

## FOREWORD

# Co-Creation of Public Open Places. Practice – Reflection – Learning

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Public open space is a subject that belongs to us all. Every time we leave our homes, our private territory, we enter a space we have to share with others. Public space is the place for social interactions, strengthening sociability and ultimately exercising democracy. As a subject of study, public space has also long been analysed, explored and researched in various ways and under different guises, by planners, landscape architects and designers, anthropologists, social and cultural geographers, and urban historians. They all bring evidence on the role of public space in urban life, in the quality of urban environment and in the construction of cultural identity. Consequently, public space should deserve serious consideration by all - starting with those in charge and who hold regulatory responsibilities for those who use the places and ultimately give them life.

As the UN-Habitat (2015) rightly recognises, a public space represents a key resource for social cohesion, economic development, and in particular liveability in urban settings. Public space is a resource that critically affects community values and positively impacts the quality of urban life. Backed by these premises, this book is about the co-creation of public open spaces, an issue at the core of the C3Places Project. To better understand the process, particularly the values of engaging people in the production of public space, is one of the C3Places' objectives. The project is developing strategies and tools to help increase the quality and responsiveness of public spaces. In this process, the Project also aims to better understand how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can influence co-creation and social cohesion.

The chapters of this book bring science a little closer to the knowledge about the design, production and management of public spaces. 37 authors responded to the Project's call to share experiences, visions and reflections on how co-creation and participatory processes can create possibilities for a sustainable and equitable future.

This book intends to help researchers, governments and community leaders to move from insights to more collaborative actions in two critical ways. First, by providing timely and multifaceted information about the management of co-creation and civic engagement, and flagging the need for future research and experiences. Second, this book intends to identify examples and reflections that outperform in certain dimensions, thus revealing best practices and lessons that can guide policies and programmes in other cases. It is one thing to understand where co-creation challenges lie; another is to address them. To this end, sharing experiences is essential. Two challenges can be pointed out early on. First, councils still consider people as mere “users” and believe they bear sole responsibility for the production of public spaces (delivery, design, maintenance, etc.), despite the wide range of beneficiaries and stakeholders. Second, the rapid pace of technological advancements and the challenge of keeping stride with this rapid pace of new technologies and their potential contribution to increase the divide and inequities.

The lack of engagement and opportunities for interaction pose critical societal challenges. Also, a hegemonic techno-social understanding is an issue in any discussion on mediated public space (Artopoulos & Smaniotto Costa, 2019). As advocated by C3Places, technology is and must be a means to an end, in our case, making cities more liveable and sustainable, and this for all. Taking on these two big challenges that face such a process, i. e. considering people more than mere consumers and addressing digital technology itself not as an end, is the backbone of this book. As the title indicates, this collective work thoroughly covers different co-creation processes that are embracing society in the fight against exclusion and inequities, and many find that technology is a powerful ally.

### **Rationale of the Project C3Places**

The notion of C3Places is based on the premise that public open spaces have many different forms and features, but collectively add huge value to the experience and to the liveability of urban areas. Understanding the public open space can be done from a variety of perspectives. For simplicity’s sake, and because it best captures what people care most about, C3Places considers the “public” as a crucial feature of an urban space. A public space has relevant ecological, economic and social benefits which are multifaceted and accumulative, each space contributing to the sociability, aesthetics and environmental mitigation of urban areas. Consequently, public spaces deserve serious consideration by those with regulatory and other responsibilities for their delivery. Despite the wide range of beneficiaries, too often municipalities consider people as mere “users” and assume they bear sole responsibility for the production (design, maintenance, etc.) of public spaces. Citizens, however, are key partners in co-creation initiatives as they have specific resources and competences which are valuable for (re)designing and delivering public services. As Rizzo et al. argue, citizens are essential in the context of a “community of resources” moving

towards a more sustainable, participatory and resilient society. This brings about the concepts of inclusiveness and responsiveness. Responsive space is one that gives a positive perception of a place to the people who live and work around it and which induces people to spend (a long time) there and/or to opt to come again and share the same experiences. Public spaces are common good, everyone should be able and encouraged to use, accept and share them with others – public space has to accept/tolerate even users who for different reasons are still excluded; in their reflection Smaniotto & Patrício call attention to non-desirable users. Exclusion concerns actual and perceived social isolation, as Alves asserts in his essay, the impoverishment of spatial conditions promote alienation between the city and its citizens. Similarly, Almeida, Batista & Lourenço call attention to teenagers as a group of public space users whose needs and ideas is hardly allowed to influence politics for a variety of related reasons or circumstances. The authors see the possibility to overcome such a situation by practicing urban planning thematic workshops as non-formal and interactive education, offering exploration of subjects complementary to the official curricula. The experience with places is highlighted by taking the “classroom” into different locations, experiencing the space- or time-dependent flexibility of activities, among others. Since responsiveness and inclusiveness factors are amenable to change, the Project’s findings and the arguments in this book are the strongest evidence that, through co-creation, sustainable improvements can be achieved that also deter the proliferation of deprived places.

