

Creating a Network of Places through Participatory Actions across Cities and Cultures

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Abstract

The aim of the A-Place project is to address the problem of placelessness in our multicultural, and interconnected societies from a multidisciplinary and participatory perspective. Artists and creators, educators and students of art and architecture, and cultural agents collaborate with communities in the design and implementation of placemaking activities with the purpose of reinforcing the bonds between people and the places they live in. Activities in locations in several European cities, as well as in digital spaces, have contributed to the creation of a network of places –both tangible and intangible – that exploit the multiple dimensions of public space as a stage for leisure, entertainment and education. A sequence of planning, performing, reflecting and evaluating has been applied to the activities carried out in the first year of this four-year project. The outcomes of this first cycle will help to expand the network of places in the coming years of the project. A key issue for the further development of the project is the evaluation of the impact of placemaking activities on the communities.

Keywords: placemaking, public space, situated learning, practice-based research, place

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I. Introduction

A-Place – “Linking places through networked artistic practices”¹ – is a project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme (2019-2023), whose aim is to address the problem of placelessness in our multicultural, and interconnected societies. It does so by designing and implementing activities in public space involving residents as well as artists, educators and cultural agents. These activities, carried out in six European cities (Barcelona, Bologna, Brussels, Lisbon, Ljubljana, and Nicosia) connect the meanings and experiences associated to places across cultural and geographic boundaries (Figure 1). Partners are community-based organizations, cultural agencies and higher education institutions (art, architecture and planning, social sciences).

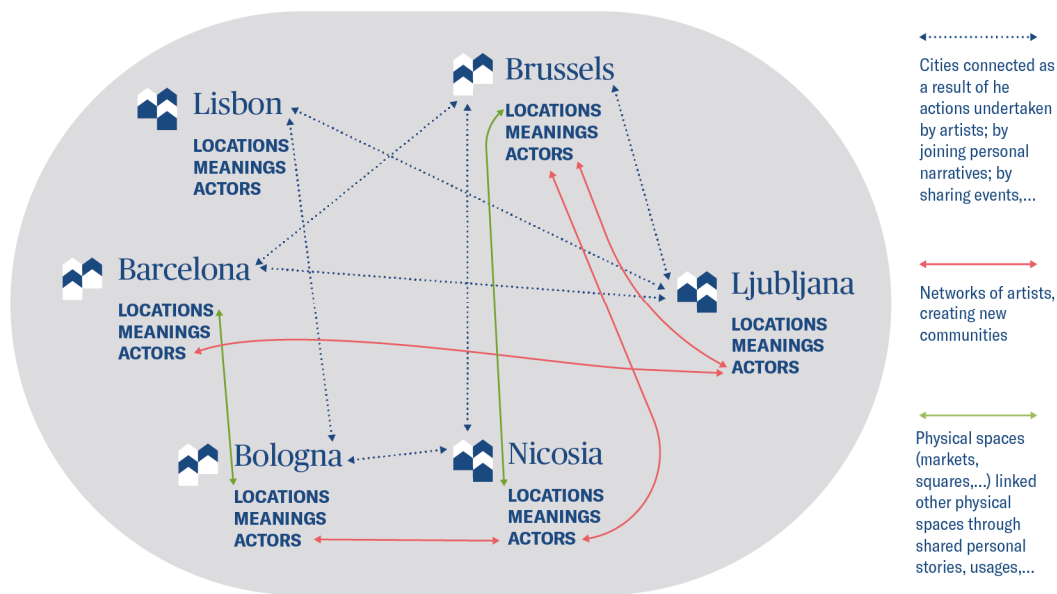


Figure 1. Creating a network of places.

The objectives of the project are:

- To develop and apply community-based, interdisciplinary practices to reveal the manifold meanings that the various individuals and social groups give to the places they share and to create meaningful connections between places in different cities and cultures.
- To create cross-disciplinary learning spaces arising from the confluence of artistic practices with educational programmes at various levels, from school to higher education. These spaces, intertwined with placemaking activities, will overcome the boundaries between academia and society, and between disciplines.
- To explore the role and exploit the potential of networked artistic practices in the process of creating places, in physical and digital spaces, by embedding them in the community and engaging other stakeholders in the co-creation process (residents, students, educational staff).

¹ <https://www.a-place.eu/>

- To exploit the capacities of digital technologies in the creation of new links between representations of places (videos, photographs, stories) disseminated through digital networks, and framing activities in digital space in sociocultural contexts where they can be meaningfully used in creative placemaking activities.

The creative spatial practices implemented by the network aim to create meaningful places in order to foment more inclusive and supportive communities. Ultimately, the aim of A-Place is to contribute to the humanization of places at risk in cities that are undergoing transformation processes, resulting from the contemporary movements of migration, acculturation to local life, street art and political activism, sustainability and other current urban trends.

1.1 Public spaces and places

Typically, with the term public space we refer to spaces that belong to the community, rather to a person or group; spaces which are open and accessible to everyone, any time, in both physical and the political sense. In the physical sense, public spaces are urban and natural areas; highways and train stations; squares, streets and promenades; playgrounds and shopping malls, and digital infrastructures. A space is public because it belongs to the “public”. However, the public realm is regulated by laws and policies issued by political representatives. Public spaces can also be a site of negotiation and conflict, where individuals and groups come together to discuss and debate issues of common concern. It is the manifestation of the “public sphere” (Habermas, 1984), a discursive space in which people –regardless of their origins or class– exercise their capacity for communicative action.

