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# Suburban regeneration through Capacity Building

Two case-studies from France (Périgueux) and Denmark (Viby)

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## ABSTRACT

Across Europe many suburban areas strive to boost their vitality through intensification of uses and densification of their vast existing urban fabric. Urban participatory practitioners working from external positions to urban administrations can play a vital role by introducing new co-creative formats for collaboration between public and private actors. Drawing on theories of capacity building and participatory planning this article explores two case-studies from France and Denmark. Through two models of action led by two different urban participatory practitioners we investigate capacity building as long-term and multilevel processes that are structured through different phases and processual goals: (1) To Mobilize: How to create a group of action. (2) To Involve: How to work together in the same direction (3) To Flow: How to anchor the process. The juxtapositioned cases then establish a nuanced perspective on interdisciplinary approaches of urban practitioners and their implications for capacity building in a suburban context.

KEYWORDS: Capacity building, suburban regeneration, participatory planning, urban participatory practitioners

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on how suburban regeneration can be met through Capacity Building (CB) processes, which encourage public and private actors to work jointly. Knowing that within collaborative and participatory stances of urban planning CB has been recognized as a useful approach for practitioners (Healey 1998; Fischer 2012; Moulaert et al 2013; Innes & Booher 2018; Agger & Sørensen 2018; Polk 2011), this research explores its possibilities of application in the specific case of suburban towns. The paper is based on two case-studies in Denmark and France, chosen to illustrate different key challenges and approaches in a European context<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The case-studies were part of the research project CAPA.CITY involving partners from three universities and three smaller enterprises of urban participatory practitioners in Belgium, Denmark and France. Focusing on the retrofitting of existing suburban

The French case is located in Périgueux<sup>5</sup>, a typical example of a suburban town whose core is emptying while its outskirts are expanding due to a lack of available buildable land within city boundaries. In this context, Lab InVivo<sup>6</sup> with the Faculty of Architecture of Marseille works with the City of Périgueux and focuses on a first leverage: regeneration through the densification of private plots. In this case, the homeowners' engagement is considered as a starting point in order to elaborate a model of action in private space.

The Danish case is located in Viby<sup>7</sup> and is characteristic of dormitory satellite towns. Here, the planning goal of attracting new residents are challenged by a decrease of commercial and cultural functions of the town centre. In this context, the University of Roskilde with the NGO GivRum<sup>8</sup> focuses on a second leverage: regeneration through the intensification of public spaces. The community engagement is here considered as a starting point, in order to elaborate another model of action in public space.

The cases provide an interdisciplinary perspective on how to make more out of suburban landscapes in Europe and how different local resources and interests can be mobilized, in order to counteract urban decline and sprawl. The aim of this paper is to shed light on two action models experimented with in private and public space to be implemented for the regeneration of suburban areas.

In this perspective, the first part of the paper outlines challenges for suburban towns and demonstrates theoretically and methodologically why CB might be a forceful response for their regeneration. In this, the critical role of urban participatory practitioners as intermediaries between inhabitants and planning authorities is elaborated. Secondly, the two cases will be analysed, to understand how urban participatory practitioners, such as Lab InVivo and NGO GivRum, introduce approaches that support CB processes in suburban towns. The analysis of the two radically different cases will point to more general suggestions for how CB processes can be organized to meet suburban challenges, through the building of collective capabilities between public institutions, private owners and inhabitants, to professionals, NGO's and associations.

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towns, the CAPA.CITY project has aimed to develop a theoretical and operational framework for participatory processes. So, it has explored location-based experimental learning methods in six suburban areas. For more information, see: <https://www.capa-city-ensuf.eu>

<sup>5</sup> Périgueux is a town of 30.000 inhabitants located in the South West of France 140 km East of Bordeaux. The urban area of Périgueux has been gaining inhabitants since the beginning of the 2000s while the city itself has been losing inhabitants for the last 30 years.

<sup>6</sup> Lab InVivo is the department Research and Development of the French urban start-up Villes Vivantes. It is made up of a multidisciplinary team of architects, urban planners, legal experts).

<sup>7</sup> Viby Sjælland is a railway town with around 4650 inhabitants and is located in the southern part of the municipality of Roskilde, Eastern Denmark. Distance to Copenhagen: 50 km. The railway station has been the main motivator for a considerable urban expansion with the zoning of many new residential subdivisions in the 1960's and 1970's. In recent decades the population growth has been weak while the urban amenities have declined.

<sup>8</sup> GivRum is a non-profit organization committed to democratic and participatory processes for user driven development of urban life. Its transdisciplinary team of urban activists facilitates processes connecting the public and private sectors with civil society.

