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The URBACT Cohesion Network CoNet is a network of 11 cities from 11 EU countries exploring current approaches to strengthen social cohesion in neighbourhoods.

Topics in this edition: Participation, the Future Workshop method and the CoNet meeting in Alba Iulia

Social Cohesion, Participation and Commitment

Participation is a corner stone of any program of urban renewal aiming at strengthening social cohesion in neighbourhoods¹

Participation and commitment are two aspects of the same process. Those who participate in planning and decision making in the neighbourhood are committed to the neighbourhood.

Participation beyond elections

A lack of civic participation is often seen as a characteristic for disadvantaged neighbourhoods along with high unemployment and low educational attainment. A low turnout in parliamentary elections was one of the indicators to define Berlin's neighbourhood management areas in 1998 and an extremely low turnout in places like Vaulx-en-Velin in the French Regional elections of March 2010 was seen as very disappointing.²

Most Urban Renewal Strategies offer alternative routes to participation apart from the mainstream political representation in city councils and parliaments. The Wijkraad in Apeldoorn and the Quartiersrat in Berlin are examples.



¹ The Council of Europe sees Participation and Commitment as one element of citizen well-being. Equity / non-Discrimination , Autonomy / Personal Development and Dignity/ Recognition are the other three elements. (Concerted development of social cohesion indicators – Methodological Guide, 2005 page 28) The aim of social cohesion is to ensure well being for all members of society.

² Le Monde 18 March 2010: Certaines cités se sont exclues du système électoral. Turnout in Vaulx-en-Velin was at 27%.



Ladder of Participation

The amount of literature and research on participation in general and participation in Urban Development in particular is immense (see: www.peopleandparticipation.net) . Among the best practises often cited is the budgeting process in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre.

In 1969 Sherry R. Arnstein published „A Ladder of Citizen Participation“³. Arnstein’s ladder has eight rungs or steps progressing from „manipulation“ as the lowest form of non-participation via „tokenism“ to „Citizen Control“ as the highest form of Citizen Power. Participation is about sharing power. Participation is almost a revolutionary act and „Power to the people“ the main message. This model is one-dimensional focussing on the degree to which power is really shared with those who shall participate.

Democracy Cube

Archung Fung from Harvard University developed in 2006 a more sophisticated model: The „Democracy Cube“⁴. Fung asks three questions: Who participates? How is the communication? and What authority is given to the results?

The question “Who participates” leads to the scope of participation ranging from the “very open diffuse public sphere”, i.e. inviting everyone to participate to the more exclusive way of “inviting a group of experts to participate”.

The question “How is the communication?” leads to the mode of communication and decision, ranging from “listening as a spectator” via “deliberation” to “technical expertise”.

The question “What authority is given to the results?” leads to the extent of authorization ranging from an “individual education” without obligation via “advice” to “directly binding authority”.

The scope of participation, the mode of communication and decision and the extent of authorization form the three dimensions of the „Democracy Cube“. This model seems to be much better suited to explain participation in complex societies. There is not one single model of participation that would fit all purposes not even one model that would fit all CoNet partner cities. Fung suggests to scrutinize how methods of participation contribute to legitimacy, justice and effective governance.



³ See: <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>

⁴ Arcung Fung: Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance. see: <http://www.archonfung.net/papers/FungVarietiesPAR.pdf>

Searching for methods and tools

There is a wide variety of methods to involve large groups of people in processes of planning and decision making. Future conferences, open space, charette, planing for real are among the most popular methods in urban planning.⁵

The Change Handbook⁶ describes 61 different methods. The quote by economist Rosabeth Kanter, cited in the preface of this handbook is emblematic: „Change is disturbing when it is done to us, exhilarating when it is done by us.“ This quote takes us back to the point that participation in and commitment to processes and decisions in the neighbourhood are essential for well-being and social cohesion.

The Future Workshop Method

The CoNet network meeting in Alba Iulia used the „Future Workshop“ method developed by Austrian futurologist Robert Jungk. Jungk, born in 1913 in Berlin fled from Nazi persecution to Paris, where he studied philosophy and later settled in Austria. He was a leading figure in the Austrian Peace Movement, received the alternative Nobel Price in 1986, made an unsuccessful bid for Austrian presidency in 1992 and died in 1994.

The „Future Workshop“ method he developed with Rüdiger Lutz and Norbert R.Müllert is a method to involve large groups of people in planning processes. It is used both with children and adults. The core principal is to have three separate phases during the workshop: critique, fantasy and implementation.

Critique

In the „critique phase“ participants identify and analyse the problems that need to be addressed. Statements should be very brief and should come from all participants to avoid the risk that few participants dominate the agenda. “What do we like?” and “what do we dislike about the present situation?” are the simple questions to be asked. At the end of this phase the group chooses those problems and topics it wants to concentrate on in the next phases.



