

IDENTITY AT THE CENTRE – *Identità al centro*

A participatory project for the citizens of Montevarchi city centre

Montevarchi (AR), July 2010- January 2011

The project aims at finding methods and tools to give new value to the city centre. It was adopted a participatory approach to establish a renewed empowerment of the citizens, a feeling of community and belonging. Here the group “community” wishes to become activator of decision makers processes and “voice” in dialogue with Public Administration for the bettering of the quality of life.

In the past years the area of the city centre was gradually abandoned by the middle classes, most the owners of the houses and buildings did not find an interest in valorizing their properties.

Along with this phenomenon, disadvantaged classes came to live in the area. As a consequence there started to diffuse the feeling of as lowered urban quality. This feeling of degradation reflects on the safeguard and value both of public and private good. This elements lead to a loss of identity and function.

For this reason despite its uniqueness in the original shape and urban structure, the city centre of Montevarchi has lost its appeal, being not anymore considered as a space of identity, meeting and exchange among its citizens.

The involvement of the citizenship was the main goal of this project. In this sense, it was given value to the individual expression, because the different points of view compose the cultural richness of a community. At the beginning of the project with a simple communication and friendly cooperative approach and with the indispensable support of the register office, there were selected people living and working in the city centre, as well as representatives of groups and associations. They were invited directly by the public administration to take part to the project.

The interdisciplinary group of experts at work elaborates different forms of participation and involvement of the citizens in order to reach as many targets as possible, but also to multiple the points of view of citizens, create moments of exchange and discussions, open to wider possibilities and visions.

All these named needs and premises lead the coordinators to build an interdisciplinary working team composed by artists, architects, social workers, cultural mediators, anthropologists, semiotic experts, video makers, all capable of elaborating proposals of involvement for the citizens at different levels, and with the competences to translate the collected information and data in concrete technical proposals for the public administration.

These the actions of participation:

“Andar per case” (visiting houses), meetings and informal dinners within families and small communities to open the dialogue with citizens and open people to new points of view; “Andar per piazze” (visiting squares), a long walk around the city centre searching for beautiful and not beautiful aspects of the area through the eye of a photo camera; “Il centro che vorrei” (the city centre I would have), a big map of the city painted on

the ground of the main square to collect the needs of people on services, urban outfits, activities for the city centre; “Spazio Identità al Centro” (space identity at the centre), a dedicated office open twice a week where citizens could leave their opinions and the phases of the project were shown real time; “Sportello simulazione incentivi” (incentives simulation counter), one to one meetings between citizens owners of houses and experts, exploration of possibilities to gain public incentives and simulate problem solving on restoration of buildings; “Insieme si sceglie” (let’s choose together), two days open to citizens to elaborate all the data and information collected and let emerge priorities and values; “Il centro si fa teatro” (city centre is a stage), a theatre workshop that produced a public show in the city centre where citizens were actors and performers.

All these actions allowed to collect the opinions, the indications and information from the people participating. Along with workshops we organized also several public meetings to update and give knowledge of the in progress results reached; communication and participation was also on line with a dedicated web site and links to social networks; tv and radio shows supported the wide spreading of the communication to all targets.

The whole project was also followed by a “Tavolo di supervisione” (supervision board) composed by citizens. Participants were over 800, from mostly all the targets of the considered context, among these a very relevant result was the participation of all the ethnic groups living in the city centre. This was the first time that a public process gained the interest of minorities that normally do not take part to Public Administration initiatives.

The data and the needs resulted from this wide participatory process were collected and translated into a synthesis brief: “Dai cittadini all’Amministrazione linee guida per la riqualificazione del Centro Storico di Montevarchi” (from citizens to administration, guide lines for the re-qualification of Montevarchi city centre), which was directly handed over the major from the citizens in a public event.

The project was promoted by Comune di Montevarchi – culture councillorship, co-funded by Regional Authority for Participation of Tuscany, coordinated by artway of thinking, with the collaboration of Love Difference, Snark, Macma, B.And, Giovani Partecip-Azioni and Francesco Manetti (associations and informal groups).

<http://www.identitalcentro.info>