

Space of Urgency_Amsterdam

RESEARCH REPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSIGNMENT FOR FREE SPACE



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Commissioned by the departments
Bureau Broedplaatsen and Ruimte
& Duurzaamheid of the
City of Amsterdam

Summary

The City of Amsterdam commissioned the Berlin Space of Urgency to make a quick scan of the needs and obstacles of the users of the 'free space'. The results of the quick scan may lead to a more extensive analysis and recommendations for policy development.

The most important outcome in the quick scan is the condition to 'have a free space of your own'. Users of 'free spaces' want to take responsibility for the design of their surroundings themselves, mainly in a collective context, and decide for themselves how to meet their needs (living, working and living together). Users of 'free space' often feel distrusted and hampered by rules imposed from outside. There seems to be little political insight into cultural entrepreneurship - as well as into low and non-profit professional activities - as a result of which the discussion about all kinds of forms of 'free space' gets stuck in subsidy rhetoric and negative public perceptions. They feel that they are difficult or undesirable, and that there is little recognition in the political arena of the added values that 'free space users' bring in in terms of sustainability, empowerment, innovation, inclusiveness versus exclusivity, social cohesion, awareness, diversity and, above all, cooperation.

The definition of 'free space' is open to multiple interpretations. Is it a cultural sanctuary? A breeding ground? Or something else? However it is defined, there are differences in nature and duration and similarities in the degree of self-organization and external influences. Virtually all users say they have difficulty communicating with the government, especially when it comes to legislation and regulations. The existing legal and administrative instruments for facilitating and managing 'free space' are not clear to everyone. On the other hand, the government can broaden its urban planning instruments by proportionally allowing 'free spaces' in the city which are intended and developed by residents and entrepreneurs themselves in a cooperative context. After all, the city needs air.

Research findings

Creating a basis for cooperation

Recommendation 1:

Recognise the added value of free space and its users

Lay the foundation by giving more recognition as a municipality for

- the added value of free space and its users for the city
- self-organising structures arising from the need for self-determination

Recommendation 2:

Develop mutual understanding through the exploration of needs and values

For users of free space, values form the basis of organisational and decision-making structures. The next step is to create mutual understanding and bring together the different structures of municipality and users. This requires dialogue in the form of

- round tables between the municipality and users of free space
- workshops in which different perspectives are highlighted

Development by prototyping

Recommendation 3:

Building trust and exploring frameworks through pilots

Take the advice of both users of free space and civil servants for a prototype phase with free space pilots and

- jointly develop frameworks based on the pillars of space/time, trust/responsibility and values/needs
- let users submit the pilot locations themselves
- develop separate pilots for the three categories of free space
- arrange for regular evaluations to take place within a cooperative structure of users, municipality and environment

Recommendation 4:

A structure that supports cooperation between users and municipality

Users of free space in Amsterdam are particularly dissatisfied with the cooperation with the municipality. Internationally, too, in every case there is a need for improvement with a view to equal communication in collaborative structures. The positive exceptions offer the following practical solutions:

- Make the users of free space part of the development of new policy
Evaluate and decide together
- To this end, develop a participatory structure that supports the complex needs from a political, legal, administrative and user perspective
- A sustainable structure is possible through a cooperative model with equal input from users, the municipality and third parties
- Pilots are evaluated within the structure, which in turn provides advice and resources to the pilots
- The structure is at the basis of the development of new policies

Instruments

Recommendation 5: Instruments for the facilitation of physical free space

On the basis of the subdivision in the administrative assignment, the following legal and administrative instruments are likely to facilitate free space

Public space

- Extend the scope of the event notification in accordance with APV Article 2.41, whereby a distinction can be made between geographical areas

Area development

- Designate a non-commercial event site in accordance with APV art. 2.42.
- Include free space in tenders for temporary use, or grant exemption for 'free space' via a temporary zoning plan
- Include undefined areas according to a global zoning plan ("white spot plan")
- Include free space in the basic principles for area development by project developers

Municipal real estate

- Include free space in municipal policy objectives

Private real estate

- Create opportunities for free space by laying down new policy rules in accordance with Article 7 of the Vacancy Regulation

Network and knowledge exchange

Recommendation 6: Activation and building trust

In the first phase of the Free Space policy assignment, 80 existing and potential free space users were activated by means of telephone interviews, round tables, the free space survey, case studies and a pilot event

- In order to maintain the accumulated but fragile trust of the activated free space users and the transparency, we advise to continue this communication very carefully in the future
- An independent party that enjoys the trust of the free space users can provide valuable support in this respect
- Also, the Space of Urgency methodology can provide guidance during the development process in Amsterdam, towards a transparent and sustainable cooperation between socio-cultural initiatives and the municipality

Recommendation 7: International knowledge exchange

- Unforeseen challenges will regularly arise during the second phase of the Free Space policy assignment. Short lines to similar international developments are essential in order to quickly identify the do's and don'ts per situation.
- It is efficient to work with an independent platform that serves as a link between different cities, facilitates knowledge exchange and connects experts.