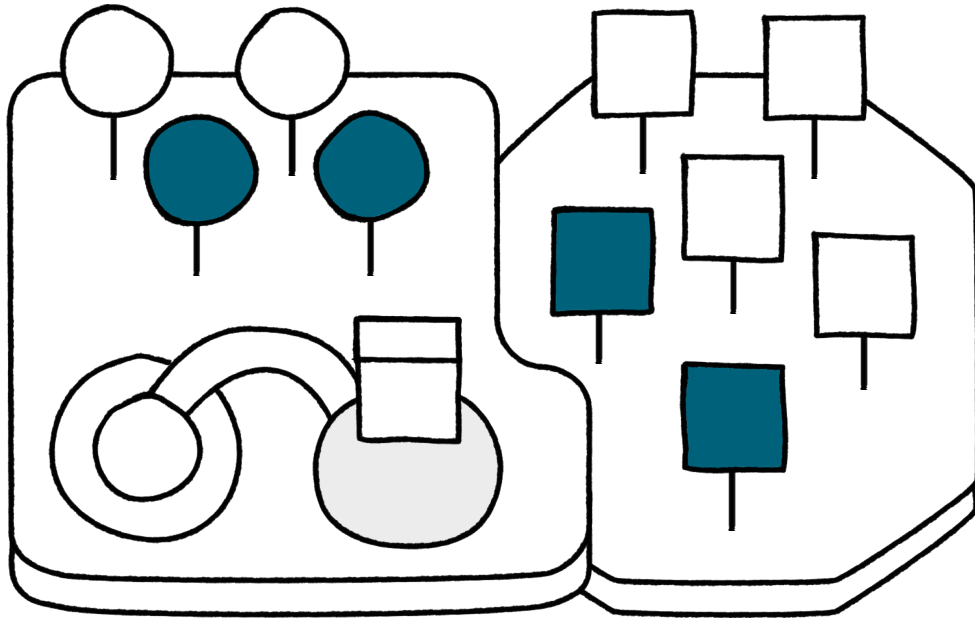


Intermediary use of a brownfield site as a children's workshop



Time frame

2014

Stakeholders

Political executive
Civil society
Spatial and urban planners
Government builders

Typologies (space types)

Outside space



Design quality criteria

Designability
Opportunities to interact



Structure-related quality criteria

Collaboration
Participation and identification

The starting point

The city building authority works yard on the corner of Reussstrasse and Oberalpstrasse in the Basel neighbourhood of Neubad was to be demolished. It was clear that this would create a barren wasteland for quite some time as there were not yet any plans to build on it. The city tendered the site for construction and soon found new leaseholders. Happily, they were a building consortium that wanted to build an association building. A quick-thinking group of neighbourhood residents contacted the consortium with the request to use the space as a pop-up children's workshop until the building work started. The idea came about spontaneously, as there are many families with young children living close to the site and there are only a few playgrounds in the area. The site managers approved this intermediate usage with the condition that the initiating group would be liable for any damages and accidents. Now nothing stood in the way of Basel's first children's workshop! The children's workshop was open Monday to Friday from 2pm to 8pm and from 10am to 7pm on Saturdays and in the school holidays, from June 2014 to November 2014.

Aims

The children of the Neubad neighbourhood were to have the option of using this wasteland as a neighbourhood meeting place and playground. Various materials were available for independent building.

Target group

- Children and young people from the neighbourhood
- Residents

Costs

The materials were made available free of charge by various parties. Thanks to donations of money and goods and to the voluntary engagement of all participants, the project was completed without incurring any costs at all. The insurance costs were assumed by the KinderKraftWerk trusteeship and their more than 5 million Swiss francs liability insurance coverage.

Project progression

After a residents' meeting in February 2014 and communications about the planned children's workshop, the initiating group concluded a contract with the new leaseholder that clarified the issue of liability for usage and other legal details. The city parks department made available a toy box and tree trunks for a climbing course for the intermediate period. A neighbouring builder supplied the sand for the sand pit as well as concrete containers for an entrance way. He also levelled a space for a provisional bowling alley. The remaining play materials were made up of boards, ropes, tyres, fabrics, stones and branches, all available for free, that children could use to build their own toys.

The children's workshop was opened with great fanfare in June 2014. Two members of the initiating group had a key to the workshop. They were responsible for the proper opening and closing of the workshop and the project team ensured that the space was regularly cleared of undue waste. However, the children's workshop was not generally supervised. A sign at the entrance notified people that its use was at their own risk and there would be no liability assumed for any accidents. A few bumps and scrapes aside, the space were used without accident – which was quite incredible given the adventurous structures and builds the children made.

Success factors

- Early inclusion of residents.
- The option of leaving any complaints or requests in a post box on-site at the children's workshop.
- Project information panel at the entrance including contact details for the initiating group.
- Engagement from the leaseholder and the initiating group.
- Donations of building materials from the population.

Challenges

- Concerns about the opening times and about safety issues from the residents and parents.
- Covering the opening and closing times, especially during the summer holidays.
- Illegal waste dumping on the site and night-time youth trespassing.
- Aggressive behaviour shown by some children who were often on-site without their parents.
- Unclear date for construction to begin, therefore the site closed early. The children's workshop was then empty for almost a year.

Conclusion

The residents' reaction to the new playground and meeting place was overwhelmingly positive. Consensus was reached on issues of safety and opening times. News of the site spread quickly and families with children from neighbouring areas also visited. It demonstrated that playgrounds with no equipment but plenty of construction materials are desperately needed. Only adventure playgrounds have similar, yet supervised, provisions and most of them are outside the city area. The fact that the children sometimes wanted to work stones with a hammer and chisel and could build bridges with crates and boards probably did unsettle a few parents initially. However, the children demonstrated that they absolutely could assess risks and also learn something by trying out new ways of playing. It was free play, just as it should be.

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