



# Red Couch



Is a temporary offer to citizens of a neighborhood, young and old alike, to sit on a red couch and talk about anything concerning their residential environment.



Information  
Ideation  
**Consultation**  
Co-Decision



<15 people  
15-30 people  
30-100 people  
100-250 people  
> 250 people



**Preparation:**  
1-3 months for invitation of the participants etc.  
**Implementation:**  
1 day – 6 weeks  
**Follow-up:**  
1-5 days for analysis and documentation



\$  
\$\$  
\$\$\$  
Costs for sofa, venue, staff



**At least one person** for preparation, moderation and documentation

## The Method: What is it, when to use it and what outcome to expect

The Red Couch is a physical point of contact for citizens to freely express their mind on issues regarding their living environment, directly where they live in a living room atmosphere. Statements are collected and forwarded to decision-makers to eventually improve or change situations.

Red Couches are useful to address (known) sensitive topics in a neighborhood, pro-actively research current concerns in an area to integrate them into policy planning or to give unheard groups a voice. They can be initiated by local policy makers or social initiatives.

Red Couches enable open dialogue which helps to address severe issues that otherwise won't come up in formal processes, to involve citizens who otherwise are hard to reach and foster communal spirit.

## The Process: How to conduct it in an in-person setting or online using a PC/laptop with video option

The method follows three steps:

- 1. Preparation:** Scout, secure and set up a venue, red sofa and other equipment if needed (e.g. a tent, extra chairs, theme sign/billboard, brochures, camera, microphone). Optional, define a theme and if certain politicians should be invited to have a talk with. Decide on open or guided dialogue; create an interview guideline if needed. Determine opening hours and professionals who can cover these and engage with the visitors. Define how to document the conversations (e.g. pictures, full-length audio/video). Promote the event. For virtual settings, provide entry data to the virtual room and design and test it upfront.
- 2. Conduction:** Professionals invite and explain the concept to passers-by and moderate and document the open or semi-guided dialogue with visitors using the interview guidelines, either 1:1 or with very small groups of visitors.
- 3. Wrap up:** Process collected statements into a document, hand it over to respective government officials or decision-makers in an organization/social initiative/association but also make it available to be accessed in public.

### Blended participation

The actual "red couch" can be supplemented by a virtual "red couch". If the necessary resources are available, a simple platform or submission format can work as "room" for citizens to voice contentious issues. Data privacy should be ensured, and there should be room for anonymous submissions.

### Digital communication

Digital communication is crucial for outreach / in order to inform citizens about the red couch and how / where they can access it. This does not have to be targeted but can also be advertisement on different public websites or in local radio stations.

### Good to know

- A different colored sofa or an armchair will do, too
- Can be open to any citizen or target group specific (e.g. teenagers, families or elderly people from the neighborhood) – the theme of the Red Couch event will attract the desired target group
- Consider:
  - Easy-access, highly-frequented locations
  - For it to be part of a larger (city) event
  - A traveling Red Couch' set up at several places one after another for larger data collection
  - If audio or video documentation is appropriate
- If there is no change or action taken some time after the Red Couch event, participants may feel not taken seriously, worst screwed, and resign or disengage in upcoming participation processes
- Read further:
  - <https://www.bipar.de/das-rote-sofa/> (German)