

Focus Experience

#22

Educating Cities
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Title

Trust in Archimedes' Thrust

An inclusive facility as meeting place and lifelong learning in Settimo Torinese (Italy)

Basic data

City: Settimo Torinese

Country: Italia

Number of inhabitants: 48.115

Topics: Culture and leisure, civics, lifelong learning, personal development, information and documentation.

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 14, 17, 19

Summary

In order to create new lifelong learning meeting spaces for citizens, the City Council of Settimo Torinese has designed different services and projects such as the Archimedes Library which have transformed the territory giving the city a new focus.

Through this facility, the city intended to open up a new cultural pole of attraction and meeting place that brings traditional reading (consultation and books or other materials lending) on the one hand, closer to scientific-oriented activities and to the new technologies, and, on the other hand, to social inclusion initiatives through transversal projects that can attract citizens of all ages to the library, especially young people and their families.

The library has reading rooms, a section with comfortable seats to watch films or listen to music in a relaxed environment, a large lecture hall, multi-media areas, rooms for holding events, internet zones with apps that facilitate reading for the elderly and the vision impaired, spaces for working in groups, consultation and study areas, rooms where people can use their own computers, space for conference calls, a historical archive, a polyvalent terrace, among other.

One of the most highly valued areas of the library is devoted to children from 0 to 14 years old, with special sections for each age group. It integrates a 50-person capacity auditorium where various activities are carried out, a space for the dyslexic, instruments and programs adapted to children with learning disorders, space for courses and workshops, an open room with materials to be used or consulted, as well as a newspaper and periodicals library for parents and teachers, an a multi-media space.

This facility is open seven days a week and has a large number of users, many of them from outside Settimo Torinese, which shows that the Library is a landmark in the area. Some spaces are used by associations and city services that organise, in conjunction with the library, meetings and conferences on different contemporary issues. Likewise, the library promotes activities and initiatives that foster social cohesion and receives proposals from the citizens that can turn into opportunities, thus stimulating creativity, which has made the Archimedes Library a place for social innovation.



The library promotes pro-active activities

Objectives

- To promote culture amongst the citizenry through a facility that fosters socialisation and learning .
- To provide a meeting space for families with small children in order to strengthen the social fabric and reinforce the role of the family, in close concert with the city's educational services.
- To create meeting opportunities for children through activities that are carried out in the afternoons during which volunteer retired teachers help students with their homework.
- To provide support to young people with special educational needs, particularly those with learning disorders, as well as offering guidance and support to families.
- To set up study areas that can be used individually or collectively, and for specific projects that use the "peer education" method in order to provide support to young people for them to overcome the difficulties that they have to deal during their school years.
- To create lifelong learning opportunities by bringing the elderly - who assemble a great store of knowledge and experience - in touch with the younger generations, who also show interest in learning based on less traditional formulas.
- To provide meeting and debate opportunities on the difficulty of finding a job: opportunities, regulations, guidance, etc., by activating the local services network.

Methodology

Amongst the most important projects and initiatives of the Archimedes Library of special note are:

- 1) The knowledge exchange 3.0: young students teach the elderly how to use computer tools and in exchange the elderly teach them different skills: how to fix a bicycle, sewing, carpentry, etc.
- 2) Born to Read: a reading initiation project for children from 0 to 3 years old and their families, through story-telling.
- 3) After school - Homework area: children from 6 to 10 receive support from retired volunteer teachers while doing homework. They can also do their homework with other kids, allowing them to share their doubts and grow intellectually.
- 4) Fab Lab: set up of a manufacturing laboratory at the library, with 3D printers and laser cutting machines for learning and marketing activities, mainly for schools and businesses.
- 5) Scientific lectures: regular meetings with university professors to create awareness on issues of scientific research and innovation.
- 6) Reading groups: every day individuals with language skills read the library's international newspapers to other people.
- 7) Co-working: a co-working space has been set up where a dozen young people set their start-up in motion.
- 8) Beyond the Library: a project that was created in order to take books out of the library, for which two small in-plant libraries were created outside the Archimedes Library, one at the Settimo Torinese Hospital and the other at a L'Oreal Group company in the city.
- 9) The Innovation and Science Festival: this is an annual event of national importance lasting 7 days, involving a great variety of activities which counts with the support of many international sponsors: Pirelli, L'Oréal, Lavazza, Enel, etc. The activities focus on the school context and 30 high schools in the metropolitan area are involved. The City Council coordinates and manages the activities that are carried out these days. More than 200 events are also held at the library during the year: book presentations, story-telling (cantastorie), scientific meetings, literary aperitifs, theatre shows, film projections, etc.