## **2. Capacity Building as a forceful response to the challenges of suburban towns?**

### **2.1 The suburbs: between decline and attractiveness**

Historically, residential subdivisions have mostly been driven and managed by private initiatives (Fischel 2003; McKenzie 2006; Phelps & Wu 2011; Vanier 2011; Dragsbo 2008). As a result, these areas have grown haphazardly, depending on land tenure opportunities and causing structural problems such as waste and artificialization of ground, high cost of infrastructures and networks and excessive use of motorized travel (Charmes 2013; Kvorning et al 2012; Van de Weijer & Van Cleempoel 2015; Deilmann et al. 2016). These contemporary challenges are non-exhaustive but characteristic of the decline of suburban areas and communities. They underpin numerous questions dealing with the prospect of the existing physical structure of suburban towns. What happen when demographics don't sustain infrastructures such as buildings, public spaces, roads, railways anymore? How to keep improving urban and suburban living conditions?

In recent decades, planning policies in France<sup>9</sup> and Denmark<sup>10</sup> have been put in place to counteract these effects (Serre et al 2019). They aim at revitalizing suburban cores, attracting new populations and densifying existing residential subdivisions. In this perspective, revitalization and regeneration policies deal with building typology, housing quality, public spaces and their qualities in terms of uses and sense of community.

Despite these policies, many suburban areas and middle-sized towns keep losing urban functions and experiencing a decline in job opportunities, commercial life and services (Davezies et al 2013; Guilly 2014; Razemon 2016; MBLL 2013). The Viby case is characteristic of this challenge, which consists in coping with the lack of activity. Indeed, because of the low-density structure of residential subdivisions towns such as Viby, it has shown increasingly difficult to foster a critical mass to sustain the nearby access to schools, day care services, retail life and public transport. As a consequence, residential subdivisions risk to get increasingly isolated and thus car dependency has grown (Dodier 2013; Groth & Fertner 2013; Hanlon & Vicino 2019).

However, as the single-family house has been a driving force of suburbanization and remains attractive, new buildable land to satisfy demographic needs and growth around major cities

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<sup>9</sup> In France, laws and urban strategies have recently focused on these challenges. The law ALUR (2014), which means "law for access to housing and the renewal of urbanism", encourages "to build the city on the city", especially by densifying existing residential subdivisions (Touati & alii., 2015). And, more recently, the so-called "Action Cœur de Ville" (2018) urban strategy, which means "city core action", aims at revitalizing the very center of 222 French suburban towns.

<sup>10</sup> In Denmark, policies on suburban expansion have been more strict and special zoning regulation have worked to prevent uncontrolled urban growth. See Fingerplan 2019. However, there has been a special concern for the future vitality of suburban centers, which is most notably expressed in the 2011-2015 national initiative Forstædernes Tænketaank (Think tank on suburbs) led by Realdania and the Ministry of Environment

becomes a scarce resource (Harris & Lehrer 2018; European Environment Agency 2016). Moreover, due to rising prices in the real estate market, it has become more expensive for first-time buyers to purchase their own houses and they are therefore forced to look for dwellings with greater distances between home, work and leisure activities (Lambert 2015; Kristensen 2007), contributing to increasing the average age of the inhabitants living in residential subdivisions. The Périgueux case is particularly representative of this issue. In a bleak perspective, this trend of aging demographics may put pressure on local economy and lead to decline and failure to accommodate the housing stock to changing everyday needs of younger inhabitants, affecting a narrow down in urban functions and services.

These two issues — lack of activities and lack of land — underpin concerns for intensification of uses and densification of spaces, which are linked. Densification — understood as a process of construction of new buildings — can contribute to increasing uses and functions of a neighbourhood. Conversely, intensification — understood as the diversification of uses and social interactions — can renew the attractiveness of a neighbourhood and lead to its densification (Charmes & Keil 2015, Hesse & Siedentop 2018). This paper undertakes to question these two challenges by exploring new methods based on the involvement of local actors. CB processes will be analysed and put to a test: how can they be leverages of action for public and private actors to engage and transform jointly suburban towns?

## **2.2 Capacity Building: from NGOs to urban regeneration in suburban towns**

Originally from the NGOs world, capacity building (CB) is defined by mutual learning processes, in which collective capacities are built between a variety of stakeholders. In the NGOs world, Baser and Morgan defines capacity as *“the overall ability of an organization or a system to create public value”* (Baser and Morgan 2008:34).

Within urban planning a similar concern on CB for collective action has been pointed as a mean to address the shortcomings of traditional top-down spatial planning (Albrechts 2004; Cars et al 2002; Fischer 2012). Since the 1990's, community CB has been the target of policies in countries such as UK and Denmark that aimed at regenerating deprived neighbourhoods and fighting social exclusion (Craig 2007; Fallov 2010; Wolf-Powers 2014) as well as addressing issues of urban revitalization more broadly. This has led to a wide range of experiments with new forms of collaboration, learning and problem-solving among public, private and community actors (Cornwall, 2004; Moulaert et al, 2013; Agger & Jensen, 2015; Nyseth et al, 2018).