Through the activities performed in public spaces –walking or driving a vehicle; meeting with friends and neighbours; playing with children; participating in a demonstration, a party or a marathon– people forge links with spaces, that is, they create places from open spaces with “no fixed pattern of established human meaning” like “a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed” (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). This place creation involves a process of personal perception through all the senses (sights, smells and sounds), as well the activation of our imagination and our memories of the spaces we inhabit. Place is not only an individual creation but a social and cultural construct that is shaped by the interactions and experiences of individuals and groups. Places are “a manifestation of human culture” (Ujang and Zakariya, 2015), a reflection of the values, beliefs and practices of the people who inhabited them.

Place and identity are strongly interrelated; place and place attachment are inextricably connected. “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place”, contended Tuan (1977, p. 73). We belong to places and places belong to us; we make places our own and develop a sense of belonging to them. The sense of place is inherent to the human being, since being –in the Heideggerian sense of Dasein– entails creating links with the spaces we inhabit in order to make them the places of our existence. As Relph (1976, p. 38) argued, “To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular”. However, in a globalised world subject to continuous flows of individuals (workers, tourists) and groups (massive migration waves), undergoing a continuous mix of cultures and values, a “local place” has become a “closed, coherent, integrated as authentic, as ‘home’” (Massey, 2005, p. 6), that is, a place where we retreat to protect

ourselves against the invasions of “the others”. To counteract this “exclusivist claims to places” what is needed is a notion of space “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales” (Massey, 1994, p.4).

1.2 Public space as network

The idea of public space as a network of relations in a continuous process of becoming, helps to overcome the dualism between material and social structures which has been seen as a limitation by sociologists as well as by architects and planners.

From the perspective of sociology, spaces are not given, but are constructed and deconstructed, and in the course of this process, their constitutive elements are linked in multiple ways. Reflecting upon the need to imagine notions of space which respond to the conditions of our globalised societies in order to articulate spatial politics accordingly, Massey contends that space is “a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made” (Massey, 2005, p. 9). In a similar vein, Löw (2016) argues that space is not just an empty container, but “a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods” that facilitates certain actions and practices while being actively shaped by them.

The need to think of space in relational terms is also postulated in the field of architecture and planning. Tonkiss argued that overcoming the boundaries established by the social sciences and design disciplines is a prerequisite to think about urban form in a multi-dimensional way, as something “composed of material structures and physical spaces, but also and perhaps more fundamentally by social, economic, legal and political modes of organization and interaction” (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 2).

1.3 Public space as communication space

The network of interrelated elements that make up a space also includes the messages that are transmitted through it. Public space is essentially a space for communication. Public and publicity are strongly interlinked: what happens in public space is known by all, that is, it is publicized. Any element –a piece of public furniture or a large infrastructure; an artwork or a building– or an event –a festival, a demonstration– placed in public space becomes a sign which conveys a message. The capacity of public space to convey messages has been exploited in cities throughout history. As Çelik, Favro and Ingersoll (1994, p. 4) contend: “The naming, sitting and form of the streets, and the iconography of the buildings and street furniture that help shape them are a means of communicating ideological messages to the public domain”. This is true for both ancient and contemporary cities. Today, newly installed benches in a neighbourhood transmit the message that the local government is taking care of public equipment, while dirty streets suggest that there are not enough services and/or little care of the residents; the abundance of graffiti can be an expression of rejection by certain social groups against social and power structures, but public art in murals tell us about the will of the community to reinvigorate dull and lost spaces.

The communicative capacity of public space has grown exponentially through the use of digital media. Messages are emitted, and re-emitted in public space and spread through digital media. A passer-by taking a photograph of the new benches or the dirty streets amplifies the message beyond the social and physical limits of the neighbourhood; and a well-driven social media campaign about a local event in a community can attract the

attention of people from any distant location. In this way, digital technologies become instruments of contemporary practices of spatial production. Referring to Lefebvre's production of space, Zamani, McMeel and Manfredini (2014) pointed out that "digital and communicative social networks within digital realms produce their own social spaces which are entwined with the urban social spaces". Therefore, the production of space is no longer constrained to location, rather it expands through the digital networks interlinking images, sounds and words, opinions and values from the most diverse places.

1.4 Public space as space for artistic creation

Artists have exploited the communicative potential of public space to expose and disseminate their works, outside the institutionalized circles of galleries, museums and concert halls. Art works displayed or performed on the streets transcend the realm of individual expression to become a vehicle for social and political critique, giving visibility to the artist's ideas and talent as well as expressing the concerns of a community. However, although in its beginnings, street art was the expression of a revolutionary aesthetic against established practices, over time "it has become co-opted, artistically annexed, through acting as a (literal and metaphorical) facade, a mere marketing tool for the Creative City brand" which is "selling a false notion of place" (Schacter, 2014, p. 162). Nowadays, street art is not only used by artists to convey ideological messages, but it has been endorsed by private initiatives, such as organizing street art tours as part of the branding strategy (Andron, 2018), and by public administrations which turn to artists to transform dull walls into colourful murals as part of their urban renewal programmes (Landry et al, 1996).

