

Integrating Youth Concerns into Urban Development Strategies

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Abstract

As former Deputy Mayor of the City of Essen and President of the Council of the German Association for Housing, Urban and Spatial Planning (DV) as well as Past President of the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP), I would like to present some conclusions to the Conference held in Rabat.

The DV is the German desk and lead partner in relation to the EU for the URBAN-program of the EU. This program initiated in several cities and towns, local projects for an integrated approach on urban renewal in combination with employment and education opportunities on the level of the chosen quarters. Experience and results of some of those projects show the possibility of integrated approaches on the local level, initiated by the national or international level. Special concern is taken in respect of young immigrants or children of migrated families. Most of the cities taking part in the URBAN-Program of the EU and being part of the German –Austrian Network focus on this topic of approaches for education and integration.

Further examples are dedicated to the special program of the City of Essen, named “Essener Konsens, “a co-operation model of companies, chamber of commerce, NGO and the City Government to organise special working opportunities and educational initiatives for young unemployed people in combination with sport, housing, construction, modernising and rebuilding. The City of Essen has more than 10 years experience with this “Essener-Konsens” that is working on the organizational and administrative side as a voluntary and non profit organisational unit. It is financed by sponsorship, governmental support and own earnings for the projects itself.

Corporate Citizenship Mentoring Models as well as non profit agencies models and how they are organised in co-operation with NGO's especially the Agenda 21 approaches in schools and Universities, serve as a pool of experience as well.

Further on models are developed to use the knowledge of the well educated and /or elderly executives in mentoring programs and training approaches for young leadership representatives to widen their horizon in taking over responsibility for the less educated young people to give them a chance.

Long time youth concerns were neglected in the urban planning disciplines. Infrastructure, traffic, housing, offices and places for production have been the issues with the priority to secure the economic basis and organised living situation in our cities. Meanwhile experience and research came to the hindsight so that now only an integrated approach, including all relevant disciplines and parties concerned, can solve the problems in our cities. This leads to the awareness that youth is a very special challenge in urban development.

Urban

One of the important incentives in this field is the URBAN Community Initiative of the European Union . This programme initiated in several cities and towns of the EU local projects for an integrated approach on urban renewal in combination with employment and education as well as training opportunities on the level of chosen quarters. They have been selected by the cities themselves in combination with NGO`s, CBO`s, churches, education institutes and trade unions and other involved local special bodies in a process of finding goals and strategies for the quarters, which have been accepted by the local representatives as well as the financial support assuring bodies of the EU.

One of the crucial decisions which many of the cities have taken was to have a special concern on youth problems and to create better living and job conditions for young people. So the projects follow supra – national guidelines, national ratification and local realisation with a lot of freedom in variations following special living conditions and cultural varieties in the different quarters.

They have been evaluated within a certain time and the continuation of the financial support was dependant on this evaluation. So URBAN contributed significantly to sustainable stabilisation and revitalisation of urban areas in difficulties in European cities. It took those measures that especially strengthen the local economy and promote employment and social integration of young people. This is one of the main goals and successes of this programme.

The German Association of Housing, Urban and Spatial Planning DV is the German desk for this programme and it built up a German – Austrian Network for information, training, exchanging of knowledge and continuity between the different cities which have decided to work within this EU-programme.

Some of the fields of action are :

-Improving the attractiveness for investment and reinforcing competitiveness:

This can be organised by supporting local groups which work for the better identification of young people with their quarter, to give them the responsibility for running their sport – and playgrounds, to organise with them health and security support. This brings over all a better atmosphere in a quarter that attracts investments and raises positive feelings of the inhabitants, so that within a raising area of competitiveness the quarter as a whole begins to be reinforced.

-Strengthening entrepreneurship, promoting small and medium sized enterprises:

Example for activities in this field can be employment pacts. Medium sized companies and craftsmen commit oneself to train and educate the young unemployed and get the support for this commitment by the state and the city in offering elder professionals as coach, and in implementing common training units, so that those youngsters that are employees in their companies are continuously trained in the necessary skills for better jobs. Private training organisations, states and companies are working together for making young people fit for the opportunity to be at the end entrepreneurs in their own business.

-Improving education, training and qualification opportunities:

Start up centres by private companies, universities and cities offer special training and targeted, advice and services, creating business networks and continuity in support of young people who are willing to commit themselves to such courses and follow ups.

