Starting up communities in housing spaces

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Abstract

The service presented consists of an enabling system called the "Community Start-up Process" which is made up of a guided process together with various tools (such as a web platform, "social" cards, and "design/generation" cards). The service is aimed at assisting groups of residents involved in collaborative social housing projects to manage and design spaces and services.

KEYWORDS: housing, community, shared spaces

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Description of the service: what it offers, who offers it, to whom it is addressed, what needs it solves.

Fondazione Housing Sociale (the "Fondazione" or "FHS") was founded for the purpose of developing Fondazione Cariplo's "Social Housing" project. This was aimed at implementing real-estate projects of a social nature, experimenting with new approaches for intervention, with integrated design of the architectural, financial and social aspects involved. The idea behind this was to create a platform to raise the awareness and availability of social housing in Italy and to make this type of intervention systematic and therefore more virtuous. Social housing in Italy had, up until then, been rather random and sporadic.
In carrying out its mission, FHS absolutely intends to promote the creation of living and social contexts in which the inhabitants are directly and responsibly involved, supported by an appropriate network of services.
Social Housing is an integrated program of interventions that includes the offer of accommodation, services, activities and tools aimed at those who cannot satisfy their personal housing needs on the market, for financial reasons or because there are no suitable solutions available.
The scope of Social Housing is to improve and strengthen the living conditions of these people through the creation of a quality residential context in which it is possible not only to get access to an affordable home but also to actively participate in the experimentation with

new or reinvented forms of living in which the residents themselves are called upon to construct a sustainable community.

The methodology described here has been developed within a private social housing project while it was underway and implemented through a Sistema Integrato di Fondi (SiF – Integrated Fund System) managed by CDPI sgr. The System operates through FIA (Investment Fund for Housing) which invests in 32 local funds distributed throughout Italy. The accommodation proposals offered by this project include affordable accommodation, primarily for lease, and shared communal spaces. The aim of the program is to create 20,000 new homes by the end of 2019, of which around 6,000 have already been built or are in the process of being built. The FIA has € 2.028 Bn of available funding, all of which has already been allocated.

With respect to public sector residential accommodation, which necessarily is built with public money, the social housing developed by FIA is characterised by its use of private capital in partnership with public funds.

Service structure: the actors involved in the system and the role of the different actors involved

The actors involved in the community start-up process are: the residents and the social manager (in all the collaborative social housing projects there is a social manager whose role is to take care of all matters relating to the residents and the buildings).

How it was designed: by whom, how and in how much time
How and why the case fits into the theme of the track and why it is a proof or concept for a given approach or solution

To spread and facilitate such initiatives in the residential environment as well, it is necessary to equip individuals and groups to be able to build their own neighbourhoods by making relevant platforms available to them.

Offering relevant platforms means making the following elements available: tools to facilitate organization and communication, spaces (other than those that are strictly residential in nature), a structured process, resources and knowledge that will speed up the process of group formation, the implementation of the services and the design of spaces.

This, therefore, is what we offer: the tenants sign up to a housing project that is based on the sharing of spaces and services aimed at optimizing the day-to-day and improving their own personal living conditions. In return, the tenants expect to receive tools and an appropriate level of organisation.

In practice, the project is structured as a "Community Start-up Process" that starts around 6 months before the first tenants move in and finishes when the residents have been living in their homes for 1 year. It is a process whose objective is to equip the tenants to plan the use of the common spaces available to them and to define the rules that will govern their use.

The methodology adopted for working with the residents is closely connected to the culture of the project: we ask them to design and manage their activities and we assist them to implement the project in a short time and with minimum effort. In order to achieve this, we have designed several tools to design and prototype the activities, a platform to manage the project and facilitate communication among the tenants, tutorials on how to efficiently perform each activity in a short time and how to structure the governance. Our intervention has the "final product" of the creation of services and the putting into practice of the ways of inhabiting the shared spaces proposed by the residents (that is, helping to give form to something that starts life as an idea emerging from a concept generation session.

The spaces that host the activities are set up by the residents, who also decide how the spaces should be equipped. These spaces are designed with a certain degree of flexibility that enables them to be used for a wide range of purposes and to be modified over time.