However, so far, this collaborative and participatory turn has had little impact in suburban towns and their residential subdivisions. Due to the large share of private ownership and private actions, experiments of participatory processes have not been explored much or often failed (Ekers et al.,

2012; Touati & Crozy, 2015). Yet, CB opens perspectives to explore and raises the question of how these processes can be organized to tackle the challenges of suburban towns.

Following Baser and Morgan and the literature on participatory planning, we in this article understand CB processes as long-term and multilevel processes where experimental approaches of mobilization are linked with careful attention to facilitation and organization and their wider embedment in overall development and planning strategies.

Research on participatory processes has shed light on different ways in which planning practices needs to be reconfigured when promoting CB processes (Nyseth et al 2018, Agger & Sørensen 2018; Sehested 2009). In this context, methodologies in planning processes are decisive in how deliberate opportunities are framed (Forester 1999). The organization of dialogue is vital for bringing knowledge into action in complex urban settings (Innes and Booher 2018). This raises a number of important challenges that we are going to address in this article: (1) How to mobilize and engage actors that do not necessarily have a lot in common in a specific issue? (2) How to enact collaboration around a shared vision and stimulate a collective learning process among divergent interests? (3) How the process can be anchored and lead to self-organization around new practices?

These challenges are not only posed to planners working in urban administrations. The question of supporting socially innovative processes is also a central concern for *participative urban practitioners, urban professional intermediaries or spatial professionals* (Kaethler et al 2017) that from an external position are introducing co-creative formats for planning and organization of spatial agendas around alternative publics (Larsen & Brandt 2018; De Blust et al 2019; Toft-Jensen & Andersen 2012; Biau et al 2013). In the following cases, Lab InVivo and the NGO GivRum are typical examples of these participative urban practitioners. They constitute an interdisciplinary field and draw competences from architecture and design, urban activism, action research, social sciences and critical pedagogy. They often develop their practices through a close connection to participatory and interactive research (Frandsen and Andersen, 2019; Kaethler et al 2017; Biau et al 2013).

### **2.3 Theoretical contributions and methodological keys to the action-research processes**

Concerning the first challenge — *How to mobilize and engage actors that do not necessarily have a lot in common in a specific issue?* — as the aim of working in a co-creative approach is to destabilize status quo, urban participatory practitioners often address this question by engaging in experimental design-processes as catalysts for social interactions and building of relations (Kaethler et al 2018; Frandsen 2017; Biau et al 2013). According to this, in both cases, researchers and urban practitioners developed approaches which imply learning about values, meanings, feelings, relations and questions of power as a way of opening up the field for new perspectives and

alternative futures. In Viby, an open-ended experimental process of collaboration has been favoured to explore possibilities for participatory practices and leave options open for participants to influence the articulation of the issue. In Périgueux, in order to motivate and engage homeowners' interest, the starting point for the co-design process was *experiences and problematic situations that citizens are familiar with in their everyday life* (Vigneron & al., 2018). These are starting points that have also been noted by Frandsen and Petersen (2014) as particularly relevant to engage local communities when third parts are involved.

The second question — *How to enact collaboration around a shared vision and stimulate a collective learning process among divergent interests?* — concerns how a successful mobilisation is channelled into long-lasting collaborative relationships. Forester emphasizes the importance of skilful mediators that despite conflicting interests among different local actors are able to bring them together to discover common fields of concern. Instead of focusing on apparent conflicts such processes should focus on relations of interdependence (Forester 1999, 2012). That is, the less articulated values and interests around which action can be organized. Following Forester, researchers and urban practitioners in Viby and Périgueux directed attention to strategies and actions to form a deliberative dialogue that motivate participants to learn from each other while recognizing initial problem frameworks.

Lastly the question — *how the participatory process can be anchored and lead to self-organization around new practices?* — directly refers to the aim of CB to foster social bonds and conditions for citizens to address issues collectively on a more permanent basis. It refers to their ability to relate and attract resources (Baser & Morgan 2008). The goal of the participatory process is to build alliances that focus on reconfiguration of existing social-material setups (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017). If successfully achieved, the professional facilitators are no longer needed. Instead a self-governing network of actors established through the CB process defines and carries out actions. However, as Seravalli et al (2017) illustrated, professional facilitators have a vital role in driving the process towards robust self-organization will be shown.

