

Givat Olga Neighborhood Center Project

GIVAT OLGA NEIGHBORHOOD – BACKGROUND

Givat Olga is a neighborhood in the city of Hedera in Israel. Despite the advantages of the neighborhood's location – near the sea and a nature reserve, the neighborhood is defined as a poor socio-economic neighborhood. Givat Olga is rundown and has a poor image.

Givat Olga was founded in the fifties by new immigrants from North Africa. In the seventies and nineties new immigrants from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia were settled in this neighborhood.

Today there are approximately 11,000 residents in Givat Olga, 30% of whom are new immigrants, 30% children under the age 17, and 17% senior citizens - most of whom need economic and social aid and support.

In the center of the neighborhood at the heart of a residential and commercial area is a neglected and poorly developed site of approximately 25 acres. The development of a neighborhood center at this site will strengthen the neighborhood, improve its resident's quality of life and contribute to a positive image for the neighborhood.



THE CHALLENGE

Renewing this neglected neighborhood center fits with MIU's objectives: strengthening city centers and neighborhoods with public participation in the planning process.

The challenge of this project is to give the residents knowledge and responsibility by means of a mutual planning process to revitalize the center of their neighborhood.

The idea is to rebuild this neglected site, make it the center of the community life, and, through a mutual work process bring about a change in the attitude of the residents to their space and the environment in which they live and to take responsibility in other areas of their lives.



THE CHANGE WE WANT TO BRING ABOUT

We suggest a different way of planning built urban sites - with public participation. A way in which all participants have equal influence and the resulting plan is feasible, benefits everyone and has them take urban and social responsibility for the outcome.

In the conventional planning process in Israel, especially the neighborhoods in which weak and poor populations live, the local authority plans and builds without resident participation and sometimes with other interests in mind. The probability of a project to succeed, when the local authority makes the decisions and imposes a plan on the residents, is very low. In the existing planning process, the "beneficiaries" – the residents – do not participate in the planning process do not care what happens and have no interest in maintaining their neighborhood and caring for it. This system is one sided, one-dimensional, does not reflect the desires of all sides and does not take into account additional parameters such as the habits of the residents, culture, religion and other real day to day needs. The

planners and executors do not ask for or take interest in the residents' opinions and needs. Experience accumulated in Israel and the world shows that in the end, projects built this way failed and did not achieve their objectives.

We believe that urban planning with public participation is the way to achieve a lively and active neighborhood center. The way the residents will feel responsible for their environment and lives is by participating in their spare time with a feeling of responsibility and purpose. Through this process, it is possible to change the attitude of the residents and interested parties towards their living space. The process is not only a physical planning process but has an educative element in giving and taking responsibility.

The immediate and direct result of the project suggested by us - revitalizing the neighborhood center in Givat Olga - is as important as the long-term results.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

General

At the center of the neighborhood of Givat Olga is a neglected and poorly developed area of approximately 25 acres. Residences and commerce surround this site. This area is an affliction and inhibits the development of a neighborhood center that can strengthen the neighborhood and give it a positive image. This area contains three synagogues, low-level industry: welding workshop, freezing works and warehouses.

Vision and Purpose

- Turn this neglected site into a lively multi-purpose neighborhood center combining commercial, residential and public buildings and a neighborhood park. This will improve the image and environment of the neighborhood and make it a pleasant place to live, work and play.
- By means of a planning process with public participation, we strive to raise the participant's awareness to quality of life, environment and urban responsibility.
- Strengthen the relationship and trust between the municipality and neighborhood residents.

Project Stages

A dynamic planning process, with public (residents and stakeholders) participation:

- Prepare the community, establishment and public representatives to work with the residents of the neighborhood on the project.
- Identify and map the different interested parties relevant to the project and enlist them to participate.
- Research the problems and potential according to the residents' way of thinking and understanding what they want and need in a neighborhood center.
- Define a common shared vision.
- Hold planning workshops with the participation of the public and establishment to develop several alternative plans for the neighborhood center and choosing the best plan in an intensive 4-day charrette.
- Implementation of the chosen plan (by a planning team) for submission to the authorities for approval before execution.

Participants

Planning team:

An architect/urban planner (head of the team), landscape architect, social worker specialist in mediation and forging consensus, traffic advisor, infrastructure consultant and an economist.

Residents and stakeholders:

Representatives of: businesses in the area, residents of the neighborhood, land owners and the general public.

Local Authority:

Social workers from the municipality, the municipal engineer, a representative of the city council.

CHANGES WE SEEK TO GAIN

1. The influence of the project on the neighborhood and it's residents:
 - A neighborhood center that is active and lively for the benefit of all the residents and businesses in the center.
 - The change in the center will revitalize the neighborhood and the community and give a positive image to the neighborhood.
2. The influence of the project on other neighborhoods in the city:
 - The success of the project will spur other neighborhoods to revitalize their own neighborhoods in the same way (with public participation).
3. Change in outlook and acceptance of responsibility
 - Participants of the project will learn to take responsibility for their environment (natural and built).
 - Creating a process which builds trust between residents of the neighborhood and the local authorities and understanding that in a process of participation and cooperation you get results that could not be reached in current decision making and planning processes.
4. Change at a National Level:
 - We expect this project, along with other activities, to help change the existing system and procedures for urban planning in Israel. This project will help put public participation as a **position** in urban planning.

CRITERIA TO EVALUATE ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS

- The extent of public and stakeholders participation in the process.
- The regularity with which the representatives of the different sectors came to the work group meetings.
- The willingness of the municipality to continue the project to implementation of the plan.
- The consent of the different interested groups to a feasible plan.
- Approval of the plan
- Execution of the plan and beginning of actual building.

