

Common Space: A Cooperative Planning Methodology and Creative Process Program for Local Governments Studio Metropolitana Urban Research Institute, Budapest

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It's hard to create a space that will not attract people, what is remarkable, is how often this has been accomplished.

—William H. Whyte

Mission and objectives

Studio Metropolitana's *Common Space: Cooperative Planning Methodology and Creative Process Program for Local Governments* is an innovative new project predicated on the idea that revitalizing neighborhood public squares not only strengthens neighborhood identity but contributes significantly to identity and quality of life in the city as a whole. Common Space targets Budapest's smaller, lesser-known sites rather than large or well-known tourist sites because, although these should be a vital part of the urban fabric meant for daily leisure, recreation, festivals, social interaction and other activities, many have been reduced to run-down interstitial spaces, just places to transit through and not a destination in themselves. Many lack any real social function, do not connect to the adjoining neighborhood, do not reflect the needs of the residents, have lost their historic meaning or local identity, and are plagued by vandalism and neglect. Some are considered unsafe. Furthermore, historically, terms such as „public hearing” or „residential forum” are more associated with protest and discontent than with a constructive dialogue between residents and municipal authorities.

The project's main emphasis is on providing municipalities with the know-how and skills for making vital, exciting neighborhood spaces. The municipalities who submit grants applications are not applying for funding, but rather, to be part of this learning process. Common Space starts with an open tender process and continues with Studio Metropolitana forming partnerships with local governments in Budapest and its agglomeration to revitalize 13 neighborhood public spaces, 10 of them in the capital and 3 in the surrounding area. While working closely with the municipalities for two years to produce a total of 13 revitalized neighborhood places is the immediate, concrete objective, Common Space's broader objectives include:

- Changing the way municipalities and residents view the design and use of public spaces
- Providing municipalities – and through them, the broader community – with an innovative and diverse range of tools and skills for community-based planning
- Making it standard practice for public space design to be an interactive, democratic process that results in high-quality landscape architecture and urban design that accurately reflects the needs of the surrounding community.

Project implementation

At the end of January, we conducted a dynamic, interactive workshop for local governments to stimulate interest in the project and signal the official launch of the applications process. In addition to presentations by our own staff on the specifics of the project, we also hosted lectures and roundtable discussions featuring landscape architects, urban planners, municipal architects, civic activists and university professors on topics including:

- Innovative public-private partnerships
- Fostering stewardship and responsibility among residents for sustainable public spaces
- The public space as the city's 'living room,' and what characterizes a good public space
- Participatory planning
- Involving children in the planning and design process
- Neighborhood revitalization and inclusiveness
- The process for creating of a successful, lively semi-pedestrian commercial street

The applications process took place in February and was open to all of Budapest and agglomeration communities over 10,000 residents. They were juried by a panel of independent experts from the arts and business sectors, who further divided the winners into four subgroups according to their structure and location. Out of each group an archetype was chosen, which will serve as a sort of 'open kitchen' for the others in the group and for which Studio Metropolitana will manage the two-year process. The winners are the following:

Belvárosi közterek:

VI. Kerület, Hunyadi tér és vásáracsarnok

VIII. Kerület, Mária utca – Gutenberg tér – Kőfaragó utca – Gyulai Pál utca, mint összefüggő köztérrendszer (köztérláncolat)

Külső városközponti közterek:

XVI. Kerület, Veres Péter út környéke

XVII. Kerület, Csaba Vezér tér és rákoscsabai Piac tér

XVIII. Kerület, Pestszentimre városközponti területe

XIX. Kerület, Kós Károly tér

XX Kerület, Szent Erzsébet tér

Lakótelepi közterek:

IV. Kerület, Tulipán kert

XI. Kerület, Költők parkja

XVIII. Kerület, Kondor Béla sétány, Havanna lakótelep

Agglomerációs közterek:

Vác, Deákvári főtér

Göd, Kossuth tér/Kincsem Istálló

Pomáz, Szabadság tér

Archetípus Közterek

Belvárosi köztér:

VIII. Kerület, Mária utca – Gutenberg tér – Kőfaragó utca – Gyulai Pál utca, mint összefüggő köztérrendszer (köztérláncolat)

Külső városközponti tér:

XVII kerület, Csaba Vezér tér és rákoscsabai Piac tér

Lakótelepi köztér

IV kerület, Tulipán kert

*Agglomerációs köztér
Göd, Kossuth tér/Kincsem Istálló*

Favorable consideration was given to those applicants who could demonstrate that the site is central to neighbourhood identity, and that there is established local stakeholder interest in revitalizing the site on the part of individual residents, a civic organization and/or a public institution such as a school.

The project is now in its realization phase (spring 2008-spring 2010) with ongoing trainings and workshops for the 13 sites. Most recently we hosted the Project for Public Spaces, a New York-based organization that has developed the so-called “Placemaking” approach to public space revitalization. The essence of PPS’s work is that the merits of a public space lie not only in its aesthetics or design, but also in its functions, community spirit, accessibility, activities, surrounding facilities and other aspects – and that the community plays an indispensable role in determining how a public space should function. In the course of a whole day the PPS trainers worked with the project’s participants, conducting interactive games and on-site work at two of the participating sites. As one of the participants said, “Én nagyon érdekesnek és hasznosnak találtam a tanácskozást, és megfogott az a szellemiség, amit képvisel.”

The future trainings and workshops that we facilitate will be designed both for the group as a whole, and also individually-tailored for each specific site. During this process we will help the municipalities develop comprehensive strategic plans for the entire two-year revitalization process. Throughout the two-year project, Studio Metropolitana’s team acts as program facilitator by providing municipalities and residents with tools and know-how for

- mobilizing community stakeholders
- doing site analysis,
- creating a management model
- carrying out public discussions and design sessions
- seeking financing
- assembling the multi-disciplinary design team that will work with the community to determine the square’s functions, identity and design

In addition to our organization’s staff - which includes landscape architects, urban planners, sociologists, economists and architects - we have assembled an advisory panel of outside experts from business and the arts to assess the applications and also to provide continuous consultations throughout the process. The final phase of the project (spring-fall 2010) includes the creation of a toolkit and anthology of best practices derived from the 13 sites. This will serve as a comprehensive resource of ideas and techniques for other municipalities who want to go through the same process. While as urban practitioners Studio Metropolitana seeks to influence and improve the aesthetic and functional quality of urban design in Budapest, the parallel goal is to introduce a new decisionmaking mechanism to local governments and shape a new way of thinking through participatory methodology. Although the project’s duration is two years, after the Common Space project is completed, we as an organization plan to continue serving as a resource for the skills and techniques that we helped the local governments implement to revitalize their public spaces.

Participatory methodology has never been employed on this scale before in Budapest or even Eastern Europe, so the project is pioneering in every sense. It is also unique and innovative because it is not direct financial or material assistance that we are offering, but rather, an

intensive training program that provides skills that have been proven effective elsewhere but that no other organization in Hungary has ever offered.

The results that we expect for the sites are:

1. Strong examples of high-quality landscape architecture and urban design that engage and invite visitors
2. A deep sense of stewardship and responsibility on the part of the residents who use these spaces, which in the long term means increased use, increased social activity, decreased vandalism and visibly vital, more interactive neighborhoods.
3. New methodology, skills and attitude on the part of the municipalities in redesigning public spaces