1.5 Place and placemaking

The term "placemaking" has been used since the 1990s by the non-profit organization Project for Public Spaces (PPS). They define placemaking as "an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighbourhood, city, or region, placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community" (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). Other authors have proposed definitions of placemaking which put the focus on the objectives of placemaking. According to De Brito and Richards (2017), "Placemaking can be basically summarised as the art of making better places for people", although what makes a place "better", why and how to make it better, lies at the core of the matter. The purpose of placemaking is to create places "that benefit everyone – places that connect existing residents, instead of dividing, alienating, or displacing them, and places that enhance the existing character of a neighbourhood, instead of erasing it", asserts Kahne (2015). For Wyckoff (2014) the goal of placemaking is "to improve the quality of various places in a neighbourhood, and by extension, the community and region in which those places are located as well." In sum, what drives placemaking is a desire to improve and enhance the built environment and to make it more liveable through the participation of people, "in both the production of meaning and in the means of production of a locale", a "contested process in which citizenship plays a key, mediating role" (Lepofsky and Fraser, 2003, p. 128). Placemaking involves creating temporary, community-driven interventions to activate spaces through events. In this regard, it aligns with the principles of tactical urbanism: affordability and ease-of-set-up ("lighter, quicker, cheaper") enabling agile responses;

performing as experimental micro urban labs for testing alternative scenarios to overcome the traditional division between plan making and plan implementation, in the spirit of the “experimental city” (Silva, 2016); ensuring community relevance and enabling support for a set of interventions leading to adaptive and responsive solutions to community concerns (Treskon et al, 2018); and providing incremental build-up towards future longer-term and permanent projects playing a strategic role in urban development (Lydon and Garcia, 2015).

The experimental nature of temporary placemaking offers multiple opportunities to integrate art and artistic performance (Evans, Karvonen and Raven, 2016) and explore “place-as-it-can be” which helps connect people to places and get them involved in the reimagining of the future of the places they are engaged in. Edensor (2015) focuses on the potentials of “sensual discovery” and elaborates on how senses can open up the city to multiple interpretations. Placemaking with senses in mind, integrating sounds, smells, tastes and tactile interactions facilitate the creative challenging of the established ways of acting and thinking for and with the people (Franck and Stevens, 2015).

Integrating artistic performances in placemaking also opens up the potential of performative modes in urban development. Performativity in this context is twofold: first, artists create their own “performance space” (Treskon et al, 2018), and second, this space has a performative capacity beyond the artistic intervention, as a community embedded relational placemaking (Parolek, 2014). In this sense, placemaking integrating artistic performances can be understood as a mode of performative urbanism: placemaking as the art of articulating “other spaces” activating the performative character of places by creating situations in which a new reality is created (Wolfrum and Brandis, 2015).

1.6 Creating networks of places

The creation of places as nodes in a network of relations in continuous construction transcends the notion of public space as a fixed and delimit urban form. In its dynamics, this network generates links between locations and actors, material elements and symbolic meanings, public realm and personal experiences. Through the use of digital media, this dynamic construction overcomes the geographic limits of public spaces, transcending both locality and culture.

The process of creating networked places involves the participation of a diverse group of actors, including professionals from multiple disciplines and the inhabitants of the area. In today’s socially diverse, fragmented and fluid societies, identifying and addressing the shared needs –both functional and symbolic– of different groups can be challenging for planners when proposing new public spaces or transforming existing ones. To overcome this challenge, it is essential to involve individuals and various social and ethnic groups in the planning process in order to gain a deeper understanding of the places and the needs of the community, which can inform decision making.

Currently, a variety of practices such as placemaking, creative placemaking, tactical urbanism, pop-up urbanism, performative urbanism and community art-based interventions all share a common goal of engaging and learning from community members, strengthening connections between people and the spaces they live in order to foster a sense of belonging. These approaches to public space and planning open up opportunities for collaboration between professionals, such as artists, planners, and sociologists, and non-professionals to engage in creative practices that are deeply

rooted in the social and built environments. Through this collaboration, the community's knowledge and perspectives can be integrated into the design process, resulting in public spaces that are more responsive to the needs and desires of the community.

2. Methodology: placemaking as practice-based research

Research on placemaking is integrated into the humanities and social sciences. While natural sciences and technical sciences need hypothesis, which might be supported by research questions, humanities and social sciences are based on questions and aims. Thus, research aims or themes play the role of research questions in the scientific field. Instead of applying a general theory and methodological framework to the case studies, we focus on theme-related knowledge which can be explained step-by-step from the case studies, rather than from any methodological generalisation. In this kind of social-based research, methods remain case-dependent. This bottom-up research approach has received a variety of names: 'practice-based' research, 'practice-led' research, 'research by design' and 'practice-driven' research.

Placemaking can be seen as a 'practice-based research' (Vienna Declaration, 2014) which reveals a research problem and a bank of research evidence; such as a 'practice-led' research (Zupančič, 2020); 'research by design' conducted by experimentation and live-research laboratories (Verbeke, 2013; Tamke, Nicholas and Ramsgaard Thomsen, 2017) or hybrid 'practice-driven' (Zupančič, 2021) research which responds to unpredictable circumstances although it is nevertheless guided by research aims.

Placemaking is about transforming spaces into places by changing their aesthetic, physical and social characteristics (Kelkar and Spinelli, 2016). Therefore, a key issue is to assess to which extent these goals are achieved. The evaluation encompasses includes assessing the relevance of the themes addressed and the impact on places and their communities. In order to assess this relevance, we need to answer questions such as: "Which values (collective creativity, social engagement, community building) have the activities helped to reveal?" and "Have the activities brought about changes in the community and in the social groups involved?". The evaluation needs to be specifically "designed" for each placemaking activity, taking into account the expectations and shared goals of the various actors involved (e.g. artists, planners, citizens).