The following part will describe and analyse the two experiments led in a CB perspective. In both cases, cities were willing to explore new ways to address suburban challenges and have initiated collaborations with researchers and urban practitioners helping them to open new perspectives to trigger these processes. Both experiments are dealing with existing resources. In Périgueux, the model of action in private space will be developed. For this, private homeowners are identified as key actors for the regeneration strategy: it will be shown how they can contribute to a soft densification process in order to unleash the housing market. In Viby, the model of action in public space will be developed. In this perspective, citizen associations and local actors have been pinpointed as key actors to reactivate public space and thereby support planning goals of attracting new residents through housing projects.

### 3. Materials and methods

The two case-studies of capacity building experiments in France and Denmark provide the empirical foundation for this study. The authors of this article have been involved in organizing, carrying out and evaluating the experiments and either had the primary role of being practitioner introducing methods to the process or researcher collaborating closely with the practitioners.

#### 3.1 Lab InVivo and NGO GivRum, two urban participative practitioners

As previously mentioned, this research is based on a partnership between researchers and urban practitioners: the faculty of architecture of Marseille works with Lab InVivo in Périgueux and the University of Roskilde works with NGO GivRum in Viby. This partnership aims to cross theory and practice, in order to develop and test action models for the regeneration of suburbs, replicable in other European areas.

Lab InVivo is the research and development department of an urban planning start-up called Villes Vivantes<sup>11</sup>. It develops contemporary planning tools and, more specifically, tests the BIMBY (“Build In My Back Yard”) approach in Périgueux. The BIMBY process emanates from a research project carried on between 2009 and 2012 and is currently developed as an open source initiative aiming to soft densification, through designing, building and collectively organizing a new supply chain for housing production within existing neighbourhoods. The City of Périgueux was interested in this tool because of their need to build housing, undermined by the lack of land. Thus, the City Council formed a contract with Lab InVivo which mission is to evaluate the densification potential, through several urban analyses but mostly by including homeowners in a densification process. For that, Lab InVivo team members help and coach inhabitants willing to build new housing in their gardens or backyards. Using a new generation of 3D modelling tools Lab InVivo seeks to introduce a new perspective on the question of technology as a means to foster civic contribution to urban renewal projects.

NGO GivRum is a group of urban practitioners; whose objective is to facilitate user-driven urban development with local communities. Through activation of unused buildings and urban space they work with open-ended processes, where they enter into dialogue with public institutions, private businesses and civil society. With a team of researchers from Roskilde University, they in Viby experimented with participatory methods to envision re-uses of urban space that support the creation of new community meeting places. For that, the process was initiated by a collaboration agreement between the research group and a local culture house *Kulturcosmos*. In the approach of the research group, a festival event in public space including exhibitions and workshops was

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.vivantes.fr/liv/>



considered a starting point for regeneration. A basic criterion was that diverse local actors representing commercial life and local civic institutions should be involved in a steering group organizing the festival. The event in itself is seen as a powerful revealer of new uses that could enliven an underused space on daily basis. The final goal is to create new imaginaries for the space, so that it is reinvested annually thanks to the reorganization of the event — as in Viby — or even daily in the most successful experiments.

In both cases, partnerships between universities and practitioners allow to develop specific action research focusing on fostering participatory and community-led urban development (Andersen & Frandsen 2019). As institutional capacity building in a suburban setting constitute a new field of research, we argue that it is fruitful to explore its juxtapositions by two radically different case studies. This demonstrate differences in how urban participatory practitioners can tackle CB processes and point the potentialities of interdisciplinary approaches. We argue that the two different approaches provide for a nuanced discussion on how to work with socio-spatial dynamics in different contexts. Thus, we will discuss what kind of tasks, approaches, organization and relations that need to be activated in order to find solutions for locally owned solutions for intensification and densification. The discussion is structured around the three crucial phases previously identified in CB processes to emphasize on roles and relations in these highly networked processes with multiple actors:

- (1) To Mobilize: How to create a group of action?
- (2) To Involve: How to work together in the same direction?
- (3) To Flow: How to anchor the process?

The core differences in the approaches to capacity building in the two cases are listed in the box:

	<b>Périgueux</b>	<b>Viby</b>
Goal	Densification	Intensification
Project's holder	City of Périgueux	Kulturcosmos association
Local actors involved	Homeowners	Community associations
Primary expertise	Architects, urbanists	Community activists
Participatory approach	Sketching/building	Event/steering group

**Figure 1.** *Differences in approaches to capacity building*

#### **4. Results: How are CB enacted in order to answer suburban challenges?**

Based on insights from the two cases, we will analyse how capacity building for suburban regeneration urge for particular roles of urban practitioners, inhabitants and institutional bodies that take part in and/or facilitate these processes.