-Expanding infrastructure and leisure, cultural and recreational activities:

An example for this field is, for instance, the establishment of a talented youth group consisting of an editor and contributing journalists who published a monthly magazine with the assistance of interested young people to tell and disseminate thinking, challenges, creativity and ambitions of the youth. After a while initiatives began in organising multicultural theatre, different indigenous music, little business of producing arts, books and discs.

For those and other cultural activities old buildings of former industrial sites some times renovated by them as a supplementary form of engagement – were offered either by the city or the company. In some cases the relevant company was waiting for future changes of the urban development and agreed on letting the building without rents for a certain period of time to different groups of young people who organised themselves up to the time that they were able to overcome with their business without financial support.

These are some examples and thoughts of how a top down programme like the URBAN programme of the EU is providing its significant contribution to economic growth, integrating disadvantaged groups, youth, unemployed and socially weak. The urban programme can achieve great success if some support from the government is increased through combination with committed institutions that together meet the commitment of creative local groups and enable their activities.

If citizens, who feel responsible for their quarter, get the responsibility in implementing their own urban developing strategies in partnership with local authorities and involved partners who commit themselves to a certain continuity in their support, it grows a new sort of “good governance” that includes the so called “disadvantaged groups” like unemployed, youth, children, aged people or foreigners. But it is

important, that they implement rules to be followed. In combination with many creative ideas this is a path to their success.

On the other hand these bottom up strategies will only work if at the same time local authorities work on long term approaches and look for continuously improving urban development policies. Therefore an ongoing exchange of experience and long term support is crucial. The success of URBAN the most European Countries, as I have had the opportunity to recognise during my Presidency of IFHP, is related to this long term approach because it has already been working for around ten years within the EU. The German – Austrian Network on the URBAN Programme, to which the DV offers its knowledge, time and capacity, that I have the privilege to chair, shows that by taking especially youth concerns in the programme of urban development and by creativity and partnership in the relevant measures it is possible to make the cities more fit for the future in giving the youth a better chance.

“Essener Konsens”

Another example – in this case a special programme only on the local level – is the so called “Essener Konsens” (Consensus of Essen). This is a co-operation model of companies, the City Government, Labour Agencies, Chamber of commerce, training institutions of the industry and middle sized companies and the university. Along ten years one has worked by co-operation on voluntary basis in offering training to the youth for making them fitter for jobs, in offering jobs if they finalised this training with success and in coaching them if they are in danger in their jobs. Mentoring models of retired leaders are a supplementary offer to young employees or directly after the school in the time in between searching for the best solution for their further education.

This co-operation works in a special way in supporting projects that bring together unemployed young people to train them to offer them job opportunities and reintegration in the labour market in combination with renovating buildings, rehabilitating empty houses, restoring heritage protected public buildings, sustaining green areas, constructing bicycle ways and parking areas. Especially, forests and river rehabilitation projects bring a lot of public welfare, so that they are not only subsidised but bring at the end economic advantage. Projects like these are typical for a “win-win - situation“, because the result is a better environment. At the same time they generate better qualified young people.

These are mostly programmes for boys, who are in a larger percentage less successful in the schools or not developing enough discipline to stay in an education or in jobs than girls. The initiatives for the girls are to give them qualifications in the new media, in animation and TV-design, in computer training, in cad and other relevant technologies, so that they are able to enter the labour market in fields that offer jobs only for well trained employees with special skills. Within the framework of close co-operation between the Media House, a voluntary organised non profit institution, and the City of Essen, suitable projects were realised for mutual benefit.

Corporate citizenship

Looking for further fields of experience in bringing together urban development and youth concerns, I would like to mention the successful example of “Corporate

Citizenship”. In a time where companies must resist the global competitiveness, it is difficult to persuade them to get involved in little local projects. To implement the idea that citizens feel responsible for their City or their quarter, where they live, and that they are convinced in social engagement, is the programme of the so called “corporate citizenship”, that some companies developed as models for their staff. That means, that leading and prospective leading employees in their companies, take over the responsibility as a citizen for a special project in the City. This may be a shelter for the battered girl child, or for one evening in the week the football training with kids in a sports club, or going during one afternoon in a week to read out in a kindergarten. The idea is not only to help under privileged children but to train those who are privileged and are shaping to be leaders in taking over responsibility in the city, in a certain project that is far from their ordinary business, to achieve social competence. This enables quite another pool of experience by dealing in other fields and not giving only money for charity.

On the other hand it is a successful experiment to get the members of global acting companies to be involved in local projects and being in some way engaged in the place where they live, feeling not only

responsible for the benefit of their company. It is a very personal commitment of each person, but it is because of the common welfare, an element of corporate identity for the involved company and a part of citizenship, that helps the youth.

