

Angels of Beauty: How volunteers help to keep Florence beautiful

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Organisation: Angels of Beauty Foundation

Country: Italy

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Recreation, culture and religion

Type: Other

Launched in: 2010

Overall development time: 3 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Foundation Angels of Beauty pursues the key objective of improving the quality of the built environment in Florence. In particular, the initiative aims at reducing the degradation of the historic environment and strengthening civic feelings of ownership of the historical sites through volunteering.

However, the activities of the volunteers are not intended to substitute for the statutory services provided by the local authority of Florence, such as refuse collection. The President of Angels of Beauty, Giorgio Moretti, highlights what the volunteers care about: "The love for Florence; the wish to get involved; to undertake specific actions for the city; to be on the street; to be recognizable; to be a point of reference. These are the motives of the volunteers of the Angels of Beauty - a mix of patience and determination to maintain the beauty of the city."

Why the innovation was developed

- Florence is known all over the world for its artistic heritage, which has meant that it benefited from special status as a UNESCO protected site since 2006.
 - What most tourists visiting Florence are less aware of are the activities of about 1800 volunteers who are working with the nonprofit organisation Angels of Beauty and the professional gardeners of the local authority of Florence, who are all working to keep Florence beautiful by reducing graffiti, litter, degradation, and inappropriate behaviour through community involvement.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Improve effectiveness, Increase citizen engagement, Support economic growth

- Promotion of activities which aim to improve or maintain the beauty of public spaces, buildings and green spaces. This includes activities to clean up specific areas and to reconstitute the order or beauty of public spaces. However, this excludes regular refuse collection or collection of dangerous litter.
 - Promotion of educational activities which strengthen civic ownership and raise environmental awareness of service providers, associations, schools and universities.
 - Collaboration with citizen associations and neighbourhood forums to manage joint environmental projects and to coordinate the work of volunteers.
 - Organisation of training courses and fundraising events.
 - Creation of education materials.
 - Building of public relations between the press and public and private agencies to promote the objectives of the Foundation.
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Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government staff

- Residents of Florence
- Tourists
- The municipality

Results

Effectiveness

- The achievements of the 1800 volunteers who have been working with Angels of Beauty since 2010 are impressive, both in terms of 'before and after' comparison and the actual extent of activity.
 - The performance information gathered shows that the volunteers have taken care of 21 kilometres of roads and 45930 square meters of wall space. On average, volunteers have invested about 165 hours per month, taken care of 17 roads and provided 453 hours of paid labour.
 - Overall, social control has improved and, on average, the amount of littering in the streets has been reduced since Angels of Beauty volunteers have started to operate in Florence.
 - Sometimes volunteers have interacted with people causing litter in the streets. Moreover, the local court now usually sentences people prosecuted for writing graffiti in non-authorised spaces to work with volunteers with the aim of stimulating awareness of the consequences of their illegal actions.
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Service quality

Responsiveness:

- Currently, there are 1800 volunteers who work in different parts of the city. Residents often express their satisfaction by offering the volunteers coffee and refreshments while they work and give small gifts to show that they appreciate their efforts.
- The volunteers have not only improved a number of selected public spaces and sites in Florence but also provided the local authority of Florence and other service providers with new ideas on how to improve public services.
- This included the simplification of municipal regulation to improve public urban spaces. The introduction of a fine of EUR 75 for people writing graffiti in non-authorised spaces.

Development

Design

The nonprofit organisation Angels of Beauty (Angeli del Bello) was founded by the private sector environment agency Quadrifoglio SpA and the private sector association Partners Palazzo Strozzi in September 2010. The key person driving this initiative was a Florentine entrepreneur. The City of Florence didn't participate during this foundation period, but came in after the Foundation started and has since become an important partner - for example, the local authority department for the environment makes a significant contribution to the planning and coordination of the services provided by volunteers.

Testing

- Volunteers and citizens participate in the decision process, such as deciding in which part of the city the Foundation should become active.
 - For example, volunteers and professionals meet several times a week to discuss the specific actions to take in removing graffiti on walls.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Volunteers are recruited informally, e.g. through word of mouth or social media. In some cases, the Foundation invites residents in specific neighbourhoods to volunteer, by posting calls for participation in letter boxes. Citizens have generally responded to these initiatives. The age of the volunteers varies from 6 to 89 years. One important focus of the Foundation's activities has been implementation of many educational projects in primary and secondary schools, and the university.
- Every year, all volunteers receive some training, for example in health and safety or in gardening. The Foundation has produced a manual that has been co-designed with the volunteers, defining the 'rules' of how volunteers and professionals should work together.
- Volunteers typically establish contacts with local citizens. For example, in the removal of graffiti, they advise citizens on how they can easily remove graffiti from their walls and how they can obtain free paint to do it.
- Initially, in 2010, most of the work of the volunteers focused on improving green space.
- The volunteers also ensure that both visitors and residents using the green spaces behave appropriately.
- In order to promote positive behaviour change, the local authority has launched the initiative "Florence for the Better" in cooperation with the local branch of Unesco and the Foundation Angeli del Bello. This has involved volunteers distributing postcards in the historic centre of Florence to visiting 'citizens of the world'.
- Further activities undertaken by the Angeli del Bello volunteers include: targeted clean-ups, such as the removal of cigarette stubs, paper and bottles; the opening of parks on special occasions; the care of specific park areas, such as playgrounds for children; taking care of herbs, plants and flowers in other spaces of the city. The volunteers also carry out work to improve a road or public square.

Resources used:

- With regard to the financial aspects of the initiative, the Foundation is not directly financed by the City of Florence. The Foundation's assets consist of an Endowment Fund of EUR 100 000 set up by the founders and original promoters, as well as subsequent donations and contributions from individuals and institutions.
- The Angels of Beauty regularly organises self-financing campaigns to achieve its institutional goals.
- In the 2014 budget, activities amounted to EUR 168 573, with liabilities of EUR 9776 and a EUR 7549 surplus for the year.
- The Savings Bank of Florence (Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze) is among the most important donors. In 2012 and 2013 it financed the Project 'Lovers of Florence - Angels of Beauty', dedicated to the care of urban spaces for citizens and the project "SoS Angels", for the maintenance of urban quality in Florence, donating EUR 150 000 and EUR 50,000 respectively to these projects (see appendices for the financial statements of Ente Cassa di Risparmio Florence, 2012 and 2013).

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The Angels of Beauty initiative increased the civic sense of identify of citizens and introduced new ways to care for and clean up public urban spaces. Volunteers activity improved awareness of the important role of citizens. They contributed to circle of positivity, increasing solidarity and reciprocity versus indifference.
 - Given that this initiative has now matured, some volunteers have moved on to do other things. This requires the continual marketing of the initiative to recruit new volunteers and to incentivize them to get involved. New volunteers can be recruited from medium-sized to large companies, which may consider this as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility Program.
 - In addition, the Foundation needs to explore whether the members of other civic associations may be willing to become involved. Finally, the Foundation needs to explore greater use of social media to reach out to new groups of potential volunteers.
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Other information

The Angels of Beauty Foundation does not have analytical reports which detail the staff and volunteer training costs. To understand better the value of this initiative, it would be necessary to know what savings are being made through the reduction of littering and better care of parks through volunteer activity, which reduces work by the Environment Department of Florence.

Low fines and lack of surveillance of monuments suggest the need for a digital platform to classify and monitor the management of graffiti. This digital platform is very important because it can improve the network between different public administrations and volunteer associations. Using this digital platform could enhance efficiency and effectiveness, e.g. by helping to select in how many parts of the city volunteers can operate in agreement with Environment Department of Florence city.

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