#### **4.1 Towards a model of action in private space based on a process of soft densification: the Périgueux case**

##### **4.1.1 To mobilize: how to create a group of action?**

In Périgueux, the initial framing of the process with the municipality as a contractor of Lab InVivo formed the point of departure of the process which consists in assisting homeowners completing new housing projects meanwhile helping the City to meet its demographic and building goals. The BIMBY approach was chosen to infuse new energy and destabilize a fixed situation, where it had proven hard for the municipality to motivate homeowners by themselves to initiate soft densification projects on their lots and counteract NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) reactions. BIMBY starts from homeowners needs and everyday life concerns by setting up an entire process for supporting them from initial ideas and dreams to the building of a new dwelling in their gardens, in a way that is respectful of the neighbourhood's architectural and landscape qualities.

BIMBY process is structured in two stages. The “futuring stage” consists in assessing the potential for BIMBY densification, defining an urban and housing production strategy, organizing workshops with inhabitants to figure out their willingness to engage in a plot densification process, and redesigning zoning rules according to models developed with participants. Then, the “performing stage” consists in helping up willing households to achieve their BIMBY projects.

As part of the futuring stage, the BIMBY “*design date*” is a crucial participatory and experimental approach that works as a catalyst for social interaction and building of relations between homeowners and urban practitioners from Lab InVivo. These “design dates” take place in massive local sessions to include homeowners in the actual production of houses. Homeowners are invited to interact with a team of architects in order to design 3D models of existing plots and possible housing projects within an hour. The design date has a practical-sensory approach where the interactive drawing helps to give a concrete experience of possible future designs. Thanks to 3D fast modelling techniques, BIMBY officers engage inhabitants, allowing live visualization of several possible ways to transform any given property.

The BIMBY process in Périgueux shows how architectural design can be applied in an experimental and collaborative process. For most people, before they've had the opportunity to experience a “design date”, an architect blueprint or model is something totally set, on which only a professional may intervene. Basics of 3D model sketching lead them to an appropriation of the design process: they know very well their garden, the buildings in it, their dimensions, openings, the way the sun shines on them at spring, the way the wind blows on them in winter times. This case provides an

insight into how the use of 3D modelling can create an interesting situation of learning where individual plots are presented with a range of different options as to how they can accommodate a new residential unit on their land in ways that correspond to their specific life situation and needs. In the same time, the design date provides situational learning for the BIMBY officers who learns about values of homeowners and on how the envisioned goal of soft densification can be met through adaption to the needs of everyday life and the physical design of specific neighbourhoods.

Further the process in Périgueux reflects how the BIMBY officers work both to identify common matters of concern between the public goal on densification and the homeowners' individual interests and life situation. The process was initiated by a mapping of the urban area as whole and how many new houses that potentially could be erected in private gardens in order to identify relevant homeowners to mobilize. The 3D models generated on design dates represent tactical resources to plant the seeds in homeowners to take action to build a new house on the plot. Homeowners are not obliged to go any further in actually realizing any of the design proposals but provided with the scenarios, this step may be easier and more comprehensible to take. Moreover, understanding homeowners' values can further develop and refine the process of soft densification. The 3D models developed with homeowners provide the guiding framework for a redesign of zoning rules.

In Périgueux, an event held in December 2015 gave the opportunity to meet 103 homeowners and to assess how they can recompose their estates to accommodate new dwellings. In 2017, 3 more massive sessions have taken place. In 2018, 300 projects have been drawn on already built plots. These first experiments do reveal a bounty of private projects, but this potential cannot be mined at leisure by way of public policies. For the projects to bloom within a significantly compact time period, there is a need to create a close network of relationship where inhabitants feel empowered and ready to carry out the projects.

#### **4.1.2 To involve: How to work together in the same direction?**

The primary goal of capacity building in the BIMBY process was to trigger new building projects by helping homeowners in all stages of the building process. Whereas the design date formed the first step in translating the vision into specific local needs, the subsequent BIMBY process focused on building competences and capabilities with homeowners to initiate and carry out building projects.

Multiple actors were important in this process ranging from BIMBY officers, the city council, homeowners and local professionals. BIMBY officers were all part of the multidisciplinary research team Lab InVivo (e.g. architects, urban planners, landscape architects, legal experts) that has formed a contract with the City Council of Périgueux. They were responsible to match project holders and reach a satisfactory quality level with projects and so they worked actively to build relations between all the relevant stakeholders and to build capabilities to take action. In this they worked from a set of core guidelines and protocols for recruiting and supporting homeowners until

completion of their projects. First, they aimed to coach inhabitants on architectural, financial, tax and real estate issues. Second, to make them feel entitled to discuss and cooperate with planning authorities to complete private projects and in the same time contributing on the collective goal of densification. Third, to match these private project holders with relevant local professionals to carry out their projects. Fourth, to match inhabitant between themselves to ease the process. Lastly, to obtain actual building of new residential units with a successful impact on city face and demography. BIMBY officers also sought to match inhabitants between themselves to ease the process. This concerned the neighbour agreement for an access, to co-design multiple projects in a close area, to co-develop projects between owners selling their garden and families buying it or to bring family members together on projects of adapted housing for the old age of granny.