As I feel and as I have experienced, it is very important to convince the global companies that besides globalisation their success depends as well on the regional network and the relationship to the place where the majority of their employees live, their children go to school, and their commitment in local affairs gives them a feeling of being at home in a more and more homeless world.

Agenda 21

The last example that I would like to share with you is my experience with the Local Agenda 21 in the City of Essen as the Speaker of the Association, and internationally, in looking to those countries in which the Agenda 21 initiatives were successful in their approach on urban development.

Beginning with the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro 1992, the Agenda 21 was the first Agenda to which the family of 177 states expressed their commitment to organise a process of participation. All over the world this idea of participation took place in local activities and changed step by step from primarily participation in environmental themes to general themes of urban development. In an urbanising world, as we see all over the world, the process of concentrating population in the city - shelters, access to water and land, gender questions, employment, education and health as well as security and infrastructure, are to be solved in the cities. As UN-HABITAT defined: "the cities are the problem and in the same time they are key for the solution".

The idea of Agenda 21 – “Global thinking – local acting” – got a huge awareness all over the world. I had the opportunity to visit wonderful examples in Kuala Lumpur as well as in Rio de Janeiro, in Odensee as well as in my own town Essen. As in most cities of the European countries, in Essen the first step was taken by the City Government. But many organisations, institutions, NGOs and the Churches worked together with the City administration to spread the ideas of the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro and to implement a lot of voluntary projects. These projects encompassed charity projects as well as educational projects such as implementing an Agenda School, in which in a very special manner children are trained to take over responsibility for their environment, for their quarter, for foreign friends and foreigners, for tolerance and respect to one another. These are the abilities with which they are trained for the future in which freedom is the one side of the medal that shows them on the other side responsibility for the community.

After termination of the Government involvement we have founded an association named “Agenda Forum“ of dedicated citizens who for the past 4 years have been working on Agenda themes and projects. With monthly Agenda Round tables on urban development there an open forum is offered on all relevant themes and one of the main themes is the integrated approach on themes concerning youth. So the co-operation with the university came to the proposal for special training offers, i.e. training the trainers to be ? jour with international themes and researches. Another project was to recommend to the City to implement a Parliament of children so that their voices and views on developing decisions within planning approaches can be heard. The support of the Agenda-School was another important activity in giving knowledge and experience of elder and world wide active merited leaders to the young for widening their horizon. Artists were working with the pupils to implement gardens with plants from which natural colours for their paintings can be generated. Besides, that it was a revitalising project of changing the concrete school court yard with the pupils into a garden. The important aspect of it was that the parents were integrated into the project.

The Agenda Forum gives a special award for environment and integrative projects especially concerning the youth. This award went to housing companies for their activities in training unemployed. It was given for an initiative to work with immigrants, for exploring a ship building project on the nearby lake. It awarded artists who worked with children on special theatre projects to exercise tolerance to foreigners, and gave certification to companies who reduced CO² pollution by changing heating and air condition systems. This was in relation to relevant educational training offered to young trainees. The Agenda Forum organised in co-operation with the chamber of engineers training opportunities to recognise the needs of developing countries and their living and learning conditions. The goal is to make young qualified representatives of their companies (in case they are working in foreign countries) more sensible

for the cultural and living situations in these regions. On the other hand, they bring back more engagement for their citizenship in their own city where they are staying. Tolerance is not a one way skill. So overall the Agenda Forum tries, to generate an ethical attitude of tolerance and respect and implement this in urban development processes and, to share the knowledge of the well educated with the less educated and those, with less chances. The Agenda Forum in Essen as part of the civil society shows ten years of commitment.

Participation in this sense is therefore the main element of a successful, at least economic successful urban development, because in cities with this spirit and attitude of participation getting the civil society involved, investments will grow and as a result increasing working opportunities for the youth in the future will follow.

These are some of the smaller or bigger in less or more sustaining initiatives. These initiatives were tried - and have had a lot of hard work as well as success in order to get the City Government involved to integrate youth concerns into urban development in working together with the civil society, stakeholders, institutions of public concern, educational institutions and the economy. The result of this inner city ongoing dialogue with the municipal authorities shows that the City Government does not only act as a mediator but is active in its main field of responsibility: the field of defining the local framework. In each of the land use or legal binding plans there is implemented a test procedure about a “youth impact assessment” that has to be presented to the City Council for consideration and decision. Since that time the public has become more aware of these questions, thus achieving “common local solutions for global lessons”.

Literature

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