

SUMMARY

Problems and proposed solutions

Culture as the intermediary is a method using an unexploited physical resource as a frame and a starting point for experiments that includes the municipality, citizens and civil society in finding sustainable solutions to complex challenges.

Several challenges faced by cities of a certain size can be addressed by the method such as:

- Developments in many European cities have left old industrial sites located in residential areas. New solutions are required in order to secure a suitable and sustainable exploitation of the industrial building mass. We invite citizens to use the space and to take part in cultural activities in collaboration with the municipality. By re-activating the empty buildings, we prevent them from being occupied or left to fall into disrepair, while indicating new possible functions, and, alternatively, contributing to gathering knowledge that can be used in other places.
- When cities reach a certain size, collaboration across municipal subject areas becomes difficult. We use culture strategically to break down barriers between municipal departments by creating cultural projects that address different issues, which are also European issues.
- Cities in Europe are growing and, as a result, facing challenges in relation to inclusion and integration. Many European cities, e.g. Paris and Malmö, have problems with young people who need to be integrated in a way that considers their needs and interests. Through co-creation with young people, we turn them into citizens who contribute to society instead of working against it.
- The bigger cities become, the greater the distance will be between local government and citizens. Decisions that have an impact on the individual citizen's life are made far away from the citizen. This puts democracy under pressure, and we move from a notion of society as a 'we' – a community – to a case of 'the system vs me'. By using the method the local authority starts a dialogue and a collaboration with the citizens around finding solutions to different society problems. This helps them believe that together we make a difference in the world.

Timeframe, dates, important milestones

Autumn 2013: The City Council of Aarhus decides to start a 3-year project finding solutions to youth problems such as inclusion of vulnerable young people and getting young people to take an youth education.

Spring 2014: Start of the project Youth Community Centre in temporary buildings. The first young people join the project through workshops, cultural activities and through collaboration with a production school.

Winter 2014: A new temporary setting is tested giving the opportunity to add more cultural activities to the project and to involve more young people.

Summer 2015: Moving the project to another building. Adding more activities. More young people are involved.

Autumn 2016: The City Council of Aarhus donate money for one more year to the project.

Spring 2017: Evaluation of the project.

Summer 2017: The project will move to another temporary building.

Results achieved, monitoring

The method has been applied successfully in relation to the youth community centre. We have succeeded in creating a place for people aged 15-25 where the young people have organised themselves with a management group and monthly, public youth council meetings.

Political attention is now directed at the need for a new temporary location for the centre. The attention results from our demonstrating that it is possible to run a youth community centre as a collaborative effort involving young people and more local governments.

The project is supervised by a steering committee consisting of executives from three administrations at the municipality, two representatives for the young users and two external representatives from different youth environments in Aarhus.

The youth community centre has not yet been evaluated. A course in entrepreneurship, formed by the participants, has been held and evaluated by an external evaluator but the report is only available in Danish.

Potential for re-use

We are convinced that the method can be applied to other areas where the desire is to involve citizens and civil society in the solution of social challenges. The method can, for instance, form the framework for the solution of completely local issues with very different stakeholders (e.g. refuse and recycling), or for strengthening a city's cultural development so the city is experienced as an attractive place to live. Or it can be the framework for endeavours to get people involved in local democracy. The method can be scaled up or down as needed to include more or fewer municipal subject areas and citizens. Municipal involvement can be scaled up or down, but the municipality cannot be omitted from the project, as this would fail to secure the potential for knowledge sharing, and it would not bring the municipality closer to the citizens.