Moving forward, C3Places is contributing to a better understanding of mediated public spaces. Digital technologies are opening new perspectives to make public space more responsive, enabling their adaptation to users and situations. This also concerns digitalization; for public space planning, Šuklje Erjavec & Žlender identify criteria to evaluate digital technologies in terms of their characteristics, attributes and values, while Bizjak focuses on the potential of the digital and connected environment for increasing civic participation. This enhances the quality of the space as a public realm. Digital technologies are not new in public space, but they have to be planned – the call is to create interventions to explore new terrain at the intersection of the physical and digital city – but the emergence of hybrid spaces has to be done with the engagement of both users of technologies and public spaces. The C3Places approach offers new lenses, distinct, complementary perspectives on making life in urban settings more sustainable.

In this book, many interesting and diverse examples are given of the advantages of digital advancements, namely by Botteldooren et. al, who combine co-creative processes with the use of technology in the transformation of the urban soundscape, by Almeida & Viana analysing a radio broadcasting programme for increasing awareness of environmental issues, thereby influencing the sense of citizenship, by Duarte & Mateus who reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of a digital tool to increase

citizen engagement, while Ruchinskaya & Lalenis point out the single technology potential to increase community resilience in the public space.

### **Rationale of the book on THE Co-Creation of Public Space**

This book emphasises three issues: practice, reflection, and learning. **Practice** concerns driving actions, identified and analysed experiences that serve as key models, be it enhanced spaces or engaged stakeholders. Skaržauskienė et al. build upon an assessment of knowledge for exploring digital co-creation initiatives to evaluate the digital co-creation to assist leaders, managers and urban planners to generate diverse ideas, improve tools and find new change-enabling resources. **Reflection** is the process of exploring and examining the results and performance of a co-creation process, of drivers' and users' engagement. As Goličnik Marušić & Šuklje Erjavec rightly explain, co-creation is not the search for a final product but a process, a way to come to public spaces that are more responsive and embedded in the context. Finally, **Learning** refers to knowledge transfer and replication. It can be both a practical example and/or a reflection on the process. Co-creation as Menezes & Mateus point out is an open process of learning, and can be, as Gomes & Pina bring to the discussion, a process that is not agencied or initiated on purpose. Just the fact that people use a place implies they also co-create it.

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The main challenge for this book was to select examples, reflect on their achievements in order to enable other councillors, facilitators and researchers to plan for a more liveable urban environment. The chapters address a wide range of experiences, models, and topics in order to foster a wide reflection on the various expressions of public open spaces - as places and ideas, as opportunities to build identity and to express urbanity, for people and for communities. Different perspectives on practice, reflection and learning of co-creation are in play, opening up new possibilities to approach responsible and inclusive public open spaces. This book presents some reflections and experiences on the implications for planning and research practice in which researchers and experts are leading the way. This book taps into their expertise and scholarship. The time is ripe to revisit and freshly interrogate both the notion and the scope of co-creation, of participatory processes as well as the role digital technology plays in a world that has become an urban planet. Our call is to make the social dialogue viable and strengthen citizens' participation in the construction of their environment. Placemaking and open space can be used as empowerment for citizens to engage with their environment, and to challenge the city and its social role (Estrela & Smaniotto, 2019). They can also be a laboratory for ongoing professionals, as Sanches & Ortiz and Ramalhete report on the university's interest in expanding knowledge and action beyond the academic context.

A public open space embodies planning, social, cultural and economic assets defined by the overlapping of multifaceted values produced by people who use and share it,

and benefit from its qualities and features. By extension this makes the call to maintain the commitment to public open space and its key social role. In this respect, municipalities have to be open to people's needs and provide answers to them. Co-creative processes and tactics could be a possible pathway towards more inclusive and responsive public spaces and towards sharing responsibilities when responding to the challenges of building more cooperative and relational governments.

The co-creation of public space requires a willingness to experiment - from all concerned. A co-creation approach should be open to unforeseen or even utopian outcomes, as they still pave the way for generation of ideas and unpredictable possibilities. These are also the cases and the experiences reported in this book – they share not only where more things were allowed but also the barriers encountered - which is a critical first step to solving bottlenecks. The chapters share experiences, issues and insights that can help reinforce a proliferation of co-creation and citizen engagement processes. Hoping that these fall on fertile ground, as it is now more important than ever for cities to develop and implement strategies that are deeply rooted in the local contexts and tackle at the same time inclusiveness and socio-spatial segregation while aiming to improve the quality of life of all citizens. Citizens' well-being and sustainability can be ensured through responsive and inclusive public spaces, as is acknowledged by UNESCO (2011).

