ABSTRACT: This contribution introduces the European Project C3Places – using ICT for Co-Creation of Inclusive Public Places and discusses the preliminary findings of a case study in Lisbon’s neighbourhood Alvalade. C3Places addresses the question how digital technologies can be employed to engage different sectors of the community towards creating more attractive public open spaces. The Lisbon case study explores the relationship between urban fabric, lifestyles and teenagers’ behaviour and needs on public spaces. In the neighbourhood Alvalade students of a secondary school are being engaged in Living Lab. The co-research approach includes interviews, field observations, study visits, design exercises and debates, and aims to empower teenagers to express their needs, ideas and values on public spaces. The Lisbon Living Lab will contribute to the creation of a network of knowledge where teenagers, the school community, the parish council and other stakeholders can gather together to co-create more inclusive and teens sensitive public spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. C3Places and the Lisbon Living Lab

The European Project C3Places – using ICT for Co-Creation of Inclusive Public Places (H2020 JPI UrbanEurope, www.c3places.eu), addresses the question how digital technologies can be employed to engage diverse sectors of the community towards creating more attractive public open spaces. C3Places aims to explore the possibilities of ICT as a fuel to enhance the attractiveness, responsiveness and inclusiveness of public open spaces, boosting their transformation into places with a meaning for users. For this purpose, Living Labs in four European cities (Ghent, BE; Lisbon, PT; Milan, IT and Vilnius, LT) are exploring the interactions of different users’ groups.

The Lisbon Living Lab is centred on teenagers, a group of users with unique interests and spatial needs. Backed up by co-creation and co-research principles the Living Lab is anchored on thematic workshops on urban planning. Several methods and tools are used to examine and explore teenagers’ perceptions, behaviours and needs regarding public space use and appropriation. The urban planning workshops took place in the academic year 2017/2018 with 10th grade students of the secondary school Padre António Vieira in Alvalade neighbourhood. The collaboration with this school has a twofold purpose: 1) To interact with students under an institutional framework and to avoid the workshop sessions to become an additional workload for students; and 2) To ensure a higher participation levels as well as to minimise dropout rates, since taking part in the classes is mandatory. Fulfilling these requisites was possible since the school is taking part in a pedagogic pilot project of the Portuguese Ministry of Education “Flexible and Autonomous Curricula”¹, which gives the school greater flexibility in defining the curricular programmes for a certain number of hours.

Alvalade neighbourhood has been chosen since it constitutes a distinctive and paradigmatic exemplary of modernity and urbanity in the urban history of Lisbon. The Urban Development Plan of Alvalade was designed by the architect João Guilherme Faria da Costa in 1930-45 and aimed to control the urban expansion focussed on rent control led housing. Alvalade is structured by large main roads and eight large concrete panels buildings developed around a central core - a school (ca. 500 meters away from those 8 buildings). Alvalade is considered an example of well-distributed functions and equipment, traffic hierarchisation and block interiors sometimes treated as common spaces (Coelho 2007; Tostões 2001; Costa 2002). Although, the only one extensive green space in the neighbourhood is the Alvalade Woods

(with 11 ha), there are several small yards and common/shared spaces in the different quarters. Also, large pedestrian lanes and squares, with large trees and benches are typical for Alvalade; they offer a usable and liveable public space between the large main roads and buildings.

1.2. Teenagers and Public Space
Teenagers (aged 13 to 17 years old) are amongst the more frequent public open space users. They provide the context where youngsters can gather together and interact away from to adult power and supervision, exploring the freedom to be themselves. Institutional and privatised activities favoured by contemporary parenting cultures are making this harder (Valentine 2004). Moreover, when conflicts emerging from space sharing between users of different ages are typically addressed in an adult-oriented manner, priority is often not given to children and young people. This adult hegemony on space occurs since some adults assume that attributing responsibilities to children may compromise their right to a childhood free of concerns or simply because they aren’t yet able to exercise responsibilities, hence shouldn’t be also granted with rights (Valentine 2004). This brings to discussion the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (The United Nations 1989), that offers precisely a relevant conceptual framework to children’s relationship to public space (Elsey 2004), by pushing forward concepts associated with children’s participation, the promotion of their rights and raising capacity to contribute on decisions that impact their lives.

