

C3Places Policy Brief on Co-creation of inclusive public open spaces and the use of digital tools

The Project C3Places (www.c3places.eu) is concerned with places (parks, squares, streets, etc.) that affect us all on a multitude of levels: physically, socially, psychologically and culturally. The Project, aimed at developing strategies and tools to increase the quality of public open spaces through digital technologies, has learned much about how placemaking can positively influence co-creation and effect social cohesion.

The lessons learned in the Project show that when digital technology is not only used to transform the public realm into more high-tech places it can rather contribute to enrich the experiences of all users and support their involvement in placemaking. This in turn could fuel people's greater attachment to places. Because it is always about people. The overarching lesson learnt is that using digital in co-creation processes is still very demanding, from various aspects. C3Places has not simply added empirical nuance to studies of contemporary urban places, but has offered important critiques of the way that cities are theorised and understood.

This policy brief gives concerned stakeholders arguments for decision taking on where to start, how to approach placemaking and set priorities for co-creation supported by digital tools.

UNDERSTANDING BENEFITS AND IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Which arguments can be used?

It is paramount for public spaces to be inclusive, responsive, and inviting for all. Public space is a common good and an important resource of urban justice, inclusiveness, social cohesion and quality of life. If planned, designed and implemented responsibly, such places can help transform the way people live, work, learn, spend leisure time, and interact socially. Studies have shown that people's physical and mental health and well-being is improved by contact with nature, green landscapes and by regular doses of outdoor activities. However, public spaces must be located where people live, work, learn and play and well accessible to all. For example, the empiric evidence provided by C3Places show that for teenagers', the availability and proximity to different public services and facilities, is one of the reasons that makes their neighbourhood a good place to live. That seems to be truth to other age groups as well. For an inclusive urban public space, it is crucial to provide "liveable" public spaces, of different typologies, within an immediate neighbourhood or at a close walking distance. In addition, good environmental quality has to be ensured to make using a public space a pleasant experience. **The more high-tech our lives become, the more nature we need.** The COVID-19 pandemic is making clear that socialising online is not enough for health and well-being of people. They need to go out, be active and in contact with nature and each other on an everyday basis. A well distributed network of public spaces across the urban fabric, especially those rich with natural features are a key factor for quality of life and is in a current situation proven to be an important asset to mitigate the negative effects of lockdown and social distancing. It is necessary to take this into consideration for the future urban development on all levels.

FOR INCREASED SPATIAL QUALITY, INVEST IN RESEARCH

What are spatial quality factors and how to achieve and keep them?

To make public open spaces effective it is important to take into consideration all necessary spatial quality aspects. Among the most important are provision of good accessibility to all, comfort and security, legibility, navigation and convenience for movement. These refer to the level of captivation, cleanness, safety, available attractivities for users, which includes equipment, greenery, level of vitality and variety

of possible activities. Besides these aspects, there are also other intangible factors such as image of a place, personalisation and individual appropriation possibilities, adaptability, environmental quality and ecological sustainability. C3Places project examined various stages and types of cocreation and proves that the best way to capture the community needs on public spaces towards specifying quality responses and standards is via implementation of co-creation processes. Quality is a fundamental criterion to achieve responsive and inclusive places. This calls for **direct support and investments in scientific and practical research to provide evidence-based urban environment, local needs, and conditions**. Research evidence must be the basis for urban planning and design and should be produced at different levels and together with different stakeholders – local authorities and experts, academia, civic society organizations, businesses, public institutions, and people that after all enlivens the places. Co-creation can be a strategy to open the opportunities for all those stakeholders to come together and share knowledge, experiences, practices, needs and ideas for high quality public spaces. It must also be assured that funding is appropriate, not only to plan and design public spaces, but for their maintenance and adaptations when necessary.

PLACES & LEARNING – LEARN ABOUT PUBLIC SPACES, LEARN IN PUBLIC SPACE

Why urban learning should be motivated?

