and Amelie Rost, an architect specialized on floating architecture, we built a pontoon on the river raising the theme of water as a public space. We also had an intense and fruitful collaboration with HafenCity university, Antje Stokman, Kathrin Wildner and Dagmar Pelger in particular, and started a mapping process of the waterscapes of the river Bille. The summer was extremely hot and we had a wonderful festival: people were swimming in the river and going on all sorts of floating vehicles. Usually, people can't reach the water as the river has always been only used as an industrial system of transport. At the moment there are only two

entry points to the river, one is an informal access to the water from a small park and another one is from the rowing association RV Bille. Three years later, we're still working on creating a commonly designed access to the water and there's signs that this will be supported by the city authorities.

What are your next steps?

After three years of voluntary work, including taking part in the exchange program "Actors of Urban Change"³, hosting international and local workshops (e.g. with iac) and applying for a lot of funding schemes, at the end of March 2021, the Federal Ministry of the Interior announced this year's selection of "National Urban Development Projects." Among other winning proposals is our project application "WERK – House of New Work" which we submitted together with the borough of Hamburg Mitte. With five million euros from the federal government and additional co-financing from the city of Hamburg, the renovation and co-productive development of one of the buildings on the site can be financed over the next few years. We would like to take over a part of the Kraftwerk Bille area in Hammerbrook as a cooperative (WERK eG), redevelop and run it in the long term: as an open, affordable and diverse space for common-good-oriented work. For us, this requires a model of common ownership and organisation – to secure WERK as a common good. We are now continuing to negotiate with the owner, municipal representatives and foundations about the cooperative takeover.

3 <https://www.kraftwerkville.com/events/actors-of-urban-change-final-meeting-40.html>



IN CUSTODIA



chapter 4

**Developing
economic
resilience**

*interview
with:*

**GIOVANNI
GRASSO**

President of Fondazione
Val di Noto

Community foundations are a means to mobilise resources within a territory in order to help the creation of local initiatives. In an area with limited public resources but a great density of active charities, civic organisations and private companies, a community foundation can act as an actor to raise funds, connect initiatives and trigger cooperation within an area. The Val di Noto Community Foundation was founded in 2014 by a partnership consisting of a group of cooperatives, foundations and the Archbishops of Syracuse and Noto, covering an area in South Sicily with a population of 120,000. In its first five years, the Foundation has already sponsored over 85 projects, 90% of these were carried out by networks composed by third sector organisations or by other entities such as schools, trade organisations, public institutions, trade unions, parishes. In this interview, Giovanni Grasso, President of Fondazione Val di Noto, explains the foundation's activities.



*The tourist shop of the
Val di Noto Foundation.*

Photo (cc) Eutropian



What is the mission of Fondazione Val di Noto?

The aim of our foundation is to give a chance to those who have an idea about the community to realise it. We have three main activities. We work with vulnerable people such as the disabled, or kids with difficult family background; helping children with after school home work, arts and crafts and sports; and we run a business incubator supporting the local social economy. We spend 700,000 euros a year for social programmes. We are certainly a Catholic organisation but we can do what we want. 70% of the money we spend comes from the individuals who donate a percentage of their tax to church charities.

Besides financial support, how do you help your partners?

We help organisations in our territory with a variety of activities that are useful for their growth, from meetings with crowdfunding experts to consultations with social and solidarity economy advisors or events on legislation relevant to third sector organisations. Moreover, the Foundation ensures logistic support for the associations it works with, creates coordination between similar associations to optimise resources, and between complementary sectors to encourage collaboration. Horizontally, we coordinate between companies that operate in the same sector to optimise their use of resources and avoid developing similar projects and services. Vertically, we coordinate between companies operating in complementary sectors to encourage collaboration between them and maximize the positive effects of their activities on the territory. The activity of the Foundation aims to create a permanent

network of collaboration between selected organisations as holders of similar interests, which accept common financial reporting and transparency rules.

Why is a community foundation better than an association that brings together all the actors?

There is a basic difference between an association and a foundation. The foundation has a certain amount of money that it collects. The focus is not on the volunteer or the person but to use the money as best as you can in an ethical way. The funds raised have to be used in the territory. We do not use the money we collect directly; we use it to make more money. We use the market against the market, in a way. For example, we invest in social housing programmes: we buy houses and rent to those who cannot afford a high rate. We use our money and gain our money back while benefiting the community.

What is the essence of a community foundation?

The founders are not just a company, a single entity, it is a community that raises money. Fondazione Val di Noto was created by twelve founders, including two Archbishops of the nearest towns, and small cooperatives and small foundations. Community foundations do not serve a specific purpose. They can be used for several objectives, they are multi-purpose. You can choose the way how you want to use the foundation. Each association delegate someone to the board so everything is well known about the founders. If there are too many members, then those associations that work on similar issues can delegate one person to

*Event space of the Val di
Noto Foundation.*

Photo (cc) Eutropian



the assemblies such as assembly of social cooperation. A community foundation has to choose the territory they want to work in. It can be a smaller territory like East Brighton or for a whole city like Dubrovnik.

Can you tell us about the structure of your organisation?

As a foundation we have only one employee – our secretary – and nine chairmen who are unpaid. We have coordinators for each programme but they are all volunteers. We work with about 20 people as coordinators and we have about 90 volunteers in our programmes of all different ages. We ask volunteers to stay a year with us and 80% of them remain if they see that the programme works. They find other volunteers, involve friends in the programme and they view the programmes as a family. We have volunteers from all ages. For instance, we work with schools where we identify children with family or economic problems and we take care of them after school. Within this programme we have young volunteers playing with children as well as older volunteers who help with their education.

What is the challenge of working with so many volunteers?

The task is to coordinate and motivate volunteers. We have to recognise their work and motivate them. They can see how the lives of the people they work with change for the better and they are motivated by this. If they think of themselves as just members of the association but not a member of the city, the programme will fail. The key is to feel part of the programme.

How do you coordinate the work of many organisations you cooperate with?

We try to organise things so different associations do not end up working on the same thing. Each NGO has a delegate in our board. Each organisation appoints a person in charge of relations with the Foundation who interfaces with the general secretary for the reservation of spaces or equipment and for their relationships in general. With our most important programmes we are the core coordinators but with 70% of the programmes we involve other associations. We approach the programme with an association that has worked in the field for

several years so they have lots of experience and can run the programme even without our help.

Besides associations, you also work with local businesses. How do you help them grow?

A few years ago we founded a business incubator that supports 15 enterprises in the process from conceiving an idea to becoming a company. We support them with accounts, lawyers and organisation of their workers. There are various start ups taking part: some are interested in games for children, some are restaurants. After two years, 13 of these companies are still on the market. The incubator serves people who do not have work and this way, they do not need to go to the soup kitchen and the housing programme but can set up their own business.

How else do you support the incubated projects?

We run a tourist information centre that has many purposes. We opened up a building right in the middle of the city centre that was closed for a long time and give information about the city as well as the companies we support through the incubator. This way we give exposure to the tourists about the companies and what they do. While there are couple of private tourist centres in our city, this is one of the largest in Sicily. We also have a shop right by the tourist centre where the companies we helped to create can sell their products and services.

What projects do you work on with the municipality?

We are involved in different programmes with the municipality such as social housing. The municipality provides a list of those who need a house urgently and we provide them with a house for six months and also try to give them work. It is the Housing First model.

What is the importance of a space like the Urban Center in this ecosystem of associations and companies?

The Urban Center is an important place where private and public actors can join and talk, discuss problems. We need a place like this. But we also need a specific purpose for such a space. People have to identify a building with a purpose. A town must have a city centre, an NGO house, an auditorium for meetings. Each space has its own purpose.

Community foundations

Public charities dedicated to social improvement in a geographically defined community such as a region or city district. They work in partnership with donors, local organisations and the community to address community needs. Their fields of intervention are typically poverty alleviation, education, social services and unemployment. from funds by donors. They often have grant programs as well as donor advised funds, scholarship funds and provide technical assistance and training for small, local NGOs.



Crowdfunding for the Orlando Youth Association

author:

PETRA
MARČINKO

A fairly new concept of crowdfunding was prepared and conducted successfully in Dubrovnik for the Orlando Youth Association, an organisation with a 20-year history. Why was it so successful? Because it connected three important actors related to the topics of participatory democracy and active citizens: NGOs, students, and the University via a program of service-learning.

In 2018, the Erasmus Student Network Dubrovnik, one of the partners in the Youth Center started a project named „UniActive“, co-financed by the European Social Fund. One of the main goals of the project was to strengthen student capacities when it comes to putting their theoretical knowledge into practice to help the local civil society, with the guidance and expertise of their professors at the University of Dubrovnik. By testing and implementing service-learning, ESN wanted to create a future teaching methodology concerning service-learning for the future generations of students. One of the six programs conducted through the project was the crowdfunding campaign for the Orlando Youth Association.

Preparation is the key

Ivana Grkeš, the project manager of UniActive, tells us that the first step in this process was changing the image of the association in public perception: *„When we consider the image of Orlando at the local level, we can see that it has certain negative implications. Only us who were more engaged in the work and activities of this organisation know that it was always a positive thing happening here.“*

Crowdfunding campaign Orlando.

Image (c) Orlando



To improve the image of the organisation and to enhance its visibility in the local community, students with the expert guidance of their professor started to work on creating events and media releases as well as sharing information and news about Orlando through social media, mainly Facebook and Instagram. They have also created a promotional video about the organisation.

During this “visibility boost” process, Ivana Grkeš and Žarko Dragojević, expert associate in the project, led a discussion with representatives of the Orlando Youth Association and agreed that the main goal of the crowdfunding would be raising funds for the revitalisation of the association and its program development. After setting the goal, the two protagonists started considering different options when it comes to crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and IndieGoGo, but according to Žarko Dragojević, none of those platforms were popular or even known in Croatia.

Therefore, they have decided that the main efforts were going to be a media campaign and active communication led by the „below the line“ technique. That meant focusing on an already defined audience and direct communication through e-mail, promotional activities, press conferences, and social

media pages, mainly Facebook and Instagram which was growing exponentially in Croatia at that time. Donations were decided to be collected through direct payment to the account of the organisation, and the transparency would be achieved through a weekly report of the raised funds.

To successfully generate interesting content, they conducted an archive analysis about Orlando and identified interesting events, videos, photographs concentrating mostly on the period between 2005 and 2010, considered the „golden age“ of the association. As Žarko Dragojević explains, *„We tried to revive the best memories to show the potential the association had in those days and to suggest that the same could be possible again through either this crowdfunding campaign or if new people joined and volunteered.“*

Alongside this technique and bringing an emotional message to the front of the campaign, they also asked the former and current members and collaborators of the association, mainly well-known musicians and other actors from the cultural scene of Croatia, to make a short video sharing their favourite memories about the organisation and inviting people to donate.

Concert in Orlando.
Photo (c) Orlando
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The next step was another educational action designed to prepare the students for the upcoming implementation of the crowdfunding campaign. The Dubrovnik Development Agency DURA organised a workshop on the topic of crowdfunding for them. After the event, Žarko and Ivana started working with students on the media plan, teaching them how to prepare and tell an interesting story for the press conference which will mark the beginning of the campaign. These brainstorming sessions, as Žarko and Ivana recall, were a mutual learning experience mostly because the students were knowledgeable about trends that were not necessarily known to Žarko and Ivana because of the generation gap. After collaboratively developing a communication and PR strategy they were ready to bring the campaign into the public.

Just before the press conference, they contacted possible private donors and companies detected as having some kind of fondness and sensibility towards Orlando (by being either ex-members or spending their youth days there). This was done before the press conference to have already some funds raised before going public.

Reporters who were contacted for the press conference were also specifically chosen for having some sensibility towards Orlando or having regularly reported about their events. This choice would later prove significant

because the same media would continue reporting throughout the whole campaign, prompting others to follow their example. In total, around 10–12 media portals and companies on the local and county levels followed the story regularly.

Before the crowdfunding campaign had begun in the summer of 2019, other NGOs offered their support to the project by using some of their resources to complement the crowdfunding campaign with events and video production.

The most significant contribution was a concert by the singer Mary May, one of the most prominent singer-songwriters on the independent scene of Croatia. It was organised and funded by the Audiovisual Center of Dubrovnik and Art Workshop Lazareti (both members of the Platform for Lazareti). The aforementioned contributions to the campaign, as Žarko Dragojević highlights, were done to minimize Orlando's promotional costs so that they could keep the full amount of the donations collected.

In the end, through the cooperation of the University of Dubrovnik, their students, and the Erasmus Student Network alongside other organisations of the civil society, former and current members of the Orlando Youth Association, DURA, and the media, the crowdfunding campaign was a success.

Benefits of the crowdfunding campaign

interview with:

Ivana Grkeš, ESN Dubrovnik

Žarko Dragojević, AVCD

Petra Marcinko, ULG coordinator

PM: Apart from the obvious financial gain for Orlando and its program development, other actors also gained experience and knowledge, while strengthening their civil network. Tell us more!

ŽD: As for the students, they had the opportunity to informally learn tricks of the trades from the people who had at least 10–15 years' experience in media and marketing, working in the fields of civil society, music, and culture. At the same time, it was a way for students to get the mark more creatively and interestingly by applying their knowledge in practice. They could be innovative, develop a project more informally by brainstorming in cafés, and in the end, they did not only learn through experience but also contributed to the local community with their knowledge and skills. When it comes to Orlando, besides the financial gain, the campaign made the association's visibility much more pronounced. Other NGOs involved, such as the Erasmus Student Network, Audiovisual Center and Art Workshop Lazareti continued their work as they had done for years, supporting other NGOs, as well as young artists and the independent culture scene in Croatia.

IC: The Orlando Youth Association gained around 500 new followers on their

social media accounts. And as for the Erasmus Student Network, by successfully implementing the project „UniActive“, we have started successfully developing the service-learning model which will be continued through other projects with the University of Dubrovnik, activating the model in the local community and applying the knowledge acquired by students in helping the community.

PM: At the same time, this was one of the first crowdfunding campaigns in Dubrovnik.

IC: Yes. It was not the very first, but the earlier ones were not as visible and were conducted at the national level. Also, it was the first time such a campaign was made for an NGO, led by a group of youngsters with the help of relevant experts. After this experience, we can say that this is something that every NGO can easily organise to help themselves financially, especially because it does not require many funds but will, skill, creativity and few good connections, especially with the media. In the end, this project and the crowdfunding campaign made a significant contribution to activating young people into becoming active citizens and bringing about positive change in their communities.



A community perspective on the power of Asset of Community Value in Brighton

*interview
with:*

**SARA
McCARTHY**

chairperson of
the Phoenix Estate
Community Association

Interview by Tom
Goodridge, Community
Engagement Officer,
Brighton & Hove City
Council

The right to bid for Assets of Community Value was defined in the Localism Act, introduced as an act of UK Parliament in 2011 by the Coalition Government of the time. The Localism Act contains a wide range of measures to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions like housing and planning. But whether greater decision-making powers have been allocated to local communities is still very much up for debate.

ACTive NGOs Brighton were keen to hear from a local community that have used the Asset of Community Value to save a place of neighbourhood worth. ACTive NGOs Brighton spoke with Sarah McCarthy, chairperson of the Phoenix Estate Community Association and chair of Hanover and Elm Grove Community Forum, to hear her candid perspective on the effectiveness of ACVs in safeguarding the future of a derelict pub within her community.



*Whitehawk Inn.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



Can you tell us more about both groups, starting with The Phoenix?

The Phoenix Community Group started up roughly over two years ago, due to a group of us, residents, getting together, being unhappy with the services our social landlords were providing, which is Hyde Housing Group. We found we had common complaints about Hyde but also common issues with anti-social behaviours in the area, the bins not being cleaned to the level we liked, there was a few issues that brought us together as a group and thanks to the support from the local council and people they empowered us to become a constituted group which enables us to have a bigger voice in the community.

Tell me a bit about the Hanover and Elm Grove Community Forum (HEG).

I joined it as the chair of the Phoenix Group. I went along as someone who was in a community group, within the HEG there are many smaller groups that make up the HEG. I got involved, I saw it as a great mechanism so groups can communicate and network together from funding to issues of anti-social behaviour and other issues that went on in the community. I participated in the meetings on a regular basis and then eventually because certain people connected to the HEG felt that it should be attractive to all members of the community. I was asked as someone from social housing to encourage a more diverse group to get involved with HEG.

You have community activism background before the Phoenix Community Group and the HEG.

In the 90s I was a community activist, I was a squatter. I launched the Big Issue in Brighton in 1992. That made me more aware of homelessness. I was also in private renting at the time as a single mother and I had the opportunity to move into an established squat called Trumpton which I then lived in for four years and we won the right to live in the houses once they had been renovated by a housing association called CDHA.

We are talking about community assets today. What is the community asset that you and the Phoenix group try to secure?

It was a public house called the Free Butt. The site of where the social estate where I lived on was originally a brewery, it became the Phoenix Brewery. The pub has been there since 1780. It was one of the first buildings built on the estate. It was originally for local people. It was mostly the people who worked at the brewery that used the pub. It went on for decades and centuries right up until the 1990s. It was still open when I squatted a house nearby and before the estate was built around us. It ran as a pub that was on the circuit with bands and some famous groups played there. Once the estate was built it was seen fitting as a pub-venue kind of place and it was turned into a family pub which unfortunately wasn't successful. Then it was sold and it went back to again a venue pub. The residents were up in arms about it. It went on for about six years but there were so many complaints about it that it was shut down and it has been shut ever since, at least ten or fifteen years. It shut because of noise pollution. There was a big shift of smoking

being banned. People smoked outside and because it is surrounded by disabled units that was very unpleasant for those families to have it on a weekly basis.

What's been threatening the community asset in recent times?

Before the planning application going in, the community started thinking about that it is a pity it is empty, maybe we can turn it into housing or some sort of community asset. Out of the blue we were made aware of a planning application which we felt was done sneakily around Christmas and planning applications appeared on a lamppost. None of us were made aware of the ownership. We would just see mattresses coming in and out as it was used as some sort of storing place. They put in an application through the council to turn it into some sort of shared accommodation, it is incredibly unclear what they actually want it to be but the idea was some sort of temporary housing for people who are in between a situation such as leaving hospital or a place to hang out before they are housed somewhere else. To give the owners their due, they did meet us. We were quite angry as they stated the community wasn't interested in Free Butt and if they had done any research they would have known it was to the contrary. They seemed very unclear about what the future purpose of the Free Butt was going to be.

You mentioned a little bit about the response in the community. The community association along with the council arranged a meeting with the developers. What has happened since then?

We had the meeting with the developers. They were a little bit taken aback by the strength of feelings from the people who attended the meeting, which were the immediate neighbours, the council, people like yourself. They were taken aback that they hadn't done their research properly. That is the sense I got. They went off and then we spoke to the local council with regards to the problem as we saw it. Unfortunately, we didn't get the response we were hoping because the space allocated to the potential tenants was so small and they wanted to extend its height by two stories which would have a major impact on the rest of the estate. Because it's connected to the community centre and the community centre is listed, the Heritage lot are not happy about the proposal either. The council said they felt they were between a rock and a hard place because they were offering temporary housing for vulnerable people. The application was eventually refused with the support of our local councillor David Gibson. It stopped there.

So in terms of the response did you look at the Localism Act and the Asset of Community Value (ACV) to support you as a community? To safeguard the community asset?

By chance I came across the Localism Act. I was in a waiting room and there was an article about the Localism Act and how community groups should use it as legislation and from then on I started reading about the Localism Act and that led me into neighbourhood planning. We went to the council, the planning people met me and some other community groups and suggested materials to read. I was in the middle of doing that and COVID-19



Community-run sports field on Manor Road. Photo (cc) Eutropian



happened. The mechanism the government put there, ironically could benefit community groups in a way that I don't think the government would like. I am quite excited about the legislation if we are clever about it.

One aspect of that legislation is the Asset of Community Value (ACV). Have you come across that when you were looking to safeguard and secure the future or at least prevent the planning application on the Free Butt?

I was explained that it is not a given just because you become an ACV. In fact, if you flag yourself up as ACV, there are so many solicitors out there fighting for ACV you can also put a target on your back as a community group. Then I spoke to David Boyle who has had his own experience with ACV and he advised me that because Brighton Council hadn't defined ACV in a way that other council have around the country, that limited the power of ACV. For someone like myself, Brighton Council needs

to put in legislation, so then as a community group could give strength and power to go forward, not just for us, but for other community groups around Brighton who want to secure a potential building as a ACV.

It sounds like a little bit like postcode lottery. If your local authority has interpreted the ACV in a pro-community sense or even developed the national guidelines or has left it ambiguous at the moment.

I wouldn't even say the Council, it is the planners, the people in the planning department might see it as another headache. But I think ACV could work really well for Brighton Council because if communities were given that power to take over buildings near them to support their local community it could be a vote winner. Rather than people being imposed something they don't want in their community.

What would you see to make the ACV a better vehicle for change? What kind of things would you like to see as a community activist and chair of different community groups?

More advice, more workshops. This is pre COVID-19. Accessing information and support. Sometimes it hurts my head because I am not a trained solicitor. The language of the legislation is jargonistic. You have to decipher. One part of neighbourhood planning was much clearer than another lot of planning information. You have to go through a lot of information I personally wasn't trained in. You could translate it into laymen's terms. It's a responsibility, that is the flipside of it. The community then has to be the custodian of the building. That is why this process should be easier. It repels people I think.

One of the accusations we got was being "NIMBY". So "not in my back yard" about the housing. Because the estate was purpose built with a specific amount of households, we can't take more people.... 36 more individuals would live down here with no parking facilities, no areas to take their families, we were worried about the impact on the greater estate because it has been built that a specific amount of households would be based there. With antisocial behaviour and other city-wide concerns when you live in central Brighton, because we have a lot of vulnerable people, it is not right, more vulnerable people could become a negative cocktail. That is one of the things people had against us. We are not opposed to homeless, vulnerable or temporary people being housed whatsoever but we don't think it's appropriate in the space they are suggesting.

What can be classed as an Asset of Community Value?

An Asset of Community Value (ACV) is land or buildings nominated by a local voluntary or community group and which the council decides meets the requirements to be listed as an asset of community value. The statutory rules about assets of community value can be found in sections 87 – 103 of the Localism Act 2011⁽¹⁾ and in The Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012.⁽²⁾ In essence, the actual current (or recent past) use of ACVs must further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. It is also realistic

to think that there can continue to be non-ancillary use of the land or building that will further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. ACVs can include, for example: day care centres, schools, pubs, open spaces, theatres, civic halls and buildings, heritage sites, football grounds, markets etc.

1 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

2 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2012/9780111526293>



Collective ownership in a self-organised social and cultural centre

interview
with:

**MARCI
BIRÓ,
ANDRÁS
SZÉPE**

founders of Gólya

Gólya¹⁾ is a self-organised community space in Budapest's 8th district. Gólya has relocated to its current location due to intense property development and increasing real estate pressure around its previous venue. In order to counter gentrification and gain independence from the changes of the rental market, the community running Gólya decided to buy a building and own it as a cooperative. The new venue is in an office building formerly administering a large factory, now located in the vicinity of a supermarket, a gas station and a number of small shops inhabiting the remaining structures of the industrial site. In a series of interviews, conducted in November 2018 and October 2020, founders Marci Bíró and András Szépe explained the goals of the organisation, its financial arrangements, the challenge of renovating a run-down former factory building and the challenges and opportunities brought to the cooperative by the Covid-19 pandemic.

1 <http://golyapresszo.hu/>



*Gólya's terrace. photo
(cc) Eutropian*



Could you introduce Gólya?

Gólya is a community house where we are trying to mobilise as many functions as possible: we work as a concert and events venue, a bar, a cafeteria, children day-care, communal repair shop, but also as a platform where to organise workshops and meetings for the organisation we cooperate with. We give office space to Helyzet Műhely⁽²⁾, a social theory working group that meets here. In the new venue, we also host Mércé⁽³⁾, an independent left-wing news website, the Lahmacun radio station⁽⁴⁾, a 60m2 gym, a ceramics workshop, our offices and also a crèche open for children in our broader community. Gólya originally started as a small pub in the 9th district of Budapest, named Frisco, and ran cooperatively from the beginning. In 2012, it moved to the 8th district, on Bókay János utca, where we rented a historical pub that we renovated and re-opened under the name Gólya. Our main goal is to spread the idea of cooperative economy because we consider it the most beneficial working system for everybody as it does not take advantages of the workers. This logic also makes work more pleasurable: in a cooperative everybody is an owner of the company and works both for themselves and the other group members.

Who comes to Gólya?

It is hard to define our guests, many people from the neighbourhood come here since they consider us the district pub, but we also receive people who search for cheap prices or come from the outskirts of the city

to hang out here. A lot of foreigners also like Gólya's vibe because we resemble a squat-like-establishment and we also have occasional visitors who are curious about our economic or organisational model. The new venue is much larger than the previous one, allowing us to implement more wide-ranging facilities and programmes so it might attract a broader variety of people. We try to build a network with other cooperatives in Budapest and outside Hungary so that we can learn from each other about the challenges of a cooperative.

How does the cooperative work?

As members of cooperatives, we work for 40 hours a week, of which at least 18 hours must be physical labour and the rest is organising work in specialised smaller groups responsible for different areas of activity: programming, marketing, logistics, finance, bureaucracy and all the things that we need in order to keep the cooperative running. We all attend weekly assemblies and monthly meetings dedicated to strategic planning and team-building. We have now 15 members with four persons in the process of becoming members. The fluctuation is not that big, usually if somebody leaves there is always somebody about to become a member.

You can become a cooperative member after a year of work in Gólya. You start as a regular worker doing physical tasks, either at the bar, in the kitchen, at the shows, in renovations, as a courier, or at the day-care. After about half year you can apply to become a member and usually you start to engage in the more organisational work, such as coordinating tasks, back office, learning how to run the place itself. By the time you become a member you should

2 <https://helyzet.wordpress.com/>

3 <https://merce.hu/>

4 <https://www.lahmacun.hu/>

*Gólya's first floor
with the bar.*
Photo (cc) Eutropian
»»



have learnt how Gólya functions and how to organise your own tasks.

Apart from the time spent working at Gólya, to become a member it is necessary to invest in some shares, with an investment equal for all members and which cannot be sold, but which will return to the person in case they leave the cooperative. Membership also comes with social benefits, such as food and drink provision, vacation, housing allowance, maternity and paternity leave, sick leave, and special considerations for studies or other personal needs. We try to keep the number of employees low because we prefer to teach people the methods we use so they can join the cooperative. Working with us is not like working in a bakery or in a regular bar because we aim to function in a structure in which each of us becomes a piece of a puzzle and works in connection with the others, knowing that each moment of inattention will put more work on the shoulders of the co-workers.

Why did you have to move?

We needed to move because the owner sold our rented venue, making a big profit. Our building was 150 years old, but all around us were newly built offices and luxury apartments. It always surprised our visitors to see the fancy, new tall glass corporate buildings that surrounded our tiny-one-floor-house. This area is undergoing huge changes: in the '80 and '90s, District 8 has been known as sketchy neighbourhood, but it has always had a good transport system, good infrastructure and it is close to the city centre. Since the 2000s, the incoming foreigner investments has modernised this area, starting from the centre outwards, eventually reaching us.

Tell us about the new venue!

This used to be an office building of Ganz Works, a transportation manufacturer, and it had been abandoned for years. We found this venue over two year ago; we negotiated with the owner and bought it.

The old Gólya was 350 square meters and this is 1200 square meters, plus a rooftop. On the ground floor we have a concert hall and a bar, on the first floor we will have our offices and other spaces that organisations rent from us. As we won't have a garden anymore, as it used to be in the old Gólya, we use the rooftop as a terrace. We had no support from any local institution, but we still try to keep a good relationship with the city council. We feel that sometimes the city council or even some of our neighbours are sceptical about us, but we suppose they admire that we are still running the place, legally, and above water.

How did you end up buying the building and what is your financial model?

We wanted to feel secure about our venue so we decided on buying a building. At the

same time, it was important to have a model that excludes the possibility of individual profiteering and which serves the aims of the cooperative. Buying comes with massive responsibility: our cooperative supports itself from the market economy.