The transformation of spaces into places is a gradual and slow process that involves developing civic and cultural habits and a sense of identity with regard to these spaces. The first step is precisely to understand how people perceive these spaces: what they see (or do not see); what they hear and how they hear it. Learning to perceive a space and to share that perception is a way to begin the transformation process. Jason Miller (2021, p. 122) advocates the importance of a [Hegelian] "aesthetic reflexivity" that summons subjectivity through the perception of art, as part of the "cultural turn" that reasserts art's socio-political meaning. In this context, the perception of spaces through art, which suggests "Where to look?", shapes a cultural policy and highlights "a way of understanding art as something that orients us within our social environment. Miller argues that art is a form of "aesthetic narrative" that has a stronger ability to communicate with a diverse audience than traditional discourses: "This is because the work of art appears to us as a sensible object also invested with human thought, emotion, perspective, insight, meaning, etc.- i.e., with Idea. [...] the Idea may appear in a

work of art, its appearance is necessarily manifested in sensuous material: the bronzen form; the painted image; the word; the notes; the photograph; the film; the performance; and so on” (Miller 2021, pp. 116-117). This reflexive characteristic of art, which relates to a phenomenology of aesthetic experience, can be the basis for a change in attitudes and mentalities towards the transformation of spaces over time.

2.1 Iterative cycles of planning, performing and reflecting

In A-Place, we are applying an action research approach which is based on cycles that Zuber-Skerritt (2001, p. 19) summarized as follows: “(1) strategic planning, (2) implementing the plan (action), (3) observation, evaluation and self-evaluation, (4) critical and self-critical reflection on the results of (1) - (3), and making decisions for the next cycle of action research”. The planning-performing-reflecting-and-evaluating cycles are carried out throughout the four years of the project’s lifetime (Figure 2).

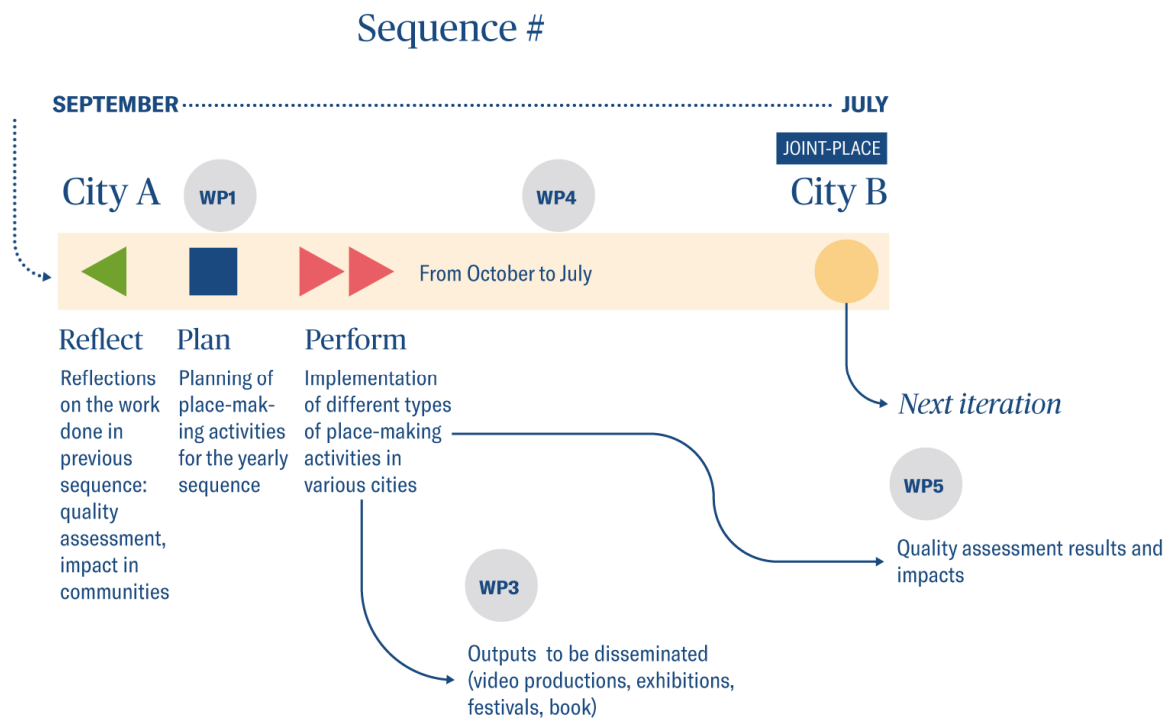


Figure 2. Iterative cycles of the A-Place project

Placemaking and creative actions are *planned* in diverse locations, utilizing the resources that are available, such as contacts with communities and existing institutional programmes, through a bottom-up and iterative process. The initial selection of cases is pragmatic and based on the project partners’ capacities and previous experience. A more specific design of the activities is then developed based on the issues that are relevant for the local communities. Most activities are problem-oriented fieldwork case studies. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to adapt and develop activities on a global scale using digital technologies.

After the placemaking activities have been *performed*, a *reflection* process is undertaken to identify common topics and shared strategies. This reflection is crucial in the overall

process of creating a network of places and establishing a global sense of place. It involves creating a shared glossary and to identify themes of debate derived from the work done by partners in the various cities and locations. The glossary and themes are made public on the “Netplaces” section of the project website to facilitate further collaboration and knowledge sharing among project partners and stakeholders (Figure 3).

