



URBAN IDEA IS AN INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN TALLINN'S NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATIONS AND THE CITY GOVERNMENT

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Urban Idea

Urban Idea is the initiative of Tallinn neighbourhood associations, through which the basis of the future cooperation between neighbourhood associations and governing power will be defined. One of its goals is to draw up a good cooperation practice, which will create stronger trust and through that a fertile surface for finding solutions to improve the city's environment and milieu. During 2013, Urban Idea has conducted several seminars about life in the city, organized research tours and meetings between community members, parties and members of the City Government offices.

HONEST CONFESSIONS FROM THE COORDINATOR OF URBAN IDEA

TEELE PEHK, *head of Urban Lab, co-ordinator of Urban Idea*

For a year now, I have tried to improve the communication between twenty neighbourhood associations and find out how these groups could find a common language with the city government. It has been time-consuming work, with planning activities and choosing tactics, there has been an insane amount of goading and persuading and a fair amount of negotiating with the city. In addition, an endless amount of brainstorming with my teammates¹ on how to make the message of civic associations heard in the fray of local elections.

I will not go into details about how difficult it is to run such a project. That would be rather uninspiring. I am quite aware of the fact that in any field, it takes time before the culture of co-operation takes root. Instead, I will focus on what we have achieved. What is this special and novel 'model' that we have created in the course of discussions, meetings and events of Urban Idea?

In short, it means increasing social capital. With the initiative of Urban Idea, we have tried to raise awareness of neighbourhood associations as experts on running local life, even though at the same time we have had to deal with the issues of inner democracy and self-awareness of the civic society. We have tried to convince the city government of the benefits born from co-operation and accordingly, in passing, to alleviate the politicians' fear of losing power. Wishing to boost civic courage, we have given more power to the city district governments in our thoughts. We made it our goal to increase the focus on

1. *The primary team of Urban Idea includes a civil society expert MADLE LIPPUS, social scientist and documentary filmmaker PEETER VIHMA, urbanist ANDRA AALOE, members of the Estonian Urban Lab KAISA KAER and IVAN LAVRENTJEV, marketing expert MARTIN KAROLIN and volunteers MARTIN LAIDLA, ANU KÄGU, MARIA DERLÕŠ.*

In addition, the Urban Idea has been helped on the right track by the members of the advisory committee: Minister for Regional Affairs SIIM KIISLER, MP ANDRES ANVELT, analyst at Praxis HILLE HINSBERG, professor of sociology KATRIN PAADAM, entrepreneur TERJE KROSS, village activist and filmmaker ARTUR TALVIK and designer and entrepreneur VILLE JEHE.

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local issues in election debates and found ourselves lobbying to the political parties. We have tried to come up with a definition of a neighbourhood association, but have also rephrased civil rights (An association for every resident!).

Despite the fact that the ideals of participatory democracy often crash against heavy metal doors in Tallinn, the district associations have become a force to be reckoned with. This social capital, born out of discussions between active citizens, city administrators, experts of civil society and officials, helps us to distinguish the symptoms of the ailing city rule. And that is not all – it also inspires people to create communities elsewhere and encourages them to join the neighbourhood association movement.

Within Urban Idea, there have been more and less tortuous discussions, educational seminars and assemblies of associations, and one tangible result for that has been a three-page document. This document should become the basis for a new culture of governing the city. The **Good Collaboration Pact** is nothing revolutionary. It is more like a cry for help in a situation where the trust between civic associations keen to contribute to the development of the city and the decision-makers representing the city is as thin as first ice.

If the city council approves the Good Pact (this will be clear within the next few months), our city could still become a prime example of open government and community-friendly thinking. Not that one document would solve the problems; rather, agreeing on the principles of co-operation would help us to move beyond the point we always seem to get stuck at. There is potential, as the cities of neighbouring countries envy the high level of organisation of Tallinn's neighbourhood associations. That is the potential that should not be left unused in city development.

I do dream about a home city like that. And I will keep working to make my dreams come true.



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