To buy and renovate the venue (a part of the office building) we needed 150 million HUF (€450.000). We were seeking for a loan, and we calculated to be able to pay it back from the rents collected, the bar's revenues and other activities. Thought we had a clear, proven business plan, it was difficult to find banks to give us loans. Fortunately, we managed to negotiate with the previous owner to pay the buying price back in increments, with interest. Partially, we funded the relocation through a successful crowdfunding campaign; we also reached out to our community and raised funds with the help of small investors, friends who

Community radio in Gólya. Photo (cc) Eutropian 



helped us, regular customers at the old Gólya and relatives who wanted to support us. These smaller loans helped us to proceed with the purchase and the renovation until we could have access to larger loans. It took us a long time and lot of effort to finally get a 30 million HUF (-€85.000) loan from Erste Bank, through an integration fund largely guaranteed by the European Central Bank.

Due to the short duration of some of our loans (1-2 years), we needed to start paying back some loans and interests already before the renovation was over. This meant that we needed to generate revenues from as early as possible. Therefore we decided to get the first-floor offices ready for our tenants before finishing the renovation of other spaces in the building. Our tenants rent the offices but they all operate in a cooperative logic and we have constant discussions on how implement a collective property.

What changes did the Covid-19 pandemic bring?

Normally we organise events, offer food and drinks to generate income. We also offer catering for private events outside our premises and are present at festivals. We host private parties for special occasions such as birthdays but we also host cultural and political debates. In the past year, however, the bar and event venue has had a limited operation due to the pandemic. We spent months with the venue closed and our revenue from the bar was greatly reduced in 2020. Therefore we needed to diversify our revenues streams. During the renovation process, we realised that we gained many construction and renovation skills. To put these new skills in the service of

the cooperative, we launched a construction business and now we have some revenues from doing renovations in the neighbourhood as the cooperative. We also established a bike delivery service as many of our members had experience working as couriers.

These three services now constitute the main building blocks of our business. Because of the flexibility of our organisation and members, we were capable of moving our workers from the bar and event venue to the renovation and delivery businesses. This allowed us to retain all our employees. Everybody works according to their skills, some with building, renovating, some with couriering. Each member gets paid according to their needs. This is how we are surviving the current pandemic period.

What is your relationship with the neighbours?

We have a neighbourhood community building programme that we finance through a grant. As a first step, we are focusing on the four buildings opposite us. We are in constant contact with them with the aim to ensure that Gólya is a beneficial place for them. We're building a neighbourhood advocacy initiative whose goal is to create a neighbourhood community that stands up for its rights. The programme is going very well and we receive positive feedbacks.

NOVA CVERNOVKA

Cultural centre breathing life in an abandoned school complex

interview
with:

ŠYMON
KLIMAN,
BRANISLAV
ČAVOJ

co-founders of Nova
Cvernovka

Nova Cvernovka¹⁾ is a community and cultural space located in a former Secondary Chemical school complex in the outskirts of Bratislava. Nova Cvernovka gives home to a community formerly located in a thread factory downtown, providing studios for several artists and local entrepreneurs. By bringing together complementary social functions, it aims to create a better city model where discussions on public spaces, civic society and politics are at the core. In this interview, made in November 2018 and updated in 2020, Šymon Kliman and Branislav Čavoj give an overview of the process and challenges of creating Nova Cvernovka.

1 <https://novacvernovka.eu/>



*The Nova Cvernovka
building.*

Photo (cc) Eutropian



Can you describe this venue and its functions?

This venue is composed of two buildings, a school and a dormitory, of 9000 square meters each. **We imagine this space as a village within the city**, and for this reason we activated various complementary functions.

The first building, the school, hosts many of the original members of Cvernovka. It features creative studios, offices, cultural spaces, and an event venue, and it has a floor dedicated to public functions such as shops of regional producers and local entrepreneurs. We tried to preserve the social connections established in the old Cvernovka, although this venue is more modest than the previous one: we had to compromise some aspects, for example before everyone had their photo studios but in this building we have only one photo studio which is shared.

For the second building we planned three functions: housing, public services spaces – such as school, kindergarten, place for elderly people – and studio/offices. The areas are all interlinked, in particular the co-working area is directly connected to a children day-care. **We hold educational programs in the events space favouring themes such city history, urban planning, pop culture.** There is a library, which we call the Cabinet of Slowness as we envision it as a place where to slow down and which provides readings and literature programs for youngsters. Lastly, we are working on a theatre as there are many artists who don't have a performance space. This will be constructed close-by, in cooperation with the municipality and with the support of European funding.

How do you select the members?

About 70% of the community members were already part of the group in the Old Cvernovka. **We selected the rest of the members keeping in mind the community needs and we tried to bring projects that complement the ones already existing here, but always favouring creative and educational projects.**

In the co-housing part, we accommodate mostly people who work here as well, but we also have artists in residence and we started to give housing to homeless people. **The homeless people housing project started by complete chance: during the renovation we needed workforce for different tasks in construction, wood work and similar, and we eventually discovered that some of the workers were in fact sleeping rough, and now we have two flats just for former homeless people.**

How did you access the venue?

We have a 25-year rent contract with the regional government. At first, the regional government tried to sell it but, as after four years nobody bought it, they eventually agreed to rent. The building was in a very bad shape and this is why we negotiated cheap rent and we asked to deduct all our renovation investments from the rent. This building dates to 1948, and it has never consistently been renovated, therefore it required a massive intervention including the renovation of the roof and of the facade, and a new energy system that would be ecologically efficient. We started working on it as soon as we accessed the venue, investing in the structure although we didn't have a financial plan to cover the costs. Our first interventions were trying to physically

*Restaurant space in
Nova Cvernovka.
Photo (cc) Eutropian
>>*



access the venue by cutting down the grass, cleaning it from a previous flood and fungi, and removing accumulated school furniture.

How did you finance the renovation?

The building reconstruction was multi-source financed: we had two loans, volunteer and in-kind help from architects and project managers, individual support from each organisation, who reconstructed their own rented studio space, and various forms of support from our partners and from our fundraising campaign. We estimated the cost of this venue renovation of about 2 or 3 million euros. Our first step in financing was to negotiate a loan of about 500,000 euros with the social department in Erste Bank, as unfortunately social banks are still absent in Slovakia. Securing this loan took us about eight months, but at the time we were already investing fundraised money into the renovation. The bank found this project risky and asked to present a business plan and evidences of contracts for the studios on rent as well as an 80% collateral. We secured the collateral with a second loan of 200.000 euros from TISE⁽²⁾, a Polish fund, covered by European Commission, and by using two of our personal flats as collateral.

Lastly, as a foundation, we are enrolled in a smaller leasing program for the heating and we have benefitting from community work, donation and reductions for the purchasing of materials.

What is your legal structure?

We opened a foundation in 2015. Foundations in Slovakia have usually the function of maintaining the cooperatives. We chose the format of a foundation because we wanted to establish the most transparent entity possible.

What type of relations do you have with public institutions?

It is the first time a publicly owned building is being assigned to artists in Bratislava. I hope our commitment and the efficiency with which we opened the venue in only eight months, give us credibility to keep working with the government. The library, for example, was opened in joint management with the city: we offered the space and the books and we develop the cultural program, and the city covers

² <https://tise.pl/en/>

staff salaries and the library system so that we can join the public library network. We cover most of the expenses but we can also participate to the Ministry of Culture grants as we are part of the national library system. Now, we are discussing forms of cooperation with the regional government, because our foundation is independently run by its funders and its legal bodies, but we would like to connect our strategic cooperation points – financial, legal, content – and become more progressive, possibly finding the path for other initiatives in the cities. The municipality and the government has lots of empty buildings and we plan to propose them a business plan which will aim to adapt buildings to social housing.

What is your impact on the neighbourhood and the broader area of your venue?

Until now we have been focusing on the venue's renovation but from now on we want to develop an outreach program and improve our communication strategy. Taking care of the building is a never-ending process and by the end of our current loan we will probably have to develop another financing plan in order to keep developing this venue and bringing innovations and high technology. We have limited human capacity and many projects but in the future we would like to expand this project to the neighbouring zones as we have discovered that there has been a positive response to our work

The major change Nová Cvernovka has undergone since 2019 was extension of the summer terrace and further development of the infrastructure in the cultural venue. In this regard we launched an unique environmental project called "Sut na Park" (Debris into park) based on recycling and

regeneration of the construction debris from the reconstruction of the building into certified material used for walking paths and circle terrace in the new public park. In 2020 we also received a grant support from Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) for an architectural study and planning documentation used for a project of regenerative transformation of the old dormitory into the Centre for Metropolitan Innovation Bratislava (CMI.BA). The process of the reconstruction should take place in 2023 and at the end the building will consist of three main functions: 1) Affordable living with strong community elements for longterm (CoHousing), midterm and short term housing (Residencies, Guests), 2) Modular and collaboration-nurturing working spaces for creative professionals, artists & social innovators, 3) Services & amenities complementing the needs of the Nová Cvernovka campus and its neighbourhood.

How did Nová Cvernovka cope with the Covid-19 crisis?

We were forced to postpone bank loan instalments and cut the monthly salaries of the foundation's team by 30%. This allowed us to offer postponement of rents for the creative studios housed in Nová Cvernovka, which were more or less (financially) affected by the pandemic situation. In the cultural program production we "moved" our activities online and invested into the video content creation, which at the end, helps us to spread the awareness about the program of the centre and also balance out the amount of disinformation content on the web. The lockdown of the economy caused also the closure of our childcare facility within the co-working centre. Reopening is to take place again in 2021.

FRIEDA 23

A media and arts space in the city centre of Rostock

interview
with:

**BARBARA
DRATH**

project coordinator at
KARO

FRIEDA 23⁰¹ is a venue for art and media production. Located in Rostock, Northern Germany, it was opened as a result of the cooperation of various institutes in the city: an Art School (Kunstschule Rostock), the Institute for New Media (ifnm), the cinema Lichtspieltheater Wundervoll (li.wu), the Lokalradio LOHRO, and other organisations that wanted to work in a shared space. These institutes organised themselves in a cooperative named KARO, that bought a former school and renovated it with the help of a loan from an ethical bank (GLS).

1 <http://frieda23.de/>

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FRIEDA 23.
Photo (cc) Eutropian



What is the story of FRIEDA 23?

We started out as two separate organisations: The Institute for New Media and the Art School started doing projects together and realised very soon that they would benefit from working in the same venue. As a result, in 2014, we opened FRIEDA 23 as a home space for these two institutes and other organisations with whom we had been developing partnerships in the meantime. We established KARO (“Kultur-Aktien für Rostock” meaning “shares in culture for Rostock”), a cooperative of all FRIEDA 23-members, with the unique scope of buying this property and adjusting it to the administrative requirements necessary to move here. KARO takes legal responsibility for this relocation without waiving on any of the single organisations, and it can access public funding.

We chose this building because of its central position in Rostock and because of its dimension. Until the 2000s, this building used to be a classic GDR school. Around the year 2000, the number of students in this area was expected to decrease progressively. It seemed that this school would not be needed anymore and that it would be up for sale. Until the start of reconstructions, the Art School and the Institute for Modern Media were allowed to use the former school as it was. This gave us the opportunity to try out and to consider all the different features we would need or that we could use. We rebuilt some areas from scratch so that they could fit better all the heavy equipment we use in art workshops but, as far as possible, we tried to conserve most areas the way they were. During this time, important decisions concerning the ground-plan have been made. For example, the part oriented towards the north has a

similar light all day long, and this is why we built in large windows and assigned it to the workshop area.

Today, FRIEDA 23 hosts a wide variety of projects: we have sound studios and special offices for film production; we have a newsroom; we host a radio with a 24/7 programming including a Sunday children radio show; we have a space for pottery and sculpture; learning rooms for arts classes, seminars and language courses and there is even a cinema auditorium. On each floor, we have socialising rooms with kitchens for lunch breaks, the exchange of ideas and social gathering. The entrance area of the building is a space for exhibitions of various genres, e.g. young artists, the arts in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, social, political and environmental subjects.

How is FRIEDA 23 financed and organised?

Mainly, we have a long-term loan with the bank. Furthermore, we are a stock company whose most shares are held by the Art School, by the Radio, by the Institute of Modern Media and by the cinema, but we also have individual shareholders all around the city. Our partner bank, GLS Bank, organised the shares in smaller payments so that regular people were allowed to purchase a larger number of shares all at once by paying back regular monthly fees over several months. In the beginning, some of our members took the individual responsibility of 25,000 Euros for the loan, but as we have been paying the loan regularly, this responsibility has been lifted. The stockholders don't receive any financial remuneration or any form of discount or bonus. This is why we put in extra effort to create a community and workspace that responds to our original vision.

Our main shareholders are also the ones that rent most of the space of FRIEDA 23. This means that their rent-payments are crucial for the functioning of the place. Our tenancy agreements have been signed for 10 years with a fixed rent which is very low in this house. Every institution – except for the cinema – pay five euros per square meter. The cinema pays six euros as its studio reconstructions were much more expensive than the rest of the building. The average rent cost in this area of the city has been lately of 10–15 euros per square meter. Despite this low rent we can still afford to pay the loan with the bank because the purchase price was not very high. We also rent out rooms to private companies.

As a non-commercial community, we don't have a high budget available. Our projects are mostly funded by the city or our federal state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Also, we continuously apply for projects at the national or European Union-level. The number of employees is increasing, and our different institutions work with over 200 volunteers, who mainly work for the radio station LOHRO. For us, it was important to have a democratic division. We have a monthly meeting, called Hausgruppe, with representatives of each organisation. Here, we take all the main decisions on the FRIEDA 23-community and building, while the stockholders and KARO decide about larger investments separately in annual meetings.

What was the public administration's contribution to your project?

Purchasing this venue was not a linear process: the city unit responsible for land in Rostock was considering an alternative to selling it, but the Regional Parliament

advocated for FRIEDA 23, and the city eventually accepted to sell it. Yet, our buying contract still protects this venue and it guarantees this building's use only for educational purposes.

We also received support from the local municipality and on a national level. The Urban Development Program allocated 2,6 billion euros in support of the development of cities in East Germany, in the context of the unification of East-West Germany. This gave us some public funding for the venue's reconstruction. Moreover, most organisations in the FRIEDA 23 receive individual public funding for their specific projects.

Is there convergence in the programming across the organisations present in the house?

Yes, we have shared projects and try to create synergies. The Hausgruppe is organised by KARO and calls to participation all the organisations present in the house. We have two yearly events which we usually organise all together as the FRIEDA 23-community: one in summer which attracts the broader community, and one in winter for varying target groups. Furthermore, there are several cooperative projects. Usually, a head institution is in charge and finds suitable partners within FRIEDA 23. The yearly FiSH festival would be a good example of such cooperation.

How do you position yourself within the city?

We have grown a large network throughout the city and have projects that are of importance for or unique in our federal state

*Sound studio in
FRIEDA 23.*

Photo (c) FRIEDA 23



Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MV). Therefore, there are various levels and intensities of collaborations between the different FRIEDA 23-players and other organisations in Rostock and MV. Many of our collaborations are informal and arise from opportunities that appear. FRIEDA 23 as a whole does not have a formalized structure of collaborations. For the year 2019, we developed the Rostock Embassy (Rostocker Botschaft) project, a program that celebrates Rostock's 800 years anniversary, featuring concerts in town and sending musicians outside as "ambassadors" of Rostock. This was a collaborative project made possible by the synergies of many partners in town.

We know that cultural activities are rather piling up in the city centre and that there is a lack thereof in the periphery. Sense.Lab, whose main office is allocated in FRIEDA 23, has been reaching out to Toitenwinkel, a peripheral district of Rostock with few

culture venues. As the initiative "Stern.macht.Platz" they are working on developing a former supermarket and local square into a venue for cultural activity. Collaborative projects of FRIEDA 23 institutions have been taking place there.

Lately, FRIEDA 23-players have been engaging in "Bündnis für Bildung", a Rostock-wide network whose aim is to promote lifelong education for all inhabitants of the city. The scope of FRIEDA 23 in this network is to strengthen and to widen the presence of our educational activities in the peripheral parts of town and to establish long-term networks and collaborations.

The adaptations that have been necessary due to the Corona-pandemic have forced us to go more digital in our communication and work. Now, our digital and non-digital presence are getting more and more intertwined. Furthermore, we are installing



*Movie shooting.
Photo (c) FRIEDA 23*



high-quality camera and sound equipment for long-term and free use. It will be free for use for all non-commercial organisations in Rostock and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The equipment has been founded by our federal state. It is supposed to help grow all organisations' audiences and to make participation fully accessible. We position ourselves in the city as well as in our federal state as a huge network with a great variety of modern and valuable resources such as knowledge, know-how, technology and manpower in the fields of arts, media and education. Moreover, FRIEDA 23 is an educational, welcoming and inspirational space.

How do you see your future?

The Corona-pandemic has pulled our focus away from working on our physical space-related concepts towards strengthening our professional networks and our public relations work. Our mission is to keep our knowledge and our networks accessible for everybody and every organisation that is engaging in one of our fields of proficiency. Despite the pandemic and its adversities, we aim at staying an open and welcoming place in the city.

PETER-WEISS-HAUS

A literary centre in Rostock

*interview
with:*

**MARIT
BAARCK,
ULRIKA
RINKE**

Peter-Weiss-Haus e.V.,
and Programme Director
at Literaturhaus Rostock

The Peter-Weiss-Haus¹⁾ is a free educational and cultural centre located in an historical building in downtown Rostock. Through the creation of an original and spontaneous governance structure, supported and bounded by different entities in the city, the Peter-Weiss-Haus Association has launched a community finance scheme to buy its building and renovate it with the support of volunteers. The goal of the several associations that rent and use the house together is to run not only a literature house that would welcome a mixed audience for readings and theatre performances, while also preserving the building's heritage value, but also a venue that has very different educational and cultural offers.

1 <https://peterweisshaus.de/>



*The Peter-Weiss-Haus.
Photo (cc) Eutropian*



What were the first steps in establishing the Peter Weiss Haus?

We are an association of people from different organisations who have dreamt of opening a literature house. We didn't have the money and at the time there wasn't any municipal space available that we could use. We asked advice from one of the ethical banks present in Germany specialised in sustainable and community-driven projects. They had accompanied us for seven years as we tried to access various smaller venues before finally succeeding with the Peter-Weiss-Haus.

In 2009 we funded an association that would enable us to buy this venue. This building used to be owned by the next-door brewery, that was happy to sell it and was pleased with our renovation concept. This was a very run-down building that had never been renovated over the past twenty years. Many associations were using this space for their offices, but they were unable to invest in it. For this reason, we established one lead association that would act as the venue owner and manage the entire renovation: it would free the other associations working here from this responsibility.

Only the base level was usable when we accessed the building in February 2009, and the wild vegetation and garbage completely hid an internal garden. We had to get the bar and the hostel running as quickly as possible since we needed a source of income and we had a call to arms and people helped us clean the space on weekends. With the community help we could open the bar on May 1st, and all the other projects came later on. As we were renovating new parts of the building, we were also moving from a room

to another but we finally finished almost the entire renovation.

We have reconstructed the interior and the roof and we are almost done. We have many volunteer helpers and especially youngsters who have recently finished their studies and they are doing their apprenticeships in crafts. Their work was fundamental especially in the roof reconstruction and in some of the offices on the top floors. They worked for free and we only covered their accommodation and food.

How much did you invest in this building?

The building cost us €150,000, a good price for us. To buy it, we had a special contract with GLS bank⁽²⁾ that supports similar projects. They registered donors who signed up to give a fixed amount of money regularly as a contribution to our loan. This allowed us to collect more than half the price of the building and we bought and renovated it with a smaller loan.

How did you handle the renovation? Did you have any particular constraint?

Reconstructing such a monumental building implies conforming to high and specific demands and we knew it would have taken a much longer time than renovating a regular enterprise building. But we are also bound by the contract we signed with our sellers, the brewery, and by the bank and the associations we work with. With the brewery contract, we agreed to use less than 50% of our space for commercial

2 GLS Gemeinschaftsbank eG <https://www.gls.de/privatkunden/english-portrait/>

purposes, to not use it for residential purpose – except a hostel – and to renovate the external surfaces and the windows within a fixed timeline. This gives us an important self-control tool that allowed us to build these organisations step by step and to maintain independence.

One big constraint we have had is that we cannot simply adapt it to our needs as this is a protected heritage site. The preservation of the historical aspect of the building was problematic when we were looking for other options that would make the Peter-Weiss-Haus more accessible for disabled people: our stairs are high and difficult for people with different abilities, but we cannot simply build a ramp as this would affect the integrity of this monumental site. Our solution was an external elevator, which

however has very high costs that we are unable to cover and we haven't been able to finance this project yet. For the moment, we have had a crowdfunding campaign to build a small elevator that would reach the toilets through the hostel but we didn't collect enough money yet.

Many things have been improved but not everything is ready and for many of our visitors, this place is not comfortable enough or sometime it appears to be too alternative. Usually, most of the literature houses have an ageing audience for whom is harder to adapt to colder environments – for long time we didn't have central heating and still now heating in the toilets is absent – but we are able to mix the audiences and also attract young people.

Office of Soziale Bildung eV. Photo (cc) Eutropian 



How does the co-management of the space work between the various organisations?

The Peter-Weiss-Haus Association is the leader of the entire project. Over 50% of our space involves registered associations while the economic side involves less than 50% of the venue.

We can't rent more than 50% of our spaces and this helps us to avoid overcommercialising as we are forced to keep our economic work at a fixed minimum. We have a hostel, a cafe and the other spaces are all assigned to different associations as Literaturhäuser and Soziale Bildung. The Soziale Bildung was the first association that brought together other associations. We had an office at Frieda before they renewed it, and then we moved here. The economic cooperative rents the hostel and the cafe and they are independent. If we want to use the room they manage we need to pay an extra fee as our monthly rent only covers two smaller rooms.

The Literaturhäuser and Soziale Bildung cooperatives took part in the decision-making during monthly meetings, but we had to take many decisions as Peter Weiss alone. At first, we had to take quick decisions, so we tried to keep the group flexible enough so we could work well. But now we are trying to open the organisation more and include more people and more associations.

In general, we are organised in groups and teams with specific tasks. We try to moderate problems and supervise the cultural workers in the house so that we can improve internal cooperation. We don't decide on the cultural programming – such

as the band or the authors we invite – but these type of decisions are independent. We also received many critiques from the right-wing since they accuse us of being too radical, while on the contrary the left-wing considers us not left wing enough. We developed our profile over a decade with the inputs of people working in our associations' network and we prefer to focus on inside feedback to improve this organisation.

How did your organisation change with the consolidation of the Peter-Weiss-Haus?

At the moment, Peter-Weiss-Haus has 15 members, four external people working with us as facility managers and in administration. We have one employee who can work 20 hours a week and we don't have any possibility of increasing that time and adding more tasks. For us, it is also difficult to connect the bridge between cultural work and social work which don't have to be necessary separated but they often are. In the last 10 years, our team changed a lot. The senior members of the team have become parents and have less capacity to work in the association. Now that we have structured our organisation and define our profile, we need to make a call and invite new people to join. We would like to include more the younger generation in order to consider a fresh idea and approaches oriented towards the future.



The social value of Can Batlló

Urban regeneration through new administrative tools
in Barcelona

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I - Story of the heritage site

Like other major European cities, Barcelona has a great industrial heritage that can now be re-used for a new and different development of its urban life, regenerating spaces, places and communities. The former Can Batlló factory, a post-industrial infrastructure in *La Bordeta* neighbourhood of the Sants district, is part of this industrial heritage. Due to its size of 14 hectares, the general interest and dynamics, Can Batlló became a site of experimenting with new ways of conceiving and regulating the *urban commons*. This story is also of significant interest for other cities engaged in bringing urban planning closer to the social activism of its citizens.

Founded as a textile factory in 1880 with the name “Sobrinos de Juan Batlló”, the structure was one of the key economic drivers of Sants’ transformations at the end of the 19th century. In 1976 the Metropolitan General Plan (PGM) defined Can Batlló’s site as “an area of public facilities and green spaces”. This decision triggered a long fight by the industrial owners of Can Batlló – the real estate corporation “Desarrollos Inmobiliarios Grupo Gaudir, SL” – that since the end of the 1990s, in a period of massive building speculation, has negotiated several planning changes to obtain greater benefit from the site, in particular from a new project: the construction of several luxury tower houses exploiting the strategic location on the *Gran Via*, one of Barcelona’s main streets.

With the arrival of the real estate crisis in Spain in 2008, the investor’s interest has stopped. The lack of recovery for such a long period of time, however, had effects



Can Batlló. Photo (cc) Eutropian 

on the neighbourhood: since 1976, La Bordeta has been lacking public facilities that were supposed to be built in the Can Batlló site. The district's indignation led to the constitution of the Platform "Can Batlló es pel Barri" ("Can Batlló is for the neighbourhood"), a group of citizens who have always followed the state of (non) progress of the works. Faced with the immobility of the municipality not complying with any of the project's deadlines, the Platform decided to give an ultimatum: if by 11 June 2011, works were not starting in Can Batlló, the Platform would enter and start building the structures they need themselves.⁶⁷ Thus began a countdown, a media campaign aimed at strengthening and legitimising the Platform with the support of various associations and social movements of Sants and the whole city.

Shortly before the date of entry defined by the citizens, the municipality had started to negotiate with the owners for the acquisition of the site in order to protect the citizens, as well: as the municipality took the property of the Can Batlló site, citizens were occupying a public asset and the municipality could decide to negotiate with them, in this way an eviction from a private property was avoided. The first space occupied and reassigned is called "bloc onze" (in memory of the historical date of entry in Can Batlló by the Platform) and marks the beginning of a new phase in the process of rehabilitation and transformation of Can Batlló. Since then, the Platform has been active as a space for reflection and claim for the neighbourhood's surroundings, collectively rethinking its urban transformation. With the subsequent acquisition of the building,

the municipality supported the occupation by giving legitimacy to the occupants and returning the space to the neighbourhood with a concession that gives responsibility to the public administration responsibility to maintain the building's external structure while the management of the activities inside Can Batlló are responsibility of the neighbourhood association, Platform "Can Batlló es pel Barri".

II - An enabling system

Since 2011, the inhabitants of La Bordeta involved in the regeneration of Can Batlló have decided to organise all their activities with a horizontal, inclusive and transparent monthly assembly composed of working committees. The assembly decides about all the activities, uses and plans for the sustainability of the space. Inside Can Batlló, almost four hundred citizens have been working cooperatively and voluntarily to meet the social needs of the neighbourhood, rehabilitating the spaces collectively, refurbishing and making the space available to everyone without any distinctions.⁽²⁾

The General Assembly is held on the last Wednesday of each month and is the place where main decisions are taken. All committees and projects are involved and invited to participate, committees are more organisational structures while projects are more singular activities. The commissions and projects are divided into 4 major groups:

- **internal structure** - made of the following committees: Secretariat and Reception for the Neighbourhood and Visitors Dissemination, Strategy, Negotiation, Economy, Space Design; Infrastructures
- **arts and crafts** - the Arts Can Batlló committee plus the following projects:

Carpentry, Collective Printing, Mobility, Audiovisual Laboratory of Can Batlló AvLabCB, Espai Eines (School of Trades), Beer Workshop, Sewing Workshop

- **education and documentation** - composed by the following projects: Josep Pons Popular Library, La Fondona, Social Movements Documentation Center, Arcadia School
- **culture and leisure** - the Activities committee plus the following projects: Meeting space, Bar, La Nau, Children's and family space, Community Orchards and Gardens, Musical Creation Space, Climbing wall, Performing arts and circus training space, La Garrofera de Sants, La Borda, Coopolis

Open meetings are often held on specific topics such as economics, space improvements, and discussions on the urban transformation of the entire site. The General Assembly has also discussed, planned, and followed for more than two years the renovation of the "bloc onze", the first building financed by the municipality, through collective work sessions.