The ultimate objective of our activity is to make it possible to repeat an experience which, outside our project, has up until now been done casually and spontaneously; that is, to try to put into place tools which will allow us to spread and reinterpret the models that emerge from this experience and from the resulting idea of living

How the service differs from other similar solutions on the market and what the elements of innovation are.

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When the project had reached a first concrete stage through the setting up of a fund which enabled the creation of 20,000 homes throughout Italy, the planning activities concentrated on the identification of which housing model to put forward. Undertaking a project of this magnitude has brought us to the realisation that this could be the opportunity to experiment with different ways of living that would make the tenants more responsible and more independent. Among the examples we studied, both Italian and foreign, two stand out for the influence they had: cohousing and the Italian co-operative experience. Two examples that are very different from each other, but which have several key factors in common: the leading role played by the residents themselves. Co-housing is identified as a bottom-up activity, meaning it is completely driven by the residents and implemented in properties for sale, even if recent experiences have been developed also in properties for rent. The undivided-ownership cooperatives have also always adopted a model based on sharing, but with top-down governance. Our proposal is certainly more similar to cohousing in its outcomes but not in its development and management strategies
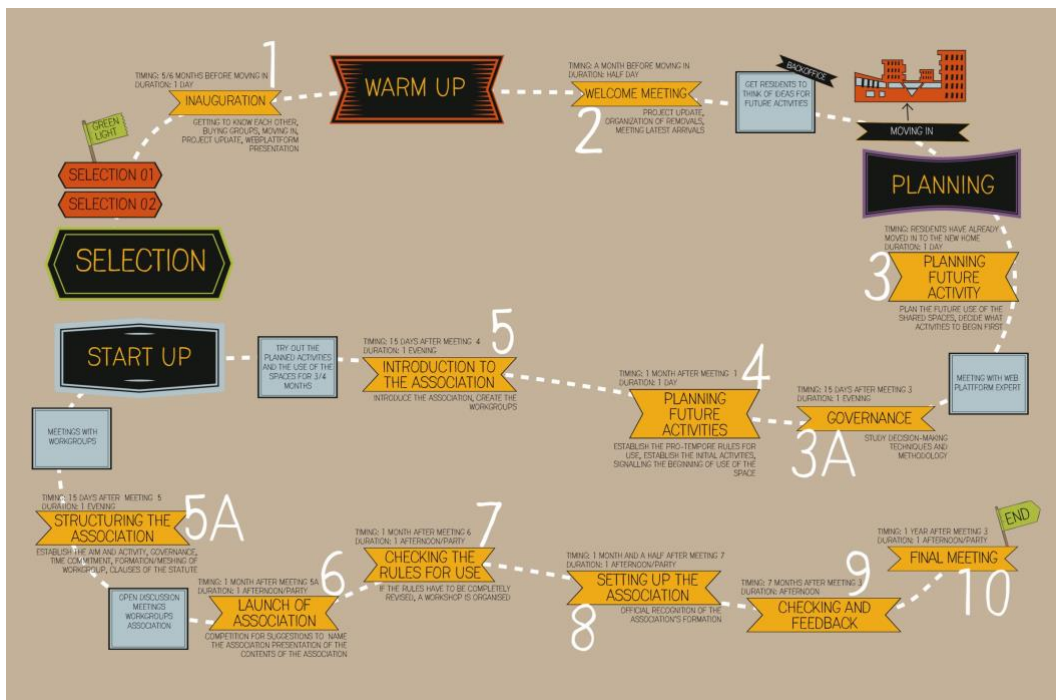
Future challenges and possible developments

These initiatives, if they work, expand: if they expand, they require increasingly higher levels of commitment, professionalism and continuity. How, therefore, can we make these initiatives efficient without losing sight of their collaborative nature?

These questions can be answered, as mentioned before, by opening up towards a wider user base. In the case of a residential project, this means visualizing the spaces and collaborative activities as being destined to a section of the neighbourhood rather than to a single building. Imagine, within your own neighbourhood, having access to self-managed functions that are - like collaborative living itself - an extension of the home but which also bring people together based on a geography that is freely-chosen rather than just physical. This is already happening spontaneously if we think about social streets and social districts that actually bring people together through their common desire to build a neighbourhood based on shared initiatives.

Title and Authors

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Guided process scheme

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