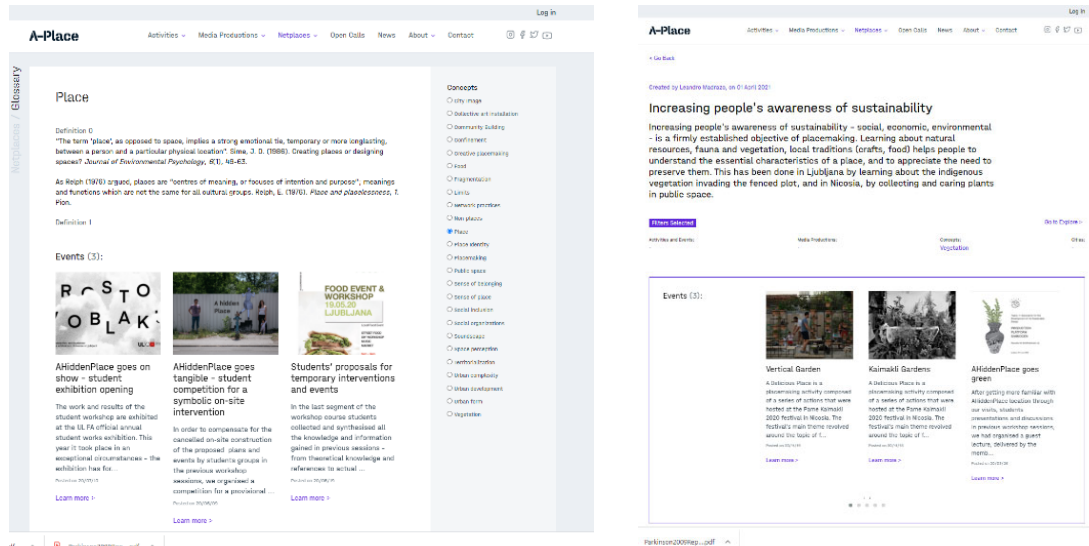


Figure 3. Vocabulary and themes in A-Place website

Each cycle ends with an *evaluation* of the process and outputs. This conveys adopting a position outside the self-reflective process (Schön, 1983), for then initiating the next iteration taking into account the findings of the evaluation. Non-linearity, shifting argumentation and unexpected coherences are essential in this iterative process. At the outset, it is more about weaving the individual experiences into a web of relations than creating a methodology.

A-Place is a project that aims to combat indifference and socio-cultural exclusion through the qualitative transformation of public spaces into places. However, addressing the problem of placelessness requires actions that go beyond singular events and even beyond the lifetime of the project. Socio-cultural transformations that involve changes in habits and behaviours towards humanizing public spaces and fostering neighbourhood relations are slow processes. The transformation of spaces at various levels such as physical, socio-cultural, and affective, which is the objective of most of the project's activities, also requires changes in the mentality of the actors involved, which can only be revealed through the continuity of the cultural and artistic activities over time. Furthermore, assessing the deep and long-term impact of these changes requires specific methodologies that go beyond the spatiotemporal limits of a specific placemaking activity.

3. A comprehensive programme of placemaking activities

A broad programme of placemaking activities (Madrazo, 2020) was planned at the start of the first year of the project, and launched in February 2020. However, the COVID-

19 pandemic struck right at the start of the implementation of the planned activities. For a project focused on activating social and physical spaces through placemaking interventions, the restrictions imposed by the lockdown presented a significant challenge. Despite these limitations, and also thanks to them, we adapted our plans to examine the concept of community and its relationship to place, in the context of confinement. In this regard, the pandemic ultimately provided opportunities for new perspectives and insights.

3.1 “A Calm Place”, by Alive Architecture and KU Leuven

The Schaerbeek district in Brussels has a long migration history. Communities from multiple origins and ethnicities live in the same area. Additionally, the district is home to several higher education institutions. The Campus 1030 project was launched with the goal of strengthening ties between residents and students.

To contribute to the objectives of this project, we designed a series of interventions around the Place de la Reine, where the Maison des Arts is located². Students from an elective master course at KU Leuven made a sensorial urban walk to familiarize themselves with the area. They left traces of their impressions in bowls which were left floating on a pond in the square. The floating bowls produced a meditative sound that created the peaceful atmosphere of a calm place.

In a second walk, students marked the area with signs to propose paths for residents to move through public space. Participants were able to develop their spatial awareness, paying attention to sound, smells and the materials they touched (Figure 4). They then left written testimony of their impressions on the green (Figure 5). As a closing event, a dinner and a concert by the Turkish Tatyos ensemble for students and residents was organized in the square. This ephemeral placemaking intervention helped to create an emerging community of students and faculty members, artists and activists, through a participatory process which enabled them to discover a place.



Figure 4. Sensorial walk touching different materials.



Figure 5. Leaving a trace of the feelings after the sensorial walk.

² <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/18>

3.2 “A Confined Place”, by School of Architecture La Salle, Urban Gorillas and City Space Architecture

As the COVID-19 pandemic limited our ability to carry out planned activities in physical space, we reacted to the unexpected situation by creating a new programme of activities – “A Confined Place” – to strengthen the sense of place during confinement. The activities, which were fully developed online³ (A Confined Place, 2020), dealt with the perception and representation of places using mixed media such as photography, video, graphics, and texts. The programme consisted of three types of activities: photographic representation of space for students in the partner institutions (Figure 6), artistic works with hybrid media through open call (Figure 7) and short films on the transformation of public spaces through a film competition. Through these activities, participants were able to share their artistic interpretation of the sense of place that emerged during this unprecedented global situation.

