

Social street english

The idea

The idea of "social street" originates from the experience of the Facebook (FB) group "Residents in Fondazza street – Bologna" starting in september 2013. The purpose of the Social Street is to promote socialization between neighbors resident in the same street in order to build relationships, to interchange needs, to share expertise and knowledges, to implement common interest projects, with common benefits from a closer social interaction.

To reach this zero cost objective, without opening new sites or platforms, Social Street makes use of the creation of Facebook closed groups.

Our Philosophy

This web site is intended to be the referral point for the Italian Social Streets. Anyone who wish to replicate the project adhering to the Social Street vision, may notify it at info@socialstreet.it. we will update the mapping of the web portal so that anyone visiting this site will be informed about the newborn social streets. Our aim is to support the creation of further Social Streets sharing the "Residents in Fondazza street – Bologna" experience.

Guidelines

The definition of Social Street may be somewhat subjective and we do not presume to be the owner of the right one. We can just explain what social street means for us; if you agree with our vision, we will be happy to support you hosting the link of your Facebook group in our website.

The primary goal of the "Social Street" initiative is to socialize with the people in the neighborhood in order to meet daily life individual needs, factual help, sharing of activities, exchange of views, opinions..... endless possibilities.

It is a no-profit activity with social purpose.

Social Street is not pursuing any political, religious, ideological view.

It brings people together with the sole criterion of the proximity between area residents.

Once your Facebook group started, you can report it to info@socialstreet.it we will contact you and after having verified your objectives are in line with the initiative, we will add your group to the "social street" portal.

How we in via Fondazza started our "Soicial Street"

Step 1: creating a Facebook closed group.

The first step is to set up a closed group starting from your personal FB profile: to be found by Facebook searching engine it is important that the name of your group follows the format "**Resident in ...STREET or SQUARE NAME – CITY – social street**".

The group should be closed to protect members privacy.

Privacy setting can be managed by the founder who can decide whether or not to authorize all posts in automatic or to moderate/approve them: because the social street spirit does not include the idea of a "boss" the second option is not recommended.

Founder is in such a way the moderator who provided directions to proposal and ideas but should not be the absolute leader of the group. Social Street model should be as much democratic as possible and "sharing" is the basis of this trend. Of course some specific decisions requiring a fast and slim and approach, can be taken without previous shared discussion.

This is the reason why we recommend the creation of a sort of "board of directors" including the group owner and other 4-5 people. Considering Facebook is the main element of Social Street, the founder of th group will open closed private chats with the "board of directors" to take fast decisions.

Some members could join the group for reason other than the social scope, i.e. for specific advertising: it will be founder's decision to permit it (in the case it could be useful for the community) or not and it this case to decide to remove it.

It is possible that at the beginning the founder has no idea about the other members of the group in order to choose the board of directors members: the choice will be postponed. The most important is to start.

Step 2: Advertising the Group

Once you have created your Facebook group, you can advertise it with a A4 poster indicating the newborn group name, the goal of socializing, affixing some copies in the most visible and legal area of your street; you could put in mailboxes or under the doors; to contact shop owner explaining them the scope of the initiative and asking them to expose your poster (as, for example the our one below)



Huge goals are not requested. The success of Social Street is no based on the number of the members of the group: in fact paradoxically, we experienced that smaller groups work better than larger ones because of higher interaction and mutual understanding. At this stage, commercial activities in the street can be involved proposing agreements that could be beneficial for both them and the community (discount for residents, more costumers for the business).

Step 3: Group Management

Fed the group with a minimum of contents and ideas. Not always the group is able to auto produce ideas. Both founder and members have to stimulate group activity even with small initiatives. For example, in our group of residents in Fondazza street in Bologna, photo albums with terraces normally not visible from the street as well as for exchanged items were created.. These are just examples considering a wide range of possibilities as to create the own path hash tag on Instagram and upload photos for Via Fondazza is #fondazziani.

Consider that Social Street should not become a job for anyone, doesn't have to be a disproportionate effort but a pleasure. Facebook allows you to interact with others at any time but the most important aspect is the possibility to share experiences, needs, proposals: and this can lead, in turn, to the creation of "sub-groups" based on affinities. Are you a musician? With Social Street you can easily check if other people in your street share your passion for music.

Once you will have at least 30 people in your group who, maybe, don't know each other but are living in the same street, they will be able through the group to solve problems and needs and maybe to support the beginning of new friendships: well, at this point you can say that your Social Street has been successfully activated.

Step 4: From Virtual to Real life

The most interesting part of Social Street is represented by the fact that starting on virtual basis (just because you physically don't know your neighbors), can be turned in real life experience. Within the Facebook Group you can create group events in order to have face to face meeting with your group members! What are you waiting for? There is no need for private spaces or rooms to be rent: there are squares, gardens or the members' apartments to use for your meetings. Remember that to go on with Social Street there is no need of financial investments but only willingness to interact with your neighbors!

Promoting the the Facebook closed group "Residents in via Fondazza – Bologna"

Few months ago, walking along the arcades of via Fondazza, the street is living in since 2009, Federico Bastiani realized to know just very few people and no one with children to contact to play with his two years old son Matteo... How to solve the problem in a fast and zero cost way?

So Federico decided to open a Facebook group and promoted it with some leaflets along the street.

Expectation was to collect few tens of answers to his proposal...

What happened was a bit different and now, after 3 months, neighbors joining the FB group are more than five hundred...