The library is also synonymous with innovation since it has an automatic lending system, 3D printers, PDA to listen to music at the library, e-readers and e-books loans. Moreover, one can also participate in various workshops in scientific and technological topics, listen to interviews with well-known experts through QR codes, amongst others. The events are free of charge although some workshops charge.



An infrastructure that encourages people to participate

Social and urban context

Entities involved: the Piemonte Region; the Province of Turin; the City Council of Turin; the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research; the Polytechnic University of Turin; the University of Turin; the National Institute for Nuclear Physics; the Italian Historical Auto Club; the European Sociological Association; the Chamber of Commerce; the Internationalization Centre of Piemonte, etc. More than 200 local and regional associations also collaborate.

Settimo Torinese is a markedly industrial city where the population has quadrupled since the end of the 50s, growing from 14,000 inhabitants in 1958 to 48,000 today. The city went through a period of stiff demographic growth in the 60s and in the last 15 years the presence of non-EU citizens has increased. The economy in the last few years has been marked by a crisis that has affected many of the major industries in the area and consequently the small- and medium-sized enterprises related to them. This has increased the malaise of many families who have seen their incomes cut by half or disappear altogether, thus affecting their economic stability.



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On the local scale, the transformations that have affected the social and community fabric have led to the creation of complex social and urban contexts. Some of the factors that have caused these changes are: the aging of the population; the diminishing youth population; a younger generation tending to postpone the traditional stages of life: education, job access, independence, marriage, children, etc.; the disappearance of a generational pact that has accentuated the lack of security and guarantees for the future; the loss of the job, etc.

The Archimedes Library is a reference point for the city; it is a place that fosters socialisation and culture. It was opened in November 2010 after a 6,000 m²-industrial building was renovated and divided into two stories and a terrace that is also used for activities. The library forms part of the Library System of the Metropolitan Area (SBAM) of Turin, which brings together around 30 municipalities and their libraries, through a book circulation project that permits the lending of books from one library and their return to any other in the network.

Assessment

The library has around 15,000 users. Almost 1,000 people use this facility daily and 130,000 books are lent out annually. In 2013, the Innovation and Science Festival, which is the most important event organized by the library had 15,000 visitors. In 2014, and with the arrival of new sponsors on the scene, the Festival attracted 30,000 people.

Strengths:

The main strengths are: innovation, technological resources, design and the use of space, and, especially, the vitality of the library. With more than 200 events per year, open 7 days a week, even at night on occasion, the Archimedes Library has become a regular meeting ground, providing recreation and also learning opportunities in different fields, especially for young people. In addition to offering guidance and opportunities for socialisation it offers job and business possibilities as well as guidance and consulting services.

Weaknesses:

The economic crisis has hit the local governments particularly hard, as they have fewer and fewer resources for activities of this type. Thus, there is a need to generate new synergies and collaboration with other public bodies and the business sector, mainly for fund raising through national and European tenders and other initiatives.

Future proposals:

-To continue attracting users from other nearby populations, mainly young people, by organising events and designing learning opportunities and specialisation workshops to meet their needs.

-To pay special attention to the start-up sector by strengthening the co-working method.

Ressources

Video of the experience (in Italian)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEmN34Wc_Wc

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