Keeping the fire burning throughout the different phases and moving the process forward with homeowners was key to actualizing building projects and was supported by high frequency communication. The BIMBY process from take-off to landing set out a detailed organizational framework for three main stages in the building process with three different responsible BIMBY officers: (1) Decision to act. Gardening and building (2) Coaching: Architectural and technical project is set (3) Closing: Contract is set with building professionals. Homeowners of more than 200 designed projects have been coached by BIMBY officers and more than 30 projects have been realized by local professionals.

#### **4.1.3 To flow: How to anchor participatory projects**

In Périgueux, the BIMBY process shows how an experimental learning approach can help to match a city vision of soft densification with individual needs and desires and that participating homeowners gradually build up competences to carry out building projects. In the first stage of the research project, the soft densification potential was estimated to potentially 400 new dwellings and 700 new inhabitants. The ambition stated in the agreement between Lab InVivo and the City Council is that over a period of 30 months 100 new dwellings will be produced.

By the end of 2018, the ambition stated was reached. If the 100 new houses were not yet built, most of them were under construction or about to start. Lab InVivo has succeeded in building a local culture of soft densification. More and more homeowners joined the project thanks to a very wide communication. City officials were fierce communicators of the process — mayor first — and important facilitators since most building authorizations were eased when approved by BIMBY officers. 60% of real estate on sale within the city boundaries had been through the process. Lab InVivo had contributed to matching homeowners with buyers but above all with their new neighbours, which made several local newspaper front pages. Before the end of the year, when the City Council faced the end of Lab InVivo's mission, the decision was taken to reconduct Lab InVivo and widen the scope of the research project to abandoned houses.

The limits of the BIMBY proces were pointed out during the national research program and the first experiments (Miet 2013) which took place between 2009 and 2012. Regarding Périgueux, more or less the same situation is found. First, only homeowners can participate to the ongoing process or future homeowners, in other words, the purchaser of land resulting from a BIMBY plot division. Others are obviously excluded from the process. Second, indifferent or opposed homeowners are free not to participate in the process as its success relies only on a tiny part of volunteer homeowners each year and further, it will take several decades before running out of homeowners. Homeowners against for example neighboring a soft densification project, have been invited by BIMBY operators very early in the process. Such situations have, empirically, shown that when the future neighbors meet and the architectural project is intelligently articulated with the existing suburban context, the opposition turns into indifference or support.

The Périgueux case study shows how essential a third body is when starting an experimental process that requires excessive communication. Especially in this case, where most of the process was invented and tested as the process was growing.

## **4.2 Towards a model of action in public space based on a process of intensification of uses: the Viby case**

### **4.2.1 To mobilize: how to create a group of action?**

The initial framing of the process in Viby was founded in an action research project to explore potentials for community-led urban revitalization of urban space. Unlike top-down political frames, the aim was to invite community actors to design a process and activities that they wanted to be involved in. It was chosen to initiate the project in collaboration with a volunteer driven culture house *Kulturcosmos*. This collaboration revealed to be productive since the culture house had a broad profile of activities that aimed to meet the needs of different actors in terms of gender, age, interests etc. Likewise, Kulturcosmos had also been recognized as a strategic partner by the municipality in questions of urban development in the town centre and expressed willingness to collaborate with other local associational and institutional actors.

The research group and GivRum agreed with Kulturcosmos to arrange two one-day festivals focusing on experimenting with and activating urban space. The aim was that these events would be organized by setting up a steering group where different community actors representing commercial life and local civic institutions would be involved. As facilitators, the research group and GivRum introduced the festival format with the intention of exploring new uses of public space and

create a platform for collaboration between different community actors. The organization process of experimental festivals created a forum for citizens involved in the steering group to discuss and enact collaboratively their visions for the town centre by planning practical activities for the events. Besides, the purpose of the festival format was to create different entry points for participation (1) Being an active member of the steering group organizing the festival (2) Being coordinator of a specific activity during the festival (3) Being a participant in the festival activities and activate the public space.

