Building Communities brick by brick

Name of the organisation
Associazione IL VERGANTE

Website of the organisation
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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Active citizenship/activism
- Volunteering/voluntarism
- Community work

Good practice category
Concrete tool

Good practice aim & purpose
This good practice comes from the desire of encouraging dialogue between young people, policymakers, public administration employees, and social stakeholders, about the topics of sustainable development, active citizenship and promotion of the territory and the geographical area. Young people are not sufficiently involved in the process of political decision-making, as they are not yet entitled to vote, or because they are not in direct contact with policymakers.
Our active citizenship workshop is based on the possibility of creating dialogue and open and direct debate between all the parts involved, and the physical construction (thanks to bricks) of an “ideal world”, an ideal city, an ideal school, etc.
The changes that “IL VERGANTE” is willing to make are not only about the creation of an ad hoc space where debate and dialogue are facilitated, but also about the introduction of a reusable tool, whose use is easy and intuitive. Moreover, this tool is already in use at school, at home, or in community centres.
The bricks allow users to build what they want to create, and talk about it with clearer ideas, generated from open dialogue.
The debriefing phase is fundamental in order to plan the necessary actions and changes for a complete liveability of the territory.

Good practice description
The first part of the workshop includes an “icebreaker” activity that facilitates the team building process, so that participants get to know each other better. If they already know each other, this activity becomes an “energizer” activity, that brings energy and gets participants into the right mood for the following activities (active citizenship and building bonds).

The second part is the core of the workshop. Bricks are given to participants: young people, policymakers, public administration employees, and social stakeholders. Bricks are used to build a model, which has to answer a question or a task given by facilitators (eg. “How is your ideal Youth Center?”).

Questions and tasks can deal with various issues such as active citizenship, sustainable development, culture and school, art, sport and free time, territory liveability.

After a first step of individual work, participants share their ideas and creations, and they listen to each other, so that debate and discussion are open.

Exchanging ideas leads to reflection, and once more, bricks will be used by groups to build new models, as a mean to create a shared view.

This activity will lead to a co-decision process, but also to respecting each other’s ideas. In a standard debate, these topics would not be explored in the same profitable way.

Using their own hands, their creativity, and bricks, participants can consider in a more concrete way their real needs and the everyday challenges of their community. Participants are given not only simple bricks, but also doors, windows, plants, animals and minifigures, so that they can build their own ideal world in the most accurate and stimulating way possible.

The aim of this workshop is to develop critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills using bricks. Participants are invited to build 3D models in reaction to different challenges given by facilitators. Every model brings something meaningful to its builder, as making things by hand has the power to transfer into the construction some non-conscious knowledge as well.

3D model is an external idea, an idea that the mind has processed while hands were acting on the bricks. In other cases, the construction is completely random, as it starts without a given and predetermined image to which the 3D model must conform.

The third part of the workshop is a debriefing phase, in order to conclude the activities and allow facilitators to be supported by participants in the task of gathering, rearranging and tidying up the used material. Tidying up has both a practical and an educational purpose.
During this activity, the “call to action” phase takes place. In a shared and cooperative way, participants decide and program the actions to be taken in the following months in order to realise the ideas that emerged. An evaluation of the impact of the project is scheduled after 6/12 months.

During the workshop, participants always show enthusiasm, proving to be creative and cooperative. The workshop allows them to learn, to discuss, and to debate in an amusing way, and it stimulates in them the idea of local identity.

Good practice result & concrete effects
This good practice is increasing awareness of involved stakeholders who, through dialogue and building activities, understand each other's necessities and different generations' needs. Moreover, they realise what can be done to make citizens more and more active in their own specific context (in particular, participants between the ages of 18 to 29).

Results are related to contacts that are made and maintained among individuals and categories that would hardly have the possibility of a so close dialogue. Sitting at the same table, young people, policymakers, public administration employees, teachers or Youth Workers understand how the well-being of their territory comes from a synergic work, and after this workshop, they use more non-formal channels in order to collaborate and work together as a team.

An active citizenship manifesto has been edited, and it will be brought into 5 local high schools in 2024, in the occasion of elections. Over 50 workshops have taken place in the area of Biella and Novara over the last 5 years, they have involved more than 500 participants among students, young people aged 13 to 29 years old and over 30 organizations such as schools, and Local Authorities.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work
Youth workers