

EMPTY PROPERTY AS CO-CREATIVE CITY LAB

ARKI_LAB
ASNÆS, DENMARK



CATEGORIES

- S** Community spaces where diverse people meet
- P** Inclusive youth participation

PRESENTER

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DESCRIPTION

arki_lab is a small interdisciplinary urban consultancy based in Copenhagen, Denmark and Sydney, Australia. Our work is defined by our focus on democratic design processes and we identify as facilitators of collaborative processes. The Asnæs project focuses on students becoming involved in the planning of public spaces in their city through an engaging board game, visualisation techniques, and co-building installations.

MOTIVATION

Our intention is to develop cities and towns where the inhabitants are represented and engaged with their surroundings. Co-design is an ambitious socio-political approach that aims to restore people's right to their city and the power to shape everyday spaces. arki_lab's take on co-design aims to bridge the existing gap between end-users and decision-makers to create more viable projects, creating a common language between the end-users and designers in order to establish more democratic and non-hierarchical dialogues. Citizen involvement creates a space for dialogue and discussion, building a strong and inclusive foundation for any project. Involving people and integrating their design ideas builds a sense of ownership over their neighbourhood and strengthens community values.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Cities today are facing a myriad of challenges from scarcity of resources and spaces to socio-economic polarization; these cannot be solved from a top down perspective. We need to involve the inhabitants of our cities and towns in order to develop resilient, sustainable, and relatable solutions. Participatory design, especially involving young people, lies at the centre of this ambition. Our experience has proven that involving stakeholders and end-users not only creates a long-lasting sense of ownership, but it more importantly helps strengthen the community bonds and creates new local networks and collaborations. We've developed our cities mostly based on differences, zoning and segregation; it only makes sense to redevelop our planet through collaboration and unity through diversity.

MORE DETAILS

We have developed a wide range of unique and creative engagement tools in order to bring all users and stakeholders around the same table, while always ensuring diversity among the user groups. We tailor-make processes to give citizens the opportunity to become part of their city's future and uncover local knowledge that is crucial for resilient and sustainable cities. We want to change the linear and top-down approach to design by "designing cities with people" instead of "designing cities for people". Involving young people in the design process enables them to realize that their ideas matter and that they can play an active part in shaping their surroundings.

One of the best examples of our practice is our project in Asnæs for the municipality of Odsherred. We transformed an empty property into a co-creative City Lab, where the local community was involved in designing new public spaces in the city of Asnæs. Youth engagement played a crucial role in the project, especially at the beginning of the process. We collaborated with the local high school and middle school students, who took on the role of planners and studied the needs of their city, coming up with new design solutions. By involving the youth, one of the main user-groups, the project aimed to create a sense of ownership around the city and its development. This initiative corresponded with the city development plans that aim to strengthen Asnæs' position as a youth-driven and education-oriented city.

Following the youth engagement the City Lab was activated through educational workshops, exhibitions, events and city tours etc., during which we collected local knowledge and ideas on how to develop and improve the public spaces around their city. The gathered ideas and wishes were then translated into a public space strategy for the town and permanent designs around Asnæs.

OUTCOMES

Even though it's difficult to quantify the outcomes of a participatory design process, we've identified some key numbers. The goal was to communicate the value in co-creation and engagement processes, which is difficult to measure and qualify. We have engaged with over 1500 individuals throughout the span of 2 years, actively working with more than 200 young people from two local schools. The final report also details the new social and economic networks that were facilitated by project as well as the many local institutions that participated at different points of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

Given the nature of our practice, we need to constantly reflect, iterate and innovate. We've adapted our process to more efficiently and sustainably achieve democratic design. One of the critical learnings is related to youth participation. We learned early that even small physical changes in their surroundings is a great motivation for young people. Successful youth participation stems from establishing a sense of ownership and the knowledge that they can influence their community and local environment. This doesn't have to be costly, it can be as small as creating traditions in the community to establish a sense of belonging. This especially applies to long-term projects where it's unrealistic to expect continuous active interest and engagement from the youth. They should be involved more in event-based and quick-win formats.

LINK

www.arkilab.dk