The festival and the steering group formed important openings for facilitators to work tactically and strategically. It helped them learn about different values that local citizens attached to the town centre as a community meeting place in Viby. Tactically, the festival aimed at creating experiences of alternative uses that could make collective visions and ideas emerge for future ways of organizing community spaces. Activities also contributed to make these visions more tangible for citizens participating in the event. Strategically, the intention was reached; the festival events showcased local potentials and explored activities that could be part of more permanent solutions for revitalized town centre.

The first event took place on a warm summer day in June 2018. Around 400 people took part in the activities representing a broad variety of people from families with kids, youngsters and elderlies. The event was conceptualized as 'build-your-own-party' which involved using urban space as a creative playground by painting on walls, putting bird prints on the urban square, arranging flowers and other measures to decorate the square. Teenagers built a prototype of what they thought would be a cool hang out place. The event was round off with a communal dinner with outdoor grilling and music on the major square.

What can be concluded from conversations with inhabitants on the day is that the atmosphere of the event was highly appreciated and made inhabitants reflect on what kind of uses they wished to see in the urban centre. They were happy that the event created an occasion for gathering in the town centre and that this was something they missed. So, the event worked to be what has been a deliberate attempt on staging community life that was criticized for not being visible for citizens not active in one of the associations.

#### **4.2.2 To involve: How to work together in the same direction?**

In the beginning of fall 2017, the steering group was comprised of representatives from Kulturcosmos, local commercial life, library and a local artist. Through the process, researchers and GivRum recruited more broadly to build relations between different community interests. The first festival event also inspired new actors to take part. Among them, an urban planner from the municipality, a representative from the youth club, a local entrepreneur working on establishing a new coworking space in the city centre and a library manager joined the steering group. Thus, it came to reflect a group of citizens that were interdependent through a shared concern for

community life and activities in the town centre and by their organizational attachment also were linked to a broader network of citizens.

After the first festival a number of reflective workshops were held in the steering group. They focused on how they as local community actors could foster a better culture of collaboration across their different interests in urban development in the town centre. Steering group members considered how to involve citizens wanting to take action for their community but did not have interest in going to meetings and in long-term organization. Further it was discussed how a culture of co-creation between local community actors and the municipality could be organized in questions of urban development. Thus, possibilities for collective action were discussed beyond the festival format and linked to a political and strategic level by inviting municipal actors for a debate on expectations of co-creation between institutional and community actors.

In planning the second festival event, the steering group aimed to involve more citizens in creating workshop activities. Kulturcosmos members proposed activities they would like to facilitate; a local history association was exhibiting old pictures of the town centre and local entrepreneurs from a newly started community space for self-employed shared their skills through mini-lectures and creative workshops. With hindsight, it was clear that members of the steering group had appropriated the festival events as a way of developing social relations and local engagement in Viby. They took pride in that the event aimed at transforming citizens from being mere observers to being active participants in making the event happen and picture how Viby is a vibrant community.

On a more critical note the steering group organized around the festival format did not evolve to be representative of all community interests. Though it succeeded bridging different concerns it was also challenged by a sense that e.g. cultural associations and business life were competing for the resources that the municipality would invest in urban development. Thus, it refrained some local businesses to take part. This points to how CB around urban revitalisation still needs to be attentive to the individual interests and ask how they can be accommodated within the pro

#### **4.2.3 To flow: How to anchor participatory processes?**

While co-creation processes can start as an open-ended process it is ultimately important that participants explore options for further formalizing the network collaboration in order to sustain the energy and collective effort. Throughout the process, GivRum and the research group facilitated the process with the explicit aim of creating momentum for the steering group to be a self-organizing network assembling different community interests working towards intensification with more collective uses of the town centre. A planned future community house yielded a specific physical structure for the collaboration to continue. Participants reflected that festivals provided a

testing-bed for community engagement, design of common spaces in the new building and expanding a culture of collaboration between institutional and non-institutional actors. Members of the steering group decided to continue by themselves and organize a new festival event to be held in the summer 2020. The informal way of building relations through organizing an event has been recognized as good way to foster social bonds across different community interests which in other situations may lead to better local problem-solving.

In order to ensure more effective capacity building towards a community-led intensification of uses in the town centre, strong commitment towards this approach need to be present at the institutional and political decision-making level. The municipality presents a strategic vision to support local partnerships <sup>12</sup>. By working with a bottom-up approach with community representatives, the facilitators tried to introduce a capacity building inspired model to do this. Attempts were made to foster platforms for policy learning in order to link local visions to the political institutional level in the municipality. However, the process was carried out at a time when the municipality was more preoccupied with implementing already approved urban development plans. More broadly, capacity building process would benefit from a better timing with situations where municipalities see a benefit from letting planning processes being infused with experimental and participatory approaches.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Capacity building processes, as presented in Viby and Périgueux, stand out from conventional procedures and approaches of planning focused on zoning and regulation. The strength of the capacity building approach lies in its collaborative nature and it can be a significant leverage for urban development if successfully linked to core planning procedures and political decision-making moments.