Relating so many people via FB represents a very important step but more important is to switch from virtual to face to face relationship, having the people opening the window and talking each other, walking along the arcades and saying hallo to the neighbors and shop owners...

This is what happened and we wondered about the reason of a so extensive success.

"Social Street" plays an unspoken and almost unconscious role, even if deeply felt, of participation.

The interest generated by this first "virtual stage", in fact eventually led to a genuine interest to know each others in the off-line world, fitting into the real life of the members of the group.

From breakfast to dinner, movies to exhibitions, from sharing to swapping, every event becomes a good occasion of socialization. More, this new group was able to internally set up in a completely spontaneous way, supporting the different activities in an enthusiastic way.

New potentiality generated by socialization are discovered every day; and positive implications involved not only the group members but the whole local community.

A few days ago a member posted a cultural event in another city asking for others with the same interest and in few minutes she was able to organize a trip with other people of the group sharing the interest (socialization) but also car expenses (economic implication) to move there.

Sociability, saving, sharing, obtained in just 2 minutes through a simple post on FB...

Saving food. Too many lemons received as a present and unable to use by yourself? Just post the photo on your FB group page and you inform your neighbors who can have them free...

Saving, collective support, building a bond of trust: web is already offering such kind of services: if you wish to sell something you can use ebay, for the car you have car sharing, tripAdvisor for advises where to go.

All these services are offered by and within the group of Residents in via Fondazza, but with an added value: mutual trust.

Why use ebay to sell your fridge when your neighbors could be interested, and just crossing the street you can sell it without transportation and commission costs and pollution? Why to ask for informations about a restaurant to tripAdvisor when someone in the community is able to provide you the requested and more reliable advice?

Sharing objects but also interests as exhibitions, theatre, readings, music, is a very important step.

But the most innovative aspect is represented by reconsidering the approach to economy, optimizing the use of resources, applying no-waste policies, considering zeroKm foods.

Giving new value to goods represents a natural step in a new vision of community: what thrown away or left unused before becomes now available for the community.

Same considerations are applicable to skills: skills and time are made available in return for other skills and more time.

Via Fondazza is becoming a study case, in Italy and abroad... Many new groups are spreading in Bologna and in other places from the north to the south of Italy.

We think we were able to point out that it is possible to move to virtual to face to face relationships and that these relationships are able to produce a virtuous cycle involving the community, revealing the strong interest and need of the people to cooperate in order to recover a forgotten need of sociality.

SOCIAL STREET ONE YEAR LATER

Rational Analysis

- The objective is to re-establish the importance of social relations and interaction focusing not only on developed urban areas but also a return to what was once a reality and way of life in the countryside and villages where relationships were historically of fundamental importance in daily life. This modern tendency to focus on the 'self' has an undeniable consequence, urban decay, lack of social control (ownership) of the territory, loss of a sense of belonging, people are essentially living in isolation.
- We allow academics to speculate and study the root that caused this situation, and also accepts what authority dictates to us (in terms of ways of living, so contrary to these approaches the "Social Street model" proposes a possible solution from the ground up and aims to recreate social ties and acknowledgment as well as changes in behaviours/interaction between neighbours

Strengths

- The shift from theory to practice, we've observed that the main features that probably marked success, (in Quantitative terms – Given the growing number of Social Street(s) nationally and internationally) are represented by:
 - o Facebook —> to use a free medium and spread info via social network which is FB as facilitator of the transition from the "virtual to real"
 - o Territoriality —> The decision to restrict the closed FB group in a predetermined territory of a small size.
 - o Free —> at two levels, as internal trade (exclusion of do ut des) but also as macro structure being Social street as a model is absolutely free.
 - o No structure —> every single group can act to reintroduce appropriate social relations taking into account the peculiarities of its territory.
- Inclusion. It has been an important choice to focus on everything that brings people together (excluding that which divides), also to be proactive in the face of the harshest criticism, not accept being against something without being constructive, the exclusion of languages not acceptable to all members of the group.
- Using a specific territory, well defined, as a unifying element helped in the dismantling of all other categories in which people recognize themselves dividing belonging groups (social classes, interests, age, political affiliation, country of origin)
- The fact that from inception we have completely ruled out any economic and legal aspect, proved the innovative aspect that has characterized this experience differentiating markedly from all other structured experiences (associations, committees, etc.) and we have continued on this path further attracting the interest of more people. These elements have been, although in retrospect, fundamental and successful. The more than 350 groups born in Italy and abroad in just over a year, are the demonstration of the latent need for infinite changes in the way we socialise and interact not dependent on any economic aspect, defined or expectation. The interactions cannot be defined or quantified in financial terms.

The interest demonstrated by the academic world, seems to support this analysis. In addition to dozens of dissertations and research ranging from the field of psychological, anthropological, sociological, economic and urban studies, this experience has been endorsed by important personalities such as:

Prof. Anthony Giddens (Sociologist, Professor and former Director of London School of Economics)

Prof. Marc Augé (Anthropologist, former director Ecolé des études en Sciences Sociales in Paris)

Prof. Pierpaolo Donati (Professor of sociology at University of Bologna)

Prof. Anna Cossetta (Sociologist, University of Genova)

Prof. Jacques T. Godbout (Professeur émérite en sociologie Université du Québec)

Rob Hopkins (Founder of Transition Town)

Bologna, 4th January 2015

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