Investing in research advances the knowledge on quality aspects, inclusiveness and co-creation of public spaces on general and local level. The C3Places experiences proved that understanding local context, both from spatial and social aspects are crucial to effectively address real potentials and needs of local places and communities but also revealed two contrasting realities coexisting simultaneously – a valorisation of public spaces that goes side by side with a weak urban literacy and spatial representation. Our pledge is to invest and promote territorial capacity building, connecting education and learning to environment and urban fabric. Urban education can enhance our understanding of the world around us, provide us with more and better opportunities and improve our quality of life. We learn everywhere and at any time. Places of daily use, as public spaces are important for lifelong learning and promotion of civic participation. Territorial education and capacity calls to advance knowledge on how to increase the ability and skills to understand, reflect and reason the urban space and urban environment that help people to orient, feel comfortable, pay attention, care and appropriate the places in a civic and sustainable manner. The experiences of the living labs prove that integrating co-creation into the development process contributes significantly to the exchange and increase of knowledge of different stakeholders and empower them not only for further participation but also for better use of possibilities offered for better quality of life.

CO-CREATION AS A RESPONSE FOR INCLUSIVE PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Why co-creation approach is important? Which benefits can be expected?

C3Places uses the terms inclusive and responsible place to describe a far-reaching framework of principles on which communities can build a shared commitment to sustainability in social and urban development. The fundamental principle is to involve communities, from the very beginning in the making and transforming of public spaces, giving people a voice and a forum to set priorities, negotiate their needs and preferences and actively participate into development of suitable solutions. The co-creative approach is intrinsically user-oriented because it helps the people and organizations to promote their own decisions, develop capacities for open-ended social innovations, rather than invites citizens to participate in existing initiatives. Co-creation has enhanced debates concerning the nature of contemporary cities. Co-creation of public spaces offers an excellent opportunity to actively engage different stakeholders in the process of the production and consumption of urban fabric. Participatory

strategies and methodologies, as co-creation, imply sharing clear goals and expectations, to assure a common understanding among all stakeholders involved. It may be time consuming on a first sight, seems short term more expensive, and require councils to devote time and resources for placemaking. but it brings long-term all-round benefits that cannot be achieved in any other way. It supports local community interactions that are crucial for quality of everyday life. Through active co-creation of own environment, a positive attitude, care and the sense of place is developed among people, as well as the possibility of reducing common problems on spatial and social level, as for example safety, lack attractiveness and responsiveness, vandalism, social exclusion and urban alienation. C3Places' pledge is for involving the community in placemaking. The experiences show that people do not ask for flamboyant public spaces, rather they need places where they feel welcome, safe, and inspired to use. Public spaces should demonstrate conviviality, allowing a variety of activities and practices - with diversity of areas, greenery, and equipment (for both individual and group use). Flexibility is a crucial feature to ensure more responsible and user-friendly places. Finding a balance between responding to "everyday life" needs and fostering new (even transitory or ephemeral) ones is a challenge. Taking it, calls for setting public space at the core of the community, it has to be rooted in local needs and negotiated within the community.

INTERLINK CO-CREATION PROCESS AND PUBLIC SPACE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Where to start?

Co-creation is an approach but also a tool to be used within spatial planning, design, implementation and management process (open space development). C3Places proved that multi staged co-creation process by well-considered interlinking of different types of engagement activities with adequate expertise support in all phases of spatial development is crucial. In this way, positive outcomes of co-creation in public spaces exceed features of the final product, a spatial solution. There are many different types of collaboration activities, varying in intensities of citizen engagement depending on the issue addressed from sharing and interpreting information, co-learning, expressing opinions, defining priorities, refining ideas, making decisions, creating common values, implementing solutions, monitoring, etc.

USING DIGITAL TOOLS FOR CO-CREATION

What are the potentials of digital tools to enhance public spaces, the bottlenecks and how to deal with them?

ICT offer interactive and innovative tools which can better connect people and places. Mobile technology and digital media are creating new social spaces, transforming the physical public space in a hybrid space. In this context, digital technology becomes an important resource to enrich the use of public spaces, turn placemaking more dynamic and to foster the democratic process of placemaking and co-creation. On the other side, the use of digital tools can be quite demanding in relation to the necessary knowledge and skills and well as technical equipment. C3Places' pledge when technological decisions are implemented, they have to be bolstered by scientific reasoning. In an immature environments these technological solutions can accelerate negative aspects of exclusion and distance even more from the desirable goal of an inclusive community.