The first space to be set up was the Josep Pons' popular library. Later, a bar and meeting space, an auditorium, a climbing gym and several multifunctional rooms for activities and workshops were renovated. As the working group and the interest grew, the Platform also managed to recover more spaces within the same complex for other community projects and always in the same way: the municipality took the

1 <https://www.canbatllo.org/historia/plataforma/>

2 <https://urbannext.net/bloconze-can-batllo/>

property of the spaces one-by-one and then assigned the management to the Platform. Over the years, other locations have been transformed and new uses have been identified: a repair shop, a carpentry shop, a collective printing shop, a documentation centre, a space for families, a space for the arts, and a circus arts gym. In 2013, together with the new street “Carrer de l’Onze de Juny de 2011”, opened to stretch across the site from one end to the other, the first community garden (50m²) was inaugurated.

The Platform “Can Batlló es pel Barri” has worked and questioned the precedent urban planning project for the area and worked on new proposals that revise the transformation of Can Batlló. Since its activation, the Platform has made adjustments and improvements to the Metropolitan General Plan of Can Batlló–Magòria.

Self-management, collaboration in general activities, maintenance and good functioning of the project are the essential commitments for all people and groups joining the “bloc onze”. The Assembly decides on the self-financing methods that are allowed internally according to the following guiding criteria: projects or individuals who contribute with money cannot run activities that are against the principles of the “bloc onze” and cannot endanger its independence. Can Batlló is engaged to move towards economic self-sufficiency at all levels of the organisation, within the commissions, working groups and the General Assembly. It is everyone’s commitment to work towards this goal creating processes of independence from grant funding and/or public funds. People and groups using the spaces for activities must contribute to the community with a social and/or economic return. The path

towards economic self-sufficiency does not derive from a position against the municipality but from an entrepreneurial vocation embedded in the history of the place. Multifunctionality, activism and periodic change of activities make this place a new generator of economic and social life in the Sants district.

III – A new legal and conceptual framework

The internal organisation and social activism of its inhabitants have made Can Batlló an enabling system. In this process, a non-secondary role has been played by the municipal administration, which has been able to adopt new tools for the co-management of *urban commons*. These new tools are the result of a significant paradigm shift in the ways of conceiving the public sector.

In 2016, the city council led by *Barcelona en Comú* (a political party including several social activists aiming to bring citizens closer to political life in an active way) started a work to define the rules of co-management of publicly owned spaces together with the Network of Community Spaces of Barcelona, the XEC – Xarxa d’Espais Comunitaris.⁽³⁷⁾ The Network has long been asking for parameters that could go beyond the dominant market logic and to redefine ways to measure activities within the co-managed spaces. In this way, a work towards a new conceptual and normative framework based on a definition of *urban commons* started. A systemic vision of city facilities has also been adopted, a vision in which libraries can also host social services, opening up to other needs of the surrounding area. The municipality was also beginning to have a new position and a new language: goods and services once in the



A view of the factory in Sants in the late 19th century.



hands of the “public” can now be managed as “commons”. The city council wanted to promote processes such as Can Batlló where local communities are able to organise and have a positive social impact working for a common good. As a result, this change led to the definition of the “Programa de patrimoni ciutadà d’ús i gestió comunitàries”, the Citizens Assets Programme.⁽⁴⁾

Within this new programme, the concession of more than 13,000 square metres to the Can Batlló neighbours’ association represents another important innovation: a politically risky decision, a process of innovation within the local administration that has pushed technicians to go beyond the comfort zone of their usual office work. For the first time, an urban planning concession has been given in the favour of a self-managed non-profit entity considering that the community project of Can Batlló constitutes an important social benefit for the city of Barcelona, measured and monitored according to new administrative tools: the *community balance* and *social return*.⁽⁵⁾

IV - Social Return

An urban planning concession such as the one allocated to Can Batlló is normally granted to private and large construction companies because a municipality must always “justify” the concession with an immediate monetary return or a future real estate return: in that case, the building at the end of the concession returns to the hands of the municipality. On the contrary, the Can Batlló Neighbours’ Association wanted to obtain the management of the space through an urban planning concession within the new Citizens Assets Programme because this type of agreement could guarantee them more freedom inside the site. The concession obtained for a period of 30 years, expandable to 10 or 20 more years, allows the association to plan the activities with a great stability and to better plan for the common good.⁽⁶⁾

3 <https://xarxanet.org/comunitari/noticies/coneixes-la-xarxa-despays-comunitaris>

4 <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/participaciociutadana/ca/patrimoni-ciutada>

5 See also in this book the article on Barcelona’s Community Balance – guaranteeing and regulating the open and democratic use of common assets

6 https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/sants-montjuic/es/noticia/concesion-para-la-gestion-comunitaria-y-vecinal-de-can-batlló_747075

Taking into account the total number of hours worked by the volunteers between 2012 and 2017, it is possible to make an overall assessment of the historical cost of Can Batlló. Counting the hours of volunteering since the beginning of the regeneration process of Can Batlló, including the hours dedicated to space development (construction), community management (assemblies and participation spaces), group activities (projects and commissions), cleaning its premises, festival spaces and maintaining the spaces, the community project would have costed €3,959,500 in salaries between 2012 and 2017.⁽⁷⁾

With these numbers, the Municipality of Barcelona justifies the investment already made in Can Batlló, recovering the building and giving legitimacy to the neighbours association. The calculation of the Social Return is thus able to “hack” the urban planning concession. These numbers linked to the funding received by the municipality make it possible to measure the return on public investment, which is approximately €4 for every euro spent.

V - A special public-community relationship

Can Batlló’s experience demonstrates the importance of both community networks, which act as intermediary bodies, and the involvement of technicians and citizens to innovate in local government. A new regulatory framework and new tools for measuring and accompanying projects oriented towards the common good are the result of a (not easy) collaboration between two worlds, that of activists and that of technical administrators, who often find themselves in a conflictual relationship. However, the case of Can Batlló does not exhaust and does not resolve the tensions that will continue to exist, both among

activists and technicians, even within a government that fully supports the cause of the common good. The challenge now is to demonstrate that the regeneration of Can Batlló is a bet won by all, especially by those who have devoted the most time to its development.

A final result will be defined above all by a correct definition and use of tools such as *community balance* and the *social return*. It is necessary to prevent *community balance* from becoming one of the many ways in which the local government can control community projects. In order to succeed in this, there must be a recognition of the political relevance of these tools, claiming their use, and claiming also for a different role of the municipality that must act as a continuous facilitator, promoting these community processes, not forgetting that there are no commons without commoning, and therefore without community. The effort made so far reveals the city of Barcelona’s commitment to change the way it conceives “the public sphere” also for future governments, creating internal tensions within the administration. It is also worth mentioning the effort made by Can Batlló’s neighbours in forming an association to facilitate communication with the public administration. Community, co-design and communication have been the key elements in making Can Batlló a good reference project in the field of urban regeneration studies.

7 https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/participaciocitadana/sites/default/files/documents/bienes_comunes._hacia_el_uso_y_la_gestion_comunitaria_de_lo_publico.pdf



Barcelona's Community Balance

Guaranteeing and regulating the open and democratic use of common assets

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“Participation and co-production lack meaning if we are not able to influence our context”.
Enric Capdevila, XEC - Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris
Interviewed in Barcelona, 15 January 2020.

The Citizens Assets Programme defines a series of principles for the community management of “urban common goods”, the mechanism of access to these goods, in order to guarantee an open and democratic use of a common resource. To ensure this, within this programme, the Balanç Comunitari wants to monitor the work of self-managed communities in the city with the aim of making their impact more visible and communicative, as well as avoiding the renewal of concessions that do not have a real impact on the territory.

The design of Balanç Comunitari

Within the Barcelona City Council, a cultural change has taken place in the last five years. Planning to go further than the work previously done with the “carta de participación ciudadana” and the “gestiò civica”, the city council has begun to understand that the benefit of a public structure managed by the neighbourhood is much more than just economic. This concept was already clear for the Barcelona Network of Community Spaces (XEC - Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris): for them, a community project has a greater social return, is capable of stimulating active citizenship and is deeply-rooted in the territory.

The cultural change promoted by the Municipality and the XEC has produced internal disagreements for some groups of citizens, a contrast between those who wanted to remain anchored to the old model of civic management and those who wanted to adopt a communitarian vision. The XEC also felt very close to realities that were still alien to this network of spaces, such as Can Batlló. It was necessary to establish what the characteristics of community management were in order to understand what civic centres that promote a communitarian vision had in common, and also to understand how to improve them.

It was necessary to go beyond the logic of simple city management, regulated by a contract with the municipality, an annual budget review, 3+1 or 2+2 year renewal formulas, and a performative request by the municipality through the use of quantitative and productive parameters: number of workshops and people involved, for example. Until that point, the dialogue between the managers of civic centres and the municipality was based solely on an annual budget and a report of the activities carried out with all the numbers involved. Starting from the assumption that **there is no point in producing and participating in the management of civic spaces if it is not possible to transform the context in which one works**, XEC was already asking (since 2011) for a new set of indicators that would allow to better evaluate the work of communities in order to improve on some points: social cohesion, gender equality, sustainability, democratic participation among others. An evaluation study similar to the “Social Balance” (Balanz Social) already used by the members of the Catalan Solidarity Economy Network (XES - Xarxa d’Economia Solidària).

Elements of the Community Balance

The Community Balance wants to systematically and objectively evaluate four main characteristics of every socially responsible community space: democracy, equality, environmental and social responsibility, and the quality of work. The tool co-designed by XEC together with the Municipality and the cooperative La Hidra is inspired by the tool used in the world of solidarity economy and uses the same (open code) web platform for its formulation. This is under development, a first version was made in 2018 and a second one in 2019. For now, a list of 14 associations have been “balanced” to test and improve the questions and parameters designed so far. The set of indicators developed so far can be grouped in the following 4 areas of work:

- **Rooting to the context** - the orientation of the project towards the actual needs of the territory (neighbourhood) and the extent to which it manages to coordinate itself in the production of activities with other realities of the territory: socio-cultural, productive or commercial and institutional associations (schools, municipal services, etc.). The relationship with existing networks in the same territory or sector is also taken into account here.
- **Social impact and social return** - the project’s response to community interest and/or orientation towards the common good, as well as social impact and positive externalities and whether there are beneficiaries outside the project.



*Conceptual Map of the Community Balance.
(c) Ajuntament de Barcelona*



- **Internal democracy and participation** – the internal governance of projects must be as democratic as possible. Participation channels must be designed to promote the activation of users and neighbours in producing space activities. The degree of transparency in the management of the spaces and the existence or non-existence of a code of ethics, standards of conduct, are also taken into account.
- **Care for people and the environment** – a commitment to sustainable working conditions, and the promotion of diversity. Gender equality is measured here, including the adoption of a gender perspective in the definition of the objectives set. Similarly, it values the commitment to environmental sustainability, with energy savings or the use of renewable energy sources. Finally, the economic sustainability and self-sufficiency of the project is also assessed.

The projects that will be approved through the Citizen Assets Programme must have a Community Balance within them. The main challenge at the moment is to make this instrument adaptable, which should be able to evaluate both an urban garden and buildings of the size of Can Batlló. The online platform works with a series of initial questions from which it should be possible to generate the rest of the questions that will be project-specific. It is a complex work still in the definition phase but achievable from the experience of (SSE) Social Balance.

The Social Balance

The Social Balance is a useful tool for accountability and measurement of social and environmental impact and internal governance of XES members. The results obtained can be used by organisations to improve themselves internally and serve the XEC network to get an overview of the ethical standards of the solidarity economy and the social market. It can be done through an online portal that allows access to a questionnaire that once completed generates a report of the “Balanç Social”, the document with which companies describe and measure their commitment to social, working, professional and ecological conditions, made in running a company.

The Social Balance also serves to communicate the values of the organisation to the community and to be recognised as a social and solidarity-based economy (SSE). On the other hand, it fulfils two key objectives of the SSE sector. The first is the creation of an annual statistical basis in relation to the Balance’s indicators, which makes it possible to keep an accounting (social and environmental) of the entire sector, through the publication of a report on the state of the Catalan social market. The drafting of the Social Balance makes the social market more accessible: the companies and organisations that do so will be “publicly” recognised in the catalogue of the portal. ¹⁾

1 <https://xes.cat/comissions/balanc-social/>



Large, stylized graffiti characters in shades of purple, pink, and blue, positioned above the main mural.



MKM





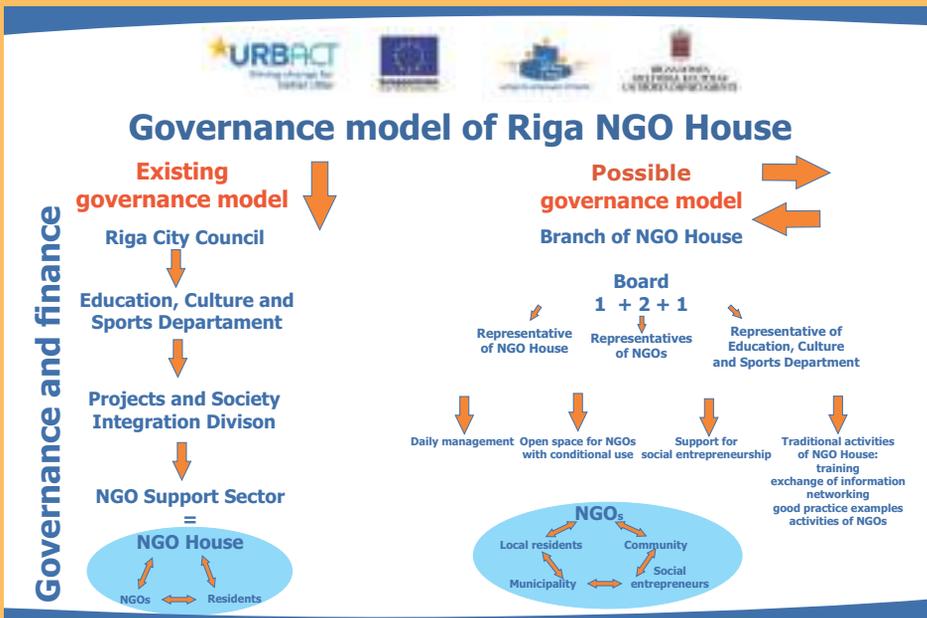
chapter 5

**Governing civic
spaces**

Governance model for Riga's NGO House

Governance model of Riga NGO House explains the existing operating model and highlights the possible new one elaborated within the ACTive NGOs project by planning new branches of the House. If the local government plays a key role in the existing model, the new governance model could provide for greater NGO involvement in both governance and decision-making. It can be intended that a Board could be set up for the governance of the possible new branch of the NGO House, consisting of NGO representatives, a representative of the NGO House and a representative of Education, Culture and Sports department. This Board could jointly decide on daily management, measures to cooperate and support with social entrepreneurs. In particular, it should

also be noted that the rules on the use of premises could also differ from existing NGO House rules and be supplemented with points that provide for increased co-operation and responsibility of NGOs for activities in NGO House. As valuable and continuing activities, training for NGOs could also be organised in the new branches, networking, good practice examples and events organised by NGOs. An important cornerstone of the new model could be the interaction and development of cooperation between NGOs, local people, communities, municipalities and social entrepreneurs through joint discussions, forums, think tanks and informal events in a creative atmosphere with a cup of coffee!





Strategic and systemic partnerships

Learning from Riga's NGO House

A somewhat dreary day in a municipal office was, unbeknownst to me, a significant one in the form of an email with the Urbact Project III call out for partner cities. Having previously failed with a strong collaborative application to Horizon 2020, talk amongst the office was that UK would be out of vogue as partner cities, particularly with the B(rexit) word casting a shadow over future EU collaboration. Optimistically, I read through the projects in this round and stumbled on ACTive NGOs. NGO House, Riga, Latvia. The only thing I knew of Latvia is that I grew up imitating a cult Latvian player's (Marian Pahars) goals on the local green – Marian played for my beloved team, The Saints, in the late 90s.

NGO House's description was impressive – talk of municipal-NGO collaboration and a physical space in which these two spheres come directly and favourably into contact. I submitted an expression of interest and supporting statement for Brighton & Hove – specifically East Brighton – to become a partner city in the project. More experienced and pragmatic colleagues told me it would likely amount to a 'thank you but you have not been successful', akin to the countless job application rejections received via cold generic email. However, to my delight and surprise, the lead partner, Irina, sent a very different kind of email saying that they were interested and in two months planned to

visit Brighton & Hove to find out more about East Brighton and its community assets.

A visit from Levente, Irina and Ilona followed – who were impressed by the grassroots spirit of local community champions and repurposed community assets – with Brighton & Hove making a late entry into the ACTive NGOs family.

'This will amount to nothing...it's been done before', these are the words I heard at the final workshop before the East Brighton Neighbourhood Action plan was produced, a culmination of three years' work alongside and within the community, involving a heated discussion and hundreds of innovative ideas and solutions. This was my second day in post at the municipality and the words were from a veteran community activist within Whitehawk, East Brighton. I have since found that comments like these lie at the basis of the relationship between the Bn2 Five (East Brighton postcode) communities and the municipality. There has been a recent history of well-intentioned but inherently top-down paternalistic community initiatives and previous iterations of neighbourhood plans that often left the key stakeholders, the local people, at the periphery of the discussion and removed from the decision making. Therefore, building and maintaining strong relationships is essential. Trust between the municipality

and local communities is hard earned and can quickly thaw in East Brighton and rightly so. Decades of embedded deprivation and palpable inequality have changed little despite the grand multi-million-pound initiatives under New Labour and a succession of local administrations from across the political spectrum over the past four decades. Systemically, East Brighton is a forgotten, maligned and demonised part of the city – perpetuated by sensationalised clickbait local media articles and views of those who have never stepped foot there themselves. The strength of BN2 Five lies within the community; community champions, activists of all denominations and community assets that reach the most isolated and fill the growing gaps where

the municipality cannot. These community champions know their communities, work and (predominately) volunteer countless hours of their time to benefit others in their local area and make it a hub of connection, neighbourliness and an understandably hesitant place to collaborate significantly with municipal teams.

What sprang to mind when reading through NGO House good practice description, was how that space formed a relationship between the municipality and the city's NGOs. They went further than just offering a free space in a former school for groups to meet, debate, create and showcase – the municipality offered regular training to support NGOs to be sustainable and

View of East Brighton. Photo (cc) Eutropian 



inclusive. This is not to say that strong partnerships between the municipality, NGOs and communities in East Brighton had not been established to date – far from it – but they were either on an individual level or differed by municipal service by service. In other words, these relationships remain fragile and based on the strength of key individual relationships rather than strategic and systemic partnerships. This approach, although key, has been unable to breach the deeply-embedded inequalities that remain a constant hum without a vertically-integrated collaborative approach established at NGO House. The real appeal from NGO House is the combination of the strategic and personal, mixture of collaboration and space (physical and figurative) for independence. Visiting NGO House and hearing from Zinta, NGO House Project Coordinator further cemented possibilities for successful transfer from Riga to East Brighton. Our cities were not so different; the need for grassroots voice, independence and as and when support mirrored the needs back in BN2 Five.

From the outset, it was clear that a straightforward transfer would not be realistic – the dispersal of community assets across East Brighton – under different ownership and leases, the lack of available municipal funds to create an East Brighton NGO House and respecting the identity of those NGOs that run community assets and not to undermine their independence and need within the community. During the initial visit made by Irina, Ilona and Levente, we made sure to show the range of community assets and their distinctive purposes and unique relationships with residents, NGOs and municipality. Ownership and governance model differences across these assets also complicate a simple transfer

from NGO House. Rather, the focus has been on how the vision of NGO House be replicated in East Brighton – an asset-based approach, through the sharing of skills, co-designing events, improving community-wide communications and marketing and ultimately establishing clear and equitable partnerships between the municipality and NGOs and community members. In ULG meetings since and in between transnational visits, talk of a community-led representative for East Brighton has been mooted. Bn2 Five community forum or representative trust is being discussed by local members and this is an ongoing project that will continue to be explored long after the end of the ACTive NGOs project, given the complexities at play.

I hope that through our involvement in this transnational learning network, we have learnt that despite the wider geopolitical climate (Brexit, rise of populism and nationalistic self-interest) both cities can continue to learn from each other and forge strong bonds into the future. There is a sense that the ULG members of East Brighton – particularly those involved in the transnational visits – have inspired our friends in Riga some ways to be creative, fun and community-led in their approaches going forward.

For East Brighton, we are certainly not there yet with a representative Bn2 Five body – stakeholders are rightly cautious about this. Previous attempts – promises and statements quickly come to mind, and this continues to prompt some reluctance and cynicism. This is coupled with who has been driving these changes – namely municipal officers (myself included) and this is where the grassroots – local residents namely – amongst the ULG should be given the opportunity to establish, lead and

East Brighton Neighbourhood



East Brighton map. Image (c) Brighton and Hove

determine the course of such a governance structure. Accordingly, the Bn2 Five body is a provocation – a starting pistol on the future of community governance within East Brighton.

Instead of discussing community governance in microscopic detail, there has been a focus on action – the production of the What's On in BN2 Five Guide for Summer 2019, with the Facebook group now a mecca of activity and upcoming events posted by NGOs, municipal staff and local residents. The tailored social media training and Zoom hosting training

workshops, facilitated by local experts in virtual marketing and content, has given built further capacity to enable community groups to lead on grassroots communications and events planning. The move to virtual communication prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic saw municipal officers, like me, leading and hosting meetings – often inadvertently managing the content and agenda of those sessions. The training will give the opportunity to local residents to coordinate, manage and lead the conversation rather than the other way around.

The involvement in ACTIVE NGOs has opened up a critical space to observe the current state of play in East Brighton and has certainly reinvigorated many East Brighton ULG members through this process so far. From a personal point of view, it has highlighted the need for a clear vision that can act as a catalyst to bring all stakeholders – active, inactive and dormant – together to benefit all community members. It has also reiterated of my need to be aware of my role, as a municipal officer, not part of the community, but a figure who can – hopefully – continue to build trust and meaningful partnerships in the community whilst lobbying for cultural and systemic change within the municipality to push for sustained change that can challenge the embedded inequality in East Brighton. The hope is that this can be helped through the transfer of learning and innovative practice from NGO House and our other partner cities – we shall wait and see the real legacy through the project and beyond.

author:

Tom Goodridge

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Council



A Potential Governance Model for the BN2 Five Community in Brighton

Well before East Brighton's involvement in ACTIVE NGOs, talk of community and neighbourhood governance has been long been on the agenda but never collectively resolved. One of the key issues is that the municipality has led this conversation, with concerns from NGOs, community groups and residents that rather than democratising power but entrenching power dynamics. The ACTIVE NGOs project has given much needed space to re-examine the potential for a community governance model – hearing from a range of stakeholders within the East Brighton ULG.

Those that run community assets, NGOs and community champions have input their views that creating a new community governance model could be beneficial on the following ways:

- Becoming a more powerful collective voice towards municipality decision making – including potential future area-based commissioning that takes place within East Brighton
- Bringing in substantial funds and grants to benefit the whole community
- Sharing and transfer of skills throughout individuals within each individual NGO and community group
- Enable strategic decision-making and visioning to tackle generations old, community-wide issues affecting East Brighton and its residents as well as build upon untapped community potential

- Provide collection of individuals into specified sub groups that can focus efforts on particular areas – for example Environment, Arts & Culture and Fundraising

A Bn2 Five steering group would be representative of all key stakeholders (place-based NGOs, community assets, resident's groups) a number of locally elected resident representatives as well as invited representatives from the municipality, local ward councillors and from Police, Fire Service and local Health organisations. Following our ULG learning visit to Liverpool, we were inspired by the Hub & Spoke model established at Safe Hub, where the "organisation is not one body which becomes larger and larger in order to achieve greater impact. Rather, in keeping with the lean principles, they have developed a network of interdependent organisations working together like parts of a wheel."¹⁷ The interdependent nature of this model lends itself to the dispersed and independent nature of NGOs within Bn2 Five/East Brighton and is the most appropriate model for community governance. Whether a Bn2 Five community governance model gets consensus buy in and can be successfully implemented is the next key step within the journey that ACTIVE NGOs transfer network has helped forge.



⤴ A Possible Governance Model for BN 2 Five - Stakeholders. Image(c) Tom Goodridge



⤴ A Possible Governance Model for BN 2 Five - Stakeholders. Image(c) Tom Goodridge

1 Traynor, K & Simpson G (2020). Community Hubs: Ten Strategies for sustainability. Learning from the experience of Safe Regeneration, A Community Hub in the Liverpool city region. University of Liverpool. Power To Change. Available for download: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SAFE-Regeneration-report-V4-Digital.pdf>



Governance model for the Civic and Social Centre in Santa Pola

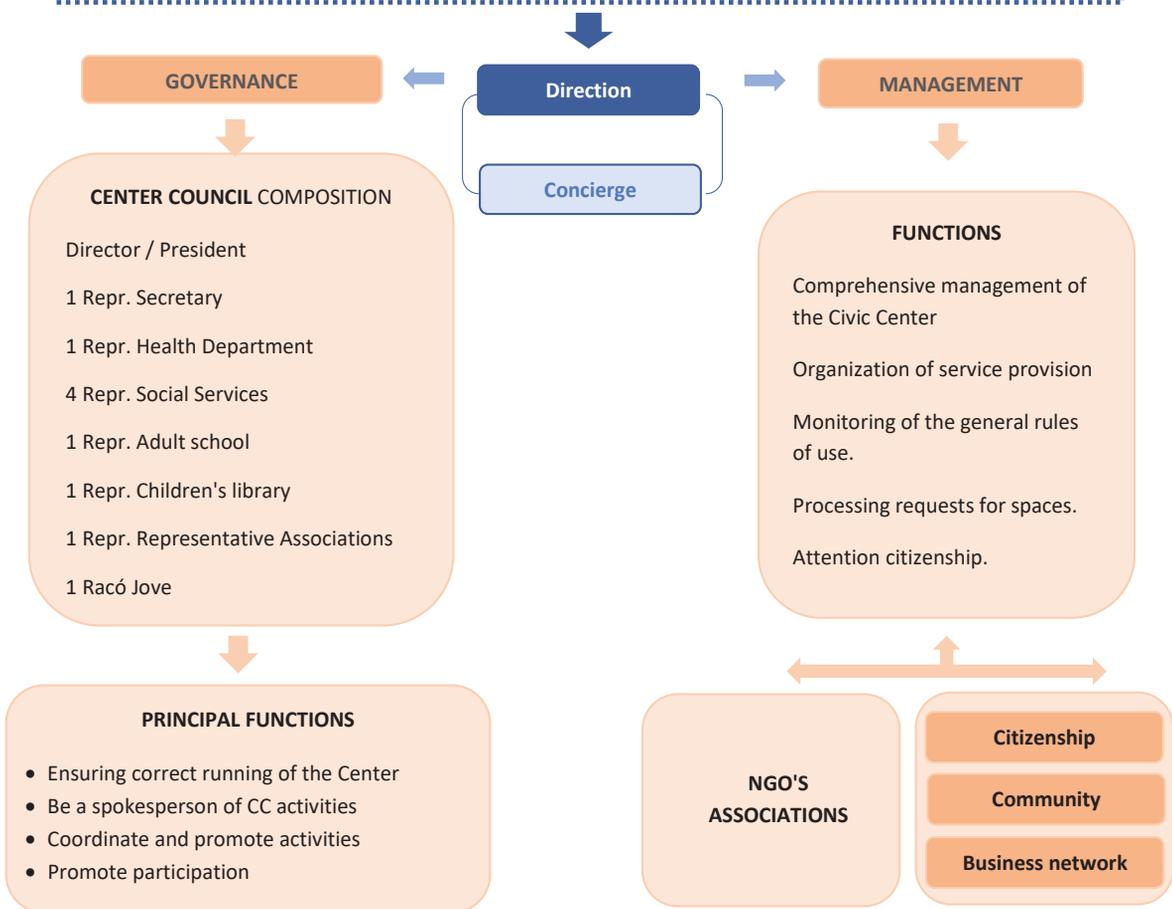
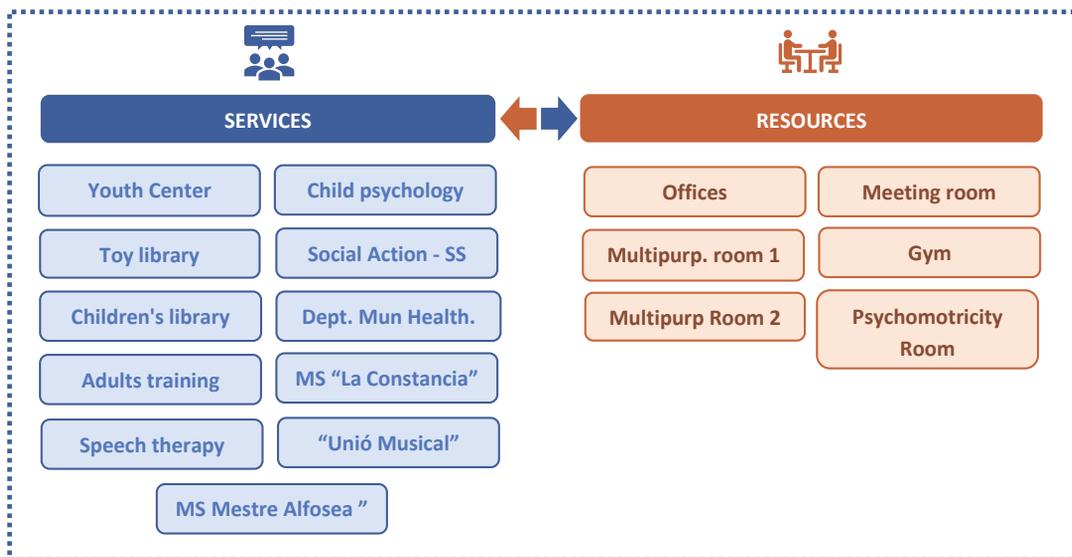
This diagram describes the future management model of the Santa Pola Civic and Social Center proposed by the members of the ULG in the framework of the Active NGO project.

