

FIVE LESSONS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS

DE CEUVEL, A CIRCULAR GREEN HOTSPOT IN AMSTERDAM

For 80 years, the van Hasselt Canal was part of a commercial shipyard, repairing and building ships. The plot stayed deserted for 20 years until a group of volunteers decided to transform the area into a creative co-working space called 'de Ceuvel'. Besides regenerating an abandoned industrial site, what makes de Ceuvel particularly special is their approach to commons governance and involvement of communities. The following five lessons showcase how de Ceuvel can be an inspiration for project developers and city governments in meaningfully engaging local citizens.

LESSON 1: FOSTER VISIONS AND IDEAS OF COMMUNITIES

Communities have local knowledge, ideas and plans but not always a platform or chance to implement these in practice. For de Ceuvel, a citizens contest was set out by the municipality. The 'problem' of polluted soil was seen as an opportunity for innovation and a new way of living.

"Let citizens think with you – give local communities your problem and empower them to find solutions for places where they live, play and work."

LESSON 2: CREATE AN EQUAL PLAYING FIELD

Project managers should not solidify the desired outcome but rather

create a framework that ensures safety, legal, social and environmental measures while providing space for creativity and innovation. To do so, it is important to question the idea of one-way participation: are you, as the offering party, willing to participate as well?

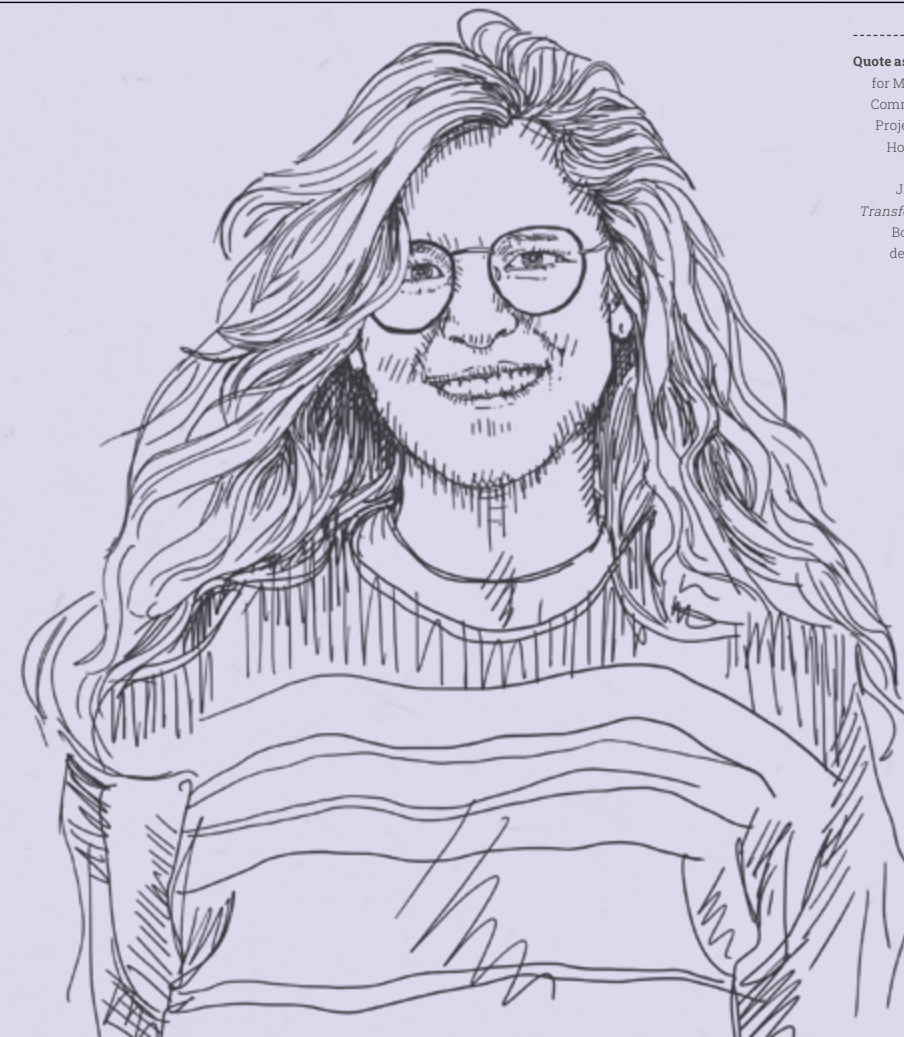
"There is a need for space and a bottom-up approach but also for leadership to guide the project in a meaningful direction."

LESSON 3: ENGRAIN LOCALS IN THE PROJECT

De Ceuvel's community engagement has become a long-lasting success in the neighbourhood through the engagement of locals. This is done by organising workshops, events, activities

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Quote as: Van Remortel, E. Five Lessons for Meaningful Engagement of Local Communities in Urban Regeneration Projects. De Ceuvel, a Circular Green Hotspot in Amsterdam. P. 254-255. In: Mejia, M.A., Amaya-Espinel, J.D. (eds.). *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities with Biodiversity*. Bogotá. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. 2022. 288 pages.

for children and providing job opportunities solely for locals.

"Stay connected to your social responsibility and keep thinking about small initiatives that share the benefits of the space with all."

LESSON 4: SEARCH FOR PERMEABILITY

It is important to find common ground in boundaries and search for permeability. De Ceuvel has blurred boundaries between nature and people through nature-inclusive building; between living and working by bringing social values into the design; between public and private space by opening the site for visitors; and between art and science by navigating interfaces.

"Permeability and thinking outside of boundaries can enable innovation towards multi-benefit solutions."

LESSON 5: CITIZENS OWNERSHIP

Communities need to feel a sense of ownership over their space to make them fully connected and invested. Ownership does not stop at envisioning but is strengthened by building, planting trees and creating with your own hands. De Ceuvel is decentralised through commons governance, which means that ownership is not dedicated to a single person but instead to the community as a whole.

"A community is not just about ideas and work, but also about eating,

dancing and singing together for a meaningful sense of belonging."

There is a need for a paradigm change in how we engage, empower and co-create with local communities in cities. We need to move away from a one-way conversation style and see citizens as our partners in building greener and more liveable cities. There should be space for bottom-up democracy and leadership, including values of nature and people and using tools from art and science. If we want localised effective solutions, we need to engage citizens in an equal partnership and empower them to envision, develop and implement solutions.