The main objective of this work on co-creation experiences is to share and guide the establishment of responsive cities as well as to disseminate, reflect, strengthen and streamline existing initiatives. To this end, the chapters address several ideas and possible courses in people's relationships with places and spaces and digital technology, considering the mutual relation among the spatial physical shapes, spatial organisation, links, natural features, social and cultural values, the variety of stakeholders and different levels of action.

This book is divided into two parts: Part I focuses on **Co-creation and participative processes** and Part II sets the spotlight on **The digital in the production public open spaces**. It starts with an introduction to JPI Urban Europe, the European Joint Programming Initiative that the Project C3Places convinced to provide support for exercising the co-creation of public open spaces. By raising the question “**Urban living labs as the new normal in co-creating place?**”, **Jonas Bylund, Johannes Riegler and Caroline Wrangsten** describe the JPI Urban Europe's approach and the role of urban living labs as a way of supporting urban development in sustainable ways. In order to develop this approach in itself, JPI Urban Europe has engaged in dialogue with various parties of the urban research and innovation community, with stakeholders from civil society and public administrations as well as policy makers to shape, at the moment, what JPI Urban Europe considers to be urban living labs 2.0.

While, in the first part, the authors identify good practices towards the production, delivery and maintenance of public space, in the second part, they discuss the efforts made towards co-creation with the support of digital tools. These are, however, not the centre of attention, as the focus is not on the final result but on the process of developing a co-created urban product. Such experiences are beautifully described. They bring to light specific moments and planning challenges that may be ignored in a static process of urban development. The chapters highlight tactical phases and unconventional interventions, and bear witness to the building of communities, as an important step to harnessing their agency to attract and incorporate institutional support for the development of responsive/inclusive public space, and on the flip side for the realization of citizen-initiated developments.

The diversity of experiences and the range of levels of involvement are important issues, but also create a dilemma: it is hard to compare the experiences and the development processes. Each one, however, provided a single seed between initiators and communities that now pose the challenge to make the experiences even more instructive.

**Barbara Goličnik Marušić** and **Ina Šuklje Erjavec** in the chapter “**Understanding co-creation within open space development process**” examine co-creation as open space planning and design tool. They pay attention to the interrelations among actors in relation to the actual characteristics of the process and roles of the players.

**Aelita Skaržauskienė**, **Monika Mačiulienė** and **Laura Gudelytė** in their chapter “**Assessing Digital Co-Creation in Urban Transformations: Case of Vilnius**” propose a Digital Co-Creation Assessment Framework which integrates a variety of factors influencing the transformation of open public spaces into co-creative systems. Such framework provides a novel approach to exploring digital co-creation initiatives in urban contexts and allows to define potential areas of improvement.

**Carlos Smaniotto Costa** and **Catarina Patrício** in the chapter “**The production of public open spaces and the deliberate exclusion of undesirables**” address appropriation and co-creation from another viewpoint, from the perspective of the undesirable and a worrying fact that the deliberate exclusion by design of users in public spaces is a concern for several municipalities.

**Manoel Rodrigues Alves**, in the chapter “**Public Space, Spaces of Public Domain: icons of a contemporary simulacrum?**” immerses in the multiple contents of a transition era. Contemporary urban territorialities bring new possibilities to issues related to urban morphology, but the latter also confronts itself with a hegemonic global scenario where public spaces are mostly scenographic spaces, for visual consumerism. In these contemporary times, this essay investigates the notion of “in-between” public spaces of otherness.

In the chapter **“Exploring co-creation as a learning process to (re)think public space from a transformative perspective”**, **Marluci Menezes** and **Diogo Mateus** discuss co-creation as an opportunity to carry out planning together with citizens, promoting participation and innovating from the perspective of a learning process, thus contributing to the more collaborative planning of an open and more people - and environment - friendly city.

The chapter **“Participatory design as a tool to create resourceful communities in Sweden”** by **Agatino Rizzo**, **Björn Ekelund**, **Jenny Bergström** and **Kristina Ek**, embraces participatory design methods and design thinking to explore the future energy-aesthetics of cities. The authors call the result of this process “resourceful community”, which is a vision based on a new understanding of the nexus between energy and society. This new vision aims at steering the current debate on the energy transition towards socially and environmentally just urbanism.

In their contribution, **“Placemaking with teenagers. Experiences driven from thematic workshops on urban planning”**, **Inês Almeida**, **Joana Solipa Batista** and **Filipa Lourenço** address the experiences of engaging teenagers to critically think about city-making processes. In the context of urban planning workshops, they reflect on teenagers’ participation in placemaking, comparing researchers’ expectations with teenagers’ topics of interest, and discuss the opportunities for active civic participation of teenagers.