Fantasy

In the second phase the “fantasy” or “utopian phase” participants make full use of their fantasy and imagination to come up with ideas and suggestions to improve the situation. Here it is important to allow free development of fantasy. Statements like: “this is impossible”

⁵ <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/browse+methods> gives an alphabetic list.

⁶ Peggy Holman, Tom Devane and Steven Cady (eds.): The Change Handbook- The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems



or “this is unrealistic” are taboo in this phase. The moderator should encourage all participants to contribute actively to the fantasy phase. At the end of this phase the group chooses those ideas it wants to pursue in the last phase.

Implementation

In the third and last phase, the “implementation” or “practical phase” participants try to find ways to realise the proposed ideas and plan for concrete steps. At the end of this phase there should be concrete proposal and timetables, like “association A will organize”, “company B will invest...”, “municipality C will provide...”

Factors for success

It is essential that the three phases are kept separate to avoid a blockade of fantasy by criticism or worries about implementation.

Future Workshops need a good preparation to make sure all participants are informed about the topics and the atmosphere is constructive. Future Workshops also need a follow up to support the results produced in the third phase. Research from Germany, where Future Workshops are very popular, shows that the method can be successful and results sustainable when the main stakeholder who organizes the event (mostly a municipality) is committed to the process and open minded about possible outcomes.



Future Workshop in Alba Iulia

During the CoNet meeting in Alba Iulia on 27 and 28 May 2010 two groups, one in Romanian, one in English used the „Future Workshop“ method to develop a plan for the future of the „Lumea Noua“ (new world) neighbourhood in Alba Iulia, that suffers from difficult housing conditions, high unemployment and low income. Most residents are from the Roma minority.

To prepare the workshop Lucian Marina from the Alba Iulia “1 Decembrie 1918 University” presented the results of a sociological study and an action plan on the Lumea Noua neighbourhood. Monica Marin presented a project developed within the URBACT Nodus framework on the G2 housing bloc in the Cetate neighbourhood of Alba Iulia. Both presentations are available in the document section of www.urbact.eu/conet .

Alba Iulia’s Mayor Mr. Mircea Hava outlined the possibilities and difficulties the municipality faces to improve the situation in Lumea Noua. He stressed the responsibility both of the





municipality and of the residents to improve housing and educational attainment and to reduce unemployment.

CoNet partners then had a chance to visit the Lume Noua neighbourhood. It was obvious that housing quality varied from “basic” to “very bad”. Some residents are working in collecting and trading in old metal. Many children were on the street not being at school. The extent of poverty and exclusion visible during the short visit left most CoNet partners deeply moved.



The Future Workshop in the two groups (English and Romanian) was held on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning. There were three main aspects from the English-speaking group:

1. Representation for the neighbourhood

The lack of representatives of the inhabitants of Lumea Noua neighbourhood is a major obstacle for a future development. These structures must grow slowly from local networks of groups like mothers or people in old metal recycling business. The process will take at least one year and should be supported by the municipality

2. Cultural and ethnic stereotypes

Nearly all inhabitants of Lumea Noua (97%) are from the Roma ethnic group and their exclusion from many aspects of city life in Alla Iulia is linked to their ethnic background. Participants suggested two strategies to deal with this problem either to promote a positive image of Roma culture through music and history or to strictly ignore the cultural differences and to make sure that projects are not “Roma-projects” but projects for the neighbourhood.

3. Education

Mayor Mircea Hava had pointed out that Roma in Lumea Noua have the same access to education like every citizen in the city. The main problem with education is according to the Mayor the lack of interest in school and education among some Roma families. Participants to the Future Workshop suggested a whole range of ideas to bring the education to the Roma community of Lumea Noua, from trying curricula for parents and children, incorporating aspects of Roma culture in the curriculum, and creating occasions for informal or disguised learning. The idea behind many suggestions: If people don't come to school than school must come to them.





The Romanian-speaking group moderated by Mrs. Roxana Braga from Bucharest highlighted in addition **health** problems and the problem of **land ownership**. In the fantasy phase they envisaged a massive investment into public infrastructure up to 2015. They recommended a **social housing** project and **income generating** projects.

Alba Iulia

Participants to the CoNet meeting in Alba Iulia had the chance to visit a daycare centre for elderly offering meals and cultural activities. The project started using the PHARE funds to support Romania's accession to the European Union. The orchestra and choir from the centre greeted the CoNet partners with traditional Romanian music. Due to the demographic change and the emigration of many young Romanians centres like this will be increasingly important to prevent the exclusion of the elderly in Alba Iulia and elsewhere in Romania.

Participants profited from the Alba Iulia city days. This annual event brings many cultural activities into the historic city of Alba Iulia. Among the highlights was a military ceremony in the citadel in 18th century uniforms. The citadel in the centre of Alba Iulia houses many historic buildings. There is a lot of private and public investment to preserve this heritage and to promote tourism. (www.apulum.ro)



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