



Co-funded by
the European Union



Stories 4 Wings

2024-1-ES01-KA220-ADU-000255317

Active Citizenship

The Forgotten Park





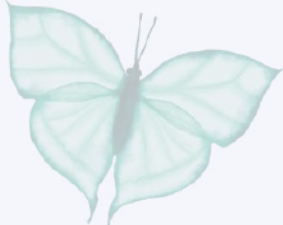
When I moved to this neighborhood twenty years ago, the little park on the corner was the beating heart of the area. I remember Sunday mornings, when families would come out after church and linger there: children would run on the swings, grandparents would chat on the benches or read the newspaper, and we adults would exchange recipes, news, and secrets. That rectangle of grass and gravel was, in its own way, a town square.

Every summer, in the last week of June, a large neighborhood dinner was organized right in the park: everyone would bring a plastic table, a few chairs, and prepare something to eat. Everything was free, everyone was welcome; even those who hadn't managed to prepare anything found a ready-made meal and a cold drink. Over the years, however, something had cracked. There seemed to be no time left to stop and spend time together; everyone had more and more things to do. And then, first, it was the swings that broke and were never replaced; they said, no one used them anymore. Then the benches began to splinter and lose their wooden planks. The grass stopped being cut regularly, and weeds took over the edges.

I remember the first time I saw a beer bottle abandoned under the swing: it struck me like an omen. Little by little, the little park that had been a meeting place became a place to avoid. In the years that followed, families stopped bringing their children. In the evenings, the park remained dark, the streetlights broken, and the silence broken only by voices and raucous laughter. In the morning, you could glimpse papers and cigarette butts on the ground in the grass. I still passed by it every day on my way to catch the bus to work, and every time I felt a pang of melancholy: it was like watching a friend grow old without being able to do anything about it. One spring afternoon, returning home, I saw a woman standing in front of the rusty gate of the park. I knew her by sight: she lived in the building next to mine. She said to me bitterly, "What a shame, right? My children used to play here, and now I take my grandchildren somewhere else, too far away."

Those words struck me more than usual, perhaps because the sun was shining that day and it seemed almost insulting that such a space was left abandoned. That's when something clicked. We began talking about it among neighbors.



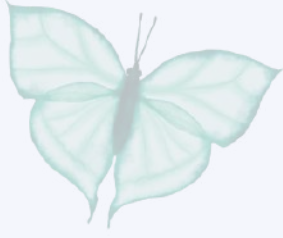


First in casual conversations when we bumped into each other on the street or while standing in line at the supermarket, then more forcefully. One evening, in the courtyard of my building, five or six of us gathered. "Why don't we try to do something?" someone suggested.

The idea seemed crazy: we, ordinary citizens, could restore a public park? Yet the madness was imbued with desire: we all wanted to have a shared space again, a piece of the city that hadn't been left to decay. We formed a small neighborhood committee. We printed out some computer-generated flyers and distributed them in mailboxes: "A community park! If you believe in it, join us." We didn't know what to expect, but at the first meeting, in a parish hall, more than twenty people showed up. Some were elderly, others were parents, others were young people eager to lend a hand and find a safe, clean space to spend their afternoons.

We started small: one Saturday morning, we brought garbage bags, gloves, and shears. We cut the tallest grass, collected glass and bottles, and painted the still-usable benches green. The neighborhood children, intrigued, came to help us: some passed paintbrushes with imprecise hands, others brought bottles of water to the adults. It wasn't just a cleanup job, it was a community ritual: for the first time in years, we felt united again, with a common goal. Then came the bigger steps. We wrote to the City Council, asking for the playground equipment to be replaced and the streetlights to be fixed. At first, we received only silence.

But we didn't give up. Every month, we sent new letters, collected signatures, and called the city council. Eventually, our perseverance paid off: an official came to inspect the site and was amazed to see how many people from the neighborhood were involved. After a few months, work began: new swings, a colorful slide, and two streetlights were installed. The municipality did its part, but we continued with ours, also thanks to collaboration with local associations that had the right resources and expertise: we organized shifts to keep the park clean, events to liven it up, and neighborhood parties with music and shared food.



Today, when I walk past the park, I no longer see a dark, forgotten place. I see children laughing, elderly people chatting, young people playing soccer. Every time I sit on one of the repainted benches, I think about how important it was not to give up on the idea that public space does not concern us. It's not true that "the City Council decides." We decide too, every time we choose to care for what surrounds us.





Co-funded by the European Union. The opinions and views expressed in this document are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the Servicio Español para la Internacionalización de la Educación (SEPIE). Neither the European Union nor the issuing authority can be held liable for them.

The publication obtains the Creative Commons Licence CC BY- NC SA.



This license allows you to distribute, remix, improve and build on the work, but only non-commercially. When using the work as well as extracts from this must

1. Be mentioned the source and a link to the license must be given and possible changes have to be mentioned. The copyrights remain with the authors of the documents.
 2. The work may not be used for commercial purposes.
 3. If you recompose, convert or build upon the work, your contributions must be published under the same license as the original.
- 