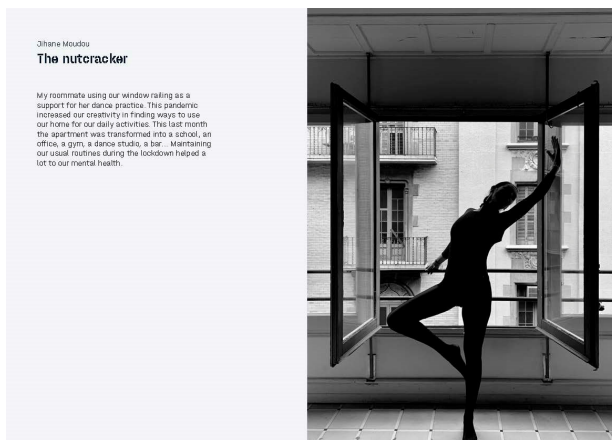


Figure 6. “The nutcracker”. Photograph by Jihane Moudou, student (La Salle School of Architecture). Domestic spaces were transformed to become working places, gyms, or dance studios.



Figure 7. “#AsocialPlace”, by Sophie Thiel and Miriam Cooler, winners of the first prize.

3.3 “A Delicious Place”, by Urban Gorillas

The Kaimakli neighbourhood in Nicosia is home to a diverse group of social groups, ages, and ethnicities, but there is little social interaction among them. The Pame Kaimakli annual festival aims to bring the communities together by reinforcing the bonds between them and with the public and private spaces.

This year’s activities explored the socio-cultural, artistic, and placemaking possibilities of collecting, elaborating and sharing food⁴. A variety of stakeholders participated, including elders, migrants, children, artists, local activists, and the local community at large. The activities included a series of dinners and walks (Figure 8) through the neighbourhood, the creation of a community vertical garden in the Agia Varvara square (Figure 9), the production of three video stories, a publication on the gardens of Kaimakli, and a pop-up cinema that screened international films, and video stories around the thematic of

³ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/22>

⁴ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/24>

food in other places. The presentation of local and international stories in videos that explored the same theme from different angles enhanced intercultural dialogue. Through the participation of local actors in the video productions, it was possible to give life to certain intangible community assets which contributed to creating stronger bonds among the people.



Figure 8. Kaimakli walk included 14 stops in the neighbourhood and storytelling from residents.



Figure 9. Community Planting event: 200 pots were planted to create a vertical garden.

3.4 “A Hidden Place”, by Faculty of Architecture, University of Ljubljana and prostoRož

An unused and fenced plot in the central part of Ljubljana, in the Bežigranski Dvor district, is not only physically detached from its surroundings, but also from the social and collective memory. The plot’s public face is the fence, which, together with the wild greenery behind it, shapes the surrounding streets.

The objective of the activities was to suggest new uses and invite young people and adults – residents, teachers from nearby schools, parents and relatives of children and young adults, as well as passers-by– to visit the site, inhabit it, and transform the enclosed area and the surrounding streets into places⁵. Due to the lockdown, onsite activities were limited, and it was only possible to organize walks with small student groups. Also, it was not possible to engage the local schools to the extent that had been initially envisioned. Architecture students, guided by faculty staff and by guest specialists in sociology and community planning, made proposals for temporary, semi-permanent interventions to attract people to the site.

A series of lectures on local vegetation and methods for ethnographic research helped architecture students broaden their design thinking beyond issues related to form and construction. A student competition was organized to award the intervention that would best contribute to activating the abandoned site, and to inform the community about the history of the place (Figures 10, 11). Through these activities, a vivid learning space was established, which combined knowledge and reflections from different professional disciplines (architecture, urban design, sociology, geography, arts etc.), artistic practice, tacit knowledge and experiences shared by students, artistic mentors, guest lecturers, and local community through interviews and opinion sharing.

⁵ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/19>



Figure 10. Winning proposal: symbolic onsite intervention by students Oriol Gracia Vallès and Lara Jana Gabrijel Milanovič. Photo: Pia Klančar..



Figure 11. Winning proposal: symbolic onsite intervention by students Oriol Gracia Vallès and Lara Jana Gabrijel Milanovič. Photo: Pia Klančar.

3.5 “A Sound Place”, by Universidade Nova de Lisboa

In recent years, the transformation of Martim Moniz square in the Mouraria district of Lisbon has been a subject of debate (Figure 12). Local associations have opposed the municipality’s plans to install a shopping centre, advocating instead to reduce traffic and to build a garden to create a pleasant place for residents.

The purpose of the activities was to contribute to the creation of a sense of place using the sounds of the neighbourhood, along with sounds from other places, to create musical pieces that would be performed in the square to transform it into a different kind of place⁶. However, due to lockdown restrictions, a streamed live concert took place in the Mouraria Innovation Center instead of the open space (Figure 13).



Figure 12. Martim Moniz square.



Figure 13. Live concert / Duo Contracello, Mouraria Innovation Centre.

Two pieces were performed by the Duo Contracello: A composition created by Jaime Reis and students from the Lisbon Superior Music School based on the sounds collected in the neighbourhood, together with imaginary sounds and memories of local communities, migrants, transient population, and artists, and a second composition from the young composer João Quinteiro, based on the story of an immigrant living in the

⁶ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/20>

vicinity of Mouraria and other inhabitants' stories of surrounding parishes. The authors of these compositions learned to listen to the sounds of the environment, relocating them, that is, decontextualizing and aestheticizing them.

These creative placemaking activities provided a unique opportunity for both students and listeners to explore and become aware of the existence of soundscapes, by collecting and transforming local sounds of life into musical compositions, and performing them in the designated spaces.

