

Focus Experience

#9

Educating Cities
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Title

Castello Alto Project

Citizen participation in the transformation of this neighbourhood of Castelfiorentino

Basic data

City: Castelfiorentino

Country: Italy

Number of inhabitants: 17991

Topics: associationism and participation, welfare, civics and coexistence, culture and leisure, personal development, lifelong learning and health and sport.

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20

Summary

In the Castello Alto area, the historical centre of Castelfiorentino, the population has been generally dissatisfied of late, and there have also been several altercations. The Castello Alto project has arisen from the desire of the City Council of Castelfiorentino to set up a common strategy by creating synergies between the activities of different local associations and the citizenry, in order to carry out a social transformation of this city district.

The Kappaerre Association, a social welfare body fostering citizen participation, has taken charge of creating and rolling out the project, as well as coordinating the local associations involved and the informal groups of citizens who also participate in the project.

The Castello Alto area, which is inhabited by a large percentage of immigrant population, has different features when compared to the rest of the city. Between 2006 and 2008 the number of immigrants in this area reached 40%, a very high percentage compared to the national average. The old town is very densely populated and has become a multi-cultural, heterogeneous reality, with different ways of looking at public space and social relations, and, accordingly, an intervention was called for in order to prevent possible social instability.

The main goals of this project were to provide services and opportunities and foster the social integration of immigrants and minimize social conflicts. In the Castello Alto area a sense of disappointment and alienation was appreciated, especially amongst the local elderly, due to the multi-ethnic transformation of the neighbourhood. Based on the idea that the path to inclusion and social integration must be based on cultural exchange, it was necessary to create points of encounter and collaboration that facilitate cross-cultural dialogue on social norms and the shared use of public spaces.



Arch of Entry to the Castello Alto Neighbourhood

Objectives

The main objective was to set up an experimental intervention of citizen participation in the Castello Alto area that would involve the different social actants there (institutions, social services, associations, informal groups of citizens, companies, shops, etc.) in order to foster the integration of the immigrant population and improve the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, in addition to creating a co-participatory intervention committee to back up the actions of the experience and raise funds to carry out different activities.

Specific objectives:

- To educate the population about civic responsibility and respect for public space and heritage, and to instil a feeling of community and solidarity, in order to promote social inclusion of all persons.
- To make the community responsible for the process of social hosting and integration of people that are culturally, ethnically, socially and physically different.
- To improve and increase citizen participation in the management and use of the city's public spaces in order to make them places for recreation, in which people can gather.
- To transform the Castello Alto area into an active citizen space for collaboration amongst different social actants, in order to create a bridge with the city and thus avoid isolation becoming degradation.
- To transform the district into a city resource, from the social, cultural, economic and development points of view.

Methodology

The methodology used is based, on the one hand, on the acquisition of life skills, which promote personal and social well-being and are necessary for facing up to problems, and, on the other, on active participation of the citizenry, stimulating their critical attitude, independence, self-management and responsibility.

Some of the activities included in the programme:

1. Let's Get Carried away by Sport! (*Transportiamoci!*):

This project is designed to coordinate all the sport organisations in Castelfiorentino managed by the Centre for Childhood, Adolescence and Family. The main goal is to bring sport closer to the children of the Castello Alto area and ensure that they gather other children outside their social environment, while fostering, at the same time, a healthy lifestyle.



On the swimming pool

2. Cross-cultural study space:

Educators and volunteers, aided by cultural mediators, provide support to Arab mothers so that they can help their children with their homework. Moreover, this is a meeting place to deal with issues relating to the education of their children, and, at the same time, to work on self-sufficiency, through the learning of Italian and knowledge of the different municipal services.

3. Recreation and meeting place:

This is a premises of the City Council assigned to the residents of the Castello Alto district, refurbished with the help of the residents in the neighbourhood, including children. It is made up of three different spaces, in which different activities are carried out, that change based on the suggestions of children and youth. Educators and volunteers help out with the activities. Families and educators also meet here, which helps everyone to get to know each other.



Refurbishing the recreation space

4. Neighbourhood dinners:

The purpose of this initiative is to develop a greater sense of community feeling in the neighbourhood and bring locals and immigrants, youth and adults, closer together. This idea arose from the wish of children to jointly organize a dinner with people in the neighbourhood. The first dinner took place in 2011 and was held in a small garden where kids normally play. The dinner was prepared jointly by the entire neighbourhood, including children, educators, tradespeople and volunteer associations.



Preparing the community dinner

5. Local crafts workshops:

Through this initiative and thanks to the involvement of local crafts people, techniques and trades linked to local traditions have been taught. Workshops are carried out so that children and young people can work with different materials. The first workshop took place in 2011, led by specialized crafts people making nativity scenes and showing people how to model clay. The second workshop will be on wood-working for making games as well as furniture for the places the City Council has provided for the project.

6. Neighbourhood committee:

The purpose of this body, which is still being organised, will be to coordinate all the entities collaborating on the organisation of the activities: social, educative, sport, youth, cultural, commercial and volunteer bodies, as well as people participating individually.

Located in the hills of Tuscany, in the province of Florence, Castelfiorentino has a population of 17,991 inhabitants (2011 stats). It has a population density of 260 inhabitants/km². The city forms part of the Empolese Valdelsa conurbation area, together with ten other municipalities.



Castelfiorentino general view © Sailko

The population by age group breaks down as follows: 0 to 18 years old: 16,2%, 19 to 60: 53.5%, and people over 60: 30.2%.

In January 2009 the city had a total of 1,998 immigrants, 753 of which were from Albania, 479 from Morocco and 238 from China. With regards to the population under 18, 20.99% were born abroad or are second generation. These statistics show that in Castelfiorentino, 1 out of every 5 people represents a new culture and a different ethnic group. This is most evident in the Castello Alto district since it houses, in a concentrated way, many immigrant families. In this multi-cultural area a wide-variety of lifestyles can be found.

In the past the city's economy was characterised by agriculture and livestock: fruit, meat, milk products. Good road transportation routes with nearby cities (Florence, Pisa, Sienna, etc.) facilitated the transport of products easily to market. Other commercialized products are: wine, cereals, tobacco and oil.

At this time, amongst its new economic resources, Castelfiorentino has a large number of small and medium-sized companies producing clothing, footwear, furniture, construction materials and engineering services.

Assessment

A general improvement has been detected in the relations between immigrant and local children.

Of special note is the involvement of certain crafts people, who, on their own initiative and in a disinterested manner, organize workshops for the children and young people, without charge.

Strengths:

- Increase in respect for the law.
- Capacity for self-management of the meeting space provided by the City Council.
- Re-establishment of public order in the area.
- Increase in citizen participation: children, youth, families and neighbourhood residents.

Weaknesses:

- There are few economic, cultural and training-related resources in order to give continuity to the project.
- The meeting place provided by the City Council is not big enough for all the children and young people.

Future projects:

- To diversify the activities by age groups.
- To create a research and documentation centre with the collaboration of different public and private agents.
- There is interest on the part of other cities in the Empolese Valdelsa conurbation area, where they have also detected a certain dissatisfaction amongst the population of some neighbourhoods, in rolling out an educative, social process based on the Castello Alto model.



Showing handicraft



Community dinner

Contact

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