Nevertheless, reality has proven harder and public participation agenda is often imposed to rather than being initiated by young people. Engaging young people in co-creation, namely in the case of public spaces, is demanding and challenging path. On the one hand, professionals (from different areas and expertise) have little or no training in working with young people (Valentine 2004), and thus do not have a good enough understanding of how young people can fit into urban planning and placemaking. On the other hand, professionals consider that young people still lack responsibility, experience, interest, legitimacy and power (Laughlin & Johnson 2011). Despite these constraints, public spaces still play a key role on teenagers’ skills, competences and lifestyles choices, public health and quality of life. Consequently, it is paramount to gain a deeper knowledge on their socio-spatial practices, needs and preferences. The Lisbon Living Lab, described in the next section, seeks to engage teenagers to build this knowledge, proving teens the context and the necessary tools to actively participate.

2. METHODOLOGY, GOALS & EXPECTED OUTCOMES
The Living Lab consisted of four workshops on urban planning that took place between February 19th and May 8th, 2018, with 49 students (aged 15 to 18) from two 10th grade classes. Each workshop comprised four sessions of 90 minutes each, amounted to 24 hours of contact. The workshops were conceived and implemented taking as reference co-research and co-creation principles and formal and non-formal education methods and tools. The workshops’ tripartite aim was to enhance teenagers’ spatial capacity building through: 1) exploring and discussing spatial knowledge and concerns; 2) presenting and discussing opportunities for civic participation; 3) co-production of knowledge on planning and designing public spaces. Through the co-created results, C3Places strives for gathering knowledge which may contribute and support the development of recommendations on more inclusive and teenagers’ sensitive public spaces. The four themes which guided the workshops are: 1) A critical look at the city; 2) Building the city; 3) The digital era and the city, and 4) Designing a public space. The workshops are presented and discussed in detail in Almeida et al. (2018).

Both in the classroom context and out in public spaces in Alvalade, all sessions were conceived to promote interactive and stimulating activities, allowing the students to, as freely as possible, acquire enough ability to express suggestions and solutions to the activities. The activities encompassed, for example, studying, observing and recording spatial features of public spaces; structured debates; discussion with different stakeholders involved in building the city (local government, civil society movements and business representatives) about different opportunities for civic engagement and participation (participatory budget, grassroots movements and crowdsourcing). The workshop ended with students drawing a proposal to transform a public space in Alvalade according to their suggestions.

3. PRELIMINARY RESULTS
The process of analysing and exploring the data gained from the workshops is still ongoing. Nevertheless, some preliminary findings have been detected and are described below. As said previously, despite the advantages of organising the workshops in a school context, this also poses one limitation that needs to be taken into account in the evaluation process: The attendance at classes was mandatory, which means the participation is imposed by the school, restricting from the very beginning the teenagers’ conscious act of engaging in the workshops.
It was noticeable throughout the sessions an apparent lack of knowledge regarding urban features and concepts, difficulties in spatial representations and on identifying and expressing their needs on public spaces. The students also manifest a lack of spatial/territorial references, reporting little use of public spaces, and stating a clear preference for private and indoor spaces, for example shopping malls. Therefore, they have difficulty of differentiating between public and private spaces.

It was expected to encourage students to reflect on public open spaces in Alvalade, but this goal was hard to be successfully achieved. One possible explanation may be related to the students’ place of residence: 75% although studying in Alvalade live in other parish councils of Lisbon or even in the outskirts of the city. Other factors could be related to the fact that the school is located at the edge of the parish council, with few interesting places for teenagers, and the relatively recent reorganization of the parish councils in Lisbon combined with the territorial expansion of Alvalade.

