

Designing with Children

Spacemakers

What began as an educational project initiated by the Architecture Centre in Bristol, The SPACEmakers Project resulted in a successfully completed new public area. Over a two year period, the project actively involved 16 children in all design stages, from the first steps right until the realisation of a public open space in the Hartcliffe and Withywood area of Bristol. From September 2002 to November 2004, 16 (later 10) young people, aged 13-15 years old, were chosen from a range of backgrounds within the Hartcliffe and Withywood local community to form a group called Spacemakers.

Motivation

The main initiator of the project, the Architecture Centre Bristol, listed the three key objectives of the Spacemakers project as: *'to involve disenfranchised youth in shaping their environment; to create a sense of ownership, and develop feelings of community; and to improve the young people's feelings of self-worth and career prospects'* (The Architecture Centre Bristol).

Children's involvement

The group of youngsters first went through an educational training process learning about the issues related to design and open spaces. This included several UK visits and one international site visit to set up a benchmark of ideas around what children wanted in their own public space. As part of their analysis, the group also talked to local residents and park users to find out how they liked to use public open areas. With their framework of ideas in mind, the Spacemakers team visited potential sites and analysed them with the help of local artists. Through the process of evaluation, a final site was selected for realisation of their own project.

What

A new public space at Wilmott Park, Bristol

Where

Bristol, United Kingdom

Age

13-15

Group Size

16 (later 10)

Project Stage

Brief, Concept, Construction, Design Development, In Use, Technical Design

Children's Roles

(Co) Designers, Clients

Timescale

September 2002–November 2004

Partners

Greg White, Loci Design (Landscape architect)
Kathrin Boehm, Public works Group (Artist)
Cleo Broda (Artist)
The Architecture Centre Bristol (Initiator)
The Glasshouse Trust (Partner)
Bristol City Council (Partner)
Hartcliffe Community Campus (Partner)
Mark Rooney (Project manager)
Mike Snow and Claire Warren, Withywood Secondary School mentors (Facilitation)
Paul Spatchurch, Hareclive youth centre youth worker (Facilitation)
Young people from the Hartcliffe and Withywood local community (Participants)

The young Spacemakers also came up with their own set of criteria to choose a landscape designer. Out of 17 practices that responded to their advert, Greg White of Loci Design was invited to work with the group on the project. The three month interaction between the designer and the young people generated ideas in the form of wish lists, plasticine models and sketches. As they have described it, Greg White would go off to his office after every workshop with the Spacemakers and come up with a proposal for the following meeting, which was then discussed further with the young people. By the end of the process the group arrived at a proposal that everyone agreed upon. The children also observed the construction process on site.

Outputs and outcomes

The final output of the process was a public space, popular with the local people of all ages. The personal development of the involved youth was evaluated as significant. The team developed a close relationship with Bristol City Council, who generously took over the maintenance of the park, which was underestimated by the original project budget.

Resources

Austin, A 'The Spacemakers Project. Young People Designing a Public Space'
http://aprb.co.uk/docs/finaldraftspacemakers1_0.pdf (accessed 3 December 2013).

Creating Excellence for better places and communities 'Spacemakers'
<http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/regeneration-renewal-article76-p1.html> (accessed 19 March 2013).

Engaging Places 'Young Spacemakers' <http://www.engagingplaces.org.uk/news/art72698>
(accessed 17 October 2013).

Regional Policy European Union United Kingdom (SOUTH WEST, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & North Somerset. Youth involvement and action: The Spacemakers project
<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=8&ved=0CGAQFjAH&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fream0QWMuoH4Ag&usq=AFQjCNHWHNCOcDxlb7LY6IRF4SOTXMkXYq&sig2=qQyl-fx-Qs0-H9nLJJbZw&bvm=bv.44158598,d.d2k> (accessed 4 December 2013).

The National Archives 'SPACEmakers, Hartcliffe, Bristol'
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/case-studies/spacemakers/evaluation> (accessed 19 March 2013).

The Architecture Centre Bristol 'The Spacemakers project'
http://www.architecturecentre.net/docs/content/bristol_spacemakers_project_case_study.pdf
(accessed 19 March 2013).





Courtesy: Greg White



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