

Teaching Unit 12: Voices from the Ground – Community-led Urbanism and the Struggle for Integration

Key question(s)

What does an ideal civic-public partnership look like from the perspective of community initiatives? How can they be empowered and recognized? What is the evolving role of the municipality?

Overview

This unit examines civic-public partnerships from the perspective of grassroots initiatives, urban commons, and community-driven action. Civic actors often emerge as critical agents of urban transformation in contexts of institutional inertia, spatial injustice, or environmental degradation. Students will investigate how grassroots initiatives articulate their demands, develop spatial tactics, and negotiate with public authorities. The goal is to understand how bottom-up actors conceptualize ideal partnerships and how municipalities can be transformed into more open and responsive institutions.

Through critical urban theory, case-based exploration, and applied exercises, students will explore how community initiatives sustain their autonomy, build legitimacy, and navigate complex power dynamics in urban governance. Emphasis is placed on storytelling, collaborative tools, and stakeholder mapping to envision inclusive, democratic planning processes.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the motivations, practices, and claims of civic initiatives
- Identify the tools and strategies communities use to influence urban transformation
- Explore tensions in civic-public relationships (recognition, co-optation, autonomy)
- Design tools and tactics for strengthening civic agency in public processes

Teaching Methods

- Storytelling and audiovisual narratives of grassroots struggles
- Stakeholder power mapping and spatial justice analysis
- Hackathon: “Design a civic engagement toolkit”
- Participatory mapping of community needs and spatial claims
- Dialogues with local activists and NGO representatives
- Role-playing negotiations with institutional actors

Keywords: grassroots initiatives, right to the city, civic activism, spatial justice, participatory urbanism

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