Furthermore, the students also raise the question on the benefits of participation. They are aware of the temporal gap between being involved in community, civic consultations and movements and enjoying - still as teenagers - the benefits due to the long period between planning and implementation phases.

4. FINAL REFLECTIONS

Moving towards a deeper understanding of teenagers’ spatial needs demands a critical look from different stakeholders’ perspectives. Even though public spaces may be considered privileged arenas of debate and political struggle (Malone 2002), hence potentially participatory and inclusive, they are also sites of conflict between different users what can result in exclusion and segregation. Research has shown how teenagers are, in different contexts, deprived of using the (so called) public space, due to an age-based segregation (Lieberg 1995; Carmona et al 2003; Owens 2002; Massey 1998).

Public spaces are designed with a specific target group in mind, mostly working age adults. Consequently, it must be pondered to what extend other social groups can be taken into consideration. Power relations are prominent in interactions among distinct groups, and, from a hegemonic adult view on public spaces, where teenagers are considered qualitatively less important and dependent on adults’ will and experience (Qvortrup 1994), opportunities to teenagers participate and therefore exercise influence on urban policies are restricted. Thus, when the process of placemaking is conducted leaning on participatory approaches, all stakeholders must be granted the right to contribute and be encouraged to deliver meaningful input into the decision-making process. Regarding teenagers, it is paramount to explore and understand their spatial practices to design spaces that better meet their needs and requirements and not only present solutions based on preconceived assumptions imposed by experts and professionals.

Teenagers’ and children should be able to express their own requirements on urban spaces. These should be negotiated and designed with teenagers’ participation in the decision-making process. It is important to bear in mind that despite the difficulties with participatory processes (who to include, required and available time and resources, motivation, permanent reconfiguration of needs, trends and behaviours) the advantages they may bring to develop sustainable spaces outweighs the limitations (Malone 2002). This makes the call to develop and try out methods and innovative procedures to engage teens in placemaking processes. C3Places is creating in Lisbon a platform where teenagers can express their views and ideas on public spaces. Yet, it seems that students involved in these workshops prefer private indoor spaces in detriment of public open ones. Sorkin (1992) discussed the phenomenon of homogenisation and domestication of public space and the substitution of those by private and commercial spaces. Also, the use of public spaces by teenagers is conditioned by the availability of suitable places in their surroundings. It is necessary to further reflect and explore to what extent these public spaces exist and are still (or not) relevant for teenagers in their daily lives, if they still constitute a privileged context for socialisation with peers and other groups. Public spaces are described by the literature as relevant for youngsters’ social, cognitive and emotional development, as they offer the possibility for interactions between their internal reality/lived reality and the external stimuli surrounding them (Strecht 2011). This raises the question if these spaces of construction of social identity and of the lived experience are changing; and if they are being substituted by indoor and/or private spaces.

Another relevant dimension emerging from teenagers’ discourse was the recognition of the temporal gap between their participation and the implementation of their ideas. This concern is highlighted by different authors, who stress the fact that participatory exercises usually focus on plans for the future instead of present changes (Caputo 1995). Holloway & Valentine (2003) refer precisely to policies’ timescale, which can be very slow, creating a conflict with teenagers’ tendency to focus on the present, hence making harder for them to recognise positive outcomes from their engagement.

This article addresses effective and innovative ways to overcome obstacles of involving young people in the participatory process of placemaking. It discusses the preliminary results of the Lisbon Living Lab. It is beyond discussion that creating more
attractive and sensitive public spaces is a key in the city making process, nevertheless this is a highly complex process, not only due to the uniqueness of adolescence, but also because the needs of other user groups must be considered, in order to avoid the development of segregated spaces.

5. REFERENCES


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Web of Knowledge | A Look into the Past, Embracing the Future

Editors
Sara Albuquerque, Teresa Ferreira, Maria de Fátima Nunes, Ana Cardoso de Matos & António Candeias

Universidade de Évora, Portugal
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