The center's management model is structured around two main pillars: the services that are implemented in the facilities and the resources available to citizens and associations. In total, 11 services are carried out, among which the Youth Center, the toy library, adult training, social services, or musical activities stand out. In terms of resources, the spaces for associations, meeting rooms, the gym or multipurpose rooms are the most important.

The set of services and resources are managed on a day-to-day basis by the direction of the civic center that has the support of an administrative team. Its functions are to ensure the good management of the center, the quality of services and guarantee good citizen care and use of resources.

Beyond management, the civic center has a space for governance and public-private decision-making. It is made up of the local administration and representatives of the associations and services of the center. Its functions are to promote citizen participation, give visibility to the center's activities and coordinate its activities.

GOVERNANCE MODEL CIVIC AND SOCIAL CENTER - CITY COUNCIL OF SANTA POLA





A governance model for Syracuse's civic spaces

Relations between the NGOs and the Municipality, for what concern duties, roles, tasks and use of the Houses, are defined in an Official "Agreement" signed by them.

The Bodies of the Houses of Associations and Volunteering are:

- The Assembly
- The Executive Committee
- The Secretariat
-

The Assembly is unique for the different "Houses" and is composed by representatives of all NGOs that have signed the Agreement. They elect, every year, the 3 members composing the Executive Committee. The EC meets regularly and has administrative, fiscal and management tasks. The 3 Secretariats (one for each House) manage the calendar, communication and information activities.

The Municipality acts mainly as supervisor and Collaborator.

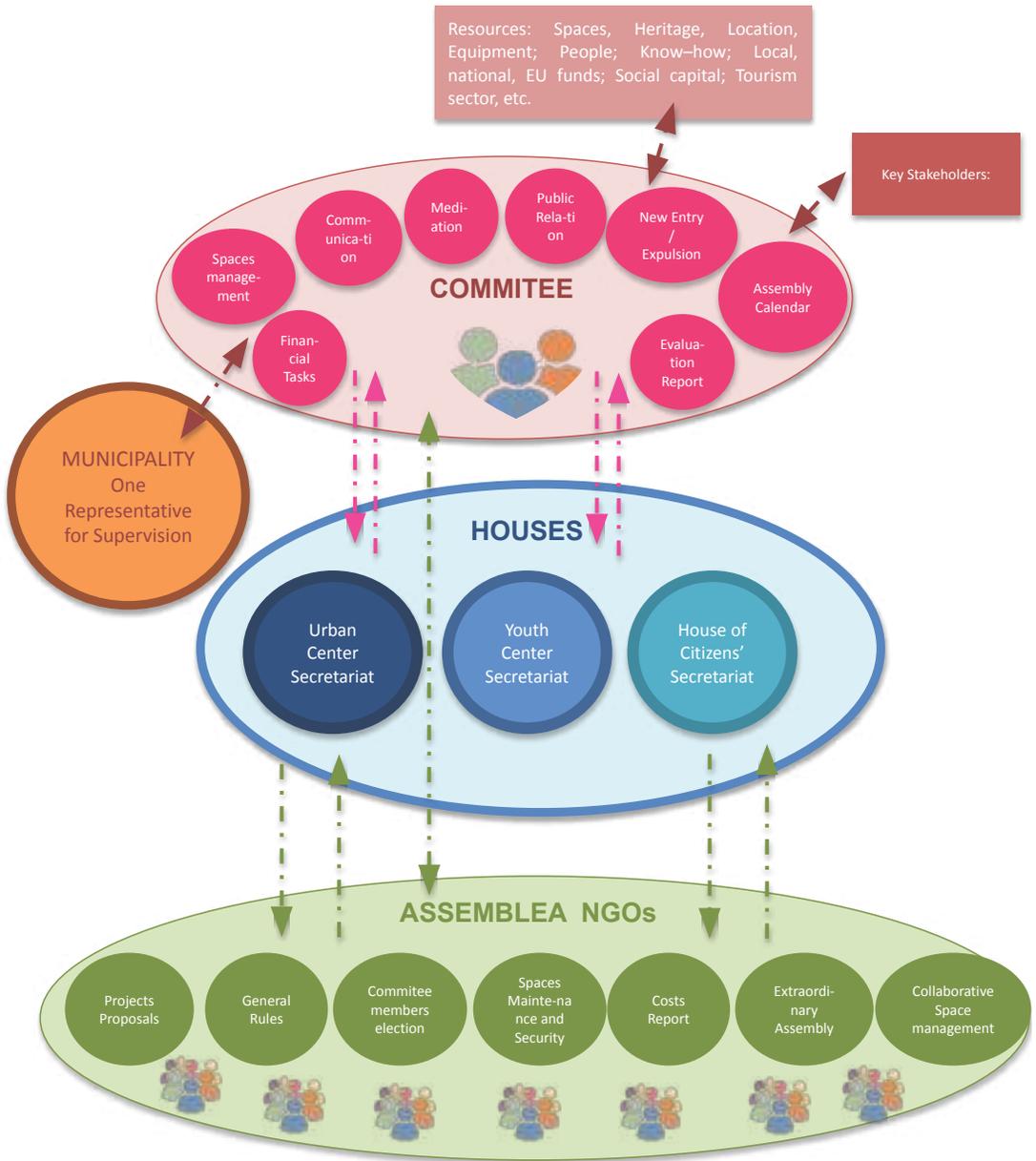
The Key Stakeholders are:

- Other users of the Houses of Associations and Volunteers
- In particular Citizens living in the neighborhood close to the Houses/ to be reached through engagement activities
- Schools
- Circostrizioni (Neighborhood Boards)
- Other Departments of the City of Siracusa (Departments of Education and School; Heritage; Culture and Sports)
- Tourists
- Other NGOs active at local or national level
- Region of Sicily
- National Ministry of Family, Culture, etc.

The Communication will be based on the following tools:

- Traditional Media (newspapers, tv, etc.)
- Social media (FB, WhatsApp)
- Flyers
- Mailing Lists / Newsletter
- Press conferences
- Local and national Platform
- App (Virtuocity, etc.)
- Existing Networks (es. Città Educativa, etc.)

GOVERNANCE MODEL ACTIVE SIRACUSA





The value of cooperation: How did Syracuse learn from Riga's NGO House?

It was a spring morning and I was cycling via Malta to Ortigia when I saw a beautiful building, clearly a work of industrial archaeology, and I wondered what it was about. I had recently moved to Syracuse and everything was new and waiting to be discovered. The building was not yet open to the public, but the person I asked for information told me that it was the Urban Center, a recovered space to become an innovative interface between administration and community, a space open to the city, where citizens can explore urban, environmental and social policies, a place for promotion, sharing, planning, socialization. I have a vivid memory of the emotion I felt admiring the building and listening to this passionate and visionary story. I imagined a social and cultural ferment, a physical place where people, stories, needs, experiences, knowledge, projects, activities meet to design together a new way of living the city.

Two years later, when I started working for the ACTive NGOs project, I remembered myself, on my bicycle, listening and imagining the Urban Center. Suddenly I felt energised and joyful to give my contribution to the challenge that the city of Syracuse was facing with its third participation in the European URBACT programme in the transfer of the good practice of Riga: to enhance the potential of citizens' ideas and skills and to develop the collaboration

between the municipality and third sector associations.

Public-private cooperation and civic involvement are important issues for many European cities in urban development. Sharing resources and responsibilities between municipalities and civil society can help create processes of co-designing urban spaces and services, thus active participation in city life.

The city of Syracuse is facing some problems. The recent austerity measures imposed on the administration and the consequent cuts in public budgets have led to the inefficiency of some social services. The municipality wants to address this situation also by creating innovative synergies with different social and economic actors and involving NGOs to ensure services and social inclusion to all citizens, especially the most disadvantaged groups.

NGOs need a better "hard" and "soft" system: physical spaces to carry out recreational, cultural and social activities, training courses, services to citizens; knowledge and skills to face social challenges.

And again, the municipality has had several difficulties in carrying out some projects related to three public spaces, between experiences that have been



*Siracusa
Urban Center.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian*



interrupted, such as the Citizen's House in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, and very promising and important initiatives, such as those of Officine Giovani in the historic centre of Ortigia and the Urban Center in a very central location, which still have great potential to express. The challenges that the municipal administration of Syracuse is facing seem to echo the problems faced by the NGO House in Riga, and have prompted Syracuse to look with interest at the experience of the Latvian city.

Riga and Syracuse very different cities, how can one be useful for the other? What kind of relationship has been created? It is true, they are different cities, but they share some things: they are learning to make the most of energy from below to create synergies between NGOs, citizens and institutions. They are both beautiful cities with good practice of civic-public cooperation, their historical centres are both UNESCO World Heritage Site, they are both seaside cities.

Unlike a provincial city like Syracuse, Riga is a capital city that performs the functions

of political direction for the whole nation, has many structures and specialized staff. Riga is a model to understand how to create and manage cooperation between NGOs and institutions. "Nothing truly valuable can be achieved except by the unselfish cooperation of many individuals" says Albert Einstein and Syracuse have a lot to learn from Riga in the path towards social inclusion and improved services to all citizens.

The idea of the NGO House in Riga was born in 2010 as a possible model of cooperation between citizens, NGOs and local municipalities, to solve communication problems and respond to the NGO's lack of meeting spaces and activities. The Riga City Council established the NGO House in September 2013 to address the challenges of participation in the activities of the municipality and social integration for people of different ages, social groups and nationalities, to support NGOs and promote citizens' awareness of local affairs.

*Illustration by Salvo
Antoci*



It serves as a platform for cooperation between non-governmental organisations and the municipality, providing a space where organisations develop cooperation with the municipality, receive educational, technical, administrative and information support, organise events, discuss and address current societal issues and challenges. The solutions offered by the Riga good practice are oriented towards the creation of a democratic and inclusive society based on solidarity, sustainability and equal access to civil, social, economic and cultural rights. How can this good example be reused and adapted in Syracuse to provide practical support to NGOs and involve citizens in addressing the various current challenges?

In Syracuse, city's NGOs need meeting spaces and activities and have few opportunities for collaboration with the municipality. The city is receptive and ready to put into practice processes of cooperation with civil society. Thanks to the Open Pilot Transfer Network Urbact GeniUSiracusa, an Open Innovation process has been experimented with good results in communication and collaboration between NGOs and the municipality, leading to the co-design of the Citizens' House, a

participatory space realized in an abandoned floor of a public school.

The NGO House in Riga inspired us because it worked to solve the problem of active participation and cooperation between NGOs and citizens. We were surprised by the practice in Riga as a political will turned the idea of opening the NGO House into reality and we were intrigued of how much the public administration has invested by providing a large structure and a dedicated staff; a fairly top-down approach that has led to great results. Thanks to the initial meetings in Riga and to the URBACT methodology based on facilitation and comparison, we understood how to adapt the Good Practice to our context. In Syracuse it was not possible to provide for the involvement of financial and human resources made available in Riga, but we could count on an active local support group, partly already experienced with the Citizen's House, ready to collaborate by providing energy and human resources and to participate in the management.

Syracuse's challenge has therefore become to develop a more open and inclusive governance model and offering NGOs opportunities for empowerment. Within

ACTive NGOs, locally led by the “Policy Sector for City Relations and Innovation”, the challenges of Syracuse found some solutions in the transfer, adopting and adapting the Riga Good Practice. Since the municipality does not have the financial and human resources to fully take care of the management of the three spaces, while NGOs need spaces to carry out their activities and improve their skills, there is a need to improve collaboration between NGOs and the administration; therefore a more open and inclusive model of governance has been sought and developed, which is opening up as opportunities for learning, growth and collaboration for both organisations and the municipality.

The transfer process is focused on the creation of a network of collaboration between the associations and a network of three civic spaces provided by the municipality, on the co-design of their identity and institutional vision and on participatory events to test their model of functioning. The spaces, connected as the House of Associations and Volunteers (following the example of Riga), have different characteristics and possibilities of use. The most interesting and humanly motivating part of the transfer process, which is able to create generative wealth, is the shared and mutual learning, thanks to the methodology of exchange and comparison and cooperation between cities. Methodologies, tools and knowledge have been shared into the network and become useful for all cities. This also contributes to the enrichment of the Good Practice path proposed by the Lead Partner. In other words, in the Good Practice transfer path it is not only the ‘receiving’ cities that learn but also the ‘giving city’.

Aristotle said: “What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing”. It is essential to practice a skill in order to become proficient at it. This is especially true with cooperation. We have taken learning and inspiration not only from the example of Riga but also from the partner cities during the transnational meetings. In Santa Pola we understood how useful the topic of “mapping” is, a starting point and an effective tool also in the long term, and this allowed us to build on and develop an ongoing project. In Dubrovnik we had confirmation that a public administration can use its physical resources to create strategic locations and channel different funding, which was very inspirational, despite the diversity of context. The ongoing discussion with colleagues in Brighton has inspired us for all those recreational activities (morning coffee, football matches, etc.) which are fundamental both for the ULC’s commitment and for the activities with the residents and which we want to start with the opening of the Houses. In the comparison between peers it was equally useful to be able to stimulate the other partners in their path.

Salvo Antoci, one of the stakeholders of ACTive NGOs tells his experience: “*ACTive NGOs is the third URBACT project in which I participate and it is the one that has most strengthened the mutual knowledge and the connection with the other participating associations. The good practice of Riga has made us reflect and work to achieve a similar result in our city. Thanks to local and transnational meetings I’ve experienced what cohesion and exchange means, for the first time I got to grips with the realities of the other partner cities and was aware that I was a European citizen, committed to a purpose that goes beyond the idea of our city. I was commissioned to document*

the various phases of the project with a diary, I tried to do so with the means most congenial to me: photography and drawing.”

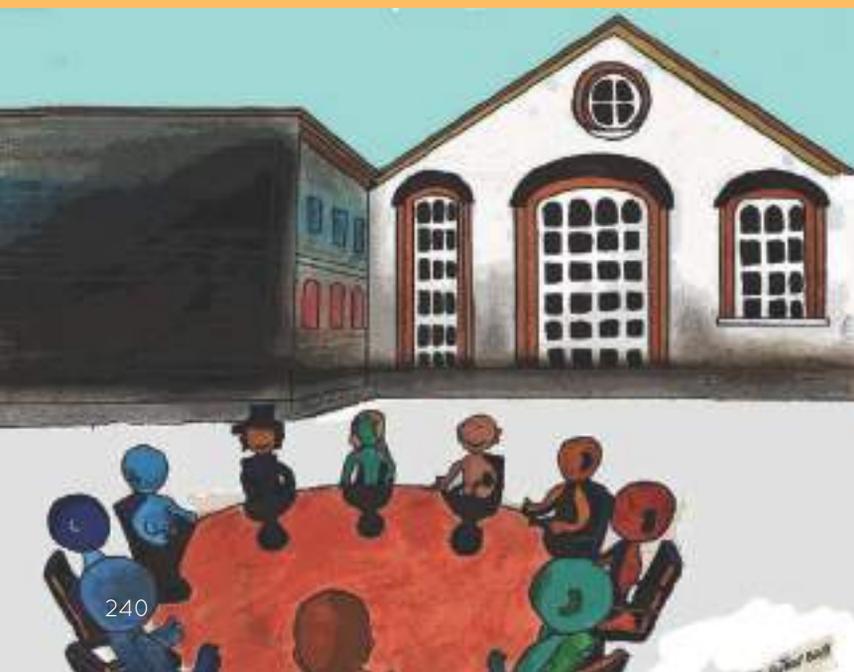
The ability to collaborate effectively between associations and with municipality has found its best result in the co-design of the Governance Model of the House of Associations and Volunteers. This demonstrates that we have incorporated the example of the NGO House and that we have pursued final objectives more suited to the local context. In fact, Syracuse has taken advantage of the mistakes made in the past with the House of Citizens and wanted to involve from the beginning all stakeholders in sharing the drafting of the protocol.

It's a process of learning and empowerment both of NGOs and municipality. The municipality is learning the new role of supervisor of a social innovation project, it is increasing an attentive and inclusive city leadership that listens to the needs of all citizens, in particular the most disadvantaged groups. “We are understanding how important it is to dedicate an exclusive

structure to manage the coordination between associations and manage the community centres” says Nunzio Marino, the ACTIVE NGOs project manager for the Municipality of Syracuse. “We are learning to listen to the needs that come from the bottom up and incorporate them into public programs and activities.”

NGOs are acquiring a lot of knowledge and skills. For the first time many NGOs have had to engage in participatory governance models that brings together public and private in a new and effective synergy, they are protagonists in the co-design of complex management and communication models in order to shape the management model and write the governance agreement of the new House of Associations and Volunteers.

We are learning that involving citizens to civic challenges frees up energy and skills, makes them feel like actors for change. It is exciting and inspiring. We are learning how the mapping of needs, activities, missions is useful to increase the mutual knowledge and encourage collaboration and synergy. To do it we are learning to use a digital system map solution, ‘Guidabile’, a



*Illustration by
Salvo Antoci*





Illustration by Salvo Antoci 

data collection app based on community-generated content, developed to digitize the association mapping process.

We are obtaining communication skills: how to effectively communicate during meetings, increasing listen and mutual understanding in order to collaborate more effectively, how to improve the use of online communication, thanks to the activation of social network (whatsapp group) and media (facebook pages) and newsletter. This ability to use digital technologies to collaborate is crucial in this period of lockdown caused by the Covid-19 emergency, it's a concrete proof of the skills acquired. We are learning that leisure activities are useful to involve stakeholders. All this learning is useful today to carry on the co-management of the House of Associations and Volunteers and will be even more relevant in the future for the challenges of welfare.

An important step in the transfer process was the signature of the Protocol of Understanding, which was the result of a shared writing between the NGO and the municipality, by the Mayor and 27 active organisations. An important signature because it officially sanctioned the birth of the House of Associations and Volunteers, a long-awaited signature delayed due to the

difficulties arising from the lockdown and the period of health emergency due to Covid-19 which slowed down the final procedures. Now the House has its governing bodies and is working out innovative ideas and solutions to celebrate the House's opening to citizens, taking into account the limits due to the anti-Covid restrictions.

The transfer process of the Best Practice to Syracuse is moving on, it's too early to say if it's a complete success. We are learning many useful skills and we are understanding many difficulties and gaps. In order to ensure continuity of dialogue between NGOs and institutions, a team could perhaps be set up to deal specifically with this issue. What we still have to learn in Syracuse is to bridge the gap between institutions and volunteering, to implement a social inclusion strategy that foresees a systematic involvement of citizens and associations. The results of the project in Syracuse are mainly based on the good will of some actors but the cooperation is not yet structured to effectively change the nature of services provided to the city. We want to continue to acquire all the knowledge and skills useful to better manage the new scenario that opens before us, in which the third sector will play a key role in the implementation of urban policies.



Regulating the Urban Commons

What we can learn from Italian experiences

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The international debate on the commons has a long history but only in recent years has it started gearing towards the definition of Urban Commons and what their role is in shaping our society, especially at the wake of the economic crisis.

“Commons are those resources that apart from the property that is mainly public, pursue a natural and economic vocation that is of social interest, immediately serving not the administration but the collectivity and the people composing it. They are resources that belong to all the associates and that law must protect and safeguard also in virtue of future generations.”⁽¹⁾ According to Lucarelli, more than property, public or private, commons are defined by rights and by the management models rather than simply the property model. Urban Commons provide a complex scenario in which both property and management of these collectives resources require a new legal framework, increasingly provided by legal experts, municipalities and activists in various parts of Europe. As Foster and Iaione point out, “[...] the urban commons framework is more than a legal tool to make proprietary claims on particular urban goods and resources. Rather, we argue that the utility of the commons framework is to raise the question of how best to manage, or govern, shared or common resources.”⁽²⁾

1 Lucarelli, A. (2011) Beni Comuni, Dalla Teoria All’Azione Politica, Dissenzi

2 Foster, Sheila and Iaione, Christian, The City as a Commons (August 29, 2015). 34 Yale L. & Pol’y Rev. 281 (2016). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2653084> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2653084>

This debate developed strongly in Italy as a result of the Referendum on the Privatisation of Water, which saw a victory with 95% from the position supporting water as a commons to be protected in public interest and not to be privatised. Following this episode, which has not yet seen a clear policy developed at national level, many city administrations have brought forward this debate at local level. The concept of commons has extended from water to many other resources, both physical and immaterial. In terms of physical spaces, open public spaces are rather unanimously recognised as urban commons and regulations in many cities have been developed to legislate the community use of urban gardens, as an example. Such spaces do not prove to be unproblematic as even through the property remains public, the collective access and the management costs are interpreted differently across the

country. In Rome, the Regulation of Green Spaces adopted by the City Council in 2014 foresaw that all running costs, such as water, and ordinary maintenance, such as cutting the grass, should be responsibility of the communities adopting the green space, where open public access must be nevertheless be guaranteed. Given the poor condition of maintenance of public green spaces in Rome, many people accepted these conditions to improve their living standards. Within this context, the regulation of buildings appears to be far more complex, given the higher number of variables in which the civic and the Public should find terms of agreement. To respond to these challenges, some cities developed a Regulation of the Commons, that would provide a framework for civic organisations and the public administration to find agreements on the shared management and use of urban commons.

Bagni Pubblici di Via Aglie', Turin. Photo (cc) Eutropian 





Urban Center, Bologna. Photo (cc) Eutropian 

The City of Bologna has had a long tradition in terms of citizens' participation in decision making over the city's development, but especially as a result of the economic crisis and the subsequent reduction on welfare expenditure, citizens have become increasingly active in the city. Responding to such inputs, the City Council has over recent years developed a series of relevant participation processes, Open Data initiatives, a participatory budgeting platform and the Regulations of the Commons, this last having gained much visibility both at national level and abroad. The reason for the Regulation of the Commons⁽³⁷⁾ having gained so much attention was because this was the first of its kind ever being developed and was then adopted, with small variations, by a large number of cities across the peninsula.

The Regulations of the Commons is an application of the Principle of Subsidiarity foreseen by the art.118 of the Italian Constitution, that foresees that public administrations should support citizens in the development of autonomous initiatives aiming towards the collective interest. Therefore in 2014, Bologna's City Council officially adopted the Regulation on the collaboration between citizens and the public administration on activities aiming at the care and regeneration of urban commons. The Regulation acts as a general framework within which citizens, both individuals or groups, can submit proposals for projects to be developed on a spontaneous basis with voluntary effort for the involved parties, putting competences, resources and energy

available to the collective good. Such projects are disciplined by the Regulation through a series of specific agreements, called Collaborations Pacts, in which both the citizens and the Public Administration agree to the terms of their cooperation for the safeguarding of the commons. The commons targeted by this Regulation are material spaces as public squares, green areas or schools, immaterial commons, such as education and social inclusion, and digital commons, such as applications and digital alphabetization.

The value of this pioneering Regulation has been to attempt to provide a legal framework to the activities and projects promoting the commons that were taking place spontaneously in the city, often outside if not even in contrast to the existing regulations. At the same time, this Regulation has the limitation of addressing only the less problematic situations of collaboration between civic and public stakeholders when promoting the urban commons. In fact, collective cleaning of public spaces, paintings of murals or creation of street furniture have been valuable initiatives taking place even more frequently thanks to the legal clarity in which they can take place, but are rather unproblematic in social and political terms. Urban Commons involving higher stakes in terms of ownership, management and economic conditions, as in the case of public buildings or even private ones, are not part of the scope of the Bologna Regulation of the Commons.

Such a challenge was instead recently taken on by the City of Turin, which as many other Italian cities adopted the Bologna' Regulation of the Commons with very small adjustments in January 2016. Within the framework of the Co-City project⁽⁴⁾

supported by the Urban Innovative Actions program, Turin developed the experience of the commons further towards the creation of an innovative social welfare network to foster the co-production of services with community enterprises. Low cost urban regeneration activities in open spaces as well as buildings took place and were financially supported through the European-funded project. The Co-City project's ambition was strongly embedded within a longer experience in terms of civic-public collaboration, as testified by the experience of the Network of the Neighbourhood Houses⁽⁵⁾, which are also a key partner in the Co-City project. This network of community spaces, started up in 2007, gathers eight spaces across the city with different functions and management models, some being public and others privately-run. For example, Cascina Roccafranca⁽⁶⁾ is a multi-functional community centre operating in a building owned by the City of Turin. Partly financed by the municipal budget, the centre is managed through cooperation between public and civic actors: a scheme that offers a valuable governance model while providing a wide range of social and cultural activities. As the staff member Stefania De Masi stated: "Our status as a public-private foundation is an experiment, an attempt of close collaboration with the municipality."

3 Further information on the Bologna Regulation of the Commons is available online (in Italian): <http://comunita.comune.bologna.it/il-percorso-ed-il-regolamento>

4 Further information on the Co-City project in Turin is available online (in Italian): <http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/co-city>

5 Further information on the Rete delle Case di Quartiere in Turin is available online (in Italian): <http://www.retecasesedelquartiere.org/>

6 Further information on Cascina Roccafranca is available online (in Italian): www.cascinaroccafranca.it/

An experience stemming from a different background than Bologna's is the Regulation of the Commons in Naples⁷⁾. It was in this city that for the first time in 2011, the juridical definition of Commons was introduced in the City Council's Statute, referring especially to the case of water, which had been object of the national Referendum that same year. The following years, the "Regulation for the Discipline of the Commons" and the "Principles for the government and management of the Commons" were established. According to these, "each citizens should concur to the natural and spiritual progress of the city." The focus towards the urban commons was explicit in 2013, when the City Council adopted the Public Space Charter, elaborated by the Biennial of Public Space held that same year in Rome, which aims at the creation of concrete processes towards the promotion of the urban public spaces.

It was in 2014 that the current regulation deliberating on the urban commons in Naples was approved by the City Council. This regulation outlines the identification of the commons and the process of collective management for their civic use and collective benefit are outlined. This regulation has foreseen the recognition of ongoing civic initiatives pursuing projects in spaces identified as urban commons. This approach therefore attempts to foster a logic of self-governance and experimental management of public spaces, aiming at recognising these spaces as commons of collective interest and fruition. In 2016, seven locations in Naples were identified as commons because of the collective commitment of citizens in their regeneration after a long period of abandonment. Before such recognition, these spaces were officially identified as

illegal occupation of public properties, for which all people involved were subjected to legal persecution. The innovation of what is happening in Naples stands basically in the fact that the ancient tradition of the *Usi Civici* (Civic Uses) applied since medieval times to the forests for people to access and harvest wood or collect food, is now applied to urban spaces. This is the case of the *Je So' Pazzo* initiative⁸⁾ taking place in the old mental asylum in the city centre of Naples, where a group of inhabitants, many of whom youngsters, have taken over the space to provide a series of local services, such as music classes, sports facilities and many other community-run activities. Currently the agreement with the Municipalities implies that utility costs of the space are paid by the City Council but all activities related expenses are responsibility of the users. In terms of property rights, the space remains in public ownership and users are granted freely access as long as the activities remain of public interest and open to all citizens.

