

Open courtyards

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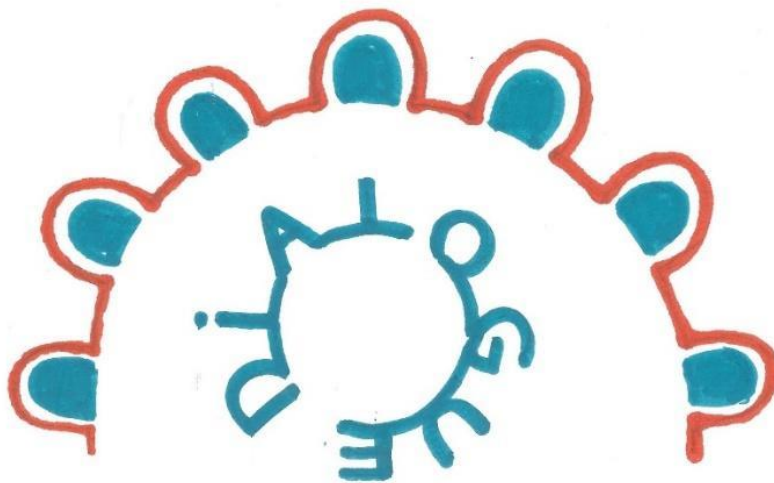


Figure 4: Open Courtyards, Source: Calarasi FvL

Description

This method tests the capacity of the Roma community living in disadvantaged areas to define topics of interest and to come together around the issues that are defined in an open, informal dialogue. The setting of the open courtyard loosely follows the current type of consultations that politicians occasionally perform in the community - they pay short visits where they ask about problems. Except that now, the hierarchy and power of that type of interaction is subverted; instead, neighbours visit each other to talk, peer to peer, about their issues and the participants will have to operate at a horizontal level. There will be a budget for snacks to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage people to sit and talk.

People are invited to discuss and collect specific local topics, urgent issues and future expectations. What is important is not just the definition of topics relevant at the grassroots level, but the creation/establishment of a host, the discovery of a new place, the creation of social bonds and an opportunity for new voices and leaders to emerge.

Since there are no authority figures attending, nor a hierarchical format to the interaction, this is an opportunity 1) to foster neighbourhood relationships by bypassing classical power structures or the consultation convention (where everybody represents their individual interests) and 2) new voices can emerge who did not have access to public or formal fora beforehand.

At an open courtyard session, the participants need to produce a list of issues (5-10) that matter to a diversity of community members. Mediators will help identify a set of common problems to everyone, and a set of group-specific issues. Some key phenomena or overarching problems will be distilled. The first host will act as an informal rapporteur, and together with the facilitators will write down the key problems collected through the day. Additional facilitation exercises may be carried out at the meeting in order to make space for a variety of themes.

In each of the five communities (Oborul Nou, Livada, 2 Moldoveni, 5 Calarasi, Magureni) we will conduct a minimum of two open courtyard sessions, and the host will change. The first session will be supported by facilitators, but the second session may be organised and conducted by the local community alone, and the host will report new findings to the facilitators. The reason for this is to give them ownership and freedom over the participation process, without it being seen as a researcher-owned project. Repetition also gives an opportunity for new people to attend, and for consistent findings to emerge. By the end of the two open courtyard sessions, each community should have identified a long and a short list of specific issues, and three people who will represent them in the visits with other marginalized communities, described in method-card "Cross Deliberation". It is important to stress that the three representatives will be as diverse as possible in terms of gender, age, and previous experience interacting with local public authorities.

There are numerous challenges to overcome in the preparation of the meetings, and that is part of the exercise, not only finding the host and ensuring gender balance, but also securing a proper place, and this will be a particular challenge for the overcrowded social blocks of flats, but also an opportunity to discuss the need for a community room. The preferred time might be in the morning, unlike in typical middle-class communities where evening is the time of choice, in poverty areas noon is the best time of the day because it creates an opportunity to offer food and to avoid the presence of intoxicated people.

One challenge might be that neighbors would feel a sense of competition towards the hosts. However, this can also be seen as a potential advantage, because they might be motivated to become a host themselves and the micro-intervention would multiply by imitation.

Tags/ keywords: Method, deliberation, internal dialogue, empowerment, information, technical knowledge.

Who can use this method/ be involved?

Local emerging NGO's.

Resources and materials required

Sound recording device, video recording device, notebook, flipchart, car, cookies, water.

Tips/ What to pay attention to

- Hygiene, unwelcomed guests.
- Raising unrealistic expectations.

Example of use

<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1049696>