The two cases present different models on how to work with socio-spatial dynamics in different contexts. Périgueux's presents a model of interaction for soft densification in private space, with the implementation of a municipal strategy as a point of departure. Viby's presents a model of community-led urban centre revitalization which is based on the idea of bottom-linked social innovation in public space. The aim of presenting these two models has been to demonstrate the complexity of suburban challenges and their possibilities. In many situations urban governments are required to deal with issues of both densification and intensification and need to apply multiple strategies.

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<sup>12</sup> Municipality of Roskilde 2018, Urban Planning Strategy



In both cases the inhabitants — homeowners and civil society representatives — make up significant resources for a positive development of their urban environment as they can take action around densification and intensification in ways that are not possible to do by sole initiative in the urban planning departments. Likewise, it gives the inhabitants an opportunity to actively influence urban planning processes and where professional mediators can work to foster an experience of being able to initiate changes. The cases illustrate how inhabitants from different positions can take part in suburban regeneration. In other cases, action may be better organized around homeowners' associations. This should encourage planning to have a diversified outlook on suburban actors and how they can make up assets in specific contexts.

Through these new approaches, we define new roles and develop new capacities in the field of participatory urbanism. We point to how other practitioners within urban planning such as NGO's, consultants and academics work as mediators cultivating capacity building processes. The case-studies illustrates these different actors who are exogenous to the urban administration and provide external help to structure internal capacities and change of (sub)urban communities. In these processes, they play key roles as activators and facilitators. Thus, CB makes a strong case for employing interdisciplinary approaches that can help articulate and reframe private and local concerns to meet public and collective goals.

In this paper, we argue for the value of viewing capacity building as being structured through different phases each characterized by different processual goals: (1) To Mobilize: How to create a group of action. (2) To Involve: How to work together in the same direction (3) To Flow: How to anchor the process. The two cases illustrate with their different approaches how roles and relations evolve in the highly networked processes of capacity building. Thus, it demonstrates how participatory practitioners must go beyond mere involvement of the public in singular instances. Instead they need to foster the conditions for inhabitants to address questions of suburban regeneration collectively.

Initially, experimental design processes offer ways to open up urban areas to alternative futures and learn about core values among local inhabitants to inform physical layout and planning actions. These are vital in opening up participatory arenas and can be organized in multiple ways. They may contribute to successful local adaptations to a planning strategy as the case in Périgueux or they may be organized more open-ended to explore civil society responses to urban revitalization that then can inform municipal planning. In both cases the linking to long-term organization and institutional embedment capacity is important.

The two cases articulate different models for building relations. In Périgueux, relations are primarily being built between homeowners, local construction professionals and Lab InVivo. In this sense, the process seeks to build professional competence to initiate building a second home on the plot. In

Viby, the aim has been to build alliances across different community organizations and citizens groups with GivRum as a facilitator. Here the process seeks to build capacity to act as a collective on behalf of collective interests in social amenities in the town centre. Throughout the process the mediating roles of Lab InVivo and GivRum have been to identify fields of common concern to inform densification and intensification strategies. Again, the cases illustrate differences in how this can be organized around the implementation of a municipally approved strategy or work as an element in a bottom-up initiated process that seek to deliver input to planning policies. In Périgueux, the primary concern has been to address NIMBY concerns and develop models for densification with respect to the architectural and urban qualities of the neighbourhood. The festivals in Viby have been made in attempts to articulate community organizations potentials for infusing new energy in the town centre.

Lastly, in terms of CB processes abilities to create public value it is important to aim attention at how to anchor and encourage self-organization around new practices. In Périgueux, the model of action is supported by the City Council and public value is created through finalization of building projects. The BIMBY approach represents a model for soft densification that can be — and currently are — applied in other contexts. To estimate potentials for longer-term soft densification it seems crucial to see how processes create policy learning at public and private levels in order to carry out new projects after the contracting with urban practitioners has ended. In order to build new alliances for community-led urban centre revitalization it is important from an early stage to guide the steering group towards self-organization. GivRum has been applying similar models elsewhere. Experiments have shown them how it is crucial to link these open-ended processes with the planning level. Similarly, inputs generated through the activation of urban space come at a time when planning authorities express willingness to react on them.

Due to their differences, the two case-studies bring nuanced perspectives on how to enact capacity building to answer challenges in a suburban context. It makes a call for an in-depth understanding of the implications of reconfiguring specific planning practices on densification and intensification by focusing attention on *who* and *how*. This requires the municipalities to open up for participatory formats while supporting their longer-term organization and anchoring if CB between multiple actors is going to succeed.

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