At first sight the Regulations of the Commons of Bologna and Turin and the one of Naples could appear to be rather similar, having been developed at the same with an overall same objectives, yet they greatly differ in terms of concepts of property and usage of the commons.

Bologna and the blueprint in Turin, do not effectively intervene on the property model of the public estates, that remain an asset exclusively managed by the Authority, albeit in the public interest. Even in terms of what

7 Further information on the Naples Regulation of the Commons is available online (in Italian):: <http://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/16783>

8 Further information on *Je So' Pazzo* initiative in Naples is available online (in Italian): <http://jesopazzo.org>



*The Casa del
Quartiere San
Salvario, Turin.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian*



is the usage model of these properties, this remains unaltered as the Authority is ultimately responsible for the refurbishment of the estates or for the development of social and economic functions. For this reason, it can be said that the civic-public collaborations to be activated tend to take place in open public spaces with a low conflict threshold.

Instead, Naples has attempted to pursue a different model of property and management of the commons. In fact, to be identified as a commons are the buildings themselves, based on a series of social and cultural elements, and not the communities operating in them, therefore avoiding conflicts in terms of public procurement in assigning tenants to a public property. The activities currently taking place within these identified Urban Commons are accepted by the Administration as long as they respect the Commons ethics and guarantee access to citizens.

These experiences from Italy are also inspiring other parts of Europe, allowing for an increasing international exchange to take place. From a more institutional perspective at European level, not only has the European programme Urban Innovative Actions financially supported the Co-City project

in Turin, but also other European programs are recognising the relevance of such experiences for a European audience. This is the case of the URBACT capacity building program for cities that recently awarded the Good Practice title to the Commons initiative in Naples ⁹⁾, based on which a knowledge transfer network of cities has been financially supported throughout Europe starting from 2018. Civic initiatives were also inspired by the work of many initiatives and institutions in Italy, as the model of LabGov, the Laboratory on the Governance of the Commons that supported the elaboration of the Bologna Regulation, has been collaborating with a number of European cities to develop different commons regulations.. The European Alternatives network has initiated a research mapping local governments that are promoting participatory governance in their institutions, in which Naples is thoroughly covered.

These Italian applications of regulating the Urban Commons well depict the political positions and the solutions that may be adopted to regulate a form of property that is neither public nor private, but collective.

9 Further information on the URBACT Good Practice in Naples is available online (in English): <http://urbact.eu/lost-found>



The promotion of the commons in Naples

From self-organisation to co-governance

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The city of Naples (Italy)⁽¹⁾ is an exemplary case study of how a city can co-design legal and sustainable urban commons governance mechanisms and enable city inhabitants and local communities to act collectively in the general interest. In 2011, the City of Naples enabled the activity of a network of local communities in Naples that informally manage publicly-owned spaces in different areas of the City, by turning the latter into spaces for artistic exhibitions and urban welfare services and recognizing them as urban commons. The City developed innovative legal design principles, governance arrangements, urban policy tools to do so. The toolkit developed through this experience was later recognized by Urbact as a best practice in urban sustainable development and became the pillar of an Urbact transfer network, “Civic eState”⁽²⁾

The case of Naples⁽³⁾ is centered around the transformation of building complexes and urban welfare services in urban commons. Its innovation potential consists of enabling collective management of urban essential facilities governed as urban commons through a public-community governance approach. Such approach secures fair and open access, co-design, preservation and a social and economic sustainability model of urban assets and infrastructures, all to the benefit of future generations. Collective governance is carried out through the involvement of the community of neighbourhood inhabitants in designing, experimenting, managing, and delivering new forms of cultural and social services. This article will situate the historical context of the commons in Naples and then discuss the governance arrangements that the city has experimented with and valuable lessons for commons regulation that can be applied elsewhere.

Introduction

Before the work of the political economist Elinor Ostrom gained global prominence, the governance of the so-called ‘commons’ was seen as a difficult task. Hardin in *The Tragedy of the Commons* describes how, when individuals have open access to resources that are non-rival and non-excludable, they will act according to their self-interest, contrary to the common good of all users. Elinor Ostrom however, undermined this assumption. She provided examples of how communities from Switzerland to Nepal were able to effectively manage common pool resources by establishing a shared set of rules and norms⁽⁴⁾.

While her examples mainly concerned natural resources – such as irrigation waters and forests – a plethora of urban commons have emerged in cities around the world. Naples is one such city that is experimenting with different forms of governance suited to the commons. Home to seven formerly empty buildings turned to civic use, Naples

is the lead city of URBACT Civic e-State transfer network – a three-year-long network transfer among six European cities aimed at disseminating knowledge on how to create, manage, and maintain urban commons. Naples defined urban commons as tangible and intangible assets, services and infrastructures functional to the exercise of fundamental rights considered by the city of Naples as collectively owned and therefore removed from the “exclusive use”

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- 1 Naples is the third most populated city in Italy, after Rome and Milan. It is the capital city of the Campania Region and the metropolitan area of Naples. Characterized by urban sprawl, and with poverty concentrated in the central area of the city (rather than in the periphery as is the case in Milan and Rome), over the past decade the City of Naples decided to invest in the reuse of existing historical city centre heritage.
 - 2 <https://urbact.eu/urban-commons-civic-estate>
 - 3 <https://urbact.eu/lost-found>
 - 4 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the commons*, (Cambridge University Press, 1990).



*Workshop
in Scugnizzo
Liberato. Photo (cc)
Eutropian*





⤴ *The building of Scugnizzo Liberato. Photo (cc) Eutropian*

proprietary logic to be governed through mechanisms of urban co-governance based on the legal tool of the “civic and collective urban uses”.

Naples’ journey to the urban commons started in 2012 with the informal management of a former convent called ‘Asilo Filangieri’, a monumental building in the city centre owned by the City of Naples⁵. The community that started the informal management of the space was composed mostly of artists who opposed the high unemployment and precarious working conditions of the cultural sector. The

building had been lent to a Foundation in charge of organising the UNESCO’s Universal Forum of Cultures, an event that occupants thought did not sufficiently make use of local cultural assets. Rather than conceiving the building of the Asilo Filangieri as simply an ‘occupied space’, occupants started seeing it as a common. They transformed it into a cultural and arts centre and made means of production (for example theatre stages, crafts material) free and accessible to all.

5 <https://urbact.eu/commons-towards-new-participatory-institutions-neapolitan-experience>

'Civic use' as a legal tool for urban co-governance

The vision of the City as a commons that the City embodied, shaped the Scugnizzo liberato case, another collectively occupied building, through a self-governance tool, the "Civic and collective urban uses". The Asilo commoners, in close collaboration with civil servants from the Municipality from a Department for the Commons (created in 2011 by the freshly elected Mayor Luigi de Magistris as part of a broader strategy to promote commons in the city) collectively wrote a Declaration of Urban Civic and Collective Use'. The Declaration establishes the usability, inclusiveness, fairness, and accessibility of the Asilo spaces and infrastructures.

This model is a system of urban co-governance that intends to go beyond the classic "concession agreement model" which is based on a dichotomous view of the public-private partnership. Civic and collective urban use recognizes the existence of a relationship between the community and these public assets that triggers the formation of a social practice eventually evolving into a "civic use", which in essence is the right to use and manage the resource as shaped by the practice and concrete use of the common resource by its users. This process makes community-led initiatives recognizable, creating new institutions, ensuring the autonomy of both parties involved, on the one hand the citizens engaged in the reuse of the urban commons and on the other hand the city administration enabling the practice. The policy was implemented through a series of City resolutions starting with the Asilo experience in 2012. The Declaration of the Asilo was recognized by the resolution of

Naples City Government n. 893/2015 as the public regulation of the building. By doing this, the local administration "recognized not only a mere access entitlement but also the rights to the direct administration of the building itself". The process culminated in 2016, with a new resolution (n.446) enabled other public spaces to adopt the civic use model of the Asilo and be declared as 'emerging urban commons'. In addition to the Asilo Filangieri, in fact, seven public properties were recognized by the City Council of Naples as "relevant civic spaces to be ascribed to the category of urban commons": Ex-Convento delle Teresiane; Giardino Liberato; Lido Pola; Villa Medusa; Ex-OPG di Materdei; Ex-Carcere Minorile – Scugnizzo Liberato; Ex Conservatorio S. Maria della Fede; Ex- Scuola Schipa.

Civic use is an historical legal tool used in rural areas in Italy to grant certain communities collective rights over land and pastures. Essentially, this model recognizes the existence of a direct relationship between public assets and the community itself and gives the latter the right to use and manage them, consistent with the nature of commons⁶.

6 Ugo Mattei and Alessandra Quarta, Right to the City or Urban Commoning? Thoughts on the Generative Transformation of Property Law, *The Italian Law Journal* No. 2 (2015); Giuseppe Micciarelli, Introduction to urban and collective civic use: the "direct management" of urban emerging commons in Naples. *Heteropolitics International Workshop Proceedings*, http://heteropolitics.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Conference_Proceedings_Website.pdf.

It is important to note that the City administration does not abandon its role in the Naples' commons framework. According to the Declaration, the City instead provides the possibility for the compensation of management expenses "and what is necessary to ensure adequate accessibility to the property". This is justified by the fact that commons like the Asilo generate social value by providing welfare and services that are in the residents' general interest. The City of Naples, in other words, recognizes the 'civic added value' (*redditività civica*) of these initiatives and thus contributes to supporting them and enabling their practice. In the first five years, the Asilo offered 7,800 public initiatives, and targeted 260,000 beneficiaries. All spaces provide cultural and creative services as well as urban welfare services such as primary health care or legal counselling for migrants and vulnerable people. The spaces' management relies on shared rules and principles for the use of the space. During the first pandemic outbreak in the Spring of 2020, the City relied on urban commons to support its action of relief for the population of Naples, offering shelter to homeless and delivering food across town. These spaces turned into commons constitute the civic patrimony of the city of Naples. The main design principle in the activities' scheduling is the non-exclusive use of any part of the property. No property can be assigned to as operational headquarter to any subject or group, not even temporarily, and everyone will be granted access to the space on a rotational basis.

The challenge of a sustainable urban co-governance mechanism.

The mechanisms agreed by the City of Naples, although rooted in the Italian legal system, are characterized by a high degree of adaptability to other urban contexts. In a theory of the *City as a Commons*, which adapted Elinor Ostrom's theories on the commons to the city context, Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione identified three features for effective collective governance, which are all present in the case of Naples: sharing, collaboration, and polycentric governance⁽⁷⁾.

Firstly, collaboration was key to the success of the establishment of urban commons in Naples. Direct collaboration between the City of Naples and Asilo users was crucial to establish a framework for civic use and outline the new role of the City administration as an 'enabler'. Collaboration is also at the heart of the day-to-day management of the Asilo. The users become problem solvers and resource managers that are able to make strategic decisions about common assets and to implement them with other citizens and other urban stakeholders.

Finally, the day-to-day management of the urban commons reflects a system of polycentric governance. This means that resources are neither exclusively owned nor centrally regulated. Rather than having a top-down management system where organisations on the ground carry out mandates and are accountable to the city government, the Asilo belongs to the

7 Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione, *The City as a commons*, Yale law and policy review, 2:34, 2016.



Inside the Ex Asilo Filangieri. Photo (cc) Eutropian



community, and it is governed by different bodies that reflect such community. At the same time, there is a certain level of interdependence between the City of Naples and the Asilo, as the administration commits to pay for some of the expenses. In other words, in a polycentric system of governance, the State takes on enabler's role, providing the necessary tools for urban commons to flourish and generate social value while maintaining their participatory and open-access nature.

The use and informal management of these empty buildings by the urban communities implied on one hand a temporary use of such places and, on the other hand, it created a stimulus to start searching for

innovative mechanisms for the use of such spaces as a community-managed estate. The latter feature is the main object of the role of Naples as lead partner of the "Civic eState" URBACT Transfer network. To recognize and implement forms of self-organisation and urban co-governance, by creating an innovative dialogue between administration and citizens started and building a process of co-creation, not just of legal tools and governance arrangements, but of economic-financial tools that can ensure the medium and long term sustainability of the spaces.



In search of co-creation and collaboration through organic growth: The story of NGO centres in Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik should not only be known for its problems with mass tourism or its unique UNESCO features. It should be also known by its longstanding tradition of active citizens and NGOs. In the past decade, NGOs have been progressing to the next level in the form of civil–public partnerships and social–cultural centres. In Dubrovnik, there are two successful examples: Platform for Lazareti and Youth Centre. As it is common when forming new alliances and especially socio–cultural centres (NGO Houses), finding suitable governance and decision–making models is a key challenge. However, with the help of the knowledge transferred in the ACTIVE NGOs URBACT Transfer Network, these centres may have found their response to this challenge.

Platform for Lazareti and Youth Center

It is well known that Dubrovnik has been dealing with the issues of “overtourism” for the last almost two decades. In this period, many public spaces and common spaces have unfortunately been commodified, commercialised and put to an almost exclusive use of tourism. As a result, the space for civil society has been shrinking each year, leaving the Municipality and NGOs in an urgent need to improve and stabilise their communication. To resolve these issues and further stabilize the

civil scene, the Platform for Lazareti and the Youth Centre have been working on establishing their venues based on public–civil partnership and participative governance

Civil–public partnership requires strong cooperation between NGOs and the local administration. The idea of a social–cultural centre requires a strong connection to the local community and their needs. And the idea of civil–public partnership is burdened by the top–down policies of the recommended and legally available formal models of a public institution, a publicly–traded company, a cooperative, or a foundation. All of these formats were considered by the Platform for Lazareti and the Youth Centre as unsuitable, too formal, potentially bringing a bureaucratically overburdening layer to their current business models. In order to respond to this challenge, each of the centres set out to find a suitable collaboration model which would allow them to better communicate and collaborate not only as platforms but also with the City of Dubrovnik.

The Platform for Lazareti is an unofficial advocacy association consisting of 5 NGOs residing and/or working in Dubrovnik’s Lazareti complex, dedicated to developing the idea of Lazareti as a horizontally



*Youth Center Dubrovnik.
Photo (c) Youth Center*



integrated social-cultural centre open to the local community. During the last years, member organisations of the Platform have been working on the Platform for Lazareti Regulations to make their collaboration more efficient and official, but also to enable the Lazareti to open up its spaces to other users. At the same time, the making of the Regulations was an ideal beginning to establish a better collaboration model for Lazareti with the City of Dubrovnik. As Ana Cvjetković (Platform for Lazareti) recalls: *„By creating and implementing protocols of conduct you establish very clear relationships which enable successful collaboration through mutual planning and clearly defined goals. To ensure that everyone respects the rules, you need to write them down. Through the protocols, we will also create a basis for more effective and organised usage of the spaces of the Lazareti complex whilst opening them up for the community to use.“*

Dubrovnik's Youth Centre is a civil-public collaboration platform for developing and providing programs for youth. They currently consist of seven NGOs. In the last year,

they have been preparing the horizontal organic model for their centre, consisting of several working groups. As Gino Sutic (Youth Centre) explains, *„when it comes to cooperation between the civil and public, not only in Dubrovnik but in Croatia, public administration is usually the passive party which only finances – they give you the money and then you need to justify your costs by tons of paperwork. We wanted to establish complete equality and active participation between the partners so we used this organic horizontal structure which allows us to have decentralized governance. In such a way, if one piece fails, the rest of the structure can continue.“*

Learning from Syracuse

The Platform for Lazareti and the Youth Centre shared the path to find a suitable way to stabilise and further develop their public-civil partnership, develop ways of opening up their spaces to the local community and think outside the given box of models. The help that was very much needed came from the third international „ACTIVE

NGOs” meeting held in Syracuse (IT) in October of 2019. The topic was governance, communication, and decision-making structures. It gave the partners another perspective on how to make participatory governance more simple and more effective.

A very important input, confirming the ideas of the Dubrovnik activists, came from the unique approach to governing and regulating urban commons written in the „Bologna regulation of collaboration between citizens and the City (...) “. This Regulation emphasised the idea of the „right to co-city“ or in other words, it highlighted the idea that the city is a shared resource open to different actors through the formal recognition of collective governance and stewardship rights. Stewardship is one of the main values of the Youth Center, as explained by Anja Marković (Youth Centre): *„We want the youth of Dubrovnik to own the centre, not just visit it. To be an active partner in developing it, and taking responsibility for it as well so that they can inherit it someday. “*

The second very important input and confirmation were given through the examples of co-governance carried through the involvement of the local community in designing, managing, and delivering new forms of activities and with great benefits to the centres and the community itself. This is something that resonated with the Platform for Lazareti which in the summer of 2019 implemented their first open call for the citizens and other NGOs to apply with their activities to be organised in the Platform’s spaces. Thirdly, the knowledge transferred from the meeting helped the partners to think outside the box, look at their situation holistically, and to find the modality of governance which is the most suitable for their own needs and capacities. The only important premise was the notion of regulated equality and participation.



*Strategic planning workshop in the Youth Center.
Photo (c) Youth Center*



So, how to go back to the basics?

Partners from Syracuse (IT) kindly shared with the rest of the partners their Regulation for the governance and use of their spaces (Regolamento della Casa delle associazioni e del volontariato di Sesto San Giovanni; Regolamento per la gestione ad utilizzazione della casa delle associazioni; etc.). These protocols helped the Dubrovnik team to finish the Platform for Lazareti Regulations which not only regulate the relationships and spaces shared by the Platform but also the criteria and rules of lending spaces to other NGOs and citizens for their activities. It was also very useful in finishing the lists of tasks of the working groups in the organic horizontal model that Youth Center has been developing.

An additional document sent by Syracuse, the „Carta dei Servizi“ was helpful to the Platform for Lazareti in many ways. Firstly, the structure of the document helped the Platform in preparing the document which would become a sort of “instructions to Lazareti”, a pamphlet in which the complex Lazareti would be described alongside the organisations working there (their program, contact, webpages, social media, information about the available spaces and under which conditions it is possible to use them, some interesting facts). The main goal of the „guide“ is to open up the spaces of the Lazareti to the wider community and help them get in contact with the organisations. Additionally, to make their spaces known and available to the broader public, the Platform for Lazareti added a contact form to their social media and webpages where the interested organisations and citizens can book spaces for their activities. A great help in designing the form was found in a questionnaire of the Riga

NGO House. The final form, therefore, consists of the basic information about the applicant, the chosen space (with a short description of each of the spaces), the date, duration and type of the activity (allowed types of activities were defined by the Platform for Lazareti Regulation), a short description of the activity, whether the activity has a participation fee or not and what equipment is needed (with the list of the available equipment provided by the Platform attached). Alongside the contact form, the terms of fair use are noted, also in accordance with the Platform for Lazareti Regulation. All of these were the necessary tools to ensure equal participation supported by regulated equality and helped the Platform for Lazareti and Youth Centre to find new forms of governance models suited to their needs and capacities.

Challenges in ‘transferring’

At the local level, Dubrovnik’s Youth Centre and the Platform for Lazareti had been facing a shortage of spaces for civil society and problems of unstable communication and collaboration with the City of Dubrovnik. The solution for these problems was found in establishing social and cultural centres (NGO Houses) based on civil–public partnership and modalities of participatory governance. During this time, they faced the challenges of securing active and regulated participation of everyone involved as well as finding suitable ways of opening up the spaces to the local community for their activities. Both of the platforms concluded that the recommended and legally available formal models were ill–suited to address their specific challenges. Both the Youth Centre and the Platform for Lazareti drew inspiration for their own local regulations and governing models from the



⤴ *Citizens assembly in Dubrovnik. Photo (c) Dubrovniknet*

other partners, especially from the Syracuse and Riga examples. However, it is important to be noted that social-cultural centres are largely defined by their local contexts and communities. For example, both of the platforms in the Dubrovnik case have grown by the bottom-up principle based on their long-term presence in civil society. By growing in their reputation, knowledge, finance, and experience, they were ready to do the next step in their development: to establish social-cultural centres. The City of Dubrovnik recognized that the new community venues were capable of realising

their concept and agreed on the proposal of civil-public partnership. In this sense, the Dubrovnik situation with a long, autonomous history differs from the Syracuse and Riga cases where the Municipality has a greater impact on shaping the social-cultural centres (NGO Houses). These different paths make it clear that when considering the development and growth of an NGO House, its local context seeks for an organic and a more flexible approach led by the modalities of governance rather than models, meaning bottom-up solutions.

Support from URBACT

In order to help Dubrovnik, use the good practices of Riga and Syracuse, support from the URBACT programme has been manifold. The topic of governance and decision-making has helped in resolving the main dilemmas partners had at the beginning of this process. The knowledge gained at the Syracuse meeting with very concrete examples of the regulations helped the two centres in Dubrovnik in accomplishing a more suitable governance model that guarantees participation of the NGOs, the City of Dubrovnik, and the local community. It also helped in developing online and offline tools for opening up the spaces of the Platform for Lazareti to other NGOs and citizens for their activities. Additional workshops organised during the project also helped the process significantly. A strategic planning workshop was organised for the Youth Center and the data generated by it will be a base for their future Strategic Plan 2021–2023, the first one in their history as a platform. A PR and media workshop organised for the Platform for Lazareti and the media plan developed at the occasion helped significantly in terms of promoting the Platform to the local community. One of the main accomplishments of the project was made through organised ULG meetings, workshops, and international meetings which brought together partners who did not get the chance to communicate or collaborate before. In such a way, communication has become better on three different levels: between the members of the NGOs in the centres, between the two centres, and between the centres and the City of Dubrovnik.

Conclusion

The ACTIVE NGOs network and its emphasis on knowledge transfer and improving the communication between the civil and public actors have helped Platform for Lazareti and Youth Center Dubrovnik in many ways. Besides gaining invaluable knowledge from other partners, Lead Expert, and Ad-hoc Experts, it helped to resolve one of the most important questions in the latest development phase of social-cultural centres not only on a local level but also on a national level: how to accomplish equal participation in a public-civil partnership and participatory governance in social-cultural centres? Learning from the other partners' community centres in the project, the platforms concluded that there are no two NGO Houses or social-cultural centres alike. Their governance model and approach to civil-public partnership need to be adjusted to their local context, capacities and the needs of the local community, meaning they need to follow modalities of governance, not models. The protocols of governance and cooperation need to be flexible and permeable enough not to be an additional burden to the actors involved and they need to follow organic growth and preferably, a horizontal decision-making structure. This bottom-up case conclusion is the one that will be communicated to policymakers to improve the policy and legal frameworks for social-cultural centres in Croatia.

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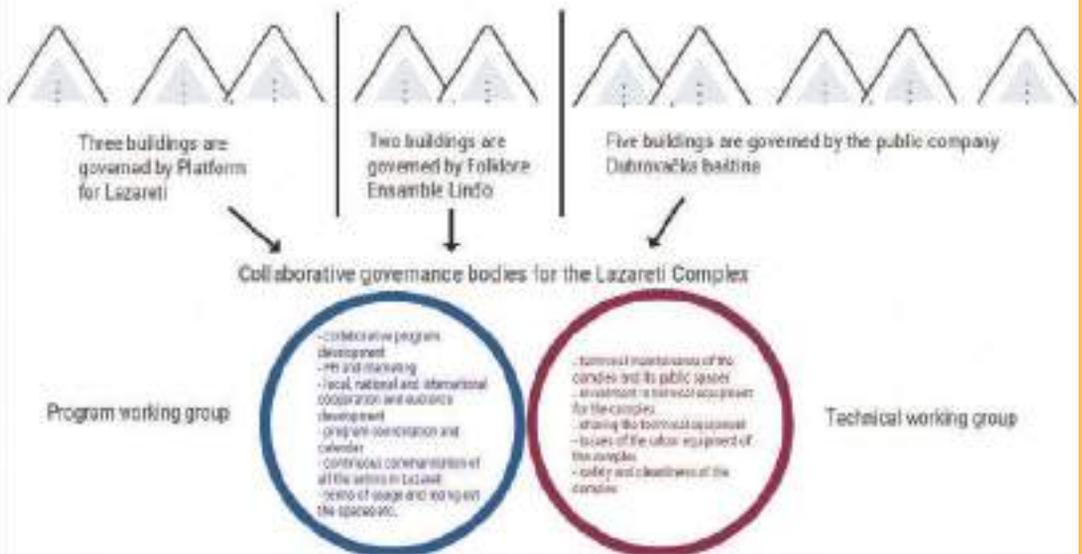
Governing Dubrovnik's civic spaces

Youth Center is a civil–public collaboration platform for developing and providing programs for the youth, currently consisting of 11 NGOs. Youth Center Dubrovnik is working on developing a centre for youth, based on the civil–public partnership with the City of Dubrovnik. To strengthen their position as a newly formed alliance and their relationship with the City of Dubrovnik, one of the first steps they have taken is establishing a governance model. The main premise of their governance model is based upon the idea of the holacratic collaborative management model. Such decentralized model presumes group work without hierarchy and represents the main values of the Center which is collaboration and stewardship meaning taking on the responsibilities and obligations towards the development of the Center and its space. Therefore the model consists of eight working groups. The technical maintenance group takes care of the IT, electrical installations, and infrastructural issues. Since they are sharing a space, another important working group leads the spatial development, meaning possible renovation, upgrade, and expansion of space. There is also a group dedicated to nurturing and furthering collaboration between the main

actors of the Center, as well as the strategic planning group. The international and national coordination group is taking care of networking with the various national and international partners and projects. The local collaboration group takes care of the local relations and marketing, whilst the finance group is in charge of developing social entrepreneurship and financial development of the Youth Center in general. They are all supported by the legal and policy affairs group. Each of these groups has a coordinator that represents the interests and informs the other groups of their work. Apart from the representatives of the NGOs residing in the Youth Center, representatives of the City of Dubrovnik are also actively included in each of the groups. By this organic governance model, the Youth Center is aspiring to strengthen the civil–public partnership it's based on, as well as to implement and develop the Local Youth Development Plan (2019–2021). Their main vision is to create a unique place for the local youth and their creative and social development, as well as to create a place that would be dedicated to the capacity building of the NGOs, so that they could be better and more successful in responding to the everyday challenges.

Governance integration model for the Lazareti Complex

Lazareti Complex consisted of 10 buildings is owned by the City of Dubrovnik



Governance model for Lazareti and The Youth Center. Image (c) Platform for Lazareti



The Lazareti complex

The Lazareti Complex consists of ten separate buildings owned by the City of Dubrovnik and governed by several different actors. There are different levels of management when it comes to Lazareti. The first level is that of the owner, in this case, the City of Dubrovnik. The second level is that of Dubrovnik Heritage Ltd., a public company that is under the administrative authority of the Department of Culture and Heritage. Dubrovnik Heritage Ltd. was given the responsibility of governing the site via a contract signed with the City of Dubrovnik and approved by the City Council in the summer of 2019. The contract defines Lazareti as a socio-cultural centre and runs until 2029. Responsibilities of Dubrovnik Heritage include issues of space financing and development alongside its regular maintenance and/or renovation work and security measures. Also, they are in charge of the program development of the five buildings in the complex.

The third level of governance consists of two sets of actors: Folklore Ensemble Lindo and Platform for Lazareti. Platform for Lazareti is an unofficial collaboration and advocacy platform consisting of five NGOs residing and/or working in complex Lazareti continually since the 1990s. They are dedicated to developing the idea of Lazareti as a horizontally integrated social-cultural centre open to the local community and their needs. The Platform for Lazareti governs the three buildings in Lazareti according to the contract that Art Workshop Lazareti signed with the City of Dubrovnik in 2000, running until 2025. This contract was given based on the elaborated concept for the Lazareti (“Quarantine”) cultural and residential centre for artists developed by Art Workshop

Lazareti and which was ultimately the first feasible project of renovation of the complex after several decades of the space being left to ruin. Some of the first investors were World Monument Fund, FACE Croatia, etc. This contract is also one of the first examples of civil-public partnerships in Croatia.