3.6 “A Visionary Place”, by City Space Architecture

A parklet was installed in the Porto-Saragozza neighbourhood in Bologna as part of the preparatory activities of the Urban Visions festival. Three parking spots located in front of the headquarters of City Space Architecture (Figure 14), the organizer of the festival, were transformed into a temporary public space dedicated to cultural and artistic activities. The intervention received the support of the municipality, through the programme “Strade Aperte”, initiated by grassroots organizations working together with architects and designers, with the goal of making public spaces more inclusive, greener and more pedestrian-friendly⁷.

Two events took place in the parklet in October and November 2020. The first event, a language workshop in English “Come and speak English at the Parklet!” in collaboration with TWYO language training institute, offered children and adults, regardless of their previous knowledge of the language, the opportunity to talk, listen, and ask questions to English teachers. The second event was a performance by StaMurga, a group of young artists, featuring live music and dance. “Murga” is a form of street theatre that combines percussion, dance, singing and acting, and it is meant to be an instrument of peaceful, noisy and colourful dissent (Figure 15).



Figure 14. Parklet in Via Curiel 13/d, Bologna.



Figure 15. StaMurga live performance in the parklet.

Through the creation of a new place in the public realm and the organisation of a cultural program of cross-disciplinary activities, we started a process of capacity building on the importance of public space, for and with the community. The artistic performance organized in the parklet is an example of the transformation of a public

⁷ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/17>

space to make it more inclusive for people from different creative fields, and it could become part of a network of artistic practices.

3.7 “A Weaved Place”, by School of Architecture La Salle and Sitesize

The purpose of this programme of activities was to bring together architecture students and faculty, artists and citizens to reflect on the sense of place and collective identity in the city of L’Hospitalet in the metropolitan area of Barcelona⁸. The planned activities included a joint analysis of the socio-physical territory conducted by students, faculty and residents, as well as participatory activities in public spaces and cultural and civic associations. Due to the lockdown, the activities could not be carried out in person, so digital environments and tools were used instead.

The students in the programme carried out a visual cartography of the city in two stages: first, exploring the areas around a specific coordinate point using Google Earth and then communicating their findings to classmates, faculty, and the community through a public blog. After the visual mapping, students conducted research on the activities of civic and cultural associations that were engaged in community building.

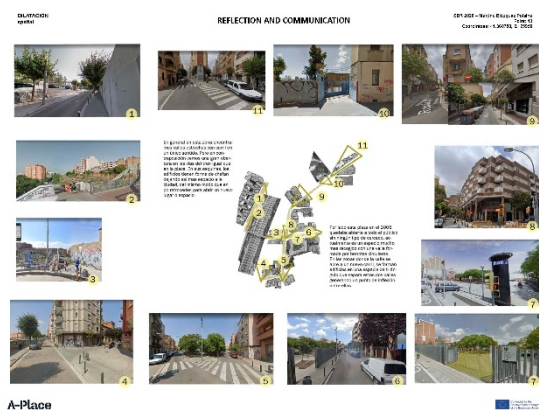


Figure 16. Spatial dilation. Martina Blázquez, student. A description of the spaces found along the path followed by the student, referring to the elements that defined the spaces and their connectivity.

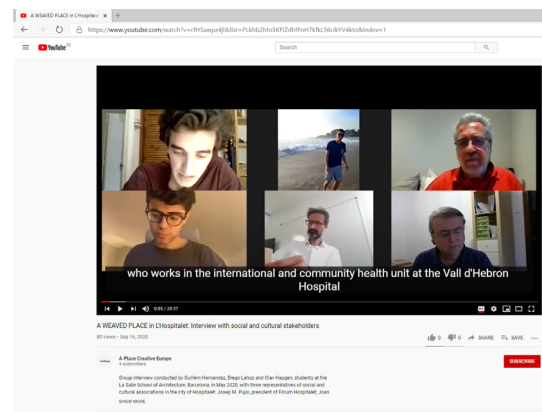


Figure 17. Group interview of students with representatives of social and cultural associations. Guillem Hernández, Diego Lahoz and Olav Hauge, students.

They prepared questionnaires and conducted interviews based on four topics: 1. “Caring city”, which focused on how the city protects its inhabitants and provides means for their wellbeing (health, education, poverty), 2. “Diverse city”, which examined how the city embraces, respects and preserves the diversity in terms of origin, religious, culture and race 3. “Metabolic city”, which looked at how the city makes proper use of resources (materials, energy, information) to maintain city life and 4. “Emergency city”, which explored how the city reacts to situations derived from natural, economic and health crises. Finally, the students produced videos of the interviews which were processed by faculty members to create a series of short videos on key topics (e.g. constructing relationships, using public spaces, sense of belonging) that were disseminated through social media (Figure 17). Through contact with citizens

⁸ <https://www.a-place.eu/en/placemaking-activity/14>

of different origins and backgrounds, individual and group interviews, and their dissemination through social media, the programme aims to raise awareness in the community about the value of public space in the construction of a sense of belonging.

4. Reflections from actions

The activities implemented in the first year of A-Place covered a variety of public spaces such as plots and parks, squares and streets, in urban areas at various scales, such as blocks and neighbourhoods), located within the urban fabric of the six participating cities.

Professionals from various disciplines –architects, artists, film makers, and designers– have participated in the design, planning and implementation of the activities. Students from art and architecture, along with faculty members, were engaged in action research and learning, studying the socio-physical environments, in collaboration with experts from diverse disciplines and with residents. All of these components –areas, disciplines, actors– were combined in a distinctive way in each of the placemaking activities.