**Débora Sanches** and **Sérgio Ricardo Lessa Ortiz** discuss the experiences of a university extension project. As they become involved in organising a co-participatory process with children for the rehabilitation of squares, the students not only gain technical skills by working in “real-life situations” but are also confronted with the local community’s practical knowledge, have to act with and plan for society, as the authors state in their contribution **“The design of co-participation processes in public spaces in São Paulo as university extension project: The revitalization process of Dom Orione and Major Freire Squares”**.

**Lucas Ariel Gomes** and **Silvia A. Mikami G. Pina**, also working in São Paulo, investigated the **“Use and appropriation as the everyday design of public spaces in the Bexiga neighbourhood (São Paulo)”**. The findings of their research suggest that the creative and engaging potential of the public sphere provided by the existing flexible public spaces also fosters the claiming of other public spaces, and can become the seed for further movements towards more public spaces.

**Filipa Ramalhte** in the chapter entitled **“Producing collaborative public space: the laboratory of intervention in architecture in situ/ experiment”** analyses the role of academic experiences in the construction of collaborative interventions in public spaces. It describes the in situ/ laboratorial experiments



conducted by the research centre CEACTION/UAL in the municipality of Almada, Portugal.

In part II, the chapter by **Ina Šuklje Erjavec** and **Vita Žlender** in the contribution titled “**Categorisation of digital tools for co-creation of public open spaces. Key aspects and possibilities**” explore different digital tools available that can suit different stages of the co-creation process to effectively support the spatial planning process. From this base they propose a framework to classify digital tools for co-creation. The proposed categorization is an important step towards enhancing our understanding of the hybrid space that technology advancements are provoking but also to make better use of technology.

**Dick Botteldooren, Toon De Pessemier, Karlo Filipan, Kang Sun, Bert De Coensel** and **Timothy Van Renterghem** argue in “**Modifying and co-creating the urban soundscape through digital technologies**” that the local character and the volatility of sounds – and by extension the soundscape - make them an ideal subject for co-creation and getting citizens involved. Digital technologies have the potential to improve not only the perception of environmental noise, but also the overall user experience and appreciation of a public place.

**Tatiana Ruchinskaya** and **Konstantinos Lalenis** address “**The effect of public places on community resilience. A case study of the role of social and digital tools in the City of Volos (Greece)**”. The case study reveals that existing social projects are successful in bringing communities and different social groups together for disaster mitigation and collaborative response. This chapter explores the relationship between public urban places and community resilience in the Greek city of Volos and discusses the potential of using Blockchain technology for strengthening community resilience.

**Edney Mota Almeida** and **Lúcio Hanai Valeriano Viana** have researched how a community radio station can contribute to sustainable urban development. In the chapter “**Technology and community communication: the use of the radio broadcasting as a strategy for urban sustainability**” the authors explain that a broadcasting schedule targeted to raise awareness, to mobilize and to sensitize, placing the common citizen at the centre of the proposals, can create significant impact on solving or reducing the problems related to urban sustainability.

**Igor Bizjak** in “**Web 2.0 tools as framework for participation and co-creation**” analyses the use of platforms and tools to boost participatory methods in spatial planning processes. Web 2.0 tools can be powerful, among other things, in the communication between their users, according to the author. The more information is available to the public, the greater is its role in participation and decision-making power.



**Tiago Duarte and Diogo Mateus** centre their attention on **“Planning of public open spaces with digital tools – the example of the WAY CyberParks”**.

The authors describe the experiences and opportunities that digital technology offers to aid spatial planning, by introducing the monitoring tool WAY CyberParks. This digital tool intends to increase information and knowledge about places, in order to create more inclusive public spaces that correspond to the needs of their users.

The chapters in this book identify and analyse experiences, methods and tools for both research and practice on the socio-spatial dimension of public space. They share the focus on co-creation and participatory approaches and deal with innovative uses of digital technology. Our purpose is to provide planners, scholars and policymakers with ideas on how to engage citizens, how well engaging citizens may achieve the aim of urban social development, and how to generate dynamism. The experiences analysed here may encourage and guide the development of more inclusive and responsive public spaces and therefore support sustainable development efforts. Co-creation, the Project C3Places is confident, is a process that makes social dialogue viable and responds to the challenges of building an inclusive and responsive urban environment.

Having said that it is important to note that the chapters of this book were completed prior to Spring 2020, so their research and insights do not reference the global public health crisis caused by Covid-19. However, in such challenging times the argument for co-creation to increase the potential of public spaces to support a range of inclusive and responsive outcomes is even stronger.

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