During the 2019 and 2020, Platform for Lazareti made its Regulation, which defines the purpose, structure, and mode of operation of the Platform, as well as the terms under which other users, civil society organisation, independent artists, representatives of the cultural sector and the citizens can temporarily use the spaces of the Platform for their activities. Alongside this effort, and as a part of the project “Community place – development of social-cultural centre in Lazareti” co-funded by the European Social Fund and backed by the knowledge gained from the project “Active NGOs”, the Platform started working on the proposal of the collaboration model that would connect the actors residing in the complex and better their communication as well as collaboration. As a result of several meetings and workshops, it was concluded that the goal for all of the actors involved was the same – to develop Lazareti as a social-cultural centre. To achieve that, a flexible coordination and collaboration model consisting of two working groups was proposed. The first working group was the technical working group concerned with the development of the technical equipment repository, sharing of the equipment, coordination of running costs and current maintenance, developing a joint plan for investment in equipment, management of the safety and cleanliness as well as the outdoor spaces such as the plateau. The second working group was that of the program development in Lazareti concerned

with the development of the collaborative programs, PR and marketing, local, national and international cooperation as well as the audience development, and most importantly, coordination of the programs happening in the complex as well as the development of the calendar. The opening of the process for establishing a collaboration model for the whole of Lazareti will help in developing Lazareti as a horizontally intertwined socio-cultural centre comprising different actors, but with the same goal and will enable them to collaborate on mutual activities and projects. It will also help in using the spaces more efficiently, especially when it comes to running costs.

This partnership model proposed by the Platform and refined with the help of the representatives of the City of Dubrovnik is an example of participative governance modality stemmed from the local context, capacities, and the organic cooperation that was already happening between the actors. In this way, it is fairly similar to the idea of the holacratic collaborative model of the Youth Center and its horizontal decision-making. Due to its flexibility, this model also ensures that the autonomy of all of the actors and their activities are respected and affirmed, and permeable enough not to be an additional burden on the actors involved. It also encompasses the different levels of governance that these actors have while respecting diversity as a fundamental value of this social-cultural centre and tends towards nurturing trust and further collaboration.

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Protocols for the Lazareti Platform

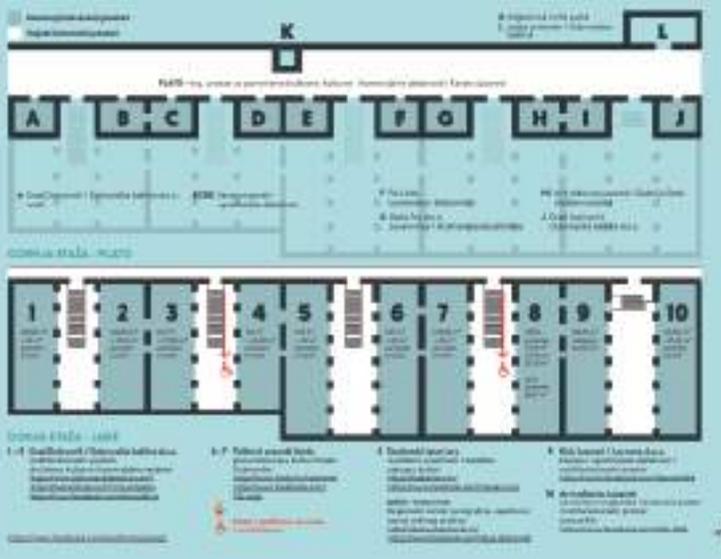
Opening up the space for the local community

As a part of the project „Community place – development of the social-cultural centre in Lazareti“ co-funded by the European Social Fund, the Platform for Lazareti started a mentoring process on the topic of participatory governance with dr. sc. Ana Žuvela, a cultural policy researcher specialised in civil-public partnerships and participatory governance in culture. The result of this mentoring process was the “Platform for Lazareti Regulation” that stemmed from the organically developed collaboration effort between the actors. The first part of this internal protocol of conduct defines the main principles of the Platform: solidarity, unity, equality, openness, responsibility, innovation, creativity, and partnership. It also defines the purpose of the Platform which is to establish and develop joint advocacy activities to ensure the Platform’s further development and the long-term sustainability of the civil society organisations operating in the field of resource-poor forms of contemporary culture, artistic and creative endeavours.

It also defines the membership criteria: non-profit civil society organisations that operate in the field of resource-poor forms of cultural, artistic creation, and social activities; have the contractual and/or collaborative relations with the Platform’s member organisations; have an intent of actively participating in the work of the Platform and contribute to its development. The three main directions of the Platform’s

agency are organisational development, management, and program development. Program development includes maintaining the continuity and quality of the programs produced by the Platform’s member organisations, encouraging program cooperation and co-production between the members, encouraging the involvement of new organisations, implementation of the joint programs and projects, establishing and developing multidisciplinary and multisectoral cooperation as well as the international cooperation. When it comes to organisational development, it includes providing spatial and technical conditions for the implementation of programs in the Platform’s spaces, providing administrative, financial, and technical support for the member organisations, implementing jointly designed media and communication plan alongside PR and marketing as well as building the capacities of the Platform’s member organisations.

Management activities include establishment and implementation of the Platform’s internal governance bodies, establishment and elaboration of the spatial usage schedule for the spaces under the Platform’s jurisdiction, establishment and articulation of mutual relations within the Platform, but also on the level of communication with the City of Dubrovnik and Dubrovnik Heritage Ltd., drafting and further development of a rulebook for using the spaces of the Platform by other actors.



The map of Lazareti. Image (c) Platform for Lazareti



The Governing body of the Platform consists of representatives of the member organisations, whether these organisations are permanent or occasional users of the spaces. The work of the governing body is carried out through meetings that are held every month (every first Wednesday of the month) and as needed. The work of the Governing body in terms of competence and scope of activities includes all of the previously mentioned levels of agency related to the management, planning, production, co-production, and development of cultural, artistic, and social programs. Within the body, responsibilities are distributed individually following proven experience and anticipated needs and situations.

The second part of the Regulation is the description of the spatial resources that Platform has and their purposes as well as the technical and auditorium capacities. The third part of the document summarises the participatory mechanisms that Platform uses oriented towards the local community and other actors of the civil society. They are yearly Open calls for activities and a Contact form for booking the spaces.

Yearly Open call

As we've previously mentioned, Lazareti as a social-cultural centre is oriented towards the needs of the local community, especially so when designing, managing, and delivering new forms of activities. In the summer of 2019, Platform for Lazareti implemented their first open call for proposals of the activities that other NGOs, artistic organisations, and citizens would like to organise with the help from the Platform's organisations and in their spaces. The application form of the Call was organised through a simple Google form. The general conditions of the Call were that the activities need to be free and open to the public; related to cultural, artistic, educational, or social practices; organised and implemented in collaboration with one of the member organisation of the Platform; they should contribute to improving the quality of life of the local community; mustn't conflict with the values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia.

Eligible costs were authors' fees and fees for contractors, travel and accommodation expenses, costs of designing and printing

the promotional materials, procurement of materials for the implementation of activities, and rental of additional equipment as well as their transport. The selected proposals were then prepared in collaboration with the Platform's member organisations for open tenders of the City of Dubrovnik, Ministry of Culture, and other bodies during August and September 2019. In the Google Form, the proposers needed to fill in the following: general information about the applicant; select the Platform's member organisation they wanted to collaborate with; type of activity according to the predefined categories (defined in the Platform for Lazareti Regulation); duration of the activity (one-off / several continuous events); financing category (ranging from 5 thousand to 15 thousand kunas); a description of the proposed activity and a simple budget outline. Finally, they could choose to be a part of the selection committee. To enable transparency in the selection of proposals, Platform for Lazareti decided to include two activity proposers chosen randomly.

Contact form and Lazareti Guide

The Call had a great turnout, and the Platform for Lazareti provided the selected projects logistical, technical, and implementation support, alongside getting projects the funds they needed in the tenders. However, as 2020 passed and serious budget cuts in local and national funds for civil society started to appear, the members of the Platform decided to advance one more mechanism of opening up the spaces to other NGOs and citizens. They've transformed the Call into an online and offline Contact form for booking the spaces. The Platform for Lazareti Regulation has several criteria to be

taken into consideration when approving the applications through this contact form. In defining these criteria and rules of lending spaces to other NGOs and citizens, regulations for the governance and usage of the spaces provided by the Syracuse partners of the „Active NGOs“ project was of great help (Regolamento della Casa delle associazioni e del volontariato di Sesto San Giovanni; Regolamento per la gestione ad utilizzazione della casa delle associazioni; etc.).

Basic criteria (applications must meet all of them)

- Applicants are either a legal entity or natural person who does not have a permanently available spatial resource for organising and implementing the activities
- Proposed activities and program are public, open, and accessible
- Proposed activities encourage and promote pluralism, dialogue, and are of deficient social, cultural, and artistic nature
- Proposed activities are in line with the existing activities in Lazareti or are aiming to upgrade and diversify them

Specific criteria (applications must meet a minimum of three specific criteria)

- Proposed activities implement a high level of inclusion
- Proposed activities are contributing to the development of democratic public policies and are empowering and encouraging active citizenship
- Applicants have a past and proven partnership with the Platform's member organisations or the organisations that were previously active in Lazareti
- Proposed activities are contributing to the visibility and the development of the Lazareti as a social-cultural centre and a community place
- Proposed activities are significantly

contributing to the audience development and user capacity building
– Proposed activities are contributing to the development of international cooperation in Lazareti

Activities to be exempted from the possibility of using the space are those related to religious, political, and sports activities and programs as well as the activities that in any way encourage, promote and/or affirm any type or form of social exclusion, intolerance, and discrimination. Proposals of the activities and appointments need to be submitted from one month to one year before the implementation, depending on the type of the activity. The possibility of applying for the use of the term is continuously open throughout the year. The Governing body of the Platform for Lazareti approves the applications quarterly, i.e. every three months. The process of approval is guided by the established criteria. After the publication of the results, the applicants and the chosen Platform's member organisation sign a Cooperation Agreement.

The contact form was added to the webpage of the Platform and has some additional questions relating to the spatial and technical requirements of the proposed program such as the requested date and duration of the estimated preparation and implementation time; the estimated number of the participants (total number of both the program organisers and participants); need for special assistance for the disabled actors; need for technical equipment and logistical support in which case the list of the equipment is sent. A great help in designing the form was found in the questionnaire from Riga's NGO House.

The Contact Form can be also found in the pamphlet named "Lazareti Guide" which is

consisted of the description of the Lazareti complex, description of the organisations working there (their program, contact, webpages, social media, etc.) alongside the short version of the Platform for Lazareti Regulation and the map of the complex. While finishing this Guide, a document sent by the Syracuse partners titled „Carta dei Servizi“ was helpful in many ways.

What are the main benefits of this process?

By setting up the Regulations, the Platform for Lazareti has defined and regulated their mutual relations, obligations, and rights, governing bodies as well as their mutual vision and mission, all of which will benefit them in their further collaboration and advocacy towards helping the Lazareti complex transform into a social-cultural centre that embodies both the needs of the community as well as the deficient forms of artistic, cultural and social practices. At the same time, the Regulation, as well as the Open call and Contact form, helps them in further efforts of opening up the spaces of Lazareti to other NGOs and citizens in a context of burdening spatial scarcity in Dubrovnik for such activities. Criteria and protocols of lending the spaces to other actors have also ensured the basis for mutual respect and communication between the members of the Platform and other actors as a more organised and efficient usage of their spaces.

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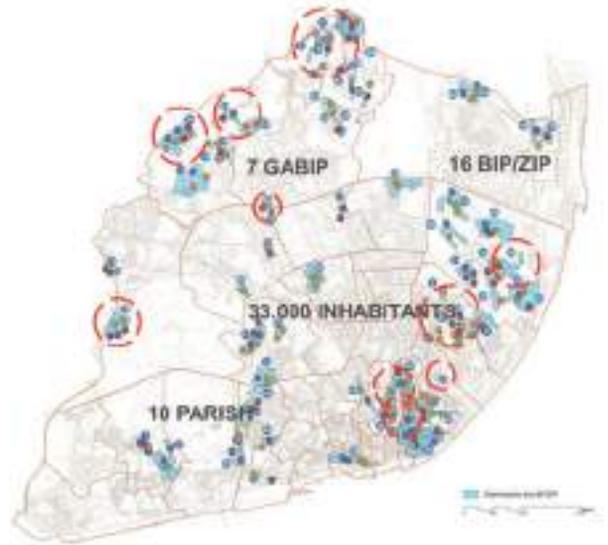
The GABIP, also known as Neighbourhood Priority Intervention Support Office, is a local task-force created in 2010 by the municipality of Lisbon. Aiming to promote socio-territorial cohesion through the implementation of Local Development Strategies, the GABIP is a management and local coordination structure of municipal initiative, for the development of co-governance processes in one or more Priority Neighbourhoods. It is based on a co-governance framework involving the Municipality, Local Boroughs and all relevant stakeholders and citizens organisations. Originally created to support the regeneration of the local neighbourhood of Padre Cruz in Lisbon, it promotes the articulation of a participative response to concerns of political, administrative and technical nature emerging during the development of more complex local regeneration projects.

GABIP structures do not operate in all BIP/ZIP⁽¹⁾ areas but only in some of them. The model is indeed flexible and adjustable and each concerned territory disposes of an office adapted to its specific needs and evolution. The mission of each GABIP is closely linked to the local socio-territorial priorities identified by its partners. Moreover, depending on its mission, each GABIP may include one or more territories that correspond to the ones of the BIP/ZIP Mapping.

The constitution of each GABIP is defined by the core of a local partnerships, due in its initial phase. Among its core values and missions, GABIP promotes local development through local capacity-building initiatives based on

1 see in Chapter 1 and at <https://cooperativecity.org/2017/05/07/bipzip/>

Activated task forces.
Image (c) BIP/ZIP



cooperation principles, active participation and transparency. This is why GABIPs ensure the creation of strong partnerships with local initiatives and the local community allowing for the co-construction and the subsequent implementation of its mission and goals. In other words, GABIPs allow the municipality to move decision making to the local scale and share it with local actors.

Among its main tasks, the GABIP proposes, schedules, implements, manages and monitors all the relevant processes of community-led local development in the territory. Similarly, it participates, in articulation with the Local Development Department (DDL), in the definition, implementation and monitoring of the Local Development Plan (PDL), which contains the principles of the Local Development Strategy for the territory.

Establishing a GABIP

The establishment of a GABIP is by protocol solicited by the Housing and Local Development City Councillor, together with

each and all Deputy Councillors whose portfolios are related with the specific needs of the concerned territory. In a second phase of the task-force creation, all entities and organisations aiming to be part of a GABIP must sign a “Principle and Commitment Letter” in order to:

Commit to the GABIP functional model and Local Development Plan definition.

Commit to the mission, goals, network, decision model and results’ achievement in the scope of GABIP.

Commit to the local intervention promoted by GABIP, its goals and expected results.

Commit to the designation of a representative, who must have legitimacy to act on entity’s behalf in GABIP’s co-governance structure.

GABIPs consist of a coordinator from the municipality and an executive committee with local key stakeholders of the urban regeneration process, local authorities, local associations and other actors. The precise composition of this committee depends on the technical, urban, social, environmental, cultural, educational aspects of the

*Task Force governance model.
Image (c) BIP/ZIP*



related projects: usually elected officials and representatives of the Department of Housing and Local Development are involved, but elected officials from other departments can also take part. Since the beginning of the program, seven GABIPs have been developed and today six of them are still running over 16 BIP/ZIP areas. These structures are not permanent physical spaces but a coalition of people that meet on average every two weeks or once a month, depending on the need to discuss the development of the local project. The meetings are hosted in different existing places, such as neighbourhood organisation offices or schools. This disposition, besides being a cheaper option, fosters the responsibility of local stakeholders as being active agents in the process. The management of the local offices is coordinated by the City of Lisbon that allocates civil servants to support the process, but there are also cases in which the local management is taken over by other stakeholders, as in the case of the Almirante Reis.

The governance model

The GABIP Coordination team is composed of one Coordinator appointed by the Municipality, in articulation with the remaining GABIP partners. This coordinator must come from the most adequate area, considering the kind of intervention needed for the territory. As part of the coordination team, a group of several technicians, who subscribed to its creation, are appointed by the City Councillor(s). The team may also include technicians from the Local Parishes and/or other organisations. It manages and follows all technical and administrative activities in a permanent way, namely the integrated territory interventions, particularly those resulting from the Local Development Plan implementation.

The GABIP Executive Commission is composed of City Councillors and other stakeholders such as Local Parishes, Public and Private entities, Residents Associations and NGOs. Its mission is to prepare and follow all the relevant initiatives in the territory, namely those foreseen in the PDL. GABIP's Extended Commission has full representation of all organisations that are part of GABIP's decision-making body. Its mission is to analyse and monitor the

intervention process on the territory, and present concrete proposals towards its development. The decision-making process is based on participation principles and direct representation of the different organisations. This commission works as a representative assembly where each organisation has the right to one vote. Decisions must be taken in a freely and informed way, by consensus and, preferably, unanimously; whenever a consensus is not possible, a majority may be accepted, in the framework of each GABIP's internal rules. All organisations must commit to the decisions taken in the context of their actions, social objects, network and structure.

Actions

The GABIP participates in the definition of the Local Development Plan: an instrument of municipal policy to promote social and territorial cohesion on priority territories, tackling poverty and exclusion. This instrument reflects the Local Development Strategy, and serve as a base to plan and implement territory interventions, through processes and models of citizen participation, cooperation and transparency. The Local Development Plan ensures: Local, integrated and transversal interventions, planned and developed with co-governance processes linking the Municipality with local agents and “players” in the territory, as well as the public and private sector. The local diagnosis of the intervention area, which must include the most recent statistical data, collective experiences, perceptions and expectations from/about the community.

Local community empowerment, enabling local groups to find solutions to their

problems in a sustainable, participated, cooperative and transparent way. Social, economic, urban and environmental enhancement of territories and communities, recognising their autonomy, emancipation and contribution to the city. The update of the Local Development and Investment Strategy, which promotes social-territorial cohesion. Examples of the issues being addressed include how to organise the reallocation of inhabitants during the refurbishments of the homes without displacing them, or how to involve local enterprises in the regeneration process, as special attention is posed to try to secure the investment potential in the neighbourhoods themselves as much as possible according to procurement law.

Conclusions

In the face of the upcoming economic and social crisis during from the Covis-19 pandemic, it is evident that the emergencies cannot be addressed in an isolated manner by any institution or organisation. Establishing permanent structures to ensure the collaboration between different stakeholders is fundamental to ensure the sustainability any investment on the long term, might this be in terms of financial, human or timing resources. The experience of the GABIPs shows a way in which participation is not only a consultation method but a means to engage people in a common decision-making process. For this process to be successful it is necessary to ensure political commitment, effectiveness of the common decisions and finally human and economic resources to be allocated on the long run. Collaboration in itself will not counteract the upcoming crisis but it will ensure the social cohesion to be able to develop and implement the necessary strategies by all stakeholders.





chapter 6

Building new capacities

Riga's Youth Centre KANIERIS is a non-formal learning and inclusive collaboration space for young people and their organisations to gain knowledge and skills, as well as to develop mutual cooperation. The main goal of the centre is to provide support to non-governmental youth organisations (youth NGOs) in their work of non-formal education and capacity building. The main functions of KANIERIS include the provision of space and resources, opportunities to improve knowledge on different topics related to youth work, promotion of mutual cooperation among various youth NGOs, and identification of the most pressing needs and relevant current topics of the field.

✓ *Activities the Youth Centre. Photo (c) Kanieris*



The creation of KANIERIS is an amazing example of a local youth initiative. When local youth NGOs needed a modern resource and experience centre both for their capacity building and development of participation skills, the Central Baltic Sea region INTERREG project “Youth Space” brought along the right occasion.¹⁾ With the participation of the Tallinn Youth Centre, the Stockholm School of Arts, and the Youth Division of the Education, Culture and Sports Department of Riga City Council, the new home dedicated to the development of Riga’s youth NGOs finally was opened on 20 May 2011. Since 2013, KANIERIS is financed by the City Council in full capacity. Until the first Covid-19 lockdowns in April 2020, KANIERIS has hosted 2865 events.

Everything in KANIERIS was and still is done together with the representatives of local youth organisations and the youngsters themselves, starting from the idea of the centre until the everyday life of the centre. This has given a strong sense of ownership to local youth. They were in charge of planning the various rooms and spaces in the centre, as well as the functions and content it would accommodate. All of their ideas, wishes and needs were taken into consideration. KANIERIS is a result of a very special and grandiose collaboration that involved more than 50 youngsters from various youth organisations and local craftsmen. They all acquired new skills during that time, including cooperation and creativity.

The stages of ideas coming real

The physical space of KANIERIS goes hand in hand with its mission: its four main rooms

are dedicated to specific stage of an idea becoming something real. The central element of the *Meeting Room* is the round table that symbolizes equality, inclusion and cooperation. This is the room designed for the ideas to be born and brainstormed upon, and the first thoughts of future projects come to life here. Equality among the City Council, youth organisations and youngsters is the main theme in this room and elsewhere in KANIERIS. Just like in other spaces of the centre, everything in this room is made and decorated by youngsters themselves, including the table, chairs and walls, as a part of the original project.

The *Smart Space* is where ideas bind together with knowledge and skills. There is a small library in this room, which covers literature and informative materials on subjects like non-formal education, history, youth initiative projects, equality, inclusion, and it is free of charge for everyone. This room is used mainly for training, seminars, small conferences, and workshops.

When the idea is clear and knowledge is absorbed, every youth organisation has access to the third room, the *Youth Office*, a coworking space. It is equipped with multiple computers, varied office equipment and office supplies. This is the space where ideas become reality and the execution of projects takes on speed. Every youngster and youth organisation is able to use all of the resources found in this room, make their own little workspace and work on everyday tasks. Finally comes the *Cosy Space*: a room for reflection, feed-backs, and review of the work that has been done. This room is famous for its soft and cosy bean-bags, board games, music and TV. Its chill atmosphere is enjoyed by not only those who have successfully finished their projects

1 <http://projects.centralbaltic.eu/project/437-youth-space>

or wish to organise a game night, but also by different theatre enthusiasts or someone who prefers a little less formal meeting.

Free resources and capacity building

Throughout KAÑIERIS there is a free Wi-Fi available. Also, worth mentioning that the youth centre is located near the Daugava river, therefore it is possible to organise the activities outdoors. Along with actual, physical space, KAÑIERIS also offers resources for organising activities both inside and outdoors: video projectors and iPads for presentations, flipcharts and whiteboards for workshops, portable speakers, green screen and spotlights, video cameras, outdoor equipment (tents, sleeping bags, etc.), bean-bags, dishes and more. Needless to say, it is all free of charge, which gives youngsters unlimited opportunities to organise their activities. Around 4000 youngsters and more than 30 of the most active youth organisations take advantage of the free space and resources every year.

One of the most important tasks of KAÑIERIS' is to provide knowledge and capacity building for those involved in the youth work. A great part of it is accomplished by learning about the actual needs of local youth NGOs, listening to their suggestions and summarising all the gathered information. Events like seminars, discussions, meetings and training courses are organised by KAÑIERIS every year in order to educate and share knowledge with youth workers from all around Riga (and occasionally other parts of Latvia), including those who work at children and youth centres, youth initiative centres or leisure centres. It does not only help to raise the level of professionalism in the field, but is also a great and effective way of networking.

Topics include non-formal education, the use of social media, financial management of an NGO, cross-sectoral cooperation and many more. Every event is supported by a field professional. The KAÑIERIS team is ready to consult youngsters and organisations on practical and strategic matters at any time, and is also working on raising its own level of knowledge by attending seminars, training sessions for youth workers, exchanging knowledge and more.

Self-building and the Participation Award

One of the achievements that KAÑIERIS is the most proud of is the annual open house event "Build Yourself," which brings together the most active youth NGOs and youngsters from different schools in Riga. This event is an amazing opportunity for youngsters to learn more about the everyday work of youth NGOs, the possibilities they offer, as well as to meet like-minded people and get inspired to make their own ideas come true. It is a very compact and effective exchange of information and a great way to help everyone in search of their own one and only youth organisation.

The annual tradition of the Youth Participation Award is another way KAÑIERIS is promoting and encouraging civic participation. It is one of the most inspiring moments of the whole year and an integral part of the youth centre. The award jury consists of representatives from the previous year's winner NGOs, the City Council and KAÑIERIS.

Three awards and three acknowledgements are presented during the ceremony to the last year's most active, courageous, and simply the best youth NGOs in Riga.

Better Life Award, Incubator of Leaders and Rising Star – these are only a few of the nominations. The award has a very special value: it is a confirmation of quality, which then improves the perception of the winning organisations in the eyes of youngsters' parents, as well as facilitates cooperation with schools and other NGOs.

Every autumn, KAÑIERIS acts as a key partner in the municipality-financed Capacity building grant competition. Those youth NGO projects that have successfully been approved for the second round, are presented by their applicants in a cosy, yet extremely important event at KAÑIERIS. It is the final step to receive the municipality's financial support for youth NGO capacity building projects. During the presentations the jury asks additional questions about each project and presents an opportunity for the applicants to clarify the idea and realization of the activities. The work starts

even earlier than that: in order to prepare for the presentations, every NGO can rely on consultation and attend training on how to write the project application, how to present it, how to execute it and how to submit all necessary reports.

It is safe to say that everything that KAÑIERIS does is dedicated to the support of youngsters and youth non-governmental organisations, because they are the driving force of the youth centre. Every decision is based on their needs and challenges. KAÑIERIS is an inclusive and benevolent environment, open for cooperation. It is a place where youngsters and youth NGOs can grow, become stronger and more professional. The advocacy of non-formal education and youth non-governmental organisations will always be the main mission of KAÑIERIS, together with the encouragement of active civic participation among youngsters.

✚ *In the Youth Centre. Photo (c) Kañieris*





Changing engagement in Brighton & Hove

The Community Engagement Officer

Within every local authority – big or small, there is a periodic need to reflect on engagement practices and the structures that have been built around a set of principles of how a municipality connects, communicates and – hopefully – co-produces with citizens.

In May 2019, the Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) had reached this moment of reflection and this precipitated significant change. Engagement and involvement officers from different municipal sectors were brought together into a single community engagement team, to include the tenant and leaseholder engagement. The aim was to support strong, active and inclusive communities who can influence and shape the city in which they live and work.

“Local people are effectively informed, engaged, involved and empowered by the council. They actively help define and design local priorities and policies, deliver and evaluate services and inform council decision making in areas that impact on their lives.”

BHCC’s aspirations towards citizen engagement across the municipality’s 400 services

Engagement with communities is a core priority in the Brighton and Hove Corporate Plan ‘*A Stronger City*’, the municipal strategy for the years ahead. Included within the strategy, retention and support to sustain community assets and increased civic participation are key statements from the municipality. However, community assets have never been at more risk – austerity measures coupled with an ever-shrinking municipal budget and assets in need of long-term investment place them in a fragile state and an uncertain future.

Defining community engagement?

The idea of being involved in your community or in local decision-making and/or public services can be very different for different people. For some it may be about creating something in the community: setting up a group, such as a parent and toddler group, art club or lunch club, to provide a service and connect with local people. Others may be interested in going to meetings and finding out about what’s happening. Some people may wish to create change in an area and set up or join a community group or create a campaign to highlight an issue. Many people are interested but get much of their information from friends or social media, others will choose to engage in an event or fun day.

Similarly, the term 'community engagement' can mean different things to people and covers a range of approaches depending on what people want it to achieve. It is best understood as

'A planned process, which has the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by place, interest, affiliation or identity, to encourage them to actively take part in making decisions about their community'

This can range from encouraging communities to share their views on how their needs are best met and influence how services should be delivered, to giving communities the power to make and share decisions and provide services.

Key principles of the Community Engagement Team:

- Ensure that staff provide supportive and facilitative direction to communities based on openness;
- foster a safe and trusting environment enabling communities to provide input;
- ensure that communities are involved early;
- share decision-making with communities;
- acknowledge and address community experiences of power imbalances between communities and professionals;
- invest in communities who feel they lack the skills and confidence to engage;
- create quick and tangible wins;
- consider the motivations of both the community and organisations.

