

Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People's Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location:	GRENOBLE, FRANCE
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	CITIZENS' REFERENDUM AGAINST THE DEMOLITION OF SOCIAL HOUSING
Name of organization:	ASSOCIATION PLANNING & COLLECTIF RIC ARLEQUIN
Type of organization:	Association, law 1901, whose purpose is to experiment with methods of advocacy planning with groups of inhabitants in the Villeneuve de Grenoble. The RIC ARLEQUIN collective is a collective of inhabitants and organizations that fight against the demolition of social housing in the Villeneuve.
Website:	http://www.assoplanning.org
Category and Edition:	HOUSING. Transformative Cities Award 3er edition (2020).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
<p>The Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne (RIC) de l'Arlequin (Referendum Initialized by Citizens) was organized by residents of Villeneuve de Grenoble to fight against the demolition of social housing in their neighborhood.</p>	
Context and problem definition	
<p>The Harlequin Citizen Initiative Referendum (RIC) encountered several difficulties in implementing this initiative. 1) we asked the city of Grenoble to organise this referendum so that the inhabitants could decide on the future of their neighborhood. For several months, the inhabitants mobilized to get the elected representatives to position themselves in favour of the RIC, using the fact that Mayor Eric Piolle had said he was in favour of the RIC's demand, which was supported by the Yellow Vests movement.</p>	

Design and Implementation

After a few months, the inhabitants realized that they had to rely on their own resources and the support of partner organizations. However, the main difficulty was the lack of legitimacy that could be argued against the referendum's implementation. This is why the inhabitants decided to apply for a co-construction body, the neighbourhood table, which was set up through the Lamy law as part of the reform of urban policy.

Since the purpose of this neighbourhood table is to support citizens' initiatives, it was entirely legitimate for this body to be able to hold a citizens' initiative referendum. Because some actors did not want the RIC to be put in place, it was necessary to create a commission within this neighbourhood table, which set up a campaign that took place over a month, implementing multiple actions, debates, door-to-door campaigning... Then the vote took place for a week at the basements of the social housing buildings.

Results achieved and Evaluation

526 inhabitants of the Harlequin district voted in the Citizens' Initiative Referendum and more than 50 people contributed to the implementation of this initiative. To date, the results of the Citizens' Initiative Referendum have not been accepted by Mayor Eric Piolle. However, this campaign has had a significant media impact on the issue of social housing demolitions and the lack of democracy in the implementation of urban projects. While the results are relatively disappointing in the short term, it is likely that this initiative will lead to significant advances for direct democracy.

Political Strategies

The Citizen Initiative Referendum (RIC Arlequin) has been set up with a triple strategy:

- 1) a strategy to mobilize the inhabitants through a door-to-door campaign throughout the entire Citizen Initiative Referendum (RIC) campaign. The first door-to-door campaign was dedicated to informing people about the referendum and the conditions under which it would take place in a neutral manner. The second door-to-door campaign was carried out by activists who campaigned against the demolition of social housing.

2) Communication strategy: as soon as the initiative was launched in January 2019, the residents' collective addressed the press to cover the event through press conferences and invitations to participate in the event. We also asked the press to come and observe the voting process to ensure that it was properly conducted. This strategy was particularly effective because journalists covered the initiative through numerous articles in the local and national press.

3) a strategy of expertise: to organise the Harlequin RIC, the inhabitants called on experts and academics who are specialised in local democracy issues. This support by experts helped to reinforce the impact of the initiatives with the public authorities.

Communication and Cultural Strategies

The communication strategy was an intense poster campaign in the neighbourhood, using the colour yellow as a symbol of the movement of the yellow vests. In the months leading up to the campaign, we had been encouraging residents to put a piece of yellow cloth in their windows. We also used social networks and relied on the local media that had been created during previous struggles to document the campaign.

See: <https://www.lecrieur.net/referendum-arlequin-large-victoire-du-non-aux-demolitions/>

Resources, Financing and Transformative Economy

This initiative benefited from structural support to the planning association by the Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme.

Related legislations

There is a local referendum procedure which allows voters in a local authority, under certain conditions, to decide through their vote whether or not to implement a project concerning a local matter (Articles LO1112-1 et seq. of the General Code of Local Authorities (CGCT) provide a framework for local referendums). However, citizens consider this procedure to be too restrictive and demand direct democracy procedures.

After the election of Eric Piolle as mayor of Grenoble in 2014, the municipality attempted to improve referendum procedures through a citizens' initiative scheme which required 2,000 signatures from Grenoble citizens to put an issue on the municipal council's agenda and which could lead to a local referendum. While the inhabitants of Villeneuve had gathered the 2000 signatures, this procedure was challenged by the administrative court, which invalidated the new municipal law.

Moreover, the inhabitants relied on the radical reform of the city's policy implemented in February 2014, in particular on the principle of co-construction and the setting up of a neighborhood table.

Ecological Transitions

The fight against social demolitions is part of environmental struggles and the need to renew the field of urban planning in order to build cities that articulate ecology and the right to the city. Indeed, it is an aberration to destroy good quality housing that will have to be rebuilt in other parts of the city. It is necessary to have an approach that takes care of the existing housing to rehabilitate social housing rather than destroy it. Of course, this initiative has put more emphasis on democracy and housing issues, but we believe that citizens' initiative referendums should be used to collectively challenge all projects that do not respect the environment.

Lessons learned

At this stage, three main lessons can be drawn from the Citizens' Initiative Referendum corresponding to four dimensions of this experience: practical, methodological and institutional.

Firstly, direct democracy tools make it possible to mobilize a large number of people in campaigns in favour of the right to the city. This experience has generated a great deal of interest following the social movement of the yellow vests.

Secondly, this experience shows the importance of creating concrete mechanisms for the implementation of the principles of the Right to the City. It is not only a question of proclaiming rights but also of finding the means to implement them.

Thirdly, this campaign has aroused the interest of institutions which will be able to draw inspiration from it to think about setting up direct democracy mechanisms, even if it is still too early to measure the effects.

Conclusion

We are particularly proud of the democratic process that took place in La Villeneuve during the citizens' initiative referendum. We showed that it is possible to have direct democracy initiatives so that residents can decide the future of their neighborhood. We built a methodology that can be reused in other contexts.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

<https://www.lecrieur.net/referendum-arlequin-large-victoire-du-non-aux-demolitions/>
<https://www.lecrieur.net/pour-ou-contre-les-demolitions-de-hlm/>
<https://www.lecrieur.net/nous-reclamons-larret-des-demolitions/>
<https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/isere/grenoble/grenoble-premiere-fois-habitants-ont-fait-vrai-ric-universitaire-1741405.html>
<https://www.humanite.fr/grenoble-un-ric-qui-peut-faire-jurisprudence-679282>