DECIDING FOR DIGITAL CO-CREATION OF PUBLIC SPACES

is your situation/context suitable for co-creation of inclusive public spaces by digital tools?

Although we can reasonably expect that in the near future both the availability and usability of digital tools and the knowledge to use them effectively will greatly improve, it is important to understand and

take into account that not every situation is equally suitable for this approach. To support decisions on the appropriateness of the particular situation C3Places has developed a tool, a **Digital Co-Creation Index**, which provides guidance to assess conditions as well as to evaluate, measure and compare different digital co-creation initiatives. The index is compiled in three sub-indexes: Public space quality Index, to evaluate physical and social aspects of the place; Digital Inclusiveness Index, which explains the extent to which affordable technology enables co-creation; and Social Responsiveness Index, which is linked to stakeholders and community members and addresses their maturity to respond to social challenges and generate public value.

FURTHER READING

C3Places provide a vast array of publications on co-creation in practice, on engaging different stakeholders and on digital tools - www.c3places.eu/publications:

- Aletta, F., Van Renterghem, T., & Botteldooren, D. (2018). Influence of Personal Factors on Sound Perception and Overall Experience in Urban Green Areas. A Case Study of a Cycling Path Highly Exposed to Road Traffic Noise. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(6), 1118. <http://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/15/6/1118>
- Goličnik Marušić, B., & Šuklje Erjavec, I. (2020) Understanding co-creation within urban open space development process, in: C. Smaniotto Costa, M. Mačiulienė, M. Menezes, & B. Goličnik Marušić. (Eds) *Co-Creation of Public Open Places. Practice—Reflection—Learning*. C3Places Project Lisbon: Lusófona University Press. ISBN 978-989-757-125-1
- Mačiulienė, Monika (2018). Mapping Digital Co-Creation for Urban Communities and Public Places. *Systems*, 6 (2), 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems6020014>.
- Smaniotto Costa, C., Mačiulienė, M., Menezes, M. & Goličnik Marušić, B. (Eds.) (2020). *Co-Creation of Public Open Places. Practice - Reflection - Learning*. C3Places Project. Lisbon: Lusófona University Press. ISBN 978-989-757-125-1. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24140/2020-sct-vol.4>
- Smaniotto Costa, C., Solipa, J., Almeida, I., & Menezes, M. (2020). Exploring teenagers' spatial practices and needs in light of new communication technologies. *Cities*, 98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102574>
- Smaniotto Costa, C., Šuklje Erjavec, I., Kenna, T., de Lange, M., Ioannidis, K., Maksymiuk, G., de Waal, M. (Eds.) (2019). *CyberParks – The Interface Between People, Places and Technology - New Approaches and Perspectives*. Cham: Springer, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-13417-4.
- Solipa Batista, J.; Smaniotto Costa, C.; Menezes, M.; Almeida, I. (2020.) *Co-Creating a Teenagers' Sensitive Public Open Space: A Case Study in Alvalade Neighbourhood*. In Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia (ed.). *Na era da “pós-verdade”? Esfera pública, cidadania e qualidade da democracia no Portugal contemporâneo*. Lisbon: APS
- Šuklje Erjavec, I., & Žlender, V. (2020). Categorization of digital tools for co-creation quality of public open space: Key aspects and possibilities, in: C. Smaniotto Costa, M. Mačiulienė, M. Menezes, & B. Goličnik Marušić (Eds) *Co-Creation of Public Open Places. Practice—Reflection—Learning*. C3Places Project Lisbon: Lusófona University Press. ISBN 978-989-757-125-1.
- Van Renterghem, K. Vanhecke, K. Filipan, K. Sun, T. De Pessemier, B. De Coensel, W. Joseph, D. Botteldooren (2020). Interactive soundscape augmentation by natural sounds in a noise polluted urban park. *Landscape and urban planning*, 194, 103705, 2020.
- Žlender, V, Šuklje Erjavec, I and Goličnik Marušić, B (2020) *Digitally Supported Co-creation within Public Open Space Development Process: Experiences from the C3Places Project and Potential for Future Urban Practice, Planning Practice and Research*, DOI: 10.1080/02697459.2020.1829286.