∨ Workshop in Whitehawk Inn. Photo (cc) Eutroplan



Types of engagement

To engage communities in a meaningful and valuable way we must ensure we are offering a range of opportunities that are interesting, rewarding and accomplishing, that maintain enthusiasm, and build trusting open relationships.

Different people will want to be involved in different ways: the diagram below helps consider the type of engagement opportunities we offer and to ensure that people are supported in the right way i.e. if people are passionate about doing things they are often frustrated in meetings as they want to get on and make things happen.

Community Engagement Team

The Community Engagement Team's members are area-based across North, West, East and Central areas of the city and work with community and neighbourhood groups on the issues that matter to them. We offer support to contact public services, run meetings, activities or events, engage with the wider community and we administer funding through the Estate Development Budget and are looking at how to expand our approaches to also use participatory budgeting.

We have a key role to support the council and other public services to engage with residents on a range of work, from practical developments such as playgrounds, information gathering, policies development or any type of consultation. We work with residents and public services to

work together to develop ward-based Neighbourhood Action Plans, to set out the key issues, projects and aspirations for the areas.

Our Engagement Approaches

Pro- Active Engagement

This type of engagement allows us to build relationship with people that often do not wish to or cannot attend meetings. It builds new relationships with people who are unaware of the opportunities to be involved with council services. It supports people to engage with each other and develop new ideas, projects and activities within their communities

Responsive Engagement

This engagement can be delivered by the Community Engagement Team but also supports services to speak to residents. It provides an outward communication, understanding and action on local priorities and can support communities to develop their own ideas, activities and services.

Structural Engagement

This is the most formal engagement, it often involves looking at council policy and practice. This engagement is often meeting-based and strategic, thus appealing only to some residents.

Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement

In the city there are just under 12,000 council housing tenants and about 3,000 leaseholders.

The number of regularly active people engaging in the housing management structures is very low, with a small number of tenants/leaseholders involved in many groups. We are lacking engagement with residents from minority groups, except for disability and older people, therefore missing the skills, knowledge and experiences of many residents. More residents are involved in Tenant Associations and the Leaseholder Action Group, but numbers have also reduced over the last few years.

The number of active residents the council is working with to be part of key decisions for all tenants is approximately 0.4% of the total tenant population.

As stated above, a range of engagement methods needs to be available to ensure people have different opportunities that work for them. However, where we do have structures, these have become large and time-consuming both for staff and residents; currently it is difficult to show the impact they are making.



Espoo's NGO cooperation coordinator

The link between the municipality and NGOs

In Espoo, the local Active NGOs project manager Maria Tiilikkala works as an NGO cooperation coordinator for the city of Espoo. The post of an NGO coordinator was founded in early 2018. The roots of creating this position dates back to the year 2015, and the cooperation that emerged then between various actors during the refugee crisis. Both citizens and refugees were willing to volunteer, while the situation needed coordination. After the immediate need of volunteer coordination and the following calming of the refugee crisis, it was clear that a wider cooperation between the municipality and the NGOs is necessary in the future.

Even though the situation is different nowadays, the population of foreign speakers in Espoo is increasing very fast. New services and ways of doing things need to be invented, with the inclusion of all parties affected. That is why the NGO cooperation coordinator focuses a lot on social integration.

When providing help to people during their integration process, municipal workers need contacts to their clients and often also support with cultural translation. NGOs, having a greater local embeddedness, have these grassroots-level contacts and cultural skills. NGOs with immigrant backgrounds in particular can provide essential help bridging better the municipality with its residents to help the integration process.

"An interesting thing is that when we develop services with open eyes and listen to the target group, the service is not only better for the foreign speakers but for everyone," describes Maria the impact of this approach. While the municipality needs NGOs help to connect better to residents, NGOs in turn need the municipality's help to overcome bureaucratic barriers. This is where the NGO coordinator steps in. Together with partners inside and outside the municipality, she organises trainings, networking events and offers guidance to the NGOs.

The NGO cooperation coordinator fulfils a dual role: she represents NGOs when they need to meet city officials, and provides up-to-date information from the municipality to help NGOs.

“One must understand both fields, be a kind of a hybrid. Luckily, I have previously worked both for municipalities and in the NGO sector. Ongoing communication is a key to successful cooperation. I try to do my part in developing and promoting efficient ways of sharing information about different stakeholders. There is also communication with citizens. The form of communication depends on the target group. I use social media, the NGO information platform uusimaalaiset.fi, Teams groups, emails, WhatsApp and old-fashioned calling,” Maria summarizes her role.

The cooperation coordinator helps to build trust between actors. Without trust one cannot speak about true partnership. Finding the common factor helps to focus on essential things.

As Maria explains, *“the customer or the citizen is in the centre. The stakeholders have the same goal: to help people, and to support residents to actively take part in the developing of the activities, services and the city.”* However, building trust and true partnerships between organisations and also between people takes time and needs continuity. So, the cooperation coordinator herself needs to have a clear aim. This aims depends on the local situations of the NGO cooperation, the values of the employer, topical subjects and the local society. *“One must always listen and be aware. I work with amazing and talented people, so I must do this work with all ears and with open heart,”* concludes Maria.

author:
Nga Phan Hang
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*ULG meeting.
Photo (c)
Espoo
Municipality*



Neighbourhood Mothers

From target group to actor

author:

LIISA
KULTA

Project Manager of
the Neighbourhood
Mothers project,
Nicehearts Association

Neighbourhood Mothers (Naapuriäiti in Finnish) is a social inclusion programme that is reaching out to women who moved to Finland and encouraging them to become active in society. Project is empowering women through strengthening otherwise often unrecognised skills, enabling women to get peer support, providing them with tools to organise activities in their own neighbourhoods, and methods to help others. Originally developed in Denmark, the Neighbourhood Mothers concept was brought to Finland in 2016 by the Nicehearts association.

✚ Roundtable discussion. Photo (c) Neighbourhood Mothers



Welcome to the world of Neighbourhood Mothers! This is a world of peer support, inclusion, equity and empowerment. The Neighbourhood Mothers project started in Finland in 2016 with funding from the European Social Fund. One project led to another, continuously developing the model to meet better the needs and circumstances in Finland. At the moment, the on-going project in Finland is active in five cities: Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, Lappeenranta and Imatra. In total, there are more than 300 trained Neighbourhood Mothers in Finland and the project is currently funded by the Finnish Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations. Similar projects can also be found in different countries like Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany.

The Neighbourhood Mothers project in Finland is coordinated by the association Nicehearts ry, an NGO for women and girls.¹⁾ The association was founded in 2001 in Vantaa. The fundamental values of Nicehearts are equality, equity, communality and joy. From a small voluntary based organisation, Nicehearts ry has grown into an active, professional and influential NGO with almost 30 employees in the Metropolitan area and East Karelia. Gender and cultural sensitivity are cross-cutting values in Nicehearts and used as basic method of work. This NGO is also doing integration work, but in its own Nicehearts style. But the core is that through different projects, Nicehearts is empowering girls and women, improving their wellbeing, supporting them to find their own path and who they really are in a safe and supporting space where they can use and expand their own skills, get help and finding new friends.

There are as many ways to be a Neighbourhood Mother as there are Neighbourhood Mothers. The network of Neighbourhood Mothers is in every way a diverse group of women from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, there are things in common for all of them. Our women have lived in Finland for a bit longer time and they want to be active in their own terms, in their own way. Many are struggling in finding their own path in this society and having quite small social network. Our biggest mission in the project team is to find the women and enable them to find their own way to be a Neighbourhood Mother.

The project starts with a Neighbourhood Mother-training. Normally it is organised locally but in times of social distancing also this model can be adjusted to offer trainings virtually. Trainings last seven weeks and provide the tools for participants to become a Neighbourhood Mother. The trainings cover various topics from support to recognize own skills and power, more information of Finnish and specific services and activities, to tools to help others as well as how to organise activities independently. Above all that, Neighbourhood Mothers are also learning how to take care of themselves, how to ask help and how to take care of one's personal limits.

Many training sessions are conducted by guest professionals sharing their own expertise. This is one of the ways in which Nicehearts shares its large network and good cooperation methods with our Neighbourhood Mothers. The project team is also always there to support Neighbourhood Mothers, when they want to organise a thematic evening about domestic violence, peer support group for single mothers, a series of workshops on how to find one's

1 <https://www.nicehearts.com/>



Training event.
Photo (c)
Neighbourhood
Mothers



own motivation in the struggle of finding work or having free yoga course for women. Many participants have gathered important experience from this training, acquired new skills, developed their own network and gained more confidence.

The very essence of all the Neighbourhood Mothers projects around the world is to help others. Our Neighbourhood Mothers are carrying out a lot of voluntary help, especially to other women who have lived in Finland for a shorter time. The actual help can happen anywhere, for example in one's own circle of acquaintances, in public transportation or conducted by the project. The project team receives requests from public services, when officials encounter clients with a very small social safety net and often with limited Finnish knowledge. Situations vary a lot, but the basic idea is that our Neighbourhood Mothers are voluntarily helping others in need. One needs a person to talk to in their own native language, others need guidance with managing the relationship between

school and home, and another one might need actual guiding to find the location of a bank, the place of a leisure activity, social service office or any other place in a new environment. For various different reasons, going out in an unfamiliar environment with very little knowledge and experience of public transportation or local behavioural culture is especially challenging for women. That is why a little support and helping hand from someone is needed. And when that *someone* has a similar experience herself, the support is often much more reachable and effective. The project team is always there on the back of Neighbourhood Mothers to give support.

What is the benefit of participating? It is an important question that we received from a woman who saw our advert of a new course. This is voluntary work, so it does not involve monetary benefit. Instead, voluntary work in its best can give the mutual feeling of support, participation, inclusion, belonging, importance and hope. Our Neighbourhood Mothers are giving support

to other people and Neighbourhood Mothers themselves have the support of other Neighbourhood Mothers and the project team. Many of the women in the training say, that they wish there was something like this when they came to Finland. But now they can be the *ones* who are supporting and welcoming new-comers. Through the project, women feel that they are part of a bigger network and that they are not alone: that they are an important part and actors in our society. Their efforts of voluntary work are highly appreciated and recognised not only inside the association, but also in public services and by many professionals. Neighbourhood Mothers are true experts on integration and their knowledge and experiences are a treasure when developing the society to the direction of true inclusion, respect and equity.

Many of the women joining the training do not feel that they can have an impact and that their voice would matter. Through the training and activities, the project is empowering women. Being able to help someone can really give the feeling of self-confidence. Many women had already, instinctively, acted kind of as Neighbourhood Mother even before joining the training, but not always recognizing it as voluntary work nor the value of their actions. If we do not see that our actions, voice and presence can influence society around us, why would we use it? Why would we even try, if we cannot see our impact? This project is trying to show to women that everyone has the potential of being a change agent. But that potential needs a safe space to grow and find its form. It is a lot to ask from an individual to do it all by oneself. Society needs to be awake and open to be supportive and enable its members to flourish. That is a lot but not too much to ask

from society, and that is why we as NGOs and the third sector in general can show the way. When there is no such thing as small help or action, there is more space for hope and finding one's own way of being. The power of really being seen, heard and valued is huge. It often starts the snowball effect and a chain reaction. That is the power of our project as well, empowering one woman at a time.

The great thing about the project is not just the empowerment of women to find their skills and realizing their potential, but also challenging society, services and the attitude of people. Our women are facing too much prejudice, patronising and discouragement. We, as a project, can offer a platform for different professionals to encounter our Neighbourhood Mothers as experts and as a group of women who have much to offer for planning and developing services as well as decision-making. Little by little, this exchange of experiences and conversations can lead to better mutual understanding. Our project team and Neighbourhood Mothers are often seen in panel discussions and local development committees of different public services. There are quite many Neighbourhood Mothers who have been employed by the public services and also some who have been signed in for elections to take part in political decision making. Nothing will stop our powerful Neighbourhood Mothers, and in future I am sure to see much more of them in different roles developing our society.



Service design for NGOs

author:

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Service design is the activity of planning and organising people, infrastructure, communication, and material components of a service in order to improve its quality and the interaction between the service provider and its users. Service design may function as a way to inform changes to an existing service or create a new service entirely. Service design for NGOs is the activity of planning and organising their resources in order to directly improve their own organisational experience, and also to indirectly, enhance their customer's experiences. The concept of service design among NGOs has been all about cooperation with local municipalities, cities, different stakeholders including their customers and among different NGOs. It is also a reflection on their ways of working and how best to utilize the tools and resources available to them to add additional value to the work being carried out. Efforts to streamline activities and building capacity through entering into partnerships and engaging members is a pivotal role of service design.

The service design training process for NGOs in Espoo started in November 2020 and ended in February 2021. The training consisted of three main topics:

- (1) understanding the needs, challenges and resources of the organisation's target group;
- (2) client-oriented service development; and
- (3) utilizing service design tools.

During the training, participants were able to reflect on their current services and activities by using various service design tools. The feedback that they have received from their peers as well as the facilitators made them realize the importance of a multi-professional collaboration and mutual learning exchange. After the training sessions, participants were also offered coaching sessions. These coaching sessions served as an additional support in their service design process and for some organisations, it also served as a brainstorming session to think of better ways to develop their activities and services or to talk about possible funding opportunities.

In February 2021, a “communication of services and missions” seminar was held with individual NGO pitching sessions. The major points to come out of this activity were the needs for

1. Greater cooperation;
2. Further mentoring and coaching;
3. Funding to develop services;
4. To be sustainable;
5. To build capacity e.g. leadership & organisational structure

The whole training process ended with a workshop about the “elevator pitch” – learning the art of communicating the work of one’s organisation in a strategic, but concise way. Learning the structure of a good pitch allowed the participants to rethink their communication strategies in reaching their target groups and / or potential funders. During group mentoring and discussion sessions as well, several important points of impact of increased communication and trust were highlighted. One such example, is the communication about Covid-19 by NGOs, an initiative headed by the City of Espoo.

Though receiving funding from the EU and other agencies is a point of contention and competition among NGOs, these issues can be managed through a robust service design by clearly identifying and demarking individual programs, stakeholder mapping and potential and eventual impact, so as not to duplicate efforts on the part of NGOs that might have a similar or in certain cases the same target group. The effective communication on Covid-19 is a prime example of close cooperation, working together and efficient utilisation of international funding to achieve a common goal.

Community place

Developing a social-cultural centre in Dubrovnik's Lazareti

In 2018, the Croatian Ministry of Culture announced a project tender for the development of social-cultural centres in Croatia, based on participatory governance and public-civil partnership. The announcement, opening a new chapter in cultural funding, followed recommendations by the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Agenda for Culture (2015–2018) about developing participative governance in culture as well as securing mechanisms of participative decision-making for local communities.

The European context

In the European framework of cultural policies, the notion of participatory governance has risen in significance in the last 30 years. In this context, participatory governance is seen as *“a solution to overcoming the deficits of representative democracy and countering the alienation between public cultural resources and communities,”* explains Ana Žuvela, a cultural policy researcher. In order to achieve sustainable cultural development, there is a growing need for more open, participative and effective forms of cultural governance where the civil sector acts as the most important actor of change.¹⁾ In order to achieve this, there is a need for a more efficient way of collaboration between the public administrations and civil sector, mainly through the public-civil

partnerships. Participatory governance in culture is regarded as the needed transformation that will allow and inspire participatory governance in other sectors of political and social life as well.⁽²⁾ *„Some of the most interesting examples that we follow in this regard“,* Žuvela explains, *„is the emergence of new institutional formats which are mostly shaped in forms of social-cultural centres based on the participatory governance and public-civil partnerships.“*

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- 1 Voices of Culture (2015) Brainstorming Report. Participatory Governance in Cultural Heritage. Structure Dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector, p.7. Available at: https://www.voicesofculture.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/4.Brainstorming_Report_Intercultural_Dialogue.pdf (Accessed 30 Jun. 2020)
 - 2 Vidović, D., Žuvela A. and Mišković, D. (2018) The vision of socio-cultural centres, p. 29. In: D. Vidović, ed., Do it together. Practices and Tendencies of Participatory Governance in Culture in the Republic of Croatia. Zagreb: Kultura Nova Foundation, pp. 62–72. Available at: http://participatory-governance-in-culture.net/uploads/biljeske_EN_web.pdf (Accessed 30 Jun. 2020)



Participatory governance in culture conference in Rijeka. Photo (cc) Eutropian



The Croatian context

In the Croatian example, the development of social-cultural centres stemmed from a severe lack of spaces for civil society associations and their activities, the need for protecting valuable public spatial resources from speculative interests as well as the need for developing transparent decision-making when it comes to cultural development and sustainability.⁽³⁾ *„In the past 10 or 15 years we have been following the emergence of these mostly bottom-up organised social-cultural centres. The most important accent in the Croatian experience is on the spatial resources as public resources. Civil society organisations are creating alliances, taking over different sorts of public spatial resources, and creating partnerships with the public authorities, mainly municipal or local public authorities in creating new spaces for different social interactions around artistic and cultural creation“*, explains Žuvela. Therefore, the next step in developing these centres is to explore and test different models of participative governance with the premise of the active participation and

contribution of every actor involved: the public administration (usually the owner of the space), NGOs using the space for their activities and the community itself.⁽⁴⁾

The Croatian Ministry of Culture recognised that there is a growing distrust between the public and civil sectors, but positive counterpoints to this tendency emerge in the form of social-cultural centres mostly organised and led by the civil sector. These centres helped the recognition of the civil sector as robust and experienced enough to shape the models of the participatory governance of public resources. Therefore, in 2018 the Ministry of Culture put up a tender titled „Culture in Centre“, co-financed by the European Social Funds (85%) and Croatian State budget (15%) in order to provide financial support to the

³ Vidovic et al. 2018, p.56–57

⁴ Vidovic 2018, p.58

development of these centres. Through this effort, as the text of the tender emphasised, funders were hoping to further develop participatory governance in culture and improve the capacities of all actors involved in such processes. The tender also envisioned to include and empower citizens as much as possible in order to improve the governance of public resources and enhance their role in the cultural and social life of local communities with the final goals of decentralising culture and supporting of the independent cultural scene.

Development of the social-cultural centre in Lazareti

The Lazareti Complex, a social-cultural centre finds itself in the context of Dubrovnik's monocultural orientation towards mass tourism. This orientation brings severe negative consequences to urban development and aggravates the ever-growing commodification and commercialisation of public resources. At the same time, mass tourism effects negatively the quality of life of local citizens, most notably when it comes to their social and cultural needs. This pressure underlines the importance of Lazareti as a social-cultural centre and space of independent cultural and social creativity, oriented towards the needs of the citizens. Currently, only some of the actors in the centre cooperate along a form of governance. Therefore, there is a need for a stronger participatory integration between them in order to strengthen their mutual vision of Lazareti as a fully functional and activated social-cultural centre. In order to help the situation, Platform for Lazareti applied for the „Culture in Centre“ tender in 2018 and its application was approved, alongside other important centres in Zagreb (Pogon), Split (Dom mladih), Pula (Rojc) etc.

The total approved budget of the project is around €300,000, its duration is two years and the main goal is defined as establishing a social-cultural centre in Lazareti, horizontally integrated and based on civil-public partnership and a participatory approach towards its governance. The funding also requires that the centre should be based on the cultural and social needs of the community and the values of participation, inclusion, openness and sustainable preservation of cultural heritage. The main partners of the project are the City of Dubrovnik, the Dubrovnik Summer Festival (one of the city's key cultural institutions) and the Platform for Lazareti (Art Workshop Lazareti, NGO Deša and Student Theatre Lero).

The project consists of three main elements. The first element focuses on capacity building related to participatory governance in culture and other organisational capacities of the current and future stakeholders in the social-cultural centre Lazareti. The activities of this element include various capacity-building workshops (finance, PR, strategic planning etc.). Another great part is the mentoring process about the principles of civil-public partnership and participatory governance led by an expert. This element is concluded by an evaluation research on the state of governance towards the end of the project.

The second element is oriented towards establishing a participatory collaboration model and protocols on two levels: between the NGOs in the Platform for Lazareti; and between the Platform of Lazareti and other relevant stakeholders in Lazareti, in particular with the City of Dubrovnik and the public company Dubrovnik Heritage (Baština Dubrovnik). The main goal here

is to ensure the active involvement of all the stakeholders (NGOs, local community and public administration). Activities in this project element include the development of protocols for spaces, decision-making and internal rules of the Platform for Lazareti; the development of a collaborative model of governance for the whole of the Lazareti complex; launching an open call for citizens, NGOs and initiatives to suggest and/or organise activities in Lazareti with help from the Platform for Lazareti; mapping of the spatial assets and spaces in Dubrovnik which could be used for organising cultural, social and art activities, etc. This process will also be presented in the final handbook of the project, conceived as a guide to Lazareti and its organisations.

The project's third element is dedicated to participatory cultural and artistic practices, workshops and activities to be co-created between the citizens, artists and creative professionals. Such co-creation could help open the space of Lazareti even more to the local community and empower the stakeholders of Lazareti for such practices and production.

Srdjana Cvijetić (Art Workshop Lazareti) sees the „Culture in Centre“ project as the continuation of the vision that the Platform for Lazareti has had since its beginnings: the concept of a civil-public partnership and collaborative model for the whole of Lazareti. The project gave the Platform a collaborative and organisational stability, especially in the form of the internal

∨ *Participatory governance in culture conference in Rijeka. Photo (cc) Eutropian*



protocols developed with the help of the experts. As Cvijetić explains, the protocols „allows us to have a mutual governing mechanism. This way we can act like an alliance but it also gives us freedom to act like individual organisations. We've also built on mutual trust and support. We are already working on the collaborative model which will include all of the Lazareti stakeholders. Our final goal is to make easier for the local community to accept Lazareti as their own place, but to make it easier for the actors in Lazareti to consider it as a place of collaboration.“ The results from this process are already visible, adds Srdjana: „we meet more regularly, plan and discuss, not only the current but also the future projects and plans. Everyone is considered as a relatively equal partner and we are making a progress which will allow us to establish at least some collaboration and a coordination body.“ Lazareti's broader community has also been very active in participating at the activities, as well as suggesting activities they would like to attend or organise in Lazareti through an open call. The community also participated in a collective exhibition, sharing stories that helped to identify the activities most needed in Dubrovnik.

At its conclusion, this project will result, as with the other centres in development, in policy recommendations for building the legislative and other frameworks to include in the cultural policy of Croatia and to further explore and develop the various modalities of governance these centres can achieve. „Culture in Centre“, in collaboration with the other socio-cultural centres, will result in a set of policy recommendations to promote the inclusion of participatory governance mechanisms developed in these centres, in cultural policies and other

legislative frameworks. There is a long way to go to reach sustainable civil-public partnership, but these experiments and recommendations are important steps towards this goal.

In May 2020, „DKC-HR“ – a new network of social-cultural centres in Croatia – has been established with the goal of advocating for the establishment of an institutional framework and policies for socio-cultural centres in Croatia according to the principles of participatory governance and civil-public partnership in culture.⁵² The network will also function as an advocacy and representative body for these centres, ensuring their sustainable development (especially when it comes to finance) and serving as a support as well a knowledge hotspot for other initiatives planning to establish similar centres.

5 <https://clubture.org/dkchr>

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The Third Sector Reform and Social Cooperatives in Italy

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The Italian legislation has recently introduced new regulations for the Third Sector, harmonising all the rules relating to the world of associations and non-profit organisations. The Reform of the Third Sector has intervened organically to redefine and reorganise the entire functioning of the non-profit sector in Italy, an important cultural change that not only concerns the organisations directly involved in this process, but also the identity of this varied world.

The Third Sector incorporates the legacy of civil participation and active citizenship that, in its different cultural and social nuances, is expressed through the organisations that are now called to start a process of re-thinking their operations and collaborations.

The Enabling Act no. 106 of June 6, 2016 "*Delegation to the Government for the reform of the Third Sector, social enterprise and for the regulation of universal civil service*" defines the **Third Sector** as the **set of private entities established for civic, solidarity and social utility purposes** that, without profit, **promote and carry out activities of general interest, through forms of voluntary and free action or mutuality or production and exchange of goods and services**, according to the purposes set out in their respective statutes or deeds of incorporation. The aim is to support the autonomous initiative of citizens who participate for the common good, to enhance the potential for growth and employment, thus implementing the **principles of democratic participation, solidarity, subsidiarity and pluralism** enshrined in the Italian Constitution.

In essence, the **Enabling Act** is aimed at revising the rules contained in the Civil Code on associations and foundations. It establishes principles and guiding criteria for the reorganisation of the registration system of entities (and relevant management acts), through the development of a **Unique National Register of the Third Sector** (to be established at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). Registration in the Register is mandatory for all entities that use “mainly or permanently” public funds, private funds collected through public subscriptions, or European funds.

The Act provides the criteria for a **precise definition of voluntary activities, social promotion and mutual aid**. Moreover, it specifies the necessary characteristics that a **social enterprise** must have in order to be included among the Entities of the Third Sector, i.e. to carry out **business activities for civic, solidarity and social utility purposes**. The Act also assigns supervisory, monitoring and control functions to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. Finally, it provides for the reorganisation and revision of the **National Civil Service** Regulations in order to achieve the establishment of a universal civil service oriented towards the unarmed defence of the Homeland and the promotion of the founding values of the Republic, first and foremost that of solidarity.

The Reform is to be enacted through the issuing of implementing decrees, some of which have already been issued, while others are still in the process of being drawn up. With the **Legislative Decree 117/2017**, the **Code of the Third Sector** comes into force, which organically **reorganises the Third**

Sector Entities. In brief, the reform repeals several historical regulations and groups together in a single text the categories of Voluntary Organisations (ODV), Associations of Social Promotion (APS), Philanthropic Bodies, Social Enterprises (including social cooperatives), Associative Networks, Mutual Aid Societies, Foundations and other private entities. Excluded are public administrations, foundations of banking origin, parties, trade unions, professional associations and employers' associations. Entities in the Third Sector must exclusively or principally carry out one or more activities of general interest, which are defined in a single list. In addition to the usual activities of the non-profit sector, there are some that have emerged in recent years, such as **housing, social farming, legality, fair trade**.

The NGOs that choose to become Third Sector Entities have numerous advantages: in addition to economic and fiscal advantages, there are interesting ones related to transparency and co-designing services with the Public Administration. Among the **economic advantages**, there are the access to a series of exemptions and increased tax incentives, the possibility of benefiting from charitable donations (social bonuses) in cash for those who have presented projects for the recovery of unused public property or movable and immovable property confiscated from organised crime; or benefit from solidarity bonds issued by credit institutions to favour the financing and support of activities. Entities may have **tax benefits** due to the non-commercial nature of the activities carried out predominantly. The Unique National Register of the Third

Sector is an instrument of knowledge of non-profit entities accessible to all, where all the information will be contained, thus respecting the principle of **transparency**. For example, it is possible to identify entities that allow to obtain tax savings following a donation in their favour. A final and important advantage is the possibility of **co-planning** and **co-design** in the management of services with public administrations.

Membership of the Single National Register of the Third Sector also has **disadvantages**, including increased costs linked to the adaptation of the memorandum and articles of association to the contents of the Third Sector Code, costs linked to the preparation and filing of the financial statements (small non-profit organisations currently draw up a simple annual report) and less advantageous tax treatment.

The Third Sector Code identifies a specific section of the Single National Register of the Third Sector dedicated to **Social Enterprises**, including **Social Cooperatives**. The revision of the regulations on Social Enterprises is contained in the Legislative Decree 112/2017. The new rules represent **an essential tool for the relaunch of non-profit operators**, those non-profit bodies (associations, foundations, companies set up as Srls or SPA or cooperatives) which, in order to achieve their institutional purpose of social relevance, can operate with an economic method.

This new legislative environment opens a variety of new opportunities. Social cooperatives and their consortia acquire by right the qualification of Social Enterprise.

The notion of general interest replaces that of "social utility." New activities are added, including development cooperation, fair trade, services aimed at work integration, housing or social housing, microcredit, social agriculture. Exceptions to the ban on profit sharing and new rules on transparency and accounting records are introduced. Forms of involvement of workers, users and other stakeholders directly involved in their activities are foreseen.

