Design Thinking and Participation in the Smart City

Although there are different definitions of the Smart City approach, this course focused on the role played by citizen participation in the co-production of the cities of the future.

Four projects with four very different challenges and participation stages were covered using the Design Thinking method.

The objective of this method is to develop innovative products focused on the user through an interactive process, including interviews to inform and capture information that is not found otherwise, creation of personas as a model citizen that is being targeted, the generation of prototypes based on the behavior of the society that is being analyzed and constant tests to continue shaping the solution.

This allowed a deep understanding of the different needs of the stakeholders in order to develop participation solutions adapted to the unique characteristics and challenges of each of the projects.

To ensure the viability of the solutions and to organize the final work, we used the business model canvas.

This business model, which is divided into customers, key activities, partners, values propositions and costs, helped us to identify the various components necessary for each project for a successful implementation of each one.

The Alte Mälzerei was a former brewery and malt warehouse. It will be converted into a multipurpose space with special emphasis on cultural activities. In its surroundings, it is also planned a new housing project. There are different stakeholders cooperating in this project.

The project “Gemeinschaftswohnen im Wedding” is currently being constructed and is located in Lyanestrasse, right next to the S-Bahnhof Wedding. It will consist of three largely wooden, connected buildings with shared apartments and open community spaces.

The project is going to be built after the closure of Tegel airport, that is why there are currently no potential future residents who could be involved on the participation process. Besides, Gardenfeld as an island, what means it has no physical connection to its neighbours. For this reason, people from Haselhorst, Alt-Tegel, Wasserstadt-Spandau and Siemensstadt do not really know something about Gardenfeld project.

The Alte Mälzerei is an offline platform located in nearby stores around Gartenfeld’s surrounding neighborhoods where people can exchange ideas, test, and present ideas to the Jury. There is a need for a more structured way to engage for the future residents, as since construction began there has been an abrupt drop in engagement. The neighbors’ main concern is to be properly informed about the project and to get to know their new neighbors, while the residents want to engage with each other before they move in and ensure their new neighbors have a positive perception of them.

The location of the building at the former border area and a lack of identity in this socially heterogeneous and calm Kiez makes it hard for people to feel attached to the building. BUWOG said it would like to have the residents of the neighborhood as ambassadors for their project, but this plan does not work out without people getting really involved. In addition, most things had already been decided and construction works have already started, which makes real participation very hard to realize.

The new Gardenfeld

The Gardenfeld project areas is located in the northwest of Berlin, on the edge of the district Spandau near Haselhorst and Siemensstadt. Tegel Airport - which is still in operation is located nearby. The island was an industrial area of Siemens and Fören until 2002, and now there remains historic buildings protection that are going to be used for the new project.

The Gardenfeld project is going to be built after the closure of Tegel airport, that is why there are currently no potential future residents who could be involved on the participation process. Besides, Gardenfeld as an island, what means it has no physical connection to its neighbours. For this reason, people from Haselhorst, Alt-Tegel, Wasserstadt-Spandau and Siemensstadt do not really know something about Gardenfeld project.

The participation process in this project is not heterogeneous enough to be representative of the inhabitants of the district. In particular, citizens who are not involved in local initiatives do not actively participate, and the participants mostly have fairly homogeneous sociodemographic characteristics. Our main challenge is: to revert these conceptions about participation, to make broader the current participation process and to sustain it for different future public issues in Lichterrade.

A general lack of sufficient information leads to negative misconceptions among neighbors. In addition, there is a need for a more structured way to engage for the future residents, as since construction began there has been a dramatic drop in engagement. The neighbors’ main concern is therefore to be properly informed about the project and to get to know their new neighbors, while the residents want to engage with each other before they move in and ensure their new neighbors have a positive perception of them.

The Lichterrade

The Lichterrade radar is a mobile, modular and flexible box-system with different interests.

The new Kiez Collage will have a series of workshops, which seek to inform, train and reach an agreement on what is needed and desired in those spaces the project will have.

The Kiez Collage will have a series of workshops, which seek to inform, train and reach an agreement on what is needed and desired in those spaces the project will have.

Bridging the Engagement Gap in Community Living

The solution for the residents will consist of one event at the end of the development phase, serving as instruction for the residents to plan a “neighborhood housewarming party”, and one at the end of the construction phase, which is the housewarming event itself.

The central tools for bridging this engagement gap are participation guidelines provided by the cooperative as well as nebenab.de - a neighborhood social network - to plan the event.

The neighbors on the other hand will be informed of the project and any events through posters on the building fence as well as through open nebenab.de events.

The new Neukölln

The Geyer Werke in Neukölln are an old movie studio that still has an important role in the German film industry and history. The private developer BUWOG wants to build around 250 flats and two courtyards open for the public here.

The main challenge is: to revert these conceptions about participation, to make broader the current participation process and to sustain it for different future public issues in Lichterrade.

The planned solutions

The Kiez Collage:

Integrates peoples identity to the community spaces.

The goal is to collect different ideas and wishes for the courthouse and the Kiez and to take a step from temporary use to long term urban Co-Designing of the courtyard. The Jury makes sure that it is a fair competition and that the winning proposition will be realized.

The Lichterrade radar:

A mobile, modular and flexible box-system with information and data collection for projects of public interest in Lichterrade.

It also has boxes for exchanging books and records, and games for small children to engage people with different interests.

The mobile character of the proposal allows it to be arranged in different spaces in which people usually spend time, such as the train station (S-Bahnhof Lichterrade), the library, the “Bürgersamt”, etc.

Each module is associated with a particular actor who must take care of the content. Conveniently the Lichterrade radar is adaptable to other projects of public interest at any given time.

The Geyer Werke in Neukölln are an old movie studio that still has an important role in the German film industry and history. The private developer BUWOG wants to build around 250 flats and two courtyards open for the public here. At the same time they want to preserve the historic parts and offices of the building.

The method of Design Thinking