However, despite the specific conditions of each setting, it is possible to identify some common strategies to address key issues for the re-appropriation of shared spaces:

- **Situated learning.** The emplacement of learning in action research relies on the direct exposure of learners to a place and its history, as well as to people who can describe a place through their life experiences. This includes a visual exploration of a physical territory, both on-site and on-line, which helps to create mental maps of the territory. However, to truly understand the meanings embodied in the socio-physical territory, it is necessary to engage in conversations with people and to access historical records of the experiences of past generations. This was done through the interviews in the city of L'Hospitalet, the recording of sounds in Lisbon's Mouraira neighbourhood, and the walks and videos produced with residents in Nicosia's Kaimakli.

- **Sustainability.** Increasing people's awareness of sustainability – social, economic, and environmental – is a key objective of placemaking. Unveiling the essential features of a place, which may have been hidden or forgotten over time, can help to maintain cultural traditions, which is an important aspect of social sustainability. Exploring the urban territory of the city of L'Hospitalet through the testimonies of the first dwellers and involving residents in the production of video stories about traditions with local food in Nicosia, are attempts to revive a foundational time in the development of an urban area, a city or a neighbourhood, and are part of a process of reviewing and reconstructing the traditions of places. Learning about natural resources, fauna and vegetation, local traditions (crafts, food) helps people to understand the essential characteristics of a place and to appreciate the need to preserve them, making them more aware of environmental sustainability. This was done in Ljubljana by learning about the indigenous vegetation invading the fenced plot and in Nicosia, by collecting and caring for plants in public space.

- **Community building.** The participation of communities in the activities took on multiple forms and served various objectives. In the parklet in Bologna, residents were invited to re-imagine a parking lot as educational space; in L'Hospitalet, civic representatives and neighbours reflected on the issues that determine their relationship with the streets and other public spaces, at the neighbourhood and city scale; in Schaerbeek, a diversity of actors came together in ephemeral interventions which gave

rise to temporary communities of students and residents. Through their participation in these events, citizens were encouraged to discover the issues affecting their relationship with their living environment, and, in this way, to define the qualities and values they assign to it.

- **Sensorial experience.** Enhancing people's sensorial awareness about their living environment, in urban and natural settings, helps to re-establish lost connections between the body and space. The sensorial walk in Schaerbeek and the recording of sounds in Mouraria, contributed to enhancing the sensitivity towards the living environment. City sounds, tastes, and smells are part of a place's identity. The activities helped people to become aware of their presence and value.

- **Temporality.** Ephemeral and temporary interventions which can last from hours, to days or months, are well-established tactics for introducing changes in the socio-physical environments. Such community-embedded, incremental and experimental practices can serve as a way to develop adaptive and responsive long-term projects that address community concerns. Examples of temporary actions include the transformation of the Place de la Reine in Schaerbeek into a repository of memories and a setting for a multicultural event; the parklet in Bologna as an educational space for residents to learn English; the square in Nicosia becoming a collective construction of pots and plants brought by residents, and the signs left in the fence of the empty plot of Ljubljana. These temporary actions activate a place and raise awareness in the community about local history and socio-spatial challenges.

- **Performativity.** The experimental modes of placemaking integrated art and artistic performances to connect people to places and imagine the future of those places. An example of this is the live concert-installation performance in Lisbon, which was inspired by both the real and the imaginary sounds of the square and surrounding streets. The performance of the pieces composed by music students invited people to imagine and reinvent their perception of indifferent spaces through the artistic transformation of its sounds, ultimately turning them into pleasant places. The performance of the Turkish music ensemble Schaerbeek articulated "other spaces" of mutual respect and harmony in contrast with the stigmatized nature of the neighbourhood, and aimed to create a future alternative reality. Finally, the music performance in the parklet in Bologna transformed a parking lot into a performative public space.

5. Conclusion

The activities carried out in the first year of the project represent a first step in the process of constructing a network of places across locations, cultures, actors, and disciplines, spanning the partner cities and beyond. Through reflections about the work done in the first cycle, it has been possible to identify strategies that can help to strengthen the links across the network in the next three years of the project. The different components that make up a network of places –both material and immaterial– the different values of public space –such as communication, leisure, performative and educational spaces – and the different time dimensions of the events taking place in them –hours, days or weeks– have emerged in the project activities. The project has also delved deeper than expected into the territory of digital space as a result of the constraints imposed by the lockdown. This includes the exploitation of the

potential of digital media in creating blended learning spaces embedded in the community (online focus interviews, analysis of urban territories with digital media), and online activities to foster creativity during confinement (open calls, film festival). In addition, the project activities have also contributed to the use of digital tools to enhance the experience of public space and to encourage people to engage with their surroundings in new and meaningful ways. Furthermore, the use of digital platforms and social media to disseminate the results of the research and activities helped to reach a wider audience and raise awareness about the importance of public space in the construction of a sense of belonging.

The diversity of tactics and forms of communication undertaken by partners to carry out the activities has enriched the capacities of each organization involved in the project. The exchange of this know-how will positively affect second year activities, and will most definitely contribute to enriching the diversity of issues that constitute each node of the network that is being constructed in the project, and their relationship to others.

Future placemaking activities to be carried out in the project will focus on further developing the evaluation of their impact. This should include a comprehensive examination of the real and potential impacts, both at the individual and societal level. Additionally, it will be important to consider the long-term consequences of placemaking in order to fully understand its significance.

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