The Reform of the Third Sector is a legal framework that enables the transition from traditional forms of NGOs towards cooperatives and social enterprises. The new regulations acknowledge the legitimacy and importance of undertaking economic activities in the pursuit of the common good, eliminating the artificial boundaries between traditional NGOs and social and solidarity economy initiatives and giving a chance for a variety of civic organisations to become more autonomous economically (and politically). The new legislation thus gives a more prominent role to both NGOs and cooperatives or social enterprises in shaping the spaces and services of urban and rural areas, making them also stronger partners in public-civic cooperation.



Public procurement with social impact

author:

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Local communities and their local governments have two possible ways to cooperate. One is centered upon the use of public procurement for social purposes. The second is based on new forms of partnerships. The perspective of new types of partnerships that overcome the public-private binary and allow new forms of public-community or public-private-community collaboration is increasingly being discussed as a way to conduct strategies of urban regeneration. These approaches could be pioneered by applying Public Procurement for Innovation (PPI)⁽¹⁾ and Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP)⁽²⁾ procedures to involve civic actors in tendering for innovation therefore supporting to the EU Urban Agenda goals, as well as the EU Green Deal ones.

The relevance of public procurement for the involvement of NGOs and civic actors in urban sustainable development strategies

Within its legislative action on green and social procurement, the EU Commission is working to address the issue of how public procurement can best “integrate the demand-side function for social innovation and social entrepreneurship”.⁽³⁾ The EU has indeed encouraged public buyers to develop opportunities for social

1 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/public-procurement-innovative-solutions>.

2 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/pre-commercial-procurement>.

3 Communication from The Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Making Public Procurement work in and for Europe, COM(2017) 0572 final 2017 at 8.

economy enterprises, but the requirements (economic, legal and bureaucratic) to access the tendering processes are still difficult to achieve for most NGOs. This goal was transposed in national legislations in different ways. This includes the introduction of social considerations linked to the employment of disabled people, or to the promotion of gender equality and the promotion of employment in the public procurement process.⁽⁴⁾

More recently the EU Commission has increased its attention to Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP) to achieve social impact outcomes through public contracts that go beyond the traditional tools (e.g. social clauses; reserved contracts) and a) embed community benefits or other economic empowerment stimulus and value sharing mechanisms; b) adopt risk-sharing partnership mechanisms rather than classical purchase of services, works, goods; c) introduce co-creation and pre-procurement consultation as a methodology to design the procurement

process; d) foresee mechanisms to measure the impact. This is more than evident in some of the cases described in the recently published guidance of the EC⁽⁵⁾.

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- 4 Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (European Commission), Buying for social impact (2020) <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b09af6a5-513a-11ea-aece-01aa75ed71a1> (last visited Sep. 8, 2020).
 - 5 A report, published by the European Commission, written with support by ICLEI, collected 71 good practice cases on how public buyers have implemented SRPP, in order to promote employment opportunities, decent work, social inclusion, accessibility, ethical trade, design for all and seeking to achieve wider compliance with social standards. In cases it is possible to find trace of these new features. See cases 13, 31, 33, 34, 38, 47, 51, 53, 65 of the Making socially responsible public procurement work report (2020), available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/making-socially-responsible-procurement-work-71-good-practice-cases_en.



*Co-managed
public space in
Turin.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian*





*Rooftop garden
at Beeozanam in
Turin.
Photo (cc)
Eutropian*



New forms of partnerships that enable innovation and cooperation with civil society: examples from Italy

Although the approach described in the previous paragraph stimulates innovation and the creation of social impact, it does not promote decentralization as an approach that includes citizens or city residents in general in the procurement process itself. The Urban Agenda for the EU recognizes the potential of civil society to co-create innovative solutions to urban challenges and the newly adopted European Green Deal stresses the need to involve communities, local authorities, social partners and non-governmental organisations in the climate transition. In fact, the Urban Agenda Partnership on Social and Responsible Public procurement⁶⁾ was created to bring together cities and regions, member states, observers and associations, EU institutions, stakeholders and expert organisation to research and assess how to facilitate more use of innovative and responsible public procurement.

The European Green Deal, just like the Horizon 2020 approach, is shifting the attention to the importance of the integration and participation of citizens in the elaboration and achievement of the objectives. The participation of civic actors/ citizens currently refers only to the decision-making process and their contribution in terms of decision taken, which can be identified as a limited form of participation⁷⁾. Local, regional, national and international governments are pursuing new tools to support the participation of citizens in Green Deal domains, which is active, sustainable and democratic.

6 <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/it/urban-agenda/public-procurement?language=it>.

7 R.A. Irvin, and J. Stansbury, Citizen participation in decision making: is it worth the effort?, in Public administration review, 64(1), pp.55-65; T. Enright, and U. Rossi, Ambivalence of the Urban Commons, in K. Ward, A. Jonas, B. Miller, D. Wilson (eds.) The Routledge Handbook on Spaces of Urban Politics, Routledge, 2018, pp. 35-46; C. Mouffe, On the Political, Routledge, 2005.

The literature on urban innovation points to innovative procurement practices overcoming the business as usual PPP model of long-term innovation for public infrastructures and service provision⁽⁸⁾. Moving towards partnerships that involve civic society actors, city residents, and local communities starting from the pre-procurement phase would allow the risk of investing in innovative services and infrastructures to be shared amongst multiple actors. Besides, introducing end-users in the procurement process allows the development of collaborative and innovative solutions targeting local challenges and needs. The Urban Agenda Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Procurement, as mentioned above, recognized the potential of multi-stakeholder strategies, and especially public-social cooperation structuring co-creation processes with civil society, social innovators, local communities⁽⁹⁾ to foster innovation and circular economy through procurement⁽¹⁰⁾. There are already examples of policies or laws introduced to establish forms of social partnerships for governing urban commons collaboratively or to deliver innovative urban welfare services. In some cases they foresee rewards for civic actors that give an active contribution, for instance, in the care and maintenance of urban public spaces, or promote sustainable habits, such as riding the bike to commute to work. In Italy, the Code for Public Contracts (law n. 50, 2016) introduced the “administrative barter”, which allows public administrations to provide rewards, even in the forms of fiscal and tax incentives, for citizens that carry out projects of public interest linked to the care of the city and urban regeneration.

Especially when it comes to the inclusion of city residents and civic associations,

innovative procurement practices hold the potential to experiment new regulatory and governance solutions for the co-design, collaborative management, and implementation of urban regeneration projects as well as service delivery. The Agency for digitalization of Italy, AGID, in cooperation with the Italian Ministry for Research and University (MIUR) launched a program of open innovation in Pre-Commercial Procurement to address challenges of national interest: health care digital innovation; food security; environmental protection. The goal of the open innovation process is to stimulate the participation of as much stakeholders as possible and promote in the consultation phase a process of mutual exchange between SMES, industries, civil society

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- 8 P. Marana, L. Labaka, & J.M. Sarriegi, A framework for public-private-people partnerships in the city resilience-building process, in *Safety Science*, 2018, p. 39-50; C. Oliveira Cruz, J.M. Sarmento, Public-Private Partnerships and Smart Cities, in M. Finger, N. Bert, M. Razaghi, D. Kuofer, K. Bouchard, (eds.), *Regulatory challenges for smart cities*, *Network Industries Quarterly*, 2017, Vol. 19, No. 3[Florence School of Regulation], [Transport] Retrieved from Cadmus, European University Institute Research Repository, at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/48008>.
 - 9 Henry Mintzberg suggests to define this category of actor as “plural”. See H. Mintzberg, *Time for the Plural Sector*, in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Summer 2015), available at http://www.mintzberg.org/sites/default/files/article/download/ssir_summer_2015_timeforthepluralsector.pdf.
 - 10 URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU, Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement, Final ACTION PLAN 26th October 2018, AT 22. <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/it/urban-agenda/public-procurement/library/public-procurement-partnership-final-action-plan?language=it>.

that could shape the way the challenge is framed and will encourage the development of solutions as responsive as possible to the needs of the actual beneficiaries of the services⁽¹¹⁾.

There are critical issues related to the involvement of city residents and civil society in general in public procurement procedures, related to expertise, knowledge and representation. If the civil society groups involved are not representative or do not possess the necessary knowledge and experience to actively cooperate with both public and private actors, there is an inherent risk that their role within a public procurement process will be meaningless, or even produce distortive or negative effects⁽¹²⁾.

Although the inclusion of city residents in pre-procurement phases or in the service design and implementation is said to reduce the risks linked to top-down complex urban regeneration projects, infrastructure development or service delivery; the literature on public-private-people partnerships (P4)⁽¹³⁾ sees increased public engagement as a strategy that “can help improve the development process by moderating the risk of unforeseen oppositions, building clear responsibilities and rights, and creating opportunities for public inputs”; scholars argue that “formulating such effective and genuine public engagement framework for PPP projects would assist government bodies (...) to better realize the changing public aspirations and demands for infrastructure planning and policy formulation”⁽¹⁴⁾, the concrete implementation of innovative procedures entails a high degree of complexity at the local level. Building a framework where cities can feel free to

experiment with innovative procurement procedures safely, share risk, receive support from advisors and policy capacity building processes is crucial.

There are examples of projects that promoted public-community partnerships, although they did not use or innovated any of the tools that the EU legal framework on public procurement offer to support the purchase of innovation (Public Procurement of Innovative Solutions or Pre-Commercial Procurement) but used traditional procedures of public tendering. For example, the city of Turin, with the “Co-City project⁽¹⁵⁾” which also received funding by the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) program. The project, beginning in 2017, studied and implemented collaborative management of urban commons as a tool to counteract poverty and socio-spatial polarization. Through the Neighbourhood Houses Networks, city residents found the information necessary to support the drafting of proposals for different pacts of collaboration as well as the opportunities to meet other city residents interested in cooperating in efforts to take care or regenerate these same urban commons.

11 <https://www.agid.gov.it/it/agenzia/appalti-innovativi/programma-PCP-MIUR>.

12 Carol Cravero, Rethinking the Role of Civil Society in Public Procurement, 14 EPPL 30 (2019)

13 Wisa Majaama, The 4th P - people - in urban development based on Public-Private-People Partnership, 2008. <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/4559>.

14 S.T. Ng, J.M.W. Wong, K.K.W. Wong, A public private people partnerships (P4) process framework for infrastructure development in Hong Kong, in *Cities*, 2013, p. 370-381, 370-381.

15 <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/turin>



^ Co-City event in Turin. Photo (cc) Eutropian

These pacts of collaboration represent the key legal tools of the Co-City project, envisioned through a “Regulation for governing the urban commons”. Many of the pacts of collaboration implemented through the Turin project envisioned an innovative form of partnership notably seen through the “Via Cumiana” pact proposing the creation of a community center starting from the regeneration of a factory in a former industrial neighborhood. The regeneration operations are carried out through traditional public procurement, but the design of the project that will be awarded through the tender as well as the use of the building are co-created by citizens and the city through a phase of co-design that is precedent to

the publication of the tender. Also, the local communities and NGOs that participate to the co-design and sign the pact will be the key actor in the co-management scheme, and will use the structures to carry out the project’s activities and will benefit from the revenues that they will eventually produce.

To enable the new forms of procurement above, the following four innovations/enablers can help:

- 1) Legal tools: e.g. pacts of collaboration, contracts, social enterprises, agreements pursuant to the existing legal framework, Community Coops and Community Land Trusts;



Bicycle workshop at the Casa del Quartiere di Aurora in Turin. Photo (cc) Eutropian



- 2) Governance: e.g. urban innovation brokers (third party facilitators that are either individuals or entities) can foster innovation in procurement processes, as they allow for the overcoming of barriers inherent to public sector service delivery. Also appaltiinnovative.gov.it as an example;
- 3) Financial: social impact bonds, solidarity funding;
- 4) Digital: digital and technological tools, which must be made available and accessible to all local actors.

Concluding remarks and possible resources for support

Innovative tools centered on new forms of cooperation between the public, social and private sector set forth by the public procurement and public contracts EU regulatory framework can enable, strengthen and amplify NGOs' and local communities' work, as well as involve city inhabitants and their informal, collective social aggregations. These types of partnerships can become the most important urban governance mechanisms to solve wicked problems cities have to face in the near future to adapt to and mitigate the effect of climate change. In addition they can become delivery mechanisms for social cohesion, social protection, COVID-19 recovery measures. In this way cities can therefore meet the goals of EU policies, chiefly the Next Generation EU, the EU Green Deal and the European Urban Initiative.

Ex OPG Occupato Je so' pazzo

A space to empower the neighbourhood and the city

interview
with:

**SALVATORE
PRINZI**

co-founder of ex OPG
Je so' pazzo

Ex OPG Occupato Je so' pazzo (Neapolitan for "I am crazy") is a former monastery that was later turned into a criminal asylum.¹⁾ The building complex with a total surface over 9,000 m² was saved from abandonment and returned to its neighbourhood (and the city) in the form of an autonomous social centre. Through a series of renovations, new social services and political mobilisation, the Ex OPG has become a key venue to help marginalised individuals and groups as well as organisations, with a significant impact on the city of Naples and beyond.

1 <http://jesopazzo.org/>

*Courtyard view
of Ex OPG.
Photo (c) Diego
Dentale*



The story of Ex OPG Occupato - Je so' pazzo

The story of this place, located near the centre of Naples, in the Materdei district, begins in 1573, the year of its foundation. It was a monastery devoted to Sant'Eframo, and remained so until 1859. The mountain on which it was built is called Monte di Sant'Eframo, all around it was open countryside and the city was far away. During the first unification of Italy the Savoys confiscated the place from the Church and used it as barracks in order to have a point of support in the city. About sixty years later, during the Fascist regime, it became a criminal asylum and remained so - a prison for mentally ill offenders - until February 2008, when it was finally closed. Thousands of people have passed through these OPGs (Ospedale Psichiatrico Giudiziario - a formerly common type of criminal mental institutions in Italy), and many have died. It was a real social dump.

When did you decide to occupy this space?

The place was owned by the State Property Office and was entrusted to the Penitentiary Police that still managed it when we occupied it on March 2, 2015. In 2005 there had been an investigation promoted by regional councillors and journalists who had decided to shed some light on human rights violations everybody knew about but never took action on. In Naples there had been a strong anti-psychiatry movement since the 1970s, and many struggled to try to improve the terrible living conditions of this place. Only on November 2011 would Decree Law no. 211 (then converted into Law no. 9 on February 17, 2012) allow the dismantling of these mental institutions. However, due to the extensions, these structures were closed only in the spring of 2015. When we occupied it, we technically entered a prison that was formally still in operation, and our occupation was strongly emphasised by the simultaneous approval of the legislation for the closure of these asylums.

✚ *Ex OPG- Je so' pazzo demonstration. Photo (c) Diego Dentale*



What did the place look like once you entered it?

Starting from 2008, this place was completely abandoned. It was devastated: clothes were scattered all over the place, as if everyone had suddenly escaped. Probably people really had to leave without much notice, and were transferred to the asylum of Secondigliano, that stayed open until 2015. The Penitentiary Police pillaged the place and auctioned many objects, meantime copper and piping were stolen. There were 150 restrooms in the building, but no toilet remained. Many walls were musty and cracked, plants started to grow everywhere.

How did you manage to overcome institutional resistance to the occupation?

Within the framework of the so-called “Marino Law” (Law no. 9, February 17, 2012) it is envisaged that disused OPGs can become property of those municipalities that propose to acquire the property from the State Property Office. At that time, we opened the place to everyone and we invited the press. The prosecutor who followed the story not only decided to evict us for squatting the place, but at the same time he proceeded against the Penitentiary Police for fiscal damage. We succeeded in activating a roundtable between the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (which knew nothing about it and didn't want to know anything about it), the State Property Office (which didn't want to invest) and the City of Naples which, due to the relationship it established with us, declared itself available to acquire the property. Nowadays the ownership transfer with the Municipality is underway.

How did you reinvent the space?

With lots of projects and activities. We have renovated many spaces, but clearly there are still entire areas that should be put back in place. We have readapted the old interview room and turned it into a study/library room; we have created the first indoor climbing wall in Naples and a soccer field. We also have a radio station (in a small soundproof room with microphones and the necessary equipment) and we had a shared kindergarten – for only three years, as it was directly managed by the mothers of children who now grew up. That room now became a Media Centre – a room with wi-fi and computers that is also being used by kids to study, as public libraries here close at 16.30. There is a classroom for middle school students and a social after school, where we perform various activities with the children of the neighbourhood. There is also a theatre, a gym, a bar and of course a kitchen that we use to have self-financed social dinners. Last but not least, we have two concert areas – the smallest one can fit about 600–700 people and the largest one, actually a parking lot, can fit up to 2000 people. Art is particularly important for us. In our Atelier we do painting and sculpture, while we have created the theatre ourselves, literally building both the stage and the dressing rooms for the actors, in addition to the control room. Our Teatro Popolare produces its shows autonomously but we also host projects from other independent theatre companies. For example, a group of women who were victims of violence set up a theatre company, and the same goes for a group of people with mental health issues. We have shows roughly every two weeks, and we're constantly working on new projects.

What are your most popular activities?

Most activities follow a calendar that changes year by year, semester by semester. We have political work groups, and at the same time we promote a more “social” approach towards the neighbourhood. We strongly believe in mutualism. The activities on which we focus the most are: sport, after-school activities, theatre, music, health, migrant help desk and work desk. Today, we use the caretaker’s house in different ways: we support migrants and/or welcome people from the neighbourhood that are experiencing significant poverty. Behind the medieval cloister, which we keep regularly clean, there is a part that used to be the prison administration – that is the place where we do language courses today. We have another room in which there is a labour union, and since the largest Sri Lankan community in Italy is in Naples, some people

from there set up the Ethers Api Association in collaboration with our Chamber of Labour. There are also rooms that we are completely renovating in order to grant spaces for self-managed activities.

We set up a counselling service with psychologists, psychiatrists and experts to combat gender-based violence, also in order to maintain the legacy with the history of this structure. There are lots of mental health issues in this neighbourhood, but obviously there are no facilities to treat it. We also activated an outpatient clinic that is now also acknowledged by the Municipality of Naples. We have established a relationship with the drug bank and the Italian national health service that supply us with quickly distributable medicines. It works really well, and it has become one of the most acknowledged services in the neighbourhood.

Meeting of the theatre group. Photo (c) Diego Dentale



We also organise many monthly prevention programs (breast cancer prevention, for instance). Each group working on a specific program also learns how to relate to the context: for instance, general practitioners based a lot of their efforts on prevention and nutrition following the Cuban model, and since this area has high rates of lung and heart issues we provided more access to screenings. In order to guarantee other services like dentistry, as we don't have enough room and funds for equipment, we created a network of professionals that help people who can't afford dental care. We collect clothes and collaborate with associations that deal with distributing meals to the homeless. Two years ago we started a project during a cold emergency: we opened the doors of the OPG and hosted about thirty homeless people with whom we had already established a relationship.

How do you manage the whole structure?

We have a management assembly every Thursday with the people of the neighbourhood – this is where we create the calendar and share updates. Then, every single activity has its assembly, and there is a general assembly, open to everyone, once a month. It is a lot of work because there are about two to three assemblies a week, plus the daily activities. We are open more or less every day from 4pm to 10 or 11pm except Saturdays and Sundays, as during the weekends we usually work on refurbishing the place, we go to demonstrations or we do some other political activity, so we are usually closed. Basically, we are constantly mobilised!

How can people take part in the activities and courses? Are they all free of charge?

All the activities and courses are free of charge and nobody is paid. Money comes in from our own merchandise, from the bar and obviously from the concerts, the festivals and the theatre nights. In any case no event costs more than €5. Courses and activities are a common good and serve a function. For example, if we organise a sports activity somewhere we will then get in touch with the Municipality to tell them they should renovate or enhance the facilities. We show and teach people whom they have to turn to and how they can make their voice heard. We could start many more courses and activities, but we won't do that until we're sure that they are "politically tested". We don't want to create situations in which some people take control over certain programs and use them as their own product, without caring about the surrounding environment and maybe even going against the core values of the space.

How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect your activities?

Our response to the crisis has been threefold: organising within our communities to meet immediate needs; supporting workers struggles on the ground (also with legal advice); formulating wider political demands to make to local government. We believe that the only way out of this disaster is to build our capacity for collective action and coordination.

When the pandemic came we had to shut down our normal activities. We started shutting down a bit before the government announced the lockdown as we were being extra careful. We began to meet online and began to discuss immediately what action



Event at the Ex OPG. Photo (c) Diego Dentale 

we could be taking in the circumstances. Mutual-aid is at the core of our theory and practice, we are experts you could say, so we sprang into action and set up a phone-line for people needing support with daily chores, such as shopping for basic necessities, a service we could provide while maintaining all the necessary safety measures. We also set up a crowd-funder to fund a food distribution project. In a short space of time we raised thousands of euros and the ex-OPG was turned into a hub for packing food parcels which were then distributed to around 100 families in different parts of Naples. The food distribution project attracted a lot of attention from the media and over 50 people got in touch with us wanting to help out. The project allowed us to come into contact with disadvantaged communities

from across Naples, and we used it as a way of opening a dialogue with families and communities, to understand the issues they were facing and to get the message out about who we are, what we do and why we do it. We have now stopped distributing the food parcels but have continued to provide support to families by assisting them to access services and welfare.

The group that runs the legal aid drop-in for workers also created a national hotline to provide legal advice to workers affected by the crisis, as part of *Potere al Popolo*. After only two days of the hotline going live we received more than 70 calls from workers who were being forced to work in unsafe conditions, who had been dismissed, or who work in the informal sector and as such risked being left out of the government's

crisis support plans. With the information collected from these calls, we were able to plan what action to take as an organisation and formulate demands on employers and the government. All calls to the hotline are taken first by a small group of volunteer legal professionals, then callers' details are passed on to volunteers in their locality for follow-up support.

A third key element in our response to the pandemic has been dialogue with the local government, sign-posting areas where intervention was needed and holding them to account when their response was lacking. We wrote a detailed document outlining the critical issues we had come across in our work with local communities in terms of categories of people not covered by support, delays or mismanagement in local government support. We also wrote an FAQ on how to access the emergency support provided by local government.

As of autumn of 2020 the lockdown has been lifted in Italy but we haven't returned to normal functioning. Some of the centre's activities have been able to re-start in safe conditions but we have to be careful about monitoring participant numbers and providing safe equipment. In constantly changing circumstances we have to be flexible, finding creative solutions to continue our organising and community work, moving some activities to open spaces, or using booking systems. It is vital that we don't lose the community we've created here, and so we've been working extra hard on the communication front. We are also now focusing on regional elections which we will be held in September; as Potere al Popolo, we are standing as a candidate and are very busy with campaigning.

Graffiti by Blu on the walls of the Ex OPG. Photo (c) Diego Dentale







More than any other event before, the COVID-19 crisis proved that civil society organisations are key protagonists of our cities. While the lockdown and rules of social distancing have heavily disrupted the activities of NGO Houses, community spaces and their civic ecosystems, making most of the activities of these spaces impossible, many of them moved their activities online and became protagonists in existing or emerging solidarity networks. When municipalities and their welfare systems were struggling with budget cuts or pressures caused by the health crisis, civic networks began distributing food and other goods, and civic spaces transformed themselves to host essential services or social businesses.

By understanding the needs of institutions, other initiatives, individuals or particular social groups and disposing of the right (spatial or organisational) resources, tools or skills, many local actors shifted their profile to match local needs better to become useful parts of their local ecosystems. Community assets turned into food storage, hostels for essential workers or quarantine facilities for refugees. Restaurant kitchens engaged in cooking for vulnerable groups, delivery companies took part in food distribution and local media channels joined the effort to distribute important messages. Existing local communities and solidarity networks proved to be a strong asset in

tackling the crisis: in neighbourhoods and cities where mechanisms of solidarity and care had already been in place, NGOs and civic spaces were able to organise themselves and provide their communities with the necessary goods and services.

Many stories collected ⁽¹⁾ from the cities participating in the ACTIVE NGOs network, and beyond, indicate an important tendency: NGO Houses and community spaces across Europe have been key allies of municipalities in tackling the COVID-19 crisis. Community venues and the civic networks organised around them have been an important resource for cities in reaching out to local communities and civic initiatives. Recognising this role in the wake of the health crisis, European economies should be built back better, with an eye on these ecosystems.

There are many reasons why local and national funding should **give priority to developing and nurturing local civic ecosystems**. Because of their direct connection to local communities, NGO Houses and their civic partners better know their needs, vulnerabilities and strengths. Through these (often personal) connections and trust, local civic networks

1 See <https://cooperativitycity.org/cooperative-city-in-quarantine/>

are often better positioned to mobilise people, communities and capacities such as volunteers, mutual care and distribution of goods of primary necessity. In an ecosystem based on the cooperation of many organisations, it is easier to identify the skills and resources available in the community, and activating them to address pressing challenges. The position of many NGO Houses and their partner organisations at the margins or outside of public bureaucracy makes them more flexible and faster in reacting to emergency situations. They also accommodate citizens and groups with a desire and capacity for long-term engagement, going beyond the duration of political cycles and public commissions.

Municipalities have a key role in these ecosystems. By creating an overview of the local civic networks, municipal officers can understand better the role of each organisation and help them coordinate their activities. By mobilising funding and channelling resources into civic ecosystems, public institutions can improve cooperation among local stakeholders. By developing governance models and protocols for the shared management of resources, municipalities can share responsibilities and help their partner organisations grow and reach maturity. By providing spaces for civic initiatives, authorities can help these initiatives gain new skills and new capacities, contributing to their long-term stability.

In this context, especially with the prospect of new austerity measures and reduced public budgets for social and cultural activities, stronger cooperation between public authorities and civil societies are needed. To support the social cohesion in local communities and keep NGOs active, it is important to help community spaces and their civic partners in overcoming physical distance, by supporting the digitalisation of some of their activities. New digital tools, platforms and educational methods are needed to improve digital literacy and to create a shared digital culture. New outreach actions are necessary to overcome the digital gap and to include marginal groups and isolated individuals. New funding programmes are vital in helping NGOs and community spaces overcome their budgetary shortcomings. It is essential for new legal frameworks to enable civic organisations to develop economic models that make them more economically independent, opening new revenue streams and creating stronger links between NGOs and social economy initiatives. These measures can all contribute to **increasing the stability of NGO Houses and community spaces** in the post-COVID world: a crucial component of more resilient local societies.







Riga's NGO House opened in 2013, responding to the wishes of residents and civil society actors, to support NGOs and to increase citizen awareness of local affairs and participation in municipality-related activities. Set in a refurbished school building, the NGO House offers resources for NGO capacity building, exchange of information, experience and best practices, networking and leadership training. It promotes society integration, active social inclusion and citizen's participation. Riga's NGO House was recognised as an URBACT Good Practice in 2017. The URBACT Transfer Network based on the Good Practice of Riga brought together the cities of Brighton and Hove, Dubrovnik, Espoo, Santa Pola and Syracuse, for the period 2018–2021.

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School



Theatre



Garden



Farm



Shop



Public-civic cooperation has never been as important for European cities as today. Fading trust between public administrations and the civic society, rising authoritarianism and deteriorating services all make urban life more burdensome, especially for the most vulnerable social groups. In turn, sharing resources and responsibilities between municipalities and civil society actors has helped cities not only in generating enhanced participation in urban development issues but also in co-producing urban space and co-creating urban services.

The Power of Civic Ecosystems: How community spaces and their networks make our cities more cooperative, fair and resilient explores methods and practices of building stronger local civic ecosystems around community spaces. The book is based on the experiences of ACTive NGOs, an URBACT network that brought together the municipalities of Riga, Brighton and Hove, Dubrovnik, Espoo, Santa Pola and Syracuse for a 3-year learning process towards creating new platforms for public-civic cooperation.

Putting these experiences in a broader context, The Power of Civic Ecosystems also collects inspiring practices from other cities, ranging from municipal policies to citizen initiatives and professional methodologies, exploring mechanisms of stakeholder mapping and ecosystem - building, frameworks to access to public and private spaces, models of economic resilience, structures of participatory governance, and processes of capacity building.

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